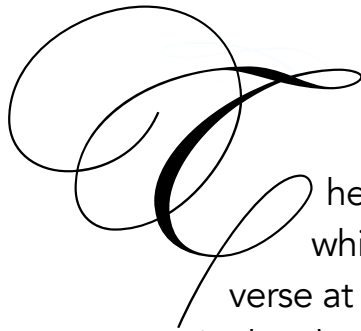


Parashas

DEVARIM

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here is the story of a philosopher who, while contemplating the secrets of the universe at the base of a mountain whose peak was in the clouds, was interrupted by a scientist running past him. "Why so fast?" the philosopher asked him.

"Join me!" The scientist answered him, "I am running to unravel the mysteries of the universe by climbing this mountain!"

The philosopher chuckled to himself and said, "No, no, you go ahead," the philosopher said. I'm too old to run up mountains like that."

"As you wish," the scientist said, as he ran off and began his ascent.

It took the scientist a lot of time, but he finally broke through the clouds and reached the summit of the mountain. Satisfied with himself and all that he had accomplished, the smile left his face when he noticed on the other side of the top that the philosopher was already there, contemplating the secrets of the universe!

Was the universe designed, or did it come to exist as it does

randomly? The Torah answers this historic philosophical question from the very first verse in no uncertain terms. Philosophers over the ages have come to the same conclusion just by observing the world around them. And now, thousands of years later, scientists have finally built a supercomputer that can answer the question in empirical terms, and it's the same answer. They just can't yet get the computer to actually say "God," so they're sticking with mathematics as their creator, while others use "aliens" for theirs.

Of course, the debate would come to a close with the same answer for everyone if God would just come out of hiding and re-introduce Himself to mankind. If He would just praise the righteous like He did Pinchas and take down the evil like He did Bilaam, we'd get our answer about this universe in no uncertain terms, right?

Seemingly, yes and no. One of the most astounding things about Jewish history is how, despite God's obvious involvement in that history, people still made mistakes. Catastrophic mistakes that could have been avoided if the Jewish People had taken God's threats seriously.

We're not talking about the Second Temple destroyed by the Romans because, by that time, prophecy was long gone and no one had "seen" God for centuries. We're talking about the First Temple, when miracles abounded and prophets spoke in the name of God all the time. We were able to look God in the face, so to speak, and still look away...

And not just look away, but look the other way entirely. Just read the prophets like Hoshea and be shocked how far people can move away from God knowing full well that He is looking on. Only when it finally hurt did people realize how ridiculous their approach to life had been.

It all comes down to vision. Vision is one of those things that is so obvious and yet so mysterious. We take it for granted when we should be marveling at it every day. We call this Shabbos "Shabbos Chazon," not just because that is the first word of the Haftarah, but because it sums up the Three Weeks and Tisha B'Av perfectly.

The Gemora asks why Yirmiyahu put the Peh before Ayin in Eichah. It answers because the spies spoke about things they did not see (Sanhedrin 104b). More accurately, they spoke about things they did see, but not the way they were meant to be seen. It is amazing how personal biases skew personal vision.

Until reality sobers a person up. We can run from reality but we can't hide from it, not forever. Life catches up to us, and it doesn't have to even be in one lifetime. A person can pay for a current lifetime in a future one, and certainly after all of them in Gihenom. Certain "laws" are immutable, and though it took hundreds of years for that to become clear during Temple times, invasion, destruction, and exile made it real.

That's what it is all about, being real. Being real with God, being real with Torah, and being real with yourself. That doesn't always happen naturally, especially when it comes to spiritual matters. Often, we have to do something, or something has to happen to us, to make it happen. You can worry daily about paying back your loan, but once the bank calls the concern goes to another level.

The Three Weeks, culminating in Tisha B'Av, is supposed to be that "something" that happens to us to make us real with our situation, and how it is far from the ideal. If it's enough, then we may not need more. If not, well, then, history has an answer for that...

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I am very pleased to announce that Volume 3 of Sha'ar Hagilgulim has now been published through Amazon. This completes the comprehensive re-edit and re-publication, b"H.

On the same topic, Series Two of the "Sha'ar HaGilgulim Course" continues this week, b"H. For more information or to register, go to: <https://www.shaarnunproductions.org/Shaar-HaGilgulim-Course.html>.

Have a great Shabbos, a meaningful fast, and GEULAH SHLAIMAH.

Pinchas Winston