

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

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There is a difficult Midrash (D'varim Rabba 9:6) which depicts Moshe as being despondent and even upset when HaShem tells him, "Behold (HEIN), your days are drawing near to die." (31:14) "With the word HEIN, Behold, I praised you (see D'varim 10:14), and now, you use that word to decree my death?" HaShem responds: "Moshe, do you not remember when I sent you to redeem the Jews from Egypt, you refused, saying (Sh'mot 4:1), V'HEIN, Behold, they will not believe me and they will not heed my voice.' Therefore, I now decree death upon you with the word HEIN, Behold."

The question is plain. Here's how Rav Pam put it: What indeed was Moshe's mistake. Why would he believe that a people who - for 210 years - had discarded the mitzva of brit mila, who were steeped in idolatry and the depravities of Egypt, and had descended to the 49th level of spiritual impurity - why would such a people respond positively to the word of HaShem? Moshe was convinced his mission would end in abject failure. And ..., that was his mistake.

The Chofetz Chayim (Al HaTorah, p.95) explains that Moshe was guilty of CHOSHEID BICH-SHEIRIM, of sus-

pecting innocent people, of not believing that, notwithstanding their delinquent behavior, the people had within them the purity of soul to hear the voice of Gd and believe that they could be redeemed and elevated. And, in fact, that is exactly what happened. When Moshe finally did proclaim to them HaShem's desire to liberate them and take them unto Himself as His Chosen Nation, the people did believe (Sh'mot 4:31).

The word, HEIN, explains the Chofetz Chayim, is an expression of unequivocal certainty. Employed by Moshe, it signified that Moshe firmly believed that the people would ignore the miracles he performed and turn their backs on HaShem. And so, measure for measure, after Moshe's repeated pleadings to rescind the decree forbidding him to enter Israel, HaShem responds with a final, definitive "no", and does so with the word, HEIN. Clearly, Moshe's misreading of Israel's true religious potential should not be lost upon us, especially as we approach the coming Yamim Nora'im.

This lesson is twofold: First, one must never give up on any Jew no matter how far that person has strayed. The stain of sin can always be cleansed. Rav Soloveitchik has often referenced the Ba'al HaTanya to the effect that sin is only incidental to the neshama of the Jew; it cannot be blemished. Rather, sin encrusts the

soul in layers of impurity making it difficult for it to sense its spiritual Father. However, as Chazal comment on the verse, "I am asleep, but my heart is awake" (Shir HaShirim 5:2), "my heart" refers to HaShem. The Jew may slumber, caught in the thicket of sin, and lose consciousness of Gd, but HaShem still occupies his soul. There is an indestructible spark of holiness deeply embedded in every Jew's neshama, and that spark can be ignited into a blazing fire of renewed commitment to all that is sacred and precious in our great Mesorah.

The second message is no less critical. A person should never give up on him/herself! As the New Year draws near and we reflect back upon the past year, we may despair of initiating any real changes in our unhealthy behaviors and deeds. How many times did we try to be more patient and control our anger; how many times did we resolve to be more considerate and caring to those of our family and friends; how many times did we commit to improve our religious service to HaShem through Torah study and slower prayer; how many times, how many times...? And we so often fell short.

There is a story of a young Torah scholar who happened upon the Gerer Rebbe at the Kotel. He hesitatingly approached the great

Chassidic leader and asked, "What is it about HaShem that I should know before Rosh HaShana? The Rebbe responded cryptically, "Know that HaShem never laughs!" The student didn't quite know what to make of the answer. He was afraid to ask, and so returned to the Gerer Beis Midrash and asked the Rebbe's relative. This is what he was told: Say, a student comes late to class one day with an excuse. The teacher listens and accepts his explanation. The next day, the student is late again with another extenuation. Again, the teacher pardons the boy, but admonishes him not to be late again. Well, on day three, the boy comes in with yet another excuse. At this point, the teacher begins to laugh. "Do you really expect me to forgive you again?!" HaShem never laughs!

The lesson here could not be more straightforward. From HaShem's perspective, it matters not one iota whether we've failed countless times in our resolve to be better. We may erroneously believe that because of our errant behavior, HaShem has abandoned us. But, as S'forno comments, Gd has not moved at all. He is simply waiting for us to return to Him. And when we do, He never laughs!

Ramban, in his interpretation of the verse, "For this mitzva that I command you this day ... is not hidden

or distant from you; it is not in the heavens ... nor beyond the sea. Rather the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart to perform it" (30:11-14), maintains that the mitzva of which the verse speaks is the mitzva of t'shuva, repentance. Indeed, we must believe it is always possible to return to our Maker, and that no transgression, no matter its frequency or severity, can prevent that wondrous and emotional reconciliation from taking place.

As we approach the Yamim Nora'im, we must never forget that HaShem never laughs! 🙌