



The Sweetness of Tikun Hamiddot

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller-Gottlieb

Elul is a time of love but it is also a time for change, introspection, and reassessment of our lives.

Our moments of joy are invariably related to connection and achievement. Connection is one of our most basic spiritual needs. If a person doesn't have a relationship with Hashem, the desire won't disappear. It will turn into a state of *ahava nefela*-unfocused love, where the person goes from one relationship to the next in the hopes of finding something that will fill the void. With every failure, the lack becomes deeper and the abyss less penetrable. The more the person wants connection, the less achievable it becomes. In a failed relationship, a person's ability to love becomes progressively narrower. His relationships become superficial because his fear of giving of himself is greater. If he can find the place within him where his insecurity developed, empty the space, and turn it towards Hashem, there's room for hope.

In Elul, every step you take towards Hashem is rewarded with a certain level of Divine Providence not normally found during the rest

of the year. There's a direct response where we can feel Hashem allowing Himself to come into our life.

There are different ways to draw close. To begin the process, make a history of your life. Break it down to segments, such as early childhood, later childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and middle age. Focus on the smaller units of time where the critical stages in your development took place. Set aside a half hour or an hour to ask yourself, "What were the important events that took place in my life at this time?" Don't intercept with judgment calls because then your narrative will become self-centered and less honest. If you do this year by year, a sense of what is and isn't important will emerge.

The next question should be, "How did I respond to these events?" Visualize yourself experiencing it all over again. Then ask, "Did my responses get me closer to where I wanted to be or did it take me further away? What was I thinking when I made these choices. Why did I make it?" Try to find patterns in both your good and bad decisions. Sometimes your good deeds may have been prompted by the

need to escape or for idealistic motives. Your slip-ups may have been caused by desire for social acceptance, or fear or ignorance. You may discover that your good side was driven by the desire to be part of something larger than yourself, or in order to know the truth, or to ease your conscience.

All this self-introspection is meant to lead you to your middot. Middot are neither good or bad, it's what you make up of them. The Gra teaches that life is about perfecting ones middot. "Tzadik v'ra lo" refers to someone with difficult middot. When he succeeds in conquering or turning around his bad middot for the good, he becomes a tzaddik. Conquest is learning to say no, primarily to sins of the flesh. Turning them around is putting desire in the right place. Elul is an opportunity to take stock of our middot, to discover the divinity within us, the part of us that's eternal and connected. The more carefully we look at ourselves in Elul, the more we can progress.

We will continue this discussion next week.

Teshuva

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The daily *shemone esrei* contains two blessings that discuss *teshuvah*. The first is *harotze b'teshuva*- who desires our repentance and the second ends with *hamarbeh l'seloach* - who grants us forgiveness. Why do we need the first blessing? If Hashem forgives us obviously we need to repent first. In order to understand this we need to define what *teshuvah* is. *Chazal* say that *teshuvah* preexisted creation. "Before mountains came into being, before you created earth, you already brought people to a point where you could approach them and say, 'Return.'" *Teshuva* needed to be in place before creation. Otherwise there would be no hope for the world's continued existence. It does not say this about forgiveness. Hashem gave Adam one commandment. If he would not have violated it there would have been no need for forgiveness.

Teshuva comes from the root word *shuv*- to return. Before a soul comes into the world, it

is close to the throne of Hashem and can see His presence clearly. In that state the soul can do no wrong. When man comes down into this world his level of clarity dims. The body prevents the soul from shining through. Even Adam before the sin lived in a world of darkness so as to create the possibility of free choice. Imagine an astronaut sent into space. He has everything he needs to exist for the next 120 years in his spaceship. He orbits around space doing his work. Suddenly he loses contact with his base on earth. One can imagine how lost and miserable he feels and the thrill that goes through him when he is finally able to reconnect. The soul is given everything it needs to accomplish its mission on earth but there's the sadness of being disconnected from the Source. Of course, the soul will aim to connect again and that is man's purpose on earth. *Teshuva* is returning to the level of clarity and closeness we had in heaven. It's developing our connection to Hashem by strengthening our soul and living a

Torah life. It's nurturing a desire to be close to Him and experiencing His presence more acutely as our soul grows.

What is closeness to Hashem based on? The prophet Hoshea tells us, "*Shuva yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha...*" Return to where you came from. You can have a relationship with Hashem as you did before you came into this world. The Torah defines this connection in Devarim. '*Banim atem l'Hashem...*' You are children of Hashem. Based on this verse we refer to Hashem as our father. It's a parent/child relationship. On Rosh Hashana we ask Hashem, "*Im k'banim...*" If we are like children, have compassion on us like a father has mercy on his children. In the Gemara, Rabbi Meir teaches that this is unconditional. Even if we don't behave, we remain children of Hashem. The natural love of a parent for his child is everlasting and that is the nature of our relationship with Hashem.



Parshat Re'eh Dwelling of G-d: Shilo vs. Jerusalem

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In Parshat Re'eh, we read about the various resting places of the Holy Ark. The Torah refers to the final resting place of the Ark as "*Menucha V'Nachala*". Chazal say, "*Menucha*"-tranquility, refers to Shilo and "*Nachala*"-a resting place, signifies Yerushalayim, the final destination of the Aron Hashem.

The Shem MiShmuel asks why the Mishkan needed to sojourn first in Shilo before coming to Yerushalayim. He writes that Hashem created the world with various energies. These are manifested in our world in triple form - time, place, and the human soul. The soul is a combination of *Moach*-intellect and *Lev*-emotions. Torah study engages the *Moach* and performing mitzvot develops the *Lev*-an awareness and closeness to Hashem.

Moach and *Lev* are each emphasized in time. Shabbat is *Moach* and Yom Tov is *Lev*. On Shabbat, the seventh day of the week, there are seven aliyot. Seven symbolizes completion. The Gemara writes that Shabbat is a day dedicated to the study of Torah. In addition, there is a mitzvah of *oneg*-pleasure. This is characterized by a feeling that one has achieved completion. Whereas Shabbat involves *Moach*-intellectual pursuit and satisfaction, Yom Tov exudes *simcha*-happiness. It is *Lev*-an emotional experience expressing the joy of existence, not just of man but of the miracle of nature. Each festival celebrates a different aspect of nature. Pesach is the time of new beginnings, Shavuot is the holiday of the first fruits-*bikurim*, and Sukkot celebrates the completion of the

harvest. There is exhilarating energy in the air as we rejoice with the changing seasons of nature.

Shilo is the place of *Moach*-intellect and was Hashem's first resting place. Yerushalayim, the *Lev*-the emotional center of the Jewish people, was the final destination. Shilo is in the portion of Ephraim, the son of Yosef. Yosef symbolizes the power of the mind. According to Kabbalah, Yosef's encounter with the wife of Potiphar was a trial of the *Moach*. Yosef knew intellectually that the act was wrong. Passion, anger, and fear were all at work to make him sin. Yet his exceptional power of *Moach* helped him overcome this incredibly difficult test. The first level of holiness is when the mind defeats the sinful passionate heart. According to Jewish law, one who brought up a sacrifice in Shilo was permitted to eat it at a distance as long as one could still see the Mishkan. There were no walls which constricted the person. This signified that there was a certain confidence that holiness could spread. In contrast, one who brought a sacrifice to Yerushalayim needed to eat it within its walls. The holiness of Yerushalayim was limited as opposed to the kedusha of Shilo which was boundless. This is the power of the mind. Torah learning helps one achieve the level of Yosef which can defeat all evil. This is the power of Shilo and that is why it was the first resting place of the Mishkan.

The Beit Hamikdash, the final stop for the Aron Habrit, was the emotional center of the Jewish nation and was in the portion of Binyamin and Yehuda. Binyamin represents the power of the

Moach. Yehuda is royalty, the heart of the nation. This was the second stage. It is much more difficult to channel one's emotional passions towards the service of Hashem than to convince the mind of the logic of Torah. The power of Yerushalayim is the invisible energy, the yearning hovering in the air, which draws us close to Hashem. We need to physically be there to sense it. It is the power of the *Lev*-the heart of Israel, which is a lot greater and more difficult to achieve than *Moach*.

Yerushalayim is also called Zion, the identical numerical value of Yosef. Yerushalayim is the power of mind and heart working in perfect synchrony. When the Mishkan moved from Shilo, we did not lose *Moach*. On the contrary, in addition to gaining heart, the power of the mind increased in Yerushalayim. The Shem MiShmuel explains that Shilo is *Menucha* and Yerushalayim is *Nachalah*. *Menucha* is temporary. The mind is a fickle thing and flits from one thing to the next. In contrast, the heart, the desire to be close to Hashem, remains eternal. Throughout our long years of exile, the Jewish nation's strong bond with the Creator was never severed. The physical trappings of Yerushalayim were destroyed but its spiritual holiness lives on forever. Similarly, Shabbat is associated with *Menucha*-a transient dream. In contrast, Yom Tov, the joyous emotional experience of *Lev*, remains with us throughout the year.

Let us use the power of our own minds and hearts to build a personal Mishkan, a Mishkan of *Lev* and *Moach* dedicated solely to the service of Hashem and His Torah.