

*NCSY Torah* — *on One Foot Series*

# HASHEM

הַקַּב"ה



THOUGHTS ON  
**GOD**

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## 1. WHAT'S HIS NAME?

**THERE** are many names by which people call G-d, reflecting different attributes. Some of these names are reserved for prayer and we use slight variations in conversation. Here are just a few.

### *Aibishter*

The Most High (Yiddish)

### *Adonoi*

My Master (*Hashem* in conversation)

### *Avinu she'ba'Shamayim*

Our Father in Heaven

### *Eil or Elohim*

God (*Keil* or *Elokim* in conversation)

### *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*

The Holy One, May He be Blessed

### *HaMakom*

The Omnipresent One

### *Ribono shel Olam*

Master of the World

### *Shadai*

The Creator (*Shakai* in conversation)

#### WHAT'S WITH THE DASH IN "G-D"?

We are very careful not to take Hashem's name in vain, either in speech or in writing. According to many authorities, words like "God" and "Lord" are not considered holy and it is permitted to say them (and even to write them, as we just did). Many consider it more respectful, however, to write them as "G-d" and "L-rd."

## 2. SO WHAT'S YHVH?

**THIS** name has several names! It is called:

The **Tetragrammaton**, a Greek word meaning the four-letter name of G-d, because it is spelled *yud-hey-vav-hey* in Hebrew.

The **Shem HaMeforash**, the explicit name of G-d. In English it is often called the **ineffable name of G-d**. (Ineffable means unable to be pronounced.) This is because the proper pronunciation was known only to a very few holy people in each generation and it was only spoken by the *Kohein Gadol* (High Priest) as part of the Yom Kippur service. (In English, it is often wrongly rendered "Jehovah" or "Yahweh," but these are not really names of G-d in Judaism.)

The **Shem Havayah**, or the name of existence. This name comes from the Hebrew word meaning "to be" and it refers to the fact that Hashem always was, is and will be. Similarly, when Moshe asked G-d His name, He replied, "*Eheyeh asher Eheyeh*," "I will be as I will be" (*Shemos* 3:14).

In prayer, we pronounce this name **Adonoi** (my Master), but in conversation we say **Hashem** (meaning "the Name").



#### AIN'T THAT A SHAIMOS

Books and papers that contain words of Torah or a Name of G-d (not including the English word "God," according to most authorities) may not be thrown in the trash. These items are called *shaimos* (literally "names") and must be buried. Most synagogues have a box where you can deposit your *shaimos*.



## Can G-d Make a Rock so Heavy He Can't Lift it?

This question is based on a faulty premise: that concepts such as "lift" and "heavy" apply to G-d. He "can't" make such a rock because, by definition, there can be no such rock!

## How Can I Have Free Will if G-d Knows What I'm Going To Do?



G-d exists outside of time, so past, present and future have no meaning to Him. He can see what you are going to do, but He doesn't make you do it. Did you ever see a movie two or three times? You know what's going to happen, but you don't make the actors do those things!

## What Does it Mean to be in G-d's Image?

The Torah tells us that man was created *b'tzelem Elokim*, "in G-d's image." But what does it mean to be in G-d's image? G-d has no physical body and no visual appearance! *B'tzelem Elokim* doesn't mean a physical resemblance to G-d, but a spiritual potential to emulate Him as the Torah says, "Be holy, because I, Hashem your G-d, am holy." (*Vayikra 19:2*)

Just as G-d is gracious, so should you be gracious. Just as He is merciful, so should you be merciful. Just as He is holy, so should you be holy. The prophets described G-d using all His various attributes, such as slow to anger, full of kindness, righteous, upright, pure, mighty, powerful and so on. This is to teach us that these are good qualities for a person to cultivate in order to emulate G-d as much as possible. (*Rambam Hilchos Deos 1:6*).



The Baal Shem Tov says that, just as Hashem is too complex for us to understand, a person (who is in the image of G-d) is also unbelievably complex. Genetics, environment, life experiences, education, psychology, aspirations, failures, and more all combine to make a person so multifaceted that we can never fully understand someone else. Accordingly, we must be careful not to judge others since we don't truly understand them.

## THREE OUT OF TEN

Of course, there are 613 commandments in the Torah, but of the Ten Commandments that Hashem gave publicly on Mt. Sinai, the first three are about G-d Himself.



1. I am Hashem, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery. (*Shemos 20:2*)

2. Do not have any other "gods" in My presence. (*Shemos 20:3*) (And there's no place that *isn't* in G-d's presence!)

3. Do not swear by the Name of Hashem your G-d unnecessarily. (*Shemos 20:7*)

What kind of commandment is "I am Hashem...?" It's the commandment to know that there's a G-d. It is a requirement for us to look for Him in all places! (*Maimonides*)

# THE 13 ATTRIBUTES OF HASHEM

- G-d is:
- 1 merciful before a person sins;
  - 2 merciful even after a person sins;
  - 3 powerful;
  - 4 compassionate;
  - 5 gracious;
  - 6 slow to anger;
  - 7 abundant in kindness...
  - 8 and in truth;
  - 9 He preserves kindness for generations;
  - 10 forgives intentional sin\* ...
  - 11 willful sin\* ...
  - 12 and accidental sin\*;
  - 13 and cleanses those who repent. (*Shemos 34:6*)

\*One must regret one's past misdeeds and resolve to improve in order to receive this forgiveness. See NCSY's *Teshuvah* pamphlet for more information.

## TORAH THOUGHTS

- You have been shown so that you will know that Hashem is G-d. Beside Him there is no other. (*Devarim 4:35*)
- G-d is not a person so that He should lie or a human being so that He should change His mind. (*Bemidbar 23:19*)
- Hashem your G-d is G-d in the Heavens above and on the Earth below. (*Yehoshua 2:11*)
- The eyes of G-d are everywhere, seeing both the evil and the good. (*Mishlei 15:3*)
- There is nowhere in the world that Hashem's presence isn't found. (*Baba Basra 28a*)
- The first foundation of wisdom is the knowledge that there is a timeless Being who brought the world into existence and sustains it. That Being is Hashem. (*Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah 1:1*)
- By definition, people are simply incapable of understanding the true nature of G-d. (*Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah 1:9*)
- If I understood Him, I would be Him. *R. Yosef Albo (1360-1444)*
- Listen, Israel: Hashem is our G-d. Hashem is One. (*Devarim 6:4*)

## From Our Sages

A girl once told Rav Yose that her "god," the snake, was greater than Hashem because Moshe ran away from a snake, but not from the burning bush. Rav Yose replied, "Moshe could escape from your 'god' by running a few steps. Where could he go to flee from Hashem, whose presence fills the Heavens and the Earth?" (*Shemos Rabbah*)

The Roman emperor Hadrian asked Rabbi Yochanan why Hashem doesn't reveal Himself. Rabbi Yochanan replied that no person could look at Hashem



and live. If we can't look at the sun, which is one of Hashem's simplest creations, how could we hope to look at the Creator Himself? (*Chulin 60a*)

The existence of a house tells us there was a builder. The existence of a garment says there was a tailor. Similarly, the existence of the world announces the presence of Hashem. (*Midrash Tanchuma*)