

The Ben Ish Chai's Divine Revelation

Menashe the King of Yehudah Killed the Prophet Yeshayah with the Tzitzis that Protruded from the Cedar

In this week's parsha, parshas Shelach, it is fitting that we explore the mitzvah of Tzitzis. It is a vital mitzvah that we perform each and every day. It states (Bamidbar 15, 38): **“דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם ועשו להם ציצית על כנפי בגדיהם לדורותם, ונתנו על ציצית הכנף פתיל—speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them that they shall make themselves Tzitzis on the corners of their garments, throughout their generations. And they shall place upon the Tzitzis of each corner a thread of “techeiles.”** According to the Rambam (Hilchos Tzitzis 1, 6), one of the eight strands should be “techeiles,” and the other seven should be white.

In truth, according to the halachah, the white strands and the strand of “techeiles” do not negate one another. In other words, even if a person doesn't have “techeiles,” he can still fulfill the mitzvah with eight white fringes. As we have learned in the Mishnah (Menachos 38a): **“התכלת אינה מעכבת את הלבן, והלבן אינו מעכב את התכלת”—the absence of the “techeiles” does not invalidate the white; and the absence of the white does not invalidate the “techeiles.”** Thus, currently, even though we lack “techeiles”; nevertheless, we fulfill the mitzvah of Tzitzis with eight white strands.

To Have in Mind the Mitzvah of “Techeiles” Even Today

It is worth publicizing, however, a tremendous chiddush from the writings of the Arizal (Sha'ar HaKavanos, Krias Shema, Drush 8). He writes that even in these times, when we do not have “techeiles,” nevertheless, when reciting the passuk (Bamidbar 15, 39): **“וראייתם אותו וזכרתם את כל מצוות ה' ועשיתם אותם”—and you shall see it and you shall remember all the mitzvos of Hashem and perform them—we must look at the Tzitzis and imagine that we actually do have “techeiles.”**

Notwithstanding our limited comprehension of these matters, it appears that we can explain the Arizal's remarks based on what we have learned in the Gemara (Menachos 43b). The holy

Tanna, Rabbi Meir, provides us with a magnificent rationale for the mitzvah of “techeiles”:

“תניא היה רבי מאיר אומר, מה נשתנה תכלת מכל מיני צבעונין, מפני שהתכלת דומה לים וים דומה לרקיע ורקיע לכסא הכבוד, שנאמר (שמות כד-י) ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר וכעצם השמים לטוהר, וכתיב (יחזקאל א-כו) כמראה אבן ספיר דמות כסא.”

It was taught in a Baraita: R. Meir used to say: What distinguishes “techeiles” (a shade of blue) from all the other colors (for this mitzvah)? Because “techeiles” resembles the (color of the) sea, and the sea resembles the color of the sky, and the sky resembles the color of the Kisei HaKavod (Throne of Glory), as it is said (Shemos 24, 10): **“And under his feet was that which had the form of a sapphire brick,”** and it is also written (Yechezkel 1, 26): **“The appearance of sapphire stone in the likeness of a throne.”** Rashi explains: The impression of the “techeiles” reminds a person of the One Who sits on the Throne.

Thus, we can better appreciate the teaching of the Arizal. He wrote that when reciting the passuk: **“וראייתם אותו וזכרתם את כל מצוות ה' ועשיתם אותם”—we should gaze upon the Tzitzis and imagine that one of the fringes is actually “techeiles.”** This will remind us of Rabbi Meir's elucidation: **“The ‘techeiles’ resembles the sea; the sea resembles the sky; and the sky resembles the Kisei HaKavod.”** Consequently, we will remember HKB”H sitting atop the Kisei HaKavod.

Nevertheless, Rabbi Meir's statement still deserves further explanation. Without a doubt, it is crucial to keep HKB”H, the Giver of the Torah, in mind, as David HaMelech declares (Tehillim 16, 8): **“שׁוֹיֵתִי ה' לְנֶגְדִי תָמִיד”—I have set Hashem before me always.** However, why is the “techeiles” necessary to help us envision the Kisei HaKavod upon which HKB”H sits? This suggests that not only must we remember HKB”H, but it is also important to remember that He sits atop the Kisei HaKavod. This deserves further clarification.

The Prophet Yeshayah Was Punished Severely for Disparaging Yisrael

I was struck by an incredible idea. I would like to explain the matter based on a fascinating yet horrifying incident described in the Gemara. The Gemara describes how Yeshayah HaNavi was murdered by his grandson, Menasheh the King of Yehudah; Menashe was the son of King Chizkiyahu and the grandson of Yeshayah HaNavi, his mother's father. The incident occurred while Menasheh was still an evil person and an idolater. He went so far as to place an idol in the Heichal, as chronicled in Melachim II (21, 7). Yet, as the Gemara teaches us (Sanhedrin 103a), he subsequently performed teshuvah; however, all of the heavenly malachim locked all of the gates of teshuvah, in an attempt to deny him entrance. Ultimately, though, HKB"H created a special entrance and accepted his teshuvah. Here is the Gemara's chronicle of the event (Yevamos 49b):

"מנשה הרג את ישעיה. אמר רבא, מידן דיינייה וקטליה, אמר ליה [הוכחה א'] משה רבך אמר (שמות לג-ב) כי לא יראני האדם וחי, ואת אמרת (ישעיה ו-א) ואראה את ה' וישב על כסא רם ונשא. [הוכחה ב'], משה רבך אמר (דברים ד-ז) מי... כה' אלקיניו בכל קראנו אליו, ואת אמרת (ישעיה נה-ו) דרשו ה' בהמצאו. [הוכחה ג'] משה רבך אמר (שמות כג-כ) את מספר ימיך אמלא, ואת אמרת (מלכים ב כ-ו) והוספתי על ימיך חמש עשרה שנה."

Menashe murdered Yeshayah. Rava said: First, he (Menasheh) **judged him** (as a false prophet) and then he **killed him** (as dictated by Torah law). He (Menasheh) **said to him** (Yeshayah), **"Moshe, your teacher said, 'For no human can see Me and live.' Yet, you said: 'I saw Hashem sitting upon a high and lofty throne.'** Secondly, **Moshe, your teacher, said: 'For who is a great nation that has G-d close to it, like Hashem, our G-d, whenever we call Him'**—implying that G-d is available for Yisrael at all times. **Yet, you said: 'Seek Hashem when He can be found'**—implying that there are times that Hashem is unavailable to Yisrael. Thirdly, **Moshe, your teacher, said: 'The number of your days I shall fill out'**—indicating that He will never add to them. **Yet, you said (to my father Chizkiyahu): 'I will add fifteen years to your life.'"**

Further on, our blessed sages reconcile all of the apparent contradictions. Surely, Yeshayah HaNavi could have justified himself to Menasheh in similar fashion had Menasheh been willing to listen. Yet, he did not attempt to justify himself to Menasheh, as the Gemara explains:

"אמר ישעיה, ידענא ביה דלא מקבל מה דאימא ליה, ואי אימא ליה אישויה מזיד, אמר שם, איבלע בארזא. אתיוה לארזא ונסרוה, כי מטא להדי פומא נח נפשיה, משום דאמר (ישעיה ו-ו) ובתוך עם טמא שפתים אנכי יושב."

Yeshayah thought to himself, **"I know that he (Menasheh) will not accept whatever I say to him** (justifying my apparent contradictory statements). **If I do answer him** (and he kills me, anyway), **I will render him an intentional killer:**" Instead, **Yeshayah uttered a divine name** (in an effort to save himself) **and was swallowed up within a cedar tree.** **They** (Menashe's servants) **brought the cedar tree and they split it** (with an axe). **When it** (the axe) **reached his mouth, he passed away** (he was punished "midah k'neged midah" for using his mouth to speak disparaging words against Yisrael), **because he said: "And I dwell among a people with impure lips."**

Yeshayah's Hiding Place Was Revealed by His Protruding Tzitzis

The great Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad, the author of Ben Ish Chai, in his sefer Ben Yehoyada on the parables in the Talmud, notes additional details of this tragic story that appear in the Talmud Yerushalmi. Menashe was able to identify the cedar in which Yeshayah hid, because his four Tzitzis protruded from the tree; they were not swallowed by the tree along with the navi. Here is the pertinent passage (Sanhedrin 51b): הוה "כד דקם מנשה, הוה פרי חורי ישעיה, בעי מיקטליניה והוא ערק מן קדמויי, ערק לארזא ובלעיה ארזא, חסר ציציתיה דגולתיה. אתון ואמרינן קדמויי, אמר לון אזלון ונסרון ארזא, ונסרו לארזא. **When Menashe became king, he pursued Yeshayah. He attempted to kill him, but he fled from him. He fled to a cedar-tree, and it swallowed him up, except for his Tzitzis that remained exposed, revealing his location. They came and informed Menashe that he was inside the cedar. He told them to go and split open the cedar-tree. They split open the tree and blood dripped from the tree as he was killed.**

Further on, the Yerushalmi expounds on that which is written about Menasheh (Melachim II 21, 16): **"וגם דם נקי שפך מנשה הרבה מאד עד אשר מלא את ירושלים פה לפה, וכי איפשר לכשר ודם למלאות את ירושלים דם נקי פה לפה, אלא שהרג את ישעיהו שהיה שקול כמשה, דכתיב ביה (במדבר יב-ח) פה Menashe also shed a large amount of innocent blood, until he filled Yerushalayim from end to end ('mouth to mouth')."** **Is it possible for a human being to fill Yerushalayim with innocent blood from end to end? Rather, it means that he killed Yeshayahu, who was equivalent to Moshe, about whom it is written: "Mouth to mouth do I speak to him."**

The Ben Yehoyada provides us with an incredible insight. He explains why HKB"H arranged for Yeshayah HaNavi—who was punished for speaking disparagingly of Yisrael—to be found by means of his exposed Tzitzis. He cites a precious fact in the name of the Rosh; the mitzvah of Tzitzis indicates that Yisrael are G-d's children. After searching for the source, I was unable to find the Rosh in question.

Nevertheless, I found an explicit source in the Midrash Shocahr Tov related to the passuk (Tehillim 90, 16): **“יראה אל עבדיך בעליך - והדרך על בניהם - והדרך, זה תכלת שבציצית, שישראל מתכסין בו, שנקראו בנים למקום.”** **“May Your deeds be visible to Your servants and Your majesty upon their children.”** **“And Your majesty” refers to the ‘techeiles’ in the Tzitzis that Yisrael—who are called G-d’s children—cover themselves with.**

The Ben Yehoyada adds a wonderful allusion: **“כי כל כנף יש בו - שמונה חוטי, וחמש קשרים, כמנין אה”ד, וארבע פעמים אה”ד עולה ב”ן”** **—every corner (of the Tzitzis) has eight fringes and five knots, equaling the numerical value of אה”ד (13). Now, four times אה”ד equals ב”ן (52)—**meaning child. Thus, we have an allusion that we are referred to as G-d’s children in the merit of the mitzvah of Tzitzis.

Two Tzitzis in Front and Two Tzitzis in Back Either Way They Are Called Children

In this manner, he proceeds to explain brilliantly why HKB”H commanded us to place Tzitzis on the four corners of our garments—two in front and two in back. He refers to a dispute in the Gemara (Kiddushin 36a) between Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Meir apropos the passuk (Devarim 14, 1): **“בנים אתם לה’ אלקיכם, בזמן שאתם נוהגים מנהג: רבי יחודה, בנים אתם קרויים בנים, אין אתם נוהגים מנהג בנים אין אתם קרויים בנים, דברי רבי יהודה, “You are sons to Hashem, your G—d”: when you behave like sons, you are referred to as sons; when you do not behave like sons, you are not referred to as sons; this is the opinion of Rabbi Yehudah. Rabbi Meir says, under all circumstances you are considered sons.**

The Rashba (ibid.) points out that we have a general rule that in disputes between Rabbi Meir and Rabbi Yehudah, the halachah accords with Rabbi Yehudah (Eiruvim 46b): **“רבי מאיר ורבי יהודה, הלכה כרבי יהודה.”** Nevertheless, regarding this particular dispute, the halachah accords with Rabbi Meir—**“under all circumstances you are considered sons.”** For, the language of the pesukim substantiate his point-of-view. Accordingly, we can posit that the mitzvah of Tzitzis demonstrates that the halachah accords with Rabbi Meir; even when Yisrael are not acting in line with the will of G-d, they are nevertheless considered His children.

Let us explain. The two Tzitzis in front of a person represent Yisrael when they are acting in accordance with G-d’s will; since all of Hashem’s mitzvos stand before them, ready to be fulfilled properly. On the other hand, the two Tzitzis behind a person represent Yisrael when they fail to act according to G-d’s will; since the mitzvos are behind them and out of sight. Hence, HKB”H commanded to place four sets of Tzitzis on the four corners of their garments, in front of them and behind them, to teach us that the halachah accords with

Rabbi Meir. In both situations, we are considered His children, even when we are not acting according to His will.

The matter is easily understood in light of what the Chida writes in Rosh David (Emor). He explains that the reason Yisrael are afforded a means of tikun by performing teshuvah is because HKB”H is like a father to them. As the Gemara teaches us (Kiddushin 32a): **“האב שמחל על כבודו כבודו מחול”**, **--a father who waived his honor, his honor is waived.** Therefore, HKB”H is legally permitted to accept Yisrael’s teshuvah and forego His kavod. This is alluded to by the mitzvah of Tzitzis. Even if there are Jews who do not follow G-d’s will—and to them the mitzvos are like the two Tzitzis behind one’s back, out of sight and mind—nevertheless, they are still called children and are afforded tikun by means of teshuvah.

This explains very nicely why HKB”H orchestrated the death of Yeshayah HaNavi utilizing the Tzitzis protruding from the cedar-tree. As explained, he was being punished for speaking disparagingly of Yisrael: **“And I dwell among a people with impure lips.”** He followed the viewpoint of Rabbi Yehudah—that when Yisrael fail to act in accordance with G-d’s will, they are no longer considered His children. Therefore, having the status of reshaim, they are an impure people and are not afforded tikun. The Tzitzis on the four corners, however, prove that he was mistaken. Even when they fail to follow the ways and precepts of Hashem, they remain His children. Therefore, the Tzitzis were instrumental in his punishment. This concludes his magnificent insight.

Rabbi Meir’s Elucidation Regarding the “Techeiles” Is Consistent with His Opinion Regarding Yisrael’s Status as Children

We can now rejoice, for this enlightens us with regards to Rabbi Meir’s rationale for the mitzvah of “techeiles”: **“מפני שהתכלת דומה לים, וים דומה לרקיע, ורקיע לכסא הכבוד”**—the “techeiles” calls to mind the sea, which calls to mind the sky, which calls to mind the Kisei HaKavod. Rashi explained that this process serves to remind us of the One sitting upon the Throne of Glory. Recall that we posed the question: Why is it necessary to evoke the image of the Kisei HaKavod, after all, the goal is to evoke the thought of HKB”H?

Based on what we have learned, we can propose an explanation. The four sets of Tzitzis prove that the halachah accords with Rabbi Meir—in either situation, Yisrael are referred to as G-d’s children, and are afforded tikun via teshuvah. Now, we have learned in the Gemara (Yoma 86a): **“גדולה תשובה שמוגעת עד כסא הכבוד”**-- the power of teshuvah is so great that it reaches all the way up to the Kisei HaKavod—highlighting the fact that a father is permitted to waive His kavod. Therefore, HKB”H specifically instructed that “techeiles”

be associated with the mitzvah of Tzitzis; He is conveying the fact that He accepts the teshuvah of all of His children, even those Jews analogous to the rear Tzitzis.

Let us add another juicy idea. We have seen that Rabbi Meir's elucidation about the "techeiles" and the Kisei HaKavod coincides with his opinion that Yisrael are considered G-d's children under all circumstances. As such, they are afforded tikun by means of teshuvah, a fact that we learn from the four corners of the Tzitzis. Thus, we find that Rabbi Meir's two statements go hand in hand marvelously.

This explains very nicely a Jewish minhag that originated from the teachings of the Arizal in Sha'ar HaKavanos (Drushei Tefillas HaShachar 1). Prior to reciting the morning Krias Shema, one should gather together the fringes from all four corners and hold them opposite one's heart. In this manner, we demonstrate our desire to connect and reunite those Jews who are analogous to the two rear Tzitzis with Hashem by accepting the yoke of heavenly sovereignty with the recitation of the Krias Shema. We pray that they will also perform complete teshuvah and lovingly accept upon themselves the yoke of heavenly sovereignty.

The Wonders of Divine Providence: The Three-tiered Connection between Yeshayah HaNavi King Chizkiyahu and His Son Menasheh

Now, let us delve further into the specifics of the terrible and tragic demise of Yeshayah HaNavi and reveal the wondrous ways of Hashem and His divine supervision. As we learned, our blessed sages attest to the fact in the Yerushalmi that Yeshayah was comparable to Moshe Rabeinu: **שהיה שקול כמושה דכתיב ביה פה** Yet, he was murdered by his grandson Menasheh, the King of Yehudah, the son of King Chizkiyahu. While hiding in a cedar-tree, his location was revealed by means of his exposed Tzitzis. May Hashem guide us on this journey.

To begin with, Chazal teach us that Yeshayah HaNavi was instrumental in Menasheh's birth. HKB"H sent him to visit the ailing King Chizkiyahu; he was to inform him that his time to die had arrived due to his failure to fulfill the mitzvah of "pru u'rvu." Here is the Gemara's account of the incident (Berachos 10a):

"אמר רב המנונא, מאי דכתיב (קהלת ח-א) ומי יודע פשר דבר, מי כהקב"ה שיודע לעשות פשרה בין שני צדדים בין חזקיהו לישעיהו, חזקיהו אמר ליתי ישעיהו גבאי, דהכי אשכחן באלהו דאזל לגבי אחאב, ישעיהו אמר ליתי חזקיהו גבאי, דהכי אשכחן ביהורם בן אחאב דאזל לגבי אלישע.

מה עשה הקב"ה, הביא יסורים על חזקיהו, ואמר לו לישעיהו לך ובקר את החולה, שנאמר (מלכים ב כ-א) בימים ההם חלה חזקיהו למות, ויבוא אליו ישעיהו בן אמוץ הנביא, ויאמר אליו כה אמר ה' צו לביתך כי מת אתה ולא תחיה וגו', מאי כי מת אתה ולא תחיה, מת אתה בעולם הזה ולא תחיה לעולם הבא.

אמר ליה, מאי כולי האי, אמר ליה, משום דלא עסקת בפריה ורביה, אמר ליה, משום דחזאי לי ברוח הקודש דנפקי מינאי בנין דלא מעלו, אמר ליה, בהדי כבשי דרחמנא למה לך, מאי דמפקדת איבעי לך למעבד, ומה דניחא קמיה קוב"ה לעבד.

אמר לי, השתא הב לי ברתך, אפשר דגרמא זכותא דידי ודידך ונפקי מינאי בנין דמעלי, אמר ליה, כבר נגזרה עליך גזירה. אמר ליה, בן אמוץ כלה נבואתך וצא, כך מקובלני מבית אבי אבא, אפילו חרב חדה מונחת על צוארו של אדם אל ימנע עצמו מן הרחמים."

Rav Hamnuna said: What is the meaning of that which is written (Koheles 8, 1): "Who is like the Wise One, and who knows a thing's interpretation"? It means: Who is like HKB"H, Who knows how to make a compromise between two tzaddikim—namely, between Chizkiyahu and Yeshayah. Chizkiyahu said, "Let Yeshayah come to me! For, thus do we find concerning Eliyahu; he went to see Achav." Evidently, the honor due a king is greater than the honor due a navi. Yeshayah said, "Let Chizkiyahu come to me! For, thus do we find concerning Yehoram the son of Achav; he went to Elisha." Evidently, the honor due a navi is greater than the honor due a king.

What did HKB"H do? He brought afflictions upon Chizkiyahu, and then He said to Yeshayah, "Go visit the sick one." For so it says (Melachim II 20, 1): "In those days, Chizkiyah took sick unto death, and Yeshayah the prophet, son of Amotz, came to him and said to him: Thus, said Hashem! Instruct your household, for you are dying, and you will not live." Why does the passuk say: "You are dying, and you will not live"? If one is dying, it is obvious that he will not live. The Gemara explains: "You are dying" in Olam HaZeh "and you will not live" in Olam HaBa.

He (Chizkiyahu) said to him (Yeshayah): Why do I deserve to be punished so severely? He replied to him: Because you did not procreate. He explained to him (why he did not marry): Because I saw via "ruach hakodesh" that the children issuing from me would not be virtuous. He (Yeshayah) said to him: What have you to do with the secrets of the Merciful One? You should have done what you were commanded, and let HKB"H do that which He sees fit.

He (Chizkiyahu) said to him: So, now give me your daughter; perhaps my merits and yours combined will result in virtuous children issuing forth from me. He said to him: But a decree (of death) has already been issued against you. He said to him: Son of Amotz, conclude your prophecy and go. I have this tradition from my grandfather's house: Even if a sharp sword rests upon a man's neck, he should not desist from praying for mercy.

In fact, HKB"H acquiesced to King Chizkiyahu's tefilah; the death decree was annulled, as it is written (ibid. 2):

"ויסב את פניו אל הקיר ויתפלל אל ה' לאמר, אנא ה' זכור נא את אשר התהלכתי לפניך באמת ובלבב שלם והטוב בעיניך ישיתי ויבך חזקיהו בכי גדול. ויהי ישעיהו לא

יצא העיר התיכונה ודבר ה' היה אליו לאמר, שוב ואמרת אל חזקיהו נגיד עמי, כה אמר ה' אלקי דוד אביך שמעתי את תפלתך ראיתי את דמעתיך, הנני רופא לך ביום השלישי תעלה בית ה', והוספתי על ימיך חמש עשרה שנה."

He then turned his face toward the wall and prayed to Hashem, saying, "Please, Hashem, remember now, how I walked before You truly and wholeheartedly, and I did what is good in Your eyes." And Chizkiyahu wept profusely. And it was when Yeshayahu had not gone out to the inner court, and the word of Hashem came to him, saying, "Return and say to Chizkiyahu, the ruler of My people, 'So has Hashem, the God of your father David, said: I have heard your prayer; I have seen your tears. Behold, I shall heal you. On the third day, you shall go up to the house of Hashem, and I will add fifteen years to your life.'"

Menashe Is the Leader of All the Ba'alei Teshuvah in the Fifth Heichal in Gan Eden

We should point out that it is quite possible that Yeshayah HaNavi did not want to give his daughter to King Chizkiyahu from the outset. For, he said: "A decree (of death) has already been issued against you." He might have sensed that that union would produce a son that was destined to kill him, in keeping with what we have learned in the Gemara (Megillah 3a): "אף על גב דאיהו לא חזי מזליה: (Megillah 3a): "חזי." In other words, he might not have actually foreseen the event, but his heavenly representatives did, and he sensed it. Nevertheless, upon seeing that HKB"H accepted King Chizkiyahu's teshuvah and tefilah, he agreed to give him his daughter—in the hope that their dual merit would result in decent, upstanding children.

As we know from the conclusion of the story, Chizkiyahu was not mistaken. His request to marry Yeshayah's daughter, so that the merits of the two of them might produce decent children, was validated. Even though, they gave birth to Menasheh, the King of Yehudah, who was initially a total rasha; nevertheless, he ultimately performed teshuvah for thirty-three years and became the head of all the ba'alei teshuvah. This is described in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 103a):

"אמר רבי יוחנן, כל האומר מנשה אין לו חלק לעולם הבא, מרפה ידיהן של בעלי תשובה, דתני תנא קמיה דרבי יוחנן, מנשה עשה תשובה שלשים ושלש שנים... אמר רבי יוחנן משום רבי שמעון בן יוחי, מאי דכתיב (דברי הימים ב לג-יג) וישמע אליו ויחתר לו, ויעתר לו מיבעי ליה, מלמד שעשה לו הקב"ה כמין מחתרת ברקיע, כדי לקבלו בתשובה מפני מדת הדין."

Rabbi Yochanan said: Whoever claims that Menasheh has no portion in Olam HaBa, weakens the hands of ba'alei teshuvah (discourages them from performing teshuvah). For a teacher of Baraitos taught the following Baraisa before Rabbi Yochanan: Menashe performed teshuvah for thirty-three years (the end of his life) . . . Rabbi Yochanan reported in the

name of Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai: What is the meaning of that which is written: "G-d hearkened unto him 'va'yeichater lo'"? It should have said "va'yeiater lo"! This teaches that HKB"H made a type of tunnel in the firmament in order to receive him in teshuvah (surreptitiously), because of "midas hadin" (which opposed admitting Menasheh).

Concerning the teshuvah of Menasheh, the King of Yehudah, we find more details in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Sanhedrin 51b). He performed complete teshuvah after he was captured by the military officers of the King of Assyria. They placed him in a cauldron full of water that was cooking on a fire. Here is the pertinent passage:

"כתיב (דברי הימים ב לג-י) וידבר ה' אל מנשה ואל עמו ולא הקשיבו, ויבא עליהם את שרי הצבא אשר למלך (אשור) וילכדו את מנשה בחושים [בכבלי ברזל]... אמר רבי לוי מולא [דוד] של נחושת עשו לו ונתנו אותה בתוכה, והיו מסיקין תחתיו, כיון שראה שצרתו צרה, לא הניח עבודה זרה בעולם שלא הזכירה.

כיון שלא הועיל לו כלום, אמר זכור אני שהיה אבי מקרא אותי את הפסוק הזה בבית הכנסת (דברים ד-ל) בצר לך ומצאוך כל הדברים האלה באחרית הימים, ושבת עד ה' אלקיך ושמעת בקולו כי אל רחום ה' אלקיך, לא ירפך ולא ישחיתך ולא ישכח את ברית אבותיך אשר נשבע להם. הרי אני קורא אותך, אם עונה אותי מוטב, ואם לאו הא כל אפייא שוין.

והיו מלאכי השרת מסתמין את החלונות, שלא תעלה תפילתו של מנשה לפני הקב"ה, והיו מלאכי השרת אומרים לפני הקב"ה, רבונו של עולם אדם שעבד עבודה זרה והעמיד צלם בהיכל אתה מקבלו בתשובה. אמר להן, אם איני מקבלו בתשובה, הרי אני נועל את הדלת בפני כל בעלי תשובה.

מה עשה לו הקב"ה, חתר לו חתירה מתחת כסא הכבוד שלו ושמע תחינתו, הדא הוא דכתיב (דברי הימים שם) ויתפלל אליו ויעתר לו וישמע תחינתו וישיבהו ירושלם למלכותו, במה השיבו, שמואל בר בונא בשם רבי אחא, ברוח השיבו, כמה דתימר משיב הרוח, וידע מנשה כי ה' הוא האלקים, באותה שעה אמר מנשה אית דין ואית דיין."

It is written (Divrei HaYamim II 33, 10): "Then Hashem spoke to Menasheh and his people, but they did not listen. So, Hashem brought the captains of the Assyrian king against them. They caught Menasheh with metal hooks" . . . Rabbi Levi said: They made a copper cauldron for him and placed him inside it; they lit a fire beneath it; recognizing that he was in dire trouble, he appealed to every known form of idol-worship.

Since his entreaties were to no avail, he said: I recall that my father used to read me this passuk in the Beis Kenesses (Devarim 4, 30): "When you are in distress and all these things have befallen you, at the end of days, you will return unto Hashem, your G-d, and listen to His voice. For Hashem, your G-d, is a merciful G-d, He will not loosen His hold on you, and He will not destroy you, and He will not forget the covenant of your forefathers that He swore to them." Thus, I will recite it; if He answers me, great; and if not, they are all the same (He is the same as the rest of the idols).

The ministering angels stopped up all of the openings, so that Menasheh's tefilah would not reach HKB"H. The malachim said to HKB"H: Master of the Universe, a man who worshipped avodah-zarah and placed an idol in the Heichal, are You willing to accept his teshuvah? He answered them: If I refuse to accept his teshuvah, I am effectively locking the door in the face of all ba'alei teshuvah.

What did HKB"H do for him? He dug a passage for him beneath His Kisei HaKavod, and heard his entreaty, as it is written (Divrei HaYamim II 33, 13): "So, he prayed to Him and He granted his plea, and heard his entreaty. He brought him back to Yerushalayim to his kingship." How did he bring him back? Shmuel bar Buna in the name of Rabbi Acha said: He brought him back with a gust of wind, as it is said: "He causes the wind to blow." "Thus Menasheh recognized that Hashem is G-d." At that moment, Menasheh proclaimed: "There is justice (law) and there is a Judge."

The dramatic teshuvah of Menasheh, the King of Yehudah, placed him at the head of all the ba'alei teshuvah. The Zohar hakadosh (Bereishis 39a) explains that there are seven "heichalos"—sections or levels—in the lower Gan Eden. The ba'alei teshuvah, whose neshamos expired in a state of taharah, are located in the fifth "heichal." At the entrance to that "heichal" stands Menasheh, the King of Yehudah—for whom HKB"H dug a special passageway beneath the Kisei HaKavod, in order to receive him.

Menashe Learned from His Father Chizkiyahu Not to Despair

Upon reviewing what we have learned, we find a wonderful connection between the events surrounding Menasheh's birth and his ultimate teshuvah. His father King Chizkiyahu did not despair when he was informed by Yeshayah HaNavi that a tikun was no longer available for him: "כבר נגזרה עליך גזירה"—your decree has already been issued. Not only did he not lose hope, but he dismissed the navi by saying to him: "בן אמוץ כלה נבואתך וצא, כך מקובלני מבית אבי אבא, אפילו חרב חדה מונחת בן אמוץ כלה נבואתך וצא, כך מקובלני מבית אבי אבא, אפילו חרב חדה מונחת על צווארו של אדם אל ימנע עצמו מן הרחמים"—go away, I have learned from David HaMelech that even when a sharp sword is held against your neck, you should not refrain from praying for rachamim.

Menashe was conceived as a result of his father's reluctance to give up hope even under the direst of circumstances. Evidently, this had a profound influence upon Menasheh. He, too, performed complete teshuvah when a figurative sharp sword was being held against his neck, when death was imminent—when he was in a

boiling copper cauldron. For, he recalled the passuk that he had learned from his father Chizkiyahu: "בצר לך"—even when you are in the most precarious situation; "ושבת עד ה' אלקיך"—it is not too late to return to Hashem's good graces by means of teshuvah. And he, in fact, performed wholehearted teshuvah and paved the way for the entire people of Yisrael to perform teshuvah.

Let us continue to marvel at the wonders of HKB"H's divine supervision. Yeshayah HaNavi belittled Yisrael by saying: "ובתוך עם טמא שפתים אנכי יושב." It was as if he suddenly forgot that they possess the amazing ability to make total amends by performing total teshuvah. According to the Gemara (Berachos 34b,) they can vault to a level even higher than consummate tzaddikim: "במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין אין צדיקים עומדין." For his disparaging remark, he was punished in keeping with the notion (Yevamos 121b) that HKB"H is exacting in dealing with tzaddikim (they are held accountable for even the most minor of infractions).

Therefore, Yeshayah's punishment was delivered by his grandson Menasheh, the living proof of the navi's erroneous thinking. After all, there was no greater rasha than Menashe; he was so evil that the heavenly malachim shut off the portals of teshuvah in his face. Nevertheless, since he performed sincere, wholehearted teshuvah, HKB"H dug a passageway beneath the Kisei HaKavod, so that He could accept him. In turn, he became the leading and foremost ba'al teshuvah. Therefore, it was orchestrated from above that Yeshayah HaNavi's punishment for speaking ill of Yisrael would be meted out by none other than his grandson, Menasheh the King of Yehudah, while he was still a rasha.

Now, it is as clear as day that when Yeshayah saw that hiding in the cedar was to no avail, he finally understood. For, when they cut open the tree, they struck his mouth as punishment for speaking disparagingly of Yisrael. Realizing the error of his ways, he performed complete teshuvah for his ill-advised remark. Apparently, his teshuvah and kedushah had their impact upon Menasheh himself, who had killed him. For, he, too, ultimately performed complete teshuvah.

Thus, the orchestrations of HKB"H's divine supervision revealed to the world the tremendous power of teshuvah via the three-ply cord: **Yeshayah HaNavi**, one of Yisrael's greatest prophets, **Chizkiyahu HaMelech**, a consummate tzaddik and **Menashe, the King of Yehudah**, who became the foremost of all the ba'alei teshuvah—due to the merits of his father and grandfather.

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