

While Illumination May Be Hidden, G-d Is Always To Be Found – Parshat Beshalach

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Imagine you merit to a Divine experience and G-d gives you enlightenment. Then suddenly He hides his face from you and then appears and disappears again. What would this mean and how would you deal with it?

This week's Torah portion is *parshat Beshalach*. In this *parsha* we have four wondrous topics: the splitting of the Red Sea, the bringing forth water from a rock, the appearance of the manna, and the war with Amalek. Rabbi Natan reveals an important thread that connects all these events and arouses

great wonder: HaKadosh Baruch Hu is revealed and shows Himself to us, and at the very same time He hides Himself, and it appears that He is not present, G-d forbid. And again, HaKadosh Baruch Hu is reveals Himself and then disappears, G-d forbid.

In the previous *parshiot*—“*Shemot*,” “*Va’eira*,” and “*Bo*,”—the Torah tells of the suffering, enslavement, and redemption of the Nation of Israel. HaKadosh Baruch Hu revealed himself to Moses and gave him signs and wonders, and He commanded him to tell the Nation of Israel that He had heard their cries and that He was about to redeem them. G-d performed wonders to bring the Nation of Israel to have faith in Him, and indeed it was so: “And the people believed, and they heard that G-d had remembered the Nation of Israel” (Exodus 4:31). In practice however, in practical terms, not only was there no redemption, but on the contrary, Pharaoh further burdened the Jews’ load and working conditions. Though there was a revelation of awesome wonders, immediately afterwards there was a concealment, as if G-d had disappeared. What happened to the promise that He made to redeem the Nation of Israel? Datan and Aviram took advantage of the fact that G-d appeared to be “hiding His face,” and boldly attacked Moshe Rabbeinu making claims against him: “And they said to them, ‘May G-d look upon you and judge, for you have brought us into foul odor in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants, to place a sword into their hands to kill us’” (Exodus 5:21). They held Moses responsible as if his prophecy was false, and he was the cause of the Jews’ suffering.

But immediately afterwards it was revealed that the words of Moses were a true prophecy, and the promise of HaKadosh Baruch Hu was true. G-d struck Egypt blow after blow, and eventually the people of Israel left Egypt, and the Egyptians along with the whole world saw that there is no power in the world as great as the power of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, as it is written: “That you should know that there is none like the Lord our G-

d" (Ibid., 8:6) and "In order to show you My strength and in order to declare My name all over the earth" (Ibid. 9:16).

Afterwards everyone—including the skeptics, Datan and Aviram—saw that Moses' prophecy that the Nation of Israel would come out with great possessions was not an invention or a fabrication, and G-d did indeed bring them out of Egypt into the world as free men with abundant possessions. The whole prophecy came to pass, but then, once again, as soon as there was *hastarat panim* (G-d's presence was no longer apparent) and the Egyptians pursued them, as it is written: "The Egyptians chased after them...The Israelites looked up and behold: the Egyptians were coming after them" (Ibid., 14:9-10). Then Datan and Aviram rekindled their argument, and they claimed to Moses: "Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us to die in the desert? What is this that you have done to us to take us out of Egypt? (Ibid., 14:11). At first, they claimed that Moses was a liar (G-d forbid) and the Jews should not leave Egypt at all, and that the Jews were only suffering more because of Moses' words as Pharaoh made things harder for them. But even after the promise was fulfilled, when the Egyptians chased after them, instead of believing in G-d and praying to Him to save them, they made a foolish claim, that the reason he brought them out of Egypt was to "kill them in the desert, because there are no graves in Egypt." Is there a greater folly than this?

And here we come to an important and deep idea that is beyond compare. Although at first there was *hester panim* ("the hiding of G-d's face"—meaning that there was the appearance that G-d was not actively involved), in the end the entire Nation Israel saw that HaKadosh Baruch Hu kept his promise. Why then did doubts arise again, for G-d promised them that he would bring them to the land of Israel as it is written: "I will take you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians...I will bring you to the land" (Ibid., 6:6, 8). They had already seen that He was able to do anything, so surely, He would keep his

word. Most of the Jews believed in Hashem and shouted out to Hashem in prayer without any resentment, as it is written: “and the children of Israel cried out to G-d” (Ibid., 14:10). But still a portion of the Jews—those who from the beginning did not believe in Moses’ prophecy and G-d’s promise—became skeptical when the Egyptians pursued them again and did not believe that G-d could save them from Egypt, despite the fact that they had already seen that G-d was omnipotent.

And again, at the Red Sea—one more time—G-d revealed Himself in His infinite power and saved them. He commanded the Nation of Israel to go down to the sea, and the G-d fearing Jews listened to Him, and the sea split before them. They merited to see a revealed miracle the likes of which had never occurred in the world. The sea was split in half (to be more accurate, it was split into twelve paths, one for each tribe), and the Nation of Israel passed through the sea on dry land while the Egyptians drowned.

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Well, wouldn’t you think that from then on there would be no more doubt or lack of faith and that everyone would believe in G-d unquestioningly? Unfortunately, this was not the case. Immediately after the Egyptians drowned and the Jews became extremely wealthy from the plunder of Egypt, they walked for three days in the desert and found no water. Again, there was *hester panim*, and immediately everything was reawakened as if they had never seen the revelation of G-d’s power. Again, there were complaints, as it is written: “The people complained against Moses, saying, ‘What shall we drink?’” (Ibid, 15:24). And again G-d revealed Himself and they saw an open miracle when Moses struck the rock at G-d’s command, and suddenly enough water came out for 600,000 men, a total of about three million people, men women and children.

So maybe now, finally, everyone would have faith, but unfortunately, again it was not to be. The bread that they brought with them from Egypt ran out, and again there were complaints: "The entire congregation of the Nation of Israel complained against Moses...For you have brought us out into this desert, to starve the entire congregation to death" (Ibid., 16:2-3). And again. HaKadosh Baruch Hu was revealed and brought down the manna from heaven, something that had never been heard of. Despite this, they denied the miracles and the Divine providence of the Creator. Moses warned them to eat all the manna each day: "And Moses said to them, 'Let no one leave over any of it until morning'" (Ibid., 16:19). They pretended that they did not understand, and they intentionally left some over and it became full of worms, as it is written: "and it bred worms and became putrid" (Ibid., 16:20). And on Friday when G-d commanded them to take two portions of manna (one for Friday and the other in honor of Shabbat), and to leave the second portion for Shabbat, they did not do so, and went out on Shabbat to gather. Of course, they did not find, as it is written: "It came about that on the seventh day, some of the people went out to gather manna, but they did not find any" (Ibid., 16:27).



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It is no coincidence that, the culmination of the deceptive denial of G-d was precisely connected to the manna—to their livelihood. It is explicitly stated about a person's livelihood: "I am going to rain down for you bread from heaven...so that I can test them, whether or not they will follow My teaching" (Ibid., 16:5). One would have expected that they would have fully believed in G-d after He show them so many miracles. It is no wonder that immediately afterwards was the episode with Amalek, as it is written: "Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim" (Ibid., 17:8). Rabbi Natan quotes Rashi's words: "He [God] juxtaposed this section to this verse, ['Is the Lord in our midst or not?'] implying: 'I am always among you, and I am always prepared to provide all your necessities, but you ask, "Is the Lord in our midst or not?" By your life, the dog [which is embodied here by Amalek] will come and bite you, and you will cry out to Me, and then you will know where I am.' This can be compared to a man who carried his son on his shoulder and set out on the road. Whenever his son saw something, he would say, 'Father, take that thing and give it to me,' and he [the father] would give it to him. And then the same thing happened a second time, and then a third. They met another traveler, and the son said to him, 'Do you know where my father is?' So, his father said to him, 'You don't know where I am?' He threw him [his son] down off him, and a dog came and bit him [the son]."

What do we learn from all this? Rabbi Natan explains that this is precisely our mission: to know that HaKadosh Baruch Hu is always there, even when we can't perceive Him. A person's main test is concerning the matter of his livelihood. G-d is constantly showing a person his great kindness, but then He hides his face. The evil inclination then fills his heart with worry, as if it is impossible to engage in Torah because of the burden of earning one's livelihood. One must always

remember that G-d is always present even when He is hidden, as it is written: " Indeed, You are a G-d Who conceals Himself, the G-d of Israel, the Savior" (Isaiah 45:15). Even when He appears to be hidden, G-d is present. The more a person believes in Him, G-d will continually reveal Himself to him, more and more.

(According to *Likutei Halachot, Gvi'at Chov M'HaYitomim* 5:3-4)