

# SHABBOS HAGADOL

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*Sfas Emes, Zechuso Tagein Aleinu, Shabbos HaGadol, 5631*

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar with some thoughts that he had from his grandfather. The Chiddushei HaRim posed a basic question: Why is this Shabbos called "HaGadol" ("the Great")? To address this question, the Chiddushei HaRim (and the Sfas Emes) look at other cases in which Chazal used the word "gadol." The objective is to conclude from those other contexts what Chazal may have had in mind when they used the word "gadol."

One such case is the term "Anshei Kenesses HaGedola" -- the men of the Great Assembly. This term refers to our Torah leaders in the early years of the Second Beis HaMikdash. The Gemara (Yoma, 69b) explains that the assembly was called "Gedola" because they restored HaShem's crown to its former glory. This answer, however, only deepens the puzzle. Because to say "restored" implies that the glory of HaShem's crown had somehow been diminished in an earlier time period. But how could that have happened? Have no fear. The Gemara and the Sfas Emes will explain.

Chazal note that Moshe Rabbeinu referred to HaShem (Devarim, 10:17) as "HaGadol, HaGibor, VehaNorah" ("the Great, the Mighty, and the Awesome"). But later generations could not in all honesty apply those words to HaShem. Thus, Yirmiyahu witnessed the Babylonians desecrating the Beis HaMikdash, and asked: "Where is His awesomeness?" And seeing no sign of HaShem as being awesome, he deleted the word "Nora". Thus we see Yirmiyahu (32:18) referring to HaShem only as "HaGadol, HaGibor".

Similarly, when Daniel saw how the Babylonians oppressed their Jewish captives, he asked: "Where is His might?" And seeing no evidence of HaShem's "might," Daniel deleted the word "HaGibor" and referred to HaShem (Daniel, 9:4) only as: "HaGadol (Vehanora)".

Then came Anshei Kenesses HaGedola and said: Adrabba! (On the contrary!) What you have witnessed is in fact powerful evidence of HaShem's might and awesomeness. For were it not for His great might, He could not stand by as His people are oppressed. And were it not for His awesomeness, the Jewish people could never have survived -- let alone maintained its identity among the nations of the world as Ovdei HaShem. Thus, interpreting the evidence differently, Anshei Kenesses HaGedola recognized that HaShem is indeed mighty and awesome. Therefore, they reinserted the attributes of "HaGibor VeHanora" into our conception of HaShem. And to this day, we utter those words in the first beracha of Shemoneh Esrei. This was indeed "restoring HaShem's

crown to its former glory"!

The Sfas Emes cites another context -- Creation -- in which Chazal employ the word "Gadol." Chazal comment: "'Gedula,' -- zeh ma'aseh bereishis." ("The word Gedula - Greatness -- refers to HaShem's having created the world.") The Sfas Emes explains. The world that HaShem created -- i.e., nature -- appears to be contrary to a perception that HaShem rules the world. But a closer look enables us to see that nature exists only because HaShem gives it existence. Thus, Creation -- and nature -- also testify to HaShem's greatness.

The Sfas Emes cites one more case where the word "Gadol" appears. That place is in parshas Lech Lecha, (Bereishis, 12:2), where HaShem promised Avraham Avinu: "Ve'eh'escha legoy gadol" ("I will make you a great nation.") The Rambam gives us the context of this promise. Avraham had been able to penetrate and see through the fiction of the many false gods worshiped in his milieu. Thus, he was able to perceive HaShem's Omnipresence in the world. However, Avraham Avinu wanted to see an entire nation that would provide testimony to HaShem's dominion. In that context, HaShem assured Avraham that He would make Avraham into a "great nation." Thus, once again we encounter the word "gadol."

To conclude, the Sfas Emes is saying that the word "gadol" (as in "Shabbos HaGadol") refers to the capacity to see through apparent reality -- whether in history or nature -- and thus to perceive HaShem's Omnipresence.

Our ancestors demonstrated this capacity many years ago, in Egypt. They did so when on, the day now known as Shabbos HaGadol, they dared to prepare for slaughter the deity of their former masters. This action required personal bravery. It also required a key intellectual attribute: namely, the ability to pierce the Hester with which HaShem chooses to cloak the true real world, and thus to see reality as it truly is. Clearly, we need more of both of these qualities -- both individual courage and intellectual integrity. May HaShem help us to develop these strengths in our everyday lives!

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