

COMING DOWN FROM ON HIGH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

This week's parshah sheet as been dedicated in memory of Yosef ben Reuven Shmiryahu v'Shmerel, z"l. May the merit of those who learn it be an ilui Neshamah for him.

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Listen heavens, and I will speak! Hear earth, the words of my mouth! (Devarim 31:1)

As Yom Kippur approaches and we consider our final plea before the Heavenly Tribunal regarding our upcoming final judgment, it is worthwhile to read this as well:

Where is there a warning against having a haughty spirit? Rava said in the name of Zeiri, "Listen and pay attention: Do not be proud' (Yirmiyahu 13:15)." Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: "From, 'Your heart be lifted up and you forget the Lord your G-d' (Devarim 8:14), and it says, 'Beware lest you forget the Lord your G-d' (Devarim 8:11)." This is similar to what Rebi Avin said in the name of Rebi Elai; for Rebi Avin said in the name of Rebi Elai, "Whenever it says 'Beware lest' and 'Do not' the reference is to a prohibition." Rav Avira expounded (sometimes he said it in the name of Rav Assi and at other times in the name of Rav Ammi): "Every haughty person will in the end be reduced in rank, as it says, 'They are exalted, there will be reduction of status' (Iyov 24:24). And, in case you think that they remain in existence, it continues, 'And they are gone' (Ibid.). (Sotah 5a)

The trouble with all of this is that most haughty people do not consider themselves to be haughty, so the question becomes, what good is this warning? Is it merely to assure the rest of us non-haughty people that those annoying haughty people are going to get their just desserts in the end? The answer comes from the continuation of the lesson from the Talmud.

If, however he changes he will be gathered in his due time like our father Avraham, as it says, "But when they are lowly they are gathered in like all" (Iyov 24:24), i.e., like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov in connection with whom the word "all" is used.

Hence, though we may not be haughty like Korach, are we humble like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, inasmuch as we attribute all aspects of our success to G-d and only G-d. Do we see every aspect of life as a gift as they did, and do we devote ourselves first and foremost to the well-being of the Shechinah, the Divine Presence? For, the main characteristic of the Avot was that they were a "chariot" for the Shechinah, meaning that all they did revealed the Divine Presence in life.

From that perspective, maybe we have what to work on. And work on ourselves we must, for it says:

If not, they are cut off as the tops of the ears of corn. What does it mean "as the tops of the ears of corn?" Rav Huna and Rav Chisda [explain it]. One says that it means like the awn of the grain, and the other that it means like the ears themselves. This is true according to the one who says that it means like the awn of the grain, since it says "as the tops of the ears of corn;" but according to the one who says that it means like the ears themselves, what does "as the tops of the ears of corn" mean? Rav Assi said, and it was similarly taught in the School of Rebi Yishmael, "It is like a man who enters his field and gleanes the tallest ears." (Sotah 5a)

Thus, explains the Talmud, arrogant people increase their exposure and make themselves more vulnerable. You want to stand out in the eyes of Heaven but not in this manner, for it brings one negative attention, even the slightest amount of arrogance.

So, for those who are beyond repair, there is nothing to say. But, for those of us standing there on Yom Kippur and feeling, at least for the time being, humbled by the experience...

"With him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit" (Yeshayahu 57:15). Rav Huna and Rav Chisda [explain it]: one says that it means "the contrite is with Me," and the other that, "I [G-d] am with the contrite." The more probable view agrees with him who says the meaning is "I am with the contrite," for The Holy One, Blessed is He, ignored all the mountains and heights and caused His Shechinah to dwell upon Mount Sinai, but did not elevate Mount Sinai [up to Himself]. (Sotah 5a)

Thus, we could say that it is a matter of becoming a Har Sinai, a small and humble mountain amongst the larger and haughtier ones. After all, what difference does it make how "big" we are in this world if in the end the Shechinah is able to dwell amongst us? Can there be anything bigger than this?

SHABBAT DAY:

When I will proclaim the name of G-d, ascribe greatness to our G-d. (Devarim 32:3)

Speaking of G-d's greatness, the Talmud continues and says:

Rav Yosef said, "A man should always learn from the mind of his Creator, for The Holy One, Blessed is He, ignored all the mountains and heights and caused His Shechinah to abide upon Mount Sinai, and ignored all the beautiful trees and caused His Shechinah to abide in a bush." (Sotah 5a)

However, true as that may be, the Tikunei HaZohar finds another important reason as to why a bush and not a tree of greater stature (the large-type is the Tikunei HaZohar and the small-type is the commentary, "Mitok Midvash"):

WHY DID HE REVEAL HIMSELF IN A BUSH and not in the form of another kind of tree? IT WAS TO SHOW HIM THAT SHE (the Shechinah) IS OPPRESSED AMONGST THE THORNS that is, amongst the gentiles and Chitzonim with the Jewish people in exile; for the sake of His people She suffers. AND even though the Shechinah is there NEVERTHELESS THE BUSH WAS NOT CONSUMED, that is, the

Erev Rav are not eliminated, BECAUSE THE ROSES WHO ARE HER CHILDREN, THE JEWISH PEOPLE, ARE DESTINED TO BE EXILED AMONGST THE EREV RAV, WHO ARE THE THORNS. In the future the Jewish people will be exiled amongst the Erev Rav who are like barbed thorns to the Jewish people, imposing decrees and destruction upon them. THIS IS HINTED TO IN THE POSUK, "I WILL BRING AN END (kallah) TO ALL THE NATIONS - for your sake - TO WHICH YOU WERE SENT" (Yirmiyahu 46:28), BUT YOU I WILL NOT DESTROY, since the troubles of exile imposed by the nations will hasten the redemption. (Tikunei HaZohar, Tikun 12, 27a)

In other words, according to this explanation the issue was not one of humility, but of representing those who would oppress the Jewish people, and therefore the Shechinah, in exile. Like wood should burn because of fire, the evil of history should be eliminated because of the presence of the Shechinah. But the bush did not burn to indicate that the "Erev Rav" (the Mixed Multitude) would also remain in spite of the presence of the Divine Presence, in order to facilitate the final stages of the Final Redemption:

THE DIFFICULTY OF EXILE IMPOSED BY THE EREV RAV ON ISRAEL SPEEDS UP THE REDEMPTION, since it causes the Jewish people to do teshuvah, and it causes Holy Sparks to be separated out from the K'lipot; this speeds up redemption. WHEN THEY BECOME LESS HARSH - if the gentiles ease up on the oppression of the Jewish people, THEY PREVENT THE REDEMPTION because there is a certain amount of troubles meant to be endured during exile in order to separate out the Holy Sparks from the K'lipot. Furthermore, it is necessary to atone for the sins of the Jewish people, and for this reason they have been decreed. (Ibid.)

It is understandable that we feel good about being treated well when living amongst the gentiles. Who wouldn't? Who wants to spend his life living in fear of his neighbors, at moment's notice losing everything he has built-up without any legal justification, and of losing everything that is dear to him and in the cruelest of ways? For a nation that has been running for its life now for thousands of years, a little derech erez from our gentile hosts is a welcome respite.

Yet, ironically, it works against us in the long run. What we really want is the Final Redemption when we won't even have to consider the possibility of any kind of danger from anyone. When we do well amongst the gentile nations at this stage of history, it only delays the Final Redemption, and more importantly, it delays the return of the Shechinah to Tzion, which we pray for every day.

Indeed, that is what we are all about. The Shechinah has gone into golut with us for our sake, and we are supposed to try and leave golut for its sake. That's why all of our tefillot incorporate the theme of redemption, and with regard to that, one of our great mashgichim of the last fifty years admonished:

The Sefer Mitzvot Katan (Rabbi Ya'akov of Corbeil, 1206-1280) wrote in his explanation of the Positive Mitzvah, "I am G-d your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt", that it means one must know that He Who created Heaven and Earth alone controls [the world] above and below. However, to this he added, "This [mitzvah] is the basis for what the rabbis teach: At the time of a person's judgment after death,

they ask him, 'Did you anticipate redemption?' (Shabbat 31a). Where is this mitzvah written? Actually, it comes from this [same mitzvah], for just as 'I am G-d your G-d, Who took you out of Egypt' means that we are expected to believe that G-d redeemed us from Egypt, it also means, 'I also want you to believe that I, G-d your G-d, will gather you in and redeem you in mercy a second time.'" According to what he has said, belief in the future redemption is part of our faith in, "I am G-d, your G-d", and thus is included in the first of the Ten Commandments. However, if we examine ourselves, it seems as if we are very far from having faith in the future redemption. Occasionally we speak about G-d having made Heaven and Earth, and that He directs Creation. However, when it comes to the arrival of Moshiach and the resurrection of the dead we are quiet, as if we are embarrassed to speak about them, as if we have given up [on them] altogether. However, the words of the Sefer Mitzvot Katan should arouse trembling in our hearts since they are part of the mitzvah of "I am G-d your G-d". And, anyone who is not involved with these matters is far from having any true faith... In truth, almost the majority of the Shemonah Esrei deals with the future redemption... And, just as we are lacking faith in this matter we are also distant from the essence of prayer. We lack connection to [the blessings regarding redemption], and all of our prayers are only lip service! (Ohr Yechezkel, Emunat HaGeulah, 1960; p. 287)

For, nothing proclaims the greatness of G-d more than the return of His people to their land and the success of Torah to overcome the elements of heresy, and return the world to a path of obedience to the Creator of the Universe. If we want children who walk in the ways of G-d, it has to be for this reason. If we want parnassah, it has to be to this end. If we want success in our own Torah learning and mitzvot, it has to be so that we can better contribute to this ultimate cause.

Jewish history is not about the individual Jew. The individual Jew is about Jewish history.

SEUDAT SHLISHIT:

For, though G-d is exalted He notes the lowly, and the High One makes Himself known from afar.
(Tehillim 138:6)

It is always fascinating how the Talmud, and even more so Kabbalah, can find a deeper meaning for a posuk that seems to be quite different from the original intention from the point of view of Pshat. Indeed, the Hebrew word "gavoah" is interpreted as "High One", as in G-d Himself. However, according to Rebi Elazar it is a reference to one who thinks highly of himself, a haughty person.

Rebi Elazar said: "The Shechinah laments over every haughty man, as it says, 'The high one He knows from afar' (Tehillim 138:6)." (Sotah 5a)

As to why the Shechinah laments, the Talmud continues:

Rav Chisda said, and according to another version it was Mar Ukba: "Regarding the arrogant person, The Holy One, Blessed is He, declares, 'I and he cannot both dwell in the world.'" (Ibid.)

Look at it as if life is a continuum stretched out between two extremes, on the far right, the

Shechinah, and on the far left, the individual. From this perspective to the extent that a person is concerned about himself is the extent to which he does not care about the welfare of the Shechinah. And if the person is indeed arrogant then the Shechinah is not part of his world at all, not even close to it.

Contrary to what many think, and the Sitra Achra would have us believe, the building of the individual does not necessarily build the Shechinah, or at least not effectively. Whereas, the rectification of the Shechinah automatically, by definition, builds the individual. To understand the difference, just ask yourself the question, "Is what I am about to do going to enhance my life? Will it also rectify the Shechinah in the world?"

You may be surprised, perhaps, if you answer each question honestly, how the answer is not always yes for both questions. You may also be surprised how you will find that you don't always understand what it is that actually rectifies the Shechinah in the first place, and how often what we think is a good personal goal according to the Torah, actually interferes with the ultimate goal of the Jewish people. We are, after all, still in exile, still battling the nations of the world for our very survival, and it may get worst, G-d forbid.

Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi said: "Come and see how great the humble are in the eyes of The Holy One, Blessed is He. When the Temple stood a man brought a Burnt-Offering and received the reward of a Burnt-Offering, a Meal- Offering and he received the reward of a Meal-Offering. However, regarding a contrite person, the Torah ascribes it to him as though he had offered every one of the sacrifices, as it says, 'The sacrifices of G-d are a broken spirit' (Tehillim 51:19). More than that, his prayer is not despised, for it continues, 'A broken and a contrite heart, O G-d, You will not despise'." (Sotah 5b)

This Yom Kippur, make the Shechinah your top priority. Make its welfare your chief concern. Whatever else it is that you hope to achieve on Yom Kippur, make it important for the sake of the rectification of the Shechinah. Not only will it bring benefit to you, but it will help push history past the blocks that keeps us from achieving what we have longed for for over three thousand years: the Final Redemption, and may it come quickly in our time.

MELAVE MALKAH:

Nefesh HaChaim, Chapter Four

A Jew should conduct himself accordingly and never think to himself, "What am I, and what difference can my insignificant actions make to the world?"

Rather, he should understand and be conscious that every detail of his actions, words, and thoughts at any moment, is never meaningless, G-d forbid. On the contrary, how many and exalted are his actions, each one reaching up to its specific root to have its impact in the Highest Heights in the worlds and the splendorous lights above.

Certainly the wise man who fully understands this idea, finds his heart trembling when he considers

his inappropriate actions and how destructive their impact can be, G-d forbid, even worse than the damage done by Nebuchadnetzar (who destroyed the First Temple in 3338 BCE).

This is because Nebuchadnetzar and Titus (who destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE) could not affect the worlds above, since they themselves were not rooted in those worlds. It was because of our sins by which we "weakened" the strength of G-d and through which we defiled the Temple of G-d above, that Nebuchadnetzar and Titus were able to destroy the Temples below; the Temples below corresponded to the Heavenly Temple. This is the meaning of what the rabbis wrote (regarding Nebuchadnetzar), "You ground already ground flour" (Eichah Rabbotai 1:43). Our sins destroyed the Heavenly abode, the holy upper worlds; they only destroyed the earthly abode.

This is what King David prayed for when he wrote, "It had been regarded as bringing to the Above, the axes in the thicket of trees ..." (Tehillim 74:5). He had requested that what he (Nebuchadnetzar) did be considered as if he destroyed on high. However, in truth, he had no such effect, as already mentioned.

There is also another idea that should make the heart of every man belonging to the holy nation tremble: included in him are all of the countless forces and worlds, as we will explain later, G-d willing, in Chapter Six and in Part Two, Chapter Five. These forces and worlds comprise the Heavenly Temple. The heart of man, found in the "middle" of the body and which incorporates everything, corresponds to the Holy of Holies, which is considered to be in the center of the world, and the Evven Shesia (Foundation Stone). It includes all the sources and roots of holiness just like the Holy of Holies. This idea is alluded to in the chapter (in the Talmud in "Brochot"), "The Morning Prayers" where it teaches "Direct your heart toward the Holy of Holies."

In the Zohar it says:

Come and see how The Holy One, Blessed is He, when He made man, perfected him according to the Supernal plan, and imbued him with power and strength in the center of his body, because that is where his heart is situated. The Holy One, Blessed is He, set up the world in a similar fashion, as a single body. For, just as the heart is in the middle of the body and controls everything and everything is dependent upon it ... so too did the Courtyard envelop the Holy of Holies where the Divine Presence dwelled, as well as the ark cover (Kapporet), the cherubim, and the Ark. Here is considered the "heart" of the entire land and world, and from here the entire world is nourished. (Zohar, Shlach, 161:1)

See the Zohar at length.

If so, then when a person pursues impure thoughts of his heart (we should be protected from such things), it is comparable to bringing a woman of ill-repute, the symbol of betrayal of G-d, into the awesome Holy of Holies in the Heavenly Temple; he strengthens the forces of impurity and the "Other Side" (i.e., the Sitra Achra) there, far more than Titus did when he actually committed a profane act with such a woman in the Holy of Holies in the Temple below.

Every sin a Jew considers in his heart is considered to be a "strange fire" whether it is a feeling of anger or an evil longing. It is to this that the verse literally refers, "Our holy house and our glory which... was burned in fire..." (Yeshayahu 64:10), the Merciful One should save us.

This is what G-d told Yechezkel:

"The place of My throne ... which I will cause to dwell there among B'nei Yisroel forever; B'nei Yisroel will no longer defile My holy Name through ... unfaithfulness ... And now, let them distance themselves from ... and I will dwell among them forever." (Yechezkel 43:7)

Now we can understand the words, "And G-d made man from dust ... and breathed into him a living soul, and he became a living spirit." (Bereishit 2:7). The basic understanding is as the Targum explains it, that man became a "speaking spirit". What he meant was, when man consisted only of a body he was simply dust lacking any life and movement. However, once G-d breathed into him a living soul he came alive, able to function and speak. (See the Ramban and his commentary on the Torah.)

However, the verse does not say, "in man it became" but rather, "the man became," which could be interpreted to mean after all that has been said that the man with his soul became a living spirit to countless worlds. For, just as all the actions of the body are the result of the soul within it, so too is man the force and living soul of unlimited upper and lower worlds, all of which respond to him.

May G-d accept our prayers and answer them sweetly. May we merit to see the rectification of the Shechinah, and as a result, the rectification of the world and the Geulah Shlaimah. Gmar Tov.

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