

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

The Secret To Receiving God's Blessings

The final two portions of the Torah, Haazinu and Vezos Haberacha (Deuteronomy 32:1-34:12), contain a song and a blessing.

In the song, Moses urges the Jewish people to reflect on their past and remember that God guarantees Israel's survival. Furthermore, despite the many challenges Israel will endure the Jewish people will witness the downfall of their enemies

In retrospect, we can see how true these words are. Although the Jewish people suffered terribly at the hands of their enemies, the Jews survived and our powerful foes like the Babylonians, Greeks, Romans, and Nazis are no more.

Moses' final words are both a blessing and prophecy directed to each tribe according to their unique responsibilities and strengths. These words of love and praise reassure the Jewish people that they will fulfill their divine mission and receive rewards that will eclipse the horrors they will endure.

Spiritually a song represents unity because it is sung in unison. As it says, "*Burst out, sing in unison*" (Isaiah 52:9). Despite our differences, the secret of Jewish survival is the Jewish unity expressed in our universal belief in one God. The words "*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one*" (Deuteronomy 6:4) pronounce God's unity and are the most recognized and important Jewish prayer.

Accepting God's unity elicits God's blessings, and so does living in unity. King David expresses it this way, "*Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity... for there God bestows his blessing*" (Psalm 133:1-3).

These words are so significant they are recalled in the well-known Hebrew song - Hinei Ma Tov U'Ma Naim Shevet Achim Gam Yachad.

The Jewish scriptures are replete with examples of the Jewish people referred to as a single individual. As it says, "*And the people gathered as one man*" (Nehemiah 8:1).

Another example is in the verse, "*You are My witnesses, says the Lord, and My servant, whom I have chosen*" (Isaiah 43:10). It is noteworthy that the Jewish people are interchangeably referred to in the plural as God's "*witnesses*" and then in the singular as God's "*servant*."

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The final portions of the Torah use an unusual Hebrew word to refer to the Jewish people in the plural. The Hebrew word is “למֹו–lamow” and is used more than 50 times in the Jewish scriptures. In every instant, the context demonstrates that it has a plural meaning of “*them*” or “*they*.” This is true even when it is used in reference to a nation or idolatry, which are plural by their very nature.

The word “למֹו–lamow” is found twice [Deuteronomy 32:32 and 32:35] in the portion of Haazinu. In the portion of Vezos Haberach this word also appears twice. One verse describes God as coming “*forth from Sinai and having shone forth to them [Israel] from Seir*” (Deut. 33:1). Another verse says, “*with his right hand he presented the fiery Torah to them [Israel]*” (Deuteronomy 33:1).

Since “למֹו–lamow” is biblical Hebrew, many Israelis are unfamiliar with it since they speak modern Hebrew. No wonder Israel missionaries miss its significance when Isaiah proclaims, “*for the transgression of my people [the nations] they–למֹו [the Jewish people] were stricken*” (Isaiah 53:8).

When translated properly, these words dispel the missionary claim that Isaiah 53 cannot be speaking about the Jewish people since it is written “exclusively” in the singular. It isn’t!

Furthermore, when read in context and in the original language, the straightforward meaning of Isaiah 53 is unmistakable. Isaiah refers to the Jewish people as one individual who suffers from [because of] the evil perpetrated on them by the nations of the world.

Missionaries blatantly mistranslate Isaiah 53 to make it sound like someone is suffering “for” our sins. Christians translate this verse as “*he was wounded for our transgressions*” (Isaiah 53:5). However, this verse contains the Hebrew prefix “מ–mem” before the word “sin” which unquestionably means “from.” Therefore, the correct translation of this verse is “*he was wounded from our transgressions.*”

There is an essential difference between saying that someone suffered “for” (vicariously) you or “from” you.

The unity of the Jewish people and our acknowledgment of God’s unity are the secret of Jewish survival and the source of blessings. May this Shabbat provide opportunities to experience unity and may you receive blessings along with the entire Jewish people.

Shabbat Shalom,

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