

In this week's *Parashah*, *Bnei Yisrael* enter into a new covenant with *Hashem*, as we read (29:11), "For you to pass into the covenant of *Hashem*, your *Elokim* . . . that *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, seals with you today." But why? Why was the original covenant at *Har Sinai* not adequate?

R' Ze'ev Wolf Halevi Olesker z"l (1700-1778; Galicia and *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: The *Gemara* (*Eruvin* 54b) describes how Moshe transmitted the Torah to *Bnei Yisrael*. First, Moshe taught each lesson to his brother Aharon. Then, Moshe repeated the lesson for Aharon's sons, while Aharon listened again. The third time, Moshe taught Aharon, Aharon's sons, and the Elders. The fourth time, Moshe's audience included all of *Bnei Yisrael* as well. Thus, Aharon heard the Torah four times from Moshe, Aharon's sons heard it from Moshe three times, and so on. Moshe then left, and Aharon repeated the lesson again, so that his sons also heard it a total of four times, the Elders three, etc. Then Aharon left, and his sons repeated the lesson so that the Elders heard it a fourth time. Lastly, the Elders repeated the lesson, so that everyone heard it a total of four times.

It turns out, writes R' Ze'ev Wolf that most of *Bnei Yisrael* only heard the Torah. Indeed, that is all the only learning they had promised to do when they entered into the original Covenant: "*Na'aseh Ve'nishmah*" / "We shall do and we shall hear." That worked well as long as *Bnei Yisrael* were in the desert, living near a centralized teacher. Now, however, *Bnei Yisrael* were about to enter *Eretz Yisrael* and disperse to the far corners of the Land. Henceforth, they would need to take more responsibility for their own education, especially if they were going to preserve the transmission of the Oral Law. That is why a new covenant was necessary. (*Derashot Ha'Razah*)

## 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 in *Midrashim*.

R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) writes: "**Amidah**" / "standing" indicates that the person who is praying negates himself completely before *Hashem*. "Standing" is the opposite of "sitting," which is what a person does when he feels the heaviness of his own limbs. Thus, "standing" indicates a lack of awareness of one's physical self.

R' Pincus continues: From the *Midrash*, it appears that *Amidah* itself is a form of prayer, even if one does not utter a single word of supplication. The reason for this is that the essence of prayer is *Deveikut* / a connection with, and negating oneself before, *Hashem*--which, as noted, *Amidah* indicates.

R' Pincus notes that *Amidah* also connotes prophecy, the ultimate *Deveikut* with *Hashem* (see *Bereishit* 18:22--"Avraham was still standing before *Hashem*"). R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes (*Moreh Nevochim* III ch.51) that *Deveikut* means thinking about *Hashem* and being aware of His presence. This is, indeed, the common denominator between prayer and prophecy. *Seforim* say that a person is where his thoughts are. Thus, whether during prophecy or during (proper) prayer, when a person is actually speaking directly to *Hashem*, he is literally with Him. In light of the above, we understand, as well, the phenomenon that, during prophecy, the prophet's (except Moshe's) physical faculties are suspended. (*She'arim B'tefilah* p.130)

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**“For this commandment that I command you today – it is not hidden from you and it is not distant.” (30:11)**

R’ Moshe ben Nachman z”l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270) writes that this refers to the *Mitzvah* of *Teshuvah*.

R’ Moshe Zuriel *shlita* (former *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Sha’alvim) observes that many people find *Teshuvah* difficult. We all feel as if we generally do what is right. Moreover, our Sages teach us that we should approach the Day of Judgment with the confidence that we will emerge vindicated and triumphant.

Nevertheless, R’ Zuriel writes, if we understood the depth of *Hashem’s* judgment, we would not be so complacent. Who can claim that he has not offended his spouse, family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, etc. during the year? Do we realize the seriousness of this sin? Do we repent for it properly?

We are all familiar with the *Halachah* that *Teshuvah* does not atone for a sin against another human being unless the offended person is appeased. We therefore are used to asking our friends, “Do you forgive me?” And, of course, they say, “I forgive you.” But do they really forgive us, or are they simply too embarrassed or uncomfortable to tell us that they still feel hurt? Do we take steps to right the wrongs that we have committed, or are we satisfied with a pro forma apology?

Moreover, we forget that appeasing those we have offended is only the first step. We still must appease *Hashem* when we offend His loved ones. The *Gemara* relates that a great sage was severely punished because he came home late from *Yeshiva* and caused his wife to shed one tear as she sat by the window watching for him. She would not have wanted him to be punished, but *Hashem* does not tolerate even a small show of insensitivity from a person of stature. Even the fact that he was preoccupied with Torah study did not save him. True, we are not on the stature of that sage, but our sins are not as subtle, either.

Even when a person hurts another with the best of intentions, he is punished. We read at the beginning of *Shmuel I* (the *Haftarah* for the second day of *Rosh Hashanah*) that a man named Elkanah had two wives--Penina and Chana. Penina had children and Chana did not. Our Sages say that Penina used to goad Chana to pray for children by asking questions such as, “Have you bathed your children for school today?” Penina had the best of intentions; she wanted Chana to cry from the depths of her heart so that she too would give birth. And it worked! Nevertheless, Penina was punished severely.

And who has not offended his parents?! The *Halachic* work *Chayei Adam* (67:3) writes that even thinking negatively about one’s parents is a grave sin about which the Torah says (*Devarim* 27:16), “Cursed is one who degrades his father or mother.”

Therefore, concludes R’ Zuriel, let us all realize that we have sinned grievously. Let us ask for forgiveness from those we have offended and from our Father in Heaven. Then we truly will be able to enter *Rosh Hashanah* with confidence. (*Otzrot Ha’Torah* p. 664)

**“You are standing today, all of you, before Hashem, your Elokim.” (29:9)**

R’ Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal z”l *Hy”d* (1885-1945; rabbi of, and *Rosh Yeshiva* in, Pieštany, Czechoslovakia) writes: I was lying in bed last night thinking about this verse in connection with the *Midrash* that comments on the verse (*Shmot* 3:14), “I Shall Be As I Shall Be.” Says the *Midrash*: “‘I Shall Be’ for the individual, and ‘I Shall Be’ for the many.” This teaches, R’ Teichtal explains (based on the writings of the *Maharal* of Prague z”l), that *Hashem* relates differently to the individual than He does to the nation as a whole. Every individual has *Bechirah* / free choice, and *Hashem* relates to each individual based on the choices he makes. In contrast, the nation as a whole has no free choice. Rather, *Hashem* will reign over us no matter what.

R’ Teichtal continues: The word “today” connotes eternity, as *Midrash Tanchuma* comments on the verse (*Devarim* 26:16), “Today, *Hashem*, your *Elokim*, commands you . . .” -- “The commandments should be new in your eyes as if they were given today.” In other words, the Torah was not given once; it is given over-and-over again, for all eternity. Our verse therefore means, “For all eternity, you are standing before *Hashem*.” Why is that so? Because I am speaking to “all of you.” (*Mishneh Sachir Al Ha’Torah*)

**“It will be when all these things come upon you--the blessing and the curse that I have presented before you--then you will take it to your heart among all the nations where Hashem, your Elokim, has dispersed you. You will return to Hashem, your Elokim, and listen to His voice . . .” (30:1-2)**

R’ Yisrael Meir Kagan z”l (the *Chafetz Chaim*; died 1933) asks: It seems from these verses that the generation in which *Mashiach* comes will have done *teshuvah*. In contrast, there are statements of our Sages implying that the generation in which *Mashiach* comes will be a very lowly one!

He answers: Both are true. The generation in which *Mashiach* comes will be a generation of extreme opposites. On the one hand, there will be Jews who will make every possible sacrifice to ensure their children’s Torah educations. Among that part of the nation, there will be a thirst for knowledge, and their hearts will be pained by their own ignorance and lack of *Mitzvah* performance. On the other hand, there will be Jews who will do whatever seems right in their own eyes, so far removed from Judaism that any rebuke would be hopeless.

One might ask, continues the *Chafetz Chaim*, why would *Mashiach* come in such a generation, when he did not come to redeem past generations that were entirely religious and seemingly more worthy? He answers: In early generations, the redemption was less necessary, since their faith was strong and there was no question that Judaism would be preserved. Indeed, the longer *Mashiach* delayed, the more merits the Jewish People as a whole accumulated because of their adherence to the Torah. Now, however, when a significant part of the Jewish People is becoming lost, further delay is counter-productive. Thus, *Mashiach’s* arrival surely is closer. (*Kuntreis Tzipita Li’shuah* ch.1)