

# LIVING FOREVER

*by Shlomo Katz*

## **Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz**

### **Bereishis**

**Volume XIV, Number 1  
29 Tishrei 5760  
October 9, 1999**

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Today's Learning:

Ma'aser Sheni 5:15/Challah 1:1

Orach Chaim 173:1-3

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Mo'ed Kattan 2

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Yevamot 67

R' Azaryah Figo z"l (Italy; 1579-1647) writes: Our trust in Hashem is based on three things. These are: His honor, His kindness, and His promises to us. Moshe Rabbenu appealed to these attributes when he prayed (Bemidbar 14:15-19): "Then the nations that heard of Your fame will say . . . And now, may the strength of my Lord be magnified as You have spoken, saying, 'Hashem, Slow to Anger, Abundant in Kindness . . . ' " The first phrase ("Then the nations that heard of Your fame will say") appeals to Hashem's honor. The second phrase ("as You have spoken") appeals to Hashem as one Who keeps His promises. Finally, the third phrase ("Hashem . . . Abundant in Kindness") appeals to Hashem's kindness.

The above idea explains why we read in the Torah that those praying for repentance often magnified the severity of their sins. One would expect someone seeking repentance to downplay the sin; nevertheless, in our parashah, Kayin said (after he killed Hevel - Bereishit 4:13), "My sin is too

great to be borne." Similarly, when Moshe prayed after the sin of the golden calf, he said (Shmot 32:31), "This people has committed a grievous sin." When one says, "My sin is great, but I trust in G-d to forgive me nevertheless," one demonstrates his belief in the magnitude of G-d's honor, His kindness and His fulfillment of His promises. (Binah La'ittim: Drush Aleph L'Yom Aleph Shel Sukkot)

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*"To Adam He said, 'Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate of the tree . . .'"* (3:17)  
R' Aharon Yosef Bakst z"l (Poland; 1869-1941) taught: Why was Adam's repentance not accepted? (We can see that it was not accepted from the fact that the decree of death was not lifted, says R' Bakst [but see the opinion of Rabbenu Nissim z"l, below].)

Adam was not punished for eating from the tree - for which he repented. Rather, he was punished: "Because you listened to your wife." By listening to Chava when she offered him the fruit, Adam demonstrated that he did not have the willpower to withstand peer pressure. That is a sin for which repentance is impossible. One who succumbs to peer pressure negates his very existence and therefore has no place in this world.

In Shmuel I (Ch. 15) we read that King Shaul lost his kingdom because he did not destroy Amalek as he was commanded to do. Shaul himself defended his actions by saying that he was afraid of the people (who wanted to keep Amalek's animals). However, says R' Bakst, it was precisely because Shaul listened to the people that he was not fit to continue in his position. (Lev Aharon p. 68)

A related thought: The mishnah (Sotah 9:15) states that in the last days before the time of Mashiach, "The face of the generation will be like a dog's face." What does this mean?

When a man walks his dog, the dog walks in front as if it is leading its master. However, when the dog comes to a crossroads, it stops and looks back to receive instructions from its master. So, too, in the days before Mashiach, "leaders" will pretend to walk ahead of their people as if they are leading. In reality, though, all of their decisions will be based on the polls that tell them what their "followers" want. In this way, the face of the generation - the leaders who walk ahead of a nation as one's face precedes his body - will be like a dog's face. (Heard from R' Moshe Eisemann shlita)

Rabbenu Nissim z"l (Spain; 14th century) writes: Adam's death was not a punishment per se. Rather, it was the consequence of his actions. He explains:

In order to live forever, as Adam was supposed to, one's soul must be strong and must overpower his body. In turn, one's soul is strengthened when he focuses on intellectual pursuits and minimizes physical pursuits.

In contrast, the Etz Ha'da'at/Tree of Knowledge awakened the physical desires of the one who ate from it. When Hashem said (2:17), "For on the day you eat of it, you shall surely die," He did not mean that Adam would be punished with death. He meant only that Adam would change from being a

person who was capable of living forever to a person whose nature it is to die eventually. (Derashot Ha'Ran No. 1)

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### Birkat Hachodesh/Blessing the Month

It is customary in most Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities that an announcement is made on the Shabbat preceding rosh chodesh (such as today) that rosh chodesh will fall on a certain day or days during the coming week. The reason for this custom is so that people will know to recite Ya'aleh Ve'yavo and other rosh chodesh prayers on the appropriate day(s).

In many Sephardic communities, this announcement is preceded by the following prayer:

Yehi ratzon/May it be by the will of our Father Who is in heaven to preserve among us the sages of Israel - them, their wives, their sons, their daughters, their disciples and the students of their disciples in all their dwelling places, and let us say: Amen.

Why is a prayer recited for the sages and their families at the time that the new month is announced?

R' Shemtov Gaugin z"l (early 20th century Sephardic Chief Rabbi of London) offers the following reason: When the Sanhedrin still existed, that body set the day for rosh chodesh based on the sighting of the new moon. Because the scheduling of rosh chodesh was dependent upon the decision of the sages, the day when rosh chodesh is announced is a fitting time to pray for the welfare of the sages and their families.

Ashkenazim recite the above prayer for the sages after the Torah reading on every Monday and Thursday. Why? R' Gaugin suggests that it is because Monday and Thursday are days when prayers are accepted more readily. In recognition of the indispensability of the sages to our lives, we pray for their welfare on those days. (Ta'amei Minhagim Ketter Shem Tov p. 227)

The "yehi ratzon" prayer recited by Ashkenazim before announcing the new month is based on a prayer found in the gemara (Berachot 16b). This prayer (without the words "that You inaugurate this month upon us for goodness and blessing") was recited by the sage Rav at the conclusion of shemoneh esrei every day.

Recitation of this prayer is widespread, but the reason for doing so at this time is obscure. In fact, some authorities question its recitation at all because one is not supposed to make personal requests on Shabbat. R' Chaim Elazar Shapiro z"l (the Munkatcher Rebbe; died 1937) suggests that this is why some people add the words: "In the merit of Rav's prayer." It is as if they are saying, "We are not making personal requests on Shabbat; we are merely telling the story of how the sage Rav used to pray every day." (Divrei Torah IV, No. 107)

R' Zvi Elimelech of Dinov z"l (the "Bnei Yissaschar"; died 1841) writes: The custom of saying "In the

merit of Rav's prayer" is a mistake. Originally, some siddurim had the notation after this prayer: "Berachot Tefilat Rav" - i.e., the source of this prayer is in Tractate Berachot and it is Rav's prayer. Later, a printer changed one Hebrew letter and the notation now read: "Bezchut Tefilat Rav"/"In the merit of Rav's prayer." (Maggid Ta'alumah: Berachot 16b)

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### Letters from Our Sages

The following letter was written by R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (died 1898; one of the three leading disciples of R' Yisrael Salanter). It is published in Ohr Rashaz, Volume I, No. 7.

To my dear son, the delight of my heart, the understanding one, Nachum Zev, may your light shine seven times [brighter than the sun - see Yishayah 30:26]

On this past Shabbat, I spoke about that which we observe, that every species of living thing has its own name. This is because each one has a purpose all its own, and its appearance informs us of its purpose.

Adam, G-d's handiwork, was a very wise man, and he understood from each species' appearance what its purpose was. [Therefore, he was able to name each species - see Bereishit 2:19.]

Mankind has a name different from anything else on earth [i.e., from the Torah's perspective, man is not part of the animal kingdom]. Why? Because man was created in the tzelem/image of Elokim - "in Our image, after Our likeness" [Bereishit 1:26]. Rashi interprets this to mean: "Understanding and intelligent." Man's appearance indicates the presence of understanding and intelligence; this is the tzelem of G-d. If understanding and intelligence are lacking, then man is an animal in human form. The sin of such a person is too great to bear, for he himself causes the degradation of the tzelem of Elokim (besides the fact that he transgresses the command of the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed is He). . . .

Accordingly, every person is obligated to guard his own holy tzelem. From this arises the obligation to study Torah constantly or to contemplate it day and night, in order to guard the tzelem of Elokim which is on and in oneself. Also one's activities - if he does them in accordance with the Torah, and his mind is constantly on the Torah, [hoping] to return to it and to study wisdom or mussar/ethics to the extent that he can - these too become part of [using] one's understanding and intelligence. May we be aided by the One Who aids and Who has mercy on His creations without limit so that the complete image of man will be upon us . . .

*Sponsored by the Parness family in memory of Anna Parness a"h*

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.

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