Vayishlach

The Three Ways to Describe Hashem

In Parshat Vayishlach, we read how Yaakov dedicated an altar, and he called it:

"קֵל אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל"
"God, who is the God of Israel."

Rabbi Shapiro of Lublin contrasts this with the way in which Avraham described Hashem. Avraham said of Hashem:

"קֵל עוֹלָם"
"God of the entire universe."

But then there is a third description of Hashem. It's the description He gives to Himself, how He introduces Himself at the beginning of the Ten Commandments in Parshat Yitro:

"אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ"
"I am the Lord your God"

"Your" is in the singular. So, there are three different ways to describe the presence of Hashem. And each of these ways reflects the responsibility that we have.

First of all, I have a responsibility to myself, because Hashem declares that "אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ". He is my personal God, and therefore, in every way I conduct myself, my actions should reflect my awareness of Hashem's existence.

Secondly, He is "קֵל אֱלֹקֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל". Hashem is the God of my people, and that therefore means that I have a responsibility to my people through all of my actions and the support and the contribution I give to them.

But thirdly, Hashem is also "קֵל עוֹלָם". He's the God of the universe, and consequently I have a responsibility to the whole world, to all the people in the world and to the planet itself, in terms of its future viability.

So therefore, how do we describe Hashem? He's my God. He's the God of my people. He's the God of the world.

And that needs to be reflected every day, through every one of our actions.

Shabbat Shalom.

This is a transcript of a video, which is available to view via chiefrabbi.org/dvar-torah