



AD or EID?

Shabbat Shuva- 22 p'sukim

Hoshei'a 14:2-10 and Yoel 2:15-27

HA'AZINU HASHAMAYIM VA'ADABEIRA, V'TISHMA HA'ARETZ IMREI FI.

This week's parasha begins with Moshe Rabbeinu calling on the heaven and earth to witness (and testify to) the truth of the words he will recite during this "Shirat Moshe", Moshe's Song. These opening words echo that which Moshe said at the closing of the last parasha (perek 31), that this song will serve as a witness of the inevitable punishments that would befall them were they to abandon Hashem. Interestingly, at the end of parashat Nitzavim (perek 30), Moshe again calls upon the heaven and earth to stand as witnesses to his plea to Israel to choose good and life over evil and death.

I chose to begin this explanation of the Shabbat Shuva haftara by discussing the parasha because the P'sikta (a collection of midrashim on

the Torah and the haftarot, composed around 845CE), makes a puzzling comment about the opening pasuk of the haftara. The pasuk from Sefer Hoshea states: SHUVA YISRAEL AD HASHEM E'LOKECHA, that Israel should return to Hashem, while the P'sikta argues that the pasuk should properly be read as SHUVA YISRA'EL EID HASHEM E'LOKECHA - that Hashem is a witness for Israel!

HaRav Soloveitchik, in one of his essays (found in "On Repentance"), sees this somewhat curious statement of the P'sikta as a support to the view of the Rambam. Rambam declares (Hilchot T'shuva 2;2) that true repentance is achieved when the sinner resolves in his heart never again to repeat the sin, and He who knows all that is hidden can indeed testify that this person will never again repeat that sin.

The Rav is quite troubled by this comment. Is it not a condition that the remorseful sinner will find almost impossible to fulfill? How can this be the demand of G-d on one who sincerely desires to do T'shuva? And, if Hashem will testify that the sinner will never again sin - then what happens to the person's freedom to choose how to act?

Rav Soloveitchik, therefore, turns to the Lechem Mishneh's explanation of the Rambam's words. The term YA-ID that is used does not mean that G-d

will testify that the sinner will never again sin throughout his life. Rather, the word YA-ID can also be understood to mean to designate one as a witness, something Moshe Rabbeinu himself does at the end of the last parasha when he calls upon heaven and earth to be witnesses, to testify for Israel in the future. The Rambam's meaning, therefore, is that the sinner himself designated Hashem to witness how sincere and whole-hearted is his intention to repent and not to sin.

During this time of year, we stand before Hashem hoping to be granted a positive and successful future. Indeed, we did the same last year, as well. And yet, for many of us - and perhaps for most of the Jewish world - this past year was not what we had wished it would be. And, as a result, we approach the unknown future hardly knowing what prayers might be most effective and how to G-d to best reach out to Hashem.

For this reason, I would suggest that we heed the opening words of our haftara and realize that... SHUVA YISRA'EL EID..., our tefillot should be based upon the knowledge that Hashem is listening and witnessing how sincere our prayers are. We must understand that WHAT we pray for is less important than HOW we pray. A sincere tefilla becomes an impactful experience that reaches the heavenly

throne, and, equally important, affects our very behavior throughout the year.

And so, do not worry if we forget to pray for a specific something or someone. We simply need to pray deeply to Hashem and allow Him to "fill in the blanks" for us all.

After all, when He witnesses that kind of tefilla how can He fail to respond positively? ✨