

Only One God

'God and God alone is to be worshipped'

A sight of God? A rock of stumbling for monotheists who maintain that God can never be seen.

Both the Tenach and the New Testament are emphatic and unequivocal.
God in the absolute has never and cannot be seen by sinful man.

'My face shall not be seen' (Ex.33.23b)

'And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.' (Ex.33.20)

'No man hath seen God at any time' (Jn. 1.18a, 1 Jn. 4.12a)

'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God' (1 Tim.1.17a)

'The blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see' (1 Tim.6.15-16)

However both halves of the Bible are also equally emphatic and unequivocal that God *has been* seen.
What then is the solution to this paradox?

First we must recognise that there are shades of expression, grades of experience.
For example, Israel of all nations has been uniquely blessed and glorified with a direct experience as a newborn nation with [God's own immediate presence](#).

This is described in a singular and dramatic way,

'The LORD talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire' (Deut. 5.4).

However it is made abundantly clear to the people that at this glorious experience, they did not actually see any form or 'similitude':

'And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice.' (Deut. 4.12)

כִּי לֹא רָאִיתֶם, כָּל-תְּמוּנָה

The danger of seeing any similitude is very evident in the manifold warnings and predictions that after Moses and especially after Joshua's death, idolatry would come in like a flood.

'For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God' Exodus 34.14
'Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.' Deut. 34.16

This being the prime theme of Moses' inspired song,

'But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not,

to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not.
Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee.'

'And he said, I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith.

They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities:

and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.'

Deut.32.15-8,20-21

Are all such expressions of sighting then a kind of poetic licence, a sort of literary hyperbole, inaccurate but expressive indications of an experience of a Divine manifestation, in this case seeing fire and hearing a voice?

Why would the righteously Jealous One employ such dangerous and loaded expressions then?

Why didn't the Holy One write in the cooler and more sanguine tones of the latter rabbinic authors?

As we [examined before](#), many of the prophets also had profound experiences of seeing a human figure representing HaShem directly.

Many of these were as visions or dreams.

Moses' experience of God was qualitatively different.

'And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face' Deut. 34.10

'And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.' Exod. 33.11

In describing Moses' relationship with His Master, there is plainly a correspondence with Abraham's walk with God.

Moreover, that which was forbidden to Israel is apparently allowed to Moses,

'With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?'

The expression for similitude is the same as Deut.4.12,

תִּמְנַת יְהוָה

Yet even Moses, though he was wonderfully enabled to speak with God face to face, we are explicitly informed he did not actually ever *see* God face to face.

'And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.' (Ex.33.20)

What then is this similitude? What then were the forms both Moses and the patriarchs saw with their own eyes and bowed to and adored *without* violating the Law?

A human form *is* worshipped as the chosen manifestation of the only true God

'And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

And said, My Lord (**אֲדֹנָי**), if now I have found favour in **thy** sight, pass not away, I pray **thee**, from **thy** servant.'

After Abraham prostrates himself (**וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ**), only One of the three is pleaded with as Head and Chief. Only one of these three human forms is addressed with the plural dignified form of Lord, usually reserved for Deity.

Maimonides too acknowledges the profoundly mysterious nature of this, but then cites a former rabbi to claim the encounter took place within the context of a prophetic vision ([M.N. 2.42](#)),

proposing this on the precarious basis of Num.12.6 as a general principle for prophets, though *not* for other parties like Hagar and Manoah and his wife.

Given Sarah and the servants' full participation and the real nature of the shared feast, the proposal is implausible.

All three are addressed when Abraham exhorts them to wash and refresh.

'Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree'

If all three were angels what is the necessity for the sharp distinction in addressing but One as Lord (and that using the majestic plural)?

Then when HaShem addresses Abraham, it is by the mouth of the same Messenger, Whom Abraham had described uniquely as 'Lord'.

The Messenger's words reveal His own immediate creative power. There is no indication that a delegate or representative is speaking at all.

How dangerously misleading if the speaker was just a creature, merely a mouthpiece, and how dangerously misleading are the words of the inspired scribe who describes these transactions,

וַיֹּאמֶר, שׁוּב אָשׁוּב אֵלַיךְ
v.10

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-אַבְרָהָם
v.13

The Speaker unequivocally and directly asserts Himself to be the Agent of HaShem's 'impossible' work, a miraculous conception from a dead womb, in effect an act of creation, 'Is any thing too hard for the LORD. At the set time *I will return* unto thee' v.14

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה v.20

The two men, we see subsequently to be mere angels, depart, and Abraham is left alone with one Individual, with whom he has talked, eaten and drunk.

The text is explicit, Abraham **still stands** before the remaining individual, HaShem, to Whom he *draws near* in His physical manifestation,

and with Whom alone He now intercedes addressing Him again as his majestic Lord.

[Targum Onkelos](#) writes that Abraham 'ministered in prayer before the Lord', and [Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel](#) (TJ) adds 'now supplicated mercy for Lot'.

וַיִּפְנוּ מִשָּׁם הָאֲנָשִׁים, וַיֵּלְכוּ סְדֻמָּה; וְאַבְרָהָם עוֹדֵנוּ עֹמֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
וַיִּגַּשׁ אַבְרָהָם הוֹאֵלְתִי לְדַבֵּר אֶל-אֲדֹנָי

The ensuing wrestling dialogue leaves us with the strong indication that only two parties are involved.

It was sheer blasphemy for a mere creature to speak as this Spokesman speaks, representing Himself as holding Divine prerogatives,

and hideous idolatry for Abraham so to intercede with Him as is proper only with God.

[Why, O why didn't they have the opportunity to avail themselves of a better wisdom before committing such offences?](#)

See Abraham's entreaties - he attributes the absolute authority of forgiveness and of judgement to His interlocutor:

I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes...
Wilt *thou* also destroy the righteous with the wicked?
Wilt *thou* also destroy and not spare...?
Far from *thee* to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked?
That be far from *thee*...
Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? ([TJ](#) 'before the Lord, the Lord of all the world')
Oh let not the Lord be angry...(twice)

In reply, the Divine Spokesman in human form makes claims and grants mercy, which any creature daring to do usurps the very Throne of God:

If I find there forty and five, *I will* not destroy it.
I will not do it for forty's sake.
I will not do it, if I find thirty there.
I will not destroy it for twenty's sake.
I will not destroy it for ten's sake.

The finding of the righteous and the descent into Sodom *were* mediated by His servants, the sought mercy and the pardon are granted immediately.

Finally HaShem's human manifestation '*leaves off communing*' with Abraham and '*goes his way*'.
Abraham did not rouse from a prophetic trance, as [Rambam suggests](#), but soberly 'returned unto his place'.
All three phrases directly evidence HaShem's real and local presence.

Just as with Moses, Abraham spoke with God face to face, yet *not* face to face, a human similitude was seen, a direct human manifestation, veiling the glory and majesty of the Divine Majesty.

Recognising the true Image of the Invisible God, they both properly worshipped and prayed and honoured the One True God, in the Presence of His Word.

To suggest otherwise necessarily again invokes the danger of [worshipping angels](#).

'With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold:

wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?'

Num. 12.8

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