**[The Blazing Love – Parshat Shemot](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/the-blazing-love-parshat-shemot)**

וְאֵ֗לֶּה שְׁמוֹת֙ בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל הַבָּאִ֖ים מִצְרָ֑יְמָה
And these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt…

A disciple once asked Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heschel of Apt: “It says that the seven years Jacob worked to marry Rachel seemed like a few days to him because of his love for her. How does this make sense? If he loved her so much, the seven years should seem even longer, not shorter! I would think that every minute he had to wait would feel like an eternity!”

The rabbi of Apt responded: “There are two kinds of love: the kind that attaches you to the object of your love, and the kind that is given freely to your beloved. We are most familiar with the first kind – we love someone or something, and the love enslaves us; that’s the kind when every minute away from your beloved seems like an eternity. But Jacob had the second kind of love – his love was given away freely to Rachel, and so he too was free. In that freedom, he wasn’t longing for the future, he was simply being in the moment; so, the entire seven years seemed like only a moment, because throughout that time he had always been in the moment!”

On the physical level, we are absolutely slaves, in constant need of external support to survive. This is reflected in the parshah – the children of Israel are driven to Egypt by the famine and the promise of food, and there they become slaves.

וַיַּעֲבִ֧דוּ מִצְרַ֛יִם אֶת־בְּנֵ֥י יִשְׂרָאֵ֖ל בְּפָֽרֶךְ
Egypt enslaved the children of Israel with crushing labor…

Egypt is Mitzrayim, which comes from the root that means “constriction” and “suffering,” hinting that on the physical level we are ever incomplete, ever in need of external nourishment, without which we suffer and die.

But the physical, form-based dimension of experience is not all there is.

The very fact that we can feel suffering at all means there is awareness that feels. That awareness, that dimension of being without which there cannot be any experience at all, is itself beyond Mitzrayim, beyond constriction. Spacious and free, awareness is the ever-present background against which the constriction of Mitzrayim comes and goes. How do we access this dimension of freedom?

Love this moment!

It is true, we are often acting to bring about results that we need for our survival; even our next breath is toward this end. But our actions need not only be aimed at the narrow and conditional goals of the future; we have the power to also be in this moment lishma, for its own sake, to offer our Presence to the inner goodness of this moment, as it is. This is the second kind of love the Rabbi of Apt speaks about: the love that sets us free.

To bring forth the love that sets us free, we must remember that the inner goodness of this moment is easily hidden by our goals in time, by our Mitzrayim-based aim to secure something for ourselves. There is a hint of this in the passage about Moses’ birth:

 וַתֵּ֤רֶא אֹתוֹ֙ כִּי־ט֣וֹב ה֔וּא וַֽתִּצְפְּנֵ֖הוּ
She saw that he was good, so she hid him…

She feared for Moses’ life, because Pharaoh threatened to kill him. Moses represents the pathway to freedom, while Pharaoh represents the encroaching and deadening power of ego that kills the simple joy of being. Moses’ mother is the beginning of desire for freedom, the desire that cries out:

 בַּ֭צָּר הִרְחַ֣בְתָּ לִּ֑י חָ֝נֵּ֗נִי וּשְׁמַ֥ע תְּפִלָּתִֽי
Batzar Hirkhavta Li, Honeni uSh'ma Tefiltati!
From constriction You expand me – be gracious to Me and hear my prayer!
​(Psalm 4:2)

If the path to freedom were not hidden, there would be no desire for it, no longing in the heart for release from Mitzrayim, and freedom wouldn’t stand a chance. It is only because it is hidden that desire for freedom is born:

 דִּרְשׁוּ יְהֹוָה וְעֻזּוֹ בַּקְּשׁוּ פָנָיו תָּמִיד
Seek the Divine and Its Power; search for Its Presence constantly…
​(I Chronicles 16:11)

And when we seek, we find – because It is not elsewhere; It is hidden within this moment, hidden as the Presence of Being within all being. Give your attention to this Presence and you draw it forth. Just as Pharaoh’s daughter drew forth Moses from the river, so too we draw forth the light of the present from the river of time; it shines like a soft glow at first, then like a fire that blazes forth but heals rather than burns. All we need do is give our attention to It, to love this moment for Its own sake. Then, the path to freedom appears in the present, as Presence…

וַיֹּ֤אמֶר אֱלֹהִים֙ אֶל־מֹשֶׁ֔ה אֶֽהְיֶ֖ה אֲשֶׁ֣ר אֶֽהְיֶ֑ה
And Elohim said to Moses, “I Am That I Am”

***More on Parshat Shemot...***

[**Seek the Face – Parshat Shemot**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/seek-the-face-parshat-shemot)

It is difficult to be present when we face adversity. But it can be just as difficult, if not more so, when we are in easeful situations. That’s because without the motivation to escape suffering, the tendency is to forget all about the constant effort required to present.

וְאֵ֗לֶּה שְׁמֹות֙ בְּנֵ֣י יִשְׂרָאֵ֔ל הַבָּאִ֖ים מִצְרָ֑יְמָה
*These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt…*

The children of Israel went down into Egypt because it they needed nourishment; Egypt was a place of satisfaction, and only gradually did it become a place of great suffering. And, it was only because of the suffering that the Israelites were motivated to leave and return home.

Similarly, when our experience is pleasant and easeful, it is easy to sink into “Egypt” without knowing it – meaning, it’s easy to sink into identification with the mind and its thinking. After all –

נָ֑פֶשׁ וְיֹוסֵ֖ף הָיָ֥ה בְמִצְרָֽיִם
*Joseph was in Egypt.
​*
“Joseph” represents the power to grow, to be creative, and this is the power of thought. But when thought becomes so constant that we lose connection with the space of awareness within which thought arises, we’ve become stuck in Egypt, in *Mitzrayim,* the place of narrowness.

Then, when adversity comes, the degree to which we’ve become trapped gets revealed with the reactivity that arises, and the suffering that comes along with it.

But, not to worry!

The force of the suffering itself can cause “Pharaoh” to let go. Meaning, consciousness that’s become trapped in identification with thought – called “ego” – is motivated to let go when it feels the suffering that it unconsciously created.

The key is to use suffering in the right way – accept it fully, let it do its thing. *In that openness to whatever arises lies the key to liberation.* The suffering may persist for some time, but eventually it burns itself out, just as Pharaoh eventually relents after the ten plagues.

But even better is to learn to remain conscious when things are good!

Give thanks for the great and constant blessings of Being, root your awareness in your body, let go of the stream of thinking, and know yourself as the Light of Presence within which this moment arises. This is hinted at in a verse from Chronicles:

 בַּקְּשׁ֥וּ פָנָ֖יו תָּמִֽיד
*Bakshu Fanav Tamid
Seek Its Face Constantly*

Behind every experience is the radiant Light of Being, but you have to "seek it out" in a sense. This is a totally different kind of seeking from the ordinary kind, in which you seek something that isn't present, something that's hidden somewhere else. "Seeking the Face" means remembering that whatever the moment brings is literally the Face of the Divine – a manifestation of Reality, arising in the vast field of consciousness that you are...

[**"I" Am With "You" – Parshat Shemot**
​](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/i-am-with-you-parshat-shemot)

When Moses confronts the Voice from the Burning Bush calling him to his destiny, he responds, Mi anokhi ki elekh el Paro? – Who am I to come to Pharaoh? To which the Voice responds, Ki Ehyeh imakh – For I will be with you.

On the surface, God is reassuring Moses – “don’t worry, I’ll be there to help you out.” But look at what the words are actually saying: Mi anokhi? – Who am I? The answer is, Ehyeh imakh – I will be with you. In other words, Ehyeh imakh is actually who Moses is.

This is, in fact, who we all are at the very root of our being – an open space of awareness, awake to whatever arises in its field. We might call this level of our being, “Presence With.” This Presence (that is both the Divine Presence and our own presence) has a dual nature: on one hand, it has no other agenda than to simply be. On the other hand, since it is free from all other motivations, it also bubbles with potential. Every idea, inspiration and motivation arises from within it. That’s why the tense of Ehyeh is ambiguous; it can mean I Am, but it can also mean I Will Be.

And to clarify this further: a few verses later, Moses asks the Voice what its Name is. The answer is Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh – I Am That I Am, or I Will Be What I Will Be. Presence and Potential, Being and Becoming, in One.

This Presence and Potential is not something we must develop or create; it is who we are, if we can uncover it – if we can step off the worn path of our habits and behold the firey core of this moment.

And how to do that?

Say: Ehyeh imakh. Open yourself to fully be with this moment as it is. And in that Presence, is your own presence – along with the infinite potential of Whatever Arises Next.

Good Shabbos!
-brian Yosef

[**Against the Wall- Parshat Shemot﻿**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/against-the-wall-parshat-shemot)

One summer when I was about eight years old, I was walking through the playground at my day camp in upstate New York. As I passed by a certain play structure, built as a replica of a covered wagon, a bigger kid with a mean face came out of the wagon and told me to get inside. Hypnotized by his authoritative tone, I immediately acquiesced.

Once inside, I saw what was going on: several scared kids, some of whom were my friends, were all trapped at one end of the room with their backs against the wall.

“Get against the wall with the others!” the big mean kid barked at me. I did.

He then proceeded to lecture us: “You are all now my slaves. You will do exactly as I say, or I will crush your head!”

With that, he took a small thick stick and rammed it against the wall near us. He then continued bashing it and grunting, violently splintering off pieces of wood against the corrugated aluminum.

I became very still and alert. I couldn’t accept being this kid’s prisoner. I watched him very closely for several minutes, waiting intently for a moment when his awareness of me would lapse.

As he threatened us and repeatedly rammed his stick against the wall, he glanced just briefly at the spot where he was pretending to bash someone’s head. That was the moment. Without thinking, I darted for the door, jumped down the steps and escaped.

I hope the other kids were okay that day.

At that time, all I could do was free myself. But in this week’s reading, Moses receives the calling to free his entire people. He had already freed himself, escaping from the wrath of Pharaoh into the dessert. Eventually, he settled down with the Midianites and married Zipporah, daughter of the priest Jethro.

Then, one day while shepherding the flock, a Divine angel appears to him in a blazing fire burning within a thorn bush. He goes to examine the strange sight and notices that the bush is not being consumed by the flame:

“Moses hid his face- afraid to gaze on the Divine…”

Why was he afraid?

In this and every moment, there is nothing but Truth-Reality-Divinity everywhere, fully available and free. And yet, we too tend to “hide our face”- to shrink away in fear.

There are three types of fear gripping Moses at the burning bush, hinting at three types of psychological resistance we often feel toward being fully present with the “burning bush” of this moment.

First, when Moses hides his face, what does Hashem say to him?

“I have seen their afflictions and heard their cries…”

Being present can make you temporarily vulnerable to feelings of pain- both your own and the pain of others. In fact, the increased suffering of the Hebrews on the threshold of their liberation hints at this truth: To become free, you must be willing to fully feel whatever pain comes to you.

But, for us as in the story, there comes a time when the pain of resistance becomes greater than your resistance to pain. When that happens, you can surrender your resistance, feel whatever temporary pain you were resisting, and get free.

Second, when God chooses Moses for the awesome mission of liberating his people, what’s Moses’ response?

“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the Children of Israel out of Egypt?”

If you become free from your limited narratives about yourself, you then must confront your enormous potential. This gives rise to a different fear- what if I fail? Sometimes it’s easier to think of yourself as worthless than to acknowledge your tremendous potential. If you're worthless, then you don’t even have to try; you can stay comfortable with the status quo.

But when the magic of empowerment becomes sweeter than the security of comfort, you too will be able to look unflinchingly into your inner “fire”- your true potential- and get free.

Finally, when Moses asks what God’s Name is, what’s the reply?

“Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh- I Will Be That Which I Will Be…”

Entering the world of the Eternal- that is, the present moment- means letting go of the world of time. To let go of the world of time means putting aside the world of thought. To put aside your thoughts, you must have trust:

“If I stop worrying about the future and be fully here, will I be okay? Will things work out?”

The Divine is reminding Moses: “You don’t have to worry. I will be with you. Who made your mouth anyway? And even deeper- everything is ultimately Me. I am the Hebrews, I am the Pharaoh. I am everything in this moment, and later on, it will still be Me. I’ll be whatever I’ll be. Let go into this moment, trust that you will have what you’ll need, and embrace your path.”

Letting go into this moment and trusting is like pouring water into a cup:

The water takes the shape of the interior. It doesn’t resist one cranny, one curve, one angle; it simply takes the precise form of the vessel, without hesitation and without effort.

In the same way, you can “pour” your awareness into the “vessel” of this moment. There’s a hint of this in the beginning of the parsha:

“Uv’nai Yisrael paru… vatimalei ha’aretz otam-

         “And the children of Israel were fruitful… and the land became filled with them”

Who are the “Children of Israel?”

“Israel” comes from the Hebrew Yashar El- “straight to God”- so to be Israel means to drop the idea that you are separate from God/Reality. To drop the separateness is to “fill the land”- to be like water, perfectly conforming to the vessel of this moment.

But then it says:

“Vayakam melekh hadash al Mitzrayim-

         “And a new king arose over Egypt…”

This king, the Pharaoh, is fear.

It’s the fear of pain, the fear of your own potential and the fear of the unknown. Ultimately, it’s the fear of death of the separate “me.” The separate “me,” or ego, is formed by contracting away from “sides of the vessel”- that is, awareness disconnecting from the fullness of this moment.

Pharaoh is the king of Mitzrayim- the land of tzar- of narrowness. He is the King of Contraction.

So how do you let go and fill the vessel of this moment?

You don’t- gravity does.

Just as gravity causes the water to descend and fill the cup, there’s an inner “gravity” that will pull down your awareness into the vessel of this moment, if you surrender to it. This surrender comes not from pushing away your fear or trying to get rid of it, but from fully feeling it and transforming it into the cries of prayer. As it says:

“I have seen their afflictions and heard their cries…”

Meaning: When you fully feel, surrender, and cry out to the One, this revolutionary possibility comes into being: the possibility of realizing that you are the miracle of awareness. You are the Divine who sees, hears and feels all that arises in this moment.

This is your own inner perfection, your own Divine potential- to perfectly fill the imperfect manifestation of being as it moves in time. And in your perfect connection with the ever-imperfect manifestation of this moment, it is to bring healing and tikkun to yourself and others through words and acts of love, support, wisdom and understanding.

Living your full potential in the present is simple, but not easy. It takes training and practice, just like mastery of any skill requires.

Once Rabbi Chaim of Krozno, a disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, was walking through town with his disciples on their way to pray. They came upon a boy, dangerously walking along the edge of a towering stone wall. Rabbi Chaim stopped and became completely engrossed in the boy's antics.

“Rabbi,” a disciple queried, “What’s so interesting about that foolish boy that you make us late for prayers?”

“This boy,” replied Reb Chaim, “is risking his life and I have no idea why. But I am quite sure he’s not worrying that he might not keep his balance, because if he did, he certainly wouldn't.”

On this Shabbat Shemot- the “Sabbath of Names”- may we drop all of our "slave names”- the "bricks" in the wall of fear against which "Pharaoh" seeks to keep us confined. Instead, may we courageously practice walking the razor's edge of the present and fearlessly gaze into the “fire” of our own Divine potential. May we actualize that potential not just for ourselves, but for the sale of freeing the entire world.

Amein, Good Shabbos,
b Yosef

[**Perfectly Imperfect - Parshat Shemot**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/perfectly-imperfect-parshat-shemot)

Pour water into a vessel. Perfectly, it takes the shape of the interior. It does not resist one cranny, one curve, one angle; it simply takes the precise form of the vessel, without hesitation and without effort.

How?

Through its fluidity and the pull of gravity. Without fluidity, the water would already have its own form, and therefore could not conform. Without gravity, the water would not pour; it would move like smoke through space.

Now imagine: the water is alive and the vessel is alive. The vessel, once beautiful, has become twisted, contorted, wounded. It longs to be reshaped; it wants to be healed. The water is intelligent- it contains the knowledge of how to heal this twisted vessel. All it needs to do is to push on the walls of the vessel in just the right way to help it back into a wholesome shape, into its potential beauty.

But the water is impatient. In its zeal to fix the vessel, it contracts away from the interior and shapes itself into its idea of the perfected vessel. It pushes on the remaining surface that it touches in attempt to coax the vessel into its own shape, but to no avail. Without complete contact with the entire inside of the vessel, it cannot exert its influence. Now there are two shapes, one distorted and one ideal, with no connection to one another. The water has taken on the imagined ideal of the vessel, but it has lost its perfect connection with the vessel.

Now and always we find ourselves in “This”. By “This” I mean the totality of existence as it meets awareness in this moment. Awareness is like water; it is able to perfectly fill and take the shape of This that Is and is Becoming, Now. But awareness is not passive, inanimate water; it is living water. It is intelligent. It sees and responds. It is not only given shape by the vessel, but exerts force, desires to shape.

And in its desire to shape the reality it meets, it tends to contract away from the surface. This is the power of mind- to imagine the world as different, and to contract awareness into itself in order to form this image. Awareness contracts, and a sense of self as separate from the rest This is born. And, as a result, this self suffers terribly.

There is a hint of this in this week’s reading, Parshat Shemot. It says that the Children of Israel filled the land of Egypt- vatimalei ha’aretz. Who are the Children of Israel? “Israel” means to penetrate the shell of reality to the Divine. To find the Divine is to “fill the land”- to be like water, perfectly conforming to Reality as it arises.

But then it says that a new king arose who was afraid of the Children of Israel, afraid that they might become too strong and destroy Egypt. This king, the Pharaoh, is fear. It is the fear of death of the separate “me” that is formed by contracting away from “sides of the vessel”- that is, awareness disconnecting from the fullness of this moment. Pharaoh is the king Mitzrayim- the land of narrowness, the King of Contraction.

What is his strategy for survival? He imposes harsh labor on the Children of Israel and attempts to weaken them that way. This is the suffering that comes not from work, but from the tension we bring to our work- the tension of contracting into separateness. At some point, the suffering becomes too great and the Israelites cry out to the Divine “from their labor”. It says that the Divine “saw the Children of Israel, vayeida Elokim- and the Divine knew.”

This word for “knew”- yeida- means to “join with”. It is the same verb used to describe the intimate union of Adam and Eve. It is telling us- when our suffering becomes the cry of prayer, the awareness that is our Divinity within can again become fluid like water, re-joining in the fullness of presence with the presence of fullness- Reality as it arises, Now.

How do you make this happen? You don’t; gravity does. “Gravity” is the natural movement of awareness to fill this moment with its presence, once it surrenders its separateness. When we express our suffering in the cry of prayer, there can be this profound release. This release doesn’t destroy our vision for the future. It doesn’t deny the pressure we must exert on the walls of the vessel. It simply releases the contraction away from the walls and returns us to our own wholeness, our own perfection.

This is your own inner perfection, your own Divinity, right Now: to perfectly fill the ever-imperfect manifestation of being as it moves Now. In this is the release of all inner tension, the release of the whole drama of the “me” in the world. And, it is the birth of the Divine as it expresses Itself through you, as it is needed, Now. It is the inner Moses, whose name means “drawn from the water”…

And this is also the sacred promise of Shabbos- to separate from Pharaoh’s crushing labor for twenty-five hours and become fluid once again, to surrender to the gravity of wholeness, for the Divine to be born within. So it may be, Now, for us all-

Good Shabbos.