

Parashat Shemot - Finding Our Own Burning Bush
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He was all alone for the first time in a very long time. Living in his father-in-law's village, Moses was constantly surrounded by people, young and old. There was little time to think about his problems or the painful past from which he was running. He enjoyed the kindness, the *Chesed* of the Midianites, and he respected the wisdom of his Priestly father-in-law, Yitro. He settled down, got married, and began a career. Moses put the past behind him. Now he was shepherding a herd of goats at the far edge of the wilderness. With nothing but the sound of the wind, and the sounds of the animals to accompany him, he began to think about his enslaved family, and the tremendous suffering he had witnessed in Egypt.

That's when he encountered the Burning Bush. It was just another day in the wilderness when he came upon what should have been an ordinary site: a humble bush, dry and parched by the desert air, burning.

How long had Moses been staring at it, before he realized what an extraordinary sight it was? What made him realize that God was present in this simple phenomenon?

Scholars have tried to interpret the meaning of this strange symbol for many generations. Why did God choose to appear to Moses in a burning bush? After all, this is the God of Sinai, who later spoke to an entire nation amid thunder, lightning, and the sounds of the shofar. This was a God of drama and awesome power. Yet here the Holy One appears to Moses in a *sneh*, in a simple ordinary bush, something that must have appeared everywhere in the wilderness.

There are many different interpretations of the Burning Bush. Was the purpose of this bush to teach us that God appears not only in the exalted, but in the most humble of places? Or was it a symbol of the children of Israel, who faced burning oppression, but would never be consumed? Maybe the Burning Bush was a reminder that, while it was easy to get into Egypt, it was much harder to get out, just as one could place one's hand into the bush but could not extricate it so easily, because the thorns would tear one's flesh.

Yet all of these interpretations seem to miss the point. The point of this episode in the life of Moses is not that the bush appeared to Moses, but that Moses noticed the bush.

How many of us might have seen the Burning Bush, and then walked right on by, never even noticing that God was present in this strange place?

Rabbi Larry Kushner, a prominent Rabbi and author, offers another interpretation of the Burning Bush. He understands the Burning Bush, not as a symbol, but as a test. Is Moses a worthy leader? Does he have the patience, and the vision, to see God in unexpected places? How long would it take him to realize that God was present in this strange place? Would it take three minutes, five minutes, ten minutes, or more? Would Moses stop and look, really look at the Burning Bush?

Most of us would not have the patience to wait long enough to see God in such a place. We are in too much of a rush. We have schedules to keep. We have places to go. Who has time to look for God in the hidden corners of our lives? Yet it is this very

quality that makes Moses a worthy spiritual leader of his people. He had already proven that he was a compassionate and caring human being. Moses had no tolerance for suffering or injustice. When he saw an Egyptian beating a slave, he struck the Taskmaster down and, when he arrived in Midian, he protected the daughters of Yitro from a group of bullies. But compassion was not enough to make Moses a spiritual leader. A leader has to have patience, and must have the vision to see the hidden potential for Holiness in all things, and in all people. Most important of all, Moses proved that he could be present in the moment, in order to see the hidden God around him. The Burning Bush, then, was an appropriate test of Moses' inner spiritual qualities.

This is a test that we all encounter in our lives. God is everywhere. We must find our own Burning Bush. God is present in ordinary, everyday encounters in our daily lives. Do we really see the Holy One? Or are we in such a rush that we do not take the time to really stop and see all the miracles, and God's presence around us?

Each of us has our own Burning Bush. It might be something as dramatic as a sunrise, or as ordinary as a snowstorm. Most likely, our Burning Bush is close by, something, or someone, we encounter every day and every place, which we hardly notice. It might be a person sitting next to us in synagogue this morning, or the person we meet in the supermarket. Is it your fellow member of Women's League? Do we see the miracle in their eyes? Do we hear the voice of God in their voice? Are we willing to acknowledge the miracle of life, and the presence of God in them?

God is not only in the extraordinary, but also in the ordinary (yet we often fail to notice this).

Let us take this one step further. It is not that God was especially present in the Burning Bush. It is that Moses chose to really look at it. God was always present in the Burning Bush. What is extraordinary is that Moses chose to really look at it.

It is up to each and every one of us to find the divine sparks in all things, and in all people, and to free them by acknowledging these things, these people, these divine sparks.

A piece of bread, or an apple, the car we drive, the streets we drive on, the tree standing in front of our home, bare of leaves during the cold winter: these can be our Burning Bushes. There's nothing extraordinary about them - it's how we see them.

So I ask you: Have you seen God today? Have you seen a Burning Bush today? Where is your Burning Bush? Who is your Burning Bush?

Let us all slow down long enough to see God, and hear God's voice, in our daily life. Religion does not only teach us what to do, but how to see the things that really matter in our daily lives.

Some of the most important people, and groups that matter in our daily lives, are the women who compose our Sisterhood, who are here today to celebrate Women's League Shabbat.

Before you leave this morning - sit back and take a deep breath, and ask yourself: Is it possible that I am in the presence of God, and do not even know it? Look around and you will be amazed at what you find!

Shabbat Shalom!