

PARSHAT SHEMOT

12 - 18 Tevet 5785
12 - 18 January 2025

Torah: Exodus 1:1 - 6:1
Haftorah: Isaiah 27:6 - 28:13;
29:22-23

Psalms Daily

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalm 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

Havom Yom

Hearken and hear (people of) Israel, this is the time marked for redemption by Mashiach. The sufferings befalling us are the birth-pangs of Mashiach. Israel will be redeemed only through Teshuva (repentance). Return Israel unto the Eternal your G-d; prepare yourself and your family to go forth and receive Mashiach, whose coming is imminent.

THE REAL ANSWER TO THE JEWISH PROBLEM

The portion of Shemot begins by enumerating the children of Jacob that descended into Egypt with him, and then curtly states, "Now Joseph died, as well as all his brothers, and all that generation."

This narrative always reminds me of an adorable story from the Old Country about a man who was both incredibly hospitable and miserly. He relished having guests at his table but didn't want them to eat anything. He would put a spread of delicious dishes before them, and then, to prevent them from eating, he would bombard them with questions: "Where are you from? How are things in your town?" Remarkably, he seemed to know everyone. "How is Moshe the butcher? How is Dovid the tailor? How's the rabbi? How's the shamash? How's the banker?"

He skillfully kept his guests engaged in conversation while he savored his meal, ensuring that once he was done, the table was cleared, leaving no opportunity for his guests to eat.

One day, a poor man arrived in town and heard about this wealthy man who set out a lavish spread but prohibited his guests from indulging. This newcomer was astute. Sitting down at the table adorned with delectable food, the host promptly interrupted and asked him where he was from. As the guest mentioned his hometown, the wealthy man launched into his usual barrage of questions:

"How's Moshe the tailor?" asked the host.

"He's dead," replied the guest.

"Oy! How's Rueven the butcher?" asked the host.

"Dead," replied the guest.

"Terrible! How's Chaim the rabbi?" asked the host.

"Dead," replied the guest.

Upon hearing this news, the host was visibly shaken. It seemed that everyone he knew in the town had passed away! He couldn't fathom it. As he sat there digesting the news and mourning for his departed friends and acquaintances, the guest indulged in course after course, relishing a meal unlike any he had experienced before. Finally, the host mustered some strength. "My friend," he said, regaining his composure, "I must ask. How is it possible that everybody from your town is dead?"

The poor man, taking a sip of wine and clearing his throat, responded with a grin, "When I'm eating, the whole world is dead!"

Forgetting Joseph

Back to our Parshah: After informing us that Joseph and his entire generation died, the next verse states, "The children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and increased and became very strong, and the land became filled with them." According to Rashi, citing the Midrash, they were giving birth to sextuplets - six babies at a time.

But then a strange thing happened. A new king ascended the throne of Egypt, and this new Pharaoh "did not know Joseph."

How could he not know Joseph? Joseph ruled Egypt for 80 years and saved the entire country from famine!

There is a debate between the two great Talmudic sages, Rav and Shmuel, on this matter. One argues that the new Pharaoh was indeed a new king, while the other contends that it was the same Pharaoh as before, but he acted as if he didn't know Joseph.

How did this lack of recognition manifest? Pharaoh and his cabinet proceeded to deliberate on what to do about "the Jewish Problem."

What Jewish problem? Did the Jewish people offend the Egyptians? Were the Jews disloyal in some way?

Certainly not. On the contrary, they contributed positively to Egypt's success. Joseph literally saved the country. The Jews were exemplary citizens - kind, considerate, and educated.

So, what was "the Jewish Problem"? It was simply that the Jewish people existed. This marks the first recorded instance of antisemitism in the Torah - hatred toward the Jews purely because of their Jewish identity.

As we know, the Egyptians then proceeded to enslave the Jewish People and subject them to severe persecution. Fast forward a couple of hundred years, and G-d appeared to Moses at the burning bush, instructing him, echoing the famous lyrics, "Go down Moses, way down to Egypt-land, tell old Pharaoh, let my people go!"

Moses responded by asking G-d, "When the Jewish people ask, 'Who is G-d? What is His name?' What should I tell them?" G-d's response to Moses was to tell the Jewish People, "I will be what I will be." Rashi explains that G-d was saying He will be with the Jewish people

not only in their current exile in Egypt, but also in the future exiles.

Our sages taught that the Jewish people experienced four exiles throughout the ages: the Babylonian exile, the Greek exile, the Median exile, and the Roman exile - which has lasted nearly 2,000 years. G-d told Moses to tell the Jewish people, "I have never abandoned you, and I will never abandon you. I am with you in Egypt; I will be with you forever."

The Antidote to Antisemitism

I've always asked the age-old question: Why don't they like the Jews? What have we done? We're nice people. Wherever we go, we contribute. Wherever we go, we help. Wherever we go, we're loyal.

We didn't harm Egypt, or Persia, Media, Greece, or Rome. On the contrary, we always contributed. The same goes for Spain, Germany, Poland, Russia, and sadly the list goes on and on. So why the antisemitism?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson OBM, shared a profound insight on this topic, drawing a connection to the Purim story (approximately 5th century BCE). The wicked Haman, that evil prime minister of Persia, approached King Ahasuerus, and said, "Your majesty, the Jewish people are bad people. They don't contribute to your country. I will pay you ten thousand silver pieces if you let me destroy them." Surprisingly, Ahasuerus responds, "You can keep your money and you can take the Jews."

He didn't even accept the payment. The Talmud, quoting this episode, delves into a discussion about who hated the Jewish People more, Haman or Ahasuerus. The question is then answered with a parable about two farmers. The first farmer had a large mound of dirt in his field, and the second farmer had a deep pit. The first farmer proposed, "Let me put my extra dirt in your field, and I will pay you." The second farmer responded, "I have a pit in my field, and your dirt will help me. You don't have to pay me."

The Rebbe posed the question: what new insight do we gain from this parable? It seems to be the same story, adding nothing we didn't already know. But, the Rebbe points out, it's not just the same story - it's a lesson in the two paradigms of antisemitism.

One approach is to say the Jewish people are a "mound," elevated above

Aleph Institute

Hyman & Martha Rogal Center

5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217

412-421-0111

Fax: 412-521-5948

www.AlephNE.org
info@AlephNE.org



ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

everyone else: the Jews have all the money; the Jews control the media; the Jews control Wall Street. The Jews control everything.

Then there's the second approach, asserting that Jews are a "pit," living off everyone else. They don't work; they just collect welfare. They're derelict. All they do all day is study. They are a drain on the economy and don't contribute.

The Rebbe explains that the parable teaches us an important lesson. The problem is not that the Jews are a mound, and the problem is not that the Jews are a pit. The problem is that they hate the Jews.

And antisemitism cannot be fixed by trying to solve the supposed problem. Some argue: "If they hate us because we're successful, maybe we should lie low and act poorer?" Others suggest: "If they hate us because we lie low, maybe we should act wealthier and be better citizens?"

The only proper response to antisemitism is to be who you are, walk with your head held high, and be proud of your Judaism.

This is what G-d told Moses to tell the Jews: Before the Final Redemption, there will be more exile, and there will be more antisemitism. But I will be there with you; I will never abandon you. Wherever you go, walk with your head held high! Continue to contribute, continue to be hardworking, and continue to be the wonderful person you are. This is how you earn the respect of G-d and man, and this is how you face antisemitism.

The King's Name

Two businessmen once approached the Alter Rebbe, founder of Chabad, whose Yahrzeit (anniversary of passing) we observe around this time of year. "We are in deep trouble," they began, and explained: "We supply uniforms to the Tsar's army and have been unjustly accused of supplying inferior-quality uniforms by our competition. We're being accused of treason. We are about to go to St. Petersburg for our trial, and although we have hired the best lawyers, it's not looking good!" "I want to ask you a question," said the Alter Rebbe. "The Talmud says that kingship here on earth mirrors kingship in heaven. How do we see that?" The two businessmen did not know the answer, nor could they understand what this had to do with their problem. "I will tell you the answer," continued the Alter Rebbe. "Just as G-d's name is written one way, yet we read it differently

out of respect, the king has his given name, yet, out of respect, we call him 'Your Majesty, the Tsar.'" With that, the Alter Rebbe blessed them, and they left his presence.

The businessmen were disappointed. They had come to the Rebbe for advice, or even better, a miracle, and all they got was a speech. With no choice, they traveled to St. Petersburg. There, their attorney informed them that the situation looked bleak, and his only advice at that point was to approach the Minister of Justice and beg for mercy. "The Minister of Justice is a relatively nice guy," said their lawyer, "and every day, he takes a ride in his horse and carriage through the park. I suggest you stop him, throw yourself at his feet, and beg him to have mercy on you."

Reluctantly, the two followed his advice and went to the park. Upon seeing the minister's horse and carriage, they fell to the ground, begging for mercy. "Your honor," they exclaimed, "we didn't do it! We are innocent people! Please, have compassion upon us and our children!"

"Stand up," the minister instructed them, "You seem to have made a mistake. You probably think that I am the Minister of Justice. However, I am the Minister of Culture. So, I cannot help you with your legal issues."

"However," he continued, "you seem to be learned people, and perhaps you can help me with something. If you do, I promise to put in a good word for you with my friend, the Minister of Justice."

The minister went on, "The Tsar has given me three days to come up with the answer to a question he has about a Jewish teaching. The Talmud says that kingship here on earth mirrors kingship in heaven, and the Tsar wants to know how is that so. I've been researching and looking, and I cannot find an answer."

The two businessmen were shocked! "We do know the answer!" they told him excitedly. "Just as G-d's name is written one way in the Torah and is pronounced differently out of respect, so, too, the king has a given name, yet we call him 'His Majesty, the Tsar' out of respect. The Minister of Culture was very pleased with their explanation, and needless to say the story had a happy ending.

"I will be what I will be," declared G-d to Moses when antisemitism first emerged nearly three-and-a-half thousand years ago. This name of G-d, resonating through every era of exile and

persecution, served as the beacon by which the Jewish people recognized their Divine connection. True to His unwavering promise, G-d stood by us then, and throughout every subsequent exile.

Let us walk confidently with heads held high, proudly demonstrating our identity as the children of Israel—those who once descended into Egypt, endured slavery and persecution, were redeemed by G-d, and gifted His Torah. Despite all of the baseless and cruel hatred directed at us, we persevered, over and over again, and we will continue to persevere, until the Final Redemption, may it be speedily in our days! Amen.

A lecture from Rabbi Yehoshua B. Gordon OBM

SHMOT IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, "Shemot," means "Names" and it is found in Exodus 1:1 - 6:1.

The children of Israel multiply in Egypt. Threatened by their growing numbers, Pharaoh enslaves them and orders the Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah, to kill all male babies at birth. When they do not comply, he commands his people to cast the Hebrew babies into the Nile.

A child is born to Yocheved, the daughter of Levi, and her husband, Amram, and placed in a basket on the river, while the baby's sister, Miriam, stands watch from afar. Pharaoh's daughter discovers the boy, raises him as her son, and names him Moses. As a young man, Moses leaves the palace and discovers the hardship of his brethren. He sees an Egyptian beating a Jew and kills the Egyptian. The next day he sees two Jews fighting; when he admonishes them, they reveal his deed of the previous day, and Moses is forced to flee to Midian. There he rescues Jethro's daughters, marries one of them (Tziporah), and becomes a shepherd of his father-in-law's flocks.

G-d appears to Moses in a burning bush at the foot of Mount Sinai and instructs him to go to Pharaoh and demand: "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me." Moses' brother, Aaron, is appointed to serve as his spokesman. In Egypt, Moses and Aaron assemble the elders of Israel to tell them that the time of their redemption has come. The people believe; but Pharaoh refuses to let them go, and even intensifies the suffering of Israel.

Moses returns to G-d to protest: "Why have You done evil to this people?" G-d promises that the redemption is close at hand.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 12 Tevet 5785 - 12 January 2025

R. Abraham Ibn Ezra Receives a Letter from the Shabbat Queen (1159)

Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra was visiting London in 4919 (1159) when, one Friday night, he had a fascinating dream. In it, a venerable man approached him and handed him a letter from the Shabbat Queen. Rabbi Abraham read the letter, in which Shabbat informed him that one of his students had attempted to prove that Shabbat begins Saturday morning, and not Friday night, and beseeched his assistance. As a result of this dream, Rabbi Abraham wrote his Epistle of Shabbat, in which he demonstrates beyond doubt that Shabbat indeed begins Friday night.

Thursday, 16 Tevet 5785 - 16 January 2025

Salvation of Baghdad Jewry (1638)

On this date in 5398 (1638), Murad IV, Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, recaptured Baghdad from the Persian Shah after a forty-day siege. The Jews of Baghdad, who had suffered under the Shah's tenure, celebrated this day each year to praise G-d for rescuing them from Persian rule.

Friday, 17 Tevet 5785 - 17 January 2025

1st NY Synagogue (1728)

In 5444 (1684), a group of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who fled the Inquisition held a Rosh Hashanah service in New Amsterdam (later New York), thereby founding congregation Shearith Israel ("Remnant of

Israel"). On the 17th of Tevet in 5488 (1728), the congregation purchased a lot in Lower Manhattan to erect the first synagogue in New York.

Shabbat, 18 Tevet 5785 - 18 January 2025

Mar Huna Killed (469)

The Exilarch ("Reish Galuta") of Babylonian Jewry, Mar Huna Mori bar Mar Zutra, was executed in Pumpadita by order of the Persian emperor on the 18th of Tevet of the year 4229 (469). Also killed on that day was Rav Mesharshia bar Pekod (the third Jewish leader who was arrested with them, Rav Ameimar bar Mar Yenuka, was executed two months later).