



TEN DAYS IN TANACH: STUBBORNNESS, SUSPENSE & SALVATION

The source for Aseret Yemei Teshuva in Tanach is somewhat ambiguous. The Torah (Vayikra 23:23-27) teaches us that the first of the seventh month is “*shabbaton zichron teruah*” (a day of rest commemorated with loud blasts) and the tenth day is “*Yom HaKippurim*,” without specific mention of the significance of the interim days. One may infer that the days from “*Shabbaton*” to “*Shabbat Shabbaton*” (i.e. Yom Kippur), are inherently ridden with sanctity and an opportunity to prepare for atonement, though not explicitly stated.

Rabba bar Avuha teaches us (*Rosh HaShana* 18a) based on Yeshayahu 55:6 — דַּרְשׁוּ ה' בְּהִמְצְאוֹ, קְרָאֵהוּ בְּהִיטּוֹ קְרוֹב — Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him when He is near — that during the ten days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, Hashem is particularly close and should be sought

out by every individual. Maimonides codifies this in his *Laws of Repentance* (2:6), recommending that one repent and cry out during these auspicious days as one’s teshuva will immediately be accepted.

The Gemara (ibid.) further expounds that one may learn about the essence of these ten days from the novel and delayed death of Naval the Carmelite (I Shmuel ch.25) who refused to properly compensate David and his servants for assisting Naval's shepherds. Avigayil, his sagacious wife, came to the rescue with lavish provisions and prevented David from slaughtering the house of Naval. Thereafter, the navi described Naval as selfishly feasting without constraint “like the feast of a king and Naval's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken.” Avigayil wisely waited until morning to speak of the gifts she offered David to save the household.

Unexpectedly, upon hearing her words, “And his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.” Avigayil's account brought Naval to understand the repercussions of his deplorable conduct.

The verse states: “And it came to pass about ten days after that the Lord smote Nabal, and he died” (I Samuel 25:38). These ten days, what are they doing here, i.e., why was there a delay of ten days before Nabal died? Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: They correspond to the ten meals that Nabal gave the servants of David who came to visit him, as out of politeness he allowed David's ten servants to eat, and therefore his punishment was delayed for ten days. Rav Nachman said that Rabba bar Avuha said: These are the ten days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, during which everyone is given one last opportunity to repent for the sins he committed over the course of

the previous year.

Hashem provided Naval with ten days to complete a process of regret and repair, and therefore Chazal saw these days as paralleling the Ten Days of Repentance (Malbim). Furthermore, this serves as the source for tefillot to be answered within ten days (*Midrash Aggadah Bereishit 41:1*). Naval failed to internalize the lesson and ten-day opportunity to change his ways; when the initial shock wore off, Naval returned to his stubborn and habitual conduct. For this reason, after ten days, God smote him and he died (*Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabba 18:10*).

Another hint to these cathartic and potentially transformative “ten days” in Tanach may be found in the prophetic narrative following the assassination of Gedalya ben Achikam on Rosh HaShana post-destruction of the First Temple. After Yishmael ben Netanya assassinated Gedalya, Yochanan ben Kereach led the remainder of the farmers of Judea to Egypt seeking asylum from Babylonian vengeance. As they rested near Bet Lechem on their way down to Egypt, they asked of Yirmiyahu ha-navi to appeal to Hashem on their behalf, convinced that God wished them to settle in exile until a future time to return (as he prophesied through Rachel’s cries in ch. 31). Yirmiyahu conceded “And after ten days, the word of Hashem came to Yirmiyahu” (*Yirmiyahu 42:7*). The Abarbanel explains that Yirmiyahu appealed to Hashem throughout the ten days between (i.e.including) Rosh HaShana (when Gedalya was killed) and Yom Kippur.

Amidst his prayers and fasting during Aseret Yemei Teshuva, Hashem answered Yirmiyahu’s supplications on behalf of the people with words of consolation:

אם שׁוֹב תִּשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּבִנִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא אֶהְרֵס וְנִטְעַתִּי אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא אֶתּוֹשׁ כִּי נִחַמְתִּי אֶל הָרְעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לָכֶם. אֵל תִּירְאוּ מִפְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ בְּבֹל אֲשֶׁר אֶתֶם יִרְאִים מִפְּנֵי אֵל תִּירְאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ נְאֻם ה' כִּי אֶתְכֶם אֲנִי לְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם וְלְהַצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיָּדוֹ. וְאַתֶּן לָכֶם רַחֲמִים וְרַחֵם אֶתְכֶם וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל אֲדֹמְתְכֶם.

If you remain in this land, I will build you and not overthrow, I will plant you and not uproot; for I regret the punishment I have brought upon you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you fear; do not be afraid of him...for I [Hashem] am with you to save you and to rescue you from his hands. I will dispose him to be merciful to you: he shall show you mercy and bring you back to your own land.

Yirmiyahu 42:10-12

These days offer us an auspicious opportunity for repentance, to swing the pendulum of our behavior from stubbornness and haughtiness to humility and change

The last remnant of Judean settlement was assured that they would not have to seek refuge in Egypt; they would be safe and secure in the Land of Israel. They were given a chance to start-

over and rebuild a social and religious infrastructure in preparation for national return.

Unfortunately, like Naval, the people did not take advantage of the opportunity of return and rebuilding. Instead, they accused the prophet of falsehood as they continued to Egypt, leaving the Land bereft of Jewish settlement and running towards their doom. Had they only heeded the prophetic message, not only would they have survived, but they could have and should have started the process of repair!

The righteous and the wicked, explain Chazal, are judged immediately on Rosh HaShana, whereas the *beinonim* — the “average” Jew is provided with the interim days until Yom HaKippurim to acquire merits and prove his righteousness (*Rosh HaShana 16b*). The ten days between the first and the tenth of Tishrei are not only days ridden with sanctity and preparation of prayer, fasting and atonement; they are gifts from God as our individual and national futures are held in abeyance. These days offer us an auspicious opportunity for repentance, to swing the pendulum of our behavior from stubbornness and haughtiness to humility and change, from suspense of annihilation to survival and salvation.



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