

PARASHAH: Sh'mot (Names)
ADDRESS: Sh'mot (Exodus) 1:1-6:1
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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

This week we begin a new book of the Torah. The familiar English title “Exodus” was applied much later when the Torah was canonized, but the Hebrew name “**Sh’mot**,” derived from the first few words in the book, has always been the title among the Jewish community. The root word “shem” (say “shame”) means “name.” Moreover, it is the name of the eldest son of Noach. If you will remember, Shem was the recipient of the righteous blessing in B’resheet (Genesis) 9:24-27. Etymologically, we derive the modern word “Semitic” from this man’s name. A Semite is a descendant of Shem. According to B’resheet chapters 10, and 11, Avraham was a descendant of Shem, thus, the Hebrew People, as well as the Arabic Peoples, spring from the Semitic race. Also, the word “HaShem,” which is what I and many other Orthodox Jewish People call God, is made from the Hebrew words “ha,” meaning “the,” and “Shem” meaning “name”; thus, “HaShem” literally means “The Name.” So, Sh’mot (“shame-ote”) means “names.”

Parashat Sh’mot signals the beginning of the most significant event in the history of the Jewish Nation: the Exodus from Mitzrayim (Egypt). Why is it so significant? It is the Exodus from Egypt that brought the great multitude to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah of HaShem. Surely it is significant for us believers today, for only after our deliverance from Egypt (sin), does HaShem graciously give us his written revelation, the Torah, written upon the tablets of our circumcised hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). Only with circumcised hearts can we worship him in spirit and in truth, according to his Will. Also, as we shall discover

during this book, the deliverance from Egypt is meant to forever signify, to those who have genuinely experienced it, a deliverance from bondage.

This bondage, taught elsewhere in the rest of the Torah, has been characterized as a type of sin. Moreover, we as believers in Messiah Yeshua are taught that this physical deliverance of the Jewish People, from Egypt, is a picture of our deliverance from the bondage that sin held us in, prior to coming to Yeshua. It is significant, therefore, that we as non-Jewish believers, gain an appreciative understanding of the events and circumstances surrounding the “exodus” from Egypt.

Let us go to the text.

“He (HaShem) replied, “I will surely be with you. Your sign that I have sent you will be that when you have led the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”” (Sh’mot 3:12, emphasis mine)

Isn't it fantastic that at this early stage in HaShem's dealings with 'Am Isra'el (People of Israel) and Moshe (Moses) their prophet, that he is already promising that he will indeed deliver them? I believe that this demonstrates the heart of our loving Abba, in that he wants us to realize that not only is he willing to deliver us, but that he is able to deliver us—and that it is his desire that we BE delivered. Plus, when we hear all of this wonderful good news, we are inclined all the more to place our trusting faithfulness in him. Unfortunately, like Moshe, sometimes even the assurance from the mouth of the Almighty himself is not enough to convince us. Moshe still finds it necessary to “argue” the situation with HaShem. In this way, perhaps we can identify with his initial doubt.

But HaShem goes on to reveal something about his unchanging character so vital to the oppressed Jewish Nation then, and now, and is likewise important for non-Jews today. In verses 13-21 of chapter three, a very significant dialogue takes place between the Holy One, Blessed be He, and Moshe. It is here that my commentary will find its focus this week.

Sh'mot (Names)

Moshe informs HaShem that when the time comes for him to introduce this invisible deliverer of theirs to the people, that they in turn will inquire about his name. As mentioned earlier, the Hebrew word for “name” is shem שֵׁם. In Hebrew thought, “a name implies a reputation; the name is the embodiment of the character of an individual, based upon who they are, or what they have done.”¹ The online version of the Jewish Encyclopedia makes this statement about the Divine Name of God:

¹ Brown, Driver, Briggs, שֵׁם.

Like other Hebrew proper names, the name of God is more than a mere distinguishing title. It represents the Hebrew conception of the divine nature or character and of the relation of God to His people. It represents the Deity as He is known to His worshipers, and stands for all those attributes which He bears in relation to them and which are revealed to them through His activity on their behalf. A new manifestation of His interest or care may give rise to a new name. So, also, an old name may acquire new content and significance through new and varied experience of these sacred relations.²

Before I go much further in this commentary, I wish to draw your attention to a lengthy 24-page commentary called 'What's In a Name' available at our web site Grafted In. The following discussion is elaborated on in that commentary. In chapter three, verses thirteen through fifteen, HaShem reveals his nature to Moshe in a way that, according to Exodus 6:3 has never been done before in the Torah, up till this point. Chapter six verses two and three in the English reads,

God spoke to Moshe; he said to him, "I am ADONAI.

I appeared to Avraham, Yitz'chak and Ya'akov as El Shaddai, although I did not make myself known to them by my name, Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh [ADONAI].

The Hebrew is,

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו
אֲנִי יְהוָה

וַיֹּאדָא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב
בְּאֵל שְׁדֵי יְשָׁמִי יְהוָה לֹא נִוְדַעְתִּי לָהֶם

Comparatively, 3:13-15 in the English reads,

Moshe said to God, "Look, when I appear before the people of Isra'el and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you'; and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what am I to tell them?"

God said to Moshe, "Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh [I am/will be what I am/will be]," and added, "Here is what to say to the people of Isra'el: 'Ehyeh [I Am or I Will Be] has sent me to you.'"

God said further to Moshe, "Say this to the people of Isra'el: 'Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh [ADONAI], the God of your fathers, the God of

² <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=52&letter=N>

Avraham, the God of Yitz'chak and the God of Ya'akov, has sent me to you. 'This is my name forever; this is how I am to be remembered generation after generation.

The Hebrew is,

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים הֲנָה אֲנֹכִי בָא
אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם
שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמַרְתֶּם לִי מִה־שְּׁמוֹ מָה
אָמַר אֱלֹהִים

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה
וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי
אֵלֵיכֶם

וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה־תֹאמַר
אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם
אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב
שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה־שְּׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זְכוֹרִי
לְדֹר דָּר

Looking at the first part of verse 14 we note that HaShem tells Moshe that his “name” shall be referred to as,

“Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh [I Am/will be what I Am/will be].”

This appears to be very strange (to simply state that ‘HE IS’ or that ‘HE WILL BE’) until we understand that HaShem is about to deliver his people in a way that he has never before performed. Not only is he going to do this, but he will forever be remembered for this deliverance! This is why the phrase “**I Am**” is not really the best rendering of the Hebrew phrase “**Ehyeh.**” Rather, the phrase carries with it the idea that HaShem is about to perform a mighty work, never before witnessed by his people (i.e. “**I Will Be**”)! Rashi offers a thoughtful insight into this interchange by explaining that when HaShem invoked the double reference of 'Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh,' he was informing Moshe that he would go together with all of Isra'el and sustain them during this exile in Egypt – and in all future exiles (as Ehyeh means "I will be there"). Rashbam as cited by Bekhor Shor confirms the possible translation of “he causes to be”:

Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh This phrase has variously been translated, “I Am That I Am,” “I Am Who I Am,” and “I Will Be What I Will Be.” It clearly evokes YHVH, the specific proper name of Isra'el's God, known in English as the Tetragrammaton, that is, “four consonants.” The phrase also indicates that the earliest recorded understanding of the divine name was

a verb derived from the stem *h-v-h*, taken as an earlier form of *h-y-h*, “to be.” Either it expresses the quality of absolute Being, the eternal, unchanging, dynamic presence, or it means, “He causes to be.” *YHVH* is the third person masculine singular; *ehyeh* is the corresponding first person singular. This latter is used here because name-giving in the ancient world implied the wielding of power over the one named; hence, the divine name can only proceed from God Himself.³

HaShem continues in verse 15 to say that the God of their fathers Avraham, Yitz’chak, and Ya’akov is to be remembered forever as “**Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh!**” Now here is where slight difficulty arises. According to a normative understanding of the Hebrew text, this “name” is to be “remembered” forever. To be sure, HaShem tells Moshe in the latter part of verse 15, that this is his (HaShem’s) “name” forever. The word translated “forever” is not spelled using the usual Hebrew lettering that Torah readers are accustomed to when reading the English word “forever.” The usual spelling of “forever” in Hebrew, transliterated letter-by-letter as “o-l-a-m,” is comprised of the Hebrew letters, “ayin-vav-lamed-mem” עולם as can be observed from my blue-highlighted word in Exodus 12:14 below,

*“And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance **for ever.**”* (KJV)

Hebrew:

וְהָיָה הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה לְכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן וְחֻגָתֶם
אֶתוֹ חֹג לַיהוָה לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם חֻגַת עוֹלָם תִּחְגַּגְתֶּם

(Emphasis, mine)

What is more, the Hebrew word comprised of the letters “lamed-ayin-lamed-mem” לעולם does show up in other verses where the translation is rendered correctly as “forever”:

Genesis 3:22,

*And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live **for ever.*** (KJV)

Hebrew:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים הֵן הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאַחַד

³ Nahum M. Sarna, *JPS Commentary to Exodus* (Jewish Publication Society, 1991), p. 17-18

מִמְנוֹן לְדַעַת טוֹב וְרַע וְעֵתָהּ פְּנִיּוֹשָׁלַח
יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מִעֵץ הַחַיִּים וְאָכַל וְחַי
לְעַלָּם

(Emphasis, mine)

Of the two possibilities in the translation of the Hebrew words עולם and לְעַלָּם into the English word “forever,” in Exodus 3:15, the latter spelling “lamed-ayin-lamed-mem” לְעַלָּם lies behind the English. Grammatically, there are differing uses for the letter vav ו and its corresponding vowels. One such usage is the letter vav with a cholam (a dot) above and to the left of the letter, as we read Hebrew right to left (Example: כֹּה [=thus]). The other usage is a cholam-vav where the consonantal letter is followed by a vav with the dot directly above the vav itself (Example: קוֹל [=voice]). In the case of the word l’olam לְעַלָּם, the initial “lamed” ל up front accounts for the preposition “unto,” or “for,” which would make the remaining letters “ayin-lamed-mem” connote the word “ever,” thus: for+ever=forever. However, in the remaining word “olam,” the usual vav is NOT present.

Compare (not counting the prepositional lamed):

Normative spelling=עולם
Spelling in verse 15=עלם

In my opinion, the verse could have easily made perfect sense if rendered using the normative spelling of o’lam without the prepositional lamed. What could the Holy One have meant by this choice of alternate spellings for the same English meaning? (For more on omitting letters when spelling the names of God see my excursus below)

At this point it becomes necessary to pull quotes from the Chazal, the Sages of Blessed Memory. I shall begin with the Talmud, the great compendium of Jewish and rabbinic thought:

A. Said Rabbah bar bar [sic] Hannah said R. Yohanan, “The correct pronunciation of the Divine Name made up of four letters sages hand on to their sons and disciples [the identity of that family], repeating the information once every seven years.”

B. Others say, “Twice every seven years.”

C. Said R. Nahman bar Isaac, “It stands to reason that the rule is in accord with him who said, once every seven years, for it has been written, ‘This is my name for ever,’ but the word is so written that it can be read, ‘to conceal.’”

D. Raba considered giving a lecture on that in the public session. Said to him a certain said, "...the word is so written that it can be read, 'to conceal.'"

V.18 A. R. Abina contrasted verses: "'This is my name,' as against, 'this is my memorial' (Exo. 3:15). Said the Holy One, blessed be He, 'It is not in the way that I am written that I am to be read. My name is written with a YH but is read with AD [YHWH as against Adonai].'"⁴

The Jewish Encyclopedia, referencing the very Talmudic quote I just provided, gives us this insight:

Even though the Scripture is quite clear, on the use of the name יהוה, the Rabbis developed teachings to justify their practice of substitution and non-use. One of which is based on the verse in Shemoth [Exodus] 3:15. "And יהוה said further to Mosheh, 'Now you say to the sons of Yisrael, יהוה, Elohey of your fathers, Elohey of Abraham, Elohey of Yitschaq and Elohey of Yaaqob, sent me to you. 'This is My Name forever, and this memorial for generation to generation.'" Now the word used for "forever" is L'OLM [לְעֹלָם] (lamed, ayin, lamed, mem). According to the rabbis, this rendering means to conceal. "The sages quoted, 'This is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations' (Ex. iii. 15). Here the word 'le-'olam' (forever) is written defectively, being without the 'waw' for the vowel 'o' which renders the reading 'le-'allem' (to conceal; Kid. 71a)."⁵

The Onkelos Pentateuch with Rashi's commentary adds:

"The Hebrew word le'olam ('forever') is spelled defectively, without the letter vav, so that it may be read le'alem, which means 'to conceal,' viz., 'to conceal it' that the name of God shall not be read exactly as it is written."⁶

Klein's dictionary of the Hebrew language clarifies our Hebrew word o'lam עולם:

עולם (owlam) in the Hebrew means " 1. long, duration, antiquity. 2. continuous existence, eternity, uninterrupted future. 3. World. 4. PBH

⁴ The Babylonian Talmud, Translation and Commentary by Jacob Neusner (Soncino CD-ROM Edition), Tractate Qiddushin, Folio 71a, Hendrickson Publishers, 2006.

⁵ The Jewish Encyclopedia, 1905, Vol. IX, under Names Of God, pg.162.

⁶ The B'nai B'rith Jewish Heritage Classics, Onkelos Pentateuch With Rashi's Commentary, pg. 89.

(Post-Biblical Hebrew) mankind, humanity. 5. PBH pleasures of life. 6. MH (Mishnaic Hebrew) community. [Related to Biblical Aramaic and Aramaic עֶלַם, Syriac amli (=eternity; world; whence probably Ethiopic alam, 'eternity; world'), Arabic alam (=world). According to some scholars these words literally mean 'the hidden, unknown time,' and derive from base עֶלַם (=to hide). According to several other scholars the above words are related to Akkadian ulu, ullanu (=remote time), so that – ain in mloi, etc., would be a suffix.”⁷

Yet, commenting on our word alem עֶלַם he states:

עֶלַם (elam) “1. To hide, conceal [a base with no equivalents in the other Semetic languages.] MH was ‘hidden.’”⁸

The context of the Talmudic discussions, with their support from the Jewish Encyclopedia and Rashi above, is too broad for me to develop here in our commentary, but the gist of the immediate quotes can be summarized thusly: the rabbis would have us to believe that this word עֶלַם can be pronounced “ah-leyam,” owing to the fact that originally, the Hebrew Scrolls contained no “vowel markings” facilitating the correct pronunciation. Admittedly, o’lam עֶלַם and ah-leyam עֶלַם look identical when rendered from the Hebrew without vowel markings! This subsequent rendering of the letters “ayin-lamed-mem,” according to the Sages means “secret,” or “unspoken.” Hence, the traditional understanding is that HaShem is instructing Moshe to teach the Children of Isra’el that the God of Avraham, Yitz’chak, and Ya’akov is “YHVH,” and that we are NOT to mention his name aloud. Moreover, this “silence” is to be “remembered” forever. Don’t get me wrong here! I am NOT suggesting that we lose all reverence for the Holy Name of “YHVH” (supposedly pronounced “Yahweh,” and other times supposedly pronounced “Jehovah.” In actuality, neither one of these pronunciations may be etymologically correct).

To be sure, I personally advocate serious respect for the Holy Name of our Holy God. Allow me to pull a quote from a well-know rabbinic translation of the Scriptures, the “Artscroll Series” Stone Edition TaNaKH. In the introduction to the translation we read,

The four-letter Name of Hashem [YHWH] indicates that God is timeless and infinite, for the letters of his name are those of the words "hayah," v'yihyeh," "hoveh," He was, He is, and he will be!

This name sometimes appears with vowel points [yehovah] and sometimes without. In either case, this Name is never pronounced as it is

⁷ A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language, Ernest Klein, pg. 466.

⁸ Ibid. pg. 473.

spelled! During prayer, or when a blessing is recited, or when a Torah verse is read, the Four-Letter Name should be pronounced as if it were spelled "adonai;" the Name identifies God as the Master of all. At other times, it should be pronounced "hashem," literally "the Name." The four letter Name of God is translated "HaShem," the pronunciation traditionally used for the Name to avoid pronouncing it unnecessarily. Sometimes the Name appears with the vowelization "yehovih," this version is pronounced as if it were spelled "elohim," the Name that refers to God as the One Who is all powerful... and last when it appears with the prefix "leyhovih" it is pronounced "lalohim" This is translated as Hashem/Elohim to indicate that it refers to the aspects inherent in each of those Names!⁹

How am I personally affected by what I just quoted? Well, for starters, when I am with Jewish folks under the persuasion that the Four-letter Name should never be pronounced then I do not pronounce it in their presence! It is just that simple. What I am also saying, however, is that because of the above assumptions on the part of our ancients, we may have temporarily lost the correct, original pronunciation of these four letters. Some in the emerging Torah communities today feel that unless we somehow recapture the original rendering of these four letters, that we are in error in addressing our God as "LORD." I believe that this is an unnecessary distraction as well. In all reality, we may just have to wait until Messiah returns to earth to teach us the correct way to say it. In the mean time, I believe that we DO have something just as powerful and acceptable to "YHVH." Allow me to elaborate.

Shem Mashiach (The Name of the Messiah)

What I am about to suggest runs counter to the above argument, offered by most rabbis of today. I offer my interpretation as someone that has been renewed within my mind by the effectual work of the Messiah Yeshua, and has therefore liked to believe that he has discovered the "name that is above all names!" I believe that, according to a literal understanding of this verse, HaShem was instructing Moshe to teach the Children of Isra'el to forever remember that "YHVH," the God of their fathers, not only "IS" (I AM), but, that he "WILL BE" the God who delivers them from the bondage of sin, characterized by Egypt! And that forever, they were to remember that there is NO other god besides "YHVH!" In remembering (as opposed to shrouding it in obscurity) the Eternal, unchanging "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh," they would be ever mindful of the nature and character that their One, True God displayed in his mighty works! In other words, they were to forever remember his reputation and his name (i.e. his "shem")!

How do we possibly internalize the above-mentioned revelation when we are constantly concerned with mispronouncing the original spelling of a Hebrew text

⁹ The Stone Edition TANACH "The ArtScroll Series," Published by: Mesorah Publications, Ltd.

that originally used no vowel markings in the first place? I feel that the ancients have missed the point of this wonderful revelation of the character of God embodied in a name. I also feel that moderns who today place too much emphasis on correct pronunciation of this name of HaShem are also missing the point. You might argue that many are simply seeking to recapture what I am purporting should have been preserved all along. That may be true. But by allowing our energies to be consumed in this area, we just might miss an even clearer revelation from our God! In other words, you could say that since we messed it up the first time around, HaShem has decided to graciously give us another chance, but this time it involves his Son! To bolster my argument, allow me to use a very significant New Covenant passage.

In Philippians 2:9-11, Rav Sha'ul (Apostle Paul) teaches us that when “Yeshua the Eternal Word of HaShem” became a man (cross-reference John 1:1, 14), that HaShem granted—indeed gave him—a name that is ABOVE every name! Now how can this be, unless we naturally assume this to mean that the name “Yeshua” is somehow above the name “YHVH”?! This is meshugga (crazy)! Of course that CANNOT be what the verse is meaning, for that would pit the Son against the Father in a contest of names, where the Son emerges ABOVE the Father! We know from the rest of the teaching in the Torah that Yeshua the man is “subjective” to the Father. Yet, the rabbi is teaching us something about the equality and divinity of the name of Yeshua that stretches the limits of normal modes of speech, whether Hebrew, Greek, or today’s English!

According to Yeshua’s own testimony in John 10:30, he and the Father constitute an “echad,” that is, they are “one.” This Hebrew word “echad” אחד can be understood as describing a “composite unity.”¹⁰ This means that one revelation of the unity doesn’t detract from the other part (or parts) of the same unity. In plain English: Yeshua is **ONE** with the Father in such a way as to share the exact same **Purpose, Will, and Glory** with the Father, but Yeshua never subtracts any of these attributes from the Father. To be sure, Yeshua did just the opposite—by his life of servitude, he brought clarity of meaning to the **Purposes** of the Father; he correctly defined the divine **Will** of the Father by becoming obedient even unto death; and he demonstrated the majestic **Glory** of the Father by being raised from the grave! Yeshua never usurped any authority from the Father, and this is proved not only in his very own words recorded in the Synoptic Gospels, but also in the very same chapter mentioned above (see Phil. 2:6). So we find that the Torah sometimes uses language that stretches the limits of our finite understanding of the nature and name of HaShem, in relation to the nature and name of the Messiah, yet the Torah remains foundationally true!

I believe that HaShem wants us to come to the awesome realization, through the Ruach HaKodesh, that the “name” of the LORD is Yeshua! If you don’t believe me, read the rest of Philippians where the Torah teaches that one day, everyone

¹⁰ Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT), אחד.

will acknowledge that Yeshua is ADONAI, to the glory of God the Father! This word “adonai” is the Greek word “kurios” κύριος, which can be translated “sir” or “lord” depending on the context. Since Sha’ul is quoting from the TaNaKH book of Isaiah, then the context demands the rendering “LORD” (i.e. YHVH). In fact, to further the seeming controversy, Isaiah 45:23 is specifically referring to ADONAI the Father! This means that the verse in Philippians is hinting that Yeshua will be acknowledged as ADONAI without explicitly stating that Yeshua IS the Father. We must be careful not to put something into the text that is not there.

We as believers in Messiah know in our spiritual intellect (our new man) that Yeshua is the Father veiled in flesh, yet the Torah never comes right out and tells us that Yeshua is the Father (God). Moreover, we will not find a text that states explicitly that the Father (God) is Yeshua. Rather, the Torah uses unique language such as that which is found in our current parashah to reveal to us the intimate character and identity of our otherwise unfathomable God. Moshe becomes privy to the revelation that would someday be fully realized in Yeshua: that HaShem’s name is to be forever remembered as “Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh,” the God who IS and WILL BE the deliverer of Isra’el!—and that his Son is also the great I AM! To be sure, our Messiah possesses these unique qualities otherwise found solely in HaShem! This is a wonderful revelation indeed! For a more complete look at the NAMES of HaShem ask for my “What’s in a Name?” commentary; for a more complete look at the ECHAD of HaShem ask for my “**Shema**” commentaries (Part One, Part Two, Part Three).

Practical Application

Our parashah goes on to teach us about the method that HaShem would use to demonstrate his mighty power, not only to the Jewish People, but to the Egyptians as well. HaShem instructs Moshe to perform various signs and wonders in the sight of the king of Egypt, but, that even these would not convince the Pharaoh to free the people. Only in the end with a mighty, out-stretched arm would HaShem cause the Pharaoh to let the people go. We need to understand that the king of Egypt willfully hardened his own heart until HaShem himself saw fit to use this for his glory by confirming (hardening) the Pharaoh’s heart also. Please don’t misunderstand! HaShem only confirmed the hardness of a heart that was originally and willfully hardened by Pharaoh himself!

Today, the lesson for us should be one of willful obedience, rather than disobedience and eventual hardening. To be sure, the more Pharaoh hardened his heart towards HaShem, the more difficult it became to change that heart. Similarly, today, the more we say “no” to HaShem and his Son, the more difficult it becomes to ever say “yes” to HIM.

Pharaoh’s hardness is vividly displayed in the phrase found in Sh’mot 5:2, where he declares, “Who is ADONAI... I don’t know ADONAI!” This is a willful denial of

the God of the descendants of Avraham. This is the attitude that eventually brought the king to destruction, and his country along with him. But HaShem does not allow the stubbornness of one ignorant king to thwart his masterful plans! Instead, as we read the story of the Exodus from Egypt, it is precisely in this disobedient vessel that HaShem displays his awesome power in deliverance! This deliverance will be spoken of for generations to come!

Today, if you have experienced the deliverance from the bondage of sin, then you have something exciting to talk about! To be sure, the Torah instructs us to proclaim the “good news” of this “salvation from spiritual Egypt!” If we are to be living testimonies of the power of HaShem in the Earth today, then we need to know from whence we came, and why. As we study the story of the Exodus from Egypt, the Torah is going to provide us with the necessary “inspiration” and foundation to share that redemption with others.

I want to challenge you to grab a seat, sit back, and get ready to “go through the Red Sea!” The Torah is about to take you on one of the greatest adventures in the history of the sons of Avraham. And because of your Messiah Yeshua, as non-Jewish believers, you need to know that THEIR history is YOUR history!

Excursus: G-d?

Why do some people write the name of God without the “o” (as in “G-d) or why do some spell the title “LORD” with a dash (as in L-RD)?

*May it be noted that my personal preference is to use all of the letters when writing “LORD,” “God,” and such. But due to sensitivities I have often used “HaShem” as a reference for the Tetragrammaton Name of God in my commentaries. However, I will break with personal tradition and omit the required vowels in this excursus.

Based on the words in Deut. 12:3-4, the Rabbis deduced that it is forbidden to erase the name of G-d from a written document. Since any paper upon which the name of G-d name was written might be discarded and thus “erased,” the Rabbis forbade explicitly writing the name of G-d, except in Holy Books, with provisions for the proper disposal of such books.

According to Jewish Folklore, G-d has 70 names. However, only one of these names is the ineffable name, which cannot be erased or pronounced. Further, of the 70 names, seven may not be erased but they can be pronounced on certain occasions (such as when reading the Torah). The other names may be erased and pronounced, but still must be treated with respect. The Talmud (Shevuot 35a-b) makes it clear that this prohibition applies only to seven Biblical names of G-d and not to other names or attributes of G-d, which may be freely written. The prohibition was later codified by Maimonides (Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah 6:1-2). The practice of writing “G-d” is supported in Shut Achiezer, 3:32,

and, where it is endorsed and accepted as the prevailing custom. Rambam cites Deut. 12-03:04, which states "and you shall destroy the names of pagan gods from their places. You shall not do similarly to G-d your Lord." The intent of this is to create an atmosphere of respect for G-d's name vs. pagan gods names.

As a result of this, people acquired the habit of not writing the full name down in the first place. Strictly speaking, this only applies to Hebrew on a permanent medium, but many people are careful beyond the minimum, and have applied it to non-Hebrew languages, hence, "G-d."

One explanation is that using G-d is a reminder that anything that we may say about G-d is necessarily metaphorical. Spelling out the Name (even in a language other than Hebrew) would imply that one could speak meaningfully (not just metaphorically) about G-d.

However, the Shach (Yoreh De'a 179:11) ruled that "God" spelled in a foreign language does NOT have the status of a "shem" and thus may be erased, lehatkhila. There is a story about Rav Soloveitchik (z"l) intentionally writing GOD on the board while teaching a class and then just as deliberately and intentionally erasing it, so as to demonstrate by his own example that this was not halachically a problem.

Conservative and Reform practice is to use "God." However, even some who are not strict (or even observant) in general will write "G-d," to emphasize that Jewish conceptions of G-d are meant.

Note: There is one exception to the destruction of G-d's name. In Numbers 5:11-31, the Suspected Wife Ceremony (Heb: Sotah), a man who suspects his wife of adultery (with witnesses seeing a forbidden seclusion) brings his wife to the temple. The Priests test the woman by pronouncing the horrible Biblical curse. After reading the curse it is written on parchment and dissolved in water (which the woman drinks). If she is guilty she dies and otherwise the couple gets their marriage back. Thus, G-d actually allows the ineffable name to be dissolved in water that the woman drinks. As the Talmud notes: G-d allows the ineffable name to be erased for the sake of bringing peace between a husband and wife.

The closing blessing is as follows:

***"Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-'Olam,
asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn."***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.

Ameyn.)

“Shabbat Shalom!”

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