

תשפ"ז

Please watch for our Yom Kippur issue!

At the end of this week's *Parashah*, Moshe Rabbeinu is commanded (32:49), "Ascend to this mountain of Avarim, Mount Nevo, which is in the land of Moav, which is before Yericho, and see the Land of Canaan that I give to *Bnei Yisrael* as an inheritance." Why was Moshe commanded to see the Land? R' Ovadiah Seforno z"l (1470-1550; Italy) answers: "See the Land so that you will place your blessing upon it."

R' Chaim Moshe Reuven Elazary z"l (1902-1984; rabbi in Canton, Ohio) comments: Even after the sin of *Mei Merivah*, because of which Moshe was punished and forbidden from entering *Eretz Yisrael*, *Hashem* still wanted Moshe to bless the Land. This teaches us how very subtle Moshe's sin was--something that only *Hashem* could perceive as a sin. (Indeed, commentaries struggle to explain the sin.) As far as *Bnei Yisrael* could tell, Moshe sanctified *Hashem* by hitting the rock and bringing out water.

R' Elazary continues: In *Tefilat Geshem* that we recite on *Shemini Atzeret*, we invoke Moshe's merit, saying, "He hit the rock and water came out." But was that not the wrong thing for Moshe to do? How do we request rain in the merit of that act? Clearly, R' Elazary answers, the very subtle mistake that Moshe made, whatever it was, does not diminish from his greatness or from the *Kiddush Hashem* that he made by providing water to *Bnei Yisrael*.

R' Elazary adds: Moshe was told to "see the Land." From here we learn that a blessing is more effective if the one giving it can see the recipient. (*Netivei Chaim*)

האזינו

Selichot

"Do not cast us away in old age; when our strength gives out do not forsake us."

Throughout the weeks of *Selichot* and on *Yom Kippur*, this line is recited by the entire congregation in a loud voice that shatters the Heavens, notes R' Yosef Konvitz z"l (1878-1944; rabbi in Newark, NJ; President of the Agudath HaRabonim of the United States and Canada). But why, he wonders, do young people in the prime of their lives recite this verse along with their elders? Let them instead pray that they should reach old age, and then they can ask for mercy that they not be forsaken!

He explains: This prayer is not referring to the individual at all, but rather to the Jewish People. In our nation's youth, we had great people who approached the stature of angels, including the Patriarchs, the Prophets, the *Tanna'im* / sages of the *Mishnah* and the *Amora'im* / sages of the *Gemara*. Who can compare to them? Our Sages said, "If we view the earlier generations as angels, then we are humans. But, if we view the earlier generations as humans, then we are donkeys!"

Therefore, continues R' Konvitz, when we gather to beg for mercy for ourselves, we beseech *Hashem*, "Do not cast us away in old age." It is true that our old age is an embarrassment to our younger days (a play on the words of *Sukkah* 53a), but since You chose us in our youth and drew us close to You to serve You, do not forsake us now that we are old. Rather, express to us words of love and friendship, as we read (*Yirmiyah* 2:2), "Thus said *Hashem*, 'I remember for your sake the kindness of your youth, the love of your bridal days, your following after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown'."

At one time, R' Konvitz concludes, we had *Tzaddikim* who protected us with their merit. But now we beseech You, *Hashem*, "When our strength gives out do not forsake us." (*Divrei Yosef: Yom Ha'kippurim* #1)

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Faiga Reva bat Yoel Aharon a"h (Fay Lerner)

"He would make him [i.e., the Jewish People] ride on the heights of the Land..." (32:13)

R' Yitzchak Ze'ev Yadler z"l (1843-1917; Yerushalayim) writes: Beginning with this verse, the Torah lists acts of kindness that *Hashem* did for the Jewish People when they were on their Land. This phrase teaches that, unlike other nations that prosper because their lands are bountiful, the Jewish People cause *Eretz Yisrael* to be bountiful, not the other way around--they "ride" high over the Land, so-to-speak. (*Tiferet Tziyon*)

"Return, Yisrael to Hashem, your Elokim, for you have stumbled due to your sin." (Hoshea 14:2--the opening verse of the Haftarah)

What does it mean that someone stumbled due to his sin? Is it not the other way around--i.e., a person stumbles, and therefore he sins?

R' Eliyahu z"l (1720-1797; the *Vilna Gaon*) explains: "Stumbling" refers to an unintentional sin. Why does Heaven cause a person to sin unintentionally? Because he previously sinned intentionally. This, writes the *Vilna Gaon*, is also the meaning of the verse (*Mishlei* 13:6), "Evil will corrupt the sinner"--i.e., the evil that a person performed previously will corrupt him and cause him to sin unintentionally.

(*Be'ur Ha'GRA al Mishlei*)

Elsewhere, the *Vilna Gaon* elaborates: There are sins for which a person is punished even though he committed them unintentionally ("*B'shogeg*") or even unavoidably ("*B'onnes*"). The reason is as our Sages teach in *Pirkei Avot* (4:2), "One sin leads to another," or as the *Gemara* (*Yoma* 39a) teaches, "If a person defiles himself a little, Heaven defiles him a lot." The *Vilna Gaon* explains: Our Sages are teaching that even sins that were committed *B'shogeg* or *B'onnes* are the consequence of intentional sins that a person committed earlier or of defilement that he brought upon himself intentionally. Therefore, he is held accountable even for such sins.

(*Be'urei Aggadot: Bava Kama* 9b)

R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l (1724-1806; lived in *Eretz Yisrael* and Italy, but traveled throughout Europe and North Africa; known as "*Chida*") offers a similar explanation for the verse (*Yeshayah* 43:25), "*Anochi* / I, *Anochi* / only I, am the One Who wipes away your willful sins for My sake, and I shall not recall your unintentional sins." He writes: There are those who say that a person first sins willfully and later unintentionally. As such, our verse means that once *Hashem* has wiped away (forgiven) man's willful sins in the merit of "*Anochi*," i.e., because we accepted the Torah, He will no longer recall man's unintentional sins, which were merely the consequence of his willful sins.

(*Nachal Sorek: Vayikra* #2)

"The Rock! -- His work is perfect, for all His paths are justice; a Kel of faith without wrongdoing, He is righteous and fair. Corruption is not His -- the blemish is His children's, a perverse and twisted generation." (32:4-5)

R' Elazar Loew z"l (1758-1837; rabbi in Bohemia and Moravia; best known for his work *Shemen Rokeach*) writes: There are heretics who claim that *Hashem*'s knowledge of the future forces a person to do what *Hashem* knows he will do and negates the possibility of *Bechirah* / Free Will. The truth, however, is that *Hashem*'s knowledge of the future does not negate our Free Will, though that is a paradox we cannot resolve, as R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes in *Hilchot Teshuvah* (5:5).

R' Loew continues: Logic dictates that *Hashem*'s knowledge does not negate our Free Will. *Hashem* is righteous and virtuous, and He surely wants people to behave righteously and virtuously. Indeed, if *Hashem* were forcing man to behave a certain way, all people would be righteous and virtuous. But they are not, and wrongdoers exist, which proves the existence of Free Will.

R' Loew adds that this is the meaning of our verses: "The Rock! -- His work is perfect" -- *Hashem* made man inherently good -- "for all His paths are justice." If *Hashem*'s knowledge forced a person to sin, it would be as if He caused the sin directly, but that is impossible, for He is "a Kel of faith without wrongdoing, He is righteous and fair." Therefore, "Corruption is not His" -- it cannot be attributed to *Hashem*. Rather, "the blemish is His children's, a perverse and twisted generation." (*Yavin Shemu'ah*)

A student once asked R' Dov Yaffe z"l (1928-2017; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Knesset Chizkiyahu in Rechasim, Israel) for advice on concentrating on his prayers when he finds himself sitting in *Shul* near someone who is praying too loudly or too enthusiastically--a phenomenon that is particularly common during the High Holidays.

R' Yaffe answered: First, if one tries harder to concentrate, it ameliorates the problem a little bit.

Second, a Jew must always ask himself, "What does *Hashem* want from me at this moment, in the situation in which I now find myself?" It follows that if *Hashem* gave someone a neighbor who is disturbing his prayers (and there is no possibility of changing seats), it must be that what *Hashem* wants from the person at that moment is to do his best to concentrate under those trying circumstances.

Finally, R' Yaffe said, it would be good to think: "Thank G-d that person is praying so enthusiastically. *Hashem* is surely deriving great pleasure from his prayers." (*Avodat Ha'yamim Ha'nora'im* p.94)