

MEANINGFUL PRAYER

Parshas Shoftim

By Rabbi Menachem Rokeach

Calling someone by his name is a sign of friendship and warm familiarity. When Hashem spoke to Moshe, says Rashi (Vayikro 1:1) He preceded by calling him by name, lovingly, "Moshe Moshe". Great people often have several names. Yethro, father-in-law of Moshe, had seven names. Moshe had ten names. On Simchas Torah, at the conclusion of Parshas Brocho, and the restart of Beraishis, it is customary to enumerate all ten names. The selection of the name Moshe, in the Torah, above all other names, is a compliment to the daughter of Pharaoh, who so named him when she saved him out of the river.

This concept, of a loving feeling when calling by name, is likewise true when calling upon Hashem in prayer. Surely must Hashem's name be uttered in striking reverential awe; but likewise does the calling betoken a sense of profound love.

Moshe teaches us this blend of awe and love when calling upon Hashem, as he was about to say farewell to the Israelites. He exclaims: "I will call upon the name of Hashem...". He precedes this calling by heralding a thunderous impact world-wide. "Haazinu... give ear, O Heavens... and may the earth hear..." (Devorim 32:1).

Moshe has the entire universe tremble with awe and overwhelming deference. But then accompanies same with soothing loving utterances. "... May it penetrate like life-giving rain and flow like the dew..." When we approach Hashem in the Mincha Shemona Esra, we precede quoting the above, obviously taking Moshe's guidance seriously.

Horav Nesanel Quinn z.t.l. escorted Reb Elchonon Wasserman z.t.l. H.y.d. Baranovitcher Rosh Yeshiva, to the mountains for a Shabbos, before the war. On Motzei Shabbos, he wished to daven later than the others. The room was still dark. He began Boruch, Ato. Then silent for a few minutes. Then a thunderous "Hashem"... Rav Quinn z.t.l. added: "after that my davening was not the same as hitherto."

In our Sidrah the Torah teaches how to prepare in case of a war against an enemy. The Torah cautions certain individuals to be discharged and returned home (Devorim 20:3-8). Among them is a man who is fearful and fainthearted. The Mishna (Sotah 44a) quotes Reb Josi Haglili that this refers to fearfulness because of sin.

The Talmud adds that, according to this sage, one who conversed between donning the Tefilin of the hand and the Tefilin of the head is to be discharged.

The above seems a most insignificant violation, yet it touches upon a fundamental principle of Judaism. The portion of Shema Yisroel has a close bearing on the effectiveness of the Israelite army. "And he (the priest) shall say unto them 'Shema Yisroel, Hear O Israel, you draw near this day unto battle against your enemies...'" (Devorim 20:3). Comments Rashi, "Even if you have nothing more than the merit of the recital of the Shema Yisroel you are worthy of the Al-mighty's help."

According to some opinions, this minimum observance includes the sentence "V'Ohavto..." you shall love Hashem..., which is the minimum recital daily obligation (see Brochos 13a,b). Commentators add that what is meant is the recital of Shema with Tefilin, a basic part of the Shema. For Tefilin is relevant to victory in battle.

"And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the L-rd is called upon thee, and they shall be afraid of thee" (Devorim 28:10); "This refers to the Tefilin on the head" (Menochos 35b).

It is axiomatic that every Mitzva performed can be meaningful only when done with cogitation and contemplation. A Mitzva performed absentmindedly is worthless. Without meditation and deliberation it is mechanical and lifeless. The same applies to recitals and prayers. "Prayer without thought concentration is like a body without a Neshomo" (Abarbanel Avoth 2:13). This basic concept is best expressed in the Mitzva of Tefilin. The part donned on the hand symbolizes the deed, whereas the part donned on the head symbolizes thoughtfulness. The Tefilin on the hand must be immediately followed by the Tefilin on the head, without the slightest interruption, in order to reaffirm this basic idea. Conversing between the hand part and the head part is thus contrary to a crucial maxim of Torah. It is sinful enough to cause a weakening of strength in the war effort. He should be returned home.

The SHIRA concludes with the a passage from Tehilim (35:10) "All my limbs (moved by the mind) will say, Hashem who is like you?" Then "He delivers the poor from one mightier than he" (ibid).

Remarkably, the conclusion of Shemona Esra is referential to the beginning and the name of Hashem. "Asai l'maan shemecho" (Act for Your name's sake). Surely is this climax meaningful when the name of Hashem has been pronounced, throughout, with utmost concentration, with awe and love.

