

TORAHSCOPE: Shemot (Names)

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Exodus 1:1-6:1
Isaiah 27:6-28:13; 29:22-23

“Fear to Hear”

“He said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ **Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God**” (Exodus 3:6).

This week the Torah cycle turns to the beginning of the Book of Exodus. In an attempt to link the opening verses with the previous teachings from the concluding chapters of Genesis, the narrative immediately reminds the reader of the “names” of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Hebrew word *shemot* (שְׁמוֹת), used for the entire book, means “names” in English. Hence, we see an eternal reminder to Israel that it is all twelve tribes that comprise the emerging nation. The English title Exodus is derived from the Greek Septuagint designation *Exodos* (ἜΞΟΔΟΣ), and points to the events that transpire as the people of Israel are finally going to begin their arduous journey back to the Promised Land.

Many lessons can be learned from this portion, as the focus of attention is now directed to Moses, the person chosen to be the implementer of the deliverance process. As I pondered the well-known story about the rise of Moses from the waters of the Nile to the one called to declare, “**let my people go**” in the courts of Pharaoh, I was drawn to consider some of the unique characteristics that Moses embodied, in order to discern if his pattern for living was applicable to modern-day Messianics in our walk with Yeshua. While seeking to hear what the Spirit has to say about this week’s reading, the Lord pointed me to one of the foundational building blocks of our faith that can be summarized in this ancient proverb:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10).

As I followed this train of thought, I began to see in my own heart that fearing God and hearing His voice more clearly almost goes hand in hand. From the life of Moses we have an example of a humble human being, who we know from later descriptions was actually able to commune with the Holy One on a “face to face” basis (Exodus 33:11). But as we quickly discover in the opening chapters of Exodus, Moses did not begin his life with the ability to dialog with the Almighty with such intimacy. Instead, we notice that this communicative ability is an acquired trait that is, in many respects, a byproduct of not only his humility, but also—most profoundly—his fear of the Living God.

A Healthy Fear

As the opening chapter begins to establish the state of affairs of Israelites, we are told that the growing numbers of slaves were becoming a threat to the new Pharaoh of Egypt, who did not know and respect the work of Joseph. This perceived threat precipitated an edict that in many ways prefigures a similar action that ushers forth from Herod, centuries later prior to the birth of Yeshua, the Messiah of Israel (Matthew 2:16). But just as providence would intervene in the life of Yeshua to protect Him from the evil of Herod’s orders, Moses is also protected, because the Hebrew midwives feared God:

“**But the midwives feared God**, and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded them, but let the boys live. So the king of Egypt called for the midwives, and said to them, ‘Why have you done this thing, and let the boys live?’ And the midwives said to Pharaoh, ‘Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous, and they give birth before the midwife can get to them.’ So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty. **And it came about because the midwives feared God**, that He established households for them” (Exodus 1:17-21).

Twice in the narrative, in deviance of the command from Pharaoh, the Hebrew midwives are unwilling to slay the sons of Israel. Their described “fear of God” establishes a theme for the entire chapter, if not the entire Book of Exodus—perhaps even the entire Torah and Bible. After all, the proper fear of God is critical to reverence, worship, and praise Him as our Creator, Protector, Redeemer, and Deliverer. By fearing Him, the Hebrew midwives were not only putting Him ahead of their own safety, but in this specific case, they were unwilling to abort the lives of male children who were added to the numbers of the male children of Israel. As a result of their willingness to fearfully obey God rather than Pharaoh, they were rewarded for choosing Him by the establishment of their own households and families.

Of course, as we continue through the specific details, we are soon introduced to the baby Moses who is spared an untimely death and eventually adopted by one of the daughters of Pharaoh himself. We are further informed in the Apostolic Scriptures that Moses is raised in the house of Pharaoh with all of the privileges of royal living. Stephen’s speech, prior to his stoning, gives us some great insight into the early life of Moses:

“But as the time of the promise was approaching which God had assured to Abraham, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt, until there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph. It was he who took shrewd advantage of our race, and mistreated our fathers so that they would expose their infants and they would not survive. And it was at this time that Moses was born; and he was lovely in the sight of God; and he was nurtured three months in his father's home. And after he had been exposed, Pharaoh's daughter took him away, and nurtured him as her own son. **And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.** But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. **And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him; but they did not understand.** And on the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace, saying, ‘Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?’ But the one who was injuring his neighbor pushed him away, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and judge over us? **You do not mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday, do you?**’ **And at this remark Moses fled,** and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons. And after forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush. **And when Moses saw it, he began to marvel at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.’ And Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look.** But the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt, and have heard their groans, and I have come down to deliver them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt.’ This Moses whom they disowned, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ is the one whom God sent to be both a ruler and a deliverer with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush. This man led them out, performing wonders and signs in the land of Egypt and in the Red Sea and in the wilderness for forty years” (Acts 7:17-36).

Here in this lengthy narrative about Moses, many details about his life are included to enhance our understanding about him as a man, and some of the obstacles he had to overcome in order to be the one chosen to be the deliverer. First, we discover that Moses is not only brought up in the house of Pharaoh, but he is just as knowledgeable about the things of the world as his peers. Our Torah portion simply states that Moses simply “grew up” in the house of Pharaoh, but Stephen gives us a fuller picture:

“**And Moses was educated in all the learning of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds.** But when he was approaching the age of forty” (Acts 7:22-23a).

For the first forty years of his life, Moses lived in exquisite surroundings and learned all the knowledge that Egypt, the preeminent power of that era, could teach him. From these

statements it is clear that Moses was indeed a very powerful man in Egypt, who by the time he was forty, had already achieved a degree of noted success in his position as the adopted grandson of Pharaoh. In some respects, you can almost see some parallels between his early life and the life of Joseph, as both were in positions of great influence in spite of their Hebrew heritage. But then we discover that it is the very Hebrew blood connection that gets Moses into difficulties:

“It entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel. And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian. And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him; but they did not understand” (Acts 7:23b-25).

Moses, at the height of his natural strength and societal position, decides to visit his brethren, the people of Israel, and defends one of his Israelite brothers by striking an Egyptian dead in his defense. In the description by Stephen, he states that Moses “took vengeance,” or he took it upon himself to be the dispenser of rash judgment upon the Egyptian. Whether it was losing control of his temper, or as the narrative continues, proudly concluding in his heart that he was going to be the “deliverer” of Israel from the taskmasters of Egypt, the result is cold-blooded murder. Something in Moses allowed him to take vengeance into his own hands. He knew he was a Hebrew and apparently knew about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—because we learn that he later gives his son a Hebrew name. But here with some admitted provocation, he takes the life of another human being. The result of this altercation is not what he expected. When he approaches his brethren the following day, an interesting statement appears:

“And he went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrews were fighting with each other; and he said to the offender, ‘Why are you striking your companion?’ But he said, ‘Who made you a prince or a judge over us? Are you intending to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?’ Then Moses was afraid, and said, ‘Surely the matter has become known’” (Exodus 2:13-14).

Here, we discern that at forty years of age with the blood of an Egyptian on his hands, Moses is exhibiting a **great fear of man and what man can do to him**. Is it possible that Moses had a greater fear of man than of God at this point in his life? Certainly, the actions he takes to flee from the possible consequences of his murderous act indicate that he was indeed in great fear of Pharaoh himself. As the narrative continues, we read that Pharaoh finds out about the murder and tries to kill Moses:

“When Pharaoh heard of this matter, he tried to kill Moses. But Moses fled from the presence of Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well” (Exodus 2:15).

Moses is able to elude the attempt of Pharaoh and he flees to the land of Midian to avoid capture and death. Now the story focuses on the life of Moses as he spends the next forty years in the desert learning what he needs to know as a humble shepherd of sheep:

“And after forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush” (Acts 7:30).

The Fear of the Lord

Finally, after spending forty years in the desert, the Holy One decides that it is time for Moses to understand that fearing Him derives a far greater reward than fearing man. For forty years Moses pastured the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, who is described as a priest of Midian. Midian and his descendents, the Midianites, were the offspring of Abraham and Keturah. Although we are not absolutely sure that Jethro was a worshipper of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob during this time period, as the one noted to be the “priest of Midian,” it would be fair to conclude that he was at least a seeker of truth.

We know that eventually in the years ahead, Jethro definitely comes to the full recognition that the God of Israel is indeed the true Creator (Exodus 18:10-12). But at this point, we are not sure just what Moses learned from his association with Jethro. We can determine that Moses honored Jethro’s position as the head of the community, for when the time to depart and return to Egypt does come, Moses asks for and receives blessings from Jethro. We also know that

in the future, when Jethro joins Moses and the Israelites in the desert, Moses honors, respects, and even follows the wise advice of his father-in-law (Exodus 18:13-27).

For forty years Moses is honed to be the instrument for the deliverance of the people of Israel from the bondage of Egypt. Learning the skills of a shepherd seems to be one of the best instructional tools that the Father employs with selected vessels for His use. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all shepherds, and as we know, King David and others used throughout the ages by God have likewise been molded by their experiences as shepherds. Yeshua refers to Himself as the Good Shepherd when He tries to describe to His Disciples some of the godly attributes that would be exhibited by the shepherds for their sheep:

“I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

After forty years of shepherding, Moses is ready for a formal introduction to the Holy One of Israel. In a very dramatic fashion—but in a manner where the humbled murderer turned shepherd could handle the light of revelation—the Almighty reveals Himself in the midst of a burning bush:

“And the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. So Moses said, ‘I must turn aside now, and see this marvelous sight, why the bush is not burned up.’ When the LORD saw that he turned aside to look, God called to him from the midst of the bush, and said, ‘Moses, Moses!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ Then He said, ‘Do not come near here; remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.’ He said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God’” (Exodus 3:2-6).

The stunned Moses is perplexed by the fact that the burning bush is not being consumed. This is a very confusing reality, because all of the knowledge he had retained from his forty years in Egypt, and now forty years of experience in the desert, could not help him comprehend this. After all, he had probably warmed himself and his sheep many a night by some of those very bushes. Now for some unknown reason, the fire did not consume the bush. Then from the midst of the bush, as Moses’ confusion is evident, a voice cries out: “Moses, Moses.” You can imagine your own reaction to a voice declaring your name twice from a burning bush. Without apparent hesitation, Moses blurts back, “here I am,” or *hineni* (הִנְנִי) in Hebrew. Consider how your own heart would be pounding as the presence of the Holy One is evident and a voice calls your name twice. Then, without reservation, the same voice beckons a warning to remove his sandals, because the place where Moses was standing is holy ground—and by inference, he was a mere mortal who could not approach the Most High because of his lack of holiness. God told Moses to get down on his face and pray that he is not consumed by His Divine presence.

From out of that same unconsumed bush the voice continues: **“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”** At that point, the dialog takes a break to describe that Moses was probably prostrate on the ground covering his face and *afraid* to look at God. Here, it becomes evident that Moses is ready to **fear** the Lord God Almighty in order to hear His voice with absolute clarity:

“He said also, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ **Then Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God**” (Exodus 3:6).

Of course, as we continue to read the narrative, it is very apparent that the voice of God does not stop with simply declaring that He is the God of Moses’ forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He goes on to declare that He has heard the cries of His people Israel, and that He has decided to use Moses as His instrument to convey His words to Pharaoh, and ultimately to them as well.

The More You Fear the Better You Hear

As I read this part of our Torah portion, it struck me that the Holy One of Israel had chosen a broken vessel for use in delivering His people. At eighty years of age, Moses had already had two diametrically opposed lives that were permanently embedded in his memory. From the

riches and power of the courts of Pharaoh, interrupted by the impetuous act of murder, to the star filled nights in the desert tending the needs of helpless sheep, this man was uniquely prepared for the work that he was called to do. And then, in one of the most dramatic recorded appearances of the Holy One of Israel, the fear of His holiness was emphatically implanted in Moses' mind, heart, soul, and spirit. After all, as we will later learn, no human being can see the face of God and live:

“But He said, ‘You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!’” (Exodus 33:20).

From this statement, we know that Moses never saw the face of God. But we do know that he was in His presence and hearing His voice clearly for the next forty years until his death on Mount Nebo overlooking the Promised Land.

As I thought about this, I was prompted to consider the correlation between the degree of one's fear of the Lord and the ability to hear His voice more clearly. After all, following this dramatic encounter with God and his calling on Mount Horeb, Moses reluctantly became the instrument to whom He communicated the Torah. Later we are told that the communication between the two was like or according to someone who would speak to another face to face:

“And it came about, whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; **and the LORD would speak with Moses.** When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent. **Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend**” (Exodus 33:9-11a).

Is it possible that the “burning bush” experience and the dialog with God, that goes from Exodus 3:4-4:17, has such a profound impact on Moses that he truly fears Him like no other human before or since? Is a result of this fear the ability to hear His voice more perfectly?

Think about your own life experiences. When are the times that you have been able to tune into the voice of the Almighty? Does it occur at times when you are in crisis or have great needs? Is it when you are humbling yourself and interceding for difficult circumstances? Do you remember the time that you had your real life encounter with the Messiah when you were born again? Do you remember the time when you came to the end of yourself and cried out for mercy in order to receive His salvation and deliverance? Do you remember hearing His comforting words as He communicated to you the assurance that you were saved or born again or delivered from the oppressive spirits that might have harassed you?

How about the times you might have had a vision or a dream or heard an audible word from what you innately knew was the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Can you remember the vision or dream or the word with absolute clarity, almost like it was burned into your brain's “hard drive”? If you think back to those times when the Almighty was touching you, you might recall that you were experiencing a holy fear or awe or reverence for Him. Do you see the connection between fearing Him and hearing Him?

If we consider one of the Haftarah portions that correspond to this week's reading, we are directed to another man who was uniquely chosen to be a vessel of the Most High during his life as a prophet to Israel while he lived in Jerusalem. The call upon Jeremiah has some real similarities that are directly parallel to Moses' prostrate time on Mount Horeb when he covered his face:

“Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations. Then I said, “**Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth.**” But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am a youth,’ because everywhere I send you, **you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them,** for I am with you to deliver you,” declares the LORD. Then the LORD stretched out His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me, “**Behold, I have put My words in your mouth**”” (Jeremiah 1:4-9).

As the calling to Jeremiah is described, it is evident that Jeremiah, just like Moses, was chosen from his conception for the Divine assignment to be a prophet to Israel. Jeremiah, like Moses, was also a reluctant prophet, who in his humility as a youth, did not believe he was capable of handling the assignment. It is obvious from God's statement that Jeremiah was very

fearful about his mission. Fear was a good thing that probably resulted in the ability to hear more clearly and repeat to the Israelites the hard words that would eventually come forth from his prophecies. He received further confidence that via the touching of his mouth by the hand of God that the words he would speak would be from Him.

As we follow his life as a prophet and then consider the other prophets of God, we begin to see a pattern emerging. As one truly fears the Holy One of Israel, the ability to hear His voice and then boldly proclaim it is augmented. Further writings include examples of the concept that **the more you fear the Lord, the better you hear the Lord:**

“Who is the man who fears the LORD? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. His soul will abide in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. The secret of the LORD is for those who fear Him, and He will make them know His covenant” (Psalm 25:12-14).

“I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has so worked that men should fear Him” (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Fear God and Keep His Commandments

As we come to the end of these thoughts and consider the words of Ecclesiastes, we can marvel at its simple conclusion. A summation of a successful life is **“fear God and keep His commandments.”** If you believe that these words are true, would there be any better reason to do these two very things? First, fear or revere God with all of your heart, mind, soul, and strength. Recall like Moses and Jeremiah, and others throughout the ages, that the Holy One of Israel is a living God who can truly show up and be with you at any time He so chooses. Remember that He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient and that He is absolutely concerned about the intimate details of your life. **By fearing Him and getting to know Him, you will undoubtedly begin to hear His voice more clearly.**

Secondly, when you think about hearing His voice, why not start by beginning to read and meditate upon the words that we believe are absolutely His as recorded in the Bible. If you really want to be able to “keep His commandments,” perhaps it would be appropriate to read and study them. Since 613 commandments that have been categorized from the Torah, perhaps it would make sense to commit to a diligent consistent study of the Torah. To carry these suggestions a step further, Believers are supposed to be conformed to the image of the Messiah. And do we not know that the Messiah Yeshua is the Word made flesh, or in another vernacular, the Torah made flesh? If we are going to be conformed to the Torah made flesh, perhaps we could spend some amount of time learning all that we could from its instructions.

Moses feared the Holy One of Israel, and he heard His voice clearly. Thankfully, what he heard has been recorded and retained for our personal edification, so that we can ultimately learn to keep His commandments. If this does not bring you to fear Him who made you, then you might consider getting down on your face and crying out to Him for more mercy, **so that your fear of Him will result in hearing Him better:**

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life. The one who despises the word will be in debt to it, but the one who fears the commandment will be rewarded. The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, to turn aside from the snares of death” (Proverbs 13:12-14).

May we all learn to fear Him that we may hear Him more clearly!

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