



Prayers and Tears at Mt. Meron
Parshas Tezaveh

In those fateful days, when Nazi Germany was working with full force to implement the Final Solution, six million Jews died during that horrendous period. In the end of 1942, Wehrmacht General Irwin Rommel was leading the German army from Africa towards the Land of Israel, but was stopped by the British at El Alamein in Egypt.

Communities in Israel congregated in prayer, beseeching G-d to send a speedy deliverance from possible annihilation. My Rebbe, Rabbi Moshe Mordechai of Lelov took it upon himself to work personally for the salvation of the Jews in Israel.

He traveled to Mt. Meron to the tomb of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, where he spent 40 days and nights immersed in prayer and Torah study, pouring his heart out before G-d.

The Rebbe fasted through the day and ate only a bit at night. He was sorrow stricken over the plight of his brethren. His followers feared for his health, but he would not listen to them. He was determined to defeat the enemy through prayer.

And then the watershed moment in the battle occurred, turning the tide and crowning the Allies victorious.

In our weekly parsha we learn of Moshe's self-sacrifice as a leader. He, who had led the Israelites through difficult and dangerous times, displayed here a different, higher form of leadership.

Moshe's name is mentioned in every parsha since his birth is recounted, but in this week's parsha, which recounts the construction of the Mishkan, Tabernacle, and its various holy vessels, Moshe's name is not mentioned.

Our Sages teach us in the Zohar¹ that the omission of Moshe's name here is deliberate. Moshe, who told G-d to remove his name from His holy book if he annihilated the Israelites in the desert after the sin of the gold calf, was now being taken to task for that statement and therefore his name was not mentioned in this week's parsha.

The Turim's commentary bring a similar line of thought, explaining that an oath made by a holy individual must be realized, and in these verses Moshe's oath is in fact realized.

What did Moshe mean when he stated "Let my name be taken out of Your book?"² and if his statement was required, why was he penalized for it?

The reason is that Moshe was a real leader who self-sacrificed himself for the Jewish nation. He proved that when he demanded that his name be stricken from the Torah, for the sake of the Jewish people. This was a true and lofty display of leadership.

This is what G-d meant at the first verse in our parsha – "and you shall command"³ – coming together with the Israelites, without being acknowledged as their leader, you have become one with them. And therefore "they shall take to you, pure olive oil"⁴ – you have sacrificed yourself for them, and therefore have merited that they take the oil to you, and the commandments will be in your name.

Great happiness was seen throughout the cities in Israel. General Rommel had come to the gates of Israel but failed to move forward.

Rabbi Yosef Turner, who himself has escaped the Nazis, accompanied the Rebbe during those days.

He later recounted how the Rebbe, during one of the tensest nights when he felt his prayers were not being answered, turned directly to Rabbi Shimon.

"Our master Bar Yochai, I know I have worked hard in the Heavens, and if my prayers go unanswered and I fail my mission in the world, I ask that nothing remain of me. I wish to bestow my merit of existence to the Jews living in Israel."

"Please G-d, in Merit of the holy rabbi, please withhold that evil man from entering the holy land, remove all threat from us and bring redemption to the residents of Your land," the Rebbe said.

Rabbi Turner further recounted how the Rebbe's Psalms book was drenched with his tears, and on the fortieth day the news came that Rommel had been defeated and that his armies were in retreat, without ever making it to Israel.

This force of self-sacrifice, up to the point of self-negation, for the Jewish people saved the Jews in Israel from total destruction. This is the power of a leader.

¹ Pinchas 246a.

² Shmot 32:32.

³ A play of words in Hebrew – "אתה תצווה" can also mean "צוותא," unison and coming together as one.

⁴ Shmot 27:20.