

Hashem spoke to Moshe, “Behold, your days are drawing near to die; summon Yehoshua, and both of you shall stand in the Ohel Moed, and I shall instruct him.” (31:14)

The changing of the guard, the transference of leadership, was about to occur. Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to summon Yehoshua. In the *Midrash*, *V'zos HaBrachah*, *Chazal* teach that ten “deaths” were written concerning Moshe. Ten times the Torah writes about the concept of death as it related to Moshe – but the decree had still not been sealed until.... Moshe did not take the entire idea of his death to heart and conjectured: “*Klal Yisrael* sinned many a time, sins that were certainly much more egregious than anything I have ever done. Even as a young child I did not sin. Yet, when I entreated Hashem on their behalf – He listened and forgave them. So is it not certain that when I pray for myself Hashem will listen to my entreaty?”

When Hashem saw how Moshe delayed trying to avoid his punishment by taking his time to engage in prayer, Hashem retracted all of His favors. Moshe was **not** going to enter into *Eretz Yisrael*. *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, derives from here that if Moshe would have **immediately** taken the decree to heart and commenced praying, he would have averted disaster. Those moments of delay spelled the ultimate difference for Moshe. He did no wrong. He even prayed 515 times. Sadly, however, it was too late.

Moshe was acutely aware of the efficacy of *tefillah*. He just felt that he had time. Of course, he was going to *daven* – but not right away. Hashem would listen. He always did.

Moshe was right. Hashem did listen. Regrettably, this time the answer was no. Moshe had waited too long. *Tefillah* requires immediacy.

Tefillah must be expressed with a sense of urgency, thereby indicating that the supplicant understands that there is **no other way** to achieve anything in this world. Praying at leisure, as if one is carrying out a service, fulfilling an obligation, is not prayer. We derive from *Chazal* that although Moshe *Rabbeinu* was acutely aware of the significance of prayer, the mere fact that he did not consider it imperative to pray **immediately**, was an indication – **relative** to the quintessential leader’s exalted spiritual level – of a subtle laxity in his attitude toward prayer. As a result, his 515 prayers supplicating Hashem to allow him entry into *Eretz Yisrael* did not achieve the desired result.

It is a frightening thought, especially at this time of the year – *Shabbos Shuvah*. It is with great trepidation that I include the following two narratives, whose primary purpose is to inspire and motivate us to pray with greater urgency and deeper concentration at this compelling moment. As we approach *Yom Kippur*, may it be the will of Hashem that our *tefillos* be answered *l'tovah*, and that we and our families enjoy good health and Torah *nachas*.

In the introduction to his second volume on prayer, *Touched by a Prayer*, Rabbi Yechiel Spero relates that *Horav Aharon Karliner, zl*, was once asked how he prepared for *tefillah*. What did he think about when he focused his heart and mind, as he prepared to ascend the spiritual realms to supplicate the Almighty? The *Rebbe's* answer should serve as a wake-up call for us all.

"I imagine that I am lying in bed," the *Rebbe* began, "and my strength is beginning to ebb away. I become weaker and weaker; my pulse slows down and then, I die. The *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society, comes and prepares my mortal remains for burial. My *tachrichim*, linen shrouds, are placed on me. The members of the *Chevra Kaddisha* ask *mechilah*, beg forgiveness, for any inappropriety they might have done in preparing my body. Then they place me in the casket in which they will carry me to the cemetery. After a short walk, we arrive at the cemetery. I am about to be lowered into the ground which will serve as my final resting place.

"Suddenly, a Heavenly Voice is heard: 'Stop the funeral! The Almighty has decreed that this Jew is to be given one more chance to open his mouth in prayer.'

"I am allowed **one** prayer. That is all. Then the funeral will continue."

The *Karliner* looked at his questioner and said, "This is how I prepare myself for prayer."

A second episode demonstrates the motif of prayer and the significance of urgency in expressing one's emotions. It occurred with *Horav Yeshayah Bardaky, zl*, son-in-law of *Horav Yisrael, zl, m'Shklov*, a distinguished student of the *Gaon m'Vilna*. *Rav Yeshayah* was among the group of the *Gaon's* followers who emigrated to *Eretz Yisrael*. He eventually became the *Rav* of the *Perushim* community in Yerushalayim which was comprised of the *Gaon's* followers.

Travel on the high seas in the rickety boats, which was the mode of overseas travel two hundred years ago was dangerous, but so is crossing the street today. One does what he must do, and leaving Europe for *Eretz Yisrael* was a primary goal for the *Gaon's talmidim*, students. With great yearning, these families left the "comfort" of their Eastern European environment to brave the dangerous seas and hostile environment, just to live in the Holy Land.

Rav Yeshayah was among the last group to set sail from Europe. He traveled with his young son and daughter. Their ship, which was not much to begin with, was wrecked by a storm and sank. Lucky to survive the wreck, *Rav Yeshayah* instructed his children to climb on his back, as he made a desperate attempt to swim to shore. After a few hours of rigorous swimming, *Rav Yeshayah* could no longer continue. The weight of both children was too much. They would all drown – unless one child "volunteered" to let go.

This is neither the place nor the forum for a discussion on the *halachic* decision that renders priority to the male child. In any event, *Rav Yeshayah* explained to his young daughter that, sadly, she was the logical "volunteer." Anyone reading this story will certainly feel the emotion that an exhausted

father, after hours of swimming in the treacherous waters, must have sustained during the moments of his final goodbye with his young, precious daughter. It is a decision no human being should ever have to make. Father and daughter held each other very tightly, as the implication of *Rav Yeshayah's* words sunk into his daughter's mind.

Suddenly, the young girl cried out, "But, *Abba*, I have no other father!" She implied that she had no one to whom to turn. He owed it to her. Upon hearing these words, *Rav Yeshayah* gathered his strength and told his daughter to hold on. With superhuman effort, fueled by fatherly love, he reached the shore and collapsed, entirely spent and exhausted he passed out.

After a short while, *Rav Yeshayah* woke up. He turned to his daughter and asked her to remember forever the profound words she had said when she was on the brink of drowning. "Remember that whenever you are in trouble," he told her, "just turn to Hashem and say to Him exactly what you said to me – that you have no other father except for me, and you will discover that actually you do have another Father, Who **can** and **will** come to your rescue."