

PARSHA

VAYEILECH

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SHABBAT SHABBATON

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Let us take a closer look at the importance of the great and holy day of Yom Kippur, which has just recently passed, and whose influence lasts until the final “seal” of Hoshanah Rabba. The Torah calls this day Shabbat Shabbaton. In fact we stop all our material activities; we do not eat, drink, wash ourselves, or wear leather shoes. We are completely “spiritual” on this day, wearing white garments and resembling angels, and we pray to G-d with supplications and obedience.

That being the case for an ordinary Shabbat, how much more does it apply to Yom Kippur, Shabbat Shabbaton, a day that is not only rest, but also a true break, a complete detachment from all worldly activities, both external (such as sustenance) and personal (such as food and drink). Thus the influence on our soul is ten times as great.

The Greatness of Shabbat

The Ten Days of Teshuvah: Paralleling the Ten Sefirot

The Ben Ish Hai explained the essence of the holy weekly Shabbat as follows: “There exists nothing that does not possess both an exterior meaning as well as a deeper, inner meaning. This applies to every mitzvah. In the case of Oneg Shabbat, first the body rejoices in this day, since we dress better, enjoy the Shabbat meal, and enjoy more pleasures than during the week. We can also rest, for we are free of all material constraints and activities. This is the revealed aspect. As for the internal aspect, this consists of the pleasure experienced by the soul due to the additional influx of holiness on Shabbat, as well as the light of the supernal worlds and middot being connected above. Of course, none of this is evident to us.”

The ten days that start from Rosh Hashanah and continue until Yom Kippur are called the “ten days of teshuvah,” a time during which G-d draws closer to us. Our Sages connect this period of time to the verse, “Seek Hashem when He can be found; call upon Him when He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). During these days, the King is out, close to His people and His children.

He then adds, “This allows us to understand why, when we welcome Shabbat, we say Boi kallah, Boi kallah twice aloud and once in a low voice. Both times aloud are in parallel to the external aspect, which is obvious and connected to the body, namely the pleasure of food and drink on the one hand, which are related to the positive aspect of Shabbat observance, and the benefits of ceasing all physical activity on the other hand, which are connected to the negative aspect of Shabbat observance. As for the Boi kallah recited in a low voice, it corresponds to the internal aspect, to the hidden path belonging to the soul that receives an extra dose of holiness, and to the additional soul of the holy Shabbat” (Shana Shenya, Parsha Vayeira).

These ten days parallel the ten Sefirot of all the worlds, which constitute the channels and vessels that connect the reality of the Creator to the lower world. In fact G-d cannot dwell among us without “withdrawing” Himself, for the world cannot exist in the presence of His extreme holiness. Now the ten Sefirot are precisely the paths taken by the divine presence to reach our world.

Thus during Shabbat we are detached from all our other activities, as well as from financial concerns related to making a living. “With Shabbat comes rest” – a rest that is both material and spiritual, exterior and interior. Shabbat signifies rest, peace, tranquility, and security, as much in relation to G-d as in relation to others, a rest with the power to heal our souls. In fact throughout the week we bustle about, occupied by numerous concerns. Then comes the day of rest and relaxation, and it brings immense benefits to our lives. Yet these benefits appear clearly to us! We should realize that in regard to the internal aspect, the arrival of Shabbat brings the coming of a spiritual soul, an additional soul that lives within us and brings an additional degree of holiness and purity.

To what can this be compared? It is like someone who tries to gaze at the sun. If he looks at it with his bare eyes, he will be blinded by its intense light. He won’t be able to see anything, and his vision will be damaged. It is only by using various filters that he can look at the sun. This is the principle behind the ten Sefirot: They allow us to be vessels for the profusion emanating from Heaven.

However during the ten days of teshuvah, a miracle occurs: The King is out, and the Creator draws close to us: “Call upon Him when He is near” – He is within reach, without anything separating us. He draws closer with each day, as if one Sefirah disappears. If we are aware of this fact and take advantage of these days with the proper frame of mind, we can sense this special proximity and understand that the current day is more elevated than the previous day... until we reach the most awe-inspiring day of all: The holy day of Yom Kippur.

As we have said, the very essence of Yom Kippur is Hashem’s presence among us in the most elevated way possible. Furthermore, Rashi explained that the day itself effects atonement, even without any repentance or action on our part, for G-d draws closer and comes to meet us. This is the greatest degree of closeness possible between the Jewish people and Hashem.

It is true that according to the Halachah, atonement is only possible due to our repentance on Yom Kippur. In the words of the Rambam, “The essence of Yom Kippur atones for those who re-

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pent” (Hilchot Teshuvah 1:3). In reality, to sense this closeness we need to prepare, to properly reflect, and above all to do teshuvah: To return (lashuv) to G-d by abandoning our sins and bad behavior, and by adhering to the right path.

Thus in the Gemara (Taanith 30b), our Sages state that the Jewish people have no greater holiday than Yom Kippur. This is due to the very essence of the day on the one hand, when G-d draws as close to us as

possible, and because of our deeds on the other, meaning our observance of the five prohibitions of this day and our detachment from materiality. As a result of all these things, this day become Shabbat Shabbaton – without even mentioning the incredible gift that G-d offers us on this day, a gift like no other: “For on this day he shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed” (Vayikra 16:30).

The Words of the Sages

The Kapparot

In his commentary on Shabbat 81b, Rashi first reveals to us the custom of the kapparot, which today has spread to all Jewish communities:

“In the responsa of the Geonim, I have found that we make small palm leaf baskets and fill the basket with dirt and fertilizer 22 or 15 days before Rosh Hashanah for each boy and girl in the house. We plant in these baskets either an Egyptian bean or a type of legume. On erev Rosh Hashanah, everyone takes his plant and swings it around his head seven times and states: ‘This is instead of So-and-so. This is my exchange, this is my substitution,’ and then we throw the plant into the river.”

The difference between chalifa (exchange) and temura (substitution) is that chalifa consists of obtaining something good in exchange for something bad, whereas temura consists of substituting something good for something bad. In fact it is written: “He shall not exchange it nor substitute it, whether good for bad or bad for good” (Vayikra 27:10). Thus exchanging revolves around something bad, and substituting revolves around something good. In this case, since the sinner has a worse moral level than an animal, the rooster can be his chalifa. However at the time of the kapparot, when he confesses and completely repents, he becomes better than any animal, and this rooster represents but his temura.

The custom most widely adopted among Jewish communities is to swing a rooster around the head of the person for the kaparah. We find this clearly mentioned in the responsa of the Geonim and by the Mordechai: “When we slaughter a rooster on the eve of Yom Kippur, we must do so with pure intentions. Likewise, it is the custom of the Sages of Israel and families to swing live roosters and hens above the head of every member of the household and declaring: ‘This is instead of So-and-so. This comes in exchange for So-and-so. So-and-so for life, whereas this for death.’ These birds are then ritually slaughtered, and their meat distributed to the poor, to widows and orphans in order for this tzeddakah to constitute an atonement for the soul. Some also do this on Rosh Hashanah. Particularly wealthy individuals do it with rams, sheep, and lambs, and they distribute [their meat] to the poor.

“Our custom is to take a rooster and bring it to a wise or pious man with the necessary focus, and then to send this rooster to someone to whom it was not destined in order to do tzeddakah, which we know protects against death. We look for a white rooster, so that our sins – which were red like scarlet – become as white as snow” (Ohr Zarua, Shibolei HaLeket, Kol Bo and others).

In a response by the Geonim to Rav Sasna Gaon, the choice of a rooster for the kapparot was explained as follows: “You have asked why our custom is to use a rooster for the kapparot. In fact, if this consists of giving an animal in exchange for a person, what is so special about a rooster rather than any other domestic or wild animal? This is a fair question. We have two reasons for this approach: First, it is easier for everyone to obtain a rooster than a domestic or wild animal. We also find in our region some wealthy families that have chosen to use rams, in order to evoke the ram of our father Isaac. Nevertheless, our teachers tell us that it is preferable

to use a rooster instead of a more costly animal, for a rooster – like a man – is called gever.”

The Levush holds the distinctive opinion that we may, after the fact, use fish for the kapparot. Anyone who doesn’t have a rooster can use fish. However we must not use animals designated for offerings upon the altar, such as turtledoves or doves. Yet this opinion is rejected by the gaon Rabbi Shem Tov Ganin in his book Keter Shem Tov, in which he states: “How is it possible to use fish for atonement? What purpose is served by a dead fish, as lifeless as a piece of wood? How can we proclaim, ‘This fish will die,’ since it is already dead, rotting, and gone from this world?”

In his holy Shulchan Aruch, Rabbi Yosef Karo rules that it is better to avoid doing the kaparah on the eve of Yom Kippur by slaughtering a rooster for each boy and reciting verses. He bases himself on the Ramban and the Rashba, who prohibit this custom because of the habits of the Emorim. The Rashba himself wrote, “I have worked hard for this, and by great divine goodness, my words have been heard. There is no more of this kind of thing in our city.”

Despite this, people have the custom of slaughtering kapparot each year on the eve of Yom Kippur. Although some Rishonim do not follow this custom, it has already spread according to the opinion of most of the Geonim, especially since the Arizal was particularly careful to observe it. This is how his disciple, Rabbeinu Haim Vital, describes it in Sha’ar HaKavanot:

“Our teacher was very careful to respect the custom of the kapparot mentioned in the books of the Geonim. He took a rooster for each boy in the family, and a white hen for each girl in the house. For a pregnant woman, being in doubt [as to whether she was carrying a boy or a girl], he would slaughter two animals (a rooster in case of a boy and a hen in case of a girl), and another hen for the woman herself.” In the book Eretz HaChaim, the booklet on the principles of Rav Sithon states that we follow the opinion of the Arizal, even if it goes against that of the Maran.

As for Yemenite Jews, they do not follow the custom of the kapparot, for the Rambam never mentioned it. On the other hand, people in the cities of Morocco have remained very faithful to this custom, even slaughtering a rooster or hen for people who are ill. They perform the kaparah on the eve of Yom Kippur, having faith that one soul is taken in place of another. The kaparah is then buried in the cemetery next to the grave of a dead person.

In Egypt, the custom is to slaughter the kapparot on the eve of Hoshanah Rabba, as mentioned by the gaon Rabbi Nathan Aaron ben Shimon in his book Nahar Mitzraim. They established this custom based on the fact that Hoshanah Rabba is considered a mini Yom Kippur, a day when the judgment is sealed. In fact the Midrash states: “Hashem said to Avraham, ‘I am unique, and you are also unique. I will therefore give your children a unique day to atone for their sins, Hoshanah Rabba, the twenty-first day of Tishri. If your children are not forgiven on Rosh Hashanah, they will be on Yom Kippur. And if still not [forgiven by Yom Kippur], they will be on Hoshanah Rabba.’” Hence their custom of performing the kapparot on the eve of Hoshana Rabba.

The Men, the Women, and the Small Children

It is written, “Gather together the people – the men, the women, and the small children” (Devarim 31:12).

Since the expression, “Gather together the people” signifies everyone without exception, why does the verse specify “the men, the women, and the small children”?

The Me’am Lo’ez replies that this alludes to the three duties that are incumbent upon man and woman: A man is obligated to study Torah, a woman must listen to the words of her husband – as it is written: “Who is a virtuous woman? One who fulfills the will of her husband” (Tanna D’vei Eliyahu 9) – and both must guide their children in the path of Torah and mitzvot.

It is therefore in parallel to these three duties that the verse states, “the men, the women, and the small children.” Our Sages have also explained: “The men, so they may learn. The women, so they may listen. And the small children, so they may procure merit for those who brought them, meaning their parents who brought them under the wings of the Shechinah, and who guide them along the path of Torah and mitzvot.”

Tzarot Will Vanish

It is written, “Many evils and distresses shall befall them. They will say on that day, ‘Have these evils not come upon us because G-d is not in our midst?’” (Devarim 31:17).

The gaon Rabbi Elazar Menachem Shach, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ponevezh, asks why the verse begins with “many evils [raot] and distresses [tzarot],” but ends with just “evils” (raot) without any mention of distresses.

He brings a wonderful response in his book *Avi Ezri*: The term raot, translated as “evils,” designates misfortunes themselves. However the term tzarot (“distresses”) represents the hopelessness we feel as a result of our precarious situation, such that we become depressed and see only misfortune in our lives. This happens because we lack confidence and faith in G-d, and therefore we feel troubled and overwhelmed.

On the other hand, anyone who fears G-d and firmly believes in Him will pay no attention to these misfortunes, for nothing will disturb or torment him. As King David said, “Even though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me” (Tehillim 23:4). We can find peace and consolation in everything we experience in life, for those who place their hope in Hashem will have their strength renewed.

Therefore once Hashem has sent misfortunes to atone for sin, and once we clearly realize that this has happened “because G-d is not in our midst,” at that point “distresses” (tzarot) will vanish, for we will understand the reason why these evils (raot) have struck us. Hence the verse ends with only, “Have these evils not come upon us.”

A Place of Study

It is written, “So now, write this song for yourselves and teach it to the Children of Israel” (Devarim 31:19).

The Sefer HaChinuch states, “Know, my son, that although our primary obligations are found exclusively in the written Torah, we must certainly make every effort to also respect the other books written according to this same Torah, even if they are quite numerous. Such was the attitude of all upright and G-d fearing men who preceded us: To establish a place of study in their homes so that authors can write numerous books, according to the blessing that Hashem bestowed upon them.”

The author of Sefer HaChinuch concludes: “Whoever does this will be blessed, and he and his children will become Torah scholars.”

The Footsteps of Mashiach

It is written, “When many evils and distresses have befallen them” (Devarim 31:21).

The Maggid of Dubno states that toward evening, as the peddler stands in the marketplace with baskets in hand, most of his goods having already been sold, he wants to return home quickly. He therefore takes his remaining pears, prunes, and other fruit and mixes them together in one basket and sells them at half price, for he wants to sell them as quickly as possible.

Hence the Torah states, “When many evils and distresses have befallen them” – when you see a combination of various ills descending upon Israel, it signifies that all the “goods” are almost gone, and that only the leftovers remain, meaning that we have already reached “the footsteps of Mashiach” – his imminent arrival. May it soon come to pass!

Moshe’s Sefer Torah

It is written, “When Moshe finished writing the words of this Torah into a book” (Devarim 31:24).

In his book *Eden MiKedem*, Rabbi Raphael Moshe Elbaz cites the words of the Midrash in stating that when Moshe finished writing the Sefer Torah on the day of his death, the angel Gabriel descended from Heaven and took hold of it. He then brought this Sefer Torah to the supernal worlds to proclaim Moshe’s greatness. The tzaddikim in Heaven read from this Sefer Torah on Shabbat, the holidays, and on Mondays and Thursdays.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Torah is a Defense Against the Evil Inclination

It is written, “Return, O Israel, unto Hashem your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem” (Hosea 14:2-3).

Why does the verse first say ad Hashem (“unto Hashem”), but then says el Hashem (“to Hashem”)? Also, what is the meaning of the phrase: “Take words with you”?

Let us examine what our Sages have said on this verse (Sifrei, Devarim 306): “The term devarim [words] signifies words of Torah, as it is written: ‘Ha-devarim [These words] Hashem spoke to your entire assembly’ [Devarim 5:19].” Hence our verse means that it is not enough for a person to simply regret his misdeeds. True teshuvah is only possible when he immerses himself in Torah learning, thanks to which a person does not repeat his sins. One cannot go without the other. In fact whoever studies Torah but fails to regret his sins will leave this world without repenting. And whoever repents but does not study Torah will eventually return to his transgressions, for nothing is as effective as words of Torah in protecting a person from sin.

The prophet asks what the mitzvah of teshuvah consists of, and he answers that the sinner must stop sinning and sincerely regret his sins. This is the meaning of, “Return, O Israel, unto [ad] Hashem.” How can we return unto Hashem and do complete teshuvah? It is because we “take words” – words of Torah. At that point we will have returned unto Hashem, and we will be assured of never falling back into our sins because we learn Torah, which is a defense against the evil inclination.

We must realize that the essence of teshuvah consists of learning Torah. In fact a person who repents but does not learn Torah is liable to transgress many commandments that he is not aware of, since he never studied them! This is why repentance must be immediately followed by Torah learning, in order to know what is permitted and what is not. Hence the Shulchan Aruch states, “Those who are vigilant begin to build the sukkah as soon as Yom Kippur ends, in order to proceed from one mitzvah to another” (Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5). After having mended their ways on Yom Kippur, they immediately go and fulfill mitzvot in order to protect themselves from sin.

The Sound of Torah Learning

When the Rebbe of Belz, Rabbi Issachar Dov Zatzal, was in Vienna, one Shabbat night at two o'clock in the morning he went outside and heard the sound of Torah learning emanating from a small, nearby synagogue. He approached and stood for a long time by a closed door, not wanting to enter lest he disturb the person studying inside.

When he eventually entered, he saw a soldier who was seated and learning with great devotion. When the soldier sensed his presence, he stood up and approached him, at which point Rabbi Issachar asked him who he was.

This is what the Viennese soldier said: "When I was drafted into the army, I begged Hashem to help me not desecrate Shabbat. As my first assignment in the army, I was to serve a senior officer. When I first began, I gathered my courage and asked this officer, upon whom I was depending, if he could give me Shabbat off. He agreed. Since that time, I've committed myself to devoting all of Shabbat to Hashem. Throughout the day, I study Torah and make an effort not to get distracted from this learning."

On this Rabbi Issachar Dov said: "Who knows if people like this don't delay the Geula [Final Redemption]!" His reasoning was the following: It may be that for the Holy One, blessed be He, the Torah study of this soldier was more important than the Passover or daily burnt offerings, as the Sages have said: "The study of Torah is greater than the offering of the daily sacrifices" (Megillah 3b), especially when Torah study is done with such devotion! Yet how can we say that the holy Torah is responsible for delaying the Final Redemption?

Weeping Behind the Stable

When one of the children of the gaon Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliashiv Zatzal was hospitalized and scheduled for surgery, the Rebbetzin Shaina Chaya wanted to discuss this with her husband. She therefore went to the Ohel Sarah synagogue. Yet when she approached, she heard a voice singing a melody of Torah, and so she turned back. As she left, she thought: "He should still be told, and he should ask Hashem to have compassion on the child." She then returned and heard this voice a second time, at which point she turned back again. She then changed her mind and headed back a third time, but as she approached the synagogue the sound of Torah study stopped her. She therefore went to the hospital alone, and it was only late at night that her husband learned that their child's operation had been successful.

To better appreciate this story, we shall describe the circumstances surrounding Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv's birth, prior to which his parents had remained childless during 17 years of marriage. Here is the story behind how they merited such a great son:

When the wife of the kabbalist Rabbi Shlomo Eliashiv Zatzal (the author of *Leshem Shevo VeAchlama*) passed away, his daughter and son-in-law, Rav Avraham Eliashiv (the father of Rav Yosef Shalom), came to live with him in the town of Shavel. One day, Rav Avraham and his wife received a medical opinion from one of the greatest doctors in Vilna, who said that it was impossible for them to have children. Rav Avraham's wife felt the need to cry, but she was afraid of distressing her father and distracting him from his Torah learning. She therefore sought refuge outside, behind a stable, where she burst into tears.

While she was still weeping, her father went outside and saw her there. He asked, "My daughter, why are you in tears? What happened?" In her sorrow she replied, "You know why, papa!" However he continued: "But why cry outside, rather than in the house?" She said that she hadn't wanted her tears to distract him from his Torah study.

Stunned by the beauty of his daughter's soul, the gaon said: "Since you're so careful not to distract someone from the study of Torah, you have great merit. With Hashem's help, you will have a son who will enlighten the eyes of Israel by his Torah and fear of Heaven, and nothing will be able to distract him from his learning." – Tuvcha Yabiu

How Can You Sleep?

The Rebbe of Klausenburg Zatzal said, "My grandfather, the author of *Divrei Chaim*, was once asked why he slept so little. He replied, 'When Alexander of Macedonia was asked why he slept little, he said that when a man sleeps, he is not a king. Therefore how can I renounce my kingship?' Now concerning us it is said, 'You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests' [Shemot 19:6], and heavenly beings fear and tremble before us. Therefore how can we sleep?"

He continued with an inspiring message: "One who experiences but a sliver of the exquisite taste of the holy Torah cannot close the Gemara to go eat. He cannot exchange continuous pleasure for fleeting pleasure. It is like someone who is exceedingly wealthy, and can eat anything he wants, but chooses to eat candy instead."

I Want Him as Rosh Yeshiva

In his youth, the gaon Rabbi Elazar Man Shach Zatzal served as the Rosh Yeshiva of Karlin in the city of Luninets. How was a Lithuanian Rav able to become the Rosh Yeshiva of a chassidic yeshiva? Here are the details behind this amazing story:

There was once a meeting of Torah giants from Lithuania and Poland, with the heads of yeshivas and rebbes in attendance, all leading figures in the Torah world. At the height of the meeting, a young avrech entered the room where they had gathered, and without paying attention to any of the assembled rabbis, he headed toward the main table. When people tried to stop him, he stood firm, explaining to everyone that he absolutely needed to enter.

He addressed the most important figure present, the gaon Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski Zatzal, and said to him: "Insofar as yesterday's question is concerned, I have a simple response...." One participant arose and protested: "Young man, a little respect!"

The avrech apologized and left.

When he was gone, Rabbi Chaim Ozer spoke to everyone in the room with a smile, explaining that "as long as this avrech has a question or response on his mind, he's not aware of anything that goes on around him. Therefore there's nothing to criticize him for."

The Rebbe of Karlin, Rabbi Avraham Elimelech Zatzal, who was in attendance, spoke to Rabbi Chaim Ozer and said: "In that case, I want him as a Rosh Yeshiva for my yeshiva. That's the kind of person I'm looking for!"

The Rebbe of Karlin's request was granted, and this avrech – none other than Rabbi Elazar Man Shach – was appointed to lead the Karlin yeshiva, where he taught Torah and the fear of Heaven for four years.

Guard Your Tongue

Rechilut

Whoever speaks rechilut about his fellow violates a negative commandment, since it is written: "You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people" [Vayikra 19:16]. This is a grave sin that can cost numerous Jewish lives, which is why the very same verse states: "You shall not stand over the blood of your fellow." In fact the rechilut spoken by Doeg the Edomite resulted in the death of all the inhabitants of Nov, the city of the kohanim.