

## *Introduction to Parsha #13: Sh'mot<sup>1</sup>*

<b><i>Torah:</i></b>	<b>Exodus 1:1 - 6:1</b>
<b><i>Haftarah:</i></b>	<b>Isaiah 27:6 - 28:13 Jeremiah 1:1 - 2:3</b>
<b><i>B'rit Chadasha:</i></b>	<b>Acts 7:30 - 8:4</b>



***Behold, the cry of B'nei Yisrael has come before Me,  
and I have also taken note of the oppression  
with which the Egyptians oppress them.***

**[Exodus 3:9]**

***This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #11, Y'rushalayim [Jerusalem]***

***V'eleh sh'mot b'nei Yisrael*** – *And these are the names of Yisrael's sons ....* **Exodus 1:1a.**

*B'reshit* - the season in which everything and everyone in the universe seemed fresh, new, and full of promise - has run its course. The identity, persona, attributes, uncompromising goodness and unfathomable wisdom of the One Who designed, created, sustained, and manages the parallel universes we know as *ha-shamayim* [*i.e.* 'the heavens'] and *ha-aretz* [*i.e.* 'the earth'] are now all firmly established as independently operating ecosystems. The initial twenty-four generations of God-man collaboration have come and gone. *Ra*, *shachat*, and *chamas* have taken turns running rampant on man's watch, but just when it looked like all was lost we saw the Holy One inaugurate a brilliant initiative of strategic counterbalance. First Avraham, then Yitzchak, then Ya'akov *sh'ma*-ed the Holy One's beautiful Voice and taught their households the disciplines of, walking humbly with, and serving, the Creator of the Universe. The Will of the Holy One

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became these men's magnificent obsession. His Covenantal instructions and rules of engagement with the world became their north star. The land of Israel became their down payment on the Divine promise of 'on earth as it is in Heaven'. proving ground. The foundational, elementary protocols of the Divine Plan for God/man Relationship and inspired Macro-Ecosystem Stewardship have been established, tested, and proven. It is now time for phase II of the Grand Plan - the key element of GREAT NATION BUILDING.

In this intermediate level of Apprenticeship/Discipleship the Holy One starts to make good on the "***I will make of you a goy gadol*** – i.e. a 'great nation' - promise that He made to our forefather Avram. See Genesis 12:2. This phase of our special forces training curriculum takes us beyond the basic level of learning to walk with our Creator as conflicted individuals, into the deeper realm of shifting atmospheres, synergizing strangers, and inspiring nations. Our challenge in the days to come will be to quit taking everything so personally, and instead surrender to our King's greater vision for the 'common good' of mankind as a species – which involves us joining forces with others in Covenant, and behaving responsibly toward and selflessly serving as a royal priesthood to all people, cultures, tribes, and tongues.

It is one thing for a few independent pioneers to enjoy scattered episodes of private fellowship and communion with the Creator of the Universe and reap the benefits of supernatural favor. It is going to prove to be quite daunting to take the next step in the Grand Redemptive Plan, and embrace our Beloved King and Friend's call to live very public, always on-display lives of beauty, peace, joy, kindness, patience, higher vision, and humble service in cooperation with hundreds of thousands of others. This next phase of the Grand Plan will require us to die to every last vestige of the flesh driven Ya'akov in us, and to put on instead the renewed mind and transcendent spirit of Yisrael.

It is time to grow into the 'great nation' aspect of our calling. We can get there – but only if we heed the words of Yosef, the Great Reconciler, and do not fall out along the way. See Genesis 45:24: ***And he [Yosef] said to them [i.e. his brothers]: see that you do not fall out along the way.***

Are you ready ... get set ... let's go!

### ***Why Are We Still In Egypt?***

Many years have now past since Yosef said: "*The Holy One will surely visit you, and bring you up from this land ...*" Genesis 50:24-25. Unfortunately - as we see it, at least – that promised 'visitation' has not happened yet - and we are quickly losing faith that it ever will. After all, a lot of time has passed. Not only Yosef, but all of our patriarchs – the ones in whose ears this promise was spoken – have died. In *Egypt. Unvisited. Unredeemed. Undelivered.* It has been decades – perhaps

centuries – since the *great caravan of Ya'akovian Progeny* wound its way through the barren desert scapes between Be'er Sheva to Goshen. A lot has happened in the interim – to us, and in the world. Be prepared to experience a little culture shock.

Since Ya'akov's funeral procession, not a single Hebrew has set one foot out of Egypt – even for as much as a visit to the Land. A succession of Pharaohs have come and gone – and the one constant each has had to face has been the growing presence, down in Goshen, of those ... of *us* ... *Hebrews*. The famine is long since over and gone. Why ... are ... we ... still ... HERE?

And now, the cruelest human being alive has assumed the title of Pharaoh. 'Ra' incarnate holds the scepter of, and sits on the throne of, Egypt. Oh, how different is this man from the one who happily shared his kingdom with Yosef and his family. Darkness oozes forth from this man's countenance. Arrogance glares forth from his eyes. Anger and offence spew from his lips. Anti-Semitism resides in his soul. And Egypt is catching his abominable disease. His hatred for all things – and people – Hebrew is spreading across Egypt like a sandstorm across the horizon. Utter disdain for Israel's God – and the Ways of Life, Health, and Shalom He taught to the patriarchs – are infecting the populace of Egypt like a plague. All eyes are on us. If anything goes wrong, we are blamed for it. If any crime is committed, we are accused of it. If any scandal breaks, we are deemed to be responsible for it. We are fish out of water. We are out of men of excellence like Yosef and Yehudah. We are out of fellowship with the Holy One. We are out of favor. We are out of hope. And we are just about out of time.

Tension is building. Stress is proliferating. Living conditions are intolerable. The *status quo* is unacceptable. The outlook is getting bleaker by the moment. Something is going to have to change - and SOON! We are about to be tossed and blown in every direction - like Shabbat candles caught in a Hurricane force wind!

But fear not, Beloved. All will be well. Our God is working all things together for good for those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose. This descent is only temporary; our next season of ascent is just around the corner. Ah, yes, but first we must hit rock bottom. So ... what is 'rock bottom'? What are the stones – dead or living – that make up our foundation? Where are the rocks from which we are hewn? Do we even remember their names?

### ***The Rocks From Which We Were Hewn – The Stones That Make Up our Bedrock Foundation***

As the *sefer* of Nation Building begins, names that have long since been forgotten by the Egyptians are being spoken. Names like *Reuven*. And *Sh'mon*. And *Levi*. And *Yehudah*. And *Yissakhar*, And *Zevulun*. And *Binyamin*. And *Dan*. And *Naftali*. And *Asher*. And *Gad*. And, yes, *Yosef*. What do all these have in common? Two things: First, they are all biological sons of one man – Ya'akov. Second, not

one of them is going to play any direct role in the narrative of Torah's fascinating second book. The Great adventure is about to transcend Yosef and his brothers, you see. It is not *patriarch maturation* time anymore - it is ... *nation-building time*.

The names of the tribal leaders of yesteryear will therefore be mentioned once, with feeling – and then we will move on. The unique, separate identities of the patriarchs will merge – and the collective term *B'nei Yisrael* – also called *Ivri'im* - i.e. Hebrews - will emerge and begin to take center stage in regard to every earthly drama. From this point forward, as *B'nei Yisrael* – i.e. *ha-Ivri'im* – go, so will go humankind – and, for that matter, of all of planet earth.

### **The Next Critical Phase of our Glorious Journey:**

#### ***Understanding and Embracing our Collective Destiny as B'nei Yisrael***

The seal on a new *sefer Torah* has now been broken. The Most Beautiful Voice in the world calls to us: “**Arise, my love – and come away with Me!**” The greatest love song ever written – and the most famous ballad of redemption ever told – are about to be sung by men and angels. A great cloud of witnesses – witnesses with *names* - is eager to escort us to the store cities of ancient Egypt, then to places like *Sukkot, Etam, Pi-HaCherot, the Sea of Reeds, Marah, Elim, Refidim*, and, ultimately, to the most amazing mountain in the world – *Sinai!*

The next section of the Torah scroll contains some of the most famous narratives of any piece of literature in existence. It contains the beautiful play-by-play accounts of the Holy One taking on the role of *Divine Bridegroom*, delighting in, engaging in rituals of courtship with, pledging His Troth to, exchanging vows with a *chosen Bride-people*, and then actually stepping out of eternity to cohabit with them. This is *the ultimate love story* – and our Creator wants it to be *our story as well*. A beautiful banquet table has been prepared. A Divine Invitation has been issued. Who will respond

### ***The Book of Redemption Begins:***

#### ***With The Scandalous Testimony of the Vav Prefix***

Torah's second book begins with a *vav* prefix<sup>2</sup>. In the English language one reads this as ‘and’. To English readers this hanging conjunction at the forefront of the narrative seems strange and awkward. After all, English readers are taught from earliest childhood that to begin a sentence – much less a book – with a conjunction – i.e. an ‘and’ - is the epitome of poor grammar. The Hebrew mindset sees things very different. In the Hebraic worldview absolutely everything that happens is connected to that which has gone before – and for that matter to everything that

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<sup>2</sup> In the Hebrew text the second book of Torah opens with the phrase *V'eleh sh'mot B'nei Yisrael ...* [KJV/NKJV: *Now these are the 'names' of the children of Israel ...*].



will follow. In the eyes of a Hebrew one cannot understand any book or revelation without having experienced, understood, and become firmly rooted in that which came before. To a Hebrew *all revelation is an outgrowth of “Light, Be!”* and *all books are mere sequels to the Creation Song of Genesis 1 through 3.* Moreover, to a Hebrew *all events that follow the death of Yosef are simply outworkings and illustrations of the essential veins of eternal truth that the Holy One exposed in seed form in the Book of Beginnings.*

The *vav* prefix at the beginning of Torah’s second book testifies that the ten plagues cannot be understood without reference to what broke Avram and Sarai free from the house of Pharaoh generations before. It further testifies that the significance of the Passover Lamb cannot truly be grasped by anyone who does not remember the conversations between Avraham and Yitzchak as they made their way up Mount Moriyah. The *vav*, with its hint of scandalously bad grammar in the English-speaking world, reminds us that the Tabernacle, its furnishings, its service, and its Priesthood cannot fully be appreciated by anyone who has not shared with Avram and Sarai the sweet pleasure of entertaining Divine Visitors in a tent, or seen a ram with its horns caught in a thicket descend from Heaven onto the top of a mountain, or heard the Beautiful Voice of his or her Creator speaking from atop a staircase that connects earth to Heaven.

### ***The Segue***

Ya’akov, the last of the patriarchs, reached his personal vanishing point in the current exile’s 17<sup>th</sup> year. Yosef continued to serve as Pharaoh’s viceroy for another sixty-four years, but then he too went the way of all flesh. At Yosef’s request his bones were simply put in a box, where they lie even yet, awaiting something that no human being alive at the time could even pretend to understand.

Fast-forward a few generations. We now know not a single human being alive by name. Nevertheless, the dry bones of ‘*that dreamer*’ are still prophesying to all who will listen:

***... the Eternal One will surely visit you, and He will bring you out of this land  
unto the land which he promised to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya’akov.***

...  
***The Eternal One will surely visit you;  
and when He does, carry up my bones from hence.***

[Genesis 50:24-25]

For many years it has seemed like no one the planet was really listening to the prophetic message of Yosef’s bones. The idea of a Glorious Visitation from Heaven seemed like a dream, an illusion, a fantasy. But the time is drawing near for all that to change dramatically.

## ***It is the Appointed Time to Begin the Process of Bringing the Kingdom of Heaven to the Earth***

Welcome to the *Book of Divine Kingdom Building*. There is no more powerful story on earth or in Heaven than the one that unfolds on this book's hallowed pages. This is the story of a great nation being brought forth from Avraham's loins and Egypt's convulsing womb. Through an epic prophetic season of *the Kingdom of Heaven coming, and the Will of our Father in Heaven being done on earth as it is in Heaven*, the Divine Shepherd is going to teach us what it means for Him to *be with* those who follow Him as they walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, to *comfort* them with His rod and His staff, and to *lead* them in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.

One does not merely read, or even study, a book such as this – one  *marvels at and basks in* it.

### ***Mah Shemeicha?* [i.e. What is Your Name?]**

Most English-speakers have come to know the second book of Torah by a Latin name – the one given to it by the Catholic fathers. Neither the language, the perspective, the message, nor the title of this book is Latin however. This book is Hebrew through and through. It is not about a Catholic book about Catholicism. It is a Hebrew book about Hebrews. Its title is not *Exodus*, as the popes of yesteryear have managed to convince the Christian and secular worlds our day; its title is *Sh'mot*.

What is *Sh'mot*, you ask? *Sh'mot* is the feminine plural form of the Hebrew noun *shem* [i.e. shin, mem]. That Hebrew noun is usually translated into English simply as 'name'. But the Hebrew noun *shem* involves much, much more than what English-speaking people think of as a 'name'. A Hebrew's *shem* – or a *shem* appertaining to the God of the Hebrews' - is not just a convenient moniker. It is instead a *prophetic declaration of identity, characteristics, attributes, mission, worldview, hierarchy of priorities, purpose, and destiny of one to whom it is ascribed*. A *shem* is not a proper noun by which one is *called*; a *shem* is a description of who one is.

It is said by the sages that between the lines of this Sefer Torah the *sh'mot* of all the Holy One's people are written. Look closely, employing the eyes of the Spirit, and you may just find your own *shem* inscribed - and your own life and purpose on earth described - in this Book of Divine Kingdom Building. Which brings us to an important point in these studies. As the angel with whom Ya'akov wrestled all night asked at our beloved patriarch at the approaching of dawn, so it is now the appointed time in these studies for me, as your scribe, to pause and ask you an important question. The critical question for this appointed moment in time is this:

*Mah shemeicha?* [i.e. what is your name?] **Genesis 33:28**. Who are you *really*? By what *shem* are you known, prayed for, praised, and rooted for in Heaven? Who *have you been* in your past, who *are you now*, and who *are you in the process of becoming*? Torah's second book is designed to help all people of the Eternal Covenant rediscover the answer to all these questions. This is a three-act play – and you are not here to watch but to learn how to play a part.

### ***Sefer Sh'mot: The Great Three-Act Play of Nation Building***

There will be three major 'acts' in the glorious drama of Divine *Nation Building* in which we are about to be called to participate. Act I of the saga will be set primarily in the land of exile, where the preceding *sefer Torah* left off. But the Holy One will not leave us to languish in exile and enslavement for long. A mere 3 weeks into the almost three-month long study therefore we will find ourselves plunged into Act II, adrift the shifting sands of the desert in the area between Egypt's Eastern border and the fiery mountain Torah calls *Sineh* [Sinai]. The third and final act of this epic story will be set at the mysterious 'mountain of God' itself. See the Divine Playwright's unofficial 'program' below:

<b><i>Act #</i></b>	<b><i>Setting</i></b>	<b><i>Main Characters</i></b>	<b><i>Chapters</i></b>
I	Egypt/Midyan	YHVH, Pharaoh, Moshe, Tzipporah	1-12
II	First Desert	YHVH, Moshe, Y'hoshua, Yitro	13-18
III	Mount Sinai	YHVH, Moshe, Aharon, Betzalel	19-40

The dramatic action sequences we will encounter in the various acts of this redemptive drama – and the emotional roller coaster rides that go along with those action sequences –will be at times so fast and furious that they will both *overwhelm the mind* and *numb the senses* of the reader. For instance, Act I will begin with *a bitter enslavement and persecution of the fledgling Hebrew nation*. In only the first week's study we will experience all the following:

... *the blunt cruelty of a despotic monarch bent on infanticide* as a means of population control and the maintenance of political, economic, and social power;

... *the desperation of a Hebrew slave woman* as she is driven to an unthinkable act - setting her 3-month-old infant adrift on the waters of the mighty Nile River in a wicker basket;

... *the idealistic but presumptuous anger of a young prince of Egypt* that arises the first time he witnesses his adoptive people committing injustice against a population of helpless slaves;

... *the wrath of a Pharaoh against a prince who killed one of his overseers and tried to cover it up*;

... *the loneliness of life on the run as a fugitive from a death decree issued by*

*the most powerful man on earth;*

*... the life-changing heat of a thorn bush engulfed in flames but not consumed;*

*... the terror, yet sheer excitement, of hearing the Voice of the Creator of Universe speak promises of deliverance, salvation, and redemption;*

*... the divine transformation of a man slow-of-speech and thick-of-tongue into a fearless prophet of deliverance and redemption;*

*... the thrill of a community of slaves when told that God cares for them and that the redemption they have prayed for is coming; and*

*... the bitter disappointment that results when what was trusted in for redemption actually causes oppression and enslavement to become worse.*

As action packed as this first parsha is however we will soon find out that is only *setting the stage* for the most stunning series of events contained in Act I of ***Sh'mot***. These action sequences merely provide the prophetic wallpaper for the ten famous 'plagues' through which the Holy One makes Himself known to the descendants of Avraham on the one hand and to Pharaoh and the people under the hypnotic spell of Egyptian culture on the other.

Saddle up your horses, Beloved – *this is the great adventure!*

### ***The Source Material for All Three Pilgrimage Festivals***

In later portions of Torah the Holy One will instruct us to converge on Mount Moriyah *en masse* three times each year. He will empower and commission us to make pilgrimage to the place of ultimate surrender and resurrection at *Passover* in the springtime, at *the Feast of Weeks* in the summer, and at *the Feast of Tabernacles* in the Fall. Each of those pilgrimages is deeply rooted in the pages of the book of Torah we are about to study.

The glorious springtime 'crossing over' journey of Passover [in Hebrew, ***Pesach***] is designed to enable us to experience afresh each year, with our children and children's children, the Great Walk to Deliverance the world knows as 'the Exodus'.

The summertime pilgrimage - often called the Feast of Weeks [in Hebrew, ***Shavuot***] - is designed to empower us to *relive the Great Sinaitic Theophany and Betrothal ceremony* and to annually *renew the Covenant that our forefathers cut on the mountain*.

The annual autumnal ascent of Mount Moriyah for the Feast of Tabernacles [in Hebrew, ***Sukkot***] is designed to awaken our hearts afresh for another wild, wonderful,



breath-taking season of awestruck courtship when the Holy One's Presence will once again overshadow us, preserve us supernaturally, lead us through the Wilderness to the place He has prepared for us as, and empower us to function in the critical role He has designed for us to play in His Grand Plan of Redemption.

It is because of the events chronicled in the book we are about to study that we tell our children every Passover, *we were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Holy One brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand; and the Holy One showed signs and wonders before our eyes, great and severe, against Egypt, Pharaoh, and all his household. Then He brought us out from there, that He might bring us in, to give us the land of which He swore to our fathers. And the Holy One enjoined us to observe all these statutes, to fear the Holy One our God, for our good always, that He might preserve us alive, as it is this day.*"

### ***Making Good on the Promise to Make of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov a 'Great Nation'***

As we read and study and bask in the beauty of this book together over the next few weeks therefore Dear Reader let me suggest that you always keep a close lookout in the narrative for *names*. Take particular note as you read of *who among the relevant characters in the drama is* – and *who is not* – given a *name* by Torah. The revelation you receive from such an evaluation may surprise you. The people you would think most likely – by the world's standards, at least - to have their names remembered have been left intentionally nameless.

The first secret of this second Sefer Torah we are supposed to find hidden by the Holy One in plain view is that *no matter what human beings may think is important, it is the Holy One and He alone Who ultimately chooses whose name will be recorded in the Book of Life – and whose name will be blotted out.*

#### **Example No. 1: Pharaoh Who Shall Remain Anonymous**

Take for example the mighty Pharaoh of the Exodus story – the one who came to power after the Book of Genesis closed and whom we are told *knew not Yosef*. Though this Pharaoh was unquestionably the most powerful man on earth in his day, please note that *the Torah will not even once speak his name*. Not once. Can you believe it?

Indeed, this man who seemed so important, and upon whose every word so many people doted in his day, is in the Torah narrative referred to only by the generic designation *Melech Mitzrayim* [King of Egypt]. In this manner the Holy One has seen to it that this vile despot who considered himself divine and who twice condemned innocent Hebrew man-children to death has been rendered completely anonymous to the world. He has borne multiple judgments of the Almighty – not

the least of which is that *he has had his name completely blotted out.*

The point? Believe it or not, *great wealth, power, and influence among men do not qualify one to have his or her name written in the Holy One's Book.*

### **Example No. 2: The Midwives**

Two of the midwives this man ordered to do his dirty work, however, and who risked their lives to refuse - I am talking about *Shifra* and *Puah* - are the first ones other than the patriarchs to have their names listed in the text. Note the irony - the names of two humble midwives who lived their life under Pharaoh's thumb are recorded forever in the Book; the name of the one at whose word they could have been killed for disobedience, however, has been blotted out completely.

### **Example No. 3: The Daughter of Pharaoh**

Another example of one the *Ruach HaQodesh* chooses to give no name is *the daughter of Pharaoh*. We humans would consider her name worth knowing, and perhaps even memorializing. Torah, however, sees her as doing the infant she pulled from the Nile no significant favors. The doer of good deeds who found and raised as an Egyptian prince the baby of Hebrew slaves she found adrift in a basket is therefore nowhere named in the Holy One's book. In, fact, her identity remains an impenetrable mystery to this very day. Hers is not among the *sh'mot* recognized by the Holy One.

The point? *Good deeds and philanthropy apparently do not qualify one to have his or her name written in the Holy One's Book any more than wealth, power, and influence among men.*

### **Example No. 4: The Older Sister of the Baby Condemned to Die**

The little Hebrew girl called Miryam. on the other hand, the one who had absolutely nothing material to give to anyone but who worshipped the Creator of the Universe with abandon and was ever sensitive to His Voice, is given by Torah a name that shines forever like a star in the Heaven. Millions upon millions of women – including the mother of the Messiah - have been gifted with this little girl's name.

The daughter of Pharaoh - the celebrity of her day – is long since forgotten. But a slave girl with a tambourine is memorialized for eternity. How strange!

### **Example No. 5: The Taskmaster**

Want another example? Think about *the cruel taskmaster* who Moshe saw beating a Hebrew slave. Physically the man was imposing. He roared and shouted. He cracked his whip with authority. He certainly seemed to be a man of importance

and influence to those who had the misfortune to have to deal with him.

The point? *Taking on a position of responsibility, assuming the role of a shepherd over people, does not apparently qualify one to have his or her name written in The Holy One's Book either.*

The name of the man who killed this man – *Moshe* - and the name of *Aharon*, another slave this man [or someone of his ilk] probably terrorized at one time or another during the most bitter period of enslavement<sup>3</sup>, — are both now names synonymous with leadership and the shepherding of souls. The Holy One's thoughts are very much higher than our thoughts, and His ways are inestimably higher than our ways.

The second book of Torah is not at its essence a book about great power, about wealth, about great influence, about great deeds of philanthropy, or about great principles of leadership. It is instead at its essence a book of *names*.

### ***The Thing About Hebrew 'Names' ...***

The narrative begins with a listing of the names [Hebrew, *sh'mot*] of each of Ya'akov's sons from which the tribes of Israel devolved. Similar listings will be found in the prophetic books of Ezekiel and Revelation. See **Ezekiel 48; Revelation 7**. We who have just completed the study of *Sefer B'reshit* [the Book of Genesis] know the names that make up these lists well by now. The opening words of *Sefer Sh'mot* tell us, in words almost identical to a passage in the 45<sup>th</sup> chapter of Genesis, that the sons of Ya'akov/Yisrael who accompanied Ya'akov/Yisrael to *Mitzrayim* [Egypt] were:

***Re'uven, Sh'mon, Levi, and Yehudah  
Yissakhar, Zevulun, Binyamin  
Dan, Naftali, Gad, and Asher***<sup>4</sup>.

*Yosef* was already in Egypt, of course. Even as his father and brothers were on the road from Kena'an, he was preparing for them and their families a 'secret place' to inhabit - a special hideaway in the Lower Nile Delta where the Nile dumps most of the silt it picks up on its trek through Eastern Africa before pouring into the Mediterranean. The region where Yosef settled his father and brothers – probably

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<sup>3</sup> The author is not suggesting that Aharon is the Hebrew slave that was being beaten by the taskmaster in question when Moshe intervened. The identity of the beaten slave involved in that incident is not mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> The passage with which the Book of Exodus begins is almost a word-for-word repetition of the passage beginning at Genesis 47:8. It can be argued that it was at this point – the point of departing Eretz Yisrael for Egypt - the exile truly begins. See also **I Chronicles 2:1 ff.**

in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century BCE<sup>5</sup> - came to be called *Goshen*<sup>6</sup>. It was there that Yosef kept the chosen family fed and protected until his death in *circa* 1775 BCE.

### ***The Startling Spiral of Events That Transpired In the Years Following Yosef's Death***

But now *several hundred years have passed*<sup>7</sup>. In the interim hordes of *Hyksos* [Egyptian for 'rulers of foreign lands'] from the East had overrun Egypt. These foreigners came in droves beginning in approximately 1730 BCE [45 years or so after Yosef's death]. The foreigners took the best lands – including lands like Goshen – for themselves. They enslaved the inhabitants<sup>8</sup>.

The Egyptians suffered at the hands of these Eastern 'shepherd-kings' for almost two hundred years. Then, however, the Egyptian warlord *Amosis* took Egypt back from the *Hyksos* by force. Amosis expelled the Hyksos and established a new leaner and meaner Egyptian dynasty in circa 1570 BCE – a new dynasty still reeling from the *Hyksos* experience. This new dynasty viewed with suspicion bordering on paranoia all 'outsiders' – including of course the descendants of Ya'akov/Yisrael. So things in Egypt have *changed dramatically* since the end of the book of Genesis. The Egypt in which Yosef rose to power and ruled - and which welcomed had Ya'akov and family with open arms - simply no longer exists. The Egypt that has arisen from the ashes of the Hyksos wars is not a friendly place at all. Just as America after Pearl Harbor looked suspiciously at and tended to deal harshly with people of Japanese descent, so Egypt after the Hyksos invasion looked suspiciously at and dealt harshly with all who they even thought

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<sup>5</sup> BCE is an abbreviation used in Jewish writings for the phrase 'Before Common Era'. It is the accepted Jewish manner of describing the time period the Christian world calls BC.

<sup>6</sup> Goshen is *gimel, shin, nun sofit*. Strong's Hebrew word #1657, it is pronounced *go'-shen*.

<sup>7</sup> This writer assumes a traditional date of approximately 1447 BCE for the departure of the mixed multitude under Moshe [Moses] from Egypt, based in part upon the statement in 1 Kings 6:1 states that the fourth year of Solomon's reign in Israel was 480 years after the Israelite Exodus from Egypt. However, this date is not without controversy, as it has been pointed out that if you add up the 40 years of wilderness wandering, the 410 year period recorded in the book of Judges, 40 years for the career of Eli [for the latter two periods, see Acts 13:16-20], 40 years for the reign of Saul, and 40 years for the reign of David, you get 570 years between the Exodus and the beginning of Sh'lomo's reign – and this does not include the time during which Y'hoshua led Israel, nor the career of Samuel. If one were to speculate that these add up to at least 30 years, the statement in I Kings 6:1 that Sh'lomo's 4<sup>th</sup> year of reign occurred 480 years after the Exodus seems to conflict with what one can calculate from chronological data given elsewhere in the Bible.

<sup>8</sup> There is, of course, far from unanimous agreement among historians when the events described in this paragraph occurred. Torah, of course, does not tell us specifically what happened during the 'interval' between Genesis 50 and Exodus 1. Torah also does not name the Pharaohs involved, nor tell the years they reigned, nor even specify from which dynasty they came. For the purposes of this study, I choose to take the traditional approach to dating the exodus and the events that led up to it, leaving to secular historians the task of arguing what the artifacts and steles the archaeologists dig up mean, and whether carbon dating is really as accurate as scientists with anti-Spiritual agendas would like us to think it is.

might join forces with them if they – or some other mongrel horde - ever attacked again. Welcome to Egypt *circa* 1526 BCE.

### *The Scandal of a Hebrew ‘Name’*

Meanwhile let us look at what is going on with the descendants of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Ya’akov. What has happened with the children of the Covenant? Ya'akov *avinu* is of course long gone. Yosef’s bones lie in a coffin in Goshen. Efrayim and Menashe are long dead. Reuven and Sh’mon, Levi and Yehudah are a distant memory at best.

Conspicuous in the absence of the patriarchs, however, are untold thousands of men and women we have not met, with hordes of children, who are now scattered across Egypt. To a discerning eye these hordes can be seen to some degree or another to exhibit the same olive complexions and distinctive foreheads and noses as Ya'akov, Yitzchak, and Avraham once did. Great-great grandsons and granddaughters of Ya'akov they are. The chosen people of the Creator of the Universe they are. But as this week’s parsha opens these great-great grandsons do not look much like a “chosen” people. Indeed they do not look like a “people” at all. They lack *identity*. They lack *community*. They lack *leadership*. They lack any *common bond*. They are slaves. They are powerless. They are statistics in the gross national product of the ‘new’ leaner, meaner Egypt. They are bought and sold as horses or cattle or so many sheep. They are fungible with every other race of slaves - and the “new” Egypt in which they now find themselves has many, of several races, tribes and tongues.

The once famous ancestors of the olive-skinned slaves – the men whose names are listed in Exodus 1:1-5 - are now hardly more than obscure footnotes in the history of the noble race of Mitzrayim. And they are footnotes destined to fade into oblivion - or *so it appears*. The opening words of *Shemot*, however, militantly declare that these great-grandsons and great-granddaughters of Ya’akov are something else. These are not what they appear - mere beasts of burden, mere desert rabble. True, they might only mean numbers, quantities, commodities, to this new Pharaoh<sup>9</sup> and to his taskmasters. But to the Holy One they were *names* [Hebrew, *sh’mot*]! They were not slaves. They were not ‘things’. They were not ‘numbers’. They were not ‘objects’. They were *Names*. Each one unique, each one given lovingly by an earthly mother and father to describe characteristics imparted by a breath of Heaven. They were *names written in a Book in Heaven*. Each one

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<sup>9</sup> The Bible indicates that the same Pharaoh whose daughter pulled Moshe [KJV ‘Moses’], at 3 months of age, from the Nile, died when Moshe was between 40 and 80 years old. This Pharaoh therefore reigned for a *very long time* – *at least 41 years*. The most likely candidate, in my mind, considering the time frame, is Pharaoh Thutmose I, who began to reign in 1526 BCE – the same year in which it is believed that Moshe’s birth occurred.

*declaring the essence of human dignity, and in the case of these particular humans proclaiming the covenant promises of the God of the Universe. Names.*

To the Holy One the Hebrews residing in Egypt were not obstacles to someone's plan of national, social, philosophical or religious development. They were not statistics to be figured in equations and feasibility studies. They were not commodities to be bought and sold in marketplaces. They were not means to someone's selfish ends. They were *names inscribed on the palm of the Holy One's hand. Names - names* They were names that *mean* something. Names like *Reuven* - "See, a son!"; *Sh'mon* - "He hears!"; *Levi* - "He unites us!"; *Yehudah* - Praise Him!; *Dan* - "He judges!"; *Naftali* - "He struggles"; *Gad* - "He has brought good fortune!"; *Asher* - "Happy"; *Yissakhar* - "He has hired me!"; *Zevulun* - "He abides with me!"; *Yosef* - "He increases me!", *Binyamin* - "Son of my right hand". They are *names*, Pharaoh. Divinely created individuals - with *names!* But that is far from the end of our story. These multitude of scattered hook-nosed, olive-skinned descendants of Ya'akov are not *just* names. It is not enough simply to recognize that the subjects of our parsha are not what they appear to be; it is just as important that we see that they also *are* what they do *not* appear to be - *a people*.

*A people?* Look at them. No, not a people. *A people?* Not they, surely. To the human eye they certainly do not *appear* to be a people. They are *not unified*. They are *not autonomous*. They *do not by and large live together*, but are interspersed and intermixed with a hundred other varieties of folk conquered and purchased by or who have sold themselves to Pharaoh over the years, dispatched as the taskmaster determines they are needed for specific jobs. Each one has in order just to stay alive surrendered every trace of tribal identity in him to the fulfillment of the specific task Pharaoh's personnel officer has assigned to him. And for that matter, each one has much more of a relationship with whatever wretched human creature of whatever race who toils alongside him than he does to his or her fellow Hebrews.

Thoroughly *scattered grains of sand* virtually devoid of identity. Blown to the four winds, unconnected to the rock from which they were hewn. That is what they appear - *isn't it*, Dear Reader?

### ***Appearances Can Be Deceiving***

Oh yes that is what Avraham's descendants *appear* as *Sefer Sh'mot* begins. But that is *not* what they are. Our parsha sees them *through different eyes* - not as Pharaoh sees them, or as the next worker in the quarry views them, or even as they might see themselves - but as the Holy One, blessed be His Name, sees them. And to the Holy One, however geographically dispersed they are, however dejected or



degraded they have become, however devoid of identity they appear, they are *Yisrael!*

They are *tribes!* They are *princes!* They are *heirs of the Promise!* They are *a people!* And they are *not Pharaoh's.* Oh no, they are *not Pharaoh's,* Dear Reader. They have *never* been Pharaoh's. They are *the Holy One's,* and His alone! They are *the people of the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov.* They are His *chosen people.* They are His *am segulah* – His *special treasure people.* They are His *mamlakah kohanim* – His *kingdom of priests.* They are His *goy k'dosh* – His *holy nation.* And *He wants them back,* Pharaoh! He wants them *NOW!* *And if you haven't noticed ... He does not seem happy at all about what's being done to His People in your country* – and you know, I have a suspicion He might just be taking names!

### ***A Quick Look at Haftarah Sh'mot***

Isaiah 27:6 - 28:13 and Jeremiah 1:1 - 2:3

There are two different traditions regarding what prophetic reading best completes the narrative of parsha *Sh'mot.* The *Ashkenazi* tradition is to read and meditate on Yeshayahu 27:6-28:1. The *Sephardic* tradition, on the other hand, is to read and meditate on the call and commissioning of Yirmayahu, in Jeremiah 1:1 – 2:13.

What saith the prophet *Yeshayahu* - *i.e.* 'Isaiah'? He prophesies of a second Exodus – a glorious day to come when:

*... a great shofar will be blown;  
and they will come who were lost and ready to perish in the land of Assyria  
and those who were driven out to the land of Mitzrayim,  
and they will worship the Holy One on the holy mountain at Y'rushalayim."*

In that day, declares Yeshayahu:

*The Lord of Hosts shall become a crown of glory  
and a diadem of beauty to the remnant of His people.*

Yeshayahu wants us to know, as we read of the trials of our ancestors in Egypt, and consider our own present trials, even yet the Holy One has a Great Redemptive Plan. He wants us to always remember that one day soon a shofar will sound, and there will be a miraculous gathering of the People of the Covenant. He will bring us together, bone upon bone, and we will become all we were created to be.

What saith the prophet Yirmayahu – *i.e.* Jeremiah? Here is a sample:

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you;  
before you were born I set you apart ...*

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*To everyone I send you you are to go,  
and whatever I enjoin you, you are to speak!*

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*Behold, I have put words in your mouth;  
This day I have set you over the nations and the kingdoms ...*

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*What do you see?*

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*I am with you, says the Holy One, to deliver you!*

***“I See the Heavens Opened!”***

*Brit Chadasha Sh'mot: Acts 7:30 - 8:4*

In the passage from the B'rit Chadasha that I have selected for study this week we will complete the narrative from the Book of Acts regarding the Greek-surnamed Jew *Stefanos*. We previously were introduced to Stefanos [known to most English speakers by the Anglicized name Stephen] in the week of parsha Vayashev. Then we learned of his name, his mixed identity, his Divine calling, his *mitzvot*, his persecution, and the opening phases of his trial. This week, in connection with our studies in parsha *Sh'mot*, we will read the story of how the trial turned out. We will stare in *wide-eyed wonder* at Stefanos' glorious final vision – in which Yeshua of Natzret will be seen standing at the right Hand of the Father. We will *marvel* at Stefanos' beautiful and inspired last words. And alongside a certain rabbi named Shaul of Tarsus we will find ourselves *transfixed* by the deafening silence as Stefanos' prophetic voice and breath of life ebb away before our eyes.

The Holy One willing, we will come to understand why *Stefanos* is barely going to notice the stones speeding his way. It is because he will be looking into the Heavens. He will not be looking quizzically, or desperately, or hopefully or even prayerfully. He will be looking “steadfastly”. What he is going to see *there* will make what was being done to him *here* seem a mere passing discomfort - even though a crushing blow, a mortal blast, will be delivered to his physical body. Hence, when we hear Stefanos cry out at last we will not hear him cry out in pain, or fear, or for either mercy or for vengeance. He will indeed cry out. The words he will cry out will echo to the highest heavens. At the moment of death overtakes him he will cry out in *sheer and inexpressible joy!* As life ebbs from him, you see, *he will fix gaze with the One his soul loves.*

This week we will be called, like Stefanos, to look *steadfastly* into Heaven. We might be surprised what we see.

*May you see the One whom your soul loves  
standing at the right hand of the Holy One this week, Beloved!*

***The Rabbi's son***

***Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week***

Petition No. 11 – *Y'rushalayim*

***V'lirushalayim ireicha b'rachamim t'shuv***

*And unto Jerusalem, your City, return in compassion*

***v'tishkon b'tokah ka-asher d'varto***

*and make your dwelling within it, as you have declared*

***ub'nei asah b'karav b'yomeinu bin'yan olam***

*May you rebuild it soon in our day, an eternal structure*

***v'chisai David m'herah l'tokah tachin***

*And speedily re-establish the kingdom of David*

***B'ruch atah Adonai Bonei Y'rushalayim***

*Blessed are You, O Holy One, Builder of Jerusalem*