

Beit Hamidrash Hameir Laarets | Issue 88

Shemot | A New You!



MESILLOT

Pathways to the Soul

Illuminating teachings and insights on the weekly parasha
by **Rabbi Yoram Michael Abargel zt"l**

From the weekly lectures of his son,
Rabbi Israel Abargel shlita

...*~* PATHWAYS TO THE SOUL *~*...

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Parashat Shemot

Never Say It's over!

The days of repentance may have passed not so long ago, but we're again entering special days with the days of *Shovavim*...

The days of *Shovavim* (שובבים) is the period of six weeks in which the six parashot of Shemot (שמות), Vaera (וארא), Boa (בא), Beshalach (בשלח), Yitro (יתרו), and Mishpatim (משפטים) are read.

Although the corrected time for repentance is the forty days from the month of Elul until Yom Kippur, during which all of Am Israel is accustomed to doing *teshuvah*, repent, and ask for forgiveness for all their sins and wrongdoings, the holy Arizal who merited that all the secrets and mysteries of creation were revealed to him, revealed to us that the days of *Shovavim* are days

that are very capable of having our *teshuvah* accepted, and especially for the sins of our youth.

To understand the reason for this, we'll first preface...¹

Hashem gave us His Torah and commanded us to read one parasha every Shabbat, and that's called the "*Parashat HaShavuah*."

The *Chemdat Yamim* explains that we gather all our lifeforce from the *Parashat HaShavuah* because the reading of the parasha, during its set time, brings down an abundance of blessing into the world!

Each and every week, there's special *shefa* (an abundance of blessing) that comes down to the world according to the topics or commandments written in that week's parasha.

Parashat Shemot - Never Say It's over!

Because of that, *chazal* called the period of reading these parashot, Shemot, Vaera, Bo, Beshalach, Yitro, and Mishpatim - the days of *Shovavim*.

Precisely in these parashot are all the issues of Am Israel's exile in Egypt, as well as their redemption, explained. All leading up to the moment that, together as one, Am Israel said, "We will do, and we will hear" (Shemot 24:7), as is written in parashat Mishpatim.

Just as in these parashot, all the barriers separating between Am Israel and Hashem were removed, so too, during these days, it's possible for us to remove all the barriers separating us from Hashem...

In particular, these days are capable of also correcting the bitter injustice caused by the exile, for now, in this bitter and difficult exile, Am Israel experience all kinds of downs, and for that reason, they end up sinning in all matters that have to do with *kedusha*, *tzniyut*, and more than all, *Pgam HaBrit*. And that's caused by their intermingling with the other nations

of the world, as is written, "And they'll mix with the nations and learn from their ways" (Tehillim 106:35). They learn from the deeds of the gentiles and walk around with a lack of modesty, causing forbidden sights among Am Israel...

This is the main cause of all our troubles and exiles... that people walk around in the world with no care whatsoever for modesty and *tzniyut*...

As a result of the defect of lack of modesty and *kedusha*, the souls of Am Israel become blemished, and as a result, they fall into the hands of the *yetzer hara*, who does as it wishes with them!

One of the most difficult things that the *yetzer hara* does is, after causing someone to sin, convinces them that Hashem hates them!

The *yetzer hara* has a warehouse full of actors and costumes, each time choosing a different character to use and explain to a Jew that Hashem hates them. Sometimes it's in the disguise of a "rabbi," sometimes in the disguise of a

“friend,” and sometimes, it uses their own “inner voice.” However, behind everything, there's only one... the *yetzer hara* !

Therefore, before we continue and bring our customary story, we'll quote the words of Rashi in his introduction to *Shir HaShirim*, in which he writes that Hashem's love for every Jew is an eternal love that doesn't depend on any cause or factor in the world !

This is what he wrote...

Shlomo saw with *Ruach HaKodesh* that in the future, Am Israel will go through exile after exile and destruction after destruction in order to mourn their original honor and to remember the original love that they were a virtue for Him of all the nations, to say I will go and return to my first because it was better for me then than now, and they'll remember His kindness and the honor and the good things He's supposed to give them at the end of days.

And he wrote this book (*Shir HaShirim*) in the language of a woman who is bound, a living widow, longing for her husband,

remembering her youthful love for him and confessing her sin.

Even her lover is suffering from her sorrow and recalls the graces of her youth and her beautiful beauty, and the splendor of her actions in which he was bound to her with intense love.

To let her know that he didn't mean to hurt her or send her away, for she is still his wife, and he is her husband, and he's going to return to her !

More than anything, during these days, the days of the end of the exile, when all peace of mind is shaken and the difficulties of making a living are increasing, we need to remember, announce, and make known that everything that happens to every Jew is only from Hashem, who is merciful and compassionate beyond understanding, and loves us more than we can imagine, and only desires and longs for each and every one of us to have only good. Endless good !

For that reason, He refines and purifies our souls in ways known only to Him...

Still Connected !

In a small village in the vicinity of the town of Krinki in the Grodna district of Belarus lived a chassidic man and student of the Rebbe of Slonim, the “*Yesod HaAvodah*.”

The name of that chassid was Rabbi Yehuda Leib Kastelnitz zt”l.

Another day ended, a day overflowing and full of *avodat Hashem* with passion and enthusiasm. Rabbi Yehuda Leib then began reciting the bedtime *Kriyat Shema*, and when he reached the point of reciting *viduiy* (confession), his eyes suddenly darkened...

Thoughts that he shouldn’t have thought. Words that didn’t need to be said. Actions that didn’t need to be done. “That’s not called prayer, those aren’t blessings, and that’s not how you learn !”

In short, total despair !

What can he do? He then suddenly got up and went to the home of his holy rabbi to cry and ask for a correction for his sins.

Although it was late, he decided to go and see if any lights emanated from the windows of the home, and if so, he would enter.

He saw light but feared that maybe the members of the house were already sleeping. He didn’t want to wake them...

Quietly, he lowered the handle and opened the door...

The Rebbe sat at the head of the table, facing the entrance. He didn’t see his student entering, though. His head was in his hands. He was in the middle of doing *cheshbon nefesh* before going to sleep...

“That’s not called prayer, those aren’t blessings, and that’s not how you learn !” he cried out. “You call that serving Hashem, the King of the world ? !”

Then the Rebbe cried out heartbreaking words... “Hashem, I may have moved away - but I haven’t broken our connection !”

Rabbi Yehuda Leib had already received his answer. Quietly

he retreated back out toward the door and closed it behind him. He leisurely walked home, his lips

reiterating... "Hashem, I may have moved away - but I haven't broken our connection..."²

How'd You Do Such A Thing?!

Who hasn't heard of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov? Who hasn't heard of his teachings or met one of his followers?

Rebbe Nachman of Breslov was born in the year 1772 and died 38 years later at the beginning of the year 1810. And although he lived a short life in quantity, these were very long years in quality, and there were many, even during his lifetime, who followed in his footsteps.

A few months before his death, he told his followers about a dream that he had...³

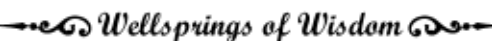
"I dreamed that I was sitting in a room inside my home and that I felt strange because no one came in to visit me. I got up and went to the other room, and there was no one there either. I then went to the *Beit Hamidrash* but

found no one there either. Finally, I decided to go outside.

When I got outside, I saw a bunch of groups of people standing and talking about me. Suddenly everyone began to laugh, and I realized that someone had told a joke about me. Everyone was making fun of me. Even people close to me were there, laughing and telling secrets behind my back...

I approached someone and asked, "What's going on here? Why are you all staying away from me? Why are you all laughing at me?"

He then angrily answered, "How dare you do such a terrible thing! How's it possible for you to do such a thing and we stay friends with you?!"



2. Mayan HaEmuna (Vol. 4, p. 367).

3. Chayei Moharan (91).

Parashat Shemot - How'd You Do Such A Thing?!

I didn't understand, though...
What did I do?

I then began debating what to do, and I suddenly realized that I had no choice but to sail to another country... I arrived in a foreign country, and to my surprise, there, too, I was in the headlines. I became the topic of conversation all over the world...

I made my way away from people to some forest, and five of my followers came after me. Together, we stayed in the forest. When we needed food or the like, we would send someone who would buy us what we needed, and each time, I would ask the messenger, "Have they stopped talking about me?" But the messenger would reply, "No, Rabbi, it's only getting worse..."

One day, we heard footsteps coming down the forest path. Thin twigs were crushed, and branches were bent over. Suddenly, an old man came out of the thick brush and approached me. "I need to talk to you!" he said...

I got up and walked to the side with him. Then he stopped,

fixed his gaze on me, and said, "You? The famous Rebbe Nachman would commit such a sin?! How are you not ashamed? How can you stand before your holy forefather and ancestors? How will you stand in front of your holy grandfathers, Rebbe Nachman of Hordenka and the Baal Shem Tov? What do you think, that you can just sit here forever? You think you can just sail to a different country, and they won't know who you are?!"

I took a breath and answered, "At least I'll merit *Olam Haba* from all these insults."

The old man burst out laughing, "*Olam Haba*?! He wants *Olam Haba*! You won't even have the privilege of entering *Gehinom*! The sin you committed cut you off from this world and the next! You were thrown into a bottomless pit forever and ever! You're completely lost! You have no hope!"

I looked at him and replied, "Are you done talking? Go away! I don't need people who will try to bring me down!"

The old man heard what I had to say and turned around and left...

I continued to sit in the forest and thought to myself that since I'd been sitting here for such a long time, I could completely forget all my learning. I then asked our messenger to bring us some books, but unfortunately, he wasn't able to bring us any. He said that he couldn't purchase any without informing the merchant who the books were for. I was in great agony from the news...

Then, one day, our messenger man arrived with a book under his arm.

He gave me the book, but it was like I'd never learned before. I opened the book, and I didn't understand anything. It was like a different language to me. I was tormented by it and was scared that even the few people who were with me would abandon me if they knew...

Again, that same old man arrived and began to talk to me..."How did you do such a thing? How come you have no

shame? There's no place for you, even in *Gehinom*!"

I turned to him and said, "How do you know what will happen to me in the next world? Have you ever been there?"

He then replied, "I'm the messenger of the High Court! They sent me to tell you that you don't have a place in *Olam Haba*!" He then proved to me that he was really from there!

Then, in those difficult and bitter moments, in that terrible moment of feeling that I had no connection with Hashem whatsoever, I suddenly remembered the story of the Baal Shem Tov, who also believed that he had no place in *Olam Haba*, and said, "I love Hashem even without *Olam Haba*!" but even so, I couldn't cheer myself up...

Then, without thinking, I looked up, as if staring straight at Hashem in heaven, and shouted, "Hashem! I know the truth. Even if I distanced myself from you as a result of the sin, that doesn't mean that I've cut myself

off from you! I know that it's impossible, in any way, to separate a Jew from Hashem!"

In that very moment, everything changed, and thanks to this faith,

he was eventually granted great salvation!

Before we move on to this week's parasha, we'll give another short introduction...

Faith In The Power Of Prayer

In a lecture delivered by Rabbi Shimshon David Pincus zt"l, he said the following...⁴

Chizkiyahu, king of Yehuda, was a righteous king. At the age of 25, Chizkiyahu ascended the throne and immediately enacted a law... Whoever doesn't learn Torah will be put to death!

And truly, the law was helpful. The Gemara testifies⁵ that they searched from Dan until Be'er Sheva and didn't find even a baby who wasn't familiar with the laws of purity. Everyone was a *talmid chacham*!

Fourteen years passed, and at the age of 39, king Chizkiyahu fell ill, and his medical condition rapidly deteriorated...

Chizkiyahu's personal servant approached him and said, "My king, Yeshayahu, the prophet, has come to visit you. Chizkiyahu immediately ordered to have him enter.

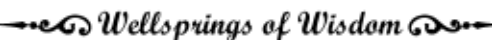
Yeshayahu entered, stood near Chizkiyahu's bed, and remained silent.

Chizkiyahu asked, "Do you have a prophecy for me?"

Yeshayahu then replied, "Yes. I was sent to tell you that you will die in this world and in the next! You have no hope!"

Confused, Chizkiyahu wondered, "Why? What did I do?!"

"You're asking what you did!?" responded Yeshayahu.



4. Ohel Chava (p. 98).

5. Sanhedrin 94b.

“Why didn’t you get married? Don’t you know that that’s the first commandment in the Torah?!”

“**I** saw with *Ruach HaKodesh* that I’ll have a wicked son, and therefore I didn’t want to get married!” replied Chizkiyahu.

Yeshayahu quickly countered, “A Jew has to keep Hashem’s commandments innocently and not think too much about Hashem’s decisions. If Hashem commanded you to get married, there’s no reason in the world to think otherwise...”

Chizkiyahu responded, “If so, I was wrong... I will do teshuva, but I also ask that you give me your daughter as a wife.”

“**Too** late!” answered Yeshayahu. “You have no way back...”

“**Are** you done talking?” shouted Chizkiyahu. “Go away! I don’t need people who will try to bring me down! My father always said that even if a sword is placed on your neck, don’t despair of mercy!”

Chizkiyahu prayed to Hashem, and his prayer was accepted, and he was given fifteen more years of life to live.

After he healed, king Chizkiyahu married the daughter of the prophet Yeshayahu, and they had a son named Menashe.

Menashe was just like his father, but the opposite... He enacted a law that anyone who learns Torah will be killed. He filled Jerusalem with blood...

He ruled in Jerusalem for twenty-two years, and then the king of Bavel went to war against him, and in that war, he was captured.⁶ The king of Bavel put him in a copper pot filled with water and lit a fire under the pot...

What would you expect of someone like Menashe to do in that situation?! Simple - Pray to Hashem.

But Menashe didn’t do that. Instead, he only called out to all the idols in the world! He knew them all. But not one answered him...

Parashat Shemot - Faith In The Power Of Prayer

It was starting to get hot inside the pot... Menashe suddenly remembered that his father would repeat to him the verse, “When you’re in distress and all these evils find you, return before Hashem your G-d” (Devarim 4:30). He then called out, “Hashem! Accept my teshuva and my prayers, and return me to Jerusalem, and if not, I’ll say that You’re just like the rest of them! Just like they didn’t answer me, neither did you! You’re all the same.

Is there any greater audacity than that?

And yet, what happened? Hashem accepted his teshuva. For if not, it would cause anyone that sinned before Hashem to think they have no chance of doing teshuva...

Now, what was Menashe’s claim? If his words were nonsense, why was his prayer accepted? And more, why was it written in the Torah?

Rather, surely there was some wisdom in this claim, and we have to understand what...

Menashe, all his life, loved idol worship. He even killed his grandfather, Yeshayahu, the prophet, for them. He forbade learning Torah and put an idol in the Beit Hamikdash for them! Yet, when Menashe was in dire need of help, he turned to the idols, begging them to save him, and they didn’t listen to a word he said... Well, it’s understandable why he was so disappointed in them and came to the conclusion that they’re worthless!

But what was his claim against Hashem? After all, his whole life, he fought against Him! Even when he got into trouble, he turned to him only at the end, after no one was left to help him!

It’s understandable why Hashem didn’t want to answer him... Yet, Menashe claimed that if He didn’t, he would know that He was just like the rest of the idols. What insolence!

But in truth, Menashe said something wonderful, and he was right! He asked Hashem to save me with a miracle, and Hashem

Parashat Shemot - And He Sent Yehuda Ahead Of Him

didn't want. Why? After all, Hashem saved Avraham Avinu with a miracle...

“Why not me?” asked Menashe. “If you're not willing to rescue a Jew who crossed the line, that means there's a limit to your mercy! Someone who has limits to their mercy can't be the creator of the world! The Hashem that I know, as I was brought up to know, has no limit to His mercy and compassion! Even when it comes to the evilest person in the world, you answer them when they call you!”

Because of that, Hashem, so to speak, proved to all the

generations that there would never be anyone who calls out to Him out of trouble, and He won't answer them!

Now let's observe what happened... How long did Menashe's prayer last? Seemingly, no more than a second or two, for the pot was already boiling! One second of prayer from the bottom of your heart has the ability to draw down Hashem's endless kindness without limit!

Hashem loves us, hears our prayers, and wants them! And *chazal* have already promised us that there's no prayer that isn't heard!

And He Sent Yehuda Ahead Of Him

The dramatic meeting between Yosef and his brothers is over. Yosef turns to his brothers and says to them, “Be aware, the Egyptian exile has begun! You have to all come here. But, since I know how dangerous the atmosphere in Egypt is, I'll make sure to build a city that will be only yours... A city in the district of Goshen.”

Yosef approached Paraoth, the king of Egypt, and told him about his family and about their worship of Hashem, the Creator of heaven and earth. He then went on to say that in order for his family to be able to continue managing their lives as they do now, both spiritual and physical, they need a place that will be only theirs and that

will provide them with protection and a normal way of life.

Paraoh heard and reassured, “I’ll give you an area in the district of Goshen, and I’ll send architects to build the city for you.”

When Yaakov heard about this, he was overjoyed and immediately sent Yehuda there, “And he sent Yehuda ahead of him, to Yosef, to survey Goshen before him... and they came to the land of Goshen” (Bereshit 46:28).

This is what HaRav Yoram Michael Abargel said on this...⁷

“**And** Yaakov lived in the land of Egypt for seventeen years” (Bereshit 47:28).⁸

The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt”l brings in Hayom Yom (18th of Tevet)...

When the Tzemach Tzedek was a child and learned this verse, his teacher translated it for him according to the commentary of the Baal HaTurim, “Yaakov

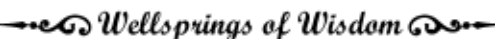
Avinu lived his seventeen best years in Egypt.”

When the Tzemach Tzedek returned home, he asked his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe, “How could it be that the best years of Yaakov Avinu’s life were the seventeen years that he lived in Egypt?”

The Alter Rebbe answered, “It’s written in the Torah, וְאֵת יְהוּדָה שָׁלַח לְפָנָיו אֶל יוֹסֵף לְהוֹרֹת לְפָנָיו גִּשְׁנָה”

The simple meaning is that Yaakov first sent Yehuda down to Egypt in order to survey the land of Goshen and then return to instruct him on how to proceed with their arrival. However, the Midrash quoted by Rashi explains that Yehuda’s task was to prepare a Beit Midrash for them to learn Torah in.

From this, we learn that through Torah study “לְהוֹרֹת לְפָנָיו”, you draw closer to Hashem “גִּשְׁנָה” (ויגשים – coming closer) in a way that



7. Imrei Noam (Vayechi, Maamar 3).

8. The Original Hebrew -

”ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה”

even in Egypt (A place so far from the ways of the Torah or holiness in general), you can achieve **וַיֵּחִי** (Vayechi) – life (liveliness and enthusiasm in your own personal *avodat Hashem*).”

Let’s explain...

It’s well known to all that until the age of 130, Yaakov Avinu lived a hard life filled with hardships, struggles, and sorrow. His own brother Esav wanted to kill him. His uncle Lavan deceived him into working many years in manual labor without any pay. His only daughter Dinah was taken by Shechem, who did unbearable things with her, which also caused him to be pursued by many enemies. His wife Rachel, who he loved more than all his wives, passed away suddenly at a young age in the middle of the birth of Binyamin. After that, he was pained by his son Reuven who interfered with his marriage. He then mourned for twenty-two years over the death, as he thought, of his favorite son Yosef, who he was told was devoured by a wild animal. All this left him unable to

eat, sleep, or even put a smile on his face. Even his connection with Hashem disappeared...

Therefore, when Pharaoh asked Yaakov, “How old are you” (Bereshit, 47:8), instead of replying, “I’m 130 years old,” he said, “The days of my living are 130 years, few and miserable were the days of my life” (Bereshit 47:9). He just couldn’t hold the pain in his hurting heart anymore...

Yet, at the end of Yaakov Avinu’s life, those last seventeen years that he lived in Egypt, the verse states

וַיֵּחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעַת עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה.

The Baal HaTurim writes that only in these seventeen years was the Torah able to say that Yaakov Avinu “lived” (וַיֵּחִי). For all the years prior, Yaakov Avinu didn’t “live” because his life was full of suffering and hardships.

As straightforward as this seems, it wasn’t sufficient enough for the Tzemach Tzedek as a child. Already from a young age, when all the other children his age were

busy playing games, his mind was troubled by the lofty matters of the Torah. Already then, the Tzemach Tzedek understood that the life of a true tzaddik, and even more so that of our Avot, and the most superior of the Avot, Yaakov Avinu, isn't a life of worldly pleasure but rather a spiritual life of divine service, of Torah and Mitzvot.

Therefore, when we say that the best years of Yaakov Avinu's life were the seventeen years he spent in Egypt, it can't mean that they were good because they weren't full of suffering or for any other worldly reason. Rather it has to mean that those years in Egypt were the best years of his life when it came to spirituality and avodat Hashem.

This, the Tzemach Tzedek, couldn't understand. How could it be that precisely in Egypt, a place completely filled with impurity, wickedness, and immorality, Yaakov Avinu had the best years of his life?! He should have suffered there more

than he had at any other point in his life...

He received the answer to this from his grandfather, the Alter Rebbe...

Already before Yaakov Avinu arrived in Egypt, he sent Yehuda there to establish a place where he and his sons could learn Torah and pray to Hashem without any external troubles or worries. Through their Torah study and prayers, they were able to purify the land and the air of the area they lived in and its surroundings, so much so that they felt as if they were living within Eretz Israel.

From this, we learn that it doesn't matter where you are, even if you're somewhere as impure as Egypt, as long as you surround yourself with a community of people with *yirat shamayim*, a *beit kneset* to pray in, a *yeshiva* to learn in, and a *Talmud Torah* for your children to learn in, you can purify the place and live there with the same spirituality as Eretz Israel.

And the Jewish city of Goshen continued to develop...

There's A New King In Town

Many years passed. During those years, Yaakov Avinu and all his sons passed away, and Am Israel was holding on to the last thing connecting them to the previous generations of their holy forefather - Levi! The only son who still hadn't passed away...

Then, one day, it happened!

Hundreds of thousands of people stood throughout the Jewish city, wiping away tears. Levi had passed away! Their last connection was gone!

They still hadn't recovered from the funeral, and in the main news broadcast, in a crying voice, the death of Paraoh, the king of Egypt, was announced!

It's not known what happened after Paraoh's death and how much blood was shed in power struggles until a substitute was crowned, but in the end, "A new king arose over Egypt who didn't know Yosef" (Shemot 1:8).

Yosef served as viceroy for 80 years, during which Egypt experienced the most difficult period it had ever known. For that reason, it's very difficult to understand the words "who didn't know Yosef" as they are.

We found that they're interpreted in this way...⁹

The new king walked around his palace, angry and nervous. He turned to his personal advisor and said, "What does a special district for Jews mean?! Where have you been doing all these years?!"

His personal adviser apologized, "My king! I'm not guilty. The previous king made a coalition agreement with Yosef that the district of Goshen would belong to the Jews."

The new king became even angrier... "What, am I dealing with fools?! One, who is Yosef? He's nothing! Two, since when, is a coalition agreement upheld?!"

Parashat Shemot - The First Scream !

I demand you immediately bring me the Secretary of Housing, the Secretary of Internal Security, the head of the F.B.I., and the chief police commissioner. I demand that the exclusivity of the Goshen district be abolished. From now on, the Egyptians will also be able to live there as well, and anyone who interferes with this will be immediately thrown into prison under strict federal conditions !

Slowly, slowly, the Egyptian impurity began to penetrate and seep deep into the hearts of Am Israel... Sparks of heresy and difficulties regarding the

supervision of Hashem began to be heard. From there, the path to rock bottom wasn't long...

The Zohar says¹⁰ that when Am Israel was in Egypt, they defiled themselves with all kinds of impurity until they were completely engulfed by the powers of impurity.

Since they distanced themselves from Hashem, Hashem "hid" from them, and permission was given to the Egyptian nation to enslave them...

The Egyptians then began abusing the Jewish people with all sorts of terrible cruelties...

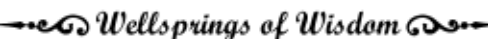
The First Scream !

There are no words to describe those years of suffering and hardship that Am Israel went through in Egypt. Beatings, tortures, broken bones, and bloodshed were all commonplace...

Also, it wasn't a short period at all. That hard servitude lasted for 116 years ! All the while, we don't find even a hint that Am Israel

turned to Hashem and asked Him to save them from all their troubles...

Toward the end of the period of slavery, Paraoth was stricken with severe leprosy, and his wicked advisors advised him to bathe in the blood of Jewish babies as a cure ! Every day, Paraoth slaughtered one hundred and fifty babies in the morning



10. Zohar Chadash (Yitro 39a).

and one hundred and fifty babies in the evening so that he could bathe in their blood twice a day !

Only then, when Am Israel truly reached rock bottom, and this terrible decree was brought upon them, did they begin to cry out and ask for mercy from Hashem. Of course, Am Israel's

prayers were accepted thanks to the merit of their ancestors, for their own merit wasn't enough, and Hashem healed Paraoth in order to remove the terrible decree from them...

And thanks to them crying out, Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe Rabbeinu...

We Have No Chance !

The third chapter of parashat Shemot describes the first divine revelation (written in the Torah) that Moshe received and the placing of the mission on his shoulders to go and lead Am Israel out of Egypt.

Then comes the fourth chapter, in which Moshe's response to the heavenly mission assigned to him is written. And what did he say ? "They won't believe me or listen to my voice for they'll say Hashem hasn't appeared to you" (Shemot 4:1)...

For 116 years, Am Israel was enslaved under the hard and cruel Egyptians, and in all those years, no ray of light and hope shone for them. And now, for the

first time, they're supposed to receive a greeting from Hashem "To let her know that he didn't mean to hurt her or send her away, for she is still his wife and he is her husband, and he's going to return to her !"

And since this is the first time, how does Moshe know that Am Israel will neither believe nor listen to him ?

The answer to that is Moshe knew the feeling and impression that prevailed in Egypt during that terrible time was that Am Israel thinks that Hashem hates them.

This feeling stemmed from a simple calculation...

Parashat Shemot - The Key To Redemption

After all, they were the descendants of Avraham, Itzchak, and Yaakov. They were the descendants of the holy tribes who, even in the land of Egypt, served Hashem with joy and greatly revealed His light in the world.¹¹

However, after the tribes passed away, Am Israel slowly began to distance themselves from the ways of their ancestors...

Many sins, enormous transgressions, and horrific misdeeds befell the souls of Am Israel there in Egypt. And one day, without notice, the servitude began...

From that moment on, Am Israel realized that Hashem hates

them! “How can You not hate sinners like us?!”

And because that’s how they felt, they didn’t even try to pray and ask for mercy. It didn’t even occur to them that there was a chance in the world that Hashem would pay any attention to them.

Moshe Rabbeinu turns to Hashem and says...

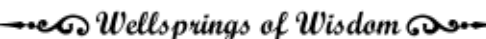
Ribono Shel Olam! You want me to now go to Am Israel and announce that time for their redemption has come!? - They won’t believe a word!

As long as they don’t believe that You love them and, even more so, think that You hate them, they have no chance of redemption!

The Key To Redemption

Hashem turns to Moshe and says, “You’re right, and therefore, in order to make Am Israel understand that I truly love them more than anything, a love that doesn’t depend on anything, I will do two things...”

1. Although I arranged my world in a strict order, what’s known as “nature,” in order to show them my love, I’ll flip all the orders of nature upside-down.



11. See Zohar Chai (Shemot 6a).

2. I'll announce and say, "Israel, My children and firstborn" (Shemot 4:22), and this very announcement will awaken in their hearts true faith and belief in my love for them.

On a side note, we found a source for the fact that a saying by Hashem can awaken feelings within individuals...

Rebbe Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam once told...¹²

I remember in my childhood that I asked my father (Rabbi Herschel of Rodnik) to explain to me why people are so amazed that Avraham agreed to slaughter his son Itzchak on the altar. Didn't many Jews do this throughout many generations when they were led like sheep to be slaughtered for the sanctification of Hashem's name, and together with them, their beloved children, all so they wouldn't have to give up their faith?

So too, what they did is even greater than what Avraham Avinu

did, since Avraham heard an explicit command from Hashem, while they did so by themselves, without being told...

To this, my father replied...

The main part of the trial for Avraham to slaughter his son Itzchak was that Hashem told him, "Please take your son, your only one, who you love."

Hashem's words make an impression on the individual. At the very moment that Hashem spoke to Avraham, an immense love for Itzchak ignited within his heart, a love like no other. A love that can't be explained in any words.

Therefore, the act of taking his son to be slaughtered was considered so great !...

Moshe agreed to accept the mission and set out...

Am Israel was rescued from the depths of their imagination and began to feel Hashem's pure love for them, and they, too, in response, began to draw closer to him out of true desire and love...

Parashat Shemot - The Days Of Shovavim

Then, on the 15th of Nissan, 2,448 years after the creation of the world, the revelation of the love of Am Israel to Hashem reached unprecedented heights, and they were redeemed from Egypt!

So does the prophet say, “Thus said Hashem, I have remembered

the kindness of your youth, the love of your engagement” (Yeremiah 2:2)...

And now, after we understand that redemption is only possible after we believe with complete faith in Hashem’s love for us, we’ll move on to the days of *Shovavim*...¹³

The Days Of Shovavim

The days of *Shovavim* are days that are very capable of complete teshuva, which draws you close to Hashem.

In particular, these days are able to correct all matters of holiness and modesty. Rebbe Yehoshua Horowitz of Dzikov zt”l wrote¹⁴ that the Arizal revealed to us that when someone does teshuva during these days for the sin of spilling seed,

they’re able to purify and sanctify themselves and reach the level of a tzaddik who has never sinned.

Knowing that, it’s necessary for us to explain how to do teshuva...

We wrote in our book *Chelev Haarets* that¹⁵ the matter of teshuva is that a person returns to Hashem with all his heart and soul, not only for the serious transgressions that surely need to be repented for but

...*~* **Wellsprings of Wisdom** *~*...

13. Our main task in these days of *Shovavim* is to be strong in remembering that we are Jews. As Rebbe Shlomo of Karlin zt”l said, “The worst thing that can happen to you is forgetting that you’re the child of the one and only King.”

We must always remember that we are children of the King, and we’re very close to Hashem, and no matter what we need, we just have to call out to Him.

And now is the time for mercy and to repair what we’ve ruined by our sins and accept upon ourselves to do true teshuva with a whole heart and a willing soul, and to do His will with a whole heart and not to return to our previous ways...

- Chassidut (Vol. 13, p. 27).

14. Ateret Yehoshua (Vol. 4, p. 95b).

15. Chelev Haarets (Vol. 6, p. 1).

also for the “small” things that we may overlook and think that they’re not so significant.

Being that our souls are derived from such a high place, completely connected to Hashem, and that they aren’t able to endure even an ounce of sin, being that it distances them from Hashem, it’s proper and right for everyone who feels close to Hashem and truly desires to correct their soul from any wronging’s, to set time to conduct a detailed *cheshbon nefesh* from time to time on all their actions and concerns.

Chazal have said that any sin causes a barrier and separates the person from Hashem, as the prophet Yeshayahu said, “Your sins have separated between you and your G-d” (Yeshayahu 59:2). However, by returning to Hashem with all your heart, you merit that those barriers are completely removed.

And how should a *cheshbon nefesh* be done ?

First, you need to recognize the reality of your sin and truly know and believe that with

your actions, you rebelled and distanced *yourself* from Hashem, even if it was unintentional. On top of that, you also damaged your soul and disconnected it from its source of life and brought it down to a place of impurity.

After you acknowledge your mistake and realize that you’ve sinned, you can go on to carry out the four stages of teshuva, which are...

1. Distancing yourself from the sin.
2. Regretting what you did.
3. Confession and *viduiy*.
4. Accepting not to return to the sin again.

And in truth, anyone who truly desires to repair their soul should try to make time every day to sit and learn Torah according to their ability, for the Torah has the greatest ability to correct and repair even for the greatest sins, so long as its learned *lishma*, and if so, it

Parashat Shemot - The Days Of Shovavim

will lighten up even the darkest soul.¹⁶

Just as no one would go a day without food or something to

~ Wellsprings of Wisdom *~*

16. In our neighborhood, everyone knew Itzchak. Already at the age of 9 years old, you could always find him wandering the streets, whether it was 5:00 a.m. or 9:00 p.m.

Years passed, and it was time to enroll Itzchak in yeshiva, but his parents were embarrassed. Which yeshiva would accept him? What Rosh Yeshiva would take on such a heavy responsibility? They tried to apply pressure, knocked on rabbis' doors, and finally managed to get him into some small yeshiva.

A few more years passed, and Itzchak was hardly seen on the streets of the neighborhood.

Then, one day, the good news arrived... Like thunder on a clear day... Itzchak was engaged!

There was no one who wasn't amazed to hear the news. Itzchak was only 19 years old, and he studied at a remote and unknown yeshiva. Who would have believed that Itzchak would get engaged at such a young age?

Days passed, and people met Itzchak's father-in-law, who was very pleased and thanked Hashem for finding such a groom... The bride was also an excellent seminary graduate, happy and confident that she found such an extremely rare diamond.

Then came the big shock... It became known that on the night of the wedding, the groom also made a *siyum shas*!

I myself couldn't understand how this turn happened...

One night, I randomly met Itzchak at a mutual friend's wedding. I saw how he nobly approached the groom's father and wished him a heartfelt *mazal tov*.

I remembered the Itzchak of old and approached him...

Itzchak talked to me openly. I enjoyed hearing his words. I said to him, "Can I please ask you, Rabbi Itzchak... after all, we all know how you used to be... and we're all proud of you today. Perhaps you could explain to me how's it possible to make such a sharp turn? What happened so suddenly?"

It seemed that he was waiting for this kind of question.

"I never thought I had any chance," replied Itzchak, "after all, you know my life story and my unique past..."

But an incident happened, and one evening, after the third *seder* in yeshiva, I opened my Gemara, almost by mistake. I was simply interested in checking something in it when I suddenly saw a shadow on the Gemara...

Parashat Shemot - The Days Of Shovavim

I raised my eyes, and there I saw Rabbi Shmuel, the rabbi of our class. "Itzchak!" he called. "Itzchak! *Ashreicha!* To sit down after the end of the *seder* and open a Gemara? ! I haven't found many guys like that!" He looked at me with appreciation, turned, and walked away, and I was left with my Gemara...

I don't know how, but the next day I again found myself left after the *seder* with my Gemara. This time it wasn't by accident. I opened the Gemara and tried to prepare the part of the Gemara that we were supposed to study tomorrow in class with Rabbi Shmuel.

A few nights like this passed, with me staying after the third *seder* to prepare the Gemara. Rabbi Shmuel saw me in the mornings and excitedly exclaimed, "I see you learning at night! I appreciate you! I admire you!"

There was never someone who admired me...

One morning, in the middle of class, I suddenly had a *kushiya* on the Gemara. The night before, I prepared the material, as usual, and during class, my mind was free to understand and find a difficulty with the words of the Gemara. Rabbi Shmuel was amazed. "Itzchak! Rabbi Shmuel exclaimed in astonishment. "You have the same difficulty that the *Pnei Yehoshua* had!!!"

The other kids in the class turned their heads. They hadn't gotten to know me yet. They probably thought that some genius had landed in their class.

That day, one of the guys approached me and asked to study with me. I was ecstatic. It was the first time someone asked to study with me!

The feeling was invigorating. I felt that I love my Gemara. Rabbi Shmuel appreciated me, and his appreciation benefited me endlessly...

My evening study hours were also extended to my noon hours. I didn't feel that it was excessive because it was good and pleasant for me to study. Rabbi Shmuel was so amazed at my ability to persevere, and I felt that I was really able to persevere in my studies.

Naturally, the dining room appealed to me less, and so did my other "pastime" sites.

Itzchak stopped for a moment, then continued...

You're right. It's really amazing. But this is a law of creation - a warm feeling can melt even the most frozen ice!

The hours I studied between classes gained momentum until I got engaged, Baruch Hashem, and I managed to finish the entire *shas* before my wedding.

Itzchak finished his story, and I reflected on the merit of that rabbi, who, with a small number of compliments, saved a child from the street and even helped him grow up to be a G-d fearing *talmid chacham* who finished the entire *shas* before his wedding.

Parashat Shemot - The Days Of Shovavim

drink, for that's the body's main source of life, so too is it absolutely forbidden, and it should never happen, that someone would go a day without their spiritual food and drink, the holy Torah and mitzvot.

Just as we're not satisfied with a meager cracker for an entire day's worth of food, but rather we want meat and a lot of good and nourishing food, so too,

a short lesson should suffice for any Jew, but they should fill themselves up with a lot of Torah.

If someone just abides by these guidelines, it's absolutely in their ability to do complete teshuva, separate their soul from all impure forces, reconnect their soul with its source of life, and give it the power and ability to shine its precious light throughout the world...

Shabbat Shalom!



— *~ Wellsprings of Wisdom ~* —

If we internalize this ability to spread compliments, then in doing so, we'll do a favor to everyone around us, both at home and outside it, and we'll be doing

good to others, and even more so to ourselves...

- 201 Stories That Changed People's Lives (pg. 313).

The Pathway...

1. The days of repentance may have passed not so long ago, but we're again entering special days with the days of *Shovavim*. The days of *Shovavim* (שובבי"ם) is the period of six weeks in which the six parashot of Shemot (שמות), Vaera (וארא), Boa (בא), Beshalach (בשלח), Yitro (יתרו), and Mishpatim (משפטים) are read.

2. Although the corrected time for repentance is the forty days from the month of Elul until Yom Kippur, during which all of Am Israel is accustomed to doing *teshuva*, repent, and ask for forgiveness for all their sins and wrongdoings, the holy Arizal who merited that all the secrets and mysteries of creation were revealed to him, revealed to us that the days of *Shovavim* are days that are very capable of having our *teshuvah* accepted, and especially for the sins of our youth.

3. Just as in these parashot, all the barriers separating between Am Israel and Hashem were removed, so too, during these days, it's possible for us to remove all the barriers separating us from Hashem. In particular, these days are capable of also correcting the bitter injustice caused by the exile, for now, in this bitter and difficult exile, Am Israel experience all kinds of downs, and for that reason, they end up sinning in all

matters that have to do with *kedusha*, *tzniyut*, and more than all, *Pgam HaBrit* caused by their intermingling with the other nations of the world.

4. As a result of the defect of lack of modesty and *kedusha*, the souls of Am Israel become blemished, and as a result, they fall into the hands of the *yetzer hara*, who does as it wishes with them! One of the most difficult things that the *yetzer hara* does is, after causing someone to sin, convinces them that Hashem hates them! The days of *Shovavim* are days that are very capable of complete *teshuva*, which draws you close to Hashem and show you just how much Hashem truly loves you, and in particular, these days are able to correct all matters of holiness and modesty. But it all starts with *teshuva*.

5. The idea of *teshuva* is that a person returns to Hashem with all his heart and soul, not only for the serious transgressions that surely need to be repented for but also for the "small" things that we may overlook and think that they're not so significant.

6. Being that our souls are derived from such a high place, completely connected to Hashem, and that they aren't able to endure even an ounce of sin, being that it distances them from Hashem, it's proper and right for everyone who feels close to

The Pathway...

Hashem and truly desires to correct their soul from any wronging's, to set time to time on all their actions and concerns. *Chazal* have said that any sin causes a barrier and separates the person from Hashem, as the prophet Yeshayahu said, "Your sins have separated between you and your G-d" (Yeshayahu 59:2). However, by returning to Hashem with all your heart, you merit that those barriers are completely removed.

7. And how should a *cheshbon nefesh* be done? First, you need to recognize the reality of your sin and truly know and believe that with your actions, you rebelled and distanced *yourself* from Hashem, even if it was unintentional. On top of that, you also damaged your soul and disconnected it from its source of life and brought it down to a place of impurity.

8. After you acknowledge your mistake and realize that you've sinned, you can go on to carry out the four stages of teshuva, which are...

1. Distancing yourself from the sin.
2. Regretting what you did.
3. Confession and *viduy*.
4. Accepting not to return to the sin again.

9. Also, anyone who truly desires to repair their soul should try to make

time every day to sit and learn Torah according to their ability, for the Torah has the greatest ability to correct and repair even for the greatest sins, so long as its learned *lishma*, and if so, it will lighten up even the darkest soul. Just as no one would go a day without food or something to drink, for that's the body's main source of life, so too is it absolutely forbidden, and it should never happen, that someone would go a day without their spiritual food and drink, the holy Torah and mitzvot.

10. By abiding by these guidelines, it's absolutely in their ability to do complete teshuva, separate their soul from all impure forces, reconnect their soul with its source of life, and give it the power and ability to shine its precious light throughout the world...

11. Lastly, we must remember that more than anything, during these days, the days of the end of the exile, when all peace of mind is shaken and the difficulties of making a living are increasing, we need to remember, announce, and make known that everything that happens to every Jew is only from Hashem, who is merciful and compassionate beyond understanding, and loves us more than we can imagine, and only desires and longs for each and every one of us to have only good. Endless good!

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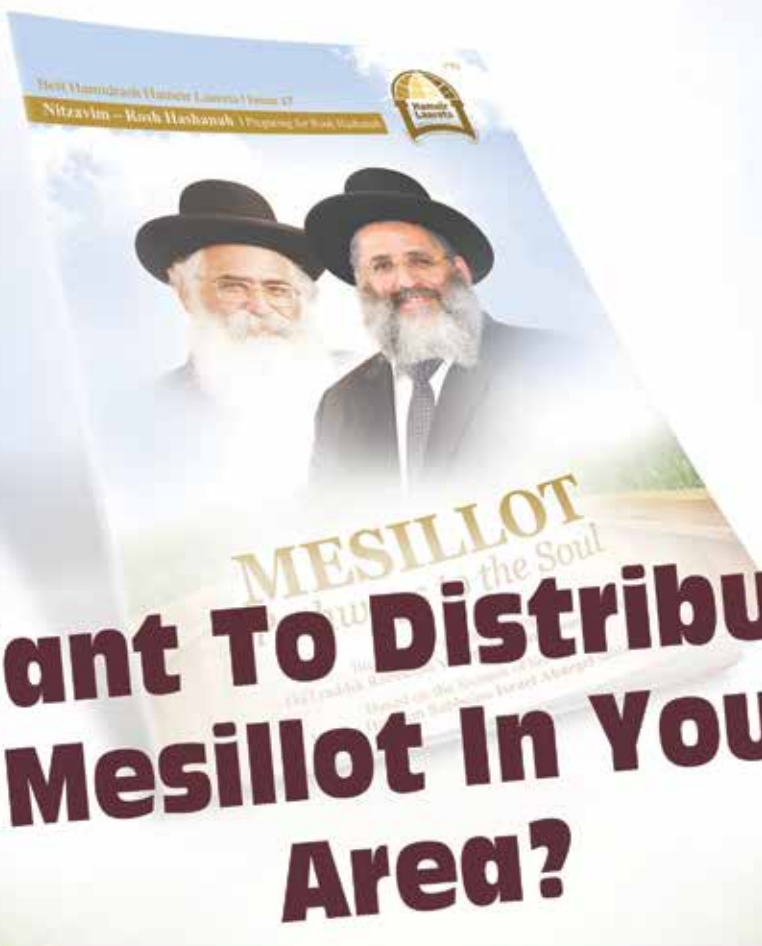
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Shemot

21st of Tevet , 5783



City	Candle Lighting	Shabbat Ends	Rabbeinu Tam
New York	4:32 pm	5:37 pm	6:05 pm
Miami	5:31 pm	6:28 pm	7:03 pm
Los Angeles	4:46 pm	5:46 pm	6:18 pm
Montreal	4:16 pm	5:25 pm	5:48 pm
Toronto	4:45 pm	5:52 pm	6:18 pm
London	4:02 pm	5:16 pm	5:31 pm
Jerusalem	4:41 pm	5:31 pm	6:04 pm
Tel Aviv	4:36 pm	5:27 pm	5:59 pm
Haifa	4:34 pm	5:25 pm	5:56 pm
Be'er Sheva	4:38 pm	5:29 pm	6:01 pm

Pathways to the Heart

*From the Words of
HaRav Yoram Abargel zt"l*

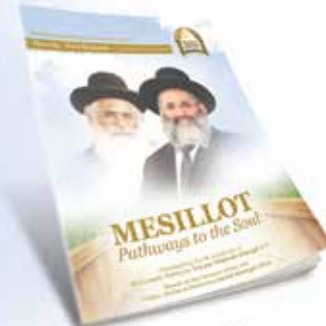
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