

DIFFERENT NAMES, DIFFERENT NATURES

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"G-d spoke to Moses, and He said to him, 'I am HaShem. And I showed myself to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov, as the A-lmighty G-d, but My name HaShem was not known to them.'" [6:2-3]

What does this mean? The four-letter name of G-d, YHWH, appears many times throughout the Book of Genesis! Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki) explains: the verse does not say "Lo Hodati," I did not tell them, but rather "Lo Nodati," I was not known to them. Obviously our forefathers knew G-d's Name, but as Rashi continues, they were never given the opportunity to recognize G-d's full nature. In what regard? They could not see how reliable and truthful He is, because they never saw Him fulfill the promises He made to them concerning their descendants. When HaShem promises something, it comes to pass! But because they never actually saw this with their own eyes, they could not see for themselves this aspect of His nature - and this is so crucial an element of G-d's nature that this is what defines his name as "HaShem," The Name, YHWH.

There is an immediate lesson there - that if we truly want to emulate G-d, our very first responsibility is to be truthful and keep our word!

At the same time, our Rabbis explained that this didn't represent a deficiency of the forefathers, but a sign of greatness. For as we know, Moshe asked for G-d's name because he said that Israel would ask for it [3:13], and nonetheless the people did not believe Moshe when he said they would be redeemed [6:9]. The Rabbis tell us that G-d said to Moshe, "how terrible is it for something to be lost and not found again! I should mourn for the death of the fathers; several times I revealed Myself to them as the A-lmighty G-d, and they never asked My name, while you asked immediately what to tell Israel."

Again, what does this mean? That the forefathers were willing to place their trust in G-d simply because they knew he was G-d - they did not need to know that He kept his promises; they believed it anyway. If we know that G-d exists, we should immediately recognize that He keeps his promises. If He has promised us that everything we receive is for the best, then whether or not we see it yet, we should understand and accept that this is so.

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The author is the Director of Project Genesis.