

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Leeba *bas* Sh'muel *a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her *neshamah*

The Mysterious Case of King Menasheh

PARSHAS HA'AZINU 5778

The focus of this time period is, of course, the endeavor of *teshuvah* (repentance). While an important form of Divine service at any point during the year, during the period between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – known as “*Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* (The Ten Days of Repentance)” – this effort is particularly pertinent and the atmosphere quite conducive. It obviously behooves any earnest servant of Hashem to utilize the opportunity to the fullest extent and to engage in as complete a form of *teshuvah* as possible.

Certainly, one must ensure that his *teshuvah* efforts will be lasting and accepted, as there are potential pitfalls in this regard. Some examples are related by the Mishnah (*Yoma* 8:9), which states:

הַאֹמֵר אֶחֱטָא וְאָשׁוּב אֶחֱטָא וְאָשׁוּב, אִין מְסַפִּיקוּן בְּגֵדוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה. אֶחֱטָא וְיִוֵּם הַכַּפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר, אִין יוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר.

“One who says: ‘I will sin and then repent; I will sin and then repent’ – will not be afforded the ability to repent. (One who says:) ‘I will sin and Yom Kippur will atone for it’ – Yom Kippur will, in fact, *not* atone for it.”

Conflicting Impressions

There are other factors that may play a significant role in determining the effectiveness of one’s repentance, as illustrated by the most curious case of Menasheh, one of the kings of the Kingdom of Yehudah.

Sefer Melachim II records the events of Menasheh’s reign. Even a cursory glance at the account reveals a portrait of an evil king steeped in idolatry and other grave transgressions: ...הַרְבֵּה לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי ד’ לְהַכְעִיס, וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־פֶּסֶל הָאֲשֵׁרָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה בְּבֵית אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ד’ אֶל־דָּוִד וְאֶל־שְׁלֹמֹה בְּנוֹ בְּבֵית הַזֶּה... אֲשֵׁים אֶת־שָׁמַי לְעוֹלָם... הָרַע מְכַל אֲשֶׁר־עָשׂוּ הָאֲמָרִי אֲשֶׁר לִפְנֵי וַיִּחַטָּא גַם־אֶת־יְהוּדָה בְּגִלּוּלָיו... וְגַם דָּם נָקִי שָׁפַךְ מִנְּשָׁה הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד עַד אֲשֶׁר־מָלֵא אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם פֶּה לְפֶה לְבַד מִחַטָּאתוֹ וְאֲשֶׁר הִחֲטִיא אֶת־יְהוּדָה לַעֲשׂוֹת הָרַע בְּעֵינֵי ד’ – “He acted with extreme wickedness in Hashem’s eyes, to antagonize Him; and he placed the statue of Asheirah, which he made, into the House of which Hashem had said to David and to Shlomo, his son: ‘In this house... I shall have My Name set permanently...’ (Menasheh’s) deeds were more wicked than anything perpetrated by the Emorim who preceded him; and he caused Yehudah also to sin with his idolatry... Also, Menasheh spilled much innocent blood, to the point that Yerushalayim was filled with it from gate to gate; (all of this is) aside from the sin by which he caused Yehudah to sin and perpetrate wickedness in the eyes of Hashem” (*Melachim II* 21:2-16). The description concludes simply: וַיִּתֵּר דְּבָרֵי מְנַשֶּׁה... הֲלֹא־הֵם כְּתוּבִים עַל־סֵפֶר דְּבָרֵי הַיָּמִים לְמַלְכֵי יְהוּדָה, וַיִּשְׁכַּב מִנְּשָׁה – “And the remainder of Menasheh’s affairs... are recorded in the book of chronicles for the kings of Yehudah; And Menasheh slept with his forefathers (i.e., he passed away)” (*Ibid.* v. 17-18). Seemingly, a fairly distressing but straightforward account.

Much of the history of the kings of Yehudah and Yisrael appears again in Sefer Divrei Ha’yamim. When it comes to Menasheh, we encounter once again an almost identical account

of his wicked and idolatrous ways; but here, there is an interesting addendum: וְכַהֲנֵן לֹא חָלָה אֶת־פְּנֵי ד' אֱלֹהֵי וְיִכְנַע מְאֹד מִלְּפָנֵי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתָיו וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֵלָיו... וַיִּדַע מִנְּשָׂה כִּי ד' הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים... וַיִּסַּר וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֵלֵינוּ... וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֵלֵינוּ... וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֵלֵינוּ... וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֵלֵינוּ... – “And when (Menasheh) was in distress, he supplicated before Hashem his G-d, and he humbled himself greatly before the G-d of his fathers and prayed to Him... And Menasheh knew of Hashem, that He is G-d... And he removed the foreign deities... And he told Yehudah to serve Hashem, G-d of Yisrael...” (*Divrei Ha'yamim II 33:12-16*). Apparently, Menasheh did *teshuvah* – certainly a significant development! Why, then, is this information completely omitted from the account in *sefer Melachim*?

Competing Interests

In his treatise *Emunas Chachamim* (ch. 22), the early 18th-Century sage R' Avi Ad Sar Shalom accounts for the differing descriptions. The lack of mention of *teshuvah* in the version in *Sefer Melachim* actually reflects a notion discussed last week – namely, the lingering effects of one's deeds. Yes, it is true that Menasheh repented and even told the people to desist from further idolatrous activity. Nonetheless, he did not take such a vigorous and active role in eradicating idolatry, to the extent of some of his righteous predecessors (such as Chizkiyahu). Recall that Menasheh had initially led others astray, inducing them to violate Hashem's will. And so, while he corrected his personal misdeeds, the idolatrous practices of his protégés (and their subsequent offspring) continued in many instances. As a result, his *teshuvah* was not accepted – as long as the sins to which he contributed continued to exist. Being that, for all intents and purposes, his repentance did not “register,” it is not even mentioned in *sefer Melachim*.

Why, then, was it indeed recorded in *Divrei Ha'yamim*? The *Toldos Yehoshua* (*Avos 2:2*) points to the authorship of these scriptural volumes to resolve the discrepancy. *Sefer Melachim*, Chazal tell us, was written by the Prophet Yirmiyahu, while *Divrei Ha'yamim* was the work of Ezra the Scribe (*Bava Basra 15a*). Now, Ezra was a member of that august body of Sages known as the “Anshei K'nesses Ha'gedolah – Men of the Great Assembly.” Chazal tell us further (*Yoma 69b*) of a most significant event that took place during their tenure. The Sages took the extraordinary step of actually neutralizing the power of the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) in the area of idolatry; after this time, then, Yisrael was no longer led astray in pursuit of this form of transgression.

What emerges, then, is that the inclination toward idolatry was still very much in effect during the time of Yirmiyahu, who wrote *Sefer Melachim*. Thus, the ramifications of Menasheh's deeds still reverberated then, preventing his repentance from being accepted. With the composition of *Sefer Divrei Ha'yamim*, however – authored, as mentioned, by a most prominent member of the Anshei K'nesses Ha'gedolah – the *yetzer hara* for idolatry had already been abolished. With the cessation of these practices, then, the harmful effects of Menasheh's original enticements had come to an end. As such, his *teshuvah* was finally able to come to fruition – as underscored by its inclusion in *Divrei Ha'yamim*.

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