

A PARASHA THOUGHT

The Purity Within

The period we are about to enter is known as the *Yamim Noraim*, often translated as the “Days of Awe.” This phrase can evoke images of a fearful G-d deliberating over our actions. While we must certainly reflect on the solemnity of this time, an excessive focus on fear may hinder us from embracing the profound opportunity for closeness to Hashem. In fact, Rav Pam referred to these days as “*Yamim Niflaim*,” or wondrous days, highlighting the potential for achieving a closeness to Hashem that may have previously seemed unattainable. Through *teshuva*, we can turn over a new leaf and are granted a clean slate.

In this week’s *parasha*, we learn that *teshuva*—returning to Hashem—is not out of reach. It is described as “extremely close to you, in your mouth and heart to perform it.” But how can this be? After distancing ourselves through our actions over the past year, how can it be so easy to repair our relationship with Hashem?

It becomes clear that *teshuva* is not something external to us; rather, it is a return to our true selves. It illuminates the path to rediscover who we really are. The Ramchal explains that our souls yearn to return to the source from which they were drawn. It is

the natural state of our *neshama* to seek a connection with Hashem and to cleave to Him. All we need to do is remove the blockages that prevent our souls from reconnecting to their source.

Every Jew possesses a pure *neshama*, though it may become sullied through

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RABBI
TZVI
RICHTER



THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH
RABBI DOVID SPETNER

Q. In describing the potential desolation of Eretz Yisroel, the *parasha* (29:22) compares it to the overturning of the 4 cities of Sodom, Amora, Adma and Tz’vayim. Wasn’t there a 5th city?

A. Yes, Bela - also known as Tzoar. Although it was one of the 5 cities that was destined to be destroyed, Lot requested that it not be destroyed so that he could find refuge there. However, shortly after, he left, as he believed that it too would be destroyed. In *parashas Vayeira* we are left wondering whether it was actually destroyed. The *posuk* in this week’s *parasha* would seem to clarify that despite Lot’s fear, it indeed escaped destruction. There are actually other, less obvious indications that this city remained. Lot described the city as “*mitzar* - small” and the Torah says that because of this it was renamed Tzoar. If it was destroyed almost immediately after Lot’s referring to it as *mitzar*, it is very improbable that the name Tzoar would have stuck. Also, when Moshe is shown Eretz Yisroel at the end of his life,

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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one of the spots he is shown is the valley of Yericho “until Tzoar” (Devarim 34:3). This would also indicate that Tzoar continued to survive. 🕒

Something always bugged you about the upcoming parasha (or last week's)? Ask! Submit a question on the parasha by Monday at noon by emailing parasha@cincynkollel.org. Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.

A PARASHA THOUGHT

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out the year by various behaviors and sins. However, during these *Yamim Nifla'im*—wondrous days—we have the opportunity to polish our souls. We recognize their preciousness and greatness, allowing us to return to our true essence.

Now we can understand why *teshuva* is not distant but, rather, extremely close; it resides within us. Hashem is waiting for us to draw near, inviting us to recognize His greatness by acknowledging the profound greatness hidden within each and every one of us. 🕒

PROMINENT TORAH PERSONALITIES – NEW COLUMN!

RABBI YAAKOV SAKLAD

Rav Moshe Isserles: Part One

Rav Moshe Isserles (Rama) was born in Krakow around year 1525 to Rav Isserel (nickname for Yisroel) Lazrus. The last name “Isserles” probably comes from a contraction of Isserel and Lazrus, as the Rama and his siblings were the first to be called with the last name “Isserles,” referencing them as children of Rav Isserel Lazrus. Rav Isserel was a wealthy individual, a *talmid chacham* (Torah scholar) in his own right, and a supporter of Torah. He imbued his son Moshe with a love of Torah and those who learn it. (*Encyclopedia L'Toldos Gedolei Yisroel*, 1950) (Ziv, 1957)

He hired *rebbeim* to teach his very bright son Torah until his son acquired a vast knowledge of *Shas* (Talmud) and *poskim* (halachic authorities). When Moshe outgrew his *rebbeim*, Rav Isserel sent Moshe to the city of Lublin to learn under the tutelage of his next *rebbe*, Rav Shalom Shachna, who was also the head of the *Beis Din* (Jewish court) in the city. Rav Shachna was a tremendous influence on young Moshe Isserles by transmitting extensive and comprehensive knowledge of Torah. Rav Shachna also inspired him with his humility and elevated character. Rav Shachna raised the next generation of Torah leaders in Poland. In Lublin, Rav Moshe Isserles advanced greatly in his learning, and his knowledge of Torah flourished. After some time, he had achieved a clarity in all of *Shas* and *poskim*. He married the daughter of Rav Shachna around year 1550. (Knevel, 1955) (Ziv, 1957)

After his marriage, he decided to travel back to Krakow to establish his own *Yeshiva* and share his immense storehouse of Torah. Being a wealthy individual, he supported all of the *Talmidim* (disciples) of his *Yeshiva* and generously gave to the poor as well. He was also appointed as Rav of the town of Krakow soon after he arrived. Many people sent Rav Moshe Isserles halachic inquiries, and he corresponded with the Torah luminaries of the generation, among them Maharam M'Paddewa and Rav Yosef Karo (author of *Shulchan Aruch*). Despite his many influential positions in the community, he would maintain an extraordinarily humble persona (see end of Rama responsum 10). During this time, he became a member of the *Beis Din* in Krakow and in year 1553 he was appointed to head of the *Beis Din*. (*Encyclopedia L'Toldos Gedolei Yisroel*, 1950) (Ziv, 1957) (Knevel, 1955)

Works Cited

Encyclopedia L'Toldos Gedolei Yisroel. (1950). Tel Aviv: Yehoshua Chuchik.

Knevel, S. (1955). *Toldos Gedolei Horaah*. New York: Shulsinger Brothers Publishing.

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TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI MORDECHAI BERINSTEIN

The Rema (OC 581:4) writes that in many places there is a custom for people to daven in a *beis hakevaros* (graveyard) on erev Rosh Hashana. The source to pray in a *beis hakevaros* in general is the Gemara (*Sotah* 34b), which tells us that Calev went to daven at the *Me'aras haMachpeila* when he was part of the group of spies who entered Israel before the rest of the Jewish people. A reason given for this practice is that prayers to G-d are more readily accepted in a *beis hakevaros*, because once *tzad-dikim* are buried there it is a holy place (Maharil).

However, going to pray in a *beis hakevaros* did meet some opposition due to the enormous *halachic* concerns raised when unlearned people prayed to the dead person to help them, as opposed to directing their *tefillos* to G-d. This is something which touches upon idolatry, among other Torah prohibitions (*Gesher haChaim* 2:26). Out of this concern there were those who wanted to ban the practice of praying in graveyards entirely (*Chochmas Adam* 89:7).

Even if one does direct one's *tefillos* to Hashem, there is much *halachic* discussion about whether it is forbidden to address the deceased at all, or if one can ask them to bring one's prayers to G-d. The *Mishna Berurah* rules stringently, although others seem to be lenient (*Eshel Avraham* 16). It is worth noting that the Gemara mentioned above as the source for praying in a *beis hakevaros* has Calev addressing the deceased, seemingly unlike the *Mishnah Berurah*. However, there are textual variations of the Gemara which would not raise this concern (*Maharam Shick* 293). 🕒