



# Light of Torah

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By Teresa Pirola

## “I am the LORD”

In the Book of Exodus we find a sequence of tense encounters between Pharaoh and the two Hebrew brothers, Moses and Aaron. The encounters have a larger stage too, for this is really a dramatic confrontation between the egotistic powers of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, versus the Lord God, King of the universe (of whom Moses and Aaron are agents).

As the story unfolds in chapters 5 and 6, Pharaoh and God lock horns:

*Pharaoh to Moses: “Who is the LORD that I should heed Him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go” (5:2).*

*The LORD to Moses: I am the LORD. I will free you from the labors of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage” (6:6).*

Pharaoh poses a question. The Lord provides an answer. And both boldly declare their intentions. Imaginatively and prayerfully ponder these statements. Read the verses around them. What do you notice? How does the text speak to you? Creatively envisage the scenes, the tone of the speakers, the electricity of each moment.

In the midrash (ancient Jewish storytelling traditions), an imaginative and insightful story is woven around these verses.

According to this midrash, after asking “Who is the LORD?” Pharaoh says, “I will search my records.”

*And he went into his archives and brought out a list of divinities... “The god of Moab, the god of Ammon, the god of Zidon”... Finally he decreed, “You see, I looked for the name of your God in my archives, and did not find it.” ....*

*Moses and Aaron said to Pharaoh, “Utter fool that you are! Are the living to be sought among the dead? The divinities in your records are dead. But our God is a living God, the King of the universe.”<sup>1</sup>*

Pharaoh is ignorant, but does he really want to learn the truth? How difficult it can be to embrace a new idea when it threatens our powerbase or takes us beyond our comfort zone. Pharaoh’s resistance helps us to appreciate the great leap that Moses, himself raised as an Egyptian prince, took in embracing the revelation of the divine name.

Pharaoh’s refusal to free the Israelites is bad enough, but Moses also has to contend with rejection from his own people.

*“They would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage” (6:9).*

A devastating story forms the backdrop to this verse (pause to revisit it in chapter 5 of Exodus)

where Moses’ efforts actually lead to greater suffering for his kinsfolk. Have you ever been in a circumstance where your best efforts not only were unsuccessful, but it seemed that you actually made the situation worse? Here the sacred text is magnificent:

*“I am the Lord. I have heard the cries of my people. I have remembered my covenant. I will redeem them with an outstretched arm. They will be my people and I will be their God” (6:5-8).*

Can you taste the power of divine reassurance in this dark moment? Can you allow it to touch a dark moment of your own life?

Why not, right now, create a prayerful pause in your day. Call out to God in prayer and remember God’s promise in Exodus 6:5-8. Make an act of trust in our living and liberating God. •

1. *The Book of Legends*, 64-65.

Sources: Bialik & Ravnitzky, eds., *The Book of Legends* (NY, 1992); Leiboldowitz, *New Studies in Shemot* (Jerusalem, 1996). Scripture: JPS.