

The first text begins by quoting Psalm 25:8 which the ba'al hamidrash/midrashist will then apply to his theme:

Good/Beneficent/tov and upright/firm/straight/yashar is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way (Psalm 25:8). They inquired of Wisdom: "As for the sinner, what is his punishment?" She answered them: *Evil pursues sinners* (Proverbs 13:21). They inquired of prophecy: "As for the sinner, what is his punishment?" She answered them: *The soul that sins shall die* (Ezekiel 18:4). They inquired of Torah: "What is the punishment of a sinner?" She answered them: "Let him bring a guilt offering and it shall atone for him" (This is a paraphrase of Leviticus 5:6). They inquired of the Holy One, Blessed be He: "As for the sinner, what is his punishment?" He answered them: "Let him repent and that will atone for him, as it is written: *Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way* (Psalm 25:8).

Said Rabbi Pinhas: "How can he be *beneficent/tov* seeing as how he is *firm/yashar*? How can he be *firm/yashar* seeing as how he is *beneficent/tov*? [Says the Psalm:] *The Lord is both tov and yashar and therefore [because of these two qualities] he instructs sinners in the way* (Psalm 25:8). That is to say, he directs sinners towards the path whereon they can make teshuvah. Therefore, Hosea exhorts Israel [in the haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah]: *Shuva/return/repent, O Israel [for you have stumbled because of your sin. Take words with you and return to the Lord]* (Hosea 14:2).

- The Rabbis quite often had an entire field scriptural field in mind when they cited a particular verse. You are always well served to have a Tanakh with you when you study rabbinic texts so as to see whether the context of a citation shapes or colors the verse cited.
- It is a good idea to investigate the contexts of all the "Gallup Poll" responses to the question, "What do you think about sin?"
- Note that it is the abstracted categories of Tanakh that are consulted: **Ketuvim** (called Wisdom), **Nevi'im/Prophets**, and **Torah**.
- Who is the "they" who make the inquiries?
- What is your assessment of each response? How well do they function as a group? Do they balance each other?
- How well can we live with and within the framework of responses to sin that **TNK** offer? What is lacking in them according to the Midrash?
- Does God override or invalidate any of the three biblical components?
- Apparently, the most livable response to sin is one that is more than equal to the total of the biblical parts. What does this say about the ultimate source(s) of Teshuvah?

The next excerpt from our Piska/Chapter on Shabbat Shuvah is part of a long list of examples encouraging Teshuvah. God says, naming in turn a list of notorious sinners, (such as Cain, Ahab, the Ninevites of Jonah's day): "If I accepted the teshuvah of so and so, why would I not accept yours?"

- In order to set the stage for this excerpt, read 2 Kings 21:1-18. Then, having gained an appreciation for Manasseh's zeal for sin, read the account of 2 Chronicles 33:1-20.
- What about the 2 Chronicles account challenges the Rabbis to refine a philosophy of Teshuvah?

"I accepted the teshuvah of Manasseh, should I not accept your teshuvah?"

For a harsh decree had been decreed against Manasseh as it is written: *And the Lord spoke to Manasseh and to his people but they paid no attention. And he brought upon him the captains of the Assyrian king's army and they seized Manasseh with hooks, etc.,* (2 Chronicles 33:10-11). What is meant by, *with hooks*? Rabbi Abba

bar Kahannah said: “with manacles”. *And they bound him with copper fetters* (ibid.). What is [meant by] *copper fetters*? Rabbi Levi ben Hita said, “they made for him a copper [cauldron shaped like a] mule and put many holes in it. They put him inside and started a fire underneath it. And when he saw that his trouble was real trouble he did not refrain from calling upon all the idols in the world asking idol such and such to save him. And when he saw that this availed him nothing he said, “I remember that my father used to recite this verse to me: [*But if you search there [in your captivity] for the Lord your God, you will find him, if only you seek him with all your heart and soul] when you are in distress because all these things have befallen you and, in the end, return to the Lord your God and obey him. For the Lord your God is a compassionate God. He will not fail you nor will he let you perish. He will not forget the covenant with your ancestors which he swore to them* (Deuteronomy 4:30-31). Behold, I will recite this. If He answers me—fine; if not, all gods are the same.”

Then the ministering angels began to close the windows of the firmament in order that the prayer of Manasseh not ascend before the Holy One, blessed be He. And they said before the Holy One: “Master of the world, does a man who erected an idol in the Temple have teshuvah [available to him]?” The Holy One, Blessed be He, replied to them: “If I do not accept his teshuvah I will be barring the door before all penitents.” What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do? He broke through a small opening beneath his throne of glory and he listened to his plea. As it is written: *And he prayed to him and he was entreated/vaye'ater of him* (2 Chronicles 33:13). *And he was broken through to/vayehater* is written. *And he listened to his plea*. Rabbi Lazar ben Shimon said, “In the west atirta/an entreaty is pronounced hatirta/a hole.

And he returned him to Jerusalem, to his kingdom; then Manasseh knew that the Lord was God (2 Chronicles 33:13). How did he return him? Rabbi Shmuel ben Nahman said in the name of Rabbi Aha: “He returned him with a wind, as it is said: *who causes the wind to blow/mashiv (haruach)* [a pun on shuva/return/repentance].” At that moment, Manasseh said, “There is justice and there is a judge.”

[Having accepted Manasseh’s teshuvah] shall I not accept your teshuvah?

- Is sincerity a necessary feature of Teshuvah?
- Do the opinions of Wisdom, Prophecy and Torah from the last excerpt find support in this excerpt?
- What do the angels hope to accomplish by shutting up the windows?
- Why does God resort to use of a trap door? Is God a prisoner within the larger “palace,” within the protocols and logic of Teshuvah?
- Does God’s role in this excerpt parallel the divine role in the preceding section?
- Can Teshuvah be offered silently and understood intuitively? Or, is there a necessary interactive component?
- Whom does Teshuvah transform?
- What does this text say about the importance of Teshuvah to the individual and the community?