

5782 - Exodus 6-9 - Va'era (And I appeared)

Exodus 6:3-13

³I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as **God Almighty**, but **by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them**. ⁴I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. ⁵Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and **I have remembered my covenant**. ⁶"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and **(1) I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. (2) I will free you from being slaves to them, and (3) I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. (4) I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. THEN YOU WILL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD**, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. ⁸And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.'" ⁹Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage. ¹⁰Then the LORD said to Moses, ¹¹"Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his country." ¹²But Moses said to the LORD, "If the Israelites will not listen to me, why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?" ¹³Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, and **he commanded them to bring the Israelites out of Egypt**.

1. **וַיֵּרָא**—*And I appeared*. The Torah attaches great importance to the distinction between the various Names of God. These Names reveal to us the Supreme Being in His several attributes: Creator, Master of Fate, Lord of hosts, Absolute Being, Hashem of love, Supreme Judge, Source of blessings and holiness, Providence and Almighty.¹

According to Rashi,² this verse is telling us that God made promises to the Patriarchs under the name **אל שדי**, Almighty (Gen 17:1, 28:3, 35:11).

a. Genesis 17:1

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, **the LORD appeared to Abram** and said to him, "I am **God Almighty** (**אל שדי**); Walk before Me, and be blameless.

b. Genesis 28:3

³May **God Almighty** (**אל שדי**) bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples.

c. Genesis 35:11

¹¹And God said to him, "I am **God Almighty** (**אל שדי**); be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will be among your descendants.

The Divine Name **יהוה**, Hashem, the God of Absolute Existence, on the other hand, was not really known to them because they did not see those promises fulfilled during their lifetimes. The Name **יהוה**, Absolute Existence, represents the attribute of truth and the fulfillment of promises ... Thus, it also denotes Hashem's ability to execute His will. **Although this power was not fully revealed to the Patriarchs, they never doubted its existence**. They had complete and absolute faith in the Divine promise. However, Ibn Ezra³ and Ramban⁴ offer another interpretation. They contend that **אל שדי**, Almighty, designates Hashem as the Master of nature, performing so-called hidden miracles without upsetting natural law (see the commentary to Genesis 17:1). The Patriarchs and their children were accustomed to such miracles. However, **in references to Moses, the Name of Hashem, is exclusively used since it denotes God as Absolute Sovereign of the universe, performing open miracles** such as the Ten Plagues, the splitting of the Red Sea, the falling of the manna, etc. In this interpretation, **God's response to Moses in this verse served to put Moses on notice that unlike the Patriarchs his generation needed wonders and miracles because of their imperfect faith in God**. R' Yehudah HaLevi⁵ adds that although the Children of Israel witnessed these miracles it does not imply they were greater than the Patriarchs. **These miracles occurred primarily for the benefit of many people who had doubts in their hearts**. As for the forefathers, they were strong believers in Hashem and their faith never faltered despite the many tragedies they experienced during their lives (Kuzari⁶ 2:2).

a. Matthew 12:38-42

³⁸Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him,

3 Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1089/1092–1164/1167) was one of the most distinguished Sephardic biblical commentators and philosophers of the Middle Ages.

4 Moses ben Nachman (1194–1270), also known as Nachmanides and by the acronym Ramban, was a leading medieval Jewish scholar, Sephardic rabbi, philosopher, physician, kabbalist, and biblical commentator.

5 Judah Halevi (1075–1141) was a Spanish Jewish physician, poet and philosopher.

6 The *Kuzari*, full title *Book of Refutation and Proof on Behalf of the Despised Religion* is one of the most famous works of Judah Halevi, completed in 1139–40 CE.

1 Rabbi Elie Munk, *The Call of the Torah*, (Mesorah Publications, Ltd.), pp. 74–85.

2 Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040–1105), today generally known by the acronym Rashi, was a medieval French rabbi and author of a comprehensive commentary on the Talmud and commentary on the Hebrew Bible. Acclaimed for his ability to present the basic meaning of the text in a concise and lucid fashion, Rashi appeals to both learned scholars and beginner students, and his works remain a centerpiece of contemporary Jewish study.

"Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." ³⁹He answered, "**A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign!** But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴²The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

2. ^{3b}by my name the LORD ...

a. וְשִׁמִּי יְהוָה לֹא נִדְרַעְתִּי לָהֶם — "but (by) my name YHVH, I was not made known to them."

- 1) An enigmatic phrase. **It cannot mean that a previously unknown divine name—YHVH—is about to be revealed for the first time. A divine promise is of little credibility if it is made by an unknown diety.**⁷
- 2) G-d also says: "By My name, Y-H-V-H, I did not make Myself known to them." This is understood by the commentaries as G-d saying to Moses: "**I did not reveal My quintessential truth,**" represented by the divine name Y-H-V-H, to the Patriarchs; they knew Me only by the name El Shadai which represents a more limited manifestation of My being ... (Rashi, Ramban).
- 3) To the Patriarchs—G-d is saying to Moses—I revealed Myself only as *El Shadai*, relating to them only via the constraints and limitations that define My investment within the created reality. But to you and your generation I shall reveal, for the very first time, "My name Y-H-V-H," the name that connotes "My quintessential truth." For the purpose of the Exodus (as G-d said to Moses at the burning bush) **is the revelation at Mount Sinai and the communication of My Torah**, which is the very embodiment of My wisdom and will (Lubivitcher Rebbe, Menachem Shneerson).
- 4) **I appeared**. to the fathers. **with [the name] Almighty God.** I made promises to them, in all of which I said to them, "I am the Almighty God." **but [with] My name YHVH, I did not become known to them.** It is not written here לֹא הִדְרַעְתִּי, "but My Name YHVH I did not make known to them," but לֹא נִדְרַעְתִּי, "I did not become known" [i.e.,] **I was not recognized by them with My**

attribute of keeping faith, by dint of which My name is called YHVH, [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).

b. Numbers 6:22-27

²²The LORD said to Moses, ²³"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them: ²⁴"The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; ²⁶the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.'" ²⁷**So they will put my name on the Israelites**, and I will bless them."

c. Deuteronomy 18:18-22

¹⁸I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. ¹⁹If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account. ²⁰But **a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say**, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death." ²¹You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the LORD?" ²²If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

1) **Speaking in God's name does not make a false message true!—Any more than asking for something from God obligates Him to provide it—even when it is not in His will.**

a) John 15:16 (cf., John 16:24-26)

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then **the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.**

b) James 4:1-4

¹Don't (fights and quarrels) ... come from your desires that battle within you? ²You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³**When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.** ⁴You adulterous people ...

c) **Apparently, James never got the "blank-check" memo!**

d. Judges 13:2-25

²A certain man ... named Manoah ... had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. ³The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "... you are going to conceive and have a son ... the boy is to

⁷ David L. Lieber, *Etz Hayim, Torah and Commentary*, (The Jewish Publication Society), p. 351.

be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines." ⁶Then the woman went to her husband and told him, "A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from, and **he didn't tell me his name** ...

⁸Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent **to us come again** to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born." ⁹God heard Manoah, and **the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her.** ¹⁰The woman hurried to tell her husband ... ¹¹Manoah got up and followed his wife. When he came to the man, he said, "Are you the one who talked to my wife?" "I am," he said. ¹²So Manoah asked him, "**When your words are fulfilled**, what is to be the rule for the boy's life and work?" ¹³The angel of the LORD answered, "Your wife must do all that I have told her ... ¹⁵Manoah said to the angel of the LORD, "We would like you to stay until we prepare a young goat for you." ¹⁶The angel of the LORD replied, "Even though you detain me, I will not eat any of your food. But **if you prepare a burnt offering, offer it to the LORD.**" (Manoah did not realize that it was the angel of the LORD.) ¹⁷Then Manoah inquired ... "**What is your name, so that we may honor you when your word comes true?**" ¹⁸He replied, "**Why do you ask my name? It is beyond understanding.**" ¹⁹Then Manoah took a young goat, together with the grain offering, and sacrificed it on a rock to the LORD. And the LORD did an amazing thing while Manoah and his wife watched: ²⁰As the flame blazed up from the altar toward heaven, the angel of the LORD ascended in the flame ... Manoah and his wife fell with their faces to the ground.

²¹When the angel of the LORD did not show himself again to Manoah and his wife, Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. ²²"**We are doomed to die!**" he said to his wife. "**We have seen God!**" ²³But his wife answered, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this." ²⁴The woman gave birth to a boy and named him Samson ...

e. Psalm 22:22

I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you.

f. Psalm 25:11

For the sake of your name, O LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.

c) How does forgiveness benefit God's name?—It doesn't! Rather, **it accurately reflects the character of God's name!**

g. Malachi 4:1-2

¹"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. ²**But for you who revere my name,** the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

h. Matthew 24:4-5

⁴Yeshua (said): "... ⁵For **many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,'** and will deceive many.

i. Revelation 2:12-13

¹²"To the angel of the *k'hilah* in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. ¹³I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet **you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me** ...

3. 4. אֶת־בְּרִיתִי—וְגַם הִקְמַתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי—*Moreover, I established My covenant.* Ramban quotes the Midrash (also cited by Rashi to v. 9), in which Hashem compares Moses with the Patriarchs. They trusted Him and so He extended His covenant with them, **even though they did not have the benefit of the greater revelation that Moses had. They did not ask Hashem for His Name** and did not complain about His not fulfilling His promises. When Abraham wanted to bury Sarah, he had to pay dearly for her burial place even though Hashem had given him the entire land. When Isaac dug the wells of water, he encountered the envy of his neighbors. Jacob, too, had to purchase property (Genesis 33:19) to erect his tent. It was precisely because of their trust that Hashem established His covenant with them. And so it was for their sake that Hashem has now heard the groan of the Children of Israel (v. 5).

The Midrash concludes that the unconditional and resolute faith of the Patriarchs was superior to Moses' questioning belief. However, Moses attained a greater knowledge of Hashem. Moses had a perfectly clear prophetic vision whereas the vision of the other prophets was comparatively obscured (Yevamot [Levirate Marriage] 49b; see also Guide to the Perplexed 2:35).

a. Sanhedrin 111a

For how many times did I reveal Myself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name of El Shaddai (God Almighty), and **they did not question my character,** ⁽²⁶⁾ **NOR SAY TO ME, WHAT IS THY NAME?** I said to Abraham, Arise, walk through the land in the length of it, and in the breadth of it, for I will give it unto thee: ⁽²⁷⁾ yet when he sought a place to bury Sarah, he did not find one, but had to purchase it for four hundred silver shekels; and **still he did not question My character.** I said to Isaac, So-

jour in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee:⁽²⁸⁾ yet his servants sought water to drink, and did not find it without its being disputed, as it is said, And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen saying, The water is our's;⁽²⁹⁾ **still he did not question My character.** I said to Jacob, The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed:⁽³⁰⁾ yet he sought a place to pitch his tent and did not find one until he purchased it for an hundred kesitah;⁽³¹⁾ **nevertheless he did not question My character;** nor did they say to me, **What is Thy name?**⁽³²⁾ And now thou sayest to Me, **Neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.** [Therefore] Now shalt thou see what I will do to Pharaoh:⁽³³⁾ thou shalt behold the war against Pharaoh, but not the war against the thirty one kings.⁽³⁴⁾ And Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped⁽³⁵⁾ ...

(26) **Lit., 'my attributes', 'my dealings' with man. Whether my promises were reliable.**

(27) Gen. XIII, 17; (28) Ibid. XXVI, 3; (29) Ibid. 20; (30) Ibid. XXVIII, 13.

(31) Ibid. XXXIII, 19. R.V.; 'piece of money.'

(32) The emphasis laid here upon the name of God, the virtue ascribed to the Patriarchs for refraining to ask it, and the reproach that Moses had wished to know it, are due to the fact that **God's name was regarded as more than a mere title of distinction. It represented His character, His Attributes, and the relationship in which He stood to His people. Consequently, to refrain from asking after God's name was the equivalent of displaying complete confidence in Him, without examining his character closely to see whether His promises were reliable; whilst to ask it was to betray a lack of confidence.**

(33) Ibid. VI, 1.

(34) **I.e., the conquest of (Canaan). Josh. XII, 24.**

(35) Ex. XXXIV, 8.

a) **Name = Character, Attributes**

b) **God's Name has no magical power**—the idea that uttering God's "Ineffable" (i.e., indescribable, unutterable) Name protects one from harm is superstitious!

4. 6. **וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלַת מִצְרַיִם—I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt.** This verse and the next contain **four different expressions to describe the process of redemption from Egypt:** I shall take you out; I shall rescue you; I shall redeem you; I shall take you (to Me).

The Zohar comments upon why the Torah begins with the phrase I shall take you out rather than I shall rescue you. R' Yehudah⁸ explains that the Torah prefers to begin with the most important and es-

sential purpose of redemption, freedom from the burdens of slavery (I shall take you out from under the burdens of Egypt). To this R' Yosei⁹ objects that the true purpose of redemption was to make Israel into Hashem's nation as defined by the last term of redemption, I shall take you to Me. R Yehudah replies that at the moment of redemption nothing mattered more to Israel than freedom from the bondage of Egypt. Accordingly, the promise to release them from bondage was made first. Then, because they might be concerned that the Egyptian armies would pursue them and restore their servitude, Hashem said, I shall rescue you from their service.

The next term of redemption is presented as a response to another argument that the Israelites might pose. After all, liberation and independence do not guarantee real freedom since Israel might come under the domination of another power. To this Hashem answered, I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm, an arm that extends far and wide, protecting you from other powers as well. However, these three stages of the redemption are not an end in themselves, for a freedom that brings only social benefit fails to satisfy the moral and spiritual aspirations of the soul. Thus, the fourth stage of the redemption describes God's selection of the Jews: I shall take you to Me for a people.

In the Talmud (*Yerushalmi Pesachim* 10:1) R' Yochanan¹⁰ teaches that **these four terms of redemption are the basis for the mitzvah of drinking four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder.** The four cups memorialize the fourfold deliverance, whereby each part constitutes an immense and everlasting benefit to Israel. This is in the spirit of King David, who sang: How can I repay Hashem for all His bountiful dealings toward me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call upon the name of God (Psalms 116:12-13).

Many explanations symbolic, philosophical and historical, are given as to why the redemption was divided into four stages. Some commentaries suggest that number four evokes the historical and social basis for Israel's existence.

5. "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and **(1) I will bring you** out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. **(2) I will free you** from being slaves to them, and **(3) I will redeem you** with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. **(4) I will take you** as my own people, and I will be your God.

9 Yose ben Halaftha was a tanna of the fourth generation (2nd century CE). He is the fifth-most-frequently mentioned sage in the Mishnah. Of the many Rabbi Yose's in the Talmud, Yose Ben Halaftha is the one who is simply referred to as Rabbi Yose.

10 Johanan bar Nappaha (180-279 CE) also known simply as Rabbi Yochanan was a leading rabbi in the early era of the Talmud. He belonged to the second generation of amoraim.

8 Judah ha-Nasi (c. 135-217 CE) was a second-century rabbi and chief redactor and editor of the *Mishnah*. He was a key leader of the Jewish community during the Roman occupation of Judea.

a. הוֹצֵאתִי אִתְּכֶם—*ho-tze-ti et-chem*, I will bring you out., f. יֵצֵא—to go or come out, *hifil* (causitive); to cause you to go or come out.

1) **The Cup of Sanctification**

b. הִצַּלְתִּי אִתְּכֶם—*hi-tzal-ti et-chem*, I will deliver (or snatch) you., f. נָצַל—to strip, plunder, *Nifal* (reflexive); deliver oneself, be delivered, *Hifil*; snatch away, deliver.

1) **The Cup of Affliction**

a) Matthew 26:42

(Yeshua) went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

c. גָּאֲלִיתִי אִתְּכֶם—*ga-al-ti et-chem*, I will redeem you, i.e., act as a kinsman on your behalf., f. גָּאַל—redeem, act as a kinsman.

1) **The Cup of Redemption**

d. לָקַחְתִּי אִתְּכֶם—*la-kach-ti et-chem*, I will take you, i.e., "as my own people., f. לָקַח—to take, *e.g., in marriage*.

1) **The Cup of Blessing**

e. The four types:

1) Avot 5:10

There are **four types of men**: he who says, "Mine is mine, and yours is yours"—the average man; some say, this is the type of Sodom. He who says, "Mine is yours, and yours is mine"—the ignorant man [the *am ha-aretz*]. He who says, "Mine is yours, and yours is yours"—the pious man. And he who says, "Yours is mine, and mine is mine"—the wicked man.

2) Avot 5:12

There are **four types of disciples**: quick to learn and quick to forget—his gain is dissipated in his loss; slow to comprehend and slow to forget—his loss is offset by his gain; quick to comprehend and slow to forget—that is a good portion; slow to comprehend and quick to forget—that is a bad portion.

3) Avot 5:15

There are **four types of those who sit before the sages**: a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, and a sieve. The sponge absorbs everything. The funnel lets in at one end and lets out at the other. The strainer lets out the wine and retains the lees. The sieve lets out the powdery stuff and retains the good flour.

4) Avot 5:16

Among those asked **to give charity are four types**: he who wishes to give but does not wish others to give—he is grudging toward others; he who wishes others to give but is himself unwilling to give—he is grudging of his own; he who willingly gives and wishes others to give—the pious man; he who does not give and wishes others not to give—the wicked man.

5) Numbers Rabbah XVIII:12

Our Rabbis have taught: **Four types of people are called wicked.**

(1) One who puts out his hand against his fellow to strike him, even though he has not actually struck him, is called wicked; as may be inferred from the text, And he said to the wicked one: Wherefore wilt thou smite thy fellow? (Ex. II, 13); it does not say 'Wherefore hast thou smitten' but 'Wherefore wilt thou smite'. (2) One who borrows and does not repay; as is borne out by the text, The wicked borroweth, and payeth not; but the righteous dealeth graciously, and giveth (Ps. XXXVII, 21). (3) One who shows insolence and who is not ashamed in the presence of one greater than himself; as it says, A wicked man hardeneth his face; but as for the upright, he looketh well to his way (Prov. XXI, 29). (4) One who is given to contentiousness; as it says, DEPART, I PRAY YOU, FROM THE TENTS OF THESE WICKED MEN.

6) Matthew 13:1-9

¹That same day Yeshua went out of the house and sat by the lake. ²Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴As he was scattering the seed, (1) some fell along **the path**, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵(2) Some fell on **rocky places**, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷(3) Other seed fell **among thorns**, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸(4) Still other seed fell on **good soil**, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹**He who has ears, let him hear.**"

7) From the Passover Haggadah

There are **four questions and four ways to ask them**: the heedless, the foolish, the dull and the wise. The heedless child asks, "What is the meaning of this service of *yours*" as if it didn't concern him. The foolish child asks only what happened. The dull child doesn't discern anything unusual and therefore doesn't ask. The wise child wants to understand what is the meaning of each thing we do.