

# YIZKOR: KEEP THE WATER WARM - NOT TOO HOT!

Category: Holidays, Simchas Torah

*Let's examine the prayer for rain and its meaning.*

## Memory of Water

We stand now in the moments before Yizkor, when we ask that G-d remember our loved ones and bless their souls. Later in the service, we will continue with another “Yizkor” prayer - this time asking that G-d remember the fathers of our nation, our patriarchs. Actually, this “Yizkor” is a special prayer for rain, recited in the Musaf Service. In this prayer the word “Zechor (remember)” comes six separate times. We ask G-d to remember the deeds of our great Patriarchs and grant us rain for their sake. [If you'd like to follow along with me please open your Siddurim to pg. 356.]

The prayer begins with a request that G-d should tell “*Af Bri*,” the angel in charge of rain, to send us rain in the coming year.

In the first Zechor of the prayer we say: “Zechor—Remember [Abraham our] forefather who followed you like water.”

The nature of water is to flow on its own without any help or encouragement. This is true about Abraham as well—he discovered the Creator and Master of the universe by himself without anyone showing him the way. So we turn to G-d and say, “Remember how Abraham was drawn to You and clung to You with out any instruction at all!” and “For his sake, do not hold back water.”

The second Zechor is about Isaac, who was “careful in pouring out his heart [in prayer] like water.”

Pouring out your heart doesn't mean that while you pray tears are pouring down your face like water. Pouring out your heart in prayer means that you spill out everything that is in your heart the way only the closest friends can. You tell every secret and every worry. You share every joy and every sorrow. This was exactly

how Isaac's connection with G-d was. They had a warm, personal relationship.

This is how a Jew is supposed to pray to G-d. We must speak to G-d as though to dear friend or family member and we can be sure that G-d hears our prayers, feels our suffering and will alleviate our pain.

The third is: "Zechor—Remember the one who carried his staff," which is talking about Jacob who as everyone knows "...wrestled with an angel composed of fire and water."

But one thing seems strange about this Zechor. Angels are spiritual beings and they are not made of a physical matter. But here in the prayer the angel is described as being composed of fire and water. What exactly is that all about?

One possible explanation is that when you want to describe something as being supernatural you can say "it's made of fire and water," because fire and water are two things that can never co-exist. By describing the angel as being made of fire and water together, we see that this being has the power to do things that are physically impossible. (Like when G-d revealed Himself to Moses in the form of the burning bush. The bush was on fire yet it was not getting consumed by the fire, which is physically impossible.)

Therefore, when we mention Jacob we speak about how he succeeded in overcoming every obstacle that he faced in a way that can only be described as supernatural.

Next is Moses. Rabbis are constantly asked, "How is it that Moses himself disobeyed G-d's command and hit the rock instead of speaking to it?" The most famous answer is that Moses was upset, angry with the Jewish people for their kvetching against G-d and in his anger he made a mistake.

A more Chassidic perspective would be that Moses acted not out of anger but out love. "*Moshe Rabeinu*" was the ultimate leader of the Jewish people. He was faithful and devoted, and he loved the people like his own children. Moses felt the Jews' pain and this put him under a lot of stress. Wouldn't any parent whose children are in such a perilous situation become distressed, even desperate? Moses' heart was breaking as he saw his people, the men, women and children almost dying of thirst. Therefore when G-d commanded him to speak to the rock, he tried, as the Midrash tells us, but no waters came. So it's no wonder that

Moses quickly lost his patience and in his desperation to save his children he hit the rock, in effect defying G-d's command as long as the Jews would get water to drink.

Here in the prayer we mention this incidence as a great merit for Moses. It was a symbol of a true Jewish leader that he did everything in his power to obtain water for his people.

Now we come to Aharon the High Priest. We ask G-d to remember how the High Priest would immerse himself five times in a Mikvah of water on Yom Kippur. This is an indication of just how great the merit of immersing in a Mikvah is. You see, it is so great that on the holiest day of the year the holiest member of the holiest nation does it five times! (When any Jew goes to immerse in a Mikvah, especially when a Jewish woman goes to the Mikvah they are able to ask of G-d that in this merit they should be granted strong healthy children.)

And finally the last Zechor is about the twelve tribes of Israel or the entire Jewish people who throughout the generations have sacrificed themselves for the sake of G-d's name. We ask that they be remembered and that in their merit we should be granted rain.

## **The Meaning of Rain**

Now let's discuss rain.

The Hebrew word for rain is *Geshem*. *Geshem* comes from the word "*Gashmiut*" which means physicality. In Kabbalah, water is the symbol of all physical pleasure. Practically speaking it's clear that water means pleasure. Every vacation is to a place of sand and water, and the brochures of all the tourist companies are covered with pictures of beaches and water. Everyone's dream honeymoon is to the coast of some far away Island. And if the water off that coast is warm that's even better...

But if the water gets too warm that creates a problem. Not only is it no longer pleasurable or beneficial, it can even become destructive as we've seen all too clearly by the Tsunami which is what happens when the oceans warm up too much.

The lesson from all this is that we can enjoy life to a certain extent. A person is allowed to enjoy life, to have fun and splash around in the water, but we need to remain wary of waters that get too warm. We must never get too enthusiastic about "*Gashmiut*", our physical pleasures and desires. We mustn't cause our "*Geshem*" to get too warm, because water that gets too warm can cause a hurricane or Tsunami and get very destructive.

Fellow Jews, Zechor! We must always remember that G-d provides our *Gashmiut* with His holy, open and generous hand, and we may take pleasure in it. But the purpose of all of the *Gashmiut* that G-d gives is for us to make *Ruchniut* out of it, to make it spiritual. To uplift the physical things we own. In fact we can uplift every physical thing we come in contact with by using it in a way that is constructive in doing mitzvos or helping out another Jew.