



January 6, 2024



Parshas Shemos

25th of Tevet 5784

The Jew's Secret Weapon

One of the best ways a company or an organization or a book can convey its mission statement is by choosing a good name, a name that encapsulates the very essence of the company, team or organization. "Hatzalah," in one word, sums up exactly what they are and what they stand for. "Home Depot." It is exactly what its name says it is: a store for all your household needs. "Tesla": new, exciting and electrifying.

When one looks at the names of the books of the Torah, they all do a great job in encapsulating what is contained inside. *Bereishis*. The entire *Sefer Bereishis* is in essence the physical and spiritual beginning and development of the world. *Vayikra*. Rashi says it is a loving call from Hashem, teaching us how to properly serve Him with *korbanos*. *Bamidbar*. It is the entire story of the Jews in the desert. *Devarim*. It is the entire speech that Moshe gave on the last day of his life.

But then there is *Shemos*. Names? How does that encapsulate the entire *sefer*? What does "Names" have to do with the exile in *Mitzrayim*? What does "*Shemos*" have to do with getting out of Egypt and going into the desert? What does "Names" have to do with camping around *Har Sinai* and receiving the Torah? What does *Shemos* have to do with building a *Mishkan*?

Shenayim Mikra

The Baal HaTurim says something fascinating on the word *Shemos*, which can perhaps shed light on our question. He says that the word *Shemos* is really an acronym for *Shenayim Mikra V'echad Targum*. This refers to the obligation for every male to learn the Torah twice each week with the translation. Now there is an obvious question. Why is the Torah suddenly, right at the beginning of *Sefer Shemos*, telling me about the mitzvah to do *Shenayim Mikra*? Shouldn't it have reminded me long ago, somewhere in *Sefer Bereishis*? Shouldn't the Torah allude to this Mitzvah somewhere closer to the beginning of the year, when we begin our cycle of Torah reading?

Perhaps there is a rhyme and reason for choosing to place the reference to *Shenayim Mikra* right at the beginning of *Shemos*. Perhaps it is to tell us a powerful message. Perhaps the Torah is telling us, "Do you want to know the key to surviving exile? Do you want to know the secret to making it out of persecution alive? Do you want to know how to thrive in a desert? It is *Shenayim Mikra V'echad Targum*." The Torah specifically waits until *Sefer Shemos* to tell me about the mitzvah of learning the weekly Torah reading, for *Shemos* begins the *Galus*. *Shemos* begins our journey into the desert. *Shemos* begins our voyage that will eventually crisscross the entire world. *Shemos* begins our trek that took us to Iran and to Iraq. To Spain and to Portugal. To Yugoslavia and to Yemen. To France and Germany and Morocco and Russia and Egypt and Africa and Austria and Australia and China and Norway and Bosnia and Croatia and Chile and Mongolia and to everywhere in

between. Precisely there do we need a reminder about the mitzvah of *Shenayim Mikra*. For it is the secret; it is the key. Keeping the Torah close by is the antidote to the poison of exile. Week in and week out, month in and month out, year in and year out, century in and century out. No matter where our journey takes us, the Torah will be by our side.

The Times on the NY Times

For many, many years, every Friday, on the bottom right corner of the cover of the New York Times was a box stating: "Women should light the Shabbat candles at such-and-such time." For decades this was there. Year in and year out. One day it stopped. The sponsor had died, and the New York Times moved on without its familiar Friday candle-lighting times. Years later, on January 1, 2000, the New York Times put out the much-anticipated special millennium edition. The front page of the paper was split into three thirds. The first third was a reprint of the front page from January 1, 1900. The next third was the front page of the present day, January 1, 2000. The last third was a futuristic front cover depicting January 1, 2100. That predictive page was strange. The headline introduced a humorous article debating whether or not robots should be allowed to vote. But what it had on the bottom right corner is what took people by surprise. For some reason, on the corner of the 2100 front page it had the following familiar words in a box: "Women shall light Shabbat candles at such-and-such time". People were bewildered. They hadn't seen that in years. Why all of a sudden did it make its return?

The editor in chief, an Irish gentleman, was asked what the box was doing there, and he responded as follows. "When we were sitting in the editors' boardroom trying to figure out what to put on that last section of the front page, we realized that there is no way to know for certain where the world will be in one hundred years. We can't even remotely predict what the world will look like. But there is one thing that we can predict with certainty, and that is that Jewish women will be lighting the Shabbat candles on Friday night. I don't know how, but they did it the last 3,000 years, they'll do it the next 3,000."

Our nation has a little secret. We have something called the Torah, which has guided us and prodded us and loved us and saved us and nurtured us. It has led us through the darkest times in world history. It held our hands and took us out of cattle cars and ghettos. It bent down, picked us up, dusted us off and carried us on its wings throughout the world. It has been our pipeline to Heaven. Our connection to infinity. And we, likewise, revere it and study it. We learn it and we love it. We sing it and we cry for it. We pick it up and we dance with it.

Precisely at the beginning of our exile, the Torah tells us the antidote. The very first words of *Sefer Shemos* lets us in on the secret. It not only encapsulates the entire *Sefer Shemos*, it encapsulates our entire trek through time. *Shemos* belts out: "Love the Torah and the Torah will love you." Learn it week after week after week after week. Be there for it and it will be there for you. It is our mantra. It is our anthem. It is what kept us, a little tiny nation, thriving in our long, dark exile.