

We read in this week's *Parashah* (4:6), "You shall safeguard and perform them, for it is your wisdom and discernment in the eyes of the nations, who shall hear all these decrees and who shall say, 'Surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation!'" The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 75a) teaches that the wisdom and discernment referred to here are those involved in calculating the Jewish calendar.

What is so wise and discerning about the Jewish calendar? R' Ben Zion Neshet *shlita* (one of the senior rabbis in Tel Aviv, Israel) explains:

Most of the world uses a calendar that is based on the sun (*e.g.*, the Gregorian calendar) or the moon (*e.g.*, the Muslim and Chinese calendars). This is symbolic of the belief held by much of mankind that man is subjugated to, and even controlled by, the forces of nature. The Jewish calendar, in contrast, combines elements of both the solar and lunar calendars, and we further adjust it to our needs by inserting an extra day in certain months and an extra month in certain years. By doing this, we demonstrate our belief that we are not subject to the laws of nature; rather, there is a Higher Authority.

This, writes R' Neshet, is why sanctifying the new moon and calculating the calendar was the first *Mitzvah* given to *Bnei Yisrael*, shortly before the Exodus (see *Shmot* 12:2). As the long-awaited day of salvation neared, it was necessary to wean the Jewish People from the Egyptian spiritual environment. The *Mitzvah* of sanctifying the moon and creating a Jewish calendar was the first step in that process. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shir Tziyon* p.59)

Tefilah

This year, we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue discussing the thirteen types of prayer identified by the *Midrash Rabbah* and *Midrash Yalkut Shimoni*.

Last week, we discussed "*Pegi'ah*," which R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus *z"l* (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) defines as stubbornly praying again and again, with single-minded focus, for something that one needs badly.

R' Pincus continues: Extreme caution is needed when praying in this manner. Proof of this is the *Gemara* (*Ta'anit* 23a), which relates that after the sage Choni *Ha'me'agel* drew a circle on the ground and declared that he would not step out of it until *Hashem* answered his prayer for rain (which *Hashem* did), the sage Shimon ben Shetach told him, "If you were anyone but Choni, I would excommunicate you." Apparently, what he had done borders on impropriety.

Why is praying in this manner disfavored? First, explains R' Pincus, we must realize that we are very far from knowing what is best for us. Therefore, it is not in one's best interests to stubbornly dwell on a single request--be it for wealth or, even, for wisdom. If we are honest with ourselves, we will acknowledge that there are things we have prayed for that turned out not to be good for us.

Instead, R' Pincus writes, a person is better off praying generally for whatever *Hashem* knows is best for him or her. For example, when praying for a *Shidduch*, do not pray for a specific match. Rather, pray for the right match at the right time, and that one's own sins not interfere.

Second, R' Pincus adds, even when praying for things that our Sages told us are inherently good--for example, the ultimate Redemption--it needs to be done in a way that is respectful to *Hashem*. As the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 34a, in a different context) says, "Is *Hashem* your 'colleague'?" This applies, as well, when we praise *Hashem* and thank Him. *Hashem* is not our "friend." Rather, He is lofty beyond description, and it is only His humility that permits us to speak to Him at all. (*She'arim B'tefilah* p.72)

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring

10815 Meadowhill Road, Silver Spring, MD 20901 / 301-593-2272

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Chayim ben Ha'rav Avraham Mordechai a"h

“Hashem will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where Hashem will lead you. There you will serve gods, the handiwork of man, of wood and stone, which do not see, and do not hear, and do not eat, and do not smell. From there you will seek Hashem, your Elokim, and you will find Him, if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul.” (4:27-29)

R' Yitzchak Arieli z"l (1896-1974; *Mashgiach* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; author of *Enayim La'mishpat*) writes: The verse states that the false gods *Yisrael* will serve in the lands of its exile “do not see, and do not hear, and do not eat, and do not smell.” It does not say that they do not speak!

R' Arieli continues: R' Eliyahu z"l (1720-1797; the *Vilna Gaon*) explains that the verse is alluding to the statute made by the Babylonian king Nevuchadnezar. *Midrash Shir Ha'shirim* relates that Nevuchadnezar inserted the *Tzitz* / headband of the *Kohen Gadol* into the idol's mouth, and then it did indeed speak. This, says the *Vilna Gaon*, is what the next verse refers to when it says, “From there you will seek Hashem . . . and you will find,” *i.e.*, you will find that an idol can speak with the help of Hashem's Name that is engraved on the *Tzitz*.

R' Arieli adds: *Midrash Tehilim* states that, in the future, Hashem will enable idols to speak to those who worship them, and to say, “How did you abandon eternal life, the Creator of heavens and earth, and bow down to something about which it is written (*Tehilim* 115:5), “They have mouths, but they do not speak?” About this, says R' Arieli, our verse says, “From there you will seek Hashem . . . and you will find.” The very idols that you worshiped will rebuke you and tell you to “find Him.”

R' Arieli concludes: Even when the idols themselves rebuke *Yisrael*, there will be those who will not take heed. It will still be necessary to “seek Hashem” and to “find Him,” like something that is not out in the open.

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha'geulah* p.85)



“Or has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation. . .” (4:34)

Our Sages comment on the words “a nation from amidst a nation”--“As a shepherd births a sheep.” R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995) observes:

We read in the *Pesach Haggadah* that the Exodus was brought about by G-d Himself, not by an angel. Why does that matter? Isn't the important thing that we were freed?

In fact, R' Auerbach explains, the Exodus was not about freedom, but about rebirth, a completely new beginning. That is something only G-d can bring about.

(Quoted in *Minchat Avot* p.118)

“Let me now cross and see the good Land that is on the other side of the Jordan, this good mountain and the Lebanon.” (3:25)

The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 14a) relates that the sage Rabbi Simlai expounded: Why did Moshe Rabbeinu a"h yearn to enter the Land? Did he need to eat its fruits or satiate himself with its goodness? Rather, Moshe said as follows, “*Yisrael* was given many *Mitzvot*, and they can be performed only in *Eretz Yisrael*. Let me go into the Land so that they can be done by me.”

Hashem said to him, “You are only seeking their reward? I consider it as if you performed them.” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (Belarus; 1749-1821) asks: This is wondrous! Surely Moshe desired the *Mitzvot*, not their reward! Does not *Pirkei Avot* (1:3) teach: “Do not be like a servant who serves his master in order to receive reward”?

R' Chaim explains: There are two different levels of seeking reward. Some people think, “I will perform the *Mitzvot* so that I will enjoy their benefits.” That is what *Pirkei Avot* is teaching us not to do. However, if a person can genuinely say, “I want to receive the reward for *Mitzvot* because rewarding me will bring pleasure to Hashem,” that is a very lofty level. That is the level that the *Gemara* is attributing to Moshe Rabbeinu.

(*Ruach Chaim* 1:3)



“Ascend the mountain, and look at the Land which I have given to the people of Yisrael.” (3:26)

For what purpose was Moshe commanded to “look” at *Eretz Yisrael*?

R' Mordechai Rhine *shlita* (rabbi of Southeast Hebrew Congregation-Knesset Yehoshua in Silver Spring, MD) explains based on a story that is told about R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (1910-1995; Yerushalayim):

A man who worked in R' Auerbach's *yeshiva* told R' Auerbach that he would soon be moving to a new apartment. In reply, R' Auerbach asked the man to tell him once the move was finalized, but before the family moved in. The man was surprised by the request, but he complied, whereupon R' Auerbach asked that they go together to see the apartment.

When they arrived at the apartment, R' Auerbach requested a tour. As they entered each room, R' Auerbach smiled enthusiastically, and in each room he added a pleasant comment: “So this is where the children will play. . . This is where your wife will cook such nurturing meals. . . This is where you will have your *Shabbat* meals,” etc. The man enjoyed the attention and the enthusiasm, but he was confused all the same. Why had R' Auerbach taken the time for a tour of the apartment.

Sensing the man's confusion, R' Auerbach explained: “I know that the last few years have been difficult for you. You've had health problems, and some financial issues. The apartment you were in was too small for your family, and this too was causing much stress. Therefore, I wanted to bestow an '*ayin tovah*' (literally, ‘a good eye’), an atmosphere of blessing on your new home.”

Similarly, by looking at the Land where *Bnei Yisrael* were destined to settle, Moshe Rabbeinu was able to bestow an *ayin tovah* on it.

(*A Parsha Message: Pinchas* 5774)