



Shlach: The Smallest Letter

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

"The Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Send out for yourself men who will scout the Land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel. You shall send one man each for his father's tribe; each one shall be a chieftain in their midst." So Moses sent them from the desert of Paran by the word of the Lord. All of them were men of distinction; they were the heads of the children of Israel ... These are the names of the men Moses sent to scout the Land, and Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua (Bamidbar 13:1-3, 16)."

We have all had ideas that in the moment appeared to be good and solid and in retrospect were flawed and impetuous. We were steps away from the actualization of the promise God had made to Avraham. The Land we had dreamed of and pined for was within arm's reach. Moshe appointed tribal representatives to go in and scout the land. The goal was to bring back necessary reconnaissance information and inspire the people to enter, engage and actualize their destiny. Before dispatching the scouts, Moshe pulled Hoshea aside and gave him a special blessing in which he changed Hoshea's name to Yehoshua. The commentaries are intrigued by the meaning and timing of this name change, but I want to focus your attention on a moving passage in the Yerushalmi (Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin Chapter 2):

Rav Huna said in the name of Rav Acha: The (letter) YUD that God took from the matriarch Sarah's name (Sarah was originally Sarai) came and prostrated itself in front of God and said, 'Master of the Universe, You have uprooted me from the name of this great and pious women, what will be with me? God explains, 'Do not fear, in the past you were the last letter in (Sarah's) name, now you will be the first.'

The Rabbis explain that the letter "YUD" which was added to Hoshea to make it Yehoshua was the YUD removed from Sarai's name when she became Sarah. What is the connection between Sarah and Yehoshua? There are many answers and perhaps, in subsequent years we can discuss. What intrigued me most was the distressed YUD. The YUD is the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Perhaps, the YUD represents the YID (Jew in Yiddish). There are times in life when we feel so small, times in life when we feel insignificant and then when we finally manage to achieve some level of connection often it is taken from us as a result of circumstances beyond our control.

There are so many within our community who feel marginalized and small. There are many battling mental illness whose scars are not visible on the outside. Yet, day after day, these individuals and their families face overwhelming challenges that at times seem insurmountable. There are those who have difficulties within their life relationships who have so much love to give but can't seem to find the right way to express their feelings or don't have a partner who is receptive. There are those who struggle financially, who feel trapped in their mountain of debt and obligation. And of course there is the community of cholim (those who are physically ill) whose life and the lives of their family members focus on treatments, appointments, trials and clinical studies, desperate to find the cure that can restore all-important life. There are many beautiful and holy YUDs who are struggling and trying to find their way. And often these YUDs open their hearts before God and say, "*Ribbono Shel Olam (Master of the Universe), I feel so lost, I feel so listless. I thought I had a place in this world and now I am not sure.*" To which God responds, "*My dear YUD, I promise there is greatness and beauty waiting for you. You feel like you are the end of your rope (name), I promise you that your circumstances represent new opportunities for growth and self-actualization.*"

The YUD may be the smallest letter, but it has incredible power and potential. You see, YUD is the one letter which also represents the name of God. The smallest letter, yet the most powerful one. Sometimes, it is the smallest Yid (Jew) who can disseminate the greatest amount of light.

There was a beautiful and innocent YUD taken from us this week. Hallel Yaffa Ariel HY'D, a bright and kind 13 year old girl from the community of Kiryat Arba was brutally murdered by a Palestinian terrorist. Hallel was a gifted student and talented dancer. Rina Ariel (Halle's mother) in her eulogy for her beloved daughter said, "*I call upon the Avot and Imahot (Matriarchs and Patriarchs) to watch over my daughter in Heaven. Miriam (a reference to the sister of Moshe Rabbeinu) I ask you to make room next to God's holy seat so that Hallel can dance.*"

A beautiful YUD, a holy Yid, with so much to give, so much to accomplish taken from us in such a horrific fashion. I am sure that Hallel in her short life, accomplished much. This is the power of the YUD.