

Skipping Over the Mountains

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October 7, 2011



Once a week I teach a class on *Shir HaShirim* to a very lovely group of women in Jerusalem, and this week's lesson brought us to the verse: "The voice of my Beloved, behold it is come; skipping over the mountains, jumping over the hills." (*Shir HaShirim* 2:8) Whenever I can find a teaching of Rabbeinu or Reb Nosson on what we're learning, I always like to bring it in addition to the commentators on whom we usually rely.

The second chapter recalls the far past of the Jewish people, and this verse is our reminiscence of what it was like to first hear the promise of the coming redemption while we were still deep in the mire of Egypt, suffering. G-d's voice, conveyed by His emissary Moshe Rabbeinu, powered by the merits of the forefathers and foremothers, came rushing toward us in leaps and bounds over every obstacle, even compressing time so that the end came nearly two hundred years before it was anticipated.

These words fill me with such a hopeful yearning for redemption; just as it was then, so will it be in the future. (*Michah* 7:15)

But what about today?

In one of his letters, Reb Nosson of Breslov teaches a beautiful lesson about how we can translate the unfettered hope expressed in the verse for our lives right now.

"...The mountains and hills represent all of the obstacles laid in our path to keep us from drawing close to Hashem. The evil inclination is compared to a mountain...

[Note: The sages taught that, in this world, the wicked perceive their evil inclination as an insurmountable mountain, and so they don't even try to overcome it. In the end, they will be shown that it was only as broad as a hair—easily scaled. The righteous, on the other hand, look at their evil inclination as a hair in this world—they only focus on the next hairsbreadth of good to do and do not get caught up in fear—and in the next world they will be shown that it was really like a mountain, their hairsbreadths added up to such a towering height!]

"...And this is all the more true of someone who has already fallen; may Hashem save us from now on! Yet the Holy One skips over everything, for He is compared to a deer... Even though He 'stands behind our wall'—the barriers that we have thrown up through our sinning—nevertheless even an iron wall cannot stand between the Jewish people and their Father in heaven...

"...And even if our bitterness [at our own shortcomings] threatens to overwhelm us, nevertheless we merited to attach ourselves to a man [the tzaddik] who is so complete, and who has the ability to rectify everything. We need to learn a lesson from this attribute of Hashem's, this 'leaping and jumping' over all obstacles. I once told you in [Rebbe Nachman's] name that he praised a certain tzaddik who, upon leaving this world, said, 'Ibber geshpringen!'—'I skipped over!' We would not have known [the significance] of this, and certainly not have been able to follow this path without [Rebbe Nachman's] guidance...

"With this path, one can dance nearly every day, and certainly on Shabbos and the festivals...Un takeh fort hup nor geshpringen, un gohr nit ibber getracht. Gott iz mit unz! [Indeed, one must rejoice no matter what; one must just skip over it and not brood on it at all. Hashem is with us!]"
(Alim L'terufah, Letter #397)

As we stand on the verge of the holiest day of the year, a day of fasting and self-affliction, a day of sweet prayer and purity, we need to remember that the purpose of all our *avodah* is the restoration of our loving relationship with Hashem. We confess to wipe clean the slate, not to dwell and brood on what we have done wrong. We have five confessions that parallel the five times that the *kohein gadol* immersed and cleansed himself at each phase of the *avodah*. Every confession is a means of washing away the past as we move toward a clean and clear future. And may we merit to fulfill Rebbe Nachman's teaching—that tears of *teshuvah* must be rooted always in joy, directed toward restoring a joyful and loving connection with our Creator. The letters of the word for weeping, *bechiyah*, are formed by the initials of the phrase from *Tehillim*: "*B'shimchah yegilun kol ha'yom*"—"In Your Name, they rejoiced all the day long."

May Hashem help us to feel not deprivation on Yom Hakippurim, but liberation from the material things that bind us down, so that we are free to serve Him without any distractions. And for the mothers and others among us who will not be spending the day in synagogue, may we never forget that our homes are our sanctuaries, and the *kohanim* and *levi'im* spent their days not praying only, but speaking with Hashem while setting up the altars, slaughtering and preparing foods for the offerings, dealing with all of the sins great and small of the Jewish people, singing while they worked, and being, in their way, loving mothers to a very large and fractious family.

Wishing everyone an uplifting Yom Kippur, and may we meet on the other side, red transformed to white, ready to begin

again.