

PARSHAT VAERA
1 SHIVAT 5781/14 JANUARY 2021



Zohar, Book of Concealment
Painting by Michael Hafftk, 2009

“The Book of Concealment, a book balanced on scales. For until there was balance, they did not gaze face-to-face....Until the head of Desire of all Desires arranged and bestowed garments of glory.... This balance hangs in a place that is not; weighed upon it were those who did not exist. The balance stands on its own, ungrasped and unseen. Upon it rose and upon it rise those who were not, and who were, and who will be.”

~ Zohar, The Book of Concealment

THE BALANCE HANGS IN A PLACE THAT IS NOT

1. “...the children of Israel *lo sham 'oo*” (Ex. 6:9). “...Pharaoh’s heart became hardened, *lo sh'ma*” (Ex. 7:22, 8:11, 9:12).
2. “Even the Israelites would not listen to me (*lo sham 'oo eilai*), so why should Pharaoh? Thus am I of uncircumcised lips!” (Exodus 6:12)
3. Language was in exile, as long as they refused to receive the word of God, were not prepared to hear it. In the midrash we find, “They did not hear, because it was hard for them to separate from idolatry....In order to hear one must be clear of all obstructions. This is the essence of exile, even now, that one cannot clear oneself of distractions and forget the vanities of the world. (Sefat Emet)

4. If one comes to defile himself, he is provided an opening; if one comes to purify himself, he is assisted. (Talmud, Shabbat 104a)

Through arousal below, there is arousal above. Until there is arousal below, nothing is aroused above to rest upon him. (Zohar, Vaera)

5. What is the source of our first suffering? It lies in the fact that we hesitated to speak....It was born in the moments when we accumulated silent things within us. The brook will nonetheless teach you to speak, in spite of sorrows and memories, it will teach you euphoria through euphuism, energy through the poem. It will repeat incessantly some beautiful, round word which rolls over rocks. (Gaston Bachelard, *On Poetic Imagination and Reverie*)
6. “Let them labor (*ya’asu*, הַפְּעוּ - to make, do) and let them not pay attention (*al yish’u*, הַפְּעוּ – to gaze) to false words” (Ex. 5:9).
What is *yish’u*? They had scrolls in their possession, with which they would play (*yishta’ash’u*, עָצְעוּ - to sport, take delight in) from Shabbat to Shabbat: these declared that God would redeem them. So Pharaoh said to them, *al yish’u* – let them not play. (Midrash Tanchuma Vaera)
“If Your Torah had not been my plaything (*sh’ashu’ai*), I should have perished in my affliction” (Psalm 119:92)
7. [The psychotic’s incapacity for reverie] means that he destroys the capacity for thought which is essential to action in reality and which makes bearable the frustration – an essential concomitant of the interval between a wish and its fulfillment. So the psychotic’s attempt to evade frustration ends in producing a personality more than ever subject to frustration. (W. R. Bion, *Cogitations*)
8. We empty of their humanity those to whom we deny speech....Break off speech to others and the Medusa turns inwards.” (George Steiner, *In Bluebeard’s Castle*)