

## R. Yehuda Halevi on the Yamim Noraim (High Holy Days)

This year my thinking about the yamim noraim has focused on an idea in R. Yehuda Halevi's Kuzari (I'll call him Rihal for short) about what he calls hainyan haeloki - the divine principle. For Rihal, hainyan haeloki is what Torah's all about.

Now what is hainyan haeloki, the divine principle? I'd like to get at that question in a sort of a long way around.

My older son, Amos, is very into dungeons and dragons right now. That's a game where people make up characters and follow them through various adventures. His favorite character is a monk. Now, monks in this game are basically a religious order of the martial arts. They extensively train their bodies and minds until they are able to access a body of energy, which, drawing from eastern spirituality, is called Chi. This energy causes them to feel and do all sorts of terrific things.

One can understand this idea in a simple way. I think we all know that if we train our bodies and minds in a particular way, through exercise and meditation or prayer, for example, that greatly impacts on how we feel and what we do. One might call the power of the way we feel and act in such circumstances 'a body of energy', called Chi or something else, and by correctly organizing our lives we access that body of energy.

Now back to hainyan haeloki, the divine principle. Rihal holds that fully living Torah is a way of organizing one's body and mind so that God's unique presence in Israel is revealed. This revealed divine presence is what he calls hainyan haeloki. I think one may understand this idea very much like the body of energy that the monk engages. But Chi and the inyan haeloki are not the same thing. Just as the history of Israel is unique, so too the way of Israel, which is the Torah, consists of a unique and

particular kind of human life in which the God of Israel is present. Sometimes Rihal uses other names for that presence, like the Shekhinah.

If we've said something about what the hainyan haeloki may be understood to be, another question comes up: what does it feel like? At least part of the answer to that question seems pretty clear. We pray:

האר עינינו בתורתך, ודבק ליבנו במצוותך, ויחד לבבנו באהבה וביראה את שמך

Light up our eyes in your Torah, and cleave our hearts to your commandments, and unify our hearts in love and fear of your name.

It must be that hainyan haeloki feels like having our eyes lit up in Torah, and our hearts cleaving to Torah, and our hearts unified in love and fear of God's name. That must at least mean that we truly find the meaning of our lives in the details of Torah and Mitsvot, and that a close personal relationship with Hashem, the God of Israel, fills our lives. This would be the experience that "body of energy" in Torah terms.

But if I'm permitted to generalize from myself, we don't quite get there. There's a vicious circle of not fully living Torah, and thus not finding hainyan haeloki, and thus not fully living Torah. There's always this gap.

And that's what the yamim hanoraim are about. On these days we do two things which are perhaps contradictory. First, we admit the gap and ask forgiveness for it. That means we ask Hashem to reveal His or Her self in our lives in spite of the fact that we're not quite there. But we also try to close the gap. We push hard through a serious of commandments, those of hayamim hanoraim, whose inner meaning is addressing and closing that painful gap. We struggle to make hainyan haeloki as real and as concrete as the Tefillin that we wrap on our bodies.

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