

II. Insights on God from Elsewhere in the Tanach and Later Jewish Writings

Introduction

A."HaShem said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of HaShem, and HaShem is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before Hashem, but HaShem was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but HaShem was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but HaShem was not in the fire. And after the fire came a still, small voice. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his cloak in his face and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'" I Kings 19:11-13

How do we compare this experience to those of Moses and the people at Sinai? Do you have any views about the importance

of these moments in Elijah's life? How do these verses advance our understanding of God?

(Discussion)

B. "HaShem is my shepherd. I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in the paths of righteousness for the sake of His name. Yea though I walk through the valley of deepest darkness, I will fear no evil. You are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare before me a table in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil. My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of HaShem forever." Psalm 23

These verses are familiar to us, maybe overly so. Is this psalm about death? Or is it about more? What? What do we think of God, from a fresh reading of this psalm? What's God's role in our lives?

(Discussion)

C. "You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them." Nehemiah 9:17

We've begun to see an emphasis on these features of God. Do you have additional thoughts about our frequent encounter of them?

(Discussion)

D. "The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel; for gaining wisdom and discipline, for understanding words of

insight; for receiving instruction in prudence – righteousness, justice, and equity.” Proverbs 1:1-3

These are among the first words of the book of Proverbs. After I set the stage, we'll discuss what Proverbs teaches us about God and the way in which God's worshippers hope to use God's wisdom to help fulfill God's will in the world.

(Discussion)

E. Some look at the seven days of creation to get an understanding of the operation of the sefirot, reflections of the Divine attributes. For example, we can get an understanding in the first three days of a blending of chesed (freely given loving-kindness) and gevurah (strength and constricting) into tiferet (splendor, harmony, compassion)...Both law and mercy are required for social justice and the ordering of human relations.

-----from a discussion of kabbalah on chabad.org

We'll briefly look at ways in which kabbalistic treatments of Biblical concepts teach us about the God of the Bible and how the Divine works in our lives.

(Discussion)

F. "[For thus says the One Who lives forever in the most sublime heights, whose name is holy: I live on high, in holiness; Yet I am with the contrite and downtrodden -] reviving the spirits of the lowly, reviving the hearts of the disadvantaged."
Maimonides, in Mishnah Torah, Laws of Megillah, 2:1617,
quoting Isaiah 57:15

According to this wisdom, where is God? What are God's main intentions in the world? The great medieval sage, Maimonides, drives our thinking with this insight.

(Discussion)

G. "We have faith that God's loving-kindness is unceasing regardless of what we have gone through..."

"When we get very low, there is a concealment of God, where one may believe there is no hope...But God is in this place, too. There is always hope. There is an exalted life force in this very place. One must look for the stirring of this life force and follow it." ----Nachman of Breslov

We'll consider this saying along with verses from Psalm 22. How might we square this saying with the psalm and words from the psalm that were expressed by Jesus on the cross?

(Discussion)

H. "God wants to reign over free agents, and it is their obedience He desires to obtain."

"When God teaches that "these words which I command this day, shall be in thine heart," the divine means that we should "place these words upon thy heart, for through them you will learn to know the Holy One, blessed be He, and cleave unto His ways." And these ways...concern this world."

-----Solomon Schechter

There is something crucial about the human-Divine relationship that is taught here? What is it? How does it affect our "understanding of God in the Bible?"

(Discussion)

I. "What I look for is...primarily how to live a life that would deserve and evoke an eternal Amen."

-----A.J. Heschel

What is Heschel teaching here? What's its importance to our study?

J. Conclusion: we'll look briefly at the following words from Micah and explore them more deeply next week.

"In the last days, the mountain of the Lord's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains: it will be exalted above the hills and peoples will stream to it.

Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go to the mountain of HaShem, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths...

They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for HaShem has spoken.

All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of HaShem, our God for ever and ever.”

Micah 4:1-5

Think about how this vision follows from what we've been discussing over the past two weeks. Next week, when we look at more troubling passages in the Bible, we'll consider how they might fit into the trajectory of thought and faith that we've been developing.