

Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash
(office@etzion.org.il)

"And Yeshu'a says: Avraham and Yaakov did not know this name; only Moshe wrote [the Torah] thus."

Two Promises: One Fulfilled, One Not Yet Fulfilled (6:3)

By Rav Elchanan Samet

A. "THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE FOREFATHERS KNEW THIS NAME"

(6:2) "And God spoke to Moshe and said to him, I am God (YKVK).

(3) And I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak and to Yaakov as Kel-Shakkai, but My name YKVK I did not make known to them."

Endless commentaries have attempted to explain the latter verse, but its mystery has not yet been solved. A "simple" reading would seem to suggest that this Divine statement reveals some of God's different names, with a distinction being made between two periods: to the forefathers God revealed Himself by the name "Kel-Shakkai," but He was not known to them as YKVK. Now, on the other hand, with the time drawing close for redemption, God reveals Himself to Moshe with this latter name – as we see at the beginning of the utterance, in verse 2: "I am YKVK."

This explanation presents a great difficulty: the name YKVK (the "Tetragrammaton," in which, due to reverence, we have substituted a K for an H) appears more than a hundred times in Sefer Bereishit, not only in relation to the forefathers, but also relating to the world as a whole and to individuals such as Adam, Kayin, Hevel, Noach, etc. The name is used not only in the narrative, but also in the language of various speakers – including God's own utterances to both Avraham and Yaakov. The following are some examples:

NOAH: (9:26) "And he said: Blessed is YKVK, the God of Shem..."

AVRAHAM: (14:20) "...I lift up my hands to YKVK, the most high God, Creator of heaven and earth..."

GOD TO AVRAHAM: (15:7) "And He said to him: I AM YKVK, Who brought you out of Ur Kasdim..."

GOD TO YAAKOV: (28:13) "I AM YKVK, the God of Avraham your father, and the God of Yitzchak..."

Ibn Ezra, in his Long Commentary on our verse, quotes the Karaite sage Yeshu'a ben Yehuda:

In other words, the WRITING of Sefer Bereishit took place after God's revelation by this name to Moshe, and Moshe then made use of this name in writing the Sefer – even in places where the various speakers actually made use of different names. Ibn Ezra himself rejects this explanation:

"Yeshu'a is not correct, for how could Moshe write a name that God had not mentioned? There can be no doubt that the forefathers knew this name..."

Ibn Ezra's claim is correct: from the verse under discussion we see that there is some fundamental importance (although we may not understand it) to the distinction between the different periods of God's revelation, and if the name YKVK was indeed revealed for the first time only to Moshe in Egypt, then how could he not have taken care to maintain this distinction in writing Sefer Bereishit? In fact, it is not only in the words of the various speakers in Bereishit that the name should not have been used, but even the narrative itself should have avoided use of this name.

B. WHICH PROMISES WERE MADE IN SEFER BEREISHIT WITH THE NAME KEL-SHAKKAI, AND WHICH WITH "I AM YKVK"?

A brief comment by the Ba'al Ha-Turim here will assist us in progressing towards a satisfying solution:

"And I appeared to Avraham and to Yitzchak and to Yaakov as "Kel-Shakkai," but My name YKVK...' – meaning, with these two names I appeared to them; WITH THE NAME YKVK I PROMISED TO SETTLE THEM IN THE LAND SAFELY, WHILE WITH THE NAME KEL-SHAKKAI I PROMISED THEM THAT I WOULD MAKE THEM NUMEROUS, for this name concerns offspring."

R. Yaakov Ba'al Ha-Turim appears to be following the example of Rashbam, who interprets the verse not in accordance with its traditional cantillation and not in accordance with the literal meaning: "And I appeared to Avraham... as Kel-Shakkai and My name YKVK; I was not known to them." This interpretation does not sit well at all. But the importance of the Ba'al Ha-Turim's explanation lies in its distinction between two types of promises that God made to the forefathers, in each of which God presented Himself by one of the two names in our verse. This distinction is developed by Chagai Misgav-Moskowitz ("The Third Slogan – A Study of the Beginning of Parashat Vaera," Megadim 7, Shevat 5749):

"God was revealed to the forefathers on many occasions. Most revelations involved no name and no identification: 'Go forth from your land, from your birthplace and from your father's house' (Bereishit 12:1); 'Lift up your eyes and see from the place where you are' (13:14); 'Do not fear, Avram' (15:1); etc. These [revelations] concerned various issues: the promise of seed, the promise of protection, the promise of the land, and various instructions.

Two of the revelations came with the name Kel-Shakkai. One was to Avraham (Bereishit 17:1), 'I am Kel-Shakkai; walk before Me and be perfect,' and it concerned the multiplying of his seed after Yishmael, and the giving of the land to the multitudinous offspring of Avraham. The covenant is accompanied with a deed – berit mila (circumcision). The second such revelation was to Yaakov (28:3): 'And Kel-Shakkai will bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you,' and it concerns again the multiplying of seed and the giving of the land to the numerous descendants. Thus, **THE BLESSING OF KEL-SHAKKAI IS PARTICULAR TO BEING FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLYING, AND THE PROMISE OF THE LAND THAT RESULTS FROM IT.**

Two other revelations come with the statement, 'I am YKVK.' One is to Avraham, and it is the heading of the Berit Bein Ha-betarim (15:7 onwards): 'And He said to him: I AM YKVK who took you out of Ur Kasdim TO GIVE YOU THIS LAND AS AN INHERITANCE.' The crux of the covenant is particularly related to the Egyptian exile and its results, whose introduction and conclusion – and thus its purpose and essence – is Eretz Yisrael. **HERE AVRAHAM IS PROMISED THE LAND INDEPENDENTLY, NOT STEMMING FROM THE BLESSING OF SEED,** and God makes this promise by His name – 'I am YKVK.'

The second revelation of this type is where God is revealed to Yaakov and repeats this theme, again on the brink of an exile (28:13): 'I AM YKVK, the God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitzchak; **THE LAND UPON WHICH YOU ARE LYING I SHALL GIVE TO YOU, AND TO YOUR DESCENDANTS.**' Again this is a promise of protection in exile, with its framework and content being **THE PROMISE OF THE LAND, AGAIN WITH PRINCIPAL STATUS, WITH THE BLESSEING OF SEED ACCOMPANYING IT.** This time, too, God attaches His name to the promise.

We find that God is revealed to the forefathers through two names. He appears to them as Kel-Shakkai and promises great progeny, and He appears to them as 'I am YKVK' promising

the land as an inheritance. Thus what God tells Moshe [now, concerning the redemption from Egypt] becomes clearer... **AS KEL-SHAKKAI I PROMISED SEED,** and I fulfilled this, and the seed has multiplied greatly and become great. **AND IN THE NAME YKVK I ALSO PROMISED, BUT I HAVE NOT YET FULFILLED;** the nation is still exiled and is not yet in its land."

Misgav interprets the first portion of verse 3 in the same way as Cassuto does (without mentioning him). His innovation, though, is that he interprets the second part of the verse, too, as a hint to certain specific promises of God in Sefer Bereishit – the promises of the land transmitted to Avraham and to Yaakov through "I am YKVK."

Thus, my understanding of the words "but [by] My name YKVK I was not known to them" does not follow Rashi and Cassuto, who take them to mean, "I was not known to them with the attribute expressed in My name, YKVK – as the One Who fulfills all My promises." Rather, I interpret as follows: "I was not known to them in the fulfillment of the specific promise made through My name, YKVK – i.e., the promise of the land." The distinction between the two names in our verse is therefore based not on their assumed etymology, nor on any philosophical-theological assumptions, but rather on the very clear distinction between the styles of the different promises given to the forefathers in Sefer Bereishit.

The two principal promises given to the forefathers, surrounding which God maintains His dialogue with them throughout Sefer Bereishit, are the promise of the land and the promise of seed. The two covenants that God makes with Avraham (and which He repeats to Yitzchak and Yaakov) are divided accordingly: Berit Bein Ha-betarim concerns the promise of the land, while berit mila concerns the promise of seed. But in each covenant there is also mention of the other half of the promise, for a simple reason: the value of the promise of the land is dependent on it being given to the descendants of the forefathers; a land without their seed had no value. On the other hand, the value of the promise of seed depends on them having a land; of what value is it to have a great nation if they will be wanderers in a land that is not theirs? Therefore, neither promise can be made without any mention at all of the other. But it is quite easy to discern, in each case, which aspect of the promise is the principal one and which is secondary. The wording and the order, as well as the relative weight of each aspect, leave no doubt in this regard.

Just as God made two covenants with Avraham, so He was revealed in two principal revelations to Yaakov, both in Beit El: the first took place as he was leaving Eretz Yisrael (chapter 28), where God appears to him for the first time in the dream of the ladder, and promises the land to him and his descendants (and the promise of seed is attached). Upon his return from Charan to Beit El, God appears to him again (chapter 35) and promises to make him fruitful and numerous (and the promise of the land is attached). The order of the promises made to Yaakov is the same as the order of the covenants made between God and Avraham: first the land, then the offspring.

C. THE RELATION OF EACH NAME TO ITS ATTENDANT PROMISE

On the basis of this objective distinction between the revelations of God to Avraham and Yaakov using the name Kel-Shakkai, where the focus is the promise of seed, and the revelations to them using the name YKVK, where the promise of the land is the focus, we may raise the following question: what is the connection between each of these names and the nature of the promise that is associated specifically with that name? The answer to this question is not vital to our understanding of the verse under discussion, for the intention of the verse and its meaning are now clear to us: the verse uses the two names only as a pointer to the two covenants that God made with the forefathers in Sefer Bereishit.

If we were to deal with the name Kel-Shakkai only in the contexts in which it appears in Sefer Bereishit (and in our verse), we may have sought a connection between it and similar roots that are related to fertility. Indeed, some such connections have been proposed. But these fail to explain the many appearances of this name in Sefer Iyov (as well as in other places in Tanakh), in varied contexts. The discussion therefore lies beyond the bounds of our present study. Nevertheless, Cassuto's conclusion (in Encyclopedia Mikra'it 1:290-2) is that this name describes God as Master of the natural forces.

A discussion of the name YKVK, which appears 6823 times in Tanakh, similarly lies beyond the limits of this study. However, we may note two points concerning this name, which may be related. a) In Tanakh, the name YKVK is the name unique to the God of Israel; and b) it appears that the root of the name is H-V-Y, such that it refers to Divine revelation in the dimension of time. It is through the name YKVK that God is revealed as the ruler of human history and as realizing His plan within that realm. He is the God who directs the human reality and is involved in the events of a person's life as well as in the history of mankind; He is the God Who has a plan concerning how historical time is played out.

A Divinity that created the world and that exerted an influence upon it was known also to the pagan nations, but the concept that this unique God was also the ruler of human history was an innovation that characterized Israelite faith and the whole purpose of the Torah. For this reason the name YKVK is the name unique to the God of Israel.

Accordingly, we may now understand why the promise of fertility was given to the forefathers through the name Kel-Shakkai, Master of the natural forces, while the promise of the land was given through the name YKVK. The promise of seed is related to the natural processes of fertility. However, the giving of the land is related to historical processes: changes in social orders, taking one nation out from amongst another, a great all-encompassing human plan in which the God of history is revealed – the God of Israel, known as YKVK.

D. "I WAS NOT KNOWN TO THEM"

The words "U-shemi YKVK lo nodati lahem" ("By My name YKVK I was not known to them," or "I did not make Myself known to them") contain a linguistic difficulty which has not been addressed thus far: "nodati" is an intransitive verb, which cannot refer to a direct object. The verse should have read either, "shemi lo hodati" (I did not make My name known to them), or "shemi lo noda" (My name was not known). Ibn Ezra solves the problem as follows:

"This is a grammatical rule: there are words that refer to themselves and also draw others to themselves; the same applies to letters...

Such is the case with the letter 'bet:' [the 'bet' in the phrase] 'be-Kel-Shakkai' (BY the name Kel-Shakkai) carries over to the next phrase, as if the text had said, 'bi-shemi YKVK lo nodati' (BY My name YKVK I was not known to them)."

In other words, the letter "bet" that appears in the first portion of the verse, before the name Kel-Shakkai, refers also to the second part of the verse, as a prefix to the words "My name YKVK." Thus it is as if the text reads, "And by My name YKVK I was not known to them" (such that the intransitive verb "nodati" has an indirect object, as is proper). Ibn Ezra's explanation is adopted by several other commentators.

We may perhaps add that the "drawing" in our verse is two-sided: the word "shemi" (My name) is likewise drawn from the second half of the verse to the first, meaning that the verse is an abbreviated formulation of the full meaning as follows:

"And I appeared to Avraham... by [My name] Kel-Shakkai, but [by] My name YKVK I was not known to them."

According to this explanation, we can say that this characteristic of our verse – i.e., that it contains a prefix or word that "refers to itself and also draws others to itself," in both directions – exists in a broader sense than the one discussed thus far.

"I appeared" (va-era) means "I was revealed in prophecy," while "I was not known" (lo nodati) means, as Rashi explains, "I was not actually known." (Thus, the two verbs do not oppose each other, as some wished to explain the verse.) On this basis we may understand that "And I appeared (va-era)... as Kel-Shakkai" should be completed as follows: "And what I promised, when I appeared using this name, I have fulfilled." In other words, through the name Kel-Shakkai I APPEARED AND I ALSO WAS KNOWN (for I fulfilled that promise). But through the name YKVK I APPEARED THOUGH I WAS NOT KNOWN (for I did not fulfill that promise yet). The connection between the two parts of the verse is therefore double: there is comparison (parallel), created by the fact that the verb "I appeared" (va-era) refers also to the second part of the verse as it stands, and there is a contrast created by the fact that "I was not known" (lo nodati) refers also to the first part of the verse through contrast: by the name Kel-Shakkai I was indeed known.

Our verse is therefore an abbreviated formulation of the full meaning as follows:

"AND I APPEARED to Avraham... by My name Kel-Shakkai (and I was also KNOWN TO THEM by this name),

but by My name YKVK (although I appeared to them using this name) – I was NOT KNOWN to them."

E. THE WATERSHED BETWEEN THE TWO PARTS OF SEFER SHEMOT

This being the case, verse 3 fits in well with God's monologue as a whole, and it is quite clear how it belongs to the first portion, which deals with God's promise to the forefa. The paraphrase of our verse is: "I promised the forefathers seed, and I fulfilled; I promised them the land, and I have not fulfilled."

Does this first portion of the verse add anything to our understanding of the speech, according to this interpretation? Is not the first part of verse 3 ("And I appeared to Avraham... as Kel-Shakkai...") foreign to the subject of the monologue, which focuses on the need to fulfill God's promise to GIVE THE LAND to the forefathers and their descendants?

In fact, the opposite is true: this interpretation enhances the function of verse 3 at the beginning of God's monologue. In my previous shiur on parashat Vaera (<http://www.vbm-torah.org/parsha.60/14vaera.htm>) I noted that at the beginning of the parasha we find ourselves at a watershed in Sefer Shemot: we are between the conclusion of the slavery, at the climax of its severity, and the beginning of the battle of the exodus from that slavery. Before the process of redemption begins, we find this speech as a "declaration of intent" on the part of God concerning the process. It explains the basis of the redemption in the promise made to the forefathers, and the redemption's ultimate purpose as being the fulfillment of that promise.

But the first portion of Sefer Shemot, until the beginning of our parasha, describes not only the slavery; at the beginning of our Sefer we find a description of the wondrous multiplication of Bnei Yisrael, which motivates Pharaoh to enslave them. This means that even the story of his decrees at the beginning of Sefer Shemot is in fact the story of the fulfillment of God's promise to the forefathers that He would make their seed numerous. In chapter 1 of Sefer Shemot, God becomes "known" to Bnei Yisrael as "Kel-Shakkai" – despite the hiding of His face and their great suffering.

Before the stage of battle with Pharaoh and Egypt begins – the stage of redemption - we find first this Divine declaration of intent. But it would not be proper or just for the declaration to emphasize only what had NOT been done, and that needed to be done now: the fulfillment of the promise to the forefathers concerning the land. Just like a person who finds himself at a crossroads before embarking on a new chapter in his life, as he weighs up what he has achieved in his life thus far and what

he intends to do from now onwards in this new chapter, so God in His speech opens with a sort of balance-sheet summarizing what has been done to date in His broad-scoped and multi-generation plan, as opposed to what still needs to be done from now on. What God promised to the forefathers when He appeared to them as Kel-Shakkai – that He would multiply their seed greatly – He has already fulfilled; what remains now to be fulfilled is the other aspect of the promise to the forefathers, and the fulfillment of that aspect – the promise of the land – is the main subject of the rest of the speech.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish.

The unabridged Hebrew version of this shiur is archived at:

<http://www.vbm-torah.org/hparsha-7/hparsha7.htm>.)

Visit our website: <http://etzion.org.il/en>