



SoulSpa 3.14 • P. Vaera  
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ברוך אתה יהוה  
אלהינו מלך העולם  
אשר קדשנו במצותיו  
וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה:

Barukh Atah Adonai  
eloheinu melekh ha'olam  
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, YHVH, our God,  
eternal sovereign, who sanctified us  
in God's mitzvot and commanded us  
to busy ourselves in words of Torah.

Divine introduction (from last time):  
God of enoughness • breasts • maternal

Exodus 6:2-13

וידבר אלהים אל-משה ויאמר אליו  
אני יהוה: וארא אל-אברהם  
אל-יצחק ואל-יעקב באל שדי ושמי  
יהוה לא נודעתי להם:

2-3. God spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am YHVH. I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzhak and to Ya'akov as **El Shaddai**, but by My Name **YHVH** I was not made known to them. **NAME CHANGE: who is evolving: God, or "us"?**

וגם הקמתי את-בריתי אתם לתת  
להם את-ארץ כנען את ארץ מגריהם  
אשר-גרו בה: וגם אני שמעתי  
את-נאקת בני ישראל אשר מצרים  
מעבדים אתם ואזכר את-בריתי:

4-5. "I also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their sojourning where they dwelled. And I also heard the moaning of the Children of Israel that the Egyptians enslave them, and I remembered My covenant.

THE PROMISES OF REDEMPTION = THE CUPS AT PASSOVER SEDER

לכן אמר לבני-ישראל אני יהוה  
והוצאתי אתכם מתחת סבלת מצרים  
והצילתי אתכם מעבדתם וגאלתי  
אתכם בזרוע נטויה ובשפטים גדלים:  
ולקחתי אתכם לי לעם והייתי לכם  
לאלהים וידעתם כי אני יהוה  
אלהיכם המוציא אתכם מתחת  
סבלות מצרים:

6-7. "Therefore say to the Children of Israel: 'I am YHVH; I will take you out from under the sufferings of Egypt; I will deliver you from their slavery; I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and by great judgments. I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God, and you will know that I am YHVH your God who frees you from under the sufferings of Egypt.

God does not respond: what is God's intro to the People?

... for all generations

lit, "raised My hand [on oath]"

והבאתי אתכם אל-הארץ אשר  
נשאתי את-ידי לתת אתה לאברהם  
ליצחק וליעקב ונתתי אתה לכם  
מורשה אני יהוה: וידבר משה כן  
אל-בני ישראל ולא שמעו אל-משה  
מקצר רוח ומעבדה קשה:

8-9. "I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Avraham, to Yitzhak and to Ya'akov, and I will give it to you as an **inheritance**: I am YHVH." Moshe spoke thus to the Children of Israel, and they did not hear Moshe from **shortness of spirit** and from hard labor.

(also, breath)

TRAUMA

SHEMA: They couldn't "SHEMA"!

HOW CAN WE HEAR IF WE CAN'T BREATHE?

are these related?

וידבר יהוה אל-משה לאמר: בא  
דבר אל-פרעה מלך מצרים וישלח  
את-בני ישראל מארצו:

10-11. YHVH spoke to Moshe saying: "Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites depart from his land."

וידבר משה לפני יהוה לאמר הן  
בני-ישראל לא-שמעו אלי ואיך  
ישמעני פרעה ואני ערל שפתים:  
וידבר יהוה אל-משה ואל-אהרן  
ויצום אל-בני ישראל ואל-פרעה מלך  
מצרים להוציא את-בני-ישראל  
מארץ מצרים:

12-13. Moshe spoke before YHVH saying, "The Children of Israel did not hear me – so how will Pharaoh hear me, I who am of **blocked lips**?" YHVH spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, and commanded them about the Children of Israel, and about Pharaoh king of Egypt, to take the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. from "blocked," we get "foreskin"

\*\* we forget that God is with us when we suffer \*\*

\*\* "God" teaches us at our evolving "level" of capacity to absorb \*\*

## “I WAS NOT MADE KNOWN TO THEM”

### Exodus 6:3

ושמי יהו"ה לא הודעתני להם:  
passive voice!

... but by My Name YHVH I was not made known to them.

•  
there's more here

לא הודעתני אין כתיב כאן אלא  
לא הודעתני, לא נפרתי להם במדות  
אמתות שלי, שעליה נקרא שמי  
ה', נאמן לאמת דברי, שהרי  
הבטחותים ולא קמתי:

Rashi, Ex. 6:3  
Not written is “I did not make [Myself] known,” but rather “I was not made known.” [That is], I was not recognized by [Moshe’s ancestors] by My attribute of truth, for which I am called YHVH, faithful in the truth of My words, because promises [to them] I did not fulfill [in their lifetimes].

### Sforno, Ex. 6:3

באותה המראה, ולא שניתי  
בעדם שום טבע מטבעי הבלתי  
נפסדים. ולכן ראוי שאודיע זה  
לזרעם שלא קבלו זה מאבותם,  
למען הקים אותם לי לעם, ובכן  
אגאלם.

By such an *appearance*. Until now, I never needed to change nature for their sake: it would have been unseemly. Now it was appropriate to make Myself known to their descendants in ways they could not receive from their ancestors, for the sake of establishing them through Me as a nation, and thereby to redeem them.

### Mekhilta d’R. Shimon Bar Yohai, Tos. 6:2

האבות כשהיה הקב"ה מדבר  
עמהן לא היה קולו מרעיש את  
העולם אלא בחשאי שלא היה  
הצורך להשמיע בני דורו: אבל  
שאר הנביאים כשהיה הקב"ה  
מדבר עמהן היה מרעיש את  
העולם שני (תהלים כ"ט ה') קול  
ה' שובר ארזים

When the Holy Blessed One spoke with the patriarchs, God’s voice would not shake up the world, but it was rather quiet, since there was no need for the people of their generations to hear. But all other prophets [starting with Moshe]: when the Holy Blessed One spoke with them, [God’s voice] shook up the world, as in (Ps. 29:5), “YHVH’s Voice breaks cedars!”

### Shemot Rabbah 6:4

א"ל הקב"ה למשה חבל על  
דאגדו ולא משתכחיו, הרבה  
פעמים נגליתי על אברהם יצחק  
ויעקב באל שדי ולא הודעתני להם  
כי שמי ה' כשם שאמרתי לך ולא  
הרהרו אחר מדותי... ואתה  
תחלת שליחותי אמרת לי מה שמי

The Holy Blessed One said to Moshe: “Alas for the patriarchs no longer here. Many times I revealed Myself to Avraham, Yitzhak and Ya’akov as *El Shaddai* and did not make Myself known, for My Name is [YHVH], the Name I told you, but they did not consider My qualities [*i.e.* who I truly am].... But you, from the start of when I sent you out, said to Me, “What is [Your] Name”?

### Zohar 1:104a

אמר ר' שמעון ת"ח דשכינתא לא  
אעדי מניה דאברהם ביהיא  
שעתא דקב"ה אמר ליה, א"ל ר'  
אלעזר והא שכינתא הנה מליל  
עמיה דהא דא אתגלי עליה קב"ה  
דכתיב וארא אל אברהם [ווגו']  
באל שדי. א"ל הכי הוא ודאי.

R. Shim'on said, “Come and see that Shekhinah did not move from Avraham, so at all times the Holy Blessed One spoke to him.” R. Elazar said to him, “Shekhinah spoke with him, but the Holy Blessed One revealed only at his level, as in (Ex. 6), “I appeared to [the patriarchs] as *El Shaddai*” – to them exactly.

## “FROM SHORTNESS OF SPIRIT”

Interplay of physical - psychological - emotional - spiritual

### Exodus 6:9

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה כֵּן אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה מִקְצָר רוּחַ וּמֵעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:

Moshe spoke thus to the Children of Israel, and they did not hear Moshe from shortness of spirit and from hard labor.

### Rashi, Ex. 6:9

מקצר רוח. כל מי שהוא מצר רוחו ונשימתו קצרה, ואינו יכול להאריך בנשימתו:

*From shortness of spirit* – If one is in narrowness [=anguish], breath comes in short gasps: one cannot lengthen breath.

### Sforno, Ex. 6:9

different ‘kinds’ of knowing  
can’t imagine different reality

מקצר רוח. כי לא נאמנה את אל רוחם, ולא נתנו לב להתבונן.

*From shortness of spirit* – It did not appear believable to their spirits, so their heart could not understand.

### Ibn Ezra, Ex. 6:9

וידבר. ולא שמעו ולא הטו אזן לדבריו כי קצרה רוחם באורך הגלות, ובעבודה קשה שנתחדשה עליהם:

*Moshe spoke* – They could not hear or even incline their ears to his words, for their spirits were short [*i.e.* **impatient**] due to their length of exile and the hard labor newly added to them.

### Ramban, Ex. 6:9

all reality telescopes into suffering

מקצר רוח ומעבדה קשה לא בעבור שלא יאמינו בה' ובנביאו, רק שלא הטו אזן לדבריו מקצר רוח, כאדם שתקצר נפשו בעמלו, ולא ירצה לחיות רגע בצער, מדעתו שינוח לו אחרי כן, וקצר הרוח הוא פחדם שלא יהרגם פרעה בחרב, כאשר אמרו שוטריהם אל משה.

*From shortness of spirit and from hard labor* – It was not that they didn't believe in God and God's prophet: **they paid no attention [at all] from shortness of spirit** – like one whose soul is aggrieved in one's misery and doesn't want to live another moment in one's suffering though they know that later it will be relieved. Their shortness of spirit was fear that Pharaoh would murder them by sword, as their officers said to Moshe.

\*\* THE PUBLIC NATURE OF THE SUFFERING AND LIBERATION MAKES THE PASSOVER STORY, AND THE COLLECTIVE STORY, ALSO “POLITICAL” IN THE PUBLIC SENSE.

### R. Shefa Gold, Torah Journeys: Vaera

At the center of our liturgy is the prayer that says, “Listen! **Sh'ma!**” Listening is the first step in the process of liberation. Va-eyra reveals to us two main obstacles to listening, and here our spiritual challenge is laid out.

The first challenge to listening is “shortness of spirit.” This is sometimes translated as “impatience.” The process of liberation requires great patience and discipline to take the small, necessary steps that will not necessarily relieve our immediate pain. Resolute patience is required to fully rest in the present moment as it is. This full acceptance of “what is” awakens the power of our presence and allows the process of **transformation** to unfold. Here is the paradox: One must patiently BE... in order to BECOME...

THE SPIRITUAL CHALLENGE of [this Torah portion] is to keep the heart open in the face of prolonged suffering and to let the seeds of freedom grow in the darkness.

na'aseh v'nishmah - DO, THEN HEAR  
(what the people will say later at Sinai)  
\*and\*

deep mindfulness - we are not our suffering

how do we see the ‘dark’ as the incubator of ‘light’  
... winter as incubator of spring  
... suffering as springboard for transformation

### R. Sandra Lawson, "Vaera: When Breath is Short"

God speaks to Moses with words of hope and liberation. But when Moses brings this message to the Israelites, the Torah tells us they cannot hear him because of *kotzer ruah* – a shortness of breath, a constricted spirit.

That matters this week. *Kotzer ruah* is what happens when trauma settles into the body. It's the tightness in the chest when we learn a synagogue has been destroyed by fire. It's the shallow breathing that comes with shock, grief, fear, and anger compressed together... In [this Torah portion], God meets the Israelites exactly where they are and says: I hear your groaning. I see your pain. I know...

### R. Kimberly Herzog Cohen, "Turning a Diminished Spirit into Hope"

The root of *kotzer* can mean "to be shortened" but it also can mean "reap, harvest, join together." A well-known use of the word *kotzer* with the meaning "reap, harvest, join together" is Psalm 126:5: "Those who sow in tears, shall reap with songs of joy" (*b'rinah yiktzoru*). In this single, seemingly simple verse, we learn of the possibility to turn *kotzer ruach*, a diminished spirit, into *rinah yiktzoru*, songs reaped in joy – a soul that is shortened, into a sense of hope and promise.

### R. Erin Leib Smokler (on the Sfat Emet)

Moses is to bring a message of salvation to a downtrodden people, promising them that God will – finally – deliver them. After hundreds of years of slavery, generations of oppression and trauma, redemption is nigh. But the people could not hear it. [T]he Israelites were too deeply mired in their pain of the moment to take in future-oriented promises. They could not fathom a reality other than the one they (and their grandparents and their grandparents) inhabited, and so they blocked out even mention of an alternative. They simply could not metabolize what seemed so flagrantly false....

[While Torah records that Moses was a man of "blocked lips,"] Moses could not speak because the people could not hear. That is, he could not communicate with a people so very shut down and unavailable to his messaging. With no a priori buy-in, no openness to taking in new things, Moses, the harbinger of hope, was effectively silenced.

Exile is not a place. It is a condition of being in which we are closed down, shut off, unable to receive, unable to activate our faculties of imagination. It is the state of being stuck, folded into ourselves, unable to open to the presence of another. To exit exile, then, we must render ourselves vulnerable, capacious, receptive. Redemption and revelation demand radical openness, an inner quieting so that we might hear the sounds of the others who call to us. Such an emptying... will return us to deep breath (*neshimah*) and to our expansive souls (*neshamah*). In humbly listening for the whispers of revelation, we simultaneously attune ourselves to intimations of the Divine.

**THIS IS RISKY.  
IT MAY HURT.**

**Martin Buber, "Tales of the Hasidim: Later Masters," 277**

The great Hasidic master Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Kotzk [=Kotzker Rebbe] asked some learned men who were visiting him, "Where is the dwelling place of God?"

Laughing, they responded, "What a thing to ask! Is not the whole earth full of God's glory?" (Isaiah 6)

Menachem Mendel then answered his own question: "God dwells wherever we let God in."

1575 a.k.a. last week

**The 'Kotzer' Rebbe**

מרגישים כשהקב"ה נעדר כביכול רק כשנחסם אותו בזמן שמוצפים ע"י הנסיבות. צריכים להתרגל להבן המציאות הזאת בקוצר רוח ודאי, לקשר את קוצר רוחנו לנשמה הכללית שאין לה גבול ומדה. וא"כ יוצאים מקוצר רוח ע"י מן המצר קראתי יה, ענני במרחב יה. הצעד הראשון הוא לשים לב היכן הכאב אחוז בחוזקה. לנשום עמוק בתשומת לב. לצעוק לגמרי ולנשום שוב. כך לפתוח למרחב יה.

We feel that God is absent, as it were, because – overwhelmed by circumstance – we block God out. We must accustom ourselves to discern this condition from the shortness of spirit itself, then reconnect the shortness of our spirit back to the totality of Spirit that has no boundary or measure. Then we can emerge from it by (Ps. 118:5), "From the narrows I call out to You, and You answered me in Yah's expansiveness." The first step is to notice where pain is held tightly. Breathe in with mindfulness. Cry out completely, let the lungs empty, then inhale again. This is opening to Yah's expansiveness.

**"I WHO AM OF BLOCKED LIPS"**

**Sforno, Gen. 6:12**

וְאֵנִי עֵרֵל שִׁפְתַּיִם. כִּי חָשַׁב שְׁלֹא צָרָף אֶהְרֹן עִמּוֹ אֶלָּא בְּדַבּוּר רִאשׁוֹן שֶׁהָיָה דְּבָרוֹ לְעַם.

*I who am of blocked lips.* For he thought that Aaron would not accompany him except when he first spoke to the people.

**Isaiah 6:5-8**

וְאָמַר אוֹיְלִי כִּי־נִדְמִיתִי כִּי אִישׁ טָמֵא־שִׁפְתַּיִם אֲנִכִּי וּבְתוֹךְ עַם־טָמֵא שִׁפְתַּיִם אֲנִכִּי יוֹשֵׁב כִּי אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ יְהוָה צָבָאוֹת רָאוּ עֵינַי: וַיַּעַף אֵלַי אֶחָד מִן־הַשְּׂרָפִים וּבְיָדוֹ רֶצֶף בְּמִלְקַחַיִם לָקַח מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ: וַיִּגַע עַל־פִּי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נֹגַע זֶה עַל־שִׁפְתֶיךָ וְסָר עֲוֹנֶךָ וְחִטָּאתֶךָ תִּכָּפֵר: וַאֲשַׁמַּע אֶת־קוֹל אֲדֹנָי אֲמַר אֶת־מִי אֲשַׁלַּח וּמִי יֵלְךְ־לָנוּ וַאֲמַר הִנְנִי שְׁלַחְנִי:

I said, "Woe is me; I am lost! For I am a man of impure lips and I live among a people of impure lips – yet my own eyes have beheld the Sovereign YHVH of Hosts." Then one of the *seraphim* flew to me, and in its hand were tongs by which it took a [hot] coal from the altar. It touched it to my lips and said, "Now that this has touched your lips, your iniquity will depart and your sin will be atoned." Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for Us?" I said, "Here I am. Send me."

## Shemot Rabbah 1:26

והיו שם יושביו חרטמי מצרים,  
ואמרו, מתיראין אנו מזה שנוטל  
כתרך ונותנו על ראשו, שלא יהיה  
זה אותו שאנו אומרים שעתיד  
לטל מלכות ממך. מהם אומרים  
להרגו, מהם אומרים לשרפו,  
והיה יתרו יושב ביניהן ואומר  
להם, הנער הזה אין בו דעת, אלא  
בחנו אותו, והביאו לפניו בקערה  
זהב וגחלת, אם ישיט ידו לזהב  
יש בו דעת והרגו אותו, ואם ישיט  
ידו לגחלת אין בו דעת ואין עליו  
משפט מות. מיד הביאו לפניו  
ושלח ידו לקח הזהב, ובא גבריאל  
ודחה את ידו ותפש את הגחלת  
והכניס ידו עם הגחלת לתוך פיו  
ונכוה לשונו, וממנו נעשה ...:

Egypt's magicians were sitting there and said: "We are afraid of this one who takes your crown and puts it on his head, lest he be the one of whom we said that he is destined to wrest your kingdom from you." Some said to behead him, some said to burn him. Yitro was sitting in their midst and saying to them: "This boy has no *da'at* [=knowing]. Rather, test him. Bring before him a bowl with gold and [a bowl] with a hot coal. If he extends his hand to the gold, he has *da'at* and [you should] kill him. If he extends his hand to the coal, he has no *da'at* and he has no sentence of death." Immediately, they brought [them] before him and he extended his hand to take the gold. Gavriel came and pushed his hand. He seized the coal and placed his hand with the coal into his mouth, and his tongue was burned. From that he became (Ex. 4:10) "slow of speech and slow of tongue."

## Jessica Jacobs, "Moses and this Moment"

When God comes to Moses and asks him to speak to Pharaoh as God's prophet, Moses replies he is unworthy as he has *aral sfatayim* [=blocked lips]. Often translated as "impeded speech," the literal translation is much stranger: "uncircumcised lips." Yet *aral* can also mean "unharvested" and *sfatayim*, "language."

What might it mean to have "unharvested language?"

When crops remain unharvested, they go to seed and stop producing. When we speak without first considering our words, repeat and repost ideas and slogans without thinking, or add our names to petitions we haven't completely read, we let our critical faculties lay fallow and the better parts of ourselves go to seed within us. From Moses's hesitation, we learn we can instead opt to tend our words with care, choosing which to compost and which to share, which aspects of ourselves to cultivate and which to witness as they arise but not react to or act upon.