

# CHAGIM U'ZMANIM - SHABBAT TESHUVA

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari*

Why should the Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Hakippurim be called Shabbat Teshuvah? What is so intrinsically different between that Shabbat and the other days of Aseret Yemei Teshuvah? In what way does it flow from the nature of Shabbat?

We know from the Gemarah (Kidushin 59a) that thought and speech cannot counteract the result of an action. It is difficult therefore, to understand how a sinner can correct to correct a sin that is actually the result of an action through a thought process that is teshuvah, merely through the feelings of the heart and the verbal expression of the viduy. Perhaps it could be understood in the case of teshuvah out of love, where unintentional sins are transformed into merits, since the teshuva does not negate the action that now is turned into a merit. But in teshuva out of fear, where intentional sins become unintentional, if teshuva is effective, why should they not be completely cancelled?

In Pirkei Avot (chapter 4, mishnah2), we are told, 'one aveirei leads to another,' so one is always caught up in the cycle, unless one eradicates the first sin, through teshuvah. What actually is the origin of that first sin is the thought that was translated into the deed; and the sinful thoughts are more serious than the actual deeds. Therefore, it is obvious that whenever one does teshuva, that is a thought process that corrects the evil thought from which the original evil acts originated, so that they become unintentional sins.

Now we can understand the matter of Shabbat teshuvah and what it adds to the teshuva process specifically because it is Shabbat. 'Then G-d completed on the seventh day His work ' (Ber. 2:2). This is difficult to understand, shall we say that He worked on the seventh day? However it goes on to say, that He rested? Indeed this was one of the places that the seventy changed when they translated for King Ptolemy. They wrote, 'G-d completed on the sixth day and then He rested'. What was missing on the seventh day was rest, came Shabbat, came rest' (Midrash, Rabbah Bereishit, chapter 10: section 9). So we see that rest and cessation from work are considered work, an action.

In the same way we can understand that shevut, rest, on Shabbat is a mitzvah asei. At the first glance, it would seem that shevut is the absence of doing or working. However, when Hashem gave us the day of His rest on which to rest, then in the same way as in the days of creation, shevut was called action, so too, our rest on Shabbat is a maaseh. This is like the acknowledgement of impurity that is

considered an action that comes to distinguish between tumah and kedushah, or like when one takes a vow, one transforms chulin into holy. So too, when we say, 'Who sanctifies the Shabbat' in the kiddush that is considered an action. So, if the thought of teshuvah is an action and the shevut is also an action, then on Shabbat teshuvah, it changes the evil act so that deliberate sins become unintentional ones like during the other days of teshuvah, but are totally erased.

We read in the Gemarah (Shabbat, 73b), 'One who sows and ploughs', so they queried that after all, to plough comes first, so we should teach first one who ploughs and then sows. However, they answered, that is said concerning Eretz Yisrael where first one sows and then one ploughs in order to cover the seeds'. Rashi tells us that that is because there the soil is hard and it is impossible to cover the seeds without ploughing and covering the seeds is also ploughing. It is clear that there are 2 kinds of ploughing; the first to prepare for the sowing and the second to cover the seeds. This is a reference also to the hearts of Israel that is the opposite of that of the gentiles who are easily turned to teshuva (Tanchuma Vayikra, 8). [The Shem mi Shmuel also explains elsewhere, that is what happened in the case of Nineveh]. Now on Rosh Hashanah, anniversary of the Creation when the Light of the Eternal came to the world, is the time for a spiritual deep ploughing, just as the plough is needed to cure and improve the soil (Moed Katan.2:b ). Yaakov devoted the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur to fasting and penance that is the breaking of the heart (Zohar part 3,100).However, on Shabbat there is no need for the plough; 'and on the Shabbat it [the Temple gate] shall be opened' (Yechezkel 46:1). And as it is written, 'Kavod Shabbat is better and more preferable than a thousand fasts' (Tanchuma, bereishit section 3).This because one who merits one Shabbat merits that the Light of Hashem enters the innermost recesses of the heart. That is the meaning, 'that one inherits on Shabbat the ananei kavod and the taste of life. The Rambam "Pirkei Avot, chapter 2, mishnah 1) explains that that the reward for mitzvot outweighs the punishments of aveirot, so as the punishment for desecrating the Shabbat is karet so the reward is life.

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