

Parashat Shemot, 5781, 2021:

The Name Hashem

Rabbi David Etengoff

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 Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The name *Hashem* (*yud-heh-vav-heh*) appears 47 times in *Sefer Bereishit*, a number of which take place within the context of Hashem's direct communication with the *Avot*. In our *parasha*, the name is found following Moshe's request from the Almighty as to what he should tell *B'nai Yisrael* when they ask: "What is His [that is, G-d's] name? what shall I say to them?" The Almighty responds: "So shall you say to the children of Israel, 'The L-rd G-d of your forefathers (*Hashem Elokei avotaichem*), 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 and all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) It is, therefore, difficult to understand one of the early *pasukim* in next week's Parashat Vaera: "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob with [the name] Almighty G-d (*A-le Sha-dai*), but [with] My name *Hashem*, I did not become known to them." (*Sefer Shemot* 6:3)

Rashi (1040-1105) explains this seeming contradiction in the following fashion:

It is not written here *lo hoda'ati*, "but My Name *Hashem* I did not make known to them," but *lo noda'ati*, "I did not become known." [That is,] I was not recognized by them with My attribute of keeping faith, by dint of which My name is called *Hashem*, [which means that I am] faithful to verify My words, for I made promises to them, but I did not fulfill

[them while they were alive]. (*Sefer Shemot* 6:3)

Rashi suggests that the solution to the above-noted inconsistency is contained in the terminology of the verse itself. Clearly, the *Avot* were well aware of the name *Hashem*. They were, however, unaware of its full significance and meaning, since Hashem had not yet fulfilled His promises regarding their future numerous descendants and possession of *Eretz Yisrael*.

The great Spanish exegete, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (1092 –1167), presents an insightful resolution to our textual conundrum that parallels that of Rashi. He opines that it was impossible for the *Avot* to be unaware of the name *Hashem*, since it is used throughout *Sefer Bereishit*. He describes this name as the *shame etzem* (the proper name) of G-d. In other words, while they knew G-d by this title or appellation, they had not encountered Him based upon His actions and deeds, which the Ibn Ezra calls the *shame toar* (the adjectival descriptive name). *Hashem* specifically refers to G-d's name as manifested through His actions and as He who fulfills His promises. The Ibn Ezra places a great deal of emphasis on this newly revealed aspect of G-d's being. In fact, he suggests that the true purpose inherent in Moshe's agency was none other than: "... to make this name *Hashem* known [to mankind]." (Ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Torah, Sefer Shemot* 6:3) When viewed in this light, *Hashem* clearly carries the connotation of He who fulfills that which He has promised. In sum, it was this newly revealed aspect of Hashem that Moshe publicized to the Jewish people and the world.

My *rebbe* and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as "the Rav" by his students and followers, builds upon the interpretations of Rashi and the Ibn

Ezra, and suggests the following analysis of the meaning and import of the name *Hashem* to the Jewish people:

The name Hashem signifies realization. The Patriarchs had only been given promises; a long road still lay ahead of them before their descendants would conquer the land. Deviations from the straight course and long delays characterize the strange movement of Jewish history: the longest, not the shortest route, seems to be our destiny. This mystifying pattern of Jewish history demands our loyalty even as it defies our comprehension. Why should *A-le Sha-dai* be separated from *Hashem*, the promise from the fulfillment? And yet the Jew waits patiently, filled with expectancy, with an unshakable faith in the inevitable *geulah*. (*Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Shemos*, page 49)

May the time come soon, and in our days, when the promises made to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov regarding *Eretz Yisrael* and their future offspring will be completely realized:

For all the land that you [Avraham] see I will give to you and to your children for all eternity. And I will make your children like the dust of the earth, so that if a man will be able to count the dust of the earth, so will your children be counted. Rise, walk in the land, to its length and to its breadth, for I will give it to you. (*Sefer Bereishit* 13:15-17)

V'chane yihi ratzon.

Shabbat Shalom, and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the pandemic from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

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 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:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

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

*** 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.