

Dvar Torah December 2013/5774 – Shemot
“Becoming” – R’ Sherril Gilbert

In this week's parasha we re-enter one of my favourite stories, and one of the deepest stories in Torah, about Moshe Rabbenu, our teacher Moses. In this story, Moshe is tending sheep in the wilderness when something remarkable happens. God appears to Moshe in the midst of a burning bush. The bush burned with fire, but it was not consumed.

God and Moshe engage in a long and intriguing dialogue in which God gives Moshe a mission, and asks him to take his mission to the Israelite people. Moshe says: Sure, You're giving me a mission, but who shall I say sent me? And God says, tell them that you were sent by the God of your ancestors; tell them that *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* sent you. *Ehyeh asher ehyeh*. It means something like “I Will Be That I Will Be”, or “I Am Becoming What I Am Becoming”. God says, “Tell the people that *I Who Am Becoming* sent you”.

I really love that notion of “becoming”. It speaks to me of unfolding potentials, possibilities, processes. We have been made *b'tzelem elohim* - in the Divine image. Like God, we are always becoming. And the thing is, because of that, because it is a process, we don't know yet exactly who we will become.

In the next verse in our story, God reveals to Moshe another new and even more mysterious Name for God-self, Y-H-V-H, the Tetragrammaton. This is the four-letter Name which we can spell but we cannot pronounce or say out loud, and so instead we say HaShem.

We already know that there is to be a special relationship between God and Moshe. Here is a very deep teaching about that relationship: in Hebrew, Moshe's name is spelled *Mem-Shin-Heh*. If we spell it backwards it's *Heh-Shin-Mem*, which spells Hashem. Could it be that this intimate connection between the two names, Hashem and Moshe, was God's way of revealing to Moshe his inner potential, his inner spark of divinity and holiness?

We have been made in the Divine image. Like God, we are always becoming. And the fact that we are always changing is part of what makes us like God, the Infinite One. God is constant transformation. We might say that God – that

Something More, that spark of divinity or holiness that is within and surrounding each of us - is both the *source and the force for transformation* in our lives. The revelation at the burning bush is a metaphor for our inner spirit that is awakening to discover its unique place and mission in the world.

Our ancient tradition suggests that Moshe was not the first person to pass by the burning bush. Others had walked by and ignored it. Maybe they thought they were imagining things. Maybe they assumed it was something other than what it was. Maybe they figured there was some rational explanation for a bush that burned but was not consumed, and anyway they had things to do, important things like herding sheep and spinning flax. One way or another, as a result of their distraction, they all managed to miss the Presence of God, the *ruach ha-kodesh*, noticeably in plain sight.

But not Moshe. He had his eyes wide open. He saw, and he marveled, and he altered his path to get a closer look. In this way, he took his first step toward greatness.

And the pre-condition for all of the wonders he accomplished later on was the *simple act of opening his eyes and his heart*. His vision was clear enough that he could see what was in front of him and so recognize it for the miracle that it was; his heart was open enough that he could hear the Universe's holy broadcast on multiple levels, and he could respond.

Moshe looks at the burning bush and, because his eyes are truly open, he sees that it's a miracle. And because revelation is ongoing, we, too, even now, stand in front of the burning bush. This moment is an invitation. An invitation to notice the miracles around us. To notice the bush as it still burns. To notice that the place we are standing - wherever that is - is holy ground. All this in order to remove whatever gets in the way of our encounters with holiness. When we do this, we honour the *ruach ha-kodesh*, the holiness inherent in the burning bush, in creation, and in every ordinary miracle that waits for us to open our eyes and take notice of what is, and of who we can become.

My wish for all of us tonight is that we may be blessed in this season, in this lifetime, to discover our unfolding potential in the process of becoming who we are meant to be. May our journeys be blessed with insights and learning,

compassion and support, and love and appreciation, as we each discover our unique missions and grow into our truest selves. And let us say, Amen!

Sources:

Rabbi Rachel Barenblatt, <http://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/VR-divrei-torah.html>

Rabbi David Wolfe-Blank, Meta-Parshiot 5758

Rabbi Avraham Arie Trugman, Orchard of Delights