

# WHERE IS HASHEM'S NAME?

*by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein*

Be'er Mayim Chaim: You might not notice till someone points it out, but there is a direct correspondence between the word "mitzvah" and Hashem's havaya Name. Here is how.

Within the Shem havaya, there is a distinction between the first two letters, which allude to the neshamah, and the last two, which connect to the earthly and material. (It is fairly easy to remember this. Think of the pasuk **ישמחו השמים ותגל הארץ**. Looking at the first letters, you will see that they form the Shem Hashem; the first two are keyed to shomayim/ heaven, and the last two to aretz/ earth.

Like a human being, every mitzvah contains an apparent, manifest, earthly component - the action that is visible to the observer. But the mitzvah also has an inner core that animates and breathes spiritual life into the physical activity of the mitzvah. That core can be seen as the neshamah of the mitzvah.

Now, the last letters of "mitzvah" are vav heh, the very same last letters of the Shem. This makes sense. These letters refer to the "earthly" component. In the case of the Shem, it means aspects of His influence that reach the material realm, giving life and form to all physical things. In relation to a mitzvah, these letters refer to the physical activity of the deed.

The connection between the beginning of the word "mitzvah" and the first letters of the Shem is not immediately apparent. Nor should it be. The inner, spiritual core of the mitzvah is hidden from us, as the soul is hidden in the body. The first two letters of the Shem - yud heh - come from the hidden realm of Hashem's world in Heaven. Its effects upon the mitzvah are hidden from view. So they show up - but in an obscured manner. It just so happens that the first two letters of mitzvah - mem tzadik - happen to correspond to yud heh in the alphabet known as atbash.<sup>2</sup>

This introduction may help us puzzle through an observation that I made, that I have not found elsewhere. Many non-mandatory, physical activities contain the first two letters of the Name: **אכילה**, **שינה**, **הליכה**, **שתיה** and others. On the other hand, spiritual activities connected with Torah and mitzvos tend to include the last letters of the Name: **מצוה**, **קדושה**, **עבודה**, **תורה**. We would have expected the opposite. The first two letters of the Shem ought to be linked to spiritual productivity!

By considering what is hidden from view, however, we can understand this phenomenon. When people turn to physical activity - especially pleasures - not related to mitzvos, they need little encouragement. They respond to well-established wants and desires that are part of human nature.

They see what they want, and move to take it. What they don't see is that every physical object has a spiritual core. Nothing physical exists without a spark of kedushah that empowers it. Within the physical act is something of spiritual value. The yud heh in physical activities reminds us of that.

Mitzvos pose a different challenge. We don't turn to them because of any natural lust or desire. Our enthusiasm for them comes from a higher, spiritual place. This leaves room for people to dismiss the physical part of mitzvah observance, and focus entirely on the spiritual core. Some people will conclude that since the essence of the mitzvah is that core, the physical observance is only a vehicle to put people in touch with it. Better equipped, "enlightened" people should be able to bypass the expedient of the physical observance, and head straight for the spiritual core. They will convince themselves that through study and contemplation, they will achieve the intended benefit of the mitzvah without having to perform it! To counter this tendency, the vav heh of the Shem - the part that is bound to this world - is embedded in mitzvah-activities, stressing that the physical component is important, and cannot be ignored.

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Sources:

1. Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Devarim 7:12
  2. In this alphabet, each letter is replaced with its "mirror image." In other words, aleph, the first letter, becomes tav, the last letter of the conventional alphabet. Beis, the second letter is replaced by shin, the second from the end.
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