

Torah Talk - מאמרי תורה



The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital

Parashat Vaera
January 5, 2019

פרשת שמות
כ"ח בטבת תשע"ט

Torah Reading: *Shemot* (Exodus) 6:2-9:35

In this *parasha*, God commands Moshe and Aharon to bring B'nei Yisrael out of Egypt and deliver them from slavery. They receive the message that God will free them, and yet, their spirits still remain heavy. In the middle of the narrative, we find a genealogy of Reuven, Shimon, and Levi, which also includes the family origin of Moshe and Aharon. Moshe and Aharon approach Paro (Pharaoh) with their demand that he let B'nei Yisrael go worship God in the wilderness, and they perform a miracle of turning a staff into a serpent. We then read about the first seven plagues to hit Egypt, as well as Paro's heart being hardened against B'nei Yisrael.

Toward the beginning of this *parasha*, God tells Moshe and Aharon that they should reveal God's name to B'nei Yisrael – a name that was not revealed to Avraham, Yitzchak, or Ya'akov. According to this text, the *avot* (forefathers) knew God by another name, but God's true name, The Name (Ha-Shem) is reserved for the nation of B'nei Yisrael. This signifies that God's relationship with the *avot* is of a different nature from the relationship that God will form with this nation of slaves turned a free people. But why does God relate differently to this nation than God related to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, and what are the differences in those relationships?

According to Rashi, God means: "I was not recognized by them [the *avot*] in My attribute of "keeping faith," by reason of which My name is called [ה'], which denotes that I am certain to substantiate My promise, for, indeed, I made promises to them but did not fulfill them [during their lifetime]. – נֶאֱמַן – לֹא נִכְרְתִי לָהֶם בְּמִדַּת אֲמִתּוֹת שְׁלִי, שְׁעָלֶיהָ נִקְרָא שְׁמִי ה', נֶאֱמַן – לֹא אֲמַת דְּבָרִי, שְׁהָרִי הַבְּטָחָתִים וְלֹא קִיַּמְתִּי

Rashi is saying that God's true name is one that people use when they see God fulfilling promises. God promised many things to the *avot* – countless offspring, a land for their descendants, blessings, and material goods – but the *avot* did not see God's promises come true. Rather, B'nei Yisrael will have the privilege of witnessing this happen. They will see God's people become a nation and will make their way toward the land that was promised to their ancestors. They will receive the Torah and become a kingdom of priests.

Rashi's commentary shows us just how important it is to keep one's promises. Anyone can make promises, but it is a holy and special thing to be able to keep those promises and

transform them into reality. This ability is so special, in fact, that it can be the basis for a new type of relationship and can cause us to know people (or God) in different and much deeper ways. B'nei Yisrael knew God by a different name, The Name, because they saw God behave differently toward them than toward Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. If we take Rashi's idea a step further, we see that when we not only make promises, but also keep them to the best of our ability, we are tapping into a holy and unique part of God and making God's Name shine here on earth.

Shabbat Shalom

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) Was there anything about the nation of B'nei Yisrael that made them worthy of learning God's name? Was there something unique that they needed in this moment?
- 2) How can you try to make promises and keep them in your own life?
- 3) Think about someone with whom you have a special relationship. How is that relationship reflected in what you call that person? Think about that person's title, nickname, or the role that person plays in your life.