

WHAT HAVE WE DONE FOR GOD LATELY?

By Ozer Bergman

From the Haftarah for Parashat Masei:

Thus says God: "What fault did your ancestors find in Me that they abandoned Me...? They never asked themselves, 'Where is God Who brought us up from the land of Egypt and took us through the wilderness, a land of deserts and pits, of drought and darkness, a land untraveled and uninhabited by any human being?' I brought you to this fertile land, to eat its fruit and bounty... I will continue to argue with you," says God, "and I will argue with your children's children... Has any nation changed its gods, even though they are non-gods? But My people have exchanged their glory for that which cannot help... O Judah, you have as many gods as you do cities..." (Jeremiah 2:5-28).

God has what to say to us. And He's right. We're not always so grateful; we think, "What's He done for me lately?" We get bored by Judaism and explore here and there—maybe there's something better, or at least something that will let us be free to do more of what we want to do. It is hard to shake "Golden Calf Disease" and "How Do the Goyim Worship Syndrome."

But you have to understand. This is not about anger. This is about concern. The beginning of Chapter 2 of Jeremiah, right before the *Haftarah*, has God speaking to us in a different tone of voice, as it were. "Go tell Jerusalem that God says, 'I count it in your favor the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land unsown. Israel is holy to God, the first fruit of His harvest...'" (Jeremiah 2:2-3). It's because we have so many redeeming features that God hasn't lost hope. The underlying message of the prophet's words is still true: Jew! Take an honest look at yourself and get your act together!

Reb Noson tells us: "[Rebbe Nachman] hinted to me how much I need to cry out to God, using the elegies [of *Tikkun Chatzot*, the Midnight Lament] as a model of prayers that awaken the heart. He chanted them with the melody of *Chatzot* in a deep, beautiful voice.

"He also greatly praised the ballad *My Beloved Came Down to His Garden*, a deeply moving litany of complaints the Jewish people make to God.

"I heard in the Rebbe's name: A Jew's main devotion in the winter is to awaken at midnight. In the summer, when the nights are very short (and so awakening at midnight is not practiced [in the Diaspora]), one should be careful to wake up early, at the crack of dawn."

On the other hand, we Jews aren't shy either. We know how to needle and wheedle when necessary. (You should see our CV!) The Creator is quite impressive and formidable—but He is also a very close relative of ours! The ode *My Beloved* is based on the husband/wife relationship we have with God. We tell of our separation from Him, of our being disparaged, second-class citizens; that our souls and His Torah are disrespected and abused; that there are no tzaddikim to shepherd His sheep.

How does God respond to all this? He wants to get back with us even more than we want to! *Nu*, so what's taking so long? What's missing? Our prayers. It's not enough to wish for redemption. We have to want it and say so, out loud. Even if we cannot awake at the deepest part of the night, even if we fail to become alert as day draws nearer and nearer, let us at least stop at some point, every day, to recognize and feel that the world is in shambles, and pray something about it.

May we be privileged to soon see the coming of Mashiach. Amen.

agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

— Based on *Sichot HaRan* (Rabbi Nachman's *Wisdom*) #268, 301

SIDEPATH

Do not put things off from day to day, saying: "Tomorrow I will begin; tomorrow I will pray with mindfulness and enthusiasm, as is proper..." For all that a person has in the world is this one day and this one hour in which he exists (*Likutey Moharan* I, 272).

Every intelligent person understands that time does not exist. The past is gone, the future is yet to come, and the present is like the blink of an eye. Thus, the life of a man consists only of this instant in which he exists. Consider this, and in whatever circumstance you may find yourself—even in the depths of Hell—you will be able to cleave to God in each moment. (*Likutey Halakhot*, *Matanah* 5:47).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

33:1 These are the travels

When a Person Rectifies His Faith, He Draws God's Compassion

Our Sages teach that because the Jews made the golden calf and declared: "*EiLeH Elokekha* — *These are your gods*," they had to experience "*EiLeH masei* — *These are the travels*" (Midrash).

Travel is a form of rectification for idolatry and blemished faith (LM I, 40; LH VIII, p. 140b).

Whenever idolatry is prevalent — idolatry being a lack of faith — there is Divine anger (*Sifrei, Re'eh*). But when a person rectifies his blemished faith and removes idolatry, he removes Divine anger and instead draws down God's compassion (LM II, 62).

Faith in the Tzaddik Raises Us To New Heights

Our Sages teach that because the Jews made the golden calf and declared: "*EiLeH Elokekha* (*These are your gods*)," they had to experience "*EiLeH masei* (*These are the travels*)" (Midrash).

These verses show us how great is faith in the tzaddik, for Moses was able to bring the

Jews to repent after making the golden calf, and elevated them to the point that their seemingly mundane travels became part of the Torah! That is, they traveled to rectify their sins, but through their repentance, their travels became sanctified and are now an integral part of the Torah (LH VIII, p. 141a).

Therefore it is written, "Moses wrote down their exiles and their travels according to God's command. These are their travels in their exiles" (Numbers 33:2). First the verse mentions exile followed by travel, then travel followed by exile. The Jews' sins caused exile and the necessity to travel. But their repentance elevated their travels and rectified the exile (LH VIII, p. 141b).

Fear of God Vanquishes All Other Fears

The Jews' travels in the desert enabled them to tread upon the *kelipot*, as represented by the "snakes, serpents and scorpions" (Deuteronomy 8:15). These *kelipot* appear to each person in the form of the fears he experiences. If one elevates his fears to the fear of God alone, he can tread upon and vanquish all other fears (LH VII, p. 200).

Turning a Spiritual Desert into an Oasis of Torah

From their travels, they made Torah! Wherever the Jews went in the desert, they subdued the forces of evil and transformed each place from a spiritual wasteland into an oasis of Torah (LH II, p. 166).

Our Travels Today Reflect the Journeys in the Desert

The sojourning of the Jews in the desert, their travels and travails, are reflected today in the travels we undertake when we go to our houses of prayer and when we travel to the tzaddikim (LH VII, p. 150).

The Deeper Meaning of Our Daily Travels

HaLaKhaH (Jewish law) is related to *HaLiKhaH* (walking). The travels of the Jewish nation in the desert were meant to seek out, clarify, and elevate the laws and ideas which until then were hidden and concealed.

The same applies to each person today. One should view his travels as ways to clarify the paths to draw close to God, and to elevate paths that are not yet well-trodden with spirituality into service of God (LH V, p. 274a-548).

35:4 One thousand cubits all around

The Protective Power of Azamra! and AyeH?

Two thousand cubits of land surrounded each Levite city. The inner 1,000 cubits were to be left empty for the inhabitants' use. The outer 1,000 cubits were designated for fields and vineyards (Rashi).

In Hebrew, *ELePh* (one thousand) is spelled the same as *ALePh* (the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet). To truly take refuge from the forces of evil, one needs the two lessons of Rebbe Nachman that begin with the letter *aleph*.

The first is *Azamra!* (I will sing!), which speaks of finding the good points within oneself (LM I, 282). For the "land" should be planted, and you can find good things to "grow and develop" within yourself.

But when you think that things are very bad and you have so many unanswered questions, you must recall the lesson of *AyeH?* (Where?) (LM II, 12). Even though the "land" seems empty, devoid of Godliness, it is not. It serves a purpose, and God exists even there (LH III, p. 75a).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

2 — "Speak to the priests" (Leviticus 21:1) (continued)

4. It is impossible for a person to attain perfect prayer except by guarding his sexual purity to perfection. Therefore, each person must bind his prayers to the true tzaddikim of the generation, since they know how to send each and every prayer up to the proper place. Furthermore, these tzaddikim build the construct of the Divine Presence with these prayers, and thereby hasten the coming of the Mashiach.

5. Torah study and prayer strengthen and illuminate each other, so it is necessary to engage in both of them. For all the Torah that a person learns with the intention of guarding and carrying it out, all the letters [of the Torah] are "sparks of souls"; they become clothed in his prayer and are rejuvenated there like a fetus in the womb. As a result of their rejuvenation, the light of the person's prayer is also that much fuller. The principal way to perfect prayer, however, is by binding

it and bringing it to the tzaddik of the generation.

6. If a person engages in much prayer and conversation with God for many years, and nonetheless sees for himself that he is still very far from God — and it seems to him that God, so to speak, is hiding His Face from him, God forbid — he should not make the mistake, God forbid, [of thinking] that God does not hear his prayers and conversations with Him at all. Rather, he should believe with perfect faith that God hears, listens and pays attention to every single word of every prayer, request and conversation. Not a single word is lost, God forbid. To the contrary, each and every word is slowly making an impression on high and is arousing God's compassion every time. It is just that the building of holiness which he needs to enter is not yet finished. After many days and many years, if he will not be a fool and will not become discouraged in any way; if he summons his strength, fortifies himself, and strives in prayer more and more; then, through his many prayers, God's compassion will be awakened until He turns to him and shines His Face upon him, and fulfills his desire and his will through the power of the true tzaddikim, and brings him close to Him with great compassion and mercy.



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