

MATOS (NUMBERS 30:2-36:13)

The Language of G-d

2010 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

"THE NINE DAYS"

This Sunday evening, July 11, is Rosh Chodesh Av, the first day of the tragic month of Av. It marks the second phase of the three weeks of intensified mourning leading up to Tisha B'Av. During those nine days, we avoid consumption of meat and wine (with the exception of "Mitzvah Meals" such as Shabbos, Bris celebrations, and a few others) Like a mourner during Shiva, (R"L) we avoid bathing as much as possible.

We are supposed to feel the pain of the destruction of the Temples and all of the suffering our People have endured while waiting for the Final Redemption and the building of the Third, the permanent Temple in Jerusalem.

“The Language of G-d”

Wouldn't it be great to dialogue with G-d? We could talk to Him and He would respond. We'd be able to hear, from G-d Himself, the answer to all our questions.

Aaron the Priest ascended Mount Hor in accordance with G-d's command and died there... (Numbers, 33:38)

“...in accordance with G-d's command...” Our Sages make a very surprising comment on this event. “G-d said to Moses, ‘Do Me a favor, and tell Aaron that he's going to die, because I am embarrassed to tell him.’”

This statement obviously requires explanation. What could cause G-d to refer to Himself as “embarrassed”, and how would that embarrassment be prevented through Moses' intercession?

Rabbi Elazar Shach explained this by pointing out the difference between Moses' powers of prophecy as compared with those of other prophets. As G-d Himself told Aaron and Miriam:

“...If there are prophets among you... I speak with him in a dream. Not so is My servant Moses...”
(Ibid, 12:6-7)

The Talmud explains that Moses received a clear, illuminating revelation from G-d, rather than a dream or a vision, which was not as clear. Rabbi Shach attributes this prophetic clarity of Moses to the fact that since he personally received the Torah, he had a much more clear understanding of G-d's words.

G-d's so-called "embarrassment", explains Rabbi Shach, was due to the fact that since Aaron's death was a punishment for an apparently minor transgression, Aaron would not fully understand why he was being punished. He would not have a clear understanding of the full import of his "sin." Since his powers of prophecy were not as great as those of his younger brother, he would not fully comprehend the subtleties of the prophecy from G-d. As a result, G-d's judgment would not be fully understood. Therefore, He was "embarrassed."

By speaking with Moses, who had an illuminated understanding of G-d's words, G-d insured that the message would be communicated in a manner which Aaron would fully appreciate.

In other words, what we see here is that in order to appreciate prophecy, one must be fluent in the language of G-d. That fluency is attained in one way, and one way only – through receiving the Torah. Moses, as the receiver and transmitter of Torah from G-d to Israel was the one who best understood what G-d had to say. Only he was capable of "translating" the message to Aaron. Had Aaron received the prophecy himself, as great a prophet as he was, he would not have been able to fully comprehend it.

I received a call the other day from a fellow who had come across one of my Torah Talk articles on the Web. He congratulated me on my wisdom (?) and my sense of humor. (?????!!!!!!) He wanted to discuss an interpretation of the Torah he had come up with.

This gentleman proceeded to point out several questions on various passages in the Torah, which led him toward his conclusion. I responded that a number of his questions were addressed by the Talmud, and I shared those answers with him. In turn, he replied that there are always lots of opinions in the Talmud. On that basis, he went back to his personal analysis of the text, implying that his answers are at least as valid as those of the Talmud.

I write to you every week, offering my humble interpretations of Torah, Talmud and Commentaries. While I will sometimes offer what seems to be something of a novel approach, I always try to keep my comments in line with traditional Jewish Commentaries. (In fact, there have been times that I've typed up a message and, after examining my writings in the light of Torah Commentaries, concluded that it was wrong, and deleted it without sending it.)

There are, “out there,” on the Internet and elsewhere, a whole assortment of self-appointed “experts” on Torah, Jewish Law, and especially Jewish Mysticism. Like parrots who can repeat words without having a clue as to what they are saying, they will quote and misquote passages from all over, presenting a theology of nonsense that is swallowed up by people who know even less than they do.

As Rabbi Shach explained, the only way to understand G-d and His will is to be conversant in His language. That language is NOT Hebrew; it is a language whose expertise is acquired through a lifetime of learning genuine, unadulterated Torah sources from teachers who continue the unbroken Tradition back to Moses.

I wonder if Rabbi Shach realized he was talking about himself. Until he died in 2001 somewhere between the ages of 103 and 106, the Torah world beat a path to his door to glean wisdom from this great sage. Rabbi Shach became the great man he was by dedicating a lifetime delving into the Torah he received from his teachers.

Do you want G-d to talk to you? Be like Moses and Rabbi Shach; spend a century or so studying, and you may begin to pick up the lingo. Till that happens, we are all better off if we listen to reliable interpreters who know what they are talking about.

Have a great Shabbos. Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplovitz

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