

I prayed to Hashem at that time. (3:23)

In the course of relating to *Klal Yisrael* his numerous efforts to stay Hashem's decree that he not enter the Land, Moshe *Rabbeinu* adds, "Hashem became angry with me because of your matters." Apparently, our leader was laying the blame for his remaining in the wilderness at the feet of the nation. This is uncharacteristic of Moshe, whose humility, dedication and forbearance serve as a model for future leaders. It almost seems as if he is bitterly blaming the people for his situation. In *Pri Tzadik*, *Horav Tzadok HaKohen*, *z'l*, offers a novel interpretation of Moshe's words.

When Moshe heard the decree, he immediately began to pray. Moshe's prayer was unlike anything we can imagine; yet, it was ineffective. He prayed so much that Hashem finally told him to desist. He was not rescinding the decree. *Chazal* explain that Moshe had almost achieved his goal, and some more supplication would have "compelled" Hashem to allow him entry into *Eretz Yisrael*. *Rav Tzadok* cites an intriguing episode from *Chazal* (*Bava Metzia* 85b). Apparently, *Eliyahu HaNavi* would often attend *Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi's shiur*. One day he arrived late, explaining to *Rebbi* that he had just returned from *Me'oras HaMachpeilah*, Cave of the Patriarchs. The following is his rendering of what took place during his "visit." (Obviously, this is all above us.)

Eliyahu: "I woke up the Patriarchs. I woke up *Avraham Avinu* first, washed his hands and waited for him to finish his prayers. I then put him back to sleep. I followed the same procedure with *Yitzchak Avinu* and *Yaakov Avinu*." *Rebbe* asked him, "Why did you not just wake them all at the same time?" He replied, "Had I done so, they would have all joined in prayer simultaneously. Their prayers would have had such an effect that it would have catalyzed the advent of *Moshiach* – prematurely." *Rebbi* then asked *Eliyahu*, "Does anyone in our generation have such a preeminent power of *tefillah*?" *Eliyahu* replied, "Rabbi Chiyah and his sons have such a commanding power of *tefillah*."

We derive a powerful lesson from this dialogue: A small, unique number of individuals are invested with an unusual power of prayer. Even Hashem does not intervene with their prayers. Moshe *Rabbeinu* had earned this distinction. When he prayed, Heaven listened. The gates of blessing may have already closed, but Moshe's prayers were able to pierce through and gain ingress for his supplications. It was for this reason that Hashem instructed Moshe to desist from his prayers. Hashem must not rescind the decree.

Rav Tzadok wonders why is it, if Moshe's *tefillos* had such efficacy, that Hashem insisted that he stop. What would be the negative consequences for Moshe entering *Eretz Yisrael* with the people he so lovingly nurtured?

Rav Tzadok cites *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Chukas* 10), which he uses as a basis for explaining Hashem's reluctance to allow Moshe to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, "Moshe asked Hashem, 'Why have You decreed that I die in the wilderness as did the wicked generation that angered and rebelled

against You? Future generations will equate me with them.’ Hashem replied, ‘How can you enter the Land? People will say that you buried the people you took out of Egypt in the wilderness and entered *Eretz Yisrael* with a new (and improved) generation. Furthermore, people will conjecture that the generation that died in the wilderness had lost their portion in *Olam Habba*. Therefore, you should die together with them and return them at the time of *Techiyas Ha’Meisim*, Resurrection of the Dead.”

What an illuminating reason for Moshe’s inability to enter *Eretz Yisrael*. It was not about him, but rather about *Klal Yisrael*. Hashem wanted Moshe to die together with the *Yotzei Mitzrayim*, Jews who left with him from Egypt, because this way they, too, would arise with him for *Techiyas Ha’Meisim*. They were not perfect; their actions spoke volumes about how distant they were from spiritual perfection. Nonetheless, Hashem did not abandon them. If Moshe led them in “death” as he did in life, they would then have another chance – during *Techiyas Ha’Meisim*. Understanding Hashem’s desire, our selfless leader refrained from *davening*. He chose, rather, to die in the wilderness, to be with his flock. Whatever they were, however much they had stumbled, they were his. A leader does not abandon ship.

Two lessons may be gleaned herein. The power of *tefillah* is beyond anything we understand. With his *tefillos*, Moshe *Rabbeinu* had the ability to compel Hashem to open the gates of blessing and rescind the decree that he would not enter the Land. He refrained from *davening* because it was Hashem’s will that he do so. What was Moshe’s *koach*, power? Why were his *tefillos* so special, so effective? He was selfless. He had no personal vested interest, but only the interest of *Klal Yisrael*. Only a *tefillah* that emanates from such a *lev tov*, altruistic heart, carries such unprecedented efficacy.

We also learn that there is a time when we should desist, when our urgent and justifiable needs do not align with the will of Hashem. There are times, as we all may well know, that our requests and pleas receive a negative reply from Heaven. It does not, *chas v’shalom*, mean that Hashem was not listening. He listened, but His answer remained, “No.” We must be prepared to accept that Hashem’s will does not always coincide with ours. It does not necessarily mean that we did not pray hard enough or that our *tefillos* were insufficiently sincere. It means Hashem decided that, in this instance, His answer would be, “No.” Moshe taught us that we must accept Hashem’s ruling. We trust in Hashem. As the *Chazon Ish* teaches: *Bitachon*, trust, in Hashem does not mean that everything will be good. It means that we firmly believe that whatever will be is Hashem’s will. That is the only way to live.

We are accustomed to the notion that prayer is part of our regular, daily endeavor. If a situation arises which warrants greater intensity and devotion in expressing our plea to Hashem, we pray harder. What about pre-emptive prayer, petitioning Hashem that nothing goes “wrong.” Is this part of our range of prayer? Preemptive prayer is not about superstition or anxiety; it is about relationship. A person who speaks to Hashem before a disaster strikes is intimating: “Hashem, I need You always – not only when things fall apart.” The fear we have should be transformed into

a spiritual tool. When we sense a cloud on the horizon, we do not wait for it to pour; we pray. Even if nothing happens, indeed, especially if nothing happens, the prayer was not “wasted;” it strengthened our bond with Hashem.

Horav Nochum Zev Dessler, zl, son of the venerable *Michtav Mei’ Eliyahu, Horav Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, zl*, was, as a young boy growing up in England, childhood friends with Ben-Tzion Lopian. The Desslers and Lopians lived a fifteen-minute walk from one another, and the two boys would often walk to each other’s home to spend time together. The automobile was relatively new and not a common sight. Walking was the primary mode of getting around.

One day, Nochum Zev left his home to visit his friend. As he was turning the corner, a car came out of nowhere. He instinctively stopped in his tracks as the car barreled down the street where, a few seconds earlier, the young boy might have been. “Something” stopped him from taking that next step, which, if not for the grace of Hashem, might have been his last. He continued on towards the Lopian house where he was greeted by *HoRav Elya Lopian* himself. The saintly *Mashgiach* never greeted him at the door, since he was always in his room, learning and preparing *shiurim*. He asked the boy, “How are you?” “*Boruch Hashem*,” he replied. “Did anything happen to you on the way here?” *Rav Elya* pressed on. “Almost,” he answered. “As I was about to cross the street, a speeding car came out of nowhere. I stopped in the nick of time.”

“*Baruch Hashem*, the danger has passed,” *Rav Elya* sighed. The young boy did not understand. The *Mashgiach* replied, “Last night, I dreamt that you were involved in a terrible accident. I have been praying for you from the moment that I had the dream until now. Hashem listened to my *tefillos*.” When Nochum Zev returned home, he immediately went to his father’s study where he found him learning as usual. His father’s eyes lit up when he saw him. He listened intently to his young son’s story of his escape from what might have been a grave injury. He added that *Rav Elya* had dreamt about this at night and prayed that the tragedy be averted. *Rav Dessler* took his son’s hands in his, and, with a soft, soothing voice, said, “I, too, had the very same dream, and I have been fasting and *davening* ever since. Now that I see you, I will end my fast.” We now have an idea of the meaning of preemptive *tefillah*.