

**Tell a story**  
**Parshah Vayelech**  
**by Julie Zhuk on 2022-10-01**

**Comments**

Deuteronomy 31:1-30

This part of the Torah is going to recount all the things that Moses did on his last day on earth. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old on his last day on earth. He told the Jewish people he could no longer go forth and then come in. He had transferred his leadership skills over to the prophet, Joshua.

Moses has concluded writing the Torah in a scroll and he entrusted that to the Levites. He was hoping they would keep it in a safe place in the Ark of the Covenant that G-d gave them. There was a mitzva of the people gathering together every seven years during the holiday Sukkot. This is referring to the first year of the Shemittah cycle. All the Jewish people, including all the men, women, and children at the Holy Temple. This was located in Jerusalem and the king was to be with the people.

It was there in front of the people, the king was expected to read to them from the Torah. It's in this Parsha that there is a prediction, now that the Jews have gotten the Torah they are not going to stay faithful to it. This means they would turn away from the covenant that G-d had set up for them.

This would also cause G-d to hide His face away from them. G-d was still going to keep His end of the promise that the words coming from the Torah wouldn't be forgotten out of the mouths of their descendants. This means that even if the Jews as a whole would turn away from G-d, there would still be a few who would stay true to G-d. These few Jews would continue to study Torah. At the end of the day, the point of this Parsha is to teach and remind us Jews today to strive and be like the few Jews who kept studying Torah.

**Haftarah Vayelech**

The Jewish Sages say that repentance is always beneficial at certain times. It is accepted more favorably in Heaven. Considering the ten days that start with the Jewish New Year, it is the right time, when we read verses that deal with the theme of doing teshuva. This happens on Shabbat between the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement. There are three selections from what is called, the "Minor Prophets. The first one of these starts out with Hoshaiia having a famous call. The call was telling the Jews, to Return back to G-d. This gives Shabbat its name. Hoshaiia addressed the kingdom of Yehuda, and was warning the people there to change their lifestyle in order that they could be spared from destruction and sent to exile. Hoshaiia was explaining the basic principles of teshuva. His words that he said were considered timeless. There are three verses at the end of the Book of Michah that are read in many congregations. These reflect on the Thirteen Qualities of Mercy that G-d gave to the Jewish people. These Thirteen Qualities assure the Jewish people that if they do teshuva, G-d is going to deal mercifully with them.

The last part of the Vayelech Haftara is from the Book of Yoel. This selection, too includes important directives for teshuva. It is in the first verse of Yoel, 2:11, where it says Our Sages refer directly to The Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement. The verse that talks about the Jews returning to G-d, is also saying that we stumble into misfortune because we make transgressions. Hoshai'a was a prophet for the Northern Kingdom of the Ten Tribes. His call had been addressed mainly to the kingdom of Yehuda. This verse has wonderful insights regarding teshuva. Some of these include a person transgressing deliberately and then choosing to do teshuva. If this is the case, G-d will consider it as though their transgression was done by mistake. This is implied in the words of, if you repent even if only fear from being punished, you will still be treated as though you had merely stumbled and transgressed by accident. If people are motivated to do teshuva by love for G-d, then your past transgressions are not merely mitigated, they are actually going to be turned into merits. The Jewish Sages tell us that doing teshuva is great, for it reaches the Heavenly Throne. There isn't a missile or a rocket that can ever boast such power! This is meant by the words of the Jews returning back to G-d. If we can only imagine how enormous is the power of repentance that it can actually reach G-d's throne! By making transgressions, the person has removed themselves far from his Creator.

Doing teshuva reattaches the person to G-d again. Even if people are so far gone that they deny the existence of G-d, then doing teshuva is going to be accepted. There is another verse that says we take a long with us the words of confession. This means we are returning with G-d, we are imploring Him, and asking Him to forgive all sins and as an atonement we are wanting G-d to accept our good deeds! We want to pay with the confession of our lips, instead of giving sacrifices like bulls. That was an obligation Jews had many years ago, it was a way of giving an offering to G-d for the times we transgressed. The verse lets us know about another marvelous aspect of doing teshuva. If someone insults another person in public, but then later will apologize for doing that, the other person can say the words that they were insulted in front of a lot of people. The person can ask the one who insulted them to apologize in front of the crowd and then they can forgive them. G-d is not in favor of Jews doing this, there is no need to apologize in front of a large crowd. That would just embarrass the person who realized the mistake they made themselves. Instead G-d asks for Jews anyone who has made a mistake against G-d, to apologize in private. If Jews confess in private and do teshuva, G-d is willing to forgive them just like that.

There is a verse of people taking their words, the Midrash is asking us why the prophet didn't tell us simply to say the words of viduy or prayer? There has to be a special significance to the words of "take". It's an unusual verb to use with the word, "words". Chofetz Chaim gives us the explanation that the Midrash is referring to the verse of our daily prayers. The prophet Hoshai'a, is giving the Jewish people some practical advice. That is before uttering a prayer, one should review in their mind what he is about to say. For example, before saying the second blessing of shemone esray, one should think outloud, "I am now going to praise G-d for reviving the dead." This applies to the other eighteen blessings, as well as to the blessing after a meal and the other prayers. The advice given here is contained in the phrase which translates to, "Take to heart the words you are about to say by first devoting a few moments of your attention to them." When people are talking to each other, the same words can be referred to our thoughts after the prayer. In one's prayer, a Jew makes numerous requests from G-d. One of these is asking G-d to please enlighten our eyes with His Torah! Another is to please let us perform perfect teshuva. Jews also tend to ask G-d to please rebuild Jerusalem. Jews repeat these day after day, it may happen as soon as we conclude our prayers. And then we go home and forget about them. The prophet Hoshai'a explains the words take the words of prayer with you wherever Jews go and to remember them.

Hoshaia says all of this to remind Jews to do teshuva. He tells the Jews to take the good; and then let u pay with our lips for the bulls! These words could be interpreted in several ways. We are begging G-d to use our lips because the Bais Hamikdash is destroyed and we can't offer sacrifices as we did before to atone for our sins. We are also asking G-d to accept our confession, which is an oral confession instead. The Midrash also tells us that Jews are asking G-d to accept our daily shemone esray prayers in place of the daily sacrifices. As we study the laws of sacrifices, we are asking G-d to please consider it as if we had actually offered them. G-d is merciful towards the Jewish people and accepts all of these types of "lip payments". These are substituted for sacrifices we used to do many years ago.

Hoshaia asks the Jews to do teshuva, in order to do perfect teshuva a person has to do three things. He has to stop sinning, he must say an oral confession for whatever he did wrong. The last thing is he must undertake not to repeat the sin in the future. Our verse deals with the second stage, confession. There will be another verse, where Hoshaia will admonish the Jewish people concerning the third point, namely that they have to seriously accept to not repeat their misstep in the future. When Jews complete their teshuva, they are promising to no longer rely on Asher to save themselves. This means they will no longer trust in riding on a horse, and they will no longer call their handiwork "G-d" for they know that only through G-d does the orphan find mercy. The Jews in the time of Hoshaia's time transgressed in three ways. They relied on military aid from Ashur and other neighboring nations. They did this instead of turning to G-d. They trusted in the strength of their own army, and they served idols. Hoshaia called on the Jews to do teshuva for these three things that they did. He asked the Jews to never repeat doing these things. Hoshaia offered words that were overflowing with comfort to encourage Jews to return back to G-d.

G-d gives the Jewish people the response that He will forgive them for their rebellion. He will love them generously. G-d says that if anyone was offended and then forgave the person who caused them pain. The person who forgave the one who caused them pain may not start loving that person. It's okay, because G-d would love the person who caused someone pain or sinned. G-d will love that person for doing teshuva. By doing teshuva, G-d's anger will turn away from them. The verse is teaching Jews another facet of the greatness of teshuva. If a person does teshuva, the whole world is being forgiven to a certain extent because of him. We learn this from the beginning words of the chapter, the words: for the Jews to return back to G-d. This was written in the singular for every Jew. G-d says that He will forgive the rebellion every Jew has inside of them. This implies that G-d forgives many on the account of one individual who did teshuva. The prophet Hoshaia, continues to describe the wonderful effect teshuva has. He refers to the perfect teshuva that our entire nation will do in the time when Mashiach comes.

G-d claims He will be like dew to the Jewish people. His love will come upon them as regular dew falls; daily without fail. The Jews will bloom like a rose and strike their roots firmly into the earth, like the cedar trees on Mount Lebanon. There is a significance of the words dew, rose, and roots. The dew is used in reference when the Jews transgress, Hoshaia described them as a "dried up spring". This is because the Jews have lost their spiritual vitality. At the same time, if Jews are doing teshuva, they are spiritually refreshed as if by a layer of dew. The verse is using dew instead of rain as a substance that waters a plant.

We know that dew falls daily, without fail. This is G-d's way of saying His love for the Jewish people would be constant as well, even if the Jews are not deserving. Rain is not always a convenience for a person who is always outside. Dew on the other hand is very beneficial; is never unwanted. G-d has renewed His love for the Jewish people and it will be like that in every respect. The Jewish people are likened to a rose. We learn that a rose has so much beauty and it is majestic splendor. It is clearly visible among the thorns and other greenery surrounding it. When we were in Egypt, the Jews were unique in their elevated standard of kedusha. Especially when we were compared to the impure Egyptian neighbors. When there is a bouquet of flowers, it is the rose that is considered to be the queen. When Jews keep the Torah, they are standing out among the other nations. It becomes obvious that they are a nation that is being blessed by G-d. During the week, people are generally far too busy to appreciate the beauty of flowers. When the day of Shabbat comes, they have more time to thoroughly enjoy the rose's beauty and sweet fragrance it has. With this said, the non-Jewish people don't appreciate the Jewish people's exclusive status. When the Mashiach will come, the Jewish people are going to be admired for devoting themselves to G-d's Torah. The rose's fragrance is a symbol for a Jew's Torah learning and good deeds. These are the ultimate purpose of the Jewish people's creation. The cedar roots of Mount Lebanon have meaning too. All of the aforementioned qualities of a rose notwithstanding, its roots are, after all, not as substantial as those of a much larger tree. The verse mentions the cedar, because it is a powerful tree that can't be easily moved. It can't be moved easily, because it has a lot of roots that are firmly entrenched in the earth.

The Midrash is mentioning that G-d is going to one day firmly plant the Jews in Israel. From there the Jewish people will flourish forever. G-d's Jewish nation has twigs that will spread out. His magnificence will be like that of an olive tree that has leaves and will remain wet all year long. His fragrance is going to be like Mount Lebanon that is covered with herbs and trees. All of these metaphors mentioned above describe G-d's kindness that He will show the Jewish people in the future. G-d will always shower the Jewish people with constant blessings just like an olive tree's leaves stay fresh all year round. This is the reward promised to those people who do teshuva. People who are in G-d's shadow will rest. They will revive like grain does, and blossom like the vine. Their mention will be like that of the superior wine of Mount Lebanon. The verse contains additional blessings for the Jewish nation when they return to G-d. The nation will be gathered in by Mashiach and will live under his guidance. Anyone who is dead will be revived and they will be showered with goodness and its merits will always be remembered before G-d. It will be like the blowing of the trumpets that are meant to cause such awareness when the wine is being offered in the Bais Hamikdash.

The Jewish Sages say that the offshoots represent the Jewish young men. They are specifically likened to olive trees and Mount Lebanon, because olive trees symbolize the oil used for the menorah in the Bais Hamikdash. They have impeccable moral conduct and cause young Jewish men to radiate light, just like the menorah in the Bais Hamikdash. The term Lebanon is another name for Bais Hamikdash. Our Sages interpret Lebanon as the "place that cleanses the Jewish people's transgressions." This means, that the Bais Hamikdash was where sacrifices were once offered to atone for our sins. The verse is referring to the "fragrant spices of Lebanon," the incense was the holiest spot on earth. The prophet Hoshai had compared the morally elevated Jewish youth to things that pertained to the Bais Hamikdash. If we go back to the righteous converts who join the ranks of the Jewish people, it is hinted in the Midrash that they will return to rest in the shade of the Presence of G-d. Having G-d around in our lives will become as essential to the people as grain is to the human diet. Efraim was willing to do teshuva. He was

willing to give up worshiping idols and turn only to G-d. G-d would look after the Jewish people and He would be like a fresh cypress tree that bends its wet branches to the ground. G-d would descend from heaven and be close to the people to help them. The people's fruit would be successful, because of G-d. Hoshaia had summoned the kingdom of Yehuda to do teshuva. Hoshaia was addressing a last call to Efrayim, the kingdom of the Ten Tribes. Hoshaia wanted all of the people in the Tribe of Efrayim to leave their idols. Then G-d would come attend to them. The Midrash is asking us why the prophet Hoshaia, granted these great prophecies concerning teshuva? When Yaakov's sons sold their brother Yosef into slavery, the brother Rueven was sent from the scene. Reuvenj came to the pit only later, and found it to be empty. Where was Reuven during the sale of Yosef? Reuven only sinned by rearranging his father's couch and that was why he was constantly engagede in doing teshuva. He was accompanied by fasting and mourning as well. G-d turned to Reuven and said he was the first man to do a proper teshuva. He would be rewarded with a descendant who would be the first to receive wonderful promises that would concern teshuva. It was Hoshaia, from the tribe of Reuven, who proclaimed for the Jews to return to G-d. Hoshaia told the Jews their doing teshuva would reach the Heavenly Throne of Glory and that it would transform the people's intentional sins int unintentional ones!

Hoshaia turned to the Jews and said those who are wise would understand his words of reproof and those who thought in a logical way would comprehen them. It was because of G-d's ways these types of Jews were thinking straightforward. The people who were considered to be tzaddikim would walk in these ways and would given eternal life. Anyone who was evil would stumble and refrain to go in the straightforward ways. The people who would be evil would always be delivered to Gehinnom. Hoshaia was trying to warn about Divine justice and it was from this no one could escape. The Gemara teaches us that the verse was saying something else. Even in identical acts of performing a mitzva, a person could still be considered a "tzaddik" and another person could be seen as wicked. This is possible and the Midrash explains this through a story. There was Rabba bar Bar Chana who taught us to take an example of a case between two Jews eating their portions of the Passover sacrifice. One of them had in mind that he was wishing to perform the mitzva of eating the korban Pesach. This person would be classified as a tzaddik. The prophet, Hoshaia would concern them saying the tzaddkik walk in the way of G-d. The second Jew on the other hand, would eat his sahare as though it were just any ordinary piece of meat. This particular man would be seen as an evil person and what would be seen about him is he would always stumble in G-d's ways.

A Jewish sage, Raish Lakish objects to this saying, how can you call the second person evil? After all, he did perform a mitzva even if he lacked having the proper intention! If we assume this sage, Raish Lakish is right, the above discussion of the Sages makes us aware of the major importance of having proper motivation. We learn that before we perform a mitzva, like saying the shema or the blessing after eating the matza on the first night of Passover, we need to make a mental note that we are about to fulfill our Creator's commandment and it's important to do this. There were four occasions where a loud wail filled the courtyard of the Bais Hamikdash. The first time was when the high priest Eli was advanced in his years, and his sons, Chofni and Pinchas, had presided over the avoda in the Mishkan of Shilo. They had one main goal to enjoy the sacrificial portions that were their due. They would routinely delay offering sacrifices of which their share was meager.

Because of this, their sacrifices of a childbearing woman would constantly be delayed overnight, for the priests gave priority to the other sacrifices of which they got a larger share. At this, the courtyard had cried out in pain as if to say to get out of there, you rebelious sons of Eli!

The priestly family was more concerned with its own honor than with the honor of G-d. Part of their eventual punishment was that the office of kehuna gedola was taken away from them. There was a time during the second Bais Hamikdash, when a kohen by the name of Yissachar from the village of Barkai used to put a silk glove on his right hand before performing the avoda for he wanted to avoid getting his hand dirty. The Torah law tells us, this is not allowed. Seeing that the honor of G-d had been slighted, the courtyard as it were also cried out the words "Out with you!" Eventually the king ordered for Yissachar's right hand to be cut off that was his punishment. There was a kohen gadol named Yishmael ben Fiabi.

When he died, the courtyard cried out in pain, because he had indeed handled himself with the fear of Heaven. The people in the courtyard proclaimed, "Let Yochanan, the student of Pinkai enter and fill his stomach with the meat of the korbanos!" This kohen used to consume a lot of portions of meat. He would also distribute the sacrificial meat to numerous young klohanim who were raised in his home. All of this was done in the honor of G-d. He was concerned that the holy meat of the sacrifice would be left over. In this case, it would have to be burned. In an effort to avoid this dishonorable situation he had exerted himself and ate large portions. G-d evaluates every person's deeds according to the thoughts and intentions they have behind them. We are able to upgrade the quality of our daily actions if we ask ourselves before each one, what is my underlying aim here? Am I doing something in honor of G-d? The next verse in the Midrash comes from the Book of Micha. There is a question of who is powerful such as G-d? A G-d who forgives for those who sin intentionally and overlooks even the rebellious sin of the remnant of His inheritance (people)? G-d doesn't hold onto His anger forever, for He desires only kindness. In the haftara of Vayelech, we are saying praises to G-d for His extreme kindness and patience with all human beings.

He is constantly hoping for the people to do teshuva, He is ready to disregard their past transgressions as soon as they are willing to show that they can improve. The next verses in the Book of Micah resemble that the Thirteen Qualities of Divine Mercy that G-d revealed to Moses have some explanations and encompass all of them. G-d had informed Moses of His attributes, because it is as if He has wrapped Himself in a prayer shawl and called out G-d oh merciful and gracious G-d. After enumerating His thirteen Traits of Mercy, He instructed for Moses to follow the procedure of not refusing the Jewish people. G-d wanted Moses to follow this procedure, because He didn't promise that as long as the Jews would recite this list, they would be answered. Instead as long as the Jews act in accordance with these thirteen qualities, they are assured G-d to keep His positive response. This was G-d's way of enunciating His attributes isn't guaranteed to evoke Heavenly mercy, only acting likewise. We have to study the verses from the Book of Micah. We need to have the goal of emulating the Divine Traits. The very first attribute is mentioned here, it asks us who is a G-d like You? That Name Kail, is a combination of both unequalled might and mercy as well. G-d allows for a human being to sin with the faculties and strength He granted him, and sustains him even as he is making poor choices and sinning. It is rare for G-d to curtail a human being's ability to defy Him.

G-d did this when King Yeravam offended a prophet that belonged to G-d. The story goes as follows, King Yeravam, was a former officer of King Shlomo. King Shlomo at the time ruled over ten tribes after the latter's death, feared that his subjects could defect and join the rival king, who was a descendant of David, when they traveled to the Bais Hamikdash in Jerusalem. They were traveling on a Yom Tov. There, only a scion of King David's dynasty was allowed to be seated, which would accentuate the inferior status of anyone else. To stop this from happening, Yeravam established there to be two centers of worship in his own kingdom. Yeravam placed a calf statue as a "holy symbol" in each. When the king inaugurated the temple

in Bais Ail and stood ready to offer incense on its altar, a prophet of G-d's came. That prophet was trying to threaten Yeravam with punishment, but King Yeravam ignored the prophet's reproof and tried to motion to a servant to arrest the prophet. It was at that moment, G-d had paralyzed King Yeravam's arm. It frustrated his plan, G-d was acting drastically for the sake of the prophet's honor. The Midrash tells us the same fate should come upon anyone who acts like Yeravam. Anyone who lights a fire on Shabbat should lose the use of his hand; one who speaks poorly ought to be deprived of his faculty of speech. Anyone who will purposefully eat non-kosher food should choke on that food.

Micah told the Jews that there is no power equal to G-d when it comes to kindness. G-d is able to tolerate incessant insults from His creatures. He will still be able to sustain them and grant them everything they need. People who do transgress on purpose, however are neither ignored or forgotten. G-d will tolerate this for a while and then awaits for the sinner's repentance. If a sinner is persistent in being stubborn until the end of his life and he has not yet been punished, his death will partially atone for him. His soul will ultimately be punished, which is a far worse fate than them suffering in this world. The Divine Trait has a plan for people who do sin on purpose. It teaches all that just like we have to bear insults from others around us and stay calm. We are not supposed to be angry at the people who insult us. Having this level of self-control requires having humility. It is a trait that is acquired by all our great Torah leaders. Moses and Aaron were once attacked by Korach and his followers. They humbly asked, who are we that you should complain against us? When King David heard himself being cursed, he wasn't just silent. He was serene in his heart.

That was one of the main reasons why he was named a "chassid" meaning a saintly person. We pray daily to G-d for Divine help to achieve such restraint at the end of the daily shemone esray. We say Let my soul be as dust to all! There is another phrase that expresses another trait of Mercy. Each transgression creates a destructive angel. It is a negative spiritual force that demands for the sinner's immediate punishment. Maybe even his death is calling, G-d is the one who bears the accuser generated by the transgression they committed. G-d is trying to restrain the sinner from meting out justice. The words, "G-d forgives" the word forgives actually indicates the sin is still there, but G-d bears with it and represses it for a short while. He is waiting for the sinner to come and repent. G-d is also discarding the sin totally so that it no longer is around. The biblical character Micah tells us a different statement, he doesn't agree that the sin is no longer around. He says that G-d has suspended justice for a sin that was committed due to an overpowering desire.

At the same time, G-d is totally annulling a rebellious sin, which is more severe. In order to resolve this problem, the Midrash interprets it in two different phrases. The Midrash brings up the death of Hevel, who was killed by his brother Kayin. The Heavenly verdict at the time was that Kayin had become a wandere. When he learned of his punishment, he confessed his sin and came before G-d. Kayin said to G-d that His mercy and patience were both endless. He continued to say that it says (not saying where), that G-d forgives sins and overlooks rebellious acts. Kayin came to the realization how outrageous any sin is. G-d forgives the upper and lower worlds; this is when Kayin asks G-d if his sin is too heavy for G-d to bear? He asks G-d to please overlook it. G-d felt pleased hearing these words coming from Kayin, he erased his punishment. He allowed him to remain in one place, that was in the land of Nod. The Midrash points out what was the best argument of Kayin's that found favor in G-d's eyes. It was Kayin's admission of the severity of his transgression. From this we learn that the more a person recognizes the magnitude of their offense, the deeper forgiveness G-d gives. If someone is to regard their misdeed just as an error that is caused by an overpowering desire that doesn't

involve any element of rebellion, the person's teshuva will be superficial. With that said, G-d will defer the person's punishment. G-d doesn't forgive the person completely.

There is an idea if the person feels their transgression is not a big deal and they have slighted the honor of G-d, for in fact anything contrary to G-d's will is considered a major crime. The person's teshuva is a lot more profound. If that is the case, then G-d is going to annul the sin completely. This is where Micah comes in, he states that the degree of forgiveness and atonement for any transgression depends on its status in the sinner's eyes. We are asked, whose sin does G-d forgive? Is it of a person who has superior character traits? Or one who ignores the offenses of others against him? The Midrash uses a lot of stories to show us different lessons. There was a famous Rav named, Hunna and he was very sick. When another sage named, Rav Pappa, came to see him, he was convinced that the afflicted sage's end was close by. He told the family to prepare Rav Hunna's shrouds. Rav Pappa was wrong about the other Rav, because Hunna was able to recuperate himself. This caused Rav Pappa to feel embarrassed. People were asking Pappa if he misjudged Hunna's condition? Pappa admitted that he did misjudge Hunna's condition in the throes of death. In the end, it was up to G-d who decided to lengthen Hunna's life and heal him. G-d did this because Rav Hunna had a wonderful character. He always forgave everyone who ever wronged him, and he never requited evil with evil.

G-d forgives those who overlook the wrong his fellow men did to him. This is a positive thing in the eyes of G-d. It's an important clue on how to arouse G-d's mercy, by acting in a similar manner. The story about Rav Hunna shows that someone could be rewarded with a longer lifespan. There is another trait of Divine mercy that is hinted to us Jews. G-d is lenient because He considers all the Jewish people to be His relatives. One of the terms G-d likes to use is "family" G-d further takes into account that the Jews are His inheritance. This means that the nation belongs to Him since the days of the forefathers. Jews have to learn to conduct ourselves in a similar way. We have to learn to tolerate our fellow Jews' untoward conduct because they are too our family. The Midrashic interpretation is, if a person considers himself to be a leftover, meaning they are humbled and unassuming. Then his transgressions will be forgiven. There is another trait of mercy that is brought up in the Midrash. It talks about G-d will often relent even if someone fails to do teshuva, as an act of grace. Maybe it will motivate the person to become better out of gratitude. The verse concludes with G-d desires kindness. It is in fact, that there is no end to G-d's kindness and mercy, just as there is no end to His greatness. All transgressions are punished eventually, if people continue to practice in their evil ways. It is a kindness for them, because it purifies them. G-d desires human beings to perform kindness with one another. If someone acts kindly to people, G-d condones the person's improper behavior to Him and is patient with the person. Knowing this, people learn to be more tolerant towards each other and to be kind with each other. The verse discussed here is known as a general declaration of G-d's compassion towards the Jews. It is referred to G-d's conduct towards the generation before the arrival of Mashiach. That generation before Mashiach will come is the remnant that has survived the long exile. G-d will treat those people with extraordinary consideration and mercy. This will include the people who don't merit the Redemption because they have made transgressions. G-d will deal leniently with them because His kindness is abundant. G-d will once more have compassion on the Jewish people as He used to in the past. He will repress our sins, preventing them from demanding punishment. G-d will cast into the depths of the sea all of our sins, this will make them go away.



G-d represses the sins of the Jewish people. We know this, because when the Jews used to sin G-d always defended them. It was G-d who created the evil inclination that everyone has. G-d did this on purpose to mislead the Jewish people. G-d represses the accuser who attempted to criticize the Jewish people. It was the accuser who would be punished. We also learn that G-d will always cover or conceal our transgressions. The last part of the verse tells us that, G-d will cast the transgressions into the depths of the sea. G-d sends them into the sea instead of a deep valley. From G-d's perspective, if a person does good or evil they have a lot of consequences. A sin isn't considered only evil in itself. Usually it is set in motion, like a train of negative and harmful events. The words "the depths of the sea" is where plants and seeds usually don't survive. We ask G-d not only to cover our sins, but also to prevent our transgressions from spreading their harmful influence. The verse mentions two different kinds of sins, these are intentional and rebellions. The verse adds unintentional sins. We ask G-d to forgive us for all of these kinds of transgressions. A verse is mentioned here from 7:20. It is, G-d told the Jewish people to make our oath to Yaakov.

This way G-d wouldn't forsake him come true, as to repay Avraham for his kindness. Yaakov instructed his descendants to act with righteousness and justice, just as G-d swore to our forefathers in olden times, after the Binding of Yitzchak. It was after that, the Jewish people would overcome their enemies. There is another interpretation to this verse. When G-d swore to give the Jewish people the land of Israel, He repeated this oath to Yaakov. G-d was confirming its truth because G-d at the time had already felt obligated as it were, but that promise was originally a kindness to Avraham. G-d at the time didn't feel obliged to give the land to the Jews. It's not coincidental that "truth" is mentioned in connection with Yaakov and "kindness" with Avraham. Every forefather we have possessed a dominant quality. Starting with Avraham, he had so much kindness for his life's occupation was to constantly host guests. He was teaching these guests about G-d.

Then there was Yitzchak, his dominant quality was strength and strict justice. Yaakov's was finding the "truth" because he was committed to life-long Torah. Jews call Torah "truth". G-d always deals with a person as he deals with other people. We ask G-d to grant us truth, this means His promise. In Yaakov's merit, and mercy in Avraham's honor. It explains why Yitzchak is not explicitly mentioned here. We appeal to G-d's kindness, but we may not be worth of salvation according to strict justice. The verse begins by mentioning Yaakov, instead of mentioning Avraham who was the first forefather Jews have. We know Yaakov to have always been closely associated with the difficult situation of the Jews in exile. Yaakov's life was filled with a lot of anguish and hardships. As our Sages tell us, when the Jews had sinned, Yaakov felt it in his grave. His grave was in the Cave of Machpaila. When the joy of the Redemption will come, Yaakov will be the happiest of the forefathers. It was Yaakov who was told by G-d Himself, that his descendants would become like the dust of the earth. This meant they would be downtrodden and stepped upon when they would be in exile. Because of that they would be like dust. Even though they would be considered as "dust" they would outlast all of their opponents and they would manage to survive. The dust of the earth always endures.

Micha's appeal to G-d's Traits of Mercy ends on a note mentioning, G-d's covenant with the forefathers. The covenant G-d has with the Jewish people is eternally binding and must eventually bring our Redemption. Now that the section of Micah has been read, the Midrash will move on to verses from Yoel. Yoel was a prophet who predicted a plague of locusts and urged communal fasting for the Jews. Yoel also urged the Jewish people to do teshuva. From the verse 2:11 in Yoel we learn, that G-d issued His call through the prophets. He did this before sending out His army. G-d had a host and they were numerous, there were those who carried

out G-d's word to destroy the Jewish people. G-d planned to destroy the Jewish people if they failed to do teshuva are mighty. G-d's punishment and very awesome who can withstand His punishment without being harmed? Or who could withstand it if not for the possibility of teshuva that G-d granted us? We are asked what army would G-d send upon the kingdom of Yehuda to whom this call was addressed, unless the people in the kingdom of Yehuda would do teshuva. The prophet Yoel was trying to let the Jews know of a devastating plague coming up.

This plague was consisting of locusts. Yoel had spoken about this at the beginning of the book. It is at the end of the Haftara in 2:25, that it explicitly states this. This plague would be even more severe than the one that had befallen in Egypt that was part of the Ten Plagues. It was going to last four successive years. Every year, there would be a different species of locust that would attack. This would result in the Jews suffering for four years of severe famine. G-d could have sent the plague without giving a prior warning, but in His great mercy He foretold it, in order to motivate the Jewish people to do teshuva. G-d was doing this to avoid punishment. There was another opinion regarding G-d's army, it was referring to the Babylonians who were described as numerous and mighty. In reality they were truly both those things, they would soon attack the kingdom of Yehuda. The great and mighty day of G-d's punishment hinted at the Ninth of Av when the Bais Hamikdash was to go up in flames. The Jewish people were going to be exiled and it was a day of calamity in our history. It was crucial for the Jewish people to realize that the Babylonians had no power of their own, they were only seen as G-d's agents to bring about the punishment the Jews deserved.

To impress this upon the Jewish people, the prophet called the Babylonians, His army. He did this merely as an instrument of His will. It is possible the verse gives us both explanations, meaning the armies of locusts would invade and devastate the land the Jews lived in. As well as the precursors of the future human armies. If the Jews would take the first catastrophe to heart and really improve their ways, they could be spared from the second one. If that was to happen, the locusts would prove to be the greatest blessing! Our Sages tell us another interpretation of the verse, it is referring to the yearly festivals of the Jewish New Year and the Day of Atonement. It is on the Jewish New Year that, G-d calls out using the shofar. He calls out to His army on earth, meaning the Jews. On that day, G-d is judging them with His Heavenly tribunal of accusers and defenders. G-d has a host of angels and they deliberate about the fate of the Jewish people. These hosts are numerous and mighty. The people considered as tzaddikim are acquitted, the evil people are condemned, and the verdict of those in-between are deferred. Finally on the Day of Atonement, what is considered to be "the great and awesome day", anyone classified as "in-between Jews" are pardoned. It is a day of mercy when the accusers are no longer granted power. Later the prophet will explain that even after the army of locusts have come, G-d is still asking the Jews to do teshuva.

G-d told the Jews that after the locusts came, it was still not too late. We could still Return to G-d with all of our hearts, with fasts, weeping, and mourning as well! This is a verse in the book of Yoel, found in 2:12. There is a difference between teshuva before a Heavenly decree and then following it. Once the realization of the Heavenly edict starts, the honor of the entire community is accompanied by their sincere entreaties and doing teshuva is required to stop it from continuing. The verse emphasises for Jews to come back to G-d with all of their hearts. It is in addition to the outer manifestations of fasting and mourning. It is a mitzva that is instituted by our Sages to proclaim communal fasts at any time of national calamity. Trumpets are blown and prayers are said to elicit Heavenly mercy. Teshuva at such a time is important, because if the Jews reach out to G-d to be rescued from the disaster they are in, then their records are scrutinized on a High level. G-d is able to see if the Jews are worthy then, which may result in

the accusation against them becoming strengthened. Their sins have created destructive forces and can be eliminated only through doing teshuva. This is why saying confession outloud will resolve in improvement and it will precede supplication relief for them.

If a Jew didn't say teshuva on Yom Kippur that is considered a "great and awesome day" who may think they shouldn't try to come back to G-d, it's not going to be worth it, this person's way of thinking is wrong. The prophet stresses for the person to know that doing teshuva whenever is beneficial. G-d tells the Jews to tear their hearts and notly our clothes, then return to Him, for He is our G-d. He is the gracious and merciful one. He is the one who is patient and has abundance amount of kindness. Lastly, He is relentless when planning anything evil to people. In bliblical times people used to tear their clothing in grief or when they were angry at hearing bad news. There were biblical characters who did this, Joshua and Kalaiv tore their garments when they heard the spies evil report about the land of Israel. The prophet advises that what G-d primarily desirse is the "tearing of one's heart". That is the, removal of the barriers of egotism, arrogance, and self-deciet. That blinds someone to perceiving the objective truth about himself and prevent him from sincere introspection and to do teshuva.

If this is the case, why is fasting and outward manifestations of mourning needed at all? Shouldn't everyone instead just on concentrate on thoughts of teshuva? The answer is that those actions engender a climate that is conducive to teshuva. A Jew should be aware that fasting, etc aren't the goal. The point is for the person to perform the mitzva of teshuva by making themselves be humble and contrite. There was a fast that had been decreed by the Jewish court, it was because of a lack of rain. A certain procedure was followed in Israel, the ark contianing the sefer Torah was brought into the street where the public got together. Ashes were placed on it so as to humble all the Jews to gether and have cry. Then the ashes were put on the heads of the judges of the Jewish court. This was done in order to humiliate them and ineducue them to do teshuva. Then every ordinary Jew would put ashes on their head and a sage arose from all of this. They delivered a speech that inspired the public to do teshuva. The sage encouraged the people, "Dear brothers, it is not our sacklcloth, and fasting that will change the decree of G-d. It is only our doing of teshuva, the city of Ninvay was saved in Yona's time. It wasn't saved because of the people there who mourned and fried about the destruction that was upon them, but because G-d saw that they had changed their evil way of life.

The prophet Yoel, warned the Jews to tear their hearts and not their garments! The sage continued to speak until he moved the people to sincerely do teshuva. Then he or if he wasn't able to do so, another righteous person led the community in praying out to G-d. There are many stories in the Gemara that show when rain actually fell on a fast. This meant G-d had considered the deeds and the honors of the Jewish people. Rabbi Eliezer once decreed for there to be a fast of thirteen days. No rain fell after that and on the last of these fasts, when the Jews were planning to leave, this Rav called out to the people. He asked the people, how can you go home, have you prepared graves for yourselves? At that, all broke down the people started crying this time, it came from their hearts. That was when G-d sent the rain to fall. Another Rav named Yehuda HaNassi once decreed for a fast to come because no rain fell. To no avail, there was another famous Sage named Ilfa, he went up to lead the prayers. As soon as he read the words, He makes the wind blow, it became extremely windy. When this Sage Ilfa, enunciated the phrase, He makes the rain fall, it did start to rain. This Sage Ilfa had special merits. Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi asked the Sage Ilfa what he did to deserve this?

Ilfa said that the residents of the village he was living in were extremely poor and couldn't afford wine for kiddush and havdala. Every Shabbat Ilfa would supply them with wine to fulfill the mitzva. The Rav once made a decree for a fast in a certain place, which suffered from drought. Still no rain fell, but when the cantor who was appointed to lead the prayers got up and said the words, "he makes the wind blow," a wind did start blowing. That cantor then said the words, "He makes the rain fall," and then the rain started. The Rav asked the cantor what special deeds do you have to your credit. The cantor claimed to be a Rabbi of young boys and he was treating the children who came from poor and rich families alike. Those who couldn't afford to pay, the cantor was teaching for free. Those who weren't interested in learning the Rabbi was giving fish for prizes, because he owned fish ponds. This was the Rabbi's way of motivating those not interested until were willing to study.

Our Sages tell us that the phrase, "Tear your hearts and not your clothes," means if you rip your hearts and do teshuva, you don't need to rip your clothes for your sons' deaths. G-d was warning that if the Jews' will not take to heart the punishment of locusts that destroys their p-d would take the lives of the Jews' children. Anyone who knows of a transgression they made, they shall return to G-d and regret it. This way, G-d will leave a blessing after them, for the locusts will stop devouring the crops. The crops will thrive because of the person doing teshuva and the person will have enough produce for flour offerings and wine offerings to give to G-d. There are some explanations that refer to G-d as follows: Who knows, maybe G-d will change His decree despite our transgressions, or at least He will relent after punishing us just minimally. It says in verse 2:15 in Yoel, to blow a shofar in Jerusalem. This will encourage the Jewish people to do teshuva, ordain a fast day, and call everyone to gather in the House of G-d. The verse continues onto the situation in which the plague of locusts had already started> measures had to be taken to stop the plague, and the only way or more than one way for this to happen is if the entire community was to turn to G-d. If they all turned to G-d and did teshuva, then G-d would not reject them as they were were in a communal prayer. It was taught by the Sages that a person's prayer is only answered if it is wholehearted.

Not just the person giving some kind of a lip service. Some people object to this on the basis of the verse saying that, G- is merciful and forgives all transgressions. Then G-d will accept a prayer even if it's not perfectly sincere There was a contradiction to this, but it was resolved. There was a person who prayed without putting his heart into his prayers and they were not answered. If the entire community was answered and even if some of the members were not being completely sincere. Yoel told the Jews to blow the shofar, since its blast frightens the listeners and will motivate them to do teshuva. Yoel told the Jews to start a fast and to gather the entire community for prayers and to do teshuva. The details of this gathering are in another verse. It says to gather the nation, to start a fast, and assemble the elders. Then the young children were to be gathered around and the sucklings. The bridegroom was to come out of his chamber and for the bride to come from the private room that was reserved for the newlyweds, where they would weep and fast with the community. If the community was considered to be in danger, everyone was required to participate in its troubles. One could say they were going to go home and eat or drink and enjoy themselves. A Jew who would separate themselves from the community was refusing to share in the suffering going on.

They were not takign part in the consolation either. The Midrash gives us another example anyone who took the Jewish people's hardship to heart was like Moses during the war against the Amalek people. Refusing a comfortable cushion, Moses sat on a hard stone while holding

up his hands, it was his way to remind the Jews to direct their hearts up to heaven. There is a requirement to not separate oneself from the whole community in time of distress. It explains why everyone is obligated to join together. This includes the newly-wed couple and children are included too. The heartbreaking sight of starving children will induce the grown-ups to do teshuva. It will also evoke Heavenly mercy. This point provides an additional insight into why the bride and groom are specifically included. Seeing the bridal couple, whose joy is transformed into mourning, is going to arouse others to do teshuva.

This will lead G-d to have compassion for the Jewish people. It says between the hall and the altar shall the kohanim, the servants of G-d weep and reach out to Him. There, the kohanim would encourage for G-d to not stop the word. The kohanim were forbidden to cry, since "the Heavenly gates of tear-filled prayers are never locked." How could the Jews become a disgrace and a proverb among the nations? The plague was causing such a severe family that the Jews were going to be forced to leave their Land. They would have to reside among the non-Jewish nations who would dominate them and cite their plight to "prove" that who they believed to be G-d, had failed them. G-d forbid that G-d would fail the Jews in reality. During the time of the Bais Hamikdash,<sup>t</sup> the Jews would emigrate to Egypt and the land of Pelishtim. This plague would cause pain for G-d. G-d told the Jews if we were to return and cry out to Him, He would be zealous for His land that had become desolate. It became desolate on the account of the famine, and He would have compassion for His people. G-d would reply to His people and say, "Behold, from now on I will send you blessing in your grain, wine, and oil. You will be satiated by it. I will no longer cause you shame among the nations,<sup>f</sup> or you will no longer be driven to go among them in search of food. Or they will no longer deride you as being "paupers" and "beggars."

The person who will emerge from a northern direction, I will remove from you in its entirety. I will push its main mass to parched, desolate land where that person will perish from lack of food. Its front part I will push into the eastern sea known as, the Salt Sea. Or the Sea of Kinneres. And its rear into the western sea, the Mediterranean Sea. Its stench will rise and its foul smell will go up in the nostrils of anyone coming by. It shall perish forever, for it did great evil in Israel. The term, the northern one doesn't occur anywhere in the T'nach. The basic explanation is that the verse refers to the swarm of locusts hailing from the north. It will totally disappear if the Jews do teshuva. Another interpretation is the vast enemy armies coming from the north, referring to Ashur and Bavel. They are stretching from the east to the west of Israel and will be decimated, in part by drowning. The verse intimates that those armies that imagined they could accomplish great things for thousands of years are going to sink into oblivion. A final explanation is that the concealed one talking about the evil inclination in a person's heart.

It appears in a thousand different ways to deceive each individual as to its true nature. In the history of the nations' lust for conquest and fame, it appears as a "religion", "colonization", or simply spread of "civilization." It was the evil inclination in the Jews, that led them into idol worshiping in the time of the First Bais Hamikdash. The Jews continued to sin when there was the Second Bais Hamikdash. The Jews may have question the benefit of getting a surplus of wine, grain, and oil when fearing that such abundance could lead them to renewed sinning. Yoel tells them that in the future, in the time of Machiach, G-d is going to eliminate the evil inclination completely. G-d will expel the evil inclination to a desolate land. The stench of the evil inclination will rise, but it won't affect the Jewish people. Despite the harm, the evil inclination inflicted it will also accomplish great things. It will be because of fighting it, that the tzaddikim would become elevated. Something else that could happen, is G-d could promise that once the locusts come, their stench would go up so high and the locust would just disappear instead of staying around.

If it was to stick around, it would cause additional unpleasantness and sickness due to the foul atmosphere, since the locusts already finished their mission.

The Jewish people were told in biblical times and even now to not fear the earth of Israel. This plague of locusts sounds unpleasant, but it would bring happiness to the people. The people would be so happy because they would see that G-d is doing great things. He will bring abundant goodness to the people. In the future, the situation will be the opposite of the past one. Instead of what we refer to as G-d's "awesome punishment" there would be no more fear. People wouldn't be mourning any more, they would be rejoicing. Instead of the northern one doing great evil, G-d would bring great goodness. We are told to not fear the beasts of the field. We shouldn't be upset that we lack pasture ground. We will have the former desert dwellings sprout grass. The tree will bear the fruit it once gave us. The fig tree and vine is going to give us their produce. There will be compensation for whatever didn't grow in the years of famine. In the time of Mashiach, every tree is going to bear some kind of fruit. None of the trees will go barren, There will be fruit that will grow in just one day, and the bark of the trees will become edible as well. The Jewish people will be so happy and that won't be due to the material blessings they get. Instead, they will be so happy because they will be able to finally feel G-d's renewed love.

There is a verse that says, Your sons of Jerusalem, will be so happy and rejoice in G-d, your G-d. G-d is the one who has given the people early rain that is charitable. It is G-d who has disregarded the people's sins. Rain will fall for the people, the early rain in the month of Marcheshvan and the late rain in the month of Nissan will come. It will come in Nissan, before the drought, when each rainfall will take place in its proper season. Our Sages tell us a different perspective than what is written in this verse. In the prophet's time, Yoel, his generation had the plague of locusts and it caused the Jews to do teshuva. Since they did teshuva, the locusts went away. On the first of Nissan, Yoel told the Jews to go out and grow their crops! The Jews response was they only had small amounts of wheat and barley seeds left over after the plague. They needed to subsist, if they were to sow them then, they thought for sure they would starve! Yoel encouraged the Jews to go ahead and sow what they have and to not worry. G-d was going to provide miracles for them.

In that one year the rain had failed to come in Marcheshvan. So it poured in at the beginning of Nissan. The spinir gell on the fifth of the same month. It was early and the late rains came in the first month. The grains miraculously ripened within eleven days after that. The grains ripened within eleven days instead of just the normal span of half a year. It was on the sixteenth day of Nissan, the barley had ripened so that the korban omer could be offered like usual. It was around Shavuot that the wheat had ripened and the two loaves of bread could be offered as it always had in the past. About that generation it was stated, those who would sow with their tears could reap happiness. This phrase comes from the Tehillim. There is a phrase in Hebrew that is ambiguous, because it is expressing that G-d has given the Jews prophets who show us how to deal justly. In particular, this maybe a reference to Mashiach himself. Mashiach is supposed to teach the entire world the proper way of serving G-d. Another explanation is that the yetzer tov will be within us. Yetzer tov is good inclination that people have, as opposed to what has been talked about in the Midrash before, the yetzer hara meaning the evil inclination that people have.

Once we have the good inclination within us, that evil inclination will go away. It indicates to us that in the future, the evil inclination is going to instruct and teach people to deal justly. There is another idea of the word in Hebrew for teacher refers to the plague of locusts. It taught the Jews to act righteously. In the same manner, the Jews will acknowledge this and be happy about it. The Jews would have granaries that would be filled with grain. The oil and the wine pits would

resound with the noise of wine and oil. It would be poured into them. The Midrash shares another story for us, in the days of Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach, rain would fall usually on Wednesday and Friday nights. The grain kernels swelled to the size of kidneys. The barleycorns to that would get to be the size of olives and the lentils would become the size of dinar coins. The Sages preserved samples of these giant products they were demonstrating to later generations the blessing that would be there, but for purposes of transgressing. The greatest blessings are to be saved for the future. G-d told the Jews He would compensate them for the years they struggled with the various locusts.

There were different kinds of locusts, the arbeh, the yelek, the chasil, and the gazam. G-d told the Jews he sent His great army among the people. It was His army that consumed the produce, which once belonged to the Jews. It's at the beginning of the Book the Jews are told that there were four kinds of locusts, which would plague the Jewish people. Every year there was a different kind of plague. The plants that were left over by one species would be devoured by the next year's. English translations for the names of the species of locusts were mentioned in the verse vary. They had Hebrew names, with the exception of arbeh. This indicated their destructive nature. Arbeh is related to the word for numerous, it is because this appears in the greatest of numbers. The name yelek means it uproots grass meaning it's licking it or sucking it up. The term chasil means it destroys everything and finishes it off. The last term for these different locusts was gazam. It means to cut off the produce, to shear it.

The first verse of the Haftara explains G-d's army. It may allude to the enemies invading Israel. There is one explanation coming from our Sages about the four kinds of locusts. It is hinting to the four exiles to which the Jewish people had been subjected in the course of history. The Jews were told to eat because eating would leave them feeling satiated. The Jews should praise the Name of G-d and remember that He is our G-d. He was the One who had done so many wondrous things with us. He wanted to remind us that we should never feel shame again. A verse before this that was mentioned, predicted an abundant amount of harvest for the Jews. This one adds that as soon as the Jewish people would eat they would feel satiated. It was a further blessing for them. In the future, there would be no danger of Jews being led astray by the great material abundance. The term, tzefoni was once known as yetzer hara (evil inclination) it had been removed from the hearts of the Jews. It would be at this point, the Jews would start feeling G-d's blessings. These blessings would be in honor of G-d. They would be there in order to be able to serve G-d in a joyful way. It would give the Jews even more reason to praise Him.

We would no longer seek luxuries for our personal enjoyment or convenience. We would be estranging ourselves from these luxuries to feeling satisfied with G-d's many blessings. It would give us more reason to praise G-d for what we already have. One of the last verses mentioned in this Haftara says Jews should know that G-d is in the midst of Israel. He is there to supervise the Jews with His special Providence. He is G-d and there is no other power that can stop Him from bringing the blessings He sends. These blessings of abundance are to be brought upon the Jews. G-d says His people will never be put to shame again, for Who can oppose the will of G-d? We have reached the end of the Haftara and it clearly is referring to the era of the Mashiach's time. This is when the Jewish people's suffering will finally be over. The Jewish people will see, first of all, that G-d is constantly in their midst. Secondly, there is no power other than Him.

Of course, both of these ideas were already demonstrated earlier to our nation at the Giving of the Torah. This was when the Torah stated, about the Jews were shown to know that He is the Almighty G-d. There is none beside Him. When the Jews are in a period of exile, we are longing for the actual experience of the presence of G-d. We want that to be around us once more again. This verse promises that for us in the future. Even in the second Bais Hamikdash, the presence of G-d had been absent. We, Jews, believe that the presence of G-d will return in the future. It will stay with the Jews permanently. This is another reason why G-d will never shame the Jewish people again.