

"CAN YOU HEAR IT?"

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

We all started as one and in the end we all end as one. In the beginning, G-d created one human called Adam. That human creature was then divided into the two components of Adam and Chava - male and female. Following that fundamental division the rest of the countless individuals emerged onto the stage of history. Each one was born alone and each one died alone. The way humanity began is the way each of us meets our end - alone and as one.

There are other references in the Torah to the concept of being one and alone. When G-d decided to destroy the world he saved humanity in the merits of one man - Noach. "Because in this entire generation I have found only you to be righteous." (Ber. 6:1)

Avraham was the one-person in his generation to undertake the responsibility of emulating G-d's Chesed (kindness). In his merit the Jewish nation was born.

As a nation the evil Bilam described us as, "A nation that dwells alone." (Bamid. 23:9)

Yitzchak was described by G-d as, "Your son, your only son..." (Ber. 222:2)

Yakov was chosen from among two to be the third of the Avos.

Yoseph was chosen from among the twelve sons to be enslaved first.

Moshe emerged as the one person to lead the Jews out of bondage. He argued with G-d to choose his brother Aharon, but in the end it was Moshe who ascended Sinai to receive the Torah, not Aharon.

Following the sin of the Golden Calf Aharon was the one person chosen to be the Kohain Gadol (high priest). The Kohain Gadol is the one and only person who can enter the Holy of Holies on the single most holy day.

I think you get my point.

At the beginning of this week's Parsha, G-d "called to Moshe and spoke to him from the Ohel Moed." Rashi referenced Torah's Kohanim that explained that the voice of G-d was loud enough to be heard by the entire world, yet it was restricted to within the four walls of the Meeting Tent. In theory every person in the world should have heard G-d speak, instead, only Moshe heard the voice of G-d.

My Grandfather Zt'l questioned why G-d did not just speak in a voice that only Moshe could hear? Why speak in a voice that was loud enough to be heard by the entire world yet make sure that only

Moshe could hear it. I would like to share with you one of his answers.

My Grandfather explained that there is a tremendous power in being commanded. Contrast in your own mind the difference between being asked to do something by the President of the United States with being asked to do something by the President's Chief of Staff. In either situation being personally identified by the office of the President would be a compliment. However, a direct meeting or phone call from the President would be a far more powerful motivator than the same request delivered by the President's Chief of Staff.

In the aftermath of Matan Torah, the Jews were on the level of prophets. Each person was worthy of being the direct recipient of G-d's wishes. Had they not sinned with the Golden Calf, G-d would not have restricted His manifest presence to "between the wing span of the two Keruvim." However, after sinning, G-d withdrew from within the being of each Jew and secreted Himself within the Holy of Holies. Thereafter, G-d's words would be only be heard by Moshe Rabbeinu.

Although Moshe was the only person worthy of hearing the voice of G-d, the truth was that the voice of G-d was loud enough to be heard by the entire world, if only they had been worthy. Therefore, Rashi explained that G-d's voice was powerful enough to shatter the great cedar trees of Lebanon but G-d stopped it at the door of the Ohel Moed.

My Grandfather explained that knowing that the voice was loud enough to be heard if only we had been worthy obligates each of us as if we had heard the commandments from G-d's own voice.

Imagine if a foreman had difficulty hearing because the noise at the job-site made it impossible to hear normal speech from a normal distance. The boss shows up with his personal secretary to give some instruction. Due to the noise, the foreman can only see the Boss's lips moving but his voice is unintelligible. Recognizing that his foreman had not heard his instructions he sends his secretary to speak directly into his ear. As far as the foreman is concerned, the voice of the secretary is the voice of his Boss. Regardless of the fact that he did not hear the actual voice of the Boss, he knows that the Boss was the one who gave the instructions, not the secretary.

Knowing that G-d's voice was loud enough to be heard if only we were deserving was the same as hearing the instructions from the secretary with the Boss standing there. The knowledge obligated each Jew as if hearing it from G-d Himself.

The book of Vayikra is a compendium of laws intended to create the ideal relationship between G-d and human. It frames every expression of devotion, thanksgiving, atonement, subjectivity, elation, and hope in detailed service and ceremony. It presumes a Mishkan or Bais Hamikdash, the various vessels and religious appointments, the Kohanim, Leviyim and a united nation.

However, central to the entire process is the individual. It is the individual who is born into the world crying and kicking. It is the individual who struggles to understand his or her place within the limited society of family and the far more complex society of community. It is the individual who battles the

natural dichotomy of freewill within the ever-challenging demands and pressures of self and conscience. It is the individual who must ultimately stand alone before G-d in final judgment.

The G-d of the Jews - our G-d, is a personal G-d. As individuals we have the right and the ability to engage Him in personal dialogue. Three times a day we stand alone before G-d and confront our choseness. Much of our identity is tied up in family, community, and nationality. In fact, our eternal quality is the indisputable result of our nation's Divine protection; however, the individual must still stand-alone. We cannot hide behind the greatness of the past or the miracle of our historic survival. It is the consequences of our own personal relationship with G-d that is the final arbitrator of our success or failure.

Many sub-cultures within Judaism have attempted to replace individual devotion with communal commitment. Unfortunately, they have disappeared within the pages of history and the cultures of many foreign lands. The greatness of our continuity has always been, "When a man among you brings an offering to G-d... (1:3)

Individuals have always been the backbone of our existence. It was the courage of Nachshon that parted the sea, and the infinite value of every human that dictates the dignity of life. It was Aharon's love that saved the Jews at the time of the Golden Calf and his same love that effected forgiveness in the Holy of Holies. One man brought Torah to us, and the transmission of those same Divine truths have passed from individual to individual, from parent to child, from teacher to student for over 3,000 years.

In the final analysis, we truly stand alone before G-d. In the final analysis we are each held responsible for our personal relationship with the Creator. In the final analysis, through the power of our love for each other we must become a nation of individuals molded into a single cohesive whole. In the final analysis we are judged by how clearly we each heard the voice of G-d.

Parshas Zachor

This week, in addition to the regular Parsha, we read Parshas Zachor. Parshas Zachor is the 2nd of the four special Shabbosim preceding Pesach when additional portions are read from the Torah. The first special Shabbos was Parshas Shekalim. This week we read Zachor, and in a few weeks we will read Parah and Chodesh. There are set rules which determine when each of these additional Parshios is to be read. Parshas Zachor is always read on the Shabbos before Purim.

On Parshas Zachor, we read the additional Parsha found in Divarim, 25:17. As a nation, we were commanded to destroy the nation of Amalek. This nation came into existence at the same time as we did. Eisav's son Elifaz had a son Amalek. Eisav and Elifaz's legacy to Amalek was an undying hatred against the children of Yakov.

At the time of the exodus from Egypt, Amalek traveled hundreds of miles to ambush the newly freed nation in the hope of destroying them. We, as a nation, did not pose any threat to their

sovereignty. They lived to the east of Canaan and were not among the Seven Nations occupying Eretz Yisroel. Nevertheless, their irrational hatred against Hashem and us compelled them to attack a harmless and seemingly defenseless nation. In the aftermath of their attack we were commanded to always remember the evil that is Amalek. It is the reading of this Parsha that is the fulfillment of this Biblical commandment. This mitzvah, according to most authorities, is not restricted by time and must be fulfilled by men and woman.

The Rabbi's selected the Shabbos before Purim for the fulfillment of this Mitzvah because Haman was a direct descendent of Amalek, and Mordecai was a direct descendent of King Saul. The entire story of Purim is directly linked to this Mitzvah and the missed opportunity of King Saul that we read about in the Haftorah.

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