

A DIVINE PRESENCE OF MIND

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Mt. Sinai was smoking, because G-d came down on it in fire. The smoke rose like the smoke of a furnace; the whole mountain trembled. (Shemos 19:18)

Yesurim (suffering) is such a part of life; no one is free from it. It doesn't affect everyone equally or at the same time, except during major crises such as wars, G-d forbid. But, everyone pays their dues at some time in their life, and if not in this incarnation, then in another.

There are different purposes for yesurim. The main purpose, according to Kabbalah, is called tziruf v'libun (refinement and whitening). Everyone knows that yesurim has the capacity to make people stronger and refine them, and it tends to act as a vehicle for purification (whitening) of their soul. True, yesurim can, G-d forbid, break a person, but that is only in extreme situations, when that itself is the necessary tikun for the person.

Thus, the Talmud, when addressing the issue of yesurim writes:

Rava, and some say, Rav Chisda says, "If a person sees that sufferings have come to him, let him examine his conduct, for it says, 'Let us search and try our ways, and return unto the L-rd' (Eichah 3:40). If he examines and finds nothing [objectionable], let him attribute it to the neglect of the study of the Torah, as it says, 'Happy is the man whom G-d disciplines, and whom You teach from Your Torah' (Tehillim 94:12). (Brochos 5a)

Hence, yesurim is a mode of communication between Heaven and man. It is first and foremost an excuse to do a Cheshbon HaNefesh (Soul Accounting). It is difficult for us to know if our present state of Torah observance is the most that is expected from us, from our Creator's point of view. We can be underachieving and losing valuable opportunities to maximize our portion in the World-to-Come, so the yesurim become a Divine wake-up call to re-examine our level of mitzvah performance.

Personally, that would be enough information for me. I know that there are plenty of reasons for yesurim just based upon my mitzvah performance. Not that I don't try, and sometimes I try very hard. It's just that, like everyone else I know, I have a yetzer hara that still holds sway with my body. So, when I get yesurim, the first thing I do is take a look at my actions and try to find something I can work on and improve.

Hence, I cannot relate to what the Talmud says, "If he examines and finds nothing [objectionable], let him attribute it to the neglect of the study of the Torah." I only WISH I could make such a claim with confidence, and be right about it. However, few as they may be in the world, there are some people who can, and so for them their yesurim may be a function of not spending as much time on Torah as they ought to.

On such a level, one would certainly be called a Gadol b'Torah (Great in Torah). The lives of such spiritually-great people would be exemplary, and bittul Torah would amount to not having their eyes in a Torah book, or at least their minds in a Torah thought, at a moment in time when they were not involved in some other more pressing mitzvah. Indeed, there is one Gadol b'Torah here in Jerusalem, to whom I used to ask my shailos, whose eyes would be back in his sefer every time I paused to collect my thoughts.

What a level to live on! But why?

SHABBOS DAY:

Whom the L-rd loves He corrects. (Mishlei 3:12)

The answer to this question lies in the continuation of the Talmud's lesson:

". . . If he did attribute it [thus], and still did not find [this to be the cause], let him be sure that these are sufferings of love, since it says, 'Whom the L-rd loves He corrects' (Mishlei 3:12)." (Brochos 5a)

The Talmud is saying that, if the person suffering can claim with surety that he has no sins, and does not waste any time when it comes to learning Torah, and yet he still has yesurim, then it is yesurim shel ahava (suffering of love).

But what more is there than Torah? We recite daily:

These are the things that a person benefits from in this world, but the principle is saved for him in the World-to-Come; they are: honoring one's father and mother, acts of living kindness, coming early to the Bais HaMidrash in the morning and evening . . . but the study of Torah equals them all.

Even still, it seems, Talmud Torah is only a means to a higher end, and the key is in Rashi's explanation:

The Holy One, Blessed is He, troubles him in this world to increase his reward in the World-to-Come, more than his merits.

And, that is all that counts, in the end. Amazing as it seems, for this world is so elaborate, it is only a very elaborate stage. It would be great to have an Olam HaBah meter, something you can carry around with you, like the ones that measure radiation. Instead, this one you could carry into ANY situation, happy or sad, exciting or boring, secure or fearful, and measure its Olam HaBah potential.

For, as the Talmud says:

There are some who acquire the World-to-Come in a moment, and there are some who do so after an entire lifetime. (Avodah Zarah 18a)

And, a single moment can come and go in the blink of an eye, and with it, the chance to earn one's portion in the World-to-Come, or at least to greatly expand it. That's why "Whom the L-rd loves He corrects," and why He gave Torah to us in the first place: to train us, for:

G-d's purpose in Creation was to bestow of His good to another . . . Since G-d desired to bestow good, a partial good would not be sufficient. The good that He bestows would have to be the ultimate good that His handiwork could accept. G-d alone, however, is the only true good, and therefore His beneficent desire would not be satisfied unless it could bestow that very good, namely the true perfect good that exists in His intrinsic nature . . . His wisdom therefore decreed that the nature of His true benefaction be His giving His created beings the opportunity to attach themselves to Him to the greatest degree possible. (Derech Hashem 1:2:1- 1:3:2)

And, that is why He gives us yesurim: to wake us up from the illusion for which we have fallen. A sin is just the result of a person trying to enjoy the World-to-Come in this world. Yesurim says, "Wake up! A sin is a poor and wasted attempt at realizing future paradise in the present."

And, even if the person has come to this realization, and can maintain it on a daily basis, he may come to think, "I am there. I can afford to slack off a bit here and there and still benefit from the good I do." Says the yesurim, "Not true. If you have a spare moment to fill with Torah, you have a spare moment to enhance your portion in the World-to-Come. Otherwise, why live it?"

But, there is a level beyond as well, the level of yesurim shel ahavah. The person does every mitzvah, and with the proper intention, that comes his way. He already fills every moment with Torah learning that he can. So, what is left? To do so with the extra burden of yesurim is like running up a hill while carrying someone. It is more taxing and therefore more beneficial, spiritually-speaking, and quite theoretical for most of us.

Regardless, the goal is the same for all of us, and the reason why G-d even bothered to come down on Har Sinai to talk to man. He had a gift to give us, the World-to-Come, and it came with instructions. Following the instructions can be extremely taxing, but the reward for doing so, on whatever level we can, will be well worth it, forever.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

"G-d stands in the Divine Assembly" (Tehillim 82:1)

The term "Shechinah" (Divine Presence), is a common one, at least in the Torah world. It can refer to different levels of Divine revelation, to that at Har Sinai in this week's parshah, or in the sense of G-dliness one feels while living in Eretz Yisroel, or during prayer. Regardless, it is an awesome sense, depending upon the level to which one is able to feel it. There is no question that when one feels "spiritual" he is feeling an aspect of the Shechinah, but it is distant from actually feeling like a

"vehicle" for the Shechinah.

The Talmud discusses some of the ways that "cause" the Shechinah to descend upon people, so-to-speak:

How do you know that if ten people pray together the Divine Presence is with them? It says: "G-d stands in the Divine Assembly" (Tehillim 82:1). And how do you know that if three are sitting as a court of judges the Divine Presence is with them? For it is said: "In the midst of the judges He shall judge" (Ibid.). And how do you know that if two are sitting and studying Torah together the Divine Presence is with them? It says: "Then they that feared the L-rd spoke one with another; and the L-rd listened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the L-rd and that thought upon His name" (Malachi 3:16) . . . And how do you know that even if one man sits and studies Torah the Divine Presence is with him? It says: "In every place where I cause My Name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you" (Shemos 20:21) . . . To [a gathering of] ten the Divine Presence comes first, but to three, it comes only after they sit down. (Brochos 6a)

Why these things in particular? First and foremost, they represent the idea of bringing kedushah into the world, which automatically draws the Divine Presence down. More than this, they represent our effort to become partners with G-d in running Creation, and raising it to higher spiritual levels. Chillul Hashem, the profanation of G-d's Name, comes from the word "challal," which means an empty area. Certain acts chase away kedushah, and therefore, chases away the Shechinah, resulting in greater Hester Panim.

However, when we do anything that leads to greater justice in the world, or greater spirituality, starting with ourselves, then we have acted as G- d Himself does, and this prompts Him to join us in our efforts. It is for this that we were created, and it is this specifically, that earns us reward for the World-to-Come. And, it is this, we shall see, b'ezras Hashem, what leads to enhanced Hashgochah Pratis, something we all need, and if we're truly in touch with life, we want as well.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Having discussed something about the Divine Presence, we can now discuss something about Divine Providence, otherwise known as Hashgochah Pratis.

Hashgochah Pratis, like everything else in life, has extremes and all kinds of levels in-between. The best-case scenario is prophecy, on the level of Moshe Rabbeinu. Unlike other prophets, Moshe Rabbeinu was able to converse with G-d just about any time he wanted, and more importantly, while remaining conscious. All the rest of the prophets had to wait for the call, and could only receive their communication while in a dream state.

Nevertheless, as long as man is physical, there will always be some limitation on Hashgochah Pratis, if only to preserve free-will. Indeed, Moshe Rabbeinu asked G-d to show him the intricacies of Divine Providence, so that he could understand, in advance, confusing situations such as why bad things

happen to good people, or good things to bad people. (Brochos 5a)

The Talmud says that he was not granted that particular request, and the following account makes this point:

Rav Avin, the son of Rav Addah, said in the name of Rebi Yitzchak: "How do you know that The Holy One, Blessed is He, puts on Tefillin? It says: 'The L-rd has sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength' (Yeshayahu 62:8). 'By His right hand,' this is the Torah, as it says, 'At His right hand was a fiery law' (Devarim 33:2); 'And by the arm of his strength,' this is the Tefillin, as it says, 'The L-rd will give strength unto His people' (Tehillim 29:11). And, how do you know that the Tefillin are a strength for Israel? It is written, 'And all the peoples of the earth will see that the name of the L-rd is called upon you, and they shall be afraid of you' (Devarim 28:10)." And, it has been taught: R. Eliezer the Great says, "This refers to the Tefillin of the head." (Brochos 6a)

And, later it says:

"And I will take away My hand, and you will see My back" (Yechezkel 33:23). Rav Chama ben Bizana said in the name of Rebi Shimon HaChasid, "This teaches us that The Holy One, Blessed is He, showed Moshe the knot of the Tefillin [on the back of His head, so-to-speak]." (Brochos 7a)

For, as G-d told Moshe earlier, no man can see the face of G-d and live, for to understand Hashgochah Pratis in advance, and even at the moment, takes away the possibility of free-will, and the chance to earn reward in the World-to-Come. That abrogates the purpose of Creation, and therefore, technically speaking, the purpose of one's existence. Therefore, no man can live with that level of knowledge.

However, to see G-d from the back, that is, Hashgochah Pratis in hindsight, after the fact, is not only possible, but it is also a privilege. That is why there is a reference to the Tefillin knot, which is in the shape of a Dalet, as in the Dalet of the word "Echad" in the Shema. Only for the person whose mind is on G-d is One can understand Hashgochah Pratis, even after the fact.

Not only does that not take away from one's free-will, but it even alerts a person to the potential free-will available to be used. Indeed, that was the reason for the entire Sinai Experience in this week's parshah: to reveal to mankind just how G-dly he can be, and just how far the Shechinah is prepared to meet us "half-way" in all holy matters. As the GR"A revealed, when it comes to the holy matter of Geulah Shlaimah (the Final Redemption), may it come speedily in our time.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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