Revelation

Source Sheet by Rabbi Amy Bernstein

רש"י על שמות כ:א'

(א) **וידבר אלהים.** אֵין אֱלֹהִים אֶלָּא דַּיָּן; לְפִי שֶׁיֵּשׁ פָּרָשִׁיּוֹת בַּתּוֹרָה שֶׁאִם עֲשָׂאָן אָדָם מְקַבֵּל שָׂכָר, וְאִם לֹא אֵינוֹ מְקַבֵּל עֲלֵיהֶם פֻּרְעָנוּת, יָכוֹל אַף עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדִּבְּרוֹת כֵּן, תּ"ל וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים – דַּיָּן לִפְרַע (מכילתא): (ב) **את כל הדברים האלה.** מְלַמֵּד שֶׁאָמַר הַקָּבָּ"ה עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדִּבְּרוֹת בְּדִבּוּר אֶחָד, מַה שֶּׁאִי אֶפְשָׁר לְאָדָם לוֹמַר כֵּן, אִם כֵּן מַה תּ"ל עוֹד אָנֹכִי וְלֹא יִהְיֶה לְךָ? שֶׁחָזַר וּפֵרַשׁ עַל כָּל דִּבּוּר וְדִבּוּר בִּפְנֵי עַצְמוֹ (שם): (ג) **לאמר.** מְלַמֵּד שֶׁהָיוּ עוֹנִין עַל הֵן הֵן וְעַל לֹא לֹא (שם):

Rashi on Exodus 20:1

(1) וידבר אלהים AND GOD SPAKE — The word אלהים is a term for a judge. Since there are chapters in the Torah of such a character that if a person observes the commands contained therein he will receive a reward and if he never observes them at all) he will not receive punishment on their account, one might think that the Ten Commandments are also of such a character (that no punishment will follow upon the infringement of them); therefore Scripture expressly states, "God spake" — God Who is Judge, exacting punishment (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 20:1:1). (2) את כל הדברים האלה ALL THESE WORDS — This statement (that God spake all these words) tells us that the Holy One, blessed be He, said all these words in one utterance, something that is impossible to a human being to do — to speak in this manner. Now if this be so, why does Scripture again say the first two Commandments, אנכי and לא יהיה לך? But the explanation is that He repeated and expressly uttered each of these two commandments by itself (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 20:1:1). (3) לאמר lit., TO SAY — This expression teaches us that they answered to that which required the reply "Yea" (אנכי) by "Yea" and to that which required the reply "Nay" (לא יהיה) by "Nay" (Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 20:1:1).

מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל כ:א'

Mekhilta d'Rabbi Yishmael 20:1

(1) (Ibid. 20:1) "And G d (Elokim) spoke": "Elokim" connotes "a judge," to exact

(א) "וידבר אלהים" – אין אלהים אלא דיין ליפרע, ונאמן לקבל שכר: "את כל" – בדבור אחד, מה שאי איפשר לבשר ודם לומר כן, שנאמר "וידבר אלהים את כל הדברים האלה לאמר". אם כן מה ת"ל "אנכי ה' אלהיך... לא יהיה לך..."? – מלמד שאמר הקב"ה בדיבור אחד עשרת הדברות, חזר ופירשן דיבור דיבור בפני עצמו. שומע אני אף כל דברות שבתורה נאמרו כולם בדיבור אחד? ת"ל "את כל הדברים האלה". אלה נאמרו בדיבור אחד ושאר כל הדיברות דיבור דיבור בפני עצמו:

(ב) "לאמר" – שהיו אומרים על הן – הן, ועל לאו – לאו, דברי רבי ישמעאל. רבי עקיבא אומר: על הן – הן ועל לאו – הן. ד"א "לאמר" – צא ואמור אליהם, והשיבני את דבריהם. ומנין שהיה משיב דברים לפני הגבורה? שנאמר "וישב משה את דברי העם אל ה'". ומה היו דברי העם? (שמות כד ז) "כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה ונשמע". ומנין שהודה המקום לדבריהם? שנאמר (דברים יח יז) "ויאמר ה' אלי: הטיבו את אשר דברו":

punishment and trusted to reward. "all of these things": in a single utterance, an impossibility for flesh and blood. If so, how are we to understand "I am the L rd your G d," There shall not be unto you," etc." We are hereby apprised that the Holy One Blessed be He uttered all of the Ten Commandments in one pronouncement and then reiterated each commandment individually. I might then think that all of the commandments in the Torah were thus uttered. It is, therefore, written "all of these things": These were uttered in one pronouncement, and all the others, individually.

(2) "saying": They responded to an affirmative (i.e., "You shall, etc.") in the affirmative ("Yes") and to a negative, in the negative. R. Akiva says: to an affirmative in the affirmative, and to a negative in the affirmative. Variantly: "saying": Go and say to them (what I have told you) and return their reply to Me. And whence is it derived that He did so? From (Ibid. 19:8) "And Moses returned the words of the people to the L rd." And whence is it derived that He acknowledged their words? From (Devarim 18:17) "They have done well in speaking as they did."

R. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*

Revelation means that the thick silence which fills the endless distance between God and the human mind was pierced, and man was told that God is concerned with the affairs of man; that not only does man need God, God is also in need of man...At Sinai we have learned that spiritual values are not only aspirations in us, but a response to a transcendent appeal to us...(p. 196-197).

There is a partnership of God and Israel in regard to both the world and the Torah: He created the earth and we till the soil; He gave us the text and we refine and complete it. The Bible is a seed, God is the sun, but we are the soil. Every generation is expected to bring forth new understanding and new realization. The word is the word of God, and its understanding He gave unto man (p. 274).

Shemot Rabbah 5:9

Rabbi Yochanan said the voice of God went forth and was split into 70 voices, 70 languages, so that all the nations would hear, and each nation would hear the voice in its own tongue...The voice of God spoke to each Israelites, that means to each and

every person. God's voice was heard and understood because the voice spoke to each individual according to that person's particular ability to hear and understand...to the elderly in keeping with their ability, to the young in keeping with their ability, to the little ones in keeping with their ability, and so on.

Shabbat 3b

When Rabbi is in one tractate, do not ask him regarding a different tractate.

שבת ג:

כי קאי רבי בהא מסכתא לא תשייליה במסכתא אחריתי דילמא לאו אדעתיה

***Pahad Yitzhak*, Shavuot, Essay #9, Rabbi Yitzhak Hutner (translation by Rabbi Abe Friedman)**

And we find, according to this, that in the truth of the matter at the moment when one Statement held dominion, the world had no open space for the content of any other Statement, and a special action of removing the first Statement's dominion was necessary in order to clear space for its fellow. "Each one passing one by one."

And the same structure and characteristic holds true in the spiritual world of a person who gives himself over to the words of Torah. At the moment when one Statement of words of Torah has dominion over his soul, every space in his soul is perfumed by it. And only through a special action of disconnection and passing is it possible for a second Statement to be grasped in his soul.

Pirkei Avot 1:1

(1) Moshe received the Torah from Sinai, and transmitted it to Yehoshua, and Yehoshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly. They said three things: Be deliberate in judgment, and establish many students, and make a fence for the Torah.

משנה אבות א':א'

(א) מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרָה מִסִּינַי, וּמְסָרָהּ לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ, וִיהוֹשֻׁעַ לִזְקֵנִים, וּזְקֵנִים לִנְבִיאִים, וּנְבִיאִים מְסָרוּהָ לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוֹלָה. הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים, הֱווּ מְתוּנִים בַּדִּין, וְהַעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידִים הַרְבֵּה, וַעֲשׂוּ סְיָג לַתּוֹרָה:

Menachot 29b

§ **Rav Yehuda says** that **Rav says: When Moses ascended on High, he found the Holy One, Blessed be He, sitting and tying crowns on the letters** of the Torah. Moses **said before** God: **Master of the Universe, who is preventing You** from giving the Torah without these additions? God **said to him: There is a man who is destined to be** born **after several**

מנחות כ"ט ב

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב בשעה שעלה משה למרום מצאו להקב"ה שיושב וקושר כתרים לאותיות אמר לפניו רבש"ע מי מעכב על ידך אמר לו אדם אחד יש שעתיד להיות בסוף כמה דורות ועקיבא בן יוסף שמו שעתיד לדרוש על כל קוץ וקוץ תילין תילין של הלכות

generations, and Akiva ben Yosef is his name; he is destined to derive from each and every thorn of these crowns **mounds** upon **mounds of *halakhot*.** It is for his sake that the crowns must be added to the letters of the Torah.

I. The Sound of Silence

"Said Rabbi Abahu....in the name of Rabbi Yochanan...When the Holy Blessed One gave the Torah, no bird chirped, no fowl fluttered, no ox lowed, the angels did not fly, the Seraphim did not utter the Kedusha, the sea did not roar, the creatures did not speak; the universe was silent and mute. And the voice came forth "Anochi Adonai Elohecha" (I am the Infinite, your God).—Shmot Rabba 29-7

"R. Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin (1823-1900) makes this point succinctly: In the beginning of the revelation, before *matan Torah,* it says: "And there were sounds." That is the beginning of the uproar in a person's heart to become attached to God, blessed is He. Then came the lightning, which means that they experienced the gleam of God's light (*Pri Tzadik,* Shavuot 16.[3])
Instead of our being passive observers of the divine revealed, we were, and continue to be, active participants in the act of revelation. This way, Hasidic theology solves the problem posed at the beginning of this essay: how did we know it was God's voice? The answer: since we comprise a part of the divine, we simply recognized our own, inner godly voice from within the clouds."

- from "A Hasidic Matan Torah" by Yoel S.

II. Revelation as a Continuous Process

"The Ba'al Shem Tov took the kabbalistic notion of divine revelation to its logical extreme, proclaiming that God is inherent in all existence. More importantly, he declared that God's essence can easily be discovered: All we need to do is to uncover the divine from the numerous "garments" which obstruct it from view. Put differently, God need not reveal Godself, because God is always there. We need only open our eyes and watch God being revealed in all God's glory.

Thus, it is not God who changes during revelation, it is we who change. We consummate the revelation that began with creation and culminated with *matan Torah*. Humans are bestowed with the unique gift of being able to pierce through the superficial layers of finite nature and expose the infinite divine.

Hasidic doctrine maintains that we ought to find traces of the divine in every piece of matter. What modern science calls laws of nature, Hasidism calls "divine animation"—that is what keeps the stars shining and the trees growing. But how do we detect the innermost divinity? The answer is: wherever we see such positive traits as life, generosity, beauty, wisdom etc., we discern that God is hiding there. And since such traits can be found virtually everywhere, it follows that God is present everywhere.

Our only task is to overcome our tendency to become apathetic to the marvels of nature and the magic of life, which inhibit us from seeing the divine. In order to see divinity we have to appreciate our ability to exist, to understand, to create art, to be amazed, to be alive."

- from "A Hasidic Matan Torah" by Yoel S.

Revelation as a State of Being

"Hasidism essentially renders revelation a subjective, personal, and active experience. While traditional Judaism attempts to place God and the Torah outside of the human realm, Hasidism attempts to place God and the Torah into our hearts and souls. If we want to see the divine, we have to dig into the innermost recesses of our souls and wash away the dirt, such as selfishness, conceit, and deception, all of which stall the divine rays, such as honesty, integrity, and kindness from shining forth.

For Hasidim, revelation ceases to be merely a belief in something that once occurred; instead, it becomes an activity, a state of being. Love, unity, and happiness are faith; hatred, pessimism and indifference are heresy. The Talmud teaches us that arrogance is akin to heresy. In fact, Hasidism tells us that arrogance IS heresy, because arrogance entails an illusory separation from God. A haughty person may be committed to all Jewish beliefs and commandments, and yet he or she is as far from God as can be. No amount of dogma can help arrogant people until they change their attitudes.

A central part of Hasidism is *devekut*. This is akin to what William James calls "experiences of the divine presence," and what contemporary psychologists would call "a state of flow." This state can be induced by prayer, meditation, study, or just by focusing on one of the positive forces that runs through our daily lives, even the most trivial and insignificant one. Upon reaching such a moment of transcendence, a person overflows with emotion. He or she stands in rapture and awe of the all-pervasive unity, goodness, and beauty that is inherent in the universe. This is the essence of true revelation, in which one goes beyond his or her physical limitations to grasp the inner divinity of all being. It is with this experience that Hasidic teachers came to understand the revelation of *matan Torah*."

- from "A Hasidic Matan Torah" by Yoel S.

Orot HaKodesh 1:4:4:1

If you will it, human being, observe the light of the divine presence that pervades all existence. Observe the harmony of the heavenly realm, how it pervades every aspect of life, the spiritual and the material, which are before your eyes of flesh and your eyes of the spirit.

Contemplate the wonders of creation, the divine dimension of their being, not as a dim configuration that is presented to you from the distance, but as the reality in which you live.

Know yourself, and your world; know the meditations of your heart, and of every thinker; find the source of your own life, and of the life beyond you, around you, the glorious splendor of life in which you have your being.

The love that is astir in you -- raise it to its basic potency and its noblest beauty, extend it to all dimensions, toward every manifestation of the soul that sustains the universe, whose splendor is dimmed only because of the deficiency of the person viewing it.

Look at the lights, in their inwardness. Let not the names, the words, the idiom of the letters confine your soul. They are under your control, you are not under theirs.

אורות הקודש א׳:ד׳:ד׳:א׳

אם תרצה, בן אדם, הסתכל באור השכינה בכל היקום, הסתכל בעדן החיים השמימיים, איך הם מתפלשים בכל פנה וזוית שבחיים. הרוחניים והחמריים, שנגד עיני בשרך, ונגד עיני רוחך.

התבונן בפלאי היצירה, בחיי האלהות שלהם, לא בתור איזה תכנית כהה, שממרחקים מציגים נגד עיניך, כי אם דע את המציאות שאתה חי בה.

דע את עצמך,ואת עולמך, דע את הגיוני הלב שלך, ושל כל הוגה וחושב. מצא את מקור החיים שבקרבך, ושממעל לך, שמסביבך, את פארי הדרות החיים, שאתה שרוי בתוכם.

האהבה שבקרבך העלה אותה לשורש עזה ועדנת תפארתה, הרחיבה לכל סרעפותיה, לכל אשד נשמת חי העולמים, אשר רק רצוץ המקום של ההגה גורם מיעוט זהרו.

הבט על האורות, בתוכיותם. אל יבלעו נשמתך השמות, הניבים והאותיות, הם מסורים בידך, ואי אתה מסור בידיהם.

Ascend towards the heights, ascend! For you have the strength. You have wings of spirit, wings of mighty eagles. Do not forsake them, lest they forsake you. Seek them, and they will find you immediately.

Precious and holy are the forms that robe reality. We need them, as do all who are limited in their spiritual perception. But

עלה למעלה עלה, כי כח עז לך, יש לך כנפי רוח, כנפי נשרים אבירים. אל תכחש בם, פן יכחשו לך, דרש אותם, וימצאו לך מיד.

יקרים וקדושים הם לנו לבושי הציורים, מוכרחים הם לנו, ולכל בעלי גבול

always, when we approach a life of enlightenment, we must not swerve from the perspective that light flows from the incomprehensible to the comprehensible, by way of emanation, from the light of Ein Sof.

We are summoned to share in the heavenly delight, in all the particularized perceptions, which are included in this universal whole, from which comes all life.

(based on a translation by Ben Zion Bosker)

במבטיהם הרוחניים ביחוד. אבל תמיד בעת שאנו באים לחיים מדעיים, אסור לנו לזוז מהנקודה העליונה, שרק מהבלתי נתפס אור מתפלש בהנתפס, במהלך האצילות, מאור אין סוף.

ואנו קרואים להיות מתעדנים בעדנים שמימיים, בכל פרטי ההכרות, שבכלל הגדול הזה, שממנו תוצאות כל החיים.

Yochanan Muffs from *Love and Joy*

Any meeting of personalities requires great bravery. One who attempts to communicate with another endangers his own life, for to do this he must reveal what is in his heart. Such an act is potentially dangerous because one does not know ahead of time if he will find a receptive ear. There is always the possibility that the ear of the listener will be impervious. Any real communication, then, is a dangerous leap. But if one never screws up the courage to jump, he will wither away in silent isolation. There are two choices: to love or to die . . .

The Holy One, blessed be He, took a great chance when, at Sinai, He spoke with Israel for the first time. This act of communication was also an act of love. But God did not know ahead of time, so to speak, if His intended bride would be responsive to His voice: "I only hope their hearts will always be as responsive, as willing to obey Me, as they were just now" (Deuteronomy 5:26). How much anxiety is wrapped up in these awful words . . .

[This] dialectical tension in the loving relationship – the painful need to express feeling and the anxiety that the expression might not be properly received – is the inner dialectic of the human personality, as well as of the Divine, and is impossible to avoid. Mankind can only overcome this tension by imitating God Himself, by undertaking an act of bravery, a leap of faith, as God has done – by reaching out to the other, to communicate, to love.

Exposed on the mountains of the heart
Exposed on the mountains of the heart. See, how small there,
see: the last hamlet of words, and higher,
and yet so small, a last
homestead of feeling. Do you recognize it?
Exposed on the mountains of the heart. Rocky earth
under the hands. But something will
flower here; out of the mute abyss
flowers an unknowing herb in song.
But the knowing? Ah, that you who began to understand
and are silent now, exposed on the mountains of the heart.
Yet many an awareness still whole wanders there,
many a self-confident mountain animal
passes through and remains. And that great protected bird
circles about the peaks of pure denial. But
unprotected, here on the mountains of the heart.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

Irschenhausen: September, 1914

Orot HaKodesh 1:4:4:1

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יקרים וקדושים הם לנו לבושי הציורים, מוכרחים הם לנו, ולכל בעלי גבול במבטיהם הרוחניים ביחוד. אבל תמיד בעת שאנו באים לחיים מדעיים, אסור לנו לזוז מהנקודה העליונה, שרק מהבלתי נתפס אור מתפלש בהנתפס, במהלך האצילות, מאור אין סוף.

We are summoned to share in the heavenly delight, in all the particularized perceptions, which are included in this universal whole, from which comes all life.

ואנו קרואים להיות מתעדנים בעדנים שמימיים, בכל פרטי ההכרות, שבכלל הגדול הזה, שממנו תוצאות כל החיים.

(based on a translation by Ben Zion Bosker)