

In the *Parashot* we have read in recent weeks, and continuing in this week's *Parashah*, Moshe Rabbeinu delivers his farewell address to *Bnei Yisrael* on his last day in this world. R' Doron David Gold *shlita* (*Menahel Ruchani* of Yeshivat Derech Chochmah in Yerushalayim) notes that Moshe Rabbeinu seems to have reserved his toughest rebuke and warnings for this final day. Why? Weren't *Bnei Yisrael* at the very pinnacle of their spiritual growth after forty years under Moshe Rabbeinu's leadership?

R' Gold explains: The higher a person's spiritual ascent, the farther he is prone to fall. Thus, precisely because *Bnei Yisrael* had attained such a high level, Moshe Rabbeinu had to warn them to guard themselves in the future.

R' Gold continues: We are now standing just after *Yom Kippur*, when we attained the highest spiritual levels that most people achieve all year. Thus, we, too, must be wary of falling very far and very hard. The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 6b) instructs that a person leaving *Shul* should not take large strides. Indeed, records the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 32b), the pious people of old used to sit in *Shul* for one hour after *Davening*. In this way, explains R' Gold, they eased into their everyday activities rather than rushing headlong from their spiritual high into mundane life. We, too, must ease out of *Yom Kippur*.

R' Gold adds: It is said in the name of R' Yisrael Lipkin *z"l* (1810-1883; "R' Yisrael Salanter"; founder of the *Mussar* movement), "Every day should be like *Elul*, and *Elul* is *Elul*." Perhaps R' Yisrael means that we must try to preserve some of the spiritual gains of *Elul* and the High Holiday period so that, when *Elul* returns next year, we will start off on a higher level than we did last *Elul*. (*Kuntreis Hirhurei Teshuvah* p.121)

Tefilah

This year, we have devoted this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers--most recently, discussing the thirteen different types of prayer identified in *Midrashim*. R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus *z"l* (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) concludes his explanation of those different forms of prayer as follows:

One of the foundations of prayer is to know that praying is not just something we do three times a day. Rather, prayer is the foundation and the plan for living as a Jew, *i.e.*, living one's everyday life with *Hashem*. We read (*Devarim* 4:7), "For which is a great nation that has an *Elokim* Who is close to it, as is *Hashem*, our *Elokim*, whenever we call to Him?" That is what a Jew looks like, R' Pincus writes. He lives his entire life close to G-d. This is why our Sages liken the Giving of the Torah to a wedding and the relationship of *Hashem* and the Jewish People to that of a husband and wife. Just as marriage is not just another relationship--rather, it is a unique way of living life--so is the connection between *Hashem* and a Jew. *Hashem* is by our side at all times to help with any issue, large or small. He is even there just to talk, so-to-speak, about any subject that is on a Jew's mind.

Regarding Yosef, we read (*Bereishit* 39:3), "His master perceived that *Hashem* was with him, and whatever he did *Hashem* made succeed through him." *Rashi z"l* explains that Yosef's master heard that Yosef constantly mentioned *Hashem's* Name. The *Midrash* elaborates, explaining that Yosef uttered a prayer before each task he performed. He lived with *Hashem* in the most literal sense of our verse ("*Hashem* was with him"). Yosef was like a child who walks through a dark and frightening place--because of his fear, he grips his father's hand tightly. Thanks to Yosef's constant prayers, says the verse, he succeeded in every aspect of his job. This is how a Jew should go through this world, writes R' Pincus. - **Continued in box inside** -

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“Is it not revealed to Me, sealed in My treasuries? Mine is vengeance and retribution at the time when their foot will falter, for the day of their catastrophe is near, and future events are rushing at them.’ When Hashem will have judged His people, He shall relent regarding His servants, when He sees that enemy power progresses, and none is saved or assisted.” (32:34-36)

R’ Yaakov Moshe Charlap z”l (rabbi of Yerushalayim’s Sha’arei Chesed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav; died 1952) explains: *Hashem* has a secret. Our Sages teach that His judgment overlooks nothing (“Mine is vengeance and retribution”). Nevertheless, even if we hit rock bottom, *Hashem* will have a way to redeem us despite our sins (“He shall relent regarding His servants”). How both statements can be true is revealed only to Him, sealed in His treasury. (*Mei Marom* Vol. V.)

“See, now, that I, I am He, and no god is with Me. I put to death and I bring life, I struck down and I will heal, and there is no rescuer from My hand.” (32:39)

R’ Yisrael Hofstein z”l (1744-1823; the *Maggid* of Kozhnitz) explains: “I” implies importance. Thus, Pharaoh declared (*Bereishit* 41:44), “I am Pharaoh!” In reality, however, the only “I” is *Hashem*—“I, I am He.” The proof is that no one else can do what I, *Hashem*, can do. (*Avodat Yisrael*)

“And He will atone for אדמתו / His Land and His people.

“Moshe came and he spoke all the words of this Song . . . He said to them, ‘Apply your hearts to the words that I testify against you today, with which you are to instruct your children, to be careful to perform all the words of this Torah.’” (32:43-46)

Why, immediately after completing the Song of *Ha’azinu*, did Moshe warn *Bnei Yisrael* once again to be careful to perform all of the words of the Torah? R’ Eliyahu Hakohen Ha’Itamari z”l (Izmir, Turkey; died 1729) explains:

The word “אדמתו” / “His Land” has the same letters as “ד אמות” / four cubits. Thus, the verse, “He will atone for His Land and His people,” hints to the *Gemara’s* statement (*Ketubot* 111a) that when one walks four cubits in *Eretz Yisrael*, all of his sins are forgiven. The *Gemara* there likewise states that if one is buried in *Eretz Yisrael*, it is as if he is buried under the altar (a good thing).

These statements can lead a person to become complacent. “Why observe the *Mitzvot*? I will live as I see fit, and the *Mitzvah* of living in *Eretz Yisrael* will guarantee my atonement.” No! says Moshe Rabbeinu. True, “He will atone for His Land and His people.” Nevertheless, “Apply your hearts to the words that I testify against you today,” “Instruct your children” regarding them, and, “Be careful to perform all the words of this Torah.” Why? Because, says the next verse, “Through this matter shall you prolong your days on the Land to which you cross the Jordan to possess it.” If you sin, you will be expelled from the Land and will not get the atonement you took for granted. (*Semuchin L’ad*)

“When I call out the Name of Hashem, ascribe greatness to our Elokim.” (32:3)

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 21a; see *Rashi* there) derives from this verse that one must recite a *Berachah* before studying Torah. This suggests that only on the last day of Moshe’s life did he teach *Bnei Yisrael* to recite a *Berachah* over learning Torah! How is it, asks R’ Avraham Dov Auerbach z”l (Chief Rabbi of Teveryah, Israel; died 2021), that *Bnei Yisrael* studied Torah for forty years without reciting *Birchot Ha’Torah* / the blessings on the Torah?

He explains: Early commentaries write that, in chronological order, *Ha’azinu* was the last *Parashah* that Moshe taught. The final *Parashah* according to our order--*V’zot Ha’berachah*--actually was taught earlier in the day on the last day of Moshe’s life. Thus, with *Parashat Ha’azinu*, the Torah was completed. As such, writes R’ Auerbach, only now could a blessing be recited over the Torah, for only now was *Hashem’s* revelation of the Torah completed. Just as one would not recite a *Berachah* on a partial *Etrog* or on a *Sefer Torah* that is missing even one letter, so *Bnei Yisrael* could not recite a *Berachah* on the Torah before it had been revealed completely.

It follows, adds R’ Auerbach, that the greater the understanding of the Torah that one attains, the greater the effort, energy and meaning that he must put into his *Birchot Ha’Torah*. For him, the Torah was less complete yesterday than it is today; therefore, his obligation to praise *Hashem* for giving the Torah was less. Today, his Torah is more complete, so his obligation to acknowledge *Hashem’s* blessing is greater. (*Pitchei Avraham*)

“Yeshurun [i.e., Yisrael] became fat and kicked.” (32:15)

R’ Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z”l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: We have a tradition that there will be a spiritual revolt in *Eretz Yisrael* and among the Jewish People in the very era in which the national life of our People reawakens. The reason for this is that the material tranquility that part of our nation will experience will lead it to believe that it already has attained its ultimate goal. This will cause the soul to shrink, so-to-speak. Yearning for lofty and holy ideals will cease, and, as a natural consequence, the spirit will sink. Eventually, a storm will come and cause a revolution, and then it will be apparent that *Yisrael’s* strength lies only in the Eternal Holy One, in the light of His Torah, and in our desire for spiritual “light.” (*Orot* p.84)

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R’ Pincus adds: What is *Hashem* to a Jew? In various verses and prayers, we refer to Him as: “The teacher of Torah to His nation, *Yisrael*,” “*Avinu Malkeinu*” / “Our Father, our King,” a brother, a mother, a beloved uncle, and a friend. *Hashem* is all of these things and more. And, the way to develop these relationships into realities that we can sense is through prayer.

(*She’arim B’tefilah* p.147)