

Dear Chavraya,

It was a mid-summer's evening. I was about ten years old, free from school, free from care. I was sitting on a hillside above the ocean with a friend and classmate who lived two houses away from me. He was Roman Catholic and attended church regularly. His name was also Victor, as was his father's, though he was called Butch or Butchie. Sitting on that hillside looking westward we watched the sun as it prepared to set, a brilliant red ball touching all of heaven and earth with its hue. We sat in silence. I don't remember which one of us finally put into words the pure theological question that formed in the innocence and shared wonder of that stillness. In any case, one of us finally asked, "what do you think God is?"

We sat on that hillside until long after the sun had set, parental voices finally intruding upon our theological speculation, the calling of our own names breaking the stillness. By the time we got up and dusted off the seats of our pants and began the downhill hike home we had agreed that God was in that sunset, that God had something to do with the daily drama that we had been privileged to witness. Was God the sun itself? Was God the light, or the quiet darkness that now enveloped us, or the warmth, or the unspoken feelings that welled within us while sitting there? Could you actually see God? Those were questions for other summer evenings, questions to evolve through the days and nights and seasons of our lives. As I continue to wonder about God, I treasure the innocence of those first musings, of those early "God memories." However more "sophisticated" my adult awareness of God is, there was in that moment of childhood wonder an encounter with the divine Presence, delicious for its freshness even in recollection, that transcends time and continues to speak to me.

What are your "God memories?" It is a pleasant and at times cathartic journey to look back at those early musings. Over the course of our lives, our understanding of God changes according to our life stages and needs at a given time. We become aware of aspects and qualities of God at one stage that we weren't aware of at an earlier time. It is not that God changes, rather changes within our selves and the nature of our experience of life allow for new perceptions that weren't possible before. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Va'era*, God, in effect, explains this to Moses. God says, "I am God, [and was so] even when I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov as *El Shaddai* but had not become known to them as that which My name *Yud Hey Vav Hey* implies." *El Shaddai* can be translated as "God of the breast." Abraham and Sarah's need is for children. From out of their own yearning, they seek to know the nurturing aspect of God, God of breast and womb. To Moses, God is revealed through the meaning God's name, *Yud Hey Vav Hey*. Known as the *Shem Havaya*, the *Name of Existence* or *Being*, the letters of God's most holy name are the letters of the verb to be. Neither masculine nor feminine, noun as verb, verb as noun, it is God's name of Being and Becoming. Moses' need is to know that the former slaves he is leading will become a people and will exist among the nations. As our people emerge through the desert journey, it is a model for our own becoming. As our understanding and awareness of God varies for us as a people through time, as it

did from Abraham to Moses, so it does for each of us over the years of our own lives.

Seeking to understand our own personal spiritual journeys and emotional make-up and to know God and our selves anew at each stage along the way, we look back and remember those first musings about God. From these early stirrings of awareness emerge a life long relationship, dynamic and ever becoming. When I wonder about God, I often find myself drifting back and recalling two young boys on a hillside, a summer evening, and the setting sun. What do you recall?

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor