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קול תורה

Parashat Ha'azinu/Aseret Yemei Teshuvah

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A LABOR OF LOVE

by *Rabbi Ezra Wiener*

The Gemara at the end of Masechet Yoma (86b) states that the concept of Teshuvah is Gedolah, remarkable, in that it has the power to "Docheh Et Lo Taaseh SheBaTorah," "erase the record of any negative commandment that one may have violated." The Chatam Sofer questions the novelty of the Gemara's statement, as we are familiar with the general principle of "Aseih Docheh Lo Taaseh," "A positive commandment overrides a negative commandment." If a positive commandment generally has the strength to push aside a negative commandment, then it should be obvious that the positive commandment of Teshuvah should have the ability to push aside and thereby remove any negative commandment that one has violated! What, then, is the greatness of Teshuvah above and beyond the other positive commandments that warrants the Gemara singling out its own specific power of erasure?

The Chatam Sofer quotes the teaching of Chazal (Yoma 86b) that there is a difference between Teshuvah MeiYirah, through fear, and Teshuvah MeiAhavah, through love. When one performs Teshuvah MeiYirah, the transgressions that were performed BeMeizid, purposely, are transformed to acts that were in fact performed BeShogeg, mistakenly. While the Aveirot still exist, they are viewed by Hashem as if they were performed inadvertently. In contrast, Teshuvah MeiAhavah has the ability to transform purposeful transgressions into Zechuyot, merits. Thus, by performing Teshuvah out of love, one need not utilize the principle of Aseih Docheh Lo Taaseh, since the Teshuvah is not pushing aside any visible Aveirot; once the Teshuvah process begins, there is no remaining trace of the Aveirot. The principle of Aseih Docheh Lo Taaseh is applied only in the instance of Teshuvah MeiYirah, since in such a case the Aveirot still exist, albeit BeShogeg.

One of the rules regarding the principle of Aseih Docheh Lo Taaseh is that we don't rely on this principle when we can perform the Aseih without the violation of the Lo Taaseh (see Tosafot Gittin 41a s.v. Lisa), leading one to the conclusion that if one can perform Teshuvah MeiAhavah, he should not default to Teshuvah MeiYirah. This idea in turn illuminates the novelty of

the Gemara's statement. Teshuvah is so extraordinary that it allows one to be Docheh a Lo Taaseh by performing Teshuvah MeiYirah despite the fact that he could have removed the Aveirot altogether by performing Teshuvah MeiAhavah.

May we all merit this Yom Kippur achieving a complete Kaparah, atonement, for all of our sins through Teshuvah MeiAhavah and thereby add to our Zechuyot and the Zechuyot of all of Klal Yisrael.

"SHUVU VANIM SHOAVAVIM"

by *Hillel Koslowe ('17)*

The Gemara in Chagigah (15a) cites a fascinating and troubling story about Rabi Meir and Acheir, Rabi Meir's teacher who became a heretic. One Shabbat, Acheir was riding a horse – meaning he was violating Shabbat – and walking behind him was Rabi Meir, who wanted to learn Torah from him. After walking for some time, Acheir explained to Rabi Meir that he should return back to town, because according to Acheir's estimation, they were approaching the Techum Shabbat, and even though Acheir was no longer personally interested in keeping the Halachot of Shabbat, he nonetheless did not want his Talmid, Rabi Meir, to violate Shabbat. After hearing this, Rabi Meir turned to Acheir and told him that he should return to the ways of Hashem. However, Acheir explained to Rabi Meir that he had already heard a Bat Kol proclaiming "Shuvu Vanim Shovavim, Chutz MeiAcheir," "Return, rebellious children, except for Acheir."

How are we to understand this Bat Kol heard by Acheir? Could it really be that Hashem would not allow Acheir to do Teshuvah? There are many answers given to address this question, but Rav Yehuda Amital zt"l, the founding Rosh HaYeshivah of Yeshivat Har Etzion, offers a unique approach to this Bat Kol. While most answers to this question attempt to explain how Hashem could have produced such a troubling Bat Kol, Rav Amital revolutionizes this Gemara by suggesting that the Bat Kol heard by Acheir was not an actual Bat Kol, but rather was a fabrication in Acheir's mind. Acheir believed that as someone who had strayed so far from the Derech Hashem, he was unable to do Teshuvah. He could not accept the concept of Teshuvah – that Hashem can truly forgive us and that we can truly improve. Therefore, Acheir convinced himself that God would not allow him to do Teshuvah. Rav Amital then went on to say that we all, to some degree, have this incorrect belief in our mind. It is easy, and oftentimes simpler, to tell ourselves that we cannot do Teshuvah, that we cannot improve ourselves, that we

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cannot change. But this belief is not a Bat Kol; it is merely in our heads. Simply put, we can all do Teshuvah.

In Hilchot Teshuvah Perek 3, Rambam lists many types of people who do not merit Olam HaBa. From a quick reading, one might conclude that there are indeed certain people who do not have the ability to do Teshuvah. However, this is not so. In his closing of the Perek, Rambam says that all these people do not merit Olam HaBa “BeSheMeit BeLo Teshuvah,” “If they die without doing Teshuvah;” however, if these people do Teshuvah, they merit Olam HaBa, “SheEin Lecha Davar SheOmeid BiFenei HaTeshuvah,” “For there is nothing that stands in the way of Teshuvah.” Additionally, Rambam says that anybody who does Teshuvah is forgiven, based on the Pasuk “Shuvu Vanim Shovavim,” “Return, rebellious children” (Yirmiyahu 3:14). Interestingly enough, despite using the same Pasuk found in Acheir’s Bat Kol, Rambam does not note any exceptions to his rule, which suggests that truly everyone, without exception, can do Teshuvah.

Rambam explicates this concept further by noting that at the core of Teshuvah is the concept of free will. And as he proceeds to explain in Hilchot Teshuvah Perek 5, “Reshut Kol Adam Netunah Lo... Kol Adam VeAdam Ra’uy Lihyot Tzadik KeMoshe Rabeinu O Rasha KeYarav’am, O Chacham O Sachal, O Rachaman O Achzari, O Keilay O Sho’a... VeEin Lo Mi SheYichpeihu VeLo Gozeir Alav VeLo Mi SheMoshecho LeEchad MiShenei HaDerechaim, Ela Hu MeiAtzmo UMida’ato Noteh LeEi Zeh Derech SheYiretze,” “Free will is granted to everyone... Each person is fit to be righteous like Moshe Rabbeinu or wicked like Yarav’am; wise or foolish, merciful or cruel, stingy or generous... There is nobody who compels a person, sentences him, or leads him towards either of these two paths; rather, he on his own initiative and decisions chooses whichever path he wants.” Hopefully, if we internalize that we are all granted the ability to do Teshuvah and that we truly and completely choose our actions, we will be able to have a more meaningful Yom Kippur.

THE HEAVENS, FRONT AND CENTER

by *Natan Lehman* (‘19)

Parashat Ha’azinu, consisting mostly of a poem composed by Moshe and Yehoshu’a, takes a look at the past and then foreshadows the future of Bnei Yisrael. The very first Pasuk of the Shirah (Devarim 31:1) states, “Ha’azinu HaShamayim VaAdabeirah, VeTishma HaAretz Imrei Phi,” “Listen, heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth!” In this Pasuk, Moshe Rabbeinu is calling both the Heavens and

the Earth to testify to the words he’s about to speak. Suprisingly, multiple questions emerge from the very first Pasuk. Firstly, we notice that the phrases “Ha’azinu HaShamayim” and “Tishma HaAretz” are repeated in reverse by Yeshayahu (Yeshayahu 1:2); he utters “Shim’u Shamayim VeHa’azini Eretz.” Why does Yeshayahu Hanavi say “Shim’u” when referring to the Heavens and “Ha’azini” when referring to the Earth, when Moshe previously does the opposite? Secondly, why does Moshe call up the Heavens and the Earth to be witnesses to this poem in the first place?

In an attempt to answer the first question, the Da’at Zekeinim explains the word “Ha’azinu” as coming from shresh “Azen,” meaning “give ear” or “pay attention,” while the word “Shim’u” is defined as listening, a more intimate connection than merely “giving ear.” The reason Yeshayahu reverses the order of Moshe is that Yeshayahu feels a closer connection with the physical Earth than the spiritual Heavens. Since Yeshayahu has a weaker connection to the Heavens than to the Earth, he proclaims “Hear, Heavens, and give ear, Earth,” to make sure the Heavens are listening. However, he does not need to do so for the Earth, since he already has a strong connection to it and is confident that the Earth is already listening. This reasoning can be compared to a public speaker asking whether the people in the back of a room can hear him—he asks only the back of the room and not the front because he is confident that they already hear him. Unlike Yeshayahu, Moshe is on such a high spiritual level that he feels he has the Heavens already listening to him in the “front of the room,” so he appeals to the Earth in the “back of the room.”

The Midrash Tanchuma (Devarim 32:1) offers an answer to the question of why Moshe Rabbeinu calls upon the Heavens and Earth as witnesses. Moshe recites this song right before his inevitable death and Bnei Yisrael’s entrance into Eretz Yisrael, and the song focuses on the future of Am Yisrael. Moshe needs both the Heavens and the Earth to be witnesses because he will no longer be able to lead or daven for the sake of Bnei Yisrael once they enter Eretz Yisrael. Both the Heavens and the Earth were around for the birth of Bnei Yisrael and will around be for their future. Therefore, even after Moshe passes away and will not be able to save or daven on behalf of Bnei Yisrael, the Heavens and the Earth will not forget the sacrifices Moshe and Bnei Yisrael have made.

In addition, the Kli Yakar offers his own opinion to explain why Moshe calls down the Heavens and the Earth as witnesses. He quotes Masechet Shabbat 88a, which states that had Bnei Yisrael not accepted the Torah, the world would have returned to “Tohu VaVohu,” “nothing and emptiness.” If not for Bnei Yisrael’s acceptance of the Torah, even the first Creations of this world, Shamayim VaAretz (which are juxtaposed to “Tohu VaVohu” in BeReishit 1:1 and 1:2), would not exist. Since the objective of Moshe’s song is to motivate Bnei Yisrael to keep the Torah, Shamayim VaAretz are perfect witnesses, as they owe their existence to Bnei Yisrael’s observance of the Torah. Just as our acceptance of the Torah filled up the empty world with

Shamayim VaAretz, we too must follow the Torah to fill our personal voids with meaning and purpose.

Moshe Rabbeinu's addressing of his poem to the Heavens and Earth to benefit Bnei Yisrael right before his death expresses his tremendous love for all of Bnei Yisrael. Just as Moshe filled his personal void with love for Bnei Yisrael and the Torah and was therefore able to reach such a high level that he had the Heavens in the "front of his room," we too should try to learn from this Moshe's marvelous attributes and try to improve ourselves.

SHENAYIM MIKRA VE'ECHAD TARGUM

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

The Gemara (Berachot 8a) teaches, "One should always finish the Parashiyot with the community [by studying] Shenayim Mikra VeEchad Targum (the Parashah twice and Targum Onkelos once)." The Aruch Hashulchan (O.C. 285:2) clarifies that this is a rabbinical obligation. It seems that women are not obligated to study ShMV" T (the acronym for Shenayim Mikra VeEchad Targum), since it is a time bound positive obligation. In this issue, we will examine the parameters of this obligation.

Reason for the Obligation

In the introduction to the Sefer HaChinuch, the author explains a reason for this obligation in a simple yet beautiful way:

Our sages established that we should read a portion of the Torah every week in the synagogue to inspire us to observe the Torah ... The sages also obligated us to study in our home every week the Torah portion that is read in the synagogue to further enhance our understanding of the Torah.

The aforementioned Gemara notes that all those who engage in ShMV" T "have their days and years lengthened." One may interpret the Gemara as saying that this practice greatly enhances the quality of one's life. Surely, the joy on Simchat Torah of one who has fulfilled his ShMV" T obligation is exponentially greater than one who has not done so. Moreover, the Shabbat of those who observe this Halachah is immensely enhanced. Indeed, the Tur and Shulchan Aruch present this Halacha in the context of Hilchot Shabbat. Rav Soloveitchik told this author that the primary time for ShMV" T is Shabbat. This author also heard from Rav Soloveitchik (in a public lecture delivered at Yeshiva University) that every Shabbat is characterized by the Parashah of the week. For instance, the Shabbat on which we read Parashat Ki Teitzei is not simply Shabbat; it is Shabbat Parashat Ki Teitzei. One may argue that while the public reading of Ki Teitzei characterizes Shabbat as Shabbat Parashat Ki Teitzei on the communal level, individual ShMV" T study characterizes the Shabbat as Shabbat Parashat Ki Teitzei for the individual.

Of course, the primary way that ShMV" T enhances one's life is by promoting fluency in our most basic and holy text, the Torah. Accordingly, even women, who are not technically obligated to study ShMV" T, receive abundant reward for doing so.

A Defense for Those Who Do Not Study ShMV" T

Many individuals do not engage in ShMV" T for a variety of reasons. There is a "Limud Zechut" (limited Halachic basis) for such people. The Beit Yosef (Orach Chaim 285 s.v. Aval Misham) cites the opinion of the Ra'avan that ShMV" T is an obligation only for an individual who has not heard Ker'iat HaTorah in the Beit Keneset. According to the Ra'avan, ShMV" T is merely a substitute for Ker'iat HaTorah.

However, the Beit Yosef points out that almost all Rishonim reject the view of the Ra'avan. For example, he cites the Rambam (Hilchot Tefillah 13:25) who writes, "Although one hears the communal reading of the Torah, he must study the Parashah every week Shenayim Mikra VeEchad Targum." In fact, the Vilna Gaon (Bi'ur HaGra O.C. 285:1) specifically notes that the Shulchan Aruch rejects the opinion of the Ra'avan.

Therefore, those who do not study ShMV" T are not "sinners," but it is proper to study ShMV" T in addition to hearing Ker'iat HaTorah in shul. All authorities concur, though, that one must study ShMV" T if he did not hear the communal Torah reading.

When Must We Complete ShMV" T Study?

The Gemara does not specifically state that one must complete ShMV" T by a specific time. Tosafot (Berachot 8a s.v. Yashlim), however, state that it is preferable to complete ShMV" T before eating on Shabbat. In fact, the Magen Avraham (O.C. 285:2) cites the Shelah HaKadosh who writes that it is preferable to complete ShMV" T on Friday after Chatzot (midday). This preference stems from Kabbalistic concerns.¹ Tosafot note, though, that it is acceptable to complete ShMV" T study even after the meal. However, Tosafot believe that ShMV" T must be completed before Shabbat ends. Indeed, the primary opinion presented by the Shulchan Aruch states that one must complete ShMV" T before Shabbat ends.

Nevertheless, the Shulchan Aruch cites two lenient opinions that appear in the Rishonim. One lenient view allows one to study ShMV" T until the Wednesday after Shabbat on which we read the particular Parashah. This view is based on the Gemara (Pesachim 106a) that permits one to recite Havdalah until Wednesday if he forgot to do so on Motza'ei Shabbat. A second, even more lenient view allows one until Simchat Torah to finish ShMV" T. The Aruch HaShulchan (285:10) writes that this is a viable opinion. The Mishnah Berurah (285:12) cautions that all authorities concur that it is preferable to complete ShMV" T before Shabbat ends.

¹ Kabbalists attach profound significance to ShMV" T study—see Ba'eir Heiteiv and Sha'arei Teshuvah 285:1.



When May We Begin Study of ShMV" T?

Tosafot write that the earliest time to begin ShMV" T study of a particular Parashah is after the Mincha on Shabbat afternoon when we begin to read from that Parashah. This opinion is codified by the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 285:3, and see Mishnah Berurah 285:7).

One may suggest that this opinion of Tosafot reflects their view that ShMV" T is a weekly obligation (i.e. that we must study ShMV" T of a particular Parashah within the week in which we publicly read that particular Parashah). However, the lenient opinion that believes that one may complete ShMV" T until Simchat Torah regards ShMV" T as a yearly obligation (i.e. that every year, one must complete ShMV" T). It would appear that just as the lenient view permits completing ShMV" T late, it also permits starting ShMV" T as early as Parashat BeReishit. Thus, if one finds difficulty in completing ShMV" T during the course of the year but is able to do so during a vacation period, he should take the opportunity and complete ShMV" T for the entire year during the vacation period. Rav Mordechai Willig told this author that he agrees with this analysis.

Rashi or Targum Onkelos?

The Rosh (Berachot 1:8) and the Tur (O.C. 285) assert that Rashi's commentary to Chumash constitutes a viable alternative to Targum Onkelos for the study of ShMV" T. The Beit Yosef (O.C. 285 s.v. Velm Lamad), however, cites the Ri (Rashi's great-grandson) as disputing this assertion. He thus rules that a "God-fearing individual" should study both Targum Onkelos and Rashi. Similarly, in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 285:3), Rav Karo rules that Rashi's commentary serves as a viable alternative to Onkelos, but a "God-fearing person" should study both Rashi and Onkelos.

It seems from the Shulchan Aruch that if one has enough time to study either Onkelos or Rashi (but not enough time to study both) that one can choose either and that there is no preference between the two. The Mishnah Berurah and the Aruch HaShulchan also do not seem to indicate a preference between Onkelos and Rashi. It thus appears that one with limited time is permitted to study either Onkelos or Rashi, according to his own preference.²

Alternative Translations

Tosafot (s.v. Shenayim) cite an opinion that asserts that any translation of the Chumash into the local vernacular constitutes a viable alternative to Onkelos. Tosafot reject this opinion, stating that Onkelos is special because Onkelos not only translates the Chumash but also explains many obscure words and passages. Both the Mishnah Berurah (285:5) and the Aruch Hashulchan (285:12) cite Tosafot's view as normative. However, the Mishnah Berurah writes that if one cannot comprehend Rashi, he may use

a Yiddish (or any other language) translation based on Rashi and traditional sources that are rooted in the Talmudic tradition.

Conclusion: Shenayim Mikra Is Within Everyone's Grasp

The study of ShMV" T is within the grasp of all. Ideally, one should plan and habituate oneself to making ShMV" T a priority Shabbat activity. If it is not feasible for one to do this and fulfill this obligation at the optimal level, one should nevertheless make every effort to fulfill this Mitzvah as best as he can. It is highly worthwhile to either carry a small Chumash in one's attache case and car or to download an app with Shenayim Mikra so that one can seize available moments to study ShMV" T. In my experience, if one diligently seizes the available moments in transit, waiting in line, or waiting for appointments, he will find the estimated 40-50 hours annually that are necessary to complete Shenayim Mikra at least on a basic level.³ The investment is relatively small but the return is priceless—to master Chumash with Rashi, our most basic texts.

The Aseret Yemei Teshuvah and Yom Kippur are the perfect times to resolve to make the effort to find time to complete Shenayim Mikra VeEchad Targum in the coming year and the years in the come, may they be long, healthy and happy ones.

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This publication contains Torah matter and should be treated accordingly.

² See, however, the Sha'arei Teshuvah (285:2) who presents a dispute among the Acharonim whether Onkelos or Rashi is preferable for one with limited time.

³ I am preaching that which I personally practice. Ironically, busy congregational rabbis find it challenging to find time for ShMV" T. However, two round-trip flights to Israel from New York is sufficient time to complete a basic level of Shenayim Mikra VeEchad Targum.