

Dear Chavraya,

My early school career was not illustrious. Struggling to make it through first grade, I often wished that I could take a very early retirement. My first grade teacher, Miss Blanford, was one of those pre-diluvian types who have hopefully become extinct. Called to many parent-teacher conferences, my mother trod a well-worn path up the rising semi-circular drive that curved around the flagpole. Following one of those meetings, my mother found consolation in sharing lament with the mother of one of my classmates. Over time, these two advocates for their sons became life-long friends, bonding on that painful afternoon in response to Miss Blanford's knowing assertion that neither boy would ever amount to anything. Through the years, long removed from the heartache of two young mothers, mom and Isabelle would often tell the tale and smile in the knowledge that one of their sons became a doctor, the other a rabbi.

Planted within each person is the seed of possibility. Every child born is meant to be and become, if only the sacred birthright not be snatched away by injustice and inequity. Created in the image of God, we are also challenged to be and to do in the ways of God's names and attributes. As God is compassionate, kind, faithful and forgiving, so are we to be. In this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Sh'mot*, the first portion in the second book of the Torah, *Sh'mot/Exodus*, Moses is called to his mission as liberator. Pushing back against his own destiny, struggling to overcome his lack of confidence, Moses asks God what he should say when the people ask of God's name, wanting to know who sent him to be their unsought leader. God tells Moses to tell that people that he was sent by *Eh'yeh Asher Eh'yeh/I Shall Be That Which I Shall Be*. And then God says simply to tell them: *Eh'yeh/I Shall Be has sent me to you*.

God is known in Jewish tradition by seventy names, each one holy, each one offering insight into a different facet of God's being, yet it is this name given to Moses at the outset of his calling that encapsulates them all. A midrashic telling teaches that of all God's names this one is unique, *v'ayn chutz mimenu/there is nothing outside of it*. In a playful use of *gematria/numerology*, we are given to see that taken together the first letters in the names of each of the five books of the Torah have the same numerical value as God's name *Eh'yeh*, twenty-one. As all is encompassed by Torah, so too by God's name of being. A few chapters later, in next week's Torah portion, God offers another name to Moses, the most holy of God's names, *yud, hey, vav, hey*, unpronounceable, ever-unfolding. Neither a noun nor a verb, free of the gender association of Hebrew words, it is a name formed in unique arrangement from the letters of the verb "to be." God is ever-becoming, and created in God's image of being, so are we.

In a beautiful Chassidic teaching on the meaning of *Eh'yeh Asher Eh'yeh*, the *M'or Va'shemesh*, Rebbe Kalonymous Kalman Epstein reaches out to each one of us, raising our eyes to see our own worth and possibility, imagining God's own explanation of the Name: *I shall be called through each one according to the nature of their holy service*. With a remarkable challenge to everyone who would ever teach or mentor another, which means every person in their own time and way, God tells Moses, therefore, to tell the people that they should not do the mitzvot and serve God in the way that Moses does, but each in their own manner. In this

way, the *M'or Va'shemesh* explains, shall each person *arrive at the meaning of their own existence*.

Of two boys who would never amount to anything, their mothers' tears told a different story, of being and becoming, each in their own way. For each one of us, God's own name through which we are called can be a gentle song of triumph, of praise and possibility, I shall be that which I shall be.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor