"FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE"

(Agadic Portion)

The relation of Faith (emunah) and Knowledge (daat) in Judaism is quite a complicated study. But in relation to our Halakhic discourse, let us analyze these two elements and see how they correspond to two aspects of the Creator Himself.

Rabbi Shneour Zalmen, the author of the Tanya, tells us that there are two aspects of God to which faith and knowledge correspond. One of these is called Sovev-kol-Almin, God as He is distant and remote, as He causes the world to whirl through space and about each other. This is the aspect of God which is transcendent. The other aspect is that of Memalei-kol-Almin, God who "fills the world," who is close to man, involved in his destiny and history, who sustains Nature; it is the immanent aspect of God. Now, teaches Rabbi Shneour Zalmen, our orientation and relation to God in this aspect of transcendence (Sovev-kol-Almin) is faith, or emunah; our relationship to God in His immanence (Memalei-kol-Almin) is knowledge, or daat. There is a compelling logic to this analysis. God in His transcendence, in His remoteness, in His total otherness, cannot be "known" in any human sense. One can only have faith in God who is beyond all human conception. When, then, can we be said to "know" God? — in His aspect of immanence as He "fills the world," Memalei-kol-Almin. God as He is involved in nature and in history, as He is accessible to human and thought and investigation and feeling, can be "known."

Rosh Hashanah, according to Rabbi Shneour Zalmen and his grandson-in-law, Rabbi Menahem Mendel, embodies the principle of Sovev-kol-Almin; God is recognized as a King, who sits in judgment upon the world. The Deity is almost completely satim: hidden, obscure, transcendent. It is a day in which the attribute of din, justice, reigns supreme. That is why Rosh Hashanah is known as yom ha-din, the day of justice or judgment.
Yom Kippur, however is that day in which is revealed primarily God in His immanence, God as Memalei-kol-Almin. It is the time that the Deity partakes more of galya than satim. On this day one can almost feel the presence of God. It is therefore a day of rahamin rather than din; love and mercy rather than justice and judgment. To be accurate, therefore, Yom Kippur should not be called yom ha-din but yom ha-rahamim. (As a matter of fact, some of the more precise copies of the Siddur, in the Mi she‘berakh, do not refer to Yom Kippur as yom ha-din but yom ha-rahamim.)

Therefore, because Rosh Hashanah represents the aspect of transcendence and justice, it is the day when it is most appropriate to speak of emunah or faith. The relation between justice or fear and reverence and faith can be amply illustrated. For instance: va-yiru ha-am et ha-Shem... va-yaaminu ba-Shem. Or, referred to Rosh Hashanah itself, the famous hymn in which we read ha-obez be‘ad midat mishpat... ve‘khol ma‘aminim... tusgav le‘vadeka ve‘timlokh... — note the relation between mishpat, emunah, and the idea of God's sole transcendence and kingship. By the same token, Yom Kippur as a day of immanence and mercy and love, emphasizes daat, knowledge. That love and knowledge go hand in hand is also obvious from many passages. For instance, the idea of "carnal knowledge," as in va-yeda Adam et Havah. Or, the famous statement by Mamonides relating the knowledge of God to the love of God: le‘fi ha-deiah ha-ahavah.

There are yet two other key words that can be used to distinguish between these two complexes of concepts. The idea of immanence and justice, Sovve-kol-Almin and din, may be referred to as: malkhut. Whereas immanence and love, Memalei-kol-Almin and rahamin, may be referred to as: kavod.

Thus, Rosh Hashanah is primarily the day of Malkhut. It is a day when we celebrate God's transcendence royalty, and pray melokh al kol ha-olam ku-lo. If there is any mention of kavod, it is only secondary. Thus, the prayer which
above all emphasizes God's immanence, his turning from otherness to closeness, from transcendence to nearness, from malkhut to kavod, is the famous barukh shem kevod malkhuto le'olam va'ed -- and that is recited in a whisper on Rosh Hashanah as well as all year long! But on Yom Kippur, we no longer recite the prayer of melokh al kol ha-olam ku-lo; yet, this is the one day of the year when we recite aloud and in full voice the barukh shem kevod malkhuto le'olam va'ed. It is a day when God is evident everywhere, we feel with every fibre of our being that He is Memalei-kol-Almin. No wonder that we forbid ne'ilat ha-sandal: how can one wear shoes, and with his boots trample upon the earth which is filled with the kavod of God!

We even find the difference expressed as well in the nature of the sounding of the Shofar in these two days. On Rosh Hashanah the tekiah is expressive of man's foredoomed attempt to reach God who is beyond all reaching. The tekiah represents man's frustrating efforts to reach the setima di-khol setimin, no wonder that Hassidim used to weep during the sounding of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah! They knew in advance that the attempt to discover the secret of God's transcendence, of the Sovev-kol-Almin, is doomed to failure. On Yom Kippur at Ne'ilah, however, the Shofar has a completely different meaning. It signifies the conclusion of a day in which there took place hitgalut, the revelation of God's love and closeness to man. No wonder that at the sounding of the Shofar at the end of Yom Kippur we pronounce le'shanah ha-baah bi-yerushalayim!

The function of teshuvah according to Rabbi Hayyim Volozhiner, is to increase the relatedness of God, to bring God closer to us, to draw Him out of His transcendence and into greater immanence. In other words, we might say that the function of teshuvah is to lead man, correspondingly, from emunah to daat, from faith to knowledge. This is the meaning of the Prophet's shuvu elai v'ashuvah alekhem -- if we will turn to God, if we will have more than faith, but also knowledge, than God will turn to us, out of transcendence to immanence.
So too, the famous Rabbi of Ger interprets the verse in Deutoronomy: ve'yadato ha-yom ve'hashevota el levavekha ba-shamayim mi-maal v'al ha-aretz mi-taḥat ein ode. This means, he says, not that what we must know is that there is only one God, but that this knowledge — ein ode — is the only knowledge that is really knowledge. There is no other daat or knowledge! The knowledge that God is ba-shamayim mi-maal, i.e. that he is Sovev-kol-Almin, and that God is v'al ha-aretz mi-taḥah, i.e. that he is Memalei-kol-Almin, is the only knowledge worthy of man’s contemplation: ein ode, there is none other.

It is told of Rabbi Lebele Eger, the grandson of Rabbi Akivah Eger who became a Hasid, that in the days when he was follower of/Rabbi/Kotzk, he said, "the only difference between Kotzk and other Jews, is that only Jews believe in God — whereas we know that there is a God..." Herein lies the superiority of daat over emunah.

It is Hoshea, the Prophet of teshuvah, who begins his famous Haftorah which we read today, with the invitation to teshuvah in the famous words shuvah Yisrael ad ha-Shem Elokekha. And his conclusion is: mi-hakham ve'yaven eleh, navon ve'yeda'em -- repentence or teshuvah must leave man from the grace and noble state of emunah to the yet greater, more splendid, and more luminous state of daat.