

Shiur L'Yom Chamishi¹

[Thursday's Study]

READINGS: ***Torah Sh'mot:*** **Exodus 3:13 - 4:31**
 Haftarah: **Jeremiah 1:1-10**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Acts 7:39-40**

Moshe said, "O Holy One, please send someone else to do it."

[Exodus 4:13]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 18:10-13;

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

Vayomer Moshe el-ha-Elohim – Then Moshe said to the Elohim [Ultimate Sovereign Authority] ... *hineh anochi va el-b'nei Yisra'el* –Behold, I am to go to B'nei Yisrael...
Exodus 3:13a.

It is not public knowledge yet, but something incredibly wonderful – and absolutely pivotal for the Creator's Grand Plan - is happening in a desert near Egypt. A portal between *Ha-Shamayim* [KJV 'the Heavens'] and *Ha-Aretz* [KJV 'the earth'] has opened up in the Sinai watershed, on a hill called 'Horeb'. It started with the spontaneous combustion of a lowly thorn bush. Now Hebrew words of Divine Origin are pouring forth from that bush like tongues of fiery flame. Only one man can see it. But it is turning his life upside down. He has spent the last forty years hiding out in the badlands of Sinai, with the burden of an Egyptian's blood on his hands and with the *Damoclean Sword* of Pharaoh's death sentence aimed squarely at his head. He is neither saint, nor prophet, nor priest. He is no hero. He has no superpowers. He is not even particularly articulate, much less wise. He is no leader of men – much less of movements. Why then has the Holy One chosen to visit him? Why does he not choose someone – anyone – else?

Listen! Do you Want to Know a SECRET!

Do you Promise not to Tell?²

The Voice that spoke '*Yehi Ohr*' [KJV 'Let there be light!'] into the primordial goo of Creation is suddenly being heard on earth again! This time the Voice is using a thorn bush as a microphone. Fingers of fiery flame explode off the bush's branches in pulses and waves - yet not one twig droops, nor does a single leaf show the slightest sign of withering. The surrounding atmosphere does not carry even a hint of *the smell of smoke*. Out of the midst of glowing embers powerful, creative Words – all in the Hebrew tongue - are flowing directly from Heaven into Moshe's

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² The heading is taken from the John Lennon/Paul McCartney song '*Do You Want to Know a Secret*', written in 1962.

soul. Suddenly Moshe is more alive, alert, and oriented than he has ever been in his life. Suddenly he can see into the Throne Room of Heaven, where the King is high and lifted up, emanating Divine Light. Suddenly all Moshe's senses are working the way they were designed to work. Suddenly Moshe can hear the sweetness in the King's Voice; can smell and delight in the King's healing fragrance; can feel the depth of the King's love – not just for him, but for all humanity and for Creation. Suddenly Moshe can taste the King's essential goodness. Suddenly his *neshamah* is awakening from the deep, deep slumber in which it has lain in state all his life to this point. Suddenly his mind, will, and emotions are coming into alignment with His Creator's design. Suddenly his heart is melting; his lips are quivering; and his inner organs are trembling. Suddenly his entire body is vibrating in resonance with the frequency of Heaven's true tone. Suddenly the strange things that have been going on in the world as he knows it are beginning to make sense. Suddenly an understanding of the reason for which he was *born in a hovel* but *raised in a palace* is dawning on him. Suddenly he can sense that everything that has happened to both his Hebrew and Egyptian families - indeed, everything that has ever happened or will ever happen affecting any human being on earth - is just a loosely choreographed chapter in a Brilliantly Intricate, Wonderfully Immaculate, *Grand Eternal Plan*. Suddenly it is dawning on Moshe that not just his name but the names of all the sons and daughters of Yisrael have, since before the foundation of the world, been written into a Glorious, Faith, Hope, Love, and Fear-of-the-Holy-One Inspiring Storyline of Liberation, Emancipation, and *Tikkun*. Suddenly the Redemption of Mankind as a Species, bloodline by bloodline, family by family, and household by household, and the restoration of all Creation to its intended Edenic state of beauty, fruitfulness, and *shalom* seem not only possible, but inevitable! Suddenly the old shepherd is catching a vision of a purpose that transcends time, place, nation, ethnicity, and makes arrogant outrage and knee-jerk emotional reaction over daily life's momentary light afflictions look petty, pouty, and blatantly narcissistic. Suddenly his – and all fallen humankind's – brokenness – from our pathological attraction to the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to our psychotic fixation on abstract concepts like 'morality', 'social justice', and 'diversity', to our *messiah complex* – sometimes acting as vigilante or avenger, other times imagining ourselves a hero and/or a martyr - can all be seen for the *tohu v'vohu*-producing vessels of corruption that they are. Suddenly all he can imagine ever wanting is to serve as a humble ambassador for the God of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov. Who knew that he would do so not only in dealings with the men, kingdoms, and cultures of his day, but also in relation to millions of people in all generations to follow? Who could have imagined that he was receiving a gift that will keep on giving until the memory of man runs not to the contrary?

Oh, Moshe will have to grow into this great calling, of course. He is being set apart for a great mission, but sanctification is always a process, never an event. Several parts of his ‘new identity’ persona will take quite a while to develop and ‘gel’. There will be plenty of flesh resistance, push-back, and overwhelm that he will have to face and overcome. He will even experience occasional relapses. From time-to-time he will lose his focus, start to get hard-hearted and self-righteous again, and as a result will throw disgusting fits of fleshly anger, play parlor games of pseudo-intellectual folly and false piety, pick up and carry personal and cultural offense, and wallow in self-pity. But the Voice of the Creator of the Universe has awakened awe and wonder and germinated a seed of *emunah* in Moshe; so whatever challenges the rest of his life may present, *there is no turning back now*.

The Voice That Heals, Restores – and Changes Everything!

After all, the Voice speaking from the flames is the same One that spoke the Universe into existence. It is the Voice that Adam heard in the Garden; that warned Noah about the Flood; that called Avraham out of Paddan-Aram. It is the Voice that calmly guided Yitzchak, Ya’akov, and Yosef through all their life experiences. The sweet sound of this Voice has not been heard by any human being in a long time – but thanks be to Heaven, THE DROUGHT IS NOW OVER. Marvelous things are being declared. And it is all being spoken in the language the world has come to know as ‘Hebrew’ – *i.e.* the very language the Creator used to call forth Light from the primordial darkness. When the fire that blazes in the Thorn Bush goes out, the land will be just as it was before it was lit. The whispers of Divine Speech that are being spoken out of the fire, on the other hand, will resound throughout both the Heavens and the Earth forever. As a result of those whispers, neither mankind as a species nor the earth as a Created Realm will ever be the same.

The only witness to the spectacle is Moshe. Who is he, and what qualifies him to be here? He is, in the eyes of the world, just an old shepherd with a sketchy past – and a rap sheet that includes manslaughter if not outright murder. Why was he chosen? Not because of any position or title or degree he holds. Not because of any skill, talent, or winsomeness he possesses – he is the ultimate nobody. Not because he is popular – for he is anything but. Not because of his high level of influence over other people – because he has none. He is not known for piety. He has no track record of spiritual discipline. He has no ministerial credentials. He has no mailing list. He has absolutely no following – well, except a few always hungry, often stubborn, easily distracted, and wholly ungrateful sheep that actually belong to his father-in-law.

***The Hebrew Whisper That Will Change Everything:
V'eshalchacha – I Will Send You ...***

Moshe did not come up this mountain looking for an encounter with the God of his ancestors. The only reason he came up this mountain was to retrieve a wayward sheep that somehow slipped away from the fold. But alas, that sheep's rescue will have to wait. Moshe is standing still – transfixed, as it were, by the sight of a thorn bush that burns but suffers no ill effects on account of either the heat or the flames. Could this be happening? Could this phenomenon be real? Was a Beautiful Voice from Heaven – perhaps even the same Voice that he had been told spoke often to his forefathers - really talking to *him*? Moshe slipped off his sandals in reverence. He wasn't going anywhere anytime soon. He was frozen in place, lost in time. Then he thought he heard the Voice say to him something that sounded like: ***V'atah lecha*** [and you - go out now,] ***v'eshlachacha el-Par'oh*** [I am sending you to Pharaoh] - ***v'hotze et-ami v'nei Yisra'el mi-Mitzrayim*** [bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt]? Listening has never been Moshe's strong suit. Could he have possibly have just heard what he thinks he heard?

Yes, Moshe, you heard right. ***'I am sending you to Pharaoh'*** and ***'bring My people out of Egypt'*** are exactly what the Voice speaking from the burning thorn bush just said to you. Details are sketchy. No timeline is mentioned. Methodology will apparently be revealed on a 'need to know' basis. But one thing is clear: *the seeds of a great awakening are being sown*. It is not going to be a grass-roots human movement toward freedom, social and economic justice, or morality; it is a Heavenly call to *arise*, to *be inspired*, and to *be empowered* by the Holy One just as Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov were. The long-lost sons and daughters of the Avrahamic Covenant are about to awaken from a long season of slumber. After many generations they are about to realize that prolonged immersion in a culture that celebrates materialism, sensual and sexual perversion, fatalism, occult practices, and blatant paganism has had a horribly toxic effect on everything that is important to them – and to their mission on planet earth. Finally the chosen people of the Most High God are going to realize that their children, their Covenant identities, their individual and collective callings, the great redemptive mission to which they have been called, and their Kingdom destiny are all slowly dying in this environment. They are finally going to realize that the status quo of economics, politics, education, entertainment, and religion in the pagan land[s] in which they have settled is killing everything and everyone it touches. Finally a great cry is rising up to Heaven for Divine Intervention. Finally, after all these decades of trying to make the best of a bad situation, a call is going out to the Courts of Heaven for deliverance.

The Plan has been announced – and it is *way* outside Moshe’s comfort zone. The Holy One actually intends for Moshe to go back to the land of Pyramids and Sphinx’s from which he fled for his life, confront the most powerful man on earth, right in front of his people and his army, convince Pharaoh to let the Hebrew people who are building his store cities go free, and then lead B’nei Yisrael through the desert back to the land of their fathers. *Outrageous! Unthinkable! Absurd!* So, Moshe stutters and stammers and stalls. *Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? Who am I to lead B’nei Yisrael out of Egypt?* Forgive him – he is a product of Egypt’s state of the art educational system, and he is having a little trouble keeping up. He is used to arguing esoteric and irrelevant issues of philosophy, ideology, and religion with other arrogant and judgmental men – not discussing eternal plans of Redemption and Restoration with the Creator of the Universe. In his mind, everything is relative, every plan is negotiable, and his ideas – and no one else’s – represent the pinnacle of intelligence, morality, efficiency and effectiveness. To his way of thinking, logic and reason dictate that there has to be a *better plan*, a *better prophet/deliverer* – and a *better way*. It is the Egyptian way for someone to always play ‘the Devil’s Advocate’ – so he enthusiastically assumes that role. In his mind, contingency plans need to be proposed. As he sees it, all kinds of scenarios need to be considered and discussed. *Oy vey* – what a *shmuck!* As I said, he is used to negotiating with mortal men over strategies of ethnicity, politics, ideology, morality, religion, philosophy, trade, and war - not speaking face-to-Face with the Creator of the Universe. So don’t worry. Even though Moshe, like all of us, is a little slow to catch on, he will eventually learn God-man interaction protocol – even if he has to learn it the ‘hard way’. The Plan is the Plan. The Holy One can out-think Moshe – as He can us - with both hands tied behind his back.

***The God of the Thorn Bush Waits Patiently for Moshe
to Get Over Himself, Just Say ‘Yes’ ... And Trust the Plan!***

The Holy One smiles at Moshe’s protestations. He knows humanity. He knows that no human will ever accept or cooperate with deliverance until he is mentally and emotionally ready to let go of that which holds him in bondage. Our Covenant Partner in Heaven has therefore been waiting for generations for His People to awaken and cry out for deliverance from that which they previously clung to foolishly but tenaciously. He has had this plan ready since before the foundation of the world. Before Yitzchak was even born, He told our ancestor Avram:

***Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs,
and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.
Also, I will take judicial authority the nation they serve;
afterward they will come out with great possessions.***

[Genesis 15:13-14]

‘*Afterward they will come out ...*’, He said. Well, are you ready for *afterward, Dear Reader*? A great deliverance is coming. It will stun the principalities and powers of this world. It will bewilder its scholars. It will inspire and give hope to all men in all generations. Oh yes, a great deliverance is coming. All that is left to be determined is ... well, let’s not get ahead of ourselves, Dear Reader. All will be revealed in good time.

The Call Is for Such a Time as This – And Far, Far Beyond!

The first task for which the Creator has chosen Moshe that is to serve as *the human vessel through which He intends to deliver the descendants of Ya’akov from Egyptian bondage*. But that is just a training mission. The Creator has made it clear that even after He makes Pharaoh set the covenant people free He still wants Moshe to do at Least two more very important things:

1. bring the community of redeemed souls back to this very mountain to worship *en masse*; and then, upon signal, to
2. lead the community of redeemed souls from this mountain ***“to a good, spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey, the territory of the Kena’ani, the Chiti, the Emori, Perizzi, Hivi and Yevusi”***.

This is no *short-term project* the God of the Thorn Bush is talking about – this is a *lifelong mission*. And there is no school or seminary or on-line training facility at which Moshe can take a crash course in *either ‘Principles of Pharaoh challenging’ or ‘Nation-building 101’* before embarking on this mission. He is just going to have to rely upon some intense ‘on the job’ training. No worries – he will be trained at the Feet of the Master. Welcome, Moshe, to the *Immaculate Apprenticeship*. Model it well for us. Be faithful in all the Holy One’s house, for a testimony of those things that will be spoken afterward. See Numbers 12:7; see also Hebrew 3:5.

It is Never About Who We Are or What We Are Good At!

Moshe has accurately pointed out that he is in no wise qualified for the job of deliverer. He *can NOT* do it – ***no way!*** But then again ... he doesn’t *have to*. The Holy One has already told Moshe:

I have come down l’hatzilo [to deliver them—the descendants of Yisrael]]
out of the hand of the Mitzrim,

ul’ha’aloto [and to bring them up] *out of that land ...*³

To Moshe’s ‘*who am I*’ question the Holy One replied basically [Rabbi’s son paraphrase]:

‘It doesn’t matter one whit who you are, son!’

³ Exodus 3:12.

*You are with ME! Just go wherever I tell you to go.
Just do what I tell you to do, and just say whatever I tell you to say.*

If the Holy One weren't as polite and considerate of Moshe's feelings He might have said it this way: "**Trust Me, son – a donkey could do this job!**" That is the way it is with all jobs in the Holy One's kingdom. The Holy One does not need our education, our preparation, our unique gift-complex, or whatever we may perceive as - or may even be - our special 'anointing'. We are the ones who need Him. Without the inspiration of His Presence, the energy of His Words, the Guidance of His Instructions, and the energy of His empowerment, we can do absolutely nothing. *So let us not think of ourselves more highly than we ought. All together now, let us bray: Eee-ahhh. Eee-ahhh. Nicely done. Congratulations - you are now all officially qualified for the work of the kingdom. And so am I. Next question.*

Moshe's Second Excuse: But ... Who are YOU?

Moshe is still skeptical. Staring into a burning thorn bush, not believing what is happening to him, he is probably thinking something like "Okay, so it doesn't matter who I am, or what qualifications I have, or anything like that, because YOU are the One Who is going to do all this deliverance stuff anyway. But if you don't mind my asking, well ... just *WHO ARE YOU?*"

Let's face it – Moshe is not playing coy here. The man who stared into the burning thorn bush had lived in something other than a Hebrew household for exactly 79.75 of his 80 years. He *really doesn't know* the One Who is speaking to him. After all, Moshe was a mere 3 months old when his Hebrew mother cast him adrift on the Nile in a basket. And while his biological mom was enabled by Divine Providence to serve his adoptive mother as his 'wet-nurse' for a few short years of early childhood, he grew up in *an Egyptian palace*. He came of age in a land with a pantheon of shadowy, spiteful gods, where chicanery, occult arts, and pagan worship practices were the norm.

More recently Moshe had spent 40 years immersed in another pagan culture, the culture of the Midyani⁴. So the Voice that spoke to Moshe out of the burning thorn bush was by no means familiar to him. This was completely new territory. Perhaps at some point early on in his life he heard stories, musty old legends, about the patriarchs' encounter with a powerful God in the lands of Mesopotamia and of

⁴ Commentators have sought to attach Godliness and worship of the Holy One to **Yitro** [Jethro] because he is referred to as the 'priest' of Midyan. But the Hebrew word *kohen* [translated 'priest'] can also mean simply '*sheik*'. Moreover, the Midyani were not part of the covenant people [though descended from Avraham through Keturah], and were not worshippers of the One True God – as will be made very clear a few years later when they conspire with the Moavi, hire Bila'am to curse Israel, and seduce many from B'nei Yisrael to perform disgusting acts of idol worship. If Yitro was a 'priest' in the sense in which we use that word, he was almost certainly a priest of Ba'al or of some regional pantheon of gods.

Kena'an. But nowhere in Torah is there a suggestion that *in the course of his life* Moshe has never encountered – or even *known anyone* who has encountered – this God⁵. So Moshe asks the one speaking to him out of the thorn bush a very legitimate question:

Hineh anochi va el-b'nei Yisra'el v'amarti lahem

'Look, if I go to the Israelites and say to them

Elohei avoteichem sh'lachani aleichem

'The God of your fathers sent me to you.'

v'amru-li mah-sh'mo mah omar aleihem

They will immediately ask me what His name is. What am I to say to them?'

[Exodus 3:13]

Look, it's something *inquiring minds will want to know!* Egypt has lots and lots of 'gods'. They are all well known. But who in Egypt knows the Holy One? He has been silent – and completely invisible – for *generations*. So, the Holy One gives his questioner this cryptic response: ***Ehyeh asher ehyeh***. Exodus 3:14(a).

Ehyeh asher ehyeh? What meaneth this? *Ehyeh asher ehyeh* is not a name – at least as Western thinkers think of a 'name'. *Ehyeh asher ehyeh* is more of a description – a description that cries out '*totally indescribable*'. It includes in its connotation things like *timelessness*, and *unchanging steadfastness*, and *unlimited levels of being, seeing, hearing, speaking, and doing*.

Some have tried to translate ***ehyeh asher ehyeh*** as "*I am*". Some have tried to translate it as "*I am He who was, who is, and who will be*". Others have tried to translate it as "*I will be who I will be*". But the phrase is – and was *intended* to be - untranslatable. The point, I believe, is that Moshe – and those who want to be delivered from Egypt – and Pharaoh for that matter – are going to have to *totally re-learn theology*. They are going to have to *throw away everything they know – or think they know - about 'god'*, and *start over with foundational truth*. The Holy One, you see, will not fit into any of their - or our - theological boxes. He is not '*a god*' – He is *absolute existence* and is *outside the realm of time*. He is *that without which there is nothing*. He is the source of the very first thought and impulse of

⁵ Of course, it should be borne in mind that the Holy One described Avraham as one called to ***enjoin his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Holy One by doing righteousness and justice***. Genesis 18:19. One can always hope that Yocheved and Amram, to the extent their limited time with baby Moshe allowed, at least made an attempt to fulfill this basic '*ancient pathway*'. Hebrews 11, by mentioning Moshe's parents in the list of 'Hall of Faith' members, encourages us that Moshe's parents at least had some significant kind of faith walk - even if we are not told specifically of what it consisted other than an urge to protect Moshe during the first 90 days of his life. Whatever Amram and Yocheved did or do not do with the limited time and opportunity they had, the point is that *every parent should take seriously the opportunity provided by the Holy One to teach their children the ways of the Holy One for as long as those children remain in their care*.

Will that initiated the creative process. He is the One who designed and sustains the universe and directs the affairs of all its inhabitants, and the One who can - any time He wills - cause it to disintegrate and disappear as easily as He caused it to come into existence. The Holy One simply will not allow Himself to be recreated by anyone in any convenient or utilitarian image. Not by Moshe. Not by the elders of Yisrael. Not by Pharaoh. Not by you. Not by me. He is Who He is – not who we or any other man think He is. **Ehyeh asher ehyeh** – that is His ‘*shem*’. It is His identity. The characteristics, attributes, will, worldview, and hierarchy of priorities that adhere to that identity will each be revealed in due time – as we have need to know of them. Man’s biggest need - as enslaved Israel’s was in the days of Moshe - is not theological certitude or nominal specificity. Man’s greatest need – then and now – is merely to be assured that He has always been, even now is, and will always be.

***Moshe’s First Assignment Beyond Take Off Your Shoes!
I Will Send You to Pharaoh!***

Moshe is not being called to a belief system or a creed; he is being called to a glorious adventure of collaboration. There are certain places the Holy One wants his newly appointed apprentice to go, certain people He wants him to see, certain things He wants him to do, and certain messages He wants him to deliver.

The Holy One’s first actual instructions to Moshe are for him to go back to Egypt on His behalf and deliver a message to ‘*b’nei Yisrael*’ [i.e. the descendants of Israel]. ***Come now ... I will send you to Pharaoh, so that you may bring My people – B’nei Yisrael – out of Egypt.*** Exodus 3:10.

Is that even possible, Moshe wonders? How is he supposed to break this news to the people?, he asks. How is he even supposed to describe the One Who has commissioned him to his kinsmen?, he inquires. The Holy One replies:

Lech v'asafta et-ziknei Yisra'el v'amarta aleihem

'Go, gather the elders of Israel, and say to them,

Adonai Elohei avoteichem nir'ah elai

'Yod, hey, vav, hey, the God of your fathers, appeared to me -

Elohei Avraham Yitzchak v'Ya'akov

the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov –

l'emor pakod pakadeti etchem

and He said, 'I have granted you a special visitation

v'et-he'asui lachem b'Mitzrayim

To deal with what is happening to you in Egypt.

Va'omar a'aleh etchem me'oni Mitzrayim
I declare that I will bring you out of the wretchedness of Egypt,
el-eretz ha-K'na'ani v'ha-Chiti v'ha-Emori v'ha-Prizi v'ha-Chivi
to the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites
v'ha-Yevusi el-eretz zavat chalav udvash
and Yevusites - to a land flowing with milk and honey.' '

Did you notice that the Holy One seems to feel quite comfortable referring to Himself as the ‘*God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak and the God of Ya’akov*’? Did you notice He also seems to like to call Himself ‘*the God of your fathers*’? I hope Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov are still alive in the minds and hearts of at least some of the children and the elders of Yisrael, don’t you? I hope somebody along the way has been faithful to pass down to the babies born in exile the fascinating details of each of the individual patriarchs’ amazing and unique yet intimately connected history of God-encounters and Divinely ordained life experiences. I hope that some ordinary father or mother somewhere has spent hours in the night regaling his or her children and household with the wonderful stories which we read over the past 12 weeks from the Book we call ‘Genesis’, which form the fundamental basis for relationships between man and the God of the Thorn Bush. I hope that somebody, sometime, somewhere, has invested the time and energy to lay a firm foundation of the truth of covenant life for the generation that will be called upon to leave captivity and step into destiny.

I am not talking about Moshe and the Hebrew children enslaved by Pharaoh four millennia ago. I am talking about *you* and about *me*, and our children, in this similarly critical hour. Do we – and do our children – know what the Holy One means when He describes Himself as the ‘*God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Ya’akov*?’

Oh Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov of blessed memory – *do you know where your children are?* And oh children of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov – *do you know who your fathers are – and into Whose ever-faithful arms each of them, one by one, commended their spirits?*

Moshe’s Third Excuse: They Will Not Believe Me!

Alas, Moshe is still overwhelmed. What the Voice in the burning thorn bush is telling him simply ‘does not compute’ with his fruit-of-the-tree-of-knowledge based pseudo-intelligence. And so he raises his third ‘objection’.

Vaya'an Moshe v'yomer v'hen lo-ya'aminu
When Moshe [was able to] reply, he said, 'But they will not believe me

li v'lo yishmei'u bekoli

They will not sh'ma me.

ki yomru lo-nir'ah eleicha Adonai.

They will say, 'The Holy One did not appear to you.'

[Exodus 4:1]

I am sure part of Moshe wished that he had never brought Yitro's sheep up on this mountain – or at least that he had ignored that strange thorn bush that burned without being consumed. But it is now too late. How, he must have wondered, can he get out of this 'gracefully' – without being incinerated or something!

Clever Pseudo-Intellectual Excuses, Please Don't Fail Me Now!

Ah – excuses! Let's see: “*The dog ate my homework.*” “*Nobody likes me.*” “*Everybody always picks on me.*” “I've just seen too many hypocrites in my day to believe in any of this stuff!” “*My childhood was traumatic.*” “*I have been diagnosed as ADHD – or was it 'bi-polar' – or maybe OCD?*” “*I am a visual learner rather than auditory.*” No, wait, I know: “*I am slow of speech and thick of tongue*”. That might work! Here goes nothing!

“But ...”

When one does not *sh'ma* the Voice of the *God of the Thorn Bush* - that is, when a person does not take the time to truly *listen to exactly what the Holy One has said*, to *receive the words the Holy One has spoken as unchanging and unchangeable truth*, and to *resolve inwardly to do just what the Holy One says* - the excuses and rationalizations tend to come fast and furious. They did in Moshe's time – and they still do today.

“But ... I am not qualified!”

“But ... no one will believe me!”

“But ... I do not have the training!”

“But ... what about the people here who rely upon me?”

“But ... surely someone else could to a much better job than me!”

I am not in any way condemning Moshe for making excuses. I – and *you* - make such excuses all the time. We understand Moshe *all too well*. I am merely pointing out that the *source* and the *cause* of all our excuses is failure to truly *sh'ma* the words of our Creator. We *lo sh'ma* – and as a result what comes into our minds is *excuses* instead of *words of ecstatic praise flowing from the joy of the prospect of actually getting to participate in the grand and wonderful destiny for which we were created and given the breath of life*.

Madame Reporter, Could You Read That Back to Me, Please?

Let us look at what the Holy One has said to Moshe - out of a burning thorn bush

no less - thus far.

*I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt.
I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers,
and I am concerned about their suffering.*

*I have come down to rescue [the Hebrews] from the land of the Egyptians
and to bring them into a good and spacious land,
a land flowing with milk and honey*

[Exodus 3:7-8]

*I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who sent you:
when you have brought the people out of Egypt
you will worship the Holy One on this mountain.*

[Exodus 3:12]

The elders of Israel will listen to [sh'ma] you.

[Exodus 3:18]

*I know the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him.
So I will stretch out My hand
and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them.*

After that, he will let you go.

*And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people,
so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed ...*

And so you will plunder the Egyptians.

Of course, Moshe did not have the luxury we do of sitting in his living room or study hall going over the Holy One's statements word-by-word and line-by-line. He was in the midst of the most frightening encounter of his life, His *very first* "God-encounter" ... and he was quite literally just trying to *cope*. Moshe was more than likely having to struggle just to keep from *collapsing in fear*. And in this situation I am sure that he simply could not fit the words he was hearing spoken out of the bush into any frame of reference his mind or his life experiences could justify. The words he was hearing simply did not add up. His mind could not conceive of the things the Holy One was saying would happen. Give Moshe credit for *hanging in there to discuss the matter* - rather than breaking and running as fast as he could. The pseudo-intellect dies hard ... but walking away from the Voice of True Wisdom, once a person has heard it, is simply no longer an option worthy of even a second of consideration.

The Opening Round of a War of 'Signs' and 'Wonders'

The Holy One was not in the mood for Moshe's excuses. He had heard the cries of His people and the voice of the blood of the innocent babies the Egyptians had drowned in the Nile. He *was going forward with His plan of deliverance, whether Moshe liked it* – or wanted any part of it – or not. So to take away all Moshe's excuses once and for all the Holy One introduces him to the world of '**signs**' [Hebrew, *otot*] and/or '**wonders**' [Hebrew, *mofet*].

The Holy One's freshman level class in the science of signs and wonders involved three relatively minor miracles. The first one involved Moshe's shepherd's rod. Here is how Torah describes it:

V'yomer elav Adonai mah-zeh v'yadeicha
What is that in your hand?' asked the Holy One.

V'yomer mateh
And [Moshe] replied: 'A staff.'

V'yomer ha-sh'licheihu ar'tzah
And [the Holy One] said: "Throw it on the ground.'

V'yash'licheihu ar'tzah vayehi l'nachash
When [Moshe] threw it on the ground, it turned into a serpent,

V'yanas Moshe m'panav
and Moshe ran away from it.

There is a Hebrew legend that the snake [Hebrew, *nachash*] that appeared to Moshe when he threw down his rod was none other than the serpent who deceived Chava. That is, the legend advises, why Moshe fled. A man 80 years of age – and particularly a shepherd - would know, the sages say, that running away from any ordinary snake, whether a venomous viper or a constrictor, is the absolute worst thing one can do, because rapid motion only attracts such creatures' attention and invites attack. Moreover, since snakes move faster than humans, the proper response would not be to run, but to either stand very still, or back away very slowly. But the serpent of the Garden of Eden is another story altogether. The only proper response to him is to *get away from him as quickly as you can.*

Not so fast, Moshe!

Who says the Holy One doesn't have a *sense of humor*? If you could just look at Moshe's face

Note that Moshe's basic 'problem' was his *fear of man* – he felt there was no way he could stand before the leaders of the Hebrew people – much less the most powerful man in the world - and say the bold and seemingly nonsensical things which the Holy One told him to say. So, the Holy One confronts him with a power greater than the power of the most powerful man in the world – the serpent – and makes him stand toe to toe with him. After dealing with the Serpent, Moshe, dealing with Pharaoh will seem like a *piece of cake*.

The Holy One wants Moshe to know that which whole denominations and entire movements of organized religion do not grasp – that *even the Serpent is only a part of the Holy One's creation, and can only do what the Holy One allows him to do.* The Serpent is not the Holy One's equal. He only *operates by license* from the

Holy One, and *is completely subject to the Holy One's will* – as is every human being, including Pharaoh. But the Holy One is not through yet. The show must go on! The Holy One therefore does not let Moshe run away. He calls his reluctant protégé back to *face* the serpent. And he given him this instruction:

Sh'lach yadeicha v'echoz biznavo
'Stretch out your hand, and grasp its tail.'

The Holy One is not teaching snake-handling 101. He is teaching Moshe a *sign*. Hence Moshe, probably not without some significant trepidation, stretches out his hand and grabs hold. Don't try this at home.

Alef - Tav - the Creator fulfills the Covenant. He makes the serpent a rod in Moshe's hand. He puts the serpent completely at Moshe's disposal.

V'yishlach yado v'yachazeik
When [Moshe] reached out and grasped it,
bo vayehi l'mateh b'chapo
it turned back into a staff in his hand.

All powers of heaven are in the Holy One's hand – and, by Divine authorization, in his own. Moshe need not fear.

L'ma'an ya'aminu ki nir'ah eleicha Adonai
This is so that they will believe that the Holy One appeared to you,' [He said].
Elohei avotam Elohei Avraham Elohei Yitzchak v'Elohei Ya'akov
'The God of their fathers, the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and the God of Ya'akov.'
[Exodus 4:2-5]

Are you listening *now*, Moshe? Does the Holy One have your *undivided attention*? Then let's proceed.

The Sign of Tza'arat

What the Holy One showed Moshe about his rod is now punctuated by what the Holy One shows him about his hand – the hand that holds the rod.

V'yomer Adonai lo od have-na yadeicha b'cheikeicha
The Holy One then said, 'Place your hand [on your chest] inside your robe.'
V'yavei yado b'cheiko vayotzi'ah
When [Moshe] placed his hand in his robe and removed it from his chest
V'hineh yado metzora'at kashaleg
it was covered in tza'arat, and completely encrusted.

Tza'arat – the condition that attached itself to Moshe's hand - is not leprosy [Hanson's disease] as we know it. *Tza'arat* is a *sign*. It is an external condition of an

internal spiritual impurity⁶. It is related to *l'shon ha ra* [negative speech about others]. Speaking evil – as the serpent of the Garden did and does – brings about a spiritual impurity. *Tza'arat* is the external evidence of that impurity.

When had Moshe spoken *l'shon ha ra*? When he said of the elders and people of Israel “*they will not believe me, nor listen to my voice; for they will say, ‘The Holy One has not appeared to you.’*” **Exodus 4:1**. He attributed to them hearts, minds, and ears too spiritually dead to recognize and respond to the Holy One. He *judged* them. He *complained* of them. He *slandered* them to the Holy One – their Maker.

V'yomer ha-shev yadeicha el-cheykeicha

‘Place your hand in your robe again,’ said [the Holy One].

V'yashev yado el-cheyko vayotzi'ah mecheyko

He placed his hand [back] into his robe, and when he removed it from his chest

V'hineh-shavah kivesaro

his skin had returned to normal.

V'hayah im-lo ya'aminu lach

‘If they do not believe you,’ [said the Holy One],

v'lo yish'mei'u l'kol ha-ot ha-rishon

and they do not pay attention to/resonate with the first miraculous sign,

v'he'eminu l'kol ha-ot ha-acharon

then they will believe the evidence of the second sign.

[Exodus 4:6-8]

The Hebrew word that our English Bibles translate as ‘sign’ in this passage is *ot*⁷, i.e. *alef, tav*⁸. The first Biblical usage of this word is found in Genesis 1:14, when

⁶ Moshe had just touched the Serpent – a *tamei* creature – with the hand he now finds covered in *tza'arat*. The hand that touched the Serpent took on the Serpent’s *tamei* status immediately when the contact occurred. But while Moshe’s hand acquired *tamei* status upon touching the Serpent, contact with the Serpent did not cause the *tza'arat*. Instead, even after touching the Serpent, Moshe’s hand showed no evidence of *tza'arat* until Moshe – per the Holy One’s instructions – placed his hand *inside his own robe* and *touched the chest cavity in the area of his heart*. The *tamei* status, it is true, came from the Serpent – but the *tza'arat* came not from anything external - but from Moshe’s own heart. Why? What was so wrong with Moshe’s heart? What came from within him that made him more spiritually impure than what he had just touched with his hands? It was *l'shon hara* - speaking negative statements about others.

⁷ Also called an ‘*ot*’ [i.e. *sign*] by Scripture are:

- the ‘mark’ the Holy One placed on Kayin [Cain] – Genesis 4:15
- the ‘bow in the clouds’ - Genesis 9:12, 13, 17
- the ‘mark’ of circumcision – Genesis 17:11
- the Seventh day Shabbat [Sabbath] – Exodus 31:13, 17; Ezekiel 20:12, 20
- Aharon’s budding rod - Numbers 17:10
- The Torah – Deuteronomy 6:4, 11:18
- The death of Hofni and Pinchas the same day – I Samuel 2:34
- The conception of a child by a virgin – Isaiah 7:14

⁸ Pronounced like the English word *oat*, *ot* [*alef-tav*] is Strong’s Hebrew word #226.

we are told that, on the day He created the sun, the moon, the stars, and the planets, The Holy One said:

*Let there be lights in the expanse of sky to divide the day from the night;
and let them be for signs [ot], and for seasons, and for days and years ...*

Strong's defines the Hebrew word *ot* as a 'sign', or 'signal', or 'warning' or 'distinguishing mark'. It is – or can be - all of these. However, to truly understand the Hebraic concept of an *ot*, one must go beyond definitions and similitudes. Just look at the Hebrew letters that make up the word. The Hebrew letter *alef*, as we have discussed, is the first letter of the Hebrew *alef-beit* [alphabet] and constitutes a Hebraic pictograph representing [though in no wise picturing] the Holy One, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, the Source from which everything in either the realm of Heaven or the realm of earth comes. The third letter, *tav* on the other hand is the last letter of the Hebrew *alef-beit* and constitutes a Hebraic pictograph representing the fulfillment, or finishing, of a covenant. Were the translators of the Book of Revelation to have used Hebrew terminology instead of Greek terminology to translate the way Yeshua described himself in Revelation 1:8, instead of reading '*I am the alpha and the omega*', it would have read "*I am the alef and the tav, the beginning and the end.*"

Now, with that understanding let us look a little closer at the pictographic mural presented to us by the Hebrew word *ot*. It depicts the Holy One as Creator, the One Who Pre-existed the natural realm, bringing about the end and conclusion of that which He has created just as He covenanted to do. It represents completion of the cycle from eternity to eternity. It pictures something eternal, superimposed upon, and manifested in, something temporal. For Moshe's rod or his hand to be called an *ot* means that the temporal has been infused with the eternal.

An *ot* then is something that has been *touched by the Holy One* and therefore *has qualities and characteristics beyond its temporal appearance*. An *ot* is not a 'trick', or 'magic'. It based upon an *eternal reality*, not –upon *optical illusion*. The rod of Moshe, for instance, did not just appear to be a serpent – it was a serpent. And his hand did not just *appear* to be covered with *tza'arat* – it was covered with *tza'arat*.

Questions For Today's Study

1. In the opening verses of *Shemot* chapter 4 Moshe provides the Holy One two more logical excuses why he should not be the human instrument chosen to accomplish the Holy One's deliverance of the Hebrew people.

[A] What are the two excuses Moshe gives the Holy One?

[B] What does the Holy One do or say to take away the *first excuse*?

[C] What does the Holy One do or say to take away the *second excuse*?

2. The Holy One decided to show Moshe a small glimpse of His power by showing him three miraculous signs.

[A] What were the three miraculous signs?

[B] Were these three signs for Moshe's eyes only, for *Israel's eyes only*, or for the eyes of all to see, including Pharaoh?

[C] Do you see any symbolic meaning to the first sign? Do you see any picture of Messiah in it? Explain your answers.

[D] Do you see any symbolic meaning to the second sign? Do you see any picture of Messiah in it? Explain your answers.

[E] Do you see any symbolic meaning to the third sign? Do you see any picture of Messiah in it? Explain your answers.

[F] What was the stated purpose for which these signs were given?

3. By *Sh'mot* 4:19 what had happened to the Pharaoh who was in power when Moses killed the Egyptian overseer?

4. In verse 22 of today's reading we are given a prophetic insight into why the Holy One chose the '*plague of the firstborn*' as the final blow by which to demonstrate His authority over Egypt. Why does the Holy One say He is going to strike Egypt's firstborn?

5. What had Moshe neglected to do with regard to his own son prior to leaving Midyan for Egypt? How did the Holy One get Moshe's attention to this oversight?

6. Where and how were Moshe and Aharon reunited?

7. Beginning in verse 29 of today's reading Moshe and Aharon gather the elders of the various tribes together to reveal to them what the Holy One has said. This was the first real challenge – for unless a person (or a nation) wants to be delivered, and believes it is possible, deliverance will be temporary at best. Here is how Torah describes the meeting:

Moshe and Aharon went and gathered together all the Zakenim of the children of Yisra'el.

Aharon spoke all the words which the Holy One had spoken to Moshe,

and did the signs in the sight of the people.

The people believed, and when they heard

that the Holy One had visited the children of Yisra'el, and that he had seen their affliction,

then they bowed their heads and worshiped.

[A] In verse 31 we are told that the people "believed". In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the word our English Bibles translate as "believed". Write the Hebrew word, in its *pa'al/qal* form, in Hebrew letters, with vowel sounds. Then, describe the Hebraic word picture this verb presents to us.

[B] In the last phrase of verse 31 we are told that the people "*bowed their*

heads and worshiped". In Strong's, look up the Hebrew word our English Bibles translate as "worshiped". Write the Hebrew word, in its *pa'al/qal* form, in Hebrew letters, with vowel sounds. Then, describe the Hebraic word picture this verb presents to us.

[C] Most people in the body of Messiah's followers today equate "worship" with the playing of musical instruments and/or the singing of songs, accompanied (in some streams) by dancing or physical actions of "prophetic intercession". Is this the *Biblical* picture of "worship"?

[D] According to verse 30 to what was the people's "worship" in response?

8. Today's Haftarah reading is from the opening chapter of the book of *Yirmayahu* [Jeremiah]. In this reading we will see Yirmayahu, while he is still young, have a dramatic and life-changing "God-encounter".

*The words of Yirmayahu the son of Hilkiyah,
of the Kohanim who were in `Anatot in the land of Binyamin:
to whom the word of the Holy One came
in the days of Yoshiyahu the son of Amon, king of Y'hudah, in the thirteenth year of his reign.*

*It came also in the days of Yehoiakim the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Y'hudah,
to the end of the eleventh year of Tzidkiyahu, the son of Yoshiyahu, king of Y'hudah,
to the carrying away of Y'rushalayim captive in the fifth month.*

Now the word of the Holy One came to me, saying,

***Before I formed you in the belly I knew you,
and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you;
I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.***

Then said I, Ah, Holy One GOD!

behold, I don't know how to speak; for I am a child.

But the Holy One said to me, "Don't say, 'I am a child';

for to whoever I shall send you, you shall go,

and whatever I shall command you, you shall speak.

Don't be afraid because of them; for I am with you to deliver you", says the Holy One.

Then the Holy One put forth his hand, and touched my mouth;

*and the Holy One said to me, **Behold, I have put my words in your mouth:***

behold, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms,

to pluck up and to break down

and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

[A] Write the name *Yirmayahu* [Jeremiah] in Hebrew consonants with vowel markings.

[B] What does the name Yirmayahu mean?

[C] During what time period (and during the reign of which kings) did Yirmayahu prophesy?

[D] What country was the dominant "world power" at the time Yirmayahu prophesied?

[E] In verse 5, the Holy One tells Yirmayahu he has been called as a

“*prophet to the nations*” [the phrase in Hebrew is *nabiy l’goy’im*]. What do you think it means, in the Holy One’s sight, for a person to be a “**prophet to the nations**”/*nabiy l’goy’im*?

[F] Why does the Holy One say Yirmayahu need not fear those to whom he is sent to speak?

[G] Yirmayahu reports to us that the Holy One not only spoke to him; He came really close and actually *touch*ed him. Where did the Holy One *touch* Yirmayahu, and what did this touch accomplish?

[H] In verse 10 the Holy One uses seven Hebrew verbs to describe to Yirmayahu his task.

*I have this day **set you over the nations and over the kingdoms,**
to **pluck up and to break down**
and to **destroy and to overthrow,**
to **build and to plant.**”*

In Strong’s and Gesenius look up each of these 7 verbs and write them (in their verb root form) in Hebrew letters with vowel markings. Then for each verb describe the Hebraic word picture it presents.

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

[J] As an exercise to get you thinking about what it would be like to have an encounter with the Holy One, rewrite verse 5, changing “I” to “God” each time, and changing “you” to “me”. Read it aloud to your study partner.

[K] Memorize verses 8-10 for Shabbat.

9. In today’s reading from the B’rit Chadasha *Stefanos* continues his praise of Moshe – the very man he is accused of speaking *l’shon ha ra* about.

*This [Moshe] is he ... to whom our fathers would not sh’ma,
but they rejected him, and turned back in their hearts to Mitzrayim,
saying to Aharon, ‘Make us gods that will go before us,
for as for this Moshe, who led us out of the land of Mitzrayim,
we don’t know what has become of him.’*

[A] Who does *Stefanos* [Stephen] accuse of not respecting Moshe?

[B] What Hebrew words/phrases do you think Stephen used in his sermon to the Hebrew-speaking religious leaders rather than “*be obedient*”, “*rejected*”, and “*turned back*”? Use your Strong’s, Gesenius, and Richards or Vine’s expository dictionary of Bible Words to try to figure this out. Write each appropriate Hebrew word [in its verb root form] in Hebrew letters, with vowel markings, and describe the Hebraic word picture each such word presents.

[C] What examples does Stefanos give of those people not respecting Moshe?

*May the Holy One's people learn to truly **sh'ma** his Words,
and see the events going on in their world through His eyes.*

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 18:10-13

*He rode on a Keruv [cherub] and He flew;
yes, he soared on the wings of the wind.
He made darkness his hiding-place, his pavilion around him,
Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.
At the brightness before him his thick clouds passed,
hailstones and coals of fire.
The Holy One also thundered in the sky,
The Elyon uttered his voice:
Hailstones and coals of fire.*