

Concerning “Ani Hashem”¹

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1. Backdrop

G-d had made it clear to Moshe that Pharaoh would refuse the Israelites' request to go on a three-day-journey to serve “Hashem, our G-d” (Ex. 3:19-20). He reinforced this message when Moshe was on his way back to Egypt (4:21-23). Nevertheless, Moshe was not prepared for the significant worsening of the Israelites' condition that the request engendered. There is a big difference between having heard that the king would refuse as part of a larger, successful context and having experienced it! There also is a big difference between being prepared to struggle unsuccessfully with repeated disappointment for a period of time and a serious deterioration of a situation that causes increased suffering. This especially applies to the case at hand given that his efforts prompted his brethren to be resentful of him and question his mission!

In any event, Moshe had not imagined the possibility of the brutal response that was totally disproportionate to the request. He could not understand G-d allowing the situation to get worse and he seems to consider his own inadequacy as part of the problem; accordingly, he protests G-d's doings and questioned his being selected for the mission (5:22-23).

But G-d had His agenda. Before intervening, He had deemed it necessary to allow Pharaoh to publicly demonstrate his arrogance, cruelty and tyrannical powers, revealing the pathetic plight of Israel. In this way it was to be established that short of Divine intervention there was no hope for the enslaved nation; its salvation was totally dependent on that Divine intervention. Without criticizing Moshe, G-d answered him that the turning point has arrived: “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh, for by dint of a strong hand... he will chase them from his land” (6:1).

Those who established the chapter and verse numbers widely used in our *humashim* today rendered this latter verse the start of a new chapter since in the following verses G-d continues with a positive proclamation. Together, they begin a new phase of the action. The rabbinic tradition, however, considers 6:1 as concluding the previous *parasha* and is thus followed by a paragraph break (a *setumah*). A close reading demonstrates the latter construction to be preferable.

Hashem's statement to Moshe, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh...” (6:1) is a response to Moshe's complaint, assuring him with a general statement that He will now intervene and that the venture will conclude successfully. It goes together with Moshe's complaint and the subject was closed. In the following verse (6:2), the narrative again introduces G-d speaking to Moshe with the standard introductory formula, וַיִּדְבֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו. Here, the Torah employs a different divine appellation from that of the previous verse, *Elokim*, and the elaboration goes far beyond a simple continuation of the previous response. In this statement G-d articulates principles and details of the greatest import, formulated in an artistic manner with self-contained and highly structured internal patterns (as we shall soon demonstrate). Accordingly, 6:2 should be seen as the start of a new passage.

¹ This article is from Rabbi Shamah's study on *Parashat Va'era*, Part I, available online at www.judaic.org.

2. “Ani Hashem”

In a proclamation that reflects the grandeur and uniqueness of what was now beginning to transpire, G-d informed Moshe of the acts of cosmic proportions that He was initiating on behalf of His people. The message is linked with His self-presentation as Y-H-V-H, that is to say, in consonance with the concepts signified in His distinctive Tetragrammaton (referred to traditionally as *Hashem*, “the Name,” a term also used to refer to Him). In the ancient Near East, as undoubtedly elsewhere, deity names reflected character, attributes and functions, and *Hashem's* name followed this pattern, as we shall discuss shortly.

The proclamation comprised two segments- the first addressed to Moshe and the second a message he was to transmit to the Israelites. He begins with “I am Y-H-V-H” (using a form of self-presentation then popular with kings and also ascribed to deities). He states that to the patriarchs He appeared as “(K)el Sh-d-y”* (Gen. 17:1; 35:11) and did not make Himself known to them by His Tetragrammaton, thus signifying that He is now taking a historic step forward for Israel. He established a Covenant with the patriarchs, pledging to give the Land of Canaan to them and their progeny. He has taken heed of Israel's cry from oppression and is now prepared to fulfill His Covenantal promise. This segment emphasizes Hashem's faithful nature through the centuries and recalls His promises to the nation's forefathers. For Moshe, it served as an expansion and reinforcement of what he was told at the burning bush.

To the Israelites, Moshe is to announce that G-d, revealing Himself as Y-H-V-H, will soon begin a multi-step process on their behalf. He will release them from their burdens, rescue them from slavery and redeem them from Egypt. He will take them as His people**, be their G-d, foster in them the recognition that He is the author of the wondrous doings that He had performed for them, bring them to the Promised Land and grant it to them as an inheritable possession. These verses constitute a breathtaking series of eight consecutive verbal phrases communicating immediacy, definitiveness, enthusiasm and awe-inspiring power.

Many understand *Hashem's* Tetragrammaton as related to the concept of His eternal existence, which directly leads to the concepts of His capability to make long-term plans for the world, to be conscious of past generations' merit and to intervene in the distant future. They interpret the letters of the Tetragrammaton as a combination of הָיָה (was), הוּא (is) and יִהְיֶה (will be). Others see the Tetragrammaton as a form of the causative verb that is derived from “be” (such as הוּוֹה, גָּבַר לְאַחֲרָיִק, Gen. 27:29), denoting He who causes to be all that is, related to the post-Biblical term מַמְהוֹה, who makes happen, creates. With the first letter a *yod*, it would more specifically imply a future, focusing on His faithfulness, “He will make happen.” As a name, it would point to His possessing the wherewithal to fulfill His promises, all-powerful. Theologically, the latter interpretation tacitly incorporates the concepts of the former, as the one who brings all that exists into being implies a perpetual status of doing so.

In any event, in elaborating on the Tetragrammaton, the passage proclaims that the One who is eternal and conscious of past generations' merit has decided that now is the time to fulfill the promises He made to the forefathers and intervene on Israel's behalf with His great power.

Such enduring Divine faithfulness is a direct corollary of monotheism. In the polytheistic world, a deity could not guarantee something over the long term because circumstances might change beyond his control; another deity or primordial force might interfere with his plans. The new belief gave great impetus to working toward a more moral order to better the state of the world, whether for one's children or in general; there was no danger that one's commitment to virtue would be overlooked by a god who was no longer in power.

The statement that G-d did not make Himself known to the forefathers by His Y-H-V-H name should not be thought to indicate that they did not know that name in some manner. The term is attested several times in His revelations to them (see Gen. 15:7; 26:25; 28:13). It is even stated in association with Enosh (grandson of Adam), "then they began calling in the name of Y-H-V-H" (4:26). Rather, the forefathers did not experience a substantial actualization of the potential that the name implies. On a number of occasions in the Bible, G-d uses the expression of it becoming known "I am Hashem" in conjunction with a mighty manifestation of His power such that witnesses will have no doubt that it is His doing (e.g. Ex. 7:5; 14:4, 18). Specifically defining knowing His name, He declared, "...I will make known to them My hand and My might and they shall know that My name is Hashem" (Jer. 16:21). The patriarchs did experience His intervention in their personal lives in a limited manner but never on the grand, national scale that commands the attention of others.

3. "And You Shall Know"

The specific location of the וידעתם ("and you shall know") clause in the series of promises as well as its literary formulation – "and you shall know that it is I, Hashem your G-d, who took you forth from under the burdens of Egypt" (Ex. 6:7b) – engender an important question. The verb follows mention of the various stages that comprise the process of redemption as well as the declaration that Hashem would take the Israelites as His nation and be their G-d. It only precedes reference to His leading the Israelites into the Promised Land and giving it to them. It is understandable that it follows the stages of redemption, since it refers to them and is a result of them. However, why does it not precede establishment of the G-d-Israel covenantal relationship? In addition, the clause refers back to the previous verse's description of the first stage of the process, deploying virtually the identical terminology that was used there. With וידעתם we read והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבֹלֹת מצְרַיִם while the first stage was termed מתחת סבֹלֹת מצְרַיִם.

Perhaps placement of the וידעתם clause where it is indicates G-d's acknowledgment that while subject to the rigors of slavery the Israelites could not be expected to properly comprehend all that He was doing for them. Their resistance to the message that Moshe transmitted to them, "due to impatience and rigorous labor" (v. 9) evidently held to some degree throughout the turbulent period of the plagues, although they surely were progressively developing a more positive disposition toward what was happening and subsequently cooperated with instructions.

Consequently, G-d projected the וידעתם stage to the enlightenment associated with the Sinai experience of His Revelation, which occurred between the Exodus and entering the land. The proclamation informs us that with Revelation, which occurs together with His taking the Israelites as His people and becoming their G-d, all attitudes will change. Israel will then clearly

realize that it was His intervention at work from the initial moment. This parallels Hashem's statement to Moshe at the Burning Bush, "And this shall be for you the sign that I sent you: When you bring the people forth from Egypt you [plural] will worship G-d on this mountain" (3:12). Just as in that context G-d told Moshe that a sign (to persuade the people that He sent him) was not immediately available, but must await the experience on Mount Sinai, here, too, וַיִּדְעֶתְּךָ would be referring to that transcendent event scheduled to take place in the near future.

Although the וַיִּדְעֶתְךָ clause nominally refers to something Israel is to do, it does not interrupt the rushing flow of G-d's actions, as it connotes His assurance to the Israelites that they will soon understand, as if to say He will also make them understand. That the number of successive verbal phrases in this part of the message is eight – וְהִיִּיתִי, וְלָקַחְתִּי, וְגִאֲלֹתִי, וְהִצַּלְתִּי, וְהוֹצֵאתִי – וַיִּדְעֶתְךָ, וְהִבְאֵתִי and וְנָתַתִּי – is probably a literary manifestation of the Covenantal association of what is transpiring. (See our study *On Number Symbolism in the Torah From the Work of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon.*)

4. On Structure

The passage's key phrase *Ani Hashem* is attested four times in this proclamation, each strategically located. This phrase comprises:

1. G-d's first two words (v. 2).
2. His central two words (v. 6), which are also the first two words of the message Moshe is to relate to Israel.
3. The central two words of the segment directed to Israel (v. 7).
4. His last two words (v. 8). In this unique passage wherein G-d reveals Himself as *Ani Hashem*, that phrase is clearly the locus of an intended literary pattern.

This passage also contains a chiasmus that emphasizes the unity of the message and its key point, an ABCD before the center followed by dcba after the center (see Nehama Leibowitz *Iyunim Besefer Shemot*, p. 87), as follows:

A - Ani Y-H-V-H
B - reference to the patriarchs
C - commitment to grant the land
D - the oppression
Center - Ani Y-H-V-H
d - redemption from the oppression
c - fulfillment of the oath to grant the land
b - reference to the patriarchs
a - Ani Y-H-V-H

Another structural feature of this passage involves precise word count, employing methodology demonstrated in many cases by Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon, on an aspect of whose pioneering work these insights are based. Although in straightforward explication of the Five Books of the Torah most scholars have rejected the validity of interpretations based on the sum of a word's (or phrase's) Hebrew letters' numerical equivalents (*gematria*), the following appears legitimate and compelling.

The *gematria* of Y-H-V-H is twenty-six. It and its multiple, fifty-two, appear to be deeply embedded in the structure of this proclamation as well as in that of a coordinate passage later in Exodus that is a thematic complement to this one. The second segment of our passage comprises fifty-two words. The key two-word phrase “*Ani Hashem*” comprises its first two words, its last two words and its two middle words. Hence, the intervals from the first Y-H-V-H to the second and from the second to the third, are consequently each exactly twenty-six words.

In the first segment, the number of words that the Deity said to Moshe up until, but not counting, the first word that Moshe is to repeat to Israel, is fifty. (This excludes the six narrative introductory words, consistent with the system we often find in such matters.) The first two words are “*Ani Hashem*.” Counting from that first word “*Ani*,” the fifty-first and fifty-second words are “*Ani Hashem*” just as was the case in the second segment. However, the words G-d spoke to Moshe himself cannot be read totally as a separate segment from the words He asked Moshe to transmit to Israel, since the last words of the first segment are לְכֹן אָמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (“Therefore say to the Children of Israel”). To provide the object of the verb to complete the clause the next two words “*Ani Hashem*” must be joined to the previous; a proper reading would call for a pause only after reciting those two words. Accordingly, in a way, the first segment would be read as comprising fifty-two words.

It appears likely that the “*Ani Hashem*” words at the center of G-d’s entire statement, as they complete the connecting clause at the conclusion of Segment A, were intended to do double service and be counted with both segments. In a most sophisticated manner, G-d’s 102-word statement appears to be considered to contain two segments of fifty-two words each or a total of 104 words, or four times twenty-six. It is likely that this was intended to correspond to the four attestations of “*Ani Hashem*” in the passage. (There is a fifth attestation of Hashem in the passage (v. 3), without “*Ani*,” which is not directly part of the positive message being transmitted here. Its purpose is to point out that Y-H-V-H was not the name known to the patriarchs. Thus, it is not included in the “*Ani Hashem*” pattern of this passage. However, it appears that it is included in another literary “system” as we shall soon point out.)

As we point out in our study on *Shirat Hayam* (Ex. 15), the first stanza of the Song at the Sea (vv 1-11) is thematically complementary to our Exodus 6 passage. When Israel intones, “Y-H-V-H is His name” (15:3), it recalls, “Tell Israel that I am Y-H-V-H” (6:6), Hashem’s proclamation of His name that the Israelites were too crushed to be attentive to when Moshe related it to them.

That first stanza of the Song, beginning with its first word “*Ashira*” (excluding the nine introductory words of superscription) and concluding with verse 11, contains 102 words and subdivides into two parts of fifty and fifty-two words respectively, just as G-d’s proclamation does in our passage. The first strophe of that stanza, concluding with “Y-H-V-H is His name” (v. 3), appropriately comprises twenty-six words. In addition, in the Song’s second stanza, the final two strophes combined (vv 14-18), concluding with the verse relevant to our theme, “Y-H-V-H will reign for ever and ever,” contain fifty-two words.

This is an example of an extraordinary feature of prophetic literature. Finely-nuanced and sublimely written literary passages may contain overlapping patterns, meeting complex and exacting specifications, addressed to the most conscientious and attentive reader, without being

stilted or reading as contrived. Indeed, such writing may be recognized as superb literature independently of any knowledge of the presence of internal patterns and subtle connections to other passages.

The two central figures who led G-d's previous new initiatives in the world were Noah and Abraham. Noah was the tenth generation from creation and Abraham was the twentieth. Moshe, who leads a third new initiative that incorporates *Hashem's* name, is the twenty-sixth generation from creation, consistent with the *gematria* of His name.

5. Further Research

The following is based on insights and methodology of Rabbi Solomon D. Sassoon a"h as expanded and applied in subsequent research, primarily that of Ronald Benun.

The key term of G-d's proclamation "*Ani Hashem*," so explicitly associated with the Covenant in our passage, is attested exactly eighty times in the Torah. This links the phrase with the Covenant in another manner, since the number eight, as well as its decimal multiples, are Covenant signifiers. In Leviticus 19, a chapter closely linked in content to the Decalogue and the Covenant (see our Lev. 19 study), "*Ani Hashem*" without "*Elokekhem*" attached appears exactly eight times while "*Ani Hashem Elokekhem*" also appears eight times.

There are a number of remarkable number phenomena associated with our passage and the twenty-six *gematria* together with its multiples. When we count the *Hashem* of the first "*Ani Hashem*" of our passage (Ex. 6:2) as number one and count forward all the attestations of the Tetragrammaton (when it appears in the pure form, Y-H-V-H, without a prefix), the last one in *Nebiim Rishonim* (The Early Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel 1 and 2 and Kings 1 and 2) is exactly number 2600. (Perhaps the manner this should be viewed - in an approach well demonstrated by Rabbi Sassoon - is that when counting back from the end of *Nebiim Rishonim*, our passage's first occurrence of the *Tetragrammaton* is number 2600.)

When we count the very next *Hashem* of our passage as number one (Ex. 6:3) - the one that is part of G-d's statement that He did not reveal His name to the patriarchs - and count forward the attestations of Y-H-V-H (again, only when appearing without prefixes) through the end of the Five Books of the Torah, the total is again a multiple of twenty-six, albeit not a decimal multiple, but exactly 26×52 , or 1352.

Concerning verses: Beginning from the Exodus 6:3 verse, the number of verses to the end of the Torah in which the Tetragrammaton appears in the pure form is 26×45 or 1170. Also beginning from Exodus 6:3, the number of verses in which it appears in the pure form through the end of *Nebiim Rishonim* is 26×84 or 2184. The total number of verses in the Five Books from beginning to end in which *Hashem* appears in the pure form is 26×51 or 1326. The total of this category for Torah plus *Nebiim Rishonim* is 26×90 or 2340.

Beginning from Ex. 6:3, the number of verses in which Y-H-V-H including prefixes is attested through the end of *Nebiim Rishonim* is 26×96 or 2496. Again including prefixes, the total attestations in the Five Books is 26×70 , or 1820.

This is all there in front of the reader. Although such research requires patience and diligence, it is based on straightforward reading without skipping, without varying the process, without manipulation in any way, using the traditional Masoretic text and simply counting one attestation after the other! Whatever the full meaning of all this striking, apparently purposeful interconnectedness awaits further research. It surely points to the great care that had been taken through the centuries in the transmittal of the authoritative text of the Torah and *Nebiim* and the extraordinary degree of accuracy in the traditional text, despite the existence of supposedly alternate versions and many variants. It supports the view that the composition of Scripture is of a different order than that of other writing. It also indicates that the books of the prophets besides the Five Books are directly linked with the prophecy of the Five Books and that in some ways Torah and *Nebiim Rishonim* should be viewed as an integrated entity – כָּלֵם מְרוֹעָה אֶחָד נִתְּנוּ –

Endnotes

* There is as yet no consensus as to the meaning of the word *sh-d-y*, often rendered “Almighty.” Many have thought that it is related to the Akkadian word for mountain, the divine appellation possibly meaning the high or mighty G-d. Others presume an association with fertility (see Gen. 17) while some relate it to the Hebrew word for “breasts.” From this verse on, it is no longer deployed in Scripture except in poetic contexts.

** The Sages associate the Passover *seder* ritual of four cups of wine with the first four clauses of this series, whereby each cup of wine celebrates another phase of G-d’s redemption of the Israelites and taking them as His people (JT Pes. 10:1).