

OUR LONG TERM FAMILY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

by Rabbi Berel Wein

The Lord appears to Moshe at the beginning of this week's parsha with a recounting of His relationship with the fathers of Israel, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. The Talmud comments that the Lord, so to speak, complained that it is a sadness and loss that those who were once here and alive are no longer so. This is in connection with Moshe's complaint to God that since the beginning of his mission to Pharaoh and to the enslaved Jews things had gotten far worse instead of improving.

The fathers of Israel never complained in such a fashion when faced with their own many tests and challenges. They fully believed in God's promise that all would somehow turn out well for them and their descendants. Avraham and Yitzchak saw the "place from afar" and even though they would first have to undergo the supreme test of the akeidah - the proposed sacrifice of Yitzchak - they also saw "from afar" the Temple and the redemption of Israel that would take place on that very spot of Mount Moriah.

God always preaches patience and a long term outlook on events. The rabbis preached that the wise person was one who took the long term view of one's actions and is cognizant of how the future will view present behavior and ideals.

Moshe's task in Egypt is not to be fazed by the current rather bleak scene. Rather he himself must be able to see the future which will be better and even more importantly to have the Jewish people share his faith and belief in that better future. Moshe is to be held to the standard of faith of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

It is interesting to note that God appears to Moshe and to the Jewish people always as the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov and not as the Creator of the universe or other attributes that can be used to identify Him. We Jews imitate that type of description in the Amidah prayers that we recite thrice daily by blessing You, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak and the God of Yaakov.

Our connection to God is through our parents, our ancestors, through the founders of our faith and people. Midrash tells us that the voice that spoke to Moshe at the burning bush sounded in Moshe's ears and heart as the voice of his father Amram. As long as Jews feel that the voice of their past is speaking to them even now they will yet have a valid connection to Godliness and holiness.

For so many Jews this ancient and vital chord of memory has been weakened if not even severed. God is therefore no longer a personal presence or factor in their lives. Truly they and we should mourn over "what has been lost and can no longer be found."

The Lord, so to speak, is the storekeeper who has serviced generations of our family granting them credit and sustenance and we are His latest customers applying for further credit from Him on the basis of our long term family relationship with Him. Truly the past lives within us.

Shabat shalom.

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