Potomac Torah Study Center

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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!

With our being out of town for several days and our return delayed because of delayed flights, I have not had an opportunity to prepare a Yom Tov/Shabbat message this week. We are under quarantine this week because of contact with numerous individuals who did not follow safe masking procedures during our time out of town, and because of wall to wall people during a long wait (and delays) at an airport that resulted in our return home at 2:30 a.m. on Monday. Also, with my earalier than normal posting, some materials that I usually include are not yet ready and therefore missing.

There are many on line study guides for Yom Kippur. One excellent free guide is AlephBeta.org's free downloadable guide on Yonah (Jonah), the famous Haftorah for Yom Kippur afternoon, available at:

https://aleph-beta.cdn.prismic.io/aleph-beta/97eea1c2-2499-4e95-b5ce-9e8aeb0fa64c_yom-kippur-jonah-study-guide-updated.pdf

Chaim Shulman's outstanding Internet Parsha Sheet will be available Wednesday by very early in the morning at:

www.parsha.net This compilation includes material from a broad selection of top authors.

Yeshivat Chovevei Torah prepared an excellent High Holy Day guide last year, available at:

https://www.yctorah.org/yct-publications-and-readers/

Chabad has extensive materials on line, available at

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/default_cdo/jewish/Torah-Portion.htm

One can find many more guides, and there is still time to search and print materials to learn over Yom Tov, especially those who must observe the holy day at home, or those whose shuls have shorter davening than normal because of the risk of spending all day in shul.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Adam Yermiyahu ben Devorah, Yissocher Dov Ben Chaya Bracha (Rabbi Frand), Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Gmar chatima tova and Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Haazinu: Non-Trivial Pursuit

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1998

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

The song of Ha'azinu encompasses a panoramic view of Jewish history. It tells of the past, present, and future of Klal Yisrael. However, Moshe does not end the portion with a song. He exhorts them to take his words seriously and apply them to their hearts. Then he reiterates the most prevalent theme of all his teachings "be careful to perform the entire Torah, for it is not an empty thing for you, for it is your life" (Deuteronomy 32:46-47).

The spectrum from "not an empty thing" to "it is your life" is extremely broad. It is quite disconcerting to see Moshe telling the nation he had guided with the words of Torah proclaim that Torah is not an empty thing. Can he have meant something deeper?

Rashi tells us that he in fact did mean something deeper. There is no empty thing in Torah. Every fact and seeming minutia bear tremendous relevance, even the seemingly trivial fact that is written in Sefer Braishis, "the sister of Lotun was Timna," (Genesis 36:22) is a springboard for philosophical, historical and even kabalistic discussions (see Sifri 336).

Again, something needs clarification. The Torah tells us that there is not one thing empty, irrelevant, and trivial in the Torah, as it is your life. Is there no middle ground? Can something be important yet not be life encompassing?

When I was in seventh grade one of my classmates was frustrated at a difficult commentary that Rashi had cited. "I don't like this Rashi," quipped the student.

My Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel Dishon, stopped him short with a story that occurred to his friend Chaim. Chaim was on a tour of Paris' Louvre. On the tour was an elderly American woman, whose appreciation for art must have begun and ended with her grandchildren's works which hung proudly on her refrigerator. As the guide passed the Mona Lisa, the oohs and ahs of the crowd were drowned out by the cynicism of the woman.

"Is she smiling or not smiling? Can't DiVinci make up his mind?" she kvetched. The Rembrandts and Reubens did not forego her criticisms either.

When the guide began to explain the distinction of painting style, the differences of oils and brushstrokes and a host of other amazing facts and analysis, the women let out a sigh of impatience. "I really don't see what is so wonderful about these pictures! My gr…" The guide cut her short. In perfect English with a French accent, he began.

"My dear madam, when you go to the Louvre you must realize the paintings are no longer on trial. They have already been scrutinized and analyzed by those who have spent their entire lives studying art. Every stroke of the brushes have been praised and critiqued. What hangs here are the standard bearers for every generation of artists to come.

“No my dear,” he continued, “at the Louvre, the paintings are not on trial. It is you who are on trial. The paintings have passed the test. It is you who have failed.”

Needless to say, my classmate understood our Rebbe’s point.

In order to appreciate every detail of the Torah and to understand that every fact, figure, and seemingly trivial detail contain endless depth and countless meanings, one must make the Torah his life. Moshe is telling us more than a critique of Torah wisdom; he is teaching us a fundamental Torah principle. “There is not one empty thing in Torah when it is your life!” If one makes a serious career of Torah study, if he analyzes and commits himself to Torah knowledge, he will be amazed at the never-ending lessons, laws, and lifestyle morals he will glean from it.

Imagine, in 1637, mathematician Pierre de Format wrote a tiny theorem. On the margin of his notebook he noted that he found a truly wondrful proof which this margin is too small to contain.

For 350 years, in universities around the world, mathematiciens toiled unsuccessfully to decipher the riddle. It was their life and they lived to fit in the missing pieces of what may seem to many of us as insignificant mathematical minutia. But to those who live math, it is not empty. For there is nothing empty in it when it is your life.

Surely , the everlasting words of the Torah contain the theorems that sustain us eternally. NAd they are to be found in its tiniest details. We must, however, actively pursue it. And when you are truly in pursuit of its truth, you will find that the Torah contains nothing trivial.

Good Shabbos!

* Reb Ahron Kotler (1892-1962) was the Rosh Yeshiva of Kletzk, Poland. After his escape from Europe during World War II he established Beth Medrash Govoah in Lakewood New Jersey. Reb Ahron was a prime force in the establishment of the day school movement in America as well as a Torah Educational system in Israel.

https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5756-netzavim/

Yom Kippur 5782 Greetings from Rabbi Dov Linzer

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

Dear Friends,

Yom Kippur is a day which often directs us inward. It prompts us to ask ourselves where we have succeeded and where we have failed, and how we want to do better going forward. This is the classic process of teshuvah: to return (shav) to our past, to repent, to correct and, hopefully, to achieve forgiveness.

The Torah, however, speaks of a different type of teshuvah: Vi’shavta ad Hashem Elokekha, “And you shall return to the Lord your God” (Deut. 30:20). Here, the focus is not on sin and its repair, but on return–not on forgiveness, but on atonement, from the Middle English “to be at one.” We yearn to return again to God, to be at one with ourselves and with the Divine.

How is this return achieved? The answer, found In the Torah’s description of the Yom Kippur service, is through cleansing. The focus of that service is the sprinkling of the blood in the Temple sanctuary. This sprinkling cleanses the Temple which has become impure as a result of our sins. Yom Kippur, then, is cleansing not ourselves, but the world around us, the world that we, through our actions or inactions, have allowed to become sullied, unjust, impure.

This is true both in our personal world and the world at large. On the personal scale, our sins and misdeeds, our insensitivities and inattention, may have hurt others. They may have impacted our marriage, our home life, our friendships. All of this needs to be cleansed and restored.

On a more global scale, there is so much that we need to purify: the air that we breathe, the vitriol that pollutes our discourse and prevents us from seeing our shared humanity, the structures of inequality and injustice that pervade our lives. With drive, dedication, and courage, we can and must work to achieve the return to God that we so badly need.

As the Kohen once a year had the opportunity to enter the Holy of Holies to be at one with God, we also have an opportunity on this day to begin to effect change: to look at things anew, to purify what has become polluted, and to create a more Godly society so that we, and the world, can be one with God.

The teshuvah that I ask us to work on this Yom Kippur is the teshuvah of returning to God and of restoring the world. Let our teshuvah be our concrete commitment to do our part to make both our personal world and the larger world clean and pure, to make these worlds ones that support and nurture life for all.

Gmar Chatimah Tovah!

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/09/yom-kippur-5782-greetings-from-rabbi-dov-linzer/

Atonement and Sacrifice

Explanations of the concept and history of teshuvah for Yom Kippur 5782

by Rabbi Zachary Truboff *

In the days of the Beit HaMikdash, one achieved atonement through two key rituals: vidui (confession) and the offering of korbanot (sacrifices). Although each one could be viewed as a separate act, both pieces were fundamentally brought together by the kohen gadol, or high priest, on Yom Kippur. He offered one goat as a sacrifice and confessed the sins of the Jewish people on the other. It was then sent out into the desert, and with its death, Jewish people gained atonement. Following the Beit HaMikdash's destruction, atonement can still be achieved through confession even it is not accompanied by sacrifice. As Rambam (Laws of Repentance 1:3) writes, "In this time, when there is no Beit HaMikdash and we do not have the altar for atonement, there is only teshuvah."

For most of us, this is not a problem. If one confesses their sins and does real teshuvah, ensuring one will not sin again, what need is there for more? But in truth, the concept of atonement is more complicated. This fact is made clear by an examination of the Torah's language. In the eyes of the Torah, sin is not just a black mark recorded in our ledger to be counted up and measured against our merits on the Day of Judgement. It is something tangible that one feels viscerally, a weight that presses down upon you. Atonement is the removal of this weight (noseh avon), and it is here where sacrifice plays an important role. Ramban (Vayikra 1:9) explains that in seeing the sacrifice:

a person should realize that he has sinned against his God with his body and his soul, and that "his" blood should really be spilled and "his" body burned, were it not for the loving-kindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life.

In a sense, our sins are transferred to the animal that is killed, and its death serves as reparation for what we have done wrong. Only then can atonement be achieved, the slate be wiped clean, and we can continue on with our lives.

Without sacrifices, can teshuvah alone lift the weight of our sins? Maybe most of the time, but not always. Over the centuries, a set of practices developed around teshuvah, otherwise known as Teshuvat HaMishkal. Originating in Chassidei Ashkenaz (12-13th century Germany), these practices reflected the belief that teshuvah alone was not sufficient to attain atonement and that it must be accompanied by additional acts such as fasting, tzedakah, and self-mortification that in effect function in the place of sacrifices. Mishkal can mean equivalent, in that one must my find equivalent consequences for one's sin, but it can also mean weight, attesting to the enduring fact that sin is not something that can be easily removed. Teshuvah alone may gain us forgiveness, but the weight of sin can only be removed by a more tangible act, a sacrifice we make with our money or our bodies.

Rabbi Yechiel Yakov Wienberg seeks to address the appropriateness of Teshuvat HaMishkal in the case of a man who accidentally caused his friend's death in a car accident. Though one could argue that the driver did nothing wrong and therefore has no need for atonement, this is not the approach of Seridei Eish. Instead of dismissing the man's feelings of guilt, he treats it seriously, and recognizes that it weighs upon him. He begins by noting that the practices of Teshuvat

HaMishkal can be extreme, and that numerous fasts are often mandated depending on the nature of the sin. Even though such prescriptions are not found in the Talmud or other halakhic texts, they are discussed by many important halakhic authorities. In the end, Seridei Eish recommends that the man need not be strict with the fasts but should give tzedakah to the best of his ability. If he can, he should also help out his friend's children to ensure they are looked after.

Seridei Eish understands that it is only by acknowledging the tragedy of his friend's death through acts of fasting and tzedakah that the man is able to address his guilt. Doing so allows him to engage in a process of atonement even when not halakhically mandated. It requires sacrifice, but one motivated by a desire to take responsibility for the past and do one's best to rectify it.

***** Coordinator of the International Beit Din Institute, which seeks to educate rabbis about halakhic solutions to the agunah problem. Sponsor: The Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies at YCT.

https://library.yctorah.org/lindenbaum/atonement-and-sacrifice-yk-5782/

"Happy Yom Kippur!" ?

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2021

A friend of mine, Aryeh, took his child to the pediatrician last week, just after Rosh Hashana. As the doctor, a kindly woman, finished the exam, she turned to Aryeh and asked, "Would it be appropriate for me to wish you a 'Happy Yom Kippur'?"

Aryeh was taken aback for a moment. "Well, yes, of course, that is very kind of you. Why not?"

"Well," she explained, "I know that you fast, and that it is a day of seriousness, part of the High Holy days. So, I was just asking…"

Now, appreciating the question, Aryeh responded, "Yes, actually I think 'Happy Yom Kippur' might be a very proper greeting," he said. "Imagine," he explained, "that a parent invited a distant child back home and said, let us, together, put the past behind us, and rekindle our relationship. Certainly, that would be a happy moment. Every year, G-d invites us, no matter where we find ourselves in life, to rekindle the relationship. Indeed, I think you are right Doc, 'Happy Yom Kippur' is a real part of the Yom Kippur experience."

Remarkably, Halacha captures the balance of Yom Kippur in a special way. On the one hand it is a day of judgment, of fasting, atonement, and seriousness. On the other hand, it is a day when we greet each other with the words, "Good Yom Tov," and dress in holiday garments. As the commentaries express it, "We are confident that G-d will make a miracle for us on this day of judgment," that He will invite us to put the past behind us and rekindle the relationship.

Interestingly, the effectiveness on Yom Kippur is linked to Teshuva (repentance). To be truly effective, a person has to truly regret and be prepared to move forward in a better way. Unfortunately, for those who have experienced Yom Kippur before, and have focused on the very same shortcomings in the past, it may seem like a joke to claim that this year will be different. Yet, the gift of Yom Kippur is that we do believe this year will be different. We keep ourselves open to new strategies and new support systems to try to be truly effective in our Teshuva.

A number of years ago there was a young man in a Yeshiva in Israel who had fallen on hard times. Different things in his life collapsed and he slipped terribly and was no longer the respectable young man that he once was. He tried to pull himself out of his rut, but nothing seemed to have any significant lasting power. One year, on the night before Yom Kippur, he decided to go to the Kotel, and plead for clarity, for resolution, for a way forward. On his way back to Yeshiva, he met a Rebbe from years ago, and confided that he was struggling terribly, that he had just gone to the Kotel making promises that this year would be different, and that he would truly start anew; "But," he added, "I feel so helpless and unsure. I feel like these are empty promises. I have promised these improvements many times before, and they haven't lasted."

The Rebbe waited patiently, until he had full eye contact with the young man, and then said, "Do you know the greatest kindness that G-d has with mankind?"

The Rebbe continued, “The greatest kindness that G-d has with mankind is that He doesn’t laugh. We might think that our resolutions are one big joke. But He doesn’t laugh. He takes us seriously.”

“And you should take yourself seriously too. You have an inspiration for Teshuva, to start anew. Go for it! Build for yourself a network of people who can support you and encourage you. Build a network of people who believe in you, myself among them. And go for it! G-d is taking you seriously, and so should you!”

The young man sat quietly absorbing the elevating perspective his Rebbe was sharing. It is the perspective of a parent with years of experience and maturity inviting a child home, once again. The wisdom to believe that with the right resolve and support this time will be different.

With tears in his eyes, he mouthed the words, “Thank you Rebbe,” and met his Rebbe’s embrace.

“Have a Good Yom Tov,” they wished each other.

And so may it be for all of us: A meaningful, good, and happy Yom Tov!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org.

Thoughts on Parashat Haazinu

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The Haazinu poem is Moses' admonition to the people of Israel, recited to them shortly before his death. In the second verse, he uses the imagery of rain to symbolize his hope that his teachings will sink into the people and be beneficial to them.

Rabbi Haim David Halevy, late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel-Aviv, commented on the significance of rain in religious imagery. Rain is vital for the growth of crops and vegetation. Yet, for the rain to be most effective, it is necessary for the soil first to be cultivated and that seeds be planted. In such a field, the rain leads to abundant produce. When rain falls on fallow, uncultivated fields, it does not result in optimal results. Likewise, wrote Rabbi Halevy, with "spiritual rain". Those who are most receptive and spiritually cultivated derive far more benefit from Torah than those who remain "fallow". For us to derive maximum spiritual satisfaction, we need to study Torah, observe the mitzvoth, and thereby attain higher levels of spirituality. If we don't prepare ourselves to receive the spirit of Torah, its "rain" may produce weeds and thistles. Nonetheless, the power of Torah is such that it can provide blessing even to the uncultivated.

The 19th century Hassidic Rebbe Simha Bunim observed that the holy words of Torah are compared to rain. The effects of rain may not be immediately evident since it may take weeks for the crops and vegetation to grow. Likewise, the words of Torah may not seem to make an immediate impact on the listener. Yet, like rain, it seeps in and does its beneficial work. Even if it seems that the words of Torah have little or no influence, yet in the course of time these words sink in and help one attain greater spiritual insight and happiness.

On Shemini Hag Atsereth, which we will be observing very soon, we have a special prayer for rain, asking God to grant blessed rainfall so that there will be abundance and prosperity in our world. Just as we pray for the physical rain to sustain our physical lives, so we should keep in mind to pray for the "spiritual rain" that will sustain our spiritual lives.

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Thoughts on Parashat Haazinu

by Max Nussbaum **

The third Pasuk of Ha’azinu states “When I call out the name of the Lord, ascribe greatness to our God.” In Masekhet Berakhot, on Daf 21a, this Pasuk is brought as a source for Birkat HaTorah, the blessing we say everyday shortly after we wake up, before we learn Torah. The Gemara lists Birkat HaTorah as one of the two blessings that are obligatory by Torah law; the other one is Birkat HaMazon. (The other blessings are obligatory by rabbinic law.)

We know that Birkat HaTorah is said before we actually learn, but with Birkat HaMazon, the blessing is said after we eat. Why aren't they both said before or both said after-- shouldn't they be the same?

Before we eat, we are overwhelmed with gratitude to Hashem because we are hungry and want to eat. It's obvious that we should ask permission and thank Hashem before we eat. After eating, it's more likely that we forget to thank Hashem for the food we just had. That's why we say Birkat HaMazon after we eat. Birkat HaTorah is the opposite; it's very easy to thank Hashem after we learn because it is such an enjoyable experience. It's very hard to get the motivation to start learning, that's why we say the blessing before. It's supposed to get us excited to start learning.

There is an important comparison to be made between these two blessings. Torah and food are both a major part of daily life and they share the same result in that they both satisfy us. Food satisfies us physically, and Torah satisfies us spiritually. We can't have too much of one without the other or else we wouldn't be able to function properly. If we learn too much without eating, we will lose strength. If we eat too much without learning, we might forget that everything comes from Hashem.

Both of these berakhot are important, recognizing that we are grateful to Hashem for the physical and spiritual blessings with which He endows us.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

** Shana Bet student at Yeshivat Reishit in Beit Shemesh, Israel; grandson of Rabbi Marc Angel.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/thoughts-parashat-haazinu

For an outstanding collection of Devrei Torah for the holy days during the coming month, see:
https://www.jewishideas.org/article/holiday-reader-institute-jewish-ideas-and-ideals

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

Yom Kippur and Haazinu

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

[Because I must post a day early this week, I do not have a Dvar Torah from Rabbi Singer. Watch for his column in future weeks.]

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD.

Tax Season for Rabbis

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Every line of work has its season. For accountants and H&R Block employees, we know that in March and April, that's when they are at their busiest.

As I'm fond of telling others, this season is "tax season" for rabbis and shul workers. Of course it's a labor of love, but the people I've communicated this to seem to enjoy the comparison.

So with that in mind, I offer to you short and sweet versions of my direct emails.

For this one, I will send you a wonderful rendition of the Unetanneh Tokef prayer sung by the chief cantor of the IDF. I think it is definitely worth the 6 minutes of your time. (And it sounds even better if you listen to it as you prepare the apples and honey!)

IDF Chief Cantor Sings "Unetanneh Tokef" -- YouTube

Enjoy, Shabbat Shalom, and Shanah Tovah!

* Rabbi, Knesseth Israel Congregation, Birmingham, AL.

Rav Kook Torah
Eating before Yom Kippur

The Ninth of Tishrei

While there are several rabbinically-ordained fasts throughout the year, only one day of fasting is mentioned in the Torah:

> *"It is a sabbath of sabbaths to you, when you must fast. You must observe this sabbath on the ninth of the month in the evening, from evening until [the next] evening."* (Lev. 23:32)

This refers to the fast of Yom Kippur. The verse, however, appears to contain a rather blatant 'mistake': Yom Kippur falls out on the tenth of Tishrei, not the ninth!

The Talmud in Berachot 8b explains that the day before Yom Kippur is also part of the atonement process, even though there is no fasting: "This teaches that one who eats and drinks on the ninth is credited as if he fasted on both the ninth and tenth."

Still, we need to understand: Why is there a mitzvah to eat on the day before Yom Kippur? In what way does this eating count as a day of fasting?

Two Forms of Teshuvah

The theme of Yom Kippur is, of course, teshuvah — repentance, the soul's return to its natural purity. There are two major aspects to teshuvah. The first is the need to restore the spiritual sensitivity of the soul, dulled by over-indulgence in physical pleasures. This refinement is achieved by temporarily rejecting physical enjoyment, and substituting life's hectic pace with prayer and reflection. The Torah gave us one day a year, the fast of Yom Kippur, to concentrate exclusively on refining our spirits and redefining our goals.

However, the aim of Judaism is not asceticism. As Maimonides wrote (Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Dei'ot 3:1):

> *"One might say, since jealousy, lust and arrogance are bad traits, driving a person out of the world, I shall go to the opposite extreme. I will not eat meat, drink wine, marry, live in a pleasant house, or wear nice clothing... like the idolatrous monks. This is wrong, and it is forbidden to do so. One who follows this path is called a sinner.... Therefore, the Sages instructed that we should only restrict ourselves from that which the Torah forbids.... It is improper to constantly fast. "*

The second aspect of teshuvah is more practical and down-to-earth. We need to become accustomed to acting properly and avoid the pitfalls of material desires that violate the Torah's teachings. This type of teshuvah is not attained by fasts and prayer, but by preserving our spiritual integrity while we are involved in worldly matters.

The true goal of Yom Kippur is achieved when we can remain faithful to our spiritual essence while remaining active participants in the physical world. When do we accomplish this aspect of teshuvah? When we eat on the ninth of Tishrei. Then we demonstrate that, despite our occupation with mundane activities, we can remain faithful to the Torah's values

and ideals. Thus, our eating on the day before Yom Kippur is connected to our fasting on Yom Kippur itself. Together, these two days correspond to the two corrective aspects of the teshuvah process.

By preceding the fast with eating and drinking, we ensure that the reflection and spiritual refinement of Yom Kippur are not isolated to that one day, but have an influence on the entire year's involvement in worldly activities. The inner, meditative teshuvah of the tenth of Tishrei is thus complemented by the practical teshuvah of the ninth.

(Gold from the Land of Israel pp. 210-212. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 42.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/EMOR59.htm

Moses the Man (Ha'azinu 5778)

By Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

> *That very day the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain which you go up, and be gathered to your people …For you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel."*

With these words there draws to a close the life of the greatest hero the Jewish people has ever known: Moses, the leader, the liberator, the lawgiver, the man who brought a group of slaves to freedom, turned a fractious collection of individuals into a nation, and so transformed them that they became the people of eternity.

It was Moses who mediated with God, performed signs and wonders, gave the people its laws, fought with them when they sinned, fought for them when praying for Divine forgiveness, gave his life to them and had his heart broken by them when they repeatedly failed to live up to his great expectations.

Each age has had its own image of Moses. For the more mystically inclined sages Moses was the man who ascended to Heaven at the time of the giving of the Torah, where he had to contend with the Angels who opposed the idea that this precious gift be given to mere mortals. God told Moses to answer them, which he did decisively. "Do angels work that they need a day of rest? Do they have parents that they need to be commanded to honour them? Do they have an evil inclination that they need to be told, 'Do not commit adultery?'" (Shabbat 88a). Moses the Man out-argues the Angels.

Other Sages were more radical still. For them Moses was Rabbenu, "our Rabbi" – not a king, a political or military leader, but a scholar and master of the law, a role which they invested with astonishing authority. They went so far as to say that when Moses prayed for God to forgive the people for the Golden Calf, God replied, "I cannot, for I have already vowed, "One who sacrifices to any God shall be destroyed" (Ex. 22:19), and I cannot revoke My vow." Moses replied, "Master of the Universe, have You not taught me the laws of annulling vows? One may not annul his own vow, but a Sage may do so." Moses thereupon annulled God's vow (Shemot Rabbah 43:4).

For Philo, the 1st century Jewish philosopher from Alexandria, Moses was a philosopher-king of the type depicted in Plato's Republic. He governs the nation, organises its laws, institutes its rites and conducts himself with dignity and honour; he is wise, stoical and self-controlled. This is, as it were, a Greek Moses, looking not unlike Michelangelo's famous sculpture.

For Maimonides, Moses was radically different from all other prophets in four ways. First, others received their prophecies in dreams or visions, while Moses received his when awake. Second, to the others God spoke in parables obliquely, but to Moses He spoke directly and lucidly. Third, the other prophets were terrified when God appeared to them but of Moses it says, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11). Fourth, other prophets needed to undergo lengthy preparations to hear the Divine word; Moses spoke to God whenever he wanted or needed to. He was "always prepared, like one of the ministering angels" (Laws of the Foundations of Torah 7:6).

Yet what is so moving about the portrayal of Moses in the Torah is that he appears before us as quintessentially human. No religion has more deeply and systemically insisted on the absolute otherness of God and Man, Heaven and Earth, the

infinite and the finite. Other cultures have blurred the boundary, making some human beings seem godlike, perfect, infallible. There is such a tendency – marginal to be sure, but never entirely absent – within Jewish life itself: to see sages as saints, great scholars as angels, to gloss over their doubts and shortcomings and turn them into superhuman emblems of perfection. Tanakh, however, is greater than that. It tells us that God, who is never less than God, never asks us to be more than simply human.

Moses is a human being. We see him despair and want to die. We see him lose his temper. We see him on the brink of losing his faith in the people he has been called on to lead. We see him beg to be allowed to cross the Jordan and enter the land he has spent his life as a leader travelling toward. Moses is the hero of those who wrestle with the world as it is and with people as they are, knowing that "It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to stand aside from it."

The Torah insists that "to this day no one knows where his grave is" (Deut. 34:6), to avoid his grave being made a place of pilgrimage or worship. It is all too easy to turn human beings, after their death, into saints and demigods. That is precisely what the Torah opposes. "Every human being" writes Maimonides in his Laws of Repentance (5:2), "can be as righteous as Moses or as wicked as Jeroboam."

Moses does not exist in Judaism as an object of worship but as a role model for each of us to aspire to. He is the eternal symbol of a human being made great by what he strove for, not by what he actually achieved. The titles conferred by him in the Torah, "the man Moses," "God's servant," "a man of God," are all the more impressive for their modesty. Moses continues to inspire.

On 3 April 1968, Martin Luther King delivered a sermon in a church in Memphis, Tennessee. At the end of his address, he turned to the last day of Moses' life, when the man who had led his people to freedom was taken by God to a mountain-top from which he could see in the distance the land he was not destined to enter. That, said King, was how he felt that night:

> *I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.*

That night was the last of his life. The next day he was assassinated. At the end, the still young Christian preacher – he was not yet forty – who had led the civil rights movement in the United States, identified not with a Christian figure but with Moses.

In the end the power of Moses' story is precisely that it affirms our mortality. There are many explanations of why Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. I have argued that it was simply because "each generation has its leaders" (Avodah Zarah 5a) and the person who has the ability to lead a people out of slavery is not necessarily the one who has the requisite skills to lead the next generation into its own and very different challenges. There is no one ideal form of leadership that is right for all times and situations.

Franz Kafka gave voice to a different and no less compelling truth:

> *He is on the track of Canaan all his life; it is incredible that he should see the land only when on the verge of death. This dying vision of it can only be intended to illustrate how incomplete a moment is human life; incomplete because a life like this could last forever and still be nothing but a moment. Moses fails to enter Canaan not because his life was too short but because it is a human life.[1]*

What then does the story of Moses tell us? That it is right to fight for justice even against regimes that seem indestructible. That God is with us when we take our stand against oppression. That we must have faith in those we lead, and when we cease to have faith in them we can no longer lead them. That change, though slow, is real, and that people are transformed by high ideals even though it may take centuries.

In one of its most powerful statements about Moses, the Torah states that he was "one hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his strength unabated" (34:8). I used to think that these were merely two sequential phrases, until I realised that the first was the explanation for the second. Why was Moses' strength unabated?

Because his eyes were undimmed – because he never lost the ideals of his youth. Though he sometimes lost faith in himself and his ability to lead, he never lost faith in the cause: in God, service, freedom, the right, the good and the holy. His words at the end of his life were as impassioned as they had been at the beginning.

That is Moses, the man who refused to "go gently into that dark night", the eternal symbol of how a human being, without ever ceasing to be human, can become a giant of the moral life. That is the greatness and the humility of aspiring to be "a servant of God."

FOOTNOTE:

[1] Franz Kafka, Diaries 1914 – 1923, ed. Max Brod, trans. Martin Greenberg and Hannah Arendt, New York, Schocken, 1965, 195-96.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. *See*

https://rabbisacks.org/moses-man-haazinu-5777/

Yom Kippur Afternoon Haftarah Companion
For an informed reading of the book of Jonah
By Mendel Dubov * © Chabad 2021

Overview
The haftarah for Yom Kippur afternoon, known as "Maftir Yonah," is one of the most celebrated haftarot of the year. Our tradition has it that the recitation of this haftarah in the synagogue brings with it the blessing of wealth, and has the ability to arouse a person to teshuvah (repentance).1

The obvious reason why this haftarah is read on Yom Kippur is because the story of Jonah is a story of teshuvah. Jonah, a Jewish prophet, was instructed by G d to travel to the non-Jewish metropolis of Nineveh. There he was to warn them that if they did not return from their sinful ways, the city would be destroyed.

Upon Jonah's eventual arrival, the king of the city instructed a national repentance on a massive scale. Men, women, children, and even animals fasted and donned sackcloth. They mended their wicked ways and returned all stolen objects to each other. As a result, the city was spared.

The drama of the story, however, is of Jonah's initial refusal and ongoing reluctance to fulfill this seemingly simple mission. No sooner had the instruction come for him to go to Nineveh than Jonah boarded a ship to "flee from before G d." A raging storm engulfed the ship, threatening to sink it. In the end, Jonah has himself thrown overboard by the sailors, as they together determine that he, and no other, is the cause of the storm.

A large fish is prepared by G d, and it swallows the drowning prophet. Jonah spends three days in the belly of the fish, and prays to G d from within it. In the end, the fish spits him out alive on dry land.

But even after this ordeal, Jonah was still reluctant to go. G d came to him a second time with the same instruction, and Jonah understood that he had no choice. After going to the city and his mission proving a resounding success, the prophet fell into deep grief.

G d taught Jonah a lesson by making the sun beat down very strongly in the place of his encampment outside the city. G d then caused a plant called kikayon to grow at that place, to shelter him from the sun. Overnight, however, G d sent a worm which caused the kikayon to shrivel up and die. Jonah was now beside himself with frustration and pain from the heat.

G d told Jonah: "You took pity on the kikayon, for which you did not toil nor did you make it grow, which one night came into being and the next night perished. Now should I not take pity on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are many

more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well?"

As sinful as they were, the city and its inhabitants were G d's creations. If there was an opportunity for them to repent and do better, it had to be utilized at all cost.

Recalcitrant Prophet

The recalcitrance of Jonah is the mystery of the entire book. Why did the prophet not want to go to Nineveh? Where was he running? How could such a great man—a prophet no less—think that it was possible to "run away" from G d?

Rashi explains that Jonah's flight was because he knew that "the gentiles are quick to repent. Should I prophesy to them and they repent, it will mean that I am condemning Israel, who do not heed the words of the prophets."

To this end, Jonah fled from the Land of Israel, for "the Divine presence does not rest [on a prophet] outside of the Holy Land." This seemed to Jonah a way to be freed from this guilt-laden mission, as G d would then not communicate with him.

As such, this is one of the most breathtaking and historic accounts of ahavat Yisrael, love for the Jewish people.

Here was G d Himself coming to Jonah and giving him an instruction. The Talmud says that a prophet who withholds his or her prophecy is deserving of death.2 Indeed, had G d not intervened by the fish first swallowing and then ejecting him to safety, Jonah would have lost his life at sea. But to Jonah this did not matter. He preferred to die rather than be the medium through which his people would be seen in a bad light.

It was for this very reason that Jonah was so frustrated over his "success" at Nineveh, and why in the last part of the book he actually asked G d to take his life.

As said, this drama is the running theme of the entire book, taking up the majority of its content. It is obvious that Scripture is interested that we read and understand not only the story of Nineveh's repentance, but also of Jonah's reluctance.

The book of Jonah appears as one of twelve small books of Scripture known as Trei Asar ("The Twelve"). The book of Jonah is followed by Michah (Micah), which in turn is followed by Nachum. The book of Nachum speaks almost entirely of the sinful city of Nineveh and its final destruction. Nachum lived after Jonah had brought Nineveh to repentance, but evidently their repentance was only temporary. Not long after, they relapsed and returned to their wicked ways.

This adds special significance to the verses we append to the haftarah, which are the last three verses of the book of Michah—which sits between Jonah and Nachum. These verses describe G d's special bond with the Jewish people, who are "the remnant of His heritage." No nation has endured anything like the Jewish people have—and all for the sake of G d and the covenant with Him. If G d went to such lengths just for Nineveh to (temporarily) repent, how much more so does G d's compassion and kindness apply to the Jewish people.

The complexity of the motives in the book of Jonah is palpable. Suffice it to mention that G d never admonished Jonah for fleeing from Him, and Jonah never repents for doing so. The story of Jonah, like every story told by the Torah, is—in its entirety—a timeless teaching.

One concrete lesson to be learned from Jonah is the utmost precaution that has to be taken in not casting the Jewish people, collectively or individually, in a negative light. On this holiest day of the year, we read of the lengths to which Jonah went so as not to even imply something negative about his people. Situations and actions may need to be called out and rectified, but simple negative talk, or even the implication of such, is to be totally avoided.

Footnotes:

1. See HaMelech BiMesibo, vol. 1, p. 73.

2. Talmud, Sanhedrin 89a.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4511279/jewish/Yom-Kippur-Afternoon-Haftarah-Companion.htm

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Shabbat Shuvah: Return and Transform

Adapted by Rabbi Yosef Y. Alperowitz © Chabad 2021

Shabbos Teshuva

This Shabbos [posted for last Shabbat] gets its name from the the Haftarah read this week, which begins with the words ("Return, O Israel"). In addition, this Shabbos is between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, a period that is called the Ten Days of Teshuvah.

Usually, teshuvah is commonly translated as "repentance." Repentance means feeling sorry for something wrong that we have done. When we have done something wrong to another person that we later regret, we say "I am sorry," and hope that the person will forgive and forget.

But this is not the case when we are dealing with sins that have been committed against G-d. For as we said in the Musaf prayer of Rosh Hashanah, "There is no forgetfulness before the throne of Your Glory." Since G-d does not forget, how can He "forgive and forget" when we do teshuvah?

The answer to this question can be found in the word teshuvah itself. In truth, teshuvah does not merely mean to repent and to be sorry—although both are vital to the teshuvah process. Teshuvah (from shuva) means "return."

We are not strangers to G-d. We are His children. A father's love for his child does not depend on how well behaved or intelligent his child is. A father loves his child unconditionally and at all times. Even if a child has misbehaved and decided to leave his father, the father will call out: "Return!"

This is what G-d does every year. Although He knows everything and forgets nothing, His love for us is boundless and He does His utmost to bring us back home.

This is the meaning of Shabbos Shuvah: G-d is welcoming us back home.
The transformational process of teshuvah, in which we abandon the ways of the past and return to G-d, creates within us a new reality and we are no longer remembered for our transgressions, for we are now considered completely different human beings, (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 2:4).

* — from *Pearls for the Shabbos Table*

Gut Shabbos and a good and sweet new year,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Yom Kippur – How It Changes Us

To those who fully open themselves to it, Yom Kippur is a life-transforming experience. It tells us that God, who created the universe in love and forgiveness, reaches out to us in love and forgiveness, asking us to love and forgive others. God never asked us not to make mistakes. All He asks is that we acknowledge our mistakes, learn from them, grow through them, and make amends where we can.

No religion has held such a high view of human possibility. The God who created us in His image, gave us freedom. We are not tainted by original sin, destined to fail, caught in the grip of an evil only divine grace can defeat. To the contrary we have within us the power to choose life. Together we have the power to change the world.

Nor are we, as some scientific materialists claim, mere concatenations of chemicals, a bundle of selfish genes blindly replicating themselves into the future. Our souls are more than our minds, our minds are more than our brains, and our brains are more than mere chemical impulses responding to stimuli. Human freedom – the freedom to choose to be better than we were – remains a mystery but it is not a mere given. Freedom is like a muscle and the more we exercise it, the stronger and healthier it becomes.

Judaism constantly asks us to exercise our freedom. To be a Jew is not to go with the flow, to be like everyone else, to follow the path of least resistance, to worship the conventional wisdom of the age. To the contrary, to be a Jew is to have the courage to live in a way that is not the way of everyone. Each time we eat, drink, pray or go to work, we are conscious of the demands our faith makes on us, to live God's will and be one of His ambassadors to the world. Judaism always has been, perhaps always will be, counter-cultural.

In ages of collectivism, Jews emphasised the value of the individual. In ages of individualism, Jews built strong communities. When most of humanity was consigned to ignorance, Jews were highly literate. When others were building monuments and amphitheatres, Jews were building schools. In materialistic times they kept faith with the spiritual. In ages of poverty they practised tzedakah so that none would lack the essentials of a dignified life. The sages said that Abraham was called ha-ivri, "the Hebrew," because all the world was on one side (ever echad) and Abraham on the other. To be a Jew is to swim against the current, challenging the idols of the age whatever the idol, whatever the age.

So, as our ancestors used to say, "'Zis schver zu zein a Yid," It is not easy to be a Jew. But if Jews have contributed to the human heritage out of all proportion to our numbers, the explanation lies here. Those of whom great things are asked, become great – not because they are inherently better or more gifted than others but because they feel themselves challenged, summoned, to greatness.

Few religions have asked more of their followers. There are 613 commandments in the Torah. Jewish law applies to every aspect of our being, from the highest aspirations to the most prosaic details of quotidian life. Our library of sacred texts – Tanakh, Mishnah, Gemarra, Midrash, codes and commentaries – is so vast that no lifetime is long enough to master it. Theophrastus, a pupil of Aristotle, sought for a description that would explain to his fellow Greeks what Jews are. The answer he came up with was, "a nation of philosophers."

So high does Judaism set the bar that it is inevitable that we should fall short time and again. Which means that forgiveness was written into the script from the beginning. God, said the sages, sought to create the world under the attribute of strict justice but He saw that it could not stand. What did He do? He added mercy to justice, compassion to retribution, forbearance to the strict rule of law. God forgives. Judaism is a religion, the world's first, of forgiveness.

Not every civilization is as forgiving as Judaism. There were religions that never forgave Jews for refusing to convert. Many of the greatest European intellectuals – among them Voltaire, Fichte, Kant, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Frege and Heidegger – never quite forgave Jews for staying Jews, different, angular, countercultural, iconoclastic. Yet despite the tragedies of more than twenty centuries, Jews and Judaism still flourish, refusing to grant victory to cultures of contempt or the angel of death.

The majesty and mystery of Judaism is that though at best Jews were a small people in a small land, no match for the circumambient empires that periodically assaulted them, Jews did not give way to self-hate, self-disesteem or despair. Beneath the awe and solemnity of Yom Kippur one fact shines radiant throughout: that God loves us more than we love ourselves. He believes in us more than we believe in ourselves. He never gives up on us, however many times we slip and fall. The story of Judaism from beginning to end is the tale of a love of God for a people who rarely fully reciprocated that love, yet never altogether failed to be moved by it.

Rabbi Akiva put it best in a mere two words: Avinu malkenu. Yes, You are our sovereign, God almighty, maker of the cosmos, king of kings. But You are also our father. You told Moses to say to Pharaoh in Your name: "My child, my firstborn, Israel." That love continues to make Jews a symbol of hope to humanity, testifying that a nation does not need to be large to be great, nor powerful to have influence. Each of us can, by a single act of kindness or generosity of spirit, cause a ray of the Divine light to shine in the human darkness, allowing the Shekhinah, at least for a moment, to be at home in our world.

More than Yom Kippur expresses our faith in God, it is the expression of God's faith in us.
[Extract from the Koren Sacks Yom Kippur machzor]

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Is Yom Kippur a happy day or a sad day? Many associate the Day of Atonement with solemnity and trepidation. Indeed, according to most translations, the Torah specifically states regarding this holiest of days, "you shall afflict your souls" (Lev. 16:29).

The great Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, however, suggests a radically different understanding of this day. "On Tisha B'Av, I can't eat because I'm so sad," he said. "On Yom Kippur I have no need to eat, because I'm so happy." But what of the command to afflict oneself? What is the basis for his happiness?

In truth, his interpretation reflects a deep insight about the essence of the day, based on the fact that the Hebrew letters that form the root, "affliction" ("ayin-nun-yud"), are also the letters that form the root for expressions of joyous song. For example, the Torah states (Deut. 26:5) regarding the declaration of the farmer, who, filled with feelings of happiness, brings the First Fruits (Bikkurim) to the Temple: ("V'anita v'amarta"), "you shall happily sing and declare…", with the proper musical cantillations.

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Similarly, at the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds, the Torah (Ex. 15:21) reports, “And Miriam (happily) sang to them” (“V’ta’an la’hem Miriam”)

This gives us a fresh perspective on the aforementioned verse in Leviticus, which as we noted above, is usually translated as “you shall afflict yourselves”. However, re-reading the Hebrew original – (t’anu et nafshoteichem”) – in light of the above, we can accurately understand it as “you shall make your souls sing”. Indeed, the next verse explains why we should be happy: “For on this day shall atonement be made for you, to purify you; from all your sins shall you be purified before God.”

We can now gain an appreciation of the verse in our portion that refers to the Torah as a song. In what way is the Torah a song? Because like a song, the Torah can bring us great happiness via the commandments, which allow us to ennoble and sanctify ourselves. In the same way that we enjoy a great high when we accomplish a difficult task and perform it well, so, too, does the song of the Torah allow us to rejoice in the potential of human nature and the ability of the human being to achieve a life of morality and holiness.

It is for this reason that the Day of Atonement is fundamentally a day of happiness. One might have thought that with all the fasting and the many hours spent in the synagogue, we should relate to the day in purely solemn terms. But Yom Kippur is not a fast of sadness. Rather, it is when we re-discover our great spiritual capacity to be like the angels who never need food or drink, soaring close to God, and transcending the physical. It is then that we understand the meaning of true rejoicing: spending twenty-five hours in fellowship with the Divine, without need of physical comforts. This experience opens the window to the spiritual rejoicing that gives us such great comfort and well-being.

Indeed, the custom in yeshivot is to ecstatically sing and dance with renewed vigor and dedication after the last Shofar blasts are sounded at the end of the Ne’ila prayer, at the conclusion of the fast. The excited students and teachers declare with their enthusiasm: Behold, we have transcended our physical selves. We have climbed upwards into the Divine embrace. We feel Your gracious compassion, and we are ready and hopefully worthy to attempt to perfect ourselves and the world.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

How can we rejoice at the very moment when our fate is in the balance? This is exactly what happens on Yom Kippur. At the very time when, on this great Day of Judgment, Hashem is sealing our fate for the coming year, we have simcha!

Yom Kippur is a Yom Tov because we are optimistic that Hashem will respond to our prayers and bless us with a good new year.

The Chatam Sofer highlights how, when we say our confession on Yom Kippur, when we say, “Ashamnu, bagadnu…” – “We have been treacherous against You God, we have sinned…” – we chant these words in all our shuls with a lovely melody! We are happy, even at that moment. The Chatam Sofer explains that this is because we’re confident that Hashem will respond positively to our prayers.

We need to maintain this sense of joy that we experience on Yom Kippur well beyond this holy day. Rabbi Chaim Volshansky z”l very creatively compared the path that we are on at this time of year to the journey of a spiritual space ship: The month of Elul in which we blow the shofar every day – that’s the count down. On Rosh Hashanah we have lift-off, and on Yom Kippur we reach our destination, the greatest possible spiritual heights. But when it comes to the journey of the spaceship, there is one critical factor that still remains, and that is re-entry.

So many things can go wrong as the spacecraft makes its journey back into the earth’s atmosphere towards terra firma here on earth. And similarly, we need to concentrate as well on what’s going to happen after Yom Kippur, our re-entry back into a normal way of life.

So how do we make our re-entry after Yom Kippur? It’s through the festival of Succot. On Succot we express our continued deep trust in Hashem and our wonderful relationship, a spiritual connection with our Creator, to appreciate the privilege we have to carry out mitzvot but most importantly of all, to rejoice. The prime mitzvah of the festival is: “Vesamachta bechagecha vehayita ach sameach,” – “You shall rejoice on your festival and you shall be exceedingly happy.”

That rejoicing on Yom Kippur is continued through Succot and from Succot hopefully through to the rest of the year.

So we are indeed joyous on Yom Kippur at the very time when our fate is being sealed for the coming year and, through Succot, that joy will be carried on right through the year. For we shall forever be joyous because of the privilege we have to be Jewish and the daily opportunities we have to carry out the extraordinary mitzvot which enhance and beautify our lives so much.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Transforming Our Sins

We have a very old minhag which dates back at least to the days of the Geonim to begin our observance of Yom Kippur with the reciting of Kol Nidrei. The older text of Kol Nidrei was based on the assumption that the chazzan, together with the two people standing at his sides, constitutes a beis din to be matir the nedarim which we all took over the course of the past year (from last Yom Kippur to this Yom Kippur.)

What is the special connection between hatoras nedarim and Yom Kippur? Several explanations have been given, the most famous of which is as follows: when a husband or a father is maifer the nedarim of his wife or daughter, the neder was in effect up until the time that he declares the ha'forah, and only from that moment and on is the neder is no longer in force (Nazir 21b.) Beis din can be matir a neder, and the Gemorah (Kesubos 74b) asks how are they the baalei batim over my neder to declare it as null and void? The answer is that the beis din paskens that the neder was taken in error (b'ta'us) and therefore was never binding in the first place. The reason for this retroactive uprooting is that the individual never would have made the neder to begin with had he realized how difficult life would be or how uncomfortable things would be because of it, and therefore the beis din has the right to declare the neder to be a neder b'tous - a neder made in error.

The definition of ta'us with respect to nedarim is not the same as the definition of ta'us with respect to a purchase or a marriage. If a couple gets married and after many years realize that they are not for each other, they cannot declare their marriage to have been a kiddushei ta'us. Similarly, if one buys shares in a corporation and the value of the shares goes down, he cannot declare that as a mekach ta'us (see Making a Farce of the Halacha.) Everyone knows that marriages and businesses have their ups and downs. Only with respect to nedarim does the Chumash tell us that we have a different definition of ta'us. The Torah uses the expression "l'chol asher yi'vatei ha'adom b'shvua" which the Gemorah (Shavuos 26a) understands to imply, "h'adom b'shvuah, prat l'anus - to the exclusion of a shevuah or a neder made in error. Regarding neder we work with a different definition of ta'us.

This retroactive uprooting is the connection to Yom Kippur. The Gemorah (Yoma 86b) tells us that a person who does teshuva mai'yirah can accomplish that the aveiros that he violated b'meizid should be considered as if they were only violated b'shogeig, while one who does teshuva mai'ahava will accomplish that the aveiros that he violated b'meizid will be considered as if they were mitzvos. Just like regarding heter nedarim the beis din has the ability to undo the neder such that it is considered as if it was never binding in the first place, teshuva also has the ability to undo aveiros even though the aveiros were done many years before.

How is this possible? Rav Yosef Engel (Otzros Yosef, drush #3) suggests the following explanation: The navi, both in the words of this

week's haftorah as well as in other pesukim, tells us, "shuva Yisroel ad Hashem Elokecha", i.e. that one who does teshuva has the ability to come closer to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Time itself is part of creation so by definition Hashem is above time since he is not part of creation but rather He is The Creator. Once an individual achieves closeness to Hakodosh Boruch Hu, he too, in a certain sense, is above time and therefore can he undo the aveirah today that he violated years ago; he is no longer limited by time! His teshuva makes it is as if that at the time that he did the aveira b'meizid it was really b'shogeig or a mitzva.

The Gemorah (Shabbos 118b) tells us also that one who will be careful to observe Shabbos properly stands a better chance of having his aveiros forgiven if he does teshuva. This idea is conveyed in the Shabbos zemiros when we say "kol shomer Shabbos kados mei'chalilu", where the word mei'chalilo has the connotation of mochul lo, that his sins will be forgiven. What is special about Shabbos that it has the ability to bring about mechilas avonos? Rav Yosef Engel quotes kaballah sources to explain that from the very outset of sheishes yemei bereishis Hashem created the concept of time, but at the conclusion of the six days of creation Hashem instituted his Shabbos which gives us the ability to come closer to Hashem and return to the pre-creation status of lema'alah min ha'zeman. It is that ability to be lemaalah min hazman that enables B'nei Yisroel to undo the aveiros ex post facto. The umos ha'olam also have the ability to do teshuva, as is evidenced from sefer Yonah, but this concept of being okeir aveiros l'mafreiah, which is similar to the beis din's ability to be matir nedarim l'mafreiah, is reserved only for Benei Yisroel.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Four Approaches to Teshuva
Rabbi Avi Bart

Eyes closed, face buried in your machzor; you stand in shul. Swaying gently in rhythm with the haunting melody of ונתנה תוקף 'Let us voice the power of this day's sanctity'. Along with the Chazzan, you chant these ancient words וקול דממה דקה ישמע ובשופר גדול יתקע 'A great shofar sounds, and a still small voice is heard'. You shudder as you read כבקרת רועה עדרו מעביר צאנו תחת שבטו, recognizing that today we are all sheep passing beneath our Shepherd's staff. As the Tefilla continues, its imagery is clear before your eyes: Hashem as judge and you as defendant. You reflect on your year – the person you are, the person you are becoming, and the person you want to be. The Tefilla builds, you feel its power rising within you. Like a wave breaking on a beach, its swell crescendos and breaks as the entire shul cries out in unison ותשובה ותפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רע הגזרה 'But repentance, prayer and charity avert the evil decree'.

Teshuva is a central theme of the High Holy Days. But what specifically is Teshuva? Though Teshuva is such a well-known concept, evoking intuitive responses from all of us, it is interesting that the definition of Teshuva is contested within Jewish sources. Each of these alternative conceptions of Teshuva provides a different frame not only for Teshuva in a narrow sense, but for the entire goal and purpose of the Yamim Noraim in a broader sense. Following are four conceptions of Teshuva that resonate with and inspire me (and hopefully you too).

Teshuva as Repentance (Rambam) In his Mishneh Torah (Laws of Repentance Chapter 2: 1-2), the Rambam outlines what has become a very traditional framing of Teshuva. After sinning, a sinner should distance himself mentally, verbally, and physically from his wrongful actions. Teshuva involves articulating the sin, being remorseful about the past, and resolving to do better in the future. As such, the marker of 'complete repentance' in a reformed sinner is one who has an opportunity to repeat the same sin but, due to the process of Teshuva, can overcome the desire to sin.

To me, the Rambam's conception forms the cornerstone of Teshuva and the key themes of the Yamim Noraim. Over this past year, and all the preceding years, we have fallen short. Be it in our interpersonal relationships, spiritual connections, or work, each of us have instances where we should have acted differently. The Yamim Noraim are the time to acknowledge that 'There is no completely righteous person on earth who does what is best and doesn't err' (Ecc. 7:20). We should all take the opportunity the Yamim Noraim provide us to perform a personal critical accounting and resolve to repent for our shortcomings.

Teshuva as Self-Improvement (Alter Rebbe) For the Alter Rebbe of Lubavitch, the first Rebbe of the Chabad Chassidic dynasty, Teshuva is better understood by considering its etymological root שוב – meaning 'return'. For the Alter Rebbe, Teshuva means to refine our thoughts, speech, and actions as to 'return' our pristine souls masked in their worldly existence ever closer to their source – Hashem (Iggeret HaTeshuva 1). That is, Teshuva asks us not only to repent for our sins, but also to live our lives on a constant trajectory of spiritual growth and self-improvement. In this framing, the purview of Teshuva extends into all aspects of our lives, not just the parts in which we have obviously 'sinned'. Teshuva urges us to consistently do more and strive to be the best versions of ourselves.

Teshuva as Seeking Hashem (Rebbe Nachman)* - The Torah of Rebbe Nachman, the founder of the Breslov Chassidic movement, is known for its raw honesty, emotional depth, and psychological insight. Rebbe Nachman recognizes the doubts, despair, and even sense of Divine abandonment that someone may feel in response to their repeated failings. For Rebbe Nachman, Teshuva starts with acknowledging that everything, including this person's struggle, is rooted in Hashem – the source of all creation (Likkutei Moharan Part II 12:1). With this knowledge, Teshuva is then the act of seeking out the Divine from within our darkest places. Drawing on a phrase from the Kedusha איה מקום כבודו 'Where is the place of His glory?' Rebbe Nachman creatively punctuates: 'Where' – the very act of asking where is Hashem during this difficult moment? – is itself the place of His glory. Searching for Hashem in our personal difficulties redeems those difficulties and helps us repair ourselves and our world despite the challenges.

Teshuva as Self-Acceptance (Rav Shagar) Aligned with his post-modernist leanings, Rav Shagar's notion of Teshuva emerges from skepticism about the extent to which people can change (My Soul Will Return). Acknowledging the breadth and depth of forces influencing our decision-making, Rav Shagar posits that people in fact have very little ability to truly change. For Rav Shagar the central question of Teshuva is not "can I change my life," but rather, "can I accept the way I am".

Conclusion - Each of these conceptions of Teshuva resonates with me at different times and in different settings. Rather than committing to one view of Teshuva, I think it is most useful to draw on all of these different conceptions when appropriate. Repentance can best guide cases where we have fallen short; the self-improvement lens can be inspiring and motivating; seeking out Hashem can help us navigate difficult times; and self-acceptance provides an awareness of our all too significant limitations. By drawing on these four conceptions, we can have a richer and more nuanced approach to Teshuva. *[This article was written as part of the "Journeys" series for Tishrei 5782*]

* I am indebted to Rav Noam for teaching me this Torah of Rebbe Nachman in his weekly young adult shiur.

Prayer as Atonement
Rabbi Shlomo Wallfish

The Mishnah in Baba Kama (Chapter 8, Mishnah 7) gives a summary of the compensatory damages that have to be paid by a person who injured or embarrassed his friend. The Mishnah goes on to say that the offender not only has to pay damages, but he must also appease the offended party. The Mishnah's argument is based on the story in which Sarah was taken by King Abimelech and later returned to Abraham following an instruction from God. From this episode, it seems that the offended party has to forgive his offender wholeheartedly. A true expression of this sincere forgiveness is if the offended prays for the offender who has asked for forgiveness.

"Even if he gives him 1, he is not forgiven until he asks for forgiveness, as is written: 'And now give back the man's wife…' And

whence do we learn that the forgiver must not show cruelness? As is written: 'And Abraham prayed to the Lord, and the Lord healed Abimelech.'"

The Gemara in Baba Kama (Babylonian Talmud 92:1) brings a commentary that adds to the Mishnah mentioned above, and reiterates the importance of asking for forgiveness:

"All the damages mentioned above are for the actual shame that was caused him; however, for the sorrow caused by that shame – the very best of the world's offerings will not suffice, and he is not forgiven until he asks for forgiveness…"

From here we learn that the severity of an injury is not only assessed by means of the monetary damage caused. Emotional or spiritual injury is also taken into account. Sometimes, no sum in the world will appease the person who has experienced grief; however, asking for his forgiveness wholeheartedly may reunite the two rivals.

The other side of the equation is accepting the apology. Many of us are familiar with the Rambam's words in his book, Hilchot Teshuva instructing us not to be cruel, to accept any apology that is expressed sincerely and give our forgiveness. This is the source for the directive stating that an offender need not ask for forgiveness more than three times. The reason being that the offended party should not be stubborn and refuse to forgive 2. It seems to me that what our Sages wish to teach us is that the process of forgiveness also involves the offended party praying for the person asking for forgiveness. Although the Pnei Yehoshua points out that this prayer is not mandatory, from the following sources we can see that this prayer is not only very important, but is even compulsory on the part of the forgiver.

A few years back, I learned this topic in depth, and on that very day God "gave me the privilege" of somewhat hurting a close friend. We made up quickly, and peace soon prevailed, and so I asked my friend to pray for me, just as I had learned. My friend looked at me in astonishment, with a look that said – "Surely, if anybody is supposed to pray for somebody, it should be you praying for me!" I told him what I had learned, and he accepted it kindly. Nevertheless, this little incident drew my attention further to this topic, and I decided to delve a little deeper into it.

The Tosefta (in Baba Kama, Chapter 9, Halacha 29) advises one who has been offended to forgive and pray for the offender, even if the latter is not at all sorry for his wrongdoing:

"In the case of one who has injured his friend – even in such a case where the offender has not asked for forgiveness from the offended party, the latter must still pray for the offender, as is written: 'And Abraham prayed to the Lord'. The same idea is expressed in the Book of Job with regard to Job's friends: 'And now take you all seven bulls and seven rams and offer them as sacrifice.' And what follows? 'And the Lord restored the fortunes of Job when he prayed for his friends.'"

This appears to be a very radical demand of man; some go so far as to say that only the very righteous are able to fulfill it: Even if the offender has not asked for forgiveness, the injured party must still pray for him 3.

Unlike the Tosefta's difficult demand, the Mishnah takes a softer approach. The prayer for the offender follows the latter's plea for forgiveness. The prayer in itself acknowledges the fact that even when a person wants to forgive, it is not always so simple. According to the Mishnah, the prayer uttered by the injured party for the offender is not only an indication that the injured person has given his forgiveness – an enlightening fact that is important in its own right – but beyond this, I believe that the very act of prayer can help a person forgive and overcome the injury he has experienced. It is very difficult to shake off resentment for a hurt suffered, even if we really want to. This can be proven quite simply. Consider the following case: A person hurts his friend, asks for forgiveness and the offended friend gives his forgiveness. If a short while later the same offender should hurt his friend again, it can only be expected that the offended party will not shake off the offense as easily as he did the first time. Despite the initial forgiveness, the first offense leaves its mark and cannot be erased. I don't think we can expect the offended to react any other way.

In my view, our Sages wish to give the issue of asking for and granting forgiveness a different dimension, one that bypasses the problem posed above. My commentary will attempt to bring the two contradicting approaches mentioned in the Mishnah and in the Tosefta somewhat closer:

When I am told I have to pray for a person who has asked me for forgiveness, I have to sit myself down and ask myself: What do I wish for the person who has hurt me? Am I angry at him to such an extent that I want his life to be miserable? Indeed, I am still hurt; truth be told, if he were to hurt me again, I would add this new injury to the previous one, and my initial forgiveness would not erase the incident from my mind. However, I still understand that he is sorry for what he did; I really do want to make things right again; I really do wish him all the best in life. I am even willing to pray to God and ask him to fulfill that wish.

In the prayer recited at the start of Yom Kippur – Tefilla Zakah – we say as follows: "May no person be punished on my account" (in the siddur of the SHLAH HaKadosh, this verse also appears before the Shma Yisrael prayer recited when going to sleep). Even when it is difficult to forgive, the understanding that refusing to forgive causes the other party pain puts into motion the wheels of forgiveness. Consequently, two things happen: The first is the realization that despite the injury, one can still wish the offender well and want him to be happy. This, in turn, circumvents the inability to forgive wholeheartedly. Secondly, the very act of praying for the good of the person who has asked to be forgiven can trigger a process which culminates in full forgiveness. In light of this, we might suggest a possible 'forgiveness track' even when there was no explicit apology on the part of the offender. 4

In conclusion, we have presented a new and surprising model of prayer. In most cases, prayer is perceived as a unidirectional act: one talks to another entity and asks for something. This new type of prayer offers a new perspective. Instead of a monologue, prayer becomes a dialogue, and perhaps even a multilogue. Prayer is intended to arouse action in this world, and there is no need to define the exact parties involved in this dialogue. In the case of a dispute where forgiveness has to be initiated – the forgiver can also impact the situation through prayer, not only the one asking for forgiveness 5.

[This article was written as part of the "Journeys" series for Tishrei 5782[

1. In other words – pays him.
2. Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva, Chapter 2, Halachot 9-10
3. Interestingly, Sefer Chassidim quotes this Tosefta as is (chapter 360), and seems to regard it as compulsory behavior.
4. See also the words of the MAHARSHAL (Yam shel Shelomo, Yevamot, Chapter 8), who also tries to reconcile between the approaches of the Mishnah and the Tosefta, and concludes that full atonement from God can also be achieved if the offended party prays for the offender. Therefore, the forgiving party is obliged to pray for the friend who has asked for forgiveness after the former has been appeased.
5. See also Likutei MOHARAN, Chapter 119, concerning a sick person who needs heavenly mercy. He can only get that mercy if he himself shows compassion, as is written "And He shall give you mercy and show you compassion." There is a similar model here – the need to put into motion a certain action if one wishes to enjoy the effects of such action. Perhaps it is not without reason that the Tosefta itself connected the laws of Tefilla to this verse.

Vows and Yom Kippur - Avi Ganz

On the Eve of Yom Kippur or, what we often call "Kol Nidrei Night," men, women, and children across denominational, cultural, and generational spectra join together in shuls to usher in the holiest day of the year: Yom Kippur. The Day of Atonement is also a day of "at-one-ment" when we commune with our Father in Heaven and He mercifully bestows forgiveness. It is a day of introspection, self-criticism, and reckoning, to be sure, but also a day of promise and hope; a time for strengthening bonds and maybe brushing off the cobwebs from old commitments or aspirations.

On a day so lofty, why do we start our full day of prayer with the public annulment of vows? After all, how many of us really make vows? Of those who do, how many of those vows can be ceremoniously annulled in what amounts to a wholesale dissolution of very serious commitments?

Perhaps the message is not about the individual vows at all: perhaps the message is about the very concept of a vows. At their core, a vow is a verbal commitment for the future. I understand today that tomorrow will somehow be better if I lock in today's "rates." This idea is antithetical to what Yom Kippur and atonement are all about. Sure, there are times when a commitment (tzedaka, a korban, a stricter adherence to a mitzvah, or a commitment to more frequent chessed) is inspired by something objectively good. The mechanism is a Torah-prescribed mechanism for good. At the same time, the idea that I can bind tomorrow by the perception of today is an idea that is foreign to the renewal of Yimei HaDin – the High Holy Day season. We start off Yom Kippur with our public individual and communal declaration: "Today is a new day. This year is a new year. I am a new me. We are a new we."

With this subtle reminder, we enter the day and indeed the year. May it be a blessed year of renewed vigor and productivity; health and happiness. *[This article was written as part of the "Journeys" series for Tishrei 5782]*

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

To Put the Fire Out

For the sin which we have committed before You under duress or willingly.
And for the sin which we have committed before You by hard-heartedness.
For the sin which we have committed before You inadvertently.
And for the sin which we have committed before You with an utterance of the lips.
For the sin which we have committed before You with immorality.
And for the sin which we have committed before You openly or secretly.

These are just a brief sample of a long laundry list of items that we mention verbally quietly and together aloud on Yom Kippur. Every time we say the words, "for the sin" we give a tap on our heart. What is that small often repeated action meant to accomplish?

The Dubner Maggid answered every question he was asked with a Moshol – Parable. When he was asked how come he answered every question with a Moshol, he responded, as you might expect, with a Moshol. He told a story that a man named EMES his English name was TRUTH. He walked all over town but he was naked. Everywhere he went people were shocked and alarmed by his presence. Immediately rooms cleared out and people left screaming like their hair was on fire. He was making everyone very uncomfortable. He had a close friend who cared about him very much and his name was Moshol or his English name was Parable.

One day Moshol approached EMES and made him an offer. He said, "I have a giant clothing store with all sizes and styles. I am inviting you to my store and am happy to give you an entire wardrobe of shirts, pants, socks, shoes, jackets, and hats. You can have them for free. Then people will not be disturbed by your presence and they will not be repulsed by you and reject you before they get to know you first in a comfortable way.

People don't appreciate being told the TRUTH straight to their faces. It wakes up the defense mechanism of the ego. No one wants to see themselves as being wrong or faulty in the clear light of the TRUTH.

A good pediatrician does not approach a child showing the needle. They have the child blow on a pinwheel to distract him and then they punch the injection quickly into his arm when he is unsuspecting. Immediately the kid gets a lollypop in the mouth. He leaves happy, but wondering why he feels soreness in the arm. So too a good teacher tells a parable to make the message more acceptable.

Why do we bang on our hearts repeatedly on Yom Kippur? The Dubner Maggid told a story about a fellow named Reb Berel that went to visit a certain town for the first time. He was sitting by his host on Shabbos enjoying the delicious meal when the peaceful atmosphere was suddenly disturbed by cries of distress and panic. People were shouting in the distance, "Fire- Fire!" Then there was a heavy pounding of drums that continued to beat until the cries were quieted.

Reb Berel asked what had happened. The host explained that there was a fire and then the drums were pounded until the fire went out. Berel was amazed by this phenomenon. After Shabbos and before going home inquired about the type of drums that were used. When he returned to his town Berel shared with the community leaders his firsthand experience in that neighboring town. They too were amazed but skeptical. They ordered the drums and based on Berel's report they fired the fire department and retired all the trucks and hoses.

Months later a fire broke out in the town and the drummers banged loudly and continually but the fire spread and the entire town burnt to the ground. Everyone turned to Berel for an explanation. Berel went back to that town where the drums had worked wonders and shared his bitter experience. They were astonished to hear that they fired the fire fighters and stored away the hoses. They told Berel that the drums were an alarm to set the fire fighters into action. They then put the fire out with real water. The drums alone did not put out the fire.

So too on Yom Kippur we bang the drum because the fire of Aveiros and sins uncured burn in our hearts but banging is not sufficient. It's meant to awaken our pure and holy hearts to bring some tears to put the fire out.

Torat Har Etzion

Praying with All of Israel
Harav Aharon Lichtenstein

Prior to Kol Nidrei, we recite the following declaration (Al da'at ha-Makom):

With the approval of the Almighty and with the approval of the congregation, in the convocation of the court above and in the convocation of the court below, we sanction praying with transgressors.

The real purpose of Kol Nidrei is to allow the "transgressors," those who have been excommunicated from the community, to rejoin the congregation for the Yom Kippur prayers. This proclamation is the opening of the Yom Kippur prayers in the liturgy of all Ashkenazic Jewry. In Ashkenaz, the cherem (excommunication) was a powerful a form of punishment and an effective tool to protect the community from negative influences. Nonetheless, the Ashkenazic Torah leadership established Kol Nidrei as a mechanism to allow these people to rejoin the congregation for Yom Kippur.

This is not simply a nice gesture to an excluded part of the community during times of trouble; this inclusion is based on a clear mandate of Chazal. The Gemara in Keritut (6b) states:

Rabbi Chana bar Bizna said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Chasida: Any fast that does not include the sinners of Israel, is no fast, for the odor of galbanum (chelbona) is foul, and yet it was included among the spices for the incense.

The Gemara states that a fast that excludes the sinners is no fast – and presumably this implies that the prayers offered in such a fast will not be answered. Rabbi Shimon Chasida is teaching us an important rule, that whenever we have a fast, it is not enough for those who follow the Torah to beseech God for mercy; the entirety of the Jewish community must be included in the prayer.

Moshe Rabbeinu was the quintessential model of this trait. After the sin of the spies, Moshe does not simply ask for mercy on himself or on those who remained clear of sin. Rather, he pleads:

Pardon, I beseech You, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your mercy, as You have forgiven this people from Egypt until now (Bemidbar 14:19).

Moshe prayed on behalf of the entire nation. Similarly, when the children of Israel were fighting against Amalek, Moshe took part in the pain of the nation as a whole.

The Gemara in Ta'anit (11a) states:

A person should share in the distress of the community, for so we find that Moshe, our teacher, shared in the distress of the community, as it is said (Shemot 17:12), "But Moshe's hands were heavy; and they took a

stone and put it under him, and he sat upon it." Did Moshe not have a bolster or a cushion to sit on? This is what Moshe meant [to convey], "As Israel are in distress I too will share with them." He who shares in the distress of the community will merit to behold its consolation.

Moshe sat on a rock so that he would feel the pain the nation was experiencing.

The Torah even considers the eventuality that an entire community might commit a sin, and it then prescribes a specific sacrifice whereby the community can gain atonement for this act:

Then it shall be, if anything is committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bull for a burnt offering… And all the congregation of the people of Israel, and the stranger who sojourns among them shall be forgiven; seeing as all the people were in ignorance. (Bemidbar 15:24, 26)

We see from here the only proper way to seek mercy from God and be answered is to include the entire nation. These verses reinforce the message that Rabbi Shimon Chasida learns from the incense, that even sinners must be included in the community in a time of trouble.

This notion can relevant at any time of the year. Yet, it is particularly pertinent to Yom Kippur.

Rosh Ha-shana is both a universal day and a day for the individual. It is the day that commemorates the creation of the world, and thus a day for judgment of the entire world. There is judgment on the global scale, as well as individual judgment. However, the special significance of the Jewish people is not inherent in the definition of the day.

On the other hand, the opposite can be said about Yom Kippur. Regarding Yom Kippur, the day is entirely focused on the Jewish people as a nation. The concluding blessing recited in the central kedushat ha-yom blessing, which speaks to the definition of the day, refers to God as "Melekh mochel ve-sole'ach la-avonoteinu, ve-la-avonot ammo beit Yisrael, the King Who pardons and forgives our iniquities and the iniquities of His people, the house of Israel." It is a day when the community as a whole receives forgiveness from the Almighty. The elaborate, intricate, critical Temple service of Yom Kippur is performed on behalf of the entire Jewish people – the community as a whole; the vidduy, confession, undertaken by the Kohen Gadol, High Priest, is recited on behalf of the entire nation – not just those who observe all the mitzvot.

However, Yom Kippur ought not be conceived as a day of unity for the Jewish people in a geographic vacuum. The land of Israel is the locus for the unity of the Jewish people. The Rambam writes in numerous places of the special status the land of Israel regarding the establishment of the Jewish people as a community. Only in the land of Israel is the Jewish nation seen as one cohesive, organic, indivisible entity. One such source is in the Sefer Ha-mitzvot (mitzvat asei 153), where the Rambam writes that any kiddush ha-chodesh (sanctification of the new moon) – even when it must be performed in the Diaspora – must trace its roots back to the land of Israel to be effective.

For this reason, on Yom Kippur it is essential that our mindset in prayer is one focused on the Jewish people in toto – not just those with whom we pray in the immediate sense. When we ask God that "the memory of Your entire nation Israel should come before You," we must have in mind the entirety of the Jewish people, regardless of the religious observance of any particular Jew.

There are those in the Religious Zionist community who speak now about "disengaging" from the nation as a whole, since they do not approve of the actions of some fellow Jews. This is not the proper Jewish approach, this is not the way to beseech God for mercy, this is not the way to observe Yom Kippur, and this is not the proper understanding of the unifying message of the land of Israel.

We need to integrate the message of Rabbi Shimon Chasida that "Any fast that does not include the sinners of Israel, is no fast," and include all of the Jewish people in our prayers. This way we will follow the prescription for beseeching God, properly celebrate Yom Kippur, and fulfill the mission of the land of Israel. This way we will, God willing, merit a good year, achieving forgiveness and atonement for ourselves and for the entire Jewish people. [Summarized by Aryeh Dienstag This sicha was delivered on leil Yom Ha-kippurim 5766 (2005).]

Being a Sheliach Tzibbur
Rav Elyakim Krumbein

Every so often, our teacher, Rav Yehuda Amital, *z"l*, would ask something of us during his *sicha* on the first night of *Selichot*. He would ask us to put aside our personal needs and view ourselves as "*shelichei tzibbur*," prayer leaders and emissaries of the congregation, pleading for peace for all of Israel and for national redemption. To me, this always sounded exciting and challenging, but at the same time made me uncomfortable. "Only the greatest person amongst the community, in terms of wisdom and actions, is appointed as *sheliach tzibbur*," teaches the Rambam (*Hilkhot Tefilla* 8:11). Rav Amital himself was suited to the task – but are we worthy of assuming that title and role for ourselves?

An examination of the demands that Chazal set forth for a *sheliach tzibbur*, and the way in which they were interpreted by the Rambam, may help reconcile us with Rav Amital's request. The Gemara discusses the qualifications of the *sheliach tzibbur* in the context of prayer on a public fast day (and Halakha tends to draw a comparison between the fasts and the High Holy Days). The Rambam concludes, based on this discussion, that there are two different models for a *sheliach tzibbur* (as we shall soon see).

The Mishna (*Ta'anit* 15a) presents us with two public roles related to the fast day – one is "he who delivers words of admonition" (or "a moving address" – *divrei kibbushin*), the other is the prayer leader ("*ha-over lifnei ha-teiva*"). Who are these two people? The Mishna explains:

Ashes were placed on top of the Ark, and upon the head of the *Nasi*, and upon the head of the *Av Beit Din*… The most senior among them would deliver words of admonition… They would then stand in prayer, led by an elder who was proficient [in the prayers], and who had children, and who was destitute – in order that he would pray wholeheartedly.

The speaker who delivers the address is a respected personage, a leader of the community – either the *Nasi* or the *Av Beit Din*, whoever was older. The *sheliach tzibbur*, in contrast, is described as possessing specific qualities. The *beraita* in the Gemara (16a) highlights the difference in the description of these two figures. Concerning the "words of admonition," we learn:

Our Rabbis taught: If there is an elder [present], the elder speaks; if not – a learned scholar speaks; if [there is] none – a person of stature speaks.

Or, according to the formulation of Abaye: If there is an elder who is a learned scholar, then the elder who is a learned scholar speaks; if not – a learned scholar speaks; if [there is] none – a person of stature speaks.

Unquestionably, this is a person of distinction. The prayer leader, in contrast, is described thus in the Gemara:

"They would then stand in prayer": even if an elder, who is also a learned scholar, is present, they appoint as prayer leader only a regular person. What is the meaning of a "regular person"? Rabbi Yehuda says: He has children, but lacks [financial] means, he labors in the field, and his house is empty, his youth was unblemished, and he is humble and acceptable to everyone, he is skilled in reading and has a sweet voice, and reads Torah, the Prophets and the Writings frequently, and studies the Midrash, halakha, and aggada, and is proficient in all of the blessings.

The Rambam codifies these requirements, along with his commentary, in *Hilkhot Taaniyot* (4:4):

Who is worthy of leading the prayers on these fast days? A man who is proficient in the prayer service, and proficient in reading from the Torah, the Prophets and the Writings, and has children but lacks means, and works in the field, with no transgression among his children or household members or those associated with him; rather, his house is clean of transgression, and he did not make a bad name for himself during his youth, he is humble, and acceptable to the people…

Let us focus on the Rambam's opening words. In his view, this is talking about someone who is worthy of leading the prayer specifically on "these fast days." Indeed, we cited above what the Rambam says in his *Hilkhot Tefilla* concerning the prayer leader on regular days, where the preference is different:

"the greatest person amongst the community, in terms of wisdom and actions." The other personal qualities which appear in the *beraita* – an empty house, humility, etc. – are not mentioned. In other words, there is a difference between the ideal prayer leader on a regular day, and the ideal prayer leader for a fast day.

This distinction drawn by the Rambam is not accepted by other authorities. The Tur (53) understands the *beraita* in *Ta'anit* as simply enumerating the exemplary qualities that should characterize the *sheliach tzibbur* on any day in the year. This leads us to ask two questions. First, from where does Rambam deduce that there is a difference between the requirements for a *sheliach tzibbur* on a fast day and those for the same position on any other day? Second, what is the meaning of this distinction?

I believe that the answer to the first question is quite simple. Speaking about the *sheliach tzibbur*, the *beraita* starts off by saying, "Even if there is an elder present who is also a learned scholar, they appoint as prayer leader only a regular person." Why would we think that preference should be given to an elder who is a learned scholar – i.e., a leader of great Torah stature? Apparently, that was the accepted norm throughout the year. The ideal *sheliach tzibbur* on a regular day would resemble, in essence, the scholar/elder who delivered the admonishing address on a fast day. Hence the Rambam rules that on a routine day, the greatest amongst the community, in terms of wisdom and actions, should be appointed. On a fast day, in contrast, a "regular person" (*adam ha-ragil*) is chosen. When we use the term "regular," we mean "just like everyone else." But in the context of the *beraita* it is likely that the term means "*ragil bi-tefilla*" – i.e., proficient (experienced) in leading the prayer. But at the same time the *beraita* does also seem to convey a sense of "ordinariness" as a personal quality. In any event, the Rambam picks up on this nuance. And this brings us to the crux of the difference between the two types of prayer leaders.

In the preceding halakha in his *Hilkhot Ta'aniyot*, the Rambam writes:

After this man finishes his words of admonition, they stand in prayer. And they appoint a prayer leader who is worthy of praying [i.e., leading prayers] on these fast days, and if the same one who delivered the words of admonition is worthy of leading prayers, then he does so; if not, someone else is appointed.

The leader who delivers the words of admonition is great in Torah and wisdom, but there is no guarantee that he is fit to lead prayers on a fast day. For this particular role we seek someone who labors in the field and is humble and is acceptable to the community – in other words, a person who is not arrogant, who is unexceptional and upright. The greatest amongst the community may be such a person, but this cannot be taken for granted.

Why is it specifically this sort of person who is sought as a *sheliach tzibbur* for a fast day? There are two aspects to this.

First, we must consider the perspective of the community. The person selected to lead the prayers is someone who is "worthy of praying on these fasts." We appoint him in our stead, because we feel that we ourselves are not worthy. This person is supposed to serve as a role model, showing how people such as ourselves should pray: he is an ordinary person with no pretensions or manners of authority. We also place this person in front of ourselves in order to bring submission to our hearts, as a continuation of the "words of admonition": why could we not have been more like him? If the *sheliach tzibbur* was by definition the greatest person amongst the community, enjoying a status far removed from the day-to-day realities familiar to most people, then it is doubtful that these objectives could be attained.

But there is also another side to the coin, and that is the perspective of the *sheliach tzibbur* himself. In what sense does he see himself as a "*shaliach*" – a representative, an emissary? The answer is to be found in the continuation of the Mishna, in the blessings which the *sheliach tzibbur* recites:

The first [of the special additional blessings on a fast day] he concludes with, "He Who answered Avraham at Mount Moriah – may He answer you and hear the sound of your cry this day. Blessed are You, God, Redeemer of Israel." He concludes the second with: "He Who answered our forefathers at the ReedSea, may He answer You and hear the sound of your cry this day…" He concludes the third with, "He Who answered Yehoshua at Gilgal, may He answer you and hear the sound of your cry this day…"

The *sheliach tzibbur* halts his conversation with God, as it were, in order to address the congregation: "He Who heard our forefathers, may He hear your cry." He turns to the public that has appointed him because, in his simplicity and humility, and in contrast to their intention, he for his part is not prepared to stand in their stead. His aim is to reveal to them their own prayer. To those who feel that they lack the ability to pray, he declares: "You have a mighty prayer, and it is identical to the prayer of the forefathers, the prayer of Yehoshua, the prayer of Shemuel, and of all the great leaders of Israel."

To perceive the prayer of *Klal Yisrael* when they do not believe in themselves, to become one with their prayer, to elevate it and to believe in its greatness – that is the role of the *sheliach tzibbur* on a fast day.

Likewise, we too – the simple, regular people – are called upon to assume this great task on the *Yamim Nora'im*. May it be God's will that our prayers ascend and find favor before the Compassionate One. *[Translated by Kaeren Fish]*

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Arc of the Moral Universe

In majestic language, Moses breaks into song, investing his final testament to the Israelites with all the power and passion at his command. He begins dramatically but gently, calling heaven and earth to witness what he is about to say, words which are almost echoed in Portia's speech in The Merchant of Venice, "The quality of mercy is not strained".

Listen, you heavens, and I will speak;
Hear, you earth, the words of my mouth.
Let my teaching fall like rain
And my words descend like dew,
Like showers on new grass,
Like abundant rain on tender plants. ((Deut. 32:1-2)

But this is a mere prelude to the core message Moses wants to convey. It is the idea known as tzidduk ha-din, vindicating God's justice. The way Moses puts it is this:

He is the Rock, His works are perfect,
And all His ways are just.
A faithful God who does no wrong,
Upright and just is He. ((Deut. 32:4)

This is a doctrine fundamental to Judaism and its understanding of evil and suffering in the world – a difficult but necessary doctrine. God is just. Why, then, do bad things happen?

Is He corrupt? No – the defect is in His children,
A crooked and perverse generation. (Deut. 32:5)

God requites good with good, evil with evil. When bad things happen to us, it is because we have been guilty of doing bad things ourselves. The fault lies not in our stars but within ourselves.

Moving into the prophetic mode, Moses foresees what he has already predicted, even before they have crossed the Jordan and entered the land. Throughout the book of Devarim he has been warning of the danger that in their land, once the hardships of the desert and the struggles of battle have been forgotten, the people will become comfortable and complacent. They will attribute their achievements to themselves and they will drift from their faith. When this happens, they will bring disaster on themselves:

Yeshurun grew fat and kicked –
You became fat, thick, gross –
They abandoned the God who made them
And scorned the Rock their Saviour …
You deserted the Rock, who fathered you;
And you forgot the God who gave you life.
(Deut. 32:15-18)

This, the first use of the word Yeshurun in the Torah – from the root Yashar, upright – is deliberately ironic. Israel once knew what it was to be upright, but it will be led astray by a combination of affluence, security and assimilation to the ways of its neighbours. It will betray the terms of the covenant, and when that happens it will find that God is no longer with it. It will discover that history is a ravening wolf. Separated from the source of its strength, it will be overpowered by its enemies. All that the nation once enjoyed will be lost. This is a stark and terrifying message.

Yet Moses is bringing the Torah to a close with a theme that has been present from the beginning. God, Creator of the universe, made a world that is fundamentally good: the word that echoes seven times in the first chapter of Bereishit. It is humans, granted freewill as God's image and likeness, who introduce evil into the world, and then suffer its consequences. Hence Moses' insistence that when trouble and tragedy appear, we should search for the cause within ourselves, and not blame God. God is upright and just. The shortcomings are ours, His children's, shortcomings.

This is perhaps the most difficult idea in the whole of Judaism. It is open to the simplest of objections, one that has sounded in almost every generation. If God is just, why do bad things happen to good people?

This is the question asked not by sceptics, doubters, but by the very heroes of faith. We hear it in Abraham's plea, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" We hear it in Moses' challenge, "Why have You done evil to this people?" It sounds again in Jeremiah: "Lord, You are always right when I dispute with You. Yet I must plead my case before You: Why are the wicked so prosperous? Why are evil people so happy?" (Jer. 12:1).

It is an argument that never ceased. It continued through the rabbinic literature. It was heard again in the kinot, the laments, prompted by the persecution of Jews in the Middle Ages. It sounds in the literature produced in the wake of the Spanish expulsion, and its echoes continue to reverberate in memories of the Holocaust.

The Talmud says that of all the questions Moses asked God, this was the only one to which God did not give an answer.[1] The simplest, deepest interpretation is given in Psalm 92, "The song of the Sabbath day." Though "the wicked spring up like grass", they will eventually be destroyed. The righteous, by contrast, "flourish like a palm tree and grow tall like a cedar in Lebanon." Evil wins in the short term but never in the long. The wicked are like grass, whereas the righteous are more like trees. Grass grows overnight but it takes years for a tree to reach its full height. In the long run, tyrannies are defeated. Empires decline and fall. Goodness and rightness win the final battle. As Martin Luther King said in the spirit of the Psalm: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

It is a difficult belief, this commitment to seeing justice in history under the sovereignty of God. Yet consider the alternatives. There are three: The first is to say that there is no meaning in history whatsoever. Homo hominis lupus est, "Man is wolf to man". As Thucydides said in the name of the Athenians: "The strong do as they want, the weak suffer what they must." History is a Darwinian struggle to survive, and justice is no more than the name given to the will of the stronger party.

The second, about which I write in Not In God's Name, is dualism, the idea that evil comes not from God but from an independent force: Satan, the Devil, the Antichrist, Lucifer, the Prince of Darkness, and the many other names given to the force that is not God but is opposed to Him and those who worship Him. This idea, which has surfaced in sectarian forms in each of the Abrahamic monotheisms, as well as in modern, secular totalitarianisms, is one of the most dangerous in all of history. It divides humanity into the unshakeably good and the irredeemably evil, giving rise to a long history of bloodshed and barbarism of the kind we see being enacted today in many parts of the world in the name of holy war against the greater and lesser Satan. This is dualism, not monotheism, and the Sages, who called it shtei reshuyot, "two powers or domains"[2], were right to reject it utterly.

The third alternative, debated extensively in the rabbinic literature, is to say that justice ultimately exists in the World to Come, in life after death. Although this is an essential element of Judaism, it is striking how relatively little Judaism had recourse to it, recognising that the central thrust of Tanach is on this world, and life before death. For it is here that we must work for justice, fairness,

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compassion, decency, the alleviation of poverty, and the perfection, as far as lies within our power, of society and our individual lives. Tanach almost never takes this option. God does not say to Jeremiah or Job that the answer to their question exists in heaven and they will see it as soon as they end their stay on earth. The passion for justice, so characteristic of Judaism, would dissipate entirely were this the only answer.

Difficult though Jewish faith is, it has had the effect through history of leading us to say: if bad things have happened, let us blame no one but ourselves, and let us labour to make them better. I believe it was this that led Jews, time and again, to emerge from tragedy, shaken, scarred, limping like Jacob after his encounter with the angel, yet resolved to begin again, to rededicate ourselves to our mission and faith, to ascribe our achievements to God and our defeats to ourselves.

I believe that out of such humility, a momentous strength is born.
[1] Brachot 7a.
[2] Brachot 33b.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The very joyous and ritually rich festival of Sukkot comes at the heels of Yom Kippur, the Day of Forgiveness and Purity. Now that, hopefully, we have been forgiven for our transgressions, we begin afresh with a clean slate. It is certainly a wonderful feeling to start off the new year with joyous days of familial and communal togetherness. We celebrate by eating our meals in colorfully decorated booths (sukkot) which remind us of God's protection in the desert. And our prayers in the synagogue are punctuated by the waving of the Four Species through which we thank God for His agricultural bounty.

From this description, it would seem that the emphasis is on religious ritual connecting God and Israel. However, the great legalist-philosopher Maimonides makes the following comment in his Laws of Festivals (6: 18): When a person eats and drinks in celebration of a holiday, he is obligated to feed converts, orphans, widows, and others who are destitute and poor. In contrast, a person who locks the gates of his courtyard (or sukka) and eats and drinks with his children and his wife, without feeding the poor and the embittered, is not indulging in rejoicing associated with a mitzvah, but rather the rejoicing of his gut.

And with regard to such a person the verse, (Hoshea 9:4) is applied: "Their sacrifices will be like the bread of mourners, all that partake thereof shall become impure, for they kept their bread for themselves alone." This happiness is a disgrace for them, as implied by the verse (Malachi 2:3): "I will spread dung on your faces, the dung of your festival celebrations."

The Four Species are symbolically described by the Sages of the Midrash as representing four types of Jews: the "Etrog Jew" is both learned and filled with good deeds; the "Lulav Jew" has learning but no good deeds; the "Myrtle Jew" has good deeds but no learning and the "Willow-branch Jew" has neither learning nor good deeds. We are commanded to bind these four together, in order to remind us that a Jewish community consists of many types of Jews all of whom must be accepted and lovingly included within our Jewish community. Hence, a festival which superficially seems to be oriented solely in the direction of religious ritual actually expresses important lessons in human relationships.

To this end, I would like to relate a story. Reb Aryeh Levin, of sacred memory, was renowned as a righteous person of Jerusalem. He was known for his punctilious observance of each of the ritual commandments and his overwhelming compassion for every human being. Two days before the advent of the Festival of Sukkot, he went to the Geula district of Jerusalem to choose his Four Species. Immediately, word spread that the great tzaddik Reb Aryeh was standing in front of a long table in the street selecting his species. A large crowd gathered around him, after all, the etrog (citron) is referred to in the Bible as a beautiful fruit (eitz hadar), and since we are enjoined to "beautify the commandments", observant Jews are especially careful in purchasing a most beautiful and outstanding etrog. Everyone was interested in observing which criteria the great tzaddik would use in choosing his etrog. To the amazement of the crowd, however, Reb Aryeh looked at one etrog and put it down, picked up a second, examined it, and then went back to the first and purchased it together with his three other species. The entire transaction took less than 5 minutes. The crowd, rather disappointed, rapidly dispersed imagining that the great rabbi had a very pressing appointment.

One person decided to follow Reb Aryeh to see exactly where he was going. What could be more important than choosing an etrog the day before Sukkot? this Jerusalemite thought to himself. Rav Levin walked into an old age home. The individual following him, waited outside and 90 minutes later the great Sage exited. The Jerusalemite approached him "Revered Rabbi", he said. "Please don't think me impudent, but I am anxious to learn a point of Torah, and therefore, I am asking the question."The great commandment of Sukkot include the waving of a beautiful etrog. I am certain that visiting the elderly individual or individuals in the Old Age home is also an important mitzvah, but they will be in the Old Age Home during the Festival of Sukkot as well as after it. The purchase of the etrog is a once a year opportunity. I would have expected the revered rabbi to have spent a little more time in choosing the etrog."

Rav Levin took the questioner's hand in his and smiled lovingly "My dear friend", he said. "There are two mitzvoth which the Torah employs the term hidur,(beautification), one is: the mitzvah of a beautiful etrog (pri etz hadar), (Leviticus 23: 40) and the second is beautifully honoring the face of the aged – (vehadarta pnei zaken) (Leviticus 19:32). However, the etrog is an object and the aged individual is a subject, a human being and not a fruit. Hence, I believe one must spend much more time in beautifying the commandment relating to the human being than beautifying the commandment relating to a fruit.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

When the Maps of Countries Are Being Redrawn — Hold Your Breath!

The Torah states, "Remember the days of old, understand the years of generation and generation. Ask your father and he will relate it to you, your elders and they will tell you." [Devorim 32:7]. Rashi does not explain this pasuk (verse) according to the simple reading. Rather, Rashi explains the pasuk as a warning: "Look at what happened to other people who came before you, when they angered Me." "Understand the years of generation after generation" refers to the era of Enosh, upon whom HaShem (G-d) poured forth the waters of the Ocean, and to the era of the (people of the) Flood, whom HaShem washed away.

The next pasuk continues, "When the Supreme One distributed to nations their portions, when He separated the children of man, He set the borders of nations according to the number of the Children of Israel." [32:8]. Rashi similarly interprets this pasuk: "When He separated the children of man" refers to the Dor Haflaga (Generation of the Dispersion). This is what happens to those who anger HaShem.

However, we have a long-standing tradition that "Scriptural verses (pesukim) do not leave their simple interpretation" [Shabbos 63a; Yevamos 11b; 24a]. Rashi himself says in a number of places that even though at times he is providing a Midrashic interpretation, the simple interpretation of the pasuk remains. The simple interpretation of these pesukim is an admonition to us to understand history and learn its lessons.

The traditional Jewish belief is that HaShem is not only the Creator of Heaven and Earth, but that He is the G-d of history. The historical events that we witness are the means by which HaShem is continuously directing His world. Simply stated, these pesukim are teaching us that when HaShem establishes the boundaries of the world, it is ultimately because of the Children of Israel. The different wars and conflicts that take place in the world and the different border changes that occur—according to the simple reading of our pesukim—all occur because of their ultimate impact on the Jewish nation.

There is a quote from the writings of Rav Elchanon Wasserman (who himself was killed by the Nazis at the beginning of World War II): The Torah gave us a great key to understand the hinge upon which all historical events revolve—Devorim 32:8 (the previously quoted pasuk). HaShem sets the borders of nations and causes nations to inherit for the sake of the Jews. History revolves around the Jews. "For Hashem's share is His people; Yaakov is the portion of His possession" [32:9].

Rav Elchanon continued (regarding the Peace Treaty ending World War I), "when the map of Europe was drawn up in Versailles, the borders were already set in Heaven". Sometimes it takes us years, decades, or centuries to put the pieces together. Sometimes, in the interval, the activities seem to have nothing to do with the Jewish people. But the great lesson of history that we are taught in the opening pesukim of this week's parsha is that when HaShem sets up the borders of nations, it is for the sake of the Children of Israel.

I recently read (1993) that the people in MacMillan and Company—the mapmakers—are having a very hard time these days. We think that we have hard jobs! Imagine the job of mapmakers! It has been a very difficult couple of years for them. They had just finished their latest edition of the Atlas, in which they printed East Germany and West Germany. Bonn and Berlin were the respective capitals. All of a sudden, they had to reprint the map. OK, done. Now they think that they are set. Then, all of a sudden, Yugoslavia divides—Serbia, Croatia, we cannot even pronounce all these names! When we are talking maps or when we discuss borders—ultimately, we are talking Klal Yisroel.

One does not need to be a politically astute individual to realize the momentousness of the breakup of the Soviet Union. The mapmakers do not know from day to day whether they should draw 15 republics or 12 republics. We ask ourselves what difference does it make if Azerbaijan decides to become independent or not. What is the meaning of all these changes?

This is the lesson of history that we should never forget. These events—the placement of national boundaries—have an impact on Klal Yisroel.

At the beginning of World War I, the Ottoman Empire chose the wrong side and allied themselves with the Germans. At that time, a person would have had to be exceedingly insightful to have realized that this decision would have a major impact on Jewish history in the twentieth century. Our tendency would have been to think, "Who cares? What's the difference?" But that single event—coupled with the fact that there was this little country called "Palestine" under the rule of the Ottoman Turks—had major ramifications. When Germany (and the Ottoman Empire) eventually lost World War I, their empires were disassembled. Part of the price that the Ottoman Empire paid for "picking the wrong horse" was that they lost their empire. Their little protectorate called "Palestine" became the British Mandate of Palestine. Not long after that, there was a proclamation called the Balfour Declaration. Who would have thought that the Ottoman Turk's poor decision would lead toward the Jews attaining an independent homeland in the Land of Israel?

When we see maps changing, we need to hold our breaths. This has to do with us. Somehow or another, we will be in the center of this. Sometimes it is for our benefit. Sometimes, G-d forbid, it may be to our detriment. But we are always on center stage, because "Yaakov chevel nachaloso" (Jacob is the portion of His possession). We are the protectorate of the Master of the Universe.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Torah?

Rabbanit Dena (Freundlich) Rock

Parshat Ha'azinu is unique in that virtually the entire parsha is a song. Even in an actual Sefer Torah, the verses of Shirat Ha'azinu are written in two columns, instead of the standard continuous lines.

Surprisingly, however, Chazal interpret 31:19, "V'ata kitvu lachem et hashira ha'zot" – Now write for yourselves this song, as a reference to the entire Torah, not the immediately upcoming Shirat Ha'azinu (Sanhedrin 21b and Nedarim 38a). (This interpretation has significant ramifications because it transforms our pasuk into the source for a new mitzva – the mitzva for every Jew to write for himself a Sefer Torah. See Rambam Hilchot Sefer Torah 7:1 and Sefer HaChinuch Mitzvah 613.)

What led Chazal to veer from the obvious interpretation that "ha'shira ha'zot" refers to Shirat Ha'azinu, in favor of the surprising one that it is a reference to the entire Torah?

An examination of the pesukim reveals that Chazal's seemingly farfetched interpretation actually emerges directly from the text. Although at first glance it seems to be obvious that the words "this song" in 31:19 must refer to the upcoming Shirat Ha'azinu (and in fact, Rashi and Ramban interpret them as such), other phrases in the text make it seem just as clear that they refer to the entire Torah. For example, 31:2224 reads, "Moshe wrote down THIS SONG on that day and taught it to Bnei Yisrael… And when Moshe finished writing the words of THIS TORAH in a book until they were completed . . ." which implies that the song that he wrote was the Torah.

Similarly, at the conclusion of Shirat Ha 'azinu, it says, "Moshe came and spoke all the words of THIS SONG in the ears of the people… and he said to them, 'Pay close attention to all the words which I testify among you today . . . the words of THIS TORAH.'" In addition, in 31:20, Hashem tells Moshe that "ha'shira hazot," this song, is meant to serve as an eid, a witness. A mere six verses later, Moshe instructs the Levi'im to place a Sefer Torah he has just written at the side of (or inside – mackloket, of course) the aron to serve as an eid, again making it seem that this "shira" and the entire Torah are one and the same.

The above examples demonstrate that Hashem wrote this section intentionally in a way that blurs the distinction between Shirat Ha'azinu and the entire Torah. (It is very helpful and interesting to read through 31:14-30 and 32:44-47 twice, one time interpreting every usage of the word "shira" as referring to Shirat Ha'azinu, and the other time interpreting them all as referring to the entire Torah.) This interchangeability in the pesukim between Shirat Ha'azinu and the Torah must reflect some common denominators between the two. How is Ha'azinu representative of the entire Torah? And how can the Torah be called a shira?

Why is Ha'azinu worthy of being equated with the entire Torah? Many elements of this parsha contribute to its being quintessential Torah, in particular the fact that it encapsulates virtually all of Jewish history, from Hashem's choice of Bnei Yisrael through our abandonment of Him in favor of other gods, to our exile, and ultimately to our redemption. As Ramban, quoting the Sifrei, says, "Great is this song for there is in it the present, the past, the future, and there is in it this world and the World to Come." One of the Torah's overarching goals is to develop Bnei Yisrael's relationship with God. Since Shirat Ha'azinu depicts the ongoing relationship between Hashem and His people, its ups and downs, its periods of grace and rejection, of hester panim and the final reconciliation, it embodies this aspect of the entire Torah.

The Netziv, in his introduction to Bereishit, develops a brilliant explanation as to why the Torah is called a shira. He writes that the essence of poetry is that it is concise, so that a few meticulously selected words express volumes of emotion and meaning. In addition, the condensed, sometimes cryptic, nature of poetry enables the poet to slip several layers of meaning into one poem, and it is the reader's challenge and delight to discern those multiple messages. So too, writes the Netziv, each word of the Torah was deliberately chosen by God, and He embedded within each pasuk endless possible interpretations. It is mind-boggling that a text written thousands of years ago which is likely the single most-studied text in the history of the universe, still has novel sefarim and chiddushim written about it every year! Our Torah is undoubtedly the most profound shira ever penned.

Nechama Leibowitz connects this idea to the words at the end of Ha'azinu,"Ki lo davar raik

hu mikem" – for it is not an empty thing for you (32:47). In Yerushalmi Pe'ah 1:1, Chazal interpret this phrase as follows: "'Ki lo davar raik hu,' v'im raik hu, 'mikem' hu. V'lama? She'ain atem yigai'im ba'Torah" – "For it is no empty thing," and if it is empty, it is your fault. Why? Because you do not labor in the Torah. The Torah contains infinite wisdom; the challenge is ours to discover it.

Referring to the whole Torah as a shira reminds us of the poetic nature of the entire Torah, including its narrative and legal sections, not just Shirat HaYam (Shemot 15:1-19), HaBe'er (Bamidbar 21:16-18), and Ha'azinu (Devarim 32:1-43). It calls to us to dive in and explore with fresh, inquisitive eyes, seeking each time to delve a little deeper, understand a little better, and perhaps even to discover a chiddush of our own.

Torat Har Etzion

"You Forgot God Who Formed You"

Harav Aharon Lichtenstein

In the song of Ha'azinu, the Torah describes the process of Am Yisrael's betrayal of God:

He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he ate the produce of the field; He nourished him with honey from the rock and oil from the flint stones; butter of cattle and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the kidney-fat of wheat; and of the blood of the grape you drank wine. But Yeshurun grew fat, and kicked – you grew fat, and thick, and vulgar – and abandoned the God Who made him, reviling the Rock of his salvation. They aroused His jealousy with strange gods, angering Him with abominations. They sacrificed to demons, non-gods, gods which they had not known, new arrivals of late, which your fathers never feared. You were unmindful of the Rock Who bore you, and forgot God Who created you. (Devarim 32:13-18)

We might understand these verses as describing a single phenomenon: Am Yisrael attains wealth and abundance, and it is specifically in this state that they abandon their faith in God and start believing in other powers. According to this understanding, the words "You were unmindful of the Rock Who bore you, and forgot God Who created you" are a summary of the process of Am Yisrael's betrayal of God.

However, a different way of understanding it is that the verses are describing two separate phenomena: the first is that economic prosperity causes the nation to abandon God; the second is that the practice of idolatry causes them to forget God. According to this understanding, the words, "And forgot God Who created you," come as a result of "They sacrificed to demons, non-gods." I shall focus on this understanding of the verses.

In parashat Ekev, the Torah gives a different description of betrayal: "And it shall be, if you will forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and serve them and prostrate yourself to them…" (Devarim 8:19). This description is different from the one in our parasha. Parashat Ekev describes a situation in which a person forgets God and therefore follows and serves other gods. This is certainly unacceptable, but it is understandable: could a person possibly offer sacrifices to "demons, non-gods" if he is aware of who God is? Is it possible that a person would know and recognize God's strength and power, and nevertheless choose to serve idols "which do not see, nor do they hear, nor do they eat, nor do they smell"? The only possible explanation for a person choosing to serve other gods is that it results from his forgetting the true God. In our parasha, however, the process is described in the reverse order: abandonment of God precedes and causes forgetting Him.

This teaches something about the essence of the betrayal of God as described in Parashat Ekev as opposed to the betrayal in our parasha. Parashat Ekev talks about idolatry in the usual, familiar sense – abandoning God and placing one's trust in idols and superstition. In this scenario, we are speaking of the regular sort of forgetting: a person who does not engage in Torah, but rather knowingly immerses himself in other things, will come to forget God's strength and power, and ultimately stops serving Him, out of complete forgetfulness.

However, Tanakh also provides a different concept of forgetting: "Can a woman forget her suckling child? … Yes, these may forget, but I will not forget you" (Yeshayahu 49:15-16). Is the verse talking about the regular sort of forgetting? Are we really concerned that a woman might forget that she has a baby? Obviously not. What the Torah means here is not the regular sort of forgetting, but rather existential forgetting – in other words, lack of attention. We do not imagine a woman forgetting her baby and being unaware of his existence; rather, the situation is one of her failure to respond to his needs, leaving him helpless, turning her attention elsewhere.

The forgetfulness described in Parashat Ha'azinu is of this latter sort. A person is aware of God's existence, but he does not follow through with the ramifications of this knowledge; his knowledge of God's existence has no influence on his lifestyle or his day-to-day activities. For this reason, the idolatry here is also not of the usual type: the Torah is not talking about someone who serves idols out of a conscious desire to abandon God; rather, it is talking about someone who is completely immersed in material matters – "And Yeshurun grew fat." This draws his attention away from any sort of spiritual reality – "and he kicked." This person knows that God exists – perhaps he would even profess to believe in Him – but his life is nevertheless considered one of "sacrificing to demons, non-gods." He serves success and prosperity, setting aside no time for developing a spiritual personality.

In a certain sense, modern man is faced with the problem of the forgetfulness of Ha'azinu. A modern person may be aware of God's existence in the general sense, and if prodded indications of His existence he might be able to shake layers of dust off his faith and answer. However, this shallow knowledge has no impact on his life or his behavior. Although he knows that God exists, he does not act accordingly. He ignores the Torah lifestyle and observance that this knowledge is meant to bring with it. This forgetfulness is especially prevalent, as described in the parasha, in the wake of economic achievement and success, which create the sense that one need not subjugate oneself to God.

People today are not stupid; they do not believe, as some once did, that "The Nile is mine; I made it" (Yechezkel 29:3). However, they are still prone to ignore the observance of mitzvot, and to "forget," in the existential sense, God's existence. The problem described in the parasha applies to the reality of our lives today just as it did at the time it was first uttered, to the generation of the desert: "You were unmindful of the Rock Who bore you, and forgot God Who created you." *(This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat parashat Ha'azinu 5763 [2002] Adapted by Shaul Barth; Translated by Kaeren Fish.)*

Why Do We Read Yonah on Yom Kippur?

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

The colorful story of Yonah is familiar and well loved. Read annually at Minchah on Yom Kippur, it introduces a prophet who defies God, a fish which swallows him at God's command, and – perhaps most unusual of all – a city which actually repents when a prophet arrives to warn of impending doom.

But as we take a closer look at the details of Yonah, strange details jump out at us. To begin with, why does Yonah defy God's command to journey to Nineveh and warn its inhabitants to repent? Isn't delivering warnings what prophets do for a living? (2) Later on, when Nineveh repents and God relents, Yonah himself seems to clarify the matter with his protest: "Was this not what I said when I was still back in my land – and that is why I fled to Tarshish! Because I know that You are a God who is compassionate and merciful, slow to anger and great in kindness, repenting of punishment! Now, O God, take my soul from me, for I prefer death to life!" (4:2-3). But this outburst leaves us even more puzzled: Yonah is angry that God is merciful and forgiving

The repentance of Nineveh is strange as well. The king declares a general fast, but bizarrely includes the animals of the kingdom in his decree along with the people – as if the grass-munching bovines of Nineveh had sinned and were now being called to repentance. The populace complies, even taking the animal participation to a new level of ludicrousness by dressing their barnyard beasts in sackcloth. Animals which had spent all their days unencumbered by both sin and clothing now assume the one and don the other. One wonders whether the farmers of Nineveh invited their cows to Selikhotservices; perhaps they left copies of Rabbi Soloveitchik's On Repentance in the fields, over which the ruminants could ruminate. What does it mean for animals to repent?

Finally, why do we read Yonah on Yom Kippur? The usual explanation is that we read it because Yom Kippur is the day of repentance, teshuvah, a central theme in Yonah. But if Chazal chose this story to be a Yom Kippur haftarah because it features teshuvah, many other biblical stories could have done the job. More to the point, why would they have chosen specifically a story about repentant non-Jews when so many narratives showcase the teshuvah of Jews?

Perhaps the answer to all of these questions is that we read Yonah not as a general paradigm of repentance, but as the answer to a critical question which we often ask ourselves as Yom Kippurapproaches: Is our repentance real?

Most of us have experienced trying to break an unwanted habit or ingrained personal pattern. Many of us have tried to change elements of our personalities which we think need improvement, or which we feel are holding us back in life. Most people find that changing themselves even in the short term can be monumentally difficult – so do we really mean it when we confess our sins on Yom Kippurand promise never to return to them? Do we really believe our own Yom Kippur resolutions? And if we don't – if we acknowledge, with the ghosts of Yom Kippurs past haunting this year's contrite commitments, that we may well return to the sins of yesteryear – then isn't our teshuvah meaningless, even hypocritical?

The prophet Yonah was troubled by this very question. He had no problem with repentance per se, provided that it was sincere and lasting; God ought to forgive those who abandon evil and truly embrace good. What he could not abide was teshuvah which would prove fleeting and therefore, to his mind, counterfeit. Why should God forgive sinners whose repentance would give way to sin as quickly as their fasting gave way to feasting and their sackcloth gave way to the everyday? Feeling regretful and repentant for a few hours means nothing, Yonah insisted, and he refused to participate in such a sham. Moreover, Yonah felt that by arriving in Nineveh and foretelling destruction, he would be actively encouraging precisely the kind of fleeting repentance he found repugnant: How could one expect people to repent sincerely if they were motivated only by the threat of punishment ("Who knows – maybe God will repent of His anger, and we will not be destroyed," 3:9)? Once the threat had been neutralized, theteshuvah would evaporate as well.

It was for this reason that after delivering his warning to Nineveh and observing the people's panicked paroxysm of penitence, Yonah did not simply return home, but instead built himself a hut outside the city "to see what would happen in the city" (4:5). God had forgiven Nineveh already (3:10), and Yonah knew it. He remained, however, because he was waiting to be vindicated – he was waiting for the grim satisfaction of witnessing Nineveh's return to her old ways.

Yonah ends with a strange conversation between God and his prophet. To provide shade for Yonah, God caused a plant to grow over his hut. Yonah, we hear, "was exceedingly happy" with the plant (4:6). Shortly, however, God caused a worm to attack the plant, and it quickly shriveled and died. Yonah was despondent over its death, whereupon God turned to him with the question which ends the book: "You cared for the plant, over which you did not toil and which you did not raise; it appeared overnight, and disappeared overnight. And I should not care for Nineveh, the great city, which contains more than 120,000 people who do not know their right from their left, and many animals?" (4:10-11). What is God trying to say? How does His response address Yonah's argument that ephemeral repentance is illegitimate? And why does He group the people of Nineveh along with their animals.

The answer is that Yonah was right about one thing, but wrong about another. He was right that the repentance of Nineveh, while sincere for the moment, was childish in its character, motivated not by the desire to achieve closeness with God and worship Him, but by the desire to avoid punishment for the moment. Yonah was right in predicting that the people would soon return to their sinful routines. In the long run, their fasting, prayers, and feelings of contrition would likely prove as meaningful as that of the farm animals who joined them in their teshuvah process.

But Yonah was wrong in thinking that God should reject penitents like these. By providing Yonah with a plant in which he

took great pleasure, God was teaching the prophet about His own feelings toward His human creatures. “You loved that plant and mourned its death,” God was telling Yonah, “though you did not raise it and put no work into its growth. But I have taken great pains in raising the tens of thousands of simple human creatures who inhabit Nineveh. Though they may not know right from left, though they may be spiritual simpletons, no more sophisticated in their religious approach than the animals which share the city with them, I love them and take great joy in their lives. It therefore pleases me to spare them when they make whatever effort they can.”

We read Yonah on Yom Kippur not because it focuses on repentance in general, but because it tells a particular story of repentance – a story of teshuvah which is heartfelt in its day, though it may not live to see the next Yom Kippur. The message of Yonah is that we are granted forgiveness on Yom Kippur even if we cannot offer God the exalted teshuvah which his prophet Yonah demanded. We are forgiven if even for just one day, even for just one moment, even motivated by fear rather than love, we truly desire to improve and commit to doing so. For God does not judge us by a cold calculus of our merit, but rather with the mercy and patience of a Creator whose creatures give Him joy.

[1] This article summarizes a much more detailed and thorough treatment in Hebrew by Professor David Henshke in Megadim 29 (Iyyar 5758), pp. 75-90. Interested readers are referred also to the subsequent exchange in Megadim 31.
[2] The best-known explanation, whose source is the Midrash, is that Yonah feared that the repentance of Nineveh would focus attention on the recalcitrance of his own people in the face of prophetic warnings.

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YOM KIPPUR – The Biblical Meaning of "Kippurim"

Is the 'Day of ATONEMENT' a precise translation for YOM KIPPUR? In English, the word 'atonement' implies amends for a certain wrongdoing. In this sense, the 'Day of Atonement' implies expiation for transgressions that may have been committed over the course of the previous year. However, in Chumash we find numerous instances in which the word "kippurim" is used in a very different context.

In the following shiur, we examine the Torah's use of the word "kapara" in various contexts, in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of its meaning in relation to Yom Kippur.

***THE SHORESH K.P.R.* --- A PROTECTIVE COATING!**

We begin our shiur by examining the Torah's very first use of the shoresh k.p.r. [chaf peyh reish] - as found in Parshat Noach:

> "And God said to Noach: Make an ARK out of gopher wood... -V'CHAFARTA alav - and you shall COAT IT from within in and from without with - KOFER - pitch (a PROTECTIVE COATING)." (see Breishit 6:14)

To protect ark from the mighty waters of the flood, Noach is commanded to coat the gopher wood with a protective covering. To describe this 'coating procedure', the Torah uses the verb "v'chafarta" and the noun "kofer" ! Note how both words stem from the same "shoresh" [root] of "k.p.r.".

Hence, the very first usage of "k.p.r." already indicates that this shoresh relates to some sort of a 'protective covering'.

**** A PROTECTION GIFT***

Later on in Sefer Breishit (in Parshat Va'yishlach), when Yaakov Avinu sends a gift to appease his brother Esav, the Torah uses this same shoresh ["k.p.r."] to describe yet another form of protection. Review Breishit 32:20-21, noting how Yaakov explains the reason for sending this gift:

> "Maybe, - A'CHA'PRA pa'nav - I can APPEASE him - with this gift that I am sending..." (Br. 32:21)

In this narrative, Yaakov is not asking Esav for forgiveness; rather he hopes that this gift will deter Esav from attacking him. One could suggest that this gift is intended to PROTECT Yaakov from Esav's anger.

**** A COVERING OF THE GROUND***

In Sefer Shmot, the Torah employs the shoresh "k.p.r." to describe the manner in which the 'manna' covered the ground:

> "And behold it was on the face of the wilderness thin and flaky - k'KFOR - like 'frost' on the land." (Shmot 16:14)

Even though the precise Biblical meaning of "kfor" is not quite clear, it undoubtedly relates to some type of covering, such as the frost which covers the ground. [See also Tehilim 147:16 - "kfor k'efer y'fazer" (from daily davening).]

**** PROTECTION MONEY***

In Parshat Mishpatim (see Shmot 21:30), the word "kofer" is used to describe a payment which can be made in lieu of punishment. This payment can be understood as PROTECTION from the actual punishment that is due.

Similarly, in Bamidbar 35:31 we find the prohibition of accepting "kofer nefesh" - payment in lieu of capital punishment. In essence, this 'ransom money' [if accepted] would have served as 'protection' from the death penalty.

SHORESH K.P.R. AND THE MISHKAN

Later on in Sefer Shmot (in Parshiot Trumah/Tzaveh), in relation to the vessels of the Mishkan and its dedication ceremony; we find several additional words that stem from this same shoresh - "k.p.r." .

We begin our study with the word "kaporet", for this vessel is not only located in the "kodesh kedoshim" [holy of holies], but it also later becomes the focal point of the Yom Kippur "avoda" ritual. [See Vayikra 16:13-16!]

**** THE KA'PORET***

Recall that the "aron" (the holy ark) was an open, gold-plated wooden box that contained the LUCHOT (see Shmot 25:10-11 & 25:21). To cover this "aron" [and as we will suggest - to 'protect' it], Moshe is commanded to make a KAPORET (see 25:17-22). But this KAPORET (again note shoresh k.p.r.) was not merely a lid - rather it was an elaborate golden cover with two "keruvim" [cherubs] standing upon it.

If the purpose of this "kaporet" was simply to cover the "aron" - then it should have been called a "michseh" - as the Torah uses that word to describe the cover of Noah's ark in Breishit 8:13 and the cover for the Mishkan in Shmot 26:14. The very fact that the Torah refers to this cover as a KAPORET (shoresh k.p.r.) already suggests that there may be something 'protective' about it.

However, the placement specifically of "keruvim" on the kaporet - provides us with an excellent proof as to the 'protective' nature of this covering. To understand why, recall that first (and only other) time that we find "keruvim" in Chumash was in regard to the "keruvim" whose purpose was to PROTECT the path to Gan Eden (see Breishit 3:24). Just as those "keruvim" protect the path to the "etz ha'chayim", the "keruvim" on the kaporet serve to protect the "luchot".

> [See Mishlei 3:18! Recall as well our shiur on Parshat Nitzavim where we used this parallel to explain how the Mishkan, and possibly the entire land of Israel become a 'Gan Eden' type environment, where God's Presence becomes more intense.]

Hence we conclude that its very name - the "kaporet" - relates to the fact that it serves as a protective cover for the "aron"!

> [Note also that the PA'ROCHET (a related shoresh p.r.k) - the curtain which protects the "kodesh ha'kadoshim"- is also embroidered with "kruvim" (see Shmot 26:31). Symbolically, the also stand guard, protecting the "kodesh kedoshim".]

KIPPURIM & THE SEVEN DAY MILUIM CEREMONY

The first use of the actual word "kippurim" itself is found in the commandment to perform a seven day dedication ceremony for the Mishkan (better known as the MILUIM).

On each of those seven days, God instructs Moshe to offer a special korban "chatat", whose blood was sprinkled on the "mizbeyach" (see Shmot 29:1,12) - yet the purpose for this offering remains unclear. Note however, the concluding verses of that commandment, paying attention to how the Torah summarizes this daily offering, while referring to this entire procedure as "kippurim" :

> "And each day [of the MILUIM] you shall bring a PAR CHATAT for the KIPPURIM... (Shmot 29:36)

In that same description, we find that the "kohanim" also required KAPARA during this seven day ceremony - for the Torah uses the word "kapara" to describe the process of sprinkling the blood of the "ayil" offering on their earlobes, thumbs, and toes (see Shmot 29:1,19-21). Note how the Torah refers to this procedure is referred to as KAPARA:

> "This [meat of the korban] shall be eaten only by [the kohanim] - asher KUPAR bahen - who had KAPARA from them [from the blood of this animal]... " (see Shmot 29:33)
>
> [See also parallel account in Vayikra 8:1-36, noting 8:34]

Thus we find that the primary purpose of the seven day MILUIM ceremony was to perform KAPARA on the MIZBAYACH

and on the KOHANIM.

But what was the purpose of this "kapara"? Was it necessary for the atonement of any specific sin?

Some commentators suggest that the kohanim require "kapara" as atonement for "chet ha'egel" (the sin of the Golden Calf/ see Rashi 29:1). However, that interpretation would force us to accept the opinion that the commandment to build the Mishkan (in Teruma/Tezave) was given after the events of "chet ha'egel" (and hence not in chronological order). Yet that very topic is a major controversy among commentators.

Furthermore, even if we do accept that opinion, surely the "mizbeyach" did nothing wrong. Why then would it require a KIPPURIM procedure?

Based on our understanding of the shoresh k.p.r. above, one could suggest an alternate reason for this "kapara" procedure - possibly, both the "mizbeyach" and the kohanim require some sort of special 'protection'!

But what would they need protection from?

PROTECTION FROM THE SHCHINA

Recall from our shiurim on Sefer Shmot that the primary purpose of the Mishkan was to create a site where the SHCHINA [God's Divine Presence] could dwell:

> "And they shall make for Me a sanctuary - v'SHACHANTI b'tocham"- that I may dwell among them." (Shmot 25:8)
>
> [See also Shmot 29:45-46]

Furthermore, the MISHKAN was supposed to create an environment similar to MA'AMAD HAR SINAI (see Ramban on Shmot 25:2) - and hence perpetuate that event.

However, as was the case at Har Sinai, the presence of the SHCHINA carried its consequences. As we saw in our study of the 'Ten Commandments' - the very presence of God's SHCHINA creates an environment where we find immediate and severe punishment for any transgression.

> [For example, on the very next day, Nadav and Avihu made one small mistake and they received immediate punishment! See also earlier shiur in regard to the 13 midot ha'rachamim.]

One could suggest that it is specifically because the Mishkan will be the site of God's SHCHINA, both the "kohanim" and the "mizbayach" will require PROTECTION - and hence "kapara! The "kohanim" - for they will need to officiate in the Mishkan; and the "mizbayach" - for it is designated to become the site where God's "korbanot" will be consumed (see Vayikra 9:24).

Thus, this entire KIPPURIM ceremony could be understood as symbolic, for it reflects the nature of the Divine encounter which takes place in the Mishkan. Performing this procedure teaches Bnei Yisrael that encountering the SHCHINA requires not only preparation and readiness, but also protection from its consequences.

To support this interpretation, lets examine yet another vessel in the Mishkan that requires yearly "kapara" - the "mizbach ha'ketoret"!

THE MIZBACH KETORET

The word KIPPURIM is mentioned once again at the end of Parshat Tzaveh, when the MIZBACH KETORET [the incense alter] is first introduced (see Shmot 30:1-10). Here, to our surprise, we find the first reference in Chumash to the day of YOM KIPPUR itself!:

> "v'CHI'PER Aharon al kar'no'tav - Aharon must KAPARA [sprinkle blood] on its corners ONCE A YEAR from the blood of the CHATAT HA'KIPURIM. Once a year y'CHA'PER a'lav - he must do KAPARA on it..." (Shmot 30:10)

Even though the Torah (here) only tells us that this special procedure must be performed once a year, later on, in Parshat Acharei Mot (see Vayikra 16:1-34) we find the complete details of this CHATAT HA'KIPPURIM, including the precise date when this procedure must be performed - i.e. the tenth day of the SEVENTH month. [See also Bamidbar 29:11.]

In our study of Parshiot Trumah/Tzaveh, we noted two aspects are unique to this MIZBACH KETORET:

1) It is the only vessel which requires this special CHATAT KIPPURIM.

> [Note: In Acharei Mot we see that also the PAROCHET and KAPORET need to be sprinkled with the blood of the CHATAT HA'KIPPURIM, however it is not mentioned in Sefer Shmot.]

2) It is LEFT OUT of the primary presentation of the Mishkan and its vessels.

> [Scan Shmot chapters 25->29/ note that 25:8 and 29:44 form 'bookends' which include almost all the vessels of the Mishkan, except for the mizbach ktoret which is left out until the very end (30:1-10/ note that this ends the "dibur" which began in 25:1). See previous shiur on Parshat Tzaveh.]

Once again, the meaning of the shoresh k.p.r. as protection can help us understand why. The ANAN KTORET (cloud of smoke created when burning the ktoret) in the Ohel Moed acts as a BUFFER between the SHCHINA in the Kodesh Kdoshim and the MIZBAYACH in the AZARA (courtyard), thus protecting Bnei Yisrael. [Note parallel to the ANAN on Har Sinai. Note "vayered Hashem b'ANAN..." (see Shmot 34:5)]

Because the MIZBACH KETORET protects Bnei Yisrael each day when the ktoret is offered, it requires a yearly CHATAT HA'KIPPURIM!

YOM HA'SHMINI - THE 8th Day DEDICATION CEREMONY

An additional link between Yom Kippur and our interpretation of "kapara" can be found by examining the korbanot of the YOM HA'SHMINI ceremony (the eighth day/ read Vayikra 9:1-24), the first day in which the MISHKAN began to function.

Once again, special korbanot are offered for the purpose of "kapara". From the psukim describing these korbanot, one could suggest that this KAPARA is necessary to protect Bnei Yisrael from the SHCHINA which is to appear on this day:

> "This is the procedure which you must do, and God's glory (KVOD HASHEM) will appear unto you... Go near the mizbayach and offer you chatat and olah - v'CHA'PER - on your behalf and on the behalf of the people..."(9:6-7)

It should come as no surprise that the korbanot offered at that inauguration ceremony are almost identical to the korbanot offered yearly on YOM KIPPUR. In each ceremony, there is a special chatat & olah offered both by AHARON and by the PEOPLE. The following table summarizes this parallel between Vayikra 9:1-3 and 16:1-5:

	YOM HA'SHMINI	***YOM KIPPUR***	***NOTE***
AHARON			
Chatat	Egel*	Par	[An EGEL is a baby PAR]
Olah	Ayil	Ayil	
AM YISRAEL			
Chatat	Seir	Seir	
Olah	Egel + Keves	Ayil	[A Keves is baby Ayil]

In each case Aharon offers a PAR CHATAT and AYIL OLAH (an EGEL is simply a baby PAR/ this change most probably relates to chet ha'egel). Likewise, Am Yisrael offers a SEIR CHATAT and AYIL OLAH (a keves is a baby ayil). Despite these minor differences, they are basically the same type of korban.

[See article by Rav Yoel Bin Nun in Megadim Vol. #8]

YOM KIPPUR - A YEARLY "YOM HA'SHMINI"

The above parallel indicates that Yom Kippur can be considered as a 'yearly repetition of the korbanot of the Mishkan's

inauguration ceremony on YOM HA'SHMINI.

This parallel underscores the very nature of YOM KIPPUR. It suggests that the primary purpose of the "avodat Kohen Gadol" is to PREPARE the Mikdash for the FORTHCOMING year, just as the korbanot of YOM HA'SHMINI prepared the Mishkan for its original use.

Likewise, the "kapara" can be understood in a similar fashion. Once a year, it is necessary to perform a procedure that will PROTECT Am Yisrael from the consequences of HITGALUT SHCHINA. This KAPARA process, which enables Bnei Yisrael's encounter with the SHCHINA in the MISHKAN, must be 'renewed' once a year.

In fact, Parshat Acharei Mot may allude to this very concept in the pasuk which completes the commandment to sprinkle the blood on the KAPORET:

> "v'CHI'PER - And he [the kohen] shall do KAPARA [sprinkling the blood] on the KODESH, from the uncleanliness of Bnei Yisrael... and thus he must do to the Ohel Moed - ha'SHOCHEN iy'tam - He who dwells among them, EVEN WHILE THEY ARE 'TAMEY' [spiritually unclean]..." (Vayikra 16:16)

EVEN THOUGH Am Yisrael may become TAMEY (due to their sins), the SHCHINAH can remain in their midst! However, Bnei Yisrael still require KAPARA - to PROTECT them from the SHCHINA and its consequences.

> [Note: See Vayikra 18:24-27 in regard to the relationship between TUMAH & sin.]

ATONEMENT or PROTECTION

In Sefer Shmot we find an additional use of the shoresh k.p.r. when Moshe ascends Har Sinai to ask God to forgive Bnei Yisrael for their sin at chet ha'egel:

> "And Moshe told the people, you have committed a terrible sin, and now I will go up to God, possibly - A'CHAPRA [I can achieve KAPARA] - for your sins." (Shmot 32:30)

When reading this pasuk, we usually understand A'CHAPRA as asking for forgiveness. However, one could understand that Moshe is asking God to PROTECT Bnei Yisrael from the punishment which they deserve. Undoubtedly, this protection from punishment leads to ultimate forgiveness. This explains why later in Chumash, the word "chapara" may actually imply forgiveness.

The classic example is found in Parshat Vayikra in relation to the korban CHATAT & ASHAM (4:1-5:26). Note that each type of korban concludes with the phrase:

> "v'CHI'PER alav ha'Kohen, v'NIS'LACH lo..."
> (see Vayikra 4:20,26,31,35; 5:10,13,18,26)

Based on our understanding of k.p.r. one could suggest that the sprinkling of the blood (the technical "kapara") by the kohen PROTECTS the owner of the korban from his due punishment for his transgression (the conceptual "kapara"). Then - v'NISLACH lo - God forgives him for that sin. Thus, the KAPARA 'process' enables the SLICHA 'effect'.

WHY ON THE 10th of TISHREI

Although we have explained the necessity of offering a yearly CHATAT KIPPURIM in the Mishkan, we have not explained why it must be performed on the tenth of Tishrei. In fact, based on the parallel to YOM HA'SHMINI, the first of Nisan would seem to be a more logical date!

Most probably this date was chosen for a historical reason. On the tenth of Tishrei, Bnei Yisrael received the SECOND LUCHOT and were thus forgiven for chet ha'egel. Due to God's attributes of Mercy - the 13 MIDOT HA'RACHAMIM, God agreed to allow His SHCHINA to remain with Am Yisrael, EVEN THOUGH they may not be worthy. [See Shmot 34:9, and shiur on the 13 MIDOT.]

On the anniversary of this event, the day on which Bnei Yisrael received the Torah at the level which they can maintain, we re-enact Ma'amad Har Sinai for it is a day of HITGALUT SHCHINA. Just like Moshe Rabeinu, we can neither eat nor drink (Dvarim 9:9), nor wear shoes (see Shmot 3:5). In this manner, we also prepare ourselves for this awesome day (See Yoma 2a).

However, specifically BECAUSE this is a day of HITGALUT, Bnei Yisrael require PROTECTION from the SHCHINA. Therefore, the CHATAT HA'KIPPURIM must be offered, for we are privy to a relationship which we may not deserve. It is this HITGALUT which enables the forgiveness of our sins on this day, just as it enabled the forgiveness of chet ha'egel several thousand year ago.

YOM KIPPUR

True atonement is accomplished only by teshuva. However, YOM KIPPUR allows for the special relationship between God and Am Yisrael to continue. By understanding the protective nature of the AVODAT YOM KIPPUR by the Kohen Gadol, we can better appreciate God's CHESED (kindness) in allowing us this special relationship, even though we may not deserve it. That understanding should encourage us not only to take advantage of the opportunity for atonement on this special day, but also to grasp any opportunity for spiritual growth during the course of the year to come.

"Yhi ratzon" that God should enact His MIDOT HA'RACHAMIM on this Yom Kippur, and enable us to meet the many challenges that face our Nation this coming year.

gemar chatima tova,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

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A. Note that the parsha describing YOM KIPPUR in Chumash is presented in relation to the death of Nadav an Avihu which took place during that inauguration ceremony on YOM HA'SHMINI/ See 10:1-4, and relate to 16:1.

1. Based on the above shiur, why do you think Nadav and Avihu thought it necessary to offer specifically ktoret, and specifically when they saw HITGALUT?
2. Were they wrong? If not, why were they punished?
3. Is there any other case in Chumash where ktoret is offered to protect Bnei Yisrael from punishment?

B. Note that on Yom HaShmini, also a Korban Shlamim was offered (see Vayikra 9:3-4)

1. Why is this korban not offered on Yom Kippur?
2. Can you relate this question to why the tzibur brings a korban shlamim davka, and only, on Shavuot (see shtei ha'lechem in Parshat Emor /see also previous shiur on Shavuot!)

C. Based on our shiur on Rosh Hashana, one could suggest an additional reason why this procedure in necessary in the SEVENTH month. After we request that God show His Providence over us on Rosh Hashana. If we ask for His special HASHGACHA on the land and the rainfall, we must be ready for its consequences.

1. Relate this to last week's shiur on Rosh Hashana and the nature of all CHAGEI TISHREI.

D. Sefer Shmot never states the specific day in which the SECOND LUCHOT were given. Read Devarim 9:8-10:11 to understand how Chazal reach the conclusion that it took place on 10 Tishrei.

'What defines what's right?"
For Parshat Shoftim

What's considered 'doing what is right in the eyes of God' ["ha'yashar beinei Hashem"]?

Sefer Devarim mentions this phrase several times, and

assumes that we'll understand what it means; yet the classic commentators can't seem to agree on its precise interpretation.

To illustrate this problem, our shiur begins with the final pasuk in Parshat Shoftim - to show how if forms a rather meaningful conclusion for its opening line!

INTRODUCTION

The last nine psukim on Parshat Shoftim (21:1-9) discuss the laws of "eglah arufa" – when the leaders of a community must perform a special ceremony in the case of an unsolved homicide.

Even though the first eight psukim describe the various stages of this 'ritual' – the final pasuk is not its last stage, rather – it appears to be some type of summary, or possibly even an additional commandment.

To verify this, review 21:1-9 – noting how the final pasuk is different, and how it relates to the previous eight psukim. [Make not as well of how you translated the word "ki" in 21:9!]

SUMMARY – OR NOT?

Let's begin with the JPS translation of 21:9, noting how it understands this pasuk as a summary for the previous eight (by adding the word 'thus'):

> "**Thus** you will remove from your midst guilt for the blood of the innocent, **for** you will be doing what is right in the sight of the Lord." (21:9 / JPS)
>
> [Note similar translation in Rav Aryeh Kaplan's Living Torah, and in the Jerusalem Bible ['so' instead of 'thus' - but all view this pasuk as a summary.]

In other words, after explaining all the various stages of this ritual – the Torah concludes by informing us that it will work! However, this explanation forces us to accept two conclusions:

1) That this "dam naki" [innocent blood] refers to the blood of the "chalal" [the slain person/ see 21:1] – which requires some sort of atonement, ideally with the blood of his murderer, but otherwise with the blood of the "eglah arufa". Without either, it seems that there would be terrible consequences.

2) The phrase "ha'yashar beinei Hashem" refers to these specific procedures of "eglah arufa" (as described in 21:2-8). Hence, when you have done them, the "dam naki" will be atoned.

The second conclusion is rather difficult to accept, for why would this ritual of "eglah arufa" fall under the category of doing 'what is correct in the eyes of God'? Usually, this phrase of "ha'yashar b'einei Hashem" refers to something in the realm of moral behavior, but rarely ever to ritual. [See Shmot 15:26, Devarim 6:18, 12:28 and 13:19.]

But even the first conclusion is rather difficult to accept, for the pasuk seems to imply some sort of new command – "v'ata t'vaeyr" [You must get rid of...] – in contrast to summary. Furthermore, the last phrase of 21:8 –"v'nikaper la'hem ha'dam" [and (thus) they will be atoned for the blood/ see Rashi] – in itself seems to be a summary, and hence, there doesn't seem to be a need for an additional summary in 21:9.

THE CASE ISN'T CLOSED!

Most probably for either one or both of these reasons, Rashi offers a very different interpretation, understanding the pasuk as an additional command (and not a summary):

> "[This pasuk] tells us that should they afterward find the murderer – that he must still be put to death; and THAT is [what the Torah refers to] as 'yashar b'einei Hashem'." (see Rashi on 21:9)

Rashi's commentary solves both problems, for it understands this pasuk as an additional command – i.e. to continue to look for the murderer – EVEN THOUGH the "eglah arufa" ceremony was performed; while this 'continued search for the murderer' is referred to (and rightly so) as 'what is correct is the eyes of God'.

To summarize Rashi's approach, this additional pasuk is basically coming to teach us that just because we have performed the ritual – the case is not closed! Instead, we must continue to pursue justice – for that is what is 'correct in the eyes of God'.

> [See English translation of 21:9 in Stone Chumash, which reflects (as usual) Rashi's commentary, and how it differs from the other English translations.]

PARTICULAR or GENERAL

One small problem remains with Rashi's approach, in relation to our understanding of the phrase "ha'yashar b'einei Hashem". If we consider the other times in the Torah where we find this phrase, we find that it usually refers to a very general category of behavior – more like a 'way of life' - in contrast to something specific. For example, after Bnei Yisrael cross the Red Sea and arrive at Mara, God challenges the nation to follow him as follows:

> "If you obey God, and **do what is upright in His eyes** [v'ha'yashar beinav taaseh], and listen to all of His mitzvot and keep all of His decrees..." (see Shmot 15:26)

Earlier in Sefer Devarim as well, we find how this phrase is used in a very general manner:

> "Keep God's commandments, His 'eidot' & 'chukim' as He commanded you – and **do what is upright and good in God's eyes**..." (See Devarim 6:17-18)
>
> [See also Devarim 12:28 and 13:19.]

Therefore, if we follow the more general usage of this phrase elsewhere in Chumash, especially in Sefer Devarim, it would make more sense if "ha'yashar beinei Hashem" related to a wider range of mitzvot, relating to general moral behavior.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES!

Most likely, it is this question that caused Ibn Ezra to offer an alternate, and rather create interpretation. After mentioning the two approaches that we discussed above (i.e. either a summary or a command to pursue the murderer), Ibn Ezra continues:

> "But what seems correct in my eyes ['v'hanachon b'einei' – note his clever choice of words!], this relates to what I mentioned in my commentary (i.e. in 21:7) that no murder at all would have taken place in the land if [beforehand Bnei Yisrael had] acted in 'a manner that is upright in the eyes of God'. – following the principle of:
>
> > 'schar aveira aveira u'schar mitzvah mitzvah' – the penalty for a transgression is another transgression, and the reward of a mitzvah is another mitzvah."
>
> (see Ibn Ezra 21:9 / & 21:7)

Note how according to this interpretation, the phrase "ha'yashar beinei Hashem" describes good behavior in general, and not any particular commandment, just as it does earlier in Sefer Devarim (6:18, 12:28 and 13:19).

Hence, there is no longer a need to explain this pasuk either as a summary or as an additional commandment; rather Ibn Ezra understands this pasuk as the Torah providing us with some 'good advice' – to prevent this type of situation (that would require an "eglah arufa") from occurring in the first place.

A GOOD TEACHER

If we follow Ibn Ezra's approach, this finale pasuk to the laws of "eglah arufa" follows a pattern that emerges throughout Moshe Rabeinu's speech in Sefer Devarim. Quite often, when Moshe Rabeinu is teaching specific laws, he'll take a quick break to provide a reminder, or some good advice – that relates to good behavior in general, in relation to that specific mitzvah.

> [If you'd like some examples, see 12:19, 12:28, 13:19, 14:2, 15:11, 16:12,16:20,19:10, not to mention all of chapter 8 thru 10 – note also 24:9, according to Rashi! I'm sure you can find many more.]

HOW DO WE KNOW WHAT'S 'RIGHT IN GOD'S EYES'

Before we conclude our short shiur, it is highly recommended that you read the Ramban on Devarim 6:18, where he solves the problem of how we are supposed to figure out what is considered "yashar b'einei Hashem". [Note how (and why) he brings so many examples from Parshat Kedoshim!]

It is also recommended that you see the Ramban on Devarim 21:5-8, where he quotes the Rambam's explanation how the laws of "eglah arufa" are not quite ritual, but rather a set of very wise steps to increase the chances that the true murder will be found!

In conclusion, note how the opening psukim of the Parsha command Bnei Yisrael not only to appoint judges, but also insists that their primary goal is to pursue justice and set a personal example of moral behavior (see 16:18-20!). With this in consideration, the final pasuk of Parshat Shoftim (according to Ibn Ezra's interpretation) serves not only as an appropriate finale for the laws of "eglah arufa", but also for all of Parshat Shoftim!

shabbat shalom,
menachem