

## VAERA

### What's In A Name?

The opening statement to this week's *parashah*, *Vaera*, means 'and I appeared.'

And God (**ELOHIM**) spoke to Moshe and said to him: 'I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as **EL SHADDAI**, but I did not make myself known to them by my name, **ADONAI** (the ineffable, unpronounced name known as YHVH).

**ELOHIM** is the generic name for any god and it appears to be in the plural and is the name used by the Patriarchs for God. It is a variant of the name **EL** which is used frequently also as a name for God.

**ADONAI** - the God of Mercy, the ineffable, unpronounceable name, is the distinguishing name for God preferred by the Israelites. **EL SHADDAI** - the nurturing God, is also a name for God preferred by the Patriarchs.

Why by the name **ADONAI**, God of Mercy? God sees Moshe as a merciful man tending to the Israelites when he leads them towards liberty from under the yoke of the Pharaoh, such as God, in His Mercy looks after the Israelites.

In contrast, God is revealed as **EL SHADDAI**, a nurturing God that our forefathers needed, who would encourage them, lead them step by step. God was a nurturing, parental force in their lives. That is why God is also called **AVENU MALKEINU**, Our Father, Our King.

In fact, there are over 150 names for God. Some of the more familiar ones are: Justice - *Elohim*

Fear of God - *Yirat Shamayim*

Healer of the Sick - *Rofeh cholim*

Intimate Presence - *Shechina*

King of Kings - *Melech Malchei Melachim*

Lord of the Universe - *Adon Olam*

The Name - *HaShem*

Why all the names, many of which describe the attributes of God? We call upon God in the name that applies to our needs at the time of our prayer. For instance, when we are sick, we call God by the name *Rofei Cholim*, Healer of the Sick.

At the site of the Burning Bush God refers to Himself as *El Shaddai*, the name Moshe knew as the God of his fathers. But Moshe needs to know more. He asks: But what is

your NAME? I have only verbs. Whom shall I say sent me? And God says: *Ehiyeh Asher Ehiyeh*, I am that I am, I will be what I will be.

What is Moshe thinking?

'You must be kidding! The Israelites barely know me. How am I going to explain You? They do not have a connection with me. I am still the Prince of Egypt to them. I have not experienced their trauma. You want me to go before the Pharaoh, my nemesis, and tell him that *Ehiyeh Asher Ehiyeh* sent me. Let's see how that works out! God I need more than that. How about some plagues, maybe 10 of them? Then they will know who's boss.'

To sum it up, WHAT'S IN A NAME?

God cannot be grasped or defined by a name. God is gender-free. God's name in *Ehiyeh Asher Ehiyeh* is a verb. God is more than we can comprehend. God is constantly growing and changing; and we, in turn, are growing and changing in our relationship with *Adonai*.

I want to leave you with these questions as you consider your relationship with God and how it has changed over time.

Do you talk to God?

Have you ever felt God talking to you?

Is there anything that makes you angry about God?

Has God answered any of your prayers?

Do you pray to God more when you need God?

Do you thank God for the good things in your life as well as relating to God to the bad things that happen?

I leave you with these thoughts and wish you a Shabbat Shalom.

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Questions from JTS publication GOD TALK, with questions adapted from *Higher and Higher*, by Steven M. Brown