

Never Having Been Born?

Indeed, a rather odd title which requires some unpacking. The question mark is deliberate because posing it as such shows what's offered here is simply a proposition. At the same time entertaining such a concept is intriguing and clearly outside mainstream thinking we're accustomed to in the West. As soon as we hear "West" automatically there comes to mind its opposite, the East. Yes, some if not most of the ideas about the denial (for lack of better word) of birth comes from there. That's enough to put some people on edge, understandably so. At the same time there's something attractive to it, perhaps not as far off the mark as we may think or have been programmed to believe. Each one of us is concerned with death and what happens afterwards, if anything. Few, if any, give thought to what comes before our birth or whether we had any type of existence. Automatically reincarnation comes to mind. That's discussed a bit later on, which seems to be a misdirected insight.

So what's presented here isn't based upon in-depth scholarly research though for some years I had pondered the state (or lack of it) with regard to pre-birth along with some reading. The more I read the more there grew the distinct possibility it might have some validity and even more important, application to life here and now. In sum, either we might be able to verify or deny it on the spot. I'd feel remiss if I hadn't given it a shot.

A way to begin is sitting by yourself quietly. After the surface thoughts and emotions quiet down a bit, you see what presents itself and make a decision. Simple, really. In light of this, the following reflection are offered for what they are. The majority of people experience a whole jumble of thoughts and distractions. Nevertheless, more lies behind this apparent dead-end which will become evident. We have to move on without any fuss. In a way pondering this right now is an excellent time because the entire world is turned upside down as a result of the Covid 19 virus killing people and tanking the economy. Even more recently are race riots in the USA during the early summer of 2020. Even if both disappear, the ramifications don't seem to be going away any time soon. As a friend in another country asked over the phone, why is America filled with such rage all the time?

Appeal now can be made to an experience many of us have had but aren't quite sure how to express it because we might be laughed at. We should note its oddness, about being "found" in this life almost against our will and being forced, if you will, to continue living. It isn't a death wish or anything of the sort...more like being exiled into an alien land which isn't our home. Immediately comes to mind the classical idea of a pilgrim which applies to not having been born nor will die.

So what is the source of this oddness, of being not at home? You could say that accumulative experiences of the transitory nature of things play a role, especially with the presence then absence of those whom we love. True enough. However, a closer look reveals an intuition, albeit faint and undeveloped, that we existed before. Here's were

reincarnation sounds attractive but as said a little later below, that's not accurate; it's more like a convenient excuse. Those among whom this intuition grows stronger over time feel somehow they have existed before being born physically. They know they hadn't been some type of spiritual seedlings that popped into the current life and will pop back into that same life at death. Comfort can be sought in literature dealing with pilgrims as well as those living on the outskirts of society. Of course, there comes to mind someone like Thoreau but most people with the insight just described don't follow such a life style. Perhaps his inkling of not quite fitting in had something to do with the more basic one of not having been born. Hence the sustained popularity of his writings.

So whether we like it or not we're stuck with this intuition of having "pre-existed," for lack of a better term. Admittedly it's awkward to present, easily misunderstood, but on the minds of most people to one degree or another. It's mysterious, enduring and at the same time troubling. Serious stuff indeed. However, a way out of this impasse. That consists in a way that's more light-some, of not to take this seriously. We can turn attention at this juncture to the experience of children when they're at play because it's so natural. They haven't acquired the baggage adults carry around with them. We've all engaged in play and have fond memories which continue to inform us well into adulthood. For example, one child gets the idea to play a game of cowboys and Indians¹. At once the others chime in spontaneously, and off they go. No need for elaborate costumes and accouterments. They pull all that literally from thin air by pretending to be dressed and equipped as necessary. Really, it's quite amazing to see them go at it totally absorbed in all the details as if they were real. By no means should we write them off or dismiss their activity. Instead, we should be envious of them.

This play continues for an indefinite amount of time or until an adult steps in, telling them it's time to come in for lunch. Without hesitation they drop their activities and return to the so-called real world. "So-called" has some validity in that if you compare personal memories related to genuine play as a child with conventional adult activity, you can't but wonder which is real and which is not. Chances are you'd lean to the former because it registers in the memory more permanently and informs your life. Certainly it's more than mere nostalgia for a better time. Recently a friend of mine brought this home who told of his experience of cops and robbers with friends they played when around seven years old. They pulled this remarkable feat off while in the confines of a car at a drive-in movie theater. The joy with which he expressed it was written all over his face, like it happened a week ago. You couldn't help agree it was more real than a lot of other experiences and was informing him even as we were speaking with each other.

1 Is this example outdated, given the omnipresence of electronic media and given the current climate of political correctness? That's beside the point. The play instinct remains and most likely won't fade away despite the form it may take. The essence of it all is spontaneity.

Such an attitude might be helpful to grasp this business about never having been born¹. For example, a child can adopt a different persona spontaneously while at play with no effort at rehearsing. Obviously he got the information from somewhere and had stored it away in his memory with incredible detail. At any time he can pull out what's necessary to go about his play. It seems a child has little or no experience of death and how that ties in with life which for him never ends. To envision the cessation of his very being is beyond his ken. Yet if somehow you could get across to him the idea that one day he will simply not be—won't be able to relate to all the people and things about him—we might be in for a surprise. He might not feel sad at the prospect but automatically close his eyes trying to imagine the disappearance first of everything and then himself. To him it's a game, a form of play and probably would think it's pretty cool. He might translate this into being an invisible person going anywhere and doing anything he pleases. On the surface it's an undeveloped or immature response but has an underlying brilliance in that the child apprehended the significance of nothingness with regard to his own life as invisibility which is close to non-existence as he can get. In fact, the same might hold true should we apply ourselves. The main point is we have to go out there and do it.

There are limits to this, of course. We're dealing with two realities, the so-called day-to-day one and the one of pretending, of play. Yet the attitude required for pretending enables us to take stuff from that plane and locate it on the adult level. Like a child, we can play with the attitude that we are dead. "Attitude" isn't exactly correct because we're dealing with a mode of behavior that involves our whole heart and soul. Some of the best philosophers down the centuries always have claimed that life is a rehearsal for death, Socrates being a prime example. So here it is in real time through the lens of play. There's no need to ask how to do it, a non-sequitur if you will. If you asked a child this, he'd simply stare at you, thinking you're really dumb. Yet if we take a closer look, play bears a certain resemblance to basic principles of mediation as put into real practice.

The usual approach to prayer is first to sit quietly, calm the fidgety mind and after a while sail as best you can past the incessant thoughts and distractions beating up against you. This image of sailing is helpful to get through the initial rough spots. Others can be used when appropriate. Once we've done this, everyone and everything else disappears...becomes invisible...not totally, to be sure, but enough to differ radically from our normal experience of life and to make us want more. This desire is key to countering those pesky distractions which never go away, for desire or *eros* is stronger and more persistent. And so this is the first and foremost observation people have but often don't run with it and imitate the child who became invisible.

But is there something else that had escaped our notice? Yes, it can be put in terms of being present at the death of a loved one. That person dies with you bedside while outside the room life is going on as normal. In this situation many people report that they're struck by birds chirping, dogs barking, a jet flying overhead and the ebb and flow of nearby traffic. All this, of course, was going on before the death had occurred, but we weren't tuned into it. Somehow those background sounds merge with death, even if for a moment. However, their memory abides with us a long

¹ Admittedly even putting this way is awkward, as though I'm speaking of something way out there and alien to our experience of life. Still, something within us tells us to press on in case we hit upon something. Always the opportunity is present to abandon the quest.

time. You wonder if it's a passing insight or pointer to a deeper reality. I'd go for the latter because it has a lasting impact, even a life changing one.

We can't give an explanation for this experience; that's impossible. However, we can describe what takes place in its vicinity and thereby get a clue as to the invisible or unrevealed agent (if any) which has effected the impact. The experience of sound remains more indelible than anything visual perhaps because sound actually gets inside you. That makes it more easily to capture or to be captured by it when making the distinction between sounds that occur before and those which come after death of a loved one. We could say that those that happen before, while they have entered us, did so only physically. As for the other type after death, they too enter physically but take up residence on a more lasting basis. So it's a question how to dispose ourselves to make something transitory lasting; better, to realize we're the lasting ones and the sounds are transitory. Further reflection reveals that we have nothing to do with all this. That's a humungous discovery. Some-one-something-somewhere-somehow is doing it which relieves us of the burden to strive after the experience. Once this burden is lifted, we enjoy an out-of-this-world peace and joy.

Let's say after this death has occurred we return home, leaving relatives and friends behind. Now a really painful experience begins, a change of life we know that will remain with us the rest of our days. Indeed, we have crossed the threshold into a new state of life. But before that takes hold we go through a period of mourning which is mitigated by the support around us. That may go on a few days or weeks but eventually peters out. Then we slink back into our normal routine with the same heaviness that hit us at the beginning. Often it doesn't come from missing the recently deceased person but from the realization that now I'm hanging out there pretty much alone. It's accentuated when we step outside and see families going about their business together while we're among them by ourselves. Now we're experiencing an invisibility but not the one we'd like. Still, it can prompt us on to seek a meaningful one. Time to consider the play of a child.

Keeping in mind the title of this article which deals with never having been born (followed by a question mark), we can adopt another tactic to get at this sought-after invisibility by recalling as best as possible our earliest experience in life. Usually that's around five years old or so; before that we haven't much to go by unless it's of a traumatic nature. We draw a complete blank which is not unlike the one we face with regard to death, that being a Big Hard Wall beyond which we haven't a clue. Then we discover that we have come from another Big Hard Wall which is before our physical birth. And so we find ourselves living between two impenetrable fog banks, in the tiniest of spaces imaginable. Just stand outside this gap for a minute and try to visualize it, not unlike those familiar yet dazzling examples of astronomical measurements we hear so much about. From this perspective these two fog banks essentially seem to be the same. So we're flanked on two sides, each containing nothing, that is, each contains no thing. Such is our first impression.

This mind numbing insight taken from astronomy has become so popularized that easily we can forget the immensity involved. However, it can be modified with regard to the situation just described when the element of play is introduced. To do this means we're bringing to bear an element of humor which apparently is unique among human beings. All other living beings around us doesn't have it though some animals clearly engage in play. As for humor, we can

presume it's lacking. Humor involves insight into play, to see what's really going on and take it a step further. With regard to the topic at hand, such an attitude takes some courage to adopt because we lack assurance as to what lies on either side of that tiny gap which comprises our current life. At the same time we know for sure it's no-thing so we have to work with that insight which at first appears awkward.

This, of course, demands closer inspection, starting with what we experience about no-thing. Though we may use this phrase, often we don't go much beyond it's apparent negativity. First, we have to get comfortable with this negativity. Our lives are filled with "things," and to say there is none of that stuff on either side—before birth and after death—means a lack of things or no-things. That including every aspect of our lives. In sum, no-thing is all-encompassing. Our time in this so-called tiny gap is meant chiefly to appreciate this regardless of what circumstances in which we find ourselves. It's as though we become those sounds which register with us when a person dies, a time granted to realize how we fit in between the two no-things.

So we come to the point of appreciating that lack of things...the nothing-ness of them...which doesn't necessarily apply to their destruction, simply their inevitable disappearance or passage into invisibility which includes us. Regardless of what we think or believe, we all come to this point at death. Now comes the strange part. As soon as we intuit this nothing-ness in seminal fashion, something completely unexpected from within it pops up. We can assume the same applies at the point of death, but no one knows for sure until we get there. Still, the intuition at hand is pretty close to death which means we can assume it works in both instances. The only difference is that with death, the intuition is absolute, not provisional, as it is now during life.

Much of our concern with regard to perceiving this no-thing-ness takes place in the present as we ponder what will happen to us in the future. At this point we may be tempted to subscribe to reincarnation which assumes we had lived a previous existence, are in a different one now and will pass into yet another. At best this is a projection with no merit which puts some-thing into no-thing, a genuine waste of time and useless speculation. And so reincarnation is misguided way of seeing a relationship between birth and death. Then there's the problem of repeatability. The only benefit about reincarnation is that it hints at a state prior to our current existence but goes about articulating it the wrong way. At issue, of course, is that state of no-thing-ness before we were born. Reincarnation brings up what's before life which is just as important as after it. In the meantime life *hic et nunc* is pretty much bypassed, a way-station among many others.

One way of articulating the twofold nature of no-thing-ness (before birth and after death) is the unexpected presence of that "thing" described as "no" which comes through the realization that I am, pure and simple. There's no-thing other than this am-ness because it just hangs out there ready for anyone to appropriate for himself. Actually you don't appropriate it; this is simply a conventional way of speaking. Trying to get a handle on this is more difficult than at first glance, for there's something within us that wants to grasp it even though we know we should refrain from doing so. To acknowledge this at all levels of our being is crucial after which we simply say no to it and walk away. We don't do this flippantly, for if we did, it'd come back right away to bite us. Rather, we watch it in operation, purely and simply, which makes it fade away all on its own.

Not only that, this watching does a pretty thorough job. We can even say that the watching at hand is essentially what peace consists of or at least seems to be the case.

We find some of this I am-ness expounded in the East, not in the Western tradition, though some Christian mystics may hint at it. They do so with caution else they'd be labeled as heretics or the like. For some reason or other, it never took root which is unfortunate. Perhaps the presence of gnostic doctrines from the beginning of Christianity had something to do with it, this set against the desire for orthodoxy. This devolves into either a head-trip or a devotional approach. Then there's the concrete problem of being stuck with ourselves 7/24 which seems a uniquely modern problem expressed through boredom and depression. We can't run away from ourselves. Trying to do this may be another contribution to the problem at hand, the most extreme "solution" being suicide. Nevertheless, as pointed out, I am-ness is something readily accessible. Once you realize it, there's the question of interpretation which admittedly can run wild, and surely it must have in some instances. While it's important to be aware of, it's of no immediate concern here.

The best part about centering upon the fact that I am is we carry our am-ness around all the time which differs radically from that tedious 7/24 dilemma mentioned above. We can access it at any time under any circumstance. At least when we do fail we just look at it, recognize for what it's worth and simply get in line. This can happen a hundred times a day and is free from guilt or regret at our inattention. What grounds us is humility, recognition that we're not up to the task even though the opportunity is extended to us day and night, night and day. Cultivating this humility also has the benefit of keeping us away from doctrines of reincarnation.

Another way of putting this element of humility into perspective is that it's unconditioned. In a nutshell, being humble is awareness that we're at rock-bottom. Since we're at the bottom, this image can allow us to look up and watch everything else going on with or without us, preferably the latter. The opposite—being conditioned—means there's some cause producing an effect within us. While it's transpiring all the time, our awareness of it makes us uncomfortable not necessarily in a painful way but creates a certain uneasiness that can permeate our day. This feeling is low grade and can flare up on occasion meaning we have to waste a lot of time recovering our normal state (of uneasiness). While all this is transpiring we ask ourselves what in God's name is going on? Why am I so afflicted and not being able to do something about it?

Our problem boils down to having bought into the idea that we're conditioned and have been from birth. It seems inescapable, and we live within a prison which is illusory. That's part of the reason why an apparently hard wall exists both before our birth and after death, the intermediary part (where we're at now) being a kind of tease as when things don't go right as often is the case. Here is the place where conditioning runs riot, actually has no contenders. The trick (used loosely, not as a gimmick) is to identify this conditioning and then stare it right in the face with before birth and after death as a backdrop. This makes our lives a kind of stage famously put by Shakespeare as everyone knows. That means whether we like it or not, we are acting out our roles which gives the quality of our lives a certain unreality. And most of the time this unreality is troubling much like that vague, persistent unease mentioned in the last paragraph.

So this acting is a skill we learn early on and because of this, it's difficult to pinpoint. We don't set out to act in and by itself but acquire modes of thought and then behavior to adapt to our surroundings. In sum, it's a learning process. Even children engage in acting as in a school play. That means they have to learn their parts, rehearse them before getting in front of a live audience. Thus acting seems to differ from playing as discussed already. Playing is more spontaneous in both its implementation and cessation. No rehearsal is required which when you come down to it, would be a lot of work. Children simply get an idea in their heads and let it come out naturally. In acting we attempt to influence events whereas play has none of that. As long as this notion of exerting influence is present, there's no freedom. In the end any kind of doing which is essentially a cause results in restriction of our freedom.

Acting isn't necessarily an obstacle to appreciate this talk about no-thing which sandwiches us from behind and in front, for it's secondary to the role of play. However, we might be better off without it. Putting on a show, as the expression goes, can be a way of dealing with what we fear, trying to bring it under our control. With play, there's no control. Because of this, events are allowed to flow freely, without rehearsal, if you will. Play means we're free from the tyranny of cause and effect. It might sound pretty far out to speak like this but just take a look at how play unfolds among children. Although each child may have a specific role, there's no hierarchy. One isn't better than the other because all participants are caught up in the present moment, the unfolding of the play. Thus this freedom from causality, to realize we're unconditioned—not subject to cause and effect—is a freedom so unlike what we're accustomed that we find it difficult to comprehend. At the same time it's there, for never have we departed from it.

All this is offered as a means to assist us in taking up a stance within that tiny space between the no-thingness before our physical birth and the same no-thingness after our physical death, the two from our perspective seemingly to be the same. Both are characterized by an unknown-ness which is unequivocal in the strongest possible way. All our attempts to see how we're connected with the before and the after crash against them as against re-enforced concrete, for trying to look at it this way involves causality: before-birth *causes* life and life *causes* death. The bugaboo of reincarnation can be inserted here: death *causes* life and so on *ad infinitum* or at least until we're liberated (whatever that means). So it becomes quite obvious that we've been taken in by causality hook line and sinker. To ponder things in this fashion is a good sign that at least we've learned to question such a hard and fast rule and to see if any options exist after which we can go ahead and practice it. "Practice" is used tentatively for it intimates a mechanical action. Read the directions and follow them which leads immediately to the desired result. Talk about causality which we don't want.

The task at hand is how to withdraw from causality. Even proposing it might sound absurd, like a fish saying it has no need to live in water and would rather live in an environment alien to it. Given the above mentioned remarks about play, it seems to fit the bill, not falling under the rigorous yoke of causality, because it contains a number of fanciful elements. At least it isn't acting also as noted, for that would require a prearranged script (causality). To deal with the proposed two-fold no-thing-ness in terms of play is the first step away from this hard fast arrangement so familiar to us. However, it puts us in an awkward position. We must unlearn our habitual behavior not so

much for the unknown but for something we adults have forgotten. At the same time we're added by the fact that play remains stuck in our memories as among the most pleasant of times.

We do have a remarkable power in this attitude of play which defies all the conventions you can throw at it. At first we may agree that yes, play is a wonderful attitude, but can it dislodge that two-fold no-thing-ness, harder and more impenetrable than anything we imagine? Perhaps which infers that we retain some doubt, quite natural because we're dealing with something that has a certain transcendent character. It functions within the serious world while not partaking of it. Yet something deeper is involved, play's ability to point to a reality in a non-serious fashion. The peace we get when adopting this attitude is remarkable, most likely the truest sign of its transcending capacity. It function regardless of any and all things thrown at us, even personal guilt and memories with which some people enjoy confronting us. So in the end the spirit of play may or may not breach the two apparently absolute walls of pre-birth and post-life. It's up to each individual to give it a go and see what happens.

Play works best when it flows from a knowledge that we're secure in our I-am-ness which stands smack in the middle of the two impenetrable barriers. If we abide there, even for a short time, we realize the truth of the quote, "wherever you go, there you are." This is no half-hearted thought experiment (certainly it uses our thought) but something that can be done *hic et nunc*. Even after a short while we find that what had appeared so frightening and impenetrable can loosen up. The best part is we haven't done a thing to these barriers, just shifted our attention or better, brought it home to its native place.

Naturally we desire to see if and where such a thing is recorded in our common heritage which may require digging deep through some texts considered as classics. There we run up against the problem of language which should come as no surprise with regard to the West in general. The problem? Never in the West, it seems, has a tradition evolved with terms related to consciousness or awareness concerning religious practices. Should we run across any, often they're tainted with dabbings in Eastern spirituality which ultimately don't ring true. So for many people the two traditions seems hopelessly apart. So when it comes to expressing religious truths, best to stay with the one in which you are and not wander off. However, any bridges to be made must come from a lot more close consideration, especially the original languages which for the East principally means Sanskrit.

So if it's God we're after, we in the West should look to the Bible, a task which will occupy the next few pages. Genesis presents some pretty good stuff, actually tons of it, if we look carefully. A key insight consists of being made in the divine image and likeness though if you look at how many times it's developed in scripture, the evidence is surprisingly scant. Compare that scantness with the way it has taken off, especially among Orthodox Christian traditions. So while image and likeness is talked about a lot as we expect, we're left high and dry as to how we realize it except through the expected talks about self-denial and all that. Well and good but pretty worn out by now.

A bit later in our cursory glance of the Bible we hit upon Moses' encounter with the Lord who takes the initiative of revealing himself. Moses has nothing to do with it, that's clear and should put us at ease since we're in the same situation. Always we're trying to bring about a spiritual realization this way or other. At first it may sound exaggerated but the more we go on, the truer it is, embarrassingly so. We may consider this as the key point in our every so brief survey, the next one being the birth of Jesus Christ. Consider the famous revelation recorded in Exodus 3.14: "God said to Moses, 'I am who am.' And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" If any common Israelite heard this, he'd think Moses is crazy, uttering gibberish. How can anyone worship "I am?" Seriously. If dealing with the Israelites was tough enough, Moses had Pharaoh and the Egyptians to bounce that off. Obviously this verse has been gone over with a fine comb, actually thousands of them, and people have come up with all sorts of interpretations. And so here comes yet another one, quite amateurish though there's something irresistible (perhaps all others have said the same thing).

At this point we can offer some reflections on this verse from Exodus. The words *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* are rendered literally as "I will be what I will be." The first and second words mean "existed" or "was," the first person singular imperfect form, and can be translated in as "I will (shall) be." While interpretation of this has been debated and continues to be so, it might be helpful to focus on the connective or relative pronoun *'asher* or "who" which bridges the gap between the two identical *'ehyeh*. In other words, *'asher* by its very nature deals with relationships, of going from one to another, and is the focus of attention here. In fact, we may say that the article at hand leads up to this relative pronoun.

The preposition *'asher* is derived from the verbal root *'ashar* whose fundamental meaning is straightness. By its very nature, a preposition is transitional in that it points to something else as opposed to focusing upon itself. With this in mind, we could say that the first "I am" moves to the second "I am" which points not so much to God's being but to his activity and interest in creation and human affairs. However, it has to pass through a relative pronoun whose task is to connect two distinct elements which isn't the case we have here. Instead, it's a passage from the same to the same. At the same time *'Asher* represents a transition, essential to go from Point A to Point B, while not attracting attention to itself...almost shy, if such a way of putting it is appropriate. And so we may say that the quicker the relative pronoun makes the transition, the better because less attention is drawn to it.

The first half (in this case *'ehyeh*) could never make the switch to the other side, as it were, without intervention from the relative pronoun *'asher*. Interestingly, the same verbal root to this pronoun is used in the opening word of the Psalter: "Happy is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked" where the adjective for "happy" is *'asher*. With this in mind, blessedness can be described as something you can't quite get your hands upon (you'd ruin it otherwise) because it's too slippery, goes by you too quickly. The reason? Your attention prefers to focus less upon the middle in favor of Point A and Point B. But once you've put attention on the middle—the *'asher*—you have the best of both A and B. Such is the composition of God's name, a wise decision on his part and shorted to the familiar YHWH, four letters suggestive of breathing and therefore of life itself.

As for the Lord communicating this to Moses, you can't help but see how excited he is, almost unable to contain himself to show off this name. For Moses' part, he deserves special credit for having taken all this in stride. To make things clearer, the Lord interprets *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* with the words "Say to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" That is to say, "*'ehyeh* has sent me"...*'ehyeh* without the connective pronoun *'asher*. That leaves the divine essence out of the picture which might appear defective. However, at this stage of first revelation the Israelites weren't in a position to grasp theological subtleties.

Vs. 15 has the Lord refining his (abbreviated) name of *'ehyeh* in more familiar terms immediately after *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*, that is, he being the God of Israel's fathers specified as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Every Israelite can sink his teeth into that. Note that the Lord identifies himself with each patriarch individually, not collectively, a way of drilling in the fact that indeed he means business. Hopefully this would arouse first their curiosity and then their allegiance to Moses. Looking back upon encounters all three patriarchs had with the Lord shows that no such name as the one revealed to Moses had been given. Now it is time to take it one crucial step further and see if Moses could have the Israelites put two and two together, the divine name and the Lord of their forefathers' memory. The *'ehyeh* part can wait until Mount Horeb.

The next part of the divine commission to Moses is "this is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." Note the distinction. The Lord's name is forever or for all eternity with this eternity mirrored in human history, "generations" (the Hebrew text reads literally 'to generation generation'). That means starting with Moses and the Israelites currently in Egypt the Lord's name will be imparted. Once imbued with it, they will pass it on to the next generation or those who will be born in the Sinai wilderness. So we could say that the people were a kind of living relative pronoun...an *'asher*...as each generation was subsumed into the next. In a sense, the second generation is more difficult to train because they are one step removed from the initial impulse. That's why forty years in the desert is necessary for appreciation of the divine *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh*. Once that second generation has had time to reflect upon it, they were in a stronger position, even more than the first generation, to impart it to the third and so forth or those who would reside in the land of Canaan.

What was just presented, of course, are personal reflections are offered to flesh out that "I am" we come to access between the two absolutes of pre-life and post-life as we know it. Perhaps by pondering the divine name focus upon the shy relative pronoun *'asher* can shift it a bit. That is to say, since our current existence is in an in-between state, we're not unlike *'asher*. Note that as with the divine name *'ehyeh* or "I am" it uses *'asher* to reach the other *'ehyeh*. This implies that the revelation at Horeb enriches the usual "I am," if you will. So instead of the pre- and post-absolutes we substitute the two *'ehyeh*. Each one is allowed to flow through us. In essence both are the same but our perspective is the thing that changes by reason of our *'asher*-ness.

All this doesn't say we are the same as that divine revelation to Moses, something that a cursory consideration of all this could be read into this presentation. The point is that by employing *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* or revelation of the dynamic divine name we can participate in it despite the fact that

never are we free from the vicissitudes of life. This doesn't preclude engaging in that play already mentioned which is so important because play is total absorption in a reality that parallels another reality where most people conduct their lives. Take away a child's play, and automatically he returns to the "real" world. So when you read the Horeb revelation from this vantage point you can't help but share in the thrill God has dealing with Moses. While it's serious business (releasing Israel from bondage), in another way it's pure play.

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