



1. Shemot 1:15-22

2. The usual read (as per Sotah 11b)

And the Egyptian king told the Hebrew midwives, one named Shifrah/Yocheved and the second named Puah/Miriam. And he said, "When you birth the Hebrew women, and you see on the birthing table, if it's a son then kill him, and if it's a daughter then she shall live."

And the midwives revered Hashem and they did not follow the Egyptian king's instructions, and they kept the boys alive.

And the Egyptian king called the midwives, and he said to them, "Why have you done this, and you have kept the boys alive!"

And the midwives told Pharaoh, "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are strong. Before the midwife comes to them, they give birth."

And Hashem benefited the midwives, and the nation became many, and they were very mighty. And it was, because the midwives revered Hashem, and He made families of kohanim/leviyim/kings for them.

And Pharaoh commanded his entire nation, saying, "Every son who is born, throw him into the river, and keep every daughter alive."

3. Questions regarding this version of the story

- 1) Did Pharaoh really expect two women to manage all of the births in this growing nation?
- 2) What is the "benefit" Hashem gave them, before Hashem gave them "families"? Or are those the same?
- 3) What did Pharaoh do to the midwives at the end?
- 4) Is it really an act of heroic reverence for Hashem to refuse to kill babies?

Answering our questions

4. First: There is an army of rebellious midwives

- Seforno – There are two in the capital city
- Ibn Ezra, Netziv – These two are the ones in charge
- Malbim – There are two types, one assisted the birth and the other handled things once the baby emerged

5. Second: "And Gd benefited the midwives, and the Jews became many and mighty"

- Separate from Jewish growth
 - Benefit
 - Abarbanel – Hashem made them good
 - Ohr haChaim – Hashem gave them wealth, which they used to give food to the babies
 - Protection
 - HaKtav v'haKabbalah, Netziv – Hashem made Pharaoh believe them
 - Malbim – Hashem protected them from Pharaoh
- The benefit was the Jewish growth
 - Benefit
 - Abarbanel – So that they paid the midwives well
 - Ohr haChaim, Torat Moshe – Hashem gave them mitzvah opportunities
 - Protection
 - Rosh, R Chaim Paltiel and others – An alibi for the midwives before Pharaoh
 - Bechor Shor – So that the Jews didn't suspect them of wrongdoing

6. Third: Pharaoh did not give up, and the midwives may have been in danger
 - Hashem made the houses, protecting them from Pharaoh - Rav Hai Gaon in Ibn Ezra – Hid them
 - Pharaoh made the houses, as an aggressive measure
 - To thwart the midwives – Rashbam, R' Chaim Paltiel
 - To make the midwives more successful
 - R' Chaim Paltiel – To house them among the Jews so they could get to the women in time
 - Abarbanel, Malbim – To house the pregnant women, so that his men could monitor the birth
7. Fourth: The midwives are Gd-fearing Egyptians
 - In the popular read, these are indeed Jewish women
 - But many argue that these are actually Egyptians
 - Why would Jews refusing to kill Jewish babies be heroic? (Kli Yakar)
 - Why would Pharaoh trust them to do it? (Abarbanel)

Putting all of this together, we have a more complicated narrative

And the Egyptian king told the assembled/representative [Egyptian] midwives of the Hebrews, one named Shifrah and the second named Puah. And he said, "When you birth the Hebrew women, and you see on the birthing table, if it's a son then kill him, and if it's a daughter then she shall live."

And the midwives revered Hashem and they did not follow the Egyptian king's instructions, and they kept the boys alive.

And the Egyptian king called the midwives, and he said to them, "Why have you done this, and you have kept the boys alive!"

And the midwives told Pharaoh, "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are strong. Before the midwives come to them, they give birth."

And Hashem benefited/protected the midwives, making the nation many and very mighty. And it was, because the midwives revered Hashem, Pharaoh made housing for the midwives or pregnant women.

And Pharaoh commanded his entire nation, saying, "Every son who is born, throw him into the river, and keep every daughter alive."