



Parashat Yom Kippur 5772 - #205

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On Yom Kippur...

Repentance and Free Choice

[From Rav Aviner's commentary of the Book of Yonah]

Question: Was Yonah's first repentance considered repentance?

Answer: The Chafetz Chaim discusses this question in the Mishnah Berurah (6:22:7) and writes that we read this Haftarah on Yom Kippur because it discusses repentance and demonstrates that we cannot flee from Hashem's will. He further explains (in the Sha'ar Tzion) that sometimes a person despairs that he does not have the ability to repair himself, and will therefore continue to act in the same way. If Hashem decrees that he will die because of it, he will die. But this is a mistake, since in the end anything Hashem wants him to fix will be fixed. The person will return to this world again and again until he eventually fixes the problem. Why then does a person have to experience the pain of death and the grave? We learn this from Yonah. Hashem wanted him to go and prophesy, but Yonah refused and fled to the sea, a place where, as we know, the Divine Presence for prophesying would not rest on him. We see that he also drowned in the sea, and was swallowed by a fish and remained inside it for three days. It certainly appeared that he was not going to fulfill Hashem's instructions. Nonetheless, we see that in the end, Hashem's will was fulfilled, and Yonah went and prophesied. This follows what our Sages say in Pirkei Avot (4:29): "And do not let your evil inclination promise you that the grave will be an escape for you - for against your will you were created, against your will you were born, against your will you live, against your will you die and against your will you are destined to give an account before the King of Kings, the Holy One, Blessed Be He" (Sha'ar Tzion *ibid.*). The Master of the Universe wanted Yonah to repent, he therefore directed events in a manner that would bring this about without taking away his free choice. He repented the first time, but it was not complete repentance. The second time he fully repented. We learn from this that both the low level repentance of the people of Nineveh and the supreme repentance of Yonah was accepted by Hashem.

Question: But doesn't this contradict free choice?

Answer: The meaning of free choice is that the Master of the Universe does not interfere with a person's decisions. If there are two possibilities, one good and one bad, Hashem does not

interfere and force a person to do the good or the bad. If a person has the choice to steal or not, there is no inner, divine power which forces him in either direction (unless he has a severe emotional illness and thus does not have free choice. In this case he is controlled and by an unconquerable inclination, a fact which is taken into consideration both by Halachah and the secular courts of this world). The Master of the Universe pursued Yonah and caused him to have certain experiences and to be brought to different places, until he finally repented (see Tosafot Yom Tov, Avot 5:6). The Mishnah Berurah teaches us that even if Hashem has to bring a person to the world again in a different reincarnation, He will do so until that person repents.

In order for free choice not to be nullified, Hashem directs a person's situation, so that eventually he performs the will of Hashem of his own volition. As proof for this idea, the Mishnah Berurah brings the teaching of our Sages in Pirkei Avot: "And do let not your evil inclination promise you that the grave will be an escape for you." Hashem wanted Yonah to repent and he did not do so. He was even on death's doorstep, where it seemed as if there was no possibility for him to repent. But this was not true: "for against your will you were created." Hashem took him from "She'ol" (the lower world) and brought him back here and he repented. "But He devises means, that none of us be banished" (Shmuel 2 14:14). In fact, our Sages say that after Hashem spoke with Yonah about the kikayon, he prostrated himself and said: "Direct Your world with the attribute of mercy, as it is written (Daniel 9:9) 'For Hashem our G-d of mercy and forgiveness'" (Yalkut Shimoni at the end). Of his own free will, Yonah repented completed.

Yonah's experience within the fish was therefore not only an even that occurred in reality, but was also a parable to show us that the Master of the Universe does what He has decided to do (according to the secrets of souls), i.e. some people live and others die. This is the basis of the Vilna Gaon's commentary to the Book of Yonah.

We clearly saw this idea in the previous generation. The Holy One Blessed Be He decided to establish the State of Israel for us and nothing could change this fact, despite all of the internal and external obstacles. On the contrary, those who wanted to block the establishment of the State actually sped up and advanced its establishment, since Hashem decided that the time had arrived. Great international pressure was exerted on the British to establish a national home for the Nation of Israel, as they had accepted in the Mandate. They transferred the decision to the United Nations with the confidence that there would not be a majority in the UN for a Jewish State, since the Muslims were opposed and the Communists and Americans would never follow the same path. But behold, the unbelievable occurred: there was a majority on November 29th! Everyone voted according to his own considerations. The Russians wanted a stronghold in the Middle East against the Americans. The Americans wanted to evacuate the Displaced Persons camps of Jews in Germany and use them for military bases against the Communist Block. Thus, what the English tried to do to bring us down actually helped to build us up. After the decision, everyone panicked and tried to renege. The British said that the UN decision was only an opinion. Many Jews living in the Land of Israel had their spirits broken and considered giving up on the establishment of the State. But the day after the UN decision, the Arabs increased their acts of hatred and began their war against us until the British finally decided to leave the Land of Israel. So in whose merit was the State established? "In the merit" of the Arabs. If they had sat quietly, the British Mandate would have remained here.

Many times in the history of the Nation of Israel, we see that Hashem uses what other people want to do to us to advance His own plans (Maamrei Ha-Re'iyah of Rav Kook, pp. 360-362). In the martial arts of Judo, there is a technique of using the power of the attacker to his own detriment. This is similar to the way that the Holy One Blessed Be He uses the wickedness of evil people and the transgressions of sinners in order to achieve His own goals.

To summarize, the words of the Mishnah Berurah are two ideas which are in fact one: 1. The power of repentance. 2. The impossibility of fleeing from Hashem. They intermingle into one idea: It is impossible to flee from repenting before Hashem.

Whether it is low level repentance, hasty repentance or even repentance out of fear, it is still considered repentance – "Hashem is good to all and His mercy extends to all of His works" (Tehillim 145:9).

Rav Aviner on... Four Pathways to Marriage

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Netzavim-Vayelech 5771 – translated by R. Blumberg]

There are four pathways to marriage, and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. What they have in common is that they are all good and straightforward, and everything depends on the person himself. The four pathways are: Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah.

What is Sarah's pathway? Sarah was a relative of Avraham, his niece. They were well aware of each other over many years' time, and there were no surprises involved. Everything was known in advance. Everything was fine and upright.

What about Rivkah? That was a set-up, a match. Yet it wasn't a set-up like nowadays, where a boy and a girl meet once, and then again, and examine their compatibility. Rather, it was a prearranged match, such as was practiced in ancient times, and today is very rare. Yitzchak had more faith in Avraham's servant Eliezer than he had in himself. Yitzchak had been offered up as a burnt offering. He was a holy of holies. By contrast, Eliezer was one who soaked up wisdom from his master Avraham, and would teach it to the masses. He was well acquainted with the ways of the world. He considered what to do, and in the end found the Matriarch Rivkah and said to her something along the lines of, "With this ring/jewelry you are hereby betrothed to Yitzchak, in accordance with the laws of Moshe and Israel." When Rivkah and Yitzchak met for the first time, they were already married. Only sometime later does the Torah recount that Yitzchak loved Rivkah.

And what was Rachel's pathway? When Yaakov saw Rachel for the first time, he immediately saw that this was the soul intended for him, and the seven years of work he did to attain her felt to him like only a few days.

And how was it with Leah? It was a forced marriage. In other words, Yaakov thought he was marrying Rachel, but the morning after the wedding, he discovered that he had wed Leah (Bereshit 29:25). Obviously he was very surprised, and we, too, are surprised by the apparent audacity of the Matriarch Leah. Yet the Torah does not say that Yaakov rejected the match. Rather, he accepted it.

Four pathways to marriage, four different beginnings, and yet all of them leading to love, harmony and friendship. **We thus derive that it is not the beginning of the marriage that is important, but the continuation of it over time.**

Marriage is a long road, a long haul, and shared journey.

To what may it be compared? To a long race. In a 100 meter dash, the person who does not start exactly on time can lose on that account. Even a second's delay can ruin his chances of

success. But in a forty-two kilometer marathon, even a full-minute's delay need not be critical. A less-than ideal beginning can still end well. Marriage is the same way.

A boy once asked his father, "Daddy, how much did Mommy cost you?" His father answered, "I can no longer recall what I paid for the ring, but I must keep paying all my life." And what is this never-ending payment? According to the Ketubah: "love and honor, support and [provision]".

Imagine an advertising flyer for some product that states in bold letters, "Only 100 shekels!" and in the fine print: "and another 50 shekels every month for the next ten years..." This is in essence what the groom agrees to. He says to his bride: "With this ring you are hereby betrothed to me [immediately]," but I am also signing a Ketubah that obligates me to keep showing you kindness on a daily basis.

We may also compare this to being in the army. In our holy army everything is certainly well-organized, but sometimes there are surprise missions, and the commander must announce to his troops: "Forward! We're moving out. We'll organize ourselves along the route."

Marriage too is called a "route" (in beginning of Tractate Kiddushin). One has to keep investing in it along the way. One has to make a constant effort to stay on the path. Couples don't fall in love out of the blue forever. Couples make this decision together, over and over, throughout their long journey together.

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