



Parashat Vayetze - #258

Ask Rav Aviner: mororly@bezeqint.net

Prepared by Rabbi Mordechai Tzion

Visit our blog: www.ravaviner.com

Rav Aviner's song from the Last War in Gaza:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtD7vyi5yas&feature=youtube_gdata_player

On the Haftarah... Two Types of Repentance

[Ashkenazim/Sefardim: Hoshea 11:7-12:12
Yemenite Jews: Hoshea 11:7-12:14]

Our Haftarah presents us with two types of repentance: repentance unto Hashem and repentance to Hashem.

In his rebuke of the Nation of Israel, who was deeply entrenched in sin, the prophet Hoshea proclaimed: "Israel, return unto Hashem your G-d for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take words with you and return to Hashem" (Hoshea 14:2-3). This linguistic pair "unto/to" is repeated numerous times, showing us that it has special significance (and in general, there is nothing fortuitous in the Tanach). We see this doubling in other places: "Yet even now, says Hashem, return unto me...and return to Hashem your G-d" (Yoel 2:12-13). And we read about the prophet Yirmiyahu: "Let us search and examine our ways, and return unto Hashem, Let us lift up our heart with our hands to G-d in heaven" (Eichah 3:40-41). When we turn to the Oral Torah, we find a statement from our Sages that proper behavior which is not for its own sake reaches unto the heavens, while proper behavior for its own sake reaches to the heavens (Pesachim 50b). In order to complete the list, we turn to the Torah itself: "And you will return unto Hashem your G-d...when you will return to Hashem" (Devarim 30:2-11).

It is quite clear that there is a distinction being made here, and we must try to figure out what these words mean with regards to repentance. For this purpose, we permit ourselves to use the language of mathematicians. The word "unto" ("ad" in Hebrew) means that the borders are not included and "to" ("el" in Hebrew) means that the borders are included. Therefore, repentance unto Hashem does not include Hashem Himself. But is repentance without Hashem possible?

Based on the theory of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, this type of repentance is seen in the Zionist movement, which has shaken the Nation of Israel over the last one hundred and twenty years. He wrote at the end of his book "Orot Ha-Teshuvah" that the awakening of the Nation to return to its Land, its identity, its spirit and its character truly contains the light of repentance in it. And this phenomenon is fully clarified by the Torah's expression: "And you will return unto Hashem your G-d...when you will return to Hashem" (Orot Ha-Teshuvah 17, 2).

Is it possible to find a rational explanation for a movement that causes the return of the Nation of Israel to its Land? At the time of Maran Ha-Rav Kook, this movement was at its modest beginnings. In our time, we have a state, an army, an economy, a living language and many of the fundamentals which contribute towards our national revival. There are those who will protest: Zionism is a completely secular movement! But do they know what is hidden in the recesses of the soul of Israel? Have they penetrated our national sub-consciousness?

Maran Ha-Rav Kook (ibid.) concluded that this is inner repentance that is "covered over", but there is absolutely no impediment which can prevent the supreme light from appearing upon us.

Secular Israelis envisioned for themselves a Holy Land without holiness, a holy language free of holiness, a Kingdom of Hashem on earth without Hashem, an army of Hashem without a King on High, even a Tanach free of Torah. But we are not led astray by this. We see the immeasurable self-sacrifice which allowed the national revival of the Nation of Israel. We know with full confidence that the Jewish soul – including the pioneers before the establishment of the State and the soldiers after the establishment of the State until this very day – yearns for this return to, this inner repentance.

We are therefore optimistic. We are confident that the Jews who repented unto Hashem will eventually repent to Hashem and everyone will be transformed into lovers of Torah. And then all of the lovers of Zion will also become lovers of the G-d of Zion.

Rav Aviner on... Those Who Dictate to G-d What to Do

[Be-Ahavah U-Be-Emunah – Toldot 5773 – translated by R. Blumberg]

Bilaam was certainly a believer in G-d. After all, he'd dared to argue with Him! He also believed in G-d's might, and thought that it was possible to bend the will of G-d to match his own will, to force G-d's hand, and to dictate to Him. Thus, he was no prophet, but a sorcerer and a magician - a spiritual technician who held that by way of certain mystical measures it would be possible to transform G-d's will to be like his own. G-d could be tempted, G-d could be deceived. G-d could be manipulated as a means towards achieving his own ends.

After all, it was as clear as day that G-d did not want him to curse the Jewish people. "Do not curse the nation, because it is blessed" (Bemidbar 22:12). Even so, he sought out one trick after another to carry out his scheme and curse us. Bilaam thought that not everything is always revealed to G-d; that G-d is not always in the same state of awareness. It was therefore possible, he thought, to take advantage of moments of inattentiveness in order to curse the Jewish people (Rashi 22:9). Likewise, if G-d did not wish him to go with Balak's princes to curse Israel, perhaps he could curse them from his present location (Rashi 22:12).

Or, if he couldn't curse them, then he could bless them (ibid.) and conceal veiled curses within these blessings. It was entirely clear to Bilaam that G-d opposed his plans and was angry. Even so he went, thinking, "Perhaps I will be able to induce G-d to accept my plan" (Rashi ibid. 20). All the same, because he had a great desire to curse, and that was the overriding factor (Rashi 22), he sought every possible avenue. He told the angel, "If you consider it wrong, I will go back home" (ibid. 34), by which he meant, "True, you are obstructing my path, but G-d gave me permission" (Rashi ibid. 34). Obviously that wasn't true. G-d had not given him permission, but He had given Bilaam free will (Rashi 22:9). "A person is led along the path of his own choosing" (Rashi ibid.).

Bilaam told the angel: "G-d gave me permission and you are nullifying His words. That's common with G-d - He says one thing and an angel nullifies it, as when he told Avraham to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah, and then he had an angel nullify it. Here as well, you have the final say" (Rashi ibid. 34). The bottom line, according to Bilaam, is that G-d did not have the final word. The angel did, and it would suffice to come to an arrangement with him.

Even after the miracle of the talking donkey and the angel blocking his path, Bilaam still thought he would succeed in finding an escape hatch to bribe G-d. All along the way, Bilaam was hoping that perhaps G-d would agree with him. "Perhaps G-d would come to meet him as he wished" (Rashi 24:1). After all, Bilaam saw as his life's goal bending G-d's will to his own will. Yet since all of his previous attempts had failed, he had an alternative strategy: "I will mention their sins, and that will give my curse a foothold" (ibid.). In the end, after all his efforts failed, he used a doomsday weapon, literally inciting them to sin. "I will tell you what to do: their G-d hates sexual sin... my advice is that you make them sin" (Rashi 24:14), and this was carried out with Moabite women (ibid. 25:1).

Without a doubt, the man was very wise. Indeed, he was a great genius equipped with lofty, mystical talents. Yet he used those talents to oppose G-d's will and to try to bend G-d's will to his own: "You might ask: Why did G-d cause his divine presence to rest upon a wicked non-Jew? It was to prevent the nations from being able to say: 'If we just had prophets we would repent.' G-d thus sent them prophets, and the nations rebelled. At first they were sexually chaste, but Bilaam advised them to abandon themselves to promiscuity" (Rashi 22:5).

Bilaam is dead, but his disciples and his disciples' disciples continue to contaminate the world among each of the nations. For some of them, the most important thing is their own will. For them, the world is a means to their satisfying their wishes. They want to bend G-d's will to their own; to nullify it before their own.

We however, Avraham's disciples, say "Treat G-d's will as your own so that your own will becomes like his (G-d will so love your wishes that they will become like His own). Nullify

your own will before His (the fear of G-d), so that the will of others will be nullified before your will" (Avot 2:4). The ideal for us is to increase G-d's glory on earth.

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch distinguishes between Avraham, who when he went to sacrifice Yitzchak said (Bereshit 22:5), "We will bow down", i.e., we will humble ourselves, and Bilaam, who told Balak, "Stand by your burnt offerings" (Bemidbar 23:3). i.e., stand erect.

Like Bilaam, his disciples think that the purpose of sacrifices is to make G-d capitulate to our will. Therefore, since the Patriarchs built seven altars in all, Bilaam also built seven altars. (Rashi 23:4). We, the disciples of Avraham, do not involve ourselves with magic and sorcery, but with serving G-d, and we do not force Him to do our will. Actually, we would wish to sacrifice ourselves as Avraham did when he brought Yitzchak, and we long to do all we can for the sake of his name.

Bilaam's disciples look for every possible way to make the commandments fit into their world, nullifying, erasing or minimizing. They scratch away at the edges of Jewish law, neutralizing halachot by all sorts of pseudo-halachic arguments. After all, their whole world consists of I, what I want, what I feel. "I have set myself before me always." What determines whether a Mitzvah will be relevant and in force, is whether or not I emotionally take a liking to it...

They support their utterances with nonsensical comments, claiming that our Sages nullified Mitzvot that they found inconvenient, such as Shofar when Rosh Hashanah falls out on Shabbat, Lulav on Shabbat, Prozbul, and Heter Iska. In their opinion, these enactments provide a flexible model suited to the needs of man.

G-d forbid! It's just the opposite! These laws were enacted in order to do G-d's will. They constitute holy reverence for G-d's will, and a fear of the Sabbath being profaned, or a fear that people will refuse to make free loans to the poor.

Thus, Reform and Conservative Jews at first did not wish to differ openly, so they invented all sorts of Prozbuls and Heteri Iska and Shabbat timers to change the Torah, to make life easy for themselves. In the end however, the cat came out of the bag, and their true face was revealed. The idea of moving to the Land of Israel was not so easy for the Reform Jews either, so they blotted it out of their prayer books and dispensed with their longing for it. Indeed, in our Holy Land, they constitute a marginal minority. Still other examples of self-deception, as though in the name of the Torah, can be found in Mesillat Yesharim, Sha'ar Ha-Nekiyut.

The "Bilaamic" foundation for preferring man's will over G-d's likewise finds expression in Torah learning. There are two approaches to Torah learning: the traditional Torah approach and the academic approach. The traditional approach of our Sages and of their disciples and their disciples' disciples says the following: Moshe is true and his Torah is truth. The words of the Medieval Sages are truth and the words of the later Sages are truth, and we stand before this heavenly truth with holy reverence. We do not understand everything, but we know that this is the truth. We therefore break our heads trying to understand this truth, and when we do not understand it, we lower our heads in humility and we say: "This requires further study." Who requires the further study? We do. When the eminent genius Rabbi Akiva Eiger writes regarding Tosafot, "this requires further study," he does not mean that he recommends to the author, the Tosafot, to examine their own words more carefully. Rather, he is addressing himself, saying that he must examine the text more and more until he understands it.

"If our predecessors were angels, then we are human beings. If our predecessors were human beings, then we are like donkeys" (Shabbat 112b). It is therefore not surprising that we do not always understand what Rashi says. Quite the contrary, what is puzzling is that we sometimes do understand it. We strive to adapt and exult our intellect to Rashi's level.

Yet Bilaam's modern disciples say, "I decide what is right and what is not, what the verse means and what it does not, and if Rashi or our sages did not say what I say, then that is a question on them. It shows that they did not understand the topic so well and we understand it better."

“The sum of the matter, when all is said and done: Revere G-d and observe all His commandments, for that is man’s whole essence” (Kohelet 12:13). Man’s whole essence – the fear of G-d! If you dictate to G-d what to do, that's not reverence.

You might ask: True, Avraham’s disciples have things good in the World-to-Come, but the disciples of Bilaam have things good in this world because they do what they like. If G-d robs us of this world, then we have to be honest with ourselves and admit that the disciples of Bilaam have the better deal.

That is not true, however. Bilaam's disciples descend to Gehinom whereas Avraham's disciples enjoyed this world and inherit the next, as it says, “Endowing My friends with wealth, I fill their treasures” (Mishlei 8:21. See Avot 5:23).

That must be our goal: to draw near to G-d, and not to draw G-d near to us. After all, we know what G-d’s will is, so let’s not try to be overly smart. Rather, let us be the living fulfillment of, “Relate to G-d with perfect faith” (Devarim 18:13).

Shut She'eilat Shlomo - Questions of Jewish Law

Shut Rabbenu Tam Tefillin

Putting on Rabbenu Tam Tefillin

Q: Who should put on both Rashi Tefillin and Rabbenu Tam Tefillin (the four Torah portions which mention the Mitzvah of Tefillin and are inside the boxes are placed in different orders according to these opinions)?

A: One who is known for his great piety (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 34:2-3. Ha-Rav Moshe Feinstein made an innovative ruling that there is another condition that the Rabbenu Tam Tefillin must be "Mehudar" [of supreme halachic quality]. And when he fled Russia, his Rabbenu Tam Tefillin were damaged and lost their "Mehudar" status, until the Lubavitcher Rebbe arranged to get him a "Mehudar" pair of Rabbenu Tam Tefillin in America. Shut Igrot Moshe, Orach Chaim 4:9).

Beginning of Dispute regarding Rabbenu Tam Tefillin

Q: When was the beginning of the dispute regarding Rashi Tefillin and Rabbenu Tam Tefillin?

A: This dispute certainly began before Rashi and Rabbenu Tam. They found both types Tefillin according to the opinion of Rashi and Rabbenu Tam in the Judean desert (from almost 2000 years ago). This is an ancient dispute, but it is known by their names since they had a dispute in this matter and on account of their opinions this subject became famous. Nonetheless, there are two ways of explaining how and when this dispute began: 1. Because of the Exiles, suffering, and so many hardships we forgot the correct order of placing the Parshiyot in the Tefillin. This is similar to the Rambam's explanation of why we have so many different Shofar blasts (Hilchot Shofar 3:2). 2. Hashem gave two opinions regarding Tefillin and the authorities were to decide, similar to Rav Hai Gaon's opinion brought in the Rosh also regarding the Shofar blasts (Rosh Hashanah 4:10).

Q: Is it possible to decide which type of Tefillin is the correct one when ancient Tefillin is found?

A: The halachic authorities have already discussed this issue. The Semag (Mitzvat Aseh #22) wrote that there is proof that we should follow the opinion of Rashi since very old Tefillin according to his opinion were found at the grave of Yechezkel Ha-Navi. But the Derisha (34:1) comments that this is not conclusive proof since perhaps the Rashi Tefillin were buried because they themselves were invalid. And the Bach (ibid.) writes that we can reject the Semag's explanation since if the Parshiyot were in an incorrect order, they need not be buried, rather they could be replaced in the correct order.

Special thank you to Orly Tzion for editing the Ateret Yerushalayim Parashah Sheet



Yeshivat Ateret Yerushalayim P.O.B. 1076 Jerusalem 91009 Tel.02-6284101 Fax.02-6261528

www.ateret.org.il To subscribe, send e-mail to: mororly@bezeqint.net

