

ואתתנן

MOSHE RABBEINU, ELIYAHU HANAVI AND RABBI AKIVA

ורב לך אל תוסף דבר אלי עוד בדבר הזה

“And let it suffice you, speak no more to Me of this matter” (*Devarim* 3:26).

Hashem commanded Moshe to cease and desist from his persistent pleading to gain entry to *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe begged for a decision of mercy, rather than one of strict judgment (see chapter on *Parshas Chukas*, page 336). Hashem explained that it was for Moshe’s benefit to remain outside of *Eretz Yisrael*, for “in *Eretz Yisrael* you will have a mundane burial by mortals; but should you remain in *chutz la’aretz* — outside of *Eretz Yisrael* — you will join with the heavenly angels and your burial will be through the Hand of Hashem” (*Yalkut Mei’am Lo’ez*, *ibid.* 3:27).

Moshe’s strongest desire was to join with his brethren in *Eretz Yisrael*, for this represented the fulfillment of *Klal Yisrael* as a nation (see *Sotah* 14a; *Aruch L’neir*, *Sanhedrin* 17•). Only in *Eretz Yisrael* could they reach the apex of *taharah* and *kedushah* in carrying out Hashem’s commandments, the *Taryag Mitzvos* (Ramban, *Vayikra* 18:25). That Moshe *Rabbeinu* was denied permission to enter *Eretz Yisrael* was a source of personal frustration in that he was not able to lead his people from bondage in *Mitzraim* to the glory of freedom in their promised homeland. It also represented a great spiritual frustration for Moshe in that he would be unable to practice the Torah in its highest form. And yet, Hashem forcibly detained him in *chutz la’aretz* for what on the surface seemed to be an esoteric rite of burial.

When Moshe finally died, Yehoshua cried, and he mourned for an exceedingly long time. Hashem called out to Yehoshua: “For how long will you continue this excessive mourning? Did Moshe die for you alone? He died for Me too!” Hashem closed His reprimand to Yehoshua with the consolation: “Moshe is guaranteed *Olam Haba*” (*Yalkut Shimoni*, *Devarim* 31:14).

Moshe, the great law giver, the man who forged *Klal Yisrael* and redeemed them, the man who spoke to Hashem with a kinship greater than any other *Navi*, the man who is forever known as the Teacher of our nation — could there have been any doubt that he was deserving of *Olam Haba*? What kind of consolation did Hashem offer Yehoshua by stating that “Moshe was guaranteed *Olam Haba*”? If any one at all deserved it, it was certainly Moshe!

The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 13•) states that:

אליהו תלמידו של משה

Eliyahu was a disciple of Moshe.

Only Eliyahu shares with Moshe the unique achievement of having a glimpse of Hashem (*Megillah* 19:), and according to some authorities Eliyahu was actually Pinchas *Hakohein*, who

learned Torah directly from Moshe (*Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer* 47). Yet, Rashi (*Sotah* 13•) interprets the aforementioned quote strangely:

Not that he (Eliyahu) actually learned directly from him (Moshe), but that the Torah of Moshe was taught to Eliyahu.

Obviously, Rashi is referring to a much deeper bond between Moshe and Eliyahu; after all the entire nation was (and still is being) taught “the Torah of Moshe.” There is something so unique and important in the bond between these two men that it is only alluded to in cryptic fashion by the above *Gemara*.

The *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Mishlei* 9) reveals a fascinating episode involving Eliyahu *Hanavi* and Rabbi Akiva. The *Yalkut* states that Rabbi Akiva was not buried after he was tortured by the Romans, but that he was thrown onto a bed and was then carried to a cave by Eliyahu *Hanavi* and Rabbi Yehoshua. Eliyahu, who is a *Kohein*, then personally involved himself with Rabbi Akiva's body, explaining that the body of a *talmud chacham* does not defile. In order to properly understand Moshe *Rabbeinu* and Eliyahu *Hanavi*, it is imperative to understand Rabbi Akiva.

The *Gemara* very vividly describes the last earthly moments of the life of Rabbi Akiva:

בשעה שהוציאו את רבי עקיבא להריגה, זמן ק"ש היה, והיו סורקין את בשרו במסרקות של ברזל, והיה מקבל עליו עול מלכות שמים אמרו לו תלמידיו: רבינו עד כאן? א"ל כל ימי הייתי מצטער על פסוק זה "בכל נפשך" אפילו נוטל את נשמתך. אמרתי מתי יבוא לידי ואקיימנו, ועכשיו שבא לידי לא אקיימנו" היה מאריך ב"אחד" עד שיצתה נשמתו ב"אחד"

The time at which the Romans took out Rabbi Akiva to murder him coincided with the prescribed time for the recitation of the *Kerias Shema*. They raked his flesh with combs of iron. At that point, Rabbi Akiva accepted the yoke of the Heavenly Kingdom (by the recitation of *Kerias Shema*). His students inquired of him “even to this extent?”; he responded that all his life he interpreted the phrase “with all your soul” to mean (that one must accept the yoke of Heaven) “even if they take your soul. I wondered when I would have the opportunity for this demonstration. And now that I have the opportunity, should I not take advantage of it?” Rabbi Akiva prolonged the proclamation of “*echad*” and he expired with “*echad*” on his lips (*Berachos* 61:).

Rabbi Akiva understood that the sanctification of Heaven was the only purpose for human existence. To the extent that the Romans attempted to destroy his corporeal being, Rabbi Akiva declared his unity with Hashem for eternity. Upon witnessing this scene, the Heavenly angels cried out to Hashem: “This is Torah, and this is its reward?” They felt that Rabbi Akiva, the pious Torah sage, should not have been humiliated and tortured at his demise; he deserved a more comfortable death (*ibid.*). At this point, the Almighty consoled the angels with the statement “Praised are you, Rabbi Akiva, in that you are ‘prepared’ for the next world” (*ibid.*) (see *Sanhedrin* 47• with Rashi and *Tosafos* [46:]).

This is reminiscent of the consolation Hashem offered Yehoshua regarding the demise of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. There was no question that Rabbi Akiva, like Moshe *Rabbeinu*, was deserving of *Olam Haba*, so what type of consolation did Hashem offer? The angels complained about the unfair punishment encountered by Rabbi Akiva, and Hashem responded with a seemingly irrelevant point: Rabbi Akiva was clearly deserving of *Olam Haba* even before his death.

Similarly in the *Yom Kippur* and *Tisha Be'av* prayer of the *Asarah Harugei Malchus* (*Kinos* 21) the description of the passing of Rabbi Akiva is accompanied by the unusual declaration “Fortunate are you, Rabbi Akiva, your body has been purified with every type of purity.” Why was similar praise not used in reference to the other nine sages murdered by the Romans? Obviously, Rabbi Akiva’s death was unique, for there is a very subtle nuance to the phrase: “You are *mezuman* — prepared — for the next world.”

The use of the word “*mezuman*” in Divine expression bears special significance and relevance. This term certifies that the subject will enter the next world without undergoing the travails of Heavenly judgment (*Tosafos, Kesubos* 103: ; see *Taanis* 29a). Prior to entering the next world, one must undergo a terrifying and frightening judicial trial by the Heavenly court. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai confirms that this petrifying experience is more fearful than death itself or even the possibility of being dispatched to *Geihinom*. On his deathbed, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai expressed to his students his fear of the Heavenly trial, and only as an afterthought mentioned the fear of possibly being relegated to *Geihinom* (*Berachos* 28:). Hence, it is apparent that Hashem, in responding to the angels, certified that Rabbi Akiva would forgo the tribulations of the Heavenly tribunal (*Magid Yosef* 313).

Rabbi Akiva’s life was portrayed to Moshe *Rabbeinu* in a prophetic vision, at the time Moshe was prepared to accept the Torah. Upon witnessing Rabbi Akiva’s greatness, Moshe wondered why he, and not Rabbi Akiva, was chosen to receive the Torah on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*: “Hashem, You have such a great man as this (Rabbi Akiva), and yet You choose to give the Torah through me?” (*Menachos* 29:). To which Hashem responded:

שתוק - כך עלה במחשבה לפני

Be silent — this is My plan (ibid.).

Moshe then asked to be shown Rabbi Akiva’s ultimate reward, and was then shown how Rabbi Akiva’s flesh was being scraped off by iron rakes.

Moshe, as did the angels, protested Rabbi Akiva’s treatment: “This is Torah, and this is its reward?” Again, Hashem commanded Moshe: “Be silent — this is My plan” (ibid.). (See Ramban, *Shaar Ha'gmul, Kisvei HaRamban* II, p. 275).

To understand all this dialogue regarding the apparent punishment of Rabbi Akiva, and also the apparent punishment of Moshe *Rabbeinu*, it is imperative to understand the nature of existence. Absolute human existence is really only in the soul of man. The corporeal body, with which the soul is equipped in this world, is only an artificial veneer. The one hundred twenty years in which the soul exists in this world is only a small fraction of the spectrum of its existence. This world is only a phase through which the soul passes — the container employed in this rite of passage is the human body. When the soul continues on with its eternal journey to the next world, the excess baggage is discarded. In the next world, the true world, there is no need for a body (*Rabbeinu Saadya Ga'on, Emunos Vedai'os*). Hence, mortal death, the separation of the physical body from the soul, is the first essential step in preparation for the next world. The soul, which becomes tainted and sullied by sin in this corporeal world, must be painfully cleansed in the intense fire of *Geihinom*. The Heavenly tribunal, which the soul must face in order to determine how much cleansing is actually necessary, is a most indescribable ordeal in pain, anguish and trauma. Hence, any soul-cleansing which is possible in this world would alleviate

much more intense suffering in the next. The righteous may avoid some of the punishing cleansing of *Geihinom* by undergoing physical punishment in this world; in absolute terms, a task easier borne than *Geihinom*. The truly saintly, who are not tarnished by sin at all, may even avoid the grueling Heavenly tribunal and pass directly into the next world, avoiding *Geihinom*, the Heavenly tribunal, and even mortal death.

If the mortal body is ordinarily merely clothing for the soul, the truly saintly, who elevate the nature of the mundane to the spiritual, incorporate the human body into the soul. Under such circumstances death is entirely unnecessary — for there is no need to separate the mundane from the spiritual, for that being has become all spiritual.

Rabbi Akiva did not commence with Torah study until he was forty years old. Up to the age of forty his soul was soiled with pernicious sin. The saintliness that he engendered after age forty was so great that Hashem sought to help him avoid *Geihinom* and even the ordeal of trial. Hence, it was necessary for him to undergo this inhuman torture in order to cleanse his soul. When Moshe asked to see Rabbi Akiva's reward, he was shown Rabbi Akiva being tortured; this was in fact a reward for Rabbi Akiva, for now he was "prepared for the next world" — without even having to undergo trial. It is now apparent that the Torah could not be given through Rabbi Akiva because his soul on this earth was not totally pure — he still had to undergo certain purification rites. Moshe, on the other hand, was especially created in purity for the role of the Torah-giver (*Sotah* 12•) in accordance with Hashem's plan.

When Moshe cried out "This is Torah, this is its reward?" he was seeking Heavenly mercy (*Midas Harachamim*) for Rabbi Akiva instead of the fierce and stern judgment (*Midas Hadin*). Hashem had to silence Moshe, for the institution of *Midas Harachamim* would have foiled Hashem's plan to purify Rabbi Akiva in this world. Similarly, Hashem ordered Moshe to desist from pleading for *Midas Harachamim* so that he could enter *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe, too, was tainted by some sin (*Bamidbar* 20:12) and had to submit to an earthly purification rite in order to avoid the Heavenly tribunal and *Geihinom*. It is now clear that Hashem's punishment for Moshe was only for his own benefit; and the statement "You will join with the Heavenly angels, and your burial will be through the Hand of Heaven" signifies that Moshe was destined for the next world with his soul and body intact. This is precisely the consolation Yehoshua received from Hashem, who sought to end his excessive mourning. Yehoshua was informed that not only was Moshe saved from *Geihinom*, but that it would also be unnecessary for him to face the ferocious Heavenly tribunal.

Rabbi Akiva and Moshe *Rabbeinu* were so saintly that after some slight mortal purification, their corporeal bodies assumed the purified spiritual state of the soul, and it was unnecessary to separate the body from the soul even in death. Hence, the *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Mishlei* 9) intimates that Rabbi Akiva left this world, bypassed the Heavenly tribunal, and directly entered the next world with his purified body and soul intact.

We now understand what the *Gemara* (*Sotah* 13•) intends with the statement: "Eliyahu was a disciple of Moshe." Like Moshe, Eliyahu was so saintly and pure that he, too, would enter the next world directly with his soul and body intact. There was no need for Eliyahu's soul to shed its body, for his body had forged a great spiritual alliance with his soul (*Bereishis Rabbah* 21:5).

In this world of darkness, it is impossible for anyone to truly discern what is beneficial from what is potentially harmful. Loving kindness from Hashem is the hallmark of every act that

befalls mankind, but unfortunately it is not always recognized as such. Moshe did not understand that Hashem's refusal to permit him entry to *Eretz Yisrael* was actually a deed of loving kindness. Similarly, he could not understand the reason for the terrible tortures which befell Rabbi Akiva. However, in absolute terms this seemingly strict behavior on the part of Hashem was actually the greatest act of loving kindness.

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