

This Week In Torah *Vaera*

Faith in God is a very personal issue. I like to compare it to my eyeglass prescription. What my optometrist prescribed for me will not work well for someone else and vice-a-versa. The same is true about our belief in God; each of us has a belief system that reflects our world view and that is shaped by our experiences and our intellectual makeup. Like the eyeglasses, we each have “God-focals” so to speak which is developed and nurtured by each one of us.

Exodus 6:3—“I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name *Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay*”

Each of our patriarchs and matriarchs had a unique and special bond with God. That is why the Rabbis who created our prayer book highlighted this in the *Avot/Emahot* prayer. In the apogee of our worship, our communal prayer becomes unique—*Elohai Avraham, Elohai Yitzchak, Elohai Ya’akov*, etc. Thus we can add our own names to our relationship with God, which philosopher Martin Buber made as the essence of his theology. The religious existential paradigm of the “I-Thou” relationship, linking us and God thru-out our lifetimes. The 16th century Italian sage Ovadia Sforza described the relationship between the patriarchs/matriarchs as not a complete one as God transcends the lifespan of individuals; we strive to do the best we can within the context of our relationship, but it will never be fulfilled. As we read in *Pirkei Avot*, we are not obligated to complete the task but that doesn’t make us exempt from doing our fair share.

Exodus 6:3—“I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name *Yod-Hay-Vav-Hay*”

That searching for a relationship with God is essential. Take a look at 19th century Danish, Christian theologian Søren Kierkegaard who uses the metaphor of waiting for a friend in a coffee shop as similar to yearning to connect to God. The anticipation and waiting is so similar to the desire for a connection to the Almighty. And as Moses learns later on in Exodus, the glimpse of the Divine should be sufficient enough to sustain our

search for that relationship. 9th/10th Century Rabbi Saadia Gaon compared this idea to the name of God in our Torah verse. He wrote that *El Shai* should not be seen as God of the breast/heart but as God *shee*-that is *dey*-enough... “God who is enough for me.” We cannot know the entirety of God, it is impossible for the finite beings to comprehend the infinite. We should be content to strive to connect to God as best as we are capable to do. And never stop yearning for a bit more. RaSHI taught that this verse shows us that our curiosity should never be satiated, but we glean enough to keep our faith strong.

Faith is something evolving and maturing. It something we nurture in ourselves and we do so each time we pray, each time we study, each time we enter the realm of the sacred. It is an on-going journey that is never complete. And that is the joys of faithful living.