



PARSHAS VA'ESCHANAN – RABBI RAPHAEL GOLDBLATT

At the beginning of this week's parsha, Moshe Rabbenu relates to the Bnei Yisrael his supplication to Hashem to be permitted to enter Eretz Yisrael, to witness the culmination of the forty year journey through the desert. He continues to relate that this prayer was rejected, indicating that his leadership of the people was about to end, with the final stages of the journey to the Promised Land being overseen by Yehoshua and Elazar. The prayer as quoted is very short, but nonetheless we can learn some significant lessons from it.

The passuk says, “ה' אלקים, אתה החלות להראות את עבדך, את גדלך ואת ידך החזקה, אשר מי אל בשמים ובארץ אשר יעשה כמעשיך, וכגבורתיך.” “Hashem Elokim, You have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your powerful hand, that there is no power in the heavens or on earth who can perform the like of Your actions or Your mighty deeds.” Moshe then continues with the prayer per se, requesting that he be permitted to enter the Land. Chazal derive from this that the beginning of prayer should always be with an expression of praise of Hashem, introducing one's requests with a declaration of admiration and fealty (Brachos 32a). For this reason, we start our Shemone Esre with three brachos which do not contain any prayer or request, but are merely declarations of Hashem's divinity, omnipotence and holiness.

However, there is another point which can be learnt from this passuk. Moshe uses the word החלות – “You have begun.” This implies that were the prayer to be granted, Hashem would thus be adding to the demonstration of His might that had been achieved up until this point. Moshe had witnessed the wonders of the burning bush and the ten makkos in Egypt. He had seen the numerous miracles during the forty years in the desert, including the splitting of the Red Sea and the falling of the Mon. Furthermore, three times he had spent forty days and forty nights within the thick cloud at the top of Har Sinai, where he had learnt the Torah directly from Hashem, neither eating nor drinking throughout that period (Ki Sisa 34:28, Ekev 9:9,19). Chazal tell us that the sun stopped for Moshe during the battle with Sichon, in the same way as it stopped for Yehoshua in Giv'on (Rashi Devarim 2:25, quoting Gemara Avoda Zara 25a). Nevertheless, his cognisance of Hashem's might and power would be much greater were he to witness the conquest of Eretz Yisrael and its thirty one kings. The magnitude of the feat of the conquest of Eretz Yisrael would be (and was) much greater than all the miracles that had been performed up to this point.

This point is also made by Rashi in Parshas Shlach Lecha, where Moshe implores Hashem not to destroy the people despite their sins, saying that this would create a Chilul Hashem. Moshe suggests that this would bring the Egyptians to assume that Hashem's power was insufficient to conquer Eretz Yisrael, and that for this reason He had been forced to annihilate them before they reached the Land. Rashi there (14:16) points out that in order for this to be understood, it must be that the incredible might demonstrated in Egypt would not have been sufficient to defeat the thirty one kings.

It is important to note that Moshe Rabbenu's prayer included this reference to his desire to witness this demonstration of Hashem's supreme power. Besides the fact that he wanted to see the Land itself, and to witness the culmination of the long journey, he also desired to add to his recognition of Hashem's greatness by seeing how the powerful kings in Eretz Yisrael would be defeated and the Land would be given over to Bnei Yisrael. This itself is a purpose, not only to gain the result of the miracles, but also to witness the miracles themselves.

We can add to this that the miracles that will occur when Mashiach finally comes will be incomparably greater than those of Yetzias Mitzrayim, as Yirmiyah says (16:14-15 and 23:7-8) that the principal praise of Hashem will be for His removing the Jewish People from the final exile, and the Exodus from Egypt will pale in comparison. It seems that they will also be greater than those of the Conquest of the Land, which did not have this effect. Similarly to Moshe Rabbenu, our desire for the final Redemption must include our wish to see Hashem's power demonstrated outright, increasing Kiddush Hashem in the world. This can only increase our desire for the coming of Mashiach, as foretold in the seven haftaros of consolation, beginning this week, במהרה בימינו אמן.