

The pressures of 2020 have helped us notice things about our brains. Like how much they want to picture future scenarios, and frustrated they are right now doing that. Turns out our brains are quite preoccupied with predicting the future, but they mainly rely on past experience to do so. It's not like we have a lot of "how we get got of a global pandemic before" experience.

I grew up with the *Flintstones* and the *Jetsons*, prime-time cartoons. *Jetsons* was futuristic. It imagined people in flying cars gadding about. There had been such progress in the previous 2 years: prop planes to jet planes to space flight. I fully expected we'd be flying around like the Jetsons by now. Instead, we got the Internet. Something no one imagined except a few nerds squirreled away in computer labs. Data flies around, but not us: DANG

They think that meme that went around "which color is the dress?" was mostly a function of past experience shaping what color we perceived.

Have you noticed when your circumstances remain the same for a long period of time, it's more difficult to imagine them ever changing? I made a really abrupt transition from having summers off as a kid (just paper routes and part time jobs, but great freedom to roam around the city unsupervised) to full scale adulthood: study, work, family responsibilities 24/7. Throughout my undergrad years, every June, I'd feel resentful—my brain expected summer free time. Oh right. I'm an adult now. Whose idea was this?

All of this is very much reflected in the Exodus story. The Israelites have been in Egypt for 400 years; at first they were a celebrated immigrant population; but times changed, and new Pharaohs came to power, fear-driven, fear-mongering Pharaohs who took it out on the Israelites—fearful Pharaoh-mind spread throughout Egypt, and Israelites suffered for it in cruel grinding-monotonous oppression. By the time we meet them in early chapters, not a single Israelite speaks, they have no dramas, they can't imagine a different future to speak of.

Even Moses, an Israelite abandoned at 3 months because Pharaoh decreed that all male babies had to be killed, raised in Pharaoh's household—even Moses has very little imagination concerning a different future. This is reflected in his slowness of speech, once he reconnects with his Israelite identity.

As soon as he does this, he incurs Pharaoh's wrath—his Egyptian grandfather's wrath--and he has to escape to wilderness, where he marries a Midianite named Zipporah, a beautiful black woman who saves his life. Now he's living as a stranger in a strange land but making the best of it. He can't imagine going home and he's unfamiliar with the ways of Midian. Where is back home? In Pharaoh's palace, or among the Israelites? Who is he anyway?

Everything begins to change, the possibility of a new future opens up, when he comes across a strange apparition. A large bush on a mountainside aflame with fire, but on closer inspection the fire is not consuming the bush. He's stumbled into a Thin Spot where the divine energy is breaching and mingling in the realm of space-time and matter.

Moses and the Voice from burning bush have a conversation that goes like this:

The Voice from the bush said: "Moses! Moses" And he said, "Here I am!" And He said, "Come no closer here. Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place you are standing on his holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said, "I indeed have seen the abuse of My people that is in Egypt and its outcry because of its taskmasters. I have heard, for I know its pain. And I have come down to rescue it from the hand of Egypt and to bring it up from that land to a goodly and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey... And now look, the outcry of the Israelites has come to me and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. And now go that I may send you to Pharaoh and bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." And Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring out the Israelites from Egypt? And He said "For I will be with you. And this is the sign for you that I Myself have sent you." When you bring the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." And Moses said to God, "Look, when I come to the Israelites and say to the 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name,' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, [Ay-hi, asher, Ay-hi] 'Eheyeh-Asher-Ehyeh,' I-Will-Be-Who-I-Will-Be ... that is my name forever and thus I am to be invoked in all ages." (Exodus 3)

This thinspot is THICK with revelation. But I want to focus on the 4-Letter name, the name so sacred it was only spoken by the High Priest in the holy of holies on the day of atonement. So much so that the actual pronunciation of the Name was forgotten, because there are no vowels in Hebrew, these are passed on by oral tradition. Jehovah was the older guess, Yahweh is the newer. And the translation of the Name's meaning into English has also shifted. The older consensus was "I-AM-WHO-AM" [a kind of no-name name] But Robert Alter and other Hebrew scholars now consider "I-WILL-BE-WHO-I-WILL-BE" as the more accurate translation into English. I like this later consensus: it suggest that this God, the God who hears the cry of the oppressed and acts, and calls us to do the same--is not a static God of being—I AM WHO AM—but the dynamic God of BECOMING: I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE.

The revelation of divinity to humanity is tied to our needs, this is why it is progressive, multi-faceted, dynamic in our experience, not static. Some facets are gendered masculine, some feminine, some like Elohim are plural, most singular. But Israel has a very specific need at this stage: after long years of grinding-oppressive monotony, it's hard to imagine things becoming anything else than what they have been for so long.

"Things can be different than they are now and have been for a long time"—this is the effect of encounter with a God of Becoming. *I will be who I will be*. Which means the realm in which this G-d

wants to act within us is the realm we call imagination. Imagination is not just what has been, what is now, but what can be.

I went through a period of big losses between 2012 and 2014 [future was up in air]... and I can remember the moment, the very moment...I was sitting in my living room having rearranged it myself the way I wanted it for the first time in 40 years, because that had been Nancy's domain...I was sitting there, it was a Saturday morning, I'm drifting into a day-dreamy praying space. And I'm listening to a piece by Max Richter called "On the nature of daylight"—it's theme song for 2016 movie *Arrival* starring Amy Adams, about an alien intelligence coming to earth, to nudge humans toward a better future. On the nature of daylight, starts with simple melodic line that is sad, I think the word is elegiac [mournful but sweet]...and over the course of the song, another line is added along with the sad, that is brighter, hopeful, slightly more energetic. I'm listening to this song, and I'm moved, then crying, but relief not grief crying. Because words formed inside my head or a feeling I can only describe with the words, "You can be happy again. You will be"

I believe this was the voice of I-will-be-who-I-will-be.

Whatever happens between now and January, we are gonna need a little inspiration from *I will be who I will be*, the God of Becoming.

If we are a parent who needs to remind their child not just to wear a mask and wash their hands but also to drive below the speed limit, to have their registration handy without digging around in the glove compartment, to put both hands on the wheel not just when they are driving but especially when they are pulled over by the police officer...we're gonna need a little inspiration from *I will be who I will be*, the God of Becoming.

If we are experiencing distress regarding our extended family because it feels like the fear-mongering Pharaoh mind, impervious to the suffering of people we love, maybe including ourselves, is spreading to our family members and it feels like they are in a mind-lock that will not, that cannot soften...we are gonna need a little inspiration from *I will be who I will be*, the of God of Becoming. (In the Exodus story, Pharaoh's hard heart was the only Egyptian hard heart that permanently hardened... for the others, there was hope. In the prophets, Egypt is singled out for praise, and the Messiah took refuge there and was protected as a child.)

If we feel trapped in Groundhog Day—can't see things different than they have been for the past six months, we're gonna need a little inspiration from *I will be who I will be*, God of Becoming

Like Moses, who couldn't predict the future based on past experience, we're gonna have to listen to a voice from the bush—maybe the natural world will, in unexpected moments, fill with divine energy, hope. Hearing such voices, invest whatever tentative trust we can muster

Scripture interprets nature as a temple, and so many divine encounters happen in the outdoor cathedral—on a mountainside, on a boat in the lake, on the shore, at night beneath the open sky, in a field, near certain trees. Often in places our hearts are drawn to.

Meditation: If you have a favorite spot in nature, places you are drawn to or that hold a certain appeal or fascination for you, let's just take a minute now, if you are free to do so, where you are, to sit or stand or lie down or whatever you prefer, notice the weight of your body on the chair or bed, feet on the floor, feel yourself grounded in that way, take in a nice deep breath or two and just picture yourself in that special spot.

I'll begin the minute and end the minute by speaking the English translation of the meaning of the most sacred, not the name itself but the meaning of it. Let's begin: *I will be who I will be.*

"Moses! Moses" And he said, "Here I am!" And He said, "Come no closer here. Take off your sandals from your feet, for the place you are standing on is holy ground." And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look upon God. And the Lord said, "I indeed have seen the abuse of My people that is in Egypt and its outcry because of its taskmasters. I have heard, for I know its pain. And I have come down to rescue it from the hand of Egypt and to bring it up from that land to a goodly and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey .... And now look, the outcry of the Israelites has come to me and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. And now go that I may send you to Pharaoh, and bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt." And Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring out the Israelites from Egypt? And He said "For I will be with you. And this is the sign for you that I Myself have sent you." When you bring the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." And Moses said to God, "Look, when I come to the Israelites and say to them 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His name,' what shall I say to them?" And God said to Moses, [Ay-hi, asher, Ay-hi] '*Eheyeh-Asher-Ehyeh*,' I-Will-Be-Who-I-Will-Be ... that is my name forever and thus I am to be invoked in all ages." (Exodus 3)