

# THE MIRROR OF G-D

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

Why were we created? Simply put, we were created to recognize the Creator. The most direct formulation of this over simplified answer is the culmination of the Yom Kippur prayers where we collectively proclaim, "G-d is G-d!" Yom Kippur, the day of atonement, the day of fasting, the day of prayer, the day of focused introspection concludes with three words, "G-d is G-d!" This climactic conclusion of Yom Kippur does not demand any statement of personal resolve or commitment; it is simply a statement of awareness.

Obviously, awareness alone is not sufficient. Awareness of G-d as the Creator of the universe should be followed with a resolve to better ourselves. However, the concluding prayers of Yom Kippur do not state the obvious. It is obvious that the stage following awareness of G-d should be the effort to understand what G-d expects from us.

Our question now shifts from, "Why were we created?" to "Why did G-d create us?" The simple answer to that question is, "To do as He commands." Inherent in this answer is the expectation that at some time in history G-d revealed His intentions to humanity. We of course call that moment, "Revelation - Mattan Torah - the Giving of the Torah."

Reviewing the simple steps of our logic we have moved from awareness of G-d to discovering His commandments. Recognizing that we were given free will, we must decide what we want to do. Will we do as G-d commands or will we ignore His wishes and do as we want to do?

How we choose to answer that question is profoundly influenced by our natural inclinations, our familial and social upbringing, and our formal and informal education. Assuming that we were raised in a religiously oriented home, doing G-d's commandments began as an imitation of our parents and siblings. If they prayed, we prayed. If they practiced the traditions, we practiced the traditions. It is doubtful that any of our early practices were motivated by real spiritual yearnings. However, the process of continued religious practice, education and intellectual maturation should allow our minds to influence our hearts. What begins as actions unsupported by true spiritual intent should develop into religious observances motivated by spiritual responsibility and commitment.

Our purpose in being created is therefore to bridge the gap between action and intent. Our goal is for us to act in concert with our thoughts and feelings, and for our thoughts and feelings to be in support of our actions.

It says in Yishaya 6:3, "usÂ"cf .rtv kf tkn" - "G-d's honor fills the entire land." We believe that G-d has no physical attributes and is therefore unlimited. (See the third Ani Maamin.) Therefore, the universe is filled with His presence. Without attempting to explain the differences between the "physics" of spirituality and the physics of physicality, it is important to understand how G-d's presence can occupy everything physical in the universe. We could suggest that just like the soul is a spark of G-d's divinity and is somehow integrated into the physical body, so too G-d's presence permeates everything in the universe. However, the comparison is both too simplistic as well as erroneous. The soul itself is a creation of G-d and although it has dimensions that are far more divine than the body, nevertheless, it too is a creation that is filled with G-d's honor, not G-d Himself.

A more accurate explanation would be that whatever serves the intent of the Creator is by definition something that reflects His honor. A material world that serves G-d's purposes is a world filled with His honor. The non-free willed world has no choice but to reflect G-d's intentions. However, the free willed human chooses to either follow G-d's commandments and reflect His intentions, or to not follow G-d's commandments and not reflect His intentions. The degree that a free willed human will reflect G-d's purposes is in direct proportion to the integration of his actions with his intentions in service to G-d. The more closely aligned the two are the more accurately the human will reflect "G-d's image." The more closely aligned the two are the more completely is the world filled with G-d's honor.

Think of the universe as a mirror that reflects the image of the Creator. The non-free willed components of the universe reflect back a 3 dimensional image of G-d without effort or distortion. On the other hand, the free willed component of the universe (the human) is a mirror that reflects an image of a work in progress. On the surface, no different than any other creation, it appears to be a 3 dimensional image of the Creator's intent. However, the human is potentially far more than that. The human can reflect a fourth dimension of G-d's image. The human can reflect the internal process of choosing to "be as G-d, knowing good and evil." When the intent of the human (not just his actions) is fully committed to following G-d's commandments, the human not only reflects the image of G-d, he emulates the image G-d.

If a human chooses not to listen to G-d's commandments he distorts the image of G-d. Instead of the human reflecting G-d's intentions, the human reflects his own intentions. The world is no longer "filled with G-d's honor."

It is impossible for us to understand how G-d's unlimited presence can be limited by our free willed intentions and actions, however; it seems that G-d grants us the ability to push His presence out of the parameters of our personal experiences. In doing so we suffer the consequences of G-d's departure. Along with G-d's departure goes His personal protection and benevolence. This process is called *oumm* - containment, and the consequences are called *ohbp r,xv* - the hiding of G-d's countenance. However, at any time we can reconnect with G-d and bring "His honor" back into our lives. As the Pasuk says, G-d is near to all those who truthfully call to Him. (Tehilim 145:18)

In Parshas Terumah, G-d commanded Moshe to build a Mishkan, "and He would dwell in their midst." The original intention was for every person to be his own Mishkan reflecting G-d's honor and presence in every intention and action. G-d would "dwell in the midst" of each person. However, with the sin of the Golden Calf G-d "restricted" His presence to the limited building of the Mishkan. It was still possible for the individual to reflect the intent of G-d and have G-d's presence fill him; however, no human (except Moshe - the radiance of his face) would ever be able to accurately reflect G-d's true honor. The capacity to reflect G-d's intent had been, for this stage of humanity, irrevocably limited by the sin of the Golden Calf. Instead, the Mishkan was constructed as a goal and symbol of what could have been and what will yet be once Mashiach comes.

For the building of the Mishkan to accurately reflect "what could have been and what will yet be," it demanded the integration of intent and action in the service of G-d. Therefore, in last week's and this week's Parshios there is the mantra of "as G-d had commanded." This is especially true in Pikuudei where Moshe's final inspection of all the Mishkan's components takes place. (39:43) Moshe sawâ€¦ and lo! They had accomplished it as G-d had commandedâ€¦ and Moshe blessed them."

Last week the Torah detailed how each artist and craftsman dedicated their entire being, heart and mind, intent and action, to the construction of the Mishkan. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch expresses this in his commentary on Pasuk 39:43. "First it was they who had done it, every part from the smallest to the largest expressing their whole personality their devotion, their spontaneous enthusiasm and the strength and energies of the entire nation. Secondly, their zeal and enthusiasm in its sum total as well as in its every detail had been subordinated completely to the commands of Torah. There had been no attempt on the part of any craftsman to bring his own ideas and his own individuality to bear upon the work by making additions or omissions. Rather, each and every one of the craftsman had considered it his supreme accomplishment to execute obediently, and with scrupulous care and precision, not his own idea but the idea and commandment of G-d."

Artists and craftsman are a finicky lot. Their personal investment in their creativity often translates into ego and pride. However, when Moshe reviewed the workings of the Mishkan he saw that every action and intent had been subordinated in service to G-d. Therefore, the Mishkan became the proper receptacle for G-d's honor and presence.

At the end of the Parsha, right before the conclusion of the book of Shemos, the Torah describes G-d's presence descending in a cloud and filling the Mishkan. The same event took place 486 years later at the inauguration of the first Bais Hamikdash. Why did G-d choose a cloud as the physical representation of His presence?

A cloud is a gaseous type compound. Whether a rain cloud or a smoke type cloud, it is sufficiently ethereal to float upon the air and yet occupy a given space. However, like a gas, the cloud will spread to fill the confines of a closed room. At the same time that the cloud fills the room the contents of the room remain inside. The contents do not interfere with the spread of the gas. If

someone enters a thick fog or cloud they are quickly enveloped to the extent that that they can lose sense of themselves. If the cloud is thick enough the individual will not be able to even see himself.

G-d chose the cloud as the representation of His Shechina - presence, because like the cloud G-d's honor fills the entire land. The physical and material aspects of the universe do not interfere with G-d's presence because they reflect His intent and purpose. However, as the Torah states and as is reiterated in this week's Haftarah, while the cloud filled the Mishkan and the Bais Hamikdash no human was able to remain inside. Non-free willed creations that perfectly reflect G-d's intentions are a complement for G-d's presence and are integrated into the entirety of His honor. They can be totally enveloped and subjugated to G-d's intent. However, free willed humans who struggle to subjugate their own personalities in service to G-d cannot sustain the purity and intensity of His presence. They retain too much of themselves to completely reflect G-d's intent. So long as the slightest vestiges of our own wants and desires remain, G-d's honor cannot fill the entire land.

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