

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Shmuel *ben Moshe a"h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

Returning Shabbos

PARSHAS VAYEILECH 5779

The Shabbos preceding Yom Kippur is referred to in Torah literature alternately as “*Shabbos Shuvah*” or “*Shabbos Teshuvah*.” The former term is a reference to the opening exhortation of the Navi Hoshei’a, as contained in the *haftarah* portion read on this Shabbos: “*Shuvah Yisrael... – Return, O Yisrael...*” The latter title reflects the fact that this is the Shabbos that falls out during the period known as “*Aseres Yemei Teshuvah – Ten Days of Repentance*,” beginning with Rosh Hashanah and culminating with Yom Kippur. Either way, the theme is quite obviously in keeping with the aura and principal form of *avodah* (service) of this period – the endeavor of repentance.

Teshuvah... or Shabbos?

One of the manifestations of the penitent mood of this time is the intensification of prayer by Klal Yisrael, which, for example, takes the form of the additional supplications known as “*Selichos*” (Petitions for Forgiveness). In this regard, we find a certain *halachic* issue discussed by the great *poskim* relating to this particular Shabbos. The *Tur* (*Orach Chayim* § 602) cites a custom of the community of Sfarad (Spain) to engage in such *Selichos* even on this Shabbos. But he wonders how such a practice could be sanctioned; after all, the general rule states that we avoid prayers of a petitionary nature on Shabbos (*Ta’anis 11a*).

The *Beis Yosef* defends the custom of Sfarad in his commentary to the *Tur*, attributing the practice to the urgency of the situation. Yom Kippur is fast approaching, and on that day the final judgment in Heaven will be sealed. It is this imminent need that renders the offering of supplications on Shabbos permissible. The *Beis Yosef* compares this circumstance to the scenarios described in the following Mishnah (*Ta’anis 3:7*):

על אלו מתריעין בשבת, על עיר שהקיפוה גוים או נהר, ועל ספינה המספרת בים.

“For the following (situations) one may offer supplications (even) on Shabbos: On behalf of a city that is surrounded by a gentile force (threatening to attack) or a (flooding) river, and on behalf of a ship at sea on the verge of sinking.”

However, the comparison of the *Beis Yosef* seems to require some clarification. As R’ Yeruchem Olshin points out (*Yerach L’mo’adim [Yamim Nora’im] vol. II, part II, § 69*), there seems to be a clear distinction between the cases appearing in the Mishnah and the circumstance of Shabbos Shuvah. The cases in the Mishnah involve a danger that is present *on that very day*; as the marauders are poised to strike on Shabbos itself, the need for supplications is immediate and cannot be postponed for the morrow. But it is a much different situation when it comes to Shabbos Shuvah. True, the judgment is to be sealed imminently and is obviously a most weighty matter; but the determination is not being made *on this Shabbos*, and it won’t be finalized until Yom Kippur itself. Seemingly, the petitions could be relegated to the following day or days. How, then, could the *Beis Yosef* contend that the urgency applies even today, to the point that he permitted conduct that would otherwise be forbidden on Shabbos?

Drawing on the classic teachings of our sages, R’ Yeruchem clarifies the matter by elucidating the true essence of these *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*. Of course, it is a time designated for repentance, especially in light of the impending judgment. The *passuk* states: דַּרְשׁוּ ד’ – “Seek out Hashem when He is

to be found, call to Him when He is near. Let the wicked abandon his ways... and return to Hashem, Who will have mercy on him" (*Yeshayah 55:6,7*). Chazal identify the period "when He is found," as referring to the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* (*Rosh Hashanah 18a*).

Bringing Back the Days

But there is yet another element to this period, which emerges from a remarkable teaching in the Zohar. The full meaning of this lofty passage may be lay beyond our limited capacity, but the general notion should be discernible. The Zohar states:

"On the day that a person is created, all of his (pre-ordained days) assemble and stand at the ready. They then go forth and meander in the world... When, on a particular day, a person commits a sin before Hashem, that day ascends on High in shame, renders testimony (against the perpetrator) and stands alone on the outside... (where it waits) until that individual repents from (the sin). If he indeed merits to repent, that day returns to its place. (But if not...) his days will (eventually) be counted and found to be missing (certain days), which will not be included in the tally (together with those days that indeed were properly rectified). Woe to the person who will (have to stand) before Hashem missing (a portion of) his allotted days!"

Based on this passage, the *Marpei Lashon* explains that a key function of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* is to serve as a means to indeed "return lost days." The unique opportunity of this period is that it presents the ability to retrieve those days that had "fallen out of the tally." Thus it is that on a Monday of *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, for example, a person is able to retrieve all the "Mondays" that had gone lost on account of his past failings – be it neglect of Torah study, praying without proper *kavanah* (focus), etc. And so it is with every day of the week – including, of course, the day of Shabbos. By rectifying his past behavior, a person can restore his lost days. In fact, this is the deeper meaning of the term "*Yemei Teshuvah*." We tend to understand this in its plain sense, as referring to "days" designated for "repentance." But from the above we see that the intent is even more literal; as this is a period for the "days" themselves to be "returned" and restored.

And so we can see, concludes R' Yeruchem, that the comparison of the *Beis Yosef* is indeed a solid one. Just as with a threatening flood or a floundering ship, the needs of Shabbos Teshuvah indeed constitute a pressing matter for the immediate present. This Shabbos is not simply another day of a time-period during which *teshuvah* is encouraged; rather, it is an opportunity to repair and rectify all of the *Shabbosos* of the entire year when one's *avodah* may have been deficient. The morrow indeed will be too late, as the *avodah* then turns to rectifying all of the "Sundays." Now is the time to address the needs of Shabbos itself.

Although the Ashkenazic communities conduct themselves differently and do not engage in *Selichos* on this Shabbos, it is still possible to glean a vital lesson from the teaching of the *Beis Yosef*. We learn about the essential *avodah* of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, which is to utilize each of these days to effect rectification for all the days of the year.

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