

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 25 Tevet 5781. We bensh Rosh Chodesh Shevat, which will be this Thursday. The re-appearance of the moon, the Molad, will be this Wednesday at 5:35pm and 3 chalakim (10 seconds), Jerusalem time. We omit Av HaRachamim.

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 206 Hz) (p. 319 S) (p. 213 Hi) (p. 292 AS)

שְׁמוֹת שְׁמוֹת

Exodus 1:1

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED),
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1. The Jewish family is now settled in Egypt, having reached the magic number of 70 Jewish souls, including Yosef and his family. Yaakov had made sure that each member, no matter how young, was married. He did not want any of them to marry an Egyptian. The slavery period would begin once all twelve sons had died. Yosef was the first one to die. He died in the year 1452 BCE, at the age of 110, having ruled Egypt for 80 years! Levi was the last brother to die. He died in 1430 BCE, at the age of 137. Each brother prospered in Egypt, becoming quite wealthy. They were all in the livestock business. Living in Goshen was an excellent idea, as it isolated the family, enabling them all to observe their religion, away from the Egyptian culture. No wonder that the last 17 years of Yaakov's life were the most enjoyable ones, having survived Esav, Lavan, and the inner family turmoil of Yosef and his brothers.

2. "The children of Israel were fertile, and their population increased. They became very, very, numerous, and the land was filled with them" (1:7). Rashi comments that it was normal for a Jewish woman to give birth to sextuplets. The Midrash states that it was twelve in each pregnancy, or even sixty, astronomical and unbelievable numbers! The Midrash was actually attempting to respond to the reality of imagining how a family of 70 could become a nation of 600,000 adult males, plus women and children, and elders in about 200 years. Astounding! And the families were all able to support themselves financially. They were not a burden on the State. But we certainly understand Pharaoh's fears of seeing an immigrant family prosper and grow so much within the Egyptian borders. He really did have a Jewish problem to contend with.

3. "A new king, who did not know Yosef, came into power over Egypt" (1:8). Rashi quotes the Talmudic discussion of Rav and Shmuel; one said that it really was a new king, who had usurped the throne and did not know all that Yosef had done to save Egypt. The other sage said that it was the same Pharaoh but had reversed his approach to the Jewish people due to their alarming population explosion. Some commentators posit that Pharaoh was forced into dealing harshly with the Jews by his Supreme Council. This situation would repeat itself frequently in Jewish history, where the seemingly peaceful exile that Jews would experience in a host country can turn and become quite harsh for the unsuspecting Jewish residents. Any of these three possible

conditions could create a drastic change for Jews, no matter how many years they had experienced peaceful and rewarding living conditions. (RED)

4. When the slavery began, it was quite harsh; the Egyptians made the Jews work with backbreaking tasks, embittering their lives. Except for the tribe of Levi. Levi was exempt from the slavery, and commentators discuss why. Some say that the Leviyim were the only Jews circumcising their sons at this time. The rest of Bnei Yisrael abandoned this ritual. Hence Hashem rewarded them, by sparing them in Egypt. I favor a different approach. During the famine, all of Egypt became serfs to the ruling Pharaoh. Except for the Egyptian priests, who were exempted. Pharaoh could not take the lands owned by his priests. Yaakov had already appointed the tribe of Levi as the religious leaders and teachers of our religion in Egypt. As such, the tribe of Levi were entitled to the same treatment as their Egyptian counterparts. And they never became slaves. Moshe and Aharon were never enslaved. (Even Korach was exempted.) The Beit HaLevi wrote that this also explained why the tribe of Levi was smaller in number than the other tribes. Only those who were enslaved were rewarded with huge families.

5. One has to question Pharaoh's decision to kill the Jewish male babies. If he really wanted to stop the population explosion, wouldn't it make more sense to kill the females? They are the ones who give birth. Perhaps this question is what influenced the Midrash that states that the Egyptian astrologers told Pharaoh that the stars revealed that a Jewish son would now be born who would lead the Jews to freedom. Therefore Pharaoh decreed that only male babies would be killed. However we explain these events, the set was prepared for Moshe's birth, and his adoption by the Egyptian princess. This was also critical in Moshe's upbringing. Moshe was very familiar with the goings on in the king's palace. He knew the rituals and normal practices of the royal family. And he knew how to speak to royalty. He not only was spared from the slavery that surrounded him, but he would be brought up being educated how to be a leader among men. Important training for the future leader of Bnei Yisrael. (RED)

6. Shifra and Puah were heroes in the story. These midwives defied Pharaoh's orders and did not kill the babies. We must assume that considering the astronomical numbers of birthing Jewish mothers, Shifra and Puah must have been the supervising midwives for the Jewish people. Yet the Midrash (and Rashi) state that Shifra and Puah were Yocheved and Miriam. But that raises a different problem. Miriam is Moshe's older sister and was only five years old at the time her little brother was born. And she is a midwife? The Abravanel places a different twist to the story. He states that Shifra and Puah were Egyptian midwives. Obviously they were very pious women, to risk their lives and defy Pharaoh. The Midrash later on would reward Shifra and Puah, and Bityah, Pharaoh's daughter who raised Moshe, as having converted to Judaism and left Egypt with Bnei Yisrael in the Exodus.

7. Sarah was 90 years old when she gave birth to Yitzchak, and much is made of this miracle in the Torah. Yet according to our tradition, Yocheved was 130 when she gave birth to Moshe, and absolutely nothing is recorded about this even greater miracle. (For that matter, Yocheved was 125 when she gave birth to Miriam and 127 when she gave birth to Aharon.) The Ramban raised this question and answers that there are revealed miracles, and there are hidden miracles. He also stated that the Torah only relates miracles that are predicted by a prophet. Where a miracle has not been foreseen, it is not recorded. I can accept this, for what do you see with the founding and creation of the current State of Israel? I believe that it is a divine miracle! The story of Esther and Mordechai is another miracle. Yet Hashem's name does not appear in the story. And the miracle is veiled by a normal story involving a great deal of palace intrigue. Miracles exist today, but I guess it depends upon our religious makeup.

8. MIDRASH, Shemot Rabbah 2:5. Why did Hashem show Moshe such a symbol (of a lowly thorn bush)? Because Moshe had thought to himself that the Egyptians might consume Israel. Hence Hashem showed him a fire which burned but did not consume. Hashem said to Moshe: Just as the thorn bush is burning and is not consumed, so the Egyptians will not be able to destroy Israel. [RED's note: This is our concept of Netzach Yisrael. The Jewish people are eternal. We will suffer in this world. We have survived Pharaoh, Haman, the Inquisition, and Hitler! We will never give up hope. We feel that Hashem will always save us, no matter how many losses we are forced to endure.]

HAFTORAH

(p. 225 Hz) (p. 345 S) (p. 843 Hi) (p. 1147 AS)

ISAIAH יְשַׁעְיָהוּ 27:6

The terms Yaakov and Yisrael are both used in the first verse of today's haftorah. *"The coming generations will allow Yaakov to take root, it will blossom and flower as Yisrael."* Yaakov represents the name of the Galut (exile) appearance of Israel. Only when Yaakov takes root, establishes himself to exist in strength, will he grow and develop. This development in Jewish history will be a struggle, in exile, and through much pain and trouble. If he succeeds in rooting himself in this "purifying" manner, he will blossom into Yisrael. Yisrael is the name of Israel when it is realizing its given name, when its entire existence is stamped with God's government. The Yaakov of the exile will become the Yisrael of the Promised Land. The divine blessing will come if Yaakov/Yisrael perseveres in Torah and good deeds (Hirsch).

SHABBAT HALACHAH

REMOVING PITS FROM MELONS

When eating watermelon, one should not remove the pits from the fruit. Rather, one should remove the pits from one's mouth, while eating the fruit. It is questionable whether one is permitted to wash off, or remove by hand the seeds

of a cantaloupe. Therefore, one should not remove the seeds by themselves, but should remove them along with some of the fruit.

RETURNING A POT TO A BLECH

One is permitted to remove a pot from the blech and return it under the following conditions: (1) one should have the intention of returning the pot at the time the pot is removed. (2) The pot should remain in one's hands the entire time it is off the blech. (3) The food must be completely cooked and still be warm. If one had in mind to return the pot, but mistakenly put it down on the counter or table (but not on the floor), then the pot may be returned to the blech as long as the food is warm. If one mistakenly did not have the intention of returning the pot to the blech, but kept the pot in one's hand, one may still return it to the blech.