

THE NAMES OF HASHEM

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

What is a point of confusion for many who question the Divinity of Torah is the basis of most of Sod. Kabbalah is vast, and yet so much of it discusses the various Names of God, specifically the level of Divine revelation associated with each Name.

It is clear from history that there are times when God makes His Presence obvious, and other times when He makes it seem as if He has withdrawn from the affairs of man altogether. This is something the Torah warns about and calls "hester panim," the hiding of God's face:

God told Moshe, "After you lie with your fathers, this people will act immorally and pursue the gods of the strangers of the land they are going to. They will abandon Me and nullify My covenant which I have made with them. I will become very angry at them on that day, and I will abandon them and—haster astir Panai—hide My face from them." (Devarim 31:16-18)

Nevertheless, the responsibility of man is not reduced during such periods of hester panim, but increased:

The foundation of wisdom and root of Kabbalah . . . is to know and make known that Hovayah-Elokeinu, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Ya'akov the God of Israel alone, with His good will, made everything exist and created all created beings. [He] has formed and continuously forms all that has form, has done and continuously performs all actions, giving existence to everything at all times . . . He oversees everything at all times and directs everything continuously. He alone does this, and there is never anything else but Him. (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

Thus even during times of hester panim everything is the direct result of the will of God, even if it ceases to be obvious to man. It also remains for our good even when the opposite seems more likely. The intensity of Divine revelation can fluctuate but neither God nor His Providence changes, and it is our responsibility to recognize this and to proclaim it to the world.

The Names of God are an important part of this process. Each Name means something unique and refers to a distinct level of Divine revelation. The main Name of God, however, the "tree" from which all other Names "branch out" is spelled Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh, and is referred to as the Tetragrammaton.

During Temple times the Name was pronounced as it is written because the proper level of holiness to say the Name was maintained. With the destruction of the Temple and the subsequent exile, this no longer remained the case and consequently:

His Name is written "Hovayah" but it is pronounced "Adon'ai." (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

"Hovayah" is spelled Heh-Vav-Yud-Heh, which are the same letters as the Tetragrammaton Name, except that they are out of sequence and therefore permissible to pronounce even today. In prayer, though, the Name "Adon'ai," which means "my Master," is the pronounced substitution since it has less holiness.

The main meaning of the Name Hovayah is that His Presence is enduring . . . that His Being is always in the present, and never in the past or in the future. (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

The Name Hovayah alludes to three words: hayah, hoveh, and yihyeh, which mean "was, is, and will be." Therefore, it is the Name of God that refers to His infiniteness. For man, the Present is but a threshold over which the future passes on the way to becoming the Past. For God there is only the Present:

With respect to His Essence, may His Name be blessed, in truth it is always only in the Present, and that is the main teaching of the Name Hovayah, may He be blessed. (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

There is another lesson to which the Name Hovayah alludes, something that was easier to recall while it was still possible to pronounce the Name:

All of existence is from Him and is always dependent upon Him. He bears all of it in all its fullness. (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

The Name "Elokim" means "Judge," and it is holy when used in reference to God, but profane when used in reference to angels and human judges. Man was made "b'tzelem Elokim," in the image of God, because he is like God when he uses his intellectual capacity to discern truth and exercise justice.

Elokim is also the Name used to refer to God's Providence when it is hidden, which gives the impression that nature is the force behind Creation. Hence, the Name Elokim also refers to God as the "Ba'al HaKochos," the Force behind all forces within Creation, and even the Hebrew word for "nature"—*hateva*—has the same gematria as Elokim.

The difference between the levels of Divine revelation of the two Names is alluded to at very

important turning point in history, the Akeidah:

Go to the land of Moriah. Bring him up there as an offering, upon one of the mountains which I will show you. (Bereishis 22:2)

On the third day of his journey Avraham "lifted up his eyes" and saw a Divine sign that indicated he had reached his intended destination and the location of the Akeidah. Har HaMoriah, the Midrash says, was encompassed by fire from Heaven to earth, and the Clouds of Glory hovered above it. It was a supernatural vision.

The Midrash also says that at that time Avraham was uncertain who should accompany him up the mountain. Aside from Yitzchak, Avraham had brought Yishmael, his son from Hagar, and Eliezer his trusted servant, with him.

He decided, therefore, that only those who could see the miraculous vision were fitting to complete the journey with him. When it was clear that neither Yishmael nor Eliezer could see the miracle, Avraham told them to remain behind, saying:

"You stay here—Peh-Heh—with the donkey, while I and the lad will walk until there—Chof-Heh, prostrate ourselves and then return to you." (Bereishis 22:5)

The gematria of Peh-Heh is: $80 + 5 (+1)$, or 86, the same numerical value of the letters of Elokim. The gematria of Chof-Heh, however, is: $20 + 5 (+1)$, which is equal to 26, the gematria of Hovayah. On a simple level, therefore, Avraham had merely given instructions to Yishmael and Eliezer to remain with the donkey. On a deeper level, as the Midrash explains, he was sending them a spiritual message as well, telling them:

"Since you see nothing and the donkey sees nothing, you belong together with the donkey. Wait here together with the donkey until we return." (Bereishis Rabbah 56:2)

Far be it from Avraham Avinu to simply denigrate his own son Yishmael, whom he loved dearly, and his servant Eliezer, whom he trusted implicitly. Instead, he was qualifying his decision to leave them behind at that point, at what ended up being a historical crossroad with the Jewish people going in one direction, and the rest of the world going in another one.

Thus at the end of Yom Kippur, the day on which the Jewish people are said to reach the level of angels and to share their vision of God somewhat, we declare passionately:

Hovayah is Elokim

As the Divine Presence withdraws to higher levels of reality and therefore greater levels of hiddenness, we declare and remind ourselves that even if we can't see Hovayah so clearly in everyday life, it is always Him, working through Elokim, Who maintains Creation. Elokim is really

Hovayah in disguise, as we declare twice daily in the Shema:

Hear O Israel, Hovayah is Elokeinu, Hovayah is One. (Devarim 6:4)

The Name of God, "Adon'ai," is also a Name that is holy in reference to God and profane when used for man, means that:

He is the Master of everything. He supervises everything, and guides it all, distinguishing and judging all actions, determining all that is necessary for all that exists in order to sustain and guide each element at all times. (Hakdamos u'Sha'arim, Sha'ar 1, Perek 1)

Thus, the Name "Adon'ai," like the Name "Elokim," we pronounce correctly. And like the Name Elokim, Adon'ai reminds us that God is the Ba'al HaKochos, the Master of All Forces. The difference is that Adon'ai corresponds to the lowest revelation of God within Creation, where the face of God is the most hidden and is hardest to fulfill:

You have been shown in order to know that Hovayah, He is Elokim; there is none else besides Him. (Devarim 4:35)

The entire point of Torah is to facilitate the realization of this seminal concept. The entire point of history has been to actualize it in everyday life, and thus the Final Redemption is defined in terms of it:

Hovayah will be King over the entire land, and on that day Hovayah will be One and His Name [will be] One. (Zechariah 14:9)

This will be in Yemos HaMoshiach, when the reality of Chof-Heh will be apparent not just to the descendants of Avraham Avinu, but to the entire world. At that time the words of the Shema will be more than just a declaration. They will be an obvious statement of fact to everyone.

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