

Ki Savo

How to Look just like God

All of the nations of the land will see that the name of God is called upon you and will fear you.

Dvarim 28:10

“Hashem gave Cain a sign so that whoever would find him would not kill him.”¹⁴⁶ The Chida¹⁴⁷ quotes R. Yehuda Mehalal¹⁴⁸ who, in turn, had quoted the words of “a great scholar” to explain this verse. According to this unnamed Sage, Cain was taught how to contort his face in way that resembled the four-letter name of Hashem. Whenever a potentially threatening person or animal would take one look at the face of Cain, they would be unable to harm him. The Chida concludes that this is what every person should do if they feel that they are ever in danger.

R. Chaim Palagi¹⁴⁹ explains that this is the meaning of our verse when it speaks of the nations’ seeing that the name of God is upon us and fearing us. The Jews will contort their faces in the special way that expressed that name of God, and this will awe and impress members of other nations. One wonders what all of this could possibly mean. Is the ability to contort one’s face really something so important? Why would a person unable to read Hebrew letters, or an animal, grow frightened from some makeshift letters on a man’s face?

The Baal Shem Tov¹⁵⁰ used to teach that when a person offers charity to a poor man, something amazing happens. King David told God, “Through charity, I will see Your face.”¹⁵¹ God’s name is made up of the four letters *yod*, *beh*, *vav* and *beh*. A *yod* looks like a coin. A person taking a coin into his hand is represented by the letter *beh*, which is the fifth letter, just as a hand is made of five fingers. He then reaches out his hand, which is represented by the long

146 Bereishis 4:15

147 *Chomas Anach* to Bereishis 17

148 In a manuscript copy of his *Netzach Yisrael*.

149 *Tnufa Chaim* to Ki Savo 33

150 Quoted in *Mevaser Tzedek* to Reeh, s.v. *ki pasoach tiftach*. R. Chaim Palagi, in *Tnufa Chaim* to Ki Savo 32, quotes this teaching as that of the Arizal. See also what he quotes there from his son-in-law, R. Bentzion Jackrill.

151 Tehillim 17:15

vav which looks just like an outstretched hand, and places it into the hand of the poor person, another *heb*. Thus, when a person gives charity, he sees the name of God. This is far from a joke. The way that a person can act just like God is through giving to others. The Baal Shem Tov is teaching us how we can bring the divine in to our world. Not only that, but there is more to this teaching. If a person waits for the poor person to extend his hand, and only gives the charity as a response to a request, teaches the Baal Shem Tov, then the giver has misspelled the name of God. It is only a fully developed Godly act when a person is driven to offer assistance to the less fortunate. Through charity we imitate God.

R. Zvi Hirsch Horowitz, in his monumental *Lachmei Todab*,¹⁵² offers a similar insight. The Talmud¹⁵³ teaches of lessons that we can learn from the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The letter sequence *aleph, beis* represents “study understanding”; *gimmel, dalet* means “give to the poor”; *heb, vav* is the name of God – and so on. However, he wonders, since the name of God starts with the letter *yod*, why do the *hey* and *vav* come first in the alphabet to represent His name? He explains that the letters *alef, beis, gimmel* and *dalet* add up to ten in *gematria*, which is the value of the letter *yod*. Thus, the name of Hashem is spelled out only when a person studies Torah and performs acts of kindness, represented by *alef, beis*, and by *gimmel, dalet*. If one does those actions, he properly spells out the name of God with his life. This may also explain what the Talmud means when it teaches¹⁵⁴ that when a person involves himself in Torah alone, and not in acts of kindness, he is like a person who has no God. For the only way that we can connect to God is through being just like Him; following the Torah and being kind to people.

Our Sages teach us¹⁵⁵ that Hashem, Himself, keeps the Torah. It sounds farfetched. Why would God listen to a set of rules? After all, He answers to no one! In truth, though, we have it backwards. “Just as God is merciful,” teaches the Talmud,¹⁵⁶ “so are you to act mercifully.” Of course Hashem keeps everything in the Torah – because the entire purpose of the Torah is simply to help man bring out the divine in him, and make him a little bit more like God, Himself. God is perfect, and we keep the Torah in order to be just like Him.

When a person acts properly, an onlooker can see the divine emanating from him. The entire purpose of Torah is to train us to be people who reflect the divine on our very faces. The only trick that can help you contort your face into something that will fill others with awe is to allow your face to reflect the Godly part of you. When that happens, even animals will cover in awe. Members of all of the nations of the world will be in awe of you. No matter where they come from, they will be struck dumb by your glorious face, and know that it is the name of God that they see represented there.

152 P. 86b

153 Shabbos 104a

154 Avodah Zarah 17b

155 Yerushalmi 1:3, Koheles Rabbah 8:4

156 Shabbos 133b