

1-13-24 Message to Roeh Israel Abilene – VaEra (and I [Adonai] appeared)

Torah Portion: Exodus 6:2 – 9:35

Haftarah: Ezekiel 28:25 – 29:21

Suggested Acheron K'tuvim: 1 Peter 2:1-6

You Are Completely Unique

Central question of this message: What is holding you back from engaging in the service that G-d has ordained for you in His kingdom?

We are in the second portion of the book of *Shemot* (Exodus) today. It is entitled *VaEra*, and that name comes from the sixteenth word of the passage in this English translation, and the 9th Hebrew word in the Torah. *VaEra* means “and I [Adonai] appeared”.

This passage begins with the declaration that G-d is revealing to Moses for the first time His four-letter Name. Then the L-rd continues to tell Moses what he should be doing to bring out the People from under the bondage of the Egyptians.

Ex 6:2-4

2 God spoke further to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord; 3
and I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty,
but by My name, Lord, I did not make Myself known to them. 4

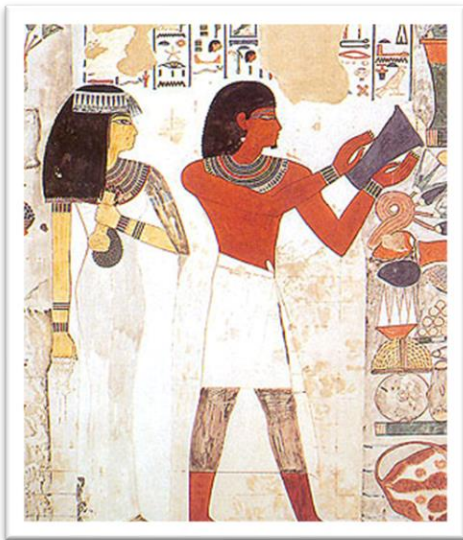
And I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned.

וַיִּדְבֹר	אֱלֹהִים	אֶל-	מֹשֶׁה	וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלָיו	אֲנִי	יְהוָה:	²
And spake	God	unto	Moses,	and said	unto him,	I	the Lord:	
<u>1696</u>	<u>430</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>4872</u>	<u>559</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>589</u>	<u>3068</u>	
וַיֵּאָרָא	אֶל-	אַבְרָהָם	אֶל-	יִצְחָק	וְאֶל-	יַעֲקֹב		³
And I appeared	unto	Abraham,	unto	Isaac,	and unto	Jacob,		
<u>7200</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>85</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>3327</u>	<u>413</u>	<u>3290</u>		
בְּאֵל	שְׁדֵי	וּשְׁמִי	יְהוָה	לֹא	נִדְעָתִי			
by the name of God	Almighty,	but by my name	JEHOVAH	not	was I known			
<u>410</u>	<u>7706</u>	<u>8034</u>	<u>3068</u>	<u>3808</u>	<u>3045</u>			
לָהֶם:								
to them.								
<u>3807a</u>								
וְגַם	הִקְמַתִּי	אֶת-	בְּרִיתִי	אִתָּם	לָתֵת	לָהֶם		⁴
And also	I have established		my covenant	with them,	to give	them		
<u>1571</u>	<u>6965</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>1285</u>	<u>854</u>	<u>5414</u>	<u>3807a</u>		
אֶת-	אֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן	אֶת	אֶרֶץ	מִגְרֵיהֶם	אֲשֶׁר-		
	the land of	Canaan,		the land of	their pilgrimage,	wherein		
<u>853</u>	<u>776</u>	<u>3667</u>	<u>853</u>	<u>776</u>	<u>4033</u>	<u>834</u>		
וְגָר	בָּהּ:							
they were strangers.	wherein							
<u>1481</u>	<u>871a</u>							

What unfolds in this parasha is a contest between the gods of Egypt, and the G-d of the Hebrews. This kind of “battle of the titans” is not new in Egypt. It was common in ancient Egyptian polytheistic theology.

Throughout successive generations, various different Egyptian deities were considered to be the highest. Their adherents vied for control in Egyptian society and if they gained sufficient control, their favorite Egyptian god became recognized as “supreme” for a period of time. In the end, by the time of the Exodus, the sun god “Ra” had been somewhat firmly established as the chief of gods, and whose nature permeated (to one degree or another) the lower tiers of gods.

Also, when other people came into Egypt as slaves or immigrants, they would bring their particular cultural gods with them, and then there would be some “competition” between these “imported” gods as well. But the Egyptians, who were not only their captors and masters, considered themselves to be vastly superior in sophistication and intellect.



The Egyptians considered themselves to be the “master race” of mankind, due to their massive feats of construction as well as their military domination of the known world. Egyptian society was sharply stratified, with an upper class of wealthy and powerful and the lower classes of servants made up of the weak and intellectually inferior peoples.

The privileged elites wouldn’t go out into the sun, and so they were as

white as they could be. The lower classes were darkly tanned, and so even the skin tones showed the social status of the typical Egyptian. You can see that in one example of ancient Egyptian tomb art, as a privileged lady is pictured with one of her servants.

The Egyptian gods were considered to be embodied in the person of Pharaoh. The Pharaoh's name tells us precisely which of the Egyptian gods were considered to be their "god with us." The naming convention was that the Egyptian god's name was joined to the Egyptian word for "he is born" which is *mses*. So, if the Egyptian god Ah is born, the Pharaoh would be named Ahmoses. If the Egyptian god Tut is born, then Tutmoses. If Ra is born, it becomes Ramses, and so on.

And so you now can see something special about the name of Moses. His Egyptian name simply means "he is born." That name suggests to me that Pharaoh's daughter intended that this boy would one day rise to the office of Pharaoh, and at that time she would append to his name her preferred Egyptian god, and thus XXXmoses would take the throne. Moses, I believe, was being groomed by Pharaoh and his family for the throne of Egypt.

But he abandoned the opportunity to be the supreme ruler of the strongest nation on the planet, to become a fugitive from justice, pushing the flocks

of Yitro around Midian. And that is where Moses encountered G-d (in the person of Yeshua) in what is known as the “burning bush.” And at that time Moses received a commission to return to Egypt to bring the Hebrews out of slavery.

With that background, we can easily see what is at stake as Moses confronts Pharaoh with the demand for freedom. This, in the eyes of Pharaoh, is going to be yet another “my god is better than your god” argument, that he has seen his entire life. And, since Pharaoh is considered to be all-powerful (god with us), he is confident of an easy victory in the upcoming battle of wits. He thought he was going to be able to intimidate Moses with his superior strength, and probably keep Moses in Egypt as a “trophy slave.” That would be a bonus.

But Pharaoh didn’t count on the fact that it wasn’t Moses he was going to be opposing... it was the G-d of the universe Himself. You know the story. There were ten plagues, and each was directed at one of the “top ten” Egyptian false gods. One by one, each of the gods were defeated by an unseen force that seemed to have even greater control than anything the Egyptians had imagined.

G-d’s sense of humor is revealed in the story of the plagues. The shamans of Egypt were able to replicate, to a degree, the first couple of plagues.

Their attempts to prove their powers of darkness were equal – or superior to – the power of the G-d of Israel didn't help Egypt... they made things worse with more blood (instead of water), and more frogs upon the land.

The first two plagues set-up the Egyptian magicians for the third plague – gnats. Let's read the account in Torah.

Ex 8:16-19

16 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, that it may become gnats through all the land of Egypt.'" 17 And they did so; and Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff, and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats through all the land of Egypt. 18 And the magicians tried with their secret arts to bring forth gnats, but they could not; so there were gnats on man and beast. 19 Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the Lord had said.

Pharaoh seems to have believed that his shamans had demonstrated rather well a parity with Israel'd G-d, and he felt no need to end the challenge

yet. But the shamans knew they were defeated, and admitted as much to Pharaoh.

But what is it that G-d was doing? He was turning the dust of the earth, an immeasurably small thing, into a swarm of insects that afflicted the entire country. Our G-d defeated the shamans, not with a big thing, but with something so small it is not even regarded until it is washed from the feet. That shows G-d's sense of irony.

In the end, Pharaoh's authority as ruler was also judged by G-d. The firstborn of Pharaoh also died, and that proved that Pharaoh – "god with us" didn't have the power to save his own son. Moses then led the people out of Egypt to freedom, and to meet with G-d at Mt. Horeb.

This story leads me to an issue that I find which plagues the body of believers in this day. I wish to address it today with you.

When you read this story, do you secretly wish you could be as brave as Moses, and be used of G-d in a spectacular way? Or, have you ever looked at another believer who is doing great things for G-d, and you have said, "I would love to do such things for G-d as well!" I would ask you to fill in two blanks in the following sentence silently in your mind.

“If I were like (name of a person) , then I could (do this specific good thing for G-d) .” Please remember this to the end of today’s message, because I want to revisit it then.

I wish to now tell you something about yourself that you may not really believe. And to do that, I need to show you how a specific testing protocol came to be, and what it showed.



It began when a scientist by the name of Don Clifton set out to improve reading speeds in students. He conducted an initial reading assessment of the group of students he would work with in this experiment. Most students in the group, when reading for 80% retention, were

able to maintain 90 words per minute. A few began at a higher level, that of 350 words per minute. All the students got the same speed reading training for 6 weeks.

After this training, they were tested again. The students who started at 90 wpm improved to 140 wpm with 80% retention. That was nearly double their beginning score.

The higher group which began at 350 wpm improved to 2,970 wpm. That represents an improvement of a multiple of 8.5 times.

This scientist was excited by this result, and concluded that the upper group had a certain talent for reading that could be vastly improved by training. He wondered if there were other types of talents which could be identified and improved.

He put together a 2000-question survey and gave this survey to thousands of people across the globe. During the next 40 years he identified more than 600 separate talents that people have for certain things. He considered that such a number was far too high, so he consolidated those into 34 talents.

He gave those 34 talents certain one-word descriptors, each describing a central theme of that talent, and he put together a longer description of that talent under that single descriptor. Examples are: “Achiever,” “Strategic,” “Focus,” and so forth.

His testing allowed him to determine for every test subject what their top 8 strengths are, and ranked them in order of strongest at top, and 8th strongest at the bottom. He did the same with the bottom 8 talents, which

were the 8 things that the person was least talented at doing, also in order of least to most weak.

He discovered that the human brain goes through certain changes, and during those changes these particular talents manifest themselves. He determined that from age 2 to 40 years, our brains “rewire” and during that time there is optimization of the building-blocks of what will be our strongest talents, and our weakest ones.

He determined that everyone’s top 6-8 talents are a sort of “baseline” for you. It’s much like the readers who achieved the 350 wpm level. It is a raw talent to read well, but not yet a true “strength” yet. He determined that most people don’t know that they have certain talents, because they haven’t done an assessment yet.

He postulated that if you identified your top talents, and began working to develop them by adding experience and knowledge to practicing that talent. He believed that a person with a talent for reading could then become a 2,970 wmp reader.

He wondered if he could, by applying these concepts to actual people whose talents had been identified, be able to show that their natural talents

would blossom. He also wanted to see if he could take the bottom few, weakest, talents and improve them with the same techniques.

He found that working on the top few talents in any one person caused those talents to increase dramatically. He also found that working very hard to improve the weakest talents did lead to slight improvements, but those were short-lived. Without constant effort, those weak talents reverted right back to where they were before.

He also found that when a person developed their top talents, they experienced not only great improvement, but the use of those talents gave the person great joy as well.

He also did some statistical analysis, and came up with some amazing findings, that are important to us today.

How many people would have to take the same “strengths test” in order to get the same results as you did for only the **top 5** strengths in the same order? **One in 33 million.** That means that there might only be 10 people in the USA with the top 5 talents just like you.

How about if we ask for a match for the **top 6** strengths as you in the same order? **One in 1 billion.** That means that there might only be 8 people in the entire world like you.

How about if we ask for a match for the **top 8** strengths as you in the same order? **One in 700 billion.** That means we would need another 87.3 total populations of the Earth to find only *one other person* just like you with those same 8 strengths in that same order.

Consider also that I am doing these calculations based upon today's population numbers given by the US Census Bureau, which are vastly higher than the former population of the earth at any previous time in history. So, if we reduce the population figures to levels of only 100 years ago, being less than half of what is seen today, the chances of finding another "you" would be dramatically more remote than those listed above.

And consider that this scientist identified 34 separate talents, not merely 8. So, you can easily see that we might need at least another galaxy full of today's Earths if we used all talents as discriminators.

So, after all this science and statistical analysis, what can we now say with total certainty? After more than 31 million have taken the survey, we

know that there has never, ever been, in all of history from creation forward, anyone just like you.

We are fond of saying about G-d, “There is none like You!” And now you know that He looks down and says of us individually – “Yeah, and there is *no one* like you, as well!”

It was at the time I learned this information that I finally understood the deeper meaning of this passage.

Josh 8:30-32

30 Then Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, in Mount Ebal, 31 just as Moses the servant of the Lord had commanded the sons of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, **an altar of uncut stones**, on which no man had wielded an iron tool; and they offered burnt offerings on it to the Lord, and sacrificed peace offerings.

Why “uncut stones?” That specific requirement was first set out by G-d to Moses in Deut 27:6. And in this passage above, we see that Joshua follows the directions explicitly. There are the ruins of an altar of uncut stones today on the top of Mt. Ebal in Israel. I don’t know if it is the same one Joshua built, but regardless, it shows us how such an altar looks.



I have built with natural – uncut – stones. It is a decidedly more difficult task than building with stones cut to fit, or using bricks of uniform shape and size. In order to build with uncut stones, there is a process I use.

1. I must first gather the stones from places where I find them, where they are naturally occurring.
2. Then I place them around the place where I wish to build.
3. I arrange them in ways so I can easily see what their unique characteristics and shapes are.

4. I first lay-out the size of the thing I am building, and establish the corners.
5. I lay foundation stones, larger ones that will support more weight, first.
6. I choose the perfect size and shape for the stones that fill-in the gaps.
7. As it rises upward, I choose other stones that will fit perfectly in the spot that I have chosen it to fit.
8. The timing of the placing of that stone into the structure is important to the integrity of the entire structure.
9. Every stone fits the place I put it, and without it, there would be a defect in what I am building.
10. Every stone is supported by the ones below it, and it complements the structure where it is located. It doesn't matter if the stone is high or low, or toward the center or at the edge. It is important to the structure precisely where it is.

I discovered that the building of an altar with uncut stones signified much more than merely the construction of a place of worship. It gave me deeper spiritual lessons. The steps that I take to build with uncut stones are the same steps that G-d take when building His kingdom. Let's look at those steps again, with spiritual eyes.

1. He gathers each of us from the place that He finds us.

Ps 102:18-22

18 This will be written for the generation to come;
That a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.
19 For He looked down from His holy height;
From heaven the Lord gazed upon the earth,
20 To hear the groaning of the prisoner;
To set free those who were doomed to death;
21 That men may tell of the name of the Lord in Zion,
And His praise in Jerusalem;
22 When the peoples are gathered together,
And the kingdoms, to serve the Lord.

2. He assembles us together in a fellowship, at the location where He wishes to build.

Heb 10:23-25

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own

assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

3. He is always looking at our unique characteristics.

1 Cor 14:26-27

26 What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

4. He began building His kingdom by first laying-out the size of what He is building, and establish the cornerstones.

Isa 28:16-17

16 Therefore thus says the Lord God,
"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,
A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.
17 "And I will make justice the measuring line,

And righteousness the level;

5. He lays a firm foundation, using larger and stronger pioneers that will support more weight, and determine the strength of the whole.

1 Cor 3:10-11

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. 11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

6. He chooses the perfect size and shape for the persons gathered to fill-in the gaps.
7. As His work rises upward, He chooses other people who will fit perfectly in the spot that He has chosen for us to fit.
8. The timing of the placing of each of us into the work of the kingdom is important to the integrity of the entirety of His work.

Eph 2:19-22

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a holy temple in the Lord; 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

9. Every one of us fits perfectly in the place He puts us, and without our contribution, there would be a defect in what He is building.

Eph 4:11-16

11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. 14 As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ,

16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

10. Each one of us is supported by the ones who came before us, and where we are placed by His hand complements the structure He is building. It doesn't matter if we are placed high or low, or toward the center or at the edge. There is no unimportant location in what He is building. We are important to what He is building precisely where we are placed at the time we are placed there.

1 Peter 5:6-7

6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

You are not only unique, just as every snowflake, blade of grass, flower, cloud and rock is unique... you are immensely valuable to what G-d is doing in His kingdom on this Earth, and beyond.

Nobody has ever existed in this world who is just like you. Discover your talents, and hone them to a fine edge. Then, when the L-rd's hand closes

upon you, and lifts you to the place that He has ordained that you occupy in the work He is doing, rejoice. And when you are placed in His structure, remember that you are a living stone, and exist for the glory of G-d.

1 Peter 2:1-6

2 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, 2 like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, 3 if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord. 4 And coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Do you remember the fill-in-the-blank statement with which we began our lesson?

“If I were like __ (name of a person) __, then I could __ (do this specific good thing for G-d) ____.”

Can you now see how that statement is completely inappropriate for any one of us to ask. Become that perfect, uncut, unique, talented, living stone.

You can discover your talents by taking the same survey that I did, at:

<https://www.gallup.com/cliftonstrengths/en/253868/popular-cliftonstrengths-assessment-products.aspx>