

Parashat Yitro: A Wider Voice

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Shemot 19:19	
וַיְהִי קוֹל הַשֹּׁפָר הוֹלֵךְ וְחֹזֵק מֵאֵד מֹשֶׁה יִדְבֹּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֵנוּ בְּקוֹל:	The blare of the horn grew louder and louder. As Moses spoke, God answered him in thunder.

1. As Moses Spoke, God Answered Him...

Rashbam Shemot 19:19	
מֹשֶׁה יִדְבֹּר - אֶל הַקֶּב"ה וְאִין קוֹלוֹ נִשְׁמָע לְשׁוֹם אָדָם אֲלֵא לַהֲקִיב"ה. אֲבָל הַקֶּב"ה יַעֲנֵנוּ לְמֹשֶׁה בְּקוֹל גָּדוֹל בְּשִׁבִּיל קוֹל הַשּׁוֹפָר שֶׁהוֹלֵךְ וְחֹזֵק מֵאֵד וְצָרִיךְ שֶׁיְהִי קוֹלוֹ שֶׁל הַקֶּב"ה נִצָּח קוֹל הַשּׁוֹפָר לְהִשְׁמִיעַ לְמֹשֶׁה.	משה ידבר, to God, but his voice was not audible to any human being, only God Himself could hear him. However, when it came to God's reply, יעננו בקול, God responded in a loud voice audible to all. This was necessary as otherwise the sound of the shofar, which was ongoing and getting stronger all the time would have drowned out God's voice and Moses could not have heard God's responses.

Ramban Shemot 19:19	
מֹשֶׁה יִדְבֹּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֵנוּ בְּקוֹל אֲמָרוֹ בְּמַכִּילָתָא (כאן) שָׁזָה עַל שְׁעַת מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה, שֶׁהִיא מֹשֶׁה מְשַׁמְעֵה הַדְּבָרוֹת לְיִשְׂרָאֵל, כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתֵב רַשִּׁי" (רש"י) עַל שְׁמוֹת י"ט:ט"ו). וְעַל דֶּרֶךְ הַפֶּשֶׁט לֹא יִדְבֹּר בָּזָה עֲדִין, אֲבָל יֵרֵד הַשֵּׁם הַנִּכְבָּד אֶל הָהָר בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי, וְהוֹצִיא מֹשֶׁה אֶת הָעָם מִן הַמַּחֲנֶה לְקִרְאָת הַכְּבוֹד הַנִּרְאָה לָהֶם, וַיִּתְּצוּהוּ הֵם בְּתַחֲתִית הָהָר, וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה לְמַעְלָה קְרוֹב לְרֹאשׁ הָהָר שֶׁשֵּׁם הַכְּבוֹד מִחֲצָה לְעֶצְמוֹ וּמִדְּבַר עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהוֹרֹתָם מִה יַעֲשׂוּ, וְיִשְׂרָאֵל שׁוֹמְעִים קוֹל הָאֱלֹהִים שֶׁעוֹנָה אוֹתוֹ וַיִּצְנֹנוּ, וְהֵם לֹא יָבִינוּ מִה יֹאמַר לוֹ, וַיִּצְוֶה אוֹתוֹ בְּצִוּאוֹת הָאֲמִרוֹת אַח"כ בְּפִרְשֵׁה רֵד הָעֵד בְּעַם וְגו', לָךְ רֵד וְעֲלִית אֹתָהּ וְאַהֲרֹן עִמָּךְ וְגו', וְהִיא זֶה קֵדָם מִתֵּן תּוֹרָה וְגַם בְּשְׁעַת הַדְּבָרוֹת, כִּי מֹשֶׁה לֹא עָלָה אֶל רֹאשׁ הָהָר אֶל הָעֶרְפֶּל אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֱלֹהִים רַק לְאַחֵר מִתֵּן	מֹשֶׁה יִדְבֹּר וְהָאֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֵנוּ בְּקוֹל In the Mekhilta, the Rabbis have said that this verse refers to the time of the Giving of the Torah, when Moses was proclaiming the commandments to Israel, as Rashi has written. By way of the plain meaning of Scripture, the verse here does not yet speak of this. It is rather [to be explained as follows]: <i>The Glorious Name</i> came down upon the mountain on the third day, and Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet the Glory which appeared to them, and they stood at the nether part of the mount. Moses went up near the head of the mountain, where the Glory was, in a place designated for himself, and he spoke with Israel, teaching them what to do. The Israelites heard the Voice of God answering Moses and commanding him, but they did not understand what He said to him. Thus, He commanded Moses the precepts mentioned further on in this section: <i>Go down, charge the people; Go, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee</i> , etc. This happened before the Giving of the Torah and also during the time when the Ten Commandments were given, for Moses did not go up to

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

<p>תורה, וכן אמר (דברים ה ה) "אנכי עמד בין ה' וביניכם בעת ההיא להגיד לכם את דבר ה' כי יראתם מפני האש ולא עליכם בחר לאמר", כאשר עליתי אני. ויש מפרשים כי ישראל יראים מאד מקול השופר שהולך וחזק מאד (שמות י"ט:ט), ומשה היה אומר תחלה כונו דעתכם כי עתה תשמעו קול בענין כה, ומיד האלהים יענו באותו קול:</p>	<p>the top of the mount <i>unto the thick darkness where God was until after the Giving of the Torah.</i> And so he said, "I stood between the Eternal and you at that time, to declare unto you the word of the Eternal; for you were afraid because of the fire, and went not up into the mount, saying [that you will not ascend] as I did go up." Some scholars explain that the Israelites were very much afraid of the voice of the horn, which waxed louder and louder, and Moses would say to them at first, "Direct your thoughts, for now you will hear the Voice in such a manner," and immediately God answered him by a voice.</p>
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Zohar, Vayikra 7a (12:89-90)	
<p>כתיב (שמות י"ט:ט"ט) משה ידבר והאלהים יענו בקול, באתר דא אתקללו מלין עלאין, הא אוקמוה והאלהים יענו בקול, בקולו של משה, בההוא קול דאחיד ביה משה. הכא אית לאסתכלא דהא אפכא הוה, דכתיב (שמות כ"א) וידבר אלהים, והכא כתיב משה ידבר.</p>	<p>It is also written in the same passage: "Moses spake and God answered him by a voice" (<i>Ibid.</i> 19). This voice, as has been elsewhere explained, is the voice of Moses, the Voice to which Moses attached himself. It may be asked, does it not say further on that "God spoke" (<i>Ibid.</i> xx, 1), and not Moses?</p>
<p>אלא אית דאמרי, בגין דכתיב, (שמות כ"ט"ז) ויאמרו אל משה דבר אתה עמנו ונשמעה ואל ידבר עמנו אלהים. ועל דא משה ידבר, והאלהים יענו. בגין דלא אשתכח מלה באורייתא מפומא דמשה (רס"ו) בלחודי, ודא הוא דאוקמוה, קללות שבמשנה תורה משה מפי עצמו אמר. מעצמו לא תנין, אלא מפי עצמו, הללו מפי הגבורה. והללו מפי עצמו, מפי ההוא קול דאחיד ביה, דאקרי הכי. ושפיר מלה.</p>	<p>Some explain that the reason was because the people said to Moses: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us" (<i>Ibid.</i> 19). But, in fact, there is no word in the Torah which Moses spoke on his own authority. Hence it says, "Moses spoke" with his own voice, "and God answered him with that mighty Voice", confirming what he said.'</p>

2. A Wider Voice

Philo of Alexandria, <i>On Rewards and Punishment</i> , I:1:2	
<p>The legislative part has two divisions, one in which the subject matter is more general, the other consisting of the ordinances of specific laws. On the one hand there are the ten heads or summaries which we are told were not delivered through a spokesman but were shaped high above in the air into the form of articulate speech: on the other the specific ordinances of the oracles given through the lips of a prophet.</p>	
Mary Oliver, "The World I Live In," <i>Devotions</i>	
<p>I have refused to live locked in the orderly house of reasons and proofs. The world I live in and believe in is wider than that. And anyway, what's wrong with Maybe?</p>	<p>You wouldn't believe what once or twice I have seen. I'll just tell you this: only if there are angels in your head will you ever, possibly, see one.</p>
Big Question: Why does it matter how we define what it means for God to "speak"?	