

Parashat Shemot (Exodus 1:1-6:1) <http://www.sefaria.org/Exodus.1?lang=bi>

Daniel *Daniel Noach Ben Yechezkel Avraham v'Na'omi Yael*

January 4, 2018

Summary

This week's Torah portion is *Parashat Shemot*. I will be reading from *Sefer Shemot*, the Book of Exodus, the very first verses of Chapter 1. A new Pharaoh who did not know Yosef takes power in Egypt. He is afraid of the growing Israelite community, so he enslaves them. The heroic civil disobedience of midwives *Shifra* and *Pu'ah* help prevent the destruction of the Israelite nation.

Yocheved, the mother of Moshe, places her baby in a little ark in the river in hopes of saving him. Pharaoh's daughter discovers the basket, adopts the baby, and names him Moshe. With the help of Moshe's sister, she hires Moshe's mother as a nurse. Moshe grows up. When he sees a slavedriver behave cruelly towards an Israelite, Moshe kills him and flees to Midian. There Moshe meets the daughters of Yitro and marries one, named Tsippora. They start a family, and Moshe works as a shepherd.

God speaks to Moshe from a burning bush, telling him to return to Egypt and demand that Pharaoh let the Israelites go in order to worship God in the wilderness.

Moshe tries to persuade God several times not to choose him, but God insists on Moshe's leadership and promises that Aharon, Moshe's older brother, will speak for him. Moshe's first meeting with Pharaoh does not help and Pharaoh makes things worse for the Israelites.

Questions

1) In this week's *parasha*, when God speaks to Moshe at the burning bush and God tells him to go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt, Moshe responds by saying:

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

What do you think Moshe means? Why might he doubt that he is the right person for the job? <<Pick 3>>

Moshe may be thinking that Pharaoh would only listen to someone who is rich, powerful, or influential. Even though Moshe is told that he will have God's support, he may not completely see himself as a leader of people or someone important enough that Pharaoh would listen to him.

2) In Jewish tradition we have just one God, but a lot of different names for God. At the burning bush Moshe asks God what he should tell the Israelites if they ask him what is the name of the God who sent him. God tells Moshe to tell the Israelites that the name of the God who sent is “*Ehiyeh*” which means “I will be”. Then--he is *also* supposed to remind the Israelites of their history by telling them that the God that who sent him is the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Why do you think God wants Moshe to explain who God is by talking about the future and by talking about the past? Turn to a friend <<Pick 2>>

If Moshe started by explaining that the God who sent him was the God of the Israelites' present, it might raise their suspicion because they are enslaved in Egypt. They might wonder why God hasn't rescued them sooner. So God starts with future tense to give them hope and confidence and tell them that he will be with them in the future. Then God continues explaining that he was God of the past, so the Israelites will know he is reliable and influential.

3) Why do you think that God is so determined to have Moshe as the leader to take the Israelites out of Egypt? <<Pick 3>>

Maybe God wants to teach Moshe and anyone else who might study Torah that just because a person might face challenges, like nervousness or difficulty with speaking, it shouldn't stop them from trying to do big things.