

HANGING ONTO HOLINESS BY A THREAD

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 341, The Brachos on the T'Kios. Good Shabbos and K'siva V'chasima Tova!

Dedicated This Year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand

Climbing Up The Rope to Rachav: Hanging Onto Holiness By A Thread

There is a widely discussed question of why Rosh HaShanah [the Day of Judgment] precedes Yom HaKippur [the Day of Atonement]. Logically, it would seem to make more sense -- and certainly be to our advantage -- for the day of Mercy, when we are forgiven for our sins to precede the day in which we are judged for those sins.

Rav Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) answers this question. To appreciate the answer, we must first analyze the second chapter of Yehoshua (which we read as the Haftorah for Parshas Shlach). The first city that was conquered by Yehoshua after entering the land of Israel was Jericho. Yehoshua sent out spies to reconnoiter the land. The spies stayed in the home of Rachav the Zonah. There are commentaries who identify Rachav as an innkeeper, basing the word Zonah on the word Mazon (food). However, as the Gemarah implies, the simple reading of the pasukim [verses] is that Rachav was a woman of ill repute -- the normal meaning of the word Zonah comes from the word Zenus -- (sexual immorality).

Rachav provided the spies with the information that they wanted to hear. "I know that Hashem has given you the Land, and that your terror has fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the Land have melted because of you..."

The Talmud asks [Zevachim 116a], "How did Rachav know that the whole country was in mortal fear of the Jews?" The Gemara is making an inference from Rachav's statement that "neither did there

remain any more spirit in any man". Rachav was testifying to the loss of spirit and initiative based on personal professional knowledge. She had served as a harlot since she was ten years old. This was her profession throughout the forty years when the Jews were wandering in the wilderness. During this period, there was not a prince or ruler in the area who did not come by and use her services.

At this point of time, at the age of fifty, Rachav repented and actually converted to Judaism. She confessed to G-d that during her years of sin, she made use of three devices to secretly bring customers into and out of her residence: The rope, the window, and the wall. Therefore, she now used these same three items to help the spies escape from her dwelling and from being noticed by the Canaanites, thereby saving their lives. She asked that she be forgiven for her inappropriate use of these devices by virtue of the fact that she now risked her life and used them for a laudatory reason. This is the simple reading of the Gemara in Zevachim.

Rabbi Schwab is not satisfied with this interpretation. Rav Schwab asks, what does it mean that she used the rope, the window, and the wall for people to sin? She ran a house of ill repute for forty years. Everyone must have known exactly what was going on in that house. There was no reason to have a secret entrance by way of the window and rope. After 40 years, who were these princes and kings trying to fool? What were they trying to hide by climbing up the wall and entering through the window? Everyone knew Rachav the harlot and the nature of her business.

Rav Schwab interprets the Gemara differently. The Gemara is teaching us one of the secrets of Repentance. What finally inspired Rachav to repent? Rachav was inspired to repent through the realization that after 40 years in business, there were still people who were embarrassed to walk into her front door! There were still people who would be so ashamed that they would only enter by way of the rope, the wall, and the window. The fact was that after all these years, there were still people who had a modicum of dignity and embarrassment. They possessed some latent degree of sensitivity and morality that at least prevented them from committing this sin in a blatant fashion. Despite the fact that the times and the society were immersed in immorality, there were still individuals who at least had a sense of guilt, some remnant intuition of possessing a "Tzelem Elokim" [Divine Image]. Teshuvah can only begin under such circumstances.

Teshuvah can only begin if I do not give up on myself. If I believe that I am totally worthless, then I cannot begin to think about repentance. However, when I realize that somewhere deep down inside, there is still the dignity of man, there is still something holy, then I can use that feeling and begin the trek down the road to repentance. This is what Rachav meant when she referred to the rope, the window, and the wall.

The Mishneh states "Don't be wicked in your own eyes" [Avot 2:13] This is why Rosh HaShanah must precede Yom Kippur. In order for a person to begin the process of Teshuvah, he must first realize that he is somebody of value. He must take note: I am a son of Israel. I have a King in Heaven. I am a servant of the King. Yes, I may not have been a very good servant, but at least I can say that I am His

servant.

The realization that there is a King and that I am His servant, and therefore that I have self worth, is a prerequisite for the process of Repentance. If we would start the Ten Days of Repentance merely with confession -- merely with a recitation of all the sins that we committed, we would overwhelm ourselves with our worthlessness, and we would not be in a position to repent.

On Rosh HaShanah, we never say the words "Al Chet" (upon the sins...) or "Ashamnu" (we are guilty). Leave the sins out of it, for the meanwhile. On this day, a person must think about who he is, his vast potential, and his goal in life. From such a perspective, repentance may flow forward.

The Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) suggests a beautiful Chassidische insight on this past week's portion: "If your dispersed shall be at the ends of Heaven, from there the L-rd your G-d will gather you and take you." [Devorim 30:4] The Baal Shem Tov comments that we would have expected the pasuk [verse] to read "If your dispersed shall be at the ends of the Earth." However, the pasuk says "...at the ends of the Heaven". The Baal Shem Tov teaches the same lesson that we mentioned above: The only time that a person can be gathered back to G-d, is if "Heavenliness" is still present within the person. If a person feels that he still has a Heavenly attachment - despite the fact that he may have sullied himself with the pleasures of the earth -- then from there G-d can gather him back.

Rachav was a harlot for 40 years, but she eventually married Yehoshua bin Nun, the greatest man of his generation. It all began with her contemplation of the wall, the rope, and the window - with her recognition that man - for all of his shortcomings - still possesses holiness. That must be the beginning of the path to Teshuvah.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#341). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: The Brachos on the T'kios. The other halachic portions for Parshas Nitzavim and/or VaYeLech from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

- Tape # 022 - Reading Haftorah: Scrolls vs. Book
- Tape # 112 - Shoteh: Mental Incompetence in Halacha
- Tape # 158 - Schar Shabbos: How Do We Pay Rabbonim and Chazzanim?
- Tape # 205 - Kiddush Before T'kiyas Shofar
- Tape # 252 - Buying Seforim
- Tape # 295 - Burying the Dead on Yom Tov Sheni

- Tape # 341 - The Brachos on the T'kios
- Tape # 342 - Is Building a Succah a Mitzvah?
- Tape # 385 - Fasting on Rosh Hashana
- Tape # 386 - Succah Gezulah
- Tape # 429 - Treatment of an Invalid Sefer Torah

New! Yad Yechiel Institute is on-line! Visit <http://www.yadyechiel.org> !For information via email, you may also write to tapes@yadyechiel.org.

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from:

Yad Yechiel Institute

PO Box 511

Owings Mills, MD 21117-0511

Call (410) 358-0416 for further information.

Also Available: Mesorah / Artscroll has published a collection of Rabbi Frand's essays. The book is entitled:

Rabbi Yissocher Frand: In Print

and is available through your local Hebrew book store or from Project Genesis, 1-410-654-1799.
