

Shavua Tov

Weekly Parsha

A Rood Awakening! Torah Commentary
By Glenn McWilliams

Torah Portion: *Va'era* וַאֲרָא “And He appeared”

**I revealed Myself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*),
and did not allow them to know Me by My name YHVH**

Va'era el-Avraham el-Yitschak ve'el-Ya'akov be'El Shaday
ushmi Adonay lo nodati lahem

Scripture for study: *Shemot* (Exodus) 6:2 – 9:35

From a very human perspective, the events recorded in last week's Torah portion¹ end very poorly. Moses, the chosen deliverer, returns to Egypt declaring the good news that the Eternal One has seen the affliction of the children of Israel, has heard their cries, and knows their suffering. Moses, Aaron and the elders of Israel confront Pharaoh with Elohim's demand, “Let My people go!” But instead of being filled with the fear of Elohim, Pharaoh boldly declares,

“Who is YHWH, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not YHWH, neither will I let Israel go.” (Exodus 5:2)

Instead of freedom, the children of Israel are given an even harsher punishment. Now they will have to make the same tally of bricks while collecting their own straw and stubble.² This is not the response that Moses and the children of Israel were hoping for. At the conclusion of last week's portion Moses is again standing before YHWH, questioning the wisdom of the Holy One.

“And Moses returned unto YHWH, and said, Master, wherefore hast Thou so evil entreated this people? Why is it that Thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast Thou delivered Thy people at all.” (Exodus 5:22-23)

We should note the humility with which Moses expresses his complaint. While it may first appear that Moses is blaming YHWH for the “evil” that has befallen the children of Israel, we should note that Moses defines the “evil” as being himself. In other words, Moses is blaming

the failure of this encounter with Pharaoh upon his own weaknesses and shortcomings. YHWH responds to Moses' bewilderment by reminding Moses that He is an Elohim of His word.

"Then YHWH said unto Moses, Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh: for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land." (Exodus 6:1)

Our portion this week begins with the continuation of this dialogue between Moses and YHWH. The Holy One now explains to Moses why things went contrary to everyone's expectation. While the children of Israel are familiar with the name YHWH, the name by which Moses came to the children of Israel and to Pharaoh, they have not yet experienced this attribute and therefore do not know what to expect from the Elohim of this name. The Holy One calls upon Moses to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt to Mount Sinai.

"Now therefore, behold, the cry of the children of Israel is come unto Me: and I have also seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them. Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt. And Moses said unto Elohim, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? And He said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve Elohim upon this mountain." (Exodus 3:9-12)

Moses asks the Holy One for some token or sign by which he can establish the credibility of this calling with the children of Israel.

"And Moses said unto Elohim, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The Elohim of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them? (Exodus 3:13)

The Holy One responds to Moses' request by revealing His name to him.

"And Elohim said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And Elohim said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, YHWH ELOHIM of your fathers, the Elohim of Abraham, the Elohim of Isaac, and the Elohim of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is My name for ever, and this is My memorial name unto all generations." (Exodus 3:14-15)

It must be clear that the name YHWH (Yud, Hey, Vav, Hey) is not a completely unfamiliar name for the Holy One. This memorial name has been known since the days of Seth and Enos.

"And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of YHWH." (Genesis 4:26)

While it is clear that men know the name of YHWH, still the attribute of faithfulness that is revealed by this name has not yet been experienced by the children of Israel. And so it is that our portion begins with the revelation of this attribute of YHWH.

YHWH responds to Moses' questioning with a mild rebuke and a thorough explanation.

“And Elohim spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am YHWH: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of EL SHADDAI, but by My name YHWH was I not known to them. And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered My covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am YHWH, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: and I will take you to Me for a people, and I will be to you an Elohim: and ye shall know that I am YHWH your Elohim, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it to you for an heritage: I am YHWH.” (Exodus 6:2-8)

Within these words we should first recognize that YHWH is giving Moses a mild rebuke. In Hebrew there are two different words used for speaking. The most common form is *amar* (Aleph, Mem, Resh), which is simply translated as “he said.” *Diber* (Dalet, Bet, Resh) is the second form, and is also translated as “he said.” It is taught, however, that this second form is used with emphasis added, as is the case when someone is being scolded or rebuked. It is this second form, *diber*, that begins our Torah portion. The subtle rebuke of YHWH is also seen in the contrast that is being drawn between Moses and the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. YHWH is telling Moses that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had never witnessed this attribute of YHWH, yet they had never questioned it. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had known the Holy One only by the attributes of EL SHADDAI, the maker of promises and covenants. Even though the patriarchs had received promises and covenants that remained unfulfilled in their lifetimes, they had never doubted or questioned EL SHADDAI's faithfulness.

But within this same passage, YHWH encourages and blesses Moses with a clear understanding of the attributes of YHWH. Since up to this time no one has truly experienced these attributes, YHWH now explains them to Moses that he may realize what a blessing it is to live in the days of the revelation of YHWH. In this passage we also learn that while EL SHADDAI is the maker of promises and covenants, YHWH is the fulfiller of promises and covenants. By these seven “I will” statements, the Holy One reveals the attributes of who YHWH is. Thus from these verses we may define YHWH as one who is ever present, sees our situations, shows us mercy, hears our prayers and cries, and knows (in the biblical and experiential sense) our sufferings; He delivers us, redeems us, brings us to Himself; is Elohim to us, and fulfills all His promises to us. So it is that Moses and the generation of Israelites that live in bondage in Egypt will be the first to experience that fullness of the attributes that are YHWH.

We should also realize that this revelation of the attributes of YHWH is not just for the children of Israel, but also for Pharaoh and the nation of Egypt. Here we must remember that from the very beginning of the story, the choosing of Abraham and his descendants was not for the purpose of status, but for service. While the people of Israel are clearly the chosen people, we must never lose sight of the calling for which we have been chosen.

*“And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”
(Genesis 12:2-3)*

The children of Israel have been chosen to be a blessing to the nations. This calling will reach its full potential at Mount Sinai when the redeemed accept the yoke of Torah, the self-revelation of YHWH, and manifest His presence in the world that others may see His light and be drawn to Him. This purpose is made clear from the very beginning of the story of Israel’s calling. All of the events the children of Israel endure play a part in the revelation of YHWH, not only to Israel but to the nations as well. The same may be said for the Egyptians. We must be very clear to understand that what Israel experiences and endures is not just for its own sake. As the bearer of the image of YHWH, Israel is a servant of YHWH ELOHIM to the world. As the children of Israel we are a means rather than an end. It is the heart of YHWH that all nations know Him. YHWH’s desire that all nations know Him is a recurring theme throughout our portion.

Let us remember that it is Pharaoh who declares,

“Who is YHWH, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I know not YHWH, neither will I let Israel go.” (Exodus 5:2)

By the end of the story of the exodus, Pharaoh, his servants, and his people will all know and fear YHWH the Elohim of Israel. Let us look at the revelation of the heart of YHWH toward Egypt.

“And the Egyptians shall know that I am YHWH, when I stretch forth Mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them.” (Exodus 7:5)

*“Thus saith YHWH, in this thou [Pharaoh] shalt know that I am YHWH.”
(Exodus 7:17)*

“Be it according to thy word: that thou [Pharaoh] mayest know that there is none like unto YHWH our Elohim.” (Exodus 8:10)

“And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms shall be there; to the end thou [Pharaoh] mayest know that I am YHWH in the midst of the earth.” (Exodus 8:22)

“For I will at this time send all My plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou [Pharaoh] mayest know that there is none like Me [YHWH] in all the earth.” (Exodus 9:14)

“And in very deed for this cause have I [YHWH] raised thee [Pharaoh] up, for to shew in thee My power; and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth.” (Exodus 9:16)

“And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto YHWH; and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth is YHWH’s.” (Exodus 9:29)

We have already stated above that one of the attributes of YHWH is that of mercy. It may at first be difficult to see how the Holy One shows Himself as merciful to Pharaoh and the Egyptians when they are on the receiving end of all the plagues. Generally the attribute of justice is connected with the name Elohim. Elohim created heaven and earth, and therefore has the right to judge it. It may seem more appropriate if we read that Elohim the righteous judge of heaven and earth reveals himself to Pharaoh and Egypt. But this is not the case. Clearly the Torah teaches that the Holy One is revealing Himself as the merciful YHWH to Pharaoh and his people. To understand this concept of mercy we need to first look outside the boundaries of the Torah to the prophet Ezekiel. YHWH proclaims through the prophet that He takes no delight in the death of sinners.

“Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith Adonai Elohim: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23)

“As I live, saith Adonai Elohim, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live.” (Ezekiel 33:11)

We may therefore safely assume that YHWH did not delight in the death of Pharaoh and his army. But what we are seeking is an example of mercy being shown to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. This attribute of mercy is best seen in the pattern of the plagues. The pattern of the plagues extends beyond the boundaries of our portion, but for the sake of understanding we will deal with all the plagues that the pattern may be understood.

The pattern of the plagues is really quite simple. There are three sets of three plagues each. These nine afflictions are then followed by the most severe affliction: the death of the firstborn of Egypt. Within each of the three sets there is yet another pattern.

SET ONE

1. A warning by water followed by the river turning to blood. (Exodus 7:15-25)
2. A warning by the palace followed by the plague of frogs. (Exodus 8:1-15)
3. No warning. The plague of lice. (Exodus 8:16-19)

SET TWO

1. A warning by water followed by the plague of swarms. (Exodus 8:20-32)
2. A warning by the palace followed by the plague upon the livestock. (Exodus 9:1-7)
3. No warning. The plague of blains and boils. (Exodus 9:8-12)

SET THREE

1. A warning by water followed by hail and fire. (Exodus 9:13-35)
2. A warning by the palace followed by the plague of locusts. (Exodus 10:1-20)
3. No warning. The plague of darkness. (Exodus 10:21-23)

These are all followed by the judgment upon Pharaoh and the firstborn. In all of this we should clearly see YHWH's attribute of mercy being extended to Pharaoh and the children of Israel. YHWH extends to Pharaoh six warnings and nine chastisements prior to the final judgment being given. If these nine plagues are indeed chastisements designed to lead Pharaoh and his people to repentance, then we must concede that they are motivated out of love – not just for Israel, but for Pharaoh and the Egyptians as well. The Scripture declares,

“Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so YHWH thy Elohim chasteneth thee.”(Deuteronomy 8:5)

“He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” (Proverbs 13:24)

“For whom YHWH loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, Elohim dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?” (Hebrews 12:6-7)

The idea that YHWH loves Pharaoh and the Egyptians and desires their repentance may seem to be contradicted by the fact that Elohim repeatedly hardens Pharaoh's heart. When speaking of the condition of Pharaoh's heart there are three different Hebrew words used, all of which are translated as “hardened,” and yet each of these words has its own nuances. The first of these words is *chazaq* (Chet, Zayin, Qof), which means to strengthen. The second word is *kaved* (Caf, Vet, Dalet), which means to pain, grieve, make dull, heavy, stupid, or hard. The third word is *qashah* (Qof, Shin, Hey) which means dense, tough, severe, hardened, stiff-necked, or stubborn.

Ten times the Torah tells us that YHWH “hardens” the heart of Pharaoh.³ With the exception of two instances,⁴ the word *chazaq* is used. In other words, eight times the Torah tells us that YHWH strengthens Pharaoh's heart. Whatever way Pharaoh's heart was inclined to YHWH, He merely strengthens that inclination. If what Pharaoh had desired to do had been good and right, then by the grace of YHWH he would have been strengthened in that inclination. If on the other hand his heart had been set on doing evil, then his heart would have been strengthened to do evil. YHWH does not change Pharaoh's heart from good to evil; rather He strengthens Pharaoh's inclination that it might be revealed.

It is interesting to note that when the Torah speaks of Pharaoh hardening his own heart, the word *kaved* is used in every instance.⁵ Thus the Torah reveals that it is Pharaoh who hardens his own heart, while YHWH merely strengthens this self-chosen inclination. By the use of

chastisements and strengthening grace, YHWH shows incredible mercy to Pharaoh. YHWH uses the plagues, signs, and wonders to reveal Himself to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and then follows them with the gift of strengthening grace. Had Pharaoh been moved by any of these miraculous events and changed his heart, then YHWH's strengthening grace would have given him the resolve to repent and let the children of Israel go to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah.

There are several important lessons for us to learn from YHWH's dealings with Pharaoh. First we should realize, as did Shaul, that YHWH desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.⁶ Realizing that YHWH does not delight in the death of sinners we should be careful not to rejoice in the death of anyone, including our enemies and the wicked. I came upon a story, though unfortunately I cannot remember the source, that taught that on the day Israel crossed the Red Sea and Pharaoh and his army were swallowed up, that the angels in heaven began rejoicing with Moses and the children of Israel down below, but YHWH stopped their dancing and quieted their singing and declared that His heart was grieved over the loss of His people Egypt. While this story may just be Torah lure or oral tradition, it serves well to remind us that we are servants of YHWH to the world around us. Every person is one of the Creator's creations. If we are called to be the manifest presence of YHWH in the world, then it means that we must manifest His love for all of His creatures.

It is not always easy to remember that we are keeping Torah for the sake of the world around us, including our enemies. It is not always easy to remember that not everything that happens to us is for our sake. Shaul tells us that everything that Israel endured in the wilderness was for our example.⁷ By submitting ourselves to the Torah covenant, we have agreed to become a means by which YHWH can reach the rest of His creation. We may therefore be asked at times to endure injustice, affliction, poverty, and suffering for the sake of others.

Egocentrism may be the most difficult obstacle for us to overcome. While it is shocking to hear, not everything that happens in the world is about us. Sometimes YHWH calls us into service for the sake of someone else. The children of Israel have been bearing this cross for a long time, waiting for the fullness of the Gentiles to come in.⁸ This is an important message for those of us in exile to remember as we wait for the day of our return. We may recall that while it was our sinfulness and rebellion that caused us to be scattered to the four corners of the earth, it is not without purpose that we remain scattered. Now we are to be ambassadors for the kingdom in the nations in which we reside. While many of us long to be back in the land, we must realize that we have been commissioned to serve where we presently are.

A second lesson that we may learn from YHWH's dealings with Pharaoh is found in the purpose for YHWH revealing Himself to Pharaoh. Let us revisit these verses again and see if we may glean YHWH's purpose in revealing Himself through the plagues and afflictions to Pharaoh and his people.

"And the Egyptians shall know that I am YHWH, when I stretch forth Mine hand upon Egypt, and bring out the children of Israel from among them."(Exodus 7:5)

"Thus saith YHWH, In this thou [Pharaoh] shalt know that I am YHWH."(Exodus 7:17)

“Be it according to thy word: that thou [Pharaoh] mayest know that there is none like unto YHWH our Elohim.” (Exodus 8:10)

“And I will sever in that day the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell, that no swarms shall be there; to the end thou [Pharaoh] mayest know that I am YHWH in the midst of the earth.” (Exodus 8:22)

“For I will at this time send all My plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou [Pharaoh] mayest know that there is none like Me [YHWH] in all the earth.” (Exodus 9:14)

“And in very deed for this cause have I [YHWH] raised thee [Pharaoh] up for to shew in thee My power; and that My name may be declared throughout all the earth.” (Exodus 9:16)

“And Moses said unto him, As soon as I am gone out of the city, I will spread abroad my hands unto YHWH; and the thunder shall cease, neither shall there be any more hail; that thou mayest know how that the earth is YHWH's.” (Exodus 9:29)

The purpose of the events of the exodus was to communicate some very specific truths to Pharaoh and the people of Egypt:

- 1) That the Elohim of Israel is YHWH
- 2) There is none other than YHWH
- 3) That YHWH is in the midst of the earth
- 4) That there is none like YHWH
- 5) That Pharaoh and Egypt exist for the purpose of glorifying YHWH
- 6) That they may know that the whole earth belongs to YHWH

These six truths not only explain the purpose for the revelation, but also explain the manner in which YHWH reveals these truths to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. If at the heart of YHWH's interaction with Pharaoh is the message of the unity and sovereignty of YHWH, then it would make sense that the Elohim of Israel would reveal Himself in such a way as to prove the numerous elohim of Egypt inept and impotent. We should realize that the plagues that YHWH uses to afflict Egypt are not simply random acts on the part of the Holy One. Each one of these plagues is specifically directed toward a particular god of Egypt. For the sake of brevity I am simply going to list the god or goddess of Egypt and the plague that YHWH used to prove him or her impotent.

- HAPI- The god of the river. The river turned to blood. (Exodus 7:15-25)
- HEQT- The frog-faced goddess. The plague of frogs. (Exodus 8:2)
- SEB- The earth god. The dust of the earth turned to lice. (Exodus 8:1-15)
- HATHOR- The cow-faced goddess. The livestock were smitten. (Exodus 9:1-7)
- IMHOTEP- The deity of medicine. The plague of boils and blains. (Exodus 9:8-12)

- NUT/ISIS- The sky goddess. The plague of hail and fire. (Exodus 9:13-35)
- SETH- The protector of fields and produce. The plague of locusts. (Exodus 10:1-20)
- HORUS- The sun god. The plague of darkness. (Exodus 10:21-23)
- AMUNRI- The god of the first-born. The death of the first-born. (Exodus 11:1-5)
- BAAL-ZEPHON- The god of war. Defeated at Red Sea. (Exodus 14:2)
- PHARAOH- Considered to be a divine being. Swallowed by the Red Sea. (Exodus 14:28)

When all is complete there is but ONE ELOHIM left standing, YHWH ELOHIM, the Elohim of the children of Israel. So it is in our portion this week that we see YHWH's attribute of mercy as it is extended not only to the children of Israel but also to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians. By His actions YHWH ELOHIM gives meaning and substance to His words. By exposing the impotency of the idols, YHWH shows Himself to be the sovereign Elohim of heaven and earth.

We should also see in this portion the profound depth of love the Creator has for all of His creation. While delivering His chosen people from bondage, oppression, and exploitation, He at the same time extends His love and invitation to truth and salvation to the oppressor. Do we not see a powerful foreshadowing of Yeshua the Messiah, who even while his body was being afflicted, still cried out for mercy and forgiveness for his oppressors?⁹ If we are called to be the manifest presence of the Holy One in our corner of the world, wherever that may be, then having the grace to love our enemies and win them to the kingdom is an essential attribute for us to manifest. Yeshua Messiah taught us,

"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:43-45)

The apostle Shaul likewise wrote,

"Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, saith YHWH. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:14, 17, 19-21)

As the prophetic clock continues to tick, I believe that mastering the attributes of YHWH's mercy and grace is essential. Again, we should be busy turning our accusers into advocates. We never know whom YHWH will choose to fulfill His plans and purposes upon the earth. This is not to say that we should expect success in every endeavor to win our enemies, but neither should we be surprised by the power of YHWH to make Himself known even to the most formidable of foes.

SHAVUA TOV !

¹ Shemot Exodus 1:1-6:1

² Exodus 5:6-19

³ Exodus 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17

⁴ In Exodus 7:3, *qashah* is used. In Exodus 10:1, *kaved* is used.

⁵ Exodus 8:15; 8:32; 9:34

⁶ 1 Timothy 2:4

⁷ 1 Corinthians 10:6

⁸ Romans 11:25

⁹ Luke 23:34