

# "And God spoke to Moses and said to him: I am God"

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I consider this bizarre verse (Exodus 6:2) as one of the most important verses in the Torah. In this blog entry, I wish to explain why.

The exact verse, as it appears in common English translations, is:

"And God spoke to Moses and said to him: I am the Lord" (Exodus 6:2).

The original Hebrew verse uses two *different* names for God: *Elohim* and *Jehovah*. Its literal (word for word) partial translation is:

"And *Elohim* spoke to Moses and said to him: I am *Jehovah*" (Exodus 6:2).

Why the use in this short verse of two different names for God and how is this important or significant?

To answer this, we first have to make two assertions about the Torah, pre-requisites to our ability to later analyze the true meaning of this verse:

- \* Names are extremely important;
- \* Biblical Hebrew is extremely precise.

Regarding the latter point, the reader is referred to my blog entry:

["The mathematical precision of biblical Hebrew"](#),

where I address the precision of words and verses in the Torah, and demonstrate by four examples how the true meaning of Torah verses may be lost in

translation because the mathematical precision of the original text is not preserved in the (unsuccessful) transition to English.

Regarding the former point (addressing names in the Torah), there is repeated and uniform reference to names as the ultimate embodiment of the essence of the named; and therefore naming should not be taken lightly.

Examples:

\* “And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night” (Genesis 1:5);

\* “And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field...and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, this was its name” (Genesis 2:19);

\* “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee” (Genesis 17:5);

\* “And God said to Abraham. As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be” (Genesis 17:15);

\* “And God said Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a child indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac” (Genesis 17:19);

\* “And she bore him a son, and he called his name Gershon; for he said I have been a stranger in a strange land” (Exodus 2:22);

\* “And Moses said to God, Behold, when I come to the children of Israel, and shall say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you; and they shall say to me: What is his name? What shall I say to them?” (Exodus 3:13);

\* “And I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name, The Lord, I was not known to them” (Exodus 6:3)

\* “And the Lord said to Moses: “I will do this thing also that you have spoken; for thou has found favor in my sight and I know thee by name” (Exodus 33:17);

\* “I am the Lord; that is my name; and my glory will I not give to another” (Isaiah 41:8)

\* For my name's sake will I defer my anger..." (Isaiah 48:9);

\* "For from the rising of the sun until it goes down, my name is great among the nations; and in every place incense is burnt and sacrifices are offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 1:11)

And the list goes on and on (see some further examples in my book, Section 4.1).

We have now reached the crucial point:

Why is it so important for the Bible to convey to the reader that God (*Elohim*) has revealed himself to Moses, saying to him: "I am God (*Jehovah*)"?

To start providing some clues, let us first note that in Jewish tradition mankind knows absolutely nothing about God except that he exists!

Several verses in the Bible stress the point. Examples:

\* "Thou cannot see my face; for no man shall see my face and live" (Exodus 33:20);

\* "Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel" (Isaiah 45:15);

\* "How long, O Lord, will thou hide thyself, forever?" (Psalms 89:47)

If no knowledge about God is at all possible, what meaning can one possibly assign to names of God appearing in the Bible?

The response is also rooted in long Jewish tradition: Though one has absolutely no knowledge about God, one can observe the ways in which he leads his world. In other words: Names of God in the Bible denote various "modes of conduct" of God in relation to his world. How God reveals his presence in the world is open to observation. Furthermore, this is consistent with how God responds to Moses, after the latter pleads: "Show me thy glory" (Exodus 33:18). God's response:

"I will put thee in a cleft of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by; and I will take my hand and thou shall see my back but my face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:22-23).

In other words: You can see the effects of my presence in the world ("thou shall see my back") but the root cause cannot be observed ("my face shall not be seen").

Given this general introduction about the meanings of different names of God in the Hebrew Bible as conveying different "modes of conduct" by which God reveals his presence in the world, we may now turn our attention to how Jewish tradition would interpret the bizarre verse from Exodus:

"And *Elohim* spoke to Moses and said to him: I am *Jehovah*" (Exodus 6:2).

Generally speaking, the two names reveal the duality of human existence on this planet, and the associated two categories of observations humans can make regarding the world around us:

- **Law of nature**, where no free will can be exercised (*Elohim*);
- **Seeming randomness** (as perceived by humans), where free will can be exercised (*Jehovah*).

### ***Elohim***

This name of God is, according to biblical Hebrew grammatical rules, the plural of the Hebrew *Eloah*, which means God, but also of the shorter *El*, which means both God and power, or capability (for example, Genesis 31:29). Thus, *Elohim* should be addressed in the Bible in the plural. But it is not. *Elohim* is always related to in the Bible in the singular except for one place (refer to Section 7.2 in my book). *Elohim* is the only name of God, and only this name, that appears in the description of creation in Chapter 1 of Genesis. Gematria devotees are quick to mention that the word *Ha-teva* ("the nature") and *Elohim* have the same numerical value (86). Analysis of the root of the word "nature" in Hebrew (*Teva*) leaves no doubt that laws of nature are "perceived" by biblical Hebrew to be

"stamped" into the universe since the Hebrew root for this word is the same as that of..coin (like in: "Who has coined this phrase?"). Examples:

\* "Before the mountains were settled" (Proverbs 8:25); Re-phrased literally (word for word), the verse reads: "Before the mountains were coined" (*Hotbau*, from the word *Teva*);

\* Regarding Earth: "Whereupon are its foundations fastened"..." (Job 38:6); Re-phrased literally: "On what were its foundations stamped" (*Hotbau*, from the word *Teva*).

Biblical Hebrew relates to all that exist as consequence of the word or the will of God. "Thing" in Hebrew is *Davar*, having same root as to speak (D.B.R). A desired thing, or matter, is *Chefetz*, same word as will. Obviously *Elohim* signifies nature laws that humans have no choice but to obey since violation of these laws implies instant penalty. Jumping from a roof, or pushing a hand into fire, a human being defies laws of nature and learns instantly that he has no space for free will regarding these laws.

*Elohim* therefore signifies God presence in the universe in the form of laws of nature, comprising that part of humankind life where no free will can be exercised.

### ***Jehovah***

The basic structure of this name for God and its implications are addressed at length in my book, Chapter 4. We continue this discussion here, relating to the most holy name for the Divine in the Hebrew language, as it relates to *Elohim*.

If the latter embodies God's presence in the world in the form of laws of nature, how is the presence of God revealed by *Jehovah*?

In traditional Judaism, there are two kinds of leadership by which God conduct his world:

\* Leadership by justice (*Hanhagat Ha-Mishpat*; literally "Leadership by law");

\* Leadership by a measured combination of justice and mercy (Hanhagat Ha-Chesed and Hanagat Ha-Yichud).

Leadership by justice means that there is a law of justice and any violation of the law deserves penalty. One could allegorically assert that laws of nature are of this type of “leadership by Justice”. However, God realized that the world cannot exist under such leadership alone, therefore the Divine mingled mercy with justice:

“Thus said the Lord: “If I create the world with a measure of mercy—sin increases; with a measure of absolute justice—how could the world stand? Therefore I will create it with a measure of absolute justice and a measure of mercy, and hopefully the world would stand” (Midrash Rabbah, Bereshit, Chapter 12).

Thus, presence of God in the world, as represented by *Jehovah*, is revealed by special traits of his conduct (in leading his world), traits that are beyond the laws of nature. These traits are manifested in that part of human life, which by nature is perceived by us to be random. To get closer to God and more God-alike, human beings need to pursue these same traits of conduct in their effort to acquire proximity to God. The traits are called “The thirteen virtues of God”, and they are expounded in Exodus (34:6-7):

“..The Lord, the Lord, a merciful and graceful God, slow to anger, abundant in grace and truth; maintaining grace to thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, but not cleaning the guilty and visiting the iniquity of fathers upon children and upon the children of children and upon descendants of third and fourth generations”.

This leadership “style” of God is not utterly comprehensible to human beings. Even when all 13 traits of the conduct of *Jehovah* are understandable and accounted for, acts of the Divine are not always explainable, as God explicitly conveys to Moses: “

“And the Lord said: “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim the name *Jehovah* to you and I will show grace to whom I will show grace and show mercy to whom I will show mercy” (Exodus 33:19).

*Elohim* and *Jehovah* are logically separate and so are they experienced to human beings. The former reflects the laws of nature, the latter is invisible, not self-evident, and reflects the Divine moral conduct, as revealed in the “random” part of our lives.

Deities in the ancient world were often mean and full of emotions, not unlike humans. Morality was not an integral part of the concept of God. Combining the two concepts of God, that which is source of creation (*Elohim*) and that which is source to morality (*Jehovah*) is the greatest message of the Torah.

Combining the two sources together, the Torah declares, in no uncertain terms, that the two are one and the same:

**"And *Elohim* spoke to Moses and said to him:**

**I am *Jehovah*" (Exodus 6:2).**