

Two Types of Accessing The Divine

The bible scholars, using the documentary hypothesis, have suggested that there were a number of earlier literary strands that were combined to make the text of the bible as we know it . In recounting the Revelation on Mt Sinai, they discovered two traditions or literary strands. It is of little interest to me as to the debate between the orthodox scholars of the Jewish tradition and the world of biblical scholarship, being less interested in theology and doctrine. In a post-Holocaust world where all connections to the divine were severed in the flames of Europe I must retrieve the remnants of faith with whatever I have left from the previous generation. This is the Text, the sacred text of the tradition. In delving deep into its narrative I must make use of all and any tools that will allow me to penetrate the text and discover meanings hitherto unclaimed.

In doing so the dissection of the text with the surgical tools of scholarship has afforded me new insight into the sacred word and as I have said before, I have utmost faith in the

“logos” the word, that it will survive all scrutiny and the sharper the knife the deeper the secrets it reveals.

So when reading of the revelation narrative in Exodus and Deuteronomy I am persuaded of the two strands that have been woven together by our teacher Rabeinu Moshe.

Following the methods of Prof. Mordechai Breuer and his notion of literary bechinot I see the importance of the two intertwined narrations and the need to decipher each with its own literary structure and message as well as to reconstruct them to see the importance of the combined text and its own theology.

Prof Tamir Granot has already outline the literary problems inherent in the Revelation narrative in both Exodus as well as Devorim. He articulated two separate accounts that fit with the names of God along the lines of the professor Mordechai Breuer’s methodology of reading and the notion of bechinot. The two parallel accounts, told with two different Names of God, express two different, otherwise self-contained perspectives on what transpired.¹ I quote from his work as follows:

“According to the narrative employing the Tetragrammton, The Name Havaya, the Revelation's primary objective, is establishing the belief in Moshe's prophecy. To this end, the Ten Commandments are unnecessary. The moment the nation is convinced and believes, God speaks to Moshe alone and conveys to him the commandments, mitzvot mentioned at the end of the parasha (regarding the altar) and in Parashat Mishpatim. This divine Name of Havaya always expresses the notion of prophecy and closeness to God, and indeed the primary objective here is to firmly establish the prophecy of Moshe, and the primary concern is that the sense of closeness to God felt during this event will result in the nation's desire to approach God. The quality of closeness and love of God can also be destructive, and there is thus the need for boundaries and warnings.

“According to the narrative using the Name of Elokim, the Ten Commandments indeed stand at the center of this event, but they are said only to Moses, not to the people. The reason for this is different from the reason in the previous narrative thread, in which the purpose of Revelation is from the outset purely to affirm the belief in

Moses' prophecy. In the story as told in the Name of Elokim, the purpose of the Revelation is in fact the establishment of a covenant regarding the words of God: "Now, if you indeed heed My voice and observe My covenant..." The Ten Commandments form the basis of this covenant; the covenant depends on their observance. According to what is told from the perspective of the Name of Elokim, God had, in fact, intended to speak directly to the people, but their fear and request to stand back resulted his serving as intermediary to convey to them God's word. Indeed, the Name Elokim always signifies the notion of justice and covenant.

“The development of fear among the people likewise accommodates the Name Elokim. The revelation of Elokim is a source of fear – a concept closely related to the Name Elokim. The nation is distanced, and this distance remains even at the end of Revelation.

“Moses serves a moderating role with respect to both perspectives. He is responsible to prevent a destructive outburst of love, from the perspective of Havaya, and he likewise faces the task of assuaging the nation's fear and

assuring them that God does not wish upon them evil, and has rather revealed Himself "in order that His fear be upon you, so that you do not sin."

“Thus the narrative of Revelation has two different objectives, which determine the narrative's progression and are expressed through the use of the two divine Names of Havaya and Elokim. The focal point of the first objective is the covenant which is based upon Israel's commitment to obey the divine command, which after the fact means fulfilling the Commandments. This objective is expressed with the Name Elokim. The second objective has as its central feature the Revelation itself, which becomes the source of unwavering belief in Moshe's prophecy, rather than the word of God. This objective is expressed with the Name Havaya.

“According to the first, the Revelation instills fear into the people. Fear plays a central role in the establishment of the covenant: "So that you do not sin." But fear also has a distancing effect: "The nation stood from afar." The Commandments therefore are not spoken to the people directly from God, and are merely considered as having

come directly from God; this is their legal stature.

According to the second objective, the Revelation arouses love. Love finds expression in the transmission of the divine word to Moshe, and in allowing the opportunity to serve God and earn the merit of His revelation and blessing: "You shall make for Me an earthen altar and sacrifice upon it... Everywhere I mention My Name I shall come to you and bless you." The danger inherent in love of God is excessive closeness, and one must therefore exercise restraint and maintain a degree of distance.

“The story as presented before us bridges between these two ideal possibilities. Theoretically, each story could be told separately, but practically, it all occurs simultaneously. The Almighty and His Names are all one, and thus His revelation includes all the objectives and generates both love and fear. It stands to reason that the nation's reactions to the Revelation were mixed and included the desire to both escape from and run towards it. The Torah is not interested in presenting a detailed account of what transpired among each group in the nation or in the heart of each and every individual. Rather, it seeks to give the essential message, and hence the

arrangement in which the story is told, which synthesizes the two separate progressions:

“The two objectives of the Revelation are described in chronological sequence at the beginning of chapter 19, one following the other:

First – the establishment of the covenant.

Second – "and also they will believe in you forever."

“Thereafter begins the Revelation (God's descent onto the mountain, in verse 18), and the Torah then chooses to describe specifically the concern of overabundant closeness, which is entirely true – from one perspective. The concern for excessive closeness obviously does not negate God's revelation and speech, and God is therefore described as the one proclaiming the Commandments, such that one could conclude that they are proclaimed to the entire nation. This is not a misguided reading, but rather the correct conclusion in principle. Only after the proclamation of the Commandments does the Torah mention the problem that arose from the Elokim perspective of Revelation – the fear that gripped the

people. This is indeed a worthwhile problem that plays an important role in forging a complete, religious relationship to God and His revelation, which is indeed complex and dialectical. The description of this problem before the proclamation of the Commandments could have potentially diminished the force of the covenant, the essence of which entails the fulfillment of God's commands. The Torah presented this in such a way that would lend the Ten Commandment its status as the very basis of our covenant with God, and hence the importance of their having been proclaimed specifically by God Himself.

In the above analysis I found the source and basis for a trajectory that fits my approach to reading sacred texts, a multi-layered analysis that sees the text as a manual spiritual discipline and personal expression as well as a mirror of the higher Self, however always rooted in the textuality of the narrative structure and tied to the hermeneutic tradition. His analysis reveals a dual theory of Revelation that I found, albeit in a different spiritual key, in the Hassidic masters. Granot himself found some resonance in the work of a Polish hassidic Rebbe:

“In Hassidus the following remarks were made in the name of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Riminov concerning the enlarged letter alef in the word Anokhi with which the Ten Commandments begin. He commented that only the alef was heard by the people. The alef represents the voice that marks the very beginning of the utterance. According to this remark, only the endless, undefined voice is what was heard directly from the Almighty. The constriction of that sound into actual words, in the sense of a "utensil" lending the sound shape and form, belongs strictly to the realm of prophecy.

He correctly reads the Rebbe in his analysis of the voice that hears Revelation being split between two types of receivers: prophets and the people. This idea that Revelation somehow depends on the nature of the receiver is given much greater attention by these early hassidic masters.

Thus rather than deconstruct the two layered theory as does biblical scholarship Granot ends his thesis on a note of synthesis using the Hassidic Master Reb mendel of

Riminov a pupil of the Holy Rebbe of Lizensk the Rebbe Reb Elimelch.

The Degel Machaneh Efraim the grandson of the Baal Shem Tov also splits the revelation into two typologies depending upon the receiver. The zaddik who constantly yearns for unification with the Schechinah, and the normal lay people.

In a unique passage in parsha Yisro (P102) the Degel had made use of the zohar's expansion of the first word of the Decalogue in which the divine introduces Himself as I am the Lord your God, the first word being anokhi. The zohar had explained that the revelation on Mt Sinai which was described enigmatically in the Bible as "And the people saw the thunder"...that

"Some saw the thunder, others saw the lightning and thunder and others saw the logos-the word anokhi."

He suggested that those who did not actually see the word were separated from the divine in some existential way with an "iron curtain" (masach hamavdil) separating them

and as a result of that alone, panicked and stood from afar. The reason those who actually saw the word were not afraid was precisely because they had internalized the divine since the as described by the word anokhi which itself is a notarikon, an expansion of the very existence and self-identification of the divine in the written text as ana nafshi kesavis yehavis meaning “I myself am written into it.” By seeing the word anokhi as referring to the inscription of the divine not only into the text but also into themselves, they were actually seeking the light of the divine encoded throughout its expansive reading as notarikon, as desiring the incarnation of that very divine light. They were thus not afraid and did not stand from afar and had no need to ask Moses to intercede on their behalf.

And this is the mystery of the nefesh soul and within the mystery of the ruach and neshama as my grandfather had discussed. And this is the ultimate purpose of the creation of man in Torah, mitzvot, and inner work (avodah). And were Israel to cleave to the words anokhi and lo yihye lecha 2 mamash-in truth, then they would live.

The degel is splitting those who were afraid and asked for Moses' intercession and those for whom the very words of the first two commandments represented the desire or actualization of the divine light within themselves and were thus not afraid.

I would add that the divine name Elohim represents that un-integrated spirit that lives in fear of transgression as well as needing the intercession of the prophet, Moses or subsequent zaddik. The soul that has integrated the divine within has connected with the Havayah aspect of the divine and internalized the divine light within, what I would call incarnation or hitlabshut and lives in the grace of God.

This is a healing text precisely because it resists the typical reading of splitting between two types of people, the righteous and the pay people. the hassidic reading suggests that it depends on each person's ability to inhabit that space of zaddik or pay person. Each person can "turn on" his own inner zaddik and receive the divine light within, then "turn off" and resume normal this-worldly reality. It is healing inasmuch as it affords the normal person an access to the divine by "tuning" in to his or her

own inner spiritual receiver to “see” the anokhi within each of us.

Revelation, which has been the hallmark of Jewish theology and has split orthodox from other denominations within modern Judaism has been re-interpreted by the hassidic masters to reflect the integration of the divine light that is meta-historical and mythic in nature, an ongoing revelation that must occur in each individual in each generation for the true message of revelation and torah to continue.

In post-Holocaust world where loss of connection to the divine is pervasive the need to reinterpret the textual tradition in the trajectory of the midrash and Hassidic masters is necessary for the very survival of the text. Rather than holding on to old theological doctrines and arguments these masters have sacrificed doctrine for the living word of the text the radical implications for the individual and recovery of spiritual meaning.

1 For his detailed analysis see VBM Torah.org on Parshat Yitro

2 The first two commandments of the decalogue , “I am the Lord etc” and
“Thou shalt not have any other gods before Me.”