



Partners In Torah
San Diego-Los Angeles
Study Guide

Take home Dvar Torah

Vaera

תשפ"ד

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Hello, Welcome!

Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

***Partners in Torah
has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of
wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until
now, lacked access.***

Thank you for joining us!

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we
may grow together as a community.**

In the second verse of this week's portion וַאֲרָא – *Vaera* (Exodus 6:3), Hashem tells Moshe:

(ג) וַאֲרָא אֶל אַבְרָהָם אֶל יִצְחָק וְאֶל יַעֲקֹב בְּקֵל שְׁקִי וְשִׁמִּי יְדוּד לֹא נִוְדַעְתִּי לָהֶם

3) *And I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak and, Yaakov with My name Kel Shakai, but with My Name הויה "Havaya" I did not make Myself known to them.*

We need a bit of explanation here before getting to the explanation of the verse.

When it comes to any of Hashem's names, we are very careful not to say them unnecessarily. Even regarding making a blessing, doing so when the blessing is unwarranted constitutes saying Hashem's name in vain. We are so careful with this because of the Torah's commandment (#3 of the ten), "You should not say Hashem's name in vain." Hence, when referring to Hashem (outside of prayer and reading the Torah) by one of His names, we intentionally distort the pronunciation in a way such that we know what it refers to, but we are not actually enunciating Hashem's actual name. The commonly used method of distortion is to insert a "K" sound instead of one of the letters. Therefore, "*Kel*" "*Shakai*," and "*Elokim*", have the "K" and "*HaShem*" is used instead of the name הויה.

We refer to Hashem's **special name**, the שם המפורש - *Shem Hameforash*, as the "שם הויה" – *Shem Havaya* – a rearrangement of the actual letters of Hashem's special name, Yud – hey – vov - hey.

Hashem has a total of 10 holy names. This is very important to know because when a scribe writes a Sefer Torah, he must expressly sanctify each one. But, why does Hashem have multiple names? Isn't Hashem one?

Our Sages teach us that each of the names represent a different *modus operandi*, a specific posture, that Hashem has “donned” for His current or upcoming dealings.

Hashem told Moshe that He used only the names *Kel Shakai* with the forefathers, but not the name *Havaya*. What is the difference between these names, and why is it important for Moshe to know this now?

The Ibn Ezra explains that this is what Hashem was telling Moshe:

והנה אמר האלקים למשה נראיתי לאבות בכח ידי אשר אני שודד בו המזלות ועוזר לבחירי, אבל בשמי של יו"ד ה"א אשר בו נהיה כל הווה לא נודעתי להם לברוא להם חדשות בשנוי התולדות, ולכן אמור לבני ישראל אני ה', ותודיע להם פעם אחרת השם הגדול כי בו אני עושה עמהם להפליא, וידעו כי אני ה' עושה כל

Hashem was telling Moshe, “I appeared to the Forefathers with Kel Shakai, the name I use when I control the spiritual forces to help My chosen ones. But My name – Havaya - יו"ד, the name through which all came about - the power to create and change nature, I did not reveal to them. Therefore, tell the Jewish people “I am Hashem, יו"ד and tell them again about this great name, because with it I am going to do wonders, and all will know that I am Hashem.

Hashem’s name “*Shakai*” indicates Hashem working within the laws of nature. Hashem made sure that the Forefathers were wealthy, healthy, and prosperous, but He did so by, so to speak, pulling the strings behind the scenes by controlling the forces of nature, not with open miracles. Hashem guided nature to provide the Forefathers with wealth and prosperity.

As an aside, this is also Hashem’s name that appears on the outside of the mezuzah on affixed to your doorpost. In addition to spelling

Hashem's holy name, the three letters ש - ד - י stand for שומר דלתֵי ישראל - "The Watchman over the doors of the Israelites." Through the mezuzah, Hashem provides protection to the Jewish home, though we cannot see it because Hashem hides His protection in the forces of nature and it's behind the scenes.

Hashem's name *Havaya* is unlike His other names. It is not indicative of a posture that He is assuming; rather, it is the name that captures His essence, and it is from it that all the other names emanate. This is the name that Hashem used to create the world.

These are the words of Rabbeinu Asher in his commentary to the Talmud Tractate Yoma (8:19).

והוא נקרא שם המפורש. והוא מקור לכל השמות כי כולן נאצלין ממנו

(The shem Havaya) is called the Shem Hameforash, which is the source of all the other names; as they emanate from it.

In other words, this is the name from which the entirety of reality emanates. It is not indicative of a certain "mode" that Hashem may be in. Rather, this is the name behind the entire creation.

The three letters ה, ו, י that comprise this name are the letters needed to spell the names of the three phases of time, היה הוה ויהיה – past, present, and future, or, when referring to Hashem, He was, He is, and He always will be.

Our Sages teach us the deeper, and correct, way to understand this. It is not only that Hashem was, is and will be; rather, all at the same time, Hashem lives in the past, present, and future. What this means is that to Hashem there is no past, no present, and no future. It is all there at the same before Him. Hashem is not subject to the restrictions of time. As

such, He sees, all at once, all of humanity starting from Adam until today and until the end of time. Only created objects are subject to time and space, but Hashem Himself has no restrictions of time or space.

Hashem created time and space to enable man to live a life in which he could accumulate mitzvot and then receive reward for them in the World to Come. But Hashem Himself remains outside of time and outside of space.

Of course, as human beings created within the parameters of time and space, we cannot conceive of what existence without time and space could possibly be like. We must acknowledge that as Hashem's creations, we cannot wrap our minds around what it means to live outside of time and space.

This is why the Mishna in Tractate Chagigah says (Chapter 2:1).

כָּל הַמְסִתֵּיפֵל בְּאַרְבָּעָה דְּבָרִים, רְאוּי לוֹ כְּאֵלוֹ לֹא בָּא לְעוֹלָם, מֵה לְמַעְלָה, מֵה לְמַטָּה, מֵה לְפָנִים, וּמֵה לְאַחֹר

Whoever looks at four things it would have been better if he never came to the world. What is above, what is below, what was before, and what is after.

What is above: One who thinks that he can know what is “above” our world, viz, Hashem, is gravely mistaken. Any effort to comprehend Hashem will only result in man-made, completely inappropriate ideas. Hashem is infinite, is not corporeal and cannot be grasped by the human mind. Moreover, it is a futile endeavor, fraught with danger, because it is impossible to come out with a correct conclusion.

We are obligated to know that Hashem is a reality, but it is only through the lens of the Torah that we are permitted to see Hashem.

What is below: What is in the center of the earth? How can anyone know? Therefore, it is best not to philosophize about it.

What was before: What existed before Hashem created the world? A human being is incapable of knowing, so it is futile to try. All man will be able to come up with is speculation based on human understanding. All that existed before Hashem created the world was Hashem, and Hashem we cannot comprehend.

What is after: What will be after the world ends? Once again philosophizing about such things can bring no good, because it is impossible for man to know. Even the prophets were not shown what would be after the world ends.

Man lacks the tools to deal with these matters. It is like a person blind from birth trying to figure out how red would look with blue. How could he possibly know? He has never seen red, and he has never seen blue. He has no way of evaluating and assessing the colors and how they would look together, because he has no concept of what a color really looks like.

This same idea applies to man when trying to understand Hashem. It is beyond our ken.

The only two positive things our Sages teach us about Hashem that we can say with certainty and understanding is that He is 100% good, with no evil whatsoever, and He is perfect; He never makes mistakes, ever. Everything else the Sages teach us about Him is “what He is not.” He is not corporeal; He is One and does not comprise different components etc.

This is the significance of Hashem telling Moshe that He was about to reveal His *shem Havaya* to the world. This is the name through which everything was created, and this is the name through which Hashem will now, for the first time in world history, change the laws of nature for everyone to see.

Hashem was telling Moshe this *now*, because He wanted to convey to him that through a series of amazing nature-defying miracles, He was about to show the world that, as its Creator, He and He alone is behind what powers nature every second of every day. He also wanted to establish the principles of the Jewish religion; that He is involved with the world as a whole and with each individual in it. These would be miraculous times for the Jewish people, and they, as well as the world at large, would learn beyond the shadow of a doubt, that Hashem exists and that He runs the world.

The plagues taught us that as humans, we are unable to wrap our minds around His power. For example:

The first plague - blood.

In the plague of blood, all water in Egypt turned to blood, including the Nile River, all other rivers and brooks, the water in cisterns, and even their bottled water. Yet despite all the blood of the Egyptians, water remained fresh for the Jews, who were unaffected by any of the plagues. If an Egyptian *bought* water from a Jew, it would not turn to blood, but anywhere else he looked for water, all he found was blood. Indeed, if a Jew and an Egyptian were drinking from the same glass with straws, the Jew would see a glass of water and would draw water up his straw, whereas the Egyptian would see blood in that very same glass and draw blood up his straw. If someone were to ask, “Okay, what *was* in the glass,

blood or water?” this question would be totally off the mark. The correct perspective is, “It was water for the Jew and blood for the Egyptian, *at the very same time!*” How can that be? We cannot comprehend how that is possible, but it’s no problem for the Creator of the water and the blood.

The seventh plague - hail.

The Torah tells us: (Exodus 9:24)

(כד) וַיְהִי בָרָד וְאֵשׁ מִתְּלַקַּחַת בְּתוֹךְ הַבָּרָד

24. There was hail, and fire flaming amid the hail

This seems to be impossible! How could fire exist inside a hailstone made of ice? And how could a hailstone remain a hailstone if there is fire inside of it? Wouldn’t the fire melt the hailstone? Or, wouldn’t the water extinguish the fire within it? Only the Creator, Who gave fire and water their properties to begin with, can control those properties and allow the two opposing forces to co-exist within one hailstone.

The ninth plague – darkness.

The Torah tells us (10:23).

(כג) לֹא רָאוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו וְלֹא קָמוּ אִישׁ מִמְּוֹתָיו שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים וְלֹכַל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הָיָה אֹר בְּמוֹשְׁבֹתָם

23) No man could see his brother, nor could anyone rise from his place for a three-day period; but for all the Children of Israel there was light in their dwellings.

This verse teaches us that the plague lasted six days, and there were two stages to its intensity. From the onset, it was darker than night, and during the first three days, no one could see anyone else - *No man could see his brother.*

In the world today, which has many forms of artificial light, we have little experience with absolute darkness. There is a place in Israel called “Dialogue in the Dark,” which gives people who are gifted with sight an idea of what it is like to live with no light at all, as blind people do. In that space, they have created an environment of pitch dark. Experiencing it is like no other darkness you were ever in. The darkness is so complete that you literally feel like you have no eyes to see. The plague of darkness for the Egyptians was like that, but even more intense.

During the next three days, the darkness intensified until it was so thick, they could not even move. If they were seated, that is how they remained for the next three days- *nor could anyone rise from his place for three days.*

However, for the Jews, throughout the six days of darkness, there was light! In the very homes of the Egyptians where they were plunged into a darkness so thick that you could feel it, the Jews saw with light as if nothing unusual was going on! If a Jew and an Egyptian were in the same room, for the Jew, the room was lit up with light, and he could see the Egyptian sitting glued to his chair unable to move, but for the Egyptian, the pervading darkness was so thick that he could not even move. What was the reality in that room? Once again, Hashem created a different reality for the Jews and a different reality for the Egyptians. Only the Creator of the world could pull that off.

There are a few other noteworthy examples.

The לוחות הברית – The Tablets of the Ten Commandments.

The words of the commandments were engraved on the tablets. The engraving went through the stone to the other side. This being the case, a completely round letter like the ם (samech) or ם (mem sofit)

when engraved would lose the center piece. Miraculously, the center piece remained suspended within the letter to create the letter.

A second miracle occurred with the Tablets. Our Sages teach us that no matter which side of the tablets you looked at, it always read properly, from right to left. When looking at the tablets, one could see the person on the other side through the engravings in the tablets, and he would be able to see you. Nevertheless, when reading the tablets from the opposite sides, each would still see the letters written properly from right to left.

Once again, Hashem created a different reality for each of them.

Another striking example is the story with Yehoshua (Joshua 10:12) who needed more time to finish a battle.

(יב) אַז יְדַבֵּר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ לִידְוֹד בְּיוֹם תַּת יְדוֹד אֶת הָאֱמֹרִי לְפָנָי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמֶר
(יג) וַיִּזְדַּם הַשָּׁמֶשׁ וַיִּרְחַ עַמְדָּ עַד יָקָם לְעֵינָי יִשְׂרָאֵל שָׁמֶשׁ בְּגִבְעוֹן דָּוָם וַיִּרְחַ בְּעַמְקֵי אַיָּלוֹן
גוֹי אֲיָבִיּוֹ

12) Then Joshua spoke to Hashem on the day Hashem delivered the Amorites before the Children of Israel, and he said before the eyes of Israel, "Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valey of Ayalon."

13) Then the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the people took retribution against their enemies. (The sun stopped for 24 hours as per a later verse)

Conventional thinking would posit that the entire solar system stood still for 24 hours, and all over the world, people got an extra 24 hours of daytime or nighttime. However, our Sages are careful to teach us that that was the only place in the world where the sun remained shining. As far as the rest of the world was concerned, the sun followed its regular pattern and set at its regular time.

Once again, Hashem created different realities for different people.

The human mind cannot understand how two opposite realities can simultaneously exist. We simple lack the hardware to comprehend it. Our minds are programmed to understand only one reality at a time.

Hashem, of course, has no limitations, and lives in a totally different reality, one that we have no grasp of at all.

It is important to keep this in mind when times are difficult. Man expects to be able to understand what happening to him, and therefore feels entitled to question Hashem's actions. If only we would appreciate how far we are from Hashem's thinking and calculations.

The Prophet Isaiah teaches us (55:8,9)

(ח) כִּי לֹא מַחְשְׁבוֹתַי מַחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דַּרְכֵי נְאֻם יְדֹנָד

(ט) כִּי גְבוּהוֹ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ כֵּן גְבוּהוֹ דַּרְכֵי מִדְרָכֵיכֶם וּמַחְשְׁבוֹתַי מִמַּחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם

8) For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways. 9) As high as the heavens over the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.

We are not even in the ballpark.

We say in our morning prayers every day (Yotzer section):

עֲזַרְתָּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ אֶתְּהָה הוּא מְעוֹלָם. מִגּוֹן וּמוֹשִׁיעַ לְבַנְיָהֶם אַחֲרֵיהֶם בְּכֹל דּוֹר וְדוֹר.
בְּרוּם עוֹלָם מוֹשְׁבָהּ. וּמִשְׁפָּטֶיהָ וְדִקְדָּתָהּ עַד אֶפְסֵי אָרֶץ

You (Hashem) were always the help to our Forefathers, and You are a shield and a salvation to their children who came after them, in every generation. Your dwelling place is in the highest places, and Your judgements and Your righteousness (in judgment) are as exact as the smallest particles of the earth.

What are the smallest particles of the earth? Atoms, quarks and who know what else. But that is how precise Hashem's judgments are.

Thrice daily, we say the following verse in *Ashrei* (Psalms 145:17).

(יז) צַדִּיק יְדוֹד בְּכָל דְרָכָיו וְחַסִּיד בְּכָל מַעֲשָׂיו

17) Hashem is a **Tzadik** in all of his ways and a **Chasid** in all of His deeds.

The *Mesilat Yesharim* (Path of the Just) written by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, explains the difference between a *Tzadik*, and a *Chasid*.

A *Tzadik* is one who does exactly what he is supposed to do. He keeps all the laws to the letter, but doesn't go beyond that. The *Chasid*, on the other hand, is one who understands his master's intent – the goal and purpose of the commandment - and exceeds the letter of the law to fulfill his master's intent in the fullest way.

King David is telling us that in His judgements, Hashem doesn't punish us exactly as we deserve to be punished. Rather, He goes beyond the letter of the law to soften the punishment and give us as much leeway as He possibly can.

When Moshe and Aharon went to Pharoah for the first time requesting that he let the Jewish people go, Pharoah responded by increasing the workload on the people. He decreed that they would have to find their own straw, and still produce the same quota of bricks. This was impossible, and they were beaten by the taskmasters for not producing enough bricks. They could not understand how Hashem could send Moshe and Aharon to Pharoah to make things worse for them.

Later they saw that this was an essential part of the redemption process, and that there was a greater good that came from it. At that time, they were not able to understand the benefit of the extra labor, but in the end it hastened their exodus from Egypt.

The precedent has been set, and in our times also, Hashem has a plan, and it is all preparation for a greater good. We cannot know the multiple layers in every one of Hashem's actions. Hashem sees the entire creation from its inception until today, all at one time. His decisions are designed to direct the world to its final destination, Mashiach, and all of us and everything that we are going through is part of that process. Human beings are simply not equipped to wrap our heads around Hashem's deeds. We can console ourselves with the knowledge that Hashem does everything with our best interest in mind, and that He is doing it in the kindest way possible.

Hopefully, we will all soon merit to see how Hashem's plan brought forth the ultimate redemption, the coming of Mashiach, speedily in our day.