

# THE ART OF JEWISH PRAYER

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

***This week's parshah sheet is dedicated in memory of Chana Leah bat Baila (Ann Rosenberg), z"l, by her son, daughter-in-law, and their family. May the reading of this week's "Perceptions" be an ilui Neshamah for her.***

FRIDAY NIGHT:

*When you have come into the land which G-d your G-d gives to you as an inheritance, and possess it...*  
(Devarim 26:1-2)

There is a strong possibility that I may be in Canada around the third week of November, b"H. Anyone interested in arranging a speaking engagement in the Toronto/New York area should write me ASAP at [pwinston@thirtysix.org](mailto:pwinston@thirtysix.org).

When Parashat Ki Tavo comes around, you know that Rosh Hashanah cannot be too far away. It is not coincidental that this fire-and-brimstone parshah falls at this time of year as we prepare to enter into Divine judgment. This is a right-and-wrong and cause-and-effect parshah, reminding us once again that what we do, say, and think, impacts OUR world.

Those of us who take the Aseret Yemai Teshuvah seriously know that it is the time to pray for our lives and our livelihoods. Like servants before a master, we basically beg and grovel, albeit with a certain dignity, before the Master of the Universe Who can at a moment's notice make us history. So we pray, pray, and pray some more for a good life and for all the things we think we will need in the upcoming year to make it a fulfilling one, all according to Torah, that is.

Yet, the prayer service at this time is quite impersonal, inasmuch as it requests good for the nation and for the world as a whole leaving little or no room to focus on personal needs. "It is a time to focus on the Klal," we are told, meaning that the Aseret Yemai Teshuvah is a time to stop thinking of one's own self and to think instead about the nation as a whole. Do this and the rest will take care of itself.

The Tikunei HaZohar (large-type) with the explanation of the Matok M'Dvash (small-type) takes this idea a lot further:

"AND HE LOOKED THIS WAY AND THAT WAY..." (Shemot 2:12), that is "The Holy One, Blessed is He, looked to see IF THERE WAS SOMEONE INSPIRED TO DO TESHUVAH, whose intention was not for his own sake, but TO BREAK THEIR PRISON, i.e., to break the chains from Zehr Anpin (i.e., of the

sefirot from Chesed through Yesod) v'Nukveh (and the sefirah of Malchut), AS IT SAYS, "...TO SAY TO PRISONERS, 'GO OUT!'" (Yeshayahu 49:9), meaning to say to Zehr Anpin v'Nukveh "Leave your exile!" AND TO THOSE WHO WERE EXILED INTO DARKNESS, referring to Israel who were overtaken by the darkness of the K'lipot and are in exile under their control. HOWEVER, "HE", i.e., The Holy One, Blessed is He, "LOOKED THIS WAY AND THAT WAY, AND DID NOT SEE A PERSON." That is, someone who was inspired to do teshuvah, and concerned only with the rectification of the Shechinah, but there was ONLY EACH PERSON CONCERNED WITH HIS OWN WAY, WITH HIS OWN MATTERS, ALONG HIS OWN PATH. As it says, "FOR HIS OWN DISHONEST GAIN" (Yeshayahu 56:11), meaning that each person is after an increase of his money, that is GAIN OF THIS WORLD; from one end until the other end they're involved with property and money of this world TO INHERIT THIS WORLD. THEY ARE NOT LIKE THOSE OF WHOM IT IS SAID, "MEN OF VALOR, G-D-FEARING, PEOPLE OF TRUTH, HATERS OF GAIN" (Shemot 18:21); RATHER, ALL OF THEM CRY IN PRAYER ON YOM KIPPUR LIKE DOGS... As the posuk begins, "And the dogs are greedy; they do not know satiation. These are the shepherds who cannot understand; they have gone off on their own ways, each from his own corner, for his own dishonest gain..." (Yeshayahu 56:11). This posuk is elucidated to be referring to those people who pray for themselves, like dogs who only want the desires of their bodies, crying out "GIVE! GIVE TO US FOOD, FORGIVENESS, ATONEMENT, AND LIFE!" As we pray, "WRITE US FOR LIFE! However, the intention is for a life of desire in this world... (Tikunei HaZohar, Tikun 6, p. 22a)

In other words, says the Tikunei HaZohar, even though you may be praying during the Aseret Yemai Teshuvah for money so that you can afford to do mitzvot, and/or for children who are talmidei chachamim and tzaddikim so that you can make sure they walk in the ways of Torah, and for your own hatzlochah so that you can just be a good Jew, it is still called being self-centered! Besides, as we will soon see, b"H, such prayer only deals with the symptoms, and not the cause.

### **SHABBOS DAY:**

*If you listen carefully to G-d your G-d, and observe and to do all His command-ments which I command you today, then G-d your G-d will raise you above all na-tions of the earth. (Devarim 28:1)*

Hence, we learn that everything depends upon the status of the Shechinah. If she is in golut (exile) then the Jewish people are vulnerable, physically, spiritually, and intellectually. If the Shechinah is redeemed, that is, it has been able to return to Eretz Yisroel, then so will the Jewish people, and all the good promises of this week's parshah will automatically come true.

This is why, explains the same Tikunei HaZohar, that when Miriam was afflicted with leprosy for speaking loshon hara about her brother Moshe Rabbeinu, the latter prayed for the recovery of the Shechinah and not directly for his sister. For, Moshe knew that had the Shechinah not been in exile to some degree, then Miriam also would not have been sent into exile.

Indeed, the opportunity to speak loshon hara about her brother and the leader of the Jewish nation

would never have come up had the Shechinah been "well". Moshe Rabbeinu knew well: redeem the Shechinah and Miriam is redeemed as well, and that is why his tefillah was only:

Moshe prayed to G-d, *"Heal her now, O G-d, I beg You."* (Bamidbar 12:13) the "her" referring to the Shechinah, and not to Miriam.

In fact, whatever Klal Yisroel goes through is just the external manifestation of what has been festering internally for some time. Through action, word, and thought we either draw the Shechinah towards us or push it away. Eventually, the results become manifest either by the success or failure of the home in question, but whatever the result, it is always an indication of what is happening with the Shechinah.

Thus, the Talmud states:

A Tanna taught before Rav Nachman: When a person causes his father and mother pain, The Holy One, Blessed is He says, "It is good that I don't dwell among them, because if I dwelled among them it would cause Me pain as well!" (Kiddushin 31a)

Can anything be worse than this? Therefore, what does a parent pray for?

"Dear G-d, please bless us with children who will walk in Your ways, SO THAT YOUR DIVINE PRESENCE, YOUR SHECHINAH CAN DWELL IN OUR HOME."

It's the last part of the statement that counts most, either justifying our personal request or proving that we are wrong to ask for it. Pray for the redemption of the Shechinah and everything else will take care of itself.

### **SEUDAT SHLISHIT:**

*As for me, I am my prayer...* (Tehillim 69:14)

This calls into question the whole concept of tefillah itself, which for many people today has become a way to beg G-d for what he or she personally wants. However, as the Nefesh HaChaim points out that the point of tefillah is to draw down greater amounts of light in order to enhance the connection between G-d and our world. Or, as the Tikunei HaZohar has taught: to bring more light down into the system so that the Shechinah can be redeemed.

This is why when at Mt. Sinai when G-d descended to give Torah, all illness was cured. The light that came down brought redemption to the Shechinah which had the net effect of curing all those who had been ill, and of elevating the entire Jewish nation back to the level of Adam HaRishon before the sin. It made the desert bloom, for if anything has the "golden touch", it is the Shechinah.

Our lives mimic the Sefirot. For example, if a person wants a favor from another person he has to be on good terms with that person. Furthermore, he has to make sure that the other person is paying attention to him if his request is going to be fulfilled. Not much can be gained from talking to a

person whose back is facing you, or if they are in the middle of a cellphone conversation.

The Sefirot interact with one another in a similar manner, and since each one is a link in a chain of light that flows from G-d to us, it makes a difference to the system and to us whether or not the Sefirot are on good terms with one another, so-to-speak. In Kabbalistic jargon, it is a matter of "zivugim" and "Yechudim", which are what actions, words, and thoughts can affect.

When we do teshuvah specifically for the sake of rectifying the Shechinah, our intention reaches all the way up in the Sefirot to the level of Binah, home of the "Nun Sha'arei Binah" (the "Fifty Gates of Understanding"). Like a loving mother, Binah then turns to Zehr Anpin - the unit comprised of Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferet, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod, and gives them additional light.

This additional light then causes Zehr Anpin to become more complete, and to channel some of that light down to the sefirah of Malchut below it. Such an increase of holy light in the world banishes evil and therefore also banishes golut (exile). Thus, the net effect is redemption on some level, either for the individual, the entire nation, or the entire world - a de facto reality.

In other words, G-d's Presence becomes more manifest, the Shechinah is more healed, and good fills the heart of all those alive, as it will in Yemot HaMoshiach.

THIS is the purpose of tefillah, real tefillah. Tefillah, as the word itself suggests is a time to re-evaluate oneself in terms of the role he or she plays in drawing down Divine Light for the sake of the Shechinah. It is a time to rise above the world of the small picture, of one's individual and personal needs, and to hook into the big picture, the picture of the Shechinah, and realizing that all the lack we feel in life is really just a symptom of the "illness" of the Shechinah. That is why when we make a brocha archrona, we also say, "rabot v'cheshronon..." - We constantly turn to Hashem and bless what we lack.

Thus, Rosh Hashanah is not only about the Klal; it is about the Shechinah. And, judgment at this time of year is with regard to how much of a team player we were in the previous year with respect to contributing to the rectification of the Shechinah. It is the goal of the Sitra Achra to keep us focused on our own personal needs so that the Shechinah can remain incomplete, allowing us to remain in golut, and the Sitra Achra to remain in this world that much longer, hasfer shalom.

### **MELAVA MALKAH:**

Nefesh HaChaim, Sha'ar Aleph, Ch. 2

It is important to understand why "b'tzelem Elokim" specifically was used (regarding the creation of man), as opposed to another name of G-d. This was because the understanding of the name "Elokim" is known; it alludes to G-d as the Master of all Forces, as explained by the Tur (Orach Chaim 5).

G-d is called the "Master of all Forces" because He is unlike man; when man builds a house he does

not first create the wood of his own power. Rather, instead, man uses wood that is already in existence after which he arranges into a building to suit his plans. And, should he later remove his support, the building will still remain standing.

This is not the case with respect to G-d. Just as He originated Creation with His own power of "something from nothing," so too does every moment since Creation began, depend entirely upon G-d for its existence and form, as a result of the new light with which He chooses to provide them. Should G-d withdraw His support for even one moment, everything would return to void and nothingness.

This is what the "Men of the Great Assembly" meant when they wrote (in "Birchat Yotzer Ohr" in advance of Kriat Shema), "The One who renews Creation continuously in His goodness": continuously literally, that is every moment. Their proof is clear since it says, "To Him Who MAKES great lights ..." (Tehillim 136:7), and not "to Him who MADE great lights."

This is what is meant by the name "Elokim" ("Master of all Forces"): He is the Master over every specific power within Creation. It is He who provides them with force and energy every moment, and they are forever in His hand to change and arrange as He wills.

*Have a great Shabbos,*  
*PW*

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Text

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