

# The Postmodern Piety of Rav Shagar (session 1)

## The Shade of Faith

### 1. Rav Yehudah Amital, Hamaalot Memaamakim

The meaning of the Yom Kippur War

We are commanded to live with faith, and there is no turning back once the return to Zion has begun. There are temporary moments of hiddenness but no retreat. All the paved roads and unpaved roads lead to the redemption of Israel. One must know from the start that the beginning of redemption comes in a rough and tumble fashion as is hinted to in the verse, "The pains of Yosef." It comes according to the attribute of arousal from below. The beginning of redemption comes with pain and sometimes also by circuitous route... One must know from the start that from every tragedy will go forth salvation... the Land of Israel is acquired through suffering but in this way it is truly acquired...

With Students at the Front

When you listen to the conversations and reactions of the soldiers, who because of their education, the name of heaven is known in their mouths, when they slowly free themselves from external restraints and discover the throbbing faith in their hearts, even when their speech is stammering... you are filled with encouragement and with confidence that you are looking forward to the great day, which we know will come. The day of searching for our identity and returning to ourselves, and from there to the God of Jacob.

### 2. Rav Shagar, Bayom Hahu, "I remember the grace of your youth" p. 105-107

In the morning at around 10:00am, we received the order to go the front and we left. The story of the apples is already well-known: On the way, at Rosh Pina, there stood civilians who appeared to know better than us what had happened. They waved their hands and threw apples at us. I remember the discussion between Shmuel and Shaya whether they should eat the apples- Perhaps they were from the *shemittah* year; this was in fact the Yom Kippur at the end of the *shemittah* year. It was a wondrous thing: these two who were going out to war were debating if it was permitted to eat these *shemittah* apples. Their innocence reflected a certain idealism without which the conversation would have been objectionable. The fact that it was inspired by innocence granted the conversation a certain credibility and even beauty, and also a profound *devekut* expressed in that moment.

The final memory: My last word with Shaya was when got up close to Naphach. Even then I didn't absorb the severity of the situation but nevertheless, I asked Shaya, because he was the gunner that if something happened, he should move the cannon so that it is not directly above the driver's compartment, so that in a case of need, I would be able to get myself free. He promised that he would do this, and these were the last words, the last memory I have of him.

The next thing I remember, I wake up and find myself in the driver's compartment full of smoke; the fire is what woke me up. With the remainder of my strength, I succeeded to free myself with the help of a hammer that I found. I stood several meters beside the tank that was consumed by fire. I saw a giant flame, the size of a house with several stories- and was immediately struck by the association to Akedat Yitzchak. At the time, I didn't know what happened to Shaya and Shmuel. Had they succeeded in freeing themselves or perhaps they had been trapped in the tank- this was my parting picture of those boys.

After I had freed myself from the tank, Syrian tanks started to fire in my direction. I fled to an encampment that was there. I think it was a part of our base that was already abandoned, and I hid there. The truth is that at this point I completely lost all sense of time, and more than this, I didn't even know I was burned. There is, it appears, a defense mechanism that when a person must save themselves, they are completely focused only on what they must do to survive. After some amount of time, I heard the noise of a tank engine that I identified as a Centurion, and I went out from the encampment. It was the tank of Rav Yakov Meidan. He recognized me, brought me up to his tank, to the turret, and took me to a military aid station. Towards the morning, they evacuated me by helicopter along with the other wounded to Maimonides hospital in Haifa.

### 3. Rav Shagar, Ten Years Since the Yom Kippur War, A conversation of those who fought in it

I think that also in relation to the Yom Kippur War - on the one hand, the things, the events, everything that happened brings a lot of faith to everyone who feels such things. But my faith, as I feel it, is not always a clear faith. What this means is that there is shadow in it, there is darkness in it, there are perplexities in it. Not only because of all those previous souls who are no longer with us... that itself, when we think about it, raises questions; But even our entire reality, our entire ideology, I mean the Religious Zionist ideology. I think there is a big question mark on this whole issue, and that people haven't dug deep, haven't observed, haven't grasped the answers to that shadow of faith. What I mean is that from the side of faith - faith does not weaken. On the contrary, it becomes much stronger, precisely because of the power of the shadow.

### 4. Rav Shagar, Bayom Hahu, 107-108

...I feel the need to say one more thing; I already said this at a gathering of soldiers on the holiday of *Sukkot* some years after the war. From a certain perspective, my feeling regarding my survival is different from the feeling of many others that went through the war like me. After the war, people turned to me and said to me that it was incumbent upon me to do a *seudat bodayah*. I have said that I am not able to do this. Not because, God forbid, I reject the good I experienced, rather "How can we sing a song to God?" (Psalms 137:4) I am not capable of doing this. Am I to have a *seudat bodaya*? What about my friends who did not merit to do so?

### 5. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Likutei Moharan, Torah 64

1.

Yet when God wanted to create the world, there was no place in which to create it, since there was nothing but *Ein Sof* (the Infinite One). He therefore contracted the Light to the sides, and through this contraction the Void was made. Then, within this Void, all time and space came into existence—this being the creation of the world {as explained at the beginning of *Etz Chaim*}.

This Void was necessary for the creation of the world, since without the Void there would have been no place in which to create the world, as explained above. Yet, understanding and comprehending this contraction [that resulted in the formation] of the Void will be possible only in the Future, since it is necessary to say about it two contradictory things: existence and nonexistence.

The Void is the result of the contraction; that [God], so to speak, withdrew His Godliness from that place. Thus there is, so to speak, no Godliness there. Were it not so, it would not be vacated. There would then be nothing but *Ein Sof*, with no place whatsoever for the world's creation. However the actual truth is that, even so, there is surely Godliness there as well. For there is surely nothing without His life-force. This is why it is not at all possible to comprehend the concept of the Void until the Future.

2.

Know, that there are two types of heresy. One is the heresy that stems from secular wisdom. Of this it is said, "And know what to answer the heretic" (Avot 2:14), since this heresy has an answer. This is because it stems from secular wisdom, which stems from... the aspect of the Shattering of the Vessels...

Therefore, although whoever succumbs to this heresy should surely flee and escape from that place, nevertheless, having fallen there it is possible for him to find the way to get free. For he will be able to find God in that place, provided he seeks and searches for Him there. Since the [heresies] stem from the Shattering of the Vessels, there must be some holy sparks and some letters that broke and fell there, as is known. Consequently, he can find Godliness and intellect there in order to answer the questions raised by this heresy that stems from secular wisdom...

However, there is another type of heresy... In truth, it is impossible to answer these questions. This is because the questions [that arise] from this heresy stem from the Void in which, so to speak, there is no Godliness. There is therefore absolutely no way that one can find an answer for these questions that come from there, from the aspect of the Void—i.e., [no way to] find God there. For if God were found there as well, it would then not be vacated, and there would have been nothing but *Ein Sof*, as explained above...

This is why a person must surely be extremely wary of this second heresy; to flee and escape from there without delving or looking into their words at all, because, God forbid, he will surely become submerged there. Of this it is written, “None that go to her return...” as explained above.

3.

But know! if there is a great tzaddik who is the aspect of Moshe, he must especially delve into these words of heresy. And even though it is impossible to answer them, as explained above, nevertheless, by his delving into there, he elevates from there a number of souls that fell and became submerged within this heresy. This is because these conundrums and questions [raised] by the heresy that stems from the Void are the aspect of silence, since there is no intellect or letters to answer them, as explained above...

5.

Know, too, that by means of the melody of the tzaddik who is the aspect of Moshe, he elevates from the heresy of the Void the souls that fell into there...

Therefore, by means of the melody of the tzaddik who is the aspect of Moshe, as explained above, all the souls that succumbed to this heresy of the Void ascend and emerge. This is because his melody is in the aspect of the summit of faith—i.e., the most exalted faith of all—since through this melody and faith all heresy is nullified. And all the melodies are encompassed and made null within this melody, which is the highest of all since all melodies are drawn from it, as explained above.

#### **6. Rav Shagar, Bayom Hahu, 107-108**

On that same Sukkot, I also said, and the words are connected to the matters of the day, that the sukkah, which symbolizes for us our trust in God, does not protect us in this world. The sukkah is an expression of reality that is found in shade, in the shade of faith, but, nevertheless still shade. We dwell in the shade of the sukkah and not its light. The *gemara* understands the verse (Isaiah 4:6) “the sukkah shall serve as shade from heat by day and as a shelter for protection against drenching rain.” as describing the days of the messiah and not this world. Therefore, the rabbis instructed regarding the *halacha* of the sukkah in this world that it is enough for the sukkah to be built from two walls and a third that is only a *tephach* (a few inches). The sukkah which is for shelter and refuge is not the sukkah of this world rather the sukkah of the world to come.

A person thinks that the sukkah which is called faith and trust in God, protects them on a physical level. However, a person will see with their eyes that a sukkah does not protect us in the reality of our lives, in the reality appears before us. The divine providence we all believe in exists in the world like shade and not like light. Therefore, from this perspective, the relationship to war is not just relationship to pain, rather it is also a relationship to *hester panim* (the hiding of God’s face), of questions, of shade- the shade of faith.

I admit and confess, I assume there are those whose spiritual level is greater than mine and they do not get stuck in the shadow and in the questions. But faith, in my eyes, cannot be derived from the repression and removal of questions, rather “I delight to sit in his shade” (Shir HaShirim 2:3). As it says in the midrash:

“Like an apple tree among trees of the forest,” (Shir HaShirim 2:3). R’ Huna and R’ Acha in the name of R’ Yossi ben Zimra said: With the apple tree, in which everyone flees from it in the time of heat, why is this? Because it has no shade to sit in. So too the nations of the world flee from dwelling in the shade of Holy One Blessed Be He on the day of the giving of the Torah. Is this true also about Israel? The Torah says: “I delight to sit in his shade.” I delight in it and dwell in it. It is I who delight in it and not the nations.”

Just as the apple tree does not provide shade, so too it is with the Holy One Blessed Be He. Sometimes the world is paradoxical. Faith is found precisely in the questions, those that Rabbi Nachman taught have no answers. (Tehillim 51:19) God is found precisely in the broken heart and not only this, but the feeling of brokenness is itself the divine presence which is higher and greater than all other presence.

7. ***Elchanan Nir, Makor Rishon, 'In the Shade of Faith'***

At the beginning of my time studying at Rav Shagar's yeshiva, one of my previous teachers ran into my father and said very harsh things about the yeshiva and its way of learning. I went to Rav Shagar and asked him why people say things like this about him. He looked at me and then at the transplanted skin on his hands and arms that he had fought in war. He thought for a moment and said to me, "I was wounded in battle of Naphach at the beginning of the Yom Kippur War and I was in the hospital for many months. I was wrapped in bandages and wounded. There, I understood that the Torah is wrapped in bandages, covered in infinite wrappings, and that it, like me, needed to get out of her bandages, from its constraints. Since then I go about with this awareness in all that I learn and teach: to take the Torah out of its bandages and expose it to the sunlight. This was his life project: not only to prevent the hardening of religiosity but to renew the Torah; to reach 'the unique truth of Torah for our generation.'