

Shemot - Moses, the Bush, and The Names

Exodus 2:10

(10) When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water."

שמות ב':י'

(י) וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבַאֲהוּ
לְבַת־פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי־לָהּ לְבֵן
וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר
כִּי מִן־הַמַּיִם מָשִׁיתִהוּ:

Sforno on Exodus 2:10

(1) ותקרא שמו משה, someone who will save others by pulling them out of their calamity.
(2) ותאמר כי מן המים משיתו, the reason why I called him thus is so that he in turn would rescue others from their problems, just as I have pulled him out of the water (in which he would have drowned.) She considered the find as decreed by a higher power (compare Daniel, 4,14) Moses was saved only so that in his life he would become the instrument of saving others.

ספורנו על שמות ב':י'

(א) ותקרא שמו משה ממלט ומושה את אחרים מצרה: (ב) ותאמר כי מן המים משיתו הטעם שקראתו משה להורות שימלט את אחרים הוא, כי אמנם משיתו מן המים אחר שהיה מוטל בתוכם, וזה לא היה כי אם בגזירת עירין כדי שימלט הוא את אחרים:

Exodus 3:1-6

(1) Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. (2) An angel of Adonai appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. (3) Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?" (4) When Adonai saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." (5) And He said, "Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. (6) I am," He said, "the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

שמות ג':א'-ו'

(א) וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֵה רְעֻה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵנוּ כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחַר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹקִים חֹרֵב: (ב) וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָךְ יי אֱלֹוֹ בְּלַבַּת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֵּרָא וַהֲנֶה הַסֵּנֶה בְּעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסֵּנֶה אֵינּוּ אֹכֵל: (ג) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרֶה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הַמְּרָאָה הַגְּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא־יִבְעַר הַסֵּנֶה: (ד) וַיֵּרָא יי כִּי סָר לִרְאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹקִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּנִי: (ה) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־תִּקְרַב הֵלֶם שֶׁל־נְעֻלְיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדַמְתִּי־קֹדֶשׁ הוּא: (ו) וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹקֵי אֲבִיךָ אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹקֵי יַעֲקֹב וַיִּסְתֵּר מֹשֶׁה פָּנָיו כִּי יָרָא מֵהַבַּיִט אֶל־הָאֱלֹקִים:

[Shemot Rabbah 2:2](#)

(2) Our teachers have said: Once, while Moses our Teacher was tending [his father-in-law] Yitro's sheep, one of the sheep ran away. Moses ran after it until it reached a small, shaded place. There, the lamb came across a pool and began to drink. As Moses approached the lamb, he said, "I did not know you ran away because you were thirsty. You are so exhausted!" He then put the lamb on his shoulders and carried him back. The Holy One said, "Since you tend the sheep of human beings with such overwhelming love - by your life, I swear you shall be the shepherd of My sheep, Israel." ...

[Sforno on Exodus 3:1:1](#)

"And he came to Horeb..." Moses, all by himself; he wanted to pray and meditate there in complete isolation and concentration.

[Rashi on Exodus 3:1:2](#)

"...to the mountain of God" — Scripture so names it with reference to what happened there in the future.

[Shemot Rabbah 2:5](#)

"all aflame..." to embolden him, so that when he would come to Sinai and saw the fires he should not be afraid of them.

Shemot Rabbah 2:5

A Gentile once asked R. Joshua b. Karhah: Why did the Blessed Holy One, see fit to speak to Moses from within a thorn-bush? [R. Joshua retorted]: If it had been a carob tree or a sycamore tree, would you not have asked the same question. However to send you away you without any answer is not possible, [so] why from within a thorn-bush? To teach you that there is no empty place devoid of the Shechinah, not even a [lowly] thorn-bush.

"In a flame of fire." At first only one angel descended and stood in the center of the fire as an intermediary. Only afterwards did the Shechinah descend and spoke with him from within the thorn-bush. Rabbi Eliezer said: Just as the thorn-bush is the lowliest of all trees in the world, so too Israel were lowly and downtrodden in Egypt. Therefore the Blessed Holy One revealed God's self to them and redeemed them, as it says (Exodus 3:8) "And I will go down and save them from the Egypt."

Rabbi Yossi said: Just as the thorn-bush is the hardest of all the trees, and any bird that enters into it does not come out unharmed, so too the servitude in Egypt was harsher to God more than any other servitude in the world.

And why did the Blessed Holy One reveal Himself to Moses in this way? Because he [Moses] thought in his heart, saying, Maybe the Egyptians will destroy Israel. Therefore the Blessed Holy One revealed God's self in a thorn-bush that was burning but not consumed. God said to him, just as the thorn-bush is burning but is not consumed, so too the Egyptians will not be able to destroy Israel.

No'am Elimelech on Exodus 3:2

For the righteous, even their evil urge is turned toward good. This is taught on the verse "with all your heart" (Deut. 6:5), meaning "with both urges" (Berahot 54a) Nevertheless, you should never trust yourself fully, but remain always on guard.

This is "***an angel of Y-H-W-H appeared to him in a flaming fire***"... the evil urge is also called an angel or messenger of God. It shows itself to the tzaddik all wrapped in fiery enthusiasm, as though fully transformed into goodness. "***From amid a thornbush***": formerly having been such a "thorn" in his life. "***He looked and he saw that the bush was burning in fire.***" Even though you see the evil urge all dressed up in passion for the service of God, know that the bush is "**not consumed**". Watch out for it until your dying day.

From Art Green "Speaking Torah" p. 172

Aryeh Bernstein, JewSchool

Fugitive Moses is tending his sheep, when an unusual thing catches his eye: "He gazed, and there was a bush, all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses said, 'I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?' Although the reader already knows that this is a sign from God (v. 1), Moses does not. He just thinks it's interesting. We see unusual things all the time, but how often do we pay attention to them? More often, we ignore them, explain them away, or feel too busy tending our sheep to investigate. Had Moses not been driven by a need to understand, he never would have had the chance to hear God's voice. Note the language: "When Adonai saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him" (v. 4). It is Moses's expression of intellectual curiosity that justifies calling him and giving him the job. Strategizing within the well-defined parameters of the task at hand does not cut it: one must be constantly studying the entire world; after all, the source for solving the greatest national problems might lie in an unusual, small bush.

God's Name

Exodus 3:11-15

(11) But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and free the Israelites from Egypt?" (12) And He said, "I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain." (13) Moses said to God, "When I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" (14) And God said to Moses, **Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.**" He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, '**Ehyeh** sent me to you.'" (15) And God said further to Moses, "Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: Adonai, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, This My appellation for all eternity.

שמות ג': י"א-ט"ו

(יא) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹקִים מִי אֲנֹכִי כִי אֵלֶךְ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה וְכִי אוֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרָיִם: (יב) וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ וְזֶה־לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אֲנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת־הָעַם מִמִּצְרָיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת־הָאֱלֹקִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה: (יג) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹקִים הַנָּה אֲנֹכִי בֹא אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאָמְרוּ־לִי מִה־שְּׁמוֹ מָה אָמַר אֱלֹהִים: (יד) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם: (טו) וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹקִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה־תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יי אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹקֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹקֵי

Rashbam on Exodus 3:13:1

What is His name?: Seeing that I do not know Your specific name.

Sforno on Exodus 3:13:1

And they ask me, 'What is His name?': A name describes the individual features of a person, Being, or what makes them distinctive. The people could therefore be expected to ask Moses in what manner this God whose messenger he claimed to be had distinguished God's self as being special, different from other gods.

Rashi on Exodus 3:14:1

Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh: - I will be with them in this time of distress just as I will be with them during the suppression of other kingdoms. [Moshe] said, "Ruler of the Universe, why do I need to mention other distress? This travail is sufficient!" God said to him, "You have spoken well. This shall you say, etc."

Rashbam on Exodus 3:14:1

And God said to him: if you do not know My name, I will tell you that I am the Eternal. This means that I can fulfill any promise I make. Now that I have told you that My name is “the Eternal,” thus you shall say to the Children of Israel, “the One Who is the Eternal has sent me to you.”

Sforno on Exodus 3:14:1

Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh: I am an independent existence, not subject to influences by other phenomena or even caused by them. Seeing that this is so it follows that I love existing, and beings that exist. As a corollary to this love of Mine for existence, it follows that I deeply resent anything or anyone who tries to terminate such an existing being from continuing to do so... From this it follows that I must love righteousness and justice, the objective of both virtues being the continued existence of all who deserve it. At the same time, it follows that I must hate injustice and cruelty as these vices are apt to terminate the existence of the victims of these vices. Clearly, then, this God must hate the violence and cruelty perpetrated on you by the Egyptians.

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To comprehend the significance of this (Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh), it is necessary to know that Hebrew verbs, unlike verbs in the Indo-European languages, have no present, past, and future tenses. There is a gerund form for an ongoing action of undetermined duration, and two other forms which in modern usage apply to "past" and "future," but essentially indicate only whether an action has or has not been concluded. If the letter or word which represents the personal preposition stands before the verbal root, the action has not yet concluded; if it stands after the verbal root, the action has been concluded.

In this instance, the personal preposition letter of ehyeh is an aleph that stands for the first person singular pronoun. The other three letters come from the root h-y-h that connotes "to be." Hence, "ehyeh" signifies an action not yet concluded and can mean likewise "I am" or "I shall be."

So, Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh can be understood in four very different ways of self-definition:

1. 'I AM WHO I AM' – referring to an eternally unchanging Being. Such understanding corresponds to a "static" philosophy, the idea that since the World was created everything remains unchanged as it came from the Hand of God.
2. 'I AM WHO I SHALL BE' – standing for a fundamental constancy regardless of variations. Such a conception of the Eternal does not ignore the evident changes that

occur in nature in the course of time, but considers them of secondary importance without affecting the eternally unchanging essence of God.

3. 'I SHALL BE WHO I AM' – is the idea that evolution is inherent to the essence of God. It is in agreement with present scientific knowledge of the universe, the formation of the galaxies, the evolution of living creatures on earth, and particularly to the possibilities of the genetic techniques with its crossings and "new models" of plants and animals. In line with this interpretation, the contemporary Jewish naturalist Lutz Zwillenberg wrote, "The purpose of the Universe is the realization of all the possibilities inherent in it."
4. 'I SHALL BE WHO I SHALL BE' – can have two meanings: "To every one I am something else," or "each person has a different idea of Me," as masterfully expressed by the author of Shir ha-kavod, a well-known synagogue hymn, or to a theistic thinker it could read as if God continuously realizes Himself.

Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Hiyyah

The explanation here is that by paying close attention to the tense we learn that the mystery of redemption is mainly something that is yet to be revealed. Anything good in the present will, by comparison, seem like nothing, when set beside the incredible goodness of the redemption yet to come. For this reason our present mindset is incapable of comprehending it. And thus, all attempts even to describe the form of redemption must necessarily be limited by our present reality. And this is the real reason that the Name of God who speaks to us of the redemption is "I will be" as if to say that such a reality cannot exist now, but only in the future yet to come.

From Kushner, Olitsky Sparks Beneath the Surface p. 68-69

Rabbi Peter Knoble

Moses does not believe the names "God" and "the God of your ancestors – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" are convincing enough. He wants something much more explicit. Moses needs a name that spells out the exact nature of this God who wants to redeem them. After all, everyone wants clear proof. It is wonderful to see – both at the beginning of his career and later when Moses faces the frustration of leading the Jewish people through the desert – that he persists in seeking even greater intimacy with God to give him the confidence to proceed with his mission. If doubt exists for Moses, it is not surprising that we ourselves have doubts.

God presents him with the wonderfully enigmatic name Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh. What has God told Moses and us about Himself or Herself? Volumes have been written in

response to this question. I believe God said something like the following, "I am whatever you want Me to be. I am whatever you need Me to be. You cannot know My Essence but we will have a relationship, and you will tell stories about your encounters with Me. None of them will be totally accurate because I am not a concept. I am a living complex reality that can be experienced, but not defined or limited by language. That is Who I Am and Who I Will Be."

Rabbi Arthur Waskow (The Shalom Center Blog, 12/28/2015)

As Moses faces the unquenchably fiery Voice Who is sending him on a mission to end slavery under Pharaoh, he warns the Voice that the people will challenge him: "Sez who?" And the Holy One, the Wholly One, answers: "***Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh***, I Will Be Who I Will Be" — a fitting Name for a universe that is always Becoming. A universe in which the powerless poor can be empowered and the pharaoh's power can dissolve like powder into the Sea of Reeds. Then God adds, "But that's a mouthful. You can use just '*Ehyeh*, I Will Be,' as my nickname, if you like."

"And oh yes, you can also call me 'YHWH.'" But we actually can't. There's no way to "pronounce" those letters, with no vowels. And for a couple of millennia, Jews have been strictly taught not even to try pronouncing it but instead to say "*Adonai*."