

Repairing the Gaps

Haftorat Shabbat Shuvah

Hoshea 14:1-10

This Haftorah of Repentance teach us about repairing the gap between our head and the rest of our being, between Hashem's Infinite Light and His revelation in the world. Read on to learn about the Feminine characteristic of Teshuvah (repentance).

Giving Birth to the Coming Year

During the ten days of Repentance we read the special *haftorah* about *teshuvah* from the book of Hoshea. "Return, O Israel, to Hashem your G-d, for you have fallen because of your sin" (*Hoshea 14:2*). The Ten Days of Repentance give birth to the entire year and become the incubating period for all our actions, speech and thoughts throughout the year. Therefore, at this time we are called to return to Hashem, and become our very best. The closeness with Hashem which we will be able to attain now, will influence our spiritual level during every day of the upcoming year. Just as a birthing mother may benefit from a labor-coach, so is it recommended during this time, to seek out our Rabbis and mentors for advice and spiritual tune up.

Returning the *Heh*

The word for repentance: "*Teshuvah*" – תשובה can be understood to mean תשוב-ה "*teshuv-heh*" – return the *heh* in Hashem's four lettered Name consisting of the Hebrew letters, *yud*, *heh* and *vav* and *heh*. Each of the Ten *Sefirot* (manifestations of Hashem's light in the world) corresponds to one of the letters in this Holy Name. The *yud* corresponds to the *sefirah* called *Chochmah* (Wisdom), while the first *heh* corresponds to *Binah* (Analytic Insight). The *vav* is associated with the six middle *sefirot* from *Chesed* (Kindness) to *Yesod* (Foundation), while the final *heh* corresponds to *Malchut* (Royalty). According to Arizal, a sin separates between the final *heh* and the remaining three letters in Hashem's name. This can be remedied by *teshuvah*, which causes the *heh* to return to its rightful place (*Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Chapter 21*).

Healing the Gap between Heaven and Earth

The separation of the lower *heh* of Hashem's Name is manifested by a separation between the spiritual and the physical, our good intentions and our holy actions. The main *raison d'être* of Amalek, the arch enemy of Israel, is to separate between Heaven and Earth between Hashem and the world. The Christians, likewise, separate between spirituality and physicality. They promulgate monkhood and celibacy to be the highest religious goal. As we are moving deeper into the Messianic Era, the gap between Heaven and Earth is gradually being healed. For example, in our time we experience a great awakening regarding mindful eating. While being engaged in the most physical of all actions, a person must aspire to connect with Hashem, his spiritual source. According to the Rebbe of Biala, through holy eating a person may achieve greater spiritual rectifications than through *tefilah* (prayer) (*A Person's Table Atones, Chapter 1, Page 7*). Perhaps, the reason for this is that through connecting the physical with the spiritual we repair the breach between the *heh* in Hashem's name and the rest of its letters.

Twofold Return – to Rectify both Action and Feeling

The *Reishit Chachma* explains that there are two kinds of *teshuvah*. The Lower *Teshuvah* – (תשובה תתאה) corresponds to the last *heh* of Hashem's name whereas the Upper *Teshuvah* – (תשובה עילאה) corresponds to the first *heh* of Hashem's name. The Lower *Teshuvah* has the power to eradicate the sin, and is motivated by fear. However, the Higher *Teshuvah* which is motivated by love has the power to transform sin into merit. Malbim explains that the prophet urges us to return twice corresponding to these two kinds of *Teshuvah*. The Lower *Teshuvah* is described in verse two as “until – עד Hashem”, whereas the Higher *Teshuvah* is described in the following verse, “Take words with you and return into – אל Hashem” (Ibid 3). The words we are to take with us are the reports of the good deeds we performed through the Lower *Teshuvah*, which will propel us to “return/repent” a second time on a deeper level, penetrating the foreskin of our heart that blocks us from feeling Hashem's love. Through this Highest *Teshuvah* we will become a pure channel, ready for prophesy, completely in tune with Hashem's will. Only then will Hashem “Forgive all sin...” (ibid.), including the unintentional sins. Moreover “He will take what is good...” (ibid.), this is the sin that has now been transformed to merit and become totally good.

The Feminine Nature of Repentance and Rebirth

The two *heh*'s ה in Hashem's Name are considered feminine letters as opposed to the remaining letters of the *yud* י and the *vav* ו which are masculine. The shape of both of the masculine letters is linear, the *yud* forms a small line, and the *vav* is an extended straight line. The *heh*'s, however, are wider and more complex with an opening both below and above. To be straight is a masculine virtue. This includes remaining within the straight line of the exact boundaries of time and space, as required by the positive time-bound mitzvot such as praying in a *Minyan* at the prescribed time, and shaking the lulav every day during the holiday of Sukkot. Picking oneself up after having fallen is a feminine quality. Women who experience their natural cyclic changes are mothers of invention, positive change and transformation. Flexibility, creativity and ability to think out of the box are employed in the *teshuvah* process. Unhealthy, failing routines are altered accordingly. Mothers are mistresses of *teshuvah* through which we give birth to our renewed selves. Breathing is also vital in the birthing process. Therefore, the letter *heh* which has the sound of the breath is imbued with procreative powers. In order for Avraham's wife, Sarah, to be able to give birth, the masculine *yud* of her previous name was exchanged with the feminine birthing *heh*. (*Kli Yakar Bereishit 17:15*) It is this same breath of the letter *heh* which preceding each of the Ten Sayings that gave birth to the world. Hashem indeed created this world with the letter *heh* (*Rashi Bereishit 2:4*). Just as the *heh* is open at the top, so is this world open to those who return in *teshuvah* (*Babylonian Talmud, Menahot 29b*).

May we take advantage of these days of gestation to breathe new life into our rigid negative habits, and may we employ our feminine flexibility to transform them in true *teshuvah* and spiritual rebirth!