

The Wonders of Your Torah

Choice Excerpts from the Teachings of Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburgh Shlit"א

Returning to a virgin state

Elul is the month of Divine compassion, the month in which we hear the blast of the shofar and are inspired to return wholeheartedly to God. The Ba'al Shem Tov, founder of the Chassidic movement, who was born on the 18th of Elul, taught us that our return to God (תשובה) should be achieved through an inner sense of profound joy.

The *mazal* (מזל) of Elul is Virgo (בתולה), the virgin, and our *parashah*, *parashat Ki Teitzei*, which is always read during the month of Elul, contains the greatest concentration of the word "virgin" in the Bible.

Elul arrives right after the year's lowest point—*Tisha B'av*, which commemorates the destruction of the Temple. Yet, even while still in the month of Av, we immediately began to rise up until we reached a high point six days later on the 15th of Av, one of the most joyful days of the year. The Mishnah describes that on that day, maidens would dance in the vineyards. Still, following the trauma of the Temple's destruction, we remain with the feeling that things will never be the same. This is usually the case, that following a traumatic experience it is very difficult for a person to return to wholeness and we need to

Short and Tweet

On the 15th of Av, 6 days after the Temple's ruin, the maidens dance in the vineyards – there is hope that our purity will be restored.

Our virgin state is restored in the month of Elul, then on Yom Kippur the girls dance again. "Dance" (מחול) also means "forgiven."

learn how to rehabilitate ourselves to retrieve our virgin state of purity.

This rectification process takes place in Elul, when we regain our purity like the virgin who is the symbol of this month. The virgin of Elul is "the virgin of Israel," i.e., the innate, untouched purity of the Jewish people that can never be defiled. The phrase "the virgin of Israel" (בתולה ישראל) appears once in *parashat Ki Teitzei* in the context of a man who defames his bride with the claim that she was not a

virgin, God forbid. However, in the rest of the Bible it appears four more times.

One of the appearances of this phrase is in the book of Amos in the verse that begins, "she has fallen, she will not arise the virgin of Israel" (נפלה לא תוסיף קום) (בתולה ישראל). The sages interpret this by reading, "she has fallen and will not [fall again]; Arise, the virgin of Israel." However, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, master of the Torah's inner dimension, does not accept this interpretation. Instead, he reads the verse literally, that once the virgin of Israel has fallen, she will not be able to lift herself again. Seemingly, there is no chance for her to heal her trauma and likewise, trying to rehabilitate ourselves appears to be a lost cause. Nonetheless, though we cannot heal ourselves, our hope is not lost, because God, our Healer can elevate us and heal us from all our ailments, whether physical or spiritual. God Himself will return the lost virginity of the Jewish people by forgiving us for all our sins. This transformation is illustrated by the fact that "a lost cause" (מקרה אבוד) has the same numerical value as Mashiach (משיח); 358; it is the Mashiach who can overcome even lost causes.

According to the inner dimension of the Torah, "the virgin of Israel" corresponds to the *sefirah* of kingdom. The rehabilitation of the Jewish people will ultimately be achieved when the kingdom of Israel returns to its rightful place, with Mashiach as its ruler. We pray that this will be soon and that the sages' words will indeed be fulfilled, "She has fallen and will not [fall again]."

From Harav Ginsburgh's class 9th Elul , 5772

Distributed by Gal Einai

Live shiur every Monday night 8:30pm (Israel time)

<http://malchuty.org/live-broadcast>

Site: inner.org

Blog: www.rabbiginsburgh.com

Twitter: @Rabbiginsburgh

To join our mailing list,

please contact: gps@inner.org



Purifying the power of speech

Interestingly, of all the 74 *mitzvot* enumerated in *Parashat Ki-Teitzei*, the principal commandment that is discussed in the Zohar on this *parashah* is the sin of a man who falsely claims that his bride was not a virgin. The concluding phrase that appears in the Torah is “for he has defamed a virgin of Israel.”

The Zohar offers four examples to illustrate this sin, in each of which the “virgin of Israel” corresponds to a different metaphor. The idea that unites these metaphors is that at her spiritual root, the “virgin of Israel” always retains her innate purity, which can never be sullied.

The first example relates to the spies who defamed the land of Israel. The spies were punished by death, an even more severe punishment than the man who defames his wife. In this example, the “virgin of Israel” is the land of Israel, which they claimed was so totally under control by non-Jewish forces that even God could not redeem it. Land is always treated as a feminine entity and to claim that the sanctity of the Holy Land was sullied by the non-Jewish nations who lived there is tantamount to the groom’s false claim against his wife. The Zohar thus teaches us that expressing the idea that the land of Israel cannot be freed from its foreign inhabitants, or from the hold other nations are trying to place upon it, defames the “virgin of Israel.” Obviously, this is as relevant in today’s circumstances as it ever was, perhaps even more so.

The second example relates to Queen Esther, who was taken against her will to become the wife of King Achashverosh. The Zohar reveals that although the verses state literally that Esther became Achashverosh’s wife, the claim that Esther was made impure by Achashverosh is also a defamation of the “virgin of Israel.” Instead, the Zohar reveals that Mordechai and Esther had the spiritual power to separate their “shadow” (i.e., their animal soul) from themselves and send it on a separate mission without being involved in the mission themselves. By acting in this way, Esther, who reached the highest level of sanctity where she represents the Divine Presence, remained pure and in truth she never left her true soul-mate, Mordechai. Here, the Zohar emphasizes that even if it seems that a Jew has sinned, in essence this is not the case and it is only his or her animal soul that has been defiled.

The third example is defaming the holy Torah by saying that there is less sanctity in the second tablets than in the first tablets that were broken by Moses. A person who thinks this is defaming the Torah’s ability to retrieve its “virginity.” This idea can be applied to many pertinent examples: a yeshivah student who undergoes a crisis in his Torah study; a child whose initial and earnest literal understanding of the Torah has been lost; or even someone whose mind has been contaminated by academic Biblical criticism. All these can ultimately reveal that although it may appear that the first tablets were defiled, God forbid, at its source the Torah retains

Our mission during this month is to completely refrain from false accusations against the “virgin of Israel”: the land of Israel, the Divine Presence, the Torah of Israel, and the people of Israel.

its pure, untouched state. Reaching this level brings with it a new revelation of the Torah in all its purity.

In the Zohar, after Moses has brought the above three examples of defaming the “virgin of Israel,” the Prophet Elijah requests permission to speak and he offers another example involving Moses himself. Elijah shows Moses that for a moment, following the worshipping of the Golden Calf, he had thought that the Jewish people had sinned, but in truth they had not. In fact, only the mixed multitude, whom Moses himself had insisted on taking out of Egypt together with the Jewish people, had sinned. Moses reaction to this accusation was to kiss Elijah and ask him to always accompany him when he teaches.

We can learn from Moses, who prayed with self sacrifice to save the Jewish people from their “sin” but was accused by Elijah of defaming the “virgin of Israel,” that even if it appears that the Jewish people has sinned, God forbid, this is not true at all. In fact, the mixed multitude who were the instigators of the sin, were actually pieces of Moses’ own soul and he thus accepted the blame for the situation.

The *mazal* (מזל) of the month of Elul is a virgin and we learn from the Zohar here that our mission during this month in particular is to completely refrain from false accusations against the “virgin of Israel”: the land of Israel, the Divine Presence, the Torah of Israel, and the people of Israel. In this way we too will rise to return to an unblemished state and all our sins will be forgiven to reveal that in truth, we have never sinned.

From Harav Ginsburgh’s class, 9th Elul, 5772