

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Netzavim/Rosh HaShanah 27 Elul, 5781/September 4, 2021

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This issue of Toronto Torah is dedicated by Mark Mietkiewicz in loving memory of his late father Mike Mietkiewicz z"l, Melech ben Moshe Dovid, whose 31st yahrzeit is Erev Rosh HaShanah and his late aunt Clarice Sinuk z"l, Chassia bat Baruch, whose shloshim is also on Erev Rosh HaShanah.

The Right of Return

Standing between the scathing rebuke of the *tochachah* in Ki Tavo, and the covenantal song of Haazinu, is Parshat Netzavim. All of Bnei Yisrael stand attentively, listening while Moshe explains all of the potential consequences for not following the various mitzvot in the Torah. At this precise moment, Moshe tells them how to return to G-d. No fewer than seven times over ten verses (30:1-10), Moshe emphasizes their ability to return to G-d, utilizing the root *shuv*, meaning "return". This frequency of the word *shuv* is by far the highest in all of the Torah. The word is the root of *teshuvah*, repentance, but why is this word included so many times here? Is it really necessary?

When the relationship between G-d and us looks irreparable, that is precisely when we need to know that G-d is right there and waiting. Not only that, but Moshe continues in Devarim 30:11 by informing the Jews that not only is G-d waiting for them to return, but this return is actually a mitzvah. Understanding precisely how Bnei Yisrael must be feeling right now, Moshe continues that this mitzvah isn't something wondrous or distant. Teshuvah isn't hiding in the heavens, such that someone would need to go up to heavens and bring it down for us and show us how to do it. Nor is it on the far side of the sea, such that someone else would need to be brave in order to deliver and instruct us about it. It is close to you; it is within the grasp of your mouth and hearts to do it.

Our prophets have also taken teshuvah as a given. On the afternoon of every fast day, we read the words of Yeshayahu as the haftarah, wherein G-d explains that His ways and thoughts are unlike those of humanity, and even the wicked can leave their ways and return to G-d. (Yeshayah 55:6-8) Yechezkel expresses a Divine declaration that the Jews claim that G-d's path of mitzvot is impossible, but G-d responds that the path of sin and rebellion is the impossible one. Returning to G-d is in our grasp. (Yechezkel 18:29)

[It is worth noting that the promise of Devarim 30:3 that "G-d will return you" may also offer a physical version of teshuvah. Our return is not only spiritual; G-d's Divine Presence is always with Bnei Yisrael, no matter where we are, even in Exile. G-d is there to help us return whenever we are ready. See Rashi's commentary to Devarim 30:3, based on Megillah 29a.]

At the same time, our Sages have acknowledged a miraculous aspect of teshuvah. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Makkot 2:6) presents the following parable:

They [the Sages] asked Wisdom, "What is the punishment for the sinner?" Wisdom responded, "Misfortune pursues the sinner." (Mishlei 13:21).

They asked Prophecy, "What is the punishment for the sinner?" Prophecy responded, "The person who sins, he alone shall die." (Yechezkel 18:12).

They then asked G-d, "What is

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the punishment for a sinner?" G-d replied, "The sinner should repent and receive atonement. That is why the verse says, 'Therefore He shows sinners the way.' (Tehillim 25:8) This is the path of repentance."

This parable illustrates the perspective that the concept of Teshuvah is beyond all reason. We should not be able to erase the ill effects of our actions. If it wasn't for G-d Himself saying that it works and is a mitzvah, not even the wisest of men or the most inspired prophet could make heads or tails of it.

As we saw above, this impossibly beautiful mitzvah, this unique opportunity, is bookended by the frightening covenant of the *Tochachah* and the harrowing treaty of Haazinu. We are given this chance to return, knowing just how great the divide between the reward for serving G-d, and punishment for failure, can be.

There is always a path to return ever closer to G-d. No matter where we stand right now, we are always before G-d. Whoever we are - from the loftiest of leaders to the weary woodcutters and water drawers - G-d is showing us the path. The only real question is whether we will take that first step in the right direction.

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Summary

Chapter 17 begins the stories of Eliyahu. Eliyahu tells King Achav that there will be no rain until he, Eliyahu, bids it. G-d then instructs Eliyahu to flee and hide by Wadi Krit on the east side of the Jordan River. G-d miraculously sustains him by having ravens send him food every morning and evening, while he drinks water from the wadi. However, due to the drought, the wadi dries up. (17:1-7)

G-d then sends Eliyahu to Tzarfat, where a widow, will care for him. When he reaches Tzarfat, he sees a widow gathering wood and asks her for water. She replies that she cannot as she has no baked food, and only a minimal amount of flour in a jar, and oil in a jug. She is on her way to prepare a final meal for her and her son, before they die. Eliyahu then tells her that if she makes a small baked good for him first, G-d has declared that the jar of flour and jug of oil will never run out until the end of the drought. She does as he asks, and the prophecy is fulfilled. (17:8-16)

After a while, the son of the widow falls

ill and dies. The widow accuses Eliyahu of being responsible, as his righteous presence recalled her own sins and caused the death of her son. Eliyahu then asks for the boy. He takes him to his room, and prays to G-d, asking how He could have caused such sorrow to the widow who fed him. Eliyahu then stretches himself out over the boy, while praying that the child be brought back to life. G-d accepts Eliyahu's prayers and revives the boy. When Eliyahu brings the boy back to his mother, telling her that he is alive, she tells him, "Now I know that you are a man of G-d and the word of G-d is truly in your mouth." (17:17-24)

Insight

As Eliyahu is one of the best known biblical figures, and is identified with some of the most celebrated of Jewish rituals, such as the Pesach Seder and Brit Milah, a reader of this chapter might miss a surprising fact – we know nothing of Eliyahu's origin story. In this first chapter, he is introduced and he immediately brings a drought. [This is either because G-d commanded him, or as some commentaries have it, of

his own accord.] Eliyahu is miraculously supported by G-d, and even resurrects the dead. Yet, we are not told if he is an established prophet or a novice, though the former is more likely given that his first acts are significant miracles and his first recorded conversation is with the king.

[Rabbi Elchanan Samet](#) argues that this irony, that Eliyahu is clearly a known prophet, but the reader does not know his story, is intentional. Combined with the miraculous way in which Eliyahu ascends to heaven at the end of his arc, Eliyahu is granted the quality of mystery, which defines Eliyahu in the eyes of the Jews, both then and now.

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It Happened in Israel: The Caesarean Shevarim-Teruah

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

The Torah commands us to blow two kinds of sounds on Rosh HaShanah – *tekiah* and *teruah*. As the Talmud explains, we are supposed to blow three sets of *tekiah-teruah-tekiah*. We know that the *tekiah* blast is a long, straight sound. However, a *teruah* is supposed to be a sound of crying, which could mean a set of many rapid, staccato sounds [like what we call *teruah* today], or a set of a few longer sounds [like what we call *shevarim* today]. In the following passage, we learn about an innovation in the mitzvah of shofar which occurred in Israel at the end of the 3rd century CE.

Talmud, Rosh HaShanah 34a:

In Caesarea, Rabbi Avahu enacted [to blow] *tekiah-shevarim-teruah-tekiah*.

[The Talmud asks:] But what do you want? If the right sound is short gasping, do *tekiah-teruah-tekiah!* And if the right sound is long groaning, do *tekiah-shevarim-tekiah!* [The answer is that] he wasn't sure whether the right sound is long groaning or short gasping.

Rav Avira challenged: Perhaps it's gasping, and then the *shevarim* interrupts between the *tekiah* and the *teruah!* Yes; he also said to blow *tekiah-teruah-tekiah*.

Raveina challenged: Perhaps it's groaning, and then the *teruah* interrupts between the *tekiah* and the *shevarim!* Yes; he also said to blow *tekiah-shevarim-tekiah*.

Then what did Rabbi Avahu accomplish [with *tekiah-shevarim-teruah-tekiah*]? They do both groaning and wailing sounds! Rabbi Avahu thought the right sound might be groaning and then gasping [*shevarim-teruah*].

But then do the opposite – *tekiah-teruah-shevarim-tekiah* – in case the right sound is gasping and then groaning! When bad things happen to people, they tend to groan first, then gasp.

Some 700 years later, a Jewish community sent a letter to Rav Hai Gaon, head of the Yeshiva in Pumbedita (today: Fallujah). They expressed numerous questions about Rabbi Avahu's decision, including, "Before Rabbi Avahu, what did they do? This is an annual obligation, and it is not possible that from the time of the early Prophets to the time of Rabbi Avahu they went for a single year without blowing! And if the obligation was known to them, what did Rabbi Avahu enact for them? An enactment is only necessary for that which has been uncertain and confused!" (Otzar haGaonim, Teshuvot, Rosh HaShanah 34a)

Rav Hai Gaon answered by explaining that no one had forgotten how to blow shofar, and Rabbi Avahu was not correcting anyone's practice. Rather, what we call *shevarim* and what we call *teruah* are both legitimate fulfillments of the biblical *teruah*. In 3rd century Israel, there were communities which blew the former, and there were communities which blew the latter. Rabbi Avahu's innovation was to unify the Jewish world, having each adopt elements of the other. As Rav Hai Gaon wrote, "Such was always the custom throughout Israel; some did *teruah* as quick sounds, and some did *teruah* as the *shevarim*, and each fulfilled their obligation, for heavy *shevarim* are *teruah* and quick sounds are *teruah*... There was no conflict, and each did not mislead the other, but each did according to his place. And when Rabbi Avahu came, he saw fit to enact for all Israel to do the same thing, lest they have something which uneducated people would perceive as split."

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Biography The Netziv

Rabbi Ezra Goldschmiedt

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, also known as the Netziv (1816-1893), was born in Mir, Russia, to a family of Torah scholars. At the age of 13 he married Rayna Batya, daughter of Rabbi Yitzchak of Volozhin, the Rosh Yeshiva of the famed Volozhin yeshiva in Belarus and son of the yeshiva's founder, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin.

After decades of dedicated study, Rabbi Berlin became the Rosh Yeshiva of the Volozhin yeshiva. Despite many difficulties, including the burning down of Volozhin and its yeshiva on two occasions, enrollment steadily increased under Rabbi Berlin's guidance. During his tenure, the yeshiva produced many future leaders, such as Rabbi Moshe Epstein, Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, Rabbi Isser Zalman Meltzer, and Rabbi Shimon Shkop.

Rabbi Berlin's approach to learning was to search for the earliest possible sources on a topic, thereby developing a clear understanding through the roots of our tradition. For similar reasons, he was also a strong proponent of the study of Tanach. Additionally, Rabbi Berlin was an early supporter of the Chovevei Tzion movement and he strongly supported the resettling of Eretz Yisrael.

The *maskilim*, who viewed the Volozhin yeshiva's success as their failure, constantly appealed to the Russian government to disrupt the yeshiva's program. Eventually, their demands for an overwhelming program of secular studies (to take place from the morning until 3:00 PM), the requirement that every instructor hold a secular degree in education, as well as the closing of the yeshiva at night, forced Rabbi Berlin's hand; after leading the yeshiva for forty years, he decided to close it. (It should be noted that Rabbi Berlin had previously, albeit begrudgingly, allowed limited instruction in Russian to the Yeshiva. It was the extent of the demands that made the final version unbearable. See <http://bit.ly/2gsJvxx> for Rabbi J. J. Schacter's full presentation of this incident.)

Rabbi Berlin's life was so intertwined with the yeshiva's existence that its closing had detrimental effects on his health, eventually leading to his passing only two years later.

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Torah and Translation

We Are Judged On Our Own Terms

Rabbi N. Z. Y. Berlin, Ha'ameik Davar to Devarim 29:9

Translated by Rabbi Jared Anstandig

אין הדין וחשבון של כל אדם שוה...

[The manner of] Divine judgment and evaluation is not the same for all people...

כל אחד נידון לפי השאלה שהקב"ה שואל ממנו...

Everyone is judged in accordance to the question that G-d asks of them...

אין כל שבט ומנהיגיו נדונים בשוה, אלא לפי טבע השבט ובמה שהחזיק ביותר להיות נזהר, בזה נידון על העוותו וסורו מדרך הטובה שהחזיק בה.

[For instance,] not every tribe and its leaders are evaluated equally. Rather, whatever a tribe is most careful about, on this matter it is judged for its sin and abandonment of the positive path it was on.

וכמו שאמר עמוס הנביא "על שלשה פשעי יהודה ועל ארבעה לא אשיבנו, על מאסם את תורת ד' וחוקיו לא שמרו." "על שלשה פשעי ישראל ועל ארבעה לא אשיבנו, על מכרם בכסף צדיק ואביון בעבור נעלים."

This is as the prophet Amos says, "For three sins of Yehudah, for four I will not withhold punishment against them, for they have rejected G-d's Torah and His laws they did not observe" (2:4). And "For three sins of Yehudah, for four I will not withhold punishment, for they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes" (2:6).

הרי שעיקר הדין על שבט יהודה על שסרו מדרך הטובה לשמור חוקיו, המה מדות התורה, וזהו כבוד לתורה שבכתב שמדקדקים בה הרבה, וכאשר סרו מזה 'מאסו את התורה'.

Behold, you see that the central judgment against the tribe of Yehudah is that they strayed from their good way of observing the laws, which means the laws of the Torah, and this is the honour of the Written Torah that people are very careful about it. And, when they abandoned it, it says, "they rejected the Torah."

ולא כן שבטי ישראל שמעולם לא החזיקו כל כך בתלמוד תורה, אלא בחסד בין אדם לחבירו, כדרך מלכי ישראל... על כן עיקר הדין עליהן על שסרו מזו המדה 'ומכרו בכסף צדיק' וגו'...

Yet this is not the case with the tribes of Yisrael, for they were never so careful with studying Torah. However, [they were careful] about kindness towards one another, in the manner of the Kings of Yisrael... Therefore, the central judgment against them is that they abandoned this trait "and sold the righteous for silver..."

וכבר נתבאר בספר במדבר בדבר בלעם ברוח הקודש שנמשלו המון עם ישראל כגנות שיש בה הרבה מיני זרעים, אבל בכל גינה יש בה מין אחד שהוא העיקר,

[And likewise on an individual level:] It was already explained in Sefer Bamidbar (24:6) in the message of the prophet Bilam, speaking through Divine inspiration, comparing the masses of Am Yisrael, to gardens that have various types of seeds in it. But, in every garden there is one plant that is central.

כך כל ישראל מוזהרים בכל מצוה מעשית, אלא שמ"מ כל אחד עליו מצוה אחת להיות נזהר בה ביותר, לכל אחד לפי עסקיו מה שעלול להיות נכשל ע"פ עסקו, עליו לשום לבו על זה הפרט ביותר, ועל דבר זה הוא נידון ביחוד...

So too all of Israel are careful about all the mitzvot. But, still, everyone has one mitzvah to be most careful about, based on his dealings and what is most likely to trip him up. It is incumbent upon him to pay extra attention to this particular law, and on this matter he is judged more precisely...

כל אחד לפי טבעו, ודי' היוודע תכונת לב של כל אחד דן כל אחד לפי מדתו.

Everyone [is judged] according to his nature. And G-d, who knows the attributes of everyone's heart, judges everyone according to their traits.

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All times ET. Classes are free & open to all, unless otherwise noted.**

Monday-Thursday (Only Monday and Thursday this week, due to Rosh HaShanah)

**10:00 AM - Noon: Adult Seder Boker with Rabbi Moshe Yeres on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/sederboker> (men)
Monday/Wednesday: Talmud Succah, Orot haTeshuvah of Rav Kook
Tuesday/Thursday: Parshah, Tanach: Sefer Melachim**

Shabbat Sept 4

After minchah R' Mordechai Torczyner, Gemara Ketuvot, BAYT: Simcha Suite (men)

Sunday Sept 5

10 AM R' Aaron Greenberg, Talmud Shabbat, 533 Spring Gate or ZOOM: <http://bit.ly/jliczoom> 613613

Monday Sept 6—Erev Rosh HaShanah

8:30 PM R' Moshe Yeres, Talmud Shabbat (Chap. 15), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/talmud> *Not this week*

Tuesday Sept 7—Rosh HaShanah

7:30 PM R' Mordechai Torczyner, Shemuel (Chap. 4), ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (men) *Not this week*

Thursday September 9—Fast of Gedaliah

1:30 PM R' M Torczyner, Tisha b'Av and the Fast of Gedaliah, ZOOM: <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt> (women)

Friday September 10

**10:30 AM R' Jared Anstandig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Yehuda Mann, Bava Batra Perek 2 *advanced*
In-person at 159 Almore Ave (*vaccinated-only*), on Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/frishiur>**

COMING UP!

**On Yom Kippur, Between Musaf and Minchah
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, "What Do Shemitah and Yom Kippur Have in Common?"
BAYT Parking Lot Tent**

**Starting Tuesday October 5, 1:30 PM
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, "King Solomon's Arc: The Opening Chapters of the Book of Melachim"
A Weekly, Test-Based Series, co-sponsored with *Mekorot*
On Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>
For registration and fee information, please email mekorot18@gmail.com**

**Starting Wednesday October 13, 10:00 AM
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, "Los Pensadores: Jewish Philosophers of Medieval Spain"
On Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/weeklymt>
A three-part mini-series, Registration and fee information at <https://torontotorah.com/wednesdays>**

**Sunday October 17, 9:30 -11:00 AM
The Nusbaum Family Medical Ethics and Halachah Institute returns!
Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, "Helping Patients and Families Deal with Mental Illness"
Registration at <https://torontotorah.com/cme>
On Zoom at <http://tiny.cc/mtethics>
Non-medical professionals welcome!**

**May we be inscribed and sealed
for a year of health and shalom
and blessing and nachas and joy
and the arrival of Mashiach
and our complete redemption**