

Parashat Shemot, 5779, 2018:

The Name Hashem

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

According to a celebrated *Midrash*, shortly after the creation of Adam, he was given the job of naming the flora and fauna of the world. Why was he given this task? Why did Hashem simply not show Adam a “catalog” of the plant and animal kingdoms and tell him, when he saw this or that plant or animal, “this is the name by which it is to be called.” Why, instead, was Adam the active party in this naming convention?

Perhaps we can indirectly answer this question by noting Rabbi Eleazar’s famous dictum in *Talmud Bavli, Berachot 7b* in reference to the name of a person:

How do we know that the name [of a person] has an effect [upon his life]? R. Eleazar said: Scripture says, “Come, behold the works of the L-rd, who has made desolations in the earth.” Read not *shammot* (desolations), but *shemot* (names). (Translation, *Soncino Talmud*, with my emendations for readability)

A name, therefore, is a crucial aspect, even a constitutive element, of the person or thing it denotes. If this is the case, we can now understand why Adam was given the task of naming the plants and animals of Creation. By doing so, he became a *shutafim Hakadosh Baruch Hu b’ma’aseh Bereishit* (a partner with G-d in the Creation of the Universe).

If the names of plants and animals are so singularly important, all the more so are the names of the Creator. Unlike the rest of Creation, however, man did not name G-d; rather, the Almighty, so to speak, named Himself. This is very logical, since the giving of a name suggests a certain amount

of control over that which has been named, which would be absurd in the context of the G-d-Man relationship – as G-d is wholly other.

The name “*Hashem*” appears 47 times in *Sefer Bereishit*, and a number of these instances take place in the context of the Holy One’s direct communication with the *Avot* (Patriarchs). Fast forwarding to our *parasha*, Moshe asks the Almighty, “What should I tell *b’nai Yisrael* when they ask: ‘What is His name?’” While providing an immediate answer to Moshe’s question, it seems that the Almighty’s response simultaneously presents us with a serious exegetical challenge: “So shall you say to the children of Israel, ‘The L-rd G-d (*Hashem*) of your forefathers, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is how I should be mentioned in every generation.’” (*Sefer Shemot* 3:13 and 15) This appears to contradict an early verse in Parashat Vaera: “I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob with [the name] Almighty G-d, but [with] My name *Hashem*, I did not become known to them.” (*Sefer Shemot* 6:3)

In his *Commentary on the Torah on Sefer Shemot* 6:3, the great Spanish Torah interpreter, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (1092 –1167), presents a deeply insightful resolution to our textual challenge. He opines that it was impossible for the *Avot* to have been unaware of the name “*Hashem*” per se, since, as we have noted, it is used liberally throughout *Sefer Bereishit*. The Ibn Ezra explains that the *Avot* knew this name as the *shame etzem* (proper name) of *Hashem*. They did not, however, know *Hashem* in terms of His actions that had yet to be performed in order to fulfill His promises. The Ibn Ezra calls this the *shame toar* (descriptive name), and emphasizes this as a newly-revealed aspect of G-d’s name. He goes so far as to suggest that the true purpose inherent in Moshe’s agency was none other than: “... to make this name *Hashem* known [to mankind].” When viewed in this

light, the name “*Hashem*” clearly carries the connotation of He who fulfills that which He promises; it was this new “persona” that Moshe publicized to the Jewish people, and the entire world.

May we be *zocheh* (merit) to witness *Hashem*’s kindness and mercy in the fulfillment of His promises to our people, and the arrival of the *Mashiach*. May this time come soon, and in our days.

V’chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>

They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha’s name.

The email list, *b’chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdb718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd>

*** I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik’s](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.