

Good Shabbos... This week's parasha is Shemot. This is the parasha that contains the incident of -- the bush that burns but isn't consumed. For me, this is one of the most intriguing and mysterious events in the Torah. Even as a kid, I remember being fascinated by it. I think a part of that fascination has been that it's such a compact, pocket-size miracle. Unlike such big, attention-grabbing miracles in the Torah as the epic splitting of the Red Sea or the fiery destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the incident of the burning bush is by contrast a very small, modest, seemingly non-descript miracle. And, unlike the more grandiose and theatrical miracles, this one didn't result in death, destruction, or – as an added bonus -- any injury to animals or damage to the environment. Other aspects of this very peculiar miracle reinforce its low-key, almost invisible, nature. For example, Moses is quietly tending his sheep when he happens on the burning bush almost by accident. Then, as might routinely occur upon entering someone's private home, Moses is told to remove his shoes. Also, this seemingly inauspicious miracle is set in the middle of the wilderness -- indeed as the Torah specifically emphasizes -- -- "*far* into the wilderness." Thus, it is a miracle that is deliberately set far from any awestruck crowd of witnesses who might attest to God's thundering greatness in performing it. Instead, this is a very quiet miracle with a very private audience of exactly one -- Moses. So, why then *is* this miracle so different from other miracles in the Torah? An explanation might be that once God had selected Moses to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt, He knew He then would have to carefully tailor His approach in persuading Moses that he was in fact the person for the job. God knew that Moses was tentative, conflicted, and self-doubting on the outside, however steely-nerved and impassioned he might be on the inside. God also knew that the standard historical model of the heroic leader as valiant, stoic, and proudly assertive just wouldn't cut it with the Jewish people. Leading the Jewish people -- even then -- was unlike leading any other nation, and of course no one knew this better than God. By gently ushering a shoeless Moses into God's modest abode -- for this purpose a small bush burning mysteriously in the middle of nowhere -- God could now quietly begin the process destined to be played out on a progressively grander stage as the book of Shemot unfolds. God could now begin to whisper and confide to Moses the mission that would begin here in obscurity, advance to eventually shake the very throne of Pharaoh, and then continue on unbroken from there to unfold for us even today on stages both grand and small... Good Shabbos.