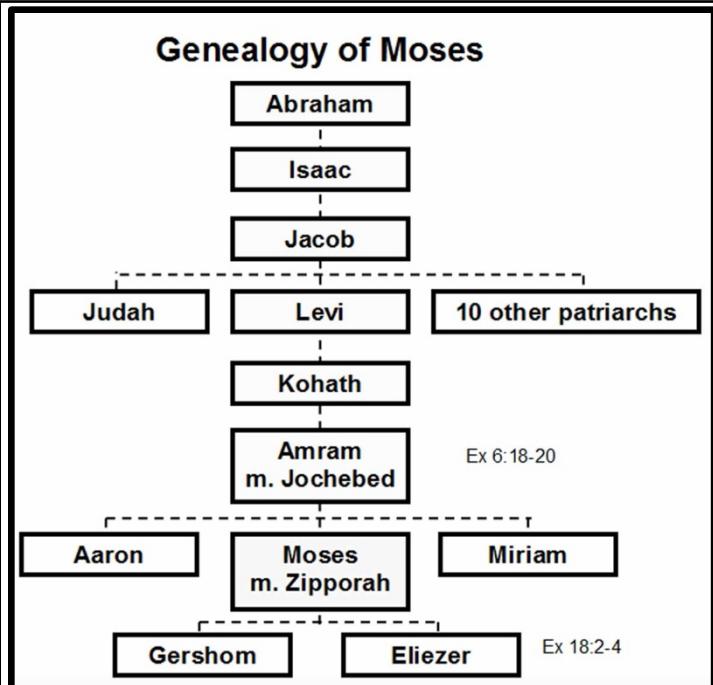


**A recap:** God appeared to Moses at the Burning Bush and Moses returned to Egypt from Midian, reuniting with his brother Aaron. Together they told the elders of the people all the things that God had promised. They performed the miraculous signs before the people, and the people trusted them (Exod. 4:30). They made their first appearance before Pharaoh petitioning him to release the Israelites. Pharaoh responded with even more cruel edicts. When last week's parasha ended, the Israelite foremen complained bitterly to Moses and Aaron that they had only made things worse. In a moment of frustration, Moses turns to God and asks, *Why have you sent me?* God responds: *Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand he will send them free, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land* (6:1). Our parasha begins with a grand promise of the exodus which includes the four terms of redemption, *וְלִקְתָּבָתִי. וְגַאֲלָתִי. וְהַצְאָתִי. וְהַשְׁלָמָתִי*—*I shall extract you; I shall save you; I shall free you; and I shall take you* (6:6-7) which we symbolize at the Passover Seder with the four cups of wine. When Moses repeats this promise to the people, they ignore him because they are so overwhelmed (6:9). God then commands Moses to go before Pharaoh again: *Go in, speak to Pharaoh king of Egypt, that he may send free the Children of Israel from his land* (6:11). Moses pushes back against God complaining that if the people are not listening to him, how will Pharaoh listen to him? (6:12) Again, God charges Moses together with Aaron with the mission of bringing the Children of Israel out of Egypt (6:13). **It is at that point that the story takes a pause, and we get a digression: a genealogy.** It begins with Reuben and his extended family, continues with Simeon, and we expect that this list will go on to include all of the tribes and their descendants, but it only goes as far as Levi and ends with Moses and Aaron (6:14-17). What is going on here? Genealogies are familiar to us from the Bereishit. The most important one is Genesis 10, the Table of Nations which shows how all of the nations of the earth descend from the three sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and



That might be true in this case, but we still have to ask, why is this here? Biblical scholars who have investigated how the Torah is put together, have many



theories about this passage. But when we read the Torah as a seamless whole, without trying to splice it into its various sources, ***what are the messages of this particular genealogy in this particular place in the story?***

**1. Moses is Human not Part of a Larger Mythology.** We take this for granted because we have already had glimpses of Moses' origins. He was born to a (heretofore) anonymous couple in the House of Levi and was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter after she discovered him floating in a basket on the Nile. He responds to the brutality of the Egyptian taskmaster and the fighting Hebrews with great pathos and fervor. He intercedes with the harassed daughters of Yitro with righteous indignation. He marries and fathers children. He is unsure of himself, is reluctant to lead, and yet once committed, he is determined to fulfil the role assigned to him. The very human Moses is the very opposite to the mythological Pharaoh. In Egyptian culture, Pharaoh is not perceived to be human like all other humans. Pharaoh is a god-king. While Egypt also has many genealogies of kings, kings are properly understood to be the progeny of the sun god Ra. *Pharaoh is an Egyptian king with a mythological past and a mythological parentage. Moses is a Hebrew prophet with a human past and a human story.* The role of the Pharaoh is to maintain the cosmic order, *ma'at*. He functions as part of a cosmic drama and as far as the bible is concerned, his lineage is irrelevant. Moses' role is to lead the people out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom. He

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Malamat, (1922-2010). Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Professor of Jewish History, the Biblical Period at the Hebrew University. Class lecture, Introduction to Biblical Israel, 1981.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Alter: *Genealogical lists, as one can see repeatedly in Genesis, serve an important compositional role to mark the*

*borders between different narrative segments. The story of Moses' early history and the prelude to the plagues is now completed, and before the unleashing of the first of the ten fearful divine blows against Egypt, the genealogical list constitutes a long narrative caesura.* Alter, p. 342.

functions as part of a very human, covenantal drama that is rooted in the interconnected relationships of individuals, families, clans and tribes, all of the groupings that make up the people of Israel. And Moses is in the seventh (most important) position from Abraham. (See the chart above).

**2. Moses and Aaron are Brothers and Partners in Leadership.** In the genealogy we learn that Amram Moses' father, marries Yocheved, and they have Aaron and Moses.<sup>3</sup> After a digression we get the following pair of verses

הִוא אָהָרֹן וְמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ה' לְהֶם הַוֹּצִיאוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִאֶרְצָם מִצְרָיָם עַל צְבָאָתֶם. הַמְּדֻבָּרִים אֵלֶּלֶת פְּרֻעָה מֶלֶךְ מִצְרָיָם לְהֹצִיאָה אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיָם הַוֹּא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן. (שְׁמ' ו: כו-כז)

*That is [the] Aaron and Moses to whom God said: Bring the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their forces; [it was] they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt, that Moses and Aaron. (Exod. 6:26-27)*

The whole genealogy builds up to these lines, and the most important that stands out for us here is the way it speaks about the brothers first referring to them: **הִוא אָהָרֹן וְמֹשֶׁה**—**Aaron and Moses** and then referring to them in reverse order: **הַוֹּא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן**—**that Moses and Aaron.** This little textual subtlety underscores the complimentary nature of the relationship.<sup>4</sup> Moses is the leader and Aaron is the spokesman. Moses will often demonstrate anger and frustration; Aaron will emerge as a more conciliatory figure. Aaron is always subordinate to Moses, and yet Aaron will eventually have a co-equal role, when all the apparatus of the priesthood is bestowed upon him. This is another contrast with Pharaoh. Pharaoh is a solitary leader. True he has a circle of advisors, a court of magicians, an apparatus of state, but as a solitary individual, he is the sole object of adoration for the Egyptian populace and the sole target of their scorn. By being a team, Moses and Aaron create a larger zone of presence. By virtue of their unique endowments, they impose a formidable blend of charisma and

awe, are able to play off of one another. Sherlock Holmes would not be as formidable a character without Dr. Watson. Captain Kirk would not be Captain Kirk

without Mr. Spock. Despite a formidable solo career, Paul Simon's greatest music will always be his duets with Art Garfunkel. There is something about the power of a leader-

## REMEMBERING RAN GVILI THE LAST HOSTAGE

<sup>3</sup>Miriam is curiously absent from this list, although she appears in ancient translations.

<sup>4</sup>The technical term for this is chiasmus, which is found often in biblical literature. This A-B-B-A structure has the effect of creating a tight frame around a concept and delivers a good punch. Some popular English examples: **When the going gets tough, the tough get going.** Or, JFK: **Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.** Or

ship pair that captivates us in ways that a single figure does not. When they are in perfect harmony, they function as one and bring out a richer emotional range of responses from their followers than single individuals. They compensate for each other's weaknesses and complement each other's strengths. **3. The Family Subverts the Pharaoh.** At its core, a genealogy is a representation of a specific family and **the idea of the Family in general.** Each constitutive element of a family is related to the other, and when it is presented in textually or graphically, it demonstrates complexity and strength because of the variety of relationships that it represents. The genealogy in Exodus 6, disrupts the flow of the story, but on the other hand, it presents Israel as an extended family. **This not only demythologizes Moses and introduces the leadership team, but it underscores the subversive power that a family can wield against the designs of a tyrannical despot.** To paraphrase Prof. Malamat, **the Torah projects the idea of Family unto the backdrop of Egypt, the world's oppressive superpower in which the sovereign is a god and human beings are slaves, in order to undermine Pharaoh.** Family claims the loyalty of its members and competes for allegiance with the sovereign. Family is a rival power structure. Family functions with its own rules, its own language and its own culture. As such, Family as a cohesive structure will always be a formidable threat to a ruler who wants to exploit it as the only means of generating more laborers. As we will see in Exodus 12, (in parashat Bo) when the people of Israel prepare to leave Egypt, they are instructed to organize themselves into their family units in order to consume the Passover offerings.<sup>5</sup> The family structure is a prerequisite for liberation precisely because **Family is a bulwark against tyranny.** All despots share a common goal: they want to destroy the Family. Similarly, all liberated peoples share a common goal: they want to reconstitute the Family.<sup>6</sup> The genealogy in Exodus 6 does indeed have a literary purpose. Like all biblical genealogies it signals to the audience that a new story is about to begin. But it also reinforces the source of power of the Israelite leadership team: they are family. God girds Moses and Aaron as they confront the most powerful man on earth, but they derive their strength from Family. They spoke for the Family of Israel then and they speak for the Family of Israel now. Shabbat Shalom.

**This parasha sheet is sponsored by Renee Gross and Stuart Feinblatt and family to commemorate the 20th yahrzeit of Suzanne Gross z"l and the first yahrzeit of Stephan Gross, z"l.**

## HONORING THE SLAIN PROTESTORS OF IRAN

Johnson & Johnson's: **I am stuck on Band-Aids, 'cause Band-Aid's stuck on me.**

<sup>5</sup>**וְיִקְחُו לְהֵם אִישׁ שָׂה לְבֵית אֶבֶת שָׂה לְבֵית - they are to take them, each-man, a lamb, according to their Fathers' House, a lamb per household.**

<sup>6</sup> The best illustration of this in recent Jewish history is the extraordinary number of marriages that took place in the DP camps after the war and the subsequent spike in the number of births.

