

TO BE ENLIGHTENED

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Ya'akov finished instructing his sons. He gathered his feet onto the bed and expired. He was gathered to his people. (Bereishis 49:33)

Expired, yes, but died? That is a discussion in the Talmud:

Rebi Yochanan said: "Ya'akov our father never died." Rebi Nachman replied: "Then was it in vain that he was mourned and embalmed?" Rebi Yitzchak answered: "I make this assertion from the following posuk, 'Do not fear, O my servant Ya'akov, says the Lord, and be not dismayed, O Israel; for, behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Ya'akov shall return, and shall be at rest, and be secure, with none to terrify him' (Yirmiyahu 30:10). Thus, Ya'akov is compared to his children, and just as the latter are still living so is he also." (Ta'anis 5b)

Then, what about the mourning and embalming? Perhaps a clever ruse by Yosef and his brothers to disguise the fact that their father never really actually died, because that would have turned him into a source of idol worship from those seeking eternal life. If so, then where did Ya'akov go? Poof?

As I write this dvar Torah, it is the seventh night of Chanukah. As I look to my left from the Dining Room table, I can see the flames of the Chanukios still burning, some three hours later, proclaiming the miracle of Chanukah. I can never get used to the way the wick is able to draw up the thick oil and turn it into a beautiful, peaceful, orange-yellow flame. However, it is subject to the following law:

The conservation of energy states that the total inflow of energy into a system must equal the total outflow of energy from the system, plus the change in the energy contained within the system. In other words, energy can be converted from one form to another, but it cannot be created or destroyed. (Wikipedia, Conservation of Energy)

Combustion or burning is a chemical process, an exothermic reaction (i.e., one that releases heat) between a substance (in this case, the oil) and gas, usually O₂, to release the heat. (Wikipedia, Combustion)

So, if you place your hand above a flame, you are feeling the energy of the oil in a different, non-viewable form. The energy, though released through the flame, did not leave the universe. Rather, it simply changed its state, perhaps like Ya'akov Avinu's body. For, the soul is already spiritual; just the body has to be answered for. However, even this is not a foreign concept, especially to a Kabbalist.

For, as we have said before, our skin today is the end result of a transition, a physicalization that resulted from the eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil:

... Thus, Adam stumbled in two ways: looking [at the tree] and then eating [from it]. As a result, the world became more physical, as did Adam and Chava. They were transformed from the clothing of the Kesones Ohr of the Ohr HaGanuz with an Aleph (ALEPH-Vav-Raish) to the Kesones Ohr (AYIN-Vav-Raish) of the skin of the snake. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 345)

Hence, our present form is not the "natural" one in which we were created, and we certainly cannot go to the World-to-Come dressed as we are now.

SHABBOS DAY:

G-d said, "Let us make Man in our image, in our likeness." (Bereishis 1:26)

Thus, though this present physical state of man suits our period of history, it is unacceptable for higher spiritual planes, especially that of the World-to-Come. Hence, before anyone can enter that ultimate phase of history, one must reverse the process and return back once again to the state of being that Adam HaRishon first enjoyed before everything went wrong. We will have to be re-built again without any of the effects of interacting with the snake and the sin that followed (Derech Hashem 1:3:9; Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:4:12:9-12).

The period of re-building is called Techiyas HaMeisim (Resurrection of the Dead). This period of time will be specifically for dying, decomposing in the ground (as part of the atonement process), and then, being re-built anew on a much higher spiritual plane. If you could see now what you will look like then after resurrection, you'd think you were looking at an angel (Bava Basra 75b). And, who can see an angel?

Now, what is really interesting at this stage of history is what physics has come to believe. The ancient Greeks were the first to deduce that the universe was made up of tiny undividable components that they called atoms. However, thousands of years later, scientists discovered that atoms were not the end of the story as far as matter is concerned, because they consist of a nucleus, which contains protons and neutrons, that are surrounded by a cloud of orbiting electrons.

But even that was not the final word in terms of the smallest components making up all the matter in the universe. Rather, in 1968, with the help of a Linear Accelerator, even smaller particles - two to be exact: up- quarks and down-quarks, were found. But even that was not the end . . .

To make a long and complicated story much shorter, the more technologically advanced the experiments became, the more physicists have been able to detect, or at least theorize about the most basic building blocks of the physical universe. And, as they search for the fulfillment of what Einstein once called the "Unified Field Theory," now called the "Theory of Everything," the latest theory of the most basic building block of physical Creation is called a "String."

"According to string theory, if we could examine these particles with even greater precision, a precision many orders of magnitude beyond our present technological capacity, we would find that each is not point-like, but instead consists of a tiny one-dimensional loop . . . String theory adds the new microscopic layer of a vibrating loop to the previously known progression from atoms through protons, neutrons, electrons, and quarks." (The Elegant Universe, p. 14)

All of it is very fascinating, and even more so if it ever proves to be true:

"If we allow ourselves to be beguiled by the siren of the "ultimate" unification at distances so small that our experimental friends cannot help us, then we are in trouble, because we will lose that crucial process of pruning of irrelevant ideas which distinguishes physics from so many other less interesting human activities." (The New Physics, Cambridge University Press, 1989)

However, the true upshot of all of this is, something that physics has definitely proven to be true, is that our assumptions about the physical world are not really that accurate. Apparently, on a sub-atomic level, the world behaves in a way that is very different than what our eyes behold, in ways that truly stretch the mind if one makes a point of trying to understand even a little of it, and in ways, to quote physicists, that make science-fiction look tame by comparison.

From a Western point of view, it can be very disconcerting, because it reveals the inherent instability of everyday life. From a Torah point of view, especially a Kabbalistic one, it's like, "Well, what took you people so long?" And, to quote some other physicists, "As long as you can't perform experiments to prove the veracity of the string theory, it no longer belongs to the realm of physics, but to the realm of philosophy instead."

What an interesting intellectual threshold it is.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

"I am G-d; I called you for righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; and I formed you, and I made you for a people's covenant, for a light unto nations." (Yeshayahu 42:6)

Science (from Latin scientia - knowledge) refers to a system of acquiring knowledge - based on empiricism, experimentation, and methodological naturalism - aimed at finding out the truth. The basic unit of knowledge is the theory which is a hypothesis that is predictive. The term science also refers to the organized body of knowledge humans have gained by such research.

Most scientists feel that scientific investigation must adhere to the scientific method, a process for evaluating empirical knowledge under the working assumption of methodological materialism, which explains observable events in nature by natural causes without assuming the existence or non-existence of the supernatural. (Wikipedia, Science)

The word Philosophy has a variety of meanings. Its etymology is from the ancient Greek word *philosophia*, which means "love of wisdom." It can mean a system of belief, values or tenets; a body of

philosophical literature that was created over the centuries by a culture or civilization; a personal outlook or viewpoint; truth found in mystical experience, or even alchemy and astrology . . .
(Wikipedia, Philosophy)

Don't worry. I have not lost my train of thought. It is just taking the scenic route home.

What does it mean to be a "light unto nations"? The most popular explanation is that the Jewish people are meant to teach the world about G-d's truth. Knowledge is light, in the figurative sense, and to live without knowledge, without truth is to live in intellectual darkness, no matter how sunny it is outside.

To a Kabbalist, being a "light unto nations" can be taken literally. What's the problem? Adam, before the sin of the Aitz HaDa'as Tov v'Rah was literally a light, as was Moshe Rabbeinu when he came down from Mt. Sinai after G-d passed by him while he hid in the cleft of the rock. And, as we have already seen, we will all become this way once again after resurrecting during Techiyas HaMeisim.

However, this is not science; this is part of our philosophy. Ironically, though, as modern physics seeks the truth about our universe, it is starting to resemble philosophy more-and-more, to the chagrin of the average physicist. Two worlds that seemed more distant from each other than simply being separate buildings on a college campus are quickly converging. The funny thing is that the very answer that scientists seek to avoid arriving at a philosophical conclusion is bringing them ever closer to one, as it should.

Physicists believe that there should only be one truth; Torah says there is. Physicists believe that one equation should unify all the forces of Creation in one all-encompassing and elegant expression; Torah says it does. And, since Torah is a matter of belief in G-d, it should not be completely and empirically provable. There should be a point where physical experimentation can no longer be performed, where understanding of the universe can only take place in the mind.

MELAVE MALKAH:

By Your light may we see light. (Tehillim 36:10)

One of the most famous of all math equations is $E=mc^2$. It was discovered by Albert Einstein around 1905, and turned the scientific world on its head. Basically, it means that when a body is at rest for a particular frame of reference, it still has energy in the form of its mass (according to Newton, it has no energy at all). The "E" is the total energy of the body, which becomes equal only to the mass when the body is at rest. When not at rest, "E" becomes equal to the mass plus the kinetic energy. In the context of special relativity theory, the implication is that energy and mass are equal, and that mass is considered as a form of energy.

That is a startling statement about the everyday physical reality, given that we act as if it is anything but that. But then again, string theorists talk about eleven-dimensional reality, three extended dimensions that we see everyday, seven curled-up dimensions that we cannot see at all, and time.

But wait, it gets even better:

In quantum physics, the Heisenberg uncertainty principle states that one cannot assign with full precision values for certain pairs of observable variables including the position and momentum of a single particle at the same time even in theory . . . The uncertainty principle is one of the cornerstones of quantum mechanics and was discovered by Werner Heisenberg in 1927 . . . The Uncertainty Principle was developed as an answer to the question: How does one measure the location of an electron around a nucleus? . . . In March 1926, working in Bohr's institute, Heisenberg formulated the principle of uncertainty thereby laying the foundation of what became known as the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics. Albert Einstein was not happy with the uncertainty principle, and he challenged Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg with a famous thought experiment . . . Within the widely but not universally accepted Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics (i.e., it was not accepted by Einstein or other physicists such as Alfred Lande), the uncertainty principle is taken to mean that on an elementary level, the physical universe does not exist in a deterministic form, but rather as a collection of probabilities, or potentials . . . It is this interpretation that Einstein was questioning when he said "I cannot believe that G-d would choose to play dice with the universe." Bohr, who was one of the authors of the Copenhagen interpretation responded, "Einstein, don't tell G-d what to do." Niels Bohr himself acknowledged that quantum mechanics and the uncertainty principle were counter-intuitive when he stated, "Anyone who is not shocked by quantum theory has not understood a single word." (Wikipedia, The Uncertainty Principle)

We live in an extremely complicated and deceptive physical universe. For those who barely acknowledge the four dimensions of which we are aware, where could Ya'akov have gone, if not into the ground? I mean, obviously his soul went back to Heaven, but his body? Where did that go?

To a Kabbalist, the last 17 years of his life, the gematria of the word "tov," a term first applied to the Supernal Light of Creation, the Ohr HaGanuz said to be in the Ner Shel Chanukah, witnessed the transformation of Ya'akov into Yisroel, from a physical state to a far more spiritual one: Kesones Ohr, also made of the Ohr HaGanuz. His last day that he could be seen was the threshold between one dimension that we can see, and one that we cannot see.

To a physicist, life is becoming stranger than science fiction, and science fiction is quite strange as it questions the very fabric of existence and stretches as far as the imagination can go.

My Ner Shel Chanukah has wound down. The oil is gone, and therefore, so is the flame. But the energy is still here in the universe - somewhere. And, as we approached the eighth day of Chanukah, the number that symbolizes the supernatural, and the thirty-sixth candle, the number of the Ohr HaGanuz, we were reminded of a far deeper meaning of what it means to be a "light unto nations," and how it is that the few could overcome the many.

And, how it is that all of the Yisroels of history don't have to die as they make the transition from our

world to theirs?

CHAZAK!

Have a great Shabbos,
PW

Text

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