



## GEULAS YISRAEL

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# Dark Clouds Above, *Yirat Shamayim* Below

At the Yam Suf we saw too much. At Har Sinai we saw nothing. Each time *Yirat Shamayim* surged.

Our relationship with Hashem is riveted upon two emotions- *ahava* and *yirah*, love and fear. Human relationships are defined by love or fear but never *both side-by side*. Our relationship with Hashem, however, is a blend of these *two* dichotomous emotions.

*Ahava* is a byproduct of understanding Hashem, His mitzvot and His role in history. We love Him most when we are able to identify the synchronicity between His will and human welfare. Realizing that His will enhances human experience, we appreciate Him and love him because adhering to His will improves our lives.

As the Rambam summarizes, (Hilchot Teshuvah perek 10) *ahava* is the ability to embrace Hashem's will, not for reward or not because we fear punishment, but because of Torah's inner logic *אמת שהוא אמת*.

By uncovering the intersection between Torah and human welfare, we love Hashem. Similarly, when we are capable of deciphering history and discerning Hashem's hidden hand, we understand and love Him. *Ahava* emerges when religion is logical, history is intelligible, and faith makes sense.

### TWO ROUTES TO YIRAT SHAMAYIM

By contrast, *yirat shamayim* materializes

when we are unable to understand Him. Standing in awe of the divine mystery and baffled by Hashem's incomprehensibility, we submit to His higher authority. Ideal *yirat shamayim* isn't fear, but awe and submission. Not trembling, or shuddering, but submission and surrender. Bowing to the divine mystery.

There are two different paths to *yirat shamayim*. Along the first route, we encounter Hashem's power and majesty which exceeds human capacity and surpasses the human imagination. We feel so incapable of processing the immeasurable divine grandeur that we surrender.

We traversed this route to *yirat shamayim* at the Yam Suf:

וירא ישראל את ה' הגדולה אשר עשה ה'  
במצרים וייראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו

Watching the riotous oceans stilled by the voice of Hashem, and spotting our cruel Egyptian oppressors drowning to death was overwhelming. Overpowered by the power and the glory, we surrendered and achieved our first collective moment of *yirat shamayim*.

ויראו העם את ה' ויאמינו בה' ובמשה עבדו

In perek 8 of Tehillim, Dovid Hamelech maps this first route to *yirat shamayim*:

כי אראה שמיך מעשה אצבעותיך ירח וכוכבים  
אשר כוננתה מה אנוש כי תזכרנו וכן אדם כי תפקדנו  
ותחסרהו מעט מאלקים

By pondering creation and scanning the

heavens, Dovid Hamelech is awed by its splendor and force, recognizes the frailty of the human condition, and concedes: "What is Man that I should even mention him!". His encounter with the vastness and beauty of the divinely-created cosmos provokes human surrender.

### SEEING NOTHING

At Har Sinai we took a completely different route to *yirat shamayim*. We didn't see too much but saw too little. We stood, terrified, at the base of a quivering mountain, ablaze in infernal fire. We were petrified. A thick cloud cloaked the mountain from which we were barred passage. The mystery of Hashem was impenetrable. Chazal portray our souls as departing this world, immediately upon hearing the reverberating voice of Hashem. At the Yam Suf we "saw" the mighty hand of Hashem, but at Har Sinai there were no visuals, only sounds.

קול דברים אתם שומעים ותמונה אינכם רואים  
זולתי קול

Frightened and confused, we begged Moshe to intervene and mediate the word of Hashem, so that we could survive this overwhelming encounter. As Moshe summarizes after Har Sinai, this event was carefully choreographed to incite maximal *yirat shamayim*:

כי לבעבור נסות אתכם בא האלקים ובעבור תהיה  
יראתו על פניכם לבלתי תחטאו

Unable to see anything, and terrified by the darkness, the fire, and the smoke, we succumbed.

Whereas Dovid Hamelech provided a roadmap for the first form of *yirat shamayim*, Iyov models the second variety of *yirat shamayim*. Though righteous and pious, he suffers miserably, and cannot reconcile what he perceives as divine injustice. He struggles to decode the divine mystery and, one by one, his friends descend upon



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his sick bed, postulating different philosophies to justify the ways of G-d to men. Finally, (perek 37) Hashem appears to Iyov in a storm, amidst the mystery and confusion of a hurricane, and reminds him that humans cannot fully grasp Hashem *כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי נאם ה'*

*Yirat shamayim* is accessed through two very different routes. Sometimes we see "too much" and are smothered by the overwhelming majesty of Hashem. Other times we look straight into the teeth of the divine mystery, are perplexed, and submit. At Yam Suf we saw too much of Hashem. At Har Sinai we saw too little. Each generated lasting *yirat shamayim*.

### THE MIRAGE OF CONFIDENCE

The first form of *yirat shamayim*, where we encounter divine miracles, can be disorienting. When His logic and His hand in history are each on display, we often forget that we

are only witnessing a small glimpse of Him. Often, under conditions of historical clarity, we become too comfortable and too confident in assuming that we know Him and can predict the historical trajectory. Sometimes it takes the dark clouds of divine mystery to remind us of how little we know and to help us recalibrate our *yirat shamayim* properly.

Over the past 75 years we lived through a *kriyas Yam Suf-like* experience. We saw Hashem's presence descend into our world with clarity and radiance. The stunning resurgence of our nation after the Holocaust was a divine operation. We recovered our national wealth, built robust Jewish communities, achieved influence and affluence, and reconstructed a flourishing Torah world just a few decades after it had been eviscerated. To cap it all off, we returned to our Homeland and enjoyed a stunning succession of victories and triumphs. With exhilaration, we watched our tiny nascent country morph into a regional military, economic and political superpower. It all made sense. Our world was painted in bright redemptive colors. Hashem's miraculous presence suffused our world, and everything made sense. Until it didn't.

Oct 7th changed everything. The past three months we have been covered by dark clouds, and we feel lost in a world without logic or clarity. Why is this happening to our people? What happened to the *Brit Avot*? Wasn't the Holocaust the last and final nightmare of Jewish exile? Shouldn't it be different back home in Israel? So many questions, so many mysteries.

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So much pain and so much frustration.

We must recalibrate. Perhaps we over-shot. Perhaps we saw too much and forgot to surrender to the Unknowable. The war has made it patently clear that we don't know, and we can't fully know. We have to moderate over-confidence while bolstering faith. We must learn to speak with more modesty and more meekness rather than with blustering confidence implying that we know where and how history is turning. אֶל-תְּבַהֵל עַל-יָפִיד וְלִבָּךְ אֶל-יְמִהֵר לְהוֹצִיא דְבָר לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹקִים כִּי הָאֱלֹקִים בְּשִׁמְיָם וְאַתָּה עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-כֵּן יְהִי דְבָרְךָ מְעֻטִים

Don't rush to speak, and don't hurry to announce ideas. G-d is in Heaven, and you are grounded on Earth. Therefore, your words should be few.

Faith yes, overconfidence no. We all need to speak with more *tzniyut* about the future. ■



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