

OUR DOTING FATHER

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

"Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Israel. He said to them, 'I am one hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in, and G-d has said to me, "You shall not cross this Jordan."'" (Devarim/Deuteronomy 31:1-2)

One might think that Moshe's inability to go out and come in was a sign of waning strength, but the Torah states upon his death that "his eye did not dim and his moisture did not leave him." (ibid 34:7) Thus, Rashi explains, Moshe's statement was "I am not allowed, for the authority was taken from me and given to Yehoshua (Joshua)."

But why must Rashi note that the permission was transferred to Yehoshua? Modeling the Torah's precision to measure every letter, to state only that which is absolutely necessary, Rashi does not simply include interesting morsels of extra information. Was it not the case that Moshe could not enter the Promised Land because permission was denied him, irrelevant of to whom it was granted or even if it was granted to anyone else?

No. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1) explains that these "extra" words in Rashi actually inform us of an important lesson in Divine providence. G-d could not take away permission from Moshe unless there was a Yehoshua to whom the responsibility could be passed, because G-d does not leave the Jewish people without leaders. Indeed, throughout Jewish history, notes Rabbi Feinstein, there have always been Torah scholars to serve as leaders and role models for the Jewish Nation. Each successive generation of leaders, one step further removed from the glory of the Sinaitic Revelation, may be of slightly lesser excellence than their predecessors, but we are assured that G-d will never leave us leaderless to navigate the great wilderness called life.

This is a very comforting thought, for we live in a day when another of G-d's promises is self-evident. "But this people will rise up and stray after the foreign gods of the land, in whose midst it is coming, and it will forsake Me. My anger will flare against it on that day and I will forsake them; and I will conceal My face from them and they will become prey and many evils and distresses will encounter it." (ibid 31:16-17) For 2000 years our people has endured this painful prophecy. But our survival is proof that while G-d is concealed, He has not divorced Himself from us. We are still His children, and He awaits the day He can fulfill another prophecy. "And you will return to G-d your L-rd and listen to His voice according to everything that I command you today. then G-d your L-rd will return your captivity and have mercy upon you and He will gather you in from all the peoples to where G-d your L-rd has scattered you."

Now, during these days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, as we contemplate our relationship with Him and our next steps to strengthen our connection, we see that - hidden as He is - He has, as He promised, always provided us with leaders to model, to guide, to cajole. This reminds us that He is still there for us, looking out for our well being, tending to every blessed detail in our lives, waiting for our return.

Have a Good Shabbos and a Sweet, Happy and Healthy New Year!

(1) 1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor of his time and one of the principal leaders of Torah Jewry through much of the last century

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