

Redemption

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Whenever a sefer of TaNaCH is completed there is a need to look at the sefer globally for its main message. The culmination of the book of Shemos is the last few verses where the presence of Hashem appears in the Mishkan. At first glance this seems a fitting end to the last half of the sefer but not necessarily to the first half. Clearly G-d's presence resting in the Mishkan is a completion of the detailed construction of the Mishkan which monopolizes much of the second half of sefer Shemos. But what of the first half? What about the Egyptian servitude and the plagues? What about our exodus and journey through the *yam suf*? What of the powerful scene at Har Sinai and the plethora of laws detailed in parshas mishpatim?

In answering this question, the Ramban gives us a tremendous insight into sefer Shemos and its place in the Torah as a whole. He explains (Hakdamah to Shemos) that each sefer has a theme which is closely related to the name of the Sefer. Not necessarily the name which appears on the binding of the chumash, but the name that chazal gave to each of the five books. The first book is called sefer Yetzirah, the book of creation (really, formation). Not only because it contains the creation of the universe, since creation is covered in the first few chapters. Rather because the actions of the Avos which are detailed in Bereishis are the seed from which the Jewish people grows. In the first book, the stage is set for the Jewish nation. The book ends with the nascent nation moving into Egypt and with the death of the last of the Avos. In the first book the concept of the Jews as a people are created and a vast potential rest within them.

Sefer Shemos is known as sefer Geulah and it details the narrative of the Jewish nation in their first cycle of exile and exodus, *galus* and *geulah*. It begins with the fact that Yaakov's family came down to Egypt. Despite the fact that this has already been documented, there was a need to begin the sefer at the beginning of the *galus*. Yaakov's family left their home in Israel and moved down to Egypt, where they would spend years in exile. The book of Shemos ends, explains the Ramban, when the Jews have achieved full redemption, *geulah*.

This Ramban is quite profound. He is saying that the true redemption of the Jewish people was not when they left Egypt or even when they received the Torah. Redemption took place when Hashem's presence descended on the Mishkan. Why is this? To answer this question we must understand the Ramban's view of the purpose and function of the Mishkan. Unlike Rashi, who sees the Mishkan as a way to make up for the sin of the golden calf, the Ramban sees the Mishkan in a very different light. The Ramban (Hakdamah to parshas Trumah) sees the Mishkan as a way to assure that the experience of Har Sinai is not transient. The revelation of Hashem in this world can't end at Har Sinai; it must only begin there. The Mishkan's purpose was to keep Hashem's presence amongst the Jewish people. The Ramban (Hakdamah to Bamidbar) explains that even the encampment around the Mishkan was meant to mirror the encampment around Har Sinai.

Once we have this background we can clearly understand the final verses of sefer Shemos. The first book of the Torah told us of the amazing path that was laid out by the Avos. The Avos were able to bring Hashem's presence back into this world. People had forgotten Hashem, the ideas of monotheism were distant memories, no longer practiced. Monotheism was dead, until Avrohom began to plant the very first seeds of our great nation (see Rambam Hil. Avodah Zorah Ch. 1). At the end of the first book the Avos have completed their work, bringing Hashem down into this world by reminding people of the reality of His existence.

This, explains the Ramban, was the point to which we needed to return to truly be called 'redeemed'. *Geulah* was only completed once we had reached the level that the Avos had paved for us. The level of Hashem's presence clearly descending to this world was not completed until we could capture the experience of Har Sinai and bring it with us. Har Sinai was the beginning but it needed to become portable, a part of our lives which always remains with us, in the center of our camp, no matter where we journey. When Hashem's presence filled this portable centerpiece, it was at that moment that the book of Shemos came to a close. It was at that moment that we reached the bar that the Avos had set for us, we achieved Geulah. May we merit to see it in our day.