

CLOUDS OF CHESED, RAIN OF DIN

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Now all the trees of the field were not yet upon the earth, and all the herb of the field had not yet sprouted. Hashem Elokim had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to work the soil.

Beer Mayim Chaim: How should we look at rainfall? Should we attribute it to din, the attribute of judgment within G-d, or to chesed, to His attribute of lovingkindness?

We may not have to look any further than our pasuk, and its puzzling use of two of G-d's Names: Hashem and Elokim. The pasuk may be hinting to us that rain should be appreciated as a combination of both attributes - of chesed and of din.

Without our pasuk, we could make the argument on behalf of either attribute. On the one hand, rain is so vital to life, that we would place it squarely in the chesed column. We depend on what we grow for our nutrition. The success of agricultural endeavors depends on adequate rainfall. If life begins as chesed, rainfall sustains it.

Chazal, on the other hand, apparently link rain to din. They call the berachah in Shemonah Esrei that speaks of precipitation *gevuros geshamim*;² *gevurah*, of course, is practically synonymous with din. They point to the phenomenon of rain sometimes falling with great - even destructive - force as the reason for linking rain with din. The Zohar³ speaks explicitly of rain originating in chesed, but handing it off, as it were, to din, which becomes an active agent in its delivery. (Think, says the Zohar, of the way we perform *netilas yodayim*. We hold the vessel in our right hand - which is associated with the primary attribute of chesed - in order to fill it. We then pass it to the left - or din. It is the left that pours the water, but those waters were obtained through the right!)

It seems, then, that both chesed and din are important. We can offer a simple reason why. Chesed, as we experience it, comes about as a kind of partnership with din - a mixture we sometimes call *rachamim*. The pure form of chesed is so powerful that it would overwhelm us. This world cannot deal with the intensity of its power. In effect, pure chesed must be tempered by the limitations of din to be available and useful to us. Rain, an offshoot of Hashem's chesed, reaches us in a cooperative venture between chesed and din.

This amalgam is expressed in the Name Hashem Elokim, combining both attributes. Seen this way, our pasuk says that this combination did not result in rain falling upon the earth, because Man had not yet been created to perform the work, the *avodah*, that was necessary. That *avodah* is Man's

occupying himself with Torah and with prayer at all times. Hashem made His responsiveness to the needs of the earth contingent upon Man living up to Hashem's expectations of him.

How does Man's spiritual output relate to this special Name: Hashem Elokim? We need look only so far as another pasuk⁴ that uses this Name. "You shall know this day and take to your heart that Hashem, He is Elokim." The word for "your heart" is levavcha, which is a plural form. Chazal take that plural to suggest that Man need serve His Creator with two hearts, as it were. He need serve Hashem with the two opposing tendencies he finds in his heart: the yetzer tov, and the yetzer hora. Now, the very existence of a yetzer hora and Man's capacity to make poor choices are sourced in din. Din, which limits the illumination of Hashem's chesed, allows Man to look away from it, or not notice it at all, and thus leaves room for finding evil attractive. Man often, however, summons up the determination to tame and even break the powers of evil within him. He finds that strength through joyously attaching himself to the yetzer tov, which is sourced in the goodness of Hashem's chesed.

In other words, Man is the constant platform upon which two Names of G-d - Hashem and Elokim - contrast with each other through their outgrowths: the yetzer tov, and the yetzer hora. By resisting the message of pure yetzer hora, Man "sweetens" din by forcibly combining it with the chesed of the yetzer tov.

The unusual implication of our pasuk turns out to be understandable. Our pasuk uses a full, compound Name to relate how Hashem did not make it rain in the Garden of Eden. Why would the Torah such a full Name to convey not what Hashem does, but what He did not do? We now understand. The blessing of rainfall, containing aspects of both chesed and din, requires that the two midos be merged. This could only happen through the avodah of Man.

Only Man, by virtue of the exercise of his free-will and suppressing his yetzer hora, can make a contribution to the cosmic drama of producing a gentler, kinder form of din.

Sources:

1. Based on Beer Mayim Chaim, Bereishis 2:5
 2. Taanis 2A
 3. Zohar Terumah 154B
 4. Devarim 4:39
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