



Ten Days in Tanach

Stubbornness, Suspense and Salvation

Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Though there is no explicit mention of the significance of *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* in Tanach, Rabba bar Avuha expounds: “Seek the L-rd while He may be found; call upon Him when He is near’ (Yeshayahu 55:6). During the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Hashem is particularly close and should be sought out by every individual” (Rosh Hashanah 18a).

The Gemara further teaches that one may learn about the essence of these ten days from the novel and delayed death of Naval the Carmelite (Samuel I 25), who refused to adequately compensate David and his servants for assisting Naval’s shepherds.

Avigayil, his sensible wife, came to the rescue with lavish provisions and prevented David from slaughtering the house of Naval. After that, the *navi* described Naval as selfishly feasting without constraint “like the feast of a king; and Naval’s heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken.”

Avigayil wisely waited until morning to speak of the gifts she offered David to save the household. Unexpectedly, upon hearing her words, Naval was deeply shaken, finally understanding the repercussions of his deplorable conduct. “And his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.”

“And it came to pass about ten days after, that Hashem smote Naval, and he died” (Samuel I 25:38). Why was there a delay of ten days before Naval died? “Rav Nachman said in the name of Rabba bar Avuha: These are the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur,” (Rosh Hashanah 18a) during which everyone is given one last opportunity to repent for the sins they committed over the course of the previous year.

Hashem provided Naval with ten days to complete a process of regret and repair, and understood these days as paralleling the ten days of repentance.

Naval failed to internalize the lesson and opportunity to change his ways; when the initial shock wore off, Naval returned to his stubborn and habitual conduct. For this reason, after ten days, G-d smote him and he died (Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabba 18:10).

Another hint to these cathartic ten days in Tanach may be found in the prophetic narrative following the assassination of Gedalya ben Achikam on Rosh Hashanah after the destruction of the First Temple.

Yochanan ben Kereach led the remainder of the farmers of Judea to Egypt, seeking asylum from Babylonian vengeance. As they rested near Beit Lechem on their way down to Egypt, they asked Yirmiyahu haNavi to appeal to Hashem on their behalf, convinced that G-d wished them to settle in exile until a future time to return (as he prophesied through Rachel’s cries in chapter 31). “And **after ten days**, the word of Hashem came to Yirmiyahu” (Yirmiyahu 42:7). The Abarbanel explains that Yirmiyahu appealed to Hashem throughout the ten days from Rosh Hashanah – when Gedalya was murdered – to Yom Kippur.

Amidst his prayers and fasting during *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*, Hashem answered Yirmiyahu’s supplications on behalf of the people with words of consolation: “If you remain in this land, I will build you and not overthrow, I will plant you and not uproot; for I regret the punishment I have brought upon you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you fear; do not be afraid of him... for I [Hashem] am with you to save you and to rescue you from his hands. I will dispose him to be merciful to you: he shall show you mercy and bring you back to your own land.”

The last remnant of the Judean settlement was assured that they would not have to seek refuge in Egypt; they would be safe and secure in the Land of Israel. They were given a chance

to start over and rebuild a social and religious infrastructure in preparation for national return.

Unfortunately, like Naval, the people did not take advantage of the opportunity to return and rebuild, and instead accused the prophet of falsehood. They continued their descent to Egypt, running towards their doom and leaving the Land bereft of Jewish settlement.

The ten days between the first and the tenth of Tishrei are not only days suffused with sanctity and a time of prayer, fasting and atonement; they are gifts from G-d as our individual and national futures are held in abeyance.

These days offer us an auspicious opportunity for repentance, an opportunity to swing the pendulum of our behavior from stubbornness and arrogance to humility and change, from suspense of annihilation to survival and salvation.



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