

In this week's *Parashah*, Yaakov Avinu blesses his children before he passes away. The *Gemara* (*Pesachim* 56a) relates that Yaakov wanted to reveal the "End"--the time of the ultimate redemption--to his sons, but the *Shechinah* departed from him. Yaakov worried that this happened because, G-d forbid, one of his sons was unworthy. His sons responded: "*Shema Yisrael, Hashem is our Elokim, Hashem is One*"--just as you believe, so we believe. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

Why did Yaakov's inability to reveal the "End" make him worry that his sons were unworthy, and how did their recitation of *Shema* assuage him? Also, our Sages say that Yaakov did not hug Yosef at their reunion because he was reciting *Shema* at that moment (see *Rashi z"l* to *Bereishit* 46:29). Why did Yaakov do that?

R' David Cohen *shlita* (*Rosh Yeshiva* of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) explains: The ultimate purpose of the Patriarchs' Divine service was to bring *Hashem's* Presence into the world and to reveal that *Hashem* is One. This is a process that will be completed only at the "End," but to which every generation contributes. After Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov did their part as individuals, it was time for this service to be taken over by *Klal Yisrael* / the Jewish nation, beginning with Yaakov's sons. There was significance to there being twelve sons, just as there are twelve months, constellations, and hours in a day. Also, the *Gematria* of the word "*Echad*" / "One" is 13, *i.e.*, the 12 Tribes plus Yaakov. This is why Yaakov mourned so deeply when he thought one of his 12 sons (Yosef) had died: he thought his mission was now doomed to fail. Thereafter, his *Shema*, his declaration of G-d's Oneness, would forever be incomplete.

When Yaakov was reunited with Yosef, he was able to recite *Shema* "completely" for the first time since Yosef's disappearance, and he did. But, when the *Shechinah* left him before his death, he thought that, again, his mission was in jeopardy. No, said his sons, *Shema* can still be recited. (*Mizmor L'David*, Vol. I, *Ma'amar* 5)

Tefilah

This year, we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. For several weeks, we have been focusing on the definition of "Tefilah" / "prayer" offered by R' Moshe ben Yosef Trani z"l ("Mabit"; 1505-1585; rabbi of Tzefat, Eretz Yisrael): "'Tefilah' is a person asking from Hashem something the person needs that he cannot obtain on his own."

He continues: The above definition encompasses only a person's requests for his needs, such as the requests in the middle blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei* [from the fourth blessing, "*Atah Chonen*," through the sixteenth blessing, "*Shema Koleinu*"]. However, one who prays must first praise the Creator [as we do in the first three blessings of *Shemoneh Esrei*].

At first glance, *Mabit* continues, this seems inappropriate. If a person has a request to make from his friend and he first praises his friend, that praise would seem insincere. Upon a deeper look, however, it becomes clear that praising *Hashem* is necessary in order for prayer to be worthy of acceptance.

How so?

Mabit explains: Human beings are inconsistent, and their good qualities are often fleeting or changing. Therefore, one who praises another human will necessarily exaggerate, and it will sound like flattery for the sake of getting something from the subject of the praise.

[That is not true of *Hashem*, of course, so there is no downside to praising Him.] When a person prays, he needs to know before he starts that there is no one but *Hashem* who can answer his prayer. He is the Creator and He is the cause of everything. Therefore, before making our requests, we praise *Hashem* to acknowledge that He is the only one to whom one should pray, He makes people poor or rich, He lowers people and also elevates them, He says and does, decrees and fulfills. No power exists that can tell Him what to do, and, therefore, we cast our burdens upon Him.

(*Bet Elokim: Sha'ar Ha'Tefilah* ch.2)

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Faith Ginsburg, on the *yahrzeit* of her mother, Lottie Rosenson
(*Zlata Chaya bas Avraham Zev a"h*) (23 Tevet)

“He saw tranquility that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant, yet he bent his shoulder to bear and he became an indentured laborer.” (49:15)

Yissachar, the subject of this verse, was the Torah scholar among the Tribes. R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (Belarus; 1749-1821) writes about our verse: Whenever Yissachar cast off the yoke of Torah, thinking that what he needed was relaxation and tranquility, he found instead that he had new burdens to bear, even becoming an indentured laborer. This is exactly what *Pirkei Avot* (ch.3) teaches: “If one accepts the yoke of Torah, the yokes of the king and of *Derech Eretz* / ‘the way of the world’ are removed from him. If one casts off the yoke of Torah, the yokes of the king and of *Derech Eretz* are placed upon him.”
(*Ruach Chaim* 3:4)

What is meant by the “yoke of Torah”? R' Dov Cohen z"l (1911-2005; first Chief Rabbi of the Israeli Air Force; at the time of his passing, believed to be the last surviving student of the *Alter* of Slabodka) explains: While a person is studying Torah, he certainly should not view it as a “yoke” or an obligation. However, every person must stop learning at times, whether to earn a living or to attend to other needs. At such times, one should feel that there is a yoke upon him--the yoke of Torah, *i.e.*, the obligation to resume learning as soon as possible. In that way, he will finish what he needs to do as quickly as possible and return to where he is supposed to be.

(*Avot El Banim* p.198)

“Yosef caused the children of Yisrael to take an oath, saying, ‘When Elokim ‘Pakod yifkod’ / remember, He will remember you, then you must bring my bones up from here’.” (50:25)

When *Hashem* sent Moshe to take *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt, He told Moshe (*Shmot* 3:16) to say, “*Pakod pakadeti* / remember, I have remembered...” *Rashi* (to *Shmot* 3:18) writes that *Hashem* told Moshe: As soon as you mention this expression to them, they will listen to you, for they have a tradition from Yaakov and Yosef that their deliverance will begin with mention of this phrase.” [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (1896-1974; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of *Enayim La'mishpat*) explains: We say in the *Pesach Haggadah*, “If *Hashem* had not taken us out of Egypt, we and our children still would be subjugated to Pharaoh.” The slavery in Egypt was not just physical; it contaminated our spirits, and that contamination would have continued to exist even if Pharaoh had given us physical freedom. This explains the significance of the double expression used to describe the redemption: “I have remembered your physical slavery, and I have remembered your spiritual bondage.”
(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha'geulah* p.44)

“And as for me, I have given you Shechem -- one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Emorite with my sword and with my bow.” (48:22)

The Aramaic translation and commentary *Targum Onkelos*, as well as the *Gemara* (*Bava Batra* 123a), interpret “With my sword and with my bow” as “*Be'tzeloti U've'va'uiti*” -- two different words for prayer.

R' Mordechai Rokeach z"l (1902-1949; rabbi of Bilgoraj, Poland; father of the current *Belzer Rebbe*) explains in the name of his father R' Yissachar Dov Rokeach z"l (1851-1926; *Belzer Rebbe*): There is a type of prayer called “a *Tzaddik* decrees and G-d fulfills.” Such prayer is like a sword--extremely accurate, but requiring one to get very close to the target. Prayer that is like a sword is effective only in the near term [and only from a *Tzaddik* who is very close to *Hashem*].

A second type of prayer is like a bow and arrow--less accurate, but having greater range. Such prayer makes a long-term impact, but it does not necessarily bring about exactly what we are praying for. Often we feel that our prayers are not being answered. In fact, say our Sages, every prayer has a positive effect; it just may not “hit the target” that we intend.

When Yaakov prayed at Shechem after Shimon and Levi killed its inhabitants, he prayed for immediate salvation--like a sword. In addition, Shechem has played a significant role throughout Jewish history, which in Yaakov's time was in the distant future. Yaakov prayed regarding that also--like a bow and arrow.
(*Parashat Mordechai* p.172)

“Yaakov called for his sons and said, ‘Assemble yourselves and I will tell you what will befall you in the End of Days’.” (49:1)

Rashi z"l writes: “He wished to reveal to them the ‘End,’ but the *Shechinah* departed from him and he began to speak of other things instead.” [Until here from *Rashi*]

R' Yehuda Loewe z"l (*Maharal* of Prague; died 1609) writes in *Netzach Yisrael* (ch.44): No person can know when the “End” (the Redemption) will be. Yaakov knew, but he was not allowed to reveal it. Therefore, the *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 97b) curses those who attempt to calculate the “End.” From this you know, writes *Maharal*, that everything our Sages say about when *Mashiach* will come is meant as a possibility or as a “not before” date, not that he will come at or by a certain time.

R' Moshe Schwerd *shlita* (Queens, N.Y.) adds in the name of R' Zev Leff *shlita* (rabbi of Moshav Mattityahu, Israel): The “End” cannot be revealed, because there is no fixed time; it is up to us. Therefore, instead of telling his children when *Mashiach* will come, Yaakov assigned them--and us, as their descendants--each a personal role in bringing about that day.

(*Az Yashir: Bein Ha'metzarim, Petach Davar* p.1-2, 9)