

## Expansions upon the Book of Exodus

### Introduction

This document comes upon the heels of its predecessor, *Expansions upon the Book of Genesis*, and follows the same basic approach. That is to say, it is a document viewed from the point of view of *lectio divina*, the slow, meditative reading of Scripture which allows dwelling upon the text for as long as one wishes. In other words, *lectio* is not a reading of Scripture as we understand it today but more a praying of it. Surely an attractive practice, yet many people, even those with many years of experience, find it more difficult to implement than at first glance. This is largely due to the emphasis society places upon covering as much material as possible. It also involves two tendencies: to view the Bible from the scientific standpoint and the lesser know one of a sometimes fanciful or far-fetched allegorical approach sometimes adopted by early Christian writers. As for the latter, virtually all were ignorant of the incredible richness of the Hebrew language. You don't become aware of the powerful grip of these two very different tendencies until you actually take up the biblical text and try your hand at *lectio*. Because *lectio divina* is a unique form of reading coupled with prayer leading to contemplation—and that may be described broadly as the suspension of thought, albeit temporary—the discipline to carry it out is unfamiliar and requires considerable practice. This practice must be done on a regular basis because it can be lost quickly. To borrow an image from the first chapter in Exodus, *lectio* is not unlike those midwives who assisted at the birth of their fellow Israelite women. Without them we would be fruitless. Despite the formidable obstacles which can be depicted in Pharaoh's decree to slay all newly born Israelite males, *lectio divina* is open to every person desirous of cultivating a relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

In the text at hand, the reader will quickly discover that transliterated Hebrew words (in italics) abound. That means the manner in which *lectio divina* is presented presupposes an appreciation of that original biblical language, the only way such nuances may be uncovered. This orientation can make the document cumbersome and even intimidating for some folks. However, staying with the notes will show that such is not the case, that the Hebrew text can speak volumes to those without any knowledge of the language.

Exodus is chock full of miraculous events starting with the Lord's appearance to Moses in the burning bush through the ten plagues, on to the crossing of the Red Sea and the wonders he had performed in the Sinai wilderness including impartation of the Torah. They come at us so frequently and in such spectacular form that the only possible explanation we're stuck with is that they reflect the tendency of ancient peoples to interpret inexplicable natural events through divine intervention. The approach adopted by *lectio divina* does not ally itself with the literal interpretation nor the one which explains it away but adopts a third approach. That is to say, *lectio* regards the text not so much as a historical document nor as a catalogue of miracles attributed to the divinity but as means of assisting the reader to access God's presence here and now. Adopting this approach allows for expanding

certain elements of the Exodus text while not straying from the story at hand nor of reading into it what does not belong there. Hence the word “expansion” as part of this document’s title. Thus we are dealing with an approach to Scripture very different from the ones we’ve become familiar with yet right at the heart and intention of the text itself. In fact, this type of reading Exodus in the spirit of *lectio* is not unlike how some strands of Judaism which approached Exodus with a special eye upon the Hebrew text. Hence the effort placed in looking at the definitions of words in the Hebrew but—and it can’t be repeated enough—with a view towards using these words as a vehicle for contemplative prayer. Once familiar with them (for many are repeated but with varying meanings), the true grandeur and meaning of a text as Exodus becomes self-evident as a means of conveying us to God’s presence. For Christians, all this offers new insight into the mystery of Jesus Christ and makes him all that more attractive.

All biblical citations are taken from **The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha** (i.e., the **Revised Standard Version**).

## Chapter One

The first word of Exodus is not included in the English translation and therefore is revealing as to its relationship with the Book of Genesis. That is to say, the text has the conjunctive *w-* (‘and’) prefaced to the first word which is “these.” Thus vs. 1 starts off as “And these are the names of the sons of Israel.” Only the first word of Genesis itself lacks *w-* by reason of its preeminence or beginning with the account of creation. To insert *w-* would imply that something had existed before God as well as his creative activity. The reason for this *w-* which gets the Book of Exodus rolling? To continue in seamless fashion where Genesis left off. The *w-* at hand is a “big” *w-*; that is to say, not only does it connect two distinct books but does so as if no time nor spacial gap ever existed between them. Temporally speaking, we’re talking about a gap of some four hundred and thirty years which exists between the last verse of Genesis and the first verse of Exodus, quite a span to cover for such a small conjunctive as “and.” To bring this important insight home, consider how the two verses run together: “So (*w-*) Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. And (*w-*) these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob (etc.)” The reader is invited to pass over this lengthy interval which in itself is not without significance, not unlike the unrecorded years of Jesus prior to his ministry which comprises the bulk of his temporal existence. Frequent reference to this span of four hundred-plus years will be made in this document.

“And” brings us to the “names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household” [vs. 1]. The reason for this “first Exodus” was because of famine and more specifically, Joseph who had become second in charge of the country, right after Pharaoh. With the exception of the unnamed Pharaoh who dealt harshly with them, the land, people and presumably most succeeding Pharaohs had been exceptionally magnanimous. Surely Israel thought that any new Pharaoh would have in mind what Joseph had done for Egypt,

saving it from ruin.

The movement of Israel and his sons into Egypt started off as a desire to seek a place of refuge. Those who set out on this relatively short journey never had in mind putting down roots, just staying a generation or two..no more...after which the people would return home. Besides, people who accompanied Israel and his family wished for a swift return; they wanted to have at least a few of Israel's sons still alive to function as leaders in their reestablishment. Then there was the problem of the Canaanites. They were delighted to get rid of the upstart immigrants within their midst and would put up stiff resistance should they attempt a return. Chances are many Canaanites cheered the Israelites as they made their southwest trek.

Dinah, the sister of Israel's twelve sons, whom Simeon and Levi rescued from the hands of Shechem, was an instrumental figure at this stage of history. She isn't recorded as having accompanied the family to Egypt though visits between Canaan and Egypt must have been frequent. Travel was easier after the seven years of famine had ended, so people could shuttle back and forth within several days. Chances are that Dinah had married one of Israel's descendants, giving rise to a line that would remain in Canaan and maintain the old ways and traditions. In this she was faithful to her ancestor Abraham's commandment not to marry a local Canaanite. That would defile the heritage permanently. Thus Dinah's task was to remain in Canaan as a kind of reference point...a reminder to Israel's sons and descendants that Egypt was not the land God had intended for them. And so she and her lineage became responsible for keeping alive the dream of return.

As for Israel's sons, some time went by without any hint of a return home. Joseph dies and they remain. Generation after generation arises and still nothing. Goshen turned out to be the best of all possible worlds, a refuge from which no one wanted to leave. Because things were so good could this indeed be the promised land? Besides, Joseph himself had brought Israel to Goshen, a good a sign as any. Single-handedly he put the most powerful country in the world at his disposal. And so, had Abraham been mistaken, even deluded? It seemed so, but nagging voices from Dinah and her clan kept saying no, that their stay in Egypt was temporary and that it was time to come home. Certainly the Israelites could have picked up and leave any time. However, all the Pharaohs starting from Joseph's time to just prior to the birth of Moses must have been ideal rulers. If one or several of them had made life intolerable, we would have heard of it long before now.

Vss. 2-3 list the offspring belonging to sons of Israel as "seventy persons" followed by a simple statement—a recap of sorts from the end of Genesis—which mentions Joseph's death as well as those of his generation. Now vs. 7 itself acts as the conjunctive *w-* mentioned above as introducing the Book of Exodus, here as the word "but:" "But the descendants of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly." *Parah* is the verb for "were fruitful" as in 23.30: "Little by little I will drive them out from before you until you are increased and possess the land." It is used in conjunction with the verb, *sharats* (increased) which means to creep,

crawl: “So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm.” This idea of swarming suggests propagation gone out of control and conveys a less than desirable feeling for the native Egyptians. Vs. 7 continues with this theme of explosive population growth: “they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong so that the land was filled with them.” The first two verbs at hand are *ravav* and *hatsam* with the latter having for “exceedingly” *bim’od me’od* or literally “in excessive excessive.” In other words, no one could keep track of these people as they multiplied beyond all expectation. *Hatsam* means to bind fast, be strong in number as in vs. 20 as well as Ps 105.24: “And the Lord made his people very fruitful and made them stronger than their foes.”

As for the last verb (the simple *mala’*), it means to full and sums up the incredible capacity for propagation of the first four verbs. These verbs apply to *‘erets* or land which, of course, is Egypt beginning in the original place of settlement, Goshen. Thus the Israelites quickly spread from Goshen to all parts of Egypt. Obviously this happened gradually over the span of some four hundred plus years until Moses comes on the scene. The Pharaoh whom Joseph had served didn’t foresee what became a national threat, that the Israelites would outnumber the Egyptians. By the end of their stay, many if not all Israelites had lost contact with Dinah and her clan who attempted to keep alive memory of Canaan, the land promised to Abraham. By now many Israelites were wondering if Egypt wasn’t their final destiny, but never do we encounter sentiments of this sort. Moses made it a point to delete them from his account, but they must have been fairly wide spread.

Vs. 8 is short yet ominous: “Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph.” Implied here is that this particular Pharaoh, unlike his predecessors, stands out from them by reason of not having known Joseph, *yadah* being the verb which connotes intimate familiarity. “You know when I sit down and when I rise up” [Ps 139.2]. Obviously this Pharaoh, as well as those before, did not know Joseph, for they came into power well after his death. However, the *yadah* at hand is a knowing that can extend beyond the limits of space and time. Not to know Joseph is not to know the *chesed* or tender mercy for which he was renowned. So in the case at hand, *yadah* = *chesed* and lack of *yadah* = lack of *chesed*. One gets the impression that the Pharaohs had a fairly good track record here, no mean feat for any country. But that is beside the point. The Israelites, not the Egyptians, are the prime object of Exodus’ saga. As for the current Pharaoh, it makes no matter who he was, even if we knew his name, for to lack *chesed* was not worth having his name remembered for future generations. Since the issue of *chesed* is at hand, we can only speculate whether or not Israel’s descendants picked up any of it. They are just as deficient as the Egyptians among whom they lived—and that includes the sitting Pharaoh—though a small remnant must have kept it alive until the appearance of Moses. This is not unlike the small yet vital divine spark stemming from Adam through Noah and on to Abraham, lack of which (i.e., *chesed*) contributed to Israel’s predicament. In sum, it was partly their fault, not entirely Pharaoh’s.

Note that in vss. 9-10 Pharaoh addresses not just those in his court but “his people:”

“Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us.” Pharaoh addressed his people in the person of messengers who flooded the land and made known his sentiments to virtually every living person. For a messenger to speak in Pharaoh’s name was the same as if he were present. He begins the decree with *hineh* (behold) which means something like “Look about you; pay close attention to what I am about to say.” *Hatstam* is the verb for “mighty” and means to bind or tie up and is found in vs. 20: “and the people multiplied and grew very strong.” In other words, the Israelites were so prolific (at least that was the official slant) that they threatened to “bind up” the Egyptians, their hosts for the past four hundred years, which was intolerable. However, this decree had to come from some courtiers within Pharaoh’s court who felt their authority threatened. Pharaoh himself may not have subscribed to this but had to adopt their position or else his supporters might overthrow him. Surely he must have considered his predecessors, of how they kept alive the *chesed* of Joseph and if he had his own way, would follow in their tracks. We see traces of this later on when in dialogue with Moses: “Now therefore, forgive my sin, I pray you, only this once, and entreat the Lord your God only to remove this death from me” [10.17].

“Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply” [vs. 10]. “Come” is similar to *hineh* but is borders on making a demand, of having all Egyptians join the common cause of making life difficult for the Egyptians. Actually this Pharaoh had good advisors, for they counseled him to get at the root of the problem, “lest they multiply,” *ravah* being the verb which was used in vs. 7 (‘they multiplied’). At this juncture being overwhelmed by Israelites was not quite a threat but one that was looming on the horizon. That’s what is implied by the word “lest” (*pen*). As for acting shrewdly, the verb is *chakam*, fundamentally as to be wise. “Be not righteous overmuch and do not make yourself over-wise” [Eccl 7.16]. What Pharaoh means by *chakam* is soon spelled out and boils down to enslaving the Israelites for construction purposes.

Next in vs. 10 Pharaoh plays his trump card: “if war befall us.” Always the threat of invasion loomed, for the rich Nile River valley offered some of the best farmland in the region. Control that and you control Egypt. Pharaoh mentions enemies but leaves them unspecified. No matter, just the thought of raising the possibility of external foes uniting with non-Egyptians dwelling within Egypt was frightening enough. Despite this, Pharaoh was more intent on the Israelites escaping Egypt (‘and escape from the land’) which means the loss of his labor force. As for the verb “escape,” it’s *halah* or go up...go up to Canaan, the land from which the Israelites had come. So he offers a paradox of sorts. On one hand Pharaoh appeals to national sentiment while on the other hand, makes his subjects aware of the value Israelite slavery would mean to their economy.

Having outlined the general threat posed by the Israelites and by not expanding upon it more, Pharaoh leaves the rest up to the imagination of his subjects. Give that they posed a threat (real or perceived), and the Egyptians will be galvanized into action. As for the action eventually taken, the Egyptians decided against expulsion or even extermination, for they recognized the Israelites as a potential slave pool. That’s why “they set taskmasters over

them to afflict them with heavy burdens" [vs.11]. "They" is a general term which doesn't include all Egyptians, presumably just some in authority and those with an axe to grind against them. The phrase for "taskmasters" is *sarey misym*. Apparently the first word is "princess" and the second "tribute" or *mas*. "So he bowed his shoulder to bear and became a slave at forced labor" [Gen 49.15]. *Mas* thus connotes not so much that which is burdensome but the notion of paying tribute, not unlike paying a tax.

*Hanah* is the verb for "afflict," and among Hebrew verbs, has one of the most varied meanings (to sing, answer, signify, to oppress). "That we may bind him to afflict him" [Judg 16.5]. *Hanah* is specified, namely, by imposing "heavy burdens" (*sevel*) upon the Israelites which derives from a verbal root meaning to bear or carry. "I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket" [Ps 81.7] (This verse seems to reflect the experience now under discussion). As for the labor at hand, it was for building two store-cities, Pithom and Raamses. *Miskenoth* (feminine plural) is the word with six other biblical references, four of which are in Second Chronicles. "He built Tadmor in the wilderness and all the store-cities which he built in Hamath." Reference is to King Solomon who did all this without forced labor, having been mindful of his ancestors' experience.

"But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad." This is the first of two complete sentences in vs. 12. A force was at work among the Israelites which neither they nor the Egyptians could explain. The former must have realized something larger was going on which would manifest itself eventually, and that indeed occurred. The verb for "oppressed" is *hanah* which was noted in the last paragraph along with two counterpoints: 1) "multiplied" or *ravah*, the fourth time used in this chapter and 2) "spread abroad" (*parats*). This verb means to break or destroy in the sense of dispersing what had just been crushed. It occurs later in 19.22: "lest the Lord break out upon them." This inability to control the Israelites had the Egyptians "in dread" of them, the verb being *quts* (it has eight other biblical references) which means to be weary, loath. "Neither be weary of his correction" [Prov 3.11].

The dread just mentioned became compounded: "So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor" [vs. 13]. This time the common verb *havad* ('serve') is used which from here on becomes synonymous with abject slavery. Not only were the Israelites made to *havad* with respect to establishing store-cities, this *havad* was done "with rigor" or *perek*, a noun with five other biblical references derived from the verbal root meaning to break, crush. "With force and harshness you have ruled them" [Ezk 34.4]. A noun derived from the verbal root *havad* is found in vs. 14 as *havodah*, very much used in Exodus: "and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field." However, *havodah* does have positive connotations as in 36.1: "for the service of the sanctuary." The word "bitter" (*marar*, a verb) connotes something unpleasant to the taste which here applies to the collective lives of the Israelites. That is to say, their work became so hard and onerous that they tasted it as bitter and could not escape it even if they wished. As for the

verb *marar*, cf. 1Sam 30.6: “The soul of all the people was grieved.” The verses above applied chiefly to forced labor in construction, but vs. 14 includes work in the field. Again, vs. 14 echoes vs. 13: “in all their work they made them serve with rigor” (*perek*.)”

Because the Nile River was the only fertile place in the country, a very narrow band where people could live, it was easy to keep track of everyone, Egyptians and Israelites alike, quite unlike a population scattered throughout a wide area. We can assume that by the time we reach the next verse dealing with the Israelite midwives Pharaoh had mobilized all the Israelites and their Egyptian taskmasters. The Israelites were laboring in the shadow of the pyramids, even considered ancient by that time. They may have consoled themselves by the thought that people like them had been enslaved more harshly for a longer period of time. Regardless of the inaccuracy of this perception, the looming presence of such monoliths must have had a profound impact upon the collective imagination of the Israelites.

With the Israelites put to work, now Pharaoh could turn attention to a less obvious but more important issue which gets to the problem at hand, control of the enemy’s population. “Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah” [vs. 15; this verse is incomplete and flows over into the next one]. First Pharaoh had to send out an order to assemble all midwives which meant that any baby born in their absence had a less than favorable chance of survival. But given the resourcefulness of the Israelites, women like Shiphrah and Puah trained people to take their place. As for these two, they are singled out by reason of their expertise and reputation among the people they served; perhaps they ran something like a hospital or clinic for Israelite women to give birth. We don’t hear about Shiphrah and Puah though they must have continued their important profession while the Israelites were wandering in the Sinai desert where their skills were even of greater value. During this wandering it must have been very trying for both women to see how many of these people turned out as disobedient to God. “Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people that were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised” [Josh 5.5]. And so Shiphrah and Puah enjoyed fairly intimate terms with virtually every person born in the years before their departure from Egypt.

“When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them upon the birth stool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live” [vs. 16]. Words spoken to both the midwives assembled before Pharaoh as well as Shiphrah and Puah, singled out for particular rebuke. “Birth stool” is *’oven* (the only reference in the Bible) which literally means stone and is applied to a low seat or stool on which a woman sits about to give birth, the midwife being nearby. Allowing female babies to live and killing male ones prefigures Herod who “killed all the male children in Bethlehem” [Mt 2.17]. Herod did this because he was tricked by the three wise men, Shiphrah and Puah being a kind of symbol of them. That’s what these two women did...allow the male children born in and under their care to live without Pharaoh knowing it.

“But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them but let the male children live” [vs. 17]. *Yare'* is the common verb for “feared” and applies more to a spirit of reverence. It is found in vs. 21 in a similar circumstance. As for the verb “commanded,” it is the common verb *davar* which means to speak. Perhaps at this juncture Pharaoh thought that his mere words and the content of his message were sufficiently intimidating, so he just spoke (*davar*) to the midwives. Besides, they were women and women were considered of less stature and more compliant to any decrees coming from above. The source of this *yare'* for God indicates that the monotheistic religion brought into Egypt with Joseph and his family. However, roots for this worship can extend further back, to the time when Abram dwelt in Egypt to escape a famine (cf. Gen 12.10-20). Now for these midwives to have feared God is no mean feat even if the country (Egypt) up until this Pharaoh had been favorably disposed. For that to endure so long is testimony, especially to the person of Joseph. Besides, the midwives acted as a kind of priestly class for the Israelites because they brought them into existence.

Vs. 18 shoots back quickly with a response from Pharaoh who got wind of the midwives' plans. “Why have you done this?” From the start of his plan to slay all male Israelites children Pharaoh had positioned spies to keep an eye out, so it was easy to keep him informed. The midwives retorted with an insult, indicative of that *yare'* for God they embodied: “The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women” [vs. 10]. As for the former, they are “vigorous” and “are delivered before the midwife comes to them.” The word for “vigorous” is *chayeh*, the only use of this term in the Bible which is derived from the verbal root “to live.” In other words, the Israelite women are full of life which bespeaks their overall condition, not just their physical one. So if these women don't require midwives, why are they mentioned in the first place? Certainly they assisted at birth but over the passage of time acquired a mystique which remained with them regardless of whether they assisted at birth or not. It was their *yare'* for God that was their true vocation, giving birth to worship of the true God for over four hundred years in the midst of a wildly, even luxuriantly, polytheistic land.

“So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong” [vs. 20]. The verb “dealt well” (*yataw*) is the root for the common adjective “good.” “The tongue of the wise makes knowledge good, but the mouths of fools pour out folly” [Prov 15.2]. So the basis of Israelite prosperity in Egypt is divine recognition of the midwives who set the stage for the emergence of Moses. Because of this *yataw*, the “people multiplied and grew very strong.” This is a repetition of vs. 7, “they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong” with the exception of a second *me'od* (‘very’). Such strength is revealed by the Israelites having families (*bayith*, vs. 21) which means house. As for these houses, they were divided in accord with the twelve sons of Israel though nothing is said of this. However, it can easily be presumed.

“Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, ‘Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live’” [vs. 22]. And so Pharaoh extends his



persecution to “all his people” meaning the Egyptians. Since people were concentrated along the banks of the Nile River, it was easy (as noted above) for them to carry out this order. Presumably the people obeyed though Chapter One ends without further details. At this juncture the insertion of becomes more a pause of fear and trepidation at what follows from this royal decree.

## Chapter Two

“Now a man from the house of Levi went and took to wife a daughter of Levi.” This opening verse of new chapter shows the lineage of the soon-to-be-born Moses, the tribe of Levi. Levi, along with his brother Simeon, was mentioned last in Gen 49.5 as “weapons of violence” against whom their father Israel cautioned not to associate (‘come not into their council’). Later the tribe of Levi was “set apart...to carry the ark” [Dt 10.8] or to perform priestly duties. However, to date being associated with Levi was less than flattering, that is, unless members of that tribe had developed some form of ritual worship to keep alive in Egypt, the tradition of the One true God begun by Abraham. Instead of the tribe of Levi, it would appear preferable that Moses, if given a choice, would have been born from the tribe of Joseph who long ago had delivered Egypt and gave refuge to Israel and his sons. Regardless, Levi won out by reason of its connection with formal or liturgical worship which had some form at the time of Moses’ birth. No names are given to Moses’ parents; it is sufficient to know their origins.

“And when the woman saw that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months” [vs. 2]. *Tov* is the adjective for “goodly” which means that even as an infant, his parents could intimate qualities that would develop later on. Interestingly, that divine quality of loving kindness or *chesed* associated with Joseph, isn’t mentioned in Exodus as pertaining to him. Moses’ mother managed to get away with a scant three months concealing her new-born son; what forces her to give him up to the waters of the Nile isn’t state explicitly. Surely an Israelite informer or Egyptian discovered that she had given birth to a male child. Perhaps this same woman gave birth to other male infants who weren’t so lucky. It was another matter, however, if the infant was female as was the case, for Moses had a sister (Miriam).

“And when she could hide him no longer she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch” [vs. 3]. The verb *tsaphan* (hide) is used as in the previous verse which connotes a laying up or storing. “He stores up sound wisdom for the upright” [Ps 2.7]. So the mother stores Moses, if you will, for safe keeping within a *tevah* or basket, the same word used for Noah’s ark. Like Noah, she waterproofs this *tevah* (only it’s made of *gome’*, marsh rushes, ‘in vessels of papyrus upon the waters,’ Is 18.2) with bitumen or *chemar*. Two other biblical references exist, both from Genesis: one for constructing the tower of Babel (cf. 11.3) and the other in reference to the Valley of Siddim (cf. 14.8). Surely she had in mind the ark which had saved mankind from the destructive, worldwide flood. To put her son in such an “ark” was repeating this salvific gesture, for later Moses would

deliver the world by being the recipient of the Torah. His mother also applied pitch or *zepheth*; two biblical references exist, both in Is 34.9: “And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch...her land shall become burning pitch.”

Unlike the ark which was obviously noticeable to everyone, the *tevah* at hand was small and easy to construct and therefore away from prying eyes. Once done, she “placed it among the reeds at the river’s bank.” She had two ideal choices, early in the morning or towards evening to escape attention. The reeds acted as a concealed spot before the river’s current took it away and out of sight since it was small and barely noticeable on the expansive Nile. As for Moses’ father, he isn’t recorded as helping out; perhaps he was talking with both Israelites and Egyptians to deflect attention from his wife. As head of the household, he had to give her consent to take this drastic action and hope for the best. The two must have prayed to God for safe conduct of their child which was about to pay off favorably. This incident closes with vs. 4 where Moses’ sister—most likely Miriam though her name isn’t give—was by the Nile watching all that her mother was doing. That means she was older than the infant Moses, old enough to realize this drastic measure yet probably too young to know the full implications. Miriam was told to stay at home but went to the river anyway, taking advantage of the reeds to conceal herself. Surely thoughts of rescuing her infant brother must have crossed her mind, but she was too small to do anything about it except watch anxiously.

Now this second ark...*tevah*...was about to set sail upon the Nile River and be at the mercy of the current. Because it contained the author of Torah (better, the recorder of it), the *tevah* at hand was far more valuable than Noah’s. Apparently it hadn’t been adrift long, let alone out of the reeds, for “the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river” [vs. 5]. The time was most likely evening after the harsh sun had declined and breezes from the Nile could be felt. And so Moses’ mother must have set her son adrift around the same time. She may have figured that people would be bathing at that time, but Pharaoh’s daughter? Being of royal stock, she was accompanied by maidens and must have done this at a more or less regular time. Thus this incident wasn’t random but planned. The daughter of the king (we don’t have her name) had a reputation for kindness and did not share her father’s harsh treatment of the Israelites, so chances were favorable that she would rescue the infant. Thus thought Moses’ mother. As for the maidens, they may have entertained different thoughts and were tempted to squeal on their mistress, but it didn’t turn out so. While they maidens were off on their usual evening walk, Pharaoh’s daughter spotted Moses among the reeds. That means the distance between his mother and the royal party was close enough to overhear every word that was spoken. The same applied to Miriam. All in all, the plan was risky but brilliant.

When Pharaoh’s daughter got hold of the *tevah*, immediately she opened it. Perhaps she was familiar with the Noah story handed down among the Israelites in Egypt and considered this a sign or reminder of that distance age when the world was consumed by flood waters. “She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews’ children” [vs. 6]. *Chamal* is the

verb for “took pity” which has a connotation of sparing. “As a man spares his own son” [Mal 3.17]. The princess recognized instantly that Moses was a Hebrew due to his circumcision. Because his mother and sister were close by, Miriam boldly approached the princess with the words “Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you” [vs. 7]? Moses’ mother must have been mortified at her daughter’s audacity and did all she could to refrain herself. This temerity paid off, for the princess told Miriam to fetch the child’s mother who was right there among the reeds. Upon hearing these words, the mother raced back home as quickly as possible before her daughter could arrive and dry off so what she had just been doing wouldn’t be given away. Pretending not to know a thing, the mother came to the river and acknowledged her identity, still afraid that the princess or one of her maidens might hand her over to Pharaoh. “So the woman took the child and nursed him” [vs. 9]. In other words, back to square one. This command, coupled with the completely unexpected salary for nursing the child, must have shocked the mother, let alone the father. The same applied to her neighbors in the village, some of whom became angry and jealous at her son having been spared. Also, some Israelites took this as a positive omen for their future and did their best to keep the child’s identity a secret.

“And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son” [vs. 10]. How long Moses remained in his mother’s care isn’t specified, though while growing up, his mother and the princess must have kept in contact, albeit concealed. The only condition—and it was a difficult one—was that the mother was paid to nurse her own child and raise it as someone else’s. It became especially hard as the child grew up and received secret visits from its “mother,” Pharaoh’s daughter, when she went to the river for her bath, virtually a daily ritual. Because the princess was so attracted to Moses, she decided that things would work out better all around if he came to live with her. She hit upon this course of action before the child matured, wondering all along who was its natural mother. Thus the real mother brought the child to the adopted mother, all the while pretending to be its nurse. When in the princess’ company, “she named him Moses, for she said, ‘Because I drew him out of the water’” [vs. 10]. As for the name Moses, it derives from an Egyptian word meaning to beget a child and here is associated with the Hebrew word *mashah*, to draw or draw out. Two other biblical references, pretty much the same, are Ps 18.16 and 2Sam 22.17, the former being quoted here: “He reached from on high, he took me, he drew me out of many waters.” First Pharaoh’s daughter had to remove the *tevah* (basket/ark) from among the reeds and then Moses. So without knowing it, she drew Moses, fulfilling his destiny as future author of the Torah. Today no one searches for Moses’ *tevah* while many entertain theories about the one of Noah. Even if both existed, they are irrelevant compared with the Torah which issued from the hand of the future recorder now rescued from the Nile River.

“One day, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and looked on their burdens” [vs. 11]. After the switch of mothers, as it were, on the banks of the Nile River, Moses became a full-fledged Egyptian living in the royal palace whose true identity successfully remained concealed from Pharaoh. Then again, Pharaoh could have known the

child's identity but kept quiet out of respect for his daughter who may have been his only child or certainly his favorite. As for the verse at hand, it says that Moses "went out to his people" which reveals that despite having been raised as an Egyptian, he did not identify with that nation. That means his mother and sister Miriam had regular access to him (his mother having been his nurse) and on one propitious day informed Moses of his true identity, that he was an Israelite. He seems to have taken it in stride, even welcomed the news, which is why so early on he recognizes "his people." The act of going out to see them means he left his royal surroundings and sought out the Israelites who continued in bondage. No one compelled him otherwise. Moses did run the risk, however, of having the Egyptian court discover his true roots. Also they may have know it tacitly but remained quiet out of respect for Pharaoh and his daughter. Nevertheless, the Egyptians must have kept a close eye upon him. At this juncture Moses made no one-on-one contact with "his people;" he just "looked on their burdens" or *sevalah* which first is mentioned in 1.11. The verb for "looked" is the common *ra'ah*. How to deal with this would work out shortly, but now was the time for observation. Part of this looking, however, turned into action when he hit upon an "Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people." Again, "his people" is mentioned which automatically made Moses spring into action. The reason for this beating isn't given, but it must have been especially cruel to have moved Moses who already had witnessed plenty of abuse. As for his age ('had grown up'), let's say it is 18-20 years of age. That means Pharaoh had been persecuting the Israelites for some twenty years, so by now the people were close to the breaking point.

"He looked this way and that, and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand" [vs. 12]. The verb at hand is *panah* (to turn) "here and here" (*koh wkoh*) which is indicative of Moses being on guard in a furtive, nervous fashion attempting to disguise the action he was about to undertake. The mood of just indignation and desire to intervene reveals itself again shortly when Moses comes across two Hebrews struggling together, a trait he would use to great advantage before Pharaoh despite some innate bashfulness. One of the Hebrews asked "Who made you a prince and a judge over us" [14]? *Sar* is the word for "prince" which can apply to a commander of soldiers. "To bind his princes at his pleasure" [Ps 105.22]. Then follows in the same breath, "Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Despite the precaution Moses had taken—*panah* this way and that—someone had seen what happened, most likely peering over a sand dune or from behind a partially completed building. The circumstance was most likely some building project where the Egyptian (taskmaster) started beating the Israelite, so plenty of people were moving about. The verse at hand ends with "Surely the thing is known," the noun for "thing" being *davar* or literally, word. That is to say, *davar* being a word is endowed the swiftness of speech and quickly reached Pharaoh. He may not have been concerned if it weren't for the partially completed building project near which this slaying occurred; otherwise, he would have let it pass. But if a Hebrew slew an Egyptian, that is, a slave killed his master, Pharaoh might soon have an all-out rebellion on his hands. At that point Moses' cover and safety net provided by Pharaoh's daughter was blown. Despite Pharaoh's love for his daughter, he couldn't allow such an incident pass by, one with the potential of

undermining his throne. The importance of *davar* is again revealed with the ominous words, “When Pharaoh heard of *davar*, he sought to kill Moses” [vs. 15].

“But Moses fled from Pharaoh and stayed in the land of Midian; and he sat down by a well” (The RSV continues the same verse, 15 as a new paragraph). This flight means that Moses had to leave the palace in a hurry and therefore his step-mother, Pharaoh’s daughter. He was too ashamed to inform her but hoped the truth would emerge later on. The flight (*baraq*) literally reads “from the face of Pharaoh” which means his presence, and being an absolute ruler, getting away from his face was a difficult thing to do. Hence Moses had to leave the country immediately. The text says in a straight-forward manner that Moses sought refuge in Midian which suggests he knows where he is going and perhaps had planned it ahead long ago just in case. As for the Midianites, they were connected with Israel through Abraham’s second wife Keturah (cf. Gen 25.2). It seemed that link may have endured the test of time. Closer to Moses’ time frame and tradition, the Midianites were traders to whom Israel’s sons had sold Joseph, thereby bringing him into Egypt (cf. Gen 37.28). Later when Joseph got established and made a name for himself, people from Midian came to him for grain. Thus these traders kept alive the memory of Joseph’s *chesed* or loving kindness, a trait that over the years became associated with Midian for which it was justly proud. While its location isn’t exactly certain, Midian seems to be in northwest Arabia or the Sinai Desert region. That means Moses had to cross the Red Sea—how people did that was perhaps by boat—and then make it on foot across the desert. Thus unconsciously he laid out the future route of the exodus his people would take.

In Genesis, wells, the source of water, are favorite meeting places as in the case of Abraham’s anonymous servant when he went searching for a wife for Isaac (cf. Gen 24) and later with Jacob (cf. Gen 29), that incident not unlike the one about to unfold, plus a number of others. All were gathering natural places jealously guarded; the same applies to the one Moses takes his rest. Furthermore, he was far enough from Pharaoh’s reach and could think about settling down even if removed from his people. What Pharaoh’s daughter, his step-mother thought about all this, is unrecorded though she must have been quite distressed at her son not having turned out as she hoped. Moses had the potential of becoming a Second Joseph...even a Pharaoh...whose memory was alive among the Egyptians.

“Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters; and they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father’s flocks” [vs. 16]. Note that all seven daughters came compared with the story of Rachel. That made a deep impression upon Moses, for it was easy to intimate that their father was quite wealthy. The name of the priest (*kohen*) isn’t given until the beginning of Chapter Three (i.e., Jethro) nor is nature of his priesthood. Because Midian and Israel were distant cousins as noted above, the former retained some monotheistic worship and perhaps sacrifice whereas we hear nothing of the sort among the Israelites during their four century long sojourn in Egypt. One tradition that may have fed into Jethro’s priesthood was the attempted sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham which occurred two chapters prior to mention of Midian’s connection through Abraham. Also the sacrifices

Abraham had performed became part of Midian's tradition, having sprung from Keturah, Abraham's second wife. As for Midian, it was easier for this people to retain its ancient traditions, fairly isolated in the desert, while at the same time retaining vigorous trade connections as with those traders who bought Joseph. In other words, they had the best of both worlds: isolation and a position right on the doorstep of Egypt.

So when the seven daughters arrived at the well, "shepherds came and drove them away" [vs. 17] which shows just how precious water is in the desert. As with the recent case of Moses watching the Egyptian beat a Hebrew, he saw this and came to their aid. The verse at hand says that Moses "stood up and helped them," nothing more. Apparently his standing up (*qum*) was sufficient to scare off the shepherds who thought the seven daughters were an easy target to scare away. "When they came to their father Reuel, he said, 'How is it that you have come so soon today'" [vs. 18]? Apparently Reuel was the proper name for Jethro which means "excellency;" regardless, we are not dealing with two separate persons. The seven daughters of Reuel/Jethro ran off excitedly to tell their father the good news, that a stranger helped them, but they returned without carry water, hence the question. They identified Moses as an Egyptian who drew water and watered the flock, words that must have delighted Jethro. His identity came from clothing or some ornamentation; after all, Moses was raised in Pharaoh's court. Immediately Jethro summoned his daughters to fetch "the Egyptian" and have him eat supper that evening. As for the shepherds, they too recognized Moses was an Egyptian and were afraid that he might be part of an advanced raiding party, hence their haste to scatter.

"And Moses was content to dwell with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah" [vs. 21]. *Yá'al* is the verb for "was content" which fundamentally means to begin, to undertake an endeavor. The other meanings apply to Moses, for his dwelling in Midian set the stage for the crucial divine revelation about to follow. "That it would please god to crush me" [Job 6.9]! Zipporah is last mentioned in 18.2 when Moses sends her and his two sons away. Other than that we have no information about her though she must have brought comfort to Moses, essential to his being *ya'al*. Actually it was her father who thought that of all the seven daughters she would fit the bill for Moses. Vs. 22 mentions the birth of Moses' first son, Gershom, though no mention of his second son Eliezer's birth is mentioned. As for the derivation of Gershom, "I have been a sojourner in a foreign land," *ger* being the word for "sojourner." In a way, Moses was a two-fold *ger*: his identity with "his people" in vs. 11 (i.e., not the Egyptians) and here in Midian. "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not their and will be slaves there (Egypt)" [Gen 15.13], words of the Lord to Abram.

"In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died." Such is the first sentence to vs. 23 which sounded like good news for both Moses and "his people." As for "many days," it is an indefinite period of time but obviously a long one, long enough for Moses to have settled down comfortably in Midian and offer time (hopefully) for memory of the murder he had committed to blow by. That memory seems to have been forgotten ('for all the men who

were seeking your life are dead,' 4.19), and mention of these words from Jethro give a general idea of how long "those many days" had been.

Instead of showing joy at Pharaoh's death, vs. 23 continues in the second sentence, "And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God." Despite this, Moses must have entertained thoughts about his step-mother, the kindly woman who had rescued him from the Nile River. She remained alive well into the reign of the new Pharaoh and perhaps fell out of favor. Due to this and her connection with Moses as well as with his mother and sister Miriam, she decided to throw in her lot with the Israelites and eventually participated in the crossing of the Red Sea. Moses would make certain that she would be cared for well during those forty years of wandering when she must have passed away, not having made it to Canaan. The verb *'anach* translated as "groaned," the pronunciation alone being well suited for its meaning. "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan" [Prov 29.2]. It's intensified by the preposition *min* used with "bondage," that is to say, "from (under) bondage." The crying which ensued must have been terrible, not unlike the cry of Abel's blood from the earth. In fact, the same verb *tsahaq* is used. "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" [Gen 4.10].

As with the case of Abel's blood, "God heard (*shamah*) their groaning and remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob" [vs. 24]. Here *tsahaq* (cry) is transformed into *ne'aqah*; three other biblical references exist, one of which is found in 6.5 (same context) and another in Judg 2.18: "For the Lord was moved to pity by their groanings because of those who afflicted and oppressed them." The power of *tsahaq* and *ne'aqah* were enough to make God remember...*zakar*...the covenant made with their three illustrious ancestors. As for *zakar*, it's more than a simple recollection of the past; a noun derived from this verbal root (same spelling) is "a male" or the agent through whom the memorial of his parents and relatives even further back are continued into the present. So in the context of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and despite the centuries between when they had flourished and Israel in Egypt, the time gap is as nothing. Besides, Moses being a male (*zakar*) Israelite is a living memory (*zakar*) of the people destined not only to continue their heritage but to enhance it...not just Moses but Israel as a whole to which this verse refers specifically.

Vs. 25 continues with this theme of divine *zakar* and brings Chapter Two to a close: "And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition." Here emphasis shifts from hearing in vs. 24 to seeing, the first being indispensable to effect the latter. As for hearing, it's closer to the situation compared with the more distant seeing. That means God went down to his people, albeit in disguise, for a better "hearing" before he takes action through Moses. The "place" from which God had seen the Israelites isn't given but quickly becomes apparent. In between the hearing and seeing is the unifying factor of remembering (*zakar*). That means God was in their midst as inheritors of the *zakar* of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. From this intermediary position of *zakar*, God then "saw" the people after he had heard them. To do so otherwise would have meant God was not faithful to Israel. Finally hearing-

remembering-seeing is elevated into a divine knowing, *yadah* being the verb which means intimate association as noted in 1.8. The Hebrew text lacks “condition.” To *yadah* is sufficient and sets the stage for the first major divine revelation in many a generation, one that had been absent to Israel while in Egypt.

### Chapter Three

“Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian” [vs. 1]. This verse intimates that after having married Zipporah, he had settled down quite comfortably in Midian but most likely not making it his permanent abode. After all, Moses was outside Egypt in self-imposed exile away from his people yet at the same not terribly distant from both Canaan and the Sinai wilderness. He may have strayed into both areas at different times, thereby acquainting himself with them. It turned out he did visit the latter territory. Moses’ time of shepherding was especially valuable in the Midian area so he could know better the lay of the land and thus guide the Israelites there after their departure from Egypt. Vs. 1 continues with “and he came to Horeb, the mountain of God (*har ha’elohym*).” As for this title, note the definite article meaning “the God.” As for Horeb being so designated, it must have been in conjunction with the Midianites who seemed to worship the same God as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Word of that religion had drifted southward into Midian and took root there, fortunately so, in order to accommodate Moses many centuries later. Moses, by reason of being married into Jethro’s family, had a privileged place to observe the Midianite religion in action though he, being a foreigner, was forbidden to approach the mountain of God. So here was Moses all alone tending the flock. Actually he “led his flock” in that direction perhaps out of curiosity and the opportunity to at last behold this sacred place he had heard so much about. Perhaps those Midianite traders who had bought Joseph four centuries earlier brought word of Horeb into Egypt, reports of which later circulated among the Israelites when they were in bondage there. And so Horeb assumed almost myth-like proportions in their minds.

“And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush” [vs. 2]. *Mal’ak* is the word for “angel” which fundamentally means a messenger, the first time one appears to an Israelite since Jacob in Gen 32.1 just before he encountered his brother, Esau. This tradition which was followed by Jacob wrestling with an unknown man (though not identified per se as *mal’ak*) had been kept alive among the Israelites in Egypt as well as other encounters Jacob had with heavenly beings. This messenger is “of the Lord” which makes him all the more important and indicates that the God worshiped by the Midianites and Israelites was the same deity. Perhaps it was the same angel who later “went before the host of Israel” just before crossing the Red Sea (14.19). As for the verb “appeared,” it is the common *ra’ah* (to see) and situated within the context of a flame of fire. What form the angel took isn’t specified, for it must have been something Moses had no problem identifying as a divine *mal’ak*. This *mal’ak* appeared *in* a flame *out of* a bush which differs from the Lord himself and who does not assume a form.



Perhaps the sight made Moses think of the cherubim at the entrance to the garden of Eden as well as “a flaming sword which turned every way” [Gen 3.24]. As for “bush,” the noun is *seneh* or a thornbush typical of deserts and occurs only in this context with the exception of Dt 33.16: “with the best gifts of the earth and its fulness and the favor of him that dwelt in the bush.” Because a *seneh* is exceptionally dry, it was no small wonder that Moses now wondered why it wasn’t being consumed, so in response to the angel appearing (*ra’ah*) here, Moses *ra’ah* this sight. Thus we have an angel/messenger and a burning thornbush, the former being seeing within the latter. That means Moses’ attention was caught more by the flame than the fire, for it was specific to the *mal’ak* who does not utter any words. In other words, this *mal’ak* (as messenger) communicates to Moses through sight. Without hesitation, Moses says to himself that he will turn aside and see (*ra’ah*) “this great sight” [vs. 3], the noun *mar’eh* being used which is derived from *ra’ah* and called “great” by reason of appearing during the bright, harsh light of the desert as opposed to night. After all, Moses was leading his flock and couldn’t do this at night. Turning aside suggests that Moses was en route somewhere with his flock or approaching Mount Horeb to get a better view of it. Thus the incident at hand prevents him from prematurely ascending the mountain, something reserved for later on.

“When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, ‘Moses, Moses’” [vs. 4]! Now it is the Lord’s turn to *ra’ah* which means he was paying close attention to Moses, whether or not he would approach the thornbush. *Ra’ah* on the Lord’s part implies that he had been watching him all along on his journey to Horeb. Spontaneously Moses said “Here I am,” probably thinking it was the angel. And so the thornbush contained both the angel and the Lord, the former making himself known by sight and the latter (true to the character of earlier divine revelations) by voice. The Lord forbade Moses to approach: “Put off your shoes (i.e., sandals) from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground” [vs. 5]. This verse echos Jos 5.15: “Put off your shoes from your feet; for the place where you stand is holy.” Moses (the same applies to Joshua) had been standing on holy ground without knowing it. More specifically, the word *maqom* is used (place) which often designates an inhabited place. “Who shall stand in his holy place” [Ps 24.3]? Use of *maqom* suggests that Moses had been wandering around with his flock and once hitting upon Mount Horeb, had entered a piece of ground (*‘admah* or earth) that was holy or *qodesh* (an adjective fundamentally meaning to be pure, clean). So we have the generic ground placed within the confines of the restricted place (*maqom*). Somewhere was the separation between the not-holy ground and the one that was holy, a distinction of which Moses was ignorant. However, he must have sensed something different about the territory he had entered as he approached Horeb but couldn’t quite put his finger on it.

“I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob” [vs. 6]. The Lord speaks like this, identifying himself with the first three ancestors who lived in Canaan, words which echoed a tradition familiar to Moses and the Israelites throughout

their four century long stay in Egypt. And so the Lord put Moses at ease and made him recognize that indeed the earth upon which he was standing was holy. Actually Moses wasn't far from Canaan and may have strayed there on occasion. If not that, then he must have come in contact with people living there, even distant descendants of Israel's twelve sons who didn't make the move into Egypt. One thinks of Dinah who had remained behind in Canaan. That makes the Lord's identity with the three patriarchs all the more familiar to him. While the Lord was speaking his angel or messenger (*mal'ak*) was standing there alongside him within the thornbush not uttering a word. Both were in "the midst" (*mitok*) of the thornbush, occupying the same space, as it were (cf. vs. 2 and vs. 3). Moses wasn't afraid to look at the spectacle before him but once he recognized the Lord within it, the same Lord who was unable to be seen but only heard, he "hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." *Satar* is the verb for "hid" and connotes putting a veil over one's face. "Hide me under the shadow of your wings" [Ps 17.8]. As for the verb "afraid," it is *yare'* and gives rise to an impulse by Moses to hide his face, *ra'ah* (to see). In the verse at hand the two read *yar'e...lire'oth*, one flowing into the other, if you will. As for looking as it applies directly to God, the verb is *navat* which connotes a regard and respect. "Then I shall not be put shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments" [Ps 119.6].

Vs. 7 has yet another example of *ra'ah* which is concomitant with that of seeing Moses in vs. 4: "Then the Lord said, 'I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings'" (vs. 7 flows into the next one making the two as one verse). This taking notice is the first time the Lord had woken from an apparent sleep or indifference...he hadn't noticed the Israelites before during all those centuries when they had flourished in Egypt. Especially comforting to Moses were the words "my people" which correspond to "his people" as in 2.11, so he knew that God had identified himself with the Israelites as much as he had. Note that here the Lord has seen the affliction which corresponds to 2.25 though there "affliction" isn't mentioned, that word being *hony* which derives from *hanah*, a verbal root with a great variety of adaptations. Fundamentally *hanah* means to sing, answer, signify, be afflicted. "For the Lord saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter" [2Kg 14.26]. The Lord responded in fairly swift fashion, for the Pharaoh under whom Moses was born—presumably the same Pharaoh from whom he fled after having murdered the Egyptian—was the only recorded tyrant during the four century-plus exile of Israel, not a bad record. Actually the misbehavior of the current Pharaoh was the impetus that got the Lord's attention, having been dormant since the days of Joseph. Note that the Lord says "my people who are in Egypt." That intimates some descendants of Dinah, the only daughter of Israel, had remained in the land of Canaan and carried on their traditions independently.

After having seen (i.e., the faculty of vision) this *hony*, the faculty of hearing comes into play: "and have heard." The noun *tshaqah* for "cry" derives from the verbal root *tsahaq* as last noted in 2.23, "and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God." The verb *nagas* has the participle form for "taskmasters" and alternately means to impel, urge. "They shall rule over their oppressors" [Is 14.2]. Finally we have in vs. 7 "I know their

sufferings” with the verb *yadah* as at the conclusion of Chapter Two: “and God knew their condition. *Mak’ov* is the word for “sufferings as in Ps 38.17: “For I am ready to fall, and my pain is ever with me.” The intimacy of *yadah* in this second use (i.e., Exodus) takes the first one not just to conclusion but to climax, begging resolution.

“And I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land.” Here vs. 8 flows (in the **RSV**) from the previous verse thereby forming one sentence. The threefold gesture of God reaches climax in this, the fourth one. Note the text says “I have come down;” that is to say, already the Lord is present but the people don’t know it. The only other biblical coming-down is just before the Lord confuses the language of the inhabitants on the land of Shinar thereby transforming it into Babel: “And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower” [Gen 11.5]. That incident involved the entire population engaged in a massive construction project, not unlike the one in which Israel is forced to labor, a sign that the Lord isn’t partial to such colossal undertakings often reflecting a desire to usurp divine authority. As for the Genesis descent and the one at hand, both are preparations for the Real Coming Down in the person of Jesus Christ where the intimacy of *yadah* reaches its finest expression. Thus in the verse at hand, we have a fourfold movement by God: it begins with his seeing followed by his hearing, enhanced by his knowing and fulfilled by his coming down.

Now that the Lord has come down (at Mount Horeb, that is, where he will later appear to the Israelites), he prefers staying out in the wilderness for the moment. Of course, he has to invite Moses to become acquainted with him before proceeding further; for in this second descent the Lord has to get everything just right. *Natsal* is the verb for “deliver” which means alternately to pull away, to snatch...in other words, a fairly sudden gesture. “That he may deliver their soul from death and keep them alive in famine” [Ps 33.19]. It’s one thing to snatch up and another to drop what you’ve snatched. The other half of this *natsal* is *halah* (to bring up) which is more than just a deliverance from Egypt and as noted above, had been exceptionally generous to Israel except for this last Pharaoh.

In vs. 8 the Lord describes the *’erets* or land to which he brings-up Israel as “a good and broad *’erets*, an *’erets* flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites.” Description of the richness of the land sounds just great, perhaps just as great as Egypt had been for so long, but the Lord quickly modifies his words by mentioning six tribes for whom that place (*maqom*) was their native home. Chances are the all six tribes maintained some contact with Israel in Egypt, for the ties between them were too strong to be cut, even if these ties in many cases were fraught with tension. After all, the goal set out by the Lord when calling Abram was to subdue the place and take it over. Although the early patriarch forbade intermarriage, certainly there must have been some if not many instances with family ties that reached back four centuries. The most favorable of the six tribes is the Hittites. Ephron the Hittite had struck a deal with Abraham to purchase land and a burial place for Sarah (Chapter 23), so the good relationship between these two men passed into Israelite

tradition as a burial place for Sarah and later Abraham. So when the time (and at this stage it was unknown) came for the Israelites to leave Egypt, chances were that they would have one tribe sympathetic to them.

“And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me” [vs. 9]. The people’s cry (*tshaqah* again) reaches the Lord not in heaven above but on earth (‘I have come down,’ vs. 8). Both terms “now” and “behold” are intended to grab the reader’s attention as to the genuine involvement of the Lord in human affairs. This is necessary because the divine presence required getting some used, having been un-experienced for so many years. That’s why later on the people had no idea of what Moses was speaking about when he introduced them to the Lord. In conjunction with vs. 7, the two facilities of hearing and seeing, they are repeated here not for repetition’s sake but to have the message sink into Moses, the primary bearer of divine intervention, that the Lord with whom he is speaking means business, not just talk. In Genesis the Lord had appeared to Abraham making promises about inheriting the land of Canaan over and over with so many apparent dead ends. Tradition picked them up as warning signals, that future descendants were to be wary about putting their faith in God, a fact the Lord desperately wants to avoid. With Abraham the Lord was elsewhere, if you will...not firmly on the earth as he is now with Moses. Besides, the Israelites have become entrenched so deeply in Egypt that they considered it home. Given divine intervention, it’s a wonder that Moses managed to get them out. Even if the current Pharaoh was treating them badly, that too would pass. Then again, there was a distinct possibility that popular opinion in Egypt had changed due to a successful propaganda program launched to enslave the Israelites.

Vs. 9 continues with a now familiar refrain: “I have seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.” Here the verb *lachsats* and the verb derived from it are used meaning to press, squeeze. “I will punish all who oppress them” [Jer 20]. As for this seeing noted here and earlier, it must have taken several occasions of close observation in order to assess the situation properly. After all, the Lord would not have taken the trouble to have come down and reveal to Moses that he was about to intervene. One must wonder what the Lord had been doing for over four hundred years. Although this is not appropriate to say, the thought does arise and is dealt with by proposition various theological contortions which fail to satisfy the question.

“Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt” [vs. 10]. So after a fairly extended address to Moses about what the Lord intends to do concerning the Israelites, he changes the situation dramatically. The Lord is not going to intervene directly or in the physical sense; Moses is the one who, upon hearing these words, was the person designated for this task. The introductory, almost familiar “come” is the last thing Moses wanted to do. Rightly Moses objects in the next verse with “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt” [vs. 11]? The Lord responds—keep in mind it comes from a voice in the burning thornbush along with an angel—“But I will be with you” [vs. 12]. Up to this point Moses had sent himself into exile

and lived among the Midianites, two cultures which acknowledged the Lord but in a vague sort of way where emphasis apparently lies upon tradition than genuine religious observances.

As for this being with you, Moses is too stunned to grasp the mode by which it will be expressed. The Lord foresees the difficulty which is why immediately he adds “and this shall be the sign for you,” *’Oth* is the word for “sign” and can apply to something lying in the future. “Let them be for signs and seasons” [Gen 1.14]. As for the *’oth* at hand, it consists of Israel serving God “upon this mountain.” Note use of the word “serve” which is *havad*, the same term used in 1.13: “So they made the people of Israel serve with rigor.” Would the *havad* requested by the Lord be the same as this, the drudgery of a slave? Use of the term doesn’t sound attractive under these circumstances, so Moses has a lot of explanation to do to the Israelites. As for Mount Horeb, from Moses’ point of view, so far so good...but the Lord seems to be glossing over how Israel will get there. He speaks of it as a *fait accompli* (‘when you have brought for the people out of Egypt’). That’s what troubled Moses, the newly appointed leader. Since the Israelites apparently were clueless about worship, the task at hand seemed close to impossible. Their only resource was turning to Egyptian deities for some clues as to its nature, even worship of some Pharaohs. In the meantime Moses was expected to focus upon that *’oth*-as-worship at Mount Horeb, not much comfort even though he was standing before the Lord. Would the Israelites end up by doing the same?

“Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you’” [vs. 13]. Moses obviously poses the most direct question to the Lord he can muster. Although the Lord identified himself as “God of your fathers” in vs. 6, Moses wondered and did so with legitimacy whether the people would recognize the Lord as such. The reason for hesitancy is that the text is completely silent as to how (or even, if) the Israelites kept alive their monotheistic faith for so long, and that in the most sophisticated and polytheistic country of its time. Moses rightly proposed “and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’” which means from first hand experience the Israelites had a tenuous grasp of the situation. Such questioning is a preface of sorts to a major revelation of God which follows next.

“God said to Moses, ‘I am who am’” [vs. 14] which transliterates as *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*. These words are amazing at how open the Lord is, not at all afraid to reveal himself in a matter-of-fact manner. The first and second words mean “existed” or “was,” the first person singular imperfect form, and can be translated in as “I will (shall) be.” While interpretation of this has been debated and continues to be so, it might be helpful to focus on the connective or relative pronoun “who,” *’asher*, which bridges the gap between the two “existings.” By its very nature, a relative pronoun connects two distinct elements. At the same time it represents a transition, essential to go from Point A to Point B, while not attracting attention to itself...almost shy, if such a way of putting it is appropriate. With this in mind, the quicker the relative pronoun makes the transition, the better, and less attention is drawn to it. However, the first half (in this case *’ehyeh*) could never make the switch to

the other side, as it were, without intervention from the relative pronoun *'asher*. Interestingly, the verbal root means to be straight, to prosper, be happy. It is the opening word of the Psalter: "Happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked" where the adjective for "happy" is *'asher*. With this in mind, blessedness can be described as something you can't quite get your hands upon (you'd ruin it otherwise) because it's too slippery, goes by you too quickly. The reason? Your attention prefers to focus less upon the middle in favor of Point A and Point B. But once you've put attention on the middle...the *'asher*...you have the best of both A and B. Such is the composition of God's name, a wise decision on his part and shorted to the familiar YHWH, four letters suggestive of breathing and therefore of life itself. As for the Lord communicating this to Moses, you can't help but see how excited he is, almost unable to contain himself to show off this name. For Moses' part, he deserves special credit for having taken all this in stride. The Lord abbreviates *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* with the words "Say to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" That is to say, "*'ehyeh* has sent me" ... *'ehyeh* without the connective pronoun *'asher*. That leaves the divine essence out of the picture which might appear defective. However, at this stage of first revelation the Israelites weren't in a position to grasp theological subtleties.

Vs. 15 has the Lord refining his (abbreviated) name of *'ehyeh* in more familiar terms immediately after *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, that is, he being the God of Israel's fathers specified as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Note that the Lord identifies himself with each patriarch individually, not collectively, a way of drilling in the fact that indeed he means business. Hopefully this would arouse first their curiosity and then their allegiance to Moses. Looking back upon encounters all three patriarchs had with the Lord shows that no such name as the one revealed to Moses had been given. Now it is time to take it one crucial step further and see if Moses could have the Israelites put two and two together, the divine name and the Lord of their forefathers' memory. The *'ehyeh* part can wait until Mount Horeb. The next part of the divine commission to Moses is "this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." Note the distinction: the Lord's name is forever or for all eternity with this eternity mirrored in human history, "generations" (the Hebrew text reads literally 'to generation generation'). That means starting with Moses and the Israelites currently in Egypt the Lord's name will be imparted. Once imbued with it, they will pass it on to the next generation or those who will be born in the Sinai wilderness. In a sense, the second generation is more difficult to train because they are one step removed from the initial impulse. That's why forty years in the desert is necessary for appreciation of the divine *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*. Once that second generation has had time to reflect upon it, they were in a stronger position, even more than the first generation, to impart it to the third and so forth or those who would reside in the land of Canaan.

"Go and gather the elders of Israel together" [vs. 16]. The Lord had taken into account the fact that Pharaoh who had begun afflicting Israel had died (cf. 2.33) and attention had turned elsewhere, away from seeking the death of Moses. That's why he bids Moses to return to Egypt. Once Moses had assembled the elders, he is to communicate his encounter with the Lord who had identified himself with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The elders were

responsible for organizing the Israelites as well as keeping alive the tradition for all those centuries. If they concurred with Moses' revelation, it would be easier to get everyone on board with the same message. They, not Moses, would transmit the Lord's words "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt." While Moses was virtually unknown to the Israelites, the people had their elders' backing of this obscure person claiming to have had direct divine revelation. Here the act of hearing and seeing of Israel's plight mentioned above assumes greater urgency by the word *paqad* for "have observed." This noun, widely used, has multiple means, but in general connotes a one-on-one encounter or putting into action. "The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised" [Gen 21.1]. Surely the elders were familiar with that incident in their religious heritage if not some of the people. Referencing the current *paqad* would thus make sense and help win over many. Note the passive: "what has been done to you," leaving out the source of distress which everyone attributed to the recently deceased Pharaoh and his cohorts and was continued by his successor (the only two recorded kings who maltreated the Israelites for over four hundred years). Thus a tacit distinction is made between officials and the Egyptian people with whom the Israelites were on generally good terms.

Vs. 17 follows as part of the previous verse with "and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt." The **RSV** has for the Hebrew "promise" the words "and I say," suggesting that anything the Lord utters is as good as a promise. Even mention of *halah* ('bring up') is a clue that the Israelites will head northeast from Egypt into Canaan as opposed to other directions. More specifically, the *halah* at hand is used in conjunction with "the affliction (*hony*) of Egypt as seen in vs. 7: "I have seen the *hony* of my people who are in Egypt." In the same breath the Lord adds "to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites (etc.)," repeating vs. 8 along with that land flowing with milk and honey.

"And they will hearken to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt" [vs. 18]. These words give heart to Moses, that the elders will first listen to him and accompany him to the king of Egypt. At the same time he knew of the current Pharaoh's hostility to the Israelites and that persuading him would not be easy, let alone getting an audience. Their words to him which they are simply to repeat in his presence? "The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us." Perhaps this Pharaoh, not unlike his predecessors, had heard of the Lord, a tradition going all the way back to Joseph whose faith in the same divinity had rescued Egypt from famine. Even though later (Egyptian) generations may have erased that from their tradition, some traces of it must have survived, at least by hearsay among the existing Israelite population. But as has been noted several times, we have no record in Exodus that the Israelites were aware of their tradition originating with Joseph, Israel and the eleven brothers.

The verb for "met" (i.e., the Lord with 'us') is *qarah* as in Gen 42.29: "They told him all that had befallen them." *Qarah* has a more expanded meaning than just meeting but of coming together where a future course of action is decided upon. The sense of this "meeting" is

intensified by addition of the preposition *hal* (upon), “upon us.” The Lord himself adds “us” which literally is not true; to date he *qarah* only with Moses. However, the expanded notion of this verb means that Moses’ *qarah* with the Lord automatically extends to the elders; in other words, it has the same impact not unlike at Pentecost with the descent of the Holy Spirit upon (i.e., the *hal* associated with *qarah* just mentioned) the disciples as well as others present with them.

Vs. 18 continues with “and now, we pray you, let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.” “We pray you” in Hebrew is rendered as *na’*, a particle used to show a submissive attitude and the making of requests which here is connected with the verb “to go,” *halak* (*nelakah-na’* being the form). The succinctness of *na’* at the end of a verb like this also has a sense of urgency as well as pleading for the request to be granted which is clear by its pronunciation after the verb at hand. The period of three days is reasonable but can have intimations of Israel’s intent to break away from Egypt. Once in the desert, it would difficult to track down the Israelites who might ally themselves with the Midianites and other local tribes who knew the wilderness well. Also mention of sacrifice sounds suspicious; that means the taking of livestock which could be a guise to sneak out as many animals as possible. As for sacrifice, chances are Moses, the elders and Israelites had a vague notion of what it meant, coming down in tradition from the three patriarchs. Hopefully the Lord would reveal details about it later on. So despite the possibility the Israelites might use their request for a three day journey as an escape, in the end it seems a reasonable request.

“I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand” or literally, “no, not by a mighty hand” [vs. 19]. Another used of the verb *yadah* suggestive of intimate, first-hand knowledge, this time about Pharaoh. The Lord garnered this information primarily from the Israelites upon whom he had trained his eyes and hears. *Chazaq* is the adjective for “mighty” which derives from the verbal root meaning to tie, fasten, bind. “With a strong hand and an outstretched arm” [Ps 136.12].

“So I will stretch out my hand and smite Egypt with all the wonders which I will do in it.” [vs. 20]. That is to say, the Lord will stretch out (*shalach*) his arm which, as just noted, is *chazaq* or mighty. *Shalach* is the common verb “to send” and implies that the divine arm won’t be extended like a crane from Mount Horeb all the way into Egypt but will manifest itself primarily through the *shalach*—the sending—of Moses and the elders. The purpose of this *shalach*? To smite or *nakah* which does not necessarily involve slaying but a striking as in Ps 3.7: “For you smite all my enemies on the cheek.” Furthermore, *nakah* assumes the definite form of wonders or *pala’* (participle), a verb which fundamentally means to separate, distinguish. “And tell of all your wondrous works” [Ps 26.7]. As for what these wondrous works are, Moses hasn’t a clue; besides, he will partake in many of them. Vs. 20 concludes with “after that he will let you go.” That is to say, a more common use of the verb *shalach*; it is as though once having felt the divine *shalach*, Pharaoh will use his own arm to *shalach* the Israelites.



“And I will give this people favor in the sight (i.e., ‘in the eyes’) of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty” [vs. 21]. *Chen* is the noun for “favor” which also applies to grace and beauty. “For the Lord God is a sun and shield; he bestows favor and honor” [Ps 84.11]. This *chen* is spelled out in the next verse as something effected in plain sight of the Egyptians who as had been noted, live up and down the Nile River. As for this not going empty (*reyq*: also means vain), it is the Israelite women who will be play a key role as vs. 21 flows into the next one as follows: “but each woman shall ask of her neighbor and of her who sojourns in her house, jewelry of silver and of gold and clothing.” This is the first time a sojourner with the Israelites is mentioned, *gor* being the verb. “You shall do no work, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you” [Lev 16.29]. *Gor* (here applied to women simply by reason of the jewelry) intimates that people—either native Egyptians or even those from Canaan who heard about Israel’s success and decided to come down—had been attaching themselves to the Israelites. Though not explicit, chances are it was due to the attractiveness of their worship of the Lord.

And so Chapter Three ends on a positive note which will require some time and much effort to realize, namely, “thus you shall despoil the Egyptians.” *Natsal* is the verb at hand and was mentioned in vs. 8, namely, the Lord delivering Israel from Egypt. The verse at hand foreshadows 12.33-36 (‘Thus they despoiled the Egyptians,’ vs. 36). Note that the jewelry taken is deliberately given to the Israelite youths, boys and girls alike. This is a way of insulting the Egyptians, that the youngest among the Israelites were now wearing their most valuable possessions. However, this isn’t what we would consider despoiling because the Egyptians willingly gave away their precious items. The *natsal* involved seems to be the rapidity and eagerness with which they did this, anything to get rid of the Israelites as soon as possible after the death of the first born of the Egyptians.

## Chapter Four

This chapter opens with the rather matter-of-fact words, “Then Moses answered.” That is to say, he answers the Lord who had revealed his divine name and goes into some detail about his plan for deliverance of the Israelites. It is a simple sentence indicative of the ready spirit on Moses’ part which later reaches its fullest development in 33.11: “Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” As for the answer, “But behold, they will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘The Lord did not appear to you.’” In this instance “but” is the connective *w-* (also as ‘and’) prefaced to *hen* or “behold” which is similar to *hineh* of 1.10 and used in virtually every sentence of both Genesis and Exodus to show continuous action. Note that Moses says first the people won’t believe and then they won’t listen to his voice. Usually it’s the other way around, listening followed by believing or the lack thereof. However, Moses seems to be relying upon the testimony of the elders on his behalf which hopefully will set the stage for him to spread word about his encounter with the Lord. In back of his mind was how to communicate the

name of the Lord revealed in 3.14 and for a divinity by that previously unheard of name to deliver them from the Egyptians. Surely the people's response ('The Lord did not appear to you') sounds reasonable in this light. As for the verb at hand, it's *rahaḥ*, the common verb to see.

With equal matter-of-factness the Lord responds "What is that in your hand" [vs. 2]? Reference is to a rod or *mateh* which can also apply to a branch or twig and most likely here refers to a shepherd's staff. Throughout the Book of Numbers (chapters one, two, seven and thirteen) *mateh* refers to the various tribes of Israel. For another reference, see Is 14.5: "The Lord has broken the staff of the wicked." The Lord bids Moses to cast the *mateh* upon the ground which turned into a serpent, causing Moses to run away in fright. *Nachash* is the word for "serpent" as in the garden of Eden. Later Moses would use an image of this *nachash* to heal the Israelites who were bitten by fiery serpents: "So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole; and if a serpent bit any man, he would look at the bronze serpent and live" [Num 21.9]. In the verse at hand, Moses was reminded immediately of how this *nachash* had deceived the first woman but soon was to become an intermediary between her succumbing to the serpent and the healing of the damage done, an image taken up by Jesus Christ in 3.14.

"That they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has appeared to you." These words of vs. 5 continue the previous verse forming one and have the feel of an appendix to the previous verse where Moses grasps the serpent's tail. *Lemahan* ('that' or 'in order that') which begins vs. 5 convey this. However, the changing of the rod into a snake and visa versa which will be repeated later in Pharaoh's court, is confined to those present in that place, not the Israelites, as intimated by the verse at hand. Then again, vs. 5 reads "That (*lemahan*) they may believe." "They" is not specified and thus could apply to the Egyptian officials and magicians. Note that the Lord identifies himself three separate times in accord with each of the three patriarchs, not lumping them all together as in 3.16. However, there it begins with "the God of your fathers" compared with here, "the God of their fathers." This intimates that in the verse at hand the Lord is referring to the Egyptians.

"Again, the Lord said to him, 'Put your hand into your bosom'" [vs. 6]. *Hod* or "again" serves to connect the serpent incident to a new sign, thereby allowing no temporal gap between the two events which must have been trying for Moses. This time Moses puts his hand upon his chest (*cheyq*) which he did unhesitatingly. Once he removed it, his hand "was leprous, as white as snow" [vs. 6]. *Tsarah* is the verb meaning "was leprous" and fundamentally means to strike down in the sense of scourge, an apt description of leprosy. "Miriam became leprous" [Num 12.10]. Moses doesn't seem phased by this because he trusted the Lord who told him to return his hand upon his bosom after which the leprosy vanished. The striking incident, is designated as a sign (*oth*: also refers to a portent). "When he wrought his signs in Egypt and his miracles in the fields of Zoan" [Ps 78.43]. As for this *oth* and that of the serpent, the Lord says "If they will not believe you or heed the

first sign, they may believe the latter sign” [vs. 8]. The word for “heed” is *shamah*, the common verb for “to hear” which here is presented as one of two options: either heeding or believing which amount to the same thing but with slightly different accents.

The Lord now gives a third *’oth* or sign provided the first two do not elicit a response: “and the water which you shall take from the Nile will become blood upon the dry ground” [vs. 9]. The precise point at which the water—and the Nile forms a narrow band of life from south to north in Egypt, the rest being desert—changes into blood is not mentioned precisely. It seems the transformation occurs when the water hits the dry ground not just absorbing the blood but leaving an ugly brownish blotch on the sand. Of the three signs, the third is the most ominous because it threatens the very source of Egypt’s life. While this isn’t connected with the shedding of Abel’s blood, it is reminiscent of it: “The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground” [Gen 4.10].

“But Moses said to the Lord, ‘Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent either heretofore or since you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and of tongue” [vs. 10]. Such words are neither an objection nor a way to wiggle out of the task laid upon him but due to a genuine inability to articulate himself properly. That’s why later Moses’ brother Aaron becomes his spokesman. Note the two parts of this objection: 1) for the adjective “eloquent,” the Hebrew is “not a man of words.” Moses really attempts to get off the hook with the qualifiers “heretofore or since” or covering the past and making excuses for the future. 2) “slow of speech” or *kevad* in the negative sense as noted in Gen 12.10: “for the famine was severe in the land.” This “severity” with regard to speaking applies to Moses’ tongue which seems to refer to his ability to express himself, the first “severity” being applicable to difficulty in articulation itself. Despite efforts to get away from the divine task entrusted to him, the Lord counters immediately with “Who has made man’s mouth” [vs. 11]? Also included is making a person deaf, bestowing sight and removing it. “Is it not I, the Lord?”

“Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak” [vs. 12]. The Lord doesn’t allow Moses to get a word in after his complaint but dismisses him right away. Note that the Lord will be not so much with Moses but with his mouth where he will take his place, as it were, and teach him what to say. The verb for “teach” is *yarah* (it forms the verbal root for Torah) alternately meaning to lay foundations, cast, sprinkle with water. “I have taught you the way of wisdom” [Prov 4.11]. Still this isn’t enough. One has to credit Moses for his persistency in the divine presence: “Oh, my Lord, send, I pray, some other person” [vs. 13]. The verb *shalach* is used twice, the second literally reading as “by the hand you send.”

“Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses” [vs. 14] with *charah* being the verb. “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak” [Gen 18.30]. We can presume that though Moses was afraid, he stood his ground, believing that what he had said about his limitations was true. This divine *charah* took the form of the Lord continuing with “Is there not Aaron, your brother, the Levite?” This tribe later became associated with Israel’s priestly caste but

as of yet had the least desirable reputation going back to Jacob's blessing (Simeon included): "O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit, be not joined to their company" [Gen 49.6]. This must have come as a surprise to Moses, long absent from his native Egypt, and surprised him that the Lord singled out Aaron. It is the first mention of Moses' brother, perhaps a leader of the Israelite community there already renowned for his ability to speak in public. The literal text in Hebrew of "I know that he can speak well" reads "speaking he speaks," *davar* being the verb. Apparently the Lord has summoned Aaron to visit Moses in Midian, for "behold, he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you he will be glad in his heart" [vs. 14]. As for the actual going out of Aaron, it isn't mentioned specifically until vs. 27 when the Lord commands him to "go into the wilderness to meet Moses." But before the two brothers meet, the Lord had to continue persuading Moses.

The first part of vs. 15 runs "And you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth." First comes the Lord speaking (*davar*) after which he puts this speaking (*davar*, noun) into the mouth of Aaron. How that will happen isn't spelled out but left to Moses. Already we've seen quite a bit of this divine *davar* including revelation of the Lord's proper name, but we are clueless as how it will be inserted into Aaron's mouth. As for the actual transmission, see vs. 28: "And Moses told all the words of the Lord with which he had charged him to do." There the verb "told" is not *davar* but *nagad* which connotes a note of showing or putting in front. "Ask your father and he will show you" [Dt 32.7]. As for *nagad* in the context of vs. 28, it will be dealt with at the appropriate time, but it consists in large part of that putting (*sum*) of the verse at hand.

Vs. 15 continues "and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what you shall do." All this emphasis upon mouth shows just how important it is to communicate properly to the Israelites who have been away from their native land some four hundred plus years. Many people may even have forgotten it and learned to consider Egypt their homeland despite the current trying experiences. So when the Lord claims to "be with your mouth" as well as Aaron's, that means *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* or "I am who am" will do the speaking, unique by any standards. As for the divine teaching, the verb is *yarah* as in vs. 12. There it was with regard to what Moses "shall speak" whereas here it concerns "what you will do," the latter putting emphasis upon action.

"He shall speak for you to the people; and he shall be a mouth for you, and you shall be to him as God" [vs. 16]. Two preposition in the Hebrew text read literally as "to you" (*l* being prefixed to 'you') and "to the people" (*el*). The former suggests on "behalf of" and the latter, "because of," direction towards-which. So the act of speaking...*davar*...by Aaron is on behalf of Moses and the act of being Moses' mouth is "to" him, that is, with constant reference to Moses as the principle mediator between the Lord and Israel. As for the preposition *l*, it is used literally as "to God," Moses being "to" Aaron in the same fashion as the Lord related to Moses. All this interaction between the Lord, Moses and Aaron is, of course, vital, but the Lord takes into consideration (much as Jesus would do later on) the need for Israel to witness signs and miracles. That's why the Lord bids Moses in vs. 17 to

take the rod which had turned into a serpent.

After the fairly long encounter with the Lord, Moses returns to Jethro, his father-in-law, and asks permission to return to his “kinsmen in Egypt and see whether they are still alive” [vs. 18]. Here he calls the Israelites “kinsmen” or in Hebrew, “brothers,” compared with earlier appellations of “my people.” That means the bond between him and them is on firmer ground after the Lord had revealed himself. Although he was married to Jethro’s daughter Zipporah and had two sons by her, Moses takes leave of them in favor of his “brothers.” Though the three aren’t mentioned later, they did accompany Moses to Egypt (cf. vs 20). They, like the wife of Joseph, were important on a personal level but not so in the grander scheme of things. Interestingly, after the Lord expressed repeated concern for Israel, Moses wonders aloud whether his people are alive or not. That reveals a lack of trust which had to be confirmed by seeing the Israelites first-hand. One would assume that word would reach Moses before and after his Mount Horeb experience as to their fate; if Pharaoh had succeeded in exterminating them, he would have known it fairly soon and remained in Midian. As for Moses’ request, Jethro responded simply “Go in peace” or go in *shalom* [vs. 18].

Jethro’s encouragement of Moses to go in *shalom* is followed by the Lord’s words, “Go back to Egypt; for all the men who were seeking your life are dead” [vs. 19]. Up until vs. 18 the Lord and Moses were having an extended conversation which apparently came to a conclusion after which Moses returned to Jethro who concurred with the Lord’s words. Now at once or during the conversation between Jethro and Moses the Lord intervenes with words Moses was waiting for, namely, that those who sought his life had died. That means Moses had been with Jethro in Midian a considerable length of time. Possibly among those dead was the Pharaoh who had persecuted Israel, and that would make Moses’ task easier. At the time he didn’t know, but at this stage any enticement to get Moses back to Egypt was worth it, even if tinged by a white lie of sorts. Should some harbor a threat against Moses, his return with three native Midianites (Zipporah and her two sons) would have provided cover. They may have not been received with open arms among the Israelites but at least tolerated as belonging to Moses. As for Moses taking his family back into Egypt, vs. 20 is clear about the role of his rod called the “rod of God” [vs. 20]. This *mateh*, while always in the hand of Moses, never belonged to him and would play an important role later on.

“When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles which I have put in your power” [vs. 21]. These words, like the ones the Lord had spoken after Jethro gave his permission, continue to show divine intervention in human affairs. As for this Pharaoh, it isn’t clear whether he was the same one who had afflicted Israel; possibly not, for he must have been included among “all the men who were seeking your life” [vs. 19]. The new Pharaoh and those around him were more concerned with using the Israelites in their service, not continuing to focus upon an obscure Hebrew who murdered an Egyptian years ago. As for the return to Egypt (this includes Moses trip to Midian), he must have taken the land route above the Red Sea or just below the Mediterranean, that is, directly into Goshen,

that area of Egypt promised to Joseph and his descendants. A critical part of Egypt, to be sure, for it was right at the crossroads not only between Egypt and Canaan but between two continents, Africa and Asia. So when looking at Goshen on a map, it was no small wonder the Egyptians wished to enslave Israel and get her out of that area. The word for “miracles” which the Lord bade Moses is *mopheth* is similar to a sign or *’oth* but of a more spectacular nature, often applicable to a future event. For an example of both, “Who in your midst, O Egypt, sent signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants” [Ps 135.9]. These miracles were “put in your power” or literally, “in your hand” and that hand is the one which bore the *mateh* or staff.

Vs. 21 continues with a warning that the Pharaoh with whom Moses will relate is not benevolent: “but I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.” This future hardening of heart (*chazaq* is the verb, even by its sound, is constricting. ‘They hold fast to their evil purposes,’ Ps 64.5) is a theme to be repeated often. Thus the constriction, so clear by the verb *chazaq*, means that Pharaoh will be immune to any divine signs and wonders. Presumably Moses will approach Pharaoh with the request to let his people go, the first *chazaq*, if you will, followed by the second one in view of these signs and wonders.

Vs. 22 refines the request Moses is to make of Pharaoh, that is, by identifying Israel as “my first born son.” The people as a whole fall into that category, the first time these comforting words appear, thereby elevating the status of Israel to a single person, if you will, dear to the Lord. Not only is Pharaoh to let Israel-the-first-born-son depart Egypt, but he is “to serve me” [vs. 23], the verb being *havad*, the same one used to describe the forced labor at construction to which Israel was subjected. The Lord’s words conclude with “I will slay your first born son” and leaves it at that. We have no response from Moses but can intimate that at last the Lord means business. However, these introductory words warn that deliverance of Israel will not take place at once but after a series of signs and wonders aimed primarily at Egypt...not so much the people but Pharaoh and his court.

The action shifts from Midian to a lodging place en route to Egypt, the location being unidentified: “At a lodging place on the way the Lord met him and sought to kill him” [vs. 24]. The noun here is *malon*, one of seven other biblical references and can mean anything from a tent to a house, possibly the former in these circumstances. “And lay them (twelve stones) in the place where you lodge tonight” [Jos 4.3]. This desire on the Lord’s part to slay Moses reveals that he had second thoughts about the enterprise. If Moses were dead, then Israel would not be able to leave Egypt. The verb *pagash* (‘met’) alternately means to rush upon, attack, and is consistent with the verse at hand. It occurs three verses later with the Lord saying to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” For another reference, see Hos 13.8: “I will meet them as a bear.” Note that in vs. 24 the Lord sought to *pagash* Moses which means he was already at the lodging perhaps disguised as a traveler who had gone ahead, and was ready to pounce upon Moses. “Sought” (*baqash*: to search, seek for) means that the Lord took time to identify Moses from others at the inn.

While the Lord was ransacking the place, Zipporah, Moses' wife, came to the rescue. She was awake while her husband was fast asleep when she detected an unwanted presence lurking about. Without hesitation Zipporah grabs a flint knife (*tsor*: one other biblical reference is used, Ezk 3.9: 'Like adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead') and circumcises one of her two sons, whether it was Gershom or Eliezer (not mentioned until 18.4) is not given, and "touched Moses' feet with it" [vs. 25]. "Feet" often is an euphemism for genitals which here implies that Moses was fast asleep without a clue as to what was transpiring. Zipporah yells out "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" As the Oxford **RSV** says in a footnote, "(this is) perhaps an old expression for a young man who was circumcised before marriage. Here it is assumed that the circumcision of the infant son was efficacious for Moses who was evidently uncircumcised." Thus before actually realizing it, Moses' sons and he were circumcised as the Lord was lurking around the lodging place in a desire to slay Moses. If it weren't for Zipporah's ability to recognize the Lord (and it is to her everlasting credit for having done so under the cover of darkness), Moses would not have made it to Egypt and Israel would continue to languish there for untold centuries to come.

"So he let him alone" [vs. 26]. The Hebrew text is more vivid: "And he loosened from him," the verb being *raphah*, to cast down, leave off. "All hand shall be feeble" [Ezk 7.17]. Just as Moses awoke and before he realized what was transpiring, he caught a fleeting glimpse of the Lord rushing out the door into the darkness. It is from this point on that we lose track of Zipporah. Her task, quick and decisive as it had been, saved the day.

"The Lord said to Aaron, 'Go into the wilderness to meet Moses'" [vs. 27]. Aaron had been in Egypt and wondered what happened to his brother since the slaying of that Egyptian many years ago. He could have thought that the Egyptian authorities eventually caught up with Moses and slew him or that he died wandering aimlessly in the Sinai wilderness. Thus for many years Aaron's life was filled with uncertainty and distress. As to the mode of the Lord's communication, we have no details except that he spoke to him. Aaron was going about his usual business trying to mollify the Egyptian overseers on behalf of the Israelites, a task at which he had become quite adept. Without knowing how or even when Aaron responded, the text simply says he got up and left on his own. God did not reveal the place where to meet Moses except in the wilderness, obviously a large space. To go there means that Aaron had to take sufficient supplies, even some men to accompany him. Then there was the problem of exiting Egypt: Aaron was well known among the Egyptians as a leader, so he had to make good his escape undetected. So without elaborating upon the terse communication from God in vs. 27, Aaron "went and met him at the mountain of God and kissed him." The Israelites had a vague idea about this mountain identified with the Lord, that is, Mount Horeb. Although the interaction with Aaron was terse as already noted, it does not mean the content is equally terse or devoid of content. Aaron was given divine directions to this strange, mystical mountain that must have formed part of Israel's folklore, though apparently no one seems to have gone there except Moses...and that was by necessity of fleeing Egypt for Midian.

As vs. 24 recounts, Moses and his family had stopped at a lodging inn en route from Midian to Egypt. Since Aaron was divinely instructed to meet his brother at Horeb, Moses must have made his way there first, even it meant taking a road other than the direct one into Egypt. He wanted to contact the Lord at the place where both first met, the burning thornbush, and see if he could restore confidence after that unnerving encounter at the inn. As for the kissing by Aaron of Moses, the verb is *nashaq* which alternately means to arrange, put in order. The idea is that when two things are lined up properly, the “kiss” each other. As for another quote, see Ps 2.12: “Kiss his feet lest he be angry and you perish.” As often the case, no details of such a momentous meeting are given; not because they are considered incidental, but the reader is invited to fill in the blanks and therefore participate more fully in the narrative.

“And Moses told Aaron all the words of the Lord with which he had sent him and all the signs which he had charged him to do” [vs. 28]. *Nagad* is the verb for “told” (cf. vs. 15) which alternately means to be in front (*neged* is a common preposition derived from it), to proclaim or celebrate. Thus the sense is more elaborate than a simple telling. “And proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, that he has wrought it” [Ps 22.31]. The object of *nagad* consists of words (*davar*) which the Lord has spoken. To be sure, Moses excitedly included the Lord’s name, but when Aaron heard *‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh*, it solved the identity as to the same Lord who had spoken with him in vs. 27. No small wonder that this divine name had to be proclaimed...*nagad*...not just simply spoken. These words or *davar* were sent along with Moses, that is, Moses didn’t carry them physically but spiritually which meant that as soon as he hit upon Aaron they flowed out on their own, of course, by the action of *nagad*. The same spontaneity of communication (again via *nagad*) occurred with the signs (*’oth*) charged upon Moses.

“And the people believed.” The first part of vs. 31 which follows upon the heels of the meeting between Moses and Aaron which as vs. 27 says, was in the wilderness far from any human habitation. The spacial-temporal gap between that meeting at “the mountain of God” and the people’s acceptance of Moses’ words is as nothing. The same applies to the inn where Moses and his family had spent that near fatal night. This lack of temporality has its roots in the *nagad* or proclamation of Moses to his brother along with the carrying of his words and signs. Because of this unique form of communication, all the Israelites within Egypt heard Moses simultaneously. Furthermore, the Egyptians right among whom they lived were deaf...impervious...to hearing any such divine communication.

Vs. 31 continues with: “And when they heard that the Lord had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.” The verb for “visited” is *paqad* is used in 3.16 as “I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt” meaning that already the Lord had been among the Israelites, albeit in disguise, as he had done before in Gen 11.5 “to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.” That presence on earth had given the Lord first-hand information as to human actions and



motivations, so he used it again by showing up in Egypt though no one had recognized him. It is precisely this *paqad* in conjunction with the Lord's observation of Israel's affliction that caused the two brothers to rejoice. Some people must have recognized the Lord among them though they weren't quite certain who it was. It was enough, however, for word to spread that something unusual and wonderful was afoot which spread like wildfire, hence "the people believed." As for the two words "bowed their heads" and "worshiped," (*qadad* and *shachah*), both pertain to the act of inclining oneself down to the ground in reverence. So with the people having believed in the Lord, the task of Moses and Aaron lay not so much with them but with Pharaoh. At least half the battle had been won though the second half would prove quite a struggle.

## Chapter Five

"Afterwards Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh." So begins the first audience with the ruler of Egypt which, as the brothers probably intimated, was doomed to failure. The word "afterwards" (*'achar*) is a kind of affirmation as to what the two were about to say and do, that is, it is backed up by the words of the concluding verse of Chapter Four, "And the people believed." Furthermore, this unanimous confession of faith by Israel in the Lord bolstered the two brothers about any misfortune laying in the future. This opening verse of a new chapter has the verb *'amar* (to speak) in the third person plural signifying that both Moses and Aaron did the speaking. Aaron was the designated spokesman (cf. 4.16) yet Moses, by reason of being the one to whom the Lord revealed himself, must have said a thing or two; to remain silent would make him appear foolish, even ignorant. And so the words of the Lord to Moses about his brother as well as those of 4.12 ('I will be with your [Moses] mouth and teach you what to speak') are about to be implemented. Actually the words "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel" come from Aaron, not Moses, who was along more as an authority figure. Pharaoh must have known about Aaron due his prominent place among the Israelites, but Moses? He was a newcomer, someone who just came on the scene which indeed is true after having reside in Midian for so long. That may have been a secondary reason for Aaron to begin with "Thus says the Lord."

Vs. 1 continues with "That they may hold a feast to me in the wilderness," the reason why the brothers came to Pharaoh. While true and following divine instructions, this request was a disguise to get Israel out of Egypt, something that was outrightly forbidden to present Pharaoh. *Chagag* is the verb for "to hold a feast," the first time it's mentioned in Exodus and not commanded by the Lord directly but intimated, for he specifically asked "that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God" [3.18]. This verb connotes dancing and thus a joyous occasion. "You shall keep a feast to the Lord" [Lev 23.39]. As for the noun "wilderness" (*midbar*) mentioned several times already, it derives from the verbal root *davar* which has several meanings as well as to lead or guide flocks in a pasture. Hence *midbar* suggests a place a of pasture as well as vegetation. Expanding *midbar* in light of its verbal root, perhaps "wilderness" could be taken as a place of speaking, a place set apart favored by the

Lord and those chosen by him where he can communicate in an uninterrupted fashion. A prime example in the New Testament is, of course, John the Baptist and Jesus Christ himself who had spent forty days in the *midbar*.

“But who is the Lord that I should heed his voice and let Israel go” [vs. 2]? As noted earlier “but,” just like “and” in Hebrew is *w-* prefaced to the first word of a sentence indicative of continuous action. With this in mind, Pharaoh’s question, more as a rebuke, shows the close connection between his words and the previous verse which contained that request to let Israel go into the wilderness. So as soon as Moses and Aaron had spoken, Pharaoh responds in almost seamless fashion. The two brothers may have thought of identifying the Lord as *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*, but that would be too much for him to bear and shut off any prospect of further communication. And so Pharaoh was right in his own way to question about the Lord. Indeed his words which follow in the same verse (‘I do not know the Lord, and moreover I will not let Israel go’) are exactly true. *Yadah* (to know) is suggestive of intimate, personal knowledge, more along the lines of acquaintance, and does not form part of Pharaoh’s world view.

“The God of the Hebrews has met us” [vs. 3] reads literally “has called (*qara*) upon (*hal*) us.” Here Moses and Aaron put *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* in terms easier for Pharaoh to grasp yet in dramatic fashion by use of *qara*’ as “has called” along with the weight of responsibility upon (*hal*) them. In other words, the burden is taken off the two brothers and shifted directly upon the Lord, they being his spokesmen. Vs. 3 continues with a refinement of their request which is more in line with the Lord’s original words of 3.18: “Let us go, we pray, a three day’s journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the Lord our God.” As far as Pharaoh is concerned, he wouldn’t mind this sacrifice taking place in Egypt, even allowing Israel time off from their forced labor, provided they return to their labors at once. To loose so many people would put the Egyptian economy in jeopardy—for it was based now upon virtual slave labor—something which up until this point Pharaoh may not have been fully aware of. Even the concluding words of vs. 3 (‘lest he fall upon us with pestilence or with the sword’), dramatic as they are, fail to move Pharaoh. As for the verb “fall upon,” it is *pagah* which suggests a sudden rush as in an ambush with the intent to kill. “Lest the pursuers meet you” [Jos 2.16].

“Moses and Aaron, why do you take the people away from their work? Get to your burdens” [vs.

45]. Pharaoh’s concern about his economic dependency upon the Israelites is revealed here clearly without the slightest interest in the Lord. After all, Pharaoh himself was held in reverence as a kind of divinity and perhaps had in back of his mind that the Lord would be a threat to his status. *Sevel* is the word for “burden” as noted in 2.11. The next verse continues Pharaoh’s words with “Behold, the people of the land are now many and you make them rest from their burdens!” Credit is due to Moses and Aaron for approaching the ruler of Egypt, the strongest man in the ancient world who, given what he might have done to them, treated them lightly. Their audience must have taken place early in the day, for vs. 6

says “The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and their foremen.” *Nagas* (cf. 3.1) is the word for the former and *shoter* for the latter; *shoter* fundamentally means “to write,” is used two other times in Exodus and refers to an officer or magistrate. It seems that a *shoter* would have under him one or more *nagas*, those designated with forcing the Israelites to do their work. “The elders of the people and offers over them” [Num 11.16].

The duty entrusted to the taskmasters and foremen? “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks which they made heretofore; you shall lay upon them, you shall by no means lessen it” [vs. 7]. As for the verb “lessen,” it is *garah* meaning to scrape off, take away as in Jer 26.2: “Do not hold back a word.” Up to now Pharaoh provided the essential binding element for bricks, straw, but not any longer. Those who brought it to the Israelites must have been Egyptians who did the gathering. As for the word “measure,” it is *matkoneth* with four other biblical references, one of which is in Exodus. For another meaning, see 2 Chron 24.13 (‘proper condition’): “And they restored the house of God to its proper condition and strengthened it.” Vs. 7 continues with “Let them go and gather straw for themselves.” At first this seems harsh—and it is an added burden—but the area from which straw could be gathered was from the narrow band of the fertile Nile River. Since the Israelites had pretty much spread throughout Egypt, it was not that difficult to organize the harvesting and gathering of straw within that narrow north-to-south area. Besides, the Nile offered easy transportation instead of over land.

Vs 8 continues with a fuller description of the order given by Pharaoh, that his underlings are to order the Israelites to continue with their daily quota of bricks in addition to gathering straw. “For they are idle; therefore they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’” As for the accusation of being lazy, the verb is *raphah* as noted in 4.26: “So he let him alone.” The idea behind *raphah* is a slacking or casting down, so in the verse at hand it applies to people who have undertaken work but later became *raphah*. In the eyes of the Egyptian overlords such *raphah* is revealed by the Israelites’ asking to make sacrifice to the Lord. So if the Lord was continuing to watch what was transpiring as noted in 3.7, this must have been quite insulting to him.

The royal decree relative to increasing work for the Israelites is concluded in vs. 9, that is, its communication to Moses and Aaron: “Let heavier work be laid upon the men that they may labor at it and pay no regard to lying words.” The words “that they may labor at it” reads literally “that they may do (*hasah*, the common verb compared with the more strenuous *havad*) in (*b-*) it.” Though *hasah* is less harsh than *havad*, the preposition “in” intimates that the Israelites are to be identified with their labors to such a degree that they will have no time for anything else. *Shahah* is the verb for “pay (no) regard” and implies looking around and not concentrating upon the task at hand. For another use, see Ps 119.117: “That I may be safe and have regard for your statutes continually.” As for the phrase “lying words,” it, like preposition “in” (*b-*) just noted. And these lying words are none other than the divine command issued first through Moses and then through Aaron about worshiping the Lord in the wilderness.

Vs. 9 concludes on a harsh note, not to be unexpected from Pharaoh, with no response from Moses and Aaron to him. Actually they had no choice in the matter. If it weren't for Aaron's role as leader of the Israelites, Pharaoh might have been tempted to either imprison or kill him. However, both brothers were allowed to leave the court and communicate to the people what had transpired. Although vs. 10 begins with the taskmasters and foremen of the people (also noted in vs. 6), they could have been Israelites who cut a deal with their Egyptian masters). Their duty was not to waste a moment's time but to proclaim "Thus says Pharaoh, 'I will not give you straw'" [vs. 10]. This surprise announcement is followed immediately by a further decree that they are to gather straw for themselves without a diminishment in their current workload. Although the words "wherever you can find" uttered by the overlords has an air of disdain, secretly it is welcomed by the people who knew the best straw lay, as noted earlier, within the narrow confines of the Nile River and the transportation it offered. However, as later verses are to prove, their increased efficiency at both gathering straw and making bricks didn't satisfy their Egyptian masters who beat them all the more. As for now, the Israelites "were scattered abroad through all the land of Egypt" [vs. 12] to get this straw. *Puts* is the verb for "were scattered" and suggests a sudden outpouring. "The whirlwind shall scatter them" [Is 41.16]. Although the text reads that this *puts* occurs "through all the land" what it really means is north and south along the Nile. The taskmasters "were urgent" [vs. 13] or *'auts* which means they hastened the Israelites to get out and gather the straw. "And he who makes haste with his feet misses his way" [Prov 19.2].

"And the foremen of the people of Israel whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over the were beaten and were asked, 'Why have you not done all your task of making bricks today as hitherto' [vs. 14]? "Were beaten" is passive, punishment meted out by the Egyptians to Israelite overseers who reluctantly had to carry out orders. They, in turn, took it upon themselves to approach Pharaoh crying out to him, the verb being *tsahaq* as in 3.7. In that verse "taskmasters" is mentioned, but then the work had not been increased. Since that *tsahaq* came to the Lord's ears and the current one came to Pharaoh, surely the latter *tsahaq* must have reached the Lord's ears as well. Usually when approaching a supreme ruler all types of protocol is observed. However, the foremen were so bothered that they threw caution to the wind and figured that if Pharaoh killed them on the spot, it would not make any difference. At the same time they knew he relied upon Israelite labor to keep his economy going. The real boldness is manifested in vs. 16: "But the fault is in your own people." *Chata'* is the word (verb) for "fault" and also means sin: "I have sinned against the Lord" [9.27]. Originally this verb is applied to archery as missing the mark as in target practice. Although Pharaoh fires back with the now familiar claim of Israel being lazy (*raphah* as in vs. 8), he does not maltreat the foremen nor punish the people further. At least he seems to have seen the economic value at stake.

"The foremen of the people of Israel saw that they were in evil plight" [vs. 19]. The Hebrew is direct in its simplicity: " were in evil (*rah*)" meaning they had no option available except

continue abiding with Pharaoh's harsh decree. These foremen had their own audience with Pharaoh because "they met Moses and Aaron who were waiting for them" [vs. 20]. The two brothers were in some outside court anxiously waiting for their compatriots to exit, telling whether or not the audience was successful by the expression on their faces. Chances are this was during set time of day when Pharaoh heard all sorts of cases from both Egyptians and Israelites. To a casual onlooker, Moses and Aaron were just two more litigants, Israelites at that. While he'd prefer to do without the large number of Israelites, economic dependency upon them dictated they be heard, even grudgingly. The verb *pagah* is used for the verb "met" as in vs. 3 and suggests a sudden encounter, a falling upon. That means the two brothers were more than waiting for the foremen...they were ready to pounce upon them as soon as they recognized them coming out.

Since Moses and Aaron could tell from afar the result of the meeting with Pharaoh, even though they individually knew it was bound to fail, the text moves into what they had expected and perhaps even had rehearsed, that is, to accept: "The Lord look upon you and judge because you have made us offensive in the sight of Pharaoh and his servants and have put a sword in their hand to kill us" [vs. 21]. The words "made offensive" consist of *ba'ash* (to have a bad smell) and *reyach* (smell; akin to *ruach* or spirit, breath). The phrase reads "you have made our scent/smell odious," odious in the sense of foul-smelling. These words reveal that the foremen considered themselves as a kind of burnt offering or incense offered to Pharaoh with good intent, but their scent turned out as disgusting to him. As for a sword in the hand of Pharaoh and his courtiers, it may have been true literally which shows how tense the meeting had been.

Without responding to the foremen, Moses "turned again to the Lord" [vs. 22]. *Yashav* is the verb and here intimates that Moses simply turned his back on the foremen right there in the courtyard before everyone else. "O Lord, why have you done evil to this people? Why did you ever send me?" This is the closest to despair Moses had gotten, having forgotten completely the divine promise not long ago, "that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt" [3.10]. After this two-fold complaint Moses continues lamenting about what Pharaoh had done, even worse, that "you (the Lord) have not delivered your people" [vs. 23]. *Natsal* is the verb for "delivered" which may be taken in a two-fold sense: 3.8 and 3/22 as "you shall despoil the Egyptians." Certainly not a good way to end an audience with Pharaoh but as mentioned above, not completely unpredictable. The desperate situation, however, sets the stage for the Lord to speak his mind.

## Chapter Six

The first verse of this new chapter begins as though there is no time gap between it and the closing verse of Chapter Five: "But the Lord said to Moses" where *w-* prefaced to "said" is taken either as "but" or "and" to show continuous action, a fact pointed out above. What the Lord says now continues through vs. 13, a repeat of much of what he had expressed

earlier in Chapter Four. The major difference: the words at hand come after the first encounter of Moses and Aaron with Pharaoh. That means they have greater impact in face of what they are now up against. “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh,” words intimating a certain eagerness and even thrill as to what the Lord will accomplish in the future, here clearly distinguishing between the ruler of Egypt and the Egyptian people as a whole. To date Moses had the idea that the Lord will take Israel from Egypt; it is Pharaoh who will be the unwilling agent: “for with a strong hand he will send them out, yea, with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.” *Garash* is the verb for “will send out” meaning to expel as well as to plunder. “The shepherds came and drove them away.” Addition of “his land” means that Pharaoh always considered the Israelites as long term residents-turned-intruders despite their vital contribution to Egypt’s economy. Again, it is helpful to keep in mind that this Pharaoh and his predecessor became hostile to the Israelites within their borders; prior to that, they had enjoyed a long, productive existence ever since Joseph was second in command.

After these introductory words to catch Moses’ attention (note that he doesn’t speak to Aaron), he says that he “appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty” [vs. 3]. *Ra’ah* is the verb at hand which was used last in 4.5: “that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has appeared to you.” There “God” is identified separately with each of the three patriarchs whereas here it is in abbreviated form, if you will. However, the verse at hand adds “God Almighty” *El Shaddai* as in Gen 17.1 which means God Most Powerful. The Lord himself makes clear the distinction: “but by my name, the Lord, I did not make myself known to them.” So while the Lord appeared (*ra’ah*) to the three patriarchs of old (Jacob was the best known by reason of his son Joseph who had become renowned in Egypt), he did not make himself known as *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh* as was the case with Moses. That task was up to Moses and Aaron, to make the Lord known, *yadah* as implying intimate knowledge and acquaintance.

“I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners” [vs. 4]. Covenant (*beryth*: suggests a cutting) was used last in 2.24: “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob.” Again, note the three patriarch, all of whom received various types of covenants while in Canaan, a fact which the Lord wishes to make clear in the verse at hand. The purpose of this frequent mention of covenant is that if the Israelites cannot grasp the Lord as *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*, they will recall their heritage which kept them together as a distinct people for over four hundred years in Egypt. Use of the verb “dwelt as sojourners” (*gur*) is a bit ironic...while true, the Israelites in Egypt are sojourners though they were unaware of it. When they hear this statement, would they be able to identify themselves with their patriarchs and wish to return to a *gur* status in a foreign land (Canaan)? Later on when in the Sinai wilderness they would struggle with this question, wanting to return to Egypt where they had plenty of food despite the harsh conditions of labor. “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the

leeks, the onion and the garlic” [Num 11.5]. The Lord seems to have second thoughts, if you will, on which he had just uttered by reminding the people that “I have heard the groanings of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage, and I have remembered my covenant” [vs. 5]. This verse pretty much echos that of 2.24.

“Say therefore to the people of Israel” [vs. 6]. This “saying” will be easy for Moses to accomplish, for he will express it through the mouthpiece of Aaron who has had much greater familiarity with the Israelites while his brother was off in Midian for so many years. The first divine statement is “I am the Lord” who identified himself as *’ehyeh ’asher ’ehyeh*; for sure, that will require some explanation. However, the Lord realizes this and expresses himself in terms of doing signs and wonders instead of explaining his name means. Note how important it is to have the Israelites know the identity of the Lord, much more so in the long run compared to their current situation, deplorable as it may be. Given their servile condition, no one was inclined to ponder theological niceties. The first order of business is for Israel to come out from beneath the burdens which the Egyptians set upon them, deliverance from their bondage, redemption with an outstretched arm (etc.) and finally in vs. 7, “I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God (etc.)” Do the Israelites know what it means to be redeemed, *ga’al*, the first mention of this here in Exodus? It must have been unfamiliar, even alien, so they must have pondered considerably about this *ga’al* which fundamentally means a buying back. “The angel who has redeemed me from all evil” [Gen 48.16]. This is the only time *ga’al* occurs in Genesis, uttered by Jacob, and possibly worked itself into tradition once Israel arrived in Egypt. Jacob (i.e., Israel) speaks of *ga’al* as having been done by an angel, not the Lord, so that was an important reason why the Lord had to lay stress on who he was right from the beginning. With regard to taking Israel for “my people,” the text has two occasions of the preposition *l-* prefaced to two words which read literally, “to me” and “to people.” The same applies with “to you” and “to God.” Once these sets where “to” is used twice, the people will know (*yadah* as intimate knowledge) that “I am the Lord your God.” *Morashah* is the noun for “possession” with eight other biblical references, seven being from Ezekiel. “Unto us is this land given in possession” [Ezk 11.15].

“Moses spoke thus to the people of Israel, but they did not listen to Moses because of their broken spirit and their cruel bondage” [vs. 10]. This verse begins with no mention of a time gap between Moses speaking to the people and the Lord’s address to him, the two being one and the same. Although Moses did as the Lord had commanded, the people didn’t care...not so much because they weren’t interested but because they were overwhelmed by their harsh circumstances. *Ruach* is the noun for “spirit” (singular, to show the collective nature of the people) which had been “broken” or *qotser*; a noun (the only one in the Bible) which derives from the verbal root meaning to reap, harvest, be short and can translate as “anguish (of spirit).” As for “bondage” *havodah* is the word as found in 1.13: “and made their lives bitter with hard service.” In sum, the Israelites prefer their slave-like plight over the unknown. Better to keep what you know, even if painful, instead of following some virtually unknown fellow, absent in Midian for many years without first hand knowledge of their situation,

who claimed revelation of a God with a strange, almost incomprehensible name.

So instead of the Lord telling Moses to reason with the people he bids him to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart Egypt (cf. vs. 10). In the verse at hand the Lord first “said to Moses,” that is, using the verb *davar* followed by “tell Pharaoh,” *davar* again. It is as though the first (divine) *davar* spilled over automatically through Moses to Pharaoh, hoping that Pharaoh gets the message. Such *davar* is not a polite request but a statement-of-fact. It, in turn, is followed by another *davar* (‘But Moses said to the Lord’), this time a kind of rebuke by Moses to the Lord: “Behold the people of Israel have not listened to me” [vs. 12]. This statement is followed by a question in the same verse, “How then shall Pharaoh listen to me who am a man of uncircumcised lips?” The for “uncircumcised” is *haral*, this the first time the idea of circumcision being mentioned in Exodus. If then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity” [Lev 26.41]. This is close to the sentiment of Is 6.5: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips.” After this legitimate objection the Lord speaks not just to Moses but to Aaron in vs. 13 though his direct words are not cited. The words consist of “and gave them a charge to the people of Israel and to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to bring the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.” Here the Lord fleshed out in greater detail what the two brothers were to say as well as offering them encouragement. Such a conversation was broader in scope, more a familiar exchange as among friends. While important, only the bare fact is stated, that both Israel and Pharaoh are to obey a charge laid against them, that is to say, the verb *tsavah* is used which means to order, command. “For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in all your ways” [Ps 91.11]. And so the multiple use of *davar* (to speak) reaches culmination in *tsavah* (to command).

Verses 14 through 25 go into considerable detail as to the genealogy of Aaron and Moses, that is, “to trace priestly lineage from Levi, Jacob’s son, to Aaron and through Aaron’s third son, Eleazar, to Phineas” (footnote in the **RSV**). This process of establishing the two brothers’ priestly line is important here before they present the charge (*tsavah*) to both Israel and Pharaoh. In other words, it gives them a legitimacy that was tacit instead of explicit even though at this stage we have no details as to what the notion of a priest is like for Israel. At the end of this lengthy genealogy vs. 26 continues the theme of “Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt by their hosts” or *tsava’*. This noun refers to an army or warfare and thus has military overtones. So before departing Egypt—when that will occur is not yet manifest—Israel is to assume a kind of military organization with Moses and Aaron as commanders.

“On the day when the Lord spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, the Lord said to Moses, ‘I am the Lord; tell Pharaoh, king of Egypt, all that I say to you’ [vss. 28-9]. The day referred to includes the just completed dialogue which by now at the end of Chapter Six seems repetitious to the modern reader. However, it takes into account the uniqueness of divine revelation, the Lord’s name as *‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh* which is why vs. 28 has “I am the Lord.” Again, *davar* (to speak) is mentioned three times: “the Lord said to Moses,” “tell Pharaoh”



and “all that I have done to you.” Vs. 30 restates Moses’ statement in vs. 12 as being of “uncircumcised lips.” That is a direct lead into the next chapter which continues with the Lord showing forbearance toward Moses despite his complaint.