



TOLMM WEEKLY NEWSLETTER for 1-25-25 VAERA

Ministry News

IF YOU HAVE A PRAYER REQUEST YOU WOULD LIKE PEOPLE ON THE LIST TO PRAY FOR YOU CAN SEND THEM TO US AT TOLMM@ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG OR BY TEXT MESSAGE TO 575 644-7706 AND I WILL SEND THEM BY EMAIL ONLY.

Remember that you can support the work of Tree of Life Messianic Ministries with a donation made via PayPal or by check to PO Box 467, Organ, NM 88052. Your donation helps our continued outreach to inmates and the time it takes to put this Newsletter together.

Donate



Tree of Life Messianic Ministries is a 501 C-3 non-profit. To donate go to etz-chayim.org and click on the PayPal link.

Tree of Life Messianic Ministries primarily focuses on its Prison Ministry and helping form groups in the prisons. TOLMM also seeks to help Home Groups and offers a covering for Home Groups and the combined experience of leadership

from Rabbi Philip Hammond and Rabbi Mordecai Silver. Group leaders can receive recognition as Elders under TOLMM, which will help in an advisory role. Your support is needed for the Prison Ministry due to continuing rising costs. We now have an Affiliate in Australia.

HOME GROUPS, CONGREGATIONS AND PEOPLE SEEKING FELLOWSHIP...

Shalom all,

As usual - to catch up on our weekly Torah Notes + which is attached and online at our website www.etz-chayim.org.

PRISON MINISTRY NEWS:

256 BOOKS AND ASSOCIATED MATERIALS WERE SHIPPED OUT IN NOVEMBER-DECEMBER TO INMATES SEEKING A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH YESHUA... OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS EXPANDING THIS OUTREACH, AND WE PRAY LIVES ARE BEING CHANGED FOR HIS GLORY. SOME GROUPS HAVE TAKEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME AFFILIATED WITH TOLMM TO HELP WITH OVERSIGHT AND GUIDANCE – REQUIRING MORE WORK... BUT MORE BLESSINGS!

WANT TO DONATE TOWARDS THIS OUTREACH – GO TO WWW.ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG AND USE THE PAYPAL LINK.

WE ARE PLEASED TO ANNOUNCE WE HAVE **10 PRISON GROUPS AFFILIATING WITH TOLMM.**

HOME GROUP NEWS.

TOLMM now offers affiliate status to Home Groups. Why this offer? Small groups no longer have to be alone [this never should be the case]. Experienced discipleship is available for servant leaders, and elders. Zoom meetings can be arranged for questions, and general discussion. Email us at: tolmm@etz-chayim.org or philip@etz-chayim.org

Home Groups joined:

Arizona – Elder Shawn Warren.

El Paso Texas – Rabbi Gabriel Levi Martinez. Phone: 915-407-1776.

Beit HaMidrash is a Home Study Group in Las Cruces. They meet on Friday evenings. Contact them at frietze96@gmail.com. Group leaders are Ruben and Yvonne Gonzales and Jean Fietze-Gomez.

JSI-Judaic Studies Institute was founded by Rabbi Hammond and Rabbi Silver and is now called JSI Yeshiva, and you can check it out at www.jsiyeshiva.com. We have classes of all shapes and sizes from short term to long term with Certificates of Completion and up to all degrees for a ministry college established in Louisiana. Rabbi Michelle Johns is the Chief Administrative Officer, a Professor with JSI as is Rabbi Mordecai Silver who is President of JSI Yeshiva.

Ba-Peretz Messianic Ministries as an Affiliate from Illinois. If you live near Wheaton, ILL drop us a line and we will refer you to the contact person for the Home Group.

We have a new Home Group in Nevada: The Group name is ‘Yeshua’s Chesed Messianic Congregation’. We meet in Sun Valley (Reno Metro) on Shabbos morning. They can contact Elder Djan Fermaint at 775-462-5539.

Don’t forget... Rabbi Silver is available to answer any questions on his weekly Parashah teachings... plus more.

If you need prayer – send an email. Not only have we witnessed prayers answered, but new relationships have been formed in Yeshua... praise His Holy Name.

FOR THOSE INTERESTED.

Rabbi Philip Hammond has several ministry outreaches:

- Shabbat service 11am [AEST] 5:00pm Friday USA Mountain Time.
- Men’s group
- Weekly Bible Study.

Contact Rabbi Hammond at Philip@etz-chayim.org for more information. Check out Rabbi Hammond’s ministry outreach at <https://www.etz-chayim.org/australia-affiliate/>.

ALL OF RABBI MORDECAI'S BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE ON AMAZON BY SEARCHING - **BOOKS BY RAV MORDECAI SILVER. THERE ARE 19 BOOKS.** RABBI HAMMOND HAS A BOOK ON AMAZON-SEARCH ON HIS NAME-**RABBI PHILIP HAMMOND OR EMUNAH CENTER.** RABBI JOHNS HAS SEVERAL BOOKS ON AMAZON.

Under His Wings,
Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph.D. and Rabbi Philip Hammond, Ph.D.

General News

TO SEARCH FOR RABBI SILVER BOOKS ON AMAZON ENTER "**BOOKS BY RAV MORDECAI SILVER**". MINE ARE AVAILABLE IN PRINT FORMAT ONLY. I HAVE TWO NEW BOOKS ON AMAZON: RAV SHA'UL AND REFLECTIONS ON TORAH. TO SEE MORDECAI'S BOOKS, GO TO: [HTTPS://WWW.ETZ-CHAYIM.ORG/SHOP-OUR-STORE/PRINT-AND-KINDLE-BOOKS/](https://www.etz-chayim.org/shop-our-store/print-and-kindle-books/)

RABBI MORDECAI HAS A NEW BOOK AVAILABLE. IT IS A SPANISH TRANSLATION OF THE TORAH IS VALID: THE COVENANT OF ISRAEL. IT'S AVAILABLE ON AMAZON.

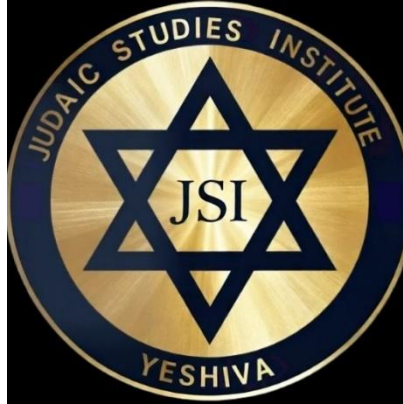
FOR RABBI HAMMOND'S BOOK, **HIS PERFECT GRACE**, GO TO AMAZON.COM AS WELL.

CHECK OUT RABBI MICHELLE JOHNS BOOKS ON AMAZON.

CHECK OUT RABBI MORDECAI SILVER'S 3 YEARS OF VIDEO TEACHINGS ON THE TORAH PORTIONS AND FESTIVALS ON YOUTUBE.

RABBI PHILIP HAMMOND HAS VIDEO TEACHINGS ON YOU TUBE AT [HTTPS://WWW.YOUTUBE.COM/@EMUNAHCENTER-CY9TQ](https://www.youtube.com/@emunahcenter-cy9tq)

WE HAVE 10 PRISON AFFILIATES THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES AND OVER 2,000 INMATES ON OUR MAILING LIST. ONE OF OUR PRISON GROUPS HAS 32 MEMBERS.



THE JUDAIC STUDIES INSTITUTE IS A POST-SECONDARY MESSIANIC YESHIVA THAT IS AUTHORIZED TO ISSUE ALL COLLEGE LEVEL DEGREES FOR MINISTERIAL PURPOSES. THE MISSION OF THIS INSTITUTION IS TO RESTORE THE ORIGINAL BELIEF SYSTEM FOLLOWED BY YESHUA AND HIS TALMIDIM (DISCIPLES) BY PROVIDING A TORAH-BASED, ACADEMICALLY SOUND, AND SPIRITUALLY VIBRANT EDUCATION FOR THOSE SEEKING A NEW OR IN-DEPTH UNDERSTANDING OF YHVH AND HIS WAYS. CHECK OUT OUR WEBSITE AT WWW.JSIYESHIVA.COM. OUR EMAIL ADDRESS IS JSIYESHIVA@GMAIL.COM.

OUR CLASSES ARE SELF-PACED, AND MOST ARE AVAILABLE THROUGH SELF-STUDY. ALL HEBREW CLASSES ARE TAUGHT LIVE VIA ZOOM. THERE ARE OTHER LIVE CLASSES, BUT THEY ARE DEPENDENT ON STUDENT ENROLLMENT. WE TRY TO OFFER TWO TO FOUR LIVE CLASSES PER SEMESTER. THEY LAST FOUR TO EIGHT WEEKS.

WE ARE A NON-TRADITIONAL INSTITUTION AND DO NOT REQUIRE A STANDARD NUMBER OF CLASSES PER SEMESTER. STUDENTS ARE ALLOWED TO PAY PER CLASS. MOST CLASSES REQUIRE A 10–12-PAGE PAPER, BUT THERE ARE SOME THAT REQUIRE QUIZZES, AND WEEKLY HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS. MOST CLASSES HAVE AN ASSIGNED BOOK THAT IS ACCOMPANIED BY AUDIO TEACHINGS. CLASSES GENERALLY TAKE A MONTH BUT CAN TAKE LONGER DEPENDING ON THE STUDENT.

JSI YESHIVA DOES ACCEPT CREDITS FROM OTHER UNIVERSITIES, COLLEGES, AND YESHIVA'S. WHEN YOU SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION PLEASE SUBMIT UNOFFICIAL TRANSCRIPTS.

PASS ALONG THE INFORMATION. CHECK OUT THE WEBSITE FOR MORE INFORMATION AND CLASSES.

IN HIM,
*RABBI MORDECAI SILVER, PH.D. AND RABBI MICHELLE JOHNS,
PH.D.*

MESSIANIC TEACHING ON THE WEEKLY TORAH, HAFTARAH, AND APOSTOLIC SCRIPTURE PORTIONS...



Rabbi Mordecai Silver tolmm@etz-chayim.org

MESSAGE FOR 1-25-25

Va'era – And I appeared

Exodus 6:2-9:35

Ezekiel 28:25-29:21

Romans 9:14-29

Exodus 6:2-3

God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but with My Name the Lord, I did not make Myself known to them.

El Shaddai – the Mighty God who sustains or provides

Ha Shem Adonai – the Name of the Lord – the Existing One

Exodus 6:6-8

Therefore, say to the Children of Israel: I am the Lord, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt; I shall rescue you from their service; I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgements. I shall take you to Me for a people and I shall be a God to you; and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Egypt. I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand

to give it to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I shall give it to you as a heritage – I am the Lord.”

From this passage is where we get the four cups spoken about in the Passover Seder. The Cup of Sanctification, the Cup of Affliction, the Cup of Redemption, and the Cup of Elijah.

Ezekiel 28:25-26

Thus said the Lord God: When I gather in the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they were scattered, then I will be sanctified through them in the eyes of the nations, and they will dwell on their land that I gave to My servant, to Jacob. They will dwell upon it in security and build houses and plant vineyards and dwell in security, when I execute judgements upon all those who despoil them from all their surroundings; then they will know that I am the Lord, their God.

Romans 9:22-26

*Now what if God, even though He was quite willing to demonstrate His anger and make known His power, patiently put up with people who deserved punishment and were ripe for destruction? What if He did this in order to make known the riches of His glory to those who are the objects of His mercy, whom He prepared in advance for glory – That is, to us, whom He called not only from among the Jews, but also from among the Gentiles? As indeed He says in Hoshea, **“Those who were not my people I will call my people; her who was not loved I will call loved; And in the very place where they were told, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called sons of the living God!”** (Hosea 2:25 (23), 2:1 (1:10))*

The tree's primary components are the roots, which anchor it to the ground and supply it with water and other nutrients; the trunk, branches and leaves that comprise its body; and the fruit, which contain the seeds through which the tree reproduces itself.

The spiritual life of man also includes roots, a body, and fruit. The roots represent faith, our source of nurture and perseverance. The trunk, branches and leaves are the "body" of our spiritual lives – our intellectual, emotional, and practical achievements. The fruit is our power of spiritual procreation, the power to influence others, to plant a seed in a fellow human being and see it sprout, grow, and bear fruit.

Roots

The roots are the least "glamorous" of the tree's parts - and the most crucial. Buried underground, virtually invisible, they possess neither the majesty of the tree's body, the colorfulness of its leaves nor the tastiness of its fruit. But without roots, the tree cannot survive.

Furthermore, the roots must keep pace with the body: if the trunk and leaves grow and spread without a proportional increase in its roots, the tree will collapse under its own weight. On the other hand, a profusion of roots makes for a healthier, stronger tree, even if it has a meager trunk and few branches, leaves and fruit. And if the roots are sound, the tree will rejuvenate itself if its body is damaged or its branch cut off.

Faith is the least glamorous of our spiritual faculties. Characterized by a "simple" conviction and commitment to one's Source, it lacks the sophistication of the intellect, the vivid color of the emotions, or the sense of satisfaction that comes from deed. And faith is buried underground, its true extent concealed from others and even from us.

Yet our faith, our commitment to God, is the foundation of our entire "tree." From it stems the trunk of our understanding, from which branch out our feelings, motivations, and deeds. And while the body of the tree also provides some spiritual nurture (via its "leaves"), the bulk of our spiritual sustenance derives from its roots, from our faith in and commitment to our Creator.

A soul might grow a majestic trunk, numerous wide-spreading branches, beautiful leaves, and lush fruit. But these must be equaled, indeed surpassed, by their "roots." Above the surface, we might behold much wisdom, profundity of feeling, abundant experience, copious achievement, and many disciples; but if these are not grounded and vitalized by an even greater depth of faith and commitment, it is a tree without foundation, a tree doomed to collapse under its own weight.

On the other hand, a life might be blessed with only sparse knowledge, meager feeling and experience, scant achievement and little "fruit." But if its "roots" are extensive and deep, it is a healthy tree: a tree fully in possession of what it does have; a tree with the capacity to recover from

the setbacks of life; a tree with the potential to eventually grow and develop into a loftier, more beautiful, and fruitful tree.

Fruit

The tree desires to reproduce, to spread its seeds far and wide so that they take root in diverse and distant places. But the tree's reach is limited to the extent of its own branches. It must therefore seek out other, more mobile "couriers" to transport its seeds.

So, the tree produces fruit, in which its seeds are enveloped by tasty, colorful, sweet-smelling fibers and juices. The seeds themselves would not rouse the interest of animals and men; but with their attractive packaging, they have no shortage of customers who, after consuming the external fruit, deposit the seeds in those diverse and distant places where the tree wants to plant its seeds.

When we communicate to others, we employ many devices to make our message attractive. We buttress it with intellectual sophistication, steep it in emotional sauce, and dress it in colorful words and images. But we should bear in mind that this is only the packaging, the "fruit" that contains the seed. The seed itself is essentially tasteless - the only way that we can truly impact others is by conveying our own simple faith in what we are telling them, our own simple commitment to what we are sharing.

If the seed is there, our message will take root in their minds and hearts, and our own vision will be grafted into theirs. But if there is no seed, there will be no progeny to our effort, however tasty our fruit might be.

Romans 11:16

...And if the root is holy, so are the branches. ...remember that you are not supporting the root, the root is supporting you.

Elohim wanted to show the world, through Israel, that He is Elohim. That Israel could not and cannot exist but through Him. It is the same with those of us who are Children of Elohim.

The Tree is made up of branches some of which are natural-Israelites/Jews and some of which are wild olive tree branches-the Nations. Together we join with the trunk of the tree-Y'shua. We are nourished by the

roots-the Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) and we are all joined to the ground-the foundation-the earth-the Father.

I think that it makes a beautiful picture of the source of life.

We include a Traditional Torah Commentary and my Messianic Commentary. The reason for this is so you can see a Messianic Perspective and a Traditional Jewish one. Remember to use discernment in approaching Traditional Jewish teachings as they do not recognize Yeshua as the Messiah. There are various ideas in traditional Jewish circles about the Messiah and Chavahn that there is no Messiah, the thinking in Reform Judaism. So, please be careful to balance the teachings.

We do not agree with the Jewish position on Yeshua, but Believers need to know the Jewish thinking on Yeshua and not buy into this thinking and forsake faith in our Messiah. For those who say they would never do this, we must beg to differ, because we have seen it over our lives as Jewish Believers in Yeshua. We have been Believers in Messiah Yeshua for decades. We have seen a lot and had many discussions with our fellow Jews and non-Jews who ultimately turned away from Yeshua because they steeped themselves in Jewish teachings. One does not come out of either traditional Judaism or Christianity and come into the Messianic walk, and then going back, or into, traditional Judaism. *There are many good things in Judaism but denying Yeshua as Messiah is not one of them.*

Berachot (Blessings), Rabbi Mordecai Silver, Ph.D., and Rabbi Philip Hammond, Ph.D.

A TRADITIONAL JEWISH PARASHAH AND HAFTARAH COMMENTARY



Parashat Vaera: Summary

Through Moses and Aaron, God brings plagues on the Egyptians, and Pharaoh repeatedly refuses to allow the Israelites to leave.

Exodus 1:1 - 6:1

A New Pharaoh Rises

The sons of Israel in Egypt were fruitful in births, and the people grew strong. Now a new Pharaoh rose up over Egypt who knew nothing of Joseph. This Pharaoh was worried that the Israelite nation was too mighty. First, he levied a tax on them, then he decided to make them slaves.

Next, Pharaoh ordered the Hebrew midwives, Shifra and Puah, to kill all the Hebrew baby boys. But the midwives feared God and told Pharaoh that the Hebrew woman gave birth before they could arrive. God dealt well with the midwives and the Hebrews continued to multiply. The Pharaoh then commanded the people to throw every Hebrew baby boy into the river.

Moses is Born

Now, a Hebrew couple from the house of Levi had a son and kept him hidden for three months. When the mother could hide him no longer, she wove a basket, laid the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the banks of the river. Her sister placed herself at a distance to see what would happen to him.

When the Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe, she saw the basket with the crying child. She took pity on him so that when the baby's sister asked, "Shall I call a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for you?" she said yes. The sister then fetched her mother. When the child had grown sufficiently, the mother brought him to the Pharaoh's daughter. She named him Moses because "I drew him from the water."

Moses Strikes an Egyptian

When Moses was an adult, he could see the burdens of his Hebrew brethren. One day, he saw an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew man. Moses turned this way and that and when he saw that no one was there, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

The next day Moses came upon two Hebrew men fighting. Moses said to the one in the wrong. "Why are you striking down your neighbor?" The man replied, "Who has made you a prince and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"

"So the matter is known," Moses said in fear.

Pharaoh heard too and sought to kill Moses. Moses thus fled to the land of Midian. There he watered the sheep for the daughters of the priest of Midian and later married the priest's daughter, Tzipporah. She bore a son whom he called Gershom, for "I was a stranger in a foreign land."

In Egypt Pharaoh died, but the sons of Israel remained slaves. God heard the Hebrew slaves' cry of distress and remembered the covenant God had made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Burning Bush

Meanwhile Moses was tending sheep for his father-in-law, Yithro, near the mountain of God at Horeb. An angel of God appeared to him in the heart of a fire from the midst of a thorn bush. He saw and lo! the thorn bush was on fire but was not consumed. Moses looked at this great sight and went to see why the thorn bush did not burn up.

God called to Moses from the middle of the bush, "Moses, Moses."

"Here I am!" Moses said.

"Do not step here!" said God. "Take off your shoes for the place you are standing on is ground with a holy destiny. I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."

And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look toward God.

God continued, "I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt and have heard their cries as slaves. Now I have come down to rescue them from the hand of Egypt and bring them to a good and spacious land, a land that can flow with milk and honey. Now, therefore go, I will send you to Pharaoh and to bring My people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt."

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" asked Moses.

"I will be with you. If you will bring the people out from Egypt, you will become the servants of God upon this mountain."

"But" Moses said, "when I tell this to the sons of Israel, they will ask me 'What is God's name?'"

"I shall be that which I wish to be," replied God. "So say to them, 'God, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob has sent me to you.' This is My Name for the distant future, and this is My memorial for every generation. Go and gather the elders of Israel and tell them. They will hearken to your voice. Then go to Pharaoh and say, 'God, the God of the Hebrews has met with us and now please let us go on a three day's journey into the wilderness to offer up a sacrifice to God, our God.'"

God Gives Moses The Signs

“Now,” God continued, “I know that Pharaoh will not let you go, not even by the threat of a mighty hand. Then I will stretch out My hand and strike down Egypt with all My miracles. After that, he will send you away and you shall leave with gold and silver and clothing.”

“But what if they do not believe that God appeared to me.”

“What is that in your hand?” God said.

“A staff.”

“Throw it on the ground.”

Moses threw his staff on the ground, and it turned into a serpent and Moses fled from it.

“Put out your hand,” God said, “and grasp it by its tail.” Moses did and it turned back into a staff.

God then had Moses put his hand to his chest. When Moses took out his hand, it turned leprous. When he put it back into his chest, it turned to flesh again.

“If they do not believe the first sign,” said God, “they will believe the second sign. But if they still do not believe, you shall take the waters of the river and pour it on dry land. The water will then turn into blood.”

“O Lord, I am not a man who is good at speaking.”

“Who has made man’s mouth or who makes one mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, God? And now, go! I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say.”

“Oh Lord,” said Moses. “Please send this message through someone else.”

Then the anger of God was kindled against Moses. God said, “Aaron, your brother, will gladly speak for you. Behold! He is coming to meet you. You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you both what you shall do. And you shall take into your hand this staff with which you are to perform the signs.”

So, Moses took his wife and his sons and returned to Egypt.

Let My People Go

God said to Moses, “You shall perform convincing wonders before Pharaoh, but I shall harden his heart and he will not let the people go until you will say to Pharaoh: This is what God has said, ‘Israel is My son, My first-born. I have told you, let My son go so that he may serve Me, but you have refused to let him go. I will therefore kill your own son, your own first-born.’”

God told Aaron to meet Moses. Moses told Aaron what God said. Moses and Aaron then gathered the elders of the sons of Israel. Aaron uttered the words that God had spoken to Moses and the signs were performed. The people bowed their heads in trust.

Afterwards, Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh saying, "God, the God of Israel says: 'Let My people go so that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness.'"

"Who is God that I should let Israel go?" said Pharaoh. "I do not know God and I will not let Israel go." That same day Pharaoh commanded that the slaves were to no longer to be given straw to prepare bricks. "Instead," said Pharaoh, "the slaves are to go and gather themselves their own straw. But the quota of bricks they are to make remains the same. Because they are lazy, they cry for this holiday to worship their God."

The Hebrew slaves went to Moses and Aaron and said, "May God look down upon you and judge, because you have brought us into foul odor in the eyes of Pharaoh!"

Moses returned to God and said, "My Lord! For what purpose have you made this misfortune for the people? Why did You send me to do this? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, Pharaoh has abused the people even more and You have not rescued Your people even from this?"

And God said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh; for by a strong hand will he let them go. Indeed, by a strong hand will he drive them out of his land!"

Parashat Shemot Discussion Questions

- 1. God heard the cry of the Hebrew slaves. Do you feel God hears your cries of distress? How can you tell if God is listening? How can you tell if God cares?**
- 2. Do you think God could make a burning bush not consume from the fire? Why or why not?**
- 3. God tells Moses what actions to take and how Pharaoh will respond. God foresees exactly what will happen. Do you believe that God foresees what will happen to people? What do you think God foresees for you?**
- 4. Moses wants proof to show the elders of Israel that God spoke to him. What proof would you give that God speaks to you?**
- 5. Do you believe that God makes people mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Why or why not?**

Haftarah for Vaera

A prophecy of destruction for Egypt.

Ezekiel 28:25-29:21

The Nile River figures prominently in the story of the Israelites in Egypt. In Parashat Shemot, Pharaoh decrees that all Hebrew newborn boys be thrown into the river (Exodus 1:22), and Pharaoh's daughter finds baby Moses floating in a basket on the Nile (Exodus 2:6).

In this week's Torah portion, Vaera, Moses hits the Nile with his staff, and it turns to blood (Exodus 7:20). He later hits it again to bring about the plague of frogs (Exodus 8:2).

The Nile as God

Since the Nile was a major source of fertility in otherwise arid Egypt, these assaults on the Nile were particularly painful for the Egyptians. Moreover, some scholars believe that the ancient Egyptians actually worshipped the Nile; seeing it turned to blood or infested with pests would be a real cause for panic.

Pharaoh The Sea Monster

The Haftarah for Vaera is a prophecy about Egypt's downfall, and it too uses the Nile as a central motif. Ezekiel foretells that God will punish the current Egyptian Pharaoh, whom he describes as "Mighty monster, sprawling in the Nile channels" (Ezekiel 29:3).

Pharaoh is the sea-monster of the Nile, Ezekiel explains, and God will drag him out with sharp hooks. God will fling the sea-monster into the desert, with the fish of the Nile sticking to its scales. Abandoned, the monster will become food for the beasts of the earth and the birds of the sky (29:4-5).

The Sin of Arrogance

Egypt's sin, Ezekiel explained, is arrogance. By claiming that "The Nile is mine and I made it" (29:9), Pharaoh and the Egyptians deny God. This earns them complete destruction. Nebuchadrezzar, Ezekiel promises, will bring about the destruction of Babylon: "He shall carry her wealth and take her spoil and seize her booty; and she shall be the recompense of his army" (29:19). Egypt will remain desolate for 40 years.

In closing, Ezekiel states that Egypt's downfall will endow Israel with strength. This event will be recognized as a symbol that the God of Israel is true.

Jeremiah's leadership and the way he is anointed as a leader are parallel to Moses' initial encounter with God and ascension to leader of the Israelites.



From the Desk of Rabbi Philip Hammond. Ph.D.

Rabbi Hammond can be contacted at – Philip@etz-chayim.org

WHO WANTS TO PLEASE THE FATHER PART 1

Who wants to please The Father?

- ▶ Stop worrying about what the world thinks of you, worry about what YHVH thinks of you!
- ▶ Stop thinking about what the world can give you, think about what YHVH can give you!
- ▶ Stop building kingdoms that reflect the world, but rather build that which reflects YHVH!
- ▶ Stop thinking what about the loses, but think about the gains in YHVH!
- ▶ Stop putting ourselves 1st, instead put YHVH 1st and foremost!

Who wants to please The Father?

- ▶ And *when* the people complained, it displeased YHVH: and YHVH heard *it*; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of YHVH burnt among them, and consumed *them that were* in the uttermost parts of the camp. ² And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto YHVH, the fire was quenched. ³ And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of YHVH burnt among them. ⁴ And the mixt multitude that *was* among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? ⁵ We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: ⁶ but now our soul *is* dried away: *there is* nothing at all, beside this manna, *before* our eyes. ⁷ And the manna *was* as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium. ⁸ And the people went about, and gathered *it*, and ground *it* in mills, or beat *it* in a mortar, and baked *it* in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil. ⁹ And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it. ¹⁰ Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of YHVH was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased. Numbers 11:1-10

Who wants to please The Father?

- ▶ Read the bible with focus and intent – you will see pattern after pattern...
- ▶ One such pattern is YHVH bringing His people up and out of Egypt.
- ▶ Another sad pattern is the continued disobedience of Israel as a nation.
- ▶ Another encouraging pattern is even amongst all the disobedience and complaining is a remnant who remain loyal to YHVH.
- ▶ Great news – YHVH will remain faithful to the remnant... those who please Him through heart circumcision, even if they have been led astray by false shepherds.

Who wants to please The Father?

- ▶ **Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith YHVH.² Therefore thus saith YHVH God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith YHVH.³ And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase.⁴ And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith YHVH.⁵ Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.⁶ In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, YHVH our righteousness.**
Jeremiah 23:1-6

Who wants to please The Father?

- ▶ Intentionally or unintentionally many Pastors, Priests, Teachers, Leaders have led the Children of Israel astray.
- ▶ Having been brought up on a sheep farm, I know the importance of good animal husbandry – shepherding. Protecting the flock, in all areas of welfare.
- ▶ What a warning and statement: **Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith YHVH.** This has been a problem down through the ages...
- ▶ **For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: ¹¹ whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.** Titus 1:10-11

Who wants to please The Father?

- ▶ But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. ² And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. ³ And through covetousness shall they with feigned [fabricated, fictitious, artificial] words make merchandise of you: 2 Peter 2:1-3a
- ▶ Destroy and scatter... that is what false prophets, false teachers, do. Yet we must also realise that sheep will destroy and scatter themselves, even if a good shepherd is in charge.
- ▶ Yeshua is the perfect Shepherd but we see...

Who wants to please The Father?

- ▶ Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an hard saying; who can hear it? ⁶¹ When Yeshua knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you? ⁶² *What* and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before? ⁶³ It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life. ⁶⁴ But there are some of you that believe not. For Yeshua knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. ⁶⁵ And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father. ⁶⁶ From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. John 6:60-66
- ▶ Not every lost sheep can be blamed onto bad shepherds. In fact most of the blame is due to decisions people make by themselves.
- ▶ Yeshua had some strong words about doing things our own way...

Hebraic Life



Why Jews Put Stones on Graves

Although the custom of placing them on a grave probably draws upon pagan customs, the stones also symbolize the permanence of memory.

The final scene in the movie *Schindler's List* is puzzling. Survivors and their cinematic offspring file by the grave of Oskar Schindler. With solemn ceremony, they place stones on the grave. Why should they leave stones rather than flowers? From where does this strange custom come?

The practice of burying the dead with flowers is almost as old as humanity. Even in prehistoric caves some burial sites have been found with evidence that flowers were used in interment. But Jewish authorities have often objected to bringing flowers to the grave. There are scattered Talmudic mentions of spices and twigs used in burial (Berakhot 43a, Betzah 6a). Yet the prevailing view was that bringing flowers smacks of a pagan custom.

That is why today one rarely sees flowers on the graves in traditional Jewish cemeteries. Instead, there are stones, small and large, piled without pattern on the grave, as though a community were being haphazardly built. Walking in the military cemetery of Jerusalem, for example, one can see heaps of stones on the graves of fallen soldiers, like small fortresses.

For most of us, stones conjure a harsh image. They do not seem the appropriate memorial for one who has died. But stones have a special character in Judaism. In the Bible, an altar is no more than a pile of stones, but it is on an altar that one offers to God. The stone upon which Abraham takes his son to be sacrificed is called *even hashityah*, the foundation stone of the world. The most sacred shrine in Judaism, after all, is a pile of stones — the Western Wall.

In the words of “The Kotel,” a popular Israeli song, “There are men with hearts of stone, and stones with the hearts of men.”

So why place stones on the grave? The explanations vary, from the superstitious to the poignant.

The superstitious rationale for stones is that they keep the soul down. There is a belief, with roots in the Talmud, that souls continue to dwell for a while in the graves in which they are placed. The grave, called a *beit olam* (a permanent home), was thought to retain some aspect of the departed soul.

Stones are more than a marker of one's visit; they are the means by which the living help the dead to "stay put." Even souls that were benign in life can, in the folk imagination, take on a certain terror in death. The "barrier" on the grave prevents the kind of haunting that formed such an important part of East European Jewish lore. The stories of I. B. Singer and the plays of the Yiddish theater are rich in the mythology of East European Jewry: Souls that return, for whatever reason, to the world of the living. One explanation for placing stones on the grave is to ensure that souls remain where they belong.

All the explanations have one thing in common — the sense of solidity that stones give. Flowers are a good metaphor for life. Life withers: it fades like a flower. As Isaiah says, "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty like the flower of the field; grass withers and flowers fade" (Isaiah 40:6-7). For that reason, flowers are an apt symbol of passing.

But the memory is supposed to be lasting. While flowers may be a good metaphor for the brevity of life, stones seem better suited to the permanence of memory. Stones do not die.

A beautiful answer takes its cue from the inscription on many gravestones. The Hebrew abbreviation *taf, nun, tsadi, bet, hey* stands for "*teheye nishmato tsrurah b'tsrur ha-chayyim*," a phrase usually translated "May his soul be bound up in the bonds of eternal life."

Yet *tsrur* in Hebrew means a pebble. In ancient times, shepherds needed a system to keep track of their flocks. On some days, they would go out to pasture with a flock of 30; on others, a flock of 10. Memory was an unreliable way of keeping tabs on the number of the flock. As a result, the shepherd would carry a sling over his shoulder, and in it he would keep the number of pebbles that corresponded to the number in his flock. That way he could at all times have an accurate daily count.

When we place stones on the grave and inscribe the motto above on the stone, we are asking God to keep the departed's soul in His sling. Among all the souls whom God has to watch over, we wish to add the name — the "pebble" — of the soul of our departed.

There is something suiting the antiquity and solidity of Judaism in the symbol of a stone. In moments when we are faced with the fragility of life, Judaism reminds us that there is permanence amidst the pain. While other things fade, stones and souls endure.

עברִי - Hebrew

Word (s) of the Week

Synagogue / בֵּית כְּנֶסֶת

Pronounced: BAIT kih-NEH-set

The Hebrew word for synagogue, *beit kneset*, literally means "house of assembly."



A Taste of Jewish Humor

A Post Turtle

Dr. David Weinstein decided to move his practice from the city to the country because he liked the slower pace of life and the down to earth nature of the locals. He particularly liked the unique perspective of some of the local farmers. One day, Dr. Weinstein dropped in on old farmer Higgins. They got to talking about politics.

Farmer Higgins said, "Well, ya know, that candidate is a 'Post Turtle'." Not being familiar with the term, Dr. Weinstein asked him what a 'post turtle' was.

Farmer Higgins said, "When you're driving down a country road you come across a fence post with a turtle balanced on top, that's a 'post turtle'."

Farmer Higgins saw the puzzled look on the doctor's face so he continued to explain.

"You know they didn't get up there by themselves, they don't belong up there, they don't know what to do while they're up there, and you just wonder what kind of dummy put them up there to begin with."

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