

*Shiur L'Yom Shenit*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Sh'mot:*** **Exodus 1:1-22**
 Haftarah: **Isaiah 27:6-7**
 Brit Chadasha: **Acts 7:30-34**

There arose a new king over Egypt.

[Exodus 1: 8]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 18:4-6

V'eleh shemot b'nei Yisra'el – And these are the names of the sons of Yisrael ... *ha-ba'im Mitzraymah et Ya'akov* – who came to Egypt unto Ya'akov **Exodus 1:1a.**

The seed of Avraham – currently numbering seventy souls - is operating *under orders*. We have a mission – and the first stage of that mission is to become a *goy gadol* [KJV 'great nation']. See **Genesis 12:2 and 46:3**. We do not yet know the HOW of doing this – but at least we know the WHERE. The Holy One has chosen the darkest of all nations, the home of the authors and masters of human-trafficking and of the architects of all forms of manipulation and misery - *Mitzrayim* [KJV 'Egypt'] - to be our incubation chamber. If the sons of the covenant thought Paddan-Aram, Sodom, Gerar, and Shechem, were strongholds of *ra*, *shachat*, and *chamas* [KJV 'evil', 'corruption', and 'violence/cruelty'] – well, just wait until they get a little taste of Mitzrayim/Egypt outside the delightful little safe-haven bubble Yosef carved out for us in *Goshen*! We will quickly discover that Egypt is *ha-Behemah* – *i.e.* the 'Beast'; that Pharaoh is *ha-Demut l'ha-Behemah* – *i.e.* the Image of the Beast; that the magicians of Pharaoh's court are *ha-nevi'im l'ruach sheker* – *i.e.* the 'false prophets' who speak and act out of a lying, deceptive, occult-fueled, illusion/delusion producing spirit; and the economy, social structure, and religion of Egypt are *vav*, *vav*, and *vav* [*i.e.* six, six, and six], respectively. The Holy One has ordained that out of the belly of this Beast the long-promised *goy gadol* – the glorious, unsinkable 'strategic counterbalance' force called *Am Yisrael* - will be born. Ah, but start feeling sentimental toward the Beast. As the Holy One said to Chava in the Garden: *I will greatly multiply your sorrow in childbearing; in pain will you bring forth offspring.* **Genesis 3:16a.**

A Rude Awakening Is Heading Our Way!

Torah begins our season of preparation for the hard labor of 'nation birth' by telling us that after Yosef died '*there arose a melech chadash* - a 'new king' - *over Egypt*'. Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves, sons and daughters of the

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covenant; the ‘new guy’ the Egyptians have enthroned is *not your father’s Pharaoh!* This one is the Image of the Beast. This one will be to Egypt what Nimrod was to Babel, what Nebuchadnezzar was to Babylon, what Antiochus IV was to 2nd Century BCE Syria; what Tiberius, Caligula, Nero, and Domitian were to Rome, what Hitler was to Germany, what Stalin was to the Soviet Union, what Umar was to the Ottomans, and what [feel free to insert here the name of whatever anti-Semitic politician you most feel is the face of the new world order] presently threatens to be to the European Union and the United States of America. But do not be too hard on any of the other despots mentioned above. It is not only the paranoid-delusional Pharaohs, Presidents, Prime Ministers, Presidents, and Perverts of the world powers that misunderstand us – it is all people, of all ethnicities, all ideologies, all socio-economic classes, and all age groups who have chosen worldviews, priorities, and lifestyles which are diametrically opposed to the Avrahamic covenant. We are light – but they love darkness. We are salt – but they want everything coated with sugar. They do not We who personally know the Creator of the Universe – not just by name but by His Ways - and who have committed our lives and households to His service, and therefore refuse to stop playing our assigned ‘strategic counterbalance’ role in the Creator’s Grand Plan to redeem humanity as a species from the serpent’s cocktail of *ra*, *shachat*, and *chamas*, and to restore all of Creation to its original Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and *shalom* are an enigma to them.

Whatever – and whoever – a person does not understand he is easily convinced to dehumanize through derogatory label, then fear, then hate, then persecute, then seek to annihilate. Sons and daughters of the Avrahamic covenant are therefore never welcome for more than a generation or two in any nation or culture that has fallen under the dark spell of idol worship. We may experience a short period of favor, but it never lasts. We simply do not - cannot - fit into the pagan worldview. We do not bow before their idols. We do embrace their folly. We do not wallow in their uncleanness. We do not buy into the lies spewed by their political, religious, scientific, or pseudo-intellectual talking heads – *i.e.* who are, to us, merely living, breathing, mantra-regurgitating graven images of the great F.R.D. – ‘Fiery Red Dragon – which Holy Writ calls *ha-Behemah*, the ‘Beast. We do not grovel before their icons of sport, theater, music, art, architecture, science, medicine, politics, or academia. We are not tempted by their delicacies. We do not recite the mantras of their religious systems, parrot the slogans of their demagogues, or wallow in the slime of their abominations. We do not share their paranoias or their biases. or They do not know what to make of us. We do not work on what to them is the busiest, most lucrative business day of the week. We do not observe their contrived holidays. hat is alright - we have much better places to go, and much more important things to do, than snuggle up to the Beast. We get deployed to such

places from time to time for strategic purposes; but we keep a ‘go-bag’ stashed in our quarters at all time – and keep our ears peeled for the signal that it is time to GET OUT!. We have an immeasurably higher calling than the ‘Beast’s Minions’. We need to learn from Torah, and teach our children – or we and they will learn the ‘hard way’ – that we simply have no business getting comfortable in societies that are *steeped in sexual perversion, fascinated by the occult*, influenced by demagogues who spew divisive rhetoric that values or devalues people according to their ethnicity, their gender, their generation, their beliefs about politics, science, medicine, and/or entertainment, their ideology. We prove we have either forgotten or rejected who we are – and WHOSE we are – every time we try to ‘fit in’ with the prevailing culture; every time we allow ourselves to become dependent upon the economic system or addicted to the technological toys offered by our host country; and every time we subject our children to the indoctrinalization/‘dis-education’ programs of the local culture’s seemingly honorable but patently toxic institutions.

Spoiler Alert! [Am Yisrael Chai!]

The scenery in this section of the Great Scroll of Wisdom is going to be absolutely breathtaking. The characters that we encounter here will seem larger than life. The action sequences are going to happen so fast that it will sometimes be dizzying. The emotions the story evokes in the reader as it progresses from scene to scene will be as intense as they are diverse. The suspense of the step-by-step development of the great plot will be so dramatic that at times it seems almost suffocating. At the end of the trauma, however, something wonderful and world-changing is going to occur. The progeny of the seventy souls we now know as *B’nei Yisrael* will be joined by a mixed multitude of souls bearing the marks and scars of all ethnicities – people of all races and ethnicities who, like us, have suffered generations of dehumanization under cruel oligarchs and power-crazed tyrants. All of these sons and daughters of Adam will emerge from the occult-driven house of horrors known as Mitzrayim to form *Am B’nei Yisrael* – that ‘Great Nation’ the Holy One has been promising to bring forth in order to introduce and model His Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan to all the world. **Genesis 12:2-3; see also Genesis 13:16, 15:6, 18:18, 22:17, 26:4, 28:14, 32:11, 35:11, and 46:3.** This Great Nation will not be like any other nation on the face of the earth. It will not be based on ethnicity, on political theory, on ideology, or on any form of religion; it will be united by two things: The *Personal Testimony of a Great Redeemer/Deliverer*, and the *instructions of the Creator of the Universe as to how to walk with Him and learn the secrets of a fruitful, productive, and well-lived life.*

The catalyst for all this action will be a dramatic regime change in the most powerful nation in the world. Torah describes this earth-shaking event simply as: ***Vayakom melech-chadash al-Mitzrayim*** – *and there arose a new king over Egypt -*

asher lo-yada et-Yosef – *who did not know Yosef. Exodus 1:8.* Buckle your seat belts – this stretch of the journey is going to be a very, very bumpy ride! This ‘new king’ is *not our friend*. He is of the ‘anti-realm’, and is going to turn out to be anti-everything that we are called to be or do. He is going to take great delight in making life in Egypt as miserable as possible for us. Stay calm. Do not over-react. Stay out of the maniac’s way. Do not try to take matters in your own hands. Do not rant, chant, or rage. There is a thorn bush out in the desert that is ready to burst into flame. There is a great deliverance about to be wrought by Heaven, but it is exclusively for the poor in spirit, for those who mourn, those who are pure in heart, those who are meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, those who walk in and exude shalom, those who are pure in heart, those who endure persecution without becoming bitter, and those who maintain the joy that comes from knowing and walking with the Holy One even when they are reviled and falsely accused of sedition (or worse) by others. These are epic times – times about which men will tell their children for centuries - even millennia. Were you not born for such a time as this, Dear Reader? Is in your world? Is it not your appointed time to awaken to *who you really are* and why you have really been given the precious gift of life, breath, and influence at such a time as this? Is not this your week to hear the Voice that launched Avram’s odyssey with a simple “***Lech Lecha!***” tell you what you are destined to bring forth into and what kind of impact you are being groomed to have upon the world?

What will you answer the Creator of the Universe when He calls you by name, tells you what He wants you to do with the rest of your life, and asks you ‘*what is that in your hand?*’

I Walk the Line

For the student of Torah a powerful, action-packed book like *Sh’mot* presents a unique challenge. The story is so compelling, you see, that not only the overall story line but a good many of the life lessons the Author intends to teach us through this Book sometimes can get lost in the drama. My goal therefore as I travel through the study of *Sh’mot* one step ahead of the reader is to walk a very fine line. On the one hand I whole-heartedly embrace the fact that the text of *sefer Sh’mot* compels everyone who reads it to *jump right in* and *become a part of the non-stop action*. I see a deep, personal feeling of involvement in the story of *Sefer Sh’mot* as a good, noble, and valuable thing. Indeed the sages go so far as to teach that *it is the solemn responsibility of every man, woman and child to personally experience the deliverance wrought for our ancestors by the Hand of the Holy One*. The sages taught, you see, that the events experienced by people who study this *sefer* are not just historical or literary but actually constitute *a part of the spiritual DNA of the descendants of Avraham*.

The events of *Sh'mot* are never to be considered merely something that happened a long time ago in places we have never been, to people we never met, in circumstances we will never understand. The events of this book are instead *eternal spiritual realities that have by their incorporation in the text of Torah been programmed into every aspect of our lives* by our Covenant partner. According to this view it is the Holy One's plan that in each generation that exists by reason of the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham², and in the life of each individual son and daughter of that covenant that will ever live, *we are destined to relive the story of sefer Sh'mot over and over again.*

This is not just a fascinating story – this is *OUR LIFE!* Perhaps that is the reason we re-enact these events in different stages every year in conjunction with Biblically mandated observations of the *Pesach* [Passover], *Shavuot* [Pentecost/Weeks], *Yom Kippur* [the Day of Atonement], and *Sukkot* [Tabernacles]. The Holy One has chosen not only to preprint our calendars with commemorative anniversaries of these events but also to *inscribe their details on our very souls in indelible ink.* More than that, the Holy One has ordained it, it seems, so that *He never stops performing wonders to deliver those He loves from all Egypt entails,* while *those of us who allow ourselves to be woo-ed and romanced by Him never stop walking proudly away from all that Egypt represents.*

On the other hand I also embrace whole-heartedly the belief that the world-changing events chronicled in *sefer Sh'mot* have a *distinctly prophetic quality about them* as well. The similarity of the plague narratives of *Sh'mot* to the *seal, trumpet, and bowl* 'judgments' of Revelation is inescapable. Likewise, the similarity of the historic Pharaoh character of *Sh'mot* to the Anti-Messiah character of Revelation is too clear to dismiss as coincidence. Furthermore, the similarity of the camp of the Redeemed as it is described in detail in *Sh'mot*, not to mention the *Mish'kan* [Tabernacle], to the Heavenly abode of the Holy One and His angels portrayed in the book of Revelation³, and the Temple at that abode's essential core, is *too striking to ignore.*

To some degree therefore we who are a part of the covenant must not only experience the events of the Exodus narrative in past and present tense, but must prepare ourselves and our children to experience them in climactic fashion *in the future*, at the end of days. Do not therefore get so caught up in either what

² This necessarily includes natural born Jews [who would not have ever been borne had not the Holy One quickened Avraham's seed and Sarah's womb long after their natural strength had dissipated], but also those who have been engrafted into the Avrahamic covenant through Messiah Yeshua.

³ See especially chapters 15 and 16 of Revelation.

happened to our ancestors long ago in the days of Moshe or in what is happening in our lives day by day in these days when Messiah has gone to prepare a place for us that we miss the prophetic message the events we are reliving portend for us and for the world.

The Mystery of Sh'mot [Names that Speak of Destiny]

Why, some might wonder, did the ancients pick the seemingly mundane word *sh'mot* out of the opening sentence and make it the title of this entire Book of Torah? If Hebrew tradition required taking the title from the first phrase why did they not choose the more obviously significant term '*b'nei Yisrael*' [i.e. the 'children of Israel'] found in that first phrase as the title rather than the generic sounding '*sh'mot*'? Is there more to this choice of title by the Hebrew sages than meets the eye? Does the title the Hebrew sages wound up choosing bear any relationship to the *subject matter* of the Book?

If the title is supposed to represent the theme of the Book some might posit that *Exodus* – the name chosen for this book by the Latin-speaking Catholics of yesteryear - would indeed a better title. But while it is definitely compelling in its own right, the narrative of the Exodus from Egypt is clearly not the focal point of this book. That distinction surely belongs instead to the revelation at Sinai that came after the Exodus and constituted the reason for which the events of the Exodus were conceived and executed by the Holy One in the manner memorialized in the first half of the Book. After all, the Holy One did not bring us out of Egypt just so we could say we were out of Egypt – He brought us out so He could betroth us to Himself at Sinai and empower us to fulfill the great Divine Mission for which He called Avram out of Charan in the first place.

The story of how the Holy One got us out from under the bondage of the Egyptians plays only an introductory role in the second book of Torah's much greater, much more glorious story of the Redemptive Program of the Creator. The second book of Torah is primarily about something the Latin fathers simply could not – or would not – embrace. What this book is primarily about, you see, is *the building and the eternal destiny of the nation of Israel*. That kind of nation building is only accomplished only one way – through people that carry *sh'mot* – i.e. names. Names spoken in the councils of Heaven. Names written in holy books since before the foundation of the world. Spiritual identities get called forth, as Divine missions get assigned and assumed. Eternal destinies get connected with human faces, hearts, hands, feet, organs of hearing, sight, and speech. When vast numbers of *sh'mot* get connected with each other, awakened, called, commissioned, and empowered – well, when that happens, a Chosen Nation is built.

As dramatic, life-changing, and earth-shaking as it was at the time, the sequence of events we call the 'Exodus' really turned out to be merely an elaborate Divinely choreographed courtship ritual that preceded and laid the groundwork for the glorious Sinaitic betrothal ceremony which the Holy One had in mind for Avraham's descendants all along. This book is therefore not as much about *a bunch of nameless, faceless, slaves obtaining freedom* as it is about the Holy One *calling Israel's sons and daughters by name to come into intimate relationship with Him and be launched into their destiny.*

The Curtain Opens, and the Great Adventure Begins

As the curtain opens on *Sefer Sh'mot* the family of the Holy One's chosen people is in the throes of a major transition. The era of patriarchal beginnings is over. As Torah puts it:

V'yamot Yosef v'chol-echav
Death claimed Yosef and all his brothers
v'chol ha-dor hahu
and everyone else of their generation.
[Exodus 1:7]

In our studies from last week's parsha, *Vayechi*, the impact of Yosef's influence on Egypt – and thus the refugee communities from the nations who had come to the land of pyramids in the days of the great famine - was discussed in detail. In the shiur for Wednesday of last week I wrote:

When Yosef is gone you can bet that all hell is going to break loose. When Yosef is gone you can bet the economy will tank. When Yosef is gone you can bet that all decorum and restraint will be cast off. When Yosef is gone the nation's moral and ethical compass will dissolve into greed, gluttony, sloth, lust, covetousness, wrath, violence, and narcissism. When Yosef is gone all respect for life – indeed all facades of human decency - will disappear. When Yosef is gone, from Pharaoh's palace to the tenements of peasants the mantra of life will revert to every man for himself – just as it was for centuries before Yosef arrived in Pharaoh's palace. When Yosef is gone - because someone will have to be blamed for the deteriorating economy and social structure – you can bet that a new, toxic form of racism will emerge, and those who recently immigrated to Egypt because of the famine or in search of economic opportunity will find themselves slandered, hated, impoverished, and persecuted minorities. As Egypt's problems multiply in the vacuum left by Yosef's light, these minorities will see their best and strongest and their children rounded up and herded into work camps to serve as slaves of the state – while the old, the weak, the infirm, will be made victims of purges and holocausts.

The time of which I warned in that quotation has arrived. Yosef is dead. The thin *techelet* strand that separates that which leads to life, health, and peace from that which leads to chaos, suffering, and oppressive darkness has broken. A tsunami of xenophobia is taking over. Class and ethnic tensions are reaching fever pitch. The

rhetoric of blame and outrage is ratcheting up. Inflammatory accusations are fueling bitterness; bitterness is fueling protests; protests are fueling backlash; and backlash is fueling acts of violence. All hell is indeed breaking loose.

In this crucible the ‘*great nation*’ that the Holy One long ago promised to bring forth from the loins, the *sh’ma*-responsiveness, and the *emunah* of Avraham will be formed. But the process is not going to be quick, or easy, or painless. Indeed, most of the lessons Avraham’s descendants are going to learn while processing through this crucible will be lessons on how NOT to build a great nation. We will learn, for instance, that a great nation cannot be built on a foundation of fear, or hate, or racial prejudice, or class envy. We will learn that a great nation cannot be built around inflammatory rhetoric, or violent protest, or greed, or ideology, or occult arts, or forms and labels of religion. And we will learn that no great nation can participate in the oppression of the poor and the foreigner that always result from each of those dark energy cesspools.

The Great Toll Inflicted by an Exile on Second and Subsequent Generations, Who Have Grown Up Thinking of the Land of Exile as Their Natural Habitat

When Ya’akov and family arrived in Egypt in the second year of the great famine the family numbered only *shivim* – 70 – souls. As we jump off into the narrative of sefer *Sh’mot* a few hundred years later, however, the number has increased dramatically. But as we shall soon see, *numbers are not everything*. As we begin *Sefer Sh’mot* we find that many generations have come and gone since the closing lines of *Sefer B’reshit*. The famine which had precipitated our ancestors’ migration to Egypt was over and forgotten long ago. And yet, as the curtain opens on the second book of Torah we find to our dismay that though the reason for the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov to sojourn in Egypt ceased to exist centuries ago, our ancestors are still living and dying in Mitzrayim [Egypt].

The famine lasted only 5 years after our ancestors arrived. *Why on earth are we still there so many years – indeed lifetimes – later?*⁴ Could it be that our ancestors liked Egypt so much once they got there that *they simply chose not to go home?* Could it be that they got so lulled into complacency by the prosperity around them,

⁴ The simple answer of course is that the Holy One had told Avraham that his descendants would be enslaved in a foreign land for 400 years. Since the Holy One said this – whether He was predetermining it or merely passing on the benefit of his omniscience – it had to occur. But this is an unsatisfactory answer. The Holy One did not specify which generation of Avraham’s descendants would be enslaved nor in what country of exile the events would occur. Each generation – and each individual – has a right and a responsibility to search out the answer as the human factors which led to this particular generation of descendants of Ya’akov – the generation we read about in *Sefer Sh’mot* – had to undergo the *Mitzrayim* experience.

got so star struck walking in the shadow of the pyramids and got so caught up in the wanderlust and allure of the commerce and culture of the dominant world power of the era, that when the appointed time came they simply could not bring themselves to leave?

Over the decades did the pleasures of day-to-day life in Egypt *anesthetize the hearts and minds* and *dull the spiritual ears* of the Hebrew fathers, mothers, and children to the point where *they could no longer hear the calling of the Holy One to their ancestor Avraham* to separate from pagan ways, and to *‘teach/direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Holy One by doing what is right and just’*?⁵ Was the grand *Lech Lecha* life-mission for which Avraham had risked all, forsaking the land and culture of the Chaldees, *forgotten* by Avraham’s seed?

The Slow Death Spiral of Exile

There are some details regarding the status of Avraham’s descendants at the beginning of the *Sh’mot* narrative that are not particularly well explained, particularly in the English versions of the text. In the English translations we read we pick up no clues as to whether or to what degree Avraham’s descendants have assimilated into the culture of Egypt⁶. But let’s look into the Hebrew text. In verse 7 of chapter 1 we are told:

Uv’nei Yisra’el paru v’yishreitzu v’yir’bu
Yisra’el’s children bore fruit, and they swarmed; and they were enlarged,

vaya’atzmu b’me’od me’od v’timalei ha-aretz otam
and they became so numerous that they filled the land.

[Exodus 1:7]

Note the number of verbs used in this sentence – all of which in English mean virtually the same thing, and all of which appear to be positive. Some traditional English translations interpret this verse to say that Yisrael’s grandchildren “*were fruitful*” [Hebrew, *p’ru*], that they “*increased abundantly*” [Hebrew, *yish’reitzu*], that they “*multiplied*” [Hebrew *yirbu*], that they “*grew exceedingly mighty*” [Hebrew, *ya’atzmu*], and that they “*filled*” *the land* of Egypt [Hebrew *t’malei*]. It all sounds good – if not a whole lot repetitive - doesn’t it? But wait just a minute. Think

⁵ This is the purpose of Avraham’s calling, as the Holy One described it in Genesis 18:19.

⁶ In ordinary sociological experience, when immigrants first arrive in a new country of residence, they are careful to maintain the customs and dress and language of their former country. Once they get acclimated to the new environment, however, and establish business and personal relations with the residents of the land, however, they begin a process of becoming more and more like the people in whose land they live. They begin to incorporate the host nation’s language into their speech. They begin to call their children by names similar to the names their neighbors call their children. They begin to dress like their neighbors. Within a generation or two, they begin to value what their neighbors value, fear what their neighbors fear, and approach life – and death - like their neighbors.

about what the English text does not tell you, that you would expect to see - *if all was as it should be with the Hebrews.*

Where Are the God-Encounters? Where are the Covenant-Keepers?

Conspicuously absent from the English translations of the text is any suggestion that this generation of Ya'akov's descendants, while in Egypt, sought – or received – encounters with the Holy One as had Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, or Yosef. Also conspicuously absent from the text is any reference to any one of those descendants calling upon the Holy One's Name, or to even a single one of them taking up the torch of the Covenant and walking after the God-conscious ways of the patriarchs of blessed memory. The text does not say that fathers circumcised their children. Nor does it say that they taught their children to cherish or keep the way of the Holy One, or to do righteousness and justice, or to live their lives in a manner consistent with the covenant the Holy One made with Avraham, renewed with Yitzchak and with Ya'akov, and had promised to renew generation after generation, forever.

Oh yes, Avraham's descendant's prospered financially in Egypt's economy, and grew greatly in number – but, for all we can see, they appear to have completely forgotten both the Holy One and the Divine Mission to which He had called them while they were still in Avraham's loins. Generation by generation, it appears, they simply faded into the fabric of Egyptian society. Their speech, their dress, their mindset, their priorities, their lives – became Egyptian. They appeared to fail the challenge of *Lech Lecha* [being called out to be set apart]⁷. Such things should not be!

There Is Far More To Be Seen In the Hebrew Text Than in any of the English Attempts at Translations!

The assimilation of the Hebrews after Ya'akov and Yosef died is as aforesaid “hidden” in the English translations, but it is strongly implied in the Hebrew text. In the Hebrew language, a downward spiritual spiral of assimilation by the Hebrew people after the deaths of Ya'akov and Yosef is suggested.

1. The First Hebrew verb: Sharatz

One Hebrew verb used to describe the sons of Yisrael after Yosef's death, transliterated *yisharetzu*, is a form of the Hebrew verb root *sharatz*⁸. Our English Bibles tell us this verb means they “*were fertile*” or, in other translations, that they “*increased abundantly*”. That is very charitable of course - but it misses the point of the verb completely. Let me explain.

⁷ With the notable exception of two midwives – identified in the text for us only as Shifra and Puah, who “*feared Elohim*”. **Exodus 1:17.**

⁸ Sharatz is *shin, resh, tzade sofit*. Strong's Hebrew word #8317, it is pronounced *shaw-rawtz'*.

The Hebrew verb *sharatz* means to “swarm”, “intermix”, and “intermingle”. It is first used in Genesis 1:20-21 – when the Holy One is speaking prophetically over the waters to bring forth fish and sea creatures in abundance. What do fish and sea creatures do? They *intermingle* with each other, and *assimilate*. They do not maintain separate territory, and live apart by species. Some sea creatures are parasitic of others. Others share the same feeding ground. Some cooperate in their feeding ground; some compete in it – but they are all creatures of *one world order*. They “swarm”, making the ocean one big fish tank. That is what the Holy One ordained for fish and crustaceans and seaweed and such. But swarming [*sharatz*] is definitely *not* His plan for the people who bear His Name.

2. The Second Hebrew verb: *t'malei*

The other thing the Hebrew text reveals to us is found in the fifth verb employed in verse 7. Our English versions tell us that the descendants of Yisrael “filled” the land of Egypt. But is ‘filled’ what the Hebrew verb chosen by the Holy Spirit to record this event in Torah means? Not really. The Hebrew word [*t'malei*] is a form of the Hebrew verb root *male*⁹. This verb root draws a picture of *spreading out*, and *infiltrating*. In other words, what the Hebrew text appears to be telling us is that the descendants of Ya’akov eventually *left Goshen in droves* and *spread out*, and infiltrated all areas and aspects of Egyptian culture and *blended in with Egyptian society*. They went to live in Memphis [the capital of the new dynasty founded by Amosis *circa* 1570 BCE] and Thebes and any other village where they could give a “walking like an Egyptian” lifestyle a shot.

The descendants of Ya’akov were not just “many”, you see - they were “everywhere” – and that means *spiritually* as well as *physically*. Just as today – some of the chosen were devout and passionate – others were aloof and alienated, rebellious and reprobate. They reached a point of ‘*everywhere-ness*’. And in the process of accomplishing everywhere-ness many, alas, appear to have both *surrendered their Covenant identity* and *forsaken their Covenant destiny*.

The High Cost of ‘Swarming’, Joining, Absorbing, and Assimilating

What our ancestors soon learned however is that for the Holy One’s people swarming [i.e. the action connoted by the Hebrew verb *sharatz*] is never tolerated for very long by human beings who have no covenant with the Holy One. No matter how much the Holy One’s people try to look like, talk like, dress like, and live like the secular society around them you see, *the world knows they are different – even if they themselves do not*. And eventually, no matter how much the Holy One’s people try to fit in with, look like, and think of themselves as indistinguishable

⁹ Male is Strong’s Hebrew word #4390. It is pronounced *maw-law*’

from the peoples around them *the very people they try to join and emulate wind up resenting, rejecting, and despising them.*

It is the “mark of the Covenant”. Just when the Holy One’s people think they have made that mark invisible – Ha-Satan – and the world he manipulates – spots it and responds accordingly. *Swarming* therefore always results in *anti-Semitism* for the Holy One’s people. Anti-Semitism in turn always results in *persecution*. And in the Holy One’s economy persecution always eventually results in what He has been waiting for - *a heartfelt cry for deliverance.*

. . . And the Times They Are A-Changin’

Yitzchak [Isaac] learned in Genesis 26 the basic principle of Anti-Semitism - that *there is nothing so hated as a Hebrew who prospers in a foreign land.* In this week’s aliyah the great-great grandsons and great-great granddaughters of Ya’akov learn the same lesson - with a *vengeance.* It all begins with a changing of dynasties in the land of our exile. A new radical, reactionary group comes to power, and old allegiances are forgotten. Here is how Torah describes the events that start our *march to Sinai*, and our road to becoming a great nation:

V’yakom melech-chadash al-Mitzrayim asher lo-yada et-Yosef

A new king who did not know of Yosef came into power over Egypt

V’yomer el-amo

He announced to his people,

hineh am b’nei Yisra’el rav v’atzum mimeinu

'The Israelites are becoming too numerous and strong for us.

Havah nitchakemah lo pen-yir’beh v’hayah

We must deal wisely with them. Otherwise, they may increase so much,

ki-tikreinah milchamah v’nosaf gam-hu al-sonainu

that if there is war, they will join our enemies

v’nilcham-banu v’alah min ha-aretz

and fight against us, driving [us] from the land.'

[Exodus 1:8-10]

What so concerned the most powerful nation of the earth about the presence of the Hebrews in their midst? Was it really that a rag-tag bunch of shepherds and brick-makers and stone masons and domestic help - with no leader and no apparent goal other than to “fit in” in their secular society - would overwhelm Pharaoh’s mighty army with its chariots and war machines and take over Egypt? Or perhaps Pharaoh¹⁰ – like so many despots and demagogues who would come after him -

¹⁰ There are going to be two pharaohs involved in the Exodus story. The first is the pharaoh whose daughter found Moshe as a baby, that later condemned Moshe to death for killing an Egyptian, and who

simply *did not like our ancestors' looks*. Whatever his rationale, Pharaoh developed a plan to take care of the '*Hebrew problem*'. He decided to deal with the threat he deemed Yisrael to represent by two means:

- [1] He would *break up their families* by taking the men out of the homes to work as slaves, building Egyptian cities; and
- [2] *He would kill the male babies*.

It was a cruel - but logical - strategy. The Holy One, however, has a radically different idea how all this is going to play out. Remember well the promise He made to Avraham: ***I will bless those who bless you; and I will arar*** [*impose limitations and restrictions upon*] ***those who qalal you***. Genesis 12:3a.

The First Pogrom: Forced Labor

The first pogrom initiated by Pharaoh to deal with '*the Israel problem*' was to assign them to 'work camps' and force them into hard labor. Pharaoh thus became the first, but by no means the last, to propagate the lie of "*Arbeit macht frei*" [*i.e. work makes you free*¹¹]. Torah tells us:

V'yasimu alav sarei misim

And he appointed taskmasters over them,

l'ma'an anoto b'sivlotam

to crush their spirits with hard labor

v'yiven arei miskanot l'Far'oh et-Pitom v'et-Ra'amses

They were to build supply centers for Pharaoh, at Pithom and at Ra'amses.

V'ya'avidu Mitzrayim et-b'nei Yisra'el b'farech

The work the Egyptians assigned the Israelites to do was to break their bodies.

[Exodus 1:11, 13]

Trafficking in human slavery was of course not something new to Egypt. Under Yosef's [Joseph's] administration the Egyptian people themselves had been subjected to slavery to Pharaoh. See Genesis 47:21, 25. Pharaoh owned all the *land*, and he owned all the *livestock*, and he *owned the very lives of his own people*. The Hebrews were not therefore by any means the only slaves in Egypt. Indeed, the only freemen in the entire country of Egypt were *the members of Pharaoh's household and the priests of Egyptian's pantheistic religion*. The rest of the once great nation land had been reduced to a great dry-docked ship of slaves.

During Yosef's lifetime the Hebrew population and the land of Goshen had been

lived until Moshe was somewhere between 40 and 80 years old. The second is the pharaoh whom Moshe confronted at the Holy One's instruction, and whose army was drowned in the Sea of Reeds.

¹¹ This was the slogan written by the Nazis on the gates of the most infamous World War II era concentration camps, Auschwitz and Dachau.

exempt from the slavery edict. But the new Pharaoh revoked the ‘Hebrew exemption’. Now those who had lived peaceably and prosperously in Goshen while Egyptians endured slavery were forced to take the hardest, most physically taxing and dangerous jobs in Pharaoh’s employ.

Most Egyptians and other persons living in Egypt were still slaves to Pharaoh – but they were able to breathe a sigh of relief as then newly enslaved Hebrews suddenly took their place as Pharaoh’s favorite targets of oppression. The Holy One’s unseen Hand moved, however, on behalf of Yisrael. No matter how hard Pharaoh’s taskmasters forced the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov to work at the most dangerous jobs in the kingdom, ‘the more they proliferated and spread’. **Exodus 1:12.** This did nothing to soften the heart of Pharaoh. It instead led him to institute a *second, even more frightening and oppressive, pogrom.*

The Second Pogrom: State-Mandated Population Control

The second phase of Pharaoh’s solution to what he perceived as the ‘Hebrew problem’ was a foretaste of things to come.

V’yomer melech Mitzrayim l’meyal’dot ha-Ivriot

The king of Egypt spoke to the [chief] Hebrew midwives

asher shem ha-achat Shifrah v’shem ha-shenit Puah

whose names were Shifra and Puah.

V’yomer b’yadeicha et ha-Ivriot

And he said, ‘When you deliver Hebrew women,

ur’iten al ha-ovnayim

you must look carefully at the birthstool.

im-ben hu v’ha-miten oto

If [the infant] is a boy, kill it;

v'im-bat hi v'chayah

but if it is a girl, let it live.’

[Exodus 1:15-16]

Who were the midwives Pharaoh directed to perform these partial birth abortions? Torah identifies two of them as *Shifrah*¹² and *Puah*¹³? But think about this for a moment. In a population as large as the Hebrew population had become - including women and children, it numbered an estimated two million by this time - these were surely not the only women serving as midwives.

¹² *Shifra* is *shin, fey, resh, hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word #8236, pronounced *shif-raw*. Strong’s opines that this word/name means ‘fair’.

¹³ *Puah* is *peh, vav, ayin, hey*, Strong’s Hebrew word #6326, pronounced *poo-aw*. Strong’s opines that this word/name means ‘splendid’, and comes from an unused verb root meaning ‘to glitter’.

Is there perhaps more to the mention of these two women than initially meets the eye? In this book of 'names', is it significant that the first persons given a name by Torah since the generation of the patriarchs are two midwives? Is it possible that the Divine Author of Torah gives these two specific women names in which those with eyes to see and ears to hear can find clues to the future?

Who Are The First Living Human Beings Mentioned by 'Name' in Sefer Sh'mot?

Were Shifrah and Puah Hebrews? Or were they Egyptians? The text is not even clear on that point. The Hebrew phrase Torah uses to introduce Shifra and Puah - *miyaldot ha-Ivriot* - is an ambiguous phrase that can be translated to mean either *Hebrews that were midwives* or *midwives of Egyptian origin that were called upon by the Hebrews*.

There are two lines of midrash on this issue. The Talmudic tradition that considers Shifra and Puah to be of Hebrew descent [though no tribe is specified] identifies *Shifrah* with Moshe's mother *Yocheved* and associates *Puah* with Moshe's sister *Miryam*. *Sotah* 11b. Other sages however believe that the proper rendering of Exodus 1:15 is that the midwives Shifra and Puah were not Hebrews at all, but were women of Egyptian lineage that Pharaoh trusted and had placed 'in charge of the Hebrews' or 'in charge of the Hebrew midwives'. Malbim; see also Josephus, *Antiquities* 2:9:2. This latter group of sages see Shifrah and Puah as the forerunners of a group of '*righteous gentiles*' that will come to the aid of His covenant people throughout the ages - like Rachav of Yericho in the days of the Conquest, Oscar Schindler of Germany during the Holocaust, and many more.

The latter possibility seems much more likely. After all, the midwives in question are said to have been called into Pharaoh's chambers to give their report [Exodus 1:18] that might have been unlikely had they been part of the slave people. Moreover, Pharaoh's acceptance of their comparison of the Egyptian women to the Hebrew women would be less plausible if the women were Hebrew, as Hebrew women would have been more suspect and unlikely to know how Egyptians give birth vis-à-vis how Hebrews give birth.

Hebraically, the name *Shifra* is believed to be derived from a Hebrew verb meaning *to swaddle* a baby. The name *Puah* on the other hand is believed to be derived from a Hebrew verb meaning *to cry out*, such as a woman does when she is in the throes of labor, and as a baby does when it breathes its first breath.

The Holy One Calls Forth Secret Agents of Deliverance

Whoever the midwives responsible for carrying out Pharaoh's decree were and whatever clues their names may or may not contain, Torah informs us:

V'tir'eina ha-meyal'dot et ha-Elohim

And the midwives feared God [or 'the gods']

V'lo asu ka'asher diber aleihen melech Mitzrayim

and did not do as the Egyptian king had ordered them.

vatechayeina et ha-yeladim

They allowed the infant boys to live.

[Exodus 1:17]

Apparently midwives' silent campaign of civil disobedience is the reason Moshe's older brother Aharon, and many of his contemporaries, escaped the death sentence for all male children. At great personal risk these refused to 'follow orders'. These two women defied Pharaoh - apparently for no other reason than their belief in the sanctity of human life - and thus become the first heroes of our story. The way in which these women became heroes, however, may seem unsatisfactory to many of you. They ***flat-out lied***. They *intentionally misled* Pharaoh. What else could they have done, you ask? Oh, they could, instead of lying, have boldly and openly stated their convictions, proclaimed the immorality of what they were asked to do, refused to do it, and resisted commands to do so anyway to the point of death. If Shifra and Puah had done this, unless the Holy One intervened on their behalf, they doubtless would have *died nobly for a cause*. But would they have saved a single life? The natural odds were against it. And so, rightly or wrongly, in the frailty of their humanity they decided *to make up a story* they knew Pharaoh was paranoid enough about the Hebrew people to believe - and they went right on delivering Hebrew boy babies, swaddling them, and handing them safe and sound into their mothers' trembling arms.

Vayeytev Elohim l'meyaleot

And Elohim was good to the midwives,

vayirev ha-am vaya'atzmu me'od

and the people increased and became very numerous.

Vayehi ki yar'u ha-meyaldot et-ha-Elohim

And because the midwives feared Elohim

vaya'as lahem batim

And He gave them great families (or houses)[of their own].

[Exodus 1:20-21]

You can now mark one on your scorecard for the Holy One, King of the Universe. But Pharaoh is a stubborn sort - and not in the least deterred.

Pharaoh's Third Pogrom: Drowning Infants in the Nile

Pharaoh does not surrender easily. He sees to it that the birth pangs of the Hebrews have just begun. He comes up with a new, improved, even more dastardly plan. And this plan involves everyone in his kingdom – not just a few contrary midwives. Here is how Torah describes Pharaoh's new and improved plan for dealing with the 'Hebrew problem':

Vayetzav Par'oh l'chol-amo l'emor

Pharaoh then gave orders to all his people

Kol ha-ben ha-yilod ha-Ye'orah tashlichuhu

'Every boy who is born must be cast into the Nile

v'chol ha-bat techayun

but every girl shall be allowed to live.'

[Exodus 1:22]

Keep in mind as you read and meditate on this decree that the Nile River was *the Holy One's gift of love to Mitzrayim and its people*. The Nile was the source of untold blessing. It had always meant life to Egypt, and, at least in times of famine, to all the world. Now however, by virtue of Pharaoh's decree of absolute genocide, all that changed. The Nile was in an instant by Pharaoh's order transformed from an *instrument of life* into an *instrument of death*.

Exactly how many Hebrew infants were surrendered to the Nile's muddy waters we are not told – perhaps hundreds of thousands, over the course of time. Remember, this decree apparently remained in effect for at least 80 years – the period of time between Moshe's birth and the Exodus. But the Holy One *saw every baby that was thrown in the Nile*. He who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps. He *heard every gurgling sound produced by the throat of each one who drowned*. He *wincd with every anguished scream that escaped the lips of a child being torn asunder by crocodiles*.

The Creator of heaven, and earth – and author of human life - ***sh'ma***-ed every bereaved mother and father's cries. He *saw*. And He *heard the cries* of the innocent blood shed by the Egyptians - and by the assimilated, compliant, complicit people of all nations who feared Pharaoh more than they revered the Holy One. The Holy One gave the Hebrews more and more babies, to comfort and encourage them. And He *remembered* what Pharaoh – and the Egyptians and other peoples who served him - did. And He *wrote every act of cruelty in His Book*. And in His proper time, according to His perfect plan, He *avenged* each and every murder - and dried each and every tear. That is, we will find, what the first three parshot of this *Sefer Torah* are about.

How Long, Holy One?

When we closed out our study of the book of Genesis everything still seemed to be nice and cozy and comfortable for our ancestors in the land of *Mitzrayim* [Egypt]. True, Ya'akov and Yosef had passed through the portal of death - but for the rest of us the sojourn in the Goshen region of the Lower Nile Delta was still seemingly pleasant enough. It was so pleasant that even though we could have stayed in the Promised Land when we went *en masse* to bury Ya'akov, we went right back to Egypt with Yosef. But obviously, as we have read, it did not remain pleasant for very long. How long? How long were Avraham's descendants actually in Egypt? How long were they actually enslaved? Let us not forget the prophetic word the Holy One spoke to our ancestor Avraham about this sojourn:

Yadoa teda ki-ger yihyeh zar'acha b'erezt lo lahem

'Know for sure that your zara [seed] will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs

v'avadum v'inu otam

They will be enslaved and oppressed.

arba me'ot shanah v'gam et ha-goy asher ya'avodu

400 years, and the nation that enslaves them

dan anochi

I am going to judge,

v'acharei-chen yeitz'u b'rechush gadol

and they will then leave with great wealth.

The Holy One identified for Avraham a *400-year period* that would end with judgment on the nation of enslavement, in ***v'dor rev'i*** [the fourth generation]. Please note, however, that the Holy One did NOT say that Yisrael would be *enslaved* for 400 years – He just said that 400 years would elapse from an unspecified event [perhaps the cutting of the Avrahamic covenant] until the enslaving nation was judged. Later on in *Sefer Sh'mot* [the book of Exodus] we are going to be told that:

Umoshav b'nei Yisra'el asher yasheivu b'Mitzrayim

the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt,

shloshim shanah v'arba me'ot shanah

was four hundred and thirty years.

[Sh'mot 12:40]

This means that Yisrael spent 430 years 'sojourning' [not necessarily enslaved]. Moreover, the 430 years may well have begun when Abraham received the covenant of the Holy One, for Galatians 3:16-17 says that the Torah was given [at Sinai, in the year of the Exodus] 430 years after the Avrahamic covenant was cut. This could mean that Yisrael was only in Egypt for *a little over 200 years*, while the rest of the 400-year period of sojourning prophesied by the Holy One was spent

sojourning in Kena'an¹⁴. Of course, neither I nor anyone else on earth today really knows 'how long' the Egyptians enslaved and oppressed Avraham's descendants. Some say it was a full 400 – or perhaps even 430 - years. Some commentators say it was really only 210 years. Others speculate more, still others less. The number of years is not, apparently, something we really need to know. But we do need to know this, Beloved: *The Holy One did not allow Egypt to oppress or degrade his people one second, much less one year, longer than necessary to accomplish his plan of redemption.*

The Holy One was – and will always be - faithful to His covenant with Avraham. And the Holy One was – and always will be - absolutely *committed to*, and *jealous over*, His chosen people's well-being, deliverance, and over His plan that Avraham's descendants accomplish their destiny to become a kingdom of priests, a special treasured possession people, a holy nation, and a bright and shining light to the world.

Questions For Today's Study

1. For a long, long time after the death of Yosef there is no direct Biblical reference to the life of Ya'akov's sons and their families in Egypt. There are however at least 4 indirect references that shed some light on what happened during those years. **Read Genesis 46:3; Exodus 1:7; Genesis 15:13-16; and Acts 7:19.** List the things we do know from these verses Bible about the years of silence after Yosef's death.
2. In an Encyclopedia or other historical source look up "Egypt". Write down a description of what you think life in Egypt would have been like for you during the years after Yosef died if you were a Hebrew. Try to include some good things and some bad things.
3. In today's parsha the new king who "did not know Yosef" came up with plans to reduce the strength of the Israelites in his country. Describe each of those plans and explain why neither "worked".
4. The Haftarah reading for today is written in a time period about 400 years after the Exodus. The prophet is *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah]. Here are the words He receives from the Holy One:

***In days to come Ya`akov will take root; Yisra'el will blossom and bud;
and they will fill the surface of the world with fruit.***

Has he struck them as he struck those who struck them?

¹⁴ The Septuagint version of Exodus 12:40 seems to accept this position, as it reads: '*And the sojourning of the children of Israel while they sojourned in the land of Egypt AND in the land of Canaan, was four hundred and thirty years.*' [emphasis added].

or are they slain according to the slaughter of those who were slain by them?

[A] What was the status and condition of God's people when Yeshayahu [Isaiah] received the prophetic word you are studying today?

[B] With what does **Yeshayahu** [Isaiah] say the Holy One will cause Israel to fill the earth, and how is this different than what the descendants of Ya'akov filled Egypt with according to today's Torah reading?

5. In the Brit Chadasha reading associated with *parsha Sh'mot* we read of the trial and stoning of *Stefanos* [Stephen]. According to Acts 6:11 the basis of the accusation against Stephen was that he *spoke against Moshe*. In today's aliyah from the B'rit Chadasha however, we hear what *Stefanos* really had to say concerning Moshe. His teaching started like this:

When forty years were fulfilled, an angel of the Holy One appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in a flame of fire in a bush.

When Moshe saw it, he wondered at the sight.

As he came close to see, a voice of the Holy One came to him,

'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Ya'akov.'

Moshe trembled, and dared not look.

The Holy One said to him, 'Take your sandals off of your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.

I have surely seen the affliction of my people that is in Mitzrayim, and have heard their groaning. I have come down to deliver them.

Now come, I will send you into Mitzrayim."

After reading Stephen's sermon this far do you agree with the charges made against him, that he speaks bad things about Moshe? Why or why not?

*May the Holy One's plan for you prevail,
this day and throughout your life.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 18:4-6

The cords of death surrounded me.

The floods of ungodliness made me afraid.

The cords of She'ol were round about me; the snares of death came on me.

*In my distress I called on the Holy One, and cried to my God.
He heard my voice out of His temple; My cry before Him came.*