

## Spotlight on....Hashem's name

### Background:

Parashat Shemot tells the story of the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt, and how Hashem began the process of the redemption. When Hashem appears to Moshe at the burning bush, Moshe seems wary of this plan, and asks many questions. One of the questions he asks is what name of Hashem Moshe should tell the Israelites when they ask who sent him. In 3:14 Hashem responds:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-לְקִיָּם אֵל-מִשְׁה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה וַיֵּן אָמַר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:

And God said to Moses, "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh." He continued, "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh sent me to you.'"

This is not a normative name for God, which raises questions about its meaning. It has been translated by some as "I am what I am," and others as "I will be what I will be." Today we will look at how two of the commentators understand the meaning of this name.

**Chizkuni** says that the full name of God here is "Ehyeh," and that "Asher Ehyeh" is the descriptor of the name. According to him, the name means that God is saying "I will be there for you, the Israelites, forever, including when I redeem you from the suffering in Egypt."

**Rashi** understands "Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh" to be Hashem's full name here. The first "Ehyeh" conveys that Hashem will be with them in their current suffering, and "Asher Ehyeh" means that Hashem will also be with them in their future suffering under subjugation from other nations.

### Questions:

1. What is the difference between Chizkuni and Rashi's explanations of Hashem's name? Is there any significance to these differences?
2. After Rashi explains Hashem's name, he quotes a gemara from Berachot. This gemara states that Moshe responded to God "Master of the Universe - why am I going to mention future sufferings to them?? Surely this one is enough!" God approved of Moshe's challenge, which is why at the end of the pasuk God instructs Moshe to say "Ehyeh sent me to you," which uses just the first Ehyeh. According to this gemara, what was the difference between Hashem's approach, and Moshe's approach? What did Moshe recognize about the Israelites current state of mind?
3. Chizkuni states that the name Ehyeh connotes an identification with the Israelites' current suffering, which is why they believe Moshe and Aharon initially. Is this approach different than Rashi's? If so, how?
4. What lesson do you derive from this about how to be present for people who are suffering?