



Parashat Sh'mot: "I Will Be With You"

Dear Friends,

We begin a new book this week - Exodus, or Sh'mot in Hebrew - and everything changes. Nothing stays as it was.

In the past two weeks of our Beit Midrash course, we have been taking a deep look at one of the climaxes of Parashat Sh'mot - some would say of the entire history of mankind - the encounter between Moshe and God at the Burning Bush. (Sh'mot 3: 2-15) It is a formative, radical moment in human awareness. There was nothing like it in all of Bereishit.

It is the first time wonder and awe appear in the Torah: **"Moses said, 'I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight...'"**

It is the first time someone sees another dimension of existence, the dimension of the eternal flame, the light of life that never dims: **"...why doesn't the bush burn up?"**

It is also the first time in the Torah that we read about holiness: **"And He said... Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground."**

This week I discovered a Chiddush - a new idea - (new for me at least) written by Amos Chacham, the author of Da'at Mikra (published by the Rav Kook Institute). This Chiddush will be the focus of this drasha.

Before that, it is important to point out that Moshe was not a random choice. Our Sages tell us that the bush is always burning, and is never consumed. Many good people have passed the same bush and not noticed it. Moshe is simply the first to have a heart and mind open enough to see the dimension of eternity, that which burns and is not consumed.

The particular language used to describe the burning bush is significant: **"An angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing center (literally, heart) of the bush."** Moshe sees the Divine in the center, the core, the heart of the bush. In other words, he sees its essence. He sees the inner, eternal presence that constitutes all of the matter in the universe - the "God particle", if you will; the delicate flame that is present and keeps everything alive.

In more contemporary terms we might say that Moshe had a moment of enlightenment; a formative moment in which he connected to the Divine light, to the blazing center that upholds the universe.

But... it is one thing to experience enlightenment. It is quite another to tell everyone about it!

When God demands that Moshe take this enlightenment and return with it to Egypt to free the Israelites from there, Moshe very justly says: But I am a shepherd! I ran away from civilization because I could not bear to see so much injustice. It made me violent. I am happy where I am. Send someone else! And anyway, I will never succeed in transmitting what I just experienced to others.

Contrary to urban myth, Moshe did not stutter! He felt himself to be heavy or slow of tongue because he could not imagine how he would succeed in conveying to others the deep spiritual experience he had. And even if they believed him, would they understand him - enough to be enlightened too? After all, there are no words to truly describe such a sublime encounter.

And what about us? Do we truly understand? Do we really comprehend the depth of the this story? Have we internalized God's message in the Burning Bush?

Absolutely not!

This is why Moshe asks God: **“Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?...When I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?”**

In other words, how on earth can I share with them my encounter with you in a way that will open Pharaoh's heart, and place courage in the hearts of the Israelites?

God gives what seems to be a very unsatisfying answer: **“And He said, “I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you: when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain.”**

Really? What kind of answer is this: don't worry, Moshe, I'll be right there with you, and you will have your proof when you bring the People to this mountain...

This is where the Chiddush comes in: Amos Chacham explains that this verse should be read entirely differently: **“And He said, ‘I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you [full stop]’”**.

In other words, God's answer is: you will know that I have sent you when you truly know/feel/experience that I am with you! And this will be your sign; there is no other! When you experience my presence within you, you will know I am with you, and your mission will succeed.

“I will be with you” is a much deeper phrase than it appears to be. God is revealing His name to Moshe: **“And God said to Moses, ‘Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.’ He continued, ‘Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’”**

“Ehyeh” - “I will be” - is the name of the God of freedom.

But what kind of word is this, “Eheye”? Even for Hebrew speakers it is not clear. “Eheye” is a verb in the future tense, but it is being manifested in the present. God says “i will be”, but not in the sense of anticipating the future. Rather, **I am the consciousness of the future, but I am present now!**

In other words, what the future holds is of no importance, **I am the awareness of eternity which exists in the the present moment.**

Now, returning to God’s promise to Moshe, **“And He said, “I will be” will be with you.”** **Eheye - the name of what is exalted - will be with you!!!** When you stand in front of Pharaoh and Bnei Yisrael, “I will be” - the awareness of the eternity in the present - will be with you. “Moshe”, God says to him, “bear me - bear the experience of Eheye - in your consciousness, and see what will happen!”

This Divine invitation to Moshe (according to this interpretation) is to experience and feel the presence of “Eheye” - of eternity - within himself. That will be the sign that “Anochi” (another name for God which we will discuss at another time) sent him.

A person who is connected to the eternal dimension within him or herself has nothing to fear.

A person who has experienced him or herself as an eternal dimension of the universe will never die!

Moshe never truly dies.

It begins with internal work, one of consciousness and cognizance, after which one must “bring it down” to the domain of experience and emotion.

Try it - it works!

Thousands of years have passed since “Eheye” was revealed to Moshe in the Burning Bush. For forty years Moshe tried to familiarize us with Him without much success. *Anyone* who tries to explain this way of being to a person who is not yet ready for it will feel “slow of speech and slow of tongue”.

It is almost 2019. Isn’t it time, finally, to get to know Him more deeply?

May “I will be” be with you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Elisha