

# **One Body Initiative: Week One – God’s Call to Communion**

## **September 6, 2020**

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**Scripture:** [Exodus 3:1-5,9-15](#)

Meanwhile Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Leading the flock beyond the wilderness, he came to the mountain of God, Horeb. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him as fire flaming out of a bush. When he looked, although the bush was on fire, it was not being consumed. So Moses decided, “I must turn aside to look at this remarkable sight. Why does the bush not burn up?” When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, God called out to him from the bush: Moses! Moses! He answered, “Here I am.” God said: Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.

Now indeed the outcry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen how the Egyptians are oppressing them. Now, go! I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt. But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” God answered: I will be with you; and this will be your sign that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will serve God at this mountain. “But,” said Moses to God, “if I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what do I tell them?” God replied to Moses: I am who I am. Then he added: This is what you will tell the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you. God spoke further to Moses: This is what you will say to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.

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### **Commentary:**

*From a commentary on Exodus by Rabbi Shai Held<sup>1</sup>:*

Moses’ heroism in siding with the Midianite women has a fascinating parallel in American history. Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist and ex-slave, was also an impassioned advocate for women’s suffrage. Asked why he, a man, should be so ardently involved in the struggle for women’s dignity, Douglass explained: “When I ran away from slavery, it was for myself; when I advocated emancipation, it was for my people; but when I stood up for the rights of women, self was out of the question, and I found a little nobility in the act.”

Like Moses a millennia before him, Douglass dedicated his life to leading his people out of slavery. And like Moses he understood that fighting for the groups to which he belonged – blacks, men – was ultimately not enough. The God of Israel is against injustice in all its forms, and not just injustice against this people or that (no matter how beloved). Put somewhat differently: what Moses and Frederick Douglass intuitively understood is that for all the profound importance of ethnic solidarity, a wider human solidarity is also fundamental. One cannot lead this particular people without concern for justice for all people(s).

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Shai Held, *The Heart of the Torah: Volume 1* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2017), 124-125.

Moses is an activist, a person appalled by oppression and persecution. These are, as we've seen, noble qualities – so noble, in fact, that they are associated with God. And yet crusaders against injustice are often consumed by their own indignation; all too often the line between righteousness and self-righteousness all but disappears and indignation crowds out gentleness, or modesty, or even the capacity for intimacy.

So the Torah tells us something else about Moses: he was a shepherd (Exod. 3:1). To perform his duties properly, a shepherd must combine power on the one hand, with gentle assertiveness on the other. He must have the capacity to control and provide for his sheep, but he must also nurture and care for each one. A midrash poignantly evokes Moses's mercy and tenderness: "When Moses our teacher was tending the flock of Jethro in the wilderness, a little kid escaped from him. He ran after it until it reached a shady place. When it reached the shady place, it came across a pool of water and stopped to drink. When Moses approached it, he said: 'I didn't realize that you ran away because of thirst; you must be tired.' He placed the kid upon his shoulder and walked on. Thereupon God said: 'You have mercy in leading a human being's flock; you will assuredly tend my flock Israel'" (Exodus Rabbah 2:2)

Not only must a leader take offense at injustice and act accordingly, in other words; he must also have compassion and act accordingly. Real compassion is not just an emotion – Moses does not just "feel bad" for the kid; real compassion is a weave of emotion and action. God's appointed leader does not merely feel for others. He acts decisively to alleviate their pain.

*From the St. Augustine's 'Confessions' (Book 10, Chapter 27):*

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved you! You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for you. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which you created. You were with me, but I was not with you. Created things kept me from you; yet if they had not been in you they would not have been at all. You called, you shouted, and you broke through my deafness. You flashed, you shone, and you dispelled my blindness. You breathed your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for you. I have tasted you, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for your peace.

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### **Questions for Reflection:**

- Who were the people who first shared with you about God? How did they do so?
- Who are some of the people who helped you develop your understanding of God further? What helped you the most in coming to a deeper awareness of God?
- Have you had experiences when God has seemed most present to you?
- Have you ever had a sense that you were called to do something that is more than you think that you have the capacity for?
- Do you find yourself longing for a deeper relationship with God? What would help you to go deeper in that relationship? Are there ways that you hold back?