

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of Points from the Rebbe's
Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל

ד"ה שובה ישראל תש"ל בלתי מוגה

Published for 'Shabbat Teshuvah'
8 Tishrei 5784, 23 September 2023¹

DIMENSIONS OF REPENTANCE

THE HAFTORAH FOR THE 'SHABBAT OF REPENTANCE'
BEGINS "Return Israel to Hashem your G-d... take with you words
and return to G-d... Our lips will compensate for bulls" (Hosea 14:2-3).
The Maamar asks several questions: firstly, why is the name Israel used,
rather than Jacob? 'Israel' suggests a higher level of the Jewish people, as
we see from the incident in which Jacob wrestled with the angel, and the
angel told him he should be called Israel 'because you have succeeded
against both spiritual and human forces'².

Why would one expect the name Jacob to be used rather than Israel? This verse is speaking of repentance. Although it is true that there are higher and higher levels of repentance, the basic level is repentance from sin. This means that the people being addressed by the verse are those who might sin. One would expect the lower term Jacob to be more relevant to them. So why is the higher name "Israel" used?

Another question is about the phrase "to Hashem your G-d" - this seems to have an extra level of meaning.

The next question is about "take with you words", which is explained as meaning the Vidduy, the verbal confession said on Yom Kippur. Surely the main aspect of repentance is in the heart, "regret for the past and a positive

¹ *Shuva Yisrael 5730*, published in Dvormalchut week of Ha'azinu 5781. The discourse was not edited by the Rebbe.

² See Gen. 32:29, Vayishlach.

resolution for the future”. So why does the verse mention specifically verbal confession?

The final question is about the phrase “... our lips will compensate for bulls” which is generally explained as meaning that after the Temple was destroyed, our prayers and Torah study substitute for the Temple offerings³. The question is why does this verse about repentance mention the offerings? While some offerings are concerned with atonement from sin, many are not. And even those offerings generally concern *accidental* sins rather than deliberate ones. So why should this verse about repentance speak of the Temple offerings?

To answer these points let us consider a Midrash⁴ which states: they asked the Torah how can a sinning soul be atoned? The Torah answered “let him bring a guilt offering and he will be atoned.” Then they asked the Holy One the same question and He replied: “let him do Teshuvah (Repentance) and he will be atoned.”

It is intriguing that the two answers are different. The Torah seems to give an answer only for accidental sins, while the Holy One’s answer applies to all sins, for ‘nothing stands in the way of Repentance’⁵.

To understand this further, let us consider the answer of the Torah. We can ask: why should an offering in the Temple have the power to bring atonement to a person, even if only for an accidental transgression? The Midrash says this is something that the Torah states, and Torah is a matter of rational understanding. In that case, what is the rationale?

To understand this, we need to consider the relationship of humans and animals in Creation. The Sages tell us that man is created at the end of all Creation; and also that he is created first⁶.

He was at the end of all Creation because everything else was created before him in the six days of Creation. Not only that, but man’s body was fashioned as an inanimate form, and only after that did G-d breath a soul into him, unlike other living creatures which were created with body and soul at the same time. So, in this sense man and woman⁷ come right at the end of Creation.

³ See Talmud Berachot 26a-b.

⁴ Yalkut Shimoni, Tehilim 25, sec.702.

⁵ Rambam, Laws of Teshuvha, end of ch.3.

⁶ Midrash Bereishit Rabbah 8:1.

⁷ The Sages state that Adam at first combined both male and female, back to back, and was then divided in two to form Adam and Eve. See Rashi to Gen.2:21.

On the other hand, there is also another way of understanding this: man and woman are the *beginning* of existence because the only way that all Creation has meaning is by the fact of Adam and Eve being created and that they call on the entirety of existence to recognise G-d. As the Zohar⁸ tells us that on the day Adam was created he declared ‘G-d is King, He is clothed in Majesty’⁹ and he beckoned all creatures to ‘bow down and kneel before G-d Who made us’¹⁰.

This happens again every Rosh Hashanah: in our prayers on this day we call on all existence to recognise G-d: ‘May everything that has been made know that You have made it, everything that has been created understand that You have created it’¹¹.

Through this we can understand why the animal offering is able to atone for a person’s sin, because the source of the animal which came before man is on a very exalted spiritual level, from the world of Tohu (Chaos), higher than the spiritual root of man which is from the world of Tikkun (Repair).

When an animal offering is brought in the Temple, the offering, which has a powerful spiritual dimension, connects above with the Face of the Ox¹², the source of the domestic beasts, which is in the vision of the Chariot of Ezekiel. Then it ascends higher to the image of the ‘Man’¹³ which is being carried by the Chariot, and then yet higher to that which is beyond the image of the Man, reaching higher and higher spiritual levels. There is then a responding flow coming down to the person who has brought the animal offering. This explains why the bringing of an animal offering has a tremendous spiritual effect for the individual, which includes a level of atonement.

However, in the answer given by the Holy One, that he should repent, we see that Teshuvah reaches an even higher level.

The discourse explains that at every stage in the spiritual realm there is always an outer level and an inner, higher level. Just as man is composed of body and soul, all existence has those two dimensions. In the Sefirot there is the vessel of the Sefirah, like the ‘body’, and the radiance, like the ‘soul’. Higher there is the external aspect of Keter and the inner aspect of Keter. Even higher, there is the ‘radiance for the sake of the worlds’ and the higher ‘radiance which is for the Divine Essence’.

⁸ Zohar I, 221b.

⁹ Ps.92:1.

¹⁰ Ps.95:6.

¹¹ End of middle blessing of the Rosh Hashanah Amidah.

¹² Ezekiel 1:10.

¹³ Ezekiel 1:26.

As explained, the Offerings brought in the Temple reach a very high spiritual level. But Teshuvah, Repentance, reaches the more inward level at every step, and therefore Teshuvah is able to bring complete atonement for deliberate sin.

This answers the first of our questions above. When the verse speaks of Repentance and addresses Israel, it is indeed speaking of the higher levels which are accessed by Repentance, even Repentance for a very tangible and earthly sin. That is why the word Israel is used in the verse rather than Jacob.

But this very exalted level also has to percolate down into the life of the person. That is why the verse says ‘to Hashem your G-d’. Repentance reaches the exalted level of the Tetragrammaton, Hashem, but it has to be drawn down to the more tangible level of ‘your G-d’, the spiritual energy within us. This is expressed in the Name Elokim, which relates to Nature and the practical world¹⁴.

That is also why the verse speaks about ‘take with you words’, meaning the verbal confession of sins which we say on Yom Kippur. Because even though repentance is something so exalted, the point is to bring the flow down into the physical world. For this reason there has to be the physical statement of the confession: that is the way we draw the repentance down into the physical world. Just as there is a body and soul on every other aspect of existence, so too the body of Repentance is the verbal confession, while the soul of Repentance is one’s internal feelings, regret for the past and good resolutions for the future.

Now, this Haftorah is said on the Shabbat of the Ten days of Repentance when we also say a Song of Degrees, Shir Hamaalot¹⁵, ‘from the depths I call to You’. During the Ten Days of Repentance we say this ten times because we are reaching deeper and deeper, and also we are drawing the exalted flow from above into all the ten aspects of our soul, percolating to all the different aspects of the person.

Indeed, that is what the process of repentance is about: reaching the highest level and drawing it down into the material world, and transforming the material world and making it a wholesome realm where the presence of G-d is revealed.

[Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care](#)

¹⁴ Note that Elokim and Hateva, Nature, have the same Gematria, 86.

¹⁵ Ps. 130.