

5785 - Exodus 1:1-6:1 - Sh'mot (Names)

THE ESSENCE OF EXISTENCE¹

I shall be that which I shall be. (Exodus 3:14)

I was with you in your present distress, and I shall be with you in future exiles and persecutions. (Talmud, Berachot 9b)

When G-d appeared to Moses in the burning bush and charged him with the mission to take the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses said to the Almighty:

Here I will come to the Children of Israel and say to them, "The G-d of your fathers has sent me to you," and they will say: "What is his name?" What shall I say to them? (Exo 3:13)

G-d replied:

I shall be that which I shall be ... Say to the Children of Israel, "Eh'hehyeh ('I Shall Be') has sent me to you. (Exo 3:14)

What is the meaning of this enigmatic exchange?

AN ANONYMOUS G-D

To name something is to describe and define it. It therefore follows that G-d, who is infinite and undefinable, cannot be named. Indeed, G-d has no name, **only names-descriptions of the various behavior patterns that can be ascribed to G-d's influence** on our lives. In the words of the Midrash,

G-d said to Moses: "You want to know My name? I am called by My deeds. I might be called El Shadai, or Tzeva'ot, or Elokin, or Havayah. When I judge My creations, I am called Elokim. When I wage war on the wicked, I am called Tzeva'ot. When I tolerate the sins of man, I am called El Shadai. When I have compassion on My world, I am called Havayah"⁽³⁾

Therein lies the deeper significance of the question that Moses anticipated from the Children of Israel.

"What is His name? they were sure to ask. What type of behavior are we seeing on the part of G-d in these times? You say that G-d has seen the suffering of His people in Egypt, that He has heard their cries and knows their pain and has therefore sent you to redeem us. (Exo 3:7-10) Where was G-d until now? Where was He for the eighty-six years that we are languishing under the slave driver's whip, that our babies are being torn from their mothers' arms and cast into the Nile, that Pharaoh is bathing in the blood of Hebrew children? What "name" is G-d now assum-

ing, after all these years that He has apparently been nameless and aloof from our lives?"

G-DLY BUT NOT HOLY

As explained above, each of the divine "names" describes another of **the attributes by which G-d has chosen to relate to His creation**: *Elokim* describes G-d's assumption of the attribute of justice, *Havayah* denotes G-d's assumption of the attribute of compassion, and so on. *Eh'hehyeh* ("I shall be"), the name by which G-d here identifies Himself to Moses, denotes G-d's assumption of being and existence.

This is why there is some question as to whether the name *Eh'hehyeh* should be counted among the "seven holy names of G-d." Torah law forbids erasing or defacing G-d's name, as the very ink and paper (or other medium) upon which it is inscribed assumes a holiness by virtue of its representation of something that relates to the Divine.⁽⁵⁾ While there are many names and adjectives that describe G-d's many-faceted involvement with His creation, there are seven primary divine names to which the strictest provisions of this law apply. Yet despite the fact that *Eh'hehyeh* is considered the loftiest of divine names,⁽⁶⁾ it is not included in certain versions of the seven-name list as it appears in the Talmud and the halachic authorities. Indeed, the final halachic conclusion is that it is not one of the "seven holy names."⁽⁷⁾

The reason for this paradox is best understood by understanding the meaning of the term "holiness." What makes something holy? The term *kadosh* (Hebrew for "holy") means "transcendent" and "apart." G-d is holy, as He transcends our earthly reality; Shabbat is a holy day, because it is a day of withdrawal from the mundane labors of the everyday; a Torah scroll or a pair of *tefilin* are holy because these are objects that have been set apart to serve a G-dly end.

The same applies to the seven holy divine names. Each of these names describes a divine activity that goes beyond the mundane norm, a divine intervention in reality-G-d as ruler, G-d as judge, G-d as provider, G-d as savior, etc. *Eh'hehyeh*, on the other hand, is G-d as being-G-d as the essence of reality⁽⁸⁾ So *Eh'hehyeh* is beyond "holiness." If holiness is a feature of G-d's transcendence, the beingness of G-d transcends holiness itself, describing a dimension of divine reality that pervades every existence even as it transcends it, and thus relates equally to them all, "holy" and "mundane" alike.

(Nevertheless, *Eh'hehyeh* is a name—that is, an assumed "behavior pattern"—of G-d's. The very phenomenon of "existence" is part and parcel of G-d's creation, and G-d certainly cannot be defined by something He created. Ultimately, G-d can be described as a "being" or "existence" only in the sense that we speak of Him as a "provider" or "ruler." These are

¹ Yanki Tauber, *The Inside Story, Exodus* (Meaningful Life Center), pp. 16-20.

mere "names," describing not G-d's essence but a certain perception that G-d allows us to have of Him by affecting our reality in a certain manner.)

THE ANSWER

This was G-d's answer to the people's outcry, "What is His name?!" Tell the Children of Israel, said G-d to Moses, that My name is *Eh'hehyeh*. Where was I all these years? With you. I am being, I am existence, I am reality. I am the groan of a beaten slave, the wail of a bereaved mother, the spilled blood of a murdered child. **Certain things must be, no matter how painful and incomprehensible to your human selves, in order that great things—infinately great and blissful things—should be.** But I do not orchestrate these things from some distant heaven, "holy" and removed from your existential pain. I was there with you, and I shall be there with you, suffering with you, praying for redemption together with you.

If you cannot see Me, it is not for My ethereality²; it is because I am so real.

(3) Midrash Rabbah, Shemot 3:6.

(5) This is why the word G-d" and other divine names are written with a hyphen breaking up the letters and/or with a letter substituted or some other alteration (e.g. substituting a "k" for an "h" in *Elokim* or transfiguring the four letters *Y-H-V-H* as *Havayah*). Were a divine name to be spelled precisely, anyone destroying or disposing of the page on which it is printed would be violating a severe halachic prohibition.

(6) See *Zohar* 3:11a; *Sefer Ho'arochim Chabad*, vol. I, pp. 645-649.

(7) See Talmud, *Shevuot* 35, and *Dikdukei Sofrim*, ad loc.; *Misbneh Torah, Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah*, 6:2; ad loc., Venice 1524 and Venice 1540 editions; *Kesef Mishneh* commentary on *Misbneh Torah*, ad loc., *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 276:9.

(8) *Guide for the Perplexed*, 1:62; Ralbag and Abarbanel on Exodus 3: *Ikarim* 2:27; et al. See also *Gevurot Hashem*, end of chapter 25.

(9) See Rashi, Exodus 3:2: "G-d revealed Himself to Moses in a thornbush, and not some other tree, to emphasize that He is together with [Israel] in their affliction" Also see *Midrash Rabbah, Shemot* 2:9: "Why from a thornbush? To teach us that there is no place devoid of the divine presence."

1. To name something is to describe and define it.

a. A **name** is a term used for identification by an external observer.

They can identify a class or category of things, or a single thing, either uniquely, or within a given context.³

1) If you and I are at an event together, and we see a friend we both know across the room, one of us might say to the other, "Look, there's George, let's go say 'Hi'."

2) George may be the "name" of our friend, **but it doesn't tell us anything about him**—it just serves to distinguish him from others.

b. Genesis 2:18-22

¹⁸The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." ¹⁹Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man **to see what he would name them;** and **whatever the man called** each living creature, **that was its name.** ²⁰So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam **no suitable helper was found.** ²¹So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

QBE—and brought them to the man to see what he would **call** them; and whatever the man **called** a living creature, **that was its name.**

c. Genesis 21:4-7

⁴When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. ⁵Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him. ⁶Sarah said, "**God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.**" ⁷And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

d. Genesis 29:31-35

³¹When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. ³²Leah ... gave birth to ... Reuben, for she said, "**It is because the LORD has seen my misery ...**" ³³She ... gave birth to a(nother) son ... "**Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.**" So she named him Simeon. ³⁴Again she ... gave birth to a son ... "**Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.**" So he was named Levi. ³⁵She ... gave birth to a son ... "**This time I will praise the LORD.**" So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

1) Reuben—"behold!, a son"

2) Simeon—from "shama" — "he heard"

3) Levi—"joined to" or "attendant upon"

4) Judah—"praise"

2. "What is His name? they were sure to ask. What type of behavior are we seeing on the part of G-d in these times?"

a. The question is NOT "What is His name?" It's "Who is He?"

² The quality or state of being light, insubstantial, and otherworldly.

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Name>

3. *This is why there is some question as to whether the name Eh'hehyeh should be counted among the "seven holy names of G-d."*

a. The name which is written **Yud-Hei-Vav-Hei**. This is [referred to as God's] explicit name and is [also] written *Alef-Daled-Nun-Yud*.⁴

2) [The name] **El**—God (Deity), Mighty One, Strength

3) [The name] **Elo'ah**—the Deity

a) The singular form of the more commonly used *Elohim*. "Eloah" appears primarily in poetic and wisdom literature, such as the Book of Job, where it underscores the majesty and sovereignty of God.⁵

4) [The name] **Elohim**—God, gods, judges, angels

a) This word, which is generally viewed as the plural of *Elo'ah* is found far more frequently in Scripture than either *El* or *Elo'ah* for the true God. The plural ending is usually described as a plural of majesty and not intended as a true plural when used of God. This is seen in the fact that **the noun Elohim is consistently used with singular verb forms and with adjectives and pronouns in the singular.**

5) [The name] **Elohai**—a "construct" form, *i.e.*, the God of ...

6) [The name] **Shaddai**—the LORD Almighty

7) [The name] **Tz'vaot**—the LORD of Hosts (or Armies)

b. Other descriptions:

1) Genesis 16:13 (CJB)

¹³So (Hagar) named ADONAI who had spoken with her **El Ro'i** [**God of seeing**], because she said, "Have I really seen the One who sees me [and stayed alive]?"

2) Genesis 17:1 (CJB)

¹When Avram was 99 years old ADONAI appeared to Avram and said to him, "I am **El Shaddai** [**God Almighty**]. Walk in my presence and be pure-hearted.

3) Genesis 22:14 (CJB)

¹⁴Avraham called the place **ADONAI Yir'eh** [**ADONAI will see (to it), ADONAI provides**]—as it is said to this day, "On the mountain ADONAI is seen."

4) Exodus 15:26 (CJB)

²⁶He said, "If you will listen intently to the voice of ADONAI your

God, do what he considers right, pay attention to his *mitzvot* and observe his laws, I will not afflict you with any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians; because I am **ADONAI Rof-echa** (**ADONAI, your Healer**)"—**ADONAI Rapha**.

5) Exodus 34:23

²³Three times a year all your men are to appear before the **Sovereign LORD (Adon HaShem)**, the God of Israel—**Adonai** (Master, Sovereign).

6) Deuteronomy 32:4 (CJB)

⁴**The Rock (HaTzur)**! His work is perfect, for all his ways are just. A trustworthy God who does no wrong, he is righteous and straight.

7) Judges 6:24 (CJB)

²⁴Then Gid'on built an altar there to ADONAI and called it "**ADONAI-Shalom**" ...

8) Isaiah 9:5 (CJB)

⁵For a child is born to us, a son is given to us; dominion will rest on his shoulders, and he will be given the name **Pele-Yo'etz, El Gibbor, Avi-'Ad, Sar-Shalom** [**Wonder of a Counselor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace**] ...

9) Isaiah 40:28

²⁸Do you not know? Have you not heard? The LORD is **the everlasting God (Elohei Olam)**, the **Creator (Borei)** of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

10) Isaiah 44:6 (CJB)

⁶Thus says ADONAI, Isra'el's **King (Melech)** and **Redeemer (Goel)**, **ADONAI-Tzva'ot**: "I am the **first (Rishon)**, and I am the **last (Acharon)**; besides me there is no God.

11) Isaiah 45:21 (CJB)

²¹Let them stand and present their case! Indeed, let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, announced it in times gone by? Wasn't it I, ADONAI? There is no other God besides me, a just God and a **Savior (Moshia)**; there is none besides me.

12) Isaiah 64:7 (CJB)

⁷But now, ADONAI, you are **our father (Avinu [Abba])**; we are the clay, you are **our potter (Yotz-reinu [Yotzer])**; and we are all the work of your hands.

4 https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/904982/jewish/Yesodei-haTorah-Chapter-Six.htm

5 <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/433.htm>

13) Jeremiah 23:6 (CJB)

⁶In his days Y'hudah will be saved, Isra'el will live in safety, and the name given to him will be **ADONAI Tzidkenu** [ADONAI our righteousness].

14) Psalms 57:3 (CJB)

³I call to **God, the Most High (Elohim El-yon)**, to God, who is accomplishing his purpose for me.

15) Psalms 23:1 (CJB)

¹ADONAI is my **Shepherd (ADONAI Ro-î)**; I lack nothing—**ADONAI Ro-eh**.

16) Psalms 71:22 (CJB)

²²As for me, I will praise you with a lyre for your faithfulness, my God. I will sing praises to you with a lute, **Holy One (K'dosh)** of Isra'el.

17) Psalms 91:2

²I will say of the LORD, "He is my **refuge (Mach-si [Mach-seh])** and my **fortress (M'tzudati [M'tzudah])**, my God, in whom I trust."

18) 1Timothy 1:1

¹Paul, an apostle of Messiah Yeshua by the command of God our **Savior (Moshieinu (מוֹשִׁיעֵנו))** and of Messiah Yeshua (**יֵשׁוּעַ**) our hope ...

4. *Certain things must be, no matter how painful and incomprehensible to your human selves, in order that great things—ininitely great and blissful things—should be.*

a. Isaiah 55:8-11

⁸"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. ⁹"As the heavens are higher than the earth, **so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts**. ¹⁰As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹so is my word that goes out from my mouth: **It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it**.

b. Romans 11:25-36 (CJB)

²⁵For, brothers, I want you to understand this truth which God formerly concealed but has now revealed, so that you won't imagine you know more than you actually do. It is that stoniness, to a degree, has come upon Isra'el, until the Gentile world enters in its fullness; ²⁶and that it is in this way that all Isra'el will be saved. As

the *Tanakh* says, "Out of Tziyon will come the Redeemer; he will turn away ungodliness from Ya'akov ²⁷and this will be my covenant with them ... when I take away their sins" (Isa 59:20). ²⁸With respect to the Good News they are hated for your sake. But with respect to being chosen they are loved for the Patriarchs' sake, ²⁹for God's free gifts and his calling are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you yourselves were disobedient to God before but have received mercy now because of Isra'el's disobedience; ³¹so also Isra'el has been disobedient now, so that by your showing them the same mercy that God has shown you, they too may now receive God's mercy. ³²For God has shut up all mankind together in disobedience, in order that he might show mercy to all.

³³**O the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God! How inscrutable are his judgments! How unsearchable are his ways!** ³⁴For, 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been his counselor?' (Isa 40:13) ³⁵Or, 'Who has given him anything and made him pay it back?' (Job 41:11)

³⁶For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! *Amen*.