

Parashat Shmot: The Cry Will Be Heard

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Dear Friends,

"Eheye Asher Eheye" – "I will be what I will be, that is my name!"(Shmot 3:14)

This may be the most significant phrase in the entire Torah! It is a phrase that changed the face of human history.

Eheye Asher Eheye is not the God of the Chief Rabbinate, nor is it the God of kashrut certificates or the God of yeshiva students; it is not even the God of the Jews. But Eheye Asher Eheye, and only Eheye Asher Eheye, is THE gift of the Israelite people to the world.

What is the essence of this gift? Who is Eheye Asher Eheye?

Eheye Asher Eheye is the God of potential that is waiting to be manifest.

Eheye Asher Eheye is the God of all possibilities.

Eheye Asher Eheye is the God who brings us out of narrow places.

Eheye Asher Eheye is the God of freedom.

God of course is One, but His faces are infinite. Each person is gets to know a different aspect; in fact, each person IS a different image of the infinity of God. The central part of the daily prayer services - the Shmone Esre - also called simply "The prayer", opens with the words "The God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Ya'akov." Why? Are there three different gods? It should have said "The God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov" - one God and three forefathers. But each of the forefathers "saw" a different face of the one God – One God, infinite faces.

In the Torah, we often encounter three faces, or qualities, of the Creator:

1. "El Shadai", the God of Bereishit, is the God of fertility. He is the God of Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivka, Ya'akov and Rachel - all of whom experienced the pain of infertility. Not just gynecological infertility; anyone whose channels of fertility in his or her life are blocked is familiar with this God. El Shadai is also the God of abundance, the God of Yoseph, who is the architect of abundance in the Torah.
2. "Elohim" is the God of nature, or, more precisely, the God of the laws of nature. The God of Creation, the God of the cycles of abundance and

drought. This is also the God of determinism – reason and effect, reason and effect, over and over. This is the God sought by those who feel weak when life seems too powerful, too overwhelming.

3. And then there is "Ehey Asher Ehey", who is also known as Hashem. This is the God of Moshe, the God of the Exodus, the God of all possibilities, the timeless God, the God of the free.

"El Shadai" takes Avram and Sarai from Ur Kasdim, from total infertility. He promises that their seed will be as numerous as the sand on the seashore even though they have no children at all. This is the God of faith in continuity. "El Shadai" promises and delivers.

"Elohim" takes Yoseph out of the pit and later out of prison. He teaches Yoseph that nature cannot be changed, but human ingenuity can prepare for any scenario: you can store food, plan a family budget, prepare for times of crisis, invest in life insurance, in pension funds, and overcome most of life's challenges.

Except one...

That one challenge is that "El Shadai" + "Elohim" = Egypt! "El Shadai" and "Elohim" will always lead to the Nile.

The book of Bereishit ends in Egypt, and this is as it has to be! Everything begins when Yoseph's brothers send him to Egypt, where the Israelite youth wisely combines "El Shadai" and "Elohim". When Yosef dies he is embalmed and his coffin is buried deep in the mud of the Nile River. That is how low "El Shadai" and "Elohim" take you if they run the show together. Yoseph - and his tribe - is now buried deep at the bottom of the fleshpots, of abundance, and of the laws of nature.

There everything feels stifled! Even breathing becomes impossible.

And then comes the cry!

It begins with a weak whimper, with a groan. But it increases, until, we are told, "And it came to pass in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto Elohim by reason of the bondage." (Shmot 2:23)

But Elohim is not the entity who redeems Bnei Yisrael from the hands of the Egyptians. Elohim does not redeem slaves. We will meet the God of the Exodus in all of His glory next week, in Parashat Va'era. This week we meet His quality of

"Eheye Asher Eheye". This is the God of the Burning Bush, of freedom, of the Book of Shmot.

Fast forward 3,000+ years... There is very little freedom in Jewish tradition today. There is very little "Eheye Asher Eheye". There is a lot of "Elohim" and even of "El Shadai". Egypt (meytzarim, narrow places) is once again closing in on us from all directions.

Like an unseen spiral – from infertility to fertility, from fertility to livelihood, from livelihood to abundance, from abundance to more abundance, from there to enslavement to the abundance, and then to slavery. And then we will cry out.

And we will be redeemed again. We will know how to return to "Eheye Asher Eheye", from the exile of slavery to even greater freedom.

It would be wonderful if there were shortcuts, if it were possible to avoid the fierce hand of the king of Egypt striking us and our children. But there is no Eheye Asher Eheye without first experiencing "El Shadai" and "Elohim."

We are in a process of descent. Again. And it's okay. It is even necessary apparently. Never has there been as much abundance (El Shadai) as there is today. Never have people been as addicted to the illusion of abundance and the economy (Elohim) as we are today.

This descent is camouflaged. It doesn't yet hurt enough, and so the collective groan is not yet audible. But it will be. And it will become a tremendous cry.

And then we will return from the depths of despair to find "Eheye Asher Eheye" once again.

It cannot happen one moment earlier. It cannot happen before we all recognize "El Shadai" and "Elohim".

Shabbat Shalom,
Elisha