

# PLEADING IN COMFORT

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## Friday Night:

*And I pleaded to G-d at that time* (Devarim 3:23)

And, if anyone knew how to plead to G-d, it was Moshe Rabbeinu. What was it -- the way he cried Š the way he threw himself down on the ground in front of G-d Š the way he groveled? No, it was the way Moshe Rabbeinu understood the concept of tefillah. He understood the role of tefillah in This World.

And, what IS the role of tefillah in This World?

To many people, I suppose, prayer is like asking your father for something you want, but can't get on your own. We do it all the time, whenever we find ourselves in the humbled position of depending upon others for things we want, and maybe need. Knowing that we have to create the right "atmosphere" that will make it favorable to fulfill our desire, we act accordingly: more politely, warmly, and we speak with a gentle voice.

However, G-d is referred to as the One Who checks the hearts men. As we have said before: you can fool some of the people some of the time, but you can fool G-d NONE of the time. Politeness, warmth, and a gentle voice will do very little before G-d unless that truly come from the heart.

And, G-d is not emotional, that breaking down and crying is going to stir His heart, so-to-speak, and make Him give us that which we do not deserve. He does not have mercy upon us simply because of His own emotional short-comings, for, He has neither -- neither emotions nor short-comings. Then, I ask again: What is the role of prayer in life?

Imagine walking up a narrow ledge, when all of a sudden, a piece of the path is missing. Somehow, you need to get across the gap to the other side, but, short of a miracle, it is impossible to do so. You have no rope, no ladder, and no physical way to span the chasm.

Conscious life, for a Jew, can be divided up into three basic activities: Torah-learning, good deeds, and prayer. Aside from the actual technical and practical knowledge that Torah-learning imparts, Torah is a spiritual mirror to reveal our inner potential; to reflect back to us our godliness, so that we can live inspired spiritual lives.

Doing mitzvos, even when it means performing activities that we actually enjoy doing, is a way to transform potential into reality, to actualize the good that we have learned from the Torah. Good deeds, and mitzvos in general, are the way that we give lively expression to our sense of godliness.

Though learning Torah is a meditative experience, it is more like a wonderful discovery experience, where the mind focuses on the beauty and axioms of truth of G-d's world. Certain kinds of learning, when performed the right way with the right frame of mind can be like prayer, but, that is rarely the case. Learning Torah can and ought to be an exhilarating experience and must inspire a person to want to be close to G-d, but it doesn't always result in that sensation at the time of learning itself.

Doing mitzvos, because of human nature, refines a person and draws out his or her godliness -- that is, they make a person act like G-d -- but, they don't necessarily result in a sense of oneness with G-d at the time either (though, there is a very positive feeling that results from doing mitzvos). Mitzvos are crises -- moments of truth, which force us to make decisions about in which direction in life we wish to go: instinctual, or, soul-like.

Tefillah, on the other hand, is an intellectual and spiritual spanning of the physical and spiritual worlds, during which one stands with his feet in the physical world, but, with his heart and mind in the spiritual world. This is why people often refer to prayer as a time to "re-charge" their spiritual batteries. All of tefillah -- be it the technical, or, the more esoteric aspects -- is designed to facilitate this experience.

Unfortunately, for many people, prayer is a technical occurrence treated very much like the it's-time-to-ask-father-for-what-I-want experience. Many people, when it comes to tefillah, are like planes that never quite pull up their landing gear and take off. They just keep rolling across that runway, stuck on the ground, desperate to get out of the "plane" as soon as they can.

Moshe Rabbeinu, the man whose strength was "in his mouth," who could change reality through His prayers, was a master pilot, albeit a spiritual one. When Moshe prayed, he easily shifted into a mode that allowed his feet to remain on the ground, while his mind soared in the heavens. For Moshe Rabbeinu, tefillah was the perfect occasion to be one with G-d's oneness.

And, when that happens through tefillah, then other things happen as well. Either the person is elevated to the point at which they can see that what they want was superfluous (and cease to want it), or, better yet, he rectifies himself (and even creation) to the point that G-d can now give him what he needs. In Moshe's case, that was canceling the decree against him that forbade him entrance into Eretz Yisroel, and, had the Jewish people been ready for Moshiach and redemption, he would have accomplished that too.

## Shabbos Day:

*Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One.* (Devarim 6:4)

One of THE most important mitzvos in ALL OF EXISTENCE is the mitzvah of "Yichud Hashem," the unification of G-d. Now, not only does that sound strange, but, even sounds tantamount to idol worship, for, the cornerstone of Jewish belief is that G-d is "ONE." Is this not what the Shema just said?

Yet, we say at the end of the daily prayer service:

On that day (when Moshiach comes), G-d will be One and His will be One. (Zechariah 14:9)

Furthermore, one of the special paragraphs said in advance of a mitzvah, to focus us on the purpose of the mitzvah (found in most prayer books) is:

[I hereby do this mitzvah] for the sake of the unification of The Holy One, Blessed is He, and His Divine Presence, in fear and in love, to unify the Name of yud-h'eh with vav h'eh in completion, in the name of the entire Jewish people.

It seems to be a contradiction.

The Nefesh HaChaim approaches this dilemma from another direction. Most blessings begin, "Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d Š" Now, some interpret these words as simple praise of the A'lmighty, but, the Nefesh HaChaim brings incontrovertible proof that this can't be the case. This creates a philosophical dilemma.

Why? Because, the concept of a blessing is to increase the lot of that being blessing. This is why, the rabbis teach, that the word "baruch" (bless) begins with the letter "bais," which represents the number two, and the concept of increasing something. To be blessed is to have at least enough, and, to seek a blessing, is to seek more than one's present lot in life.

If G-d is perfect and lacking absolutely NOTHING, then, what is there to bless Him with, that is, what can be added to Him in any way?

The answer is, nothing, IN ESSENCE. In Essence, G-d IS perfect, and lacking absolutely nothing, and therefore, non-blessable. However, for the sake of free-will, and in order to allow man to become a "partner" with G-d in creation (and thereby earn his portion in the World-to-Come), G-d made creation in such a way as to allow for His revelation and when, G-d forbid, it is necessary, His concealment.

Therefore, whereas in essence G-d's reality never changes, OUR PERCEPTION of His being and involvement in the everyday affairs of creation and the history of man, fluctuates. And, explains the Nefesh HaChaim, it does so based upon the actions of man: to sanctify the Name of G-d is to make creation more aware of His Being, and, G-d forbid, to profane His Name is to "push" His presence out

of the minds of men.

The results of each are obvious. When G-d's Presence is manifest, then man acts in a godly manner, placing spiritual priorities above materialistic ones. However, when G-d's Presence is hidden to man, then, like school children left alone for a time, mankind turns its back on spiritual matters and pursues physical comfort in excess.

Hence, the Shema is a wake-up call. It is saying, in essence, the following:

Listen, folks. Don't be fooled by the seeming lack of involvement of G-d in every daily life; it is a dangerous illusion. He is every bit as much here as you are, and then some. Take the intellectual steps to bridge the gap between what G-d is, and how you perceive Him. Only then can G-d become One in your minds, and in your hearts, for, then your perception of Him will match, on some level, His reality.

Zechariah's words echo the exact same thought, but add a warning as well:

Realize that a time is coming when this will happen, regardless of what you do on your own, and how you behave. However, once this happens, you will have lost your opportunity to come to this level of spiritual greatness on your own, and you will lose your reward for having done so. Do it now, while free-will to do so still remains, and reap the benefits of your success, in This World, and, the World-to-Come. There are strong signs in history that the process has already begun, and, is picking up pace on a daily basis.

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### **SEUDAH SHLISHI:**

*And you shall love G-d your G-d with all of your hearts, with all of your life, and, with all of your possession.* (Devarim 6:4)

This is the second Torah verse of the Shema. What exactly is going on when we say these words? What are we trying accomplish by praying this phrase? This rather esoteric phrase sums it up:

This is the mitzvah of Yichud: To constantly unify everything in creation with Him, for, "He fills the entire world with His Glory" (Yeshayahu 6:3), until it is completely apparent below that "G-d alone will have been exalted" (Tehillim 148:13), and this is the rectification that will occur in the future, when all the spiritual impurity will disappear, and all of creation will become holy to G-d and unified with Him. (Leshem, HaKadosh, Sha'ar 7, Perek 6:2)

We Jews are here to make a point, first to ourselves, then to our communities, then to our nation, and finally, to the entire world. What point do you think it is supposed to be:

1. We, the Jewish people, are masochists. This is why we choose to do ALL THESE MITZVOS, which, otherwise, seem to have no meaning other than to make our lives more difficult than our secular

brethren. Wanna join?

2. We, the Jewish people, enjoying living in the dark ages, cut off from modern society, which is why many of us refuse to integrate into secular society, in spite of the fact that many of us do in the end.
3. We are dreamers and delusional. Even though G-d seems to have abandoned us, and we, Him, still, we hold onto our ancient ways because, heh, no one likes change.
4. We, the Jewish people, believe in two worlds: the holy spiritual one that we slip into when in synagogue (and not even then sometimes), and, the everyday practical world of the non-Jew, where everything and anything goes, and we can revert to the law of the jungle.

Or:

5. We, the Jewish people, descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, a people who knows with surety that we received Torah from Mt. Sinai from G-d Himself, through His trusted and faithful servant Moshe, our teacher; a people for whom there is only ONE REALITY, and that is, G-D'S REALITY; a people for whom the apparent hiddenness of G-d in everyday life is the real illusion, and therefore, we act in everyday life with the full awareness that He is there, watching us, helping us, encouraging us to return to Him in order to live holy lives. And, we believe with complete faith that every phase of history is a passing one, one that will yield to the values of Torah at the right time, and hopefully, in the right way (that depends upon us). We know and accept that we have a mission to be holy, and, to elevate the world around us to holiness, to teach mankind what it means to have been created in the "image of G-d," and not the other way around, where we are taught the ways of those who reject man's godliness, and G-d's godliness and role in creation.

I hoping you chose the latter example, because, this is what the Torah teaches. As the posuk above states:

And you shall love G-d your G-d with all of your hearts (l'vavecha), with all of your life, and, with all of your possession. (Devarim 6:4)

As the rabbis teach, the word "l'vavecha" (lamed-bais-bais-chof) has an extra "bais," because, philosophically-speaking, we have two inclinations: a yetzer tov and a yetzer hara, representative of two sides of our heart. Hence, one bais corresponds to the yetzer tov, whereas the other bais corresponds to the yetzer hara. Hence, the Shema is commanding us: both inclinations must learn to love G-d and to serve Him.

One heart means one G-d. When every aspect of our lives reflects a single belief, a single lifestyle consistent with the will of G-d, everywhere, and, at all times, then, we have testified to the belief in a single G-d. A divided heart gives the impression of a divided belief, a belief in, G-d forbid, more than one god. This is not the message we Jews were redeemed from Egypt to teach, but, tragically, it is the message the non-Jewish world is picking up from us at this time.

The word "echad," which means "one" is equal in gematria to the number thirteen. So, too, does the word "ahavah," which means "love" equal thirteen. Love means unification with the object of our love, and unification with G-d means a unified heart in belief and devotion.

And, just to end off on a Kabbalistic note, the word "echad" is spelled: aleph- ches-dalet. In Kabbalah, the letter "aleph" corresponds to the highest sefirah, "Keser." The "ches," in this case, represents the eight sefiros below Keser (Chochmah, Binah, Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod), until the last sefirah, Malchus. The letter "dalet," in Kabbalah, always represents "Malchus."

Hence, the message of the Shema:

From the very top of creation until the very bottom of creation, even in the darkest, most physical parts of existence, you must know and be real with G-d's Oneness. There is never a place that G-d isn't, just places where it is not proper to think about Him. There is never a time when G-d isn't, just times when He doesn't seem apparent to us.

In fact, recently, He was at the Camp David talks as well, and even the major newspapers picked up on it, though, unknowingly. And, He doesn't seem to have been one of the negotiators sitting around the table either, but, when the headlines scream:

Saturday July 15 1:14 AM ET

Sabbath Seen Slowing Mideast Peace Talks in US

By Deborah Charles

THURMONT, Md. (Reuters) - Middle East peace negotiations, already hit by an angry Palestinian response to U.S. compromise proposals, enter their sixth day on Saturday in what is likely to be a quiet day of informal talks due to the Jewish Sabbath.

As the clock ticks down to Wednesday when President Clinton is scheduled to leave for a summit in Japan, talks with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak were due to be scaled down for the Sabbath, which runs from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday.

"I would expect over that 24-hour period, there could be some informal discussions," White House spokesman Joe Lockhart said on Friday. "But nothing really beyond that."

An Israeli official confirmed that Barak and his negotiating team would follow the Israeli government's avoidance of work on the Sabbath -- a day of rest for Jews -- and said any discussions that did take place would be "strictly informal."

-- at a time of such incredible pressure and historical significance, and, the papers are quick to note that:

"Barak, a former soldier who does not strictly observe Jewish religious law, obeys the convention of not inflaming Israel's religious-secular divide by violating a rule held dear by many Jews."

-- then, you can take it as a sign from Heaven, as if G-d is saying: You may deal and bargain as if I am a distant reality, but, know that I am not. I am very much alive, well, and involved in your affairs -- ALL OF YOUR AFFAIRS. And, where all of this will end up in the end, and what it will cost you, is entirely dependent upon how real you are with this fundamental of creation.

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## **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*Give thanks to G-d, for His is good, for His kindness endures forever. (Tehillim 136:1)*

This tehillah has twenty-six verses, corresponding to the gematria of G-d's Tetragrammaton Name: yud-heh-vav-heh, the extremely holy Name associated with G-d's trait of mercy. Hence, hashgochically, it works out well that this tehillah has come up in time for Shabbos Nachamu -- the Shabbos of Consolation.

This psalm is called, "Hallel HaGadol," the "Great Hallel," because, as the Talmud explains, it emphasizes that G-d sustains every living thing, every single moment (Pesachim 118a). What better time is there to recall this but Shabbos morning, when we say this psalm as part of the "Introductory Psalms" and contemplate our dependence upon G-d's kindness, and, Seder Night, when we recall such kindnesses and our mission to teach this message to the world?

The Talmud also points that there were twenty-six generations from the time Adam HaRishon first ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and, that Moshe Rabbeinu went up Mt. Sinai to receive the Torah. We weren't ready for it then either, but, G-d, in His infinite mercy, took us out of Egypt anyhow, and presented us with a "passport" to fulfillment in The World and the World-to-Come in the form of Torah.

There is no greater consolation than this: to know that, even when we are completely unworthy, G-d still finds it within Himself to show us mercy and grant us life. Not only this, says the Talmud, but even though man's sins warrant Divine punishment immediately, and should bring suffering, instead, G-d simply withholds His good, usually according to a person's station in life.

In other words, G-d takes no pleasure whatsoever in the suffering of man; just the opposite, He longs for us to become worthy of His good. Our positive behavior comes and goes, but, G-d's kindness endures forever. When we're ready, G-d's kindness comes down to us in whatever form is best for us, spiritually-speaking.

To Him Who smote the Egyptians through their firstborn, for His kindness endures forever Š (10)

It should have said, "Who smote the firstborn of Egypt." To explain this, Rashi quotes the Midrash that says, upon hearing the decree of Moshe that G-d would kill the firstborn of Egypt, the firstborn voted to free the Jewish people. However, Pharaoh would not comply, and, as a result, the firstborn took

up arms against their fellow Egyptians, and this led to civil war. Thus, THROUGH the firstborn, G-d killed Egyptians.

This is a fantastic and insightful example of how G-d works through nature -- and specifically human nature -- to perform miracles on behalf of the Jewish people. He knows all the right buttons. He knows how to get a person to say something that makes sense to him, but to no one else; words that seem peaceful to him, but, are fighting words to others. In hindsight, some of the worst conflicts in human history have started for the dumbest reasons, or, for reasons that don't seem to make sense given the results.

This is because, even with all the important issues that concern man on a daily basis, there is a master plan at work. And, all events, from the most insignificant to the most profound must, by definition, feed into that master plan -- and sometimes, no always, they do so in such a masterful way, befitting of the Master of the Universe, Whose kindness endures forever.

Have a great, comfort-filled Shabbos,  
Pinchas Winston

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