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OU ISRAEL FACULTY

Torat Imecha
NACH YOMI

בס"ד

Divine Forgiveness

"To err is human; to forgive, divine." While this well-known and oft-cited quote was penned in 1711 by the poet Alexander Pope, its foundational truth lies in the prophecy of Yeshayahu which we have been studying. Two pesukim from Yeshayahu form part of one of the essential piyutim recited during Selichot and in our Tefillot on Yom Kippur. In a paragraph leading to the Viduy, the verbal confession of our sins, we ask Hashem to remember His covenant with us, and forgive our sins as He has promised: In Yeshayahu 43:25, Hashem promises: אנכי אנכי הוא מוחה פשעיך למעני, *I, only I, am He who erases your willful sins, for My own sake, and I will not recall your sins.* Yeshayahu further promises in the name of Hashem, מחיתי כעב פשעיך, *I will wipe away your willful sins like a fog, and your sins like a cloud; return to Me, for I have redeemed you.*¹ In context, in Sefer Yeshayahu, both of these verses appear in sections that speak of Hashem as the Creator, King and Redeemer. It is as such that Hashem forgives our sins.

As Creator, Hashem is not bound by the laws of nature, or limited in any way by Man's actions. Hashem's plan for the world,

which remains under His constant governance as King, will be realized regardless of Man's behavior. Thus, Hashem will act as our Redeemer when He sees fit. We can hasten the Redemption through our efforts, but if we are not successful, there is a set time when Hashem's vision for the world will be realized, and Hashem will act for His own sake.

Just as this is true on a national historical level, so it applies to every individual, who experiences a microcosmic redemption every Yom Kippur. Teshuvah itself does not rectify our sins, nor erase the past. Only Hashem Himself, אנכי אנכי, through His infinite Chessed, and for the sake of the sanctification of His name, can do that. Siftei Chaim cites the Ramchal, who explains that Hashem created the world and governs it according to certain fundamental principles, including a just system of reward and punishment. If Hashem were bound to the Middat HaDin, the attribute of Justice, anyone who transgresses His law would be sentenced to punishment. Since Hashem is both Creator and King, only He can override His own laws at will, and that is the tremendous power invested in the concept of Teshuvah. Our Teshuvah sparks a process through which Hashem negates His own laws and erases our sins.²

Rav Yigal Ariel raises the question of which comes first, Teshuvah or redemption. While it would be logical to think that Teshuvah is a prerequisite for redemption, our text seems to suggest otherwise - שובה אלי כי - *Return unto Me, for I have redeemed*

1. A third verse, from Yeshayahu 1:18, is cited in Sefer Tanya, but is not included in the parallel paragraph in the Amidah of Yom Kippur.

2. Siftei Chaim Moadim I p.482

you! He resolves the question by citing a text from the Torah itself, from Parashat HaTeshuvah in Parashat Nitzavim: ושבתי עד - Return to Hashem your G-d, and Hashem will return you from your captivity. ושב וקבצך - and He will return and gather you in, ואתה תשוב ושמע - And then you will return and listen to the voice of Hashem. It is difficult to effect complete Teshuvah while under the yoke of the diaspora, explains Rav Ariel. If our initial sins were caused by the influence of the powerful surrounding nations while we were in Eretz Yisrael, how much more so must this be true in exile. If we make the initial overture to return to Hashem, Hashem will then act expeditiously, for His own sake, to ease our conditions, bringing us back to our homeland in which we feel His Presence so much more profoundly, so that we may return to Him fully.³

May our Tefillot this Elul and Tishrei be enhanced by our study of the texts with which they are replete, and may Hashem answer our Tefillot l'Tovah, with the גאולה השלמה, complete redemption, individually and nationally. ■

3. HaMevasser vol. II pp. 119-120

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women's Initiative Nach Yomi program

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