

תְּפִילַת יִצְחָק Tefillat Yitzchak -- Rabbi Jon's commentary on words of prayer

The worshipper must direct his heart to each and every word. He is like a man who walks in a garden collecting roses and rare flowers, plucking them one by one, in order to weave a garland.... Every word seizes hold of him... entreats him not to abandon it, not to break their bond, saying: *Consider my light, my grace, my splendor. Am I not the word 'Baruch'? Harken to me when you pronounce me. Consider me when you utter me.*"

--Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav, quoted in Rabbi A. J. Heschel, "Quest for God", p. 34

As you are learning the prayers, one goal is to find a word or a phrase here and there that is meaningful and that you can add to your "repertoire". If you find a phrase meaningful, stop and try to say it to yourself in Hebrew, whether you are reading the Hebrew or the transliteration. Say it slowly, or more than once, or in a quiet chant that your ears can just hear. Let whatever meaning or feeling sink in, and don't rush to move on with the congregation.

Siddur Sim Shalom, p. 114

רַם וְנִשָּׂא	<i>ram v'nisa</i>	[God Who is] High and elevated
גָּדוֹל וְנוֹרָא	<i>gadol v'nora</i>	Great and Awe-inspiring
מִשְׁפִּיל גֵּאִים	<i>mashpil ge-im</i>	Who lowers the arrogant
וּמַגְבִּי'הוּ שְׁפָלִים	<i>u'mag'bi'ah sh'falim</i>	and lift up the low

These words are the essence of the theology of the Exodus. Until God intervened in Egypt, a god was always allied with a king. Earthly power was frozen in place by divine power. The revolution of Exodus was that God identified with the most lowly, the most powerless. God's power was put in motion for them and through them.

These particular words, like some others we've seen, remind us that God's power is most needed when there is suffering and oppression. And also, that God's power is most real when it is for the low. When power is only used to help or firm up those in power for their own sake, it is not true power, or true God-ly power.

These words can also help remind us how to imitate God. We're coming to celebrate Pesach, and it's not only about remembering history. It is also a reminder that we are the ones whose actions can prove that God is there to "lift up the low", and as the prayer continues, "to answer when they cry out."