

לְכֹן אָמַר לְבְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל		
אֲנִי ה'		
וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם	וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם	וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם
וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם	וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם	וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם
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אֲנִי ה':		

Say, therefore, to the Israelite people:
I am GOD.
I will take you out from under the labors of the Egyptians and I will save you from their bondage and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and through extraordinary chastisements.
And I will take you to be My people, and I will be to you, your God. And you shall know that I, am GOD,
your God who freed you from under the labors of the Egyptians.
I will bring you into the Land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you for a possession,
I am GOD.”

Observations. 1. The passage as 52 words. The middle words (words 26 and 27) are **אֲנִי ה' I am GOD** in v.7. Thus, the core idea of this text is God's assertion, **I am GOD**, which not merely an introduction but also a formulaic way of conveying promise or declaration. 2. It is fascinating that the number of words in this passage equals 2x the numerical value of God's sacred name (*yod-10, heh-5, vav-6, heh-* is 26), thus one could argue that these verses encode a double utterance of God's name, ה' ה'. 3. The phrase **אֲנִי ה' -I am GOD** is repeated 3 times. A threefold repetition conveys **emphasis**, **stress**, and **focus**. 4. **אתכם -you (object)** occurs 6 times which, at the very least doubles the emphatic force of God's relationship with the people.

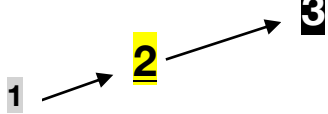
Comment: The traditional understanding of this passage, focuses on the four verbs **וְהוֹצֵאתִי - I will take out**, **וְהוֹצֵאתִי -I will save**, **וְהוֹצֵאתִי -I will redeem**, and **וְהוֹצֵאתִי -I will take**. The rabbis used these four terms to structure the Passover Seder by linking them with the four cups of wine. But if we analyze the text on its own without the layers of rabbinic

commentary, additional interpretations emerge.

What is this text saying?

There are three ideas embedded in this text: 1. **The Primary Idea: Redemption.** God will redeem Israel from Egyptian slavery. 2. **The Core Idea: Relationship.** God and Israel will be bonded in a relationship. 3. **The Culminating Idea: The Land.** God will give the land to the people in fulfillment of His promise to their ancestors.

1. Redemption: The primary idea, **Redemption**, is conveyed with three verbs: **וְהוֹצֵאתִי**, **וְהוֹצֵאתִי**, and **וְהוֹצֵאתִי**. A string of three items (nouns, verbs, or modifiers) conveys **emphasis**, **stress**, and **focus**, and also invites the reader to create at least two possible ways of understanding the text: as a crescendo or a parallelism. Let's use the well-known verse: קדוש קדוש קדוש ה' - *Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord of Hosts* as an example. We can read that verse as either as a three-step build up to a peak, ie. a crescendo:

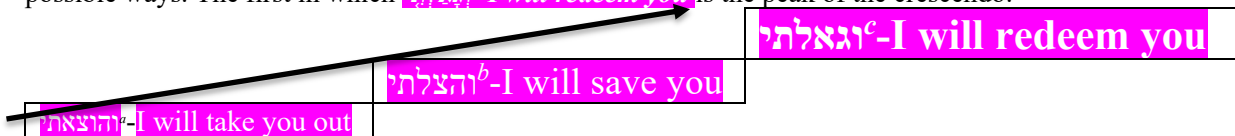




or, as a parallelism, [1+2] = [3] in which the second part of the line amplifies and completes the first part:

$$[\text{Holy}^a + \text{Holy}^b] = [\text{The Lord of Hosts is Holy.}]$$

If we break it down even further we can notice that in a 3-item string, there is always a micro-parallelism among the first two elements. Here, **Holy^b** is a slight amplification of Holy^a. Thus, we can read our text in at least two possible ways. The first in which **יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל -I will redeem you** is the peak of the crescendo:



or the second, in which **יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל -I will save you** amplifies **יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל -I will take you out**; and then **יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל -I will redeem you**, completes or compliments both *taking out^a* and *saving^b*.

$$[\text{יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל -I will take you out and יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל -I will save you}] = [\text{יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל -and I will redeem you}]$$

Does this add to the meaning of the text? Yes! Of course it does! The form of the text, its poetics, doublings and tripling's, convey to us that what Israel is about to go through an intense, complex, multi-layered experience of salvation!

2. Relationship.

The core idea, Relationship is conveyed with three verbs, **יִלְקַחְתִּי -I will take**, **יְהִי יְהוָה -I will be** and **וְיָדַעְתֶּם -you will know**. It's hard not to hear a betrothal here, in the word, **יִלְקַחְתִּי -I will take**. Again, read either as a crescendo or a parallelism, the poetics enhance the meaning of the text: ה' becomes Israel's God as a result of taking-betrothing Israel, and God's desire for Israel to **know Him** is the desired goal of the taking-betrothal.

3. The Land

The culminating idea, The Land, is also conveyed with three verbs, **וְהִבֵּאתִי -I will bring**, **וְנִשְׁבַּעְתִּי -I swore**, and **וְנָתַתִּי -I will give**. The giving of the Land is the completion of the bringing and the God's oath to the three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Land is mentioned in three references: **הָאָרֶץ**, **אֶתְּךָ**, and **אֶתְּךָ**. It's hard not to hear a rhyme between **נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי** and **וְנָתַתִּי**. Once again, the poetics enhance the text. The crescendo and parallelism of three verbs; the three references to the Land, the three Patriarchs, it's exquisite!

How does Israel respond to this declaration?

וַיִּדְבֹר מִשְׁעָה בֶן אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מִשְׁעָה מִקֶּצֶר רוּחַ וּמַעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה:

But when Moses told this to the Israelites, they would not listen to Moses, their spirits crushed by cruel bondage.(6:9) Blunt. They're not interested. They are too overwhelmed. But there is something more going on here. The message is an exquisite masterpiece of poetics and content. We can compare it to Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* or MLK's *I Have a Dream* speech, both of which are rhetorical masterpieces that defined their eras. But at Gettysburg, people came in formal attire to attend a solemn ceremony to dedicate the cemetery. At the March on Washington, people came fired up to fight for Civil

Rights. Here, in this moment at the beginning of the Exodus story, everything was off! It was a total failure! The people were exhausted, they wanted to rest! They wanted comfort! They had no patience, no expansive spiritual readiness for an exquisitely constructed message! Could they have perceived, **in real time**, what was being conveyed in the poetics of this message? Never! When Moses spoke to them, could they have decoded God's name in the number of words used? Doubtful! Redemption, Relationship, the Land? These were abstractions compounded by extravagance! The message was a failure, **in real time**. But like the *Gettysburg Address* and *I Have a Dream*, the text was to become inspirational generations later, **for all time!**