

דרשות תהילה

Derashot Tehillah

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ספר וסיפור: Writing the Oral Torah

Introduction - Rabbi Kagan

I find myself continually amazed by how a tradition that is several thousand years old can not only be relevant today, but that its relevance only intensifies as time goes on and the speed of cultural change accelerates. As well as a timeless guide to genuine, meaningful existence, Torah also seems perfectly designed to address the unique problems of modernity – challenges that were unimaginable when the Torah was given on Har Sinai thousands of years ago.

This should not be surprising. Ours is the age of technology. This technology is touted as the road to easier and better lives. In many ways our lives are easier. But few warned us of how it would simultaneously eat away and empty out our humanity. It is no wonder that Torah, which directs us to intensify and sanctify our humanity, should increasingly emerge as a lifeline and salvation in our increasingly troubled cultural milieu.

Something as basic as children playing, something as important as truly being with another person, something as essential as being alone with our selves are all being crowded out with growing thoroughness by our smartphones with wifi. When will our children learn creativity? How will we develop the skills to negotiate relationships and truly know another person if we are never truly present? Where will we find spiritual depth if we cannot be alone? Torah seems to be the only thing powerful enough to rip our concentration away from the

meticulously packaged, addictive, and numbing dribble we are fed. And Shabbos is nothing short of an oasis!

How does this relate to our Drashot Tehillah Torah journal? The diminishment we suffer from the modern world's stealthy theft of the free time it creates pales in comparison to the potential damage we face from the advent of artificial intelligence. I have been concerned for years that as we approach the singularity of a machine that can successfully present itself as human – able to seemingly engage in creative and insightful conversation – that our sensitivity to discern the unique sanctity of צלם אלקים would blur and fade. With prophecy and miracles long gone, this loss would take with it our last window on the Divine. A truly chilling thought.

But AI also faces us with a more mundane challenge. What are we to do, for example, when the AI built into our email program invites us to let it write our email, offers to summarize the response we receive, and then suggests our return response? We can passively look on as a lengthy email conversation unfolds over an issue of concern to us in which our participation is restricted to printing out its conclusion.

This reminds me of a comedy routine from the past about a college professor giving a lecture as he watches the tape recorders pile up on the desk and the room empty of students. Finally, when there are no students left, the professor deftly takes his own tape recorder out of his pocket and presses the play button to blare out a recording of his lecture for the other tapes to record as he quietly leaves. That is funny, but only mildly alarming as the professor had to write and

record the lecture and the students will eventually need to listen to the tape – the ideas are still generated through human effort and digested through human effort, albeit in a mediated fashion. In the case of the AI email exchange our humanity is completely absent! In a similar vein, students all over the world now turn to AI to write their papers for them – nothing required of the student but to formulate the questions correctly to get ChatGPT to give him a worthy and “original” paper.

This Torah journal is a gallant response to this nightmarish AI reality. Each student represented in this volume invested significant time and real effort to create these essays, as is evident from the results. She sat down, proposed a question, discussed it with Mrs Tannenbaum, researched it, thought about it, and wrote a paper. She then discussed it with Mrs Tannenbaum a few more times, leading to successive rewrites, a constant refining of her idea, and, after a light edit to smooth out the writing... voilà, a paper to be proud of. AI can write the paper or will be able to soon. The point is not the paper, the product. The point is the process and the development of self and understanding that the process fosters.

All the Torah we have today is Oral Torah. Since the time of the Greeks we have not been able to read the written Torah unless it is filtered through the Oral Torah. So in addition to Talmud and Halacha, we have all the Midrashism, Aggados, and Commentaries, Musar, Philosophy, Machshavah, Chassidus, and Mysticism. All Torah, Written or Oral, passes through the Oral Torah. Here is the point: the Oral Torah only exists in the thinking of those that are learning it. The written books of the Oral Torah do not have the sanctity of Torah. The

Torah of the Oral Torah only exists in the thinking and speaking-with-understanding of the Oral Torah. The Oral Torah can never be an object, only a process. AI cannot be Oral Torah. It may be able to write a Dvar Torah, but that will only *be* Torah when it is being read, digested, and understood. Torah can only exist in a meaningful sense in human consciousness.

This only makes sense. For Torah is the medium, or structures the medium, of our connection to God. That is not a physical connection. It is an internal conscious/spiritual/intellectual/experiential connection. So the place of Torah is that internal space.

What counts is not the written conclusion; it is the whole internal process through which the conclusion is reached. Torah cares about the process, not the product. God does not need AI. God can make or do anything He wills instantly. Then why creation? Why mankind? Why free choice? These just make things messy.

God doesn't want the product. He wants the process. For through the process we create ourselves as individuals, vessels of connection to ה"ה. For this reason we say at a siyum:

אָנוּ עֲמַלִּים וְהֵם עֲמַלִּים: אָנוּ עֲמַלִּים וּמְקַבְּלִים שְׂכָר, וְהֵם עֲמַלִּים וְאֵינָם מְקַבְּלִים שְׂכָר
"We strive and they (the nations of the world) strive. We strive and receive reward. They strive and do not receive reward." The nations of the world care about the product. The amount of effort is irrelevant to them. Lots of effort to get the same result is nothing more than a waste of time, so no reward for the effort.

Torah, on the other hand, values the effort. That is what we are rewarded for. For only through effort which we initiate do we create self (שכר מצוה מצוה). And the self is God's goal in creation. For, as Ramchal teaches us at the beginning of *Daas Tevunos*, God created existence in order to give and giving requires a receiver in some sense distinct from Him. Creating that receiver is on us.

The essays contained in this booklet give testimony to a set of beautiful and fruitful processes. From each piece we see the writer clearly growing through constructing her essay. It was my distinct pleasure to edit the student essays in this journal. I learned a lot from carefully going through each piece. I was struck not only by the quality of the material, but also by the variety of topics and unique style characterizing each essay. It is uncanny how each of these different styles and topics so accurately reflects the young woman who wrote each piece. That is the sign that the students gave themselves to the project – they were alive in the process, investing self and growing self. We can only hope that for each one of these young women her essay in this collection is only the first of many more to come!

Shaul's Fall from Grace: the Slippery Slope of Extreme Humility

וַיֹּאמֶר שְׂמוּאֵל הֲלוֹא אִם-קָטָן אַתָּה בְּעֵינָיִךְ, רֹאשׁ שְׁבֹטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אַתָּה וַיִּמְשַׁח יְהוָה

לְמֶלֶךְ עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל¹

Dina Rosenberg

There are many stories in Tanach that are confounding, challenging us to decipher what is going on and what we are to learn from their inclusion in the text. These range from the complexities of family dynamics in sefer *Bereishis* to the delinquency of the nation leading to the second *churban*. One narrative that seems particularly difficult to understand is that of Shaul and his spiraling descent from admirable humility to a detrimental jealousy, paranoia, and arrogance. From the moment we meet Shaul he is portrayed as exceedingly humble and considerate to those surrounding him. But by the end of his story he has transformed into someone unrecognizable. The goal of this article is to determine what happened to bring about this change.²

When Shaul first appears in Tanach he is introduced as extraordinarily thoughtful, lacking any sense of entitlement. His exemplary midot are highlighted as something to be admired and emulated. In the story where we are

¹ *Shmuel* 15:17.

² It's important to note that although this article focuses heavily on the negatives of Shaul's *middah* here, it does not negate the fact that he was a *tzaddik*, and that while some of his actions can be viewed through this lens, certainly not all of them should be.

first introduced to Shaul we see him treating his father's servant as an equal.³ When Shmuel tells Shaul that he has seen through *nevuah*⁴ that Shaul is to be appointed king Shaul is reluctant, feeling inadequate to the task. Though he eventually accepts that he is to become king, when the time comes for him to be anointed he hides, feeling unworthy.⁵ The humility Shaul exhibits is generally something very positive, but almost immediately we see it begin to steer Shaul in a bad direction, starting a rapid descent into behavior that would ultimately lead to the loss of his kingship.

Initially, the downward slide is subtle enough that it appears innocuous, and even as though it may be a continuation of the positive aspects of his humility. As he is being anointed, he is heckled by certain members of the crowd who mock him, asking what he did to deserve to be their king⁶. This is a blatant display of disrespect to Shaul, to Shmuel, who declared Shaul's appointment, and even to HaShem himself, whom Shmuel is representing. Despite this Shaul stays silent and pretends not to care in the face of this dishonor. This apparent humility has two sides to it. On one hand, it is a good trait to be able to relinquish one's honor for the sake of peace. That being said, however, when one's honor is placed on him by HaShem it is no longer under his jurisdiction to forgo the respect due to him as it reflects poorly on the source and basis of his honor – HaShem. This is even more the case for a king, who functions as HaShem's direct representative.⁷

³ *Shmuel*, 9:5.

⁴ *Shmuel*, 9:21.

⁵ *Shmuel*, 10:22, Rashi 10:22.

⁶ *Shmuel*, 10:27.

⁷ *Kiddushin*, 32b.

After this ambiguous display of character, what was once Shaul's outstanding trait of humility takes a clearly problematic form as his behavior morphs from humble to insecure. After the battle with the *Plishtim* he brings his requisite *korban* without waiting for Shmuel's arrival, as he sees his men's interest waning.⁸ After Shmuel rebukes him for this, we don't see Shaul respond. But it becomes apparent that he has not learned his lesson when, after conquering the Amalekites, he acquiesces to his men's desire to save their plunder for *korbanot*; he allows Agag and some *Amaleki* livestock to live despite being explicitly told to kill every last living memory of Amalek! When confronted with this colossal mistake, he initially shirks responsibility, denying that he has done anything wrong. When Shmuel makes it irrefutably clear that HaShem's command has been violated, Shaul initially lays the blame on his army rather than owning his responsibility for the problem as their king and commanding officer.⁹

As a result of these failures, Shaul's kingship is revoked,¹⁰ and Shmuel is commanded by HaShem to anoint Dovid as Shaul's replacement. When Shmuel does this, the spirit of HaShem rests on Dovid and departs from Shaul, being replaced with a *ruach ra'ah* from HaShem which torments and terrifies Shaul.¹¹ This spirit's torture causes some servants to suggest that Shaul employ a musician to soothe him, and Dovid is brought to play the lyre for him¹². While

⁸ *Shmuel*, 13:8-14.

⁹ *Shmuel*, 15:1-23.

¹⁰ *Shmuel*, 15:23.

¹¹ *Shmuel*, 16:14. There is debate among the commentaries whether this bad spirit was a mystical affliction or the onset of mental illness.

¹² *Shmuel*, 16:14-18.

Dovid is playing for him, Shaul's *ruach ra'ah* overcomes him and he is struck with paranoia and tries to kill Dovid twice.¹³ After this, when Dovid doesn't attend Shaul's meals on *Rosh Chodesh*, he accuses his son Yonatan of conspiring with Dovid against him.¹⁴ This desperate attempt to hold onto a position that he initially felt he was unworthy of holding reveals how profoundly Shaul's character has deteriorated from its original humility.

The question remains: how did Shaul's humility make such a complete change from being what was arguably his best trait to being to his downfall? How did he go from protesting his appointment to disregarding the words of his anointer and G-d to cling to something he never thought was his? There are many possible answers to this question. One approach sees Shaul's humility as poisoned at the root, with its problematic foundation hidden until circumstances brought it out. Rebbe Natan Sternhartz writes in his *sefer, Likutei Tefila*, that HaShem doesn't want people to view themselves as lowly in the pursuit of serving him, labeling this practice as false humility.¹⁵ As previously mentioned, Shaul forgoes his honor "at the drop of a hat" and is unable to attach appropriate importance to his kingly actions and decisions. This is evidence of inferiority rather than humility. Shaul appears amazingly humble, but the undertone of his humility is a deep-rooted insecurity and low self-esteem that colors all of his thoughts and actions.

¹³ *Shmuel*, 18:10-11.

¹⁴ *Shmuel* 20:30-33.

¹⁵ *Sefer Likutei Tefila II*, 35:75.

This also accounts for his difficulty with taking responsibility and holding himself accountable when he makes incorrect decisions. A person with a healthy self-image and intact self-esteem does not equate a specific failure with being a failed person. But Shaul, who has an unhealthy perception of his worth, cannot accept that he has made a mistake because it reflects on his whole person – he would not view himself as failing, he would see himself as a failure.¹⁶

It is interesting to note that it is not Shaul's failure to kill Agag that results in HaShem revoking his kingship, rather it is his failure to take ownership of his mistake. HaShem does not make the final decision until it's evident that Shaul is not going to be able to own his flaws and will therefore be unable to repair them. A prerequisite to healthy growth is a sense of the solidity of one's base self-worth. This gives a person confidence in his ability to change, to face up to failures and recover, and discovery that he is still present. In the absence of self-esteem a person cannot believe in the possibility of change and improvement, sapping any desire to even try. Shaul's actions can be explained by viewing them through this lens.

We can contrast Shaul to Moshe Rabbeinu, who had a similar struggle with a completely different outcome. Both are known for their outstanding humility, however Shaul allowed the strength of his insecurity to consume him and warp the good that was there, whereas Moshe overcame the potential negative aspects of the *middah* and only grew from his humility.

¹⁶ Rav Elyakim Krumbein, "Anava", [Eitzion.org](https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/anava-humility-2) <https://etzion.org.il/en/philosophy/issues-jewish-thought/issues-mussar-and-faith/anava-humility-2>.

When Moshe was first told that he was to be HaShem's *shaliach* and redeem *Bnei Yisrael* from Egypt, like Shaul he reacted with discomfort, disbelief, and a strong feeling of unworthiness, repeatedly attempting to avoid the assignment.¹⁷ Eventually he had to make peace with the idea that HaShem decided he was worthy and, regardless of how Moshe felt, he had to do as HaShem commanded. The only thing that protected Moshe from the kind of failure experienced by Shaul was his acceptance that if HaShem deemed him worthy he must, on some level, *be* worthy even though he didn't know why.

Moshe's doubts about his worthiness to lead the Jews resurfaced throughout his life, even after his initial acceptance of his mission. For example, both when *Bnei Yisrael* ignored Moshe's claim that HaShem would take them out of *Mitzrayim*¹⁸ and when they complained about the *maan* in the *midbar*¹⁹ Moshe explicitly doubted his ability to lead. Moshe's true humility was in his recognition that he didn't have to understand his worthiness to be worthy. We can almost see the moment he stops resisting his role when Aharon and Miriam criticize him for separating from his wife. In contrast to previous instances when people complained about him, he doesn't bring these complaints to HaShem as evidence of his inadequacy as he did before, and indeed it is at this point in his development that he is referred to as the most humble man.²⁰ This is the correct manifestation of the *middah* of modesty, rather than the undertones of insecurity in Shaul's mindset – that if he doesn't see his worthiness, it must not be there.

¹⁷ *Shemos*, 3:11; *Shemos* 3:13; *Shemos*, 4:1; *Shemos*, 4:10; *Shemos*, 4:13.

¹⁸ *Shemos*, 6:12.

¹⁹ *Bamidbar*, 11:14-15.

²⁰ *Bamidbar*, 12:3.

Shaul, for all of his flaws, was an incredible *tzaddik*²¹ so we must understand that if even he fell prey to this challenge and *yetzer harah* of low self-esteem disguising itself as humility, how much more so do we need to take stock of our thoughts and behaviors to safeguard ourselves from this error. We need to understand that although it is on an undeniably smaller scale than being leaders of the nation, HaShem did deem us worthy, at the very least, of being here on this earth and being a part of His representing nation. As such, we have a responsibility to recognize our worth, and consequently, our impact on our world. Regardless of feelings of inadequacy we all sometimes feel, we have to remember that HaShem decides who is worthy and who is not. And to presume that He is mistaken on this point with regard to any one of us individually is not humility, but low self-esteem.

²¹*Shmuel II*, 21:6.

Walking with a Father, Standing Before a King

Rut Mavashev

In the last משנה in יומא, מסכת עקיבא, רבי עקיבא states: “Fortunate are you, O’ Israel – for before whom are you purified and who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven. As it is written, ‘I will sprinkle upon you pure waters’ – so too, the Holy One Blessed be He, purifies you.”¹

רבי עקיבא describes the gratitude בני ישראל must have for being gifted with the ability to achieve a full תשובה and purification of their sins. Rav Chaim Tzvi Hollander of the Telshe Yeshiva (Cleveland) quotes Rav Aharon Kotler asking why the משנה describes us as fortunate that Hashem cleanses us of our sins. Shouldn't we rather feel ashamed that the King needs to lower himself to clean us off due to our dirtiness and failures?²

Rav Kotler answered that while G-d is our King and the King of the world, He is also our Father. Although Hashem is King, רבי עקיבא in the משנה specifically refers to HaShem as our Father. Rather than envisioning a monarch dealing with his servant entering the royal palace in a defiled state, compelling

¹ יומא:ח:ט: דרש רבי אלעזר בן עזריה: “מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו.” עבירות שבין אדם למקום – יום הכפורים מכפר. עבירות שבין אדם לתבירו – אין יום הכפורים מכפר עד שירצה את תבירו. אמר רבי עקיבא: אשירכם ישאל! לפני מי אתם מטהרין, מי מטהר אתכם? אביכם שבשמים, שנאמר: “וורקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם”, ואומר: “מקנה ישראל (ה)”, מה מקנה מטהר את הטמאים – אף הקדוש ברוך הוא מטהר את ישראל.

Similarly, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya taught that point from the verse: “From all your sins you shall be cleansed before the Lord” (Leviticus 16:30). For transgressions between a person and God, Yom Kippur atones; however, for transgressions between a person and another, Yom Kippur does not atone until he appeases the other person. In conclusion, Rabbi Akiva said: How fortunate are you, Israel; before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? It is your Father in Heaven, as it is stated: “And I will sprinkle purifying water upon you, and you shall be purified” (Ezekiel 36:25). And it says: “The ritual bath of Israel is God” (Jeremiah 17:13). Just as a ritual bath purifies the impure, so too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, purifies Israel.

² <https://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5783-acharei-mos/>

the king to cleanse him, רבי עקיבא directs us to consider the image of a child being washed by his father. This child, having ventured outdoors to play, becomes thoroughly soiled, distracted by the world around him. His immersion in the muddy yard and his engagement in games with friends result in him being covered in dirt from head to toe. Yet the parent, understanding the innocence and natural curiosity of the child, does not reprimand but rather gently cleans him. He recognizes the child's actions as part of growth and exploration in a world full of temptations. Similarly, Hashem, in His infinite compassion, acknowledges human frailties, repeatedly purifies בני ישראל, and guides them back with unwavering parental love. We must be embarrassed by the actions we have done that necessitate a scrubbing, but we are not embarrassed to turn to our Father to ask for it when we need it. The words of רבי עקיבא require us to explore the implications of our dual relationship with Hashem of Father and King.

רבי עקיבא created the תפילה of “אבינו מלכנו”. It was at a time of extreme, intense drought, and nothing, not fasting or praying seemed to help bring rain.³

³ תנו רבנן: מעשה ברבי אליעזר שגזר שלש עשרה מעניות על הצבור ולא ירדו גשמים, באחרונה התחילו הצבור לצאת. אמר להם: תקנותם קברים לעצמכם?! געו כל העם בבכייה, וירדו גשמים.

The Sages taught: An incident occurred involving Rabbi Eliezer, who decreed a complete cycle of thirteen fasts upon the congregation, but rain did not fall. At the end of the last fast, the congregation began to exit the synagogue. He said to them: Have you prepared graves for yourselves? If rain does not fall, we will all die of hunger. All the people burst into tears, and rain fell.

שוב מעשה ברבי אליעזר שיצד לפני הטיבה, ואמר עשרים וארבע ברכות ולא נענה. ירד רבי עקיבא אחריו ואמר “אבינו מלכנו אין לנו מלך אלא אתה. אבינו מלכנו, למענך רחם עלינו”, וירדו גשמים. הווי מרנני רבנן, יצתה בת קול ואמרה: לא מפני שגזר גדול מזה, אלא שגזר מעביר על מידותיו, וזה אינו מעביר על מדותיו.

There was another incident involving Rabbi Eliezer, who descended to serve as prayer leader before the ark on a fast day. And he recited twenty-four blessings, but he was not answered. Rabbi Akiva descended before the ark after him and said: Our Father, our King, our King, we have no king other than You. Our Father, our King, for Your sake, have mercy on us. And rain immediately fell. The Sages were whispering among themselves that Rabbi Akiva was answered while his teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, was not. A Divine Voice emerged and said: It is not

רבֵּי עֲקִיבָא then composed אַבִּינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, emphasizing בני ישראל's dichotomous relationship with G-d as both Father and King, and hinting that these titles embody two distinct ways in which we can relate to Hashem.

נֵרְד רַבֵּי עֲקִיבָא אַחֲרָיו וְאָמַר: “אַבִּינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ אֵין לָנוּ מֶלֶךְ אֱלֹא אַתָּה. אַבִּינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ, “לְמַעַן רַחֵם עָלֵינוּ”, וְיִרְדוּ גְּשָׁמִים”⁴

“Our Father, our King, there is no other King but you, Our Father, our King, for Your sake, have mercy upon us!”

When we cry out to HaShem “אַבִּינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ” we turn to Him both as a loving parent and as a servant’s plea to a stern king, a ruler of a nation, an authority to be revered. There is a reason why the drought that spurred רבֵּי עֲקִיבָא to create the prayer only ended after an appeal to both אַבִּינוּ and מַלְכֵנוּ. Engaging both aspects of our connection to Hashem allowed בני ישראל to reach a deeper תשובה, ultimately making them worthy of HaShem’s mercy.

These two relationships with Hashem as Father and King recur throughout תנ"ך. Hashem is addressed as אב or referred to as אב in times when that form of relationship is relevant to the moment, requiring parental love, creation, guidance, or loving discipline. In contrast to the distance and rigid judgement of a king, a father is merciful and deeply involved in the life of his child. The context dictates the appropriate relationship or balance of relationships. Recognizing the nuances of these two forms of connection can help us tap into a fuller, deeper relationship with Hashem.

because this Sage, Rabbi Akiva, is greater than that one, Rabbi Eliezer, but that this one is forgiving, and that one is not forgiving. God responded to Rabbi Akiva’s forgiving nature in kind by sending rain.

⁴תענית כה:.

The Father Relationship

Toward the end of משה's last address to בני, he warns them to follow their obligations toward Hashem. One thing he stated in his rebuke in פרשת האזינו was:

הַלִּיהְוֶה תִּגְמְלוּ-יָאֵת עִם נֶבֶל וְלֹא תִחַם הַלְוֵא-הוּא אֲבִיךָ קִנְיָהּ הוּא עָשָׂה וַיִּכְנְנֶךָ:

Do you thus requite Hashem, O dull and witless people? Is not this the Father who created you – fashioned you and made you endure!⁵

In the above פסוק, the phrase “אֲבִיךָ קִנְיָהּ” is used in reference to Hashem. רש"י explains that in this context the word “קנין” can be explained in several ways. The root of the term may relate to קנין, “acquisition”, קן, “nest” or תקן, “to fix/outfit.”⁶ In each of the instances, the role of Father is significant. In a sense, a father acquires, builds a nest to protect or outfits the child with everything that will benefit him. רש"י compares this to בני ישראל having been placed in a nest of rocks. This is the parent providing a strong grounding, something that may be uncomfortable yet is safe and stable, in a way that is beneficial for בני ישראל. Hashem is like a father who, even when punishing and rebuking us in a manner that seems bad from our perspective or makes us uncomfortable, is in actuality having our best interest at heart. A father benefits His children in the long run, and communicates with them words of rebuke that are suitable to the child's situation. Similarly, when בני ישראל have sinned, Hashem's rebuke is measured and given with immense חסד.

⁵דברים לבו.

⁶רש"י על דברים לבו: הלא הוא אביך קנין שקנאך, שקננה בקן הפלעים ובאנץ תנקה, שתקנה בכל מיני תקנה.

Based on this פסוק, the ספורנו explains that Hashem is not to be perceived as a biological father, who can *become* a father in ways that lack intentionality and necessity, but rather as Father by deliberate *choice*.⁷ G-d gives a person existence to execute the will of G-d, it does not occur by happenstance. In the case of the Jewish people, it is so that the collective can become an עם סגולה, a treasured nation. Hashem reinforces His Fatherhood over בני ישראל by choosing continuously to Father them.

ישעיה shows a different aspect of Hashem as “our Father” when he states:

כִּי־אַתָּה אֲבִינוּ כִּי אֲבִרְהֶם לֹא יִדְעֵנוּ וְיִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יִפְרֹגוּ אֶתְּהָ יְהוָה אֲבִינוּ גִּאֲלָנוּ מֵעוֹלָם
שְׁמֶךָ:⁸

Surely You are our Father: Though אברהם did not know us, and ישראל recognize us not, You, Hashem, are our Father, Your name is ‘Our Redeemer’.

יש"י says that Hashem is the Father of ישראל, and *because* of that, He must take interest in our problems and suffering.⁹ Hashem is like a human father who loves his child and therefore keeps an eye on his child’s struggles, and does not turn away from his child in those moments. יש"י further explains what the פסוק means by mentioning אברהם and ישראל. There is a fundamental difference between the fatherhood of the אבות and of Hashem. אברהם did not know בני ישראל in the troubles of Egypt, and יעקב did not know his descendants through their troubles of the מדבר. The אבות were not alive during those times,

⁷ ספורנו על דברים לבו: **הלא הוא אביך קנך**. לא אב טבעי הנותן מציאות מה במקרה אבל הוא אב רצוני שנתן לך מציאות למען תהיה קנינו מוכן להשיג כך חפצו וסגולתו זה כי הוא עשך לגוי כי לא היית גוי נחשב כלל.
ישעיהו סג:טז.

⁹ יש"י על ישעיהו סג:טז: **כי אתה אבינו**. ועליך להביט ולראות בצרותינו.

they did not witness עם ישראל struggle or sin in those particular settings.¹⁰ The עם sharpens this idea, saying that Hashem has been and always will be עזרא's Father, "ואתה אב שתמצא לעולם".¹¹ Since Hashem is not finite or bound by time in the way the אבות were He *did* see עם ישראל through those struggles and sins and yet remains a constant Father.

יעקב takes the metaphor of Hashem as בני ישראל's Father even further:
12, וְעַתָּה יְהוָה אֲבִינוּ אֵתָהּ אֲנַחְנוּ הַחֲמֵר וְאֵתָהּ יִצְרָנוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָךְ כָּלֵנוּ:

But now, Hashem, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are the Potter, we are all the work of Your hands.

Rav Steinsaltz explains that this is the way to relate to Hashem as an אב, again not like a biological parent in the sense of a physical, finite being, but rather in the sense that He is the source of all life and existence.¹³ Similar to a potter and his clay, He can do with His creations as He wishes, form them in any way, and yet He still chooses to interact with His nation through the מידה of חסד.

In ספר ירמיהו the נביא says that Hashem will view בני ישראל after sinning as:

בְּכִי יָבֹאוּ וּבְתַחֲנוּנִים אֲוִבִילֶם אֲוִלִיכֶם אֲלֵ-נַחְלֵי מַיִם בְּדַרְדָּר יִשָּׂר לֹא יִפְשְׁלוּ בְּהִיָּתִי לְיִשְׂרָאֵל לְאָב וְאֶפְרַיִם בְּכָרִי הוּא.¹⁴

¹⁰רש"י על ישעיהו סג:טז: כי אברהם לא ידענו - בצרת מצרים. וישראל לא יכירונו - במדבר כי כבר נסתלקו מן העולם ואתה ה' אבינו ככולם נעשית לנו אב.

¹¹אבן עזרא על ישעיהו סג:טז: הטעם שאתה אבינו ואנחנו בניך, ואתה אב שתמצא לעולם.

¹²ישעיהו סד:ז: וְעַתָּה יְהוָה אֲבִינוּ אֵתָהּ אֲנַחְנוּ הַחֲמֵר וְאֵתָהּ יִצְרָנוּ וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָךְ כָּלֵנוּ:

¹³ביאור שטיינבולץ על ישעיהו סד:ז: וְעַתָּה יְהוָה אֲבִינוּ, מולידנו, מקורנו אֵתָהּ. אם אֲנַחְנוּ הַחֲמֵר, האדמה המשמשת לעשיית כלים, וְאֵתָהּ הוּא יִצְרָנוּ, המעבד את החומר כרצונך, והרי מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָךְ כָּלֵנוּ. על כן אנו מתחננים אליך.
¹⁴ירמיהו לא:ט.

They (בני ישראל) will come crying to Me, and I will guide them with compassion, lead them to water, by an even road where they won't stumble, for I am forever a Father to ישראל, and Ephraim is my first-born.

After sinning, the nation defeatedly returns to Hashem, desperate for forgiveness and reconciliation, and Hashem then welcomes them back. Rav Steinsaltz explains that the crying this פסוק is referring to will be tears of joy, as their sins and struggles become mere memories.¹⁵ Hashem reciprocates with compassion, with the mentality of a concerned father towards a spiritually struggling child. A father tries to find the smoothest path on which to guide his son; Hashem approaches בני ישראל post-sin with the same mindset.

The King Relationship

In addition to being referred to as אב, throughout תנ"ך Hashem is also constantly described as our מלך. The characterization of Hashem as King conjures up the image of an omnipotent, awe-inspiring, authoritarian Ruler. But many sources in תנ"ך relay a complex and multifaceted depiction of Hashem's Divine kingship, far beyond a simple analogy to human monarchs. Hashem is a King whose sovereignty ultimately transcends human understanding. But each instance in which He is referred to as King focuses on a distinct nuance of the king relationship, the one which is relevant to the specific context in which it appears. Together these references allow us to achieve a richer appreciation of Hashem as the Ruler of בני ישראל.

¹⁵ ביאור שטיינזלץ על ירמיהו לא:ט.

One verse in *Tehillim* where דוד המלך refers to Hashem as King is:

יְהוָה מֶלֶךְ עוֹלָם וָעֶד אֶבְרֹי גוֹיִם מֵאֶרֶץ צוֹ: ¹⁶

Hashem is King eternally; the nations will perish from His land".

While the first part of this פסוק proclaims Hashem's מלכות, the connection to the second half of the פסוק is obscure. What do the nations perishing from the land have to do with Hashem's eternal rulership? רד"ק answers that Hashem is the מלך of the whole עולם, meaning all nations will eventually accept His מלכות, not just בני ישראל.¹⁷ The מלבי"ם adds on to this that Hashem is different from a מלך בשר ודם because He rules unconditionally. He does not need subjects to rule over in order to be a מלך, He just *is* King, regardless of the existence of those over whom He rules.¹⁸ Therefore, the פסוק tells us that even when all nations of the world will eventually "אֶבְרֹי מֵאֶרֶץ צוֹ", Hashem will remain in His status as the Ruler of the world.

In שמות, Hashem is also described as:

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְעֹלָם וָעֶד

*HaShem will rule as King eternally!*¹⁹

Rav S.R. Hirsch explains the words "עֹלָם וָעֶד" in this verse with a focus on the word roots. "עֹלָם וָעֶד" does not merely mean a recognition of G-d ruling eternally. "עֹלָם" can be interpreted as "fixed/set in stone" and "וָעֶד" as "hidden". The פסוק can be read as "Hashem is the מלך in a fixed and irrevocable way, even when hidden from us in גלות.

¹⁶ תהילים י:טז.

¹⁷ רד"ק על תהילים י:טז.

¹⁸ מלבי"ם על תהילים י:טז.

¹⁹ שמות טו:יה.

Before Moshe's passing, he blesses the people and depicts HaShem as King of Israel.

וַיְהִי בִישְׁרוֹן מֶלֶךְ בְּהַתְּאַסֵּף רְאִשֵׁי עַם יִחִיד וְשִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

And Hashem is King in ישרון, when the people are assembled, the tribes of Israel together.

רש"י explains this pasuk to mean that the Jews are in a continual state of awareness and acceptance of G-d's authority when they are together.²¹ This mindset, known as קבלת עול מלכות שמים, reflects a deep, unwavering commitment to acknowledging Hashem as King at every moment. It is not a one-time declaration, but an ongoing, conscious choice to align one's actions, thoughts, and values with His רצון.

In תהילים it states that,

יְהִנֵּה מֶלֶךְ גִּזְאוֹת לְבָשׁ לְבָשׂ יְהִנֵּה עֵז הַתְּאֵגָר אֲרֵי־תִכּוֹן תִּבְּל בַּל־תִּמּוֹט:

Hashem is king, He is robed in grandeur; Hashem is robed, He is girded with strength. The world stands firm and cannot be shaken.

The text here describes Hashem's kingly splendor. Yet, one may ask, how is the first half of the text, regarding Hashem's regality, related to the second half of the text, regarding the stability of the world? Rav Steinsaltz explains that this description of Hashem refers to how human perception of Him as a King *should be*: similar to that of a human king.²³ A king dresses in grand, beautiful robes to demonstrate His elevation above His subjects, His

²⁰ דברים לג:ה.

²¹ רש"י על דברים לג:ה.

²² תהילים צג:א.

²³ ביאור שטיינולץ על תהילים צג:א.

domination, strength, and power over them. This is the aspect of kingship is the one most similar to kings of flesh and blood and, therefore, is the most comprehensible and relatable. When, ultimately, G-d will be recognized by the world as King with this intense awareness, the world will stand firm and unshakable due to its lack of wickedness. Wickedness, “רוע” is etymologically related to the term “רעוע”, “broken” (similar to how a תרועה is the broken sound a שופר makes) in the sense of broken off from G-d. In other words, a world that can perceive Hashem as a King will be an unshakeable world, for the revelation of G-d will banish wickedness.

Taken together, these various perspectives depict a more profound and nuanced picture of Hashem’s role as both אב and מלך, enriching the theological understanding of His relationship with His nation. We explored multiple facets of what it means to have Hashem as a Father, on a national and personal level, including:

- G-d only has בני ישראל’s best interests at heart and only gives them what is ultimately beneficial.²⁴
- HaShem is *like* a human father, through being the source of existence, and *unlike* a human father in the sense that HaShem does not create by chance. Rather He creates by a constant choice to create us and keep us in existence.²⁵
- HaShem witnesses בני ישראל struggle through hardships in ways that even the אבות did not witness, and still constantly chooses to remain the Father of the Jewish nation.²⁶

²⁴ See footnote 7.

²⁵ See footnote 8.

²⁶ See footnote 10.

- HaShem is the source of life, like a potter to his clay.²⁷
- HaShem guides בני ישראל with compassion when they return to Him after straying spiritually.²⁸

These points illustrate a loving and fatherly figure, one aspect of our overall relationship with Hashem. However, we also relate to Hashem as King with the following qualities:

- Hashem doesn't need subjects in order to be a King. He is an unconditional monarch²⁹.
- He is an eternal King in a fixed, undeniable, and irrevocable way, though this is unclear to us so long as we are in גלות.³⁰
- בני ישראל must be in a constant state of accepting the yoke of Hashem's מלכות.³¹
- Humanity must perceive G-d in a way they can understand, which is in a manner similar to a human king. When mankind will unanimously recognize Hashem's מלכות, then wickedness won't be able to exist in the world.³²

In contrast to the fatherly, warm, inviting aspect of Hashem, here is a more authoritarian, awe-inspiring Being. Together, these dimensions of Hashem as both אב and מלך present a richly textured relationship that balances the compassion of a father with the awe-inspiring sovereignty of a king.

²⁷ See footnote 13.

²⁸ See footnote 15.

²⁹ See footnotes 17 and 18.

³⁰ See footnote 20.

³¹ See footnote 22.

³² See footnote 24.

מלכנו and אבינו in two ברכות. The first is found in the fifth ברכה:

הַשִּׁיבֵנו אֲבוּנוּ לְתוֹרַתְךָ, וְקַרְבֵנוּ מִלְּכֵנוּ לְעִבּוֹדְךָ, וְהַחְזִירֵנוּ בְּתַשׁוּבָה שְׁלֵמָה לְפָנֶיךָ: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, הַרוֹצֵה בְּתַשׁוּבָה:

Return us, our Father, to Your Torah and gather us, our King, to Your service, and bring us back to complete repentance before You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who desires repentance.

The עץ יוסף explains the reason for referring to G-d as a Father in this particular prayer. This is a prayer for repentance, as is the sixth ברכה which we will discuss in a moment. When we seek forgiveness G-d is referred to as a Father.³³ A father bears the duty of imparting to his son the principles of upright living, yet even in cases of rebellion and estrangement, paternal compassion naturally reemerges when the son turns back in repentance and seeks reconnection. Hashem wants בני ישראל to return to Him, return to following the ways of His תורה, return to building a relationship with Him, especially if they are returning from a place of sin.³⁴

The sixth ברכה in עשרה שמונה also juxtaposes Father and King:

סֵלַח לָנוּ אֲבוּנוּ כִּי חָטָאנוּ, מִחוּל לָנוּ מִלְּכֵנוּ כִּי פָשַׁעְנוּ, כִּי אֵל טוֹב וְסֵלַח אַתָּה: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה, חַנוּן הַמְרַבֵּה לְסִלַּח:

³³ The עץ יוסף in the Artscroll Siddur.

³⁴ Regarding the King aspect in this ברכה, the mode through which we accept G-d's sovereignty over ourselves is through doing His עבודה, meaning fulfilling His commandments. Therefore, the ברכה refers to returning to Hashem in the aspect of a King through servitude.

Pardon us, our Father, for we transgressed. Forgive us, our King for we sinned. For You are a good and forgiving G-d. Blessed are You Hashem, gracious One, Who abundantly pardons.

סליחה and מחילה represent two distinct but complementary aspects of forgiveness. סליחה refers to a deep, internal process of emotional reconciliation, in which one not only forgives but also eradicates any lingering resentment or ill-will towards the offender, even if the wrongdoing absolutely warranted resentment. It reflects a restoration of the relationship at the level of the heart, where forgiveness is extended fully and sincerely. This is the forgiveness of a father. מחילה, by contrast, is harsher in nature; it involves the deliberate act of foregoing one's right to give deserved consequences or punishment. It is an act of restraint, a conscious decision to release the wrongdoer from the burden of retribution, without necessarily resolving the emotional consequences of the offense. This is the forgiveness of a king. Together, these encompass the primary forms of forgiveness that Hashem gifts to בני ישראל, supplying both the fatherly emotional ways through which genuine forgiveness and spiritual repair can occur, as well as the authoritative, monarchical approach to Hashem's forgiveness.

By embracing the dual relationship with Hashem as both Father and King, בני ישראל find a profound balance between our love and reverence, and His mercy and justice. This dichotomy is not contradictory but complementary, approaching Hashem with both the warmth of a child seeking paternal love and the humility of a subject before a majestic king. As we reflect on the depth of Hashem's fatherly compassion and His kingly authority, we are reminded that His desire for our return is rooted in His infinite goodness and grace. We should

cherish the gift of Hashem's dichotomous role in His interactions with us and use it to deepen a connection with Him built on trust, love, and awe.

The Nature of Death And Grief –

Asher Yatzar Etchem Badin

Devorah Myron

Asher Yatzar Etchem Badin, or *Mechaye Hametim*, is the *bracha* said on visiting a Jewish cemetery. Everything about it is incredibly complex and layered, but unfortunately, it's often overlooked. While focusing on a topic related to death might seem odd or morbid, the *bracha* itself defies that expectation, and the message it eloquently delivers is a beautiful commentary on the nature of death and grief.

The *bracha* has several conditions that help us maintain proper focus so that we can read it in the intended way. Firstly, it has to be said in a halachically valid Jewish cemetery, which means there needs to be at least two Jewish graves present.¹ Therefore, visiting the lone grave of a *Gadol* doesn't qualify. At first, this seems obvious. Of course, a *bracha* meant for a cemetery should be recited in one. But why should we have a *bracha* specific to visiting a cemetery as opposed to a *bracha* for visiting a grave? What difference is there between visiting one deceased person and visiting two or more?

On a practical level, the way we feel in each of those scenarios changes completely. As we go about our daily lives, we focus on what we and the others around us can and have accomplished. In much the same way, visiting the grave of one great person makes us think of who they were and what they achieved while alive. In a cemetery, on the other hand, that focus shifts. Rather than

¹ Mishnah Berurah 224:16

thinking of each individual's life and legacy, we tend to become more acutely aware of the fact that we are surrounded by death, and this, in turn, reminds us how fragile our own lives are. We need that awareness if we want to say this *bracha* properly – in a way that channels that helpless feeling towards understanding the comfort and reassurance the *bracha* itself provides.

Secondly, and less intuitively, this *bracha* can only be said once every thirty days and only when a person has not visited a cemetery during that time.² On its own, this condition is a helpful way to avoid losing emotion and proper intention through habituation. In the context of the first condition – that it is only recited in a proper cemetery – it also establishes a healthy boundary to our exposure to the vulnerability we often feel when we acknowledge death. While it's generally healthy to recognize death and its implications from time to time, doing so too regularly is destructive. Prohibiting us to say this *bracha* when we visit frequently is a gentle reminder to keep a healthy distance.

The main text of the *bracha* is outlined in the *Gemara* in *Brachot*.³ The translations and the explanation I have included here are a blend of my own understanding with the different interpretations of published *siddurim* and relevant commentaries.

בְּרוּךְ (אתה השם אלוקינו מלך העולם) ... אֲשֶׁר יָצַר אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין
Hashem, you are the source of blessing, G-d and king of the world... that formed you with perfect justice

The second half of this line shifts the subject of the *bracha* to address the deceased directly. While we can't actually be speaking to the dead, framing

² Shulchan Arukh, Orach Chayim 224:13

³ Berachot 58b:5

the *bracha* this way helps us better relate to those whose graves are all around us, urging us to recognize our shared humanity.

וְנָן אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין - and nourished you with perfect justice

The word נָן, meaning "nourished," is associated with the word מזון, grain, which nourishes the body.⁴ In life, Hashem provided for all the physical needs of the deceased, just as he does for us, the living, now.

וְכִלְכַּל אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין - and sustained you with perfect justice

וְאַסַּף אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין - and gathered you with perfect justice

וְעָתִיד לְהַקְיִמְכֶם בְּדִין - and in the future will raise you with perfect justice

The shift to the future tense in this line refers to the time of *Techiat Hametim* (the revival of the dead).

Many of the words in this first half of the *bracha* are associated with farming, a detail which can be used to develop an interesting analogy. If, in the context of this analogy, we think of Hashem as a "Farmer" and the deceased as the "grain" that He grew, these words are profoundly comforting.

וְנָן. The farmer plants and then "nourishes" the grain, providing it with soil, water, and sunlight – all the basics needed for it to survive.

וְכִלְכַּל, and He "sustains" it in a way that keeps the plant not only living but healthy enough to grow strong. He is careful not to over – or under – water it, gives it special soil and fertilizer, or removes anything even partially blocking the sunlight.

וְאַסַּף. Once the grain is fully grown, He "gathers" it up. After all, if he leaves it in the ground forever, its harvest season will pass; it will shrivel and dry up, and all its potential will be lost. All of this the Farmer does,

⁴ Sefer HaShorashim, וְנָן 1 written by the Radak (R' David Kimchi)

בְּדַיִן, in perfect judgment. He knows exactly why He planted this grain. Some to sell for flour, some to bake bread for His family, some to save for a less bountiful year. For every seed of every stalk that He planted, He had a purpose. He knew exactly how to stimulate it to grow and exactly when it was ready to be collected and used. The Farmer also knows that if he doesn't replant, He'll soon no longer have a field at all, so He leaves a small part of each stalk to be buried, knowing that,

וְעֵתִיד לְהִקְיִמָּכֶם One day, the seeds he left behind will rise from the soil and grow.

So, too, during the lives of those who are no longer with us, Hashem provided for all their physical needs, took care to ensure their circumstances were conducive to growth, and took back their souls only once they had finished growing completely. Their bodies remained behind and people buried them, likely oblivious to the fact that they were not just bodies; rather, they were seeds, and one doesn't just bury a seed – one plants it. From above ground, a cemetery may look a lot like an empty field. But we have to remember that seeds have been planted beneath the surface, and even though we have no idea how long it might take, we can take comfort in knowing that they'll one day "sprout" and that the "Farmer" knows better how to tend to His crops than we do.

וְיִדְעַע מִסְפֵּר כּוֹלְכֶם - **And He knows all your “numbers”**

This line seems completely out of place and even unnecessary. Hashem is all-knowing, so surely He knows exactly how many of us there are. Why is this fact important or even relevant? Beyond that, why is it significant that He specifically knows how many people are buried in any given cemetery?

Firstly, there's a difference between knowing the quantity of something and knowing each number distinctly. No two numbers are the same; they each

represent a distinct value, but that doesn't mean the total is irrelevant. For example, if someone needed exactly twenty dollars to buy a new book but skipped the number six while counting up their cash, thinking it would not affect the total, they might be disappointed to arrive at the bookstore only to be informed that they are unable to purchase the book with only nineteen dollars. The full amount is needed, yet still, every number counts (pun intended). The *Chaver Hama'armarim* comments on the Ramban in Bamidbar to say that the entire purpose of *counting* is to give special attention to and emphasize that each individual is significant.⁵ It is also reasonable to say no one counts items without value. The only reason to count a single dollar, for example, is because having it makes the owner one dollar richer. To say that Hashem knows every number is to say that each of those individual "numbers" has value and contributes to a goal that can't be met if even one is missing.

The word for "number," "מִקְפָּר," is also more complicated than it seems. It shares a root (כ.פ.ר) with the word "סיפור",⁶ which is a "story". A story is not a fact or even a collection of facts – that would just be a textbook; stories are complex, emotional, and unique. Especially in the context of people, there is more to a number than a number; each one is a story to be told, and Hashem is constantly aware of every nuance throughout life and after death. He knows better than anyone when a chapter should begin and when it should end.

וְהוּא עֲתִיד לְהַחְיֹתְכֶם וּלְקַיֵּים אֶתְכֶם - **and in the future, He will reanimate you and maintain you**

⁵ חבר המארמרים על הרמב"ן (במדבר א:מה) מובא בשעוול

⁶ Sefer HaShorashim, ספר 1, written by the Radak (R' David Kimchi)

This line reassures us that when the time of *Techiat Hametim* arrives, Hashem will still personally involve Himself in our lives. We can think of it like a mechanic switching on an old machine. It may be able to function for a while on its own, but it will need to be checked repeatedly so that eventually, when the gears need to be oiled, the mechanic can stop it from breaking down. With respect to *Techiat Hametim* Hashem's ongoing support will assure the dead of eternity.

מְסִיחַ הַמֵּתִים ... (אתה השם) בְּרוּךְ - **You are the source of blessing Hashem... who revives the dead**

Here, the *bracha* concludes by reiterating its main topic. We're drawn back to the theme of resurrection for the third time to remind us how central the idea is to our religion. As the 13th principle of faith, it is an essential concept.⁷ Yet, as something that seems so far removed from our reality, it is not easy to understand practically. The one thing we can believe is that it will happen בְּדִין – with perfect justice. As this *bracha* assures us, life, death, and one day life again have always been and will always be given to us with the same perfect justice.

The first time I encountered this *bracha*, I was studying it for a campaign in high school. I started by looking online for a translation to help me remember what the *bracha* was for, but the first version I found did not match the one I had been given to study. My original assumption was that it had to be a different *nusach*, but the more sites I visited and *siddurim* I looked through, the more confused I became. Not a single version was the same as any of the others I'd seen. Once I found the original source in the *Gemara*, I realized almost

⁷ Rambam on Mishnah Sanhedrin 10:1:30

every line other than the first and the last (אשר יצר אתכם בדין... מהיה המתים) was sometimes changed, replaced, or removed completely. Initially, I thought it was strange that there were so many versions of a *bracha*. But with time, it started to make sense to me as I recognized how differently people view and cope with death. This *bracha* is meant to capture and express the many ways we experience loss and grief in a way that each individual can find consolation despite the unnerving nature of his surroundings. Just as there is more than one "correct" way to cope, there is more than one "correct" version of the *bracha*. There were two additions that appeared in many versions that stood out to me as representing this idea well:

וְהַחַיָּה אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין - And gave you life in perfect justice

Some cope with loss by telling themselves that, indeed, someone's life has ended, but at least they themselves are still alive. Surely, those that are gone were taken because their purpose was fulfilled, their time was 'up', and it was just.

וְהַמִּית אֶתְכֶם בְּדִין - And brought your death in perfect justice

Some, on the other hand, are comforted by accepting they will never understand Hashem's reasoning or timing. Maybe the life the deceased lived could never, by our standards, have been considered "complete," but by the standard of the Ultimate Judge, it was, and that has to be enough.

Sometimes, these two additions appear together, making a strong statement. No matter how much or how little we understand, we can always be sure that Hashem will never take advantage of His power over our lives; He only ever acts in a fair and just manner.

The *bracha's* conditions help us understand the beauty of visiting the dead while maintaining a healthy distance from death in daily life. Its many variations remind us that there are many ways to relate to and understand being in a place so naturally overwhelmed by death, and still consistently make it clear that justice underlies everything. The foundations of its original text help us reevaluate our understanding of death itself, which we otherwise think of, along with suffering, as an undeniable fact of reality and often wrongly view as the most permanent part of the human experience. This *bracha* helps us come to terms with and grow from what and who we've lost and see that what we perceive to be the end is not. Believing in *Techiat Hametim* as a cornerstone of our faith means recognizing that our losses – on every imaginable scale – can and *will be* recovered

Tehillim: The Prelude of a Perek

Mira Estrin

There is one *sefer* of *Nach* that always seems relevant, speaks profoundly to our heart and soul, and whose words are carried upon our lips far more than any other. That *sefer* is *Tehillim*. There is a wealth of deep commentary to be found on each *perek*, such that even a seemingly simple, short *perek* can be studied for hours – analyzing the meaning and symbolism behind each line, the stories in Tanach it alludes to, and the significance of each choice of wording. Yet as one delves into a *perek*, it is easy to skip the first *pasuk*, which typically is made up of one of a handful of introductory phrases used throughout the *sefer*. It can mention the authorship or give some musical instruction – seemingly not so crucial to understanding the *perek*. But there is specific significance behind each of these phrases. What does each phrase mean and what are the implications of a *perek* starting with a one phrase rather than another? This essay will try to uncover the deeper meaning behind each phrase commonly used to open a *perek* of *Tehillim* and how we can use this understanding to enhance our connection to *Tehillim* and our relationship to *tefilla* overall.

1. מזמור לדוד

One particularly common way that a *perek* of *Tehillim* will begin is simply, “*mizmor l’Dovid*”, “a song of/to/by Dovid”. What does this tell us about the *perek* which follows? Additionally, what is the difference between

this phrase and the similar, but reversed, “*l’Dovid mizmor*”, which is also a common introduction?

The *Gemara (Pesachim 117a)* explains that the introductory phrase “*mizmor l’Dovid*” indicates that only after Dovid haMelech wrote the ensuing *perek* did the *Shechina* rest upon him. It continues, “This teaches that the *Shechina* does not rest upon a person from [the midst of] laziness, nor from sadness, nor from laughter, nor from frivolity, nor from idle chatter, but rather from the joy of a mitzva.” Only through writing the psalm, through investing his own efforts to reach out to Hashem, did Hashem’s Presence come to Dovid. When we see the phrase “*mizmor l’Dovid*” we know Dovid is striving to regain closeness to Hashem through the difficult spiritual work needed to grow and lift himself up to be worthy to once again receive Divine inspiration.

A general rule in *Tanach* is that the first appearance of something is crucial to understanding its essence.¹ The first *perek* to begin *mizmor l’Dovid* is *perek* 3, which was written by Dovid as he fled from the attempted overthrow by his son Avshalom. The pain of Dovid is unimaginable: forced to run for his life yet again, this time from his much beloved son. How could he reach out to Hashem from the depths of such challenge and misery? Not only that, but even reaching the exalted status of the *Shechina* resting upon him, allowing his *tefilla* to be recorded in *Sefer Tehillim*? As Rav Hirsch explains, Dovid begins his prayer on an emotional low. Then, through the writing of the song itself, he is able to slowly raise his emotional state, verse by verse. By the end his spirit soars, comforted by his unwavering trust in Hashem, reaching the state the

¹ Rav Tzadok haKohen of Lublin, *Yisrael Kedoshim*, ch. 7.

Gemara explains is the prerequisite for receiving the *Shechina* – feeling no sadness or fear but only joy in his service of Hashem.²

While our own struggles and our ability to compose *tefillot* may pale in comparison to that of Dovid haMelech, this provides a valuable lesson for our own *davening* and connecting to Hashem. Often when we are in a strong emotional state – whether of laughter and frivolity, or sadness, anger, or depression, or when we are simply in a lazy and worn-out rut – it is very difficult to access feelings of spirituality and closeness to Hashem. It seems nearly impossible to pray, to reach out to Hashem who feels so distant. In these times we can ground ourselves and reach beyond the confines of our overwhelming emotions by focusing on the words of *tefilla* themselves. Dovid was able to lift himself out of great travails and emotional storms through the words of *Tehillim* that he authored. Our own recitation of *Tehillim* – particularly those which begin *mizmor l'Dovid* – can grant us the strength to turn to Hashem during our most difficult times and regain spiritual inspiration, greatly strengthening our connection to Him.

2. לדוד מזמור

Pesachim 117b explains that in contrast to *mizmor l'Dovid*, a psalm beginning with the term *l'Dovid mizmor* indicates that the *Shechina* rested upon Dovid *prior* to his authorship of it. The first *perek* to begin this way is *perek 24* – לְדָוִד מְזִמּוֹר לֵה' הָאֲרִיץ וּמְלוֹאָה תִּבְּל וַיִּשְׁבֵי בָהּ – Rav Hirsch writes that it is clear that the writing of this psalm was Divinely inspired: “The few verses of this brief psalm contain the most profound truths that any mortal lips were ever privileged

² *Tehillim Rav Hirsch* pg. 16.

to utter concerning the ways of G-d in the history of man.”³ Due to the great significance of the *perek*, it was chosen as the first *Shir Shel Yom* of the week. The introduction *l’Dovid mizmor* is notably less common than *mizmor l’Dovid*, suggesting that in the life of Dovid – as well as in our own – spiritual inspiration rarely just comes upon a person. In general, connection to Hashem is achieved through investing real effort and lifting oneself up to the requisite level.

Times when Dovid received the gift of Divine inspiration are not restricted to moments of spiritual exhilaration as in *perek* 24. Rav Hirsch comments on *perek* 40, which also begins *l’Dovid mizmor*, that while the beginning of the psalm suggests that Dovid was “at the height of purest bliss at the time”, the rest shows that Dovid actually wrote it in a time of great travail. “In the midst of these woes, Dovid recalls the many previous instances in which G-d has delivered him from similar situations and he is strengthened and inspired thereby... even in the midst of peril and affliction, Dovid’s soul is filled with Divine inspiration.”⁴ It can be precisely in these times of trouble when spiritual inspiration comes upon us, helping us when we most need it.

Mizmor l’Dovid can also teach us how to take advantage of such experiences. When Dovid was struck by moments of Divine inspiration, when the *Shechina* did come to rest upon him, he was quick to actualize that spirit and turn it into something very real. He composed a song to ensure the inspiration would be internalized and lead to genuine and persistent growth and connection

³ *Tehillim Rav Hirsch* pg. 172. *Perek* 24 describes G-d’s creation and ownership of the world, and the pure and moral behaviour man must display to attain holiness. It was written by Dovid for the day of the inauguration of the *Beit haMikdash*, to be said as the *Aron* was brought into the *Kodesh haKodashim*. (Radak, Ibn Ezra).

⁴ *Tehillim Rav Hirsch* pg. 295.

to Hashem. In the case of *perek* 40 when Dovid was in so much pain, the song he wrote bolstered his *emunah* by recalling past salvations.

We can draw from all this the important lesson that when spiritual inspiration strikes, we must act on it. When those precious moments come of feeling close to Hashem and feeling His presence in our lives we can't just bask in the pleasant feeling – must do something with it. We must use it to create something concrete that will enhance our relationship with Hashem in the long run. Whether through *tefilla*, an act of *chesed* for another, or a greater commitment to a mitzva, Dovid haMelech teaches us here that when the inspiration comes, the key is to actualize it.

3. למנצח

By far the most common first word of a *perek* of *Tehillim* is *lamnatzeach*, an enigmatic phrase explained in various ways by the different *mefarshim*. According to *Radak*, “*mnatzeach*” was the term for the *levi* who conducted the orchestra in the *Beit haMikdash*, so *lamnatzeach* introduces a *perek* that Dovid gave to this *levi*, the conductor.⁵ *Rashi* adds to this that perhaps *mnatzeach*, which comes from the *shoresh* נצח meaning “victory”, applied to all the *Leviim*, referring to their self-mastery in striving for excellence in Divine service. Dovid praises this trait, showing his understanding that *true* victory comes from mastery over the self, not military prowess, and that he is confident that G-d will grant him success in battle if he succeeds in his own battle over his impulses.⁶

⁵ Radak on *Tehillim* 4:1.

⁶ *Artscroll Sefer Tehillim*, Rabbi Avraham Chaim Feuer.

Lamnatzeach can therefore be translated, “to the course which grants victory.” Many *perakim* beginning with *lamnatzeach* indeed relate to this theme. *Perek* 4, which we mentioned earlier, was written as Dovid fled Avshalom. But in this *perek* he focuses on exhorting his enemies to change their ways. He urges them to engage in silent self-reflection, tremble from fear of sin, act with righteousness, and trust in G-d. Each *perek* that begins with *lamnatzeach* impresses upon us this crucial truth: victory lies not in our own efforts, but rather depends on the will of G-d. So the surest way to achieve victory in our lives is to focus our efforts on conquering our selves. In our recitation of *Tehillim* and our other *tefilla*, as we make a variety of requests of Hashem and ask Him for success in all our endeavors, this message serves to remind us of the true key to success.

4. מכתם לדוד

According to *Sotah 10b*, *michtam* (מכתם) is a composite word which praises Dovid haMelech by describing him as קָר (modest/humble) and תָּם (pure/innocent). Alternatively, his wound, מִכְתּוֹ, was perfect, תָּמָה – he was born circumcised. Rashi explains that these interpretations of the word *michtam* only apply when a *perek* begins *l'Dovid michtam*. However, in *perakim* that begin *michtam l'Dovid* the word *michtam* must be understood differently. For example, in *Tehillim* 1:16 which begins מִכְתָּם לְדָוִד שְׁמִרְנֵי אֵל כִּי חָסִיתִי, *michtam* is either an expression of music, or comes from the root כתם, crown.⁷ Rashi writes, “Dovid was accustomed to say, ‘O G-d, guard me for I have taken refuge in

⁷ Rashi on *Tehillim* 16:1. Note that elsewhere (*Tehillim* 45:10) Rashi translates כתם as ‘golden jewelry’.

you' (16:1). And this was to him as a crown, as it is stated (5:13), 'You shall crown him with will.'"⁸

Finally, Rav Hirsch offers another explanation. He writes that "the superscription *michtam* seems to denote a psalm which Dovid has recorded for himself as an everlasting memorial, a tenet to which he would adhere forever... Thus the superscription is *michtam*, a 'monument' or an everlasting 'memorial'." He adds that many of the psalms beginning with *michtam* contain "Dovid's emotions and thoughts at crucial moments of his life." *Artscroll Sefer Tehillim* combines all these differing insights into a clarifying introduction to *perek 16*, the first to contain the term *michtam*: "The lesson that even the mightiest of kings must humble himself in the recognition that all is from Hashem, is the most precious lesson of Dovid's career. Thus, it resembles *ketem paz*, 'the finest of fine gold'. Hence, this psalm deserves an especially wonderful melody to be accompanied by the most splendid of instruments, all called *michtam* because of their exceptional quality."⁹

The *perakim* beginning with *michtam* contain some of Dovid's most vital lessons: the core values which guided his life, which adorned him like a crown of precious gold. These are lessons which deserved to be recorded with glory, passed down for eternity. Dovid recognizes that his true wealth and the source of his highest honor is not his power, but the righteousness he acquires through these essential morals. To us, this serves as a call to reflect: what are the *michtams* of our own lives? What are the tenets we consider most vital to us, that we would wish to inscribe for eternity? Dovid reminds us that our *tefilot* – our deepest desires – should reflect these core ideals. If we can fully

⁸ In *Tehillim* 5:13, Rashi translates this as "You shall encompass him."

⁹ *Tehillim Rav Hirsch* pg. 192.

internalize them and, most importantly, live by them, then they will become our crown of the finest gold.

5. לדוד

There are many *perakim* of *Tehillim* which begin with just *l'Dovid*, “to Dovid”. While there is little commentary on this phrase from the *Rishonim*, Rav Hirsch writes, “Here we do not see Dovid gaining inspiration on the wings of song, nor do we have here the outpourings of Divine rapture coming from a full heart. In this psalm, Dovid simply states the emotions and thoughts that fill his soul.”¹⁰ *Perek 25*, first to begin this way, perfectly encapsulates Rav Hirsch’s explanation in its first *pasuk*, אליך ה' נפשי אשא, “to You, Hashem, I lift up my soul.” Dovid is not spilling forth a song inspired by the presence of the *Shechina*, or trying to attain it through the song, but is simply lifting up his soul, offering himself up to Hashem through his *tefilla*, just as he is in that moment in time. Davening doesn’t always have to occur when we are in a place of deep emotion or great inspiration. Sometimes we feel deeply drawn to speak to Hashem; other times we can barely focus our minds on a few words on the page. Sometimes we feel strong in our relationship with G-d; other times we feel so low and wonder how it can be that He is listening to our words. In any emotional or spiritual state, there is one thing we can always do: to lift our souls up to Hashem, to dedicate our entire self – the good and the bad – to Him, in a simple and pure song.

6. שיר מזמור/מזמור שיר

¹⁰ *Tehillim Rav Hirsch* pg. 178.

Both of these two similar statements are quite commonly used to introduce a *perek*. Composed of two expressions of song, they clearly seem to dictate a musical instruction. On a simple level, many *mefarshim* explain that *shira* refers to verbal song, while *mizmor/zemer* refers to instrumental accompaniment.¹¹ Malbim adds that *zemer* refers to a higher and more intense form of music than *shira*, and/or that while *shira* refers to music in a general sense, including secular, *zemer* refers specifically to religious music praising G-d.¹² In a fascinating alternative explanation, Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner explains that *shira* and *zemer* are both forms of praise, but refer to two contrasting ways in which we relate to G-d: *shira* is praising G-d from a position of attachment and feeling close to Him; whereas *zemer* is praising G-d from a position of awe for His greatness, and feeling small in comparison to His infiniteness.¹³ Essentially, *shira* and *zemer* relate to serving G-d out of *ahavah*, love, and *yirah*, fear/awe, respectively. With a greater appreciation for the nuances between these two terms, we can also now ask why both are needed to introduce a psalm, and why they sometimes appear in opposite orders.

The *Ibn Ezra*¹⁴ maintains that *mizmor shir* and *shir mizmor* have the same meaning, and the differences in order are seemingly irrelevant. Several later commentators, however, disagree and provide explanations. Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim refers back to the explanation of *shir* and *mizmor* as verbal and

¹¹ Ibn Ezra on *Tehillim* 105:2, Sforno *ibid.*, Radak to I Chronicles 16:9, Vilna Gaon cited by *Be'er Avraham* to *Tehillim* 27:6, Rav Shimson Raphael Hirsch on *Tehillim* 33:2.

¹² Malbim, *Biur Milim*, *Tehillim* 104:33.

¹³ Yitzchak Hutner, *Pachad Yitzchak*, *Shabbat, Maamar* 2.

¹⁴ Ibn Ezra on *Tehillim* 48:1.

instrumental song respectively, and adds that the order of the terms depends on which begins first in a particular composition. Rabbi Shimon Pincus writes that *shir* refers to the words which relay the story of a song, whereas *mizmor* refers to a more intense level of emotional expression that is beyond the ability to express through language, but which is reflected in the tune. Some songs begin with words and gradually increase in emotional intensity (*shir mizmor*) whereas others begin with an outpouring of intense emotion, only after which can words be formulated to express the thought (*mizmor shir*).¹⁵

The overall sense which we can take from these various explanations for the differences between *shir* and *mizmor* and their order is that the use of both within a psalm highlights the completeness of the expression. Both lyrics and instrumental accompaniment, both lower and higher degrees of emotional/spiritual intensity, both serving G-d out of *ahavah* and *yirah* are harnessed in our praise of HaShem. A *perek* introduced with the dual terms of song emphasizes the importance of bringing the entirety of one's self to *tefillah* and praise of Hashem.

7. לדוד משכיל

Perakim of *Tehillim* which begin with the words, *l'Dovid maskil*, were meant to be read out by a lecturer to the public, and would then be repeated in a louder voice and interpreted/explained by a disseminator for the masses (*Pesachim 117a*). The root of *maskil* is *sechel* (שכל), intellect or wisdom, implying that these psalms contain essential wisdom which Dovid wants to

¹⁵ Shimshon Dovid Pincus, *Shabbat Malketa*, *perek 9*.

ensure will be accessible and transmitted to all. The *Midrash Shocheh Tov* quotes the *pasuk* למעלה למשכיל - “The path of life is upwards for the wise” (Mishlei 15:24), characterizing a *maskil* as “one who trains his gaze only upwards” (מסתכל למעלה). The *tehillim* which begin with *maskil* contain messages of great import. The first, *perek* 32, addresses *teshuvah* and how suffering is often sent to people for their benefit in order to spur them towards self-improvement and repentance. *Perek* 42 is a beautifully poetic plea to be returned from exile. Many of the other *perakim* beginning with *maskil* relate to Dovid’s unwavering faith in Hashem’s forthcoming salvation, and his request to Hashem to give him strength through his challenges. These writings of Dovid haMelech were meant not only for himself, but for Israel; not only his generation but all ensuing ones, ours included.¹⁶ The *perakim* to which Dovid ascribed particular importance he introduced with the word *maskil*. By focusing on them we can learn the great lessons Dovid wanted inscribed on the hearts of all Israel for all times.

8. הללויה

Pesachim 117a, which lists ten expressions of praise by which *Sefer Tehillim* is written, maintains that *Halleluyah* is the greatest of them all, since it combines both G-d’s name and praise of Him. Interestingly, it does not use the full name of Hashem but rather the partial name יה-י. This name first appears in the Torah after Amalek’s attack, when G-d makes a vow of eternal war against them: “וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָד עַל־כַּס יְהוָה מִלְחָמָה לְהָ' בְּעַמְלֶק מִדֹּר־” , “upon the throne of יה-י, a war against Amalek throughout the generations” (*Shemot* 17:16). *Rashi*

¹⁶ *Pesachim 117a*.

comments on the verse that the incomplete spelling of Hashem's name and the word for throne signify that neither will be complete in the world as long as evil, epitomized by Amalek, still exists.

The term *Halleluyah*, incorporating the incomplete name of HaShem, is a praise of Hashem relevant to our world and current times – when things are still not ideal, when evil is still out there and Hashem's control is far from universally recognized. Yet even this seemingly limited praise is considered the highest of all those within *Tehillim*. Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook explains that if we can come to an understanding of the place of evil within the world – the fact that it has a purpose, that a world that has and overcomes evil is greater than one altogether without it – then we can truly praise G-d with the name ה-י. In a world full of suffering and darkness, when we are able to look not past but *through* it in order to praise G-d, acknowledging that our pain has a purpose and even feel gratitude for it, that is the highest praise we can offer Him.¹⁷ This idea is especially pertinent to our recitation of *Tehillim*, which frequently comes in our moments of greatest pain and desperation. Out of that comes our greatest praise of G-d.

9. שיר המעלות

While the other various introductions to *perakim* of *Tehillim* are scattered throughout the *sefer*, *Shir haMaalot* is the title of a concentrated group of 15 *perakim*, 120-134 (although 121 begins slightly differently, *Shir l'Maalot*). Literally translated as “a song of the ascents,” it is generally explained as describing the spiritual growth of the wise. The *Midrash Shocher*

¹⁷ *Ein Ayah*, vol. 1, pp. 47-8.

Tov (Midrash Tehillim) explains that “ascents” is in plural (*haMaalot*), because “when Jews climb, they ascend many rungs at once.”¹⁸ This group of *perakim* were recited in the *Beit haMikdash*,¹⁹ the very place that inspired Jews to grow and climb to great spiritual heights. The *Ibn Ezra* adds that each song was sung with increasing volume by the *Leviim*.²⁰ The *perakim* connect to the *Beit haMikdash* in many ways. According to *Succah 51b*, the fifteen psalms correspond to the fifteen steps leading to the *Ezrat Yisrael*, on which the *Leviim* would stand and sing these very songs. *Sukkah 53b* relates how Dovid haMelech recited these fifteen psalms in order to bring the waters of the deep back to their regular level after causing them to recede when digging the foundations for the *Beit haMikdash*.²¹ The commentary of *ArtScroll Sefer Tehillim* explains that Dovid composed *Shir haMaalot* to express G-d’s greatness on all levels of perception – to speak to all people, each with his or her own unique mind and soul, each able to aspire to a level of perceiving the Divine glory relevant to where he or she is at. The commentary compares this to the *Beit haMikdash*, which was built on a mountain and had many tiers, each a level of ascending holiness and spirituality.²²

¹⁸ *Midrash Shocheh Tov* on *Tehillim* 120:1.

¹⁹ Rashi on *Tehillim* 120:1, Radak *ibid*. Specifically, these were sung during the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* on *Sukkot*.

²⁰ *Ibn Ezra* on *Tehillim* 120:1.

²¹ Dovid dug pits into which water and wine libations could flow, which were so deep they hit the subterranean waters, which flowed upward and threatened to flood the world. Dovid threw a shard with a Divine name in, causing the waters to recede by sixteen thousand cubits. In order to draw them back to an appropriate level for the fertility of the land, he recited the *Shir haMaalot*, which raised the waters by fifteen thousand cubits. “Ascents” may be a reference to the ascent of the waters.

²² Based on the *Midrash haNeelam* on *Bereishit*.

Other commentators, including Rashi and Radak, maintain that *Shirei haMaalot* refer to the return of Jews to *Eretz Yisrael* from Babylon,²³ connecting them to the *pasuk* in Ezra, הָיָא יְסַד הַמַּעֲלָה מִבָּבֶל, “the journey up from Babylon was started” (7:9). Rav Hirsch writes that the *Shirei haMaalot* praise G-d for His ability to assist an individual or nation in rising from the depths of spiritual lowliness and/or physical and emotional suffering: “These psalms view the very strength involved in such upward striving as a demonstration of G-d’s might, and they proclaim it as such. Therefore, these chapters all bear the title ‘shir’, a song beholding the power of G-d. An ‘ascending ladder’ which leads Israel up from the humiliation of *galut* to the spiritual loftiness of its vocation as symbolized in the Sanctuary of the Law.”²⁴ These psalms, then, are essentially an ode to growth. They serve as a vital reminder to each Jew of their own ability to rise to great heights, and teach us to call out to Hashem to help us. Whether a physical *aliya* up the steps of the *Beit haMikdash*, or from *galut* to the land of Israel, or rising from spiritual/emotional depths, every single Jew, no matter his background or current state, has the power of growth within. These *perakim* enable us to tap into that innate drive to grow, and receive Divine assistance in our journey, which at its core is about coming closer to Hashem.

Each phrase used to open a *perek* of *Tehillim* has its own rich meaning, filled with layers of depth. Each teaches us a valuable lesson about how we can relate to Hashem, modelling our own *tefillot* after those of *Dovid haMelech*²⁵

²³ This is most clearly alluded to in *Perek* 126, which described the joy of the returnees from exile.

²⁴ *Tehillim Rav Hirsch* pg. 371.

²⁵ As well as other composers whose works Dovid included in *Sefer Tehillim – Bava Batra 14b* lists 10 additional authors of *Tehillim*.

and taking to heart the messages he recorded for us to learn for eternity. He teaches us to relate to G-d from any emotional state, to offer up our full hearts and minds in prayer, to relate to G-d through suffering, to take advantage of inspiration, to recognize that G-d is the Source of all the success that we daven for, and, above all, to be ever-focused on growth and to ask for Divine help in constantly reaching upwards. The next time we open *Sefer Tehillim* to daven, we can take the first words to heart and not just gloss over them quickly, for they reveal so much about the coming *peret* and how to elevate our *tefillot* to a new level. May our *tefillot* be filled with increased meaning and inspiration, and may Hashem answer them all for the good.

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Carrying a Jewish ID

Hilla Zohar

Introduction

Ever since Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, public expressions of Jewishness have been a source of contention across the world. In many places, such as college campuses, it has become dangerous to show signs of being a Jew. According to Hillel International, 83 percent of Jewish students on college campuses have experienced blatant anti-Semitism within the last year and a half, with 41 percent confessing to hiding any signs of their religion while in school.

Being proud to be a Jew is a significant part of our identity as a nation. In his *LiKvotzi M'Har"ן*, R' Nachman of Breslov explains that Hashem created the world for His chosen nation.¹ He quotes a *פסוק* in *ישעיה*: “ישָׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בָּהּ אֶתְפָּאֵר”² in which HaShem states that He will be glorified through Yisrael and derives from this that HaShem “צָפָה הַהִתְפַּאֲרוֹת וְהַשְׁעִשׂוּעִים” saw the glory and joy He would receive from the Jews and “בְּשִׁבִיל זֶה בְּרָא אֶת כָּל הָעוֹלָם” because of this decided to create the world. Here, Hashem is explicitly saying that He is glorified specifically through the Jewish people, and that they are the *reason* the world was created in the first place. That glorification is a responsibility that we need to live up to – we need to conduct ourselves in a manner that befits representatives of HaShem, acting honorably. But for our conduct to elevate

¹ ליקוטי מוהר"ן יז:א: כי כל העולם בלד לא נברא אלא בשביל ישראל, כמו שאמר: בראשית – בשביל ישראל שנקרא ראשית: כי ישראל עלה במחשבה תחלה, דהיגו שהשם יתברך צפה היתהתפארות והשעשועים שיקבל מישראל, כמו שכתוב (ישעיהו מ"ט:ג): ישראל אשר בה אתפאר; ובשביל זה ברא את כל העולם.
² ישעיהו מ"ט:ג.

HaShem we must be identifiable as Jews, as His people. To have the strength to make our identity public in today's world we need to be confident in our unique role and its legitimacy.

Separation, Not Assimilation

Obviously, a prerequisite to playing this role in creation is preserving our identity as Jews. Crucial to this is establishing boundaries between us and other nations. The יורה דעה קל"ד³ cites a specific example in prohibiting drinking alcohol with someone who isn't Jewish as a way of avoiding social intimacy that can blur the lines between the Jewish people and others. This idea is separation without isolation. This is evident in Jewish history. We have had business dealings with non-Jews since the days of תנ"ך⁴. When אברהם purchased the מכפלה⁵ from עפרון when יעקב purchased part of

³ שולחן ערוך, יורה דעה קיד:א: כל שכר של עובד כוכבים אחד שכר של תמרים או של תאנים או של שעורים או של תבואה או של דבש אסור משום חתנות ואינו אסור אלא במקום מכירתו אבל אם הביא השכר לביתו ושותהו שם מותר שעיקר הגזרה שמא יסעוד אצלו.

⁴ Tauber, Yanki. "Chabad.Org: The Hebron Purchase." *Chabad.Org*, 2005, www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2713/jewish/The-Hebron-Purchase.htm.

⁵ בראשית לג:יה: לְאֶבְרָהִם לְמִקְנָה לְעֵינֵי בְנֵי־חַת בְּלָל בְּאֵי שְׂעִירֵי־זָדוּן :
What does it mean that דוד purchased the "גרן", "threshing floor" from him? The גרן is mentioned in the Hakafot said on הושענא רבה as part of a list of names for the המוריה, the Temple Mount.

the land of שכם from the descendants of המור,⁶ and דוד המלך's transaction with היבסי for the sale of his threshing floor⁷ are such examples.

In order to understand this separation without isolation, it is important to understand its source. Hashem tells משה upon his return to Egypt, “כֹּה אָמַר”⁸ The Jews are HaShem's firstborn. רש"י explains the use of the word “בכר” to mean “גְּדֻלָּה”, “greatness”, which implies dignity. Furthermore, in פרשת יתרו, Hashem tells them “וְעַתָּה אִם־שָׁמְעוּעַ תִּשְׁמְעוּ בְקוֹלִי וְשִׁמַּרְתֶּם”⁹ meaning that if the Jewish people follow His commandments and listen to what He tells them, they will be His סגולה עם, which רש"י then translates to mean Hashem's “אוצר חביב,” His cherished treasure.

R' Eliezer Melamed (author of פניני הלכה) explains that among the different relationships the Jewish people have with HaShem – father and son, husband and wife, etc. – it is the aspect of חתן וכלה, the bride and groom, that best explains how Hashem chose the Jews.¹⁰ When a couple gets engaged (קדושין), it is as if the groom is ‘designating’ the bride – she is now separated as special. The פניני הלכה relates the engagement to יציאת מצרים: when HaShem took the Jews out of slavery, He designated them as His own – He separated His

⁶ בראשית כג:ט: וַיִּקֶן אֶת־חַלְקַת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר נָטָה־שָׁם אֶהְלֹו מִנֶּד בְּנֵי־הַמּוֹר אֶבְי שְׁכֶם בְּמֵאָה קִשְׁטָה:

What does it mean that דוד purchased the “גרן”, “threshing floor” from him? The גרן is mentioned in the Hakafot said on הושענא רבה as part of a list of names for המוריה, the Temple Mount.

⁷ שמואל ב' כב:כב: וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל־אֲרֹנָה לֹא כִי־קָנֹו אֶקְנֶה מֵאֹתָהּ בְּמַחֲזִיר וְלֹא אֶעֱלֶה לִיהִנֶּה אֶלֶּהי עֲלוֹת חַגֹּם וַיִּקֶן דָּוִד אֶת־הַגֶּרָן וְאֶת־הַבָּקָר בְּכֶסֶף שְׁקָלִים חֲמִשִּׁים:

What does it mean that דוד purchased the “גרן”, “threshing floor” from him? The גרן is mentioned in the Hakafot said on הושענא רבה as part of a list of names for המוריה, the Temple Mount.

⁸ שמות ד':כב.

⁹ שמות י"ט:ה.

¹⁰ פניני הלכה, תפילה טז:ז.

people as special from all other nations. On the other hand in ישעיה Hashem tells His nation that to be servants of Hashem isn't enough; they must reach beyond their own people to become a light to the other nations as well, ensuring knowledge of Hashem spreads to every corner of the world.¹¹

בני ישראל may be the Chosen Nation, but it can't come with a forcefulness or haughtiness. In the words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, "There is no assertion in the Bible that the Israelites are inherently better or more moral than others. Their vocation represents not a privilege but a responsibility. It confers no material advantages, only the religious life itself..."¹² There's a difference between understanding the truth of what makes the Jewish nation truly special as the Chosen Nation, and degrading everyone not like us. The most important thing to remember is the unique status that distinguishes Hashem's people from the rest of the world.

When We Forget

Unfortunately, there are many times throughout Jewish history when integration became total assimilation. The first time this occurred was in מצרים. Before arriving in the foreign country, רש"י sent his son יהודה ahead. רש"י explains that יהודה's mission was to establish ישיבות before the rest of the family arrived there.¹³ This is derived from the word "להורת" in the pasuk, which means "to teach".¹⁴

¹¹ ישעיה מטו: ויאמר נקל מהיותה לי עבד להקים את־שכטי יעקב (ונצירי) [ונצורי]. ישךאל להשיב ונתמידה לאור גוים להיות ישועתי עד־קצה הארץ.

¹² R' Lord Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, pp. 65-67.

¹³ רש"י על בראשית מו:כח: לפניו. קדם שפגנע לשם. ומדרש אגדה להורות לפניו – לתקן לו בית תלמוד שמשם תצא הוראה:
¹⁴ בראשית מו:כח: ואת־הורֶה שלח לפניו אל־יוסף להורות לפניו גשנה ויבאו ארצה גשון:

Additionally, מדרש רבה teaches us that the Hebrews (as they were then known) in Egypt kept three crucial and defining aspects of their nation separate from their מצרי counterparts: their names, language, and style of dress.¹⁵ The מדרש רבה in במדבר explains that specifically in the merit of this separation the Jews were redeemed from Egypt.¹⁶

It is noteworthy that the generation that entered Egypt under the rule of יוסף included both אבות and שבטים. In the first chapter of שמות the תורה mentions the death of not only יוסף, but also of הַדּוֹר הַהוּא – his brothers and everyone else of that generation.¹⁷ Just two פסוקים later it states “וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ”¹⁸ a new king arose over Egypt who appeared to have never heard of יוסף, and that is when the trouble started. This raises a question: what happened after the end of a holy generation that started the slavery of the Hebrews in Egypt?

The ספורנו explains that the phrase “וְכָל הַדּוֹר הַהוּא”, by joining the 70 souls that originally went down to Egypt to יעקב and the שבטים, is teaching us that none of that whole generation came to “קלקול גמור,” meaning to assimilate.¹⁹ The following pasuk tells of the immediate growth of the nation after the passing of this first generation. It ends with the seemingly unnecessary words “וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם”,²⁰ the land of Egypt became filled with Jews. These words are there to teach us that in addition to growing in numbers the Jews became significantly more assimilated into the Egyptian culture – they filled the land,

¹⁵ שיר השירים רבה ד:יב:

¹⁶ במדבר רבה ג:יט: שלש מדות טובות שהיו בקדו של ישראל במצרים ובכותן נגאלו/ See Simmons, Rabbi Shraga. “Aishet.Com: The Process of Assimilation.” *Aish.Com*, 20 Dec. 2021, aish.com/48950346/.

¹⁷ שמות א:ו: וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף וְכָל-אֶחָיו וְכָל הַדּוֹר הַהוּא:

¹⁸ שמות א:ז: “וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יוֹסֵף:

¹⁹ ספורנו על שמות א:ו: וכל הדור ההוא. כל שבעים נפש, שלא בא הדור לקלקול גמור כל ימיהם:

²⁰ שמות א:ז: “וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יוֹסֵף: וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם:

no longer remaining in גושן and learning at the ישיבה that יהודה had established years beforehand.²¹ According to the ספורנו, this is why פרעה didn't know the Hebrew people to be descendants of the יוסף who had saved his country – they didn't act in the same esteemed way.²² The Egyptians didn't associate this generation with the previous one who had commanded respect from the king. They were becoming an invasive species that simply had to be dealt with.

When at the Pesach Seder we recount our slavery and eventual exodus from Egypt it is more than a late night family sing along story hour. It's a crucial opportunity to remember that we were slaves and how it was that we became slaves – through assimilation. The Jewish people throughout time have a commandment to remember the story of יציאת מצרים.²³ If the Jewish people forget that they are special, that Hashem chose them in the year 2448 at the base of הר סיני, and that we have an obligation to retain our distinct identity, He will send a reminder; we will find ourselves in slavery again.

Fighting Back/Survival

יֹסֵף in Egypt is the perfect example of staying true to Hashem despite being immersed in a foreign environment. He could have used a number of excuses to turn from the ways of his father, יעקב – he had been sold by his own brothers, G-d had sent him to be a servant and then a prisoner with no apparent reason for his suffering; and yet, the Torah tells us that יֹסֵף is praiseworthy for

²¹ עיין ילקוט שמעוני שמות א:קסב.

²² ספורנו על שמות א:ח: "ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים וכו'. אף על פי שהיה זכרון ממנו בדברי הימים למלכים בלי החדוש אשר שם לחוק לא עלתה על לב המלך החדש אפשרות היותו מזה העם, ושהיה עם זה ראוי ספק, בפרט בענין לשאת פנים לעמו בעבורו:

דברים טז:ג: לא-תאכל עליו תמץ שבעת ימים תאכל-עליו מצות לקחם עני כִּי בחפזו יצאת מארץ מצרים למען תזכר את-יום צאתך מארץ מצרים כל ימי חייך:

staying true to the ideals he was raised with. In the beginning of שמות it recounts who went down to Egypt with יוסף,²⁴ clarifying that “יוסף היה”²⁵ “במצרים” on the verse questions the seemingly redundant addition of these last three words – wasn’t יוסף and family included in the overall 70 people? According to רש”י the חומש is praising the strength of יוסף, recognizing his ability to remain true to the teachings of his father despite his foreign surrounds and past.²⁶

In the case of modern day religious Jewry, יוסף proves to be the ideal role model. The Jewish nation is scattered across all four corners of the globe, constantly involved with the secular world. יוסף didn’t hide, he didn’t try to blend in with his Egyptian captors. This is made clear when פעהר’s cupbearer offers a solution to help the king interpret his confusing dreams of cows and wheat. The שר המשקים refers to the prisoner who could help as a “נער עברי”²⁷ a young Hebrew man; יוסף was always easily identified as an עברי, never obscuring his true identity. Just a few פסוקים later, when brought before the king to interpret his dreams, יוסף makes it very clear that יוסף’s G-d is the one who gives him the ability to do such a thing.²⁸

It is important to understand several valuable ideas from this story of יוסף: to remain true to one’s beliefs and commitment to Hashem, as well as to not be afraid to show what makes a person Jewish. If one can realize, as יוסף did, that everything comes directly from Hashem, he or she can better have

²⁴ שמות א:ה. וְיֹהֲבֵי קְלֵי־גֹפֶשׁ יִצְאֵי גֵרֵד־מִצְרָיִם שְׂבָעִים גֹּפֶשׁ וַיֹּסֶף הִנֵּה בְּמִצְרַיִם:

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ רש"י שמות א:ה. וְהֵלֵא הוּא וּבְנָיו הָיוּ בְּכָל־לַיְלָה שְׂבָעִים, וּמֵה בָּא לְלַמְדָנוּ? וְכִי לֹא הֵינּוּ יוֹדְעִים שֶׁהוּא הִנֵּה בְּמִצְרַיִם? אֵלֵא לְהוֹדִיעָה צְדָקְתוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף, הוּא יוֹסֵף הַרְוֵעָה אֶת צֶאֱן אֲבִיו, הוּא יוֹסֵף שֶׁהִנֵּה בְּמִצְרַיִם, וְנַעֲשֶׂה מְלֶכֶה, וְעוֹמֵד בְּצַדִּיקוֹ (שמות רבה):

²⁷ בראשית מא:יב. וְשֵׁם אֲתָנּוּ גֵרֵד עֲבָדֵי עֶבֶד לְשֵׁךְ הַטְּבָחִים וְיִסְפְּרֵנוּ לָוִי וַיִּסְפְּרֵנוּ לָוִי אֶת־חַלְמֹתֵינוּ אִישׁ כְּחֻלְמוֹ פָּתַר:

²⁸ בראשית מא:טז. וַיַּעַן יוֹסֵף אֶת־פְּרֻעָה לֵאמֹר בְּלִעְדֵי אֱלֹהִים יַעֲנֶה אֶת־שְׁלוֹם פְּרֻעָה:

confidence in his or her internal *and* outwardly expressed loyalty to HaShem. This allows a person to remain faithfully Jewish even while living in a world with very different values to those of a תורה Jew.

פקד: Stages of Geulah Through One Word

Naomi Akerman

When Yosef was on his deathbed, he told his brothers, “אלקים פקד יפקד”¹, hinting to *Yetzias Mitzrayim*. However, when this same word was used in *Sefer Bamidbar* – “כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקודיהם”² – it has a different meaning. In that instance, the word פקד means “to number”. I would like to show how פקד conveys many meanings in Tanach but all of them relate to aspects of the process of *geulah*.

R’ Tzadok HaKohen teaches that in order to find the essence of something we look at where it is first mentioned in the Torah.³ The term פקד first appears in the Torah when Sarah becomes pregnant. The *pasuk* preceding her conception announces: “ויה' פקד את שרה”, “And Hashem remembered Sarah.”⁴ Ramban tells us to translate the term פקד as “remember”. Ramban supports this by pointing out that remembrance is appropriate to the moment. When both Rachel’s⁵ and Chana’s⁶ pregnancies were announced in a very similar context as with the announcement of Sarah’s pregnancy the *pasukim* use the term “ויוזכר”, Hashem remembered. Ramban adds something that is crucial

¹ Bereshis 50:24.

² Shemos 30:12.

³ Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin, *Yisrael Kedoshim*, ch. 7.

⁴ Bereshis 21:1.

⁵ Bereshis 30:2.

⁶ Shmuel I 1:19.

to our discussion: “אין פקידה אלא לשון זכירה והשגחה על הנפקד”, “the word פקד means remembering and **focused attention on the remembered one.**”⁷

Ramban brings several examples to support this understanding of the root פקד, including the pasuk that opens this essay:

ואלקים פקד יפקד אתכם והעלה אתכם מן הארץ הזאת אל הארץ אשר נשבע לאברהם יצחק ויעקב

“And Hashem will surely remember you and take you out of this land, and bring you up to the Land that He promised to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.”⁸

Coming at the very end of *Sefer Breishis*, this promise is the prelude to the slavery of Egypt and one of the most famous *pesukim* in all of Torah. This is because Yosef’s promise that Hashem will “פקד יפקד” “remember the Jews” was the code by which Moshe’s claim to have met God was corroborated when he told the elders that HaShem would “פקד פקדתי אתכם”, “remember to take you out...”⁹ Translating פקד as “remember” is further supported because when the *geulah* was first set in motion, the *pasuk* says, “וישמע אלקים את נאקתם ויזכר אלקים”, “And Hashem heard their cries, and **He remembered His promise.**”¹⁰ Since the first mention of Hashem planning out the salvation comes through remembering, it makes sense that when the salvation actually begins, it starts with remembering – “פקד פקדתי” “I remember and am paying close attention.” In fact, the Ramban mentions this pasuk of פקד פקדתי אתכם as another example of פקד meaning “remember”.¹¹

⁷ Ramban, Bereshis 21:1.

⁸ Bereshis 50:24.

⁹ Shemos 3:16, see Rashi Shemos 3:18.

¹⁰ Ibid. 2:24.

¹¹ Ramban, Bereshis 21:1.

One of the clearest examples of פקד being tied to *geulah* is found in Sefer Ezra, when Koresh allows the Jews to return to Israel after the 70 year Exile in Babylon:

כה אמר כרש מלך פרס... והוא פקד עלי לבנות לו בית בירושלם אשר ביהודה

“So says Koresh, King of Persia... and He has **appointed** me to build for Him a House in Jerusalem.”¹²

Another example can be found in Sefer Yirmiyahu when Yirmiyahu HaNavi prophesizes:

ראה הפקדתיך היום הזה על הגוים ועל הממלכות לנתוש ולנתוץ ולהאביד ולהרוס לבנות ולנטוע

“See I **appoint** you today over the peoples and the kingdoms to destroy and to overthrow to build and to plant.”¹³

These *pesukim* in Ezra and Yirmiyahu reference *geulah* explicitly using the wording of פקד. However, in these *pesukim* פקד means “appointing”, a more advanced stage of the process of *geulah* than mere remembering. The appointment, whether previously prophesied or currently happening, is there to aid the coming of the *geulah*. King Koresh appointed Ezra to build the Second Temple, and Yirmiyahu’s *nevuah* prophesied the end of the Diaspora, including the appointment of someone to transition the world from war to peace.

There is yet another meaning to פקד that’s crucial for our analysis.

At the beginning of Parshas Ki Sisa in Shemos, Moshe takes a census of Bnei Yisrael:

¹² Ezra 1:2.

¹³ Yirmiyahu 1:10.

כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל לפקודיהם

When you take a census of Bnei Yisrael to **count** them.¹⁴

This is the first of numerous censuses that Moshe took of the Jews. Here פקד is used to mean counting. This census occurred after the *Chet HaEgel*, to count how many remained after the sinners were killed. There is another census in *Bamidbar* after the Mishkan was built to atone for the sin of the *Egel* which also uses the term פקד for counting.¹⁵ Coming in the context of repentance Rashi comments on this counting that it was done out of love.¹⁶ These two pasukim show פקידה at the beginning and end of the process *galus* and *geulah*: after the *Chet HaEgel*, Hashem withdrew His *Shechina*¹⁷ – *galus* – and they were counted (פקד). And when the Jews built the Mishkan to atone, bringing the *Shechina* back to them – *geula* – they were counted (פקד).

Another pasuk uses פקד in a very different way, but still deeply connected to the process of *geula*. In the second *dibra* of the *Aseres HaDibros* HaShem states:

לא תשתחוה להם ולא תעבדם כי אנכי יהוה אלהיך אל קנא פקד עון אבת על בנים על שלשים ועל רבעים לשנאי

Do not bow to them, and do not serve them (foreign gods). For I am Hashem, your God, a zealous God, who פקד the sins of fathers onto children and onto third and fourth generations of those who reject Me.¹⁸

¹⁴ Shemos 30:12.

¹⁵ Bamidbar 1:3.

¹⁶ Rashi on Bamidbar 1:1.

¹⁷ Shemos 33:3.

¹⁸ Shemos 20:5.

פקד is used in this context with the meaning of “paying attention”. HaKetav V’HaKabalah says that the פקד means drawing attention to it in order to take action on it. This means that Hashem highlights the sins of fathers onto their children so they can be fixed.¹⁹ Here פקד brings suffering in this world to atone for sin.

This is specifically relevant to our previous discussion mention of *Chet HaEgel*. The pasuk tells us:

ועתה לך נחה את העם אל אשר דברתי לך הנה מלאכי ילך לפניך וביום פקדי ופקדתי עליהם חטאתם:

Now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my Angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when **I take stock I will visit the consequences** of their sin upon them.²⁰

Rashi says on this verse that every pain the Jews experience contains some of the pain necessary to atone for *Chet HaEgel*.²¹ So, the purpose of the pain inflicted is to atone for a sin in this case. When Hashem draws attention to a sin that needs atonement to bring punishment it may not be in the pleasant, but it is the prerequisite for the eventual *geula*. This is what *galus* is; a state that is to fix ongoing problems or wrongdoings that we or our ancestors committed. But the purpose is so that the *geulah* can come.

We see the different uses of the term פקד correspond to different stages in the process of *geulah*. In the first stage, Hashem remembers. This means

¹⁹ See HaKetav V’HaKabalah on ibid.

²⁰ Shemos 32:34.

²¹ See Rashi on ibid 32:34.

Hashem initiates the salvation process. With Sarah, it meant allowing her to conceive. With the Jews, it meant focusing attention onto them and their need for salvation. As the Ramban stated, remembrance means *attention allotted* to the one remembered. The *pasuk* following Hashem's remembrance in Egypt is, "וידע אלקים", "Hashem knew."²² Rashi elaborates that "knowing" in this instance, means attention focused on the Jews.²³

In the second stage, Hashem appoints a leader. In the case of Egypt, Hashem sent Moshe, and with the culmination of *Galus Bavel*, it was Ezra. And finally, counting: Hashem shows His love by giving us an individual count in order to lay the foundation for an established return of the *Shechina*.

We daven for the *geulah* each day. But what does *geulah* mean? It is a complex process with numerous stages. This one word, פקד, holds the secret to all that we yearn for. In the prayer of *Ya'aleh V'Yavo*, פקד can be found numerous times, interspersed with זכירה, a word as we said earlier it closely resembles. In this *tefillah*, we ask Hashem to remember us and the *geulah*. The *tefillah* clearly speaks of the Salvation, "זכרון משיח... וזכרון ירושלים... וזכרון כל", "And remember *Mashiach*... and remember Jerusalem... and remember all of Your Nation, *Beis Yisrael*."²⁴ When we *daven* for *geulah*, we ask to be remembered for good, as the *tefillah* continues, we ask to have *Mashiach* come, and we ask for the *Beis HaMikdash* to be rebuilt. This one word, פקד covers every aspect.

²² Shemos 2:25.

²³ See Rashi on *ibid*.

²⁴ *Yaaleh v'Yavo* is found in *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Birchas HaMazon*. See *Tehillim* 80:15 where פקד is used in reference to *Yisrael* in the context of the final *geula*. See *Isaiah* 24:21-22 where פקד is used in the context of punishing the evildoers in the context of the final *geula*.

The word פקד is used throughout Tanach in a variety of forms, hinting to *geulah* in its many stages. Its first use hints at the first step of *geulah*; Hashem remembers. Hashem, then, appoints a leader, and finally, Mashiach. Hashem counts us, which lays the groundwork for the established return of the Shechinah. But we must remember how the *geulah* first started in Egypt: Hashem heard our cries. *Davening* is the key to sparking the *geulah*. *Imyertza Hashem*, may we merit in our days the *Geulah Shilaima* with all its stages.

