

# 100% Return

PARSHA INSIGHTS - NITZAVIM (5758)

## THREE NOVEL THOUGHTS ON REPENTANCE

### First Thought:

“It will come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you; you will think intently (about this situation)... You will return to Hashem your G-d... Hashem will accept your repentance...” (30:1-3). This is based on the *Targum Yonasan*. Another *pshat* [meaning] is that Hashem “will bring back your exiles” (*Sforno* and others). These promises are incredible. Our *teshuva* [repentance] will certainly be received by Hashem, and the exiles will be restored.

In the *Oznaim L'Torah*, the Lutzker Rav notices something. Our verses do not state anything conditional. We are not told that IF we repent, Hashem will bring back our captives from *golus* [exile]. Rather, everything is in the form of a promise: “You WILL reflect on the situation, You WILL return to Hashem your G-d, Hashem WILL bring back your remnants”. It is a certainty! *Klal Yisroel* [the Jewish people] will undoubtedly do *teshuva*. It is in our hands to undertake this noble task, but the chances of it happening, sometime, are 100%. We have the free choice to be the ones to do it. *Rosh Hashana* is upon us; let us participate in the fulfillment of this guarantee.

### A Second Thought About Repentance:

“You will return to Hashem your G-d... you and your children...” (30:2). How do children fit into the idea of *teshuva*? Rav Sorotzkin explains that when a person repents, he must consider the implications of all his deeds up to now, including the impression he has made on others. Not only has HE transgressed, but he might have educated other people to do the same, through his own deeds and teachings. Which people are most impressionable? Of course, children generally emulate their parents, for good or otherwise. Usually, children copy what their parents DO, much more than what their parents SAY TO DO. Consequently, in these magnificent verses, which discuss the foundations of repentance, the Torah gives us a penetrating and startling insight. **When one is awakened to *teshuva*, he must re-teach his children the proper way to behave.** In doing so, he will cause them to repent as well.

### One Final Thought:

“This precept that I command you today is not too mysterious or remote from you” (30:11). Which *mitzvah* [commandment] is being discussed here? Based on the continuity of the verses, the *Ba'al Haturim* and *Sforno* maintain that it is the *mitzvah* to do *teshuva*, to regret our sins and mend our ways. The *Sforno* interprets the verse as follows.

What does it mean that *teshuva* is “not too mysterious” to do? It is not far removed from us, to the point that we will need prophets to inform us about it. True, we need to read the written words of scripture, the books of *Tanach*, to learn proper strategies for *teshuva* and for forming a relationship with Hashem. However, nobody can excuse himself from repenting because of the absence of prophets to communicate with him. A person can never claim, “I would really like to improve my lifestyle by raising my level of religiosity, but I find it impossible. Since there are no prophets for me to consult, I am unable to get close to G-d.” To refute this claim, the Torah declares that *teshuva* is “not too mysterious” for us. It is not removed from the human realm, it is not out of the grasp of us mortals. This is also the meaning of the next *pasuk* [verse], which states that *teshuva* is “not in Heaven”. You do not need a prophet, a person who brings messages from Heaven, to advise you about repentance. *Teshuva* is well within our reach, in all generations.

The *Sforno* continues to analyze the *pasuk* in the following manner. The Torah states that the ability to do *teshuva* is “not remote from you”. This indicates that one does not need to make contact with the distant, wise leaders of the generation in order to repent. A person might feel that “If I were in the Holy Land, Israel, I would surely meet up with some genuine sages. In such a sacred atmosphere, I would be capable of drawing close to the Creator through performance of Torah and *mitzvos* [good deeds/commandments]. However, since I am in *golus*,

out of *Eretz Yisroel* [the Land of Israel] and far removed from the pious *gedolim* [great Torah scholars], I cannot reach spiritual heights.” This, says *Sforno*, is the meaning of the words in 30:13: “It is not on the other side of the sea.” You do not need to travel overseas to consult prominent leaders who will explain to you how to do *teshuva*. **It is very possible to do *teshuva* right where you are.** Besides the fact that there are numerous Torah leaders who can be consulted in countries outside of *Eretz Yisroel*, including renowned *gedolim*, the *Sforno* is telling us that even at times when this was not so, or in locations where it is still not true, a Jew can find Hashem’s presence wherever he is. Location is no excuse when it comes to repentance.

If one really changes his habits, regrets his sins, and confesses to Hashem, he has observed the *mitzvah* of doing *teshuva*. This WILL bring forgiveness. In the First Gate, section 9, of *Sha’arei Teshuva*, written by Rabainu Yona, he gives us such an assurance.

“There are many levels of repentance, and a person will draw close to Hashem based on the levels. INDEED, YOU WILL FIND FORGIVENESS RESULTING FROM ANY *TESHUVA*, but the soul will not be purified totally, that the sins will be as if they never existed, unless a person cleanses his heart and prepares his spirit as will be explained...”

Our attitude about repentance should NOT be that it is a sophisticated, mysterious, complicated endeavor, out of reach for the average Jew. Furthermore, as stated above, it is accessible in all regions of the world. True, there are issues of *teshuva* which need clarification. Some of these inquiries are printed in the *responsa* [responses to queries that were posed on Jewish law] of *gedolim*, in various works. Also, *teshuva* does take some skill; there is a method needed to accomplish total repentance. *Sefarim* [books] such as Rabainu Yona’s *Sha’arei Teshuva* demonstrate this.



One needs to look into such *sefarim*, particularly during this season. The *Mishna Brura* in the end of 1:12 quotes the *Birkai Yosef*, that we should learn books of *mussar* [Jewish ethical teachings] each day. In *Sha’ar Hatziyun* 26 he cites the *Chayai Adam*, that learning *mussar* is even more of a requirement than learning *Mishnayos*, in a certain sense.

The point of our *Sforno* is that we must realize that every Jew is equipped to do *teshuva*. It is not “in Heaven”, nor is it “over the ocean”.

In summary, no one has an excuse to neglect the *mitzvah* of *teshuva*. Each person is quite capable of achieving a renewed closeness with Hashem, especially at this time of year. We all have it within ourselves. We do not need to go back in time to the *nevi'im* [prophets] nor does *teshuva* required expeditions to far lands. **Even improving one bad habit, even PARTIALLY, is a degree of *teshuva*.** *Kesiva V’chasima Tova* [May you be written and sealed for good].

*By Rabbi Moshe Heigh*

Text © 1998 Rabbi Moshe Heigh. Main title, formatting and definitions © 2011 Jewlight Inc. This Essay may only be printed unaltered in its entirety with copyrights displayed and given out free-of-charge. Linking allowed if your topic is relevant. Posting online is strictly prohibited.