

PARSHAT VAERA
EXODUS 6:2-9:35
HAFTARAH EZEKIEL 28:25-29:21
1 SHEVAT 5784/11 JANUARY 2024



Untitled XVIII
Oil on canvass by Willem de Kooning

THE LIBERATING POWER OF REVERIE

1. “I appeared (*vaera*) to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name יהוה.” (Exodus 6:3)
2. When you’re a child
you learn
there are three dimensions:
height, width, and depth.
Like a shoebox.
Then later you hear
there’s a fourth dimension:
time.
Hmm.
Then some say
there can be five, six, seven...
(Ron Padgett, “Another One”)

3. “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)

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

4. “Let them labor (*ya'asu*, הַעֲשֶׂה - to make, do) and let them not pay attention (*al yish'u*, הַעֲשֶׂה - to gaze) to false words” (Ex. 5:9).

What is *yish'u*? They had scrolls in their possession, with which they would play (*vishta'ash'u*, הַעֲשֶׂה - 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 (הַעֲשֶׂה), I would have perished in my affliction. (Psalm 119:92)

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*)