



## מקדש ישראל והזמנים

# Double Sanctity: Israel and the Festivals

### ■ These are the Names

As we know, the unique name of each of the Five Books of the Torah was chosen not merely for being its first or second word. Rather, the selected name expresses the book's very essence and particular message.

Consider the second of the Five Books, for instance. Known in English as Exodus, in Hebrew it is the Book of Sh'mot (Names). The word Sh'mot most certainly appears in the opening verse, but in truth, the name Sh'mot is so much more profound than just that, with ramifications that affect the history of the entire world.

At the first Divine revelation to Moshe Rabbeinu at the Burning Bush, Moshe asked what appeared to be an innocent, straightforward question:

... וַאֲמָרוּ לִי מָה שְׁמוֹ; מָה אֹמֵר אֲלֵהֶם?

*They [Israel] will ask me,*

*“What is His Name” – what will I tell them? (Sh'mot 3,13)*

Having received a Divine mission, Moshe wishes to know G-d's Name. He does not explain why this is so significant for him, and G-d's answer to this question also appears rather bland and lacking in detail:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֶל מֹשֶׁה: אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה.

*G-d said to Moshe: “I will be Whom I will be.” (verse 14)*

“My Name is not important,” G-d says; “it will be what it will be, and I am what I am.” What does He mean? Is there really no importance to G-d’s Name?

To assume that Moshe is simply asking G-d’s Name and Hashem is responding that it doesn’t matter is only a superficial understanding of this dialogue. In actuality, the Book of Sh’mot deals with two amazing revelation of names: the wondrous revelation of “Am Yisrael,” which will be the Nation of G-d, and at the same time, the amazing revelation of Hashem as the “G-d of Israel.” G-d’s Name, and that of Israel, are the pair of names in whose merit the Book of Sh’mot received its own name.

When Israel will later stand at the foot of Mount Sinai and declare aloud: *Na’aseh v’nishma*, “**We will do and we will listen to all that Hashem has said**” (Sh’mot 24,7), an unforgettable utterance will at the same time be sounded in the Heavens: “**I am Hashem your G-d**” (20,2). These two utterances essentially define their speakers.

This is precisely the message that Hashem gives over to Moshe: “If you mean to ask My name, you know it already: it is the *Havayah* Name, that of Being [this will be explained below]. But if your question is whether I will declare openly today that I am Hashem your G-d, *Hashem Elokeichem* – then I say clearly: I do not intend to make such an announcement at this time, but rather only in the future.” In this light, we understand verse 14 as follows:

“**I will be**” – My Name is ‘I will be,’

“**whom**” - in the future,

“**I will be**” - your G-d!

We have now understood G-d’s answer. But why only in the future will He be Israel’s G-d? And on what does it depend? It depends on Israel’s willingness to accept Hashem as their G-d, i.e., their commitment to follow his commandments and statutes. “When you are ready and willing to accept Me as G-d,” Hashem says, “I will then declare *Anochi, I am Hashem your G-d* – and this will be My Name.”

זֶה שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זְכוֹרִי לְדֹר דֹּר.

*This is My Name forever,*

*and this is My remembrance for all generations.* (Sh’mot 3,15)

*My Name* will forever be “Hashem the G-d of Israel,” and *My remembrance*, that is, the way in which you remember Me as “Hashem our G-d,” will be for all generations.

### ■ The Sanctity of Place

When we study the Book of B’reshit, we see that wherever Hashem revealed Himself to the Patriarchs Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, they built an altar to G-d and thus sanctified that place. Avraham built an altar where G-d revealed Himself to him (B’reshit 12,7), and the same with Yitzchak (26,24-25). But most notable of all was Yaakov Avinu. When he received a wondrous Divine revelation and dreamed of the angels ascending and descending to the heavens, he took the rock he had used as a pillow and rendered it an altar. He also made a vow that upon his return from exile, he would build a house for G-d in that spot, something like a small sanctuary.

The type of sanctity that our forefathers thus effected is called “sanctity of place” – a place from where it is possible to see Divine visions. Such a place is reminiscent of the place in which Hashem placed Moshe so that he would be able to see G-d’s glory:

... הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֶתִּי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל הַצּוּר... וְרָאִיתָ אֶת אַחֲרֵי וּפְנֵי לֹא יֵרָאוּ.  
*“Here is a place with Me, and you will stand atop the rock...  
 you will see My back, but My face will not be seen.”* (33,21-23)

Mt. Sinai was sanctified with this type of holiness, as was the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting, and the Beit HaMikdash – in all of which there had been tremendous Divine revelations.

### ■ The Sanctity of Time

So much for place; let us now discuss time.

Sacred times complement sacred places. Just like consecrated status was accorded to places where windows to Divine revelations were opened, the same is true for particular times. Every day of the year in which a window was opened towards prophetic visions becomes a “sanctified” day. Greatest among them was the Sabbath day, on which G-d rested His Divine Presence and the world reached the verge of completion. On this day, the entire world turned into a type of Beit Mikdash in which G-d would be revealed in the world.

We may well ask: When G-d appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, why didn't the *days* on which this occurred become sanctified, as did the *places*? And even those places – why did they not remain sanctified forever, like the Sabbath?

The answer to the first question is that although an individual can sanctify a place, he cannot sanctify a time. The sanctification of time requires an entire nation. The descent of Yaakov Avinu's family to Egypt was for one purpose: To turn an individual family into a nation – one that worships G-d and represents Him to the entire world. This is the true significance of the switch of Yaakov's name to Yisrael. The name "Yaakov" represents the family, while "Israel" represents the nation it became.

The ability to sanctify time was given to Israel on the first day of Nissan: "*This [first day of the] month is for you the first of the months*" (Sh'mot 12,2). G-d thus informed Israel, via Moshe and Aharon, that now, with Israel having become a nation, He is giving the keys of the "sanctification of time" into their hands.

The first day thus sanctified by Israel – by Moshe and Aharon, specifically – was Rosh Chodesh Nissan; from here on in, every Rosh Chodesh was to be sanctified by the Sanhedrin of Israel, the Great Court of 71 Sages. The Sages in the Gemara (B'rachot 49a) explained quite clearly that when we say in our prayers that G-d is "He Who sanctifies Israel and the times," it means that after G-d consecrates Israel, Israel sanctifies time and thus determines the festival dates. As such, only when Israel is a nation does it have the ability to sanctify time.

Given the above, we see that the sanctity of place preceded the sanctity of time.

### ■ Two Names of G-d

What is the source of Israel's ability to single out and sanctify specific times? The answer lies in the *Havayah* Name of G-d. It is actually a compound word comprising all the tenses of being – *hayah* (was), *hoveh* (is), and *yihyeh* (will be) – and it thus stands for the "eternity of time."

That is to say, the moment that the Nation of Israel came upon the scene, accepting the Kingdom of Hashem, the *Havayah* Name of G-d was revealed, together with the sanctity of time. Before this, the Patriarchs had prophesized in the Name of *E-l Sha-dai*, which signifies "bursting outward from the tiny, initial, primeval central point." With this name, the world is

enlarged up to the borders G-d set when He said, “Enough (*dai*)!” This is why the Patriarchs had the power to sanctify location.

The proliferation of the human race is based on the Name *E-l Sha-dai*, the power that multiplies and increases the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov into a full-fledged nation. People, too, are a type of “place” on which the Divine Presence rests.

In short, “place” is connected to *E-l Sha-dai*; “time” is linked with *Havayah*.

We must remember that the transition process from family to nation, and from *E-l Sha-dai* to *Havayah*, also leads to the joining together of the sanctified places into one single location. With this, we can answer our second question above: Why did the places sanctified by our Patriarchs not remain holy? It is because originally, every site of a Divine revelation was worthy of being a home and altar for G-d, but now, with Israel having become a nation, all sanctified places became subservient to one holy place: the Mishkan, the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. From then on, no other places may be sanctified as an altar for the service of G-d.

Similarly, from then on, the Prophetic Voice would be revealed in one single place –from above the Holy Ark, between the two *cherubim*. From there it would reverberate to whichever prophet was to hear it, wherever he might be found.

### ■ The Windows of Time

Our calendar has two different months that each mark a new year and are each considered “Rosh HaShanah.” Tishrei marks the beginning of a new year as counted from the Creation of the World, while Nissan commemorates the year’s first month, as counted from the Exodus from Egypt. In Tishrei, the roots are planted, while in Nissan, the branches flower and blossom. In Tishrei, the world is concealed, while in Nissan, all becomes revealed.

In these two months, as well, the Torah scheduled our main festivals. In fact, in Tishrei, the 1st, 10<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> days are specifically holy (Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, Sh’mini Atzeret), while in Nissan, it is the 15<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> days (Pesach, Sh’vii shel Pesach) that are clearly sanctified (together with the holiday of Shavuot, which, though it is in a different month, is often considered a continuation of Pesach). By what pattern did each month receive its holidays?

When we look carefully at the historic events marked by the festivals, we will see that whenever G-d intervened in history without Israel's active participation, the holiday was scheduled in the month of Nissan. But days that commemorate action taken only by Israel are set in Tishrei. And if both Hashem and Israel were active, the holy day is marked in both Nissan and Tishrei. The following examples will show this clearly.

1. On Rosh Chodesh Nissan, Hashem told Israel, ***"This month is for you the first of the months"*** (Sh'mot 12,2). Israel is to be the active player here in sanctifying the days of the year, and therefore the first day of the month of Tishrei, not Nissan, is sanctified as Rosh HaShanah.
2. On the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Nissan, Israel was instructed to take very daring and brazen action: ***"On the tenth of this month... every man must take a lamb for each extended family"*** (Sh'mot 12,3). It was obviously very difficult for them to take the god of Egypt – the lamb – and tie it to their homes, thus announcing to all that they were designating the Egyptian god for slaughter. This bold action was taken exclusively by Israel, and therefore the corresponding day in Tishrei, the 10<sup>th</sup>, was marked as a holiday for generations: Yom Kippur.

It should be noted parenthetically that on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Nissan, the waters of the Jordan River were split and enabled the Nation of Israel to cross through on dry land into the Land of Israel.

3. Hashem revealed Himself as the exclusive G-d before all of Egypt on the night of the 15<sup>th</sup> of Nissan. It was then that every Egyptian household woke up to find its first-borns dead, while the Israelite first-borns were spared. However, it was not only G-d Who was active this night; the Israelites were also quite busy, offering the Pesach sacrifice, placing blood on their doorposts, eating the sacrifice with matzah and maror, and preparing for the great Exodus. Therefore, the 15<sup>th</sup> was set as a holiday in both Nissan and Tishrei, as the first day of Pesach and Sukkot, respectively.
4. On the seventh day following the Exodus, Hashem revealed Himself in all His power when, via the pillars of cloud and fire, He split the Red Sea in two and crushed the Egyptian army. The Torah tells us that Hashem alone fought for Israel: ***"G-d will fight for you, and you are to be silent!"*** (Sh'mot 14,14); Israel was passive. This is why the corresponding date - the 21<sup>st</sup> - is sanctified only in Nissan, as the last day of Pesach and a day on

which work is forbidden, while in Tishrei, the 21<sup>st</sup> is merely another day of Chol HaMoed.

5. Finally, the first day of the eighth week after the Exodus, i.e., the 50<sup>th</sup> day, is Shavuot – the day on which G-d appeared in all His glory on Mt. Sinai and gave the Torah to Israel. The Israelites, too, were active, having been commanded to sanctify themselves and unite in accepting the Torah. This “eighth” day was therefore designated as a holy day in both parts of the year: Shavuot, the start of the eighth week after Pesach, as well as the eighth day of the holiday of Sukkot – Sh’mini Atzeret – in the month of Tishrei.

What is the source of this parallel between Nissan and Tishrei? In Tishrei, the world was created, while in Nissan, the Divine Leader of the world was revealed, via His great miracles by which Israel was rescued from bondage.

### ■ The Gift of Shabbat

But our mosaic is still incomplete; we must explain the concept of “the sanctity of the Sabbath.” The question we must explore is this: What is the essential difference between the window of time that was opened on the Sabbath day, and that which was opened on Festival days? Let us consult the Talmud:

*“To know that I am G-d Who sanctifies you”* (Sh’mot 31,13). **Hashem said to Moshe: “I have a gift in my treasure house; it is named Sabbath, and I wish to give it to Israel. Go and inform them.”** (Shabbat 10b)

Hashem obligates us to rest; is that a gift?! In what way is the Sabbath a gift?

Clearly, the sanctity of the Sabbath stems from its source, the original Six Days of Creation. As this period concluded, the world was on the verge of completion, ready for the Divine Presence to dwell upon it. The entire world became a type of Beit HaMikdash upon which the Divine light would rest, as explained above.

Would it not have been logical to include the mitzvah of Shabbat in the seven mitzvot given to Noach and his descendants, i.e., the Gentiles? Should not all the world’s inhabitants have been given the chance to keep this day and thus merit the G-dly light upon them?

The answer is no. G-d saved the Sabbath day, and its accompanying Divine light for those who preserve it, as a gift exclusively for Israel. The “gift of

Sabbath” that Hashem gave them is thus a window of opportunity to merit the Divine light once every seven days; Gentiles who observe the Sabbath do not receive this special light. The gift was withheld even from Israel, however, until they left Egypt as a unified nation. Once they then began to keep the Sabbath, Israel became a full partner with Hashem and a bridge between the Creator and His world.

This Sabbath “window in time” between G-d and the world can be activated only by Israel. It was Divinely and permanently set during Creation, and it can never be changed. The other festivals of the Torah are also time-windows of opportunity, but they *can* be changed and they do not appear regularly. They are reserved for Hashem’s revelation to Israel, and G-d gave Israel say over its timing: Israel has the power to choose whether a given festival will fall on a particular day or its morrow (or even a month later, in the event of a leap-year), via its ability to sanctify the months and determine the first day of each month.

An allusion to this is found in the following Biblical verse introducing the topic of festivals:

וְאִמְרַתְּ אֲלֵהֶם, מוֹעֲדֵי ה' אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ  
אֵלֶּה הֵם מוֹעֲדֵי.

*Tell Israel: “The festivals of G-d, that you will proclaim them  
holy occasions - these are My festivals.*

שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תַּעֲשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבָּת שַׁבְּתוֹן מִקְרָא קֹדֶשׁ...

*Six days, work shall be done,  
but on the seventh day – a Sabbath of Sabbaths,  
an occasion of sanctity...” (Vayikra 23,2-3)*

This is a very strange introduction. It begins by emphasizing, twice, that it is dealing with G-d’s festivals, yet it begins the list not with festivals, but rather with the Sabbath! And then, after mentioning the Sabbath, it once again introduces the list of festivals, beginning with Pesach:

אֵלֶּה מוֹעֲדֵי ה' מִקְרָאֵי קֹדֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרְאוּ אֹתָם בְּמוֹעֲדָם.  
בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן... פֶּסַח לֵה'.

*These are the festivals of G-d,  
holy occasions that you will proclaim them in their times.  
In the first month [shall be] Pesach for G-d... (verses 4-5)*

Let us take another look at the first introduction. Hashem means to say this: “My dear children, Bnei Yisrael: I regard you so highly that even those festivals that are dependent upon your determination, I will consider them as ‘My festivals,’ just like the Sabbath whose time I set and determined. In this sense, they are equal!”

The verse is thus understood as follows: “*The festivals of G-d that you proclaim holy occasions - these are My festivals*” – such as the Sabbath. Following this introduction and example, the Torah then proceeds to list the “real” festivals.

With this profound insight, we can understand the ruling that whatever determination the Beit Din (rabbinical court) makes is absolute, whether it was made mistakenly or even purposely “wrongly.” Rabbi Akiva states in the Gemara as follows:

**The Torah states the word *otam* – meaning “them,” as in “*you shall proclaim them*” – three times (Vayikra 23, verses 2, 4, and 37), and each time it is spelled without a *vuv*, thus that it reads *atem*, meaning “you.”**

**From this is derived: “*you*” – even if you are mistaken; “*you*” – even if you purposely made a wrong determination; “*you*” – even if you were misled. (Rosh HaShanah 25a)**

This entire teaching was derived from the Rabbinic exegetical rule *kri uch'tiv* – in the form of a missing letter, as explained.

The festivals that we celebrate are not only a way by which to remember a past event. Rather, just like the Sabbath is a day of revelation of the Divine Presence, so too, every festival is a day of eternal revelation between G-d and Israel.

