

THERENESS AND AWARENESS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Now, Israel, what does G-d, your G-d, want from you, except to fear G-d, your G-d, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve G-d your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul. (Devarim 10:12)

As has been said on many occasions, it is not by chance that the Hebrew word for fear - yireh - comes from the Hebrew word to see - liroht. For, as the Ba'alei Mussar point out, there are two levels of fear of G-d: fear of punishment for breaking His commandments, and seeing Him in all that exists and occurs. As to be expected, it is the latter that is the most praiseworthy level to achieve.

For, when one fears punishment (only), doing the right thing is not a matter of being moral or productive, but of being self-protective. However, when one SEES G-d in all aspects of life, and SEES life as He meant it to appear to man, then he does the right thing because he buys into it as well, sees it as being productive, and to be a partner with G-d in his own personal fulfillment, and that of the world's.

It's all a matter of awareness; that is all G-d expects from us.

Easier said than done. For example, it said in last week's parshah:

You were shown to know that G-d is G-d - there is nothing but Him. (Devarim 4:35)

What does that mean exactly. Rashi explains:

YOU WERE SHOWN: As in the Targum: you have been shown. When The Holy One, Blessed is He, gave the Torah, He opened up the seven heavens, and just as He tore open the upper ones, so did He tear open the lower ones, and they saw that He was the only one. Thus it says, "You were shown to know . . ." (Rashi)

But, what does THAT mean exactly? It is hard to know. However, whatever it means, it means that the Jewish people were given a vision of reality so true and pristine, it was as if they were able to peer into Heaven to the highest levels. It must have been an overwhelming experience of intellectual clarity beyond anything we can comprehend, which raises a very important question: How could they have sinned after?

In fact, in spite of the phenomenally high level of awareness that the Jewish people achieved at that moment, they still allowed the golden calf to be built, and some of the Jews even participated in its

construction. Those who survived that episode went on to stumble through accepting the loshon hara of the spies about Eretz Yisroel. And, anyone who did not die out in the desert over the next 39 years because of that grave sin, erred again during the incident with the rock!

Indeed, how could Moshe Rabbeinu have even sinned by hitting the rock instead of speaking to it, or by losing his temper when the army came back from taking revenge against Midian (Parashas Mattos)? Does it not say regarding Moshe Rabbeinu:

He (G-d) said (to Aharon and Miriam), "Listen to Me. To the prophets amongst you, when I appear, I reveal Myself only in a vision, and speak in a dream. Not so with My servant Moshe, who is the most trusted in all My house. With him I speak face-to-face, while he is con-scious, and not in riddles; he has a true vision of God." (Bamidbar 12:6-8)

And yet, the Torah writes for all to read:

G-d told Moshe and Aharon, "Since you did not believe in Me to sanctify Me before the Children of Israel, you will not bring this people into the land which I have given to them." (Bamidbar 20:12)

How could that have been possible?

But, why start there? Why not go back to the beginning of history to the First Man, Adam HaRishon, and ask about his sin? What does the Talmud say about the First Man BEFORE he sinned?

It is as Rebi Elazar has said: Adam HaRishon [reached] from Earth until Heaven, as it says, "from the time G-d first cre-ated man upon the earth [and investigate from one end of heaven unto the other end of heaven]" (Devarim 4:32). When he went bad, The Holy One, Blessed is He, placed His hand upon him, and reduced him. (Chagigah 12a)

But, are we talking about physical height here? Clearly not, as the Arizal taught (whose 430th yartzheit it was as of this writing):

It is said that before the sin of Adam HaRishon, he incorporated the Four Worlds of Atzilus, Beriyah, Yetzirah, and Asiyah, and all five levels of each world: Yechidah, Chiyah, Neshamah, Ruach, and Nefesh. When he sinned, some of them were removed and returned to their holy places. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 29)

Yechidah of Atzilus?! Is that even humanly possible?! Is there any possibility of physicality on that level, and if there is, how can there have been any room to sin?!

SHABBOS DAY:

G-d took Man and placed him in the Garden of Eden to work it, and to watch over it. G-d commanded the Man, saying, "You may eat from every tree in the Garden, except from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you do, you will certainly die from that day." (Bereishis 2:15-17)

The answer to this question is really embedded in one of the possukim quoted above. However,

before showing how this is so, let us begin with a simple example.

What six year old does not love cookies? And, what six year old has not been told by his mother not to take cookies without permission, especially so close to meal times? And, what six year old has not taken them anyhow, without permission, right before meal-time? And, what six year old has not been caught with his hand in the cookie jar by his mother?

"Shmuel! Get you hand out of that cookie jar! Didn't I tell you to ask permission before taking any cookies, especially so close to meal-time?"

"But . . . but . . . well . . . ah . . ." is all most six year olds can answer at such a critical, life-threatening moment. They would like to be able to say, "Oh, really? I'm so sorry. I mean I didn't know that there was such a rule around here. I mean, I thought the cookies were free for the taking at any time. In fact, I didn't even know that you were my mother until you came in and caught me, ah, I mean, saw me taking a cookie what I thought was a free cookie . . ."

And, let's say that Shmuel did answer like that, and his mother was sport enough to play along. What could she answer?

"Ahah, I see. So, why didn't you simply take a cookie when I was still in the room?"

Good point, mom. Now, was it that Shmuel forgot all about his mother and her rules while she had left the room - out of sight, out of mind? Not likely, as was evident by the way that Shmuel operated so clandestinely. Rather, he had remained completely aware that his mother was his mother, that her rule about cookies still applied, and that he would get into trouble if caught.

However, what he had not been aware of was that he was going to get caught, because mother's have some kind of sixth sense to catch their children with their hands on the "forbidden fruit."

The problem with this analogy is that, even though it may be true that mothers have an extra sense to catch children in the act, they are still far from being omniscient. And, mothers are far from being omnipresent, though try as they do to get around that limitation.

G-d is Omnipresent; He is Omniscient. He was there and saw the snake talking to Chava, and He saw her take from the forbidden fruit. G-d saw Chava eat some, and then give it to her husband as well, and G-d watched him eat it too. And, even though G-d showed up and played as if He had no idea why Adam had gotten all dressed up, He had known the whole story even before Adam had been created in the first place!

And, what is worst is that Adam had known all of that as well. Even as he listened to his wife and took the fruit, he never once forgot that there was a G-d, that He was everywhere at all times, and saw all that took place. How could he have sinned?

Thus, the Torah says:

You were shown to know that G-d is G-d - there is nothing but Him. (Devarim 4:35)

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

You were shown to know that Hashem is Elokim - there is nothing but Him. (Devarim 4:35)

Previously, this posuk lost something in the translation. In fact, not just something, but everything. We were not shown anything to simply know that G-d is G-d; that we knew long before we arrived at Mt. Sinai. However, we were shown all seven levels of Heaven to know that Hashem - Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh - is Elokim.

What does this mean? In truth, it means many things, most of them Kabbalistic. However, in general, it means that everything is a function of G-d's will and His hand, regardless of what it appears like to our eyes and minds.

G-d, in essence, of course, is beyond any human understanding and certainly defies any description. To try to understand and define G-d's essence would be to limit it, the basis of the severe sin of idol worship.

Nevertheless, in order for man to exist, and then after existing, to build and maintain a relationship with G-d, G-d has projected a light into creation that can represent various different traits that G-d has ascribed to Himself, just for us. Since these lights and traits do not represent the essence of G-d, they can be named and quantified, spiritually-speaking of course.

The extremely holy four-letter Name of G-d that we do not pronounce today as it is written, is said to be the Name of the first level of revealed light. Elokim, on the other hand, is the same light far lower down in the system, which means that it is far weaker in spiritual intensity. The basic rule is, the less spiritually intense a light is, the less miraculous - and therefore, the more "natural" - a light it is.

It is time for another parable.

It is payday, and you dutifully go to the manager's office and pick up your paycheck. Upon receiving it, you say to your manager, "Thank you." However, he says to you, "Your welcome. But, if you really want to thank someone, thank my manager, because he gave me your paycheck to give to you."

So, thinking to yourself that it would be a nice idea to follow through on your manager's decision, you go to his manager's office, knock on his door, explain why you're there, and then finish with a gracious, "Thank you."

However, he answers, "I'm impressed, but I'm not the one to thank. Mr. Abramson brings me the paychecks each pay period, and I just distribute them to the different managers. I'm sure he'd appreciate hearing your thank you."

And, this is the way it goes for the next hour, until you find yourself at the door of the boss, where the buck truly stops. However, by this point you are both tired and awed by the incredible chain of

command responsible for paying your bills every two weeks. Next paycheck, you no longer just see one hand passing you your salary, but all the many hands involved, from the Chairman of the Board all the way down to your floor manager.

Nevertheless, it is only the person who actually passes the check into your hand whom you continue to experience, who remains real to you. You remain AWARE of all the others, but they remain only intellectual realities, and not emotional realities, as the person with whom you actually deal with every two weeks.

At Mt. Sinai, when G-d gave the Torah, the Jewish people were given a vision of the chain of command that connects Elokim - the hidden hand of G-d - to Yud-Heh-Vav-Heh. Their spiritual awareness had been heightened considerably, and its impact is still with us to this very day.

However, once the Heavens were "repaired," the Jewish people remained on earth, and on the level of Elokim only. Intellectually, they had come to know how the various different levels of G-d's light connected to each other and they had experienced, if only briefly, the hierarchy itself. But, when the experience ended, it became only a vision, and visions require diligence to be maintained accurately.

MELAVE MALKAH:

If you listen to these judgments and observe and do them, then G-d, your G-d, will keep the covenant and kindness with you which He made with your fathers. He will love you, and bless you, and multiply you. He will bless the fruit of your womb, and the fruit of your ground: your grain, your wine, your oil, the calves of your herd, and the lambs of your flock, in the land about which he swore to your fathers to give you. (Devarim 7:12-13)

Indeed, had Moshe Rabbeinu been speaking to G-d face-to-face at the time he had approached the rock, he could never have hit it. At such a moment of sublime unity with the Creator Himself, Moshe Rabbeinu would have not only understand every aspect of the truth about the situation, but would have experienced it as well with all his being, as had been the case on top of Mt. Sinai.

However, at the time that Moshe had approached the rock, the Divine Presence had withdrawn (Leshem), usually a signal of Divine disapproval. However, in this case, it had been for the sake of letting Moshe himself choose which rock from which the water should burst forth, which Moshe did not understand, increasing the magnitude of the miracle and the involvement of man in the direction of history.

Instead, the Torah shows, Moshe had become angered, and anger forces away the Divine Presence from a person. It was as if his personal connection to Heaven had become weakened, and as a result, his vision of the situation less clear.

Though it was true that Adam spanned from Earth to Heaven, spiritually-speaking, the Kabbalists point out that though his mind was in Heaven, his feet, so-to-speak, dangled in a world that had yet

to become spiritually perfect. Had ALL of Adam been on the level of Yechidah of Atzilus with his mind, then sin could never have been possible, because his awareness AND experience of G-d would have been complete - as it will be for all of mankind in Yemos HaMoshiach (Succah 52a) - and free-will would have remained only a theoretical possibility, if that.

Thus, the meaning of the posuk with which we began:

Now, Israel, what does G-d, your G-d, want from you, except to fear G-d, your G-d, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve G-d your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul. (Devarim 10:12)

It is really this: The Torah itself, particularly Kabbalah, tears open the seven Heavens for us, to reveal the spiritual chain of command between the will of G-d and the veil of nature. Nevertheless, it is vision that we can only see in the beginning at the bottom looking upward. It can only be, at first, an intellectual reality of which can become increasingly aware, but it will lack the experiential aspect.

We have been commanded to gain this vision and to obtain this knowledge. However, such knowledge on the level of the intellect alone is subject to spiritual static, like a cell phone when used in an area where the reception is weak. The vision can weaken, become unclear, and even fade away over time.

Therefore, we have been requested to build upon that vision, to make it as experiential as possible, to become one with it. Therein lies the true work of a Jew, and the effort for which we are rewarded, in this world - the blessing described above - as well as the next world. And, it is to this end that Moshe Rabbeinu has ordered his parting words and instructed the Jewish people, not just for the generation of Jews that survived and stood before him, but for all the generations of Jews until Moshiach comes, may it be quickly in our time.

Have a great Shabbos,
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