



Insight and Inspiration on the Parasha

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The Uniqueness of Man

Have you ever used the “snooze” feature on your alarm clock? I’m sure you have. Studies suggest that some 70% of Brits regularly hit “snooze”! Judaism has a wonderful tradition that upon waking up, before even getting-up from bed, we recite a prayer:

“Modeh/ah Ani – I offer thanks before you, living and eternal King, for You have mercifully restored my soul within me; Your faithfulness is great.”

The legendary Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, asks: What is the intention of the words “Your faithfulness is great”? We generally understand this to mean that our faithfulness in God is great since He has granted us another day of life. Rabbi Lau argues that this is grammatically incorrect, and the true interpretation is in fact that Hashem has faith in us.

In our *parasha* we read (31:19):

“Now therefore write this song for you, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths...”

In his compilation on the *mitzvot*, Rambam cites this as the source of the six-hundred and thirteenth *mitzvah* in the Torah, the last one in the entire Torah (SHM 18):

“We were commanded that each person must have their own Torah Scroll, and it is preferable that they write it by hand themselves ... And this is what is written, ‘Now therefore write this song for you’ – for it is forbidden to write individual sections of the Torah, hence here is implied to write the Torah that includes this song...”

Many of the commentators (Rashi, Rashbam) understood this verse differently, explaining the simple meaning to be an imperative to write the song of Ha’azinu, which immediately follows. It seems that Rambam himself understood this to be the simplest understanding, as the interpretation he suggests significantly twists the verse (“the Torah that includes this song”). Moreover, Rabbi Baruch Epstein challenges Rambam’s interpretation, arguing that if indeed the Torah is commanding to write an individual section it would override other stipulations not to do so.

How, then, is this verse an apt source for the *mitzvah*? Also, what is the essence of this *mitzvah*; why is it necessary for each person to write a Torah?

Sefer Hachinuch further comments, and explains:

“We are commanded that every person from Israel have a Torah scroll that they can readily read and study, so they don’t need to borrow from their neighbour ... and even if they inherited from their ancestors [there is a *mitzvah* to write one]...”

This too is difficult: Why is it insufficient to use an inherited Torah scroll? Also, what would be wrong in borrowing one from someone else?

The Torah is the means to connect to Hashem. At the root of the *mitzvah* to write a Torah scroll is the fundamental belief that every single person is unique. The nature of one person’s connection to Hashem is completely different from another’s. *“Just as their faces are different, so too are their dispositions”* (Talmud Berachot 58b). The words on the scroll may be identical, but the spirit of the words are completely different depending on who is reading them. Rabbi Yitzchak Luria comments that esoterically each Jew has their own unique commentary to the Torah.

When we all contribute our vantage point to the understanding of the Torah, then it creates a complete picture. If one of our “commentaries” are lacking, the Torah is lacking; if one of our personalities are lacking then our world is lacking and in turn God – as it were – would be lacking. Thus Hashem “believes” in each and every one of us; He believes in the purpose each and every one of us uniquely have to contribute. He believes in us fulfilling Himself. It is with message that a Jew begins their day upon reciting “*modeh/ah ani*”.

The *mitzvah* is learned from the command to “write this song”, to teach that every person is like a note in a symphony and an instrument in an orchestra. Each one contributing their unique beauty, and thus allowing the collective beauty of God to be manifest.

This Shabbat, the first of the new year, is known as Shabbat Shuva. It is in the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, when we are focused on introspection; we endeavour to repent for our misdemeanours, and undertake steps towards self-improvement. This can be experienced as an intense and sombre time. In reality, however, bearing the above message in mind it is actually an optimistic and hopeful time: Hashem is not against us – judging us – He is on our side, anxiously awaiting our return. Hashem believes in our purpose, and believes in our ability to fulfil that purpose. To conclude with the words from the High Holiday prayers:

“For You do not desire the condemned man’s death, but that he may come back from his ways, and live. To the very day he dies, You wait for him ...”



Yamim Noraim



Shabbat Shuva Inspiration: Kol Nidrie vs Teshuva- Avishav Engle

Every year at the beginning of Yom Kippur, we say a Tefilla, Kol Nidrie, where we release our vows from the year, it is seen as one of the most important prayers of the year. We find that there are two ways that the Beit Din can annul a vow for someone; by finding an “opening” or by gauging “remorse”.

The *Ramban* *zt”l* – as quoted by *Rebeinu Nissim* *zt”l* in Tractate *Nedarim* 27a – explains that finding an “opening”, is finding a logical or intellectual loophole in the original vow. Based on the new understanding of what the vow meant, one can declare that the vow did not reflect his/her proper intentions, thus voiding it retroactively. On the other hand, the “remorse” annulment states that the person knew what the vow that s/he made really meant at the time. The annulment here comes from the fact that s/he has now undergone an emotional transformation and has decided that although at the time s/he meant every word of the vow, s/he now regrets it.

HaRav Yoseph Dov Solevetchik *zt”l* explains that we see from here that there are two types of repentance; that of an intellectual capacity, and that of an emotional capacity. Both of which are valid and have a huge impact on our lives. (For without Kol Nidrie, many of us would be involuntarily committed to every rash decision we ever made!)

I’d like to suggest though that although this one-or-the-other method works fine with individual vows, for a person to repent properly, unilaterally and wholeheartedly for all of their sins, it is not enough to just rely on one of these types of repentance alone. In fact, just an emotional drive to repent and get closer to G-d, with no logical reasoning as to why, or just the acknowledgment that change is needed, without the emotional drive to actually equate what we know to be correct with what we do about it, is half-hearted at best, and useless at worst.

May we all be *zoche* to achieve the heights necessary to repent fully; both intellectually and emotionally, and get as close to *Hashem Yitbarach* as possible!

