Rosh Chodesh Elul ushers in the teshuvah process. During the Yamim Noraim, starting with Rosh Hashanah, repentance intensifies and peaks on Yom Kippur. It is a time to renew our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu through teshuvah. The Shabbat during Aseret Yemei Teshuvah is an opportunity to accelerate this journey and deepen our commitment to teshuvah, introspection and avodat Hashem.

There are a few explicit pesukim in the Torah (Devarim 30:1-10) and numerous passages in Navi that can serve as a guidebook for the teshuvah process. In this essay, we will focus on the haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah, from Trei Asar. This haftarah contains passages from Hoshea, (the minhag of Ashkenazim is to add additional pesukim from Yoel) and Mikhah.

The haftarah begins with Hoshea ben Be’eri’s prophecy. Hoshea is the inaugural navi of Trei Asar and the first to promote teshuvah. According to the midrash, Bereishit Rabbah no. 84, the prophet Hoshea hails from Shevet Reuven, even though there is no textual mention of Hoshea’s ancestry in the book of Hoshea. Hazal attribute the prophet Hoshea ben Be’eri to Be’erah the nasi of Reuven during the Assyrian exile in Divrei HaYamim I 5:6.

Why attribute his lineage to shevet Reuven? The midrash explains that because Reuven was the first of the shevatim to engage in teshuvah, his descendant Hoshea merited commencing Trei Asar. Reuven’s teshuvah for the events involving Bilhah is not explicit in the peshat in Breishit, yet Hazal assign his prominent position among the shevatim in future surveys to his embrace of teshuvah. He loses the position of leadership to Yehudah and double portion in Eretz Yisrael to Yosef but retains much of his stature among the shevatim. Although Reuven initiates teshuvah, it is Yehudah who is the prime example of complete...
teshuvah when he exclaims, “tzadka mimeni — she is more righteous than me” (Breishit 28:26) in his dealings with Tamar. It is no coincidence that Yehudah assumes the mantle of leadership among his brothers in the Yosef-Egypt episodes and beyond.

Why start Trei Asar with a prophet from Reuven who succeeded in his teshuvah, but not spectacularly? Perhaps this contains a message to all of us. There is always potential for spectacular teshuvah. Oftentimes, however, due to this very possibility, the expectations are so daunting. We set the bar so high and are reticent to even begin the repentance process.

Hazal’s attribution of Hoshea to the Rambam: This theme is articulated explicitly by Hazal’s attribution of Hoshea to the Rambam: This theme is articulated explicitly by Hazal’s attribution of Hoshea to the Rambam: This theme is articulated explicitly by Hazal’s attribution of Hoshea to the Rambam: This theme is articulated explicitly by Hazal’s attribution of Hoshea to the Rambam: This theme is articulated explicitly by Hazal’s attribution of Hoshea to the Rambam: This theme is articulated explicitly by Hazal’s attribution of Hoshea to

Every time individuals commit sins, they must repent throughout the year (Rambam, Hilkhos Teshuva 2:6). Requests for repentance and forgiveness are included in the Amidah prayer three times daily. However, Yom Kippur is a unique occurrence once a year, when all of Klal Yisrael as one are obligated to repent and do teshuvah.

Hoshea formulates this process as follows:

Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him: “Forgive all guilt and accept what is good; Instead of bulls we will pay [The offering of] our lips.”

Hoshea 14:3

How does one initiate the teshuvah process? It is achieved with words. This is the concept of viduy (imru elav). What words do we say? “Kol tisa avon,” Hashem, You should forgive us for all our hata’im, “v’kah tov,” just take the good deeds that we do, see the good that we do, “uneshlahmah parim s’fateinu,” and instead of bringing korbanot, we are offering words.

The Ramban cites the pesukim in Devarim 30:11-14 as the source for teshuvah generally and verbal viduy:

Yes, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, “Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?” Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?” No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

The Ramban understands these pesukim in a very uplifting way. Viduy and teshuvah are not in the heavens or beyond the sea. They are attainable with our mouths and hearts, any place and any time.

Teshuvah and confession are included in the Amidah three times daily. Among them we must include the viduy: the words must be meaningful and transformative. Words create reality. Hashem created the world with words. Words should reflect the true inner self and inspire action.

Hoshea beckons Israel to return all the way to Hashem, even though Israel is faltering and mired in sin. The beauty of the first words of the haftarah, shuva Yisrael — return Israel — is that they refer to Israel in the singular as one unit. Aseret Yemei Teshuvah culminate in Yom Kippur, a day that is set aside for all of Bnei Yisrael to do teshuvah and viduy as one community.

This theme is articulated explicitly by the Rambam:

This is the concept of teshuvah, but not spectacularly?

Hoshea formulates this process as follows:

Return, Israel until the Lord your God, for you have fallen because of your sin.

Hoshea 14:2

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To fulfill the mitzvah of forgiveness, which is accepted with teshuvah, it is forbidden to read the Megillah on Yom Kippur. The Ramban understands these pesukim in a very uplifting way. Viduy and teshuvah are not in the heavens or beyond the sea. They are attainable with our mouths and hearts, any place and any time.

Teshuvah empowers us even on our imperfect occasions. We may observe it?” No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

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The Ramban understands these pesukim in a very uplifting way. Viduy and teshuvah are not in the heavens or beyond the sea. They are attainable with our mouths and hearts, any place and any time.
If we take initiative and start with self-directed access to those that are self-imposed, there are no stumbling blocks except the act of repentance itself. The Torah states, “And you shall return until the Lord your God,” and in “Return until Me.” Our rabbis teach: Repentance is the act of returning to Hashem, which is initiated by reflection. This is hakarat hahat. We have to acknowledge our sin in order to progress. The pesukim mentioned above in Devarim and these words in Hoshea correlate to the phases that the Rambam, in Mishneh Torah, and Ramban in his biblical commentary present as the proper steps toward teshuvah.

Radak could simply have stated: Return because you have sinned. Yet he adds the words ki atah ro’eh shekhashalta b’avonekha — because you see that you have fallen due to sin. With this subtle addition, Radak emphasizes the importance of one’s self-awareness of sin. Radak accentuates that teshuvah is initiated by reflection. This is hakarat hahat. We have to acknowledge our sin in order to progress. The pesukim mentioned above in Devarim and these words in Hoshea correlate to the phases that the Rambam, in Mishneh Torah, and Ramban in his biblical commentary present as the proper steps toward teshuvah.

Radak ends with the inspiring rabbinic interpretation of the word ad, until (instead of el, to), which is that teshuvah allows us to reach the Divine seat of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This signifies that there’s no limit to attaining a close bond with Hashem by means of the vehicle of teshuvah. Teshuvah opens the path to directly connect to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. There are no stumbling blocks except those that are self-imposed. We have direct access to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, if we take initiative and start with self-realization and articulation.

On the following pasuk, the Radak comments:

Instead of bulls we will pay [The offering of] our lips — instead of [offering] bulls before you, we will provide the confession of our lips because You prefer words of repentance, as offerings don’t work without confessing the sin, as we find the Torah states regarding sin offerings, “he shall confess for his sin.” Regarding the goat that was sent [on Yom Kippur], the only thing was a confessional because the goat was not sacrificed at all on the Altar, as it states, “He will confess on it all of the sins of the Jewish people.”

Articulation is crucial. When Bnei Yisrael proffered korbanot they were accompanied by viduy, a declaration. If you sacrificed the korban without a meaningful viduy, the korban was lacking. The same standards apply to tefillah: It must be integrated with kavanah, real understanding and intent. Otherwise it, too, is deficient.

The Radak subsequently makes a fascinating point. On Yom Kippur, there were two goats — se’irim. One goat was sacrificed on the mizbeah and one was its counterpart, the se’ir mishtalei’ah that was sent down the cliff l’Azazel. The only thing that was done with that se’ir was viduy. The Kohanim proclaimed the sins of Bnei Yisrael over the goat. That was effective because the power of viduy, especially on Yom Kippur, is so robust. The key to unlock the gates of teshuvah is verbalizing the words, comprehending the words, and internalizing their significance as a vehicle to altering actions.

Hoshea continues:
You alone orphans find pity.
Hoshea 14:4

The haftarah begins with the voice and perspective of the navi. He is speaking the word of Hashem to Bnei Yisrael. He is calling on them to repent and provides them with the method of viduy as teshuvah. In this pasuk, Bnei Yisrael internalized the message and are articulating viduy and teshuvah.

Radak uses the phrase viduy:

_Assor al yishonu - rohatdin lemmi amov asher_ — of expressing our core failures and a clear acknowledgement of our reliance on Hashem. It is actually the simplest, most straightforward, elegant solution.

The next pasuk states:

_Arpak meshuvatom alobos drubin ish apim mamnon._

_I will heal their rebelliousness, (meshuvatam), Generously will I take them back in love; For My anger has turned away (shav) from them._

Hoshea 14:5

Now Hashem responds to Bnei Yisrael’s viduy. He tells the navi and Bnei Yisrael: He heard their cry. He will lovingly take them back. He is no longer angry. The choice of _meshuvatam_ and _shav_ here are cleverly used by the navi as a play on words.

Rambam 7:3 notes that prophets receive visions and communications from Hashem but take initiative in formulating the message to the wider community.

The two words contain the same root letters as teshuvah, but _meshuvatam_ is no longer angry. The choice of _meshuvatam_ and _shav_ here are cleverly used by the navi as a play on words. _Hilkhut Yosdei HaTorah_ underscores the beautiful benevolence and charitable. If you turn back to _Hakadosh Baruch Hu_, Hashem is going to embrace you lovingly, generously and open heartedly.

The last pasuk from Hoshea in this haftarah states:

_מֵי חָכָם וָיָבֵנֶן אֵלֶה נָבוֹן וְיֵדָעֵם כִּי יְשָׁרִים דַּרְכֵי_ — of expressing our core failures and a clear acknowledgement of our reliance on Hashem. It is actually the simplest, most straightforward, elegant solution.

Not like those who say “this can’t be the way of God” as it states in Yehezkel. Rather, if you repent properly, your original sins will be forgotten. Hashem has His ways and we should not question Hashem’s justice based on our superficial assessment of our lives and other people’s lives. We must cultivate _emunah_ that Hashem rewards each person appropriately. This attitude should give us the confidence and incentive to lead a righteous life.

People are puzzled by the concept of teshuvah. Shouldn’t sinners be punished? How can teshuvah erase the memory of past misconduct? This underscores the beautiful benevolence of teshuvah. Sincere teshuvah can turn your life around, Hashem will really forgive you. Even though it is not a rational concept, it is the way Hashem runs the world.
Hashem gives us a second chance. If we are alienated from Hashem and could never surmount it, we would be in a constant state of existential crisis. For this reason, teshuvah is such a foundational principle in Yahadut. There’s always an opportunity for teshuvah, to heal the relationship between us and Hashem.

After we read Hoshea in the haftarah, there are varying practices. Many Ashkenazi communities read pesukim from Yoel (2:11-27) and then from Mikhah (7:18-20). Sefardim read the pesukim from Mikhah, but not from Yoel. We will elaborate on a few pesukim from Yoel and then conclude with the pesukim from Mikhah.

The message of Yoel is that sincere teshuvah is effective at all times and all places — even in the face of upcoming disaster. It specifically focuses on teshuvah as a public communal event.

Hashem tells us:

וְגַם עַתָה נְאֻם ה' שֻבוּ עָדַי בְכָל לְבַבְכֶם וּבְצוֹם וּבִבְכִי וּבְמִסְפֵד. וְקִרְעוּ לְבַבְכֶם וְאַל בִגְדֵיכֶם וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם כִי חַנוּן וְרַחוּם הוּא אֶרֶךְ אַפַיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד וְנִחָם עַל הָרָעָה.

"Yet even now" — says the Lord — “Turn back to Me with all your hearts, and with fasting, weeping, and lamenting.” Rend your hearts rather than your garments, and turn back to the Lord your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and renouncing punishment.

Yoel 2:12-13

Radak explains:

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Yoel 2:12-13

Teshuvah that is performed together by a unified tzibbur has a unique potency. This is an additional reason why teshuvah on Yom Kippur has this collective component. The Rambam

Tefillah Insights: The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

Over the course of the High Holiday season we recite the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy many times. The source for doing so is a comment of the Gemara, Rosh HaShanah 17b:

ות圊ף ח. לע פי מרהר 'ר"ה ו"ה 
אמלצא מקרא כתוב או אפשר לאו מרי
mysłמד ומשמעש מקבר "כשתה ב無しが
וראיה לא למשם דרש הלוחמה אמן ולא כ
ומושערת והושתה פעמיים כדר
יהו אמ"ם ומאו

[The verse states] “And God passed in front of [Moshe] and He called out.” R. Yochanan said, if not for it being written in the Torah, we could not say this. This verse teaches that the Holy One Blessed be He wrapped Himself in a prayer shawl like a prayer leader and showed Moshe the order of prayer. He said, “Whenever the Jewish people sin, they should do this order before Me and I will forgive them.”

R. Eliyahu Vidas (16th century), Reishit Chochma, Sha’ar Ha’Anavah no. 1, asks: Why does the Gemara say “do this order” and not “say this order”? Furthermore, why do we find that so many people recite this order many times and it doesn’t seem to work? He answers that we don’t just recite these attributes for the sake of reciting them. We recite them so that we will come to emulate God in these attributes. If we become merciful, compassionate, etc. and “do this order” in our actions, then we will be forgiven.

Torah To Go Editors
eches this concept in *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah* 2:6:

> אֵפֶּר וְלֹא מָשָׁתָבְּשָׁה והצָעֵקָה יִפְרֶשׁ לַעַל, בֵּשַׁדֶּהָ הַרְפֵּם בְּכֵי אָרֶץ שָׁנַה וּמִשְׁמַרְיָה, אֶזֶה שֶׁבּוּרַה מָטֶפֶלְתָּו אִיזֶה מָדֶיר שְׁמַרְיָה, וְרָשִׁי ה, בָּדְמַצְא, בָּהַם בָּדְרֵיס אָפָאָרִים בּוּתיב. אֲנָל תָּבוּר מְלֹא שְׁמוֹשָׁמֶש שְׁמוֹשָׁמֶשּׁ עָצַקּוּ בֵּלַב שְׁלוֹם הָדוֹן שְׁמוֹאֶר הָבַּל, כֹּרָם אָלְיוֹ.

Although it is always good to cry out and repent, but during the space of the ten days’ time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is better, and is accepted immediately as it is said: “Seek ye the Lord while He may be found” (Is. 55.6). This is not only regarding an individual, but a community; every time they repent and cry out sincerely they are answered, even as it is said: “As the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for” (Deut. 6.7).

The passage in Yoel describes communal repentance in the face of looming national tragedy. It was chosen by the Ashkenazim as part of the haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah, because it highlights the importance of communal fasting and gathering on Yom Kippur.

Whereas the message of Hoshea is teshuvah for Am Yisrael, but especially the power of the individual to initiate and realize complete teshuvah; in Yoel the message is that Am Yisrael joining together and executing teshuvah in a ceremonial congregational fashion surely has an effect. Today we don’t have the Beit Hamikdash, we don’t have the se’ir l’azazel, but we do have the public communal aspect of Yom Kippur that echoes this powerful national dimension.

Finally, most communities conclude the haftarah with the three culminating pesukim of Mikhah:

> מא לְכָּמֹה נַשֵּׂאֲנוּ נַעֲבַר עַל פֶּשָּׁע לִשְׁאֵרִית נַחֲלָתוֹ לֹא הֶחֱזִיק לָעַד אַפּוֹ כִּי חָפֵץ חֶסֶד הוּא. יָשׁוּב יְרַחֲמֵנוּ יִכְבֹּשׁ עֲוֹנֵנוּ וְתַשְׁלִיךְ בִּמְצֻלוֹת יָם כָּל חַטֹּאותָם. תִּתֵּן אֱמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר נִשְּבַּעְתָּ לַאֲבֹתֵינוּ מִימֵי קֶדֶם.

Who is a God like You, Forgiving iniquity and remitting transgression; Who has not maintained His wrath forever Against the remnant of His own people, Because He loves graciousness! He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins Into the depths of the sea. You will keep faith with Jacob, Loyalty to Abraham, As You promised on oath to our fathers in days gone by.

*Mikhah* 7:18-20

The Mikhah verses are universally chosen as the conclusion of the haftarah and part of the Tashlikh ceremony, because the message of these last three pesukim is Hashem’s unwavering forgiveness, love and loyalty to Bnei Yisrael. These phrases represent our confidence in the covenantal relationship with Hashem that originated with the Avot and continues to this day. It focuses on Hashem’s forgiving, compassionate loyalty toward us. It does not even mention the teshuvah that Bnei Yisrael are obligated to undertake. After the elaborate discussions of Bnei Yisrael’s teshuvah process in Hoshea — and for Ashkenazim in Yoel — the haftarah concludes with our confidence in Hashem’s forgiveness that flows from His compassion for His people and His promise to our forefathers.

Our goal on Yom Kippur is to renew and transform our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu. This renewal is achieved through teshuvah. The haftarah of Shabbat Shuvah in the midst of Aseret Yemei Teshuvah affords us this opportunity. The haftarah describes the public and private process of teshuvah and viduy, and concludes with an affirmation of Hashem’s compassion for Am Yisrael because of our longstanding covenantal relationship with Him. It also emphasizes Hashem’s interest in helping us come closer to Him. If we pursue teshuvah sincerely, Hashem will generously enable us to reach his Throne of Glory:

> נוֹלֵלָה תְשׁוֹבָה שְׁמַעְתָּ וְכָא הַמּוֹבָּשׁ שְׁאִמּוּר וּעָדָה אֶלְכִּי. רֶפֶּפֶן גְּשִׁוָּת שְׁמַעְתָּ וְכָא הַמּוֹבָּשׁ שְׁאִמּוּר רֶפֶּפֶן אָלָכִּי.

Repentance is so great that it reaches to the Throne of Glory as it states “until the Lord your God.”

*Yoma* 86a

May we all merit His compassion and be inscribed in the book of life, blessing, peace, good health and success.

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