

# Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

Published Mantua 1778\*

## Chapter LVII: Kinnot (Lamentations)

Essay 13: The path to repentance is distancing oneself from the path of sinners.

**פסוק** נפלה עטרת ראשנו אויבנו לנו פי חטאנו. כלומר עכשיו שנפלה עטרת ראשנו מחמת עוונותינו, אם נתודה בלב שלם ונאמר אויבנו לנו פי חטאנו, תחזור העטרה למקומה. ולפי שאין בנו כח לעשות תשובה אמרה כנסת ישראל השיבנו וכו' הן בנו כח לעשות תשובה ונשובה.

There is a verse: **“The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us, that we have sinned!”** (Lam. 5:16), as if to say, **“Now that the crown has fallen from our head because of our sins, if we would confess wholeheartedly and say, ‘Woe to us, that we have sinned,’ the crown would be restored to its place.”** Because we don’t have the strength to repent, the Assembly of Israel said, **“Bring us back to You, O L-rd, and we will be restored; renew our days as of old!”** (Lam. 5:21), as if to say, **“Give us the strength to repent, and we will be restored.”**

ואחר כך אמר פי אם-מאס מאסתנו, ואנו כופלים השיבנו וכו' כלומר אף כי מאס מאסתנו ולמען רשעתנו קצפת עלינו עד-מאד, עשה עמנו כמו שהבטחתנו אם-לא ביד חזקה . . . ובחמה שפוכה אמלוד עליכם. ותהיה תשובה לנו, דכל פי האי ריתתא לירתח רחמנא עלו ויפרקינן. ועוד דאמרין בסנהדרין אם ישראל אין עושים תשובה הקב"ה מעמיד להם מלך שגזרותיו קשות בהמן ומחזירן למוטב.

Afterward, Jeremiah said in the final verse of Lamentations, **“For you have utterly rejected us, and are very furious with us”** (Lam. 5:22), but in order to avoid ending the book on a negative note, we repeat the penultimate verse, **“Bring us back to You, O L-rd, and we will be restored.”** This is to say, **“Even though You have rejected us, and because of our wickedness You are very furious with us, treat us as You have promised us: ‘Surely I will reign over you with a mighty hand . . . and with overflowing fury’** (Ezek. 20:33). Then we will have a salvation, as Rav Nachman said, **‘Let the Merciful One become wrathful at us with all that wrath, and He will redeem us’** (Sanhedrin 105a). Further, as it is said in Sanhedrin by Rabbi Yehoshua, **“If Israel does not repent, the Holy One, Blessed be He, will establish a king for them whose decrees are as harsh as those of Haman, and this will restore them to the proper path”** (Sanhedrin 97b).

---

\* English translation: Copyright © 2020 by Charles S. Stein.

ומטעם זה אנו כופלים הפסוק [הנה אנכי] שלם לכם את אליה הנביא, שמתחלה אמר זכרו תורת משה עבדי שבשביל זה [הנה אנכי] שלם וכו', ואם לא תהיו כשרים אבוא והכיתי את הארץ חרם, ואף בכל האי ריתחא [הנה אנכי] שולם לכם וכו'.

**For the same reason**, when we complete the book of Malachi, of which the last verse speaks of G-d striking the land with utter destruction, **we afterward repeat the penultimate verse, “Lo, I will send<sup>1</sup> the prophet Elijah to you** before the coming of the awesome, fearful day of the L-rd” (Malachi 3:23). **For first**, i.e., prior to verse 3:23, [Malachi] said, **“Be mindful of the teaching of My servant Moses**, whom I charged at Horeb with laws and rules for all Israel” (Malachi 3:22), **for because of this**, i.e., being mindful of Moses, **“Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you.” But if you won’t be proper, “I will come and I will strike the whole land with utter destruction”** (Malachi 3:24), **and even with all this anger, “Lo, I will send the prophet Elijah to you.”**

ומכל שכן שפך הוא מדותיו שאין הקב"ה חפץ במימת הרשע אלא אדרבא חפץ להצדיק, כמו שאמר הכתוב דחה דחיתגני לנפל וה' עזרני, עזי וזמרת יה וכו'. וגרסינן בפרק ג' דמנחות אמר רב אשי חזינו להו לספרי דווקני דחטרי להו לגגיה דחיות ותלו ליה לכרעיה דה"א וכו'. ומאי טעמא תליא פרעיה? דאי הדר ביה, ליזיל בקה, וליעיליה בקה, לא איסתייעא מילתא, וכדריש לקיש דבא ליטהר מסייעין אותו. ומאי טעמא אית ליה תאגא אמר הקב"ה אם חוזר בו אני קושר לו פתח עכ"ל.

**Obviously, this is His character, that the Holy One, Blessed be He, does not desire the death of the wicked, but to the contrary, he desires that he become righteous. This is as Scripture says** regarding the nations, **“You pushed me hard so that I would fall, but the L-rd helped me. The L-rd is my strength and my song . . .”** (Ps. 118:13–14).

**The proper reading of the third chapter of tractate Menachot:**

[The Gemara discusses the significance of crowns being placed on letters of the Torah.] Rava says: Seven letters require three crowns [*ziyyunin*], and they are the letters *shin*, *ayin*, *tet*, *nun*, *zayin*, *gimmel* and *tzadi*. **Rav Ashi says: “I have seen that the exacting scribes of the study hall of Rav would put a hump-like stroke on the roof of [the letter] *chet*<sup>2</sup> and they would suspend the [left] leg of [the letter] *heh* [i.e., they would ensure that it is not joined to the roof of the letter].”**

Rava explains: “They would put a hump-like stroke on the roof of the letter *chet* as if to thereby say: The Holy One, Blessed be He, lives [*chai*] in the heights of the universe. And they would suspend the left leg of the letter *heh* . . .”

[The Gemara then explains that the significance of the letter *heh* is that this world was created with the letter *heh*.]

<sup>1</sup> The translator has corrected the text in three places in this paragraph, which in the first edition had the similar words “הנני שולח לכם,” which actually appear in Joel 2:19.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, Rabbeinu Tam held that the *chet* should be written as: חׁ. Rashi held that it should be written without the hump.

And for what [reason] was this world created with [the letter] *heh*? Because [the letter *heh*], which [is open on its bottom, has] a similar [appearance] to a colonnade.<sup>3</sup> [It alludes to this world], where anyone who wishes to leave may leave [i.e., every person has the ability to choose to do evil]. **And what is the reason [that the left] leg of [the letter *heh*] is suspended** [i.e., is not joined to the roof of the letter]? **Because if one repents, he is brought [back] in** [through the opening at the top.]

**But** [why not] **let him enter through that** [same way that he left, i.e., through the opening at the bottom of the letter *heh*]? [That would likely] **not come to pass, in accordance with** [the statement] **of Reish Lakish**. As Reish Lakish says: What [is the meaning of that] which is written: “If it concerns the scorners, He scorns them, but to the humble He gives grace” (Prov. 3:34)? [One who] **comes to become pure** [is viewed as being humble, so] **he is assisted** [from Heaven]. [One who] comes to become impure [is viewed as being a scorners, so] he is provided with an opening [to become impure]. **And what is the reason** [that the letter *heh*] **has a tag** [on its roof]?<sup>4</sup> **The Holy One, Blessed be He, says: If** [a sinner] **returns** [in repentance], **I make a crown for him**.

- Menachot 29b

ותחלה אומר הרשע דחה דחיתני וכו'. לפי סברת אותם הסופרים שאינם דווקנים אינם תולים רגל הה"א, הם היו דוחים אותי לנפל. לפי שאם ארצה לשוב צריך אני לילך עד פתח של מטה ולא איסתייעא מילתא. אבל נה' עזרני שלפי סברת הדווקנים רצה שתהיה פתוחה אף למעלה, כדריש לקיש דהבא ליטהר מסייעין אותו, ועוד שעשה לי פתח, ונהו עזי וכו'.

**First, the wicked said, “You pushed me hard so that I would fall”** (Ps. 118:13). **According to the opinion of the scribes who weren’t so exacting, they would *not* suspend the left leg of the letter *heh*, i.e., they would join it to the roof of the letter. “They were pushing me to fall!”<sup>5</sup> According to the fact that if I will want to return** in repentance, and the entrance that is supposed to be between the left leg and the roof of the *heh* is not there, then **I will need to go to the lower opening, i.e., the opening at the bottom of the *heh*, and that will not be effective. “But the L-rd helped me,” for according to the opinion of the exacting scribes, [G-d] wanted there**

<sup>3</sup> A colonnade refers to columns joined on top by an entablature.

<sup>4</sup> In a sefer Torah, many letters are provided with a *tag*, or crown, that may consist of one or several strokes. Most of the occurrences of the letter *heh* in the Torah do not have such a crown, but Sefer Tagin states that there are 360 occurrences of the letter *heh* that receive a crown with four strokes, and 18 occurrences that receive a crown with a single stroke.

<sup>5</sup> Perhaps *Zera Shimshon* means that it is as though the inexact scribes pushed on the right leg of the *heh*, so that it fell over to the left until the roof was resting on the shorter left leg. Whether done intentionally or by being inexact, the result is that the upper gap was either reduced or eliminated, making it more challenging for sinners to return in repentance via that path. [If one writes the letter *chet* following Rashi, without the hump on top, then a *heh* drawn without the gap would be indistinguishable from the *chet*, and would be invalid. According to Rabbeinu Tam, though, following the Gemara, the *chet* should have the hump, so a *heh* (which does not have such a hump), would still be distinguishable from a *chet*, even if the *heh* is drawing without the gap. Thus, there is a dispute among commentators whether the inexact scribes completely eliminated the gap or only reduced it in size.]

to be also an upper opening. According to Reish Lakish, one who comes to become pure is assisted by Heaven, and also, He made a crown for me, and this is the meaning of, “The L-rd is my strength and my song” (Ps. 118:14).

פְּתַח־וּרְלִי שְׁעָרֵי־צְדָק וְכוּ'. הִנֵּה הַפֶּתַח שֶׁל מַעְלָה מוֹכֶנֶת לְטוֹב לְבַעֲלֵי הַתְּשׁוּבָה, אֲבָל אֵין הֶכִי נִמְי שְׂיִכּוּלִים אֶף לִילָךְ בַּפֶּתַח שֶׁל מַטָּה. וְזֶהוּ שְׁעָרֵי־צְדָק לְשׁוֹן רַבִּים, אֲבֵא־בָם וְכוּ'. אֶף זֶה־הַשַּׁעַר לֵה' שֶׁהוּא שֶׁל מַטָּה לְבַד, צְדִיקִים יָבִאוּ בּוֹ. וּלְפִי שְׁעָנִיתָנִי בְּיִסּוּרִין, אֲנִי מוֹדֶה לָךְ, שְׂזֵאת [נִתְהַיֵּי־לִי לִי] שְׂוֵעָה. שְׂשִׁבְתִי בַתְּשׁוּבָה עַד כִּי אֶבֶן מְאֹסוֹ הַבּוֹנִים, שְׂהִיו אוֹמְרִים אֵין לוֹ עוֹד תִּקְוָה, הִנֵּה לּוֹ פֶתַח סְמוּךְ לַגַּג הַפֶּתַח שֶׁהוּא לְמַעְלָה מִפֶּתַח הַצְדִיקִים.

**“Open the gates of righteousness for me”** (Ps. 118:19). **Here the upper opening is prepared for good, for the *ba’alei tshuva*,**<sup>6</sup> **but it is granted that they are able to enter even through the lower opening.** That is, it is unlikely that a habitual sinner who repents could re-enter this world through the same path from which he left, but it is not impossible. The Maharsha explained this difficulty, that if one sins by going to one extreme, for example by being a miser and refusing to give charity, then his path to repentance is not to simply attempt to return to the golden mean (the middle path, *דרך האמצע*),<sup>7</sup> but rather he should go to the opposite extreme and become a spendthrift. Then he will eventually be able to achieve a balance. Going from one extreme to another requires traveling a far distance, as though from the lower entrance of the *heh* to the upper entrance.

It also seems to the translator that if the opening at the bottom of the *heh* is used by people choosing to leave this world (metaphorically, by becoming sinners), then one who attempts to return through the same opening (by repenting and re-entering this world) will be fighting against the tide of people rushing in the opposite direction, toward sin. Practically speaking, consider one who frequents bars with friends and drinks to excess. If he decides to repent, he can, in theory, continue going to the same bars with the same friends, drinking soda instead of alcohol. But it would be much easier for him to choose a different path, to distance himself from the bars and from his friends, and thus avoid their influence.

**This** discussion of the two openings in the letter *heh*, which is symbolic of this world, is what Scripture means by the **“gates of righteousness,”** which is presented in plural form, **“that I may enter them** and praise the L-rd” (Ps. 118:19), that I may enter through these gates in repentance and choose life. **But** the next verse reads, **“This is the gateway to the L-rd”** (Ps. 118:20), **which is the lower one only, “the righteous shall enter through it”** (Ps. 118:20). As discussed above, one who is not righteous would have a very hard time entering through the lower opening, and it is better for him to go to the opposite extreme in behavior, and to enter from the upper opening. But isn’t everyone outside the *heh* someone who has chosen to sin? Why then would a righteous person be outside of the *heh* in the first place, or stated differently, how can someone who is outside the *heh* be called a righteous person? As Kohelet says, “For there is not a righteous man upon earth, that does good, and does not sin” (Eccl. 7:20). Therefore, the sense here

<sup>6</sup> A *ba’al tshuva* is a person who came from a secular background, but completed a process of introspection and became fully religiously observant.

<sup>7</sup> A philosophy advanced by the Rambam, in Mishneh Torah.

is that the righteous person is one who is mostly righteous, but who is subject to err from time-to-time. That person is not a habitual sinner, and he does not have to go to the opposite extreme before returning to the golden mean; thus, he can enter through the lower doorway.

According to the fact that you answered me in my torment, I thank You, in that “You have become my deliverance” (Ps. 118:21).<sup>8</sup> For I returned in repentance as far as “the stone that builders rejected” (Ps. 118:22), by which they were saying “he no longer has hope,” but now, that stone “has become the main cornerstone” (Ps. 118:22). Now, he had an opening adjacent to the roof of the crown of the letter *heh*, which is above the opening of the righteous. As explained above, the righteous person is not a habitual sinner, and he can enter through the bottom opening of the *heh*, but the habitual sinner who wants to repent has G-d’s help, and can therefore enter through the upper opening.

ועוד יש לבאר פשט הכתוב והכפל של דחה דחיתני. דאיתא בפירק ח' דיומא כינון שעבר אדם עבירה ושנה בה נעשית לו קהיתר. ולכן היצר הרע מסית את האדם לעבור שמי פעמים עבירה אחת, וזהו דחה דחיתני, כדי שיפול בידו שהרי נעשית לו קהיתר. אבל ה' עזרני שלא שניתי בחטא ולא נפלתי, ואדרבא שבתי בתשובה מחטא הראשון. ועל דרך זה אמר הכתוב טוב-וילשר ה' עלי-כן יורה חטאים בדרך. ומהו בדרך עם ה"א הידיעה, ומה דרך היא זו? אלא משום שהקב"ה הוא טוב-וילשר, שמתחלה הוא טוב שנשא עון, ואחר כך ישר, דעון עצמו אינו נמחק, דאי איכא רובא עונות מתחשב בהדיהו. על כן הוא יורה חטאים שיפגסו באותו דרך הידוע של מעלה של ה"א.

Further, it’s worth clarifying the simple meaning of the verse and the doubling of the root “to push” by presenting two words, “*dacho dechitani*” (דחה דחיתני) (“you pushed me hard”). For it is brought in the eighth chapter of tractate Yoma (87a), “Rav Huna said that Rav said: Once a person commits a transgression and repeats it, it becomes permitted to him.” Therefore, the evil inclination seduces the man to commit one transgression two times, and this is the intent of the doubling “*dacho dechitani*” that we translate as “you pushed me hard,” so that [the transgression] will fall into the man’s grasp as though it has become permissible. “But the L-rd helped me,” that I didn’t repeat the sin and that I didn’t fall, and to the contrary, I returned in repentance from the first sin. In this way, Scripture says, “Good and upright is the L-rd; therefore, He shows sinners the way” (Ps. 25:8). What is this word *ba’darech* (בדרך), meaning “the way,” with the definite article,<sup>9</sup> and what is this “way”? Because the Holy One, Blessed be He, is good and upright: In the beginning, He is good in that He forgives sin, and afterward, He is upright, for as Rava said, “That sin itself [which G-d overlooks] is not [completely] erased; if [the individual’s actions are still] mostly sins, [G-d] counts [the overlooked sin] with them [and metes out punishment accordingly]” (Rosh Hashana 17a). Therefore, “He shows sinners” that they can enter by the same known upper path of

<sup>8</sup> The translator has corrected the text, which read “היתה לי לתשועה” in the first edition. Confusion likely arose from I Chron. 19:12, “והיית לי לתשועה,” which is similar to the desired text from Ps. 118:21, “ונתהילי לישועה.”

<sup>9</sup> The *heh ha'yediah* (ה"א הידיעה) refers to a *heh* being prefixed to a word to indicate a definite article: “the.” When a word contains both a definite article and a prefixed preposition (*bet* or *lamed*), the *heh* consonant of the definite article is typically omitted, and the vowel under the preposition lengthens from a *shva* to a longer vowel. Thus, for the word *ba’darech* (בדרך), even though there is no *heh*, the fact that the vowel under the *bet* is a *patach* instead of a *shva* lets one know that there is a definite article present.

**the *heh*.** That is “the way” to repentance, i.e., by distancing oneself from the behavior (and perhaps the associations) that one had as a sinner, and instead go to the opposite extreme.

אף קשה מאי דאמרינן בפרק ב' דמכות, אם לחטאים מורה, קל וחומר לצדיקים עכ"ל, ולפי מה שכתבנו ליפא קל וחומר. ויש לומר דטעמא דהאי פתח הוא כדריש לקיש דאמר בא ליטהר מסייעין אותו, והשתא עביד הקל וחומר שפיר, אם לחטאים מורה דעביד ליה פתחא משום דהבא ליטהר מסייעין אותו, קל וחומר לצדיקים שסייעו אותם שלא יחטאו.

**But it's difficult to understand what it says in the second chapter of tractate Makkot:**

It is taught [in a *Baraita*] that Rabbi Eliezer ben Ya'akov says: Refuge was written on [signs at every] crossroads [marking the path to a city of refuge], so that the [unintentional] murderer would identify [the route to the city of refuge] and turn to go there. . . . Rav Chama bar Chanina first quoted Prov. 25:8, “Good and upright is the L-rd; therefore He shows sinners the way,” then said: “**If [G-d] shows sinners the way by commanding the placing of signs directing them to the city of refuge, it may be inferred, then *a fortiori* He will show the way to the righteous.**”

- Makkot 10a-b

**But according to what we wrote above, there is no *a fortiori* here!** That is, we said above that the sinners need G-d's assistance in finding the correct path for them, the upper opening of the *heh*, distant from their previous behavior (and perhaps from their previous associations). But the righteous do not need G-d's assistance, and can even enter through the lower opening of the *heh*, fighting against the tide of sinners exiting. Thus, based on what we said above, it is the sinners who get special assistance, and the righteous would not get special assistance, let alone even greater assistance than the sinners. **It can be said that the sense of this opening is like the opinion of Reish Lakish, who said, “One who comes to become pure is assisted by Heaven,” now the *a fortiori* becomes appealing. If for the sinners, He shows that He made an opening for [them] because, “One who comes to become pure is assisted,” then *a fortiori* for the righteous, He will assist them that they won't sin.**

והטעם דלא איסתיעא מילתא בפתח של מטה של ה"א, דאמרינן התם מפני מה נברא העולם בה"א, מפני שדומה לאכסדרא, שכל הרוצה לצאת יוצא. ומי שחטא יצא באותו פתח של מטה, ואינו בדין שהקטיגור נעשה סניגור, ולכן צריך לפתוח לו פתח אחר. וזהו במקום שבועלי תשובה עומדים אין צדיקים גמורים יכולים לעמוד, שהרי הפתח הקטן הזה הוא הפתח לבעלי תשובה, והוא יותר עליון מפתח של צדיקים גמורים. וגדולה תשובה שאף לאחר הגור דין היא יפה עד מאד. וכן הפתח אומר אודך ה' כי אנפת בי לשב אפך ותנחמני, וזהו"ל פירשו שמודה להקב"ה מי שלטובתו נשברה רגל פרתו.

**The sense is that entry through the lower opening of the *heh* will not come to pass, for it says there, in Menachot 29b: “And for what [reason] was this world created with [the letter] *heh*? Because [the letter *heh*], which [is open on its bottom, has] a similar [appearance] to a colonnade. [It alludes to this world], where anyone who wishes to leave may leave [i.e., every person has the ability to choose to do evil].” One who sins leaves by the same lower opening,**

and it's against the law “that a prosecutor becomes an advocate,”<sup>10</sup> and therefore it is needed to open another opening for him. This is represented by the adage of Rabbi Avahu, “In a place where *ba'alei tshuva* stand, the completely righteous are not able to stand” (Berachot 34b), for this small opening at the upper side of the *heh* is the opening for the *ba'alei tshuva*; it is higher than the opening for completely righteous [people]. Great is repentance, for even after the Divine decree of the Exile, [repentance] is still exceedingly beautiful. Thus, Scripture says, “I give thanks to You, O L-rd; although You were angry with me, Your anger has turned away and You comfort me” (Isaiah 12:1), and [the rabbis] of blessed memory explained that one should give thanks to the Holy One, Blessed be He, [for whom] is fulfilled the principle that “It was for his own good that his cow broke its leg.”<sup>11</sup>

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ לֹדְמֵר שְׁשֻׁלְמָה אָמַר בְּתַפְלֵתוֹ כִּי יִחְטְאוּ-לָךְ כִּי אֵין אָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִחְטָא וְאַנְפֹּתְךָ בָּם וְנִתְתָּם לְפָנַי אוֹיֵב וְשׁוֹבֵיהֶם וְכֹו' וְשָׁבוּ אֵלַיִךְ בְּכָל-לֵבָם וּבְכָל-נַפְשָׁם . . . וְשִׁמְעֵת מִוִּדְהַשְׁמַיִם וְכֹו' וְעֲשִׂיתָ מִשְׁפָּטָם וְסָלַחְתָּ לַעֲמָדָה אֲשֶׁר חָטְאוּ-לָךְ. וְקִשָּׁה מֵה צוּרָךְ הִיָּה לְשֻׁלְמָה לֹדְמֵר וְאַנְפֹּתְךָ בָּם וְנִתְתָּם לְפָנַי אוֹיֵב, לֹא הָיָה לוֹ לֹדְמֵר אֶלָּא כִּי יִחְטְאוּ-לָךְ וְשָׁבוּ אֵלַיִךְ וְכֹו'.

**It can also be said that Solomon said in his prayer:**

**When they sin against You—for there is no person who will not sin—and You are angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and their captors carry them off** to an enemy land, near or far. And they take it to heart in the land to which they have been carried off, and repent and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity, saying, “We have sinned, we have acted perversely, we have acted wickedly.” **And they turn back to You with all their heart and soul**, in the land of their captivity where they were carried off, and pray in the direction of their land which You gave to their fathers and the city which You have chosen, and toward the House that I have built for Your name—. **Then may You hear from Heaven**, even from Your dwelling-place, their prayer and their supplications, **and uphold their cause, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You.**

- II Chron. 6:36–39<sup>12</sup>

A difficulty is what need there was for Solomon to say, “and You are angry with them and deliver them to the enemy,” he only had to say “When they sin against You” and “they turn back to You.”

<sup>10</sup> Berachot 59a; Rosh Hashana 26a; Kiddushin 5a; Chagigah 13b; Yerushalmi Yoma 38a; Yerushalmi Rosh Hashana 16a.

<sup>11</sup> This appears in the first person in Yerushalmi Horayot 17b: “לְטוֹבְתֵי נִשְׁבְּרָה רַגְלֵי פִרְתֵי.” The saying appears in the third person in a number of places, including: Rashi on Zevachim 44b; Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabbah 21:2; Kav HaYashar 8:23.

<sup>12</sup> Similar language appears in I Kings 8:46–50.

אֵלָא מִשּׁוּם דְּאָמְרִינן בְּפֶרֶק קַמָּא דְּרֵאשׁ הַשְּׁנָה כְּאֵן קוֹדֵם גְּזֵר דִּין כְּאֵן לְאַסֵּר גְּזֵר דִּין, דְּכִבְרֵי ר' אֶלְעָזָר. ר' יִצְחָק אָמַר יָפָה צְעָקָה לְאָדָם בֵּין קוֹדֵם גְּזֵר דִּין בֵּין לְאַסֵּר גְּזֵר דִּין וְכוּ' וְעֵי"ש. וּמִיָּרִי הֵתָם אֶפִּילוּ בְּגְזֵר דִּין דְּיָחִיד, וְלִכְּן אָמַר לֹא דִי אִם יִקְטָאוּ לָהּ נְעֻדִין לֹא נִגְמַר דִּינָם אִם יָשׁוּבוּ וְסִלְחָת וְכוּ'. אֵלָא אֶפִּילוּ לְאַסֵּר שְׁאֵנִפְתּוּ בָם וּנְתַתָּם לְפָנֵי אוּיְבֵי, דְּהֵינּוּ לְאַסֵּר הַגְּזֵר דִּין, אִם יָשׁוּבוּ וְסִלְחָת. וְהִכִּי נָמִי אוֹדָה ה' שְׁאַף בְּזִמְנָן שְׁאֵנִפְתּוּ בֵּי דְהֵינּוּ לְאַסֵּר הַגְּזֵר דִּין, יָשׁב אַפְּהּ וּתְנַחֲמָנִי, וְנָהוּ כִּי אִם־מָאָס מְאַסְתָּנוּ קִצְפָתָ עָלֵינוּ עַד־מָאֵד. עִם כָּל זֶה הִשְׁיִבְנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנִשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יְמֵינוּ כְּקִדְמָה. וּמְכַל שְׁפֹן שְׁהַגְּזֵר דִּין דְּרַבִּים כִּוְלוּ עֲלֵמָא מוֹדוּ דְּמִתְבַּטְּל.

**Rather, it's because of what was said in the first chapter of tractate Rosh Hashana.**

[The rabbis agree that even after a sentence has been issued against a community, they can repent and G-d will forgive them, rescinding the sentence. However, there is a dispute between Tannaim, the sages of the Mishna, whether the same rule applies to an individual. Rabbi Meir said that if two people suffer from the same affliction, and one was saved and one was not, it is because one prayed wholeheartedly and was answered, and one prayed (albeit not wholeheartedly) and was not answered. Thus, his view was that an individual has the same rule as a community, that even after a sentence has been issued, he can repent and G-d will forgive him and rescind the sentence.]

[However, Rabbi Elazar disagreed, saying:] **“Here** [the first individual prayed] **before sentence** [was issued, and so he was answered, whereas] **there** [the second individual prayed] **after sentence** [was issued, and therefore he was not answered, because an individual cannot be forgiven after his sentence has been issued].” **These are the words of Rabbi Elazar.**

**Rabbi Yitzchak** [disagreed with Rabbi Elazar and] **said: “Crying out to G-d is effective for a person, both before sentence** [has been issued] **and after sentence** [has been issued, as even after his sentence has been issued, it can still be rescinded if he repents].”

- Rosh Hashana 18a

**There [in the view of Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Elazar], [G-d] judges the sentence even of an individual, and therefore [Solomon] said, it's not sufficient praise to say “when they sin against You,” and before their sentence has even been announced, to say, “they turn back [to You]” and “You will forgive [them].” Rather, the praise should recognize that even after You are angry with them and deliver them to the enemy—which is after the sentence—if they turn back [to You etc.], then “and You will forgive [them].” So too, as an individual who has sinned, I give thanks to You, O L-rd, that even in the time that You are angry with me, which is after the sentence was issued, Your anger has turned back and You comfort me, and this is the meaning of what Jeremiah has written: “For You have utterly rejected us, and are very furious with us” (Lam. 5:22), nevertheless, “bring us back to You, O L-rd, and we will be restored; renew our days as of old!” (Lam. 5:21). In any case, regarding the sentence of the community, the entire earth acknowledges that [the sentence] will be cancelled by wholehearted prayer, even after the sentence has been announced.**



אָבֵל עֲדִיין צָרִיף טַעַם לְמָה בְּפִסּוּק זֶה שֶׁל הַשִּׁיבְנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵי וְנִשְׁוֹבָה כְּתִיב חֶסֶד ה"א וְקָרִינָן וְנִשְׁוֹבָה, וְעוֹד מֵהוּ הַקָּשֶׁר שֶׁל חֲדָשׁ יְמֵינוּ וְכוּ'. וְתִדְאָ פִירוּקָא לְחֶבְרָתָא, שְׁהָרִי בְּמִקְדָּשׁ שְׁנֵי הָיוּ חֲסָרִים תְּמִשָּׁה דְּבָרִים, אֲשֶׁר מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, אִוְרִים וְתוּמִים, הָאָרוֹן וְכוּ'. וְהַכְּתוּב אֹמֵר הַשִּׁיבְנוּ ה' אֱלֹהֵי, כְּלוּמַר אֶפִּילוּ אִם אֵין אָנוּ כְּדָאִים לְפָחוֹת וְנִשְׁוֹב בְּלִי תְּמִשָּׁה דְּבָרִים, וְהִיבְנוּ דְּכְתִיב וְנִשְׁוֹב. אֲמַנָּם תְּפִלְתָּנוּ וְתַקְוַתָּנוּ הִיא שְׁוִנְשׁוּבָה כְּדְקָרִינָן וְנִשְׁוֹבָה בְּה"א, שְׁוֹה יְהִיָּה כְּשִׁיחֲדָשׁ יְמֵינוּ כְּקָדָם כְּמוֹ שְׁהִיבְנוּ בְּמִקְדָּשׁ רֵאשׁוֹן בְּעַת שְׁנִבְנָה בִּימֵי שְׁלֹמֹה, דָּאָז קָוִימָא סִיְהֵרָא בְּשְׁלִימוּתָא. יְהִי רְצוֹן שְׁיִבְנָה בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיַמֵּנוּ אָמֵן.

**But we still need a sense of why in this verse of, “Bring us back to You, O L-rd, and we will be restored” [the word *venashuva* (וְנִשְׁוֹבָה) (we will be restored)] is written missing the *heh* (as וְנִשְׁוֹב, *venashuv*) but is pronounced *venashuva*, and further, what is the connection of “renew our days as of old”? One solution to the combination, is that in the Second Temple there were five things missing that had been in the First Temple, and the letter *heh* has a numerical value of five. The five items missing were, according to Yoma 21a: **fire from Heaven; the Urim and Tumim;**<sup>13</sup> **the Ark of the Covenant**, and the Ark cover upon it, and the cherubs that were upon the Ark cover; and the Divine Presence (*Shechina*), and the Divine Spirit (*Ruach haKodesh*).<sup>14</sup> **The Scripture says, “Bring us back to You, O L-rd,” as if to say, “Even if we are not worthwhile, at least let us be restored without the five things, and that’s why it is written, “and we will be restored” deficiently, as וְנִשְׁוֹב (*venashuv*). Indeed, our prayer and our hope is that “and we will be restored,” as it is read “and we will be restored” with a *heh* and all that symbolizes, which is that He shall renew our days as of old, as we were in the First Temple in the time that it was built, in the days of Solomon, for then “the moon stood in its fullness.”<sup>15</sup> May it be Your will that [the Temple] will be rebuilt, speedily in our days, amen!****

\* \* \*

<sup>13</sup> Elements of the breastplate worn by the High Priest.

<sup>14</sup> In Yoma 21a, the fact that five items from the First Temple were missing in the Second Temple was also associated with the letter *heh*, though with regard to the word in Haggai 1:8 for “I will be glorified,” which is written as *ve’ekaved* (וְאֶכְבֵּד) but which is pronounced *ve’ekavda* (וְאֶכְבְּדָה).

<sup>15</sup> Israel is analogized to the moon, and reached its brightest point during King Solomon’s reign. Midrash Rabbah Ex. 15:26: “On the first of Nissan, the moon begins to illuminate. As the days continue, her luminosity increases, until the 15th day, when her disk is full. . . Likewise is Israel: There were fifteen generations from Abraham until Solomon; Abraham began illuminating. . . with Solomon, the moon’s disk was filled.” The term itself appears a number of times in Zohar, including I:150a, 223a, 249b; II:70a, 85a, 86a, 215a; III:40b, 46a, 61a, 98b, 287a. The term also appears in Zohar Chadash. For example, Zohar I:150a: “The moon stood in its fullness, and the Temple was built, and then Solomon saw Wisdom eye-to-eye, with no need for a dream [in order to prophesy].”