

AND THIS SHALL BE THE SIGN THAT I HAVE SENT YOU: AN ANALYSIS OF THE INAUGURATION OF MOSHEH (II)

by *Yitzchak Etshalom*

I RECAP OF PART I

In last week's essay, we began analyzing the structure of the first prophecy granted to Mosheh - the famous "burning bush" scene (Sh'mot 3:1-4:17). We noted that although the theme of the entire narrative **appears** to be the redemption of the B'nei Yisra'el from the servitude in Egypt, the repeated use of the name "Mosheh" in such a manner as to qualify it as the *leitwort* (key word) hints to the reader that the actual topic of this dialogue is Mosheh himself - specifically, his **אלימות** (agency). We also noted that Mosheh's seven responses to Hashem are themselves arranged as an inverted chiasmus - heightening the elegance of the literary structure of the entire dialogue. Finally, we observed that G-d's words are apparently broken into 8 sub-units, using Mosheh's interjections as dividers. Further investigation (aided by careful observation of the "*Vayomer...Vayomer*" phenomenon) revealed that there are nearly twice as many (15) separate Divine speech-units.

In this essay, we will analyze those 15 utterances, noting both the overall structure of the entire presentation as well as the development that takes place within them. We will note the dramatic change that takes place at a crucial point in this dialogue and will suggest changes in the nature of the Mosaic agency that are telegraphed in that change.

II THE FIFTEEN SUB-UNITS: THREE GROUPS

(Readers are encouraged to refer to last week's essay, where the entire narrative is presented in a schematic that allows the reader to easily mark each side's words)

Students of the methodology that is at the heart of many of our essays should not be surprised to find that the Divine words form an easily discernable structure, one whose emphasis is in its middle.

The first series (#1-7) and the final series (#9-15) each form a thematic whole, while the middle speech-unit forms its own thematic identity. There is also a common structural orientation to all three of the sets - each is a heptad (set of seven). There are structural, linguistic and thematic ties that bind the three sections together. There is one special phrase which appears exactly one time in each section. In the entire T'nakh, it only appears in this "first stand at Sinai". This phrase is of fundamental significance, both within the T'nakh narrative and within the development of our theologico-liturgical relationship with G-d:

אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂכָּבֵד

(The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzhak
and the G-d of Ya'akov) (3:6 15, 4:5)

Indeed, we will utilize the phrase that immediately precedes this formula to "title" each series:

- 1) I am **אֱלֹהֵי אָבִיךָ** (the G-d of **your** father), the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzhak and the G-d of Ya'akov.
- 2) **אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם** (the G-d of **your fathers**), the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzhak and the G-d of Ya'akov.
- 3) **אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָם** (the G-d of **their** fathers), the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzhak and the G-d of Ya'akov.

There are clear interrelationships between the sections of each series. These connections move from the ends of the dialogue towards the middle, with #1 and #15 being related, then #2 and #14, etc. This supports the contention that the structure of the entire dialogue as well as its composite parts is deliberate, as well as message-laden.

III THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SPEECH-UNITS

A: #1 & 15 - FROM FAVOR TO ANGER

The first speech - the shortest of the fifteen ("מַשֶּׁה מַשֶּׁה"), is one which reflects G-d's special favor for this individual. רמב"ל (Sifra Vayyikra Nedava 1:12 and in numerous Midrashim) note that those individuals who are called by G-d with a repetition of their name are especially beloved. Only Avraham, Ya'akov, Mosheh and Sh'mu'el merit this treatment.

The final speech is explicitly defined as G-d's "angry response" to Mosheh:

*And the anger of Hashem was kindled against Mosheh, and He said:
Is not Aharon the Levi your brother...*

Not only is the emotional tenor of the speeches diametrically opposite, the implications also form an inversion. Whereas the first speech was a call to Mosheh that would (apparently) result in his successful **solo** mission to lead the B'nei Yisra'el back to Eretz Yisra'el, the final speech leaves us with a coupled agency, Mosheh paired with his brother.

B: #2 & 14 - FROM BECKONING TO SENDING AWAY

The second speech, where G-d commands Mosheh to shed his shoes due to the sanctity of the place, serves as an affirmation of the favor and closeness alluded to in the first call. There are several ways to interpret the relationship between the various components of this command. The first clause - "do not come near" - may stand independent of the rest of the command, such that even after taking off his shoes, Mosheh must remain at a distance (Ramban, S'forno). Alternatively, the two may be tied together, such that Mosheh may not come close until he has taken off his shoes (Ralbag). The second read, tying the two together, certainly confirms Divine favor, inviting Mosheh to come "closer", providing he respects the sanctity of the place. Even the first read serves to express Divine favor, as Mosheh is not expelled from this place; rather, the prophecy will continue.

The second half of the penultimate speech -

Now therefore go...

is the first instance within the entire scene when G-d actually commands Mosheh to begin his agency.

These two speeches - just like #1 & 15 - form an inverted parallel. The second speech alludes to G-d's beckoning Mosheh and the fourteenth contains the express command to leave and begin his mission.

C: #3-7 & 9-13 - FROM AGENCY TO SIGNS

Although we will identify more point-by-point correlations between these two sections, it must first be observed that these two parallel sets of five speeches also "speak to each other". The radicals שִׁלְחָה appears seven times throughout the dialogues (another *leitwort*); yet their use in reference to Mosheh being sent by G-d terminates at the beginning of speech #8. In other words, the motif of שִׁלְחָה has somehow changed by the time the final section begins; yet the first section is devoted to Mosheh's agency - and that process begins in speech #3 where G-d "introduces" Himself to Mosheh with the familiar formula of אֲנִי אֱלֹהֵימָּךְ אֲלֵךְ אִתְּךָ וְאֲנִי אֲשַׁלְּחֶךָ - which is followed in #4 with the first mention of his agency. The next three speeches all comprise G-d's responses to Mosheh's two questions about his ability to convince both Pharaoh and the B'nei Yisra'el of his mission.

As noted, there is no mention of Mosheh's agency per se in the last section - but the devices of his charisma are clearly presented solely within the five speeches following the central utterance (#9-13). In the first, G-d asks Mosheh what is in his hand - Mosheh's response - **A rod** - is the "setup" for the next two speeches, where the "serpent-sign" is elucidated. The next two speeches focus on the next two "signs" - the scale-disease and the blood.

In sum, the five speeches leading up to the central one all have one focus - Mosheh's agency. The five that lead away from the central speech similarly have one focus, one that, upon inspection and reflection, is diametrically opposite of the theme of the first five.

At the core (structurally speaking - speech #5) of the first pentad is the phrase **כִּי אֲהִי עִמָּךְ** - *for I will be with you* - which is the basis for Mosheh's agency. Immediately following this assurance, in response to Mosheh's request, G-d presents Himself to Mosheh as **אֲנִי אֲהִי יְהוָה** (*I am that I am*) - which adds significant gravitas to the earlier pronouncement. Taking the later pronouncement into account, the earlier one has a sharp double entendre: "*I will be with you*" - and **אֲנִי אֲהִי יְהוָה** *will be with you*, referring to that mysterious name (see Rashbam at 3:15) by which G-d will redeem His nation.

At the core of the latter pentad (speech #11), the *raison d'être* of the "signs" is explicitly stated:

That they may believe that Hashem G-d of their fathers, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzhak, and the G-d of Ya'akov, has appeared to you.

Just as we found in the first set, this central statement defines the "new" agency laid out in this section.

C1: #3 & 13 - FROM ANCESTORS TO SIGNS

This "inverted parallel" may hold the key to understanding much of the development within the entire dialogue. For the first time in history, G-d presents Himself with that now-familiar formula, associating Himself with the three patriarchs - this in speech #3. The parallel speech also includes a threesome - but here it is not the three giants of our history, the foundation of our peoplehood, rather it is three signs by which Mosheh will convince the nation that he is truly an agent of the Master of the Universe. There is much Midrashic and post-Midrashic literature on the significance of three (all following the verse in Kohelet 4:12 - *and the three-fold cord will not quickly break*. See M. Kiddushin 1:10, BT Bava Metzia 85a, BT Berakhot 32a), most notably in the writings of the Maharal. To wit, the permanence achieved by the three patriarchs will be "matched" by the firm belief that will be maintained by the people once they see three signs (see Ralbag ad loc.)

Seen through the lens of this structural association, there is a subtle yet sharp rebuke to Mosheh and/or the people. The patriarchs were bastions of faith (see B'resheet 15:6 and Rashi at Sh'mot 6:9) - yet Mosheh is convinced the people will not believe him without the "other three", i.e. signs which they can see for themselves.

C2: #4 & 12 - FROM "GRAND" EXODUS TO "SMALL" EXODUS

While the connection between these two speeches is not obvious at first glance, a careful look at each one reveals a subtle yet powerful association.

The earlier speech contains four mentions of "Egypt" - and, in parallel, four mentions of Am Yisra'el. Twice, we are called "My nation", and twice "the B'nei Yisra'el". Note the development: The first time, the phrase is "My nation", the second time it is "the B'nei Yisra'el" and, at the crescendo of this speech, the two are couple into "my nation, the B'nei Yisra'el." In parallel, the first mention of Egypt is **בְּמִצְרַיִם** - in Egypt. The next two occurrences are without prefixes - Mitzrayim. The final one is a beautiful coda: **מִמִּצְרַיִם** - from out of Egypt. The theme of this speech is simply the pulling of "My nation, the B'nei Yisra'el" out of Egypt. It is the heart and soul of Mosheh's agency - and, not surprisingly, is the central speech in the first series. Significantly, the word **Eretz** appears three times in this speech.

The parallel speech also contains a word that appears three times - **יָדְךָ** (your hand). The overt theme of this speech is the command to Mosheh that he pull out his hand from his bosom to find it affected by **צָרַעַת** (scale disease). Note how much things have changed at this point. Instead of completing the "grand exodus" of the B'nei Yisra'el from the land of Egypt to the land of K'na'an, Mosheh must remove his hand from his own bosom.

C3: #5 & 11 - THE MEASURE OF FAITH

In the first of this paralleled pair, G-d responds to Mosheh's concern about his own inadequacy by declaring that:

Certainly I will be with you; and this shall be a sign to you, that I have sent you; When you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d upon this mountain.

The proof of Mosheh's agency (however we are to understand it - see the comprehensive survey of the approaches taken by the Rishonim by Tamar Verdiger in Megadim vol. 12, pp. 24-30) lies in the future and represents not only the purpose of the Exodus (*that they may worship Me*) but also the loftiest spiritual stand ever experienced by flesh and blood. Contradistinctively, the "proof" of Mosheh's agency in the later verse is fully credited to the "serpent-sign", one that is visible and immediate to the audience he will address.

C4: #6 & #10 - PERMANENCE AND CHANGE

In response to Mosheh's request to know G-d's Name, the famous answer is: **אֲנִי ה' אֲנִי ה'**. Most Rishonim understand that Name to reflect the absolute indivisibility, unchanging nature of G-d, along with His absolute control over all of creation. (see Rashbam, Ralbag and S'forno).

Here we have a bit of an anomaly in the structure. The parallel here expresses the same theme, but from the opposite perspective - surely an inverted parallel, but of a different stripe. Note S'forno's insightful comment on the "serpent-sign":

The rod is something that is dead...and I will give life to the dead rod. (4:2).

The Ramban's comments clarify the connection between these two parallel passages even more clearly:

Perhaps even though He informed Mosheh of the Great Name with which the world was created and everything came into existence, He wished to show him that with this Name signs and wonders would be done, changing the natural order of things...(4:1).

Whereas the first passage presents Mosheh via the Name that expresses the unchanging nature of the Divine, the second is the consequent of that theological reality - His absolute control over all of life.

C4: #7 & #9 - SUMMING UP THE DIFFERENCE

The final speech of the first unit and the first one of the final unit serve - each in its own way - to define the theme of each series.

The end of the first series deftly and succinctly captures the gist of entire section:

Thus shall you say to the people of Yisra'el, ה' אלהינו has sent me to you.

There are three components in this brief statement:

- 1) *Thus shall you say to the people of Yisra'el* - Mosheh's agency is chiefly directed towards his own people (as opposed to the later development within this dialogue)
- 2) **ה' אלהינו** - the aspect of G-d being revealed in this redemption is the one who is Himself unchanging, yet controls and changes all of His creatures.
- 3) *has sent me to you.* - Mosheh is G-d's agent, not acting of his own accord.

These three ideas cover the major themes in the first series of speeches.

In much the same way, G-d's opening words in the final section set the tone for the entire heptad.

What is that in your hand?

Everything from here on in is literally "in Mosheh's hands" - the rod, the tzara'at and the taking of the water from the Nile. In a larger way, his acceptance of the mission **on G-d's terms** is in his hands (he eventually refuses it outright).

SUMMARY

We have demonstrated, fairly conclusively, that the schema we have proposed for the dialogue is accurate. The chiasitic structure

of the “outside sections”, culminating in the central speech, is supported at every turn.

Before turning our attention to the central speech, we will summarize the critical developments from the first series to the third. We will then analyze speech #8, using it to understand this development. The corresponding speeches are placed in parentheses after each summary point.

In the first series, G-d approached Mosheh with love (#1) and notified him that he was standing on holy ground - and that demands extra care (#2). He then introduced Himself with the familiar formula (#3). and notified him that He was about to pull His nation, the B'nei Yisra'el, out of Egypt (#4). He assured Mosheh that He would be with him and that his agency would be affirmed at a later date (#5). He concluded by revealing to Mosheh His unchanging nature (#6) and by affirming that it was from this aspect that Mosheh was being sent to the B'nei Yisra'el (#7).

At this point, had Mosheh accepted the agency as presented, he would have gone to the B'nei Yisra'el directly and on his own, convinced them **through words alone** of his mission and led them out. There is no mention of any challenges or obstacles to the exodus.

In the final series, Hashem shows Mosheh how to perform signs (#9-13), all of which demonstrate that his Master has the power to change natural elements and essences (following S'forno - dead to alive, alive to dead) and that he will attack, as it were, the Egyptians. The three-fold signs serve as solid confirmation of this agency (as did the mention of the three Avot). Hashem then reminds Mosheh that he also has power over speech, such that Mosheh's claim of oratory incompetence does not stand (#14). In conclusion, Hashem reacts angrily to Mosheh's refusal and “compromises” by including Aharon in the agency.

This mission is a very different one than the task laid out in the first series. As opposed to Mosheh operating as a full-fledged representative of G-d, whose words carry that sort of weight and who has no need for signs to convince and lead his people or to speak forcefully in Pharaoh's court (see MT Yesodei haTorah 8:1). As opposed to being an **איש אלקים**, (man of G-d - who has G-d's spirit within him, indicated by the ideal **אֱלֹהֵי אֲנִי** mentioned in the third speech) leading with words, he becomes the **רֹאשׁ מִטָּה** (leader with a staff, expressed with the parallel phrase **אֱלֹהֵי אֲנִי** in the third speech of the last series) whose leadership is both confirmed and activated by his use of the rod.

Why did this change take place? Why was the original Divine intent not realized here (as it appears from the text) and why was it replaced by this “second-level” agency? This question is of great import, for it not only reflects on a possible fork in Mosheh's career path, but it may have had significant consequence for the process of Yetzi'at Mitzrayim itself.

The answer lies, I believe, in the central speech that is the fulcrum of the entire dialogue. It is to that speech that we must now turn our attention.

IV THE CENTRAL SPEECH

Here is the text of that speech; the rationale for the schema will be explained below.

(And G-d said moreover to Mosheh,)

1) Thus shall you say to the people of Yisra'el, Hashem G-d of your fathers, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzhak, and the G-d of Ya'akov, has sent me to you; this is My name forever, and this is My memorial to all generations. Go, and gather the elders of Yisra'el together, and say to them, Hashem G-d of your fathers, the G-d of Avraham, of Yitzhak, and of Ya'akov, appeared to me, saying, I have surely visited

you, and seen that which is done to you in **Egypt**;

- 2) And I have said, I will bring you out of the affliction of **Egypt** to the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a land flowing with milk and honey.
- 3) And they shall listen to your voice; and you shall come, you and the elders of Yisra'el, to the king of **Egypt**, and you shall say to him, Hashem G-d of the Hebrews has met with us; and now let us go, we beseech you, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to Hashem our G-d.
- 4) And I am sure that the king of **Egypt** will not let you go, if not by a mighty hand.
- 5) And I will stretch out my hand, and strike **Egypt** with all my wonders which I will do in its midst; and after that he will let you go.
- 6) And I will give this people favor in the sight of the **Egyptians**; and it shall come to pass, that, when you go, you shall not go empty;
- 7) But every woman shall borrow from her neighbor, and from her who sojourns in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and garments; and you shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and you shall plunder [the land of] **Egypt**.

As can be seen, the word Egypt (מצרים) appears seven times in this speech. This *leitwort* is also arranged in such a fashion that the speech may be broken into seven components, as follows:

- 1) G-d's concern for what is happening to his people in **the land of Egypt**
- 2) Redemption of His people from the hands of **the Egyptian people**.
- 3) Mission **to the Egyptians**
- 4) Inevitable refusal of **the king of Egypt**
- 5) G-d's plagues sent **to the Egyptians**
- 6) Favoring of Yisra'el in the eyes of **the Egyptian people**.
- 7) Plundering **the land of Egypt**

The overall theme of the central speech is Egypt - the land (forming the bookends of the speech), the people, G-d's address to those selfsame Egyptians (first in speech, then with plagues) and, at the center of it all, Pharaoh.

One could argue that the sequence here is a microcosm of the entire development of the dialogue. The first series of speeches, as noted above, were geared towards a "quiet" redemption, one without conflict with the Egyptian overlords. This perspective is reflected in the first three sections of this middle speech. The final series assumes a belligerent and confrontational interaction with the Egyptians, including the use of Mosheh's rod and the attack against the Nile.

Nonetheless, this speech does stand on its own. Earlier on, we observed that the only three occurrences of the well-known formula אלקי אבותינו אלקי ישראל ואלקי יעקב appear in our scene, one in each of the sections. We also noted that each time, the two words that preface the formula vary slightly.

In the first series, G-d introduces Himself as אלקי אביך - *the G-d of your father*; followed by the formula. In our speech, G-d presents Himself as אלקי אבותינו - the G-d of **your fathers**. Here, Mosheh is included in the group and does not stand alone. In the final series, He is אלקי אבותם - the G-d of **their** fathers.

I believe that each of these variations attaches to the overall theme of its respective heptad.

V

אביך, אבותינו, אבותם

In the first series, Mosheh is being beckoned to follow in the footsteps of the Avot - to attach himself to G-d in the fashion that they did. Note the use of the word יורד (and I will go down) in the first series, indicating G-d's readiness to "descend" to Egypt to save His people. This word evokes the promise given to Ya'akov upon his own descent to Egypt, hundreds of years earlier: I will surely go down with you to Egypt (B'resheet 46:4). Note also that Ya'akov is addressed by אלקי אביך - a phrase which only appears twice more in all of T'nakh.

It is Mosheh's third response that sets the tone for the second series and moves it away from the possibility of Mosheh acting as a "fourth Patriarch."

I will say to them: אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַיִם has sent me to you..."

Mosheh distances himself from the relationship implied by אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַיִם - and sees himself as a foreigner approaching B'nei Yisra'el with the curious report that **their** G-d has appeared to **him**.

In the middle series, the focus is on Mitzrayim and on the Pharaoh at its center (theologically, politically and, here, structurally). This evokes the image of another hero of B'resheet - Yoseph, whose rise to greatness and vehicle for saving the family was accomplished in the court of Egypt. Note the use of פֶּקֶד פִּקְדוֹתַי, which was the "code" transmitted by Yoseph to the other brothers to assure them of their eventual salvation (B'resheet 50:24-25; see also Rashi at Sh'mot 3:18). Surely the "ruse" of "three days" must remind us of Yoseph's dream interpretations while in the court jail, where the triad of items in both the butler and baker's dreams were correctly interpreted to refer to three days hence. We should also not overlook the "finding grace" in the eyes of the Egyptians, a trait consistently associated with Yoseph (finding favor in the eyes of his father, his Egyptian master, that master's wife, the warden, Pharaoh and, ultimately, all of Egypt). Mosheh is being asked to become, as it were, a second Yoseph - and who better for the job? Just like Yoseph, Mosheh is intimately familiar with the Egyptian court, having grown up as Pharaoh's ward/adopted grandson.

We now understand the use of the phrase אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַיִם here. Once the family was complete, with the birth of the children of Ya'akov and the successful resolution of the Yoseph drama, there is no longer אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַיִם, G-d who associates with the individual alone. Now there is the corporate entity known as the B'nei Yisra'el.

This was, as it were, the opportunity granted to Mosheh to draw himself into the collective from which he felt estranged.

It is Mosheh's response to the middle speech - the one focused on Mitzrayim and evoking so much of Yoseph's life and leadership - that moves the relationship and agency to a third position:

But, behold, they will not believe me, nor listen to my voice; for they will say, Hashem has not appeared to you

Mosheh not only casts doubt on the readiness of the B'nei Yisra'el to believe him, he continues to cast himself outside of the nation - note the repetition of "they" and "me" throughout his response.

At this point, the only option left is for Mosheh to approach them as an outsider - hence, G-d is referred to in the third series as אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתַיִם. Now, Mosheh must use physical evidence and "signs" to confirm his agency; and he will eventually be drawn into the collective through a different avenue.

How would Mosheh's mission have played out if either the first or second approach had been accepted - there is no way to know. There is, however, a gradual rise in the level of contrariety throughout the dialogue. From the favor and love of the first speech - מִצִּיּוֹן, מִצִּיּוֹן until the Divine anger at the end, one can discern gradations of conflict. First, there is the "light" conflict anticipated with the B'nei Yisra'el who will ask Mosheh the Name of G-d to prove his agency. Then, the serious conflict with Egypt and its king. In Mosheh's response to the central speech, a greater conflict with the B'nei Yisra'el is anticipated - and, finally, G-d's anger is directed at Mosheh.

The title that Mosheh **might** have earned at the beginning of his career - אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים - was only given to him at the end of his life (D'varim 33:1).