

Parashat Sh'lach Lecha 5784, 2024:

The Letter Yud

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו כל בני ישראל, בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

Our *parasha* contains a *pasuk* with a puzzling phrase: “These are the names of the men Moshe sent to scout the Land, and Moshe called (vayikra Moshe) Hoshea the son of Nun, Yehoshua.” (*Sefer Bamidbar* 13:16, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) At first glance, the concluding part of this verse seems to indicate that something new has taken place, namely, that Moshe has renamed Hoshea, “Yehoshua.” Yet, this name is hardly new, as it appears eight times before in both *Sefer Shemot* and *Sefer Bamidbar*. Moreover, the name Hoshea is not supplanted by the appellation Yehoshua, since it appears once again in *Sefer Devarim* 32:44: “And Moshe came and spoke all the words of this song into the ears of the people, he and Hoshea the son of Nun.” What, then, is the Torah teaching us when it states: “and Moshe called Hoshea the son of Nun, Yehoshua?”

The classic answer to our question is found both in *Talmud Bavli*, *Sotah* 34b and Rashi’s (1040-1105) *Commentary on the Torah*. According to these sources, Moshe was afraid the *meraglim* would have a negative influence on Hoshea and sought to protect him by renaming him Yehoshua: “May Hashem save you from the counsel of the Scouts.” This is the case, since the Hebrew origin of this name is a contraction of “*Y-ah*” (represented by the letter *yud*) and “*Hoshea*,” denoting the idea, “Hashem should save you.” My rebbe and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, expands upon the underlying meaning of the addition of the *yud* to Hoshea’s name in the following midrashically-suffused analysis:

Prior to sending the spies to scout the land, Moses changed Hoshea's name to Joshua, signifying that G-d should save him from the evil designs of the other spies (Rashi). The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabbah* 47:1) indicates that Moses effected this change by transferring the letter *yud* from Sarah's former name (*Sarai*) to Joshua's. (*Chumash Mesoras HaRav, Sefer Bamidbar: With Commentary Based upon the Teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, this and the following quotes, page 100, brackets my own*)

At this point, the Rav examines the meaning of the letter *yud* and explains that it represents privacy and separation. When Sarah was called "*Sarai*" (with a *yud*), she was "the matriarch of her family alone." Building upon this concept, the Rav notes that Hoshea needed to be keenly aware that he was completely different from the negatively predisposed scouts, so that he could remain steadfast in his commitment to the Promised Land:

Moses added the letter *yud* so Joshua would attain the sense of separation and withdrawal that was taken from Sarah [when she became "the matriarch of a family of nations"]... Moses changed Joshua's name so that he would have the strength to separate himself from...[the] collective entity [of the spies], enabling him to take a principled stand against the prevailing sentiment.

Based upon this understanding, we can more fully appreciate Rashi's further explication of the name Yehoshua. Crucially, his gloss adds the word, "prayed:" "He [Moshe] *prayed* concerning him [Yehoshua] that Hashem should protect him from the counsel of the Scouts." In other words, *vayikra Moshe* connotes much more than the idea of renaming; instead, it means, "and Moshe prayed." Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi (1455-1525) expands on this explication in his supercommentary on Rashi's *Commentary on the Torah*:

The explanation of the term "*vayikra*" in our *pasuk* is that of prayer (*tefilah*), as we find in the verse, "and Avraham called there in the name of Hashem." (*Sefer Bereishit* 13:4) Therefore, the explanation of the name, "Yehoshua," is: "Hashem should save you" ... as if it actually said, "And he [Moshe] prayed regarding Hoshea that Hashem should save you, that Hashem, may He be blessed, should save you from the advice of the spies." Moreover, it is essential to explain "*vayikra Moshe*" in this fashion, rather than in the normative sense [of "he called"], since there is no [other] reason for literally changing Hoshea's name at this juncture. (*Sefer Mizrahi, Sefer Bamidbar* 13:16, translation, brackets and underlining my own)

Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi's profound analysis teaches us the nearly unlimited power of *tefilah*. Moshe's prayer consisted of one extra letter added to Hoshea's name, yet we know it changed Jewish history forever, as Yehoshua would be chosen by Hashem to lead the Jewish people to *Eretz Yisrael*. If the letter *yud* has this great power, imagine what we can do when we encounter Hashem in heartfelt prayer.

Shabbat Shalom

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*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)