



”ואתחנן אל ה' בעת ההיא לאמר”

## With His 515 Entreaties Moshe Rabeinu Broke through Every Barrier Thereby Paving the Way for All of Yisrael's Tefilos to Reach the Kisei HaKavod

The upcoming, auspicious Shabbas Kodesh, on which we read parshas Vaeschanan, is called **Shabbas Nachamu**. This designation is related to the words of consolation offered by the navi in the Haftarah associated with this parsha (Yeshayah 40, 1): **”נחמו נחמו עמי יאמר אלקיכם”**—**“comfort, comfort My people,” says your G-d**. He goes on to say (ibid. 2): **”דברו על לב ירושלם וקראו אליה, כי מלאה צבאה כי נרצה עוונה, כי”**—**“Speak consolingly of Yerushalayim and proclaim to her that her period (of galus) has been completed, that her iniquity has been forgiven; for she has received double for all her sins from the hand of Hashem.”** The navi Yeshayahu aims to console Yisrael with regards to the difficult, prolonged galus and promises them that HKB”H will redeem them (ibid. 5): **”ונגלה כבוד ה' וראו כל בשר יחדיו כי פי ה' דיבר”**—**the glory of Hashem shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see as one that the mouth of Hashem has spoken**. Hence, it was fitting to have this Haftarah instituted as the reading on the Shabbas following Tishah B'Av, the day on which we mourned the destruction of the two Batei Mikdash.

Not only do we always read the Haftarah of **“Nachamu”** on the Shabbas following Tishah B'Av, but we also always read parshas **Vaeschanan** on this special Shabbas. In fact, the Tur and the michaber (author of the Shulchan Aruch) provide us with the following mnemonic (O.C. 428, 4): **”צומו וצלו”**—**fast and pray**. The Turei Zahav (3) and the Magen Avraham (6) explain the significance of this mnemonic: **”צומו”**

—**fast**—refers to the fast day of Tishah B'Av; **”וצלו”**—**pray** (in Aramaic)—alludes to parshas Vaeschanan, in which Moshe Rabeinu prays to HKB”H, beseeching Him to be allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael.

It is worth mentioning that all of the minhagim and numerical references related to the reading of the Torah brought down by the Tur come from the Seder of Rav Amram Gaon (end of Seder Purim), which was the first siddur to appear in the world. It was handwritten by the holy Rav Amram Gaon, the Rosh Yeshivah of Sura in Bavel; it was then sent to Rabbi Yitzchak ben Rabbi Shimon, one of the leaders of Spanish Jewry in those times. It is based on the minhagim of the two famous yeshivot—Sura and Pumpedita—the outstanding academies of learning in Bavel during the period of the Geonim. The period of the Geonim immediately followed the period of the Amoraim—the sages of the Talmud. All of the early minhagim are founded on what was passed down from the sages of the Talmud based on what was transmitted to them.

### Moshe Beseeched Hashem for All Future Generations Who Would Pray in Troubled Times

Let us now examine the mnemonic chosen by the Geonim concerning the reading of parshas Vaeschanan after Tishah B'Av: **”צומו וצלו”**—**fast and pray**. What is the connection between the fast of Tishah B'Av and Moshe's entreaties in parshas Vaeschanan to enter the land? Furthermore, this

mnemonic is formulated as a command being issued to Yisrael. The command to **fast** on Tishah B'Av goes without saying; it is easy to comprehend. But what is the significance of the command for Yisrael to **pray**—**"וצלו"**? After all, the opening words of the parsha: **"ואתחנו אל ה'"**—refer to Moshe Rabeinu pleading with Hashem to be allowed to enter the land.

It appears that the Geonim were alluding to what our blessed sages expounded in the Midrash (D.R. 2, 6) on the opening passuk of the parsha:

**What is meant by the word "לאמר" (saying)? Rabbi Azaryah said: He was telling all future generations to pray in times of distress. For, we see that even though Moshe had already been informed (Devarim 3, 27): "You shall not cross this Yarden"—nevertheless, he began to implore Hashem to mercifully repeal the decree.**

This enables us to understand the wonderful connection between the two parts of the mnemonic **"fast and pray."** First, Yisrael are being commanded to fast on Tishah B'Av to mourn the terrible and tragic churban of the Beis HaMikdash. Notwithstanding, they are also warned not to despair! On the contrary, they are commanded to **pray** just as Moshe Rabeinu did in parshas Vaeschanan; he prayed even though the decree had already been issued. Similarly, Yisrael are instructed to pray for the future, complete geulah and the fulfillment of Yeshayah's words of consolation in the Haftarah: **"Comfort, comfort My people," says your G-d.** May they become a reality, swiftly, in our times!

Notwithstanding, this does not really resolve our quandary. In fact, the commentaries are baffled by the Midrash's claim that with the word **"לאמר"**, Moshe Rabeinu intended to teach us to pray in times of distress. After all, Moshe Rabeinu's entreaties were not answered; he was not allowed to enter the land. In fact, HKB"H tells him in no uncertain terms to desist (ibid. 26): **"רב לך אל תוסף דבר אלי עוד בדבר הזה"—it is too much for you! (Enough!) Do not continue to speak to Me further concerning this matter."**

### A Fantastic Explanation from the Agra D'Kallah

I would like to propose a way to reconcile this perplexing question based on a fantastic teaching from the great Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech of Dinov, zy"א, in his sefer Agra D'Kallah (Vaeschanan). He addresses the fact that Moshe Rabeinu prayed 515 tefilos. His sacred insight is based on the words of the Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (3), who asserts that Moshe uttered specifically **515** tefilos in order to elevate his tefilos through **515** levels up to the Kisei HaKavod. According to the Gemara (Chagigah 12b), there are seven firmaments (heavens): **"ואלו"** **הן, וילון, רקיע, שחקים, זבול, מעון, מכון, ערבות"**—which are named here. Furthermore, the Gemara (ibid. 13a) teaches us that the Kisei HaKavod upon which HKB"H sits, so to speak, sits above them and is carried by holy, angelic creatures called **"Chayos."**

Now, the Gemara states that the distance between the earth and the first heaven is a five-hundred-year journey. So is the thickness of each of the seven heavens. So, too, is the airspace between each heaven. All in all, the legs of the Chayos stand above the earth a journey of **15 times 500** years.

With regards to the holy Chayos that carry the Kisei HaKavod, it says (Yechezkel 1, 7): **"ורגליהם רגל ישרה"—their legs were a straight leg.** Tosafos (Chagigah 13a) note that the gematria of the word **"ישרה" (straight)** equals **515**—**תקט"ו**. Now, if we separate these letters as follows: **ט"ו (15)** and **ת"ק (500)**—they represent the fact that the legs of the Chayos stand **15 times 500** years above the earth. How so? There are seven heavens with six airspaces between them. Additionally, there is an airspace between the earth and the first heaven and another one between the seventh heaven and the feet of the Chayos. Thus, we have seven heavens and eight airspaces, and they are each a 500-year journey. Hence, the distance between the earth and the feet of the Chayos is **15 times 500** years.

## The Tur's Enlightening Interpretation of the Berachah of "השיבנו"

We will now add a fascinating tidbit from the sacred teachings of Rabeinu Yaakov, the Ba'al HaTurim (O.C. 115). He discusses the fifth berachah of Shemoneh Esrei, the berachah of "**hashiveinu**," a supplication for teshuvah:

"חמישית השיבנו... ויש בה ט"ו תיבות, כנגד ט"ו תיבות שבפסוק (ישעיה נה-ז) יעזוב רשע דרכו [ואיש און מחשבותיו וישוב אל ה' וירחמהו ואל אלקינו כי ירבה לסלוח]... וגדולה תשובה שמגעת עד כסא הכבוד, ומן הארץ לרקיע מהלך ת"ק שנה, ועוביו של רקיע מהלך ת"ק שנה, וכן כל אויר שבין רקיע לרקיע, נמצא שבעה אוירים, ושבעה רקיעים, ולמעלה מהם כסא הכבוד, שהתשובה מגעת שם הרי ט"ו."

**It (the fifth berachah of "hashiveinu") is composed of 15 words corresponding to the 15 words in the passuk (Yeshayah 55, 7): "Let the wicked man forsake his way (and the iniquitous man his thoughts; let him return to Hashem, and He will show him mercy; to our G-d, for He is abundantly forgiving)" . . . And teshuvah is so great that it reaches the Kisei HaKavod; and from the earth to the heaven is a 500-year journey; and the thickness of the heaven is a 500-year journey; and so, too, is the airspace between one heaven and the next heaven. Thus, there are seven airspaces and seven heavens; and above them is the Kisei HaKavod to which the act of teshuvah reaches; so, there are 15 in all.**

The Beis Yosef explains his meaning: There are seven heavens; there are six airspaces between them; from the earth to the first heaven is an additional airspace; and from the uppermost heaven to the Kisei HaKavod is another airspace. Altogether there are 15 (500-year distances) from the earth to the Kisei HaKavod.

We can now return to the words of the Agra D'Kallah, who provides clarification of what the Megaleh Amukos deduced from the Midrash. After Moshe Rabeinu had offered **515** tefilos that opened up all the gates of heaven by eliminating all of the barriers that exist between the earth and the Kisei HaKavod, he wanted to offer one more tefilah to be

allowed to enter the land. Had he done so, that last tefilah would have ascended directly to the Kisei HaKavod, and he would have entered the land.

Unfortunately, Yisrael were not worthy of that happening. For, the time of the geulah with Moshe leading them into the land had not yet arrived. Therefore, HKB"H prevented him from praying that final tefilah. This then is the implication of what Moshe Rabeinu said to Yisrael: "**Hashem became angry with me because of you, and He did not listen to me; Hashem said to me, 'It is too much for you! Do not continue to speak to Me further concerning this matter.'**" In other words, HKB"H insisted that Moshe not offer one more tefilah on the grounds that He would be compelled to accept it, and Yisrael were not yet worthy.

### Moshe Shattered All the Iron Barriers to Pave the Way for Yisrael's Tefilos

Based on the insights of these two great luminaries—the Megaleh Amukos and the Agra D'Kallah—I would like to propose a novel explanation with the utmost reverence and adoration. As a result of the **515** supplications of Moshe Rabeinu, Yisrael's foremost prophet and its loyal shepherd, Moshe shattered all the iron barriers that exist between the earth and the Kisei HaKavod. Thus, he paved the way for all of Yisrael's tefilos to be received and accepted with divine mercy and divine goodwill by HKB"H sitting atop His Kisei HaKavod.

This leads us to an incredible conclusion. In reality, all of Moshe Rabeinu's **515** tefilos, bar none, were accepted by HKB"H with "rachamim" and "ratzon." In other words, each tefilah shattered one iron barrier. It was precisely for this reason that after Moshe completed all **515** supplications, HKB"H stopped him by saying: "**Do not continue to speak to Me further concerning this matter.**" For, had he offered one more tefilah, it would have most definitely reached the Kisei HaKavod. That would have forced HKB"H to accept it and let him into the land; but the time for that had not yet arrived.

With this understanding, we can also now appreciate why HKB”H did not prevent Moshe from praying his first **515** tefilos. Surely, after the very first supplication, HKB”H could have told him not to continue discussing the matter. He did not do so, because He wanted Moshe to offer those tefilos to shatter all the existing barriers between earth and the Kisei HaKavod. HKB”H wanted Moshe to pave the way for the tefilos of Yisrael to ascend to the heavens.

With immense joy, we can now shed some light on Chazal’s profound elucidation of the passuk: **“ואתחנן”** אל ה’ בעת ההיא לאמר. **What is meant by the word “(saying)?”** Rabbi Azaryah said: **He was telling all future generations to pray in times of distress.** Here is an explanation in keeping with our current discussion. We have explained that HKB”H did not prevent Moshe Rabeinu from offering **515** tefilos, the numerical value of the word **“ואתחנן”**. Only after he had shattered all of the barriers between the earth and the Kisei HaKavod did HKB”H say to him: **“Enough! Do not continue to speak to Me further concerning this matter.”** Thus, we learn from this sequence of events that **“לאמר”** means **telling all future generations to pray in times of need**, since all the barriers to their tefilos had been removed, and the gates were open to receive their tefilos.

**“Like Hashem, our G-d,  
whenever we call to Him”**

This explains beautifully what Moshe Rabeinu said to Yisrael in this week’s parsha (Devarim 4, 7): **“כי מי גוי—גדול אשר לו אלקים קרובים אליו כה’ אלקינו בכל קראנו אליו”** **for who is a great nation that has a G-d Who is close to it, as is Hashem, our G-d, whenever we call to Him?** In the Talmud Yerushalmi (Berachos 9, 1), Rabbi Simlai explains to his talmidim the unique, close relationship between HKB”H and Yisrael based on this passuk:

**“הקב”ה נראה רחוק ואין קרוב ממנו, דאמר לוי מהארץ ועד לרקיע מהלך ת”ק שנה, ומרקיע לרקיע מהלך ת”ק שנה, ועביו של רקיע ת”ק שנה, וכן לכל רקיע ורקיע... ראה כמה הוא גבוה מעולמו, ואדם נכנס לבית הכנסת, ועומד אחורי העמוד, ומתפלל בלחשיה, והקב”ה מאזין את תפלתו, שנאמר וחנה היא**

מדברת על לבה, רק שפותיה נעות וקולה לא ישמע, והאזין הקב”ה את תפילתה, וכן כל בריותיו שנאמר תפילה לעני כי יעטוף, כאדם המשיח באוזן חבירו והוא שומע, וכי יש לך אלוך קרוב מזה, שהוא קרוב לבריותיו כפה לאוזן”.

**HKB”H appears to be far away, yet there is no one closer than Him. As Levi said: From the earth to the (first) heaven is a 500-year journey; from one heaven to the next heaven is a 500-year journey; the thickness of each heaven is a 500-year journey; and so is each and every heaven . . . See how much higher He is than His world! Yet a person enters the synagogue, stands behind a pillar, prays in a whisper, and HKB”H listens to his prayer, as it has states (Shmuel I 1, 13): “Chana was speaking to herself, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard.” Yet, HKB”H listened to her prayer. And so it is with all His creatures, as it states (Tehillim 102, 1): “A prayer of the poor when he wraps himself up.” It is like a man whispering into the ear of his friend and the latter hears. Can you have a G-d who is closer than that, Who is as close to His creatures as a mouth next to an ear?!”**

In keeping with our discussion, Moshe Rabeinu wanted to reassure Yisrael and encourage them that whenever a time of distress would arise, they should pray to HKB”H—as we learned from the Midrash above. But seeing as HKB”H did not respond favorably to his supplications, Yisrael were liable to think mistakenly that tefilah is not effective or helpful.

Therefore, to encourage them, Moshe Rabeinu said to them: Look, I have prayed **515** tefilos and have shattered all of the barriers obstructing your tefilos between the earth and the Kisei HaKavod. Hence, I want you to know full-well: **“For who is a great nation that has a G-d Who is close to it, as is Hashem, our G-d, whenever we call to Him?!”** And as Rabbi Simlai taught: Even though HKB”H sits upon His Kisei HaKavod, a distance of **15** times a journey of **500** years, nevertheless He is as close as a man whispering in his friend’s ear. As such, HKB”H hears all of our tefilos. This was all

made possible on account of the **515** tefilos uttered by Moshe Rabeinu.

**“Fast and Pray” for Moshe Rabeinu to Enter the Land with the Future Geulah**

Proceeding along this sublime path, we will now explain in greater depth the mnemonic given by the Geonim “צומו וצלו” connected to the reading of parshas Va’etchanan after the fast of Tishah B’Av. They were commanding us to **“fast”** on Tishah B’Av and then **“pray”** with the reading of parshas Va’etchanan. Now, the Megaleh Amukos on Va’etchanan (20) teaches that Moshe Rabeinu yearned to enter the land, so that he himself would build the Beis HaMikdash.

This is the underlying meaning of his statement: “ה' אלקים אתה החלות להראות את עבדך את גדלך ואת ירך החזקה”—**Hashem-Elokim, you have begun to show Your servant Your greatness and Your strong hand.** The first letters of the three words אתה אה"ל (tent). This is an allusion to the Mishkan, which was a portable tent that was transported from place to place in the midbar. In other words, Moshe was saying to Hashem that He had commanded him to build the Mishkan, the Sanctuary where the Shechinah was destined to dwell. This was how You began to show me Your greatness and Your strong hand.

And now that the time has arrived to build the permanent Sanctuary in Yerushalayim: **“Let me now cross and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan—this good mountain and the Lebanon.”** Rashi clarifies: **“This good mountain” refers to Yerushalayim; “the Lebanon” refers to the Beis HaMikdash.** To which HKB”H responded: **“Enough! Do not continue to speak to Me further concerning this matter.”** Let us explain this based on a teaching in the Gemara (Sotah 9a):

“דרש רבי חנינא בר פפא, מאי דכתיב רננו צדיקים בה' לישרים נאווה תהלה, אל תקרי נאווה תהלה אלא נוה תהלה, זה משה ודוד שלא שלטו שונאיהם במעשיהם, דוד דכתיב טבעו בארץ שעריה, משה דאמר מר משנבנה מקדש ראשון נגזז אהל מועד קרשיו ובריחיו ועמודיו ואדניו.”

**Rabbi Chinana bar Pappa expounded: What is the meaning of that which is written (Tehillim 33, 1): “Sing joyfully tzaddikim because of Hashem; for the upright praise is fitting”? Do not read it as praise is “fitting,” but rather as “a palace of” praise. This refers to Moshe and David, for their enemies did not gain control of their handiwork. Of David, for it is written (Eichah 2, 9): “Its gates sunk in the earth.” Regarding Moshe, the master said: When the first Mikdash was built, the Ohel Mo’ed was hidden—its beams, its hooks, its bars, its pillars and its sockets.**

Now, we know that when the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed, HKB”H poured out His wrath on the wood and stones of the structure. Thus, He spared Yisrael from annihilation. This is explained in the Midrash (Eichah Rabbah 4, 14) in relation to the passuk (Tehillim 79, 1):

**“A psalm to Assaf: O G-d! The nations have entered into your inheritance.” Why is this psalm referred to as a hymn or joyous song, rather than a lament or dirge? . . . This is what they said to Assaf: “HKB”H destroyed the Heichal and the Mikdash, and you are sitting around and composing songs?” Assaf replied: “I am rejoicing that HKB”H poured out His wrath upon wooden beams and stones rather than upon Yisrael.”**

Accordingly, had Moshe Rabeinu been allowed to enter the land and build the Beis HaMikdash, HKB”H would not have been able to pour out His wrath on the wooden beams and stones. For, as we learned in the Midrash, the enemies of Yisrael had no power over Moshe’s handiwork. This is the implication of HKB”H’s remark to Moshe: “רב לך”—your spiritual level is exceedingly high and is beyond the powers of Yisrael’s enemies. Therefore, I cannot allow you to cross the Yarden and build the Beis HaMikdash. For, then I would be compelled, chas v’shalom, to pour out My wrath on Yisrael.

**Moshe Rabeinu the Redeemer from Mitzrayim  
Will Be the Redeemer of the Future Geulah**

Now, the Zohar hakadosh (Mishpatim 120a) teaches that Moshe Rabeinu, who redeemed our forefathers from Mitzrayim, he will be the Mashiah, who will redeem us le'asid la'vo. This is alluded by the passuk (Koheles 1, 9): "מה שהיה הוא שיהיה"—**that which was, it will be.** Note that the first letters of the first three words spell משה. Thus, the passuk is saying: "מה שהיה"—**what was**—namely, that Moshe was the redeemer in the past during the first geulah (from Mitzrayim); so, too, "הוא שיהיה"—**he will be** the redeemer once again of the final geulah.

Elsewhere, the Zohar hakadosh teaches (Bereishis 25b): "לא יסור שבט מיהודה, דא משיח בן דוד, ומחוקק מבין רגליו, דא משיח בן יוסף, עד כי יבא שיל"ה דא משיח, חושבן דא כדא". The passuk says: "**The staff shall not depart from Yehudah**"—this alludes to Mashiah the son of David; "**nor a lawgiver from between his feet**"—alludes to Mashiah the son of Yosef; "**until Shiloh arrives**"—alludes to Moshe; for the numerical value of שיל"ה is the same as the numerical value of משיח; both equal exactly 345. The Ohr HaChaim hakadosh (Bereishis 49, 11) explains that Mashiah's neshamah will contain elements from both David HaMelech and Moshe Rabeinu. Thus, there is no contradiction.

We can now interpret the passuk above in this light: "אל תוסף דבר אלי עוד בדבר הזה". You yourself, Moshe,

cannot pray one more tefilah to enter the land and build the Beis HaMikdash. For, as we have learned, it would lead to the annihilation of Yisrael. It is incumbent on Bnei Yisrael, however, to offer that last tefilah. By praying for the future geulah, Moshe Rabeinu will then enter Eretz Yisrael as the Melech HaMashiah, and he will build the third Beis HaMikdash, which will stand for eternity.

This enlightens us with regards to the mnemonic proposed by the Geonim for always reading parshas Va'etchanan after Tishah B'Av: "צומו וצלו"—**fast and pray.** In their own inimitable way, they alluded to the magnificent connection between the two acts. First, we are required to "**fast**" on Tishah B'Av, for the churban of the Beis HaMikdash, when HKB"H poured out His wrath on its wooden beams and stones rather than on Yisrael. Thus, it turns out that we are responsible for Moshe Rabeinu not being allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael to build the Beis HaMikdash.

Therefore, to make amends, after fulfilling the command of "צומו" on Tishah B'Av, we are commanded "וצלו". We must read parshas Va'etchanan, where Moshe appeals to HKB"H with **515** tefilos to enter the land. From there, we learn that it is incumbent upon us to complete his last tefilah by praying for the future geulah. In answer to our tefilos, Moshe Rabeinu will enter the land and build the Beis HaMikdash—swiftly, in our times! Amen.

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