

Parshas Vayikra 5772

HEARING VOICES

As believing Jews, we know that the Omnipotent Hashem is capable of anything. He has wrought wondrous miracles in the past and will do so in the future. While our Sages tell us that we currently live in a situation of *hester panim* — where Hashem purposefully conceals His Presence — we are perfectly aware that He can do anything He wishes, should He so choose. The reason for such conduct of concealment has a lot to do with reward and free choice. Once open miracles are readily on display, there no longer is much of a challenge to subjugate oneself to Hashem's Will. Thus, the reward for observing His commandments would be significantly diminished, and the exercise of free will would almost completely disappear. When the revelation of His awesome power is somewhat tempered, our service to Him becomes that much more meaningful and valuable.

CONTAINMENT

A similar manifestation of this idea is found at the beginning of this week's *parshah*. The opening verse speaks of Hashem's mode of communication: "And He called to Moshe, and He... spoke to him from the *Ohel Mo'ed* (Meeting Tent)..." Rashi explains the interesting mechanics of this "calling": "The sound (of Hashem's 'Voice') would travel and reach Moshe's ears; but the rest of Yisrael would not hear it..."

Rashi continues to clarify this arrangement. The failure of

Yisrael to hear was not because the 'Voice' was not loud enough; on the contrary, explains Rashi, this 'Voice' is described elsewhere as possessing great potency. As the verse in Tehillim (29:5) states: "The Voice of Hashem resounds with strength; the Voice of Hashem resounds with glory; the Voice of Hashem smashes the cedar trees..." Why, then, were the Yisraelim unable to hear when Hashem spoke to Moshe? Because He contained this great Voice within the confines of the *Ohel Mo'ed*. In other words, the Voice itself was strong enough and loud enough to project great distances; but Hashem would "cut off" the volume when the sound reached the exit of the *Ohel Mo'ed*.

Indeed, this situation is reminiscent of Hashem's conduct in the world at large. In truth, one who bothers to look can see Hashem's Presence clearly from the limitless wonders that abound in the natural world and in historical and current events. There really is little to no difference between open miracles and natural process, other than that one occurs more regularly than the other (see *Mishnas Chayim, Parshas Beshalach 5772*). To maintain an option of free will, however, Hashem purposefully engages in some concealment and provides a pitfall for those who wish to be deluded. Thus, it is possible for there to be heretics, despite the increased knowledge we have today of so many aspects of this remarkable universe. Inherently, Hashem's existence is so obvious and apparent and could be easily perceived far and wide. But, as with the Voice communicating with Moshe, Hashem purposefully restricts the emanation to a small area, if you will, wherein only those who invest the effort to seek Him out will find Him (*R' Baruch Sorotzkin, Habinah Vehaberachah*).

Dedicated in loving memory of our dear grandfather
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Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
נחמה בת יעקב ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives
to arrange Torah study on behalf of her neshamah.

THE VOICE HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD'

Interestingly, this situation of the Voice in the *Ohel Mo'ed* parallels that of another well-known broadcast, as recorded in the Mishnah in Avos (6:2):

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי, בְּכֹל יוֹם וַיּוֹם בֵּת קוֹל יוֹצֵאת מֵהַר חוֹרֵב וּמִכְרָזַת וְאוֹמֶרֶת אוֹי לָהֶם לְבָרִיּוֹת מֵעֲלֵבוֹנָה שֶׁל תּוֹרָה. שֶׁכֵּל מִי שֶׁאֵינוֹ עוֹסֵק בְּתוֹרָה נִקְרָא נֶזְוֵי.

“R’ Yehoshua ben Levi said: Every day, a Heavenly Voice emanates from Har Choreiv (Mt. Sinai) and announces, saying: ‘Woe to the people, on account of the insult (they cause) to the Torah (by neglecting its study)!’ For whosoever does not occupy himself with the study of Torah is censured.”

The obvious issue with which the commentators grapple is the nature and extent of this *Bas Kol* (Heavenly Voice) — what is it exactly, and who hears it? Some seem to explain that the Mishnah does not refer to an actual sound, but

rather, to a compelling sentiment that should be picked up by any thinking individual. It is *as if* the Torah itself is calling out, pleading for adherents (cf. *Midrash Shmuel, Chafetz Chaim [Chomas Hadas, ch. 12]*).

Others, however, seem to attribute actual auditory properties to this “Voice.” (The *Machzor Vitri* comments that the issuance of the *Bas Kol* is accompanied with a gust of wind.) The *Tiferes Yisrael*, quoting the savants of geography, states that in the environs of Mt. Sinai one can hear a constant, thundering rumble reverberating above the mountain. This, he maintains, is to remind us of the message of the Mishnah; the sound emanating from the location of the giving of the Torah bemoans the fact that the generation neglects the precious gift dispatched to them from that place.

It is instructive to compare this *Bas Kol* with another one mentioned in the Medrash, which utilizes different language in reporting about the broadcast. Chazal tell us that, prior to the birth of the Prophet Shmuel, a grand announcement was issued to this effect. בְּכֹל יוֹם וַיּוֹם הִיָּתָה בֵּת קוֹל יוֹצֵאת וּמְפוֹצֶצֶת בְּכֹל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ וְאוֹמֶרֶת עֵתִיד לָקֵם צְדִיק אֶלְעָמוֹד, וְשָׁמוֹ שְׁמוּאֵל. “Every day, a *Bas Kol* would emanate and *resound throughout the entire world*, saying: ‘Imminently, a righteous man will arise, and his name shall be *Shmuel*’” (*Yalkut Shimoni, II, 88*). The choice of wording implies that this *bas kol* was actually heard throughout the world. This fact is further borne out by the continuation of the *Medrash*, which states that all baby boys born around that time were named “Shmuel” by their hopeful mothers, who apparently heard the call.

Our Mishnah, however, did not resort to such terminology (מְפוֹצֶצֶת בְּכֹל הָעוֹלָם כּוֹלוֹ — reverberating throughout the world), but sufficed with the relatively more tempered מְכַרְזַת וְאוֹמֶרֶת (announces). This could reflect on the aforementioned theme of containment, reflecting a broadcast whose message is limited to a restricted audience. Indeed, the *Maharitz Chiyas (Sanhedrin 11a)* quotes the Rosh that a *Bas Kol* is usually issued with a certain measure “and is only heard by those worthy of hearing it.” Whatever the exact nature of the Voice emanating from Sinai, it seems that its message is only perceived by those whose minds and hearts are open to receive it.



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