Tanach in Two – Sefer Shmot

Rabbi Yechezkel Freundlich

1. **Servitude, Affliction and Redemption from Egypt (Chapters 1-18)**
   1. Suffering (tefilla), birth of Moshe and our introduction to him
   2. Burning bush and Command to redeem
   3. Return to the people, hope and despair
   4. Let my people go… serve me
   5. 10 plagues (3x3x3 +1), Korban Pesach and Rosh Chodesh
   6. Final pursuit and splitting of the sea, Shira
   7. Crises in the desert – no food or water, Amalek
2. **Har Sinai – Receiving the Torah (chapters 19-20)**
   1. Preparation and “The Scene”
   2. Mass Revelation and 10 Commandments
3. **Selected Laws and Mitzvot (Chapters 21-24)**
   1. Most בין אדם לחבירו (interpersonal)
      1. Jewish slaves, damages, caring for widow/orphan/stranger, loans
4. **Commandment to Build the Mishkan (Chapters 25-31)**
   1. Contributions of money, material, and labour
   2. The command to build mishkan and fashion its vessels
   3. The command to produce Priestly garments
5. **Sin of the Golden Calf (Chapters 32-34)**
   1. Moshe is “late”; Aharon is pressured
   2. People dance, Hashem sends Moshe down and he smashes Luchot
      1. Tribe of Levi steps forward
   3. Moshe intercedes on our behalf
   4. 13 Attributes of Mercy, Forgiveness, second set of Luchot
      1. but things will never be the same
6. **Building the Mishkan (Chapters 35-40)**
   1. Actual construction of Mishkan, vessels, and Priestly garments
   2. Hashem’s presence fills the Mishkan

**Part II: 5 Topics; 3 Names, 1 Theme**

1. Three Names for the Book
   1. “Sefer Shmot” – The Book of Names
   2. “Book of Redemption” – Ramban
      1. The Centrality of Hashem’s presence amongst the Jewish people
      2. Not only for the Avot, for us as a Nation
   3. “The Second Book” - (R ‘Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, 1816-1893)
      1. The Centrality of Torah completing the Creation story
      2. Not just for Avot, for us as a Nation
2. One Theme: Miracles
   1. To Moshe, Pharoah, Plagues, Splitting Sea, at Har Sinai, in the desert
   2. Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Yom Kippur all in this Book
   3. Ramban

**Sources:**

**Ramban – Introduction to Sefer Shmot**

השלים הכתוב ספר בראשית שהוא ספר היצירה בחידוש העולם ויצירת כל נוצר ובמקרי האבות שהם כענין יצירה לזרעם מפני שכל מקריהם ציורי דברים לרמוז ולהודיע כל עתיד לבא להם.

The Torah completed the Book of Berieshit, which is the Book of Creation, which concerns the creation of the world and the formation of all of its creatures, as well as the events of the Avot, because of all of the events in their lives are illustrations to allude and foretell what will happen to the offspring in the future.

ואחרי שהשלים היצירה התחיל ספר אחר … ונתייחד ספר "ואלה שמות" בענין הגלות הראשון הנגזר בפירוש ובגאולה ממנו ולכן חזר והתחיל בשמות יורדי מצרים ומספרם אע"פ שכבר נכתב זה בעבור כי ירידתם שם הוא ראשית הגלות כי מאז הוחל.

After it completed “Creation,” it began another Book, Shmot, dedicated to the first exile which was explicitly decreed (to Avraham) and the Redemption from it. This is why the Torah goes back and begins the Book with the names of those who descended to Egypt even though it has already been recorded, because their descent marks the beginning of the exile for it was at this point that it began.

והנה הגלות איננו נשלם עד יום שובם אל מקומם ואל מעלת אבותם ישובו. וכשיצאו ממצרים אע"פ שיצאו מבית עבדים עדיין יחשבו גולים כי היו בארץ לא להם נבוכים במדבר. וכשבאו אל הר סיני ועשו המשכן ושב הקב"ה והשרה שכינתו ביניהם אז שבו אל מעלות אבותם שהיה סוד אלוה עלי אהליהם והם הם המרכבה ואז נחשבו גאולים. ולכן נשלם הספר הזה בהשלימו ענין המשכן ובהיות כבוד ה' מלא אותו תמיד:

Now the exile did not end until the people returned to their place and to the stature of their forefathers. Therefore, even though they left Egypt and the house of bondage, they were still considered exiles, for they were wandering in a land not theirs. But when they arrived at Har Sinai and built the Mishkan and then Hashem caused His Presence to dwell amongst them, they returned to the eminence of their forefathers and then they were considered redeemed. This is why the book ends with the Divine Presence filling the Mishkan.

Netziv: Introduction to Shmot

זה הספר נקרא בפי בעלי המדרש ספר שמות…והרמב״ן סוף הספר קראו ספר הגאולה. זולת רבינו בה״ג בסוף ספרו הקדוש יקראהו ספר שני דקחשיב חמשה חומשי תורה. ספר בראשית. וחומש שני. וספר כהנים. וחומש הפקודים. ומשנה תורה

This book is commonly referred to by the authors of the Midrash as *Sefer Shemos*…And Nachmanides, at the end of his commentary [to *Sefer Shemos*], calls it the *Sefer HaGeulah* (The Book of Redemption). However, our Teacher the BaHaG*Acronym for Ba’al Halachos Gedolos, Rabbeinu Shimon Keira, ~800. [Halachos Gedolos is his composition on Halacha. Some sources attribute it to "Rabbeinu Yehudai Gaon", of the same time period.]* towards the end of his holy book*Halachos Gedolos.* when listing the Five Books of the Torah refers to [*Shemos*] as the “Second Book.” He writes: “There are five books of the Torah: *Sefer Bereishis*, (Genesis), *Chumash Sheini* (Second Book of the Torah), *Sefer Kohanim* (Book of Priests), *Chumash HaPekudim* (The Book of Numbers), and *Mishneh Torah* (Repetition of the Torah).”

אלא בא ללמדנו דזה הספר ביחוד הוא שני לספר ראשית הבריאה כי הוא חלק שני מזה הספר. היינו בו נגמר סדר הבריאה. וכמאמרם ז"ל בראשית בשביל ישראל שנקראו ראשית. פי' תכלית העולם בכלל. הוא שיהא אומה אחת חלק ה׳ עמו. וזה לא נשלם עד שיצאו ישראל ממצרים ובאו לתכליתם שיהיו ראוים להיות לאור גוים להעמידם על ידיעת אלהי עולם. וזהו תכלית הבריאה שנברא לכבודו ית׳ כמש״כ כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו וגו'

In fact, it comes to teach how this book specifically is the second volume to the book describing the beginning of creation; i.e. it is a second section describing the culmination of creation. This is like our Sages of Blessed Memory stated, G-d created the world for the sake of Israel who are called *reishis*, “first,” as stated “[Israel is holy to the L-rd] the **first** of His crop”;The understanding of this is that the purpose of the world’s creation as a whole was for a single nation to become G-d’s possession, His nation. This did not completely come to fruition until Israel left Egypt, arriving at their purpose when – upon accepting the yoke of the Torah and *mitzvos* – they experienced a transformation of their very being. Also included in this is their function to be fit to be the beacon for the nations, guiding them to recognize the G-d of the Universe. And this [transformation of Israel] is the purpose of creation, [to proclaim] His glory, may He be Blessed, as written in the Scripture: “Everyone who is called by My name, and whom I have created for My glory.”15*Isa. 43:7.*

נמצא דיציאת מצרים הי' גמר הבריאה או מ"ת כמבואר עוד ברבה בראשית בזכות התורה שנקראת ראשית. והיינו כדאיתא בעבודת כוכבים ד״ג ויהי ערב ויהי בקר יום הששי מלמד שהתנה הקב״ה עם מעשה בראשית אם מקבלין ישראל את התורה מוטב ואם לאו אני אחזיר אתכם לתוהו ובוהו.

Thus the exodus from Egypt was the culmination of creation, specifically,at the giving of the Torah, as stated in *Midrash Rabbah* to Bereishis,18*Gen. 1:1. “’B’reishis G-d Created”;* “[The world was created] in the merit of the Torah, which is called *reishis*.” This is also stated in Tractate *Avodah Zarah* 3a: What is conveyed by the phrase, “And there was evening and there was morning *the* sixth day” *(Gen. 1: 31)* It teaches us that G-d made a condition with the works of creation, saying: “If Israel accepts my Torah it will be well, but if not, I shall return you to a state of chaos and void.”

נמצא דמתן תורה הוא גמר הבריאה והיינו הך דיציאת מצרים שאז היו ראוים ישראל לקבל התורה ולהשלים הבריאה ולבא בזה לתכלית יצירתם… מ״מ הדבר מושכל גם לאוה״ע דרק זה הי׳ תכלית מעלת האדם. וכך יש לנו להאמין דאע״ג שלא ניתנה התורה וחקותיה עד אחר יציאת מצרים. וגם עתה יש הרבה מישראל שלא הגיעו לדעת תורה. מ״מ 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:

Thus the giving of the Torah completed creation. It is really the same as the exodus from Egypt for only [through the exodus] could Israel be capable of receiving the Torah, thus actualizing the purpose of their formation… It is well-understood even by the nations of the world that this is the purpose of man’s stature. Similarly, we, the Nation of Israel, need to believe that even though the Torah and its statutes were not given until after the exodus from Egypt and, even currently, many Jews have not reached [the level of incorporating] *Daas Torah*, nevertheless, it is only the Torah that is the ultimate purpose of Israel’s stature. [We] are created for this [purpose], and it is the reason we have been ‘placed [on this earth] for a covenant of the people, to be a light of the nations.’

It then follows, why the Book of *Shemos* is considered as a second volume to the first book, *Bereishis*, as both Books deal with the same theme; they are the two parts that describe the Creation.

Ramban, Commentary to Shmot 13:16

And now I will tell you a general rule about the explanation of many commandments. Behold, from the time of there being idolatry in the world - from the days of Enosh - the opinions about faith started to blur. Some of them deny the fundamental principle and say that the world is prior [to G-d's creation] and 'they rejected G-d and say, "It is not Him.'" And some reject His knowledge of particulars - 'And they say, "How can He know, and is there knowledge to the most High?"' And some of them concede His knowledge but reject His oversight, and 'they make man to be like the fish of the sea,' that G-d not supervise them and there not be punishments and reward with them at all - they say, '"The L-rd has abandoned the Earth."'

And when G-d favors a certain community or individual and does a wonder for them by changing the custom of the world and its nature, the nullification of these opinions becomes clear to everyone. As the amazing wonder teaches that there is a G-d in the world who innovated it, and knows and supervises and is able [to do whatever He wants]. And when this wonder is first proclaimed by the mouth of a prophet, the truth of prophecy also becomes clear from it - that G-d speaks with man and reveals His secret to His servants, the prophets. And with this, all of the Torah is established.

And therefore the verse states about the wonders (Exodus 8:18), "so that you will know that I am the L-rd in the midst of the Earth," to teach about [His] supervision, that He did not leave it to happenstance, as per their opinion. And it stated (Exodus 9:29), "so that you will know that to the L-rd is the Earth," to teach about [His] innovation [of the Earth] - since they are His, as He created them from nothing. And it stated (Exodus 9:14), "in order that you will know that there is none like Me in the whole Earth," to teach about His ability, that He is the Decider about everything - there is no one that stops Him. As the Egyptians rejected or were in doubt about all of this. If so, the great signs and wonders were trustworthy witnesses about faith in the Creator and about the entire Torah.

And since the Holy One, blessed be He, will not do a sign and wonder in each generation in front of the eyes of each evildoer or heretic, He commanded us that we should always make a memorial and a sign to that which our eyes saw. And we should copy this thing for our children, and their children for their children, and their children for the last generation. And [the Torah] was very strict about this, such that it made one liable for cutting off, for eating of chametz (Exodus 12:15), and for leaving the Pesach sacrifice (Numbers 9:13).

And it required that we write all that was shown to us of signs and wonders upon our arms and upon our eyes, and also to write them at the entrances to houses in mezuzot. And [it required] that we mention it with our mouths, in the morning and in the evening, as the sages said (Berakhot 21a), "[The blessing that mentions the leaving of Egypt and begins,] 'true and solid' is [an obligation from] the Torah," from that which is written (Deuteronomy 16:3), "in order that you remember the day of your leaving the land of Egypt all the days of your life." And [it required] that we make a Sukkah booth every year. And so [too], many commandments in memory of the leaving of Egypt, are similar to these.

And all of it is to be a testimony for us for all of the generations about the wonders, that they not be forgotten; and that there not be an opening for the heretic to speak and reject faith in G-d. As one who buys a mezuzah for one zuz and affixes it to his entrance and has intent for its matter, has already conceded to [G-d's] innovation [of the Earth] and to the knowledge of the Creator and His supervision, and also to prophecy. And [such a person] believes in all of the outlines of the Torah, besides conceding that the kindness of the Creator to those who do His will is very great - as He took us out of Egypt, from that slavery to freedom and great honor in the merit of their forefathers that desired to fear His name. And therefore they said (Avot 2:1), "Be careful with a light commandment as with a weighty one," since they are all very desirable and beloved - as through them a person concedes to his G-d all the time.

And the intention of all the commandments is that we believe in our G-d and acknowledge to Him that He is our Creator. And that is the intention of Creation, as we have no other explanation for the first Creation - and the highest G-d only desires the lower beings, so that man should know and acknowledge his G-d that He created him. And the intention of raising of the voice in prayer and the intention of synagogues and the merit of communal prayer is that there be a place for people to gather and acknowledge G-d that He created them and makes them exist, and to publicize this and to say in front of Him, "We are Your creatures."

And from the great public miracles, a person can [also] acknowledge to hidden miracles, which constitute the foundation of the entire Torah. As a person does not have a share in the Torah of Moshe, our teacher, until we believe that all of the things and events we [encounter] are all miracles [and] there is no nature or custom of the world with them, whether with regard to the many or to the individual. But rather, if one does the commandments, his reward will bring him success and if the transgresses them, his punishment will cut him off - everything is the decree of the Most High, as I have already mentioned (Ramban on Genesis 17:1, and Exodus 6:2). And hidden miracles regarding the many become publicized when they come from the objectives of the Torah in [the form] of the blessings and the curses, as the verse stated (Deuteronomy 29:23-24), "All the nations will say, 'Why did the L-rd do thus to this land?'[...] They will say, 'Because they forsook the covenant of the L-rd, G-d of their fathers," such that it will be publicized to all of the nations that it is from the L-rd, as their punishment. And regarding the fulfillment [of the commandments], it states (Deuteronomy 28:10), "And all of the peoples of the land will see that the name of the L-rd is called upon you and they will fear from you.'

1. שמות א:א

וְאֵ֗לֶּה שְׁמוֹת֙ בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל הַבָּאִ֖ים מִצְרָ֑יְמָה אֵ֣ת יַעֲקֹ֔ב אִ֥ישׁ וּבֵית֖וֹ בָּֽאוּ׃

And These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each coming with his household:

1. רש''י בראשית א:לא

**יום הששי.** הוֹסִיף ה' בַּשִּׁשִּׁי בִגְמַר מַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית, לוֹמַר שֶׁהִתְנָה עִמָּהֶם, עַל מְנָת שֶׁיְּקַבְּלוּ עֲלֵיהֶם יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲמִשָּׁה חֻמְּשֵׁי תוֹרָה. דָּבָר אַחֵר יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי, כֻּלָּם תְּלוּיִם וְעוֹמְדִים עַד יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי, הוּא ו' בְּסִיוָן הַמּוּכָן לְמַתַּן תּוֹרָה:

THE SIXTH DAY — The letter ה, the numerical value of which is 5, is added to the word ששי when the work of Creation was complete, to imply that He made a stipulation with them that it endures only upon condition that Israel should accept the five books of the Torah ([Shabbat 88a](/Shabbat.88a)). Another interpretation of THE SIXTH DAY — The whole Creation (the Universe) stood in a state of suspense until THE sixth day — that is, the sixth day of Sivan which was destined to be the day when the Torah would be given to Israel ([Avodah Zara 3a](/Avodah_Zarah.3a)).

1. רש''י בראשית א:א

בראשית ברא אֵין הַמִּקְרָא הַזֶּה אוֹמֵר אֶלָּא דָּרְשֵׁנִי, כְּמוֹ שֶׁדְּרָשׁוּהוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ בִּשְׁבִיל הַתּוֹרָה שֶׁנִקְרֵאת רֵאשִׁית דַּרְכּוֹ ([משלי ח'](/Proverbs.8)), וּבִשְׁבִיל יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִקְרְאוּ רֵאשִׁית תְּבוּאָתוֹ ([ירמיה ב](/Jeremiah.2))

IN THE BEGINNING G-D CREATED — This verse calls aloud for explanation in the manner that our Rabbis explained it: G-d created the world for the sake of the Torah which is called ([Proverbs 8:22](/Proverbs.8.22)) “The beginning (ראשית) of His (G-d’s) way”, and for the sake of Israel who are called ([Jeremiah 2:3](/Jeremiah.2.3)) “The beginning (ראשית) of His (G-d’s) increase’’.