

Tefillah Thoughts

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Promoting appropriate decorum and kavanah during davening

Pirush Ha'Milos:

"א-ל נקמות ה' א-ל נקמות הופיע"

"The L-rd is a G-d of retribution; O G-d of retribution, reveal Yourself!"

The Baal Shem Tov asks, "The two letter name ל-א connotes kindness and the name ה' connotes mercy. Why are these Names mentioned in connection with vengeance, which seemingly is an aspect of the Divine attribute of justice?"

Sometimes, the Holy One metes out vengeance by showing mercy and kindness. "He shines down into the eyes of a sinner just a bit of His majesty, greatness, mercy and kindness, and when the sinner sees the glorious light of His Holy Spirit and compares it to his own lowliness, he feels such shame and disgrace, no vengeance is greater.

With this form of vengeance in mind the Passuk says that Hashem the G-d of mercy, is also "L-rd of retribution." How can that be? The L-rd of retribution appears to the wicked, showering down kindness and mercy upon them. No punishment is nearly as humbling.

POINTS OF INTEREST:

The body prays to augment our existence, while the soul prays to transcend existence. Through prayer the body learns the significance of spirituality, and the soul learns that physical existence is also a means of cleaving to Hashem.

(Tanya Perek 27)

Avodas Ha'Tefillah:

Every time we pray. It should be with the certain knowledge that Hashem definitely responds. This is the basis of addressing Hashem as "Shomeah Tefillah – listening to our prayers" – a true blessing which is rooted in fact. We ask Hashem to listen, and then thank Him for doing so. We are certain, without doubt, that He answers us each and every time.

(Igeres Ha'Teshuvah Perek 11).



Laws and customs:

It is a mitzvah to run to the synagogue and to any other activity involving a mitzvah, as it is written, "Let us run in pursuit of the knowledge of G-d." Nevertheless, one should run only as far as the entrance of the Shul. In the Shul itself, by contrast, one should proceed with awe and fear. Even on Shabbos, when it is forbidden to take large strides, and also during the week, when taking large strides causes one to lose 1/500th of his sight, one should nevertheless run to any matter connected with a mitzvah. By contrast, when one leaves the synagogue, it is forbidden to run or to take large steps, because this implies that tarrying in the shul is a burden for him.

(The Alter Rebbe's Shulchan Oruch: sec. 90:13)

A Story:

The people of a certain small town were shocked when their guest, the Baal Shem Tov, insisted on davening in the hall adjacent to the shul, and not inside the regular Beis Medrash. He chose to daven there because of a moving incident which had occurred one winter day a few years before. Although the day had been terribly cold- even by Ukrainian standards- the local water carrier had insisted on bringing water to his customers. The freezing weather made the work much slower than usual. After a few hours he was horrified to discover that it was already eleven o'clock in the morning.

"I haven't davened Shacharis yet!" he cried. He raced to shul, where he began putting on his Tefillin in the hall. The temperature was so low, though, that the shel yad stuck to his hand. Unwilling to waste even a moment before davening, the water carrier yanked the bayis loose, injuring himself in the process. The Baal Shem Tov told the town people that the water carrier's devotion had cause a great stir in Heaven. It had actually fashioned a new gateway for prayer! The Baal Shem wanted to take advantage of that new approach to heaven, so he decided to pray in the hall, rather than in the shul itself.



Biur Tefillah: "Ozer Yisroel Bigevurah"

In the Talmud this blessing is associated with putting on the belt. In olden days, a sash or belt, used to be worn over a loose garment. It was worn for support and comfort. For the warrior, the belt was especially important, because it held the weapon, such as sword, or knife (in later days- a pistol). The belt was therefore the symbol of strength and power.

For us, Jews however, the belt has a spiritual meaning. According to the Abudraham, the belt is the symbol of strong attachment, because the belt is, of course, tightly attached to the body. And so it is written: "As the girdle cleaves to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto Me the whole house of Israel, and the whole house of Judah, says G-d; that they might be unto Me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise and for glory." In this sense, the blessing is to be understood to mean that Hashem is closely attached to the Jewish people, and He is therefore the source of strength of the Jewish people. This strong attachment of G-d to the Jewish people, and of the Jewish people to G-d, is something special with the Jewish people. Through good times and bad, the Jewish people remained faithful to G-d and His Torah, and this is what gave them strength to weather all storms throughout their long history in exile among the nations of the world.

There is yet a deeper meaning to this blessing. Jewish Law requires that a belt be worn during prayer, in order to draw a line between the upper part of the body and the lower part, or, as our Sages expressed it, "that the heart should not see the lower nakedness." This emphasizes the necessity to attain the highest possible degree of purity of thought and heart during prayer. The spiritual qualities of the human being- thought, feeling, and speech- are all located in the upper organs of the body, while the lower physical functions (which are more or less common to all animals) are located in the lower organs of the body. The belt separates the upper and lower parts of the body, and this serves to strengthen our purity of mind and heart. In this sense, the blessing "Who girds Israel with strength" speaks not of physical strength, but of strength of character and self-control, which is the true definition of strength, as our Sages said, "He is strong who conquers his (evil) inclination." Many are the temptations which confront a person during the day. The blessing "Who girds Israel with strength" reminds us that G-d has given us the strength to overcome all temptations. It is up to us to draw upon this strength, through our own will and determination to remain attached to, and united with, our G-d.

(My Prayer)

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Dedicated by Avraham Hayman in honor of his marriage to Devorah Gralnik.