

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	RENEWED
Shemot	6 Jan., 2018	19 Tevet 5778	Exod.1:1-6:1	Isa.27:6-28:13; 29:22-23	Matt. 2:1-12

Last week, we ended the Book of Genesis with 2,200 years of history. Hashem came to Abraham and says to him, “Know of a certainty that your *zera* (seed) shall be *gerim* (strangers) in a land that is not theirs... for 400 years”¹ Who is the seed? That is Isaac as said, “for in *Yitchak* shall your *zera* be called.”² Of Isaac, it is said, “And Yitchak was 60 years old when she bore them.”³ In Genesis 47:9 says, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are 130 years.” Thus, we add 60 plus 130 which equals 190. We then subtract 190 from 400 which leaves 210 years.

When Jacob’s family entered Egypt, so began the exile for next 210 years. The Scripture tells us that Joseph died when he was 110 years old (Gen. 50:26), and Levi who died at the age of 137 years old (Exod. 6:16) This means that all the brothers of Joseph died when they were 110 to 137 years old.

Now, our parashat is called “Shemot” in Hebrew which means “Names”. Thus this book, Exodus as we know today are misleading as the Exodus does not happen until 210 years later. So, instead of calling this book as “Exodus”, it should properly be called as “Shemot (Names)”.

The Seder Olam and the Talmud⁴ tells us that when Israel descended into Egypt, Job was born. Job died when Israel left Egypt. “After this, Job lived 140 years,”⁵ explains Rashi that when Hashem doubled everything, it also included extending Job’s life. Therefore, when Job faced his trials and tribulations, he was 70 years old. The Jerusalem Talmud (Sota 5:8, fol. 20c) says, “Rebbi Yose bar Halaphta said: When Israel descended into Egypt, Job was born and at the time of the Exodus he died. A simile for this situation is a shepherd who sees a wolf attacking his flock. Then he puts a he-goat to oppose the wolf. That is what is written (Job 16:11):”⁶ ‘El has delivered extradited me (Job) to the perverse (evil one; Satan) and turned me over into the hands of the wicked (angels of destruction).⁷ It continues in verse 12, “I was at ease, but He has broken me asunder: He has also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for His target (used me as scapegoat to divert the attention of Satan from the Israelites in Egypt.)”

Why did Hashem use Job as a scapegoat? The Midrash tells us that he was one of the three advisors to the Pharaoh. The names of the other advisors were Balaam who fathered Bilaam, and Jethro who became father-in-law to Moses later. The Midrash continues that Pharaoh asked his three advisors on how to deal with exponential growth of Israelites in the land of Goshen. Balaam recommended of killing all babies born male; Jethro’s – leave them as is; and Job remained silent. The Sages said that

¹ Genesis 15:13

² Genesis 21:12

³ Genesis 25:26

⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Baba Bathra 15a-b

⁵ Job 42:16

⁶ Seder Olam, p. 38

⁷ Job 16:11

Job was being punished for remaining silent. Thus began the tribulation when he was 70 years old which lasted a year. Jethro left Egypt in shame, and the Pharaoh followed the advice of Balaam.

As to the new king, the Scripture does not mention his name. The Book of Jasher calls the new Pharaoh as Adikam who began to rule over Egypt when Israelites were in Egypt for 206 years. Adikam was ugly, short with long beard that touched the soles of his feet, and ruled Egypt in his wisdom. He was more wicked than his father, Melol and increased bondage to the Israelites.⁸

The Sages teach that the Israelites were in slavery for 86 years. Miriam who has the root word of *mara* (bitterness) was born at that time as the oldest child. Thus, we can conclude that she was 86 or 87 (when counted with Oriental time) years old when the exodus occurred.

Moses was the youngest sibling born of Amram, born of Kehat. He was born in the year of 2368 after the Creation (1393 BCE) which will make Miriam 6/7 years old. He was the greatest prophet and wrote the Torah also known as the Five Books of Moses.

Now, the Pharaoh saw the Israelites growing exponentially in Goshen, and he along with the ministers became concerned. It means that the Israelites were no longer isolated to Goshen and they began to appear in the streets of cities. They were frightened that if there was a war, the Israelites would rise and support their enemies, and their enemy would make the Israelites as their leader and make the Egyptians as slaves.

The Egyptians realized that in another generation, the Israelites would take over Egypt and enslave them. So, they began to tax them at a high rate. They began to make them as slaves by building Pyramids and other cities. When they realized the Israelites were still being born and growing in large numbers, the Pharaoh called the midwives to kill the male babies.

The Pharaoh called upon the midwives whose names are Shiphrah (שִׁפְרָה) and Puah (פּוּאָה). The Sages teach that their real name is Yochebed and Miriam, a mother and a daughter, Moses' mother and his sister. The numerical value of Shiphrah ($5+200+80+300=585$), and for Puah ($5+70+6+80=161$). If we are to add 585 and 161, it becomes 746 which is the name of this week's parashat Shemot (שְׁמוֹת, $400+6+40+300=746$). We then subtract 746 and 161 equals 424 which is *Meshiach ben David* (מֶשִׁיחַ בֶּן דָּוִד, $4+6+4, 50+2, 8+10+300+40$).

So, what is in a name? The parashat begins with a long list of names. And this is not the first time the Torah gives us a long list of names. So, we have to wonder why the names were so important to our ancestors as it is today. The importance of name is clearer when Moses hears Hashem at the burning bush who told him to rescue the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt.

One of the first questions Moses asked Hashem was: "What is Your name?" In chapter 3, verse 11 says, "And Moshe said to Elohim, Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of *Yisrael* out of *Mitzraim*?" "And they shall say to me, What is His Name? What shall I say to them?"⁹ And in verse 14, "Hashem said to Moses, "*Ehyeh asher ehyeh* (I am That I am)," and

⁸ Book of Jasher, chapter 77

⁹ Exodus 3:13

He said, “So shall you say to the children of Israel, ‘*Ehyeh* (I Am) has sent me to you.’” And Hashem said further to Moses, “So shall you say to the children of Israel, “YHWH Elohim of your forefathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is My name forever, and this is how I should be mentioned in every generation.” (Exod. 3:13-15)

Names are of paramount importance in the Scripture as well as our tradition. In biblical times, your name represented your very essence. The Talmud tells us that the name given to a child affects his future.¹⁰ The law requires that you be extremely careful in spelling out people’s names on official documents, because the documents are void if you make a mistake.

The Talmud also tells us that one of four ways to avoid something bad happening to you is to change your name.¹¹ This gave rise to the custom of changing the name of a very sick person to fool the Angel of Death, the *mal’ach ha-mavet*.

When something is extremely important to you, you call it by many different names. People living in the far north have many different names for snow as many as 100 by Eskimos, because snow is central to their culture. America alone has 40 names for it. Arabs have forty names for “desert” and 100 names for “camel”. We also have a lot of names for large self-propelled vehicles: Car, truck, van, minivan, roadster, sedan, SUV, station wagon, compact, subcompact, convertible, sports car, not to mention the brand names that became generic names: Ford, Chevy, Jeep, etc.

Likewise, when you were little, and maybe even now, your relatives and friends probably called you by all kinds of funny pet names. This wasn’t to make fun of you, it was because they cared about you. Therefore, it is not surprising that we have many names for Elohim – 72 to be exact. The first name of Elohim mentioned in the Torah is Elokim, which literally means Elohim in the royal plural. The Torah begins with: *Beresheet bara Elokim et ha-shamayim ve-et haaretz*. (Gen. 1:1)

Later in the Torah, we encounter another name of Elohim, the Tetragrammaton, which is so holy, only the High Priest was allowed to pronounce it in biblical times, and only on Yom Kippur, and only in the Holy of Holies of the Temple in Jerusalem. When the Temple was destroyed in the year 70, the correct pronunciation was lost. However, we are told that a few saintly rabbis over the centuries possessed the secret of the correct pronunciation.

The Baal Shem Tov, who founded Hasidism in the 18th century, was said to possess this secret. He used to cure the sick by laying his hands on them and pronouncing the Holy Name. In fact, that’s what his name means: “Baal Shem Tov” means “Master of the Good Name”. Rabbi Judah Loew of Prague was said to be able to take a shapeless lump of clay and give it life by pronouncing the name of Elohim, creating the *Golem*, who would go out and defend the Jews against their enemies.

Now, when we encounter the Tetragrammaton in the Torah, we say “Hashem”, which literally means “The Name”. Even pieces of the Tetragrammaton are used to refer to the Divine. The *yod* is itself a name for Hashem. Hashem’s name in the prayerbook is frequently spelled “*yod-yod*”. The word

¹⁰ BT, Berakot 3b-4a

¹¹ BT, Rosh Hashanah 16b

“halleluyah” just means “Praise Elohim”: “Hallelu” means “praise” and “yah” refers to Elohim. The letter “*heh*” itself, which appears twice in the Tetragrammaton, early on acquired a tradition of being holy by itself.

When Abraham heard Elohim for the first time he was only Avram. Later, Hashem added the holy ‘*heh*’ to his name, and he became AvraHam. His wife Sarai became SaraH, by adding the holy ‘*heh*’ at the end of her name. The holy ‘*heh*’ can be added to the name, to inject a bit of the essence of Elohim in the person.

Some Jews today will say “God” in English, but will not write it down in full. They write “G dash D” (G-d) instead, because they fear the holy name will be carelessly discarded in a trash can. They also write “L dash RD” (Lord) instead of “Lord” for the same reason. Others say that this practice should apply only when the names are in Hebrew, the Holy Tongue, not in other languages.

Tradition tells us that, of the two main names of Elohim in the Torah, Elokim refers to the fact that He is just, and the Tetragrammaton refers to the fact that Elohim is merciful. But He has others names in the Torah:

- One of them is “El Shaddai” which literally means Elohim of the mountains, or God of might.
- The mezuzah on the doorposts of our houses has a big “*shin*” near the top. That big *shin* refers to Elohim’s name “El Shaddai”.
- We just read that when Moses asked God for His name at the burning bush, God said, “*Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*” (I Am That I Am.) That came to be another name for Elohim. Hashem was telling Moses: There are not appropriate names to describe Me; all you can say about me is that “I am”.

The Talmud and the Midrash brought us their own crop of names for Elohim:

- Machei hamlachim – The King of Kings.
- Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu – The Holy One Blessed be He.
- The mysterious “HaMakom”, which just means “The Place”.
- Tzur Yisrael – The Rock of Israel”.

The Talmud also brought us the only feminine name of Elohim, the “*Shechinah*” or “Divine Presence”. With the exception of English, in most languages, all nouns have a gender, and this gender appears to be arbitrary. For example, in French, “plate” is masculine but “cup” is feminine, “carpet” is masculine but “table” is feminine. And the word “presence” also happens to be feminine –arbitrarily.

The rabbinic period added new names for Elohim:

- Boreh, meaning Creator,
- Noten ha-Torah, meaning Giver of Torah, in the blessing before the Torah reading,

- Go-el, meaning Redeemer,
- Dayyan, meaning Judge, as Hashem referred to in death announcements,
- Ribbono Shel 'Olam, meaning Master of the Universe.

The prayerbook brought us many names that we are most familiar with. The Avot, in the 'Amidah, says: Blessed are You, O Lord our God and God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob. Note the repetition of the word "God". It does not say: "God of our fathers and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob", but "God of our fathers, God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob". The repetition teaches us that each of us sees God a little differently, even though God is really One. Each of us perceives God from a slightly different angle, and sees something slightly different, even though it is the same Entity.

The prayer continues with a proliferation of names for God:

- Ha-kel ha-gadol, ha-gibor, v'ha-nora – God the great, the strong, the awesome.
- Kel elyon –The Supreme God,
- Gomel chassadim tovim –The One who bestows beneficial kindnesses,
- Ve-kohne ha-kol –Creator of everything,
- Ve-zocher chasdei avot –The One who recalls the kindness of the patriarchs,
- Umevi go-el livnei v'nehem –The One who brings a redeemer to their children's children.

And the line concludes:

- Lemaan shemo, be'ahava –For His Name's sake, with love.

For his NAME's sake. Always "the name". The prayerbook continues, with names:

- Ha-kel hakkadosh –The Holy God,
- Av harrachaman –Father of Mercies,
- Avinu Malkenu –Our Father, our King,
- Magen Avraham –The Shield of Abraham,
- Ro'i –My Shepherd,
- Shomeya' T'fillah –The One who listens to prayers; and
- M'chayyeh ha-metim –The One who brings the dead to life.

It is interesting to note that all these Hebrew names for Elohim only tells us only what He DOES, never what He IS. In fact, Maimonides developed a negative theology. He said you can talk about what Elohim IS NOT, but never about what Elohim IS. We don't have the words for it, and we would be limiting Hashem by using our words.

The Zohar brought its own names for Hashem. The most important one is *Ein Sof*—The Endless One. Mystics teach that when we perform the mitzvot, we help restore the world to its original perfection; we effect “*tikkun ‘olam*” – the repair of the world. Let us conclude with the words of Rabbi Shim’on in Pirkei Avot: There are three crowns: The crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty. But the crown of a good name is greater than all of them.¹² So, we have to work on keeping our name good.

¹² Avot 4:13