



Shabbat Table Talk Page

Overview

- **Parashah: Shemot (שְׁמוֹת, “names”)**
- **Chapters: Exodus 1:1-6:1**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

Synopsis

The Book of Exodus (סֵפֶר שְׁמוֹת) begins directly where the book of Genesis left off, by listing the “names” (*shemot*) of the 70 descendants of Jacob who came down to Egypt to dwell in the land of Goshen. Over time Jacob’s family flourished and multiplied so greatly that the new king of Egypt – who did not “remember” Joseph – regarded the Israelites as a political threat and decided to enslave them. When the king’s oppression did not curb their growth, however, he commanded the Hebrew midwives to kill all newborn Jewish boys. When the midwives refused to obey, however, the Pharaoh decreed that all newborn boys were to be drowned in the Nile river.

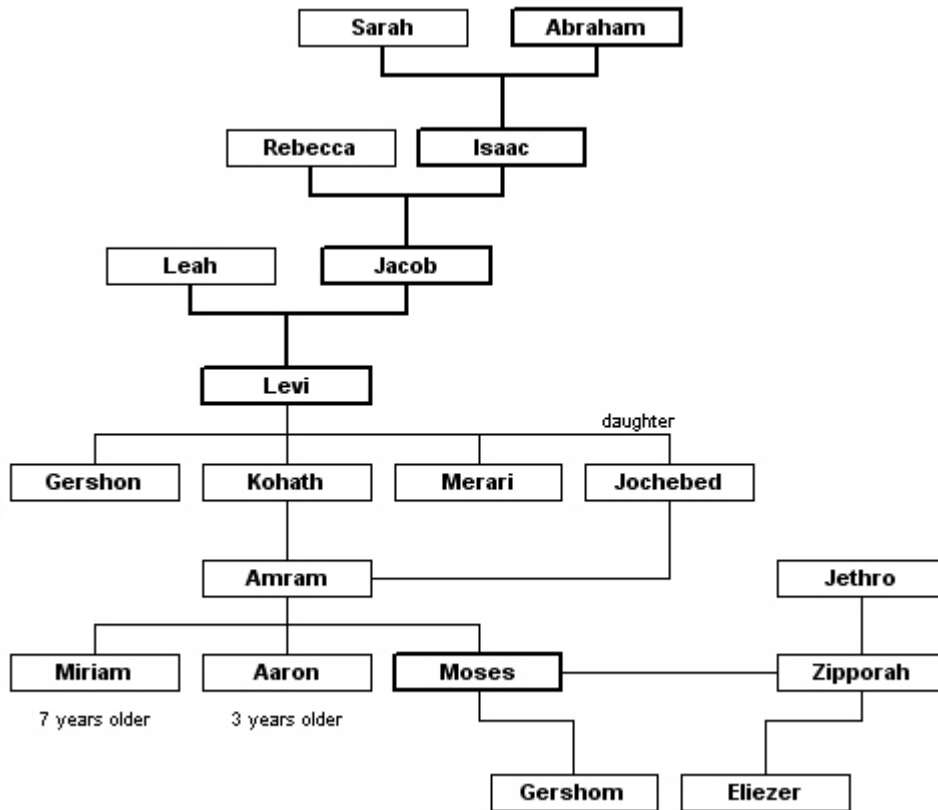
During this time of grave oppression, a family from the tribe of Levi bore a son and hid him for three months. When the baby could no longer be concealed, however, his mother Yocheved set him afloat in the Nile River inside a basket, praying that he might somehow escape death. Miriam, the baby’s sister, watched what would happen, and soon the basket was discovered by the daughter of Pharaoh, who decided to save the baby and adopt him as her own son. Miriam then cleverly offered to have her mother become the baby’s wet-nurse for the princess. After the child was weaned, he was brought to Pharaoh’s palace to live as the princess’ son. The princess named him “Moses,” meaning to “draw out” from water.

Later, when Moses was fully grown, he “went out to his people and looked on their burdens.” When he saw an Egyptian beating an Israelite slave, he killed the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. The following day he tried to reconcile two Israelites who were fighting, but the one in the wrong prophetically objected: “Who made you a prince and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?” Upon hearing this Moses decided to flee from Egypt to Midian. There he rescued Zipporah, the daughter of Yitro, a Midianite priest. Soon afterward, Moses decided to work for Yitro and married Zipporah with whom he had a son named Gershom.

One day, as Moses was tending sheep, the Angel of the LORD called out to him from the midst of a burning bush and commissioned him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt back to the Promised Land. When Moses protested that he was inadequate for this task, God gave him three “signs” to authenticate his message. God also appointed his brother Aaron to be his spokesperson. Moses and Aaron then went to the Pharaoh and demanded that the Israelites be permitted to leave Egypt to worship the LORD in the desert. The Pharaoh, however, dismissed Moses and his God, and increased the workload of the slaves by forcing them to make bricks without straw.



As the Israelites suffered even more, Moses despaired over his mission and asked the LORD why he sent him to Pharaoh in the first place: “For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your Name, he has done evil to this people, and you have not delivered your people at all.” But the LORD replied to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for he shall let the people go because of a greater might; indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land.”

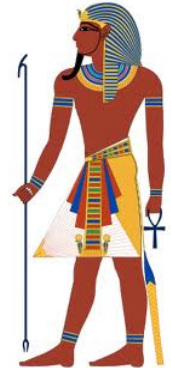


Family tree of Moses



Parashah Questions

1. What does the word “Exodus” mean? ¹
2. What does the word *shemot* (שְׁמוֹת) mean? (Exod. 1:1) ²
3. How many people emigrated to Egypt? ³
4. Why are the names of Jacob’s sons listed *again* in this portion? ⁴
5. Were all the men of Jacob’s family married when they came to Egypt? ⁵
6. Why are the tribes of Israel listed in different orders in the Scriptures? ⁶
7. What does “hashgachah pratit” (הַשְׂגָּחָה פְּרִיטִית) mean? ⁷
8. Which of the 12 sons of Jacob lived the longest? Which the shortest? ⁸
9. In what special way did God bless Israel in Egypt? (1:7) ⁹



¹ The word “Exodus” (εξοδος) was coined by the ancient Greeks when they translated the title of Moses’ second scroll of the Torah, called *Sefer Yetziat Mitzraim* (“the book of the *going out* from Egypt”). Later this Greek word was adopted into English. In the Hebrew Bible the Book of Exodus is called *sefer Shemot* (“names”), following the custom of naming a book according to its first significant word.

² The plural noun *shemot* (שְׁמוֹת) means “names,” from the singular form *shem* (שֵׁם). The Book of Exodus begins, *ve’eleh shemot* (וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת), “and these are the names” (of the sons of Israel). God calls each person by name to make the journey... Indeed, God calls each star by its own name (Gen. 22:17, Psalm 147:4) and knows each particular lily of the field and sparrow that flutters its wings (Matt. 6:28-30, 10:29). As Yeshua said, even the hairs on your head are all numbered (Matt. 10:30).

³ Seventy people emigrated to Egypt (Deut. 10:22), paralleling the seventy angels that oversee the seventy nations of the earth. Thus Moses later says, “When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel” (Deut.32:8).

⁴ They were first all enumerated back in Gen. 46:8-27 (i.e., parashat Vayigash) but are mentioned here again (Exod. 1:2-5) to indicate how much God treasured them (and to link the two narrative accounts).

⁵ Yes, “each man came with his household” is thought to mean that each man was the head of his own household, though this would imply that Peretz, who was only eight years old, was married at the time. Perhaps it is better to regard this verse to mean that each man was part of a defined household in Jacob’s larger family.

⁶ This is to indicate that all the tribes were equal. The sons of Rachel were not more important than the sons of the Bilhah and Zilpah, for instance (and before Jacob had married them, he gave them their freedom so they were no longer slaves). Though they were equal, each tribe had its own special gifting and promise, of course.

⁷ The term *hashgachah pratit* refers to God’s personal supervision of our lives (*hashgachah* means “supervision,” and *pratit* means “individual” or “particular”). God directs the destiny of every single Jew in the world.

⁸ Levi lived longest and died at age 137; Joseph lived the shortest and died at age 110.

⁹ God grew them into a great and fruitful nation there. The text says the children of Israel became “fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew *bime’od me’od*, “exceedingly many” (בְּרִבְוֹתַיִם מְאֹד), so that the land was filled with them,” which led the sages to say that each woman would give birth to six babies at a time (fruitful=1, increased=2, multiplied=3, grew strong=4, very=5, very=6).



10. Who was the “new king” of Egypt (1:8)? ¹⁰
11. What is the likely date of the Exodus? ¹¹
12. How did the “new king” regard the Israelites in Egypt? (1:9-10) ¹²
13. According to Jewish tradition, who were the new king’s advisors? ¹³
14. How did the new king “deal shrewdly” with the Israelites? (1:10-11) ¹⁴
15. Why did the king set taskmasters (שָׂרֵי מְסִיִּים) over the Israelites? ¹⁵
16. What were the names of the two store-cities that the Israelites built for the new Pharaoh? (1:11) ¹⁶
17. What happened as the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites? (1:12-13) ¹⁷

¹⁰ We are not sure. At least two pharaohs are involved in the story of the Jewish exile in Egypt. The first Pharaoh welcomed the Israelites to Egypt under the aegis of Joseph; the second Pharaoh “did not know Joseph” and later enslaved the Israelites. The second Pharaoh may have been a usurper who staged a coup and this would explain why he behaved as if he had no knowledge of Joseph and his family. Some believe that Thutmose III was the first pharaoh (he was the only pharaoh within the time specified in I Kings 6:1 who reigned long enough (54 years) to have been on the throne at the time of Moses’ flight and to die shortly before his return to Egypt) and Amenhotep II to be the pharaoh of the Exodus. See the following note...

¹¹ We are not sure. 1 Kings 6:1 says: “And it came to pass in the 480th year after the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the 4th year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month (Iyyar), that he began to build the house of the Lord,” and therefore we must first date Solomon’s reign – which is problematic. Some have identified the fourth year of Solomon’s reign as 966 B.C which means the Exodus would have taken place in 1445 B.C. (2316). Note that the Seder Olam Rabbah (ca. 2nd century AD) determines the commencement of the Exodus to 1313 BC (2448 AM). This date has become traditional in Rabbinic Judaism.

¹² He regarded them as a political threat so that if there were a war, they might join the Egyptian enemies (as a “fifth column”) in order to flee the land. Notice that these verses lend support to the idea that the new Pharaoh was a usurper who would have regarded former political alliances in Egypt suspiciously... In other words, the new king might have feared that the Israelites would rebel against his new rule...

¹³ According to midrash, the king had three chief advisors: Balaam son of Beor, Job, and Jethro. Balaam was a grandson of Laban who was a famous magician and occultist. He called directly for the extermination of the Jews. Job remained silent, but because of this God decreed he would endure horrible suffering. The only advisor who protested was Jethro, and he kept protesting until he was forced to flee for his life back to Midian. Because the king consented to Balaam’s advice, however, his son was decreed to be killed during the last plague.

¹⁴ A midrash states that the Israelites were *tricked* into slavery. Pharaoh’s counselors suggested building fortified cities based on voluntary labor. At first, even the Pharaoh joined in the building project. Soon the general population was offered wages in proportion to the number of bricks produced. After some time, however, the Egyptians were ordered to leave, and only the Israelites remained. Egyptian taskmasters then continually reduced their wages and finally enforced slave labor from the Israelites.

¹⁵ The slave drivers were set over the people “to crush their spirits” and to make them suffer (סָבְלוּת).

¹⁶ Pithom and Raamses.

¹⁷ The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and increased. The Egyptians began to “dread” (נִיָּקְצוּ) the Israelites, meaning the people became as thorns (kotzim) in their eyes. Their contempt led to full-blown slavery for the Israelites.



18. What did the slavery of the Israelites involve? ¹⁸
19. After enslaving and greatly oppressing the Israelites, what was the next step of Pharaoh's evil plan? (1:15-21) ¹⁹
20. How did God respond to the deception of the midwives? (1:20-21) ²⁰
21. When the scheme with the midwives failed, what did Pharaoh do? (1:22) ²¹
22. Why did Pharaoh murder the innocent babies of the land? ²²
23. Who tried to murder all the babies when Yeshua was born? ²³
24. Who were Moses' father, mother, and siblings? (2:1-2) ²⁴
25. What was Moses' original name? (2:2) ²⁵

¹⁸ Their slavery involved forced labor with mortar and bricks and all kinds of "backbreaking" work in the fields. According to Rashi, the people were forced to work 24 hour shifts and be regularly separated from their family members while they stayed in work camps.

¹⁹ He ordered the chief midwives Shifrah and Puah to kill Hebrew baby boys as they were being born and to make it look like an accident (i.e., to perform infanticide). Note that Rashi says that Shifrah was actually Yocheved, Moses' mother, and Puah was actually Miriam, his older sister. The midwives feared God and refused to obey the king, since murder is an act of chillul Hashem (desecration), and a Jew must be ready to give up his or her life before performing such a sin (the three cardinal sins are murder, idolatry, and sexual crimes). Giving up your life as a martyr is called kiddush HaShem, "sanctifying the Name."

²⁰ God was good to the midwives and granted them offspring of their own.

²¹ He gave orders to kill all newborn sons of Egypt – both Jewish or Egyptian.

²² According to midrash, Pharaoh had a disturbing prophetic dream like his predecessor. He saw himself sitting on his throne in all his regal glory. As he lifted his eyes, however, an old man appeared holding a balance in his hand. The old man placed all the nobles and governors of Egypt on one side of the balance, and on the other side, he placed one small lamb. To Pharaoh's great astonishment, however, the lamb outweighed all the leaders of Egypt. When the king asked his advisors to interpret the dream, they told him that it foretold of a coming king who would destroy the land, kill the Egyptians, and set the Israelites free. The royal astrologers agreed with the advisors and told the king that the stars indicated that such a redeemer would indeed come, but it was unclear if he would be an Egyptian or an Israelite (recall that Moses was both - an Israelite raised as an Egyptian). For this reason the king decreed the death of all the newborn sons of Egypt – whether Israelite or Egyptian. When the king further asked how the redeemer could be stopped, the astrologers said he would die by water (recall Moses' sin of striking the rock), so the king decreed that babies should be killed by being thrown into the Nile river.

²³ Herod the Great was afraid that the Messiah was born in Bethlehem of Judah and therefore attempted to kill all the male children in that region who were two years old or under (Matt. 2). Interesting, the Magi (astrologers) in this case were righteous, and Joseph and Mary fled with Yeshua to Egypt to escape the Herod's demonic rage.

²⁴ Moses' father was Amram (אַמְרָם), the firstborn son of Kehath (קְהָת) and a leader of the tribe of Levi (לֵוִי), and his mother was Yocheved (יֹכֶבֶד), a daughter of Levi: "Amram took as his wife Jochebed his father's sister, and she bore him Aaron and Moses" (Exod. 6:20). According to midrash, Yocheved was born as soon as the Israelites arrived in Egypt, so she was over 130 years old when she began giving birth to Miriam and Aaron.

²⁵ Yocheved "saw that he was good" (כִּי־טוֹב הוּא) and therefore called him Tov. Miriam called him Toviah (טוֹבִיָּה) to allude that he would be the redeemer of Israel (though of course only the LORD is the Redeemer of Israel). Moses was "good" because he had a good heart, was humble, and was willing to serve the Jewish people.



26. When is Moses' birthday? ²⁶
27. After Yocheved could no longer hide Moses, what did she do? (2:2-4) ²⁷
28. What was Pharaoh's daughter's name? ²⁸
29. What happened to baby Moses after he was put into the Nile? (2:5-9) ²⁹
30. How old was Moses when he was officially adopted by the princess? (2:10) ³⁰
31. Why is it ironic that Moses was an adopted prince of Egypt? ³¹
32. How did God use Moses' upbringing as a prince of Egypt to help Israel? ³²
33. Why did Moses have a speech impediment? ³³

²⁶ According to tradition Moses was born on Adar 7 of the Hebrew year 2368 (1393 BCE) and is said to have died on his 120th birthday, Adar 7, 2488 (1273 BCE). Note these dates are from the Seder Olam Rabbah.

²⁷ She made an ark of reeds, caulked it with pitch (similar to Noah's ark), and placed her son inside. She placed the ark among the reeds so that it would not be carried away by strong currents, prayed to the LORD, and put her trust in God's plan. Her daughter Miriam stood at a distance to see what would happen to her baby brother. According to tradition, it was the 6th of Sivan when Moses was put into the water, which is the date of Shavuot.

²⁸ We are not sure, though Jewish tradition calls her "Batya" (daughter of the LORD) to honor her as a proselyte. The midrash says that when she went to bathe in the Nile, she was actually going to immerse herself as part of her conversion... She is considered a sort of Egyptian "matriarch" to the Jewish people.

²⁹ The ark/basket floated toward a location where Pharaoh's daughter was bathing, and the princess had her servant fetch it for her. She then opened the ark, saw baby Moses, and identified him as a Hebrew. Miriam, who was standing nearby, then offered to find a wet nurse for the child and ran to get her mother, who ironically was offered a wage to nurse the child for the princess.

³⁰ The midrash says that Yocheved nursed Moses for 24 months and then brought him to Pharaoh's daughter. From that time on, Moses did not leave the palace, as if he were actually the princess' son. The princess called the child "Moses" because she drew him out (mashah) from the waters. Note that the name is in the active voice of the verb (not passive), prophetically indicating that Moses would "draw" the Israelites out of Egypt.

³¹ Pharaoh had made elaborate plans to kill every Hebrew boy by drowning in the Nile, but his own daughter rescued Israel's deliverer from the river so that he would grow up in Pharaoh's own palace. The LORD arranged that Pharaoh's own nemesis would be raised in his own household without understanding his identity.

³² Moses was raised in the royal court to learn the qualities of leadership he would need to serve as Israel's great national leader and spokesman. Having been raised in Pharaoh's house gave him the deportment to address the king in an appeal to let the Israelites return to the land of Canaan.

³³ According to midrash (Shemot Rabbah 1:31), as a very young lad Moses was once seen throwing Pharaoh's gold crown down to the ground. Upon learning of this apparent act of insolence, Pharaoh devised a test to see if the child understood the implications of his actions. He therefore commanded that a platter with a piece of gold and a glowing piece of coal be brought before Moses and ordered the little boy to choose one. If Moses chose the gold, it would imply that he understood its value, and therefore he would be killed. On the other hand, if Moses chose the burning coal, he would be spared since he was unable to differentiate between gold and a glowing piece of coal. Moses began to reach out for the gold when an angel pushed his hand aside and he grabbed the coal instead. Moses then immediately put his hand in his mouth, but that burned his lips and tongue so badly that he had a permanent speech impediment as a consequence. Later, when God commissioned Moses to speak to the children of Israel, he protested to the LORD that he was kevad peh - "heavy of mouth" and kevad lashon, "heavy of tongue," and therefore unable to speak on behalf of the LORD (Exod. 4:10).



34. Why is the Exodus from Egypt so important? ³⁴
35. Did Moses know that he was a Hebrew? (2:11) ³⁵
36. Why did Moses kill the Egyptian officer? (2:11-12) ³⁶
37. Who were the two Hebrew men that Moses tried to reconcile? (2:13-14) ³⁷
38. What did one of these men say to Moses that caused him to fear? (2:14) ³⁸
39. Where did Moses flee after he killed the Egyptian officer? (2:15) ³⁹
40. What was so unusual about the bush that Moses saw, and where did he see it? ⁴⁰

³⁴ The Exodus from Egypt led directly to the revelation of the Torah at Sinai (49 days later), which itself culminated in the revelation of the altar of sacrifice (i.e., the Tabernacle). The Israelites were redeemed by the blood of the lamb (a sacrifice that *preceded* the giving of the law) and were then led to confront the meaning of the sacrifice at the altar in the sanctuary.... God first saved the people and then revealed His holy standards; the culmination of the Torah was the revelation of the pattern of the Tabernacle, which expressed the nature of His love delivered to us through blood atonement... The Exodus is commemorated every year during Passover (Exod. 12:24-27; Num. 9:2-3; Deut. 16:1), is explicitly mentioned in the first of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:2), and it is recalled on every Sabbath (Deut. 5:12-15). The festivals of Shavuot and Sukkot likewise derive from it, the former recalling the giving of the Torah at Sinai and the latter recalling God's care as the Exodus generation journeyed from Egypt to the Promised Land... Indeed, nearly every commandment of the Torah (including the laws of the Tabernacle) may be traced back to the story of the Exodus. For the follower of Yeshua, the Exodus prefigures and exemplifies the work of redemption given through the Messiah as the Lamb of God.

³⁵ Yes. He still had a relationship with his real family, though he was highly esteemed and protected by his adopted mother Batya. He led a sort of sheltered life at the palace, and when he finally was allowed to see the country, he was appalled over the slavery imposed upon his blood relatives. A midrash says that he empathized with them, volunteered to work with them, etc., and even argued before Pharaoh to give them a day of rest every seven days. In this way Moses became a "man of the people" to the Israelites...

³⁶ Moses understood that this officer had raped the wife of one of the Hebrew taskmasters named Dathan, who later found out about the rape. The officer then repeatedly abused Dathan in the hope that he would retaliate so that he could be killed. When Moses saw the abuse, he decided to judge the matter and sentenced the officer to death.

³⁷ The midrash says two brothers named Dathan and Abiram who were arguing about the bill of divorce that Dathan wanted to give to his wife after she had been defiled by the Egyptian officer. Note that Torah describes the one who "lifted his hand" to strike the other as wicked, even though he did not actually strike the other, which teaches that threatening behavior is wicked as well.

³⁸ The man in the wrong threatened to inform on Moses and to expose that he was a Hebrew sympathizer to the Egyptian authorities. This caused Moses to despair that the Israelites did not deserve to be delivered after all – that their slavery was in a sense justified.... Moses' self-appointed role as a deliverer of the Jewish people was shaken and therefore he began to fear...

³⁹ Apparently Dathan and Abiram followed through with their threat and informed on Moses. After the Pharaoh understood what had happened, Moses had no choice but to flee to the land of Midian to escape being killed.

⁴⁰ Moses saw a thornbush on fire but not burned up while he tended his father-in-law's flock in the desert region near Mount Horeb (i.e., Mount Sinai). When he went to investigate, he heard the Angel of the LORD speaking from the midst of the fire saying, "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Exod. 3:1-10).



*Note: Because of time constraints, our Table Talk ends at this point.
Please see the discussion questions that follow...*



Discussion Topics:

1. In this Torah portion, we read how the midwives deliberately defied the king's orders and even lied to him when they were questioned. We also read how Moses' mother disobeyed the king's edict to murder baby boys by hiding her son in the bulrushes. Other examples of God's servants disobeying the law of the land include the following:
 - a. Rahab's refusal to expose the Israeli spies (Josh. 2:2-4)
 - b. Obadiah's defiance of King Ahaz's order to kill the prophets (1 Kings 18:4,13)
 - c. King Saul's servants refusal to murder the priest Ahimelech (1 Sam. 22:16-17)
 - d. Daniel's refusal to obey the king's order to refrain from praying (Dan. 6:10)
 - e. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's refusal to bow to the image (Dan. 3:12-30)
 - f. Esther's disobedience to the edict of Ahasuerus (Esther 4:16)
 - g. John the Baptist's refusal to stop criticizing Herod Antipas (Mark 6:17)
 - h. Yeshua's refusal to answer Herod's questions (Luke 23:8-9)
 - i. Simon Peter's refusal to stop preaching (Acts 5:29, 41-42)
 - j. Peter's "escape" from prison by the hand of an angel (Acts 12:1-12)

In general, Christians are commanded to obey the government (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), though the examples listed above indicate there are times when we should not do so. What criteria do you think should be used to decide such cases? In the examples cited here, what characteristic(s) do you think each of these people had in common?

2. *Pikuach Nefesh* (פיקוח נפש), "saving of human life" is regarded as a more fundamental obligation than nearly all other commandments given in the Torah. "To save one life is as if one saved the whole world" (Talmud, Sanhedrin 37a). For example, the laws of Shabbat or any of the holidays may be "broken" for the sake of pikuach nefesh. There are some laws, however, that may never be violated, even for the sake of saving a life. These primarily include denying God's Name (*chillul Hashem*), murdering someone, or engaging in forbidden sexual relationships. Do you have a hierarchy of values that you live by? Which commandment(s) do you believe take priority over others?
3. In this portion the LORD describes His Name as "I AM WHO I AM" (i.e., *ehyeh asher ehyeh*: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה). God then went on to further explain the meaning of His Name through a series of relationships: "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD (יהוה), [namely] the God of your fathers, [namely] the God of Abraham (אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם), [namely] the God of Isaac (אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק), and [namely] the God of Jacob (וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב), has sent me to you.' This is my name forever (וְזֶה שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם), and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations" (Exod. 3:14-15). How does the fact that the LORD (יהוה) repeatedly identifies Himself as "the God of Israel" (אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) affect your understanding of who He is?
4. What do you think was the deeper purpose of Israel's bondage in Egypt? Why was Egypt regarded as a sort of "womb" for the nation of Israel? (see Gen. 15:12-14)



5. We know very little about Moses' early life as a prince of Egypt. According to Acts 7:23-24, Moses was 40 years old when he killed the Egyptian taskmaster and fled for Midian. How much influence do you think Egypt had over Moses' thinking? Why do you think he began to identify himself as a Jew during his adult years? Do you think he sensed his destiny to be a "prince and a judge" over Israel before he was forced to flee to Midian?
6. According to the sages of the Talmud, when God instructed Moses to remove his shoes from his feet because the place he was standing was holy ground (אַדְמַת־קֹדֶשׁ), this was to show him that the path is always full of thorns and rocks. In other words, the leader of a nation must be sensitive to the emotions and pains that his people experience. Do you agree or disagree with the sages' opinion?
7. After Moses fled to Midian, he met and married Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite (i.e., Gentile) priest named Yitro (Exod. 2:16-21). They had a son named *Gershom* (from *ger* (גֵר), "stranger" and *sham* (שָׁם), "there"). Moses then spent the next 40 years in Midian tending his father-in-law's sheep. A midrash says that Moses was chosen to lead the Israelites because of his kindness to animals. While he was tending the flock of Yitro in the wilderness, a little kid escaped from him. He ran after it until he found it in a shady place, where he saw a pool of water from which the kid had stopped to drink. When Moses approached it, he said: 'I did not know that you ran away because of thirst; you must be weary.' So he placed the kid on his shoulders and walked away. Thereupon God said: "Because you showed mercy in leading the flock of a mortal, thou wilt assuredly tend my flock Israel" (Shemot Rabbah 2:2). Why do you think so many of God's leaders were shepherds? Why did Yeshua call himself the "Good Shepherd?"
8. Moses' position as leader of Israel was not hereditary. His chosen successor was Joshua, son of Nun (an Ephraimite), rather than his firstborn son Gershom (Deut. 34:9). As important as Moses was to the Israelites, it is clear that God alone redeemed Israel. Indeed, the traditional text of the Passover Haggadah does not even mention Moses' name!
9. Aaron served as Moses' spokesman (Exod. 4:10-16), and according to Jewish tradition, it was Aaron who performed the signs for the elders of Israel before they went to Pharaoh (Exod. 4:30). And contrary to Hollywood renditions of the story of the Exodus, it was also Aaron - *not Moses* - who cast down the staff that became a snake before Pharaoh (Exod. 7:10-12), and it was also Aaron who held out his staff during the first three plagues against Egypt (Exod. 7:19-20; 8:5-6; 8:16-17).

For Next Week:

- Read parashat **Va'era** (i.e., Exodus 6:2-9:35)
- Read the Haftarah (Ezekiel 28:25-29:21)
- Read the New Testament (Rom. 9:14-33)

