

# G-D'S CONCEALMENT

*by Shlomo Katz*

**Hamaayan / The Torah Spring**  
**Edited by Shlomo Katz**

**Vayeilech**

**Volume XV, No. 47**  
**5 Tishrei 5762**  
**September 15, 2001**

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Today's Learning:

Bava Kamma 8:7-9:1

Orach Chaim 514:9-11

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 57

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Peah 23

IMPORTANT - PLEASE READ THIS

When our Sages established the annual Torah-reading cycle more than 2,000 years ago, they intentionally placed the parashot dealing with tochachah / rebuke and punishment and teshuvah / repentance in the weeks surrounding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. As a result, several of the Divrei Torah in this week's issue deal with those topics. These Divrei Torah are not intended to comment on, or suggest reasons for, the events of September 11, 2001, nor are we qualified to do so. We can only join our brethren in praying that G-d heal the injured and console the bereaved and redeem us speedily in our days.

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This week's parashah describes Moshe Rabbeinu's final day, when he took his leave of the Jewish people and warned them of the consequences of straying from G-d and the Torah. He quotes G-d

as saying (31:17-18), "My anger will flare up against [the nation] on that day and I will forsake them; and I will conceal My face from them and they will become prey, and many evils and distresses will encounter [the nation]. It will say on that day, 'Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?' But I will surely have concealed My face on that day because of all the evil that [the nation] did, for it turned to the gods of others."

Many commentaries ask: The verses appear out of order! Why, after Bnei Yisrael will acknowledge that "it is because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me," will Hashem continue to hide His face? R' Yissachar Shlomo Teichtel z"l (Hungarian rabbi; killed in the Holocaust) wrote in 1943: Pharaoh, too, repented and said, "Hashem is the tzaddik and I and my people are the wicked ones," but his repentance lasted only as long as each plague. As soon as he received a reprieve, he returned to his evil ways.

The repentance described in our verse is similar. The nation "will say on that day, 'Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?'" When our repentance is not sincere, it does not bring us a reprieve from our suffering. To the contrary, it makes G-d angrier and causes Him to hide Himself even more. (Quoted in Otzrot Tzaddikei U'geonei Ha'dorot.)

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*"My anger will flare up against [the nation] on that day and I will forsake them; 've-histarti' / and I will conceal My face from them and they will become prey, and many evils and distresses will encounter [the nation]. It will say on that day, 'Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?' But I 'hastair astir' / will surely have concealed My face on that day because of all the evil that [the nation] did, for it turned to the gods of others." (31:17-18)*

R' Menachem Mendel Krochmal z"l (Poland; 1600-1661) asks: In verse 17, G-d conceals His face once ("ve-histarti"), and this concealment leads to "many evils and distresses," yet in verse 18, where He conceals His face doubly ("hastair astir"), no evils follow! Why?

He explains: The gemara (Megillah 12a) asks, "Why were the Jews of Haman's generation worthy of destruction?" The gemara answers, "Because they had bowed down to Nevuchadnezar's statue." (See Daniel ch. 3.) The gemara asks further, "Then why were they not wiped out?" and the gemara answers, "Just as they bowed down only for show, not with idolatrous intent, so G-d's decree that they be destroyed was only for show." We see, writes R' Krochmal, that G-d sometimes hides His face "for show," but nothing bad happens as a result. Sometimes when G-d hides Himself it leads to great pain and suffering, while other times He hides Himself only so that we will search for Him.

The gemara states that verse 18 contains an allusion to Queen Esther, whose name means "concealment." This is not merely a play on words, notes R' Krochmal. Rather, as we have just seen, our verse alludes to the way in which G-d concealed Himself in Esther's time - just for show, just so we would search for Him. (Pi Tzaddik: Drush 48)

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*"Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid and do not be broken before them, for Hashem, your G-d - it is He who goes before you, He will not let go of you nor will He forsake you." (31:6)*

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l ("Chida"; 1724-1806) asks why the first half of the verse - "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid and do not be broken before them" - uses the plural form, while second half of the verse - "it is He who goes before you, He will not let go of you nor will He forsake you" - uses the singular form. He explains simply: When we are united as one, G-d goes before us and will not let go of us nor forsake us. Otherwise, we must be afraid. (Chochmat Anach)

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*"Gather together the people - the men, the women and the small children..." (31:12)*

The gemara (Chagigah 3a) says that the reason for bringing small children to the Bet Hamikdash for hakhel (the king's Torah reading once every seven years on the Sukkot after the shemittah) is to reward those who bring them. [The children do not understand the Torah portion which the king reads, so why else would they be brought?] R' Moshe Shick z"l (Hungary; 1805-1879) understands that the reward referred to is given in this world, and he asks: Is this a good thing? Are we not concerned that (in the words of Devarim 32:15), "Yeshurun - Israel - will become fat and kick"?

He answers: If a person has a complete faith in G-d, he will not be hurt by achieving the "good life" in this world. And, the best sign of a person's inner feelings is his children's upbringing. We read (Devarim 29:28), "The hidden [things] are for Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed are for us and our children..." This may be interpreted: "How can one know whether man's hidden feelings are for G-d? The answer is revealed by looking at him and, especially, his children." Therefore, a person who brings his children to hakhel may be rewarded, for this itself is a sign that he can handle that reward. (Maharam Shick Al Ha'Torah)

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*"So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei Yisrael..." (31:19)*

R' David Hakochavi z"l (Provence; 13-14th centuries) writes: The received tradition teaches that this verse commands each person to write a Sefer Torah for himself. The purpose of this mitzvah is clear - the Torah is the necessary tool in order for a person to perfect himself, and, surely, no craftsman would attempt to practice his craft without his tools.

Chazal state that each person must write his own Sefer Torah, even if he inherited one from his father. The reason, explains R' Hakochavi, is that it is human nature to value more that which one has made by himself. (Sefer Ha'battim: Migdal David, Sefer Mitzvah No. 16)

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*"So it was when Moshe finished writing the words of this Torah onto a book, until their conclusion, Moshe*

*commanded levi'im, the bearers of the Ark of the covenant, saying, 'Take this book of the Torah and place it at the side of the Ark of the covenant of Hashem, and it shall be there for you as a witness'.*" (31:24-26)

Our Sages relate that Moshe wrote 13 Torah scrolls on the last day of his life, one for each tribe and one which he gave to the levi'im, as described in our verse. The reason one Sefer Torah was placed at the side of the Ark was so that if, at some future date, someone tried to falsify the words of the Torah, a master copy would be available with which to rebut the falsifier. This Torah was entrusted to the levi'im, for they are the keepers of the tradition, as it is written about them (Devarim 33:10), "They shall teach Your ordinances to Yaakov and Your Torah to Yisrael."

R' David Lifschutz z"l (the "Suvalker Rav"; rosh yeshiva in Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan; died 1993) explains further: It is human nature that one who no longer wishes to observe the Torah's laws will not simply abandon them; he will create a new religion or a new philosophy which he will claim is the Torah. [This phenomenon can be seen many times throughout our history beginning with the Gold Calf, when the Jewish people declared, "This is your god, Yisrael."] Moshe was afraid that someone would take out his Sefer Torah and, for example, erase the words "Do not" from the commandment "Do not murder" or "Do not steal." As long as the Torah remains untouched, one or two generations may stray, but their descendants will return. Once the Torah is tampered with, however, all is lost. (Tehilah Le'David p. 18)

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### **Selected Laws of the Post-Shemittah Year (From Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hil. Shemittah Ve'yovel)**

1:13 If one plowed his field or fertilized it during the seventh year so that it will be fit for planting in the post- shemittah year, we fine him and it may not be planted in the post- shemittah year. We do not rent it from him in order to plant it; rather it must lie fallow. However, if he died, his son may plant it.

1:14 If one removed the thorns from his field in the seventh year to prepare it for the post-shemittah year, or he removed stones from it, even though one is not allowed to do this, we do not fine him and he may plant it in the post-shemittah year. [The difference between this halachah and the previous one is that halachah 13 refers to a person who performed actual farm work - therefore he is penalized - while the work referred to in halachah 14 is not farm work, per se. (Radvaz).]

4:5-6 Wild growths of the seventh year which remained into the post-shemittah year may not be eaten and should not be harvested by hand. Rather, one should plow through them, but animals may graze normally among them. Until when do the wild growths of the seventh year remain prohibited? From Rosh Hashanah until Chanukah. After Chanukah, the wild growths are permitted. [Commentaries explain that Chanukah is the approximate time when the old plants rot in the fields and are outnumbered by new plants.] If one planted wild seeds from the seventh year after the

shemittah, the resulting growths are permitted.

4:7 Other fruits may not be purchased after the shemittah until the new growths of that same fruit are completed . . . Vegetables may be purchased immediately. [It was common to import vegetables from abroad. (Radvaz).]

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

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