



December 19 - 25, 2021 ט"ו - כ"א טבת תשפ"ב



## קַה בַּפָּרָשָׁה • In This Week's Parashah

- ◆ Yosef and his brothers die. A new Pharaoh comes to power.
- ◆ Pharaoh is worried about the growing number of בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (Benei Yisrael, Israelites). He enslaves them and forces them to do very hard work.
- ◆ Pharaoh instructs Shifrah and Puah, two midwives, to kill Israelite baby boys, but they disobey him. Pharaoh makes a decree that all Israelite baby boys must be thrown into the Nile River.
- ◆ Yokheved gives birth to a boy and hides him in a basket. Pharaoh's daughter sees the baby and adopts him. She names him Moshe.
- ◆ Years later, Moshe sees an Egyptian beating an Israelite. Moshe kills the Egyptian, and flees to Midian.
- ◆ Moshe marries Tzipporah, the daughter of the priest of Midian.
- ◆ Moshe is a shepherd. One day, he sees a bush that's on fire but not burning down. God speaks to Moshe from the flames and tells him to go to Pharaoh and demand that Pharaoh free Benei Yisrael.
- ◆ Moshe tries to turn down the job, but God shows him some miracles and tells him that his brother, Aharon, will help him.
- ◆ Moshe and Aharon meet with Pharaoh, but Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go. He makes their work even harder.





## מִדְרָשׁ • Midrash

Midrashim are ideas or stories that explain the Torah. They often come from listening very carefully to what the Torah says and how it says it. Here, we will look for what clues this midrash sees in the Torah's words, and try to understand its messages.

In one of the most dramatic moments in our parashah, Pharaoh's daughter finds baby Moshe in a basket on the water.

### Shemot 2:5

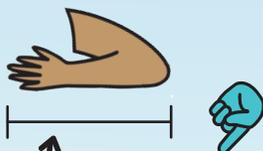
The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the river, and her maidens walked along the river. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent **her amah** to fetch it.

### שמות ב:ה

וַתֵּרֶד בַּת־פַּרְעֹה לָרְחוֹץ עַל־הַיָּאֵר  
וַנְּעַרְתִּיהָ הַלִּכְתָּ עַל־יַד הַיָּאֵר  
וַתֵּרָא אֶת־הַבַּתְבָּה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף  
וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אִמָּתָהּ וַתִּקְחָהּ:

Two rabbis in a midrash debate the meaning of amah here because there are actually two Hebrew words that sound like amah with two totally different meanings.

1) אָמָה = Maidservant



2) אָמָה = Arm (it is also a unit of measurement, the length of a forearm)

Notice that the vowels are different!

### Talmud Bavli Sotah 12b

"And she sent her amah to take it": Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Nehemyah disagree. One says that it means her arm, and one says that it means her maidservant.

### תלמוד בבלי סוטה דף יב עמוד ב

- "וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת אִמָּתָהּ וַתִּקְחָהּ"  
ר' יהודה ור' נחמיה,  
חד אמר יָדָה  
וחד אמר שפִּחְתָּה.

Since there is no וָ (dagesh, a dot that sometimes appears inside Hebrew letters) in the מ (mem) in the word, "amah," the more obvious meaning should be, "maidservant." So why might someone think it means, "arm"? Here are two possible reasons:

1. Look carefully at the words in the pasuk. It says that Pharaoh's daughter went down to the river with her נְעוֹרוֹת (ne'arot, maidens). If she had sent one of them to get the basket, we might have expected the Torah to use the same word, נַעֲרָה (na'arah, maiden). Instead, it uses an entirely different word: amah.
2. Think about the story as a whole. The encounter between Pharaoh's daughter and the baby is very personal. She gazes at him, hears him cry, feels pity, and adopts him as her son. Based on the feeling of the story, it makes sense that her finding the basket would have been personal as well, extending her own arm to reach it rather than sending someone else.

- ◆ Which interpretation do you think is more compelling? Why?
- ◆ Later on, the midrash suggests that the basket was too far away to reach when Pharaoh's daughter stretched out her arm to it, so her arm miraculously grew extra long! What does this image add to our understanding of the story?



## פְּרָשְׁנוֹת • Commentary

When baby Moshe is born, here's how the Torah describes his mother's reaction:

### Shemot 2:2

The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. **And she saw that he was good,** and she hid him for three months.

### שמות ב:ב

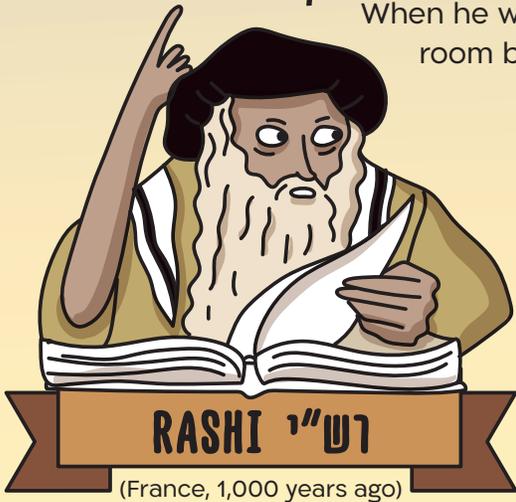
וַתֵּהָרָה הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן  
וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי-טוֹב הוּא  
וַתְּצַפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְחִים:

This line is surprising—isn't it normal for a parent to think that their new baby is good? Why does the pasuk have to bother telling us about it? The commentaries suggest that Moshe's mother must have noticed something unusually special about him.



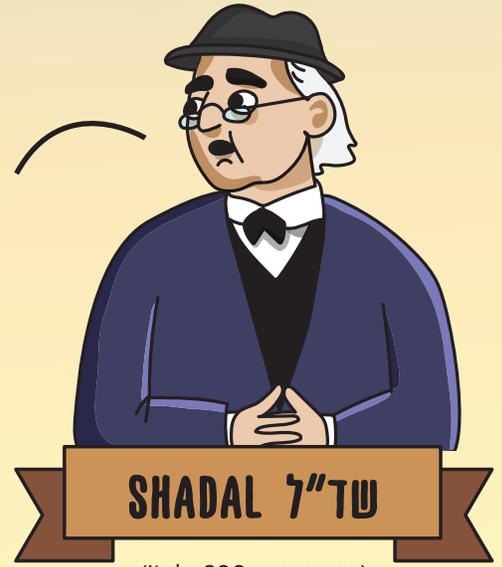
כְּשֶׁנִּוְלַד נִתְמַלֵּא הַבַּיִת כְּלוּ אוֹרָה.

When he was born, the whole room became filled with light.



וְאִם הָיָה צוֹעֵק לֹא הָיָה אֶפְשָׁר לְצַפְנוֹ, כִּי הָיָה קוֹלוֹ נִשְׁמָע מֵרְחוֹק, וּמִפְּנֵי שֶׁהָיָה טוֹב יָכֻלָּה לְצַפְנוֹ.

If the baby had screamed, it would have been impossible to hide him, because his voice would have been heard from far away. It was because he was "good" that his mother was able to hide him.



### 👉 Think About Rashi: 👈

- ◆ Back in Bereishit, "כי טוב" (ki tov, it was good)" was a phrase used to describe every step of creation. And the first time it appeared was when God created light. How do you think that might influence Rashi's reading?
- ◆ What is the significance of comparing Moshe's birth to the creation of the world?



### 👉 Think About Shadal: 👈

- ◆ All babies are good! But have you ever heard someone say, "she's such a good baby"? What do they usually mean?
- ◆ How does the order of the words in our pasuk provide support for Shadal's reading?





## הלכה • Halakhah

Many people have the custom of reviewing the Torah portion each week, reading the words of the parashah twice along with a translation. This practice is called תַּרְגוּם וְאֶחָד מִקְרָא וְשְׁנַיִם (shnayim mikra ve-ehad targum). It's a very old custom that is mentioned in the Talmud.

### Talmud Bavli Berakhot 8a

Rav Huna bar Yehudah said Rabbi Ami said: A person should always complete the Torah portion along with the community, reading the Torah text twice, and once with a translation.

### תלמוד בבלי ברכות דף ח עמוד א

אָמַר רַב הוּנָא בַר יְהוּדָה, אָמַר רַבִּי אָמִי: לְעוֹלָם יִשְׁלִים אָדָם פְּרָשְׁיוֹתָיו עִם הַצְּבוּר, שְׁנַיִם מִקְרָא וְאֶחָד תַּרְגוּם.

The Ba'al Ha-Turim connects this practice to the opening line of our parashah, וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (And these are the names of the people of Israel; Shemot 1:1). He makes these words into an acronym, where the first letter of each word spells something out:

### Ba'al Ha-Turim (Spain, 700 years ago)

A person who studies the Torah portion, reading the text twice and a translation once, and sings it with a sweet melody, will live many long years.

### בעל הטורים

וְאָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹמֵד הַסֵּדֶר  
שְׁנַיִם מִקְרָא וְאֶחָד תַּרְגוּם  
בְּקוֹל נְעִים יִשִּׁיר  
יְחִיָּה שְׁנַיִם רַבּוֹת אַרוּכִים לְעוֹלָם.

ואלה  
שמות  
בני  
ישראל



At the time of the Talmud, many people read the Torah in an Aramaic translation known as Targum Onkelos, since Aramaic was the language most Jews understood. Eventually, a different custom developed. Instead of Targum Onkelos, people would study the parashah along with Rashi's commentary (Shulhan Arukh, Orah Hayyim 285:2).

There are so many great ways of reviewing the parashah each week. Our favorite is reading Devash! Even if you didn't do this before, the beginning of Sefer Shemot is a great time to start.



## רְגַע שָׁל עִבְרִית • A Moment of Hebrew

### Shemot 1:12

But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and **spread out**, so that the [Egyptians] came to dread the Israelites.

### שמות איב

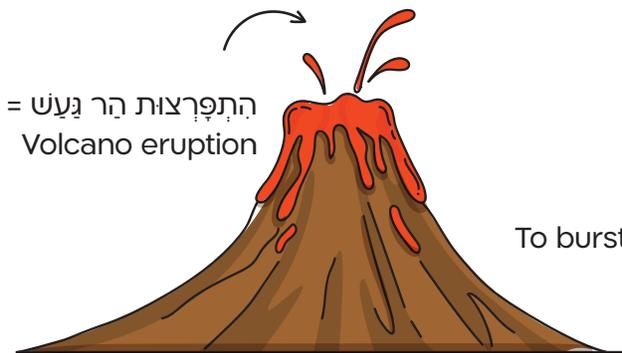
וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנוּ אֶתֵּנוּ  
כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ  
וַיִּקְצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

לְפָרֹץ (שָׁרֵשׁ פ.ר.צ.)

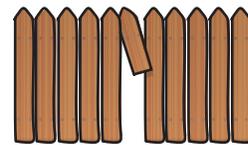
To spread out,  
erupt, break into



Gulf or bay = מִפְרָץ



הַתְּפָרְצוֹת הַר גַּעֲשׁ =  
Volcano eruption



פְּרָצָה =  
opening/loophole

לְפָרֹץ בְּצַחֲוֹק =  
To burst out laughing



### Find the Word!

There is someone in Sefer Bereishit whose name comes from this שָׁרֵשׁ (shoresh, root). Can you find who it is? (Hint: he is a twin! See Bereishit 38:29 for the answer.)



## מה קרה • What's Going On Here?

### Who were the midwives?

The Torah doesn't usually name minor characters. So it's surprising that the Torah tells us the names of the two midwives who disobeyed Pharaoh: Shifrah and Puah.

Who were these midwives? They are called הַמְיָלְדוֹת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת (hamyal'dot ha-ivriyot, Hebrew midwives). There are two ways to understand this phrase:

- 1 They were Egyptians who served as midwives for the Hebrews (another name for Benei Yisrael/Israelites).
- 2 They were midwives who were Hebrews = Israelites.

If Shifrah and Puah were Egyptians, then it's extra remarkable that they disobeyed Pharaoh to save the Israelite babies.

If they were Israelites themselves, could they even have been characters we know from elsewhere? There are two common suggestions (Sotah 11b):

1  
Shifrah was really Yokheved (Moshe's mother)

2  
Puah was really Miriam (Moshe's sister) or Elisheva (Aharon's wife).





## שאלות השבוע • Parashah Scavenger Hunt

The answers to the first seven questions can be found in the matching numbered aliyah in the Torah reading. The answers to the last three are harder and can come from anywhere in the parashah.

### aliyot:

- 1) Shemot 1:1 to 1:17
- 2) 1:18 to 2:10
- 3) 2:11 to 2:25
- 4) 3:1 to 3:15
- 5) 3:16 to 4:17
- 6) 4:18 to 4:31
- 7) 5:1 to 6:1

*Good luck!*

1 What were the names of the storehouse cities that Pharaoh forced Benei Yisrael to build?

2 For how long did the daughter of Levi hide her baby?



3 What was the name of Moshe's firstborn son?

4 What was God's sign that God was really with Moshe on his mission?

5 How did Moshe turn the snake back into a staff?

6 Who kissed whom in our parashah?

7 There is a special note in our parashah that only appears five times in the whole Torah. What is it?

8 What was the name of Moshe's father-in-law? (It isn't so simple!)

9 What word does Pharaoh use three times to insult Benei Yisrael?

10 What word in our parashah links Moshe to Noah?



\*  
Look for the answers on page 12!

## קְרִיאַת הַתּוֹרָה • Torah Reading

### What Happened to the Vowel?

Most Hebrew letters—except some at the ends of words—have נְקוּדוֹת (nekudot, vowels) under or above them. But sometimes you get a letter that has no vowel at all! Check out this word from the first aliyah in this week's parashah:

Shemot 1: 17

שמות א:יז

The midwives **feared** God

וַתִּירֹאֵן הַמִּילְדוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹקִים



In this first Hebrew word (va-tirena), what sound is attached to the aleph? Not the segol (the "eh" sound); that is under the reish. Not the kamatz (the "ah" or "aw" sound); that is under the final nun. The answer is: there is no sound! The aleph is just blank and not pronounced at all. Meaning, the word might as well be written like this: וַתִּירֵן



So why is the aleph there, and why does it matter? Well, actually it matters quite a lot! That aleph lets us know that the word is part of the three-letter שׁוֹרֵשׁ (shoresh, root) י.ר.א, which means to fear, or to have great respect for someone. That shows that this phrase means: "The midwives feared God." Shifrah and Puah, the women responsible for helping the Israelite women give birth in Egypt, wouldn't follow Pharaoh's command to kill the baby boys, because they were afraid of God and respected God more than this wicked, earthly king.

But there's more: It is so important to get it right and not to put any sound under this aleph. Because if you make the slightest change, you could end up with this:

וַתִּירֹאֵן הַמִּילְדוֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹקִים



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE >>

Look at the difference:



וּתִירְאוּ

"They saw"  
From the  
shoresh ר.א.ה



וּתִירְאוּ

"They feared"  
From the  
shoresh ר.א.ה

Saying that Shifrah and Puah saw God instead of fearing God means something totally different. So putting in the aleph without a sound is super important for getting the meaning right! Next time you see a letter without a vowel, it might be there for a very good reason!



## דְּבַר שֵׁל דִּינָא • One-Minute Debate

### How to play:

Here is a topic for debate along with some suggested arguments, but feel free to come up with your own.

- ◆ Assign people to the "true" or "false" sides.
- ◆ Each side gets 30 seconds to make their case.
- ◆ At the end, the group votes on a winner.

**Debate: Taking off your shoes is a way to show respect.**



### True!

- ◆ Moshe was told to take off his shoes at the burning bush!
- ◆ Your shoes carry dirt and germs from everywhere you've been. When you come into the house, you should take them off.



### False!

- ◆ Ew, no one wants to smell your stinky feet. Keep your shoes on!

## שקלא וטריא • Join the Conversation!

Dear Devash,

I noticed that in the Scavenger Hunt for Parashat Bereishit, there was a question about the women mentioned in the fifth aliyah. The answer said that Havah is referred to in pasuk 25. But pasuk 25 is actually not in the fifth aliyah! Can you take a look at this?

Thanks,

Hadas

Newton, MA



Send us your thoughts or questions from learning the parashah. We'll write back to you, and some will get published in future issues of Devash!

Write to us at [devash@hadar.org](mailto:devash@hadar.org)

Hi Hadas,

Great question! This is actually a case where different communities have different traditions about where to end the aliyah. Some humashim end the fifth aliyah on pasuk 23, while others continue until pasuk 26.

The reason this happened here is because there is a debate about how to read the ending phrase of verse 26, אָז הוֹחֵל לְקַרְא בְּשֵׁם ה' (then they began to call on the name of God). Some people read this positively, as a reference to the first prayers to God. Others read it negatively, as referring to when idol worship began. Someone in this last group felt that the aliyah shouldn't end on such a negative note (which is one of the rules of making an aliyah!), and so decided to shorten it and begin the sixth aliyah early.

In this week's parashah, Shemot, you can see another example of not wanting to end an aliyah on a negative note. The first aliyah ends in the middle of the story about the midwives.

The story really ends with Pharaoh decreeing that the baby boys should be drowned (Shemot 1:22).

Why don't we just end the aliyah at the end of the story, and then start the next aliyah with the birth of Moshe? It's because we don't want the aliyah to end with such bad news. So instead, we stop in the middle of the story, at the good part about the midwives' heroism.



## Parashah Scavenger Hunt Answers:

1. Pitom and Ra'amses (Shemot 1:11)
2. 3 months (2:2)
3. Gershom (2:22)
4. When Benei Yisrael leave Mitzrayim, they will eventually worship God on the very mountain where God and Moshe were speaking (3:12)
5. He grabbed its tail (4:4)
6. Aharon kissed Moshe (4:27)
7. A merkha kefulah (5:15)
8. In our parashah, he is called Re'uel (2:18), Yitro (3:1), and Yeter (4:18)—it's possible Yitro/Yeter is really a title, and his name was Re'uel
9. גַּרְפִּים—weak and lazy (5:8, 5:17)
10. תֵּיבַת גֹּמְיָא—A "little-teivah (ark or basket)" of reeds (2:3)



**Shabbat Shalom!**

~ שבת שלום ~



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