

Parshas Eikev – Shir La'Ma'alos – Song of Ascent and Growth - R. Sholom Segal

תז/כג/ל מנחם אב תשע"ה - 1/8/15 August 2015 - שבת פ' ואתחנן/עקב/ראה

We are all familiar with the unique opening to the second of the שמעלות שיר, or should we say שיר שמעלות; why the different prefix?

Let us first examine the background to these 15 chapters of תהלים. Chazal write that when דוד המלך sought to dig the foundations for the בית המקדש, excavations unearthed a piece of potsherd acting as a plug over the waters of the deep. Ignoring any warnings, they removed the bung, allowing for the waters to come out in a torrent, threatening to flood the world. דוד המלך, acting upon the advice of אחיתופל, cast the Name of Hashem into the waters, following which, they began to recede, but far further than desired; they descended 16 000 אמות. At this point, דוד המלך recited the 15 שמעלות שיר, each one raising the waters 1 000 אמות, until they reached the wanted depth, one thousand אמות below the surface of the earth.

The passage of a Jew is likened to a voyage, riding the turbulent waters of the stormy seas. (See גר"א על יונה) When we fall, we plummet, but when we ascend, it is not just the single 'מעלה', rather many 'מעלות', many rungs of the spiritual ladder. (See מדרש שוחר טוב) But, where does it start?

ועתה ישראל מה ד' אלקיך שאל מעמך כי אם ליראה את ד' אלקיך וגו'. (עקב י"א:ב)

And now, Israel, what does Hashem your G-D ask of you? Only to fear Hashem your G-D etc.

חז"ל, commenting on the above verse, write that everything is in the hand of Heaven, with the one noted exception of יראת שמים. It has been predestined who will be tall and who will be short, who will be strong and who will be weak, who will be rich and who will be poor; and so the list goes on. But, when it comes to יראת שמים, it must start from the 'אני', the person himself, perhaps otherwise known as the 'אניה' (ship) sailing in the deep oceans. If he has no drive to succeed, if he sits back and does nothing, he cannot be surprised when nothing comes of his life.

Having made the first move, climbing the first rung and rejoicing in the first of the שמעלות שיר, the inexperienced youth acknowledges his need to look for help. This is expressed in the second chapter, most succinctly in the 'ל', the only letter in a ספר תורה that rises above the line. The student looks *upwards*, to his parents and teachers, for help.

However, he begins to realise that even they are limited, in and of themselves, in terms of the aid that they can offer. They are portrayed in the mountains and hills, respectively the אבות and אמהות, the highest peaks found on earth. Beyond that point, as one raises one's eyes to the mountains, אשא עיני אל ההרים, one realises that there will come a point in time when he will require a higher source of guidance, but מאיין; namely, the letters of אני have turned into the word איין, the eyes and soul searching the horizons for a Supernatural means of help.

The פרשת אחרי מות רמב"ן writes that Aristotle and his ilk believed that what is beyond human sight, comprehension and perception, obviously does not exist. Figuratively, the mountains, the highest points on Planet Earth, are the limits of existence in a sad and pitiful finite life.

We, as believing Jews, know that this world is a mere passage to a far better place, a place which is beyond our comprehension, a place of G-Dliness. We, as believing Jews, know that beyond the horizon, there is a concealed Hand of G-D that is limitless. Truly, מאיין יבא עזרי; namely, the answer to our question lies in the question itself, for מאיין means 'nothing'. Hashem created the universe from nothing, He continues to will it into existence anew each and every split second – החדש בטובו בכל יום תמיד – and He can provide us all help, where none other can.

Many will have read or heard of the miraculous wind that appeared from nowhere to save Tel Aviv from a disaster, where the Iron Dome failed. The operator of the dome describes how they had already alerted emergency services as they braced themselves for the worst. There was no wind on the radar, but then, all of a sudden, a gust came from nowhere and ushered the rocket out of harm's way, dropping it off in the sea. The witness to the miracle excitedly exclaimed, "There is a G-D! There is a G-D! There is a G-D!" He then proceeded to put on תפילין and accepted upon himself to keep Shabbos.

We are but a לומד, a 'student', in the sense of the moon's *thirty* day cycle, in which it receives and reflects the light of the sun. כלל ישראל are the students of של עולם, forever looking to reveal that hidden Light of Hashem to the world and be שמם שמים.

Concluding with the message of מנחם אב, may this month herald the time when we merit to, find our true Father and return home אמן בימינו אמן.