YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**STUDENT SUMMARIES OF Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Vaera**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

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In memory of Albert W. and Evelyn G. Bloom,   
on their Shevat yahrzeits; parents who taught in word and deed:

"And I will take you as my nation,   
and I will be your God."  Shemot 6:7  
- Shanen and Akiva Werber, Dov and Sandy Bloom,   
Elana Bloom and Jeffrey Garrett

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**Human Effort**

Adapted by Aviad Brestal

Translated by David Strauss

Our *parasha* opens with the following verses:

And God spoke to Moshe, and said to him: “I am the Lord;and I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov, as God Almighty, but by My name the Lord I made Me not known to them. And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojournings, wherein they sojourned.” (*Shemot* 6:2-4)

These verses appear against the background of Moshe's grievance at the end of the previous *parasha*: "Why have You dealt ill with this people? Why is it that You sent me?... neither have You delivered Your people at all" (*Shemot* 5:22-23). But these verses are not simply a response to Moshe's complaint; in these verses, there is a new revelation of God in this world. Thus far, He revealed Himself to the patriarchs as "God Almighty" (*El Shadai*), whereas now He reveals Himself as the Lord (the Tetragrammaton).

The Rambam explains the difference between these names:

What the verse means is that God appeared to the patriarchs by this name (*El* *Shadai*), which suggests His subduing of the celestial order. Even when He performed great miracles on their behalf, they were not accomplished through the suspension of the natural order. Thus, in famine they were preserved from death, and in combat from the sword. The patriarchs were blessed with wealth, honor, and all variety of goodness, after the manner of all of the Torah's promises of blessings or curses…

God therefore indicates to Moshe that "I appeared to the patriarchs with My strong hand by which I overpower the stars and assist My chosen ones (*El Shadai*), but I did not make myself known to them by the Tetragrammaton, by which all existence was brought into being. I did not create new realities for them by upsetting the laws of nature. Therefore, tell the people of Israel that I am the Lord (the Tetragrammaton), and indicate to them this great name a further time, for by it I will perform wonders for them so that they may know that I am the Lord who does all. (Ramban, *Shemot* 6:2)

As is well known, the Ramban maintains that all occurrences are miracles, though most of them are hidden miracles. He explains that the name *"Shadai*" expresses God's hidden miraculous conducting of the world, as opposed to the Tetragrammaton, which expresses His overt miraculous involvement with it.

All the promises that God made to the patriarchs were missions assigned to them. The patriarchs understood that these were processes in which they had to take part in order to realize them. Therefore, they did not complain to God when they had to work hard for them. *Chazal* say as follows:

"And I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Yaakov, as God Almighty, but by My name the Lord I made Me not known to them."

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to him: O, for those who are gone and cannot be replaced. How many times did I reveal Myself to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov as God Almighty, but I did not tell them that My name is the Lord, as I have told you, and they did not criticize My ways.

I said to Avraham: "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it [for to you will I give it]" (*Bereishit* 13:17). He looked for a place to bury Sara, but did not find one, until he bought [a plot] for a great deal of money, for four hundred silver shekels, and yet he did not criticize My ways.

I said to Yitzchak: "Sojourn in this land… for to you, and to your seed, I will give all these lands" (*Bereishit* 26:3). He looked for water to drink, but did not find any, as it is stated: "And the herdsmen of Gerar strove with Yitzchak's herdsmen [saying: The water is ours]" (*Bereishit* 26:20), and yet he did not criticize My ways.

I said to Yaakov: "The land upon which you lie, to you will I give it, and to your seed" (*Bereishit* 28:13). He looked to pitch his tent, but did not find a place until he bought one for a hundred kasita, and yet he did not criticize My ways.

They did not ask what is My name, as you have asked me. You, when I first sent you, asked: “What is Your name,” and in the end you said: "For since I came to Pharaoh [to speak in Your name, he has dealt ill with this people]" (*Shemot* 5:23). About them it is stated: "And I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan" (*Shemot* 6:4). He bore them for that which He said to them that He would give them the land, and they did not criticize His ways. (*Shemot Rabba*, *Parashat Vaera* 6)

God expects man to be involved and to endeavor to attain even those things that were promised to him. When God reveals Himself by way of the Tetragrammaton, which expresses the suspension of the natural order and the performance of overt miracles, this does not mean that we are dealing with a momentary and one-time event. The gap between *El Shadai* and the Tetragrammaton relates to the degree to which God's miracles are evident to all, but in both cases, we are dealing with processes in which humans are involved and operate. As a rule, God does not bestow heavenly gifts without man playing some role. He expects human effort and striving.

The person who lives within a reality that is conducted by way of long and tortuous processes must be part of those processes, because it is through them that God manages His world.

Even the Torah was given by way of the Ten Commandments, not through a single command. The world itself was created by way of ten Divine utterances, not through one utterance. Ten Divine utterances express something. I do not know whether the six days of creation were six units of twenty-four hours or whether we are dealing with a hidden meaning that is represented by six days of creation. What is clear, however, is that the six days of creation express a process. God could have created the world with a single utterance; nevertheless:

With ten utterances was the world created. And what is this [Scriptural] information [meant] to tell, for surely it could have been created with one utterance? But it is that penalty might be exacted from the wicked who destroy the world that was created with ten utterances, and to give a goodly reward to the righteous who maintain the world that was created with ten utterances. (*Avot* 5:1)

Thus, just as God's promises to the patriarchs did not relieve them of the need to toil and act, so too in the case of God's promise to Israel to bring them out of Egypt, and despite the revelation in the name of the Tetragrammation, which promises overt miracles, there is room for earthly preparation and action on the part of Israel's leaders, such as Moshe and Aharon. This accounts for the genealogical list at the beginning of our *parasha*, which reaches Moshe and Aharon and mentions them as those who would stand at the forefront of the mission. The Torah emphasizes this in order to teach us that the redemption requires human involvement. So too, in relation to the people of Israel, this demand will be heard all along the way – on the eve of the plague of the smiting of the firstborns, at the Paschal sacrifice, and also when the people of Israel will stand at the Yam Suf: "Speak to the children of Israel, that they go forward."

Human effort is the cornerstone of man's standing before God. God does not feed a person unless he first takes a small step towards Him.

Contrary to what we have said, today there are those who maintain that one should remain passive and wait for God's salvation, on both the communal level and the individual level.

On the communal level, we refer, for example, to attitudes about Zionism, in the past and in the present, and hope for salvation. It should be emphasized that even according to Rashi, who says the third Temple will descend from heaven all built, it is clear that we have work to do beforehand. We must bring salvation, with many and varied efforts, in various areas: by seeking out Jerusalem and the Temple, by seeking out justice and righteousness, goodness and fairness, to prepare our hearts and souls for its arrival. We cannot just wait for salvation to come without effort and endeavor.

The same is true on the personal level. In the wake of the information and technology revolution, people are looking for shortcuts in every field. Regarding one's capacity to learn and to deal with many challenges, which in the past required many physical and intellectual efforts, there are those who seek to achieve everything without investment. It should be remembered that there are two matters in which there is no room for shortcuts: the acquisition of Torah knowledge and the service of God. *Chazal* emphasize: "If a man says: I have labored and found, you may believe him" (*Megilla* 6b). In everything relating to the worship of God, there is no finding without toiling. One must toil in Torah and strive in one's worship in order to develop a deep and rich world of God's service.

This week, we celebrated a *Hachnasat Sefer Torah* in memory of my father-in-law, and it is appropriate to say a few words about him in connection with these ideas. At the age of thirteen, he and his family were expelled from their home in northern Italy and were forced to go to Hungary, where they lived for a few years before the Nazis entered the country, at which point they were taken to forced labor camps. When they later tried to immigrate to what was then called Palestine, they were expelled to Cyprus. Later, my father-in-law fought in Israel's War of Independence. Despite all of these troubles, he served God and studied Torah during all those years, with no complaints toward God, with full faith, with constant service of study, prayer, charity, and benevolence, with simplicity and perseverance, with love and fear. While he was in the camps with his father, no meat entered his mouth. Despite the severe hunger from which they suffered, the father and son covered for each other in order to allow daily study of Mishna and *Chumash* with Rashi from small sets of *Mishnayot* and *Chumashim* that they carried with them wherever they went. He persevered in daily Torah study all his life, early in the morning and several hours every night.

The duty of human striving applies in all spheres of action that are required of man. Man must make his efforts, while recognizing all the good that he has received and submitting to the will of God in all situations of life. Human responsibility lies at the foundation of creation. This is true first on the individual level, regarding which man was commanded immediately after the world came into being: "Which God created to do" (*Bereishit* 2:3). The same was later demanded of the people of Israel as a nation: "You shall serve God on this mountain" (*Shemot* 3:12).

(This *sicha* was delivered at *seuda* *shelishit* on *Shabbat Parashat Vaera* 5778 [2018].)