

I Am The Witness

Book One - Exodus

by

Allen Feiglin

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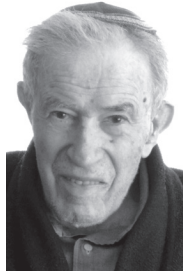
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This book is dedicated in Memory of
my dear Father In-Law

Emmanuel Gelb זצ"ל

who merited to see Grand Children and Great
Grand Children going in the way of Hashem,
before his Petirah.



*Generations come and generations go,
In our one way universe of temporal flow.
Each infinite Soul, short sojourn corporeal,
Furnaced, tempered, forging character of steel.*

*Some arrogantly think this an absolute end,
But Body and Spirit! Our God given blend.
The Physical ceases, the Soul does ascend,
Back to God, our King, but lovingly, our Friend.*

Allen Feiglin, Baltimore 5779

I AM THE WITNESS

EXODUS

Prologue -

Jerusalem, 2020, 50 meters under the Western Wall.

Professor Zev Aldehoff was desperately trying to contain his excitement. A lifetime of painstaking research and back-breaking labor in excavation had turned his once jet black hair into an untidy mane of white and made his already weathered face into a mosaic of wrinkles. The search for King Solomon's hidden chamber, the final resting place of the Ark of the Covenant and the Holiest physical symbols of Judaism, was over!

Kings of Israel and commoners, emperors of conquering hordes, priests, knights and Saracens, had excavated and demolished, dug and burrowed under Jerusalem for two and a half millennium in search of the legendary chamber and its priceless contents. Thousands had died in this quest, skilled artisans and freemen and slaves under the overseers' lash. Time after time the pits and tunnels were chewed from the bedrock only to be refilled in frustration by foreign despots or in sad resignation by the Hebrew Monarchs, realizing that it was not their destiny to welcome the era of the Messiah.

The sacred writings told them that if the Ark were removed, it would never come back. Just as the Ark took up no measurable space in the Holy of Holies, it existed in another space, so too now it would not be found again until God willed it to appear.

Incredible! Aldehoff held the manuscript in his hands. The Witness Document.

Perfectly preserved, the parchment had been contained in a leather holder, oiled and tarred on the outside and lined with lead sheeting inside. Someone in antiquity had taken great care to ensure the survival of this text. Under close examination it displayed an uncanny suppleness for a document over 3400 years in age. Unlike the desiccated and crumbling Dead Sea Scrolls, this was as flexible and readable as the day a quill first inked its surface.

“Tania, we must open this scroll now!” The professor was almost furtive in his urgency to unroll the parchment. “We can’t wait for procedure. If this goes to Antiquities they may delay and suppress it for years like they did with the Dead Sea Scrolls.”

“It’s not right, Daddy.” Tania was clearly distressed. “Everything you ever taught me since I was a child, was ‘go by the rules’.”

Aldehoff looked at his archaeologist daughter, Dr. Tania Aldehoff, with burning desperation, wildly shaking his head. His hands flapped like a bird’s wings as he projected his intensity.

“Today there are no rules! This is beyond any rules of archaeology. Tania! This is out of this world. It must not fall into the wrong hands. You of all people know that we didn’t find this parchment.” He lost himself in the passion and zeal of emotion and started to reach out to grab her shoulders to shake her into agreement, but just as suddenly, checked himself, backing away. “It found us!”

He held her questioning gaze in a frozen tableau for long seconds, then suddenly shook his head and looked away, glancing at the doorway to the chamber where anyone could enter without warning and misinterpret what they saw.

“Oh, I’m so sorry!” He brought himself under control once again, gathering up and presenting the scroll to his daughter as she stood, the expression on her usually laughing, smiling face fixed in a rictus of indecision and shock. He offered it to her imploringly, pleading. After a few moments she looked from the scroll to Aldehoff’s blue eyes and once again locked his gaze. They stood for timeless seconds until Tania slowly nodded her head and broke into a huge, relaxing smile.

“Let’s do it Pops. You’re right!”

The Professor’s shoulders slumped in relief, but his hands were steady in spite of the tension and emotion of the moment. With Tania holding down one edge and watching to prevent damage, he carefully unrolled the scroll, millimeter by millimeter, across

the workbench in the underground chamber.

The first forty or so centimeters exposed were blank parchment with grooved guide lines scored into the surface very much like a Torah scroll. This was the end of the scroll, not the beginning. Then the edge of the last column of writing revealed itself.

Tania drew in a breath. “Daddy, this can’t be!” They both stood shocked, stunned.

“That’s modern Hebrew text,” he muttered in an undertone. “This has to be a hoax.”

They unrolled the scroll to reveal the full column which was only half filled. Aldehoff shut his eyes and swayed with bitter emotion. Head thrown back and silently wailing, tears of frustration and disappointment trickled down his cheeks. He had dragged his big black yarmulke over his eyes as he beat his chest in futility and sorrow. But Tania was still staring at the parchment, eyes wide in amazement, speechless, almost choking with breathless excitement.

“Dad... Daddy! Ll... Look, look!” She was tugging the sleeve of his shirt, almost dragging him back to the work bench. He opened his eyes and gradually slid the Yarmulke back on his white shock of hair as he looked down. As they watched, new letters appeared on the parchment, like invisible ink becoming revealed. The two looked up at each other wide eyed, slowly nodding agreement that they were not having an hallucination.

“I’m not going meshuggah Tania? Please tell me you are seeing the same as me.”

“I am seeing Daddy. I see.”

The Professor looked to a paragraph break near the top of the visible column and began to read.

“I am the first and the last Witness in this chain of many. For those who see this now, in your own time, this revelation heralds the Time of the Arrival of the Mashiach, the Final Redemption.” The professor looked up with an indrawn breath of fear.

“You see Tania!” He whispered, “I was right! It is time!” He continued reading.

“I will tell you where to find the concealed chamber of the hidden Ark of the Covenant and the Tablets of the Law. You will restore to the light of day the utensils of the Temple and the Priestly vestments, the Ark and the Box of the Philistines. The flask of Manna. And yet before you do this you must learn how to identify those who are qualified to be in the presence of God and how they must be made Pure with the ashes of the Red Heifer. Never again will the station of High Priest be a purchasable commodity. Only those qualified in lineage, learning and humble of soul will serve.

In the anteroom of the concealed chamber you will find the writings which instruct you how to identify each Messiah and the signs of their arrival. The Messiah of the House of Yosef and then the Messiah of the House of David. An ordinary man must touch nothing in the chamber. All the artifacts are covered to prevent your soul from departing your body. Only Levites and Kohanim, and these must be of pure heart, will be able to touch these things and still live.

They will find themselves.”

Aldehoff looked at his daughter in puzzlement. “They will find themselves...” He repeated. “What does that mean?”

Tania pursed her lips and scrunched up her face in thought. “I think that if you put the last line of that paragraph,” she pointed to the line. ‘Only those qualified in lineage, learning and humble of soul will serve.’ Together with this sentence it implies that only those who are very humble and do not seek such position or responsibility, will be capable of performing the duties required. Those who run to assume the position will not survive and those who are forced into accepting the challenge of their own choice will become our priests, teachers and leaders.”

“Just like the good old days, eh?”

“Just like the time of Moshe Rabbeinu Daddy. And like Esther

and Mordechai. Oh please keep reading...”

Aldehoff looked down and continued.

“I will tell you how to identify the Mashiach and the signs of his arrival.

This is how to locate the secret chamber where the scrolls of Instruction and Revelation are hidden...”

Suddenly, the letters stopped appearing on the parchment. They looked at each other again, now with horror contorting their features.

“What happened? Daddy?”

They stood gaping at the last words.

“Maybe we should start from the beginning of the scroll Tania.”

* * *

Half a world away, Ari, in Melbourne Australia, decided to call it a day for his new novel and get some sleep.

He had just typed the line:

“This is how to locate the secret chamber where the scrolls of Instruction and Revelation are hidden...”

CHAPTER 1

Israel, newly conquered territory - around 1490 BCE

I am the Witness. I write and add this as a prologue to this scroll of Witness, started by my Father, Ehud, of blessed memory, to explain the beginning as I approach the end of my time. I have combined and transcribed my Father's works and my own papyrus, into this parchment scroll, as the papyrus seems to be deteriorating and might not stand the ravages of time. I will give this scroll over to my own son, Yaakov, for him to continue, when I have finish reviewing here.

The generations to come will see the truth. I have seen the beginning and have been shown the end. There are many links in the chain but all are one. I have dreamt of great mechanicals with silver skins. Some travel by land on ribbons of silver and others invade the serenity of the heavens, belching smoke and flame and thundering noise. I have seen death and destruction visited upon defenseless people, men women and children, which make these vile and bloody antics of Pharaoh look almost kindly. I have seen stone faced men in strange clothing, wearing pot-like, grey metal helmets, some emblazoned with the fork of lightning, some marked with a bent armed cross. They wrest babies and tiny children by the ankle from mothers' arms and dash their brains out against gore covered walls, throwing the tiny corpses to savage dogs.

I see at the same time, orientals in uniforms, carrying long weapons tipped by knives. They rush headlong into a hail of missiles coming from other uniformed men. These men seem to have no fear or value for their own lives. In the distance I see flying machines plunging into gigantic ships, flames and black smoke billowing from the impact.

Suddenly, I see a blinding flash and a huge glowing cloud rising into the heavens. It is shaped like a mushroom. What is all this?

Pharaoh has babies mortared into the walls my brethren build. Abandoned by the river to drown. Even Egyptian babies. He

orders it only when the work quota is not met or when he feels threatened. There is no excuse for these excesses. They are not part of the ancient institution of slavery that makes Egypt great. I confuse myself and you. Pharaoh persecuted us before these others. Maybe they did learn their evil skills from him. How often does the student surpass the teacher.

I have seen visions of strange looking men of whom I have no knowledge or recognition, but against whom I - we - will ultimately bear witness. They spill rivers of innocent blood across the ages. Some have the distinctive eyes of the oriental trader who we see in the marketplace. Some with skin pale as fresh milk, some black as charcoal. Some who look like kindly old men. One with a little square mustache stands out as evil incarnate, and another with a big bushy, grandfatherly mustache excels in ordering death. He has kind eyes. He kills 20 million of his own.

Curiously, I see young men and women, little more than children, dark of complexion - very much like my own family. They all have one thing in common. A strange corset-like belt with tubular objects embedded in it and colored strings coming out into a small box. One moment I see these youth and then they are gone in an explosive flash of light, splattered, smeared and plastered all over the place, taking to oblivion others standing near by. Such a pointless waste of life.

There is the peaceful view of a great city, built on an island in the confluence of a river system. The skyline is remarkable for the two huge towers that reach to the heavens. Then I see a flying machine drive itself straight into one of the towers in a fiery blast, leaving flames and smoke pouring from the impact zone. Soon I see a second machine crash just as violently into the second tower. In the accelerated time view, I watch as people jump from these burning towers to certain death, and suddenly one tower collapses in clouds of smoke and dust. Papers from inside the falling building are like autumn leaves in the wind. Then the second tower implodes. What is happening?

Sometimes, when I am sated with study, drowsy and drifting into sleep, I see a glowing square. Upon its face are symbols of an unfamiliar writing. In the beginning I would awaken, sorely puzzled, but now I know this vision is part of my allotted task, and one day I will understand. Even in my ignorance of meaning, my dream fingers touch upon small, squarish stones that are patterned in a staggered horizontal mosaic, akin to the side of the pyramid. Each stone has a symbol inscribed upon its surface. My dream fingers fly from one stone to the other and at each touch of the stone the same symbol appears in the moonlight glowing window. I see and recognize the shape of the fruit of an apple tree with a bite taken from it. It is in the corner of the window. It is a symbol of knowledge.

My consciousness embraces more than three millennium, past and future, yet as I recount this witnessing, I am one hundred and thirty two years old of body and I feel that my mortal end draws near. I have no fear of leaving this world of preparation, this Holy Land of Israel, as I have been shown a better place. It is time to seal these words of testimony for my successor, my son Yaakov, so I must carefully review my writings one final time. I am Yosef ben Ehud. Read with me. Who knows when in the distant future that you could be the Witness.

Egypt - around 1447 BCE

I am Yosef, son of Ehud of the tribe of Levi. My mother is Ellah. I have two older sisters and a younger brother. I am twelve years old, of slim build and dark complexion which I have inherited from my mother. We usually live in the region of Goshen in northern Egypt called S'de Sarah, however my Father is designated as a minister for the Hebrew slaves, and quite often we dwell near Pharaoh's capital and palace, not too far from the huge construction works.

We live in violent times. It is one hundred and twenty nine years since Yosef the Righteous passed on. Our brethren, the other eleven family tribes of the sons of Jacob have been forced

into abject slavery, unknown in its severity in the annals of Egyptian, even of human, history. My own tribe of Levi has been spared this terror and indignity as we are designated as priests and teachers of our people rather than warriors. The Egyptians do not perceive us as a threat to their security as they believe we have failed to save the other tribes by military intervention.

We are no longer warriors. Only our teachings propagate the traditions of our forefather Abraham. It is all we can do to prevent the rampant assimilation of the younger generation who wish to avoid becoming the lowest of the slaves, the bottom of the dung heap. Many families encourage this Egyptianization in the desperate need to protect their young from further persecution and slavery - even annihilation - by neglecting the rites of circumcision. Sadly now, it is becoming difficult to tell the difference between an Egyptian or Hebrew child. Nothing changes in the future. In my visions I see our descendants in a place called Berlin. They look and act just like the population about them, a people who's lineage traces from our greatest enemy, our cousin Eisav, the brother of Jacob.

My tribe does not engage in commerce and confines itself to S'de Sarah, the fields of our mother Sarah, given to her in perpetuity by Pharaoh Avimelech himself. There remains today, surely to the utter gall of our present Pharaoh, a message stone bearing the record of this land grant. Had the stone not been overlooked and left standing, the legality of the land grant could well have been lost or simply denied. This very Egyptian Pharaoh tends to rewrite history when his armies lose a battle, or in the case of the glorious deeds of Yosef the Righteous, who saved Egypt from starvation. Yosef's name has been obliterated from all public places and is not allowed to be mentioned anywhere. This is because he was of the children of Israel and ruled during the time of the hated Hyksos usurpers to the throne. Even in this obliteration Pharaoh will ultimately fail. Yosef's name will be uncovered by scholars, from the preservation of being plastered over in three thousand four hundred years, and his glory restored.

Yet in reality I understand why my tribe of Levi has not been

enslaved. It is quite simple. We have kept the Covenant of Abraham our Father which God made with him. A part of that agreement was that all males be circumcised of the foreskin at the age of eight days old. The other tribes stopped this practice after Yosef the Righteous died and the children immediately associated and assimilated with Egyptians, taking on their sports, pleasures, customs and gods. It is said that removal of the foreskin reduces the pleasures of the flesh, however I see that total faith and dependence on our God is our only protection. We are commanded to remove this extraneous flesh to “finish” and perfect that which God has created. It takes us beyond the natural course of existence and we do it on the eighth day. God’s day. This is the truth which the children of our brothers no longer want to see.

I have the run of the region until I come of age and even as a twelve year old, I sense that there is change in the air. I even have an Egyptian boy who is my friend.

However now I must tell you about my cousin who is considerably older than I whose name is Yekutiel the son of Amram and Yochebed. He was birthed some three years after Pharaoh’s magicians foretold that the redeemer of the Children of Israel would be born and that he, the redeemer, would perish due to water. As always, without thought towards the consequences of his actions, Pharaoh reacted most violently and bloodily, immediately ordering that all new born males, including Egyptians, be killed by drowning in the Nile river, to ensure the outcome of the water prophecy. Some call Yekutiel by the name Moshe, which means “drawn from the water” but that is another story I will tell you later. The fish of the Nile could not be caught with even the choicest bait, they were so sated by the flesh of Israelite and Egyptian baby sons.

My dear Papa answered me when I asked him why Pharaoh had chosen this complex way of solving his problem - after all, killing a newborn child could be far quicker with a sword or a dagger. He explained to me that even Pharaoh could not overtly murder

his own citizens. There would be revolt throughout the land. He had to find a good reason for performing this terrible act. Pharaoh maintained a comprehensive library, a directory of the gods of other nations and their peculiarities, and of course their attitude towards Egypt in particular, be it benevolent or malevolent.

“Yosef,” my Papa said to me that day, “when our God, the one God, visits a punishment upon mankind and promises never to repeat that punishment again, He can be believed! Pharaoh, our good and distant cousin, may he be even more distant, is quite aware of the great flood of hot waters that decimated the world and mankind over a thousand years ago. He knows that we all stem from the same survivors, Noah and his sons and their wives. So Pharaoh, our dearest cousin, may we kill him with kindness, knows the tradition very well. There will never again be punishment of all humanity by catastrophic flood.

Even so, he is aware that our one God punishes one action with like action, so he is wagering that by killing the male babies, and thus the redeemer, with water as dictated by the magician’s words, he and his people cannot be punished by water.”

“But Papa!” I blurted, “You have taught me the tradition of Shem and Ever, the son and great-grandson of Noah. I understand that the sign of the rainbow is God’s indication that he has spared humanity from destruction in totality once again, in spite of all our evil doings, yet this tradition does not apply to individuals and groups, for does not the Nile flood over its banks every year, and do we not see masses of people, whole villages, being drowned time after time?”

“You are correct my son. Pharaoh, may his divine bowels never open, sits on a throne of vapor behind ramparts constructed from the bones of idols. He lives a lie in his blindness and the Egyptian nation will ultimately pay the price. He believes that he is a god and tends to overlook the small discrepancies you have mentioned. I recall that he also believes killing with a blade

will fail, because our forefather Isaac was offered on Mount Moriah and the blade was turned away by an angel. Therefore, it is convenient for him to reason that a human host sent with blades to punish Egypt is more likely than a God delivered flood, so he is rationalizing that the flood idea is safer. Pharaoh, may his ancestors soon give welcome, is so obsessed about the possibility of the redeemer arising and taking away his economic powerhouse, that he is killing Egyptian male children as well! But in any case, before this particular new atrocity, the Egyptians were already panicking and trying to reduce the Israelite birth rate to control our rapidly expanding numbers. This was just a further excuse to intensify the destruction and murder.”

“Why does Pharaoh hate us so much Papa?”

“Well it goes way back to the wars being fought by Egypt over one hundred years ago. The root cause, in fact, was the bitter enmity between our father Jacob and his brother Eisav. The children and grandchildren of Eisav established strong kingdoms in the North, subduing by the sword and ruling cities in Mount Seir region. These descendants of Eisav fixated on the idea that they had to avenge what they considered the theft of the birthright blessings by Jacob and the killing of Eisav at the funeral of Jacob in Hebron. The grandson of Jacob, the deaf Chushim who could not tolerate Eisav’s delaying and desecration of the funeral for his own selfish reasons, cut off Eisav’s head.

These, your cousins in fact, raised a huge army and marched south to “punish” the family of Jacob in Egypt. This was before the present slavery commenced, but soon after the passing of Yosef, the Viceroy of eighty years. The Egyptian government rightly saw this as an attack on their sovereign territory rather than a specific attack on the Israelites. There were one hundred and fifty grandchildren of Jacob, mighty warriors all, who wanted to go out and meet this army and fight it, but the Egyptians were more concerned that the attackers and the Israelites were blood cousins. They concluded that the two sides might put aside their differences temporarily and join forces to conquer the Egyptian

army and oust the Pharaoh. Therefore the Israelite warriors were actually forbidden to take part in the ensuing battle. They were not even allowed to go to the battle field.”

“So what did they do Papa? I cannot imagine them remaining still.”

“What did they do? Heh! What did my grandfather do? He was one of them! The Egyptian army did not last long and was totally routed. This is what happened. Sit here and listen carefully.

The Egyptian soldiers were streaming back to the city, utterly demoralized, bloodied and defeated. They left their heavy military sandals scattered all over the desert so they could run faster. My grandfather and his cousins heard their screams for help, prayed to our God for His protection, took up their weapons and attacked the army of the Kittim and Edomites, who were commanded by Tzezo, the grandson of Eisav.

Our leader was the grandson of Yehudah and his strategist was the very old Chushim who had killed Eisav. They instructed everyone to pray to God along with the one hundred and fifty warriors that they would be successful and return home safely. The fighters stopped praying and made ready for the battle, Chushim might have been deaf, but he was a clever strategist from the tribe of Dan. He assembled all the women and showed them how to make life-size papyrus soldiers cut to shape and stiffened with reeds. They were roughly painted to look like uniforms. He then tied them together in chains of ten and strung the rows of tens across two light, but strong bamboo rods. The front row of each group had long, split bamboo poles with sharpened tips, attached to each soldier shape. They quickly made seventy four blocks of one hundred phantom soldiers.

Our real soldiers were mounted on war camels and arrayed in two lines of seventy five, with the phantom soldiers strung between the groups of two. Tzezo’s army was going to see a host of fresh soldiers marching down on them with the sun low in the sky and behind our troops. They would see an orderly army of thousands

marching on them, silent and unafraid. It would not work unless everyone continued to pray for God's assistance. Not one person failed to do their part.

They marched out with the phantom army ranks just as the last Egyptians ran past in retreat. The army of Tzefo was in disarray, randomly chasing groups of Egyptians. They were hot and tired after a day of victory and slaughter. Their front ranks stopped and backed up when they saw this fresh Egyptian army approaching without slowing down. The riders, the real soldiers, were calling out commands to the papyrus soldiers, telling them prepare to halt for the charge.

They placed the free standing blocks of papyrus soldiers on the ground, looking like a well disciplined array of fighting men, drew their bows and released, then bared their swords and charged at Tzefo's army as a wall one hundred and fifty riders across, yelling and screaming for the paper soldiers behind them to follow and kill the enemy. God blinded the enemy with the sun bright and low. They broke in fear and ran, pursued by our one hundred and fifty real soldiers.

They crashed into the fleeing enemy, chopping and stabbing into what had been the front ranks. The enemy dropped their weapons and ran, but on foot they were no match for our mounted soldiers. The flying wedge of blades and arrows killed over four thousand of Tzefo's troops, pursuing them far beyond the borders of Egypt. The land was littered with enemy dead as far as the eye could see.

They returned back to the Egypt and the city, bearing the captured banners of Tzefo's finest legions. One hundred and fifty had routed twenty five thousand."

"So after that the Egyptians must have really loved our people for saving them." I eagerly interjected.

My Papa once again raised a wry eye at me, his bushy eyebrows scrunching together the way I love to see. "So one would think under normal circumstances, but not in this case. In fact the Egyptians, instead of rallying and supporting us, totally deserted

the Israelite warriors and left grandfather and his cousins to fight alone. The “old family” Egyptian military leaders seized this moment of unrest and unseated the Hyksos usurper whose armies were decimated. The original, authentic Egyptians arose, their isolated legions called back from the exile of distant postings, and they placed a pure bred Egyptian back on the throne. His name was Pepi the First, from the far south and he truly did not know Yosef the Righteous. However I’ve digressed. Let’s get back to the battle.

Under God’s protection, in response to the community prayer effort, none of the Israelites was hurt. They all returned to Goshen after the battle, where they celebrated and further gave their utmost thanks to the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, for their salvation. However, they did not realize how much this amazing victory had deeply disturbed the new Egyptian monarch. Here was an obvious and mighty threat living right in their midst. This small group of 150 warriors was able to defeat thousands of seasoned troops. They had to be dealt with!”

“Ahh! Now I begin to understand Papa. So how did the Egyptians disarm our warriors and then enslave us? Were you yourself tricked or blinded in some way that you could not see what was happening?”

“My son, it is inherently the nature of our people to trust others and believe in the good of mankind. Yosef had saved the Egyptian nation and been a popular and benevolent ruler for eighty years. We erroneously believed that the Egyptian people were our friends, or more to the point, not our enemies. Pepi the First did not live long and his son, Pepi II took the throne at the tender age of six years old, so Royal advisors were appointed as regents to the child Pharaoh’s court. These were resurgent scum, drawn from the pre Hyksos Dynasty wells of the most evil and depraved old school of Egyptian immorality. When you have advisors such as Balaam Ben Beor and Amalek poisoning this infant Pharaoh’s receptive mind it is not difficult to imagine what comes next. Tzefo, a grandson of Eisav, had miserably failed to

do by military attack what Balaam achieved with mere words. Balaam, with his cronies, easily convinced the boy Pharaoh that we were a military threat. They emphasized our different way of life, our reluctance to integrate socially and our total ban on marriage with native Egyptians.

Finally to spread goose fat on the matzah, they pointed out our blood relationship with Egypt's northern enemies whom we had just defeated in battle. We are condemned from within and without. Everyone is our enemy.

As he matured in years, on one hand Pharaoh wanted to keep us as an important part of the economic engine of the country, but on the other hand he feared us. So this Egyptian ruler had his council devise a simple trick to disarm our warriors in one fell swoop. It all hinged upon timing, the weather and the abuse of our friendship and trust."

Papa looked closely at me to see if I was still listening. My eyes were wide and round. I was determined that he was going to finish this story no matter what.

"Our men worked in the fields daily, preparing the crops and harvesting. Pharaoh's secret police had recruited and trained young people to work along side our men, becoming friendly with them and gaining their trust. These "friends" were brought into our homes from time to time, so the women folk knew them.

On one very warm day during the harvest, when our men had taken off their outer robes due to the heat, a signal was sent to the young Egyptians. They quietly left the fields and surreptitiously gathered up the discarded robes, hurrying to the dwelling place of the Israelite "friends." At the house, the Egyptian showed the wife her husband's robe as proof that he had sent this messenger, and they asked that all the weapons be given over to be taken to the husband straight away, as there was warning of attack from the North once again.

The women complied, not having any reason to suspect duplicity. They gave over our swords, bows and armor. We were

instantly disarmed and we didn't even know it until returning home later that evening."

By now my mouth was agape. "What did grandfather do?"

My Papa shook his head, almost as if in disgust of himself. "We didn't believe or understand what was going on. Here we are, living in peace with our neighbors for over a hundred years. At first, individually, we all thought that it was an organized theft for some material motive. Even when we got together and shared the information, I don't recall anyone actually suggesting that the government might have been behind it. Why would we even consider such a bizarre possibility? We thought maybe a remnant of the Hyksos were starting an insurgency, but why would they target us? Someone actually made a joke at the meeting that maybe Tzefo was behind it, but we could beat him with our bare hands. How unfortunately sad and true this joke turned out to be."

We sat in silence for a short time, Papa gazing into the fire, the warm light flickering away the shadows and highlighting the glint of tears in the corner of his eyes. I felt so inadequate but wanted to say something, to give my Papa strength and hope. I stood up in front of him and took his big hand in my own, choosing my words carefully, the future man shining out of the little boy.

"Papa, we will be free again one day soon. There must be a reason for all this. Did not God say to Abraham our father that we would be slaves in a strange land for four hundred years? And did not Abraham remain silent at this decree? You yourself told me this tradition. Surely we must fulfill the word of God?"

He looked up at me, tears now trickling down his seamed cheeks. He reached out his free hand and cupped my chin. "Yes, Yosef, we must fulfill the word of God. But that does not mean I cannot weep for the individuals, the children, the friends who have had their lives extinguished in blood, fire, filth and excrement.

Our people, your children, will forever be more than tolerant of others because of that we are suffering in this cauldron of evil. We are being pounded and melted into something that will

last forever. This viciousness was not what God intended for us. Of their own free will, Pharaoh and the Egyptians have taken their task to heart, far beyond the test that God intended for us. I weep for the sparks that fly from the anvil and die in a wisp of smoke. I cry for each little chip of metal that the file grinds from our nation. After this Egyptian sojourn whatever that is left of us will be as the finest of tempered blades which can defend against injustice, violence and destruction or be honed to an edge to harvest God's fine crop. We need not just to know, but to experience what we should never do to others. This is what Abraham saw."

"I hear what you say Papa, but why does God need us to suffer so? I can be good without seeing all this suffering and bloodshed, and certainly those who have died can't benefit." Papa wiped his tears with the corner of his robe.

"Truly my son, could you say such a thing without having heard my words or seeing what is happening this very day in the brick pits? How can you know what is good and what is evil? Your words were well meant, but go away now and think very hard about what we have spoken. I will go to my bed now."

"I have a friend, Papa. An Egyptian friend. Memteph, the son of General Ammun-Ra. He is not bad or evil towards me." My Papa was silent and examined me through a squinted eye. I could see he was thinking how he should approach this unexpected, new development.

"My son," he commenced, measuring each word, "there is a saying, 'The fruit does not fall far from the tree.'" The father of your friend is the commanding general of Pharaoh's chariot brigades and must become our most implacable enemy if we are ever to leave this place. As much as this boy may be your friend today, he too must cling to his family and nation and follow their destiny. His gods are not your God. Be very careful, my son."

I have nothing to reply. I just stand there, digesting this information. I did not like what I was hearing. I would need to

think about it, and maybe carefully sound out Memteph to see what his thoughts were. Having decided, I cracked on a big smile.

“Good night Papa.” I reached out and hugged him. “May God give you restful dreams.”

He went to his room and I to my small room. As I passed the cloak closet I stopped and peered in behind the hanging garments. I could just make out the shape of a papyrus soldier which had been glued to the back wall. Until now it was just an ornament, a design. I drew myself up to attention and gave it a military salute, then went off to my own bed, wondering what it would say if it could talk.

CHAPTER 2

Melbourne, Australia 2020 CE

Ari rocked back in his large office chair, interlaced the fingers of both hands and flexed the knuckles. Reviewing what had been typed on the virtual screen of his Macintosh, he was satisfied that it was reading well.

He picked up some photos that lay on the edge of his cluttered desk. They were digital shots he had taken many years ago in 1997, of a speaker pointing to projection slides of a crossword like matrix of letters. The letters were Hebrew and some had been circled in one color or another at regularly spaced intervals. Ari was looking at one of the concealed codes in the Torah, known to the world as the Five Books of Moses.

Ari had spent a great deal of his early adult life wondering about the actions that, as an Orthodox Jew, he had been taught to perform since childhood. The pronouncement of blessings at various times and the ceremonies and religious objects that were familiar to him, but sometimes lacked meaning. He saw the rest of the world happening, going past, surviving without all this embroidery and what appeared to be self denial, and he questioned. He looked at Jewish people around him, most of them not maintaining traditions and openly defying God given rules with no apparent regret or physical or mental ill effects. Maybe these people were being honest with themselves. Maybe they were just ignorant. He also evaluated those who sought to change the traditions, to bend it to their own ends, and that given the remote possibility of a second or third generation embracing these altered and now alien, traditions, did make-believe that this parody of genuine Judaism was in fact something real and valid. These “progressives” wanted the insurance benefit without paying the full premium. But Ari also was uncertain about that premium. He felt he was paying, but at what price?

When he questioned his teachers, some responded that it was just a question of faith, a safe answer for them that he just

couldn't handle. They had been brought up from the cradle in a sheltered environment of intense learning and Jewish living, an opportunity which Ari had not enjoyed.

His Rabbi told him to look around. See the logic and order of the world. It had to be designed, created. The world is the entrance foyer to the World to Come. Judaism is a belief. An act of faith in an invisible, intangible, inaudible God. But do not stop looking for real evidence of His existence. "It is all around you." They would say.

When Ari questioned his teachers about the natural order of the world, as opposed to the suspension of this order, the miracles described in the Scriptures, he was given the answer, "Tradition!"

The teacher would say to him "Ari, do your parents lie to you about things?" To which he would reply the obvious, "No, not really." The old Rabbi would stroke his white beard, "So Ari, would your parent's parents lie to THEM?" And this would go on for a few more times.

The logic of this argument was that an unbroken chain of verbal tradition in a nation of some three million at the starting point, three and some thousand years ago, would carry veracity to eternity, filtering out individual aberrations.

"With respect, Rebbe," Ari would continue, "we sometimes play a game called 'Broken Telephone', where a simple message is whispered from person to person across ten or twenty people and very rarely does the message coming out sound like the message going in. How can we possibly trust this long chain of tradition?"

"Oy Ari! You need to understand that the tradition is passed through every family, through the whole Jewish people, like the parallel stripes and threads in this Prayer Shawl Tallis I am wearing. We discuss and investigate the traditions across our own generations, those alive in this world today, like the weave of the cross threads that bind the Tallis together. You pull one end of the Tallis and the

other comes along with it, even when it is tattered, burnt and torn by our violent history. Our tradition is that the majority, based on Torah fact and rules of learning, not human rationalization, must always prevail. The truth is always in the majority of our people carrying the pieces of our heritage from Sinai, all as perfect as that original day.”

Still, Ari was not satisfied. He could see about him people at all levels of religious belief and observance. The committed, the uncommitted and all the flavors in between. He constantly wondered to himself why his peers, other students who were born as Jewish as he, would go and eat non-kosher, or drive a car on Saturday, the Sabbath, or ask out any girl or guy they liked, from any religion, race or background.

But he saw clearly that time after time, from the Exodus onwards, someone’s parents had started a Lie. Lied to their children. For their own convenience. To protect a lifestyle, a misdeed, a social status. It was not right. It just wasn’t our Covenant with God.

Although the rest of the world outside of his head appeared to survive very well without all the restrictions, he knew in himself that he wouldn’t break the God given rules deliberately. They were too strongly ingrained and he had learned enough to feel inhibited, even uncomfortable, about even thinking of breaking them. The example set by older people in his parents’ social circle who maintained their Judaism influenced him greatly. Many of these people or their parents had gone through the horrors of the Nazi Holocaust and had not rejected their Judaism which had almost killed them, so surely there had to be something there. More than just an expression of faith. These people had to know their God. Ari wanted to know what they knew.

Then in 1997, a young student, Ari, discovered the Codes in the Torah. Something that defied all science, mathematics and logic, but was there. It was not absolute. There was contention about it. If it did manifest as absolute, then everyone who was not perfect in their observance would be guilty of transgression. Better there should be some doubt. A lot of doubt, in fact.

Initially he attended a student seminar at a private home and wasn't anticipating anything interesting or new, but an acquaintance had said that the codes were 'a mind boggling phenomenon' and had to be seen. The catch was, he couldn't understand why the guy who was extolling the mind blowing virtues of the codes, was slurping a huge milk shake along with his pork laden Cafeteria ham and cheese burger. However out of curiosity he still went along.

The lecturer was a middle aged, neatly bearded Rabbi with a charismatic smile and a strong English accent. He spoke with power, confidence and authority, standing before an overhead projector with the room in a twilight darkness. There were more than one hundred people, some crammed into adjoining rooms, the atmosphere stifling despite the air conditioning. It was impossible to scratch an itch without jabbing your neighbor in the ribs and there were not enough chairs. People were standing, sitting or leaning on whatever came to hand. In spite of these uncomfortable conditions, there was a mood of electric anticipation. All one could hear was the rustle and movement of clothing, a cough or the scrape of a chair.

"I am not here to perform parlor tricks for you," began the speaker in a shrill voice, "I am here to simply show you something which undeniably exists. We Jews have spent three millennium trying to protect ourselves from our persecutors and detractors. These enemies have always focused upon the foundation of our belief in God and His Torah. They have said this Torah document was written by many different people at different times in history. They have said it was not written by Moshe as dictated by God Himself. They say it is a concoction over time. That is what happens when you start applying human intellect to matters Divine.

Ladies and Gentlemen, some three thousand four hundred years ago God took our ancestors out of Egypt. These grandparents of ours witnessed a suspension of the order of Nature as we know it. Call it miracles if you like.

Performed by God!

Before their very eyes!

We see in this Torah that some consider of doubtful origin, that they heard the voice of God directly at Mount Sinai and they passed this tradition down to their children and then from one generation to the next.” He stopped and even in the darkness the sparkle of his eyes captured the audience as he looked from one corner of the room to the other, making some people squirm under his gaze.

“And a few days later,” he almost shrieked, “just forty days later, some three thousand Egyptian converts dragged these same ancestors of ours into a lapse, along with them, as they lost their faith and fell back into quasi idolatry, simply because their adopted leader Moshe was six hours late in returning!” He paused to let the words sink in. “So how many of us! How many of us can claim that the tradition passed down by our ancestors, not for just forty days when they failed, but for thousands of years, has been convincing enough to make us stick to the rules supposedly given us by God?”

“Yes, we know it was the mixed multitude of Egyptian nobles and other enslaved nationals, other escapees who had followed the Jews, who instigated this sin. One problem. These very rules, our tradition, holds that we are all responsible for each other, even for those converts amongst us who may lapse. We are all accountable for the actions of others of our faith, provided they first come to our faith in good faith! How can I say this? Take a look at three thousand years of history. The good and innocent amongst us are destroyed along with the guilty. It is real, tangible, recorded historical evidence! If we allow a stranger into our house, we are responsible for the stranger’s behavior.

We constantly ask and are inevitably scared to answer, “Why do the good perish with the evil...?” He held up one hand, fingers spread and ready to count down, “You thought I was going to say “in the Holocaust” didn’t you?” There was a murmur of assent.

“Well that’s one of them, but it goes back much further. The whole Exodus generation perished in the desert over 38 years because they supported the sin of the spies.” He he curled over the first finger. “Who was good? Who was evil? The Spanish inquisition. The massacre of the Jews of York. The pogroms in Russia. The Holocaust.” All his fingers had come down one by one.

His voice gentled, “So, when Yankel goes for a holiday in the outback of Australia and decides to try the most definitely non-kosher goanna lizard stew on safari because no one is around to see him, Reb Shmerel back here in Melbourne is getting beaten senseless by a gang of hooligans on his way to Shule on the Shabbos.”

Once again he paused. There was some snickering from the middle of the room. “You may think this situation is ridiculous. Fictional! Ludicrous! Totally unrelated events! You say to yourself “Why is this guy wasting our time with nonsense?” Well I’ll tell you, God knows!

What you didn’t know was that Shmerel was Yankel’s teacher at the afternoon Religious School for a long while, and Shmerel had actually seen Yankel’s weakness of character but had not bothered to do anything to reinforce Yankel in this area, such as talk with him or take up the matter with his parents. So Yankel Goanna Eater sinned partly because of the failure of Shmerel the teacher and Shmerel suffered the consequences for his inaction in this world, rather than the World to Come. Certainly neither actor in this life drama knew what was happening with the other at that point, but we as an audience to this drama can step back and look down on these events across time and conclude either ‘action and reaction’ as Jews or ‘pure coincidence’ as human animals. Ladies and gentlemen, tonight you will see that there is no such thing as coincidence.

He paused for sip of water. “My friends, let us first prove that our prime suspect, the Torah existed in its complete form at least

2300 years ago. It is quite simple. All we have to do is drop in to our local Greek library in Alexandria and check out a copy of the Septuagint... What is the Septuagint some may ask? After Alexander the Great died his empire was split up between his generals. Those ruling Egypt became known as the Ptolemys, and those who ruled the Syrian region were called the Seleucides, whose kings were called Antiochus. For whatever the reason, the second Ptolemy of our period decided that he wanted the Torah translated into the Greek language, so he kidnapped the seventy elders of the Sanhedrin of Israel to Alexandria, locked each of them in a separate room with no communication between the rooms, and ordered them to translate the whole Torah into Greek in an unreasonably short time of three days.

Miraculously, there's that word again, all seventy translations, with thirteen deliberate mistranslations to protect the sanctity of the Torah from misinterpretation, were identical in every case. So our very enemies, the Ptolemaic Greeks, provide third party proof that the Torah was written in its present form and complete at least two thousand three hundred years ago."

Once again he paused for effect and to catch his breath. There was a slight buzz from the audience and heads were nodding in appreciation.

Now let's back track to the time of Ezra when the Jews returned to Israel from Babylon after the Purim events. Ezra read the Torah to the Jews of Israel. This was only a few hundred years before the Ptolemaic translation. It was the same Torah that Ezra brought from Shushan. The same Torah that was taught to the children of Shushan, that the Chronicles of Persia and Medea enshrine along with the Book of Esther.

So that Torah in Shushan must have been brought there earlier, because we know that the Jews of the first Commonwealth had that Torah. In fact it was copied from the Torah scroll that Chilkiyahu the Kohen Gadol had found hidden in the Temple from the time that King Achaz had destroyed all the Sifrei Torah

around five hundred and seventy eight BCE. Therefore we can deduce that our Torah, as we have it today is now almost two thousand six hundred years old and counting. These Torahs that were destroyed and the one saved, were used constantly in the Beit Hamikdosh or in regular use by the populace. One must ask why the wicked kings of Israel, who did not support and uphold the Torah would want to write such a work that restricted them from doing the very things they wanted to do; that is, to rebel against the law of God and the Torah. It is not likely that they wrote the Torah, and with so many copies available to the people through the Levites who would teach it, no one could rewrite it and not be exposed. This takes us back to the time of Solomon who wrote The Song of Songs and other works proclaiming the relationship between the People of Israel and God. Now if Solomon had written the Torah - the ultimate Jewish authority, why would he bother with lesser works. Why would King David bother writing the Psalms? The Torah of King David was the same version as the ones that were destroyed and the one found and the one read by Ezra and the one translated for Ptolemy.

Moshe Rabbeinu wrote the Torah as instructed by God. Which human being would write a law like Shmita into civil code, requiring farmers to totally rest the land for one full year in every seven?"

The Rabbi paused for a sip of water. His face glistened with perspiration from his effort and emotion of his delivery.

"We have a tradition that says that the whole map of creation is contained in the Torah, that which we call Chumash and our non-Jewish cousins call the Old Testament. So what does such a tradition mean?

For thousands of years it was just hinted at, this meaning, until during the Holocaust, in a Nazi death camp, a Hungarian Rabbi and Torah scholar, Rabbi Weissmandl, began a process that would come of age with the advent of the computer. He himself had a mind like a computer. He was aware that by taking letters in the

Torah in regularly spaced steps, one could find hidden words and meaning. He started with the word Torah itself, taking the last letter Taf of the first word of the Torah, Breishit, which means “In the beginning”, and counting forty nine letters to a Vav, then another forty nine to the letter Resh and finally another forty nine to the letter Heh. Spelling out the word Torah. But that’s not so convincing. However it also worked with the beginning of the second book, Shemot, or Exodus. It didn’t work with Vayikra, or Leviticus, but we will come back to that. It worked with the fourth book Bamidbar or Numbers, but in reverse. He had some difficulty with the fifth book, Devarim, or Deuteronomy. The word Torah was there all right, but the start was a whole sentence into the book and also in reverse order.

There was a reason for this. Devarim is called the Repetition of the Torah. It summarized the foregoing books. In that regard the first sentence is like a foreword and is not part of the book, which commences from the second sentence.”

By this time the Rabbi had placed a transparency on the projector, showing relevant passages with the letters concerned highlighted. He pointed to the sequence for the third book. The audience could see the four occurrences of the Hebrew word Torah, two from the right and two left. He kept on with an almost smug smile on his face. “You can now see the word that appeared at a forty nine letter jump in the third, the middle book of the Torah. It is the four letter name of God.”

Another pause for effect.

“All right! Great crossword puzzle, but still not convincing. Any man of reasonable intelligence could have worked out this simple little scheme. Yes?” He looked to the audience, many of whom nodded in agreement. “Aha! But this is not something hidden. This is the key to unlocking the codes in the Torah. It gives us a set of ground rules.

There are over three hundred thousand basic letters in the five books of the Torah. If we remove the spaces between the words,

which are only there for us mere mortals to discern one word from another, and run all the letters together into one continuous line, ignoring the final form of certain letters and treating them as ordinary letters, we have our crossword matrix. Given the ability, today called a computer, to be able, without altering the sequential position of any letters, to slide those letters into new lines and along the lines without altering the sequence of the original text, we can juxtapose equidistant jump letters next to each other and yet retain the complete readability of the original text. For example I could halve all the letters into two lines and then slide the letters along further into three and four and so on.

To find an associated code we search this string of Torah Hebrew for a key word of our choice, found at the shortest uniform jump of letters. We can then shift the lines of Torah into rows that allow the letters to line up vertically, directly, one above the other. Then in close proximity to that word as formed, we state expected outcomes and find related letter groups that form the associated words.

He stopped to lay another transparency on the projector. An array of Hebrew letters appeared on the wall projection.

“To test the statistical validity of this system, we decided to take random events from The Encyclopedia of the Twentieth Century. In this test we opened it at random and the page came up on Emperor Franz Josef of Austria. The letters of the names FRANZJOSEF were transliterated into Hebrew spelling used at the time that he lived, but with the spaces removed. We expected a long jump interval with not many occurrences of this complex string. The string appeared only once. What you see before you is Torah shifted by the jump amount to bring the letters of FRANZJOSEF together vertically.” He circled the Hebrew word on the transparency.

“I am able to read the portion of Torah visible here.” He pointed at and read off a few sentences. “Now look across here. These are the letters for the Hebrew year corresponding with 1905. And over

here, diagonally on our matrix, we find the word Yerushalayim, the Hebrew for Jerusalem. We were somewhat puzzled at the connection between these words, considering that the name Yerushalayim did not exist during the chronological historical period of the Torah and in fact it was named by King David hundreds of years later. But then we checked a more complete history and found that Emperor Franz Josef of Austria visited Jerusalem in the year 1905 and was greeted at the city gates by the chief Rabbi at the time, Rabbi Auerbach, whose name appears right here.” There was a collective gasp from the crowd as he circled the letters which formed the Rabbi’s name.

“Now you tell me. Here we have an absolutely recognizable portion of Torah in view, which must have been written at least two thousand three hundred years ago. Septuagint, remember? And yet you see it contains coding of information for events that occurred less than one hundred years ago. There were no other Franz Josefs, no other Rabbi Auerbachs.”

The excitement of the crowd was almost palpable. Those that were sitting were now perched on the edges of their seats and the words were flying about, “amazing, unbelievable, incredible.”

“I would like to offer you one more item. These first two codes must provide each of you with that worn expression “food for thought” and I must warn you that should you allow your intellect to freely partake of this nourishment, your life must change. You cannot deny the evidence of your own intellect. I have shown you only one piece of evidence to prove the non-human, I prefer to call it Godly or Divine, origin of the Torah. Maybe a coincidence we say again. I am about to show you a second. No coincidence, no turning back. This is back to Sinai.”

There was a disturbance in the middle of the audience. “Excuse mes” were mumbled as someone struggled to get through to the door. A disheveled young man was taking his leave. One could hear him growling that he couldn’t take any more of this.

The Rabbi placed another letter matrix on the projector.

“The Hebrew terminology for the disease Diabetes, a disease controlled only in the latter half of the twentieth century, is SAKERET. In Hebrew the string of the letters Samech, Chaf, Reish and Tuff (סכרת). We took this at random once again from the encyclopedia. This sequence appeared several times at varying letter intervals which is what we expected with such a short and simple word. The smallest jump was ninety eight letters. We shifted the line of Torah to come up with this matrix.

He pointed out the vertical Hebrew sequence סכרת and then moved to a diagonal series of letters close to the key word. “Where in the body does the disease of diabetes originate? It is a deficiency of the organ now known to science as the pancreas. Two thousand three hundred years ago this organ had no such name. Take a look here. The Hebrew letters spell out MEI Ha Pancreas - Translation! FROM the Pancreas. Not only does the Torah tell us which organ diabetes comes from, but we are told that it is something FROM the pancreas which causes it. The room was now fired with talk and whispers. The people were turning to each other and the movement of arms and hands in utter amazement was like wind blowing across tall grass. The Rabbi had a huge grin across his face, splitting his greying beard with perfect white teeth.

“Would you like some more? You haven’t seen anything yet!” He was a master showman. “Well now just take a look here. What was the cure for diabetes? When was it discovered. Look! These letters spell out the word INSULIN. This is an artificial word created by a twentieth century drug company to name a compound for the marketplace. How did the author of the Torah at minimum two thousand three hundred years ago, know of this twentieth century concocted name of a hormone discovered in 1921 by Canadian physician Frederick Banting and medical student Charles H. Best.

And if you still doubt, we ran exactly the same tests on Shakespeare, the New Testament and the very encyclopedia from which we took the random words. There were no expected codes found in association with the minimum step occurrences. Ever!

But one cannot prove a negative, so the small doubt is in place. Of course we can now slide the letters to line up these found words and we may then locate further associated codes!"

As Ari drove home from the talk his mind was churning. He slammed on the brakes as his concentration wavered for just an instant to tell him something was red in front of him. Traffic lights. They changed to green and he drove off slowly, concentrating on getting back home in one piece. He thought back to the closing line.

The Rabbi had challenged the crowd. "How many of you believe in God? Come on don't be shy! How many? Hands up!" Eighty percent of hands went up."Do you think I believe in God?" He looked about for a brave soul to answer. No one moved.

"No I don't!"

There was a small uproar at this revelation. The Rabbi waited and signaled for silence. "I don't believe in God," he screamed out, " I KNOW there is God!"

The exhibition had shaken Ari. He had a reasonable background in mathematics and understood the implications of what he had seen that evening. The statistical probability of finding key words at regular letter jumps was not unlikely in any substantial publication. It should happen in the works of Shakespeare, in non-Jewish religious writings. But to find several predicted and related items of information in restricted proximity to the key word and information that could not have been known by any human being at the time of writing, was beyond all probability. It did not appear to happen in any of these other items of literature or writings. It was beyond any computer or super computer ability. It was beyond the natural. He started to think, what could a super computer do, stacking the letter sequences in three dimensions.

He arrived home, locking the car and then stopping as he was about to go into the house. He looked up at the stars. Until this moment his education, intellect and knowledge had told him that

these were distant suns and planets, galaxies far away, created billions of years ago. Now they were painted spots of light on a black velvet canvas and we were the only ones alive in the whole universe. He shook his head in confusion and went in for a double scotch. Straight. Then went to bed.

The next night, Ari sat at the computer, his fingers limp on the keys. He had reached a point in his novel and was writing about the Exodus. The miraculous extraction of his ancestors by God from Egyptian captivity and slavery. He wrote about the recorded miracles and the suspension of nature witnessed by millions. Previously, he had tried to rationalize the miracles into natural events because “only tradition” had driven him to believe in the stories of Passover and the history of the Jews. He had to choose to believe that the waters of the Nile turned to blood, believe in pillars of fire and smoke, the splitting of the Red Sea. Now he was going to revise his writing about all these events in full belief, as if he himself had witnessed them in their rawest, starkest form. No longer parlor tricks, fit for Universal Studios, Charlton Heston and the big screen.

The Rabbi’s extraordinary presentation made him feel empowered. He knew. Absolutely. Here in his hand was a phenomenon that exhibited evidence of concealed power and knowledge beyond the abilities and the technology of mankind. The Torah Codes were something tangible, a gift from God to the confused doubters of miracles requiring faith. More codes sampled after the talk concluded had covered the Gulf War. Yes the SCUDS were there as was Saddam and the chemical warheads. The assassination of Yitzchak Rabin. Confirmation of the Rabbinical festival of Channukah. Clear affirmation of the Oral Law Tradition and clarification of many other mysteries and uncertainties.

The Rabbi had said that only once had the codes been used “predictively” to try to pinpoint the commencement of the Desert Storm attack on Iraq. It came down to three likely dates which verified intelligence reports. Logically, if these future

events could be found, why not accept the Torah's reporting of impossible physical events that had occurred at specific and necessary times; miracles?

Ari had still not moved a muscle as he contemplated the rush of knowledge.

If all these things are true, where does that leave me in respect of the Laws and Commandments of the Torah? What happens if I DON'T keep them, exactly and to the letter? Ari looked back into his manuscript notes by the computer. There was so much that was perfect yesterday, sounding plausible and smart, and now it was all wrong. Could there be any explanation other than God?

A few years earlier, Ari had met Gita and before long they were engaged and then married. Gita became absorbed by Ari's research into history and his thirst for the truth. They were a perfect team for unearthing the secrets of antiquity.

"Here, I bought this for you today." Gita handed Ari a book. It dealt with the Bible Codes.

"Hey, this is great Gita." Ari stopped what he had been doing and immediately started reading. After a few minutes he called out to Gita "The fellow who wrote this isn't Jewish." He went back to reading. An hour later he shook his head. "This guy has some great stuff but then he tries to put his own twist to it. He mentions the New Testament but never brings any codes from there because it doesn't work and he keeps suggesting predictively nuclear holocaust. Oh well, a bit of a waste of money, but some of the code pages are great. Pity he didn't do the O.J. Simpson trial, but he did do the Oklahoma Federal Building bombing. It's all there."

Gita brought a plate piled with salad, radishes, lettuce, celery, carrot, parsley and pickled cucumbers topped with alfalfa sprouts. "Here, I brought you a snack."

"Thanks. The pickles look delicious."

"You said that the author of the book wasn't Jewish. So what

was he doing with Torah, Hebrew and codes in the first place?”

“Apparently he was just investigating the phenomena of the codes from a skeptic’s point of view. Then after a while he discovered that the codes were absolutely real and he went and learned Hebrew to be able to continue the investigation. The beginning of his book deals with that time in his life, but then he gets a bit vague when he attempts to bring the New Testament into the codes. The phenomenon doesn’t happen there and he did not say so outright. He also hasn’t kept to the strict rules established for code searching. Codes are absolutely not to be used predictively, as he tries to do. Man has freedom of choice. There are many possible outcomes to situations. The codes can only confirm retroactively that the Torah contained the outcome that occurred.”

“What would you do” Gita interjected, “if the core of your faith, that you had been brought up in and your parents and for generations back was shaken.”

Ari rocked back in his chair. “I’m thinking back to the effect it had on people who are Jewish and don’t really believe or keep anything to do with their Jewishness. There was this long haired guy who walked out at the beginning of the talk the other night after the first code was shown. I just realized who he was. The son of the Rabbi of West Gate Synagogue. He went off the rails years ago, so he had to leave because his whole reasoning for rejecting his Jewishness was shaken in that short moment. He didn’t want to recognize his error in judgment, nor give up his particular comforts of life to come back.”

“I wonder if there were any non-observant people there? What effect would it have on them?” Queried Gita. “If you had been brought up all your life like that, then you would probably believe that what you were doing was right. I suppose such people would have a similar reaction to the codes as the author of that book.”

Ari looked at Gita with a far away expression on his face. “Do you know what we are talking about here?” It wasn’t really a

question. “We are talking about a very basic aspect of Judaism and the offshoots into other religions and cults. First we have to establish the absolute veracity of one religious basis, not necessarily to the exclusion of any other, but certainly absolute in itself. So for the last three thousand and some hundred years we have had the Torah. We have our own tradition and we live within our own fences. We did not have to prove our absolute truth to anyone outside for our own benefit, only we were forced to argue with outsiders over the centuries because their versions of religion or cult were so shaky. The God given yardstick of Judaism was always present to shake them up and demolish their very foundations.”

Gita was sitting on the edge of the desk, concentrating intensely on Ari’s heavy monologue.

She asked, “Someone has to be the first each time to start each new religion. How does it keep happening? You’ve pointed to the reason why Judaism is picked out as the whipping boy each time, but how come there are so many people who believe in a new religion to give it critical mass?”

“I’ve read quite a few history books” answered Ari, and it appears that there were, and are even today, many of these splinter groups in each generation. The times when our mainstream Judaism is under the greatest threat seems to propagate more leaders, saviors and messiahs than during the stable periods. Considering the numbers of these aberrant cults I am surprised that we don’t have even more so called religions in the world today.”

“All right. So what did these history books tell you about other religions that appeared. How come some took off and other ideas at times did not?”

“The underlying theme to the groups we are talking about is our concept of a savior coming forward to save the population of the world from itself and to disperse the collective moral guilt of the common people. Western civilization seems to have forgotten that there are other cultures in the world that were

never exposed to these concepts, so the idea fails if it does not encompass the right to exist of every human being, not just one particular group.”

“But Ari, what you are saying is that the most primitive tribesman in the middle of Africa or South America will recognize a true messiah the same as you or me.”

“In a way, yes. The original idol worshipers of Canaan were supposed to be wiped out because their practices had led to such depravity of human sacrifice and immorality, they could not be permitted to continue. Our ancestors failed to complete this Divine Order out of compassion, and the remaining Canaanites were the catalyst that resulted in the fall of Israel. Other peoples, who are misguided into worshiping wood, rock and stone, but have some semblance of a supreme creator will recognize God and leave the idols behind.

I think that a messiah, or Mashiach as we call him, will be capable of identifying himself to every human being at each one’s level of understanding. No one will be excluded. What comes after that is pure speculation on our part unless we can learn such details from Talmudic sources.

However, we have to realize that using these Torah Codes can be very dangerous and misleading if used predictively as there is no one really competent to interpret future events.

And that, Gita, is what antisemitism was and is all about even to this day. We are the original. The roots for all others. God chose us to be his moral compass to creation and the world.”

Ari settled down to the computer and resumed typing the next chapter of his novel, “I am the Witness - Exodus.”

CHAPTER 3

Egypt 1447 BCE

I dream again. I see the big, glowing window and the stones. This time my fingers are moving easily over the stones and I understand the words which my striking is causing to appear in the window. Something has changed. Last time I had the dream I felt like I was swimming in thick oil and the meaning was blurred. Now I move freely and the meaning is clear. My hands are striking the stones, yes... typing, in this new language, I understand, recounting of the saving of Moshe which my Papa told me. The words appear and are as my very own, that I would wish to transcribe in my Book of Witness. The phantom hands which are not mine, but are mine, no longer resist me as they did last time. We are of one being, one mind. Now I can comfortably release the fetters of my intellect and let my dream proceed. The story flows from my, his, fingers instantly, as fast as the words I read. Strange but warm, his words are my words of witness...

“Papa, please tell me of the time of the birth of Moshe, the one we call Yekutiel.”

We were sitting under the awning of our small house. A clay pitcher of water rested on the small table as did our drinking bowls. It was a torridly hot day and conditions in the slave pits were intolerable, the stench of unwashed bodies and filth constantly in our nostrils. The smell of treachery and sorrow. My Papa was annotating a scroll filled with finely formed writing. He looked up at me, a little annoyed at my interruption, but then softened and smiled. “One moment while I finish this thought.”

His notes were neat and small in the margin of the scroll, written in our family script which we called “Ktav Ashurit” or perfect writing. It was unique to our tribes and in fact was the one language in all the world unknown to Pharaoh at the time of Yosef’s rise to power.

Papa rolled up the scroll after ensuring that the ink was dry,

binding it with a leather strip. It was finally protected by a tarred, stiffened leather tube which had a firmly fitting lid and sheet lead lining. The container was hidden in a wood lined chamber under a flagstone inside the house.

“Yosef my son,” my Papa began, stroking his beard, “you are living a special life now, by the grace of our one true God. Do you not wonder why from day to day the Egyptians leave us alone, and yet they enslave and torment our brethren so terribly?”

“Yes Papa. But you have told me that in keeping our tradition of circumcision we are protected. Is this not the reason?”

“Yes it is in a direct way, Yosef. However why don’t the Egyptians come to our gate, or speak with us or see us with suspicion? Let me tell you why. What do you see before you, right now?”

“I see our house, Mama inside. I see you sitting here. You were just writing. I see the table, the pitcher. Over there I see our flock in the distance and I don’t see any other people.”

“That is correct. That is the reality of God’s protection. The Egyptians do not see us at all. They see an old house, ramshackle and overgrown with weeds, being lived in by two old, useless, dried up harmless Hebrews who are no value as slaves. They count our flocks as their own and do not touch them, as the sheep is their object of worship. Our God rewards our faithfulness by blinding our enemies to the truth. Keep in His ways and help our brothers to return to Him, and you will live to see our redemption. Fall out and you will be lost with those who have left our tradition. You are old enough now to walk among the people and to see the terrible things happening. You will be protected. Soon you will take over this scroll. He raised the box containing the scroll. You must never stray from God’s path.

Now I will tell you of this Moshe, or Yekutiel as his father named him. He is the one to lead us out of Egypt and allow our people to serve God.

These events begin about eighty years ago, three years after the boy

Pharaoh Pepi's magicians foretold the imminent birth of a redeemer of the Hebrews, which understandably made him exceedingly worried. His father, Pepi I, a stranger from the South, had taken the throne from the weak heir of the last Pharaoh to know Yosef the Righteous. Today, Egypt's economic and military power base relies on a constant supply of slave labor, mainly of us Hebrews. Egypt simply cannot afford to lose us, but that was not always the case. Pharaoh's seers also told him that this redeemer would perish by water and so he was advised to kill all new born males from that moment."

"All Papa? Even Egyptian ones?"

"Yes Yosef, even Egyptians. His magicians could not tell from which people the redeemer would come, so Pharaoh ordered the killing by drowning of all new born boys. He had special police appointed to watch after pregnant women and to come and check on them at the time the birth was due. He also tried to coerce the principal midwives of the Hebrews into reporting births and killing the children, but they refused to cooperate, even at great personal risk.

Many babies were saved from this murderous rampage by the courageous action of the two midwives, one who in fact is the mother of Yekutiel. She is the daughter of Levi son of Jacob, born as Jacob entered Egypt. Her name is Yochebed. Her daughter, Miriam, is the other junior midwife. These two, known to Pharaoh as Shifra and Puah, were able to determine the gender of an unborn child using two precious stones. These stones would glow with their own light if a boy child was in gestation. It was said that the stones came from the huge diamond window which illuminated the Ark of Noah our ancestor.

If a male baby was determined, the mother-to-be would conceal her pregnancy as long as possible. At seven months, the mother would go into the fields, the Fields of Sarah to be precise, and would give birth two months prematurely, and not uncommonly, to six or more children at a time. You may consider this unusual,

but look at other animals, dogs, cats. The scorpion has sixty young at a time. With the grace of our God, this usually rare event of sextuplets, let alone prematurely born, became the norm. The very fields of Sarah, our ancestral mother, nurtured them in a most miraculous fashion as the birth mothers were forced to return to their homes to divert suspicion by the police. These children grew up within the soil, just like plants, and miraculously matured within a year to become self sufficient. The Egyptian police were totally puzzled because the population was growing faster than before Pharaoh's evil decree. They even plowed the fields because of informers and rumors, but the babies were hidden down deep!"

"Papa, were any babies really drowned?"

"Unfortunately the police did take infants from families who had completely rejected God's way. These, and the Egyptian babies, were placed on the bank of the Nile river to be swept away by the moon tide. Pharaoh wanted to be able to say that he had not been directly responsible for any deaths. For three years the river was awash with tiny bodies and the crocodiles and fish feasted well. After some time and Pharaoh's mounting frustration at the lack of detection, he added measures that made it much more difficult to conceal the pregnancies and impossible to sneak the mothers to the fields past police informers. The Egyptians found concealed children by bringing another baby into an area of suspected concealment then pinching the baby until it screamed in pain. Any other near by would also start crying in sympathy and be revealed to the police."

"So how did Moshe escape?"

It was getting dark now and my Papa indicated that he wanted to go inside the house. The cracking of whips and howls of pain from the distance did not abate as the sun set. If anything the sounds of anguish became more keen as those who had failed to make the day's brick quota were thrashed in punishment. We took the scroll case and pitcher and moved to the table in the

main room. My mother had lit a tallow lamp and in its flickering yellow light, my Papa continued the story.

“At the time, Amram son of Kehat, father of Moshe, was leader of the people. When Pharaoh’s secret decree came into action and realization occurred, he and the council decided that the only way to prevent mass slaughter of newborn males would be to stop having children entirely, so all the men divorced their wives and moved out of their houses.

Once again, the women folk of our people proved to be the stronger in faith and practicality than any of the men. Miriam, the six year old daughter of Amram, came to him and said, with respect, “See my Father. You and the council have managed to achieve that which Pharaoh attempts but cannot do. You destroy our own people.” To which he replied, “I am pained by the death of babes and I cannot ask your mother to bear a son to be drowned by the soldiers of Pharaoh.”

“Does any man bear a baby for forty weeks? Suffer the pain of child birth? Give suckle to the baby after birth? Women do this and yet my mother is willing to risk the agony and grief of losing a child to this murderous Pharaoh! But she and I believe that our God will protect this child, all our children. If she and I can stand all this pain and risk and trust in our God then surely so can all of you. For as certain that if we continue on this path there will be no sons or daughters to continue our people, I am also as certain that God will spare at least some of our children to continue in His service.”

This is what Miriam said to Amram.”

My Papa yawned and stretched out his arms. “Yes Papa! Please, then what happened?”

He did his usual squint at me in the bad light and cleared his throat. “Well, Amram saw the sense in the message Yochebed had sent to him through Miriam. He went back to the council and they reversed their self destructive decision. All the partners

remarried and from this remarriage came the birth of Moshe, Yekutiel as he was also called.”

I learned so much from my Papa during these frequent discussions. As I grew older he explained things in greater detail and depth, showing me the not so obvious undercurrents, the events and actions which were shaping our emerging nation.

I turned in my sleep, the dream as I typed through another’s hands now blurring with the reality of sitting and listening to my Papa. I was losing touch with the dream and the reality. I did not know which was real any more. But I was not distressed. I felt comfortable that I was meant to be exactly where I was. My Papa spoke again.

“Yochebed became pregnant with Moshe immediately after the remarriage. Yochebed was Amram’s Aunt.

There were two children from their first marriage, Miriam, the eldest at six, and Aharon who was three years old at the time, had been born before Pharaoh’s decree. Miriam possessed wisdom far beyond her years, was able to assist with a plan to save her baby brother. Of course Pharaoh’s police were aware of Yochebed’s state of pregnancy after three months and made a note to return to check the gender of the baby six months later. However Moshe was born early, six months into the pregnancy. Yochebed was concerned that her premature baby would not be viable, but was proven wrong as he thrived and grew strong. He had three months with his Mother before the danger would set in, and he did not cry at all.”

I was sitting, hearing every word, wide eyed and not making a sound.

“During this time, due to her healing skills, Miriam had come into frequent contact with Batyah, the daughter of Pharaoh, an extremely intelligent and enlightened young woman, just a few years older than Miriam. Due to her exalted position, Batyah had the regal privilege of keeping an open and inquiring mind in all

matters.

Because of her association with Miriam, Batyah had stubbornly resisted Pharaoh's demands that she follow tradition and Pharaonic Law to become his incestuous daughter/wife. Miriam, mature beyond her years, had forged a warm friendship with Batyah and was capable of answering all her probing questions regarding the Hebrews and their God. Miriam had given Batyah a new yardstick to measure against and she was now questioning the fantasy that was Imperial Egypt.

She was beginning to see through the imposed religion of the state, scoffing at how her father, the Pharaoh, could be a god of any nature, as he so proclaimed himself. Being one of very few who were aware of his habits which were designed to preserve his "godliness" such as appearing never to defecate or urinate, however she knew of his secret place by the Nile which he frequently visited to "pray and meditate" and where under the cover of the water, he relieved himself.

Batyah was intrigued by the concept of one all powerful, invisible God of the Hebrews. She would question Miriam relentlessly. "How can you be so sure that your God exists? I know my father is no god, but Amon Ra the sun, could be god." She pointed an accusing finger at Miriam. "You say even Amon Ra could not be so. You say he goes away and returns and from time to time he is covered by the god of night, the Moon."

"Ha!" Retorted Miriam. "What is a god that can be covered by another, lesser god and how is it that the lesser moon god can appear in the domain of the greater sun god and sometimes even eclipse the greater god and yet never, ever has the sun been seen to shine at night!"

"Everything you say makes sense," replied Batyah, "but how can you believe and have faith in a god that just is not there. I need proof that your God exists! Words mean nothing."

Miriam looked at Batyah hard and thought for a moment. They

were sitting by the river in early evening. The water surface was still and flat like a mirror. Suddenly there was a swirl in the water which left expanding concentric rings and wavelets.”What was that!” Gaspd Miriam as she watched Batyah from the corner of her eye.”

A fish of course!” Snapped back Batyah. “You know that. You sit with me often and we see them.”

“But we didn’t see a fish,” replied Miriam gleefully. Batyah had walked right into her snare, “so how do you know it was a fish?” Miriam crossed her arms and grinned at Batyah.

”Well, once I actually saw a fish jump out of the water and it had made swirls just like this one before it jumped out.”

“So,” continued Miriam, “from one real sighting of a fish you are confidently able to assume that all sightings of similar swirls are caused by such fish?”

“Yes, I guess so. Yes!” Batyah gave a decisive nod of the head. “Absolutely!”

“Then you have just answered your own question about our God.” Miriam said in a gentle voice.

A look of realization and revelation crossed Batyah’s face. Miriam went on, “I trust your statement to me about the origin of the swirl we saw because you are my friend and I trust and believe you. I myself have never seen a fish jump from the water, but I take your word for it that you have seen one and that the swirl was evidence of a fish.”

“But how can you compare your God to a fish!” Exclaimed Batyah. “Your answer is silly!”

“No it is not. My ancestral father Abraham found God by the use of his own intellect. He spoke with God. God actually revealed Himself to Abraham. Abraham is the one that saw the fish jump out of the water. Now tell me, would a parent tell a lie to a child? Even your father whom you admit lies to the whole nation, could not lie to his

own daughter and showed you the damaging truth. That is why you sit with me now, questioning.” Miriam paused as Batyah agreed. “My fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob communicated directly with God and taught us how to recognize God’s special ripples in this world. With this knowledge passed on to us and knowing how to look at the world, we see constant evidence of the existence of our one, invisible God.”

They sat in silence for a few moments. Batyah looked to Miriam and said, “Show me! Teach me! Please?” In a hopeful voice. So Miriam began to instruct Batyah in the traditions of the Hebrews.

At this point my dream changed and I jumped to another scene sometime later. The typing of the words spoken by my Papa’s voice blended into the reality of the new events and Miriam and the surroundings became solid and real once again.

Miriam used her friendship with Batyah to effect the saving of Yekutiel, her baby brother. She did not wish to compromise Batyah in the Royal House, so she prayed to God and then proceeded to do her best to guide events to a satisfactory conclusion.

At the time of the birth of Yekutiel, Pharaoh’s auguries had advised him that the redeemer was now born and Pharaoh halted the drowning of babies newborn after that event, but still continued searching for the redeemer. The words of the soothsayers were well known to the populace, that the redeemer would perish through water, so Miriam hatched a plan designed to confuse the magicians by using water to actually save Yekutiel.

Miriam had ignited a spark in Batyah which had flared into a burning desire to become a committed follower of the one God and a convert to the Hebrew way of life. Miriam had instructed her in concepts of spirituality, of cleanliness not only of the body, but of the soul and the requirement for physical immersion in live, running water to complete the conversion process.

Batyah realized that the purpose of life was to serve God in gratitude for placing us here and making us aware of Him.

She pleaded with Miriam to complete her conversion, however Miriam was awaiting the day that Yekutiel could no longer be concealed from the still searching police.

Miriam put the rescue plan into motion. She instructed Batyah that upon receiving a specific message, she should perform her immersion at their special meeting place by the river. Batyah was to send away all but her most trusted maid at that time.

Amram had prepared a special floating basket made of woven of papyrus reeds, thick and strong and lined inside with clean, smooth clay. The outside was coated with pitch to make it watertight, keeping the baby safe and dry. This plan would test Batyah's commitment to her newly adopted people at the very moment of immersion for the final conversion and relied on faith in God's providence to save Yekutiel.

The day that the police were due drew near. Miriam sent word to Batyah that tomorrow would be the day of immersion.

* * *

It was a glorious, warm day. Batyah and her entourage of maidens had settled on the bank of the Nile in the place that Miriam had specified. Tall reeds of papyrus screened the secluded area from any other prying eyes and only a narrow, worn path broke the reed wall, leading to the patch of clean, white sand.

Batyah dismissed all but her most trusted maid, directing them to wait at the far end of the path. To ensure total privacy, Batyah had instructed the maid, Tummy, to hang a curtain over the gap in the reed path. Batyah wore a simple, white linen robe, fastened with a new amethyst brooch which she had asked Miriam to purchase from a Hebrew artisan. The robe was also new and was a gift from Miriam. Batyah wanted to start her new life with nothing tainted by the idolatry and immorality of her father's kingdom. Today she would face her new God and join her new people. She stopped for a moment and looked out over the water, reflecting on her last conversation with Miriam. "How will I know that God, accepts me?"

“If you accept God with all your heart and soul,” replied Miriam, “and if you keep to the rules that God has provided for us in this world and you remain what we consider a “good” person as well, then you must surely be accepted. Whatever comes before you, even if it appears to be insurmountable and impossible to achieve, if you take the first step of the journey, commence the task and continue with all your strength and truth in your heart, God will help you to completion. This is acceptance. Once you are part of us, we are part of you. Forever. There is no turning back.”

Batyah slowly entered the waters of the river, only removing her wrap when she was completely covered, and then, as Miriam had instructed, she totally immersed herself, once, twice and three times, lifting her feet from the sandy river bed each time. After the last time she rose up and recovered the floating wrap, which she draped about her. She looked up, raised her arms and called out, “Oh God of Abraham, God of my dear friend Miriam, and now my God also. I am but a weak mortal with the frailties of doubt that You have created in me. Please accept me for what I am and send me a sign, send me the ripple of your existence as I spoke with Your servant Miriam.”

Just a short distance away, concealed by the bulrushes, Miriam had been waiting and watching. Upon hearing Batyah’s impromptu plea to God for a sign, she seized the moment and gently pushed the basket boat containing the baby Yekutiel out into the current, jolting it just enough to wake him.

In the palace, Pharaoh’s magicians, constantly watching the signs, were suddenly exuberant. Rushing to Pharaoh they told him that the redeemer was isolated in water and added on their own initiative, that he had been drowned.

As the tiny craft drifted toward and past Batyah, Miriam peeked through the reeds, watching and praying to God.

For the first time, Yekutiel began to cry and Batyah, arms still raised and eyes closed in the ecstasy of the moment was startled. “God of my people,” she gasped, “is this the sign I have asked

for? Surely this is a child of my new people who has been cast upon the waters and left to your care, to be saved from the vile slaughter of my father's decree. What better way to be accepted than to take this child and make him my own, secretly bringing him up to manhood in the ways of his people."

"Oh, but I cannot reach him!" She looked about desperately for anything long enough to catch the basket. She looked down and quickly pulled off her wrap, ensuring that the amethyst was attached to the corner. Wading out as deeply as she could stand, she coiled the wrap and held one corner, throwing the brooch-weighted end towards the basket. It struck the side but failed to hold, sliding off into the water. The basket was now drifting further away from her.

She began to cry in despair, but suddenly stopped as Miriam's parting words flashed into her mind. "Whatever comes before you, even if it appears to be insurmountable and impossible to achieve, if you take the first step of the journey, commence the task and continue with all your strength and truth in your heart, God will help you to completion."

Batyah closed her eyes and stretched her right arm out towards the boat, willing with all her mind and might that she should grasp the boat and draw it back to her.

In the bulrushes, Miriam finally let out the breath she had been holding for long moments as she watched Batyah's arm stretch like a long snake, to grip the boat and draw it back. Batyah looked up and breathed heavily, shaking her head. She looked in stunned amazement at the boat in her grip. "Thank you merciful God for extending my hand." She murmured.

"I too, God," whispered Miriam, "thank you for extending my hand." But she did not leave the hiding place yet. She wished to see exactly what would happen to her brother and guard him as she was able.

Batyah eased herself from the river carrying the basket. Her

maid, eyes wide in awe, came to her and covered her with a dry wrap. She bent to the basket and drew out the crying child. She put her little finger in his mouth and he sucked hungrily. “Yes my little one, drawn from the water. Yes my Moshe, you are hungry.” Batyah looked to the servant girl, Tummu, who was still shrinking away from her mistress in fear. “Tummu, my darling, what are you afraid of? God has helped me to save this baby. Do you understand?”

“Y-yes, mistress. What will you have me do?”

It was obvious to Batyah that Tummu had not really understood what she had just witnessed. She was afraid that Tummu would talk among the other servants which would soon reach the ears of the magicians and Pharaoh, her father. Thinking quickly, she decided to put Tummu off the track. “Tummu? What is wrong? Why are you so afraid? It is me, Batyah.”

“Mistress. I... I saw... I saw how your... your arm... oh!” Her head shook wildly and she fell prostrate before Batyah. She was rambling into the sand almost incoherently saying, “Daughter of Pharaoh, the god of Egypt, my mistress is a god. Save me... Save me!”

“Tummu?” Batyah knelt down beside the distraught girl and grasped her face, forcing her to look up. “Tummu, look at me. Who am I? What has made you so afraid of me? How can you possibly think I am a god? Come on, speak to me now.”

The girl began to untense, relaxing enough to sit on the sand, her breathing and pounding heart slowing to normal. “I saw your arm grow long and stretch over the water to grasp the basket. Only a god could do that.”

“Hah! Hah!” Laughed Batyah. “Take my arm. Go on! Take it. Now pull on my arm - hard as you can. You won’t hurt me. Come on, harder! Is it stretching? Does it grow longer?”

“N-no, mistress.”

“No, of course not! Look there now, at the water where I was

standing. What do you see?”

“I cannot see much Mistress. The sun is shining off the water and blinding me.”

“Yes, and now look over there.” Batyah pointed to the river bank just a few meters away. “What do you see there which has just washed up?”

“A palm leaf mistress. A long one.”

“Did you see me try to catch the boat with my robe?”

“Yes mistress.”

“And I missed did I not?”

“Yes mistress.”

“So if I could stretch my arm as you say, then why didn’t I do so in the first place?”

“I do not know mistress.”

“Because I used the palm leaf which was floating by to catch the boat and in the blinding reflection of the sun you did not see me pick it up. I suppose it must have appeared that my arm stretched. If only it would do so. Maybe then I could scratch my own back.”

Batyah sat next to Tummu and hugged her. “I won’t tell anyone how silly you have been if you don’t either!” They giggled together for a moment, no mistress or maid, just two girls sharing a joke.

“Enough of this Tummu. This baby needs to be fed, so please run to the birthing house and find a Hebrew wet nurse for our boy.”

CHAPTER 4

Egypt - Beginning of the Redemption

The images of my dream fade back into the warm grayness of semi-sleep as something disturbs my slumber. As I become aware, I hear a loud whisper, “Yosef! Yosef!” From the window. It is my friend Memteph.

I get off my bunk and go to the window. He appears to be very excited about something as he shakes and waves his hands, silently urging me to hurry up and sneak outside through the window. I can see he is bursting to tell me. I slip on my tunic and sandals and carefully, quietly climb out the window. Memteph holds a “Shhh!” finger to his lips and drags me towards the storage shed across the compound. Here we can be reasonably assured of privacy.

We squat down inside the shed and he starts jabbering in rapid Egyptian, which is my second language.

“Yosef! Two very old men just came to the court of Pharaoh today, from the desert. They spoke to Pharaoh as if they were his equals and demanded of him to let their people go away into the desert for three days. They asked for all the slaves to be released,” Memteph shook his head from side to side and snapped his fingers, “just like that!”

“Are they still there?” I asked.

“I don’t know. Want to come and see?”

“How can we do that? We’ll get caught!”

Memteph looked at me as if I was something rotten and stinky. He wrinkled his nose and said, “Come on. I know every secret hiding place in the palace. I almost live there. Come on!”

He scurried off into the dark and I trailed him, following shadow and scuffing noises until he stopped suddenly without warning and I bumped into him, knocking the wind out of myself.

“Don’t be a donkey!” He scolded me, “There is our place!” He pointed to a tall tree that I could see silhouetted by the lofty, arched colonnades of the palace. “We can see right into the throne room from up there. It is an easy climb.”

Memteph took off again, now more visible in the glow of the palace windows. There were few guards about, stationed at corners of the building, and none actually patrolling at the moment. Memteph crept to the base of the tree, still hidden in shadow. He pulled me closer and whispered in my ear, “There are hand and foot holds going up the trunk that I found ages ago. I have cut them out bigger over time and hidden them with loose bark, so watch where I go and follow exactly!”

“OK.” I replied. “But slow down a bit. You know your way. I have never done this before.”

Memteph shrugged and raised his eyes, then turned to the tree for the climb. I followed him carefully, finding the artfully hidden holds that formed a ladder up the vertical trunk until the first branches were reached.

After a couple of minutes we gained the lowest boughs that grew at right angles from the trunk. They were thick and scaly on the surface, easy to grip but generous with splinters for bare skin, of which I was exposing a lot. Memteph crawled up onto a branch and stood up, holding on to the main trunk. He peered up, looking for the next set of hand holds.

“How much farther?” I whispered. I could see the whites of his eyes glaring at me and just made out that he was pinching his lips together with his free fingers. He aggravatingly pointed down, and, following his direction, I could see the top of a guard’s helmet some twenty feet below us. I made an embarrassed grin and covered my mouth in an expression of apology. We froze in place until the guard moved on.

The next stage of our climb was much easier, with smaller limbs to grip and foliage below us to cover our movement. Soon

we were at around forty feet, and the main trunk had dwindled in size to the thickness of a large man's thigh, with branches like his arms. I could feel this was new, springy growth as it did not have the coarse finish of the lower branches. Now I could see directly into the throne room of the court of Pharaoh. Memteph slithered himself along a bough just above me and I saw how he wrapped his arms and legs around the trunk and branch. I copied him as best I could, only now looking down and feeling ice cold dread in my veins at the height we were at. One slip and dead.

Oh well. I was here now and nothing I could do except enjoy the moment.

Memteph was now too far away from me for safe whispering. The glow from the court lamps allowed us only to hand signal. His message to me was to settle down, watch and listen.

I had never seen inside the court buildings, let alone the innermost throne room of the mightiest ruler in the world. Once I began to take in the scene, craning my neck to peek between the leaves of the tree, my jaw began to progressively drop at each new revelation of wealth, power and luxury. I'm surprised that my jaw didn't hit the ground without me.

I let out an involuntary gasp when I saw Pharaoh for the first time. Not because of the magnificence or anything. On the contrary, I was stifling a laugh. Pharaoh was a dwarf. A tiny man. He was wearing the dual crowns of Upper and Lower Egypt, almost lost beneath them, and held two golden crooks that had clearly been scaled down for him. His gown was white, with the richest colors I have ever seen woven into the edge motif, with so many jewels and so much gold on him, I marveled at how he could possibly walk with all the weight that would be a burden for a normal-sized man to carry. The throne reflected the rush light off a solid gold surface, and I could just see the edges of a burgundy, gold tasseled cushion, under his tiny buttocks. I did giggle to myself, thinking that even Pharaoh gets a sore bottom.

There were servants, or slaves, behind and to the sides of the

throne, cooling him with great, feathered fans, while others stood holding trays of fruits, platters of lush, long leaf, green lettuce and even what I understood to be, iced confections. I had never seen ice in my life, but my Papa had described it to me. Solid water. Very cold. I wondered where it came from.

The walls of the throne room were covered with drapes of gold, white and crimson, with royal blue trimmings. Precious stones glittered and twinkled in the flickering light from wall sconces that held rush lamps steeped in olive oil. They gave off a pure yellow light without smoke or odor.

My inspection of the great room was broken off by some turmoil near the entrance at the opposite end of the throne room from Pharaoh's seat. I could see that the guards were being physically pushed back against the walls and a path was being forced between them, leading directly to Pharaoh. The odd thing was that it was an invisible force pushing the guards back.

This little man had been Pharaoh for about three years now, but in spite of his diminutive appearance, he still held sway and authority and was instantly obeyed. His father, Pepi II, had died after a reign of ninety four years after assuming the throne at the age of six. He was also known as Pharaoh Melol, as my Papa called him, and this dwarf Pharaoh was named Adikam, or some called him Nefekare the Younger. He was born to Pepi II in his old age, which could account for the dwarfism. His older brother was a mentally deficient, drooling idiot, incapable of assuming the throne. But my mind wanders.

There was a short pause, while Pharaoh looked to the doorway with a puzzled expression on his face, that was quickly replaced by one of anger and fury as two tall, cloaked and hooded men strolled through the doorway. Their faces were concealed, except that they both had full, bushy beards, and each carried a stout, almond wood staff.

Approaching Pharaoh without an invitation was punishable by death at any time. To come barging in like this was insufferable.

But Pharaoh, for some unapparent reason, was unable to do anything about these interlopers.

Pharaoh recognized the weathered faces of the two Israelites who had recently approached him and asked him to allow the Israelite people to travel three days into the desert in order to worship their God. Of course he had turned them down.

The status of the Hebrews had gradually changed from one of National Security repression, way back early in his father's reign, to one of National Economy, imprisonment and forced labor, long after the apparent threat of revolt was clearly non-existent. The Hebrews were Egypt's economic powerhouse, and a country can't afford to lose cheap, free labor. Hebrew was concomitant with "slave" after all these years.

In fact, Pharaoh, because of Moshe's "impudence", decided to punish the whole group of slaves by removing the provided straw quota for brick making. Let them find their own straw, and watch out any slave who did not produce the same number of bricks as before.

"Why are you here again? What do you want, and by what right do you make your demands?" Were the only words that he could get out of his mouth. He desperately wanted to tell the guards to seize and kill these rebels, but his words were frozen in his mind and his mouth paralyzed for such commands.

The court interpreter called out Pharaoh's words loudly for all to hear, then heads turned towards the two Israelites, waiting for a reply.

The foremost Israelite spoke to his partner in Hebrew, a language unknown to Pharaoh and his court. A language of slaves. But I, Yosef, was able to understand every word. The first one said to the other, "Aharon, take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh. Let it become a viper."

Upon hearing the name Aharon, a sudden realization struck me as to who these two men were. This first was my cousin Yekutiel,

Moshe, the one my Papa had spoken about as being our redeemer and the other, his older brother Aharon.

As I watched, Aharon moved close to Moshe for an instant and threw his staff past him onto the floor before the steps to Pharaoh's throne. As it touched the ground it melted into the live, sinuous form of a deadly viper, a snake at least six feet long that slithered and warped itself about, causing the closest courtiers to shrink back in fear.

Pharaoh, elevated on his throne, wasted no time in beckoning for his closest advisors and whispering in their ear. They hurried out of the throne room, clearly on a mission.

"Is that all you can do? I am supposed to be impressed with common games that even children can play?" Pharaoh waved his finger to a side entrance and a troupe of children, some younger than me, filed in, each holding a staff. They had shaved heads, with just a long tail of hair from the top. They formed a half circle facing him and with a nod of his head, they threw their staffs onto the ground, where they also appeared to become vipers. These were occultists in training, destined to become temple priests and were novices to such magic. The only matter was, as I watched from my vantage point, I could see that something was not quite right with these snakes. The children were waving their arms about as though charming and controlling the snakes and the snakes were responding exactly to the arm movements. On closer examination I could see that the snakes were interlocking segments and that there must have been a very fine, certainly invisible to me, thread system running through the snake to make it move according to the arm movements. I also noticed that each child was very careful not to allow their snake to cross the path of another, obviously to avoid tangling the control filament.

I looked back at Pharaoh who had a delighted smile on his face, until Aharon bent down and reached past Moshe to grab the tail of his viper. It immediately turned back into a wooden stick. The children were unable to do this once they released the

mechanism that held their “snakes” together, without revealing their deception. But that problem was quickly solved for them.

Aharon released his staff once again, but it did not become a snake. It did move around on the floor, quite independently of Aharon, who was back behind Moshe. I could see there were no strings attached here. Hmm... Have to remember that saying.

So as Aharon’s staff moves about, whenever it comes near the snake of a child, it just absorbs it, swallows it up. I watch it swallow at least ten of these “snakes” and wait for it to get fatter and fatter, but it doesn’t. It is edging closer to the throne, with no more snakes to swallow.

By this time Pharaoh has gone red in the face with extreme anger and is pumping himself up and down on his raised throne, and I am fearful for the safety of Moshe and Aharon.

No. Wait a moment. Pharaoh has stilled suddenly and bowed his head. He is clearly afraid and is signaling with a shooing motion of one hand for Aharon to get rid of the staff before it swallows up Pharaoh and the throne. I can see there is clearly no limit to what this staff can do and I feel that Pharaoh must surely let the Israelites go after this display of the power of their God.

But no. It takes only a few minutes. I can see Pharaoh is regaining his regal composure. The fear is evaporating from him, as if something totally external to his being is propping him up and filling him with the stubborn determination to deny the God of Israel.

He suddenly looks up, his eyes wide and flaring and declares that Moshe and Aharon should leave his presence now, and that the Israelites may not go. This is real. Not my usual dreaming.

I look up at Memtaph and he urgently hand signals me that we should climb down from the tree.

Later that night, as I lie in my bed too excited to sleep, I wonder who I can tell about what I witnessed tonight. My Papa? If I do, he will probably stop me from seeing Memtaph. Better I don’t say

anything, then I am not disobeying him. Does that even work?

I have an idea. I study reading and writing in Hebrew every day. I don't want to forget what I saw, or have the passage of time taint the story with the wanderings of my imagination. I will use some of my papyrus and write down exactly what I witnessed. If my Papa is right, and Moshe is our redeemer, then I think I will be doing a lot of writing very soon. I can add it to my Papa's scrolls at some later time.

With that decision made, I was able to sleep.

* * *

"Ellah! Ellah!" My Papa came running into the house in uncommon haste. My Mother looked up from her needlework and waited without saying anything, as my Papa regained his breath. "I just heard... from the Council of Elders... Moshe and Aharon came back again."

"Slow down Ehud," my Mother gently cajoled. "It will be the same story in another minute." Her calmness brought him to a halt, and he nodded at her, dropped his head down and took a few deep breaths.

"OK, I am good now." He was back to normal. "They came back, even after being refused since the demonstration with the snakes. This time, Moshe held up his hand, perfectly healthy, then he put it inside his cloak against his chest, took it out and it was totally covered by white leprosy. He then put it back and drew it out cured."

"So what happened?" My Mother asked.

"Pharaoh's magician's did the same trick, or apparently the same thing. The difference was that before hand they threw some incense into a fire and produced a vapor that spread through the room.

Our elders were unaffected for some reasons, but Pharaoh and everyone else saw the magician's produce leprosy and cure it.

The elders saw that nothing really happened. The vapor is some type of mass hallucination drug. Once again, Pharaoh refused to let us go.”

“I can see a Divine plan in all this my husband. I can feel that the time is coming. You must support Moshe and Aharon whenever you can.”

At that point I almost burst out about my little escapade with Memtaph. My parents both turned to look at me and my Mother said, “What is it Yosef?”

“Oh. Nothing.” I quickly thought up a childish reply, to which my Papa gave me a strange look at my out of character response. “I think it is very sad that Pharaoh is being so nasty to us.”

They pulled me to them and we had a family hug.

The real issue was that Pharaoh had withdrawn the straw supply from the brick makers; the Israelites were now forced to find their own straw. If the brick quota was not met, Pharaoh’s overseers would take Israelite babies and force the builders to use them in the walls to make up the quota. They mortared the children into the walls alive. I could not believe my eyes when I actually saw this happening. How could the people of Memtaph, my best friend, be so... so... I could not even think of a word that conveyed the horror and disgust and the fear that this new atrocity evoked in the core of my being.

This too I vowed to record in all its grizzly detail, so that one day the Egyptian people would be held to account.

The day I chose to go and watch the building was sunny. Of necessity, I had to remain at a distance and well hidden while I tried to see and absorb every detail. The Egyptian task masters would keep a tally of the bricks laid. If the work was short three bricks, they would summon a guard to go to the Israelite quarters and seize another baby. Through the shrieking of the mother and the screams of horror from workers, who themselves were lashed into abject silence, the defaulting worker was forced to mortar

the live baby into the hole left by the missing bricks. As a mercy, while I watched, even from the distance, the child's wailing was suddenly snuffed out as the worker tried to kill the baby quickly and mercifully, fast applying mortar to cover the killing.

You may wonder how I could just lie there and watch this happening. I couldn't. I was intermittently dry retching and then spilling whatever bile was left in my guts while I forced myself to watch. I refused to miss a single detail. I would record every atrocity and Egypt would pay for this!

Even as I continued to observe in despair, once again Moshe and Aharon came walking down the main construction road to where the most recent bestiality had occurred. I could see that Moshe had his cloak hood covering his head and most of his face, which was raised up to the sky as he walked. I think I could see his mouth moving as if he were speaking to some invisible Being before him.

He stopped before the wall. The Egyptian guards and overseers were trying to move toward the brothers, but I could see that every one of them was restrained as if they were tied up by their elbows and were being hauled backwards. The Israelite slaves all stopped their work and just gaped at the sight of the disabled overseers, but not for long. They slowly went back to work, fearing the punishment that would come after Moshe and Aharon left.

Moshe approached the wall where a tiny arm of a baby, not fully mortared in was still alive and visibly moving. He gently reached in and with total disregard for the mud and mortar, drew the child out of the crevice, cradling the baby boy in his cloaked arm.

Aharon said something to the nearest slaves, and the brothers, with the baby, left. Later on I found out that Aharon had told the slaves that the overseers and guards would have no recollection of the event. There would be no reprisals. And there weren't any.

I withdrew from my hiding place and headed back home,

thinking to myself, that I had not seen the last of that baby.

As I walked home on wobbly legs, I reached the garden plots close to the river where two to three vegetable crops were grown per year. Fields of plants lined the river as far as the eye could see. The deep green leaves of oval headed lettuce embraced the lighter green inner leaves, each plant distinct and well cared for. Irrigated and free of weeds. Then I saw the slaves who tended these lush crops, bent over hour after hour with no let up, finding weeds and pulling them, removing insects and ensuring adequate water. Some were hauling huge baskets of harvested lettuce, destined for the dinner tables of the highest nobles in the land before nightfall.

I was not really observing activity in the fields, distracted by the baby in the wall afterimages, until my attention was drawn to a small group of my people, Hebrew slaves, tending a crop of lettuce. I saw the Egyptian overseer lash out at one of the workers, an older woman who was bent at the waist in agony and unable to rise after stumbling under the weight of the basket she carried. He whipped the helpless slave until she stopped moving, then called others to haul the injured woman, or the possibly dead body, away.

The other slaves were stooped over, trying to ignore what could be their fate, as they tended the lettuce, looking for insects and removing the bugs and the larvae. This was a crop of romaine lettuce, the most difficult vegetable to grow, but the most desired for the tables of the nobles and royalty. Every head of lettuce had to be succulent, perfect and insect free. This required gentle, hand borne irrigation, constant weeding and constant insect removal.

The slaves were bent over eighteen hours a day caring for the crops. With the overseers not caring about injured backs and whipping any slave who slowed or faltered, this task was worse than the brick pits. People did not last too long after being forced into the vegetable detail.

An overseer looked my way, so I hurried on.

Soon I came upon two overseers who were taking a break from their harsh work. They looked up at me for a moment then went back to their food and drink, ignoring me as if I was not there.

I heard a snippet of their conversation. This is how I remember it. “You know Sennut, I had a really good time killing that Hebrew slave yesterday.”

As soon as I got home I ran to my room, still heaving in my guts. I started writing down what I had seen: the babies, Moshe and the lettuce slaves, the murderous overseers. It did not take too long and by the time I finished, I discovered that the sick feeling inside me had abated a little. In any case, I had to put on a show for my parents as I was called for dinner. That was the hardest thing all day! Pretending I was unaffected by all I had seen.

* * *

A few days later I was awakened by, “Yosef! Yosef!” The urgent whisper came in my window. “It’s me, Memteph.”

“Of course it’s you, you donkey. Who else would be whispering through my window before the cock crows! It is not even dawn yet!”

“Shush and come with me now. I have something to show you that you will just not believe! I overheard Pharaoh saying he would trick Moshe. I know what he is going to do.”

Recalling the events of a few days ago, I was having second thoughts about blindly following Memteph, but young, trusting and reckless, I pulled on my tunic and sandals, thinking maybe I should just sleep in them from now on, and climbed out the window.

“We have to be so quiet and invisible. Can you do that?”

“I will try my best. Where are we going?”

“To see a god who needs a rest-room.”

I went bug eyed at that statement, with my mouth opening and

closing like a beached fish.

“C’mon! Let’s go, or we’ll miss the show!”

We moved off as the false dawn cast long shadows, darting from tree to bush, dropping down and rolling under bulrushes (I didn’t think of the snakes and scorpions until later) and generally trying to be small and invisible to the guards posted around the perimeter of Pharaoh’s private stretch of the Nile river. I heard something go snap close by and froze. “Don’t worry,” hissed Memteph, “it’s just a little crocodile looking for breakfast.”

I am no hero. I turned around to go back, but he grabbed my tunic and dragged me on.

He stopped suddenly, squatted down and signed to me, with a finger to his lips, then swung back and gently parted a wall of reeds. We could see a clear strip of sand and a peaceful and calm cutoff of the river. It reminded me of the story my Papa had told of Miriam and Batyah. Maybe this was the same sandy stretch of river bank. The light of true dawn was making itself apparent and in a few moments, we heard the tramp of sandals crunching on crisp, compact sand, as tiny Pharaoh and two tall servants stepped into view.

Pharaoh took the towels from one servant and ordered them to return up the path. When he was sure they had departed from sight, he gave a huge sigh, pulled off his shirt and breeches and scuttled to the shallow water where he did his business, right before our eyes. Some god.

Memteph and I were both almost busting our sides with glee, our eyes bulging in mirth and hands clamped over mouths to stifle any sound from alerting Pharaoh, because certainly there were no guards around near us now. Then we both froze as an unexpected figure appeared at the head of the path that Pharaoh had just trod. A tall figure, hooded and robed, and carrying a staff.

I wondered if this was maybe Moshe again, but not for long. It seems that our paths were destined to cross at every step of the

way.

Pharaoh, caught in a most ungodly position, performing a very human and ungodly function, could only bluster and prevaricate. He attempted to finish his business and wash himself while he railed at the intruder. He kept splashing water at something repulsive that was floating close to him, trying to push it towards the slowly moving current, but the thing kept drifting back, like a loyal puppy to its owner.

Realizing that his secret was no longer secret, Pharaoh stopped his frantic splashing and moved away from the floating evidence towards shallower water, a bare, most undignified, mini-god of Egypt. “What do you want now Moshe? Don’t you understand the word ‘No’?” he squeaked in an aggravated voice.

“Mortal Pharaoh!” Moshe intoned and paused to let it sink in. “God, Lord of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, “Let My people go, and let them worship Me in the desert. Until now, you have not listened.”

Moshe continued, “This is what God says, “Through this you will know that I am God!””

“I will strike the water of the Nile with the staff in my hand and the water will turn into blood. The fish in the Nile will die and the Nile will stink. The Egyptians will have to cease drinking water from the Nile.”

At that, Moshe turned on his heel without waiting for a response and left Pharaoh standing alone in the water to contemplate what he had just been warned. Pharaoh then shook himself, like a wet dog and opened his mouth to shout for his guards, but as the first sound left his throat, he stopped, silent, realizing that he could not send his guards looking for the one man who could tell the world that Pharaoh was not a divine being, but a very human dwarf. He took up his towel and in a very human fashion, wrapped himself and sat down on the sand, head in his hands and stared glumly at the rising limb of the sun god, Ammon Ra.

Memteph and I heard and understood every word that had been spoken between Moshe and Pharaoh. We backed up from the reeds a fair way and turned, crawling far enough to be able to stand up and run for our lives.

Suddenly I heard a loud “oomph” ahead of me as Memteph crashed headlong into one of Pharaoh’s guards, who had Memteph under his arm, struggling and wriggling in his grasp. “What are you boys doing here? This is a restricted area. Come, I have to take you back to headquarters. Let me look at you.” The guard held Memteph up by the scruff of his tunic, almost strangling him. “Memteph? Is that you?”

“Mmph uurrngle dmmph...”

“Oh, I am sorry.” The guard put him down. There are some advantages to being the commanding general’s son. Memteph’s tongue was hanging out as he gasped for breath.

“OK. OK. I’m OK. It is just a mistake. My friend and I were playing a game. It is called Hide and Seek at Dawn. I was running to hide. I had no idea where I was in the dark.”

The guard squatted down to check Memteph out. “Are you sure you are OK?” He waited for an affirmative nod. “Please do not tell your father about this. I am very embarrassed.”

“Not your fault, sir. I really should have known where I was running. I will say nothing.” By then I could see and hear that we were safe so I had sidled up to the two of them, standing just behind Memteph in the gloom of pre-dawn.

“All right then. On your way, THAT way, the two of you.” The guard stood like a sign post, pointing off towards a pathway that would take us home.

We walked off nonchalantly, arms over each others shoulders. When we got out of sight and sound of the soldier we both collapsed to the pathway letting out huge sighs of relief at our close call.

We calmed down and sat facing each other, my hands on his shoulders and his on mine. Then we cracked up with laughter. “Did you see,” spluttered Memteph, “the size of that thing? Must have been at least a cubit.” And we both bowled over, rolling in merriment and crying until we were too exhausted to laugh any more.

Of course I couldn’t tell anyone else about our early morning adventure, so later in the day, I added the event to my personal witness scroll.

I was however, perturbed and puzzled. Why would anyone give a warning to their enemy about an attack? Why did Moshe warn Pharaoh? I decided I could ask my Papa as a “hypothetical” question next time I saw him, which was about five minutes later.

“Papa?”

“Yes Yosef. What is it?”

“I have been thinking about the battles our people have fought, and what is happening now with Moshe. Is there ever a good reason to warn our enemy what we are about to do, before we do it?”

My Papa did not miss a beat. “There are two circumstance when a soldier, or anyone for that matter, would forewarn an enemy. In the first case, to strike fear into that enemy when he has nowhere to turn and cannot avoid the consequences of the battle, regardless of what he does. In the second case, one may warn an enemy to allow innocent, non-combatants to remove themselves from the field of battle and danger, just as Abraham our Father asked God that Lot and his family be saved from the punishment of Gomorrah.”

“Thank you Papa, I think I understand.” I gave him a hug and raced off to add this bit of wisdom to my private scroll. I also had to think about scrounging some more papyrus. I was doing a lot of writing.