

Sermon by Rabbi Eliezer Hirsch - Vaeira 21 “A Step Back”

Gut Shabbos. Shabbat Shalom. First, I'd like to thank Monica and Rob Drowos for sponsoring Thursday's Parsha class. Thank you!

I also want to thank everyone who attended our Mekor membership meeting on Sunday. We especially appreciated the positive feedback from members, both during and after the meeting, who hadn't realized how much we accomplished over the past year, despite Covid. I think that's an important benefit of holding an annual meeting – it's a unique opportunity to see the big picture. As we proceed through daily life, it's tempting sometimes to focus on the problematic details. But when we step back and see things in perspective, we often end up with a more positive assessment.

That's exactly the dynamic we see at the beginning of this week's parsha. Last week's parsha finds Moshe complaining to God that He failed to save the Jews. But in this week's narrative, instead of getting to the business of saving us, God takes a step back to explain how things have changed since the time of our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He says that He appeared to them with the name *El Shaddai*, but he did not make Himself known to them with His primary name that He revealed during the Exodus

– the name YHVH, which means *He is, always was and always will be*; the name that reminds us that God is directly involved in our history. As we've explained before, the specific word for *made known to us* is *daat*, which means much more than simply knowing facts. God isn't simply making things known to us during the Exodus; He is giving us *daat*. The word *daat* connotes the kind of learning that can only stem from direct experience. Our forefathers had not experienced the history that awaited the Jewish people, so God could not truly make certain ideas fully known to them until their offspring lived through the events of the Exodus. For example, the concept of *daat* specifically refers to Abraham's question, *Bameh Eda, How will I know*, from the word *daat, that the land of Israel will be mine?* As the Sforno, the Radak and others explain, Avraham meant to ask, *How do I know that my grandchildren will stay on the right path and truly inherit Israel from me?* We read God's reply in our Parsha repeated in the Haggadah – *Yadoa Tedah, You will surely know, for they will become strangers in a strange land*. In other words, your offspring will be completely separated from Me, My Torah, from you, Avraham, and your teachings, and they will still end up back in the land of Israel.

And that's the only way to know, to have *daat*, to have experiential knowledge, that the land of Israel is truly our inheritance.

Beginning with our exile in Egypt and throughout the other exiles as well, including our own, we've sometimes been alienated from God and the teachings of Avraham, but we have still ended up connected to the land of Israel. More than any other generation, ours has this *daat*, the deep understanding that comes from experience, because we have lived to see God's promise fulfilled to a greater extent than any other time in history. It's easy to become mired in the negativity of exile, but sometimes we need to take a step back to gain a wider perspective and appreciate how far we've come.

No question, day to day life can be discouraging. But when we consider the arc of our own lives and the saga of Jewish history, it's remarkable to see the strides we've made and how much we've accomplished. In my book *Bringing Order to the Seder*, I explain that the point of the seder is the point we see in our parsha: to see the big picture and realize that we are a living miracle. We must resist the tendency to focus only on our day-to-day frustrations and try to see that overall, we have much to be thankful for. If keep that perspective, not only will we end up where we are supposed to, we will do so with understanding and fulfillment. Shabbat shalom.