

The Burning Bush of history

The burning bush is the eternal symbol of Jewish history. The bush is on fire, yet it is not consumed. And the State of Israel is the living proof.

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We are about to read the Torah portion in the Book of Shemot (in English, the Book of Exodus) telling of the Splitting of the Sea, the awesome miracle that followed the Exodus from Egypt.

But the Book of Shemot is not only a story about what happened long ago. It is the *Sefer HaGalus VeHaGeulah* - the book that teaches the inner story of Jewish history. When the Torah begins with the descent of Yaakov and his family to Mitzrayim, it is not only describing a journey. It is describing the beginning of a nation.

A family goes down to Mitzrayim, but a people comes out. Mitzrayim is like a womb. Inside it, Am Yisrael grows, is shaped, and is prepared. The birth of the nation is painful, just like any real birth. Through suffering and pressure, a nation is formed. *Yechidim* become a *Le'om*.

Mitzrayim becomes the model for every galut that follows. Again and again in history, Yidden (Jews) are invited by rulers to settle in their lands. They help build the economy, strengthen the country, and bring prosperity. For a time, they are welcomed and protected. Then a new king arises - "Vayakum Melech Chadash al Mitzrayim asher lo yada et Yosef." Gratitude disappears. The Yidden are no longer seen as partners, but as a threat. Suspicion replaces trust. Heavy taxes are imposed. Decrees follow. Restrictions grow. Violence breaks out. Pogroms come. And in the end, expulsion. Then the Yidden wander again through the desert, *Midbar HaAmim*, searching for another temporary home.

This is the long story of our people in galut. It is the story of Mitzrayim, Rome, Spain, Eastern Europe, and every dispersion.

But the Torah teaches us to look at history in two ways.

On the outside, we see kings, empires, wars, and politics. We see causes and effects, victories and defeats.

But behind everything that happens, Hashem is running the world. Even when history looks cruel and confusing, nothing is random. Hashem is quietly guiding events toward their purpose.

What looks like chaos is really part of Hashem's plan.

This is how Rav Kook could write during the First World War that the terrible war carried within it a deep expectation for *geulah* and the return of Am Yisrael to Eretz Yisrael. On the outside, the war destroyed empires and killed millions. But behind the scenes, it led to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Balfour Declaration, the San Remo Conference, and the opening of the gates for the return of Am Yisrael to their land.

The same pattern appears in Mitzrayim.

On the outside, the situation only gets worse. The Children of Israel are enslaved. Their lives are made bitter. Their children are thrown into the Nile. It looks like the end of hope. But behind the scenes, the promise of the *Brit Bein HaBeturim* is unfolding: "*Yadoa teida ki ger yihye zarecha be'eretz lo lahem, va'avdum ve'inu otam.*" - *Know that your descendants will be strangers in a foreign land, will be enslaved and persecuted there.*

And exactly at the darkest moment, Moshe is born.

Because of Pharaoh's decree, his parents place him in a basket in the Nile. Because of that decree, Bat Pharaoh finds him. Because of Pharaoh's cruelty, Moshe is raised in the palace. The enemy raises he who will one day destroy his empire.

Moshe grows up as a prince, not as a slave. He receives the finest education. He learns leadership, power, and government. His spirit is the spirit of a free man, not of a broken servant. As Ibn Ezra explains, had Moshe grown up among the slaves, they would not have feared him and would not have accepted him as a leader. Hashem arranged that he be raised in royalty so that he could later lead a nation into freedom.

When Moshe goes out to see what is happening in Mitzrayim, he stands between two worlds: the palace of Pharaoh and the suffering of the slaves. He is still unsure of his identity. But when he sees an Egyptian striking a Jewish man, everything becomes clear. In that moment, he chooses his people. He understands who his true brothers are. That moment is the beginning of his mission.

Centuries later, a similar awakening happens to Theodor Herzl. He was a Viennese journalist who was unsure of his national identity until he witnessed the Dreyfus trial. When he saw a Jewish officer humiliated and condemned in the heart of enlightened France, he understood that Yidden would never truly be safe in galut. That moment placed him on the path that would lead to the rebirth of Jewish sovereignty.

And history itself has now sealed that lesson. The same France that once persecuted Alfred Dreyfus has officially recognized its moral failure. French President Emmanuel Macron has declared July 12 a national day of remembrance for Alfred Dreyfus. Beginning in 2026, France will hold an annual ceremony marking the anniversary of Dreyfus's exoneration. As Macron said: "From now on, there will be a commemoration ceremony every July 12 for Dreyfus - for the victory of justice and the truth against hatred and antisemitism."

It is an important act of justice, but it also confirms Herzl's insight: galut can never be a true home.

The burning bush is the eternal symbol of Jewish history. The bush is on fire, yet it is not consumed. Empires rise and fall. Civilizations burn.

Nations disappear. But Am Yisrael endures. We are burned, but not destroyed. We suffer, but we survive.

And the State of Israel is the living proof. After centuries of galut, persecution, destruction, and ashes, the Jewish people returned to their land and rebuilt their nation.

This is the message of Shemot: even when history looks dark and cruel, Hashem is guiding it forward. Mitzrayim was not the end. It was the beginning. The fire is real - but so is the promise. Like the burning bush, Am Yisrael burns, yet is never consumed.

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