

The Difference Between “Yeshuos” and “Teshuos” in *Al HaNissim*

RABBI PINCHAS GELB



Chazal were careful with their use of language, and attention to the particular words that they chose can help us understand additional layers of meaning in the prayers that we recite. One example of this occurs with regard to *Al HaNissim*.

The opening word, *nissim*, means miracles. The next word, *purkan*, is Aramaic for redemption. *Gevuros* means strength in overcoming obstacles. And *teshuos* means salvations. The similar sounding word *yeshuos* has the same general meaning as the word *teshuos*—yet, while both of these nouns appear often in *Tanach*, the word *yeshuos* appears more commonly than *teshuos* in liturgy. For instance, in *Birkas HaMazon*, we ask that *Eliyahu HaNavi* be sent to herald *yeshuos* (salvations) and *nechamos* (comfort), but we do not use the word *teshuos* there. Likewise, the paragraph added on Shabbos to *Birkas HaMazon* describes Hashem as being the Master of salvations by using the phrase *ba'al ha-yeshuos*, not *ba'al ha-teshuos*. The second and fifteenth blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* similarly use the phrases *matzmiach yeshua* and *matzmiach keren yeshua* to describe that Hashem makes salvation flourish, not *matzmiach teshua* or *matzmiach keren teshua*.

What is the difference between the words *yeshua* and *teshua*, and why did Chazal specifically select the term *teshuos*, instead of *yeshuos*, for *Al HaNissim*?

Meaning of the Word Teshuos

Mr. Jay Braun, an expert in Hebrew language and grammar, suggests that although they have the same general meaning, the words *yeshuos* and *teshuos* derive from different roots: *yeshua* is from the root י-ש-ע and *teshua* is from the root ש-ו-ע. Just like the word תשובה is the noun form of the root ש-ו-ב, the word תשועה is the noun

Rabbi Pinchas Gelb is a lawyer in Los Angeles.
He has been a member of Adas Torah since 2005.

form of the root ש-ו-ע . Thus, *yeshua* and *teshua* both mean deliverance/salvation but each of them comes from an independent root.

What do these roots mean? The verb *lehoshia*, similar to the noun *yeshua*, means to save. But the root ש-ו-ע signifies something very different: to cry out in supplication or prayer. Its first use in the Torah states (Ex. 2:23): “And it came to pass during those many days that the King of Egypt died and the Children of Israel sighed from the slavery, and they cried out, and their outcry (שועתם) ascended to God from the slavery.”¹ Accordingly, *shav’a* is included in the *midrash* quoted by Rashi at the beginning of *Parshas Va’eschanan* as one of the ten Biblical expressions of prayer.² The Siddur also emphasizes this meaning of the root ש-ו-ע as an ascendant cry. For instance, the daily morning prayers begin with *Tehillim* 30 that states: “Hashem, my God, I cried out (שועתי) to You and You healed me.” The Shabbos morning prayers include *Tehillim* 34 that states: “The eyes of Hashem are toward the righteous and His ears toward their cry (שועתם).” *Ashrei*, recited twice daily in the morning and once daily in the afternoon, further reflects this meaning of the root ש-ו-ע : “The will of those who fear Him He will do; and their cry (שועתם) He will hear and He will save them.”

In general, the noun structure adhered to by the word “*teshua*” indicates something that is a natural consequence of—a more encompassing realization of—the root’s meaning. For instance, the simple noun form of the root ש-ו-ב (to return) is the word *שיבה*, which means a physical return (see, e.g., Ps. 126:1). The noun *תשובה* conveys another level of related meaning, namely, a verbal response (i.e., an answer) or an emotional/spiritual return (i.e., repentance). The same is true of the word “*tevua*.” Its root is ב-ו-א (to come) and its simple noun form is *ביאה*, i.e., a coming. The noun form at a more actualized level of related meaning is *תבואה*, agricultural produce, which is food that comes from the ground.³ Similarly, the word “*tevuna*” derives from

1 *Shmuel* I 5:12 similarly states with regard to the Divine punishment of the *Pelishtim* for taking the Ark: “The people who did not die were stricken with hemorrhoids, and the cry of (שועת) the city ascended to heaven.” *Shmuel* II 22:7 likewise states in the context of *David HaMelech’s* song of gratitude to Hashem: “In my distress I would call upon Hashem, and to my God I would call; from His high abode He heard my voice, and my cry (שועי) entered His ears.”

2 Rashi on *Devarim* 3:23 cites *Sifri* 26 which lists the following ten expressions of prayer: צרה, נאקה, שועה, זעקה, רנה ופגיעה, נפול ופלול, עתירה, עמידה, חילול, חנון

3 The same noun-verb relationship exists in English where the noun “produce” denotes agricultural harvest which is what the ground “produces.” In the Hebrew language, the ground is a passive conduit for what emerges from it and the active agent is Hashem, while in English the more active role in “producing” the agriculture is attributed the ground itself (see Oxford English Dict. (3d ed. 2000)). This nicely matches the view expressed by the Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:46) that a goal of *korbanos* is to refute religious systems that incorrectly had

the root ב-י-נ (to understand), and its simple noun form is בינה, comprehension. The higher level of related meaning is תבונה, which means wisdom or intelligence more generally. Another example is the word “tekuma.” Its verb root is ק-ו-מ (to arise) and its simple noun forms are קימה, standing upright, and קומה, height. Its related meaning at a higher level is תקומה, which means national revival or restoration (see, e.g., Lev. 26:36-37).

This, likewise, applies to the root ש-ו-ע (to cry out): its simple noun formulation is שוּעָה, which means a cry in prayer, and its derivative noun is תְּשׁוּעָה, which means salvation brought about in response to prayer. Hence, the words *teshua* and *yeshua* both mean salvation, but with different points of focus. “*Yeshua*” means salvation in general. It might occur in response to prayer or it could be precipitated by another factor. “*Teshua*,” on the other hand, means salvation that results specifically from prayer. It derives from the root ש-ו-ע which denotes prayer, and implies a specific type of deliverance whose catalyst is human prayer.

Use of the Word *Teshuos* in *Al HaNissim*

Accordingly, *Chazal* chose the word *teshuos* in *Al HaNissim* to emphasize that the miracles of Chanuka and Purim occurred as a result of the Jewish people’s cry in prayer to Hashem. This use of the term *teshuos* in *Al HaNissim* underscores that the deliverances we celebrate during these holidays were a proximate consequence of human prayer.

Along these lines, the Rambam explains toward the end of his introduction to the *Mishneh Torah* that every classical Rabbinic enactment expresses a concept already rooted in a verse from the Torah, and, by way of example, he states that the central item to be celebrated on Purim is Hashem’s response to the Jewish people’s prayer which the *Megilla* describes:

[T]he Prophets, together with the Court, enacted and commanded to read the *Megilla* at its appointed time in order to proclaim the praises of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the salvations (תְּשׁוּעוֹת) that He wrought for us, and that He was near to our cries (שְׁעִינֵינוּ), in order to bless and laud Him and in order to illustrate for all future generations how true is the assurance in the

attributed divinity to domesticated animals. Indeed, the Rambam states (*Hil. Avodah Zarah* 1:1) that idolatry started because people mistook the conduit of blessing for the actual source of blessing, and began to attribute divinity to things that seem to produce bounty rather than to Hashem. So too, the Hebrew language emphasizes avoidance of this error by using the word “*tevua*” to mean agricultural crop, thus accentuating that this only “comes from” the ground. English, not taking care to avoid this error, calls the crop “produce” because the ground ostensibly “produces” the bounty.

Torah (Deut. 4:7): “For what great nation is there that has deities so near to it as Hashem our God is [to us] whenever we call to Him.”⁴

It is noteworthy that the Rambam uses the word *teshua* (instead of *yeshua*) in conjunction with his description of Hashem’s response to the people’s prayer, i.e., *shav’a*. And more to the point, the Rambam’s discussion establishes that the central aspect to be celebrated on Purim is that this deliverance resulted from the Jewish people’s prayer to Hashem—which exactly dovetails with Chazal’s selection of the term *teshuos*, rather than *yeshuos*, for *Al HaNissim*.

Yet, the question arises where prayer appears with regard to Chanuka. Indeed, at the beginning of the laws of Chanuka (*Hil. Chanuka* 3:1), the Rambam summarizes the history of the events of Chanuka, but does not include prayer. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik often would ask where prayer was in the recapitulation of this history.

Rav Soloveitchik would answer that the prayer of Chanuka possibly was similar to the prayer in *Shemos* 2:23 which states: “and their outcry (*shav’asam*) ascended to God from the slavery.”⁵ The verses in *Shemos* 2:24-25 convey a beautiful description of the process by which Hashem took heed of the cries of the Jewish people: “And God heard their cries and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And God saw the children of Israel and God knew.”⁶ In these few verses, we see the unfolding resonance of prayer, *kivyachol*, in the Divine mind. However, Rav Soloveitchik underscores that, while the cries of the Jewish people were wholly received as prayer by Hashem, they were not consciously intended as such by the Jewish people. Rather, they were simply cries in response to the burdens of their servitude in Egypt:

At this point in their slavery experience, Israel had no intention of formulating prayer as such. This initial stage of prayer was little more than a poorly

4 *Mishneh Torah*, Introduction; see Rav Mayer Twersky, “Chanukah” (YUTorah.org, 2013).

5 Rav Mayer Twersky, “Chanukah: The Views of the Rambam and Ramban on the *Chashmonoim*” (YUTorah.org, 2012).

6 The *ya’ale ve-yavo* prayer appears to be modeled after these verses: the words “*ya’ale ve-yavo ve-yagia*” directly correspond to the verse (Ex. 2:23) “*va-ta’al shavasam el HaElokim*,” the words “*ve-yeraeh ve-yeratzeh*” correspond to the verse (Ex. 2:25) “*va-yar Elokim es Bnei Yisrael va-yeda Elokim*,” and the words “*ve-yishama ve-yipaked ve-yezacher*” correspond to the verse (Ex. 2:24) “*va-yishma Elokim es na’akam va-yizkor Elokim es beriso*.” While it is unclear why the *ya’ale ve-yavo* prayer transposes the order of the verbs in the verses, the verbs in *ya’ale ve-yavo* specifically correspond to these verses. Just as this process of Hashem’s receiving the prayers of the Jewish people in Egypt resulted in the redemption then, we pray on days that we would otherwise bring a *Musaf* offering (see Rashi *Shabbos* 24a) that this process of Hashem’s receiving our prayers should be repeated now, and result in the redemption that is to come.

*articulated, instinctive cry. According to the Ramban [Ex. 2:25], Hashem Himself “lifted” their groaning, allowing their cry to rise up before Him.*⁷

Rav Hershel Schachter notes that this is reflected in the Haggada as well. *Shemos* 2:23 states that the people’s cries in Egypt were just on account of their servitude, but the Haggada correlates this to the *Mikra Bikkurim* (Deut. 26:7), which states that their cry was considered prayer to Hashem. Rav Schachter explains the Haggada’s hermeneutical insight: “When we say that ‘we called out to God in prayer and that He answered our prayers,’ the *Torah Shebe’al Peh* comments that this is not to be taken literally! The Jewish people never really prayed! God in His infinite kindness considered their crying out from their hard labor under the Egyptians as if they had prayed, and this unspoken prayer was answered.”⁸

This adds textured nuance to the meaning of the word *shav’a*: it is prayer that is heard by Hashem even before it is coherently expressed. The cry of the children of Israel in Egypt was inarticulate. It was barely a stirring of the soul, a half-wakefulness during a prolonged slumber, but it nevertheless resonated with Hashem as a plaintive prayer and prompted Divine response. Hashem heard, deep within this cry, human prayer.⁹

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that this likewise might be the kind of prayer leading up to the miracles of Chanuka.¹⁰ Indeed, the Rambam describes the terrible oppression perpetrated by the Greek kingdom against the Jewish people and then states: “[T]hey pressured them (*lachatzum*) with great pressure (*lachatz*) until the God of our fathers had compassion on them and delivered them from their hands and saved them.”¹¹ The Haggada, based on the *Mikra Bikkurim*, similarly emphasizes that the prayers of *Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt, and Hashem’s response, were bound up with the “*lachatz*” perpetrated by the Egyptians. During Chanuka, as in Egypt, the prayer

7 Arnold Lustiger, *Before Hashem You Shall Be Purified: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on the Days of Awe* (New Jersey, 1998), p. 160.

8 Rav Herschel Schachter, “The Prayer of the Jews in Egypt” (TorahWeb.org, 2004); see also Rav Yaakov Neuburger, “The Prayers Within” (TorahWeb.org, 2013) (“[T]he *Ohr Hachayim* draws the conclusion that the Jews did not initially pray to Hashem and he translates the text to be stressing that the Jews screamed ‘from their servitude.’ In other words, they screamed out of terrible torment and despondent gloom and Hashem responded to their screams as if they had been praying.”); Rav Twersky (ad loc) (citing *Sforno Shemos* 2:23).

9 This is similar to the final line of the “*ana be-koach*” prayer: “Accept our *shav’a* and hear our cry, O Knower of hidden things.”

10 See Rav Twersky (ad loc).

11 *Mishneh Torah*, Hil. Chanuka 3:1.

of the Jewish people could have been a deep-seated but incompletely formulated expression of connectedness with Hashem that He received as prayer. Hashem heard this prayer (*shav'a*) and effectuated the deliverance (*teshua*) of Chanuka.

Conclusion

Thus, both “*yeshua*” and “*teshua*” mean salvation or deliverance, but each of them derives from a different root and conveys a different point of focus. The word *yeshua* means salvation generally, while the word *teshua*, which is the more encompassing realization of the word *shav'a*, connotes deliverance that is specifically precipitated by prayer. *Chazal* selected the term *teshuos*, rather than *yeshuos*, for *Al HaNissim* because Purim is a distinct expression of the verse in *Devarim* 4:7 that “Hashem our God is [near to us] whenever we call to Him,” and Chanuka is a further expression that Hashem hears even undifferentiated strivings brought about in response to national oppression of the Jewish people, and that He understands them, not merely as inchoate cries, but as resonant human prayer.

Nitzachon

Adas Torah Journal of Torah Ideas

Volume 3:1 Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkos, Chanuka 5776

Adas Torah

1135 South Beverly Drive

Los Angeles, CA 90035

www.adastorah.org

adastorah@earthlink.net

(310) 228-0963

Rabbi Dovid Revah, *Rav and Mara D'Asra*

Alan Rich, *President*

Nitzachon Editorial Team

Michael Kleinman, *General Editor*

Yaakov Siegel, *General Editor*

Yaakov Rich, *General Editor*

Peninah Cohen, *Copy Editor*

Rob Shur, *Design and Layout*

www.rbscreative.com