

Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Parashat B'ha'alotcha – The Celestial Cloud Covering

Following the Divine Cloud

I admire those of my students who follow the Divine cloud. They live in the moment, without solid plans, opening themselves to their inner voice of when to come and when to move on. I have lived in the same home for more than 15 years and it doesn't look like we're going anywhere else. I love our home and its location but I don't want to become too set in my ways. When we become too settled, we have everything set up for ourselves to be self-sufficient, almost making us too independent of needing Hashem. Rabbi Moshe Cordevero writes quoting the Zohar that in order to acquire *Malchut* (royalty) – the embodiment of humility one must go into exile, as the *Shechina* is in exile, moving constantly from place to place (*Tomer Devorah*, chapter 9). There is something attractively spiritual about moving from place to place, picking up fallen sparks, never getting stuck, always on the go, mindful of Hashem's messages for when to move on. On the other hand, it is difficult when people you love visit your country, but they don't want to make plans, they take things day by day, following the cloud. Here in Bat Ayin we are blessed with an abundance of clouds. Sometimes when I look out of my window it seems like we are flouting right inside of the clouds, which are hanging so low over the mountains. These clouds may not be formed by the special magic of Bat Ayin, although they certainly add to it. It is known that clouds easily form on mountains. When a wall of air and water vapor encounters a mountainside, it has nowhere else to go but up the slopes. Since rising water vapor cools, it eventually condenses to form clouds. A cloud is a being that floats between existence and non-existence. You see its constantly changing shape moving along the sky. If you try to grab it, or hold on to it, you might walk right through it. Its borders are not defined, yet it is still hovering over us and protecting us at this very moment. Such a cloud was leading the Jewish people in the wilderness:

ספר במדבר פרק ט

(טו) וּבַיּוֹם הַקִּיּוֹם אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן כֶּסֶה הָעֶנָן אֶת הַמִּשְׁכָּן לְאַהֲלֵי הָעֵדוּת וּבַעֲרֵב יְהוָה עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן כִּמְרָאָה אֵשׁ עַד בֹּקֶר: (טז) כֵּן יְהִי־תַמִּיד הָעֶנָן יִכְסֶּה וּמְרָאָה אֵשׁ לַיְלָה: (יז) וּלְפִי הָעֲלוֹת הָעֶנָן מֵעַל הָאֹהֶל וְאַחֲרָי כֵּן יִסְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבְמִקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֵּן שָׁם הָעֶנָן שָׁם יִחַנוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: (יח) עַל פִּי יְהוָה יִסְעוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל פִּי יְהוָה יִחַנוּ כָּל יְמֵי אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁכֵּן הָעֶנָן עַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן יִחַנוּ:

“On the day that the Tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, and in the evening it rested over the Tabernacle in the likeness of fire until the morning. It was always so, the cloud covered it, appearing as fire by night. Whenever the cloud lifted from the Tent, the Israelites would set out accordingly; and at the spot where the cloud settled, there the Israelites would make camp. At a command they remained encamped as long as the cloud stayed over the Tabernacle...” (*Bamidbar* 9:15-18).



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Soft, Fluffy, Protective, Cushioning Cloud

The Cloud of Glory is the manifestation of Hashem's *Shechina* (Divine Indwelling Presence). It was this cloud that was hanging over Sarah's tent; it was present at Sinai during the giving of the Torah, it filled the Tabernacle, and later the King Solomon's glorious Temple. Why did Hashem chose the medium of a cloud to reveal Himself?

Hashem's *Shechina* is identical with the *Ohr HaGanuz* (Hidden Light). This is the brightest light – the highest ontological level of Hashem-Presence projectable into creation. We cannot look into the light of the sun due to its brightness. How much more impossible to be in the presence of Hashem's brightest light. Therefore, He wrapped his light in the soft fluffy cushioning cloud, to protect us from His blinding light. Actually, the Hebrew word for cloud אָנָן/*anan* is connected to an Arabic verb that means to cover or conceal, (HAW Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament). Without knowing this I have often used the imagery of a cloud in EmunaHealing for people who may have various fears, like most of us and need to be strengthened in their *emunah* and *bitachon* (trust). I guide them to imagine floating inside of a soft fluffy cloud, feeling safe, feeling protected, floating without knowing to where, but trusting that all is going to be fine...

All-encompassing Cloud – Including all Elements of Creation

Clouds are formed by evaporated water rising from the earth through the wind. The water vapor clings to other numerous particles or dust found in the atmosphere. The water then condenses and forms the structure of the cloud. Most clouds are white. That's because water and ice particles that make up a cloud have just the right amount and sizes to scatter light in all possible wavelengths. When light of practically all wavelengths combine, the result is white light (<http://www.universetoday.com/46489/how-are-clouds-formed/>). In this way, the cloud includes all four elements of creation. Dust particles from the element of earth, wind and atmosphere from the element of air, water vapor from the element of water, and light from the element of fire. It now makes perfectly sense why Hashem reveals Himself in the all-encompassing cloud that includes all elements of creation within it. It also makes sense that Hashem, Who is beyond the physical choses the cloud to manifest within in the physical world, as the cloud is made of הֶבֶל/*hevel* – vapor – a non-material material. It has no physical existence as it is in the process of evaporating. This teaches us that everything in the physical world in truth has no real permanent existence. "Vapor of vapor said Kohelet, vapor of vapor, everything eventually evaporates" (*Kohelet* 1:2). Although it evaporates nothing ever disappears, it only changes form like a cloud that changes shape and transforms itself from water to cloud, back again to the moisture of rain and dew. Likewise, Hashem's *Shechina* never disappears from Israel. It is always with us even when it is concealed. Actually, although the Torah states that the cloud lead the Israelites during the day, and at night it was a pillar of fire, the cloud was still there during the night. It was only the darkness that concealed it. This perfect metaphor strengthens our belief that Hashem's *Shechina*-cloud is still with us even if it isn't apparent to us all at any given moment. When we actively seek it out, it may just appear between the silver lining of the clouds.



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Causing the Reappearance of the Cloud

Today, it is very politically incorrect to be obedient. This word has such a negative connotation that it almost became a dirty word! It could be because we have recently experienced the greatest disaster and holocaust caused by immaculate obedience to the most heinous person of history. So today, we cringe at the notion of having our actions, dress code and feelings dictated. The freedom to do, wear, feel, say, scream, decide whatever we want is what most modern day people desire. They want to have full control over their own lives. Everyone wants to do their own thing. Young couples want to decide when to have children; some even found a way to decide the sex of their unborn children. Conversion candidates want to determine the time of their program and their date of conversion. Some get upset if things don't work out their way. All this is contrasted to the way the Israelites lived during their wandering in the wilderness. "At the command of Hashem they would encamp, and at the command of Hashem they would journey" (*Bamidbar* 9:23). During the wanderings in the wilderness obedience was not a dirty word. Not only did the Israelites follow the cloud and pick themselves up immediately at the very first clue, even if they were nicely settled. They did it with desire for compliance to the Divine command. This is why it states, "Wherever the cloud settled there the Israelites would make camp יָנַח/yanach" (*Bamidbar* 9:17). It didn't state, יָנַח/chanu – 'they camped,' but rather "they would make camp" indicating that they desired to make camp wherever Hashem commanded it. Even "When the cloud lingered over the Tabernacle many days the Israelites observed Hashem's mandate and did not journey on" (*Bamidbar* 9:19). While others may have been eager to move on, weary of staying in the same dry empty space filled with dangerous snakes and scorpions, the Israelites remained only because they desired to keep the word of G-d (*Ohr HaChayim, Bamidbar* 9:18). We civilized modern westerners can learn much from the Israelites' desire to do the will of G-d. It is time for us to grow up and become mature enough to learn to differentiate between following an evil dictator and obeying the holy word of Hashem, even when presented to us through the Rabbis in Halacha (Jewish law) or current role models and mentors. Then perhaps and only then will Hashem's cloud of glory which is always with us become visible to us again. "When G-d has washed away the filth of the daughters of Tzion, and has rinsed the blood of Yerushalayim from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and by the spirit of burning. Then Hashem will create above every dwelling place of Mount Tzion, and above her assemblies, a cloud by day and smoke with glow of flaming fire by night. For over all the glory there will be a covering (*Yesha'yahu* 4:4-5). May this happen soon in Mashiach's days, when the Cloud of Hashem's Glory will hang over the Eternal Temple!



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