

TESHUVAH DONE IN PURITY LEADS US TO HASHEM

(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

On this Shabbat, Shabbat Teshuvah, we find ourselves in the midst of the ten days of teshuvah, the time from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. During these days, we all want to purify ourselves and repent completely before the Master of the universe in order to merit a chatimah tova, to be sealed for a good year, one filled with blessings. However when we reflect upon the nature of teshuvah, we realize that it depends mainly on us.

The Sages say, "If one comes to purify himself, he is helped" (Shabbat 104a). This means that before all else, a person must purify himself before receiving help from Heaven. As we read, "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: 'My sons, present to Me an opening of repentance no bigger than the eye of a needle, and I will widen it into openings through which wagons and carriages can pass'" (Shir Hashirim Rabba 5:3).

We need to understand how a person immersed in impurity can be expected, on his own, to start purifying himself without the help of Heaven. How can he be told that if he starts, he will then be given help from above? The first stage, the first step, is the most difficult! We also need to understand something else. The Sages said, "Everything is in the hand of Heaven except the fear of Heaven" (Berachot 33b). Here Rashi explains that everything which happens to a person comes from the Holy One, blessed be He. However being wicked or righteous does not depend on Heaven. It depends on man alone. He is offered two paths, and he must choose the path of the fear of Heaven. This means that the fear of Heaven depends on man himself, and he is given no help in making that choice. This is difficult to understand, for it seems to contradict the statement, "If one comes to purify himself, he is helped," a statement that appears to indicate that even in making such a choice, a person can obtain help from Heaven!

Let us explain this by means of a parable. It is like a man who suddenly obtains a large sum of money, be it through an unexpected inheritance or by winning the lottery. This man, who is not accustomed to having so much money, and does know how to invest it, is liable to quickly lose it. In fact since this money came to him easily, meaning without any effort on his part, there is every reason to believe that he will waste it. After all, something that is easily acquired is also easily lost. This is not the case when a person has to work hard to obtain something. In that case he appreciates what he has acquired and carefully guards it, lest it be lost. The same applies to all things, especially to hard-earned money, which is always greatly appreciated.

As far as we are concerned, the same applies to the fear of Heaven. If a person were to suddenly receive a tremendous amount of help from Heaven, without any effort on his part, there is a great likelihood that he would not properly appreciate this gift. He would also not know how to conduct himself in the light of Heaven's help, so much so that he would be likely to quickly lose it, return to his sins, and plunge into the abyss. It will then be that much harder for him to repent. Yet when a person begins to serve Hashem on his own initiative, without outside

help, he realizes just how difficult it is. Then when he merits receiving help from above, he will know how to properly appreciate it. He will also know how to guard it so that it continues to influence him throughout life, enabling him to elevate himself ever more in the service of Hashem.

A person never finds himself at square one in the service of Hashem. In fact he is born with a spark of godliness within him, and he is automatically considered as someone who "comes to purify himself." If he is careful to preserve this connection with Hashem by observing mitzvot in holiness and purity, Heaven will grant him help to continue, and he will elevate himself to an ever-higher level. Yet this is only on condition that he yields his heart and material desires by elevating everything to the service of Hashem.

As for a person who is entirely immersed in the vanities of this world, to the point of repudiating his connection to Hashem, Scripture describes him as being "naked and bare" (Ezekiel 16:7). That is, he is naked of Torah and mitzvot, which used to connect him to Hashem. Such a person loses his world, as well as the image of G-d and holiness that are within him. It is then obvious that he will be unable to easily purify himself, for he is enslaved by his evil inclination. Even if he were to receive help from above, he would no longer want to free himself from the Satan once he has tasted the pleasures of this world.

Yet Hashem in His great compassion, may His Name be forever blessed, continues to grant him life. He does not kill him, but instead awaits his repentance, as it is written: "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live" (Ezekiel 33:11). It is only once a person has spiritually awoken and begins to purify himself that Hashem gives him back that divine spark and helps him to purify himself completely.

Because of our many sins, today we see people who are so enslaved to the Satan that even when they are assailed by tragedy, they refuse to repent. For them the solution is to perform the mitzvot that Hashem gave to the Jewish people, for mitzvot have the power to liberate a person from enslavement to the evil inclination. Even if a person initially performs mitzvot for selfish reasons, the very fact of performing them will set into motion a process of purification. At that point he will receive extra help from Heaven in the form of additional holiness and purity. The reason why he fails to notice the help that he receives is that he is completely immersed in the vanities of this world. It is only when he continues to perform mitzvot that he will begin to sense the help that Hashem gives him. That being the case, we are all in the position of one who comes to purify himself, meaning that we can all create a small opening for repentance. By doing this, we can perform complete teshuvah before Hashem and be granted a year of joy and blessing. Amen, may it be so.



The Path To Follow

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The Pinto Associations around the world, along with Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita, send you their best wishes for an exceptional new year 5767. Shana Tova! May we all be inscribed in the Book of Life. Amen.

MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

Why of Course!

It is written, "For it is not an empty thing for you" (Deuteronomy 32:47).

The Yerushalmi states, "For it is not an empty thing for you. And if it is empty, it is because of you" (Shabbat 1:4). We may explain this remark by a parable of the Chafetz Chaim.

A poor man encountered a wealthy individual and asked him for a loan. He explained that someone had offered to rent him a store so he could earn an honest living. If the wealthy man would agree to lend him the money, he would be able to get back on his feet and become financially independent.

Agreeing to this request, the wealthy man said: "Why of course I'll help you! However I have to go somewhere now, so come to my home in two hours and you'll receive the money!" The wealthy man hurried to wrap up his affairs so he could be home when the poor man arrived. He prepared the money and waited for him to show up...but he never did!

In the afternoon he left for another meeting, and once again the poor man encountered him. Upon seeing him, the poor man said: "If you lend me the money we spoke about, I'll be able to earn an honest living! This is an opportunity to fulfill the mitzvah, 'If your brother becomes poor...you shall strengthen him' [Leviticus 25:35]." The wealthy man replied, "But we had a meeting set for this morning, and I waited for you! Alright, let's forget about the past. I have to meet someone right now, so why don't you come to my home in an hour and I'll give you the money."

One hour later, however, the wealthy man was at home waiting for the poor man, but he still didn't show up!

The next morning, as he went to pray, the wealthy man encountered the poor fellow once more, and again he asked him: "The store is still for rent. Can you lend me the money I need?"

The wealthy man said, "Look, yesterday I waited for you twice – in the morning and in the afternoon – and both times you didn't show up. You always meet me in the street, but you never make an effort to come and get the money I've set aside for you. This means that your request is just lip-service. It means that you really don't want the money, because if you did, you would have made an effort to come over and get it."

We too are like this poor man, for each day we ask G-d in our prayers: "Our Father, our King...be gracious also to us and teach us...grant our heart understanding to comprehend and to discern, to perceive, to learn and to teach...enlighten our eyes in Your Torah." In Shemoneh Esrei we ask, "Graciously bestow upon us from You wisdom, understanding, and knowledge," and afterwards we recite the prayer: "He will open our hearts by His Torah." The Holy One, blessed be He, certainly responds to our requests and says, "Why of course! Come to My home, to the Beit Midrash, and I will enlighten your eyes by the light of the Torah," for "if one comes to purify himself, he is helped." Nevertheless, we present our requests yet don't bother to go and get what we have asked for!

This is the meaning of, "For it is not an empty thing for you. And if it is empty, it is because of you" (Shabbat 1:4). It is because of us that our prayers are not answered, for we fail to go to the home of the wealthy individual, to the home of the Holy One, blessed be He, to receive what we have asked of Him. The prophet Hosea says in this regard: "Take words with you and return to the L-RD" (Hosea 14:3). Which words are these? Our own words! We are to take our own requests and approach Hashem in order for them to be granted!

A Pearl From the Rav

We understand the greatness of Shabbat Teshuvah, and we know just what an effect it has on people. We also know that through it everyone can do complete teshuvah until they are back with Hashem. In his book Pahad David, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks why this Shabbat is more special than others. Also, in this week's Haftorah why does the prophet Hosea begin with

the singular, "Return, O Israel" (Hosea 14:2) yet proceeds to use the plural, "Return to the L-RD" (v.3)?

The answer is that one of the principles of teshuvah is unity. When there is unity among people, every individual can repent and come closer to Hashem. Therefore the prophet begins with the singular: "Return, O Israel." That is, everyone should value his fellow man and yield before him, and in this way they will all "return to the L-RD."

With the Help of Hashem

It is written, "When I proclaim the Name of the L-RD, ascribe greatness to our G-d" (Deuteronomy 32:3).

When a person wants to accomplish something in business or another field, it is definitely to his advantage to link this endeavor to Hashem by saying Bezrat Hashem ("with the help of Hashem"). Everything is in His hands, and a person renders glory to Hashem and sanctifies His Name by saying this, for everyone knows that all things depend exclusively on the Creator.

This is alluded to in the verse: "When I proclaim the Name of the L-RD" – when I constantly invoke Hashem's Name and do everything with His help, then "ascribe greatness to our G-d" – I will thereby ascribe greatness and pay homage to Hashem.

No Need to be Summoned

It is written, "The Rock – perfect is His work" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

It is said that the disciples of Rabbi Shimon of Yaroslav, who lived a very long time, once asked him what he attributed his longevity to. He replied, "I always accepted what Hashem did and never complained that He was unfair. To me it is as clear as day that everything Hashem does is fair and good. However when a person complains and starts raising questions, he is summoned to Heaven and told: 'Look, everything is fair and good.' Since I never complained, I was never summoned to Heaven to discuss Hashem's justice."

The Tailor's Work

It is written, "The Rock – perfect is His work" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

One day a person came to the Chazon Ish and asked him about Divine providence, given that the Nazis had inflicted the Holocaust on the Jews of Europe.

The Chazon Ish replied, "When a person does not know how a tailor works, and he sees him cutting fabric into pieces, he will think that he is destroying a garment. In reality, however, the tailor is simply creating a new one."

A Larger Picture

It is written, "A G-d of faith, without iniquity" (Deuteronomy 32:4).

We need to understand just how this statement, which states that Hashem is without iniquity, is actually praising Him! The gaon Rabbi Israel Salanter explained, "When the authorities want to punish a person for an offence, he is judged alone. Even if his family and close friends will suffer as a result of the sentence rendered against him, this in no way prevents him from being punished. Yet the same does not apply in the Kingdom of Heaven, since before Hashem punishes a sinner, He takes his family and friends into consideration. If someone is liable to suffer as a result, Hashem checks to see if he deserves to suffer in this way. In fact, "All His ways are upright," be it with regards to the guilty party, or to his friends or relatives. He is a "G-d of faith, without iniquity," for each person receives the punishment that he deserves, not more.

Happy With One's Portion

It is written, "For the L-RD's portion is His people" (Deuteronomy 32:9).

The Chafetz Chaim said that when Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin was studying the book Tanna D'vei Eliyahu (Zutah), he came to the second chapter and read a listing of Hashem's characteristics, among them being "happy with one's portion" He was amazed by this statement, for how could it be that the Holy One, blessed be He, has a "portion," since the entire world belongs to Him?

Rabbi Chaim expressed his bewilderment to his teacher, the Vilna Gaon, who said to him: "His portion is Israel, as it is written, 'For the L-RD's portion is His people.' Hashem is happy with His portion, happy with Israel in all circumstances, even with generations whose spiritual level has diminished."

The Advisor Whose Advice Hurt Him

It is written, "You ignored the Rock Who gave birth to you, and you forgot G-d Who brought you forth" (Deuteronomy 32:18).

We can understand this verse by means of a parable: Reuven owed money to Shimon, but he had no way of repaying him. Reuven went to his friend Levi and asked him for advice on how to rid himself of his creditor, for Shimon was constantly pressuring him to repay. Levi said to him, "When Shimon comes to ask for his money, play the fool: Start whistling and dancing, and pretend that you've gone mad." Reuven followed this advice, and when Shimon saw this spectacle he felt sorry for him and returned home.

Later on Reuven asked Levi to lend him some money for a few days, which he agreed to do. When Levi came to reclaim his money, however, Reuven immediately began to whistle and sing, just as he had done with Shimon. Needless to say, Levi was very upset by this. He said to Reuven, "You good for nothing freeloader! I'm the one who advised you to act this way! How can you use my advice against me?"

The lesson behind this story is that Hashem gave man the ability to forget things. This ability is for his good, since he would otherwise be unable to forget his troubles and misfortunes. Nevertheless, people use this ability to forget Hashem!

The verse says this by stating, "You ignored the Rock Who gave birth to you." That is, Hashem gave birth to your ability to forget, so you would no longer remember your problems. Nevertheless, "You forgot G-d Who brought you forth" – you used this ability to forget G-d, Who brought you forth!

– Torat HaParasha

Overview of the Parsha

Parsha Haazinu continues the account given in Parsha Re'eh concerning the Torah and the song that Moses was to teach the Children of Israel. Moses gave them this song of testimony, which was to accompany them for all time. There are six parts to it: (1) Introduction (vv.1-3); (2) Hashem's ways (vv.4-14); (3) The sin of His people (vv.15-18); (4) The hiding of His face (vv.19-35); (5) Reconciliation (vv.36-43); and (6) The attribution of the song to Moses and Joshua (vv.44-47). At the end of the parsha, we find a statement similar to one given in Parsha Pinchas, when Moses is commanded to ascend Mount Nebo so he could see the land before dying.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

The Gift of Speech

The gift of speech that is implanted in man is an amazing ability given to us by Hashem. Even more amazing is the fact that we do not need excessive concentration to speak, even though speaking is a very complicated process. In fact for every word that a person speaks, several muscles must be used. For example, the "b" sound uses the lips, the "chet" uses the throat, and the "i" uses the tongue. Many things require concentration before actually doing, and if a person fails to concentrate, not only will he not succeed in doing them, he may also hurt himself in the process. If concentration were needed to pronounce each letter while speaking, we would have no time to concentrate on putting letters together to form words.

That is why we must protect this precious gift very carefully. We must not use it to commit sins such as Lashon Harah, lying, flattery, slander, and so on. If we use our ability for speech to commit evil, it would be like scorning the gift that Hashem has given us.

REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

Do Not Turn From the Torah Either to the Right or to the Left

It is written: "He said to them, 'Apply your hearts to all the words that I testify against you today...be careful to perform all the words of this Torah...for it is your life, and by this matter you shall prolong your days on the land'" (Deuteronomy 32:46-47).

Moses warned the Children of Israel: Know that our holy Torah is an amazing thing. Not only is it amazing, it is your life – a life of happiness on earth. However this is only if you take to heart all the things that I testify before you today. Be careful to follow the path that I have laid out for you, and do not turn from it either to the right or to the left.

We can understand this by means of a parable: One Friday afternoon, several merchants returned home after working in a nearby town. The journey took longer than expected, and the day was getting late. They arrived back in their town with not much time left before Shabbat. One of them wanted to get off the carriage and run back home to wash himself for Shabbat, and so he said to the driver: "I'm in a rush and I don't have time to take my suitcase. I'll will pay you to bring it to my home."

The man arrived home and had time to quickly wash himself and put on his Shabbat clothes, at which point the driver arrived. He was covered with sweat and breathing hard. "Those stairs!" he complained as he wiped the sweat from his forehead. "I left your suitcase by the entrance."

The man replied, "You've made a mistake. You brought me someone else's suitcase!"

The driver looked at him in surprise: "How do you know that? You haven't even seen the suitcase I brought you. Come and take a look!"

"Not necessary," said the man. "All I need to see is that you're sweating and breathing hard to understand that you didn't bring my suitcase. Mine contains a only few garments and is very easy to carry."

The driver realized that the man was right. He had struggled to carry someone else's suitcase, and he wasn't even paid for it!

The same applies to those who complain about the difficulty of observing mitzvot with all their details and fences, claiming that it complicates life. To such people Moses said: Take to heart everything that I testify before you today. If you are tired and find it difficult to serve Hashem, you are clearly not engaged in a true service of Hashem. You are not carrying the right suitcase, for "it is your life." Our holy Torah gives life, true life, a life of happiness, and as such "you shall lengthen your days." Thus we read, "The statutes of the L-RD are right, rejoicing the heart. The mitzvah of the L-RD is pure, enlightening the eyes" (Psalms 19:9).

A TRUE STORY

What Lies Beneath the Glass

It is written, "Yeshurun grew fat and kicked" (Deuteronomy 32:15).

There was once a poor merchant who began experiencing great success in everything he did. In fact he quickly became an extremely wealthy man. He started to think that he was succeeding in business because of his abilities and intelligence, and the more his wealth increased, the more his ego grew. He even began looking down on his friends and avoiding them. One day Rabbi Yechiel Michal of Zlotchov came to visit him. Rabbi Yechiel brought him near a window and asked him to look outside: "What do you see?" The wealthy merchant replied, "I see people walking along the street." Rabbi Yechiel then brought him before a mirror and asked, "And now what do you see?" The merchant replied, "I see myself." In a tone of rebuke, the Rabbi said to him: "Both the window and the mirror are made of glass, but the mirror has a thin layer of silver beneath. Without the silver we see others, but with the silver we see only ourselves."

EISHET CHAYIL

You Have Revived My Hopes!

Rabbi Shalom Schwadron said, “My mother was a righteous woman. However she was also very poor. As a widow, she earned a living and put food on the table by selling bread. She went from house to house selling loaves of bread.

“I remember one time when my mother was old, I went to see her and found her crying. I asked her, ‘Mother, why are you crying?’ She said, ‘With what will I enter the World to Come, Shalom? With what will I enter the World to Come?!’

“I said to her, ‘Mother, didn’t you sell bread? How many loaves of bread did you sell each day, a hundred? How many steps did you climb each day, five or six hundred? And how many countless years did you do all this? Therefore you have nothing to worry about! You did this to feed your children and enable them to study Torah. If all the bread you sold and all the steps you climbed during those years were put on a scale, they would certainly swing the balance in your favor.’

“My mother, who was a Jewish woman from the previous generation, said to me: ‘You have revived my hopes, my son. You have revived my hopes.’ ”

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik of Brisk

The gaon Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik (or as everyone called him, “Rav Velvel of Brisk”) was one of the greatest Torah figures in the remarkable generation that preceded the Holocaust. The son of the gaon Rabbi Chaim of Brisk Zatzal (the founder of the Brisk method of study, used throughout the world), Rabbi Yitzchak Zev was a descendant of such Torah luminaries as Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin and the Netziv, both of whom served as Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin.

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev learned his Torah from his father, with whom he remained close until his final day. He broadened and perfected the Brisk method of study, enabling it to plumb the depths of a topic and sift through issues so they became as fine as flour. In fact during his lifetime, this method became an inalienable possession of yeshivot throughout the world.

After his father passed away in 5678, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev was called upon to take his place as the Rav of Brisk. Many important figures studied Halachah with him, and he proved to be exceptionally devoted to everything concerning Judaism and faith. Insofar as matters of holiness were concerned, he feared no man, and in his time he was universally recognized as a prince of Torah, one who rendered Halachic decisions in every field. At the same time, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev guided the affairs of Brisk with a gentle scepter, bringing everyone closer to Torah.

When World War II erupted, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev managed to flee the inferno of Europe, arriving in Jerusalem in 5700. Although he did not officially serve as a Rav, every important matter was brought to his attention, for he was considered a supreme Halachic authority. On Tishri 9, 5720, the eve of Yom Kippur, Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik’s soul ascended to Heaven, and his body was laid to rest in Jerusalem in the presence of thousands. May the memory of the tzaddik be blessed.

THE DEEDS OF THE GREAT

A Treacherous Generation

Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, and Rabbi Yossi were on a journey together. Rabbi Meir always paid close attention to people’s names, whereas Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yossi paid no such attention to them. Once as they came to a certain place, they looked for lodging. As they were given it, they said to [the innkeeper]: “What is your name?” He replied, “Kidor.” Then [Rabbi Meir] said, “It is thus obvious that he is a wicked man, since it is said: ‘For they are a generation [ki-dor] of reversals’ [Deuteronomy 32:20].” Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yossi entrusted their purses to him. Rabbi Meir did not entrust his purse to him, but went and placed it on the grave of that man’s father. Thereupon the man had a vision in his dream [saying]: “Go, take the purse lying at the head of this man!” In the morning [the innkeeper] told [the Rabbis] about it, saying: “This is what appeared to me in my dream.” They answered him, “There is no substance in the dream of the Sabbath night.” Rabbi Meir went, waited there all day, and then took the purse with him. In the morning [the Rabbis] said to him: “Give us our purses.” He said: “You never left them with me!” Rabbi Meir then said to them: “Why don’t you pay attention to people’s names?” They said: “Why did you not tell us this?” He answered: “Consider it as being simply a suspicion. I would not consider it a definite presumption!” Thereupon they took [the host] into a store [and gave him wine to drink]. When they saw lentils on his moustache, they went to his wife and gave her that as a sign, and thus obtained their purses and took them back.

– Yoma 83b

IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

How to Return

Concerning the verse, “Return, O Israel” (Hosea 14:2), Rabbi Shmelke of Nickelsburg Zatzal said that if people wondered how they should do teshuvah, meaning what actions they should take and to what extent they should take them, the following parable would help clarify things:

A man left home on an extremely hot day and began walking to the next town. As he walked, the sun beat upon his head and sweat began dripping from his face. His knees also started to buckle, for he was carrying a heavy load on his shoulders. When he thought of how far he still had to go, and the number of hours that he still had to walk, he lost all hope. He therefore decided to return home and wait for a better day and better weather.

If he was wise, he would have stuck to his goal. As he walked, he would have said to himself: “All I have to do is get to that tree and take shelter beneath it.” When he arrived at the tree, he would have rested a little and said, “Now all I have to do is to get to that rock and sit down for a little.” In this way he would have reached his goal in stages.

The verse states, “Return, O Israel.” How must one return? The answer is given by the very next word: Ad (“until”). That is, set short-term goals for yourself, goals that can be seen and are easily attained. A person who commits himself to studying Torah without interruption during the entire day, every day of the year, will achieve nothing. For him, making such a decision is like trying to fly. However if he decides to study “until” a quarter-hour has passed (after which he can try to lengthen his study time), he will succeed and arrive “until the L-RD your G-d” (Hosea 14:2)!

– Shaarei Armon