

REVELATION OF THE DIVINE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

God told Moshe, "I am Y-H-V-H. I appeared to Avraham, to Yitzchak, and to Ya'akov, by the name of E-l Shadd-ai, but by My name, Y-H-V-H, I was not known to them." (Shemos 2:1)

Many people have pondered the all-profound question of, "What's life about?" For the most part, life is distracting enough that people do not even have to ask the question, let alone answer it. However, once in a while, in a somewhat rare philosophical moment, the question does get asked by many people, and in an even rarer philosophical moment, it gets answered.

Answered, yes, correctly, unlikely.

Well, at least very watered down, but that is not their fault. Rather, it is the result of the Jewish people not having enough clarity themselves about the reason for Creation, and therefore, not getting the message out to the rest of the world, to each person on the level of understanding he can comprehend. We are the light unto nations, and it is this light, in particular, that we are supposed to emanate, and with which we illuminate.

It is, in two words, Gilui HaShechinah—the revelation of the Divine Presence, as this week's parsha indicates. The Divine Names, to which this week's parsha refers, are ways to measure the level of intensity of the revelation, which, ideally, is supposed to become increasingly brilliant with each successive generation. The unfolding of history, ideally, should be the uncovering of the Divine Presence that inhabits and enlivens every single aspect of Creation.

That was really the entire exercise of the 10 Plagues. As God had told Moshe Rabbeinu in Parashas Shemos, Pharaoh was not going to be moved to free the Jewish people until the 10th Plague, that of the death of the first born. If so, then why go through all the previous nine? What were they meant to accomplish, besides act as the build up to the 10th plague itself?

The answer is, that each subsequent plague was a turn of the valve, soto- speak, that allowed more of the light of God to enter the world, and hence, a greater revelation of the Divine Presence. As the Leshem explains, by the time the 10th plague came, the revelation of God was so strong that, had the Jewish people stayed any longer, it would have destroyed all of evil for good (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 408). At that stage, freedom was an automatic reality.

As we see from the journey in the desert, though a slave may dream of freedom, he can't always live it after having been enslaved for so many years. The oppression wears him down, until he can't help

but look at the world in terms of his work, and the powers-that-be in terms of those who oppress him. He becomes blind to the reality of God.

The switch back is not an overnight process. Thus, when it came to the Akeidah, God requested, in stages, that Avraham perform the test (Rashi, Bereishis 22:1). The shock of asking Avraham all at one time, to sacrifice Yitzchak, would have made Avraham Avinu jump to a yes answer immediately, without having worked through the issue, not much of a test. The gilui—revelation—had to happen at a pace that Avraham could adjust to, so that he could maintain his senses in the face of such a level of revelation.

On the other hand, the Midrash teaches, when God spoke to the Jewish people who stood at the base of Mt. Sinai, the revelation was so overpowering, the nation died as a result. God then revived them with a special dew used for resurrecting the dead, but after hearing the second commandment from God Himself, they died again, only to be revived once more. At that point, they appointed Moshe Rabbeinu to speak on their behalf and to receive the rest of the Torah for them.

It is the same with entering the realm of Pardes—Pshat, Remez, Drush, and Sod. Each level of Torah is a higher revelation of God, and should a person delve deeper into Torah than he is ready to, it can damage him, either killing him, as happened to Ben Azzai, or causing the person to lose his sanity, as in the case of Ben Zoma, or, making him into a heretic, as in the case of Elisha ben Abuya (Chagigah 14b).

Where there is kedushah, there is revelation, and where there is revelation, there is kedushah. To be exposed to either is to be impacted by it, and if the vessel is not prepared to receive such exposure, the results can be very damaging. Just as some materials must be treated before being exposed to extreme heat, the body must be treated before it can be exposed to high levels of holiness and revelation.

Hence, all the preparation that the Kohen Gadol went through in advance of his entry into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur. He remained holy all the time, all year round. However, on Yom Kippur, by going into the Holy of Holies, the additional level of revelation could kill him, and did, at least those who became Kohen Gadol through less worthy means. Not being true high priests, they could not go through the proper preparation, and therefore, their bodies could not handle the exposure to such an intense level of holiness.

This was not only true of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur, but for all of us as well since then. As we know, all year round, when saying the Shema, we say the second verse silently to ourselves, because, as tradition teaches, it really belongs to the angels, and should they hear it, well, who knows what they'll do to us!

However, on Yom Kippur, we bravely and lovingly shout out the verse without fear of any Heavenly repercussions. For, we are told, due to our preparations, fasting, and prayer, we become like angels for the day, and earn the right to say that which belongs to the angels. When the real angels hear us

call out their line, and they look down to see who is saying it, they are satisfied with what they see, and we can continue on with the rest of our holy activities for the day.

However, what is really going on is that, as a result of all the Yom Kippur laws and traditions, we become spiritually refined. Kabbalistically, this is one of the reasons why the Kohen Gadol took the regular incense mixture from the rest of the year, and ground it up extra fine for Yom Kippur. It symbolized the refinement of the judgment, because we ourselves became more refined.

It is not our soul that requires refinement, for it is Divine light already. Rather, it is our body that is refined, and by becoming a better vessel for the Divine light that is within it, it becomes a better vessel to receive the Divine light that is outside of it, that is, for Divine revelation. And, if a person keeps moving down this path, then eventually, he will reach the level of prophecy:

Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair said: Diligence leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to purity, and purity leads to separateness, and separateness leads to holiness, and holiness leads to humility, and humility leads to dread of sin, and dread of sin leads to piety, and piety leads to the Holy Spirit ... (Sotah 49b)

Hence, when the revelations/plagues began, they did so with the Plague of Blood, which in Hebrew is spelled: Dalet-Mem. These two letters are the final two letters of the word "adam," the Hebrew word for "man," because the physical source of man's life is the blood running through his veins and arteries. Therefore, blood represents the physical component of man, which can be no different than that of the animals around him.

That leaves the letter Aleph, which stands for God, because it is comprised of two Yuds and a Vav, the gematria of which of 26, that of God's holy four-letter Name. It also represents the number one, and since God is one, it alludes to His Presence in Creation, and within man, that is, his holy soul.

Since, we are told, the Jewish people, while being spiritually submerged in Egyptian exile, descended to the 49th level of spiritual impurity, they had all but obliterated the Aleph part of their being. Therefore, each subsequent plague, from the first one, which was the Plague of Blood, to tell them what they had become, until the eighth one, which was the Plague of Locusts, was to resuscitate the Aleph, and restore it, giving those who were affected the status of an adam.

The ninth plague, the Plague of Darkness, was to remove those who would not let themselves be impacted, because they wanted to stay behind in Egypt. Eight plagues, apparently, as the number itself indicates, should have been enough to elevate the Jewish people out of the mundane reality of hester panim, to the revealed reality of a true adam, the gematria of which is equal to 45, the same as the word geulah, which means "redemption."

For, this is the true path to redemption. Redemption is a light, it is a revelation of God in the world, and for those who can withstand, it is elevating and redeeming. For those who are not able to receive the light of redemption, it can damage them (Nedarim 8b). Therefore, all that happens in

advance of a redemption is to warn us of its impending arrival, to increase our ability to be exposed to such a high level of Divine light.

It accounts for what has been occurring down in Gaza for the last few weeks. The Israeli leadership may not be impressed, but the Israeli casualties have been far less than was projected before the war, and this is impressing many of the soldiers, and some of the media. The words "miracles" and "wonders" re being used quite frequently, thank God.

But something else is happening. The religious world has become more unified amongst itself, and with many of the secular soldiers, many of whom have asked for tzitzis, and have put on tefillin before going to the front. As the expression goes, there are no atheists in a foxhole, and even less so when the foxhole belongs to the Jewish people.

Not everyone may understand what it is that they are feeling, or they may simply assume that it is just the fear of harm, or worse, that is driving them towards mitzvos. However, to those who understand how God runs His world, all of it is because of the increasing spiritual light that is being allowed to enter Creation, as it makes the final turn into the direction of the Final Redemption.

Text

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