

## ***Introduction to Parsha #14: Va'era<sup>1</sup>***

***Torah:***

**Exodus 6:2 – 9:35**

***Haftarah:***

**Ezekiel 28:25 - 29:21**

***Brit Chadasha:***

**Hebrews 3:1-6; Revelation 7-16**



***I will take you as My people, and I will be your God.***

**[Exodus 6:7(a)]**

**The Amidah Prayer Focus This Week is Petition No. 11: *Et-Tzemach David* [Branch of David]**

***Va'era el-Avraham el-Yitzchak v'el-Ya'akov b'El Shaddai* – And I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov in (the manifestation of) 'El Shaddai' .... Exodus 6:3a.**

Torah's 14<sup>th</sup> subdivision – and the greater story line of *Sefer Sh'mot* – begins with the Holy One letting His latest apprentice/disciple<sup>2</sup>, Moshe, in on an important secret – a secret that will prove essential to *B'nei Yisrael's Great Nation Building* mission. The secret is that He has no qualms whatever about breaching the primeval *rakia* – *i.e.* the great *Finity/Infinity Barrier* that divides the unseen realm from the seen realm - when His Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan requires it. The Holy One advises Moshe that He had 'appeared'/manifested visibly three times to his ancestor *Avraham* [see e.g. **Genesis 12:7, 17:1 ff, and 18:1 ff**], twice to his forebearer *Yitzchak* [see **Genesis 26:2 and 26:24**], and twice more to his patriarch

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<sup>2</sup> Moshe is not the Creator's first human protégé. Before him were many others, like Yosef, Ya'akov/Yisrael, Yitzchak, and Avraham. Before Avraham were Chanoch and Metushelach. Before Chanoch and Metushelach was Shem. Before Shem was Noach. Before Noach were Kayin, Hevel, and Shet. Before Kayin, Hevel, and Shet was Adam. Nor will Moshe be the Holy One's last protégé. After him will come Yehoshua, and a long chain of others, all the way down to you, me, and our progeny. While the life of each human partner is assigned a finite number of years, moon cycles, sabbaths, and days, the Holy One Himself lives forever – and He will not, at any time in what men think of as 'history', ever be left without at least one intimate human friend who embraces the honor of serving as His Appointed Messenger to the people and nations of earth.

Ya'akov [see Genesis 28:13-15 and 35:9]. He needs Moshe to know that He is absolutely committed to make Himself seen by His mortal Partners in Covenant strategically – whenever the challenges He knows they are about to face require a dramatic upgrade to their walk. At such times, He ‘appears’ to them, and restarts/supercharges/power boosts their *emunah* capacity in order to empower them to trust in, converse with, relate to, and serve Him at a higher level, through a new set of lenses, according to a new template of paradigms. Gird up your loins, Beloved – and *fear not!*

***Seeing and Experiencing He Who is Immortal, Eternal, Invisible,  
and Transcendent – Through A New Set of Eyes!***

The gift of natural vision is a blessing – but it is subject to severe limitations. Like many other species of Creation, we have been given eyes - but how well do any of us actually see? We have been given optical nerves, but they only enable us to see a miniscule fraction of what is going on - and our fallen, fruit-of-the-tree-of-knowledge corrupted brains tend to sort even the myopic image, dimension, quality, and detail impulses that our lenses and optic nerves send to them imperfectly. If two people look at the same thing they see totally different perspectives of it, they interpret those perspectives differently, and they assign different levels of valuation, prioritization, and emotion to them. How much more is this the case when the object of our vision is the Eternal, Invisible, Infinite, Incorporeal, Holy, *Elohim* of Creation? We look His Way – but we do not see Him. We perceive His Handiwork and catch glimpses of His majesty – but we see Him through a glass darkly. After all, if we ever looked upon Him in the fulness of His *splendor* ... well, let's just say we would not be alive to carry on this conversation. Our myopic eyes - and our fallen minds – both play tricks on us. Our experiences place severe limits on our capacity for understanding. Appearances – especially those too quickly processed – tend to be deceiving. Perceptions are always skewed by attitude. Discernment is always limited by life experience. Awareness is always distorted to fit into culture-specific, ethnicity-centered, and ideology-based pre-suppositions. Understanding is always re-defined according to preconception. Truth is always filtered through frame of reference. As a We are all blind to some aspect of the Holy One's persona, character, majesty, and splendor.

*Va'era* is a parsha of shattering paradigms and adjusting assumptions. Before we get too deep into the details, there are a couple of questions you should consider. First of all, what kind of – and how deep of – a relationship are you desirous of having with the Holy One? And second, what kind of – and how deep of – a relationship do you think the Holy One wants to have with you? You see, Beloved, the Holy One is about to test some boundaries. He is about to upset some preconceptions. He is about to tear down some walls. He is about to breach some

norms. He is about to cross some hard and fast lines. He is about to shatter a lot of barriers. He is about to appear - many times, in many manifestations. And He is about to speak and act in ways that will mess royally with our preconceived notions of Who He is and what He has planned for *B'nei Yisrael* and the nations. He is about to challenge our relational – and emotional - *status quo*.

Welcome, Moshe, to your most amazing, immaculate opportunity for growth and transcendence. And welcome to yours as well, Dearest Reader! The Holy One wants to take your/our knowledge and experience of Him – and our relationship with Him - to a far higher and more world-impacting level. Some have been Divinely prepared for this upgrade at *its appointed time*; others have resisted the drawing thus far and are in danger of missing their window. So it goes. The Holy One can handle it - *will* handle it – either way. So do not applaud yourself if you have been made ready; and do not judge those who have not. This is merely *the beginning of birth pangs* – not the throes of final-stage labor.

### ***The Glorious Mystery of Divine ‘Appearing’***

When you think about it, the words ‘... *and [I] appeared*’ are truly stunning. Those words mean that the Holy One does not simply want us to *intellectually acknowledge that He exists in a theoretical sense*. Nor does He want us to live off of anyone else’s testimony – oral or written - of Who He is and What kinds of things He does. He instead wants us to PERSONALLY KNOW HIM and INTERACT WITH HIM. He wants us to ENJOY A VIBRANT, ON-GOING RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM. And He wants this kind of face-to-Face, heart-to-Heart, fallen brain to Brilliant Mind interaction so badly that He will actually step out of eternity into time, out of infinity into space, and out of invisibility into our field of vision and visit with us from time to time – *just to keep the lines of communication and fellowship open*.

Since at least the days of Avraham, *appearing* – *i.e. breaking the ‘finiteness barrier’, manifesting His Presence, and demonstrating His Essence* by actions performed in real time - is something the Omnipotent One can do at will. He is eternal, but He steps into and out of our temporal world whenever and however He sees fit. He is infinite, but in order to commune with us, He descends into and manifests His Essence in the finite realm that He Created for us. He is incorporeal, but He takes on physical form and/or audible Voice and/or shows His ‘Face’, His ‘Mighty Hand’, or His ‘Outstretched Arm’ – or whatever He deems it appropriate to reveal at the time – whenever, however, and to whomever He chooses. One of the purposes Torah study is to train us to learn to love and long for His ‘*Appearing*’.

What does it mean for the Holy One to ‘*appear*’? If you think about it the idea is

totally outlandish and incomprehensible. The Holy One is at essence Spirit, and is therefore incorporeal and transcendent and by definition invisible to the human eye. How can such a Being ‘appear’? For the Transcendent One to ‘appear’ means He has to condescend for our sakes *to take on physical attributes* which human eyes can see, which human ears can hear, and which the human being can at least begin to know experientially. And when He appears – every single time he appears - He leaves behind a trail of Kingdom of Heaven breadcrumbs for all who are hungry to follow.

Thus far the Holy One has graced humanity with His *Manifest Presence* in multiple generations and contexts. He walked with and had conversations with the *ancients*. He took it a step further with the patriarchs and matriarchs, not only walking and speaking with them but actually *appearing to them*. See e.g. **Genesis 12:7; 17:1, 18:1; 26:2 & 24; 35:7 & 9**. In connection with each of these *appearances* to humanity the Holy One had to deliberately step out of His incorporeal, invisible, and timeless realm and enter ours. He had to – and willingly did, for the sake of relationship - take on aspect after another of *physicality*, of *materiality*, and of *temporality*. He *walked* with human beings. He *talked* with human beings. He *took the opportunity of His Appearing to release both promises and blessings* on human beings that they needed, for the sake of His Grand Redemptive Plan, to connect clearly and directly not only with Him theoretically but with His Appearing – *i.e.* His ‘advent’. When He appeared to the patriarchs He got very real and personal with them. He did not want them just to believe in His existence; He wanted them – us - to KNOW Him as a ‘very present help’. So He listened politely to Avram as He argued with Him over what should happen at Sodom. He listened to Rivkah’s complaints about the extreme discomforts of her pregnancy. He let Ya’akov try to negotiate a deal with Him. He cut covenant with them all. He assumed angelic form and ate a meal in Avraham’s tent. He touched human beings – even wrestled with one. He gave some human beings instructions as to where they should go and what they should do. He gave other instructions as to where they should not go and what they should not do. He downloaded prophetic dreams and visions and revelations into the minds of several others on various and sundry occasions. Whatever has been necessary to keep the connection between Himself and mankind alive – *i.e.* whatever ‘appearance’ He needed to make in what man thinks of as ‘real’ time and space - that is what the Holy One has always done. Whatever is necessary, whenever it is most advantageous, in whatever form and substance and quantity it is most effectively delivered - that is what He has committed all Heaven’s resources, all the strength of His Divine will, and all of His Holy passion to *always do*. He is constantly pursuing relationship with mortal men – and doing so with great passion, zeal, and delight. He has not allowed Himself to become frustrated with human weakness or impatient with human timidity. He has refused

to become disgusted with human reluctance to step out of a comfort zone. He has patiently endured our stubborn questioning of His Intentions, His Wisdom, and His Essential Goodness. He has kindly ignored our stubborn rejection of His overtures of love. He has refused to be repulsed at even the most heinous of human sin. With Him there is no shadow of turning. He does not flinch in His kindness. He is tireless in His pursuit. He is unrelenting in His love. He is un-wavering in His mercy. He is unshakable in His Covenant Commitment. He is virtually un-offendable. Should it therefore come as a surprise to anyone who has been watching this amazing pattern unfold that He would have no problem one day - if He deemed it necessary to perpetuate the relationship He desired to maintain with men - taking upon Himself the form of a human being all the way from the embryonic phase to the cadaver phase?

*“And I appeared” is the fountain from which all spiritual revelation has ever flowed.* Once the Holy One decided to ‘appear’ the first time He committed to *never stop appearing* until every single thing necessary for man’s salvation and Creation’s redemption was accomplished. *“And I appeared”* is therefore the essence of all the good news found not only in the Pentateuch but *anywhere in the Bible*. It is *absolutely amazing*, isn’t it? ***What is man, that You should exalt him, that You should set Your heart on him, that You should visit him every morning, and test him every moment?*** Iyov [Job] 7:17-18.

The Holy One is by no means through ‘appearing’ to mankind. He plans on bringing His Kingdom to earth using real people, who really know Him – far beyond the limitations of either their *musings of pseudo-intellect* or their *matrix of religious culture conditioned responses/creed recitals*. As Shaul of Tarsus wrote to his beloved protégé and chosen successor Timotheus:

*There is laid up for me the crown of righteousness,  
which the Holy One, the righteous judge, will give me on that Day,  
and not to me only, but to all who have loved His appearing.*  
[I Timothy 4:8]

If you are a true Friend of the Bridegroom-King, you see, you are never content leaving behind a trail of ‘good doctrine’; you leave behind a trail of tenderized hearts pulsing with a passionate yearning for His Appearing.

### ***The Sounds of Silence***

In our last parsha, *Sh’mot*, the Holy One embarked on an adventure with a descendant of Avraham named Moshe. As the appointed time for harvest approached, the Divine Persona stepped back into the realm of time and space, and began manifesting His Presence and demonstrating His Essence in a totally new way. This time He received in Himself the *wounds of the thorns* of humankind’s fallen condition. He appeared in a real form on a real mountain, to a real man,

amidst real flames of real fire. He spoke real syllables of real, intelligible Hebrew words in the hearing of real human ears. He downloaded a vision of a Harvest to come, accompanied with a manual of *'harvesting instructions'*. He laid out the components of His harvest-time agenda. He committed to **"... rescue<sup>3</sup> [the seed of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov] from the land of the Egyptians and to ... bring them into ... a land flowing with milk and honey ..."** Exodus 3:8. HOW did He intend to do this? He stated matter-of-factly: **"... I will stretch out My Hand - and I will strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them."** Exodus 3:20(a). Finitary barrier, watch out. Another form of 'appearing' is about to occur – and Moshe is going to be at the epicenter of it. Moshe is about to become as an arrow, pulled from a burning quiver, sent on a course to release carefully measured, but ultimately irresistible, pulses of Heavenly force. Despots of the world, prepare to experience the inexplicable phenomena of the Holy One's *Zeroa Netuyah* – i.e. *Outstretched Arm* - and *Yad Chazakah* – i.e. *Mighty Hand*.

It is 'on'. There is going to be a harvest – and there is going to be a glorious redemption about which men will speak in hushed tones of awe for as long as there are human beings on the planet.

### ***Reconsidering the Essence of the Plague Narratives***

As we begin our study of the great season of 'wonders' by which the Holy One brought our ancestors out of the ultimate prototypical state of bondage, it behooves us to consider what the essence of the narrative is at its core really all about. Is this captivating story at its essence just a *'war' story* – *God takes on Pharaoh*? Is it just an epic saga of *good* triumphing over *evil*? Is it merely a tale of judgment of a holy God upon another depraved and dysfunctional element of human society? No, it is not any of those things. It is not a *war story* - because *there is no war*. It is not *a story of good triumphing over evil* - because *the good guys are no better than the bad guys*. It is not a story of the destruction of a morally depraved society because *there is no destruction* – only *a series of well-timed, strategic 'strikes'*. So if it is none of the foregoing ... what is it? What exactly is the Holy One really going to be *doing* with all the 'sign and wonder' stuff we are about to see? Consider the possibility that instead of being at essence a tale of war, or moral supremacy, or judgment, the plague narrative is at its essence a *love story*. Consider the possibility that the essence of what the Holy One is doing in the course of the 'plagues' is not so much judging Egypt, or punishing Pharaoh, as it was *introducing Himself to, showing His affection for, and trying to win the heart of the apple of His Eye*.

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<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew verb used by the Holy One was a form of the verb *natzal*, *nun tzade, lamed*. First used in Genesis 31:9, this verb means to pull out or pull away; i.e. to deliver a person, people, or possession out of the ownership, possession, and dominion of his or its person, household, or nation into another under whose ownership and in whose possession they can flourish and thrive.

By the end of the week, you see, the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov are all going to know the Holy One as a Real Persona – instead of just a vague concept. And they are going to see the world – and look at the purpose of their lives - in a radically new light. The plague narrative is not about *crushing a Pharaoh's will*; it is about the Creator of the Universe *courting a people's hearts*.

### ***Welcome to the Courtship Phase of the Divine Romance***

Courting is a time-honored process whereby a male courtier identifies and wins the heart of someone he believes is capable of becoming a *compatible life-companion* and *effective co-laborer* for him – i.e. his *ezer kenegdo*<sup>4</sup>. On the part of the Courtier, courtship involves a series of strategically timed and closely chaperoned interactions whereby the Courtier proves to the object of his pursuit, over an extended period of time, his *seriousness as a Suitor*, his *goodness*, his *capability and trustworthiness as a provider and protector*, and his *desirability as a covenant partner*.

The season of forbearance known to men as ‘courtship’ is designed to assure the relationship does not proceed either too fast or too slow, and that intimacy and vulnerability occur only after the establishment of both well-earned trust and well-documented commitment. Courtship proceeds according to understood *protocols*, the purpose of which is to allow the Courtier to demonstrate to the object of his attention, over *an extended period of time, at arm's length*, the courtier's *honor, personal worth, faithfulness, perseverance, capacity and commitment to bring out the best in his beloved*. In other words, courtship is about the courtier convincing the object of his affection that he is ‘*marriage covenant material*’. And that, I believe, is the essence of what the ‘plague narrative’ of Exodus 6-10 is all about. The Holy One is acting the Courtier, and the very young and immature but potentially glorious nation later to be known as ‘Yisrael’ is playing the role of the object of the Divine Courtier's attention.

A series of impressive plagues were *not necessary* to make Pharaoh release Yisrael's descendants. But ten demonstrations of His power, His love, and His

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<sup>4</sup> *Ezer kenegdo* is the Hebrew phrase found in Genesis 2:19 that describes the role Chava was designed and assigned to perform vis-à-vis Adam. The phrase has historically been translated into English as ‘helpmeet’ [KJV] or ‘helper comparable’ [NKJV]. More specifically, *ezer* (derived from the verb *azar - ayin, zayin, resh* - means one who joins with another to strengthen, complement, co-labor with, assist, and share tasks, responsibilities, roles, and burdens, hence to make more efficient, effective, and productive. *Kenegdo* (derived from the verb *nagad - nun, gimel, dalet* - means to make more conspicuous, more courageous, more prominent, i.e. who brings out the latent potential and brings forth the best qualities of another. This is the verb root from which the well-known noun associated with Pesach - the ‘*Haggadah*’ – i.e. the telling of the story – emanates.

devotion to them *were* necessary to win the hearts and minds of Yisrael's descendants away from the Egyptian lifestyle.

### ***Pharaoh Was Never a Match for the Creator of the Universe***

Have you ever wondered why the Holy One did not just rain down fire and brimstone like He had proven He could do at S'dom and G'morrah? Have you ever questioned why He did not just send in a couple of angels – or an army of 10,000 of them if He pleased – to rescue Ya'akov's descendants from Egypt the way the angelic 'special forces' of Genesis 19 rescued Lot and his family? Has it ever crossed your mind to ask why the Holy One waited so long to release the one plague – the death of the Firstborn – that He knew would convince Pharaoh to let the people go? Have you ever considered that any time the Holy One wanted He could have, with one breath of His Mouth or wave of His Hand *crushed Pharaoh* into powder, *destroyed Egypt*, and *run off with Israel* as a 'captive bride'?

Let's face it - Pharaoh was no more a match for the Holy One than the King of S'dom had been. The magicians and wise men of Egypt had no more answer for the Holy One's challenge than the town council of G'morrah had. The thriving economy of the Nile Valley and abundant wealth of Egypt were no less powerless to stop the Holy One than had been the economy of the Jordan Rift Valley and the vast, untold petroleum reserves that fueled the 'cities of the plain'.

So why did the Holy One act so very slowly, so very deliberately, and so very even-handedly? Why did He keep giving Pharaoh, and his advisors, and the Egyptian people *warning after warning* and *chance after chance* to reconsider? Why did He so carefully measure each blow He struck so as to achieve *maximum spiritual, emotional and psychological impact* with a *minimum of actual physical destruction*? He did it because He was not out to destroy Egypt. He really wasn't. And He didn't. All He was out to do was to prove to His Beloved beyond a shadow of a doubt His *Power, His Goodness and Trustworthiness*.

### ***But ... Does the Creator of the Universe Really 'Court', Woo, and Marry?***

There are two equally dangerous tendencies that men follow in their theological approaches to God. First of all, there is the tendency of some men to totally de-personalize God – i.e. to think of Him as some impersonal form of 'higher power' or 'moral force' or 'karma recycler' in the universe. In such a theological approach the Holy One has no emotions and no 'persona'. In such a paradigm meaningful relationship with Him is impossible and one deals with God merely by obeying or disobeying His 'commandments'. Those who hold to this approach are quick to say things like "*Obedience yields reward; disobedience yields retribution*". This kind of legalist formulation – which ignore the Joyful Persona, the Merciful Character,



the Glorious Redemptive Plan, and the Amazing Restorative Power of the Holy One entirely - sometimes coincides appears to coincide with truth, but it *totally misrepresents the essential message of the Holy One to mankind*. It focuses only on what the Holy One demands of mankind – ignoring the pleasure of His Companionship and the Garden of Delight found through walking in His Ways.

The opposite but equally dangerous tendency of modern-day theologians is to *over-humanize God*. Such people foolishly tend to consider the Creator of the Universe to be merely a kind of ‘super-powered’ human being – a lot like the members of the Greek, Egyptian, and/or Kena’ani pantheons, but of course a whole lot more powerful. When God is over-humanized, Divine favor is to be sought by *dazzling God with acts of religious zeal*. Human beings under this deception dream up ways to cater to what they imagine to be God’s fleshly tastes and appetites, and to please and impress him the way they would another human being. In such a paradigm obedience or disobedience to an objective set of commandments is really irrelevant, as long as one does enough religious ‘stuff’ [in whatever form one imagines will please him] to get on God’s imagined ‘good’ side as opposed to his imagined ‘bad’ side. In this view of God, you see, God’s words – like the words of a human being - are seen as *just* words, which can be rendered moot or obsolete by behavior that really ‘rings his bell’ on the one hand, or really ‘ticks him off’ on the other. *Oy veh! What nonsense!* He is the Creator of the Universe. He is the Holiest of all Holiness. He is omniscient, knowing our entire life story, with all its ups and downs, highs and lows, before we were ever born. There are no surprises. Our piety cannot impress Him, and our sin cannot repulse Him. We are powerless to do anything that will make Him love us more; and we are equally powerless to do anything that will make Him like us less.

Nevertheless, most human beings at one time or another succumb to some degree of one or both these errors. The truth about the Holy One lies somewhere in between the two theological approaches I have described. Though He is spirit, the Holy One is not a Vulcan like *Star Trek’s* intensely logical ‘Spock’ character. The Holy One has intense emotions and fascinating layers of personality. As a result He can *soften His decrees of logic and justice* by providing people and nations extended opportunities for *t’shuvah* [acts of repentance/return to covenant]. He also freely offers *kippur* [covering/atonement for sin] in response to *t’shuvah*. On the other hand, He is much more than a mere human being with super-intellect and super-powers. He has eternal, unchanging standards, and makes eternal, unchanging commitments, such that every time He speaks His words are forever. Neither His covenant undertakings nor His instructions to human beings as to how they should live their lives and interact with Him, with Creation, and with each other will ever change - no matter how many amazing deeds we do in His Name on our best days

or how many disgusting perversions we immerse ourselves in on our worst days.

The concept of *Divine Betrothal/Marriage* – which the Holy One introduces into Scripture<sup>5</sup> on several occasions – is diagnostic of both of the theological errors mentioned above. To those who see the Holy One in strict, impersonal, legalistic, terms, to speak of the Holy One becoming betrothed or married to a people group [i.e. Israel] is offensive because the imagery is considered just too intimate and personal. How such people ask could God betroth Himself to *an imperfect people, who do not always obey His commands?*

On the other hand, those who see the Holy One in mere human, emotional, terms get uncomfortable with the ‘eternal covenant’ aspect of the betrothal motif. How they wonder could God possibly *bind Himself and His people forever with covenant words* that hold greater weight than spontaneity and individual creativity – so-called ‘random acts of kindness’? If therefore the Divine ‘courtship/betrothal/marriage’ language makes the reader a little uncomfortable, do not be surprised. You will not be alone in your discomfort. But consider the possibility that the problem is not the language employed. Consider the possibility that the problem instead is the presence in the mind of the reader of one or the other of the two errors discussed above. Let the intimate – yet covenantal – language of the Divine betrothal motif *challenge* rather than offend you.

### ***True Love Waits***

Keep in mind as you read *Va’era* that although the Holy One could deliver His people in the “wink of an eye”, in His wisdom He knows He must not deliver them until *they* are ready - or they will just go back into bondage somewhere else. How will He make them ready? Welcome to *the Season of Divine Courtship*. He will make them ready by “*courting*” them. The Holy One is not just coming to *free a bunch of slaves* from bondage. He is not just out to help the underdog. He is coming to *claim a Bride-People* for Himself. The deliverance the Holy One desires to bring about for His Beloved is not just deliverance *from* the house of bondage – it is deliverance *to* His Bridal chamber and Throne Room. Moreover, since what He is after is a Bride and a Co-Regent, the Holy One does not want to merely capture the young nation of Yisrael as one captures a prisoner of war. What He intends to do is to *win her heart*. He will get no joy or honor from insisting that she obey and serve Him out of fear, or even out of gratitude. He wants her to overcome with love for Him. He wants her to *choose Him* out of passion. He wants her to compare Him with all other possible suitors, choose Him with great zeal, and never look back to wonder what ‘might have been’. He wants her to

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<sup>5</sup> See Hoshea [**Hosea**] 2, Isaiah 54:5, and Jeremiah 3:14, 20, 31:32, among many other Scriptural references referring to the relationship between Israel and YHVH as a Bride-Bridegroom relationship.

joyfully, exuberantly *give her love and devotion* to Him as her ultimate dream Bridegroom. He wants her soul to pant after Him as the deer pants for the water brook. He wants her to come with gladness and rejoicing to His Bridal Chamber and Throne Room.

The Holy One imagined, created, carefully nurtured, and is about to call Yisrael forth for just such a relationship. So the Holy One begins to *reveal Himself* to His chosen Bride-Nation. Over the next few weeks He will *patiently spread out before her convincing evidences of His goodness*, of His *majesty*, and of His *awesome power*. Then, at the appointed time, He will invite whosoever will respond to His courtship advances to “*Arise, My Love, and Come Away With Me! For lo, the winter is past; the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come.*”<sup>6</sup>

### ***The Revelation Inherent in the Sh'mot By Which the Creator Reveals Himself***

As we discussed in some detail last week, the ‘book’ of Torah we are reading is in the Hebrew tongue called ‘*Sh'mot*’ – KJV ‘names’. In Hebrew what we in the English language think of as ‘names’ are very, very important. They are not just convenient labels. They are *revelatory*. They describe the spiritual essence of their object – to the extent, at least, that such essence is ‘knowable’ to the one using the name.

As parsha *Va'era* begins the Holy One wants His people – and the world - to start to know Him in a new way by an additional title. He is, and always will be, the *Elohim* of the Creation Song. He has always been, and will always be, the Great *El Shaddai* of the patriarchs. He never stops functioning as *El Elyon*, as the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, or the Prince of Peace. But He is far more than any one title – or combination of titles – can describe. He therefore wants us to remember a generic, all encompassing, yet at the same time very personal ‘additional’ inspirational title/label. This moniker is not really new of course, having first surfaced in Genesis chapter 2, as the focus of Torah was shifting from the Creation to interactions between the Creator and men. At that point the writer of Torah began to refer to the Holy One by a name created by putting the Hebrew consonants *yod*, *hey*, *vav* and *hey*<sup>7</sup> together in sequence. The

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<sup>6</sup> See Song of Solomon 2:10-12(a)

<sup>7</sup> The author of these studies has carefully reviewed and analyzed all theories and arguments about how the glorious Divinely revealed *Shem* made up of the consonants *Yod*, *Hey*, *Vav*, *Hey* was originally pronounced by the Almighty and has found such all such theories and arguments unconvincing. The evidence is woefully inconclusive. No one alive today really knows how the Holy One pronounced the Tetragrammaton – and this author, for one, strongly suspects that this state of affairs is exactly the way it is supposed to be. That is, I suspect, why in Revelation 19:12 it is said that the Glorious Rider on the

first time the Writer of Torah referred to the Creator as “*yod, hey, vav, hey*” was in Genesis 2:4. The context of that first usage was the institution of the *Shabbat* – the blessing of the Seventh Day. Immediately following that *b’racha* [i.e. after we are told that Elohim ‘blessed the seventh day and made it holy’] Torah tells us:

*This is the history of the generations of the heavens and of the eretz when they were created, in the day that the Holy One (i.e. yod, hey, vav, hey) Elohim made eretz and the heavens.*

Why did the Writer of Torah add the additional designation *yod, hey, vav, hey* to the name *Elohim* in that particular context? Ask a dozen Christian theologians and you will probably get a dozen answers. Ask a dozen rabbis and you will probably get *two* dozen answers. So I do not presume to ‘know’ in any real sense. But I do have a *theory*.

### ***Something to Think About***

Could it be that the reason the title/label ***the Holy One*** [i.e. *yod-hey-vav-hey*] is introduced in connection with the institution of *Shabbat* is because *the Shabbat is the subject matter of the very first covenant the Holy One made with His Creation?* On the Seventh Day the Holy One did not just create something and empower it to develop on its own – i.e. the kind of stuff the Creator does in the merit of the title/label *Elohim*. On the Seventh Day the Creator actually pledged *perpetual contact* with and *blessing* to the Day. He made Himself more personally involved and intimate with His Creation. And now, as He is about to expand that personal commitment and intimacy to something even more important than the 7th Day - namely, to *the creation known as man* – He describes Himself by the very same *shem* that He used to describe Himself as He blessed, made holy, and rested on the Seventh Day.

It is not sufficient for the Holy One to be known to man merely as "Master of the Universe" and "Creator of the Heavens and the Earth" - though He is indeed both. According to the Holy One's Divine plan, the Holy One is to be known to those in Covenant with Him much more personally, more intimately - as *yod, hey, vav, hey*. It is not a ‘name’ or even a ‘title’ by which He is to be called, however – it is a *shem* in the mystery of which with relationship with Him is to be passionately pursued. It is not a talisman; nor is it a ‘gotcha’ test of proper spelling, pronunciation, syllable-accentuation, or vowel articulation; it is, instead, a

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White Horse is said to have *a shem that that no one knows except Himself*. Rather than participate in a divisive debate that cannot possibly serve any useful purpose over how the Divine Name should be written or pronounced therefore, when dealing with the Divine *Shem* in these studies the author will either write in the four Hebrew consonants in their traditional form [i.e. without vowels] or refer to the Beautiful One Whom our Soul Deeply Loves by unmistakably descriptive phrases such as *the Holy One, the Divine Bridegroom of Heaven, or the Great Bridegroom-King*.

relationship-maturing paradigm - a *shem* that *opens our eyes, minds, and hearts to the fact that the Holy One desires predictable, personal, and increasingly intimate involvement in the lives of His people.* Why do I say "predictable"? Because the Holy One's interactions with men are based upon COVENANT, not upon *chance, luck, whim, or personal merit.* By using this *shem* to describe Himself, the Creator of the Universe reveals Himself as *a covenant partner Who has proven Himself faithful and trustworthy, day in, day out, since the beginning of time.* Why do I say 'personal'? Because the Holy One does not want us to have a mere 'abstract idea' or 'theological concept' of a mysterious, unknowable Divine *Construct*; He wants us to relate to Him as a very real, responsive, communicative, ever-accessible, highly relatable *Divine Persona.* Why do I say 'increasingly intimate involvement'? He does not want His Covenant People – who are to model His Ways and His love to the world - to simply believe in Him as part of a systematic matrix of doctrine and theology; He wants us to KNOW HIM, to WALK WITH HIM, to CONVERSE WITH HIM, to GET BOTH STRATEGIC BRIEFINGS AND PERSONAL INSPIRATION/EMPOWERMENT FROM HIM DAILY, TO COLABOR WITH HIM IN EVERY ENDEAVOR, and to ENJOY AND BE ENJOYED BY HIM AT ALL TIMES.

The Creator of Heaven and Earth is not just a benevolent Supreme Power we can aspire to serve. He is *the familiar stronger partner in an on-going covenant relationship* Who we know very well from a vast reservoir of past experiences, both personal to us and as recorded in the annals of our forefathers, to be *tenaciously committed to do whatever is necessary to promote our survival – and our personal and national shalom – for the sake of the Grand Redemptive and Restorative Plan* He began to reveal in blueprint form to the Patriarchs of the last era and is ready to begin to reveal in concrete detail to the '*Slaves-Soon-To-Become-Tabernacle-and-Nation-Builders*' of the current generation.

### ***Putting It All in Context***

As we have previously read, Exodus 6:2 (the very first verse of this week's parsha) informs us that the Holy One told Moshe "***I am the Holy One - although I was known by Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov as El Shaddai.*** The Holy One previously introduced Himself to Moshe as ***ehyeh asher ehyeh*** – the indescribable, eternal, transcendent, unchanging One. **Exodus 3:14.** The Holy One makes it a point in ***Va'era*** to begin His courtship of the slaves building Pharaoh's store cities by introducing Himself to them by a NEW (to them) identity/persona. He wants to get a lot more personal and intimate – first with Moshe, and then with the descendants of Ya'akov. He does not want them just to believe in Him; He wants them to TRUST HIM and to FOLLOW HIM, and ultimately to CO-LABOR WITH HIM. So He is about to do for them after the pattern of what He did for the seventh day -

to set them apart, make them holy, and "bless" them. Thus, by harking back to the first usage of the name *yod, hey, vav, hey* in Torah and grasping the prototypical and prophetic significance of that usage we can see the essence of what the Holy One is about to do with the rag-tag Hebrew slaves.

This understanding of the *Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey shem* will hopefully give much more meaning, depth, and dimension to our study of the Exodus narrative. The story of the Exodus is not primarily a story of judgment on Pharaoh and Egypt; it is a guidebook describing the relationship the Holy One desires to have with His people. He is the stronger partner in a very real covenant relationship; and *we are His personal and intimate friends*. We do not have to hope we impress Him. We do not have to work to please Him. We do not have to 'earn' His favor, much less His provision, protection or salvation. We have an eternal, unbreakable, unshakeable Covenant. When we think of Him through the lens of the '*yod-hey-vav-hey*' *shem* we understand that He *sh'mas* us not as a king *sh'ma's* his subjects, but as a Bridegroom *sh'ma's* his bride or a father *sh'ma's* his sons and daughters. Much more will be said on that later in the week. First however let us step back a little, and as is our custom in these studies, view a brief '*parsha Va'era travelogue*' to get our bearings.

### ***A Parsha Va'era Travelogue***

As our parsha begins it "appears" that Pharaoh is in control and that all hope is lost. Moshe and Aharon have done what the Holy One told them to do but Pharaoh *laughed at them* - and *added the task of gathering straw* to the people's already impossible workload. Things clearly seem to have gotten worse instead of better. But that is not how the story is going to end. No, not by a long shot. Watch what happens, Pharaoh, and people of faith ... when the Holy One 'appears'!

#### ***A. The Holy Spirit Visits the Broken and Contrite***

This week's parsha thus begins with the Holy One "appearing" to a disillusioned, dejected, and angry Moshe, consoling and reassuring him. This is the Holy One's way, as Yeshayahu quotes the Holy One:

***This is what the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, Whose Name is Holy, says:  
I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit,  
to renew the spirit of the humble and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.***

[Isaiah 57:15]

In the course of this appearing to Moshe the Holy One will declare in even more detail His intentions.

#### ***B. The Great Courtship Proposition***

The Holy One will make what is in essence a '*courtship proposition*'. The seven essential elements of the proposition are set forth as follows:

1. He promises to ***bring Israel forth*** from forced labor<sup>8</sup> in Egypt
2. He promises to ***set Israel free*** from slavery;
3. He promises to ***liberate [redeem] Israel*** with a demonstration of power;
4. He promises to ***'take Israel*** to Himself as a nation;
5. He promises to ***be Israel's God***;
6. He promises to ***bring Israel to the land*** He promised to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Ya'akov; and
7. He promises to ***give that land to Israel*** as an inheritance, forever.

All these promises will be kept<sup>9</sup>. Promise #s 1-2 will both be fulfilled before Israel ever leaves Egypt. Promise #3 will be fulfilled at the Sea of Reeds. Promise #s 4 and 5 will be fulfilled at *Har Sinai*. Promise #6 will begin to manifest in the narratives of Y'hoshua. Promise #7 is being fulfilled even as this *shiur* is being written.

### ***C. Phase I of the Courtship Process***

Then we will begin reading about the 'plagues'. In Tuesday's Study we will read about the 'plague of the Nile', when *the water turned to blood*. In Wednesday's Study we will read about the plagues of *swamp creatures* [frogs, etc.] and of *lice*. In Thursday's Study we will cover *the plague of wild beasts* and *the great livestock epidemic*. In Friday's Study we will investigate the plague of boils and the great hailstorm of fire and ice.

How is this descriptive of a Divine 'courtship', you ask? Because through these 'plagues' the Holy One will make Himself and His intentions known - not only to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt, but also to the people whose affections He is courting. We will hear the Deeds of the Holy One on everyone's lips. We will see both reverence for and trust in His goodness grow with every new 'plague'. We will see covenant relationship with the Holy One come to be acknowledged as the

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<sup>8</sup> The term we translate into English as 'forced labor' in this verse is the Hebrew word *sivlot*, [pronounced *seeve-lote*] the plural form of *siv'lah*, *samech*, *veit*, *lamed*, *hey*, Strong's Hebrew word #5450. The word refers to a "compulsory service involving burden bearing". This is a noun derived from the Hebrew verb root *saval*, *samech*, *veit*, *lamed*, Strong's Hebrew word #5447, pronounced *saw-vawl*, which pictures someone laying a heavy burden or yoke upon someone else.

<sup>9</sup> The very fact that the Creator of Heaven and Earth says something will happen means that it has already happened in the spiritual realm. To our human minds it seems that when the Holy One says something will happen He means that it will happen *in the future*. But if we understand the nature and character of the Holy One at all we know that He is not bound by time or by space, and that He not only knows the end from the beginning, but also has the ability to see and experience the reality of the future event, Hence just because an event that forms a part of eternal reality – *i.e.* has been a 'done deal' in the spiritual realm since before the Creation of the world - has not manifested physically to our senses does not mean that it is any less real.

most important asset any person or nation could have. And plague-by-plague we will witness a courted people fall deeper and deeper in love with – and be more and more prepared to give their heart and commit their troth to - their Divine Courtier.

***The Holy One And Egypt: The Second Time Around***  
*Haftarah Va'era: Ezekiel 28:25 – 29:21]*

In this week's Haftarah the prophet *Yechezkiel* [Ezekiel] prophesies of a day when the Holy One will revisit Israel with a second round of Divine Deliverance, and will revisit Egypt with a second round of Divine Judgment. Note the promise to Israel with which the haftarah begins with the Holy One saying:

***B'qabetzi et-beit Yisra'el min ha-amim asher nafotzu***

*When I have gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered,*

***vam v'nikdashti vam l'eynei ha-goyim***

*and have revealed My holiness through them in the sight of the nations*

***v'yashvu al-admatam asher natati l'avdi l'Ya'akov***

*then they will dwell in their own land that I gave to My servant Ya'akov.*

***Veyasheivu aleiha lavetach uvanu vatim venate'u cheramim***

*They will dwell securely in it, and build houses and plant vineyards.*

***yasheivu lavetach ba'asoti sh'fatim***

*They will dwell securely after I have executed wise decrees*

***b'chol ha-shatim otam misevivotam***

*affecting all those who treated them with disdain;*

***v'yadei'u ki ani Adonai Eloheihem***

*and they will know that I am the Holy One their God.*

Just as this week's parsha the Holy One begins with a promise to Israel then proceeds to release a series of carefully measured judgments upon Pharaoh for the oppression of generation after generation of Ya'akov's descendants while they were in his care, so in this week's haftarah the Holy One declares He will judge the Pharaoh of a later day for being 'a staff of reed' for the House of Israel which 'splintered and tore open their shoulders' when they sought his protection, and which broke and 'wrenched their backs' when they tried to lean on him for support in a time of weakness. In Ezekiel 29:2-3 the Holy One will tell His prophet:

***Ben-adam sim paneicha al-par'oh melech Mitzrayim***

*Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

***V'hinavei alav v'al-Mitzrayim kulah***

*Prophesy against him and against all Egypt:*

***hineini aleicha par'oh melech Mitzrayim***

*Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh, King of Egypt,*



***Ha-tanim ha-gadol ha-roveitz betoch yeorav***  
*the great dragon lying in the midst of his rivers ...*

The end state of Israel in the second time of deliverance will, we will find, be much greater than was its end state at the time of the first deliverance. And the end of Pharaoh in this second time of judgment will be much worse than was his judgment at the time of the events recorded in Exodus.

***Worthy of More Glory than Moshe!***  
*Brit Chadasha Va'era: Hebrews 3:1-6 and Revelation 7-13*

Kefa [known to most of us by the English name 'Peter' – a name he would not have recognized at all] knew Moshe very well. Kefa was a devout Jewish man. As devout Jews do he had studied the Torah from the earliest day so his youth. He like every other Jewish child of a devout family had '*personally experienced the events of the Exodus*' every single year of his life in connection with the annual celebration of the Biblical festivals of *Pesach* [i.e. Passover] and *Shavuot* [i.e. Pentecost]. Kefa had also seen amazing things on the Mount of Transfiguration – including Moshe and Eliyahu in resurrection glory. In response to this latter vision, perhaps in preparation for the celebration of *Chag Sukkot* [i.e. the Feast of Tabernacles], Kefa wanted to build three *sukkot* - one for Moshe, one for Eliyahu, and one for Yeshua. **Matthew 17:4.** Kefa was *in no wise being disrespectful* of Moshe. But something had happened on the Mount of Transfiguration that, while it did not in the least diminish Kefa's respect for Moshe – or, of course, for the Torah that came to earth through the mediation of Moshe - certainly re-arranged his priorities. Do you remember the voice that spoke from a bright cloud [the same cloud, no doubt, we will read about in Exodus beginning in parsha *Bo*, next week]? The Voice said to Kefa: ***This*** [meaning Yeshua] ***is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Sh'ma Him.*** **Matthew 17:5.**

It was not that Kefa should no longer *sh'ma* Moshe or Eliyahu. He should – and so should we. It was not that the Holy One was not well pleased with those men. He was. Indeed, the very presence of those men on that mountain with Yeshua in that moment speaks volumes of the Holy One's abiding affection for both of them and His validation of the message each revealed to the world. But when that Voice spoke from Heaven Kefa suddenly realized that as wonderful as Moshe and Eliyahu were, *Yeshua was in a class by Himself.*

Keep all that in mind as you study this week's Brit Chadasha reading from the book of Hebrews. Yeshua is not in competition with Moshe – for obedience or honor or anything else. Yeshua is the embodiment of all Moshe foresaw and proclaimed – from the 'seed of woman' who crushes the serpent's heel to the *Shiloh* Who comes from Y'hudah. Or as the writer of Hebrews puts it:

***Yeshua ... was faithful to him who appointed him, as also was Moshe in all his house.***

*For he has been counted worthy of more glory than Moshe,  
inasmuch as he who built the house has more honor than the house.*

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*Moshe indeed was faithful in all his house as a servant,  
for a testimony of those things which were afterward to be spoken,  
but Messiah is faithful as a Son over his house; whose house we are  
if we hold fast our confidence and the glorying of our hope firm to the end.*

Those of us who have met Messiah, and have, through our relationship with Him been restored to the Ancient Paths of Torah, have received a precious - truly costly - gift. Our message is not Torah for the sake of Torah. Our message is, instead, Torah for the sake of the Holy One - *yod, hey, vav, hey* - as revealed to us in the life and teaching of Yeshua.

Then in the second B'rit Chadasha reading - Revelation chapters 7-13 - we will be introduced to the mirroring events of the last days. Just as parsha *Va'era* describes the prototypical 'Beast of the Earth' Kingdom of the former days, and narrates in detail seven former days 'plagues through which the Holy One set His people apart and redeemed them, even so the writer of Revelation will describe the ultimate 'Beast of the Earth' of the latter days, and narrate in detail seven latter days plagues through which the Holy One will once again set apart His people and redeem them. Seedtime and Harvest, beloved. The cycles just keep repeating themselves. And the end result is always the same.

*Know the Holy One, Beloved.*

*And Hold fast that to Him who is faithful as a Stronger Covenant Partner.*

***The Rabbi's son***

***Amidah Prayer Focus for the Week***

Petition No. 11: ***Et-Tzemach David - Sprout/Outgrowth of David***

***Et tzemach David av'deicha m'heira a-tz'michai***

*May the sprout/outgrowth of David your servant speedily flourish*

***v'qar'nei tarum bishuateicha***

*and may we prosper and exult in your deliverance*

***Ki lishuateicha kivilinu kol hayom***

*For we long for your deliverance every day*

***Baruch atah Adonai***

*Blessed are You, O Holy One*

***matzmiach keren yeshua***

*Who causes the horn of deliverance [i.e. Yeshua] to sprout/come forth.*