



Erev Shabbos Shuva Parashas Vayeilech 5780

Dear Parents,

A key ingredient in changing one's behavior and effectively doing *teshuva* is the ability to switch gears and move in a new direction. Whether in attitude or behavior, being able to gain a new perspective or to change an existing habit, being able to consider another way of looking at things that has until now been taken for granted, is at the foundation of repentance.

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Looking at things differently, or reframing, can apply in varied situations. There is a common word that is found in various places in the *Chumash*, the word *nechama*. **Nechama** – (whose *Shoresh* is **Nun, Ches, Mem**) is frequently translated as **comfort** – as in **Nichum Aveilim**, comforting mourners, but it has a different meaning at its root. We find the Torah says in the beginning of *Beshalach* – V'Lo **Nochom** Elokim... (*Shemos 13:17*) – Hashem did not **lead** the Klal Yisrael (in the direction of the *Pelishtim*). Yet, later in the very same Pasuk, using a word with the same *Shoresh*, Hashem states a concern that “Pen **Yinachem** Ha’am” – “perhaps the people will **reconsider**.” And, in yet a seemingly different meaning of the word, the Torah states in the end of *Parashas Bereishis* (*Berieishis 5:6*) “**Vayenochem** Hashem Ki Osa es HaOdom...” Hashem **regretted** making man....

In truth, all these usages of *nechama*, i.e. comfort, lead, reconsider and regret, really have one meaning. They all stem from the idea of changing perspective. Leading, reconsidering, finding comfort and regretting are all a function of seeing the same situation in a different way than before or different than what would have been expected. Bringing comfort to a mourner is achieved when one helps the mourner gain a different perspective on what they have experienced. Similarly, Hashem's “regret” was a change of heart so to speak, different than what came before.

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In contemporary terminology we speak of a “paradigm shift.” This occurs when a strongly held belief or assumption is now seen in a way dramatically different than before. We all have our biases and prejudices that form much of our world view. They are based on assumptions that we have gathered from a lifetime of observing, hearing opinions from others such as parents, elders and friends. We often accept these assumptions, many times unconsciously, as an absolute truth.

We all have these closely held assumptions and we all have experienced paradigm shifts, when the unexpected is held up as an example of a different way, a new understanding. Two of my `favorite` paradigm shifts come from opposite ends of human experience.

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld zt'l, *Rav of Yerusholayim* a century ago was once challenged by a relative for his learning of Torah to the exclusion of any other pursuit. The relative asked: “How could the world survive if everyone would just sit and learn Torah?” *Rav Sonnenfeld* responded: “It is an integral part of the civilized world, outside of the Torah world, to desire to make money and amass wealth. We could ask the same question. “If everyone became rich, who would do the menial jobs needed in order for society to function? Who will bake bread, who will sew clothes, who will make shoes, who will collect garbage, etc. Yet, everyone still seeks economic advancement and wealth. For some reason, while many worry about the consequences of `everyone` learning Torah, no one worries about the potential societal consequences of their becoming wealthy.”

A very different paradigm shift, struck me when a friend recounted how he was desperately trying to help his impetuous and wayward adult son regain balance and stability in his life. He had offered to help his son buy a motorcycle, indulging his favorite pastime, and potentially helping his career. It was a very magnanimous move on the father's part. When they went to purchase a new motorcycle, the young man chose one of the loudest, most ear-splitting machines available. Thinking that his son was being completely inconsiderate of his parents' feelings and totally self-centered and thrill-seeking my friend asked his son why he had to choose such a vehicle that would wake up the entire neighborhood whenever he arrived or left home?

The son's answer was quick and simple, not long in coming. “Having a motorcycle with a loud engine is safer because the noise will help the other drivers on the road be aware that I am there.” All my friend's assumptions and pre-conceived notions were immediately and decidedly discredited. It was all about safety and responsibility.

Teshuva works the same way. We have many notions of how things need to be, of what I am and am not capable of achieving, how others will view me if I attempt to change, how the status quo was good enough until now, etc., etc. We need to begin to think – “paradigm shift” and allow new possibilities for ourselves and our families. What is now does not need to be tomorrow, and it's up to us to reframe, delve deeply into our heart and examine our thoughts and attitudes and gain the traction needed to move in the new direction our mind is telling us to go. May Hashem see our willingness to change and grant us the *Siyata D'Shmaya* to help us carry through on our renewed resolve and to merit a year of blessing, success and *Nachas*.

Best wishes for wonderful *Shabbos* and *Gmar Chasima Tova*.