

CHEVRAH TORAH 5778...Seeking ✧ Spirituality

Shabbat CHOL HaMO-ED SUKKOT
Exodus 33:17-23

KEY KOSHI:

WHAT DOES MOSES REQUEST OF GOD? WHAT DOES HE/ISRAEL SEE?...WHAT DO WE?

P'SHAT—AWARENESS...

<p>^{17]} And the Lord said to Moses, “I will also do this thing that you have asked; for you have truly gained My favor and I have singled you out by name.” ^{18]} He said, “Oh, let me behold Your Presence!” ^{19]} And He answered, “I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim before you the name Lord, and the grace that I grant and the compassion that I show. ^{20]}But,” He said, “you cannot see My face, for man may not see Me and live.” ^{21]} And the Lord said, “See there is a place near Me. Station yourself on the rock ^{22]}and, as My Presence passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and shield you with My hand until I have passed by. ^{23]}Then I will take My hand away and you will see My back; but My face must not be seen.”</p>	<p>17 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה גַּם אֶת־ הַדְּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֲעֹשֶׂה כִּי־ מִצֵּאתָ חוֹן בְּעֵינַי וְאֲדַעַף בְּשֵׁם : 18 וַיֹּאמֶר הֲרֵאֵנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ : 19 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי אֶעְבִּיר כָּל־טוֹבִי עַל־ פְּנֶיךָ וְקִרְאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ וְחִנַּתִּי אֶת־אֲשֶׁר אַחֲוֹן וְרַחֲמֹתַי אֶת־ אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם : 20 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא תוּכַל לִרְאֹת אֶת־פָּנַי כִּי לֹא־יִרְאֵנִי הָאָדָם וְחַי : 21 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הִנֵּה מְקוֹם אֲתִי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל־הַצּוּר : 22 וְהָיָה בְּעַבְרֹתַי וְשָׁמַתִּיךָ בְּנִקְרֹת הַצּוּר וְשָׁכַתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד־עֲבָרִי : 23 וְהִסַּרְתִּי אֶת־כַּפִּי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת־אַחֲרָי וּפָנַי לֹא יִרְאוּ :</p>
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בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתַי וְצִוּוּנוּ לַעֲסוֹק בְּדִבְרֵי תוֹרָה.

Baruch atah, Adonai Eloheinu, Melech haolam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu laasok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Sovereign of the universe, who hallows us with mitzvot, commanding us to engage with words of Torah.

REMEZ—UN-SELF-AWARENESS...

V.18 *He said, "Let me behold Your Presence!"*

RASHBAM... One has to wonder how the heart of Moses could become so full as to desire to enjoy the radiance of the *Shechinah*, when earlier it is written "*Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.*" [Ex 3:6] What Moses is saying is "Let me behold Your Presence" as a confirmation of the covenant regarding these things you have promised.

V.19-20 *"I will make all My Goodness pass before you and I will proclaim The Name YHVH...
But you cannot see My Face, for man cannot see Me and live."*

HA-K'TAV v'HA-KABBALAH... Thus, "*I will place you in the cleft of the rock...*" Man would disintegrate before he would get to see God's essence with his physical eyes... Up until now we have offered the simplest methods of understanding the text. I must not conceal that the commentators view the text very differently... Concerning Moses' request: "*Show me your Glory,*" Rabbi Ya'akov EMDEN understands this as a pleas by Moses for God to become "visible"... This interpretation has already been dealt a lethal blow by Rabbi CHISDAI... RAMBAM perceived Moses' request as an attempt to understand God's essence. According to MAIMONIDES, Moses was familiar with all the proofs of a miraculous nature of God's existence, not based on observation in nature. And he had explained these proofs to the people when he began his mission. Yet Moses now saw that, in spite of Sinai, the people had need of a tangible presence. All they had been taught about the Unity of God's Presence, God's Uniqueness, etc... had not protected them against falling victim to this tragic error. Therefore Moses requested from God an incontrovertible kind of demonstration of His being "real"... This demonstration requested by Moses would establish an irrefutable link between the Original Cause and the phenomena we observe in the Universe... All the philosophers agree that any proof of God's existence based on performance of miracles is a very shaky sort of proof... We have no criteria which existed previously by which to measure such so called proof of God's existence. We cannot simply posit axioms and assume these to be proven when the object of our investigation by definition is different from any known phenomena... Moses thought that now the time had come to tell the people what God had originally wanted him to impart... that His Name (Essence) was *EHYEH ASHER EHYEH*... since this was information never given, and considering all that has happened since.

V.23 *"I will take My Hand away and you will see my back..."*

RALBAG... "ACHORAI," This is meant to mean, "The actions that I leave in My wake."

HA-K'TAV v'HA-KABBALAH... SA'ADIAH takes this to mean, "You will see the end of My light, but you may not see its beginning." The text speaks in human terms... but I think Moses does not mean "behold" literally... The purpose of Moses' request was to unite the "forms" that have no material content, for they are the ladder by which one ascends to the Sublime... The sun, the greatest of all created things, has no face and no back, nor do the stars—much less their Creator.

Prof ROBERT ALTER... "*you will see My back, but My face will not be seen.*" Volumes of theology have been spun out of these enigmatic words. Imagining the deity in frankly physical terms was entirely natural for the ancient monotheists... But such concreteness does not imply conceptual naivete. Through it the Hebrew writer suggests an idea that makes good sense: that God's intrinsic nature is inaccessible, and perhaps also intolerable to the finite mind, but that something of His attributes—God's "*goodness*"... the directional pitch of His ethical intentions, the afterglow of His presence—can be glimpsed by humankind.

D’RASH—READING BETWEEN THE WORDS...

CHATAM SOFER...

A period of time can only be understood once we are able to view the entire context of events...In the same way, we are only able to understand God’s ways and recognize how God works in retrospect. Only then is it possible to fathom even a little bit of what God does. But at the time an event is happening or a moment unfolding, our understanding is unable to grasp God’s Presence. Instead, we are simply astonished or mystified, as we read in Psalm 28:5, “*For they do not comprehend Adonai’s works, the doings of God’s hands.*” And just this is the meaning of “*You will see my back.*” It is not referring to God’s body but to our human perspective on time itself. God says, in effect, “ Only at the End of Days will you comprehend Me and see...But My Face—YHVH—cannot be seen...Not while the events themselves are transpiring. In the midst of things, you will not be able to see Me.”

SOD—The SELF of the UNIVERSE...

R’ LARRY KUSHNER...

At first reading, you might think that God, whose face cannot be seen, indeed has both a face and a back. Yet not only is anthropomorphism forbidden, but here it distracts us from the real teaching of the text. The Hebrew word for “*My back*” is “*Achorai*” In Hebrew it connotes something not so much spatial as temporal. God says to Moses, “You can see My afterward.”

You can see what it’s like just after I’ve been there. For you cannot see what it’s like while I’m there, for that would mean that there was a part of you telling the rest of you that it was you who was there, and that would mean that not all of you was there, and if not all of you was there, then you couldn’t possibly be *in the presence* of God.

[Five Cities of Refuge, pg. 73]