תנ"ך קורן אביב • שמות

The Koren Aviv Tanakh • Shemot

THE MAGERMAN EDITION

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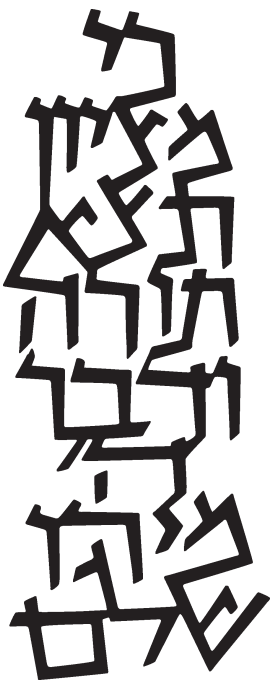
THE KOREN AVIV TANAKH • SHEMOT



TORAH TRANSLATION BY

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KOREN PUBLISHERS JERUSALEM

The Koren Aviv Tanakh • *Shemot*
The Magerman Edition
First Hebrew-English Edition

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The Torah is eternal.

Humanity is ephemeral and dynamic.

The Torah is the cornerstone of the world, of our People, and it forms
the baseline of the Tanakh, the holy writings of God and His prophets.
The changing nature of human society in which our children are growing up
in demands a fresh while remaining rooted in the eternal essence of the Torah.
The Tanakh is a living script, the screenplay of the
history of humanity from Creation to the present.

We pray that this creative and innovative new approach to learning Tanakh will engage and
empower young and old alike to find their own meaning in our ancient wisdom,
uniting us in our traditions, exposing us to new ways of thinking,
and ultimately bringing us closer to the Redemption.

אֲנִי מַאֲמִין בֶּאֱמוּנָה שְׁלֵמָה
בְּבִיאַת הַמָּשִׁיחַ
וְאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁיִּתְמַהְמֵהַּ עִם כָּל זֶה אֲחַכֶּה לּוֹ
בְּכָל יוֹם שֶׁיָּבוֹא.

I believe with perfect faith
in the coming of the Messiah,
and though he may delay,
I wait daily for his coming.

We are pleased that we were able to contribute to this critically important
Tanakh series for young people.

Debra and David Magerman
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

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Publisher's Preface

דור לדור ישבח מעשיך.

One generation will praise Your works to the next.

(Tehillim 145:4)

It is with gratitude and a certain ambition that we introduce this volume of the Magerman Edition of *The Koren Aviv Tanakh*, a multivolume, colorful, and enticing Tanakh designed to encourage connection, reflection, and learning of our foundational text.

The Tanakh is under-studied by our teenagers. The connection between Jewish young adults and the Tanakh is critical, more so today than ever. Students must learn the text of the Tanakh and the classical commentators who have illuminated difficult passages. But it is just as important that young adults engage emotionally and experientially with the text, and all too often, those aspects are neglected.

This project's unique contribution to Tanakh education is that it places the students firmly at the center of the learning experience, allowing them to relate directly to the text and find their own meaning there. While learning Tanakh through the prism of traditional commentaries is undoubtedly important, these volumes empower the next generation to connect to Tanakh in a direct and personal way. Using creative educational resources and approaches, *The Koren Aviv Tanakh* encourages students to analyze the text and find meaning in the verses that is personal and relevant for their own lives.

It is with this ambition that Koren Publishers Jerusalem has created this edition, designed for middle and high school students and young adults in synagogue *minyanim*. Since 1962, the

Koren Tanakh has been recognized for its textual accuracy and innovative graphic design. We have remained committed to these qualities, and we have recently had the privilege of enriching the Tanakh text with the eloquent English translation of one of the most articulate and original Jewish thinkers of our time, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, *zt"l*.

It is with gratitude that we acknowledge Rabbi Sacks for this exceptional translation of the Torah. And our thanks are no less due to Rabbi Dr. Daniel Rose, Koren's Director of Education, whose vision is executed in these volumes. Caryn Meltz, our Managing Editor, brought it all together into a handsome and useful edition, and Tani Bayer, our art director, created the design for the Tanakh and cover. Finally, thank you to our typesetter, Taly Hahn, and to our copyeditors and proofreaders, Efrat Gross, Tali Simon, and Carolyn Budow Ben-David, who made this volume a reality.

None of this would have been possible without the support and vision of Debra and David Magerman of Philadelphia and Jerusalem, who understood both our ambitions and the methods of this edition.

On behalf of all our rabbis, scholars, editors, and designers, we thank the Magerman family. And on behalf of the many thousands of readers, in this and future generations – we are forever in your debt.

We hope the use of these volumes of Tanakh will bring Jews closer and closer to the Torah and all the good it represents.

Matthew Miller, Publisher
Jerusalem, 5785 (2025)

Introduction

> The text of Torah is our covenant with God, our written constitution as a nation under His sovereignty. The interpretation of this text has been the subject of an ongoing conversation for as long as Jews have studied the divine word, a conversation that began at Sinai thirty-three centuries ago and has not ceased since. Every age has added its commentaries, and so must ours. Participating in that conversation is a major part of what it is to be a Jew. For we are the people who never stopped learning the Book of Life, our most precious gift from the God of life.
>
> **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks[1]**

Tanakh studies has always been synonymous with Koren as a publishing house. Ever since Eliyahu Koren published the first edition of the Koren Tanakh in 1962, Koren has committed itself to bringing serious Tanakh scholarship to a broader Hebrew-speaking, and more recently, English-speaking audience. In 2013 Koren established an educational department dedicated to the education of young Jews through innovative pedagogical publications. The launch of *The Koren Aviv Tanakh* series heralds a new stage in this journey, utilizing innovative and creative educational approaches to Tanakh study for the young. In the words of Rabbi Sacks, every age has added its own commentaries to the Tanakh, and so must ours. What better time than the teenage years to begin the empowerment of the next generation in this process.

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1 | *Covenant & Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible – Genesis: The Book of Beginnings* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2009), 3.

Educational Vision Behind the Series

The wisdom of student-centered learning has been informing the pedagogy of thoughtful educators since the research on how children learn by – among others – John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky, generations before our classrooms became populated by Gen Z and now Gen Alpha. Our students, through no fault of their own, are more focused on their own sense of self and self-worth than young people at any previous point in history.[2] Conventional pedagogic wisdom has for some time encouraged the educator to think about becoming a "guide on the side" rather than a "sage on the stage."

Perhaps influenced by these trends, the field of Tanakh study has also evolved in recent years toward encouraging students to engage directly with the text, rather than only through the prism of classical and modern commentaries. This approach has been pioneered by our friends at Herzog College, as well as other centers of Tanakh scholarship across the world. In the introduction to the Maggid series *Torah MiEtzion,* Rabbi Ezra Bick writes: "Tanakh is meant to be read and understood by the reader, without the absolute necessity of outside interlocutors. The keys to understanding Tanakh are found within Tanakh itself."[3]

This pedagogy forms the foundation and guiding light behind the approach to learning and teaching Tanakh found in *The Koren Aviv Tanakh*. That is not to say that we believe this approach should replace the traditional in-depth study of Tanakh with classical commentaries. There is without doubt a deep value to approaching the text of the Tanakh through the eyes of the classical and modern commentators, who themselves reflect ancient traditions and readings. However, we believe this approach complements that one and, we would argue, should precede it. The brave educator will encourage his or her students to find their own meaning in the text before they then explore the rich library of Jewish commentaries available to navigate our understanding of Tanakh.

Explanation of Educational Elements

The educational elements found in *The Koren Aviv Tanakh* are explained below. Several of these elements contain excerpts from essays written by Tanakh scholars, and in some cases these texts have been slightly modified for the sake of standardization and consistency, or to make the text flow.

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2 | For fascinating research on this topic, see Jean M. Twenge, *iGen: Why Today's Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy – and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood – and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria Books, 2017).

3 | *Torah MiEtzion: New Readings in Tanach – Volume I: Bereshit* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books and Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2011), xv.

While all of these elements are tools and resources to achieve the educational vision of the project – namely, independent, student-centered learning of Tanakh, allowing for a robust meaning-making process that will encourage connecting to the text in a direct and personal way – each element stands alone. Some of the elements may be more appealing than others to you as an educator and to your students. There is no need to feel that all the segments must be utilized in your classroom. Creative educators will plan their classes and facilitate the learning process in a way that only they can, and this edition can provide an array of educational resources to choose from to achieve their personal educational goals.

Taking an Episodic Approach to Structuring the Narrative

In order to focus the student on the narrative and thematic segments found in the Tanakh, *The Koren Aviv Tanakh* has taken an episodic approach, dividing the text into thematic episodes that aid in the reading and understanding of the text.

Over time, there have been various ways to break up the text of the Tanakh. For example, the division into chapters and verses dates from the thirteenth century and is Christian in origin. The Masoretic text was divided into *parashot,* and although there is some controversy over this tradition, the division of *parashot* used by *soferim* in writing modern-day *sifrei Torah* is based on Rambam's list found in the eighth chapter of *Hilkhot Tefillin UMezuza VeSefer Torah* in his *Mishneh Torah*. These *parashot* are delineated by "open portions" *(parashot petuḥot),* where the line ends with an open space and the next *parasha* begins on the following line), and "closed portions" *(parashot setumot),* where a space is left at the end of the last verse of the *parasha,* and the next *parasha* begins after that space on the same line.

The division of the Torah into weekly readings (somewhat confusingly also called *parashot*) dates from the sixth century BCE as described in the book of Neḥemya, when the weekly system of reading the *parasha* with an annual completion was standardized. These weekly readings of the Torah portion were further divided into seven sections, one for each *aliya*, or person called to the Torah reading, on Shabbat.

It should be noted that while the episodic approach taken in this book maintains the divisions of the weekly readings, these divisions do not always coincide with the Masoretic *(setuma/petuḥa)* divisions. Due to the logistics of layout and design, at times a new episode begins on a new line and may appear to be a *parasha petuḥa*. While this is something to be avoided in general, after consultation with halakhic and educational experts, we decided it was justifiable to further the educational vision of this project.

Parasha Introduction Page

At the beginning of each *parasha*, an introductory page will feature a ***Parasha Overview***, a list of the episodes featured in this *parasha*, and a list of ***Parasha Stats***. The Parasha Overview is

generally taken from the introductions to the chapters of *Covenant & Conversation: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible – Exodus: The Book of Redemption* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks.

The First Page of Each Episode

Each episode has a title and begins with a ***Summary.*** This is often adapted content from the *Steinsaltz Humash*. On the first page of each episode there is also a list of three underlying ***Themes*** that can be found in the text of the episode. More than twenty-five overarching themes were identified running throughout Tanakh, and through signaling the themes most central to each episode, we can highlight the intertextuality of parts of Tanakh, encouraging the student to identify and reflect on these themes throughout their Tanakh studies.

There are also two categories of reflection and textual analysis questions on this page, which encourage the student to engage directly with the text on their own terms, and become a Tanakh commentator in their own right. ***Unlocking the Text*** is a list of questions that identify the gaps in the text, which close readers of the Tankah would wish to address and explore. Students are encouraged to use these questions (or ask their own questions) to unlock the meaning of the text, or develop their own commentary or creative midrash. ***Finding Yourself in the Text*** asks three questions that encourage the student to relate to the text in a personal way, using their own life as a frame of reference. Reflection on these questions and their own lived experiences could help them to understand the text, and this is the aim of these questions.

In the text of many of the episodes, there are key words and phrases (in Hebrew and English) highlighted in various colors which connect them to the ***Taking a Literary Approach*** sections (see below). This helps the student immediately see the textual analysis of those authors in a visual way.

Bibliodrama

Bibliodrama is a creative educational tool that enables students to deepen their connection to the characters in the text by "stepping into their shoes." It is a form of role-playing in which students are asked to take on the role of the characters in biblical texts. Bibliodrama asks students to imagine what was going on in the minds and hearts of the personalities from the narrative, and in so doing, the students are creating their own midrash (as more often than not, the text keeps the emotions and thoughts of the characters hidden from the reader). The characters that feature in the ***A Question of Bibliodrama*** sections of this volume are largely the human personalities from the text, but in some cases they also include non-humans, such as animals (for example, Bilaam's donkey) or spiritual beings such as angels or God.

Peter A. Pitzele, a pioneer in utilizing bibliodrama in Tanakh study, compares bibliodrama to Midrash in the following way:

> Bibliodrama is a form of interpretive play. To honor it with a venerable Hebrew name, bibliodrama can be called a form of Midrash.…For the rabbis, this interpretive engagement with the Bible manifested itself in word-plays, analogies, and even puns that intensified the active experience of reading texts. Midrash is derived from a Hebrew root that means to investigate or explore. In the Midrash the written text is closely examined for meanings and insights that will enrich our understanding and enhance our relationship to the Bible. In a more generic sense, however, midrash – now in lower case – may extend in time to later ages and to our own. From a more liberal perspective, midrash may include extra-literary acts of interpretation such as movement, song, visual art, and drama, which, like their classical forebears, serve to illuminate meaning in the biblical narrative.[4]

The questions in the bibliodrama sections lend themselves well to full group role-play simulation, small group discussions, or even *chavruta* conversations, where one student could be an interviewer asking questions of the other, who plays the role of the character. They could then switch roles. You may also wish to invite your students to create their own questions. It is important to let the conversations flow in their own organic and creative directions, even if this may lead to some tricky discussions. While there are no right and wrong answers in bibliodrama, and one can never be sure of the direction the conversations will lead, you can intersperse the conversations with more information about the narrative that the students may not be aware of, using scholarship and other texts in Tanakh. But be careful not to use midrashic sources, as these would compete with the students' own midrashic approach taken during the process of bibliodrama. A period of reflection and discussion after the bibliodrama has ended is always worthwhile so that the process can be framed and reflected on, then brought back to the students and their task to develop understanding of the text.

The Art of Midrash

Using art as a modern form of Midrash has become more and more popular among creative Tanakh teachers. Just as our classical midrashim address the gaps in the text begging to be addressed, so have artists throughout the ages when they create a visual interpretation of the Tanakh text through their art. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin draws similarities between the midrashic processes involved in both ancient midrashim and contemporary art:

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4 | *Scripture Windows: Toward a Practice of Bibliodrama* (Lewisville, NC: Torah Aura Productions, 1998), 11–12.

> The Midrash expands and builds upon the text in its description of scriptural figures, inviting us to share its thoughts and emotions as it fills gaps left in the biblical account. It suggests conversations, actions, and spiritual quandaries that are not specified in the Bible itself. By describing the qualities and personalities of scriptural figures, the Midrash helps us to visualize the characters more vividly as human individuals.…[Art] opens our eyes to additional interpretations of the text [which] emerge from the world of Torah, Jewish tradition, and from the world of artists from the seventy nations of the world and different cultures. All of them read the Torah and used visual and verbal means to express the particular facet they found there. The artist, like the commentator, has a unique gift, divine inspiration, emanating directly from the ultimate Creator.[5]

Each episode in this volume has an associated piece of art that expresses in some way an approach to the text of the episode. Asking our students to analyze the midrashic process the artists have embarked on, and to evaluate if and how it enlightens our own connection to and understanding of the text, can be a powerful way for students to engage in the text. For this to be most effective, a process of debriefing and reflection facilitated by the teacher is vital. Relating to artwork as midrash can also form the foundation for your students to use their own artistic talents as a midrashic expression of their understanding of text, and this could be a fun and meaningful class activity or assignment.

Integrating Ḥokhma

In his book *Future Tense,* Rabbi Sacks describes a dual epistemology, knowledge of the world, through Torah and *ḥokhma* (which he translates as wisdom). He distinguishes them in the following way:

> *Ḥokhma* is the truth we discover; Torah is the truth we inherit. *Ḥokhma* is the universal heritage of humankind; Torah is the specific heritage of Israel. *Ḥokhma* is what we attain by being in the image of God; Torah is what guides Jews as the people of God. *Ḥokhma* is acquired by seeing and reasoning; Torah is received by listening and responding. *Ḥokhma* tells us what is; Torah tells us what ought to be. *Ḥokhma* is about facts; Torah is about commands. *Ḥokhma* yields descriptive, scientific laws; Torah yields prescriptive, behavioral laws. *Ḥokhma* is about creation; Torah is about revelation.[6]

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5 | Shlomo Riskin, Yardenna Lubotzky, and Ruth Mark, *Brushes with the Bible: Jewish Commentaries and Biblical Illustrations* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2018), ix.

6 | *Future Tense* (Maggid Books, 2021), 221.

While differentiating between the knowledge of the world that we can gain from the Torah and that which we can gain from the sciences, he also described a conversation between these two worlds in his essays on the weekly *parasha*. In each essay, while drawing insight and understanding from this ancient divine text for our contemporary world, he also drew from scientific wisdom and the best that human culture has to offer, to deepen his and our understanding of the text of the Torah. For Rabbi Sacks, "Torah is a commentary on life, and life is a commentary on Torah. Together they constitute a conversation, each shedding light on the other."[7]

In each episode in this volume, we have brought texts and resources from the world of *ḥokhma* to enlighten and deepen our understanding of the text. More often than not, this scientific wisdom was not available to the medieval and even many of the modern commentators, and this is an opportunity to empower students to engage with the text in a way that previous commentators could not.

Taking a Literary Approach

In the final section in each episode, a literary analysis approach to studying Tanakh is presented by a variety of recognized Tanakh scholars. Rabbi Ezra Bick makes the case for this approach when he writes:

> If we are reading the text directly, then we are reading it as a text is meant to be read, and this introduces the need to read using the tools of literary analysis. Of course, if the Torah is not a book, but a code or a mystery, it would be illegitimate to read it with the same eyes and mind that one reads literature. For this we have the oft-repeated principle, *dibra Torah belashon benei adam* (the Torah speaks in human language). The Torah is literature, divine literature, written not in a special divine language but in the language and the style of man.[8]

Literary analysis tools found in this section include structural analysis, terminology analysis, such as the discovery of a "leading term," textual comparison and intertextuality, plot analysis, and character analysis. Because the understanding of a literary work requires understanding of factors external to its writing, findings from history, archaeology, and Semitics also feature. The focus of these excerpts is on the story, the entire narrative, and in some cases, the whole Tanakh, rather than the traditional verse-by-verse approach taken by many of the classic commentaries.

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7 | *Covenant & Conversation – Genesis: The Book of Beginnings*, 3.

8 | *Torah MiEtzion: New Readings in Tanach – Volume I: Bereshit*, xvi.

Acknowledgments

Every day I wake with newfound gratitude to God that I found my calling as a Jewish educator and have the privilege to make some small impact on the lives of young Jews around the world with the publications I contribute to.

My thanks and friendship to the publisher, Matthew Miller, who continues to show confidence in my abilities, and has supported my work consistently over many years, even when it means sometimes taking a risk on a radical new approach. He has assembled a world-class team of talented and wonderful people I have the honor to call my colleagues and my friends, without whom a project such as this would never see the light of day. These include Rabbi Reuven Ziegler, Rabbi Avishai Magence, Caryn Meltz, Tali Simon, Taly Hahn, Tani Bayer, Aryeh Grossman, Efrat Gross, Carolyn Budow Ben-David, and Jenni Menashe.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank David and Debra Magerman once again for their generosity in supporting this project. This is the latest in a long line of projects I have worked on that they have made possible. Their vision and passion for Jewish education and the Jewish people is inspiring.

As always, my love and thanks must go to my loving family who are the foundation upon which anything I have ever achieved is built. To Jacqueline, Orli, Keren, Aryeh, Eliya, and Elisha, for your never-ending love and support, I dedicate this volume to you.

This volume was completed during a very dark time for our nation. Rabbi Sacks taught me that just as the Chinese ideogram for "crisis" also means "opportunity," the Hebrew word for crisis, *mashber,* also means "child-birth chair." From pain and darkness comes new life. He writes, "Any civilization that can see the blessing within the curse, the fragment of light within the heart of darkness, has within it the capacity to endure."[9] From one of the darkest periods of our modern history has come forth light and goodness. I wish to dedicate this volume to those we have lost; to their families; to those who have fought, on whose shoulders our state exists; and to the Jewish people, *am hanetzaḥ*.

Rabbi Dr. Daniel Rose
Modi'in, Nisan 5785

9 | *Studies in Spirituality* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2021), 63–64.

שמות
Shemot

Parasha Overview

With Shemot, the defining drama of the Jewish people begins. In exile, in Egypt, they multiply until they are no longer a family but a nation. Pharaoh, fearing that they pose a threat to Egypt, enslaves them and orders their male children killed. Moshe, an Israelite child adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, is chosen by God to confront Pharaoh and lead the people to freedom. Reluctantly, Moshe agrees, but his initial intervention only makes things worse, and on this tense note the *parasha* ends.

Episodes

1. Prologue: Previously on…	1:1–7
2. The New King	1:8–14
3. The Midwives Rebel	1:15–22
4. Baby Moshe Is Saved	2:1–10
5. Moshe's Early Leadership	2:11–22
6. God Remembers the Covenant	2:23–25
7. The Revelation at the Burning Bush	3:1–4:17
8. Moshe Returns to Egypt	4:18–26
9. The Mission Begins	4:27–31
10. Moshe and Aharon Confront Pharaoh	5:1–6:1

Parasha Stats

- 6,762 letters
- 1,763 words
- 124 verses
- 216 lines in a sefer Torah

SHEMOT

1 And these are the names of the sons of Yisrael who came to Egypt with Yaakov, each with
2 his household: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda; Yissakhar, Zevulun and Binyamin;
3 4 Dan and Naftali; Gad and Asher. The descendants of Yaakov were seventy in all, and Yosef
5 was already in Egypt. Then Yosef died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. But the
6 7 Israelites were fruitful and burgeoned; they multiplied and became exceptionally strong,
until the land was filled with them.

UNLOCKING THE TEXT

- Why does the Torah repeat information we already know from the end of the book of Bereshit?
- Why does the Torah tell us the family is seventy souls, but only list the heads of the families?
- Why doesn't the Torah give us any more information about the rest of Yosef's life or his death?
- How did *Benei Yisrael* multiply and become many and strong?
- Was this exceptional growth, considering the amount of time it took?
- Which land was filled with them?

Consider using these questions as the basis for your own commentary or creative midrash.

FINDING YOURSELF IN THE TEXT

- Do you know the names of your ancestors?
- Do you think it is important to know who your ancestors were? Why?
- Do you feel that the Jewish people is "many and strong" today?

How does reflecting on these firsthand experiences help you better understand the text?

א שמות

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרַיְמָה אֵת יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ׃
רְאוּבֵן שִׁמְעוֹן לֵוִי וִיהוּדָה׃ יִשָּׂשכָר זְבוּלֻן וּבִנְיָמִן׃ דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי גָּד וְאָשֵׁר׃ וַיְהִי כָּל־
נֶפֶשׁ יֹצְאֵי יֶרֶךְ־יַעֲקֹב שִׁבְעִים נָפֶשׁ וְיוֹסֵף הָיָה בְמִצְרָיִם׃ וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף וְכָל־אֶחָיו
וְכֹל הַדּוֹר הַהוּא׃ וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׁרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעַצְמוּ בִּמְאֹד מְאֹד וַתִּמָּלֵא
הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם׃

א ב ג ד ה ו ז

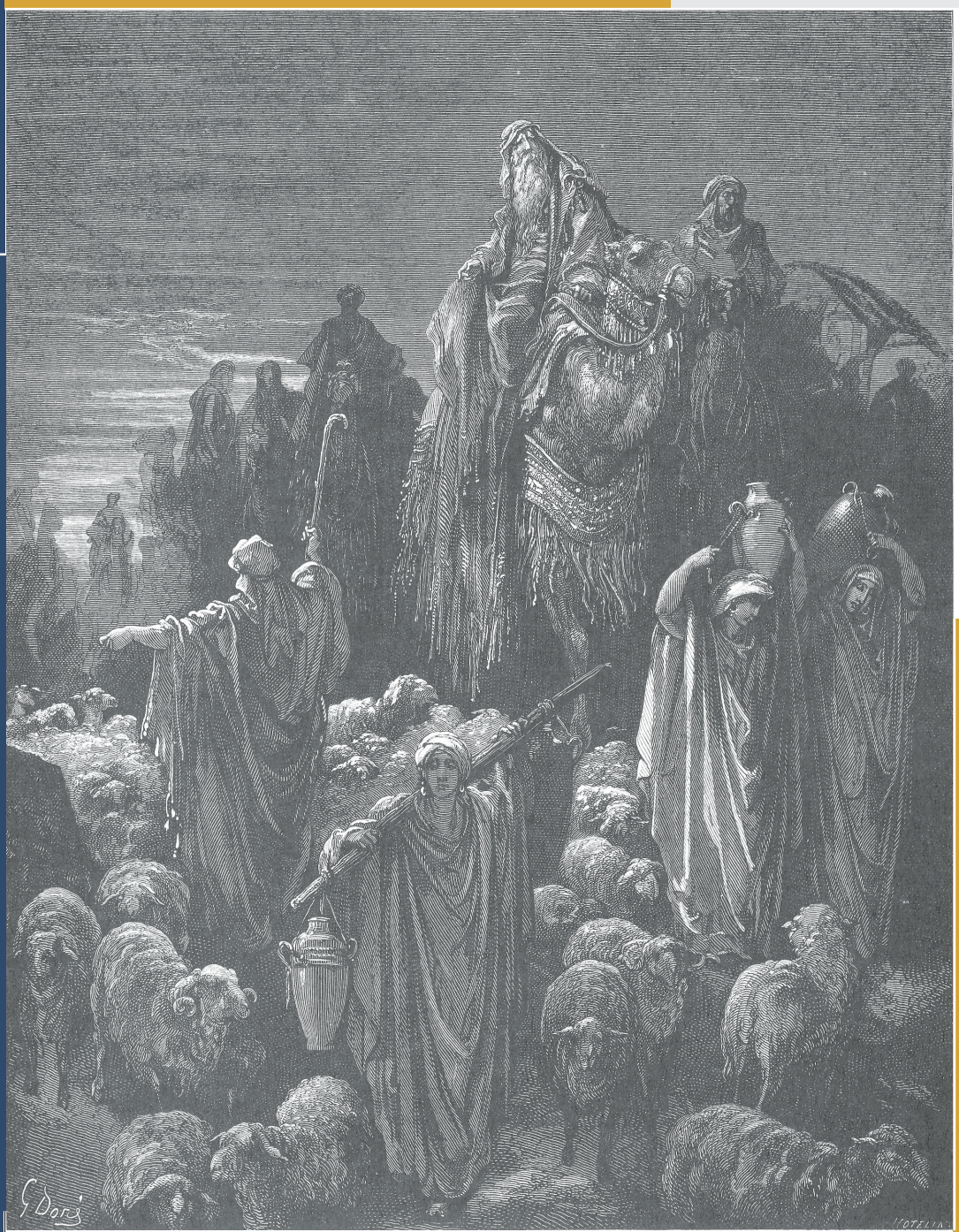
THEMES	BECOMING A NATION	EXILE	PEOPLEHOOD

Episode 1: *Prologue:* Previously on… – Shemot 1:1–7

SUMMARY

The book of Shemot is not a direct continuation of the narrative of Bereshit. Although it does begin from approximately the same point where Bereshit ended, a few of the topics that were related in Bereshit are repeated at the beginning of Shemot, due to their relevance to the events that will follow. The final chapters of Bereshit describe the exile of Yaakov's family from Canaan to Egypt, where they will multiply and become a nation, and this is where we take up the narrative in the book of Shemot.

THE ART OF MIDRASH



Jacob Goeth into Egypt
Gustave Doré (1866)

Analysis

- Which elements of this image are directly mentioned in the text?
- Which elements of this image are not found in the text?
- What midrashic interpretation is the artist giving us?

A QUESTION OF BIBLIODRAMA

TO *BENEI YISRAEL*

- How does it feel to be an Israelite in Egypt during this time?
- What do you remember of the original Israelite family that settled in Egypt?
- In hindsight, was it wise for Yaakov to relocate his family to Egypt?

Kingdom, many Canaanites were captured as prisoners of war. Furthermore, there is a record of an individual Canaanite who came to power during this time and bore high-ranking titles in the Pharaonic administration.

Is it possible to identify the Israelites of the Tanakh with the history of these Canaanites, whose presence is documented in Egyptian sources? With our knowledge of the exodus story, the thought of this overlap is enthralling – and the question is hard to ignore. However, there are no good answers. The relationship between Egypt and Canaan was always that of a large, ruling empire and a remote, underdeveloped province, and Egyptian records would not have had reason to distinguish between the different Semitic groups. Since the Western Semites who lived in Egypt left no written records of their own, and ancient Egyptian and Near Eastern records are all silent, evidence of the Israelites in Egypt is unlikely to be found.

Dr. Racheli Shalomi-Hen

Analysis

- What areas of understanding of human nature and society do we now have that were unavailable to classical Jewish commentators? How can they aid our understanding of the text?
- What can we learn from this passage to help us understand the text?
- What further questions on the text do you have now that you have read this new information?

It was not unusual for Canaanites to move to ancient Egypt – a great political and economic center that was like a magnet, attracting individuals from surrounding peoples and cultures. Evidence from the time of the Middle Kingdom (2055–1650 BCE) shows that prisoners of war, work immigrants, low-ranking servants to the aristocracy, and merchants all migrated from Canaan to Egypt. In addition, there was probably another group of Canaanite skilled craftsmen in the service of the crown. These were builders of seafaring vessels, and caravan leaders who led royal expeditions to the mines of the Eastern Desert.

Water in the Middle East is always an issue. In ancient times the Canaanite shepherds brought herds to the Nile delta in times of famine, because the Nile provided a steady supply of water that supported agriculture and fertile grazing pastures even when rain was scarce. The Egyptian government blocked infiltrators when it was strong, but when the central administration was weak, shepherds from Canaan would bring their herds to graze there.

The Canaanites living in the delta, though they were foreigners in Egypt, gained power in the seventeenth to sixteenth century BCE, the Second Intermediate period. They established a Western Semitic kingship that later expanded to include the Egyptian capital of Memphis. Eventually, they reached Middle Egypt as well. As rulers, they retained Semitic names such as Khamudi and Yakob-Har, but adopted Egyptian royal insignia and titles. The Egyptians called them Khekau-Khasut, meaning the Foreign Rulers; the ancient Greeks called them Hyksos. Their rule lasted for one hundred years: in 1550 BCE, the Egyptians drove the Hyksos out of Egypt to Canaan, united Egypt, and constituted the New Kingdom.

Even after this defeat, Canaanites remained in Egypt and maintained their own cultural identity, and newcomers continued to arrive as work immigrants. In the period of the New

their original "ghettoized" separation? Or had they burst out to live interspersed among the Egyptians? How in fact did they live in Egypt, and in what ways were they distinguishable from others?

These descriptions of the multiplication of the children of Israel underscore the crucial question: are the Israelites at this stage already a people? The answer seems to be no. They are not called a people (*am*) or a nation (*goy*). Nor is there any mention of God or their attachment to Him; unlike the barren matriarchs in Bereshit, the new fruitful generations of Israel apparently did not need or seek divine assistance in order to multiply. To the contrary, Israelite fecundity seems to partake of the natural and hyper-abundant fertility that is characteristically Egyptian – a gift of the land where the overflowing river guarantees plentiful crops.

To be sure, their fecundity might be regarded as a divine gift and a realization of God's promise: we readers of Bereshit remember that God told Yaakov that He would make of him a great nation (*goy gadol*) in Egypt, and we suspect that we are seeing the first delivery on that promise. But there is no evidence that the Israelites themselves see anything remarkable or providential in their flourishing. Instead, their swarming like locusts in a land teeming with life may appear to them as the work of bountiful nature. Indeed, the text, by its silence on their view of the matter, may be said to point to their failure to see God's providence in their success. Their fruitfulness must appear to them as a kind of strength, but it need not be experienced as a God-send. Indeed, prosperity has a way of leading to God-forgetting. When, at the end of the next chapter, God at last enters their story, He does so in response to their misery and their crying out. Unlike the patriarchal generations, it is not childlessness and infertility, which are personal woes, but the communal misery of slavery that eventually turns their attention toward God. But before things go bad, the Israelites swarm happily on their own, flourishing like the Egyptian land that is now their home.

Professor Leon R. Kass

TAKING A LITERARY APPROACH

When the children of Israel come down into Egypt, they come literally as the sons of one man, their father Yaakov (renamed Yisrael), whom they accompany on his journey. They come not alone, but each man with his household. No sooner are we told that "Yosef was in Egypt" than we learn – with telescoped passage of time – that "Yosef died," and so too "all his brethren, and all that generation." This elite generation – the first generation of Israel to become a multitude, the last to know any of the patriarchs, and the last whose names are all known to us and will be memorialized in the nation's eponymous tribes – disappears from the scene.

What they leave behind is again called, but in a new and different sense, "the children of Israel." These descendants are no longer literally the sons of Yaakov; they are now instead the incipient (but not yet) nation of Israel: Israelites. Because they are now a mass, we do not know any of their proper names; their identity is given in terms of their singular common ancestor. Other than their common descent, all we know about the children of Israel pertains to their remarkable fruitfulness, emphasized by the sevenfold description of their growth: fruitful, teemed, multiplied, grew mighty, strongly, with strength, and the land was filled with them.

Three aspects of this description deserve comment. First is the intimation of animal-like activity and profusion. The word translated as "teemed" – *sh-r-tz*, "swarming" – is often used to describe the teeming of fish and insects; it appears first in Bereshit 1 to describe the swarms of the sea ("Let the waters swarm swarms of living creatures"; 1:20). Second is the impression of might and strength – the central term, underscored by the next word, is *vayaatzmu*, "waxed mighty" – yet this impression is somewhat misleading. While there is surely strength in numbers, the "mightiness" of their numbers is not sufficient to resist the troubles that their proliferation will bring them. Finally, there is a certain (I suspect deliberate) ambiguity regarding *which* land was "filled with them": only the land of Goshen (the eastern delta of the Nile), where they had settled, or the entire land of Egypt? Were they still living, albeit crowded, in

8 Then a new king arose over Egypt, who had not known Yosef. And he said to his people,
9
10 "You see that the Israelite people are many and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them in case they increase, and if war breaks out they may join our enemies and
11 fight against us and escape from the land." So they placed slave masters over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor; they built supply cities for Pharaoh: Pitom and Ramesses.
12 But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread; and the Egyptians
13 came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians imposed back-breaking labor on the Israelites,
14 embittering their lives with harsh work in mortar and brick and all field labors; all the work they forced upon them was intended to break them.

UNLOCKING THE TEXT

- Why is there a new king?
- Why is the new king not named?
- Why is it important to know that he had not known Yosef?
- Why is it he who is the first person to describe the Israelites as a nation, and why now?
- Why is he threatened by the Israelites?
- How would his proposed solution counter this threat?
- Did it work? Why not?
- What is the real meaning and implication of "to oppress" (*laanot*)?

FINDING YOURSELF IN THE TEXT

- How does it feel at the beginning of a new school year with a new teacher who doesn't know you at all?
- Has anyone ever tried to oppress you (make your life difficult just for the sake of it)? How did that feel?
- Have you ever defied someone who was out to get you? How did it feel?

Consider using these questions as the basis for your own commentary or creative midrash.

How does reflecting on these firsthand experiences help you better understand the text?

ח וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ־חָדָשׁ עַל־מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַע אֶת־יוֹסֵף: ט וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־עַמּוֹ הִנֵּה עַם
י בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ: הָבָה נִתְחַכְּמָה לוֹ פֶּן־יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי־תִקְרֶאנָה
יא מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסַף גַּם־הוּא עַל־שֹׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם־בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ: וַיָּשִׂימוּ עָלָיו
שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עַנֹּתוֹ בְּסִבְלֹתָם וַיִּבֶן עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפַרְעֹה אֶת־פִּתֹם וְאֶת־
יג רַעַמְסֵס: וְכַאֲשֶׁר יְעַנּוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיָּקֻצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיַּעֲבִדוּ
יד מִצְרַיִם אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ: וַיְמָרְרוּ אֶת־חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה בְּחֹמֶר וּבִלְבֵנִים
וּבְכָל־עֲבֹדָה בַּשָּׂדֶה אֵת כָּל־עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר־עָבְדוּ בָהֶם בְּפָרֶךְ:

THEMES | BECOMING A NATION | EXILE | PEOPLEHOOD

Episode 2: *The New King* – Shemot 1:8–14

SUMMARY

A new king arises in Egypt who does not remember the special relationship between the Israelites and the throne. With the regime change, the geographic dislocation of the Israelites turns into a painful exile marked by oppressive bondage and cruel decrees.

A QUESTION OF BIBLIODRAMA

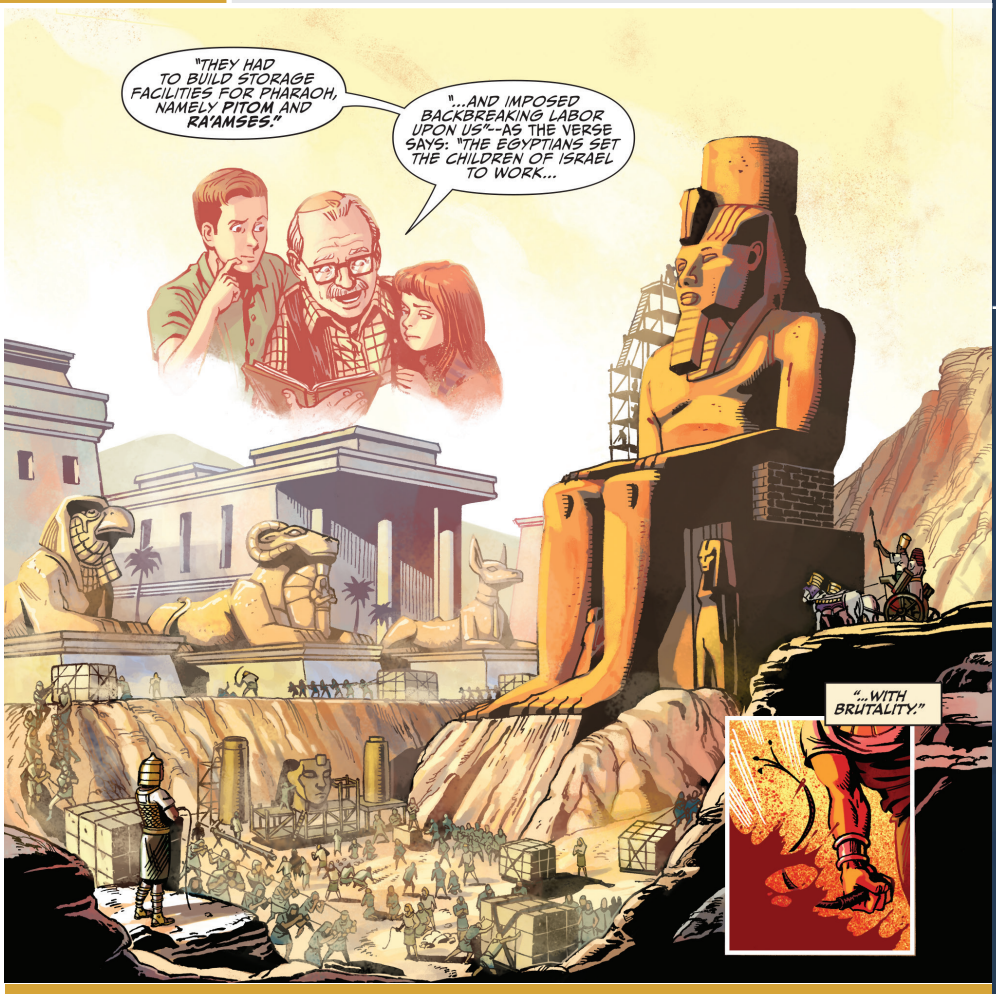
TO THE NEW KING

- Why do you feel so threatened by the Israelites?
- What do you hope to achieve with this plan to deal with them?
- Do you have any feelings of regret or compassion when you see the Israelites suffering because of you?
- How does it feel to see the Israelites continue to increase and spread despite your plan to oppress them?

TO THE ISRAELITES

- How did you feel when you heard there was a new king?
- Did you think that being descendants of Yosef would help you?
- How did it feel when the king announced these special measures against your people?
- Why did you continue to have children? Was it in defiance of the king's orders?

THE ART OF MIDRASH



Backbreaking Labor
Passover Haggadah Graphic Novel (2019)

Analysis

- Which elements of this image are directly mentioned in the text?
- Which elements of this image are not found in the text?
- What midrashic interpretation is the artist giving us?

The location of Per-Atum is less certain. It is not the cult center for Atum in Heliopolis, near what is today the Cairo airport, not far from the eastern delta – as scholars identify this site as the city On mentioned in Bereshit.

Remains of a temple of Atum have been found at Tell el-Rataba in Wadi Tumilat. This site is about nineteen kilometers (twelve miles) south of Pi-Ramesses, and it may be the location of the Pitom that is mentioned here. The storage facilities of these two localities, one a temple and the other a palace, could both be the places mentioned in this verse (1:11).

MAKING BRICKS

According to the biblical text, brick-making was a primary cause of suffering in the lives of the Hebrew slaves. This difficult, labor-intensive process is illustrated clearly in wall paintings found in the tomb of a high-ranking ancient Egyptian official, Rekhmire, a vizier during the time of Thutimes III and in the first part of Amenhotep II's reign (the last third of the fifteenth century BCE).

The paintings in Rekhmire's tomb illustrate the process of brick manufacture by prisoners of war, some of whom are depicted as Nubians – while others are shown as being of Semitic origin, reminiscent of the Hebrew slaves.

In the paintings, two figures are shown drawing up water. Other figures are depicted adding Nile mud and straw. The mud mixture is then passed along to another figure who forms the bricks using molds and lays them out to dry in the sun.

Dr. Racheli Shalomi-Hen

The manufacture of bricks,
Tomb of Rekhmire, fifteenth century BCE

Analysis

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