



In Honor of Shabbas Teshuvah and Parshas Ha'azinu

The Profound Connection between the Large “Hei” of “הלה’ תגמלו זאת” and the Small “Hei” of “אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם”

The Shabbas of Aseres Yimei Teshuvah, which approaches auspiciously, is called **Shabbas Teshuvah**. The Levush writes (O.C. 603): **We call the Shabbas between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur Shabbas Teshuvah, since these are days of teshuvah. Additionally, it is because we recite the Haftarah of “Shuvah Yisrael.”** The Maharil (Hilchos Aseres Yimei Teshuvah 4) also refers to this Shabbas as **Shabbas Teshuvah**. The Beis Yosef (O.C. 428), however, calls it **Shabbas Shuvah**, because we always read the Haftarah of “**Shuvah**” on this Shabbas, and this is the name used by the poskim.

So, sometimes the poskim refer to this Shabbas as **Shabbas Teshuvah**, and sometimes they refer to it as **Shabbas Shuvah**. In any event, it is clear that they are referring to the Shabbas of the Aseres Yimei Teshuvah, which is a time of repentance. This is why we read for the Haftarah the stirring words of the prophet (Hoshea 14, 2): “**שובה ישראל עד ה’ אלקיך**”—**return, Yisrael, unto Hashem, your G-d**. Furthermore, the Torah reading for this Shabbas is parshas Ha’azinu. Thus, it is fitting to focus on the sacred words appearing at the beginning of this parsha dealing with the mitzvah of teshuvah (Devarim 32, 6): “הלה’ תגמלו זאת עם נבל ולא חכם הלוא “**is this how you repay Hashem, you worthless, unwise people?! Is He not your Father, the One Who acquired you? He has made you and established you.**

The Small “Hei” of “בהבראם” Represents Teshuvah of Yirah and the Big “Hei” of “הלה” Represents Teshuvah of Ahavah

We will begin by introducing a tremendous chiddush found in the Zohar hakadosh (Ha’azinu 297). In the entire Torah, we find two modifications of the letter “**hei**.” The first appears in a passuk in parshas Bereishis (Bereishis 2, 4): “**אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם**”—**these are the products of the heavens and the earth when they were created**. Tradition dictates that the “**hei**” of “**בהבראם**” be inscribed in a sefer Torah as a small “**hei**.” The second appears in the passuk in parshas Ha’azinu we just introduced: “**הלה’ תגמלו זאת**”. Here tradition dictates that the “**hei**” of “**הלה**” be inscribed as a big “**hei**.”

According to the Zohar, these two **hei**’s represent two distinct worlds, in keeping with the passuk (Tehillim 106, 48): “**מן העולם ועד העולם**”—**from the world to the world**. The commentaries on the Zohar explain that the small “**hei**” of “**בהבראם**” is associated with the midah of “malchus” and the second “**hei**” of the sacred name **Havaya**; whereas the big “**hei**” of “**הלה**” is associated with the higher world of the midah of “binah” and the first “**hei**” of **Havaya**.

We can elaborate based on a teaching in the Gemara (Yoma 86b): אמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כשגגות... איני והאמר ריש לקיש גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו. Reish Lakish said: לא קשיא כאן מאהבה כאן מיראה.

Teshuvah is so great in that a person's deliberate transgressions are transformed into inadvertent ones . . . Is that so? But did not Reish Lakish himself say: Teshuvah is so great in that a person's deliberate transgressions are transformed into merits!? The Gemara says: **This is not difficult. Here** (this second statement) is referring to teshuvah stemming from **"ahavah,"** whereas **here** (the first statement above) is referring to teshuvah motivated by **"yirah."** In other words, when a sinner does teshuvah, because he is afraid of being punished, his deliberate transgressions are regarded as inadvertent ones; whereas if he repented, because he was inspired by love of the Almighty, his deliberate transgressions are regarded as merits.

In Reishis Chochmah (Sha'ar HaKedushah 17), he explains that teshuvah from "yirah" is associated with the final **"hei"** of the name **Havaya**, which represents the midah of "malachut"; it instills the fear of the King on His subjects. Teshuvah from "ahavah," on the other hand is associated with the midah of "binah"; a person reflects on the great love HKB"H has for us, and he mirrors that love by performing teshuvah.

The Bnei Yissaschar (Nissan 3, 4) explains that teshuvah motivated by "yirah" is a lower level of teshuvah associated with the second "hei" of Havaya and fear of the King ("malchus"); whereas teshuvah motivated by "ahavah" is a higher level of teshuvah associated with the first "hei" of Havaya and the midah of "binah"—it grants a person freedom and leads to the salvation of the geulah. Understood in this light, the small **"hei"** of **"בהבראם"** alludes to the lesser form of teshuvah, teshuvah from "yirah." In contrast, the big **"hei"** of **"הלה"** alludes to the higher form of teshuvah, teshuvah from "ahavah."

The Essence of Teshuvah Is Torah Study Not the Acts of "צום קול ממון" Alone

In honor of Shabbas Teshuvah, it gives me great pleasure to propose an explanation relevant to each

and every one of us regarding the connection between the small "hei" of **"בהבראם"** and the big **"hei"** of **"הלה"**. It will be based on a precious, practical interpretation of the Arugos HaBosem of the passuk: **הלה' תגמלו זאת עם נבל ולא חכם**.

Targum Onkelos renders the latter part of this phrase: **"עמא דקבילו אורייתא ולא חכימו"**—**a people who received the Torah but did not become wise.** Many of our sacred sefarim point out that the term **נבל** alludes to the 50) **נ'** gates of "binah" and the 32) **ל"ב** paths of "chochmah"; thus, it refers to **the people who received the Torah**, which possesses these characteristics. But how does this explain the continuation of the passuk referring to a people who are vile and not wise—**"ולא חכם"**?

We are taught in the Gemara (Menachos 29b) that the world was created with the letter **"hei."** The Gemara asks: **ומפני מה נברא העולם הזה בה"י, מפני שדומה לאכסדרא שכל הרוצה לצאת יצא. ומאי טעמא תליא כרעיה, דאי הדר בתשובה מעיילי ליה.** **And why was Olam HaZeh created with the letter "hei"? Because it resembles a pavilion** (Rashi: it is open underneath); **so that anyone who wishes to leave (go astray) can leave (to lead a life of sin).** Then the Gemara asks: **And for what reason is the left leg of the "hei" hanging** (i.e., it is not connected to the top of the "hei")? **So that if he performs teshuvah, they can bring him back in** (through the upper opening between the suspended leg and the top of the "hei"). So, clearly, the letter **"hei"** is associated with teshuvah.

Now, on the High Holidays, after the poetic, moving passage of **"ונתנה תוקף"**, the congregation proclaims loudly and passionately **ותשובה ותפלה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזירה**—**and teshuvah and tefilah and tzedakah avert the evil (brunt) of the decree.** In all of our machzors, the following three words appear above this proclamation: **צו"ם קו"ל ממו"ן**. It is well-known that the gematria of these three words is the same as 408) **זא"ת**. Notwithstanding, it states in the siddur of the Arizal based on the Midrash (V.R. 25, 1): **A ba'al-teshuvah**

who usually learns one daf, should learn two; for learning more Torah is the essence of teshuvah.

This then is the meaning of the admonition **‘הלה’** **“תגמלו זאת”**. Do you believe that you can repay Hashem (make amends) for all of your iniquities simply by performing the variety of teshuvah alluded to by the letter **“hei”**—by doing the three things alluded to by **צו”ם קו”ל ממו”ן**, which have a gematria of **זא”ת**? It is not so. In truth, the essence of teshuvah is devoting more time to the study of Torah. This is the implication of the words **“עם נבל ולא חכם”**. As they are rendered by the Targum, they imply that even though the people of Yisrael received the Torah, they still lack **“chochmah.”** In other words, they have not devoted themselves enough to the study of Torah to make amends for what they transgressed and tainted spiritually. This concludes the sacred remarks of the Arugos HaBosem.

"ב-זא"ת" Alludes to Two Paths of Teshuvah

Let us embellish his sacred remarks. We know that it is only possible to subdue the yetzer hara with the study of Torah. As we have learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b), HKB”H tells Yisrael: **“בני בראתי יצר הרע: ובראתי לו תורה תכלין, ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו.”** **My son, I have created the yetzer hara, and I have created Torah as its antidote. If you engage in Torah-study, you will not be delivered into its hand.** The prerequisite, however, is that a Jew must perform teshuvah prior to engaging in Torah-study, so that the following will not apply to him, chas v’shalom, (Tehillim 50, 16): **“ולרשע אמר אלקים מה לך לספר חוקי:”** **—but to the wicked, G-d said, “What benefit is it to you to recount My decrees and to bear My covenant upon your lips?”**

Now, we have a passuk that states (Vayikra 16, 3): **“בזאת יבוא אהרן אל הקודש”**—**with this shall Aharon come into the Sanctuary.** Our holy sources interpret this to mean that Aharon HaKohen was permitted to enter the Kodesh HaKodashim on Yom Kippur in

the merit of Yisrael performing these three acts of teshuvah—**צו”ם קו”ל ממו”ן**—which have a gematria of **זא”ת**. However, based on what we just learned, we can add that the Torah is also referred to as **“זאת”**. We find this reference explicit in the Midrash Shochar Tov (Tehillim 8). The Midrash quotes a passuk in Mishlei (6, 3): **“עשה זאת איפוא בני והינצל”**—**do this, my child, and be rescued.** Then it says: **זא”ת, שנאמר זאת: וזא”ת זאת אלא תורה, שנאמר זאת: וזא”ת—and there is no זא”ת except for the Torah, as it states (Bamidbar 19, 14): “זאת התורה.”** The Midrash (ibid.) expounds the same thing on the passuk (Tehillim 27, 3) in which the term **זא”ת** also appears: **“אם תקום עלי מלחמה בזאת אני בוטח.”**

We can now propose that this is the **“remez”** in the passuk: **“בזאת יבוא אהרן אל הקודש”**. The word **“בזאת”** can be interpreted as **ב’ זא”ת**—a reference to two things called **זא”ת**. Before entering the Kodesh HaKodashim on Yom Kippur, Aharon had to perform teshuvah consisting of **קו”ל צו”ם ממו”ן** (gematria **זא”ת**), and he also had to spend a lot of time studying Torah, which is also called **זא”ת**. These two manifestations of **זא”ת**—alluded to by the term **“בזאת”**—entitled Aharon to enter the Kodesh HaKodashim. I would like to add an additional tidbit: The gematria of two times **זא”ת** equals 816, which is the gematria of **“ע”ת רצון”** (470+246). In the merit of teshuvah and Torah, it was deemed the **opportune (favorable) time** from above.

Is This How You Repay Hashem Who Offered a Sinner a Tikun via Teshuvah?

Continuing along this sublime path, we will continue to elucidate the passuk: **“הלה’ תגמלו זאת עם נבל ולא חכם”** and its rendering by the Targum: **“עמא דקבילו אורייתא, ולא חכימו”**. They expounded in the Midrash Yalkut Shimoni (Tehillim 25, 8): **They asked “Chochmah” (Wisdom): “What should the punishment of a sinner be?” She answered them (Mishlei 13, 21): “Evil pursues sinners.” They asked “Nevuah” (Prophecy), “What should the punishment for a sinner be?” She answered them (Yechezkel 18, 4):**

“The soul that sins shall die.” They asked the Torah, “What is the punishment of the sinner?” She said to them, “He should bring an “asham-offering,” and it will atone for him. They asked HKB”H, “What is the punishment for a sinner?” He answered that he should perform teshuvah, and it will atone for him, as it is written (Tehillim 25, 8): “Good and upright is Hashem; therefore, He guides sinners on the path”—for He shows the sinners the path of performing teshuvah.

Here, according to the opinions of Chochmah and Nevuah, a person who sins must die; he is not afforded any tikun. The pain and torment of death is his only means of atonement for his transgressions against the King. According to the Torah, tikun can only be accomplished by bringing a korban. In the commentary of the Ramban on parshas Vayikra, he says that the purpose of a korban is for the person to imagine that everything being done to the sacrificial animal should deservedly be done to him. Thus, HKB”H associates this constructive thought with an actual deed, so that it is viewed as if the sinner himself was actually sacrificed on the mizbeiach. The bottom line is that only HKB”H has the power to forgive a sinner, provide him atonement via teshuvah, and cleanse his soul of all defects and blemishes.

We can find an allusion to this intriguing concept in a statement of Shlomo HaMelech, the wisest of all men (Koheles 9, 17): **“דברי חכמים בנחת נשמעים”**—**words spoken softly by wise men are heard . . .** We can interpret the **“words of the wise men”** as the decrees and stringencies the chachamim added to the mitzvos. At first glance, they appear to simply make our lives and our observance more difficult. In reality, however, they are aimed at providing Yisrael with **“נחת”** and support; they protect Yisrael from committing aveiros. This is learned from the term **נח”ת**, which is an acronym for **נבואה חכמה תורה**—the three voices who opined that a sinner cannot achieve a tikun via teshuvah. We learn from them how serious the damage that sins cause to

a person’s soul is. From this perspective: **דברי חכמים** **“בנחת נשמעים”**—it should be evident that the restrictions imposed on us by the chachamim are designed to assist us by distancing us from sins, so that we do not offend the honor of HKB”H, the Giver of the Torah, chas v’shalom. Nevertheless, HKB”H, in His infinite compassion and kindness, granted us the possibility of tikun via teshuvah.

This then is the interpretation of the passuk: **‘הלה’ תגמלו זאת**. HKB”H is asking Yisrael a question. Is this how you repay HKB”H, Who was the only one to forgo His own “kavod” by forgiving a sinner who performs teshuvah? You neglected to perform the three acts of teshuvah alluded to by the gematria of the term **—“זאת”** **צ”ו”ם קו”ל ממו”ן**. Furthermore, if you argue that you studied Torah, which is the antidote to the yetzer hara, and it still did not help you, the Torah goes on to explain why it was not helpful: **“עם נבל ולא חכם”**. Based on the Targum, this implies that even though we studied Torah, we were not wise enough to first perform teshuvah before studying Torah—to avoid falling into the category of: **To the wicked, G-d said, “What benefit is it to you to recount My decrees and to bear My covenant upon your lips?”** Hence, it is advisable to perform teshuvah before engaging in Torah-study, so that in the merit of our Torah-study, the yetzer hara will not have any control over us.

A Wonderful Insight from the Chasam Sofer

With immense pleasure, we will continue to elaborate on the tradition to write the letter **“hei”** of **“הלה” תגמלו זאת** as an enlarged letter. In his derashos, the Chasam Sofer provides us with a precious insight. In the selichos recited on Mondays and Thursdays, we say: **“הפותח יד בתשובה לקבל פושעים וחטאים”**—**You Who opens a hand for teshuvah, to accept wrongdoers and sinners.** In the writings of the Arizal (Sha’ar HaKavonos, Pesach, Drush 6), he explains that the letter **“hei”** has two forms. It is either a **‘ד’** (“dalet”) with a **‘ו’**

("vav") inside it or a "dalet" with a "yud" inside it. The former represents the complete union, while the latter represents the union in times of galus. That being the case, why does tradition dictate that we write the letter "hei" in a sefer Torah with the left leg in the shape of a "yud" and not the shape of a "vav"?

To explain the matter, the Chasam Sofer refers to the Gemara cited above. There, we learned that this world was created with the letter "hei," which has an opening on the left side to allow the return of sinners who wish to perform sincere teshuvah. Based on this premise, we can posit that this is why the letter "hei" is written in a sefer Torah as a "dalet and a yud" rather than as a "dalet and a vav." This provides a larger opening for "ba'alei teshuvah." If the left leg of the "hei" was a "vav," which is taller and longer, the opening above it would be miniscule.

This then is the implication of our tefilah: הפותח יד בתשובה לקבל פושעים וחטאים. HKB"H, in His infinite mercy and kindness, opens a יד for teshuvah for us. In other words, He determined that the shape of the letter ה—the letter with which this world was created—be formed by the letters יד instead of the letters וד. Since it is His desire "to accept wrongdoers and sinners," He provides them a wider opening instead of a narrow opening through which to return by means of teshuvah.

This provides us with a marvelous interpretation of the words of Rabbi Avahu (Berachos 34b): במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין אין צדיקים גמורים עומדין—in the place where "ba'alei teshuvah" stand, total tzaddikim cannot stand. We can suggest that he is referring to the place of the large opening in the letter "hei" that HKB"H has provided for "ba'alei teshuvah" between the "yud" on its left side and the top of the letter "dalet." That place is not necessary and does not exist for consummate tzaddikim, because their union is complete; it resembles the combination of the "dalet and vav."

After Yisrael Received the Torah They Were Rewarded with the Enlarged "Hei" as a Sign of הפותח יד בתשובה

Following this sublime path, we can now explain the teaching in the Zohar hakadosh. It drew a connection between the tradition to write the "hei" of "בהבראם" in the passuk "אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם" as a small letter with the tradition to write the "hei" of "הלה" in the passuk "הלה תגמלו זאת" as an enlarged letter. They expounded in the Midrash (B.R. 12, 9) on the former passuk, which appears at the end of the chronicle of the creation: "בהבראם, באברהם, בזכותו של אברהם"—the word בהבראם employed in the passuk is an anagram for באברהם, suggesting that the heavens and the earth were created in the merit of Avraham. They also expounded in the Midrash (ibid. 10): בהבראם - בה: "He created them with the letter 'hei'."

In Zera Kodesh (Chag HaSuccos, 1st Night), the great Rabbi of Ropshitz, zy"a, asserts that these two expositions go hand-in-hand. The world was created with the letter "hei" in keeping with the derashah בה; however, it is referring to the "hei" that HKB"H was destined to add to the name of Avraham Avinu when he was commanded to perform the mitzvah of "milah." As it is written (Bereishis 17, 5): וזלא יקרא עוד את שמך—your name shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham.

Thus, when HKB"H created the world "בהבראם", He already had in mind to add the letter "hei" to Avraham's name "בה' בראם". This would ensure that Avraham's descendants would always be provided a method of tikun for all their wrongdoings by means of teshuvah. As mentioned above, this is symbolized by the expanded opening on the upper left side of the letter "hei." Prior to receiving the Torah, however, Yisrael's ability to perform teshuvah was more limited. It was akin to the small "hei" and a "hei" composed of a "dalet" and a "vav," which only provided the penitent a very small window through which to return.

This all changed after Yisrael accepted upon themselves the precepts of the Torah—composed of five books, symbolized by the letter “**hei**,” containing all of the taryag mitzvos—and all the restrictions and preventive measures instituted by our blessed chachamim in Torah she’b’al peh. At that juncture, HKB”H provided them with a bigger opening and opportunity for teshuvah, an expression of “הפותח יד בתשובה”. This is symbolized by the enlarged “**hei**.” As such, the yetzer hara cannot obstruct their path of teshuvah.

With great joy, we have shed some light on the admonition the Torah directs to Yisrael: “הלה’ תגמלו” זאת. It is important to recognize the chesed Hashem performed for us; He opened for us a bigger, wider doorway for teshuvah symbolized by the enlarged “**hei**.”

Now, someone might challenge this fact by arguing that, in reality, the heavens and the earth were created with the small “**hei**,” as per the passuk: “אלה תולדות השמים והארץ בהבראם”. After all, they expounded “בה’ בראם”. This would enable the yetzer hara to obstruct the doorway of teshuvah. Therefore, the passuk continues: “עם נבל” —which is rendered by the Targum as: “עמא דקבילו אורייתא ולא חכימו”. It is imperative for every Jew to recognize that when we received the Torah, the doorway, the opening of the letter “**hei**,” was enlarged for us, in keeping with the words “הפותח יד בתשובה”. Every Jew has the opportunity to find his path of teshuvah to rectify and make amends for all that he has damaged and blemished. In this merit, we will be granted a “gmar chatimah tovah” with all of the berachos and salvations.



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