

Yechezkel Perek 18: Redefining Oneself Through Teshuva

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The Gemara says there were four decrees Moshe made concerning the Jews. Four prophets came after him and annulled them. Moshe said, "The sins of the fathers will be visited on the children." Yechezkel nullified this by saying, "The soul who sins, that soul shall die and not their children." Children bear the consequences of the sins of their father if they decide to continue that same path. If they refuse to improve, they bear the consequences.

How did Yechezkel annul what Moshe said? By the time Yechezkel prophesied, the draw of idol worship had started to weaken. The children did not worship idols the way their parents did, not because they changed, but because they didn't feel a draw to it anymore. The cycle of spiraling down wasn't because of the fathers, but because of the choices made by the children. Yechezkel said, "The soul that sins, that soul shall die."

Although the desire for *avodah zorah* was diminishing during the time of Yechezkel, as Malbim points out, they still had choices. They could worship idols as their parents did. Or they could choose to overcome their temptation and earn reward for allowing their eternal soul to assert itself. A child who saw his father sin and decided not to follow in his ways, is at a higher level than a person who did what was right because it was the only possibility in front of him.

"And the father will not bear the son's sins."
Parents often torment themselves with the

belief that if they have a child who is not living a good life, it's their fault. Blaming the parents isn't justified any more than blaming Yitzchak for having had Esav. It's completely possible that the child's own choices brought him to where he is today.

Reuven, the firstborn son of Yaakov, was the first *baal teshuva*. The blessing he received was, "Reuven shall live and not die." Rav Chaim Vital explains that the flow of energy from above, Hashem's life force to the soul, is similar to the way physical life force flows to the body. If something cuts off the flow of blood to your finger, it will die. Similarly, when we make bad choices and choose to relate to things other than Hashem, we cut ourselves off from our Creator. If our desires, pettiness, and jealousy have blocked off our spiritual arteries, *teshuva* can naturally reopen them. In Lekutei Moharan, the Reb Nachman says you can be in this world and the next world at the same time if you accept all the events that occur in your life for the good. That means seeing the whole picture. Even sin can be viewed in a different light. Not that the sin was worth it, but that the result was repentance and heightened closeness to Hashem. If a person does *teshuva* and makes changes in the present, but doesn't regret the past, Hashem will still relate to him in terms of his present behavior. Hashem wants the part of Him that's within the person to be the definitive part. He wants to see the person live. So He'll give the person help from above from the highest possible source to bring him back.

Suppose someone becomes jaded and says, "I wish I never gave away a cent to charity." He doesn't want the relationship of closeness and compassion that draws him to Hashem and expresses his divine aspect. The rule is materially you get what Hashem thinks you should have, but spiritually you get what you want. Picture rain falling. If there's a bowl to hold the rain, it will fill up. But if a person turns the bowl upside down, it's not going to contain the rain any longer. If you cut yourself off from Hashem, you cannot receive His influence. Hashem doesn't change His giving, the person changes his receptivity. When a *tzaddik* regrets his righteousness and dies in a state of sin, he'll die physically and spiritually. But when a *rasha* returns from his evil and becomes righteous, not only does he not die but he lives and raises himself to a higher level of life than before he sinned. If he regrets what he did, all of his sins are regarded as stepping stones to coming closer to Hashem. Every year his *teshuva* ascends higher than it was the previous year. This is called *teshuva al teshuva*, doing *teshuva* for the lower level of one's previous *teshuva*.

Every person is judged not by the background upon which his choices are made but by the choice itself. The struggle draws the person closer, as the gemara says, "The reward is according to the difficulty." Imagery is what moves ideas from one's mind to one's heart and gives one a new spirit and will. As Rosh Hashana nears, let us choose to make ourselves a new heart with new images that take us higher and higher.

The Businessman's Approach To Rosh Hashana

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Rav Chaim Friedlander asks an intriguing question. If we are judged on Rosh Hashana for all our deeds, what's left to judge after a person dies? You can't judge someone twice for the same thing. He answers with a parable. Suppose there's a businessman who has three branches of his business. Last year he invested \$4 million in the New York branch and made a profit of \$1 million. He invested \$10 million in the London branch and made a profit of \$1 million. In the Toronto branch, he only invested \$1 million and made a profit of \$500,000. Now the businessman has to decide how to invest his money in the coming

year. He got a mediocre 25% return in New York, a not so good 10% return in London, and an excellent 50% return in Toronto. So it seems he'll be investing more in Toronto in the coming year.

Hashem is the president of the biggest multinational company in the world. He too looks for returns. Suppose Hashem invested in Reuven. Perhaps Reuven gave 10% charity. Maybe he even made some time to learn Torah. But with the amount of money he earned, he could have spent the whole afternoon learning Torah or doing *chesed*.

Instead he sat with a cup of tea relaxing on the patio. In contrast, Shimon had a hard year. He was ill. He got fired from his job and had to work at menial labor for long hours at minimal pay. But any time he had free, he studied Torah, did acts of kindness, and gave *tzedakah*. Hashem says, "This person gave me a good return. He's the right place to invest in next year."

This is the judgment on Rosh Hashana. It's not reward and punishment for what you did. That happens after you die. On Rosh Hashana, Hashem goes through the books looking at

Continued on Page 2



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Continue from Page 1

everything we did the last year with the intention of determining what return was received. On the basis of that, Hashem will decide how to invest in us in the coming year. This demands change. In the few days we have up to Rosh Hashana and in *aseret*

yemei teshuva, we should make the maximum use of our time for *teshuva*, *tefilah*, and *tzedakah*. We must show Hashem we are a profitable branch and worthy of investment. Of course the big difference between Hashem and the president of a business is that the

Creator has unlimited resources. He can give everyone everything. May it be a fruitful, profitable, year.

Rosh Hashana Recognizing Reality

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Rav Yitzchak Blazer asks, "Why did Hashem place Rosh Hashana before Yom Kippur. Would it not have been more fitting to crown the king in a meritorious and pure state? Would it not have been better to be judged when our souls are looking their best? Rav Yitzchak explains that Yom Kippur is such an exalted day that it is a very hard day to connect with Hashem on a practical level. Therefore, Hashem gave us Rosh Hashana first. This serves as a stepping stone to reach Yom Kippur, a total spiritual experience of atonement. The Siach Yitzchak quoting Rav Levenstein says that Rosh Hashana is a day of tremendous judgment, fear, and trepidation. If we would have the purification of Yom Kippur first, we would have a subliminal feeling of fullness of heart, of standing upright. On Rosh Hashana we're supposed to feel a sense of shame, trepidation, and humility. Only in such a state can we hope to be successful on the day of judgment.

Rav Eisenman notes that Rosh Hashana comes before Yom Kippur because first we must accept Hashem as king. Then we can examine our *mitzvot* and *aveirot* and see where we fall within the context of doing His will. The pomegranate and apple play a prominent role at the Rosh Hashana table. A pomegranate has a lot of seeds. But each seed is in its own sack. We can't live a pomegranate life. We need to do a lot of *mitzvot* but we have to realize that our *mitzvot*

aren't by themselves. The apple has one core and the seeds are in the core. We need to recognize that there's a unifying factor in all the *mitzvot* we do. There's a Commander who enjoined us to do them.

The Sichas Hischazkus points out that accepting Hashem's kingship applies not only to *mitzvot* but to all areas of our life. We need to recognize that all of our circumstances are a medium to sing to Hashem. Many of us, particularly women, may find ourselves in different situations on Rosh Hashana. Some go to shul. Some are home with the kids. Instead of fighting against this reality, we have to accept it as the instrument Hashem gave us to sing to Him.

In Elul the king is in the field. On Rosh Hashana He enters the palace. All year round the world functions according to the laws of nature. Hashem hides his greatness so we can express our free choice. But on Rosh Hashana, Hashem reveals His kinship and the world takes on a different perspective. Suddenly when the king appears we look at the world in a totally different way. Rosh Hashana is that jolt into reality. It's the light that makes the illusions disappear.

The Chalban points out that if we understand that Hashem is exalted, that makes us, His servants, on an exalted level as well. We're elevated into a much greater role. Rav Kook speaks about two mindsets a person can have

when doing *mitzvot*. The narrow mindset thinks, "This *mitzvah* only affects me and maybe a couple of people around me." The wider mindset says, "I am a servant of Hashem. What I do has a global affect. My *mitzvah* will bring greater spirituality to the world."

The shofar is narrow at the top and gets wider at the end. Our *avodah* is to move beyond our narrowness to expansiveness. Before *shofar* blowing we pray, "*Min hametzer...*" From the narrow straits I called out to Hashem and He answered me from the point of expansiveness. The judgment is looking back at the year and seeing where we were in our smallness and where we can be. *Malchut*, coronating Hashem, brings about a feeling of greatness and accountability. What we're going to get in the coming year is dependent on what road we're headed towards. We can come with a broken fearful heart to Hashem, with the aspect of *Malkeinu*, Hashem is our king. Or we can turn to Him as *Avinu*, as a Father we're connected to and want to serve in the best possible way. Rosh Hashana comes first so we can recognize Hashem's greatness, our own greatness, and our relationship to Him. We can work at cleaning up the mess our sins made, when we have that feeling of shame for looking the way we do, and the loving closeness of a special bond with the king. May we merit to be inscribed for a sweet, new, year!