

Netziv's introduction to Exodus is formally an explanation of why Halakhot Gedolot regards it as the second half of Genesis rather than as an independent book. It is therefore fitting that it riffs on Rashi's exegetical comment on the opening word of Torah. "Breishit", is grammatically problematic, as it apparently means "In the beginning **of**" without telling us what is beginning. Rashi therefore cites midrashim that translate "For the sake of Reishit", and then note that Torah and Israel are both described in Tanakh as Reishit (they do not mention that Amalek is also described as "reishit goyim"), and conclude that the world was created for the sake of Israel and Torah. Netziv suggests that Creation is therefore completed (reaches its telos) in Exodus, which records the development of the nation Israel and its acceptance of the Torah.

This could easily and naturally lead to a highly ethnocentric vision in which non-Jews have no ontological significance. It is therefore highly important and revealing that Netziv takes it in exactly the opposite direction. I understand his argument as follows:

- a. The world does not end at the Exodus, nor at the Giving of the Torah
- b. Therefore, reaching the telos and completion of Creation is not the same as reaching the telos of the world; rather, Creation is completed when the world contains the **potential** to achieve its telos.
- c. Therefore Israel's reception of the Torah is not the telos of the world, but rather a means of enabling the world to achieve its telos. **The telos of the world is for all humanity to have knowledge of G-d.**

Netziv goes on to assert that Torah is necessary for the Jews to fulfill their particular telos of being the light by which all humanity comes to see G-d, but that it is not directly necessary for non-Jews to fulfill the general human telos of knowing G-d, which can be achieved via reason and character development. He provocatively refers to these capacities as Torat HoAdam, the human Torah, in implicit contrast to the Divine Torah which is necessary for Jews. Thus non-Jews are capable of virtue and human perfection even if they have no connection to Torah.

Furthermore, the Jewish mission is to enable non-Jews to gain knowledge of G-d, and the Jewish nation per se would have no purpose were there no Gentiles. Accordingly, for Jews to deny the intrinsic value of Gentile souls is to deny the value of their own national existence.

Netziv concludes optimistically, especially for a time when Orthodox Judaism was sustaining heavy losses (on this see Dr. Gil Perl's wonderful dissertation on Netziv), by noting that it takes time to move from creation to fulfillment; but as the world has progressed from paganism to a point where most non-Jews understand that the telos of humanity is knowledge of G-d, it therefore seems plausible that over time Jews will recognize their own telos of being a light for the nations. Amen, v'khen yehi raatzon.

This book is called by the Baalei Midrash¹ “Shmot”,

as we find in Genesis Rabbah (3:5): “And light came to be’ – this parallels the book Shmot”,

and similarly in many places.

Nachmanides at the end of (his commentary on) the book calls it “Sefer HaGeulah”.

Uniquely, our teacher the author of Halakhot G’dolot at the end of his holy book² calls it “Book 2” (Sefer Sheni), as he catalogues the five books of Torah as

- a. “Sefer Breishit”
- b. “Chumash Sheni”
- c. “Sefer Kohanim”
- d. “Chumash HaPekudim”, and
- e. “Mishneh Torah”.

This casual talk of our Master of blessed memory was given to teach us understanding, for it was not for nothing that he changed the (format of the) name for this book; he should have either

- a. called them all by name: “Chumash 2, Chumash 3 . . .” or else
- b. called this book Shmot, or else
- c. after the defining theme in it, such as the exodus from Egypt or the giving of the Torah, as he calls Sefer Bamidbar “The Book of the Censi”, the reason for which I have written in its place.

Rather, it comes to teach us that this book alone is second to the book of the beginning of the Creation, because it is the second section of that book, meaning that in it is completed the order of Creation,

as They of Blessed Memory said: “‘B’reishit’ - (Creation happened) for the sake of Israel, who are described as Reishit”,

meaning: the telos of the world as a whole is that one peoplehood (umma) should be the portion of Hashem and His nation, and this was not completed until Israel went out of Egypt and reached their telos, that they should be fit to be a light for the nations so as to establish them in the knowledge of the G-d of the world,

as we explained in the body of this book commenting on 12:51 “yatz’u bnei Yisroel al tziv’otam”,

and this is the telos of the Creation, which was created for His May He Be Blessed’s honor,

as Scripture writes “Kol hanikra bishmi velikhvodi b’rativ . . .”,

and as I have written in Sefer Bamidbar Parashat Shelach on the verse “V’ulam chai ani v’yimalei chai Hashem . . .”

¹ This appears to refer specifically to the editors of collections of midrashei aggadah, rather than to the Tannaim and Amoraim who are cited there and in the Talmuds

² Cf. Netziv’s introduction to Haamek Sh’eilah for his appreciation of the Geonim

It thus emerges that the Exodus was the completion of the Creation.

Or else it was the Giving of the Torah,

as is explained in (Midrash) Rabbah: “‘B’reishit’ - (Creation happened) In the merit of the Torah, which is called Reishit”,

which follows what is written in Talmud Avodah Zarah 3:

“‘There was evening, there was morning, the sixth day’ – this teaches that The Holy Blessed One made a condition with the First-Made Things: If Israel accept the Torah, it would be better; but if not, I will return you to formlessness and void”.

so it emerges that the Giving of the Torah is the end of the Creation, and this is identical with the Exodus from Egypt, as then Israel were fit to accept the Torah and to complete the Creation, and to come through it to the telos of their formation, so this is with regard to the People of Hashem the same as human reason (daat enoshi) and proper character (middot yesharot) in the Torah of Humanity (Torat ha’adam),

regarding which:

even though the land and what fills it (teivel umeloah) did not reach this completion until after a long time after the creation of Heaven and Earth,

and even nowadays there are many human beings that have not reached this height, nonetheless

the matter is comprehended even by the peoplehoods of the world that only this is the telos of the advantage/raised status of the human being (maalat ha’adam),

and similarly we have reason to believe that:

even though Torah and her principles were not given until after the Exodus from Egypt,

and even now there are many of Israel who have not achieved a Torah midndset, nonetheless

only the Torah is the telos of the advantage/raised status of Israel, who were formed to be a covenantal people/light for the nations (berit am or goyim).

It thus emerges that Sefer Shmot is the Second Book to the first, as they are one topic, and in it are the two sections of the Book of the Creation.

זה הספר נקרא בפי בעלי המדרש 'ספר שמות',

כדאיתא בבראשית רבה פרק ג: "ויהי אור" – נגד ספר שמות כו',

וכן בהרבה מקומות.

והרמב"ן בסוף ספרו הקדש יקראהו 'ספר שני', דקחשיב חמשה חומשי תורה:

א. ספר בראשית

ג. וחומש שני

ג. וספר כהנים

ד. וחומש הפקודים

ה. ומשנה תורה,

ושותא דמרן זצ"ל ניתן ללמדנו בינה, שלא בחינם שינה השם בזה הספר, והיה לרבינו

א. לקרוא כולם במספר חומש שני ושלישי וכו', או

ב. חומש שמות או

ג. על הענין המסוים שבו, כמו לציאת מצרים אן מתן תורה, כמו שקורא ספר במדבר ספר

הפקודים, וכמו שכתבתי במקומו הטעם.

אלא בא ללמדנו דזה הספר ביחוד הוא ספר שני לספר ראשית הבריאה, כי הוא חלק שני מזה הספר, היינו בו נגמר סדר הבריאה,

וכמאמרם ז"ל: "בראשית" – בשביל ישראל שנקראו ראשית",

פירוש: תכלית העולם בכלל הוא שיהא אומה אחת חלק ה' עמו, וזה לא נשלם עד שיצאו ישראל ממצרים ובאו לתכליתם שיהיו רואים להיות אור גוים להעמידם על ידיעת אלה-י עולם,

וכמו שביארנו בגוף הספר (יב:נא) על הפסוק "יצאו בני ישראל על צבאתם",

וזהו תכלית הבריאה, שנברא לכבודו יתברך,

כמו שכתוב "כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו וכו'",

כמו שכתבתי בספר במדבר פרשת שלח על הפסוק "ואולם חי אני וימלא כבוד ה' וגו'.

נמצא דיציאת מצרים היה גמר הבריאה.

או מתן תורה,

כמבואר עוד ברבה: "בראשית" – בזכות התורה שנקרא ראשית",

והיינו כדאיתא בעבודת כוכבים דף ג:

"ויהי ערב ויהי בקר – יום הששי" – מלמד שהתנה הקב"ה עם מעשה בראשית: אם מקבלין ישראל

את התורה – מוטב; ואם לאו – אני מחזיר אתכם לתהו ובהו".

נמצא דמתן תורה הוא גמר הבריאה, והיינו הך דיציאת מצרים, שאז היו ראויים ישראל לקבל התורה ולהשלים הבריאה ולבא בזה לתכלית יצירתם,

והרי זה אצל עם ה' כמו דעת אנושי ומדות ישרות של תורת האדם,

אשר:

אף על גב שלא הגיעה תבל ומלואה לזו השלימות עד אחר זמן רב אחר בריאת שמים וארץ,

וגם כיום יש הרבה בני אדם שלא הגיעו לזו המעלה, מכל מקום

הדבר מושכל גם לאומות העולם דרק זה היא תכלית מעלת האדם,

וכך יש לנו להאמין:

דאף על גב שלא ניתנה התורה וחוקותיה עד אחר יציאת מצרים,
וגם עתה יש הרבה מישראל שלא הגיעו לדעת תורה, מכל מקום
רק התורה היא תכלית מעלת ישראל, שנוצרו לברית עם לאור גוים.
נמצא דספר שמות הוא ספר שני להראשון, כמו שהמה ענין אחד, ובו שני חלקים של ספר הבריאה.