

*Shiur L'Yom Revi'i*¹

[Wednesday's Study]

READINGS:	<i>Torah Sh'mot:</i>	Exodus 3:1-12
	<i>Haftarah:</i>	Isaiah 28:1-13
	<i>B'rit Chadasha:</i>	Acts 7:37-38

The Angel of the Holy One appeared to him in a flame of fire.

[Exodus 3:2]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 18:7-9;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition #11, *Y'rushalayim [Jerusalem]*

UMoshe hayah ro'eh et-tzon Yitro chotno kohen Midyan – Then it came to pass, as Moshe watched over/shepherded the sheep of his father-in-law, sheik of Midyan **Exodus 3:1a.**

Moshe has given us the ultimate crash course in 'how to fail miserably as a social influencer'. The child of privilege raised in Pharaoh's palace had clearly thought of himself more highly than he ought. He imagined himself a hero, but he proved himself a pariah. Employing all the usual tools that self-appointed influencers use to get 'likes' and 'followers' – assuming an air of moral superiority and an attitude of self-righteousness; virtue-signaling; arrogantly presuming to be qualified to be judge, jury, and executioner in other people's disputes; exhibiting uncontrolled anger/outrage; engaging in brutish behavior; extracting vigilante vengeance; participating in racially-targeted violence; giving unsolicited, virtue-signaling criticism to strangers – and he was quickly and mercilessly taught the law of sowing and reaping. He slew a man in his anger. Then, forgetting that the blood of a murder victim cries out to the Holy One from its resting place in the earth, he appointed himself unofficial judge and jury over every situation and controversy. He insisted on interjecting himself into other people's conflicts, expressing opinions as if he some kind of all-wise and eminently righteous tzaddik instead of the arrogant, impulsive, self-righteous, hot-headed, self-deceived fool and murderer that he had proven himself be. Exposed, disgraced, he had to run away from Egypt with his ego in tatters, his family in shock and disgrace, and his tail tucked between his legs He became like Kayin - *na vanad tihyeh b'eretz* [KJV a *fugitive* and a *vagabond* upon the earth]. See **Genesis 4:12.**

Ah, but all that was part of Moshe's 'first coming'. The Holy One has a trilogy of disgrace-to-glory redemption stories on his resume²; so come with me now to Horeb – in the Desert of *Sin* – and let's see how He starts to turn thing around for Moshe in the disgraced former prince of Egypt's 81st year of life.

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² Consider the stunning stories that we read in Sefer B'reshit involving Ya'akov, Yosef, and Yehudah.

Playing With Fire!

What looks to be just another long, boring day of tending sheep will quickly morph into an eye-opening and life-altering encounter with the God of '***Yehi Ohr***' [i.e. *Light be!*], '***Na'aseh Adam B'tzalmeinu***' [i.e. *Let us make man to be our (earthly) shadow/image*], and '***Lech Lecha***' [i.e. *go out to find/become yourself*]. Truth is about to testify. Reality is about to be revealed. Hope for humanity is about to be rekindled. The Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan is about to kick into high gear. The *Horeb Initiative* is about to be inaugurated, and *kedusha* energy is about to pour forth like a freight train ... from a *thorn bush*, of all things!

Absolutely everything Moshe thinks he knows about the world, himself, and the reason he is alive at such a time as this is about to be turned on its head. All Moshe's pre-existing *theories of theology* will be exposed as superstitious nonsense; all his *paradigms of what is and what is not possible* will be shattered into a million pieces; and all his *matrices of what matters* will implode, collapsing around him like a house of cards. The most radical plan for deliverance the world has ever known is about to be set in motion. The desert of Sin is about to come alive with Divine Speech. The prospects for a higher quality of life for humankind are about to receive a dramatic upgrade. The Genesis 1:7 'finitude barrier' – i.e. the seemingly impenetrable boundary that separates the realm of *ha-shamayim* [the 'Heavens'] from the realm of *ha-arets* [the 'earth'] - is about to become a superhighway.

What Will Horeb Mean for the World as We Know and Perceive It?

As it was with Avram on that fateful day at Charan, so it is about to be with Moshe on this day at Horeb. What happens – or at least what begins – this day is going to be a day remembered and cherished by all generations.

Ah, but there will be ... shall we say ... *ramifications*. The future is about to be reimaged. Human concepts of what is and is not 'possible' are about to be drastically redefined. All human illusions about what the 'status quo' is supposed to look like are about to be swept away. Power is about to be realigned; influence repositioned; and wealth redistributed – not by any act, idea, invention, or convention of men; nor by any earthly government's edict or policy; but by the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth collaborating with a bunch of humble, hated Hebrew slaves.

The great transformation soon to unfold will not emanate from any palace, boardroom, media center, or propaganda factory established or frequented by this world's rich, powerful, popular, and self-important elites. It will not be orchestrated by technocrats. It will not be explainable by theologians. It will not be

predicted by any human author, composed by any celebrated maestro, or imagined by any popular artist, or shaped by any esteemed scientist or scholar. It will not align with the agenda or rhetoric of any human nation, culture, ethnicity, philosophy, ideology, or political theory. Nor will it comport with any man or movement's idea of either 'morality', 'justice', 'liberty, 'equality', 'fraternity', 'wokeness', or 'political correctness'. It will not originate anywhere near any of this world's folly-laden, narcissism-infected, money-obsessed institutions of education, of science, of technology, of medicine, or of religion. It will not be legislated in the hallowed halls of any human government. It is too grand, too wise, too powerful to be entrusted to any of those sources. It is going to be birthed in the middle of nowhere on the backside of a barren desert. It is going to start in a humble thorn bush - and a very special kind of fire that will use the heart of an eighty-year-old nobody, wandering around the outer reaches of the badlands with his father-in-law's hungry sheep, as kindling.

***Welcome to A Whole New Paradigm of Possibilities for the Species
Known as Humankind and the Ecosystem Known as Earth***

Oh, the sweet solitude of the desert! Oh, the silence! Oh, the *shalom*! After growing up in the hustle and bustle of the palace and forum, Moshe was finally getting back in touch with the beauty and wonder of Creation. He once foolishly dismissed this amazing matrix of intricately interconnected and synergistic ecosystems as mere 'nature'. But never again. After spending his youth listening to constant barrages of hate-filled political and ideological rhetoric, incitements to class warfare, and subliminal suggestions of the supremacy – or at least moral superiority - of this or that ethnicity over another; after spending his impressionable years immersed in the ivory tower world of pseudo-intellectual hyperbole; after suffering through decades of having his brain pumped full of institutionally-biased propaganda, fake news, disinformation, and miseducation; after enduring season after season of being slimed, and sliming others, with self-righteous moralizing, hypocritical sermonizing, selective outrage, and weaponized forms of toxic 'science', 'medicine', and 'family planning'; after spending forty years falling hook, line, and sinker for a set of silly superstitions that went around masquerading as a religion; after being blasted day-after-day for four decades with fault-projecting, finger-pointing, gas-lighting narcissism; and having all this happen to him in a world that everyone around him was touting as 'highly-advanced civilization' - Moshe was finally deprogramming. He was getting his mind renewed. He was getting his head back on straight. He was getting his life back on track. He had finally discovered his ancestors' vocation - and was finding out that shepherding can be just as spiritually empowering as it is physically and emotionally challenging. To be a shepherd in the desert around Horeb, Moshe had discovered, required foresight, concentration, patience, and, most importantly of

all, responsiveness to the gentlest Divine Whisper. Of course, none of those traits had been Moshe's forte' up to this point in life. Raised in luxury, he had tended thus far in life more toward characteristics like *entitled, impulsive, emotionally over-reactive, impatient, judgmental to the point of vengeful, and self-driven to the point of listening to no voice except his own will*. But then he was introduced to ... *sheep*.

***Welcome to the Sheepfold –
the Real School of Hebrew Prophets, Priests, and Kings***

Welcome, Dear Reader – you have just entered the world of a *servant-of-the-Holy-One/Friend-of-the-Bridegroom in training!* In this case, the servant, prophet, friend-of-the-Most-High in training is Moshe - a son of slaves, and the first fruits, in his generation, at least, of Divinely defined and spiritually empowered freedom. This man – whose youthful, presumptuous, self-righteous, violently destructive ideas of vigilantism his peers rightfully rejected a few decades ago - is destined for a major makeover. He will have to shed a lot of flesh, pseudo-intellect, and outrage; but if he will meet the Holy One half-way he will be elevated to a *go-down-in-history* level of greatness. Of course, no human being could see that from looking at or listening to him right now. As today's aliyah begins, Moshe is a hot mess if there ever was one. He is a thoroughly disgraced *almost-prince* of Egypt – *condemned to death and wanted dead or alive* by the culture that raised him. He who once naively believed that he could be a deliverer of his own oppressed people while wearing the luxurious clothes, dining on the abundance, and building store cities for the oppressing culture has found out the hard way that deliverance just does not work that way. So now he knows the sting of royal wrath. Now he knows the terror of the taskmaster's whip. Now he knows the destructive power of self-righteous judgmentalism. Now he knows the pain outrage and offense cause. Overwhelmed by it all, he has run away as fast and as far as his legs could take him - to the back side of the Sinai desert. His only human association is an occasional encounter with nomads like himself. He is married to a strong-willed, high-strung, and extremely independent woman of the desert. He who once carried on philosophical, political, ideological, and theological debates with the noblemen of Pharaoh's court now mostly just mutters to himself - and grunts in monosyllables in the direction of his father-in-law's always hungry, often stubborn, painfully ungrateful sheep.

Ah yes – did we mention that there were *sheep*? Sheep are skittish, ornery critters – and ... well, not exactly the sharpest nails in the bin, if you know what I mean. If they aren't eating, drinking, or being stroked the way they like it, they are murmuring and complaining. If their shepherd dares to raise his voice in the slightest, they run away, hide, and sulk. Moreover, for a shepherd, there are always

challenges of terrain. Forget the idyllic images of green pastures and still waters! Mostly it is just barren hills, steep inclines, treacherous declines, narrow pathways, and slippery rocks. In this kind of terrain the slightest misstep could potentially prove fatal. Water is almost non-existent. Patches of edible grass are few and far between. The sun's heat is intense. Blinding, smothering sandstorms could blow up any time. Hungry predators lie in wait, seemingly behind every rock. Moshe is slowly getting the hang of this new gig - but just between you and me, the man does not look like he is anywhere near ready to be a prophet of the Most High God quite yet. Or is there perhaps more going on here than meets the eye?

***In the Eyes of the Holy One of Israel,
What Qualifies a Man for National Leadership***

[Hint: it is not perfection; it is not education; it is not charisma; it is not the quality of one's rhetoric; nor is not the quantity of one's experience]

What are the qualifications of a prophet of the Most High? Before you attempt to answer that question, Beloved, remember the lesson the Holy One will one day teach through the prophet Sh'muel – *i.e.* 'Samuel':

***The Holy One does not look at the things people look at.
People look at the outward appearance; but the Holy One looks at the heart.***

[I Samuel 16:7]

A servant of the Most High must have the heart to both understand and empathize with the problems, the trials, the sorrows, and the needs – as well as the sins - of the people he is called to serve. That is why the Holy One's prophets, priests, and kings are never permitted to view life from ivory towers or spend their days in luxurious mansions. A prophet of the Holy One has to *know exactly what human brokenness and despair feels like*. Moshe is, therefore, further along in the Holy One's leadership training program than he looks. Moshe has been processed through intense crucibles of hardship, suffering, and pain FOR A REASON. A prophet of the Most High has to know very personally what rejection feels like – so Moshe is being processed through crucibles of disfavor, accusation, and rejection. A prophet has to know what being judged feels like – so Moshe is being processed through crucibles of public approbation, criticism, judgment, and condemnation. A prophet has to know what making mistakes – and getting called on the carpet over them - feels like, so Moshe is being processed through crucibles of accountability.

And thus, at the auspicious moment when one sheep wandered off from the ninety-and-nine, and was almost certainly about to get herself killed, Moshe had to make a choice that would change his life – and the world. He had to decide if he was a *shepherd* – or just another hireling. He had to decide if he would leave the ninety and nine at a place of relative safety, and go looking for the one sheep that had foolishly wandered off and put herself in danger. He had to decide if he had the

heart of a leader, and the mindset of a servant, or just a lot of training in the science of blame-casting, moralizing, self-justifying, and logic.

Oh What A Worldview and Lifestyle Change Moshe Has Experienced in the Wilderness!

The biological son of Hebrew slaves, this young man grew up surrounded by luxury – and by Egyptians. Born in a hovel; he was raised in a palace. In the palace in which he spent his youth there was wealth galore; but *a stunning, suffocating dearth of love*. In that palace was learning at the highest levels in every area of human study; but there was *a complete absence of wisdom*. Protecting that palace were great weapons of war; but inside its walls there was *nothing that inspired inner strength*. Surrounding that palace was a nation known for its impressive architecture; but in none of those great structures was there so much as a hint of *shalom*. In that palace's libraries sat tomes upon tomes of books written by the hand of man; but Torah – the instructions and strategies the Creator of the Universe had given for His most beloved creation, man – were conspicuously absent.

What an interesting place for a prophet-in-training of the Most High God to be raised, right? He was not going to learn about the Holy One in that palace. He was not going to learn the strategies of deliverance in those libraries. He was not going to learn how to build an eternal foundation from the kind of architecture by which he grew up surrounded. He was not going to learn how to love from the likes of Pharaoh. He was not going to learn the meaning of true strength by putting on Egyptian armor, picking up Egyptian weapons, and riding in elegant Egyptian chariots.

Something was going to have to give. Somehow this young Hebrew-by-birth was going to have to be set free from this elegant prison. Somehow he was going to have to unlearn the ways and worldview of Egypt's royal household. Somehow this young man was going to have his status quo rocked and shaken – so that he would have no choice but to reconnect with his Hebrew roots, and come to know the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov.

Something Gives

In the course of our study yesterday we received some *shocking* news about the young prophet-in-training. Indeed if what we read yesterday was true ... well, if it was true let's just say it was absolutely *scandalous*. It all happened *so fast*. Did the promising young Egyptian leader called Moshe - the young man Pharaoh's daughter had one of her slaves rescue from the Nile as a baby – really destroy his future in leadership by *taking the life of another man in anger*? The man whose life

Moshe reportedly snuffed out was a *citizen of Egypt*.

We are *never told the dead man's name*. All we are told by the text of Torah is that Moshe killed this man upon seeing him put his hands on a Hebrew – under what circumstances, and for motives, shrouded in mystery. Moshe saw the contact, and jumped to conclusions. A violent ethno-centric rage arose in his fleshly heart that he could not – or, in the throes of his immaturity and self-righteous indignation did not want to – control. He took upon himself the robe of judge, the right of the jury, and the sword of the executioner – all in one fell swoop. His murderous assault on the Egyptian was not spontaneous; it was premeditated. He paused, and looked to the right and to the left to make sure no one was looking before he engaged. Then he stepped into the situation without an invitation - and in a moment his life, and the lives of all the Egyptian's loved ones, dependents, family members, and friends, as well as the relationship between the Hebrew and Egyptian races, was changed forever. Where have we seen this kind of self-appointed vigilante raging before? Ah, yes – at Shechem!

Had Moshe – a highly respected member of Pharaoh's household - merely ordered the Egyptian to stop, or simply reached up to stay the man's hand, he probably would have been okay in the eyes of Pharaoh. He might have received a lecture, but likely nothing more would have come of it. Moshe however went much, much farther than merely halting the scuffle. In a fit of uncontrolled rage Moshe went *too far*. He crossed a line. What began as defense of a human being against a cruel oppressor quickly morphed into *self-righteous bloodlust* toward a subordinate who could not fight back. After all, what do you think would have happened if the lowly taskmaster had dared to raise his hand – even in self-defense - against *the adopted son of the house of Pharaoh*? Alas we will never know. Even after Moshe had interrupted the taskmaster's assault on the Hebrew slave his anger continued to rage out of control. He took vengeance into his own hands, assumed the role of the 'death angel', and *proceeded beat the Egyptian to death mercilessly with his fists*. Moshe thus committed not only *murder* but *high treason* against Egypt. Hence, knowing full well his guilt, after the dirty deed was completed he hurriedly *buried the taskmaster's broken body in the sand in a pathetic attempt to cover up the murder*. In an instant of rage he had just shed another human being's blood. In the process he had likely just turned some young woman in Egypt into a grieving widow and rendered any number of Egyptian children forever fatherless. He had bereaved a mother and father. And all he seems to care about was covering it up. All he appears to be thinking about is *himself*.

It had all happened *so fast* that Moshe probably thought he just might have gotten away with it. Only one person saw what he had done - the Hebrew slave he had

intervened to save. And since Moshe had – initially at least - acted on this slave’s behalf, he felt sure this slave would be so grateful for the assistance that he or she would keep Moshe’s little secret safe.

The Holy One Brings to Light the Hidden Things of Darkness³

If Moshe thought he could keep his act of murder/treason secret however, he miscalculated badly. The very man or woman Moshe rescued from the taskmaster’s beating apparently went right out and told people everything Moshe had done. And so the next day, even before any official investigation as to the disappearance of the Egyptian taskmaster could occur, when Moshe went out among the Hebrew people again he quickly discovered to his horror *achen noda ha-davar* - ‘*the thing is known*’. **Exodus 2:14.**

Moshe found out the hard way that merely to perceive that someone else has a need to be rescued and to feel righteous anger as a result thereof is not enough to justify intervention – because no one can rescue a person who is not *ready to be rescued*. Only if someone *wants* and *is ready* to be rescued will they be grateful to, and feel a bond with, their rescuer.

The *first coming of Moshe* appeared to be anything but glorious. Rejected by his brethren and hated by his countrymen, he found himself under a sentence of death. So Moshe fled to the badlands of the Sinai Peninsula - and spent the next forty (40) years in exile – sojourning with Midyani, and herding sheep like his forefathers.

The Death of the King

While Moshe was away from Egypt, however, something very important happened back in the land of Moshe’s birth.

Vayehi vayamim ha-rabim hahem vayamot melech Mitzrayim

And a long time passed, and the King of Egypt died.

[Exodus 2:23(a)]

What king of Egypt was it who died? It was THAT king of Egypt, Dear Reader. It was the king of Egypt who ‘*knew not Yosef*’. It was the king of Egypt who had forced the Hebrews into labor camps and worked them to death building ‘store cities’. It was the king of Egypt who had decreed that all male babies born to Hebrew mothers be slain on the birth stool or drowned in the Nile.

Based upon what we have read so far we would have thought that the children of Israel would *rejoice* at the news of the death of this tyrant. But that is not what the

³ In I Corinthians 4:5 Shaul of Tarsus says: “*Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, Who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.*”

Torah records. Let us consider the matter further. We learned last week in parsha *Vayechi* that when a dignitary died in Egypt the entire country shut down. The country had shut down for 110 days to mourn the foreign dignitary Ya'akov. The first 40 days had been spent embalming and elaborately entombing Ya'akov's remains, and another 70 days of official mourning had followed. **Genesis 50:2-3**. Certainly no less of a public mourning period would be given to a Pharaoh who died. The public works projects would all shut down. Even the slaves would be expected – and called upon - to mourn. And *mourn they did*. At the end of yesterday's aliyah we read words that lay the foundation for and explain what we will study today – the Holy One's burning bush calling upon Moshe to be the point man of the greatest deliverance story ever told.

The last three verses of Exodus 2 told us that in connection with the death of King of Egypt:

... *the children of Yisra'el **ye'aneichu** [groaned] because of the bondage, and they cried, and **yiz'aku** [their cry] came up to Elohim because of the bondage.*

Groanings and Cries – At Last!

This is *the critical moment*. This is *the beginning of redemption*. For Torah tells us: *And the Holy One **heard na'akatam** [their groaning], **vayizkor** [and the Holy One remembered] **his covenant** with Avraham, with Yitzchak, and with Ya'akov. **Vayar Elohim** [i.e. And God saw] **the children of Yisra'el, vayeida Elohim** [i.e. and God knew every intimate detail about them fully and infinitely]. **Exodus 2:23-25**.*

In our human wisdom we tend to think the critical moment of the redemption was the moment Moshe first stood in Pharaoh's face and said: 'Let my people go!'. Or perhaps we think it was the moment Pharaoh's firstborn son died on the night of the tenth 'plague'. Some may even see the critical moment as when the Sea of Reeds swallowed Pharaoh's mighty army. But those moments all flowed from another one. The critical moment of deliverance really came when the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov broke their silence and cried out to the God of their fathers for deliverance.

The problem prior to the outcry referenced in Exodus 2 was not that the Holy One had been oblivious - much less unsympathetic - to the plight of Avraham's descendants. Nor was the problem that the Holy One had somehow forgotten the covenant He had made with Avraham. That was not it. Oh no Beloved, that was not the problem at all.

So What Was the Problem?

What HAD BEEN the problem? As hard as it is for us today to believe, the problem was that prior to the death of the Pharaoh that ordered their male babies

killed the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov simply had not wanted - much less asked the Holy One for - deliverance. They had bought into the lie that living in the richest nation in the world - at that time, Egypt - was the best kind of life this world had to offer. They held to the lie even in the face of horrible persecution. They simply had no vision for anything more - or other - than Egypt at its best provided. The distant memory of the Covenant Plan of the Holy One that the seed of Avraham would 'go out' and have a 'great name', and 'become a great nation', and be the source of the Holy One's blessing on all peoples on the face of the earth seemed 'old school' and outdated. In their eyes, *Egypt was the thing now*. So the Holy One had to show them Egypt at its worst, else they would simply never agree to leave.

Even when the dark side of the Egyptian dream was plainly revealed, however, all the way up to the point where the cruel Pharaoh in whom they had put both their fear and their trust died, the Hebrews had always thought that *if they just worked hard enough and if they just invested enough blood and sweat and tears and time* in Egypt's economic development they would prove their loyalty, would win the king's favor with their industriousness, and would ... well, would sort of *live happily ever after in a one-world order utopian dream world*. The problem was that up to the point where their hopes of bettering themselves through their own efforts were dashed by the death of the king they had tried so hard and for so long to please, they absolutely *loved* Egypt and all it stood for - and wanted desperately to make a go of it there.

The problem was not - as some have believed - that the Holy One had hidden His Face from the descendants of Ya'akov; the problem was that vast numbers of Ya'akov's descendants had never once even thought of *seeking His Face*. The problem was not that the Holy One had theretofore ignored their cries for deliverance; the problem was that most of them had never even considered uttering any such cries. The problem was not that the Holy One had theretofore forgotten His Eternal Covenant with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov and their descendants; the problem was that the vast majority of those descendants had simply *taken no personal interest in* - and therefore *wanted no part of* - that Covenant.

Prior to the death of the king of Egypt whom they had wanted so desperately to please and 'win over' to their side most of the descendants of Ya'akov simply *did not realize they needed, and were not ready for, and did not want, and would not by any means have accepted*, redemption from the Holy One. Much like the slave rescued by Moshe from death at the hands of the Egyptian taskmaster apparently, they had the mentality that they could *work their way out of the unpleasant aspects*

of their Egyptian experience on their own. While they were hard at work all these years on the King of Egypt's projects, therefore, the people had borne the burden silently. They had not stopped working long enough to consider, much less recognize the depth of, their pain. But then Pharaoh died. Then they had time to reflect upon how bad their situation had become, how hopeless their children's future was – and how desperately they needed deliverance. Finally the veil was lifted. Finally Hebrew throats began to find the voice they had surrendered to the great Egyptian Dream. And they *groaned with unutterable groans*. And they *cried out with great pitiful cries*.

I am sure the Egyptians thought that the Hebrews were mourning for the fallen king of Egypt like everyone else in the country was doing. But the Holy One knew better. The groans and cries He heard were *exactly the sounds – and the signs - He had been waiting for*. The Holy One had known all along the lesson Moshe learned the hard way – that there is no way to rescue even one slave, much less a slave nation, who do not see their need for, or want, deliverance. He knew that *if you offer such people deliverance, they will reject it*. He knew that *if you try to deliver such people anyway they will resist, and will mock the deliverer, and will as soon as possible run right back to the sadistic kind of comfort they receive from their codependent relationship with whatever despot or madman has bedazzled them with his brilliant ideas, eloquent speeches, and his awesome might*.

One by one, two by two, a hundred by a hundred, they began to awake from their deep slumber. They finally looked beyond themselves and their surroundings. They finally turned their eyes toward and cried out to the One Who would never leave them or forsake them.

Only when a person or a nation finally realizes the depths of its pain, and groans and cries under its burden, does deliverance become possible. Only then is the Deliverer free to do that which He has longed with all His heart to do. And that is why it is always the moment the people of the Covenant begin to cry out to their Covenant Partner for redemption – that is the critical moment of deliverance.

Four Hebrew Verbs In Which our Covenant Relationship With Him is Anchored

Note the four *verbs* with which Torah describes to us the Holy One's reaction to the sudden outpouring of sighs, cries, wailing, and groaning by the descendants of Yisrael. In English we are told He "heard", "remembered", "saw", and "was concerned". He hears. He remembers. He sees. And He cares. But let's dare to look behind the English translation of these verbs. English is a language that is, like Greek, centered upon *concepts*. Both English and Greek are *humanistic languages*,

spoken by people groups who are by and large extremely humanistic in orientation⁴. Such languages are all about *the products of men's minds* – what men *think, believe, theorize, opine, empirically observe, philosophize, and theologize*. It is not so with Hebrew. Hebrew – the language in which the Holy One chose to speak to us and in which He chose to give us His Torah - is very, very different. Indeed the difference is like night and day. Hebrew, you see, is not based upon *concepts*, or indeed upon anything humanistic. It is instead a language based upon *verbs*, and therefore based upon *action*. In Hebrew, for instance, one finds that the verb in a sentence usually comes before the subject. One sees what is done first, then observes, from context, who does it.

The Hebrew verbs used in the original text are stunning in their passion. These four Hebrew verbs describe Who the Holy One **IS** by describing, in typical Hebraic fashion, what He **DOES**. The God of Avraham, of Yitzchak, and of Yaakov is not an abstract concept, a philosophy, or a theology, you see. He is an **ACTIVE FORCE**. He is a **DIVINE ACTOR**.

The Hebrew verb we translate as *heard* [in the phrase *And the Holy One heard their groaning*] is the verb root *sh'ma*. In this context it means that *He focused all His attention, and listened intently and passionately, and let the cry and groaning of Ya'akov's descendants affect His will and determine what He would say and what He would do*.

The Hebrew verb we translate as *remembered* [in the phrase *and the Holy One remembered his covenant ...*] is the verb root *zakar*. In this context it tells us that the Holy One brought to the forefront of His fantastically creative Mind and continually focused His Divine Intellect and brooded with His Divine Emotions upon - AND set in motion a Divine plan to deal with - both their *cry* and their *plight*.

The Hebrew verb we translate as *saw* is the verb root *ra'ah* [in the phrase *And the Holy One saw the children of Yisra'el ...*]. In this context it means that the Creator looked intently with His all-seeing Eyes into the situation that existed, noting with discernment exactly what that situation was, and set, and kept, a diligent and

⁴ By the term **humanistic** I simply mean primarily focused upon *man*, and upon *what man can think, what man can do, what man can empirically observe, what man can bring about, and what man can become in man's eyes*, as opposed to focused on *God*, Who *God* is, and what *God* does. For example, all athletic endeavor, as well as competition, is humanistic. Likewise, all forms of art and science, and entertainment are humanistic. All forms of government, including democracy, republicanism, socialism, and communism, as well as all forms of political action, are all humanistic. Theology and doctrine and orthodoxy are humanistic. Legalism is humanistic. All forms of medicine and law are likewise humanistic.

faithful *watch* over Ya'akov's descendants. This reminds us of the verse and song "*He who watches over Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps*".

The Hebrew verb we translate as *was concerned* [in the phrase "*and the Holy One was concerned about them.*"] is the verb root *yada*. In this context it means that the Holy One *knew* and *understood* and *acknowledged* each one of Ya'akov's descendants *intimately*, as a husband knows a wife, understanding her emotions and her needs, her desires, and her potential. So, understanding that the heart of the Holy One is *aroused with great passion* and that He *has a Divine plan*, it is only a matter of time until He interjects His Presence into and imposes His Divine Will upon the world.

The eyes of the Holy One roam to and fro over the earth looking for the man He created from the union of slaves, sheltered and taught in the courts of Pharaoh, protected from a decree of death after he killed a man in passion, and who now tends sheep in the desert for a priest of the Midyani. Where is the man who will *sh'ma* His instructions, and surrender to His will – and be made into a deliverer?

Behold He Comes!

Behold ... *he comes*. Unbeknownst to Moshe the Holy One has called him to *Har Sineh* [Mount Sinai, also called *Horev*]. The Holy One is about to encounter – nay *apprehend* - him as he pastures his flock. That is where we pick up the narrative of today's aliyah. For Torah tells us:

uMoshe hayah ro'eh et-tzon Yitro chotno
Moshe tended the sheep of his father-in-law, Yitro

kohen Midyan
sheik of Midyan.

vayinhag et ha-tzon achar ha-midbar
He led the flock to the edge of the desert

vayavo el-har ha-Elohim Chorevah
and he came to God's Mountain, in the Horeb area.

[Exodus 3:1]

What occupied the mind of Moshe, the Prince-of-Egypt-turned-shepherd, as he led the flock of *Yitro* [the name *Yitro* has been mis-transliterated into English for centuries as 'Jethro'] across the 'back side of the desert'? Did his thoughts turn to *Tzipporah*, his beautiful Midyanite wife? Did he meditate about the future of *Gershom* and *Eliezer*, his two young sons? Did he ponder the strange teachings and religious practices of his father-in-law, the "priest" of Midyan? Did he think back on the murder he had committed in Egypt, and look over each dune cautiously, fearing he

might run into an Egyptian patrol, still looking for him – the fugitive from Egyptian justice – forty years after the fact? Did he perhaps think back tenderly regarding the Egyptian princess he had known as a mother all his life? Or did his thoughts wander to the lowly Hebrew slave woman who bore him, lovingly placed him in a basket in the Nile, and had miraculously been allowed to swaddle and nurse him when he was young? Or on this day was he content merely to enjoy the desert scenery and relish the peacefulness of his new life as a Midyanite – so different than anything he had ever known?

The Fugitive is Finally Apprehended

Whatever Moshe's meditations on the fateful day of our aliyah, they were about to be *rudely interrupted*. The serene, domestic, pastoral life the husband and father of two sons had just begun to enjoy was about to be *changed forever*. Moshe the *miracle-child*, Moshe the *pampered prince*, Moshe the *murderer*, Moshe the *know-it-all*, Moshe the *apprentice-shepherd of Midyan* – now eighty years old - was about to *meet the Creator of the Universe for the first time*. For you see, the One True God – the God of Enoch, and Noach, and Shem, and Avraham and Yitzchak and Ya'akov and Yosef - was waiting for Moshe patiently ... *behind the next bush*.

Who By Fire?

The Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as bush is *s'neh*⁵. This word, which is, of course, also the root of the word 'Sinai', meaning 'my bush', is derived 'from an unused root meaning *'to prick'*. The *s'neh* was no ornamental shrub. It was a *wild thorn bush* with very sharp thorns that would prick a man, cause pain, and draw blood. From such a bush one might plait a 'crown of thorns' - or perhaps receive a 'thorn in the flesh'⁶.

Why did the Holy One select a *thorn bush* in which to manifest His Presence and give voice to His call for the deliverer? Consider that in Gan Eden before 'the Fall' Torah tells us that "*no bush of the field was yet on earth*". **Genesis 2:5**. There were no thorn bushes. There were no weeds. Everything grew exactly where, and as, and when, the Holy One told it to. But in connection with the 'curse' of the *eretz* after 'the Fall' the Holy One said to Adam '*thorn and thistle will it produce for you ...*' **Genesis 3:18**.

I believe that the thorn bush – *s'neh* – is selected by the Holy One as the vehicle for the calling forth of the deliverer *because it is the ultimate symbol of the 'curse'*. It is precisely because the *eretz* produces thorn bushes that we know that

⁵ *S'neh* is *samech, nun, hey*. Strong's Hebrew word #5572, it is pronounced *seh-nay*'.

⁶ See II Corinthian 12:7, where Shaul of Tarsus says: "*And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.*"

redemption is necessary. Every thorn bush is a reminder to mankind of how far he has fallen from his original estate. A thorn bush ablaze with the Presence of the Holy One, however, is something special - it is a promise that even in the midst of the thorns of life the Holy One *has not abandoned or forgotten man*, but is *with man*, and is *for man*, and has consented to *bear the pain of the thorn bush on man's behalf*.

The pictographic mural presented by the three Hebrew letters that make up the word is that of one who falls and rises again [or dies and comes back to life] (*samech*), becoming a son or heir (*nun*), and giving revelation (*hey*). The imagery is as beautiful as it is fitting - for Moshe, for Messiah ... and, *Baruch* the Holy One ... for you and me. Come into the King's Chambers. Come to the wedding feast. Let Him *betroth you to Him* forever. Here is how the Holy One initiates Moshe's first God-encounter:

Vayera mal'ach Adonai elav b'labat-esh

The Holy One's angel appeared in the heart of a fire,

mitoch ha-s'neh vayar

in the middle of a thornbush.

V'hineh ha-s'neh boer ba'esh

As he beheld that the bush was on fire,

v'ha-s'neh eyneinu ukal

but was not being consumed.

The *s'neh* [thorn bush] was engulfed in ascending flames of supernatural fire – the exact pictograph presented by the Hebrew letter *shin*, which observant Hebrews put on the *mezuzot* that mark their doorposts. But though the flames *engulfed* the bush, strangely enough the flames did not *consume* the bush. Not one of its limbs was charred. The fire produced no ashes. The heat did not wither either leaf or branch - or thorn. The effects of the curse spoken in Eden are not ameliorated. And yet the Holy One *loves and leads, and guides, and will redeem* the descendants of Adam. He has *a plan*. And Moshe is a part of it. And so are you and me. It is not about what we as humans can achieve, or believe. It is about sensing and submitting humbly to the Holy One's Presence, Divine Perspective, and plan of action - in the midst of the thorn bushes of life.

Eavesdropping on a World-Changing God-Encounter

Eavesdropping is usually considered to be a rude, disrespectful thing. But Torah invites us to eavesdrop on Moshe's first-ever God-encounter. But first you may wish to *take off your shoes* – this is *ad'mat kodesh* - holy ground.

Vayomer Moshe asurah-na v'er'eh et ha-mar'eh ha-gadol

Moshe said 'I will go over and investigate this wonderful phenomenon.

hazeh madua lo-yiv'ar ha-s'neh

Why doesn't the bush burn?'

Vayar Adonai ki sar lir'ot

When the Holy One saw that [Moshe] was going to investigate,

vayikra elav Elohim mitoch ha-s'neh vayomer Moshe Moshe

He called to him from the middle of the bush: 'Moshe, Moshe!'

Vayomer hineni

'I am here,' replied [Moshe].

[Exodus 3:3-4]

Consider Moshe *apprehended*. But he hasn't seen anything yet!

When the Creator of the Universe Calls Your Name ...

Did you notice that the Holy One, when He was calling Moshe, did not just call his name once? He called it twice: ***Moshe Moshe***, He said. To the Holy One Moshe was not just the Moshe who had been – the baby preserved by the Nile, raised in Pharaoh's household, who killed an Egyptian in anger, fled to the desert, married a Midyani princess, and tended sheep. To the Holy One the man staring into the burning *s'neh* was another Moshe as well – the Moshe that was to come – the Moshe who would stand before the most powerful man on earth armed only with a staff and declare '***Sh'lach ami!***' [Let my people go!].

To the Holy One the man gazing into the flames on this mountain was the man who would stand before the *Yam Suf* [sea of reeds] and declare '*Stand, and see the yeshua of the Holy One!*'" To the Holy One the shepherd out looking for pasture for his father-in-law's sheep was the shepherd who would lead his Father's flock to freedom. And to the Holy One the frightened mortal who shivered before the bush that talked was the man who would, in the future, spend 40 days upon this very mountain on at least two occasions, receiving in his spirit, for transmission to the people, the betrothal covenant the world would come to know as Torah.

Beloved, as the Holy One looks at you in this moment consider *what He sees*. He sees you as you have been, and are, of course. But He sees much, much more than that. He sees you *with all the potential He placed in you*. He sees you fulfilling the divine destiny for which you were created and given life. He sees you communing with Him, and becoming the messenger of His covenant. As Moshe said, so say we all: ***Hineni!***

The Fear of the Holy One Is the Beginning of Knowledge

Moshe was all eyes and ears. He would never, ever be the same. But he like all of us had *a lot to learn*. There is, you see, a Kingdom-Court approach protocol that the Holy One ordains for our own good. If he wants to live, one does not

presumptively approach the burning thorn bush - or the God of the burning thorn bush. So the Holy One interrupts Moshe's ascent and stops him in his tracks:

*'Do not come any closer,' said [God]. 'Take your shoes off your feet.
The place upon which you are standing ...
Ad'mat-kodesh hu. [It is holy ground!]
Moreover he said, "I am the God of your father,
the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Ya'akov."
Moshe hid his face; for he was afraid to look at the Holy One.*

The Holy One said:

*"I have surely seen **et-oni ami** [the affliction of my people] who are in Mitzrayim,
and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters,
ki yadati et-mach'ovav [for I know their sorrows].*

*I have come down **l'hatzilo** [to deliver them] out of the hand of the Mitzrim,
and **ul'ha'aloto** [to bring them up] out of that land
to a good and large land,
to a land **zavat chalav udevash** [flowing with milk and honey];
to the place of the Kana`ani, the Hittite, the Amori,
the Perizzi, the Hivvi, and the Yevusi.*

*Now, behold, **tza'akat b'nei Yisra'el** [the cry of the children of Yisra'el]
has come to me. Moreover I have seen **et-ha-lachatz** [the oppression]
with which the Mitzrim **lochatzim** [oppress] them.*

*Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh,
Vehotze et-ami [that you may bring forth my people],
the children of Yisra'el, out of Mitzrayim."*

[Exodus 3:1-10]

This is *the call of Moshe*. It is a call that will completely and irrevocably transform his life. Before this call Moshe thought *he* had to be the deliverer. He therefore slew the Egyptian with his bare hands. But that is not the kind of deliverance the Holy One's people needed. That kind of imperfect deliverance only *made their situation worse*. The kind of deliverance the Holy One wants for His people cannot be wrought by a man – only *by the Holy One Himself*. All man can do is yield his heart, his hands, his lips, his staff, to the Holy One, to become a malleable - and ultimately disposable - container vessel of clay, of the Holy One's passion and power.

Note that the Deliverance of God's people from Egypt is already a 'done deal' in Exodus 3. It is *going to happen*. Absolutely nothing can stop it. It is not only the *will of the Holy One*, but now His prophetic, creative word has *spoken it*. In

Hebraic thought that means what the Holy One has done is to *bara*⁷ it – to release Divine power in an explosive, refining, and re-structuring way to bring it to pass. The remainder of Exodus will merely explain the details.

Moshe's First Excuse: Who Am I?

Moshe has just been informed by a Voice from a burning bush that he has been chosen to go back to Egypt, confront the seemingly almighty Pharaoh, and bring out all the Holy One's people. He is, to say the least, incredulous. His first response is – but ... *who am I?* Moshe replied to the Holy One:

mi anochi ki elech el-Par'oh

Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?

vechi otzi et-b'nei Yisra'el mi-Mitzrayim

'And how can I possibly get the Israelites out of Egypt?'

[Exodus 3:11]

Moshe has a point. *Who is he indeed?* Who are *any of us?* But here is the good news. The Holy One is not looking for a *great leader*. All he wants is a *yielded vessel*. Hence the Holy One responds to Moshe: ***Ki eheyeh imach*** - *'Because I will be with you,' 'And this will be ha-ot – the sign (testifying) that I have sent you:*

B'hotzi'acha et ha-am mi-Mitzrayim

when you get the people out of Egypt

ta'avdun et ha-Elohim

All of you will then become God's servants

al ha-har hazev

on this mountain.'

[Exodus 3:12]

The Holy One will be *with Moshe*, Dear Reader. Moshe will be the beneficiary of a Divine *'with-ness'*, much as were Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov and Yosef. We will learn soon enough that the *with-ness* factor – not great leadership skills - is what really matters in the Holy One's program of Redemption.

Questions For Today's Study

1. Through the medium of Torah we have just witnessed Moshe's first one-on-One encounter with the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov.

[A] On what mountain did Moshe encounter the "burning bush"?

[B] Write the name of the mountain in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings.

[C] What does the Hebrew name of that mountain mean?

[D] When the Holy One speaks to Moshe, He identifies Himself not only as the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, but also as the God of someone else. Who?

⁷ *Bara* is *beit, resh, alef*. Strong's Hebrew word #1254, it is pronounced *baw-raw*'.

[E] What was miraculous about the bush?

[F] The Hebrew people have been compared to the bush about which we read in today's aliyah. How do you think the Hebrew people are like this burning bush?

2. In Exodus 3:7 the Holy One relates three separate ways in which He has been touched by the suffering of His people.

[A] What are those three ways?

[B] In Strong's and then Gesenius, look up the three verbs the Holy One uses to express the three ways. Do a study on each of those three Hebrew verbs, as follows:

[i] In Strong's look up each of the three Hebrew verbs.

[ii] Write each of the three Hebrew verbs, in Hebrew letters, with vowel points.

[iii] Write the transliteration and pronunciation of each of these words.

[iv] In Gesenius, find the *pa'al/kal* forms of these verbs (or as close to them as you can get), and write the primary definition of each verb.

[v] After reviewing the other notes of Gesenius regarding these verbs, write a paragraph (at least three sentences) describing how you think the Holy One was saying He was affected by the suffering of the Hebrew peoples in their Egyptian exile, considering what these verbs really mean, and the shades of meaning and usage that pertain to the *pa'al/kal* form of the verb.

3. Using the discussion between the Holy One and Moshe as a script, act out the encounter as a play. First you be the Holy One and let your study partner be Moshe. Then reverse the roles. Get the feel of what it was like for Moshe to encounter the Holy One in this way, and the sense of awe and unworthiness he must have felt.

4. In the Haftarah aliyah for today *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah] passionately denounces the attitudes and spiritual condition of the leaders of first the Northern Kingdom (verses 1-6) and then the Southern Kingdom (verses 7-13).

*Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Efrayim,
and to the fading flower of his glorious beauty,
which is on the head of the fat valley of those who are overcome with wine!*

*Behold, the Holy One has a mighty and strong one;
as a tempest of hail, a destroying storm, as a tempest of mighty waters overflowing,
will he cast down to the eretz with the hand.*

*The crown of pride of the drunkards of Efrayim shall be trodden under foot:
and the fading flower of his glorious beauty,*

*which is on the head of the fat valley,
shall be as the first-ripe fig before the summer;
which when he who looks on it sees, while it is yet in his hand he eats it up.*

*In that day will the Holy One of Hosts become a crown of glory,
and a diadem of beauty, to the residue of his people;
and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment,
and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.*

*Even these reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink;
the Kohen and the prophet reel with strong drink,
they are swallowed up of wine, they stagger with strong drink;
they err in vision; they stumble in judgment.*

For all tables are full of vomit [and] filthiness, [so that there is] no place [clean].

***Whom will he teach knowledge?
and whom will he make to understand the message?**
those who are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts?
For it is precept on precept, precept on precept;
Line-on-line, line-on-line; here a little, there a little.*

*No, but by [men of] strange lips and with another language
will he speak to this people; to whom he said, **“This is the rest,
give you rest to him who is weary; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear [sh'ma].
Therefore shall the word of the Holy One be to them precept on precept, precept on precept;
line-on-line, line-on-line; here a little, there a little;
that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.***

[A] The theme of “fruit” is continued from 27:6. How is the “fruit” in today’s aliyah different from the “fruit” mentioned in 27:6?

[B] Is. 28:9-13 contain a famous phrase - “*line upon line, precept upon precept ...*” Was this the way the Holy One desired His people to receive revelation of Him? Why or why not?

[C] If “*line upon line, precept upon precept*” is not the way the Holy One designed His people to receive revelation, by what method DID He design us to receive revelation from Him? [Hint: look carefully at, and meditate on, verse 12].

5. In today’s reading from the sermon of *Stefanos* [Stephen] we continue to hear only good things about Moshe.

*This is that Moshe, who said to the children of Yisra'el,
the Holy One our God will raise up a prophet for you from among your brothers, like me.'
This is he who was in the assembly in the wilderness
with the angel that spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our fathers,
who received living oracles to give to us ...*

[A] How does Stefanos describe Moshe in today’s B’rit Chadasha aliyah? List the things Stephen says about him.

[B] Who is the *prophet raised up from among your brethren* prophesied by Moshe? Why do you think so?

*May you turn aside this day to see that which is burning,
but is not consumed by the Flame.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 18:7-9

*Then the eretz shook and trembled.
The foundations also of the mountains quaked and were shaken,
because he was stirred up. Smoke went out of his nostrils.
Consuming fire came out of his mouth; coals were kindled by it.
He bowed the heavens also, and came down.
Thick darkness was under his feet.*