

HIDDEN IDENTITY

by Rabbi Label Lam

And G-d spoke to Moshe and said to him; "I am Hashem! I appeared to Avraham to Yitzchak and to Yaakov as El Shaddai, but with My name Hashem I did not make Myself known to them. Moreover, I established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojourning in which they sojourned. (Shemos: 2-4)

Moshe is at the height of frustration. He tried to avoid the task of being the one to take the Jewish People out of Egypt but The Almighty thrust it upon him. Now, not only was his attempt to help thwarted, but his worst fears were realized. His efforts made the situation much worse for the Children of Israel. With negotiations broken down and Moshe the verbally handicapped spokesman having failed so miserably, the situation seems all but helpless and beyond any natural remedy.

At that moment The Almighty reminds Moshe, as mentioned above, that he had dealt with the Patriarchs using a different name and He intends to follow through on his promise that he made to them. How is that the answer, the cure for this deepening crisis? What is the meaning of having related to others with a different name? What is the connection between the different names used and the promise to the forefathers?

Reb Avraham, the Ibn Ezra was a great scholar who lived an extremely austere existence. Often he traveled in self-imposed exile from place to place where he was dependant upon the kindness of strangers. One Friday night after the evening service of receiving the Shabbos, the Ibn Ezra stood humbly in the back of the schul hoping someone would have pity upon him and invite him as a guest for the Shabbos meal. All of the well-to-do members passed him by without notice. When the last person was about to leave he extended Shalom and a warm Shabbos invite to the Ibn Ezra.

At the man's house it was apparent that food was scarce and the man could hardly afford to feed his wife and self, no less a Shabbos guest. All there was to eat was a few small pieces of chicken, a wing and a leg, one for the Friday meal and another for the day meal. There was only a few small rolls for challahs and a few miniature pieces of kugel and barely enough wine to be extended over the Shabbos.

When the spare meal was served on Friday night the Ibn Ezra asked for more to eat but they told him that they wouldn't have enough for tomorrow's meal if they served too much that night. The Ibn Ezra insisted that they had nothing to worry about, that Hashem would help. Reluctantly they served the food, which was completed that night.

The next day in Synagogue the Ibn Ezra came early and planted himself in the Rabbi's velvet lined chaired. People were appalled to see him sitting there but nobody said a word. When the Rabbi entered he took another seat and some people tried to remove him from the Rabbi's place unsuccessfully. After the reading of the Torah, the Ibn Ezra ascended the bima- the platform/stage and started to deliver a profoundly erudite Talmudic discourse. Everyone was astounded that they had misjudged his stature mistaking him for a poor simpleton. They realized that this person, whoever he was actually on a lofty level and might, even be a giant scholar.

Now filled with regret at having mistreated him, the Ibn Ezra was flooded with invitations for the Shabbos meal by some of the most esteemed and prominent members of the community but he declined saying that he would only be eating at his host from the night before. At the afternoon meal, later, they sat before an empty table when a knock came at the door and another and another. People were lined up with food, kugelach, meats, wine, challahs of all types and tastes begging that the great rabbi please partake of their delicacies. The Ibn Ezra and his host ate well that Shabbos and it was as he said Hashem helped.

The same was true for Moshe and the Children of Israel. According to the old system, the regular way in which The Almighty deals with the world, there was no avenue for help. However, the supernatural channels had never been explored or exposed in previous generations, not even to Avraham, Yitzchak or Yaakov. They had never experienced the overtly miraculous. They needed it less to perform. They understood and accepted The Creator, hidden in the cloak of kindliness, through the ordinary life.

The powerful display, namely the process of the ten plagues, would demonstrate the open power of Hashem as he had never been experienced before. Just as in the story of the Ibn Ezra, those who were thoughtful enough to host the great one when his true qualities were hidden, were to merit more than those who needed open proof. The whole paradigm of the status quo changes and the situation can get unstuck when an unexpected value is made known-a single hidden identity.

Good Shabbos!

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