

**The Practice of Ehyeh:  
Groundlessness, Awareness, Vulnerability, and Intimacy**

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**Introduction**

Ehyeh, the name of God revealed at the burning bush, is the deepest divine name according to the Kabbalah. Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla (1248–after 1305), in his classic work *Sha'arei Orah* (Gates of Light), teaches that if the Tetragrammaton (YHVH)<sup>1</sup> is the trunk of the tree of divine names and all the other names are the branches of that tree, then the name Ehyeh is the essence of the tree, the pith or the sapwood<sup>2</sup>—that which carries the tree's life-force, and from which both roots and branches grow.<sup>3</sup> When we ask about the nature and meaning of the name Ehyeh, therefore, we are asking what the deepest essence of divinity is—or perhaps what the real nature of God is behind the masks and varied manifestations that humans encounter.

By reading the biblical text in which the name Ehyeh appears, we can explore not only the nature of this specific name but also how we might encounter this most essential of the divine names. In other words, the story of the encounter between God and Moses at the burning bush may give us insight into how we too might encounter this name, how we too might encounter the deep truth of divinity, the essence of the tree. We learn from Moses, as a model of the

exemplary practitioner, and we can take that with us onto our own spiritual path. With these two goals in mind, let us enter our text: reading it critically, midrashically, and spiritually in order to discern the meaning of this rarest and deepest of divine names.

### Awareness

Our text begins by describing Moses' encounter with the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–4), telling us:

Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness (*aḥar ha-midbar*), and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. An angel of YHVH **appeared** to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He **gazed**, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses said, "I must turn aside to **look** at this marvelous **sight**; why doesn't the bush burn up?" When YHVH **saw** that he had turned aside to **look**, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am."

The root *resh-ayin-bei*, "to see," appears six times in these four verses (and are bolded in the above passage). The text is asking us to notice that there is something significant about sight here, about awareness, about being able to look.<sup>4</sup> It is Moses' attentiveness, his noticing of the burning bush, which sets this whole narrative in motion. Awareness, it seems, is the very condition of possibility of the revelation of the name Ehyeh. It is Moses' willingness to turn aside and pay careful attention that allows him to see that the bush is burning but is not consumed. How long would one have to look to notice this crucial aspect? It is certainly not something that is immediately obvious. Indeed, one wonders if the burning bush has not been there, burning

but unconsumed, from the moment of creation, and Moses is simply the first human able to truly see it.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps revelation has been waiting all this time for someone to come along, someone who is present and courageous enough to receive it.

It is, then, God's seeing of Moses' curious attentiveness that causes God to call out to Moses. That is: it is the combination of Moses' seeing and God's seeing that brings revelation. And Moses—precisely because he is already present, because he is aware—responds, when he is called: *Hineini*, “Here I am.” There is, then, a practice here of awareness, of direct seeing, which is what brings about the divine-human encounter and with it (shortly enough) the revelation of the name Ehyeh.

Yet what kind of seeing is this? We are told that Moses encounters the bush when he “drove the flock into the wilderness” (*aḥar ha-midbar*). There are two things to notice about this text. First, like so much of Jewish revelation, it takes place in the wilderness, in the desert—the place that is the most stripped bare, the simplest, the most open, the most uncomplicated. There is a texture in the desert of bare attention, of the removal of complexity, of seeing without addition. The desert calls on our awareness, our seeing, to be scrubbed bare, to be direct, to be penetrating and even uncompromising, and at the same time to be wide and expansive. It calls for a naked and radically expansive awareness, ready to meet everything just as it is: unclothed, unmasked, and undivided from the All of which it is a part. Second, we can midrashically read the phrase *aḥar ha-midbar*, “into the wilderness” (literally “behind the desert”) as *aḥar ha-midabbeir*, “behind speech” or “other than speech.” This seeing or awareness thus occurs behind that which speaks; it is other than that which communicates linguistically. It takes place somewhere other than in the realm of the conceptual, the realm of language. Again, this describes a kind of bare seeing, a penetrating non-conceptual

awareness which is what enables this process of revelation and the liberation and insight which emerge from it. In modeling Moses' approach, we are then also called on to bring a bare, non-conceptual, and radically expansive awareness to our experience in order to uncover the deep nature of what is.<sup>6</sup>

### **Vulnerability and Intimacy**

Yet seeing is not enough in and of itself; there are other qualities that are necessary to make revelation possible, qualities that transform the texture of awareness itself. When Moses responds to God's call with *hineini*, God replies with one of the most famous commands in our sacred texts: "Do not come closer. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). What is the significance of this command for Moses to remove his shoes? Why is approaching the Divine barefoot so important?

On one level, taking off one's shoes is an act of vulnerability and intimacy. When we take off our shoes, our experience of the ground becomes more direct. It is not always comfortable, but we are more sensitive, more in contact, more available to sensation. We are more intimate with the earth and with the experience of walking. When we take off our shoes our feet are less protected, more vulnerable. Indeed, the whole point of shoes is to protect our feet, to make them more comfortable and less vulnerable to injury.

Taking this imagery a bit deeper, taking off our shoes may suggest not just a greater degree of contact with experience but even an erotic intimacy and vulnerability, the vulnerability of stripping ourselves bare (like the desert), of truly being open to another. In the Book of Ruth, Ruth's "uncovering of Boaz's feet" (at 3:7) certainly appears to be a euphemism for the uncovering of his genitals and an erotic

invitation.<sup>7</sup> Reading this text about the burning bush in dialogue with the Book of Ruth, and in the spirit of kabbalistic exegesis where the erotic encounter between both the masculine and feminine Divine and human practitioners and the Divine is perhaps the central metaphor, we can understand this instruction to remove one's shoes before one approaches the Divine as an erotic invitation to make love with Divinity, an invitation to deep intimacy and vulnerability. It is an invitation to walk with intimacy and connection, to "walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet" as Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh puts it.<sup>8</sup>

This command to remove one's shoes may also be a call to return to an original innocence and purity, the nakedness and intimacy of the Garden of Eden, as my colleague Rabbi Jeff Roth has suggested.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps it is asking us to be childlike in our wonder and delight in encountering the Divine.

Whatever the case, this call for intimacy, sensitivity, and vulnerability is in dialogue with the opening motif of seeing and awareness. On the one hand, from real seeing *comes* intimacy and connection. When we see truly, we are close, intimate, and vulnerable. When we see truly, we open to that which we see—whether it is another person, nature, or the Divine. When we see truly, we allow ourselves to be touched and transformed by that which we see; we are vulnerable and open. On the other hand, to see truly *requires* intimacy and vulnerability. We have to be ready to be touched and transformed in order to see. Otherwise we protect ourselves, blocking ourselves from truly seeing what is there. If we want to encounter revelation, insight, and transformation, then vulnerability is the path and intimacy is the way. It is scary and it is challenging, but we cannot see truly without being willing to let down our guard and take off our armor. Awareness and vulnerability therefore need each other. We can read the opening few verses of our text as marshalling

both of these qualities, to enable the encounter with the Divine.

Yet on another level, we can understand the removal of the shoes, following the hasidic masters, as the removal of the locks of habituation that “lock” us into the various habits and patterns of heart, mind, and body that stop us from being free, and from becoming who we want to be and who we genuinely are. Taking the Hebrew word for “shoes,” *na'alayim*, as related to the word for “locked,” *na'ul* (since both words share the same root, *nun-ayin-lamed*), and similarly connecting the words for “feet,” *raglayim*, and “habits,” *bergeilim* (which likewise share a root, *resh-gimel-lamed*), the hasidic masters understands Moses’ removal of his shoes as his letting go of and being liberated from habits and patterns. These are the habits and patterns we all have that lock us into smaller and more contracted versions of our selves.<sup>10</sup>

The lock may be different for each one of us. It may be anger, anxiety, jealousy, stress, desire, judgment, fear, pride, the desire for control, needing things to be a certain way, thinking we already know, or a host of other dispositions, feeling, and ways of thinking. The Torah is asking us to inquire what it is that is blocking us from being free. What is keeping us imprisoned in unhealthy ways of being, ways of being that block us from divinity, that keep us isolated and cut off? What habitual patterns are we caught in that stop us from being vulnerable, from touching and being touched by the world, from experiencing divinity? In what habitual ways do we respond to specific situations, persons, or events that are not helpful and do not serve us or others? In twelve-step programs, insanity is described as the way in which we respond over and over again to certain situations in habitual ways while expecting different results. We return to the same habitual argument, expecting *this* time that that argument will somehow bear fruit and be productive, that we will finally prove ourselves right—but the argument somehow never is productive.

Where is your insanity? Where would you like to become sane? Like Moses, we are asked to let these habits and patterns go, to take them off, to strip ourselves bare, to unlock the bolt on our cage, so that we can encounter what is already there, so that we can experience the holiness of this ground.

It is not easy. Like walking barefoot on rocky ground, it can be uncomfortable to do this. That act of giving up can feel unsafe. But it is essential if we want to encounter divinity, if we want to encounter what is.

Whether we are removing our shoes and our coverings to come into more intimate and vulnerable contact with what is, or releasing the patterns that have kept us locked in habitual ways of being, we are called upon to let go of that which separates us, that which locks us inside. As we bring mindfulness, we are called on to be in more intimate contact with our experience, in all of its complexity and discomfort—to see truly what is before us and to see truly what is within us, and to be trapped in neither.

### Compassion

What, then, is the next step in our journey? The biblical text continues (Exodus 3:7–9):

And YHVH said, “I have surely seen (*ra'oh ra'iti*) the plight of My people in Egypt and have heeded their outcry because of their taskmasters; yes, I am mindful of their sufferings. I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me;

moreover, I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them.

When one sees and becomes intimate with one's experience, the natural result is compassion. Compassion arises from the ability to see vulnerably. Indeed, continuing the emphasis on vision and awareness found in the first few verses, God says "I have *surely seen* [*ra'oh ra'iti*, a classic biblical doubling of the verb to emphasize the act of seeing] the plight of My people in Egypt" and "I have **seen** how the Egyptians oppress them." When one sees truly and vulnerably, one sees suffering and one is called upon to try to transform that suffering—whether one is human or Divine. It is only because the Divine has "surely seen" that God is "mindful of their sufferings" and therefore has "come down to rescue them from the Egyptians." Seeing brings awareness, which brings compassion, which brings action. Yet for seeing and awareness to bring compassion they must be warm, intimate, and vulnerable, not a cold detached observation that is unmoved by that which it observes. When we truly see our own suffering and the suffering of others with vulnerability and intimacy, then compassion spontaneously arises.

Yet on the other hand, we can tell this same story from the other direction. As Rabbi Jeff Roth suggests, compassion is not only the result of this awareness but it is its cause as well.<sup>11</sup> It is compassion, God's seeing the suffering of Israel, that sets this whole story in motion, that creates the burning bush and the call to Moses. It is what caused Moses to flee Egypt, his compassion making him unable to stand idly by as his people suffered. Though again here, the circle turns again the other way. It is both the Divine's awareness of Israel's suffering and Moses' awareness of his people's suffering that give rise to the compassion that sets the scene for revelation. To say this another way: on the one hand, seeing intimately gives rise to compassion; on the other hand, to see our suffering truly with



vulnerability and intimacy, we need to bring compassion. Both are true, both directions are vital, and they work best in dialogue with each other, each moment of awareness and intimacy supporting a moment of compassion and each moment of compassion supporting a moment of awareness and intimacy. We come with love to the darkness that is inside and out so that the light can shine and we come with light to the darkness so that love can shine. As Pablo Neruda puts it:

If each day falls  
inside each night,  
there exists a well  
where clarity is imprisoned.

We need to sit on the rim  
of the well of darkness  
and fish for fallen light  
with patience.<sup>12</sup>

That is our practice: fishing for our light with kindness and patience. Bringing compassion and illumination to the well of darkness to liberate the clarity and love that is within.

### **Transformation/*Lekh L'kha*/Liberation/No-Habituation**

What follows are two verses that take us two steps further and then bring us to that deepest of names, Ehyeh. First, Moses is told: “Now go, and I will send you to Pharaoh, and you shall bring forth My people, the Israelites, from Egypt” (Exodus 3:10). The eyes have seen, the feet have touched, the heart has been moved, and now there is the call to action. Go. In one way, it is the call to go to the world with

the compassion now awakened in the heart. In another sense, Moses is being told “Don’t stay here”—don’t hang out in the desert, in your father-in-law’s house, trying to forget the suffering of your people. Don’t hang out in the place you ran away to, in the many places our minds run away to, because being with what actually *is*, is scary and challenging. Don’t hang out in those places we flee to (Twitter, chocolate, sex, food, Facebook...) to escape our true experience, our emotions, our disappointments, our pain, our failures, or anger, our shame. Turn around. Return. You are being sent on a mission of compassionate liberation, whether that mission is to those suffering out there or the parts of you suffering in here. Don’t stay in the known and the safe, that which leaves you unsatisfied but comfortable, to a degree. Step forward onto the path of liberation. Return to where you were before, but with a different awareness, a different consciousness. Return.

### Self and Doubt

But Moses is caught, still. He is not yet ready to move. He is caught in a question of some sort. The passage continues: “But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring forth the Israelites from Egypt?’” (Exodus 3:11). On one level, Moses’ question is just an expression of a lack of confidence. “Who am I” to do this task, Moses asks. And God responds on that level with reassurance: “I will be with you (*ehyeh immakh*).” This is crucial, to know in our moments of doubt and uncertainty that someone is walking with us, accompanying us on this journey into the unknown. The importance of such companionship, the sense of support it affords, cannot be underestimated.

But, reaching for a deeper level of understanding, Moses’s question

can be read differently by focusing on his use of the pronoun *anokhi*, instead of the more familiar *ani*, to mean “I.” The form *anokhi*, a form of “I” more formal in its feeling and associated deeply with the I-ness of God,<sup>13</sup> points us toward a different question, the question of I-ness itself, the question of who we are. On this level Moses is asking more deeply and existentially: “Who am I?” What is this I-ness I experience? How does this I-ness manifest in the world? How is it related to liberation? To that question, God responds: “... for Ehyeh [literally “I-Will-Be,” using a simple verbal form as a proper noun] is with you.” Something about who and what Moses is, is tied up in this name of becoming which is Ehyeh.

### Ehyeh

What is the nature of the divine answer? When we look with intimacy, vulnerability, and compassion, when we ask who we truly are, what do we see? God responds to Moses’ question by saying: “I will be with you / for Ehyeh [I-Will-Be] is with you; that shall be your sign that it was I who sent you. And when you have freed the people from Egypt, you shall worship God at this mountain” (Exodus 3:12). As I have already pointed out, the nature of the answer is unclear. Is God simply promising to be with Moses, or is God saying that the divine name Ehyeh will be with Moses? And in what way is either of these readings a sign that Moses is sent by God?

Then our passage continues (Exodus 3:13–14):

Moses said to God, “When I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what shall I say to them?” And God said to Moses, “Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh (“I-Will-Be-That-Which-I-Will-Be”).” He continued, “Thus shall

you say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh (“I-Will-Be”) has sent me to you.’”

Moses asks for God’s name. He asks for God’s identity, God’s essence, who God is. And the response he receives is bizarre. There is no name less name-like than “I-Will-Be-That-Which-I-Will-Be.” He asks for an identity, he asks for a name, and he receives the opposite: no identity, no stability, and no name. He asks to know who God is, he conveys the imagined desire of the people to know who God is, and God responds that the Divine is always unfolding. There is nothing there to pin down; there is no name in a conventional sense. There is rather just a pointer to the nature of divinity as process.

So too we find a similar curious response in the other famous scene where Moses asks to know God. In Exodus 33:18–23, Moses asks:

“Oh, let me behold Your Presence!” And He [God] answered, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name YHVH, and I will grant the grace that I will grant and show the compassion that I will show. But,” He said, “you cannot see My face, for human beings may not see Me and live.” And YHVH said, “See, there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen.”

Moses asks to know God, to see God’s glory. Yet he is told that what he will see is (1) God in motion, (2) God’s name YHVH, itself seemingly a non-existent form of the verb “to be,”<sup>14</sup> (3) God’s unpredictable or inexplicable actions, as in “I will grant the grace that I will grant and show the compassion that I will show,”<sup>15</sup> and (4)

God's back (perhaps also in motion). That is: Moses asks to know something stable, something certain, the nature of the Divine, but he receives process and instability, being and becoming and literally a glancing familiarity with the movement of God. "I will grant the grace that I will grant and show the compassion that I will show" is hauntingly close to "I will be that which I will be." It is as if Moses is asking to truly know God deeply and totally, and God is telling him it doesn't work like that. There is no God to know in that way, or there is no way to know God in that way. You can't be with God as a face, as an identity, as a fixed thing. You can only see the Divine pass; you can only be with a process, a relationship, a becoming, and a mystery.

Returning to our own passage, God offers Moses this name which is not a name: I-Will-Be-That-Which-I-Will-Be. And then, as Rabbi Jeff Roth beautifully suggests, perhaps there is a pause, a gap, where Moses does not know how to respond, where Moses does not fully understand that it is not a name.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps there is a beat between verses thirteen and fourteen. Then, given Moses' confusion, God continues: "Thus shall you say to the Israelites, 'Ehyeh (I-Will-Be) sent me to you.'" Moses asks for a name but God refuses to give him one, instead saying only "I'll be what I'll be." Don't try to pin Me down. Don't give Me an identity. Don't give Me a name. And when Moses can't quite take that in, God compromises and says: "Okay, tell them My name is 'I-Will-Be.'" It is a kind of compromise. God offers a name, but a name that undoes the very nature of a name, a name that promises change, transformation, and instability.

Realizing how challenging that is, God continues: "And God said further to Moses, 'Thus shall you speak to the Israelites: YHVH, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you: This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity'" (Exodus 3:15). It is as

if God realizes that this deep name which is not a name, for it is just ordinary language (indeed, just two verses before it is not clear if it is meant as a name or just as “I will be”), is still too challenging. So the Divine offers another alternative, YHVH, a name that is still about being and becoming, providing no identity but just a sense of movement—but which, because of its unique non-ordinary form, at least has the feel of an actual name.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, it is the name we call “The Name.” It is, according to Gikatilla, the trunk of the tree, the outward appearance of the inner essence of Ehyeh. Yet it is not the essence. The essence is “I will be that which I will be.” Even being, in a certain sense, is not ultimate. There is only becoming, only movement, only transformation.

This is, if read as we have suggested, a profoundly disturbing passage. Moses asks to know God’s nature and the response is that there is nothing fixed, nothing stable, nothing to rely on. Following the logic of our reading, we understand that when we look closely and clearly with intimacy, vulnerability, and compassion, we receive a revelation of the Divine, a revelation of how things are. And what is the nature of the way things are? Things are unstable, they are in process. To say this of the world—that there is nothing stable, nothing to pin down, nothing with a clear and reliable identity—is destabilizing enough. But to say this of the Divine, the final refuge, the Rock of Israel, is radical! We ask for God’s name, God’s identity and God responds: “Always unfolding!” That is not a name. It is not an identity in any standard sense. But it is a deep truth.

There is something terrifying and destabilizing about this truth, about having nothing secure, nothing reliable, nothing stable, nothing one can count on ultimately in a colloquial way. Not my identity, my job, my relationships, my money, my respect, my success, or my life. None of these is stable. None of these is reliable. And yet there is something incredibly hopeful and liberating about this

approach. Nothing is fixed, nothing is stable, nothing is forever. Yes, right now the structure of Egyptian society is like this. And it seems inevitable, “God-given” and unmovable. But it can and will change, because change is the nature of how things are. This is the profound hopefulness of the exodus, a hopefulness that has inspired movements of liberation through the centuries.

It is in this way that God’s response “I will be” is an answer to Moses’ existential question “Who am I?”—asking in the form *anokhi*, the formal, deep, divine I-ness, rather than in the form of the more colloquial *ani*. God is letting Moses know that Moses, just like God, has no identity, no self, no fixed point to hold onto and say, “This is who I am.” There is only a process of change, of movement, and of becoming. There is nothing to hold onto. There is nothing solid. In this way, God answers the simple meaning of Moses’ question. Who am I to do this? You are a process, no more or less than any other being or thing. It is a lesson in humility but also a lesson in your equal nature and worth to every other creature. No one owns anything. No one has his or her successes and accomplishments. They are just more passing processes, not essentially *you* in any way. And God conveys that our being just processes is not paralyzing. Simply because we were mistaken about who we are doesn’t mean we cannot act. We do not need to be things, stable identities and selves to bring liberation. Indeed, precisely when we open to the true nature of who we are, liberation comes of its own—both as an inner transformation and as the call of love to transform the world around us.

The Reform prayerbook *Gates of Understanding* includes this passage, attributing it to Ralph Waldo Emerson:

The gods we worship write their names on our faces, be sure of that. And we will worship something—have no doubt of that either. We may think that our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of the heart—but it will out. That which

dominates our imagination and our thoughts will determine our life and character. Therefore it behooves us to be careful what we are worshipping, for what we are worshipping we are becoming.<sup>18</sup>

What is the Torah teaching us in its description of the revelation of Ehyeh? What are we be asked to worship? We are being asked to worship becoming, process, and instability. We are being asked to worship groundlessness. It is the hardest thing to worship, the hardest thing to devote ourselves to. But it is what is fundamentally liberating. It allows us to become transformation, liberation, openness, joy, play, celebration, and passion. It allows us to free our hearts so that they can open naturally to love and compassion. It allows us to see things as they really are.

It is here that we must end for now, even though it is here that the real questions begin. How does one worship groundlessness? How does this bring liberation? What is it that the name Ehyeh demands of us and what is it deeply telling us about the nature of reality, the Divine, and our lives? How are our fear and resistance to instability the actual path to our liberation? I hope to address these questions elsewhere. But for now, the Torah has led us through a process of liberation and revelation, a process of discovering who and what we are, who and what the Divine is, and the liberation which results from that. It teaches us that if we pay careful, intimate, vulnerable, and compassion attention then we can begin to discover our true nature, and that our heart will open to compassion for ourselves and the world. It teaches us that in groundlessness can be found not just chaos but rather an open-hearted desire to heal ourselves and the world, and the recognition of the possibility of doing so. It teaches us eternal hope—for though it may not be thus right now, we can always say “Ehyeh, I will be.”



## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Representing the letters *yod-hei-vav-hei*. The Tetragrammaton is often translated as “Lord,” following the tradition to pronounce it as “Adonai,” the Hebrew word with that meaning. In this essay, that translation will be misleading, as we are interested in the very nature of the four letters themselves.

<sup>2</sup> These are the two innermost parts of a tree.

<sup>3</sup> *Sba'arei Orab* (Warsaw: Bros. Orgelbrand, 5643 [1882/1882]), introduction, p. 3. s.v. *da ki kol sh'motav*.

<sup>4</sup> This connection between sight and awareness is carried through in later texts, particularly ones that explore the concrete practice of cultivating mindfulness or awareness. See the *Pri Ha-aretz* (Brooklyn, 1959) of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk (c. 1730–1788), where various forms of the verb *l'histakkeil*, “to look or gaze,” are used to denote a form of awareness, mindfulness, or type of consciousness. Indeed, as far as I can discern, every use of *l'histakkeil* in *Pri Ha-aretz* that is not a quotation refers to an operation of consciousness rather than an actual operation of the senses. See, for instance, the use of *l'histakkeil* in the following *parshiyot*: No'ah, p. 2b; Vayera, p. 4b; Vayeshev: Sermon for the Sabbath before Hanukkah, p. 6b; Mishpatim, pp. 11b–12a, Behar, pp. 16b–17a; Matot-Masei, p. 20b; Ekev, pp. 23a–b; Re'eh, p. 24b; and Shoftim, p. 25a. This is also precisely the word used to describe mindfulness practice in the texts of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapira (1889–1943), the Piaseczner Rebbe. See, for instance his *B'nei Maḥshavah Tovah*, in the section called *Seder Emtza'ei Vi-y'sod Ha-hevrab* §§6:17–18 and 10:25–26 (Jerusalem: Va'ad Ḥasidei Piaseczno, 5749 [1988/1989]), pp. 17–18 and 25–26. Rabbi Shapira is particularly significant as he provides the most developed concrete description of mindfulness in Jewish sources. See his unparalleled, to my knowledge, description of mindfulness as a concrete practice both in the “Technique of Quietening,” *Derekh Ha-melekh* (Jerusalem: Va'ad Ḥasidei Piaseczno, 5755 [1994/1995]), pp. 451–452; and *Hakhsbarat Ha-avreikhim, M'vo Ha-she'arim, Tzav V'zeiruz* (Jerusalem: Va'ad Ḥasidei Piaseczno, 5761 [2000/2001]), chap. 9, part 4, pp. 117–130. The Vitebsker here is a possible source of this terminology. See my own article “Mindfulness, Memory, Sensory Consciousness, and *Vida Contemplativa* in *Peri haAretz*,” in *Alchemy of Love in Search of a Promised Land*, trans. and eds. Aubrey L. Glazer and Nehemia Polen (forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> Compare, for instance, the midrash on the ten (miraculous) things created before twilight on the sixth day of creation (Pirkei Avot 5:8, B. Pesahim 54a), which suggests that all miracles are in fact hardwired into creation (Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* II 29). The burning bush does not appear as one of the ten things in this midrash, however.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the hasidic texts mentioned in the note 4, Rabbi Joseph

Gikatilla in his *Sha'arei Orab* also describes a form of sensory non-conceptual knowledge, here associated with hearing rather than seeing. See, for instance, the tenth “gate” of his *Sha'arei Orab*, pp. 198–211.

<sup>7</sup> The verse reads: “Boaz ate and drank, and in a cheerful mood went to lie down beside the grain pile. Then she went over stealthily and uncovered his feet and lay down.” See Israel Drazin’s extensive discussion of the erotic nature of the uncovering of the feet in Ruth in his “What Did Ruth and Boaz Do on the Threshing Floor?” (July 21, 2017), online at <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/what-did-ruth-and-boaz-do-on-the-threshing-floor/>. Drazin writes:

[Naomi] instructs [Ruth] to “wash herself, anoint herself [put on perfume], and dress [in her best clothes]” (3:3). This is usually not needed for a conversation. The only other time that the three instructions are used in Scripture is in Ezekiel 16:9–10, in regard to preparation for marriage.... Ruth should then see where Boaz lies down, and then “go in and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what you should do.” Is the uncovering of his feet a euphemism? The word used here and translated as “feet” is *margelotav*, bearing the root *r-g-l*, “foot.” However, the term only appears in the Bible in regard to the unique feet (or lower extremity) of an angel in Daniel 10:6, where Daniel describes a vision he had of an angel that did not look like a human. Isaiah 6:2 uses the usual word for feet and states that he saw a vision in which an angel covered his face and feet with wings. Why did the angel need to cover his “feet”? Is it possible that Naomi (or the author of the tale) is using this form of “feet” as a euphemism for penis? If not, why does Naomi instruct her to uncover his feet? If the purpose was to alert Boaz that she was present, wouldn’t it make more sense to uncover the upper part of his body?”

He points (in footnote 2) to other biblical examples where “feet” seem to be a euphemism for genitals: 2 Samuel 11:8 (where King David instructs Uriah to “go down to your house and wash your feet,” clearly meaning sexual activity); Isaiah 7:20 (where it is said that Assyria will shave the Israelites’ beards and “the head and hair of the feet”); and Deuteronomy 28:57 (which speaks of an afterbirth that comes out from between a woman’s “feet”).

<sup>8</sup> Thich Nhat Hang, *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, ed. Arnold Kotler (New York, Toronto, London, et al.: Bantam Books, 1991), p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Meditation talk, March 22, 2018, in Hannaton, Israel. He also argues that the clothes may represent a mask or sense of identity, which we put on as a defense.

<sup>10</sup> I recall (perhaps incorrectly) that this teaching is hasidic, but I cannot find its origins in hasidic sources. A few sources seem to read *na'alekha* as a kind of lock or block specially associated with materiality; see, e.g., the *K'dushat Levi* to Shemot (Brooklyn: Mukatsch, 1991), pp. 29b–30a, s.v. *va-yar malakh*; or the

*Sefer Toldot Yaakov Yoseif to Masai* §1 (Jerusalem: Agudat Beit Vilelipali, 1973), p. 63b.

<sup>11</sup> Meditation talk given on March 22, 2018, in Hannaton, Israel.

<sup>12</sup> Pablo Neruda, "If each day falls," in his *The Sea and the Bells*, trans. William O'Daly (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2002), p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> It is the word *anokhi* which is the opening word of the Ten Commandments: "I (*anokhi*) am YHVH your God" (Exodus 20:2 and Deuteronomy 5:6).

<sup>14</sup> The verb "to be" in Hebrew takes on various forms, none of which are YHVH. But the word YHVH contains all of the elements of a form of the verb to be and could be read as "will be, is, was."

<sup>15</sup> God will do what God will do, the text seems to say, without providing a way of understanding that, a reason, or a way of predicting what will happen.

<sup>16</sup> Meditation talk March 22, 2018, Hannaton, Israel.

<sup>17</sup> And, as an extra bone, God offers a history of relationship. If this is too hard for you, know I've been in relationship with this ongoing process that is your people for some time.

<sup>18</sup> Chaim Stern, *Gates of Understanding* (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1977), vol. 1, p. 216, who claimed inspiration from the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, to whom this quote has been attributed with uncertain accuracy.

