

# VOLUME 25, NO. 52

by Shlomo Katz

## Parshas Haazinu

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*Sponsored by Aaron and Rona Lerner in memory of mother Faiga Reva bat Yoel Aharon a"h (Fay Lerner)*

We read in this week's parashah (32:8), "When the Supreme One gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the children of man, He set the borders of the peoples according to the number of Bnei Yisrael." R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Mir Yeshiva; died 1936) writes: When we look at the natures of places, we see a remarkable thing. Every place is different--different climates, different minerals, different plants and crops, etc. And, the people who live in these places have different personalities and characteristics which somehow reflect their respective places. We tend not to view this as remarkable for we take it for granted; indeed, it makes perfect sense to us.

R' Levovitz continues: [Many people are skeptical of the idea that G-d is "found" in Eretz Yisrael more than in the Diaspora or that greater spiritual growth is possible in Eretz Yisrael than elsewhere.] Since we accept the idea that G-d gave each place unique physical characteristics, why should we not accept that Eretz Yisrael has unique spiritual characteristics also? We don't ask why etrogim grow in Eretz Yisrael and not in Poland! We understand that Poland simply is not the place to grow etrogim.

In the kinot for Tisha B'Av, we refer to Eretz Yisrael by the following terms, among others: "There the Divine Presence resides;" "the royal palace;" "G-d's throne;" "the air of your land is the life of the soul;" "who can compare to your anointed ones, your prophets, your Levi'im, your singers?" Why aren't these characteristics found elsewhere? Simply because G-d gave each place its unique characteristics, plants, climate, etc., and these are the characteristics He gave to Eretz Yisrael. (Da'at Torah p.130)

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*"For I shall raise My hand to Heaven and say, 'As I (Anochi) live forever'." (32:40)*

R' Moshe Hager shlita (the Vizhnitzer Rebbe in Bnei Brak, Israel) observes: Raising one's hands to Heaven refers to prayer. This verse teaches that one's prayer should be primarily motivated by a desire to increase G-d's honor, the honor of "Anochi" (a reference to G-d, as in the first word of the Ten Commandments). We are taught that the Shechinah shares in our pain (see Tehilim 91:15). [One way to understand this concept is that G-d created the world as an act of kindness, and He is disappointed (so-to-speak) when our deeds force Him to punish us.] Therefore, if we pray for the Shechinah's pain to end, any pain or suffering we are experiencing will necessarily end as well. (Sichot U'ma'amarei Kodesh p.213)

A related thought:

R' Mordechai Schwab z"l (1911-1994; mashgiach ruchani of Mesivta Bais Shraga in Monsey, New York) writes: We read in Shir Ha'shirim (5:2), "Open your heart to Me, My sister, My love, My dove, tamati / My perfection." A midrash comments: Read "tamati" as "te'omati" / "My twin." Just as one twin feels the other twin's pain, so Hashem feels our pain. (On other occasions, R' Schwab analogized Hashem's reaction to our suffering to the pain a surgeon would feel if he operated on his own child.)

R' Schwab adds: R' Yosef Karo z"l (1488-1575; author of the Shulchan Aruch) used to be visited regularly by an angel, whose teachings to R' Karo are recorded in the work Maggid Meisharim. The angel told R' Karo: If you knew and felt the pain that the Shechinah feels when you sin, you would be so saddened that you would be unable to enjoy the taste of food.

Furthermore, if we would focus all of our prayers solely on ending the suffering of the Shechinah (so-to-speak), we would be assured of being answered, and the Final Redemption would occur. (Kovetz Sichot Ma'amar Mordechai Vol. I, p.9)

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## **Shabbat and Teshuvah**

This Shabbat is known as "Shabbat Shuvah," a name derived from the first word of the haftarah that is read today. Some refer to it as "Shabbat Teshuvah" / "The Sabbath of Repentance." Indeed, there is a close relationship between Shabbat and teshuvah.

R' Menachem Benzion Sacks z"l (rosh yeshiva in Chicago; son-in-law of R' Zvi Pesach Frank z"l; died 1987) observes that there is a phonetic similarity between the words "Shabbat" and "teshuvah." In addition, the midrash relates that when the first man, Adam, first learned that the possibility of teshuvah exists, he exclaimed the verse that later became Tehilim 92:1, "Mizmor shir l'yom ha'Shabbat" / "A song to the Sabbath." What lies at the essence of the connection between Shabbat and teshuvah?

R' Sacks explains: Shabbat brings a new soul to the one who observes it--the so-called "Neshamah Yetairah." When observed properly, Shabbat lifts a person out of the vale of tears and raises him to a

place of holiness. The halachah requires that Sheva Berachot for a bride and groom be recited after the wedding night only if someone is present who was not present for Sheva Berachot on a previous day. The exception is on Shabbat, because Shabbat brings about "panim chadashot" / "new faces." It is not Shabbat that is the "new face," as some understand, but rather each of us who has a new face on Shabbat.

All of the above is accomplished by teshuvah as well. Teshuvah raises its practitioner from the lowest depths and brings him close to G-d exactly as Shabbat does. (Menachem Zion: Yerach Ha'eitanim p.101-102)

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*"Not with chessed nor with good deeds do we come before You; like paupers we knock on your door." (From the introductory paragraph of Selichot)*

R' Eliezer David Gruenwald z"l (1867-1928; Hungarian rabbi and rosh yeshiva) explains: If someone borrows money repeatedly and never pays back, we will soon stop lending to him. Not so if someone needs charity; the fact that we gave him charity yesterday does not fulfill our mitzvah to give again, as the Torah says (Devarim 15:10), "Give, you shall give"--even 100 times, says the midrash Sifrei.

R' Gruenwald continues: Every year we come before G-d, promise to improve, and ask for blessings. Generally, however, we do not fully keep our end of the bargain. Therefore, we say to G-d, we are not asking for a loan that we will repay with our deeds. Instead, we say, we are coming to You as a pauper seeking a handout. (Keren Le'David: Mo'adim)

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## **Eating on Erev Yom Kippur**

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 9a-b; Yoma 81b) teaches: We read (Vayikra 23:32), "You shall afflict yourselves on the ninth of the month [of Tishrei]." Do we fast on the ninth? We fast on the tenth! Rather, this teaches you that if one eats and drinks on the ninth, the verse considers it as if he fasted on the ninth and the tenth. [Until here from the Gemara]

Why, in fact, is there a mitzvah to eat on Erev Yom Kippur--a mitzvah which, according to some, has the status of a Torah commandment?

(1) Rashi z"l (France; 1040-1105) writes in his commentary to Tractate Yoma (81b): The verse means the following: "Prepare yourself for fasting on the tenth by eating on the ninth."

(2) Elsewhere (commentary to Rosh Hashanah 9a), Rashi writes: The above verse refers to eating as "afflicting" oneself. The more one eats and drinks on Erev Yom Kippur, the better [just as, the more

one afflicts himself on Yom Kippur, the better].

(3) R' Zidkiyah ben Avraham Ha'rofeh z"l (Rome; died 1275) writes: The more one eats before a fast, the more difficult the fast will be. Therefore, eating on the ninth directly contributes to the feeling of affliction on the tenth. [Ed. Note: Perhaps this is what Rashi means as well.]

(4) Alternatively, R' Zidkiyah writes in the name of his brother R' Binyamin z"l, eating all day on the ninth and beginning the fast a few minutes before sunset entering the tenth is a rabbinic mitzvah intended to publicize our opposition to the false interpretation of the Tzedukim (Saducees), who interpret the Torah literally and assert that there is a mitzvah to fast all day on the ninth. (Shibbolei Ha'lekket ch.307)

(5) Rabbeinu Yonah z"l (Spain; died 1263) writes: Eating on the ninth is an expression of our joy at the opportunity to be forgiven. The fact that one rejoices at being forgiven is itself an expression of remorse for one's sins.

(6) Additionally, R' Yonah writes: Yom Kippur is a yom tov and we are obligated to eat a yom tov seudah / feast. Since we are unable to do so on Yom Kippur itself, a fast day, we have a seudah on Erev Yom Kippur instead. (Sha'rei Teshuvah IV nos. 8-9)

(7) R' Yaakov Yokel Ettlinger z"l (Germany; 1798-1871) writes: If the Torah wants us to eat on Erev Yom Kippur, why not say so; why call it "afflicting" oneself? He explains: The purpose of eating on the ninth of the month is not to express joy. Rather, we are each comprised of a body and a soul, each of which needs an atonement. Each of them must afflict itself to achieve atonement, but each one's affliction is different because one is physical and the other is spiritual. The body afflicts itself on the tenth through an act against its nature--fasting. The soul, on the other hand, afflicts itself on the ninth by an act against its nature--eating. (Aruch La'ner: Rosh Hashanah)

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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](#) page.

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