

Drasha Shabbat Va'era 5782

Who is the God you need to speak to at this moment?

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In this week's parsha, Parshat Va'era, God explains that the name by which Moshe will come to know God was not revealed to the patriarchs before him :

<p>Shemot 6:2-3</p> <p>God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the LORD.</p> <p>I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name Ado-shem (tetragrammaton).</p>	<p>שמות ו:ב-ג</p> <p>וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי ה':</p> <p>וְאָרָא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶל־שְׁדֵי</p> <p>וְשָׁמִי ה' לֹא נִודַעְתִּי לָהֶם:</p>
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If we look back to Bereshit, there is an obvious question on God's claim here: Hashem says that he did not make the name Ado-shem known before, but when **Avraham calls God by the Tetragrammaton when he enters the land of Israel:**

<p>Bereshit 12:8</p> <p>And he (Avraham) built there an</p>	<p>בראשית פרשת לך לך פרק יב:ח</p> <p>וַיִּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם הַהָרָה מִקְדָּם לְבֵית אֵל וַיֵּט</p>
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altar to Hashem and called in the name of Hashem.	אֱהִיָּה בַּיִת אֶל מִיָּם וְהָעִי מִקְדָּם וַיִּבֶן שֵׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לִיקְוֹק וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם יְקְוֹק:
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The Talmud in Masechet Berachot 7b says as much: Avraham was the first first to call God by the Tetragrammton, Ado-shem.¹ Further, earlier God commanded Moshe himself to tell the people of Israel that “**Ado-shem (YHVH)** the God of your ancestors, God of Avraham, God of Yitzhak, and God of Ya’akov,”- sent me to you. And God emphasizes, “ this is my name forever...my remembrance from generation to generation”

So the Torah commentators try to understand the significance of God revealing the name of Ado-shem to Moshe again at this point- **Why does God say that the name Adoshem was not known before?**

Rashi explains :

Rashi, *Shemot 6:3*

...I was not recognized by the patriarchs in My attribute of "keeping faith," by reason of which My name is "the Lord," (adoshem) which denotes that I am certain to substantiate My promise—
 for indeed I made promises to them but did not fulfill them [during their lifetimes].

According to Rashi, the name Adoshem reflects God’s trustworthiness to fulfill promises.

¹ **Bavli Berachot 7b** “Rabbi Yoḥanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai: From the day that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created the world there was no person who called him “Lord”/ Adoshem until Abraham came and called him Lord- Ado-shem.. As it is stated: “And he said, ‘My Lord, God, by what shall I know that I will inherit it?’” (Genesis 15:8).”

At the end of last week's parsha, Moshe confronts God for not fulfilling his promise. God sent him to Pharaoh on the promise that God would save the Jewish people, Moshe's mission only resulted in greater suffering for the Israelite slaves.

<p>Exodus 5:22-23</p> <p>Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people."</p>	<p>וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל־ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי לָמָּה הִרְעַלְתָּהּ לָעַם הַזֶּה לָמָּה זֶה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי: וּמֵאִזַּ בָּאתִי אֶל־פַּרְעֹה לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁמְךָ הִרַע לָעַם הַזֶּה וְהִצַּל לֹא־הִצַּלְתָּ אֶת־עַמְּךָ:</p>
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God's response to Moshe's complaint is the opening pesukim of this week's Parsha. By revealing the name Adoshem, God is saying: "I will keep the promise I made to Avraham." The potential of the name was already revealed - but now God promises to follow through in action.

In revealing this new name to Moshe, God is marking a shift in the relational dynamic. God is ready to fulfill promises instead of delay and disappoint, God is ready to be accountable in a new way.

Ramban, Nachmanides, presents a second understanding of re-introducing the name of Ado-shem now. Ramban explains that God's different names connote different attributes. The Ramban writes:

Ramban, *Shemot* 6:2

The *Shekhina* was revealed to the patriarchs and God spoke to them by way of the attribute of judgment, and therewith He related to them. But to Moshe He related and made Himself known through the attribute of mercy, that is, by way of His great name.

According to Ramban, the patriarchs knew God as "*El Shaddai*"- they experienced God through the Divine attribute of judgment. *El Shaddai*, as explained by the Talmud is a God who said to the world: "**dai**"- **Enough!** This is a God who set in place unbending rules of nature, who put boundaries and order on an expanding and changing world.² Now, God would relate to the people as **Ado-shem- which reflects Divine Mercy and compassion.**

The 18th century Hassidic teacher, the Maggid of Koznitz, delves further into the dynamic of the shift from *El Shaddai* to Ado-shem.: **This name, *El Shaddai*,**

² Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, it was expanding farther and farther like two unwound clues of warp until the Holy One, blessed be He, rebuked it and caused it to stand. As it is stated: "The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at his reproof" (*Iyyov* 26:11). **This is what Resh Lakish said: What is that which is written: "I am *El Shaddai*"? I said to the world, 'Enough.'** Resh Lakish said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the sea, it was expanding farther and farther until the Holy One, blessed be He, rebuked it and made it dry. As it is stated: "He rebukes the sea, and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers" (*Nachum* 1:4) Chagigah 12a, <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/tanakh/torah/sefer-shemot/parashat-vaera/parashat-vaera-lo-our-g-d>

symbolizes God's role as the "world's rule keeper" who constantly enforces the world's obedience to the set laws of nature. In contrast, the Tetragrammaton-Adoshem, reflects the potential for the world to change. The moment that God shifts from the law-enforcing role of *El Shaddai*, and appears as the Tetragrammaton, the laws of nature can be overcome- and there can be room for miracles.

Sometimes, in the Tanach, God reveals a new experience of Godself to humankind, through a new name. But sometimes, God gets a new name through human initiative. **Rabbi Aviva Richman** cites the example of Hagar who calls God “El Roi”, the God of my being seen, after a Divine emissary responds to her prayer and her son Yishmael’s life is saved. Rabbi Richman writes, “When Hagar invents the name “God of my seeing/being seen,” **she is not only articulating gratitude for this divine encounter, but also calling on God to live up to this name in an ongoing way, seeing and caring for vulnerable people.**”

In the book of Judges, Hannah (Hannah) also uses a name for God which had never been used before: Hashem Tzva-kot. The Talmud in Masechet Berachot teaches us why Hannah innovated this specific way to address G-d:

Talmud Bavli Berakhot 31b

“[Hannah] said: YHVH Tzeva’ot” (1 Samuel 1:11).

Said R. Elazar: From the day the Holy Blessed One created His world, no one called the Holy Blessed One “Tzeva’ot (hosts)” until Hannah came and called God Tzeva’ot.

Said Hannah before the Holy Blessed One, “Master of the world, from all the

hosts of hosts that You created in Your world, would it be hard for You to give me one son?"

Hannah gives God a new name, God of Hosts, Ado-shem Tzeva'ot. In doing so, she identifies an aspect of God and places a demand upon God. She addresses God and says: You are the God who created the multitude of life forms on this earth, would it be too much for you to show me that you are truly that God by giving me a child? The name Hashem Tzevakot expresses an expectation: Creator of Life, I know you can create life for me.

The midrash teaches that all of the names by which we know God are all encompassed within the name revealed to Moshe in his first dialogue with God. When Moshe first meets God at the burning bush, back in the 3rd chapter of the book of Exodus, Moshe asks God's name (Exodus 3:13). God responds saying **"I will be what I will be."**

[Exodus Rabba 3:6](#)

"You wish to know My name. It is by my actions that I am called. Sometimes I am called *El Sha-kkai* or *Zevakot* or *Elokim* or *Ado-shem*. When I sit in judgment on humanity, I am called *Elohim*. When I war against the wicked, I am called *Zeva-ot*. When I refrain from punishing someone on the spot for his or her sin, I am known as *El Sha-kai*, And when I treat my world with compassion, I am known as *Ado-shem*"

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה, אָמַר רַבִּי אֲבָא בַר מִמְל, אָמַר לִי הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה, שְׁמִי אֲנִי
 מִבְּקֵשׁ לִידַע, לְפִי מַעֲשֵׂי אֲנִי נִקְרָא, פְּעָמִים שָׂאֲנִי נִקְרָא בְּאֵל שְׂדֵי, בְּצַבָּאוֹת, בְּאֵלֵהִים, בְּה': כְּשֶׁאֲנִי דִן אֶת
 הַבְּרִיּוֹת, אֲנִי נִקְרָא: אֱלֹהִים, וְכִשְׂאֲנִי עוֹשֶׂה מְלַחְמָה בְּרָשָׁעִים, אֲנִי נִקְרָא: צַבָּאוֹת, וְכִשְׂאֲנִי תוֹלֵה עַל חַטָּאֵי
 שֶׁל אָדָם, אֲנִי נִקְרָא: אֵל שְׂדֵי, וְכִשְׂאֲנִי מְרַחֵם עַל עוֹלָמִי, אֲנִי נִקְרָא ה', שְׂאִין ה' אֵלָא מִדַּת רַחֲמִים,
 שְׂנֵאֲמַר (שְׁמוֹת ל"ד, ו'): ה' ה' אֵל רַחוּם וְחַנוּן, הַיּוֹ: אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה, אֲנִי נִקְרָא לְפִי מַעֲשֵׂי.

In other words, our names for God reflect our experiences of God- and the midrash proves it from the name I will be what I will be” ([Exodus 3:14](#)). God is not the same in our each interaction. The vagueness of “I will be what I will be” allows for a variety of experiences of God. God encompasses all of existence, including the diversity of human experience. With this in mind, we can appreciate the fact that our parashah uses three distinct names of God in just the first two pesukim: *Elo-him*, *Ado-nai* and *El Sha-ddai* ([Exodus 6:2-3](#)).

In a week and in a time when the Jewish world and the world at large is in need of compassion and miracles, God in the first pesukim of our parsha comes forth to comfort us. To tell us that when it seems like the judgment and harshness of the world is overwhelming, the God of Compassion can yet be revealed and experienced.

And if we look to the examples of Avraham and Hannah- we have the power to bring forth the God we need to be present with us at any given moment. This reminds me of the art of spontaneous prayer, which I learned as a hospital chaplain intern in the hospital. A spontaneous prayer flows from actively listening to a person’s experience,

hopes, and needs- as well as their experience of God- and incorporating those elements into a heartfelt prayer using their own language. Our tradition teaches us that our ancestors- Hannah, Avraham- engaged in this art as well calling upon God to fulfill promises, and to live up to the divine attributes we expect to see and need to see.

May we keep those channels of prayer and communication open with God, knowing that in each moment, we can call upon God to listen to us, to be present with us, and to be revealed to us in new ways.