

Our *Parashah* opens: "Moshe went and spoke these words to all of Israel." Why is Moshe referred to as "going"? R' Mordechai Twersky z"l (1798-1837; the *Maggid* of Chernobyl) explains:

We read (*Bemidbar* 14:17), "And now, may the strength of my Lord be magnified, as You have spoken, saying." This alludes to the teaching of *Kabbalists* that when a person speaks, *i.e.*, prays, he magnifies the Name of G-d and has the ability to elevate the souls of many Jews.

How does a person know if he is praying properly? The verse concludes, "You have spoken, saying"--if, after a person prays, he wants to "say," *i.e.*, pray more, then he knows that he has prayed well. But, if he is glad to be finished, he has not prayed properly.

We also read (*Kohelet* 4:17), "Guard your legs when you go to the house of *Elokim*." Proper prayer stands on two legs, says R' Twersky. One leg is man's belief in the holiness of the prayers, and the other is man's trust that *Hashem* accepts the prayers of even the least articulate person. However, a person must always be truthful, as *Chazal* say that "falsehood has no legs." [As written in the Torah, the letters of the word "*Sheker*" / "falsehood" all come to a point on the bottom. They "have no legs" and cannot stand.]

Moshe's prayers undoubtedly stood on strong "legs"; therefore, he was able to elevate the souls of the Jewish people. It was on those "legs" that our verse says he "went." (*Likkutei Torah*)

Tefilah

This year, we will *iy"H* devote this space to discussing various aspects of our prayers. This week, we continue discussing the thirteen types of prayer identified in *Midrashim*.

R' Shimshon Dovid Pincus z"l (rabbi of Ofakim, Israel; died 2001) writes: "*Ittur*" is the type of prayer that the Torah ascribes to our Patriarch Yitzchak in the verse (*Bereishit* 25:21), "*Va'ye'etar* / Yitzchak entreated *Hashem* opposite his wife, because she was barren. *Va'yei'ater* / *Hashem* allowed Himself to be entreated by [Yitzchak], and his wife Rivka conceived." *Rashi* z"l explains: "He prayed repeatedly and urgently." This is consistent with the *Gemara* (*Berachot* 32b): "If a person sees that he prayed and was not answered, he should pray again, as it is written (*Tehilim* 27:14--the final verse of '*Le'David Hashem ori*'), 'Hope to *Hashem*; strengthen yourself and He will give you courage, and hope to *Hashem* [again].'"

R' Pincus continues: There is a fundamental difference between making a request from a person and making a request from *Hashem*. When a human being says "No" to a request, asking again will usually annoy him. Even if he does eventually accede to the request, it typically will be with bad feelings. In contrast, *Hashem* wants us to repeat our requests again and again. *Hashem* wants to fulfill our requests, and He certainly has the ability to do so. Thus, when He does not fulfill our requests immediately, it often is because He is waiting for us to form a deeper relationship with Him--which is what we do by praying to Him repeatedly with the knowledge that He never tires of hearing from us. [However, if one thinks only of himself and his desires while praying, he is not accomplishing what *Hashem* wants. Also, as discussed previously, *Hashem* sometimes does not answer our requests because He knows they are not in our best interests.]

(*She'arim B'tefilah* p.136)

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“This song shall speak up before it as a witness. . .” (31:21)

“This song” refers to the song of *“Ha’azinu”* in the next *parashah*. To what does it testify?

R’ Chaim of Friedberg *z”l* (16th century, brother of the *Maharal* of Prague) explains that there are many prophecies that do not have happy endings. Most notably, the horrible curses which were read in *Parashat Ki Tavo* end without any mention of a brighter future.

Not so the song of *“Ha’azinu,”* which ends with the verse, “He will bring retribution upon His foes, and He will appease His land and His people.” This is a promise of the long-awaited redemption. Says our verse: write the song of *“Ha’azinu”* as a testimony and reminder to yourselves that the redemption will come.

Why do so many prophecies end without consolation? Why do many chapters of the Books of the Prophets leave us with unanswered questions about our faith? R’ Chaim explains that this was done intentionally so that we should not think that the prophets served G-d only because they understood His ways. No! They too had unanswered questions, but this did not diminish their love for *Hashem* or their service of Him.

(*Sefer Geulah Vi’shuah* ch.6)



“For I know your rebelliousness and your stiff neck; behold! while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebels against Hashem [literally, with Hashem]--and surely after my death.” (31:27)

The *Gemara* (*Sanhedrin* 37a) relates that the sage Rabbi Zera had neighbors who were gang members who terrorized the neighborhood. Rabbi Zera befriended them and attempted to bring them to repentance. After Rabbi Zera died, these thugs said, “Until now, Rabbi Zera prayed for us. Who will pray for us now?” They reflected on this and repented. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

Commentaries ask: Why was Moshe Rabbeinu so confident that *Bnei Yisrael* would “surely” rebel after his death? Maybe *Bnei Yisrael* would reason as Rabbi Zera’s neighbors later did and would repent after Moshe died?

R’ Peretz Steinberg *shlita* (Queen, N.Y.) suggests: Literally, our verse does not state that *Bnei Yisrael* sinned “against *Hashem*”; rather, it states that they rebelled “with *Hashem*.” When *Bnei Yisrael* rebelled in the desert, they told themselves that their actions were all for the sake of Heaven, that they were “with *Hashem*.” When one fools himself in that way, he will never repent. In contrast, the gangsters in Rabbi Zera’s neighborhood knew that they were gangsters. They faced reality, and therefore they repented.

(*Pri Etz Chaim*)

“He said to them, ‘I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I can no longer go out and come in . . .’” (31:2)

Rashi z”l writes (in his second explanation of the verse): “I can no longer take the lead in the matter of the Law.’ This teaches us that the well-springs of wisdom were stopped up for him.”

R’ Nosson Sternhartz *z”l* (1780-1845; foremost student of R’ Nachman of Breslov) explains: Moshe was saying that he was unable to advance any further in his spiritual growth. And, since a *Tzaddik* lives only to grow -- he cannot stand still -- Moshe necessarily had to pass away.

(*Likkutei Halachot: Hilchot Tefilin* 5:36)

“Moshe summoned Yehoshua and said to him before the eyes of all Yisrael, ‘Be strong and courageous, for you shall come with this people to the Land that Hashem swore to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it.’” (31:7)

R’ Shlomo Kluger *z”l* (1785-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) writes: At first glance, the words “before the eyes of all *Yisrael*” seem to be superfluous. The important thing is that Moshe summoned Yehoshua and told him: “Be strong and courageous.”

It would seem, therefore, suggests R’ Kluger, that these words are part of what Moshe said. He summoned Yehoshua and told him, “Before the eyes of all *Yisrael*, be strong and courageous . . .” He meant: A person is obligated to be very humble. However, a leader may not act too humbly in the presence of his people; if he does, they will not fear him, and his instructions will not be followed. Rather, a leader must display some degree of haughtiness and power to his people, while in his heart he remains humble and aware of his own low worth. (*Imrei Shefer*)

“Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Behold, you will lie with your forefathers, but this people will rise up and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the Land, in whose midst it is coming, and it will forsake Me and annul My covenant that I have sealed with it.’” (31:16)

R’ Yaakov Emden *z”l* (1697-1776; Central Europe) writes: From this verse, and from several other verses in the Torah--for example, *Devarim* 4:25--it appears that it was a certainty that *Bnei Yisrael* would stray after idols. How could these verses not be fulfilled when they are so definite?

R’ Emden answers: *Hashem* knew that the bounty *Bnei Yisrael* would enjoy in *Eretz Yisrael* would lead them to sin. In His love for us, He wanted us to have an excuse for our sins and not to become depressed and despair of forgiveness. Therefore, He foretold our sins in the Torah as if we had no choice but to commit them, though, in reality, we do have free will and are not compelled to sin. (*Eim L’binah*)