

TO DWELL WITHIN YOU

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Let them make Me a sanctuary, so I can dwell amongst them . . . (Shemos 24:1)

The Hebrew term Shechinah refers to the Divine Presence that "dwells" amongst man. God is everywhere at all times. However, in some places, and at some times, He makes His Presence more palpable than it is in other places, and at other times.

This sounds like a simple thing. Between human beings it is - just like talking face to face is a relatively simple task. So, when we hear that God spoke with Moshe Rabbeinu, we figure, what's the big deal? "If God wants to talk to me face to face," some people say, "all He has to do is call me. I'm all ears."

Perhaps. But, it is not only our ears that God has given us in order to talk to us. Prophecy is not simply a matter of God deciding to talk to man, who is always ready to hear. Just the opposite! God hasn't stopped talking to man ever since He started. Man, in spite of his ears, seems to have lost the ability to hear Him.

Hence, the Talmud says:

Eliyahu said to me: "My son, what sound did you hear in this ruin?" I answered: "I heard a Divine Voice, cooing like a dove, and saying, 'Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house, and burnt My temple, and exiled them among the nations of the world!' "

He said to me: "By your life and by your head! Not only now is it exclaimed, but three times a each day it is exclaimed!" (Brochos 3a)

Rebi Yehoshua ben Levi said: "Every day a Heavenly Voice emanates from Mount Chorev, announcing: 'Woe to them, the people, because of the affront to the Torah.' " (Pirkei Avos 6:2)

What? You can't hear it? Neither can I, nor billions of other people for that matter. What's that? You think that we can't hear the voice because there really isn't one, and that the above rabbis were only speaking figuratively? Does that really make a difference? After all, do you really think that prophecy took advantage of vocal cords and ear drums?

It's God's message that counts, and if He thinks you're ready to hear it, then He will make you know it—in your head. You will see it with your mind's eye, and hear it with your mind's ear. People just inches away don't have to, and probably won't be able to, see, or hear it.

So, we've been asking the wrong question all along. We've been asking, "Why doesn't God speak to us?" when the real question is, "Why don't we listen to God?" Life, from start to finish, is one long, ongoing dialogue with our Creator, ready to become two-sided the moment we're prepared to jump into it and listen.

How do we do this? The answer is in this week's parshah, because becoming a God-listener is the same thing as becoming that which God can dwell within. And the secret to becoming that, the parshah says, is giving *terumas haleiv*—gifts of the heart.

Obviously a gift of the heart means giving it whole-heartedly, out of a love for the recipient. However, literally, it means the gift itself should be the heart, and least spiritually-speaking, as it says:

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. (Tehillim 51:17)

Practically-speaking, what does this mean? It means that there are two ways to give something, the first, more common way being to simply relinquish ownership of something to someone else. Once done, the relationship between the giver and the gift ends, and each go their own separate ways.

The second way of giving is to use the gift as a means to give a part of oneself to another. After the giving is complete, the previous owner and the gift do not part ways, but rather, it is the fact that they remain attached that makes the gift so valuable to its recipient. It is not the object that counts, but what it represents that makes it so valuable to all parties involved.

Thus, the Talmud states in a few places that:

Whether you give a lot or a little, what matters is that your heart is directed towards Heaven. (Menachos 110a)

When it comes to roommates, it is possible for odd couples to live together. However, when it comes to a person's heart, the only odd couple, so-to-speak, is God and the yetzer hara, and to the extent that the yetzer hara fills a person's heart is to the extent that God will not; God only dwells in a person's heart by personal invitation, that is, as a function of a person's free will.

There is a big difference between God "being" with a person, and God dwelling within a person. God can help or manipulate anyone, good or bad, in a number of ways. He can get into a person's head, or the heads of those around him, or just create circumstance that force a person down a particular path, to his good or to his detriment. A person does not have to be righteous at all for that to happen.

But for God to dwell within someone, the person has to be devoted to God. He may still have a yetzer hara, but it is more like an unwanted guest than a time-sharing partner. He is not easily fooled by the yetzer hara, and the moment he senses its presence, he does whatever he can to manage it, to harness it for good, rather than for sin. In such a person, God can and will dwell, even in these

non-prophecy days.

This is a deeper understanding of what Dovid HaMelech meant when he wrote:

One thing I ask of God, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of God all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of God and to seek Him in his Temple. (Tehillim 27:4)

On a simple level, Dovid HaMelech is just dreaming of being free of all worldly concerns, so that he can focus all of his attention on God and work on his relationship with Him. On a deeper level, he is talking about turning himself into a dwelling place of God, for there is no better way to dwell in the House of God than to actually become one.

It's extremely hard to do with a yetzer hara, especially if a person isn't even trying to reign it in. Then again, a person with such a frame of mind probably has no understanding of what he is missing by not working to spiritually perfect himself. On the contrary, he is probably quite content giving in to his yetzer hara, "within reason."

What about the person who is struggling with his yetzer hara, but wants to become a dwelling place for God? The Talmud already answered that question: If the realization leads him to ask God for help against his yetzer hara, then he is well on his way to becoming a dwelling place for the Divine Presence (Kiddushin 30b).

As God has said:

I created the yetzer hara, and I created Torah as its spice. (Kiddushin 30b)

With Torah, a person can outsmart his yetzer hara, even win it over to the side of holiness. Just to be moving in this direction is already a personal invitation to God to dwell within a person, and as the Talmud says:

One who comes to sanctify himself a little, they sanctify him a lot. (Shabbos 104b)

Text

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