

Parshat Va’etchanan

The Voice That Did Not Cease

By the Giving of the Torah the verse states that it was given with “a great voice, which did not cease.” The Medrash explains various interpretations as to the meaning of this statement. This Sicha analyzes the words of the Medrash and explains their significance to our daily lives.

This week’s *parsha* reviews the narrative of the Giving of the Torah and the Ten Commandments which the Israelites received from the Almighty. Concerning the voice of G-d that was heard during this tremendous delivery, Moshe related to the Israelites as follows:

Text 1

The Lord spoke these words to your entire assembly at the mountain out of the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the opaque darkness, with a great voice, which did not cease. And He inscribed them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.

Devarim 5:19

Regarding the significance of the statement that G-d spoke “with a great voice, which did not cease,” the Medrash enumerates a number of possibilities:

Text 2

The Lord spoke these words to your entire assembly...with a great voice, which did not cease. R. Yochanan stated: one voice divided into seven voices and those [seven] divided into seventy languages. R. Shimon ben Lakish stated that from it prophesized all prophets that stood. The Rabbis stated that it did not have an echo.

Medrash Rabba, Shemos 28:6

According to the first two explanations, it is evident why the voice of the Almighty was “a great voice, which did not cease.”

One voice divided into seven voices and those [seven] divided into seventy languages: It is understood that the voice was not limited to the Holy Tongue in which it was spoken, rather it “did not cease,” and was expressed in all other languages as well.

From it prophesized all prophets that stood: This statement transmits that the voice was not limited to the time in which it was said, but it rather is a continuous voice that is heard throughout the generations by way of the prophets and sages¹.

¹ See the Medrash *ibid* which states that sages as well teach from the voice that is heard at Sinai.

However, according to the explanation of the Medrash that “the voice did not have an echo,” the greatness of the voice is not understood.

Rather than expressing the magnitude of the voice, on the contrary, it seems to express that voice was rather weak. As, the nature of the world is such that the greater the sound, the greater is the reverberation. By stating that the voice had no echo, the Medrash seems to express that the sound was feeble.

If the voice had no echo, what was so great about the voice?

Miracles for naught

One of the principles of the Torah is such that regarding the nature of the world, G-d does not change its governing rules which He created, and bring about a supernatural miracle unless there is some specific purpose in doing so.

Text 3

The first preface [in understanding nature] is that G-d, Blessed be He, wishes to preserve the nature of the world whenever possible, as nature is precious in His eyes. He only changes [nature] when there is an essential need.

Derashos HaRan 8

Yet, the nature of the world dictates that the greater the voice, the greater is its echo. It is understood therefore, that the voice heard at the giving of the Torah should have had a tremendous echo.

For what purpose then did G-d reverse the natural order of things at the Giving of the Torah, in that although the voice was “a great voice”

which naturally has an echo, He nevertheless miraculously caused that it should have no echo?

No mistake

There are those² who explain that there was indeed a requisite that this voice have no echo as were there to have been an echo the Jewish people may have erred concerning the origin of the voice.

Were there to have been an echo, one witnessing this event could have been mistaken to think that what they were hearing was not a reverberation of the same voice, but was another voice saying the same thing. Had this have happened, there would have been those that could have come to the conclusion that there was more than one G-d, G-d forbid. Therefore, it was indeed necessary that this voice have no echo so that no one could be mistaken as to the source of the voice.

This explanation though, is not entirely understood. Concerning the voice that was heard at the Giving of the Torah it is explained that the voice emanated from heaven, earth and all four directions:

Text 4

At the time of the Giving of the Torah the voice emanated from the east and Israel would hear and turn to the east to receive the Torah. When they came to east the voice would go to the west. When they turned to the west the voice would emanate from the north. When they went to the north the voice would emanate from the south. When they went to the south the voice would emanate from the heavens...Israel heard the voice from four sides and heaven and earth. They said, “Maybe there are many gods?” It is for

² See, for example, Sheiris Yisroel from the Koznitzer Magid.

this reason that the Torah writes, “I am the Lord,” [to say that] all that you hear is only coming from Me.

Balei HaTosfos, Shemos 20:2

The voice that the Israelites heard at the time of the Giving of the Torah emanated from all six directions and still G-d did not make a miracle to ensure that all were aware of the presence of only one G-d.

If G-d did not make a miracle in regard to a voice that emanated from six directions, there is all the less reason to create a miracle for an echo, where there is less concern for mistake.

When a person hears an echo, they hear the same sound and words of the original voice and the reverberations comes immediately following the original sound.

It is therefore highly unlikely that the Israelites would have been made an erroneous conclusion that the voice was from a different source other than G-d. Hence, it seems that this phenomenon of there being no echo in the voice was superfluous.

Another question on this verse can be drawn from the fact that the Torah is not merely a story book of the Jewish people’s history, but rather, everything mentioned in it contains a lesson in our service of G-d.

What can possibly be the lesson in the idea that the voice heard by the Giving of the Torah had no echo?

Opening statements

The opening statement by the Giving of the Torah was³, “I am the Lord your G-d.” The Hebrew word that the Torah uses for the word “I” is *Anochi*. Concerning this word the Talmud

³ Devarim 5:6.

explains that therein lies a hint to the manner in which G-d gave us the Torah and that the word *Anochi* is itself an acronym:

Text 5

[I — *Anochi*]. I[*Ana*] have Myself [*Nafshis*] been written into the Script [*Kesibah Yehabith*].

Talmud, Shabbos 105a

When G-d gave the Ten Commandments, He placed Himself within them and gave Himself both to the Jewish people who were present and to the Jewish people who were to come in all subsequent generations. To all of them he stated “I am the Lord your G-d” in a personal way and transmitted His very essence to them.

A person, however, can think that while it is true that they are able to touch the essence of G-d in the fulfillment of the Ten Commandments, they cannot reach G-d’s essence in the rest of the subsequent *mitzvos* that were given after the Ten Commandments, as well as the *mitzvos* the ideas of Torah that were revealed by the prophets and the sages as those *mitzvos* were seemingly not given from the essence of G-d.

It is known that the words of the sages are the spirit of G-d as Tanya explains:

Text 6

Even the books on piety, whose basis is in the peaks of holiness, the Midrashim of our Sages, of blessed memory, through whom the spirit of G-d speaks and His word is on their tongue.

Tanya, Compiler’s Forward

A person can however be mistaken and think, that while it is true that the words of the sages are G-dly, they are nevertheless not on the *same* level of G-dliness as the Ten Commandments.

To negate this mistake the verse states that G-d spoke “with a great voice, which did not cease.” All the words of the prophets and subsequent sages are merely an *extension* of the voice that was heard at the Giving of the Torah.

This is the intent of the Medrash’s words in its statement that from the voice heard at the Giving of the Torah came the prophecy of all the prophets throughout the generations. That the essence of G-d is not only expressed in the Ten Commandments but the rest of the Torah as well.

Concerning *all* of Torah can the statement “I am the Lord your G-d” be applied. Meaning to say, that the essence of G-d (so to speak) is communicating His intentions to every Jew in a particular manner. A Jew connects to G-d’s essence not only when he fulfills the Ten Commandments, but when he fulfills the words of the sages as well.

This is as well the meaning of the voice dividing into the seventy languages:

Non-Jewish people are commanded to keep the Seven Noachide Laws and the Jewish people are obligated to encourage them to do so⁴.

A person is likely to assume that although non-Jewish people are commanded to fulfill the Noachide Laws, they are laws that are separate from the Torah.

To negate this mistake, the Torah as well states that the voice heard at the Giving of the Torah was “a great voice, which did not cease.” On this the Medrash elaborates that the voice “divided into seventy languages.”

⁴ Rambam, Laws of Kings 8:10.

This expresses that even those commandments that are for the seventy nations are an extension of the Torah as well.

When a Non-Jewish person fulfills his commandments, he should know that not only is he to do them because G-d commanded that he perform them, but he is to do them because through such an effort he connects to the Torah.

Text 7

Anyone who accepts upon himself the fulfillment of these seven *mitzvos* and is precise in their observance is considered one of “the pious among the gentiles” and will merit a share in the World to Come.

This applies only when he accepts them and fulfills them because the Holy One, blessed be He, commanded them in the Torah and informed us through Moshe, our teacher, that Noach's descendants had been commanded to fulfill them previously.

However, if he fulfills them out of intellectual conviction, he is not a resident alien, nor of “the pious among the gentiles,” nor of their wise men.

Rambam, Laws of Kings 8:11

This is a lesson to the Jewish People as well. When a Jew impresses upon a gentile to fulfill the Seven Noachide Laws, he should impress upon him that he is to fulfill them not only because of the moral imperative, but that by doing so he fulfills what is “commanded [to] them in the Torah through Moshe, our teacher.”

Uplifting the sparks

There is another important lesson to be learned from the fact that the voice of the Giving of the

Torah divided into seventy languages. Concerning the purpose of exile the Talmud states:

Text 8

The Holy One, blessed be He, did not exile Israel among the nations save in order that proselytes might join them, for it is said⁵: “And I will sow her unto Me in the land; surely a man sows a *se’ah* in order to harvest many *kor!*”

Talmud, Pesachim 87b

The intent of this statement is not only in regard to actual converts but in reference to uplifting the sparks of holiness that are found throughout the exile. When the Jewish people refine the world around them in exile, they uplift the sparks of G-dliness and create converts.

When a Jewish person conducts his business in the proper way that Torah directs using a secular language or when he learns Torah in a secular language, he uplifts those languages as well and transforms them to G-dliness.

A person, though, is inclined to assume that while true that the Torah which he learns in other languages is indeed holy, it nevertheless is not as holy as learning Torah in the original Hebrew.

To negate this mistake, the Torah states that the voice at the Giving of the Torah was “a great voice, which did not cease.” That the same great voice that was stated in Hebrew subsequently divided into the seventy languages so that they too are exactly like the voice that was heard on Sinai⁶.

⁵ Hoshea 2:25.

⁶ In truth, there is an advantage of learning Torah in other languages, as it is more elevated to a degree.

All of the above is the intent of the first two explanations of the Medrash—that of the voice splitting into seventy languages and that from it prophesied all subsequent prophets. What, however, is the lesson in the idea that the voice had no echo?

An echo

The intent of the Medrash’s statement that the voice had no echo can be appreciated through an understanding of the physical mechanics of an echo:

An echo is similar to a reflection. Just as a reflection of light in a mirror occurs when the light cannot penetrate and reverberates back to the viewer, an echo works in a similar manner. When the sound reaches a place that it does not penetrate, it reverberates and creates an echo similar to a ball that bounces off of a wall.

However, when the Almighty proclaimed “I am the lord your G-d,” there was no echo in the voice. The words of G-d permeated the entirety of creation to the extent that there was *naturally* unable to be a reverberation to the sound.

Thus, the reason that there was no echo was not due to the *weakness* of the voice, but due to its *strength*. Because the voice was “a great voice, which did not cease” and permeated every crevice of creation, there was therefore *naturally* no echo. The entirety of creation absorbed G-d’s words.

Our Torah learning

In truth, when we learn Torah as well, the world around us continues to absorb the words of Torah. When a person learns Torah, not only does he absorb its words but the walls of his house learn as well.

This is so because that which is higher falls lower. See Sharei Orah, Yaviu Levush Malchus Ch. 12.

This concept is related to in a similar context in the Talmud:

Text 9

Perhaps a man will say, "Who is there to testify against me?" The very stones of his house and its beams testify against him, as it is written⁷, 'For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.'

Talmud, Taanis 11a

While the Talmud there is discussing that the walls of a person's house will testify to his sins, it is understood all the more concerning the Torah that he learns, that his learning is absorbed in the walls. While at the present time what is absorbed into his wall is hidden, in the future it will be revealed and the "stone shall cry out of the wall."

Though the full revelation of this will be in the messianic era, righteous individuals are able to appreciate the Torah that is absorbed in the world around them now as well. The Talmud recounts the story of a certain sage who learned Torah from an object that had belonged to a sage who had lived before him.

Text 10

He had the walking stick of R. Meir in his hand and it would teach him knowledge.

Jerusalem Talmud, Mo'ed Katan 3:5

This sage was able to tap into the Torah learning that was absorbed in R. Meir's walking stick to the extent that he learned from it deep secrets of the Torah⁸.

The lesson

Naturally, spirituality and physicality are two opposites. The physical cannot absorb the spiritual and the spiritual cannot permeate the physical.

The reason that at the Giving of the Torah the spiritual voice indeed *permeated* the physicality of the world, was because the voice was "a great voice." Since the voice was from a higher level, which transcended both the physical *and* the spiritual, it was therefore not bound by the natural order of the world.

This is the lesson that we are to learn for our personal service of G-d.

When a person learns Torah, the Torah should not only enter his mind but should permeate every orifice of his body. This is the quality that the verse describes in regard to Avraham:

Text 11

And I will multiply your seed like the stars of the heavens, and I will give your seed all these lands, and all the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed, because (*eikev*) Avraham hearkened to My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My instructions."

Bereishis 26:4-5

⁷ Chavakuk 2:11.

⁸ It is for this reason that many sages have the practice of building their coffin from the table upon

which they learned Torah, (Kav HaYashar 46) as their table will testify concerning the Torah that they learned.

While the usual translation of the verse is that Avraham was rewarded *because* he hearkened to G-d's voice, Chassidus explains⁹ a further layer of understanding. The word that the verse employs is "*eikev*," which means heel.

From this one can learn that G-d rewarded Avraham not only because his mind and heart were permeated by G-dliness, but because even his heel was permeated by G-dliness and expressed the will of the Almighty.

The same is true with every Jew who studies Torah. This G-dly wisdom should not only be felt in his mind, but the Torah that he learns should be recognized in every crevice of his body.

Just as at the time of the Giving the Torah, the Torah permeated the physical because the voice was a "great voice" which transcended the natural order of creation, so too, for the Torah to

be felt in every facet of the individual, he must as well learn Torah in a way that transcends the natural order and connects to the essence of G-d.

When a person does learn Torah in such a manner, his Torah learning will be evident not only when he learns Torah, but even when he is involved in his own mundane matters. Even during such times, it will be recognizable that all his actions are those of a Jew who is permeated with Torah. When he lives in such a way, it is then that he can transform the world into the dwelling place for G-d.

(Based on Likutei Sichos 4, Va'eschanan, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: www.Neirot.com.)

⁹ Sefer Mamorim 5705, pg. 253.