

CREATION: A VEIL FOR THE REALITY OF GOD

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

In the beginning, God made the heaven and the earth. (Bereishis 1:1)

We are told that when God decided to make Creation, He looked into the Torah as if it was a blueprint (Bereishis Rabbah 1:1). Consistent with this idea, it says elsewhere:

Ben Bag Bag said: Turn the Torah over and over for everything is in it. Look into it, grow old and worn over it, and never move away from it, for you will find no better portion than it. (Pirkei Avos 5:26)

In this world of ours, it is very easy to forget this. Over time, the Torah world has become very separate from the rest of the world, and we tend to deal with the world beyond our own as if it came from a different universe and was constructed according to a different blueprint, one far less holy than our Torah. We lose sight of the fact that their world and our world is rooted in the same holy Torah.

Understandably so. The worlds are so different from one another, the Torah world being quite holy and the secular world being quite profane. The Torah world promotes a holy lifestyle and the secular one shuns it to such an extent that it is hard to believe that something as kadosh as the Torah could even allow for such a possible lifestyle. But it did, and it is worth understanding why and how it fits into the greater scheme of things. The starting point of this discussion is understanding the following:

It is written, "All the works of God are for His sake" (Mishlei 16:4), for all that has been created is for His own glory. However, this does not mean for His own end or good, God forbid, but rather the deeper explanation is in order to reveal His light and Glory to those who are worthy. (Sefer HaBiurim, Drush Igulim v'Yoshar, Anaf 1, Os 1)

In other words, all of Creation, every last aspect of it, the parts we can see and the parts that we cannot, exist for one purpose and one purpose only: to reveal God. Hence, when the verse says "for His Sake," the Leshem explains, it means for the sake of His revelation to man, not for His sake, but for man's sake. The greater the revelation of God in Creation, the greater is the benefit to man. This is true, especially for the person who is responsible for that revelation.

You can't have revelation if you can't have hiddenness. For man to be able to reveal God, it has to be possible for God to be hidden. However, how do you hide something that is everywhere at all times, including in that which you are using to hide it?

The answer was in an earlier parshah:

I will certainly have concealed My face on that day because of all the evil that it did, having turned to gods of others. (Devarim 31:18)

As Rashi explains, this means that God will act in a way that makes it seem, to the onlooker, as if He does not see the suffering of His own people. People have expectations of God, and they make all kinds of assumptions about how He ought to behave if He is really there and really cares. When God acts in the opposite manner, people assume that God isn't really there, or that if He is there, He doesn't really care about what happens to us.

They're wrong, of course. God is just taking advantage of people's assumptions, but it serves to give people the impression that God is not around. For example, He has incredible patience when it comes to heretics, allowing them to get away with just about everything, and people confuse His patience for absence.

In other words, nothing serves to hide God better than a world that seems to run contrary to His plan, and which it appears to get away with. And, the more it acts in opposition to the Divine will, and escapes Divine retribution, the more it hides the Creator. Eventually, God lowers the boom, but until He does that, many live with the illusion that He never existed, or turned His back on Creation and went somewhere else.

But all of this is for the sake of the few individuals who know that God is behind all of this. They know the rules of Creation, that history has been one long ongoing game of hide-and-go-seek with God, except that if you find Him, you're not just "It" but a Ben Olam HaBah—someone who is assured a great portion in the World-to-Come, and partner with God in the fulfillment of Creation in the meantime.

This is what it means when it says that:

The righteous are the foundation of Creation. (Mishlei 10:25)

Even though almost seven billion people are distracted away from the main purpose of Creation, indulging themselves in the material world in one way or another, against the purpose of Creation, the righteous individual is distracted away from the material world by seeking out and revealing God. It was to teach this that the prophet said:

Seek God while He may be found, call Him while He is near. (Yeshayahu 55:6)

But isn't God everywhere to be found? Isn't God always near? Yes, and no. As the Nefesh HaChaim, in Section 3, explains, God is everywhere, equally, and at all times. Therefore, theoretically-speaking, there really is no evil, no impurity, and nothing profane. However, practically-speaking, the Torah says that evil is real, impurity is a reality, and profanity exists, enough at least that a person is rewarded choosing to be good, pure, and holy, and punished for being the opposite. It is the nature

of man that makes all of this possible. So that he can be rewarded for spiritual growth, he was created with the capacity for spiritual downfall. As such, it is up to him to make his journey to spiritual perfection as error-free as possible, and leave the tests up to God. Life is tricky enough as it is without man taking unnecessary spiritual risks, especially without knowing really what he is capable of spiritually achieving.

So yes, God is in Physics and Biology. He's even in Hollywood, forced, by man, to be part of a very profane world. As the Talmud says, one of the things that greatly angered God about the Generation of the Flood was how, because of their illicit relationships, He had to create all kinds of illegitimate children. It's all God, every last aspect of it.

However, to find God in Physics and Biology, etc., and even more so in Hollywood, is very difficult to do. There are so many veils to be penetrated before one actually accesses the light of God. There are so many fascinating things going on that it is easy to get spiritually lost along the way, and forget the goal of the journey.

On the other hand, when one learns Torah, it is all about God. There is no part of Torah that does not either discuss Him, or what He wants for Creation. Even when two Torah scholars become emotionally immersed in a section of Talmud to the point that they forget about the world around them, it is hard to forget that the entire point of the discussion is to clarify what it is exactly that God expects from them.

See God in everything you have to deal with, but call for Him where He is closest, where it is easiest to remember Who it is you are calling. On the other hand, do not forget that everything else, even that which is remotely spiritual, also contains Godly light. If it didn't, the thing could not exist, no matter how evil, how impure, or how profane. And, though extraction of that Godliness may not always be practical, it is also impractical to act towards it as if it contains no Godliness at all, for that would imply that it is being sustained by another force other than God, and that constitutes idol worship, which only incenses God.

This is why everything that exists has some kind of holy application. Other, far holier things may be more readily applied in a similar and far safer manner, but it does happen in life when even spiritual people have been forced, by circumstance, to resort to a profane means to accomplish a spiritual task. The ends do not always justify the means in Torah, but sometimes they do, and it is helpful to know when and how.

Perhaps this is a modern-day application of an ancient philosophy:

Even the completely righteous cannot stand in the place that the repentant stand. (Brochos 34b)

Among the many differences between the completely righteous and the repentant is that the repentant have done things the righteous may never even know about. As Shlomo HaMelech wrote, even the completely righteous sin at some point in their lives, but never, ever, to the extent that

someone who was once secular did. The completely righteous live in a whole different world altogether.

But what about a Ba'al Teshuvah, someone who was once secular and has become Torah observant? Though he or she may now regret their erring ways they do not forget what they were and have the advantage of looking at the evil, impure, and profane aspects of life first hand from a Torah perspective. They can extract out of them whatever it is that can make the world a purer place, and life, a holier experience. Nothing is a better rectification of Creation than this.

This is a very important foundation of emunah—faith in God, especially for a people with a history such as ours. Over the last few months, I spent some time reading about the history of the Jewish people, starting from the time of Mordechai and Esther, and I have since reached the period of the eleventh century.

What a history! There have been some major bright spots over the last couple of thousand years, but there have been major dark periods as well. Even during the better times, Jewish communities were often subservient to potentially hostile powers, and had to act accordingly or pay the price for instigating their enemies.

The struggle that the Torah community faced to maintain Jewish tradition as received from Mt. Sinai was constant, and usually required great sacrifice. And, as if there were not enough enemies of Torah on the outside, others formed over the time on the inside, which made the battle to preserve Torah a two-front conflict.

Given all the trials and tribulations that the Jewish people have had to confront until today, it is nothing short of mind-boggling that we are even here to write about it. We are truly a miraculous people with a miraculous history, but, unfortunately, not yet miraculous enough to escape all that we have been forced to endure, most recently, the Holocaust.

Any other people that would have had to survive such a history would not have; they would be extinct today. We are not, thank God, because all the evil that has tormented us has also imparted something positive, something Godly along the way. Throughout all the many losses, there have been many eternal gains.

But why did it have to be that way? Because, we failed to achieve the same success on our own; we became overly defensive, and as a result, turned our collective back on so much of the world from which we were also expected to draw out sparks of holiness. And, as the old rule goes, if the perfection of Creation doesn't happen because of us, it happens through us instead. Not everyone is capable of confronting an impure world and extracting the purity out of it, while dispensing with the impure part. However, everyone should at least understand that every last aspect of Creation is just a veil for the reality of God, and that alone has a powerful impact in terms of revealing God and fulfilling the purpose of Creation.

Text

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