

פרשת נצבים begins with the establishment of the covenant between Gd and the generation about to enter the Land of Israel and subsequent generations of the Jewish People. אתם נצבים היום כולכם לפני ד' אלקיכם. The Torah describes the punishment of the individual who willfully abrogates the covenant and the subsequent destruction of the land that will ensue with widespread violation of the law and dereliction of observance. The Torah records a future conversation regarding these events and the magnitude of the destruction. People will inquire as to the cause of this destruction. The Torah then foretells the return to Gd in subsequent years and how Gd will gather all the exiles.

The proximity of the reading of פרשת נצבים to the Slichot and ימים נוראים periods reinforces the concept of repentance as we approach the days of judgement. The concept of בחירה, choice and free will to obey Gd, is clearly mentioned in the Parsha as we are commanded to choose life and the ways of Gd. However there is more to this connection than the statement of ובהרת בחיים.

The obligation to repent during this period is expressed in the verse לפני ד' תטהרו, before Gd you shall be purified. What does purification require and entail? The 3 festivals are unique in that they require us to appear before Gd. שלש פעמים בשנה. יראה כל זכורך לפני ד' אלקיך. What does it mean to be לפני ד', before Gd?

The Gemara (ראש השנה יז:ב) explains that Hashem presented Moshe with the 13 attributes, the formula to recite when they are in crisis. Gd promises to forgive their sins when they recite the 13 Attributes. The Gemara says that the name of Gd, Hashem Hashem, represents two distinct attributes among the 13. The first is Gd's relationship with man before sin, לפני החטא or קודם, and the second Hashem refers to Gd accepting the sinner after sin and repentance. We must understand the distinction between these aspects of Hashem. How can the same attribute apply to both situations, before and after sin?

The Gemara (ראש השנה יז:ב) notes in the name of Rav Huna that there are two parts to the verse צדיק ד' בכל דרכיו וחסיד בכל מעשיו. The first refers to Gd acting through righteousness and the strict interpretation of the law. The second part of the verse refers to Gd who goes above and beyond the letter of the law, לפנים משורת הדין, to allow those who violated His law to continue to exist. Strict interpretation of the law would necessitate administration of swift and painful justice. Hashem through His Kindness, Chesed, allows us to continue. The role of the Jew is to attempt as much as possible to come close to Gd. As the Torah says אתם נצבים היום לפני ד' אלקיכם. On this day and at this point in history, you are pure of sin. You truly find yourselves in a state of לפני ד' אלקיכם. You have attained a connection with the attribute of Hashem that represents the relationship before sin. This is Gd who interacts with the world through צדק, righteousness.

The Jews reached that level prior to crossing the Jordan. Hashem informed them that in My presence you are close to Me, you are לפני ד' אלקיכם. This is the name Hashem that is the first of the 13 attributes. It represents Hashem that is לפני ההטא, Hashem who positions Himself כביכול, between man and sin, saying if you want to sin you will have to go through Me. כי בשרירות לבי אלך. Such a person loses the לפני ד' aspect, as his sin distances him from Gd. Such brazen transgression of the commandments and the law, will result in the Jew being cast out of his land, creating the enduring impression of destruction associated with their exile. The Torah describes a strange conversation. At first glance, we can interpret that In the future, the nations of the world will marvel at the desolation of the land that continued so long. They will ask “what caused such calamity and destruction”? However another interpretation is that the remnants of the Jewish People themselves will ask this question. They will answer their question with the realization that their rejection of Gd and His Torah was the cause of their exile and destruction of the land. That question and response will mark הרהור תשובה, the initial spark of repentance that will gnaw at them, a hidden internal voice urging them to repent and return to Gd. The Torah tells us that ultimately we will reach the level of עד ד' אלקיך, we will return to Gd, and He will hear our voices and gather in all the exiles. We have only to initiate the process; Gd will complete it. When we reach the stage of עד ד' אלקיך we will have come full circle: we started out לפני ד' אלקיכם and ultimately we found our way back, עד ד' אלקיך.

The word תשובה, repentance, is complex. It is derived from לשוב, to return. תשובה is not derived from the Hebrew בנין קל, the simple form of the verb to return. The simple idea of return is based on linear travel. One travels from point A to point B and then returns by retracing his steps. תשובה is not quite the same. The Prophet Samuel used to leave his home to travel across the land, however he would return to his home, his origin, afterwards. Samuel did not simply go from point A to point B. Inherent in every step was his goal to return home. The Navi says וסבב, circular, not linear movement. Each step along the way, no matter where it took him, included the purpose to ultimately return home. Personal תשובה implies that we must take a circular path to Gd as well. We change along the way, we learn from our mistakes but the goal is to get back to the origin, to find ourselves 'לפני ד'. ושבת. עד ד' אלקיך.

However, sin itself creates a distance between us and Gd. Sin is associated with defilement, טומאה, it creates a repulsive blemish on the soul that cannot be ignored. The human being is repulsed by a corpse, which is the highest level of defilement, טומאה. Man attempts to distance himself as much as possible from a corpse, the defiling object. A similar reaction occurs between Gd and sinful man. The act of sin defiles man, causing Gd to move away from the sinner. Which aspect of Hashem becomes distant? The first attribute of Hashem, expressing צדק, responds to the defilement by separating from man.

How does man bridge this distance? How can he find himself again 'לפני ד', to renew the relationship? The second attribute of Hashem now comes into focus. Gd says that we must not profane His name השוכן אתם בתוך טומאותם. The second attribute of Hashem is the שכינה, the divine countenance that dwells with us in exile and in sin. Gd is willing to vent His anger on the sticks and stones of His Temple and to lay waste to the land instead of destroying the Jewish People who defiled the land. Gd is willing to defile Himself כביכול, and accompany us in our exile and sin because He knows that ultimately we will repent and return. As Rambam says, there is a promise that at the end of days the Jews will repent (הלכות תשובה ז:ה). Gd

is willing to grab onto us and support us in our attempt to return, provided we take the first small step.

What must we do to restore that relationship? How do we take that first step? The concept of *הרהור תשובה* tells us that we must simply take the first step to acknowledge our indiscretions and realize what we did and what we lost. After that we will be driven to return completely to Gd and once again find ourselves 'לפני ד'. Gemara says (קדושין מט:ב) betrothal conditioned on the individual being righteous is valid even if the individual was completely wicked his entire life. Perhaps he contemplated repentance at the time that he stipulated the condition as part of the betrothal. How could such an individual pivot his status in an instant? We see from here the power of repentance and *הרהור תשובה*.

The answer provided by the Jews in *פרשת נצבים* is not so much intended for the nations who may have inquired as to the extended desolation of the land. Its intended audience is the Jewish People themselves. The question regarding what caused such great destruction starts to gnaw at them, the statement is accompanied by a self-assessment and realization that their ancestors truly sinned and sank to such depths that led to the destruction of the land. They realize that they are continuing the ways of the previous generations that caused the destruction. They have not changed their ways at all! They begin to think about resetting their relationship with Hashem, to find the way back, עד ד' אלקיך, to again find themselves 'לפני ד'. This is the foundation of *הרהור תשובה*. It applies to the individual and the community as well.

Here we find the second of the 13 attributes, Hashem who is extant after sin. This is the aspect of Hashem that shows *חסד*, kindness in His willingness to grant us the leeway required to recognize and repent our sin and return to Him. This is Hashem who takes that spark of Teshuva and helps us build it into a full reconciliation allowing us to complete the circle and return 'לפני ד'. The power of *הרהור תשובה*, noted above, is amazing. Rambam rules (הלכות עדות יב:ג) that an established sinner

must present verification that he has indeed mended his ways. Witnesses should be brought to verify his change of heart. In cases where there are no witnesses, we require some other form of corroboration that the individual has changed. For example, a usurer must demonstrate that he has torn up his contracts that require interest. In other words, simply saying “I have changed” is not enough to accept one as a repentant man and reestablish trustworthiness as an acceptable witness.

If proof of repentance is required, why should **הרהור תשובה** work in the case of betrothing a woman? Rambam notes the requirement for corroboration of status (הלכות תשובה פרק ב) where he says that the repentant person must ask the **יודע** תעלומות, Gd who knows all, including those things that are hidden such as the thoughts of man, to testify on his behalf that he has indeed changed his ways. There can be no better character witness than Gd! After this, Rambam (Chapter 7) notes that how great is the power of repentance. Yesterday this individual was reviled, rejected, the Mitzvot he performed were rejected. And now after Teshuva he is beloved, brought close to Hashem, his Mitzvot are anticipated and welcome. He has successfully brought himself back to the status of Lifnay Hashem through Teshuva. All of this began with just the spark of a repentant thought. **הרהור תשובה** is enough to change his status from that of a **רשע** to a **צדיק**. Is he forgiven completely? No. The individual still has a long way to go; complete Teshuva is a long and often complicated process. However, the **שם גבורא**, the status of the individual, can be changed so that he is no longer a **רשע**, but instead a **צדיק**. It is the second attribute of Hashem, the **שכינה** that dwells with man in the depths of his sin and defilement, constantly coaxing him to return, that allows this transformation to take place.

Perhaps we can use this idea of Hashem before and after man sins to explain an interesting aspect of our Slichot, penitential prayers. In Slichot, we have two distinct formulations to introduce the 13 attributes. The first instance of the 13 attributes is preceded by **קל ארך אפיים**, while subsequent instances are preceded by **קל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים**. Why not use a consistent formulation in all cases? If we examine the text of both formulations we will notice that **קל ארך אפיים** does not mention anything about sin. It just notes that the 13 Attributes are the vehicle we

use to approach Gd. In this formulation we acknowledge the attribute of **ד' לפני** prior to sin. We were instructed to be **פניך נקדם, לפני ד'** through these 13 attributes. We omit mention of sin or the depths that we have reached, as the first attribute recognizes that Hashem is righteous, **צדק**, and we approach Him based on our acceptance of His judgement. We note that even though we say **צדיק ד' בכל דרכיו**, we also rely on the second half of the verse, **והסיד בכל מעשיו**, **חסד** is included in these attributes. Subsequent instances of the 13 Attributes revolve around man that has sinned, and we approach Gd who is **מתנהג בחסידות**, Who goes above and beyond, Who forgives the rebellious sinner. This is the second attribute of Hashem, the One that dwells with the sinner and takes him back. Perhaps this is why we recite **אשרי** prior to Slichot as it contains this verse that we rely on to request the mercy of Hashem who accepts the prayers of the sinner just as He accepts those of the righteous. We therefore appeal to Hashem prior to sin where we find ourselves **לפני ד'** and Hashem after the sin, where we try to return to our original state despite all our transgressions.

In **תפלה נעילה**, we recite two formulations of confession, **וידוי**. The first is **אתה נותן יד**, You extend a hand to rebellious sinners, and Your hand is extended to accept those that return. The second formulation begins with **אתה הבדלת אנוש מראש**, You separated man from the rest of creation as part of Your master plan. Why do we need both formulations? The first refers to our relationship with Hashem according to **קל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים**, we are a rebellious group of sinners who descended to the depths of sin and defilement. All we can rely upon Is Your second attribute of Hashem, the one that remains with man in the midst of his defilement, who extends a hand that we can grab on and lift ourselves from the depths. The second formulation represents the first attribute of Hashem manifested through **צדק**. You had a divine mission for man, which unfortunately he has not lived up to. We ask You to extend that helping hand to us as well. At **נעילה**, after a full day of acknowledging our inequities, we begin with the formulation admitting we are sinners, the second Hashem attribute, We pray that through this day of Yom Kippur we have changed and can find ourselves **לפני ד'**, so we can once again be that unique part of creation selected for a higher purpose and mission. We need Gd's help for both.

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