

Torah Portion for Sh'mot

Shabbat beginning January 13, 2023

Sh'mot (Names) begins the second book of the Torah naming the twelve sons of Jacob and proceeds to tell the story of six brave women who saved the Hebrew people. Shiprah and Puah were midwives who refused Pharaoh's order to kill all Hebrew male babies. Then, Moses' mother, aunt, and stepmother (Pharaoh's daughter) protected Moses from Pharaoh's order to throw Hebrew males into the Nile. Moses grew up and killed an Egyptian, who was beating a Hebrew. He escaped to Midian and married Zipporah, the high priest Jethro's daughter. She circumcised her firstborn to protect him from God's wrath. When instructed by God through a bush on fire without being consumed, Moses returned to Egypt with his brother Aaron to confront Pharaoh using new God-provided magic.

The Torah gives Moses magical powers to protect the Jews, but women do as much with little power but their wits and mercy. The portion stimulates us to ask, "What does it mean to me?" A little exploration leads us to reflect on the stories' meanings in modern Jewish life. Committed Jews find in them moral courage in the face of power. Some even use them to inspire us to right enduring societal wrongs.