

Afterthoughts

- Yocheved Bienenfeld

MA NORA HAMAKOM HAZEH / VE'EZUZ NOR'OTCHA YOMEIRU

The most famous descriptions of Gd are probably GADOL, GIBOR, and NORA. There are various definitions of these characteristics. One of the definitions of NORA is that it is a combination of GADOL - CHESSED, and GIBOR - DIN, judgment. Regarding Gd, it means that He is 100% GADOL - giving and full of CHESSED, at the same time that He is 100% GIBOR - holding back, the trait of DIN. Of course, to us, this seems impossible - to be completely each of these things - and so we say in the Shemoneh Esrei after these descriptions, KEIL ELYON, which means He is above our understanding and we cannot really fathom how He functions.

There is another meaning of NORA that adds meaning to part of my davening. This understanding is that NORA refers to the presence of the Shechina in the ARON in the Beit HaMikdash (see Mima'amakim on Parshat B'ha'alot'cha; p.144-148). [Not so coincidentally, NORA spelled backwards is ARON]. The fact that Gd wants an ARON on earth, the fact

that His presence is in the ARON, tells us that NORA implies a connection between heaven and earth. When Ya'akov has his dream of the ladder connecting heaven and earth, he describes it as MAH NORA... How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of Gd and this is the gate of the heavens. This tells us that the characteristic of NORA has to do with the connection of that which is heavenly with that which is earthly. Gd 'restricted', as it were, His heavenly aspect to allow Himself to be revealed in the lower world, on earth. This same connection that Ya'akov witnessed is expressed in the giving of the heavenly Torah to the Jews on earth many years later. [Interesting: the 'gimatriya' of SULAM (ladder) equals that of SINAI, 130].

This idea of the awareness of the presence of Gd here on earth can be seen from what the gemara tells us about this word. In discussing the greatness of the Men of the Great Assembly, it refers to their having reintroduced the characteristic of NORA into the description of Gd, when composing the Shemoneh Esrei. Previously, the prophet Yirmiyahu referred to Him only as GADOL and GIBOR, feeling that he couldn't use NORA to describe Gd when goyim were prancing through

the Beit HaMikdash. And the reasoning behind the return of the word NORA to the description was: "were it not for this 'fear' (attribute of NORA) of Gd, how could one nation (Israel) continue to exist among the nations? (Yuma 69:2). The continued existence of Israel, of the Jewish people alone among the nations of the world is a result of Gd's attribute of NORA - His clear presence here on earth. In addition, all that Israel does to spread the knowledge of Gd and to succeed, despite the exile, all increases Gd's being known as NORA in the world. And this was the role of the ARON with the presence of the Shechina on it - to pronounce Gd's involvement in this world.

Given this, I choose to understand a phrase in ASHREI in an additional way: VE'EZUZ NOR'OTTECHA YOMEIRU - when the nations of the world talk of Gd's being NORA, it is a sign that Gd is being GADOL - good to the Jewish people and having mercy on them, helping them to survive among the nations. Therefore, when the world's nations talk of this power of nora, then UGDULAT'CHA ASAP'RENA - I will tell of His goodness to us, the people of Israel.