



GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

Teshuva Awakens in Many Forms

Moshe Rabeinu receives final confirmation of the dreadful verdict. Despite all his *tefillot*, hinted at in the opening pasuk of *Va'etchanan*, his petition is denied. The man who shaped Jewish history and carried a nation on his shoulders is barred from entering the Land of destiny.

So it is with the Land of Israel. We dream and hope, but sometimes we leave this world without seeing those dreams fulfilled. Sometimes the land remains just beyond our reach—close enough to see, too distant to touch.

Knowing that he will not accompany them to Israel, Moshe fears that the people will fall prey to foreign cultures, slipping into idolatry

and pagan practice. He also worries that material success will inflate their egos and cause them to forget Hashem. Moshe had guided this former nation of slaves through the roaring sea and up the mountain of monotheism. He stood by them in moments of religious collapse, twice pleading for their survival and holding back the threat of divine annihilation. Now, as they approach their homeland, he is gripped by anxiety over the spiritual failures that await them.

Again and again, he warns them of these looming dangers.

WHEN MEMORY FADES

And then Moshe turns his gaze toward the distant horizon. This generation had either witnessed the staggering miracles of Egypt and the thunder of Sinai. Or, if born in the desert, they had seen water burst from rocks and bread fall from the sky. Exposure to such divine intervention granted them some immunity against spiritual collapse. While Moshe worries the present generation might stumble—he is not certain. But future generations? He is convinced they will fall.

כִּי תוֹלִיד בָּנִים וּבָנֵי בָנִים וְנוֹשְׁתֶּם בְּאֶרֶץ...

"When you beget children and children's children, and become long established in the land..." (Devarim 4:25)

Moshe sees generations rooted in the Land, complacent and forgetful, slowly unraveling. He doesn't wonder—he predicts. He isn't warning of a possible downfall—he is preparing for the aftermath of an inevitable

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one. And the collapse won't be mild. It will be catastrophic.

We will be exiled from our Land, scattered among foreign nations. The Jewish condition will reach an all-time low—estranged from Hashem and distant from our Land.

But even in that bleak landscape, Moshe doesn't despair. He carves out a pathway home. This is the Torah's first blueprint for national teshuva—for collective return.

TESHUVA'S DUAL FACES

Moshe outlines two distinct models of collective teshuva—two roads home, each forged in a different crucible of experience.

The first is a lofty and wholehearted return.

וּבְקִשְׁתֶּם מִשָּׁם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ וּמִצֵּאתָ כִּי תִדְרֹשֶׁנּוּ
בְּכָל-לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל-נַפְשְׁךָ

"And from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him—if you search after Him with all your heart and with all your soul." (Devarim 4:29)

This is not a reactive teshuva, born only of pain. It begins with exile, but does not end there. The word משם which refers to a state of dislocation—is merely the catalyst. What follows is a deep, sincere spiritual search, marked by honesty and internal transformation. Suffering awakens the heart, but the heart ultimately seeks on its own. Teshuva becomes a genuine yearning.

But in the very next pasuk, Moshe presents a second model:

בְּצַר לָךְ וּמִצְאוּךָ כָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְשִׁבַּתָּ עַד ה'
אֱלֹהֶיךָ

Here, teshuva is urgent and desperate. A person is cornered by suffering—בצר—לך—and calls out in distress. It is not as full or deep as the former; it lacks the phrase בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך. It is a teshuva of survival, not of vision. Still,



Hashem responds, listens and embraces. Even imperfect teshuva, born of fear and crisis, reawakens the eternal covenant. Hashem never forgets the *brit* with our ancestors, nor does He abandon His people. Even a faltering step toward home is met with divine mercy.

To summarize, Moshe describes two profoundly different models of collective teshuva. One form of return is internally driven. It may begin in crisis, but it doesn't end there. Suffering triggers a deeper religious search, which ultimately becomes independent of the crisis that initiated it.

The second model is the foxhole teshuva—impulsive and born entirely from fear. It lacks the depth and endurance of the first. There is no inner transformation, no deep spiritual reflection. It does not culminate in full compliance or lasting change. It is a cry of desperation—a moment of hearing Hashem's voice amidst distress, not a sustained return.

TWO FLICKERS OF MEMORY

What becomes of this second-tier, crisis-driven yet still valid form of teshuva? Though it may lack the full depth of inner transformation, it still stirs memory and identity. The Torah highlights two formative historical events that anchor the heart of this

teshuva, the second-grade repentance:

הַשָּׁמַיִם קוֹל אֱלֹהִים מְדַבֵּר מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ—The voice of Hashem thundering from the fire still echoes. Even a fractured heart remembers Sinai. The memory of mass revelation, of standing directly under the Divine word, reverberates even in those whose religious return is incomplete.

הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֱלֹהִים לְבוֹא לָקַחַת לוֹ גּוֹי מִקֶּרֶב גּוֹי—The second memory is of being extracted from the depths of a foreign nation and led on a miraculous journey to an ancestral homeland. Hashem relocated an entire nation across a vast wilderness to reclaim its destiny.

These two touchstones—the voice at Sinai and the journey toward homeland—tug at the heartstrings of even the hesitant returner. The *teshuva* may not yet reach full religious observance, but these historical echoes rekindle spiritual identity and awaken dormant longings for Hashem.

Teshuva is not a simple binary, nor an all-or-nothing choice. It unfolds in stages and degrees. Often, an initial, less complete phase of *teshuva* leads over time to a purer and more noble return. This is true for individuals—and no less so for collective, national *teshuva*. Even a *teshuva* born solely from crisis and struggle, without deep inner awakening, is embraced by Hashem. He does not abandon His children and always remembers the eternal covenant made with our ancestors.

CRISIS AND AWAKENING

October 7th triggered this second form of *teshuva*. It doesn't look like traditional *teshuva* because it doesn't always show itself in greater observance of mitzvot or full compliance with halacha. Many describe it as an *awakening of Jewish identity* or a *return to*

Jewish roots. Yet, in truth, it is the first trace of the very second type of *teshuva* that Moshe Rabbeinu depicted—a *teshuva* born from crisis.

This awakening sprang from the deep hatred unleashed by the massacre of October 7th. It emerged from a terrifying surge of antisemitism. The mask came off. Hatred of Jews, unfiltered and raw, flooded the streets and screens.

This *teshuva* centers on the two historical landmarks that Moshe predicted: Sinai and Israel. Most affiliated Jews connect profoundly to these pillars of Jewish identity. They may not observe the full roster of mitzvot, but they affirm Jewish chosenness—that we were selected by Hashem to receive His word at Sinai and to live a life rooted in divine will. They believe Israel is our ancestral homeland. Hashem led us from Egypt through the desert, and thousands of years later, in a second great migration, gathered us from the four corners of the earth to return once again to our home.

For Orthodox Jews, *teshuva* often conjures images of heartfelt repentance and increased observance of mitzvot— or Moshe's first model of *teshuva*. While we strive toward that ideal, we must also recognize and accredit the second model of *teshuva*—a form kindled by the trials and turmoil of the past two years.

TRUSTING TESHUVA

Famously, the Rambam is cautious about declaring *teshuva* as a formal mitzvah. In the first perek of Hilchot Teshuva where he outlines the process and experience of *teshuva*, he does not explicitly state that it is a commanded obligation.

Those who disagree with the Rambam and claim that there is a mitzvah to perform

teshuva point to a phrase that appears twice—in *V'etchanan* and again in *Nizavim*:

וְשָׁבַת עַד ה' אֶלְקֶיךָ

They argue that this language clearly implies there is a mitzvah to perform teshuva.

The Rambam, however, interprets this pasuk differently. In his commentary on *Hilchot Teshuva* (perek 7), he explains that the phrase is not a commandment but a prophecy. It does not command teshuva but predicts that every Jew will eventually perform teshuva. As he writes:

“וסוף ישראל לעשות תשובה בסוף גלותן”

To the Rambam a person does not possess a legal mitzvah to perform teshuva; that is a personal volition. However, every Jew does have a responsibility to believe in the prophecy that, in the end, all Jews will make their way back.

Faith in teshuva and faith in the Jewish people demand believing in this prophecy—even when it feels distant or unlikely. Belief in this prophecy requires that we recognize different forms of teshuva. It may not happen all at once, and not every Jew will choose the first, ideal model of teshuva. Yet, since October 7th, we have witnessed millions of Jews embarking on the second tier of teshuva—reconnecting with Jewish identity, reaffirming Jewish chosenness, and strengthening our claim to our ancestral homeland.

Teshuva wears many faces, but each is a genuine path toward transformation and hope. ■



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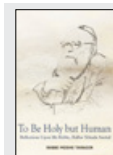
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