

FALSEHOOD HAS NO LEGS

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Today's Learning
Niddah 4:7-5:1
Kitzur 208:10-14
Pesachim 41
Yerushalmi Pesachim 9

The parashah opens: *"Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Israel."* What was the nature of Moshe's "going"? R' Mordechai of Chernobyl z"l explains as follows:

We read (Bemidbar 14:17), "And now, may the strength of my Lord be magnified, as You have spoken, saying." [Although the words "You have spoken" literally refer to Hashem, we may also interpret the verse as if "you have spoken" refers to man.] This alludes to the teaching of the Kabbalists that when a person speaks, i.e., prays, he magnifies the name of G-d and he has the ability to elevate the souls of many Jews.

How does a person know if he is praying properly? The verse concludes, "You have spoken, saying" - if, after a person prays, he wants to "say," i.e., pray more, then he knows that he has prayed well. If he is glad to be finished, he has not prayed properly.

We also read (Kohelet 4:17), "Guard your legs when you go to the house of Elokim." Proper prayer stands on two legs, says R' Mordechai. One leg is man's belief in the holiness of the prayers, and the other is man's trust that Hashem accepts the prayers of even the least articulate person. However, a person must always be truthful, as Chazal say that "falsehood has no legs." [As written in the Torah, the letters of the word "sheker"/"falsehood" all come to a point on the bottom. Thus, they have no legs and cannot stand.]

Moshe's prayers undoubtedly stood on strong "legs" and he was therefore able to elevate the souls of the Jewish people. It was on those "legs" that our verse says he "went". There is also another way to elevate the souls of Jews, R' Mordechai concludes. Next week, we will take the Four Species which Chazal say symbolize four types of Jews. Even the aravah, which has no taste and no smell - no Torah and no mitzvot - can be elevated when it is bound together with the other species. (Likkutei Torah)

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, 'Behold your days are drawing near to die . . .'" (31:14)

When R' Yehoshua Leib Diskin z"l was rabbi of Shklov, Lithuania, he was oppressed terribly by certain members of his community. Once, as he finished delivering his daily Talmud lecture, two strangers entered. R' Yehoshua Leib greeted them and asked, "What can I do for you?"

"We wish to hear words of Torah from you," they answered.

R' Yehoshua Leib directed the visitors to take the midrash Yalkut Shimoni from the bookshelf and to choose a paragraph that they wished him to explain. They did so and chose the following midrash:

"Behold, a tzaddik is paid on this earth" (Mishlei 11:31) - this is Moshe, about whom it is said, "Behold your days are drawing near to die." "Despite the wicked one and the sinner" (Mishlei, ibid.) - this is Korach and his followers.

"What is the connection between the quoted verse in Mishlei, the verse from our parashah, and Korach?" the visitors wanted to know.

R' Yehoshua Leib explained as follows: There are two ways that a person's time can come. Some complete their life's work while still young and move on to the next world, while other people die of old age without having completed their missions. In Moshe's case, the Torah testifies (Devarim 34:7), "His eye had not dimmed and his vigor had not diminished." Clearly then, Moshe did not die of old age; rather, his mission was complete - the time during which he was meant to lead the Jewish people had ended.

But Moshe could have complained, "I was cheated out of those days when Korach and his followers rebelled against me and I was not recognized as leader!" This is the message of the midrash: The tzaddik is paid his full time on earth. If Moshe's time to die was drawing near, it is "despite the wicked

one and the sinner." Moshe's suffering at the hands of Korach was already taken into account.

R' Yehoshua Leib concluded: Anyone who wants to inflict suffering on a tzaddik should know this! Nothing that the wicked do has any impact on the tzaddik in the end. In Hashem's "books," it is all accounted for. (Quoted in Yalkut Lekach Tov p.186)

The midrash lists ten verses that refer to Moshe's death, and Chazal say that there were ten events that contributed to the decree that Moshe would not enter Eretz Yisrael. However, the decree was not sealed until Hashem saw that Moshe was putting off praying for a reprieve. Although Moshe did pray 515 prayers that he be allowed to enter the Land, he waited too long.

The implication is, says R' Eliyahu Lopian z"l, that if Moshe had prayed immediately, Hashem would have relented. We should learn from this that we should not put off praying when a need arises. We should pray immediately. (Lev Eliyahu Vol I, Shevivei Ohr No. 175)

"So now, write this song for yourselves . . . so that this song shall be for Me a witness against Bnei Yisrael." (31:19)

What purpose does this witness serve? R' Meir Leibush Malbim z"l explains with the following parable:

There was once a king who appointed a convicted felon to guard his treasury. However, since the king knew this servant's nature, he made a note that the servant was a convicted felon.

Most people assumed that the king did this to serve as a reminder to the guard so that he should not fall into his old ways. In fact, that was not the king's intention. Rather, he wanted to remind himself that he assumed a great deal of risk in trying to rehabilitate this man. If the guard did steal from the king, the king wanted to remember that he had himself to blame.

Similarly, Hashem knows that man is spiritually weak, as we read (31:21), "For I know his inclination." Since Hashem took us to Him nevertheless, if He must punish us, He must be lenient. (Quoted in Ma'ayanah Shel Torah)

An Astonishing Midrash

When Avraham bound Yitzchak on the altar, he said, "Master of the Universe! Give my sons ten days of repentance."

R' Zvi Elimelech Shapira of Dinov z"l explains: Avraham's willingness to sacrifice Yitzchak and Yitzchak's willingness to be sacrificed both demonstrate a tremendous love of Hashem. Chazal teach that because of the Patriarch's mesirut nefesh/willingness to sacrifice everything for Hashem, Hashem acts as though the sacrifice of Yitzchak did take place.

Avraham reasoned: If mesirut nefesh can cause something that never happened to be treated as if it did happen, then it also can help a person achieve atonement for his sins. Even sins for which only death can atone can be atoned for through mesirut nefesh, for Hashem will view the person as if he died and was born anew. Avraham therefore asked Hashem to set aside a period for intense teshuvah.

R' Zvi Elimelech adds: These ten days are a time to repent for the events of the entire year. When a "yud" (for "ten") is added to the word "shanah"/"year", the result is "sheinah"/"sleep." Sleep is an expression of mesirut nefesh, as we say in the ma'ariv prayer, "In Your hands I entrust my spirit." [Sleep is a form of death, and we awaken from it with our souls returned to us refreshed - so, too, is the power of teshuvah with mesirut nefesh.] (Bnei Yissaschar: Ma'amarei Tishrei II:27)

More Authors of the High Holiday Prayers

[The following continues from last week the brief biographical notes on some of the paytanim/liturgists who authored the additional prayers which are recited on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and during the weeks of Selichot.]

R' Shlomo Habavli - his full name is believed to be R' Shlomo bar Yehuda - is thought to have lived before 990. He was referred to by one of Rashi's teachers as one of the "Kedoshei Elyon"/"exalted, holy ones." He should not be confused with R' Shlomo Ha'sfardi, i.e., R' Shlomo ben Yehuda ibn Gabirol, who was roughly his contemporary.

R' Eliyahu bar Shemayahu lived in Bari, Italy in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. About forty of his selichot are extant.

R' Shephatiah was a well-known kabbalist who lived in Oria, Italy. When the Byzantine emperor Basil I issued anti-Jewish decrees in 873, R' Shephatiah traveled to Constantinople to convince the emperor to annul his decrees. While there, R' Shephatiah cured the emperor's daughter who had been "possessed." As a result, the emperor released the Jews of Oria and four other communities from his decrees. R' Shephatiah's son, R' Amittai, also was a prolific author of selichot.

Some of the piyutim recited during ne'ilah are fragments of longer works by R' Shephatiah (mentioned above), by the Tosafist R' Yitzchak of Dampierre, who was Rashi's great-grandson, and by one R' Silano of 9th century Italy.

The identity of R' Binyamin bar Zerach is uncertain. Some say that he lived in late seventh-century Germany and identify him as the first dayan/Torah judge in that country. Others find allusions in his works to the First Crusade (1096), and place him later. Some refer to him as "R' Binyamin Ba'al Shem."

R' Yosef ben Avisur lived in 10th century Spain.

One of the most famous piyutim, the story of the Ten Martyrs as told during the Yom Kippur mussaf,

was written by one R' Yehuda, whose identity is unknown.

Sponsored by Samuel and Marion Markowitz on the yahrzeits of their fathers Yisroel Moshe ben Tzvi Dov Markovitz a"h Rabbi Yitzchok Mordechai ben Avraham Gross a"h

Manny and Loretta Sadwin and family on the yahrzeit of Loretta's father, Irving Smolar a"h

Aaron and Rona Lerner in memory of mother, Fay Lerner a"h

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