

Shivim Panim: From Slavery to Sinai
Unit One – Pharaoh's Paranoia
Melton Geshler at the JCC
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A) Background

- 1) General background from the last third of Breishit
- 2) Breishit chapter 50, verse 26
- 3) Shmot chapter 1, verses 6 – 7

B) Reading our unit, chapter 1, verses 8 – 22

1) Analysis

- a) Verse 8 – “who did not know Yosef”
 - (I) Never heard of him – could that be?
 - (II) Did not recognize him, acted as if he had not been
- b) Verse 10 – “Shrewdly”
 - (I) Why shrewdly; in light of the rest of the passage, what is the central methodological concern of the king?
- c) Verse 10 – “and rise from the ground”
 - (I) Hebrew – "ועלה מן הארץ"
 - Both the subject and the meaning of the verbal phrase are unclear
 - What could it mean?
- d) Verse 11 – “To oppress them”
 - (I) What is the goal of this oppression?
 - See Devarim chapter 26, verse 7, the very end, and then see the Hagada: “Our oppression” – this denotes the suppression of marital intimacy”
- e) Verse 12 – “The more they increased”
 - (I) If the suppression of intimacy succeeded, how did they increase?
- f) Verse 15 – “The Hebrew midwives”
 - (I) Hebrew – "המילדות העבריות"
 - The phrase is unclear
 - What does the phrase's exact meaning matter?
- g) Verse 16 - “If it is a girl, let her live”
 - (I) What is the logic of letting the girls live?
- h) Verse 17 – “Fearing God”
 - (I) What does it mean to fear God?
 - (II) See Breishit chapter 20, verses 11
- i) Verse 19 – “Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth”
 - (I) What might we learn from the fact that they don't say “Before we can come”, but rather say “before the midwife can come”?
 - (II) Why does this excuse work; why does Pharaoh not demand that the midwives should have killed the babies upon their arrival?
- j) Verses 20 - 21
 - (I) “He” – although in context it is quite plausible that God is the subject of the verb, it is not explicit.
 - (II) “Households” – in Hebrew "בתים"

- What might this mean?
- What might be the relationship between the two verses?

k) Verse 22 – “Throw into the Nile”

(I) In what way is this stage of the persecution fundamentally different from the previous stage, and from all the earlier stages?

(II) How many earlier stages were there?

(III) Why do you think that in the end Pharaoh decided on a course of action that he had refrained from taking at the outset?

(IV) Can you see any parallels to modern times?

C) The Commentators

- 1) Commentary 9 – Talmud
- 2) Commentary 10 – Josephus
- 3) Commentary 11 – Netziv
- 4) Commentary 12 – Tikva Frymer-Kensky
- 5) Commentary 13 – J. Cheryl Exum