

“He encountered the place and slept there”

Yaakov Ovinu Revealed that HKB”H Is Referred to as “Mokom” because He Establishes Every Creatures Proper Place

We read in this week’s parsha, parshas Vayetzai: **“ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה, ויפגע במקום וילן שם כי בא השמש, ויקח מאבני “המקום” וישם מראשותיו וישכב במקום ההוא”**—and Yaakov departed from Be’er Sheva and went to Choron. He encountered the place and slept there, because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place and he put them around his head and lay down in that place. Rashi comments: **“ורבותינו (ברכות כו:): פירשו לשון תפלה (ירמיה ז-טז) ואל תפגע בי, ולמדנו שתיקן תפלת ערבית, ושינה הכתוב ולא כתב ויתפלל, ויפגע**—our Rabbis explained that the word **“ויפגע”** is an expression of prayer; we learn from here that Yaakov instituted the Arvis service; the possuk employed this term instead of **“ויתפלל”** to teach you that the earth contracted for him, i.e. his journey was miraculously shortened.

The Sifsei Chachomim writes in the name of Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi that in light of this elucidation--that Yaakov instituted the Arvis service--we can deduce that: **“ויפגע במקום”**—indicates that he prayed to HKB”H, Who is referred to as “Mokom”. The appellation “Mokom” expresses the fact that HKB”H is “the place of the universe”. The source for this notion is the Midrash (B.R. 68, 9): **“ויפגע במקום. רב הונא בשם רבי אמי אמר, מפני מה מכנים שמו של הקב”ה וקוראים אותו מקום, שהוא מקומו של עולם ואין עולמו מקומו”**—the Midrash provides an essential clarification; the universe exists in Him; He does not exist in the universe.

It is appropriate, therefore, that we examine the following: (a) what is the significance of HKB”H’s name “Mokom”? (b) Why does Yaakov Ovinu reveal the fact that HKB”H is known as “Mokom” precisely at the moment when he institutes tefillas Arvis: **“ויפגע”**? We do not find this appellation for HKB”H when Avrohom Ovinu institutes tefillas Shacharis or when Yitzchok Ovinu institutes tefillas Minchah.

HKB”H Provides a Location for the Universe to Exist

Let us begin our journey toward enlightenment by introducing what the Maharal of Prague writes in Chidushei Aggados (Shabbes 145b). He addresses the issue of HKB”H being referred to as “Mokom”, because He is the site within which the universe exists:

“דע כי הדבר שהוא יושב על מקומו, הוא הדבר שהוא מקיים [כלומר שיש לו קיום], כי הדבר [שהוא] גולה ממקומו אין לו חזק, ולפיכך נקרא הישוב מקום והמ’ נוספת, ושורש המלה קום, כי מקומו הוא קיום שלו. והוא יתברך שהוא חזק כל הנמצאים וקיומם, נקרא בשביל זה מקום על שם שהוא נותן קיום לכל”.

Only something that has a designated place of its own is able to exist and be sustained. Something exiled from its rightful place lacks force. Hence, a settlement is called a “Mokom”. The root of the word “Mokom” is **קום**, and the letter “mem” is added on—indicating that a thing’s place sustains it! [Translator’s note: the Hebrew word “kiyum” means continued existence.] Seeing as the Almighty, blessed is He, is the force that sustains all of creation, He is referred to as “Mokom”.

We learn from the Maharal that the word “Mokom” is derived from the word **“מקיים”** (mikayeim), because a place sustains the existence of an item located on its site. Now, HKB”H created the universe and sustains it constantly, as it is written (Nechemyeh 9, 6): **“ואתה מחיה”**—and You sustain all of them. Were HKB”H to remove His life-force, the entire universe would cease to exist. Clearly, it is inappropriate to state that the universe is His place or that He is located in the universe--suggesting that He requires a location. In fact, the opposite is true; He is **“מקומו של עולם”**—“the place of the universe”. HKB”H provides a location and sustains the reality of creation. Our teacher the Rama expresses this idea as follows in Toras HoOiloh (3, 4): **“וכבר ידוע אמרם שהקב”ה מקומו של עולם, וסובל בכוחו העליונים והתחתונים, וממציאו האמת, והיותו נותן חיים ומציאות לכל חי”**.

Let us develop our simple understanding of the concept that HKB”H is **“מקומו של עולם”**—one step further based on Yisroel’s declaration at the Red Sea (in Shirat HaYam; Shemos 15, 12): **“נטית ימינך תבלעמו ארץ”**—You stretched out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them. Regarding this declaration, Rashi provides us with a tremendous insight: **“נטית ימינך, כשהקב”ה נוטה ידו הרשעים כלים ונופלים, לפי שהכל נתון בידו ונופלים בהטייתה, וכן הוא אומר (ישעיה לא-ג) וה’ יטה ידו וכשל עוזר ונפל עוזר, משל לכלי זכוכית הנתונים ביד אדם, מטה ידו מעט והן נופלין ומשתברין”**. Everything

is contained in HKB”H’s hand and the contents fall when He stretches His hand out. So, when HKB”H stretches out His hand, the wicked fall and are terminated. It is analogous to a glass item a person holds in his hand; when he stretches out his hand and releases his hold on the item, it falls and shatters.

We can explain Rashi’s comment based on a possuk in Yeshayah (48, 13): “אף ידי יסדה ארץ וימיני טפחה שמים”—also, My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has measured out the heavens. According to this possuk, that HKB”H created the universe with both hands, so to speak. It stands to reason, therefore, that when He sustains creation--“ואתה מחיה את כולם”—He continues to do so using both hands. Regarding this notion, Rashi adds the idea that HKB”H holds the universe in His two hands in order to sustain it. He deduces this from the possuk above: “נטית ימינך תבלעמו ארץ”—You stretched out Your right hand, the earth swallowed them.

Thus, we learn that the entire universe is held and exists in HKB”H’s two hands, as it were. He then manages creation by stretching out his hand in one direction or another. We can suggest that this is inferred by Dovid HaMelech, “Yisroel’s sweet psalmist”, when he says (Tehillim 145, 16): “פותח את ידך ומשביע לכל חי רצון”—You open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing. For, with the very hands that He holds the universe, He provides sustenance for all of creation. This reality is implied by the formula instituted in the berochoh of Modim: “על חיינו המסורים בידך”—we thank HKB”H for every detail of our lives, since they are controlled by His hands. We can now understand why HKB”H is called “Mokom”. For, He is “the site of the universe”—“מקומו של עולם”; everything is located and exists in his hands just like a person is located in a particular place.

HKB”H Is Called “Mokom” because He Establishes a Place for Everything He Created

Having given the matter much thought, I would like to propose a practical explanation for the fact that HKB”H is described as “Mokom”, based on a principle of the Arizal’s. He teaches us that all of HKB”H’s names are related to His functions and interactions with His creations. When He functions in a merciful capacity, He is referred to by the name Havaya; when he functions in a capacity of judgment, He is referred to by the name Elokim. In similar fashion, every divine appellation is determined by the attribute with which HKB”H is conducting creation at any particular moment.

It follows, therefore, that whenever HKB”H is referred to by the name “Mokom”, it reflects the fact that HKB”H establishes the appropriate location and unique status for each element of creation. He determines where one will dwell, whether He will be poor or rich, strong or weak, wise or foolish. HKB”H determines what best

suits each and every individual based on His divine knowledge; He determines the circumstances that will insure a person’s success and the likelihood that the person will fulfill his mission in this world and complete his “tikun”.

This sheds some light for us as to why the Torah employs this unique expression specifically regarding Yaakov Ovinu on his way to Choron: “ויפגע במקום”—he encountered HKB”H--“מקומו של עולם”, “the site of the world”. Yaakov realized that he was experiencing a tremendous transformation in his life. Throughout the entire sixty-three years of his life, while living in his parents’ house, he studied Torah and served Hashem—as the possuk states (Bereishis 25, 27): “ויעקב איש תם יושב אהלים”—but Yaakov was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents. For clarification, Rashi comments: “אהלו של עבר”—he spent his time in Shem’s tent and in Ever’s tent. Then, suddenly, everything changed. He was instructed by his mother, Rivkah, to take the berochos from Yitzchok. As a result, he incurred the wrath of Eisov, who wished to kill him, forcing him to flee to Choron.

This prompted Yaakov to reflect on what Hashem had done to him. He was forced to flee from his parents’ house--where he studied Torah day and night--and journey to Choron—to labor day and night for the wicked Lovon. When he “encountered the place”—“ויפגע במקום”—he recalled what he had learned in the study halls of Shem and Ever and found strength. He had been taught that HKB”H is called “Mokom”, because He is “the site of the world”. He determines the place and status of every creature. Knowing that HKB”H had determined that this was the appropriate time for him to leave his parents’ house and to move on to a new location such as Choron provided him with the requisite strength. He understood that this new location was the proper place for him to succeed in establishing the house of Yisroel.

Yaakov Ovinu Instituted Tefillas Arvis to Pray about the Darkness of Golus

Continuing along this path let us rise to the occasion and endeavor to explain why the Torah refers to HKB”H by the name “Mokom” precisely at this time—when Yaakov instituted tefillas Arvis. We will base our explanation on the commentary here of the Zera Kodesh, authored by the great Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy”a. He addresses the question of why Yaakov institutes tefillas Arvis on his flight to Choron and refers to the commentary of the Ramban (Lech Lecho): “אומר לך כלל תבין אותו בכל הפרשיות הבאות בענין אברהם יצחק ויעקב, והוא ענין גדול הזכירוהו רבותינו בדרך קצרה, ואמרו (תנחומא פרשת לך סימן ט) כל מה שאירע לאבות סימן לבנים.” Here the Ramban introduces a basic principle, based on the Midrash Tanchuma (Lech Lecho 9), that plays a vital role throughout the parshiyos involving Avrohom,

Yitzchok and Yaakov: the events experienced by the Ovov foretell future events that their descendants will experience—"ma'aseh Ovov siman la'banim".

According to this understanding, Yaakov's flight to Choron alludes to the subject of golus. Consequently, he instituted tefillas Arvis, the nighttime prayer service, specifically, to pray about the darkness of the golus. This is why Yaakov alludes to the fact that HKB"H is described as "Mokom"—"ויפגע במקום". He wished to teach his descendants, Bnei Yisroel, an important lesson; even when being exiled from place to place, they should remain stalwart in their faith in Hashem. He wanted future generations to always remember that HKB"H is called "Mokom", because He determines the appropriate place for each and every individual. Clearly, then, HKB"H has determined that during times of golus that is where Yisroel belong in order to rectify and clarify the holy sparks and portions of the Torah that are dispersed throughout the world.

You Should Not Have Ambivalent Feelings Regarding HaMokom

Support for this idea can be found in the writings of the great Rabbi Aharon of Karlin, zy"a, in his sefer Beis Aharon (Vayeitzei):

"ויפגע במקום. ויפגע הוא לשון תפלה, שהתפלל לפני הקב"ה, שבכל מקום שיהיה שלא יהיה לנו חלוק על המקום, ובכל מקום יהיה לנו שוה עם המקום, כמו שאומרים בשם הרב הקדוש רבי שלמה קארלינר זצוק"ל, על מה דאיתא במדרש וכן פירש רש"י בחומש על פסוק (דברים ו-ה) ואהבת את ה' אלקיך בכל לבבך, פירוש שלא יהיה לבך חלוק על המקום.

ואמר הפירוש על המדרש, אשר בכל מקום שהוא - יעבוד את השי"ת, כי יש בני אדם כשהם באיזה מקום ואינם עובדים את השי"ת, אומרים שהמקום גורם, כי אם היה באיזה מקום אחר בודאי היה עובד להשי"ת, על זה אמר המדרש שחלילה לומר כן, לזה אמר שלא יהיה לבך חלוק על המקום, כי לא המקום גורם ח"ו איזו מניעה לעבודתו יתברך.

כי כיון שהכל מאתו יתברך, ורצון השי"ת הוא שיהיה האדם כעת במקום הזה, מסתמא גלוי לפניו יתברך שזה המקום לא יגרום שום מניעה ח"ו לעבודתו יתברך, רק המניעה הוא מצד האדם, לכך אמר המדרש שלא יהיה לבך חלוק על המקום שהוא שם, ועל זה התפלל יעקב אבינו ע"ה, שבכל מקום שיהיה לא יהיה לבך חלוק על המקום."

"He encountered the place" teaches us that he prayed to HKB"H that whatever the circumstances and wherever he might find himself, his faith in Hashem—HaMokom—should always remain free of ambivalence. Additionally, he prayed that he would always serve the Almighty no matter where he might find himself. There are those who blame their current location for their failure to properly serve Hashem. The fact that a person is in a certain place at a certain time is the will

of G-d. Clearly, then, failure to serve Hashem is a personal failing and not due to one's location.

We can now begin to understand why Yaakov Ovinu prayed for these things—alluded to by the phrase "ויפגע במקום"—while instituting tefillas Arvis. Seeing as Yaakov instituted tefillas Arvis as the nighttime prayer service to pray about the darkness of golus, he beseeched HKB"H—"ויפגע במקום"—that no matter where Bnei Yisroel are, even in golus, they accept HKB"H's sovereignty. Additionally, he prayed that Bnei Yisroel believe wholeheartedly that HKB"H is known by the name "Mokom", because He determines and establishes the location, status and circumstances that are necessary for a person to achieve his "tikun" and fulfill his mission in this world.

"With His Word He Brings on Evenings with Wisdom He Opens Gates

With this introduction, we can shed some light on the formula instituted by our blessed sages for the opening berachah of tefillas Arvis: "אשר דברו מעריב ערבים, בחכמה פותח שערים, ובתבונה משנה עתים ומחליף את הזמנים, ומסדר את הכוכבים במשמרותיהם ברקיע כרצונו"—Who brings on evenings by His word, with wisdom opens gates, and with understanding alters moments, and transforms the times, and arranges the stars in their watches in the firmament according to His will. Let us endeavor to understand the association between "Who brings on evenings" and "with wisdom He opens gates". Additionally, which gates are being referring to here?

Based on what we have learned, we can suggest that our blessed sages intended to provide Yisroel with moral support during the darkness of the golus. They wished to prevent them from falling into the depths of despair after HKB"H took them down from spiritual and material heights to the extreme depths of golus. The sages believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that HKB"H—"the site of the universe"—arranged for Yisroel to move around from place to place for their own ultimate benefit. The process of golus was designed so that Yisroel could complete their "tikun" in exile. In keeping with this notion, the Gemorehh states (Pesochim 87b): "לא הגלה הקב"ה—את ישראל לבין האומות אלא כדי שיתוספו עליהם גרים"—HKB"H only exiled Yisroel among the nations, so that they would add converts to their numbers. Our teacher, the Arizal, (Shaar HaMitzvos, Eikev) explains that the Gemoreh is referring to sparks of kedushah that are concealed among the nations—and not necessarily actual converts. They are refined and then returned to the realm of kedushah by means of Yisroel's service of Hashem.

This then is the meaning of the prayer: "with His word He brings on evenings"—with His harsh words, HKB"H confiscated the brilliant light achieved by Yisroel at the pinnacle of its glory and replaced it

with the darkness and doom of golus. Nonetheless, it is essential that we realize: “with wisdom He opens gates”. At the very moment that HKB”H “brings on evenings”, he opens new gates that have been previously unopened. For, during the periods of exile, new “tikunim” and refinements are made that were not accomplished during the times that the Beis HaMikdash stood.

The formula of the berochoh continues: **“ובתבונה משנה עתים”**—and with understanding He alters moments—in order to open these gates of refinement, it is necessary for HKB”H to alter and transform the moment of Yisroel’s glory and sovereignty to a moment of golus; **“ומחליף את הזמנים”**—and He transforms the times—from the brilliant light of day to the darkness of night prevalent during golus; **“וימסדר”**—and He arranges the stars in their watches in the firmament according to His will—He arranges the cosmos to coincide with the divine management operative during golus. All of these changes are designed for Yisroel’s benefit, so that they may open these new gates while in golus.

“With Wisdom He Opens Gates” Was Fulfilled by Yaakov Ovinu

Upon consideration, it appears that this process perfectly describes the events that transpired involving Yaakov Ovinu. On a broader level, He instituted tefillas Arvis to address the darkness of golus—a period of time during which HKB”H opened up new avenues of “tikun” and refinement. On a more personal level, Yaakov initially dwelled in his parents’ house, imbued with the light of Torah and service of Hashem. Then his stable, tranquil world was turned upside down in keeping with the formula: **“אשר בדברו מעריב ערבים”**—with His word He brought on evenings. Darkness descended upon his world, he was forced to flee to Choron and to serve Lovon HaArami.

In truth, the formula **“בחכמה פותח שערים”**—with wisdom He opens gates—is also applicable to Yaakov Ovinu. In Choron, HKB”H opened new gateways that were previously closed. This allowed Yaakov to extract the holy Imohois, Rochel and Leah, from Choron, who were held captive in the domain of Lovon HaArami, the root of tumeh. There he fathered the holy tribes from whom all future generations of Yisroel would descend. To accomplish this monumental feat: **“ובתבונה משנה עתים”**—HKB”H transformed the moment of Yaakov sitting at the top of the world in his parents’ house to the moment of his exile in Choron. As we know, everything transpired for Yaakov’s benefit—so that he could establish the house of Yisroel.

All of these events are related to the occurrence of: **“ויפגע במקום”**—he encountered the place. On that occasion, he instituted tefillas Arvis addressing the darkness of golus; he prayed to Hashem that Yisroel remember, even during times of golus, that HKB”H is

called “Mokom”, because He is “the site of the world”—designating the appropriate site for each individual to achieve his “tikun”. To accord with these events, our blessed sages instituted the following formula at the beginning of tefillas Arvis: **“אשר בדברו מעריב ערבים”**—with His word, he brings on evenings—indicating that even at times when it appears that HKB”H has brought the darkness of night, we should always remember: **“בחכמה פותח שערים”**—he simultaneously opens new gateways of opportunity.

In fact, it is extremely reassuring for every Jew to realize that even in his direst moments, chas v’shalom, when he appears to be trapped in darkness: **“אשר בדברו מעריב ערבים”**, nevertheless, he should believe with all his heart: **“בחכמה פותח שערים”**—that although gateways that were initially open have now been closed—for they have served their purpose—in reality, new gateways, that were closed until now, have been opened to him. So, rather than persisting to knock on the original gates that have been closed, he must now knock on new gates. He should also pray to Hashem to open up these new gates for him—in the words of Dovid HaMelech (Tehillim 118, 19): **“פתחו לי שערי צדק אבא בם אודה יה, זה השער לה צדיקים יבואו בו”**—open for me the gates of righteousness; I will enter them and thank G-d. This is the gate of Hashem; the righteous shall enter through it. This concludes the first part of our investigation; we will now proceed to explore the concept of “Mokom” based on the methodologies of “remez” and “sod”.

The Name “Mokom” Emanates from the Four Letters of the Holy Name

For those who appreciate the dimension of “remez”, I have come up with a special treat. We have focused on the fact that the Torah mentions HKB”H’s name, “Mokom”, specifically with regard to Yaakov’s institution of tefillas Arvis—addressing the darkness of the golus. We find that one of the Rishonim, the Avudraham comments on the formula recited in the Pesach Haggodeh: **“ברוך המקום ברוך”**—**“הוא, ברוך שנתן תורה לעמו ישראל”**—Blessed is the “Mokom”, blessed is He; blessed is the One who gave the Torah to His people, Yisroel.

He explains how HKB”H is alluded to by the name “Mokom”. When each letter of the name Havaya is multiplied by itself and we take the sum of these numbers, the total equals the numerical value of the name “Mokom” (40+100+6+40=186). How so? “Yud” equals ten; ten times ten equals one hundred. “Hei” equals five; five times five equals twenty-five. “Vav” equals six; six times six equals thirty-six. Then once again five times five equals twenty-five. The sum of these numbers: 100+25+36+25=186, the numerical value of “Mokom”. Thus, we see that the name “Mokom” emanates from the holy name Havaya, the ultimate name of HKB”H.

Let us provide an explanation for this phenomenon based on Rashi's famous comment (Bereishis 1, 1): **“בראשית ברא אלקים, ולא אמר ברא ה’, שבתחלה עלה במחשבה לבראותו במדת הדין, וראה שאין העולם מתקיים, והקדים מדת הרחמים ושתפה למדת הדין, והיינו דכתיב (בראשית ב-ד) ביום עשות ה’ אלקים ארץ ושמים”**—the Torah opens with the name Elokim rather than the name Havaya, because initially Hashem intended to create the world with the attribute of “din”—judgment; however, He saw that the world could not live up to this standard and would not sustain; hence, he partnered the attribute of “rachamim”, mercy, with the attribute of “din”. This is reflected in the possuk (Bereishis 2, 4) which employs both the name Havaya and the name Elokim—with the name Havaya appearing first.

This conveys the fact that were it not for the name Havaya—which HKB”H placed before the name Elokim—the universe would not have been able to continue to exist. We see, therefore, that HKB”H sustains creation by means of the four letters of His holy name—which represents “rachamim”. We now have a wonderful explanation as to why the revelation of HKB”H’s name “Mokom”—indicating that “He is the site of the universe” and sustains the universe—emanates specifically from the four letters of the name Havaya. For, HKB”H sustains the universe by means of the four letters of the name of “rachamim”—which He placed before the name of “din”, attesting to its priority.

The Name Havaya Hides within the Letters of “Mokom”

In truth, a very reasonable question presents itself. Seeing as the name “Mokom” is rooted in the name Havaya, why describe HKB”H as “Mokom”, at all? Why not just refer to Him by the name Havaya? As we have explained, HKB”H created the world and sustains it with the name Havaya, to which He gave preference over the name Elokim. Nevertheless, it is impossible to ascertain the immense light associated with the name Havaya without some external covering. For this very reason, it is prohibited to utter the name Havaya as it is spelled and written; instead, we substitute the pronunciation **“אדני”**—a-do-nai. Thus, it should be clear to us that it is impossible to create a physical place—a “Mokom”—in this world directly from the name Havaya, without some form of restriction and outer covering.

Additionally, let us introduce what the author of the Tanya writes in Shaar HaYichud V’haEmuneh (Chapter 1). The elements of creation—the inanimate objects, the plant life, the animals and human beings—are unable to receive their life-force directly from the actual letters of

the “asarah ma’amarot”—the ten utterances with which the world was created. Rather they must receive their sustenance via alternate letters that filter and limit the light, layer by layer, one level at a time, until even the lowliest elements of creation are able to receive their life-force from there.

Now, we can also begin to appreciate the reason HKB”H created the location of the universe by multiplying the four letters of the name Havaya—each letter times itself—to arrive at the sum equal to the numerical value of “Mokom”. For, it is impossible to create a physical place directly from the name Havaya without intermediaries and outer layers. In this case, the layers are provided by exchanging for each original letter the square of that letter, i.e. the letter multiplied by itself. The result is that the purely spiritual Havaya is transformed into the physical “Mokom”—within which the immense light of the name Havaya is hiding.

This is why we refer to HKB”H as “Mokom”—implying that “He is the site of the world”. In this manner, we wish to express our tremendous faith in Hashem. On the surface, it appears to the undiscerning eye as if the physical place in this world—the “Mokom”—is entirely corporeal and lacks any divine light or spirituality. That is far from the truth, however. In fact, the light of Hashem is hiding within the “Mokom”. After all, the physical “Mokom” is generated by the squaring of the letters of the name Havaya. The result is that HKB”H, “the site of the world”, a world entirely filled by His glory, sustains all places in creation by means of the name Havaya.

Thus, we have explained very nicely why Yaakov Ovinu mentioned the name “Mokom” when he instituted tefillas Arvis—as it is written: **“ויפגע במקום”**—and he encountered the place. As explained, he instituted the nighttime service to pray regarding the darkness of the golus. Therefore, he beseeched Hashem that even in the darkness of golus, his children would remember—no matter where they would be exiled to—that the physical “Mokom” stems from the name Havaya representing the attribute of “rachamim”. In his infinite mercy and kindness, He determines and assigns every creature its proper location and status. Yaakov Ovinu wanted them to realize that in golus the name Havaya is hiding within the name “Mokom”. Having in mind the union of the “Mokom” of golus with the name Havaya—which generates the numerical value of “Mokom”—they would be able to mitigate the harshness of the decree of golus by drawing upon the “rachamim” emanating from the name Havaya.

Donated by Dr. Ralph and Limor Madeb
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