Offered in love and trepidation

**Geshem VTal**

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When he adopted the name, did Rav Amital, Z'l, know? He would likely have scoffed at any suggestion linking him with such prescience. Is it not hard enough to be a Rosh Yeshiva—do you want to make a prophet out of me, as well? Or perhaps he would have deflected the question, noting the Rabbinic saying that after the Temple’s destruction, prophecy was taken from prophets and given to fools.

But when one Rosh Yeshiva stakes his claim to Tal—dew—and then invites another to join him as a full partner, it only stands to reason that he saw in his co-Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, Z’l, the complementary qualities of Geshem—rain.

For half the year we ask G-d for dew, and the other half—for rain. The cycle of the year is not complete without both and a year with only one would not be half-blessed, but wholly cursed.

Dew is associated in Jewish lore and liturgy not with granting life, but with reviving it. The prayer for dew recited every Pesach, speaks of “resuscitating with dew those buried in the cleft of rocks.” When the Children of Israel heard the first of the commandments directly from G-d, the Midrash says that their souls departed their bodies, and that each time G-d revived them with the “Dew of Resurrection.”

Rav Amital’s task was nothing short of resurrection. A Holocaust survivor, he took on the task of reviving himself and those like him, of reassembling the dry bones of the valley of death with his drops of dew, sprinkled through sichot and shiurim. And drops they were, a flow, but never a flood. His talks were short and to the point, and when that point was made, he simply stopped speaking. His writings were measured and his sayings epigrammatic. The most potent elixir, as Dumas wrote in The Count of Monte Cristo, can revive with three drops, but kill with ten.

But seasons come and go and the dew anticipates the rain. Tefilat Tal yields yearly to Tefilat Geshem. Rav Amital, confident enough in the revitalizing power of his Torah, knew that there would come a time and a generation when his students would not need to regenerate but to generate anew. And for that task, other blessings are called for. He found those blessings in Rav Aharon Lichtenstein and the prayer book of Har Etzion was complete.

Unlike the dew, rain creates life. While the dew refreshes the desolate garden, the rain makes it grow. If the dew reminds of what was, the rain patters of what can be, and together they give birth to lives that are faithful to the patterns of the past, yet able to bear the storms of the future.

And for rain to descend in mere droplets is insufficient. Choni Ha-Me’agel said as much when he prayed for rain within his circle and a mere drizzle materialized. But for rain to
pour unimpeded, unrestrained, would mean destruction. For rain to earn the title gishmei beracha—showers of blessing—they must be powerful, but controlled.

When Rav Lichtenstein joined Rav Amital, the Yeshiva entered its stage of gishmei beracha. The words could multiply, the flow become a shower, yet never lose its focus and restraint. With the thousands of shiurim and sichot he uttered, gathered in a shelf of sefarim, Rav Lichtenstein never once lost sight of the preciousness of the single word. Students of the Yeshiva, having shown that the Judean hills are fertile surroundings for recovering the Torah of Europe could now focus on surpassing it, on building a uniquely Israeli Torah, on firm foundations of a revived past, but able to meet the challenges of the future and engage in the culture and the issues of modernity. This was not only the period of geshem but also that of hagshama—realizing and concretizing. That which Rav Amital could initially only dream of in the abstract, the two Roshei Yeshiva could make real together.

The blessing of dew is a morning blessing; Rav Amital’s vision signified a new morning for Torah in the land of Israel. The blessing of rain is realized at night, on the Friday nights that the sages designated for geshamim b’itam—timely rainfall, that doesn’t inconvenience travelers. Rav Lichtenstein’s contribution was in tailoring that Torah for the right public at the right time, when a society still suffering growing pains needed a moral compass and a gentle course correction.

Rav Lichtenstein returned his soul to its Maker mere days after the season for rain ended and we once again recited Tefilat Tal. But if we are to learn anything from the analogy it is its cyclic nature. The macro-cycle of these two tzaddikim who so respected each other’s complementary blessings is complete. The Yeshiva’s machzor is closed, but only for this year. The micro-cycles of their students and the students of their students are only beginning, soon to yield macro-cycles of their own. The best may be yet to come.

“For just as the rain and the snow descend from the heavens and do not return without having saturated the earth, enabling it to bring forth life and flower...so shall be my word which leaves my mouth—it will not return empty, but only after doing my desire and succeeding in my mission.”