

Sukkos, 5775 - 2014: The Power of Tehillim

Rabbi Zeev Smason, NHBZ

We had guests over Yom Tov. You did also -- even if you didn't realize it. *Ushpizin*, an Aramaic word that means "guests", refers to the seven special guests who come to visit us in the *sukkah*, one for each of the seven days of the festival. And when I say 'special guests', that's exactly what I mean: the *ushpizin* are Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph, and King David.

The Zohar, the foremost book of Jewish mysticism, explains that the Sukkah generates such an intense concentration of spiritual energy, that the divine presence actually manifests itself there in a similar way to the Garden of Eden. During Sukkot the souls of the seven great leaders of Israel actually leave Gan Eden to partake in the divine light of the earthly Sukkot.

Each day of Sukkot, all seven souls are present, but each takes his turn to lead the other six. And on the seventh day, our sukkot will be visited by Dovid HaMelech, King David. The Hebrew name Dovid means 'beloved', like the female Hebrew 'Dodi' (*lecha Dodi* -- come, my beloved). And David was indeed beloved to Hashem.

Today's talk is about the power of Tehillim (Psalms). I've divided my presentation into four sections:

- 1) About the Author
- 2) What is the greatness of Sefer Tehillim?
- 3) Why is Tehillim the first resort when something happens?
- 4) When and how should we go about saying Tehillim?

1) About the Author

The Zohar states that the three letters of Adam's name, aleph, daled, mem, represent the initials of three men -- Adam, Dovid, and Moshiach (messiah). What Adam began, David continued, and messiah will complete. Adam, the first human, was shown all future generations. He saw the soul of David, which had no body. He offered David 70 years of his own life as a result of which, Adam lived only 930 of the 1000 years originally allotted to him. Hashem therefore gave David a body that would live 70 years.

This teaching from the Zohar raises a number of interesting questions: If Hashem created David's soul, why didn't He initially create a body to accompany it? Why did Adam have to intervene? And why did Adam give him 70 years, not the 120 we traditionally pray for? But let's focus on David's greatest contribution -- the 'continuity' of Adam's work, Sefer Tehillim, known in English as the Book of Psalms.

2) What is the greatness of Sefer Tehillim?

Dovid HaMelech put together Tehilim in five books, corresponding to the five books of the Torah. We find that the whole Torah is included and hidden in Tehillim. When Dovid HaMelech would suffer, he would look in the letters and words of that tzarah (difficulty) in the Torah and compose a chapter of Tehilim, which was revealed to him through the light of the Torah. And each chapter of Tehilim certainly corresponds to a chapter in the Torah.

David HaMelech wrote Tehilim with Ruach Hakodesh (Divine Inspiration). When one recites Tehilim, it is as great as if Dovid HaMelech, himself, is saying it. The Ruach HaKodesh is still in the words of Tehilim. When you recite Tehilim, your own breath arouses the Holy Breath in these words. Therefore, when you recite Tehilim, it is as if Dovid Hamelech himself is reciting it.

3) "Why is Tehillim the first resort when something happens?"

When something goes wrong, the first thing Jews do is organize a Tehillim drive. Individuals and groups say Tehillim for the benefit of a sick person, a catastrophe, or some other difficulty. The recitation of Tehillim has tremendous power -- as the following story indicates.

A woman was driving on the highway when she saw a serious accident that had just occurred. Horrified, she recited a chapter of Tehillim on behalf of the injured.

A few months later she received a call. "Were you driving on route [number] around [something] o'clock on [such-and-such a date], and did you pass an accident?" the caller asked.

"Yes," the woman replied in surprise.

"I want to thank you for my life," the caller told her. "I was in that accident. I died, and my soul left my body. As it rose, I saw a car drive by with your license plate. Letters of Tehillim were ascending heavenward from the car. They pulled me back to earth."

Similarly, in the positive context, a kallah (bride) says Tehillim as she waits for her chosson (groom) to veil her before the chuppah ceremony.

Why does Tehillim have such a power in the Jewish mind and heart?

--- The third Lubavitcher Rebbe said that if people knew the power of tehilim we would never want to stop saying it.

--- The Tzemach Tzedek says that Tehilim breaks all the barriers and ascends before Hashem and works wonders.

-- When the Jewish People recite Tehilim with a broken heart, the Almighty forgives all their sins. (Mayim Rabbim) The words of Tehillim have a power to effect changes in the Higher

Realm.

-- When we bring a korban (offering) to Hashem, we should bring an unblemished, beautiful animal - the best that we have. Now that we have no Beis Hamikdash (Holy Temple), we follow the words of the prophet Hoshea, "let our lips substitute for bulls." So our prayers, our words of praise, requests, and thanksgiving, are like korbonos to Hashem. In that light, the words of Tehillim, pure and beautiful, represent some of the choicest offerings that we can bring. The recitation of Tehillim can change us.

4)) When and how should we go about saying Tehillim?

-- One who recites Tehilim every day is assured that he is a "Ben Olam Habah" -- deserving of a place in the World to Come.

-- Baba Sali would say that every Jew is required to complete Sefer Tehilim at least once a month, and that there is special significance and power in the words of Dovid HaMelech and they can work wonders.

-- Parnasa (livelihood): It is a segula (a benefit) for parnasa to recite any three chapters of Tehilim, specifically, after davening.

-- Weapon against the Yetzer Hora (Evil Inclination): Reciting Sefer Tehilim three times in one day is like sword and spear against the yetzer hara. (Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov)

-- Pidyon: If one learns Tehilim with kavana (proper intent) it's a pidyon, redemption, from all types of disasters and tragedies. Perhaps, that's why Dovid composed 150 chapters equal to the gematria of פדיון. Through the studying and recitation of Tehilim with kavana one can redeem himself from all types of misfortunes.

--- Women in Labor: Arizal says that Chapter 20 is good to say for mercy for a woman in labor. It has 9 pesukim (verses) corresponding to 9 months of labor and 70 words corresponding to the 70 pains of childbirth.

-- Harsh decrees, that the nations decree on Yisroel, recite chapter 62

--- For Barren Woman: A segula for a barren woman to bear children is to recite chapter 102.

--- Shidduch: The source for saying Tehilim 121 is a Medrash that says Yaakov Avinu (Jacob) said this, praying to find his match. The first posuk says "From where will my helper (meaning wife) come?" And the next posuk says "My help (wife) will come from Hashem".

--- Corresponding to Age The Baal HaTanya received from his Rebbe, who received from the Baal Shem Tov, who received from his teacher a minhag that one should recite the chapter of Tehilim corresponding to one's next Birthday. So, for example, if a boy turns 13, he would recite Chapter 14 everyday, and on every Rosh Chodesh, study that chapter with Rashi.

--- Chapter 119

There are eight pesukim for each letter in Chapter 119. There is a minhag to recite the letters making up the name of a sick person. Then, the mother's name is used and after the name the words קרע שטן are added

When praying at a grave. You would take the name of the deceased and read each section of Chapter 119 corresponding to the letters of the name than the letters for בת/בן, then the father's name and then the letters of נשמה

Conclusion:

When King Solomon wanted to open the gates to the Temple, they stuck together. He offered 24 different prayers, but to no avail. He then invoked King David's merit, and the gates opened. Concerning this, it says (Tehillim 24:9): "Gates shall raise their heads."

The gates would not open in response to King Solomon's 24 prayers because Jews are not perfect. King Solomon understood that perfection comes not through being whole—which no one can be—but from being responsive. He therefore invoked David's merit, because David was perfectly responsive.

David was the ultimate responder. Thus, our saying Tehillim is meant to invoke appropriate responses to different life situations. Tehillim therefore teaches us that we can be elevated. Similarly, King Solomon's prayers resulted in the gates of the Temple not being separated, but raised. Letters of Tehillim ascend heavenward.

Let us raise ourselves-- and others -- by utilizing the power Tehillim.