

Va'era – 5763

Our parsha begins with HaShem speaking to Moses directly and saying that he appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as El Shaddai but not as Adonai. Rashi points out in his commentary on this particular section of the Torah that this is not entirely true. Both Abraham and Jacob called out to Adonai, but HaShem only referred to himself as El Shaddai. There are numerous divrei Torah that expound on and explore the meaning of this difference of opinion on what to make of this naming contradiction. The consensus of opinion that I have discovered so far is that it not the name itself but what it alludes to.

When Abraham and Jacob encounter HaShem and he refers to himself as Adonai, he is referring to the role he is playing in their lives and the lives of their families. However, when HaShem refers to himself that way to Moses he is referring to something completely different. The actual text of the Torah goes on to read: I am the Lord. I will free you from the labours of the Egyptians and deliver you from their bondage. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements. I will take you to be my people and I will be your God. I will bring you into the Land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord.” The narration goes on to say that naturally, the Israelites did not listen and did not believe.

When we read the rest of the parsha it is all about the various plagues and the response of Pharoah and the rest of the Egyptians to them. We read each time that the plagues ONLY affected the Egyptians and did not go into Goshen. We read about how Pharoah hardened his heart and refused time and time again. I found myself noticing this disconnect between how the

parsha begins and how it leads into the narration concerning the events of the ten plagues. Although they seem to be directed at the Egyptians, it seemed to me as I read it this week that there was another audience the events were playing to.

Think about it. Here you have a people who have gone from being the guests of the Pharaoh in appreciation for how Joseph saved his people from starvation and left him with full larders of not just wheat but also coins to a people who admitting have forgotten Joseph and his good deeds. Now their life is bitter and thankless. Along comes someone who they had to have known was one of their own but had been raised a privileged Egyptian singing about a god who was going to save them because of a promise made to ancestors they know nothing about. Somehow or another, while Pharaoh had to be persuaded that they had to be let go, they had to be persuaded that they ought to go.

While I was mulling over all of this in my head, I was thinking about the situation in Europe right now. Putin is like Pharaoh, unwilling to part with Ukraine which he believes is his right to possess. He believes he has the power, and that history is on his side, just like it was with the Tsars that came before him. He had to be shown by the West that he cannot continue under that illusion, no matter what the cost. The Western powers need to come to appreciate why they need to believe in the rightness of the cause of justice and do whatever it takes to win Ukraine back for its people. Every time another plague is visited upon the Ukrainian people in the form of missiles or frontal attacks, they are more convinced that history is on their side, and they need to fight for their place in the sun as independent people.

Getting back to Egypt and the Pharaoh and the Israelites, at the beginning in this week's parsha, the plagues are all about magic and many

scholars have been able to explain using science how the plagues occurred. But to the Israelites, without any such knowledge, first, like the Egyptians, they had to believe it was all magic but that didn't convince them of the existence of Adonai and the place he would have in their lives, never mind allow themselves to leave the security of Egypt and knowing what they had to do to survive, to packing up and following Moses on a trek into the wilderness and the unknown for some "promised land" that they were told about. They had to be convinced that Adonai was indeed the Lord and that he was their Lord. They had to go to a land of many gods brutally appeased to a land where HaShem could not be seen but had to be believed to exist.

The drama we read about today is all about convincing not Moses, not Pharaoh, not the rest of the Egyptians but the Israelites themselves that HaShem exists and that he will fulfill his promise to their forefathers and lead them to the land he swore to them would be theirs. In the introduction to Shemot, Exodus, in our Eitz Chaim chumash, we are reminded that while Genesis is all about the forging of a group of shepherds who happened to believe in one God into a three-generation family worshipping that one god, which Exodus is all about taking that family and forging it into a nation dedicated to the covenant entered into by their founding fathers. What we read today is only the beginning of that journey.

Shabbat Shalom.