BS"D
September 30, 2022

Potomac Torah Study Center

Vol. 9 #53, September 30, 2022; 5 Tishrei 5783; Vayelech, Shabbat Shuvah, Yom Kippur 5783

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 more than 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 archives.

After the Revelation on Har Sinai, Moshe returned to the mountain for 40 days during which Hashem taught him the remaining mitzvot and presented him with the Tablets that He Himself had created. Moshe returned with the luchot to find B'Nai Yisrael drunk and dancing before the Egel Zahav (17 Tammuz). Moshe destroyed the luchot, argued with Hashem until He agreed to forgive the people's sin, and then returned for another 40 days on Har Sinai. During that period, God presented the Thirteen Divine Attributes and said that B'Nai Yisrael could attain Divine Forgiveness by reciting these words. Moshe returned to the people on 10 Tishrei, the day that has become Yom Kippur, the day of attonement for sins between individuals and our Creator. (Forgiveness for sins against others requires that we seek forgiveness ourselves.)

In my message for Yom Kippur for 5781, I discussed the details of the Torah reading and messages for Yom Kippur (see below for excerpts). During Mincha on Yom Kippur, we read Yonah, the classic exposition of God's concept of teshuva. God sends Yonah to warn the people of Nineveh (Assyria) that He was about to destroy the city and people because of their sins. The people of Neneveh believe Yonah and immediately perform teshuva – with the king of Nineveh leading the repentance. Because of their sincere teshuva, God forgives the people of Nineveh and decides not to punish the people. Yonah, as a prophet, had known that God would accept their teshuva. He also knew that the Assyrians would destroy the holy Temple in a few generations, so the teshuva would be a short term repentance. For these reasons, Yonah had not wanted to carry out Hashem's mission. Yonah thus sits down outside the city to mope. God sents a hot wind to oppress Yonah, then sends a large plant to shade him, and finally has a worm kill the plant so Yonah would suffer again. Yonah calls to Hashem, who answers him and asks whether Yonah would have preferred that He not have compassion on him. Yonah finally realizes that a world without God's compassion would be miserable. Even sinners deserve God's compassion and forgiveness, if they repent and perform teshuva. This ancient story is a classic teaching all of us how important it is to repent and work on our relationship with Hashem. (An interesting aspect is that the pagans, the sailors and the people of Nineveh, are more righteous than Yonah.)

Rabbi Sacks adds to this message by reminding us that Jews have an eternal obligation to keep Judaism alive. As Rabbi Rhine adds, we must bring our children with us to absorb the lessons of teshuva and the Torah way of life. When Moshe included all Jews, present and future, in the covenant with Hashem, the consequence was that there will always be Jews. We must do our part to keep Judaism alive forever. Other religions and civilizations come and go. Jews, although a tiny part of the world population, will always be here, and none of us can evade this obligation – as Hitler reminded us starting around a hundred years ago.

Excerpts from my 5781 message on Yom Kippur:

What is the essence of 25 plus hours of fasting and davening on Yom Kippur, from the perspective of the Torah? The insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his colleagues at AlephBeta.org have greatly influenced my concept of this central holy day for our people. This concept changes the focus from what one typically hears, but I believe that it fits in with an overall view of the Torah and includes the important points.

A good hint to the essence of a holy day is to look at the Torah reading(s) for the day. The morning Torah reading starts with Vayikra 16. After the death of Aharon's sons, Nadav and Avihu (for trying to approach God's presence on their own

initiative), God tells Moshe a way in which Aharon may approach God's presence safely. This reading is at almost the center of the entire Torah, and the Torah places its most important messages in the center.

Some background helps us understand the significance. In Gan Eden, God and Adam communicated frequently and directly. Once Adam and Chava sinned, God expelled them from Gan Eden and set two cherubs to prevent them from re-entering the garden. Much of the Torah involves attempts by man to find a way to re-establish a closeness with God similar to what man had in Gan Eden. God provides a second opportunity at Har Sinai. However, most of the people find God's presence too frightening to endure, so they ask Moshe to listen to God and relay His message to them. God then provides the Jews in the Midbar with another way to relive the Sinai experience.

The Mishkan is a way to bring the Sinai experience into the camp. The cherubs that guard the entrance to Gan Eden re-appear on the kaporet, or covering, of the Ark – this time welcoming Jews to God's presence above the Mishkan. Kippur has the same root as Kaporet – Yom Kippur is thus the day in which God's presence covers the Jewish people.

There is a limit to how close man can come to God's presence and live. The Torah describes God's world before creation – waters swirling around in darkness. Man could not survive in such a world. The morning of Yom Kippur, we read how man can come close to God's presence and survive. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol (with special preparations, including fasting, using the mikvah several times, and wearing special clothing) may enter the Holy of Holies. The Kohen Gadol then presents his incense. The smoke from the incense rises and mingles with God's cloud. Since man could not live in God's world, this mixing of man's smoke with God's cloud is the closest that a man could come to God and live. A consequence of contact with God's cloud is kaporet – cleansing of sins for everyone who confesses his sins (Vidui) and repents. This cleansing is a more refined version of the cleansing effect of contact with God's cloud of glory in the Midbar – the mechanism that cleans the bodies and clothing of the Jews during those 40 years.

The Haftorah for Yom Kippur afternoon, Yonah, is also central to the meaning of Yom Kippur. God asks Yonah to warn the people of Nineveh to repent or He will destroy them. Yonah knows that the people will repent and that God will forgive them. He therefore tries to avoid delivering God's message. Nineveh is part of Assyria – and Yonah, as a prophet, knows that the Assyrians will invade and destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel a few decades in the future. Yonah believes that it is evil for God to forgive murderers and chronic sinners.

Yonah's full name is Yonah ben Amitai – Yonah, the son of the man of truth. Yonah recites God's 13 Divine Attributes, the words from Ki Tisa that we read every fast day and many times both in Selichot, Vidui, and especially on Yom Kippur. The difference, however, is that Yonah changes "God of Truth" to "God who changes His mind about doing evil." Yonah's God is one of compassion, who is willing to give up punishing sinners when they do teshuvah. By giving Yonah a plant to shade him from the hot sun and then having a worm kill the plant, God teaches Yonah that he would not want to live in a world without God's compassion. The message of Yonah, according to Rabbi Fohrman, is that teshuvah does not change the past, but it can change the future. Formerly evil people can become good – and thus deserve not to be punished. This message, from a careful reading of Yonah, fits in with the message of Yom Kippur providing an opportunity to earn God's forgiveness (wiping away our sins). We see this same message when Avraham bargains with God not to destroy Sodom if the city contains at least ten righteous men – because a core of virtuous men can influence others to perform teshuvah.

Yom Kippur always reminds me of wonderful years with my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, with whom I spent many hours each Yom Kippur. Something unusual seemed to make each Yom Kippur with Rabbi Cahan special – his Chasidic tales during Kol Nidre services, extended sermons on Yom Kippur, which wove together many different ideas but always made sense by the end, and unexpected events. For example, one Yom Kippur, some high school kids threw raw eggs at him. He discovered who the kids were and taught them a lesson. Yom Kippur comes with messages and memories. During the pandemic, it came with a new kind of experience – more time in isolation (even for those able to go to shul) and more time to reflect on new ways to find meaning in the experience. May we learn from Yom Kippur in isolation – and never need to go through another High Holiday period away from our friends and family.

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, Yonatan Ophir ben Ilana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Gmar Chatima Tovah,
Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Netzavim Vayeilech: It's Already in Your Mouth

by Rabbi Label Lam © 2002

Because these mitzvos that I command you today are not too wondrous for you neither are they so distant from you. It is not in heaven that it should be said; "Who will ascend the heavens for us and will take it for us and we will listen to it and do it!" And neither is it on the other side of the sea that it should be said; "Who will cross the ocean for us and will take it for us and we will listen to it and do it!" Rather, the matter is close to you very much so, in your mouth and in your heart to do it. See I place before you today the life and the good and the death and the bad. (Devarim 30: 11-15)

Occasionally someone looking for his pencil finds it perched above his ear. It's comical to watch as the frustrated fellow turns every object on the desk over and looks suspiciously at each person till the dawn of reality. It's often the same one who can't find his or her glasses searching furiously till passing a mirror it becomes clear that they have been parked on top all along. How foolish we feel when it's us!

Similarly, I recall two wonderful learning sessions I had with Mike, on the top floor of Jerusalem II in Manhattan. Mike had agreed to try learning Torah under the pretense that he had seen the movie but had not yet read the book. Mike had read most of western literature and much of it in its original vernacular. However, his own Torah had remained covered with the dust of recent history. He agreed to review with me as one would study another ancient text or source document critically combing through the words to determine their hidden meanings.

We were there in the pizza shop with hippety hop music on volume 8, not quite the perfect environment for task, but it work[ed] fine for us. Within a short period of time we were transported to another time and place. The first hour passed and soon Mike looked with a panic at his watch realizing that a second hour had passed and he was well over due to get back to work.

The next week it was the same time and place and Mike with his deeply skeptical nature and critical mind was there with me the books and some pizza for round two. Now, somewhere in the middle of the session Mike opened his mouth and said one of the most remarkable innocent testimonies that I have ever heard. From nowhere he simply declared, "I feel like I have learned all this somewhere before!" He paused, absorbed in the reverie of the de ja vu experience. I didn't offer the explanation that exploded to the front of my mind at the time. I gazed back with equal contemplation and said, "MMMM, that's interesting!"

I didn't think Mike was ready to hear it. It was our last session together before work got too busy for him, shame, but his words still echo in my ears. I don't believe he was ready to accept that the Talmud in Tractate Niddah tells that a fetus in its mother's womb can see from one end of the world to another and an angel learns the entire Torah with the child. Now, right before the actual birth, the child is made to forget all the learning. Our modern psychologists tell us the nothing is really forgotten, but rather it is stored somewhere deep in the psyche. The person seeks to rediscover Torah not merely to learn it anew. It's a dusting off process; a visit to an old prenatal memory.

With Mike's words I better understood the meaning of the verse mentioned above, "The matter is close to you very much so. It is not too wondrous for you or too far off. It is in your heart and mouth to do it!" We look for it all over the world and in Jerusalem II and there it is parked on top of our head between our ears. The language is not so foreign nor the expectations so outrageous. It is at least as tasty as a slice of pie and it's already in your mouth.

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5760-netzavim/

Men and Women Standing at Sinai

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

One of the last mitzvot in the Torah is that of Hakhel, the "gathering together." On Sukkot following the Shemitah year–the year in which we find ourselves right now–the people would all come together so that, standing as one, they would be fully present as individuals and as a complete community to hear the Torah being read.

The purpose of this gathering is no doubt educational, "that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law" (Deut. 31:13). The experience, however, was not just intellectual, but experiential as well. It was a very specific type of experience: a reenactment of the standing and receiving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

The verb that the Torah uses here to gather the people is hakhel, from the word kehal, or community. Significantly, in Devarim, and only in Devarim, the day of God's giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai is referred to as yom hakehal, the day of assembly (Deut. 9:10; 10:4; 18:16). What's more, there is a direct parallel between the words used in the Torah's commanding of the Hakhel and the words used in Devarim when God commands Moshe to gather the people at the foot of Mt. Sinai:

	Hakhel (Deut. 31:12)	Mt. Sinai (Deut. 4:10)
Gather the people	Hakhel et ha'am	Hakhel li et ha'am
In order that they shall hear	lima'an yishmiu	v'asmieim at devari
And in order that they shall learn	u'l'ma'an yilmidu	asher yilmadum
And fear God	vi'yaru et Hashem	liyra oti

Experiencing Hakhel as a reenactment of the Giving of the Torah can have a deep visceral impact on the individuals participating in it and on the people as a whole.

For the individuals participating in it, it turns the learning of Torah – our central, daily mitzvah – into much more than an intellectual pursuit. It makes us realize – no, feel – that this Torah is directly from God, it is God's direct communication with us, and by engaging in Torah, we foster a direct, lived connection with God. Learning Torah becomes a religious activity, a way of drawing close to God and bringing God into our lives.

For the community as a whole it underscores a central message of who is part of this relationship with God, who was present at the Giving of the Torah and who continues to be present when the Torah is given again and again, every seven years.

That phrase "kol kehalkhem" – your entire community – is used earlier in Devarim (5:19) to emphasize that it was the entire people who stood at Har Sinai. The need to underscore that the entire people were present becomes clear when we consider Judith Plaskow's central insight in her book *Standing Again at Sinai.*

Plaskow points out that according to the simple reading of the text in Exodus, the Torah was given primarily to the men: "Be ready for the third day, do not draw close to a woman" (Ex. 19:15). In other words, the men, who were the ones to receive the Torah, needed to be pure and thus could not be intimate with their wives beforehand. The Rabbis, however, reverse this, putting women at the center. For them, the problem here was that the women would be impure, that they would be the ones who would risk being excluded. The Rabbis also famously read the verse: "So shall you say to the House of Jacob and declare to the Children of Israel" (Ex. 19:3) to include women: "The 'House of Jacob,' Beis Yaakov,

refers to the women, and the 'Children of Israel' refers to the men" (Shemot Rabbah 28:2) – placing women front and present at Mt. Sinai.

The Rabbis, I believe, took their cue from how our parsha, and Devarim as a whole, go out of their way to explicitly state that women were present at this moment and that they are an equal part of the ongoing covenant with God. The beginning of last week's parsha, Nitzavim, begins with Moshe declaring to the people that they were all standing there at that moment to enter into the covenant with God, all of them: "Your heads, your elders, your men, your children and your women and the sojourner in your midst" (Deut. 29:10). This theme is continued and reinforced in the mitzvah of Hakhel where the Torah commands that we are to gather "the people, the men, women and children and the sojourner in your midst" (31:2).

Our parsha goes further and, in a shocking way, implicitly declares women's equal presence before God not only at the original receiving of the Torah and not only once every seven years during Hakhel, but each year, during every one of the three pilgrimage festivals. The Torah states that Hakhel is to take place on Sukkot when: "All of Israel comes to be seen by the face of God" (31:11). The experience of being seen "by the face of God," refers to the mitzvah of re'iyah, of appearing in the Temple during these festivals, a mitzvah which the Torah previously, and repeatedly, underscored applied only to the males (Ex. 23:17, 34:23, Deut. 16:16). Here, the Torah is saying that while an aspect of that mitzvah might be limited to the men, it is all the people – men and women alike – who present themselves before God (see Yerushalmi, Hagigah 1:1).

The powerful message for us is that when it comes to the learning of Torah, men and women must be equal. Torah is, and must be, accessible to all. All must receive equal education and develop the same skills so that Torah, in all its forms, can be something within each person's reach.

And it is more than access and learning. It is, as Hakhel was, the experience of receiving the Torah, of encountering Torah as God's word, of learning Torah as a religious experience.

It is for this reason, I believe, that the Rabbis ruled that in principle women can receive an aliyah to the Torah (Megilah 23a). The practical application of this is, as we know, hotly debated, and yet in all this debate the key point is often lost: the Rabbis included women at a fundamental level in the ritual that connects us in a very physical and visceral way to the Torah.

This visceral experience is, for me, what is so powerful about the yeshiva culture, what it means to be surrounded by a community of people learning Torah, to be hearing from all sides the kol Torah, the sound of Torah, emerging from the discussions and debates of each havruta, two-person pair, jointly grappling with the meaning and relevance of the text. This experience, too, must be equal for everyone. All must have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the learning of Torah and to do so in a religiously intense culture of striving for understanding and mastery.

Let us undertake, this Shemitah year, to fulfil the mitzvah of Hakhel by making its ethos and its values our own and by translating them into the deep and systemic structures of our community, so that we all may have an equal place in the learning of Torah and in the striving to connect to the Giver of Torah.

Shabbat Shalom; Gmar Chatima Tovah.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/09/men-and-women-standing-at-sinai/

Time to Stand Tall --Thoughts for Parashat Vayelekh

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In this Shabbat's Torah reading, Vayelekh, Moses passes the mantle of leadership to his disciple, Joshua. In verse 31:7, we read: And Moses called unto Joshua and said unto him in the sight of all Israel: be strong and of good courage." The usual understanding of this verse is that Moses transferred his leadership to Joshua in the presence of all Israel, publicly charging him to strengthen himself for his coming responsibilities.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef offers an insightful interpretation of this verse based on its musical notations (ta-amim). The traditional musical signs actually divide the words of the verse as follows: And Moses called unto Joshua and said unto him: in the presence of all Israel be strong and of good courage. According to this reading, Moses was concerned about Joshua's ability to assume leadership. Joshua was a humble person, accustomed to working in a subservient role. Humility is a good quality: yet, for Joshua to lead his people, he needed to demonstrate strength and courage. So Moses said (according to Rabbi Yosef's interpretation): Joshua, it's fine and noble to be humble and self-effacing while you are in private. But when you are in the presence of all Israel i.e. when you are functioning as a leader of the nation, you need to be strong and of good courage. You need to give the Israelites confidence that you can lead them. You can't be wishy-washy and uncertain.

This advice to Joshua is relevant to all of us. Of course we must maintain genuine humility, and not seek to aggrandize ourselves. Quiet piety and self-effacing righteousness are great virtues. Yet, there are times when we need to show strength and courage. When we are "in the presence of all Israel" – i.e. when we need to make a public stand on behalf of our people – then we should set aside our humility and step forward with self-confidence, confidence that can inspire our people to courageous action. When the honor and well-being of our people are at stake, we dare not shy away from responsibility. When evil persists in the world, we may not let humility get in the way of forceful resistance to evil.

This message is also echoed in the symbols of this holiday season. The shofar, which is bent over into a curved shape, symbolizes the need for humility. We bow ourselves in contrition before the Lord. Yet, on Succot we take the lulav (palm branch), which must stand tall. A lulav that is bent over is not kasher for the fulfillment of the mitzvah. The lulav reminds us that we must stand tall on behalf of our people and our teachings , that we must not be cowed by the attacks and taunts of enemies, that we must defend our interests and our ideals with strength and courage.

Our inner virtue must always be marked by genuine humility. But humility must not prevent us from taking proper action and demonstrating public courage. For the sake of our people and our Torah, we always need to stand tall.

* Founder and Director, Institute for 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.

https://www.jewishideas.org/time-stand-tall-thoughts-parashat-vayelekh

NOTE: The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals offers a High Holiday and Sukkot reader free to download at
https://www.jewishideas.org/article/holiday-reader-institute-jewish-ideas-and-ideals

---

The Meaning of the Book of Jonah *

by Rabbi Hayyim Angel **

THE MEANING OF THE BOOK OF JONAH]1[

The Talmud ascribes the composition of the Twelve Prophets to the Men of the Great Assembly)Bava Batra 15a(. Rashi explains that the books were bound together in one scroll because each was so short that some might get lost if not combined into a scroll of greater size.

Together they span a period of some 250-300 years. Jonah, Hosea, Amos, and Micah were eighth century prophets; Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and Obadiah prophesied in the seventh-early sixth century; and Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi prophesied in the late sixth century. Of the twelve, Joel is the most difficult to date, and we will discuss him in the fourth chapter on the Twelve Prophets.

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to find a comprehensive theory to explain the purpose of the book, or why Jonah fled from his mission. For millennia, great interpreters have scoured the Book of Jonah's forty-eight verses for their fundamental messages.

One midrashic line suggests that unrepentant Israel would look bad by comparison were non-Israelites to repent.]2[Another proposes that Jonah was convinced that the Ninevites would repent and God would pardon them. Jonah feared that he then would be called a false prophet once his prediction of Nineveh's destruction went unfulfilled.]3[

Abarbanel does not find either answer persuasive. Perhaps Israel would be inspired to repent in light of Nineveh's repentance. Moreover, since the Ninevites did repent, they obviously believed Jonah to be a true prophet. Nowhere is there evidence of Jonah's being upset about his or Israel's reputation. It is unlikely that Jonah would have violated God's commandment for the reasons given by these midrashim.

Abarbanel)followed by Malbim(submits that Jonah feared the future destruction of Israel by Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital)cf. Ibn Ezra on 1:1(. Rather than obey God's directive, Jonah elected to martyr himself on behalf of his people. However, the Book of Jonah portrays Nineveh as a typological Sodom-like city-state, not as the historical capital of Assyria. Jonah's name appears eighteen times in the book, but nobody else — not even the king of Nineveh – is named. Additionally, there is no mention of Israel or its king in the story. The Book of Jonah appears to have a self-contained message that transcends its historical context.]4[

Seeking another approach, the twentieth century scholars Yehoshua Bachrach,]5[Elyakim Ben-Menahem,]6[and Uriel Simon]7[cite Jonah's protest from the end of the book:

> *He prayed to the Lord, saying, "O Lord! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment.*)Jon. 4:2(

These scholars understand Jonah's protest as a rejection of the very idea of repentance. To support their reading, they cite a passage from the Jerusalem Talmud:

> *It was asked of wisdom: what is the punishment for a sinner? She replied, Misfortune pursues sinners)Prov. 13:21(. It was asked of prophecy: what is the punishment for a sinner? She replied, The person who sins, only he shall die)Ezek. 18:4, 20(. It was asked of God: what is the punishment for a sinner? He replied, let him repent and gain atonement.*)J.T. Makkot 2:6]31d[(

From this point of view, there is a fundamental struggle between God on the one hand and wisdom and prophecy on the other. Jonah was not caught up in the details of this specific prophecy; rather, he was protesting the very existence of repentance, preferring instead that God mete out immediate punishment to sinners.

Although this approach is more comprehensive than the earlier interpretations, it remains incomplete. Much of the book has little to do with repentance or God's mercy – particularly Jonah's lengthy encounter with the sailors in chapter 1 who never needed to repent, and his prayer in chapter 2 where Jonah likely did not repent. Aside from downplaying the role of the sailors in chapter 1, Uriel Simon sidesteps Jonah's prayer by contending that it was not an original part of the story.]8[Regardless of its origins, however, Jonah's prayer appears integral to the book, and likely contains one of the keys to unlocking the overall purposes of the narrative.]9[Finally, most prophets appear to have accepted the ideas of repentance and God's mercy. Why should Jonah alone have fled from his mission?

Although these interpreters are correct in stressing Jonah's protest against God's attribute of mercy in 4:2, Jonah also disapproved of that attribute particularly when God applies it to pagans. It appears that this theme lies at the heart of the book, creating an insurmountable conflict between Jonah and God. Jonah was unwilling to accept God's mercy even to the most ethically perfected pagans because that manifestation of mercy was antithetical to Jonah's desired conception of God.

CHAPTER 1

Although they were pagans, the sailors were superior people. They prayed to their deities during the storm, treated Jonah with respect even after he had been selected by the lottery as the cause of their troubles, and went to remarkable lengths

to avoid throwing him overboard even after he confessed. They implored God for mercy. When they finally did throw Jonah into the sea, they made vows to God.

Jonah, on the other hand, displays none of these lofty qualities. He rebelled against God by fleeing and then slept while the terrified sailors prayed. Remarkably, the captain sounds like a prophet when addressing Jonah — "How can you be sleeping so soundly! Up, call upon your god! Perhaps the god will be kind to us and we will not perish")1:6(— while Jonah sounds like the inattentive audience a prophet typically must rebuke. The captain even uses the same words in 1:6)kum kera(that God had in commanding Jonah to go to Nineveh in 1:2)kum lekh…u-kera(.

When Jonah finally does speak in the text, the narrator divides the prophet's words between a direct quotation and narrative:

> *"I am a Hebrew!)Ivri anokhi(," he replied. "I worship the Lord, the God of Heaven, who made both sea and land." The men were greatly terrified, and they asked him, "What have you done?" And when the men learned that he was fleeing from the service of the Lord – for so he told them . . .*)1:9-10(

Although Jonah told the sailors what they wanted to know, that his flight from God had caused the storm, it is the narrator who relates those crucial words rather than placing them into Jonah's direct speech. Moreover, Jonah's statement that he was a Hebrew who worshipped the true God appears tangential to the terrified sailors' concerns. Why would the narrator frame Jonah's statement this way?

The term "Ivri)Hebrew(" often is used when contrasting Israelites with non-Israelites.]10[In this vein, Elyakim Ben-Menahem notes that Jonah's usage of Ivri in 1:9 is fitting, since he was contrasting himself with pagans. Jonah's perceived dissimilarity to the pagan sailors is the main emphasis of chapter 1. Ben-Menahem further suggests that the text does not report Jonah's response to the captain so that his dramatic proclamation in 1:9 could appear as his first words recorded in the book.]11[This contrast with the sailors was most important to Jonah; therefore, the narrator placed only these words in his direct quotation.

To explain the bifurcation of Jonah's statement, Abarbanel advances a midrashic-style comment: "The intent]of the word Ivri[is not only that he was from the Land of the Hebrews; rather, he was a sinner]avaryan[who was transgressing God's commandment." Abarbanel surmises that the sailors deduced from this wordplay on Ivri that Jonah was fleeing! For Abarbanel's suggestion to work as the primary meaning of the text, of course, the sailors would have to have known Hebrew and to have been as ingenious as Abarbanel to have caught that wordplay. Though not a compelling peshat comment, Abarbanel's insight is conceptually illuminating regarding the overall purpose of chapter 1. Jonah emphatically contrasted himself with the pagan sailors; however, the narrator instead has contrasted Jonah with God. In chapter 1, Jonah was indeed Abarbanel's Ivri — a prophetic hero of true faith contrasting himself with pagans, and an avaryan — a sinner against God.

CHAPTER 2

After waiting three days inside the fish, Jonah finally prayed to God. Some)for example, Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel and Malbim(conclude that Jonah must have repented, since God ordered the fish to spew Jonah out, and Jonah subsequently went to Nineveh. However, there is no indication of repentance in Jonah's prayer.]12[One might argue further that God's enjoining Jonah to return to Nineveh in 3:1-2 indicates that Jonah had indeed not repented.]13[In his prayer, Jonah was more concerned with being saved and serving God in the Temple than he was in the reasons God was punishing him)2:5, 8(.

Jonah concluded his prayer with two triumphant verses:

> *They who cling to empty folly forsake their own welfare, but I, with loud thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You; what I have vowed I will perform. Deliverance is the Lord's!*)2:9-10(

Ibn Ezra and Radak believe that Jonah was contrasting himself with the sailors who had made vows in 1:16. Unlike their insincere)in Jonah's opinion(vows, Jonah intended to keep his vow to serve God in the Temple. Abarbanel and Malbim, however, do not think that Jonah would allude to the sailors. In their reading of the book, the sailors are only tangential to

their understanding of the story, which specifically concerns Nineveh as the Assyrian capital. Instead, they maintain that Jonah was forecasting the insincere)in Jonah's opinion(repentance of the Ninevites.

One may combine their opinions: the sailors and Ninevites both are central to the book of Jonah, each receiving a chapter of coverage. They were superior people — the sailors all along, and the Ninevites after their repentance — but Jonah despised them because they were pagans. Jonah's prayer ties the episodes with the sailors and Ninevites together, creating a unified theme for the book, namely, that Jonah contrasts himself with truly impressive pagans. It seems that Rashi has the smoothest reading:

> *They who cling to empty folly: those who worship idols; forsake their own welfare: their fear of God, from whom all kindness emanates. But I, in contrast, am not like this; I, with loud thanksgiving, will sacrifice to You.*)Rashi on Jon. 2:9-10(

As in chapter 1, Jonah's contrasting himself with pagans is the climactic theme of his prayer in chapter 2. To paraphrase the prayer in chapter 2, Jonah was saying "Ivri anokhi]I am a Hebrew[")1:9(! I worship the true God in contrast to all pagans — illustrated by the sailors, and later by the Ninevites. At the same time, Jonah still remained in his rebellion against God; he still was an avaryan]sinner[. According to this view, God allowed Jonah out of the fish to teach him a lesson, not because he had repented.

CHAPTER 3

Did Jonah obey God when he went to Nineveh? Radak assumes that he did. In contrast, Malbim believes that Jonah rebelled even as he walked through the wicked city. He should have explicitly offered repentance as an option, instead of proclaiming the unqualified doom of the Ninevites.

The Ninevites, on the other hand, effected one of the greatest repentance movements in biblical history. The king of Nineveh even said what one might have expected Jonah to say: "Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty. Who knows but that God may turn and relent? He may turn back from His wrath, so that we do not perish")3:8-9(. We noted earlier that the same contrast may be said of the captain of the ship, who sounded like a prophet while Jonah rebelled against God.

Nineveh's repentance might amaze the reader, but it did not impress Jonah. Abarbanel and Malbim)on 4:1-2(suggest that Jonah was outraged that God spared the Ninevites after their repentance for social crimes, since they remained pagans. This interpretation seems to lie close to the heart of the book. Jonah did not care about the outstandingly ethical behavior of the sailors nor the impressively penitent Ninevites. Jonah still was the Ivri he proclaimed himself to be in 1:9, sharply contrasting himself with the pagans he encountered, and thereby remaining distanced from the God he knew would have compassion on them.

CHAPTER 4

This displeased Jonah greatly, and he was grieved. He prayed to the Lord, saying, "O Lord! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment. Please, Lord, take my life, for I would rather die than live.")4:1-3(

Outraged by God's sparing of Nineveh, Jonah revealed that he had fled initially because he knew that God would not punish the Ninevites. In his protest, Jonah appealed to God's attributes of mercy, but with a significant deviation from the classical formula in the aftermath of the Golden Calf:

> *The Lord! The Lord! A God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness . . .*)Exod. 34:6(
>
> *For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment.*)Jon. 4:2(]14[

Jonah substituted "renouncing punishment)ve-niham al ha-ra'ah(" for "faithfulness)ve-emet(." Jonah's God of truth would not spare pagans, yet God Himself had charged Jonah with a mission to save pagans! Thus, God's prophecy at the outset

of the narrative challenged Jonah's very conception of God. Jonah would rather die than live with a God who did not conform to his religious outlook. Ironically, then, Jonah's profound fear and love of God are what caused him to flee initially, and to demand that God take his life.

In an attempt to expose the fallacy of Jonah's argument, God demonstrated Jonah's willingness to die stemmed not only from idealistic motives, but also from physical discomfort:

> *"O Lord! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish . . . . Please, Lord, take my life, for I would rather die than live." The Lord replied, "Are you that deeply grieved?"*)4:1-4(

> *And when the sun rose, God provided a sultry east wind; the sun beat down on Jonah's head, and he became faint. He begged for death, saying, "I would rather die than live." Then God said to Jonah, "Are you so deeply grieved about the plant?" "Yes," he replied, "so deeply that I want to die"*)4:8-9(

God added a surprising variable when explaining His sparing of the Ninevites. Although it had seemed from chapter 3 that the Ninevites had saved themselves with their repentance, God suddenly offered a different reason]15[:

Then the Lord said:

> *"You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. And should I not care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!"*)4:10-11(

God had been willing to destroy the Ninevites for their immorality, but forgave them once they repented. Although the Ninevites had misguided beliefs, God had compassion on them without expecting that they become monotheists. After all, they could not distinguish their right from their left in the sense that they served false deities. For Jonah, however, true justice required punishing even the penitent Ninevites because they still were pagans.

To paraphrase God's response: You, Jonah, wanted to die for the highest of ideals. However, you also were willing to die rather than face heat. Your human limitations are now fully exposed. How, then, can you expect to understand God's attributes?]16[God has little patience for human immorality, but can tolerate moral people with misguided beliefs. Jonah's stark silence at the end of the book reflects the gulf between God and himself. He remained an "Ivri" to the very end.

CONCLUSION

The story of Jonah is about prophecy, the pinnacle of love of God, and the highest human spiritual achievement. But prophecy also causes increased anguish, as the prophet apprehends the infinite gap between God and humanity more intensely than anyone else. Jonah's spiritual attainments were obviously far superior to those of the sailors or the people of Nineveh – he most certainly could tell his right hand from his left. The closer he came to God, the more he simultaneously gained recognition of how little he truly knew of God's ways. This realization tortured him to the point of death.

God taught Jonah that he did not need to wish for death. He had influenced others for the better and had attained a deeper level of understanding of God and of his own place in this world. Despite his passionate commitment to God, Jonah needed to learn to appreciate moral people and to bring them guidance. He had a vital role to play in allowing God's mercy to be manifest.

The Book of Jonah is a larger-than-life story of every individual who seeks closeness with God. There is a paradoxical recognition that the closer one comes to God, the more one becomes conscious of the chasm separating God's wisdom from our own. There is a further challenge in being absolutely committed to God, while still respecting moral people who espouse different beliefs. A midrash places one final line in Jonah's mouth: "Conduct Your world according to the attribute of mercy!"]17[This midrash pinpoints the humbling lesson Jonah should have learned from this remarkable episode, and that every reader must learn.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[This chapter is adapted from Hayyim Angel, "'I am a Hebrew!': Jonah's Conflict with God's Mercy Toward Even the Most Worthy of Pagans," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 34:1)2006(, pp. 3-11; reprinted in Angel, *Through an Opaque Lens*)New York: Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2006(, pp. 259-269. It also appeared in *Yom Kippur Reader*)New York: Tebah, 2008(, pp. 59-70.

]2[See, for example, Mekhilta Bo, J.T. Sanhedrin 11:5, Pesahim 87b, cited by Rashi, Kara, Ibn Ezra, and Radak.

]3[Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 9, cited by R. Saadyah)Emunot ve-De'ot 3:5(, Rashi, Kara, Radak, and R. Isaiah of Trani.

]4[See further discussion and critique of the aforementioned views in Uriel Simon, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Jonah*)Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1999(, introduction pp. 7-12.

]5[Yehoshua Bachrach, Yonah ben Amitai ve-Eliyahu: le-Hora'at Sefer Yonah al pi ha-Mekorot)Hebrew( )*Jerusalem: The Religious Department of the Youth and Pioneering Division of the Zionist Organization,* 1967(, p. 51.

]6[Elyakim Ben-Menahem, *Da'at Mikra: Jonah, in Twelve Prophets* vol. 1)Hebrew( )Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1973(, introduction pp. 7-9.

]7[Simon, *JPS Bible Commentary: Jonah,* introduction pp. 12-13.

]8[Simon, *JPS Bible Commentary: Jonah*, introduction pp. 33-35; commentary pp. 15-17.

]9[See further critique of Simon in David Henshke, "The Meaning of the Book of Jonah and Its Relationship to Yom Kippur,")Hebrew(Megadim 29)1998(, pp. 77-78; and see response of Uriel Simon to Henshke, "True Prayer and True Repentance,")Hebrew(, Megadim 31)2000(, pp. 127-131.

]10[See, e.g., Gen. 39:14, 17; 40:15; 41:12; 43:32; Exod. 1:15, 16, 19; 2:7, 11, 13; 3:18; 5:3; 7:16; 9:1, 13; 10:3. Cf. Gen. Rabbah 42:13: R. Judah said:]ha-Ivri signifies that[the whole world was on one side)ever(while]Abraham[was on the other side)ever(.

]11[Ben-Menahem, *Da'at Mikra: Jonah,* pp. 6-7. In his introduction, pp. 3-4, Ben-Menahem adds that chapter 1 is arranged chiastically and Jonah's proclamation in v. 9 lies at the center of that structure, further highlighting its centrality to the chapter.

]12[Cf. Rashi, Kara, and R. Eliezer of Beaugency. Even Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel, and Malbim, who assert that Jonah must have agreed to go to Nineveh, grant that Jonah was unhappy about this concession. Adopting a middle position, Sforno suggests that Jonah repented, but the prayer included in the book is a psalm of gratitude after Jonah already was saved. Rob Barrett)"Meaning More than They Say: The Conflict between Y-H-W-H and Jonah," JSOT 37:2)2012(, p. 244(suggests additional ironies in Jonah's prayer: Jonah proclaims that he has called out to God)2:3(, but in fact has refused to call out to Nineveh or to God while on the boat. Jonah states that God saved him because he turned to God, while he is fleeing God's command.

]13[Ibn Ezra counters that Jonah specifically stayed near Nineveh so that he would be ready to go with a second command. Alternatively, Ben-Menahem)Da'at Mikra: Jonah, p. 13(suggests that Jonah might have thought that God had sent someone else.

]14[For further analysis of the interrelationship between Joel, Jonah, and Exodus 34, see Thomas B. Dozeman, "Inner Biblical Interpretation of Y-H-W-H's Gracious and Compassionate Character," JBL 108)1989(, pp. 207-223.

]15[For fuller exploration of this and related disparities, see Hayyim Angel, "The Uncertainty Principle of Repentance in the Books of Jonah and Joel," in Angel, *Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding the Religious Significance in Tanakh*)Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2009(, pp. 148-161.

]16[See further discussion in Bachrach, *Yonah ben Amitai ve-Eliyahu*, pp. 66-68.

]17[Midrash Jonah, ed. Jellinek, p. 102, quoted in Simon, *JPS Bible Commentary: Jonah*, introduction p. 12. R. Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests that during the entire episode, Jonah needed to learn important lessons in becoming a prophet. God therefore sent him on this initial mission to Nineveh. Only after this episode did God send him on a more favorable prophetic mission to Israel)II Kings 14:23-27(. "Commentary on Jonah")Hebrew(, HaMa'ayan 51:1)Tishri 5771-2010(, pp. 8-9.

* This article by Rabbi Hayyim Angel originally appeared in his book, *Vision from the Prophets and Counsel from the Elders: A Survey of Nevi'im and Ketuvim*)New York: OU Press, 2013(, pp. 163-172.

** Yeshiva University and Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/generation-liethoughts-911

Parshas Vayeilech – Shabbos Shuva -- Ambiance and Attitude

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

The mitzvah of Hakheil was that the Jewish people should gather every seventh year and listen to words of Torah read by the king. The Torah states: "Gather the people -- men, women, and children -- so they will hear and learn…" The Talmud wonders why the children had to be brought, and answers: "To give reward to those who brought them."

The question, "Why did the children have to be brought?" is a powerful one. After all, they are underage; they are not obligated in mitzvos. The response is that there is something great to be gained. Although the children don't yet have the obligation, the parents do. As the Malbim explains, "The children are too young to understand the 'speech.' But they will gain from the impressive Torah gathering. It will be an impression which will remain with them throughout their lives."

Attending this Hakheil gathering is not a mitzvah upon the children. But there is a mitzvah upon the parents: To provide the children with an experience of inspiration which will stay with them for a lifetime.

This obligation is not limited to Hakheil. Throughout our lives we have opportunities to create an ambiance that treasures Torah. This is particularly relevant in a child's education. Although the child might not yet understand the "speech," they do pick up on the experiences. Showing that we treasure Torah and mitzvos makes an impression, even when speeches may not. A positive impression gives the child a starting point of affinity to Torah and mitzvos.

Rabbi Emanuel Feldman writes that he once encountered a man on a plane who reached into his carry-on bag and pulled out a paper bag. The Rabbi got the impression that perhaps the bag contained the man's kosher tuna fish sandwich, or the like. Moments later, however, the contents were revealed. Contained in the paper bag were the man's Teffilin. Utterly stunned that a person would store Teffilin with such a lack of reverence, the Rabbi coined an expression "Tefflin in a brown paper bag," referring to the fact that we sometimes do mitzvos in a way that fulfills the legal requirements, but does little to display the sense of admiration and love that we should have towards a mitzvah.

Similarly, the way we talk about mitzvos leaves a lasting impression upon those around us. I cannot tell people how much they should spend on an Esrog. Some will spend a lot; others will spend little. But whatever you do spend, make sure to do it with a smile. If you bring the Esrog home with such joy that shows that you just want to kiss the treasure that you have purchased, then your family will know that mitzvos are precious.

The mitzvah of the Hakheil gathering wasn't a mitzvah obligation on the children. It was an obligation of the parents to provide the youth with an ambiance and attitude that treasures Torah, so that they would have such a baseline in their lives to treasure Torah forever.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos and a Gmar Chasima Tova!

Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is

Parshas Netzavim-Vayeilech

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2020

As we prepare for the High Holidays this year under the strain of physical separation, we seek ways to find some level of meaningful connection. The High Holidays, immediately followed by Sukkos, is a time when we are usually making arrangements for sharing and celebrating with family and friends. The void this year, as some wonder if and how they can even participate in services, is one that we all feel and seek to fill.

In Moshe's opening words in this week's parsha, the Medrash finds a message which indicates that these connections are even more important than we may realize. Engaging in efforts to connect and join together at this time can not only alleviate our struggle but may even be a powerful merit for the coming year.

The parsha opens with the words "You are standing here today, all of you" (Devarim 29:9). The Medrash Yalkut Shimoni (980) explains that these words are meant as two phrases, with the second explaining the first. "You are standing here today." When is this true? "All of you" - when you are bound together as one. The Medrash gives a parable to explain. When a bundle of reeds is taken as one, the bundle is difficult to break. If one reed is taken by itself, even a baby can break it. The Medrash is telling us that the merit which will determine whether we stand or fall as a nation is the merit of being bound together as one. As we seek ways to connect, we must realize that whatever level of connection we achieve is itself of great significance.

Yet as we think back to previous years, it may seem that our struggle to connect did not begin with the current pandemic. As we were fully joining and enjoying live human company last year, did we truly enjoy every person we saw? Did we truly seek to be bound with everyone else in the community? Perhaps there may have been some whom we took for granted, offering a short nod or a handshake and moving on, barely noticing each other. If we are to seek the merit of being bound together, we must ask ourselves what does it mean to be bound together, and how do we develop a connection of that depth?

I believe it is this question which the Medrash is addressing with the parable of the reeds. The reeds lean on each other and thereby combine the strength of every small reed together into one collective force. The collective force enables the reeds to withstand far greater pressures than any reed can withstand alone.

The Medrash is telling us to apply this concept to our human connections. If we want to withstand the test of time and remain standing firm as G-d's nation, we must learn to lean on each other and combine our individual strengths and merits into one collective force. We must recognize that though each reed may seem insignificant, each of us alone is also insignificant. It is only when we bind together that our collective merit can protect us. No one is so great that they can stand alone, and no one is too small to add to the whole.

The Medrash continues this message with the second half of the passuk. Moshe lists those standing today and says "the heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers, every Jewish individual." The Medrash explains that this too is meant to be understood as two phrases. Although, G-d has appointed for us "the heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers," we are still all of equal merit before G-d "every Jewish individual." We each have our own role and purpose in G-d's world, and each role is equally cherished by G-d.

As we seek to connect, the Medrash is teaching us to focus on the unique role and strength that each individual has. Everyone has their place in the whole, and everyone's place is important to G-d. After these last several months it is easy to look past our own strengths and realize how much we need each other. As we focus on that need, we can appreciate the role of every individual and how everyone has their own unique strengths. The more we appreciate each other, the more we can learn from each other and compromise to work together as G-d's nation, the greater our merit will be for this coming year. May it be a year of blessing.

* Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, 5909 Bradley Blvd., Bethesda, MD 20814. Rabbi Singer's Devar Torah arrived too late for my deadline, so I am reprinting his message from 2020, when the covid pandemic was still actively keeping many congregants from attending shul in person.

Seek God, Find…

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia **

On the Ten Days of Penitence, the days between Rosh HaShana and Kippur, God is closer to us. Just as a king or a president might be shut in his residence all year, enabling commoners to see him and talk to him for only a short period, so too God remains aloof and distant all year long, until He grants us a visit during these ten days. This statement always seemed problematic to me because I perceive God as omnipresent and I think that making this analogy borders on anthropomorphism, attributing human traits to God, so I would like to analyze its origins and meaning.

The saying that God is closer to us on these ten days appears in the Talmud (Yevamot 49:2) and is based on a verse in Isaiah (55:6):

> *"Seek God when He is present, call out to Him when He is nearby."*

However, this statement contradicts not only our logic and common sense, but also other biblical sources, for example (Psalms 145:18):

> *"God is close to all those who call out to Him, who do it with sincerity."*

Or, for example, the following source which uses much stronger words to convey the message that God is not only extremely close to us, but that we cannot escape or break away from this intimacy (Psalms 139:7-14):

> *Where can I run away from Your spirit, escape Your presence? If I scale the sky, there You are and if I descend to the netherworld, I will find You. If I take off on the wings of dawn and dwell in the bottom of the ocean, there too Your hand will guide me…*

And as if that contradiction is not enough, I have, as Jews always do, a diametrically opposed question: Isn't it true that God is never close to us? Didn't Isaiah say that, in the very same chapter quoted above, only two verses later (55:9)?

> *As the skies are far removed from the earth so are My ways and My thoughts far removed from yours.*

And, also in Isaiah (6:3):

> *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh, Hashem Tzetzavot – The Lord of Hosts is transcendental, far removed and distinguished*

How do we reconcile the contradicting biblical and rabbinic sources which describe the full gamut of the relationships between us and our Creator, from complete detachment, through narrow windows of encounters to an inextricable intimacy?

In order to solve this mystery I had to start searching who, besides God, would always be with me, no matter where I go or how cleverly I disguise myself, and the answer was very simple: me!

By seeking God we seek ourselves. That is the deepest yet simplest message of Rosh HaShana, Kippur and the whole process of Teshuva – repentance.

You see, we come into this world as pure, innocent creatures, and the actions or reactions of those surrounding us – family, caretakers and friends – influence and shape our personality. If we are lucky enough to have been born in a peaceful country in the developed world, we may believe at a young age that the world is a beautiful place, devoid of evil, except for that bug bite or a lost toy, but as we grow older we intercept signals of cruelty and wickedness such as bullying, foul language, apathy or violence. Some are able to rise above these negative manifestations of the human nature and to craft a wholesome, positive and loving personality, yet others fail to do so, if even in the slightest manner possible.

A research conducted on bullying among school children followed, over several years, kids on a school bus. The researchers focused on a girl who tried to stop bullies from harassing a younger kid, and what they found is quite terrifying in what it reveals about human nature. As years passed by, the girl became less and less involved as she realized that she was not making an impact on the bullies. She gave up and accepted the cruel reality. Her behavior is a paradigm of our response to evil which we think is beyond our control, and too often we hoard our own actions and bad habits under that rubric, arguing that we have tried and failed to change them so we might as well accept and live with them.

Innocence, purity, rejection of evil, and commitment to a life of creativity and activism are all aspects of the Image of God with which we are blessed upon birth, and as we drift away from them, we leave God, and our true self, behind. This is the axis on which the human life oscillates. It starts with the extreme closeness and intimacy with God which young kids possess but only few pure, unadulterated souls manage to maintain as they grow older. On the other extreme, we can find the transcendental and remote God, enclosed in His palatial ivory tower – *Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh.* But God is only in that state when we don't seek Him out, at which point He proclaims:

> *"As the skies are far removed from the earth so are My ways and My thoughts far removed from yours."*

Between those two extremes lies the vast expanse of human experience, and as we blaze our path through the vicissitudes of life we find out that God, and our inner pure self, are accessible if we only look for them as the verse quoted above states: "God is truly close to all who seek Him honestly," and so is our soul. When the psalmist describes in Ps. 139 his attempts to flee God, he is actually referring to his efforts to avoid his true call and purpose in life, which culminate in the startling revelation that they are deeply imbedded in his soul and he cannot escape them:

> *my soul knows very well.* (139:14)

This brings us back to the opening statement by the rabbis, that God is closer to us on the Ten Days of Penitence. This paradoxical, almost heretical statement should be viewed in light of a parallel maxim, found in the Jerusalem Talmud (Berakhot 5:1):

> *God is closer to us in the Synagogue and Bet HaMidrash*

The rabbis are saying that God's proximity to us is a function of the effort we invest in finding Him, because He is always near and all we have to do is look. Praying with devotion and intention helps us find God and find our identity and self, and so does serious learning which goes beyond the abstract intellectual engagement and uses it to create a life imbued with spirituality and adherence to the Torah. In the same manner, God is more accessible to us on the ten days between Rosh HaShana and Kippur because at that time we are affected by the general atmosphere of selichot, prayers and preparations for the holiday. This idea is beautifully expressed in the special prayer preceding the blowing of the Shofar:

> *Please, Almighty God, remove the curtains which separate us from You*

This prayer describes us and God as situated on two sides of a curtain, very close to each other, yet unable to see each other. The Teshuva, repentance, is the ability to take action, search for meaning and self, thus removing the curtain and being in the presence of God.

This presence is referred to in last week's Parasha by the word *נצבים*. Moshe requires the people to always be aware that they are facing God, and that awareness should guide their thoughts, words and actions, from the most sublime – *ראשיכם*, your heads, to the most mundane, your basic, everyday provisions. It is that presence that Moshe mentions later in the Parasha, as he explains that closeness to God is in our hearts (Deut. 30:11-14), and now that we understand that our quest for the divine is inseparable from the quest for the humane and human which is hiding deep in our soul, covered by layers of disappointment and neglect, we can truly grasp the meaning of these verses:

> *This commandment which I place before you today (to find God – find yourself) is not inaccessible or far removed from you*

Ask not "who shall ascend the heavens to bring it to us?" for it is not in heaven

Ask not "who shall cross the ocean and bring it to us?" for it is not across the ocean

Rather it is very close to you, in your mouth and heart, all you have to do is act upon it…

At this point of our discussion I would like to suggest, based on what I have written so far, an alternative reading to a well-known verse (Deut. 4:29):

You will seek out God from exile and you will find Him as you search with all your heart and soul

If we move the comma just two words ahead, the verse will be interpreted thus:

You will seek out God from exile and as you search Him, you will find Him in your heart and in your soul!

Let us pray and hope that this year the sound of the shofar, simple, pure, powerful, will carry us to the lost realms of our childhood and help us retrieve a sense of the Image of God and our purpose in life, as seen through the eyes of an innocent child who still believes in the innate good nature of people and in his or her power to help themselves and others.

Endnote:

Inspiration, contemplation, and prayer can be found everywhere. I feel that the following poem is intuitively connected to the discussion in the article. Lyrics and music are by one of my favorite Israeli artists, Yehuda Poliker, and it describes the interaction between the adult self and the hidden child, here referred to as a shadow. I welcome your comments and thoughts.

My shadow and I embarked on a journey, the sun was halfway in the sky, at times I lead and at times the shadow on the path, clouds gathered in the sky, drops of water started rolling, my shadow recoiled in me, I continued my journey alone

The wind trembled, the fear trickled and permeated, my shadow shuddering inside, scarier than ever, he asks: "where are you taking me?" I respond: "where are you fleeing to?" why always protective walls? why shadow when there is light outside?

Let us fly far away, you will be my wings, to an imaginary bond, until now impossible, let us jump, take-off and fly, to the bond of shadow and body, why must we continue escaping, towards what we always wanted to forget

To forget the doors of confusion, the kid peeping through the keyhole, let us cross the border, to the freedom which was in shackles, and only melodies remind that outside you can be released of all fears, only when me and the shadow are together…

Shabbat Shalom; Gmar Chatima Tovah.

* Torah VeAhava (now SephardicU.com). Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD) and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** Hebrew quotes from the Torah, omitted here, are in Rabbi Ovadia's orginial. (My word processing software cannot handle the Hebrew accurately in Rabbi Ovadia's software.)

Vayelech: Between Shabbat and Teshuvah

By Tadhg Cleary *

Let me tell you about the day that humanity first discovered teshuvah.

As the midrash tells it, it all happens on the day Kayin killed Hevel. After that first murder, Kayin accepts HaShem's verdict as just — he is to be exiled from the land.

Kayin has sinned; the guilt of fratricide is too much to bear. He deeply regrets his crime. But Kayin has also discovered murder — how easy it is, how final. His punishment is to be an unending stranger, a vagrant with no roots in any society. He has killed his kin and so he will never have kinship. Kayin realizes that strangers in every society are vulnerable. No one is invested in them; nobody would notice if they disappear. Kayin now viscerally knows the fragility of human life. He fears his blood will be cheap in the eyes of anyone who comes across him. HaShem reassures Kayin, "I am the protector of the vulnerable, the guardian of the stranger. So long as I am with you, your blood will not be cheap." God makes an Oht (sign) in Kayin's flesh, a symbol of His promise and a warning to those who would take advantage of him (Gen. 4:8-15).

Our midrash picks up after God's verdict. Adam hurries after Kayin, no doubt anxious to know the outcome of the trial against his remaining son. But to his surprise, he finds Kayin happy. "What happened?" he asks. "Simple," Kayin responds. "I did teshuvah and God forgave me." Adam is blown over. Zo hi kocha shel teshuvah v'ani lo yadati — Such is the power of teshuvah, and I didn't know it!" If only Adam had known about teshuvah after his own sin. Instead of taking responsibility, Adam blamed anyone and everyone else for what he had done (Breishit Rabbah 22:13).

The midrash continues: In response to this incredible discovery, Adam composes a psalm to mark the occasion: Psalm 92, Mizmor Shir L'Yom HaShabbat, a psalm for the Sabbath day.

It's a bit of a bizarre conclusion. How does a song about Shabbat address Adam's frustration at missing the opportunity to repent? What does Shabbat have to do with teshuvah?

There are a number of interesting overlaps between Shabbat and teshuvah, but for now I would like to suggest, rather radically, that on some level Shabbat and teshuvah actually achieve the same primary goal — mechila and kapara (forgiveness and expiation).

Consider this statement of Rabbi Yochanan: "Whoever observes Shabbat in all its detail, even if they worshiped idolatry like the generation of Enosh, they will be forgiven" (Shab. 118b). Somehow, Shabbat is so central to our relationship with God, so critical, that it can even make up for serious deficiencies in other areas. What gives Shabbat this power?

Shabbat is special because Shabbat is an Oht (sign) of the covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people (see Ex. 31:17 and others). Shabbat is a kind of return; it is an expression, a strengthening, and a reinforcement of the covenantal relationship. The shomer Shabbat stops every seven days to recognise HaShem's creation and the special relationship they have with God by dint of being a Jew. This is undeniably an act of teshuvah (in its literal meaning of "return"), a return to God and a commitment to their continued relationship.

This is the deep insight of our midrash. Remember: Kayin's teshuvah is rewarded with an Oht, a sign, in his flesh as a symbol of God's guarantee and continued commitment to their relationship, despite his heinous crime. The Jewish people, like Kayin, are possessed of an Oht. Our commitment to Shabbat is our guarantee of the everlasting covenant of mutual commitment between us and the Creator. Adam may not have an Oht in his flesh like Kayin, but he recalls the power of Shabbat to represent and constitute a divine covenant. Jubilantly he declares, A song for Shabbat: It is good to thank the Lord and to sing praise to His great name!

This incredible midrash gives our experience of Shabbat a powerful new dimension — throughout the year and especially this week on Shabbat Shuva. Today we say no Selichot (penitential prayers), and make no Vidui (confession) — but our teshuvah on this day is no less potent. Let us make a special effort to make this Shabbat a holy and special day, and we may hope that it will stand as an everlasting sign between us and God, and become the unshakeable foundation for our forgiveness and atonement on Yom Kippur.

Shana Tova, G'mar Chatima Tova, and Shabbat Shalom!

* Tadhg Cleary, a second year Rabbinic student at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, divided the last ten years between New Zealand and Israel -- learning, teaching, and building Jewish community.

Vayelech, Shabbat Shuvah, Yom Kippur
By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

* Rabbi Rube is in the process of moving from Alabama to Auckland, NZ, where he will be Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation. We look forward to his completing this move and returning to send us new learning weekly.

Rav Kook Torah
Yom Kippur: Acharei Mot: Triple Measure of Incense

A Cloud in the Holy of Holies

The High Priest was only permitted to enter the inner sanctuary of the Temple on one day of the year — on Yom Kippur.

> *"Tell your brother Aaron that he may not enter the sanctuary behind the partition at any time... so that he may not die, for I appear over the Ark cover in a cloud."* (Lev. 16:2)

What exactly was this cloud inside the Holy of Holies? In Yoma 53a, the Talmud explains that this was a cloud of incense smoke. The ketoret (incense) played a central role in the special service of Yom Kippur. Only after burning the ketoret inside the Holy of Holies was the High Priest allowed to enter, as it says:

> *"Then he shall take a fire pan full of burning coals... together with two handfuls of finely ground incense... so that the cloud from the incense will envelop the Ark cover."* (Lev. 16:12-13)

What is this special connection between the ketoret and the Yom Kippur service? And why did it need to be finely pulverized to a greater degree than the incense that was offered on other days?

Beyond Time

Once a year, the kohanim would produce enough ketoret for the entire year. They would prepare 368 portions of ketoret — one portion for each day of the year, plus an extra three portions for Yom Kippur. Why did the service on Yom Kippur require an extra three measures of incense?

The central theme of Yom Kippur is teshuvah (repentance) and kapparah (atonement). What is remarkable about these concepts is that they allow us, in a sense, to rewrite the past. Teshuvah is not just about attaining forgiveness for past misdeeds. The Sages taught (Yoma 86b) that there is a level of elevated teshuvah through which "sins are transformed into merits." They further explained that the very day of Yom Kippur, even without the Temple service, provides atonement (Yoma 85b). What gives Yom Kippur this unique ability to transcend time and change history?

The inner essence of the entire year is contained within Yom Kippur. The Torah employs an unusual phrase to describe Yom Kippur: "once in the year" (Lev. 16:34). Yom Kippur has a singular quality that illuminates during the entire year. Thus the paradox: the special nature of Yom Kippur appears achat — once a year, within the framework of time -- but at the same time, it is ba-shanah — it influences and elevates the entire year, transcending the normal boundaries of time.

We may distinguish between three aspects of Yom Kippur and its special relationship to time:

- The special nature of the day itself with its own unique holiness.
- Its ability to repair and redeem the previous year.
- Its potential to influence and uplift the coming year.

Since Yom Kippur affects time in three directions — present, past, and future — the Yom Kippur service requires three extra measures of ketoret, in addition to the regular daily quota.

Extra Fine

Why did the ketoret of Yom Kippur need to be finely pulverized when it was prepared on the day before Yom Kippur?

Despite the fact that the scent of incense engages our most refined sense,1 the daily ketoret is offered within the framework of time and thus relates to our physical reality. But on Yom Kippur, the incense needs to be dakah min hadakah. It is returned to the mortar and pounded until it becomes a fine powder. The ketoret of Yom Kippur must match the singular holiness of the day. It must be extraordinarily refined, unfettered by the limitations of physicality and material needs. Only then will the ketoret correspond to Yom Kippur's lofty goals of pure thought and holy aspirations.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, pp. 139-141.)

1 "What is it that the soul enjoys and not the body? It is fragrant smells" (Berachot 43b).

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/ACHAREI_MOT_67.htm

Why Be Jewish? (5772, 5577, 5780)

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

In the last days of his life Moses renews the covenant between God and Israel. The entire book of Devarim has been an account of the covenant – how it came about, what its terms and conditions are, why it is the core of Israel's identity as an am kadosh, a holy people, and so on. Now comes the moment of renewal itself, a national rededication to the terms of its existence as a holy people under the sovereignty of God Himself.

Moses, however, is careful not to limit his words to those who are actually present. About to die, he wants to ensure that no future generation can say, "Moses made a covenant with our ancestors but not with us. We didn't give our consent. We are not bound." To preclude this he says these words:

> *"It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing here with us today before the Lord our God, and with whoever is not here with us today."* Deut. 29:13-14

As the commentators point out, the phrase "whoever is not here" cannot refer to Israelites alive at the time who happened to be somewhere else. That condition would not have been necessary since the entire nation was assembled there. Moses can only mean "generations not yet born." The covenant bound all Jews from that day to this. As the Talmud says: we are all mushba ve-omed meHar Sinai, "foresworn from Sinai" (Yoma 73b, Nedarim 8a). By agreeing to be God's people, subject to God's laws, our ancestors obligated us all.

Hence one of the most fundamental facts about Judaism. Converts excepted, we do not choose to be Jews. We are born as Jews. We become legal adults, subject to the commands and responsible for our actions, at the age of twelve for girls, thirteen for boys. But we are part of the covenant from birth. A bat or bar mitzvah is not a "confirmation." It involves no voluntary acceptance of Jewish identity. That choice took place more than three thousand years ago when Moses said, "It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with … whoever is not here with us today," meaning all future generations, including us.

But how can this be so? Surely a fundamental principle of Judaism is that there is no obligation without consent. How can we be bound by an agreement to which we were not parties? How can we be subject to a covenant on the basis of a decision taken long ago and far away by our distant ancestors?

The Sages, after all, raised a similar question about the Wilderness generation in the days of Moses who were actually there and did give their assent. The Talmud suggests that they were not entirely free to say 'No.'

“The Holy One, blessed be He, suspended the mountain over them like a barrel and said: If you say ‘Yes,’ all will be well, but if you say ‘No,’ this will be your burial-place.”

Shabbat 88b

On this, R. Acha bar Yaakov said: “This constitutes a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy of the covenant.” The Talmud replies that even though the agreement may not have been entirely free at the time, Jews asserted their consent voluntarily in the days of Ahasuerus, as suggested by the Book of Esther.

This is not the place to discuss this particular passage, but the essential point is clear. The Sages believed with great force that an agreement must be made freely in order to be binding. Yet we did not agree to be Jews. We were, most of us, born Jews. We were not there in Moses’ day when the agreement was made. We did not yet exist. How then can we be bound by the covenant?

This is not a small question. It is the question on which all others turn. How can Jewish identity be passed on from parent to child? If Jewish identity were merely racial or ethnic, we could understand it. We inherit many things from our parents – most obviously our genes. But being Jewish is not a genetic condition, it is a set of religious obligations. There is a halachic principle: zachin le-adam shelo be-fanav, “You can confer a benefit on someone else without their knowledge or consent” Ketubot 11a). And though it is doubtless a benefit to be a Jew, it is also in some sense a liability, a restriction on our range of legitimate choices, with grave consequences if we transgress. Had we not been Jewish, we could have worked on Shabbat, eaten non-kosher food, and so on. You can confer a benefit upon someone without their consent, but not a liability.

In short, this is the question of questions of Jewish identity. How can we be bound by Jewish law, without our choice, merely because our ancestors agreed on our behalf?

In my book *Radical Then, Radical Now*[1] I pointed out how fascinating it is to trace exactly when and where this question was asked. Despite the fact that everything else depends on it, it was not asked often. For the most part, Jews did not ask the question, ‘Why be Jewish?’ The answer was obvious. My parents are Jewish. My grandparents were Jewish. So I am Jewish. Identity is something most people in most ages take for granted.

It did, however, become an issue during the Babylonian exile. The prophet Ezekiel says, “What is in your mind shall never happen – the thought, ‘Let us be like the nations, like the tribes of the countries, and worship wood and stone’” (Ez. 20:32). This is the first reference to Jews actively seeking to abandon their identity.

It happened again in rabbinic times. We know that in the second century BCE there were Jews who Hellenised, seeking to become Greek rather than Jewish. There were others who, under Roman rule, sought to become Roman. Some even underwent an operation known as epispasm to reverse the effects of circumcision (in Hebrew they were known as meshuchim) to hide the fact that they were Jews.[2]

The third time was in Spain in the fifteenth century. That is where we find two Bible commentators, Rabbi Isaac Arama and Rabbi Isaac Abarbanel, raising precisely the question we have raised about how the covenant can bind Jews today. The reason they ask it while earlier commentators did not was that in their time – between 1391 and 1492 – there was immense pressure on Spanish Jews to convert to Christianity, and as many as a third may have done so (they were known in Hebrew as the anusim, in Spanish as the conversos, and derogatively as marranos, “swine”). The question “Why stay Jewish?” was real.

The answers given were different at different times. Ezekiel’s answer was blunt: “As I live, declares the Lord God, surely with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out I will be King over you” (Ezek. 20:33). In other words, Jews might try to escape their destiny but they would fail. Even if it were against their will, they would always be known as Jews. That, tragically, is what happened during the two great ages of assimilation, fifteenth century Spain and in Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In both cases, racial antisemitism persisted, and Jews continued to be persecuted.

The Sages answered the question mystically. They said that even the souls of Jews not-yet-born were present at Sinai and ratified the covenant (Exodus Rabbah 28:6). Every Jew, in other words, did give their consent in the days of Moses even though they had not yet been born. Demystifying this, perhaps the Sages meant that in their innermost hearts, even the most assimilated Jew knew that they were Jewish. That seems to have been the case with public figures like Heinrich Heine and Benjamin Disraeli, who lived as Christians but often wrote and thought as Jews.

The fifteenth-century Spanish commentators found this answer problematic. As Arama said, we are each of us both body and soul. How then is it sufficient to say that our soul was present at Sinai? How can the soul obligate the body? Of course the soul agrees to the covenant. Spiritually, to be a Jew is a privilege, and you can confer a privilege on someone without their consent. But for the body, the covenant is a burden. It involves all sorts of restrictions on physical pleasures. Therefore if the souls of future generations were present but not their bodies, this would not constitute consent.

Radical Then, Radical Now is my answer to this question. But perhaps there is a simpler one. Not every obligation that binds us is one to which we have freely given our assent. There are obligations that come with birth. The classic example is a crown prince or princess. To be the heir to a throne involves a set of duties and a life of service to others. It is possible to neglect these duties. In extreme circumstances it is even possible for a monarch to abdicate. But no one can choose to be heir to a throne. That is a fate, a destiny, that comes with birth.
The people of whom God Himself said, “My child, My firstborn, Israel” (Ex. 4:22) knows itself to be royalty. That may be a privilege. It may be a burden. It is almost certainly both. It is a peculiar post-Enlightenment delusion to think that the only significant things about us are those we choose. For the truth is that we do not choose some of the most important facts about ourselves. We did not choose to be born. We did not choose our parents. We did not choose the time and place of our birth. Yet each of these affects who we are and what we are called on to do.

We are part of a story that began long before we were born and will continue long after we are no longer here, and the question for all of us is: Will we continue the story? The hopes of a hundred generations of our ancestors rest on our willingness to do so. Deep in our collective memory the words of Moses continue to resonate. “It is not with you alone that I am making this sworn covenant, but with … whoever is not here with us today.” We are each a key player in this story. We can live it. We can abandon it. But it is a choice we cannot avoid, and it has immense consequences. The future of the covenant rests with us.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Jonathan Sacks, *Radical Then, Radical Now,* London: HarperCollins, 2000, (published in North America as A Letter in the Scroll, New York: Free Press, 2000).

[2] This is what R. Elazar of Modiin means in Mishnah Avot 3:15 when he refers to one who “nullifies the covenant of our father Abraham.”

* 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.

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/nitzavim/why-be-jewish/

Choose Life So That You May Live: An Essay on Vayelech

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz)* © Chabad 2022

At first glance, the content of Parshat Nitzavim seems identical to that of the preceding parsha. Although this parsha has fewer curses and perhaps fewer blessings than Parshat Ki Tavo, it repeats the same essential elements. Nevertheless, a difference in mood can be discerned, a difference that makes Parshat Nitzavim the more appropriate parsha to read before Rosh Hashanah.

In Ki Tavo, the blessings and curses stand opposite one another and create a somber mood, a feeling that there is no way out. By contrast, in Nitzavim there is a certain optimism that does not exist in Ki Tavo. Parshat Nitzavim speaks of

teshuva, conveying the message that all is not lost, and that there is a way to set things right. It has a tone of hope that says that there is a way out of the distress, and this hope changes the mood of the entire parsha.

The curses in Ki Tavo conclude with the following description: “G d will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by the way that I said you would never see again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as slaves and maids, but there will be no buyer.”1 In Nitzavim the conclusion is quite different: “When all these things have befallen you – the blessing and the curse…and you will reflect on them…and you will return to G d your L rd and obey Him.”2

Parshat Ki Tavo can be summarized as follows: “If you do what is good, you will prosper; but if you do not, you will suffer.” In this parsha, too, there is a similar connection between “life and good, death and evil.”3 But here, there is also the way of teshuva: “And you will reflect…and you will return to G d your L rd.”4 The difference between the two parshas is the factor of teshuva.

What is the essence of teshuva? The fact is that people sometimes make poor decisions, and these decisions often lead to suffering. For example, one might find himself in a difficult situation, and he might decide to relieve himself and his family of their troubles by jumping off the roof. This kind of story does occur; it is unfortunately part of our reality. But what happens if, on his way down, when he reaches the fifth floor, he decides that it was not wise to take this step? The problem is that he has already fallen; he has committed an irreversible act. Correspondingly, one would think that when a person commits a sin, it should be like the person who has jumped off the roof. Remorse in such a case is useless. But because of the existence of teshuva, an act can become reversible; there is a way to stop in the middle of a fall and turn back the clock.

The Midrash relates the following:

> *Wisdom was asked: What should be the sinner’s punishment? Wisdom answered: “Evil pursues sinners.”5 Prophecy was asked: What should be the sinner’s punishment? Prophecy answered: “The soul who sins shall die.”6 The Torah was asked: What should be the sinner’s punishment? The Torah answered: “Let him bring a guilt offering, and his sin will be atoned for.” The Holy One, Blessed Be He, was asked: What should be the sinner’s punishment? He answered: “Let him do teshuva, and his sin will be atoned for.”*7

The punishment of death for a sinner is not excessive. One who sins is, by the laws of nature, like one who swallows poison. However, the innovation of teshuva lies in the possibility of reversing this reality.

Choose Life

Parshat Nitzavim contains, besides the element of teshuva, an additional element that likewise is not found in the preceding parsha: the element of persuasion. Parshat Ki Tavo establishes the facts, as a physician does: “If you follow my instructions, you will live another three months. If you do otherwise, the consequences will be different.” In Parshat Nitzavim, however, we find, more than once, persuasion to choose one option over the other: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day: I have put before you life and death…Choose life.”8

When Moses tells the People of Israel that the options are life and death, he is merely stating the facts. But then he adds, as good counsel: “Choose life, so that you may live.” Moses says that the people already know the consequences each path will bring, and the choice between the two is theirs to make. Still, his advice is to choose life. Indeed, our sages themselves pointed out that after Moses shows them what the path to blessing is and what the path to curse is, and sets the two choices against each other, he asks them to choose the good path.9

The same point is found in the case of Joshua as well. Joshua is Moses’ servant, and in a certain respect he is also his complement. Moses and Joshua are often regarded as one unit, sharing a division of labor. There are many things that Moses starts and Joshua finishes, that Moses sets up and Joshua establishes. As a continuation of Moses’ words, Joshua, at the end of his life, suggests to the People of Israel, “G d took you out of Egypt, gave you the Torah, and brought you into the Land, and we have reached a state of rest and security. Now, the decision is in your hands: If you want, serve G d; if you are loathe to serve G d, ‘I and my household will serve G d.’”10

Blessing or Curse

The Torah speaks of choosing the good, and advises us to choose life. However, when one must implement the choice in reality, it is not always clear which path to choose; distinguishing the blessing from the curse is not always simple. If the reality were clear to us, we would not commit so many errors.

Sometimes one makes a decision based on his perception of the reality, and afterward – even if it becomes clear that the decision was made on the basis of mistaken assumptions – he can no longer withdraw the decision that he made. One chooses what he thinks is a blessing, and he ends up being totally subservient to it, even though it has already become a curse for him.

In other instances, the question whether something is a blessing or a curse is completely subjective. For one person it could be a curse, but for someone else it could be a blessing. It could be that now it is a curse, but at another time it will be a blessing.

In all these matters, one's perspective is often the deciding factor. The Talmud relates of Nachum Ish Gamzu that no matter what befell him, he would declare, "This, too (gam zu), is for the best." Even when he was without hands and legs, he continued to say, "This, too, is for the best."11 One can lead a perfect life, and yet his whole life might feel like a curse, depending on his perspective. Thus, the choice between blessing and curse is partly subjective: How does one regard the events that transpire in one's life?

It is common to bless someone that he should have G d-fearing children who will become great sages. However, the nature of such a blessing depends on the perspective of its recipient. Some would rejoice upon receiving such a blessing and would respond, "The same to you!" Others – particularly those who are not themselves G d-fearing individuals – might become distraught upon receiving such a blessing, regarding it as a terrible curse.

When one encounters something of this nature, one must look at it, scrutinize it, and consider what may result from it. It often happens that it is the individual who decides whether it is a blessing or a curse; it is not a matter of knowing the future. If one decides to accept something as a curse, it will only grow worse, while if one decides to accept it as a blessing, it will fulfill that initial perception.

There was once a captain who, on a voyage, saw various lumps floating near his ship. He drew them out of the water, but they stunk up the whole ship, so he threw them back into the water. What he did not know was that these lumps were actually ambergris, an incredibly rare and valuable substance secreted by sperm whales that is used in some perfumes. When one possesses such a lump knowing that it is a blessing, it means that one was fortunate enough to happen upon a great treasure. But if one does not know what this lump is, it seems worthless. One throws it back into the ocean and is happy to have gotten rid of it.

This is a very significant point regarding the Torah as well, since the entire Torah can be considered a blessing or a curse. We have 613 mitzvot; this might seem like a huge number – who can meet so many requirements? This perspective turns the whole Torah into a curse. However, an alternative perspective is found in the Mishna: "The Holy One, Blessed Be He, wanted to give Israel merit; He therefore gave them a large amount of Torah and mitzvot."12

Is Jewish identity a source of joy and pride, or a source of shame and disgrace that one tries to get rid of? The brilliant poet and apostate Heinrich Heine said, "Judaism is not a religion; it is a curse." When one knows that he will never be rid of his Judaism, he sometimes experiences this as a terrible curse that dogs him his whole life. In his own eyes, he was born with a kind of genetic defect. By contrast, the Maggid of Kozhnitz would say, "If I were sure that I was definitely descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, I would put aside my hat and perform the Cossack dance in the street, for having this merit."

Blessing and curse do not necessarily exist in two separate worlds; sometimes they are in the same place. The Talmud states that the tzaddikim in Gan Eden sit and enjoy the splendor of the Shechina.13 In Gan Eden, there is no eating or drinking, only enjoyment of the Torah. There are people who deserve to be sent to Gehinom, but should really be sent to Gan Eden. For some people, an eternity of constant Torah study would be the greatest form of torture.

To choose life is to see things from the right perspective things from the right perspective, to choose the good aspect in everything. It is not just the question of whether or not to be a Jew, whether or not to keep the mitzvot. One can decide to

be a good Jew and yet perceive one's Judaism as a kind of curse: Against one's will one lives, against one's will one dies, and against one's will one is a Jew. There is nothing worse than perceiving the Torah as an inherited burden, because there is absolutely nothing that one can do about it.

This distinction is emphasized by the Ari in his interpretation of the passage, "All these curses will come upon you, pursue you, and overtake you…instead of (tachat) serving G d your L rd with joy and with gladness over the abundance of all things. You will therefore serve your enemies."14

The simple explanation of the passage – as we find in Targum Onkelos – is: Instead of serving G d with joy, you did not keep the mitzvot, and therefore all these curses will come upon you and overtake you.

The Arizal, however, explained that the word tachat should actually be translated as "because." That is to say, because you did not serve G d with joy, "you will serve your enemies." Punishment comes not because you did not serve G d, but because you did not serve Him with joy and with gladness; it comes because you accepted the Torah as a punishment and as a curse.

"Choose life," therefore, relates not only to the choice itself, but also to the manner in which one chooses.

"How Great is Your Goodness"

There are good things in life whose excellence can be conveyed to others by explanation, and there are things that one can learn only directly, through personal experience. When one is able to see the goodness of G d – "How great is Your goodness that You have hidden away for those who fear You"15 – it is a personal experience that cannot be taught or communicated to others.
Every Shabbat, we recite a similar verse: "Taste and see that G d is good."16 Taste cannot be received from others. In order to perceive it, one must taste it himself. This is a fundamental point within the Jewish experience. Although one who has experienced the delight of the Torah can forget part of his learning, he can never forget the pleasure, the taste, and the feeling of that experience.

There are certain tastes that everyone can recognize; a child generally does not have to be persuaded to eat candy. But there are some things that require sophistication to appreciate. A child must grow in maturity to appreciate the taste of a salty dish. This is not because the dish is not tasty. Rather, tastes change, and in order to appreciate certain tastes, one must first grow up a little.

Similarly, few people can appreciate complex music. Everyone, except perhaps a deaf person, can listen to and enjoy a simple melody. But to enjoy music that is complex, like a symphony, one must first learn to appreciate it. It could be that after one learns to enjoy such music, he will no longer be able to listen to simple music; it will be too vulgar for him. This is true not only of relatively abstract things like music; it is also true of good wine and many other things as well.

When the Torah says that we have before us "life and good," sometimes a shell must be cracked to reveal the good. Sometimes one must chew quite a lot before the good can be tasted. Sometimes one must educate himself, and many years might pass until one can discern what is truly good. Things that are obviously good are easily perceived, but to perceive the things that are truly good, one must develop this skill over time.

"Choose life": To get into the matter, to absorb it, to gain an inner understanding of it, one must make a great effort, an effort aimed at experiencing the spiritual flavor of life.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Deuteronomy 28:68.

2. Deuteronomy 30:1–2.

3. Deuteronomy 30:15.

4. Deuteronomy 30:1–2.

5. Proverbs 13:21.

6. Ezekiel 18:4.

7. Pesikta DeRabbi -Kahana 24:7.

8. Deuteronomy 30:19.

9. Sifrei, Deuteronomy 53.

10. Joshua 24.

11. Taanit 21a.

12. Makkot 3:16.

13. Brachot 17a.

14. Deuteronomy 28:47.

15. Psalms 31:20.

16. Psalms 34:9.

***** One of the leading rabbis of this century and author of many books, Rabbi Steinsaltz was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4942518/jewish/Choose-Life-So-That-You-May-Live.htm

---

Vayeilech: King of Yourself

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

> *"When all Israel comes to appear before G-d, in the place He will choose, you must read this Torah before all Israel so they hear."* Deuteronomy 31:11

Moses conveyed G-d's command to the people that they assemble once every seven years, during the festival of Sukot, in order to hear their king read specific passages from the Torah. Although they were commanded to study the Torah in any case, this ceremony was designed to instill renewed commitment to G-d's covenant with them.

We are all required to appoint a metaphorical “king” over ourselves, i.e., a spiritual counselor responsible for ensuring that we stay firmly on the path of spiritual growth. This king’s primary responsibility is to “read to us” – i.e., inculcate us with – the same passages from the Torah that the real king reads to the people at the septennial assembly.

The first passage that the king reads (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) focuses on accepting “the yoke of the kingdom of heaven,” i.e., submitting to G-d’s authority. The second passage (Deuteronomy 11:13-21) teaches us that material success is dependent upon heeding G-d’s commands.

Keeping these two lessons in the forefront of our consciousness is the key to continued spiritual growth.

– from *Daily Wisdom #3*

Gemar Chasima Tov; Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

To receive the complete D'Vrai Torah package weekly by E-mail, send your request to AfisherADS@Yahoo.com. The printed copies contain only a small portion of the D'Vrai Torah. Dedication opportunities available. Authors retain all copyright privileges for their sections.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Volume 28, Issue 51 **Shabbat Shuva Parashat Vayelech** **5783 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Torah as Song

Moses' long and tempestuous career is about to end. With words of blessing and encouragement he hands on the mantle of leadership to his successor Joshua, saying "I am a hundred and twenty years old now, and I may no longer able to enter and to leave, since the Lord has told me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.'" (Deut. 31:2)

As Rashi notes, it is written, "shall not", although Moses is still physically capable. He is still in full bodily vigour, "his eyes had not grown dim, nor his vitality fled." (Deut. 34:7) But he has reached the end of his personal road. The time had come for another age, a new generation, and a different kind of leader.

But before he takes his leave of life, God has one last command for him, and through him, for the future. "So now write down this Song and teach it to the Children of Israel. Place it in their mouths, that this Song may be My witness against them." Deut. 31:19

The plain sense of the verse is that God was commanding Moses and Joshua to write out the song that follows, that of Ha'azinu (Deut. 32:1-43). So Rashi and Nahmanides understand it. But the Oral Tradition read it differently. According to the Sages, "So now write down this Song" applies to the Torah as a whole. Thus the last of all the 613 commands is to write – or at least take part in writing, if only a single letter – a Torah scroll. Here is Maimonides' statement of the law:

Every Israelite is commanded to write a Torah scroll for himself, as it says, "Now therefore write this song," meaning, "Write for yourselves [a complete copy of] the Torah that contains this song," since we do not write isolated passages of the Torah [but only a complete scroll]. Even if one has inherited a Torah scroll from his parents, nonetheless it is a mitzvah to write one for oneself, and one who does so is as if he had received [the Torah] from Mount Sinai. One who does not know how to write a scroll may engage [a scribe] to do it for him, and whoever corrects even one letter is as if he has written a whole scroll.[1]

Why this command? Why then, at the end of Moses' life? Why make it the last of all the commands? And if the reference is to the Torah as a whole, why call it a "song"?

The Oral Tradition is here hinting at a set of very deep ideas. First, it is telling the Israelites, and us in every generation, that it is not enough to say, "We received the Torah from Moses," or "from our parents." We have to take the Torah and make it new in every generation. We have to write our own scroll. The point about the Torah is not that it is old but that it is new; it is not just about the past but about the future. It is not simply some ancient document that comes from an earlier era in the evolution of society. It speaks to us, here, now – but not without our making the effort to write it again.

There are two Hebrew words for an inheritance: nachalah and yerushah/ morashah. They convey different ideas. Nachalah is related to the word nachal, meaning a river, a stream. As water flows downhill, so an inheritance flows down the generations. It happens naturally. It needs no effort on our part.

A yerushah / morashah is different. Here the verb is active. It means to take possession of something by a positive deed or effort. The Israelites received the land as a result of God's promise to Abraham. It was their legacy, their nachalah, but they nonetheless had to fight battles and win wars. Lehavdil, Mozart and Beethoven were both born to musical fathers. Music was in their genes, but their art was the result of almost endless hard work. Torah is a morashah, not a nachalah. We need to write it for ourselves, not merely inherit it from our ancestors.

And why call the Torah a Song? Because if we are to hand on our faith and way of life to the next generation, it must sing. Torah must be affective, not just cognitive. It must speak to our emotions. As Antonio Damasio showed empirically in Descartes' Error[2], though the reasoning part of the brain is central to what makes us human, it is the limbic system, the seat of the emotions, that leads us to choose this way, not that. If our Torah lacks passion, we will not succeed in passing it on to the future. Music is the affective dimension of communication, the medium through which we express, evoke, and share emotion. Precisely because we are creatures of emotion, music is an essential part of the vocabulary of humankind.

Music has a close association with spirituality. As Rainer Maria Rilke put it:

Words still go softly out towards the unsayable.
And music always new, from palpitating stones
Builds in useless space its godly home.[3]

Song is central to the Judaic experience. We do not pray; we daven, meaning we sing the words we direct toward Heaven. Nor do we read the Torah. Instead we chant it, each word with its own cantillation. Even rabbinical texts are never merely studies; we chant them with the particular sing-song known to all students of Talmud. Each time and text has its specific melodies. The same prayer may be sung to half-a-dozen different tunes depending on whether it is part of the morning, afternoon, or evening service, and whether the day is a weekday, a Sabbath, a festival, or one of the High Holy Days. There are different cantillations for biblical readings, depending on whether the text comes from Torah, the prophets, or the Ketuvim, 'the writings'. Music is the map of the Jewish spirit, and each spiritual experience has its own distinctive melodic landscape.

Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it modulates into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. Music speaks to something deeper than the mind. If we are to make Torah new in every generation, we have to find ways of singing its song a new way. The words never change, but the music does.

A previous Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Avraham Shapiro, once told me a story about two great rabbinic Sages of the nineteenth century, equally distinguished scholars, one of whom lost his children to the secular spirit of the age, the other of whom was blessed by children who followed in his path. The difference between them was this, he said: when it came to seudah shlishit, the third Sabbath meal, the former spoke words of Torah while the latter sang songs. His message was clear. Without an affective dimension – without music – Judaism is a body without a soul. It is the songs we teach our children that convey our love of God.

Some years ago, one of the leaders of world Jewry wanted to find out what had happened to the "missing Jewish children" of Poland, those

who, during the war, had been adopted by Christians families and brought up as Catholics. He decided that the easiest way was through food. He organised a large banquet and placed advertisements in the Polish press, inviting whoever believed they had been born a Jew to come to this free dinner. Hundreds came, but the evening was on the brink of disaster since none of those present could remember anything of their earliest childhood – until the man asked the person sitting next to him if he could remember the song his Jewish mother had sung to him before going to sleep. He began to sing Rozhinkes mit Mandlen ('Raisins and Almonds') the old Yiddish lullaby. Slowly others joined in, until the whole room was a chorus. Sometimes all that is left of Jewish identity is a song.

Rabbi Yechiel Michael Epstein (1829-1908) in the introduction to the Aruch HaShulchan, Choshen Mishpat, writes that the Torah is compared to a song because, to those who appreciate music, the most beautiful choral sound is a complex harmony with many different voices singing different notes. So, he says, it is with the Torah and its myriad commentaries, its "seventy faces". Judaism is a choral symphony scored for many voices, the Written Text its melody, the Oral Tradition its polyphony.

So it is with a poetic sense of closure that Moses' life ends with the command to begin again in every generation, writing our own scroll, adding our own commentaries, the people of the book endlessly reinterpreting the book of the people, and singing its song. The Torah is God's libretto, and we, the Jewish people, are His choir. Collectively we have sung God's Song. We are the performers of His choral symphony. And though when Jews speak they often argue, when they sing, they sing in harmony, because words are the language of the mind but music is the language of the soul.

[1] Laws of Tefillin, Mezuzah and Sefer Torah, 7:1
[2] Antonio Damasio, Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain, London, Penguin, 2005.
[3] "Sonnets to Orpheus," book II, sonnet 10.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

"One Verse, Many Lessons"

We met in a Jerusalem café, and I must admit that, although they recognized me, I neither recognized nor even recalled any of them. That is, until they began to reminisce about their common experience as students of mine. Suddenly, the many intervening years evaporated, and I felt as if I was back in that classroom of so long ago.

Let me tell you about the class, which was no ordinary one. My wife and I were then living in a suburb of Washington, DC, where I was pursuing postgraduate studies at the Washington School of Psychiatry. To help make ends meet, I taught adult education classes for the local Jewish Federation.

The director of the program informed me that, although the prospective students had high levels of secular education, their Jewish educations ranged from considerable to negligible. It would be my task to create a curriculum which would be challenging intellectually, but which would also meet the needs of a religiously very diverse group.

I agreed to teach the class and created a course entitled "The Very Last Mitzvah in the Torah." About ten or twelve adults signed up for the class—mostly men, as I recall, but with two or three women as well. Until the meeting that I am about to describe, the only feedback I was given came in the form of a note from the program director that the student evaluations of my teaching were satisfactory, and that I was requested to teach another course the next semester.

More than four decades later, I found myself sitting with four members of that group and learning that lifelong friendships had developed between all the members of the class, and that four of the students had made aliyah and created lives for themselves in Israel. They were eager to catch me up on the details of their lives but preferred at first to reminisce.

Almost simultaneously and in unison, they recited the verse that was the core of the entire course. This verse is to be found in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Vayelech (Deuteronomy 31:1-30). It reads, "Write down this song and teach it to the people of Israel; put it in their mouths..."

They went on to recall the difficulty I had convincing them, and their equally argumentative classmates, that these words were a command to all Jews, for all future generations, to write a Torah scroll for themselves, or to have one written for them.

One of them, let's call him Sheldon, insisted that we, at least at first, limit our conversation to the effect that this verse had upon the lives of each of them. He began with his own story: "When I signed up for the class, I did so in a state of total ignorance of Judaism. I had moved to Washington to take up a position in an insurance company. I was alone and lonely and signed up for the course more for companionship than for scholarship. I soon changed my attitude and remember asking you about the best way to begin to gain more knowledge about my faith. You referred to the verse we all just recited and told me that the best thing I could do was to take any translation of the Chumash, the Five Books of Moses, and simply read it through from beginning to end. I did so, and I was hooked."

Let's refer to the second fellow to chime in as Dan. He elaborated upon Sheldon's remarks and informed me that Sheldon was being excessively modest. "I want you to know that ever since that first exposure to the Chumash, Sheldon has never failed to complete the entire book every year, usually with a different rabbinic commentary each year. At our meetings, he inevitably catches us up with his latest Torah insights."

Sheldon was not long in prodding Dan to boast a bit about the direction in which this one verse in our parsha had taken Dan. So Dan let us in on some of his story: "I remember how you had asked us to imagine the Jewish people living for a long period of time with no knowledge of the Torah, without even an awareness of its existence. We resisted this assignment, partly because we were convinced that this never could have happened. It is inconceivable that there could have been a time when the entire Jewish people were ignorant of the Torah. But then you read to us the story in the Book of Kings II, chapters 22 and 23 as I recall, in which the Torah was rediscovered during the reign of King Josiah, after having been forgotten for more than a generation. I became interested then, not only in the Five Books of Moses, but in all of the Bible. I eventually earned a doctorate in biblical history and have written more than one book on the subject."

At that point, Dan's surname came into clearer focus for me, and I told him that I had indeed read one of his books. I apologized to him that I no longer owned it because I had recently donated the greater portion of my library to my former synagogue and to a local yeshiva.

It was now the chance for the third person in our group to take center stage. "There is something that I remember from that class that fits right in to what you just told us—that you have donated so many of your books to others to study," he said. "You had taught us that one of the Medieval rabbinic authorities, perhaps Rabbenu Asher, had ruled that if one distributed any sacred book to others to read and study, it was as if he had written his own Torah scroll. I don't know whether or not you have ever written a Torah scroll, but you fulfilled the last mitzvah of the Torah by sharing your books with others."

It was now the turn for group member number four. "There is one thing that you said in passing that remained with me all these years. I was then a student of musicology, a cherished subject which never eventuated in a career for me. But I was intrigued by a statement you quoted from a man you identified as one of your most inspiring rabbinic figures. Long afterwards, I learned that it was Rav Kook who made the statement. You pointed out that the verse we were studying refers to the Torah as a song, as music. Rav Kook went further and said that just as music has its rules, so too do rules have their music. That was such an important lesson for me. I came to the class from a very observant background, but I was

turned off by the many rules that comprised the Judaism I was taught. The notion that rules have their own music has been a lifelong inspirational lesson for me and has enabled me to better appreciate the rules of Jewish observance."

The conversation ended, and we said our goodbyes. Walking home, I debated inwardly about whether or not I should write about this experience. I was proud beyond words that such a worthy group remembered and valued my teaching. I asked myself whether or not it would be appropriate for me to share this flattering experience with my readers.

I had just about decided not to do so when two realizations occurred to me .Firstly, I became aware that I had just experienced a reiteration of a lesson I have long sought to convey to others. Teachers never know the impact they have on their students. Often, they become deeply discouraged, convinced that their years of teaching were for naught. Writing about my experience would bring encouragement to others who have labored in the trying vineyards of the teaching profession.

Secondly, after some further thought, I realized that it was not my teaching skill that left a lifelong impact upon these fine men. In fact, I had no cause to feel flattered. My words were not at all the cause of their inspired learnings. Rather, the words that inspired them were the Torah's words: the verse in this week's parsha, the sacred narrative in the Book of Kings II, the ruling of Rabbenu Asher, and Rav kook's pithy epigram.

I was merely the messenger who brought those words to the eager ears of some wonderful young adults. After all is said and done, every teacher is but a messenger. And we are all teachers.

OU Dear Torah
Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm, z"l

Heart And Mind

There are two ways of relating to God, and hence two modes of teshuvah: the ways of the heart and of the mind, of feeling and of reason. The flame of faith, the אש דת, produces both warmth and light--warmth for the heart, and light to illuminate the mind. Religion can be conceived of as an appeal to the emotion or to the intellect.

These two approaches can be seen as opposed to each other in the prescriptions offered by two Tannaim, both of whose sayings are recorded in Avot. In one, Rabbi (Rabbi Judah the Prince) tells us: הסתכל בשלשה דברים ואי אתה בא לידי עבירה--consider three things and you will steer clear of sin. "Know what is above you: a seeing eye, a hearing ear, and all your deeds are recorded in a book." Here is an intellectual formulation for teshuvah. You must know what is above you. You must elevate your thinking towards the higher goal, and you will realize, quite rationally, that man cannot hide from Providence, that all he does is of significance to the Creator, that there is a balance and a reason and a logic to all of life.

The second option is that of Akavia ben Mahalallel. He begins with the identical introduction that Rabbi does: "Consider three things and you will steer clear from sin." But his three guide-posts are considerably different: "know from whence you came--the fetid drop; where you are going--the place of dust and maggots and worms; and before Whom you have to give an account--before the Holy One, the King of Kings, blessed be He." Akavia is not appealing to our reason. He is addressing our existential concerns. He is touching our deeply-felt awareness of our nothingness, our marginality and triviality and insignificance. He is reminding us of our purely biological origin, and that our end is nothing more significant than being food for worms. And he is compounding that by calling our attention to the fact that unbearably trivial as we are, we must yet face the ineffable Source of all being…

These two casts of mind run like two threads through the fabric of Jewish religious experience. For instance, in the Middle Ages, it was Maimonides who represented the rationalist school, the idea that the highest goal of Judaism is daat, knowledge, the attainment of the right ideas about God. As opposed to him, we have a thinker like Rabbi Yehudah Halevi who maintains that the highest ideal is not knowledge but devekut, cleaving to God, the emotional experience of closeness to the Creator.

In more modern times, we find a similar division between the Hasidim and Mitnaggedim. The Mitnaggedim elevated the study of Torah to the highest rank of Jewish values, whereas the Hasidim cherished emotion, prayer, ecstasy. For the Mitnaggedim, the way to repentance begins with the study of Torah. For Hasidim, it begins with the turning of the soul and the heart to God; it is experiential.

Which of these approaches is the most authentically Jewish? This is not an idle question. We face the problem practically and regularly in contemporary Jewish life. What shall we emphasize in the synagogue--adult education or prayer? There are those who have turned the entire service into a study session, with dialogues and monologues and lectures. There are others who have turned the study of Torah into a "ruah" session, with singing and shouting and appealing to emotions. Shall our Jewish education be geared primarily to inform our children, and fill them with knowledge--as in the traditional yeshivot--or shall we try for something more inspiration, with a seminar system and all that goes with it? When we appeal to young people to come to Judaism, shall be base our appeal upon arguments or experience?

In a sense it all boils down to this: Is Judaism primarily an objective system, a theology, or a legally consistent way of life, rationally conceived and executed?--or is it addressed to our subjectivity, an orientation and way of life that must be experienced rather than thought through?

I suggest that the answer of our tradition is not either/or, but a both/and response. We can choose either way, and preferably both. It all depends upon our own personality structure. Whether one--and there are very few such-- is completely cerebral or completely emotional, all heart or all mind, he too can find his place in Judaism. Most of us are someplace in between; every human and personality differs in the "mix" of rational and affective elements.

When, therefore, I say that we find elements of both reason and emotion in Judaism, I am not just stating the obvious and reasserting a truism. Rather, what I am saying is that Judaism is not monolithic, it is available and open to all kinds of personality, all varieties of human character. Whether you intend to be more logical or more feeling, more intellectual or more emotional, you can find that in Judaism which resonates and articulates with your own personality cast! There is therefore no excuse for anyone to pull away from Jewish life because it does not appeal to him. If you consider yourself intelligent and are put off by emotionalism, see if you can plunge into the sea of Talmud without drowning! If you feel apprehensive about the intellectual demands of Judaism, and are a more feeling person, then remember that in Judaism you have that which plays upon the full range of emotions, from genuine dread and awe through the highest reaches of pure ecstasy.

Let us now see how both of these elements are present in the various observances of this season. The main part of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah is the teruah. The tekiot, the long blasts which begin and end each shofar sound, are merely ancillary. But what is the teruah sound? The Rabbis were of two minds. Some identified it with our present shevarim. The three intermediate size blasts, and some maintained it is what we today call teruah, the staccato or series of nine very short sounds. What do these symbolize? The Rabbis referred to the three intermediate size blasts as גנוחי גנח, sighing or groaning; the nine short blasts were identified as ילולי יליל, sobbing. What is the difference between them? The late Rabbi Kook, of blessed memory, said that the difference is this: sighing or groaning is the reaction to an intellectual effort. It takes an account of my past, I consider what I have done rationally, and I come to the conclusion that I have been a dreadful failure. I therefore sigh and groan. The גנוחי גנח is therefore my response and my urge to repentance by means of the mind. ילולי יליל, uncontrolled sobbing, is obviously the sudden emotional awareness of the abyss that lies before me and into which I

am toppling. It is an unmediated response of the heart, and this too leads to repentance.

What do we do? The answer is: all three. First we sound tekiah-shevarim-tekiah--the intellectual form of teshuva. Then we do tekiah-teruah-tekiah, the purely emotional way. And then we combine them: tekiah-shevarim-teruah-tekiah, representing the great majority of us who live on both plains, sometimes inclining one way and sometimes another.

During the Selihot season, we refer to God as רב חסד ואמת, One Who is abundant in love and in truth. Love refers to His response to our emotional approach, truth to His response to our cognitive approach. One Yom Kippur, when we come to the climax of the day during the Neilah, we have the אתה נותן יד two most important prayers, each of which represents a different facet. First we say You extend Your hand to the sinner, and are willing to accept him in repentance. And —לפושעים then we cry out: מה אנו, מה חיינו, מה צדקנו, מה ישועתנו, מה כחנו, מה גבורתנו--"what are we, what is our lives, what is our righteousness, what is our help, what is our strength, what is our power!" The very repetition of the word mah is in itself a form of onomatopoeia, the sound of sobbing!

And then we turn to another paragraph which takes the other view: אתה הבדלת אנוש מראש, You separated man from the very beginning out of the rest of creation; he may be an organic, ותכירהו לעמוד --biological creature, but he has something that goes beyond the rest of natural life You acknowledged man as something special, and made him worthy to stand before You. It ,לפניך is his mind and his soul that marks him off from all the rest of the natural world. He is a creature endowed with a mind!

On Sukkot too we have both themes. The holiday is the זמן שמחתנו, the time of joy, the outpouring of great emotion. But the meaning of Sukkot is למען ידעו דורותיכם, in order that our generations know that and why God commanded us to dwell in Sukkot.
Perhaps all of this is most beautifully expressed in the Haftorah for this Shabbat Shuva. Remarkably, on this Shabbat we read from three different Prophets, and all three taken together represents what we have been trying to say.

The first one, from Hosea, is one in which we find an appeal to the Jewish mind to do teshuvah. "Return O Israel to the Lord your God, כי כשלת בעוניך, because you stumbled on your sins." The word ki, "because," in itself is indicative of reasoning. The prophet tells us to recognize that we are bankrupt, that we are actually our own worst enemy. (That most sophisticated of all cartoon characters, Pogo, once said, "We have met the enemy and he is us.") The prophet concludes on the note מי חכם ויבן אלה נבון וידעם, "who is wise and he will understand this, discerning and he will know it." It is wisdom and knowledge and intelligence which Hosea stresses.

The second Prophet, Micah, addresses the Jewish heart. He appeals to God to return to us and love us and pity us: יכבוש עוונותינו, "may He subdue our sins"--the language of emotion rather than reason; he is not asking that God discount our sins, but that He overwhelm them. And then what is by all means an emotional expression: ותשליך במצולות ים כל חטאתם, "And cast into the depths of the sea all their sins." One can almost feel with the prophet the power of his image, as if God were lifting the great burden of our sins from our backs and throwing it into the ocean in one great splash!

The third Prophet, Joel, offers us a combination of heart and mind, reason and intellect. On the emotional level he tells us: קרעו לבבכם ואל בגדיכם--"Tear your hearts rather than your clothing"; instead of rending your garments as a sign of grief, break your heart, because the Lord wants a broken heart. In the Temple, he tells us יבכו הכהנים, the priests will weep--sobbing again! The conclusion will be גילו ושמחו, you will be joyous and happy when God answers you. But his conclusion is on the intellectual level: וידעתם כי בקרב ישראל אני, "And you will know that I am in the midst of Israel." Emotion and intellect are combined. So, the three parts of the Haftorah for this Shabbat are the literary echoes of the three kinds of shofar sounds. Hosea represents the shevarim, the גנוחי גנח or sighing, symbol of an intellectual calculation. Micah represents the teruah, the ילולי יליל, the uncontrolled weeping which is the way of emotion. And Joel represents the combination of both, the tekiah-shevarim-teruah-tekiah.

So, Judaism does not fit us into a strait-jacket. It speaks to our minds--if that is the focus of our being; to our hearts--if that is where our life is centered; and it speaks to both of them if--as is usual--we operate on both levels.

But whether to heart or to mind or to both, the message is crystal clear: "Return O Israel to the Lord your God."

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is more important? Our lives or the performance of mitzvot? The answer, according to our sages, comes in the Torah reading from the afternoon of Yom Hakippurim. It comes from parshat Achrei-mot, in the book of Vayikra, where the Torah tells us "asher Ya'aseh otam hadam, v'chai bahem – you must perform mitzvot in order to live through them." So chazal tell us that if, through the performance of a mitzvah, you might (God forbid) lose your life – life is sacred and must come first – with the exception of the three cardinal sins.

So here the Torah underlines for us the critical value of life and that is why, when it comes to considerations such as Shabbat, Yom Tov and Kashrut – life must always come first.

In the targum Unkulus, the Aramaic translation of the Torah, Unkulus translates the words "V'chai bahem" – to be "v'yachai bachon chayei alma" – "in order that you will live, through them, an eternal existence" Unkulus tells us that by performing mitzvot we will merit to live forever – the soul will continue to live well beyond our physical lives here on earth. Therefore "v'chai bahem," according to Unkulus, is a statement which refers not to this world but rather to the world to come. And as a result, we learn that by committing ourselves to torah and mitzvot, with a healthy relationship between ourselves and our creator; and between ourselves and our fellow human beings we will be investing in eternal life.

The Chiddushei Harim comes up with a great peirush, something very different. He says "v'chai bahem" means: 'get a life through them'. Through the performance of mitzvot, have an exciting, exhilarating and marvellous life. Mitzvot are not given to us in order to dampen our spirit, to make life difficult – sure enough they are challenging and not always easy – but ultimately, they enhance the experience. They give us meaning. They give us a sense of fulfilment. They add simcha, true joy, to our very existence.

Over Yom Hakippurim we will be praying to God, "Zochreinu L'chaim" – "remember us for life". So let us bear in mind these three peirushim.

First, when it comes to the fast of Yom Kippur we need to look after our lives. If there is even the tiniest hint that by fasting we could be endangering ourselves, we must eat.

Second, let's remember the peirush of Unkulus, calling upon us to be committed to the performance of mitzvoth, in order please God, to invest in 'chayei alma' – 'everlasting life'.

And third, let's not forget that beautiful peirush of the Chiddushei Harim, whereby, through the performance of mitzvot, we will be investing in a life of great excitement, of novelty, of wonderful meaning and fulfilment.

V'chai bahem – thanks to the torah and mitzvot we can have the best of lives in this world,

May Hashem indeed answer all of our prayers and bless us with a wonderful, new, happy and fulfilling year ahead,

OTS Dvar Torah

A Time to Embrace: Moshe's Example of Personal Perseverance
Rabbi Dr. Ari Silbermann

Life, infused with activity, hustle, and bustle, is typified by movement from one place to another. This is true for our spiritual lives. Whereas angels are fixed without room for

failure or growth, movement defines our humanity.

Interestingly, movement takes center stage at the beginning of the parasha, which opens with Moshe having finished speaking to Bnei Yisrael, who were standing (ניצבים). Moshe goes (וילך) towards them and passes on a message that he can longer go out and come in (לצאת ולבוא). As we approach the end of Moshe's life and the end/beginning of Bnei Yisrael's journey to Eretz Yisrael, the theme of movement takes center stage and brings with it an important message.

While in the final stages of life, many people suffer physical and sometimes mental degradation; in the case of Moshe his eyes never dimmed (Deut 34:7), he climbs to his final resting place on Mount Nebo (Deut 34:1), and he 'goes' to Bnei Yisrael.

What then does Moshe mean when he tells them that he can no longer go out and return? According to the Ramban, Moshe's inability to go out and return alludes to his wisdom being concealed and the degradation of his prophetic powers. According to this approach it is fitting that the ultimate man of the spirit does not decline physically but spiritually as he approaches the end. However, if Moshe's spiritual deterioration is important why mention that Moshe 'goes' to Bnei Yisrael?

In a most fitting elegy, the commentators paint this 'going' to Bnei Yisrael as a picture of leadership and care that typified Moshe Rabbeinu. Ibn Ezra writes that Moshe went out to each tribe to bless them individually and tell them not to be afraid, despite his impending demise. The Ramban describes Moshe leaving the Levite camp and accompanying the people to the Israelite section 'as a host accompanies his friend.' These are all heart-warming portraits of an extraordinary leader farewelling his flock. Just as, according to Chazal, Moshe pursued a lone lamb into the wilderness and came upon Horev, he also follows Bnei Yisrael in one of his last acts as leader.

The Netziv, however, links Moshe's spiritual decline with this act of going to Bnei Yisrael. Since Moshe had lost his prophetic abilities, his message no longer resonated in the same way. And so, even at his last, to reach each member of Bnei Yisrael, Moshe had to take his message to them locally. He could no longer count on them standing and appreciating the Divine message and so had to speak where they stood. Moshe has to engage actively. This is not only the act of a fatherly leader but the act of a prophet fiercely driven by the Divine message.

In this way, Moshe comes full circle because Moshe's journey truly begins with another heroic act of 'going' (וילך). Moshe was conceived, Chazal tell us, as an act of defiance amid harsh decrees. Moshe's parents had been married but had separated due to the decree to murder baby boys. It was only after prodding from Miriam, Chazal teach us, they chose to remarry and conceive Moshe. And the verse which describes this act states that a man went (וילך) from the house of Levi. Moshe was born at a moment of וילך – going out despite the difficulties. Despite his changing circumstances, Moshe heroically insists on passing on the Torah.

One of Moshe's last acts is to go towards the people of Israel. This 'going' (וילך) is a testament to Moshe's heroism and concern as a leader and beautifully complements the 'going' (וילך) of his parents. Though his spiritual prowess is reduced Moshe teaches us the life-giving vitality of movement and closeness to others.

For us individually, particularly during these days of repentance, these final acts command us to persevere and to keep growing throughout our lives. On a national level, the message is clearer still. When the clarity and power of Torah no longer resonates as deeply with Am Yisrael, we need to go out to the people and be close to them. We need to persist in spreading the light of Torah to where the people are – physically and spiritually. Our goal is to defy circumstance, to bridge physical and spiritual distance, to ensure that the timeless message of Torah reaches every heart.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Jewish View of Music

In our Torah Portion, the Torah calls itself a "Song" (Deuteronomy 31:22). Although it is not clear if this refers to the entire Torah, or a few specifics sections (like next week's Torah Portion), Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin explains the analogy between the Torah and song or music. (Paraphrasing to modern nomenclature), Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin explains (Haamek Davar, Introduction to Genesis) that every song has lyrics and feelings that are implied beneath the surface, and not plainly stated. So, too, the Torah's main ideas and deeper concepts are not found in the plain text, but must be understood on a hidden, more subtle level, like a song. Ideas in the Torah, like in a song, are intentionally subtle and implied, and not openly written. Perhaps, in addition, just as a song has many levels of understanding, the Torah is intended to be understood on many levels. And just as a song contains many feelings and moods within it and varies from person to person, so, too, the Torah generates different feelings and moods for different people. Finally, just as a song inspires people, deeply moving them to action and change, so too, the Torah is meant to inspire individuals to act and to change. If the enteral book of Judaism, The Torah, is called a song, then it seems important to analyze the general Jewish view of music.

All of Judaism is Affected By Music - Music is present in and impacts all aspects of Jewish religious life, even today. In prayer, the specific melodies of each prayer service set the particular mood for each particular service. These melodies are called Nusach, and the Nusach for the daily Morning Prayer differs from the Afternoon Daily Prayer, which differs from the Evening Prayer. The mood and music of each service is intentionally different and is represented by each prayer service's unique Nusach. Certain parts of the prayer service are required to be sung in melody (Tur, Orach Chaim 51). Shabbat has its own unique Nusach, as do the Jewish holidays. The regal atmosphere and seriousness of the Days of Awe can be felt by the particular Nusach of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. The month that contains many Jewish holidays is named Tishrei, which, according to one opinion, is derived from the Hebrew word Shira -- song, and the name of the holiday of Pesach, according to one opinion, is derived from the two Hebrew words Pe Sach -- the mouth speaks/sings (Likutei Maharan, Mahdura Kama 49).

Central to Jewish life, along with prayer, is Torah learning. Even here, specifically in learning the Talmud, there is a precise sing-song chant in the way the Talmud is read and studied. Anyone who has entered the classic Beit Midrash has heard the melodies of Jewish learning. The Rabbis of the Middle Ages (Tosafot, "Vhashone" on Megillah 32a) brought down that a specific melody was learned for reciting the Talmud before it was written down, in order to remember it better. Shelah writes (Cited by Mishne Berurah and Be-er Haitaiv on Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 50) that those sections of the prayer service that come from the Talmud should be sung in the "melody specific to the reading of the Mishna". Thus, the Talmud is not only learned, but it is chanted.

Jewish Scripture also has its unique melodies. The Torah must be read with the specific melody called the trop, indicated by the music notes found in most Chumashim-Torah texts today. The Talmud (Megillah 32a) frowns upon anyone who does not read the Torah publicly in the synagogue with the correct musical notes, and the Rabbis (Mishne Berurah, Orach Chaim 142:4) rule that if the wrong notes are recited (in many cases), one has not fulfilled the obligation of reading the Torah in the synagogue. The Haftorah, words of the prophets, read each Shabbat after the Torah reading, has a different melody than that of the Torah. Each Megillah read on different holidays has its own melody, reflecting the atmosphere and mood of the holiday. So, for example, the sadness of the Temple's destruction can be heard in the sad melody of the Eicha Megillah read on Tisha B'av night and again in the Tisha B'av Haftorah the next day. Megillat Esther has a happy melody, reflecting the joyous nature of the holiday and the final outcome of the story. (In fact, it is customary to read the sad parts of Megillat Esther to the melody of Eicha read on Tisha B'av). According to Rabbi Yonah, adding

Jewish song to any regular meal can turn that meal into a Seudat Mitzvah, a repast of Mitzvah (Shaarei Teshuva, Hilchot Megillah 791). Thus, music is an integral part of all of Jewish religious life.

The Importance of Music in Judaism - Music is not only vital to Judaism and Jewish life today. Kabbalistically, it was central to the Creation and the continuation of the world. The verse (Psalms 19:2) says that "the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." In explaining this verse, the Rabbis (Midrash, Otzar HaMidrashim, Rabbi Akiva 4) clarify that the form of this declaration is through daily music of the heavens and the earth, which sing to God, and that without this daily song, God would not have created the world at all. And this Midrash goes on to say that all the rivers, mountains and all parts of nature sing to God daily. Rabbi Nachman takes this idea one step further and says that each blade of grass and each animal have its own particular melody that it sings (Likutei Maharan, Mahdura Batra 63). Another Midrash (Midrash, Otzar Hamidrashim, Kedusha 7) explains that God prefers the song of man over the song of angels, because the angels sing to God on a regular basis, the same time each day, while man sings out to God spontaneously. In fact, the very first song sung by the Jewish people to God was the Song at the Sea following their miraculous salvation by God from the Egyptian armies (Exodus 14:31-15:1). Rashi (Rashi commentary on Exodus 15:1) explains that this song was completely spontaneous, and, according to one source, this song was the first time that man ever sang to God (Midrash, Shemot Rabbah 23:4), despite all the previous interactions of God with man in the Torah. In fact, one Midrash concludes (Midrash, Otzar HaMidrashim Rabbi Akiva 6) that if not for the daily song of human beings to God, He would not have created the world to begin with. Another opinion is that the entire purpose of Creation itself was for music and song (Midrash, Otiyot Rabbi Akiva 1).

Song in the Temple service was so crucial that atonement could not be achieved for a sacrifice in the Temple unless song accompanied it (Erchin 11a). Similarly, any sacrifice brought to the Temple which lacked the song to accompany it, invalidated the entire sacrifice (Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 6:10). In fact, the highest form of service to God, according to the Talmud, is music and song (Erchin 11a). The Zohar (Zohar II:19a) explains that the reason the Levites, who sang in the Temple, were called Levites, is because they joined together (נלוים) in unison to sing to God. One who sings to God in this world is assured that he or she will sing to God in the Next World as well (Ben Yehoyada commentary on Sanhedrin 91b).

Music In The Bible - At the very beginning of human history, in the first few hundred years after the creation of man, the Torah tells us that music and musical instruments were already developed and part of the culture of human beings (Genesis 4:21). Singing in praise of God as a reaction to victory attributed to Him is fairly common in the Bible. Not only did the Jews sing at the Sea (as mentioned above), but the Jewish people also sang after the miracle of the well provided them with life's sustenance, water, in the desert (Numbers 21:17). When the Jews were victorious over the feared and more powerful Canaanites, the prophetess Deborah and the general Barak spontaneously sang in praise after the victory . We also see numerous times in Scripture when the playing of music inspired a prophet to feel God's presence and prophesy. When Elisha the prophet wanted to connect with God, he took a musician to play for him (Judges 5:1), and then God did indeed appear to him (II Kings 3:14-15). A group of prophets were inspired to prophesy when music was produced from a combination of the instruments that included the lute, tambourine, flute, and harp (I Samuel 10:5-6). King David designated several people to become musicians and play the harps, lutes, and cymbals (I Chronicles 25:1). Similarly, when King Saul felt that God's presence had left him, he summoned a young harpist to play music to inspire him and regain his connection with God (I Samuel 16:14-23). The musician who inspired King Saul was none other than young David, the harpist, son of Yishai, who later became King David.

Over the last 3000 years, King David, as a musician, has inspired millions or possibly billions of people with his musical compositions. Today, in modern Hebrew, the word for music and the word for poetry is identical -- Shira. One might think that the famous words of David, the Psalms, were composed only as poetry, as it is recited mostly today. But it is clear from the Psalms themselves (the basis for most of Jewish prayer) and from King David's background that these 150 paragraphs were composed as songs, and not poetry. The introduction to many of the Psalms connotes musical pieces. The term "Mizmor" translated today as simply "Psalm," actually indicates a melody and occurs in 58 different Psalms. The term "Lamenatze-ach" begins 53 different Psalms and is translated as either "To the chief musician" or "For the conductor." Some form of the Hebrew word Shir-Song occurs in 43 Psalms and is often the first word, indicating that the paragraph should be sung. Thus, the entire Psalms was undoubtedly composed as songs to be sung or music pieces to be played. Moreover, the Bible calls King David the "sweet singer of Israel," (II Samuel 23:1) in addition to giving recognition to his skill as a harpist.

Musical Instruments in Judaism - At the very beginning of human development, musical instruments were already created and used (Genesis 4:21). Musical instruments always seemed to accompany Jewish singing. In describing the scene of the Song by the Sea, King David (Psalms 68:26) depicts the people singing, followed by those playing the musical instruments, as the word Shira indicates singing with one's mouth and Nagen indicates playing musical instruments (Malbim commentary on 68:26). Musical instruments played properly seem to inspire everyone. The Talmud (Berachot 3b) describes the harp of David that was above his bed and played by itself every night at midnight. This inspired King David to learn Torah all night. One commentary (Ben Yehoyada commentary on Berachot 3b) compares the harp/violin/lute (Kinor) to God giving light to the world, rearranging the Hebrew letters of this instrument to 26 (Kaf and Vav) as the numerical value of God's ineffable name, and Ner, light. Thus, the playing of this instrument was through the Divine spirit.

The most prominent mention of musical instruments in Jewish ritual took place at the daily sacrifices in the Temple, and at the annual Simchat Beit Hashoeva-Water Ceremony, which took place on Sukkot in the Temple area. The Mishna (Mishna Tamid 3:8) tells us that the sounds of the musical instruments in the Temple were so loud that people not only heard in the Levites singing in Jericho, but they also heard the clanging of the cymbals, the sounds of the flutes and the sound of the Shofar and trumpets blowing. Which instruments were actually present in the Temple each day?

Maimonides (Maimonides, Hilchot Kli Mikdash 3:3-4) writes that although the number of Levites singing in the Temple was unlimited (the minimum was twelve), there would be twelve different instruments in the Temple, and the musicians were not limited to Levites or Kohanim, but they had to be distinguished individuals. He also stresses that Shira is music produced vocally, but the number of instruments varied widely. There would be from 2-6 lyres, 2-12 flutes, 2-120 trumpets, and a minimum of 9 harps, without any upper limit. Yet, there would be only one cymbal. With all these instruments, the melody would only be played by a single (cane reed) flute, as this instrument produced a pleasant sound (Maimonides, Hilchot Kli Mikdash 3:5). The instruments in the Temple service were so important that a maestro had to be appointed to supervise and coordinate this activity (Shekalim 5:1).

The sound of the trumpet in the notes that we normally associate on Rosh Hashana with the Shofar was sounded each day in the Temple with the trumpet – Chatzotzra (Mishna Sukkah 5:5). At least 21 of these sounds of Tekiah-Teruah-Tekiah were sounded each day, and on special holidays up to 48 of these sounds were heard. These included three at the opening of the Temple gates each morning, nine during the daily morning sacrifice, and nine during the daily afternoon sacrifice.

The musical instruments and the mood of the once-a-year Sukkot celebration were quite different from the daily sacrifice. The Mishna (Mishna Sukkah 5:1, 4) describes the scene. Men of piety danced juggling torches as the flutes played and torches were behind them in this night procession. Harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets were among the many instruments that accompanied the dancing, as the Levites stood on the 15 steps of the Temple Courtyard. As the procession finished at dawn, two Kohanim-Priests, each with a trumpet (Chatzotzra) in his hand, sounded the notes of Tekiah, Teruah and then Tekiah again four separate times.

Obviously, since music is such an integral part of Jewish prayer, both in the past, as well as today, this aspect of Jewish music should be analyzed further. But a full discussion of this aspect of Jewish music is beyond the scope of this chapter.

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

To Choose Life

This day, I call upon the heaven and the earth as witnesses [that I have warned] you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. You shall choose life, so that you and your offspring will live; (Devarim 30:19)

"Choosing life" is not counted amongst the 613 Mitzvos! According to Rashi it's like a loving father giving wise counsel to his child. HASHEM implores us to choose life. Free will is a risky but necessary business. One of the greatest challenges for parents is to watch their children as young adults make obvious mistakes without rushing in to rescue them or manage the outcome. Everyone must learn on their own to fail their way to success.

According to the Zohar, however, the only Mitzvah is 'Choose Life" and what we refer to as the 613 Mitzvos are really 613 pieces of advice. It's just the opposite! How can this be so?

The 613 Mitzvos are addressing the physicality of man. Torah is a training ground to cure our negative tendencies. The assumption is that a man left up to his own devices would do great harm to himself and others, and fall way short of his potential. The body of man needs a constant guide and ready coach to coax him into alignment with his sublime assignment. Such is the nature of a man. Things that are left to chance go to chaos.

While the code of Jewish Law is training the physical part of the man from the outside in, the Zohar is speaking to the inner life of man, the knowing heart. Everything is ultimately and really one clear option; "choose life". When the choices are clear like between truthfulness or falsehood or life and death then choosing is easy. It's only because the waters of our mind are so muddied with materialism that we naturally can't see so clearly.

When the Torah tells us that life and death, blessing and curse are placed before us then choosing life should be easy. The task is to come to the point of recognizing the binary nature of the choosing. Imagine now that all the deeds of your life are spread out before you. There they are for you to view like a feature length movie in living color.

You are told this movie will play before a large audience of your relatives past and present, sages and wise men from all ages and the Almighty Himself. Every act, word, and thought will be available for endless viewing and reviewing. It's your life!

Is that a glorious notion or a frightening proposition? The good news is that everything we do is forever and the bad news is that everything we do is forever. I think for most of us a sense of panic will have set in already. Now we have some better news! You have been gifted with a sophisticated editing tool -TESHUVAH – that allows you to delete the unwanted scenes, foolish conversations, and unwanted thoughts that are on display in this movie.

This is actually our situation as we enter the 10 days of Teshuva between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. All parts of our life are now open and available for editing. "Life" are those moments we would feel so good to be seen acting out in front of such an audience of HASHEM and everyone else. The experience of NACHAS those scenes deliver will be our Gan Eden. "Death" is those wasteful and destructive deeds that we would wish not to be discovered and witnessed. The experience of embarrassment those scenes would deliver will be our Gehinom.

Now we can realize that the choice is clear. While editing or living – filming forward, the Torah is advising us how to live life in such a way that very little will need dramatic and drastic editing. Be careful how you speak to people and about people! Place HASHEM before you always.

Everything the Torah tells us begins to make sense in this light as advice on the best way to behave. The fleshy body that lives in a world of distractions and temptations requires a system of guidance. We need to be saved mostly from ourselves.

The knowing heart senses well that what happens in this world has limitless consequences and will be played before the audience of eternity. Deep down inside, each and every one of us knows that life and death, blessing and curse is before us and our job is to choose life.

****

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

****

PARSHAT VA'YELECH

Were we all at Ma'amad Har Sinai? According to "pshat," only the generation that left Egypt was granted this privilege. According to the popular Midrash, however, the "neshama" [soul] of every Jew, of every generation, witnessed that momentous event.

In this week's shiur, as we study Parshat Va'yelech, we will show how the mitzvah of HAKHEL helps 'bridge this gap' between "pshat" & "drash."

INTRODUCTION

Our study of Sefer Devarim thus far has focused on the centrality of Moshe Rabeinu's main speech (chapters 5->26), which details the mitzvot that Bnei Yisrael must keep in the Land. In our shiur on Parshat Nitzavim, we discussed how Moshe Rabeinu's final speech (i.e. chapters 29->30) forms a most appropriate conclusion for that main speech.

At this point in Sefer Devarim, i.e. as Moshe has completed his address, we would expect to find some concluding remarks and thus bring Sefer Devarim to a close. Sure enough, this is exactly what happens in the opening section of Parshat Va'yelech. Moshe Rabeinu first bids farewell by explaining why he can no longer lead (see 31:2), then introduces his successor - Yehoshua (see 31:3-8), and finally presents the written version of the Torah (whose mitzvot he has just completed teaching) to the Leviim and elders.

This indeed would have been an appropriate conclusion.

However, the next section (see 31:10-13) - the mitzvah of HAKHEL - i.e. the commandment to read the Torah in public once every seven years on the holiday of Succot - seems glaringly out of place. Did we not already finish listing all the mitzvot? Did Moshe not just write down the 'final' version of the Torah and present it to the Leviim? Would it not have made more sense to include the mitzvah of HAKHEL somewhere in Parshat Re'ay, together with all the other mitzvot relating to "haMAKOM ashe yivchar Hashem"?

[Note 31:11!/ see shiur on Parshat Re'ay. (Pay particular attention to 16:12-16.)]

To understand why the mitzvah of HAKHEL is recorded specifically at this time, we must return to Parshat Ki-tavo (and to Sefer Shmot) to uncover the underlying relationship between mitzvat HAKHEL and the events at Ma'amad Har Sinai.

FROM BRIT SINAI TO BRIT HAR EIVAL

Recall from Parshat Ki-tavo that immediately upon the completion of his main speech, Moshe instructs Bnei Yisrael to gather on Har Eival on the 'day they cross the Yarden' (see chapters 27->28). Here they were to:

a) write down the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim, to be read and taught to Bnei Yisrael (see 27:1-4,8);

b) erect a "mizbayach" & offer OLOT & SHLAMIM /see 27:5-7

c) conduct a covenantal ceremony including the public reading of the "tochacha" (see 27:11-28:69).

It is important to note the fundamental difference between the "tochacha" and the main speech of Sefer Devarim. The main speech describes the MITZVOT which Bnei Yisrael must keep upon entering the Land, while the "tochacha" describes Bnei Yisrael's REWARD should they OBEY these mitzvot and their PUNISHMENT should they DISOBEY. [This can help us understand why the "tochacha" FOLLOWS the main speech]

To understand the reason for this additional "brit" on Har Eival, let's consider the parallel between this ceremony and that which took place at Har Sinai forty years earlier (see Shmot 24:3-11). There (as well), we find that Moshe:

a) writes down the laws and reads them to the nation;

b) erects a "mizbayach" and offers OLOT & SHLAMIM;

c) conducts a covenantal ceremony.

[Note that a "tochacha" was presented at Har Sinai, as well, as recorded in Parshat Bchukotei - see Vayikra 26:3-46. See also Chizkuni's explanation of "sefer ha'brit" in Shmot 24:7!]

Considering that the vast majority of the people of this new generation (i.e. those who are about to enter the Land) were not present at the original ceremony, this **new** generation must 'relive' the HAR SINAI experience. Since it will now become their duty - to fulfill the destiny originally planned for their parents' generation – they too must undergo a similar experience.

[Note: In Sefer Yehoshua we find many other parallels between "dor yotzei mitzrayim" and "dor knisa la'aretz," most probably for the very same reason. See end of chapter 8.]

FROM HAR EIVAL TO HAKHEL

For a similar reason, we can explain the reason for recording the mitzvah of HAKHEL in Parshat Va'yelech. Needless to say, the covenant of Sinai is binding for all generations (see 29:12-14). Nevertheless, just as it was necessary to 'recreate' that experience forty years later for the new generation on Har Eival, the mitzvah of HAKHEL will recreate that experience for all future generations. Once every seven years, Am Yisrael must 'relive' MA'AMAD HAR SINAI as the men, women, and children gather at the Beit Ha'Mikdash on Chag ha'Succot for a public celebration to hear the Torah. The Torah will be read in public (see 31:9-13) just as it was at Har Sinai (see Shmot 24:4-7), and just as it was at Har Eival (see 27:3,8).

This interpretation is supported by the Torah's explicit reason for the mitzvah of HAKHEL:

"HAKHEL ET HA'AM - Gather together the nation, the men, the women, and the children... in order that they HEAR and in order that they will LEARN and fear their God, and they will faithfully keep all the words of this TORAH. And their children WHO DO NOT KNOW [i.e. those who were not at the last ceremony] will listen and learn to fear God, for all of the days that they are alive on the land which you are now crossing to inherit." (31:12-13)

OLOT & SHLAMIM - ALIYAH LA'REGEL

However, for our parallel to be complete, we would expect to find a mitzvah to offer korbanot of OLOT & SHLAMIM - just as was the case at Har Sinai and Har Eival. Why don't we find them in the Torah's commandment of HAKHEL?

One could suggest that this relates to the timing of HAKHEL - on SUCCOT. Recall that on SUCCOT every individual is obligated to offer OLOT and SHLAMIM to fulfill the mitzvah of "aliyah l'regel" (see 16:16-17 and Mesechet Shkalim).

Therefore, by performing this mitzvah on Succot at the Beit Ha'Mikdash, the element of korbanot of OLOT & SHLAMIM is present, and our parallel to Ma'amad Har Sinai is complete. [Recall as well our shiur Parshat Terumah that expalined why the Mishkan/Mikdash itself is simply a model (and perpetuation) of Ma'amad Har Sinai!]

WHY HERE?

With this background, we can explain why Moshe orders the mitzvah of HAKHEL specifically now as he presents the Leviim and the elders the 'official copy' of the Torah. The mitzvah of HAKHEL is not 'just another mitzvah' in Sefer Devarim - it relates to the entire sefer! The purpose of this mitzvah is to periodically remind Bnei Yisrael of their obligation to keep ALL the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim, which Moshe had just finished teaching. Therefore, it is given when the Sefer itself is given over the Leviim for 'safe-keeping'.

[Iy"h, in next week's shiur we will explain why this mitzvah is followed by the SHIRA.]

A PARALLEL PURPOSE

The need to periodically teach these mitzvot at a NATIONAL gathering emphasizes yet another significant aspect of Matan Torah. The ultimate purpose of the mitzvot of Sefer Devarim is not only to enable each individual to develop his own, personal relationship with God, but also to create an "am kadosh" (a holy nation) in the Land of Israel - a nation that can properly represent God to the other nations.

This perspective is supported by yet another textual parallel between the mitzvah of HAKHEL and the description of "Ma'amad Har Sinai," as depicted earlier in Sefer Devarim (4:5-14). Precisely in the same 'parshia' where Sefer Devarim explains the ultimate, national purpose for keeping these mitzvot, we find a parallel description of Ma'amad Har Sinai:

> "See, I have taught you 'chukim & mishpatim'... for you to keep in the Land which you are about to enter and conquer. Keep them and do them, for they are the proof of your wisdom and discernment IN THE EYE OF THE NATIONS, who, upon hearing these laws, will say... For what a great nation that has God so close to it... and what great nation has laws and rules as perfect as this Torah..." (4:5-8)

That parsha then continues with a commandment not to forget Ma'amad Har Sinai:

> "But take utmost care ... NOT TO FORGET the things you saw with your own eyes and so that they do not fade from your memory as long as you live, and MAKE THEM KNOWN TO YOUR CHILDREN AND CHILDREN'S CHILDREN - The DAY YOU STOOD BEFORE GOD AT HAR CHOREV ("ma'amad har sinai") when Hashem told me GATHER THE PEOPLE TOGETHER that I may let them hear my words... (4:9-11)

Now we will study this parallel - using transliterated Hebrew - by carefully reading the psukim concerning Har Sinai & Hakhel [note the repetition of several key words]:

AT HAR SINAI (4:10-12):

> "yom asher amad'ta lifnei Hashem Elokecha b'Chorev b'emor Hashem alei HAK'HEL LI ET HA'AM v'ASH'MI'EIM et dvarei asher YIL'M'DUN L'YIRAH oti KOL HA'YAMIM, asher heym CHAYIM AL HA'ADAMA v'et B'NEIHEM y'LAMEIDUN."

AT HAK'HEL (31:12-13):

> "HAK'HEL ET HA'AM, ha'anashim v'ha'nashim v'hataf ... l'maan YISHM'U ul'maan YIL'M'DU v'YA'RU et Hashem.... u'B'NEIHEM asher lo ya'du, YISH'M'U v'LAM'DU l'YIRAH et Hashem KOL HA'YAMIM asher atem CHAYIM AL HA'ADAMA."

[It is easier just to compare them by yourself in the actual Hebrew.]

Similarly, the Torah in Devarim 18:16 refers to the day of Matan Torah as Yom ha'KAHAL. [Note also "k'halchem" in 5:19.]

Both these textual and thematic parallels point to a clear connection between the mitzvah of HAKHEL and Ma'amad Har Sinai.

JEWISH CONTINUITY

This background in "pshat" can possibly help us better understand the Midrash that every Jewish "neshama" was present at Ma'amad Har Sinai. One could explain that as members of the Jewish nation and our shared eternal destiny, each and every one of us was indeed present at Har Sinai. Nonetheless, to impress upon each new generation the importance of Ma'amad Har Sinai, there remains a need to recreate that experience (ideally through the mitzvah of HAKHEL).

Today, in the absence of the Beit Ha'Mikdash, we cannot fulfill the mitzvah of HAKHEL. Nevertheless, we can still utilize our 'Tishrei gatherings' [in 'shul' - the "mikdash m'at"] on Rosh Ha'shana, Yom Kippur, and Succot to help achieve (at least partially) the important goals of HAKHEL - at both the individual and national levels.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

==========

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note the opening and closing psukim of Sefer KOHELET. Based on those psukim, can you find a conceptual relationship between Sefer KOHELET and the mitzvah HAKHEL? [Keep in mind Devarim 31:12-13!]

Does this help explain our minhag to read sefer Kohelet on the shabbat of Succot?

Can you find a relate Sefer Kohelet to the time of year of Succot?

B. Review the HAKHEL psukim again and pay attention to the emphasis on "yirat Shamayim." Compare this emphasis with the purpose of Ma'amad Har Sinai as described by Moshe himself in Shmot 20:17. Notice the two distinct functions Moshe mentions. How does the element of "nasot etchem" come into play at HAKHEL? Compare Rashbam's interpretation with the Rambam's comments towards the end of Hilchot Chagiga 3:6 ("l'chazek dat ha'emet").
Additionally, see Dvarim 14:23. Could "ma'aser sheni" serve as a "miniature" form of HAKHEL? [See Ramban 14:22 and Rashbam 14:23.]

C. The m'forshim offer different bases for the relationship between HAKHEL and shmitta. Of particular interest to us is that of Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman, who compares the cessation of agricultural work during shmitta to the wilderness, which he views as the perfect setting for the preparations for Matan Torah. Note the machloket among the m'forshim on Chumash as to whether Hakhel takes place at the beginning or end of the shmita year, and the various reasons given therefor.

How does this relate to the parallel to Har Sinai?

Relate to the fact that if one was not permitted to work his field for an entire year (during shemitah), it was likely that he could dedicate that year to Torah study.

D. The Torah requires that specifically the melech read the Torah in public at Hakhel. Suggest various reasons based on the content of Sefer Devarim that would explain this halacha.

E. According to 'pshat,' it would appear that the Sefer Torah that Hashem commands to be placed next to the Aron is only Sefer Devarim. Note the machloket rishonim on this topic (see 31:9 & 31:24-26).

[Be sure to see at least Ramban.]

1. Try to explain the reason for this machloket.
2. Why is this Torah placed next to the Aron? What does the Aron contain?
3. As usual, relate this to the shiurim thus far on Sefer Dvarim.

F. Based on the above shiur, why do you think the Rambam records the halachot of Hakhel in Hilchot Chagiga rather than Hilchot Shmita & Yovel?

Parshas Netzavim Vayeilech: Dimensions of Teshuvah

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. PARASHAT HAT'SHUVAH

The second half of Parashat Nitzavim (small as it is) focuses on national introspection and the consequent movement of religious renaissance – all of which will take place, the Torah (promises? – see Rambam, MT T'shuvah 7:5) (commands? – see Ramban on v. 11) us, as a result of our having experienced all of God's blessings AND curses:

1) When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where Hashem your God has driven you, 2) and you shall/will return to Hashem your God and hearken to His voice, just as I command you today, you and your children, with all of your heart and all of your soul 3) then Hashem your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom Hashem your God has scattered you. 4) Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there Hashem your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. 5) Hashem your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors. 6) Moreover, Hashem your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.

7) Hashem your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on the adversaries who took advantage of you.
8) *v'Atah Tashuv v'Shama'ta b'Kol Hashem* (Then you shall again hearken to the voice of Hashem) , observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today,

9) and Hashem your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For Hashem will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors,

10) when you obey Hashem your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

11) Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away.
12) It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?"
13) Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?"
14) For the matter is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe. (D'varim 30:1-14)
[Note: In this shiur, we will examine the problem raised by the "sequence of events" in this parashah. I hope to send out a special shiur for Yom haKippurim which will reexamine this parashah, focusing on a different set of issues.]

II. THE "SECOND TESHUVAH"

There are, of course, many deep and profound concepts embedded in this parashah. There is, however, a problem of "sequence" in this section the resolution of which will, hopefully, provide us with a greater understanding of the phenomenon of Teshuvah.

Following the order of events as outlined in the parashah:

1) We will reflect on the fulfillment of the blessing and curse – at that point, we will be spread out and (we assume) under foreign rule among the nations. (v. 1)
2) We will return "until" (Heb. *'Ad*) God, listening to His voice (v. 2) – we assume that this refers to the process of "Teshuvah" – return/repentance, including a recommitment to observing Torah and Mitzvot.
3) God will restore our fortunes, returning us back to our Land from all corners of the diaspora (vv. 3-5)

4) God will purify our hearts to worship Him completely (v. 6)
5) God will curse our enemies (v. 7)
6) We will commit to observance (???) (v. 8)
7) God will make us prosper and take delight in us (v. 9)
The obvious problem with this sequence is Step #6 – the "repetition" of the promise/command that we will return to God. Since the "return" (which is the premise of the whole parashah) is presented in v. 2 as the result of our introspection while in exile – and is the cause of our return to former glory and God's favor, what is the meaning of this second "return"?

III. S'FORNO'S ANSWER

As we have done before, we turn to Rabbenu Ovadiah S'forno for help. In his commentary to Sefer D'varim, S'forno suggests that the phrase *v'Atah Tashuv* in v. 8 is not to be understood as "you will return", following the general theme of the parashah (open the original and note how many times that root is used in this parashah).

Rather, he explains that this occurrence of the word means "you will be at peace", as in the verse: *b'Shuvah vaNahat Tivash'un* – (you shall triumph by stillness and quiet) (Yeshaya 30:15).

In other words, the promise of the "second Teshuvah" is not about commitment born of reflection – which is the Teshuvah in v. 2. Rather, it is a promise that after we recommit to God, and God restores us and our fortunes, defeating our enemies – at that point, we will be able to hearken to God's voice and fulfill His Mitzvot in a calm and secure manner.

This works well within the sequence, since we are promised that God will "circumcise our hearts" just before this "second Teshuvah". As Ramban explains (in his comments on v. 6), this "circumcision of the hearts" means that we will n longer be tempted to abandon our commitment to God or our intimate relationship with Him.

At that point, following S'forno's explanation, we will move from the stirring, revolutionary movement of Teshuvah (upending our lives, in feeling, action and, ultimately, in geographic location and political reality) into a calm stasis of Mitzvah-observance.
This comment is most enlightening – but, as might be expected, there is room to challenge. There are two "technical" problems with this explanation of "Tashuv".

a) The verb root *Sh*W*B, as mentioned earlier, shows up so often (7 times) in these 14 verses that it might almost be called anthemic of this parashah. To suggest that in this one instance it means something different – almost diametrically opposite – of the meaning ascribed in the other occurences is not an easy theory to accept.

b) Although the noun "shuva", meaning "calm" does show up in Tanakh, we have no instance of this root used as a verb to mean anything but "return". S'forno's prooftext is, therefore, an incomplete proof (to say the least).

IV. A NEW RESOLUTION: TWO STEPS IN THE TESHUVAH PROCESS

If we could find a way to maintain the meaning "return" in our verse, yet explain this "second Teshuvah" in a way that makes sense sequentially, we would both solve our problem and avoid the linguistic challenge to S'forno's comment.

In order to explain this, we have to look back to the first instance of Teshuvah mentioned in the parashah – v. 2. Let's compare the two verses:

FIRST TESHUVAH (v. 2) *v'Shav'ta 'ad Hashem Elohekha v'Shama'ta b'Kolo* (you shall/will return to Hashem your God and hearken to His voice), just as I command you today, you and your children, with all of your heart and all of your soul.

SECOND TESHUVAH (v. 8) *v'Atah Tashuv v'Shama'ta b'Kol Hashem* (Then you shall *Tashuv* and hearken to the voice of Hashem), observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today…

If we look carefully at the first instance of Teshuvah, we note that there is no direct commitment to Mitzvot mentioned – just a readiness to "hearken to the Voice of God". What does this phrase mean?

There is a wide range of circumstances that could conceivably cause someone – or a nation – to want to return to God. As outlined in the premise of our parashah (v. 1), the cause outlined here is the fulfillment of God's blessings and curses. The nation will look at the events which have transpired and will understand that it is their distance from God which has led them realize the awful curses – just as their intimacy with God was the source of those blessings they had previously enjoyed. Indeed, the Torah tells us that the people will say: "Surely it is because our God is not in our midst these evils have befallen us" (D'varim 31:17). The awareness of that "distance" (known as "Hester Panim" – the "hiding of the Divine countenance"), coupled with a realization of the terrible circumstances in which the nation is enveloped, will lead to a resolve to return "until God".

Note that this odd phrase – *Shuva 'Ad Hashem* – to "return UNTIL God" shows up in several passages, including ours (v. 2), earlier in D'varim (4:30) and in the famous passage from Hoshea (14:2). What does this mean?

Again – when the sense of desparation and hopelessness is coupled with the realization of how far from God we have moved – the immediate and (hopefully) instinctive reaction is to try to "come back" – to restore some type of relationship with God and to return to Him. It is the Divine embrace, the security of God's Presence, which is the immediate and urgent goal of this type of "Ba'al Teshuvah".
This is, indeed, the type of Teshuvah mentioned in the first instance – "you shall return UNTIL God and hearken to His voice"; there is no mention here of specific actions or even of commitments.

It seems that this theory cannot even withstand the rest of the verse: The end of the phrase implies a commitment to Mitzvot: "just as I command you today". This phrase, however, should not be confused with the commitment to Mitzvot mentioned later. Here, the phrase implies that the Ba'al Teshuvah (in this case, the entire nation), will return and seek our a relationship with God, just as he {Mosheh – remember, this is Sefer D'varim] commanded them to do. In other words, the return to God is itself part of Mosheh's charge to the people.
When we look ahead to v. 8 – what we have dubbed "The Second Teshuvah" – we note that the tenor of commitment has changed. No longer are we returning "UNTIL" (*'Ad*) God – we are now returning to hear His voice – meaning "to observe all of His commandments…".

In other words, whereas the first step in Teshuvah (we now realize that there aren't two different types of Teshuvah – rather, there are two steps in the process) is exclusively the desire to return to God – to "reach Him" – the next step involves a full commitment to learning (hearkening to His voice – which here, by context, implies study of His laws) and observance.

We can now reexamine the sequence in our Parashah and find a remarkable statement about the power of Teshuvah (this is an edited cut-and-paste job from above; compare the two carefully):

1) We will reflect on the fulfillment of the blessing and curse – at that point, we will be spread out and (we assume) under foreign rule among the nations. (v. 1)

2) We will return "until" (Heb. *'Ad*) God, listening to His voice (v. 2) – i.e. the nation will experience a desire to come close to God.

3) God will restore our fortunes, returning us back to our Land from all corners of the diaspora (vv. 3-5)

4) God will purify our hearts to worship Him completely (v. 6)

5) God will curse our enemies (v. 7)

6) We will return "fully" to God, studying His Torah and committing to complete observance of His commands (v. 8)

7) God will make us prosper and take delight in us (v. 9)

What an amazing statement: In order for God to restore us, to purify our hearts and to achieve peace and security in our Land, all we need is to desire to return to God – to seek out His voice. Once He has fulfilled the "intermediary" promises, then we are fully expected to step up the commitment to complete Teshuvah, as indicated in v. 8. Only then will God fully take delight in us and grant us prosperity.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Volume 28 **Yom Kippur Issue** **5783 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

The Courage to Grow

I vividly remember the surprise and delight I had when I first read Jane Austen's Emma. It was the first time I have read a novel in which you see a character changing over time. Emma is an intelligent young woman who believes she understands other people better than they do. So she sets about arranging their lives – she is an English shadchan – with disastrous consequences, because not only does she not understand others; she does not even understand herself. By the end of the novel, though, she is a different person: older, wiser and humbler. Of course, since this is a Jane Austen story, it ends happily ever after.

In the more than 40 years that have passed since I read the book, one question has fascinated me. Where did Western civilisation get the idea that people can change? It is not an obvious idea. Many great cultures have simply not thought in these terms. The Greeks, for instance, believed that we are what we are, and we cannot change what we are. They believed that character is destiny, and the character itself is something we are born with, although it may take great courage to realise our potential. Heroes are born, not made. Plato believed that some human beings were gold, others silver, and others bronze. Aristotle believed that some are born to rule, and others to be ruled. Before the birth of Oedipus, his fate and that of his father, Laius, have already been foretold by the Delphic Oracle, and nothing they can do will avert it.

This is precisely the opposite of the key sentence we say on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, that "Teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah avert the evil decree." That is what happened to the inhabitants of Nineveh in the story we read at Minchah on Yom Kippur. There was a decree: "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed." But the people of Nineveh repent, and the decree is cancelled. There is no fate that is final, no diagnosis without a second opinion – half of Jewish jokes are based on this idea.

The more I studied and researched, the more I realised that Judaism was the first system in the world to develop a clear sense of human free will. As Isaac Bashevis Singer wittily put it, "We have to be free; we have no choice."

This is the idea at the heart of teshuvah. It is not just confession, not just saying Al chet shechatanu. It is not just remorse: Ashamnu. It is the determination to change, the decision that I am going to learn from my mistakes, that I am going to act differently in future, that I determined to become a different kind of person.

To paraphrase Rabbi Soloveitchik, to be a Jew is to be creative, and our greatest creation is our self. As a result, more than 3000 years before Jane Austen, we see in Torah and in Tanach, a process in which people change.

To take an obvious example: Moshe Rabbeinu. We see him at the start of his mission as a man who cannot speak easily or fluently. "I am not a man of words." "I am slow of speech and tongue." "I have uncircumcised lips." But by the end he is the most eloquent and visionary of all the prophets. Moses changed.

One of the most fascinating contrasts is between two people who were often thought to resemble one another, indeed were sometimes identified as the same person in two incarnations: Pinchas and Elijah. Both were zealots. But Pinchas changed. God gave him a covenant of peace and he became a man of peace. We see him in later life (in Joshua 22) leading a peace negotiation between the rest of the Israelites and the tribes of Reuben and Gad who had settled on the far side of the Jordan, a mission successfully accomplished.

Elijah was no less a zealot than Pinchas. Yet there is a remarkable scene some time after his great confrontation with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. He is at Mount Horeb. God asks him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah replies, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty." God then sends a whirlwind, shaking mountain and shattering rocks, but God was not in the wind. Then God sends an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. Then God sends fire, but God was not in the fire. Then God speaks in a kol demamah dakah, a still small voice. He asks Elijah the same question again, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" and Elijah replies in exactly the same words as he had done before: "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty." At that point God tells Elijah to appoint Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19).

Elijah has not changed. He has not understood that God now wants him to exercise a different kind of leadership, defending Israel not criticising it (Rashi). He is asking Elijah to make a similar transformation to the one Pinchas made when he became a man of peace, but Elijah, unlike Pinchas, did not change. Even his words do not change, despite the momentous vision. He had become too holy for this world, so God took him to heaven in a chariot of fire.

It was Judaism, through the concept of teshuvah, that brought into the world the idea that we can change. We are not predestined to continue to be what we are. Even today, this remains a radical idea. Many biologists and neuroscientists believe that our character and actions are wholly determined by our genes, our DNA. Choice, character change, and free will, are – they say – illusions.

They are wrong. One of the great discoveries of recent years has been the scientific demonstration of the plasticity of the brain. The most dramatic example of this is the case of Jill Bolte Taylor. In 1996, aged 37, she suffered a massive stroke that completely destroyed the functioning of the left hemisphere of her brain. She couldn't walk, talk, read, write, or even recall the details of her life. But she was very unusual in one respect. She was a Harvard neuroscientist. As a result, she was able to realise precisely what had happened to her.

For eight years she worked every day, together with her mother, to exercise her brain. By the end, she had recovered all her faculties, using her right hemisphere to develop the skills normally exercised by the left brain. You can read her story in her book, My Stroke of Insight, or see her deliver a TED lecture on the subject. Taylor is only the most dramatic example of what is becoming clearer each year: that by an effort of will, we can change not just our behaviour, not just our emotions, nor even just our character, but the very structure and architecture of our brain. Rarely was there a more dramatic scientific vindication of the great Jewish insight, that we can change.

That is the challenge of teshuvah.

There are two kinds of problem in life: technical and adaptive. When you face the first, you go to an expert for the solution. You are feeling ill, you go to the doctor, he diagnoses the illness, and prescribes a pill. That is a technical problem. The second kind

is where we ourselves are the problem. We go to the doctor, he listens carefully, does various tests, and then says: "I can prescribe a pill, but in the long-term, it is not going to help. You

are overweight, underexercised and overstressed. If you don't change your lifestyle, all the pills in the world will not help." That is an adaptive problem.

Adaptive problems call for teshuvah, and teshuvah itself is premised on the proposition that we can change. All too often we tell ourselves we can't. We are too old, too set in our ways. It's too much trouble. When we do that, we deprive ourselves of God's greatest gift to us: the ability to change. This was one of Judaism's greatest gifts to Western civilisation.

It is also God's call to us on Yom Kippur. This is the time when we ask ourselves where have we gone wrong? Where have we failed? When we tell ourselves the answer, that is when we need the courage to change. If we believe we can't, we won't. If we believe we can, we may.

The great question Yom Kippur poses to us is: Will we grow in our Judaism, our emotional maturity, our knowledge, our sensitivity, or will we stay what we were? Never believe we can't be different, greater, more confident, more generous, more understanding and forgiving than we were. May this year be the start of a new life for each of us. Let us have the courage to grow.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel: 'Be strong and of good courage; for thou shalt go with this people into the land which the Lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it"' (Deuteronomy 31:7).

On Rosh Hashana, the anniversary of the day on which the world was conceived, I explained the sighing-sobbing sounds of the shofar as the natural response of the Jew to an incomplete, imperfect world of evil as well as good, chaos as well as order. We are entrusted with the mission of bringing down the Divine attributes of loving-kindness and courage, of compassionate righteousness and moral justice, to suffuse society with freedom and peace in order to perfect and complete the world in the Kingship of the Divine.

This is the message of the firm, exultant and victorious tekiya sound of the shofar, when we crown God as King of the Universe.

This task is not a simple one; it requires our becoming a holy nation and a kingdom whose every citizen is a successful teacher of morality to the world. Hence, Rosh Hashana begins a period of teshuva, or repentance, which must continue until it succeeds – however long that may take. It will require the cumulative commitment of many generations to the retelling and then reliving of the biblical narrative and to scrupulous observance of God's will.

Rosh Hashana is a joyous festival because we have God's biblical promise that we will eventually succeed.

We recite those verses of our success again and again in our Yom Kippur liturgy.

But there is a second significance to the broken, crying sound of the shofar. It is the existential sound of the individual who is living life within a vale of tears, who often doubts that this world will ever be perfected in the Kingship of the Divine, who always doubts that he will have the strength of will and character to make the world any better and who even doubts that the world had a Creator in the first place.

Although such a train of thought may initially release the questioner from certain ethical and ritual responsibilities, it can only lead to a dead end. If life is merely a "tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing," why go through the struggle? The specter of a Sartrean world to which there is no exit other than suicide hardly leaves one with a life worth living or worth reproducing. It only leaves one trembling in fear before a dark, black hole of nothingness.

These questions plagued the children of Israel in the wake of the sin of the Golden Calf. Having experienced the concern, the miracles and wonders of the Lord during the Exodus, as well as the riveting Revelation at Sinai at which they actually heard the Word of the Divine, how could they possibly have fallen prey to the orgiastic abandon of wild Dionysiac debauchery? Moses, the source of their connection to God, had seemingly disappeared; they felt bereft and abandoned and so they lost themselves in a momentary "escape from freedom" and responsibility.

Moses is so frustrated that he smashes the sacred tablets. He beseeches God first to forgive Israel and then to teach the next generations how to deal with probable recurrences in the future. He says, "Make Your ways known to me" (Exodus 33:13)—now the Israelites must act to find favor in Your eyes, and "Show me Your glory in this world" (Exodus 33:18) – what truly characterizes You and Your relationship to us.

God then tells Moses to stand in the cleft of a rock in the mountain range of Sinai, to ready himself for the second Revelation, the continuation of the Ten Commandments. God will reveal to Moses His Name, His face, as it were, the aspect of God that may be grasped by the human mind.

And this is the Divine Revelation on the 10th day of Tishrei, Yom Kippur: Havaya Havaya, the Ineffable Name of God, of Havaya, which means literally "to bring into being, to create," and which the Talmudic sages identify as the God of infinite and unconditional love. The name is repeated twice, and as our Sages interpret, "I am the God who loves you before you sin and I am the God who loves you after you sin"—unconditional love.

The first Havaya explains that since God's essence is love, His first human emanation, the human being, also has most fundamentally the transcendent power to love another and thereby to perfect himself and the world. The second Havaya explains that although the human being will fail and will sin along the way, God will always be ready to forgive us as long as we seek forgiveness.

And God goes one step further. Yes, in our imperfect and incomplete world, it is often difficult to find God, to sense His presence and recognize His concern. It is even more difficult to bring the Divine Majesty to this often corrupt and evil world. But once a year, God will seek us, God will "come down" to us in His cloud of glory, God will knock on our door with His gift of unconditional forgiveness. All we need do is open the door for Him and let Him in—into our hearts, where He can already be found and into our homes and our families.

This is the magical gift of Yom Kippur, the day of consummate love.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

A Different Path to Teshuva: Why We Read the Book of Yonah on Yom Kippur
Rabbanit Chamutal Shoval

A deep examination of the Book of Yonah evokes many questions concerning the character of Yonah, his attempt to escape the mission he is given, the people of Nineveh and how Yonah reacts to their repentance.

The key question is, why, on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, do we read a story about teshuvah (repentance) that is seemingly unconnected to the Jewish nation? What lesson is there for us in the story of the people of Nineveh? Why do we choose to highlight the story of repentance of these particular people?

Following his maritime trials and tribulations and his refusal to fulfill his calling, Yonah finally arrives in Nineveh. There, he turns to the people, warning them that if they do not repent immediately, Nineveh will be destroyed. And without any resistance or delay, the people of Nineveh repent:

"And Yonah began to enter the city, a day's journey, and he proclaimed, and said: 'Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown'. And the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them" [Yonah 3:4-5].

Midrash Yalkut Shimoni highlights the difference between the People of Israel — a stiff-necked people — and the people of Nineveh: "I sent one prophet to Nineveh and they harkened unto Me and believed in Me; but this nation (Israel), how many prophets did

I not send to them time and time again and they harkened not unto me."

The Midrash explains that the People of Israel are a stiff-necked people; a nation which does not repent easily and needs constant reprimanding by numerous prophets. In contrast, the people of Nineveh repent immediately after being rebuked by a single prophet.

The comparison between the People of Israel and the residents of Nineveh is not meant to denigrate Israel in any way, nor does it serve as a further reprimand; rather, it comes to show the People of Israel that there is a way to do simple and spontaneous teshuvah.

"And God saw their deeds, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, which He said He would do unto them; and did not do it" [Yonah 3:10].

The entire story of the repentance of the people of Nineveh is captured in seven verses that encapsulate a simple story of repentance: rebuke, remorse and God's forgiveness.

In contrast, in its several thousand years of existence, the Jewish People have had a complicated relationship with God. A repetitive movement of coming closer and drawing back: sinful conduct, suffering, repentance and reverting to sin yet again.

It is an intricate relationship characterized by the desire to be close to God, going astray, exile, redemption — a tumultuous cycle. Am Yisrael desires a life of sanctity and wants to fulfill God's will; however, in reality this is not always the case. The Sin of the Golden Calf; the lack of faith during the wanderings in the desert; instances of theological infidelity even while living in the Land of Israel; the destruction of the First Temple followed by that of the Second Temple; God's ensuing hester panim — "hiding His face from us"; all of these contribute towards the relationship between God and His people: constant breaches of trust followed by restoration.

For this very reason, once a year, God wishes for us to read an alternative story of repentance. A simple story. On the holiest day of the year, God calls on us to put our complicated history aside and learn a lesson from the story of the people of Nineveh. On Yom Kippur we are given the opportunity to choose simple repentance, as exhibited by the people of Nineveh: teshuvah consisting of a mere seven verses involving rebuke, repentance and forgiveness.

The prophet Zephaniah wrote: "Woe to her that is filthy and polluted, to the oppressing city [ha'ir ha'yonah]! She harkened not to the voice, she received not correction; she trusted not in the Lord, she drew not near to her God" [Zephania 3:1].

Rashi, in his exegesis on Zephaniah, explains that the word yonah is a reference to Jerusalem, which, unlike the city of Nineveh, finds it difficult to repent and harken unto the word of the Lord. "Until now the reference was to Nineveh, but here he [the prophet] reverts to Jerusalem and says it will be a mockery, a city lying in its own filth, reeking of its sins."

As can be seen, the Book of Zephaniah plays with these similar words — "yonah and Nineveh" — contrasting the two. The yonah finds it hard to repent, but Nineveh repents immediately.

On Yom Kippur, as we read the Book of Yonah, we have a once-in-a-year opportunity to do teshuvah with no "baggage" from the past, without any mediation and unburdened by the rebuke of a myriad of prophets. Simple, straightforward teshuvah.

Once a year we have the chance "to step out of ourselves" and be, if only a little bit, like the people of Nineveh who repented wholeheartedly. God promises us that if we repent with a sincere heart, He will accept our teshuvah. The story of the people of Nineveh is meant to serve as an inspiration and a source of strength: God is waiting for our return; He will receive us with open arms.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Michael Rosensweig
The Yom Kippur Experience and its Aftermath: the Elevation of Human Spirituality (Achat Ba-Shanah)

At first glance, the mishnah (Yoma 70a) that depicts the culmination of the avodat Yom haKippurim seems to be superfluous and somewhat anticlimactic. After presenting in intricate detail the exacting protocols that enable the personal intimate spiritual journey of kenisah lifnei velifnim (entry into the innermost precinct of the Mikdash), the mishnah finds it necessary to record that the kohen gadol ultimately returned to his home, accompanied by a retinue, and followed by a yom tov celebration with his inner circle ("u-melavin oto ad beito, ve-yom tov hayah oseh le-ohavav..."). Rambam (avodat Yom haKippiurim, end of 4:2) includes this apparent aftermath as the final stage in the seder ha-avodah, to which the entire chapter is devoted. He twice emphasizes the kohen gadol's return to his home. Upon reflection, this mishnah crystallizes a profound perspective on the goal and impact of this inimitable day.

The mishnah's chronicling of the domestic return and celebration of the kohen gadol upon the conclusion of his extraordinary odyssey contrasts sharply and perhaps needs to be understood in light of the first mishnah in Yoma that begins to detail the meticulous avodah process. That mishnah informs us that the kohen gadol must distance himself from his home a full week in advance of the avodah, taking up residence in the Mikdash itself ("shivaat yamim kodem yom hakipurim mafrishin kohen gadol mi-beito le-lishkat parhedrin"). His preparation entails a necessary separation from his wife and family ("beito zu ishto"). One could have misconstrued that the kohen gadol's quarantine in advance of the avodah reflects an acute ascetic sensibility as the spiritual ideal, particularly as it relates to his journey lifnei ve-lifnim, to the sanctity of Shabbat Shabbaton embodied by ve-initem et nafshoteichem, and to the goal of kapparah and taharah. The fact that his married state is a basic prerequisite for his very capacity to preside over the avodah belies this perspective. Rambam records this precondition not as a requirement, but almost as a definition (Avodat Yom haKippurim 1:2-"hakol be-kohen gadol nasui"). The same first Mishnah examines extraordinary steps to ensure the kohen gadol's marital status, even as the concern for ritual impurity demands practical temporary separation. Indeed, the kohen gadol's family is prominently incorporated in his personal vidui on his par ("ani u-beiti"). Yahadut unambiguously decries celibacy and evinces no ambiguity or ambivalence about the spiritual significance of family life. [It is noteworthy that Aharon, who is the paradigm of the kohen gadol on Yom haKippurim - "bezot yavo Aharon el ha-kodesh", joined with Miriam in criticizing, albeit improperly and unjustifiably ("lo kein avdi Moshe..."), Moshe's apparent withdrawal from family life.] Undoubtedly, the family ideal as a halachic value underpins this avodah requirement, and conceivably it also enhances the sense of responsibility and empathy that contributes to the kohen gadol's representation of Klal Yisrael in this pivotal process. [There is some evidence that the urgency of the kohen gadol's marital status generally based upon "ve-hu ishah be-betulehah yikach" (Hilchot Isurei Biah 17:13) surpasses the general mitzvah of "ki yikach ish ishah" (Hilchot Ishut 1:1-2). I hope to discuss this and the kohen gadol's broader ideal stature elsewhere.]

The avodah is introduced against the background of the tragic death of Aharon's two sons- "achrei mot shenei benei Aharon". It is noteworthy, that according to some mefarshim, Nadav and Avihu refused to pursue family life, as they perceived it as a distraction to, even as a substantive compromise of a more ideal ascetic form of spirituality. From this perspective, the protocols presented to Aharon model the authentic halachic balance. Only a married kohen gadol, one who is firmly ensconced in "beito" can enter the kodesh ha-kodashim, notwithstanding the high standards of purity that require temporary adjustments and personal sacrifice. The ultimate joyous return to home base reinforces these themes.

Chazal perceived the emulation of melachim on Yom haKippurim as a central theme that manifests in numerous minhagim (see Rosh Yoma 8:24, and numerous other practices cited in Shulchan Aruch and poskim). On the

surface, this appears to be puzzling in light of the Talmudic passage (Shabbat 88b) that establishes man's superiority to the angels as it relates to Torah values and observance. The solution is, however, evident. Man's flaws and vulnerabilities require a more nuanced but ultimately more impressive, more challenging human spirituality. However, that entails the capacity to muster discipline and to harness a single-minded, even semi-ascetic orientation when mandated. Yom Kippur, "achat ba-shanah", embodying "ve-initem et nafshoteichem", "kulo la-Hashem", and "kenisah lifnei ve-lifnim" tests Klal Yisrael's mettle and its singular brand of human spirituality. Only if we can successfully compete with the melachim when it is halachically required or appropriate, then the wider scope and more formidable challenge of human spirituality is demonstrated to be a superior expression of avodat Hashem. Aharon's avodah, which required initial quarantine but had both its roots and telos in "beito", was accorded normative status, it was the foundation of halachic spirituality, while Nadav and Avihu's sincere effort, based on a one-dimensional ascetic posture, led to tragedy.

Chatam Sofer (Vayikra 16:23-24) commenting on Aharon's capacity to finally part with the bigdei lavan and resume his more conventional avodah representing Klal Yisrael, discusses the relative spiritual merits of isolation and engagement. While he notes Chovot ha-Levavot's (Shaar ha-Perishah) admiration for single-minded spiritual focus, he endorses the conclusion that halachically impacting Klal Yisrael takes precedence. He argues that precisely because Aharon required an initial period of quarantine in order to preside over the avodah, it was vital that he be instructed that his primary task remained as an engaged leader dedicated to "yoru mishpatechah le-Yaakov". Hence, he was instructed after completing the bigdei lavan-avodah, "u-ba Aharon el ohel moed u-pashat et bigdei ha-bad", a homiletical reference to concluding his "bedidah" (isolation) and rejoining mainstream leadership life! [Elsewhere (Torah Moshe), Chatam Sofer adds that Aharon's esoteric experiences while donning the bigdei lavan elevated his status, and by extension elevated the routine avodot (be-bigdei zahav) he resumed, justifying the need for a tevilah from bigdei lavan to bigdei zahav!]

It is no coincidence that the yirah-yeteirah (Hilchot Chanukah 3:6) - focused Yom Kippur leads seamlessly into the "simchah-yeteirah" (Hilchot Lulav 8:12) - centered Sukkot. Elsewhere, we have noted Rambam's view (Hilchot Yesodei haTorah 2:1-2) that ahavat and yirat Hashem are intimately connected. The concept of "gilu be-readah" (joy through trembling) is a core idea in Jewish thought. The celebration that concludes the avodah naturally paves the way for the multiple halachic expressions of joy on sukkot. The Shulchan Aruch records the practice to begin constructing the Sukkah on motzaei Yom haKippurim both in the end of Hilchot Yom haKippurim as well as at the very start of Hilchot Sukkah, as the interconnection between these seemingly conflicting but actually complementary motifs is reciprocally vital. It is also interesting to note that while we relocate our home in the sukkah during sukkot, the Mishnah (Sukkah 48a, and especially Rambam's codification - Hilchot Sukkah 6:11,14) emphasize that returning back to our year-round family foundation on Shimini Azeret constitutes a kiyum, the culmination of the entire period, a parallel to the journey of the kohen gadol on Yom haKippurim.

The subject of the final mishnah on the avodah, the successful and safe return of the kohen gadol to his home and family, then, represent the true culmination of the avodah itself, as implied by the Rambam's codification. While the methodology of avodat Yom haKippurim, and the demands of taharah on this day and in this process demand precautions, elevated standards of ritual purity, and a single-minded focus, the ultimate goal is to reaffirm, revisit and renew an intense level of spirituality, characterized by the theme of "kulo la-Hashem", that animates, elevates, and integrates into daily life. The initial domestic separation that is an investment in an impactful, and enhanced return home mandates a triumphant reception not only as an expression of personal relief, but as a joyous yom tov celebrating the genuine impact of Yom haKippurim, "achat ba-shanah"- a single day that transforms the entire year and that encapsulates the halachic ideal of human spirituality.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

Higher Repentance and Lower Repentance

Rav Nechemia Raanan

***Bina* (Understanding) and *Malkhut* (Kingdom)**

The Zohar (Ra'aya Mehemna III, 122b) distinguishes between two types of repentance: "teshuva ila'a" – the higher level of repentance, and "teshuva tata'a" – lower-level repentance. Each type of repentance is connected to a different Sefira of the ten Sefirot: The higher level of repentance is connected to the second Sefira – the Sefira of Bina (understanding), whereas the lower level of repentance is connected to the tenth and final Sefira – the Sefira of Malkhut (kingdom).

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi – the first rebbe of Chabad – explains the difference between these two types of repentance at length in the Tanya (Iggeret Ha-teshuva, chapters 7-9):

The true and direct path to lower-level repentance… involves two general elements: The first is to awaken supreme compassion from the Source of mercy for one's spirit and Divine soul, which has fallen from a lofty height, the Infinite Source of Life, into a deep pit, namely, the chambers of defilement and sitra achra…

The second element is to crush and subdue the kelipa and sitra achra, whose essence is simply grossness and arrogance… Crushing and subduing it to dust is its death and nullification. [Evil is crushed] through a broken and contrite heart, a sense of personal unworthiness, repugnance, and so forth…

And how is the heart to be broken and humbled? Only a very minor part of this can be accomplished through mortification and fasting… But the true humbling of the heart, so that it becomes broken and crushed, and so that the spirit of impurity and sitra achra will be removed, is achieved through being a "master of accounting" with all the profundity of one's mind. One should concentrate his intellect and understanding deeply for a period of time every day, or every night before Tikkun Chatzot, to contemplate how his sins have brought about the exile of the Divine Presence, as noted above, and caused his spirit and Divine soul to be uprooted from the Divine Source of all Life, and demeaned it to a place of defilement and death…

After deeply considering all this… his heart will be thoroughly impressed with the pathetic state of the spark of Divinity within his soul, and [in his soul's Source] Above, as noted earlier. He will thereby arouse Supreme mercy, from the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy which derive from the Supreme Will… There is no further nurture for the evil (lit., "extraneous") forces and for the sitra achra… After the spirit [of forgiveness] passes over [the souls of sinners] and purifies them, their souls are then enabled to return literally unto God Himself, to ascend the greatest heights, to their very Source, and cleave to Him with a remarkable unity… This is perfect repentance. This state of unity and this repentance are called teshuva ila'a, higher-level repentance, which follows teshuva tata'a, lower-level repentance.

Malkhut is the lowermost of the ten Sefirot, which is the furthest point of Divine revelation, the closest to the material world. The Sefira of Malkhut is where the word of God turns into physical reality, as is stated: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made" (Tehillim 33:6). Lower-level repentance, which is identified with the Sefira of Malkhut, is repentance that focuses on eradicating one's sins and achieving atonement – both by praying to God that He have mercy upon the soul that has sinned, and by humbling one's heart.

In contrast, Bina is the second highest Sefira, and it expresses the initial point of the Divine revelation in this world. Bina is likened in kabbalistic writings to Ima, mother, whose "descendants" are the Sefirot that follow it – Chesed, Gevura, and the others. Therefore, higher-level repentance – which is connected to the Sefira of Bina – is repentance that returns the soul to the highest spiritual levels, to actual cleaving to God.

Just as the Shekhina reveals itself in the world through the ten Sefirot, so too the personality of man – who was created in the image of God – reveals itself in the structure of

the ten Sefirot. In the human soul, the Sefira of Bina is very close to the deepest aspects of the individual's personality, whereas the Sefira of Malkhut is the manner in which the individual's personality is realized in actions.

Higher-level repentance should involve a struggle with a person's very identity, bringing it to perfection. It is concerned not with external actions or with the manner in which the individual's personality finds expression in the real world, but with the depths of that personality. This repentance should bring about a revolution in the person's inner world. This itself will lead to a change in his behavior as well. In contrast, lower-level repentance – which is directed at the Sefira of Malkhut – struggles directly with a person's actions, with his deeds and sins, and wishes to perfect the individual's conduct in the world.

Repentance Through Free Will

Who is charged with the task of repentance in each of its forms? This issue is the subject of a disagreement between leading medieval authorities.

According to the Rambam, it is the individual who stands at the center of repentance, and the responsibility to engage in repentance is wholly on him:

Free will is granted to all men. If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his… There is no one who can prevent him from doing good or evil. Just as a person can sin consciously and willfully, he can repent consciously and willfully. (Hilkhot Teshuva 5:1, 6:2)

According to the Rambam, God does not play an active role in the process of repentance. God's role is to observe man and examine the sincerity of his repentance, as full repentance involves reaching the state where "He who knows the hidden will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin again" (Hilkhot Teshuva 2:2). Indeed, the idea of free will plays a central role in the Rambam's Hilkhot Teshuva, as his entire conception of repentance is based upon this idea.

This is true of lower-level repentance. But according to the Rambam, this is also true of higher-level repentance. The first two chapters of Hilkhot Teshuva deal with repentance for specific sins. This repentance is focused on fixing the sin and purifying one's soul of it, and the objective is "that he will never return to that sin again":

If a person transgresses any of the mitzvot of the Torah, whether a positive command or a negative command – whether willingly or inadvertently – when he repents, and returns from his sin, he must confess before God, blessed be He…

What constitutes repentance? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart never to commit them again… Similarly, he must regret the past… [He must reach the level where] He who knows the hidden will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin again…

Among the paths of repentance is for the penitent to a) constantly call out before God, crying and entreating; b) perform charity according to his ability; c) separate himself far from the object of his sin; d) change his name, as if to say "I am a different person and not the same one who sinned;" e) change his behavior in its entirety to the good and the path of righteousness; and f) travel in exile from his home. (Hilkhot Teshuva 1:1-2:4)

Later the Rambam deals with the exalted level of repentance, and there he mentions that repentance brings a person close to the Shekhina and allows him to cleave to it:

Great is repentance, for it draws a man close to the Shekhina, as it is stated (Hoshea 14:2): "Return, O Israel, to the Lord, your God";… and it is stated (Yirmeyahu 4:1): "If you will return, 0 Israel, declares God, You will return to Me." That is to say, if you will repent, you will cling to Me.

Repentance brings near those who were far removed. Previously, this person was hated by God, disgusting, far removed, and abominable. Now, he is beloved and desirable, close, and dear… As it is stated (Hoshea 2:1): "Instead of saying to you, You are not My nation, He will tell you, You are the children of the living God"…

How exalted is the level of repentance! Previously, the [transgressor] was separate from God, the Lord of Israel… He would call out [to God] without being answered… Now, he is clinging to the Shekhina… He calls out [to God] and is answered immediately… He fulfills mitzvot and they are accepted with pleasure and joy… And what is more they are desired… (Hilkhot Teshuva 7:6-7)

The repentance mentioned here by the Rambam parallels higher-level repentance, whose objective is cleaving to the Shekhina and returning to God. But, according to the Rambam, this repentance is the result of the process of lower-level repentance, which is the sole responsibility of the individual. Free will is granted to every person to engage in repentance, a process which can only be undertaken "consciously and willingly."

Partnership In Repentance

In contrast to the Rambam, the Ramban maintains that God joins man and helps him in the process of repentance.

According to the Ramban, repentance commanded by the Torah: “For the passage ‘And you shall call them to mind… and shall return to the Lord your God’ (Devarim 30:1-2) – is a mitzva that He commands us to do” (commentary on Devarim 30:11). In order to understand the essence of repentance according to the Ramban, we must examine the verses in this passage.

The passage dealing with repentance opens with initial and general repentance, which is when the sinner is ready to obey the voice of God:

And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you shall call them to mind among all the nations, into which the Lord your God has driven you, and shall return to the Lord your God, and shall obey His voice according to all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart, and with all your soul. (Devarim 30:1-2)

This repentance appears to be general in nature and is still deficient. It is motivated by suffering that the person experienced, and not by an inner awakening to repentance. The repentance is "ad Hashem," to God, but without actually reaching Him. The individual does not yet return "el Hashem," all the way to God, as he does later in the chapter (Devarim 30:10). What is more, the Torah merely writes that the person obeys the voice of God, but does not indicate whether he fulfills all the statues and commandments, as in the later verses (Devarim 30:10). Indeed, Rabbi Avraham Y. Kook sees these verses as relating to repentance that is still filled with hindrances, as was exemplified by the movement of national revival that arose in his time:

When one truly wishes to repent, even if he is blocked by various hindrances, e.g., because of confusion, or because of weakness, or because of an inability to mend matters relating to interpersonal relations… nevertheless, since the desire to repent is strong, even though he is still unable to remove all the hindrances, we must accept this illumination of repentance as something that purifies and sanctifies…

And just as this is a great principle regarding the individual, so too this applies to the community as a whole. The illumination of repentance is found in Israel. A willing awakening of the nation as a whole to return to its homeland, its essence, its spirit and its nature – indeed, it contains the light of repentance.

Indeed, this matter finds clear expression in the wording of the Torah: "And you shall return to (ad) the Lord your God… And if you turn to (el) the Lord your God." Repentance is an inner process, only it is covered by many buffering screens – but no hindrance has the power to prevent the heavenly light from appearing upon us. (Orot Ha-teshuva 17:2)

The second stage in the process of repentance is God's response to man's actions:

And then the Lord your God will turn your captivity, and have compassion upon you, and will return and gather you from all the nations, among whom the Lord your God has scattered you. If your outcasts are at the utmost parts of heaven, from there will the Lord your God gather you, and from there will He fetch you: and the Lord your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will do you good, and multiply you more than your fathers. (Devarim 30:3-5)

In response to Israel's initial repentance, God gathers them from their dispersion and returns them to their homeland. The beginning of the process was indeed in the hands of man, but its continuation is in the hands of God.

The third stage in the repentance process – which is described in the verses that follow – is complete inner repentance, and it includes circumcision of the heart, keeping all the statutes and commandments, and returning to God. As is clear from the verses, in this stage as well, a major and important role is played by God:

And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, that you may live. And the Lord your God will put all these curses upon your enemies, and on them who hate you, who persecuted you. And you shall return, and obey the voice of the Lord, and do all His commandments which I command you this day. And the Lord your God will make you plenteous in every work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your land, for good: for the Lord will again rejoice over you for good, as He rejoiced over your fathers: if you shall hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statues which are written in this book of the Torah, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul. (Devarim 30:6-10)

The process described in these verses is a circular one. The people of Israel open with weak repentance, based on impure motivations, but this repentance suffices to move forward the continuation of the process by God. After God restores His people to their land and circumcises their hearts, Israel reaches the lofty repentance of returning to God.

Using the distinction between the different types of repentance discussed above, it may be suggested that the people of Israel open with lower-level repentance, and God helps them engage in higher-level repentance. The people of Israel are initially motivated by the troubles encountered in their exile, but in the end they are driven by a quest for God's closeness, a desire to return to Him. Man is asked to open the door, and the process is then completed by God.

For this reason, the Torah explains that this process, which ultimately leads to high levels of closeness to the Shekhina, is in fact a simple matter:

For this commandment which I command you this day, it is not hidden from you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it, and do it? Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it to us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very near to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, that you may do it. (Devarim 30:11-14)

A person must do with his mouth and with his heart that which is in his power to do, and he will receive Divine assistance to complete his course of repentance. Rabbi Chayyim of Chernovitz explains: "When it is truly in your heart and in your mouth, then 'to do it,' the Holy One, blessed be He, becomes your agent to perfect it and to do it" (Sidduro shel Shabbat I, 6, 2, 5).

The primary difference between the Rambam and the Ramban lies in their respective perceptions of the essence of repentance. According to the Rambam, the mitzva of repentance relates to lower-level repentance, which is the sole responsibility of man, whereas the Ramban posits that the mitzva of repentance includes the entire process – until higher-level repentance is reached. In other words, according to the Rambam, the mitzva of repentance calls upon the sinner to assume responsibility and totally change his ways by force of his own will, whereas the Ramban believes that the mitzva of repentance demands a person to open the door to change and then hope for Divine grace that will help him bring about a revolution in his personality.

For this reason, the Ramban sees the Biblical passage dealing with repentance as the source for the mitzva of repentance, while the Rambam maintains that this passage should be understood as a promise for the future, and not as a command:

The Torah has already promised that, ultimately, Israel will repent towards the end of her exile and, immediately, she will be redeemed as it is stated (Devarim 30:1-3): "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon you… and you shall return to the Lord your God… Then the Lord your God will return your captivity." (Hilkhot Teshuva 7:5)

Open Up For Me An Opening Like The Eye Of A Needle

In light of the Ramban's explanation, we can explain a Midrash that is based on two seemingly contradictory verses:

"Turn us to You, O Lord, and we shall be turned" (Eikha 5:21) – The people of Israel said before the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the universe, it is up to you – turn us. He said to them: It is up to you, as it is stated (Zekharya 1:3): "Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts." (Eikha Rabba 5, 21)

The Midrash works on the assumption that repentance is a joint process, which involves both man and God as partners. The people of Israel and God disagree about who must initiate the process: The people of Israel ask God to begin the process, as it is stated: "Turn us to You, and we shall be turned"; whereas God demands that the people of Israel turn to Him first so that He may turn to them, as it is stated: "Return to Me, and I will return to you." In another Midrash we find a compromise between these two positions:

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: My son, Open up for me an opening of repentance like the eye of a needle, and in turn I will open up an opening for you through which wagons can enter. (Shir Ha-shirim Rabba 5, 2)

It is man's responsibility to start the process of repentance. He must initiate by admitting to his sins and repenting for them. In this way he opens up an opening for God as small as the eye of a needle. But once the door is open, the Shekhina bursts through and expands the opening to be as large as the opening of the entrance hall of the Temple. Once man sets the repentance process in motion, with lower-level repentance, he is promised that God will circumcise his heart, draw him close, and complete the repentance process, turning it into higher-level repentance. [Translated by David Strauss]