

Va'eira

Vay'daber Elokim El Moshe Vayomer Eilav Ani Havaye
Va'eira El Avrohom...

A synopsis of the Maamar found in Torah Or

Summary

When Moshe asked of G-d why He was making it so bad for the Jews in Egypt, G-d answered by pointing out that He had revealed Himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by the Divine names “Kel Shakai,” but not by the name “Havaye.” It is necessary to understand what this has to do with Moshe’s question.

The answer lies in the fact that the names of G-d represent the manifestation of particular G-dly attributes, and the name Havaye refers to G-d Himself. We mortals can only achieve such appreciation of G-d Himself as we can glean from our perception of G-d as He has chosen to manifest Himself within creation. Even though we can conceptualize that G-d must transcend creation, that realization itself limits our concept of G-d: “G-d Who transcends creation” is a concept inherently associated with creation.

This limitation on our ability to “reach” G-d as He is in Himself – in no way linked to creation – is represented by the names Kel Shakai. There is, however, a way to attach ourselves to G-d Himself, as He transcends creation: we do so by performing mitzvos. In His reply to Moshe, G-d meant to convey that while Abraham, Isaac and Jacob experienced the

very most a mortal could experience of G-d, they were bound by the limits symbolized by Kel Shakai, and were not privy to the revelation of the name Havaye – G-d as He is in Himself – which could only be achieved once the Torah and its mitzvos were given at Mount Sinai.

However, G-d's answer implied, the Jews of Moshe's time were about to be granted that exalted level, because when they came out of Egypt they would receive the Torah which made it possible. For spiritual reasons, the Egyptian exile was a necessary preparation for this awesome revelation, and that is the comfort and encouragement underlying G-d's response.

THE OPENING verses of this week's Torah portion, *Va'eira*, contain G-d's answer to the question posed by Moshe (Moses) at the conclusion of last week's portion, *Sh'mos*. In *Sh'mos*, G-d had instructed Moshe to deliver the famous message to Pharaoh, "Let my People go." However, when Moshe did so, Pharaoh became obstinate and, instead of complying, spitefully increased the workload of the Jewish slaves. The Torah portion of *Sh'mos* concluded with Moshe's complaining to G-d (Exodus 5:22-23), "Why have You made it bad for this nation? Why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name he has done evil to this nation; You have not saved Your nation at all!"

At the beginning of *Va'eira*, the Torah recounts G-d's answer with the words (Exodus 6:2-3), "And the L-rd spoke to Moshe and said to him, 'I am G-d. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [by the name] *Kel Shakai* [actually, the names are *E-l Sha-dai*, but out of respect for their holiness are only pronounced that way during prayer or formal Torah reading] but [by] my name "G-d" I was not known to them.'" (G-d then goes on to say that He is about to redeem the Jewish People from Egypt.)

To appreciate the full content of this exchange, we must ask the obvious question, How is G-d's response (I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by the name *Kel Shakai*, but not by the name "G-d") relevant to Moshe's question (Why have You made it bad for the Jews)?

The explanation lies in the different names of G-d used in the quoted verses. In Hebrew, the phrase "And the L-rd spoke to Moshe" uses the Divine name *Elokim* [pronounced *Elo-bim* in prayer and formal Torah reading]. The conclusion of the sentence – "and said to him, 'I am G-d'" – uses the Tetragrammaton (the four-letter Name which is too holy to pronounce at all; in prayer and formal Torah reading it is read as the name *Ado-noy*, and in everyday speech it is spoken as *Havaye*). The narrative continues with G-d pointing out that He was known to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as *Kel Shakai*, but not by the name *Havaye*. (The verses can thus be read smoothly as follows: "And *Elokim* spoke to Moshe and said to him, 'I am *Havaye*. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [by the name] *Kel Shakai*, but [by] my name *Havaye* I was not known to them.'")

Let us try to understand the significance of these names. A person can be known by various terms, such as "wise," "kindly," or "strong," each expressing a different aspect of that person. Similarly, the Divine names each express a particular G-dly quality, like "All-Merciful" or "All-Mighty." However, the Tetragrammaton – the name *Havaye* – represents not just a specific manifestation of G-d, but G-d as He is in Himself, just as a person's proper name refers to the whole person, encompassing all aspects of their personality.

It is written (Genesis 2:4), "On the day that G-d, the L-rd, created Earth and Heaven." Here, G-d is referred to as "G-d, the L-rd" – a combination of the two Hebrew names *Havaye* and *Elokim*. This is because, to create the universe, the combined

qualities of these two names were needed. The reason is that although *creatio ex nihilo* (creation of something from nothing) stems from G-d Himself, Who alone transcends all – even the distinction between “something” and “nothing” – the world could not be exposed to the overwhelming radiance of G-d Himself (as expressed by the name *Havaye*) and still maintain an apparently separate, independent existence. Were the undiluted “light” of the name *Havaye* to shine forth onto the world, the world would simply dissolve into spirituality. In order for G-d to realize His purpose of creating a physical, finite world, He had to “hide” the full force of His glory from our perception.

The name *Elokim* expresses G-d’s attribute of restraint. It is this quality which withholds from our perception a total manifestation of G-d as *Havaye*. The name *Elokim* is thus responsible for the world as we know it: everything seeming to follow a natural order, apparently independent of G-d. (For this reason, the name *Elokim* is, by the device of “*Gematria*,” numerically equivalent to the Hebrew word for “nature.”) This concept is alluded to in the verse (Psalms 84:12) “For G-d, the L-rd, [*Havaye Elokim*] is a sun and a shield” – that is, the name *Havaye* is like the sun whose brilliance is overwhelming, while the name *Elokim* is like a shield which blocks the sun’s full radiance from our perception, so that we may endure it. For the world to be created in such a form as to appear separate from G-d – thus giving us the opportunity to chose, of our own volition, to worship Him – the effect of both Divine names was needed. This, then, is the significance of the verse, “On the day that *Havaye Elokim* created Earth and Heaven,” and the meaning of the concept of the combination of these two names in creation.

Now, another way to look at the difference between the two names *Havaye* and *Elokim* is as follows:

One verse (Psalms 104:24) states, “How numerous are Your creations, O G-d,” while another verse says (Psalms 92:6),

“How great are Your creations, O G-d!” The first, which speaks of G-d’s creations as “numerous,” refers to the countless myriads of creatures G-d has made in this physical world, each of which possesses its own particular dimensions, characteristics, etc. Their differences result from the fact that a different measure and form of G-dly life-force is in each. On the other hand, the verse which refers to G-d’s creations as “great” is speaking of the spiritual beings such as angels and souls. These perceive G-dliness in a more revealed way than is possible for physical creatures, and delight in that perception. Such beings, too, are diverse from one another, but in a more subtle way. Just as audience members may each understand and appreciate different parts of the same performance or the same speech, so do the angels and souls each understand different amounts and appreciate different aspects of the radiance of G-d which is perceptible to them. It is these subjective differences which account for the diversity among spiritual beings, as opposed to the objective differences in the G-dly life force among physical creatures.

In both cases, however – that of physical beings and that of spiritual entities – existence as separate, individual entities (instead of being simply absorbed within the all-inclusive unity of *Havaye*) would be impossible were it not for the limited manifestation of G-dliness perceptible to each on its own level. Thus, not only material creatures but spiritual beings as well originate through the name *Elokim*.

To understand the relation of the name *Havaye* itself – not “veiled” by the name *Elokim* – to the above, perhaps we may make the following analogy:

Speech and thought are similar in that each is composed of letters and words. The spoken word takes on an existence of its own as it leaves the speaker, while the words that make up a person’s thoughts remain one with the thinker. Metaphorically,

the creations of the physical universe were each brought into being by the appropriate words of G-d's "speech" ("And the L-rd said, 'Let there be...)'), and thus appear to possess independent existence; the angels and souls, as discussed above, experience a level of G-dliness which is united with G-d yet comprehensible on different levels – similar to the different words of G-d's "thoughts." Yet there is a level above both of these, which is not only united with G-d Himself, but indivisible into different parts. This is analogous to the intellect itself, an aspect of the person that transcends separation into particular thoughts or words, yet is the abstract source of them all. No discrete entity, whether word or thought, can exist at this level, which is comparable to the name *Havaye* alone.

Since the name *Havaye* allows for no independent existence, it is in the singular. The name *Elokim*, by contrast, because it is the source of all diversity, is actually plural by the rules of Hebrew grammar.

All the above is alluded to in the verse (Psalms 48:2), "Great is G-d [*Havaye*] and highly praised, in the city of our L-rd [*Elokim*], His holy mountain." Our sages comment, (*Zohar* III:5a), "When is He 'great'? When He is in 'the city of our L-rd.'" The meaning of this is as follows: *Havaye* is, indeed, great – but it is impossible for this greatness to be appreciated by any being, since no independent existence is possible in relation to G-d as *Havaye*. When, then, can G-d's greatness be seen? Only when it is expressed through "the city of *Elokim*." The mystical work, *Sefer Yetzirah*, attributed to our forefather Abraham, compares individual letters of the (Hebrew) alphabet to bricks or building stones; words – formed of these "letter-bricks" – to houses; and groups of words, forming entire sentences and more, to a city. The "city of *Elokim*" is a reference to these innumerable words and sentences of G-d's thought and speech, so to speak – made possible by the name *Elokim* – that brought into being all the diverse entities in creation. "When is He

‘great’? When He is in ‘the city of our L-rd’”: For it is only by contemplating the multitude and splendor of G-d’s creations, that one can come to appreciate something of the greatness of G-d.

The corollary to all the above is that we humans, as created beings whose perspective stems from a point subsequent to the “concealment” of G-d Himself, can only achieve an awareness of G-d Himself (as expressed by the name *Havaye*) through contemplation on G-d as He has concealed Himself within nature (as expressed by the name *Elokim*). A person can be inspired and moved to awe by majestic mountains, broad seas, or particle physics, for example. He or she can even come to appreciate, through Torah-guided reflection on these things, that they are all literally nothing in relation to G-d, their Creator, which appreciation can cause those feelings of awe to blossom into love and yearning for the Creator Himself, G-d as He transcends creation. But – this love and yearning for G-d Himself (*Havaye*) must of necessity be achieved through love and awe of G-d as manifest within nature (*Elokim*), which is a necessary stepping-stone in bridging the unfathomable gap between us and the transcendent G-d.

(In truth, even this latter love of G-d Himself is a love which, after all, has its source in our human efforts. However, if we have reached as high as our mortal limitations allow and achieved this level of love, G-d may reward us by bestowing upon us from Above the attainment of a love whose source is not rooted in material existence, but is truly a love of G-d as He is in Himself – utterly transcendent and unreachable through worldly existence. It is this which is our goal in striving to develop love of G-d.)

G-d’s reply to Moshe was based on the above concepts. At the beginning of the verse, the Torah states, “And *Elokim* spoke to Moshe and said to him, ‘I am *Havaye*’” – to get to

Havaye, it was necessary to go through *Elokim*. The Divine name *Shakai* (which, as noted above, is actually pronounced *Sha-dai*) is allegorically interpreted in the Talmud (*Chagigah* 12a) as referring to G-d having said to His world, *dai* (“enough”). This is a reference to the limits which G-d imposed on the extent of His manifestation within creation. Each of our forefathers is identified with a particular G-dly attribute; specifically, Abraham is identified with love of G-d and Isaac with fear or awe of G-d. The statement “I appeared unto Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by the name *Kel Shakai*” is a mystical reference to the fact that the qualities associated with Abraham and Isaac – love and fear of G-d – were put within the reach of humankind, but only from within this limited, created, perspective – that is, only through contemplation and reflection on G-d’s greatness as manifest in the world, as explained above. Our forefathers themselves achieved the very utmost in love and fear of G-d, including the level of love and fear bestowed from Above after first having reached the limit of one’s ability to appreciate G-d through contemplation of His manifestation as *Elokim*. Nevertheless, “by My name *Havaye* I was not known to them”: even our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not granted the ability, as created beings, to link to G-d as He is in Himself, not in combination with the name *Elokim*, utterly transcendent of creation.

For this, the Torah was necessary. For G-d as He is in Himself is not revealed to a person no matter how long they meditate. However, in His unbounded love for us Jews, G-d gave us the Torah, whose precepts – the mitzvot – do, literally, connect us, through their observance, to G-d Himself, G-d as *Havaye* alone. Each mitzvah is a “conduit” of sorts, drawing down upon the person who performs it a true attachment to G-d at this sublime level. (As we say in the blessing before performing a mitzvah, G-d has “sanctified us by His commandments.”) And this is reflected in the teaching of the

Zohar on the verse (Ecclesiastes 1:3), “What profit has a man of all his labor that he labors under the sun”: “The Torah is different, for its labor is above the sun.” This refers to the fact that the Torah’s spiritual level is much higher than the level of *Havaye* as expressed through *Elokim*, about which it is said that *Havaye* is a sun and *Elokim* is a shield. Instead, the Torah and its mitzvos connect us directly to *Havaye* alone – G-d as He is in Himself.

Since G-d intended to redeem the Jews from Egypt and give us His Torah, he answered Moshe as He did. For, in accordance with the spiritual principle of *ratzoh v’shov* (ebb and flow), a spiritual “flow” of such magnitude as the bestowal of the Torah had to be preceded by an “ebb,” similar to the way, for example, the waters of the sea recede before returning as a wave, or the way a vaccine is sucked up into the vacuum of a syringe before being injected into the patient. The greater the intended flow, the greater must be the ebb that precedes it. A small wave is preceded by a relatively small receding of seawater; a larger wave by a larger ebb; and a great and fearsome tidal wave is preceded by an ominous receding of all the water at the shore. For the great and mighty “tidal wave” of G-d’s revelation of the Torah, there had to be a correspondingly great “withdrawal,” as it were, of G-d’s influence first. That is the spiritual reason for the Egyptian exile: to prepare the way for the overwhelming revelation of G-dliness that followed in the giving of the Torah.

Indeed, it was that “ebb” of G-dliness that allowed for the possibility of the Egyptians oppressing the Jews. As G-d dwells in Heaven, so to speak, all creatures derive their existence from Him, including non-Jewish nations. However, G-d only bestows His presence in this physical world on His People, the Jews. (This is because they actually draw G-d into the world through performance of Torah and mitzvos.) With G-d “withdrawn” into the Heavens, the Egyptians faced no obstacle

to ruling over the Jews, for they derived their spiritual sustenance from the same basic level.

That is also the explanation of the Talmudic teaching (Talmud, *Shabbos* 89:b), “Why was [the place the Torah was given] called ‘Mount *Sinai*’ [a play on the Hebrew word for “hatred”]? Because hatred descended [there] upon the Gentiles.” Prior to the giving of the Torah there was no cause for anti-Semitism, since all nations derived their spiritual life-force from the same level: G-d up in Heaven, not coming too close. Once the priceless gift of the Torah was bestowed upon the Jews, however, linking us directly to *Havaye* Himself, there was cause, in their eyes, for jealousy.

And this is also the reason for the length (may G-d have mercy on us!) of this, our final exile. It is the “ebb” preceding the great and awesome “flow” of the era of *Moshiach* (Messiah). For the final redemption at the hands of *Moshiach*, and the revelation of G-dliness then, will be even greater than the wonders and miracles of the redemption from Egypt and the spiritual “flow” of the giving of the Torah. May we experience them now.

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© 2002. Please note that the foregoing is an informal synopsis by a private person, and that, therefore, errors are possible. Also, the Hebrew original contains much more than could possibly be presented here, and constitutes a much more direct transmission of the Alter Rebbe’s teachings. Thus, for those with the ability to learn in the original, this synopsis should not be considered a substitute for the maamar. Good *Shabbos*!