

*Shiur L'Yom Shenit*¹

[Monday's Study]

READINGS: **Torah Va'era**²: **Exodus 6:2-27**
 Haftarah: **Ezekiel 28:25-26**
 B'rit Chadasha: **Hebrews 3:1-3**

I will take you to Me for a people

[Exodus 6:7]

Today's Meditation is Psalm 18:20-23;

This Week's Amidah Prayer Focus is Petition # 11, *Et-Tzemach David* [Sprout/outgrowth of David]

Vayedaber Elohim el-Moshe vayomer elav – Then the Holy One spoke substantive, audible words to Moshe, and He said to him - **Ani Adonai** – I am [the Holy One]. Exodus 6:2.

For centuries - ever since the Holy One appeared to Ya'akov at Be'er-Sheva to tell him **Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there**³ - Heaven has been silent. Not once in the 17 years after Ya'akov arrived in Egypt, nor in the difficult decades since Ya'akov died, has the Holy One spoken a fresh word – be it of comfort, of consolation, of encouragement, of edification, of direction, of warning, or of rebuke - to any human being. But finally this long drought of communication from Heaven is over. It started quietly in the extreme isolation of the Wilderness of Sin, with the *spontaneous combustion of a thorn bush*. But that spark was just the beginning. - the startling flash of lightning that would initiate a great sustained peal of rolling thunder. Soon rumbling sounds – like the roar of many waters – congealed into: **'Moshe! Moshe!'** – and far beyond. The silence was broken. The *status quo*⁴ was shattered. Inertia gave way to momentum. The time had come for ancient roots to awaken to a new season of life. The Wise and Glorious Manager of the Creation Ecosystem is ready to inaugurate a new season of fruitfulness. To accomplish this, He wants to give a forerunner group of His *'B'tzelem Elohim'* – i.e. in/of the Creator's shadow - species a radically new perspective on first their own identity, purpose, and mission and second the direction – and the destiny – toward which *humanity as a species* and *Creation as an ecosystem* should be heading. It will start with Moshe – but it will not be confined

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² In Hebrew the phrase *va'era* [i.e. and I appeared] is written וָאֶרָא [vav, alef, resh, alef].

³ See Genesis 46:3.

⁴ The Latin term *status quo*, literally meaning *the state/condition in which [someone or something exists]*, refers to the *existing state of affairs*, especially in regard to government, politics, economic conditions, social structure/norms, philosophies, science, religion, and inter-personal and inter-cultural relationships.

to him. The spark of Kedusha – and the vision that comes with that spark - that will ignite in that 80-year-old shepherd wearing Midyanite will spread. First his older brother, Aharon, will appear seemingly out of nowhere, and be infected as well. The contagion will then spread to the tribal elders of B'nei Yisrael. Isolated cases will begin to pop up in every slave camp in Mitzrayim. Then the Kedusha spark will grow into a wildfire – spreading rapidly from one slave household to another, one work camp to another, and one slime pit to another, until all Egypt – and all nations – have been affected.

What has the Holy One started? What has His little conversation with Moshe on Mount Horeb initiated? What is coming – first to Egypt, then to the nations? Ah, Beloved, this is the Great ‘Visitation’ of which Yosef prophesied! This is the hour of ‘*Great Nation Arising*’ that the Holy One promised our patriarchs. It will not happen all at once – because neither we nor the world is quite ready. But it will happen. It cannot be otherwise. It was planned before the foundation of the world – and it MUST happen, or the Holy One is not God. So sit back, Dear Reader, and enjoy the ride. Catch fire from the eternal spark of Kedusha the Holy One has embedded in the Exodus Narrative, the ember that begins to glow and radiate heat again each and every time the tale of B'nei Yisrael's redemption is told. Welcome to a glorious season of increasing awareness of, and awakened love for, the Holy One. Is that not His Call that you are hearing in the night? Is that not the rhythm of His song of glorious freedom that you find yourself tapping out with your fingers and toes as you are sit in your homes and humming as you walk by the way?

Let this be for you – and for your household - a time for radical re-introductions, re-imaginings, and re-focusing of priorities. Let it be a time for declarations of affection as well as intent. Let it be a time for reconnection, re-alignment, and repositioning. Let it be a time for envisioning both new approaches and new horizons, and for rethinking both what is possible and what is normative. Embrace this Divinely Choreographed season of strategic briefings, assignments, communications, and debriefings. I assure you – you don't want to miss a thing!

Why Are You Downcast, O My Soul?

The parsha known as *Va'era* begins with the Creator speaking substantive, audible words to a mortal man – a dazed, confused, and depressed mortal man at that. Do you realize how wonderful that is? What our Creator is about to do is to reveal Himself and His Redemptive Plan in some marvelous new ways that no one has seen before – and He is going to do it without invalidating a single thing He said to or did with Avraham, Yitzchak, or Ya'akov. His Covenant with Avraham is both *la'olam va'ed* – i.e. for age-to-age, perpetually - and *l'dor v'dor* – i.e. from generation to

generation. It will never change. It will just enter another and more impactful phase. So ... are you ready for the upgrade? Are you ready for a paradigm shift? Are you ready for the next phase of God-man interactions in general and the next phase of the Grand Plan of Redemption for mankind and Creation in particular?

Knowing and walking with the Creator of the Universe - and learning to be what He created us to be and do what He designed us to do - is truly the GREAT ADVENTURE! And each of us has been invited - indeed *called* and *empowered* - to play a major role in it. Prepare to be amazed this week! Prepare to be astonished! Prepare to tremble in awe of our wonderful Heavenly King! Prepare to let awestruck wonder fill your soul afresh!

Awake! Awake! Arise and Shine!

The world around us, of course, has *no idea*, *no concept*, about - nor indeed any *grip for understanding* - what is about to take place. But the Holy One always reveals what He is about to do to the prophets among His Covenant partners. Hence the last thing we read in parsha *Sh'mot* was the Holy One saying to Moshe:

Tir'eh asher e'eseh l'Far'oh

You will/are about to see what I will do/make take shape in regard to Pharaoh.

ki veyad chazakah yeshalchem

For under a Strong Hand he will send them out,

uveyad chazakah yegarshem me'artzo

and with a Strong Hand he will drive them out of his land.

[Exodus 6:1]

The *Yad Chazakah* – i.e. ‘Mighty Hand’ - of the Holy One is about to be felt in strategic, surgically precise ways. The Holy One of Israel is about to intervene *powerfully* and *decisively* in the affairs of men. Visible manifestations of His Power are about to *come in waves*. There will be *climate change*. There will be *regime change*. There will be *demographic change*. There will be serious *shifts in economic and political power*.

The Creator has never ceded authority over the planet to mankind, you see. And from time to time He chooses, as part of the Redemptive Plan, to step out of His usual cloak of Invisibility and Incorporeality and reveal His *Yad Chazakah* [*Mighty Hand*], His *Zeroa Netuyah* [*Outstretched Arm*], His *Etzbah Elohim* [*finger of Authority*], and/or His *Radiant Face*, to remind us that He - not nations, or rich men, or demagogues, or institutions, or organizations, or consortiums, or leagues of nations – that controls the things that are truly important.

This is one of those times. A great shaking is about to occur. Both the power and

the management savvy of Heaven are about to be felt. He is about to effectuate a series of carefully measured signs and wonders that will change the course of events on the planet He allows us to inhabit without either destroying any species or doing permanent damage to the ecosystem. For those who would like to cling to the *status quo*, of course, things are going to seem to be getting much, much worse before they begin to get better. There will be a lot of *pushback*. There will be tons of *outrage*. There will be *awe*, and there will be serious *attitude adjustments*. Lies and misinformation will flow like water. Everybody will want to point the finger of blame at someone else – and eventually, as always, the final finger will be pointed at the Holy One’s Covenant People. The powers that be, you see, always take great offense, and react violently against, anything that threatens to interfere with their feeling of being in control. Emotionally charged rhetoric will give way to militant resistance. Pogroms will turn to interments and inquisitions. The Avrahamic Covenant’s provisions about the Holy One making us a ‘great nation’, and blessing those who bless us and cursing those who curse us, are about to take on a whole new depth of meaning. Are you *ready for this*?

When Flash Points Ignite, Emotions are Triggered, and Worlds Collide

In common human experience most people tend to see the Holy One as existing [if at all] in some *ethereal spiritual dimension* separate and apart from the physical world in which we live our day-by-day lives. We consign Him to what we think of as *His realm* - what we conceive as an *invisible spirit realm* - while we live in *our realm* - which we tend to arrogantly label as *the real world*.

As long as He stays in some ‘spirit realm’ – and out of our ‘real world’ – most are fairly comfortable with the idea of His existence. But what happens when the *spirit realm* and the *real world* collide? How comfortable with Him are we then? Will we be *offended* if He interferes with ‘our’ comfortable little corner of the world? What if when His world collides with ours everything in our world shakes and trembles? What if the shaking *collapses our economy*? What if the kingdoms in which we have invested our lives, our hopes, and our dreams *crumble before our eyes*? What if *the emptiness and falsity of our religious systems are exposed*? What if *our governmental, political, economic, societal, and religious leaders are all revealed as weaklings and frauds*? And what if the Holy One brings a crushing gavel of judgment down not just upon our enemies, but upon *our own personal pet sins*? How comfortable will we be with Him *then*? We will see.

Behold the Winepress

Before the week is over the most powerful nation on earth - *Mitzrayim* [Egypt] –

along with its new king [Pharaoh], and even all its slaves [including, but not limited to, the Hebrews] - will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that *something* or *someone* more powerful and fearsome than any force any human being can imagine is in its midst. Through wave after wave of supernatural phenomenon they [and we] will come to realize that this mysterious hostile force which has suddenly appeared in Egypt's midst has every intention of *systematically dismantling the Egyptian economy, completely humiliating Egypt's leaders, totally discrediting Egypt's religion, and effectively unraveling the very fabric of Egyptian society*. It will also become very clear before the week is over that whatever or whoever this force may be, *no one - and nothing - on earth can stop it*.

It is going to be a very interesting week to say the least. Blessed indeed is he who is not offended by the Bridegroom who treads the winepress.

The Holy One Makes His First "Appearance" In Egypt

We will study these things in some detail later this week. First however let us step back for a moment and consider the overall theme of the parsha – the Holy One's "appearing". The Hebrew word that our English Bibles translate as "appeared" in verse 1 is the primitive verb root *ra'ah*. This verb means [causatively, in our context]:

- to cause to see,
- to cause to behold,
- to cause to consider,
- to cause to enjoy,
- to cause to experience,
- to cause to gaze upon in wonder and see indeed,
- to cause to take heed of,
- to cause to perceive,
- to present oneself,
- to cause to have respect,
- to cause to stare.

The Holy One desires to *appear* - to reveal Himself to mankind. He intends to *cause us to consider Him*. He is going to offer us the opportunity to either enjoy Him - or be offended at Him. He is going to invite us to *experience Him*, and *gaze upon Him in wonder*, and to *take heed* of Him.

He wants to *give us a reason to respect Him*. He longs to share a *revelation of Who He is*. He wants us to *stare wide-eyed into His Holiness* and *let His Majesty eclipse everything else we look at* or think about. He therefore plans and orchestrates circumstances in our lives when He can *appear* to us – and *purposely come into our view* and *present Himself to us*.

The Holy One reveals Himself in many ways. His power and creativity are revealed subtly in the majesty of creation itself, seedtime and harvest, the vastness of the heavens, the uniqueness of each species of plant and of animal, and even the miraculous varieties of manners in which our own bodies are knit together. And then there are times when He reveals Himself *dramatically and personally* in startling splendor and majesty with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. These are the times when he “*appears*” in the *ra’ah* sense. As we found out last week, He draws men to the backside of the desert by what they think are life’s mundane tasks and there He *sets bushes on fire and waits behind them to “appear”*.

It is one thing to see the Holy One’s handiwork and marvel at its beauty, majesty, and order; it is quite another to *encounter* the Holy One Himself. To Noach, to Avraham, to Yitzchak, to Ya’akov, to Moshe - to each of these ancestors the Holy One not only revealed Himself but “*appeared*”. And the effect of His “*appearing*” was dramatic. The effect of His appearing, you see, was to make Himself “*known*” by those men. And it all starts with introductions – the exchanging of *names*.

This Act of the Prophetic Drama Opens With a God-Encounter

Seeing as how the Holy One’s appearing and becoming known are the parsha’s theme, the parsha begins appropriately enough with a ‘God-encounter’ – the first major one since the burning bush. The parsha opens with the Holy One telling his trembling prophet in training:

Ani Adonai

I am [yod-hey-vav-hey].

Va'era el-Avraham el-Yitzchak v'el-Ya'akov b'El Shadai

I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov as God Almighty,

ush'mi Adoni lo nodati lahem

and they did not know/relate to Me as yod-hey-vav-hey

V'gam ha-kimoti et-briti itam latet lahem et-eretz Kena'an

I also made My covenant with them, and promised to give them Kana'an's land,

et eretz m'gureyhem asher garu vah

the land in which they lived as pilgrims and sojourned as foreigners.

[Exodus 6:2-4]

The conversations and events that follow this opening statement of the Holy One are all about RELATIONSHIP. Before He lays down the first ‘commandment’ or instruction for living, the Holy One wants Moshe, and Israel, and all the world, to know *three things* very well. He wants them [us] to know:

WHO HE IS WHAT HE IS LIKE

and

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE IN COVENANT WITH HIM.

Please note that the Holy One chose not to begin Torah – or His relationship with corporate Israel - with ‘thou shalt’ and ‘thou shalt not’s’. Had He done so the Torah might perhaps fairly be considered ‘law’ – a list of do’s and don’ts. Furthermore, had He done so it might have been reasonable to conclude that the ‘do’s and don’ts’ were intended to be the prerequisites to establishing a relationship with God – in other words, a form of ‘works-based righteousness’. But this is not what happened at all. Instead, before giving us any ‘commandments’ to fulfill the Holy One spent 50 long attention-getting chapters in the Book of Genesis meticulously and lovingly laying out for us the principles of relationship with Him. He even gave us multiple real-life examples through the chronicles of the ancients and the *avot* as to how to be and remain in relationship with Him *despite being sinful, imperfect, human beings* from the beginning of the process through the end.

The Holy One obviously wanted mankind to have a thorough working understanding of the kind of relationship with Him which would be necessary to make the ‘commandments’ which he is going to give to us as *gifts of love* become – and remain forever – the furthest thing in the world from ‘law’ to us.

Let us look at the *four foundational elements* of the kind of relationship the Holy One is this week going to tell us He wants to have with us. The Holy One will make a series of *‘I will’* promises to the scattered remnant of Israel. Each of these promises is designed to separately constitute an essential element of relationship.

Promise #1: V’hotzeti – The Promise to Bring Us Forth

The first thing the Holy One is going to promise in *Va’era* to do for His Chosen Ones is *to bring us all forth*. What on earth does this mean, you ask? Does it merely mean He will *redeem us from slavery*? Does it merely mean He is going to remove us from Egypt? Or is there something more that the Holy One is trying to say? Let’s meditate on that a moment, shall we? The verb that is translated into English as *‘bring [you] forth’* in Exodus 6 is a form of the Hebrew verb root *yatza*⁵. This verb is first used in Genesis 1:12, where we are told that, in response to the Holy One’s Word, the earth *‘brought forth’* [Hebrew *yatza*] grass and plants and trees.

⁵ *Yatza* is *yod, tzade, alef*. Strong’s Hebrew word #3318, it is first used in Genesis 1:12, where we are told that, in response to the Holy One’s Directive, the earth ecosystem ‘brought forth’ [Hebrew *yatza*] flora.

Do you see it now? The Holy One is saying that from our bondage in Egypt He will create *a new thing* – a thing full of *life* and *hope* and *promise*. He is saying that *Egypt has merely been the soil – and slavery the incubator - in which He has chosen to make the seed of Avraham germinate*. He is saying this it is *His prescribed time for the first harvest of the fruit of Avrahamic seed*.

Promise #2: *V'hitzalti* - The Promise to Set Us Free

The second thing the Divine Suitor of *Va'era* is going to promise to do for us as His chosen Ones is to **free us**. Specifically He promises to free us *from serving 'them'* [i.e. others, and of course in context referring to the Egyptians]. What exactly does it mean that He intends to '*free us*'? The Hebrew word that our English Bibles translate as 'free' in this passage is a form of the verb root ***natzal***, *nun, tzade, lamed*, meaning to *draw away from*. It can mean *a violent snatching*, or it can mean *a slow, purposeful process of disentanglement, disconnection, and deliverance*. In this case it is going to be the latter. This relates back to the first usage of the verb ***natzal*** in Torah, namely Genesis 31:9, where Ya'akov told Leah and Rachel that the Holy One had 'taken away' [Hebrew, ***natzal***] their father Lavan's livestock, and given them to him. In that case as in this case what the Hebrew verb ***natzal*** described was a *slow, orderly transfer of ownership*.

Wow! Do you see it? What the Holy One is saying is *absolutely marvelous*. He is actually saying that *He is going to woo and seduce us away from Egypt!* He is promising to *capture our hearts*. He is declaring His intention to *sweep us off our collective and individual feet*. He is declaring His intention to patiently and lovingly *wrest our affections from the land of the pyramids, from the culture of death, dying, and fatalism, and from the 'it's-the-economy-stupid' worldview that keep our wagons hitched to the Egypt dream - or to the American dream, or to the Socialist/Communist dream, or to the promised 'One World Order' utopian dream*.

The Holy One is saying that He is going to give us a reason to actually conceive of something better and more to be desired than the worldly splendor and wealth and power of Egypt. He is saying that He is going to *make us so deeply fall in love with Him* that we will, for the first time in our lives, allow our minds to consider what it would be like to see Egypt's skyline disappearing in our rear-view mirror.

Okay – ***this is getting good!*** Let's move on, shall we?

Promise #3: *V'ga'alti* - The Promise to Redeem Us

Thirdly the Holy One is going to promise His chosen One is that He will **redeem her**

- with an outstretched Arm and with great judgments. The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as ‘redeem’ in this verse, is a form of the Hebrew verb root **ga’al**⁶. This verb can mean to *redeem* as a *kinsman redeemer* redeems his blood-kin from debt or slavery, or to *avenge* as a blood-relative avenges a wrong done to his kinsman. It is thus a general term which involves *someone strong acting on behalf of someone weak in any way appropriate to the situation*, to turn the weak person’s bad circumstances into good.

The first usage of the **ga’al** verb family is in Genesis 48:6, where Ya’akov, in the course of blessing Efrayim and Menashe, refers to the Holy One as the Angel who *redeemed* [Hebrew, **ga’al**] *him from all evil*. By this, Ya’akov meant that *the Holy One had, over the course of his life, intervened on behalf of him in every bad circumstance in which he found himself, and had turned every bad circumstance to good*.

Are you *getting this in your spirit*? The Holy One is promising to *always be there* for us. Not only that, He is promising to *always be working diligently on our behalf*. He is promising to *be always about the business of making lemonade out of all the lemons life may throw at us* - or that we may heap unto ourselves. He is offering us *His Outstretched Arm* as our constant companion. He is not promising that evil will not come upon us. But He is promising to, as he did for Yosef, to always take whatever others mean for evil toward us and to turn around and *use those things for our good*.

Promise #4: *V’lakachti* - The Promise to Take Us As His People

The fourth promise that is going to be made by the Holy One in *Va’era* is that He is going to ‘**take**’ the Chosen Ones to Himself as a nation. The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as *take* in this passage is a form of the Hebrew verb **laqach**⁷. This verb means to *purposefully take something or someone unto oneself and make a treasured place for it in one’s home and in one’s heart*. It is the exact verb used to describe what a man does when he takes a woman to be his wife. The picture the Holy One is engraving upon the hearts, minds and souls of His Chosen Ones is the image of a *covenant of marriage*. What He is promising to do in relation to His Chosen One is to be to her as a Bridegroom and to act toward her as if she were His Bride. He is promising a ‘**perpetual cleaving**’ covenant. He is promising a ‘**continuously becoming one**’ covenant. He is promising an ‘**I am my beloveds, and she is Mine**’ covenant. He is promising a ‘**for better or worse**’ covenant, and a ‘**for richer or poorer**’ covenant.

⁶ *Ga’al* is gimel, alef, lamed. Strong’s Hebrew word #1350, it is pronounced *gaw-awl’*

⁷ *Lakach* is lamed, qof, chet. Strong’s Hebrew word #3947, it is pronounced *law-kawkh’*.

Some will say all this is just a *metaphor*, of course. And indeed they are right. The Holy One cannot *marry* human beings in any physical sense that the human mind can conceive. But if this is a metaphor, is it not as *beautiful* and *disarming* a metaphor as any Suitor making a proposal of marriage has ever crafted?

Behold I show you a mystery. Take a moment and look with me beyond the metaphor of *taking in marriage*, and focus on the substance of what the promised *taking* consists.

The Holy One identifies three things that will result from His metaphorical ‘taking’ of His Beloved. What are those three things?

First, *His Chosen Ones will become His people*. That means they will individually and collectively *belong to Him*. It means that they [i.e. WE] will become His greatest source of pleasure. It means that *providing for their welfare* [i.e. OUR WELFARE] will be His foremost responsibility.

Second, *He will be His Chosen One’s God*. That means, to the extent possible, *just as they [i.e. WE] belong to Him He will actually allow Himself to belong to them* [i.e. US] as well. That means that HE will become our greatest source of pleasure. It also means *doing His Will* is going to become our foremost responsibility - and chief joy.

And thirdly and finally, the Holy One says that as a result of His metaphorical taking of His Chosen Ones *they will come to know Him*. The Hebrew verb translated into English as ‘know’ is *yada*, the Hebrew verb that describes the intimate, thorough, personal, experiential knowledge a man has of his wife.

Ah, Dear Reader, it was for these things for which you and I were created. Why would His Chosen Ones settle for anything else? Why on earth do we?

Promise #5: V’hayiti - The Promise That He Will Be our ‘Elohim’

The fifth promise the Holy One makes to us in *Va’era is* that we are going to ‘take’ the Chosen Ones to Himself as a nation. The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as ‘be’ in this passage is a form of the Hebrew verb *hayah*. Where, as here, it is in the future tense, it means to become – i.e. to go through a process, and stages, and phases – of becoming. This indicates that He is gradually going to cause us to disavow all other attachments and soul-ties, such that we ultimately come to think of, depend on, and relate to Him as our only, and exclusive, authority figure, helper, sovereign, deity, and king.

***Promise #6: **Vidatem** – The Promise that We will
Know Him Intimately***

The sixth promise the Holy One makes to us in the great Courtship declaration of parsha *Va'era* is that we are going to ‘know’ Him, especially as the Almighty Deity Who brought us out of Egypt. The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as ‘know’ in this passage is a form of the Hebrew verb *yada*, signifying experiential, personal, and intimate familiarity developed through close connection and interaction over an extended period of time. The *yada* level of knowledge is not produced by listening to hearsay, reading or hearing stories, or by casual, superficial acquaintance. *Yada* is the verb used to describe the intimate relations of husband and wife. It is to say the least a *very intimate, no-holds-barred kind of knowledge* – a knowledge that can be based only upon regular face-to-face encounters, heart-to-heart interactions, and tons of shared experiences.

***Promise #7: **Veheveti** – The Promise that He Will Bring Us
Into the Land of the Patriarchs***

The seventh promise the Holy One makes *is* that He is going to ‘bring’ us into the land He promised to the patriarchs and their seed. The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as ‘bring’ in this passage is a form of the Hebrew verb *bo*, which implies making/completing a volitional, transformational journey. This journey will, of course, be recorded, station-by-station, in Torah, and will become the center of gravity of not only our lives, but also the lives of our progeny forever.

***Promise #8: **Venatati** – The Promise That He Will Entrust
the Land of the Patriarchs to Us and our Seed In Stewardship Forever***

The eighth promise the Holy One makes *is* that He is going to ‘give’ us the land of Kena’an. The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as ‘give’ in this passage is a form of the Hebrew verb *natan*, which implies a stewardship entrustment. We will become fiduciaries – watchmen in and guardians of – the land He intends to use as a headquarters and launching pad for His Kingdom.

Responding to the Holy One’s “Appearance”

At the end of last week’s readings, as you will recall, Pharaoh rudely rejected the first request of Moshe, Aharon, and the elders of the Hebrews who accompanied them for permission to go into the desert and worship the Holy One. Pharaoh’s response was:

*Who is the Holy One that I should sh’ma his voice to let Israel go?
I know not the Holy One, neither will I let Israel go.*

[Exodus 5:2]

Pharaoh indicated that he did not “know” the Holy One. And he spoke truthfully. But the Holy One was preparing to change that. In fact, He is going to “appear” [*ra’ah*], and make Himself “known” [*yada*] to Pharaoh, at multiple times and in multiple ways. The groundwork for the appearing He will do this week was actually laid last week when Moshe spoke on His behalf, saying: “*Let My people go/send My people forth.*” The appearing will involve wave after wave of inexplicable, indeed supernatural occurrences with which the Holy One will punctuate the prophet’s message with bold exclamation point after bold exclamation point. At the end, Pharaoh will “know” [*yada*] the Holy One - and so will hundreds of thousands of slaves presently pre-occupied with gathering straw, making bricks, staying alive - and keeping one step ahead of the taskmaster’s whip.

The Holy One’s ‘Ice-Breakers’

We have read the end of the book. We know how it will end. But Pharaoh did not. Nor did the average person in Mitzrayim, be he Egyptian or Hebrew. Nor for that matter, I believe, did Moshe or Aharon or Miryam or anyone else on earth know. To those very real people the events were just a series of nightmares coming true. No horror movie image could compare with the terror that was unleashed in real people’s lives by the very real events that accompanied the Holy One’s “appearing”.

It was real blood that polluted the Nile. They were real swamp creatures that invaded every home, every office, every room, every pantry, every bed, and every closet. The dust of Egypt upon which we had walked for centuries really did become lice. Real houses were suddenly filled with swarms of real wild beasts, real venomous snakes, and real scorpions. Real camels, donkeys, sheep, goats, cattle and horses really did drop dead all over Egypt at the same time, so many and so fast that they could not all be buried before the stench of their decaying bodies polluted the air and the water and brought real flies and real maggots and real vultures and real pestilence. Real thunder really shook the earth for days on end, and the skies really poured forth with real hailstones - hailstones big enough to flatten houses and kill men and beasts - and real flames of fire which really devastated everything they touched.

The Holy One is *real*. His covenant is real. His *commandments* are real. When His mercy is exhausted, His *judgment* is real. And as Pharaoh is about to find out, it can be absolutely *terrifying*.

Still Playing ‘Hard-to-Get’?

But do not forget that in the midst of making Himself known to Pharaoh the Holy One simultaneously – and ultimately more importantly - makes Himself known *to*

His people – to the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov, His chosen Bride-to-be. In fact, before He shows even a little of His power to Pharaoh the Holy One begins revealing Himself to His ***am segulah*** [i.e. *treasured nation* - His term of endearment for the Betrothed]. He begins by commissioning Moshe to speak words of tender betrothal to His people [Exodus 6:6-8].

So realize as you read of rivers turning to blood, frogs covering the earth, and such, that the events of the Exodus were not just a *contest* between the Holy One and Pharaoh – they were also a *divine courtship* – a courtship between the Holy One and His people - *a romance which He wanted much more than they did (or than we do)*.

Know [*yada*] the Holy One, Dear Reader. Participate in the Divine Romance. He is “appearing” even now - and offering to make covenant afresh with you.

It All Starts With a Re-Introduction

The Holy One starts off the courtship of His chosen ones with *an introduction through a friend*. Before she can possibly understand and appreciate what He is about to do on her behalf, you see, His Bride-to-be must *know His Name*. But the Holy One has been known by many names. He was known to the ancients as ***Elohim***, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. He was known to Melchizedek as ***El Elyon*** [the Most High God]. To Avram He introduced Himself as ***El Shaddai*** [Almighty/All Sufficient God] [Genesis 17:1], and this appears to be the primary paradigm through which the other patriarchs related to Him as well. See, e.g. Genesis 43:14, 49:25. Which of those relational paradigms will He choose to use in connection with his relations with the nation He is calling forth? The answer is ‘none’. He will choose to revive the relational-paradigm through which He was known by Adam in the Garden of Eden, before the Fall – the relational paradigm associated with Yod, Hey, Vav, Hey.

You see, the Holy One’s most passionate desire is to relate to and interact with every individual in the new nation He is calling forth *in the same manner as He started off relating to Adam in the Garden*. Remember, Beloved, that the Holy One knew and walked with *Chanoch* [Enoch] intimately before the event theologians like to refer to as ‘the Fall’. The Holy One also knew, was known by, and spoke to *Noach* - and delivered him and his household from the Flood. Remember that the Holy One appeared to, spoke at length with, and cut an eternal covenant with *Avram/Avraham*. Remember how He blessed and reaffirmed the eternal covenant *Yitzchak*. Remember how He was with *Ya’akov/Yisrael and Yosef*. But if you can believe it, He desires for each individual in the new nation He is calling forth a relationship even deeper and more intimate than His relationship with any of these – or indeed

with any human being since the expulsion of man from the Garden. Hence our parsha opens with these words being spoken by the Holy One to Moshe:

Ani Adonai [*I am yod-hey-vav-hey*].

The Holy One acknowledges straight out to His prophet that the use of this Name is going to *up the ante* spiritually speaking. He actually intends for the enslaved Hebrew population to know Him *better* – or at least more fully - than their fathers did. Hence He is going to *build upon* the foundation laid by His interactions with the patriarchs. Hence He tells Moshe:

Va'era el-Avraham el-Yitzchak v'el-Ya'akov

I revealed Myself to/was seen by Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov

V'gam ha-kimoti et-briti itam

Also I made My covenant with them,

Latet lahem et-eretz Kena'an

[promising] to give them the land of Canaan,

et eretz m'gureihem asher garu vah

the land of their pilgrimage, where they lived as foreigners

V'gam ani shamati et-na'akat b'nei Yisra'el

Now I have also heard the groanings of the descendants of Israel

asher Mitzrayim ma'avidim

whom the Egyptians are enslaving

otam v'ezkor et-briti

and I have brought My covenant back into the forefront and focus of My Mind.

[Exodus 6:2-5]

The Holy One thus makes it very clear to the descendants of Avraham, of Yitzchak and of Ya'akov that *the anchor holds* – i.e. that the covenant the Holy One made with the patriarchs is still *as strong as ever*. But the Holy One is not going to stop there. He is also about to make it crystal clear that it is His intention for the covenant He made with the patriarchs be greatly *expanded*. Through the covenant expansion to come, much of what was lost in the Garden is going to be restored. Following the pattern He has begun to establish with Moshe, the door to Face-to-face intimacy between man and his Creator is going to be opened once again. You see, Dear Reader, the Holy One has *a proposal to make*.

The Courtship Proposal

Everyone loves a proposal scene. None can compare with this one. Never, in fact, have more beautiful words been spoken. Let the wondrous words with which the Holy One promises to betroth Himself to Israel forever *pierce your soul and spirit*,

and *capture your heart*, and *win you to Him forever*:

Ani Adonai

'I am yod-hey-vav-hey

hotzeti etchem mitachat sivlot Mitzrayim

I will bring you forth from your forced labor⁸ in Egypt

v'hitzalti etchem me'avodatam

and I will free⁹ you from their slavery.

V'ga'alti etchem bizroa netuyah uvish'fatim g'dolim

I will redeem you with a demonstration of My power, and with great acts of judgment.

V'lakachti echem li l'am

I will take¹⁰ you to Myself as a nation

V'hayiti lachem l'Elohim

and I will be to you as a God.

V'datem ki ani Adonai Eloheichem

You will know that I am the Holy One your God,

hamotzi etchem mitachat sivlot Mitzrayim

the One who is bringing you out from under the Egyptian subjugation.

V'heveti etchem el ha-aretz asher nasati et-yadi

I will bring you to the land regarding which I raised My hand, [swearing]

latet otah l'Avraham l'Yitzchak ul'Ya'akov

that I would give it to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov.

V'natati otah l'chem morashah

I will give it to you as an inheritance.

Ani Adonai.

I am the Holy One.'

[Exodus 6:6-8]

⁸ 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. Strong's defines this word as "burden, forced labor, compulsory service, or 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.

⁹ The English word 'free' means: "To relieve of a burden, obligation, or restraint". It is from an Old English root (*freo*). The Hebrew verb our English Bibles translate as 'free' in this verse, however, is a form of the ancient Hebrew verb root *natzal*, nun, tzade, lamed, Strong's Hebrew word #5337, pronounced *naw-tzawl'* which means to *plunder* or *dispossess*, or *take away something from someone else's possession (either by quickly snatching it away, or slowly acquiring it)*.

¹⁰ The word our English Bibles translate as 'take' [you] in this passage is a form of the Hebrew verb *laqach*, lamed, qof, chet, Strong's Hebrew word #3947, pronounced *law-kawkh'*, meaning to take unto oneself, into one's home and into one's heart – as a man takes a wife.

Read this proposal from the Creator of the Universe to the apple of His eye again and again. Each time you read it, it will speak something new and wonderful to you. Let the *words*, the *promises*, and the *passion* of your Divine Suitor flood over you, cleansing and purifying, nourishing and strengthening, restoring and revitalizing you. Of all the peoples, all the nations and tribes, of the world He *set His affections* and *focused His attention* on the lowliest, the weakest, the most impoverished and needy – on *enslaved Israel*. He promised to lift her from the dust, redeem her, cleanse her, clothe her in finery, supply her in abundance, lavish His goodness and affection upon her, and take her to a special chamber prepared just for her. Nothing but the best for His Beloved. ***Eishet chayil mi yimtza*** [a woman of strength/dignity/virtue worth ... who can find?]

In today's aliyah we find out however that the Holy One's wonderful proposal was initially rejected by the descendants of Ya'akov just as coldly as the request to "Let my people go!" was rejected by Pharaoh. As Torah puts it:

Vayedaber Moshe ken el-b'nei Yisra'el

Moshe related this to the Israelites,

v'lo sham'u el-Moshe

but they did not sh'ma Moshe

mikotzer ruach ume'avodah kashah

because of their disappointment and their hard servitude.

[Exodus 6:9]

The Bride-to-be is playing "hard to get". She simply doesn't know her Divine Suitor well enough to trust Him – yet! He will fix that, and soon. But in the meantime He will have to do some 'damage control' with his bruised and broken prophet-in-training. Some serious Divine healing is going to be needed for the most recent wounds Moshe has sustained. He is still smarting from the rejection he endured at the hands of both the Pharaoh the Holy One sent him to confront and his own brethren, whom the Holy One sent him to lead to freedom.

Moshe's Heart-to-Heart Talk With the Holy One

The rejection of the Holy One's proposal by the people due to their bitterness of spirit and their *busy-ness* with Pharaoh's work details has crushed Moshe's spirit. He has taken the rejection very, very *personally* – blaming *himself* that the people did not receive the 'good news' the Holy One entrusted him to speak. As a result of the rejection he has experienced Moshe quite frankly wants no part of any more of the Holy One's prophetic messages. He wants to 'quit' this *prophet-of-the-Exodus* job. Hence Torah tells us Moshe protested:

hen b'nei-Yisra'el lo-sham'u elay

'Even the sons of Yisrael will not listen to me,'

v'eych yishma'eini Far'oh

So how can I expect Pharaoh to listen to me?

[Exodus 6:12]

This is a trap into which even the most seasoned prophets of the Holy One at times fall. It is all tied to the 'fear of man'. The prophet knows on the one hand that he has been given a message by the Holy One; but, on the other hand he is human and wants to be 'accepted', and to see the words he speaks have an effect on the hearers. Part of it is a sense of self-doubt. Part of it is just being carried away with a sense of self-importance.

A prophet's calling is not to 'win friends' nor to 'influence people'. His calling is merely to surrender to the Holy One *his ears* [to hear clearly the message of the Holy One], *his eyes* [to see clearly what the Holy One is doing in the circumstances and among the people to which he is called], *his heart* [to be broken on behalf of the people who refuse to hear the message], and *his mouth* [to speak exactly *the message the Holy One places in his mouth*, and no other]. Consider for instance what the Holy One stated at the call of the prophet *Yechezkiel* [Ezekiel]:

Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel

they are impudent and stubborn children.

I am sending you to them, and you are to say to them 'Thus says Adonai God ...'

***As for them, whether they hear or whether they refuse— for they are a rebellious house—
yet they will know that a prophet has been among them.***

***You are to speak My words to them,
whether they hear or whether they refuse, for they are rebellious.***

***But you, son of man, hear what I say to you. Do not be rebellious like that rebellious house;
open your mouth and eat what I give you.***

[Ezekiel 2:3-8]

This same thought is stated by the Holy One in connection with His call of the prophet *Yeshayahu* [Isaiah]:

I heard the voice of Adonai saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?"

Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." And He said, "Go, and tell this people:

'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'

"Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes;

Lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears,

And understand with their heart, and return and be healed."

[Isaiah 6:8-10]

The Holy One does not generally call nor send prophets to places and/or audiences where great masses will follow them, do what they say, pat them on the back, and

tell them how much they are appreciated. The Holy One has the hearts of all who will heed a prophet's message in the palm of His Hand anyway – so why send a prophet to them?¹¹

The Holy One calls and sends prophets – in the majority of cases - to those who absolutely do not want to, and will refuse, no matter how well the prophet speaks, to heed his message. The Holy One sends the prophet merely *to prove to the hard-heartedness of the designated audience*. At some stage, you see, every true prophet's audience recognizes that the message the prophet is delivering is indeed from the Holy One – and yet *deliberately chooses* to blow it off and go right on doing whatever they have been doing anyway. The Holy One generally sends a prophet so that people who reject Him are clearly shown – to themselves and to others – to be without excuse. The Holy One generally sends a prophet *to be one of the prosecuting witnesses on His behalf* against the person - or the people - to whom the prophet was sent. That is why prophets get stoned, sawn asunder, and such.

Uncircumcision of the Lips Leads to Uncleaness of Our Speech

We will soon find that after listening to himself complain to the Holy One that no one was listening to his message Moshe winds up putting his finger on his own problem – and the problem all prophets must overcome. He will eventually shut himself up - cutting off his own grumbling and complaining - by saying:

v'ani aral s'fatayim
I have uncircumcised lips.

What on earth does that mean, you ask? Do you remember Yeshayahu's reaction when He saw the vision of the Holy One high and lifted up, with His train filling the Temple, and heard the *serafim* cry '*kadosh, kadosh, kadosh*' [Holy, holy, holy]? He said '*Woe is me, for I am a man of tamei s'fatayim* [unclean lips], *and I dwell in the midst of a people of tamei s'fatayim.*' **Isaiah 6:5**. The Holy One then sent to him a **seraf** with a live coal in his hand from the altar, with which he touched Yeshayahu's lips.

The next words out of Yeshayahu's mouth were: ***Hineni sh'lachni!*** [*i.e. Here am I – send me!*] **Isaiah 6:8**. That is a message from *circumcised lips*. *Circumcised lips* only speak two things - what the *serafim* speak [pure, unadulterated praise] *or* what the Holy One specifically tells them to speak. They do not speak popular or 'seeker friendly' messages. They do not go around looking for controversy or stirring up drama, but they also do not speak messages of peace when there is no peace. They do not

¹¹ The most noteworthy exception, of course, is Yonah [Jonah], whose message was received at Nineveh, by an Assyrian King and his Assyrian population.

declare in the name of the Holy One their own *theologies, doctrines, or personal likes and dislikes*. They do not speak their own judgments. They do not declare their own beliefs as Divine Truth or their own practices as essential *halakah*. They do not pronounce their own *opinions*, nor do they say that which will advance their own *agendas*.

We recognize this in our daily prayers. Before we dare to begin the *Sh'moneh Esrei* [Amidah] our sages have taught us to say:

Adonai s'fotai tiftoch ufi yagid t'hilotecha

Open my lips, Oh Lord, that my mouth may declare your praise!

We all – like Moshe and Yeshayahu - have ‘uncircumcised’ – and thus ‘unclean’ – lips. It is high time we recognized that fact. We all say things in His Name that He has not said. We speak of things we have not seen in the Spirit and we declare things we have not heard from His Throne. We teach doctrines and traditions and tell stories, and call it ‘revelation’. We speak *l'shon ha ra* [negative opinions, and criticism of and gossip concerning] and call it ‘discernment’ and ‘compassion’, and ‘fellowship’. May the Holy One help us. And may He be gracious enough to send a *seraf* with a live coal to touch our lips one more time.

Questions For Today's Study

1. In today's aliyah of Torah the Holy One differentiates between how He appeared and manifested Himself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, and how He is going to appear and manifest Himself to the generation of the Exodus.

[A] Which generation will know Him better? Explain your answer.

[B] By what name did the Holy One reveal Himself to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov? What do the words that make up that name mean?

[C] When in Torah was the name spelled with the consonants “**yod, hey, vav, hey**” first used to describe God? What was the context of that usage (*i.e.* what was Torah describing)?

2. In Exodus 6:6-8 the Holy One makes a series of promises to B'nei Yisrael in the form of “I will” statements which form the basis for the *ketubah*, or marriage contract, pursuant to which the Holy One is betrothed to Israel. These “*I will*” declarations should be considered as sacred marriage vows.

[A] List each “I will” promise contained in those three verses.

[B] Examine each of these “I will” promises of the Holy One for the verb. When you have isolated the verb, look up the Hebrew form of that verb in Strong's and Gesenius. Write the verb in Hebrew, and describe its Hebraic word picture.

3. In Exodus 6:9 Moshe takes the latest revelation from the Holy One back to the descendants of Ya'akov. This time there is no rejoicing.

*Moshe spoke so to the children of Yisra'el,
but they didn't listen to [sh'ma] Moshe for anguish of spirit, and for their hard servitude.*

[A] How did the Hebrews respond when Moshe told them of the marriage proposal the Holy One had made to them?

[B] What two reasons does verse 9 give for that response?

[C] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the words "anguish", "cruel", and "bondage". Write each Hebrew word and its verb root. Then, describe, with regard to each word, the Hebraic word picture it represents.

[D] Conduct a mini-yeshiva with your study partner(s) on this verse – trying to reach a consensus on why the people did not respond joyfully to the Holy One's beautiful proposal of marriage.

4. At the end of today's aliyah of Torah the narrative of the events preceding the Exodus is interrupted by some genealogical information.

These are the heads of their fathers' houses ...

[A] Concerning what three tribes are we given genealogical information?

[B] Moshe, Miryam, and Aharon were all the children of a marriage that Torah would declare was incestuous and improper. Who were Moshe, Miryam, and Aharon's parents?

[C] What do the names of Moshe, Miryam, and Aharon's parents mean?

[D] How were Moshe, Miryam, and Aharon's mother and father related to each other?

[E] What is the consequence of the fact that the Torah records, in Exodus 6:23, intermarriage between Aharon [a Levi] and a woman of Y'hudah [Judah]? Of what tribe does that make Aharon's sons [the *kohanim*]?

5. Haftarah *Va'era* is taken from the scroll of *ha navi* Yechezkiel [the prophet Ezekiel], in the midst of the prophesies of the Holy One's judgments on the nations of the world.

[A] During what years did Yechezkiel prophesy?

[B] From what tribe was Yechezkiel descended?

[C] For what prophesies is Yechezkiel most remembered?

[D] Today's haftarah aliyah follows immediately after a prophesy about the judgment of the Holy One on a particular city/nation. What city/nation was that [see Ezekiel 28:21, and what nation today occupies the land upon which that city/nation was established?

[E] What were the elements of judgment the Holy One decreed for this

city/nation?

6. In today's aliyah from Haftarah *Va'era* the Holy One turns his attention away from the nations to the "house of Yisrael", His firstborn:

Thus says the Holy One: When I have gathered the house of Yisra'el from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and will be sanctified in them in the sight of the nations, then they will dwell in their own land – that which I gave to my servant Ya`akov. They will dwell securely therein; yes, they will build houses, and they will plant vineyards, and they will dwell securely, when I have executed judgments on all those who do them despite round about them; and they will know that I am the Holy One their God.

[A] What two things does the Holy One say will happen before "the house of Yisrael" is able to dwell securely in the land?

[B] In Strong's and Gesenius, look up the verbs "gather" and "sanctify" as used in this passage. Write the Hebrew words, then describe the Hebraic word pictures you see emanating from the Hebrew letters of which they are formed.

[C] After the Holy One has gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and His holiness has become apparent – through this regathering - in the sight of all nations, list the wonderful things which our haftarah text says will happen next.

7. The B'rit Chadasha reading for study today is found in the book of Hebrews. In the opening phrase of Hebrews 3:1, the writer first gives two characteristics of true talmidim of Yeshua, then gives two characteristics of the Master Himself:

Therefore, holy brothers, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Yeshua, the Apostle and Kohen G'dol of our confession;

[A] What are the two characteristics by which the writer describes followers of Yeshua?

[B] In what two ways does the writer describe Yeshua in verse 1?

[C] Pause for a moment, take a breath, clear your head, close your eyes, and think about Yeshua. When your thoughts focus in on Him:

- i. where is He (what is His location);
- ii. who else (if anyone) is there;
- iii. what is his mood; and
- iv. what kinds of things do you see/imagine Him:
 - i. doing?
 - ii. saying?

8. To what extent do you think Moshe - or Yeshua - sought personal honor or glory?

What do you think the writer of Hebrews means in verse 3 when he says that Yeshua is worthy of more honor and glory than Moshe?

May the Holy One dramatically appear in your world this week, Beloved!

The Rabbi's son

Meditation for Today's Study

Psalm 18:20-23

*The Holy One has rewarded me according to my righteousness.
According to the cleanness of my hands has He recompensed me.*

*For I have kept the ways of the Holy One,
and have not wickedly departed from my God.*

*For all His decrees [mishpatim] were before me.
I didn't put away His directives [chukot] from me.
I was also blameless with Him. I kept myself from my iniquity.*