נשמת התורה
THE SOUL OF TORAH

A CHASSIDIC TAKE ON THE PARSHA

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RABBI YSOSCHER KATZ

TA SHMA (COME HEAR) VS. TA CHAZI (COME SEE)

At the beginning of Parshat Va'era, Moshe Rabbeinu is taken to task, and it behooves us to pay close attention as this rebuke contains profound theological lessons that remain as relevant today as they were at the Exodus.

Chazal are the spiritual love of my life. For close to fifty years, the Talmud has been my spiritual home, the defining focus of both my learning and teaching. Even after half a century, I find myself nourished and perpetually intrigued by the genius, creativity, and theological audacity of Chazal. While the examples of their brilliance are too numerous to count, their striking re-reading of Moshe Rabbeinu's biography stands out as a singular and profound insight.

In the Torah, Moshe's defining identity is that of the Noten HaTorah; he is the essential lawgiver and the mediator of Mitzvot to Klal Yisrael. Yet in the Talmud, Chazal move beyond Moshe's role as legislator to reveal a more complex layer of his personality.

The Talmudic Moshe is less a jurist and more a theologian. He appears as a searching, unsettled thinker who wrestles with God and articulates profound questions. At one point, he is sharply rebuked by God and told to desist when asking a theologically inappropriate question.

This aspect of Moshe's character deserves our scrutiny as it is far more than a mere biographical detail. This Talmudic portrait remains vital as the lessons derived from his theological struggles are as significant today as they were at the Exodus. Indeed, according to some commentators, a precise and formative lesson is taught to Moshe in this week's parsha. Va'era opens with two enigmatic verses:

וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲנִי י־ה־ו־ה

God spoke to Moshe and said to him, "I am the Lord."

וָאֵרָא אֶל־אַבְרָהָם אֶל־יִצְחָק וְאֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּאֵל שַׁדָּי וּשְׁמִי י־ה־ו־ה לֹא נוֹדַעְתִּי לָהֶם

I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as El Shaddai, but by My name, the Lord, I was not known to them.

At the end of last week's parsha, Moshe voices deep frustration, accusing God of worsening Israel's suffering. This week's parsha opens with God's response, which attributes Moshe's complaint to a deficiency in faith when compared to the Avot. God claims: They did not know Me in the way you do, and yet they did not complain; you do know Me, and yet you question.

The question is: what was the nature of this difference? What was present in the faith of the Avot that was lacking in Moshe's?

Following the *Kli Yakar* (Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550–1619), the answer lies in the Torah's precise

language. God says: I **appeared** to the Avot, but I was not known to them in the way **I was known** to you. They saw Me; you knew Me. (The Avot's ואר vs. Moshe's נודע).

Here, the Torah gestures toward two fundamentally different models of religious existence.

The first is a faith rooted in knowing and comprehension, an essentially discursive and intellectual posture. This faith of knowing relies on proofs and theological systems, where conviction results from academic inquiry and logical coherence. Because it rests on intelligibility, it is inherently conditional as it is sustained only so long as God's actions can be justified within a rational human framework. When the world becomes unintelligible, when suffering appears gratuitous, this faith falters because its foundational evidence has been compromised.

The second faith is a faith of seeing. By contrast, this faith is born of an immediate, experiential encounter that precedes intellect. This is not a faith derived through argument, but one known with an innate and visceral certainty. It is rooted in an intuitive awareness of a sacred presence so immediate that it possesses the clarity of physical sight. As this encounter is primary, it remains resilient in the face of external contradiction. While knowing requires a defense of God's ways, seeing allows one to live with the unanswered question, held steady by a conviction that is not contingent on explanation.

Moshe's difficulty lies precisely here. His faith is rooted in knowledge and, therefore, is in some measure, conditional. When events seem unfair, doubt emerges, and thus God's response is pointed: the foundational posture of Moshe's faith is inferior to that of his forebears. His predecessors saw and experienced God and thus endured uncertainty without collapsing. Moshe's faith, however, is fragile.

This distinction also illuminates a well-known difference between the Talmud and the Zohar. The Talmud introduces a new text with "ta shema" (come hear), whereas the Zohar invites the reader with "ta chazi" (come see). Legal reasoning unfolds discursively, through hearing and interpretation, while mystical truth is apprehended through immediacy and vision.

The Torah is described as a *Torat Chayim*, a living Torah. The rebuke given to Moshe speaks powerfully to our own moment. A faith based on knowing and coherence is strained in a postmodern world that undermines the assumptions supporting such faith. In an age suspicious of overarching narratives and wary of objective truth, a faith resting on intellectual clarity is perpetually vulnerable. When truth itself is contested, explanation loses its force.

A seeing-based faith, however, depends on encounter rather than argument. Such faith possesses the resilience to withstand ambiguity and remain intact even when logical certainty recedes. In a world where meaning is fragmented, the Zoharic notion that religious experience is fundamentally a lived encounter (*Ta Chazi*) offers a more resilient path. Our religious lives cannot rely solely on understanding; they require the steadiness that comes from a faith that does not collapse when explanation fails.

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