

❖ PARSHAT HA'AZINU

Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (Nachmanides), known as the Ramban, had a student, Rabbi Avner, who strayed from the path and renounced his religion. Avner became very accepted among the non-Jews and, in fact, became a respected minister. Wishing to show his contempt for his Jewish roots, one Yom Kippur, Avner sent his emissaries to fetch the Ramban by force. In the presence of his former teacher he slaughtered a pig, cooked it and ate it-all on Yom Kippur!

The Ramban was horrified. "Tell me," he said to his former disciple, "what caused you to renounce your religion?" "It was a lesson I heard from your very lips!" Avner replied. "One time, when we were studying the portion of Ha'azinu (this week's Torah portion), you said that everything in the whole world and all of the Torah's commandments are alluded to in that portion. I couldn't believe that it was possible. How could the entire universe be contained in such a tiny portion? I came to the conclusion that everything else you taught us must also be false, and abandoned Judaism."

"But it's true!" the Ramban insisted. "There is nothing in the entire world that is not alluded to in Ha'azinu."

"If what you say is true," Avner challenged him, "show me where my name is written in it." The Ramban agreed, and went into a corner to pray. The Ramban then located a phrase alluding to Rabbi Avner's name.

"In Deuteronomy 32:26," he showed him, "take the third letter of every word and you will see your name." Avner read, "Amarti af'eihem ashbitah mei'enosh zichram-I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them cease from among men." In Hebrew, the third letters are reish, alef, beit, nun and reish-forming the name R' Avner. When Avner saw this he became distraught. At once he did teshuva and repented of all his sins. "How can I make amends for all of my transgressions?" he asked his teacher.

"Just do what it says in the verse," Nachmanides replied. "I would make the remembrance of them cease from among men.' Nothing must remain of your former glory." R' Avner immediately left for places unknown. In fulfillment of the Torah's words, he was never heard from again.

There is something quite astounding about this story: Why was Avner's name alluded to in the Torah as R' Avner-Rabbi Avner, instead of his simple name? Wasn't he a wicked person who committed appalling sins? Here, however, the Torah is teaching us the amazing power of repentance. When a Jew sincerely returns to G-d, the Torah honors him. Whatever he did in the past is discounted; it doesn't even matter if his spiritual condition is not presently what it should be. For all Jews will ultimately return to G-d-and are deserving of a title of honor! (From L'Chaim 5759, #538, Adapted from Hitva'aduyot 5742)

❖ YOM KIPPUR - A Story

The disciples of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev noticed that something was amiss. Yom Kippur, the most awesome day of the year, was approaching, and it was only natural that every G-d-fearing Jew's steps should grow more measured, his mind more focused, his manner graver. But this was something else. A heavy foreboding clouded their master's features; his eyes had grown red from weeping, and an uncharacteristic sigh would often escape his lips. "The Rebbe must know something we do not," they whispered. "Perhaps he sees a terrible calamity decreed for the coming year, G-d forbid."

Several days before Yom Kippur, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak summoned his gabbai (secretary). Much to the gabbai's amazement, the Rebbe had business on his mind. "Lately, the number of people coming to request that I pray for them on the Holy Day has been steadily increasing," said the Rebbe. "It's time we set a fixed price for the kvitlach. I think we should ask for two groschen for each name written in a kvitel."

When a chassid gives his rebbe the piece of paper ("kvitel") on which his

name and the names of his loved ones are inscribed for the rebbe to mention in his prayers, he always includes a sum of money, known as the pidyon nefesh ("redemption of the soul"), as a gift to the rebbe. As a rule, the sum is left to the petitioner's discretion, which was why Rabbi Levi Yitzchak's gabbai was quite surprised by what the Rebbe was proposing.

So notices were put up in the synagogue and the market place, and soon the entire town had heard of the new rules: the Rebbe was demanding two groschen for each name. Immediately after the morning prayers on the day preceding Yom Kippur, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak began receiving the kvitlach-bearers. A sense of urgency was felt throughout the town--the Rebbe's strange stipulation, coupled with his ominous behavior of the last few weeks, fed the feeling that it was of utmost importance to be included in the Rebbe's list. Two groschen was not such a great sum, but for an impoverished peddler or tailor with a dozen children to "register," it was no small expense. Still, not a soul stayed behind. This year, no one was taking any chances.

All day the Rebbe sat, his faithful gabbai at his door, and received kvitlach. Soon his desk was covered with folded pieces of paper and copper coins. There were those who tried to bargain with the gabbai, but the Rebbe's instructions had been clear: no exceptions. Around mid-day, a woman approached the gabbai and begged for an exemption. "I am a poor widow with an only child, without a single groschen in my purse. How can I pay four groschen so that my child and I may be inscribed in the book of life? Please, have mercy on me and my fatherless child, and allow me to add our names to the Rebbe's list. I promise to pay the entire sum as soon as I have the money."

"What can I do?" said the gabbai. "The Rebbe has told me that there are to be no exceptions."

"Let me ask the Rebbe," said the widow. "Certainly he will not turn me down."

The gabbai relented, but the Rebbe was unyielding. "I'm sorry," he said to the woman, "but these are the rules. Two groschen per name." The widow left, heartbroken, but resolved to attain a year of life for herself and her child. One way or another, she would get the money. Hours passed. The last of the petitioners had already left, and the hour of Kol Nidrei, the solemn prayer which opens the Yom Kippur service, was fast approaching. The gabbai had cleared the table, counting the coins and locking them away, and packing the kvitlach in the special parcels which the Rebbe would keep with him during his prayers. Everyone was already in the synagogue, garbed in their snow-white kittelen and wrapped in their talitot, awaiting the Rebbe. Still Rabbi Levi Yitzchak lingered, his eyes casting expectant glances at the window.

Then, a small, shawled figure was seen hurrying along the deserted street. It was the widow, a folded piece of paper and a few coins in her hand. "Thank G-d the Rebbe is still home," she cried. "Here is my kvitel, Rebbe. Please pray for me and for my only child that we may be inscribed in the book of life."

"But you only have two groschen here," protested Rabbi Levi Yitzchak, peering at the coppers she had placed on the table. "So you can only write one name in your kvitel."

"Holy Rebbe," cried the woman, "I have been running about all day, borrowing from everyone that I know. This is all I was able to come up with. Please pray for us both! I promise to pay the rest within a week."

"I'm sorry," insisted the Rebbe, "the price is two groschen per name. Which name do you want in your kvitel?"

With trembling fingers the woman took her kvitel and crossed out her own name. "Pray for my Shloimeh'leh, Rebbe," she said, her eyes brimming with tears, "that he should have a year of life, health and happiness." Upon hearing these words, the Rebbe's eyes came alive with a fiery light. Grasping the widow's two groschen in one fist, and her kvitel in the other, he raised them triumphantly to heaven and cried: "Father in Heaven! Look! Look

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what a mortal mother is prepared to do for her child! And You---shall it be health and happiness?!" "Come," said Rabbi Levi Yitzchak to his gabbai said, G-d forbid, that You are less a parent to Your children?! Can You look and to the widow, "let us go to Kol Nidrei."(www.chadadonline.com) this woman in the eye and refuse to grant Your own children a year of life,

A RESUME OF THE FIFTH METHOD: H - HATZNEI'A..., "WALK DISCREETLY WITH YOUR G-D," (1). ONE MUST TAKE CARE NOT TO BE CONSPICUOUS OR OSTENTATIOUS IN THE SLIGHTEST. IT IS SAID "MAN SHOULD ALWAYS BE ARTFUL IN PIETY." (2) THE ARTFULNESS LIES IN SEEING THAT HIS PIETY NOT BE NOTICED AT ALL. WE KNOW THAT A NUMBER OF THE EARLY CHASSIDIM CONCEALED THEIR TRUE SELVES, AND WHEN DISCOVERED WERE SINCERELY DISTRESSED. THIS IS THE AVODA OF TESHUVA THAT COMES FROM HATZNEI'A LECHET, BEING DISCREET (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM TISHREI 8).

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Talk is powerful. Speak bad about someone and you expose all the ugliness in him, in yourself and in whoever happens to be paying attention. Once exposed, the scar begins to fester and all are hurt.

Speak good about the same person, and the inner good within him, within you and within all who participate begins to shine.

"Bringing Heaven Down to Earth"