



## Wembley Synagogue

### שְׁמוֹת

#### Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Shemot

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִם אִתְּ יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ - And these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt with Yaakov, each man and his household came. (1:1) Why does the book of Shemot begin with the names of the sons of Yaakov, and the size of their families? Rashi comments that although Hashem counted them by their names in their lifetime, he counted them again after they died; to teach us how precious they were to Him. This is analogous to the stars, of which it is written (Isaiah 40:26) "He who takes out their hosts by number, calls them all by name." Rashbam says that the point of the entire section is to emphasise how the Jewish People grew at a phenomenal rate, to the extent that "the land became filled with them (1:7)." Therefore the Torah repeats the fact that, when Yaakov came to Egypt, there were only seventy people in the entire House of Israel (v.5) in order to stress the incredible speed at which they multiplied. (Source: Gutnick Chumash)

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל - And these are the names of the Children of Israel (1:1)

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 285) rules that every individual should read the weekly Sidra twice (*Shenayim Mikra*) and its Aramaic translation once (*V'echad Targum*). This requirement is alluded to in the acronym of the word שְׁמוֹת which is formed by the letters shin, mem, vav and tet - *Shenayim Mikra V'echad Targum*.

Similarly, the Rabbis point out that the word שְׁמוֹת alludes to three mitzvot - *Shabbat, Milah, v'Tefillin* (Shabbat, circumcision and tefillin). These are the three mitzvot that the Torah refers to as "a sign" (see *Shemot* 31:13, *Bereshit* 17:11 and *Shemot* 13:9). These mitzvot signify the unbreakable bond between Hashem and the Jewish People. By stating "and these are the *Shemot*, the names of the Children of Israel," the Torah is hinting to the idea that when the Jews enter a foreign land, these three mitzvot, if observed fully, can serve as a protection from assimilation. (Source: A Shabbos Vort)

וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרָיִם - A new king arose over Egypt (who did not know Yosef) (1:8)

Rashi says that there is a difference of opinion between two Talmudic sages - Rav and Shmuel. One said that it was actually a new king. The other said it was the same king but he came up with new decrees. This second opinion, verse 8 (that Pharaoh did not know Yosef) means that he made himself as if he did not know Yosef.

The Midrash *Shemot Rabba* 1:8 says that the reason why the first opinion (Rav) holds that it was a different king is because the Torah uses the word "new", which implies literally a new king. The second opinion, (Shmuel) is troubled by the fact that there is no mention of the original king passing away. Therefore, he understands that when the Torah says that the king was new it means that he acted like a new king.

Aitz Yosef says even according to the first opinion, that it was literally a new king; it would be absurd to presume that Pharaoh had never heard of Yosef at all. After all, Yosef was an extremely prominent minister in Egypt for many years and it is impossible that the following king had never heard of him.

רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ - More numerous and stronger than us (1:9)

In what way were Bnei Yisrael stronger than the Egyptians? Pharaoh told his people that the Jews had taken over the Egyptian economy. This can be seen in the word מִמֶּנּוּ - "than us." The letters of מִמֶּנּוּ are the same as those that spell מָמוֹן - money. Furthermore the numerical value of the word מִמֶּנּוּ - 136 - is the same as that of קוֹל - (Kol) - meaning *voice*. Pharaoh understood that the true power of Bnei Yisrael was their ability to ask Hashem to intercede on their behalf. For this reason, Pharaoh told his people that Bnei Yisrael should be enslaved, so that their position in the economy would be negated and the hard work and long hours would curtail their ability to pray. (Source: Kol Dodi)

אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֵחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשְּׂנִיט פּוּעָה - [The King of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives] One who was named Shifra and the second who was named Pu'ah (1:15)

Who were these Jewish midwives? Rashi says that Shifra actually refers to Yocheved, the mother of Moshe. She was called Shifrah, as it is a Hebrew word which implies that she (*Meshaperet*) "groomed" the children at birth. Likewise, Pu'ah actually refers to Miriam (Moshe's sister) since she was effective at cooing (*shepuah*) to children when they cried.

Ibn Ezra asks that surely there must have been more than two midwives serving so many women. He answers that when the Torah states that there were two, it means to say that these two were the supervisors of the other midwives, and they were responsible for giving a head-tax to the king for each birth.

וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת בַּת לֵוִי - A man from the house of Levi went and married the daughter of Levi (2:1). Rabbi Moshe Feinstein notes that the Torah does not reveal the names of these people, Moshe's parents, until eighty years have passed. Only when Moshe stood before Pharaoh in the Sidra of Va'era (6:2) are we told that Amram and Yocheved are Moshe's parents. One who bears a child who seems to possess only excellent qualities cannot be sure of his baby's future, for it is not known whether the child will retain these qualities or lose them. The Mishna, in Pirkei Avot 2:4 says "do not trust yourself until the day of your death." Thus, says Rabbi Feinstein, we must withhold praising the parents at least until the child grows to adulthood and performs righteous deeds on his own. At the time of Moshe's birth, his parent's names are not revealed for they were just ordinary people. Only later, when Moshe was eighty years old and a righteous person in his own right, does the Torah praise his parents by revealing their names.

וַתִּשֶׂם בְּסוּף עַל שְׂפַת הַיָּאֵר - She put it (the baby's basket) in the reeds at the Nile's edge (2:3) Why was the river chosen as a hiding place? The Midrash says that the Egyptian astrologists had seen that the saviour of the Jewish People would meet his end through water. That is why Pharaoh decreed that "Every son who is born you shall cast into the Nile." Moshe's mother Yocheved was aware of this, which explains why she chose the river as a hiding place. After Moshe was placed there, the astrologists reported to Pharaoh that the problem was over, and Pharaoh annulled the decree. (Midrash Rabbah 1:22, 24) Abarbanel says that the river was chosen because 1) if he were kept at home, it would have been almost certain death and the presence of a baby endangered the entire family. By placing him in the river it is possible that he would be found and allowed to live. 2) The riverside was a place where somebody was likely to find him and 3) If he did die, his parents would not be present.

וַתֹּאמֶר מִלְדֵי הָעִבְרִים זֶה - And she said, "This is one of the Hebrew boys" (2:6)

In this week's Sidra, we read of Yocheved's attempt to save her baby from the decree of Pharaoh by placing him in a basket and sending her daughter Miriam to put it in the river. When the Egyptian princess Batya discovered the basket and saw the boy inside, she said immediately that he must be a Jewish child and took pity on him. Rabbi Shalom of Belz points out the difficulty in understanding her sensitivity. Pharaoh, her father, had murdered thousands of Jewish children; how could it be that a daughter who had grown up in such an environment had developed such great mercy for Jews? He answers that when Batya opened the basket, the sight of Moshe's holy face inspired her greatly and aroused in her heart the attribute of compassion. This insight teaches us that a person's countenance can exert great influence. (Source: Something to Say)

### The Burning Bush (3:2)

What is the significance of the burning bush? Rashi says that the Angel of Hashem revealed himself to Moshe specifically through a thorn bush rather than another type of tree, in keeping with the spirit of the verse in Psalms 91:15) which says "I am with him in distress" i.e. Hashem is always with the Jewish People even in times of distress (comparable to thorns).

The Midrash Shemot Rabbah 2:1 asks why did the Holy One Blessed be He formulate His revelation in this manner? Because Moshe was afraid that the Egyptians would really destroy Israel. Accordingly Hashem showed him a burning fire which was never consumed. Hashem said to Moshe "Just as the bush burns with fire but is never consumed so Egypt will never destroy Israel."

Shabbat Shalom!



Shabbat starts 4.01pm



Shabbat ends: 5.10pm