

תשובה

כי תאנו

Our *Parashah* opens with the *Mitzvah* of *Bikkurim* / bringing the first fruits of the season to the *Bet Hamikdash* and giving them to a *Kohen*. Part of that *Mitzvah* is recitation of certain verses from our *Parashah*, which are, perhaps, most familiar to us from the *Pesach Haggadah*: "Then you shall call out and say before *Hashem*, your Elokim, 'An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation--great, strong, and numerous. The Egyptians mistreated us and afflicted us, and placed hard work upon us . . . *Hashem* took us out of Egypt . . . He brought us to this place, and He gave us this Land, a Land flowing with milk and honey.'"

R' Chaim Tিরer z"l (1760-1818; rabbi of Czernowitz, Bukovina) writes: The *Mitzvah* of retelling the Exodus at the *Seder* includes, "Beginning with degradation and ending with praise," *i.e.*, telling about our slavery and subjugation first and only then telling about our salvation. This is how proper thanks is given. Likewise, we eat *Maror* at the *Seder* because we must remember the bitterness in order that our thanks and praise be expressed with the proper joy. This "unites" the Name of *Hashem*, *i.e.*, it dispels any notion that bad things just happen and *Hashem* then saves us from them. No! The bad things and the salvation are all part of the same story and the same plan.

When one has this attitude, our *Parashah* continues, then: "You will be glad with all the goodness that *Hashem*, your Elokim, has given you . . ." (*Be'er Mayim Chaim*)

## Teshuvah

R' Uri Weisblum *shlita* (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Nachalat Ha'levi'im in Haifa, Israel) writes: We usually think of *Teshuvah* as an expression of regret for a bad deed, and a resolution to distance ourselves from bad deeds in the future and to replace them with good deeds. That is all true! However, R' Weisblum writes, there is something more fundamental that comes before those steps. He explains:

The literal meaning of "*Teshuvah*" is "return," which implies coming back to somewhere that we were before. But if a person never put on *Tefilin* or kept *Shabbat* in his life, and he becomes a "*Ba'al Teshuvah*," can we call that "returning"? To where, exactly, are we returning when we do *Teshuvah*?

R' Weisblum answers: The *Gemara* (*Niddah* 30b) describes a fetus in the womb as having "a candle lit above his head by the light of which he can see from one end of the world to the other." Commentaries explain that that candle is the *Neshamah* / soul, as we read (*Mishlei* 20:27), "A man's soul is the lamp of *Hashem*." The *Gemara* states further that a fetus in the womb is taught the entire Torah, but that an angel slaps the baby before it is born and it forgets everything it learned.

R' Weisblum continues: The light and the Torah learned in the womb represent the potential with which a person was born. Our job in this world is to actualize that potential; to return to the state that existed before our soul's light was hidden and our Torah learning in the womb forgotten. Indeed, this is the meaning of our daily request in *Shemoneh Esrei*: "Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah . . ."

It emerges that a person is, by nature, in the presence of G-d, but he becomes distanced from that presence when he is born. Subsequently, through one's actions, one can return to *Hashem*. That is the foundation of *Teshuvah*: not merely addressing a specific sin, but recognizing that one's natural place is in the presence of *Hashem*, and one is not there now. R' Weisblum notes: "This is what I heard from our teacher R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l." He adds: This explains why *Rashi* z"l (*Avodah Zarah* 19a) refers to a person who does *Teshuvah* as: "One who recognizes his Creator."

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**"I led you for forty years in the Wilderness--your robes did not wear out from on you, and your shoe did not wear out from on your foot." (29:4)**

R' Aharon Yehuda Leib Steinman z"l (1914-2017; *Rosh Yeshiva* in Bnei Brak, Israel) observed in a lecture: The word "robes" in our verse is plural, while the word "shoe" is singular. R' Yosef Rosen z"l (1858-1936; the "*Rogatchover Gaon*") is said to have concluded from this wording that one is not required to have special shoes in honor of *Shabbat*. While a person must have "robes"--one set for weekdays and another set for *Shabbat*--he is only required to have one "shoe." (Obviously, this means a pair of shoes, but only one pair.)

R' Steinman added: This can be proven, as well, from the *Gemara* (*Bava Batra* 58a), which teaches that a Torah scholar's bed should have nothing underneath it except winter shoes in the summer and summer shoes in the winter. [Until here from the *Gemara*.] If a person were required to own an extra pair of shoes for *Shabbat*, then there would always be additional shoes under a person's bed. (Quoted in *Afikei Ayil* II p.208)

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R' Weisblum continues: Recognizing one's Creator does not refer to having intellectual knowledge of His existence. Rather, it connotes a visceral recognition ("*Tevi'ut Ayin*"), as one recognizes a friend without needing to focus on identifying marks. [The concept of *Tevi'ut Ayin* is found in various *Halachic* areas--for example, in the laws of *Hashavat Avedah* / returning a lost object. One usually reclaims a lost object by giving *Simanim* / identifying marks, but a person with a reputation for impeccable honesty can reclaim an object with *Tevi'ut Ayin*: "I can't specify any identifying marks, but I know it's mine."] *Teshuvah* / returning to *Hashem* means: For many years, a person lived without a visceral recognition of *Hashem's* presence, but now he has no doubt about it, and he resolves to live with that recognition.

Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (1210-1263; Spain) writes that the first fundamental of *Teshuvah* is regret. But how does one come to regret his misdeeds? R' Yonah writes: "The Creator blew life into me in order that I would recognize Him, revere Him, and control my physical deeds. That is what I was created for, but I have done the opposite! For what purpose do I live?" We see, concludes R' Weisblum, that recognition of *Hashem* is the root of regret and of *Teshuvah* in general. It is that recognition that leads to revering G-d and to controlling one's physical deeds. How does one attain it? By rekindling the light of the *Neshamah* that glowed above one's head in the womb. (*He'arat Ha'derech: Mo'adim* p.1)

**"Then we cried out to Hashem, the Elokim of our forefathers, and Hashem heard our voice and saw our affliction, our burden, and our oppression." (26:7)**

We say in the *Pesach Haggadah*: "Our burden"--This refers to the children, as it says (*Shmot* 1:22), 'Every son that is born you shall cast into the river, but every daughter you shall let live.' R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivat Mercaz Harav) writes: The Egyptians wanted to inculcate feelings of cruelty in parents toward their children and in that way to sever the ties between them. This, in turn, would separate the Jewish People from their ultimate father, their Father in Heaven. This is why the Torah ordains that the *Pesach Seder* be family oriented. Regarding the *Korban Pesach* we read (*Shmot* 12:21), "Buy for yourselves one of the flock for your families." Likewise, at the *Seder*, the story of the Exodus is transmitted from father to son. And, this is why there was an emphasis in each census taken of *Bnei Yisrael* in the desert, counting them according to their family groups. (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom* p.41)

**"Hashem will strike you with madness and with blindness, and with confounding of the heart. You will grope at noontime as a blind man gropes in the darkness . . ." (28:28-29)**

R' Yosef Yozel Horowitz z"l (1847-1919; the *Alter* of Novardok) writes: The words "as a blind man" in the second verse seem redundant, as it is clear that the latter verse is continuing the theme of the previous verse, which already spoke of being cursed with blindness. Also, what is meant by, "as a blind man gropes in the darkness"? Does it matter to him if it is dark or light outside?

The *Alter* explains: When it is light outside, a blind man enjoys the advantage that passers-by can help him find his way. Not so when it is dark and even the passers-by cannot see where they are going; they certainly cannot help a blind man, so he is left to grope in the darkness absolutely helplessly.

This is true not only of one who is physically blind, but also of one who suffers from intellectual blindness ("as a blind man"). Just as there are two scenarios affecting the physically blind--"noontime" and "darkness"--so there are two scenarios affecting the intellectually blind. Some people do not see the error of their ways, but they are open to rebuke and to teaching. They are like the blind at "noontime" who can be guided by others until they reach safety. Some people, on the other hand, are so immersed in their way of life and in their bad habits that no amount of rebuke and no attempts to clarify will reach them. They are like the blind man groping in the darkness.

(*Madregat Ha'adam: Ma'amar U'vacharta Va'chaim* ch.12)