

Rav Mordechai Yosef of Izbecha

"Anochi Hashem E-loheicha—I am Hashem your God" (Shemot, 20:2)

The word *Ani* is not used for "I" (but rather, *Anochi*). Had it been written "*Ani*," the meaning would have been that the Holy One, blessed be He, had revealed His light to Israel in all its completeness, and then they could not have reached deeply into His words, for He would have already revealed everything. However the additional letter *Caf* in "*Anochi*," teaches that it is not in a state of completeness, yet rather an imagined image of the light that the Holy One, blessed be He, would reveal in the future.³⁶ The more a man apprehends in the depths of the Torah, the more he will then understand that until now he was in darkness. This is hinted at in the night and the day. "Day" means that the blessed God opens the gates of wisdom for man, and "night" means that man should not imagine that he has apprehended all in completeness, for all he has attained is like night in comparison to the day that follows. So it goes on forever, and it follows that all is night in the face of the light that the Holy One, blessed be He, will open in the future.

This is why the verse that follows immediately is, "do not make any graven [carved] image," on which it is said in the Holy Zohar (*Shemot*, 87b), "since it was first written, 'carve for yourself [two tablets],' therefore it says, 'do not make any carved image,' meaning do not make another torah." The word *pesel*, "carved image," means something with definite form and measurement, in a state of completeness with nothing lacking, and this only exists in the Torah of Moshe Rabeynu. However for the mortal intellect to fashion something in complete perfection like this is impossible.

On this it is written (Ruth Rabba, 3:2), "Caesar said to Rabi Yehoshua ben Hanina, 'I too can make a Torah like Moshe,' and he decreed that no fire be kindled for three days. During this time he saw smoke rising from a house, and they explained to Caesar that a certain government minister was sick and it was necessary to permit him fire." For indeed, according to our Holy Torah the law is that saving a life supersedes the laws of Shabbat, yet the difference (with us and the example of Caesar) is that one who violates Shabbat to save a life is not going against the Holy Torah, for thus was it also commanded that saving a life takes precedence over the laws of Shabbat. So, too, in all places where it is, "a time to do for God" (*Tehillim*, 119:126) in that very place is also hinted, for they have made void your law³⁶. Therefore the Torah includes all the possible combinations of events that may occur, and its light surrounds all the possibilities and all the experiences that may evolve, and this is not in the power of any man to do this. This is the explanation of the Holy Zohar on "do not make any carved form," meaning positive commandments, and "any image," the prohibitive commandments, for nothing is revealed to man until it reaches its completion.

Parshat Yitro

Mei haShiloach and Rav Kook – The Partiality of Human Truth
Melton Geshet at Shearith Israel, February 6, 2012
JSI at Akiba Academy, February 7, 2012

reached → searched

imagined image → a hint or a shadow

they explained to Caesar → Caesar explained to Him

for they have made void your law → that we should void your law

until it reaches completion → in its absolute fullness

Introduction of the Ramban (Nachmanides) to his Commentary on the Torah (translated by Rabbi Hayim David Chavel)

The reason for the Torah being written in this form [namely, the third person] is that it preceded the creation of the world, and, needless to say, it preceded the birth of Moses our teacher. It has been transmitted to us by tradition that it [the Torah] was written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire. Thus Moses was like a scribe who copies from an ancient book, and therefore he wrote anonymously...

We have yet another mystic tradition⁴⁹ that the whole Torah is comprised of Names of the Holy One, blessed be He, and that the letters of the words separate themselves into Divine Names when divided in a different manner, as you may imagine by way of example that the verse of Bereshith divides itself into these other words: **berosh yithbare Elokim**. This principle applies likewise to the entire Torah ... It would appear that the Torah "written with letters of black fire upon a background of white fire" was in this form we have mentioned, namely, that the writing was contiguous, without break of words, which made it possible for it to be read by way of Divine Names and also by way of our normal reading which makes explicit the Torah and the commandment. It was given to Moses our teacher using the division of words which expresses the commandment, and orally it was transmitted to him in the rendition which consists of the Divine Names.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haCohen Kook, "The Pangs of Cleansing", Orot, page 128 (The Classics of Western Spirituality – Abraham Isaac Kook, Ben Zion Bokser, page 267)

Religion is corrupted by the decline of the higher Torah, through which one gains the recognition of the greatness of God, the higher perfection that is infinite and beyond assessment. Thus our religion does not yield the noble fruit it ought to yield, it does not raise the souls from their lowly state and the numbers of those who dishonor it and desecrate it increase. However, the Jewish religion is rooted in the Infinite, which transcends every particular content of religion, and for this reason the Jewish religion may truly be considered as the ideal religion, the religion of the future, the "I shall be what I shall be" (Exodus 2:14), which is immeasurably higher than the content of religion in the present. The ideal essence descends many levels to become the Jewish religion as a corporate religious establishment rather than the ideal essence of religion.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haCohen Kook, "Concerning the Conflict of Opinions and Beliefs", Orot, page 130 (The Classics of Western Spirituality – Abraham Isaac Kook, Ben Zion Bokser, page 272)

Every general spiritual intellectual expression carries with it certainty to the degree of its comprehensiveness, and together with its certainty, just as there is no room for doubt, so is there no room for any relativistic pluralism. Comprehensiveness, certainty, and singularity are all tied up one with the other...

In the realm of the spirit, idolatry was tolerant, while the belief in the unity of God is zealous, being comprehensive and not fragmentary, certain and not beset by doubt, it is singular and not relativistically pluralistic.

Comprehensive expressions are not tolerant according to the superficial conception of tolerance, however within their very zealousness is to be found the essential basis of tolerance. The wrong kind of tolerance, which weakens life, is a result of spiritual intellectual expressions that are not watered by the dew of comprehensiveness, and the cancerous type of zealousness is a result of a haughty presumptuousness that causes one to regard fragmentary intellectual spiritual expressions as though they stood at the heights of exalted comprehensiveness. But because they are only fragmented expressions they cannot provide life to the spectrum of expressions of the spirit that are outside of their own domain, and in their disdain for alternative understandings that they cannot incorporate within themselves they only shrink the unfolding of life and diminish the manifestations of the spirit and the intellect.

The higher comprehensiveness however, through its breadth and certainty, offers an ideal system in stressing the principle of singularity which brings forth a noble zealousness that engenders grandeur of spirit and removes every weakness of small minded fragmentation, all doubt and all relativistic pluralism. “The Lord alone will lead them, and there is no other god with Him” (Deuteronomy 32:12). And because it is comprehensive – it includes all within it – it cannot by nature exclude anything from its domain; it finds a place for everything. In doing so it only increases our perception of the light in all lifestyles and in all expressions of the spirit. The basic thrust of its kind of tolerance is to find a place for every form of illumination, of life, and of spiritual expression.

It knows that there is a spark of light in everything and that the divine spark of light shines in all the various belief systems, as so many different pedagogics for the culture of humanity, to improve the spiritual and material existence, the present and the future of the individual and of society.

But they exist on different levels. Just as there is only one force of germination, and it is manifest in the cedars of Lebanon as well as in the moss on the wall, except that in the first instance it appears in a rich and more fully developed form and in the second instance in a poor and limited form, so also does the spark of divine light appear in the more advanced belief systems in a form that is rich and exalted, while in the less advanced belief systems in a form that is muddled, poor and lowly ...

Therefore, instead of rejecting every pattern of ideas from which the tiny elements of good have begun to sparkle ... - a task which is bound to fail, it is for us to enhance the original light. It is for us to disclose the breadth and the depth, the comprehensiveness and the eternity that is immanent in the light of the faith of Israel. It is for us to clarify how every spark of the good that is manifest in the world stems from its source and is linked with in a natural bond. Then will all the sparks newly made manifest and light and life to the soul of the people mighty in its spiritual vitality, in its divine potency... This type of tolerance is bound to spread so that the human spirit will be able to find the divine spark hidden in everything, and to automatically discard every dross...

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haCohen Kook, Olat Ra'ava, volume one, page 330

Said Rebbi Elazar in the name of Rebbe Haninah: Torah scholars increase peace in the world, as the verse says – “All your sons shall be learned of God, and of abundant peace are your sons” - don't read ‘sons’ but rather ‘builders’.

There are those who mistakenly think that world peace will be built through agreement in positions and opinions. Therefore, when they see Torah scholars investigating and delving into the wisdom of the Torah, and through their investigation more and more possibilities are brought up, they think that this is a source of controversy and the opposite of peace. But such is not the case, for it is impossible for true peace to come to the world except through the abundance of peace. The abundance of peace means that all sides and opinions will become evident, and it will become clear how there is room for all of them, each according to its own standing, place, and substance. On the contrary, even matters that appear superfluous or contradictory will become evident when the truth of wisdom in all its facets is revealed. For only through an assemblage of all the parts and all the particulars, all the dissimilar ideas and all the diverse disciplines – only through them will the light of truth and justice shine, as well as knowledge of God, love and awe of Him, and the true light of Torah. That is what is meant by the statement that Torah scholars increase peace, for in that they expand and explain and give birth to new expressions of wisdom from varied perspectives with an abundance of differences, in this they increase peace, as the verse says “All your sons shall be learned of God”, for all will recognize that even the approaches and understandings that appear to be in opposition one to the other, all of them are part of God’s learning, and through each one of them will be revealed a perspective on knowledge of God and the light of His truth ... A building is constructed out of different parts, and the truth of the light of the world will be constructed out of the different sides and different opinions. For they are all words of the living God, different modes of service, and guidance, and education, each one taking its place and station. And we must not abandon any talent or ability, but rather we must expand it and find its proper place. When a contradiction appears between ideas, this is how wisdom will be built. One must reflect upon how to find the internal logic of the ideas, which will bring about a reconciliation and an end to the contradiction. The abundance of ideas that results from the differences between people and the different educations they received, that is what enriches wisdom and expands it. Ultimately everything will be established properly and it will be recognized that the complete structure cannot be built except through the confluence of all the influences that appeared to be in conflict. ... Therefore this is the blessing of true peace that comes forth out of strength. God will bless his people with peace, and the blessing of peace that comes with strength is the peace of the unification of all the opposites. But first the opposites must be found, in order that there be someone to labor and something to unite, and then the blessing will become apparent, through the truth of “These and those are the words of the living God”. That is why peace is one of the names of the Holy One, blessed be He, for He is the master of all of the different truths, and He contains them all and combines them all together. Let His great name be blessed throughout the world.