

Good Yom Tov Everyone. Rosh Hashanah begins on Wednesday evening at nightfall and ends with the beginning of Shabbos - nightfall Friday evening. On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. Our judgment depends on our track record. However, Hashem is very patient with us, even if we have not been the best Jews during the past year, we can "turn it all around" instantly by doing Teshuva - returning to Hashem. Teshuva involves: confessing our wrongdoings, feeling remorse, and promising not to do the same bad thing again. The Rambam tells us that a Jew who has sinned his whole life, yet he does Teshuva before he dies, none of his sins are mentioned at his judgment. From here we see the power of Teshuva. The following true story will inspire us to do Teshuva.

The year was 1809. R' Yisroel Shklover and one hundred and fifty of his followers packed their belongings, bade their families and friends farewell. They traveled over hill and dale until they reached the seaport. There they boarded a frail-looking vessel for the final leg of their trip to Eretz Yisroel.

After a month at sea, torrential rains started to fall. For hours the rain pounded the ship as gale-force winds rattled the vessel and its passengers to their very core. Wave after wave slammed against the ship's sides and spilled over onto the deck. Children huddled against parents who were themselves overcome with fear. The ship floundered helplessly, reeling from each blow of the storm.

After two days of unremitting wind and rain it became obvious that the trip was in danger of ending right there on the high seas. People were ordered to lighten the ship's load and they began throwing their belongings overboard. Only a few, highly prized possessions could be kept, but most baggage had to be thrown in the water.

The captain called for R' Yisroel. Bracing themselves against the wind, the two men huddled together. The captain said, "As the leader of your group, I feel that I must tell you that we are in very grave danger. I don't know how much you want to tell your people, but this is the worst weather I have encountered in thirty years at sea. I will do everything that I can to save the ship and its passengers, but I can tell you that I believe our end is near."

The rav was pale with fear as he went back to talk to his people, many of whom were sick, exhausted by the rigors of the voyage, and afraid for their lives. R' Yisroel was filled with anguish at the realization that the voyage to which his followers had been looking forward for years, the dream that they had dared to dream, would soon come to a terrible end. Their aspirations, their years of spiritual preparation to live in the Holy Land would soon be dashed. What could he say? Could he hold out any hope — or just prepare them to meet their end?

He gathered his people together and in earnest began, "I tremble as I say this, but the captain has informed me that we are in danger of sinking. He says that this is the worst weather he has ever encountered, and fears that at any moment the ship will split apart and we will all be lost."

He could hardly bear to look at the shocked faces before him, but he continued, almost choking on his next words. Holding back his tears, he said, "Soon we will be in the Olam Haelyon (the World Above). It is the custom that before one dies, he recites viduy (confession). The Talmud (Sotah 7b) tells us that it is wrong for someone to reveal his sins in public, but that is true only when those hearing the sin will remain alive. However, since we will all be going together to the Olam HaElyon, if we openly confess our sins, the embarrassment we feel as a result of their being made public will in itself be an atonement for us. In its merit we will go directly to Can Eden (Paradise), and not to Gehinnom."

The talmidim of the Gaon, many of them great Torah scholars themselves, agreed to R' Yisroel's suggestion. Despite their terror, they decided they would begin a public Viduy, one by one, starting with the youngest of them all.

The one chosen to be first was a young man who had lived in Vilna. The winds roared and the rain battered the people as they battled to stand upright while trying to hear the young man speak. He was so overcome with emotion that he burst into tears. "For two years I violated the mitzvah of honoring my father and mother. I lied and deceived my mother day after day, and I am sorry that I did so, but I wish to explain the circumstances."

"When I was thirteen years old my parents moved to Vilna. We were fortunate that our new home was right next door to that of the Vilna Gaon. When the Gaon learned, it was like music to our ears and his

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sweet voice enraptured us. One night my father who had come home from a hard day's work at his grocery store heard the Gaon repeat the Talmudic phrase, "They leave the eternal life, and are involved with temporary life" (see Shabbos 10a), a number of times.

The repetition and the intensity with which the Gaon repeated the phrase (which is a criticism of those who pursue the materialistic aspects of life at the expense of the spiritual aspects) over and over made such an indelible impression on my father that the very next morning he told my mother he felt that he had to leave his job and study Torah exclusively. He locked himself in a room and no one was allowed to disturb him.

"My mother proudly took over the responsibility of caring and providing for her nine children. She couldn't take care of the store and so we had to sell it. The only way she could support the family was by selling some bread and cleaning people's houses. It was tough work, but she was proud that her husband showed such dedication to learning Torah.

One day my mother gathered all of us around her and said, 'My dear children, I can no longer afford to feed you twice a day. We'll have to manage with just one main meal, mittag (the afternoon meal).' It was difficult but we were all proud of father who learned so diligently. The little that she brought home had to be divided ten ways. I realized that if I didn't take my portion there would be a little more to be divided among my brothers and sisters.

And so I made up a story and told my mother that in my cheder (day school) mittag was now being given to all the boys in the school. "For two years I lied every time she asked me if I had gotten my meal and eaten that day. In reality all I ate were some of the scraps that the other boys had left over.

I now beg Hashem for forgiveness for having lied to my mother all those times." The young man finished his story and the others stared in sympathetic silence.

They hadn't known of this quiet talmid's travail, and were awed by his story. R' Yisroel was visibly touched by the tale, particularly because the young man had developed into a great talmid chacham, despite his hardships.

The rav turned his face towards the crying heavens and with imploring, outstretched hands called out, "Hashem in Heaven In the first selichos (penitential prayers) before Rosh Hashanah, we say: Turn to our travails and not to our sins. We plead with You to see the travails that we have endured through the past year, so that they may atone for us, but not to see our sins. Now I plead with You, Hashem, 'Look at the sins!' Look at what this young man calls his eternal sins. These are the 'sins' of Your children. In his merit, have mercy on us."

R' Yisroel had barely finished his plea when the rains stopped. Moments later there was a break in the thickly clouded sky, and between the clouds a shaft of sunlight shone through. The winds swept the clouds away and the group began to relax, the tension easing for the first time in days. R' Yisroel instructed them to recite together Tehilim (Psalms) Chapter 100 - A "Song of Thanks," for the great miracle which had occurred.

The captain and the sailors, none of whom were Jews, stood by respectfully as they marveled at the rav and his very special people. It was a kiddush Hashem (sanctification of Hashem's Name) in the truest sense. The rest of the trip was uneventful, and the entire group arrived safely at the shores of the Holy Land.

When the Satmar Rav, R' Yoel Teitelbaum (1887-1979), heard this story, he remarked cryptically, "This is what Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses) did." The Yerushalmi (Shevuos 1:5) notes that when Hashem informed Moshe that confession on Yom Kippur would atone for the nation's sins, Moshe responded by reciting psalm 100 in gratitude that the confession would be accepted. (From The Maggid Speaks R' P. Krohn p.74)

Let us all take advantage of the wonderful gift of Teshuvah, which can turn a bad report card into straight "A"s. **Good Yom Tov Everyone.**

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