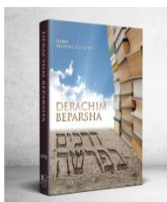


דרכים בפרשה נצבים

R' Mordechai
Appel, a talmid of
Telz Yeshiva, is the
author of
Derachim Beparsha



ושבת עד השם אלוקיך

“And you will return unto Hashem your G-d” (30, 2)

As we stand at the cusp of ushering in the new year, ready to enter into the Yamim Nora'im, no doubt the topic of the day is teshuvah. Throughout the world, Yidden all over are looking for ways to improve themselves.

There is, however, a nagging worry that is shared by many people around the world each year: What exactly can teshuvah accomplish? Can we really fix things up and improve our relationship with Hashem – without just falling back into our old ways just a few weeks into the new year? The Mabit (R' Moshe ben Yoseph di Trani, d.1580) in his sefer Beis Elokim defines teshuvah as drawing closer to Hashem from the distance and separation caused by sin. He notes that in every sin, there are two consequences: 1) One incurs liability for punishment; and 2) one angers Hashem by transgressing His command, thereby causing a distance in the relationship.

Our mission in life is to be close to Hashem. ואתם הדבקים – And you shall cling to Hashem your G-d. The goal of teshuvah needs to be the idea of bridging the gap that sin has created. If our entire focus of teshuvah is only to avoid punishment, then we are missing the boat completely. In fact, this causes Hashem's anger to increase, thereby furthering the distance between us.

Commenting on our pasuk, the Mabit notes that the word "עד" – until – teaches us that when teshuvah is done, a person can return until Hashem. This means that if teshuvah is done properly, we can actually return to the exact place where we once stood, i.e., erasing the distance that the sin has created.

Delving a little deeper into his words, we note that there are two types of teshuvah. There is teshuvah done out of fear, known as teshuvah m'yirah, and there is teshuvah done out of love for Hashem – known as teshuvah me'ahava. It is only teshuvah that is performed through love of Hashem that can bring us closer to Him.

Paraphrasing the words of the Hemek Davar, “Teshuvah that is done out of fear is because I love myself. However, teshuvah that is done out of love is because I love Hashem.” One that wants to repair a relationship, thereby coming closer once again to the person that was wronged, can only do so by showing love. But just showing fear of the consequences does nothing to restore things to where they once were.

The Zohar writes: Woe unto the people that say (on Rosh Hashanah) ‘Give, give.’ On Rosh Hashanah, our focus is to be mamlich – to coronate Hashem as the King of the universe. Therefore, if one uses his time on Rosh Hashanah worrying and thinking about himself, he is being selfish. According to what we explained from the Mabit, this can be clearly understood. The focus of teshuvah me'ahava is Hashem, not ourselves.

But isn't Rosh Hashanah an opportunity to ask for anything in the world? Shouldn't we think of our own situation at least a little bit, rather than pass up this golden opportunity? After all, we have families, health and livelihood (and so much more) to advocate for. And yet, the words of the Zohar seem to undermine that notion.

I asked this to Rav Yechezkel Munk z"l of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland. He responded with the following mashal:

It was a great day in the kingdom. The king had agreed to grant everyone a wish. From four to six in the afternoon, all of the king's subjects were granted an opportunity to stand before him and ask whatever they desired. The king made note of all the requests and all those that had come to see him. He noticed, however, that one of his closest advisors did not come to see him.

On the following day, the king questioned his advisor. The advisor explained that he had indeed intended to come, as he had many of his own requests to make. However, on his way to the throne room, he noticed a lot of garbage on the floor, with things having spilled all over. All of the royal staff members were lining up to make their own requests, so there was no one else to look after the palace. Feeling that it needed to be cleaned up properly in order to avoid disgracing the king's honor, he grabbed a broom and a shovel, a mop and a pail of water and got to work. By the time he was done, the lines outside the throne room were two long for him to make it in before the end of the two-hour time slot.

“You mean to tell me that you passed up on the chance of a lifetime just for my honor?” The king asked, utterly astounded. “In that case, you shall not lose out. Whatever it is that you require will be attended to immediately.”

This is called ahavah. When we don't focus on the “me” in the relationship between us and Hashem, the response from the King of all kings is: “I have you covered; I know what you need and will provide it all for you.”

May we all be zoche to be inscribed in the sefer hachaim, returning to Hashem with teshuvah me'ahava, finally closing the great distance between us and our Father in Heaven. ושב עד השם אלוקיך – The return should be all the way. Hashem is waiting for us and wants nothing more than a “loving” relationship with His kinderlach.

מרדכי אפפלי, Good Shabbos,