

PARASHAH: Va'era (I appeared)
ADDRESS: Sh'mot (Exodus) 6:2-9:35
READING DATE: Shabbat
AUTHOR: Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman

*Updated: January 18, 2006

(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

This week's parashah is named "**Va'era**," which means, "**I (HaShem) appeared.**" The portion this week and the portion last week continue an ongoing thought, therefore, I will reference last week's portion in this teaching. The opening sentence this week should cause us to wonder what the Holy One could have meant as he addressed Moshe that day. Let's go to the text, and then I want to offer an explanation.

What's In a Name?

The opening statement says,

"God spoke to Moshe; he said to him, "I am ADONAI. I appeared to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov as *El Shaddai*, although I did not make myself known to them by my name, *Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh [ADONAI]*"" (6:2-3).

In Hebrew it reads,

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אֲנִי יְהוָה

וְאַרְאֶה אֶל-אַבְרָהָם אֶל-יִצְחָק וְאֶל-יַעֲקֹב
בְּאֵל שְׁדַי וְשְׁמִי יְהוָה לֹא נִדְעִיתִי לָהֶם

("Vay'daber Elohim el-Moshe vay'omer, "Eylayv Ani YHVH. Va'era el-Avraham el-Yitz'chak v'el-Ya'akov b'El Shaddai u'sh'mi YHVH lo nodah'ati lahem."")

Now if you take HaShem's statement at face value alone and compare it to the words spoken to Avraham in B'resheet (Genesis) 15:7, there seems to be a contradiction. Indeed, as we examine the original Hebrew texts, we shall notice something peculiar.

In B'resheet 15:7, HaShem states,

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם הַיְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ
מֵאֶרֶץ כַּשְׂדִּים לָתֶת לְךָ אֶת-הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ

("Va'omer eylhev "Ani ADONAI (YHVH) asher hotzeyteecha mey-Ur-Kasdim lateht l'kha eht-ha'aretz hazot l'rish-ta.)

[ADONAI said to him, "I am ADONAI, who brought you out from Ur-Kasdim to give you this land as a possession"

As you can see from the original Hebrew along with my transliteration of the Hebrew text, HaShem addresses Avraham here using the name "YHVH!" How then could the statement in our current parashah, that HaShem did not reveal his name "YHVH," be true? In fact to complicate the matter, in his conversation with HaShem, during the "negotiations" about destroying S'dom and 'Amora (see B'resheet 18:20-32), we find Avraham specifically addressing HaShem as "YHVH" four times! Our answer lies in what we discussed last week in **Parashat Sh'mot**. For teaching purposes, I shall paraphrase from that portion.

In Hebrew thought the name is the embodiment of the character of an individual, based upon who they are, or what they have done, or as we are learning in the case with HaShem, what they will do. In Sh'mot 3:14, HaShem reveals his nature to Moshe in a way that has never been done before in the Torah, up till this point. HaShem tells Moshe that his "name" shall be referred to as,

אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה

"Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh [I Am/will be what I Am/will be]."

HaShem continues in verse 15 to say that the God of their fathers Avraham, Yitz'chak, and Ya'akov is to be remembered forever as **"Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh"**! This appears to be very strange until we understand that HaShem is about to deliver his people in a way that he has never before performed. Not only is he going to do this, but he will forever be remembered for this deliverance! This is

why the phrase “**I Am**” may not be the best rendering of the Hebrew phrase “**Ehyeh**.” Rather, the phrase carries with it the idea that HaShem is about to perform a mighty work, never before witnessed by his people (i.e. “**I Will Be**”)!

Rashbam as cited by Bekhor Shor confirms the possible translation of “he causes to be”:

Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh This phrase has variously been translated, “I Am That I Am,” “I Am Who I Am,” and “I Will Be What I Will Be.” It clearly evokes YHVH, the specific proper name of Isra’el’s God, known in English as the Tetragrammaton, that is, “four consonants.” The phrase also indicates that the earliest recorded understanding of the divine name was a verb derived from the stem *h-v-h*, taken as an earlier form of *h-y-h*, “to be.” Either it expresses the quality of absolute Being, the eternal, unchanging, dynamic presence, or it means, “He causes to be.” *YHVH* is the third person masculine singular; *ehyeh* is the corresponding first person singular. This latter is used here because name-giving in the ancient world implied the wielding of power over the one named; hence, the divine name can only proceed from God Himself.¹

This explains why HaShem can make a seemingly odd statement like the one he made in the opening two verses of our current parashah: he had not yet been revealed to his people, including Father Avraham, as “the God who delivered you from the bondage of Egypt.” Why was this title important? HaShem was revealing an aspect of his character that would later play a very important role in the identity of the Jewish People as a Nation. This title would also serve as a reminder to the surrounding nations that “with a great out-stretched arm, ADONAI almighty delivered his beloved people!” To be sure, the reference of HaShem as the “God who delivered [them] from the bondage of Egypt” would become a “household” name of sorts. Fast-forward in the book of Sh’mot to the “Ten Commandments” (Sh’mot 20:1, 2) and see if you can find this phrase used to identify HaShem. Thumb through the rest of your **TaNaKH** (Old Testament) and you will find that this phrase is used numerous times.

As believers in Messiah Yeshua, we know that this is one of the primary character traits of HaShem, which unifies the Messiah and the Godhead as an “echad,” that is as “one.” The name of the Messiah is related to the Hebrew name “Y’hoshua,” which itself stems from the Hebrew name “Hoshea.” Both of these names are composites of the two Hebrew words for “God” and “will save,” respectively. When we combine this knowledge with the fact that it is “YHVH” who offers us salvation from sin THROUGH Yeshua the Messiah, then we can begin to understand the significance of the type and shadow that the Exodus from Egypt plays in our lives as new creations.

¹ Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Commentary to Exodus* (Jewish Publication Society, 1991), p. 17-18

Again we turn to Sarna,

Were this statement to mean that a previously unknown divine Name—YHVH—is now to be revealed for the first time, the effort of the “I am” formula would be vitiated; the credibility of a promise is undermined, not enhanced, if it is issued by one whose name is unfamiliar. Furthermore, the phrase “I am YHVH” appears scores of times in the Bible and is widespread in corresponding form in Northwest Semitic royal inscriptions, such as “I am Mesha,” “I am Shalmaneser,” “I am Esarhaddon.” It cannot, therefore, reflect the introduction of a new name. On the contrary, precisely because the bearer of the name is well known, and its mention evokes such emotions as awe, reverence, honor, and fear, its use as the source and sanction of a law or edict reinforces its authority and encourages compliance. In the present context the invocation of a hitherto unknown divine name would hardly serve to counteract the widespread demoralization—which is, after all, the very function of God’s declaration.

In light of these considerations, the meaning of this verse needs to be reexamined. In the ancient Near Eastern world names in general, and the name of a god in particular, possessed a dynamic quality and were expressive of character, or attributes, and potency. The names of gods were immediately identified with their nature, status, and function, so that to say, “I did not make myself known to them by My name YHVH,” is to state that the patriarchs did not experience the essential power associated with the name YHVH. The promise made to them belonged to the distant future. The present reiteration of those promises exclusively in the name of YHVH means that their fulfillment is imminent. This, indeed, is how Rashi, Rashbam, Bekhor Shor, and others construed verses 2-3.²

So, we have now explained how that Avraham did not know this aspect of HaShem, embodied in the name "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh," rather, you could say that Avraham, Yitz'chak, and Ya'akov knew HaShem as the "covenant-keeping God." Instead, HaShem chose to reveal himself in this manner to Isra'el's offspring. Moreover, in the opening few verses of our parashah this week, HaShem informs Moshe that he has remembered his covenant with Avraham, Yitz'chak, and Ya'akov (6:5), which I believe provides a very nice tie-in to both of HaShem's "reputations."

Moving along in our parashah, a very interesting genealogical list appears in 6:14-30, and at first glance, seems to be sort of "out of place" with the narrative flow. We must remember that the people were greatly discouraged as a result of the cruel forced-labor, and that they, as ordinary human beings, were subject to doubt and disappointment (see 6:9). I believe that the list appears early on in the

² Ibid, p. 31.

story to sort of "validate" the authority of Moshe and his prophet/brother Aharon. In fact Moshe the human author of the book of Sh'mot seems to indicate this detail of their ministry, more than once, in verses 26, 27. In other words, there should be no mistake as to who exactly Moshe and Aharon were.

Plagues

The "Ten Plagues of Egypt" play an important and familiar part of the Exodus from Egypt. To be sure, as the Jewish People have so carefully preserved for nearly four millennia, they are an interesting part of any average Pesach Seder (Passover Dinner and ceremony) of today. What most non-Jewish believers might not know is that each plague actually singled out a specific Egyptian deity for judgment from HaShem. The talented "webservant" of MessianicArt.com, TalmidBenjamin Burton, brought the following information to my attention:

By way of an overview, this is a look at all ten plagues and the deities that they judged:

- 1) THE NILE PLAGUE judged Khnum, Sati, Hapi, Osiris, Hathor, Neith, Sobek, and Apepi.
- 2) THE FROG PLAGUE judged the creator goddess Heka.
- 3) THE LICE PLAGUE judged Seth, Geb, Ra, and Osiris.
- 4) THE FLIES PLAGUE judged Vatchit, Beelzebub, and the Scarab beetle.
- 5) THE DEADLY MURRAIN judged Ptah, Apis, Hathor, and Osiris.
- 6) THE BOILS PLAGUE judged Ptah, Osiris, Sekhmet, Imhotep, Serapis, the Egyptian priesthood, and the ritual of casting ashes.
- 7) THE HAIL PLAGUE judged Nut, Geb, Amun-Ra, Osiris, and Pharaoh.
- 8) THE LOCUSTS PLAGUE judged Sobek, Ra, Shu, Geb, and Osiris.
- 9) THE DARKNESS PLAGUE judged Nut, Hathor, Amun-Ra, and the Egyptian priesthood.
- 10) THE DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN judged Heka, Isis, Min, Horus, Bes, Seker, and the Pharaoh.

If we understand that each plague represented a judgment on a specific Egyptian deity, then we see that HaShem was truly demonstrating to the most powerful

ruler of the most powerful nation of that day that he is LORD OF ALL HEAVEN AND EARTH! In fact to this end, ADONAI proclaimed to Moshe,

"Then I will lay my hand on Egypt with great acts of judgment. Then, when I stretch out my hand over Egypt and bring the people of Isra'el out from among them, the Egyptians will know that I am ADONAI" (7:4, 5).

Once again, as was stated in Parashat Sh'mot, HaShem is highly interested in demonstrating and making known his mighty reputation, i.e. his "name" (Hebrew: shem) not only to the offspring of Isra'el, but to the surrounding wicked nations as well. In this case, Egypt would become the first in an ongoing series of demonstrations involving pagan nations and Am Yisra'el (read Dani'el 7:3-7 to read a prophecy concerning the first four in this series; read Revelation 17:10 to understand that there would be eight "oppressive kingdoms" in all).

Choosing Freedom

The story of the deliverance from Egypt is meant to remind all of God's true children (those who have joined with him in covenant faithfulness) that HaShem—and HaShem alone—is worthy to be praised as the Great and Mighty Deliverer! Isra'el was singled out to be the victims of cruel and unjust suffering so that the surrounding nations would learn about the awesome, saving Power of the Holy One. Even though the Pharaoh's pride and stubbornness caused him to become the epitome of the enemy of God, and even though (as we shall read in next week's portion) eventually his advisors and magicians came to the realization that this "invisible God of the Hebrews" was responsible for the ruin of the Land of Egypt (see 8:18, 19; 24b), **HaShem wanted to send a clear and unmistakable signal to all who shall read this account that it is HaShem who is without equal, and that it is also HaShem who makes a distinction between those who are his own and those who are not!**

But don't just take my word for it.... Let's read the Torah ourselves:

"But I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people live....so that you can realize that I am ADONAI, right here in the land. Yes, I will distinguish between my people and your people...." (8:22, 23, emphasis mine).

And also,

"For this time, I will inflict my plagues on you, yourself, and on your officials and your people; so that you will realize that I am without equal in all the earth" (9:14).

In fact, just so that there would be NO mistaking that it was HaShem who was singling out Isra'el and Egypt for his mighty purposes, HaShem instructed Moshe to inform the Pharaoh of this significant detail about the plagues:

"By now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with such severe plagues that you would have been wiped off the earth. But it is for this very reason that I have kept you alive--to show you my mighty power, and so that my name (there's that word "shem" again!) may resound throughout the whole earth" (15-17, emphasis mine).

In my estimation, this is one of the most profound statements in all of the Torah! For in this single statement, we see the sovereignty, terrible judgment and great mercy of our Heavenly Abba, in one single, sweeping event! The parashah leaves off without concluding all of the ten plagues; we shall have to wait for next week's portion to read of the awesome and terrible conclusion. But what can we also gather from this week's portion?

If our God is "the same, yesterday, today, and forever"—and he is—then his attributes of sovereignty, judgment of evil, and unfathomable mercy are constants that we can establish and build our relationship with him upon. Concerning his sovereignty, we learned in previous portions (remember Yosef) that even in the midst of the most seemingly impossible situations, HaShem is "behind the scenes" orchestrating and causing all things to accomplish the master plan that he has designed them to accomplish; concerning his judgment we see that the pattern developed throughout the entire TaNaKH is that willful disobedience, stubbornness, pride, rebellion, idolatry, injustice, etc, these are the things which bring the judgment of HaShem upon us; concerning his mercy, we find with that with the first coming of his Son Yeshua, came the ultimate expression of the Father's heart towards a race (the humans!) that, in every respect, deserved the hell-fires of Gei-Hinnom (Matt. 5:22b)!

Today, we have as much of a choice as the Pharaoh had during his initial encounters with HaShem and his spokesmen Moshe and Aharon. Shall we close our hearts in stubbornness and pride, possibly prompting HaShem to confirm the hardness and stubbornness of our self-hardened heart? Or shall we, instead, open up our hearts to the wonderful, Good News that, even though we deserve the judgment of HaShem, the Torah has demonstrated in Word and in the power of his Only, Begotten Son, that God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9b, KJV)? If this meant even the Pharaoh of Moshe's day, then obviously it means us as well. The mercy of HaShem has been perfectly demonstrated for us in one of the most beloved and well-known scriptures in the Torah:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV).

The closing blessing is as follows:

***"Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-'Olam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn."***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

"Shabbat Shalom!"

Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman yeshua613@hotmail.com