

Parsha Pearls

Vayeira 5768

And it came to pass after these things that G-d tested Avraham, and He said to him, "Avraham!" And he said, "Here I am." And He said, "Take now your son, your only one, whom you love, Yitzchak, and go to the land of Moriah, and bring him up there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains which I will tell you." (22:1-2)

Throughout this narrative, the Torah uses the name "Elokim" for G-d. But when Avraham takes the knife and prepares to slaughter Yitzchak, and an angel of G-d calls to him to stop, the name "Hashem" is used – the four-letter name which Jews are forbidden to pronounce as written.

The difference in meaning between the various names of G-d is explained by the Ramban on Shemos 6:2. The names Elokim and E-l Shaddai mean that G-d intervenes in human affairs – punishing the wicked and rewarding the righteous – but only within a structure He created called "teva" or nature. He hides Himself so that whatever happens appears to be merely a part of the natural world.

Similarly, the Shulchan Aruch in Orach Chaim 5 says when pronouncing the name "Elokim" one should have in mind that G-d is "strong, all-powerful, the Master of all powers." Calling G-d the Master of all powers implies that there are other powers, i.e. the forces of nature, and He is the master over them. In truth we know that there are no other powers and everything exists only because G-d wills it. But G-d causes the world to follow certain consistent patterns we call nature, in order to make it seem as if there are other powers. Although He acts to reward and punish,

He conceals His action behind the mask of nature.

But the four-letter name "Hashem" - explains the Ramban - signifies the fact that G-d causes (mehaveh) everything to exist, there are no laws of nature, He acts openly and does whatever He wishes. This was the mode of conduct G-d promised to use during the Exodus.

When G-d told Avraham to bring Yitzchak as an offering, it was a time of Divine concealment. Avraham was filled with questions: how could G-d desire human sacrifice? How could G-d tell him to slaughter Yitzchak if G-d had already promised him that a great nation would come out of Yitzchak? But he had faith in G-d and obeyed. Because he passed this supreme trial, Avraham was privileged to see G-d switch to the attribute of Hashem, the attribute of revealing Himself and explaining everything. All his questions were answered.

This trial foreshadows our situation today. G-d told us long ago, "And I will hide My face on that day, because of all the evil that the Jewish people did" (Devarim 31:18). During the exile, G-d hides His face and does not deal with us with open miracles as He did in Scriptural times. And at this final stage

of the exile, G-d has hidden Himself even more by allowing heretics to take control of the destiny of the Jewish people and build a state in the Holy Land, acting as if the exile were over. Amidst this deep darkness and confusion, we are filled with questions,

but G-d wants us to stay strong and faithful until it is over. Then we will be privileged to witness G-d in His role as "Hashem", unbounded by nature, when He will reveal His presence and glory upon us.