As I was rereading *Parasha Sh’mot*, I asked myself for the 5th, maybe 56th time why had I signed up for this particular parsha? All the parshiot have some commentary attached but *Sh’mot* is rife with commentary. Every significant incident and even the not so significant have been mulled over by various rabbis and scholars.

From discussions on the numbers and who of Ya’akov’s family came down to Egypt, to the Pharoah who knew not Joseph, to the edicts enslaving the Israelites, to the birth of Moshe and his adoption by the Egyptian princess, to murder, and Moshe’s flight to Midian, to marriage and children, to meeting with G-D at the burning bush and elsewhere, to returning to Egypt to bring the Israelites out from Egypt. Every one of these events has more than one commentary so what could I possibly add.

Taking pointers from Stephen’s dvar the other week, I decided to keep it simple and see where if any, there were gaps in the telling of this parsha’s story and if so, what is being left unsaid. I found several unexplained statements that commentors seemed to have passed over (ie made no comment). But first a brief introduction to Parasha Sh’mot.

Nahum Sarna, in his book, *Exploring Exodus*, comments that "this towering personality, appears upon the scene of history unaccompanied by any supernatural phenomena". Unlike Yitzhak, Ya'akov, and Samson, there is no angel of G-D informing Moshe's mother of the future role of her son as G-D's aide.

Both Sarna, and Thomas Friedman comment on the relationship between the books of *Sh'mot*, and *Bereishit*. Sarna comments that *Sh'mot* can only be understood as a sequel to *Bereishit*. In Bereishit, of the twelve parshiot, ten, beginning with *Lech Lekha* are focused on one extended family, **the Avinus**, and how this family - or certain members of this family, maintained their connection with G-D. The stories of Avraham and his descendants give insight into their character and into their role within the family, and in maintaining their connection to G-D's promise to Avraham.

Friedman, notes that even though we are introduced to Moshe's family, we are not told anything about them. There is no sense of family **as in** the *Bereishit* stories. Other than being his mother and caring for him til he is ready to go to his adopted mother, the Egyptian princess, we learn nothing about her or their relationship. And his father is not even mentioned. Friedman further comments that despite being siblings no words are exchanged between Miriam and Moshe, and even though Aaron and Moshe spend a great deal of time together - any exchanges that take place are prompted either by G-D or are addressing a situation in the community.

There is no personal conversation.

While the Torah tells us that the Egyptian princess who found Moshe, considered him her son, there is also no description of what this meant for his life in the Palace. There is no back story about Moshe's years from toddlerhood to young man, leaving room for a great deal of speculation. I think the film, *Prince of Eygpt* has the most credible back story in terms of his time in Pharaoh's court.

Given that his “mother” is an Egyptian princess, one would think that the Pharaoh was aware of this new child brought into the Palace. Was she told to keep him (Moshe) out of his (the Pharaoh’s) sight? That by not exposing Moshe to Pharaoh, Pharaoh can think if I do not see him, I do not have to acknowledge his existence. Or was Pharaoh unaware of this stranger in his household? Domestic issues were left to the women, while he (Pharaoh) dealt with officials and ambassadors, and other important government officials. The spheres of influence were so discrete that it is just as probable that Moshe was able to live, develop and grow up in the Palace without ever encountering Pharaoh.

Did he play and learn with the other children in the Palace: children of Pharaoh's courtiers, and government officials?

Rabbi Plaut comments that Moshe “was both introspective and sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of others.” What was the source of his sensitivity? Plaut continues: Even though he is raised in the Royal Court, he is aware of his real parents, and their lives as slaves of Pharaoh. Plaut comments that Moshe's ‘double status’ “must have put a severe emotional burden on him”.

We know from archeological finds of school exercises, schoolbooks, as well as references found in literary and documentary texts, that there was an Egyptian educational system that taught the basics. The students learned to recognize and pronounce several hundred hieroglyphics, they were taught arithmetic and writing, as well as general ethics and moral principles.

Kenneth Kitchen, described by *The London Times* as "the very architect of Egyptian chronology" is a British biblical scholar, who specializes in ancient Egyptian history. He posits that during the period of the Ramiside dynasty there is substantial evidence for the presence of foreigners, especially Semites, in the royal schools.

The Ramiside era was the Nineteenth Dynasty of Egypt. The rulers during this period were from one family, and Rameses II, the 3rd king of the 19th dynasty, is considered by many scholars to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Rameses II reined for over 60 years. The father of Rameses II, Seti I, was often away from his Palace on various military campaigns to fortify the Egyptian frontiers. This would most certainly have provided the Egyptian princess with the opportunity to bring Moshe into the Palace without too much questioning.

It would seem likely that when his playmates began going to school, that he joined them. How did the princess envision his life? Raised in the royal court was he to be trained as a priest, a scribe, a bureaucrat?

According to Josephus, as quoted in Plaut’s commentary: Moshe’s wisdom and education were such that they would have honored a much older person. His youthful charm was so great that people were fascinated with him and hated to part from him.

One wonders, what would have become of Moshe IF G-D had not recruited him to be G-D’s mouthpiece? His learning and his Palace experiences would make it very difficult for him to return and live easily with his birth family and given that he was a Hebrew child, how could he be placed in a court position when his kin were all slaves.

Friedman notes that the lack of information about Moshe's life in the Egyptian court is not relevant to the larger story of his role as leader of the Israelites.

The Torah states “when he had grown up, he went out to his kinfolk.” Aviva Gottlieb Zornberg has an interesting take on the meaning of “grown up”. The first time Moshe is described as “grown up” is when he is weaned and brought to Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him and named him.

His emergence from the Palace to see his kinfolk indicates a phase of growth. States Zornberg, “To become *gadol*, great, grown, may also refer to the end of a stage of development, to become capable of confronting new experiences”.

The first thing he sees on going out is a Hebrew slave being beaten by an Egyptian.

Given that Moshe turns this way and that to make sure no one will be a witness to what he is about to do (strike the Egyptian and then hide his body) it is odd that Plaut refers to this as an accident.

Tradition asserts that Moshe was 40 when he left Egypt - although there is a midrash that speculates, he was in fact very young when he left. I think the younger age is more fitting.

By 40 one would think that he had already been out and about seeing how his kinfolk were being treated and therefore the sight of an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave would not be shocking. Likely he would have a career and probably, he would have been married with a family.

As a young person, it is very likely that seeing the Egyptian beating the slave was a shock to him and demanded his quick but impulsive action. In terms of his interactions with the two Hebrews , as a man of 40 who is part of the royal household his word would be honored. He had no reason to fear their gossip. However, as a young man who still needs to prove his worth in Pharaoh’s court, he was easily frightened into running away.

Moshe is now on the run and his route takes him to Midian where he stops by a well. While sitting there, a group of Midianite women came to water their flocks. As they are doing this, shepherds come to the well and chase the women away. Moshe responds and chases the shepherds away and then waters the women’s flocks.

I thought this curious. As part of the royal household, would he have drawn water from a well or dealt with the care of animals? Yet at the well he was able draw sufficient water for the Midianite women and their flocks. As those working inside the Royal Household would be officials, priests, advisors to Pharaoh, these would not be involved in looking after Pharaoh’s flocks and herds. This would be the job of an outside worker for example, someone who looked after Pharaoh’s horses and who would invite the help of a curious boy.

Moshe is given Zipporah to be his wife and he settles in Midian tending the flocks of his father-in-law until a chance encounter - what if he had not turned aside to see the bush?

At the burning bush G-D informs Moshe, “**I have come down** to rescue them (the Israelites) from the Egyptians. The last time G-D “came down” was to confuse the

languages of the builders of the Tower of Babel to prevent their scheming.

Friedman notes that once G-D had confused their language and scattered humankind over the face of the earth G-D removes G-D’s self from dealing with the fate of the species and decides instead to work with an individual.

By “coming down” to rescue the Israelites, G-D does not engage in one action and then leave (as with the Tower of Babylon). The rescue of the Israelites is part of a larger goal that will require G-D’s presence in a way that G-D has not been previously present.

Most of their conversation is G-D laying out what Moshe needs to do and Moshe resisting in as many ways as possible.

G-D lists all the reasons why Moshe can take on this responsibility (of leading the Israelites) and only after all other avenues (including G-D’s help) have been rejected G-D says to Moshe, “Your brother Aaron can do the talking for you.” With this, Moshe accepts G-D’s charge.

His brother Aaron! When did Moshe last see Aaron? I thought it curious that Moshe left Egypt about 60 years previous - and before then he was ensconced in Pharaoh’s household. The Torah introduces him with a sister at the very beginning of the parsha, but a brother - this is new information. And Aaron has even less of a back story than Moshe. What were his thoughts on “hearing” he was to be the “mouthpiece” for the brother he maybe last saw as a toddler G-D implies that Aaron is a known entity in the Israelite community “He, I know, speaks readily, even now he is setting out to meet you and he will be happy to see you.”

Aaron and Moshe go before the Israelite elders and the community to relate their story as G-D instructed. The Torah notes that the people were convinced - the one and only time in their relationship when Moshe was not challenged.

As G-D had foreseen, the request to allow the Israelites to leave Egypt for 3 days to sacrifice to their G-D was rejected. Not only was it rejected but it provided Pharaoh with the opportunity to impose further restrictions on the Israelites.

Pharaoh noted that as it was evident that they were not working hard enough, they would now have to gather their own straw. And it states in Chapter 5, verse 12 - “the people scattered through-out the land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.” -

What are we to think of this statement? On the one hand, if they were able to scatter throughout the land what was to stop the more adventuresome from leaving; if they left their worksite and were travelling far and wide to accumulate straw, how could they be on the worksite?

On the other hand, as they were no longer given straw, perhaps it meant that each individual Israelite (at least the ones making bricks) now had to source the straw, which meant paying for it. Time spent in negotiating prices would be time away from producing bricks.

The parasha ends on the meme that would become common as they journeyed to the Promised Land. On account of you (Moshe) we are being treated unfairly, on account of you we have no water, on account of you we will die in the desert, etc.

G-D tries to placate Moshe with promises of future success. Moshe is convinced, but even with all that takes place, the Israelites are not thoroughly onside accepting G-D’s role in their lives.

As we start a new secular year, may we learn to see and attend to the miracles in our lives.

Shabbat Shalom