

Does God Actually Appear in Real Life?

To know God cannot be an intellectual exercise. It is not through philosophy or Talmud that we truly connect with the Divine, but through our own experience.

That message appears throughout our *parshah*, *Va'era*. *Va'era* means “And I revealed Myself.” Its root is the word *re'iyah*, meaning “sight.” In this case, God brings the first seven plagues for all to see, and the Torah declares:¹ “I will display My power,... I will bring forth My hosts from Egypt.... And Egypt will know that I am G-d.” *Va'era* is full of big showy miracles, for all to see.

Yet, last week's *parshah*, *Sh'mot* (names) sends a seemingly contradictory message. Only three chapters apart,² the different ways that God reveals Godself in these two *parshiyot*, when examined together, add up to a very different notion of God's power and how we can know the Divine in our day-to-day lives.

At the Burning Bush when God first speaks to Moses, Moses asks God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh with that demand? Why should he listen to me?”³ “God replies, *Ehyeh imach*, I will be with you.”⁴ Next Moses asks God, “When I go to the Israelites with this message [that You will set

¹ Exodus 6:6-8

² Exodus Chapter 3 (*Sh'mot*) and Exodus Chapter 6 (*Va'era*)

³ Exodus 3:11

⁴ Exodus 3:12

them free], and they ask me ‘In whose name do you speak?’ what shall I say to them?”⁵

“God replies with a crucial answer that defies easy translation and has provoked volumes of commentary: ‘My name is *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*; tell them that *Ehyeh* sent you to them.’ ”⁶

Rashi offers an interpretation based on the two occurrences of *Ehyeh* only two verses apart.⁷ In the words of Harold Kushner, Rashi teaches that “God’s essential identity...is ‘the One who will be with you’ when you have to do something you’re afraid will be too hard for you.”⁸ “That insight, that God is to be found not in the crisis, but in our response to the crisis,”⁹ is essential. *Ehyeh imach* means, “I won’t do it for you, I won’t do it without you, but I won’t leave you to do it alone.” I will be with you, and I will give you strength and courage and hope to do what you could never do for yourself.

My own life, as well as my professional experience, attest to the truth of Rashi’s teaching.

Maybe God does occasionally turn water into blood or make the sun stand still? Or maybe the Torah describes metaphorical events with spiritual

⁵ Exodus 3:13

⁶ Kushner, Harold S, Nine Essential Things I’ve Learned About Life. New York: Anchor Books, 2015, p. 50-51.

⁷ Exodus 3:12 & 3:14.

⁸ Kushner, Nine Essential Things..., p. 52.

⁹ Kushner, Nine Essential Things..., p. 50-51.

lessons rather than literal, historical truth? Perhaps it's true that "Coincidences are God's way of remaining anonymous?" I don't know.

I only know what God has done in my own life. I've been blessed by countless miracles that only I have seen. God has given me hope when it all seemed hopeless, and courage when I was too terrified to move.

I know this: God has 'revealed' God's self to me when I least expected it, and 'displayed God's power' in unimaginable ways. 'God has been with me, and given me strength and courage and hope to do what I could never have done for myself.'

When have you received strength or courage or hope when you most desperately needed it?

What does it mean to you to 'see' God 'reveal' Godself?

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