

Alter Rebbe
Torah Ohr
Parshas Va'eira

וארא אל אברהם אל יצחק ואל יעקב באל שדי ושמי הוי"ה לא נודעתי להם

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"I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by My name YHWH, I was not known to them."

Behold, the word "I appeared" (וארא) has two interpretations. One is in the past tense, referring to the revelation to the Patriarchs. The other is in the future tense, which is in the present form, indicating that this concept applies continually, in every time and to every person. For it is said that only the three Patriarchs are called 'fathers.' The idea is that the lives of the Patriarchs are an inheritance to their descendants in every generation, each person according to their own measure. Therefore, we say, "the God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, etc." However, the qualities and levels of other righteous individuals, such as the tribes—Reuben, Simeon, Levi—are certainly lofty spiritual lights, yet there are people who do not possess these levels at all. This is not the case with the qualities of the Patriarchs, which must exist in every person, as they are the root and source of all the souls of Israel.

To understand this concept of the revelation in every generation, concerning the qualities and levels of the Patriarchs in every Jew: exile is likened to a pregnancy, and the redemption in the days of the Messiah, may it come speedily in our days, is likened to a birth, as it is written, "For Zion has both been in labor and given birth to her children." When Israel is in distress, God forbid, it is written, "For the children have come to the birth canal, but there is no strength to give birth." (**Book of Isaiah**, specifically **Isaiah 37:3**.) Similarly, the birth pangs of the days of the Messiah are called the pangs of childbirth, as it is written, "Pangs of childbirth shall come upon you." Likewise, regarding the redemption from Egypt, the prophecy of Ezekiel likens the entire matter to a newborn on the day of birth, as it is written, "As for your birth, on the day you were born, your umbilical cord was not cut, etc."

To understand this metaphor and parable, we must first understand the concept of pregnancy. The Sages of blessed memory said, as Rabbi Simlai expounded: To what is a fetus in its mother's womb comparable? (Talmud, Niddah 30b) To a folded ledger, with its head resting between its knees and its heels resting on its buttocks. It eats what its mother eats, etc. Its mouth is closed, and its umbilical cord is open. Once it emerges into the world, the closed becomes open, and the open becomes closed, etc. This means that while the fetus possesses all its organs—head, eyes, ears, etc.—its head is bent and resting between its knees, rendering it inactive; it does not think or contemplate. Similarly, it has eyes but does not see, ears but does not hear. Furthermore, its nourishment, though derived from what its mother eats, does not enter through its mouth but rather through its umbilical cord, directly to its intestines, merely to grow its body. This is evident from the fact that over the nine months of gestation, the body grows, but the food does not pass through the mouth, which would involve transmitting vitality to the heart and then to the brain, the organs of respiration. Even though the fetus possesses these respiratory organs, it does not yet have the soul of life until it emerges into the world. At that point, it emits a cry, as the Sages said, which is the sign of birth, when it emits its head. Therefore, it does not transmit vitality to the respiratory organs during this time. Rather, it (nourishment) is directed only to the organs of sustenance through the umbilical cord, which is the residence of the intestines, the organs of sustenance. In contrast, the head and all the organs of respiration serve no purpose and are as if lifeless.

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Thus, the head rests between the knees, for it has no vitality. Behold, just as in this description and this metaphor, so were the children of Israel likened during the exile. As it is written, "The Lord will roar from on high" (Jeremiah 25:30)—meaning, as explained in the Zohar, that the Holy One, blessed be He, ascends on high. And it is written, "Rachel weeps for her children... because they are not," and the Zohar explains that this refers to the Divine Presence (Shechinah), which "is not among her children," for it has ascended above. This means that the Shechinah and the revelation of God's Divinity have been removed from the lower realms. To the eyes of flesh, it appears as if the world is an independent entity, and the people's hearts have become dull, and their eyes blind—"they have eyes but do not see" the light of God, though "in the heavens above and on the earth below, there is none else."

Even the impact of mitzvot and good deeds, which are nourishment for the soul, does not pass through the 'breath' to transmit vitality to the heart and mind, to know God, to love Him, and to serve Him with all their hearts, with a full heart, and with a soul eager and longing as with fiery flames of passion and thirst. Rather, it is like the matter described as, "Their fear of Me is like a commandment of men performed by rote"—meaning, it is performed in a physical, superficial manner, and with coldness. This is the essence of spiritual exile.

Now, the ultimate perfection of the Messianic era, which is likened to birth and the revelation of God's light within a person and in the depths of the heart, is as it is written: "The glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all flesh will see together..." (Isaiah 40:5) and "for eye to eye they will see..." This is dependent on our actions and service during the time of exile, through the arousal of the hidden love that certainly exists in a person's heart until it becomes a desire, longing, and yearning for the love of God in an openly revealed way in the heart. This is the meaning of "Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord is one," followed by "And you shall love..."

We must understand the term "one" (אחד), which does not seem to indicate the true unity of God—that He alone exists and there is nothing else besides Him. The word "one" does not fully express this, as we find other uses of "one," such as "Reuben was called the firstborn, one," even though Jacob had twelve tribes. In contrast, Isaac was called "your son, your only one" (יחיד). Here too, it could have said "the Lord is unique" (יחיד).

However, the matter is that regarding the Holy One, blessed be He, in His essence and being, the term "one" does not apply at all, for He is unique and singular, and He alone exists. Instead, as the Sages say, He is "one" in the seven heavens and on the earth and in the four directions of the world. This means that even within the heavens and the earth and the four directions of the world, which represent the attributes (sefirot) of the world—characterized by division and separation—His unity and oneness are present and revealed, and they all unite in His oneness. They are all nullified in relation to the light of God that dwells and is revealed within them, as it is written, "The host of heaven bows to You," and they are the physical six directions and their corresponding spiritual six directions—this refers to the aspect of "above" and "below" that exists in all the worlds: "above" to infinite heights and "below" to infinite depths, as it is written, "Higher than high..." This means that whatever can be grasped and understood by the intellect and comprehension of created beings in all the worlds is considered "below" relative to the higher level that cannot be grasped or understood by the intellect and comprehension of created beings below it. And no thought of theirs can grasp Him. Similarly, the four directions of the world: for example, the attribute of Chesed (kindness), the right arm, corresponds to the

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south, and Gevurah (strength), the left arm, corresponds to the north, etc. Yet all of these unite and become one in His unity, blessed be He, who dwells within them.

However, in relation to the Holy One, blessed be He, in His essence and glory—who is unique and singular—He is exalted and elevated by countless degrees, infinitely beyond both physical and spiritual dimensions of these six directions. As it is written, "To You, O Lord, belongs greatness, and might..."—meaning that the qualities of greatness and might, etc., are nullified before Him, blessed be He. They are not even considered "greatness" or "might" in His presence, as it is written, "For all that is in the heavens and on the earth [is Yours]." This means that everything is nullified before Him, blessed be He, and before Him, darkness and light are equal, "above" and "below" are the same. For His essence and being are present below just as they are above, with absolutely no distinction or change whatsoever. Therefore, "above" and "below," and "heavens" and "earth," do not apply to Him at all—not in the aspect of *memaleh kol almin* (immanent divine presence) nor in the aspect of *sovev kol almin* (transcendent divine presence), for He is beyond the realm and category of worlds entirely.

As it is written, "For His name alone is exalted; His splendor is on the earth and the heavens." His splendor (*hod*) alone—this refers only to an extension, a radiance, and a mere illumination from Him. Even in this aspect, "the earth preceded the heavens," as explained elsewhere. Therefore, it is said, "The whole earth is full of His glory," and the angels say, "Where is the place of His glory, to revere Him?"

The concept of *ibur* (gestation) refers to the period of exile, during which the Holy One, blessed be He, ascends to the highest of heights. This corresponds to His essence and being, which is unique and singular, entirely beyond the realm of worlds, and not revealed or manifest in His unity and oneness in the lower realms. As it is written, "On that day (in the future) the Lord will be one, and His name will be one," as we learn in the Talmud: "What, is He not one now?" The explanation is that during the time of exile, His unity is not openly revealed, and it seems as though the world is a separate and independent entity. Nevertheless, even in our exile, God has not forsaken us. He gives us the strength, as the children of Israel, His close nation, to draw down His unity and oneness into the lower realms, so that His name becomes revealed as one even within the divisions of the six directions—above, below, etc.—both physically and spiritually. Similarly, this can also be drawn into the human soul, into its six emotional attributes: love, awe, and so on, so that they manifest openly in the heart.

This is the meaning of "Hear, O Israel," for the children of Israel, as God's close nation, have the ability to draw the essence of the Divine Name (*Havayah*) into the lower realms, so that it becomes one and united within them. This is the ultimate purpose of all service to God, as God desired to have a dwelling place in the lower realms specifically, to subjugate the *sitra achra* (the 'other side') and thereby elevate the glory of the Holy One, blessed be He. This is the meaning of "And Egypt shall know that I am the Lord."

Thus, where the penitents stand, even the perfectly righteous cannot stand. This is also the meaning of "Israel shall rejoice in its Maker" (*be'osav*), using the plural form ("its Makers") to indicate the multiplicity and divisions that are drawn down in order to connect and unite them to Him, blessed be He. Through this process, one naturally reaches the state of "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart"—with both inclinations,

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meaning that the love of God becomes so embedded in the heart, revealed like fiery flames, that it stirs the good inclination against the evil inclination, as one who is angered by something deeply opposed to their innermost will and essence.

Similarly, when the love of God penetrates a person's heart and soul deeply, reaching the essence of their being, they naturally become deeply upset with anything that opposes it. The primary service from love is the joy of the soul in God, fulfilling His commandments with joy, as it is written: "Serve the Lord with joy," and "Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and a glad heart when you had an abundance of everything."

The Arizal explains this verse as emphasizing the importance of joy in service. This joy is likened to milk, as it is written: "Honey and milk are under your tongue," and as it says, "As a man whom his mother comforts..." Just as a mother delights her child by nursing it with milk, bringing the child joy, so too does this nurture help the child grow and develop its limbs until it can walk. Milk itself is formed from blood, for blood is refined and transformed into milk, and the blood itself is produced from the food and drink consumed by the mother, which is processed within her and converted into blood.

To understand this concept in the service of God, it is written: "My offering, My bread, for My fire-offering" (Numbers 28:2). The offering becomes, so to speak, bread and sustenance for God, ascending as a "pleasing aroma to the Lord." This is akin to the teaching that "Israel sustains their Father in Heaven." The idea of the offering is to bring closer even the animal soul within a person. At the time when one brought their offering from an animal, with intent and heartfelt desire, they would dedicate their soul to God, removing the spirit of impurity from the earth. All negative thoughts and improper intentions would be nullified and burned as a complete offering on the altar of God. Now that the Temple no longer stands and sacrifices have ceased, we are unable to fully nullify and remove the dominion of the animal soul. Therefore, the Sages established prayer as a substitute for the daily offerings. This is why we say, "Blessed are You, Lord..."—meaning that even though we are unable to fulfill our obligations through our own arousal from below (*itaruta diletata*), nevertheless, there should be an arousal from above (*itaruta dile'ela*) due to His desire for kindness. Thus, He is blessed and His blessing is drawn down from above—the blessing of God—so that His name is called upon us in the aspect of "our God," and we are nullified to Him, drawn to follow Him with all our heart and soul, as explained elsewhere.

Similarly, this applies to all 248 positive commandments, which correspond to 248 channels for drawing down the revelation of His Divinity to dwell in the lower realms. This is considered, metaphorically, like eating, whereby through food, a person's soul is strengthened within their body, allowing the body to serve as a dwelling place for the soul. Similarly, through mitzvot and good deeds, a throne and residence are made for Him, so that He may have a dwelling place in the lower realms, with His aspect of *Havayah* revealed as one within them. Furthermore, the people of Israel below receive illumination from this "eating," sending vitality to the heart and mind in order to love God and serve Him with all their heart and soul. Following this, they ascend and receive influence from this illumination, likened to the blood, which is the soul. Just as food is processed within a person and transformed into blood, which becomes their life and sustenance, so too, through drawing down the light of God upon the soul by fulfilling the mitzvot and turning away from evil, a similar transformation

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occurs by doing good, one creates a throne and dwelling place for God, until the light of God's oneness rests and is revealed within the depths of one's heart, penetrating the very soul, to the point that it becomes like one's very essence. As a result, one will naturally feel a strong aversion to the evil within oneself, similar to the way a person becomes agitated about something that opposes what is deeply personal and essential to them. This reaction comes from a "boiling of the blood," as blood represents life itself (*the blood is the soul*). This corresponds to the aspect of Isaac (*Yitzchak*) and the concept of "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit," referring to breaking the spirit of the *sitra achra* (the other side).

From this state, one reaches the level and attribute of Jacob (*Yaakov*), which is compassion for one's soul. When a person sees that their soul is trapped within its opposite, they cry out to God in their distress. Thus, from the agitation against evil, one transitions to a sense of compassion. This is in contrast to a person who walks an upright path, where compassion does not apply. Compassion arises when one recognizes their deficiencies. This compassion, in turn, serves as the beginning and preparation for the joy that follows, when one reflects truthfully on their situation, as explained in *Tanya*. This leads to great joy in God, who sanctified us with His commandments and connected us to the supreme holiness, as explained elsewhere: "*the advantage of light that comes from darkness.*"

This is the meaning of "*They will come with weeping, and with supplications I will lead them*" (Jeremiah 31:9), and "*They will walk and weep and seek the Lord their God*" (Hosea 3:5). In the future, tears will be aroused from the perception of divine revelation, as "*all flesh shall see it together*". At that time, great compassion will arise over the past, and this compassion will be the beginning of joy—rejoicing in the living God and desiring closeness to Him, as it says: "*They will seek the Lord their God.*" Therefore, in the *Amidah* prayer, we say "*Forgive us, for we have sinned*" only after the initial blessings, and not before prayer begins, because at that point, one has not yet accepted the yoke of heaven during the *Shema*. However, once one declares in the *Shema* that "*the Lord is one*"—that God's unity and oneness are revealed even in the lower realms—one then becomes aware of one's sins and deficiencies, realizing the absence of divine light in their life. Reflecting on this, their heart is stirred with compassion, as it says: "*His mercies are stirred for him; He will surely have compassion on him.*" After this, one can achieve true joy, and there is no greater joy than this. Without first awakening compassion in one's soul, the joy is not genuine.

This can be compared to a newborn baby: upon emerging into the world, the baby first cries, and only afterward is milk given to it. The essence of joy and delight comes from contemplating God's greatness, that He chose us from among all nations and brought us near to serve Him. This is why the Sages said that the breasts, which nourish, correspond to *Binah* (understanding).

This is the meaning of "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai" (Exodus 6:3). The interpretation is that this refers to the aspect and flow of *Shaddai* (*Sha-dai*), which corresponds to the attribute of nourishment (*shadayim*, breasts) and milk. These represent the nurturing and growth of the emotional attributes, such as love and awe, which correspond to the Patriarchs. Once "the Lord is One" (*Hashem Echad*) is revealed in one's heart, in the aspect of birth and revelation, it brings joy to their soul with an increase of light and gladness. This allows them to delight in God with joy and a glad heart, out of an abundance of all goodness.

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"But by My name YHWH, I was not known to them" (Exodus 6:3). The Sages explained that Abraham, our forefather of blessed memory, observed the entire Torah even before it was given. This means he performed the mitzvot out of love, as the Sages stated, "Abraham instituted the morning prayer." This reflects the aspect of drawing down the light of God so that "the Lord is One" rests and is revealed in the lower realms, inspiring a love of God filled with delight, serving Him with heart and soul. However, this is still considered the service of a servant who listens to his master and fulfills his commands with love, joy, and gladness of heart. Similarly, Isaac served out of awe and the "fear of Isaac."

But Moses, our teacher, of blessed memory, operated on an entirely different level, saying, "*What are we?*"—indicating total self-nullification. Therefore, he merited that the Torah was given through him, in the aspect of speech. The Sages said that the Shechinah (Divine Presence) spoke through Moses' throat. For in the realm of love and delight, this pertains only to the revealed light of God that resides in the lower realms, within the framework of the worlds, which include concepts like above and below. However, the Word of God—the law (*halacha*)—is unified with the Holy One, blessed be He, as "the Torah and the Holy One, blessed be He, are entirely one." His essence and being are singular and unique, beyond grasp by any thought.

In this context, love or delight cannot be experienced because the individual no longer feels themselves at all. They are entirely nullified and have no sense of self or independent existence. They are drawn solely after Him to speak whatever He speaks, as it is written: "*I will place My words in your mouth*" (Isaiah 51:16). Through this, the unity and oneness of God Himself, in His essence and being as it was before the world was created, is drawn down and revealed below, so that even now the world is as nothing and null, and there is neither above nor below.

This does not inspire love or delight in the soul but rather complete nullification. This is the meaning of *dibur* (speech), from the root *yidaber* (to lead or subdue), indicating guidance and drawing down—that His unity is revealed below in His singular essence, not merely in the aspect of *one* (*echad*). This is achieved through the Torah, as it is written, "*And the Lord spoke to Moses.*"

Moreover, this is not considered the service of a servant. For when one studies a law and articulates it, they act like a king who commands that judgment be carried out for his people. The Sages said, "*Who are kings? The sages,*" and also, "*The Mishnah is the queen.*" In this way, it is as if the person is merely articulating the king's words and not acting on their own behalf at all. This differs from the servant who performs their master's commands, as even when the servant acts out of love and delight, there is still someone who loves, and thus some sense of self remains.

Since the Torah had not yet been given to the Patriarchs, it is written: "*But by My name YHWH, I was not known to them.*" It does not say, "*I did not make known*" (*hoda'ati*), which would imply that YHWH itself was unknown. Instead, it says, "*I was not known*" (*nodati*), implying that My essence itself was not revealed to them—that is, the aspect of My singular essence.

This is the meaning of "*And these words, which I command you today*" (Deuteronomy 6:6), where the word "*I*" (*Anochi*) refers to "I, who am I"—the aspect of God's singular essence. In contrast, the verse "*And you shall*

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love the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 6:5) refers to the name *Havayah* (YHWH). However, the Torah transcends even the level of *Havayah*, as it is drawn from the level described as "*before the Lord*"—the essence of *Anochi*, "I, who am I," as explained elsewhere.