



אהיה אשר אהיה I Will Be What I Will Be

■ Who Am I?

In general, as is known, each of the five books of the Torah is named after its first or second word. The Book of Sh'mot, which means "Names," is no exception. Its first verse is:

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִם...

*These are the names of the Children
of Israel who came to Egypt...* (Sh'mot 1,1)

In truth, however, the "names of Israel" is not the only reason it is called Sh'mot – for they are not the only names mentioned in the book. The "Name of the G-d of Israel" is revealed here, performing miracles and wonders. And Israel itself, the family of Yaakov Avinu, is also revealed in the Book of Sh'mot with its new name: The Nation of Israel.

This second volume of the Pentateuch affords us the opportunity to observe, study, and marvel at the dialogue taking place between G-d and His great emissary, Moshe Rabbeinu, the Master of Prophets. The Gemara in Rosh HaShanah (p. 21b) tells us:

Fifty gates of wisdom were created in the world, and all of them except one were given to Moshe. As is written: "You have withheld from him only a little of the Divine." (Psalms 8,6)

What is the concept of "gates of wisdom"? On the face of it, it refers to "openings for understanding;" there are 50 of them, in that everything can be understood from 50 different angles – but every person must strive to reach the single one that is the truth. This tells us that to truly understand a concept, we must ask 49 different questions, so as to negate all the possible wrong understandings and leave only the correct one.

We also find the number 50 when we count both the Omer and the Jubilee (Yovel) cycles. At the root of this number in both instances is seven sevens: the Omer is seven weeks of seven days each, capped off by the 50th day, Shavuot. And the Yovel counting is also seven Shemittah cycles of seven years each, topped up by Year 50, the Jubilee itself.

Based on this, we can say: In order to understand something correctly, we must ask seven main questions, each of which contains variations of all the other ones in miniature. This concept is found in the Mishna in Sanhedrin (page 40a), which teaches: “The judges would check the witnesses with seven types of investigation...” The reliability of the witnesses is ascertained by asking them seven types of questions.

Equipped with this introduction, we can understand what our Sages (Chazal) meant when they taught that Moshe was privileged to receive 49 of the 50 gates of wisdom – that is, seven times seven. For the Torah tells us about Moshe:

לֹא כֵן עַבְדִּי מֹשֶׁה, בְּכָל בֵּיתִי נֶאֱמָן הוּא.

*My servant Moshe is different;
he is trusted throughout My house.* (Bamidbar 12,7)

That is to say, Moshe Rabbeinu knew Hashem’s precise intention in every Divine command. He knew how to ask the “seven types of investigations” so as to truly internalize G-d’s meaning and intent. When Hashem first spoke to Moshe at the Burning Bush and instructed him to rescue Israel from the Egyptians, Moshe responded by seemingly bothering Him with all sorts of questions and objections. But in truth, Moshe was simply clarifying, from seven different angles, what was to be his precise mission. When we count Moshe’s questions (Sh’mot, Chapters 3 and 4), we will see that there were five spoken questions and two “hidden” questions, for a total of seven.

Let us analyze this unique dialogue and seek the axis around which it revolves, and we will see how G-d answers each of Moshe’s questions, and thus prepares him for his historic and crucial mission. Moshe’s first question is this: “*Who am I that I would go to Pharaoh? And can I truly take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt?*” (3,11)

At first glance, Moshe appears to be asking innocently: “Who am I, what am I? What do You see in me that You think I can be Your emissary to approach the powerful King of Egypt? I see no special traits in myself that put me above anyone else, so why have I been chosen for such a difficult and complex assignment?”

Moshe's query can essentially be expressed this way: "What is the precise nature of this mission that, in Your eyes, makes *me* the only person who can carry it out?"

In response, we expect G-d to say that the traits of loyalty and humility, in which Moshe particularly excelled, precisely meet the requirements for the job. But Hashem pointedly does not take this approach and does not specify Moshe's positive traits. Instead, G-d says that whatever Moshe is missing, He will fill in! "It doesn't matter what traits you have and which ones you lack," Hashem says, "for '*I will be with you*' (verse 12) and I will help you."

Hashem does not explain why He chose Moshe for the job, nor why he of all people will receive such close Divine providence and help. But He does add another point:

וְזֶה לָךְ הָאוֹת כִּי אֶנִּי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ...

This will be the sign for you that I have sent you: When you take the nation out of Egypt, you [plural] will serve G-d on this mountain. (verse 12)

This add-on is not clear. For one thing, Moshe never asked for a sign. And even if he had asked for one, what kind of sign is it that will only come true more than a year later? Is Moshe expected to convince the people to believe in him and his mission with signs like that?! Later on, in fact, when Moshe *does* ask for a sign (beginning of Chapter 4), Hashem provides him with some convincing, immediate signs. What is the value of this sign that will take place only much later?

This is not our only difficulty with this passage. Immediately after Hashem says that He will be with Moshe and that Israel will serve G-d on this mountain, Moshe raises his second question/objection (verse 13): "Let's say I go to Israel and tell them that You have sent me – but *they will ask me, 'What is His Name?' - what shall I answer them?*"

The Divine response is three enigmatic words: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, "*I will be what I will be*" (verse 14) - as if to say: "It doesn't matter what My Name is; I will be what I will be."

A very strange exchange indeed! Moshe asks G-d, "Who am I?", and Hashem responds, "It doesn't matter, I will be with you." Moshe then asks, "Who are You?" and again He replies, "It doesn't matter." How are we to understand such an odd conversation?

These questions pave the way for us to reveal a new approach.

■ Who Are You?

Let us compare G-d's appearance to Moshe here, with His revelation to Avraham Avinu at the *Brit Bein HaBetarim* (Covenant Between the Pieces). On the latter occasion, G-d identified Himself by name: the *Havayah* Name, spelled *yud*, *keh* (*heh*), *vuv*, and *heh*:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים...

He said to him: "I am G-d Who took you out of Ur Kasdim..." (B'reshit 15,7)

And in another prophecy to Avraham, Hashem reveals Himself with the Name of E-l Sha-dai: *"I am E-l Sha-dai; walk before Me and be complete"* (17,1)

However, when Hashem appears to Moshe, He uses no name at all:

וַיֹּאמֶר: אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ, אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב.

G-d said, "I, anochi, am the G-d of your father, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov." (Sh'mot 3,6)

Who is *anochi*, "I"? This is exactly what Moshe asks:

מִי אֲנֹכִי כִּי אֵלֶיךָ אֶל פָּרְעֹה?

Who am I, anochi, that I should go to Pharaoh? (verse 11)

According to the customary translation, Moshe is asking, "Who am I?" However, let us explain it differently. Moshe is saying, "Who are **you**? You identified Yourself as *anochi* - Who is this *anochi* that is talking to me and sending me to Pharaoh? What is His name?" He explains this question again two verses later: *"They will ask me, 'What is His name?'"*

Hashem's answer is: כִּי אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ, *"For I will be, eh'yeh, with you"* (verse 12). We must punctuate this Divine response as follows: *"For 'I will be' is with you"* – meaning, "He Who is now with you and talking with you, His Name is 'I will be.'"

Moshe does not understand this answer, and turns to G-d again and says (verse 13): *"They will ask me His name; what will I answer them?"* That is: "Perhaps I did not make myself clear, so I will ask it differently. Let's say I go to the Israelites and present You to them exactly as You told me: 'The G-d

of your fathers,' without identifying You further. They will then ask me what Your name is. What exactly am I to tell them?"

G-d repeats His answer, but with added explanation: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה *"I will be (eh'yeh) what I will be (asher eh'yeh)."* (This is the customary translation of verse 14.)

In contrast with this translation, however, we will explain that what G-d is saying is this: "I repeat: He who is talking to you is *eh'yeh*. However, I am now adding an explanation: *asher eh'yeh*. That is, I am *eh'yeh*, *Who will be in the future.*"

Something is still missing, and Moshe is still confused: "Hashem will be in the future?! Isn't G-d past, present and future all in one?" And furthermore: Even if this answers Moshe's question as to "Who is this *anochi?*", it still does not tell him what to tell Bnei Yisrael!

This is in fact the first hidden question of which we spoke above; Hashem answers before Moshe gets the chance to ask: *"Tell Bnei Yisrael: Eh'yeh has sent me to you"* (verse 14). That is, "Tell them exactly what I told you: My Name is *Eh'yeh*."

But Moshe, who insists on knowing his mission perfectly, is still not satisfied, because he knows that Bnei Yisrael will not accept this answer and will continue to ask questions. Again, Hashem sees Moshe's second hidden question, and adds further explanation: *"Tell Bnei Yisrael as follows: Hashem (the Havayah Name), the G-d of your forefathers... has sent me to you. This is My Name forever, and this is My remembrance for every generation."* (verse 15)

Here, finally, G-d instructs Moshe to identify Him to Israel via the Divine *Havayah* Name.

There seems to be a contradiction here, however. Hashem had just told Moshe to identify Him with the name *eh'yeh* - and now He tells him to say ***Hashem*** (*Havayah*) *the G-d of your forefathers... has sent me to you!*

But this is precisely the secret. We must combine the two answers together, giving G-d's name both as *eh'yeh* and *Hashem the G-d of your fathers*. G-d is telling Moshe: "My name is Hashem – but I am not yet 'Hashem your G-d.' I am 'Hashem the G-d of your forefathers.' In the future, I will be 'Hashem your G-d.'"

What is the profound message that is hiding here?

■ Hashem, the G-d of Israel

Hashem designates His holy Name only upon those who accept upon themselves His G-dliness. Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov accepted Hashem absolutely as their G-d, and therefore He is called “the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.” But Israel has not yet done so, and therefore He is not yet known as “Hashem the G-d of Israel.”

Hashem reveals Himself to Moshe and informs him: “My name is Hashem (*Havayah*), and I am eternal – past, present and future. However, in the future I will be G-d of Israel – and you will be the vehicle by which this will occur.”

And so the explanation of *eh'yeh*, which literally means “I will be,” is this: “I will, in the future, be your G-d. But it is dependent on your consent, your acceptance of Me as your G-d, and your willingness to serve Me. *And here is a sign for you that I have sent you: [Israel] will serve me on this mountain* (verse 12).”

Note that Hashem says that the sign is for Moshe, not for Israel! “To them, I will give other signs, signs that take place immediately. But for you, Moshe, you must know that when you take Israel out of Egypt, the nation will worship Me here, at this place and on this mountain. That will show you the truth of what I am telling you now – that I will be Israel’s G-d *in the future* when they accept My path and laws.”

Let us see the verse again: “*When you take the nation out of Egypt, you [plural] will serve G-d on this mountain.*” It means: “When you serve Me on this mountain, at that point I will be your G-d. But in the meantime, I am – *eh'yeh*.”

Hashem gives this same message to Israel at Mt. Sinai:

וְעַתָּה אִם שָׁמוֹעַ תִּשְׁמָעוּ בְּקוֹלִי וּשְׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת בְּרִיתִי וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סֹגְלָה מִכָּל
הָעַמִּים כִּי לִי כָל הָאָרֶץ. וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ לִי מִמְּלֶכֶת כְּהֹנִים וְגוֹי קָדוֹשׁ...

*And now, if you obey Me and keep My covenant,
you shall be to Me a treasure among all the peoples, for the
entire earth is Mine. And you shall be to Me a kingdom of
princes and a holy nation...* (Sh'mot 19,5-6)

Hashem is telling Israel: “If You accept Me upon yourselves as G-d, I promise you three things:

1. You will be My most precious and treasured nation among all the others.
2. You will be raised up to a kingdom of priests.
3. You will be exalted as a holy and unique nation.

What is their response to this offer? *“The entire nation answered together and said: ‘All that Hashem has said, we will do’”* (verse 8). Israel’s acceptance of Hashem as their G-d leads directly to the declaration of the first of the Ten Commandments, which begins with these words:

אֲנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים.

*I am Hashem your G-d, Who took you out
of the land of Egypt. (20,2)*

Hashem is saying: “Now that you are no longer slaves in Egypt, and have taken upon yourselves to be servants to Hashem, *I am Hashem your G-d*. That which I said before regarding the future – *I am ‘I will be’ - eh’yeh* – has now been fulfilled.”

And this happened at the very spot of the Burning Bush, where G-d had told Moshe that Israel will worship G-d *on this mountain*. The *sneh* (bush) has turned into *Sinai*.

■ My Name Forever

This dialogue between Hashem and Moshe, which revolves around the clarification of G-d’s Name, ends with this Divine summation: *This is My Name forever, and this is My remembrance for all generations*. (Sh’mot 3,15)

The reference is ostensibly to the G-d’s eternal *Havayah* Name, and to the *Adnut* Name, Ado-nai, which we recite throughout the generations.

However, if we delve deeper we will discover that the Divine Name referred to in this verse is actually the three-word phrase *ani Hashem elokeichem, “I am Hashem your G-d.”* That is to say, the name of G-d that is uniquely proclaimed upon His nation Israel will stand forever. This declaration is of utmost importance and significance, and its validity is eternal. It means that the Nation of Israel will be G-d’s People forever, and Hashem will similarly ever be our G-d.

As such, the verse must be understood as follows:

I declare: *This is My name forever* – I am Hashem your G-d; *and this is my remembrance for all generations* – you are to declare “You are Hashem our G-d.”

Whenever we recite a blessing, we begin with the words *Barukh atah Hashem Elokeinu*, meaning, “You, Hashem our G-d, are the source of blessing...” This is a clear acknowledgement and thanks to G-d for having chosen us to be His eternal nation. This secret is revealed to us by none other than King David in his Psalms:

הַלְלוּ יְיָ הַלְלוּ אֶת שֵׁם ה' הַלְלוּ עַבְדֵי ה'.

Praise G-d, Praise G-d's name,

Praise o you servants of G-d. (Tehillim 135,1)

What are we praising? Verse 4 in this Psalm tells us: *For G-d chose Yaakov for Himself, Israel for His treasure.* The praise is for the fact of G-d's having chosen the Nation of Israel to be His treasured people – despite His exaltedness over this entire world and all worlds, and that He could have chosen any other entity in the universe over which to proclaim His Name. Later on in the chapter, David states:

ה' שְׁמֶךָ לְעוֹלָם ה' זְכֶרְךָ לְדֹר וָדֹר.

O Lord, Your name is eternal;

O Lord, Your remembrance is throughout all generations. (verse 13)

The secret is now revealed. This verse is actually a quote from Hashem's words to Moshe: “*This is My name forever, and this is My remembrance for all generations.*” This is the proclamation that Moshe so eagerly and anxiously awaited – and it was with this treasure, more precious than anything else, that he came to redeem Bnei Yisrael.

