



TORAH WEEKLY

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Parshas Nitzavim

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A Taste of Torah Perfect Imperfection

by Rabbi Aharon Wilen

The Talmud (Avodah Zara 4b) states regarding both the sin committed by Dovid *Hamelech* (King David) with Bas Sheva and the Sin of the Golden Calf committed by the Jewish People that they were actually above falling prey to such actions. In Tehillim (Psalms 109:22), Dovid *Hamelech* says, “My heart is dead within me,” meaning that the *Yetzer Hara* (Evil Inclination), which the Talmud teaches “resides” upon the heart of a person, had been vanquished. Thus, his improper behavior was not in line with his stature. Regarding the Jewish People following the Giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai, as well, Hashem told Moshe (Devarim 5:25), “Who would give... that they would fear Me like this for all time.” The level of the Jewish People at that time was one of great awe and fear of G-d, and so the Golden Calf was certainly not in accordance with their level.

How, then, did these sins come about? The Talmud explains that opportunities for these sins were orchestrated by Heaven to pave the road for *teshuva* (repentance). If an individual sins, we can point him to Dovid’s example and assure him that if someone as great as Dovid could err and repent, so can he. If a community sins, we can point to the example of the Jewish Nation sin of the Golden Calf and their subsequent repentance. The Meshech Chochma (Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk; 1843-1926) wonders why these examples demonstrate the opportunity of repentance more than any other cases in history. He explains that perfect *teshuva* is described by the Talmud (Yoma 86b)

as one who overcomes the exact same temptation with identical conditions to the situation he had succumbed to previously. As Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuva 1:49) explains, when someone is tested by an identical situation, providing a *Yetzer Hara* that is as strong as it was at the time of the previous sin, yet he resists due to the depth of his *teshuva*, that proves that his *teshuva* is complete.

With this in mind, one might think that if someone committed a sin under circumstances that are impossible to replicate, he can never achieve perfect *teshuva*. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 2:2) teaches that even in these situations, *teshuva* can still be considered perfect. He explains, based on a verse in this week’s parsha (Nitzavim 30:2), “... and you will return unto Hashem,” that the main goal of one’s *teshuva* is to reach a point that “the Knower of deepest thoughts will testify that [the sinner] will never return to his sin.”

If we examine the Sin of the Golden Calf, this was what occurred. The nation was in a state of turmoil when Moshe did not return as planned, and they were under the impression that he had died. Complete *teshuva* could only take place before his return after they believed he had died; after that point, they would never be faced with such uncertainties again.

Following his return and after destroying the Golden Calf, Moshe ascended the mountain again for a second forty-day period. This provided an opportunity to the Jewish Nation to do *teshuva* on their own without

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Stories for the Soul

We Will Outlive Them

The Jews of Lublin were doomed to fall victim to SS Commander Odilo Globocnik, a notoriously sadistic murderer. He herded them to the outskirts of the city until their backs were up against barbed wire. The Nazi guards beat the hapless Jews backward against the barbed wire. Their flesh was torn as the barbs cut into them, and they fell upon one another, trampling each other.

Glabocnik, thinking to amuse himself, ordered, “Sing, Jews, sing!” The Jews had no choice, and a few began to sing weakly, “*Lomir zich iberbeten, iberbeten, iberbeten, Avinu shebashamayim*” – “Let us reconcile, our Father in Heaven...” Gradually, the song gained more strength and spirit.

Suddenly, one of the men modified the words: “*Mir vellen zey iberleben, iberleben, iberleben, Avinu shebashamayim*” - “We shall outlive them, outlive them, outlive them, our Father in Heaven.”

Everyone began singing the adjusted lyrics, and within moments, the Jews were dancing as they repeated the refrain. Globocnik roared with laughter until he realized they weren’t accommodating him; they were defeating him. He ordered them to stop. They continued. He panicked and pleaded, but the singing and dancing continued. The SS troops plowed in, swinging whips and clubs, and still the singing continued...

In this week’s parsha, Moshe

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Kollel Happenings

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A DEEPER LOOK AT THE PARSHA

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers as he discusses a number of difficulties encountered in the weekly Torah portion, and develops a comprehensive approach to resolve the issue, simultaneously conveying a deeper understanding of the material being discussed. Tuesday nights on Zoom, 8:15-9 pm, for men and women.

Halacha Riddles

Last week we asked: Any human age six and over may perform this halachic procedure according to all opinions. What is it?

Answer: Pouring water on the hands of a person for *netilas yadayim*. Anyone, including non-Jews, minors, or individuals with limited mental capacity (such as a *shoteh*, an insane person), may perform this procedure

(Shulchan Aruch 159:11). However, some say that a child under age six may not perform the procedure (see Rema ad loc.); the Mishna Berura (ad loc.:70) seems inclined toward that lenient view.

This week's question: As long as someone involved has intent, it is valid. If not, things are more complicated. What is this intent?

Lives of Our Torah Leaders

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra - Part VII

Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra was a world-class poet, and he wrote many religious poems and prayers, many of which contain very deep ideas and allusions clothed in poetic language. His fame as a poet earned him many admirers, some of whom supported him as he travelled the world.

There is a legend that Rabbi Yehuda Halevi (a close friend of Rabbi Avraham, as discussed previously) once wrote a poem based upon the order of the *aleph-bais*, starting each line with

the next letter. However, he got stuck on the letter *reish*, unable to express a thought starting with that letter. At some point as he struggled for an appropriate verse, he fell asleep and, upon awakening, found that someone had come and written a line beginning with the letter *reish*. Thrilled with the perfect finishing touch for his poem, he is said to have exclaimed that the line was the work of an angel or Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra.

A Taste of Torah

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Moshe present. This was the beginning of complete *teshuva*. They would not have him there to guide them, but, at the same time, they would not be faced with the same level of confusion they previously experienced.

Dovid, as well, would have needed to divorce Bas Sheva and then stay away from her, but this was not a viable option. The halacha is that once a woman is married to the king, she may never marry a commoner. To avoid

placing her in this predicament, he did not divorce her, even though that would mean that his *teshuva* could never be perfect.

Nonetheless, the Jewish People and Dovid *Hamelech* achieved *teshuva* that was accepted by Hashem. The Talmud tells us that Hashem orchestrated these situations to teach that even if perfect *teshuva* seems unattainable, one must still put in his utmost effort to repent for his wrongdoing.

Stories for the Soul

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assures the Jewish People that despite the trials and tribulations they and their descendants would undergo, they would ultimately prevail, and the

sufferings, while horrible and painful, would ultimately make them stronger and ensure their survival.

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