

TESHUVA IS CUMULATIVE / WE TRY, HASHEM HELPS

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Good Shabbos & Shana Tova U'mesuka! This will be the last shiur until Parshas Noach.

"Complete Repentance" In Our Time

The Maharal (as well as other commentaries) asks a famous question: Last week's parsha (Parshas Ki Savo) contained the terrible *Tochacha* [Prophetic listing of curses that will befall the Jewish nation if they abandon the Torah]. Parshas Bechukosai, at the end of Sefer VaYikra, also contains a terrible *Tochacha*.

The end of the *Tochacha* in Parshas Bechukosai contains a consolation, while the *Tochacha* at the end of Parshas Ki Savo ends without any consolation. The Torah in Bechukosai writes "And I will remember the covenant with Yaakov..." [Vayikra 26:42]. It ends, so to speak, on a positive note. The narration in Ki Savo merely ends with the *pasuk*, "And the L-rd shall bring you back to Egypt in ships...and there you shall sell yourselves to your enemies for bondmen and for bondwomen and no man shall buy you." [Devorim 28:68] Period!

Why are there words of comfort at the end of the *Tochacha* in Parshas Bechukosai, but not at the end of the *Tochacha* in Parshas Ki Savo? I once said over an insight from Rav Yoshe Ber Soleveitchik, zt"l, that in fact there **is** consolation to be found at the end of the *Tochacha* in Parshas Ki Savo as well -- except that it comes in Parshas Nitzavim. The *Tochacha* in Parshas Bechukosai foreshadows the destruction of the First *Bais HaMikdash* [Temple] and *Galus Bavel* [the Babylonian Exile]. *Galus Bavel* was finite. It was supposed to last for 70 years and then it ended. There was light at the end of the tunnel. It came. It was scheduled to end at a specific time. It finished. Therefore, the consolation in that *Tochacha* comes right away.

The *Tochacha* in Parshas Ki Savo foretells the calamities that accompanied the destruction of the

Second Bais Hamikdash. It is now almost two thousand years later and Hashem has still not redeemed us from this destruction. There **is** a consolation to this second *Tochacha*, just like there **will be** an end to this exile. However, the consolation is not immediate. It comes later on -- in Parshas Nitzavim. What is the consolation? The consolation is "And it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you -- then you will take it to your heart among all the nations where Hashem, your G-d has dispersed you; and you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice, according to everything that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and all your soul." [Devorim 30:1-2] The consolation is that *Klal Yisrael* will in fact do *Teshuva* and then the exile will end.

This is what the Rambam writes in *Hilchos Teshuva* [7:5]: "All the prophets exhorted regarding *Teshuva* [repentance] and Israel will only be redeemed through *Teshuva*. And the Torah has already promised that in the end, Israel will do *Teshuva* at the end of their exile and immediately they will be redeemed as it is written 'And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you... and you will return unto Hashem, your G-d...'." In a nutshell, Rav Yoshe Baer concluded, the consolation to the *Tochacha* in Parshas Bechukosai, which was finite, came right away. However, the *Tochacha* in Parshas Ki Savo, which is indefinite in length, comes eventually. It comes later in our parsha, Parshas Nitzavim, and the consolation is that at the end of days, *Klal Yisrael* will do *Teshuva* and then the *Geulah* will come.

Whenever I study this Rambam, I contemplate the following question. I do not for a moment doubt the Rambam's words that in the end Israel **will** do *Teshuva*, but I have always wondered -- how on earth is this going to happen? When the majority of *Klal Yisrael* today does not know about *Shabbos* and does not know about *Teshuva* and does not know the most basic ideas of Jewish practice or tradition, how is it going to happen that in the end of the exile, suddenly, *Klal Yisrael* will repent?

How is it going to happen? Can you imagine it? Even most people today who are somewhat affiliated know almost nothing. They do not even know that they are doing anything wrong. What scenario can we envision such that "in the end of days Israel will repent?"

I found somewhat of an answer to this question this year in the sefer Shem m'Shmuel [by Rav Shmuel Borenstein; the second Sochatchover Rebbe 1855-1926], the son of the Avnei Nezer].

On the *pasuk* in our parsha "*v'shav Hashem es Shevuscha v'reechamecha*" [the L-rd will return your captivity and have compassion on you] [Devorim 30:3], the Shem m'Shmuel writes... The simple interpretation of the word "*shevuscha*" comes from the word "*shevi*" [captives]. The *pasuk* thus means that the Ribono shel Olam will return our captives and he will gather us from all the nations to which he has dispersed us.

The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel reads the *pasuk* in an entirely different fashion. He interprets the word "*shevuscha*" from the word "*Teshuva*" [repentance]. The *pasuk* thus means that the Ribono shel Olam will gather in (i.e. -- accept) all our repentances and have mercy on us. He will gather in all the

thoughts of repentance that have been uttered over all the generations.

The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel alludes to a Gemara [Rosh Hashanah 17], which qualifies an expression from the High Holiday liturgy: "*ma'avir rishon rishon...*" [He removes the first (sin), the first (sin)] and teaches, "However the first (sin) itself is not erased." The Talmud interprets that when the Heavenly Court weighs our sins against our merits -- if they are evenly balanced such that taking away one sin will tip the scales in favor of mitzvos, the *Ribono shel Olam* does that.

However, the Gemara says, "The sin itself is not erased." The Almighty does not toss away that *aveirah*, but rather, He holds it in abeyance. He puts it in cold storage. If the time will come when the person will do more sins, the Almighty will say, "Okay, I gave you a chance, but now I am going to add this back onto the pile." Thus far, we have been quoting the interpretation of the Gemara.

The Shem m'Shmuel says, "If the *Ribono shel Olam* holds sins in abeyance for the "right time" (or the "wrong time") then certainly the *Ribono shel Olam* puts all the *Teshuvah*s and thoughts about *Teshuva* that people have done for tens of centuries in cold storage. This includes *Teshuvah*s that were perhaps not complete and *Teshuvah*s that were perhaps done for the wrong reason and perhaps only preliminary thoughts contemplating a *Teshuva* which never came to fruition. The *Ribono shel Olam* collects all of these and He waits. He has this entire pile of these less than perfect thoughts and acts of repentance.

The Shem m'Shmuel says that with this concept, he understands how it could be that if a person was a *rasha* [wicked person] his entire life and then on his deathbed, he has *hirhurei teshuva* [contemplative thoughts about repentance]; Hashem considers it as if he died as a *baal teshuva* [one who has repented].

What kind of *Teshuva* is this? There is no "acceptance upon oneself to improve in the future" [*kabbalah al ha'asid*]. He is going to die within hours! The answer, says the Shem m'Shmuel, is that this person, even though he has been a *rasha* his entire lifetime, had thoughts of *Teshuva*. During his lifetime, these thoughts never came to fruition, but on his deathbed, when he was in fact **sincere**, the *Ribono shel Olam* takes all these thoughts of *Teshuva* that even this person did over his entire lifetime and now He considers it that he dies a *Baal Teshuva*.

The Shem m'Shmuel says that we can say the same thing about the *Tochacha*. The above idea does not only apply to individuals but it applies to all of *Klal Yisrael*. The *Teshuvah* fragments from throughout *Klal Yisrael* from throughout the thousands of years of exile combine into one "appropriate" *Teshuva*. Over the last two millennia, the Almighty has collected all sorts of thoughts about repentance and good intentions to change people's ways, which taken as a single conglomeration, meets the bill for a "complete and appropriate repentance," even though until now they had been pushed off to the side and held in abeyance. This, the Shem m'Shmuel writes, is how "complete repentance" could happen even in our day.

In the final generation, as spiritually weak as we may be, we will only need a little repentance to

supplement the vast reserves of "*Teshuva*" that we have collectively amassed over the millennia. Therefore, in our generation, in spite of all the people who perhaps do not even know how to do *Teshuva*, we -- who do know how -- have it within our power to tip the scales. We should therefore not give up hope and every single day we should be anxiously awaiting and anticipating the arrival of our righteous Moshiach.

This is an old question -- if Moshiach did not come in the days of Rav Chaim Ozer, the Chofetz Chaim, or the Chazon Ish -- how can we have the audacity to suggest that he might come in **our** day? Nevertheless, at the end of time, we must be exceptionally strong in the belief in his coming "...for my redemption is indeed at hand..." (*k'rova yeshuasi lavo* [Yeshaya 56:1]).

With this Shem m'Shmuel, we can understand the Rambam that says, "In the end, Israel will do *Teshuva* at the end of their exile" [*Hilchos Teshuva* 7:5]. Only a tiny bit of extra *Teshuva* will be required at the very end. Those are encouraging words.

The Mogen Avraham Is Not Teaching Us Segulahs

The Mogen Avraham writes "One time a *Baal Tokeah* could not get a sound out of his shofar so he took the shofar and whispered into the wide end the *pasuk* 'May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it.' [Tehillim 90:17] Suddenly, he was able to blow it again." [Orach Chaim Siman 585]

The Tolner Rebbe, shlit"a, asks three questions on this Mogen Avraham:

1. Why did the Mogen Avraham need to tell us this? The Mogen Avraham is not in the business of telling us miraculous incidents nor is he in the business of teaching us *segulos* [supernatural Divine aids to accomplish matters]. The Mogen Avraham was so poor that he had no paper and sometimes he even needed to write on the walls of his house. He is clearly not inclined to waste space and precious paper to tell us miraculous incidents.
2. What was so special about the *pasuk* the *Baal Tokeah* recited? If he wanted to say a *pasuk* from Tehillim he could have recited "G-d has ascended with the blast; Hashem, with the sound of the shofar" [Tehillim 47:6] or "Blow the shofar at the new moon's renewal, at the time appointed for our festive day" [Tehillim 81:4]. But what does Tehillim 90:17 have to do with shofar blowing?
3. If you cannot get the shofar to blow -- into what side of the instrument should one whisper a *segulah pasuk*? It should obviously be whispered into the narrow side. We blow from the narrow side of the shofar (according to the Levush) based on the *pasuk* "From the (narrow) straits did I call upon G-d..." [Tehillim 118:5]. Why did the *Baal Koreh* in this incident whisper into the wide side of the shofar?

The Tolner Rebbe explains that this Mogen Avraham is not sharing miraculous incidents and he is not teaching us *segulahs* -- he is telling us the basis of Rosh Hashanah. He is telling us the basis of *Teshuva* and of life itself.

When was this *pasuk* of "May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it" first said? It was said by the completion of the *Mishkan*, by Moshe Rabbeinu. The *Mishkan* was an example of a situation where the people had no relationship to construction or artistry or the skills necessary for the many tasks required to complete that project. Based on their own skills and talents, there is no way they could build the *Mishkan*. Yet, the *Ribono shel Olam* took slaves out of Egypt who only knew about working in fields and told them to build a *Mishkan*. How are we to understand this unlikely occurrence?

The answer is that the experience of building the *Mishkan* taught the Jews a fundamental lesson of life. The lesson is "you need to try." Once we do our part, we can hope that the *Ribono shel Olam* will answer our prayers and bless our efforts with success. This is the essence of the *pasuk*, "May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it."

When the *Mishkan* was completed, the people were not able to erect it. Moshe Rabbeinu tried. Suddenly he had the merit to erect the *Mishkan*. If the Almighty wanted a *Mishkan*, why did he not just send down a *Mishkan* as He will do (according to some authorities) with the Third Beis HaMikdash? The answer is that the *Ribono shel Olam* is teaching us a lesson -- yours is to do. Give it your best effort -- even if the task is seemingly impossible -- and I will make it happen.

This is what the Mogen Avraham is trying to tell us. The *Baal Tokeah* tried to blow. It did not work. So he said to the *Ribono shel Olam*, "Master of the Universe, You want us to blow shofar on Rosh Hashanah. It is not happening. We tried. 'May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us.' We made a sincere effort, just as by the *Mishkan* they made a sincere effort. Now the rest is up to you."

This is the reason he whispered the *pasuk* into the wide side of the shofar. Out of the straits I call to G-d. I am supposed to blow from the narrow side of the shofar. I tried doing that. It did not work. Now we need "...G-d answered me with expansiveness" (the end of this same *pasuk* that begins "Out of the straits I call to G-d..."). Now it is up to Him. That is why the *Baal Tokeah* whispered the *pasuk* into the wide side of the shofar.

This in fact explains the whole service on Rosh Hashanah. Chazal say that the reason why we blow shofar is to encourage the Almighty to get up, as it were, from the Throne of Judgement (*Kissei haDin*) and to sit on the Throne of Mercy (*Kissei haRachamim*). If G-d wants to be merciful, He can go straight to the Throne of Mercy. However, that is not how it works. We need to do something. By blowing the shofar, that is what we do. We inspire, as it were, the Almighty to get up from the *Kissei haDin* and move to the *Kissei haRachamim*.

We are haunted in our arduous task of trying to do *Teshuva* each year by the thought that all of our efforts in previous years to accomplish this same goal have not always been 100% successful. But this is the idea with which we must approach it. We need to do our part. Maybe this year, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* will grant us the Divine Assistance that He has not granted us in the past and we will be able to do it.

This is why the Mogen Avraham told us this incident. It is not to provide a *segulah* telling us how to get the shofar to sound. He is teaching us how to approach *Rosh Hashanah* and how to approach the service of the day. He is teaching us how to approach the entire task of doing teshuva. There is a fundamental requirement that we begin by putting our own effort into the task.

This is not only a truth about *Rosh Hashanah* and the service of the day; this is a truth about life. There are so many things about life that are overwhelming, raising children not the least of them. How are we supposed to do it? It is so hard. We need to begin by making a sincere effort; then the *Ribono shel Olam* will help us complete the job.

There is a Medrash in Shir HaShirim that records an incident involving Rav Chanina. Rav Chanina saw people going up to Yerushalayim and he was jealous of them when he saw they were bringing up such beautiful *korbanos* [sacrifices]. He went out into the forest and found a beautiful rock. He polished it with love and devotion and he wanted to bring it up to the Bais HaMikdash [Temple] Courtyard, but it was too heavy. The Medrash says he tried to hire workers and they cited an exorbitant fee. The Medrash continues that he then turned around and five "people" appeared out of nowhere (but they were not really people; they were angels). They said, "We will take up the rock for five *selaim* [a miniscule price] on the condition that you lend us a hand." The "people" together with Rav Chanina *schlepped* the rock up to Yerushalayim. When they got to the *Beis HaMikdash*, Rav Chanina turned around and the "people" vanished.

What is the Medrash teaching us? The Medrash is teaching the same lesson. Sometimes things seem beyond our power. How are we ever going to be able to do this? You need to make the effort: "Providing that you lend a hand." If we do that, then hopefully we will merit *S'yata D'ishmaya* [Help from Heaven] in completing the task: "May the pleasantness of the L-rd, our G-d, be upon us; our handiwork, establish for us; our handiwork, establish it."

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Nitzavim/Vayeilech is provided below:

- CD# 022 - Reading Haftorah: Scrolls vs. Book
- CD# 112 - Shoteh: Mental Incompetence in Halacha
- CD# 158 - Schar Shabbos: How Do We Pay Rabbonim and Chazzanim?
- CD# 205 - Kiddush Before T'kiyas Shofar
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