

Double-Sided Fear

The Sun, the Moon, the Planets, the Stars - how do we look at them? I don't mean with naked eye, binoculars, telescope. I mean, how do we see them?

In Va'etchanan, Moshe Rabeinu warns the people to be exceedingly careful to preserve their souls. He says this when he tells the new generation about the Sinai Experience - Matan Torah. He specifically reminds them, that we heard G-d speaking to us, but we did not see any image of Him. Seeing Him is not possible. And this is something that our human nature has difficulty with.

Moshe warns us about looking heavenward and seeing the heavenly bodies, and be so awed that people might bow to them and worship them...

Rambam, in the first chapter of his Hilchot Avoda Zara - the Laws of Idolatry, describes the great mistake that began in the generation of Enosh, grandson of Adam and Chava. People reasoned that the Sun is such a magnificent creation, that it is like a high-ranking minister of G-d... and worthy of worship - as a way of giving honor to the One G-d.

Big mistake. And it snowballed into all types of pagan worship - with G-d eased out of the picture.

Too much detail, and yet, there is plenty more. Let's suffice it to say that G-d's creations - all of them - or better put - none of them, is an object of worship. Not lofty mountains, majestic trees, magnificent animals... not angels. We worship only G-d.

But, as mentioned earlier, people have trouble relating to the invisible, intangible Divine Being. This difficulty led to the Golden Calf and countless other veerings away from HaShem.

There is another fear when it comes to the heavenly bodies, as well as all other elements of nature. And that fear is in the opposite direction - seeing nature and science, astronomy, biology, and so on, as something not connected to G-d. G-d is found in the religious and spiritual realms - not nature.

Scientists - and many other people - seem to have a difficulty in using belief in G-d and His Creation to help explain scientific observations. Again, more detail is necessary, but not for now.

We might say that once upon a time a long time ago, there was a powerful tendency of people to worship different things - even if belief and worship of the One G-d was maintained. Sometimes one way, sometimes the other - both AVODA ZARA.

Today, it is more common for the opposite to happen. To separate G-d and religion for Nature and Science.

Both are problematic.

Moshe Rabeinu expressed the fear in one direction, and Rabbi Yaakov in Pirkei Avot expressed the opposite fear, namely that if one's admiration of a beautiful tree is a HAFSAKA, and interruption in one's Torah life, then such a person is putting his life in jeopardy.

So how do we handle all of this? Yishayahu HaNavi gives us the simple path to follow:

Last pasuk in the haftara for Shabbat Nachamu, 40:26 - Lift up your eyes on high and see, who created these...

By all means, study nature, study science, but don't be afraid to Give G-d credit for the wonderful world He created for us.