

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778*

Chapter LIII: Haazinu (Deut. 32:1–32:52)

Essay 4. Repentance from fear and from love

"שובה ישראל עד ה' אלהיך כי כשלת בעוונך. קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אלה' ". מקשים למה מתחלה אמר "שובה ישראל" בלשון יחיד ולבסוף "קחו עמכם דברים" בלשון רבים. ומה הם אלו הדברים, ואיך בדברים שיניך לשון לקיחה, ועוד למה מתחלה אמר "עד ה' אלהיך" ולבסוף אמר "אלה' "?

“Return, O Israel, unto the L-rd your G-d, for you have stumbled because of your sin. Take words with you and return to the L-rd, say to Him: ‘Carry away [from us all the] guilt, and accept [from us] what is good; instead of bulls, we will pay [the offering of] our lips” (Hosea 14:2-3). **[People] question why at the beginning of Hosea 14:2, it says “Return, O Israel,”** with the word “return” being **in the singular tense, and at the end, i.e., at the beginning of Hosea 14:3, it says, “Take words with you and return to the L-rd,”** with “take,” you” and “return” being **in the plural form. Also, what are these “words”** you are supposed to take with you, **and how with regard to “words” is the language of “taking” relevant,** since words aren’t tangible objects, and we usually say, “speak words”? **Also, why at the beginning of Hosea 14:2, does it say, “unto (עד) (ad) the L-rd your G-d,” and at the end, i.e., at the beginning of Hosea 14:3, does it say, “to (אל) (el) the L-rd;”** why the change in prepositions?

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It can be said that the language “unto” (עד) (ad) sometimes means “unto and including,” and sometimes we interpret it as “unto and not including,” as there is such a disagreement in the Gemara, in Berachot 26b.¹

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וכַּוֹנֵת הַפְּסוּק הַיּוֹ אֵיךְ לֹא מִתְחַלֵּה לְיַחִיד שֶׁיִּשׁוּב בַּתְּשׁוּבָה יַחִידִי, וְלִפִּי שֶׁשָּׁב בַּתְּשׁוּבָה יַחִידִי הוּא סִימָן שֶׁשָּׁב מִרְאָה שְׂדֵי לְהַצִּיל אֶת עַצְמוֹ, מֵהָשָׂאִין כֵּן אִם הָיָה שָׁב מֵאֲהָבָה שֶׁהָיָה נוֹתֵן לְבוֹ גַּם לְהַשִּׁיב אֲחֵרִים בְּאַהֲבָתוֹ לְהַקִּיב"ה. מִשׁוֹם הַכִּי אָמַר "שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל" אֵף עַל פִּי שֶׁאֲתָה יַחִיד וְלֹא תִּגִּיעַ אֵלָּא "עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ" וְלֹא "עַד בְּכָל־ל", אֵף עַל פִּי כֵן "שׁוּבָה", כִּי תָרוּם שֶׁהִזְדוֹנָהוּ וְתִהְיֶה לְשִׁגְגוֹת. אֲמַנָּם אִם תַּעֲשֶׂה שִׁשׁוּבוֹ אֵף אֲחֵרִים בַּתְּשׁוּבָה, דִּהְיִינוּ שֶׁתִּקְחֶם בְּדַבְרֵי מוֹסֵר וְתוֹכַחָה וְנִהוּ "קָחוּ עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים", אֵז "וְשׁוּבוּ אֵלֶי-ה'" מִמָּשׁ נֶאֱזַר "כָּל-תְּשׁוּאָה עוֹן וְקַח-טוֹב" וְכוּ'.

The intention of the verse[s] is thus, talking first to the individual who will repent alone, for one who repents alone is a sign that he repented from fear, thinking that it was enough for him to save himself.

That is not the case if he repented from love, for then he would pay attention also to the desirability to return others in repentance, in his love for the Holy One, Blessed be He.

Because of this, it says, “Return, O Israel” in the singular tense. I.e., even though you are an individual and by repenting out of fear, you will only arrive “unto the L-rd your G-d,” and not “unto and including,” i.e., you won’t arrive to the point of being more closely connected to G-d, nevertheless, “Return” on your own, in the single tense. Even if it’s not the highest level, out of love, because at least you will profit that your intentional sins will change to unwitting transgressions.

However, if you will repent out of love, and thus arrange also to return others in repentance, which is that you will take them with words of discipline and rebuke—and this is the meaning of “take words with you”—then you will really “return to the L-rd.” The word “return” is then in the plural tense, because you are bringing other people with you, out of love. Also, the word “to” (אֶל) (*el*) is used instead of “unto” (עַד) (*ad*), because you are returning all the way to G-d, i.e., developing a close connection with Him. **Then you can say, “carry away [from us all the] guilt, and accept what is good,”** i.e., instead of merely having your intentional sins change to unwitting transgressions, the sins will be carried away entirely, and G-d will see only what is good in you.

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