

*“Return to Me and I Will Return to You”*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheil, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, Leah bat Shifra and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

This Shabbat is known as “Shabbat Chazon,” based upon the opening words of our *haftarah*: “The vision (*chazon*) of *Yeshayahu* (Isaiah) the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, [and] Hezekiah, kings of Judah.” (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 1:1, this and all Bible and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In keeping with the themes of the Three Weeks and Tisha b’Av, much of this *haftarah* consists of dire statements of prophecy that bespeak Hashem’s rejection of our behavior, and pronouncements of future disaster:

Woe to a sinful nation, a people heavy with iniquity, evildoing seed, corrupt children. They forsook the L-rd; they provoked the Holy One of Israel; they drew backwards. Your land is desolate; your cities burnt with fire. Your land - in your presence, strangers devour it; and it is desolate as that turned over to strangers. And the daughter of Zion shall be left like a hut in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city... Of what use are your many sacrifices to Me? says the L-rd. I am sated with the burnt-offerings of rams and the fat of fattened cattle; and the blood of bulls and sheep and male goats I do not want. When you come to appear before Me, who requested this of you, to trample My courts? ... And when you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you, even when you pray at length, I do not hear... How has she [Jerusalem] become a harlot, a faithful city; full of justice, in which righteousness would lodge, but now [there are only] murderers (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 1:4, 7-8, 11-12, 15 and 21, brackets my own)

Yet, in the midst of these ominous predictions, *Yeshayahu*’s words of potential reconciliation burst forth as a beacon of hope:

Wash, cleanse yourselves [O' Jewish people], remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes, cease to do evil. Learn to do good, seek justice, strengthen the robbed, perform justice for the orphan, plead the case of the widow. Come now, let us debate, says the L-rd. If your sins prove to be like crimson, they will become white as snow; if they prove to be as red as crimson dye, they shall become as wool... And I will restore your judges as at first and your counselors as in the beginning; afterwards you shall be called City of Righteousness, Faithful City. Zion shall be redeemed through justice and her penitent [ones] through righteousness. (1:16-18, 26-27, brackets my own)

Yeshayahu's message thunders throughout the ages: All is not lost, there is always hope for the Jewish people – if we do *teshuvah* (return unto Hashem). According to Rashi (1040-1105), this is the meaning of the oblique phrase in our passage, “Come now, let us debate, says the L-rd,” which he explains as, “together, you and I, and we will know who offended whom, and if you offended Me, I still give you hope to repent.” Based upon the overall message of the *haftarah*, however, the clear connotation of Rashi's explanation is that *klal Yisrael* (the Jewish people) affronted G-d through their failure to “seek justice, strengthen the robbed, perform justice for the orphan, [and] plead the case of the widow.” As such, how are we to understand the expression, “Come now, let us debate?” After all, there appears to be little to discuss when we were so demonstrably guilty.

The second Bobover Rebbe, HaRav Ben-Zion Halberstam *zatzal* (1874-1941), known to posterity as the “Kedushat Tzion” after the name of his commentary on the Torah and Festivals, suggests that there was, indeed, an outright dispute between Hashem and the Jewish people regarding the relationship between *geulah* (Redemption) and *teshuvah*:

The Holy One blessed be He said that the Jewish people should undertake the complete *teshuvah* process, and then they would be rewarded with the ultimate and total Redemption. As the text states, “Return to Me [Jewish people], and I [Hashem] will return to you, said the L-rd of Hosts...” (*Sefer Malachi* 3:7, brackets my own) [In stark contrast,] the Jewish people declared that, “Hashem, You must first redeem us and then we will do *teshuvah*.” As the text states, “Cause us to return unto You Hashem [by first redeeming us,] and then we will return to You...” (*Sefer Megillat Eicha* 5:21, brackets my own)

Based upon his analysis of the disagreement that obtained between Hashem and the Jewish people, the Kedushat Tzion explains, “Come now, let us debate,” as referring to the proper order that must obtain regarding *teshuvah* and Redemption:

Perhaps you [the Jewish people] might say: “It is not within our ability to do *teshuvah* in this bitter *galut* (exile), therefore, we have cried out to You, Hashem, ‘Cause us to return unto You Hashem [by first redeeming us,] and then we will return to You...’” Regarding this assertion, one could easily respond, “Since the Holy One blessed be He has already said, ‘Return to Me [Jewish people], and I [Hashem] will return to you...’” by definition, this expression has created an indelible impression in your hearts and minds. As such, it will be easy for you [the Jewish people] to do *teshuvah*, and perforce, [the Redemption will come] and, [therefore the text states;] “If your sins prove to be like crimson, they will become white as snow.”(All translations and brackets my own)

In sum, HaRav Ben-Zion Halberstam *zatzal* explains that it is quite understandable that we feel unable to do national *teshuvah* in the midst of the seemingly endless dark and bitter nights of *galut*, and, therefore, we invoke the words “Cause us to return unto You Hashem [by first redeeming us,] and then we will return to You...” Nevertheless, we should feel confident that this *teshuvah* is within our reach. As HaRav Halberstam notes, Hashem has guaranteed us that the *geulah shlaimah* (ultimate Redemption) will follow immediately in the wake of our *teshuvah*: “Return to Me [Jewish people], and I [Hashem] will return to you...” These are comforting and empowering words, indeed, for they foretell the coming of *Mashiach Tzidkanu* (our righteous Messiah).

With Hashem’s help and our fervent desire, may the Jewish people return to Him in complete *teshuvah* soon and in our days, so that the *geulah shlaimah* will be realized and our sins “become as white as snow.” *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>  
They may also be found on [YUTorah.org](http://YUTorah.org) using the search criteria of Etengoff and the

parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on "*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis," may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of [Rabbi Soloveitchik's](#) English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.