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From Pain to Peoplehood: Growing into Nationhood

The transition into adulthood is rarely gentle. It is often marked by rupture, confusion, and pain. To grow is to leave behind a sheltered world and step into responsibility, vulnerability, and purpose. Something must be lost for something deeper to emerge. What is true for individuals is no less true for nations. The Torah teaches us that nationhood itself is not born in comfort, but forged through struggle.

Personally, I am always a little sad to finish the book of Bereshit. For twelve weeks we immerse ourselves in complex personalities and character traits; in struggles with fertility, marriage, and sibling rivalry; in actions that seem momentous and others that appear insignificant, yet all shape destiny. We come to know our Avot and Imahot as individuals, couples, and as families. Sefer Bereshit is the long, foundational process of forming people. And then we turn the page.

We now embark on the next journey—Sefer Shemot—the story of becoming a nation.

The Netziv famously refers to Sefer Shemot as Sefer Sheini, the second book of creation.



The Netziv of Volozhin

Bereshit is not merely a story of beginnings; it is the groundwork. But creation is incomplete if it ends with the perfected individual. The ultimate goal of creation is the emergence of a nation that carries divine values into history. That is where Sefer Shemot begins—not as a new narrative, but as a continuation of creation on a higher plane. A family must become Am Yisrael.

And that transformation can only occur through descent before ascent. This truth was already taught to Avraham through the Brit Bein HaBeturim. Nationhood would require exile before redemption, darkness before revelation.

The Torah is unequivocal: Slavery, oppression, and suffering were not unfortunate detours; they were the crucible in which a people was formed. Only after enduring degradation together, crying out together, and discovering a shared destiny could Bnei Yisrael stand at Sinai and receive the Torah—not as individuals, but as a nation bound by responsibility for one another. (Of course, following the receiving of the Torah, are the many commandments to build the Mishkan, a resting place for the Shchina. Also,

something that could not have taken place out of order of events)

Growth, whether personal or national, is painful precisely because something real is being born.

On October 7, our nation was thrust into profound pain. The shock shattered assumptions we did not even realize we were holding. Lives were taken, communities were devastated, and a sense of security was torn away. The grief is real and unresolved.

And yet, something else happened.

We did not dissolve—we gathered. We reached for one another. Across divisions that once felt insurmountable, Am Yisrael rediscovered itself. We were reminded, in the most visceral way, that we are bound by shared fate and shared responsibility.

Like the descent into Egypt, October 7 was not chosen. But the response was. And in that response, something essential was reclaimed. Out of the pain, we became a nation again—not because suffering sanctifies itself, but because it strips away illusion and forces clarity. It reminds us who we are and why we exist.

This past week we observed Asarah b'Tevet, the day that marks the siege of Jerusalem—the beginning of the process that led to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. And yet it is a fast day of prayer and hope for its complete rebuilding. (May it be this year!)

On that very day, we were blessed to celebrate the brit milah of our first grandson, Amichai Binyamin Meir. Mazal tov.

Amichai—“My nation lives”—is both declaration and defiance. It proclaims that despite history’s relentless tests, Am Yisrael endures. Not only biologically, but morally and spiritually. Jewish continuity does not come from forgetting pain, but from transforming it into

resolve.

This truth is captured powerfully in the prophetic verse recited at a brit milah: “**ואומר לך בدمיך ח’**”—“And I said to you: By your blood, live.” The image is unsettling, yet it has never resonated more deeply for me than at the brit of Amichai Binyamin. Yechezkel describes a nation abandoned and wounded, lying in its blood. God does not erase the blood or deny the pain. He speaks directly into it: Within it, despite it—live!

Chazal explain that this verse refers to two bloods: the blood of the Korban Pesach and the blood of brit milah—the acts that transformed a broken slave population into a covenantal people. Life did not begin once the blood was gone; it began through commitment, covenant, and the choice to live with meaning even in vulnerability.

From Bereshit to Shemot, from Egypt to Sinai, from October 7 to the fragile hope of tomorrow, the message is the same: growth is painful, but it is not meaningless. Out of suffering can come responsibility and connection. Out of fracture, peoplehood.

Out of loss, life.

ואומר לך בدمיך ח’.

Our nation lives. *עמיה*.

Through painful exile.

Yearning for complete Redemption— with the clouds of Glory resting over and the Shnicha once again filling the Mikdash, emanating outwards.

עם ישראל ח’, לעד ■

The **Airleys** have built **Beit Binyamin**, a retreat center in Tzfat for those directly affected by the war. Soldiers, Zaka members, security forces, bereaved families and widows can come for respite, relaxation and rejuvenation. For more information and to donate, visit Beitbinyamin.org