

Unifying the Name

There are many names of God in the Hebrew Bible, but the one considered most sacred is the four-letter name known by scholars as the Tetragramaton. The Hebrew letters that make up this name are *Yod*, *Hey*, and then *Vav*, followed by *Hey*. This name is considered so sacred that it is forbidden by *halakhah* (Jewish Law) to pronounce the name, or even to pronounce the letters consecutively in order (that is why I have written them with the words “and then” and “followed by” between the letters). However, any Hebrew speaker will recognize that these letters also form the verb root “to be” (*Hey-Yod Hey*), and that the *Vav* is used in some of the forms of this verb (for example, *Hoveh*- “it is”). The Name, then, is really about being, or existence. In fact, this particular form of the letters implies the future causative, so *Hashem*, the Name, could be translated as “that which causes to be”, or “that which is the basis for all that is”. What is the basis for all that is? It is existence itself! So seen in this way, existence, or being, is the inner meaning of Divine Name.

As we have seen above, our experience of existence has two aspects- the *content of our experience*, on one hand, and *our awareness of the content of our experience* on the other. The content of our experience can further be broken down into three more “worlds”: the world of physical sensation (including the five senses), the world of emotional feeling, and the world of thought. According to Kabbalah, these three worlds, together with the fourth world of awareness, correspond to the four letters of the Divine Name. Seen in this way, *Hashem* is not merely an abstract notion of existence; it is something inherent in our own experience, at this moment. All four “worlds” are present now within our own experience.

Now let’s look again at what happens when we are in a state of “bondage”- when our consciousness is trapped inside the *Miztrayim* of ego. The ego is based on the belief that the content of my experience- my thoughts, memories, likes and dislikes, feelings, sensations and so on- are the real “me”. For example, when I feel hunger, if I feel “I am hungry”- that is ego; the sensation of hunger has become my sense of “self”. If I feel “I am angry” when anger arises, then the ego is based on anger. The ego has no sense that awareness is separate and free from feelings and sensations; rather, awareness is “trapped”, or “identified” with the content of experience. In the language of the *Tanya*, the *Nefesh Elokit* (Divine soul) has become hidden; it has been partially “subsumed” or “trapped” within the *Nefesh Behamit* (ego).

We can understand this by way of analogy: let’s think of a relationship between two people. In a healthy relationship, both beings are free and independent, and both are choosing to be with one another. They can share ideas and experiences and work together toward common goals. But what happens if one person dominates the other? The

dominated one may not be aware of his/her own ideas and desires, because s/he is completely overshadowed by the ideas and desires of the other. In such a case, there really is no relationship, because one has become subsumed in the other. In order for relationship to be restored, each person must first gain his/her own independence, and then completely accept the other as they are. Both independence and acceptance of the other are necessary if the two are to truly meet and join together in relationship. *The same is true with the relationship between consciousness and the content of consciousness.*

We must realize that our consciousness *can* be independent from our thoughts and feelings. But it gains this independence by fully *accepting* our thoughts and feelings. This is because *acceptance is the nature of pure consciousness*- it is the main quality of awareness. Conflict can only occur on the level of thought and emotion. So now we can understand the seeming paradox of accepting your own non-acceptance, because they are happening on two different levels of your being. Non-acceptance, or resistance, happens on the level of thought and emotion. Acceptance happens on the level of pure consciousness, the source of your thoughts and feelings.

Questions

1. What is *halakhah*?
2. What verb root is related to the Tetragramaton?
3. What are the four worlds which correspond to the letters of the Name?
4. How can our consciousness come into right relationship with the content of our consciousness? What does this mean?