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BRINGING A TASTE OF ISRAEL TO MONTREAL



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TESHUVA- RE-WRITING OUR STORY

BY RAV ARI FAUST (ROSH KOLLEL)

Psychologist Dan McAdams is an expert in the field of trauma and has researched how people relate to trauma differently. McAdams

suggests that there are three levels of personality: basic traits and character adaptations (like goals and values) are the first two and he has called the third level of personality the "life story". McAdams identifies this level as being a key to a person being happy even after experiencing trauma. As Jonathan Haidt (The Happiness Hypothesis pg. 142) explains:

"Human beings in every culture are fascinated by stories ... It's no different with our own lives. We can't stop ourselves from creating ... an evolving story that integrates a reconstructed past, perceived present and anticipated future into a coherent and vitalizing life myth ... You create your story in your consciousness as you interpret your own behaviour..."

The way we relate to experiences in life can shape the way we experience them. The narrative we ascribe to events shape the events themselves. I believe that in certain ways, the same can be said about the choices we make: Choice are not taken in a vacuum, they can be weaved together to create a life story.

Throughout Sefer Devarim, the Torah implores us to take ownership of our decisions and to recognize

the significance and consequences they bear. In our parasha it says (Devarim 30:19):

“הַחַיִּים וְהַמּוֹת נִתְּנִי לְפָנֶיךָ הַבְּרָכָה וְהַקְּלָלָה וּבְחַרְתָּ בֵּינֵיהֶם.”

"I have place before you life and death, the blessing and the curse and you must choose life."

The option to make decisions are open before us and we are free to choose to do right. But why is the choice of goodness associated with goodness, and choosing evil associated with death?

The principal that we have free choice is codified by Rambam, who dedicates two perakim in Hilchot Teshuva to the topic. He writes (5:1):

"Free will is granted to all people. If one desires to turn themselves to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is theirs. Should they desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is theirs..."

The Rambam's placement of the discourse on free choice is specific and noteworthy. Why include free choice in Hilchot Teshuva and not Hilchot Yesodei HaTorah where he discusses many of the tenants of Jewish Belief? In total, it is accepted that the Rambam has established thirteen principals of faith. However, Rabbi

NITZAVIM-VAYELECH
23 ELUL
SEPTEMBER 9, 2023

CANDLES: 7:01 P.M.
HAVDALAH: 8:03 P.M.

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Sacks zt”l argues that the formulation of thirteen principals is uncharacteristic of the Rambam, who was a deliberate organizer and uses fourteen as his “magic number”; Rabbi Sacks also points out that the Rambam himself calls free will a great “principal” of faith. Considering all this, why is it included in Hilchot Teshuva?

The simplest answer is that the concepts of regret, repentance and forgiveness are all irrelevant if we do not have control of our actions. To put it bluntly, there is no Teshuva without free choice.

But I believe there is further lesson to be learned from the inclusion of free choice in Hilchot Teshuva. Not only does free choice teach about Teshuva, but Teshuva also

teaches about free choice: At times we can find ourselves trapped in a behavioral pattern, we have routines we want to break but don’t muster the power to do so. Moreover, we allow our past decisions to define our present and future selves.

The concept of Teshuva teaches that we mustn’t get stuck in the ways of our past, and we need not be defined by previous decisions. We remain free to choose even after we’ve created routines or habits, and we are free to define ourselves by decisions that project our best selves. As Led Zeppelin famously sing in Stairway to Heaven: “Yes, there are two paths you can go by, but in the long run there’s still time to change the road you’re on.”

Teshuva shows that free choice does not only effect the present decision before us, but it can extend to decisions we have taken in the past and transform them (Gemara Yoma 86b)!

Uncompromising belief in free choice, as expressed through the concept of Teshuva, gives us the ability to live our lives to the fullest by insisting that we are not doomed to be trapped in the misgivings of our past. Teshuva creates a coherent narrative – a “life story” – about the person. Instead of living a life whose story is one of sin and failure, Teshuva tells a story of growth and renewal.



COMING CLOSER

BY DAVID WEINBERG

For this commandment that I command you today, it is not hidden from you... it is not in Heaven... nor is it over the sea... for it is very near to you, in your mouth and your heart to do it.” (30:11-14)

The Torah teaches us that this commandment isn’t far away like something across the sea. Instead, it’s as close as your mouth and heart – easy to follow. In simpler words, even though it might seem as far as the sky or sea, it’s actually right here with you. How is it possible that something as close as the mouth and the heart could ever be confused

with being as distant as the heavens or across the sea?

People are made up of two parts: their body and their soul. If you let your neshama - your soul - guide your body, you can reach a higher level than angels. But if you let your body control your spiritual side, you become more like animals. Just like animals have no taste for wisdom and intellectual discernment, but rather prefer hay, straw and the like, people who only focus on physical stuff don’t find spiritual things interesting. So, humans are a mix of things as disparate as heaven and earth.

The Torah tells us that when you ignore the important spiritual part of life, it seems really far away – almost like it’s in the sky. But the truth is, “it’s very close to you.” If you just let the spiritual side guide the physical side, then “you can easily do it.”

These words show how amazing humans can be. In a second, you can lift yourself up by taking in the teachings of the Torah with your heart and mind. This brings something very far away very close to you: In a quick moment, a thought can take you from feeling a bit lost to being elevated to the highest heights. So, remember, as the verse says: “it is not hidden from you”.



A MOMENT IN HISTORY: “HATIKVAH” AND ISRAEL’S UNDERGROUND MOVEMENTS

BY TIFERET DISHI

In the portion of Vayelech; which opens with Moshe addressing Bnei Yisrael before his passing, he conveys to the people that he will not cross the Jordan River, and that the leadership of Israel will be transferred to Yehoshua. Additionally, Moshe strengthens the people’s resolve in the face of the battles for inheriting the

Promised Land: “Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or discouraged because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you.”

This message resonates through generations and has been a source of inspiration for Jews in their struggle against their adversaries. An example of this is evident in the response of the underground fighters before the

establishment of the state.

Before the establishment of the state in 1948, the land was under British Mandate rule, and underground movements were formed to defend the Second Aliyah settlements. The first underground movement established was the “Haganah” whose goal was to safeguard the Jewish settlements without

PARNESS HAYOM :: ELUL

7 ELUL | Gabi Cohen, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his brother, Meir Michael ben Yitzchak HaCohen z”l

8 ELUL | Pearl and Milan Bratin, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her father, Joseph Remer z”l

11 ELUL | Sue and Kamal Gabbay, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her father, Menashe Mashaal z”l

13 ELUL | Norman Sternthal, in honour of the Yahrzeit of his father, Joel Sternthal z”l

20 ELUL | Renee Lieberman, in honour of the Yahrzeit of her father, Max Brooks z”l

CONTINUED

initiating attacks.

The second movement that arose from “Haganah” was the “Etzel”, which stands for “Irgun Tzvai Leumi”. They believed in attacking the Arab enemy as a response to aggression, not merely self-defense. The third movement to emerge from “Etzel” was the “Lehi” (Lohamei Herut Israel) – they were even more extreme and were a right-wing Zionist activist underground group, active against the British, even during World War II.

On this background, we can understand the escape from Acre Prison – a prime example that the hope of Hatikvah was never lost.

Some of the underground members were apprehended by the British, arrested, and brought to trial for their actions. When facing trial, each underground reacted differently. The members of “Haganah” were the least rebellious in court, and they received 7 years imprisonment with special treatment. In contrast, the “Etzel” and “Lehi” members defied the British and refused to listen to them, even singing “Hatikvah”, the Israeli national anthem! This act was brave

and symbolized their support for the idea of establishing Israel, despite the British policy against it. Their sentence was a life sentence and hanging.

The “Etzel” and “Lehi” planned an escape from the prison. They didn’t involve “Haganah” as they disagreed, and they would’ve stopped them. On Sunday, May 4, 1947, at 2:00 PM, a group of 34 “Etzel” fighters escaped the prison in an orchestrated plan involving British vehicles purchased ahead of time. The prison break was accompanied by a massive explosion from the outside that shook everything.

Simultaneously, Michael Ashbel, an “Etzel” member who was an inmate, detonated the prison’s iron gate from within using explosive material smuggled inside preserved food cans. Meanwhile, another group of inmates delayed the British wardens using flaming torches and smoke grenades. The British were caught off guard...

Not everyone managed to escape. Five “Etzel” fighters were captured during the prison break and brought to trial. Meir

Nakar, Avshalom Haviv, and Yaakov Weiss were sentenced to death, and Amnon Michaelov and Menachem Ostrovsky were sentenced to life imprisonment. Against the death sentence, “Etzel” kidnapped two British sergeants and threatened to kill them if the death sentences weren’t commuted. The British authorities didn’t respond, and on July 27, 1947, the official announcement was made that the three condemned men would be hanged.

Even in their last moments, they sang Hatikvah. When the time came, they sang it until they couldn’t anymore.

Today, in the gallows chamber, there is a wall with the first half Hatikvah inscribed. But only half of it. The executed members couldn’t finish it, but their brothers in arms in neighboring cells continued to sing it long after they couldn’t, and they kept singing until the establishment of our state, and beyond!



ISRAEL IN FOCUS: PETACH TIKVAH

BY YAIR GREENBLUM

In this week’s parasha, Nitzavim-VaYelech, it is said, “and you will return to the Lord, your God, with all your heart and with all your soul... And the Lord, your God, will bring you to the land which your forefathers possessed, and you [too] will take possession of it, and He will do good to you...”.

Moshe stands before Bnei Yisrael in his great speech just before their entry into the land. He speaks to them about observing the commandments of God, the reward that comes with it, and also the punishment they will receive if they abandon the Torah. We see that the reward for keeping the commandments of God is that He will gather the exiles and bring them back to their land.

In the 19th century, there was a significant wave of Jewish immigration to the Land of Israel, which later became known as the “First Aliyah”. These immigrants sought a place where they could live and wanted the

place to be a symbol of hope. Eventually, they acquired land in the area of the Sharon plain and called it “Petah Tikva,” which means “Opening of Hope” in Hebrew. The name has another meaning as well, as the Sharon region was referred to as the “Emek Achor” in the Book of Hoshea, and it says (2:17), “And I will give her her vineyards from there and the depth of trouble (= Emek Achor) for an opening of hope...”.

In 1878, the founders established Petah Tikva. This settlement was one of the first to be established in the Land of Israel and was known as one of the “Mother Colonies”. Due to a malaria outbreak, the settlement was abandoned in 1880, but six years later, the settlers returned and began to rebuild it. Shortly thereafter, Baron Rothschild visited Petah Tikva and agreed to help them with its development. He assisted in draining the swamps and planting eucalyptus trees. The Jews in Petah Tikva also had to contend with Arab attacks from the surrounding areas.

After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the city grew significantly and transformed from an agricultural settlement into a leading industrial city. The settlement of Petah Tikva symbolizes the pioneering spirit of returning to the Land of Israel. It represents the fulfillment of the words of Moshe and the other prophets who said that the people of Israel would return to their land. As the prophet Zechariah says, “So said the Lord of Hosts: Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of old age”. (Zechariah 8:4).

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A CROSSWORD FOR THE HIGH HOLIDAYS

BY REUT DOKOW

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- synagogue
- greeting card
- honey
- Yom Kippur
- Torah
- pomegranate
- Jewish
- Tishrei
- New Year
- Carrot
- fish
- beet
- holidays
- Shofar
- Sukkot
- dates
- apple

Please make sure not to circle the letters on Shabbat!

QUIZ

BY REUT DOKOW

GRADE 1, 2:

1. WHICH PARASHA ARE WE READING THIS WEEK?
2. WHAT MITZVAH IS ESPECIALLY DONE AROUND ROSH HASHANA THAT IS FOUND IN OUR PARASHA?

GRADE 3, 4:

1. WHICH SHEVET DID MOSHE GIVE A SEFER TORAH TO?
2. COMPLETE AND EXPLAIN THE PASUK: "מִזֹּטֵב עֲצִיךָ עֵד..."

GRADE 5, 6:

1. "YOU ARE ALL STANDING TODAY." WHAT IMPORTANT THING HAPPENED ON THIS DAY? (HINT: THE ANSWER IS IN THE RASHI ON PASUK 9)
2. IN WHICH VERSE IN THE PARASHA IS THE MONTH OF ELUL ALLUDED TO?

Answers: 1. Stands and will go 2. On the Torah 3. About the enemies 4. Draws from your waters 5. On the day of Moses' death 6. In the verse: "מִזֹּטֵב עֲצִיךָ עֵד" - And Hashem, your God filled your heart and the heart of your children: the initials spell Elul!



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