

SHABBAT SHALOM. Today is 21 Tevet 5786, corresponding to January 10, 2026.

TORAH DIALOGUE

(p. 206 Hz) (p. 319 S) (p. 213 Hi) (p. 292 AS)

SHEMOT שמות

Exodus 1:1

[Compiled by Rabbi Edward Davis (RED)]

1. Torah repetition. The first verse in this Chumash is virtually an exact repetition of a verse in Vayigash, both dealing with Yaakov's family tree when they came to Egypt, and now again. Hardly any commentary discusses this repetition. In Vayigash, when they came as a family to Egypt, they came as royalty; they were the family of the viceroy. Now that family is all deceased. What we now see is a family that will be enslaved. This is several hundred years later, and the family is growing into a large number of people, and they are no longer perceived as connected to that royal tribe which came as guests of the Pharaoh of Egypt. The Egyptians are now looking down upon these foreigners. No matter how many years they have lived in Egypt, they are still considered outsiders.

2. Bayit. House. The word Bayit, House is featured in these Parshiyot. Yaakov and his HOUSE came down to Egypt. A man from the HOUSE of Levi married a daughter of Levi. The midwives were granted HOUSES. And finally the Pesach sacrifice was a lamb for each HOUSE. The population growth is astounding. The family became a tribe and becomes a quickly growing house on its way to becoming a nation. The word HOUSE is reflecting this growth in such a subtle fashion that its choice of words is a way of getting our attention to notice this change. Later in Scripture we are flooded with chapters that list the names of each family in such a rapid way that we can't remember the details; we are overwhelmed by each family that are named over the centuries to impress us with the growth. (See the opening chapters in Chronicles.)

3. The population explosion is truly immense and impressive. Rashi quotes a Midrash that states that each pregnancy in that time of the Egyptian experience was a litter of six babies. I looked up that Midrash and six babies at each pregnancy was the smallest number mentioned in the Midrash. We have a tendency to dismiss this figure as an exaggeration, but think about it. They came from Canaan, as 70 in number. In a manner of 210 years, they number 600,000 adult males between the ages of 20 to 60. Add to this number all the children under the age of 20, and all males above the age of 60, and all the females, and the total number of those leaving Egypt, led by Moshe, had to be about 2.5 million Jews. The Torah, much later on, tells us that in this na-

tion there were only 22,273 firstborn males, which indicates that they had to have had large families. They had to have had many multiple births. A true divine miracle.

4. The midwives. Firstly, Rashi and most of the commentators state that these midwives were Jewish. There are a few that suggest that they were Egyptian. The Torah mentions two by name, but there had to be many more of them, considering the population explosion. Maybe they were the supervising midwives. And then the Torah states that He made them houses (1:21). Rashi interprets that Hashem made them heads of dynasties in Jewish history. One was the mother of all the Kohanim and Leviyim. The other was the mother of the Royal house of Kings. Another commentator wrote that it was Pharaoh who had them confined to houses. He placed them under house arrest and made the pregnant women come to them to give birth. Another commentator wrote that they were given special houses to hide them from Pharaoh. I find it interesting that a small inconsequential clause is in this verse gives us so much to talk about in defining the Torah phrase.

5. "A man went from the house of Levi and married a daughter of Levi."(2:1).

No names. A son was born. No names. Certainly, the parents gave him a name, but it is purposefully not mentioned. The Torah will record his name with the name that the daughter of Pharaoh gave him. This was done by Hashem to reward the daughter for taking the baby, adopting him, and raising him in the palace. (The Midrash states that the daughter of Pharaoh ended up converting to Judaism, married a Jew and had a family in Eretz Yisrael. Interestingly, Cecil B. DeMille had her riding in a wagon and leaving Egypt with Bnei Yisrael! In the film The Ten Commandments). Hashem had Moshe raised in the palace to acquaint him with the dealings of the Egyptian royalty, things that would help Moshe later in his life.

6. Moshe passed his tests, proving that he was worthy of becoming the savior of the Jewish people. Firstly, he interfered and killed an Egyptian who was beating a Jewish slave. Then he confronted two Jews who were fighting one another. And the third case was when he helped Yitro's daughters fend off Midianite shepherds. These three cases showed Moshe's true character of caring for all people. The first case was a Jew vs. a non-Jew. The second was Jew vs. Jew. And the third case was non-Jews vs. non-Jews. Moshe was an independent person who stood for justice among all people. Unlike other stories about religious leaders in the world, we do know a great deal about Moshe's younger life. The Torah gives us enough stories about the young Moshe to appreciate who he was. (RED)

7. Ask for gold, silver, and clothing. This is what Hashem directed the Jewish women to ask from their Egyptian neighbors. The men were required to do the same even though they were not mentioned in the verse. They were not requesting these as a loan, but rather as a gift. The Chizkuni wrote that this was payment for the work the Jews performed as slaves over the many years oppressed in Egypt. Hence the Jews were not required to return anything to their Egyptian neighbors. The items requested define what Hashem said to Avraham: that the enslaved Jews will leave Egypt with great wealth (in Chumash Bereishit 15:14.) The fact that the gold and silver was payment for the performed work is found in Talmud Sanhedrin 91a.

8. MIDRASH. Moshe saw an Egyptian hitting a Jew. Moshe then reacted and killed the Egyptian. The Torah does not identify the Jewish victim in the text. The Midrash wrote that the Jewish victim was Datan, who later was to become Moshe's foe.

QUESTIONS FOR PARSHAT SHEMOT 5786

I. From the Text

1. What was Pharaoh's concern with the growing Jewish population? (1:10)
2. Whom did Pharaoh order to throw the male babies into the Nile River to be drowned? (1:22)
3. What Hebrew word is used here for Mt. Sinai? (3:1)
4. What three signs did Hashem give Moshe to convince the Jewish people that Moshe was legitimately sent by Hashem? (Chapter 4)
5. Why did Hashem get angry at Moshe? (4:14)

II. From Rashi

6. What were the real identities of Shifra and Puah, the two midwives whom Pharaoh commanded to kill the Jewish male babies? (1:15)
7. How old was Yocheved when she gave birth to Moshe? (2:1)
8. In 2:23, the Torah records that Pharaoh died. Did he really die?
9. What words did Moshe use to convince the Jewish elders and people that Hashem had appointed Moshe to be their savior? (3:16)
10. When Moshe refused to be the savior, how did Hashem punish him? (4:14)

III. From the Rabbis

11. Was Moshe a Hebrew name or an Egyptian name? (Ibn Ezra)
12. Moshe named his son Gershom, a stranger in a strange land. In what land was Moshe a stranger? (Seforno, Or HaChaim)
13. Why did Moshe bring his wife and sons to Egypt when it was a dangerous place for Jews? (Ramban)

IV. Midrash

14. How did Moshe know that he was Jewish, possessing Jewish beliefs?

V. Haftorah. Isaiah (Ashkenazic custom)

15. Why is Yaakov referred to as Yaakov in the beginning of the first verse and then immediately thereafter as Yisrael?

VI. Relationships

16.

- a) Moshe - Eliezer
- b) Amram - Chevron
- c) Amram - Yocheved (2 answers)
- d) Elazar - Pinchas
- e) Miriam - Uri

ANSWERS FOR PARSHAT SHEMOT 5786

1. Lest if an enemy attacked Egypt, the Jews might join with the enemy.
2. Pharaoh ordered all the people, Jews and non-Jews, to throw their male babies into the River.
3. Chorev
4. 1) Turning his staff into a snake and then back again. 2) Turning Moshe's hand leprous and then back again. And 3) Turning water into blood.
5. Because Moshe was constantly refusing to accept Hashem's mission to be the savior.
6. Shifra was Yocheved; Puah was Miriam, Yocheved's daughter.
7. 130 years old.
8. No. Pharaoh became leprous (and bathed in the blood of slaughtered Jewish babies).
9. Pakod Pakadti (I, Hashem, have surely remembered you.)
10. Aharon became the High Priest, and not Moshe.
11. According to the Ibn Ezra, Pharaoh's daughter named him Monios, an Egyptian name which means "drawn from water." Moshe was the Hebrew translation of that Egyptian name.
12. Seforno: Midian. Or HaChaim: on earth.
13. To demonstrate to the people that Hashem was going to redeem them now.
14. When Yocheved, Moshe's mother, nursed him, she inculcated him with Jewish beliefs.
15. The sad oppressed Yaakov will become the redeemed Yisrael.

16.

- a) Father Moshe
- b) Brothers
- c) Husband-Wife, and Aunt Yocheved
- d) Father Elazar
- e) Grandmother Miriam