

סלח לנו אבינו

A clue to the real meaning of **שמונה עשרה** may lie hidden within the words **סלח לנו** and **אבינו** which constitute part of the **ברכה** of **סלח לנו**. The origin of the words **סלח לנו** can be traced to a **פסוק** that is found at the end of the story of the **מרגלים** in **פרשת שלח**:

במדבר פרק יד'-יט'- **סלח נא לעון העם הזה כגדל הסדך וכאשר נשאתה לעם הזה ממצרים ועד הנה: כ'- ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך; כא'- ואולם חי אני וימלא כבוד ה' את כל הארץ; כב'- כי כל האנשים הראים את כבדי ואת אתתי אשר עשיתי במצרים ובמדבר וינסו אתי זה עשר פעמים ולא שמעו בקולי; כג'- אם יראו את הארץ אשר נשבעתי לאבתם וכל מנאצי לא יראוה.**

In those **פסוקים** we learn from the words: **סלחתי כדברך** that the **רבונו של עולם** forgave the generation that lost hope after hearing the negative reports of the **מרגלים**. However, the forgiveness came with a condition; that a punishment be exacted. The **רבונו של עולם** decreed that the Jews spend forty (40) years in the desert and that those who were part of that generation die in the desert. The **חטא המרגלים** is a lesson that the **רבונו של עולם** forgives but that a punishment must be paid. The **ברכה** of **סלח לנו** is a reminder that we can offer our **תפלה** as a **כפרה** as we ask for **סליחה** from the **רבונו של עולם** so that our **תפלה** is accepted as a substitute for the requirement that we experience a punishment.

The same point is made by Rabbi Shaar Yashuv Cohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa, in an excerpt from his book: **שי כהן** that was included in last week's newsletter.

התשובה השלימה, . . . בה מתחיל עם "החרטה בלב", ונמשך דרך "היודוי", אל "הקבלה להבא" - ומגיע לסופו, עם ביצוע "הכפרה", בדרך הקרבן, התפילה, או חלילה, היסורים. לעתים, אין הכפרה מסתיימת ללא קבלת העונש ואף המיתה. רק בחסדי הבורא, אב-הרחמים, נפטר האדם מעונשן של יסורים ומיתה - ומתכפרים לו עוונותיו בדרכים אחרות.

At the time of the **בית המקדש**, a **קרבן** was the customary substitute for the need to undergo punishment. In our day, we offer **תפלה** as a similar **כפרה**.

This concept may be the driving force behind the fact that after **כל נדרי** on **יום כיפור** we close with the very same **פסוק**: **ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך**. We begin our **תפילות** on **יום כיפור** with a reminder that it is not enough on **יום כיפור** to ask for **סליחה**. We must also offer our **תפילות** as a **כפרה** in order to avoid a punishment. Put in contemporary terms, we offer to do community service rather than to do jail time.

תפלה is not the only form of כפרה that we can offer:

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת תענית פרק ב' דף סה' טור ב' /ה"א-אמר רבי לעזר: שלשה דברים מבטלין את הגזירה קשה, ואילו הן: תפילה, וצדקה ותשובה. ושלשתן בפסוק אחד: ויכנעו עמי אשר נקרא שמי עליהם ויתפללו, זו תפילה; ויבקשו פני, זו צדקה, כמה דאת אמר אני בצדק אחזה פניך. וישבו מדרכיהם הרעים זו תשובה, אם עשו כן מה כתיב תמן ואני אשמע השמים ואסלה לחטאתם וארפא את ארצם.

It appears that this גמרא is the source that the פייטן used to coin one of the most well known phrases of the ימים נוראים liturgy:

ותפלה וצדקה ותשובה מעבירין את רע הגזירה.

That the סליחה that we are requesting in the ברכה of סלח לנו is that the רבנו של עולם accept our תפלה as a כפרה and that we be spared affliction or death can also be seen by the use of the words: מלכינו and אבינו in the ברכה.

ספר אבודרהם שמונה עשרה ד"ה סלח לנו-סלח לנו אבינו כי חטאנו על שם (מ"א ה, ג) וסלחת לעמך אשר חטאו לך. מחול לנו מלכנו כי פשענו, על שם (שם) ולכל פשעיהם אשר פשעו בך. וסמך סליחה וחטא לאב ומחילה ופשע למלך מפני שכל זדונות שעושה הבן דומות לפני האב כשגגות ונקלים יהיו בעיניו לסלחם כמו שחטא נקל מפשע. ולפני המלך דומות שגגות העם כזדונות כמו שנאמר (משלי כט, ד) מלך במשפט יעמיד ארץ ולכן יש לומר לו כי פשענו לפי שפשע גדול מהחטא. ומחילה יש לבקש מכל אדם המקפיד ומדקדק על חבירו או על עבדו שימחול לו עלבוננו, אבל אין לומר שיסלח לו עלבוננו. ולכן יש לומר לאב שאינו מקפיד ומדקדק כל כך סלח לנו כלומר שאף הקפדה מועטת לא תשאר. ויש מפרשים סלח לנו אבינו אע"פ שחטאנו מחול לנו מלכנו אע"פ שפשענו. כי א-ל טוב וסלח אתה על שם (תה' פו, ה) כי אתה ה' טוב וסלח. בא"י חנון שנאמר (תה' קמה, ה) חנון ורחום ה'. המרבה לסלוח שנאמר (ישעיה נה, ז) ואל אלקינו כי ירבה לסלוח.

Because of the important role that the word אבינו plays in determining whether the סליחה that we obtain from רבנו של עולם includes a punishment, we can further conclude that included that word אבינו first in the ברכה of סלח לנו and then in the ברכה of השיבנו. Further proof for that position can be deduced from the fact that an early version of שמונה עשרה, one that represents מנהג ארץ ישראל, includes the word: אבינו in the ברכה of סלח לנו but not in the ברכה of השיבנו:

השיבנו ה' אליך ונשובה חדש ימינו כקדם. ברוך אתה ה' רוצה בתשובה.
סלח לנו אבינו כי חטאנו מחול לנו והעבר על פשעינו כי רבים . . . רחמיה. ברוך אתה ה'
המרבה לסלוח.

SUPPLEMENT

In order to properly understand the first three of the middle ברכות of שמונה עשרה, we need to distinguish three concepts: תשובה, סליחה, and כפרה. The following article provides some guidance in that effort. In his book, The Yom Kippur Anthology, Philip Goodman quotes from portions of an article written by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, זצ"ל, (the "Rav")- "Sacred and Profane," *Hazedek*, vol. 2, no. 2/3 (May-June, 1945), pp. 4-20; reprinted, in a slightly revised version, in *Gesher*, Vol. 3, no. I (June, 1966), pp. 5-29.

THE JEWISH CONCEPT OF TESHUVAH

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The traditional view is that the teshuvah idea is penitence. For the Christian theologian teshuvah is a transcendent act dependent upon the grace of God who is all-merciful and benevolent. The erasure of man's sins is, from the rational standpoint, incomprehensible. Only the supernatural, miraculous intercession of God on behalf of the sinner may effectuate this cleansing. The task of the sinner is to repent, to mortify himself, to practice castigation, to cry and implore for divine mercy and pity. The convert, according to this concept, is a passive, pitiful creature who begs for and attains divine grace.

The halakhic interpretation of teshuvah differentiates between penitence and purification -- kapparah and taharah (catharsis). Kapparah, penitence and absolution, is similar, in effect, to the universal concept of conversion, in toto. It is not a psychological phenomenon but a theological one, transcendent and nonrational. To alter the past is an act which denies the laws of causality and regulation in man's life.

But the halakhic concept of teshuvah contains yet another element: taharah, purification. This concept is not one that predicates the removal of sin but its exploitation. The taharah idea is, rather, to change the vectorial force of sin, its direction and destination. While the sinner of the first category attempts to forget his sin and beseeches God to erase it, the Jewish repentant strives to "remember" his sin. He strives to convert his sin into a spiritual springboard for increased inspiration and evaluation. This act is not supernatural but psychological. It conveys one law in mental causality; although a cause is given, the effect need not equal the cause. The effect need not be predetermined. Man himself may determine the vectorial character of the effect and give it direction and destination....

The halakhic concept of teshuvah vouchsafes us the revelation that there are new values accessible to man from the springboard of sin, and that in attaining them the spirit of man can and does not only conquer sin but exploits it as a constructive creative force.

Taharah does not entail the act of reinstating man into a former status of repeating the past, in copying previous good deeds and performances. It must activate one, not alone to return to a

former status of innocence and righteousness (for then the contamination itself serves no purpose, or telos, but is superfluous), but must convert and elevate one to a new stage. It must energize an ever-ascending spiral in man's spiritual state....

In Jabneh, on the first Yom Kippur in exile, the Jews were left without the Temple and its ceremonial rites requisite for atonement, kapparah. The Jewish community was perplexed and disconsolate. They could not imagine that the beautiful ideals incarnated in the symbols of the day could be realized and effectuated without the performance of the high priest, without the ceremonial of the two kids, without the ceremony in the holy of holies, and without the public confession and sacrifices. They could not see how to dispense with all the glory and pomp which used to be displayed in the Temple on the Day of Atonement. The act of teshuvah and kapparah was closely associated in their minds with all these external and ceremonial acts. How can a Jew attain absolution and dispensation before God without the intercession and worship-forms of the high priest? It seemed as if, in the smoke of the destroyed Temple, the Jewish version of teshuvah and Yom Kippur had also disappeared.

Then rose Rabbi Akiva, the majestic, unswerving "optimist," and he said: There is no need for such mournfulness and helplessness. Indeed, we have been bereft of the Temple and its divine dispensation of grace for the atonement of sin. But we have lost only kapparah, atonement and penitence, but not taharah, purification. Besides kapparah we still possess a lofty idea, far superior to absolution. Indeed, we have been bereft of the ceremonies and sacrifices that are relevant to the transcendent act of the erasure of sin by supernatural grace and incomprehensible divine benevolence that alter the past and disrupt the causal chain. The attainment of kapparah will not be as complete and perfect now as it was when the cult worship acts of the high priest brought man into contact with transcendent and incomprehensible divinity. But we Jews have brought another message of teshuvah to man, that of taharah. There is nothing transcendent, miraculous, or nonrational about taharah. It rests, not without, but within causality. It is the discovery of a causal principle in spiritual and mental life -that the conflict created in a negative A may give birth to a positive B, by the rule of contrast.

The act of taharah, in which sin is not eradicated but, on the contrary, becomes part of my ego and is arrested and retained in its negative emergence and corruptive powers, awakens a creative force that shapes a new and loftier personality. There is no place here for worship or sacrifice. The performance of taharah is not directed at a transcendent divinity but at God, as our Father, Companion, and intimate Counselor who does not require any mysterious cult ceremonies or sacrifices. This taharah is based on an intimate relationship between man and God, creature and Creator, son and Father. And this communion of God-man has not been affected by the loss of outward ceremonial rites.

When man stumbles and falls, becomes contaminated with sin, he should not despair nor resign himself; but he should cultivate hope, not only for regaining but "gaining" by his experience new visions and vistas. Our ideal is not repetition but re-creation on a higher level. And teshuvah contains hope and purification. Such an idea of teshuvah is not limited to any Temple or act of worship. All one requires is "before God," striving toward God.

TRANSLATION OF SOURCES

19. **במדבר פרק יד'-יט'** Pardon, I beseech you, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your mercy, and as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now. 20. And the Lord said, I have pardoned according to your word; 21. But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord. 22. Because all those men which have seen My glory, and My miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted Me now these ten times, and have not listened to my voice; 23. Surely they shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of them who provoked Me see it.

Rebbi said to Ezer: Three things have the effect of annulling a difficult decree and these are them: prayer, charity and Teshuvah. The power that each of these three have is derived from one verse: (Chronicles II, 7, 14) *If My people, who are called by My name, shall humble themselves, and pray*: this represents prayer; *and seek my face*: this represents charity as it is written elsewhere (Tehillim 17, 15): *As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness, and turn from their wicked ways*; what does it then say? *Then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land*.

The words: **ספר אבודרהם שמונה עשרה ד"ה סלה לנו** are based on (Kings I, 8, 50) and You will forgive Your nation which has sinned against You. Michol Lanu Malkeinu Ki Phashanu is based on (ibid.) and all their grievous sins that they committed against You. Chazal joined together the request for forgiveness with a description of G-d as a father and the request for Micheila and grievous sin to a description of G-d as a king because the mistakes made by a son appear to be innocent to a father and they appear easy for him to forgive in the same way that a minor sin compares to a major sin. But to a King even innocent mistakes appears like intentional acts as it is written: (Proverbs 29, 4) A King maintains his rule through justice. As a result we use the description King concerning grievous sins. It is appropriate to ask Mechila from anyone who is careful and watches all that his friend does or who watches what his worker does and he should pardon his humiliation but it is not appropriate to ask that he should forgive his humiliation. That is why it is appropriate to use the word: salach concerning a father who does not watch so carefully over his sons actions so it is fitting that even a small memory of the mistake does not linger. There are others who explain the use of the two expressions of forgiveness as follows: forgive us our Father even though we have sinned; forgive us our King even though we have made grievous sins. The words: Ki Ail Tov V'Salach are based on the verse: (Tehillim 86,5): Because You G-d are good and like to forgive. Baruch Ata Hashem Chanun based on the verse: (Tehillim 145, 8) The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion. Ha'Marbeh Lislo'Ach as it is written (Isaiah 55, 7) And to our G-d because He is full of forgiveness.