

YAAKOV WRESTLED WITH ALONENESS

by Rabbi Yisroel Roll

The Ramchal in Derech Hashem (1:2) states:

God's Purpose in Creation was to bestow of His Good on another. God Alone is True Perfection, free of all deficiency and there is no perfection comparable to Him. Any imaginable perfection, with the exception of God's, is therefore not true perfection. Other things may be said to have perfection, but it is only relative to something less perfect. Absolute Perfection, however, is only that of God...God Alone is the only True Good, and therefore His Beneficent Desire would not be satisfied unless it could bestow that very good, namely the true perfect good that exists in His Intrinsic Essence...There is a unique creature which stands balanced between the elements of perfection and the elements of deficiency, which are in turn the result of God's Illumination or concealment. When this creature strengthens itself by striving for elements of perfection, incorporating them into his being, this in a way means "clinging" to God, as He is their Root and Source. The more elements of perfection this creature incorporates into itself, the stronger will be his association and bond to God. He becomes, so to speak, "attached" to God Himself, deriving both pleasure and perfection from His Goodness, while he is himself the master of this good and perfection, having acquired them by choosing them.

The Aloneness of God means that He is the Sole Source of Goodness and the Bestower of Goodness in the world. The fact that He is Alone does not mean that He is lonely. Rather, it means that He is Perfect in His Goodness and in Desiring to Give. In fact, He was Perfect in Himself and did not need to create a world, but Created the world so that there could be something to receive His Goodness. Man is the ultimate vessel to receive His Goodness. When we receive that Goodness by acknowledging it comes from Him, and by emulating that goodness, then we too are "alone" in the world—in that we become givers. Aloneness, therefore, in its purest form, means to give.

Eitz Yosef explains: Just as Hashem is One and Unique in the heavenly sphere, and there is no one like Him, so too Yaakov was alone and unique in the earthly sphere, and there was no one like him in merit and strength. Therefore, the angel was jealous of him and wrestled with him.^[1]

What was there in Yaakov's *aloneness* that made the angel jealous? The Maharzu^[2] explains that Hashem gave Yaakov something that no one else ever received. What was that gift? The gift of *aloneness* itself, which contains the awesome strength needed to stand up to the angel. What is the "awesome strength" in *aloneness*? The key to Yaakov's success against the angel of Esav is that Yaakov's *aloneness* was an extension of, and expression of, Hashem's *Aloneness*. *Aloneness*

connotes individuality, independence, and oneness.

How does *aloneness* bring strength? The Sifri comments on the verse (Dvarim 32:12):

Hashem alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with Him,"

as follows: "In the future I will lead you to tranquility in this world."

The Maharal explains: The word "alone" refers to Israel's existential aloneness—which leads to tranquility. Shabbos is a day of tranquility, because tranquility is only lost due to opposition that stands against an object; but an object that is alone—and one—has no opposition, and therefore it finds tranquility. Shabbos, which is alone and one, is worthy of tranquility because aloneness leads to tranquility. The opposite of this is division and separateness, which leads to turmoil. Israel, which is alone, was given Shabbos, which is alone, to illustrate that Israel is worthy of aloneness, which is oneness.^[3]

We usually think of *aloneness* as a negative state that leads to emotional loneliness. Many people suffer from loneliness, and it is debilitating. But the Midrash, as explained by the Sifri and the Maharal, is making an astounding point. *Aloneness* leads to inner serenity when a person becomes alone and one: integrated with him—or herself. This means accepting his *aloneness* and uniqueness as an expression of Hashem's Aloneness and Uniqueness. Of course you are alone: you, alone, have been sent into the world on a unique mission that only you can perform. Not alienated, isolated, but unique, singular. Not lonely, but "only." "Only you," instead of lonely you.



If you are alone, you can find wholeness within yourself when consciousness of God fills your mind, feelings, and actions. There can be no internal turmoil or confusion when you fill yourself with the awareness that your entire being is an expression of God's Will. There is no room within your mind and psyche for inner turmoil because you are alone, one, and aligned with the Will of Hashem.

Rabeinu Bachya explains the source of the word "Levad"—alone, is the word 'vad,' as follows:

A sacred linen – and if you contemplate the word "linen" you will discover it encapsulating many wondrous intentions. It hints to humility since the flax stalk grows from earth, which contrasts wool that emanates from a living creature. It hints to singularity, since the word לבד translates as single, and its thread is indivisible. Its color hints to forgiveness which is represented as white. Its numerical value is 6

which hints to the "middle line" (mercy), represented by the letter Vav.^[4]

The word "levad"—alone, then, is based on the concept of singularity and indivisibility, sourced in the concept of "vad. *It speaks to the positive dimensions of aloneness meaning uniqueness and individuality.*

Rabieinu Bachya in Chovos Halevavos^[5] teaches:

A man is necessarily in either one of two situations: either he is a stranger or he is among his family and relatives. If he is a stranger, let his companionship be with God during his time of loneliness, and trust in Him during his period of being a stranger. And let him contemplate that the soul is also a stranger in this world, and that all people are like strangers here, as the verse says "because you are strangers and temporary residents with Me." (Vayikra 25:23)

The Marpeh L'nefesh explains: being alone is good for him so that he makes his companionship with God and places his trust in Him alone since he has no one else to trust due to his being a stranger. Furthermore, all of us are strangers because the soul, which is of Divine origin, is in this world like a stranger in a strange land. And in truth, the essence of man is his soul...

With these poignant words, Rabbeniu Bachya implores us to transform loneliness into aloneness and there, in that existential encounter with the self, to find God and to find the part of Godliness that we are meant to express in the world. It is only through that aloneness, accepting and embracing being that stranger in a strange land, that we can find our unique selves in service of God.

With this awareness and consciousness, *aloneness* can be explored and mapped for its potential: it can contribute to our happiness, rather than wrongfully conflated it with loneliness, or misconstrued as a depressing mindset or a condition outside our control. This is instructive in the last part of the verse, which says : and there was no strange god with Him." (Dvarim 32:12) God's "Aloneness" should increase our consciousness of God's Oneness and His Presence in our lives. God is alone, and man should strive to think of nothing other than Godliness alone: to realize fully that everything in the world is a manifestation of God, and that each one of us is, individually, a manifestation of God's *Tzelem Elokim*, expressed through the exercise of our Free Will.^[6] It is the hallmark and goal of an eved Hashem to experience this "God Consciousness."

When we adhere to this, and realize that there is **אֵין כְּמוֹתוֹ**—nothing except for God—that God is reality and that each individual psyche is an expression of that reality, no room remains for other gods within us, and we are no longer strangers to the Godliness within us.

This idea is illustrated most profoundly by Rav Tzadok Hakohen in Pri Tzadik on Parashas Bechukosai, in which he states that the *mitzvos* and Hashem's Attributes are neither external nor separate from His Being: they are, rather, manifestations of Hashem Himself. This is not to say that they are intrinsic to His being: it is something more than that. They are one with His Being in an

absolute way that the human mind cannot comprehend. This is the meaning of the concept that Hashem keeps His *mitzvos*: in other words, Hashem prays, puts on tefillin, and observes the Shabbos (Brachos 6b—7a). That Hashem rests on Shabbos means that He Brings everything in creation together in a harmonious oneness that reflects His Own Oneness. When we rest on Shabbos, we create an inner reality of oneness and contentment such that we need not travel anywhere or perform any creative acts. Instead, we are at rest, or at one, within ourselves. We have arrived at our destination: the integration and wholeness of the self. ^[7]

1. Breishis Rabbah 77:1
2. Rav Ze'ev Wolf Einhorn of Horodna, Poland (d. 1862). Commentary on Medrash Rabbah
3. Shabbos, as the *Tachlis Maaseh Breishis* — the purpose and pinnacle of Creation — stands alone and apart from the mundane activities of the creative work we perform during the week. Shabbos is symbolic of man's spiritual journey as he strives to elevate his physical activities, and directs them toward a singular goal and purpose: service of God. In this sense, Shabbos stands alone, and is one.
4. Rabeinu Bachya Vayikra 16:4
5. Sha'ar Habitachon
6. Nefesh HaChayim, Shaar Aleph, chapter 2
7. Schwartz, Yitzchok. Rav Tzadok Hakohen on the Parsha. Jerusalem: Mosaica Press, 2014

This essay is an excerpt of a new book by Rabbi Yisroel Roll, entitled Alone Against the World--the Torah Antidote to Loneliness. Feldheim Publishers. For details [click here](#).