

PARSHAT VAERA
EXODUS 6:2-9:35
26 TEVET 5782/30 DECEMBER 2021



Untitled XVIII
Painting by Willem de Kooning

REVERIE AND REDEMPTION

1. “They are shirkers (נִרְפִּים/*nirpim*)!” (Exodus 5:8)

Nirpim means the work is *rafui*, loose, lax in their hands; the work falls away from them. (Rashi)

רָפָה - relax, withdraw, refrain, let go, be idle

2. “Let them labor (*ya'asu*, לַעֲשֶׂה - to make, do) and let them not pay attention (*al yish'u*, לֹא יִשְׂעוּ - 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*, לַעֲשֶׂה - 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 6)

“If Your Torah had not been my plaything (׳ַׁׁׁׁׁׁ) I would have perished in my affliction.” (Psalm 119:92; see also Psalm 119:70)

3. [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*)

...reverie can provide access to a vast bank of relational information, helping us to engage empathically and intuitively with others and to contain and process their emotional experiencing....Looked at this way, reverie can be understood as a form of empathy or “other focused personal imagining” which “puts us within each other” Bion compares this loving, receptive attention with Freud’s notion of free-floating listening, in that in both states one is at the same time relaxed and attentively focused on the other and oneself; a combination which can generate an exquisite empathic sensitivity. (Lynn McVey, *Pied Beauty: Exploring Psychological Therapists’ Inner Experiencing in Reverie*)

4. ...several things dove tailed in my mind, and at once it struck me what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in Literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. (John Keats, letter to his brothers)
5. Reverie is the state of giving ourselves up to the flow of associations. This state of letting something happen – a species of relaxation – is one we need to cultivate when we look at paintings or buildings....Reverie is a mode of introducing personal material into a picture or building: it brings an abundance of thoughts and feelings into play. It also frees us from merely following routine assumptions....Reverie operates at the root of thinking: it is essential to the creative process in which we come to make thoughts for ourselves....The value of a personal discovery lies in the fact that not only do we arrive at a helpful conclusion, but that we have experience of how the conclusion was reached. *We gain acquaintance with the process of coming to see.*” (John Armstrong, *Move Closer: An Intimate Philosophy of Art*)
6. I’m in my element when I am a little bit out of this world: then I’m in the real world-I’m on the beam. (Willem de Kooning)
7. God is known and grasped to the degree that one opens the gates of imagination. (The Zohar)