

**Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold**

Candle Lighting Time
Friday Erev Shabbat 5:40 pm

Thursday Jan. 23 8:30 am Minyan and Bagels & Bible
Friday Jan. 24 5:30 pm Shabbat Services, Dinner for those with reservations
Saturday Jan. 25 9:30 am Shabbat Services

SUNDAY MORNING LECTURES

10 am Meeting followed by Lecture

Feb. 16 Where were you when the universe was created?

Mar. 9 Why is there evil in the world?

We thank God for the release of the first few hostages. We can only pray that the peace holds and the rest of the hostages are quickly released.

**PARSHAT VAERA
GOD HAS A NAME**

“I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but I did not make Myself known to them by My name *Yud-Hey-Vav-Hay*.” (Exodus 6:3)

We learn at the beginning of this portion that God has a name. By giving us God’s name, the Torah implies that God is a “person” with agency, Who acts in this world. God is not simply an impersonal idea, not “the force that makes for redemption” to use Mordecai Kaplan’s famous description. With a name, God acts within history, leading the Israelites from slavery to freedom.

When the Ten Commandments forbids us from using God’s name in vain, it is referring to the misuse of God’s name. The third commandment is not speaking about swearing or telling us to write “G-d”, a custom I have never understood. God is not God’s name. The letters *Yud-Hey-Vav-Hay* spell God’s name. Jewish tradition forbids us from pronouncing the name. In fact, the only person who could pronounce it was the High Priest during the Yom Kippur rituals in the Holy of Holies. When the High Priest said the name of God, everyone would prostrate themselves and declare, “Blessed be His glorious name forever and ever.” Today we no longer have a High Priest nor this Yom Kippur ritual. But we still reenact this ritual on Yom Kippur, with the cantor

playing the role of the High Priest and bowing all the way down. (In some synagogues everyone bows all the way down.) But we no longer pronounce God's name.

Jewish tradition teaches that when we come across God's name in our prayers or Torah reading, we say the word *Adonai* "My Lord." When we are talking casually outside of prayer, we simply say *HaShem* "The Name." Some Orthodox Jews say *Adoshem*, which is not a word at all. But it is forbidden to try to pronounce God's Name. I am aware that there are people who use the word Jehovah, such as people who claim to be Witnesses. But Jehovah is not the proper pronunciation. (There is no j sound in Hebrew.) So, the pronunciation must remain a mystery.

What does the name mean? It seems to come from a Hebrew root for "to be," "to become," or simply "to exist." This fits in with God's message to Moses earlier at the burning bush. When Moses asks God for his name, God answers *Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh* "I am Who I am" or "I will be Who I will be" (Exodus 3:14). God simply exists. We cannot know any further information about God other than God's existence. We simply know that God is.

This brings me to one of the most famous proofs that God must exist. It is known as the ontological proof of God. Conceived by the Catholic thinker Anselm of Canterbury, it was used by thinkers as varied as Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, and the great twentieth-century logician Kurt Godel. According to the proof, God is a being that includes every perfection. Existence is a perfection. Without existence, God would be less than perfect. Therefore, God must exist. (Think about it. It is extremely clever, and philosophers are still arguing about it.)

God has a name coming from a Hebrew root that means "exists." God exists and acts in history. As we learn God's name, we begin the story of the ten plagues and the ultimate redemption from Egypt. Reading this story, we can hopefully believe that God continues to act in history. Redemption was not a one-time event but is an ongoing process. As we say at our Passover seder, "In every generation a person should see themselves as if they were redeemed from Egypt."