

Lesson 13 – My Name is YHVH

Goal:

- Students will trace the use of Hashem's name in Beresheet and apply that knowledge to a significant but otherwise enigmatic pasuk here. Students will thereby retrace the steps that led Rashi to his explanation.
- Students will discover the structure of Hashem's speech and how that structure helps to convey the message of the speech.

Activity:

1. In pasuk 3, Hashem says that He showed himself to the Avot as El Shadai but his name YHVH was not known to them. Is this true? Have students fill out the worksheet:

Worksheet for Shemot 6:3

1. Translate Shemot 6:3
2. Is this true? Look up a few of the following pesukim to check: Bereshit 15:7, 28:13, 12:8, 13:22, 21:33, and 26:25. Write down who speaks and who is spoken to in these pesukim and what name of Hashem is used.
3. Try to think of a solution to this problem. Write it down.
4. What is the significance of Hashem appearing as El Shadai? Look up the following pesukim and note the context. What is being promised?
Bereshit 15:7 -
Beresheet 28:13 -
5. What is the meaning of "וַיִּשְׁמֵי יְקִיָּק לֹא נִדְעָתִי לְהֵם"? Lookup Shemot 7:5, 14:4 and Jeremiah 16:21.
6. Read the following Rashi. Can you explain how Rashi came up with this explanation?
באל שדי - הבטחתי הבטחות ובכולן אמרתי להם אני אל שדי:
שמי ה' לא נודעתי להם - לא הודעתי אין כתיב כאן אלא לא נודעתי לא נכרתי להם במדת אמתות שלי שעליה נקרא שמי ה' נאמן לאמת דברי, שהרי הבטחתי ולא קיימתי:

2. Review the worksheet and recall from Lesson 9 that YHVH means that God is the Eternal Being who was is and will always save the oppressed. Because God is One, Eternal and Omnipotent, only He can guarantee He will fulfill a promise. God, using the name El Shaddai appeared to the Avot and promised them children and the Land of Israel. Obviously, the Avot knew and even used the name YHVH. When this pasuk says the Avot did not know YHVH is means that they did not see the fulfillment of the promises. Now, however, both Egypt and Bnei Yisrael will experience the fulfillment of God's promise and understand that He is YHVH.

3. Lead students to find the structure of Hashem's statement:

What are the first and last words that Hashem says to Moshe? אני י-הוה in pasuk 2 until the same words at the end of pasuk 8. We are going to demonstrate that this paragraph is a carefully constructed literary masterpiece based on word counts and chiasm.

Read the paragraph and identify its two sections. Pesukim 3-5 are about what Hashem has done in the past and pesukim 6-8 are about what Hashem will do in the future. The two sections are links by the word לכן אמר לבני ישראל at the beginning of pasuk 6. Thus pesukim 6-8 are a quote within a quote: Hashem tells Moshe what he should say to Bnei Yisrael.

In general, *gematria* and word counting is not a reliable way to find connections and meaning in a text because it can be very arbitrary and not statistically significant. However, there are a few cases where these tools can be used effectively and where it seems obvious that they are intended in the text. The *gematria* of YHVH, the main subject of this paragraph, is 26. Focus on the second section from pesukim 6-8. Notice that the first and last words that Moshe is instructed to say to Bnei Yisrael are אני י-הוה. Notice also that אני י-הוה also appears in the middle of this section in pasuk 7. *Now count 26 words from the first אני י-הוה in pasuk 6, including those words. Where do you land? At the word אני in pasuk 7. Now start counting again from that אני another 26 words. Where do you land? At the word אני in pasuk 8. We see that this section has exactly 52 words (26 x 2) and that אני י-הוה appears at the beginning, exact middle, and end, in 26 word intervals.*

Next, count from the first אני י-הוה in pasuk 2 until the next occurrence in pasuk 6. How many words is it? אני is the 52nd word from the first אני. These word counts and center points are literary devices that beautifully highlight the main subject of the paragraph that Bnei Yisrael will come to know the name YHVH through Hashem's fulfillment of His promises to the Avot.

4. Explain what a chiasmic structure is. A good small example of one is Beresheet 9:6:

שִׁפְךָ
דָּם
הָאָדָם
בְּאָדָם
דָּמוֹ
יִשְׁפָּךְ

This ABC C'B'A' structure is not only poetically pleasing. In this case, it also highlights the *מידה כנגד מידה* aspect of this law. One who spill the blood of a human will have his own blood spilled by human hands (the court). Chiasmic structures can also be much larger. Megilat Esther in its entirety follows such a structure, see sourcesheet. That structure reflects how each part of the story reverses itself – *ונהפוך הוא*. The structure also draws attention to the turning point of *בלילה ההוא*. The purpose of many chiasms are to focus attention to the middle point.

Ask students to take five minutes in pairs and see if they can find the chiasm in this paragraph. Review with this summary sheet and discuss how the chiasm here succeeds in focusing in on the main message of the paragraph.

מבנה כיאסטית בשמות פרק ו פסוקים ב-ח

אני יְקוֹק:

(ג) וְאָרָא אֶל אַבְרָהָם אֶל יִצְחָק וְאֶל יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדַּי וְשָׁמִי יְקוֹק לֹא נוֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם:
 (ד) וְגַם הִקְמֹתִי אֶת בְּרִיתִי אִתָּם לְתֵת לָהֶם אֶת אֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן אֶת אֶרֶץ מִגְרֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר גָּרוּ בָּהּ:
 (ה) וְגַם אָנִי שָׁמַעְתִּי אֶת נְאֻקַּת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם מַעֲבִדִים אֹתָם וְאָזְכָּר אֶת בְּרִיתִי:
 (ו) לָכֵן אָמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יְקוֹק
 וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֹתָם וְגֵאלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים: (ז) וְלָקַחְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעַם וְהֵייתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְיִדְעַתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי יְקוֹק אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם:
 (ח) וְהִבֵּאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת יָדִי לְתֵת אֹתָהּ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלִיעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֹתָהּ לָכֶם מִוְרָשָׁה:
 אני יְקוֹק:

A - I am YHVH

B - unfulfilled promise to the patriarchs

C - commitment to grant the land

D - oppression in Egypt

E - I am YHVH

D' - redemption from oppression in Egypt

C' - fulfillment of promise to grant the land

B' - fulfillment of promise to the patriarchs

A' - I am YHVH

Further Reading:

Nehama Leibowits, *Shemot I*, “I am the Lord” and “Revelation: Patriarchal and Mosaic,” pp. 114-140.

Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant and Conversation: Exodus*, “The God Who Acts in History,” 59-68.

Moshe Shamah. *Recalling the Covenant: A Contemporary Commentary on the Five Books of the Torah*. Ktav, 2011, 276-81.