

Shivim Panim: From Slavery to Sinai
Unit One – Pharaoh's Paranoia
Melton Gesher 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 – “עליה 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 “בָתִים”

- 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