WHICH ANOKHI DID JACOB NOT KNOW?

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When Jacob awoke from his dream, at Bethel, having had a vision of a ladder, with the angels of God ascending and descending, he exclaimed: 'Surely the Lord is in this place – and I knew it not [v'anokhi lo yadati]' (Gen. 28:16).

This seems a most strange exclamation, for surely Jacob knew full well that God was in every place, and that His spirit was particularly manifest in the land of Canaan where Jacob had this dream. That was indubitably the spiritual tradition that he had received from his grandfather, Abraham, and which had been repeated to his father, Isaac. The latter had received a revelation from God, wherein He expressly told him to remain in Canaan, notwithstanding the famine: 'I shall be with you and bless you' (26:3). The implication was clearly that God's immanent Spirit was, and would remain, in this place, to bless him continually.

Some years later, God appeared again to Isaac, this time at Beer-sheba – significantly, the place from which Jacob would later set off in flight from his brother, Esau – and told him, 'I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you, and will bless you' (26:24). Isaac's reaction was to build an altar and to call upon the name of the Lord (v. 25). He demonstrated thereby that he clearly had no doubt that God was present there, in that land.

Isaac reiterated the certainty of that Divine Presence and promise when he blessed Jacob prior to his flight from the family home: 'God Almighty [El Shaddai] will bless you . . . and give you the blessing of Abraham . . . that you may inherit the land of your sojourning, which God gave to Abraham' (28:3-4).

Jacob's astonishment at his realisation of God's Presence in this place is therefore truly mystifying. Furthermore, part of Abraham's avowed mission, to command his children and his household after him, that they may keep the way of the Lord (18:19), would assuredly have included an account of...
how he had stood, literally, before God (v. 22) to plead for clemency for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. How was it then that, reared in such a family tradition, Jacob was so astonished by the proximity of God at the place where he had slept?

Not surprisingly, commentators have already identified this problem and probed the implication of the phrase 'And I knew it not [v'anokhi lo yadati].'

Hence Seforno's explanation that Jacob meant to imply that "had I known [of God's presence there], I would have prepared myself properly to receive such a prophetic revelation." Meir Leibush Malbim expands on this notion, rendering the phrase 'Akhein yesh Adonai bamakom ha-zeh v'anokhi lo yada'ti' as "Assuredly, it was the Essence of the Lord place (that penetrated my soul), notwithstanding my own non-awareness"; that is, my cognitive and spiritual insensitivity to my surroundings.

Rashi makes the inference that, "had I known (of God's presence), I would never have slept in such a holy place." This notion of sleep as a distraction from "the conscious act of developing [a] relationship with God," is well elucidated by Aviva Zornberg. Samuel David Luzzatto suggests that Jacob was being self-deprecatory here, and was lamenting the fact that instead of having affirmed Divine providence as guiding his flight from his parental home, he had been distressed at his plight, and rued having had to sleep out rough, in the open field. He was ashamed that, in his distress, he may even have cursed mentally that holy place.

THE LORD, ANI AND ANOKHI

It is quite possible, however, that Jacob's exclamation may yield a totally different meaning, wherein the above problem ceases to exist. This becomes apparent if we understand the word "anokhi" as referring not to Jacob himself, but to God! The sense of his outburst might then be, 'For sure, the Lord is present in this place, but [His attribute of] Anokhi I had not [hitherto] experienced.'

At a later period, God enlightens Moses as to a subtle conceptual distinction between two of His attributes, as reflected in the respective terms El Shaddai and HaShem. It was by the former attribute that He had manifested Himself to the patriarchs: 'But by the attribute of HaShem I was not known unto them [ushmi HaShem lo noda'ti lahem]' (Ex. 6:3). It is our contention
that, by his exclamation at Bethel, Jacob intended to make a similar distinction between the two Divine attributes of HaShem and Anokhi.

Hitherto, Jacob's conception of his God was that of the Lord, a mere "existence [from the root h-y-h]," a transcendent Spirit, the omnipotent Creator of heaven and earth, but not an immanent Being with Whom man could possibly have a personal relationship. He knew that his forebears had experienced that personal relationship, and that they had been promised, and truly sensed, His protective embrace; but he himself had, as yet, never experienced it and could not comprehend how, or if, it might be initiated.

It is my contention that Anokhi, when employed in certain circumstances, denotes a far more complex relationship of God to man than that implied by the name HaShem. The former conveys the notion of a God who is immanent, close and personal to each and every one of His creatures. It is natural, therefore, that it should have been the preferred attribute when the particular notions of the Divine-Israel relationship and God's special protective embrace are being conveyed, as the following passages demonstrate:

1. The most interesting exemplification of this occurs in the Book of Ezekiel where the pronoun "ani" is found some 138 times. Anokhi, on the other hand, occurs but once, in the verse 'You shall be my people and I [Anokhi] shall be for you as a God' (Ezek. 36:28). By contrast, when God refers to the concept of Him that will be vouchsafed to the other nations, He states, 'And the nations shall know that I [Ani] am the Lord' (36:36). The Anokhi relationship is active, close, immanent, and reciprocal, as reiterated by Jeremiah: 'And you shall be to Me as a people, and I [Anokhi] shall be for you as a God' (Jer. 11:4). The Ani pronoun, on the other hand, betrays a far more superficial relationship.

2. When God appeared to Abraham at the Covenant Between the Pieces, He states, 'Fear not, Abraham; I [Anokhi] shall be your Protector [magen lakh]. (Gen. 15:1).

3. When God wishes to reassure Abimelech that He had accepted his innocence in the matter of the seizure of Sarah, for which reason He had protected not only Sarah but also Abimelech himself from sinning, the protective attribute of Anokhi is employed twice: 'I [Anokhi] also knew . . . . And I [Anokhi] also restrained you [Gam Anokhi yada'ti . . . Va'echsokh gam Anokhi otkha]' (Gen. 20:6).
4. When God assures Jacob of His abiding protection, he states, 'Behold I
Anokhi am with you [ushmartikha bekhol asher teilekh]' (Gen. 28:15).

5. The message of God being in the closest protective proximity to Jacob
and his offspring is invested with greater immediacy and conviction by the
employment of the Anokhi attribute: 'Anokhi eired imkha mitzraimah
v'Anokhi a'alkha gam aloh [I (Anokhi) will go down with you to Egypt, and
I (Anokhi) will surely bring you up again]' (Gen. 46:4).

6. At the revelation at Sinai, God refers to Himself at the very outset by that
Name, with its special connotation of Divine protectiveness: 'I (Anokhi) am
the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the
house of bondage' (Ex. 20:2).

7. Not surprisingly, even when anokhi is employed by humans it attracts
that same nuance of the "I" in the role of protector. Hence, in response to
God's query, 'Where is Abel, your brother?' Cain says, 'Am I my brother's
keeper [ha-shomer ahi anokhi]?'

THE HUMAN ATTRIBUTES OF ANOKHI AND ANI

Even when the pronouns anokhi and ani are employed with reference to
humans, the former is frequently (though, obviously, not always) invested
with a particular existential intensity. Anokhi denotes far more, in those in-
stances, than merely the first person. It serves to convey the notion of an in-
dividual focusing intensely upon the issue of his being, his identity, his rank
and his situation. The following few examples illustrate this particular nu-
ance:

1. Especially significant and illustrative of this emphasis is the difference in
personal pronoun as employed by Esau and Jacob, respectively, when reply-
ing to their father's perplexed query regarding their identities. Esau responds,
artlessly, 'Ani binkha bekhorkha Eisav [I am your son, your first-born, Esau]' (Gen. 27:32). Understandably, Esau employs that pronoun, ani, given that his
conscience is clear, that he does not need to wrestle with any inner identity-
conflict, that he is indeed who he says he is. Jacob, on the other hand, replies,
'Anokhi Esav bekhorkha [I am Esau, your firstborn],' employing that more
weighty pronoun that betrays his existential turmoil. Jacob knows that he is
not who he says he is, or as he portrays himself; and his use of anokhi reflects
that preoccupation with self and his angst at having to present himself disingenuously to his father.

2. Adam's and Eve's eyes were opened (Gen. 3:7) to the extent that they now possessed the cognitive capacity to know between good and evil, to be self-critical and to reflect on their existential situation. Significantly, when God discovers Adam hiding in the Garden (symbolically, attempting to conceal the new identity he had assumed as a cognitive being), he tells God, 'va'iyyra ki eirom anokhi [I feared because I was naked]' (v. 9). Adam's nakedness was clearly not merely physical, for he must have realized that God had not previously been offended by a nakedness that He, Himself, had condoned! It was the anokhi, Adam's new identity, that was now "naked," manifestly transparent. He could not possibly conceal his newly-enhanced intellectual and moral sensitivity.

3. The desperate need of the matriarch Rachel for a child is emphasized by the employment of the personal pronoun anokhi: 'Give me children,' she cries out in anguish and desperation, 'and if not, I shall die [v'im ayin meitah anokhi]' (30:1). Jacob's angry response is, 'Am I in God's stead, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb [hatachat Elohim anokhi]?' (30:2). Rachel's suggestion is that Jacob should take her handmaid, Bilhah, who will provide a child for her: 'and I may also be built up through her [v'ibaneh gam anokhi mimmenah]' (30:3).

The anokhi-less state that childlessness creates leaps out from this narrative. Rachel's anokhi – her sense of self, her existential identity, her self-esteem, her concept of human purpose, fulfilment and destiny – are all at stake here. Without children, her anokhi veritably dies. It may be rescued, or "built up" to some extent, however, with the provision of the longed-for child. The latter will also carry forward the anokhi, the identity, values, hopes, ambitions, strivings, and the remembrance, of the adopting mother into the future, enabling her to live on in the minds and through the actions of that child and his or her posterity.

Not surprisingly, therefore, when God promises Abraham that He will protect him and grant him a great reward, Abraham responds, 'Lord, God, what can You give me, seeing that I go childless [v'anokhi holeikh ariri]?' (v. 15:2). It was Abraham's anokhi, his essential being, his identity and purpose in life that was being negated by the absence of a child.
Significantly, when Sarah chides Abraham for the wrong that she suffered at the hands of the handmaid, Hagar, Sarah says, 'I gave my handmaid into your bosom [anokhi natati shifchati becheikekha]' (v. 16:5). It was not a straight-forward thing to grant her husband intimacy and shared parentage with her handmaid. The use of anokhi conveys the enormity of the emotional and existential surrender that she was making, a surrender of self, of self-esteem, and, to some extent, of part of her husband's love and concern. Implicit in that anokhi was the intensity and enormity of the sacrifice that she believed she was making.

4. When Absalom commands his men to slay his brother Amnon for the rape of their sister Tamar, he tells them not to be afraid 'for it is I that has commanded you [ki anokhi tziviti etkhem]' (II Sam. 13:28). Intrinsic to that anokhi is not only the element of authority, but also the emotional torment that was involved in that command.

DEATH OF THE HUMAN ANOKI

Death does not involve merely the removal of the presence of the ani, the physical being. Contemplation of our non-existence has the profoundest existential significance; it impacts powerfully on our sense of anokhi, our identity, our sense of uniqueness and place in the world. It is thus one of the most difficult situations for a human to confront. The belief that we are here for a purpose – that, in the words of the liturgy, "the soul that You have given to me is pure. You created it . . . and You nurture it within me" – is the bedrock of our faith. Contemplation of our death, on the other hand, calls into question the purpose of life, whether or not we have truly lived up to our allotted purpose, how we could possibly be taken away before that purpose has run its course, and what our fate will be when we quit this worldly arena.

Such agonising conundrums explain why, so often, when biblical personalities speak of their impending death, the word anokhi, rather than the narrowly-focused ani, springs instinctively to their lips. Herewith a few examples:

1. The first person to employ the former pronoun in that context was Esau, when attempting to convince both himself and Jacob that, as he was about to die (anokhi holeikh lamut [v. 25:32]), he had no need of the blessing of the
firstborn. Even for an Esau, and even at a time like that, he saw himself as more than an *ani*.

2. Jacob announces his impending death to his son Joseph with the words, 'Behold I am to die [Hinnei *anokhi* meit]' (v. 48:21). Interestingly, when he leaves instructions for his remains to be carried up to Canaan, he says, 'I am to be gathered unto my people [Ani ne'esaf el ammi]; bury me with my fathers . . ..' The consideration here is not the complex individual, the *anokhi*, but merely the physical remains, the *ani*.

3. Joseph, when telling his brothers that he is about to die, employs the same pronoun, 'I am to die [anokhi meit]' (50:24).

4. King David says, 'I am going the way of all the earth [Anokhi holeikh bederekh kol ha-aretz]' (I Kg. 2:1).

A. J. Heschel speaks of man's realization that the self is so much more than the self, and of the necessity for him to understand what he means, not just what he does. *Anokhi* is suggestive of the self reflecting on the self, of man acutely aware of his creation in the Divine image, with a mission to accomplish in the Divine scheme of things, yet tragically unaware of what that mission might be and to what extent he has played his, or any, part in its accomplishment. Its employment is so appropriate, therefore, in the context of man's contemplation of the end of his earthly pilgrimage.
between God and his family and of the special national destiny to which it was being called.

NOTES
1. See Genesis 28:19.
2. Although the episode is introduced by the statement that Jacob set out from Beer-Sheba and went to Haran (Gen. 28:1), most commentators assume that the description of the dream relates back to an experience along the way.
4. See Commentary of Sefer no to Genesis 28:16.
5. See Commentary of Meir Lebush Malbim to Genesis 28: 16 .
6. See Rashi ad loc.

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