

בס"ד

דברי תורה ד'צבי אליהו
DIVREI TORAH

שופטים

Shoftim

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Stability

Rabbi Adam Singer

Fear can be empowering. At first this seems counterintuitive. We are accustomed to thinking of fear as something which paralyzes, something which debilitates; and these are also valid characterizations of fear. But there is a type of fear, a type of awe, which is empowering. It allows us to focus and to achieve our true personal potential. The fear I refer to comes in response to something akin to the awesome expansiveness of our universe, the sheer unimaginable magnitude of its Creator, and the inestimable importance of the relationship we stand to have with that Creator. This is a part of what it means to be a part of the Jewish people and the opportunity presented by the mitzvahs taught in our Torah. This fear and awe is an undercurrent in a verse in this week's parsha, but to understand it properly we must look to verses which describe the creation of the world in the beginning of the Torah.

The Torah's description of the creation of the world is exceedingly deep and esoteric, and therefore extremely difficult to understand. There are a few phrases and concepts I want to pick out to illustrate the concept of fear as an empowering and stabilizing force.

The Torah teaches that the Heavens and the earth were created on the first day of Creation. For the time being, we will put aside what the Heavens are, what the earth is, and what a day is in this context, but let us focus on the fact that the Heavens and

earth have been created as of day one. Given that the Heavens and earth have already been created, we should be puzzled when we see statements on day two which imply that G-d separates the heavens from the earth on day two. As it says in Breishis 1:6, "G-d said, 'Let there be a firmament between the waters' and then goes on to say that this firmament separates between "the waters above" (ostensibly sky-bound water e.g. clouds) and "the waters below" (e.g. oceans, lakes, etc.). Why does the Torah seem to repeat the creation of the firmament which divides between Heaven and earth? It is created once on day one, and then mentioned more specifically on day two.

Rashi (11th cent. France), quotes a Midrash which explains the apparent repetition. The firmament had been created on the first day, but was somehow unstable. In the Book of Job (26:11) the day-one firmament is described as if the very pillars of Heaven were weak. The Midrash explains that when G-d says on day two, "let there be a firmament", this command was experienced as a awesome roar. It was as if the firmament became awestruck "like a person who is shocked and stands still from the roar of One who is threatening him." It is as if the Torah were describing three phases to the creation of the firmament: its creation, its experience of becoming awestruck by the roar of the Almighty, and its ultimate stabilization.

Rav Shlomo Volbe, z"l, (20th cent. Europe and Israel) explains that the three phases the Torah describes regarding the firmament are also experienced by human beings. We too are sometimes soft and shaky in our resolution and in our thinking.

It is the awe of something greater than ourselves which gives us stability. The awesome responsibilities to a spouse, a comrade in arms, a friend, a child... These are small, proportionally, when we consider the awesomeness of the entirety of our relationship to our world and to our Creator. Our relationship to G-d is that which encompasses all the relationships mentioned above, and goes farther to include the actualization of all of our potential as human beings and as Jewish people. The awesomeness of our own position in world in light of our relationship with the Almighty is a source of stability and focus. This awe is referred to as the "fear of Heaven" or in Hebrew "yeras Shemayim".

Rav Volbe explains that throughout the Torah only a person with this type of fear of Heaven deserves the moniker we American Jews would call a "mentsch", a stable person conscious of his or her responsibilities and committed to fulfilling them. This is the antithesis of one who is fearful of anything other than the Almighty.

In this week's parsha, the Torah refers to one who has a fear of something other than Hashem. The following verse describes an address by military officers to their soldiers before a war "Who is the man that fears and is weak of heart? Let him return to his home and not melt the heart of his brothers like his heart" (*Devarim 20:8*).

With less than a month before Rosh Hashonah, perhaps an understanding of the awe of G-d can help us prepare for the Days of Awe which are before us. Perhaps simply reflecting on this awe and its importance can be the beginning of our preparation for Rosh Hashonah, and a

reminder of the awesomeness of the Almighty and the tremendous potential we have been given.

May we all be blessed to know and understand the awesomeness of our potential and the riches that our relationship to the Almighty can bestow upon us and our world. GOOD SHABBOS!!!

Elul

Rabbi Yosef Samberg

With a thunderous boom, you hear your name announced over the loudspeaker. While your mother dabs her tear-filled eyes and your father angles to get a better picture, you proudly stride up to the platform to receive your law diploma. Besides the excitement of graduating, you are filled with anticipation for the job in a top law firm which you will start tomorrow. This firm signed you to a lucrative contract based on the tremendous potential that was evident from your class rank.

Tomorrow comes, you make your way to the office, and to your surprise, there is a door that prominently displays your name. Over the course of the day, co-workers enter your office and welcome you to the firm, wishing you luck in your new job. Suddenly, at around noon time, the "boss" comes in and sits down adjacent to you. He expresses his excitement about having you as part of the firm and the confidence he has in you. As the initial nervousness begins to fade and you start feeling comfortable, the boss places a folder stacked with papers, seeming as tall as the Empire State Building. Before you can even

ask, the boss explains how important this case is, and how crucial it is that the case is won. Anticipating that the case needs to be done in the near future, the boss explains that you have a year to complete it. Now, as you start to breathe again, the boss, while walking out of your office, turns to you and sternly says that you were given this extremely important case because of your potential, and more importantly, he explains that your employment for the next year is dependent on the results of this case.

Naturally, you get down to business. You spend countless hours in the office working on the case, while also supporting the local Starbucks, in order to spend more countless hours in the office working on the case. But as the months go by, somehow this big case got pushed aside and lost under other smaller and less significant cases that came to your desk. Suddenly, with one month left, while cleaning off your desk, you come across the folder with the important case that you were supposed to be working on; the case that your livelihood is dependent on. Panic sets in as the reality

of the deadline begins to stare you in the face. You increase your hours in the office only allowing yourself catnaps at your desk. You set alarm clocks ensuring that you wake up promptly to resume work. The feverish pitch that you are working at continues until the deadline. Finally, the day has come to report to the boss. You give one last look over your work before you enter the boss' office. You hand the case to him and nervously stand there and wait for a response as he starts to glance through it. He looks up at you and says "I'll get back to you. Thank you."

My friends, yesterday was the first day of Elul. Last Rosh Hashana the "BOSS" because He believed in our potential, gave us a job to do over the last year. We might have become side tracked over the course of time with petty and insignificant things. We have one month until the deadline in order to make good on the resolutions we made last year. Take advantage of this precious month and finish the year strong.