

פרשת שמות

The dialogue was remarkable! Any time that the Torah presents us with a conversation, a 'give and take' between man and G-d, we are entranced. It is not merely an article of faith that HaKodosh Boruch attends to mankind, listens and responds, but, perhaps even more remarkable is that He relates to what we say and presents an answer that takes into account what man says.

The first time that we see this dialogue in a full presentation is when Avraham Ovinu pleads to save the people of S'dom and Amora. As the Torah presents it to us, Avraham seems to be bargaining with Hashem, attempting to eke out the best deal possible.

In fact, we can almost envision the scene as the negotiations that one would observe in the *shuk*.

We read the beginning of that dialogue in Parshas Va'yeiro (B'reishis Perek 18/P'sukim 23-26):

וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֵף תִּסְפֶּה צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע: אוֹלַי יֵשׁ חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר
הָאֵף תִּסְפֶּה וְלֹא תִשָּׂא לְמָקוֹם לְמַעַן חֲמִשִּׁים הַצְּדִיקִים אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבָּהּ: חֲלִלָה לָךְ
מַעֲשֵׂת כַּדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְהַמִּית צְדִיק עִם רָשָׁע וְהָיָה כְּצְדִיק כְּרָשָׁע חֲלִלָה לָךְ הַשֹּׁפֵט כֹּל
הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט: וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אִם אֶמְצָא בְּסֹדֶם חֲמִשִּׁים צְדִיקִים בְּתוֹךְ הָעִיר
וְנִשְׂאתִי לְכֹל הַמָּקוֹם בְּעַבְוֹרָם:

Avraham approached [Hashem] and he said, 'Will you also destroy a righteous person with a wicked person? Perhaps there are 50 righteous people in the midst of the city; will you also destroy and not forgive the place on behalf of the 50 righteous ones that are in its midst? It is unholy for you to do such a thing to kill the righteous with the wicked and then the righteous would be like the wicked; it would be unholy for you, Judge over the entire land would He not do justice? Hashem said, 'If I will find in S'dom 50 righteous people in the midst of the city, I will forgive the entire place because of them.'

Our Parshas Sh'mos also contains a dialogue, on the one hand similar to that of Hashem and Avraham Ovinu and on the other hand, quite different.

On the one hand, Hashem responds to each of the claims that Moshe Rabbenu raises and, on the other hand, rather than the focus be on a third party, like S'dom, as it was in Parshas Va'yeiro, here the focus is on Moshe Rabbenu, from Moshe's perspective and from that of the Ribbono Shel Olom.

But, unlike the dialogue of Hashem and Avraham Ovinu that took place on one day¹, the dialogue of Hashem and Moshe Rabbenu stretched out over 7 days².

¹ The Torah writes there at the beginning of Parshas Va'yeira (Perek 18/P'sukim 1-2):

וַיֵּרָא אֵלָיו ה' בְּאֵלֵי מִמְרָא וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב פֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל כְּחֹם הַיּוֹם: וַיִּשָּׂא עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה שְׁלֹשָׁה אַנְשִׁים
נֹצְבִים עָלָיו וַיֵּרָא וַיֵּרֶץ לְקִרְאתָם מִפֶּתַח הָאֹהֶל וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה:

Hashem appeared to Avraham in Eilonei Mamreh and he was sitting at the opening of the tent in the heat of the day. He raised his eyes and he saw and behold three men were standing near him and he saw and he ran to meet them from the opening of the tent and he bowed down to the land.

At this point the dialogue ensues and then we read (Perek 19/Posuk 1):

וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׁנֵי הַמַּלְאָכִים סְדֹמָה בְּעֶרֶב וְלוֹט יֹשֵׁב בְּשַׁעַר סְדֹם וַיֵּרָא לוֹט וַיֵּקָם לְקִרְאתָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אִפְּיָם
אַרְצָה:

And the two angels came to Sedom in the evening and Lot was sitting at the gate of Sedom and Lot saw and he arose to meet them and he bowed on his face to the ground.

Thus this dialogue took place in a total of no more than a few hours – between the 'heat of the day' and the 'evening'.

² We read in our Parsha, in one of Moshe's statements in the dialogue (Perek 4/Posuk 10):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' בִּי אֲ...ד...נִי לֹא אִישׁ דְּבָרִים אֲנִי גַם מִתְמוּל גַּם מִשְׁלֹשִׁם גַּם מֵאִזְ דְּבָרְךָ אֶל
עַבְדְּךָ כִּי כָבֵד פֶּה וְכָבֵד לְשׁוֹן אֲנִי:

Moshe said to Hashem, 'Please my Master G-d, I am not a man of words, also from yesterday and also from three days ago also from then when You spoke to Your servant, because I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue.

Rashi writes:

Thus, besides considering the meaning of the dialogue as a whole, each part of its dialogue must be examined well.

We will look at one part of it.

We read (Perek 3/P'sukim 13-15):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים...לֵקִים הַיְהוָה אֲנֹכִי בָּא אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֲנִי...לֵקִי
אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ לִי מַה שְּׁמוֹ מָה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי...לֵקִים אֶל
מֹשֶׁה אֱהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֱהִיָּה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר
עוֹד אֲנִי...לֵקִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֲנִי...לֵקִי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֲנִי...לֵקִי
אֲבָרְהֶם אֲנִי...לֵקִי יִצְחָק וְאֲנִי...לֵקִי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זְכָרִי לְדֹר
דָּר:

Moshe said to G-d, 'Behold, I will come to B'nei Yisroel and I will say to them "the G-d of your fathers sent me to you" and they will say, 'What is His Name?'; what shall I say to them?'

G-d said to Moshe, 'I will be what I will be'; and He said, 'So should you say to B'nei Yisroel 'Eh'y'yeh – I will be' sent me to you.'

G-d said more to Moshe, 'So you should say to B'nei Yisroel, 'The G-d of your fathers, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov sent me to you; this is My Name forever and this is My remembrance for all generations.'

We are familiar with Rashi's explanation to Posuk 14 in which Hashem first says that His Name is אהיה אשר אהיה and then says it is אהיה.

גם מתמול וגו' - למדנו שכל שבעה ימים היה הקדוש ברוך הוא מפתה את משה בסנה לילך בשליחותו מתמול שלשום מאז דברך הרי שלשה, ושלשה גמין רבויין הם, הרי ששה, והוא היה עומד ביום השביעי כשאמר לו זאת עוד (להלן פסוק יג) שלח נא ביד תשלח

Also from yesterday etc. – We learned that for all seven days Hashem was trying to convince Moshe at the Bush to go on His mission.

'From yesterday, from three days ago'-that is three days. Three times the word *gam* - also, is written because each usage of 'also' comes to add to our understanding of the verse. Thus we have a total of 6.

On the seventh day Moshe was standing before G-d and he said in addition, 'Send please, in the hand of whom You will send.'

Rashi explains that **אשר אהיה** means that Hashem will be with Israel through all of their suffering; in each and every case His Shechinah will be present. Moshe thought, mistakenly, that that was information that he was to give to Israel and was disturbed by the thought.

‘Why tell Israel about future suffering in the midst of their current troubles?’ To which Hashem responded that the Name to be told to Israel is only **אהיה**, ‘I am with them in their present troubles.’

In fact, when we see the verse carefully we note that Hashem does not tell Moshe to tell Israel **אהיה אשר אהיה**; He is informing Moshe of that fact.

When it comes to inform Israel, then Hashem says:

וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:

He said, ‘So should you say to B’nei Yisroel *‘Eh’y’yeh* – I will be’ sent me to you.

However, we wish to focus on other aspects of this set of P’sukim and that which surrounds them.

First, what is the reason that Israel would ask G-d’s Name? He is Hashem, G-d. What is the meaning of the question?

Secondly, how could it be that they did not know G-d’s Name? In the surrounding P’sukim, *Shem Hashem* is mentioned time and time again. How could they have been oblivious to it?

Finally, for our purposes, what is the meaning of the final verse above? Hashem said something additional **עוד**? What did He add on? What message was being given?

Ibn Ezra writes in this section:

וַיֹּאמֶר עֵתָּה בִּיקַשׁ מֹשֶׁה מֵה שֵׁם יֹאמַר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִשְׁמוֹתָיו, כִּי בִשְׁם קָל שׁ...דִּי לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתוֹת, רַק בִּשְׁם הַנִּכְבָּד.

And he said – Now Moshe wanted to know which of Hashem's Names he should tell Israel. [The reason is] that with the Names of *Keil*, and *Shad...dai*, He does not perform the signs and miracles that he would perform in Egypt. He only does so with the Honored Name [of *Yud, Heh, Vov, Heh*].

That is, Moshe was not investigating the Names of G-d. Rather, he was looking for information that would support the fulfilment of his task in Egypt. That is, Moshe's question was technical in nature, not a substantive investigation regarding the Names of Hashem and their meanings.

Ramban argues on Ibn Ezra stating that since Moshe had not yet been told to perform signs and miracles in Egypt, why would he be asking about which Name to use when making those signs?

Ramban writes:

ולפי דעתי היה משה גם בעת ההיא אב בחכמה גדול במעלת הנבואה, ודרך שאלה בקש שיודיעוהו מי השולח אותו, כלומר באי זו מדה הוא שלוח אליהם, כענין...והנה אמר ישאלוני על שליחותי אם היא במדת קל ש...די היא שעמדה לאבות, או במדת רחמים עליונית שתעשה בה אותות ומופתים מחודשים ביצירה. וזה בעבור שאמר לו אנכי א...ל"קי אביך א...ל"קי אברהם (פסוק ו³), ולא פירש שם משמותיו הקדושים כלל, ושמע משה שהבטיחו על מעמד הר סיני ומתן תורה, והוא היודע כי התורה לא תנתן בשם קל ש...די הנזכר באבות רק השם הגדול שבו היה העולם, ועל כן שאל מה אומר אליהם:

According to my opinion, Moshe was [already] at that time an extraordinarily master of wisdom and superior in the levels of prophecy. He requested that Hashem should let him know Who is sending him. This

³ The entire verse reads:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֶלֶּלֶּיִךָ אָבִיךָ אֶלֶּלֶּיִךָ אֲבִרָהִם אֶלֶּלֶּיִךָ יִצְחָק וְאֶלֶּלֶּיִךָ יַעֲקֹב וַיִּסְתֵּר מֹשֶׁה פָּנָיו כִּי יֵרָא מִהַבַּיִת אֶל הָאֵל...ל"קים:

Hashem said, 'I am the G-d of your father, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov; Moshe hid his face because he was afraid to look at G-d.

means to say that Moshe was asking regarding which aspect of Hashem's nature, which *middah* was being sent.

And now, Moshe said to Hashem, Israel will ask me about my mission – is it based on the Divine Name of *Almighty G-d* that supported the Patriarchs or the attribute of supreme mercy through which newly created miracles and signs will take place?

The reason for these questions is that in a previous verse [when Hashem 'introduced' Himself to Moshe Rabbenu at the Sneh] He said that 'I am the G-d of your father and the G-d of Avraham' and Hashem did not explain anything about His Holy Names.

Moshe heard that Hashem promised him regarding Mt. Sinai the giving of the Torah, and Moshe knew that the Torah would not be given by G-d appearing before Israel as *Almighty G-d*, the Name that was mentioned in conjunction with the Patriarchs, but [the Torah would be given] with the Great Name through which the world was created. This is why Moshe asked, 'What shall I say to them?'

When I read this Ramban I cannot help but associate this section with two other parts of the Torah.

In next week's Parshas Vo'eiro, we read the harsh response that HaKodosh Boruch Hu gave Moshe when Moshe uttered the complaints that we read at the end of our Parsha.

As Par'o increased the travails of our ancestors in Egypt following Moshe's appearance before him, Moshe spoke before Hashem (Perek 5/P'sukim 22-23):

וַיָּשָׁב מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי לָמָּה הִרְעַתָּה לָעָם הַזֶּה לָמָּה זָּה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי: וַמֶּאֱזָבֵנִי אֶל פְּרַעֲוֵה לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁמְךָ הִרְעָה לָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִצִּיל לֹא הִצִּילְתָּ אֶת עַמְּךָ:

Moshe returned to Hashem and he said, 'My master G-d, why did You deal badly with this people; why did You send me? From when I came to Par'o to speak in Your Name, he dealt badly with this people and You certainly did not save Your people.'

The response of the Ribbono Shel Olom is the lead of the following Parsha (Perek 6/Posuk 3):

וַיֵּרָא אֶל אַבְרָהָם אֶל יִצְחָק וְאֶל יַעֲקֹב בְּקֹל שׁ... וְשְׁמִי ה' לֹא נִודְעָתִי לָהֶם:

I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov as Almighty G-d; My Name of Hashem was unknown to them.

As Rashi writes:

בקל ש...די - הבטחתיים הבטחות ובכולן אמרתי להם אני קל ש...די:

As Almighty G-d – I made promises to them and in all of them I said, “I am Almighty G-d.”

ושמי ה' לא נודעתי להם - לא נכרתי להם במדת אמתות שלי שעליה נקרא שמי
ה' נאמן לאמת דברי, שהרי הבטחתיים ולא קיימתי:

My Name of Hashem was unknown to them – I was not recognized by them regarding the attribute of my truthfulness. It is for that attribute that I am called Hashem – trusted to validate My Word. I promised them but I did not fulfil the promises.

Is it not fascinating that this early conversation at the S'neh between Moshe Rabbenu and HaKodosh Boruch Hu foreshadows the 'conversation' that marks the end of Parshas Sh'mos and the beginning of Parshas Vo'eiro?

Thus, it appears that one aspect of Moshe's question to HaKodosh Boruch Hu was that he was concerned to approach B'nei Yisroel with 'more promises'. The history of Israel until that time was one of promises that were unfulfilled. Moshe wanted to know that he would be able to bring something tangible and concrete to Israel.

The second association that we have with Ramban's commentary is what we learn in Parshas Ki Siso after the sin of the Golden Calf when HaKodosh Boruch Hu has forgiven B'nei Yisroel through the agency of Moshe Rabbenu and Moshe will now prepare the *Luchos Sh'niyos*, the second edition of the *Aseres HaDibros*.

Moshe Rabbenu presents two requests before the Ribbono Shel Olom.

We read the first request (Sh'mos Perek 33/P'sukim 12-13):

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' רְאֵה אֶתְּךָ אֵלֵי הָעַל אֶת הָעַם הַזֶּה וְאַתָּה לֹא הוֹדַעְתָּנִי אֶת
אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁלַח עִמִּי וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ יִדְעֶינִךָ בְּשֵׁם וְגַם מִצְאָתָּ חֵן בְּעֵינָי: וְעַתָּה אִם נָא
מִצְאֹתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת דְּרָכְךָ וְאִדְעָךָ לְמַעַן אֶמְצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ וְרְאֵה כִּי עַמְּךָ
הִגִּוִי הַזֶּה:

Moshe said to Hashem, 'See, You say to me, "Bring up this people and You did not inform me who you will send with me; You said, 'I will know you with The Name and you have also found favor in My eyes.' Now, if I have found favor in Your eyes, tell me please Your Ways and I will know You in order that I will be able to find favor in Your eyes; see, this nation is Your people.'

Unquestionably, these verses and the ones that we will bring shortly are most difficult to comprehend because we are being privy to a conversation at the very height of holiness, beyond the pale of our imagination.

Yet, the Torah shares it with us and we must understand as best as we can, being aware that our comprehension is so limited.

Moshe Rabbenu emphasizes that he has found favor in G-d's eyes. Hashem has forgiven Israel due to Moshe's prayers and Moshe wishes to take advantage of this עת רצון.

What does Moshe mean when he requests:

הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת דְּרָכְךָ

Tell me please Your Ways?

The meaning of that request will be easier to understand when we learn the second request and examine it.

We read a little further on (Posuk 17) that Hashem accedes to that first request:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה גַם אֶת הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֲעֹשֶׂה כִּי מָצָאתָ חֵן בְּעֵינַי וְאֲדַעֲרָךְ
בְּשֵׁם:

Hashem said to Moshe, 'Also this matter I will do as you said because you have found favor in My eyes and I will inform you with The Name.

Now that Moshe was successful with the first request, the very next verse contains the second one:

וַיֹּאמֶר הֲרֹאֵנִי נָא אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ:

Moshe said, 'Show me, please, Your Glory.'

What is the difference between asking to see 'G-d's ways' and asking to see 'His Glory'.

Seeing G-d's ways is to understand how Hashem Yisborach interacts with the world. It is to understand how He deals with us. In fact, that is the intent of Rashi regarding this request. He wrote above:

ועתה - אם אמת שמצאתי חן בעיניך הודיעני נא את דרכך, מה שכר אתה נותן
למוצאי חן בעיניך:

And now – if I truly found favor in Your eyes, inform me regarding your ways: what reward do You give to those who find favor in Your eyes?'

Is it possible to conceive that Moshe Rabbenu Olov HaShalom is seeking inside information as to how he can increase his Divine reward? Is it possible to conceive that Moshe Rabbenu was unaware of the idea which is expressed in the maxim at the beginning of Masseches Ovot (Perek 1/Mishna 3):

אל תהיו כעבדים המשמשין את הרב על מנת לקבל פרס

Do not be like the servants who serve their master with the intent of receiving reward?

Rather, by understanding that for which Hashem bestows rewards and that for which Hashem metes out punishment Moshe would receive a glimpse, at least, as to how HaKodosh Boruch Hu interacts with the world.

On the other hand, the second request is much different.

הֲרֵאֵנִי נָא אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ:

Show me, please, Your Glory.

In this request, Moshe was seeking to understand the essence of Hashem. It was not sufficient for him to only perceive the external nature of Hashem – how He deals with his creations. Moshe wanted to understand the very nature of the Ribbono Shel Olom, His *Kavod*.

This second request was rejected by HaKodosh Boruch Hu. Thus we read two P'sukim forward:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאוֹת אֶת פָּנַי כִּי לֹא יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי:

Hashem said, 'You will not be able to see My Face because Man cannot see My Face and live.'

That is, it is impossible for Man to understand the nature of G-d and thus Moshe's request was unrequited.

What is fascinating to note is the verse that intervenes between this second request of Moshe Rabbenu and the refusal that he received.

We read (Posuk 19):

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעֱבִיר כָּל טוֹבִי עַל פְּנֶיךָ וְקִרְאתִי בְּשֵׁם ה' לְפָנֶיךָ וְחִנַּנְתִּי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אָחַן וְרַחֲמֵתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אָרַחֵם:

Hashem said, 'I will pass all of My Goodness near your face and I will call the Name of Hashem before you and I will favor that which I will favor and I will have mercy upon that which I will have mercy.'

This promise of HaKodosh Boruch Hu is referring to the *שלש עשרה מידות*, the Thirteen Attributes of Hashem that Hashem will reveal to Moshe Rabbenu shortly (Perek 34/P'sukim 6-7). These verses are well-known to us; they are recited many times on Yom HaKippurim and whenever Selichos are recited.

These *Thirteen Attributes* are, in fact, G-d's positive response to Moshe Rabbenu when he requested to know 'G-d's ways' since they teach us how He interacts with mankind⁴.

What is surprising is that this verse seems out of place. Moshe had already requested to know G-d's ways and Hashem answered him favourably. Why, then, should this verse which is a type of restatement of that already-given positive answer intervene between Moshe's request to understand G-d's essence and the rejection of that request?

I think that the answer is that this 'rejection' is not because Moshe was undeserving. It did not come about because Moshe did not merit this new level of understanding. Rather the rejection came about because Moshe's request was impossible to fulfil.

The understanding of the essence of Hashem could be privy to Hashem alone. No person, no creation, could attain such knowledge.

In order to emphasize that it was not a matter of Moshe's unworthiness, Hashem re-emphasized His granting of Moshe's first request.

That is, the order of these verses indicates that Moshe was deserving of everything; he just could not have that which was impossible.

Thus, we have seen that the dialogue of the verses in which Moshe requests to know the Name of G-d which he is to transmit to Israel is a harbinger of things to come.

But when we see the outcome of these two associations, we perceive the polar differences between them.

⁴ See Rashi there where he emphasizes that the double-statement of *Hashem Hashem* and other phrases as well, represents His attribute of mercy and others represent compassion and others discuss G-d's rewards to man.

These verses talk about how Hashem interacts, not Who He Is.

Whereas, Moshe's request to have a greater understanding of Hashem, to the utmost that was possible was answered favorably, his quest to change the presentation of Hashem from *Almighty G-d* to Hashem was met with considerable criticism.

That criticism is apparent in the first verse of Parshas Voeiro (Perek 6/Posuk 2) which reads:

וַיִּדְבֹר אֱלֹהִים...לְמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי ה':

Hashem spoke to Moshe and He said to him, 'I am Hashem'.

It is immediately apparent that this verse seems to have extra words. Why couldn't it have written, 'Hashem said to Moshe, I am Hashem'.

Thus, Rashi explains:

וַיִּדְבֹר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה - דָּבַר אֶתְּךָ מִשְׁפָּט עַל שֶׁהִקְשָׁה לְדַבֵּר וּלְאָמַר לְמַה הִרְעוּתָה לְעַם הַזֶּה:

Hashem spoke to Moshe – Hashem spoke harshly with him because Moshe spoke harshly when he said, 'Why have you done badly to this people?'

I think that the answer to why the request of Moshe to understand the Name of G-d was criticized and, yet, Moshe's request to know more about Hashem though answered partially was respected fully is in the fact that Moshe read into the nature of Israel rather than speaking from his own standpoint.

Moshe said that B'nei Yisroel will wish to know the Name of G-d and he said, or at least implied, that without a satisfactory answer they would not attend to whatever Moshe Rabbenu had to say to them.

Thus, the question was not only one of seeking knowledge. It suggested an underlying attitude that cast aspersion upon Israel.

Rashi already notes that Moshe's understanding of Israel's attitude was incorrect and also defamatory.

When Moshe continued to protest we read his words (Perek 4/Posuk 1):

וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר וְהֵן לֹא יֶאֱמִינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְקוֹלִי כִּי יֹאמְרוּ לֹא נִרְאָה אֱלֹהֵי ה':

Moshe responded and said, 'They will not believe me and they will not listen to my voice because they will say, "Hashem did not appear to you".'

Instead of responding, Hashem then gives Moshe an instruction in the very next two P'sukim:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו ה' מַה זֶה בְּיָדְךָ וַיֹּאמֶר מִטָּה: וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְּׁלִיכֵהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁלַכְהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיְהִי לְנָחָשׁ וַיִּנָּס מִפְּנֵיו:

Hashem said to him, 'What is this in your hand?' and he said, 'a staff'. Hashem said, 'Cast it to the ground' and Moshe cast it to the ground and it became a snake and Moshe fled from before it.

What was the reason for this strange command? Rashi explains:

מזה בידך...-שחשדת בכשרים.

What is in your hand – ...you cast suspicions upon innocent people.

ויהי לנחש - רמז לו שסיפר לשון הרע על ישראל ותפש אומנותו של נחש:

It became a snake – This hinted that he spoke *l'shon ho'ra'* regarding Israel and he adopted the expertise of the snake.

When the questions that Moshe asked were contained within an aura of inappropriateness, the answer could not have been positive.

In fact, this may be the explanation as to why Hashem did not fully answer Moshe's question about the Name.

Hashem said:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים...לְיָקִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:

G-d said to Moshe, "I will be what I will be"; and He said, 'So should you say to B'nei Yisroel *'Eh'y'yeh* – I will be' sent me to you.

Why didn't Hashem say 'tell them that My Name is *yud, heh, vov, heh*? Why did He only hint at His constant presence and providence with the word *אהיה*? The answer must be because He did not want such a vital and fundamental question to be answered fully in this aura of slander and casting aspersions.

In contrast, regarding the second request, Moshe's desire to understand the way that Hashem functions was not criticized; in fact, as we read in Parshas Ki Siso, he was treated with respect and dignity and given the opportunity to seek that which was impossible, without criticism. The refusal of that second request was not done out of irritation. That is because his request was legitimate, coming from his unquenchable thirst to understand Hashem.

And now we are ready to approach the third Posuk of this set. We read:

וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֶל־לִקְיִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֶל־לִקְיִים אֲבֹתֵיכֶם
אֶל־לִקְיִים אֲבֹתֵיכֶם אֶל־לִקְיִים אֶל־לִקְיִים אֶל־לִקְיִים אֶל־לִקְיִים אֶל־לִקְיִים אֶל־לִקְיִים
לְדֹר דָּר:

G-d said more to Moshe, 'So you should say to B'nei Yisroel, 'Hashem, the G-d of your fathers, the G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak and the G-d of Yaakov sent me to you; this is My Name forever and this is My remembrance for all generations.'

What is the meaning of 'od here? What was Hashem adding?

The answer may be that this final *Posuk*, this *od* comes to temper the expectations of Moshe and of B'nei Yisroel.

'This is My remembrance for all generations'

What is the 'this'?

'This' is the Name of G-d that was to be transmitted to Israel. It is His Name *לעלם*, forever.

However, as Rashi points out, the word *לעלם* is written in an unusual fashion. In general this word is written *לעולם* with the letter *vov* following the letter *ayin*. Exclusively in our verse, the letter *vov* is missing after the letter *ayin* and if we

didn't know better when we would read the word without its vowels we see it as לעלם, which means to be hidden⁵.

What is to be hidden, as the written form of the verse - its כתיב indicates? Rashi tells us that we receive instruction from this word as to how we are to pronounce *Shem Hashem*. He writes:

זה שמי לעלם - חסר וי"ו, לומר העלימהו, שלא יקרא ככתבו:

This is My Name לעלם – This word is missing the letter *vov* to tell us 'hide it', that the Name of Hashem, *yud, heh, vov, heh* should not be read as it is written.

That is, the consternation that we all felt as children when learning to read the Name written *yud, heh, vov, heh*, and being told, 'read it as *Ado...no...!*' stems from this verse.

Do not read Shem Hashem as its letters indicate! Hide its reading.

Shem Hashem teaches us that HaKodosh Boruch Hu is with us always:

היה הווה ויהיה

He was, He is and He will be.

That is what אהיה אשר אהיה means as well:

I Hashem will be with you always!

However, the constant Presence of HaKodosh Boruch Hu is often hidden from us; we do not always perceive His Shechinah.

That lack of perception, that hiddenness, is relevant to both of the requests that Moshe Rabbenu put forward.

⁵ See Parshas Ki Setze, D'vorim Perek 22, P'sukim 1 and 4 where the word והתעלמת is used and comes from the same root.

The very fact that we *believe* that Hashem is Almighty G-d with the power and control over all indicates that He has not fulfilled His promises to us in a way that we can perceive.

We *believe* because we cannot see. We *believe* because He, in His omniscience, chooses that there should be matters hidden from us.

And, just like our understanding of historical reality has hiddenness to it, seeing Him as *Almighty* but not seeing the actualization of His power, so, too, is our understanding of G-d muted.

We can ask the questions and we will receive some answers but ultimately our humanness places barriers to the extent of our ability to comprehend His Divinity.

At the inauguration of the service of Moshe Rabbenu at the *S'neh*, chosen for its smallness as a symbol of humility⁶, we must be reminded that our relationship with G-d must be based on that attribute of humility.

We must remember that our ability to approach His greatness is predicated on the understanding that the gap between us and Him is infinite and cannot be crossed.

We strive to understand and comprehend all that which is in our power to know and just as we cannot understand why the flaming bush is not consumed so we accept that we cannot even understand G-d's leadership of history and certainly not His essence.

That is the starting point of Israel which will be redeemed from Egypt and have אהיה אשה accompanying us throughout our history, personal and national.

That is how Sefer Sh'mos, *Sefer HaGeula* as Abarbanel, Rav Hirsch and Netziv, among others, call it, teaches us to begin our trek as the Nation of Israel.

⁶ Rashi writes there:

מתוך הסנה - ולא אילן אחר, משום עמו אנכי בצרה (תהילים צא/טו):
From the midst of the bush – and not from another type of tree. This is because Hashem says, 'I am with him in a time of trouble.'

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock