

Horav Yonasan Eibyshutz, zl, was walking on the street when he was met by the mayor of Prague. The mayor asked the *Rav*, "Where are you going?" *Rav* Yonasan replied, "I do not know." The mayor became enraged with this insolent answer. A man as distinguished as the city's *Rav* does not just walk around without purpose. Certainly, he knew where he was going. He called for his guards to incarcerate the *Rav*. This was life in the big city centuries ago. If a Jew offended a gentile, even if a gentile just perceived that the Jew was offending him, it was cause for serious repercussion; in this case, it was incarceration in the city's dungeon.

After a few days passed, the mayor, who had heretofore been friendly with the *Rav*, had a change of heart. He summoned the guards and had them bring *Rav* Yonasan to him. When *Rav* Yonasan arrived, the mayor had his chains removed. After all, *Rav* Yonasan was not a common thief. He then asked him, "Rabbi, tell me, does a person walk and not know where he is going? Why did you respond so insolently to me?"

The *Rav* replied, "If the mayor would have asked, 'where are you planning on going?' I would have responded, 'I plan on going to the *bais hamedrash* to learn.' Instead you asked me, 'Where are you going?' I thus replied, 'I do not know.' Veritably, that was the truth. I had planned on going to the *bais hamedrash*; instead, I ended up in prison!"

This powerful response defines the life of a Jew. Do we really know where we are going? Do we have any idea where we will end up at the end of the day? We make plans – but do they materialize in accordance with our intentions? We must follow our GPS/*emunah* and rely on where *Hashem Yisborach* leads us, because that is where we are going – plans or not.

Horav Mordechai, zl, m'Lechowitz, says, "Without *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, one cannot cross the threshold of his house. With Hashem, one can split the sea." It is so true. Yet, we try to convince ourselves that we can do it alone. One does not discover Hashem by probing, but by believing. Indeed, as the well-known dictum goes, 'For the believer, there are no questions; for the non-believer, there are no answers.' To him who questions G-d, who has difficulty serving a G-d whose ways are incomprehensible, we respond with the words of the *Kotzker Rebbe*, "I would definitely not want to serve a G-d whose ways are compensable to the minds of human beings."

While we may assume that *Klal Yisrael* is a nation of believers, whose *emunah* in Hashem is part of their "Jewishness"; at times, this *emunah* may be selective. We believe when it is convenient, and when it is not, we find an excuse to justify our indifference. We believe in Hashem when we have exhausted all other beliefs; after we have seen how ineffective they are, we then turn back to Hashem. One should believe in Hashem first and all the way through, even when life appears bleak. We believe that if the results differ from our hopes, it is Hashem's decree, and it is for the best.

There is also limited belief. *Horav Bunim, zl, m'Peshischa*, asks how, on *Motzoei Yom Kippur*, after a complete day of fasting and intense prayer, we recite in

Shemoneh Esrai the prayer, *Selach lanu Avinu ki chatanu*, "Forgive us our Father, for we have sinned!" When did we have the opportunity to sin? All day long was spent in prayer. Immediately following *Neilah*, the closing prayer of *Yom Kippur*, we commence with *Maariv*. When did we have the opportunity to sin? What are we asking Hashem to forgive?

The *Rebbe* explains that we ask forgiveness for our lack of belief that Hashem really forgave us. The fellow feels that he is still the same sinner that he was before *Yom Kippur*. We believe in Hashem, but we do not believe that Hashem believes in us! To believe in Hashem is to believe totally in Him, to give ourselves over to Him with complete trust and faith. We do not limit our belief.

Va'ani Tefillah

וְשִׁמְחָה קְדוֹשׁ – V'Shimcha kadosh. And Your Name is holy.

Obviously, if Hashem is holy, everything connected to Him, such as His Name, is also holy. How do we understand the concept of Hashem's Name? **Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl**, explains that the word *shem*, name, is related to *sham*, which means "there." Thus, in the realm of the mind, by naming and defining something, we give it an identity and put it in its proper place. A name designates the placement of the entity that it names. Hashem's Names are the way through which we know Him. While the human mind can have no conception of Hashem's essence, we can learn about Him through His Name.

Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, quotes the *Zohar Hakadosh*, which says, "The entire Torah is comprised of Hashem's Names." This means that every word in the Torah is another *shem*, another revelation of Hashem. The Torah's lessons are Hashem's Names. We learn about Hashem from His deeds, from Creation, from history. Since what Hashem does is endless, when we study His deeds and recognize that it is all a "drop" of His true greatness. By declaring that Hashem's Name is holy, we are affirming that everything that He does is the essence of perfection, since holiness is perfection, and His Names are His deeds.

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TORAH THOUGHTS ON THE PARSHA

**ויאמר ד' אל אברם לך לך מארצך וממולדתך ומבית אביך
Hashem said to Avram, "Go for yourself from your
land, from your relatives, and from your father's
home. (12:1)**

Although the Torah relates the birth of Avraham *Avinu* at the end of *Parashas Noach*, we are introduced to the Patriarch in *Parashas Lech Lecha*. In *Derech Hashem*, the **Maharal** explains that originally the plan of Creation was that all human beings would share equally in fulfilling the Divine mission and that the Torah would be given to all mankind. Twenty generations of failure from Adam to Noah to Avraham precluded this reality from occurring. Thus, the title of Hashem's Chosen People was given to the nation that earned it: Avraham, followed by his progeny. They would receive the Torah; they would carry out its *mitzvos* and moral/ethical mandates; they would be the ones to lead the world community to perfection by serving as the example of how a human being should act; they would bring all people to accept Hashem's sovereignty.

Avraham *Avinu* earned his position as Patriarch of our nation after passing the *Asarah Nisyonos*, Ten Trials, which not only proved his own personal greatness, but also demonstrated his unequivocal commitment and devotion to Hashem. How did Avraham achieve this status? How did he discover Hashem? *Chazal* teach that Avraham was three years old when he realized that the world had a Creator. Although he had been raised in a home steeped in idolatry, lived in an environment replete with idolaters, his own home a center for paganism, he analyzed the world and came to the realization that there had to be Someone, some entity, that not only created the world, but continues to guide every facet of it. All at the age of three, he discovered the greatest verity: the world has a Creator. All of this occurred because he delved into the world around him.

Do we delve into Creation? Do we try to understand Creation? In today's technology-filled world there is very little room for us to see Hashem, unless we are *misbonein*, delve into wisdom, try to understand. **Horav Shraga Feivel Medlowitz, zl**, once told his *talmidim*, students, that, in the large cities that have skyscrapers, these edifices cover up Hashem. The huge building conceals His Presence. What does this mean? *Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl*, explains that, when one is in a city in which every building was built by man, where one hardly sees grass, trees, mountains, hills, seas or rivers, which were all created by

Hashem, one loses perspective on what is taking place in the world. A person must attempt to understand Creation. This is why we were given the power of *binah*, the ability to understand.

Rav Shraga Feivel would quote the **Kotzker Rebbe, zl**, who said, "Hashem wrote a composition, which is the Torah. The explanation for the composition is the world. When the *Zohar* teaches that Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world, it means that the Torah is the blueprint for the creation of the world. Alternatively, since Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world, we may understand the Torah by looking at the world. Creation gives meaning to the Torah. *Rav Shraga Feivel* would recognize Hashem's ways from His creations. He was always so impressed with the glory of Creation and the beauty of the universe which are Hashem's handiwork. He saw Hashem's love for His creations by delving into the glory of the universe.

Rav Moshe Aharon relates that a group of students of the *Chafetz Chaim* wanted to observe their revered *rebbe* on the manner in which he conducts himself. One *Rosh Hashanah* they made a point to observe him closely to see what this holy saint did on the holy day. He *davened* with the *yeshivah* and then went home to eat the meal. Following his meal, he took a walk outside. The students followed very carefully -- from a distance. He walked outside of the city and sat down to observe the scenery. At this point, the students "caught up" with him. They did not have to ask him why he was there. He was their mentor and, understandably, they wanted to learn from his every nuance. He explained that the *Rambam* says that, when one delves into Creation, he increases his love for Hashem. The *Chafetz Chaim* felt that he was deficient in this area. He could love Hashem more. Therefore, on *Rosh Hashanah*, he walked outside of the city to ponder the surrounding scenery, so that he could increase his love of Hashem.

We are neither *Rav Shraga Feivel* nor the *Chafetz Chaim*. This, however, does not preclude our ability to ponder the beauty and sheer brilliance of the world around us. We see a technological marvel, and we are amazed at the genius of the man who created it. Do we stop to give Hashem the "credit" due Him? The person's genius is a gift from Hashem. The surgeon's skill is a gift from Hashem. Everything that we mortals achieve is a gift from Hashem. Yet, we tend to applaud the agent and ignore the Benefactor.

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