



Why is Hashem Hiding His Face?

Where Are You Hashem?

Sometimes it's so hard to feel Hashem in our lives. Even when we exert ourselves to our outmost in self-improvement, kindness and prayer – praying at the holiest places in the world, the outcome doesn't always match what we hoped and prayed for. A close friend, going through a hardship told me, "Today was one of the toughest days of my life. I almost didn't believe in Hashem anymore! I feel so abandoned by Hashem. I don't know how to continue having emunah in Him." There are so many things that can make us disbelieve in Hashem. Just thinking of the holocaust and all the cruel massacres. How is it possible that Hashem could allow these vile evils to happen? Sometimes, I want to shout out, "Hashem!!!! Where are You? Where are You? Where are You hiding?" I felt the furthest away from Hashem in my mid-twenties. I felt so lost. Although, I was happy to have embraced the Torah way, gotten married and given birth to a son, something was missing. I recall being especially miserable when we had to leave Israel for four years for my husband to fulfill his obligation to the USA government and pay off his medical student loans by working in a physician shortage area. Hashem seemed so far away when I was unable to actualize my full potential for serving Him. I had completed my B.Ed. teaching degree from Michalah, and gotten a few teaching jobs, mainly as a substitute for teachers on maternity leave. Yet, the students took advantage, of the young, inexperienced teacher as I was back then, to behave quite unruly. I knew I wasn't created to stand in front of a group of students who utterly ignored my attempt to get a word of Torah across, while they happily made use of the time to chat and catch up on each other's lives. I certainly jived with the Talmudic dictum, "The cow wants to nurse more than the calf wants to suckle" (*Babylonian Talmud, Pesachim 112a*). I also didn't get pregnant again although my son was already in first grade. Bunched up in me was this strong need to give so much without any suitable recipients. In my empty home, I cried and wrote sad poems yearning for Hashem and for meaning in my life.

Until When?

Here is one of these poems from that period, describing my longing. I also wrote a melody for it and sung these words to Hashem and myself:

Until When?

I know Hashem is ruling the show.
There is a masterplan.
All suffering is in order to grow,
but Hashem until when?

Until when do I keep on hoping?
Until when do I keep on praying?
Until when will my prayers be answered?
Hashem tell me until when!

Within the moment time seems endless,
looking back everything was but a flash.
When will my pain be a sweet caress,
within Your endless universe?

Until when do I keep on hoping?
Until when do I keep on praying?
Until when will my prayers be answered?
Hashem tell me until when!

Does Hashem Ever Turn Away from Us?

The worst thing for a Jew is feeling distanced from Hashem. What are our lives worth without closeness to G-d? All the feelings that Hashem has abandoned us are only to test us, whether we realize despite the seemingly distance that G-d is still right here with us, even when He hides His face. Our test is to stretch and expand our emunah by digging down deeply into the recesses of our faith allowing its estranged sparks to emerge, like a plant finding nourishment for its roots from within the hard rock.

ספר דברים פרק לא פסוק יח וְאֶנְכִי הִסְתֵּיר אֶת־יָמִי בְּיוֹם הַהוּא עַל כָּל הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה כִּי פָנָה אֶל אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים:

“Then I will hide My face on that day, because of all the evil they have committed, because they turned to other deities” (*Devarim* 31:18).

Our Torah verse gives the reason why Hashem hides His face, “because they turned to other deities.” Yet today most of us who are not idol-worshippers still experience Hashem’s hidden face. Yet, the reason given seems to no longer apply. However, according to Sforno, when we escape our hardships instead of turning directly to G-d in repentance and prayer, this too is a kind of idol-worship, that causes the hiding of Hashem’s face. I’m positive that we all have different exits – from the darkness in our lives – that prevent us from turning to Hashem alone. Furthermore, under distress, we are led astray to erroneously believe that Hashem is no longer among us (verse 17).

“I will hide My face from them...” not like they [the Israelites] thought when they said, that I am not among them (verse 17). In truth, wherever they are, the Shechina will be found, as it states, “Wherever [Israel] was exiled, the Shechina is with them” (*Babylonian Talmud, Megillah* 29a). However, I will hide my face from saving them, “...because of all the evil they have committed [to themselves].” “For they turned to other deities.” During the hardships they encountered due to their sins, they do not turn to me for help through teshuvah and tefilah. Rather they turn away to escape through other means (*S’forno, Devarim* 31:18).

Playing Hide and Seek with Hashem

When we fall short of acting in the highest way, we may fall into depression and despair feeling that our wrongdoing has distanced us from Hashem. If we only realized that it is the precisely the mistaken belief that Hashem has abandoned us which causes us to distance ourselves from Him. More than it is the sin that separates us from Hashem, our negative mindset – believing that we are separate from Him due to our sins – is what causes us to actually disconnect from G-d. Our challenge is to remember that Hashem is always with us no matter what. In our Torah verse there is a twofold language of hiding: הִסְתֵּיר אֶת־יָמִי / *haster astir* – “Hide I will hide.” This double hiding makes us oblivious to the fact that Hashem is only hidden. The first hiding refers to our general transgression, but the second hiding refers to the sin of despair mistakenly thinking that Hashem has forsaken us due to our wrongs (*Netivot Shalom, Parashat Vayelech*). It makes it so much harder to find Hashem, when we aren’t even aware that He is only hiding and that we are supposed to seek Him. This is because we don’t realize that Hashem’s hiding in itself is hidden. In truth even within Hashem’s double hiding, surely, He is still there. Nothing can exist without Hashem keeping it alive. Therefore, within EVERYTHING, all actions and thoughts, Hashem’s presence is still there. Even when we, G-d forbid, sin, and act against Hashem’s will, still Hashem is there with us, although He is greatly hidden... (*Rebbe Nachman, Likutei Moharan, Mahadura Kama* 56). Why does Hashem seem to forget us? Why does He hide His face from us? For one reason. So, that He can reveal Himself afterwards, when we truly search for him. David Hamelech cried, “since the whole point of your hiding is to ultimately reveal yourself – when is it going to happen already?!”

תהילים פרק יג פסוק ב עַד־אָנָה הַשֵּׁם תִּשְׁכַּחֲנִי בְּצַח עַד־אָנָה | תִּסְתִּיר אֶת־פְּנֵיךָ מִמֶּנִּי:

“How long, Hashem? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me?” (*Tehillim* 13:2).

Whenever we feel distanced from Hashem, let us remember that He is always with us. Rather than escaping into foods, Facebook or shopping, let us cry out to Hashem in the timeless words of *Tehillim*, with complete confidence that when we keep searching for Him and truly seek His face, we **will** ultimately find Him!