

Parshas Vaera

A True Redemption

The Almighty let Moshe know that He would reveal Himself to him with the holy name of YKVK. Additionally, G-d specifically contrasted this revelation with that of which was revealed to the Patriarchs. This Sicha uncovers the meaning and significance behind these two names of G-d, and the inherent connection with the exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt.

In the opening of the Torah portion G-d answers the question which Moshe posed at the end of last week’s portion, Parshas Shemos.

Moshe had gone to Pharaoh to demand the release of his people from bondage. Yet, instead of Pharaoh acquiescing to Moshe’s demand, he placed a greater burden on the backs of his Israelite slaves. Pharaoh demanded that although the Israelites were previously given the straw with which to make bricks, they must now gather the straw themselves, while at the same time, not decrease their daily quota of production.

Moshe, upset that his words had only exacerbated the affliction of his people, returned to the Almighty and declared¹: “My Lord, why have You done evil to this people? Why have You sent me?” Moshe tells the Almighty that since his coming to Pharaoh, the predicament of the Israelites had worsened, yet G-d had not saved them.

The present Torah portion opens with G-d’s rejoinder to Moshe’s accusation that He has done nothing for his people:

Text 1

G-d spoke to Moshe, and He said to him, "I am HaShem. I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak,

and to Yaakov as Keil Shakai, but with My name HaShem (YKVK), I did not make Myself known to them. Moreover, I established My covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojourning, in which they sojourned. Moreover, I heard the groan of the Children of Israel, whom Egypt enslaves, and I remembered My covenant. Therefore, say to the Children of Israel, 'I am HaShem (YKVK), and I will take you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you from their labor, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I will take you to Me as a people, and I will be a G-d to you, and you will know that I am HaShem (YKVK) your G-d, Who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.'

Shemos 6:2-6

The basic intent of the verse connotes G-d’s message to Moshe not to be concerned whether or not G-d will redeem His people from bondage. G-d tells Moshe that whereas previously the time for the redemption had not yet arrived, now has come the time which He had promised to the Patriarchs, and now He will redeem His people.

There is, though, a curious statement in this verse which demands additional clarification. When G-d relays to Moshe that the time of the

¹ Shemos 5:22.

Jewish people's redemption has arrived, G-d prefaces His words by telling Moshe that although He is revealing Himself to him—as per His statement, “I am HaShem”—He did not reveal Himself to the Patriarchs—Avraham, Yitzchak or Yaakov.

The Almighty declares: “I am HaShem. I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov as Keil Shakai, but with My name HaShem (YKVK), I did not make Myself known to them.” He makes it abundantly clear that the way in which He is expressing Himself to Moshe is not something that the Patriarchs merited to experience.

Why is it pertinent for the Almighty to tell Moshe that He didn't reveal Himself as HaShem (YKVK) to the Forefathers, and that He rather used the identity of Keil Shakai, in His revelation of Himself? What difference does it make regarding which name the Almighty used in His expression to Moshe or to the Patriarchs?

Rashi explains, that with G-d telling Moshe, “I am HaShem (YKVK),” He was explaining the focal difference between Moshe and his predecessors. G-d was expressing to Moshe that though He had not fulfilled His assurance to his forbearers, and that they never saw the execution of His promises, He will now honor His word and His faithfulness will be clear.

Text 2

It is not written here, “but My Name HaShem I did not *make* known to them,” rather, “I did not *become* known.” [I.e.,] I was not recognized by them with My true attribute, by dint of which My name is called HaShem (YKVK), [which means that I am] faithful to verify My words, for I made promises to them, but I did not fulfill [them while they were alive].

Rashi, Shemos 6:3

The Almighty was essentially telling Moshe, that only *now* was He making known His attribute of faithfulness, which had previously not been known to the Patriarchs, and therefore it is now that He will redeem His people.

Rashi's explanation however, does not answer multiple issues observed when examining the verse.

- 1) Why is it pertinent for G-d to tell Moshe *now* what He *didn't* reveal to the Patriarchs? Doesn't it make more sense to explain what He *will* do, rather than say what He *didn't* do?
- 2) Everything that is written in the Torah is an eternal lesson for all generations. This being the case, what is the pertinent lesson that we are to learn from the fact that G-d did not reveal Himself with the name of HaShem to the Patriarchs?
- 3) There seem to be superfluous words in the verse. G-d said, “I appeared *to* Avraham, *to* Yitzchak, and *to* Yaakov.” These words, “*to*,” seem to be unnecessary, as it should have said simply, “I appeared to your forbearers,” or “I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.”

What can be learned in the verse's specifying and separating of each of the patriarchs from one another?

I am G-d

In Chassidic thought it is explained, that in the words “G-d spoke to Moshe, and He said to him, ‘I am HaShem (YKVK)’” is embedded the answer

to Moshe's original query—"why have You done evil to this people? Why have You sent me?"²

With these word of "I am HaShem (YKVK)," G-d was not only comforting Moshe for the terrible persecution that the Jewish people were enduring, and informing him that now He would redeem His people. He was also explaining to Moshe the reason that the suffering was necessary.

The verse stresses numerous times, the name of HaShem (YKVK). G-d's statement begins with "I am HaShem (YKVK)," and continues, "Therefore, say to the Children of Israel, 'I am HaShem (YKVK).'" Still, G-d concludes His oration with the words, "and you will know that I am HaShem (YKVK) your G-d." G-d's expression of Himself in the form of HaShem (YKVK) is repeated four times throughout these few verses.

It is because the Almighty was *revealing* Himself with the name HaShem (YKVK) that necessitated the arduous slavery in Egypt.

When G-d reveals Himself with a certain name, it is not only that He is *using* this particular name to introduce Himself, but more importantly, He is *expressing* Himself in the specific manner that is embedded in that specific name.

The difference between Moshe and the Patriarchs was in the G-dly revelation that they each respectively experienced.

The revelation of G-dliness in the manner of HaShem (YKVK) was so tremendous, that G-d did not reveal Himself in this manner, even to the Patriarchs. As the verse says, "but with My name HaShem (YKVK), I did not make Myself known to them."

The Patriarchs beheld the revelation of G-d through the name Keil Shakai, but the name

HaShem (YKVK) was too deep for them to relate to.

The two names

The difference between the two names of G-d is as follows: Whereas the name HaShem (YKVK) is the true expression of G-d, the name Keil Shakai is an expression of G-dliness in a contracted form, through which it can relate to the world.

When G-d reveals Himself to Avraham in order to make a covenant with him, and to his name (thereby changing his destiny), He tells him: "I am Keil Shakai ; walk before Me and be perfect." G-d uses the name Shakai (י-ט-ש) in His expression of Himself to Avraham.

The Talmud explains the specific intent of this particular name of G-d:

Text 3

And that, too, is what Resh Lakish said: "What is the meaning of the verse, 'I am Keil Shakai (י-ט-ש)?' [It means], I am He that said to the world, 'Enough (יט)!' " Resh Lakish said: "When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the sea, it went on expanding until the Holy One, blessed be He, rebuked it and caused it to dry up, for it is said³: 'He rebukes the sea and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers.'"

Talmud, Chagiga 12b

The name Shakai indicates that an expression of G-d is in the way that the Almighty lowers Himself to interact with the creation that is defined with finite limitations. This is not an infinite expression of G-d, but it is rather the way that G-d interacts with the finite.

² Shemos 5:22.

³ Nachum 1:4.

The name HaShem (YKVK) though, is an expression of the way that G-dliness transcends the limitations of the world and is, so to speak, an expression of the Almighty Himself.

Text 4

The name HaShem (YKVK) indicates that G-d transcends time, for "He was, He is, and He will be at the same instant."

Tanya, Sha-ar HaYichud VebaEmuna, Ch. 7

In order for the Jewish people to merit such a deep revelation, which even the Patriarchs did not merit, there first needed to be a period in which G-dliness was concealed, during the time of the Egyptian slavery. Only afterwards was it possible for the revelation of HaShem to be manifest.

This is so, since when a person is trying to reach a higher level there is an interim period where all revelation is concealed.

G-d was not only consoling Moshe and informing him that the Jewish people would now be redeemed. G-d was explaining as well, the need for the exile to begin with.

The Patriarchs

When G-d told Moshe, "I am HaShem. I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov as Keil Shakai (אֱלֹהֵי שַׁכַּי), but with My name HaShem (YKVK), I did not make Myself known to them," He was explaining to Moshe the essence of the redemption from Egypt.

The quintessence of redemption is the revelation and the knowledge of G-d, in the way He reveals Himself using the name HaShem (YKVK).

The redemption was not merely to free the Jewish people from a material servitude and provide them physical emancipation, but it was primarily a spiritual redemption.

Text 5

And He said, "For I will be with you, and this is the sign for you that it was I Who sent you. When you take the people out of Egypt, you will worship G-d on this mountain."

Shemos 3:12

Furthermore, the purpose of the redemption was not only to bring them from physical enslavement to a spiritual freedom in the service of G-d. Rather, the objective and goal of the spiritual emancipation was to reveal the name of HaShem (YKVK).

This is the innermost intent regarding the verse's lengthy description of the revelation concerning the Forefathers.

The verse says, "I am HaShem. I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov as Keil Shakai, but with My name HaShem (YKVK), I did not make Myself known to them." The reason for this portrayal is because therein lies the reason for exile and the crux of the redemption.

Text 6

Reis Lakish stated: "The Patriarchs were the chariot, as it states in the verse⁴ 'and G-d went up from above Avraham,' and⁵ 'And G-d went up

⁴ Bereishis 17:22.

⁵ Bereishis 35:13.

from him,' and⁶ 'And behold, the Lord was standing over him.'"

Bereishis Rabba 47:6

Notwithstanding the greatness of the Patriarchs in their being called chariots for G-dly expression, they still were not living in a redemptive reality. They only perceived G-dliness in the way in which it related to the world. They were, however, trapped in their own G-dly reality. True redemption means leaving the confines of worldliness and perceiving the reality of G-dliness for what it is in truth.

In order to truly experience redemption, one must leave the confines of "Keil Shakai" and the way G-dliness relates to the world, and perceive the reality of "HaShem (YKVK)" in the way that it transcends our reality.

When the verse says, "I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov as Keil Shakai, but with My name HaShem (YKVK), I did not make Myself known to them," it wished to stress the supreme heights that each one of the Patriarchs reached.

Doing so amplifies all the more, the greatness of the redemption from Egypt; that despite the great levels that Patriarchs reached, they still could not attain the revelation of Hashem (YKVK).

The verse relates to each of the Forefathers individually and says, "to Avraham to Yitzchak and to Yaakov" instead of merely stating, "to the Forefathers" or "to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov."

Were the verse to have referred to them merely as the Forefathers, it would have expressed the commonality that they all had—that they were all our Patriarchs. Clearly, separating each one of these tremendously holy individuals enunciates

⁶ Bereishis 28:13.

the specific greatness that they each particularly possessed.

They were each respectively awesome in their own right, and each Patriarch exemplified a variant form of service to the Almighty.

Avraham personified the service of G-d through kindness to others; **Yitzchak** was expressive of serving G-d as a service and of prayer; and **Yaakov** served G-d through the study of Torah. They were each different, and each reached tremendous heights and perfection in the way they individually served their Maker.

Notwithstanding this however—"with My name HaShem (YKVK), I did not make Myself known to them." The Patriarchs did not experience the name of HaShem (YKVK) and therefore never truly felt a situation of redemption.

Leaving Egypt

Egypt is not merely a place; it is a state of being. The name for Egypt in Hebrew is Mitzrayim, which shares the same etymology as the word *meitzarim*, meaning constraints and limitations.

Text 7

This is the meaning [of the verse⁷, "I am the Lord, your G-d,] Who took you out of the land of Egypt (Mitzrayim). Since, the entirety of *seder hishtalshalus* (the chaining down of the worlds) is referred to as Mitzrayim—the idea of constraint and limitation.

Torah Ohr 71c

This concept of constraints exists in holiness as well. A created and finite individual is formed with limitations by his very definition. Even when he serves G-d with all his energy and might, he

⁷ Shemos 20:2.

cannot leave the confines of his personal limits—no matter how great they may be.

It is for this reason that despite the greatness of our Patriarchs, they never truly left Egypt. For, although they each reached the epitome of their particular expression of G-dliness, it was limited and therefore still “Egypt”—*meitzarim* and constraints.

Leaving Egypt essentially means leaving all of one’s limitations—even restraints of holiness. When a person serves G-d in a way that transcends themselves, they must leave behind their personal mode of serving the Almighty and become truly nullified towards Him.

However, a person cannot leave their personal boundaries on their own, for if they are the one leaving their own definitions, it stands to reason that they are not truly escaping *themselves*. If the person is leaving his individuality by means of his own *individuality*, this means that he is not truly leaving the confines of his individuality!

Rather, the redemption must be brought about by a revelation of HaShem (YKVK). When the revelation of G-dliness that surpasses the world is revealed, it is then that the person can leave the confines of human experience.

As long as the Patriarchs never experienced this, they were not able to leave these confines. It was specifically in Moshe’s time when HaShem (YKVK) was revealed, and therefore specifically *then* that the Jewish people went out of exile and left the constraints of the finite world.

An eternal lesson

This is the eternal lesson that we are all to learn.

Text 8

Similarly, every individual spark of the Shechinah, inherent in the soul of every one of

Israel, emerges for the moment from the exile and captivity during the “momentary life—meaning prayer,” and the service of the heart from the depth of the heart.

Tanya, Igeres HaKodesh, Epistle 4

Even before the ultimate redemption, one is able to experience a *personal* redemption. This verse imparts the instruction concerning how we are to know if we are truly experiencing redemption or not.

It can be difficult for a person to identify whether or not he has reached a personal redemptive state. A person can think that since he has overpowered his evil inclination and he is completely dedicated to learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*, this means that he has already reached a personal redemption.

This is what is therefore expressed in the statement of, “I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov as Keil Shakai, but with My name HaShem (YKVK), I did not make Myself known to them.” Even though the Patriarchs obviously reached tremendous heights in their service of the Almighty, they still had not reached redemption.

One can reach perfection in all manners of serving G-d; whether through kindness, prayer or Torah learning, and still have not at all experienced redemption.

How do you know?

How can an individual know however, if he is experiencing his own personal redemption or if he is merely imagining himself to be in such a state?

The means of determining his true standing is expressed in the above-mentioned Rashi on the verse. The verse explains that the difference between the Forefathers and Moshe was that to

Moshe was revealed the name HaShem (YKVK), which had not been revealed to the Forefathers.

Rashi explains that the significance of not having the name HaShem revealed to them was, “I was not recognized by them with My *true* attribute, by dint of which My name is called HaShem (YKVK).” I.e., the Patriarchs may have recognized the Almighty, but they never experienced His *true* attribute.

Text 9

What is the seal of the Holy One blessed be He? Rav Beivi said in the name of R. Rueven [that it is] truth (אמת). What [is meant by] truth? Rav Bon said: “that He is a living G-d and an eternal king.” Reish Lakish said: “*Alef* (א) is the first letter of the alphabet, *mem* (מ) is in the middle and *tuf* (ת) is the last.”

Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin 1:1

The name HaShem (YKVK) is expressive of truth (אמת). Truth is something that doesn’t change—it is just as true in the beginning, the middle or the end. It is *equally* and unequivocally true, no matter how it is being expressed. This is G-d’s attribute of truth; He is *always* true, at all times and no matter the way in which He is being expressed.

Text 10

For I, HaShem (YKVK), have not changed; and you, the sons of Yaakov, have not reached the end.

Malachi 3:6

The *true* and ultimate expression of G-d is not subject to change, and for a person to experience redemption—which is derived from the experience of this attribute—he cannot be subject to change either.

This then, is the litmus test for a person to know whether or not he has left his personal Egypt and is truly experiencing a redemptive state.

If the individual doesn’t experience change, he can know that he is experiencing redemption; if he does undergo swings in his service of G-d, he can know that he is not yet there.

If the individual serves G-d with the same energy and devotion and total nullification to G-d’s will, no matter what he is doing, then he can know that he has been emancipated from his personal exile. If he learns Torah with the same devotion as he performs *mitzvos*, and with the same vigor that he serves G-d through elevating the mundane aspects of his life, then he can be sure that he is experiencing HaShem (YKVK). If not, then he may have reached tremendous heights—as did the Patriarchs—but he is still in exile.

Were he still to be held back by his own limitations, there would be certain things that he would enjoy more, and modes of service that he would relate to more. However, when he experiences “My *true* attribute,” the attribute of HaShem (YKVK), then all that he does is with the same vigor and submission to G-d.

Text 11

“I have placed (*shivisi*) HaShem (YKVK) constantly before me⁸.” [The word] *shivisi* is from the etymology of equanimity. In all situations, everything is equal before him—

⁸ Tehilim 16:8.

whether people praise him or denigrate him. So too, in all other matters...

So too, a person must serve G-d with all his attributes, because they are all for a supernal purpose, as G-d wishes that He be served in all ways. This means, that at times, a person speaks with individuals and cannot learn at that moment...or a person is travelling and cannot pray or learn as he usually does. At that time, he must serve G-d in other ways. He should not be pained by this, because the Almighty wishes that He be served in all ways. Sometimes in one manner and sometimes in another. This is why [G-d] caused that he should travel or speak to individuals; in order to serve G-d in this second way.

Tzavas Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov 2-3

When a person experiences HaShem (YKVK), he is in a state of complete equanimity and no matter his personal situation, and no matter the specific way that he is serving G-d, he is completely driven and devoted to fulfilling G-d's will.

This is true redemption; that a person completely leaves their personal definition and identification, and is completely at peace with the wish of G-d.

The time of Moshiach

In the same way that the redemption from Egypt was not only a physical redemption or a spiritual redemption, but more importantly, the revelation of HaShem (YKVK), so too, will be with regards to the ultimate redemption.

The redemption is the ultimate expression of the revelation of HaShem (YKVK). When G-d will be

revealed to all with His "true attribute," then the entire reality of the world will be elevated to the ultimate redemptive state.

In Maimonides's Mishna Torah, he concludes with the laws concerning the time of Moshiach. The final law of his book ends with a description of that period.

Text 12

In that era, there will be neither famine nor war, envy or competition, for good will flow in abundance and all the delights will be freely available as dust. The occupation of the entire world will be solely to know HaShem (YKVK). Therefore, the Jews will be great sages and know the hidden matters, grasping the knowledge of their Creator according to the full extent of human potential, as it states⁹: "The world will be filled with the knowledge of HaShem (YKVK) as the waters cover the ocean bed."

Rambam, Mishna Torah, Laws of Kings 12:5

The description of the messianic era is intrinsically linked with a revelation of the Almighty as He is expressed in the name HaShem (YKVK). It is then when the world will relate to the *true* expression of G-d, that the entire world will leave all limitations and confines and truly be in a redemptive reality.

May we merit to experience this immediately!

(Based on Likutei Sichos 31, Vaera 1, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel.

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⁹ Isaiah 11:9.