

# Likkutei Sichos

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## Turning Justice into Mercy

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## 1.

### A PECULIAR RASHI

Regarding the verse,<sup>1</sup> “*Elokim*<sup>2</sup> remembered Noach and all the beasts...,” Rashi quotes the phrase, “*Elokim* remembered,” and comments:<sup>3</sup>

This Name connotes the Attribute of Justice, but it was transformed into the Attribute of Mercy through the prayer of the righteous. The wickedness of the wicked, in contrast, transforms the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of Justice, as it says,<sup>4</sup> “*Havayah*<sup>5</sup> saw that man’s evil was great.... *Havayah* said, ‘I will dissolve....’” This name connotes the Attribute of Mercy.

The verses “*Havayah* saw that man’s evil was great...” and “*Havayah* said, ‘I will dissolve’” present the same difficulty as our verse (as Rashi himself says in his commentary).

— That is, Hashem’s conduct described in the verse seems inconsistent with the Name (and Attribute) stated. (Regarding the clause, “*Havayah* said, ‘**I will dissolve**’” [an act of strict justice and severity], the verse uses the name *Havayah* — the Attribute of Mercy; and regarding the clause, “*Elokim* **remembered**...,” the verse uses the name *Elokim* — the Attribute of **Justice**.) —

Nevertheless, Rashi does not address this issue in his commentary on the earlier verses. This needs to be clarified: Why does Rashi pause to explain the later verse (in our *parshah*) and not the earlier verse, “*Elokim* saw...” (in *parshas Bereishis*)?

Furthermore, specifically in his commentary on our verse, “*Elokim* remembered,” Rashi also explicates for the first time the novelty recorded in the earlier verses, “{*Havayah*} saw... {*Havayah*} said” (alluding to the Attribute of Mercy being transformed into the Attribute of Justice)!

This indicates that the earlier verses do not necessarily call for this interpretation. It is precisely the verse “*Elokim* remembered” that provides such compelling evidence for his interpretation (that the Attribute of Justice was transformed into the Attribute of Mercy) to the extent that it also informs our understanding of the earlier verses, “{*Havayah*} saw... {*Havayah*} said.” This suggests that those verses also mean that the Attribute of Mercy was transformed into the Attribute of Justice {a transformation of attributes}.

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<sup>1</sup> *Bereishis* 8:1.

<sup>2</sup> {*Elokim* is the name of Hashem that represents the Attribute of Justice.}

<sup>3</sup> {Rashi on *Bereishis* 8:1;} based on *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 32, par. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Bereishis* 6:5-7,

<sup>5</sup> {*Havayah*, also known as the Tetragrammaton, is the four-letter name of Hashem, spelled *yud-hei-vav-hei*. *Havayah* is the name of Hashem that represents the Attribute of Mercy.}

We cannot answer that until the verse “*Elokim* remembered,” we were unaware (in the realm of *pshat*)<sup>6</sup> that the name *Havayah* connotes the Attribute of Mercy and the name *Elokim* connotes the Attribute of Justice (as is seemingly implied from Rashi’s wording: “This name connotes the Attribute of Justice..., this is the name of the Attribute of Mercy” — a writing style Rashi uses to present a novel idea he derives from a verse). —

This is because (aside from the need to clarify this point itself — How does the verse “*Elokim* remembered” provide more insight into the names {of Hashem} than the earlier verses, “*Havayah* saw... *Havayah* said...”? — moreover, and most importantly) right at the beginning of the Torah, concerning the verse, “(In the beginning of) ***Elokim’s*** creating,”<sup>7</sup> Rashi already informs us in his commentary:<sup>8</sup>

It does not say, “***Havayah’s*** creating,” because it first arose in {Hashem’s} thought to create the world with the Attribute of **Justice**. But He saw... and gave precedence to the Attribute of Mercy..., as it says,<sup>9</sup> “On the day that *Havayah*, *Elokim* made....”

## 2.

### MERCY OR JUSTICE

This will be understood by first examining the nuanced wording in Rashi’s commentary cited above (regarding the verse, “*Elokim’s* creating”) — “But He saw that the world could not endure and He gave precedence to the Attribute of Mercy and joined it to the Attribute of Justice”:

Rashi’s wording, “**He gave precedence** to the Attribute of Mercy,” indicates that Hashem did not merely **join** the Attributes of Mercy and Justice so that the world would be governed by both Attributes in (equal) partnership. Instead, He gave precedence to the Attribute of Mercy over the Attribute of Justice (as reflected in the order of the Names in the verse, “On the day that *Havayah* (and subsequently), *Elokim* made...”). This means that the Attribute of Mercy is the **primary** Attribute. When the world is being weighed on whether it should be governed by the Attribute of Mercy or Justice,<sup>10</sup> the Attribute of Mercy (takes precedence and consequently) outweighs the Attribute of Justice.

In any case, it is understood that all occurrences in the world must follow the decision and “ruling” of the Attribute of Mercy. Even Divine **punishments** cannot be administered

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<sup>6</sup> {“The plain meaning of Scripture. Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of Scripture.” When the plain meaning is understood clearly, Rashi does not comment.}

<sup>7</sup> *Bereishis* 1:1.

<sup>8</sup> {Rashi on *Bereishis* 1:1.}

<sup>9</sup> *Bereishis* 2:4.

<sup>10</sup> See **Rashi** on *Bereishis* (1:26): “These tend to the right for {arguing} for innocence, and these....”

without the agreement of the Attribute of Mercy (because if Hashem’s governance would allow justice to be executed **without** [the consent of] the Attribute of Mercy, this would lead again to a state in which “the world could not endure”).

[The Attribute of Justice is also essential (“and joined it to the Attribute of Justice”) since the purpose of the world’s creation is — as **Rashi** explains<sup>11</sup> — “for the Torah.” In simple terms, this means (not only that the Torah exists but also) that the Jewish people — “for Israel”<sup>12</sup> — should **learn** the Torah (and fulfill its *mitzvos*). Thus, “justice” (reward and punishment) is necessary to ensure that the Jewish people will study the Torah, which gives the world “the right to exist.”

Yet, for the world to endure, the Attribute of Mercy is (also) essential. In fact, its influence takes precedence and outweighs the Attribute of Justice.

### 3.

#### CLARIFYING RASHI

On this basis, it is readily understood why Rashi is not troubled by the verses in *Bereishis* that say, “**Havayah** saw.... **Havayah** said, ‘I will dissolve,’” instead of {using the name} “*Elokim*”:

Since Hashem **gave precedence** to the Attribute of Mercy over the Attribute of Justice, and even Divine punishment cannot be administered without the agreement of the Attribute of Mercy, as explained above, the verse must use the Attribute of Mercy. If the verse had said, “**Elokim** saw.... **Elokim** said, ‘I will dissolve,’” it would have been perplexing: How could the decision and conduct expressed by the term “I will dissolve” result from the Attribute of Justice (*Elokim*) alone? What happened to the determination that “**He gave precedence** to the Attribute of Mercy **and joined it** to the Attribute of Justice?”

Thus, Scripture must address this by saying (that even though the judgment **practically** came through the Attribute of Justice — *Elokim* — still), “**Havayah** said, ‘I will dissolve.’” The decision and “ruling” — “I will dissolve” — came from **Havayah**, the Attribute of Mercy.

Even though {one may ask}, “I will dissolve” **practically** came through “*Elokim*,” how does the verse say, “**Havayah** said, ‘**I will dissolve**’”? We could explain that this is an

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<sup>11</sup> Rashi on *Bereishis* 1:1, s.v., “*bereishis bara*.”

<sup>12</sup> Rashi, *ibid*.

“abbreviated verse” (as Rashi has previously<sup>13</sup> explained, there are “verses that abbreviate their wording”). It is as if it would have said, “*Havayah* said, ‘I will dissolve,’” based on (*Havayah*’s agreement with) the name **Elokim** (the Attribute of Justice).

While this is not an entirely smooth explanation, it is smoother than explaining “*Havayah* said, ‘I will dissolve’” to mean that justice **practically** was executed through the Attribute of Mercy (“*Havayah*”). This is because it is entirely unreasonable to suggest (especially according to *pshat*) that a **human being** can (through his actions or prayer) **transform** the Attributes of **the Holy One!**

It makes sense that through prayer, repentance, etc., a person can awaken mercy from Hashem, or conversely, his undesirable conduct can cause the Attribute of Mercy to agree that he deserves punishment (which is then carried out through the Attribute of **Justice**).

However, it does not make sense to say that **the Attribute of Mercy itself** should be **transformed** (through a human act!) to the extent that it itself “engages” in executing justice and punishment.

#### 4.

#### THE NOVELTY IN OUR VERSE

Interpreting the verse, “*Havayah* said, ‘I will dissolve,’” in this way (that the Attribute of Mercy agreed that destruction of the world was necessary) fits only when discussing the Name *Havayah* (the Attribute of Mercy). After all, “**He gave precedence** to the Attribute of Mercy,” making it the primary attribute and the ultimate arbiter of all of the world’s affairs, as explained above. Thus, the Attribute of Mercy can even be attributed to an act of justice.

In contrast, the verse “*Elokim* remembered,” which discusses merciful conduct, presents a difficulty: How does it make sense to say “**Elokim** remembered” using the Name denoting the Attribute of Justice?

Even if we say that something additional was accomplished — not only that the Attribute of Mercy overpowered the Attribute of Justice, but also that the phrase “*Elokim* remembered” means that the Attribute of Justice agreed with ***Havayah*** when it “remembered” with mercy — the idea remains difficult. It would be similar to the discussion above regarding the verse, “*Havayah* said, ‘I will dissolve.’” Yet, it seems far-fetched to

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<sup>13</sup> Rashi on *Bereishis* 1:1, s.v., “*bereishis bara*”; similarly, Rashi on *Bereishis* 4:15; et al.

suggest that “*Elokim* alone remembered,” attributing the act of remembering solely to “*Elokim*,”<sup>14</sup> the Name that denotes the Attribute of Justice.

Therefore, Rashi must explain that our verse introduces a novel idea — “remembering” happened through *Elokim* (the Attribute of Justice). Not only did the Attribute of Justice agree to the act of remembrance, but it was **carried out** through “*Elokim*” — the Attribute of Justice transformed into the Attribute of Mercy.

Once we are compelled to introduce this novel idea that a human being has the power to transform Hashem’s attributes, it makes sense that the verse, “*Havayah* said, ‘I will dissolve,’” is also not abbreviated. Instead, “I will dissolve” came from *Havayah* (the Attribute of Mercy) itself because “the wickedness of the wicked transforms the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of Justice.”

## 5.

### THE NEED FOR TRANSFORMATION

However, this requires further clarification: Why was it necessary that “*Elokim* (be the Attribute that) remembered” for the abundant prayers of the righteous to transform the Attribute of Justice into the Attribute of Mercy? Was it not sufficient for “remembered” to be (solely) from the Name of *Havayah*?

The explanation: “{*Elokim*} remembered... Noach” marked the beginning of the covenant that Hashem later made with Noach: “Never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”<sup>15</sup> This covenant negated the **possibility** of a future flood.

For this, it was insufficient (for the remembrance) to come solely from the Attribute of Mercy (with the Attribute of Justice merely not “opposing” or even “agreeing” to it). If this were the case, it would mean that from the perspective of the Attribute of Justice, another flood was possible.

Therefore, it had to be brought about that “***Elokim*** remembered.” In other words, the Attribute of Justice itself transformed into the Attribute of Mercy. It was explicitly this transformation that negated the possibility of another flood.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> It should have said, “*Havayah* remembered,” or, “*Havayah Elokim* remembered.”

<sup>15</sup> *Bereishis* 9:11.

<sup>16</sup> Note *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 53 ff.

## 6.

### THE DEEPER MEANING

The deeper explanation of these ideas is as follows:

The verse, “*Elokim* remembered Noach...,” is recited in the *Musaf* prayer of Rosh Hashanah as one of (and, in fact, the first one of) the verses of Remembrances. This needs some clarification:<sup>17</sup>

The subject of all the verses of Remembrances is the remembrance of the (Covenant that Hashem made with the) **Jewish people**. Although we say,<sup>18</sup> “You remember the world’s dealings and recall **all** that was created in days of yore,” still, the (**primary**) Remembrance of Rosh Hashanah concerns the Jewish people. “All that was created in days of yore” is remembered by remembering the Jewish people.

Hence, why do we recite the verse, “*Elokim* remembered Noach...” — a Remembrance relevant to the general existence of the **world** (following the Flood)?<sup>19</sup>

The explanation given<sup>20</sup> is that the subject of this Remembrance (which happened **before** the Covenant) was primarily (not regarding the world, but rather) “about Noach himself, due to the inherent value of the Jewish people.” Thus, we say,<sup>21</sup> “You also remembered Noach **with love**,” referring to the “deep and essential love” (for the Jewish people).

However, this calls for further clarification: Immediately following the words, “You also remembered Noach with love,” we continue to say, “You were mindful of him with a promise of salvation and mercy when You brought the waters of the Flood... **Therefore his remembrance came before You...**” This implies that this Remembrance was **in order** to make a covenant guaranteeing the world’s continued existence.

The explanation: The covenant made with Noach regarding the world’s existence was not merely to ensure the world would endure (and would not be destroyed again by a flood). The covenant was also made to ensure the world would align with the intention and objective of its creation.<sup>22</sup> And because the world was created “for the Jewish people,” it is understood

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<sup>17</sup> For the following discussion, see *Hemshech* 5672, vol. 1, ch. 201; see later {*Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 20} p. 372 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Text of the *Musaf* prayer for Rosh Hashanah (“זְכָרֹנוֹת, Remembrances”).

<sup>19</sup> This is particularly difficult considering that there are multiple verses of remembrances in Scripture that pertain to the Jewish people.

<sup>20</sup> *Hemshech* 5672, vol. 1, ch. 201.

<sup>21</sup> Text of the *musaf* prayer for Rosh Hashanah (“זְכָרֹנוֹת, Remembrances”).

<sup>22</sup> See {*Sefer HaMaamarim*} 5708, “*Va’yarach*.”

that Noach's Covenant was connected with the Remembrance (that preceded and led to the Covenant) "about Noach himself..., due to the inherent value of the Jewish people."

## 7.

### INFINITE POWER

This concept — that the Covenant made with Noach for the world's continued existence was to ensure that the world would align with the intention behind its creation — mirrors the accomplishment of the Covenant that there should be no change or interruption in the way the world runs: "Continuously, all the days of the earth... shall not cease."<sup>23</sup>

The unchanging quality of nature demonstrates that a force beyond limitation is invested in it — the power of the *Ein Sof* {the Infinite}.<sup>24</sup> This is because (like all creations) nature, qua nature, cannot be eternal, **devoid** of change, if not for a (Divine) power that is **higher** than change that is invested in it — "I am Hashem, I do not change."<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the strength and power invested in the **world's** existence through this covenant (is not a matter of **concealment**. On the contrary, it) is a matter of **revealing Hashem's Infinite power** (which is immutable).

## 8.

### A "PLEASING AROMA"

In light of this, we can also understand the teaching of the Midrash<sup>26</sup> on the verse,<sup>27</sup> "Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma" — which led to the Covenant with Noach — "and Hashem said..., 'I will not continue to curse the land'": The "pleasing aroma" alludes to:

The pleasing aroma that arose when Avraham, our forefather, was in the fiery furnace..., the pleasing aroma that arose when Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were in the fiery furnace..., and the pleasing aroma of the Generation of Forced Apostasy.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Bereishis* 8:22.

<sup>24</sup> See *Akeidah*, "Bo" (sec. 38); *Hemshech* 5666, beg. and end of s.v., "hachodesh"; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 17, p.152.

<sup>25</sup> *Malachi* 3:6.

<sup>26</sup> *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 34, par. 9.

<sup>27</sup> *Bereishis* 8:21.

<sup>28</sup> {During the time of the Roman Empire, the Romans issued decrees against the practice of Judaism, particularly under the reign of Emperor Hadrian. These decrees included banning circumcision, Torah study, and other core Jewish practices. Those who resisted often paid with their lives.}



This means that the self-sacrifice of Avraham, Chananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and the Generation of Forced Apostasy prompted Hashem to say, “I will not continue to curse...”

The question is asked:<sup>29</sup> Why wasn’t the pleasing aroma of Noach’s sacrifices sufficient to bring about the covenant for the world’s continued existence? Why did it specifically need to come from the “aroma” of self-sacrifice (culminating in the self-sacrifice of the Generation of Forced Apostasy), which is the highest level of *avodah*?<sup>30</sup>

The explanation is as follows: This covenant ensured that the world would endure — “It shall not cease” — which (a) was derived from Hashem’s Infinite power, “I am Hashem, I do not change”; and (b) this power was specifically revealed (within and through) nature itself, as mentioned above. Thus, the *avodah* (the “aroma”) that brought this about had to be similar {to what it would take to ensure the world’s continued existence} (as it says,<sup>31</sup> “With the standard that a person measures, he is measured”). This is the *avodah* of self-sacrifice, especially the self-sacrifice exhibited by the Jewish people in “The Generation of Forced Apostasy,” as self-sacrifice entails both elements:

First, self-sacrifice demonstrates that a person serves Hashem in a manner consonant with {Hashem’s attribute:} “I do not change”<sup>32</sup> — nothing, not even the greatest concealments, can disturb or weaken *avodah* performed with self-sacrifice.

Conversely, the strength of the self-sacrifice is revealed by the **concealment itself**. As known,<sup>33</sup> the power for self-sacrifice radiates more during exile than during the Temple era, as the concealment of exile calls forth the revelation of the Divine power for self-sacrifice.

It follows that the concealment **itself**,<sup>34</sup> which (externally) hinders a person’s *avodah*, actually develops a greater strength in a person’s *avodah* — even self-sacrifice that transcends limitation.

When a Jew overcomes the obstacles and tests by surrendering himself to Hashem, it nullifies the concealment. It reveals that the intent behind the test<sup>35</sup> and the concealment was to propel the person’s *avodah* beyond limitation.

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<sup>29</sup> Beg. of *Maamar* “*Vayarach 5674*” (in *Hemshech 5672*) and *Sefer HaMaamarim 5708*.

<sup>30</sup> {Divine service.}

<sup>31</sup> {*Sotah* 1:7.}

<sup>32</sup> See beg. of *Maamar* “*Vayarach 5708*.”

<sup>33</sup> *Sefer HaMaamarim Kuntreisim*, vol. 3, p. 121; *Sefer HaMaamarim Yiddish*, p. 5; *Sefer HaMaamarim 5709*, p. 118 ff.; et al.

<sup>34</sup> See an extensive discussion of this concept in *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 17, p. 96 ff.

<sup>35</sup> As explained in several sources (*Maamar* “*Ki Menaseh 5708*,” ch. 8; *Sefer HaMaamarim 5711*, s.v., “*Nasata Lireiecha*,” ch. 1; et al.), a test {or trial} is not an independent entity, but rather, serves as a means of concealment and obstruction. As our Sages stated (*Tanchuma*, “*Vayera*,” sec. 22), regarding the trial of the *Akedah*.

## 9.

### THE NEED TO TRANSFORM

This also clarifies why Hashem’s remembering, which led to the Covenant, had to come from “*Elokim*.” The Attribute of Justice itself had to transform into the Attribute of Mercy:

Nature itself can lead to Divine revelation only when *Elokim* (the source of nature,<sup>36</sup> and consequently, the concealment of the world) is changed into mercy (thereby **revealing** G-dliness).<sup>37</sup>

The primary reason Hashem transformed the Attribute of Justice into the Attribute of Mercy — “You also remembered Noah with **love**” — was the reminder of “the deep and essential love” of Hashem for the Jewish people “due to the essential value of the Jewish people,” who are rooted in the *Ein Sof’s* inwardness and Essence, Who “is not comprised of these **Attributes** whatsoever.”<sup>38</sup> Due to this essential love,<sup>39</sup> the Attribute of Justice transformed into the Attribute of Mercy.

This dynamic cascades into the lowest levels, nullifying all concealments over the Jewish people and Judaism. Not only do these concealments fail to hinder the Jewish people’s *avodah*, but they also are changed into assets — helping the Jewish people with all they need. They do so in a fashion resembling what the verse recounts: “For all the children of Israel, there was light in their dwellings.”<sup>40</sup> This was true even in the land of מִצְרַיִם, Egypt — alluding to {and etymologically related to} מְצָרִים וְגְבוּלִים, boundaries and limitations. —

This metamorphosis will serve as preparation for the imminent fulfillment of the promise,<sup>41</sup> “Strangers will arise and pasture your sheep,” with the actual coming of our righteous Mashiach speedily in our days.

— From a talk and discourse delivered on *motzaei Shabbos parshas Noach*, 5740 (1979)

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<sup>36</sup> The name “*Elokim*” had the numerical value of “*hateva*” {nature} (*Pardes*, sec. 12, par. 2; *Shnei Luchos HaBris* [89a] implies that the same is in *Zohar* [see, there, 189a: **as alluded to** in *Zohar*]; *Tanya*, “*Shaar HaYichud VeHaemunah*,” beg. of ch. 6).

<sup>37</sup> See *Tanya*, “*Shaar HaYichud VeHaemunah*,” beg. of ch. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Intro. to *Tikkunei Zohar* (17b).

<sup>39</sup> See *Or HaTorah*, “*Ki Sisa*,” p. 2,072 (see there for the reason that the wicked have the power to transform the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of Justice).

<sup>40</sup> *Shemos* 10:23.

<sup>41</sup> *Yeshayahu* 61:5.