

Yosemite Nights II

Contemplations on the Holy Name YHVH

By HaRav Ariel Bar Tzadok

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We have just returned from another overnight stay in Yosemite National Park. As always the overwhelming beauty of the place leaves one in awe of the majesty of G-d's creation. It is a most fitting destination for every religious family, and in my opinion, especially on Succot, when we are supposed to be outdoors and contemplating the natural life. However, next time we spend the night I do not think we will camp out in a non-heated canvas tent when the nighttime temperature falls to about 21 degrees Fahrenheit. Even we robust old rabbis get a wee bit chilly every now and then.



Cuddled nice and warm in my sleeping bag (rated to keep one warm to below zero temperatures), without night lights or night life, I had the time to just lie back and think about the secrets of Succah and deeper meanings of the holy Name YHVH. Rather than allow my mind to be distracted with abstract concepts and philosophies, which I consider to be an appalling waste of time, I focused instead on what does YHVH mean in practical application in a normal human life and how I can apply such meanings to my life, making both it and me better for it.

I started off by contemplating that the Name YHVH means “being.” YHVH is in everything, in every place and at every time. YHVH is the Source of all and sustainer of all. Yes, we all know this, I thought. Now what? What can I do to make this more real? So, I began to contemplate the world YHVH created. In my mind I gazed upon the natural order, the way HaShem meant it to be, as seen by all the wonders of nature that places like Yosemite make so glaringly obvious. Then I contemplated the world that we human beings have created, with all our modern technological terrors and our most ridiculous illusions of grandeur. It did not take me long to realize that for the most part collective humanity is so far removed from understanding the natural order and the natural way of life that G-d intended for us that it might be proper to say that collective humanity suffers from a mass form of mental illness.

YHVH means “being.” How many people today know and understand simply “how to be?” How many of us are so caught up in our little roles in life that we have allowed ourselves to confuse our true

identities of self with those of the character roles we play in society. How many of us have come to identify self worth not by who and what we are as individuals, but rather by how much we have and how much we earn. We have transformed into a society of “have-ers” and have lost the meaning of what it is to instead be a “be-er.”

As long as we continue to value our self worth by what we own and what we possess, we will forever be exiled from our true sense of personal being and self worth. And if we are in exile from the “being” of who we are, then we are equally in exile from the “Active Being” (YHVH) that is the Source of all being.

Ultimately it boils down to this: the more we have, the less we be. The less we be the further from YHVH we are. The further from HaShem we are the more isolated we feel. The more isolated we feel, the greater our desire to belong to something. The greater our desire to belong to something grows, the more and more we build a world and society divorced from true self, divorced from the natural way and all the more so divorced from the Source of all, YHVH. I realized that this problem is as psychological as it is spiritual and is equally present in every segment of the religious community as it is in the secular. I have long believed that one’s connection to G-d is not defined by one’s external embrace of religion, but rather by one’s sincere heartfelt attachment. This only proves it.

Sleeping in my sleeping bag, breathing in the fresh cold mountain air, I could see with my inner eye how the norms of modern society, religious and otherwise are destroying the hearts and souls of those who embrace them, however unwittingly. I contemplated some more, visualizing the letters Yod Hey Vav Hey in my mind’s eye, just like I teach in all my meditation courses. Ideas popped into my mind and images seemed to flash into my head. I could see things so clearly; now I thought, if only I could get others to see what it was that I saw in the light of YHVH. As I prayed this morning in my Succah, the thought of this essay came to mind. The same images and insights from two nights ago returned and seemed to say in my head; “just start typing, the words will come out.” So here I am at the keyboard and here are some of those practical and applicable insights I saw in the Name YHVH.

I thought of young men seeking to get married and how today choosing one’s marriage partner is based more on the size of one’s bank account and family money than the state of one’s heart, where one truly stands with HaShem and the morals and integrity that one is truly judged by. So, I thought of this advice.

Guys! When it comes to dating, expose your feeling and hide your money. Never ever let a prospective marriage partner know how much money you make or how much money your family has. When you date you must get to know each other as human beings, and learn if the two of you can really live together as a couple and as partners.

Mutual outlooks on life and religion are fine, but they are not the foundation of a healthy and stable marriage. Marriage is built upon the common care and camaraderie of the two partners involved. It is built upon the bond of knowing that a couple sticks together through thick and thin, or as it is said, for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, in good times and bad, till death do us part. We do not say these words in the Jewish marriage ceremony, but the intent is the most glaring and obvious part of marriage, how is it then that this gets overlooked?

How is it that when dating, requirements include having enough money to purchase a home prior to the marriage, and not just a small modest home to start a family in? No today’s couples are prestige

conscious, the new home has to be expensive and one that can be showed off to others. Never ever do this!

Guys and girls both, insist that when you get married that for the first year or so you live in a modest rental facility one that gives you less to invest in so you can have more to invest in one another. Forget about your living space and focus on your living together as a newborn couple.

The less you waste on space the more you can invest in one another, into getting to know each other's likes and dislikes, parameters and boundaries. In this way, as you grow together the two truly do merge into one, with one outlook and with one direction in life. Two become one and build together. This is not romance, this is reality, and this is natural. It is the natural way to be, and by "being" we begin to become aware again of the Active Being of YHVH in our lives and in everyday living. This is the secret of redemption and the end of exile. And it all begins at home.

This is why the Zohar has long taught that no male can be called a Man until he is married. For it takes two together, male and female united as one to be called a Man. Yes, human females must become Men just as the males must. To become a Man, for a female is the ultimate fulfillment and meaning of being a WoMAN. Remember in YHVH, the two letters Hey and Hey are female. They are united with the male letters Yod and Vav and only together do we have the Active Being, Source of all YHVH, the Creator.

The more we have, the more identified we become with what we have. The more we have the less aware we become of who we are. The more we have the more confused and divorced from reality we become. Simply living a simple life really clears the mind of all the clutter and garbage that it gets filled with when we fill our lives and homes with clutter, garbage and an ever growing number of possessions and things. The more we have the less we be. This is the source of exile, psychological and political. This is why Biblical prophecy always warned that before Mashiah comes the world has to suffer an apocalyptic collapse of society. This is not because of the "wrath of a vengeful G-d." Rather, it is a natural course of nature itself moving to remove all the hindrances that we have built up that blind our eyes and dulls our hearts from seeing the true natural simple path that we human beings were originally destined to live.

We have to clear out the garbage in order to have fresh space. This is simple common sense, which today unfortunately has become all too uncommon. Remember the "Torah of HaShem is simple (temimah), it restores the Nefesh (soul)" (Psalm 19:8). The soul is the source of life. Simplicity restores life; Torah when observed properly is simple and the path of simplicity. No one who lives with the abundance of things can be said to be living the proper life ordained for us by Torah.

And just in case one might ask, why should one care about what Torah says, let me share with you another pearl of revelation from the Zohar (Ekev 73a), "Torah and YHVH are one." You cannot have one without the other. Therefore, YHVH is simplicity; Torah is simplicity; your Nefesh (soul) is simplicity. Life is simplicity and the natural way is simplicity. Have one and you have them all. Fill your life with things and you lose them all.

All these thoughts came running through my mind cuddled in that sleeping bag, breathing the fresh mountain air. I decided then and there to get rid of a lot of stuff that we just do not need to be cluttering up our lives anymore. We will be selling a lot of stuff on e-bay in the near future. If anyone needs anything, you might want to drop me an email, I might have a deal for you. I had other thoughts to, other ideas and other visions, but those will have to wait for another time.