



Parashat Ki Tavo



English version

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A HAPPY ELUL

Teshuva is a happy thing. If you are doing Teshuva and you are not happy, you are not really cashing in on all your benefits. Happiness is what changes the evil decree of sin. Happiness is what brings upon you G-d's mercy.

This is found in Rabbenu Bachye in this weeks parasha, at the end of the prayer of the one who brings his Bikurim to the Bet Hamikdash. *שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּקוֹל יְקֻנָּק אֱלֹקֵי עֲשִׂיתִי כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי: I listened to what Hashem, my G-d, said; I did all that You commanded me.* (Devarim 26) Rabbenu Bachye writes on these words: *I listened to the voice of Hashem my G-d, by bringing the Bikurim, to the Bet Hamikdash. I did all that You commanded me, that I was happy and I made others happy.*

How do our Rabbis infer that the words *I did all that You commanded me* means that I was happy and I made others happy? The answer is found in the word Kol **,all**, as we find it elsewhere meaning happiness. ושמחה בכל הטוב. And you shall be happy with **all** the good. (Rabbenu Bachye) The secret to this happiness, the secret to making others happy, is hidden in the word "Kol". When you realize that **all** you have is all that you are supposed to have, because G-d is G-d and you are just human, you can begin to be happy.

And then, Rabbenu Bachye says the most amazing thing. The passuk continues הַשְּׂקִיפָה מִמַּעַן קִדְשׁוֹ מִזֵּה-הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבִרְדֵּי אֶת-יִשְׂרָאֵל (Devarim 26 15) *Look down from the holy place in Heaven called Maon- the place where happiness is from, and bless Your nation, Yisrael.* Rabbenu Bachye asks, isn't the word הַשְּׂקִיפָה usually linked to G-d's Attribute of Judgement, as we find וְהִי בְּאִשְׁמֵרֶת הַבְּקָר וַיִּשְׁקֶף וְהִיא יְקֻנָּק אֶל-מַתְּנָה מִצָּרִים... וַיִּשְׁקֶף עַל-פְּנֵי סֹדֶם וְעַמּוֹרָה? Why, over here, does it link with G-d's Attribute of Mercy?

The answer is that when someone is happy, he accesses the Attribute of G-d of mercy, as he is connected to Maon, a different part of Heaven. R' Nachman from Breslov is quoted as having said that happiness nullifies and prevents decrees from being enacted upon a person. This is seen in the Megilla. After having invited King Achashverosh and Haman to a special, festive meal, Esther was particular to make a second party, and only then did she make her accusation against Haman. Why should she not have spoken out against him in the first instance? Why was it necessary to have a second party?

At the first party, Haman was happy, and when someone is happy, suffering and evil decrees do not fall upon him. This is true even in regard to a Rasha. Once Haman became



depressed for having suffered the disgrace of leading Mordechai around the city on the King's horse, while Mordechai was wearing the Kings clothes – this put Haman in a position that made him vulnerable to his fall. Happiness is the way to change one Attribute of G-d to another.

So how am I supposed to be happy in Elul, when I am saying how wrong I was all year long?

This is something that is so important, so crucial for relationships. The words “I was wrong” when you make a mistake, have so much value. People shy away from admitting

they were wrong, because it brings them down from their place of inflated ego, to a place of being human. This is the ultimate test of Rosh Hashana, how humble you really are, how bent over are you, how similar you are to the Shofar, with its bent over shape. But this is what Teshuva is really about, recognizing that you are just a human, and humans make mistakes, and only G-d can help you become better.

How great it is to become more humble, more human? How much calmer would that make us? How much more happy would we be, if would stop thinking that we are anything more than that?

ROSH HASHANA SURVIVAL KIT

My 8 year old daughter came back from school and brought home a beautiful concept. Her Morah, her teacher, was displaying the Shofar to the class, showing them its shape, its colors. *One end is thin, while the other end is wide.* My daughter raised her hand from the back of the classroom. “Morah, didn't you teach us that when we do Teshuvah, Hashem says פתחו לי פתח אחד של תשובה כחודה של מחט ואני פותח לכם פתחים שיהיו עגלות וקרניות נכנסות בו *Open up for Me one Entrance of Teshuva the size of a needle's hole , and I will open up for you entrances that wagons can pass through!* (Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5, 3) My daughter asked the Morah, “Could this be a lesson that we learn from the shape of the Shofar, that Teshuva, for us, is just to start, to take the first step, and Hashem helps us out with the rest, opening up gateways to connect to Him?” Allow me to expound on this concept.

The Shofar is amazing, for, in appearance, it is quite unimpressive. It looks like a simple

horn, but it is the strongest weapon of the Jewish Nation. כי חק לישראל הוא משפט לאלקי *For the Mitzvah of the Shofar is a Hok, a Mishpat of the G-d of Yaakov.* Hok and Mishpat both mean statute. But the difference is that Hok is a law whose meaning we do not know , while Mishpat is a law that we can understand. This sheds light on the Rambam... אע"פ שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה *Even though blowing the Shofar on Rosh Hashana is a Law for which we are given no reason, still, the Shofar comes to hint something to us.* עוררו עוררו ישינים משינתכם והקיצו נרדמים מתרדמתכם וחפשו במעשיכם וחזרו בתשובה וזכרו בוראכם *It is to wake us up from our spiritual slumber...* (Rambam Teshuva 3; 4)

There is a self- help gem buried between these words. If the Shofar is intended to be a “wake-up” call for us, why does the message have to be hinted at? Why does the Torah not just go straight to the point and tell us that we are to wake up and do Teshuva? The answer to this



question is the secret to waking up spiritually. A person can wake up spiritually only if he uses his brains, his creativity, expending effort to figure out what he should be doing, from the hints that life throws in his path. Only if he picks up the hints that G-d is sending him. If you tell someone off, they just do not listen. You've got to hint it to him. *Let him realize it on his own.* The Shofar does not have an explicit meaning. Because, *there is nothing that can be more meaningful and powerful than an observation you come to on your own.* My daughter came up with an eye-opening insight, her own meaning of the Shofar. So, I made my own observation about her observation.

It is annoying when we get “woken up”, and we find ourselves unable to change. It is something like when you wake up late and you have to catch a train,.... but you can't find your shoe. You're awake, but you are jammed. You are so trapped in your behaviors that even if you wanted to change, you couldn't do it. You have been trying to “get things moving” during the whole month of Elul, but you seem to be, still, in the same place. You can't stop speaking Lashon Hara, even if you want to . You can't learn more Torah, even if you try. You are just like a person who is walking up a downward escalator. How sad.

But then, the Shofar screams out; it tells you that you've got it all wrong. G-d did not ask you to change. He asked you to try. Not even try your best. Just try. Keep trying, and He will open the doors of change for you. He will accept you, as long as you accept Him, and let Him into your life, even just a crack.

The Point of A Needle

Why does the Midrash talk about the hole a needle makes in a cloth? Why not the hole a nail makes in a piece of wood? Because in order for someone to repent, one needs to soften himself up, being as pliable as material,

not stiff, like wood. Only then can one do real Teshuva. What does it mean, to be soft, like material, or stiff, like wood?

There is a great saying. From the moment I heard it, it has just been floating around in my head. “*A person is always in one of two modes. Either אין עוד מלבדו , or, אין עוד מלבדי.*” A person is always in one of these two zones. *There is nothing else in the world except G-d.* Or, *There is nothing else in the world except for Me.* You cannot be in both zones simultaneously. We say, or are supposed to say, each morning in the beginning of Shaharit. ומותר האדם מן הבהמה אין. Literally, there is no way in which Man is superior to an animal, other than the fact that Man has a Neshama, while the animal does not. The Kotzker spices up this saying with his unique Hassidic wit. The only plus of Man over the Animal is the ability to be אין, or “unimportant”. I.e., an animal is always thinking about its own survival, or אני, Me. Betsy the Cow, is worried about Betsy, and Rexie the Dog, is worried about Rexie's dog food. Humans can transcend themselves, be considerate, and let others' priorities be a priority. Being considerate of others, instead of being self-centered, helps Man bring G-d into his personal world.

Now, let's play around with the letters of אני , Me. If we bring G-d into Me, i.e., if we move the letter ך , the letter of G-d and the letter of the Neshama,(see Zohar in beginning of M.Ruth) into the center of Me, into the center of our priorities, into the center of the word אני, then we get the word אין, Nothing. I am nothing, without G-d. This ability to make room for G-d in our lives, to put Him in the center of our priorities, is the greatness of Man over animal. But, if the spiritual part of Me is the last priority, the ך gets pushed to the end of the word, and all that is left is אני, and “he” is nothing better than an animal.

The difference between a garment and a piece of wood is that a garment makes room for a

needle and thread, it has room inside it for something other than itself. A piece of wood, has no room inside it for anything else, and so the nail is only wedged into it. One can do real Teshuva only by opening a crack just big enough for the letter ך to enter. As long as a person's thoughts revolve around himself, his money, his fame and honor or his temptations, there is no room for "hints". There is no room for G-d.

The "latest" in psychology is that for an addict to overcome addictions, he has to recognize the fact that he is addicted. That he is *not* in control. He needs to pray to G-d to help him change. It is the only way to overcome habit. G-d. אלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו אינו יכול לו. (Kiddushin 30b) The bent shape of the Shofar teaches us this lesson of humbleness. כמה דכייף איניש דעתיה

טפי מעלי (Rosh Hashana 26b) . The more a person humbles himself during Rosh Hashana, the better. This is the lesson that we are to learn from the bent Shofar. To bend ourselves, and allow G-d in.

And one last word about the point of a needle. If you have ever blown a shofar, you know how it feels to channel all the air, everything you've got, into that one point. If your strength is spread out over too much territory, you cannot change. You need to have just one point, that you want to change. You give all you've got to G-d by just changing one thing. That's how you make an opening, an Entrance of Teshuvah, by directing all your energy to make a small change in your behavior, the size of of a needle's hole.

THE SILENT WITNESS

Your best chance at judgment on Rosh Hashanah is to take it seriously. Rosh Hashanah is the time that G-d judges how much you value life as an opportunity to serve Him better. And the "impression" you make on Rosh Hashanah will be the New You for the New Year.

"You don't get a second chance to make a first impression". Social science states that after the first 3 seconds, people you meet decided subconsciously if they like you or not. G-d gives you a week to decide what type of impression you want to make, and that will be the New You for the New Year. A lot is at stake during the next week. R. Moshe Shapiro, shlita, was quoted as saying that Rosh Hashannah is the Rosh, the Head of the new year. The whole body is encapsulated in the head; the brain runs every part of the body. And your behavior on Rosh Hashana has control over your behavior for the coming year. The rest of the year depends on your RH performance.

Recently, I moved apartment in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem. And when moving a family after 10 years, you have a lot of decisions to make. The most common of all decisions was what to throw away and what to keep. My wife and I concluded that the rule of thumb should be something I read in the field of maximizing space and organization. If you had no use out of the item for a whole year, you most probably could get rid of it. The space in your house has more value than the item. Don't waste space on things you don't need or on things that have little importance.

And then, I started shaking. I realized that is what Rosh Hashanah is all about. G-d decides on the upcoming fateful day who used his potential, and who was a waste of oxygen. G-d keeps us around to bring G-dliness into the world. G-d kept us around last year, for He decided, that we would fulfill a purpose to justify our being around last year. He believed in us. And now, there is judgment, to see if our merits outweigh our misdeeds. Just like an

employer checks to see if his employee is bringing in more than is being spent on him. Is it worth keeping me around? Or do I get tossed out, *chas veshalom*?

But G-d saves the day. תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה. *Blow the Shofar in the (new) month, when (the moon) is covered for our holiday.* כי חק לישראל הוא, משפט לאלוקי יעקב. *For this (day's) law is (a day) beyond logic for Israel. It is a judgement day for the G-d of Yaakov.*

Notice that Pesah and Sukkot are on the 15th of the month, Yom Kippur is on the 10th, Shavuoth, on the 6th, and only Rosh Hashanah is on the first of the month, when the moon is covered. בכסה ליום הגינו, “the holiday when the moon is covered”. The moon is symbolic of the Jewish people, as mentioned in Birkat Halevana. The similarity between the two is that both the moon and the Jewish people have times when their light is strong and full, and times when our light is weak – then, we are not noticeable. The Jewish holidays, Pesah and Sukkot, are when the moon is full, to commemorate the times when the Jewish people shone in its full glory. So, why is Rosh Hashanah on the day when it looks dark for us? When the moon is covered?

The Zohar says that on the day of Rosh Hashanah, when G-d is judging the world, the Satan levels his accusations against. “G-d! Your children have sinned!” G-d asks the Satan, “Who are your witnesses? My Torah says that I accept testimony only if there are two witnesses”. So the Satan goes to the Sun, and brings him as a witness. For surely, the Sun can testify to all the sins of each and every Jew. And the sun testifies. And then the Satan goes to look for the Moon to be the other witness. But the Moon is out of sight! It is covered! The Satan has only one witness, when G-d’s Torah requires at least two! This is

why we are celebrating Rosh Hashanah, that the moon is covered! And this is why G-d judges us on Rosh Hashanah. (יערות דבש דרוש י' כ"ה אלול/ מדרש – זוהר חלק ג' ער"ה) This is the only way we get out of the sticky judgment. And this is why we are not to mention our sins on Rosh Hashanah, so that there won't be another witness against us! The gentiles, who do not follow the Torah, accept one witness. So the sun is a witness against them, making judgment against them more difficult. But the Jews have this חק, this Torah law, that another witness is needed to get someone in trouble.

I wondered what this means, that the Moon is covered, so it cannot testify against us. Why can't the Satan find the moon? Can't the Satan see in the dark? Can't the moon testify, even if it is covered?

The answer is that the moon is not just covered. The moon has the power of renewal, and when the moon is covered, it is undergoing renewal. The secret of the Jewish people is that they are able to renew themselves. G-d judges us on Rosh Hashanah by the impression we make on that day, more than anything else. As the Shaarei Teshuva (1 41) cites the Yerushalmi, אם זך וישר היית לא נאמר. אלא אם זך, G-d tests how you are now. Rosh Hashanah is a time that you are in the process of renewal. And just as the moon is a different moon, you are a different person. The Satan cannot use the moon, the epitome of renewal, to testify against a nation of renewal. You are a new person, and the Moon knows that the testimony on the old you cannot be used against the new you.

There is one reason why I believe it is fair for me to ask for another year. Because now, I am a year smarter. I have realized what my weaknesses are and what my strengths are. That is why, for a whole month, I am admitting



sins, beating my fist against my heart, soul searching and thinking of my sins between the Shofar sets. Because I know that when I am coming into the New Year, I realize where I can go and where I can't. I realize what

stresses me and what builds me. And I realize that without G-d, I am nothing.

Maybe, just maybe, G-d will give me another chance to be a better Jew!

THE HUMILITY TACTIC

The clock is ticking. We are in a total lack of control of the time, the judgment, the verdict. All we have for self-defense is Teshuva, Tefillah and Tzeddaka. (Rosh Hashana 16b). Rosh Hashana is coming soon, G-d is going to judge me soon, and some time on that day, my fate for the future will be decided. Time flies when you are having fun, and time disappears when you are not doing Teshuva.

This is not a scare tactic. This is a humility tactic. Rosh Hashana judgment is not to scare us. It is to make us humble.

Probably the biggest lesson of Rosh Hashana is that nothing is for granted. All that you have from last year, all of your honor and respect, all of your wisdom, all of your skill, your health, your life, your freedom, your relationships, your very existence, your whole "account", ... does not transfer over to the new account, the new year, "automatically", without the King's decision.

As a coach, I have seen many life changes over the years. People sat with me while they were going through the darkest moments in their life, and then I saw them a year later – the happiest people. Everything just worked itself out; even the wildest of dreams came true. Like having a first child at the age of 60+, like breaking the connection with marijuana, like going from financial depression to making 500 grand in one year, or seeing a close relative being suddenly, miraculously released from jail. Or seeing the boy with a strong stutter, who no one wanted to marry, end up marrying

the girl of his dreams. And the list goes on. All those verdicts were given on RH.

Every Rosh Hashana, the Y2K fantasy goes into effect. Before New Year 2000, people were frantic with worry that the computers running very important data were not ready for the switch from 999 to 000. But every year, on Rosh Hashana, we all go to 000. And then, G-d decides what to give us for the New Year. You cannot transfer anything from one account to another, from one year to another – even your right to live – without G-d's approval. This is true to the extent that halacha dictates that we recite the blessing, ברוך אתה ה' אלוקינו מלך העולם, if we did not see a person for an entire year. *Blessed are You, our G-d, King of the Universe, Who resurrects the dead.* What? Your friend did not die! Why this wording?!! Because if you did not see each other for a year, certainly, one Rosh Hashana has passed by. If you passed Rosh Hashana, it is not that you made it out, alive, but that G-d gave you another chance to live. He resurrected you. (Berachot 58b, see Meharsha: Shulchan Aruch OH 225;1) A scary thought. Or, more precisely, a humbling thought.

The voice of the shofar expresses many things: our crying out to G-d, our tears, our request that He remember the Binding of Yitzhak. (Rosh Hashana 16a). It is also G-d's calling out to us, to waken us from our slumber of Olam Haze, of materialism and self-centeredness (Rambam Teshuva 3;4). It is the sign to reach for a new perspective of humility, as portrayed by the bent-over shape of the



Shofar (Rosh Hashana 26b see Rashi). How does the Rambam say something different from the Talmud? And why does the Talmud, itself, contradict itself?

I believe that it all boils down to humility. When we are humble, we remind G-d of the binding of Yitzhak, “and He considers it as if we had bound ourselves”. And the only way that we can awaken ourselves from the slumber of Olam Hazeh is through humility. How so?

Every time we see G-d's strength, we see His humility. (Megillah 31a) Before creating Adam, G-d consulted with the angels. וַיִּאָמֶר אֱלֹהִים גְּעִשָׁה לְנֶאֱמָר. Let us make man. Rashi says, Even though the angels did not help Him in creating Man, and there is a place for the hypocrites to focus on, the Torah does not refrain from teaching proper conduct and humility, that a person who is greater should consult and ask permission from those who are less in stature.

The Midrash tells us the rest of the story. *When Moshe recorded the Torah, when he reached this verse, he asked G-d why He would allow an opening for hypocrisy in His Torah. G-d said that He wanted to teach humanity humility, to seek counsel from those who are less wise. The lesson of humility is a great lesson, and if a person wants to make a mistake, misinterpreting, believing that there is more than one G-d, Has Veshalom, then he will make a mistake no matter what is written (Breshit Rabah 8;8). Even if the Torah says “I will make man”.*

But why is this lesson of humility so important that G-d is willing to allow a place for heresy? Because once someone is humble, there is no room for mistakes. G-d is so obvious. All questions about Emunah come when one is lacking in humility.

The Alter from Slabodka, R' Eliyahu Dessler, and R Chaim Friedlander all learn from here that the first thing that stops someone from repentance, from uprooting bad habits, is haughtiness. A person thinks within the framework of his desires. *And a person's desires go according to his haughtiness.* How much he thinks he deserves. If someone decides to follow a certain way, even if he is making a grave mistake, no one can stop him. And if someone is haughty, all he wants is his way. One's logic is distorted.

The atom bomb to the Yetzer Hara is humility. וַיִּרְאֵהוּ אֱלֹהִים מֵהָהָרִים I raise my eyes to the mountains, to the Yetzer Hara that looks so overpowering. Western Culture, Advertisements, Honor, Money, Fame, Life Challenges, Stress. The mountains of the Yetzer Hara. (When Mashiach comes, G-d will slaughter the Satan in front of the world, and to the righteous, the Satan will look like a huge mountain. See Sukkah 52a) What is the only weapon against all of this? מֵאֵין יבֵּא עֲזָרָי. From אין, from nothingness, from humility, will come my strength. That is the only help I can get.

Why is humility the only key out of the Escape Room of Desire, Lust and Ego? Because that is the only way one can see outside his four amot, outside his mental schema. The first sin of Man was from the desire to be G-dlike, והייתם כאלוקים. With that first sin of arrogance, we gave entry to the Yetzer Hara into our psyches. And when we get rid of arrogance, we rid ourselves of lusts, bodily appetites and negative emotions such as anger and jealousy. When we rid ourselves of arrogance, we shake off all negativity, bitterness and grudges. This is why when you find humility inside your heart to forgive, G-d forgives you for all your sins. כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו. (Rosh Hashana 17a)



This is why we read the story of Chana and Peninah on Rosh Hashana. It is the story of Elkana's two wives. Chana was barren; Peninah was mother of 7. Peninah would praise her 7 children to Chana, intending to make Chana so hurt that she would pray with more intent and merit a child. And then, G-d switched things around. Chana had seven sons, and Peninah lost hers. Although her intentions were great, a drop of haughtiness ruined them. Because haughtiness can make you the most insensitive, the most self-centered and the most evil person in the Universe. And on Rosh Hashana we read this story to remind us that G-d can switch all the one ups and one downs we have 180 degrees.

So, what does G-d want from us on Rosh Hashana? How does G-d want us to restart at the start of the new year? *To make ourselves small, so that He can make us great* (Eruvin 13a). Small ego, big man. Big ego, small man. The whole Shirah of Chana is about משפיל גאים עדי ארץ *That G-d brings down the haughty to the ground.* מגביה שפלים עד מרום *That G-d*

brings the lowly up high. The Kotzker would say that the reason why G-d brings the humble to the very top and keeps them there is because even when they are on the top, they stay humble. And the reason why G-d brings the haughty to the ground and keeps them there is because, even while they are on the bottom, they remain haughty.

There are seven mitzvot each one of which has the weight of all 613. Denying Avodah Zarah, 2. Wearing Tzitzit. 3. Shabbat. 4. Torah learning. 5. Brit Milah. 6. Tzedaka. 7. Living in Eretz Yisrael. The Baal Haturim, in this week's parasha, lists an 8th. The Mitzvah of Teshuva. Why is Teshuva so powerful? Because Teshuva is the power of humility, and when you master humility, it is as if you observed all the 613.)See Baal Haturim Devarim 30; 11)

May we all merit a year of happiness, hope, health and most importantly, a year of humility.

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IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H

