

I AM HIS HASHEM, TOO

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Kedoshim

I am his Hashem, too

Our parashah opens: "You shall be holy, for I am holy, Hashem, your Elokim. Every man: His mother and father you shall revere and My Shabbat you shall observe, I am Hashem, your Elokim. Do not turn to the idols, and molten gods you shall not make for yourselves--I am Hashem your Elokim." What is the message in the threefold repetition of the phrase, "I am Hashem, your Elokim" (or a slight variation thereof)?

R' Avraham Abale Posveler z"l (1764-1836; dayan / rabbinical judge in Vilna) explains: These verses allude to various types of Jews. There are Jews who are holy, i.e., who limit their pursuit of even permitted pleasures. Of them, Hashem certainly says, "I am Hashem, your Elokim."

There also are Jews who do not qualify as "holy," but who observe all of the mitzvot (e.g., honoring their parents and keeping Shabbat) meticulously. Of them, too, Hashem says, "I am Hashem, your Elokim."

Finally, there are Jews who observe virtually no mitzvot. Lest you think that it is your duty to pursue such Jews and seek their destruction, the Torah tells you, "[So long as they] do not turn to the idols or make molten gods, I am Hashem, [their] Elokim." (Quoted in Itturei Torah, Vol. IV, p.105)

"You shall be holy, for I am holy, Hashem, your Elokim." (19:2)

The midrash Torat Kohanim states: "The verse means to say that if you sanctify yourselves, I will view it as if you have sanctified Me. If you do not sanctify yourselves, I will view it as if you have not sanctified Me. Perhaps the verse means to say that if you sanctify yourselves, I will be sanctified and, if not, I am not sanctified? To dispel this interpretation, the verse says, 'I am holy'--whether you sanctify Me or not." [Until here from the midrash]

R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) explains: The midrash was bothered by the

verse's implication that we can imitate Hashem's holiness. Clearly that is not so! Therefore, the midrash interprets the verse to mean that if we sanctify ourselves, it will be as if we have sanctified Him.

Alternatively, writes the Chafetz Chaim, the midrash was bothered by a seeming contradiction between our verse, which indicates Hashem's desire that we sanctify *ourselves*, and the verse (22:23), "I should be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael," which implies that He wishes us to sanctify Him. The midrash answers that these verses are one and the same, for if we sanctify ourselves, it is as if we have sanctified Hashem. (Be'ur He'chafetz Chaim)

R' Ovadiah Sforno z"l (Italy; died 1550) interprets our verses as follows: "For I am holy, Hashem, your Elokim," and it is fitting that you should be similar to Me as much as possible. In order to accomplish this, one must keep the commandments on the first of the Luchot [i.e., the first five of the Ten Commandments], the purpose of all of which is to bring us to eternal life. This is evident from the ending of the first five Commandments (Shemot 20:12), "So that your days will be lengthened." (Be'ur Ha'Sforno Al Ha'Torah)

We read in Mishlei (11:27), "He who seeks good seeks G-d's favor, but he who searches out evil, it will come upon him." R' Eliyahu z"l (the Vilna Gaon; 1720-1797) notes that, about good, the verse refers to seeking G-d's favor, whereas about bad it says, "It will come upon him." He explains: The verse is teaching that attaining holiness requires great effort ("seeking"), while the opposite of holiness comes effortlessly and immediately.

The Vilna Gaon adds: Regarding seeking good, the verses uses the verb "shocher" whereas regarding searching for bad, it uses the verb "doreish." This is because a person who strives to do good generally wakes up before dawn ("shachar") to begin his Divine service. Not so one whose desire is to do bad. He must inquire ("doreish") from other wicked people how to do bad things, so there is no point in arising early, for the wicked are still asleep then. (Be'ur Ha'Gra Al Mishlei)

Pirkei Avot

"Shimon, his [Rabban Gamliel's] son, says: 'All of my days I was raised among the Sages and I found nothing better for oneself [literally, 'one's body'] than silence; not study, but practice, is the main thing; and one who talks excessively brings on sin'." (1:17)

What is the connection between Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel's first statement (regarding the virtue of silence) and his second statement (regarding the importance of deeds)? R' Avraham Azulai z"l (1570-1643; Morocco and Eretz Yisrael) explains: There is no better way to improve one's character

traits than by remaining silent. Lest one object: "How will I make friends if I remain silent?" Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel states that the quality of one's deeds will cause others to come close to him or distance themselves from him.

R' Azulai offers several other interpretations as well: "Silence" refers to patience and restraint in the face of insults. It is not enough to study about the merits of patience and to know that silence is good in such a situation; one must put that knowledge into practice. In this vein, R' Azulai quotes a popular proverb, "A person who cannot take one insult will hear many insults."

Alternatively, the "body" refers to the unlearned masses who occupy themselves with material concerns. For them, silence is preferable, since they have nothing worthwhile to say.

Alternatively, R' Azulai writes, the mishnah can be read as follows: "I found nothing good for one's body from silence." According to this interpretation, it is good for the masses to speak in front of wise men so that the latter can correct the errors of the former and set them on a straight path. (Ahavah Ba'ta'anugim)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) also interprets the mishnah as teaching that no good comes from silence. He explains: The Zohar teaches that teshuvah / repentance is incomplete if it is not articulated. We might have thought otherwise, since the ability to think intelligently is man's crowning trait; nevertheless, speech is an essential element of teshuvah. Thus Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, "All of my days I was raised among the Sages." Being Sages, they had very well developed powers of thought. Even so, "I found no good coming to the body- i.e., the material part of man which is the cause of sin-from silence."

On the other hand, Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel cautions, do not overestimate the importance of speech. "Not study, but practice, is the main thing." The importance of action is demonstrated by the fact that we eagerly await techiyat ha'metim / the resurrection of the dead, when the body and soul will be reunited. Although the soul is already immortal, it is helpless to act without a body. (Olat Re'iyah II p.162)

Memoirs

R' Yom Tov Lipman Heller z"l (1578-1654) is best known as the author of the Mishnah commentary Tosafot Yom Tov. In 1629, while serving as rabbi of Prague, he was imprisoned on a false charge of writing anti-Christian statements. That experience is the subject of his memoir "Megillat Eivah"--literally, "The Scroll of Hatred." The following is a description of the events preceding his arrest:

In the great wars, which lasted for about 10 years, the inhabitants of Bohemia rebelled against his Royal Majesty, the [Austrian] Emperor Matthias, and afterward against his successor, his Royal Majesty, the Emperor Ferdinand. They [the people of Bohemia] crowned Duke Frederick as king but, in the first year of his reign, the Emperor Ferdinand sent 90,000 cavalry and chariots, and they destroyed the Bohemian army at White Mountain, near the capital Prague. They [the Austrians] then retook Bohemia and the metropolis of Prague. Because of the constant great battles, people's income decreased, while taxes increased. The Jewish community had to borrow a great deal of money at high interest rates. When the time came to repay these loans, machloket / infighting increased among the Jewish People, and there were divisions in the community. Those who had been close became distant, and secret conspiracies were formed--also some public ones. All of my efforts to bring people together by speaking softly and pleading were of no use. King Shlomo wrote (Mishlei 12:16), "A clever man conceals shame." Therefore, I won't name those who sinned grievously; may Hashem forgive them, and may the Name of Hashem be blessed forever, amen and amen! I did not want to believe it when I was told that people were conspiring against me as well, for I knew that I had hurt no one and cheated no one, and I had done nothing bad. However, [like King David--see Tehilim 22:7], I am but a worm and not a man. King David also had enemies who told lies about him and who hated him for no reason--how much more so I, who am lowly and despicable, and who is not fit to be mentioned even among the servants of King David a"h. -- To be continued --

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 **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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