

# INTERSESSION READER 2009

שמות - וארא



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N.Y., N.Y. 10001

## **Intersession Reader 2009**

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**Parashiyot Shemot (1/17) & Va'era (1/24)**

Location	Sat Date	Candle Lighting*	Friday Sunset	Sunrise	Sunset	Shabbat Ends**
Jerusalem, Israel	1/17 1/24	4:18 4:25	4:58 5:05	6:34 6:31	4:59 5:06	5:34 5:41
Brooklyn, N.Y.	1/17 1/24	4:36 4:45	4:54 5:03	7:16 7:12	4:56 5:04	5:31 5:39
Turnberry, Florida	1/17 1/24	5:34 5:39	5:52 5:57	7:08 7:07	5:53 5:58	6:28 6:33
Orlando, Florida	1/17 1/24	5:34 5:40	5:52 5:58	7:18 7:17	5:53 5:59	6:28 6:34
San Juan, Puerto Rico	1/17 1/24	5:51 5:55	6:09 6:13	7:00 6:59	6:10 6:14	6:45 6:49
Palm Beach, Aruba	1/17 1/24	6:16 6:20	6:34 6:38	7:06 7:06	6:35 6:38	7:10 7:13
Acapulco, Mexico	1/17 1/24	6:09 6:13	6:27 6:31	7:12 7:12	6:28 6:32	7:03 7:07
Cancun, Mexico	1/17 1/24	5:09 5:14	5:27 5:32	6:27 6:26	5:28 5:33	6:03 6:08
Punta Cana, D. Republic	1/17 1/24	6:00 6:04	6:18 6:22	7:09 7:09	6:19 6:23	6:54 6:58

\* **Candle Lighting is calculated based on 18 minutes before sunset (Jerusalem is 40 minutes before sunset).**

\*\* **Shabbat end time calculated based on 35 minutes after sunset.**



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# **The Midwives**

Nehama Leibowitz a”h

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# The Successful Failure

Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo

Throughout history some of the greatest people often failed time after time before they really made it to the top. Others thought that they had failed but realized at a later stage in life that what they believed to be failure was in fact a grand success. Still others never succeeded in the conventional sense of the word, but became the hallmark of marvelous accomplishments, sometimes, without ever being aware of it.

When we carefully study the life of Moshe, we are confronted with a series of failures. Until his eighties he spent most of his time on the run without getting anywhere: After a short period of tranquility at the palace of Pharaoh, Moshe had to run for his life after he killed an Egyptian. He spent many years in different countries, often hiding from the soldiers of the Egyptian regime, never enjoying a quiet moment. On other occasions he continuously failed to make any impression on his surroundings. There is little doubt that when he reached the age of eighty, just before God called to him, he must have thought that his life was over and that it was predominantly wasted. Nothing was accomplished; he was still the same shepherd trying to obtain some meager food, running around in circles. And even *after* God called to him in his eightieth year at the burning bush and he is consequently sent to liberate his people from the bondage of Pharaoh, his failures seem by far to outdo his successes: His first encounter with Pharaoh was a complete defeat. Instead of getting Pharaoh to agree that he should let the Jews have their freedom, Moshe's audience with Pharaoh caused a stiffening of the latter's heart and his fellow Jews were now doomed to work even harder. Each time after a major plague, Moshe was

convinced that his goal was achieved and *now* he would be able to take the Jews out. A little later he discovered that Pharaoh had once more changed his mind and again Moshe's high hopes were crushed.

In the desert he encounters one rebellion after the other. The Jews blame him for all sorts of crimes and even demand to return to Egypt. After the debacle of the golden calf God tells him that He will destroy this people. No doubt Moshe must have felt that he had completely failed to educate his people to avert such a terrible transgression. Still later, after he sends emissaries to the land to "spy" the land, he is told that he will have to walk around in circles and spend another 39 years in the desert! On another occasion his opponent Korach desires to undermine his authority, and Moshe is nearly murdered by his own people. And then there is the great fiasco whereby Moshe ignores the exact instruction of God and instead of speaking to the stone in order produce water, he smites it and consequently hears that he will never be allowed to enter the land of Israel. This devastating news must have worked as the final blow to all his expectations. Now that he was not allowed to fulfill his greatest dream, of living in the land, he must have felt that "it was all over" and that all his good intentions and deeds were of little value.

That he would become the greatest Jew of all time, that his name would be immortalized in Scripture and that it would be on the lips of millions and millions of people for thousands of years, probably never entered his mind. Indeed he may never have known what an eminent man he really was and that there would never be a person who could come close to his heels as far as accomplishments are concerned.

What was Moshe's secret that enabled him to continue in spite of everything to fight for his goals and succeed where so many others would have failed?

The answer is simple: *he knew how to lose*. He knew that his failures were in fact the building stones of his future successes. While he may never have known what his accomplishments were, he continued to fight and ultimately prevailed.

*He who lies on the ground cannot fall*, says a Yiddish proverb and many who are the most critical of those who failed do not realize that they themselves never left the ground. Those who never fail, never accomplish since defeat is the necessary step to success. The famous American philosopher Paul Tillich once remarked: “The awareness of the ambiguity of one’s highest achievements as well as one's deepest failures is a definite symptom of maturity.”

Above anything else one has to ask oneself what *real* success is all about. Let us draw an example from the world of a fitness center. This site consists of a large hall filled with many pieces of equipment which could take us on long journeys.

There are bicycles, which go nowhere, no matter how hard we peddle. There are rowing boats but no water, skies without snow and even climbing frames on which you can climb for hours without getting any higher. Still, you will find lots of people throughout most of the day working hard in the fitness center but getting nowhere. This however does not sadden them. In fact many return next week and try again. The reason is obvious: Success with such equipment is not measured in *how far* you get but how much you gain in making your body more healthy from *within*. Externally

it seems that there is no success whatsoever but inwardly the human being is growing tremendously. The superficial viewer may draw the conclusion that the cyclist, the mountain-climber and the rower are all failures. The wise man smiles and knows that they are great winners.

# At the Burning Bush<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Moshe Shamah

## 1. Introduction and Setting

After the Torah completed the story of Moshe's early personal life it shifted back to the national state of affairs. G-d's intervention begins to change from having been "behind the scenes" to overt. The turning point is depicted in a three-verse passage, with especially rich diction, that speaks of Israel's cries and of G-d's decision to invoke His Covenant with the patriarchs. We will discuss several details of this passage.

The Egyptian king died. At a time when it was usual for the new ruler to extend amnesty and a degree of relief to the suffering, the burden upon the Israelites was obviously not lightened. They groaned from the workload, and cried out, their pleas rose to G-d and He heard their moans. He recalled His Covenant with the patriarchs, He noted the Israelites well and empathized with their plight (Ex. 2:23-25). Israel's cries are expressed in four phrases, each with a distinct nuance: וַיִּצְעֲקוּ-וַיִּזְעֹקוּ-וַיִּשְׁעוּ-וַיִּתְעַבְדוּ; G-d's response is correspondingly articulated with four different verbs: וַיִּשְׁמַע-וַיִּזְכֹּר-וַיִּרְא-וַיִּדַע. The first term of G-d's response is joined with the fourth term of Israel's cries – "G-d heard their moans" – joining the two subunits of four into a unit of eight. The passage contains forty words. The text reflects the Covenant coming into active play. The next verse opens the burning bush passage (Ex. 3:1).

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Rabbi Shamah's study on parashat Shemot. This study and all other referenced studies of Rabbi Shamah can be found online at [www.judaic.org](http://www.judaic.org).

Moshe is introduced as shepherding the flock of Yitro his father-in-law, the Midianite priest. This appellation “Yitro” is derived from the root that means “more,” “extra” or “abundance,” possibly connoting “excellence.” In the previous chapter (2), Moshe’s father-in-law is Re’uel (“friend of G-d”). In Numbers 10:29, Moshe speaks to חֹבָב בֶּן רְעוּאֵל הַמִּדְיָנִי חֵתֵן מֹשֶׁה (Hobab son of Re’uel the Midianite, Moshe’s father-in-law). Some parse that clause to mean that Hobab is “*hoten Moshe*,” Moshe’s father-in-law, while Re’uel is Hobab’s father (see *Sifre Beha’alotekha*). A straightforward reading of Exodus 2, however, does not appear to allow seeing Re’uel as the grandfather of Moshe’s wife. The differing attestations of Moshe’s father-in-law’s name in various contexts are difficult to reconcile.

Others parse the Numbers 10:29 verse to mean that Hobab was Moshe’s brother-in-law while the words *hoten Moshe* refer to Re’uel. In Judges 4:11, however, Hobab himself is termed *hoten Moshe*. Perhaps, (following Ibn Ezra), *hoten* is a term not restricted to a father-in-law but indicates a relationship through marriage, applying also to brother-in-law.

On an occasion when Moshe led the sheep “*aḥar hamidbar*,” apparently westward into the wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula, he came to הַר הָאֱלֹקִים חֹרֵב הַהַר, “to the mountain of G-d, Horeb.” Although a relatively long distance from Midian, dedicated, proficient shepherds were known to travel far for good pastureland.

A successful shepherd was an individual with great concern and compassion for his flock, gently leading it to grazing, water, sun and shade as the need arose. He protected it from predators, the elements and pitfalls and cared for each animal from newly born to aged to infirm. Accordingly, in

the refined circles of the ancient world the occupation was highly respected and considered priming for virtuous leadership.

Leaders were frequently depicted as shepherds and in *Tanakh* the Deity is often so described. Psalm 23 famously elaborated on His protecting, guiding and comforting characteristics in such terms. In an instance of His criticism of the nation's leaders wherein they were addressed as shepherds, which it was their responsibility to be, the metaphor is elaborated: "You have not sustained the weak, healed the sick, or bandaged the injured; you have not returned the strayed or sought the lost, but you have governed them with your might and unfairly...scattered, they have become prey for every wild beast" (Ezek. 34:4-5).

What is the significance of the name of the site Moshe was then at, "*Har HaElokim*" ("the mountain of G-d")? Some assume it received its sacred designation as a result of its being the future location of G-d's Revelation to Israel. However, that explanation does not fit the unfolding literary structure, for it would uncharacteristically diminish the dramatic effect the narrative takes great care to construct. It would inform the reader of the successful conclusion of the mission before it began while the narrative continuously maintains heightened tension as to what will transpire. From Moshe's reluctance to accept G-d's charge to Pharaoh's ongoing resistance to G-d's orders, from Israel's deafness to G-d's message to the Egyptian pursuit of their erstwhile slaves, the final outcome is presented as always in doubt. Although the Torah should not be thought of and studied as mere "literature," its composition has been recognized as meeting highly sophisticated literary norms. An interpretation that is consistent with such norms is thus to be preferred.

From G-d's instruction to Moshe to remove his shoes because the site is holy (v. 5), it appears that the site is already holy. In Deuteronomy 33:16 G-d is described as *הַיְיָ הַיּוֹשֵׁב בַּסִּבְיָה*, the One who dwells in the bush, apparently referring to the burning bush, the location Moshe was at in our narrative. No other bush is a candidate for that designation. That "He dwells in the bush" implies that this bush is a site invested with His presence. Subsequent to Moshe's theophany at the bush, but before Revelation, Aharon meets Moshe at *Har HaElokim* (Ex. 4:27). Yitro also goes to *Har HaElokim* to meet Moshe (18:5). (The latter point is only relevant to our discussion if we assume Yitro came before Revelation, in accordance with the order of the *parashiyot*.) It seems likely that the location was known as possessing religious significance prior to Israel's interaction with it, perhaps because it was a spiritual center of sorts for the nomadic tribes of the region.

According to some present-day scholars, during the second millennium B.C.E. there had been developing among nomadic tribes in that region certain modes of religious expression without full-fledged idolatry. We may assume that Yitro, the priest of Midian whose daughter Moshe chose to marry and in whose domain he agreed to live for a lengthy period of time, was a prominent leader of those who were developing a non-idolatrous expression of religion. The names the Torah calls him by, whether Yitro, Re'uel or Hobab, all signify extremely positive qualities. (If some of those names apply to his father or son, it also reflects well on him.) And Yitro does make a significant contribution to Israel with his counsel. Exodus 18:12 relates that Aharon and all the elders of Israel ate from Yitro's sacrificial offering (Moshe's presence in that context is taken for granted), indicating that he possessed an acceptable spiritual orientation. Some Midianite tribes, derived from Abraham (Gen. 25:2), very possibly preserved some of the values and

traditions the patriarch suffused into the world. (See our comments on אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִצְּרַת in our *Vezot Habrakha Part I* study.<sup>2</sup>)

## 2. The Burning Bush

The sight of a burning bush that does not get consumed attracts Moshe's attention. Curious, he turns aside to inspect this amazing phenomenon, wondering as to its explanation. When G-d sees that he pursued the matter – the text makes a point of this – He called out to him. In His approach to man, after taking a first step, G-d awaits man's receptivity and initiative.

What is the symbolism of the burning bush? As G-d called to Moshe from it, informing him that the site was holy and given that He is depicted as אֱלֹהֵינוּ מִצְּרַת, the One who “dwells” in the bush (Deut. 33:16), many have thought it likely that the symbolism refers to basic characteristics of the Divine presence. Representation of G-d's presence as an ongoing flame that does not require any outside substance for its perpetuation may signify His permanence, His independence and His superiority over natural forces. Such background motifs fit the scene well. They correspond to important aspects of the message G-d communicates to Moshe and instructs him to transmit to Israel when He answers Moshe's question of “they will ask me, ‘what is His name,’ what shall I say to them?” as we shall discuss shortly.

Others maintain that both the textual depiction of the phenomenon Moshe saw, “and behold the bush is burning with fire and the bush is not consumed,” as well as Moshe's rhetorical query, “why does the bush not get burned?” point

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<sup>2</sup> Available in the Sukkot Reader, Tebah: 2008, pgs. 77-87

to a different explanation. It seems to indicate that the most prominent feature is the bush's endurance through expected destruction. Thus, the burning bush may symbolize Israel, mightily oppressed in Egypt, but surviving, of course with supernatural help, another background motif to the revelation experience.

### 3. Autonomy of the Prophet

After revealing Himself, G-d called upon Moshe to be His agent to go to Pharaoh and deliver Israel from Egypt. Moshe demurs, saying, מִי אֲנֹכִי וְכוּ' which in *peshat* translates, "who am I to go to Pharaoh and to bring out the Children of Israel from Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11). This question manifests great humility as well as natural anxieties. G-d responds, "כִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ" ("for I will be with you"). He will subsequently expand on this statement in describing His name.

Moshe presented a second objection and again G-d answered him. Then there was a third and a fourth and a fifth. G-d engaged in an extensive dialogue with Moshe with the aim of persuading him to accept the mission. How is it possible for a human being who has entered into prophetic communion with G-d, who has just responded *hineni*, indicating his commitment to Him, refuse His request? A similar situation obtains with other prophets as well.

This passage teaches that even an individual who has achieved the lofty spiritual status of experiencing prophecy from G-d, even while in the midst of that transcendent state, is not totally swallowed up by the grandeur of the event. He does not lose his sense of integrity and free will. He maintains autonomy together with his personal perspective. As G-d dialogues with Moshe, it is clear that He

acknowledges the legitimacy of the latter's questions and concerns and that the prophet is only expected to accept a mission that he can understand and relate to. However, when the questions are adequately answered the human being is expected to acquiesce. G-d did not recognize Moshe's fifth objection as legitimate.

#### 4. "And This Shall Be Your Sign"

In answering Moshe's first question, G-d informs him of a sign that will indicate that He has delegated him for this mission, וְזֶה לְךָ הָאוֹת (v. 12). What is this sign?

It does not appear that it is the supernatural phenomenon of the burning bush, since Moshe did not require a private sign – he was receiving his instructions directly from G-d. Also, the burning bush was observed and appreciated by Moshe before his question. Neither does the sign appear to be the future ongoing successful performance of his mission that was implied in G-d's assurance that He will be with him, which Moshe may very well assume would be a series of wondrous phenomena amazing to all observers. Such evidence appears too intangible for the specific and concrete וְזֶה לְךָ הָאוֹת, "this shall be for you a sign." Furthermore, both above interpretations do not fit well with the second half of the verse in which G-d relates that when Moshe brings the people out of Egypt they will worship Him on the very same mount at which the present dialogue is taking place.

Some commentators have addressed this problem (see Rashi, following Shemot Rabbah) by interpreting Moshe's initial response of מִי אֲנִי כִי אֵלֶיךָ אֶל פְּרַעֲהוֹ וְכִי אֲוֹצִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם (v. 11) as two distinct questions. The first refers to his own sense of inadequacy to go to Pharaoh and the second focuses on Israel's lack of merit to deserve such

Divine intervention. In this way the end of verse 12 does not have to continue the thought of the beginning of that verse as it may be construed as G-d's answer to the supposed second question. G-d would be saying that Israel will have merit in the near future when they come to this site.

However, in straightforward reading “*mi anokhi*” clearly applies both to going to Pharaoh and to leading Israel out of Egypt; Moshe is asking one compound question, expressing his feeling of personal inadequacy for the mission on two counts. Also, complaining on Israel's lack of merit is not in the spirit of his remarks or in accordance with what we know of his character, despite his having had a terrible experience when he rebuked the man who was hitting his fellow. He cannot be arguing that Israel should be left in its slavery! Finally, the verse lacks the necessary critical words concerning or pointing to Israel's shortcomings that would be required for this explanation to be considered the intended meaning.

Following the Rambam, it appears that וְנָה לְךָ הָאוֹת refers to what follows in verse 12, namely, the post-Exodus event of the nation worshipping G-d on הַר הָאֱלֹהִים, associated with the Revelation. That event will illuminate many doubtful matters to the people (MT *Yesode HaTorah* 8:2). Thus, after addressing Moshe's humility and natural fears, G-d informs him of an important detail concerning his mission. A true sign is not yet available for all to know that G-d did in fact delegate him, that He was with him and accomplished the great wonders in Egypt, but will be available in the near future.

This statement anticipates what surely was another fear of Moshe, which G-d's assurance of being with him – implying wondrous deeds – brings to the fore. The

unprecedented concept of a mortal human functioning as a Divinely appointed prophet-messenger would not easily be properly understood; Moshe may be misinterpreted and imagined to be another one of the many **וְקַדְשֵׁי** **וְקַדְשֵׁי** who supposedly possessed various supernatural powers. This was an especially relevant fear in ancient Egypt where religion and culture were steeped in many forms of magic and wonder-working.

Thus, the sign proffered by G-d is not to persuade Moshe that he will be able to successfully perform his responsibilities. At this point, the assurance He had just given him, that He will be with him, is assumed to fully address that fear. The sign was intended to comfort Moshe, to inform him that after the great mission is accomplished, in the foreseeable future, there will be proof to others that he was indeed G-d's messenger. At the Revelation, G-d refers to this when He says, "Lo, I come to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also trust in you for ever" (Ex. 19:9).

This information regarding a sign implies an additional aspect of G-d's plans; with it, He reveals that He intends to proceed with the redemption regardless of Israel's lack of understanding and appreciation of what is really transpiring.\* He is providing Moshe insight into a process to which he could relate. Only further in the dialogue (4:1), when Moshe expresses fear that the people will not believe him even to the basic extent necessary to get the project started, is he provided signs of a different nature to help persuade the people, signs presumably of lesser import.

## **5. Regarding G-d's Name**

Moshe asks a second question: What shall I say when they ask me "What is His name?" (v. 13). A name connotes

one's particular identifying features, differentiating that individual from all others. In this case Moshe may be referring to what would be a convincing demonstration to the people that indeed the G-d of their fathers appeared to him. Undoubtedly, the elders had a tradition regarding this matter. Yaaqob had transmitted his prophecy that G-d would one day intervene to bring the nation back to its land and Yosef had made his trust in G-d's promise explicit. But under bondage and oppression the tradition may have faded considerably. Moshe wonders how can he adequately describe the G-d of their fathers and convincingly connect with their tradition. G-d responds with a comprehensive pronouncement regarding His "name."

G-d's answer is "*E-H-Y-H asher E-H-Y-H*" (v. 14), often translated as "I will be who I will be," or "what I will be," a term apparently related to the Tetragrammaton, G-d's ineffable Y-H-V-H name. Many have taken it as the first-person future form of that name.\*\* The phrase appears to connote much more than the two great ontological principles that have been seen to reside in it, namely, G-d's eternal existence and His absolute freedom from any restraining forces. (To a certain degree the former, but particularly the latter, were concepts that could not easily exist in the pagan mind and were virtually unknown to the polytheistic world. Their gods, by the very nature of their multiplicity and various domains of power, were limited by each other and by the mighty primordial forces. To Israel, of course, these principles are vital fundamentals.) The Tetragrammaton also appears to denote the Deity's ongoing creative activity (related to *מְהַיְהוֹת*, "brings into being"), pointing to His power to fulfill His promises. (We will further discuss the meaning of the Tetragrammaton in our *Va'era Part I* study – Concerning "Ani Hashem", see page 69.)

In addition, the Tetragrammaton, and the “*E-H-Y-H asher E-H-Y-H*” name that is related to it, refer to several derivative concepts of practical application that directly flow from the basic principles, as G-d Himself points out in His continuing elucidation. After He enunciates His name, He instructs Moshe to inform the people, “*E-H-Y-H* has sent me to you.” To say, “I will be” a single time in such a context is not a relevant statement. Rather, its meaning appears to be connected to the fact that it recalls the phrase G-d employed two verses before (v. 12a) when He told Moshe, *אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ*, “I will be with you.” G-d’s name “*E-H-Y-H asher E-H-Y-H*” is associated with His statement that “I will be with you.”

In the following verse (15) G-d elaborates further, instructing Moshe to inform the people: “Hashem, the G-d of your fathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Yishaq and the G-d of Yaaqob has sent me to you, this is My name forever...” (v. 15). This indicates that His “name” connotes His faithfulness through the centuries to those loyal to Him; the present generation is now the beneficiary of the great merit of the patriarchs. The phrase *הַזֶּה שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם* (“This is My name forever”) is to make clear that, in harmony with His essential nature, this characteristic of His is permanent and unchanging.

Most of these concepts appear again in a later passage that Moshe is instructed to transmit to the nation (Ex. 6:2-8), comprising a major, majestic proclamation by G-d that is the formal expansion of the message He gave Moshe at the burning bush.

## **6. “And They Shall Heed Your Voice” (Ex. 3:18)**

Upon concluding the elucidation of His name, and before Moshe responds, G-d continues, moving to the next step.

Moshe's question as to what he should tell the people when they ask regarding G-d's name implied that he basically consented to accept the assignment but required the answer to his query. Since G-d answered him (and Moshe, indeed, had no complaints about the answer), He assumed Moshe was ready to go, so He promptly went into detail regarding the mission. He provides Moshe instructions: gather Israel's elders, tell them... come to the king of Egypt and say, etc. (Ex. 3:16-22).

Concerning the elders, after telling Moshe what to say to them, G-d told him, וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלְךָ (“they shall heed your voice”), followed by “and you and the elders of Israel shall come to the king of Egypt” etc., (3:18). When G-d concluded speaking, Moshe responded (4:1): “They will not believe me and וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי” (“they will not heed my voice”). How could Moshe directly contradict what G-d had just told him?

The Midrash states that at that moment Moshe spoke inappropriately (שָׁלַח כְּהוֹנֵן) and G-d reproved him (*Shemot Rabbah* 3:12). It interprets the two signs G-d provided Moshe in response to his assertion – the rod and leprosy – as chastisements. However, most of the classical commentators did not consider this approach to convey the true meaning of the passage (for good reason as we shall soon see) and proposed various answers. Some of the more prominent ones follow:

Ibn Ezra: G-d predicted the elders would heed but Moshe feared that the rest of the people would not. Or, G-d referred to outward obedience; Moshe, to sincere commitment.

Rambam: G-d predicted they would have belief in Him, their G-d; Moshe feared they would not believe in him, the messenger.

Ramban, preferred explanation: G-d referred to the immediate situation, that they would agree to accompany him to Pharaoh; Moshe referred to the longer-range process. (We will discuss his non-preferred explanation shortly.)

But the text does not state or in any way imply that G-d and Moshe were referring to different groups of people, or different degrees of belief or different objects of belief, or different time frames!

Nehama Leibowitz (*Studies in Exodus, Parashat Shemot, "Did Moses Speak Unbefittingly"*) praised the Midrash Sages for their interpretation. She admired how they approached the subject without the preconceived notions later commentators appear to have had, willing to interpret the text honestly even with regard to a failing of the greatest of prophets! True, in its boldness, the Midrash does set an example of seeking truth regardless of the personage it may be impugning. However, it is highly unlikely that its interpretation was proffered as a serious explanation of the contradiction. It probably was intended to transmit a valuable message that addressed an important need of the time, and which could always easily be cited and recalled because of the verses it is attached to. As a legitimate explanation, however, it contains at least three critical shortcomings.

Granted that a prophet retains his autonomy even while in a state of communion with the Deity and has the right to endeavor to understand the situation from his own perspective and insist on his personal integrity. However,

one cannot conceive that in mid-prophecy a prophet would directly contradict G-d on a matter that He had just informed the prophet of, predicting how others will respond to an instruction. If G-d declares they will obey, they will obey! Rejecting such a statement is more than acting inappropriately; it is impugning G-d's power and integrity, cardinal transgressions.

In addition, there is no indication that G-d became angry with Moshe at this point, requiring a reprimand; on the contrary His tone is understanding and supportive. Only later, when Moshe resists accepting the assignment without providing a clear-cut explanation, does the text state that G-d became angry with him. And if G-d had, indeed, become angry at Moshe's response and chastised him, how could the latter have continued his arguments, business as usual?

Finally, after G-d accommodated Moshe by giving him the rod and leprosy signs, He informed him that if the people did not believe and did not obey the first sign's message they would believe the message of the second. And if they did not believe even with both signs and “וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּן לְקוֹלְךָ” (“they do not heed your voice”), then “you shall take from the water of the Nile and pour it on the dry land,” etc., (4:8-9). Here, G-d Himself clearly indicates that the people possess free will and it is possible they will not heed Moshe's voice, exactly as Moshe feared. G-d employed the identical words that Moshe did, adjusted for the tense!

Some commentators defend the Midrash and answer the latter question by suggesting that G-d cancelled the original guarantee that they will heed Moshe's voice when Moshe directly contradicted it. However, this is not hinted at in the text and does not fit the passage's tone. And the other aforementioned questions remain unanswered.

Before presenting his preferred solution that we cited above, the Ramban had proposed another approach. After surveying the other interpretations, that proposal appears to be the *peshat*. He suggested that perhaps G-d's words "וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלִי" which in and of themselves would normally be taken as a definitive statement and when coming from G-d would be thought to be a prediction based on foreknowledge, are not to be so understood here. In this context they express hopeful expectation, referring to that which would be appropriate for the people to do. G-d is not canceling the people's free will and the issue of His foreknowledge is not brought into the discussion.

The Ramban supports this view of language usage with examples from the very same passage we are dealing with. As previously mentioned, when G-d gave Moshe the rod and leprosy signs, He stated, "in order that they should believe." Subsequently, however, within the same context, He Himself expressed doubt as to whether they will believe and heed Moshe's voice on each of the two signs (4:8-9). Regarding both He used the same general wording as Moshe previously did.

Sharpening the point of a varied use of language, Cassuto translated וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלִי as "when they heed your voice." Rabbi Sassoon interpreted the phrase as "heeding your voice accomplished," meaning 'when that is past,' a condition that is necessary and expected to be fulfilled at some point – but not guaranteed. A speaker who intends such a meaning would employ a different tone and accentuation than otherwise. It appears likely that in certain post-Biblical periods such usage was not common and interpretations based on it were not proffered. But surely it can be recognized that such meaning lies within the potential of the words and such usage comprises a legitimate style of speaking.

## 7. Requesting a Leave

An essential element in Hashem's instructions was that Moshe and the elders should request leave from Pharaoh for the Israelites to take a three-day journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to Him. How could He have Moshe ask this; was it not the intention to leave permanently? Ibn Ezra justifies the request by pointing out that it was, indeed, a three-day journey of traveling to Mount Sinai where the Israelites were scheduled to go to serve Hashem, a detail Moshe had already been informed of previously in the theophany (3:12). No mention was made to Pharaoh that they would return from the journey; it is only something he and the Egyptians assumed on their own.

However, it should be borne in mind that a request for the outright freedom for a nation of slaves was beyond the realm of possibility; Moshe would have been laughed right out of the palace. The primary purpose for requesting a leave to take a three-day journey appears to have been to enter into dialogue with Pharaoh. Ancient Egyptian records document work groups that received permission for vacations of a week or more, sometimes to travel to shrines to attend religious ceremonies, so Moshe's request was not totally unprecedented. The limited request gave Pharaoh the option to respond with various counteroffers, providing the opportunity for G-d to progressively educate him and his people. Pharaoh's continual refusal of even a relatively minimal entreaty publicly established the extent of his arrogance and cruel and stubborn disposition as well as the plight of the Israelites. The indications for the need of G-d's great intervention would be fully appreciated.

Nevertheless, some ask, was the request not misleading? However, we must reject the very legitimacy of such a question. No nation has the right to enslave people against

their will. There is absolutely no moral obligation on the enslaved to remain in slavery or to return to it once they are out of their masters' clutches. The Torah legislates: "You are not to hand over a slave to his master who has escaped to you from his master" (Deut. 23:16). Although slavery – with important provisions to insure it be basically humane – is tolerated in the Bible, escaping from slavery is respected and supported. A direction was set for its future elimination (an innovation not doable at the time).

When finally, after the tenth Plague, Pharaoh acceded to the request (Ex. 12:31-32), a comical, anti-climactic scene ensued, as the Egyptian populace was already vigorously and hastily sending Israel out of the land (v. 33). The situation was then no longer under Pharaoh's control. Did Pharaoh think that his agreement to Moshe's request for a three-day journey into the desert was just that? Did he or the Egyptians think the slaves were going to return? Subsequently, they said, "What did we do that we sent Israel out from serving us?" (14:5). Of course, that does not mean that they had officially freed them, but it was a rhetorical question, meaning that by giving permission for the three-day journey, if they even had then been thinking of that detail, in effect, they set them free.

## **8. Compulsion or Free Will**

Hashem informs Moshe that He knows Pharaoh will refuse the request until He brings enormous pressure to bear upon him through powerful plagues (3:19-20). Here, where Hashem explicitly states that He "knows" Pharaoh's reaction, it appears that we are dealing with a guaranteed situation. Does His foreknowledge preclude Pharaoh's free will? This is an ancient theological conundrum. Does G-d know the future? If so, how can free will exist? According to one school of thought (Saadia, Rambam, et al), G-d has

foreknowledge of man's choice, but it is in a totally different realm (or of a totally different nature of knowledge) than that of man, and so does not affect man's ability to choose freely.

But it appears that the more philosophically acceptable approach today is that in granting man free will G-d restricted His own foreknowledge of what man will choose and discovers it when man actually makes the choice (Ralbag, et al). Of course, it is His prerogative to limit free will in any particular case to predetermine an outcome in advance as He sees fit. (See a further discussion on these matters in our study on *Parashat Ki Tissa Part II: On the King David Census.*)

Nevertheless, even those who do not recognize a contradiction in the foreknowledge-free will issue have a problem with G-d's predicting that He will intervene in Pharaoh's decision-making process, "strengthening" his heart (from קִיָּן, 4:21, et al) and "hardening" it (from הִשְׁקָה, 7:3, et al). Here, the questions arise: Does G-d preclude a person from repenting? And if so, how can such an individual then be criticized, let alone punished, for his actions?

Some have viewed the matter as follows. Pharaoh's character was such – arrogant, proud, cruel and stubborn – that his refusals were totally predictable. Human nature is such that an individual who has become accustomed to live in accordance with certain behavioral traits, at some point may truly be unable to reverse himself. He will continue behaving in accordance with his ingrained personality. He would have essentially destroyed his free will on matters related to those areas of behavior connected to his deeply-rooted characteristics until an overwhelming event "forces" him to reconsider. Knowing Pharaoh, Hashem knew that

even under the pressure of the first nine plagues he would not reverse himself until the tenth plague strikes. Hashem's "strengthening" and "hardening" his heart are terms used to describe the king's amazing obduracy in the face of the plagues, a persistence unexplainable to average people except as resulting from Divine intervention. As Hashem is the creator of the natural order that allows such personality traits to exist and as He is the cause of causes, the Bible ascribes to Him the phenomenon of Pharaoh's extraordinary refusals (see Luzzato, Cassuto).

When Moshe spoke to Pharaoh after the fourth plague, it did appear that at that point he believed there was a chance that the tyrant might finally let the Israelites go (8:25b). After the seventh plague, however, he is skeptical and accuses the king and his courtiers of not yet having achieved fear of Hashem, but implying that they could have.

Saadia Gaon (Beliefs and Views, 4:6, see Abarbanel) views the "strengthening" and "hardening" of Pharaoh's heart as providing him the wherewithal to withstand the pressure of the plagues and continue to retain his free will, which he exercises throughout.

The Rambam's explanation is that G-d precluded Pharaoh from the possibility of repentance as retribution for the tremendous evil he had already committed with his free will through the brutal oppression (MT *Hilkhot Teshubah*, 6).

As it turned out, the Torah described Pharaoh as having himself hardened his heart during the course of the first five plagues, and G-d having hardened it during the course of the last five.

## 9. You Shall Not Leave Empty-Handed

G-d informed Moshe that when the Israelites leave they would not leave empty-handed. “Each woman should request from her neighbor silver vessels and gold vessels and garments...and you shall despoil Egypt” (Ex. 3:22). This is in accordance with what G-d foretold to Abraham in *Berit Ben Habetarim*, “יֵצְאוּ בְרִכְשׁ גָּדוֹל” – “they shall depart with great wealth” (Gen. 15:14). Such parting “gifts” partly fulfilled the demands of justice and fairness in the larger, cosmic context – a nation enslaved against its will for as long as Israel was surely deserves substantial reparations (See BT *San.* 91a).

In the standard case when a Hebrew slave is sent to freedom upon conclusion of his enslavement term, the Torah mandates that he is not to be sent out empty-handed. Although we should assume he was treated kindly, he must be given *הַעֲנָקָה*, a severance grant (Deut. 15:13-14). The Torah indicates that it should be substantial: “from your flock, from your threshing floor and from your vat...” (ibid.). The word usage in our Exodus context appears linked to that Deuteronomy passage. Here it states *וְאַחֲרַי כֹּן יִשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם* followed by *וְהָיָה כִּי תֵלְכוּן לֹא תֵלְכוּן רֵיקָם* (Ex. 3:20-21) while there it states, *וְכִי תִשְׁלַחְנוּ* followed by *לֹא תִשְׁלַחְנוּ רֵיקָם*.

## 10. The Signs

G-d responded to Moshe’s fear that he might not be believed by furnishing him with two signs to help persuade the people. The first related to his staff and the second involved his skin becoming temporarily leprous. In accordance with the standards of the ancient Near East, these signs probably had symbolic meaning. What do they represent? Rabbi Sassoon explained them as follows.

The staff has been looked at as symbolic of a leader's power and authority. As Moshe ascends to a position of leadership, this sign provided a relevant message for him and the people. The staff turns into a snake, one of the wildest and most dangerous of creatures (see Gen 3:1). This indicates that leadership is deceptive and potentially hazardous to the one who wields it. It is a widely experienced feature of human nature that power often leads to an increased ego and a heightened sense of self-importance and may corrupt the individual who possesses it. Eventually, it may bring about his downfall. Moshe is told to grasp the snake by its tail, contrary to the safe and usual method of grasping it by its neck. He is to demonstrate that he is not assuming leadership in the normal manner, which may be understood as based on the standard methods of a sense of superior ability and self-confidence and as a result of personal ambition. He is accepting an assignment strictly at G-d's behest and relying on His directives. When one is holding a snake by its tail he is aware that he must be on constant guard not to be bitten; similarly, one who exercises power and authority must never be lulled into complacency but must be ever wary of it injuring him, that is, damaging his character and much more.

In the second sign, Moshe placed his hand in his bosom; when he took it out it was struck with leprosy. When he returned it into his bosom and took it out again, it was back to normal. Rabbi Sassoon suggested that the hand in the bosom symbolizes inaction. In requesting G-d to become active, the psalmist cries out: לָמָּה תִּשְׁׁיב יָדְךָ וְיָמִינְךָ - "Why do You withhold your hand, your right hand," מִקֶּרֶב חִיקְךָ כִּלְה - "discontinue keeping it in Your bosom" (Psalm 74:11). The second sign balances the first; it proclaims that although leadership has its pitfalls, inaction is not necessarily correct-it too can be destructive. The same action can produce

opposite results, for the true determinative factor as to how to act is to be in accordance with G-d's will.

## 11. Moshe's Further Resistance

Moshe's fourth objection was that he had a speech impediment and lacked verbal fluency (Ex. 4:10). G-d reassured him on this, pledging to be with his "mouth." Given his mission and the milieu in which he was to function, one wonders whether his speech impediment may not ultimately have been an advantage, mitigating the fear that he might be suspected of accomplishing his mission by great eloquence.

As respectfully as possible, without explicitly stating his refusal, Moshe put forth his final and most obscure dissent, "Please delegate whom You will delegate" (4:13). Did he finally just feel inadequate? Did he fear that ultimately the people would not respond to him or just that somehow things would not work out? At this point וַיִּחַר אֶף ה' בְּמֹשֶׁה, G-d becomes angry with him since He had adequately addressed all of his objections. Moshe had identified with the concept of the mission and implied he had a favorable view toward it, so resistance based on personal reluctance without legitimate reason is no longer appropriate or acceptable. To some degree G-d accommodates Moshe by including Aharon in the mission, but essentially He overpowers him, closing off further discussion on the subject. G-d has a great deal invested in this enterprise; Moshe is the right man for the task and the time is right. His Providence had been hovering over Moshe continuously from before his birth (2:1).

It is noteworthy that this is the only instance in Tanakh of וַיִּחַר אֶף ה' at somebody without mention of a retribution or at least a threat of one.

## Endnotes

\* See our study *Parashat Va'era – Concerning “Ani Hashem”* (see page 69) where we point out that the structure of G-d’s message to Israel in Exodus 6:6-7 concerning the various steps of redemption lends strong support to this interpretation.

\*\* The third letter of the Tetragrammaton, here denoted by a “v,” is actually the letter denoted by a “w” sound, a semivowel, which makes the linkage clearer. The “v” is used here so as not to cause unnecessary pronunciation of the Divine name.

# The Glory and Grandeur of Moshe Rabenu

Rabbi Ezra Labaton

Moshe Rabenu achieved what no other human being achieved or could achieve. He became the Master Prophet—the one who spoke to *Bore Olam* פְּנִים אֶל פְּנִים “face to face”—as the final verses in *Sefer Debarim* attest. The Master Prophet rightly earned the epithet, *Adon Haneviim*.

Yet, we wonder, what were the character traits of the one who achieved so much? Were these character traits directly linked to the status he achieved as the Master Prophet? And what role did these character traits play in shaping the character and destiny of the nation that Moshe Rabenu founded? It seems to us that all of the above questions could be answered by a close reading of the opening Mosaic narratives of *Sefer Shemot*.

We begin by noting that the biological parents of the child, destined to become Moshe, are not named. We are simply told that a man from the tribe of Levi took a woman from the tribe of Levi. Later, it is revealed to us the names of the child’s parents. Why are the parents’ names not mentioned; why delay their identification? Perhaps the text wants the reader to see this child as ordinary, as nothing special—his parents are so indistinct that they are introduced to the reader anonymously. This notion takes on significance as we note how important names are in the biblical narrative. Going back to Adam in the Garden of Eden, who names Hava, and on to the Patriarchs whose names are changed (Abraham and Jacob), all the way to the discussion Moshe has with El-Shakai as to the Divine name (“שְׁמוֹ”), nomenclature plays a great role in the Bible. Yet, here the names of this child’s parents remain unknown— as the child

himself. He is not immediately named by his biological parents, but by an anonymous Egyptian princess, who had compassion on the child and retrieved him from the river reeds. How strange that this child is named by one outside the circle of Israelites. Yet again, this indicates that all that Moshe achieves is by dint of his own efforts. His biological and step-parents play no role. From this early narrative we see that an anonymous child, born to anonymous parents, does not seem to be destined for greatness- unless the child acts to secure his own future as a people shaping individual.

This he does. The child grows into a young adult. He intentionally leaves his palatial surroundings (“וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אֶחָיו”) to mingle with his brothers. The text significantly now tells us, “He sees their affliction....” This young adult is not self-absorbed in the trappings of power and royalty. Rather, as Rashi points out, he sees with his eyes and feels with his heart. Moshe’s “seeing” is not a dispassionate objective view of reality, as another royal prince might “see.” Mosaic seeing has an emotional quality to it.

Moshe sees and feels. As a result, he is moved to action. He strikes the Egyptian who is striking his brother. Though the one struck is a Hebrew slave, he is still Moshe’s brother. This emotional bond moves the heart, and pushes the seeing/feeling Moshe to lash out. The Egyptian, deserving death, (as the Midrash points out) is killed. Moshe acts beyond all rational considerations, with the “logic of the heart” rather than the “logic of the mind”. The compassion felt by the young Moshe for his “brother” (note that this is emphasized by the text) becomes a defining characteristic of the Jewish people. As Jews we are not only motivated by the logic of the mind to do what’s right, but by the logic of the heart as well. At times, we must push aside all rational considerations and enter into the fray, as Moshe.

HaRambam sees this quality as so significant that he questions the Jewish identity of one who is cruel and has no compassion. “How could a brother not have compassion on another brother?” He asks rhetorically (see *Matenot LaAniyim*, 10:2). A defining characteristic of the Jewish persona is compassion.

Note, as well, that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* also sees fit to describe Himself as the Lord of compassion. In numerous texts throughout the Tanach, we find this self declared description. The most powerful of these texts is certainly found in *Shemot* 34:6, where the thirteen attributes of *Bore Olam* are taught to Moshe, and in *Debarim* 10:18, where God describes Himself as He who loves the *Ger*- stranger - and other unfortunate, powerless and unprotected members of society. Indeed, though HaRambam teaches that there are no definitive terms to describe *Bore Olam*, the attributes of loving compassion and kindness reflect most closely the Divine essence. It is no accident that Moshe demonstrates these qualities early on, and reflects this Divine quality.

As a result of Moshe’s impulsive empathetic act of compassion, he must flee the anger of the King. Crossing the desert, he finds himself resting by a well in Midyan. Sitting, he “sees” an act of injustice perpetrated against a few Midianite women, shepherding their father’s sheep. Though they filled the water trough for their sheep, they were chased away (“וַיִּגְרְשׁוּם”) by the more powerful male shepherds. Moshe observes this injustice and rises up to save these women (“וַיִּקָּם וַיִּוֹשַׁעַן”) from this indignity. (Every act of injustice is an act of indignity, an attack on the “צֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים”- Divine Image-status, of the individual- See *Beresheet* 1:26, 27.)

Here, Moshe sets the tone for the Jewish people. Repeatedly, throughout the sacred Scriptures, the Jewish

people are commanded to pursue justice. They are told in *Sefer Debarim* that without this pursuit, they will not inherit the land that God has promised them (*Debarim* 16:18-20). This value is not only emphasized in the five books of *Torat Moshe*, but throughout all of the prophetic literature as well. The hallmark of the post Mosaic prophet is his demand for justice. (See, for example Amos 5:24)

As to be expected, this call for justice is a “character trait” of the Almighty as well. His demand for justice is a reflection of His personal pursuit of justice (“קָבַלְנוּ” – “קָבַלְנוּ”). Note, Abraham the Patriarch established his family and followers on the principles of justice and righteousness (צְדָקָה וּמִשְׁפָּט – see Beresheet 18:19). Subsequently, his demand for justice for the people of Sodom is accepted by *Bore Olam*. Indeed, the “Judge of the whole world” will and must do justice. In other biblical texts there are numerous self-descriptions of the Almighty as “עוֹשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט” and “דָּן אֶלְמִנּוֹת.” Thus, Moshe’s initial concern for and pursuit of justice for the daughters of Yitro not only foreshadow the Divine demand for justice, but reflects this Divine trait as well.

The third narrative of great significance that defines the character of Moshe is found in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of *Shemot*. Here we find Moshe comfortably settled in the family framework of Yitro. Married, with a child, he works as a shepherd for his father-in-law. He leads the sheep to a distant part of the desert, and there sees a great marvel: a bush aflame but not consumed (“הַסֵּבֶה בּוֹעֵר וְאֵינּוּ אֶכְלָה”). Unaware of any theological implications, he declares: “I will turn aside and see this great sight: why is this burning bush not consumed? Moshe hears the Divine Voice, and responds properly: “Hineni.” Then, upon hearing the first part of the message, he hides his face (“וַיִּסְתֵּר מֹשֶׁה פָּנָיו כִּי” – “וַיִּרָא”). Had Moshe lacked the intellectual curiosity of seeking out an understanding of the marvel he witnessed;

had Moshe responded in any other way other than “Hineni”; had Moshe not hidden his face in fear—all would have been lost. *Bore Olam* needed the one who was to be chosen as the Master Prophet, to aggressively seek out an explanation for the supernatural sight he witnessed, and then know when and how to withdraw.

The intense motivation to seek out and attempt to understand that which is beyond understanding has to be balanced by a fearful withdrawal from the Presence- once it is revealed. Here, Moshe hides his face in a proper gesture of humility for one destined to become *Adon HaNeviim*.

This dialectic cuts to the spiritual core, not only of the Master Prophet, but also to all who seek religious knowledge. The latter’s quest for more understanding and more in depth knowledge of the wondrous marvels of the Creator, must balance this quest with withdrawal, as Moshe. Those who seek must know when to “hide one’s face” when confronted with the Divine Presence and the Divine Voice.

HaRambam, in *Yesode HaTorah* 2:2, well captures this dialectic in speaking of the mitzvah to love and stand in awe of the Holy One. On the one hand, the religious seeker is commanded to love G-d. Properly done, this expresses a burning desire to know *Bore Olam* (“יִפְתָּח עֵינָיו וְיִדְעֵם”). HaRambam suggests that a study of G-d’s Creation – through an understanding of the physics and biology of the natural order- brings one to a love of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. Yet, once the goal of loving G-d is realized, or about to be realized, the religious seeker is shaken to his core and must withdraw.

Moshe Rabenu’s initial experiences at the burning bush serve as the model for all those who follow. One must seek

out the Divine Presence, yet withdraw once one realizes the spiritual power of the moment.

These three opening narratives define the character and personality of Moshe- *Adon Haneviim*. Initially he sees and feels his brothers' pain. Compassion and empathy are essential traits of Moshe and must be part and parcel of every Jew's psychological makeup. Equally significant is Moshe's pursuit of justice. The Jew dare not sit idly by and witness injustice. As Moshe acted out of a sense of righteous indignation in the face of injustice, so too must every Jew act when confronted with persecution and oppression. Yet to be a Jew- part of the nation of Israel- Moshe teaches us that more is required. One must seek out with intense desire the presence of *Bore Olam* and be prepared at the revelation of the Presence to withdraw humbly into the shadows of "hiddenness." Moshe, as the model, boldly stamped his personality upon all the subsequent generations of the Jewish people.

# The Genesis Exodus Continuum: What Happens When They Are Viewed as a Larger Unit

Rabbi Hayyim Angel

## 1. Introduction

These are the names of the sons of Israel, who came to Egypt, Jacob and his descendants; (*ve-elleh shemot benei Yisrael ha-ba'im Mitzraimah Ya'akov u-banav*): Jacob's first-born Reuben... (Gen. 46:8).<sup>1</sup>

These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob (*ve-elleh shemot benei Yisrael ha-ba'im Mitzraimah et Ya'akov*), each coming with his household: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah... (Ex. 1:1-2).

One of the basic axioms of Jewish tradition is that the divinely revealed Torah does not waste words. Why does Exodus open with information we know almost verbatim from the genealogy in Genesis 46? In his introduction to Exodus, Ramban addresses this difficulty:

...This is the very same verse that He (i.e., God in the Torah—HA) repeats here. Even though they are two separate books, the narrative is connected with subjects which follow one another successively...A similar case is found in the Book of Chronicles and the Book of Ezra... (Ramban on Ex. 1:1).<sup>2</sup>

From a purely technical standpoint, Ramban is addressing a straightforward issue of redundancy. However, Ramban's response yields the essential argument that while there are indeed five books in the Torah, Genesis and Exodus are intimately linked and form one larger unit.

Ramban's argument has potentially significant ramifications. If Genesis and Exodus are considered separately, we might perceive their overarching purposes in one way. Genesis concerns itself with the meaning of creation. The book begins with God's desire for all humanity to reach certain spiritual and communal heights. After successive failures and generations of refining, Genesis concludes with a reconciled Jacob and sons, the covenantal family that fulfills the purpose of creation.

Those good days are rapidly erased at the beginning of Exodus. Joseph and his generation die out, and a new Pharaoh rises and enslaves the Israelites. Exodus is about the Israelites' descent into slavery, their redemption, their receiving the Torah at Sinai, and their building the Tabernacle—the resting place for God's Presence among the Israelites.

If Genesis and Exodus are considered as a single unit, however, the book of Exodus may be viewed as the culmination of creation. There are several literary associations between the two books, drawing them together. In this essay, we will briefly consider a few poignant examples from Exodus and how we may ascertain a deeper layer of meaning when reading them in light of their parallels in Genesis.

## **2. The Israelites Fill the Land**

The Israelites carry out the purpose of creation at the beginning of Exodus by being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the land:

But the Israelites were fertile and prolific; they multiplied and increased very greatly, so that the land was filled with them (...*paru va-yishretzu va-yirbu...va-timmalei ha-aretz otam*) (Ex. 1:7).

While the “land” in this verse refers specifically to Egypt, the formulation echoes the blessing to humanity in creation:

God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the land...” (*peru u-revu u-mil’u et ha-aretz*) (Gen. 1:28).

With Israel’s role understood in this manner, Pharaoh’s enslavement of Israel interferes with God’s very creation, rather than only the people of Israel. As a result of Pharaoh’s impeding divine blessings, God unleashes the forces of creation against him and his nation through the Plagues, just as God had done against all humanity in Noah’s time with the Flood.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Moses

Moses’ mother sees that her baby is “good,” and therefore chooses to save him:

The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was good, she hid him for three months (Ex. 2:2).

To what does Moses’ “goodness” refer? The interpretations of several *peshat* commentators (e.g., Moses was good looking, healthy, well-behaved, etc.) do not address the basic issue: mothers would want to save their children regardless of how adorable or good-natured they are. One talmudic passage captures the literary import of this verse by drawing a parallel to the creation narrative, where God looks at His creation, and sees that it was good:

‘And when she saw that he was good’ (*va-tere oto ki tov hu*) (Ex. 2:2)...When Moses was born, the whole house was filled with light. It is written here, ‘And when she saw that he was good’, and elsewhere it is

written (Gen. 1:4): ‘And God saw that the light was good’ (*va-yar Elokim et ha-or ki tov*) (*Sotah* 12a).<sup>4</sup>

The birth of Moses, then, represents the beginning of a new world order to redeem it from the Pharaoh who is threatening creation.

Moreover, Moses was saved in a *tebah* (ark, Ex. 2:3, 5), the only occurrence of a *tebah* in the Torah outside the Noah narrative. This parallel calls further attention to the similarities linking these two figures. God reveals laws to both Noah and Moses right after major water disasters destroy wicked people who undermine creation. Noah receives the seven Noahide laws for all humanity after the Flood (Gen. 9:1-6), and Moses receives the Torah for Israel after the splitting of the Red Sea. Both heroes were “drawn from the water,” and Moses was even named for that event: “She named him Moses, explaining, ‘I drew him out of the water’” (Ex. 2:10).

#### **4. The Garden of Eden and the Tabernacle**

Originally, God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Unfortunately, they sinned and were banished from their utopian world. What would have occurred had they never sinned? Perhaps all humanity would be centered in this utopian Eden. One Midrash pursues this logic by suggesting that God’s Presence ideally should have been manifest to all humanity in Eden:

God wanted a dwelling place on earth just as He had one in the heavens. God told Adam: “If you are worthy, then I will allow you to rule over the earth the same way that I rule over the heavens.”...But Adam failed; and when he sinned, God’s Presence left him. When Israel stood [at Mount Sinai], God said to them, “You were not redeemed from Egypt except on

condition that you should build a Tabernacle for Me. [If you do so,] I will then place My Presence among you” (*Tanhuma Behukkotai* 3).

Adam and Eve should have constructed a “Tabernacle”, i.e., a place for God’s dwelling, for all humanity in Eden, but they failed and were expelled. The building of the Tabernacle would need to wait for the Israelites in the desert.<sup>5</sup> There was no greater purpose for redeeming Israel than to allow God’s Presence to manifest in this world.

Another Midrash considers the building of the Tabernacle the final act of creation, thereby linking it directly to Genesis:

What was the world like at the time of creation like? It was like a chair on two legs which cannot stand erect but wobbles, and when they make for it a third leg it becomes steady and stands firm. In the same way, as soon as the Tabernacle was constructed...the world was immediately set on a firm foundation and stood erect (*Num. Rabbah* 12:12).<sup>6</sup>

God’s very creation is incomplete and unstable, and requires the partnership of humanity to bring it stability.

The Tabernacle forms a perfect culmination to Genesis through several striking textual parallels to the creation account:

And God saw all that He had made and found it very good (*va-yar Elokim et kol asher asah ve-hinnei tov me’od*)...The heaven and the earth were finished (*va-yekhulu ha-shamayim ve-ha-aretz*), and all their array. On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing (*va-yekhal Elokim ba-yom ha-shevi’i melakhto asher asah*)...God blessed (*va-yevarekh Elokim*) the seventh day and declared it

holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done (Gen. 1:31-2:3).

Thus was completed all the work (*va-tekhel kol avodat*)... (Ex. 39:32).

And when Moses saw that they had performed all the work—as the LORD had commanded, so they had done—Moses blessed them (*va-yar Moshe et kol ha-melakhah ve-hinnei asu otah ka'asher tzivvah Hashem ken asu, va-yevarekh otam Moshe*) (Ex. 39:43).

When Moses had finished the work...(*va-yekhal Moshe et ha-melakhah*) (Ex. 40:33).

To summarize, “to see” (*r-'-h*), “to complete” (*y-k-l*), “all he/they had made” (*et kol asher asah*), “blessed” (*b-r-k*), “work” (*melakhah*), and several other idioms appear in both.

The laws of Shabbat are intimately linked to the building of the Tabernacle. God created the universe, and ceased creative work on Shabbat. We emulate God in our Shabbat observance by our cessation of creative labor. In addition, the commandment to observe Shabbat flanks the laws of the Tabernacle on both sides. It concludes the descriptions of what needs to be built (Ex. 31:12-17) and then is reiterated immediately preceding the actual building (Ex. 35:1-3). Following these biblical precedents of connecting Shabbat and the Tabernacle, the prohibited categories of work on Shabbat enumerated in the Talmud are derived specifically from the categories of creative labor used in the construction of the Tabernacle (e.g., *Shabbat* 31b, 49b, 73b).<sup>7</sup>

As a further link between the creation narratives and the Tabernacle, God surrounded the Tree of Life in Eden with sword-wielding Cherubim to protect it from Adam and Eve:

So the LORD God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:23-24).

The supernatural Tree of Life in Eden is replaced. Instead of a magical fruit that grants eternal life, we are given the Torah as a means of connecting to eternity. The book of Proverbs links the Garden of Eden and the Torah-wisdom by referring to the latter as a tree of life:

She is a tree of life (*etz hayyim hi*) to those who grasp her, and whoever holds on to her is happy (Prov. 3:18).<sup>8</sup>

In the Tabernacle, Cherubim are placed above the Ark, to guard our “Tree of Life”. The references to the Cherubim in the Tabernacle are their only occurrences in the Torah outside the Eden narrative.

Another Midrash links these elements further by stating that the Garden of Eden actually opens to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem:

“He drove the man out” (Gen. 3:24)—He was driven from the Garden of Eden, and settled on Mount Moriah, for the entrance to the Garden of Eden opens onto Mount Moriah (*Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 20).<sup>9</sup>

By viewing Genesis-Exodus as one greater unit, the Tabernacle belongs to all humanity and is the culmination of creation and an Eden replacement. Israel is the kingdom of priests to safeguard the Tabernacle and teach the world:

Now then, if you will obey Me faithfully and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples. Indeed, all the earth is Mine, but you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'... (Ex. 19:5-6).

King Solomon recognized that the Temple similarly was designated for all God-fearing people, not only Israel:

“Or if a foreigner who is not of Your people Israel comes from a distant land for the sake of Your name—for they shall hear about Your great name and Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm—when he comes to pray toward this House, oh, hear in Your heavenly abode and grant all that the foreigner asks You for. Thus all the peoples of the earth will know Your name and revere You, as does Your people Israel; and they will recognize that Your name is attached to this House that I have built” (I Kings 8:41-43).

And of course our messianic prophetic visions never lose sight of this overarching goal of all humanity being God-fearing and serving God in the Temple:

In the days to come, the Mount of the LORD's House shall stand firm above the mountains and tower above the hills; and all the nations shall gaze on it with joy. And the many peoples shall go and say: “Come, let us go up to the Mount of the LORD, to the House of the God of Jacob; that He may instruct us in His ways, and that we may walk in His paths.” For instruction shall come forth from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:2-3).

Israel's procreating and filling the world and Moses' being “good” further emphasize that Israel was positioned to

fulfill the purpose of creation in the book of Exodus. However, they were doing so as representatives of all humanity, and would find their ultimate purpose in being a kingdom of priests that brings God's Presence to all people. In this spirit, Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin-19<sup>th</sup> century Lithuania, introduction to Exodus) similarly stresses that Exodus completes the creation narrative from Genesis. Israel's receiving of the Torah was designed to transform Israel into a light unto the nations (Isa. 42:6), thereby fulfilling the purpose of creation through that religious model.

To summarize, Genesis and Exodus reflect complex realities. On the one hand, there is a clear separation between the two books. On the other hand, the two books are intimately related. The beginning of Genesis parallels the beginning of Exodus and also the end of Exodus, joining them into a broader unit. Ramban's reflections on a simple redundancy have the potential to add layers of meaning towards a global interpretation of Genesis-Exodus. Ultimately, the two books taken together should inspire us to fulfill our purpose in creation—to be a light unto the nations and bring God's Presence to all humanity, created in God's Image.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Translations of biblical passages are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh* (Philadelphia, 1985). When I quote parallel verses with similar Hebrew idioms, I have modified the translations when necessary to highlight the similarities.

<sup>2</sup> Translation from *Ramban (Nachmanides) Commentary on the Torah: Exodus*, translated and annotated by Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel (New York: Shilo Publishing House, Inc., 1973) pp. 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed effort to link each plague with elements in the creation narrative, see Ziony Zevit, "Three Ways to Look at the Ten Plagues," *Bible Review* 6:3 (1990), pp. 16-23, 42-44. For analysis of other biblical

passages that reflect God's undoing of creation in the face of human evil, see Michael Fishbane, "Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern," *VT* 21 (1971), pp. 151-167.

<sup>4</sup> Translations of passages from the Talmud and Midrash Rabbah (with minor modifications) from Soncino. Translations of other midrashic passages are my own.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Num. Rabbah* 12:6: "R. Simeon b. Yohai said...From the beginning of the world's creation the Shekhinah had dwelt in this lower world; as it says, 'And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden, etc.' (Gen. 3:8), but once the Shekhinah departed at the time when Adam sinned, it did not descend again until the Tabernacle had been erected."

<sup>6</sup> A different Midrash extends the Creation theme to King Solomon's Temple as well: "'All the work [that King Solomon had done in the House of the Lord] was completed' (I Kings 7:51)—scripture does not say 'the work,' but 'all the work,' referring to the work of the six days of creation. As it says, '[God] completed all the work that He planned to do' (Gen. 2:2). Scripture does not say 'that He had done,' but 'that He had planned to do,' implying that there was yet more work to do. When Solomon completed the Temple, God proclaimed: 'Now the work of the heavens and earth are complete.' [When it says] 'All the work was completed' (*va-tishlam*), it indicates why he was named Solomon (Shelomo), for God completed (*hishlim*) the work of the six days of creation through him" (*Pesikta Rabbati* 6).

<sup>7</sup> For elaboration on this point with a thorough analysis of the aspects of Shabbat in the Torah, see Rabbi Mordechai Breuer, *Pirkei Mo'adot* vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Horev, 1993), pp. 23-39.

<sup>8</sup> One Midrash makes this association: "God hid the tree that granted eternal life to all who ate from it and in its place He gave us the Torah. This is the Tree of Life, for it says, 'She is a tree of life to those who grasp her'" (Prov. 3:18) (*Midrash ha-Gadol Bereshith* 3:24).

<sup>9</sup> For a survey of other biblical passages that link Eden to the Temple, and discussion of how this connection relates to its ancient Near Eastern setting, see Lawrence E. Stager, "Jerusalem as Eden," *BAR* 26:3 (May-June 2000), pp. 36-47.

# Limiting Humility<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

**Value: Limiting humility.** Generally, the attribute of humility is a positive one. It is connected with the idea that all our abilities and opportunities are given to us by Hashem, in order to do His will. (See Shabbat Table Talks, Lesson 2: Miqess, for a full discussion of the positive aspects of this attribute.) Sometimes humility is confused with timidity, self-doubt, and shyness. When humility is viewed in this way, it must be limited as it could hinder responsible action. The balance between humility and responsible action is a delicate one, but it is one that we aspire to. This talk presents different examples where we must limit our feelings of humility in order to act according to the talents and abilities that Hashem has given us. Considerations of humility or of excuses why you cannot act could prevent a person from accomplishing important tasks.

**Background:** After killing the murderous Egyptian, and being spurned by his own people, Moshe fled Egypt for Midyan. In Midyan he married into a prestigious family, the family of the spiritual leadership of the country. He spent his days shepherding his father-in-law's sheep in the wilderness, until one day he notices the burning bush and his life changes. Hashem called upon that shepherd to save his people from the most powerful empire of the time. Moshe's reaction is one of self-doubt. He raises objection after objection with Hashem responding to each of the objections. Finally, when he has no other objection to raise, he just asks Hashem to send someone else.

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<sup>1</sup> From Rabbi Ralph Tawil's Shabbat Table Talks for Parashat Shemot, Lesson 3.

**Text: Shemot 4:12-17 (Schocken Bible)**

So now, go! I Myself will be there with your mouth and will instruct you as to what you are to speak.

But he (Moshe) said: Please, my Lord, pray send by whose hand you will send! (—Send somebody else).

Hashem's anger flared up against Moshe, He said: Is there not Aharon your brother, the Levite—I know that he can speak, yes, speak well, and here, he is even going out to meet you; when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart. You shall speak to him, you shall put the words in his mouth! I Myself will be there with your mouth and with his mouth, and will instruct you as to what you shall do. He shall speak for you to the people, he shall be for you a mouth, and you, you shall be for him a god. And this staff, take it in your hand, with which you shall do the signs.

**Discussion:** Why did Moshe not want to go? (Because he was not sure that he was the right person. He did not trust in his own abilities.)

Why did Hashem get angry with Moshe? (Hashem knew that Moshe was the ideal person to take Israel from servitude to freedom, from serving the evil Pharaoh to worshipping Hashem and receiving the Torah. Hashem knew that Moshe was just not sure of himself and was just making excuses why he could not go. He wanted Moshe to know that all of Man's abilities come from Hashem and that He would help Moshe.)

Ultimately, did Hashem take Moshe's request seriously? (Yes. Hashem actually accedes to Moshe's request to send another person. Yet, Moshe probably meant to send another person instead of him. Hashem sent another person along with Moshe to help him to carry out his mission.)

Can you think of situations where you knew you should act but were afraid to because you doubted yourself, or you were too timid? (Let each person, including the adults, take a chance at describing a situation. One common situation is at school, where a student is afraid to give an answer or ask a question because he or she think it might not be the correct answer or a smart question.)

What can we think of or do in order to overcome our fear or self-doubt? (We can think of the benefits that would come to us if we are successful. We can think of what could be the worst possible result of taking the action. We can take small steps first and more ambitious ones later. We can ask someone, like a friend or parent, to help us think through the issues.)

Moshe Rabbenu ultimately does what Hashem commanded him to do and goes to Egypt to save Bne Yisrael. Yet, Hashem helped him by giving him the knowledge, the signs, and the help that he needed. Hashem took Moshe's objections seriously and found ways of helping Moshe overcome his self-doubt. This led to Bne Yisrael being saved and to Moshe becoming the greatest prophet that ever lived. Imagine if he had given in to his self-doubt and fears?

The section on humility in the classic work of Mussar (Jewish Ethics), *The Paths of the Righteous*, contains the following words about limiting humility:

The thing that we have to distance ourselves from (concerning the attribute of humility) is that the humble person should not surrender to the wicked one. This is what scripture meant when it said: "Like a muddied spring, a ruined fountain, is a righteous man fallen before a wicked one." (*Mishle* 25:26). If a

person has the ability, he must attack the wicked viciously, for the honor of Hashem, and rebuke them vehemently, and stand against them like a roaring lion, in order to save the exploited from those who exploit.

Just like a spring and a fountain can be a source of life-giving water, so the righteous person is to his society, a source of life and inspiration and a source of good acts and laws that help build the society. Yet, if the righteous person surrenders to the wicked one, his source of water becomes fouled and is useless. The society suffers and his talents are wasted. As was once said: "All that is needed for evil to prosper is for good people to do nothing." There are times that we must overcome our timidity and act, all along recognizing that Hashem helps us to do what is right.

What are some things that we can do as a family to apply this idea? (This is a good opportunity for the family to consider its abilities and the ways it can contribute to the betterment of the society.)

# Haftarat Shemot - Jeremiah Chapter 1: In the Footsteps of Moshe<sup>1</sup>

by Rabbi Moshe Shamah

The “biography” of Jeremiah parallels that of Moshe to a remarkable degree. Jeremiah also was reluctant to accept the mission G-d selected him for until G-d overpowered him: וְאַפְתָּ חֲזַקְתָּנִי וַתִּגְדַּלְךָ עָלַי, “You enticed me, Hashem, and I was enticed, You overpowered me and You prevailed” (Jer. 20:7). Just as Moshe did, Jeremiah protested that he was not good at speaking (1:6). G-d’s response to him, that He will place His words in his mouth, was similar to His response to Moshe, that He will be with his mouth. In Jeremiah’s case also, G-d had a great deal invested in the upcoming prophet-messenger mission, and had been nurturing and watching over him from before his birth, as He explicitly informed him: בְּטֶרֶם אֶצְרְךָ בְּבֶטֶן יְדַעְתִּיךָ (1:5).

The Sages pointed out many additional similarities between these two great prophets. Both were from the tribe of Levi; a rod is prominent in the first prophecy of each; both were placed in a life-threatening situation in water; both were saved by non-Israelites; both had to confront rebels among the Israelites and both had to overcome attempts to reject their prophecies; Moshe prophesied forty years as did Jeremiah in Jerusalem; Moshe led Israel out of Egypt and Jeremiah led a remnant into Egypt. In our *Parashat Qorah Part II* study we will point out several remarkable associations between the accounts of Moshe and his challenger Qorah (Num. 16-17) and that concerning Jeremiah and יוֹחָנָן בֶּן קָרַח (Yohanan ben Qare’ah), one of

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from Rabbi Shamah’s study on Parashat Shemot, “At the Burning Bush Part II.”

those who accused the prophet of falsifying his prophecy (Jer. 40-43).

Although reluctant at first to accept their assignments, once they accepted, both Moshe and Jeremiah devoted every fiber of their being to faithfully and courageously fulfilling G-d's instructions. But in the midst of their missions both had moments when they questioned G-d concerning their assignments. Their extraordinary initial reluctance to acquiesce to G-d's summons illuminates a number of matters, including their great humility, the enormity of the problems being confronted, the requirement for supernatural solutions and G-d's commitment to His people and His world.

It is thus clear why Jeremiah Chapter 1 became designated as the *haftara* for *Parashat Shemot*.

# The G-d Who Acts in History

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

The Israelites are at their lowest ebb. They have been enslaved. A decree has been issued that every male child is to be killed. Moses is sent to liberate them, but the first effect of his intervention is to make matters worse, not better. Their quota of brick-making remains unchanged but they now have to provide their own straw. Initially they had “believed” Moses when he told them that G-d was about to rescue them, and performed the various signs G-d had given him. Now they turn on Moses and Aaron, accusing them:

When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, and they said, “May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us” (Ex. 5: 20-21).

At this point Moses - who had been so reluctant to take on the mission - turns to G-d in protest and anguish:

Moses returned to the LORD and said, “O Lord, why have you brought trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all” (Ex. 5: 22-23).

None of this, however, has been accidental. The Torah is preparing the ground for one of its most monumental propositions: *It is in the darkest night that Israel has its greatest visions. Hope is born at the very edge of the abyss of despair.* There is nothing natural about this, nothing inevitable. No logic can give rise to hope; no law of history charts a path from slavery to redemption, exile to return. The entire sequence of events has been a prelude to the single most formative moment in the history of Israel: the

intervention of G-d in history - the supreme Power intervening on behalf of the supremely powerless, *not* (as in every other culture) to *endorse* the status quo but to overturn it.

The speech that follows is breathtaking in its grandeur and literary structure. As Nechama Leibowitz and others point out, it takes the form of a chiasmus:

G-d said to Moses

**[A] I am the Lord.**

[B]I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as the Lord Almighty, but by my name G-d I was not known to them.

[C]I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens.

[D]Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and have remembered my covenant.

[E]Therefore say to the Israelites,

**I am the Lord**

[D1]and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgments. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your G-d. Then you will know that I am the Lord your G-d who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.

[C1]And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hands to give

[B1] to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession.

**[A1] I am the Lord.**

The structure is worked out in extraordinary detail. The first and second halves of the speech each contain *exactly fifty words* in the Hebrew text. B and B1 are about the patriarchs; C and C1 about the land; D and D1 about Egypt and slavery. The first half is about the past, the second about the future. The first half refers to the Israelites in the third person (“them”), the second in the second person (“you”). The entire speech turns on the three-fold repetition of “I am the Lord” - at the beginning, end and middle of the speech. (The phrase actually appears four times, the extra mention occurring in D1. It is not impossible that this is linked to the fact that the name - which is, as we will see, the central theme of the speech - has four letters, the so-called tetragrammaton).

The entire speech is full of interest, but what will concern us - as it has to successive generations of interpreters - is the proposition signaled at the outset: “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as the Lord Almighty, but by my name G-d I was not known to them.” A fundamental distinction is being made between the experience the patriarchs had of G-d, and the experience the Israelites are about to have. Something new, unprecedented, is about to happen. What is it?

Clearly it has to do with the names by which G-d is known. The verse distinguishes between *E-l Shaddai* (“the Lord Almighty”) and the four-letter name of G-d which, because of its sanctity, Jewish tradition referred to simply as *Hashem* (“the name” par excellence).

As the classic Jewish commentators point out, the verse must be read with great care. It does not say that the patriarchs “did not know” this name; nor does it say that G-d did not “make this name known” to them. The four-letter name appears no less than 165 times in the book of

Bereishith. G-d himself uses the phrase “I am the Lord” to both Abraham (Gen. 15:7) and Jacob (28: 13). Rashi’s explanation is therefore the simplest and most elegant:

It is not written here, “[My name, The Lord] I did not make known to them” but rather “[By the name, The Lord] I was not known to them” - meaning, I was not recognized by them in my attribute of “keeping faith,” by reason of which my name is “The Lord,” namely that I am faithful to fulfill My word, for I made promises to them but I did not fulfill them [during their lifetime].

What then is the difference between the other names of G-d and *Hashem*? For the sages, *Hashem* signified the Divine attribute of compassion:

G-d said to Moses, “You wish to know My name? I am called according to my deeds... When I judge creatures, I am called *Elokim*. When I wage war against the wicked I am called “Lord of hosts.” When I suspend judgment for man’s sins I am called *E-l Shaddai*. When I am merciful towards My world I am called *Hashem*.

For Judah Halevi and Ramban, the key difference has to do with G-d’s acts *within* and *beyond* nature. This is how Halevi puts it in *The Kuzari*:

This is perhaps what the Bible means when it says, “and I appeared to Abraham...as *E-l Shaddai*” namely, in the way of power and dominion... He did not, however, perform any miracle for the patriarchs as he did for Moses... for the wonders done for Moses and the Israelites left no manner of doubt in their souls that the creator of the world also created these things which He brought into existence immediately by His

will, such as the plagues of Egypt, the division of the Red Sea, the manna, the pillar of cloud, and the like.

Similarly Ramban writes:

Thus G-d said to Moses, “I have appeared to the patriarchs with the might of My arm with which I prevail over the constellations and help those whom I have chosen, but with My name *Hashem* with which all existence came into being, I was not made known to them, that is, to create new things for them by the open change of nature.”

Thus, for the Midrash, the key to the new revelation of G-d in the days of Moses was his *compassion* in responding to the cries of the oppressed Israelites. For Judah Halevi and Ramban it was the fact that the exodus was accompanied by *supernatural events* (what Ramban calls “revealed” as opposed to “hidden” miracles).

The simplest and most cogent explanation, however, is that of Rashi. Something was about to change. The patriarchs had received the covenantal promise. They would become a nation. They would inherit a land. None of this, however, happened in their lifetime. To the contrary, as the book of Bereishith reaches its close, they number a mere seventy souls and they are in exile in Egypt. Now the fulfillment is about to begin. Already, in the first chapter of Shemot, we hear, for the first time, the phrase *am bnei Yisrael*, “the people of the children of Israel.” Israel has at last become, not a family, but a nation. Moses at the burning bush has been told, by G-d, that He will bring them to “a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” *Hashem* therefore means *the G-d who acts in history to fulfill His promises*.

Throughout these studies I have tried to convey the world-changing character of this idea. What is revolutionary in Judaism is not simply the concept of monotheism, that the universe is not a blind clash of conflicting powers but the result of a single creative will. It is that G-d is *involved* in His creation. G-d is not simply the force that brought the universe into being; nor is He reached only in the private recesses of the soul. At a certain point He intervened in history, to rescue His people from slavery and set them on the path to freedom. *This* was the revolution, at once political and intellectual.

At the heart of most visions of the human condition is what Mircea Eliade (in his book *Cosmos and History*) calls “the terror of history.” The passage of time, with its disasters, its apparent randomness, its radical contingency, is profoundly threatening to the human search for order and coherence. There seems to be no meaning in history. We live; we die; and it is as if we had never been. The universe gives no sign of any interest in our existence. If that was so in ancient times, when people believed in the existence of G-ds, how much more so is it true today for those neo-Darwinians who see life as no more than the operation of “chance and necessity” (Jacques Monod) or “the blind watchmaker” (Richard Dawkins).

It is against this background that myth and ritual arise as the attempt to endow the human condition with significance by re-enacting the divine drama at the beginning of creation. Human beings become like gods. A holy site becomes the centre of the universe. Ritual becomes the act through which people are transposed to time beyond time, and space beyond space. In Eliade’s words: “an object or an act becomes real only in so far as it imitates or repeats an archetype. Thus reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation... any repetition of an archetypal gesture,

suspends duration, abolishes profane time, and participates in mythical time.” The mythic imagination is *an attempt to escape from history*.

In ancient Israel, by contrast, “for the first time, the prophets placed a value on history... For the first time, we find affirmed and increasingly accepted the idea that historical events have a value in themselves, insofar as they are determined by the will of G-d... Historical facts thus become situations of man in respect to G-d, and as such they acquire a religious value that nothing had previously been able to confer on them. It may, then, be said with truth that the Hebrews were the first to discover the meaning of history as the epiphany of G-d.” Judaism is the escape *into* history, the unique attempt to endow events with meaning, and to see in the chronicles of mankind something more than a mere succession of happenings - to see them as nothing less than a drama of redemption in which the fate of a nation reflects its loyalty or otherwise to a covenant with G-d.

Eliade’s conclusion is worth quoting at length:

Basically, the horizon of archetypes and repetition cannot be transcended with impunity unless we accept a philosophy of freedom that does not exclude G-d... Faith, in this context, as in many others, means absolute emancipation from any kind of natural “law” and hence the highest freedom that man can imagine: freedom to intervene even in the ontological constitution of the universe. It is, consequently, a preeminently creative freedom. In other words, it constitutes a new formula for man’s collaboration with the creation – the first, but also the only such formula accorded to him since the traditional horizon of archetypes and repetition was transcended. Only such a freedom... is able to defend modern man from

the terror of history – a freedom, that is, which has its source and finds its guarantee and support in G-d. Every other modern freedom, whatever satisfactions it may procure to him who possesses it, is powerless to justify history; and this, for every man who is sincere with himself, is equivalent to the terror of history... Any other situation of modern man leads, in the end, to despair.

Not just then, in other words, but at all times including the present, the ultimate choice lies between *faith in the G-d of history* (who invites human beings to become His partners in the work of redemption), or the “terror of history” from which the only refuge is myth.

Where is G-d? It is a mark of how deeply influenced we have been by ancient Greece that we tend to answer this question in philosophical terms, by referring to logic (the “ontological argument”) or nature (the “argument from design”). Many Jewish thinkers themselves - Maimonides is the most famous example - did likewise. Judah Halevi, however, thought otherwise. The ten commandments begin - he pointed out - not with the words “I am the Lord your G-d who created heaven and earth” but “I am the Lord your G-d who brought you out from Egypt, from the house of slavery.” G-d - the One we call *Hashem* - is to be found not primarily in creation (that is another face of G-d to which we give the name *Elokim*) but in *history*.

I find it moving that this is precisely what non-Jewish observers concluded. Pascal, for example, wrote:

It is certain that in certain parts of the world we can see a peculiar people, separated from the other peoples of the world, and this is called the Jewish people... This people is not only of remarkable antiquity but has also lasted for a singularly long time... For whereas

the peoples of Greece and Italy, of Sparta, Athens and Rome, and others who came so much later have perished so long ago, these still exist, despite the efforts of so many powerful kings who have tried a hundred times to wipe them out, as their historians testify, and as can easily be judged by the natural order of things over such a long spell of years. They have always been preserved, however, and their preservation was foretold... My encounter with this people amazes me...

The once-Marxist Russian thinker Nikolai Berdayev came to a similar conclusion:

I remember how the materialist interpretation of history, when I attempted in my youth to verify it by applying it to the destinies of peoples, broke down in the case of the Jews, where destiny seemed absolutely inexplicable from the materialistic standpoint... Its survival is a mysterious and wonderful phenomenon demonstrating that the life of this people is governed by a special predetermination, transcending the processes of adaptation expounded by the materialistic interpretation of history. The survival of the Jews, their resistance to destruction, their endurance under absolutely peculiar conditions and the fateful role played by them in history: all these point to the particular and mysterious foundations of their destiny.

More recently, the historian Barbara Tuchman wrote:

The history of the Jews is... intensely peculiar in the fact of having given the western world its concept of origins and monotheism, its ethical traditions, and the founder of its prevailing religion, yet suffering dispersion, statelessness and ceaseless persecution, and finally in our times nearly successful genocide,

dramatically followed by fulfillment of the never-relinquished dream of return to the homeland. Viewing this strange and singular history, one cannot escape the impression that it must contain some special significance for the history of mankind, that in some way, whether one believes in divine purpose or inscrutable circumstance, the Jews have been singled out to carry the tale of human fate.

Some 3,300 years ago, G-d told Moses that He would intervene in the arena of time, not only (though primarily) to rescue the Israelites but also “so that My name may be declared throughout the world” (9:16). The script of history would bear the mark of a hand not human but divine. And it began with these words: “Therefore say to the Israelites: I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians.”

# Concerning “Ani Hashem”<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Moshe Shamah

## 1. Backdrop

G-d had made it clear to Moshe that Pharaoh would refuse the Israelites’ request to go on a three-day-journey to serve “Hashem, our G-d” (Ex. 3:19-20). He reinforced this message when Moshe was on his way back to Egypt (4:21-23). Nevertheless, Moshe was not prepared for the significant worsening of the Israelites’ condition that the request engendered. There is a big difference between having heard that the king would refuse as part of a larger, successful context and having experienced it! There also is a big difference between being prepared to struggle unsuccessfully with repeated disappointment for a period of time and a serious deterioration of a situation that causes increased suffering. This especially applies to the case at hand given that his efforts prompted his brethren to be resentful of him and question his mission!

In any event, Moshe had not imagined the possibility of the brutal response that was totally disproportionate to the request. He could not understand G-d allowing the situation to get worse and he seems to consider his own inadequacy as part of the problem; accordingly, he protests G-d’s doings and questioned his being selected for the mission (5:22-23).

But G-d had His agenda. Before intervening, He had deemed it necessary to allow Pharaoh to publicly demonstrate his arrogance, cruelty and tyrannical powers, revealing the pathetic plight of Israel. In this way it was to

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<sup>1</sup> This article is from Rabbi Shamah’s study on *Parashat Va’era*, Part I, available online at [www.judaic.org](http://www.judaic.org).

be established that short of Divine intervention there was no hope for the enslaved nation; its salvation was totally dependent on that Divine intervention. Without criticizing Moshe, G-d answered him that the turning point has arrived: “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh, for by dint of a strong hand... he will chase them from his land” (6:1).

Those who established the chapter and verse numbers widely used in our *humashim* today rendered this latter verse the start of a new chapter since in the following verses G-d continues with a positive proclamation. Together, they begin a new phase of the action. The rabbinic tradition, however, considers 6:1 as concluding the previous *parasha* and is thus followed by a paragraph break (a *setumah*). A close reading demonstrates the latter construction to be preferable.

Hashem’s statement to Moshe, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh...” (6:1) is a response to Moshe’s complaint, assuring him with a general statement that He will now intervene and that the venture will conclude successfully. It goes together with Moshe’s complaint and the subject was closed. In the following verse (6:2), the narrative again introduces G-d speaking to Moshe with the standard introductory formula, וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר, אֲלֵי. Here, the Torah employs a different divine appellation from that of the previous verse, *Elokim*, and the elaboration goes far beyond a simple continuation of the previous response. In this statement G-d articulates principles and details of the greatest import, formulated in an artistic manner with self-contained and highly structured internal patterns (as we shall soon demonstrate). Accordingly, 6:2 should be seen as the start of a new passage.

## 2. “Ani Hashem”

In a proclamation that reflects the grandeur and uniqueness of what was now beginning to transpire, G-d informed Moshe of the acts of cosmic proportions that He was initiating on behalf of His people. The message is linked with His self-presentation as Y-H-V-H, that is to say, in consonance with the concepts signified in His distinctive Tetragrammaton (referred to traditionally as *Hashem*, “the Name,” a term also used to refer to Him). In the ancient Near East, as undoubtedly elsewhere, deity names reflected character, attributes and functions, and *Hashem*'s name followed this pattern, as we shall discuss shortly.

The proclamation comprised two segments- the first addressed to Moshe and the second a message he was to transmit to the Israelites. He begins with “I am Y-H-V-H” (using a form of self-presentation then popular with kings and also ascribed to deities). He states that to the patriarchs He appeared as “(K)el Sh-d-y”\* (Gen. 17:1; 35:11) and did not make Himself known to them by His Tetragrammaton, thus signifying that He is now taking a historic step forward for Israel. He established a Covenant with the patriarchs, pledging to give the Land of Canaan to them and their progeny. He has taken heed of Israel's cry from oppression and is now prepared to fulfill His Covenantal promise. This segment emphasizes Hashem's faithful nature through the centuries and recalls His promises to the nation's forefathers. For Moshe, it served as an expansion and reinforcement of what he was told at the burning bush.

To the Israelites, Moshe is to announce that G-d, revealing Himself as Y-H-V-H, will soon begin a multi-step process on their behalf. He will release them from their burdens, rescue them from slavery and redeem them from Egypt. He will take them as His people\*\*, be their G-d, foster in them

the recognition that He is the author of the wondrous doings that He had performed for them, bring them to the Promised Land and grant it to them as an inheritable possession. These verses constitute a breathtaking series of eight consecutive verbal phrases communicating immediacy, definitiveness, enthusiasm and awe-inspiring power.

Many understand *Hashem's* Tetragrammaton as related to the concept of His eternal existence, which directly leads to the concepts of His capability to make long-term plans for the world, to be conscious of past generations' merit and to intervene in the distant future. They interpret the letters of the Tetragrammaton as a combination of הָיָה (was), הִנֵּה (is) and הֵיְהִי (will be). Others see the Tetragrammaton as a form of the causative verb that is derived from “be” (such as הָרַה גָּבִיר לְאַחֲרָיִךְ, Gen. 27:29), denoting He who causes to be all that is, related to the post-Biblical term מְהַיְהוֹת, who makes happen, creates. With the first letter a *yod*, it would more specifically imply a future, focusing on His faithfulness, “He will make happen.” As a name, it would point to His possessing the wherewithal to fulfill His promises, all-powerful. Theologically, the latter interpretation tacitly incorporates the concepts of the former, as the one who brings all that exists into being implies a perpetual status of doing so.

In any event, in elaborating on the Tetragrammaton, the passage proclaims that the One who is eternal and conscious of past generations' merit has decided that now is the time to fulfill the promises He made to the forefathers and intervene on Israel's behalf with His great power.

Such enduring Divine faithfulness is a direct corollary of monotheism. In the polytheistic world, a deity could not guarantee something over the long term because circumstances might change beyond his control; another

deity or primordial force might interfere with his plans. The new belief gave great impetus to working toward a more moral order to better the state of the world, whether for one's children or in general; there was no danger that one's commitment to virtue would be overlooked by a god who was no longer in power.

The statement that G-d did not make Himself known to the forefathers by His Y-H-V-H name should not be thought to indicate that they did not know that name in some manner. The term is attested several times in His revelations to them (see Gen. 15:7; 26:25; 28:13). It is even stated in association with Enosh (grandson of Adam), "then they began calling in the name of Y-H-V-H" (4:26). Rather, the forefathers did not experience a substantial actualization of the potential that the name implies. On a number of occasions in the Bible, G-d uses the expression of it becoming known "I am Hashem" in conjunction with a mighty manifestation of His power such that witnesses will have no doubt that it is His doing (e.g. Ex. 7:5; 14:4, 18). Specifically defining knowing His name, He declared, "...I will make known to them My hand and My might and they shall know that My name is Hashem" (Jer. 16:21). The patriarchs did experience His intervention in their personal lives in a limited manner but never on the grand, national scale that commands the attention of others.

### **3. "And You Shall Know"**

The specific location of the וַיִּדְעֶתְמוּ ("and you shall know") clause in the series of promises as well as its literary formulation – "and you shall know that it is I, Hashem your G-d, who took you forth from under the burdens of Egypt" (Ex. 6:7b) – engender an important question. The verb follows mention of the various stages that comprise the process of redemption as well as the declaration that

Hashem would take the Israelites as His nation and be their G-d. It only precedes reference to His leading the Israelites into the Promised Land and giving it to them. It is understandable that it follows the stages of redemption, since it refers to them and is a result of them. However, why does it not precede establishment of the G-d-Israel covenantal relationship? In addition, the clause refers back to the previous verse's description of the first stage of the process, deploying virtually the identical terminology that was used there. With **וַיִּדְעֶתְכֶם** we read **מִתַּחַת אֲתֶכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלֹת מִצְרַיִם** while the first stage was termed **וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִצְרַיִם מִתַּחַת סְבִלֹת מִצְרַיִם**.

Perhaps placement of the **וַיִּדְעֶתְכֶם** clause where it is indicates G-d's acknowledgment that while subject to the rigors of slavery the Israelites could not be expected to properly comprehend all that He was doing for them. Their resistance to the message that Moshe transmitted to them, "due to impatience and rigorous labor" (v. 9) evidently held to some degree throughout the turbulent period of the plagues, although they surely were progressively developing a more positive disposition toward what was happening and subsequently cooperated with instructions.

Consequently, G-d projected the **וַיִּדְעֶתְכֶם** stage to the enlightenment associated with the Sinai experience of His Revelation, which occurred between the Exodus and entering the land. The proclamation informs us that with Revelation, which occurs together with His taking the Israelites as His people and becoming their G-d, all attitudes will change. Israel will then clearly realize that it was His intervention at work from the initial moment. This parallels Hashem's statement to Moshe at the Burning Bush, "And this shall be for you the sign that I sent you: When you bring the people forth from Egypt you [plural] will worship G-d on this mountain" (3:12). Just as in that context G-d

told Moshe that a sign (to persuade the people that He sent him) was not immediately available, but must await the experience on Mount Sinai, here, too, וַיִּדְעֶתְם would be referring to that transcendent event scheduled to take place in the near future.

Although the וַיִּדְעֶתְם clause nominally refers to something Israel is to do, it does not interrupt the rushing flow of G-d's actions, as it connotes His assurance to the Israelites that they will soon understand, as if to say He will also make them understand. That the number of successive verbal phrases in this part of the message is eight – וְהוֹצֵאתִי, וְהִצַּלְתִּי, וְנָתַתִּי, וַיִּדְעֶתְם, וְהִיִּיתִי, וְלִקְהֹלְתִּי, וְנִגְאֲלֹתִי, וְהִצַּלְתִּי – is probably a literary manifestation of the Covenantal association of what is transpiring. (See our study *On Number Symbolism in the Torah From the Work of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon.*)

#### 4. On Structure

The passage's key phrase *Ani Hashem* is attested four times in this proclamation, each strategically located. This phrase comprises:

1. G-d's first two words (v. 2).
2. His central two words (v. 6), which are also the first two words of the message Moshe is to relate to Israel.
3. The central two words of the segment directed to Israel (v. 7).
4. His last two words (v. 8). In this unique passage wherein G-d reveals Himself as *Ani Hashem*, that phrase is clearly the locus of an intended literary pattern.

This passage also contains a chiasmus that emphasizes the unity of the message and its key point, an ABCD before the

center followed by dcba after the center (see Nehama Leibowitz *Iyunim Besefer Shemot*, p. 87), as follows:

A - Ani Y-H-V-H

B - reference to the patriarchs

C - commitment to grant the land

D - the oppression

Center - Ani Y-H-V-H

d - redemption from the oppression

c - fulfillment of the oath to grant the land

b - reference to the patriarchs

a - Ani Y-H-V-H

Another structural feature of this passage involves precise word count, employing methodology demonstrated in many cases by Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon, on an aspect of whose pioneering work these insights are based. Although in straightforward explication of the Five Books of the Torah most scholars have rejected the validity of interpretations based on the sum of a word's (or phrase's) Hebrew letters' numerical equivalents (*gematria*), the following appears legitimate and compelling.

The *gematria* of Y-H-V-H is twenty-six. It and its multiple, fifty-two, appear to be deeply embedded in the structure of this proclamation as well as in that of a coordinate passage later in Exodus that is a thematic complement to this one. The second segment of our passage comprises fifty-two words. The key two-word phrase "*Ani Hashem*" comprises its first two words, its last two words and its two middle words. Hence, the intervals from the first Y-H-V-H to the second and from the second to the third, are consequently each exactly twenty-six words.

In the first segment, the number of words that the Deity said to Moshe up until, but not counting, the first word that

Moshe is to repeat to Israel, is fifty. (This excludes the six narrative introductory words, consistent with the system we often find in such matters.) The first two words are “*Ani Hashem*.” Counting from that first word “*Ani*,” the fifty-first and fifty-second words are “*Ani Hashem*” just as was the case in the second segment. However, the words G-d spoke to Moshe himself cannot be read totally as a separate segment from the words He asked Moshe to transmit to Israel, since the last words of the first segment are לָכֵן אָמַר לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (“Therefore say to the Children of Israel”). To provide the object of the verb to complete the clause the next two words “*Ani Hashem*” must be joined to the previous; a proper reading would call for a pause only after reciting those two words. Accordingly, in a way, the first segment would be read as comprising fifty-two words.

It appears likely that the “*Ani Hashem*” words at the center of G-d’s entire statement, as they complete the connecting clause at the conclusion of Segment A, were intended to do double service and be counted with both segments. In a most sophisticated manner, G-d’s 102-word statement appears to be considered to contain two segments of fifty-two words each or a total of 104 words, or four times twenty-six. It is likely that this was intended to correspond to the four attestations of “*Ani Hashem*” in the passage. (There is a fifth attestation of Hashem in the passage (v. 3), without “*Ani*,” which is not directly part of the positive message being transmitted here. Its purpose is to point out that Y-H-V-H was not the name known to the patriarchs. Thus, it is not included in the “*Ani Hashem*” pattern of this passage. However, it appears that it is included in another literary “system” as we shall soon point out.)

As we point out in our study on *Shirat Hayam* (Ex. 15), the first stanza of the Song at the Sea (vv 1-11) is thematically complementary to our Exodus 6 passage. When Israel

intones, “Y-H-V-H is His name” (15:3), it recalls, “Tell Israel that I am Y-H-V-H” (6:6), Hashem’s proclamation of His name that the Israelites were too crushed to be attentive to when Moshe related it to them.

That first stanza of the Song, beginning with its first word “*Ashira*” (excluding the nine introductory words of superscription) and concluding with verse 11, contains 102 words and subdivides into two parts of fifty and fifty-two words respectively, just as G-d’s proclamation does in our passage. The first strophe of that stanza, concluding with “Y-H-V-H is His name” (v. 3), appropriately comprises twenty-six words. In addition, in the Song’s second stanza, the final two strophes combined (vv 14-18), concluding with the verse relevant to our theme, “Y-H-V-H will reign for ever and ever,” contain fifty-two words.

This is an example of an extraordinary feature of prophetic literature. Finely-nuanced and sublimely written literary passages may contain overlapping patterns, meeting complex and exacting specifications, addressed to the most conscientious and attentive reader, without being stilted or reading as contrived. Indeed, such writing may be recognized as superb literature independently of any knowledge of the presence of internal patterns and subtle connections to other passages.

The two central figures who led G-d’s previous new initiatives in the world were Noah and Abraham. Noah was the tenth generation from creation and Abraham was the twentieth. Moshe, who leads a third new initiative that incorporates *Hashem*’s name, is the twenty-sixth generation from creation, consistent with the *gematria* of His name.

## 5. Further Research

The following is based on insights and methodology of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon as expanded and applied in subsequent research, primarily that of Ronald Benun.

The key term of G-d's proclamation "*Ani Hashem*," so explicitly associated with the Covenant in our passage, is attested exactly eighty times in the Torah. This links the phrase with the Covenant in another manner, since the number eight, as well as its decimal multiples, are Covenant signifiers. In Leviticus 19, a chapter closely linked in content to the Decalogue and the Covenant (see our Lev. 19 study), "*Ani Hashem*" without "*Elokekhem*" attached appears exactly eight times while "*Ani Hashem Elokekhem*" also appears eight times.

There are a number of remarkable number phenomena associated with our passage and the twenty-six *gematria* together with its multiples. When we count the *Hashem* of the first "*Ani Hashem*" of our passage (Ex. 6:2) as number one and count forward all the attestations of the Tetragrammaton (when it appears in the pure form, Y-H-V-H, without a prefix), the last one in *Nebiim Rishonim* (The Early Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel 1 and 2 and Kings 1 and 2) is exactly number 2600. (Perhaps the manner this should be viewed - in an approach well demonstrated by Rabbi Sassoon - is that when counting back from the end of *Nebiim Rishonim*, our passage's first occurrence of the *Tetragramaton* is number 2600.)

When we count the very next *Hashem* of our passage as number one (Ex. 6:3) - the one that is part of G-d's statement that He did not reveal His name to the patriarchs - and count forward the attestations of Y-H-V-H (again, only when appearing without prefixes) through the end of the Five Books of the Torah, the total is again a multiple of

twenty-six, albeit not a decimal multiple, but exactly 26 x 52, or 1352.

**Concerning verses:** Beginning from the Exodus 6:3 verse, the number of verses to the end of the Torah in which the Tetragrammaton appears in the pure form is 26 x 45 or 1170. Also beginning from Exodus 6:3, the number of verses in which it appears in the pure form through the end of *Nebiim Rishonim* is 26 x 84 or 2184. The total number of verses in the Five Books from beginning to end in which *Hashem* appears in the pure form is 26 x 51 or 1326. The total of this category for Torah plus *Nebiim Rishonim* is 26 x 90 or 2340.

Beginning from Ex. 6:3, the number of verses in which Y-H-V-H including prefixes is attested through the end of *Nebiim Rishonim* is 26 x 96 or 2496. Again including prefixes, the total attestations in the Five Books is 26 x 70, or 1820.

This is all there in front of the reader. Although such research requires patience and diligence, it is based on straightforward reading without skipping, without varying the process, without manipulation in any way, using the traditional Masoretic text and simply counting one attestation after the other! Whatever the full meaning of all this striking, apparently purposeful interconnectedness awaits further research. It surely points to the great care that had been taken through the centuries in the transmittal of the authoritative text of the Torah and *Nebiim* and the extraordinary degree of accuracy in the traditional text, despite the existence of supposedly alternate versions and many variants. It supports the view that the composition of Scripture is of a different order than that of other writing. It also indicates that the books of the prophets besides the Five Books are directly linked with the prophecy of the Five

Books and that in some ways Torah and *Nebiim Rishonim* should be viewed as an integrated entity – כְּלָם מְרוּעָה אֶחָד נִתְּנָה.

## Endnotes

\* There is as yet no consensus as to the meaning of the word *sh-d-y*, often rendered “Almighty.” Many have thought that it is related to the Akkadian word for mountain, the divine appellation possibly meaning the high or mighty G-d. Others presume an association with fertility (see Gen. 17) while some relate it to the Hebrew word for “breasts.” From this verse on, it is no longer deployed in Scripture except in poetic contexts.

\*\* The Sages associate the Passover *seder* ritual of four cups of wine with the first four clauses of this series, whereby each cup of wine celebrates another phase of G-d’s redemption of the Israelites and taking them as His people (JT Pes. 10:1).

# The Abbreviated Genealogy<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Moshe Shamah

## 1. General Remarks

The second half of Exodus 6 contains a curtailed genealogical table that furnishes details regarding the descendants of Reuben, Shimon and Levi, the three eldest sons of Yaaqob. In a departure from standard genealogical tables it provides information about its individuals in a most uneven manner. Of course Exodus 6 was not a natural location for a genealogy, in the midst of a narrative, but the partial genealogy appearing at this point serves an important purpose. The primary interest here was in Moshe and Aharon, and once their lineage and several other relevant details were registered there was no purpose in continuing. As fuller family background for Moshe and Aharon, central protagonists of the narrative, was called for, more particulars were provided about their tribe, their direct forbears and important personages of their tribe than about the others.

By beginning with Reuben, Levi was placed in perspective (once again pointing to the reversal of primogeniture). In citing portions of what might have been a large national genealogical table, despite “skimming” through the first two tribes and concluding after Levi, Moshe and Aharon’s lineage is more fully appreciated and legitimated (a critical concern as we shall soon discuss).

The primary purpose of this genealogy appears to have been achieved after it listed the basic details of Aharon and Moshe. However, with the benefit of hindsight at the time of its writing, knowing who played significant roles in the

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<sup>1</sup> This article is from Rabbi Shamah’s study on *Parashat Va’era*, Part II, available online at [www.judaic.org](http://www.judaic.org).

coming events of the Torah, the narrative provided pedigree details about several other Levite individuals. Thus, it includes information about Aharon's four sons, Qorah's sons (who do not die with their father, Num. 26:11) and the grandson of Aharon, Pinehas, the son of Eleazar. Foreshadowing the latter's important accomplishment and ascension to priestly prominence, his pedigree is more fully elaborated with details included as to his maternal grandfather as well as to his paternal grandmother's father.

No mention is made of Moshe's sons, whose births are recorded elsewhere in the Book of Exodus. One may wonder: since his sons did not become prominent, did the Torah here pass over them to make the historic point that a man's greatness did not bring with it the securing of positions of eminence for his sons? \*

The need to provide the pedigree of Moshe and Aharon may explain the structure of the genealogy, but there remains a question. Why was it placed exactly here, after Moshe and Aharon had already been interacting with Israel and Pharaoh and not at the point that they presented themselves to Israel or to Pharaoh (towards the end of Chapter 4 or the beginning of Chapter 5)? And why, in the two verses attached to the end of the genealogical table (Ex. 6:26-27), is there so much clustered repetition in different ways emphasizing the identities of Moshe and Aharon, a unique phenomenon in Tanakh: הוּא אַהֲרֹן וּמֹשֶׁה (“It is he Aharon and Moshe that Hashem spoke to”); הֵם הַמְדַבְּרִים אֶל פַּרְעֹה (“it is they who spoke to Pharaoh”); הוּא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן (“it is he, Moshe and Aharon”)? It is written as if there is keen interest in assuring that these details, more than others, never be forgotten and that, more than with other data, there should be no possibility that anyone would ever make a mistake.

## 2. Rabbi S. R. Hirsch's Explanation

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (Commentary on *Shemot*) pointed out that the genealogical table is set exactly at the spot that the account of the supernatural wonders and successes begin. In ancient times an awed public often attributed divinity to human beings who seemed to have dominion over nature, and there would have been a great temptation to deify Moshe and Aharon, if not during life then after death. This would be a great violation of a cardinal principle of the Torah. It is precisely at this juncture that there was a critical need to assert and reassert in various ways that Moshe and Aharon were mortal human beings. The point was thus made from all angles that they are like all humans. They were part of a family tree, born of father and mother, with uncles, aunts and cousins, relations known to the contemporary public. Their ancestors also were born, lived a certain number of years and died, and they likewise were part of a larger population group. Once Moshe and Aharon's human background was established and confirmed, and certain linked data were furnished, there was no need to continue with the genealogy.

We may support this view with what otherwise appears to be an anomalous feature of the text. The genealogical table interrupts the narrative after the brief accounts that relate of G-d instructing Moshe to go to Pharaoh, Moshe expressing reluctance, followed by G-d speaking to Moshe and Aharon and formally "commands them to the Children of Israel and to Pharaoh the king of Egypt to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt" (vv 10-13). These particulars are repeated immediately after the genealogical table, with slight, albeit significant, variations in both G-d's opening statement and Moshe's reply, but also with a detailed response from G-d attached. In *peshat* interpretation, despite the variations, the second account "is exactly the one mentioned earlier... but because the subject was interrupted to provide their

pedigree the text repeated it to begin again with it... as a man would say to his friend ‘let’s return to the subject’” (Rashi, on 6:29-30; also see Rashbam, Ibn Ezra). The text indicates the repetition by introducing the later account with, “And it was on the day that Hashem spoke to Moshe in the land of Egypt” (v. 28), referring back to those instructions.

Regarding variations, as Ibn Ezra on occasion states, G-d’s prophecy should be thought of as communicated in conceptual terms, not limited to a particular literary formulation; it contains more than can be compressed into finite words. The prophet, as recipient or narrator formulating the conceptual message into words, in his prophetic capacity, may one time highlight one aspect, the next time another, varying the word usage. Going beyond Ibn Ezra, based on compelling research, we assume that there are subtle reasons, part of the prophetic process, that explain why the literary formulations are different even when referring to the identical experience.

In the resumptive account there are several significant additions that awaited the genealogical table before being incorporated into the text. G-d now introduces His instructions for Moshe to speak to Pharaoh with “*Ani Hashem*” (6:29), a detail that has no parallel in the first formulation. It is a statement implying His supremacy and His intent to reveal His wondrous power, as will be explicitly elaborated in the continuation of His response (7:5).\*\*

After repeating that Moshe expressed his reservations, G-d’s response was recorded at length, a matter not known from the earlier formulation to which it corresponds. There, His response was not quoted or paraphrased at all; it had merely been described in the third person narrative informing us in a general way that He had spoken to Moshe

and Aharon, וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן, and commanded them to get on with their mission, וַיִּצְוֶם אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶל פְּרַעֲהַ (6:13). Those two back-to-back clauses constitute a most unusual construction. We are surprised that we are not told the words G-d spoke as is the standard in the many other cases of וַיִּדְבֹר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה. It is as if there was a reluctance to record the details of G-d's response at that point and His words were skipped over.

In the resumption it is very different. G-d says to Moshe וַיִּרְאֵה נְתַתִּיךָ אֱלֹהִים לְפַרְעֹה וְאַהֲרֹן אַחֲיֶיךָ יִהְיֶה נְבִיאֶךָ – “See, I have appointed you as a god for Pharaoh, and Aharon your brother will be your prophet” (7:1). G-d goes on to speak about the numerous great wonders He is imminently going to perform in Egypt in order that the Egyptians will know that “*Ani Hashem.*” It is this response to Moshe (just before the plagues begin) that prompted insertion of the genealogy and explains its location exactly at the spot where it is, an insertion designed to counter the fear that Moshe might be deified. The passage depicts Moshe as a god to Pharaoh, who was himself perceived as a god! With the many coming wonders that are alluded to, Moshe would surely be seen as Pharaoh's superior and might accordingly be thought of as a god.

Thus, although the readers of the previous chapters of Exodus are aware of Moshe's human birth, the structure of the present narrative segment reflects (and transmits to us) the concern that then existed with deification. Until the genealogy was recorded and Moshe's humanness established, the fullness of G-d's response to Moshe was withheld in the text, reflecting the lesson that was being transmitted.

### 3. Number Symbolism Based on Rabbi Sassoon's Insights

In Exodus 6 and 7, a central objective in the message to Israel as well as in the goal for Egypt is to get to know “*Ani Hashem*,” each nation, of course, in its distinctive manner. Israel’s enlightenment is associated with its Covenant with G-d, while Egypt’s is to reject idolatry and promote religious truth. In our previous study we have demonstrated a patterned presence of the *gematria* of Hashem’s Tetragrammaton, the number twenty-six, within the structure of the celebratory passage in which He reveals His name to Moshe and instructs him to transmit it to Israel. We also pointed out that Moshe’s generation was the twenty-sixth from Creation. It is also the case that the number twenty-six, through its multiples, is incorporated in the genealogy at the end of Exodus 6, as we shall soon see.

The symbolism of seven and its multiples, especially its decimal multiple of seventy, is also present in the genealogy. It is well established that in the ancient Near East seven and its multiples were markers of completion and perfection. Here, they apparently represent religious attainment of the highest rank in the “old order,” that which preceded the Covenant symbolized by eight and its multiples. In addition, the symbolism of thirteen and its multiple one hundred thirty, associated with the concept of *Hashem Ehad* (one G-d), is also attested in this passage. (As Rabbi Sassoon explained, thirteen was used to refer to matters connected to the concept of one G-d since it is the *gematria* of  $\tau\text{-}\eta\text{-}\alpha$ . Such usage is attested throughout the Torah. See our study *On Number Symbolism in the Torah From the Work of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon.*)

The genealogy represents the transition of what had been occurring through recent generations from the sons of Yaaqob onward. The three patriarchs are not included in

this section. To some extent, their immense achievements were as individuals, and although they had established a potential for the future, they were now viewed as part of history. This genealogy is concerned with their offspring. The forebears of Moshe beginning with Levy, as indicated by the number of years they lived, were men of stature, preparing the path for him and the forward motion he leads, but, nonetheless, were within the realm of “seven,” not having entered the new national covenant symbolized by “eight” and “eighty.”

Most of the following is from Ronald Benun’s applications of Rabbi Sassoon’s guidelines.

The total number of words in the genealogical passage, from *setumah* to *setumah* (Ex. 6:14-28) is 182, 7 x 26. The number of words for the Reuben and Shimon portion is 28, 7 x 4, while from the introduction of Levi to the end of the passage (which is all within the realm of Levi) is 154, 7 x 22. Twenty-eight individuals are mentioned in the genealogy. The total number of years of Levi is 137, or 130 + 7. Moshe’s father Amram’s years are also 137, while those of his grandfather, Qehat, are 133, 7 x 19.

Aharon, instrumental in the transition from the old order of “seven” to the new Covenant of “eight,” marries Elisheba, or “My G-d is seven.” (His connection to the old order was stronger than Moshe’s, who’s wife was the daughter of the priest of Midian “who had seven daughters.”) Elisheba’s father is Aminadab, while her two first sons were termed *Nadab* and *Abihu* (literally: “he is my father”), both obviously named after her father. Eventually, the two of them offer “strange fire” in the sanctuary on the “Eighth Day” and die. It was the day that the Covenant was to reach the pinnacle of acceptance. Their case may imply that they could not separate themselves from the old order when the

new order replaced it, a particularly grievous matter in the case of the priests.

Aharon's name appears as word number 80 and word number 130 in the genealogy. In the passage that follows the resumption of the narrative (at the beginning of chapter 7), in which he is designated as Moshe's "prophet," his name appears as word number 77 (v. 6) and word number 88 (v.7).

The opposition to Moshe through the years comes in great part from those who insisted on remaining committed to the "old" system after the nation had been bidden to accept the Lawgiving and the Covenant, symbolized by "eight" and "eighty." The leader of a major rebellion against Moshe was Qorah, obviously a distinguished individual. The number of deaths associated with the secondary effects of his rebellion, that is, aside from the deaths of the rebels themselves, was 14,700 (Num. 17:14), a distinctive multiple of seven. In our genealogy, Qorah's name and that of his father, Yishar, are in the eminent positions of being exactly the two central words of the passage – Yishar being word number 91 (7 x 13) and Qorah word number 92, or number 91 counting from the end – indicating their leadership positions within the tribe of Levi, a discussion for another occasion.

G-d's response to Moshe (Ex. 7:1-5), instructing him concerning the upcoming interaction with Pharaoh and His goals for the Egyptians, that "Egypt shall know that I am Hashem" ("וַיִּדְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי אֲנִי ה'", v. 5), comprises exactly seventy words (counting only G-d's words, excluding the four-word superscription at the beginning of 7:1). This aspect of G-d's revelation is articulated strictly from the standpoint of His input toward Egypt, specifically apart of His Covenant with Israel. It symbolizes religious stature and completion for Egypt.

The attached verses (7:6-7) provide a statement of Moshe and Aharon's faithful fulfillment of their charge together with information concerning their ages when they were speaking to Pharaoh. Moshe was eighty years of age (symbolizing the Covenant in its fullness) while Aharon, the intermediary to Egypt, was eighty-three years of age (within the sphere of "eighty," but possibly to be understood as seventy plus thirteen).

This barely touches the tip of the iceberg. As Rabbi Sassoon often pointed out, enormous work must be done to comprehend what the prophecy of the Torah connotes beneath the surface.

### **Endnotes**

\* The genealogy informs that Amram, son of Qehat, son of Levi, married Yochebed, his paternal aunt, who bore him Aharon and Moshe. Such a relationship is later forbidden by the Torah, included with the incest laws (Lev. 18:12; 20:19), but before the Lawgiving it was permitted. This is similar to the cases with Abraham, who stated he married his sister from his father (Gen. 20:12) and Yaaqob who married two sisters. It is important to note that there is no inhering blemish or shortcoming associated with the prohibition that might exist independently of the law. Relationships, actions or items that are prohibited are prohibited only to the extent that the law so declares them.

\*\* We must again point out that those who established the chapter divisions widely used in our printed Bibles did not always grasp the subject matter well. In our case they did not recognize the cohesiveness between the end of Chapter 6 (the resumption) and the beginning of Chapter 7 (Hashem's response).

# Keeping the “Big Picture” in Mind<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

**Value: Keeping the “big picture” in mind.** Life is full of details. Precise attention to life’s details is necessary for accomplishing anything. Yet, attention to details and the routine developed to accomplish these details might lead to losing sight of the “big picture”—your goals and the purpose of your life’s work. Periodically evaluating whether your routine and details are leading to your goals is a practice that can help ensure the achievement of your goals.

**Background:** Moshe’s first attempt at saving Bne Yisrael from their oppressive slavery ended in a result worse than failure—Bne Yisrael’s situation became worse. After a heated confrontation with the furious people of Israel, Moshe complained to God, asking why He had harmed the people by sending him. God answered that Moshe will see what He will do to Pharaoh. Our parasha begins with a continuation of this speech. God explained that there would be a new revelation of His nature. God then gave Moshe a new message to convey to Israel.

**Text: Shemot 6:2-9 (NJPS)**

God spoke to Moses and said to him. “I am Hashem. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name Hashem. I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. I have now heard the moaning of the Israelites because the Egyptians are holding them in bondage, and I have remembered My

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<sup>1</sup> From Rabbi Ralph Tawil’s Shabbat Table Talks for Parashat Va’era, available online at [www.judaic.org](http://www.judaic.org).

covenant. Say, therefore, to the Israelite people: I am Hashem. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. And you shall know that I, Hashem, am your God who freed you from the labors of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession. I am Hashem.

But when Moshe told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moshe, from shortness of breath and hard labor.

**Analysis:** Hashem's prophecy to Israel contains the most concise statement of Israel's goals for the next stage of its existence. Yet, Israel ignored Hashem's words. The people were too busy with their hard work. Even though Moshe's words promised deliverance from their work, Israel chose to disregard the goal, and keep working.

Occasionally, we are so caught up in what we are doing that we forget to evaluate the big picture of our goals. We focus on routine triumphs over realizing our goals. Concern with details replaces striving for our destiny. When we suspect this is happening we must take a step back and evaluate whether what we are so busy with is really fulfilling all of our ambitions.

**Discussion:** After reading the section to your Shabbat table, ask: Why do you think that Israel kept on working? Didn't Moshe just tell them that Hashem was about to save them from working for the Egyptians? (Your family might answer that Israel did not believe Moshe would succeed. The verse tells us the answer; they were too impatient and too busy working.)

Does it make sense to be too busy working as someone else's slave when you soon will be redeemed?

What do you think is more important to `Am Yisrael, to continue building cities for Pharaoh or to get the Torah and go to Israel? (Obviously the latter choice.) Why?

Sometimes we get so busy with the things that we are doing that we forget why we are doing them and what we should be doing. We can become so busy in getting somewhere and forget why we were going in the first place.

**Some examples:**

**In school:** Sometimes we are so busy getting grades and doing homework that we forget that school is about thinking, being creative, learning, and loving to learn. Some people are so concerned with making the grade that they even forget the very important social aspects of school.

**In family:** Concern with the details of making a living and accomplishing the many things that must be accomplished in running the family, that we forget to make time for working on the relationships—the crux of what family is all about.

**In business:** We can get so used to producing our item that we do not stop to ask whether the item should be produced at all.

**In community:** What are we trying to achieve as a community? What are our goals, are we coming close to achieving them? Do we need goals at all or should we just keep on going, just trying to survive? What does “survive” mean—physical, spiritual, cultural survival?

**In Israel:** We are so caught up with dealing with our survival that we forget to ask what it is that we are meant to accomplish as a people. Is the purpose of having a state just to have a state?

**Danger signs:** Here are some examples of when to suspect that we are ignoring something that we should be doing because of concern with other, less important things:

- When you say about too many things, “I would like to do it, but I do not have the time.”
- When the details of what you are doing are all in order, but you are still not succeeding.

**What to do:**

Ask your family what can be done to rectify this situation.

- Articulate clear goals
- Take time off to evaluate whether what you are doing leads to your goals.

# Haftarat Va'era: The Redemption from Egypt (Yehezkel 28:25 – 29:21)<sup>1</sup>

Rabbi Yehuda Shaviv

## 1. A Parasha of Redemption

We find that the haftarah is divided into three parts: the first (Ez. 28:25-26) may be an independent unit or it may be a continuation of the prophecy about Tzidon, but either way it is not directly connected to the pesukim which follow. The central part (Ez. 29:1-15) is the prophecy concerning Egypt, and the last part is a separate prophecy, but also related to Egypt; its subject is the repayment for the actions of Nebuchadnetzar in Tzor. The selection of a prophecy dealing with Egypt and the plagues as the haftara for Parashat Va'era is obvious, but we are left with the question of why the first two pesukim were also included, since they do not appear to be in any way connected with Egypt.

It seems that these two pesukim about the redemption of Israel are included in order to draw our attention to the fact that Parashat Va'era is, first and foremost, a parasha about redemption. The awesome and frightening plagues are no more than tools that spur the process on. Indeed, our parasha – more than any other – depicts the redemption as it unfolds: “And I shall also uphold My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan... For I have also heard the cry of Bne Yisrael... and I have remembered My covenant... And I shall take you out from under the burden of Egypt, and I shall deliver you from their servitude and I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm... and I shall take you to Me for a people, and I shall be your God, and you will know that I am the Lord your God who takes you out from

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<sup>1</sup> Certain transliterations were modified to our American Sephardic pronunciation.

under the burdens of Egypt... and I shall bring you to the land... and I shall give it to you as a heritage...” (Ex. 6:4-8).

The haftarah, which opens with the redemption of Israel and concludes with the redemption of Israel (“On that day I shall make the horn of the house of Israel sprout forth...”, Ez. 29:21) teaches us that this redemption is the purpose of all these events. But there is a difference between the two redemptions. The redemption from Egypt involved getting the entire nation out of one country of exile, while the future redemption will require the gathering of the house of Israel “from the NATIONS among which they were scattered.” But even if the exile and dispersion have extended far and wide, the first redemption will always serve as the model for future redemption: just as in the first instance God brought judgment upon their oppressors, so too in the future “I shall execute judgment upon all those that disdain them around them.” (Ez. 28:26)

## **2. The Purpose of Redemption**

While the redemption from Egypt serves to teach us about future redemption, the reverse is also true. Just as the purpose of the future redemption is the sanctification of God in the world – “And I shall be sanctified in them in the eyes of the nations” – so too the purpose of the redemption from Egypt was likewise, that God would thereby be sanctified in the eyes of the nations in general, and in the eyes of the Egyptians in particular. Indeed, this idea is given explicit expression in the parasha just before the plague of hail: “Indeed it is for this purpose that I have raised you up, in order that you may show My power, and in order that My name be proclaimed throughout the land” (Ex. 9:16). Even prior to this Moshe is told, “And Egypt shall know that I am God, when I stretch My hand out over Egypt” (Ex. 7:5). Hence the plagues are not just a vehicle to speed up the

departure of Israel from Egypt. They have a purpose in their own right, a purpose similar to that of the redemption itself: to make God's name known in the world, and to demonstrate His power to the Egyptians and the other nations. This purpose is expressed several times in the haftarah: in the beginning with regard to the nations in general, and further on with regard to Egypt in particular.

### **3. The Egyptians Shall Know**

What unique feature characterizes the Egyptians among all the other nations, such that this message is directed primarily towards them? The pesukim of the prophecy explain: "So says God... Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great crocodile that lies within his streams, who has said, 'My river is mine and I have made it for myself'" (Ez. 29:3). Pharaoh's audacious pride reaches destructive proportions when he compares himself to the Omnipotent Creator. He believes himself independent of any outside heavenly entity; his needs are continually taken care of, and he can entertain himself with thoughts of his own exclusive rule, with all subservient to him.

This theme does not appear in the parasha, but the words of the haftarah may explain Pharaoh's refusal to follow God's command to let the nation go. His stubbornness is easier to understand if we see the situation as a battle between the Supreme God and someone who fancies himself as a god.

In addition, what applies to Pharaoh in his personal capacity applies equally to the Egyptians as a nation, for they seem to suffer collectively from the same illusion of grandeur as their king: "...Set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt and prophesy against him and against all of Egypt" (Ez. 29:2). Therefore it is important to make all of Egypt recognize God: "And all the inhabitants of Egypt shall

know that I am God” (Ez. 29:6); “And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste, and they shall know that I am God” (Ez. 29:9). Indeed, our prophecy closes with the words, “And they shall know that I am the Lord God.”

#### **4. Completion of the Redemption from Egypt**

The narrative in *Sefer Shemot* indicates that with Israel’s departure from Egypt, the Egyptian exile came to an end. This is certainly true of the physical exile, but there is some doubt as to whether it applies to their psychological exile as well.

Hundreds of years of harsh and bitter labor turned the nation of Israel not only into laborers, but into slaves – completely dependent on Egypt and the Egyptians. This dependence was deeply rooted in the national psyche, such that even many years after the exodus its negative consequences were still recognizable. Even when they became a sovereign entity in their own land, they turned to Egypt at the first sign of any external threat, seeking the patronage and assistance of their former taskmaster.

It is most likely that for this very reason, the Torah warns us not to return to Egypt - and not to collect too many horses for the imperial chariots, which would provide an excuse to go back there. In order for there to be a psychological break with Egypt, there must first be a physical break, and in the course of time the complete break will bring about the completion of the redemption. But it is only when Egypt becomes “desolation and waste” (Ez. 29:9) and “desolate in the midst of waste lands, and her cities desolate among ruined cities” (Ez. 29:12), that everyone will know and recognize that Egypt is nothing but a broken reed, “and it shall no longer be a haven for the house of Israel, a remembrance to their sin when they shall turn after them;

and they shall know that I am God...” (Ez. 29:16). At that time, the redemption from Egypt will be complete – the redemption whose plan is set out in *Parashat Va’era*.

## **5. Redemption from Egypt – the Significance of Redemption**

This concept is generally understood as referring to the redemption of Israel from Egyptian slavery, but in Yehezkel’s prophecy, mention is also made of the future redemption OF Egypt. After the land of Egypt is completely laid waste and her cities destroyed, and after “I will scatter Egypt among the nations and will disperse them throughout the lands,” the era of redemption for Egypt herself will arrive: “For so says God... at the end of forty years I will gather Egypt from the nations where they were scattered. And I shall bring back the captivity of Egypt and I shall return them to the land of Patros, into the land of their origin” (Ez. 29:12-14). Just as Bne Yisrael are redeemed, i.e. that they return to their land after forty years, so shall the Egyptians return and rebuild Egypt. This is the redemption of Egypt. What is the nature of the renewed Egyptian kingdom? “And they shall be there an abject kingdom. It shall be the most abject of the kingdoms, and it shall not exalt itself any more over the nations, for I shall diminish them so they shall no longer rule over the nations” (Ez. 29:14-15). How can this “abject kingdom” be considered “redeemed”? A profound and important principle of redemption is to be learned here. Redemption for a nation means bringing that nation to its proper proportions. An enslaved nation requires redemption, but the nation which enslaves them is also in a state of “exile.” It is not normal or natural to be an oppressor, to bind others against their will. The return of Egypt teaches us about the significance of redemption: redemption means the return to proper and natural proportions, no more and no less.

## **6. Thereafter They Shall Leave With Great Bounty**

It remains for us to discover why the last portion of the haftarah was included – the portion dealing with the future payment to Nebuchadnetzar king of Babylon. In and of itself, this portion is surprising: since Nebuchadnetzar received no reward from Tzor for the work he performed there, he is to receive a reward from Egypt. But what does Egypt have to do with Tzor? Furthermore, why should he receive any reward at all, considering that he did what he did on his own initiative and for his own profit rather than for the good of Tzor?

We can never fathom the ways of Divine Providence and the way in which events unfold and arrange themselves in this world. But one lesson does arise from this prophecy: labor does not remain uncompensated. Sometimes the payment is direct and obvious, other times it is indirect and hidden – but always there is compensation for labor.

And from here we understand the reward concerning which Bne Yisrael are commanded in Egypt. For if reward is given even for work performed voluntarily, for one's own gain – like that of Nebuchadnetzar – then how much more appropriate is compensation for labor performed against the will of the laborer and in the interests of his employer rather than for his own gain. Therefore, before leaving Egypt, Bne Yisrael must ask their Egyptian neighbors for vessels of silver and gold, and this serves as some repayment for their prolonged servitude in Egypt. This is extremely significant, for complete redemption also includes an element of justice being performed, and so long as no payment has been made for labor – not even a symbolic compensation – justice has not been done.

The awarding of the Egyptian bounty to Nebuchadnetzar as reward for his labor in Tzor may be seen as the closing of a circle that started with the bitter and difficult servitude of Bne Yisrael in Egypt. Despite the great bounty with which Bne Yisrael left Egypt, their servitude had not yet been compensated in full, and Egypt was still indebted to them. Now Nebuchadnetzar acts, as it were, as God's emissary to be a staff of wrath among the rebellious nations, to demand repayment by force. And from where? From the nation which still has an outstanding debt – Egypt.