

FOR SUCCESS, LOOK THE OTHER WAY!

PARSHAS HA'AZINU – ROSH HASHANA

Rosh Hashana is *Yom HaDin*, the day that we are all judged to determine what kind of year that we will have. We should be terrified and should look for ways to escape harsh judgement.

Hashem loves us so much that he gives us “an escape hatch”, a way to escape from harsh judgement for our sins. That “escape hatch” is called teshuva, repentance. Through proper repentance, we can erase our misdeeds, Sometimes, we can even change those misdeeds to mitzvos.

Rabbeinu Yona (Sha’ar Teshuvah) quotes a parable from **Midrash Koheles** (7:15). A group of thieves were imprisoned by the king. While in jail, they dug a tunnel and escaped. One thief stayed behind.

He did not take advantage of the opportunity to save himself. Teshuva is a golden opportunity that we should “grab” and take advantage of. The three basic parts of teshuva are admitting our sin to Hashem, truly feeling bad that we sinned, accepting upon ourselves not to repeat this sin in the future.

In his Sichos Mussar, **Rabbi Michal Birnbaum** z”l, mashgiach in Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim, encourages us to look for strategies and well-known remedies to help us emerge successfully on Yom HaDin. One strategy which is known to be successful is quoted in three different places in the Talmud. The **Talmud** (Rosh Hashana 17A)

*“He bears sin
and forgives
transgression”
(Micah 7:18)*

relates that when Rav Huna, son of Rav Yehoshua, became sick, Rav Pappa went to visit him. Rav Pappa saw that Rav Huna was dying, so he told his attendants to prepare burial shrouds.

Amazingly, Rav Huna recovered. Rav Huna’s friends asked him what he had seen when he had been suspended between life and death. He told them that he was very close to dying, but Hashem interceded with the heavenly court. Hashem said that since Rav Huna was not exacting with injustices committed against him, then the heavenly court should not be exacting with him in his judgment. As it says in the pasuk (Micah 7:18), “He bears sin and forgives transgression”.

In another story quoted in The **Talmud** (Ta’anis 25B), Rabbi Eliezer was the chazan davening for much-needed rain, reciting twenty-four blessings, but he was not answered. Rabbi Akiva descended before

the ark after him and said, “Our Father, our King, we have no king other than You. Our Father, our King, for Your sake, have mercy on us”. It started raining immediately! The Sages were surprised that Rabbi Akiva’s prayers were answered while those of his teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, were not. A Divine Voice emerged and said, “It is not because Rabbi Akiva is greater than Rabbi Eliezer, but that Rabbi Akiva is forgiving, and Rabbi Eliezer is not”.

Rabbi Birnbaum z”l explained that Rabbi Eliezer acted, according to the letter of the law, which was totally fine. Hashem responded to him in kind, according to the letter of the law. However, Rabbi Akiva was less exacting and more forgiving.

The **Talmud** (Bava Metzia 30B) quotes Rabbi Yochanan who says that Jerusalem was

destroyed because they adjudicated cases strictly on the basis of Torah law and did not go beyond the letter of the law. **Rav Zalman of Volozhin**, student of the GRA, quotes **Tosefos** who asks how that can be. The **Talmud** in Yuma says that Jerusalem was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*, unwarranted hatred and not because of judging based on strict justice. The answer is that when the Jews went beyond the letter of the law in their relationships with others, Hashem treated them likewise. Once the Jews followed strict justice, the letter of the law, that is how Hashem judged them. Thus, Jerusalem was destroyed because of *sinas chinam*. The Jews didn’t merit that Hashem treat them beyond the letter of the law because that was not how they treated others.

Hashem loves us and is waiting with “open arms” for our teshuva.

Let us also forgive others who have caused us pain or anguish. When we are less exacting and more forgiving with others, that will be how Hashem will treat us.

May we all be zoche to a *ksiva vachasima tova*, a year filled with health, happiness, and blessing for us and for all Klal Yisroel.

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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