

TIME FOR TESHUVAH

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Parshas Vayeilech

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Today's Learning:
Bechorot 7:2-3
O.C. 203:4-6
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Gittin 85
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nedarim 21

Every year, the first ten days of the month of Tishrei are set aside as the "Aseret Yemei Teshuvah" / "Ten Days of Repentance." R' Avraham Halevi Horowitz z"l (16th century; father of the Shelah Hakadosh) explains that this period was designated as the time for teshuvah because Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of [man's] creation. Our Sages teach that G-d knew at the time of creation that mankind could not be perfect and would sin. Therefore, He created the concept of teshuvah even before He created the physical world. However, writes R' Horowitz, it would not have been seemly for Rosh Hashanah itself to be the day of forgiveness; after all, that is the day of judgment. Therefore, Hashem has given us a period after the day of judgment to mitigate the harshness of the judgment through repentance. This is the meaning of the verse (Yeshayah 55:6), "Seek Hashem when He can be found." When "can He be found"? When He created the world!

Therefore, continues R' Horowitz, on each day of the Ten Days of Repentance, one must turn aside somewhat from his mundane affairs - or even better, at night, when he is in any case free from the interference of other people - to reflect on his sins and confess about them. This should be done with crying, tears and heartbreak as if a close relative had died, as we read in Tehilim (119:136), "My eyes shed streams of tears because they did not keep Your Torah." A repentant person should not underestimate the importance of tears, for our Sages have taught that the "Gates of Tears" are never locked. (Emek Berachah p.200)

"Hashem, your G-d -- He will cross before you; He will destroy these nations from before you . . ."
(31:3)

In light of this promise, why did Bnei Yisrael carry weapons in their war against the Seven Canaanite Nation? R' Dov Berish Gottlieb z"l (Sieniawa, Poland; died 1801) explains:

Sometimes there is a state of "hester panim" (literally, "concealing of the face") in which, because of a sin, man is abandoned to the forces of nature and chance. Therefore, one who goes to battle without weapons is endangering his life and is called a fool. We find similarly that Yaakov Avinu was afraid lest a sin cause him to fall into the hands of Esav (see Rashi to Bereishit 32:10). Accordingly, one must guard himself against accidental injury lest at that moment G-d is hiding from him because of some sin. Even the smallest sin can cause Hashem to hide Himself and, if at the moment that a person is distant from G-d, some misfortune occurs, a person can be in danger. The remedy is that in every time of trouble, a person should repent to remove the hester panim from himself. (Quoted in Shomer Ha'pardes: Yesodei Ha'Torah V'ikarei Ha'dat p.113)

"Hashem spoke to Moshe, 'Behold your days are drawing near to die'." (31:14)

When R' Yehoshua Leib Diskin z"l (died 1898) was rabbi of Shklov, Lithuania, he was oppressed terribly by certain members of his community. Once, as he finished delivering his daily Talmud lecture, two strangers entered. R' Yehoshua Leib greeted them and asked, "What can I do for you?"

"We wish to hear words of Torah from you," they answered.

R' Yehoshua Leib directed the visitors to take the midrash Yalkut Shimoni from the bookshelf and to choose a paragraph that they wished him to explain. They did so and chose the following midrash:

"Behold, a tzaddik is paid on this earth" (Mishlei 11:31) - this is Moshe, about whom it is said, "Behold your days are drawing near to die." "Despite the wicked one and the sinner" (Mishlei, ibid.) - this is Korach and his followers.

"What is the connection between the quoted verse in Mishlei, the verse from our parashah, and Korach?" the visitors wanted to know.

R' Yehoshua Leib explained as follows: There are two ways that a person's time can come. Some complete their life's work while still young and move on to the next world, while other people die of old age without having completed their missions. In Moshe's case, the Torah testifies (Devarim 34:7), "His eye had not dimmed and his vigor had not diminished." Clearly then, Moshe did not die of old age; rather, his mission was complete - the time during which he was meant to lead the Jewish people had ended.

But Moshe could have complained, "I was cheated out of those days when Korach and his followers

rebelled against me and I was not recognized as leader!" This is the message of the midrash: The tzaddik is paid his full time on earth. If Moshe's time to die was drawing near, it is "despite the wicked one and the sinner." Moshe's suffering at the hands of Korach was already taken into account.

R' Yehoshua Leib concluded: Anyone who wants to inflict suffering on a tzaddik should know this! Nothing that the wicked do has any impact on the tzaddik in the end. In Hashem's "books," it is all accounted for. (Quoted in Yalkut Lekach Tov p.186)

The midrash lists ten verses that refer to Moshe's death, and Chazal say that there were ten events that contributed to the decree that Moshe would not enter Eretz Yisrael. However, the decree was not sealed until Hashem saw that Moshe was putting off praying for a reprieve. Although Moshe did pray 515 prayers that he be allowed to enter the Land, he waited too long.

The implication is, says R' Eliyahu Lopian z"l, that if Moshe had prayed immediately, Hashem would have relented. We should learn from this that we should not put off praying when a need arises. We should pray immediately. (Lev Eliyahu Vol I, Shevivei Ohr No. 175)

"But, conceal I will have concealed My face on that day because of all the evil that [Yisrael] did, for it had turned to gods of others." (31:18)

R' Nachman of Breslov z"l (1772-1810) teaches: There are two levels of hester panim. When G-d merely hides Himself, it is difficult to find Him, but it is possible if one looks hard enough. And, since one knows that G-d is hidden, one can motivated himself to seek Him.

Sometimes, however, G-d conceals the fact that He is concealed. [In this case, we do not realize that He is hiding and that He has abandoned.] This is a greater tragedy because, when we don't realize that He is concealed, we are not motivated to search for Him. (Likutei Moharan I 56:3)

"So now, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to Bnei Yisrael . . ." (31:19)

R' David Hakochavi z"l (Provence; 13-14th centuries) writes: The received tradition teaches that this verse commands each person to write a Sefer Torah for himself. The purpose of this mitzvah is clear - the Torah is the necessary tool in order for a person to perfect himself, and, surely, no craftsman would attempt to practice his craft without his tools.

Chazal state that each person must write his own Sefer Torah, even if he inherited one from his father. The reason, explains R' Hakochavi, is that it is human nature to value more that which one has made by himself. (Sefer Ha'battim: Migdal David, Sefer Mitzvah No. 16)

Is the Shemittah Over?

With the arrival of Rosh Hashanah this past Monday evening, the shemittah year ended. However, as discussed below, the laws of shemittah will continue to affect the diets of Jews in Eretz Yisrael for several more months.

First, as explained in prior issues, produce of the seventh year is subject to kedushat shevi'it / sanctity of the seventh year. Such produce may be eaten by humans or used for certain other limited purposes. It may not be sold, except in limited quantities, and the money obtained for its sale takes on kedushat shevi'it as well. Any produce or money that was subject to the restrictions of kedushat shevi'it during the seventh year remains subject to kedushat shevi'it after the seventh year and the same limitations on its use apply.

Second, each species of produce of the shemittah year is subject to biur (literally, "destruction") when that species is no longer available in the wild. (This mitzvah does not actually involve destroying the produce, but rather, declaring it hefker / ownerless, just as one may do at "biur chametz" according to the letter of the law.) For most common species, the time for biur occurs in the year after shemittah, not during the shemittah itself. For some species, the time for biur is as late as next summer.

Third, if one plowed his field or fertilized it during the seventh year so that it will be fit for planting in the post-shemittah year, he is penalized may not plant the field in the post-shemittah year. One may not rent it from him in order to plant it; rather it must lie fallow. However, if he died, his son may plant it. In contrast, if one removed the thorns from his field in the seventh year to prepare it for the post-shemittah year, or he removed stones from it, even though one is not allowed to do this, he is not penalized and he may plant it in the post- shemittah year. The difference between the two cases is that the former refers to a person who performed actual farm work - therefore he is penalized - while the latter did not do farm work, per se.

Finally, as discussed previously, our Sages instituted a rabbinic prohibition on eating certain produce - called "sefichin" - that grew in the wild during the shemittah year. This was done to discourage farmers from planting secretly and claiming the produce had grown on its own. Sefichin remain prohibited until enough time has passed in the post- shemittah year for that species to have grown. If one is in doubt whether the produce before him is sefichin of the seventh year or is new growth of the post-shemittah year, then he may be lenient after Chanukah but must be stringent before Chanukah. (Sources: Rambam; Sefer Ha'shemittah; Shemittah 5768: A Practical Guide)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](https://torah.org) page.

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