



Around the Shabbat Table

Parashat Shemot 5762

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Introduction:

This week's Parsha introduces us to the slavery in Egypt. The content of the parsha includes four themes:

1. From Family to Nation
2. Pharaoh's decrees and the opposition to them
3. Moshe: From birth to leadership
4. Moshe the leader's first confrontation with Pharaoh and with the Jewish People

From Family to Nation: The book of Genesis describes the experiences of the family of Abraham. It was Jacob's growing family that ended up living in Egypt.

In Genesis we learned of God's blessings to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would multiply and become a very large nation, and that they would inherit the land of Israel. In our Parsha, we learn of the fulfillment of the first part of the blessing. The family multiplied and became so numerous that they became a nation – an *Am*.

Pharaoh's decrees and the opposition to them: The first person to call them *Am Yisrael*, the nation of Israel, is Pharaoh himself. He fears that the Nation of Israel, having grown so much, will revolt against him. He devises a three phase plan: a) to weaken them he puts them to work; hard labor. b) to minimize their number, especially the number of men, he commands the midwives to kill the newborn boys. When the midwives defy the Kings command, he goes to plan c) ordering the whole nation to kill every new baby boy they encounter (but the girls can live).

Moshe – From Birth to assuming leadership: Moshe is born to a couple from the house of Levi. After 3 months of hiding him, the mother places the baby in an “ark” (basket with a lid, made of reeds) and puts the “ark” in the river. His older sister watches from

afar and sees that Pharaoh's daughter discovers the baby, knows he is a Hebrew but still wants to adopt him. The baby's sister offers to bring a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby. The woman is the baby's mother. Moshe stays with his birth family for about 3 years, then grows up in the Egyptian palace. After growing up, Moshe observes the Hebrew slaves. Moshe hits and kills an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew slave. Later, when trying to save a Hebrew slave from a fellow Hebrew slave who is beating him, Moshe discovers that his previous deed is known and that his life is in danger. He flees to Midian where he arrives at a well and helps a group of women draw water for their father's sheep. He is invited to join Yitro's family, marries one of Yitro's daughters, becomes a shepherd, and, with his wife, has two sons. During one of his outings with his sheep, near the mountain called the Mountain of God in *Horev*, Moshe encounters God, who informs him that he is to become God's messenger to Egypt and that he, Moshe, will take the Hebrews out of Egypt.

Moshe the leader's first confrontation with Pharaoh and with the Jewish people: Moshe met with the Hebrew elders sharing with them God's message. They believed him and accepted his leadership. Moshe and Aaron then met the King who rebuffed them after hearing that they want to take the people out to the desert to worship their God. "I don't know God and I will not send out the Israelites." The working condition of the Hebrew slaves worsened. Moshe and Aaron were blamed by their own people for the deterioration of their condition.

Questions for Your Family's Discussion

1. Why was Pharaoh afraid of the Hebrew's "population explosion"? Why didn't he get rid of them and declare a national holiday when they left his country?
2. The midwives defied Pharaoh's order to kill the Hebrew baby boys. They did it even though they were in danger for disobeying the King. Why did they do it? What situations in history do you know in which people risked their lives for others? (e.g., Queen Esther and Mordechai, Gentiles during the Holocaust, American Jews in the civil rights struggle)
3. Why did Moshe first refuse God's assignment? Share examples of a difficult assignment you had. How did you overcome it?
4. The Torah picks to tell us only three incidents from Moshe's early life: Two in Egypt and one in Midian at the well. Why these incidents? What do they tell us about Moshe?

Some texts to wrestle with

1. One of the reasons Moshe is reluctant to go to Egypt as God's messenger is his lack of speaking talent. How does God comfort him? Will this satisfy anyone? Why?

But Moses said to the Lord, "Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words, either in times past or now that You have spoken to Your servant; I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." And the Lord said to him, "Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with you as you speak and will tell you what to say."

2. Pharaoh's response to Moshe about God is very interesting. Pay special attention to: "I do not know God" – you will see later that the goal of the plagues is that Pharaoh, his people, the world and the nation of Israel will "know God".

*Afterward Moses and Aaron went and said to Pharaoh, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Let My people go that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness." Pharaoh said, **"Who is the Lord that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go."***

Toward an action agenda

1. In Genesis, there are many stories about conflicts between siblings (e.g. Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers). In contrast, in the first portion of Exodus, we read about brothers and sisters cooperating – first, to save the life of the youngest, Moses, and later, to bring about the Exodus. Which pattern is more common in your family – conflict or cooperation? Together with your family, recall a time when you had a serious conflict with a brother or sister. Try telling about it from the point of view of the brother or sister. Imagine you are one of your parents watching the conflict develop. Suggest solutions. Now recall a happy time when you and a brother or sister cooperated. Tell about how your parents might have felt watching their children work together. Conclude by having each family member place himself/herself on the values continuum below. Then think of ways to move each of you toward the ideal position.
2. The bush, which burns but is not consumed, is a powerful image which can be interpreted in many ways. Using this image, try to come up with some analogies. You might want to think along these lines: How is the people of Israel like the burning bush? How is the word of God like the burning bush? How is the lesson of the Exodus like a burning bush? How is Torah like the burning bush?
3. The phrase "Let my people go" (Exodus 5:1) makes its first appearance in our Parsha, Parshat Shemot. This expression has become the slogan for a variety of social causes. Brainstorm a list of historic and contemporary causes for which this phrase would make a good rallying cry.

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to RavADS@bjeny.org

If there is any way we can be of service, please contact us at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: www.bjeny.org

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