

Afterthoughts

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T'SHUVA

- AN EMOTIONAL

RETURN

Much has been said about T'shuva and I didn't think there was much to be added that would increase my understanding of it. After all, it is relatively simple; some soul-searching, be honest in that effort, see what needs correcting and work on it. This is obviously not the halachic formula which requires specific steps. But the basic idea is fairly simple, however, to do it, is not. Then I read something that deepened and enhanced my understanding of the process.

R. Meir Tzvi Gruzman (Al HaMo'adim; p.262-266) focuses on the use of the verb 'lashuv' in Megillat Rut. Although the word 'lashuv' means to return, he shows how it can imply more. It implies an emotional connection. Otherwise, the verb 'lalechet' or 'lavo' could be used. This can be seen, for example, in the story of Noach and the sending out of the birds to determine if it was possible to leave the ark yet. When he sends out the raven, it goes out 'yatzo vashov' (Noach 8:7); when he sends the dove out the first time, 'vatashav eilav' (8:9); the second time he sends her, she returns with an olive leaf in her

beak 'vatavo eilav' (8:11); and finally, she doesn't return 'v'lo yasfa shov eilav od' (8:12). When there was still water covering the earth, the verb used to describe their return to the ark was shav - this was their only home, they were attached to it. However, when the dove returns with an olive leaf, she is no longer "drawn" to the ark and the verb used is vatavo - it describes her action but it was different than before. When, finally, the dove finds a resting place, she no longer had any connection to the ark and she didn't shov to it.

Similarly, in Devarim (20: 20-27), when the shotrim free some fighters from going to war: a man who hasn't made a chanukat habayit yet; one who hasn't enjoyed the fruits of his vineyard yet; one who is engaged but not yet married; even one who is simply fearful, the terminology used in all of these cases is 'yelech v'yashov' - should return home. Not just return but the word indicates a clear connection, an emotional attachment to something. The idea could just as easily have been expressed with the one word 'vayelech' but there is a reason that it is said along with 'v'yashov'.

The use of the word in this connotation is especially noticeable in Megillat Rut in the first perek. Naomi decides to return to Israel with the phrase 'vatashav misdei Moav'.

When used in this context (shav me...) it means that the emotional tie is no longer there. The fact that the word 'lashuv' is used to describe how all three women set out for Israel, implies that within these two Moabite women, there existed, at this point, some connection or desire for this new land. During their walk together, a significant change had apparently occurred in the attitude of the two women. And when Naomi tries to convince them to return to the home of their parents, she doesn't only say 'lechna', she says 'lechna shovna' - recognizing that there is this attachment to home. When they refuse her suggestion, they reaffirm their feelings about this new destination by saying 'ki itach nashuv' rather than saying 'nelech'. When Naomi repeats her suggestion, she says 'shovna' twice more but, interestingly enough, she says 'lama telachna imi' - choosing to use the verb lalechet as opposed to lashuv. Is it possible, perhaps, that Naomi doesn't really believe they could feel that strongly, but rather are only "going" with her? Orpah leaves, as Naomi suggested, 'shava yevimtech' - to return to the place that really calls to her. The verb shov is used 11 times in this perek. It has to mean more than simply "return".

How does this affect my understanding of T'shuva? It puts it on a deeper personal level. The words

of the Torah itself show this. We are told in Nitzavim (30: 11,14) "ki hamitzva hazot...lo niflait mimcha v'lo rechoka hi... ki karov eilecha hadavar m'od, b'ficha uvil'vav'cha..." {For this commandment that I command you today it is not hidden from you and it is not distant...rather, the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart to perform it}. The Ramban as well as the Kli Yakar identify the 'mitzva' being referred to as T'shuva. It is 'b'ficha' = viduy; ub'l'vavcha = charata (regret).

T'shuva is so much a part of us that we can't really escape it. There are few people (if any) in this world who have never felt guilt. Why? Because we are simply uncomfortable with having done wrong and want to be rid of the feeling. Therefore, wanting to do T'shuva is something we are born with.

The Gemara (Avoda Zara 17a) tells of Elazar ben Durdaya who had indulged in all sorts of illicit behavior and he finally wanted to do T'shuva. He realized he couldn't rely on any help from outside (mountains and valleys; heaven and earth; sun and moon) and he finally understood that it was all up to him. He then placed his head between his knees and cried until his neshama left him, at which point he was accepted into Olam HaBa. The Ben Ish Chai explains his actions: he realized at that moment that he was

like a fetus in his mother's womb. Placed in a fetal position, without any power to raise his head or to have the audacity to lift his face toward Gd. Then, in his heart, he simply begged Gd, admitting that he was like an infant, totally powerless, and all he wanted to do was T'shuva. The position of a fetus in-utero illustrates the closest attachment one can have and here that represents the desire to "return" to what he was supposed to be.

Indeed, this call, this magnetic pull is within each of us. It is really what we want to do, even though it isn't easy. Nothing worthwhile ever is. And this time of the year was gifted to us by Gd, to make it easier. We should take advantage of the opportunity. 🌸