

Shabbos: Ta'am HaChaim Vayeilech-Shabbos Shuva-Yom Kippur 5773

(From the archives)

Shabbos in the Parasha

This week is Parshas Vayeilech and Shabbos Shuvah, so named because of the Haftorah we read where the prophet Hoshea exhorts the Jewish People to repent from their sins. What does repentance mean? The Rishonim enumerate the steps that are involved in the process of repentance. Among these steps are forsaking the sin, regretting the past and acceptance not to sin in the future. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 2:2) writes that the ultimate form of repentance is when one reaches the state of repentance where HaShem, Who knows all concealed matters, can testify on the person that he will not commit this sin again. One must wonder, however, how one can know when he has achieved this level of repentance? There are those who claim that after Yom Kippur, if one feels a true sense of relief, then he knows that has gained atonement for his sins. Repentance certainly involves ones emotions. Nonetheless, the mitzvah of repentance is akin to shaking a lulav and blowing a shofar, where one must perform the action involved in the mitzvah and one should not be focused on whether HaShem has accepted his performance of the mitzvah. This being the case, why does the Rambam write that part of the process of repentance is that HaShem has to testify that he will never sin

again? The Lechem Mishneh (Ibid) is bothered by another question. He asks how it can be that HaShem testifies that a person will never commit this sin again. Does this not contradict the idea that man has free choice? The Lechem Mishneh answers that when one repents he must take HaShem as a witness that he will never commit this sin again. It would seem from the words of the Lechem Mishneh that the Rambam is not saying that HaShem is actually testifying on behalf of the person. Rather, the repentant is taking HaShem as a witness, similar to Moshe taking the heavens and the earth as a witness that the Jewish People were warned what will occur if they do not heed HaShem's will. This is also the understanding of the Kesef Mishneh (Ibid). This explanation, however, is difficult, as the Rambam implies that HaShem will actually testify on behalf of the repentant. Furthermore, how does one take HaShem as a witness? Lastly, if one takes HaShem as a witness that he will never sin again, is it still possible to sin again? This matter requires further research, but perhaps we can explain the words of the Rambam in a different manner. The Rambam (Ibid 1:1) writes that the mitzvah from the Torah is that one confesses his sins, and part of the confession process is that he repents. One of the confessions that we recite on Yom Kippur is that we sinned before HaShem with *Viduy Peh*,

insincere confession. While one can certainly confess his sins verbally, it is insufficient unless he has truly repented. How can one know if he has truly repented? Regarding this the Rambam writes that if HaShem testifies upon the person that he will not commit the sin again, then he will know that he has truly repented. This is the only way that one can sincerely confess his sins, as without true repentance, one cannot recite a true confession. It is said (Yechezkel 33:11) *emor aleihem chai ani nium HaShem Elokim im echpotz bimos harshah ki im bishuv rasha midarko vichaya shuvu shuvu midarcheichem haraim vilamah samusu bais Yisroel*, say to them: ‘as I live – the word of the Lord HaShem/Elokim – [I swear] that I do not desire the death of the wicked one, but rather the wicked one’s return from his way, that he may live. Repent, repent from your evil ways! Why should you die, O House of Israel?’ Thus, we see that when one repents, he is now considered to be amongst the living. The definition of living is to be attached to HaShem and His will. One who repents is close to HaShem, as it is said (Hoshea 14:2) *shuva Yisroel ad HaShem Elokecha*, return, Israel, unto Hashem your G-d. The Gemara (Yoma 86a) derives from these words that repentance is so great that it ascends to the Heavenly Throne. In a similar vein, every week we experience a spiritual elevation on the Holy Shabbos. How does this come about? I was struck by the words from the Haftorah that we read on a fast day. It is said (Yeshaya

56:3-5) *vial yomar ben haneichar hanilvah el HaShem leimor havdail yavdilani HaShem meial amo vial yomar hasaris hein ani eitz yaveish ki choh amar HaShem lasarisim asher yishmiru es Shabsosai uvacharu baasher chafatzti umachazikim bivrisi vinsati lahem biveisi uvichomosai yad vasheim tov mibanim umibanos sheim olam etein lo asher lo yikareis*, let not the foreigner, who has joined himself to HaShem, speak, saying, ‘HaShem will utterly separate me from His people’; and let not the barren one say, ‘Behold I am a shriveled tree.’ For thus said HaShem to the barren ones who observe My Shabbosos and choose what I desire, and grasp My covenant tightly: In My house and within my walls I will give them a place of honor and renown, which is better than sons and daughters; eternal renown will I give them, which will never be terminated. We can interpret these verses homiletically to mean as follows: and let not the barren one say, ‘Behold I am a shriveled tree, i.e. let a person not say that life is dry and without meaning. For thus said HaShem to the barren ones who observe My Shabbosos and choose what I desire, and grasp My covenant tightly, i.e. although during the week a person may feel that he is on the precipice of despair, he should know that one who observes the Shabbos and studies Torah will be more rejuvenated than one who bears children. The reason for this is because Shabbos is a semblance of the World to Come, which is eternal. One who experiences Shabbos has experienced true life.

Hashem should grant us that this Shabbos the entire Jewish People observe the Shabbos properly, and then HaShem will grant us complete atonement on Yom Kippur, which will come upon us, for good.

Shabbos in the Zemiros

Askinu Seudasa

Composed by the Arizal, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria

Chadu sagi yeisei vial chada tartei nihorah lah yimtei uvirchaan dinfishin, abundant joy arrives, in place of one, a double measure. Brilliance will envelop the soul, and manifold blessings. This passage refers to the *neshama yeseira*, the extra soul that a Jew receives with the onset of Shabbos. On Shabbos we are blessed with an extra soul and extra joy. Hashem should allow us to experience the extra soul and to be truly joyous for the entire Shabbos.

Shabbos in Tefillah

Raah vihiskin tzuras halevanah, He saw and fashioned the form of the moon. What is the significance of this passage? We declare that HaShem fashioned the form of the moon, but what was the purpose in HaShem fashioning the moon? It is said (see Bach Ohr HaChaim 282, Tiferes Shlomo Vayishlach) that Yaakov Avinu is associated with the moon. Perhaps based on this kabalistic idea we can suggest that we are declaring that HaShem called to the sun,

which represents Esav, as the gentile world is reflected by the solar calendar. To negate Esav's influence in the world, HaShem fashioned the form of the moon, i.e. HaShem Himself watches over Yaakov to save him from the clutches of Esav. With this explanation we can understand why we say that HaShem saw. It is said (Bereishis 1:4-5) *vayar Elokim es haor ki tov vayavdeil Elokim bain haor uvein hachoshech vayikra Elokim laor yom vilachosech kara laylah vayehi erev vayehi voker yom echod*, G-d saw that the light was good, and G-d separated between the light and the darkness. G-d called to the light: "Day," and to the darkness He called: "Night." And there was evening and there was morning, one day. The Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 2:3) states that when it states that HaShem called the light "Day," this refers to Yaakov, and when it states that HaShem called darkness "Night," this refers to Esav. Following in the line of the Medrash, we can suggest that when we say that HaShem "saw" and fashioned the form of the moon, it is parallel to HaShem calling the original light "Day," a reference to Yaakov. Although the Medrash interprets "Day" to be referring to Yaakov, and here we allude to Yaakov as the moon, the idea is that Esav represents darkness to the Jewish People. It is for this reason that we say that HaShem fashioned the form of the moon, i.e. despite the fact that Esav dominates in this world, in the future the light of Yaakov will shine when the

entire world recognizes Hashem as the One G-d.

Shabbos Stories

Another mosquito to swat at! Would he have any ears left a month from now? Wondered Robert Burns. He never had enjoyed hot weather, even in Bayside, New York. And, he had to admit, his hometown couldn't compete in this league. In all his young years he had never felt sweat and humidity like what he was currently feeling. From where he was squatting he was able to see only the thicket of trees and a glimpse of the sky. The clouds were sweeping in front of the full moon, temporarily blocking its beams. It didn't matter; Viet Nam's jungle wasn't much to look at anyway, and you couldn't spot the enemy by day or night until they opened fire. The real question just now was, should he do the traditional Jewish hand-washing or not? There was a stream about 800 feet away; he could get water there. Then again, the Vietcong weren't far away either. Crawling even that far could cost him his life. As Robert weighed the options, he swatted another mosquito from his ear and wondered how he had ended up in such a bizarre situation. Until shortly before being drafted he had heard neither of Viet Nam nor of "netilat yadayim," the traditional Jewish hand-washing. He thought back to Bayside and childhood. He had attended public school, and three times a week went for "Hebrew instruction." The main purpose was simply to learn enough Hebrew to read his "half-Torah," which he eventually

learned from a venerable and rather friendly tape recorder... Graduation from Hebrew School followed his Bar Mitzvah and marked his abandonment of what little Judaism he had ever known. He never set foot in a synagogue again until his grandfather passed away. Then his father, by no means a religious man, suddenly started going to minyan every day. When Robby questioned his father about his sudden resurgence of interest in religion, his father replied, "I'm saying Kaddish for my father. His soul won't get rest unless I say Kaddish every day for him." Robert figured that his father would abandon this ritual after a week or two. To his astonishment he was mistaken. His father took the responsibility quite seriously, and made sure to go to synagogue every day, even if it conflicted with a football game on TV. A few times Robert accompanied his father; he sometimes slept late, and he was impressed that his father took on such consistency for 11 months. In the fall of 1965 Robert left for college in Oneonta, New York. The student protests against American involvement in Viet Nam drew little interest from him. The summer following his graduation Robert was hit with another misfortune: his father's sudden heart attack. Robert rushed from his job in the rope factory to the hospital. He could barely recognize his father with the tubes and wires all around him -- he felt as though he was gazing at an octopus ensnared in a fisherman's net. Looking down at his father, Robert knew the condition was serious. Resolutely he

took a seat at his father's right. "Dad. I'm here. Can you hear me?" Mustering the little strength left in his body, Mr. Burns responded in barely audible tones, "Bobby. Thank G-d you're here." The strain of talking seemed too much for him. Yet like so many times before, he persevered: "I want you to make one promise to me. You're my only son. Say Kaddish for me if I don't make it this time." Through his tears, Robert said he hoped the occasion wouldn't arise for many years to come. But he knew he could not refuse the request, and finally choked out, "I promise." His father seemed suddenly at peace, and closed his eyes in easy sleep. Robert sat at his father's bedside for about half an hour, watching the heartbeat on the monitors. The nurse entered: "I'm sorry, but visitor's hours are over now." Robert left Pine Meadow Hospital and returned to the rope factory. Unfortunately, his Kaddish duty took effect only a few days later. Robert felt the loss, and also remembered the promise he had made. Just as his father had, following the seven-day mourning period (shiva) he went to synagogue to say Kaddish. He found that the only synagogue in his neighborhood which had daily services was the local Orthodox synagogue, Ahavas Torah. Robert's Hebrew was like the buried vessels of the Holy Temple: existing somewhere, but not visible. Rabbi Jacobs immediately took a liking to the young man who struggled so hard with his Kaddish, and seemed so intent on keeping his father's last wishes. During services the young man

seemed lost, only catching himself when it came time for Kaddish. He even needed signals from Rabbi Jacobs to know when to start; the rabbi willingly gave them. "I hope it all went smoothly today," said the rabbi. He was in his early forties, with streaks of gray in his light brown beard, which reached below his neck collar. It occurred to Robert that he didn't even know what the Kaddish meant. Looking his elder companion in the eye, he asked what would be the first of many inquiries. "Can I ask you something?" "Certainly," replied the Rabbi. "What does this prayer mean? I mean, why do we say anything for the dead?" "You asked a very good question. Kaddish represents your commitment to Judaism. By saying the Kaddish you connect with the Jewish people, and announce publicly your commitment to keep the 613 mitzvot. For the recently departed there can be no greater merit in Heaven." "613 mitzvot? I didn't know they had a number. Uh, I also didn't realize there are so many." "There are many more than just 613, the number only represents the main ones. You know, we could talk more later. Why don't you come to the class that I'm giving tonight in Chumash?" "Chumash? What's that?" asked Robert. "Bible." Robert froze. He was starting to get interested, but that term, "Bible," brought images to his mind of a televangelist begging his audience to send him money and repent their sins, in that order. He shrugged his shoulders, and mumbled "I'll try to make it." Tuesday night came and went, but

Robert never showed up for the class. Eventually Robert got to know Rabbi Jacobs well enough to know that he wasn't a fanatic. It helped him get over his apprehension to discover that the term "Bible" is hardly ever used among Jews. He first attended a few of the rabbi's classes, then began accepting Shabbat invitations. This was the year Uncle Sam began drafting by birth date, and Robert's date, May 7th, was number 35. The top 196 birth dates meant almost guaranteed conscription. The expected notice arrived shortly thereafter, ordering him to report for a physical. Far from wanting to flee the inevitable, Robert was proud to serve the USA. He felt that the country could use a dose of patriotism. Shortly following his 11 months of Kaddish, Robert knocked on Rabbi Jacobs' door. "Rabbi, I just came to say goodbye. It looks like they'll be shipping me to South Carolina soon for basic training. It's going to be real hard for me to keep any of the 613 mitzvot. So tell me, Rabbi -- pick one for me. Which one of the mitzvot should I keep no matter what?" The rabbi thought for a while. Who could answer such a question? Too difficult an assignment would end in failure. Shabbat? Kashrut? Tefillin? Robert clearly wasn't ready to tackle these. Suddenly the Rabbi's face lit up. "Robert, I have just the right one. Make sure you do "netilat yadayim," the traditional hand-washing every time you eat bread -- even if you don't say the blessings over the food, even if you don't say the Grace after Meals, and even if the bread is not kosher." "Netilat

yadayim?" "Yes. It's a mitzvah that won't put undue pressure on you, since nobody will think twice about your washing your hands before eating. Keep that one mitzvah as well as you can, and remember, any mitzvah will protect you even in the direst circumstances. Best of luck to you, and write me when you get the chance." During basic training, and even when he was shipped out to the base in Viet Nam, Robert had little difficulty in performing this mitzvah. Nobody noticed anything strange about his desire to wash his hands before eating bread. But finally, about six months after being stationed in the jungles of Southeast Asia, the first real difficulty developed. The platoon was sent for a late-night raid on the fringes of the enemy lines. It wasn't long before the shooting began, and it soon developed into a full-scale battle. A few of his comrades had dropped and the remainder of the unit was trapped behind enemy lines. After a few hours' lapse in the fighting, some of the soldiers recalled their hunger. In fact, they hadn't eaten for the major part of the day. They began to take out their combat rations of oranges, sardines, and bread. Robby was about to join a few of his colleagues when he remembered "netilat yadayim." He quickly and quietly broke from the camp, his destination a small stream he had seen about 800 feet away. It didn't matter that this excursion was insanely dangerous; no argument could convince Robert to abandon it. He had promised the rabbi, and it was in memory of his father, too. That was that. He slipped,

silent and alone, toward the stream. Traversing the ground like a snake slithering through the forest, Robert quickly reached his destination. He poured water over his hands, delighted that even in this combat situation he was able to keep his mitzvah. It was just after he finished pouring the cup of water over his other hand when he heard the gunfire. Rapid-fire machine guns, piercing the stillness of the jungle in a long barrage of thunderous noise. For what seemed to him hours, Robert remained hidden in the grass, long after the last sounds of the bullets had faded. Mustering up his strength, he slowly slithered back to his unit to find not one of them alive.

Shabbos in Navi

Shmuel I Chapter 6

In this chapter we learn how the Plishtim decided to send the Aron, the Holy Ark, back to its place amongst the Jewish People. They sent the Aron back along with five golden images of hemorrhoids and five golden mice. The Radak writes that they did this because when the people would relieve themselves, the mice would attack the bleeding hemorrhoids. They sent the Aron and the golden images on a new wagon that was drawn by two nursing cows. They then sent the calves of the cows back home, and if the nursing cows would forsake their calves and follow the Aron, it would be a clear sign that HaShem wanted the Aron back. The Plishtim then sent the Aron on the wagon drawn

by the nursing cows on the direct road, on the road to Beit Shemesh, and the cows drew the Aron to Beit Shemesh. The people of Beit Shemesh saw the Aron coming, and because they gazed disrespectfully at the Aron, thousands of people died. The people of Beit Shemesh were distressed by the deaths of their citizens, so they sent a message to the inhabitants of Kiryas Yearim to take the Aron to their city. In describing the journey of the cows, it is said (Shmuel I 6:12) *vayisharnah haparos* baderech, the cows set out on the direct road. The Gemara (Avodah Zara 24b) interprets the word *vayisharnah* as a term of song, meaning that the cows turned towards the Aron and sang praises to HaShem. This was truly an incredible event. The people of Beit Shemesh, because of their disrespect that they displayed towards the Aron, were killed, whereas the cows sang HaShem's praises because they intrinsically recognized the sanctity of the Aron. Regarding Shabbos we know that one who properly observes the Shabbos will be greatly rewarded. The converse, however, is also true. One who disrespects the Shabbos will be severely punished. It behooves us to learn from the cows who, upon recognizing HaShem's Presence near them, sang HaShem's praises. We too should recognize the holiness of Shabbos and engage in prayer, Torah study, and praising HaShem.

Shabbos in Agadah

The Imrei Emes, the Gerrer Rebbe, writes (Beshalach 5693) that the Gemara (Shabbos 118b) states that had the Jewish People only observed the first Shabbos in the Wilderness, no race or nation could have assailed them. This is derived from the fact that it is said (Shemos 16:27) *vayehi bayom hashevii yatzu min ham lilkot vilo matzau*, it happened on the seventh day that some of the people went out to gather, and they did not find. Further on it is said (Ibid 17:8) *vayavo Amalek vayilachem im Yisroel biRefidim*, Amalek came and battled Israel in Rephidim. The Imrei Emes questions this, because Rashi writes that the reason that Amalek attacked the Jewish People is because the Jewish People displayed a lack of faith in HaShem, when they said (Shemos 17:7) *hayeish HaShem bikirbeinu im ayin*, “is HaShem among us or not?” The Imrei Emes resolves this discrepancy by answering that it is said regarding the giving of the manna (Ibid 16:29) *riu ki HaShem nasan lachem haShabbos al kein hu nosein lachem bayom hashishi lechem yomayim shevu ish tachtav al yeitzei ish mimekomo bayom hashevii*, see that HaShem has given you the Shabbos; that is why He gives you on the sixth day a two-day portion of bread. Let every man remain in his place; let no man leave his place on the seventh day. The Zohar states the word *mimekomo* refers to the Shechinah, the Divine Presence. Thus, we see that Shabbos reflects the idea that HaShem is in our midst.

Shabbos in Halacha

One can only return a pot to the blech if the food has been completely cooked. ‘Completely cooked’ means that the food has been cooked to the degree that most people would eat it without requiring further cooking. One cannot return partially cooked food to a blech once it has been removed. This includes even food that has reached an edible state, known as the food of Ben Drusoai. One who returns such food to a blech violates the Biblical prohibition of cooking.

Shabbos in Numbers and Words

From the beginning of the month of Elul and continuing on through Sukkos we recite the chapter of Tehillim that begins with the words *LeDovid HaShem ori*, by Dovid, HaShem is my light. It is said (Tehillim 27:8) *lecho amar libi bakishu fanai es panecho HaShem avakeish*, in Your behalf, my heart has said, “Seek My Presence.” Your Presence, HaShem, do I seek. It is noteworthy that the words *fanai es panecho* equal in gematria the word *Shabbos*. This alludes to the idea that on Shabbos we are, so to speak, face to face with HaShem.

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Vayeilech-Shabbos Shuva-Yom
Kippur 5773

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