

The Jewish Weekly

The Single Unatonable Sin

By Rabbi Yerachmiel Tilles

He was a wealthy and respected, happily married man, whose world collapsed after his wife gave birth to twins that were paralyzed from head to toe. They grew up unable to speak, confined to wheelchairs, and needed to be fed, clothed, cleaned, and changed. He couldn't take the suffering any longer and took to drinking as an escape route.

His friends brought the matter to the attention of Rabbi Yosef Netanyan, asking him to intervene. R. Netanyan promptly went to visit HaRav Ben Tzion Abba-Shaul and told him the man's story. The Rav immediately said, "Bring him to me!"

Netanyan went and told the man about the greatness of HaRav Ben Tzion, but he paid no attention. He said, "What could he possibly do for me?"

"The key to salvation is in his hands," Netanyan replied. "They heed his words in Heaven!"

After much persuasion he finally agreed. They went together to the Rav, who seemed to be waiting for their arrival. The Rav sat the man to his left and Netanyan in front of him. The Rav then turned to the man with affection and said, "Tell me what the problem is."

Years of suffering erupted in bitter tears. "I'm healthy, I have money, I have everything. Yet, my life is miserable!" He exclaimed. He then explained to the Rav about the two children and how he's unable to continue living and had even thought about committing suicide.

He cried, "Either the Rav performs a miracle that at least one of them will be healed, or he pray for me that I die!" He then sobbed uncontrollably.

Netanyan thought that HaRav Ben Tzion would comfort him, but to his surprise, the Rav's great wisdom led him to rebuke the man harshly.

"You should be ashamed of yourself! You should know that all sins can be atoned for, except suicide. That sin completely removes one from Olam HaBah (the next world [of everlasting life]).

"Do you know why? Because this world is the world of tests, like a war zone. A soldier is sent into battle. If he gives his life, fights fiercely, and wins, he will receive recognition and a medal of honor, and will be promoted to a higher rank. But if he is negligent and shows resentment, he will be condemned and even punished. But for one act, there is absolutely no forgiveness, desertion. Despair of life is like desertion!"

No one ever spoke to him like that. He stopped crying and listened intently. HaRav Ben Tzion then told him about an incident that happened in Izmir, Turkey, about three hundred years ago.

Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen, the Shevet Mussar, was invited to a seudat mitzvah, and when he arrived, the hosts' wife yelled at him to leave.

"What injustice did you find in me?" he wondered.

"Nothing, but it is forbidden for a rasha (evil person) to look at the face of a tzadik (righteous person). I can't stand your kedusha (holiness)!"

Perplexed, Rabbi Eliyahu asked, "What makes you think that you are a rasha?"

"Not me," she answered, "rather the spirit possessing me."

When the Rabbi heard this, he began speaking with the spirit, asking him why he received this punishment.

The spirit explained "I was born in Germany to a Torah-observant family. In my teens, I connected with bad friends, and they enticed me to commit the most severe sins. After a while I started to feel remorse and wanted to return to my community.

"The community didn't agree to take me back. Rather they denounced and expelled me. The friends I left also mocked me for trying to go back. I wandered around tormented. My soul had been beaten from all sides, it was too hard for me, and I couldn't take it anymore. Then, one clear day, I committed suicide.

"My soul ascended to heaven and there they didn't even agree to look at me, because suicide had no atonement. They cast me back to this world to wander for eternity, persecuted by ruthless malachei chabala (angels of destruction) full of wrath."

Rabbi Eliyahu HaKohen promised that he would pray and dedicate a certain amount of his Torah study for him, and in that merit he would be permitted into Gehinom (Purgatory), to be cleansed.

Upon hearing this, the spirit agreed to leave the woman.

After the Rav finished telling the story the man murmured, "But poor guy, he couldn't stand life anymore."

HaRav Ben Tzion was determined, "There is a rule in Torah that says that no one can receive a test that they are unable to withstand, just as a soldier isn't sent into a lost battle. The Talmud brings proof for this by telling us that Chananya, Mishael and Azariah sacrificed themselves and didn't bow down to Nebuchadnezar's statue, thereby sanctifying G-d's name in public.

"The Talmud then reveals that if they had been tortured they wouldn't have stood the agony and

It Once Happened...

and would have bowed down to the statue (because it wasn't actual idolatry, rather a monument in honor of the king, as the Tosafot commentary explains there).

"How did the Sages know that they wouldn't have withstood the torture? The answer is that one doesn't receive a test one cannot withstand. They were tested by being thrown into a fiery furnace and they endured it. If they could have withstood a more difficult test such as torture, they would have been tested with that instead.

"Listen carefully. That young man was tested with terrible depression and stress, and he was required to withstand it. You are being tested from heaven with an enormous test, but you're required to withstand it and therefore able to do so. Don't desert the battle! Getting drunk is also a kind of desertion."

The man had a gloomy look on his face. He asked, "But why? Why? Why were these souls sent into the world if they're bound like cocoons? and why were we chosen to be their parents?"

HaRav Ben Tzion's face lit up. "You want to know why? You want to understand? Good! Who these souls are I won't reveal to you. But why they chose you I will tell you. In your previous gilgul (reincarnation) you..."

As the Rav began speaking, the man became pale. Rabbi Netanyan felt that the matter was personal, a secret from the world of souls. He called to the Rav and said "Kevod HaRav, maybe I should step out?"

The man stared at me. HaRav Ben Tzion muttered, "That's it. That's enough!"


"No! Please HaRav, tell me," begged the man.

The Rav replied, "It is from Heaven that we were interrupted. It is a sign that I shouldn't continue. But know that everything is justified. Everything is precisely measured. Everything is for the best.

"But this I can say: this is the height of your suffering. You won't suffer from health problems or from earning a living, and the rest of your children will be healthy and will bring you utter satisfaction and joy!"

The father left HaRav Ben Tzion's home invigorated, his face glowing and his soul strengthened, and now able to accept the judgment of heaven wholeheartedly and with joy. And indeed, they subsequently had healthy children and today are a happy and joyous family.

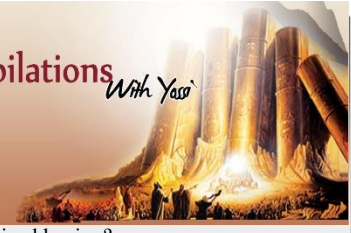
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Y-GRAPHICS

Shabbat Times – Parshat Noach

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	5:26	6:38	7:18
Tel Aviv	5:41	6:39	7:15
Haifa	5:31	6:38	7:16
Be'er Sheva	5:44	6:41	7:18



It is the Germans Who You Saw Smoking on Shabbat

When the Bobover Rebbe, R' Shlomo Halberstam, arrived in America after surviving the Holocaust, he settled in the West Side of Manhattan. With barely a minyan (a quorum of 10 people), the Rebbe and his son, R' Naftali, would often stand on the sidewalk in search of Jewish men to complete the minyan.

One Erev Shabbat, they called in a man named Yankel, who was also a Survivor. Yankel shared that back in the day, he had served as the baal tefillah (cantor) in his village. When the Bobover Rebbe heard that, he said, "Wonderful! Please lead the Friday Night prayers for us!"

This continued for many weeks – Yankel would lead the community with the Friday Night prayers. As they got to know him, it was clear that Yankel's traumatic war experiences had left him angry at Hashem for all he had endured.

One Friday, Yankel decided not to come. And the following week he again did not come. The Bobover Rebbe was concerned. He asked R' Naftali to find him. But they did not know his address.

"He said he lives on the other side of Central Park," said the Bobover Rebbe, "so go there and see if you can find him." R' Naftali took someone along, and they started their search, which felt like finding a needle in a haystack. As they walked through Central Park, they were shocked to see Yankel sitting on a bench smoking a cigar – on Shabbat!

They went over and relayed that the Bobover Rebbe was concerned about his welfare. Yankel nodded, thanked them, and continued smoking his cigar. R' Naftali reported back to his father, "We found Yankel in the park. Unfortunately, he was smoking a cigar."

The Rebbe responded, "It can't be."

"But we saw him smoking with our own eyes."

The Rebbe again said, "It can't be."

"But we are two witnesses, who both saw him smoking on Shabbat."

The Rebbe responded, "He's not the one smoking, it's the Germans that are smoking. You don't know what he went through."

The next week, Yankel returned to shul. The Rebbe greeted him with, "R' Yankel, I've been missing your Lecha Dodi! Please daven for us."

Fast forward 30 years. The Rebbe was now a leader of thousands of chassidim. One day, a man approached the Rebbe after Shacharit. "Rebbe, do you remember me? I'm Yankel from your minyan in the West Side."

The Bobover Rebbe gave him a very warm welcome. Yankel continued, "I am marrying off my first grandchild, and I'd be honored if the Rebbe would be mesader kiddushin (officiate the wedding)."

The Rebbe explained that he didn't even do it for many of his own grandchildren but agreed to come to one of the Sheva Brachot. R' Naftali came along with the Rebbe to the simcha. When they entered, they saw at least 100 of Yankel's grandchildren – all Bnei Torah, many learning in Kollel.

The Bobover Rebbe turned to R' Naftali and said, "Didn't I tell you? It was the Germans smoking that cigar; it wasn't him." The Rebbe relegated the cigar smoking on Shabbat to the effects of Yankel's traumatic experiences, not attributing it to his essence. It's not that the Rebbe judged R' Yankel favorably – he did not judge him at all!

Reprinted from an email of The Weekly Vort.

What is our most repetitive blessing?

Without doubt it's the brachah we recite over a rainbow. In Parshat Noach, the Torah tells us that immediately after the flood Hashem placed a rainbow in the sky to be an everlasting sign of the fact that never again would He bring about global destruction. Therefore when we see a rainbow, we recite this beautiful blessing and it brings us a lot of reassurance.

The wording is as follows: ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם - Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe, זוכר הברית - who remembers the Covenant, ונאמן בבריתו - and Who is faithful to His Covenant, וקים במאמרו - and who fulfils His word.

We can see three statements in this brief blessing, and they all seem to be saying the same thing.

The origin of the blessing is in the Gemara Masechet Brachot. There the Gemara asks what is the blessing we recite over a rainbow. The answer given is that it's a blessing with the conclusion, "זוכר הברית - Hashem remembers His Covenant," and that's all.

Rabbi Yishmael however has a different tradition; that we conclude the brachah with the words, "ונאמן בבריתו וקים במאמרו" - Hashem is faithful to His covenant and He keeps His word."

When Rav Papa heard these two different traditions he struck a compromise formula. He brought both endings together to keep both traditions, and that's how our brachah came about, a brachah with these three statements in it.

When you come to think of it, they are not completely repetitive. First of all we say, "זוכר הברית - Hashem remembers the Covenant." Remembering could mean recalling without necessarily doing anything about it, and that's why in addition we say, "ונאמן בבריתו - He is faithful to His covenant," that is, He cares about it, He will recall it properly for the sake of the future, but even that isn't sufficient. We need the third statement, "וקים במאמרו" - and who fulfils His word." Hashem will act on His word to guarantee in practice that He will deliver.

When it comes to our commitment to a Jewish way of life I believe that similarly, there are three levels. First of all we have "זוכר הברית" – it's so lovely and wonderful when Jewish people remember their Jewishness, their upbringing, their roots, their Bar or Bat Mitzvah. It is part of what they are about.

But in addition to that, we need a higher level as well – נאמן בבריתו, faithfulness to the covenant, support for Judaism. We need to be loyal to our synagogues and communities, to be there for the sake of our nation, to participate generously in charitable activities, to be one of those seeking to guarantee the continuity of our faith.

But even that is not the highest level we can reach. We need the third level as well: "וקים במאמרו" – קיום המצוות, the fulfilment of the word of Hashem. This means being observant, to guarantee that on a practical level in our lives we are true to the word of the Almighty.

So therefore we find within this ever-so-repetitive blessing a key to guaranteeing the continuity of the Jewish nation. Let's continue our Jewish tradition, pray with all our hearts for the healing of all those injured, for the safe return of those taken as hostages, as well as Divine Protection for our brave IDF soldiers, Police officers, medical professionals, Firefighters, ZAKA members, security personnel and all those citizens protecting us in Israel as well as around the world, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children or parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, safe, quiet and sweet Shabbat.

Yossi

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: None

NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 153

NUMBER OF WORDS: 1861

NUMBER OF LETTERS: 6907

HAFTORA:

Ashkenazim: Yeshayahu 54:1 - 55:5

Sephardim & Chabad: Yeshayahu 54:1-10



On behalf of "The Jewish Weekly" We apologize, but due to the current situation and our editor being dispatched down to the south, unfortunately, we were not able to publish an issue last week.

Please see a message sent by Yossi to the world last Friday Erev Shabbat Bereishit.

WOW!!!!!! Never did I think it would be this hard to put pen to paper, or fingers to keyboard. Words cannot describe how we all feel right now. There are simply no terms in the dictionary to describe the depth of the pain, the outrage, and the sadness, especially for those like myself, who went down south last Shabbat afternoon, to save those who can be saved and honor those who simply couldn't be saved.

But neither can words contain the strength of the Jewish People's resolve, and the immense power of our faith and our unity. United as one and firm in our trust in Hashem, Torah assures us victory over the evil people who are blinded by darkness.

It is no coincidence that the hostilities broke out on Simchat Torah, the day we joyously read how Hashem created heaven and earth. It was He who gave the Land of Israel to His beloved nation, and it is He who will surely watch over us today.

Let's remember: We are all in this together. And together, with Hashem's help, we shall overcome.