

# PERCEPTIONS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

*On the day you pass over the Jordan to the land which God, your God gives to you, set up large stones and plaster them. Write upon them all the words of this law, once you have passed over. In order to for you to enter the land flowing with milk and honey which God, your God, and the God of your fathers gives to you, as He promised. (Devarim 21:10- 12)*

On one hand, it is perfectly understandable that the Jewish people had to perform this mitzvah on their entry into Eretz Yisroel. It was a good way of bringing the Torah experience of the desert into Eretz Yisroel as well. On the other hand, it was a somewhat unusual request, and therefore, at least symbolically, it must have something to say about living in Eretz Yisroel as well. If yes, then what?

Everything in the physical world is also a parable with which to better understand the spiritual world, which is invisible to the eye. By understanding how the physical world functions, we can also understand how the spiritual world works, because the former is a function of the latter. Everything down here has "grown" from "roots" that exist up there.

Hence, as technology advances, so does our understanding of the spiritual world. For example, wireless technology<sup>1</sup> is a rather new invention that has created all kinds of new possibilities that didn't exist even just 15 years ago. We take it for granted now, but 15 years ago, the idea of going on line, without actually being physically attached to a modem, seemed too futuristic to the average person.

The advantage of going wireless is obvious. With less wires attached to your computer, your work area becomes less cluttered. More importantly, you can sit in the middle of some public area, like at an airport for example, and maintain contact with your server without actually physically hooking up to any device. It allows for work to be done while on the road, which can amount to a lot of time saved, and money made.

The disadvantage of being wireless is also obvious. The signal can only maintain its strength for a specific distance. As you move further away from the source of the signal, it weakens, and therefore, so does one's connection to the Net. He might even lose the signal from time-to-time, or it might get bumped off by a competing signal, all problems that do not exist when one is physically attached to a modem.

What can we learn from this to better relate to the spiritual world? Obviously, the "signal" in this case is the light of God, the information and understanding necessary to stay on course in life. Even more obvious is the Source of the signal, God Himself, and the stronger the signal, the more plugged-in

we are to God, and His reality. The easier it is to stay spiritually online.

To learn Torah and to perform mitzvos for the right reasons is to be directly plugged in to God. As the Leshem points out, the letters and words of the Torah are conduits for the light of God, and by looking at them, and by learning their meaning, we channel God's light towards us. The deeper the level on which Torah is learned, the more this is true.

Likewise, when a person performs a mitzvah as a mitzvah, the action of the mitzvah itself creates a direct connection between God and the person. For the duration of the mitzvah, Ohr Ain Sof flows to the person, and this is the sense of elevation a person feels as a result of the mitzvah, the sense of Godliness he inherits. It is also the reason why "the reward of a mitzvah is another mitzvah" (Pirkei Avos 4:2): the first mitzvah brings the light that inspires a person to do the second mitzvah.

However, in-between learning Torah and performing specific mitzvos, when a person takes care of the necessary but mundane matters of everyday life, it is like being "al chutie" (Hebrew for wireless). At such times, it is possible to maintain a decent signal and remain on line with God, but it is also possible to move too far away, by getting involved in aspects of life that really don't keep one focused on God, or at least on what is meaningful in life.

With such a weak spiritual connection, it is possible to lose it altogether, or to get bumped off God's network by another signal, of which there are many in this world. Such foreign signals, given out by false realities, can draw a person further away from God, until God's signal is not only too distant from the person to be picked up, it is history.

Kabbalistically, this is symbolized in the following way. The Ten Sefiros — Keser, Chochmah, Binah, Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, Yesod, and Malchus, act as the spiritual conduit through which God filters His light down to us. They, in turn, correspond to the four letters of God's Ineffable Name, as follows: the Yud corresponds to Chochmah, but the pointed top of the Yud corresponds to Keser above it. The first Heh corresponds to Binah, followed by the Vav, which corresponds to the six sefiros from Chesed through Yesod. The final Heh corresponds to Malchus, the world in which we live.

In the ideal situation, such as during times of redemption, all letters are attached to one another, and light flows uninterrupted from the Keser to the Malchus, vis-à-vis the eight sefiros in-between, though it is filtered as it goes from level-to-level. However, during times of exile, which are the result of sins, which cause a person to move away from God, the final Heh is said to be pushed away from the upper three letters. It no longer receives its signal directly, but rather, long distance; it becomes wireless, so-to-speak.

The effect of this spiritual breakdown on the world is, well, take a look around you. The inherent lack of Godliness in the world today is due to the fact that final Heh of God's Name has been pushed away, due to the constant sinning in the world. If it moves to its most extreme limit away from the rest of the letters, past which point it would be completely devoid of Godly light, Heaven usually

steps in to remedy the situation, and it is not usually a pleasant time of history.

Therefore, we want to return the Heh to its proper place before God steps in. This is the concept of teshuvah, which is spelled: Tav-Shin-Vav- Bais-Heh, and which can be read, tshuv-Heh, which means, "return the Heh." Repenting is like going back on line with God, in a very direct manner, which has the effect of drawing the Heh closer to the rest of the four letters of God's Name, until it is finally attached.

That is called "redemption," which can happen on the level of the individual, as well as on the level of the nation. Doing that which enhances one's reception of the Divine signal is the basis of returning the Heh to the rest of the letters, which is tantamount to sanctifying God's Name, and being a light unto the nations. It is, in essence, the service of the Jew while in this world.

This is why we have six constant mitzvos — Know there is a God, Don't believe in other gods, God is one, Love God, Fear God, and Don't be misled by your heart and eyes — which should be evident from our lives whether we are focused on them or not. They are mitzvos necessary to build an environment around a Jew to such an extent that he can never really be too wireless, too far away to receive the signal of God. When one's life is an expression of these mitzvos, so that all he does reflects his devotion to the fulfillment of them, he remains attached to God, even in the most spiritually void places.

And, this is why Eretz Yisroel is so important to the Jew as well. Just as it is important, when working wireless, to stay as close to the source of the signal as possible, living in Eretz Yisroel is exactly that for the Jew. Whatever complaints Jews have about Eretz Yisroel today, and whatever claims they make about living on a higher level in Chutz L'Aretz, they cannot dispute the reality that all the light that God sends to this world descends first over the Kosel HaMa'aravi — the Western Wall — before going out to the rest of the world (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 87).

And yes, it does get weaker as it moves out from that point to the rest of the world, not because God can't maintain the strong signal, but because He chooses not to, in order to distinguish one level of holiness from another (Nefesh HaChaim, 3:6). No matter how hard one tries to create a holy environment in the Diaspora, it can never equal what he could have created had he made the same effort in Eretz Yisroel.

That is why many secular Jews in Eretz Yisroel tend to be more extreme in their secularism than many of their Diaspora counterparts. If you want to leave the earth's gravitational force, you have to have strong engines to do so. If one wants to leave the kedusha of Eretz Yisroel, one has to be more extreme in one's secularism. Indeed, the extent to which secular Jews in Eretz Yisroel go to shun their three millennia heritage only testifies to just how strong it is in the Holy Land.

When I first returned to Israel, I was totally secular. In fact, I was only there because I had heard that travel was cheaper there than in Europe. However, shortly after landing there, I felt very strange, and it began to annoy me. And, though going to Eilat made me forget about it for the time being,

returning back to Jerusalem only made it more intense. With each passing day in Jerusalem, the feeling became even stronger, until I found myself running away, not just from Jerusalem, but from Israel altogether. Yet, the moment my Olympia Airlines flight took off from Ben Gurion airport, I felt a strange reversal, even a sense of lack as the plane moved further away. I even heard a voice inside me say, "I'll be back here some time soon." At that time, I couldn't have known just how soon, but over the next year, due to a series of events, I began to attend Torah classes, and gradually, I became more observant. About six months later, I couldn't get enough learning fast enough, and by the following year, I knew that I had to go to yeshivah, preferably in Israel. So, I dropped everything else I was doing, and headed for the Holy Land. Amazingly, after landing and heading for Jerusalem, I had the same intense feeling, but this time, it was welcoming. This time it greeted me, and this time it made me feel perfectly at home, because this time, I didn't resist it. Rather, I embraced it, because it made me feel even more Jewish than back in the Diaspora, even closer to God. That's when I realized that the previous year, it had been annoying because, at that time, I had wanted to go in the opposite direction. Now, thank God, I was free to go with the Godly flow, and I loved it.

Thus, for the Jew who acquiesces to the kedusha of Eretz Yisroel, what our parsha is telling us, it is like attaching oneself to the Source of life itself. One not only survives spiritually, one thrives spiritually. And, at the end of the day, and at the end of one's life, that is all that really counts. It is certainly what the Bais Din Shel L'Ma'ala — the Heavenly Court — is going to be checking out on this Rosh Hashanah, and throughout the Aseres Yemai Teshuva — the Ten Days of Repentance.

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<sup>1</sup>Obviously wireless technology has existed for some time, in the form of two-way radios, etc. Here I refer to recent developments in the technology that has allowed for such devices as cell phones, wireless modems, etc., — and at more affordable rates — all of which has greatly enhanced, technologically-speaking, the quality of life of the average consumer.

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