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RABBI YITZI'S
**DIVREI
TORAH**

TISHREI EDITION

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A Mother's Tears

Dear friends,

I wrote this letter to Dina, after a long and difficult year. She thought that I should publish it because it is a letter/dvar Torah. Perhaps other women will draw strength from it as well.

Have a happy and sweet year!

~

Dear Dina my heart of gold,

This year has been difficult, your tears didn't go unnoticed. I'm sure the tears I saw were only the tip of the iceberg. How many were shared with your pillow, how many were written into your blog and how many have you held back.

Who can understand the heart of a Jewish mother? It is like you have a sixth sense, only Jewish women have it. It is a closeness to Hashem, as if you can sense His sadness as well. Sometimes you sense His joy.

This is talked about in the last mishnah in Taanis that on Yom Kippur, the girls would go dancing in the vineyards, just like Tu B'Av. What was special about those times? They are times of forgiveness of sins, and the girls could sense Hashem's joy, which caused them to well with joy, this caused them to go out and dance.

Now, if women can sense Hashem's joy, it would follow that they sense His sadness as well. And so you cry even more.

I think the deepest crying is for the children. I think this is why you identify so strongly with the Haftora of the second day of Rosh Hashanah. Rochel is crying for her children and there is nothing to console her. It just seems endless, with no reprieve in sight. So much work, so much selfless giving and giving, with no gain, no reward.

The Haftora continues. Hashem says, you can stop crying, there is reward for your work. There is hope, the children will return to their borders. Moshiach is coming and it's your work, your tears, your love and your joy that brought him.

Your suffering is not in vain. You will see the fruits of your hard work and you will be honored. I don't know why Hashem chose us, but he did. We, like Rochel, won't give up and we won't let him down.

In this week's parsha we read the words from Moshe to Yehoshua "chazak v'ematz", be strong and courageous. Perhaps it is our bitachon, simcha and emunah that will bring an end to this dark galus.

I am with you,

Your Yosef Yitzchak

This article is dedicated
Lizechus Avionam Ben Varda Faiga Bluma for a Shnas Brocho
Vihatzlocho Bigashmiyus Veruchniyus.

~

A Cry From The Depths Of Our Souls

About Rosh Hashanah, the Mishnah¹ says, “The mitzvah of the day is with the shofar.”

The Baal Shem Tov explains shofar with a parable. It is like a child that cries out, “father father save me.”²

The Rebbes of Chabad made it known³ that the main thing is not the content of the cry, “father father save me,” but rather the cry itself.⁴

Being that we are all different, the content of our cries are different, but each of us cry out to Hashem. For one the cry from the depths of his soul is audible, for another it is silent. But it is from the depths of his soul that he cries.

This is what the sounds of the shofar are all about, a cry from the depths of our souls. And that is what breaks through the gates of heaven and reaches Hashem, our father.

Then there is the parable of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev. There was a boy that wanted an apple, but his father didn’t want to give it to him. The clever boy quickly said the blessing over fruits and his father had to give it to him.

Sometimes a father doesn’t want to give. Then there are times that the father does want to give, and the only reason he is denying his child what he wants, is because he wants to bring

1 Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 26b.

2 Found in Hemshech Vechacha 5637 par. 70.

3 This was told over by the 6th Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, brought in Lekutei Sichos vol 2 pp. 405-406.

4 See Sefer Hamaamarim Kuntreisim volume 2 p. 642.

out something more from the child, to see how clever he is. Will he figure out a way to get it?

In our case, Hashem wants to give. As the expression found in the Talmud goes, “more than the calf wants to suckle, the cow wants to nurse.”⁵ The same idea is said regarding the One above, the verse says, “for the work of your hands, He longs.”⁶ In other words, Hashem wants us to serve Him. He therefore wants to give us what we need to serve Him.

This is why in the Rosh Hashanah Musaf prayer, at the culmination of the verses of shofar, we conclude with the blessing, “Blessed are You Hashem our G-d, Who hears the sound of the terua (the sound of the shofar) of Your nation Israel with compassion.”

When it comes to saying a blessing with Hashem’s name, the rule is that if there is any doubt, we don’t say the blessing, because we do not want to say His Name in vain. Yet here we say, “Who hears the sound of the terua of Your nation Israel,” and not only that, but He hears it “with compassion.” Why are we so certain?

The Men of the Great Assembly, at the beginning of the Second Temple era, were the ones who authored our prayers. They were comprised of 120 Tzadikim of which many were prophets. So they were in the position to know, they were not in doubt. They therefore ruled that we should say this blessing with Hashem’s name, because it is absolutely certain that Hashem hears our terua, the cry from the depths of our souls, and that He hears it with compassion. Meaning, that He will grant us all our needs, especially nachas, health and sustenance.

The central theme of Rosh Hashanah is twofold. First we reach up to Hashem, accepting Him as our King, accepting the yoke of His dominion. And then He in turn, so to speak, accepts upon Himself all the blessings he said He would give us in parshat Bechukotai⁷,

5 Pesachim 112a.

6 Job 14:15.

7 Leviticus 26:4.

“And I will give your rain in their time...”⁸

This year, when we sound the shofar, the cry from the depths of our souls, Hashem will surely grant us what we need, including nachas from our children, good health and abundant sustenance. Which is all included in the traditional Rosh Hashanah blessing, that we wish everyone with “a good and sweet year.” May he also grant us the coming of Moshiach. The time has come.

8 Lekutei Sichos vol 2 pp. 405-407.

Dedicated By Dr. Ezra and Lauren Kest

In honor of our children who teach us how to love, listen and be heard. They should be blessed to find, see and recognize their zivugim at the right time and always listen well, be heard and feel listened to.

~

How Shofar Draws The Blessings For A Sweet Year

On Rosh Hashanah, in the musaf prayer, we hear the shofar blowing three times. Once with the verses and the blessing of kingship, a second time with the verses and the blessing of remembrance, and a third time with the verses and the blessing of shofar.

The Talmud cites a Braisa that says, “The shofar blasts and the blessings of Rosh Hashanah... Are dependent on one another. What is the reason? Raba says that Hashem says, ‘Say before Me on Rosh Hashanah verses of kingship, remembrance, and shofar. Verses of kingship, so that you will make Me King over you, verses of remembrance, so that good memories of you will come to Me, and with what (will you raise the verses before Me)? With the (verses and the blasts of the) shofar.’”

On Rosh Hashanah there are two main themes that are intertwined. First we ask Hashem to be King over us, we coronate Him as our King, second is that we are accepted as His subjects, meaning that we will do His will and He will bestow upon us His goodness, that our needs are met and more. And this all happens in the musaf prayer.

How does this work? And why is it that shofar is what makes it happen?

To explain this, there are two parables.

The first parable is from the Baal Shem Tov:

There was a king who had an only son. The prince was well educated and was the apple of his father’s eye. The King decided

that it was a good idea for the prince to travel to foreign countries to learn and absorb new knowledge and cultures.

The king gave his son officers, servants and a lot of money, so that he would be able to travel to distant countries and islands, to become more than he could have ever been had he stayed in his father's house.

Much time passed, all his wealth and supplies were used up because of the pampered lifestyle he was used to; he was accustomed to always indulging his every whim. He eventually sold everything that he had and found himself in a distant land where no one even knew who his father was at all.

This caused him great anguish. He yearned to return to his father's country. Because so much time had elapsed, he even forgot his native tongue; what could he do in his own country without knowing his own language?!

When he came back to his country, he began to gesture and signal that he was their king's son. He came to the courtyard of the king and continued gesturing that he was the prince, but they didn't recognize him at all, they ridiculed him.

He began to cry in a loud voice, hoping that the king would recognize it. When the king heard his voice, he exclaimed "Isn't that the voice of my son crying out in desperation?" The love for his son was evoked, and he embraced and kissed his son.

The analogy is easily understood. The Jewish people are called the sons of Hashem. Just as the prince left the palace to learn and grow, so too, the neshama accomplishes and grows by doing mitzvos down here and reaches higher heights than it did before it descended to earth.

Alas, because of the body's self-love and indulgences, the neshama can end up in a distant place where even his own father isn't recognized, nor his own language.

Until he returns and cries out in a primal, simple voice. And this is what the cry of the shofar is—a cry from the depths of the heart,

deeply regretting everything that he did and resolving to listen to the voice of his father. This cry elicits from the King of Kings a deep love for his “only son” and he forgives him for all he’s done in the past.

This is what the verses and the blessing of kingship accomplishes, but it is the sound of the shofar, a primal cry from the depths of our hearts that drives it home to the essence of Hashem, He accepts and He is our King for the new year.

The second parable is from Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev:

A King once traveled through a big forest, to the depths of the forest, where he could no longer find the route home.

He noticed some villagers and asked them for directions. They, of course, didn’t recognize the King, and didn’t know what to answer because they never knew the route to the palace.

He eventually found a wise man and asked him for directions. The wise man recognized that this was the king, and was shaken. He immediately fulfilled the king’s wish by pointing him in the right direction. Because of his great wisdom, he knew the correct path to the palace and was able to guide the king back to his throne.

The man found favor in the king’s eyes.

Time passed and this same man sinned against the king and angered him. The king commanded his highest officers to judge this man as those who commit treason are judged.

The man was extremely pained knowing that he was doomed to harsh judgment for sinning against the king. He fell before the king and pleaded for one final request. He wanted to be dressed in the original clothes that he was wearing when he guided the king from the forest and back to his palace; and the king shall, as well, wear the same clothes he wore on that day.

The king obliged. When both the king and the man were dressed in the garments from the day they met in the forest,

the king remembered the great kindness he displayed for the king by guiding him back to his palace and throne. This aroused compassion and benevolence within the king to forgive the sins of the man and return him to his post.

This is an analogy for Hashem and the Jewish people. At the time of the Giving of the Torah, Hashem approached all the nations of the world, but they didn't accept the Torah. We, the Jewish people, accepted the Torah with happiness and deep joy to the extent that we immediately said "Naaseh V'Nishma" (we will do and then we will understand). We accepted Hashem as our King and committed to fulfilling the mitzvos and laws of the Torah.

Now, however, we sinned and rebelled against the king. Therefore we blow the shofar, the same "clothing we wore" at the Giving of the Torah. (The sound of the shofar was heard at the Giving of the Torah, so it serves) as a reminder that we accepted the Torah and we coronate Hashem as king with this same shofar. Through this, Hashem forgives us for all our wrongdoings and immediately inscribes us for a good life.

This is what the verses and the blessing of remembrance accomplishes, but again, it is the sound of the shofar, the reminder of how when no one would accept the Torah, we accepted the Torah and the mission. His compassion and benevolence is aroused, He accepts us as His subjects for the new year and He grants us our needs and more for the new year.

There is a question: What is it that actually drives it home to the essence of Hashem, is it the verses or the blasts of the shofar? Therefore we do both.

On a deeper level, there are two aspects of the shofar, one is accomplished by the verses and the other by blasts.

The blasts of the shofar are a mitzvah and have the power of a mitzvah, which is Hashem's will, His essence, therefore they reach His essence.

Reciting the verses is Torah study, Torah is light, which reveals and has the power to draw down the accomplishments of the

shofar into reality. And there is an advantage that Torah study has over mitzvos, it reaches the highest levels. Therefore there is an advantage that the reciting of the verses of shofar has over the actual blasts of the shofar. As the Rebbe Rashab says, “The true revelation that will be in the time of Moshiach at the highest level... Is drawn down now, on Rosh Hashanah, by saying the verses of shofar.”

Therefore, on Rosh Hashanah that falls on Shabbos, when we don't blow the shofar, we suffice with reciting the verses of shofar, because it accomplishes the same thing, if not more.

Through shofar we accomplish the essence of Rosh Hashanah, we choose Hashem, and He chooses us, and He grants us a sweet and happy year.

May we all be written and sealed in the book of life for a happy and sweet new year, with good health and happiness, nachas and shalom bayis, abundance and success. And may we merit to see the coming of Moshiach and an end to this dark and bitter exile. May he come soon. The time has come.¹

I would like to thank Chana Gurevitch for her help translating the two parables.

¹ Based on Lekutei Sichos vol 34 pp. 180-186.

Rachel's Sacrifice

The Haftora for the second day of Rosh Hashanah is all about the redemption. How we will return, how wonderful it will be, why we will merit redemption, and how much Hashem loves us.

At the core of its message, is repentance and ultimate sacrifice, that is its connection to Rosh Hashanah.

The Haftora opens with Hashem saying that He found favor in us when we were in the desert, and he led us to rest in Israel. How we will return there, how wonderful things will be, and that we will return as a vast assembly.

In what merit will we return? In the merit of teshuva, returning to Hashem through prayer and supplication. As the verse says, "They will come weeping, with supplications I will lead them." The power of our teshuva will bring an end to this exile, and it is teshuva that is central to the High Holidays, as the Ten days from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur, are called The Ten Days of Teshuva.

Hashem now addresses the world, and tells them that He will redeem us and that they won't be able to take advantage of us any more. Then Hashem says the most amazing thing, He says, "I will turn their mourning into joy." He doesn't say that He will end our mourning, rather, He will turn our mourning into joy. This means that the actual suffering and pain of the exile will be transformed into joy. The more the suffering in exile, the greater the joy when Moshiach comes.

The Haftora continues, "So says Hashem, 'a voice is heard on high, bitter weeping, Rachel is crying for her children...'" Her cries are so powerful, that Hashem gives in to her, He tells her that she doesn't have to cry any more, "your children will return to their border."

It is certain that our patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, and our other matriarchs, Sarah, Rivka and Leah are crying for us as well. Why are only Rachel's cries heard? Why is she able

to break through, while the others could not?

It is because of her great sacrifice. What was her sacrifice?

Many of you know the story. When Yaakov and Rachel were to be married, Yaakov suspected that the unscrupulous Lavan, his future father in law, would put his older daughter, Leah, under the veil. So he and Rachel prepared a secret signal for her to show, so that he would know that it was really her. When Lavan made the switch, Rachel realized how embarrassed Leah would be if she was found out, so she gave her the secret signal. By giving her the signal, she sacrificed everything. First she gave away the man she loved, second, had she married him that day, she would have possibly been his only wife and the mother of all the tribes. She also gave up the ability to be with Yaakov, which was not only a physical sacrifice, but a spiritual loss as well, because Yaakov was such a holy man.

By giving the signal to her sister, she gave up everything and she didn't hold back the signal from her because of jealousy. This is her argument to Hashem, this is what she is crying for her children. If I, a mere mortal, was not jealous of my sister, and gave her the secret signal, then Hashem, who doesn't have jealousy, because He is way beyond that, should not be jealous that the Jewish people served false gods. And with this cry, she accomplishes what no one else could, that her children will return to their border.

Then, as He does throughout the Haftora, Hashem uses Ephraim to mean the Jewish people. Why? First, because he was the main tribe of Yosef, who was the first Jew forced into exile. Second, because Ephraim was born in exile, in Egypt, before the Jewish people came down there. Third, because the tribe of Ephraim was the leader of the ten northern tribes, who were sent into exile first, during the First Temple era.

Hashem says, "Isn't Ephraim my beloved son? Isn't he a precious child?... I surely will have compassion on him, says G-d." This beloved verse is part of the Rosh Hashanah liturgy, it is always said in a beautiful melodic tune, and the congregation usually joins in. In this verse Hashem describes his love and affection

for us, and that when He thinks of us, He is moved.

Hashem loves us so much, and he will have compassion and redeem us. The message here for Rosh Hashanah, is that through teshuva and true sacrifice we can bring Moshiach.

With all this said, we have all sacrificed enough already. May Hashem show His love for us, and send Moshiach right away.

Have a happy and sweet year.

In honor of my wife Dina, whose daily sacrifices for me and the family is what keeps us together and strong. I don't know what we would do without her.

Teshuva Beyond Teshuva

This week the Haftora begins with the words Shuva Yisrael, therefore, we call this Shabbos, Shabbos Shuva. Some call it Shabbos Teshuva, because it is in The Ten Days of Teshuva.

The Haftora begins, “Return Yisrael until Havaya Elokecha, (Hashem your God) for you have stumbled because of your sins. Take with you words and return to Hashem...”

Why are we reading this now after the teshuva of the month of Elul, and after The Day of Judgment, Rosh Hashanah, on which we were certainly forgiven and granted a good year, and especially with the shofar blowing, which symbolizes Hashem’s acceptance of us, as He becomes our King for another year? What does it mean, that we should return, “until” Hashem your God, shouldn’t it say, “to” Hashem your God? Why is it that after the first verse says “return until Hashem,” the second verse says “Take with you words and return to Hashem,” what is the second verse adding to the first?

Another question. The terms used in these verses seem off. Throughout the books of the prophets, there are two names that are used to mean the Jewish people, Yaakov and Yisrael. Yaakov, the lower name, refers to the Jewish people when they are not so perfect. The name Yaakov, is from the word akaiv, which means a heel, suggesting a lower level. Yisrael, the higher name, refers to the Jewish people when they are righteous. The name Yisrael, is made up of the words li rosh, which means I have a head, head suggests a higher level. Here in our verse, Hoshea, refers to us as Yisrael, the higher name and tells us to return to Hashem. If we are Yisrael, we are already close to Hashem, why do we need to return? And if we are Yaakov, how do the words, “for you have stumbled because of your sins,” make sense, what kind of sins does righteous Yisrael have? On the other hand, if we do need to return, why does he call us Yisrael?

While there are many answers to these questions, I will try to answer them in the context of the time we are in, The Ten Days

of Teshuva.

It is true, when Shabbos Shuva comes around, we are already forgiven for our sins, we are at the level of Yisrael. However, here we are talking about a higher level of teshuva.

The most basic teshuva, is to correct blemishes in our relationship with Hashem that were caused by committing sins, specifically, breaking one of the 365 negative Commandments. This is fixing the physical infractions, as mitzvahs are all done with the physical. This is what the teshuva of the month of Elul, and Rosh Hashanah accomplishes.

A higher level of teshuva, is on a spiritual and intellectual level. Once the faults have been corrected, we are at the level of Yisrael. However, Hashem wants us to come closer, a relationship that is just about not doing anything wrong, is not much of a relationship. He wants us to know Him, through the study of Torah, and spiritually get closer through learning and meditating on the esoteric teachings of the Torah. This is the meaning of, “until Hashem your God,” until you see Havaya as Elokecha.

1. Every name of Hashem has a different meaning and purpose. The name Havaya is the life force of all existence, spiritual and physical. However, it is so holy, that the physical world would cease to exist if exposed to its revelation. The name Elokim, which Elokecha is the same, allows the physical world to exist, by acting as a shield which filters the energy from the name Havaya making the physical world possible, and it seems, as if, it is the strength and the life force of existence.

This is why the Torah starts with, “In the beginning, Elokim created the heavens and the earth.” Because it is the name Elokim that makes creation possible.

To return until Havaya Elokecha, is to get to such a spiritual closeness to Hashem, that the creative energy of Havaya becomes revealed to you, and you begin to see Havaya as your

life force. This revelation can only be attained through reaching a point where you cease to exist. In other words, it is all about Hashem.

This is why we proclaim at the closing of Yom Kippur, Havaya hu ho'Elokim. Because at that point we attain the higher level of teshuva.

Now you can understand why it says “for you have stumbled because of your sins.” Because for someone who is at that high level of spirituality and doesn't reach for the deeper connection, where Havaya is Elokecha, it is akin to a sin.

During The High Holidays we are inspired and attain this spiritual high. Once you reach this high level, it is easy to fall back once the inspiration is gone. This is what the second verse adds, “Take with you words and return to Hashem.” it is not enough to reach the high level, but you have to be able to retain it after the inspiration is gone. What this verse is asking of us, is to internalize the spiritual level attained so you can take it with you once the excitement is gone.

We see this idea later in the Haftora, “for the paths of Hashem are straight, the righteous will walk in them, and the wicked will stumble in them.” A path is meant to take you to a place, the goal is the place not the path. The inspiration and excitement are the path to the goal, to be one with Hashem. When we use the inspiration to get close to Hashem we remain close when the inspiration is gone. However, when we make the inspiration and excitement the goal we stumble, because naturally inspiration and excitement dissipate, and when it does, the connection is lost.

May we experience this high level of teshuva, and become one with Hashem. May we come to a time when seeing Havaya in Elokim, seeing Havaya in creation is the norm, which will happen with the coming of Moshiach. As the verse says about the time of Moshiach, “For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of Havaya, like the water covers the sea. May it happen soon.

I Chose To Live, So Should You

It is now over 5 years since Hashem gifted me with ALS. But this week we celebrated a milestone, it is 3 years since I had a tracheostomy.

It was the day after Rosh Hashanah, I had been using a machine called a bipap to help me breathe, still I seemed to be fading. My wife Dina took me to the hospital, where I was diagnosed with pneumonia, and my oxygen level was dangerously low.

It was at that point, that I was given the choice to have the tracheostomy and live, or not and put an end to the suffering and difficulties. Legally and halachically it was my choice, with Dina's support, I chose to live.

The simple fact is, that if I would not have had it then, I wouldn't be here today and possibly wouldn't have lived through the week.

Another fact is, that the true sacrifice in this story, is my wife's, she is the one who has the brunt of the hardships, taking care of me and the family with love and tears. She has to be mother, father, wife, caretaker, sometimes nurse and a multitude of other titles. I can't begin to imagine how much she suffers, not having a normal husband, to do what husbands do for their wives.

All I am able to do is listen and write to her, but she has given me a life and the ability to watch my children grow up. With her support and womanly cleverness, she pushes me to be a better father, to study Torah more and more, and to write. I owe it all to her.

Being able to see my children grow is one of the greatest pleasures. It is incredible that with all the hardships, they found a way to function as normal and healthy kids should. And I get to see them, talk to them, and experience their personalities and talents.

Over the past five years, we were blessed to see amazing kindness from all over the world. And especially the Los Angeles community. But no one more than the five exceptional people who have taken on the responsibility of taking care of me and my family. We call them the fantastic five, they started the Hurwitz Family Fund, and in over five years, they haven't wavered. They are truly amazing.

After having the tracheostomy, I lost the use of my right hand, and with that went my ability to communicate. Before that I would type on an iPhone for communication and writing blog posts. For those 9 days in the hospital, I couldn't communicate and I just let go and put my trust in Hashem, and my wife made sure I was taken care of.

I was in recovery in the ICU, when I began to understand the importance of bikur cholim, visiting the sick. Even though I wasn't able to communicate, I felt uplifted with every visit, whether it was a rabbi or lay person, man or woman.

My children being too young to enter the ICU, to my pleasure, snuck in, I can't begin to tell you how much I enjoyed seeing them.

As Yom Kippur was approaching, we wondered what kind of holiday we would have in the hospital. The thought sounded grim, but we were in for a surprise.

Just before Yom Kippur, a woman was ushered into the room right next to mine. Her children were with her and when it came time for davening, they came to my room and with the most melodic voices they sang the davening, it was truly uplifting.

Over Yom Kippur, we had several visitors that walked to the hospital to see us. All and all, that Yom Kippur was one of our most memorable ones.

I am blessed to live at a time when there are technologies that keep me alive such as the ventilator that breathes for me, and the incredible computer that reads my eye movements, so I can communicate.

While life is full of difficulties, pain and suffering, there is so much to be grateful for. While I understand the hardships, I choose to focus on the positive parts of my life and that keeps me going. There is my wife, my children, family, friends and you. I have the opportunity to learn and teach Torah. There is the hope that in the future a cure will be found or perhaps a miracle even sooner.

Each of us has so much good in our lives, even within the suffering and difficulties there is so much good to be found. Focus on the positive in your life now, see all the love that is around you, there is so much you can do, and so much more you can give.

May you have a good and sweet year, and may Moshiach come and put an end to all the suffering. The time has come.

This Dvar Torah is Dedicated
By Irving Bauman, in memory of his father
Horav Moshe Aron Bauman ZL.

~

This article is a long one, it is divided into 4 sections. Each section is a lesson on its own. Enjoy!

Close To Hashem One With Hashem

On Yom Kippur morning we read a Haftora¹ from the book of Isaiah, which tells us what a meaningful fast is, and what it can accomplish. There are also other messages which connect to the theme of Yom Kippur.

If I were to sum up the Haftora in one sentence it would be: Hashem wants us to be good and real, and when we are, He does amazing things for us, including sending Moshiach. There are also messages of healing, Hashem being with us always and the great reward for keeping Shabbos with pleasure.

The Haftora begins with, “Make a path, make a path, clear the way, remove obstacles from My people’s way.”² In other words, Moshiach is coming and soon we will be on the path of the redemption. The rest of the Haftora tells us how we get there.

1. Teshuva And Humility

First, through teshuva, as Hashem says, “I dwell on high in holiness, yet I am with the broken hearted, and humble of spirit...”³ This is the Baal teshuva, who realized how far he was from Hashem. Now as he is going through the process of teshuva, he is broken hearted and humble of spirit.

Hashem being with the broken hearted and humble of spirit,

1 Isaiah 57:14-58:14.

2 Isaiah 57:14.

3 Isaiah 57:15.

shows us that Hashem too is humble. This is difficult to understand, because how could Hashem be humble when He is all powerful?

There are two kinds of humility. The common kind of humility comes as an intellectual decision. Like Moshe, of whom the Torah says, “And the man, Moshe, was humblest of any person on the face of the earth.” Moshe, who spoke face to face with Hashem, led the Jewish people for forty years, did amazing miracles and wonders and transmitted the Torah, how was he to be humble? Didn’t he know who he was? Rather he felt that if someone else would have been given his qualities, perhaps he would have achieved more. Intellectually he felt that he wasn’t greater than the next person, just that he was given gifts, and perhaps if someone else would have these gifts, he would have used them better.

Then there is an essential instinctive humility, when humility is a part of the person’s essence, a natural part of who he is and not based on an intellectual decision. As our sages said about Hashem, “In the place where you find the greatness of the Holy One Blessed Be He, there you will find His humility.”⁴ We see this in our verse, “I dwell on high in holiness, yet I am with the broken hearted and humble of spirit...” Moshe’s thinking, that someone else would achieve more, can’t possibly apply to Hashem.

Yet Moshe had both of these qualities, intellectual humility and essential instinctive humility, that is why he felt humble before any person.⁵

The Haftora continues to say that when Hashem sees that we repent, he makes everything good and right for us.

2. Those Who Are Far And Those Who Are Near

Then the Haftora says, “I will create utterance of the lips, peace to those who are far and to those who are near, said

4 Talmud, Megillah 31a.

5 Lekutei Sichos vol 13 pp. 36-37.

Hashem, and I will heal him.”⁶ What is this new utterance of the lips that Hashem will create? When you say, utterance of the lips, it sounds like it comes automatically, without thought, how does this happen? Who do far and near refer to?

The Radak⁷ gives us two explanations on who are the far and the near. First He says that they refer to those who are far or near to Yerushalayim. Then he brings the teaching of our sages⁸, that far refers to Baal Teshuvos, and near refers to Tzadikim.

If far refers to Baal Teshuvos, then utterance of the lips refers to his confession, which comes automatically from the depth of his heart, because he feels so broken and distant.

If far refers to those who are far from Yerushalayim, that means that they lack fear of Heaven, as one of the explanations of the word Yerushalayim, is *yiras shamayim*⁹ (fear of Heaven). The utterance of the lips then refers to Torah study, because the way to combat the lack of fear of Heaven is through Torah study. It is automatic, because he puts himself into Torah study, so much so that it becomes engraved in him, it becomes a part of him, to the extent that even when he doesn't think about it, he says Torah. This is hinted in the last words of the verse, “said Hashem, and I will heal him.” Through what will he be healed? Through what Hashem said, which is the Torah.

You may ask, if those who are far refers to Baal Teshuvos, why are they mentioned before those who are near, the Tzadikim? It would seem that being that they were always near, Tzadikim should be mentioned first.

Our sages learn from this verse, that “In the place where Baal Teshuvos stand, complete Tzadikim don't stand, as it says,

6 Isaiah 57:19.

7 Radak to Isaiah 57:19.

8 Talmud, Brachos 34b.

9 See Tosafos Taanis 16a. Lekutei Torah Rosh Hashanah 60b.

‘peace peace to the far and to the near.’”¹⁰ Meaning, that there is something about a Baal Teshuva, that is greater than a complete Tzadik. What about a Baal Teshuva is greater?

This is hinted in the last word of the verse, u’refuasiv (and I will heal him), it teaches us that teshuva is like healing. When a doctor prescribes medicine, a tiny amount, a small pill, is all that is needed to have the desired, and sometimes an amazing effect. The same is true about the Baal Teshuva, in one moment and with one thought of repentance, he is transformed and reaches the highest levels that a Tzadik worked his whole life to achieve and even higher. Because while a Tzadik is always close to Hashem, his service is limited to his abilities. However, a Baal Teshuva’s act of repentance is not limited, because he is coming from a place of feeling distant, he is broken. Therefore, the moment is so powerful, that he breaks all limitations and reaches higher than a complete Tzadik can.

Now you may ask, if Hashem says, “peace peace to the far and the near,” it would seem that the Baal Teshuva has already come near. So why does He say after that, “and I will heal him,” isn’t he already healed?

The answer is that though he has come near, he still has a lot of healing to do. And that healing comes through what “Hashem said,” Torah study.

Here we see the common link between the two interpretations that the Radak cites, ultimately it is the Torah that heals. Even going to a doctor for a physical ailment, is what the Torah wants you to do, so it to, is through Torah.

3. The Kind Of Fast Hashem Wants

Hashem now sends Yeshayahu to rebuke the Jewish people for their insincere fasting, for going through the motions, while remaining wicked. You even feel Hashem’s hurt, as he says, “Is

¹⁰ Talmud, Brachos 34b.

this the kind of fast I desire?!”¹¹

He continues, rather, “This is the fast I desire, loosen the bonds of wickedness, unlock the fetters of injustice, set the oppressed free, and break every yoke. You should divide your bread to the hungry, and bring the moaning poor into your house, when you see a naked person, you should clothe him, and don’t ignore your own kin.”¹²

He continues, that if we do this we will be successful and when we call out to Him, He will answer. And if we stop the oppression of the poor, the pointing finger and the corrupt speech. If we open our hearts to the hungry and satiate the afflicted, our light will shine in the darkness, and the deepest darkness will be as bright as the morning. Hashem will always guide you, satisfy your needs in times of drought, and strengthen your bones. You will become like a well watered garden, like a spring whose water never ceases. Our ruins will be rebuilt, and our foundations reestablished.

4. Keeping, Enjoying and Honoring Shabbos

The Haftora now tells us about keeping Shabbos. “If you will restrain your foot because it is Shabbos, from doing your desires on My holy day, and you will declare Shabbos as a (time of) pleasure, a holy day of honor for Hashem, and you will honor it by not carrying out your (regular) activities, not pursuing your desired (labors), and not speaking about (financial) things. Then you will find pleasure with Hashem, and I will raise you on the high places of the earth, and you will enjoy the heritage of Yaakov your father, for the mouth of Hashem has spoken.”¹³

The Rambam says, “Anyone who keeps Shabbos according to its laws, and honors it and finds pleasure in it to the best of his ability, it has been clearly handed down, that his reward will

11 Isaiah 58:5.

12 Isaiah 58:6-7.

13 Isaiah 58:13-14.

be in this world, in addition to what is hidden away for him in the world to come, as it says, ‘Then you will find pleasure with Hashem...’¹⁴

The Rambam is explaining the simple meaning of the verses. “If you will restrain your foot because it is Shabbos, from doing your desires on My holy day,” means keeping the laws of Shabbos. “And you will declare Shabbos as a (time of) pleasure...” This is finding pleasure in Shabbos. “And you will honor it by not carrying out your (regular) activities...” This refers to honoring the Shabbos.

“Then you will find pleasure with Hashem, and I will raise you on the high places of the earth, and you will enjoy the heritage of Yaakov your father.” The Rambam explains that his reward will be in this world, in addition to what is hidden away for him in the world to come. In other words, Shabbos is special, in that its reward is threefold.

First, the regular reward, which the Rambam explains elsewhere¹⁵, that the reward for mitzvahs is in the world to come, which is basking in the light of Hashem. This is “enjoying the heritage of Yaakov.” On top of that, we will enjoy the light of Hashem in this world as well, that is why he says, “in addition to what is hidden away for him in the world to come,” because it is the same kind of reward, but in this world. This reward is unique to keeping Shabbos, and is learned from the words, “Then you will find pleasure with Hashem.”

Then there is a physical reward, this reward is different from the other rewards in two ways. First, it is not “the reward,” it is just that because you are doing the mitzvahs, Hashem gives you your needs, so you can continue to do what Hashem wants without difficulty. Second, it is a limited reward, while the others are unlimited.

Being limited, there could be various levels of comfort

14 Rambam, at the conclusion of the Laws of Shabbos.

15 Rambam, Laws of Teshuva Chapters 8 and 9.

rewarded. So the verse says, “I will raise you on the high places of the earth.” That the reward will be the best of the earth.

Why does Shabbos have such a great reward, greater than any other mitzvah?

Just before the Rambam says the reward for keeping Shabbos, he says, “Both Shabbos and idol worship are equal to all the other mitzvahs of the Torah, and Shabbos is the sign between us and the Holy One Blessed Be He...”¹⁶

Idol worship is a denial of the essential underpinnings and sanctity of the Jewish people. By comparing Shabbos to idol worship, he is saying that Shabbos is different from the other mitzvahs. While all the other mitzvahs add to our holiness, not doing them does not constitute a denial of the essential underpinnings and sanctity of the Jewish people. Shabbos, on the other hand, is an essential part of who we are, keeping Shabbos is therefore, upholding the essential underpinnings and sanctity of the Jewish people.

Shabbos is the time when our unity with Hashem shines bright, it is therefore a taste of the world to come, when we will experience Hashem’s essence which we are one with. This is the pleasure of Shabbos, a taste of Hashem’s essence.¹⁷

Now we can understand why we read about this on Yom Kippur. The Torah calls Yom Kippur, “Shabbos Shabboson,”¹⁸ the ultimate Shabbos, the essence of our essence. When our unity with Hashem shines brightest, it is the ultimate expression of our Jewishness.

May we soon merit to experience the time that is called, “The day that is entirely Shabbos,”¹⁹ the time of Moshiach, with the coming of Moshiach. The time has come.

16 Rambam, at the conclusion of the Laws of Shabbos.

17 Lekutei Sichos vol 30 pp. 125-133.

18 Leviticus 16:31.

19 Grace After Meals.

The Sukka And The Blessing It Brings

Two mitzvos are specific to the Yom Tov of Sukkos, the mitzvah of Sukka and the mitzvah of the “four kinds,” lulav, esrog, haddasim and arravos. If so, why is the Yom Tov called Sukkos, and not after the four kinds? And what are we meant to learn from this?

There are several reasons that it’s called Sukkos.

One reason is that the mitzvah of Sukka is connected to every moment of the holiday, from when the holiday is sanctified until it ends seven days later. On the other hand, the four kinds begins only in the morning of the first day.

What more, the Sukka has to be built before the holiday, especially for the mitzvah of Sukka and the building of the Sukka is considered a mitzvah. Whereas it’s possible to put the four kinds together on Yom Tov.

Another reason is that once you do the mitzvah of the four kinds, there is no more obligation. But the mitzvah of Sukka is that you should live in it as you live in your home. This means that it continues all day long, until the holiday is over.

Another way that Sukka is greater than the four kinds, is that the four kinds are like most mitzvos, they are particular to one part of the body, in this case, the hands. On the other hand, Sukka is with the whole body, the mitzvah envelopes the whole body. And all the mundane things that are regularly done in the home should be done in the Sukka, and they become a mitzvah, so it makes everything you do a mitzvah.

You have to live in the Sukka as you live in your home. That means that your Sukka is your home for the duration of the holiday.

Our sages say, “One who has no home, is not a mentch,” he is missing a vital part of being a person, a place to call home. When a person doesn’t have a place to live, he doesn’t feel

like a mentch. This means that when a person isn't home, he is affected by the fact that he has a place to call home. On Sukkos, when we call the Sukka home, we are affected by the Sukka even when we are not in it, every moment of Sukkos we are affected by the Sukka.

Everything that we do in the month of Tishrei, the Holidays, the Ten Days of Teshuva, Shabbos Bereishis, and even the other days, are meant to affect the whole year.

We are expected to do everything for Hashem, as our sages say, "know Him in all your ways." And the mitzvah of Sukka gives us the strength for this. Because even if you sleep in the Sukka, you are doing a mitzvah, even when you are not in it, you are connected to the mitzvah, connected to Hashem. We have to take the holiness and the joy of the Sukka and bring it into the home throughout the year.

Our sages say, "a man's home is his wife," this tells us the power of the Jewish woman, that she has an effect on her husband and children, not only when they are home, but even when they are not home, as she is their stability.

May we all have a wonderful Sukkos, and may it affect our whole year and our homes that they should be filled with nachas and shalom bayis, hope and happiness, light and joy, good health and success.

We Should Strive To Be A Lulav

It is explained¹, that everything that Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are about, Sukkos has as well. The difference between them is that on the High Holidays, it is in a hidden way and on Sukkos, it is in a revealed way.

For example, the unity of the Jewish people. On Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, since we connect to the essence of our souls, we are essentially one. When it comes to the essence of our souls, there is no difference between the heads of the Jewish people, and the most unlettered of our folk, the essence is the same, it is actually one². Sukkos, on the other hand, the unity of the Jewish people is revealed. In this unity, the differences of the Jewish people are clearly recognizable, there are heads and common folk, but we are united and we can't do without one another.

This is seen in the mitzvah of taking of the four kinds, the lulav, esrog, Hadassim and aravos. The Midrash³ tells us that they represent the four kinds of Jews. The esrog which has both taste and smell, represent those who learn Torah, which has flavor, and do mitzvahs, the aroma of Judaism. The lulav is a frond of the date palm, the date has good flavor, but it has no distinct aroma, it represents those who learn Torah, but are not so much involved in mitzvahs. The hadas is a myrtle, which has a nice fragrance, but not a pleasant taste. It represents those of us who do mitzvahs, but aren't so involved in Torah study. The Arava has no distinctive smell or taste, it represents those of us who are not so involved in Torah or mitzvahs.

The Midrash concludes, "Hashem says, 'let them all be bound together in a bundle and they will atone for each other.'"

One of the differences between the High Holidays and Sukkos, is that on Rosh Hashanah we have the shofar, and on Yom

1 Lekutei Torah Nitzavim p. 48b.

2 See Tanya chapter 32.

3 Vayikra Rabbah 30:12.

Kippur you have teshuva, and in both of them, you don't recognize the differences amongst the people, everyone is equal. However, on Sukkos the differences are clearly recognizable, yet we are together as one. And what more, we are not complete without all four kinds of Jews, just as in the mitzvah of lulav, you can have the most beautiful esrog, lulav and Hadassim, but if you are missing the aravos, you have nothing, you can't do the mitzvah.

If the esrog represents both Torah and mitzvahs, why do we say the blessing over the lulav? We say, "Al netilas lulav."

The simple reason is because it is the tallest of the four kinds, so we say the blessing over it⁴. But everything in Torah has layers of meaning to it, we must conclude that there is something about the lulav, that is greater than all of the other of the four. We also know that everything that is in the physical takes its form, because in its spiritual source it is that way. That means that the lulav is not only taller physically, but it has a spiritual advantage over the others as well. What does the lulav have over the rest?

Another question. All of the other items have the smell or taste or the lack of, on their own, with the exception of the lulav, it is the date that has the flavor, not the frond. Why is the lulav different?

To understand this, we first have to understand the difference between the connection we make with Hashem through doing mitzvahs, and through Torah study. The Zohar calls the mitzvahs, "the limbs of the King,"⁵ and he says about Torah, that "Torah and Hashem are entirely one."⁶

4 Talmud, Sukka 37b. Shulchan Aruch Harav end of chapter 651.

5 Tikunei Zohar tikkun 30.

6 In Tanya chapter 4 and 23, he cites this saying in the name of the Zohar, and in Lekutei Torah Nitzavim, at the beginning of the maamar Ki Karov he says that it is in Zohar parshas Beshalach p. 60a. See also Tikunei Zohar tikkun 6 and tikkun 22.

In a body, the limbs receive life from the nefesh (the life force), and while they automatically respond to the will of the nefesh, you don't have to think "I want to move my hand," for it to move, rather, as soon as you want to move it, it moves, yet the nefesh only gives life to, and controls the limbs, but the limbs are not one with the nefesh.

The same is true about mitzvahs, they are the will of Hashem, and when we do them, we are accepting the yoke of Hashem and connecting to Him, yet by doing mitzvahs, we are not one with Hashem.

However, when one studies Torah with diligence, and grasps a Torah concept in its full length and breadth, since "The Torah and Hashem are entirely one," when you get the concept, you are understanding Hashem's wisdom, which is one with Him, so you are one with Him.⁷

Now we can understand why we say the blessing over the lulav, because the lulav represents those of us who are Torah scholars, of course they also do the mitzvahs, that is an outcome of their Torah study, but their main focus is studying Torah, which makes them one with Hashem. So the lulav is greater than the esrog, and that is why we say the blessing over it.

This will help us understand another thing about the mitzvah of taking the four kinds. The law is that the lulav has to be at least four tefachim, one higher than the Hadassim and aravos, in order that you should be able to shake it.⁸

When the neshama is in heaven, it is called "standing,"⁹ because although it goes up level after level, it is all part of the program, and it can't leave it, it can't break free to attain a whole new level that is not part of the program. On the other hand, when the neshama is in the physical world, in the body, through doing

7 See Tanya chapter 5.

8 Talmud, Sukka 32b. Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim chapter. 603.

9 Zechariah 3:7.

Torah and mitzvahs, it can break free and attain infinite levels¹⁰. And this yearning is expressed by the neshama in the physical, by the way we shake (shukkel) when we daven and learn Torah.

The Zohar¹¹ explains why we shukkel. He says that a neshama is like the flame of a candle. Just as the flame flickers constantly because it wants to leave the wick and connect to its source¹², so too, the neshama is constantly yearning to become one with its source, Hashem, and the physical expression of this, is that we shukkel.

And because, as mentioned earlier, the most intimate connection is through Torah study, we shukkel when we learn Torah. One would think that it would be the opposite, Torah study is an intellectual pursuit, it would make sense to be cold and intellectual, and that we would be completely still when studying it. However, since we are connecting with Hashem, Who is infinite, and when we do that, we are moving higher and higher, our neshamas are moved, and so, we shukkel.

This shukkeling is not only the physical movement we do when studying, but it is also the way the study of Torah works. It shukkels, there has to be constant unrest. First, he could never be happy with what he already knows. And if he is studying it correctly, he will always feel like he has only scratched the surface, and yearn to know more. Second, the way Torah is studied, is that when you first learn a part of it, you see it one way, and then when you think about it, you are filled with questions. So you learn it again, and you begin to see it from a different angle, and some of your questions are answered. Then you learn it again and again, every time gaining a new and deeper perspective, and hopefully new questions. When you learn Torah, you are constantly yearning for more.

And now we will understand why we take the lulav, which is the frond of the date palm, and not the date itself that has

10 Torah Ohr Vayeshev 30a. Lekutei Torah Shelach 38d.

11 Zohar volume 2 p. 218b.

12 Tanya chapter 19.

the flavor. Because, as mentioned above, taking the four kinds together, represents the unity of the Jewish people. In order to have unity, there is the prerequisite of humility and self nullification, if a person has a big ego or is arrogant, he will not be able to unify with others, because there is only him. The one who has to be most humble, is the one who has the highest status, the Torah scholar. The date, which has the flavor, represents the prize, the final product. The lulav is there to protect the fruit, so that it will be able to grow successfully. So the lulav is part of the means, to the date that is the end.

In Torah, having the date would mean that you already know it, that you already have it, that attitude can breed arrogance. On the other hand, the lulav represents working to get the prize, and that you haven't reached it yet, and that breeds humility.

A Torah scholar has to be the unifier, and therefore, the most humble. He has to be a beacon of leadership, and a living example for the esrog, Hadassim and aravos Jews. And when he is, he will have a tremendous effect on them, and when he shukkels, when he goes the extra mile, he takes the others with him, just as when you shake the lulav, all the rest of the four kinds are shaken as well.

On a deeper level, at different times, we are all a lulav, an etrog, a hadas or an arava. At those special moments that we are at the level of the lulav, we should put in the effort so that it will raise the other parts of you. So when you are studying Torah, doing mitzvahs, and even when you are doing neither, meaning, when you are working, eating, exercising, etc., it is all for Hashem.

This Sukkos, when we shake the lulav, we should see the value of every Jew, but we should strive for those lulav moments, and raise the entirety of ourselves. If we do, we will be a living example for our brothers and sisters, raising them up as well. This way, we will surely merit to enter the ultimate Sukka, the Sukka of David, the Beis Hamikdash, with the coming of Moshiach. May he come soon.¹³

¹³ Based on Lekutei Sichos vol 4 pp. 1159-1165.

The War That Will End All Wars

On Shabbos Chol Hamoed Sukkos, the Haftora is from Yechezkel (Ezekiel), and about the war of Gog and Magog, which will be the prelude to the coming of Moshiach. It is followed by Yechezkel's vision of the Third Temple. (Note: There is a Chasidic tradition, that this war may not need to occur, being that this exile has been so prolonged).

In the Haftora, Gog, king of Magog, together with his allies, which is understood to mean the whole world (this is hinted in the numerical value of the words Gog uMagog, which equal 70. 70, is the amount of nations originally counted in the Torah, therefore, it represents the nations of the world), will converge on Yerushalayim.

The Haftora now describes what Hashem will do to Gog, Magog, his allies, and the lands that support the war. There will be an earthquake, fires, and much more. The armies that will converge on Israel will be so vast, that its weapons will provide fuel for seven years, and it will take seven months to bury all their dead.

After this war, hatred towards the Jewish people will cease, as all their opponents will be gone. It will be the war that will end all wars and everyone will accept Hashem as their God.

The question is, why do we read this Haftora on Shabbos Chol Hamoed Sukkos?

One connection is its similarity to the Torah reading. On Shabbos Chol Hamoed Sukkos, we read about the making of the second set of tablets, which signifies Hashem's acceptance of the Jewish people after the sin of the golden calf. Which can be seen as a new era of greatness and closeness between Hashem and the Jewish people. Our Haftora also speaks of the acceptance of the Jewish people following this dark exile, which was brought on us, as we say in the holiday prayers, "because of our sins." The difference between then and now, is that the acceptance after the golden calf, was followed by an

exile. However when Moshiach comes, the acceptance will be complete, not to be followed by another exile.

Another connection is that according to many, the war of Gog and Magog will happen during the month of Tishrei. But why read it on Sukkos? Because in the Haftora of the first day of Sukkos, it speaks of the same war and mentions that the gentiles will have to keep the holiday of Sukkos. Another reason is that our Haftora tells about the transformation of the nations of the world and on Sukkos 70 sacrifices were brought for the nations of the world.

However, I feel that the main reason is because Sukkos is the holiday of the harvest, when we gather all the produce we toiled so hard for. On a spiritual level, we start to gather in the spiritual benefits of our efforts throughout the month of Elul, the High Holidays and the Ten Days of Teshuva. After the war of Gog and Magog, we will reap the benefits of our toil in this dark exile, and we will be forever together with Hashem.

We are left with a question. I understand the connection between the Haftora and Sukkos, but why read it on Shabbos Chol Hamoed, why not read it on the first day of Sukkos? Because the message of the Haftora, while being connected to Sukkos, it is not an annually recurring theme of the holiday. Being that Shabbos Chol Hamoed doesn't occur every year, for example, when the first day of Sukkos is Shabbos, there is no Shabbos Chol Hamoed, therefore it is the perfect time to have a message that connects to the holiday but is not recurring.

This Haftora is about the coming of Moshiach, which we don't need to be recurring, we just need it to happen once. With or without a war, may he come soon.

Dedicated By Yerachmiel Jacobson
In honor of the five holy Shluchim who help our family and run the
Hurwitz Family Fund

~

The Greatest Love Is For The Jewish People

The last parsha of the Torah, V'zos Habracha, is read on Simchas Torah, it concludes with telling of the greatness of Moshe, each accolade greater than the previous, culminating with the final words of the Torah "Before the eyes of all of Israel."¹

Rashi explains that this refers to when Moshe broke the first set of tablets of the Ten Commandments, which he did, "Before the eyes of all of Israel."² He continues to say that Hashem agreed to Moshe's action, saying, "Yasher koach sheshibarta," (i.e. Well done that you broke them).

Rashi comes to tell us the simple meaning of the verse³, but this doesn't seem like the simple meaning. Rashi was explaining how the last few verses of the Torah are telling of the greatness of Moshe.⁴

"Who knew Hashem face to face," Rashi says, "For he was familiar with Him, speaking with Him at any time he wanted."

"And to all the strong hand," Rashi says, "that he received the Torah on the tablets, with his hands."

"And all the great awe," Rashi says, "miracles and great deeds in the great and awesome desert."

1 Deuteronomy, 34:12.

2 Ibid., 9:17.

3 See Rashi, Genesis 3:8, 3:24.

4 Deuteronomy, 34:10-12.

And all of a sudden, Rashi changes his tune, saying one of the worst things, on the final words of the Torah, “before the eyes of all of Israel,” Rashi says, “his heart was stirred (literally: he raised his heart) to smash the tablets before their eyes, as it is said, ‘and I shattered them before your eyes,’ And the Holy One Blessed is He gave His approval, as Scripture states, ‘which you broke,’ (Hashem said to Moshe) “Well done that you broke them!”

Other commentaries say that the last words, “Before the eyes of all of Israel,” are connected to the accolades that precede. In other words, they were done “Before the eyes of all of Israel.”⁵

However, Rashi chooses to explain these words as a separate thing, and just after the Torah tells us the amazing and positive greatness of Moshe, it turns around and concludes with what seems to be a negative thing about Moshe. Therefore, it doesn’t seem to be the simple meaning.

The commentaries on Rashi say that this is why Rashi adds the part about Hashem agreeing with him, to show that it is really to bring out the greatness of Moshe, that Hashem agreed to him.⁶

However, this is difficult to understand, because if it wants to say something positive, why would the Torah say such a negative thing to bring it out? This question becomes stronger, when you realize that Hashem agreed to him on other occasions that were not negative. Why doesn’t it say one of those?⁷ And besides, the fact that Hashem agreed to him, is only a side point to the breaking of the tablets. The words that the Torah says, “Before the eyes of all of Israel,” hints to the breaking of the tablets, and not to the fact that Hashem agreed with him.

We also have to understand the words of the verse, “Before the eyes of all of Israel,” which according to Rashi means that

5 Nachmanides, Bichayeh, Sfurno, Or Hachayim etc.

6 Mizrachi, Sifsei Chachomim.

7 See Rashi, Exodus 19:15. Talmud, Berachos 32A.

Moshe broke the tablets. That it was done “Before the eyes of all of Israel,” seems besides the point. But the fact that the Torah mentions these words, means that it is an important point. What is the significance of him breaking the tablets, “Before the eyes of all of Israel.”?

Rashi tells us, “he raised his heart to break the tablets.” Why doesn’t he simply say that Moshe broke the tablets? Why does he add the words, “he raised his heart”?⁸

Another question. We have a rule that we conclude with something good⁹. Why would the Torah conclude with something negative, the breaking of the tablets? It’s not only negative, it is not in the honor of the Torah, which we are concluding. Rashi also concludes his commentary of the Torah with the word “sheshibarta,” which means, “that you broke them.” Why does he end on a negative note?

With all of these questions, we are forced to conclude that according to Rashi, the breaking of the tablets was the best thing that Moshe ever did, and that it deserves greater praise than the miracles that he did, receiving the Torah and his ability to talk to Hashem whenever he wanted to. Rashi says that Hashem “gave His approval,” to prove that it was a good thing. And since it is a good thing, it would make sense to end the Torah on this note. So why is Moshe’s breaking of the tablets such a good thing?

When Hashem commanded Moshe to hew new stones for the second set of tablets for the Ten Commandments. On the words, “hew for yourself,”¹⁰ Rashi says, “This can be compared to a king who went abroad and left his betrothed with the maidservants. Because of the immoral behavior of the maidservants, she acquired a bad reputation. Her bridesman [the person appointed to defend the bride should any problems arise] arose and tore up her marriage contract. He said, “If the

8 These words are not found in Sifri, who is the source of Rashi’s explanation.

9 Talmud, Berachos 31A. Rashi, end of Eicha. Tosfos, end of Niddah.

10 Exodus, 34:1.

king decides to kill her, I will say to him, ‘She is not yet your wife.’”

The King is Hashem, the betrothed is the Jewish people. The troublesome maidservants are the mixed multitude, which were the non Jews that came out of Egypt with the Jewish people, and were the instigators of all kinds of trouble, including the sin of the golden calf. And the bridesman, who saved the Jewish people by breaking the tablets, is Moshe Rabbeinu.

Moshe, who was the faithful shepherd of the Jewish people, only intention was to save them. Just imagine the sacrifice he made at that moment. He was the one who received the Torah directly from Hashem, and he spoke to Him whenever he wanted to, transmitting the word of Hashem, which is Torah. He was the one who performed the miracles, the content of the Torah, and he was the one who taught the Torah to the Jewish people. The Torah was so very precious to him and he was willing to throw it away to save a relatively small number of Jews who served the golden calf.¹¹

Moshe, who taught them to honor the Torah, broke it in front of their eyes, even though it was the greatest sacrilege, to show them the value of a Jewish person, that he or she is more precious than the Torah, even if he or she sinned a grave sin, he was teaching us how much we must love every Jew. And Hashem agreed with him, He said, “Yasher Koach sheshibarta, well done that you broke them.”

This took great strength and love on Moshe’s part, he had to raise his love for the Jewish people over his love for the Torah, that is why Rashi says, “he raised his heart.” That is the main point.

And that is why the Torah ends with this and Rashi ends with this, because it’s the best thing that Moshe ever did.

However we are left with a question. This is the end of the whole Torah, shouldn’t it end with the greatness of the Torah?

¹¹ See Exodus, 32:35. See Rashi there, 32:20.

Even though it's positive about Moshe, it seems to be negative about the Torah, the breaking of the Ten Commandments isn't honoring the Torah.

In Tana D'vei Eliyahu Raba¹² it says, "There are two things in the world... Torah and (the Children of) Israel, but I don't know which one was first. I said, 'My son, it's the way of people to say that Torah was first, but I say that (the Children of) Israel were first.'"

Isn't it obvious that the Jewish people were first, the whole Torah is addressing the Jewish people, "command the Children of Israel, speak to the Children of Israel." If there were no Jews, there would be no Torah.

The question that was posed to Eliyahu was not: Which one was first in time? But: Which is first in importance? And to that Eliyahu said that the Children of Israel is first. The whole Torah is only for the Jewish people, because the Jewish people are more important.

And that is what Rabbi Akiva says that loving your fellow Jew "is a great rule of the Torah,"¹³ and Hillel says, that is the "whole Torah."¹⁴ In other words, by ending this way, the Torah is saying that the essence of the Torah is that we should love each other.

And that is why we read parshas V'zos Habracha on Shemini Atzeres in Israel and Simchas Torah which is the second day of Shemini Atzeres outside of Israel, because while on Sukkos seventy bulls were offered for the nations of the world, on Shemini Atzeres only one bull was offered for the Jewish people. Shemini Atzeres is all about the Jewish people. And that is why we celebrate Simchas Torah on Shemini Atzeres, because the Torah is all about the Jewish people.

And this is hinted in the words Simchas Torah. On one hand, it means that we are joyous for the Torah, as it's once again

12 Chapter 14.

13 Talmud Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4.

14 Talmud, Shabbos 31A.

completed. On the other hand, Simchas Torah could mean the joy of the Torah, that we make the Torah joyous, we give to the Torah, showing that we are greater, the Children of Israel are first.

By loving our fellow Jew, we complete the Torah, by loving our fellow Jew, we complete the purpose of the Torah, to make this world into a home for Hashem, which means that we bring Moshiach. May he come soon.¹⁵

¹⁵ Based on Lekutei Sichos vol 34 pp. 217-224.

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