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PARSHA INSIGHTS

THE DIVINE PRESENT

“And G-d appeared to him (Avraham)...” (18:1)

I often hear the question, “Where is G-d? I don’t see Him.” Many of us don’t sense G-d’s Presence in the world; and even of those who concede the compelling logic of an All-powerful Being, many find it difficult to internalize that logic and feel His Presence.

Why is this?

The English translation of the first verse in this week’s parsha, “And G-d appeared to him,” is not strictly accurate. A literal translation of the verse would be, “And He appeared to him — G-d...”

In the order of the words, the one who sees – Avraham – precedes the One Who is seen – Hashem. Why did the Torah use this unusual syntax?

In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, the Rambam says that it is axiomatic that G-d cannot change, alter, or move in any way. Since He is Omnipresent, if He “moved” it would imply the existence of some place from which He had previously been absent and to which He had subsequently arrived. This would be a clear contradiction to His Omnipresence.

Thus, any approach by G-d to us, any appearance or

revelation, is really us drawing closer to Him.

This is what is meant by the verse in Shir HaShirim “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me.” (5:6, 6:7). To the extent that we bring ourselves closer to G-d, to that same degree will we perceive His Presence.

But how does one draw close to a Being Who is totally removed from anything we know or could ever know, Who is non-physical, non-spiritual?

Three days after his *brit mila*, Avraham was suffering great discomfort. The day itself was unusually hot, yet Avraham left the shade of his tent to look for travelers who might be suffering from the heat and offer them hospitality. It was after this act of selfless *chesed* that he experienced the closeness to G-d, which is known as revelation.

If we don’t sense G-d in the world, if the world just seems to spin around all on its own, maybe it’s because we are spinning around our own egos, our own desires and our own agendas.

If we stop seeing ourselves as the center of the world, and bring ourselves close to G-d by doing acts of selfless kindness, then we will receive the Divine Present — of sensing G-d’s existence.

• Sources: *Ohr HaChaim and Dvash v’Chalav in Iturei Torah; Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch on the parsha*

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

Three days after performing *brit mila* on himself, Avraham is visited by G-d. When three angels appear in human form, Avraham rushes to show them hospitality by bringing them into his tent, despite this being the most painful time after the operation. Sarah laughs when she hears from them that she will bear a son next year. G-d reveals to Avraham that He will destroy Sodom, and Avraham pleads for Sodom to be spared. G-d agrees that if there are fifty righteous people in Sodom He will not destroy it. Avraham "bargains" G-d down to ten righteous people. However, not even ten can be found. Lot, his wife and two daughters are rescued just before sulfur and fire rain down on Sodom and her sister cities. Lot's wife looks back and is turned into a pillar of salt. Lot's daughters fear that as a result of the destruction there will be no husbands for them. They decide to get their father drunk and through him to perpetuate the human race. From the elder daughter, Moav is born, and from the younger, Ammon. Avraham moves to Gerar where Avimelech abducts Sarah. After G-d appears to Avimelech in a dream, he releases Sarah and appeases

Avraham. As promised, a son, Yitzchak, is born to Sarah and Avraham. On the eighth day after the birth, Avraham circumcises him as commanded. Avraham makes a feast the day Yitzchak is weaned. Sarah tells Avraham to banish Hagar and Hagar's son Yishmael because she sees in him signs of degeneracy. Avraham is distressed at the prospect of banishing his son, but G-d tells him to listen to whatever Sarah tells him to do. After nearly dying of thirst in the desert, Yishmael is rescued by an angel and G-d promises that he will be the progenitor of a mighty nation. Avimelech enters into an alliance with Avraham when he sees that G-d is with him. In a tenth and final test, G-d instructs Avraham to take Yitzchak, who is now 37, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Avraham does this, in spite of ostensibly aborting Jewish nationhood and contradicting his life-long preaching against human sacrifice. At the last moment, G-d sends an angel to stop Avraham. Because of Avraham's unquestioning obedience, G-d promises him that even if the Jewish People sin, they will never be completely dominated by their foes. The parsha ends with the genealogy and birth of Rivka.

ISRAEL Forever

THE LESSON OF SODOM

The awful fate of the sinful cities of Sodom and Amarah will be recalled in synagogues throughout Israel and the world this Shabbat in the reading of the weekly Torah portion.

Were these indeed the worst cities in the world that they were designated for such a violent upheaval?

No, writes Ramban in his commentary. These cities were singled out for total destruction because of two reasons.

One is that they were located in Eretz Yisrael, a holy land which does not tolerate the abomination of which they were guilty. Just as this land would eventually spit out the nations that contaminated it, these sinners were now completely

destroyed because their crimes surpassed those of all the others who inhabited the land.

The destruction of Sodom and Amarah was also intended as a lesson for the nation of Israel which would eventually inherit the land to be careful lest it deserve a similar fate.

The major sin of these cities was a total indifference to the need to share its wealth with its needy neighbors and visitors. It is hoped that the lesson of Sodom and Amarah will be taken seriously by a government which is more concerned with economic growth than it is with the needs of its large families and senior citizens. Only an application of this lesson will guarantee the well-being of Israel forever.

לע"נ

מרת לאה בת ר' יצחק אייזיק ע"ה

ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why did G-d appear to Avraham after the *brit mila*?
2. Why was Avraham sitting at the entrance to his tent?
3. What were the missions of the three angels?
4. Why did Avraham enjoin the guests to wash the dust off their feet?
5. Why did Avraham ask specifically Yishmael, and not someone else, to prepare food for the guests?
6. Why did the angels ask Avraham where Sarah was?
7. When G-d related Sarah's thoughts to Avraham, He did not relate them precisely. Why?
8. What "cry" from Sodom came before G-d?
9. How many angels went to Sodom?
10. Why was Lot sitting at the gate of Sodom?
11. Lot served the angels *matza*. Why?
12. Why did Lot delay when he left Sodom?
13. Why were Lot and his family not permitted to look back at Sodom?
14. Lot's wife looked back and became a pillar of salt. Why was she punished in this particular way?
15. In what merit did G-d save Lot?
16. Why did Avraham relocate after the destruction of Sodom?
17. Why did Avimelech give gifts to Avraham?
18. Why was Avraham told to listen to Sarah?
19. Why did G-d listen to the prayer of Yishmael and not to that of Hagar?
20. Who accompanied Avraham and Yitzchak to the *akeidah* (binding)?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 18:1 - Avraham was sick, so G-d came to "visit" him.
2. 18:1 - He was looking for guests.
3. 18:2 - To announce Yitzchak's birth, to heal Avraham and to destroy Sodom.
4. 18:4 - He thought they were among those who worship the dust, and he didn't want any object of idolatry in his home.
5. 18:7 - To train him in the performance of *mitzvot*.
6. 18:9 - To call attention to Sarah's modesty, so as to endear her to her husband.
7. 18:13 - For the sake of peace.
8. 18:21 - The cry of a girl who was executed for giving food to the poor.
9. 19:1 - Two; one to destroy the city and one to save Lot.
10. 19:1 - He was a judge.
11. 19:3 - It was Passover.
12. 19:16 - He wanted to save his property.
13. 19:17 - As they, too, deserved to be punished, it wasn't fitting for them to witness the destruction of Sodom.
14. 19:26 - She was stingy, not wanting to give the guests salt.
15. 19:29 - Lot had protected Avraham by concealing from the Egyptians the fact that Sarah was his wife.
16. 20:1 - Because travel in the region ceased and Avraham could no longer find guests.
17. 20:14 - So that Avraham would pray for him.
18. 21:12 - Because she was greater in prophecy.
19. 21:17 - Because the prayer of a sick person is more readily accepted than the prayer of others on his behalf.
20. 22:3 - Yishmael and Eliezer.

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- The balance between Torah study and Simchat Yom Tov
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- What the *eiruv tavshilin* food must consist of
- *Tevilah* (immersion in mikveh) of man, vessels or water on Shabbat or Yom Tov
- Does ignorance of one law indicate ignorance of another
- Which sacrifices can be offered on Yom Tov
- When does one transgress the ban on delaying the offering of a sacrifice
- *Semicha* (placing hands on animal) on sacrifice offered on Yom Tov
- The conflict between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai regarding *semicha*

TWO APPROACHES TO REMEMBERING SHABBAT

The Sages Hillel and Shammai agreed that a Jew should have an awareness of Shabbat throughout the week. They interpreted the Torah command to “Remember the Shabbat” as including referring to the days of the week by their relationship to Shabbat – Yom Rishon (first day after Shabbat) rather than Sunday.

This consensus is explained by Ramban in his commentary on Torah (*Shmot* 20:8) while noting the difference between these two Sages in regard to preparing

food for Shabbat which is mentioned in our *gemara*.

All of Shammai’s days were dedicated to the food with which he would honor Shabbat. If he found an animal which seemed like a good source for meat for Shabbat he would purchase it. If he subsequently came across an even better animal he would consume the first one and put aside the second one for Shabbat. In this manner he would each day be on the lookout for Shabbat preparation. Hillel, on the other hand, had complete confidence that Heaven would provide him before Shabbat with what he required. He lived by the faith of King David’s words (*Tehillim* 68:20): “Blessed is G-d Who provides us with our needs day by day.”

WHAT THE Sages SAY

“One who gives a gift of food to a child should let his mother know. (So that the parents should be aware that he has an affection for them and thereby increase friendship among Jews. – Rashi)”

• Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel - Beitzah 16a

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LOVE of the LAND

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LUNAR LITURGY

From: Peter Merker in NYC

*Dear Rabbi,
Where does the halacha for kiddush levana (blessing for the New Moon) come from, and have there been any Torah authorities who were opposed to it?*

Dear Peter Merker,

The source for blessing the new moon comes from the Talmud. To my knowledge, there have never been any Torah authorities who opposed it.

I assume that your question is based on the misconception that sanctifying the moon bears a resemblance to moon-worship. This is incorrect. We are not worshipping the moon; rather we are praising G-d for His marvelous creations, including the miracle of the moon's monthly rebirth. One of the principal ways to recognize G-d is through His works; the immutable monthly cycle

of the moon is one of the more visible aspects of G-d's masterful creation.

Additionally, the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people is compared to the relationship between the sun and the moon. The sun is the source of the light radiating from the moon. The extent to which the moon "turns its face" to the sun, that radiance is visible to others. When the moon "turns away" from the sun, it is cast into darkness. So too, when the Jewish People turn away from G-d, they weaken and wane. When they return to G-d, they reflect His luminescence and wax to become "a light unto the nations".

Therefore, specifically at the time of the new moon – a renaissance of return and rejuvenation - we turn our faces upward to G-d and view the monthly rebirth of the moon as a symbol of G-d's promise to ultimately redeem the Jewish People and make us whole again, such that we can reflect His Divine Light into the world with full radiance.

Sources:

- Talmud Sanhedrin 42a

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

REAL-LIFE QUESTIONS OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ETHICS

THE SWALLOWED LENSES

Question: The son of my neighbor who is studying in a yeshiva returned to his darkened dormitory room late at night. To quench his thirst he poured some water into a glass he found on the table and drank its contents. Only in the morning did he realize that the funny taste of his drink was the result of it being the solution in which his roommate had placed his contact lenses. He is now concerned as to whether he has to pay for the lenses he accidentally swallowed. What is the right thing to do?

Answer: A similar question was posed to the generation's leading halachic authority, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv of Jerusalem. He gave several reasons for not

holding the lens swallower responsible for payment despite the fact that a person is responsible for any damage he causes, even if he did so unintentionally. We quote two of them:

There was no way that he could have presumed that there were lenses in the glass so that there is no liability for damage done.

The owner of the lenses brought the damage upon himself by placing such an expensive item in a glass placed in a room he shared with others.

In conclusion, you can relieve the conscience of your neighbor's son but impress upon him the need to "think before drink".

A SPECIAL PAIR OF SHOES

In the home of the Rosh Hayeshiva of the world-renowned Beit Midrash Gavoha of Lakewood, Rav Malkiel Kotler, there is a precious heirloom – a pair of worn-out shoes.

He inherited them from his father, who inherited them from his father, the founder of the Lakewood Yeshiva, Rav Aaron Kotler. The original owner was Rav Aaron Kotler's father-in-law, Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Kletzk in Europe and later head of Yeshivat Eitz Chaim in Jerusalem.

How did Rav Meltzer come to own such tattered footwear?

During World War One many yeshiva students were forced to leave their places of study which suffered from the shelling of opposing armies and to return to their homes. One such youngster, who was to later become

the great Rosh Hayeshiva of Ponevez, Rav Eliezer Shach, could not afford carfare and walked for a week to his home, often seeking refuge from flying shells. When he knocked on the door of his home he was met by his mother who insisted that he immediately return to the yeshiva where he would be safer than at home. Without hesitation he turned around and started walking back. Still exhausted from the first journey, it took him longer to get back and he was on the road for nearly two weeks.

Before he took his seat in the Beit Midrash, the Rosh Hayeshiva, Rav Meltzer, offered to exchange the badly torn shoes he was wearing for a new pair of shoes. The "deal" was made and the torn shoes which told a touching story of love of Torah and respect for a mother became the precious heirloom of a royal family of Torah.

LOVE OF THE LAND - THE WISDOM

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

THE FOX AND THE FISH

When the Romans decreed that anyone learning Torah would be put to death, Rabbi Akiva defied the ban and continued to publicly teach Torah. Papus ben Yehuda criticized him for endangering himself and his students by thus ignoring the power of the Roman rulers to punish them.

"I will give you a parable," replied the great Sage. "A fox was once walking alongside a river in which fish were frantically scurrying from one place to another. When he asked them for the cause of their flight they explained that they were escaping fishermen who were trying to catch and kill them. The fox sug-

gested that they would be safe from danger if they joined him and all other animal life on dry land. To which the fish replied that the fox, reputed to be the cleverest of animals, was speaking utter foolishness. If they were so endangered in their natural habitat, they argued, what chance would they have for survival outside the water?"

We Jews, concluded Rabbi Akiva, face the same situation for Torah is to us what water is to the fish. If while we are learning Torah, of which it is written "It is your life and length of days" we are in danger, what chance do we have for survival if we abandon it?



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