



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY

RABBI REUVEN TRADBURKS
RCA ISRAEL REGION

PARSHAT SHEMOT

The Jewish people are in Egypt. A new Paro is concerned with the size of the Jewish people. He decrees hard labor, infanticide and then actively drowning the male babies. Moshe is born, raised in Paro's daughter's home. After seeing the Jews mistreated, Moshe flees to Midian, marries and settles there. At age 80, Moshe encounters the burning bush. G-d instructs him to go to Paro and demand, in G-d's name, to free the Jewish people. Moshe, after attempting to refuse this mission, goes to Paro. Paro increases the burdens. The people complain.



1ST ALIYA (1:1-17)

70 Bnei Yisrael descend to Egypt. They grow exceedingly numerous, filling the land. A new king who knew not Yosef arises. Afraid that the Jews would join with enemies of Egypt, he seeks to weaken their numbers. A labor tax is followed by oppressive labor. Then the midwives are instructed to kill the Jewish babies. The midwives fear G-d and do not heed Paro's directive.

The book of Shemot, of Exodus is a contrast to the book of Bereshit.

Bereshit was the story of people, our patriarchs and matriachs; Shemot is the story of the nation. Bereshit takes place in the Land of Israel; Shemot, in Egypt. Bereshit is the story of the covenant to inherit the Land of Israel; Shemot, the exodus from Egypt.

But while the Torah is an account of our

people and our history, it is more importantly the encounter of G-d and man. And this encounter of G-d and man is entirely different in Bereshit than it is in Shemot.

In Bereshit, G-d hovers, lurks, while the people play out their lives. He promises the Land to Avraham and his children, then seems to leave the people to figure out how to make that happen. He promises but doesn't control. The promises are the backdrop to the machinations of man.

In Shemot, G-d controls. He is the Main Director, the Jewish people the mere stage actors. He no longer lurks, with repeated promises. He acts, dominates, controls, manipulates. He initiates, communicates, commands. Later, at Sinai, He reveals Himself.

Shemot is the story of Divine control of Jewish destiny.

But His appearance begins only when we hit bottom. We have to wait until that Divine control appears. Until then, He appears to be absent.

Paro acts to weaken the Jewish people. Vicious actions, including murder. The midwives fear G-d, refuse to murder. Where is He? Our people are being murdered. Where is He? There is no mention of G-d's actions.

We have seen this before. G-d's name is absent from the sale of Yosef, as it is here. Yosef is sold, becomes a slave, then a prisoner. Where is He? Why doesn't He save Yosef?

It is as if He restrains Himself, allowing us to spiral downward all on our own. Man does

a mighty fine job of cruelty all on his own. The Divine restrains Himself, allowing man to be cruel. He will appear when we hit bottom.



2ND ALIYA (1:18-2:10)

The midwives defend their actions to Paro. Paro commands all Jewish baby boys to be thrown into the river. Moshe is born, placed in the water in a basket. Paro's daughter rescues him. Miriam arranges for Moshe's mother to nurse him. He is returned to Paro's daughter and named Moshe.

The story of Moshe's rescue is in stark contrast to Yosef's sale. Yosef is thrown by his brothers into a dry pit that had no water; Moshe is thrown into the water by his mother but remains dry. Yosef's brothers move away from the pit; Moshe's sister stays close to see what happens. Yosef's brothers didn't respond to his cry; Paro's daughter hears Moshe's cry. Yosef's brothers do not bring him home to his father; Moshe's sister brings Moshe home to nurse with his mother. Parallel stories; radically different.



3RD ALIYA (2:11-25)

Moshe matures. He goes out to see the travails of his brothers. He defends a Jew by killing his Egyptian aggressor, and then saves a Jew from a Jewish aggressor. He flees for his life to Midian, aids Yitro's daughters, is welcomed by Yitro, marries Zipporah, has a child, Gershom. "For I am a stranger in a strange land". G-d sees the suffering of the Jews and remembers His covenant.

The reversal of the sin of the brothers continues: the brothers did not see the suffering of their brother while Moshe wants to see and relieve the pain of his brothers. Moshe names his son Gershom, for "I am a stranger",

while Yosef names his son Menashe, as he has forgotten his father's home.

And then, when the suffering is so oppressive everything changes.

G-d appears. His name appears 5 times in 3 verses. Now, everything is different.



4TH ALIYA (3:1-15)

Moshe and the burning bush. Moshe, Moshe, Hineni. G-d speaks, Moshe cowers. G-d tells him: I have seen the suffering of My people. I will save them from Egypt and bring them to the Land of milk and honey. I am sending you to go to Paro and he will release My people from Egypt. Moshe objects: who am I to go to Paro? And the Jewish people will question who sent me. G-d says: tell them the G-d of their forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov sent you.

The entire story of the Torah changes here. G-d moves from the unseen force behind human action to directly dictating human activity. He tells Moshe that He will take the Jewish people out of Egypt and bring them to the Land of Israel.

Up until now, the Jewish people have been promised the Land but have lived only with the promise, not with its fulfillment. They have not seen the Hand of G-d but have rather detected it behind the events. As Yosef said "G-d has brought me to Egypt to save the family." He never heard that. He surmised that being in Egypt to save his family is just too bizarre a twist of events; it must be Divinely driven. But he doesn't know that; he figures it must be.

Now the veil is drawn. Moshe is told in vivid detail exactly what will transpire. The Jews will be sent out by Paro. The story of the Exodus from Egypt is a pillar of Jewish belief because it is a blatant, direct display of

G-d's Hand in our history. It is His Hand in full display, not behind the veil.



5TH ALIYA (3:16-4:17)

G-d continues: Gather the people. Tell them that I will take them to the Land. They will listen. Go to Paro. I know he will not listen. I will smite the Egyptians. You will be loaded with gold, silver and clothing from the Egyptians. Moshe is still convinced that the people will not believe him. G-d gives him signs: staff turns to snake and then back, hand turns leprous and then back. And water to blood. Moshe objects: I am not a good speaker. G-d says: I give speech to man. I will send Aharon with you. He will speak. Take your staff.

Moshe's reluctance is striking. The exchange at the burning bush covers 2 aliyot, a total of 39 verses. That is a lot. And it is because Moshe doesn't want to do what he is told to do.

Avraham did not demur from a pretty rough command to sacrifice his son. Noah didn't either when given a command that would bring derision. Moshe is a very begrudging leader.

But that itself is instructive. Moshe is not a man driven by a mission, a great, charismatic leader who leads his people from oppression

to freedom, displaying the power of human will in the face of injustice. And after all, he is 80, a rather late start on leading his people.

The charismatic leader leading his people from slavery to freedom would be a great story. But it is not our story. Our story is of the Divine Hand guiding human events through a reluctant leader.

This is not Moshe's story. It is the Divine's. And even that great refrain "let my people go" is used inaccurately. It is not the charismatic leader confronting the tyrant, demanding to "let my people go". No. It is G-d speaking. He tells Moshe: go tell Paro to let *My* people go. Moshe is delivering a message. He is quoting G-d to Paro – he is but the messenger.

And that is the point. It is the story of G-d's Hand in history. He is the Active One, Moshe the mere messenger.



6TH ALIYA (4:18-31)

Moshe gets Yitro's blessing to return to Egypt. G-d tells Moshe that those seeking his death have died. G-d tells him to tell Paro: G-d says Israel is my first born. Send out *My* son, for if you do not, I will slay your first born. Zippora circumcises her son. Aharon greets Moshe. They gather the people. The people believe that G-d will redeem them.

G-d adds one more thing to Moshe; Israel is *My* first born. As if to say – "Moshe, this is a story of love. I view the Jewish people as my beloved first born." And. Refusal by Paro will result in Divine punishment.

Our western ethos is uncomfortable with these central principles of Judaism: G-d's Hand in history, G-d's love for the Jewish people, and Divine punishment. These are radical pillars of Judaism. As Rabbi Sacks, z"l, said; Radical then. Radical now.



Mazal Tov to

Dr Yitzhak & Yael Applebaum
on the Bat Mitzvah of
their daughter Tova Libby



Mazal Tov to the proud Grandparents
Debra Applebaum and Ziva & David Katz
And to the Great Grandparents
Rabbi Shubert & Iris Spero



7TH ALIYA (5:1-6:1)

Moshe and Aharon approach Paro, requesting a 3-day journey to the desert to celebrate. Paro refuses. He increases the workload. Conflict arises between the Jewish workers and the Egyptian supervisors. The Jews criticize Moshe for increasing their burden. Moshe complains to G-d. G-d reassures him that through a strong hand, Paro will send them out.

What a great lesson: even when G-d Promises, don't think it is all clear sailing. His promises run smack into the uncomfortable reality of human beings. The plan for the Jews to leave runs into the reality of Paro and his resistance. Paro derails the plan, at least in part.

That is the lesson: man meanders as the Divine plan unfolds, up and down, forward and back. But resistance need not dull the end. The end will come. Maybe later than sooner. But a Promise is a Promise.

HAFTORAH:

YESHAYAHU 27:6-28:13; 29:22-23

This week's *haftorah* parallels the week's Torah reading on many levels. One of the parallels is the message of redemption conveyed by Yeshayahu—"and you shall be gathered one by one, O children of Israel"—that is reminiscent of the message of redemption that G-d spoke to Moses at the burning bush, a message that Moses then communicated to Pharaoh.

The *haftorah* vacillates between Yeshayahu's prophecies concerning the future redemption, and his admonitions concerning the Jews' drunken and G-dless behavior. Yeshayahu starts on a positive note: "In the coming days,

Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom, filling the face of the earth . . ." He mentions Hashem's mercy for His nation, and the measure-for-measure punishment He meted out upon the Egyptians who persecuted them. And regarding the future redemption: "You shall be gathered one by one, O children of Israel. And it will come to pass on that day that a great *shofar* will be sounded, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those exiled in the land of Egypt will come, and they will prostrate themselves before the L-rd on the holy mount in Jerusalem."

The prophet then proceeds to berate the drunkenness of the Ten Tribes, warning them of the punishment that awaits them. "With the feet they shall be trampled, the crown of the pride of the drunkards of Ephraim . . ."

The *haftorah* ends on a positive note: "Now Jacob will no longer be ashamed, and now his face will not pale. For when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, who shall sanctify My name . . . and the G-d of Israel they will revere." ■



STATS

13th of 54 sedras; 1st of 11 in Shemot.
Written on 215.2 lines in a Torah (18th).
7 parshiot; 6 open, 1 closed.
124 pesukim - 15th (tied with Emor).
1763 words - 14th (Emor: 22nd).
6762 letters - 16th (Emor: 23rd).
2nd in Shemot in those three categories.



MITZVOT

No mitzvot are counted from Shemot.
One of 17 sedras without mitzvot.