

Today I'll be speaking about my Torah portion, Exodus 33:12 through 34:26, which is a special section of Torah we read twice a year, including on the holiday of Sukkot, which we are now celebrating. In this section, Moses has been getting curious about God. He's wondering... If God is pleased with him for leading the Israelites, like he says he is, then shouldn't God do something for him in return? So Moses asks if God will show him God's glory so that he can see God and get confirmation that God even exists at all. God honors his request and places Moses in the crack of a large rock, explaining that no one can see God's face and live, so God will place God's hand over the crack of the rock, and when God lifts it, Moses will see his back, but he will not see God's face.

During my time with Rabbi Bressler, some very insightful questions arose, questions like What is the importance of God, and Why is it hard to believe in things we can't see. Some of them sadly don't contain answers; I'll do my best to share my personal thoughts on them. Why would Moses even want to see God in the first place? I found myself asking this question a lot as I wrote this speech. Maybe it was to feel special and to see himself as the true leader of the Israelites, or maybe it was because he simply wanted to know. In my opinion, Moses is getting a little rebellious. He really would follow whatever God says, but now he's looking for some proof.

How does Moses or any of us, for that matter, know God is real if we can't even see God? It's hard to believe in something you can't see. If I couldn't see somebody and just heard a voice, that would be hard for me, too. If I had been chosen like Moses was, maybe I would just believe and listen to the voice, but eventually I would have questions. Moses wants to see God as proof, proof that he's not crazy and that God is really there, that his whole journey with the Israelites wasn't just because a voice told him to, but because God told him to.

This leads us into my next question: What even is this voice that Moses says he hears? Obviously, it's God talking to him, but how is he receiving this information that God is giving him? In their first encounter, God "spoke" to Moses through the well-known burning bush, a bush that was engulfed in flames yet somehow not consumed, and by the time my torah portion is happening, it seems like Moses can just summon God for a quick chat whenever he feels like it. And this got me thinking, what if Moses isn't as special as we think, and God speaks to all of us, but he speaks to all of us differently? For some, God may speak through visions, others through dreams, and maybe some people are actually able to hear God speak with literal words.

My final question is, What is God? This may just be the single hardest question to answer ever. And I think that's because there is no one right answer since it's all up to how people perceive their version of God. God is thought of a lot as a man in the sky with humanoid features and the divine power to shape all of humanity, as He sees fit, but I personally disagree with this description. I used to see God as a physical thing but now, as I've gotten older, I've realized that God can't be a "thing" because he's not describable to anyone on earth. Every single religion tries to shape God into this comprehensible deity in some way, shape or form but that's simply to get a better grasp on what God is even though we don't know what he is. All we can do is feel what we each think God is. The words to describe God don't exist,, which reminds of a quote by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein that my English teacher told me at the beginning of the school year. "The limits of my language are the limits of my mind; all I know is what I have words for." God is a feeling - we feel God's presence within us, and we feel God affecting our life's events. We feel God telling us to do what's right, just like Moses felt God telling him to free the Israelites. But what if these interactions between Moses and God were just Moses listening to his own internal thoughts and desires.

Moses made it sound like someone was commanding him to do this, and that's why he was so eager to see him, because until he had maybe Moses just felt God. Maybe it was all Moses.

A good example of this is how my parents and I think about God. If my dad or I really wanted something to happen, we'd pray to God and ask him to help make that thing happen. My Mom however likes to manifest which is where she tells herself that thing is gonna happen and pretty much convinces herself that there is nothing stopping her from achieving what she wants. Maybe manifestation is my Mom's version of God, maybe it was Moses's too.

What I want you to take away from this Dvar Torah is we can shape our version of God to be whatever we want it to be since there isn't and never will be a right or wrong answer. We all feel God differently and react to that feeling differently, we can turn God into whatever we want but you won't be able to convince anyone that your version is the true one, because that's the thing about God, it's indescribable and you can't describe something with no description.

Shabbat Shalom!!!!