

*Vayeilech*

**Shuva Yisroel (#1)**

*A synopsis of the Maamar found in Likutei Torah*

Summary

*A Jew’s task in life is to illuminate the world with G-dliness, accomplished through observing Mitzvos.*

*He or she must sometimes struggle against his or her own desires to do this. This struggle is associated with the name of our patriarch Jacob; when the battle is won, it is associated with his other name, Israel.*

*If one transgresses a mitzvah (G-d forbid) he or she does not allow G-dliness to flow into the world. However, all is not lost, for one can gain atonement and a fresh start through sincere repentance.*

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This Shabbos is popularly known as “Shabbos *Shuva*” (the Shabbos of “Return ...”), since it is the Shabbos between the High Holidays of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and we therefore read in the synagogue the prophetic exhortation (Hosea 14:2): “Return, O Israel, unto G d your G-d ...” All this is because the period from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) is especially conducive to “returning to G-d,” repentance from any transgressions we may have done, and so it is appropriate to reflect on the Jew’s relationship with G-d; his or her mission in life; and how, during this period between

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur – commonly referred to as the Ten Days of Penitence – we have an especially good opportunity to make up for past wrongs and start anew.

More fully, the verse quoted above reads, “Return, O Israel, unto G-d your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity.” Iniquity – transgression of G-d’s will – is like a stumbling block impeding an individual from proper progress on the path that will strengthen his or her relationship with G-d. To understand this – just what this relationship is, and how transgressions impede it – let us dwell for a bit on the purpose of life.

G-d Himself is omnipresent and all-powerful; if He did not specifically will it otherwise, the universe and all created entities would be simply overwhelmed by Him and cease to exist in their own right. One may visualize a brilliant light, more blinding than a million suns, filling all of space with its intensity; unless there were some way to conceal or withhold that brilliance, nothing else in the universe would be discernible. Certainly a mere light bulb or candle flame would be imperceptible, overwhelmed in this all-pervasive energy. In a comparable fashion, G-d conceals Himself from our open perception in this world – so much so that a person might not even realize He exists, G-d forbid – since if He were to reveal Himself in all His Glory, the entirety of creation would simply be absorbed in His omnipresence and cease to exist as we know it. When we wish to refer to this aspect of G-d Himself, overwhelming in all His Glory, we use the Tetragrammaton (the four-letter Name of G-d, pronounced *Havaye* in everyday speech); if we mean G-d in His self-imposed state of “incognito” discussed above, we use a word which implies concealment and restriction in Hebrew, the Divine name *Elokim*.

Now, actually, the necessity of concealing the “blinding light” of pure G-dliness from the world is all part of G-d’s

“master plan” of creation: just as a light is most striking and beautiful when it shines forth out of the darkness, G-d deliberately concealed His “light,” but also gave us a means of revealing it even in the resulting darkness of this physical world. This is accomplished through the Torah which He gave to us Jews: each time a Jew performs a mitzvah (religious precept), it’s like flipping a switch that makes the connection between that individual and G-d, causing some of the G-dly “light” to shine on his or her own soul in particular and on the world in general. This open revelation of G-dliness even where it had previously been concealed is one of the most beautiful manifestations of G-d’s sovereignty over the universe; indeed, it is one of the very reasons He created the universe at all. This, then, is our challenge in life: to be the spiritual “lamplighters” of this dark world. It can be a trying task, at times requiring the worshipper to sublimate his or her own natural desire for hedonism in deference to G-d’s will, but this is by no means impossible.

In fact, each Jewish person has an inextinguishable love for G-d deeply rooted in his or her soul, and this is what gives us – and has given us for thousands of years – the motivation and the strength to sublimate our own petty, worldly desires, and even to transform them completely into G-dly desires. This burning love for G-d that should motivate every aspect of a person’s life can be brought out and cultivated by the individual’s reflecting at length on the indivisible omnipresence of G-d, as the verse expresses it (Deuteronomy 4:39): “Know this day and take unto your heart that G-d, He is G-d; in the heavens above and upon the earth below, there is no other.” This loses something in the translation, since in Hebrew it reads, “... take into your heart that *Havaye*, He is *Elokim* ...”; these are the names of G-d explained above.

It is one of the fundamental principles of Judaism that G-d is One in the most perfect and basic unity. Even though He relates to us through various aspects and attributes (such as

those represented by, on the one hand, the name *Havaye*, the unimpeded outpouring of G-d's creative Force, and, on the other hand, the name *Elokim*, the restraining Force that allows this creation by the name *Havaye* to take place to begin with), it would be a cardinal error to think that this implies any sort of plurality in G-d, Heaven forbid. For example, it can be seen that since *Elokim*, the concealing attribute of G-d, is intrinsically necessary for *Havaye*, the creative attribute, to create, *Elokim* itself, in this context, is a function of *Havaye*. This is a profoundly deep concept, and is what the verse actually means by saying, "*Havaye is Elokim.*" (For further elucidation of this concept, see *Tanya*, Part II, chapter 6.) Honest realization that G-d pervades the universe, and is the only true source of existence, stimulates a person to the heartfelt love of G-d that enables him or her to overcome any obstacles to bringing G-dly "light" into the world, and as a reward for our efforts along those lines, in the Messianic era G-dliness will be openly revealed.

In human terms, *Elokim* – concealment of G-dliness – represents a person's worldly pursuits and desires, a feeling that he or she is independent from G-d. It is up to us to bring an appreciation of *Havaye* – G-d's all pervasiveness – into our daily lives, nullifying our own will in deference to G-d.

This is alluded to in the two names of our forefather Jacob: the Hebrew spelling of his name *Yaakov* hints at the struggle to draw *Havaye* (represented in the name *Yaakov* by its initial letter, *Yud* – the initial letter of the written name *Havaye*) into the very lowest levels (represented by the remaining letters, which form the Hebrew word *eikev*, meaning the heel of the foot – the very lowest part of the body). However, after the struggle against corporeality, against "worldliness" – symbolized by *Elokim* – is won, we refer to Jacob's other name, *Yisroel*, which means "... you have struggled with *Elokim* ... and have won." (See Genesis 32:29.)

Now, it is noteworthy that the verse (in I Kings, chapter 18) repeats the phrase “*Havaye is Elokim*” twice. This is because that phrase actually represents two concepts: the first is as we have discussed above; the second is that G-d’s own unknowable, unfathomable Self, so to speak, is infinitely higher than any level of manifestation, even the level of *Havaye*. Compared to G-d’s very “Essence,” as it were, even *Havaye* is considered like *Elokim* – worldly matters.

The significance of this is as follows: A person’s worship of G-d should really begin with the basics and build up from there: by observing mitzvos, he or she should strive to draw the “light” of *Havaye* onto his or her soul. This striving is that associated with the name *Yaakov*; only afterwards can the person attain the level associated with the name *Yisroel*. However, if one transgresses a mitzvah (G-d forbid), one hinders the spiritual benefit of *Havaye* from reaching him or her. This is because the mystical source of the mitzvos themselves is the spiritual level associated with the name *Havaye*, so transgressing mitzvos, G-d forbid, impedes the revelation of that level.

If, as we have said, one must draw *Havaye* to oneself as the starting point of one’s worship, and one has prevented that through transgressing, is the individual now cut off from bringing him- or herself close to G-d? The answer is emphatically NO, for in His mercy G-d always accepts true repentance. When G-d sees that a person repents from the depths of his or her very self, He responds in kind – from His own very Self, so to speak – from the second level of “*Havaye is Elokim*” mentioned above. At this sublime level, even *Havaye*, the source of the mitzvos, is considered like *Elokim*, insignificant worldly matters; any gap left in the revelation of the spirituality that should have shone upon the person from the level of *Havaye*, but which was prevented from doing so by the worshipper’s failure to perform mitzvos, can therefore be filled

in, and he or she gets a chance to start again. Nothing can truly “impede” G-d from relating to a Jew if He really wants to do.

That is why the prophet advises, “Return, O Israel, unto [the second level, the point where even] *Havaye* is your *Elokim*.” And these Ten Days of Penitence, from Rosh Hashana. through Yom Kippur, are especially favorable for achieving this heartfelt repentance.

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