

# A RIGHT TO REPENT? - PART 2

*by Shlomo Katz*

## Parshas Ki Savo

## A Right to Repent? - Part 2

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Our parashah opens: "V'hayah / It will be when you enter the Land that Hashem, your Elokim, is giving you as an inheritance, and you will possess it and dwell in it." R' Chaim Palagi z"l (1788-1868; Chief Rabbi of Izmir, Turkey) writes:

Our Sages teach that any verse that begins with the word, "V'hayah," is an expression of joy. Thus, our verse is teaching that one who makes aliyah to Eretz Yisrael should do so with joy. It is wrong for a person to say, "I have to leave my home for health or financial reasons, so I may as well move to Eretz Yisrael," R' Palagi writes. Rather, aliyah should be motivated solely by the joy of living in such a holy place as Eretz Yisrael.

R' Palagi continues: If, for whatever reason, a person is unable to move to Eretz Yisrael, he still must yearn for the Land, as we read (Tehilim 87:5), "But of Zion it can be said, 'Man and man who was born there.'" Why the redundancy ("man and man")? The Gemara (Ketubot 75a) explains: "One who was born there and one who yearns to see it [is as if he was born there]." R' Palagi notes: The gematria of Eretz Yisrael (832) equals the gematria of "tet lev" / "pay attention." Then, Hashem will view one's desire to perform this mitzvah as if the person had actually performed the mitzvah. However, if one refrains from moving to Eretz Yisrael simply because he is happy where he is, then he will be punished, concludes R' Palagi. (Tochachat Chaim: Parashat Chayei Sarah)

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"When you have finished tithing every tithe of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithe, you shall give to the Levi, to the convert, to the orphan, and to the widow, and they shall eat in your cities and be satisfied. Then you shall say before Hashem, your G-d, 'I have removed [literally 'set fire to'] the holy things from the house . . .'" (26:12-13)

R' Raphael Moshe Luria z"l (Yerushalayim) writes: The sin of Adam consisted of two parts, and the repentance for each is different. First, because he disobeyed G-d's command, there was an element of blasphemy in his sin; second, his sin involved an element of deriving improper pleasure from G-d's creation. When one repents from a sin that involves blasphemy, one must distance himself entirely from his past. On the other hand, to repent from a sin that involved improper pleasure, one must elevate his enjoyment of creation to a level where it can be considered a Divine service. Paralleling these two forms of repentance, there are different laws relating to produce. Sometimes--for example, in the case of orlah / fruit of a new tree--the prohibited food must simply be thrown away. In contrast, some mitzvot involve elevating the food--for example, by giving it to a levi as ma'aser or to a convert, orphan, or widow as ma'aser ani. One who has thus elevated the pleasures of this world can truly say, "I have set fire to the holy things," i.e., I have ignited a holy fire, using ordinary items "from the house." (Ori Ve'yishi II, Introduction p.2)

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"I did not eat of it in my intense mourning, I did not consume it in a state of impurity, I did not give of it for the needs of the dead ..." (26:14)

Literally, this verse is a statement that a Jew is required to make attesting that he has complied with all the laws of ma'aser. However, in the spirit of the High Holidays, R' Moshe Avigdor Amiel z"l (1883-1945; Chief Rabbi of Antwerp and TelAviv) interpreted the verse as decrying the loss of proper focus in many people's service of Hashem. He writes in part:

In past generations, Yizkor was never a big deal. It has no source in the Torah or the books of the Prophets. Yet, it has become a major event, and people are very meticulous to observe it.

In contrast, many people forget to remember their own souls. We are supposed to recite every day (at the very beginning of the morning prayers), "Elokai / My G-d, the soul which You have placed in me is pure. You created it, You 'blew' it into me, You guard it within me, and You are destined to take it from me and return it to me in the World-to-Come." This "Yizkor" has the potential to save man from sin, but it has taken a back seat to a much less important Yizkor.

Likewise, Jews in our time take particular care to observe yahrzeits as if that is one of the Thirteen Foundations of our faith. This is another practice that seems to have received very little attention in earlier generations. In contrast, man forgets to observe his own yahrzeit. What does it mean to observe one's own yahrzeit? Our Sages teach: "Repent one day before you die." But, does a person know when he will die? they ask. Indeed not! Therefore, one should repent every day. (Derashot El Ami)

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"Hashem will strike you with madness and with blindness, and with timhon levav / confounding of the heart." (28:28)

[R' Samson Raphael Hirsch z"l (Germany; 1808-1888) interprets "timhon levav" as "haziness, confusion, cloudiness of perception, of thoughts and ideas."]

In the Yom Kippur vidui, we confess the "sins that we have committed with timhon levav." What are those sins? R' Gedaliah Anemer z"l (1932-2010; rosh yeshiva of the Yeshiva of Greater Washington, rabbi of Young Israel Shomrai Emunah and av bet din of Greater Washington, D.C.) explained in a Kol Nidrei derashah that this refers to the sin of ignoring the sins of others. We fail to recognize the fact that all the troubles that befall the world are the result of the immorality and other sins of mankind. We allow our perception to be clouded and fail to act, or at least speak up, against these sins. Therefore, we are guilty as well, and for this we confess. (Heard from Moshe Katz)

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"Because you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, amid gladness and goodness of heart, mei'rov kol / when everything was abundant." (28:47)

R' Eliyahu de Vidas z"l (Eretz Yisrael; 1518-1592) writes: After what I have told you in the previous chapter [that one must perform mitzvot with conscious attention to them rather than by rote], it is appropriate to add that every mitzvah one does must be done with joy, as it is written [that the curses in our parashah come] "Because you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, amid gladness and goodness of heart." It also is written (Tehilim 100:2), "Serve Hashem with joy!" In this vein, the Zohar teaches: "The Shechinah resides only in a place that is whole--not a place that is lacking, a place that is damaged, a place that is sad-only in a place that is proper, [which is] a place of joy. That is why the Shechinah did not rest on Yaakov Avinu all the years that Yosef was separated from him."

R' de Vidas adds: I heard in the name of our teacher, R' Yitzchak Luria Ashkenazi z"l (the Arizal; 1534-1572), that he interpreted the verse literally, "Because you did not serve Hashem, your Elokim, amid gladness and goodness of heart, mei'rov kol / more than if you had everything." The message, R' de Vidas writes, is that one should rejoice with G-d, his mitzvot and the Torah more than one would rejoice over all the money in the world.

How can a person attain happiness? By reflecting on the good that G-d has done for him. [The author continues, addressing this topic at length.] (Reishit Chochmah: Sha'ar Ha'ahavah ch.10)

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Teshuvah

Last week, we quoted R' Joseph B. Soloveichik z"l (1903-1993), who explained that there is teshuvah / repentance which is accepted because of G-d's Attribute of Mercy, and there is

teshuvah / repentance which is accepted because of G-d's Attribute of Justice, i.e., justice demands that the sinner be forgiven. This week, we present R' Soloveitchik's explanation of the latter phenomenon.

Kabbalists teach that the first set of luchot--the ones Moshe later broke--had the entire Torah engraved on them, while the second Luchot had only the Aseret Ha'dibrot. In place of the comprehensive first luchot, Torah She'be'al Peh / the Oral Law was given with the second luchot. What does this signify?

R' Soloveitchik explains: We find that the concept of hekdesch / consecrating an item for the Temple can take two forms. One is kedushat damim / sanctification of the item's value, while the other is kedushat ha'guf / sanctification of the item itself. [A donation for the upkeep of the Temple falls in the first category, while an offering on the altar falls in the second category.]

Among the legal differences between the two categories, notes R' Soloveitchik, is the following: If a person makes personal use of an item with kedushat damim, that item loses its sanctity. On the other hand, if a person makes personal use of an item with kedushat ha'guf, he must pay a penalty, but the item's status is unaffected. Why? Because the latter item has inherent sanctity which is not easily removed from the item. In contrast, the sanctity of the former is external and any act inconsistent with sanctity destroys that sanctity.

R' Soloveitchik continues: A similar difference exists between a person who has studied the Oral Law and a person who has studied only the Written Torah. The Written Torah is found in books; it is external to the person studying it. Thus, while it creates sanctity, it is not a sanctity that can withstand sin. Only through G-d's Mercy can such a sinner be forgiven and regain his sanctity. This is why the Written Torah (including the Prophets) is "unaware" of teshuvah except as a function of G-d's Mercy (see last week's issue).

In contrast, when one studies the Oral Law, it necessarily becomes part of him since [ideally] the Oral Law is not written and has no physical manifestation. Thus, when such a person sins, his inherent holiness remains untouched. From this it follows the even Justice demands that his teshuvah be accepted.

When were the second luchot given? On Yom Kippur. This is why Yom Kippur is associated with teshuvah--because it was on the day that the Oral Law was given that we attained the inherent sanctity which makes atonement more achievable. (Divrei Ha'Rav p.123)

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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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