

(Dvar Torah continued from front page...)

Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name YHVH.” But while it is true that God uses the name El Shaddai multiple times with the Avot (Bereishit 17:1 and 35:11) and the Avot themselves refer to El Shaddai multiple times (28:3, 43:14, and 48:3), a casual reading of Bereishit reveals that YHVH was ALSO used (see Bereishit 12:7-8, 15:1, 22:14, 26:2, and 28:13). So in point of fact, there isn't much to this announcement at all. YHVH? Yawn. We've heard that one before.

Unsurprisingly, Rashi and other classical commentators notice this as well. So as they read the text, it's clear that God cannot be saying that the Avot didn't know the name YHVH, so God must be saying something else. And they find the word in the verse on which to hang the more nuanced reading that resolves the difficulty. In the verse, God says “לֹא נִתְּנָהּ לָהֶם” (I did not make known to them) and not “לֹא הִוָּדַעְתִּי לָהֶם” (I did not inform them). The verb is passive and not active. God may have INFORMED the Avot of YHVH, but God was NOT YET KNOWN TO THEM as YHVH. But what exactly does that mean?

The Avot “knew” two names for God, El Shaddai and YHVH, but they had only come to experience (know at a deeper level) God as El Shaddai and not as YHVH. The name YHVH was really just a promise that at some point in the future God would BE EXPERIENCED AS YHVH by the Israelites. So what God is really saying to Moshe is that that time has arrived.

And what does it mean to experience God as YHVH rather than El Shaddai? El Shaddai has the power to save. YHVH saves. El Shaddai makes promises. YHVH fulfills them. El Shaddai makes the system work. YHVH intercedes to perform special acts of chesed - lovingkindness.

Experiencing God as El Shaddai requires only that God appears as such - “I APPEARED to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai.” But God cannot just appear as YHVH. God has to BE YHVH and sustain it until the experience sinks in - until YHVH is no longer just a piece of information held by the mind, but a deeper knowledge grasped by one's heart and soul.

As the election season progresses, may Israel's political leaders likewise sustain their work on behalf of the Jewish people so that their party names are transformed, from mere slogans into real experiences of salvation and renewal.

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## TORAH SPARKS

### Parashat Va'era

### Shabbat Mevarekhim Hahodesh

January 5, 2019 | 28 Tevet 5779

Annual | Exodus 6:2-9:35 (Etz Hayim p.351-368; Hertz p. 232-244)  
Triennial | Exodus 8:16-9:35 (Etz Hayim p. 362-373; Hertz p. 240-244)  
Haftarah | Ezekiel (Etz Hayim p.1219-1223; Hertz p. 944-947)

## D'var Torah: What's In a Name?

*Rabbi Andy Shapiro Katz, CY Director of North American Engagement*

Last week in Israel, a bill was passed to dissolve the Knesset and set new elections for this April. This led to announcements of multiple new political parties - among them the “Gesher” party of Orly Levy-Abekasis, the “New Right” party of Naftali Bennett and Ayelet Shaked, the “Israeli Resilience” party of Benny Gantz, and the “My Israeli Brother” party of Adina Bar Shalom. We know the party names, and even some of the names on their candidate lists, but what do those names really mean? Will these parties be what their names promise? Will they lead Israel out of the narrow straits toward a better future? Only time will tell.

Serendipitously, the first two parashiot of Shemot (which means Names!) ask similar questions. At the burning bush last week, Moshe is an audience of one at God's introductory press conference, and he hears a little about God's biography and God's plan. Tasked with transmitting the news to the wider public, he naturally asks God in 3:13, “When...they [the Israelites] ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” And God gives him two different answers. First, God says “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh” or just “Ehyeh” for short. In some sense, this is really a non-name. God is just saying that God will be whatever God will be. But then God says in 3:15: “The LORD (Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh / YHVH)...shall be My name forever...”

It seems like it's a major announcement, this NEW NAME OF GOD. In verse 6:3 in our parashah God stresses that: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El

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## D'var Haftarah: Leadership & Arrogance

*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

Judea, the southern kingdom, was all that remained of the Jewish nation at the time of the destruction of the First Temple. The northern kingdom, Israel, had already been conquered and dispersed more than a century before. This left Judea in a geopolitically precarious position, stuck between two empires, Babylonia to the north and Egypt to the south. Its challenge was to negotiate its own safety between these two giants and to determine with whom to establish an alliance. The two major prophets of the times, Ezekiel and Jeremiah, had a clear opinion on the subject, declaring Babylonia to be the wise choice. Their critique of Egypt was part political and part theological; it was their determination that Egypt had not changed since the days of the Exodus. Its leaders, the Pharaohs, still thought of themselves as deities and as a result were both arrogant and unreliable as allies: "Thus said the Lord God: I am going to deal with you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, mighty monster, sprawling in your channels, who said, My Nile is my own, I made it for myself." (29:3)

As Rashi indicates, the prophets saw this attitude as the ultimate rebellion against God which needed to be put down: "Since all of Egypt's greatness and its self-sufficiency were dependent on the Nile, the prophet equated Egypt's king to a crocodile and its people to fish. Pharaoh declared I have no need for God for my Nile provides all of my needs, Hence, through my greatness and wisdom I have increased both my greatness and governance."

The rabbinic sages thought that this attitude in a ruler was totally destructive. Such a ruler needed to be brought down and could never be depended on. While the following midrash merges the Pharaoh of Second Temple times with that of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, its message was for rulers of all generations: "Come and see, all who desire to make themselves god, [it is as if they] build their palaces on water. Pharaoh built his palace on water and blocked the Nile so that its water would not flow into the sea. As a result, the level of the water in the Nile began to rise and so the palace rose up to the heights, as it says: 'Thus said the Lord God: I am going to deal with you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, mighty monster, sprawling in your channels.' The Holy One Blessed be He said to him: 'Wicked one! You have become arrogant on account of water, by water you shall die! As Scripture says: 'Who hurled Pharaoh and his army into the Sea of Reeds' (Psalms 136:15)" (Tanhuma Bereishit 7)

The sages believed in poetic justice. Leaders who are arrogant will fall on account of their arrogance. Pharaoh whose arrogance showed itself in his absurd presumption that he controlled the great Nile River would ultimately be undone by water. The bottom line, of course, is a warning not just to the leaders themselves but also to those who trust in such leaders.

## Parashat Va'era Self-Study

*Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

Moshe tells the people that God plans to take them out of slavery in Egypt to the land promised to their ancestors. In the process, God sends 7 plagues to Egypt (for the last 3, come back next week) but Pharaoh does not let the people go.

- 1) In 6:2-8 God gives his plan of action for rescuing us from Egypt. It includes 4 verbs (6:6-7) that have become associated with drinking the 4 cups of wine on Leil HaSeder on Passover: 'I will bring you out', 'rescue you', 'redeem you', 'take you... as a people'. But there is a fifth verb: 'I will bring you into the land' (6:8). Why do you think that we do not relate to that on Leil HaSeder? (Although, there is a question if it should be counted.)
- 2) Moshe delivers God's promise of rescue, but the people don't listen to him because of "shortness of spirit and hard work" (6:9). What do you think that "shortness of spirit" means, and why does hard work prevent them from listening?
- 3) Not only the people are given a Godly plan, but Moshe is given one as well in 7:1-5. He is told "I will make you like a god (*Elohim*) to Pharaoh and Aaron your brother will be your prophet (*Navi*). Why do you think that Pharaoh will think of Moshe as a god and why is this important?
- 4) Pharaoh is warned about the upcoming plagues before the Nile turns to blood (7:14-25), and before the frogs come out of the Nile (7:26-8:11). But before the third plague, there is no warning (8:12-15). Why do you think that there was no warning? (This repeats in the 6<sup>th</sup> and the 9<sup>th</sup> plagues.)
- 5) The last plague in this Parasha is hail (9:13-35). It broke the barley and the flax, but not the wheat and the spelt which were not yet ripe. Why do you think that the crops were targeted? Why were some crops spared? What do you expect the Egyptian reaction to be?

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