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HOPING THAT “TOMORROW” NEVER COMES

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

Right at the very end of *Neilah* – the very last service on Yom Kippur – we shout out the words, “*Hashem Hu haElokim* – Hashem is G-d!” We don’t just shout it out once. Rather, we shout it out *seven* times, repeating the words over and over again. It is one of the most moving moments during Yom Kippur. Not because we have come to the end of the Fast, but because, in a way, it is the climax of everything that the whole period that led up to Rosh Hashana and ended with Yom Kippur stands for. On Rosh Hashana we begin the process of crowning G-d as our King, and in the very last remaining moments of Yom Kippur we coronate Him.

“*Hashem Hu haElokim* – Hashem is G-d” are truly poignant words. As we leave the holiest day of the year, we do so on a spiritual high of having wholeheartedly embraced G-d. Where do these words come from? They are actually part of a verse from the Book of Kings. Achav, one of the wickedest kings in Jewish history, had turned his back on G-d, and he and the vast majority of the Jewish people worshipped the idol Baal. Eliyahu, the faithful and dedicated prophet of G-d, challenges the priests of Baal to a spiritual battle to see who is the true G-d. Without going into the details of the riveting story (you can read it yourself in Kings 1 chapter 18), I will spoil the end for you. The final outcome is unequivocal. Eliyahu triumphs. The priests of Baal are put to death. And the Jewish People proclaim as one, “*Hashem Hu haElokim! Hashem Hu haElokim!*”

When Izevel, Achav’s evil and sinful wife, hears what Eliyahu has done, she sends him a message warning him not to get too comfortable because, “at this time tomorrow I shall make your soul like the soul of one of them.” Izevel is telling Eliyahu that she will have him

put to death just as the priests of Baal were put to death. And Eliyahu is forced to flee for his life.

Izevel is a monumentally powerful woman who seemingly can do as she wishes. So, why didn’t she just have Eliyahu murdered immediately? Why did she tell him that it would happen “tomorrow”? There are several explanations that are offered by the commentaries, but there is one particular observation that is extremely distressing. Izevel is telling Eliyahu that right now the people are in such a spiritual thrall that there is no way she could get away with having G-d’s true prophet murdered. But “tomorrow” (i.e. in the near future), the thrall will have worn off and the people will have lost their passion for serving G-d. And then she will be able to have him killed without any repercussions.

And, terrifyingly enough, she was right. Not very long afterward, the people went back to their idolatrous ways and Eliyahu had to stay in hiding.

Perhaps that is the final message of *Neilah*. Perhaps that is the final message of the whole of Yom Kippur. Rabbi Yehuda Segal, the late Rosh Yeshiva in Manchester, was accustomed to say that one way to measure the success of Yom Kippur is not according to the fervor of your prayers on Yom Kippur, but, rather, according to how you pray *Ma’ariv* (the nighttime service) immediately *after* Yom Kippur!

In effect, it is not enough *just* to declare “*Hashem Hu haElokim* – Hashem is G-d!” Because, if that is all we do, then the passion and the fire that was ignited on Yom Kippur might soon be extinguished. Instead, what we must do is to take that passion with us into the year – and live it every single day, anew.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Granny's Tales

“Yeshurun became fat and kicked.” (32:15)

Last week I mentioned that one of the great things about having been part of Ohr Somayach for around three decades is that I have met some people who are clearly living on a different level than the rest of us. One of these holy souls distilled the essence of one's relationship with one's fellow into three principles. His first principle: “I was created to serve others, and no one was created to serve me.” The second principle: “I wouldn't do it to you. But if you do it to me – it's okay.” I said that this doesn't mean that a person should be a doormat and invite the world to trample on him, but, post facto, if you did something to me that I could really take you to court for and get back at you for, and I give up on that – I get forgiven for *all* of my sins. And his third principle: “Whatever I do for you is never enough; whatever you do for me is more than I deserve.”

In Yiddish there's an expression called “*bubbe maisos*” – literally “Granny's tales.” Sometimes, *bubbe maisos* are just that – stories and ideas without foundation. But sometimes they reflect a wisdom that comes from

our Sages. In this particular case, the Rabbi of whom I speak heard the statement “Whatever I do for you is never enough; whatever you do for me is more than I deserve” from his grandmother (Gittel bas Yitzchok Dov HaLevi, *a”h*). It just so happens that virtually the same idea is found in *Mesechet Derech Eretz Zuta, perek beit*, for there it says, “If you did much good, let it be in your eyes as a little. And if they did you a little good, let it be in your eyes as a lot.”

“Yeshurun became fat and kicked.”

This verse is preceded by the most beautiful and poetic description of how Hashem cared for and guarded the Jewish People in the desert. When a person feels he deserves something, whatever he gets will seem but little in his eyes and he will end up denying his benefactor. Even Yeshurun, which means “the straight one,” will be turned aside and start to “kick” if his appreciation is not greater than his appetite.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

The Best of Both Worlds (*Eruvin 44-57*)

“Give him another 400 years of life and also grant him and his entire generation a place in the World to Come.”

This is what Hashem told the angels to announce to Rabbi Preida to reward this Torah scholar for his great love for the Torah and for others, and for his great patience and humility. What did Rabbi Preida do to merit this reward?

He had a student whom he needed to teach a new part of the Torah 400 times until the student understood it. One day Rabbi Preida told the student that he was called to do a mitzvah and might need to leave earlier than usual. Nevertheless, Rabbi Preida succeeded in teaching the day’s portion 400 times, but the student did not understand it that day!

When Rabbi Preida asked his student what was different about that day, he received the following reply: “Ever since you told me you might be leaving early, the thought was in my mind that you might leave at any moment, which distracted me and I couldn’t concentrate on today’s Torah studies.”

Rabbi Preida asked the student to try harder to concentrate and that he would teach him the same Torah section another 400 times.

Then a *bat kol* (“voice from Heaven”) offered Rabbi Preida his choice of reward. “What do you prefer as a reward? An additional 400 years of life or a guarantee of a place in the World to Come for you and your entire generation?”

Rabbi Preida replied that he would prefer that he and his generation merit the World to Come, thereby showing his willingness to forgo a personal reward of extreme longevity in this world.

Hashem commanded His angels, saying, “Give him another 400 years of life and also grant a place in

the World to Come for him and his entire generation.”

A beautiful and inspiring story indeed! But what is its message? Commentaries ask what Rabbi Preida did, exactly, that made him worthy of receiving such extraordinary rewards from Above.

At the end, of course, he showed great humility, in placing the reward for others before his own personal gain, choosing a place in the World to Come over an additional 400 years for himself in this world. His humility resulted in his being granted both this-worldly and next-worldly rewards. But what did he do in the first place to be deserving of any special reward from Hashem?

I once saw an answer offered by a certain educator, explaining that it was Rabbi Preida’s display of “superhuman” patience – his “beyond the call of duty” – that was so praiseworthy and earned a very special reward.

This is certainly an important principle that should guide any teacher. Recognizing that not all students are alike and that some comprehend and “grow” in their Torah knowledge at a rate that is faster than others. A “kosher” educator will know how to teach and relate to each and every student, according to the student’s need.

However, with sincere respect for this commentary’s claim that it was Rabbi Preida’s patience in teaching and re-teaching his student what seems to be the same material – 400 times normally, and even 800 times on this occasion – it seems that this interpretation of our *sugya* is not quite correct.

If great patience was his virtue, then why wasn’t he granted the reward for his daily show of

extraordinary patience? Day after day, Rabbi Preida taught this student the “Torah portion of the day,” repeating it 400 times daily until the student finally “got it.” (Please note that what seems to be a large number of attempts at explaining the subject to the student does not mean that the student was weak or slow in his ability to learn. The material may have been particularly complex and/or Rabbi Preida may not have been content with anything less than his student understanding it with the depth of understanding that would not only help him internalize and remember it, but also enable him to teach it to other students as well.)

Another challenge to this explanation is that teaching Torah is a mitzvah that has no limit. According to many authorities, every single word of Torah study is a fulfillment of an additional mitzvah of Talmud Torah. Therefore, why is the *number of times* that Rabbi Preida taught his student particularly significant? If he needed to teach the student again and again, that is precisely the mitzvah of teaching Torah. It is not a special mitzvah. In fact, the mitzvah of Talmud Torah is to be “involved in Torah study,” as we say in the morning blessings. The reward received for Torah study is for “toiling” in the study of Hashem’s Torah, as we say at the conclusion of studying a Tractate of the Talmud: “We toil (in Torah study) and receive reward (for our toil in pursuit of Torah study).”

Rather, Rabbi Preida’s special trait as a true Torah scholar who transmitted the Torah from one generation to the next was that he looked carefully, with love, into the heart of his students to understand their potential for probing the depths of the Torah. And accordingly, he taught his students according to each student’s needs. When he saw that his student, who normally understood after 400 times, one time did not succeed in understanding, Rabbi Preida did not judge him or be inclined to suggest that the student learn from a different Rabbi (what is sometimes nowadays called “promoting a student horizontally”).

Rabbi Preida sincerely wanted to know why this day was different and more challenging for the student. When his student told him that he had difficulty concentrating, thinking that the Rabbi might be called away at any moment for a different mitzvah, Rabbi Preida then understood the problem and knew the solution. Since he was a teacher of Torah to the heart and the soul of his student, he knew that if he clearly instructed his student to concentrate, the Rabbi would continue to teach him and the student would successfully learn as he did on every other day. And so it was.

- *Eruvin 54b*

We wish all of Ohrnet Magazine’s readers and friends Gmar Chatíma Tova — May you be sealed in the book of life and have a good and sweet new year!

HAAZINU Q & A

Questions

1. Why were heaven and earth specifically chosen as witnesses?
2. How is the Torah like rain?
3. How is G-d "faithful without injustice"?
4. Why is G-d called "tzaddik"?
5. How many major floods did G-d bring upon the world?
6. What group of people does the Torah call "fathers"? Cite an example.
7. Why did G-d separate the world's nations into exactly 70?
8. Why is the merit of the Jewish People's ancestry called a "rope"?
9. How is G-d's behavior toward the Jewish People like an eagle's behavior toward its offspring?
10. Regarding the Jewish People's punishment, G-d says, "I will spend my arrows on them." What is the positive aspect of this phrase?
11. How does the idea of "*chillul Hashem*" prevent the nations from destroying the Jewish People?
12. What will happen to the nations that conquer the Jewish People?
13. When G-d overturns a nation that persecutes the Jewish People, His attribute of Mercy is "replaced" by which attribute?
14. When G-d punishes the heathen nations, for whose sins does He exact punishment?
15. How will G-d's punishment change the way the nations view the Jewish People?
16. On what day was *Ha'azinu* taught to the Jewish People?
17. Verse 32:44 calls Yehoshua "Hoshea." Why?
18. In verse 32:47, what does "it is not empty from you" mean?
19. Why did G-d tell Moshe that he would die a similar death to that of Aharon?
20. If Moshe had spoken to the rock rather than striking it, what would the Jewish People have learned?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 32:1 - They endure forever.
2. 32:2 - The Torah gives life and promotes growth like rain.
3. 32:4 - He is "faithful" by rewarding the righteous, and "without injustice" by rewarding even the wicked for any good deeds.
4. 32:4 - All will agree that His judgments are righteous.
5. 32:7 - Two. One in the time of Adam's grandson Enosh and one in the time of Noach.
6. 32:7 - The Prophets. Elisha called the Prophet Eliyahu "My Father." (*Melachim II 2:12*).
7. 32:8 - To correspond to the 70 *Bnei Yisrael* who entered Egypt.
8. 32:9 - Their merit is "woven from" the merits of the *Avot*.
9. 32:12 - He mercifully wakes them gently, hovering over them, and carrying them on His "wings".
10. 32:23 - "The arrows will be spent" implies that the afflictions will cease but the Jewish People will not.
11. 32:27 - The nations would attribute their success to their might and the might of their gods. G-d would not let His name be desecrated like this.
12. 32:35 - They will eventually be punished.
13. 32:41 - His attribute of Justice.
14. 32:42 - For their sins and the sins of their ancestors.
15. 32:43 - They will view the Jewish People as praiseworthy for cleaving to G-d.
16. 32:44 - The Shabbat upon which Moshe died.
17. 32:44 - To indicate that although he was the Jewish People's leader, he still maintained a humble bearing.
18. 32:47 - That you will receive reward for studying Torah and that there is nothing meaningless in the Torah.
19. 32:50 - Because Moshe wanted this.
20. 32:51 - The Jewish People would have reasoned as follows: If a rock, which receives neither reward nor punishment, obeys G-d's commands, all the more so should they.

YOM KIPPUR Q & A

Questions

1. Passover commemorates the going out of Egypt. Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah. What historical event can Yom Kippur be said to commemorate?
2. For what kinds of sins does Yom Kippur not atone?
3. What should someone do if the person he wronged does not forgive him the first time?
4. Why is the Vidui confession included during the *mincha* prayer the afternoon before Yom Kippur?
5. On Yom Kippur we refrain from: Working, eating, drinking, washing, anointing, family relations and wearing leather shoes. Which three of these prohibitions are more severe than the others?
6. In what two ways does the prohibition against eating food on Yom Kippur differ from the prohibition against eating pork the entire year?
7. Who wrote the prayer "*Unesaneh Tokef*" said during the chazan's repetition of *musaf*?
8. Why do we read the book of Yonah on Yom Kippur?
9. In what two ways does havdala after Yom Kippur differ from havdala after Shabbat?
10. Ideally, what mitzvah should one begin immediately after Yom Kippur?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai on the tenth of Tishrei with the second set of Tablets, signifying forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. Yom Kippur can be said to commemorate this event, the first national day of forgiveness for the Jewish People.
2. Sins committed against other people, including hurting someone's feelings. Yom Kippur does not atone for these sins until the perpetrator gains forgiveness from the victim himself. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
3. He should try at least two more times to gain forgiveness. (*Orach Chaim 606:1*)
4. Lest one choke while eating the pre-Yom Kippur meal and die without atonement, or lest one become intoxicated and unable to concentrate on the prayers at night. (*Mishneh Berura 607:1*)
5. Eating, drinking, working. (*Mishna, Kritot 1:*
6. (i) Although any amount is forbidden, eating on Yom Kippur is not punishable by a Sanhedrin until one has eaten food equal in volume to the size of a date. Eating pork, on the other hand, is punishable for eating even an olive-sized piece, which is smaller than a date. (*Mishneh Berura 612:1*) (ii) Eating on Yom Kippur incurs the punishment of karet - spiritual excision - whereas eating pork does not.
7. "*Unesaneh Tokef*" was written by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany, about 1000 years ago.
8. The repentance of the people of Ninveh serves as an inspiration to us to repent, and shows us that repentance can overturn a Divine decree. (*Shelah Hakadosh*)
9. After Yom Kippur, the blessing over spices is omitted from havdala. Also, the source of the flame used for havdala after Yom Kippur must be a fire kindled before Yom Kippur. (*Orach Chaim 624:3,4*)
10. Building the succah. (*Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5*)

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WHAT'S IN A WORD

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

The Power to Hold Back

The Book of Kings refers to the seventh month of the Jewish calendar – what we colloquially call *Tishrei* – as the “Month of the *Eitanim*” (I Kings 8:2). The Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 11a) explains that this is due to the fact that the patriarchs of the Jewish People, who are called *Eitanim* (“powerful ones”), were born in this month. This leads the Talmud elsewhere to identifying the character Eitan the Ezrachite in Psalms 89:1 with the patriarch Abraham, the “powerful” hero who stemmed the tide of polytheism (see *Maharsha* to *Bava Basra* 15a). In this essay we will examine five Hebrew words which all refer to “power”: *eitan*, *koach*, *gevurah*, *adir*, and *kabir*. We will see how these various words are not true synonyms, but that each word carries nuances not expressed by the others.

The Torah requires performing the *Eglah Arufah* ceremony at a place described as *Nachal Eitan* (Deut. 21:4). Rashi understands that *nachal* means “valley/wadi” and *eitan* means “strong/hard.” According to Rashi, the Torah refers to a rocky locale as the place of this ceremony. However, Maimonides (*Laws of Murder* 9:2) understands that *nachal* means “river” and *eitan* means “strong-flowing.” Without referencing these two sages, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Edel (1760-1828) reconciles their opposing views by explaining that *eitan* literally refers to the “river bank” because it appears to be holding back the waters from passing beyond its threshold. As Rabbi Edel explains it, this act of restraint takes much strength, and so *eitan* came to be synonymous with strength and power.

It is thus no wonder that the word *eitan* appears in the Torah when describing Joseph’s unshakeable righteous prowess (Gen. 49:24) and the rocky habitat of Jethro’s descendants (Num. 24:21). Like Abraham, Joseph and Jethro exhibited strong discipline and self-control in their lifelong pursuit of righteousness. Indeed, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Ex. 14:27) adds that *eitan* refers to something strong and durable that has lasted a long time – like bedrock.

In light of this understanding of the word *eitan*, we can better grasp its connection to the month of *Tishrei*. In the aforementioned discussion about the month of *Tishrei*, the Talmud asserts that even if the patriarchs were not

born in that month, it is still called “powerful” because it is especially blessed with more timely commandments than other months. *Meutzudat David* (to I Kings 8:2) explains that *Tishrei* is called the “Month of the *Eitanim*” because it is an especially powerful month in that it includes so many different holidays that one can use towards self-perfection. In other words, *Tishrei* is the time of year that can transform a person into a firm, strongly-anchored stalwart. Just as the rock and/or hard place cannot be easily budged, likewise, the strong believer cannot be easily swayed from his devotion to G-d.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) admits that he is unsure of exactly how to break down the word *eitan*. In *Yerios Shlomo*, he suggests that the root of *eitan* is TAV-NUN, which means “give.” This core meaning relates to *eitan* because *eitan* denotes a concentration of strength and power that can clearly only be “given” to a person as a Divine gift. No one can mistake this amount of strength as something naturally-occurring. In *Cheshek Shlomo*, Rabbi Pappenheim connects the word *eitan* to the biliteral root ALEPH-TAV, which he further reduces to the monoliteral root TAV. He explains that this root refers to “connections” and “linking.” For example, the word *et* serves a grammatical function in “connecting” a verb to the object of that verb, and sometimes even means “with.” Similarly, *oht* (“sign”), another word derived from this root, forges a semiotic “connection” between the sign and the signified. In the same way, the word *eitan* refers to the concentration of power as resulting from the extreme compression of multiple components “connected” together (like in the case of rocks, mentioned above).

We previously mentioned the notion that self-restraint requires much strength. This idea is famously taught in the Mishna (*Avos* 4:1) which asks, “Who is a *gibbor* (strongman)?” before answering, “He who conquers his Evil Inclination.” This classical teaching suggests that *gevurah* (“strength/power”) is also related to self-control, just like *eitan* is.

Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993), in his famous essay *Catharsis*, echoes this sentiment when discussing the difference between *gevurah* and *koach*. He notes that in the daily morning prayers we thank G-d twice for the power He has given us: In one blessing we bless “... He who girds

Israel with *gevurah*,” and afterwards we bless “... He who gives *koach* to the tired.” Rabbi Soloveitchik explains that these two blessings recall different aspects of man’s powers. The word *koach* in the Bible and Torah sources generally refers to “physical strength.” As such, it is not something unique or exclusive to man. Both man and beast alike possess physical strength, so both can be said to have been bestowed with *koach*. On the other hand, *gevurah* is something given exclusively to man. It denotes his ability to transcend the brute instinct of survival that he shares with the citizens of the animal kingdom.

As Rabbi Soloveitchik explains it, *gevurah* can be best translated as “heroism.” This counterintuitive strength gives a human being the courage to enter a situation that might not be ideal for his physical survival. Accordingly, *gibbor* (“warrior”) in the Hebrew language does not always refer to the “victor,” but it always refers to somebody who enters the battle and fights with all his might. Ultimately, when a person dares to continue a fight and stand up for what he believes in, he generally emerges the victor – even if he does not win the immediate battle. Rabbi Pappenheim offers a similar explication of the word *gevurah*, but acknowledges that the Bible also borrows this term to refer to elements of nature that do not have free will, like water (e.g., Gen. 7:18-19).

If *gevurah* entails holding oneself back, then G-d is the immaculate *Gibbor*, because He holds back His anger and gives the wicked time before punishing them (see *Yoma* 69b). For this reason, G-d is often described as a *Gibbor* (see Jer. 32:18 and the daily liturgy).

Rabbi Pappenheim offers an extensive study mapping out the relationships between different Hebrew words for “strength” or “power.” He begins by noting that *koach* is the most general of those terms, as it simply means the plain ability to do or withstand something. In his estimation, the word *chozek* denotes extra-strength *koach*, i.e. a non-standard “ability” by which one person might stand out above the rest for his extra dose of strength.

Rabbi Pappenheim then differentiates between qualitative strength and quantitative strength. He explains that *eitan* refers to inherent qualitative strength, i.e. something strong because it itself is strong (even if made up of smaller components compressed into one unit, like a rock). In contrast, *kabir* refers to quantitative strength, i.e. something strong because it is comprised of multiple units banded together (see Rashi to *Berachos* 8a who associates the word *kabir* with the power of communal prayer). Rabbi Pappenheim further distinguishes between two types of quantitative strength in terms of how the individual components that comprise the unit in question

contribute to the unit’s overall strength. In doing so he clarifies that *otzem* applies when each sub-unit within the union does not necessarily contribute an equal amount of force, while *kabir* connotes a union comprised of equally-powerful components.

Finally, Rabbi Pappenheim explores the relationship between *koach* and *gevurah*, arguing that *gevurah* denotes an act by which one actualizes one’s potential *koach*. *Gevurah* is thus an excurrent show of strength. In a similarly way, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) explains that *koach* refers to the power of maintaining/preserving a given state, a feat that necessitates withstanding the mitigating forces that try to break that status quo. *Gevurah*, on the other hand, is a more proactive use of *koach* that tries not to just withstand what opposes it, but to defeat such opposition entirely.

Alternatively, Rabbi Mecklenburg explains that *koach* refers to mental fortitude and concentration. With this in mind he explains why the Targum (to Deut. 8:18) translates the term *koach* as *eitzah*, which typically means “advice.” This is because, in that context, *koach* refers to the mental strength of being able to think through a problem and decide on a course of action. Rabbi Mecklenburg also points to the Talmudic discussions of the superlative reward for “whoever answers ‘*Amen yehei shmei rabbah*’ with all his *koach*” (*Shabbos* 119b). This does not refer to declaring the greatness of G-d’s name with all of one’s physical strength (i.e. screaming the words as loud as possible), but to doing so with all of one’s mental focus (see Rashi there, *pace Tosafos*).

This leads into our closing discussion of another synonym for “power/strength” in Hebrew: *adir*. Rabbi Pappenheim explains that labeling someone as *chazak* means that he is more powerful than somebody else, but describing somebody as *adir* means he is the *most powerful* out of a whole group. It is thus quite apropos that G-d be described as the most *adir* of all existence (see Ex. 15:6, Ps. 8:2; 93:4); He is indeed the strongest and most powerful entity that exists. Rabbi Pappenheim traces *adir* to the two-letter root DALET-REISH, which refers to “freedom of motion” without limitations or constrictions. Certainly, G-d is “free” from being subject to any other force, because He created everything and obviously overpowers them. Rabbi Edel adds that *adir* is related to *adar/hadar* (“beauty/glory”) because G-d’s “acts of strength” bring Him more honor and glory, as they demonstrate to man His omnipotence. May we too merit becoming vehicles for the furtherance of G-d’s glory.

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSING FOURTEEN: THE PRICE OF GREATNESS IS RESPONSIBILITY (WINSTON CHURCHILL)

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who gives strength to the weary.”

The source for the fourteenth blessing is found in the words of the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah proclaims in 40:29, “He gives strength to the weary and grants abundant might to the powerless.” Our blessing is a Divine promise that despite our exhaustion from this seemingly never-ending exile, the Jewish Nation will always persevere. G-d will grant us the strength to tolerate the intolerable, and to overcome the suffering and the persecution that is an inescapable feature of the Jewish landscape.

This is why this blessing appears here, just before the end of the Morning Blessings. In our ascent up the “Stairway to Heaven,” we have reached the moment when we now radiate a sense of holiness. We have come so far, we have climbed so high, in order to be connected to G-d in the most effective way possible. Our relationship with G-d is no longer defined by theoretical concepts, but it is in fact real and tangible. Not just to ourselves but to others as well. And that begs the question: Who is the real beneficiary of this extraordinary journey that the Morning Blessings have taken us on?

There is no doubt that the grammatical structure of the blessing refers to G-d giving us the strength to continue until the dawn of the Messianic Era. But there is something deeper here as well, something truly wondrous. Our Sages teach that our task in this world is to try to emulate G-d to the best of our abilities. We are not G-d, and there is no way that we, as human beings, can emulate the *infinity* that is G-d. But we can strive to replicate the way that G-d gives to others. This means to look out for the next person; to worry about your neighbor; to truly care about all those around you. It means to search out the weary and to give them from your own strength.

Judaism teaches us that true greatness is not only measured in how brilliant a person is but also by how

compassionate they are. How caring and how thoughtful they are. There is a famous maxim that says, “Important people take care of the little things. Little people may ignore even the important things.”

As a rule, in the secular world, the more successful a person becomes, the more inaccessible they become. As they move up the ladder of success, the number of secretaries and personal assistants they have grows exponentially because they are status symbols. Symbols of triumphs and accomplishments.

But in the Jewish world this is not the case. Paradoxically, the greater someone becomes – renowned for their piety and their erudition and their leadership qualities – *the more accessible they need to be*. They are now beholden to provide for all those who need their help. It is an extraordinary sight that repeats itself night after night. We find long lines of people, from all different backgrounds, stretching out from the doorways of the homes of our spiritual leaders. All are patiently waiting for their turn to be able to speak with the venerated Rabbi and gain his insight into what is troubling them. It often requires great patience. Not because there is a gamut of assistants to get through before you are granted an audience, but simply because there are so many other people waiting in line in front of you.

This is true greatness – to unstintingly give to others without limits. But it requires a huge reservoir of strength. Whether it is for personal advice, a ruling in Jewish Law or a debate in Talmudic minutiae, they have to be available (often at any hour) to help all who call out for their assistance. And when they do so, they are truly giving strength to the weary.

In his generation, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) was the acknowledged authority in Jewish Law. He was a spiritual titan, revered for his encyclopedic

knowledge, his piety and – perhaps most of all – for his gentleness, sincerity and empathy for anyone in need. Slight in build, he carried the spiritual needs of the Jewish world on his shoulders. He assuredly ruled on every facet of Jewish Law, while never failing to show incredible personal warmth and concern for each and every individual who approached him. He was blessed with spiritual strength truly beyond our comprehension, but he cloaked it all in an aura of simplicity and humbleness. And G-d blessed him and re-blessed him with extraordinary faculties to be able to listen to the Jewish People's sorrows, pain and anguish, and to offer everyone advice, succor and assistance. The greater he became, the more strength he was granted from Above. And the more strength he was given from Above, the greater he became. The strength to

lead, the strength to advise, the strength to rule on all aspects of Jewish Law, is a blessing given to the individual by G-d. And when that person has fulfilled their task here in this world, that phenomenal strength is removed from them. Tellingly, the very last words that Rabbi Feinstein said before his passing were in Yiddish, "*Ich hob mehr nisht ken koach* – I have no more strength."

As we arrive at the penultimate blessing in the Morning Blessings, we, too, have reached the moment where we are now worthy to "lead." Not, perhaps, as Rabbi Feinstein did, but each of us in our own "small" way. We become the recipients of Divine strength by helping and assisting those who are "weaker" than we are. And the more we help others, the greater the blessing of our strength will be.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

From Glory to Demons: The Path of Defection

In the Song of Ha'azinu, the Torah foretells Israel's defection: The prophetic rebuke describes the haunted road upon which those travelling away from G-d must go.

Once Israel became "fat" – indulgent in material abundance and pleasure – it paid no heed to G-d, Who had made it what it was. When one is in need, and has no other support, then it is useful to seek support from on High. But after one is back on one's own feet, having attained freedom and happiness, trust in G-d and faithfulness to His Torah quickly withers. This withering brings a second and third withering in its wake – the moral unraveling of the people, and the ultimate withering of their own serenity.

Whenever [Israel] became fat...he forsook the G-d Who had made him, and regarded as worthless the Rock of his salvation. They impaired His rights with aliens, angering Him with abominations. They made offerings to demons

that were non-gods, deities of whom they knew nothing, new ones that came up late, whom your fathers never dreaded. (Devarim 32:15-17)

In the words of the Torah, their departure impaired G-d's rightful exclusive claim upon them to "others" – who are completely alien to them, to whom they owe nothing and from whom they can expect nothing. They made offerings to these "demons" – invisible forces which even in the deluded imagination of the early pagan nations are not invested with the power of gods.

Rav Hirsch's contrast between the secure serenity of he who trusts in G-d and the fear of he who turns to these "demons" is too exquisite to paraphrase:

"One certainty alone – the certainty that there is one sole G-d, Who maintains a covenant of intimate closeness with those who do Him homage – sustains man and

uplifts him above all the other forces between heaven and earth. This conviction alone frees him from all fear and from all degrading trembling which undermines morality; it alone removes from his heart the fear of real or imaginary forces that threaten man's prosperity. But once he leaves the service of the one and only G-d, man loses all stay and support; he imagines that he is free, and yet is anxious about and afraid of all the forces of nature and fate – which are truly more powerful than a man who relies only on himself...

“In the light of truth emanating from the one and only G-d, man sees the whole world illumined in the clear light of wisdom and goodness. In this world, all creatures have a good end; and even if, on their way, they pass through darkness and death, pain and ruin, ultimately they are led to a higher state of existence and life, strength and joy, immortality and eternity. In this world, man is a child of his heavenly Father and is given

the task of living in His presence a life of duty. Hence, man is close to his Creator even in his lifetime. Clinging to the Hand of the one G-d, he can pass, even through darkness and death, in untroubled serenity toward light and life.

“But if man closes his eyes to this light... His world descends into a dark night filled with demons, real and imaginary. In that case he has only the miner's lamp of human experience to guide him through the darkness in which he must wrestle with hostile demons for his life and happiness. Then every delight and joy ends for him in disgust and disappointment... In such a life, man is the unhappiest of all creatures because he has the awareness that he is the unhappiest... From the bliss of a world full of G-d's glory to the pessimism of a world full of demons – that has always been the dismal road taken by Israel's defection...”

- Sources: Commentary, *Devarim* 32: 15-16

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Most of the portion of Ha'azinu is a song, written in the Torah in two parallel columns. Moshe summons heaven and earth to stand as eternal witnesses to what will happen if the Jewish People sin. He reminds the people to examine world history and note how the Jewish People are rescued from obliteration in each generation – that Hashem "pulls the strings" of world events so that *Bnei Yisrael* can fulfill their destiny as Hashem's messengers.

Hashem's kindness is such that Israel should be eternally grateful, not just for sustaining them in the wilderness, but for bringing them to a land of amazing abundance, and for defeating their enemies. But, this physical bounty leads the people to become self-satisfied and over-indulged. Physical pleasures corrupt their morals. They will worship empty idols and indulge in depravity. Hashem will then let nations with no moral worth subjugate Israel and scatter them across the world. However, the purpose of these nations is as a rod to chastise the Jewish People. When these nations think that it is through their own power that they have dominated Israel, Hashem will remind them that they are no more than a tool to do His will.

The purpose of the Jewish People is to make mankind aware of the Creator. Neither exile nor suffering can sever the bond between Hashem and His people, and in the final redemption this closeness will be restored. Hashem will then turn His anger against the enemies of Israel. Hashem then gives His last commandment to Moshe: That he ascend Mount Nevo and be gathered there to his people.

The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

A Letter to Rav Schiller – It's Great to Be Back!

Here's a letter from Rabbi Yitzchak Greenblatt to Rav Nota Schiller, Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Somayach. Enjoy!

It's fantastic to have returned to Eretz Yisrael and to be back working at Ohr Somayach. It's a credit to the efforts of all the staff, and especially the recruitment staff, that the yeshiva is packed to the rafters during the current situation. Obviously, it has been, and continues to be, a tremendous challenge to teach and run Ohr Somayach with the restrictions, but at every turn the yeshiva has come up with creative, flexible solutions. Rebbeim teaching from behind plastic mechitzahs, open-air classes, food in prepackaged containers, portable plexiglass partitions...

In the mornings I'm teaching an *iyun* shiur in Center, and it's just phenomenal to see how motivated the students are to learn. For many, it seems a pandemic brings out the best...

In the afternoons I'm involved with various internship programs – J101, JPro, etc. This is much more "front-line," in-the-trenches *kiruv*, and my experience in the US over the last four years is extremely helpful. I'm also teaching the guys from an innovative program – JTerm. These are guys whose college programs in the US are online. They come and learn in the yeshiva, and take their college courses online when necessary. This cohort of students is much less advanced in their *yiddishkeit*, and so they need much more *tippul* (attention), meaning the job is as much pastoral as it is educational.

The Beis Midrash also seems to be going strong, as does the Kollel, Ohr Lagolah, and the other programs. Mechina is packed, Derech too. All in all, the energy in the yeshiva is wonderful. It seems that the new building could not be coming at a better time – we need the space!

May Hashem give you and your family, and the yeshiva, continued *hatzlacha* in everything in 5781. May it be a year of *bracha* and health, and of helping even more of Hashem's children come back to Him.

On a personal note, thank you for all the support over the last few years and for helping us come back home to Ohr Somayach. It's an honor and a privilege.

Rabbi Yitzchak Greenblatt, was born in Cape Town, South Africa and moved to England as a child. He earned a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in Linguistics. While at Cambridge, he was a member of their varsity rugby team. After teaching at Cambridge, he joined the staff at Ohr Somayach. He then spent four years "in the field," working with young professionals in Boston, MA, and has recently returned to Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem where he teaches in the Center programs and the various internship programs. For a fuller profile of Rabbi Greenblatt, see <https://ohr.edu/6334>