



## שבטי י־ה The Tribes of G-d

### ■ Signet of Truth

Parashat Pinchas finds Bnei Yisrael camped in the Plains of Moav opposite Jericho, anticipating their entry into the Land of Israel. Part of their preparations centered around the upcoming census: the counting of all the males above 20 years of age, in accordance with G-d's command.

שָׂאוּ אֶת רֹאשׁ כָּל עֵדֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִבְּן עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה וּמַעְלָה לְבֵית אֲבֹתָם...

*Count the children of Israel,*

*from age 20 and up, according to their families...* (Bamidbar 26,2)

As each family is counted, the Torah repeats a particular phraseology again and again: “*to Tola, the family of the Tola'i*”, or “*to Nemuel, the family of the Nemueli*,” etc. That is, every family is listed first by the name of its father, and then again with his name supplemented by the letter *heh* [meaning “the”] at the beginning, and the letter *yud* at the end. For instance, for the families of the Tribes of Reuven, the Torah states:

רְאוּבֵן בְּכוֹר יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן:  
חֲנוּךְ מִשְׁפַּחַת הַחֲנוּכִי, לְפָלֹא מִשְׁפַּחַת הַפְּלֹאִי...

*The sons of Reuven, Israel's first-born:*

*Chanoch, the family of the Chanochi;*

*for Palu, the family of the Palui...* (26,5)

Why must the family name be repeated twice – and this for each of the dozens of families? Would one mention of each name not have sufficed? The Torah is surely adding important information by using this special format, and we must seek out what it is.

Let us remember a very important principle: When the Torah repeats a particular phrase several times, the key to understanding its purpose can be found in that which is “different” than the other repetitions. It is the “atypical” element that has something to teach us about all the other elements.

In the case at hand, we find that one family, from the Tribe of Asher, is different than the others: Yimnah.

בְּנֵי אֲשֵׁר לְמִשְׁפַּחְתָּם לְיִמְנָה, מִשְׁפַּחַת הַיִּמְנָה ...

*The sons of Asher, by their families:  
of Yimna, the family of the Yimnah...* (verse 44)

Instead of Yimna’s second listing being *Yimni*, ending with a *yud* like all the others, it remains *Yimna*. What does this come to tell us?

The Sages of the Medrash (Yalkut Shimoni, Pinchas 26) allude to a solution for the riddle of the added letters:

Rav Idi says: [The second appearance of] each name has a letter *heh* at the beginning and a *yud* at the end. It is as if G-d – spelled with these two letters, in reversed order – attests that they are the sons of their forefathers, and not of the Egyptians. As is written in Psalms 122: ששם עלו שבטים שבטי ייה עדות לישראל, *There the tribes ascended, the tribes of G-d [yud, heh], a testimony to Israel.*

In other words: Since the combination of the two added letters is G-d’s name, as written in the Song of the Sea -

עֲזִי וְזִמְרַת יְיָ וְיָהּ לִי לְיִשׁוּעָה ...

*My strength and song is G-d [yud and heh],  
and this is my deliverance...* (Sh’mot 15,2)

- this shows G-d’s “stamp of approval” of the purity of the families and of their ancestry: The addition of the letters of G-d’s Name to *the tribes of G-d* is *a testimony to Israel*.

Rashi adds the following explanation:

“The other nations were denigrating them, saying, ‘Why do they bother tracing their lineage? Do they really think that the Egyptians didn’t exploit their mothers? If they ruled over the [men’s] bodies, then how much more so did they rule over their wives!’ Hashem therefore appended His name upon Israel – *heh* on one side and *yud* on the other – to say, I am witness that these are the sons of their fathers.”

To this we can add that the plague that broke out within Israel after they sinned with the Moavite women required a new census to confer a stamp of approval on those who were not killed and confirm that their families were pure and kosher.

Rashi, who cites the above Medrash, strengthens this explanation by noting that the reason Yimna is the only family that didn't have its last letter replaced by a *yud* is because it already has a *yud* at the beginning and a *heh* at the end! There is therefore no reason to add another *yud* at the end.

Equipped with this explanation of the exception that proves the rule, we can now proceed to seek deeper insights and understandings of this topic.

### ■ The Number 70

At the end of B'reshit, the Torah takes the trouble to name each member of Yaakov's family who went down to Egypt, and then sums up the final total:

... כָּל הַנֶּפֶשׁ לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב הַבָּאָה מִצְרַיִם שְׁבַעִים.

*The members of the house of Yaakov who came to Egypt numbered seventy.* (46,27)

And again in Moshe's parting speech in the Book of D'varim (10,22), this important number from which Bnei Yisrael stemmed is emphasized:

בְּשִׁבְעִים נֶפֶשׁ יָרְדוּ אֲבוֹתֵיךָ מִצְרַיִם...

*With seventy people [souls] your ancestors descended to Egypt...* (D'varim 10,22)

But if we count all the names listed in B'reshit, we find that there were only 69, not 70. Who was missing? The Sages tell us that it was Levi's daughter Yocheved, mother of Moshe Rabbeinu; she was born "between the walls," meaning on the border of Egypt. They thus entered Egypt as 70 people.

With this in mind, let us return to our story and the census of Bnei Yisrael in Parashat Pinchas. Here, too, amazingly enough, we find the numbers 69 and 70: The number of families to which the Torah added the letters *heh* and *yud* is exactly 69 – and together with Yimnah, which already has a *yud* and *heh*, we come to 70!

The significance of the repetition of this 69-70 combination is startling. When Yaakov's family went down from the Holy Land to Egypt, the numbers were 69 and 70 – and now, generations later, when we are counting not

individuals, but the families that were to “complete the circle” and enter the Land of Israel, we find the same numbers!

But there is more. The number of prophetic judges encompassing Moshe is 70:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֲסַפֶּה לִּי שִׁבְעִים אִישׁ מִזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל  
וְאֶצְלָתִי מִן הָרוּחַ אֲשֶׁר עָלַי וְשַׁמְתִּי עֲלֵיהֶם...

*Hashem said to Moshe: “Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel ...and I will bestow from your spirit and I will place it upon them...”* (Bamidbar 11,16-17)

This number 70 is to be the permanent number of Sanhedrin (High Court) judges forever. Given that the most scholarly sage is chosen as the President of the Court, as per R. Yehuda in the Talmud, we are left with 69 “regular” judges - giving us once again the 69-70 combination.

Let us return to Psalms 122, quoted in the above-cited Medrash:

שָׁשֶׁם עָלוּ שְׁבִטִים שְׁבִטֵי יְהוָה עֲדוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַדוֹת לְשֵׁם ה'.  
כִּי שָׁמָּה יָשְׁבוּ כְּסֵאוֹת לְמִשְׁפַּט כְּסֵאוֹת לְבַיִת דָּוִד.

*There the tribes ascended, the tribes of G-d [yud and heh],  
a testimony to Israel, to thank the Name of G-d.  
For there sat the seats of judgment,  
the thrones of the House of David.* (Psalms 122,4-5)

For one thing, the number of letters in these two verses is exactly 70! Even more significant is the fact that Jerusalem is the site of the convergence of three factors:

1. The Tribes of G-d, marked by the letters *yud* and *heh* of G-d's Name;
2. the seats of judgment upon which the 70 judges sit; and
3. the kingdom of the House of David.

This trio joins together *to thank the Name of G-d* – this time spelled out fully: not just *yud* and *heh*, but with all four letters of the Havayah Name. This is what is meant by the verse that precedes the above: *The built-up Jerusalem is like a city joined together* (122,3): It joins together the Tribes of G-d, the seats of judgment, and the House of David.

## ■ The Complete Name

The great Sage Rabbi Akiva teaches us in the Talmud about the special *yud-heh* combination:

**If a man (איש) and woman (אשה) merit, then the Divine Presence dwells in their midst. But if they do not merit, then fire consumes them.** (Sotah 17a)

Rabbi Akiva learned this profound thought from the very words themselves. The words for **man** and **woman** both have an *aleph* and a *shin*, which spell *esh*, fire. But they each have a letter that the other one does not have, namely, *yud* and *heh* – the letters that spell G-d’s Name. Thus, if man and wife stand separately and on their own, all they have is fire - but if they join together in a peaceful home, they share together in the illumination of G-d’s presence. What this means in practice is that their mutual ambitions to fulfill G-d’s will propels them forward in holiness. This is the “Divine Presence dwelling in their midst.”

To complete this profound insight, let us return to the days of Creation, when the world was created with the Divine name “Elokim”:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ.  
*In the beginning, Elokim created  
 the heavens and the earth.* (B’reshit 1,1)

In the next chapter, we see that the Divine name Havayah (spelled *yud* and *heh*, followed by *vuv* and *heh*) is joined to Elokim:

... בְּיוֹם עָשׂוֹת ה' אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם.  
*... on the day that Hashem (Havayah) Elokim  
 made earth and heaven.* (2,4)

The first time that G-d’s Divine name of Havayah appears by itself is after Adam and Eve are banished from Eden:

וַתֵּהָר וַתֵּלֶד אֶת קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת ה'.  
*Chavah (Eve) conceived and bore Kayin,  
 and she said, “I have acquired a man with Hashem (Havayah).”* (4,1)

Regarding the progression of Adam and Chavah, the two of them together were at first called “Adam,” or “man.” The Torah says:

זָכַר וּנְקָבָה בְּרָאָם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם וַיִּקְרָא אֶת שְׁמֵם אָדָם בַּיּוֹם הַבְּרָאָם.

*Male and female He created them,  
and He blessed them and named them "Adam"  
on the day they were created. (5,2)*

“Adam” is spelled with the letters *aleph* and *mem* at either end – the same letters that begin and end the Divine name Elokim. In the middle is the letter *dalet*, alluding to the creation of man in G-d’s *d’mut* (image), which starts with the letter *dalet*:

... בְּדַמוֹת אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֹתוֹ.

*... in G-d’s image He created him. (5,1)*

When Adam and Eve were separated and received their own identities, Adam was called man (איש), while she was called woman (אשה):

לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה כִּי מֵאִישׁ לָקַחָהּ זֹאת.

*This one will be called “woman,”  
for she was taken from man. (2,23)*

This separation introduced, as Rabbi Akiva taught us above, the letters *yud* and *heh* – the first two letters of the Havayah name. What about the last two letters of this name, *vuv* and *heh*? They are filled in after Adam gave his wife her name, following their sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge:

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הוּא הִיְתָה אֵם כָּל חַי.

*Adam called his wife Chavah,  
for she was the mother of all life. (3,20)*

The name he gave her, Chavah, is spelled with the letter *chet* – standing for *chaim*, life – followed by *vuv* and *heh*, of the Havayah name. The entire Divine name is thus completed.

Immediately afterwards, this complete Divine Havayah name is mentioned for the first time on its own, when Chavah gave her oldest son his name, as we quoted above (4,1).

Let us now summarize the five steps of the gradual revelation of Hashem’s Name:

### **Creation**

1. Elokim – in the first account of Creation

2. Hashem Elokim – in the second account of Creation
3. *Yud* and *Heh* – revealed in the separation of *ish* and *ishah*, man and woman

***The sin of Adam and Chavah***

4. *Vuv-Heh* – when Chava received her name, Mother of All Life
5. The complete Havayah Name – when Kayin was born and received his name.

These steps can be understood as follows:

***Creation***

1. Creation without Free Will
2. Free Will together with the command not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge
3. Adam and Chavah are given the opportunity to strive to fulfill G-d’s will [and have the Divine Presence dwell in their midst]

***The sin of Adam and Chavah***

4. The revelation of the “next generation”
5. G-d’s will to be carried out in full with the addition of the coming generations [the full *Havayah* Name]

That is, the revelation of G-d’s complete *Havayah* name, the total fulfillment of G-d’s will, will not be complete until the end of all generations. This means that after the sin of Adam and Chavah, every man and woman will be able to fulfill only part of G-d’s will, leaving the rest for their children.

Let us cite once again the two verses that conclude the story of the sin:

וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הוּא הִיְתָה אִם כָּל חַי.  
וַיַּעַשׂ ה' אֱ-לֹהִים לְאָדָם וּלְאִשְׁתּוֹ כְּתָנוּת עוֹר וַיִּלְבָּשֵׁם.

*The man called his wife’s name Chavah,  
for she was the mother of all life.*

*And Hashem Elokim made for Adam and his wife  
cloaks of skin-hide, and he dressed them. (3,20-21)*

We need not be surprised to see that the total number of letters in these verses is: 70.

Let us note the words “*cloaks of skin-hide.*” The Hebrew word for “skin,” *ohr*, is spelled with the letter *ayin*; spelled with an *aleph*, it means “light.” And in fact, the Medrash (B’reshit Rabba 20,12) teaches that

“in the Torah of R. Meir, it was found spelled with an *aleph*, meaning, ‘cloaks of light.’”

“In the Torah of R. Meir?” Could it be that R. Meir had a different version of the Torah? The Zohar (B’reshit 36b) solves the riddle: “Originally, they were cloaks of light.” That is to say, first there was a casing of light protecting their bodies, and only after the sin did G-d create their skin.

The difference between “skin” and “light” is the difference between the letters *ayin* (70, in numerology) and *aleph* (1). Light is the “innards” of the skin, and the source of its strength. That is, the difference between 69 and 70 is like nine men waiting for one more so that they can pray in a minyan; his arrival arouses them to life. It is like the 49 Gates of Wisdom waiting for the 50<sup>th</sup> – the one who is equal to all the rest. Similarly, the one who fills out the 69 to become 70 is like the soul that gives meaning to all the rest and is thus “equal” to them.

Among the 70 members of Yaakov’s family who descended to Egypt, Levi’s daughter Yocheved was the “one” that was equal in value to all the rest – for she was the mother of Moshe, Aharon and Miriam, representing all of Israel. In addition, when the 70 Elders gathered around Moshe, he was the “one” from whose spirit all the other received prophecy. As we saw above, R. Yehuda teaches that of the Sanhedrin’s 70 judges, the greatest will be chosen to lead the court – equivalent to all the rest.

### ■ Complete Name, Complete Throne

As mentioned above, the Divine Name, spelled *yud* and *heh*, appears in the Torah for the first time in the Song of the Sea:

אֲשִׁירָה לַה' בִּי גָאֵה גָאֵה... עָזִי וְזַמְרָת יְהוָה לִי לִישׁוּעָה...  
*I will sing to Hashem (Havayah), for He has triumphed...  
 the strength and vengeance of G-d [yud and heh]  
 were my salvation...* (Sh’mot 15,1-2)

The meaning of this verse is as follows: “I will sing to G-d, the full Havayah Name, the source of עָזִי, my strength and the splendor of the *yud*-and-*heh* Name of G-d, and it will be my salvation.”

At the end of the story of the war with Amalek, Moshe builds an altar and declares:

כִּי יָד עַל בֵּס יְהוָה מִלְחָמָה לְהָ בְעַמְלֵק מִדֹּר דָּר.

*For the hand is on G-d's throne,*

*G-d shall be at war with Amalek for all generations.* (17,16)

Two words in this verse are incomplete: the word for “throne” is spelled *kuf-samekh*, missing the letter *aleph* at its end, and G-d's Name is spelled only with *yud* and *heh*, without the *vuv* and final *heh*. Regarding this special combination of an incomplete Divine name and an incomplete Divine throne, our Sages teach (Yalkut Shimoni 643) on the verse dealing with the ongoing war with Amalek:

**R. Levi said in the name of R. Chama: Neither G-d's Name nor His throne will be complete until Amalek is wiped out... But when the memory of Amalek is lost, then both His throne and His Name will be complete, as is written, “The enemies have come to an end, in perpetual ruins... their memory has been lost. But G-d shall endure forever, He has prepared His throne for judgment.”** (Psalms 9,7-8)

That is, the complete will of G-d will not be fulfilled in This World until the seed of Amalek is vanquished. “*G-d's throne*” refers to the revelation of the glory of Divine kingship. Just like the serpent impeded G-d's will and delayed it until the end of all generations, so too, the appearance of Amalek effected a similar delay.

Let us now consider the declaration that G-d made at the end of the war with Amalek:

כָּתֹב זֹאת זְכוֹרֹן בְּסֵפֶר וְשִׁים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ  
כִּי מַחָה אֶמְחָה אֶת זְכוֹר עַמְלֵק מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם.

*Write this as a remembrance in the book,  
and make sure Yehoshua knows,*

*that I will surely obliterate the memory of Amalek  
from under the heavens.* (Sh'mot 17,14)

Most remarkably, this passage has precisely 70 letters, just like the two verses cited above regarding the serpent's instigation to sin!

Note that the above verse cites Yehoshua, whose name at the time was still Hoshea, without the letter *yud*. Therefore it can also be said to have only 69 letters, given his name at the time. (We recall that Moshe added the letter *yud* to his protegee's name just before he sent the Twelve Scouts, after the

battle with Amalek.) Thus we once again see this 69-70 combination, and once again the *yud-heh* juxtaposition.

Let us return to the census taken in the Moav Plains, with which we began. The Torah notes clearly the main difference between this census and the earlier one taken in the Sinai Desert: Not one man counted in the first census was alive to be counted for the second one, in accordance with G-d's harsh decree after the Sin of the Spies. As the Torah states:

וּבֵאֵלֶּהָ לֹא הָיָה אִישׁ מִפְּקוּדֵי מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֵן  
אֲשֶׁר פָּקְדוּ אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּמִדְבַּר סִינַי.

*Among these there was no one from the census  
of Moshe and Aharon the Priest,  
who counted the Children of Israel in the Sinai Desert.*

כִּי אָמַר ה' לָהֶם מוֹת יָמָתוּ בְּמִדְבָּר...

*For Hashem had told them,  
"They will surely die in the desert."* (Bamidbar 26,64-65)

It is noteworthy that every person counted in the Moav census was included in the national lottery to determine the geographical inheritance of each tribe and its families. The census was thus largely aimed at “drawing the map” of the Land of Israel in terms of the families and the size of the plots that each one would receive. This explains why, after the census – in which the letters *yud* and *heh* were added to each family's name, as we saw above – the division of the land is recounted: *To these will the land be divided, according to the number of names.* (verse 53)

In light of this, we can readily understand why Yehoshua's name was changed when he was sent as one of the Twelve Scouts to check out the Land before Israel's entry. Moshe added a *yud* to his original name of Hoshea, thus giving him a *yud-heh* combination:

וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לְהוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן נוּן יְהוֹשֻׁעַ.

*Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun "Yehoshua."* (13,16)

Here, unlike the family names listed in Parashat Pinchas, such as *HaNemueli* and *HaPartzi*, the *yud* and *heh* are not separated – one at the beginning of the name and one at the end – but are rather together, at the beginning. Yehoshua thus had a special blessing, and it was in fact he who was first to fight the war with Amalek, and first to bring the Children of Israel into the Land of Israel.

