

Va'eira D'var Torah 20131228

When I read that Parsha a few weeks back, there was nothing that spoke to me personally. I read about the plagues and decided I did not want to discuss any and their disruption to Egyptian life or the intended build up of the Jewish people. I did not see how to add new information or a different perspective to the seven plagues.

Then I thought I would discuss the various names of G-d and the respective meaning and representation each could or should have to us. However this too did not light me up. As I felt I would merely repeat others as I would not expand those teachings making it personal.

Then I took another try at Va'eira and found something that stood out. I never noticed in my prior readings over the years. It is a portion with some of the opening verses. "I am Hashem. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as El Shaddai, by My Name Hashem I was not known to them." To me such statements did not make sense even with reading onward.

Paraphrasing Rashi, our patriarchs did not know G-d by the name Hashem because the promise of giving the people of Israel the land of Canaan was not an event or promise they would see. For them the name El Shaddai was sufficient and nothing more was needed. As within this name everything was encompassed including all of creation. For Abraham, Isaac and Jacob this understanding of G-d as being all encompassing existed.

Then I looked at Rambam who believes that Rashi left out or missed something due to the word phraseology that Rashi's comments used. So Rambam re-phrases Rashi slightly so that phrasing is "but My Name is Hashem, and I was not known to them", that is "I was not known to them by ..." therefore making Rashi much more explicit about the patriarchs not knowing the name Hashem.

Rambam then refers to commentary from Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra who also alters the phrasing making more explicitly about the patriarchs not knowing the name Hashem. Ibn Ezra's phraseology means the constellations are subdued and though G-d performed miracles for the patriarchs G-d did not alter nature in those miracles. All things for Avraham, Isaac and Jacob appeared within the natural order of that Torah mentions and is within our understanding. The commentary goes on to involve the Children of Israel

Va'eira D'var Torah 20131228

needing to know me by the greater name of Hashem, as the laws of nature were to be altered because I am the maker of all.

Rambam then goes to note his difficulty with the wording and phraseology of Ibn Ezra. Rambam does mention Ibn Ezra handles his (Rambam's difficulty) elsewhere by noting that visions for the patriarchs were at nighttime and Moses' visions were face to face with G-d. Thus G-d was not known to the patriarchs the same way as Moses did.

Sforno comments on the verses without playing with wording as follows: 1) the name Hashem represents not just that of the one who created all, there is the assurance that all existence will be ongoing through his power; 2) it reveals his control over all of nature; 3) the fulfillment of the Patriarchic covenant; and 4) the response to the prayers of the people of Israel.

I came to look at it from a relational viewpoint. The patriarchs had a relationship not based on a name. They had a relationship based on what Hashem did, could do, and would do. They felt, possibly instinctively, that nothing was impossible for the Almighty and any promise or prophecy made would be fulfilled. The how was not a concern.

Moses had a different relationship with G-d. Moses asked, what is G-d's name? To Moses relationships start by knowing a name. A name was provided that would teach the children of Israel that there was a being not subservient to anything in the mind of man or any incantation invoked by man or other presumed deity or even the laws of nature that were created. Thus G-d was permitting Moses the first glimpse of the relationship we the Jewish people would have. One founded on an intellectual, emotional, philosophical and realization of one G-d. Intellectual exist because in Judaism studying is part of the requirement to having a relationship with Hashem.

We each have relationships with G-d. Additionally we have other relationships. We have a relationship with our families, friends, shuls and other institutions. These relations all start with a name, whether are person, or an organization. Now some of our relationships are not strong. There are those who seek to strengthen those relationships. For example: Bob starting sending out notes from the executive meetings. We can look at this as simply a communication to inform. I think the purpose is broader. Bob

Va'eira D'var Torah 20131228

wants each of us to feel connected, related to the board and this shul on a level that may not have existed prior to the information. I know he receives comments and solicited responses on specific subjects when needed, which tightens the relationship even for a moment in time.

In conclusion, our patriarchs, Moses, our ancestors and we have relationships. With Hashem each may be different and it is okay. We each create relationships in our lives with people, organizations and G-d. We each want those relationships to be fruitful just as the relationships of our patriarchs, Moses and the earliest generations of our ancestors had.