



LOUGHTON SHUL
MORE THAN A

INSPIRE

HAAZINU - 8 TISHREI - 26 SEPTEMBER

THE INSPIRING STORY OF RABBI AVNER, THE SINNER

I recently read a fascinating story that I'd like to share with you. Moses ben Nachman, commonly known as Nachmanides, and also referred to by the acronym Ramban, was a leading medieval Jewish scholar in the 13th century, in Girona, Catalonia.

He had a disciple, Avner, who strayed from the path of observant Judaism, left his community and became an important government official.

One Yom Kippur, Avner sent guards to the synagogue, ordering the Ramban to appear before him. In his palace, before the eyes of his former teacher and master, Avner slaughtered a pig, roasted it and ate it on this holiest of fast days. The Ramban couldn't contain his anguish and cried, "What caused you to fall so low? What compelled you to abandon the holy teachings of your ancestors?" "It was you, my master!" Avner roared derisively. "Your teachings completely disillusioned me and caused me to reject Judaism." "You were once teaching the Torah portion of Ha'azinu," he explained. "You taught us that in this brief Torah portion of 52 verses, the Torah encodes all the details of the long history of the Jewish people until the coming of Moshiach. You claimed, too, that encoded in its verses are the names of every Jew to have ever lived." "This is obviously preposterous!" thundered Avner. "How could 4,000 years of history and millions of names be compressed into 614 words?" "What I said is absolutely true," declared the Ramban. "If so, then I must be found there, too. Where is my name, and where is my fate?" The Ramban's expression grew serious. He prayed silently to G-d to reveal this secret. "Your name, Avner, can be found in verse 26. Tell me, what is the third letter in these words: AmaRti (reish) AfEihem (aleph) AshBitu (beit) Me'eNosh (nun) ZichRom (reish)?" The verse reads: "I [G-d] said in my heart, that I would scatter them, causing their memory to cease from mankind."

Here, G-d rebukes the Jewish people for turning away from the path of the Torah and becoming so evil that He wanted to destroy them. Avner turned deathly white and began to wail bitterly. "Is there any hope for me?" he begged. "Is there anything that I can do to rectify my terrible sins?" The Ramban looked compassionately at his former student. "The verse itself has provided the rectification. It says that G-d will scatter them till their memory is erased. You must run away, never to be heard from again." Avner boarded a ship and was never seen again.

Notice that the name encoded in the third letters of this verse is not Avner, but includes the prefix "R," which stands for Rabbi Avner. Even though up until this point Avner led a life that was the complete antithesis of what a rabbi stands for, the Torah calls him "Rabbi." Avner had free choice to choose whether or not he would repent. But the Torah is confident that ultimately the holiness of his soul will shine through, and that through repentance he will have transformed himself not only into an Avner, but an illustrious Jew, a rabbi. What a lesson in how we must view every Jew, even ourselves—with the confidence that even a great sinner like Avner can, and will, become a great rabbi.

What Does G-d Need Us For?

By Aron Moss

Question:

Rabbi, I have two questions for you:

- 1) Do you make up these questions or do you receive them from real people?
- 2) If G-d is perfect, why did He create us? A perfect being isn't missing anything, so why would He need us? And if He doesn't need us, is our life meaningless? Are we just some divine experiment?

Answer:

Some questions are too esoteric to answer. It is beyond our limited understanding to reach a solution to all the mysteries of the universe, and these may always remain mysteries. So I will have to skip your first question and only deal with the second. You are absolutely correct: G-d, being perfect, was missing nothing before creation. There is no possible need that this world can fulfill for Him. He doesn't need anything. So creating us could not have been in order to fulfill a need. It was something G-d chose to do. He doesn't need us, He wants us. What does G-d want from us? The one thing He didn't have before creation was a relationship. He was alone. What He wanted from this world was a relationship with free beings. So He created us and gave us ways of connecting to Him — the mitzvot.

But we can't say that He needed this relationship with us. He may have been alone before creation, but he was still G-d — perfect and missing nothing. He didn't need a relationship — He wanted it. Does this make our life unnecessary? Does the fact that G-d doesn't "need" us make us less significant?

No, on the contrary. When we have a relationship with someone just because we need them (such as a cleaning lady, or a family doctor) then when that need has been fulfilled the relationship ends. Your connection is dependant on them providing a service, and will only last as long as that service is needed. But when we have a relationship with someone simply because we want to, because we have chosen to connect to them, then that bond is intrinsic. We don't love them because of what they do for us, we love them for who they are — and that is forever.

G-d doesn't need us; He wants us. He didn't give us commandments because He needs them to be fulfilled, but because He wants us to relate to Him. If we were created because G-d needed us to do something, then we would be secondary to that mission — once the mission was fulfilled we could be disposed of. But G-d needs nothing. He chose to bring us into being as a pure act of love.

That is the test of true love: if my beloved could no longer provide me with my needs, would I still love him or her just for being my beloved?

By creating us, G-d answered yes.

SHUL TIMES

Shabbat Times

Candle Lighting

6:32pm

Shabbat Ends 7:39pm

Friday

6:30pm

Shabbat

9:30am (shochen Ad)

Artscroll

1100

1204

Living Torah

1024

1246

PARSHA SUMMARY

The greater part of the Torah reading of Haazinu ("Listen In") consists of a 70-line "song" delivered by Moses to the people of Israel on the last day of his earthly life. Calling heaven and earth as witnesses, Moses exhorts the people, "Remember the days of old / Consider the years of many generations / Ask your father, and he will recount it to you / Your elders, and they will tell you" how G-d "found them in a desert land," made them a people, chose them as His own, and bequeathed them a bountiful land. The song also warns against the pitfalls of plenty—"Yeshurun grew fat and kicked / You have grown fat, thick and rotund / He forsook G-d who made him / And spurned the Rock of his salvation"—and the terrible calamities that would result, which Moses describes as G-d "hiding His face." Yet in the end, he promises, G-d will avenge the blood of His servants, and be reconciled with His people and land. The Parshah concludes with G-d's instruction to Moses to ascend the summit of Mount Nebo, from which he will behold the Promised Land before dying on the mountain. "For you shall see the land opposite you; but you shall not go there, into the land which I give to the children of Israel."

HAFTORAH SUMMARY

The Shabbat between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is known as Shabbat Shuva or "Shabbat of Return (Repentance)." The name is a reference to the opening words of the week's haftorah, "Shuva Israel — Return O Israel." This haftorah is read in honor of the Ten Days of Repentance, the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The prophet Hosea exhorts the Jewish people to "Return, O Israel, to the L-rd your G-d," encouraging them to repent sincerely and ask for G-d's forgiveness. Hosea urges the Jews to put their trust in G-d, not in Assyria, powerful horses or idols. At that point, G-d promises to remove His anger from Israel, "I will be like dew to Israel, they shall blossom like a rose." The prophet then goes on to foretell the return of the exiles and the cessation of idol-worship amongst the people. The haftorah concludes with a brief portion from the Book of Micah, which describes G-d's kindness in forgiving the sins of His people. "He does not maintain His anger forever, for He is a lover of kindness. He will have mercy on us, He will grasp our iniquities and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." Micah concludes with an enjoiner to G-d to remember the pacts He made with the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Austin Irving Father Avrohom ben Joseph 9 Tishrei
Trainis Avril Mother Raisel bas Yitzchak 9 Tishrei
Lane Lewis Father Yitzack ben Schlomo 10 Tishrei
Baskin Natalie Father Shlomo Aria ben Reb Zvi 11 Tishrei
Cohen Richard Brother Avram ben Simcha Ha Cohen 11 Tishrei
Kovler Andrea Mother Hinda bas Yitchak Yosef 13 Tishrei
Green Shirley Father Yona 14 Tishrei

JEWISH HUMOUR

Sadie is having terrible headaches that just won't go away so she goes to her rabbi to see if there's anything he can do. She whines, and cries and talks for hours not only about her headache, but about her terrible living conditions as well. All of the sudden, Sadie shouts, overjoyed, "Rabbi, I think your holy presence has cured me! The headache is completely gone! To which the rabbi responds, "No, no Sadie, it's not gone. I have it now."

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

The bigger I become, the less you see.
What is it?
Answer to last week's Riddle .

STORY TIME

The Baal Shem Tov was once travelling with his disciples in their carriage. The horses came to a halt in the middle of a field. The Baal Shem Tov and his disciples disembarked, prayed the afternoon service and sat down to eat. Then, the Baal Shem Tov dug a little hole in the ground, poured a small amount of whiskey into the hole and said, "l'chaim!" The curious disciples asked for an explanation and were told the following story:

Many years ago there lived a man who had an only daughter. When she came of age he found a good husband for her, a young man of sterling character who studied Torah all day. The father supported the couple and the son-in-law pursued his studies. When the father passed away, his daughter began managing the store and business, and the young man continued his Torah studies. Now, there lived in the area a minister who was especially devoted to trying to win learned Jews over to Christianity. When he found out about the young husband, he set his mind to finding a way to begin a dialogue with him. Every day the minister would come to the Jewish store to make a purchase and ingratiate himself to the young woman.

Once, when the minister came, the wife confided that her husband was ill. The minister commiserated, offered his wishes for her husband's recovery, and asked if he could pay a visit to cheer him up. The woman agreed, and the minister finally met the object of his plan. The next time the young man took ill, the minister suggested that he come to his fine estate to recuperate. He advised the young man to bring his own servant along to prepare kosher food for his stay. The invitation, the minister explained, was being extended in gratitude for the many happy hours of conversation they had enjoyed in the past and would have in the future. The invitation was accepted. Meanwhile the minister had succeeded in bribing the young man's cook to prepare food that was not kosher. As is explained in Jewish mystical texts, one effect of eating non-kosher food is that it dulls the mind and heart, preventing an individual from perceiving G-dliness. Unfortunately, such became the case. The minister's friendly overtures and kind words had an effect on the young man and after a period of time he decided to convert to Christianity. He abandoned his wife, married the daughter of the minister, and was showered with wealth and privileges. The young man bought himself property with an orchard and a house. In charge of overseeing the orchard was a very old man who lived on the grounds. One day, when the young man and his wife went for a stroll, they heard the caretaker weeping as if his heart would break. The old man could not be consoled and would not reveal why he was crying. The matter touched the heart of the young man. He was determined to discover the cause of the caretaker's grief.

Eventually the caretaker revealed the cause of his anguished cries. "I am a Jew," whispered the old man, "a descendent of Marranos who were forced to convert to Christianity in Spain. In my heart I have always remained faithful to my G-d. The Jews have one day a year which is called Yom Kippur, a day for repentance and seeking atonement. Today is Yom Kippur, and that is why I am crying," he finished. When the young man heard this tale, he was overcome with emotion. He vowed to return to the true faith of his people. He revealed that he, too, was a Jew, and explained how he had reached his current position. After the two of them had wept together, a thought occurred to the old man. "Why are you crying? You are very rich. You must certainly have the means to travel to another country, to begin life anew as a Jew." The young man did as the elderly caretaker suggested. He repented of his former ways and once again trod the path of the righteous. When her husband disappeared the gentile wife did not know what to do. Having seen him in the company of the old man, she asked him if he knew of her husband's whereabouts. She continued to badger him until he revealed the entire story. The woman was so impressed by the power of the Jewish faith that she sold all her possessions, left her country and converted to Judaism. (In those days, in that country, it was against the law to undergo conversion to Judaism). After all this took place the elderly caretaker began to think, "What is to become of me? I am responsible for two people living a Torah life, yet I myself am still here."

Despite his lack of means, he decided to wander until he reached a place where he could live openly as a Jew. He began his travels, but before reaching his final destination, he suddenly died. "And this spot," continued the Baal Shem Tov, pointing to the small hole he had dug, "is the final resting place of the old man. When his soul ascended to Heaven it was met by two camps of angels, each arguing his fate. The defending angels claimed that he decided to return to Judaism and had even taken the first few steps, even though he had not been able to complete his mission. The prosecuting angels argued that he be barred from entry, as he had not actually done what he set out to do." The case was left open, and since his death the old man's soul has wandered about, unable to find a resting place. Now, however, in the merit of our prayers on this spot and our saying 'l'chaim,' his soul has been elevated to where it belongs. May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life," the Baal Shem Tov concluded.

FOOD 4 THE SOUL

At the threshold of the ultimate good, the highest sparks of G-dliness lie on the ground at our feet, but we are too busy to bend down and pick them up. Where the greatest of miracles occur, wonders beyond imagination, we are too preoccupied to lift our eyes and notice. The table is set for a feast, but we are all asleep—and who will wake us from our dreams?