

CLASS 35 - VAERA

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"VaYidaber Elokim El Moshe, VaYomer Eilav, Ani Hashem" "VaEra El Avraham, El Yitzchak, V'El Ya'akov, B'E-l Shad-dai, U'Shmi Hashem Lo Nodati Lahem." (Shemos, 6:2-3)

Hashem issues a rebuke to Moshe Rabbeinu. The forefathers never witnessed true revelation. Their prophecy was through the name 'Shad-dai', the trait by which G-d controls the forces of nature, the heavens and stars that determine the flow of worldly affairs. They discover that reward and punishment are due to Divine providence, with no deed unrecorded. Moshe Rabbeinu, on the other hand, is party to the unveiling of the secrets of existence, and through his staff, all of nature is revealed as a mere mask. The miracles that he performs shatter all of man's conceptions, and the physical universe is revealed as an ephemeral and fleeting dimension, devoid of true substance. He sees the ineffable Name, the essence of His relationship with the world.

Could it be that Moshe Rabbeinu is greater than the Avos? How can he produce miracles on a level higher than anything they had ever seen?

In our shiur this week we will explain why seeing is not believing.

1

"HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to Moshe: It is a pity, those who are gone and not to be found. Many times, I appeared to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov as E-l Shad-dai, and I never made known to them that my name is Hashem, as I have to you. Yet, they never had complaints regarding my Midos.....and never asked what is My Name, as you have."

"And you, at the very start of your task you asked for My Name, and at the end you said: 'from the moment I came before Pharaoh [to speak in Your Name things became worse for this nation..]'...." (Midrash Rabbah, 6:4)

Avraham Avinu is the father of all faith.

Faith, or Emunah, is not what society commonly refers to as belief in G-d.

Knowing that there is a G-d above does not mean that one has faith. In fact, today, it is quite common for one spouse to believe, while their partner is atheistic. This is because no one expects belief in G-d to impact on one's consciousness or interests.

In other words, I may believe in a higher entity somewhere up there, and you may think that life is a

black hole. Someday, we'll find out who is right, but, in the meantime, we have other things to worry about, such as: What's for supper? Did the Yankees win? What channel should we watch tonight?

True faith is something more.

What defines a faithful person?

If a trustworthy man asks to borrow a huge amount of money, I would be willing to place all my savings in his hand, confident that he is good for his word. If the borrower is not as reliable, I will hesitate and ask for reassurance, lacking faith in his promise to repay.

Some time ago, I noticed this:

Before going to sleep, my nine-year old daughter, Shayna, asked if I would go to the store and buy a box of Cheerios. I promised that I would do so, and she went to sleep quite happily, fully certain that when she awoke the next morning her treasured cereal would be waiting.

To her, a father's word is as good as done.

This is faith.

A child believes that her parents will provide for all her needs, trusting a mere promise that has yet to be fulfilled.

One's parents are the emissaries of G-d, intermediaries between earth and a higher source. For this reason, the relationship of a child to his parents is a critical factor in religious development. If this natural trust is shattered, and the child has no one to believe in, his faith in G-d is likewise disabled, and he questions: I want to see it, then I'll believe! Or: How do I know He'll come through?

Chazal taught this idea in the following way:

"Rebbe Yochanan spoke: G-d is destined to bring precious stones and diamonds measuring thirty Amos by thirty, and carve out an archway of ten Amos by twenty, and place them in the gates of Yerushalayim."

"A certain student laughed at him. We cannot find diamonds the size of chicken eggs, can we really find stones that size?"

"A while later, that same student traveled by boat on the sea. He saw the heavenly angels chopping stones and diamonds that were thirty Amos by thirty, and carving out a hole ten by twenty."

He asked: Who are these stones for?"

They told him: Hashem is destined to place them in the gates of Yerushalayim."

"He came before Rebbe Yochanan: Rebbe, speak! For you, it is right to speak. Exactly as you said it, that is what I saw."

"Empty fool! Had you not seen it, you wouldn't have believed? You are mocking the words of the Sages!...." (Bava Basra 75a)

What was this student's crime? Certainly, seeing physical verification can only enhance one's grasp of the truth, guaranteeing that he will accept all of his Rebbe's teachings in the future.

The answer is this: once a man of faith understands the truth, he doesn't need to see it happen.

Here's an example: If a man writes a dramatic screenplay, complete with narrative and cast of characters, does he need to watch the movie in order to know what happens? Isn't the story already over even before the show begins?

Avraham Avinu is the man of perfect faith. In his youth, he recognizes the truth, meriting the prophetic vision that pledges all of eternity to he and his descendants.

Why should he need to see this actually occur? In his world of a higher dimension, the end is already here, it is only this physical world that has yet to bear witness.

He has no need to know G-d's Name, nor to see His outstretched hand. He has Hashem's promise, and he merits G-d's trust, and that is enough - 'E-l Shad-dai - SheAmar L'Olam Dai.

Klal Yisrael are the children of G-d, heirs to the Divine assurance of an unlimited reward. Once man understands the nature of this binding relationship, he recognizes it as an immutable truth, one that cannot be denied.

And he knows that G-d's word is as good as done.

Baruch SheAmar V'Hayah HaOlam - When G-d speaks - life happens.

2

This concept explains the why Jews have a treasured custom, the pledge to give charity, the promise to undertake a certain good deed.

Why the need for a pledge? Why not just bestow Tzedakah without any prior commitment?

To understand, we must know this: man is ordained to be like G-d - Imitatio Dei.

The word of G-d is omnipotent, permanently stable, solid and absolute. His word precedes creation, activating a process that carefully unfolds.

Man strives to follow the path of his Creator, endeavoring to speak words that are more real than deeds. (It is for this reason that so many men are tyrants at home, demanding that their orders be treated as Divine decree - "Hu Amar VaYehi" - "Baruch Gozer U'Mikayem") A promise of this sort is itself a Mitzva, and the man of faith becomes a pillar of truth, good for his word and loyal to his commitments.

Faith, then, is a character trait, not a statement of belief. The man who has faith does more than echo an ancient teaching. He lives with the word that he knows to be true, faithful to a vision that he cannot deny.

Faith in G-d is not the absence of reason. On the contrary, it is the constructs of reason that deny him the option of rebellion. It is the skeptic of faith who fails to follow his intellect. He does not base his rejection of G-d on solid ground, but because he cannot believe. He has no trust. Lacking the unwavering devotion to a concept he cannot see, he wanders from one commitment to the next, loyal only to the base instincts of survival.

Is it any wonder that modern man's concept of natural development is 'survival of the fittest'?

Aware only of the struggle and strife of a society that claws at each other's throats, he abandons the trust that propels man towards a spiritual domain, losing all faith in man, and incapable of belief in his Creator.

Though the fulfillment of Jewish destiny is long overdue, to the man of faith the miracle of redemption has already arrived. History may lag behind, but the future has been written long ago, and the words echo still, bringing solace and comfort to those who believe what they know, and care little for what they see:

"Bifroach Reshaim Kemo Esev, V'Yatzitzu Kol Poalei Aven, L'Hishamdam Alei Ad.....Tzaddik KaTamar Yifrach, K'Erez BaLevanon Yisgeh, SheSulim BeVais Hashem, B'Chatzros Elokeinu Yafrichu..."
(Tehillim 92)

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