

Parshat V'era
Probing the Heart and the Soul – Hasidic Insights into the Weekly Torah Portion
Melton Geshet at the JCC, January 18, 2012
JSI at Beth Torah, January 19, 2012

Shmot chapter 6, verses 2 – 4

- Point of syntax – 'ה' ושמ' must mean 'ה' ובשמ' – the letter 'ב' is written once but serves twice
- The difference between God's appearance is Breishit and in Shmot

Sefat Emet on Parshat V'era, opening phrase **וַאֲרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶבְרָהָם**

"I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai, but by My name YHWH I did not become known to them" (Ex. 6:3).

All of the patriarchs' efforts were for the sake of the children of Israel; that is why they are called our "forefathers." They went into all the hidden places within nature, struggling until there, too, they found the light of holiness. This is the conduct of the name El Shaddai, which our sages explained to mean that "there is enough (*she-dai*) of godliness for each creature." This means that God placed in each thing a point of divine life, powerful enough to draw to itself all that which surrounds it.

This world is called "the world of lies"; there is much falsehood for every point of truth. Of this it is written: "The wicked walk all about" (Ps. 12:9) and also: "Save my soul from lips of falsehood" (Ps. 120:2). Every bit of truth is surrounded by falsehood on all sides. Nevertheless, by means of struggle, that point of truth can be found in every place.

This was the holy work of our forefathers. That is why Scripture refers to "the land of their sojourning, where they sojourned (*garu*)" (Ex. 6:4). The same word *ger* (sojourner) refers also to the proselyte. We are told that "Abraham would convert the men [and Sarah the women]." This act of "converting" is one of drawing everything back to its root. The exile of Egypt, and indeed all exiles, are of this order. And in this work, the merit of our ancestors stands by us.

We are taught that "Moses prophesied through a lucid glass, and all the other prophets through an unlcid glass." But why is their vision called a "glass" at all, if it is not translucent? This refers to the point that is in hiding; it is revealed in the very midst of its hiding. Moses merited seeing things as they will be in the future: One God and His name One. Then there will be nothing but the divine life-force. But in this world everything is garbed in nature. It is by sanctifying yourself in this-worldly matters that you attain some bit of understanding. This is called the "unlcid glass"; it is through the hiding that you come to merit revelation. But this is hard work, the task we do through the week. The holy Sabbath is the lucid glass, when there is an abundance of revelation for every Jewish soul. . . .

- Enough of something means there is only enough, but it is not full of that something; there is also something else.
- Possible mistranslation: "We must be powerful enough to draw to that point all that which surrounds it".
- Finding truth everywhere means looking where you might not expect to find it, going to places you might not think of going. It means 'judging favorably' not just people but ideas and movements and ways of life. This means taking certain risks. Raising up the sparks. Example of Rav Abraham Isaac haKohen Kook – secular Zionism and evolution.
- "Drawing everything back to its root" – seeing everything's connection to Judaism. "Converting" everything to Judaism. Example of the kirtan rabbi.

Sefat Emet on Parshat Veyara, opening phrase **אֵתָא אַבְרָהָם בִּירַר**

It is said that Abraham cleared the way for all the exile. "Israel were exiled only so that converts would be added to them." This means drawing all creatures near to Torah. Therefore, Abraham chose to take himself to all these places, in order to set them right and raise them up. Thus it is taught that while Noah still needed [God's] help to walk [in the proper path], Abraham found his own strength in his righteousness. "As a person goes, so is he led." He chose this path, that of seeking out truth, on his own.

This is why the righteous who lived previous to Abraham's time were born circumcised, while he, by his own service, attained circumcision as a commandment. He was mending the mundane world, so that humans by their own work should be able to remove the foreskin.

Because of this, those who serve God should not be too concerned by those times of "hiding" that happen to every religious person. "According to the suffering is the reward." This way was chosen by our father Abraham, who so loved God that he took himself into dangerous places, in order to rejoin all of Creation to Him. That is why Creation itself is called by his name (*Be-HiBaR'aM/Be-'aBRaHaM*).

Thus it is for all generations. "In the beginning" means "for Israel, who are called 'beginning,'" for they bring all of Creation near to God and thus arouse the power of new beginnings in the world.

This is also why it says that Abraham established the dawn prayer service, as Scripture tells us: "He arose early to that place where he had stood in God's presence" (Gen. 19:27). On the simplest level, this tells us that as soon as he arose, he was able to get back to that [spiritual] place where he had been when he lay down the previous night.

This is the way of those who serve God. They are called "walkers," as Scripture says: "Speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:7). All of a person's days are a single journey; of this Scripture speaks when it says that someone "was come in his days." Thus we say in our prayers: "May we arise and find our heart's hope." For this is a sign that we truly love God: if as soon as we awaken we can recall our Creator, before we do anything else. . . . Thus Scripture testifies that Abraham, the Pillar of Love, "Abraham My Lover" (Is. 41:8) "arose early to that place where he had stood." This is what they mean when they say that he established the dawn service: he gave the power to each Jew to arouse the dawn every day.

1:67

- Possible mistranslation of the word בִּירַר - may mean clarify, purify. "Avraham purified the exile".
- Source of Talmudic quote – Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Pesachim, page 87b
- See the connection to the previous piece.
- Noach walked with God; Avraham walked before God. See Rashi on Breishit 6:9
- Source of quote – Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Macot. Page 10b
- Born circumcised – you might consider it an advantage or a sign of greatness, like the midrash about Moshe, but not so for the Sefat Emet.
- Midrash in Breishit Raba about the philosopher who asked why we are not born circumcised
- No pain, no gain –Ethics of the Fathers, 5:2
- The letters of the name אברהם - Midrash Breishit Raba 12:9
- Mei HaShiloach on day and night