

# HIDE & GO SEEK

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## FRIDAY NIGHT:

G-d told Moshe, *"After you lie with your fathers, this people will act immorally and pursue the gods of the strangers of the land they are going to. They will abandon Me and nullify My covenant which I have made with them. I will become very angry at them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them."* (Devarim 31:16-17)

If the Jewish people of that time wondered what that could possibly mean, our generation, in retrospect, understands only too well. The generation before us - Holocaust survivors - and the many before them understood first hand. It is utterly horrifying and debilitating to recall to what extent the evil people of this world have had their way with the descendants of Avraham Avinu.

Hester panim - the hiding of G-d's face - has been so powerful at times that even in the time of the Second Temple, when the Romans spilled Jewish blood like water, the leaders contemplated allowing the Jewish people to die out (Bava Basra 60b). It is a sentiment that has probably been contemplated many times by Jewish leaders, at the darkest moment of Jewish history.

Motzei Shabbos begins the saying of Selichos for B'nei Ashkenaz; the Sephardim started saying Selichos right after the first day of Rosh Chodesh Elul. The beginning of Elul represents the start of a process that will end, for the most part, Motzei Yom Kippur, as we fervently shout the words, "Hashem Hu HaElokim!" - G-d is Elokim - seven times at the conclusion of the Ne'ilah Service.

Why seven times? Because, the Midrash teaches, there are seven layers of Heaven:

When Adam sinned, the Shechinah departed to the First Heaven. The sin of Kayin forced it to the Second Heaven; the Generation of Enosh to the Third; the generation of the Flood to the Fourth; The generation of the Dispersion to the Fifth; Sodomites, to the Sixth; Egypt of Avraham's day, to the Seventh ... (Bereishis Rabbah 19:7)

As it is well known, the word "Elul" is made up of four letters - aleph-lamed-vav-lamed - each of which is the first letter of one of four words from Shir HaShirim (6:3), which means: I am for My beloved and My beloved is for Me. In other words, we are told by many commentators, Elul is the one time of year that G-d reaches out to the Jew, meeting him half-way, so-to-speak. That is why it

is so much easier to be spiritual at this time of year, and to do teshuvah.

What this technically means is that G-d is doing just the opposite of Hester Panim. Hester Panim is the name given to the process of G-d removing himself from one level of Heaven to another more distant one. Elul Zman is just the opposite: G-d is moving from more distant levels of Heaven to closer ones, eventually, on Rosh Hashanah, arriving at the closest one possible. At the end of Ne'ilah the King will return to the furthest ones, unless we do major teshuvah, elevate the world, and make it fitting for Him to stay all year round.

However, before that time, and for what we call the Aseres Yemai Teshuvah - Ten Days of Repentance - G-d will linger on the lower levels. It is as if a king has stopped by our town along his way and stayed for 10 days. It changes everything about the town: the atmosphere, the way people go to work, and the way they deal with each other. His very presence, even when he can't be seen physically, is felt everywhere, and it draws out of people even greater respect. How much more so with G-d, the King of kings!

However, imagine if someone was blind, G-d forbid, and could not see what all the fanfare was about. Imagine he could hear all the noise and the people rushing about to prepare for the arrival of the king, but he could not see what they were doing, or for that matter, understand why. What would he do?

### **SHABBOS DAY:**

*G-d saw that the light was good, and G-d separated between the light and the dark. (Bereishis 1:4)*

The blind person would, of course, turn to another who could see, and ask for an explanation. The person to whom he would ask his question, if he was a sympathetic person, would not only explain what all the commotion was about, but even describe to the blind man what was happening in detail. This would allow the blind man to use his mind's eye to see what he was about to be a part of, which would enable him to be part of the experience as well, to the best of his ability.

A question: If G-d really comes down towards us, spiritually-speaking, at this time of year, why isn't everyone and everything blown away? We're talking about G-d, the omnipotent and omniscient G-d, the Creator of the entire universe, Master of the world - King of all kings! If He is truly here, then why aren't our senses overwhelmed, like they were at Mt. Sinai when G-d came down to us then, and caused our bodies to short-circuit and result in death?

There is another similar reality that answers this question. The Torah tells us that on the first day of creation, G-d created light. However, the Talmud tells us (Chagigah 12a), as Rashi reveals, that this was a special light, and was therefore subject to abuse by the evil people of history. Therefore, the Talmud says, G-d hid this light on the first day of creation to avoid such a future crisis, and is saving it for the righteous as a reward in the Time-to-Come. Hence, its Hebrew name: Ohr HaGanuz - Hidden Light.

From Rashi and the Talmud, it sounds as if this light was hidden on the first day of creation, never to be seen again except by the righteous at a future date, well after the evil are gone from creation. However, as is often the case with ideas such as this one, the concept is more complicated than it seems on the surface, thank G-d.

I say thank G-d, because if this was not so, then we would not have left Egypt, we would not have been saved by the splitting of the Red Sea, and we could not have received the Torah. For, all miracles take place through this light, and everywhere a miracle has occurred, it is the tell-tale sign that the Ohr HaGanuz has made a special guest appearance in history.

Furthermore, it is the light that shines out to us through the words of Torah. If we are deriving pleasure from Torah, then we are sensing the Ohr HaGanuz. If we are gaining insight into the world through Torah, then we are seeing with the Ohr HaGanuz. Most important of all, if Torah is causing us to feel the Presence of G-d more, then we are being touched and elevated by the Ohr HaGanuz. And, to the extent that all of this is true, that is the extent to which we are accessing this holy and sublime light of Day One of creation.

But how does this jive with Rashi's comment, which is really the Talmud's revelation? For, many of us who have yet to become righteous in the full sense of the term can testify that we have experienced this on some level. And even for the fully righteous, how are they able to enjoy the Ohr HaGanuz now when it has been set aside since time immemorial as a reward for the righteousness at much later time in the future?

... Hiding as is taught with respect to the verse, "G-d separated between the light and the dark" (Bereishis 1:4), that He separated it for the righteous in the Time-to-Come, as it is said in Chagigah (12a), but held it back from the evil (Bereishis Rabbah 83; Midrash Tehillim 27) ... In other words, The Holy One, Blessed is He, saw to it that the light flows only to the righteous in the Time-to-Come, but from the evil He prevented it ... He made a division in the illumination of the light, so that it should only flow to the righteous whose actions draw it to them. However, the actions of the evil prevent it from coming to them, and this is the matter of the hiding of the light. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 133)

In other words, "Time-to-Come," in this case, is not talking about Yemos HaMoshiach and onward in time. It was talking about the future with respect to Day One of creation. From that time onward only righteous actions can allow a person to access the light. Thus, within one world, indeed, within one room, one person can access the Ohr HaGanuz, while the one standing next to him cannot, unless he too is acting righteously at the time.

Is it unreasonable that such a miraculous light would be so miraculous? Of course not. In truth, we witness such a split reality all the time, which is the basis of such colloquial expressions as, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." But how can that be? Is not beauty an objective reality?

Ultimately, yes. However, until we reach that ultimate OBJECTIVE reality, life and perception of beauty will be quite subjective. As long as free-will is a relevant possibility, subjectivity will be the

way of the world, as each individual struggles to find the essence of who they are and what they are here to accomplish.

Thus, in this world it is possible for some that the King comes down from the farthest reaches of Heaven, but not for others. In fact, the Midrash says that when G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people at Mt. Sinai, the world went quiet. When the gentile nations came to Bilaam to find out why, he explained to them that G-d was giving His Torah to the Jewish people!

Did it stop Balak from hiring Bilaam to curse the Jewish people, and did it stop Bilaam from going to Balak to accept his offer? No. Not much changed in the world even though they either heard about the miracles being done for the Jewish people or witnessed them first hand themselves! WHY NOT!

### **SEUDOS SHLISHIS:**

*Seek G-d and you will find Him . . . (Yeshayahu 55:)*

Let's say it is raining buckets outside, and three people wish to drink. One has a cup, another has a cup full of holes, and the third lacks a cup altogether. Though the rain falls for each of them, each will have a different experience of the rain as far as drinking its waters.

The one with the whole cup need only stand in one spot and receive the water that is being brought to him. The one with the cup with holes in it will also drink rainwater, but it will take more time to gather the same amount of rain, if doing so is possible at all. The one without the cup will simply have to go thirsty.

By virtue of the fact that the Jewish people are the children of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, and that we stood at Mt. Sinai and accepted Torah, we have "vessels" with which to receive the light of G-d, with which to receive G-d Himself, so-to-speak, to drink from the waters of Torah. The "cup" is our heritage, our starting point as Jews.

To sin, G-d forbid, is to puncture the walls of our vessel, limiting its ability to contain the light that flows from Above to Below. To do teshuvah is to patch up those holes, and the extent to which we do teshuvah, that is the extent to which we are able to receive the King and His light, experience it, and even maintain it.

Thus, hester panim is not just a national and world reality, but a personal one as well. The saddest and most frustrating thing about talking to non-believing individuals is knowing that their belief is not based upon fact, but upon an inability to receive and contain the light of creation. If they could only become a vessel for the light of G-d, how quickly they would change their way of thinking.

Kiruv rechokim - to bring close those who are distant - is a matter of finding some part of their kli - their spiritual vessel - that is capable of receiving a least a taste of this light, to initiate the process of teshuvah, and prime the pump, if you will. For, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to discover the truth about G-d and Torah, and sometimes it is better NOT to be one.

Was the universe designed for us? Or did we just get lucky? Searching for answers, some theorists have invoked the so-called Strong Anthropic Principle, which states that our universe has to have laws suitable for life. Otherwise we would not be here to see it. The apparent "fine-tuning" of this universe is simply an artifact of our own existence here as observers, Dr. Brandon Carter, now at the Paris Observatory in Meudon, argued in 1974. The principle fits well with recent theories of the Big Bang that suggest that the universe seen through telescopes is just one in an endless chain of bubble universes that sprout from one another. If there is just one universe, the fact that it suits us would seem suspiciously lucky. But if there are many universes to choose from, our existence is less miraculous. It might be the diversity of string-theory universes that gives this meta-cosmos a chance at harboring life, Dr. Susskind says . . . As a result, he said, in whatever form it starts, the universe will branch out into other forms. If it keeps sloshing, it will eventually land in a valley with the lucky mix of cosmic constants that allows for galaxies and carbon-based chemistry somewhere. If a small fraction of the sub-universes can support life, then there is a good chance that life will arise somewhere, Dr. Susskind explained. Others caution, however, that it has not been proved that different classes of universes would be so interconnected. "It could be that there are many disconnected landscapes," explained Dr. Douglas of Rutgers. Dr. Susskind said that "whether we like it or not," the new findings gave further credence to the anthropocentric principle and a mathematical framework for how it might work. But such "anthropocentric thinking" is defeatist to many physicists. "We see this kind of thing happen over and over again as a reaction to difficult problems," Dr. Gross said. "Come up with a grand principle that explains why you're unable to solve the problem" . . . Dr. Witten said he also disliked the anthropocentric principle. "I continue to hope that we are overlooking or misunderstanding something and that there is ultimately a more unique answer," he wrote by e-mail. (One Cosmic Question, Too Many Answers, September 2, 2003)

If anything suggests to what extent personal hester panim can stretch, the Strong Anthropocentric Principle is it. It is impressive how deep man can think and how far he can theorize. It is utterly depressing and frightening to see how, along his path to truth, and ultimately to G-d, he can run right past the truth and use his mind's eye to be blinder than those who can barely see!

### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

G-d told Moshe, *"After you lie with your fathers, this people will act immorally and pursue the gods of the strangers of the land they are going to. They will abandon Me and nullify My covenant which I have made with them. I will become very angry at them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them. They will be devoured, and plagued by many evils that will distress them, and will say, 'Do we not suffer because G-d has left us?' "* (Devarim 31:16-17)

On the Hebrew that translates as, "I will] hide My face from them. They will be devoured" the Ba'al HaTurim comments:

The gematria of the final letters [of each of the words] equals "Haman," as the Talmud elucidates in

Chullin [139b], that [the words] "I will hide My face" is a hint to Esther. (Ba'al HaTurim, Devarim 31:17)

As in Esther of the Purim story, it is quite fitting that Haman be alluded to here as well. But where there is a Haman, there is an Amalek, and that is who we are really always talking about. Haman was merely the face of Amalek in Mordechai's and Esther's time, and Amalek is really the face of hester panim. He is the technical reality that results from tzimtzum, the constriction of G-d's light.

Purim is the face of galui panim, the exact opposite of hester panim - the revelation of G-d's light. It represents the opposite of tzimtzum, and therefore it is the light of redemption, and therefore, the true undercurrent of history. Thus, the rabbis teach:

All the holidays will be annulled in the future, except for the days of Purim . . . Rebi Elazar says, Yom Kippurim will also not be annulled. (Mishlei Rabbah, 9)

The Leshem explains that there will come a time when even Yom Kippurim will also be buttel, and that is in the eighth millennium. But Purim, that will not be annulled until the ninth millennium, which corresponds to the sefirah of Chochmah - Wisdom - and therefore will be the last of the holidays to go.

And, why are the Jewish holidays annulled at all? Because, the Leshem explains, creation is elevated to their level of light and holiness until there is no longer a need to have a special day of the year to experience their unique light. With respect to Purim, it is the last level of light to be reached before we enter the final stage of the World-to-Come - forever.

Thus, the rabbis were not merely making a play on words when they revealed that Yom Kippurim is really Yom k'Purim - a day like Purim. Not Purim itself, because the light of Purim is actually on a higher level, close to it. If that is hard to relate to, it is only because of the amount of hester panim that we live with everyday of our lives.

Perhaps we once understood what this means. The Talmud says that after Shlomo HaMelech and the nation of his time completed the building of the Bais HaMikdash, they celebrated for two straight weeks, beginning on Rosh Hashanah and ending on Succos (Moed Katan 9a). But what did they do when they got to the tenth day of Tishrei and the holy day of Yom Kippur? Break to fast and pray?

No. They kept on going - celebrating and feasting to honor G-d and His new dwelling place on earth. EAT ON YOM KIPPUR? DELIBERATELY? Doesn't that result in the punishment of kores, of being cut off from the Jewish people?

Not that year. Not only were they not punished for their celebration on Yom Kippur, but the Talmud says, a Heavenly Voice announced that each of them were actually destined for the World-to-Come! They accomplished through their feasting what most can't accomplish through their fasting and prayer!

Such is the power of eating for the sake of G-d, of sanctifying the physical for spiritual purposes.

Which, at last, brings us back to Selichos. For that is what Selichos is preparing us to do. They are designed to elevate us, to focus and direct us in the direction of G-d just prior to the arrival of the King. They are our final chance to repair our keilim, our vessels, in order to receive the light of G-d to be showered upon the Jewish people.

L'Chaim!

L'Shannah Tovah sichaseivu v'sichaseimu l'alter chaim v'tovim, Pinchas Winston