

## מתוקים מדבש

*Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah*

RABBI MICHA BERGER

**Bemachashavah Techilah**

As the *Yamim Nora'im* approach, it is only logical to wonder about the phenomenon of *teshuvah*. Chazal tell us that *teshuvah* is a gift from Hashem, that Divine Justice alone would not allow a man to be freed from accountability for one of his actions. What is *teshuvah*? By what mechanism does it work?

Let's take a step back and look at *sechar va'onesh* – reward and punishment. Perhaps if we understood what punishment is, we would understand why *teshuvah* can “pass through the evil of the decree.”<sup>1</sup>

Psychologists have developed many methods for changing an undesired character trait. Among them is a technique called “behavior modification.” Theorists have found that by consciously deciding to behave a certain way, your character will change to fit that behavior. It is inevitable to compare this to the Halachic concept “*Mitoch shelo lishmah, ba lishmah*” – “From [doing a *mitzvah*] without proper intent, one will come to do it with proper intent.” The goal of a *mitzvah* is not only to express one's love of G-d and his fellow man, but also a way to generate those feelings.

Behavior modification focuses on teaching a child that actions have consequences. These consequences are broken down into two classes: they can be imposed, a punishment meted out by the parent; or they can be natural, the normal consequences of cause and effect. For example, a

child could learn not to touch a stove by either getting slapped on the hand each time she reaches for it, or by touching it once and getting hurt. The first is safer, the other is more effective. Which does Hashem use?

To ask the question another way: Does Hashem punish us to correct evil behavior, or did He build the world so that sin causes punishment as a natural consequence?

The answer is quite clearly stated in this week's *parashah*. “*Hatzur tamim pa'alo...* The Archetype, His work is perfect, for all of His ways are just; a reliable G-d with no flaw, He is trustworthy and without iniquity. Is corruption His? No – His children's is the blemish, a crooked and perverse generation.”<sup>2</sup> Any tribulations in our lives are not His corruption, but ours.

Similarly, Yirmiyahu Hanavi writes, “From the ‘Mouth’ of the One Above, come neither the evil nor the good.”<sup>3</sup> Yirmiyahu is not implying that what happens to us is by chance. “*Chai gever al chata'av* – a man lives on his sins.”<sup>4</sup> The suffering of the sinner is not attributed to Hashem, because it is a natural consequence of the sin. Rashi<sup>5</sup> explains the prophet by invoking R. Yochanan's comments on a *pasuk* we read last week, “I have placed before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; choose life so that you shall live!”<sup>6</sup> Choosing between good

and evil is not choosing between whether Hashem will reciprocate with life or death. By choosing between good and evil, you are choosing to bring upon yourself one or the other.

The Ikkarim describes *gehennom* as a natural consequence of one's actions. He writes that the “fires” of *gehennom* are those of shame.<sup>7</sup> Rabbeinu Yonah compares a sinful soul to a sick person. Just as a sick person suffers from his illness, the sinner suffers from his sins.<sup>8</sup>

R. Chaim Volozhiner shows the same idea from a Gemara in Eiruvim. “The wicked deepen *gehennom* for themselves.”<sup>9</sup> What you receive in the World to Come is the consequence of the *mitzvos* you do. R. Chaim takes this one step further. Each sin, he writes, causes a flaw in your soul. In true Divine mercy, the punishment is both the natural consequence of this flaw and a key tool for healing it.<sup>10</sup>

The Ramchal writes, “Sin detracts from one's perfection.”<sup>11</sup> Rav Eliyahu E. Dessler explains the expression “*aveirah goreres aveirah* – one sin is followed by [another] sin” by saying that after repeatedly doing a given sin, it becomes part of one's nature; so that no conscious decision is required next time the situation arises.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Ikkarim 4:33<sup>8</sup> Sha'arei Teshuvah 4:1<sup>9</sup> Eiruvim 19a<sup>10</sup> Nefesh HaChaim 1:21<sup>11</sup> Derech Hashem 1:4:5<sup>12</sup> Michtav MeiEliyahu vol 1 pp 113-114<sup>1</sup> Mussaf, Yamim Nora'im<sup>2</sup> Devarim 32:4-5<sup>3</sup> Eichah 3:38<sup>4</sup> Ibid v 39<sup>5</sup> Ad loc<sup>6</sup> Devarim 30:19

We read on *Rosh HaShanah* that when Hagar and Yishma'el were kicked out of Avraham's home, and were on the verge of death from thirst in the desert, G-d gave them a well. Yishma'el was not judged for the evil he did that made him unacceptable to Avraham's home, or the evil he will do, and his children still do. Yishma'el was repaid in terms of "*ba'asher hu sham* – as he was there."<sup>13</sup> The way your soul stands at that moment is the direct cause of reward or punishment.

Notice that this implies a major statement. *We are not judged for what we did, we pay the consequences for who we are.* As the midrash states, one of the first three questions the A-lmighty will ask as part of the final judgment is, "Why did you not fulfill your potential?" Man is judged based upon the gap between reality and potential. Mitzvos were given as vehicles for closing this gap.

This also gives us a means to start addressing another difficult point. We learn that a man receives a minor punishment for *aveiros beshogeg* (accidental sins). Why would a man

<sup>13</sup> Bereishis 21:17

Injustice, causing undeserved pain to someone, is an imperfection that is inherently unG-dly. In describing the just ways of G-d, the Torah states: "A reliable G-d, without flaw; He is trustworthy and without iniquity" (Devarim 32:4). The question, though, remains why it is necessary to describe G-d as lacking flaws (*ein aveil*). If we are already stating that he rewards and punishes justly, is it not redundant to state that G-d is not flawed in his method of determining rewards and punishments?

deserve any punishment for a crime he did not intend to commit? Now we can understand that Hashem is not pinning blame, but rather the damage caused by the wrongful act is being corrected. An action can be destructive whether we intended it to be or not.

The key to *teshuvah* is to make a basic character change, to take the character flaw associated with a given sin and eradicate it by conscious decision. As we said above, man is judged by what he is. After *teshuvah*, he is no longer the person who is capable of such a sin. By removing the flaw, he is that much closer to his potential. He no longer needs punishment to correct his behavior. The gap is that much smaller, and so the punishment is so much less.

In this context, *teshuvah* is more understandable. The Rambam says: "What is complete *teshuvah*? When the opportunity to do an *aveirah* he did earlier comes to him, and he is able to do it, but he refrains from it, and doesn't do it – because of the *teshuvah*."<sup>14</sup> Rav Yoseph Ber Soloveitchik explains, "the *Ba'al*

<sup>14</sup> Hilchos Teshuvah 1:2

*Teshuvah* says that he is a new man; the man who performed the sin no longer exists."<sup>15</sup>

Since, as R. Chaim Volozhiner writes, punishment is the natural consequence of the flaw in your soul, by taking the effort to remove that flaw, the punishment disappears on its own.

*Teshuvah mei'ahavah*, *teshuvah* caused by love of the Creator, causes the aveiros not just to be ignored, but even to be considered as mitzvos.<sup>16</sup> Through *teshuvah* a person can improve himself to the extent of being beyond where he would have been had he not sinned. Each *aveirah* can become something to regret, motivation for learning a lesson, so that each brings him closer to the ideal Hashem has for him. And in that way, it serves the role of a *mitzvah*, a tool for self-improvement.

*Leshanah tovah tikaseivu veseichaseimu!* May Hashem take our *teshuvah* and fulfill another verse of this week's *parashah*, "And Hashem will return your captives, and have mercy upon you." (30:3)

<sup>15</sup> Al HaTeshuvah

<sup>16</sup> Reish Lakish, Yoma 86b

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### Bakeish Shalom

her husband experiences setbacks. Similarly, this man's friends will be pained at his grief, and even these friends' friends will be slightly saddened by their friends' indirect pain. This is all indirect punishment from G-d. Divine retribution can be seen as a point – the direct punishment that falls on one individual – with concentric circles surrounding that point, reflecting the indirect punishment that impacts all those involved in any way with the directly punished person. There are those in the inner circle who suffer severe indirect punishment and those

R' Yisrael Salanter<sup>1</sup> explains that there are two kinds of punishments - direct and indirect. A man who sins and is punished, e.g. he breaks his arm or loses money, can be said to be directly punished. The punishment falls on him. However, he is not the only one who suffers from his loss. His wife endures hardship while helping him recover from his broken arm, or suffers deprivation from the lost income. Or, perhaps more fundamentally, she is saddened when

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Peninim MiShulchan Gavoha on Devarim 32:4

in the periphery who are only slightly unsettled. All of this, says R' Yisrael Salanter, is deserved punishment.

It is certainly true that G-d only directly punishes an adult for the sins he has committed. However, the Torah goes even further and tells us that G-d has no flaw (*ein avel*). G-d does not even indirectly punish someone without cause. Even peripheral indirect punishment, minor discomfort over the pain of someone very distant, ultimately derives from our own misdeeds. Had we been perfect and entirely undeserving of reprimand, not only would we be free of punishment but even those surrounding us would be as well.

R. Chaim Shmuelevitz<sup>2</sup> arrives at this explanation on his own and adds that this is the meaning of the enigmatic Gemara in Shabbos (32b) that a wife dies because of her husband's laxity in fulfilling his vows. The question begs itself: How can an adult woman be punished for someone else's sins? This is justice? This is *ein avel*? R. Chaim Shmuelevitz explains that the Gemara is referring to what the husband did to deserve the pain of losing a wife. Clearly, a woman will not be punished unless she deserves it. But when a spouse dies, the other spouse suffers from significant indirect pain. This indirect suffering, says the Gemara, is also punishment.

<sup>2</sup> Sichos Mussar, ma'amar 98

The calculations that G-d must go through in order to determine when and how someone should be punished, taking into account all of the indirect relationships and their relative strengths, are complex enough to boggle even a super-computer. However, the important lesson we can learn from this process can still be applied to our lives.

The Torah (Vayikra 19:18) prohibits exacting revenge. On its surface, this prohibition seems unfair. Vengeance, when in proper proportion, is entirely fair. He hit me and I hit him back. However, the Torah disallows such behavior. Rationales offered for this injunction include the necessity of developing proper character traits, prioritizing the spiritual over the material, the recognition of G-d's providence, and the unity of the Jewish people.<sup>3</sup> It could be suggested that another rationale for the prohibition against taking revenge is that true revenge is impossible to calculate. A man who punches you in the stomach is not only hurting you; he is also hurting all of your friend's who saw the attack, all of the local residents who now live in fear, your wife who is now scared for your safety, your child who wanted to play with you that afternoon but now cannot, etc. If you take revenge on that attacker, you are not only hurting him but also

<sup>3</sup> See R. Daniel Z. Feldman's *The Right and the Good*, ch. 7

anyone indirectly connected to him. While that man may rightly deserve a punch, his wife may not deserve being indirectly punched, nor do his children necessarily deserve such suffering, nor do his parents, colleagues, and neighbors. Direct revenge might be fair, but the indirect results of revenge are almost certain to be unfair. It is, perhaps, to avoid this indirect unfairness that the Torah prohibits revenge.

These same calculations can be taken to our daily lives. When we interact with others, we have to take into account the "big picture," the indirect relationships that are affected by our interactions. When we punish one child, how will this impact his siblings? When we fire an incompetent worker, how will this affect his family? And if we do not fire the worker, how will it impact his coworkers and their families?

Furthermore, when we do *teshuvah* for our sins, we need to repent not only for the direct damage we have caused but also for the indirect pain. Not only is the man we publicly insulted hurt, but his wife is certainly injured as well. It could very well be that his wife is more insulted than he. In that case, indirect offense is actually greater than direct. The implications of such a theory are sizeable and are not something that we can ignore while reciting *vidui* in this season of *teshuvah*.

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## Sefasai Tiftach

*This column is largely based on a lecture by R' Mayer Twersky on 9/11/2002, available in audio at <http://www.torahweb.org/torah/audio/noraim2002.html>*

**M**alchuyos. Kingships. These resonate throughout the *Yamim Noraim*, particularly on Rosh Hashanah. *Malchus* implies a mutuality between Ruler and ruled, that may be closer than our connection to the King as He is crowned in the daily *kedushah*.

The idea of *kedushah* is separation, removal from the mundane for a holy purpose, as Rashi says at the beginning of *Parashas Kedoshim*. The daily *kedushah* coronation emphasizes this separateness: our prayers rise up to the angel Sandalphon, who weaves them into

crowns, and then pronounces a Name over them, and they fly up to the separate realm of the *Ein Sof*, the Infinite Transcendent G-d. Our prayers, not we, reach the angels. The crowns, not the angels, can traverse the infinite gulf between the finite spiritual world and the Infinite.

There are two unbroachable layers separating us from *HaKel Hakadosh*.

But during this period of the Ten Days of Repentance, our *teshuvah* is most appropriate, and is accepted immediately.<sup>1</sup> We are told “*Dirshu Hashem behimatzo, kera’uhu bihyoso karov* – seek Hashem when He is to be found, call to Him when He is near.” How do we reconcile this with the separation of the Holy?

The Gemara gives us a special *mitzvah* on Rosh Hashanah to crown the King. In *mussaf*, we say *Malchuyos* “*k’dei sheyamlichuni* – in order that you crown Me.” Not the angels, not through separation, but directly. In line with this, we make what R’ Isadore Twersky, the Talner Rebbe z”l, described as the greatest change in the prayers of *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*: the third blessing of the *Amidah* changes from *HaKel Hakadosh* to *HaMelech Hakadosh*. In fact, the Rambam refers to a now-lost custom to include the extra *Uv’chein* paragraphs in the *Amidah* during the whole 10 days, further emphasizing His kingship. How does this shift make such a big difference?

*Malchus*, in the ordinary sense, indicates absolute rule. He is the absolute Sovereign, and we absolutely submit to Him.

The kabbalists, however, speak of the *sefirah* of *Malchus*, as the mouth of the Primordial Man, the node through which power is transmitted from one level of the spiritual world to another. *Malchus* is thus associated with *gilui*, with revelation. A few examples demonstrate this:

1) The Gemara in Megillah, recounting the story of David and Naval, David wants to kill Naval for lese majeste, but Avigayil (Mrs. Naval) argues that David doesn’t have the right, as he has not yet been publicly proclaimed king. In Avigayil’s phrasing, “*lo yatza tiv’o*

*ba’olam*,” his coins have not yet been minted. He is not yet fully revealed to the public.

R’ Velvel Brisker notes that while the restrictions on a king’s wealth, wives, horses, etc. apply always, the king is not obligated to write his second *Sefer Torah* until *vehayah keshivto*: he is seated on his throne. Why? From the above Gemara – it’s a function of public acknowledgement, of public revelation.

This identification of *gilui* with *malchus* thus suggests an intimacy which, aside from this relationship, doesn’t exist. When Hashem revealed Himself at the sea, there was a closeness, an intimacy – we could say *Zeh Keili v’anveihu*, or as we say after Shma, *Malchus’cha ra’u vaneicha* – we saw Your kingship, in splitting the Sea. It was a revelation that created a closeness.

Later in Hilchos Teshuvah, the Rambam talks about the *teshuvah* process. Last night, one was *muvdal*, separate from G-d; although he cried out, he was not answered. Sin blocked him. Now he is *mudbak*, cleaving to G-d, after doing *teshuvah*. The essence of sin distances us from the Kadosh Baruch Hu. *Cheit*, sin, is the antithesis of *malchuyos*. How can the two coexist, be resolved, through this time?

We note a difference in the *malchuyos* of Rosh Hashanah and the rest of the week. We are not allowed to confess sins on Rosh Hashanah, because of this dialectic. On the day we specially crown G-d, we cannot concentrate on *cheit*. But the emphasis on *malchus* continues through the ten days. Note that the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah 2 tells us that Yom Kippur is *keitz* for *teshuvah*. Not just the *time* for *teshuvah*, but the *culmination* of *teshuvah* during this period.

It is a process, from the mandated coronation on Rosh Hashanah,

through the 7 days of self-scrutiny and *teshuvah*, through Yom Kippur when atonement is granted for those who do *teshuvah* (according to the Chachamim).

Hashem wants to be our King. How is He King? As we say in the *Shmoneh Esreh*, He is *meimis umechayeh*. We see from David and Naval that the power to execute helps define earthly kingship. Only He can sustain us. He doesn’t need our permission for this, of course, but he does, as it were, need our cooperation.

The Malbim explains *Baruch atah Hashem* as giving Him something. Following Ramban, it’s something He needs, as it were. He wants to shower us with blessings, but we, to allow Him to do so, must be worthy.

Our coronation, our creation of the intimate relationship, allows Him to sustain, to be fully *Melech meimis umechayeh*. The *mitzvah* of *Malchus* obligates us further in *teshuvah* so as to attain the *malchuyos* of the King Who gives death and life.

This is an awesome and terrifying, yet energizing responsibility, as R’ Mayer Twersky says. G-d comes knocking during this time, by giving us varying degrees of suffering. Are we ready to answer the call, during this time of *Dirshu Hashem behimatzo*?

May Hashem give us the sensitivity and strength to answer, to repent, and to merit a good inscription and sealing.

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<sup>1</sup> Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah, ch. 2