

REVELATION AND REDEMPTION

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

"They don't make them like they used to ..." was G-d's response to Moshe's complaint about increased slavery (see last week's parsha). "To Avraham, I only revealed myself as E"l Shadda"i, but you are talking to Hashem (Yud-Heh-vav-Heh; this is the name that is not pronounced the way it is written because of its extreme holiness). And you are doubting My methods of redemption?"

This little dialogue and reproof can generate many discussions, including some of the deepest in Kabbalah. To begin with, what is this idea of G-d using different names, and what difference is there whether or not Avraham knew G-d using one name versus another name?

A simple analogy might be the concept of color produced from a white light. Actually, white light is made up of a full spectrum of colors, ranging from red to violet and everything else in-between. However, with the use of different colored filters, certain colors from the spectrum are "held back" while others are allowed to pass through (depending upon the frequency of the color), and this transforms the white light into a color, say green for example when a green filter is used. In a sense, the word "green" used to connote a certain color is really just a "name tag" to describe a specific result that occurs when a specific filter is used.

The same can be said of G-d's Holy Light as well. It does not take much imagination to realize that G-d is extremely powerful. Often people say, "If G-d would only reveal Himself to me in an obvious way, I'd believe in Him." However, it is not so simple. For G-d to reveal Himself to a spiritually unprepared individual would be like pouring 20,000 gallons of water into a fine crystal glass. Not only would the person go thirsty, but he would also be without his crystal glass.

Even Moshe requested (after he had pleaded on behalf of the Jewish people successfully when they sinned with the golden calf and warranted annihilation):

If I have found favor in your eyes, let me know Your way, that I may know You ..." (Shemos 33:13)

G-d had to shield even Moshe from the revelation from the great spiritual intensity. Even what he did witness left him glowing - literally - unable to talk to the nation face-to-face without wearing a veil, and Moshe was about as spiritually prepared as they come!

In other words, the closer one approaches G-d, the greater the revelation of His being is, to the point

that if one goes too close (and some have tried), the body may "blow a fuse." To the person looking on it may simply appear as if the person is becoming mentally unfit, or maybe he is dying prematurely - whatever; but spiritually, the body is receiving more "light" than it is capable of holding.

Therefore, G-d uses "filters" to step-down His light to make it more accessible. Miracles are the result of G-d's light skipping some filters along the way, which is why it is so much easier to recognize G-d's involvement in the process. Nature is merely the light of G-d filtered to such an extreme that His hand is all but hidden completely.

Another analogy for this very sublime concept is electricity (the Rabbis teach that the physical world functions the way it does to teach us what is happening in the spiritual world). For example, consider the water-powered generator at Niagara Falls. The tremendous pressure there of the water turns a turbine that creates, eventually, a flow of electricity with the help of a generator. Let's say you wanted to make toast, and decided to plug your toaster-oven into the generator at Niagara Falls. Would you get toast? Not only would you get toast, you would get toasted literally ... and were not talking with champagne either!

So what do we do? What good is all that power if it can't be used?

Through an intricate system of transformers and different size cables, the power is stepped down over miles until it reaches the household of countless people, who merely have to plug the toaster-oven into a little wall socket (unless of course, it is an American appliance and you're in Israel at the time, at which time you'll need another transformer).

The same thing is true of G-d, so-to-speak. At the source, His power is too great for a physical body to contend with, and would spiritually "fry" (if not physically fry as well). Therefore, G-d "steps down" His light through an intricate system of spiritual filters, to make the light more accessible to us. The entire physical world and everything in it (including us) is just the result of what happens to that light when it is filtered enough times.

In short, just like the word "green" describes the light at a particular stage of filtering, so too does a name of G-d describe His light at a particular level of spiritual filtering. The holier the name, the less filtered the light, and the more direct the revelation. The clearer the revelation, the easier it is to see the hand of G-d. G-d chastized Moshe saying, "The level of light and revelation I showed to your ancestors was lower, and yet, they had no difficulty trusting in My ways. You, on the other hand, are seeing a higher level of revelation, and yet you are questioning My approach to redemption?"

Shabbos Day:

Moshe complained to G-d, "The Jewish people didn't listen to me, how will Paroah listen to me ... I am of uncircumcized lips!" (Shemos 6:12)

At first, this expression must appear very strange. Circumcision is not a concept usually related to the mouth, nor is the lack of it usually deemed a cause for disabled speech. The midrash simply states that Moshe had a lisp, developed as baby in Paroah's palace when he put a hot coal into his mouth.

As we mentioned though last week, everything about Moshe was different; from birth, Moshe had not been an ordinary human being. His soul was rooted very high up, and though his feet walked the ground, and he was the humblest man to "walk the face of the earth" (BaMidbar 12:3), his mind reached into realms of light and knowledge to which the average mortal mind could not; much of which he could not render into words, and much of which he did not want to reduce to words.

This is the deeper, more esoteric meaning of "oral sefasayim" - uncircumcized lips. For, the concept of "orlah" is that of a spiritual interposition (though it is physical as well) that holds back spiritual fulfillment and service of God. Moshe asked God: How can my physical lips express such highly spiritual knowledge, especially to one as spiritually defiled as Paroah, when even the Jewish people couldn't comprehend the meaning of my words?

The answer to Moshe's question was:

"See, I have made you like an Elokim [Rashi: judge and castigator] to Paroah, and Aharon, your brother, will be your prophet [Rashi: interpreter] ..." (Shemos 7:1)

It seems as if God accepted Moshe's plea. He placed an additional "filter" between Moshe and Paroah - Aharon the kohen (Moshe's brother). Moshe possessed the ability to receive the word of G-d, but Aharon, at least in Egypt, had to receive it from Moshe already filtered down, to filter it down again for the general populace on lower spiritual levels to relate to.

This is not a new concept, at least not to the Kabbalists. The Arizal (Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, zt"l), the greatest Kabbalist of the last 400 years, rarely wrote anything down. Whatever the Arizal did write down is almost completely unintelligible, even to some of the most profound minds. However, what his prime student, Rabbi Chaim Vital wrote down in Rabbi Luria's name, is studied around the whole world (at least by Kabbalists).

The following very famous midrash is understood by tradition. The Talmud (Menachos 29b) paints a scene during which Moshe is on Har Sinai watching G-d write down the crowns on top of the letters (found in a Sefer Torah). The ensuing dialogue between Moshe and G-d has Moshe asking G-d about

the purpose of the crowns, to which G-d answers:

"There will be someone in the future, Akiva ben Yosef is his name, who will learn out from these crowns mounds of halacha (Jewish law)."

Moshe asked G-d for a vision of this man, and G-d complied. Moshe sat at the back of a class discoursed by the great Rabbi Akiva, and became faint. What he heard was brilliant, but unfamiliar. However, when one of Rabbi Akiva's students asked about the source of the law, Rebi Akiva answered, "We know this from Moshe at Sinai," at which point, Moshe relaxed.

Those looking to justify a "modernization" of traditional Jewish law have tragically interpreted this midrash to prove that rabbis of the future can understand things about the principles of Torah that the rabbis of the past didn't, just as Rebi Akiva expounded laws that even Moshe had not learned.

However, the reason why Moshe had yet to know the laws of Rebi Akiva was because the whole episode had taken place prior to G-d's teaching them to Moshe! Rebi Akiva's answer to his student calmed Moshe down because it indicated that G-d was about to teach him the laws, after which time he would teach them to others, eventually to be learned by Rebi Akiva himself.

The other concept is that Moshe was asking G-d a far more sophisticated question: Torah is so sublime, and so sophisticated that to limit it to words would be, well, too limiting. Can't it be taught to the Jewish people on the level that I have received it?

G-d's answer to Moshe was, "No. As the generations wind their way down the long road of history, their ability to understand Torah will weaken. Therefore, I must build in ways for them to learn Torah, that to you may seem so profane, but for them, will be life-saving."

Let this suffice to be a "taste" of a very important concept.

Seudos Shlishi:

When Moshe stood before Paroah, and threw his staff to the ground to transform it into a snake, Paroah was unimpressed (Shemos 7:10). According to the midrash, Paroah and his court was steeped in Black Magic, as Moshe must have remembered, and Paroah had even the children come out and mimic Moshe's act. It must have been pretty humorous for Paroah, and disconcerting for Moshe and Aharon.

However, as Paroah and his court chuckled, Moshe began Phase Two: the snake not only returned back to the staff it had come from, but it even went and swallowed up all the Egyptian staff-snakes! The Talmud refers to this as a "miracle-within-a-miracle." The first miracle was that the snake had returned to the form of a staff, and the second miracle was that it swallowed up all of the Egyptian

snakes. Paroah did not obey Moshe's command to free the Jewish people, but the mood in the palace had certainly changed. Why?

The Nefesh HaChaim points out that even Black Magic is really the hand of G-d in disguise, for the sake of free-will. However, because it is being done by less-than-spiritually-worthy people, it gives the impression that G-d is not involved (after all, why would G-d comply with their will). However, Black Magic has limits; in other words, G-d will only go along with the ruse to a point, before He pulls out.

Thus, turning the wood into a snake was never meant to convince Paroah of anything - it was merely to put the cards on the table, so-to-speak. On the other hand, transforming the snake back into a wooden staff again - something magic can never do - was to teach Paroah the essential difference between Kabbalah and Black Magic (though both are from G-d): Kabbalah reveals the hand of G-d; Black Magic hides it. Kabbalah brings people back to traditional Torah; other forms just distract people from the truth.

In our day and age when people are looking to Kabbalah as a source of interest and secret power, it is a wise lesson to heed. Success can be misconstrued, and mislead the student and his followers. However, as we learn from Paroah and his court, eventually the limitations are revealed, and they become the undoing of many a would-be Kabbalist.

Melave Malkah:

As the focus of the story turns from the general picture of the enslaved Jewish people to that of a personal confrontation between Moshe and Paroah, one wonders what the Jewish people were up to the entire time. According to the midrash, the plagues took ten months to decimate Egypt; what was happening in Goshen all this time?

The Pri Tzaddik explains that the Jewish people were on the way up. As the Talmud states (Nedarim 8b), "the sun that heals the righteous judges the evil." In other words, says the Pri Tzaddik, each plague that humbled the Egyptians spiritually "cured" the defiled nation of Israel, in preparation for leaving Egypt simultaneously.

It is not unlike what happened to Yosef and his brothers. When Yosef revealed his true identity, it was a nightmare come true for his brothers, though the same information lifted the spirits of Ya'akov! The truth hurts, only when one has been living a lie. And as the midrash points out, four-fifths of the Jewish population did not leave Egypt, but, instead, perished in the nine plague of darkness.

Living a dream may be comfortable for the moment, but every dream ends eventually and must yield to reality. Over the course of thousands of years, the pattern has never been broken.

Redemption will come, eventually. But one person's redemption becomes another's enslavement if the latter was living in exile as if already redeemed. In fact, as we will discuss next week, b"H, it is the perspective that living a dream is exile which allows one to climb the spiritual ladder to higher levels of revelation. Doing so is the true source of lasting redemption.

Have a great Shabbos.

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