

5783 - Exodus 6-9 - Va'era (And I appeared)

⁷¹Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. ²You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. ³But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in Egypt, ⁴he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. ⁵And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it." ⁶Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded them. ⁷Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

1. (v. 1) רָאָה נִתְּתִיךָ אֱלֹהִים לְפָרֹעַ—*See I have made you a master [lit. god]*

over Pharaoh. Targum Yonasan explains that with these words, Hashem was effectively saying to Moses: Why are you afraid? I have already caused Pharaoh to fear you. **It is as if you were his god!** Moses is variously described as *a master* (here), *a man* (2:19), *a king* (Deuteronomy 33:5), and *an angel* (Numbers 20:16). He was born like every human being, with desires and weaknesses. Yet, through his own efforts he acquired those virtues which turn men into only a little less than the angels (Psalm 8:6). He became in King David's words, אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים

הָאֱלֹהִים, *a man of God* (Psalm 90:1). However, the Midrash remarks that even though Moses was described as אֱלֹהִים, in facing his final punishment he prayed to Hashem as a humble human being (Deuteronomy 3:23; Devarim Rabbah).¹

a. John 10:31-39

³¹Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, ³²but Yeshua said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" ³³"We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, **because you, a mere man, claim to be God.**" ³⁴Yeshua answered them, **"Is it not written in your Law, 'I have said you are "gods"?' ³⁵If he called them 'gods,' to whom the word of God came—and Scripture cannot be set aside—³⁶what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?** Why then do you accuse me of blasphemy because I said, 'I am God's Son'?" ³⁷Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father. ³⁸But if I do them, even

though you do not believe me, believe the works, **that you may know and understand that the Father is in me**, and I in the Father."

³⁹Again they tried to seize him, but he escaped their grasp.

—Yeshua quotes from the Psalms but calls it Torah.

1) Psalm 82:1-8 (CJB)

¹A psalm of Asaf: *Elohim* [God] stands in the divine assembly; there with the *elohim* [judges], he judges: ²"How long will you go on judging unfairly, favoring the wicked? (*Selah*) ³Give justice to the weak and fatherless! Uphold the rights of the wretched and poor! ⁴Rescue the destitute and needy; deliver them from the power of the wicked!" ⁵They don't know, they don't understand, they wander about in darkness; meanwhile, all the foundations of the earth are being undermined. ⁶"My decree is: **'You are *elohim* [gods, judges], sons of the Most High all of you.** ⁷Nevertheless, you will die like mortals; like any prince, you will fall.'" ⁸Rise up, *Elohim*, and judge the earth; for all the nations are yours.

b. Deuteronomy 3:21-26

²¹At that time I commanded Joshua: "You have seen with your own eyes all that the LORD your God has done to these two kings. The LORD will do the same to all the kingdoms over there where you are going. ²²Do not be afraid of them; the LORD your God himself will fight for you."

²³**At that time I pleaded with the LORD:** ²⁴"Sovereign LORD (*Adonai HaShem* [הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ]), you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do? ²⁵Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan—that fine hill country and Lebanon." ²⁶But because of you the LORD was angry with me and would not listen to me. "That is enough," the LORD said. "Do not speak to me anymore about this matter.

1) Luke 5:15-16

¹⁵Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses.

¹⁶But **Yeshua often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.**

2) Luke 6:12-13

¹²One of those days **Yeshua went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.** ¹³When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles ...

3) 2Corinthians 13:5-7

⁵Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test

¹ Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah, Shemot*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 86-96.

yourselves. Do you not realize that Messiah Yeshua is in you ...

⁷Now **we pray to God** ... so that you will do what is right ...

2. (v. 3) וַאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה—*But I shall harden Pharaoh's heart.* If

Hashem hardened his heart, **then in what way did Pharaoh sin**, and why did he deserve punishment? *Rambam* explains that sometimes when Hashem punishes a person for committing a very grave sin, this punishment takes the form of denying to that person the opportunity for repentance. This is what the Torah means by saying, *I shall harden Pharaoh's heart*. Other people to whom this type of punishment applied were Sihon, the king of Heshbon (*Deuteronomy* 2:30), the Canaanites (*Isaiah* 12:20), and the Jews themselves in Elisha's time (*IKings* 18:37) (*Hil. Teshuvah* 6:3).

This view is based on the opinion of R' Shimon ben Lakish, recorded in the Midrash. After Hashem had warned Pharaoh five times and after each warning Pharaoh refused to listen and hardened his heart, Hashem punished him by subsequently hardening it for him. [Note that for the first five plagues, the Torah states וַיַּחֲזֶק לִב־פַּרְעֹה, *Pharaoh's heart was strong*.]

According to this explanation, Hashem exerted a direct influence in hardening Pharaoh's heart after he had clearly revealed his stubborn defiance of Hashem. Such intervention is brought to bear even for kings, as *Ramban* points out, citing the words of King Solomon, *the heart of the king is like a stream in the hands of Hashem; He directs it wherever He wants* (*Proverbs* 21:1).

Pharaoh's stubbornness served the beneficial purpose of allowing many signs to be performed, thereby encouraging Israel to acknowledge Hashem's might.

This is one of Hashem's principles. **He brings punishment upon the nations so that Israel will understand and fear** (see *Zephania* 3:6). *Sforno*² and *Sefer Ikkarim*³ (5:25) take a psychological approach to answer this question. It is obvious that were Pharaoh's heart not hardened, he would have freed the Israelites sooner—**not from a sincere desire to repent and submit to Hashem's command, but simply because he could no longer bear the plagues**. If Pharaoh sincerely wished to repent, nothing prevented him from doing so. Thus, *I shall harden Pharaoh's heart*, means that **Hashem gave him the courage to endure the pain and suffering**, so that this alone would not cause him to release

the Jews. **Hashem wanted the Egyptians** to acknowledge His greatness and omnipotence, and to find the path to true repentance.

- a. *Zephaniah* 3:6-7

⁶"I have destroyed nations; their strongholds are demolished. I have left their streets deserted, with no one passing through. Their cities are laid waste; they are deserted and empty. ⁷Of Jerusalem I thought, **'Surely you will fear me and accept correction'**! Then her place of refuge would not be destroyed, nor all my punishments come upon her. But they were still eager to act corruptly in all they did.

- b. *Song of Songs Rabbah* 5:2, #2; *Yalkut, Song*, #988

"Open to Me, My sister" (*Song* 5:2). According to R. Yose, the Holy One said to Israel: My children, **open to Me in penitence an opening as small as the eye of a needle, and I shall make an opening in Me for you so wide that through it wagons and coaches could enter**.

- 1) *Exodus Rabbah* 19:4

"The stranger need not lodge outside" (*Job* 31:32). The Holy One declares no creature unfit—He receives all. **The gates [of repentance] are always open, and he who wishes to enter may enter**.

- 2) *Romans* 10:11-13

¹¹As Scripture says, "Anyone who believes in him will never be put to shame" (*Isa* 28:16). ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, **"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"** (*Joel* 2:32).

- 3) *Mark* 6:45-52

⁴⁵Immediately Yeshua made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

⁴⁶After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

⁴⁷Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake ... ⁴⁹when they saw him ... they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ⁵¹Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵²for **they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened**.

—In the preceeding pericope (a section of text) Yeshua feeds 5,000 (men) with five loaves of bread and two fish.

2 Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (1475-1550) was an Italian rabbi, Biblical commentator, philosopher and physician.

3 *Sefer Halkkarim* ("Book of Principles") is a fifteenth-century work by rabbi Joseph Albo. It is an eclectic, popular work, whose central task is the exposition of the principles of Judaism.

3. (v. 6) כִּן עָשׂוּ אֲתָם כִּן עָשָׂה יְהוָה צִוָּה כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן—*Moses and Aaron did as HASHEM commanded them; so they did.* The phrase כִּן עָשׂוּ, *so they did*, is mentioned frequently throughout the Torah, with slight variations in the wording. In this verse it indicates that Moses and Aaron did as Hashem commanded, **not as a political act for the independence of their nation but because it was a mitzvah, the will of Hashem.**

a. The simple meaning of the word mitzvah is *command*. It appears in various forms with that meaning about 300 times in the Five Books of Moses. It generally refers to the Divine commandments to the Jewish people, things He wants us to do or not do.⁴

In common usage, a mitzvah often means “a good deed”—as in “Do a mitzvah and help Mrs. Goldstein with her packages.” This usage is quite old—the Jerusalem Talmud commonly refers to any charitable act as “*the mitzvah*.”

1) 2Timothy 3:16-17

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and **training in righteousness**, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for **every good work**.

a) ἔργον (*er'gon*)—*business, employment, that which any one is occupied 1a) that which one undertakes to do, enterprise, undertaking 2) any product whatever, any thing accomplished by hand, art, industry, or mind 3) an act, deed, thing done.*

b) מַעֲשֶׂה (*ma'aseh*)—*work, deed*

The verb עָשָׂה has the basic connotation of “do” or “make.” It is used in numerous crystallized expressions, always with the same basic idea.

Aside from the numerous occurrences of the meaning “do” or “make” in a general sense, עָשָׂה **is often used with the sense of ethical obligation.** The covenant people were frequently commanded to “do” all that God had commanded (Exo 23:22; Lev 19:37; Deut 6:18, etc.). The numerous contexts in which this concept occurs attest to the importance of an ethical response to God **which goes beyond mere mental abstraction and which is translatable into obedience which is evidenced in demonstrable act.**

The word is often used in specialized expressions such as “make war” (Gen 14:2), “deal kindly” (Jud 1:24), “show faith-

fulness” (Gen 32:11), “do folly” (Deut 22:21), “offer sacrifice” (Exo 10:25), “keep the Passover” (Exo 12:48), “execute vengeance” (Jud 11:36), and many more (TWOT).

4. (v. 7) וּמֹשֶׁה בֶּן־שְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה—*Moses was eighty years old.* Abraham was seventy-five years old when he was entrusted with his historic mission. Clearly, the physical capacities of those having faith in Hashem do not diminish with age, as the prophet says: *They ... shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not be faint (Isaiah 40:31).* Furthermore: *Wisdom comes with the aged men, and in length of days comes understanding (Job 12:12).*

a. Acts 7:23-29

²³“**When Moses was forty years old**, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. ²⁴He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. ²⁵**Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not.** ²⁶The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’ ²⁷“But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us?’ ²⁸Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’ ²⁹When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

^{7:14}Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh’s heart is unyielding; he refuses to let the people go. ¹⁵Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the river. Confront him on the bank of the Nile, and take in your hand the staff that was changed into a snake. ¹⁶Then say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness. But until now you have not listened. ¹⁷This is what the LORD says: **By this you will know that I am the LORD:** With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood. ¹⁸The fish in the Nile will die, and the river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.’” ¹⁹The LORD said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters of Egypt—over the streams and canals, over the ponds and all the reservoirs—and they will turn to blood.’ Blood will be everywhere in Egypt, even in vessels of wood and stone.”

1. (v. 17) בְּזֹאת תֵּדָע כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה—*Through this shall you know that I am HASHEM.* Abarbanel (1437 [Portugal]-1508 [Italy]) states that the purposes of the Ten Plagues was to convince Pharaoh and the Egyptians

4 https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1438516/jewish/Mitzvah.htm

of the three fundamental truths of Hashem: 1) His existence, 2) His Divine Providence over nations and individuals, and 3) His Divine Omnipotence. Corresponding to these three truths are the three sets of plagues indicated by R' Yehudah's⁵ three-part acronym mentioned in the *Pesach Haggadah* דַּעֲיִיב בְּאַחֵיב דֶּתְצַח, *adash, b'achav* [each letter of the acronym corresponds to the initial letter of one of the Ten Plagues.]

The first plague of each group was preceded by a general declaration characterizing that group. Before the first set of plagues, Pharaoh was told, through this shall you know that I am Hashem, thus indicating that this group of plagues would demonstrate Hashem's existence.

The second group, beginning with the plague of עֲרוֹב, *wild beasts*, is prefaced with the declaration: So that you will know that I am Hashem in the midst of the land (8:18)—a statement of the principle of Divine Providence, **expressing the ongoing involvement and concern by Hashem in the events of the world**. The final group of plagues, beginning with בָּרָד, *hail*, is announced by invoking Hashem's Omnipotence: So that you shall know that there is none like Me in all the world (9:14). Thus, the Ten Plagues in Egypt were not only punitive measures; **they were also highly instructive**.

Blood (*Dam*) דָּם

Frogs (*Tz'far-deah*) צְפַרְדֵּי

Lice (*Ki-nim*) כִּנִּים

Wild Beasts (*A-rov*) עֲרוֹב

Cattle Disease (*Déver*) דֶּבֶר

Boils (*Sh'chin*) שְׁחִין

Hail (*Ba-rad*) בָּרָד

Locusts (*Ar-beh*) אֲרֵבָה

Darkness (*Cho-shech*) חֹשֶׁךְ

Death of the First-born (*Ma-kat b'cho-rot*) מַכַּת בְּכוֹרוֹת

a. Genesis 31:11-13

¹¹The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' ¹²And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats

mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for **I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you**. ¹³I am the God of Beth-el, where you ... made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.'"

1) Exodus 3:7-10

⁷The LORD said, "**I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt**. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and **I am concerned about their suffering**. ⁸So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land ... ⁹And now **the cry of the Israelites has reached me**, and **I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them**. ¹⁰So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

a) Acts 7:33-34

³³"Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'

2) Isaiah 57:15-19

¹⁵For this is what the high and exalted One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: "I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite. ¹⁶I will not accuse them forever, nor will I always be angry, for then they would faint away because of me-- the very people I have created. ¹⁷I was enraged by their sinful greed; I punished them, and hid my face in anger, yet they kept on in their willful ways. ¹⁸**I have seen their ways**, but I will heal them; I will guide them and restore comfort to Israel's mourners, ¹⁹creating praise on their lips. Peace, peace, to those far and near," says the LORD. "And I will heal them."

3) Psalms 142:1-5

¹A *maskil* of David. When he was in the cave. A prayer. I cry aloud to the LORD; I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy. ²I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble. ³**When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way**. In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me ... ⁵I cry to you, LORD; I say, "**You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living**."

⁵ Judah ha-Nasi or Judah I, was a second-century rabbi (a tanna of the fifth generation) and **chief redactor and editor of the Mishnah**. He lived from approximately 135 to 217 CE. He was a key leader of the Jewish community during the Roman occupation of Judea.

4) Psalm 119:143

¹⁴³Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your commands give me delight. ¹⁴⁴Your statutes are always righteous; give me understanding that I may live. ¹⁴⁵I call with all my heart; answer me, LORD, and I will obey your decrees.

5) 2Corinthians 4:8

⁸We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

6) Hebrews 4:15

¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are yet he did not sin.