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| Shemot | Names | Under Cover of Darkness |
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| Torah: | Exodus 1:1-6:1 |
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This portion begins to tell the story of our people's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. When it says that there arose a Pharaoh who did not know Joseph, it indicates that there was a change in the ruling dynasty. Egypt had at least 38 dynasties in her long history, and the dynastic shifts were often violent as the new rulers established their power and rooted out the supporters of the previous regime.

The Jewish sojourners in the land went from a privileged position of honoured guests to a group which the new rulers thought might be a source of uprising. While the regime did not want to lose access to the labour of our people, they wanted to break the spirit of the people and even cause them to assimilate and disappear as a distinct group which was capable of rising up against them. They wanted us to be scattered and broken.

We are introduced to Moses who is adopted into the family of one of Pharaoh's daughters and tries to take things into his own hands to try and help his people. He commits murder and has to flee until the coast is clear. He becomes a shepherd in the wilderness through which he will one day lead his people. We discover that while he was impetuous, he was not a very brave person and may even have had a speech impediment.

YHVH reveals Himself under the sacred name for the first time as an everlasting testimony to His singular deity. He is not the best G-d among many gods, He is the only G-d and there is none else. He links His name with the three patriarchs to indicate that He is committed to the blessing of both His people and of all peoples.

Moses is still reluctant to be the public spokesman and even turns down the offer of healing from the L-RD. He is given enough signs to be able to convince the people that G-d has heard them and will be active on their behalf until they are set free from Egyptian bondage, but Moses doesn't want to do it alone. His older brother is sent to him and they set out to both convince the people and to place G-d's demands before the ruler of Egypt.

Despite a glorious, bumpy beginning, the passage ends with the people in worse trouble than they were before Moses spoke to Pharaoh. Under cover of this darkness, the L-RD is preparing to demolish the resistance of Egypt even if the people have to survive several lengthy setbacks along the way. The darkness will always resist the light and we should never wait for the world to recognize His Word before we let it have its way in our lives.

We need to remain light dwellers in the midst of darkness and understand that there is a conflict which will often target us and make our situation more difficult in order for the purposes of G-d to be lined up, even under the cover of the darkness which targets us.

The prophetic portion deals with the purposes of G-d being accomplished, often despite the folly of G-d's people. Israel went into captivity because of succumbing to the influences of darkness (idolatry and fornication). We can only be delivered from the darkness if we are not attached to it. Our own personal holiness (spirituality) remains the key to all and any

deliverance in our lives. We may wander through some excruciatingly dark valleys and encounter so much resistance that it looks like we are done for, but as long as we maintain our grip on the Word and the holiness which such a grip requires, while others fall backwards and are snared and taken, our spiritual destiny will be deliverance.

The New Testament portion deals with the Corinthian conundrum, where their spiritual excesses were being corrected without damaging their ability to experience the powerful, authentic presence of G-d in worship and in prayer. Tongues and prophecy are mentioned as a means for G-d to reveal to light seekers the secrets of their hearts, even though this same process will be misunderstood and even mocked by those who have no interest in the light.

Under cover of darkness, the light still shines and the L-rd wishes to first deliver all light seekers from the influence of the darkness in which we dwell. Once the darkness no longer has any influence on us, then He moves to deliver us from its power with the same kind of majesty and strength He exercised when our people were delivered from the bondage of Egypt.

We should never first look at the darkness of the world we dwell in when we want to understand the purposes of G-d. He will first work in our hearts under the cover of darkness so that its hold is broken in our lives. Once we have a grasp on Him through His Word and through our faithful obedience, then He will move us out of the power of darkness in each and every part of our lives. He does this under the cover of darkness as we patiently wait for Him to intervene, remove all darkness, and cause His light to shine, not just in our lives, but in the life of all the nations and generations of mankind as He fulfils the promise which He made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The great nation will indeed be a blessing to all nations as we call all the light seekers from among the darkness dwellers and under cover of this same darkness, see great freedom and deliverance, generation by generation until the day of His return when His everlasting Kingdom will be established in your lifetime and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel, speedily soon.

Haftarah: Is. 27:6-28:13; Jer. 1:1-2:3

Brit Chadashah: I Cor. 14:13-25

(John p. 167) Ps. 99 Jewish hero: Bezalel. Torah Carrier: Sharon

Sermon: Staying in Touch - A Vision for the New Year

Passage: *When there is no vision (revelation) the people cast off restraint (perish). Blessed are those who keep (observe) the Law.*

I want to talk to you about vision this morning as we begin a new year in the L-rd in 2016. The passage I have selected speaks about two spiritual functions which are inseparable if we are going to stay in touch with the L-rd and keep our vision alive for another year. First of all there is a mention of revelation or vision and then there is a mention of keeping or observing the Law. He wants to speak to us personally as well as teaching us from His written Word.

There is a popular misconception about prophetic revelation which too often makes even believers wary of seeking out this kind of ecstatic personal dialogue with the L-rd. Prophets

are often seen as people having revelation episodes which are portrayed as seizures or even psychotic breaks where they lose control and writhe and shake as if they were under the influence of a powerful mood altering drug or a major chemical imbalance in the brain

It was this kind of misbehaviour which Paul sought to correct among the Corinthians who were used to this kind of revelation episode or vision seizure which occurred among the pagan prophets. It was assumed that the loss of control was essential in order for the Spirit of G-d to speak and grant a vision or a revelation to a prophet. Now it is true that the prophets of Israel were sometimes overwhelmed by the power and majesty of G-d's presence, but it should never be confused with a kind of seizure or psychotic break where the person who is receiving the vision or the revelation loses control in order for G-d to take control and speak through them. We are to be filled by His Spirit and not be possessed or out of control in Him.

There will be times when G-d wishes to speak to us personally or individually and even corporately as a community and there will be manifestations, but not in the same category as the seizures and the writhing which the pagan prophets experienced. We may shake, the room may shake and all and any of the other signs and wonders which Israel experienced may come our way, but it will never primarily be some kind of divine sound and light show, with a sound track like those which are used at rock concerts and in the entertainment world.

What G-d has to say will be awesome and powerful, but it will be spoken to us so that His control over our lives through His Word is both established and extended; we will leave the carnal dramatics to the prophets of Baal and Astarte who equate yelling and screaming with authentically hearing the voice of G-d. You have to yell at deaf people, not spiritual people.

Now, I have had some pretty powerful encounters with the Spirit of G-d and they have often been emotionally overpowering, but they never came in the form of seizures where I had to rattle and shake in order to receive a revelation from G-d. I have been stopped in my tracks and have had my share of phenomena like burning bushes and angelic ladders and I look forward to many more authentic encounters with the Spirit of G-d through His Word as we meander through 2016, but there was nothing incoherent or psychotic about the presence of G-d. The mountain shook and trembled, not Moses. Being seized by His Spirit is never the same as losing control and having a seizure.

Saul fell on his face and lost his clothes when he encountered the Spirit of G-d, but only because he was full of carnal resistance and his life was so out of control that he had no intention of either listening to what the Spirit was trying to say to him or of obeying G-d's Word in how he lived his life. We want to be under His control, and not lose control for this to occur. Without personal, direct actual contact with G-d through His Spirit and His Word, it is true our lives will cast off His constraint. This is because He wants us to actually apply the Word to every area of our lives and He wants to get our attention and cause us to both avoid spiritual sidetracks and also to set straight paths for our wounded feet, so that our hearts and lives are made better and not worse because we live under His control by His Spirit and His Word.

Revelation and visions are never given in opposition to the written, already revealed Word and they are never intended to cause us to lose control and become prone to seizures or psychotic breaks, as if what He had to say to us was incoherent and what He wanted us to do was strange or bizarre. We must not look at the extreme cases of prophetic revelation in the Bible as the norm for us as we seek to maintain a close, personal tie with G-d's Spirit and as

we allow Him to speak to our hearts. The further we wander the harder He works to reach us.

There may be times when we get really excited and are even shocked or startled by the Spirit of G-d, but that is usually when we are barrelling down a wrong road towards a dangerous precipice and our donkey has to talk some sense into us. The harder the heart, and the further we are from the light of faithful obedience, the stronger and louder the call is to get our attention. But there is nothing in how hard the L-rd has to work to get our attention which can compare to the wonder and joy (and peace) of the still small voice when He has our attention.

The mountain trembled to shake the people loose from their Egyptian habits. The wind and fire and earthquake came upon Elijah to shake him loose from his fear and cause him to have faith in the G-d who will always be more powerful than any of the opposition which the darkness of this world can throw at us. What does He have to do to get your attention?

In 2016, I want us to receive visions and have revelations from G-d as B'nai Chayim continues to shine and be salty in our darkening world. And if we have to be shaken up a bit in order for G-d to get our attention, then so be it. However, our passage from this morning outlines the nature of the true blessing which G-d wants us to experience – the blessing which comes from observing His Word and putting it into practice in every area of our lives, both as individuals and as a community. How much of a shake-up do you need in your life?

There is a lot of work to be done at B'nai Chayim and all of us will need to be occasionally shaken up along the way, but never so that we lose control of any area of our lives, emotionally or mentally. He wants to speak to us both personally in our hearts and generally from His written Word, because His objective will never vary. He wants us to walk in the light as He is in the light and allow the blood of the Lamb and the fire of the Spirit to free us from sinfulness of every kind so that neither the world nor the enemy has any access to our hearts and lives. This is so that when the storms of life strike us, we will be protected by the rock upon which our houses are built and the double blessing of spirituality will be ours in 2016.

He will have our attention and we will have His attention as we stay in touch with Him in every area of our lives so that we do not lose our salty flavour or become choked or withered. It is a jungle out there, but may 2016 be a year of blessing and progress for all of us in all that we do as we allow His restraint to set us free from whatever snares which rise up against us!