

# SONG OF THE CONSCIENCE

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## Friday Night:

Now write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the Children of Israel ... (Devarim 31:19)

The "song" referred to in this posuk is recorded in Parashas Ha'azinu and is meant to serve as a warning to the Jewish People throughout the ages. However, the Talmud uses this posuk for a different purpose, as the following discussion relates:

"Rebi Yosi son of Rebi Chanina said that Torah was only given to Moshe and his descendants, as it is written, 'Write for yourself ...' (Shemos 34:27) and 'Hew for yourself ...' (Shemos 34:1)-just as the shavings (left over from hewing the Tablets) are yours [Moshe], so too is the 'writing' yours (i.e., Torah). However, Moshe acted generously and gave it to Israel, and with respect to him it says, 'A man with a good eye will be blessed ...' (Mishlei 22:9).

Rav Chisda objected: 'Hashem commanded me at that time to teach you ...' (i.e., all of Israel; Devarim 4:14;)?

[This posuk really means that] He commanded me, and I [taught it] to you. [But it is written] 'Now write this song for yourselves ...' (i.e., for the entire Jewish nation; Devarim 31:19)?

This refers only to the actual song itself.

[But it concludes] '... In order that the song may become a witness against Me for the Children of Israel ...'?

Rather, [conclude that it was] the argumentative deductions [that were given to Moshe and his descendants only, and he shared them with the rest of the nation]." (Nedarim 38a)

The "argumentative deductions" (pilpulah b'almah) referred to by the Talmud have been, to a large extent, the main part of the learning program of most yeshivos throughout the ages. Rashi explains them to mean, "understanding something from within something," a high level of insight into Torah concepts. This is what the student of Talmud works year after year to gain, and what so many Torah commentaries throughout the years have recorded for us to learn and enjoy. And to think that all of this dependent upon the generosity of one man, Moshe Rabbeinu.

But then again, that's what made Moshe "rabbeinu"-our teacher. The above Talmudic passage is followed by this statement:

"Rebi Yochanan said, 'The Holy One, Blessed is He, causes His Presence to dwell only on one who is strong, rich, wise, and humble-and all of them [we learn] from Moshe.'" (Nedarim 38a)

The Torah has already testified to Moshe's humility in Sefer Bamidbar (12:3), and his level of wisdom does not need to be proven. His wealth, as the Talmud reveals (Nedarim 38a), came from the second set of Tablets, and his strength ... Perhaps "strength" here means more than physical prowess, as the rabbis teach:

Who is a strong person? One who overcomes his yetzer hara, as it says, "He who is slow to anger is better than the strong man, and a master of his passions is better than a conqueror of a city." (Mishlei 16:32). (Pirkei Avos 4:1)

Perhaps Moshe may have had the right to keep the argumentative deductions to himself, and maybe to be human is to have the "passion" to do so, but someone as "strong" as Moshe could only fully derive pleasure from such godly knowledge, when it is shared with his fellow Jews. This, perhaps, may be another reason why:

Rebi Simlai explained: The Torah begins with [an act of] chesed and ends with [an act of] chesed ... (Sotah 14a)

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## Shabbos Day:

Now write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the Children of Israel ... (Devarim 31:19)

This posuk is the source of another mitzvah, as the Talmud teaches:

"Rabbah said: Even though a person has inherited a Sefer Torah from his father, still, he must write one for himself, as the verse says, 'Now write this song for yourselves ...' " (Sanhedrin 21b)

The Shulchan Aruch confirms this:

"There is a mitzvah on every male from Israel to write a Sefer Torah ..." (Yorah De'ah 270:1)

The Taz, a commentator on the Shulchan Aruch, adds to this statement:

"... One who corrects even a single letter [in a Sefer Torah] is like one who received [Torah] from Mt. Sinai."

However, as simple as this sounds, even this requires skill and a good knowledge of sofrus (the profession of the sofer, i.e., one who writes, Sifrei Toros, Tefillin, and Mezuzos). Sofrus requires more than a knowledge of the Aleph-Bais, it requires background and training in being able to properly form each letter according to the prescribed dimensions for Sifrei Toros, Tefillin, and Mezuzos, among other halachos. Unfortunately, there is a lot counterfeiting today in the world of STaM (an

acronym for Sifrei Toros, Tefillin, and Mezuzos), and in cheaper pairs of Tefillin and Mezuzos, some of the writing has appeared more like "chicken scrawl."

Since few people halachically qualify as sofrim these days, to fulfill this mitzvah, people often pay for a letter, or words, or a whole parshah, and sometimes, even an entire Sefer Torah to be written on their behalf. However, in the words of one sofer, there is very little as pleasurable as writing the word of God as a mitzvah, as our ancestors having been doing now since they left Mt. Sinai.

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## SEUDAH SHLISHI:

Continuing on with the theme of sofrus, it is interesting to point out how most of the letters of the Aleph-Bais, when written this way, are made up of other letters. As a composition, the letters in and of themselves teach something about life from a Torah perspective. In the case of the letter bais, it is not only what is written that teaches us something, but even what is not.

In sofrus, the negative space of the letter bais forms the letter peh. What makes this so fascinating is that the letter bais is the first letter of the Torah, which begins the word bereishis-in the beginning. The letter peh when spelled as it sounds (peh, heh), is the Hebrew word "mouth." It is as if the first letter of the Torah is telling us that creation emerged as a matter of God's speaking, which it did.

Furthermore, the gematria of the word "peh" is 86, the same numerical value as God's name "Elokim" (when spelled with a heh, not a kuf), and the word ha-teva, which means "the nature." It was Elokim who made creation, which resulted in the existence of nature. To think that all of this emanates from the negative space within one tiny little bais at the beginning of the Torah; can one even begin to comprehend what can emerge from "positive spaces" within the rest of the Torah that follows?

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## Melave Malkah:

This Shabbos is Shabbos Shuva. Even though Rosh Hashanah has passed, and we're now heading for Yom Kippur, the following is still relevant.

It says in the Talmud that on Rosh Hashanah, three "books" are opened before G-d (Rosh Hashanah 16b). Tosafos there (q.v. Nichtamim l'alter l'chaim) explains there that this is with respect to the World-to-Come (i.e., the person is being judged in terms of their portion in the World-to-Come).

However, this is difficult to understand; how is it relevant to judge a person who is still living with regard to his portion in the World-to-Come? Is it not a person's final moment that proves everything about him, whether he is worthy or unworthy for eternal bliss?

The answer given is as follows: On Rosh Hashanah, the Heavenly Court judges someone first to see

if presently he is worthy of the World-to-Come, and if he is, then he may be punished in This World, now, before he dies, to save him suffering in the Next World. But someone who is going to need spiritual "cleansing" in a major way, more than his life can provide, they give him good in This World now, as it says in the Talmud:

Sometimes they lift the judgment meant for after death and give him evil in This World instead. (Kiddushin 39b)

In other words, all that happens to a person in This World is dependent upon his position with respect to inheriting the World-to-Come. After he dies and leaves this world, then he will finally be judged based upon all he went through in his lifetime on earth. Hence, the "three books opened on Rosh Hashanah" are really with respect to the World-to-Come, and in them the completely righteous and the completely evil are "sealed" on Rosh Hashanah. However, with respect to This World, no one is sealed until Yom Kippur. This is what Tosafos means.

Based upon what has been said above, the Gr"a says it is incorrect to wish someone "Leshanah tova sikaseiv v'sikaseim"-A good year, written and sealed," because it sounds as if the brochah is only for one year, this year, which is only in This World. If one's intention is to bless someone regarding the World-to-Come, then he should only say: l'chaim tovim sikaseiv v'sikaseim-a good life, written and sealed, without mentioning "a good year," the main reason being that the judgment of the World-to-Come is over before the "writing" and the "sealing." After the "sealing" of the judgment of the World-to-Come the "writing" for This World is done on Rosh Hashanah. What one really needs to say is:

"For a good life you should be written and sealed for in the World-to-Come, and for a good year you should be written for life in This World."

However, the tradition is not to say such a long greeting, so therefore, the Gr"a said that one should only say "written" which refers to This World, and which will also include a brochah for the World-to-Come. This didn't help you this year, but maybe you'll remember it for the next year.

In any case, have a wonderful year filled with blessing and only good news, and a great Shabbos Shuva as well.

Kesiva v'Chasima Tova,

Pinchas Winston

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