



Hashem Ori V'Yish'I

Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

Editor-in-Chief:
Jack Levkowitz '17

Senior Editor:
Noam Gershov '17
Noah Hyman '18
Gidon Amsellem '18

Layout Editor:
Eitan Tennenbaum '17

Managing Editors:
Eitan Lavian '17
Eytan Merkin '18

Distributors:
David Silverman '19
Benyamin Tarko '18
Eitan Lavian '17
Eli Isaacs '18

Staff Advisor:
Rabbi Arye Sufrin

Beginning on the first day of Elul, Jews worldwide recite - twice daily - *Tehillah* 27, which begins with the words "Hashem Ori V'Yish'I" - God is my light and salvation. This recitation is one of the more inscrutable customs of the season - it appears nowhere in the literature of the *Rishonim* and seems to be "only" a few hundred years old; in addition, it is the only custom which spans both extremes of the season - from the penitent mood of Elul to the exhilarating festivity of Sukkot. I would like to take a brief look at Psalm 27 and see if we can discover the propriety of its recitation during this time of year.

The psalm is made up of 14 verses, which reflect diametric poles of feeling. In the first half of the *Mizmor* (vv. 1-6), the psalmist is confident, sure of his security which God consistently guarantees, able to watch from a distance as his enemies trip over each other. The one thing he lacks is the opportunity to "sit in the house of Hashem..."

An abrupt change of mood is apparent in verse 7, as he begs Hashem to "listen to My voice as I call, have compassion on me and answer me" - he is afraid of God turning away from him in anger and pleads his loneliness, "For my father and mother have abandoned me" as a reason for Hashem to "take me in." His enemies are about to devour him and he petitions God to save him "from their throats."

The final verse - "*Kaveh El Hashem*" (roughly, "wait on the Lord") seems to fit neither half of the psalm - it is not descriptive of either confident victory or the desperation of isolation and fear of defeat - it is an exhortation to anticipate God's salvation.

What are we to make of this pastiche of emotions and the final doubled charge, "*Kaveh el Hashem...* *Kaveh el Hashem*"? And why is this psalm - of all 150 - the one recited twice daily throughout the season of repentance and joy?

I would like to suggest that the *Mizmor* is addressing a spiritual danger common to both extremes of experience - when we are "riding high," experiencing a wave of success and feel like we have inherited Midas' magic touch, it is easy to forget how each blessing in our life is a gift of Hashem and how none of it is really "ours." On the other hand, when everything seems to be going against us, when friends turn away and the market drops, when everyday life feels like an obstacle, it is all too easy to "give up" and feel as if there is no point in reaching out to God in prayer - sometimes there is a feeling that "no one is listening." Although standing at opposite sides of the emotional and experiential spectrum, these two circumstances share one thing - an abandonment of the intimate dependence on God. Whether because things are going so well we feel that "we don't need any help" or because things are so abysmal that "nothing can help" - we abandon God. Even if we continue to pray thrice daily, we may be doing so as routine, but without the sense of immanence and imminence that defines our dependence on - and hope in - God's *Hashgachah*.

Although we experience this season - the Elul-Festival continuum - yearly, one of the obstacles we face is to feel the spiritual power, possibilities and challenges anew. To enter the month of Elul, to hear the first haunting *Kaddish* of *Selichot*, to finally hear the *Bracha* over the *Shofar* - at some point, we should be struck by a sense of longing, of desperation, of feeling the terrifying distance between who we are and who we could be - between us and the Almighty. At that point, someone truly "going through Elul" (and having "Elul go through him") might feel a sense of desolation, which is expressed in so much of the *Selichot* and *Piyyutim* of the season. "We knock on Your door like poor, destitute people." At that point, the call of "*Kaveh El Hashem*" rings out and gives us the courage and spark to reach out to God. Conversely, the festive air of Sukkot, surrounded by the bounty of a long year's work, might lead a true celebrant to forget the source of his blessings - and it is to that overconfident soul that the second "*Kaveh El Hashem*" is addressed.

As we make our way from the trepidation of Elul to the exuberance of Sukkot, we are always reminded, by this powerful psalm, that we must always "wait for Hashem," anticipate His blessings, and never forget that the real source of all good in our lives comes from Hashem.

The Flame of Our Ancestors
"NEED QUOTE"
-Proverbs 22:6

Tefillah Gems

Eytan Merkin '18

In *Berachot* 8a, Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai comments on the most favorable situation for prayer: "When is it a 'favorable time'? When the congregation is praying together." We usually view prayer as a private matter between Hashem and us. Why does Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai emphasize the power of communal prayer?

Rav Kook explains that prayer is, first and foremost, a tool for refining moral character. A person who lives alone does not encounter many moral and ethical challenges. These issues arise from living with other people, when it is necessary to interact and share resources. Since prayer is meant to improve our moral sensitivity, it makes sense that prayer is more necessary for those who require such sensitivity in social interactions with people around them. Hermits and recluses have a smaller need for prayer, as their moral character requires less refinement.

Therefore, prayer possesses an inherent communal nature. When a congregation prays together, each member prays for the good of the community. Our Sages placed an emphasis on communal prayer because it fulfills one of the most basic functions of prayer—improved social living and the refinement of morals and ethics.

Torah Accessibility

Lior Khalili '17

In the beginning of *Parshat Netzavim*, Moshe gathers the entire nation of Israel to speak with them for the last time. He urges them to uphold Hashem's covenant, and tells them that those who do not observe the Torah's commandments will be cursed. Once the curses for violating the Torah's commandments were revealed to *Bnei Yisrael*, every Jew became frightened. Moshe then states, "You have nothing to worry about. You have done many sins in the past and you got God angry, but look: you are still standing; God didn't destroy you." Now, why would Moshe make such a statement that would stunt their fear?

When the Jews heard the 98 curses for violating the Torah, they became intensely terrified. Hashem, however, did not intend to frighten the Jewish nation. He wanted them to have pleasure in performing his commandments, so he gave us the Torah as a guide system. Hashem mentioned the curses so that the Jewish nation would refrain from sinning and simply become aware that bad actions have consequences. In an attempt to restore the frightened Jewish people back to their normal state, Moshe made that statement.

Parshat Netzavim states that one does not have to go to heaven or travel far to learn Torah. The Torah is close to our hearts and our lips to live and observe. The *Parsha* later makes a contrary statement, saying that sometimes the Jewish people will be so spread out that even if outcasts are at the ends of the world, Hashem will still gather the nation. These two statements show an interesting contrast. Even though the Jewish people may be remote from each other, the Torah is always within their reach. Now the question is what does the Torah mean when it states that it is not in the heavens? We have the Torah here on earth, so what point does the Torah try to make by saying that it is not in the heavens?

An old Jewish story about Reb Chaikel can help clarify the Torah's message in this week's *Parsha*. Reb Chaikel was a poor tailor from Lodz, and he repeatedly kept having the same dream. Every night, his father appeared to him and told him about a secret treasure in a royal palace in Vienna. There was an old oak tree fifty yards away from the palace, and under that tree, there was a treasure. Reb Chaikel disregarded the dreams at first, but he repeatedly saw the same dream every night. He eventually decided to go to Vienna and find the treasure. He settled near the palace and waited for the proper time to start digging under the oak tree. At midnight, Reb Chaikel prepared for digging, but the palace guard stopped him and questioned his actions. Reb Chaikel told the guard about his dream and the treasure that lay under the oak tree. The guard laughed at Reb Chaikel and told him about his own dream. He had dreamt of going to the city of Lodz in Poland and digging in the basement of a Jewish tailor named Chaikel to find treasure. The guard then dismissed Reb Chaikel. When Reb Chaikel returned to Lodz and started digging in his basement, he found a great fortune and became wealthy.

The story of Reb Chaikel shows us that we sometimes look at the Torah's values and assume that they are up in heaven, thus they are unreachable. We think that carrying out all the commandments in the Torah is beyond our abilities. The Torah states twice that what it teaches is within our abilities. Even if a Jewish soul goes wayward and strays from Torah, it can always come back to Judaism and follow Torah. The Torah is more accessible to us than we may think.

HALACHIC ILLUMINATIONS

FROM RABBI NACHUM SAUER

There is a prohibition of *Hachana* on Shabbat-preparing for the weekday on Shabbat. This is an issue concerning studying for a test on Shabbat. The *Poskim* explain that studying Torah does not involve a problem of *Hachana*, because when learning Torah, one is fulfilling a mitzvah at that moment. However, studying for secular exams is questionable whether that would be permissible based on the prohibition of *Hachana*. One should consult with a *Halachic* authority concerning this issue. Many *Halachot* also deal with handling books, paper, and notebooks on Shabbat.

If one is reading a book on Shabbat, it is forbidden to tear pages that have never been separated by the publisher. That would involve the *Melacha* of *Korea*, tearing, and *Makeh B'Patish*, finishing off an object. If two pages are stuck together by glue or another material, such as water, then the *Halacha* is dependent on whether letters are present in the place where the pages are stuck. If letters are present then one may not pull them apart in order not to erase those letters. If, however, the pages are stuck in a place that has no letters, then one may pull them apart. If a page is already torn, it is permissible to put the two pages next to each other in order to read the page. However, one may not tape the pages together with scotch tape because that would be a *Toldah* of *Tofer*, sewing.

The *Halacha* concerning notebooks is also extremely interesting. If a notebook is empty then it is *Muktzeh*- not allowed to be moved on Shabbat. If it is partially filled then one is permitted to use the notebook to read the contents.

One is allowed to open and close the rings of a binder and remove or add pages. However, many *Poskim* hold that blank pages of paper are *Muktzeh* because they are designated for the purpose of writing. If there are loose pages mixed together, one may not sort them on Shabbat because of *Borer*; the *Melacha* of separating.

Compiled By Ari Willner '19

Hashem's Bracha For The New Year

Ariel Mansano '20

Who Blesses the New Month? In explaining the custom not to recite the blessing for the new month on the Shabbat before *Tishrei*, the Alter Rebbe relates, "When I was in Mezeritch, I heard the following teaching from my Rabbi, the Maggid, in the name of his Rabbi, the Baal Shem Tov: 'The seventh month is the first of the months of the upcoming year. [In contrast to the other months,] Hashem, blessed be He, Himself blesses this month on... the last Shabbat of the month of Elul. And with the strength, the Jews bless the next 11 months.'"

It is written: "*Atem Netzavim Ha'Yom* - You are standing today" (*Devarim* 29:9). "Today" refers to the day of Rosh HaShanah. "You are standing," triumphant, in the time judgment. On the Shabbat before Rosh HaShanah, we read the portion "*Atem Netzavim*." This reading is the blessing of Hashem on the Shabbat on which the seventh month is blessed. It is a month which is satisfied and which satisfies all of Israel with goodness for the entire year.

More particularly, the word "*Netzavim*," the core of the blessings given by Hashem, does not simply mean "standing." It implies standing with power and strength, as reflected in the phrase, "*Nitzav Melech* - the deputy serving as king." Hashem's blessing is that our prestige will reflect the strength and confidence possessed by a king's deputy.

This blessing enables us to proceed through each new year with unflinching power; no challenges will budge us from our commitment to the Torah and its *Mitzvot*. Oppositely, we will proceed from strength to strength in our endeavor to spread Godly light throughout the world.

What is the source of this strength? Something that lasts forever is a Divine quality. As it says in *Navi*, "I, Hashem, have not changed" (*Malachi* 3:6), and our Rabbis explain that one of the basic principles of our faith is that the Creator is unchanging; nothing in our world can effect a transition on His part. Nevertheless, Hashem has also granted the potential for His unchanging firmness to be reflected in the behavior of regular beings, for the soul, which is granted to every person, is an actual part of God. This inner Godly core provides every individual with more than enough resources of strength to continue his Divine service.

Our Torah reading continues, stating that the Jews are "standing today before God" for a purpose, which is "To be brought into a covenant with God" (*Devarim* 29:11). What is the intent of a covenant? When two people feel a powerful attraction to each other, but realize that with the passage of time, that attraction could become weaker, they establish a covenant. The covenant maintains their connection even at times when, on a conscious level, there might be reasons for distance and separation.

Each year, on Rosh HaShanah, the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people is made again. For on Rosh HaShanah, the essential Godly core, which every person possesses, rises to the front of his consciousness. Therefore, the fundamental bond between Hashem and mankind surfaces, and on this basis a covenant is renewed for the entire year to come, including the inevitable occasions when these feelings of wholeness will not be experienced as powerfully.

