

SHOVaVYM (ToT)

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This is “extra credit,” intended to be informative, not obligatory. This is a slightly updated version of a dvar Torah from many years ago, so if it looks familiar, you know why.

The week of the Torah-reading (*parshat*) Shemot begins the period of Shovavym. *SHOVaVYM* is an acronym for the first six *parshiot* found in the book of Shemot: Shemot, Vaera, Bo, B’shalach, Yitro, Mishpatim. (*ToT* is an acronym for the following two *parshiot*, Terumah and Tetzaveh. See below.)

According to the Arizal, this period of the year is a time for repentance, particularly for sins of relating to unchastity. (One of the major reasons for the Egypt Exile was to correct Adam’s sins of unchastity.) It parallels the slavery, exodus and receiving the Torah that we read about in the aforementioned *parshiot*. Our sins are our slavery, our repentance our exodus, and our affirmation and re-commitment to the Torah is our receiving of the Torah.

Rebbe Nachman writes (*Likutey Moharan* II, Lesson #73) that saying Psalms both induces in oneself a stronger desire to repent and guides a person on his personal path to God, as well. He points out that this is alluded to in the very first

verse of the *parshat* Shemot, “v’eileH shemoT bneI yisrael habaiM mitzraimaH eiT yaakoV iSH u’vaitO... (These are the names of Yisrael’s sons who came to Egypt with Yaakov, each one and his family...)” In the Hebrew, the last letters in the verse spell out the words for Psalms and repentance (Tehilim and *teshuvah*, respectively).

For this reason some say additional Psalms beyond their regular, personal “quota.” It was once customary to fast (as the Arizal prescribed) as an act of repentance, but this is no longer done (by chassidim, any way). In Breslov, some are “vegan for a day,” that is, they refrain from eating animal products for one daylight period each week of Shovavym, from *alot hashachar* (the crack of dawn) to *tzeit hakokhavim* (nightfall). One Breslover chassid of the previous generation, Reb Shmuel Shapira (obm), refrain for a full 24-hour period.

In a Jewish leap year, such as this year (5771) is, the Shovavym period offers greater potential for *teshuvah* (returning to God). This is partially due to the extra month the leap year contains (the entire year has more *kedushah* (holiness)-potential), and partially to the additional *parshiot*, Terumah and Tetzaveh, which are added to this period. Those two *parshiot* deal with the contributing to and building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle), building God a home in this world, even in a desert.