

PRICE FOR CLOSENESS TO HASHEM

Parshas Beshalach

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Yeshayahu speaks to one who feels removed from Hashem and the one who feels close: "Shalom Shalom... peace peace, for the far and near, says Hashem, and I shall heal him" (Isaiah 57:19, Haftora for Yom Kippur). The profounder interpretation of Isaiah's message is that he speaks to the individual who feels removed from Hashem, but is desperate to get near. This might be the reason this chapter is chosen for the Yom Kippur Haftora. So heart-broken is this individual because of his distance from Hashem, that he feels ill and needs healing. For this alone he deserves divine healing. "And I will heal him, says Hashem".

The highest level of closeness to Hashem was experienced by the Israelites following the Exodus as they miraculously crossed the Yam Suf, and burst out in song, "Oz Yashir... Zeh Kailee... this is my G-d, and I shall glorify Him..." (Shemos 15:2). The word "Zeh" expresses a nearness as if pointing a finger at someone in sight (see Rashi Shemos 30:13). That ecstatic encounter was experienced by all Israel, approximating the prophetic. "A simple maid-servant SAW divinity at the Yam Suf on a higher level than that of Yechezkel and other prophets" (Mechilta Beshalach 3:2).

The SHIRA concludes "Hashem shall reign for all eternity" (15:18) (according to most commentators; Even Ezra includes the following passage as well into the SHIRA). As is found in other portions of the Torah where the conclusion is linked to the beginning, here, too, there is a profound connection. It is the instruction to all future generations, unto eternity, that they have the capacity to become close to Hashem on the level "ZEH", if they meet certain conditions. Indeed Isaiah (25:9), proclaims that day of closeness to Hashem in the future, when we shall say "Behold this is our G-d, ZEH HASHEM...."

What are the conditions to reach that level? It is disclosed in the very passage: ZEH ... This is my G-d, VEANVAIHU and I shall glorify Him. Aba Shaul in the Mechilta expounds the word VEANVAIHU to mean ANI VEHU, I and He. We must emulate Hashem; just as He is merciful, so must we be merciful; just as He is compassionate so must we be compassionate." This requires us to become extra sensitive to the distress of our brethren, to do our utmost to alleviate his pain, to help lift the downtrodden.

This condition is rather surprising, elevating the refined human touch to the spiritual heights of closeness to Hashem. However, this is the profundity of SHIRA, harmonious song. It means enabling the voices of those just helped to sing with us in harmony.

There is another condition to arrive at the "zeh" level with Hashem. Unkeles translates V'ANVAIHU "I shall build Him a sanctuary. NAVA means a building. This interpretation does not contradict the above; rather it expands on it. While compassion may be showered at another individual and thereby satisfy the requirement of ANI V'HU, Unkeles requires to serve the need of the whole Jewish community. In order for a Jewish community to aspire to grow spiritually, Torah intellectually, it must have a Beth Medrosh where to study and daven together. Indeed, those who lend a shoulder in financial upkeep of the Beth Medrosh, for children and adults, with, of course, the personal participation in its Torah and Avodah, reach up to the level of closeness to Hashem on the level of ZEH.

The SHIRA includes yet another stipulation in the process of reaching up to the level of ZEH. In that very passage we sing He is "the G-d of my father and I will exalt Him". Rashi quotes the Mechilta that herein the Jew acknowledges that the sanctity and self elation he may gain is an inheritance from the ancestors. The fact that he paces the path established by the ancestors gives him the strength and stamina to

reach up to that higher destiny. It also serves as a basic element in the harmonization of the SHIRA. It is the symphonic orchestra of generations beginning with the ancestors and persevere into eternity.

In addition to reading the SHIRA daily at the conclusion of Psukai d'zimra (before Yishtabach), the SHIRA is quoted again (in synopsis) before Shemona Esra: "with great joy they recited MI CHOMOCHO".

The Mechilta teaches that at crossing the Yam Suf the SHIRA began MI CHOMOCHO, and only as a result of the fiery, ecstatic, SHIRA beginning, they were uplifted to reach the level of "ZEH KAILY, ELOKAI OVI". [For a more elaborate treatment of this subject see this writer's essay in HADOROM, #56 Elul 5747].

Thus the mention of MI CHOMOCHO before the silent prayer is a reference of the beginning of SHIRA and indicative of the complete SHIRA including the ZEH KAILY and ELOKAI OVI. Before the evening AMIDA, the passage ZEH KAILY is more specifically mentioned, which is indicative of the sentence completion, "the G-d of my father."

The reason, one conjectures, is that our prayers of Shachris, Mincha and Maariv were established by Abraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov (Talmud Brochos 26b). Thus it is most appropriate to precede mention the SHIRA, the Biblical source, showing the ancestors as the foundation of Israel's sanctity. The first Bracha of the silent prayer, indeed, speaks of the kindness of the Patriarchs and the Redeemer to their children's children.

