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

Note: Because of Sukkot, the next two weeks have very few work days. I expect not to be able to post again until Noach on Rosh Hodesh Chesvan. I included a few items for Sukkot in this issue – when I did not have postings from regular contributors for Yom Kippur.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

As Israel's primary focus turns from Hamas to the evils of Iran, Gaza, Hezbollah, and their allies, we pray that Hashem will protect us during the coming year of 5785. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world.

On Yom Kippur afternoon, frequently around 4 p.m., after fasting for approximately 22 hours, we reach mincha – a good time to reflect on the meaning of Yom Kippur and a fast that has already continued for nearly an entire night and day. Almost immediately, mincha turns to a Torah reading about sexual prohibitions and then the famous haftorah of Yonah. Why do we read this Torah reading (from Achrei Mot) and haftorah now, late on Yom Kippur afternoon? Extensive discussions by Rabbi David Fohrman (alephbeta.org) and Rabbi Y.Y Jacobson have contributed substantially to my reflections on these questions. For the Torah reading, the symbol of Yonah's fish is a reference to sexual addictions and promiscuity – an obvious connection between the Torah reading and Yonah.

Hashem calls to Yonah ben Amitai to go to Nineveh, an evil city of 120,000 people (around 700 BCE – a very large city at the time) to call on them to perform teshuvah. Should the people ignore Yonah's message, God will destroy the city and the people in 40 days. Yonah rebels against this prophecy and runs away to Tunisia (in Africa), far away from Israel, because of his understanding that God only delivers prophecies in Eretz Yisrael.

Why does Yonah not wish to deliver this message? He knows that the people of Nineveh will believe his message, perform teshuvah, and that God will forgive them. Yonah also knows that in approximately 80 years, the grandchildren of this generation in Assyria will rampage Israel, destroy the northern kingdom of Israel, weaken Yehuda, and nearly succeed in destroying the Temple. Yonai does not want to deliver a message that he knows will not come true. His name, Yonah ben Amitai, means "Yonah, the son of truth." He does not want to live if his message will not come true.

There are several problems with this summary, which should be familiar to all of us. If Yonah wants his message to be true, he need only say, "perform teshuvah or in 40 days God will destroy Nineveh." That message is true. Also, is this Haftorah about performing teshuvah? Yonah never performs teshuvah. The Haftorah is not about the teshuvah of Assyria – that "teshuvah" is only temporary. The Haftorah is about Yonah. What message to Yonah are we to learn from his short book?

Rabbi Fohrman correctly notes that we cannot understand the story unless our explanation includes the message of the plant that appears over night to shade Yonah and the worm that comes the next day and kills the plant. The plant grows by magic without anyone planting a seed or cultivating it. The plant is a gift from God, and the message is that Hashem loves Yonah. Rabbi Fohrman notes by contrast that the worm represents Divine Justice. Since no one planted a seed or cultivated the plant, it had no reason to be there, and thus it must die.

Yonah ends by slightly modifying God's thirteen Divine Attributes. Yonah changes "Emet" (truth) to "changing His mind about doing evil." Yonah is angry that God accepts the teshuvah of the people of Nineveh (and decides not to destroy them). God wants to teach Yonah (and us) that he should not want to live in a world without Divine compassion. God brought a tall plant to shade Yonah – out of love. Yonah was happy with that plant for shade. We, as well as Yonah, must realize that a world without Divine compassion would be an unhappy place. Moshe and the people of the generation of the Exodus quickly learned that a world of Divine justice without Divine compassion would be fatal for humans. This message is probably the most important lesson from Yonah.

What if this call to a prophet came in the past twelve months, and Hashem had asked one of us to take a message to Iran or Hamas threatening to destroy their people if they did not perform teshuvah and give up trying to destroy Israel? Would any of us be willing to accept this mission (with a guarantee of Divine protection while delivering such a dangerous message)? Is God trying to create a situation where Israel faces an opportunity (and the danger) of making such an agreement with hostile Arab leaders? The Abraham Accords show that Israel is able to negotiate such an agreement with some Arab countries – but Hamas? Iran? Hopefully Jews will have an opportunity to consider another such genuine offer in the near future.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander prays that we can transform October 7 from a day of horror and devastation into a catalyst for national renewal, dialogue, and solidarity. As Rabbi Brander observes, part of our task going forward is to work on ourselves – make B'Nai Yisrael stronger and more united. We have this task as well as that of working toward coexisting with other nations surrounding Israel – and finding a way for fellow Jews to live in peace with others wherever we live. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, would have agreed with Rabbi Brander and would have urged me to be certain that we taught this message to our children and grandchildren.

Kativah v'chatima tovah.

Hannah and Alan

* Because of a lack of time, I am using my message from last year as a starting point rather than writing an entirely new Dvar Torah. I am likely not to be able to post again until after Yom Kippur.

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah, Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah,

Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

From Memory to Action: Reflecting on October 7 and Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5785 (2024)

Rabbi Brander has dedicated his Yom Kippur Dvar Torah in memory of **Captain Eitan Oster z"l,** a graduate of Ohr Torah Stone's Robert M. Beren Machanaim Hesder Yeshiva, who fell in battle in Lebanon.

As we honor the sacrifice of Eitan and all of our other heroes, we also pray that this Yom Kippur brings us all ktiva v'chatima tova — may we all be inscribed in the Book of Life for a year of peace, health and strength.

As we mark the first anniversary of the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, especially with Yom Kippur just days away, this is a moment that calls for reflection on the meaning of memory. The Aseret Yemei Teshuva are, year after year, a time for reflection on where we are and how we've gotten here. These are the very questions that weigh on our hearts and minds, as we mark a full year since the horrendous attack and the ensuing war and hostage crisis. We each carry memories and emotions from the past year, along with countless stories from others. As we mark the Yahrtzeit of so many souls, we must ask: How will we remember this chapter of our Jewish story? What narrative will we pass on to our children and grandchildren about that fateful day in October?

Memory is of paramount importance in the Torah. We are asked to remember Shabbat (Shemot 20:8), the Exodus from Egypt (Shemot 13:3), the history of our past (Devarim 32:7), the gossip of Miriam (Devarim 24:9), the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai (Devarim 4:9), the waywardness of our ancestors in the wilderness (Devarim 9:7), the assault of Amalek on our people (Devarim 25:17), and more. While some authorities, like Nachmanides, see many of these calls to memory as full-fledged mitzvot (Ramban, Hasagot HaRamban l'sefer ha'Mitzvot ha'Asin #7; Sh'chat Lavin #2), Maimonides adopts a more selective approach. He considers remembering Shabbat (Sefer Hamitzvot, Asin #155), Amalek (ibid. #189), and the Exodus (Hilchot Chametz Umatza 7:1) as mitzvot, while excluding the others.

Maimonides' shorter list of mitzvot connected with memory teaches us that memory mitzvot should only be counted in the 613 commandments if they require action, not only intent. In the mitzvot he lists, we actualize memory through concrete acts: Kiddush and Havdala for Shabbat; the Pesach Seder's storytelling and symbolic foods or remembering the Beit haMikdash underneath the chuppah and at various other times within the Jewish calendar. Memory, in this view, must manifest through action. This active memory shapes our present, guides our future, and even opens us up to reevaluate the past.

The Rav, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, captures this idea in Halakhic Man, where he writes that our actions done in memory of people or events can reshape the past. "Man molds the image of the past," he writes, "by infusing it with the future, by subjecting the "was" to the "will be."" (p. 117) This awareness of time, he argues in The Lonely Man of Faith (p. 46- 47), is essential to our relationship with God. In the covenantal community, generations of the past, present and future

engage in dialogue, and every moment manifests in memory, present action and anticipation of the future. (p. 46-47)

This is why, the Rav explains, we have the capacity to do teshuva. When people reevaluate their past personal transgressions and acts upon them positively, the past and future intertwine into a single experience, and the legacy of the past takes on new meaning.

The role of memory in shaping the future is strikingly demonstrated in the debate between Rav Tarfon and Rebbe Akiva regarding the closing blessing of the Haggadah's Maggid section (Pesachim 116b). R. Tarfon maintains that the blessing of the storytelling phase of the Seder should simply give thanks to God for redeeming our ancestors from Egypt, but the optimistic, future-oriented R. Akiva insists on including a prayer for the future – showing that memory must always propel us toward writing the next chapters in the Jewish story; toward redemption.

As we stand before God this Yom Kippur with the memory of October 7 fresh in our hearts, we must recognize our responsibility to actively shape how this chapter will be remembered. What actions will be taken to define our shared vision of what this moment in our history has meant and will continue to mean? What concrete steps are each of us taking to build national resilience and foster national unity? To support those on the frontlines and those who are holding up the homefront? What are we doing to bring an end to so much death, displacement, and despair? These questions are fitting for this Day of Atonement.

This year, when we recite the Yizkor for our loved ones who are no longer with us, we also remember the victims of Oct. 7th and the ongoing war. We commit to preserving their memory, like we do for loved ones of the past, through meaningful action. Let us transform Oct. 7 from a day of horror and devastation into a day of mourning that is also a catalyst for national renewal, dialogue and solidarity.

This is the Torah's challenge: every memory of our shared past holds within it a call to action, and a prayer for a better tomorrow. As we determine our destiny for the coming year, let's include in that a commitment to not only remember the past, but also to reshape our future. May our actions in the coming year bring healing to Am Yisrael, peace to our region and redemption to the world.

Gmar Chatima Tova.

* President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone, a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

Yom Kippur: I am a Work in Progress

By Rabbi Dovid Green * (2000)

I was describing a scene recently that had occurred in a crowded shul where I had gone to pray the afternoon service. A fellow walked in near the end with a look that was rather tenuous and uncertain. He got the siddur open to a page on the back of the book with his finger poised at a certain point. He looked around as if awaiting some cue. The service ended and people started to exit. Seeing that, he asked the fellow next to him if it's over and in a semi-panic state he began to recite haltingly the mourners kaddish from the transliteration at the back of the siddur. Some people gathered around him and afterward he told them that his mother had just died and he had come to say kaddish for her. I was relating the story partially in admiration of his courage to enter a strange environment and recite strange words in a foreign language aloud, and partially in awe of the powerful lure of an adult child to do something significant for a deceased parent.

My meaning was misunderstood and someone in the group suggested that maybe the people there considered him to be a hypocrite for only coming then to the synagogue. Nothing had been farther from the truth. Actually, that person had

been immediately swallowed into a sea of concern and empathy.

It's a little like the bad joke about the boy who hadn't say a word for fifteen years and his parents thought him incapable of speech until one night at dinner when he threw his spoon down in disgust and declared, "Arrrrrrrgg! The soup is terrible!" His mother jumped with joy and exclaimed, "John, you spoke! But, how come you didn't say anything till now?" To which he blithely answers, "Till now the soup was good!"

The parent cares less why he didn't speak till now and focuses on the fact that now he speaks. Even if a person opens his mouth in prayer only in a time of pain and sorrow, that kaddish, that tearful sincere expression is certainly received with joy. Why a person didn't pray till now is less important to the Receiver of prayer. Till now the soup was pretty good! Life was smooth and creamy.

Furthermore, there is a crucial distinction between being a hypocrite and being inconsistent. If a person comes to lay a carpet in my living room and somewhere in the middle of the job I spot him going out to his truck, I am not ready to condemn his work on the spot and report him to The Better Business Bureau. Even though the rug is full of bumps and not every corner is buckled down, still, if he goes out to his truck and eats his lunch, the lack of job completion is only an indicator that more work is yet to be done. Why should I panic and come to false conclusions? However, if he enters his truck, revs the engine, heads home and sends me a bill, thereby declaring that he considers the job is complete, then I'll have Ralph Nader on the phone in the drop of a carpet nail.

When person says that he is the archetype of virtue and the model of perfection, as if the job is done, crowning personal errors or institutionalizing human foibles as ideals; these are the boldest invitations to be titled hypocrite.

I asked a great man what the definition of a positive self-esteem is, and he answered simply: "Knowing your good points and your bad points!" When striving for goodness, inconsistencies will continue to appear. The moment a person improves in one area there are other areas to be updated. When one dish is being koshered the other dishes may not yet be koshered. If that's being a hypocrite then we could not afford to try to be perfect until we actually were!

There are two faults here. The first is to pretend to be perfect and the other not to at least try to become better. I have seen it displayed on the fancy buildings in Manhattan when under renovation, "Pardon our appearance, work in progress." When we stand honestly before our Father in heaven on the holy day of Yom Kippur it is important to neither feign perfection or to fall into despair.

The healthiest way to succeed may be to hang a sign on the wall of your heart simply declaring, "Pardon my appearance I am a work in progress!"

Good Shabbos! A Good Yom Tov!

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

Yom Kippur: A Thought for Shabbat Shuva and Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Dov Linzer

Rosh Yeshiva and President, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2012

The relationship between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is both obvious and complex. Obvious, in that Divine judgment and forgiveness are closely connected – we recognize that there is no one who can justify him or herself to their Creator, and thus a day of judgment requires a day of forgiveness which brings with it the Divine gift of atonement. Complex, however, in that the sequence of the two days does not seem to be logical. Why does Yom Kippur follow Rosh Hashana? Would we not prefer to first be forgiven and then to stand in judgment? And if we have already been judged on Rosh Hashana, what good is the forgiveness of Yom Kippur?

In answering this latter question, the Gemara in Rosh Hashana (16b) (also to be found in the Tosefta Rosh Hashana

(1:13)) states that the judgment is protracted. It does not end on Rosh Hashana – one's judgment is "written" on Rosh Hashana, but it is only "sealed" on Yom Kippur (perhaps we might say that it is "penciled in" on Rosh Hashana). This explains the role of Yom Kippur that follows a day of judgment, but in the process it transforms Yom Kippur from a day of forgiveness into another day of judgment. The theme of din, of judgment, now dominates both days. Although teshuva is necessary to achieve a positive outcome, it seems to no longer be the immediate theme of the day of Yom Kippur. An alternative, which would have maintained more the discrete themes of the days, would have been to say that the judgment is sealed on Rosh Hashana, but Yom Kippur, as a day of teshuva and atonement, allows us a chance of appeal (the concept of "tearing up" the evil decree). Chazal, by and large, did not emphasize this approach, and to have done so would have been to create a greater hurdle for us to overcome – the decree has already been finalized and would now need to be reversed. Regardless, neither of these approaches explains fully why we cannot begin the process with forgiveness, why a day of atonement does not or cannot precede a day of judgment.

I believe that it is possible to think about the relationship of these two days in the reverse. Yom Kippur does not end the process of judgment. Rather, Rosh Hashana begins the process of teshuva (indeed, it is the first day of the aseret yimei teshuva). What is the first step in teshuva? The standard answer is – vidduy, admission of one's sins. But there is actually a critical step that precedes vidduy, and that is hakarat hachet, a true, honest realization of sin. A person needs to look at him or herself harshly in the mirror, to truly confront his or her shortcomings and transgressions, to own them, to understand how wrong they are, to recognize the harm that they cause, and to understand why one acts this way. All this is necessary before a meaningful vidduy can take place. For the teshuva process to have any traction and for the vidduy to be more than just a vidduy peh, more than just a superficial admission with perhaps some momentary sincerity, but without deep conviction, one must first be makir chet, one must first go through a serious process of introspection, reflection, and self-judgment.

For this hakarat hachet to take place, one needs to present him or herself to judgment – before God, and before oneself. For true teshuva to take place, Rosh Hashana must precede Yom Kippur. A Day of Judgment is necessary to begin the teshuva process that can end in a Day of Atonement. Sure, we would all love to start with forgiveness. It is so much easier to be forgiven without owning up to one's sins. As a cartoon in a recent New Yorker would have it: Man in a flower store says to the clerk, "What kind of flower says, 'I'm sorry' without admitting wrongdoing?" And don't we see this every day in the news – politicians and celebrities who are asking to be forgiven, while never admitting they have done anything wrong? Or, more frequently, that they admit that they have done wrong, but it is a totally facile admission, it is a vidduy peh with no reflection or conviction behind it. The message is: let's just get beyond the admission, so I can be forgiven already, so I can be loved and accepted again. It is a desire for a Yom Kippur without aYom HaDin.

The Sefat Emet says it this way: We ask in our prayers, zakhreinu li'tova, remember us for good. This request is a core part of the process, for in our prayers we acknowledge that we are being judged. By not submitting to judgment against our will, but rather by asking to be remembered, by willingly presenting ourselves for Divine judgment, we take stock in ourselves, we look at ourselves honestly, and we engage in self-judgment. If we take this step, if we own "zakhreinu," then it will be "li'tova,", it will lead to a good judgment, it will lead to true forgiveness.

It is obvious why we seek to avoid this critical first step. Hakarat hachet is no easy thing. We have built up many defenses – both psychological and habitual – to protect ourselves against such introspection and self-criticism. Who likes to hear or think bad things about oneself? And we fear the outcome of such a process. If we are truly honest with ourselves, and truly own up to our failings, then what? Our ego is devastated; our self-esteem is in shambles. Where would we go from there? How much easier it is to continue to hold ourselves in high regard, and to find ways to bracket those things we would rather not look at, to maintain our bad behavior and not let it impact our sense of ourselves. Our capacity for self-deception and rationalization is infinite. The Gemara teaches that once a person has committed a sin and repeated it, he considers it to no longer be sinful, but it has become (in his eyes) a reshut, a matter that is permitted. To which Rav Yisrael Salanter added – and once he has done it three times, it becomes a mitzvah.

How do we stop engaging in such self-deception? How do work towards true change, true self- betterment, true teshuva? We submit ourselves to a process of din, to honestly presenting ourselves before God in judgment, and to honestly judging ourselves before God. And how will our ego survive such a brutally honest process? How will we regain our self-esteem? That is the promise of atonement. A true process of teshuva which begins with hakarat hachet will culminate in forgiveness, in being forgiven by God and, equally important, in allowing ourselves to truly forgive ourselves. And such

forgiveness will bring atonement, an at-one-ment, a being at one with God, and a being at one with oneself. We will have been transformed in the process, we will be better people, and we will be truly, and honestly, at peace with ourselves.

May we all engage in the serious work of true teshuva, and may this Yom Kippur bring forgiveness and atonement to all of us and to all of Klal Yisrael. Ki bayom hazeh yikhaper aleikhem litaher etchem. Mikol chatoteikhem lifnei Hashem titharu. "For on this day God shall make an atonement for you, to purify you. From all of your sins, on this day, you shall be made clean before the Lord." (Vayikra 16:30)

Ketiva vaChatima Tova!

[note: from my archives]

Thoughts for Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Although we popularly refer to the upcoming fast day as Yom Kippur, the Torah calls it Yom haKippurim — the day of atonements (in the plural). The plural form reminds us that there are many roads to atonement. Each person is different and is on a unique spiritual level; each comes with different insights, experiences, memories. The roads to atonement are plural, because no two of us have identical needs.
This season of Teshuvah and Kapparah — repentance and atonement — provides us with a special challenge and opportunity. We are granted a yearly period of time for intense evaluation of our lives. This period should serve as a springboard to deeper understanding and personal growth.

The first step in the process of spiritual renewal is to become humbly aware of our frailties. No matter how successful we think we are, we are mortal! We have limited physical capacities and a limited time of life on this earth. Aside from our physical limitations, we have moral and religious shortcomings that must be confronted. The Spanish thinker, Ortega y Gasset, suggested that a person grows only after confronting deep existential crisis. *"These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. He who does not really feel himself lost, is without remission; that is to say, he never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality."* The first goal of this season is to feel "shipwrecked."

But when we do "come up against our own reality" we often reach a point of perplexity. How are we to make ultimate sense of our lives? How are we to understand the vagaries of human existence — disease, wars, injustice? How are we to deal with all the social and professional pressures? How can we cope with problems in our families and communities? How can we advance beyond the quagmire of fear and self-doubt?

The famous Hassidic Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk once asked: Where is God? And he answered: Where ever a human being lets Him in! If we want to feel the presence of God, we need to open ourselves to that experience. The season of Teshuvah and Yom haKippurim is a time to restore our relationship with the Almighty, to express our perplexities. This genuine experience of relationship with God gives us the inner strength to cope with our problems and perplexities.

A further step in the process of Teshuvah and Kapparah is balancing the feelings of alienation and belonging. We say to the Almighty: *"ki ger anokhi imakh; toshav kekhol avotai,"* I am a stranger with You, a sojourner as were all of my ancestors. What does this mean? I feel as though I am a stranger, alienated from God; there are barriers between me and You. But I want to be a sojourner, a permanent resident in Your presence, not a stranger or a passing visitor. I want to come home to the teachings and traditions of my ancestors who have maintained faith and courage for the past 3500 years.

A parable: A person tries to cut down a tree with a dull edged saw. He works very hard but makes little progress. A passerby sees this and asks: why don't you sharpen the saw? The person responds: I don't have time, I can't stop working, I need to cut down this tree. The passerby says: But if you would stop working for a few minutes to sharpen the

saw, you would actually save time and effort, and you would better be able to accomplish your goal! The person replies: No, I don't have time to stop working, I must keep sawing.

Without the proper tools, we exert great energy but achieve inadequate results.

In spiritual life, too, we need proper tools. If we work with old habits, with stubborn attachment to stale and futile patterns, we will not grow. We need to think more clearly about our goals and how we can best attain them. Yom haKippurim provides a day when we take off from our usual routine. It is an entirely different kind of day from any other day of the year. It is a time to sharpen ourselves spiritually; to humbly face our limitations; to cope with our perplexities; to seek atonement and purification, to return to our spiritual core.

The season of Teshuvah and Kapparah provides us with a unique spiritual opportunity. Happy are they who can experience this season with an acute mind and alert spirit.

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* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.
https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3281

Happiness: Thoughts for Succoth

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

The Torah informs us that the festival of Succoth commemorates God's providence over the Israelites during their years of wandering in the wilderness. An old question is: why was this holiday scheduled to begin specifically on the 15th day of Tishri? The dates for Pessah (15 Nissan) and for Shavuoth (6 Sivan) are clearly linked to historical events — the day of the Exodus and the day of the Revelation at Mount Sinai. But the wandering in the wilderness was ongoing for 40 years, with no particular historic connection to Tishri 15?

Rabbi Haim David Halevy, in his Torat Hayyim al ha-Moadim, suggests that the Tishri 15 date was specified by the Almighty so as to be parallel to the Nissan 15 date of Pessah. Since the Exodus from Egypt is so central to Jewish thought and observance, Pessah and Succoth were set exactly six months apart, to the day, in order to ensure that we experience the power of the Exodus on a regular basis every six months.

The great 18th century sage, Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (known popularly as the Hidah), offers a different explanation in his Midbar Kedeimot. He notes that the lives of our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob overlapped for fifteen years. When Abraham died, his grandson Jacob was 15 years old. In rabbinic tradition Abraham is identified with Pessah, Isaac with Shavuoth, and Jacob with Succoth. (See Tur O.H. 417). Because of the merit of these extraordinary 15 years, the holy days of Pessah and Succoth were both set for the 15th of the month.

The Hidah is alluding to something deeper than the clever confluence of numbers. He suggests that the 15 years of shared lifetime among Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were a period of extreme happiness for the world. These three luminaries literally changed the course of history and brought humanity to a better understanding of the One God. Succoth, which is known in our tradition as the season of our happiness (zeman simhateinu), commemorates the extraordinary happiness and enlightenment that emerged at the founding of our nation.

Since Pessah (symbolized by Abraham) and Succoth (symbolized by Jacob) both occur on the 15th day of the month, this highlights the special link between grandfather Abraham and grandson Jacob. When grandparents and grandchildren share ideas and ideals, this is a sign of continuity, love…and genuine happiness. When there is a "generation gap," there

is sadness and alienation. Just as Pessah and Succoth are linked together by sharing the date of 15, so Abraham and Jacob are bound together by their shared 15 years of life.

Pessah and Succoth celebrate the Exodus from Egypt in ancient times. The relationship between Abraham and Jacob suggests the key to the future redemption of Israel — when the traditions are shared, loved and experienced by the generations of grandparents and grandchildren. A teacher of mine once quipped: Who is a Jew? Someone with Jewish grandchildren! While this is not an objectively true statement, it underscores a vital principle in the Jewish adventure: the importance of transmitting our teachings and values through the generations.

The genuine happiness that derives from family and national continuity does not just happen by chance. It is the result of deep devotion, strong commitment, and many sacrifices. There is a vast difference between happiness and amusement. Happiness entails a genuine and deep sense of wholeness. It is not attained casually. Amusement, on the other hand, is a passing sense of enjoyment. It is shallow and ephemeral. We laugh at a joke, we enjoy watching a sports event—but these amusements do not touch our souls in a lasting way. Whereas happiness is achieved through active and thoughtful involvement, amusement is essentially a passive experience. We sit back and wait to be entertained. Succoth, the festival of our happiness, reminds us to strive for genuine happiness, to be committed to transmitting our traditions through the generations, to distinguish between real happiness and shallow amusement. Mo'adim leSimha.

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/happiness-thoughts-succoth

Yom Kippur – True Strength

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Dedicated in Memory of Mr. David Rhine Sholomo Dovid ben Avraham Yitzchak z.l.

The High Holiday season is a time that we contemplate the strength of G-d. The Nesaneh Tokef prayer describes how at this time of year G-d judges us and decides, *"Who will live and who will die… by war, by wild beast, by starvation, by earthquake."* Again and again in the prayers we describe that G-d is great and powerful.

Yet, from the second blessing of the Amidah, which we recite three times daily, we emphasize a different aspect of G-d's strength. *"You, G-d, are strong,"* we declare, *"You sustain life with kindness, You support those who have fallen and You heal the sick."* This blessing is known as *"Gevuros,"* which means *"Strengths,"* and is intended to depict the strength of G-d. Nowhere in this blessing about G-d's strength does it talk about punishment or death.

How are we to understand the true strength of G-d?

The Talmud (Brachos 59) writes that thunder was only created to break the crookedness of mankind. That means that the roar of thunder is not part of the essential plan of creation. Thunder was created because sometimes man needs to be humbled. So, G-d created a fearful roar to remind us of our mortality and of judgment day. The strength of G-d is not in thunder. Thunder was created to address a problem.

Similarly, the fact that G-d can dish out fearsome punishments is not the expression of His strength. This is just something that sometimes needs to be done, either to punish evil, or to protect good people from evil. We mention G-d's ability to punish in the Nesaneh Tokef prayer to humble ourselves and facilitate repentance. But that is not the true strength of G-d. The true strength of G-d is when He is not sidetracked to address evil. The true strength of G-d is, as described in the second blessing of the Amidah, when He sustains life with kindness, supports those who have fallen and heals the sick.

One of the great teachings of Judaism is that we are given the life mission to emulate G-d. Just as G-d is kind and patient,

so should we be. In fact, the Mishna in Avos (4) states, *"Who is strong? One who controls his temper."* Fearsome punishments may be necessary at times. But those are not expressions of strength. True strength can be found in sustaining life, and in the qualities of kindness and patience.

We live in complicated times that could affect our attitudes to core values that we hold dear. We live in times when a country that has nuclear bombing capabilities is considered strong. We live in times when one of the greatest military assets is bunker busting bombs. Our value system may be affected such that in our hearts the sign of strength may well be the roar of the explosion that can be heard when powerful bombs are used.

These, however — as necessary as they may be to fight evil — are not expressions of true strength that we consider a core value. That strength is reserved for doing good, for sustaining life, and for doing unbridled kindness.

The United States, for example, has many armaments that cause the world to consider it strong. These armaments are necessary. But the true accomplishment of the strength of a nation is not in the destruction it can potentially wreak on another country, but rather in the power of life: a kindliness in governing that provides everyone with food, medical care, safety, and education.

We live in a generation in which a segment of society has chosen to train themselves to be barbarians and to glorify death. They consider it an act of strength to kill, to be killed, and to take as many civilians as they can with them (from both sides of the border) as they die. Let us remind ourselves: Death and killing are not strength. They may induce righteous people to fight evil, as necessary. Tons of explosives are used to eliminate threats. Exploding drones are used to neutralize terrorists. But the true strength of G-d and good people is not in those explosions. Like thunder, those roars are necessary only due to the circumstances.

True strength is in sustaining life. A woman who has just given birth, having partnered with G-d and her husband to bring life into this world, is an example of true strength.

So, when we rightfully feel an overflowing of emotion, anger, and frustration at the evil we hear and see reported, we might have a wishful urge to have bombs explode and wipe the bad actors out. That may well be necessary, just as thunder is necessary. But true strength and merit is not in those big explosions. True strength is in us being the best life sustainers we can be to our families, neighbors, and the many good people that surround us.

With heartfelt prayers and blessings of safety, peace, and good health to our people everywhere,

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The Four Species – Self-Serving or G-d-Serving?

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * (5782)

One of the most cherished mitzvos of Sukkos is the mitzvah to take the four species. There are numerous concepts symbolized by the four species – our forefathers, our foremothers, the human being, the different elements of the Jewish nation and more. We take these elements and bind them together and through this mitzvah bind ourselves with G-d. We shake the bundle in all directions with further symbolism – denoting G-d's Omnipresence, our complete devotion to G-d, and more.

There is an unusual wording used in the Torah in Parshas Emor)Vayikra 23:40(when introducing this mitzvah. The

possuk states *"And you shall take for yourselves."* The Medrash quotes R' Abba bar Kahana who explains this unusual language. Hashem is asking us to draw a comparison between the "taking" of the four species and the "taking" we did in Egypt when we took the hyssop to wipe the blood of the Pascal lamb on our doorpost. The hyssop was inexpensive, and yet as a result of that simple plant we merited great bounty and wealth – the booty after the Splitting of the Sea, the booty from the battles of Sichon and Og and the booty of the thirty one kings of Canaan. If this is the result of easily taking the hyssop for that one mitzvah, than imagine the bounty for the four species, which is far more expensive and has many mitzvos done with it. It is for this reason that the possuk says *"Take for yourselves."* We should realize from the hyssop that taking the four species is really for our own benefit.)Vayikra Rabbah 30§1(

This Medrash is most astounding. The four species is a mitzvah of great mystical significance and depicts our relationship with Hashem. The four species would appear to be a mitzvah expressing the ultimate service to G-d. Yet, it is specifically here that the Torah instructs us to do mitzvos for our own sake – to serve ourselves. This mitzvah)and every mitzvah(should be done for Hashem. Why does Hashem command us to take the four species for ourselves rather than directly instructing us to serve Him?

Perhaps a closer look at mitzvos in general will help us better understand this Medrash. The Ramcha"l tells us in the opening paragraphs of *Mesillas Yesharim – Path of the Just* – that the reason Hashem creates us is to give us the pleasure and joy of the World to Come. In this world we have the opportunity to earn that pleasure and joy by using our time, talents and surroundings to get closer to Hashem and to develop and enhance our personal and individual relationship with Hashem. The means by which a person can attain that closeness and the pleasure which comes from that closeness are the mitzvos which Hashem has commanded us. By serving Hashem and keeping His mitzvos we create and mold our relationship with Hashem. Each mitzvah is a gift from Hashem to enable us to more fully experience a relationship with G-d.

When we return to our Medrash, this understanding of mitzvos would seem to only further our difficulty in understanding our Medrash. Mitzvos were given to us as a gift by which we can connect with G-d, have a real relationship with Him, and experience the great spiritual joys of the World to Come. Yet, the Medrash is telling us to take the four species for our own
sake, because of the great bounty we received the last time Hashem told us to "take." Why is the possuk instructing us to approach the mitzvah of the four species as a means for personal physical gain and not for the great spiritual joy gained by serving G-d for G-d's sake?

If mitzvos are the means to our relationship with G-d, perhaps we can better understand this Medrash through a closer look at relationships. Human relationships begin with shared goals and shared experiences, but they are deepened and cemented through mutual respect, mutual concern and mutual appreciation. Researchers and psychologists have studied the common practice of gift giving and suggest that giving and receiving gifts is a critical element in expressing these feelings of mutual appreciation. When we give gifts, we tangibly express our appreciation of the other. When we receive a gift, we experience the other person's appreciation and can feel validated. When someone refrains from receiving gifts, they lose out on truly experiencing the relationships in their lives. In order to feel loved and appreciated, we need to learn to recognize and appreciate the gifts we have been given.

Perhaps this perspective on gift giving and receiving is the key to this Medrash. When we consider Hashem's gift of mitzvos, we need to understand that a gift is intended to signify more than the gift itself. The gift is intended to express one's depth of concern, appreciation and sometimes even commitment to the other. When Hashem gave us the Torah and the means to the spiritual joys of the World to Come, this wasn't only about the World to Come. Rather, Hashem's gift was an expression of His love and concern for us.

If we understand that this was Hashem's gift and that it is an expression of His love and concern for us, then it is incumbent upon us to recognize and appreciate not only the gift itself, but the deeper message, as well. We need to understand that the mitzvos are not only about the World to Come, but that the act itself of appreciating the mitzvos is part

of developing our personal relationship with G-d here and now.

R' Abba bar Kahana is teaching us precisely this message. When we approach the mitzvah of the four species, Hashem is telling us that we have already seen the expression of His relationship with us in this area. The message of the bounty and wealth is not about the physical pleasures, but about the way Hashem loved us and cared for us after we kept the mitzvah of to "take" the hyssop. If our relationship with Hashem was so tangible for that simple act of "taking," how much greater will our relationship with Hashem be after "taking" the four species! If we are to understand and appreciate the gift of Torah and mitzvos, we need to reflect upon this truth. We need to truly receive the gift Hashem has given us by recognizing the good we have been given and thereby experiencing G-d's love for us. We need to take the four species as a precious gift.

The Maharz"u notes another related message in this Medrash. Although, the real reward for Torah and mitzvos is in the World to Come, the message of Hashem's love is not relegated to the World to Come. Hashem's concern for us and involvement in our lives is equally in both worlds. It is this deeper message which we are being instructed to focus on and learn from the "taking" of the hyssop. The more we engage in our relationship with Hashem and the more we experience and enjoy that relationship, the more Hashem expresses that relationship and the more He embraces us and cares for us. A proper life of Torah and mitzvos is not intended to be a sacrifice, exchanging this world for the next. Rather, it is intended to be a gift, living a life experiencing Hashem's embrace in this world and in the World to Come.

The Medrash illustrates this concept with a story of R' Yochanan. He was walking with his student R' Chiya bar Abba. As they passed farmland, a vineyard and an olive press R' Yochanan related how he had owned these lands but had sold them so he could support himself while studying Torah. When R' Chiya bar Abba expressed concern for R' Yochanan's physical world, R' Yochanan responded and said *"Is it light in your eyes what I have done? For I have sold something that was created in six days and acquired something which was given in forty days."* R' Yochanan was not belittling the beauty and pleasure of this world, nor was he sacrificing joy and pleasure for a greater purpose. Rather, R' Yochanan saw all the gifts and opportunities in his life, both the physical ones and the spiritual ones, as expressions of G-d's love and concern. He was simply exchanging one joy for another.

As we begin the new year and leave behind the sins of our past, we joyously celebrate our relationship with Hashem and our national heritage and identity with the holiday of Sukkos. It is specifically now that Hashem gives us the precious mitzvah of the four species, a unique opportunity for closeness and connection, It is specifically with this mitzvah at this time of year that Hashem instructs us on how to approach mitzvos. We must see them as expressions of G-d's love, accept them, cherish them, and elevate our lives now and forever.

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Why Aharon? Turning Our Flaws Into Virtues

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter * (2023)

> *The temple service of Yom Kippur is only valid if performed by the High Priest.*)Yoma 32b(
>
> *And Moshe said to Aharon, "What did this people do to you, that you brought so great a sin upon them?"*)Shmot 32:21(

Aharon is the one who led the people to the brink of destruction in the episode of the golden calf. Does it really make sense to entrust him with the survival of the people on Yom Hakippurim? The answer is, well… yes.

The Talmud Sanhedrin 7a states:

> *And when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. What did he actually see? — R. Benjamin b. Japhet says, reporting R. Eleazar: He saw Hur lying slain before him and said]to himself[: If I do not obey them, they will now do unto me as they did unto Hur, and so will be fulfilled]the fear of[the prophet, Shall the Priest and the Prophet be slain in the Sanctuary of God? and they will never find forgiveness. Better let them worship the golden calf, for which offence they may yet find forgiveness through repentance.*

The Talmud records an opinion which praises Aharon's involvement in the sin. He was willing to sacrifice himself. He was willing to stand with the people in their breach of God's covenant to save them from an even worse violation which would almost certainly have brought God's wrath and destruction upon them. For Aharon, love of the people trumps the Covenant with God.

According to the great Hassidic master, Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter)1847–1905(, the Sfat Emet, it is precisely this skeleton in Aharon's closet which makes him uniquely qualified to serve as High Priest.

> *In Rashi: "Draw near to the altar"*]Moshe speaking to Aharon[*'Why are you reluctant/ashamed? You were chosen* ***because*** *of this.' This is why the Shechina did not dwell in the mishkan by the merit of Moshe but only by the merit of Aharon, because Aharon was a penitent)Ba'al Teshuva(. .. I believe that this is the reason that it happened that Aharon was involved in the sin]of the golden calf[so that he could redeem the people's sins through his love*.)Shemini 5641(

It is precisely the shame and lack of worthiness which Aharon feels as a consequence of his complicity in the sin of the golden calf that qualifies him to be the chosen one to repair the broken relationship between the children on Israel and God.

The one who stands before God on Yom Kippur on behalf of the people, must be ***of*** the people; his fate bound to theirs, paradoxically, even at the expense of his own relationship with God.

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.åååååå

Some Reflections on Job

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

]Rabbi Ovadia has a long and brilliant discussion of the meaning of Job and its significance as we prepare for the High Holiday season. I have selected this part of his extended essay, which comes in several parts. Hopefully we can all reflect on Job's message during Yom Kippur.[

I hope to present a more extensive analysis of Job in the future, but here is synopsis of what I believe is the enduring message conveyed by the author, who in my opinion is Jeremiah:

Job, who of course is a fictional character, is a God fearing man who observes all of God's commandments, but for the wrong reason. He does so because he believes that God is more powerful and that He will smite Job if the latter deviates from His laws. Job repeatedly complains that God is more powerful and that he therefore cannot present his arguments which will prove that he is right and God)God forbid(is wrong. Because of that approach, Job fails miserably in educating his family about doing good, to the extent that he brings sacrifices for his children in case they have offended God. He does not talk to them about the meaning or the necessity of belief and observance, but rather pays tribute to God to guarantee his children's wellbeing.

When Job is afflicted and reduced to a shadow of a man, sitting on the ground and using a shard of clay to scratch his ailing body, his wife suggests that he commit suicide. She tells him that the system he trusted in, that of reward and punishment, does not work and that he should curse God, thus bringing his own demise. In other words, she says that the world is inherently evil and that one should take the nearest exit door when suffering.

Job angrily rejects her offer and instead opens his mouth to curse his day. He wishes that the day in which he was born would have never existed, or, in the words of the poet *"I don't wanna die, I sometimes wish I'd never been born at all."* By cursing his day, Job reveals that he does not believe in God but rather in destiny, and that he thinks it is his date of birth that got him in trouble. According to that worldview, you could do all the good in the world, but if you were born on a bad-omen day, it will not help you one bit.

The twisted theologies of Job and his wife are joined by a third, that of Job's friends. Those lovely friends, such as whom I do not wish on anyone who is in need of consolation, first cry and mourn with Job, but then offer a very simple answer to his suffering. You think you are such a great Tzaddik, they tell him, but in reality you are a sinner, only you are not aware of it. If you search well enough, you will be able to recognize your faults.

At this point it seems that all is lost. Five gloomy figures sit on the ground. Job's wife wants him to commit suicide, Job believes that he must live and suffer as predetermined by the starts, and Job's friends convinced that he is a terrible covert sinner. And then the author introduces a new character, almost a Deus Ex Machina, who delivers a revolutionary message. As a matter of fact, this message is so revolutionary that it is hidden behind mountains of chatter, six chapters)32-37(and 160 verses, to be accurate. The man's name is symbolic and reflects the deep dichotomy between Job's behavior and his hidden beliefs. The name translated roughly as: He is my God, the son of he who blesses]i.e. curses[God, the disgraced one]בוז[of a noble family.

Elihu blasts Job for thinking he is righteous and his friends for deeming him a sinner, and then, after a long-winded

introduction he drops this theological bomb)Job 35:5-8(:

> *Look up to the sky and see the heavens, way beyond your reach*
>
> *If you sin how do you impact Him]God[, and how do your numerous transgressions affect him?*
>
> *If you are righteous, what have you given Him, or what shall He take from your hand?*
>
> *Nay, your wickedness affects humans, your equals, and your righteousness impacts the descendants of Adam!*

There you have it, in simple, clear, and penetrating words!

God does not need our mitzvoth and is unmoved by our transgressions. Our actions have an impact on people like us and on the world we live in. The reward for good deeds is the knowledge that we did good and the satisfaction derived from making the world a better place. Giving to others selflessly grants us a sense of fulfilment and helps us elevate above the daily grind. It also helps us overcome tragedies and misfortune because when we know that there are those who depend on our help and energy, we cannot allow ourselves to sink into depression, apathy, and indifference. Regarding evil, as much as we would like to justice to be served and revenge to be taken, no evil-doer ever paid for his atrocities. The death penalty cannot bring a murder victim back to life, and life in prison cannot wipe the memories or heal the wounded soul of a rape or abuse victim. Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, Hitler, and Stalin all died after destroying the lives of millions. Was justice served? Was it served at the Nuremberg trials? Of course not. But what was achieved is that with every turning page of history, humanity realizes that those who seek to destroy will eventually disappear while those who are engaged in helping society, whether through philanthropy, education, medical research, or technological development, are the ones who made the world a better place.

Imagine, just for a second, that all people decide to drive and park legally. There will be no traffic or parking violations, which will allow law enforcement agencies to focus on greater crimes. If, in turn, thieves, robbers, and embezzlers all decide to repent and do only good, the money, time, and energy used to fight crime will be diverted to even greater cause and so on ad infinitum or ad utopium.

Good citizens such as you and me have already made this world a much better place. It’s true. Despite our complaints, kvetching, and nostalgic reminiscence, the world is a much better place today than what it was in the past. There is less violence, more knowledge, better health and dental care, and a million other things we take for granted. All these things happened because of humans who were, to use the words of Elihu, like me and you.

This, I believe, is what we should have in mind when we speak of God sitting on His throne on Rosh HaShana with the Books of the Living and the Dead open in front of Him.

We should think of the endless possibilities opening before us this coming year and that though we have no guarantee that we will live to celebrate another Rosh HaShana, it should not prevent us from making every moment count.

Rosh HaShana calls on us to be responsible and accountable, and to harness our talents and knowledge to the service of

humanity, becoming ever more altruistic and less selfish.

May we have a year filled with the blessings of mutual love, peace, and support within and between families, communities, and nations, Amen!

Gmar Chatima Tovah.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(. Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** . The Sefaria articles usually include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Devrei Torah from Rabbi Ovadia this year come from an unpublished draft of his forthcoming book on Tanach, which Rabbi Ovadia has generously shared with our readers. Rabbi Ovadia reserves all copyright protections for this material.

Yom Kippur: We Fast for Focus, Not for Punishment

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

It's time for the fast day. The only fast day mandated to us in the Torah. On no other day of the year does the Torah ask us to refrain from the joys of eating and drinking.

And even though it is a mitzvah to fast, it is also a mitzvah to prepare for the fast by eating a lot the day before so we are prepared. Our Sages say that one who eats the day before Yom Kippur has fulfilled a mitzvah just as precious as not eating on Yom Kippur. I speak from experience that eating and drinking a lot the day before does make it easier on Yom Kippur.

All this serves to show that the point of fasting is not so we can make ourselves suffer. Causing ourselves pain does not by itself relieve us of our past mistakes or inscribe us for a good year. The point of fasting is to align our focus. When we don't spend the day wondering what we'll be eating for breakfast, lunch and dinner our attention and awareness sharpens itself towards other things. Like our prayers, our relationships and our wishes for the coming year. It's incredible how much of what we'd like to focus on in the tapestry of our lives gets sidelined by our necessary daily tasks like feeding ourselves.

In that respect, Yom Kippur is a gift. It's a chance to focus on what we usually do not have time to focus on. It's like an ultimate Shabbat which this year is more than a metaphor as Yom Kippur is literally on a Shabbat.

So I wish everyone an easy and meaningful Yom Kippur where you are given the freedom to explore and think about how would you like to grow and improve this year. And I wish everyone a meaningful day before Yom Kippur where you eat enough tasty food so your Yom Kippur can be comfortable.
Shabbat Shalom and G'mar Chatima Tova.

Rabbi Rube

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Rav Kook Torah
Yom Kippur: Complete Teshuvah

> *The focus of the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is on teshuvah — return and repentance. We recite the Avinu Malkeinu prayer during this time of introspection and self-examination, asking God: "Our Father, our King, return us in complete teshuvah before You!"*

When is teshuvah full and complete?

Healing the Source

We can understand this phrase better in light of the request that immediately follows: *"Our Father, our King! Send complete healing to the sick of Your people."*

What is *"complete healing"*? Often we are only able to alleviate the patient's external symptoms. The true source of the illness, however, remains unknown or is untreatable. Such a treatment is only a partial healing. When we plead for complete healing, we are praying that we may succeed in discovering the source of the illness and completely cure the patient. Such a comprehensive treatment will result in full restoration of the patient's health.

The same concept holds true for teshuvah. If we address a particular fault, we are really dealing with a symptom of a much larger problem. Correcting a specific sin is only partial teshuvah. When we ask for God's help in attaining "complete teshuvah," we seek a comprehensive teshuvah that corrects the root source of our various sins and character flaws. Such a complete teshuvah will restore our spiritual wholeness.

Elevated Perception

How does one attain complete teshuvah? In his book *Orot HaTeshuvah,* Rav Kook explained that this teshuvah is based on an elevated outlook on life and the world:

> *"The higher level of teshuvah is based on holy enlightenment and a penetrating perception of the beauty of Divine providence. This]elevated teshuvah[is the source and foundation for the lower teshuvah that corrects deeds and refines traits. The basis for elevated teshuvah is none other than the foundation of Torah, in all of its roots and branches.")15:6(*

> *"Teshuvah that is truly complete requires a lofty perception — an ascent to the rarified world that is replete with truth and holiness. This is only possible by delving into the depths of Torah and Divine wisdom, to the mystical secrets of the universe....*

Only the higher]mystical[Torah can remove the iron barriers that divide the individual — and society as a whole — from our heavenly Father.")10:1(

)Silver from the Land of Israel, pp. 72-73. Adapted from *Mo'adei HaRe'iyah,* p. 66.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/TESHUVAH_68.htm

Yom Kippur (Acharei Mot): Thinking Fast and Slow (5779)

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

If we put together recent discoveries in neuroscience with Midrashic tradition, we may be able to shed new light on the meaning of the central mystery of Yom Kippur: the two goats, identical in appearance, over which the High Priest cast lots, sacrificing one as a sin offering and sending the other, the scapegoat, into the wilderness to die.

In past *Covenant & Conversation* essays on Acharei Mot, we have looked at the scapegoat as it figures in Jewish tradition and, in a very different way, in other cultures. But there are other dimensions of the rite that cry out for explanation. We argued that there were two goats because Yom Kippur represents a dual process of kappara, atonement, and tahara, purification, directed respectively at guilt and shame. But this does not explain why the two animals were required to be as similar as possible to one another, nor does it account for the role of casting lots)goralot(. Presumably, these elements were designed to inspire feelings of awe and penitence on the part of the crowds that thronged the Temple on the holiest day of the year, but how and in what way?

Over the centuries, the Sages sought to decipher the mystery. Two animals, alike in appearance but different in fate, suggests the idea of twins. This and other clues led the Midrash, the Zohar, and classic commentators such as Nahmanides and Abarbanel to the conclusion that in some sense, the two goats symbolised the most famous of all the Torah's twins: Jacob and Esau.

There are other clues too. The word se'ir, "goat," is associated in the Torah with Esau. He and his descendants lived in the land of Seir. The word se'ir is related to sei'ar, "hairy," which is how Esau was born: *"his whole body was like a hairy garment"*)Gen. 25:25(. When Rebecca urged Jacob to pretend to be Esau in order to take Isaac's blessing, Jacob said, *"My brother Esau is a hairy]sa'ir[man while I have smooth skin"*)Gen. 27:11(. According to the Mishnah, a red thread was tied to the scapegoat, and "red")Edom(was Esau's other name. So there was a tradition that the scapegoat in some way symbolised Esau. Azazel, the mysterious place or entity for which the goat was intended, was Samael, Esau's guardian angel.

In particular, the phrase *"two kids of the goats,"* shnei se'irei izim, mentioned in the High Priest's rites, reminds us of the very similar expression, *"two kids of the goats,"* shnei gedi'ei izim, mentioned in Genesis 27, the scene of Jacob's deception. Isaac had asked Esau to catch him some wild game and prepare him a meal so that he could bless him. Rebecca tells Jacob to *"Go out to the flock and bring me two choice kids of the goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, the way he likes it."* Such verbal parallels are not coincidental in the Torah. They are part of its sustained intertextuality, its finely woven prose in which one verse sheds light on another.

So the two goats of the High Priest's service evoke in multiple ways the figures of Jacob and Esau, and specifically the scene in which Jacob pretended to be Esau, dressing in his clothes so that he would feel and smell like his brother. It was then, answering his father's question, *"Who are you, my son?"* that Jacob said the words, *"I am your firstborn Esau,"* leading Isaac to say, *"The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau"*)Gen. 27:22(.

Who then were Esau and Jacob? What did they represent and how is this relevant to Yom Kippur and atonement? Midrashic tradition tends to portray Jacob as perfect and Esau as an evil-doer. However, the Torah itself is far more nuanced. Esau is not a figure of evil. His father loved him and sought to bless him. The Sages say that in one respect – honouring his father – he was a supreme role model.]1[And in Deuteronomy Moses commands, *"Do not despise an Edomite]i.e., a descendant of Esau[, because he is your brother"*)Deut. 23:8(.

Esau in the Torah is not the epitome of evil. Rather, he is the man of impulse. We see this in the scene in which he sells his birthright to Jacob. Coming in one day exhausted by the hunt, he sees Jacob making lentil broth:

> *He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!"… Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to me?" But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.* Gen. 25:30–34

This vignette of Esau's impetuosity – selling part of his heritage for the sake of a bowl of soup – is reinforced by the unique description of the action in the staccato form of five consecutive verbs)literally, "he ate, he drank, he rose, he left, he despised"(. Every time we see Esau we have the impression of an impulsive figure always driven by the emotion of the moment, be it hunger, filial devotion, a desire for revenge or, at last, generosity of spirit.

Jacob is the opposite. He does not give way to his feelings. He acts and thinks long-term. That is what he does when he seizes the opportunity to buy Esau's birthright, when he works for seven years for Rachel)a period that *"seemed to him but a few days"(*, and when he fixes terms with Laban for payment for his labour. Rebuking his son Joseph for the seeming presumptuousness of his dreams, the Torah tells us that the brothers were jealous of Joseph *"but his father kept the matter in mind."* Jacob never acts impulsively. He thinks long and hard before deciding.

Not only is impetuosity alien to him, he is also critical of it when he sees it in his children. On his death bed, he curses his three eldest sons in these words:

> *Reuben, you are my firstborn…. Unstable as water, you will not excel…. Simeon and Levi … Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!"* Gen. 49:3–7

Acting on the basis of anger and impetuosity is for him the sign of an unworthy personality with which he does not wish to be associated.

What does all this have to do with sin, transgression, atonement, and two goats?

Recent years have seen a revolution in our understanding of the human brain, and with it, the human mind. One key text was Antonio Damasio's book *Descartes' Error.*]2[Damasio discovered something unusual about patients who had suffered brain damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex. Their ability to think remained unchanged, but their ability to feel dropped to almost zero. The result was that they found it impossible to make decisions. They would reason endlessly but fail to make their mind up on one course of action rather than another.

Much subsequent work has shown that Descartes and Kant were wrong in their assertion that we are, first and foremost,

rational animals. David Hume was right in his view that we are primarily emotional beings who make decisions on the basis of feelings, desires, and drives of which we may be barely conscious. We justify our choices, but brain scans show that we may have made those choices before being aware that we had done so.

We are more driven by emotion and less by reason than Enlightenment thinkers believed. This discovery has led to new fields of study like behavioural economics)what people actually do rather than what theory says they do(, emotional intelligence, and interdisciplinary studies linking neuroscience to morality and politics.

We have, in fact, a dual-system or twin-track brain. This is what Daniel Kahneman is referring to in the title of his famous book *Thinking, Fast and Slow.*]3[One track is rapid, instinctive, emotional, and subconscious. The other is slower, conscious, deliberative, and calculating. The former allows us to react quickly to situations of immediate potential danger. Without it, we and our ancestors would not have survived. Many of our instinctive reactions are benign. It is natural to have empathy, and with it the tendency to feel other people's pain and come to their aid. We develop a strong sense of attachment that leads us to defend members of our family or community. But not all instincts are benign. Anger, envy, jealousy, fear, hate, and the desire for revenge may once have been functional, but they are often deeply destructive in social situations. That is why the ability to *"think slow,"* to pause and reflect, matters so much. All animals have desires. Only human beings are capable of passing judgement on desires – of asking, should I or should I not satisfy this desire?

These recent discoveries in neuroscience and related fields do not tell us something new. Rather, they have vindicated an ancient insight that was often obscured by Enlightenment rationalism. We cannot live, choose, or love without emotion. But one of the fundamental themes of Genesis is that not all emotion is benign. Instinctive, impulsive behaviour can lead to violence. What is needed to be a carrier of God's covenant is the ability to *"think slow"* and act deliberatively. That is the contrast between Isaac and Ishmael)of whom it was said, *"He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him,"* Gen. 16:12(. Even more so, it is the contrast between Jacob and Esau.

Which brings us to Genesis 27 and the moment when Jacob dressed up in Esau's clothes and said to his father, *"I am Esau your firstborn."* The two goats of the High Priest's service and the two goats prepared by Rebecca symbolise our duality: *"The hands are the hands of Esau but the voice is the voice of Jacob."* We each have an Esau and Jacob within us, the impulsive, emotional brain and the reflective, deliberative one. We can think fast or slow. Our fate, our goral, our life-script, will be determined by which we choose. Will our life be lived *"to the Lord"* or *"to Azazel,"* to the random vicissitudes of chance?

This is the moral drama symbolised by the two goats, one dedicated *"to the Lord,"* the other *"to Azazel"* and released into the wilderness. The power of ritual is that it does not speak in abstractions – reason versus emotion, instinctual deferral rather than gratification. It is gripping, visceral, all the more so when it evokes, consciously or otherwise, the memory of the twins, Jacob and Esau, together at birth yet utterly divergent in their character and fate.

Who am I? That is the question Yom Kippur forces us to ask. To be Jacob, we have to release and relinquish the Esau within us, the impulsiveness that can lead us to sell our birthright for a bowl of soup, losing eternity in the pursuit of desire.]emphasis added[

FOOTNOTES:

]1[See *Shemot Rabbah* 46:4, Bamidbar Rabbah 1:15.

]2[Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*)New York: Putnam, 1994(.

]3[Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*)New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011(.

AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

- What is the connection between the two goats in this week's parsha and Jacob and Esau?
- Do you think Esau was evil?
- Which is more important in the life of a human being, fast thinking or slow thinking?
- Would you say you are more like Jacob or Esau?
- What is the connection between Jacob and Esau, the two types of thinking, and Yom Kippur?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/acharei-mot/thinking-fast-and-slow/

Yom Kippur Afternoon Haftarah Companion:
For an informed reading of the book of Jonah

By Mendel Dubov * © Chabad 5785

Overview

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

G d told Jonah:

"You took pity on the kikayon, for which you did not toil nor did you make it grow, which one night came into being and the next night perished. Now should I not take pity on Nineveh, the great city, in which there are many more than one hundred twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well?"

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

Recalcitrant Prophet

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The book of Jonah appears as one of twelve small books of Scripture known as Trei Asar)*"The Twelve"*(. The book of Jonah is followed by Michah)Micah(, which in turn is followed by Nachum. The book of Nachum speaks almost entirely of

the sinful city of Nineveh and its final destruction. Nachum lived after Jonah had brought Nineveh to repentance, but evidently their repentance was only temporary. Not long after, they relapsed and returned to their wicked ways.

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

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

2. Talmud, Sanhedrin 89a.

* Director of Chabad in Sussex County, NJ faculty member at the Rabbinical College of America in Morristown, NJ.

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

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Yom Kippur: Higher Living

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Higher Living

> *It will be an eternal rule for you: In the seventh month, on the tenth of the month, you must afflict yourselves and not do any work, neither the native nor the convert who lives among you.)Lev. 16:29(*

The inner purpose of fasting on Yom Kippur is to allow us to derive our vitality, at least for one day, from a higher source than physical food. Freed from the pampering effect of eating, we can focus on our higher, spiritual selves. This, in turn, helps us realize more greatly the importance of repentance and renders us more apt to regret past wrongdoing and make firm resolutions for the future.

Even from the purely physical perspective, fasting forces the body to live off its own stored reservoirs, which it has created from the food that we ate previously. In other words, instead of metabolizing the three lower kingdoms – mineral,

vegetable, and animal – we are metabolizing ourselves – the highest, human kingdom. We are thus living for the duration of the fast off a higher level of life.

Emerging from Yom Kippur, we are, with G-d's help, able to relate to the material world from a higher, more spiritual perspective.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant resounding victory and peace in the Holy Land.

Good Shabbos, an easy fast, and a happy and sweet new year.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight by the Rebbe on parshat Ma'sei, selected from our *Daily Wisdom,* by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

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Gmar Chatima Tova

Volume 30 **Yom Kippur Issue** **5785 B"H**

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Ten Ideas for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

As we approach Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the start of the Jewish year, here are ten short ideas which might help you focus your davening and ensure you have a meaningful and transformative experience during these ten days of repentance.

Number one. Life is short. However much life expectancy has risen, we will not, in one lifetime, be able to achieve everything we might wish to achieve. This life is all we have. So the question is: How shall we use it well?

Number two. Life itself, every breath we take, is the gift of God. Life is not something we may take for granted. If we do, we will fail to celebrate it. Yes, we believe in life after death, but it is in life before death that we truly find human greatness.

Number three. We are free. Judaism is the religion of the free human being freely responding to the God of freedom. We are not in the grip of sin. The very fact that we can do teshuva, that we can act differently tomorrow than we did yesterday, tells us we are free.

Number four. Life is meaningful. We are not mere accidents of matter, generated by a universe that came into being for no reason and will one day, for no reason, cease to be. We are here because there is something we must do; to be God's partners in the work of creation, bringing the world that is closer to the world that ought to be.

Number five. Life is not easy. Judaism does not see the world through rose-tinted lenses. The world we live in is not the world as it ought to be. That is why, despite every temptation, Judaism has never been able to say the messianic age has come, even though we await it daily.

Number six. Life may be hard, but it can still be sweet. Jews have never needed wealth to be rich, or power to be strong. To be a Jew is to live for the simple things: love, family, community. Life is sweet when touched by the Divine.

Number seven. Our life is the single greatest work of art we will ever make. On the Yamim Noraim, we step back from our life like an artist stepping back from their canvas, seeing what needs changing for the painting to be complete.

Number eight. We are what we are because of those who came before us. We are each a letter in God's book of life. We do not start with nothing. We have inherited wealth, not material but spiritual. We are heirs to our ancestors' greatness.

Number nine. We are heirs to another kind of greatness: to Torah and the Jewish way of life. Judaism asks great things of us and by doing so makes us great. We walk as tall as the ideals for which we live, and though we may fall short time and again, the Yamim Noraim allow us to begin anew.

And number ten. The sound of heartfelt prayer, together with the piercing sound of the shofar, tell us that that is all life is - a mere breath - yet breath is nothing less than the spirit of God within us. We are dust of the earth but within us is the breath of God.

So, if you can remember any of these ideas, or even just one, I hope it will help you to have an even more meaningful experience over Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Together with Elaine, I wish you and your families a ketiva v'chatima tova. May we, and all of Am Yisrael, be written in God's Book of Life for a year of blessing, fulfilment and peace. Shana tova u'metukah to you all.

Ohr Torah Stone

From Memory to Action: Reflecting on October 7 and Yom Kippur

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

As we mark the first anniversary of the Oct. 7 attack on Israel, especially with Yom Kippur just days away, this is a moment that calls for reflection on the meaning of memory. The Aseret Yemei Teshuva are, year after year, a time for reflection on where we are and how we've gotten here. These are the very questions that weigh on our hearts and minds, as we mark a full year since the horrendous attack and the ensuing war and hostage crisis. We each carry memories and emotions from the past year, along with countless stories from others. As we mark the Yahrtzeit of so many souls, we must ask: How will we remember this chapter of our Jewish story? What narrative will we pass on to our children and grandchildren about that fateful day in October?

Memory is of paramount importance in the Torah. We are asked to remember Shabbat (Shemot 20:8), the Exodus from Egypt (Shemot 13:3), the history of our past (Devarim 32:7), the gossip of Miriam (Devarim 24:9), the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai (Devarim 4:9), the waywardness of our ancestors in the wilderness (Devarim 9:7), the assault of Amalek on our people (Devarim 25:17), and more. While some authorities, like Nachmanides, see many of these calls to memory as full-fledged mitzvot (Ramban, Hasagot HaRamban l'sefer ha'Mitzvot ha'Asin #7; Sh'chat Lavin #2), Maimonides adopts a more selective approach. He considers remembering Shabbat (Sefer Hamitzvot, Asin #155), Amalek (ibid. #189), and the Exodus (Hilchot Chametz Umatza 7:1) as mitzvot, while excluding the others.

Maimonides 'shorter list of mitzvot connected with memory teaches us that memory mitzvot should only be counted in the 613 commandments if they require action, not only intent. In the mitzvot he lists, we actualize memory through concrete acts: Kiddush and Havdala for Shabbat; the Pesach Seder's storytelling and symbolic foods or remembering the Beit haMikdash underneath the chuppah and at various other times within the Jewish calendar. Memory, in this view, must manifest through action. This active memory shapes our present, guides our future, and even opens us up to reevaluate the past.

The Rav, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, captures this idea in Halakhic Man, where he writes that our actions done in memory of people or events can reshape the past. "Man molds the

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image of the past," he writes, "by infusing it with the future, by subjecting the "was" to the "will be."" (p. 117) This awareness of time, he argues in The Lonely Man of Faith (p. 46- 47), is essential to our relationship with God. In the covenantal community, generations of the past, present and future engage in dialogue, and every moment manifests in memory, present action and anticipation of the future. (p. 46-47)

This is why, the Rav explains, we have the capacity to do teshuva. When people reevaluate their past personal transgressions and acts upon them positively, the past and future intertwine into a single experience, and the legacy of the past takes on new meaning.

The role of memory in shaping the future is strikingly demonstrated in the debate between Rav Tarfon and Rebbe Akiva regarding the closing blessing of the Haggadah's Maggid section (Pesachim 116b). R. Tarfon maintains that the blessing of the storytelling phase of the Seder should simply give thanks to God for redeeming our ancestors from Egypt, but the optimistic, future-oriented R. Akiva insists on including a prayer for the future – showing that memory must always propel us toward writing the next chapters in the Jewish story; toward redemption.

As we stand before God this Yom Kippur with the memory of October 7 fresh in our hearts, we must recognize our responsibility to actively shape how this chapter will be remembered. What actions will be taken to define our shared vision of what this moment in our history has meant and will continue to mean? What concrete steps are each of us taking to build national resilience and foster national unity? To support those on the frontlines and those who are holding up the homefront? What are we doing to bring an end to so much death, displacement, and despair? These questions are fitting for this Day of Atonement.

This year, when we recite the Yizkor for our loved ones who are no longer with us, we also remember the victims of Oct. 7th and the ongoing war. We commit to preserving their memory, like we do for loved ones of the past, through meaningful action. Let us transform Oct. 7 from a day of horror and devastation into a day of mourning that is also a catalyst for national renewal, dialogue and solidarity.

This is the Torah's challenge: every memory of our shared past holds within it a call to action, and a prayer for a better tomorrow. As we determine our destiny for the coming year, let's include in that a commitment to not only remember the past, but also to reshape our future. May our actions in the coming year bring healing to Am Yisrael, peace to our region and redemption to the world.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Marking October 7 during a season of anniversaries - This is a season of anniversaries.

Rosh Hashanah is an anniversary — it marks the very first day on which human beings were brought into the world. Hashem started His days of creation on the 25th of Elul, and Adam was created on Rosh Hashanah.

Yom Kippur is also an anniversary — it commemorates the second ascent of Moshe to the summit of Mount Sinai, where he received the second set of tablets. It was a time of atonement following the previous occasion when Moshe smashed the tablets on his descent from the mountain.

This year, for the saddest of reasons, we are marking another anniversary. It is the first anniversary of that awful, tragic, horrific day when, on Shemini Atzeret — corresponding to the seventh of October — Hamas terrorists mercilessly murdered so many of our people.

But how should we approach this day? Regarding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we reflect on the past, but that is only for the sake of the future. We recall the arrival of human beings in this world and ponder our ways, seeking to better our lives and make this world a better place.

On Yom Kippur, we atone for our sins for the sake of a better future — for ourselves, our families, our communities, our nation, and the world. The past inspires our productive, constructive, and hopefully happy future.

In that context, while we remember where we were exactly a year ago, when we heard that awful news and how it all unfolded, we must also commit ourselves to the future in the name of those who perished — to ensure that we contribute to a safer and better Israel.

When we recite the Yizkor prayer, we take it upon ourselves to give Tzedakah. We use our sad memories of what transpired to better our environment and our fragile world.

Therefore, at this time, on this exceptionally sad first Yahrzeit, let us do whatever we can to support Medinat Yisrael and pray to Hashem that the hostages will come home safely and soon. Let us engage in numerous acts of Chessed, an outpouring of loving-kindness.

We live in a world where, tragically, there is so much hatred. Let us ensure that love, consideration, and decency will ultimately prevail. In this spirit, may Hashem bless the State of Israel and world Jewry, please God, with a Shana Tovah, a happy, secure, and peaceful new year.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

The Ultimate Sin and Its Atonement

Teshuva has many components to it, as we would well expect. There is the sincere regret for having done the transgression in the first place; there is the effort to never do it again; and then there is the vidui - confession. From experience, we all probably realize that the easiest one is the confession, true regret is a bit more difficult, while working at making sure that we never do it again is the one that we usually have the greatest difficulty with. Yet, the Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 1:1) when defining the mitzvah of teshuva defines it as the act of confessing the sin. Indeed, on Yom Kippur what is clearly repeated again and again is the vidui. To us this seems counterintuitive. We could even imagine a scenario where a person truly regrets his sins, stops doing what he shouldn't do, but never got around to reciting the vidui - confession. We would ask ourselves, "who is the better of the two: the one who confessed but hasn't really succeeded in changing his ways much, or the one who actually changed, but hadn't recited a formal confession?"

To understand this conundrum, we need to go back to the very origins of sin. When the serpent seduced Adam and Chava into sinning, the enticement was not the taste of the fruit. What the serpent told them was, "if you eat from the fruits of this tree, you will be like G-d and understand evil and good." What this means is that Hashem had endowed mankind with extraordinary wisdom. A wisdom that can think far and wide, understand incredible things about the universe he lives in, and create extraordinarily works of depth and understanding. The one thing that the human mind cannot understand in its fullest is the definition of what is truly good and what is truly evil. Great minds have grappled with this issue, which is at the heart of much of philosophical search and thought. Many points have been bandied about, but no two people have ever agreed on the same set of rules. We even struggle to define what actually makes something good and what makes something evil, for good and evil are moral values laid down by Hashem. We can compare, contrast, and expand, but we can never reach the point of being able to independently define good and evil. Being that man was created to be independent, and in a certain sense all-encompassing, this lack of ability frustrates him to his core. It is the one place where man must bow his proud head and say, "You, Almighty One, are the One who knows it and deems it good or bad, and I am simply a servant who needs to follow your direction

faultlessly". This admission in a certain sense is a core irritant of the human being, and that is why he so readily fell into the serpent's enticement of, "you will become like G-d to know good from evil."

When we do teshuva, we must always start at the root of our straying from Hashem. Besides the actual deed we did, besides the particular cravings and desires that we had, at the heart of sinning is a deeper root. It is that we decided that something is just fine to do. In every sin there is the tiny speck of, "I will make the decisions about my life, and about what is right and what is wrong." Therefore, without a confession, it may be that a person may change his actions, but he is not really moving away from sin. Imagine the following: a person has been eating treif, and the doctor tells him that meat is deadly for his heart condition and he must immediately give up all meat if he wishes to be healthy. The person, in his desire to be healthy, might listen flawlessly to the doctor and give up all meat. He has in effect stopped eating treif, but he has not moved away one iota from his sin of eating treif. On the other hand, the person who confesses and owns up that Hashem is the one who dictates right and wrong and that he is merely to follow instructions, has taken the first step in the right direction. He may struggle and not be able to move on, but at least he has taken the first step. This is why the heart of teshuva is the vidui - confession.

This also lends insight to an extraordinarily central part of the avodah on Yom Kippur. Of all the sacrifices that we bring on Yom Kippur, the placing of the two goats next to each other, and then casting the lot as to which one would be brought on the mizbeach and which would be thrown off Azazel, is perhaps the strangest of all of the rituals. It is strange for many reasons: firstly, it seems as if the Azazel offering is an offering to powers other than Hashem, which is strictly forbidden. We won't focus on that point. But the very ceremony of drawing lots seems to be a very strange ritual. After all, all of the sacrifices brought had to be first dedicated orally before being brought as a sacrifice, and yet no mention is made of this step, for it is an unimportant prerequisite for bringing a sacrifice. Rather it is the actual act of bringing a sacrifice which is what the avoda is about. And yet when it comes to the two goats, it seems that the ceremony of choosing which one would go on the mizbeach and which one would be cast off Azazel seems to be the highlight. How do we get a sense of that?

In effect, what is happening is that we are going back to the very beginnings of sin, and acting out something that will return us to the acknowledgement that good and evil are all Hashem's to decide. For the halacha is that we must take two goats that are as similar as possible. This means we have standing before us two animals that are indistinguishable to the human eye in every which shape or form. They're similar in height, weight, in price, and in every which way possible. We have no way of deciding which is the ultimate good and which is the ultimate bad. When we cast a lot it is as if we are saying, "Hashem it's Your call". Your hashgacha decides which lot is cast on which animal, and that will designate what is good and bad. The animal that You designate to be brought on the mizbeach is the embodiment of the ultimate good. The animal that You designate to be cast off to the powers of evil, has been designated by you as the embodiment of evil. In effect we are saying to Hashem, "You are the one that is yodea tov vera, and we are clueless".

Yom Kippur is a day of atonement. It is an atonement of the many, many individual sins that have accumulated over the year. We certainly need to examine our actions, regret those that we should not have done, and put into place the mechanisms and disciplines that are necessary to move us forward. We have thus rectified our actions.

But at the deepest level, the attitude and perspective underlying our ease and ability to sin is the thought that, "I know what is right and what is wrong, and no one will tell me differently." On Yom Kippur we come face to face with that poison that the serpent has injected in us, and we say, "Anna Hashem, yes, it is You who sets the standard of good and bad, and I have fallen short of that standard that is Yours to set." Thus begins the process of atonement for the ultimate sin: the sin of the eitz hada'as.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Yom Kippur: From A to Z
Rabbanit Sally Mayer

Many of our tefilot and piyutim over Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur take the form of an acrostic of the aleph-bet. Why do we use this model? When we praise or beseech Hashem using all of the letters of the alphabet, we symbolically strive for completeness, because it's actually impossible to truly complete the task at hand. If we were to try to praise Hashem with just a few words, we would run into the problem of when to stop, as we see in the Talmud (Megillah 25a), when an individual leading the prayers begins to list positive attributes of Hashem beyond the standard text of our tefilla, and Rabbi Chanina admonishes him " –Have you finished all of the praises of your Master?" We could never possibly finish, so we need to use defined formats – in the case in the Talmud, it was the praises said by Moshe Rabbeinu in the Torah, and in the case of our tefilot, the Hebrew alphabet. By using every letter, we are saying that Hashem is incredible in every way, without limits.

Another example of this model is the vidui, the confession, that we say again and again on Yom Kippur: ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu – we are guilty, we have betrayed, we have stolen – and so on. We are saying to Hashem that we have sinned in countless ways; we can't enumerate them all. We try to specify exactly what we have done wrong and make amends, but we know that there are too many misdeeds to remember, so we use the alphabet once again to emphasize completeness, and to ask for complete forgiveness.

Alongside the importance of reflecting on where we have gone wrong over the past year, Rav A.Y. Kook zt"l teaches us that it is also motivating and empowering for each of us to think about what we have done right, to encourage ourselves to continue to do good in the world. Inspired by Rav Kook, Rav Binyamin Holtzman (Rav of Kibbutz Maaleh Gilboa) composed the following positive vidui: Ahavnu, bachinu, gamalnu, dibarnu yofi – we have loved, we have cried, we have shown kindness, we have spoken nicely. We have believed, we have tried, we have remembered, we have hugged.

Over this year of so much pain for Am Yisrael, we have also seen so much kindness and caring and love. From the shipments of gear coming from the four corners of the world for our precious IDF soldiers, to the prayers for the hostages, from the countless meals cooked for reservist families, to the clothing drives for displaced families, the Jewish People have come together in so many ways and done so much good. The incredible heroism of our soldiers and their families, the gevurah of those who have lost loved ones and yet are a force for goodness and healing for our people, are nothing short of inspiring. Alongside our confession of our wrongdoing and the crucial process of reflecting on how we can do better, Rav Kook encourages us to pay attention to how we have done well, where we have succeeded, what good examples we want to build upon for the coming year. It is our fervent hope that Hashem will see this as He judges us this year and have mercy, choosing to focus on the goodness of His people, from A to Z.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

What the Whole Day is About

ust as a Mikva purifies the impure, so too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, purifies Israel. – The Conclusion of Mishne Yoma Chapter 8

It was more than 30 something years ago and I was beginning a new chapter in life going out into the big city of New York to learn Torah

with business people, millionaires and billionaires, men of industry. One thing began to concern me as I started. I knew there was a difference, back then, between having a TV or not having a TV. That was the challenge of that time. (Remember those days!?) I was one who had chosen to keep my focus away from worldly matters.

However, I soon discovered that my trips to New York, the Big Apple were having an effect on my basic level of Kedusha. I was mentally and physically and emotionally exhausted from the traveling and having to refocus my attention at all times. I felt like I was living in the TV. It didn't matter whether I was the one who had or didn't have. The environment itself was toxic for me.

So, I came to ask Rabbi Ezriel Tauber ztl. what I should do. He didn't hesitate. He understood my dilemma right away. He too had worked there for many years. He insisted that I go to the Mikva every day. That meant getting up even earlier every day before catching the bus to the city.

He told me that that the Rambam waxes poetic and calls the Mikva "Mei Daas" – "waters of knowledge". It had wondrous powers. If it can take a gentile and make him into a Jew, with the proper intent, then what can it do for a Jew!?

I started going regularly. It made a world of difference. I can't describe it. I felt like a hot knife slicing through butter as I went about my business in the big city milieu. The one or two times that I missed I detected the obvious difference. It was like the difference between night and day. Every day I would go and refocus and rededicate my energies to a new day. I can't see myself living any other way now.

That year went around and Yom Kippur arrived. On Yom Kippur, one of the five things that we don't do, besides not eating and drinking, is not bathing and not washing. On Yom Kippur immersion the Mikva is forbidden. Yom Kippur was going as Yom Kippur tends to go. I still don't know why they call it a "fast" day. It should be called a "slow" day.

Anyway, we were nearing the end of a long and intense Yeshiva Davening. There was more leg to go. After Mincha and before Neila we took just a 20-minute break to prepare for the last push of Teshuva.

I approached Rabbi Tauber as he was resting in preparation for leading that last service. I told him that I miss the Mikva terribly on Yom Kippur. I thought I would get a nod of agreement or approval. After all, it was his great advice that was working so well for me. Instead, he gave me a look that shouts. He said, "You think you need the Mikva today? Then you don't know what the whole day is about!" I was shocked. Here, the whole day had almost passed and there was only a half hour yet to go and I don't know what the whole day is about. He explained, "You are in the Mikva on Yom Kippur". You are Toveling (soaking and bathing) in Yud and Hey and Vuv and Hey, in the name of HASHEM."

The dirt is being removed by the most powerful and universal solvent, Teshuva, and HASHEM, Himself is washing us in his Mikva as the last Mishne is Yoma declares in the name of Rabbi Akiva; Rabbi Akiva said: 'How fortunate are you, Israel; before Whom are you purified, and Who purifies you? It is your Father in Heaven, as it is stated: "And I will sprinkle purifying water upon you, and you shall be purified" (Yechezkel 36:25). And it says: "The ritual bath of Israel is HASHEM" (Yermiahu 17:13). Just as a Mikva purifies the impure, so too, the Holy One, Blessed be He, purifies Israel.'

I have to admit that for a very short while, a moment or two I felt the sting of deep disappointment but thankfully, now, and forever more I can say I know what the whole day is about.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

How Does the Scapegoat Atone?
Yom Kippur's Message of Mercy and Hope
By Rav Yoel Bin-Nun

Seemingly, there should be no such day as Yom Kippur. How can there possibly be any rectification of sins committed intentionally? Repentance certainly has its place, for it comes to repair the deformed personality; but how can a sacrifice bring forgiveness and atonement for anything other than an unintentional sin?

The prophets steer well clear of speaking about a sacrifice that atones for a sin committed intentionally. It is quite audacious to read the words of Yishayahu in the haftora of Yom Kippur itself. What the prophet is asking is whether the community has ensured that, at the end of the fast, a meal will be waiting not only for those who have plenty, but also for the less fortunate: "Offer your bread to the hungry and bring the bitterly poor into your house" (58:7). Fasting, beating one's breast, bowing one's head and wearing sackcloth and ashes by themselves have little meaning for the prophets: "I desire kindness rather than sacrifices," Hoshea declares (6:6). Religious worship that does not uproot moral wrongdoing, and which is sometimes regarded as a "bribe" to God to continue engaging in interpersonal corruption, is regarded in a most serious light.

The Torah teaches that if a person sinned unwittingly and then became aware of his sin, he should bring a sin offering. But does the Torah mention anywhere a sacrifice that brings atonement for a sin performed knowingly?

Yom Kippur atones for intentional sins, although this seems impossible. For unintentional sins, we don't need Yom Kippur to atone, while for intentional sins there can be no atonement (in the sense of erasing punishment). The door to repentance is always open, but punishment for sins committed knowingly should be unavoidable.

Yom Kippur is thus a paradox, and the Torah itself points to this, just as it does to the exceptional laws concerning the red heifer used for ritual purification. All these laws are puzzling: why do we need a heifer; are not all ritual impurities purified through water? Why, when the impure person is purified through the ritual of the heifer, is the the priest who performs the sprinkling (and who was ritually pure) simultaneously rendered impure?

The red heifer and the scapegoat are paradoxical exceptions to the general laws of purity and sacrifices, and are very difficult to understand. In fact, our Sages teach that the nations of the world ridicule Israel because of the scapegoat and the red heifer.

It is not so difficult to understand why these sacrifices render impure those who have been involved with them, for they belong to the category of sacrifices prepared outside the camp, and these have the characteristic of rendering impure. But the need for these "external sacrifices" is itself problematic. Generally, we are forbidden to offer sacrifices outside the Temple. Why does the Torah make an exception here and command the banishing of the goat outside the camp?

In Vayikra 17, a chapter lodged between the Torah reading of Shacharit of Yom Kippur and the Torah reading of Mincha, there is an emphasis on the prohibition, "They shall no longer offer their sacrifices to the 'se'irim'" (demons); anyone who slaughters a sacrifice outside the camp is considered to have given an offering to demons! But what about the two goats offered on Yom Kippur? Are we – heaven forbid – hinting at two deities? To whom are we sacrificing the scapegoat in the barren land?

On the Day of Judgment – Rosh Ha-shana – we do not fast, nor do we beat our breast over our sins, nor do we recite Selichot. It is a day of truth, a day of remembrance, a day of judgment. Our fear of heavenly judgment makes this day a fearful one, and we feel awe and dread upon hearing the shofar and reciting

Malkhuyot, Zikhronot, and Shofarot. We fear God's judgment of our actions.

But the Torah teaches that fasting has an effect, that man can repent and be given a second chance, that God relates to us not just in justice but in mercy as well. The presentation of the second set of Tablets of Testimony, on Yom Kippur, symbolizes this. The Holy One reveals that there is another dimension to His providence over the world – the attribute of mercy. This is a dimension that has no place according to justice, truth and judgment.

The essence of Yom Kippur, explains the Ramban in parashat Emor, is "mercy within judgment." Therefore, we confess and we cry out Selichot. The Selichot even "spread backwards" all the way to the week preceding Rosh Ha-shana, or to Rosh Chodesh Elul.

During the period of "the Days of Mercy," Rosh Ha-shana is a day (today, two days) of truth, without Selichot. It is a day of judgment based on strict justice. But the Torah nevertheless gives us – against all logic – a day of atonement, where our sins are forgiven and punishment cast away. After all, we are only human, and we cannot deal with the attribute of truth. The Holy One saw that the world cannot exist based only on the attribute of justice, and so He added to it the attribute of mercy.

The haftara – the Book of Yona – teaches us faith, prayer and repentance, in that order. But the haftara does not end after chapter 3, when the people of Ninveh repent. The story continues with the tale of the gourd in chapter 4, teaching us of the attribute of mercy: "Shall I not then have mercy on Ninveh, the great city?" The world cannot exist only in the attribute of justice, and the Holy One performs a great kindness for the world, and a great kindness for Israel, in giving us Yom Kippur. It is a great and wonderful message of hope.

However, the sins and iniquities that are placed upon the goat cannot be offered on the altar. The altar does not accept the offering for an intentional sin.

This goat, then, cannot be offered up, but we must confess and send away our sins, for we cannot stand before the attribute of truth. Therefore, we banish these sins committed knowingly to the wilderness, to a barren wasteland.

That is why the Torah commands – almost in the same breath, as it were – "They shall no longer offer their sacrifices to the 'se'irim,'" but on one day of the year you shall send all your intentional transgressions out of the camp with the goat. "And he shall confess over [the scapegoat] all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions and all their sins…."

(See the first Mishna of Massekhet Shevuot for the parallel between atonement for the Sanctuary from its impurity by means of the Kohen Gadol entering the Kodesh Kodashim, and the scapegoat, carrying all the rest of Israel's sins and wrongdoings to the wilderness.)

The first half of Sefer Vayikra – up to the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur – deals with sacrifices and ritual purity. From there onwards, the second half discusses the sanctity of the congregation (prohibited sexual relations), "You shall be holy," the holiness of the land, holiness in time, etc. By allowing us to cast out even our intentional sins, Yom Kippur connects the sanctity and the purity of the Temple with the daily life of the congregation.

Like the story of Yona, Yom Kippur teaches us that without mercy, the world cannot exist at all. Despite all logic, justice, truth and judgment, Yom Kippur brings us a message of hope, atonement, and great possibility. [*Translated by Kaeren Fish*]

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot *[1974]*

Diffidence and Indifference

Years, decades, even centuries seem to have passed since we last assembled here for Kol Nidre services. What a difference between last year and tonight! Last year at Kol Nidre, things seemed so normal despite the intermittent crises, so innocent despite the occasional scandals, life so secure and danger so remote. We did not even know how lucky we were. Tonight, however, in the State of Israel, parents and children of some twenty eight hundred young men will rise at the end of the service to recite Kaddish at the occasion of the first yahrzeit of their children who fell in battle.

The Jewish tradition tells us that one of the fundamental differences between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is that Rosh Hashanah is יום הדין, the day of judgment, whereas Yom Kippur is יום הרחמים, the day of mercy or compassion. While each contains an element of the "בני יששכר", other, these are the major emphases. Thus, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Shapiro, author of complained that the מי שברך, the special prayer recited for those who receive Torah honors on Yom Kippur, mentions לכבוד יום הדין, "in honor of the day of judgment." He ordered that these words not be inserted in the prayer, because Yom Kippur was a day of love and compassion, not judgment and justice. I confess that for a while I was planning to do the same at The Jewish Center.

But no more. Yom Kippur, of course, remains a day of mercy and compassion. But, alas, the stamp of יום הדין(day of judgment), is indelibly impressed on it as of 2 P.M. last year on Yom Kippur day, and so it will remain forever. A new and ominous dimension has been added to the historic character of this day.

Never before in my adult life did I recite the words of the ונתנה תוקף prayer with such feeling and conviction as I have since the outbreak of hostilities last year who knows? Who is destined to life and who is destined to death? Who to an early -- ומי לא מי בקיצו end and who to survival? מי במים מי באש מי בחרב -- who will drown in the Suez Canal or the Mediterranean, who will be incinerated in a burning tank or a crashing jet, who will be the victim of the enemy's sword or napalm or missile? איזו לחרב ואיזו לשלום, and on this judgment day it is decided which nations are doomed to war, and which will be graced with peace. We have achieved a new awareness of the fragility of our lives, of the marginality of our existence, of our vulnerability, of the extent to which we are pawns and not players in the games of life. But, Jews are Jews! And Jews never let any experience of life pass without squeezing out of it some lesson, something that they can both learn and teach, some insight into securing survival.

What were the lessons of that traumatic experience a year ago? I am not speaking of the military and political reevaluations: these themes neither fall within my competence nor are they appropriate for this holy night. Rather, I ask the question in the spirit of the Jewish tradition, which from its beginnings insisted that every cardinal event must become a springboard for self-examination, for teshuvah (repentence). Our question, then, is: where have we gone wrong, not as soldiers but as people, as Jews? Certainly, Yom Kippur, the time of introspection and confession, is appropriate for such soul-searching.

There are two problem areas which cover all our lives: the spiritual and the social. Or, to use the classical formulations of our tradition, the realms of בין אדם למקום(between man and God), and בין אדם לחברו(between man and man).

These two areas are alluded to in the Amidah just concluded For Thou art the pardoner of Israel and the Forgiver of the tribes of" כי אתה סלחן לישראל ומחלן לשבטי ישורון בכל דור ודור Jeshurun in every generation."

Rabbi Baruch Epstein, author of "ברוך שאמר," asks: why do we in one case refer to our people as "Israel," implying an organic entity, and in the second phrase as "the tribes of Jeshurun," implying a divided people? He answers by referring to a Kabbalistic idea

which is not at all overly mystical. The Kabbalists ascribe all sins and failings to two primal sins committed by our people in the dim past. These are, the Golden Calf, when the people of Israel made themselves a calf and worshipped it, and the selling of Joseph by his brothers. The Golden Calf is paradigmatic for all sins בין אדם למקום; all spiritual failures derive, no matter how indirectly or remotely, from that of the Golden Calf. The selling of Joseph is the source of all sins בין אדם לחברו; all social injustices reflect, somehow, some aspect of that cardinal crime of treachery early in our history.

Therefore, on Yom Kippur we pray that God be a סלחן לישראל-- that he pardon Israel for its crime of making the calf, and for all מחלן sins against God that derive from it; and that He be a that He forgive the tribes of Jeshurun, the brothers who sold Joseph into slavery and thereby accepted responsibility לשבטי ישורון, for all wrongdoings of one Jew against another for all generations.

I would analyze that a bit more carefully. The sin of the Golden Calf is recorded in the Torah after the following prefatory words: the people saw כי בושש משה, that Moses was delayed. Our traditions says that בושש come from בא שש, "six hours had passed." By this they mean that Moses had promised when he went up to to receive the Torah that he would return in 40 days. The people thought that meant the 40th day, whereas he meant the end of 40 full days. Because of a difference of six hours, the people became exasperated, frightened, impatient, anxious, nervous. Because of this they made the calf and proclaimed: אלה אלהיך ישראל, this is your God – or, preferably, your leader – 0 Israel. Their fundamental insecurity lead to impatience, to search for a leader, to impulsiveness, and this is always the cause of man's sins against God.

The selling of Joseph into slavery came from just the opposite characteristic: from over-confidence rather than from diffidence, from insensitivity rather than from insecurity and anxiety. The tribes or brothers were too independent, too contemptuous, and therefore developed disrespect and enmity for their brother.

The illusion of weakness results in alienation from God, and a search for ersatz gods, for substitutes whether for Moses or for the Lord. This was the essence of the sin of the Golden Calf. It holds no less true today for young Jews who, in their exasperation and in their unwillingness to learn the difficult and demanding road of Judaism, thus find their ways into ashrams, into Jesus-freaks groups, into Buddism and Christian Science and – some four thousand years after our ancestors repudiated moonworship – to this new evangelist from Korea, Rev. Moon.

The delusion of power leads to the alienation of man from his fellow man, of Jew from Jew. It leads people to sell their brothers down the river! These, then, are the two primals sins for which we beg forgiveness and pardon on Yom Kippur: diffidence and indifference, impatience and impudence, nervousness and "nerve," insecurity and insensitivity.

Before last Yom Kippur our major problem was: the selling of Joseph. We were too much "the tribes of Jeshurun." We were over-confident to the point of arrogance, and not only Israelis but American Jews as well were cocky, secure, and – divisive! Israel had become a powder keg of internal strife. The tribes of Jeshurun were at each other's throats: Black Panthers, economic scandals, political infighting, hatred, were tearing apart the fabric of Israeli society.

Since last Yom Kippur, our major problem is not the selling of Joseph, but the Golden Calf. We have become nervous and weak, too pessimistic, on the brink of hopeless. The voices of despair and self-doubt are abroad in the land. Some Israelis ask: maybe we should never have built a state, maybe we should give up what is asked from us, maybe the Arabs are not wrong after all. The alienation of Torah and God as the source of our national dignity has affected our claims and rights to the land. Our alienation from our history and past jeopardize our very future. As with the Golden Calf, insecurity leads to infidelity.

Not only does this hold true for Israel, but for the United States as well. Our whole community suffers from these two weaknesses.

This was brought back to me with stunning clarity last Friday morning when, with a group of colleagues, I met with Senator Jackson in his office in Washington, D.C. The Senator is truly one of the חסידי אומות העולם (noble gentiles). He is the prime mover, despite the absence of any obvious political motivation, in the effort to tie in credits for the Soviet Union with the rights of Jews to emigrate from Russia, and an end to their harassment, in the famous "Jackson Amendment." We met him immediately before he was to meet with President Ford at the White House, who was to meet thereafter with Ambassador Gromyko on the same problem.

We came to tell the Senator not that we support him – we are not politicans – but that the Jewish community has a sense of gratitude and that we approve of and applaud what he is doing. He told us that he had trouble with two groups of Jews. One was the American Jewish leadership which, devoted though it was to the cause of American and world Jewry, was overly-nervous, too fearful, and buckled under too quickly to pressure. Every time Secretary Kissinger felt a cold coming on, American Jewish leaders sneezed. They allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by the Executive Branch. They were too ready to compromise too much, even before beginning negotiations. The second group were the American Jewish intellectuals, especially the leftists, who were so concerned with advancing their abstract concept of Détente, who were so committed to their liberal dogma of friendship with Russia, that they were willing to overlook the vital interests of Russian Jews or Israeli Jews or any human rights.

There they are! One group – the impatient, insecure, nervous Jews, who are willing to compromise whether it be with the Golden Calf or with the Soviet Union. And the second group, Jews who are guilty of contempt and indifference towards their fellow Jews; "tribes of Jeshurun" who are willing to sell Joseph to every passing band of Medianites or Egyptians – or Russians – in the name of liberalism!

So if we ask God to forgive us these sins, to be the סלחן לישראל ומחלן לשבטי ישורון, we must make every effort to rectify our failure, whether in Israel or in communal life in the United States.

But it is not sufficient, on this holy day, to speak about communal leadership problems in which we do not have much of a voice. Permit me to speak rather directly and personally as well about two areas in our life here at The Jewish Center. In both of these, I urge you to overcome the sense of alienation, both in the area of man-God relationship, and in the area of our social life.

First, as "Israel." In times of such threats to the continuation of Judaism, we simply have got to be more vigorous in our practice and our observance of Judaism. We are a bit too smug. We look about each other, notice many people in shul, and think that it will always be this way. We are not sufficiently aware of the constant dangers and assimilatory pressures that surround us. And the answer must come not by what somebody else will do, but by what we ourselves are willing to do. It means that we, who are sufficiently sophisticated to read what we read and do what we do, must at least attend on she'ur of Torah study per week. It means that those of us who come only on the High Holidays must do more. Of course, I know you are good Jews in the sense that you support every Jewish cause so liberally; would that all of us would follow your example! But is it not necessary to recharge your batteries, to establish your contact with the synagogue and with the Torah, and with Jewish life, in order to gain something from all that you are giving? It means that those of you who come every Shabbat – and that is the overwhelming majority of this congregation – must come Friday night as well. I am often deeply embarrassed at the fact that this great

synagogue sees only 40 or 50 people and hardly any children on Friday nights. Is it not possible to come home 45 minutes earlier and welcome the Sabbath the way it should be welcomed? It means that our women who have time for every cause, must not refuse to respond to the Center itself when it calls upon them for assistance.

Second, the area of "the tribes of Jeshurun." We often speak of "The Center Family." Sometimes I wonder if this is only a great ideal, and whether it is or is not a reality. For instance, if, Heaven forbid, there is a funeral at The Center, I look about me and wonder: where are all the friends, where are all the people who see each other every Shabbat? Why is it that when we have to have a minyan in the house of a mourner, we must use the telephone to invite people? That should never be necessary! Those who are friendly in times of happiness, must be friendly in times of need as well. It means that we must feel a closeness to every Jew, and if a stranger comes in to the synagogue and moves into our seat, we must not act aggrieved and upset.
Yom Kippur must teach us greater devotion to the Holy One, and greater love of Israel. If we sincerely dedicate ourselves to this double program of avoding the sin of the Golden Calf and of the selling of Joseph, God will indeed be the "Pardoner of Israel and the Forgiver of the tribes of Jeshurun."

Last year at this time we rose and we prayed. יעלה תחנונו מערב, may our prayer rise at sunset, when we recite Kol Nidre; ויבוא שועתנו מבקר, may our cry arise before God at sunset on Yom Kippur day; ויראה רנונו עד ערב, and may our song, indicating God's acceptance of our prayer, be seen and heard by sunset, by Neilah time.

Apparently, we did not pray hard enough or wisely enough or with enough sincerity and kavvanah. Even if we did, it did not help. Because while יעלה, while our prayer arose at sunset; while ויבוא, our cry came to God in the morning – it stopped there. There was no ויראה. By Neilah time, no רינה, no song, was seen or heard. Instead – the cold clash of iron and steel. No melody, . ויראהbut not , יעלה ויבוא.but wail and lament. Fire and blood and tears Tonight, chastened by a year of travail so cruelly and abruptly thrust upon us by the . יעלה ויבוא ויראהenemy last year on Yom Kippur afternoon, we pray with special fervor
0 Lord, let Your help and goodness and salvation be Your answer by tomorrow evening. Because, Lord, as Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev said to You one Kol Nidre eve, after a particularly vicious pogrom: "Master of the World, we need You! But Master of the World, You permitted these pagans to murder us and spill our blood, the blood of our old and our young, of our men and our women. No more, 0 Master of the World! Because while we need You – You need us! What, after all, will You do without Your Jews in the world? Who will speak of You? Who will keep the memory of You alive?"

So we say, 0 Lord, "how we need You! How You are needed by those who are sick and worried; by those who are disappointed, whether in children or in themselves; by those who feel economically threatened, their whole position in life jeopardized; by American Jewry; by the Jews of the State of Israel. But Lord, You need us too! Your prophet Isaiah said, אתם עדי, 'Ye are my witnesses. 'And so forgive Israel and pardon the tribes of Jeshurun, because we must still witness to You in this world."
You need us, 0 Lord, so let all three of our prayers be answered this time. יעלה תחנונו מערב ויבוא שועתנו מבקר ויראה רנונו עד ערב
May our prayers arise tonight, may they come before Thee in the morning, and by Neilah time may they be answered with song and a promise of a year of health and peace and redemption.

BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **YOM KIPUR** - 5785

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Chaim Shulman

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from**: Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>
date: Oct 10, 2024, 11:04 AM
subject: Tidbits - Yom Kippur 5785 in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZTL
Yom Kippur 5784
An abridged version of Selichos is said • During Shacharis, Mizmor L'sodah, Tachanun, and Lamenatzei'ach are omitted. Avinu Malkeinu is recited this year (as Yom Kippur coincides with Shabbos) • The minhag of Kapparos should be performed with proper concentration and thoughts of teshuvah. Ma'aser funds should not be used • There is a mitzvah to immerse in the mikvah on Erev Yom Kippur. Some say to immerse oneself three times, while others say seven times. It is best to go to the mikvah no earlier than one hour prior to chatzos, but before one davens Mincha • One should daven Mincha on Erev Yom Kippur before the Seudah Hamafsekes, so that Mincha's Viduy is recited prior to the Seudah Hamafsekes. A woman who will not be davening Mincha should still recite the Viduy • There is a mitzvah to eat on Erev Yom Kippur. Rabbeinu Yonah cites three reasons: 1) To display our simchah over our upcoming atonement. 2) A seudah on Erev Yom Kippur substitutes for the Seudas Yom Tov that we obviously cannot have on Yom Kippur. 3) To give one strength for the fast • Note, one who isn't thirsty and is drinking water solely for hydration does not make a berachah • The Seudah Hamafsekes may be eaten any time after Mincha. There is no obligation to wash and eat bread at this seudah, but there is a custom to eat kreplach at this meal. Preferably, one should verbally state (or at least have in mind) before saying bircas hamazon that he does not intend to begin fasting at this point and will continue eating and drinking • The home should be prepared and cleaned for Yom Kippur as it would be for Shabbos, with a tablecloth set on the table • One should dress in Shabbos clothing, yet the attire should reflect the tone of the day. Some have the minhag to wear white garments and to not wear (yellow) gold jewelry • Parents should bless their children before setting out to Shul • A 24-hour candle is lit to be used for the Havdalah flame on Motzaei Yom Kippur. Many have the minhag to light a Ner Neshama, due to Yizkor. One should remember to fulfill his Tzedakah pledges from the Yizkor. Some have the minhag to have a lit candle in their bedroom as well ("gezunte lecht") • The tallis is worn during all tefillos throughout Yom Kippur. One should don his tallis on Erev Yom Kippur prior to shekiya, as the berachah on the tallis may not be recited at night. Most wear a kittel as well • There is mitzvah d'oraysah (mentioned in Tefillas Zakkah) to add to the day of Yom Kippur by accepting the arrival of Yom Kippur upon oneself a bit earlier • Since Yom Kippur is also Shabbos this year, the berachah on candle lighting is "l'hadlik ner shel Sahabbos v'shel Yom hakippurim".
There are restrictions against the following activities:
Eating and Drinking. Pregnant women, kimpeturin, the elderly etc. must seek the guidance of a competent halachic authority and not be lenient - neither with their health, nor with the laws of Yom Kippur. Children, when appropriate, should be trained to some degree in the mitzvah of fasting by not eating at night or even delaying breakfast in the morning, etc.
Washing. One may wash until his knuckles upon awakening, after relieving himself, and after touching shoes or a covered part of the body. One need not be overly cautious to keep the water below the knuckles. If an area becomes soiled, one may wash off the area; however, regarding washing away perspiration, one should be stringent. A Kohen prior to Bircas Kohanim and those not fasting who are eating bread, should wash their hands entirely.
Anointing. This includes any soap, oil, cream, cosmetics etc. Some include deodorant in this category.
Leather Shoes. The minhag is to be stringent with children as well. Many poskim do not allow slippers without a back to be worn outside an Eruv.
Marital Relations. Some add that one should practice Harchakos as well.
No preparations may be done on Yom Kippur for after Yom Kippur, including food preparations.
Following Kol Nidrei, an abridged Kabbalas Shabbos is said • The additions for Shabbos are recited in Shemoneh Esrei • Avinu Malkeinu is omitted on Shabbos from all tefillos aside from Ne'ilah • The special supplications usually said by the tzibbur during Bircas Kohanim are omitted.
Viduy, confessing our sins in repentance, is a mitzvah d'oraysa. Teshuva is performed by regretting one's sins, confessing sins through Viduy, and resolving to avoid sinning in the future. One must seek forgiveness from anyone he may have wronged. There is a practice in many communities to express verbally that one forgives anyone who may have wronged him. This expression is included in many versions of Tefillas Zakah.
Rabbi Zlotowitz z"l would say that on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, the holy Kohen Kadol would enter the holiest place on earth, the Kodesh Hakodashim and recite a short tefillah that Klal Yisroel should have sufficient parnassah (Yoma 53b). While one may consider certain requests to be more mundane, in essence, every tefillah to Hashem is recognition that He is in control. By praying even for minor things, we acknowledge that we must beseech Him for everything, as He is the source of it all.
To achieve the daily 100 berachos, some have the practice of reciting a berachah on besamim periodically. One should have in mind for this blessing to apply only to this occurrence of smelling besamim. One should wait at least a half hour before reciting another berachah. Alternatively, many include berachos made by the Aliyos to the Torah in the daily count (when one pays attention and answers amen to them).

Most have the minhag to recite Kiddush Levana immediately after Maariv (the final opportunity this year is Wednesday night, October 16th.)
As always, one may not eat or drink before Havdalah, with the exception of water. One should recite Baruch Hamavdil… before drinking water or doing any other melachah. Generally, a woman should wait to hear Havdalah from a man, if possible.
Since it is also Motzaei Shabbos Havdalah includes Besamim. Additionally, in this case one is not required to recite the Borei Me'orei Ha'eishover a "Ner She'shavas" - a flame which was kindled before Yom Kippur - however it is most preferably to do so (if this flame only has one wick, an additional candle should be adjoined to the flame as a second wick for Havdalah; alternatively, a standard Havdalah candle can be lit from this flame).
There is a praiseworthy minhag to begin building the sukkah immediately after Yom Kippur so as to go from one mitzvah to the next (one should be careful not to disturb neighbors while doing so). Some say that as an alternative one can learn the halachos of sukkah. Helping one's wife prepare for Yom Tov is, in fact, also a mitzvah.
There is a custom to daven Shacharis a bit earlier in the morning following Yom Kippur. Tachanun is omitted in the days between Yom Kippur and Succos.
SHACHARIS: The leining (Vayikra 16) is divided into seven aliyos (since it is Shabbos) and discusses the Yom Kippur Avodah as performed in the Beis Hamikdash. The Maftir (Bamidbar 29:7-11) reviews the Korban Mussaf offerings brought on Yom Kippur. In the haftarah, Yeshayah Hanavi (57:14-58:14) encourages the nation to teshuvah, cautioning them that fasting and other afflictions are only effective when performed with a sincere heart seeking to repent.
MINCHAH: The laws of forbidden relations are leined (Vayikra 18) in three aliyos. The gravity of these sins are recounted to encourage one to overcome the strong temptation in these areas (Rashi, Megillah 31a). The Maftir is Sefer Yonah. The story of Yonah teaches us the power of teshuvah. In addition, Yonah's inability to circumvent the divine plan demonstrates that no man can escape Hashem and His decrees. Many regard the aliyah of Maftir Yonah as a significant segulah.
Unlike the rest of the year, on Yom Kippur we recite "Baruch Sheim Kevod Malchuso" aloud. The Yalkut Shimoni (Parashas Acharei Mos) explains that on Yom Kippur, Klal Yisrael are like angels as they go without shoes, without food and drink and practice other restrictions. However, once Maariv arrives on Motazei Yom Kippur we resume saying Baruch Sheim in an undertone. One may question, wouldn't it be logical to continue reciting Baruch Sheim aloud at Maariv after Yom Kippur, once we have been thoroughly purified from the day?
Rav Zalman Sorotzkin zt"l, explains that immediately upon accepting Yom Kippur and all its practices, we achieve lofty heights which enable us immediately to recite Baruch Sheim aloud. On Motzaei Yom Kippur, however, when these obligations have already been relaxed, we are no longer committed to these levels, thus no longer are we on this high level. This power of a firm resolve and true commitment to change and improve is immediately effective, even before the desired spiritual goal is reached. Through recommitting ourselves to be better people to others and to Hashem may we merit to attain lofty levels and a G'mar Chasimah Tovah.
Please reach out to us with any thoughts or comments at: klalgovoah.org Ira Zlotowitz - Founder | iraz@gparency.com | 917.597.2197 Ahron Dicker - Editor | adicker@klalgovoah.org | 732.581.5830 Instagram Instagram Website Website Forward Forward

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from: OU Israel <tt@ouisrael.org>
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subject: Torah Tidbits - Yom Kippur - Sukkot - Bereshit - Issue 1584

Yom Kippur and Simchat Torah: Two Days Joined by Jewish History
BY **RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN RAM, YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**
On the surface, these two days appear to have little connection. They fall within the same month, but present as completely unrelated, and even oppositional. Yom Kippur and Simchat Torah come across as polar opposites. Yom Kippur is divinely designated, delivered to Moshe at Sinai as an eternal day of forgiveness and atonement. Simchat Torah, on the other hand, emerged as a minhag, probably around 1,000 years ago. Yom Kippur carries a somber, solemn tone, filled with gravitas and the looming reminder of human frailty. Simchat Torah bursts with joy, energy, and festive celebration. Yom Kippur invites quiet solitude, personal confession, and deep moral introspection. Simchat Torah is vibrant, collective, and communal. They are also distinct historically. Yom Kippur lost much of its grandeur after the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Our current observance pales in comparison to its original form. Without the Kohen Gadol, the Mikdash and the special avoda of the Kodesh Hakodoshim, Yom Kippur remains a shadow of its past. In contrast, Simchat Torah is a product of galut. The second day of Shemini Atzeret or "Yom Tov sheni shel galiyut"- birthed Simchat Torah. This second day of Shmini Atzeret, devoid of specific mitzvot, transformed into a joyous celebration, marking the conclusion of the Torah-reading cycle. Yom Kippur suffered the effects of galut whereas Simchat Torah evolved from galut.
JOINED IN JEWISH HISTORY
Yet despite their contrasting nature, these days share a tragic bond. In 1973, on Yom Kippur, we were brutally attacked by enemies seeking to exploit our vulnerability during this holy day. Once again in 2023, savage attackers attempted the same, striking us on Simchat Torah, when we least expected it. Both assaults occurred on Shabbat, a day when we affirm Hashem as the sole Creator. The experiences were hauntingly similar: cars rushing from shuls to the frontlines, parents bidding farewell to children without knowing if they would return, sirens shattering the peace of our sacred days, and silent radios suddenly crackling to life with devastating news.
THE HEAVENLY COURT
The eerie parallels between these two days separated by fifty years, are undeniable. Not only did these two days begin with similar tragedy, but they will conclude in the same way. In 1973, we were caught off guard by a dual assault, facing an existential crisis over the survival of the State of Israel. However, the idea that Yom Kippur could be weaponized against our people is unfathomable. The Heavenly Court or the Beit Din Shel Ma'aleh would never permit such a desecration of Yom Kippur, nor would it allow Shabbat to be turned into a weapon. With Hashem's help, and through the brave and swift response of our army, we repelled the surprise attack and ultimately achieved remarkable military victories. Our resilience in that war, and the triumph we snatched from the jaws of defeat, led to a stabilization of relations with two of our major adversaries. While we don't enjoy a warm peace with Egypt and Jordan, open hostilities have ceased.
The same outcome awaits us now. Though no one can predict when this war will end, one thing is certain: we will overcome the enemies of Hashem. The Heavenly Court will, once again, refuse to allow the day we celebrate Torah to be used as a weapon against us. Despite our current suffering and trauma, we will triumph, and one day we will grasp how this war is woven into the unstoppable process of redemption.
Jewish history has, curiously, bound these two seemingly dissimilar days together. An unusual pairing—Yom Kippur and its war and Simchat Torah and its war. Apparently, history beckons us to contemplate the deeper connection between these chagim, which, on the surface, appear so different. Apparently, contemplating Simchat Torah enriches our appreciation of Yom Kippur, while reflecting on Yom Kippur deepens our celebration of Simchat Torah. How do these two days, joined by Jewish history, cross-pollinate?
SPIRITUAL RESTORATION FOR A CHOSEN NATION
As the people chosen to represent Hashem in this world, we challenge humanity towards morality and monotheism. We alone accepted Hashem's Torah and, with it, the mission of living a life shaped by 613 mitzvot. We embody a life of 613 mitzvot to inspire the world towards the 7 universal

mandates. However, the demanding and all-encompassing nature of taryag mitzvot renders us vulnerable to failure. There are many mitzvot and, unfortunately, many opportunities to fail. It is no coincidence that our first national sin—the egel—occurred at the very mountain where we received the Torah. A nation tasked with such lofty expectations requires a day of atonement. While sin is not inevitable, for a people expected to carry such a demanding burden, it is highly likely. Teshuvah is universally accessible to all humanity, as illustrated by the sparing of Nineveh. Yet, Yom Kippur and its distinctive process of teshuvah serve as a remarkable gift to the Jewish people—a day when Hashem extends an extraordinary opportunity for atonement. On Simchat Torah, we joyfully celebrate our chosenness, and recognize that the system of mitzvot we embrace grants us the need and the privilege of Yom Kippur.

SPIRITUAL REPLENISHMENT Yom Kippur transcends mere atonement and the cleansing of sin. It offers a glimpse into eternity, a purely spiritual existence unburdened by physical needs. On this sacred day, we strive to reach the heavens, fully immersed in the presence of Hashem and experiencing a heightened spiritual consciousness. Yom Kippur provides an opportunity to reset our relationship with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Simchat Torah celebrates our divine selection, while Yom Kippur is the day our nation stands alone before Hashem, and only before Him. By deepening our awareness of being עם הנבחר on Simchat Torah, we better appreciate the profound spiritual replenishment which Yom Kippur enables.

PREPARING TORAH FOR GALUT

Just as Simchat Torah accentuates Yom Kippur, Yom Kippur should also enrich Simchat Torah. As the Rambam emphasizes, Yom Kippur is not only a time for personal repentance but also a day for collective and national teshuvah. On the very first Yom Kippur, in the aftermath of the devastating sin of the Golden Calf, Hashem forgave us not as individuals but as a people. On that day, He also granted us Torah a second time, upon the same mountain that had witnessed both our glory and our shame. By reissuing the Torah, Hashem did more than merely forgive us; He endowed a Torah with the power to endure sin and human failure. He reassured us that despite our transgressions and betrayals, His word and His mitzvot would always be with us. On the first Yom Kippur Hashem equipped Torah for a nation that would sin.

A TORAH FOR GALUT

The Beit HaLevi suggests that the Torah itself was altered in its second version. Originally, Torah Shebichtav (the Written Torah) and Torah Sheba'al Peh (the Oral Torah) were unified, indivisible. In a supernatural manner, the reading of a pasuk immediately yielded its related interpretations and halachic derivations. However, following our sin and the impending reality of galut, it became essential to distinguish between these two dimensions of Torah. The Oral Law became distinct from Torah Shebichtav, adaptable, and portable—a key to our survival in galut. Without a homeland, a common language, or common flag, we maintained our identity through the study and practice of Torah Sheba'al Peh- our secret unifying "language". On the first Yom Kippur we received Torah Sheba'al peh, and were assured that not only would we survive exile, but we would thrive within it. Simchat Torah embodies our thriving through the odyssey of galut. It emerged as a product of exile, born from the additional day of Shemini Atzeret and celebrated by generations far removed from the Mikdash and from Jewish sovereignty. In distant lands, we realized that the Torah was eternal, transcending the boundaries of time and place. Yom Kippur was Hashem's original gift to us, while Simchat Torah was our gift to Him. The seeds of our success in galut were planted on that first Yom Kippur when Hashem forgave us and endowed us with the Torah in a form that would sustain us even in the depths of galut. Simchat Torah is the icon of our success in galut MERGE THE TWO This year, more than ever, we should merge the experiences of Yom Kippur and Simchat Torah, blending the themes of these two days which have been fused together by Jewish history. Yom Kippur is a day of eternity, a glimpse into the life beyond—free from physical needs, time, and the distractions of human frailty, where we exist in purity, like angels. But eternity is not reserved for a single day. We encounter it daily in our relationship with the eternal word of Hashem and in our dedication to His enduring will. Simchat Torah celebrates our daily encounter with eternity, while Yom Kippur intensifies the experience of eternity in its most holistic and transformative form..

TORAH IS MERCY

Likewise, on Simchat Torah, remember that one of the names for the Torah is Rachmana, rooted in the word for mercy, because Torah was given by Hashem, the merciful One. When we study Torah, we aspire to shape our character in the image of a compassionate Creator. His greatest display of divine mercy was the gift of Yom Kippur. We study Torah to become merciful like Him and on Yom Kippur we recall His greatest act of Mercy. Especially now, after a year in which religious charlatans distorted the image of G-d from merciful to wrathful, we must remind ourselves on both Yom Kippur and Simchat Torah that Hashem is compassionate. Hopefully this year's hybrid of Yom Kippur's purity and Simchat Torah's joy will serve as a merit for our people and will help alleviate the pain we continue to endure. History joined these days in tragedy. They will ultimately be joined in triumph.

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from**: Rabbi YY Jacobson** <rabbiyy@theyeshiva.net>
reply-to: info@theyeshiva.net
date: Oct 10, 2024, 9:39 PM
subject: **How Can I Experience a Blissful Yom Kippur**? - Classes & Essay by Rabbi YY

A Small Step for Man; A Giant Step for G-d
It's Never All or Nothing
By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Teshuvah

Relativity

An Odessa Jew meets another one. "Have you heard, Einstein won the Noble Prize?"

"Oh, what for?"

"He developed this Relativity theory."

"Yeah, what's that?"

"Well, you know, five hairs on your head is relatively few. Five hairs in your soup is relatively many."

"And for that, he wins the Noble Prize?!"

Today we will discuss this "theory of relativity" in Jewish spirituality. What may seem small on one plane is seen quite differently on another.

What's the Novelty?

Teshuvah, or repentance, one of the greatest gifts that Judaism and the Torah have given humanity, is the idea that G-d gives second chances. This is a fundamental part of the Jewish experience and is written in innumerable places in Torah -- and it is the focus during this time of the year, as we welcome Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

Which is why it comes as a surprise that Rabbi Akiva, the famed Jewish leader and Talmudic scholar living in the second century CE, some 1500 years after Sinai and the writing of the Torah, seems to have been surprised, inspired, and even astounded by the idea that G-d gives a second chance to the sinner who repents.

I refer to a statement Rabbi Akiva made which has since gained fame in Jewish songs, chants, and liturgy, and it is recorded in the Mishna.1

אמר רבי עקיבא, אשריכם ישראל! לפני מי אתם מטהרין ומי מטהר אתכם? אביכם שבשמים! שנאמר (יחזקאל לו) וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם, ואומר (ירמיהו יז) מקוה ישראל ה'. מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים, אף הקב"ה מטהר את ישראל.

Rabbi Akiva said: How lucky are you, O Israel! Before whom are you purifying yourself, and who purifies you? Our father in Heaven! As it is written (Ezekiel 36), "I will sprinkle upon you purifying waters, and you will become purified," and it is said (Jeremiah 17), "Hashem is the mikva of Israel," just as the Mikvah purifies the impure, so too does G-d purify Israel.2

What innovation, what revolutionary idea is Rabbi Akiva teaching that has not been taught for over a thousand years? That G-d purifies the impure, forgives the penitents, and absolves the sinner? This is an axiom of Jewish

thought dating back to Abraham! This idea is fundamental to Judaism itself. It is as old as Moses and the Jews of the Golden Calf, as Joseph forgiving his brothers, as G-d giving Adam a second chance after eating from the tree of knowledge. The entire concept and institution of Yom Kippur—discussed at length in the Book of Leviticus—is that G-d cleanses the people of Israel! Comes Rabbi Akiva 1500 years after Yom Kippur was created, and declares a novelty! How fortunate are you Israel. Why? Because your father in heaven cleanses you from your blemishes. It seems that Rabbi Akiva has suddenly "discovered America," when in essence he is repeating an ancient axiom of all of Tanach!

The question is stronger: To support this thought, Rabbi Akiva quotes verses that were transcribed some 500 years earlier which clearly state this very truth! Yet even the verses he quotes are from Ezekiel and Jeremiah, rather than from the Five Books of Moses, which clearly state the same truth.3

Even if you can find some reason why Rabbi Akiva repeated this ancient idea, why did the Mishna have to record it? The Mishna is a collection of original Jewish Law, and not the place to record inspirational sentiments that do not teach us anything new and innovative.

Two Extra Words

Many times, when studying Torah we will find, that if there are two questions on the same text, one question will be answered by resolving the other. Here too, there is another problem on the concluding words of Rabbi Akiva:

מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים אף הקב"ה מטהר את ישראל.

"Just as the Mikvah purifies the impure, so too does G-d purify Israel."

Every word in Mishna is precise. There is not an extra word used, not even for esthetical beauty. Every word of the Mishna was carefully edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince and is exact and necessary. Rabbi Judah chose from thousands of collected records of teachings and manuscripts and redacted in the Mishna only the best and most exact wordings.

In this statement of Rabbi Akiva, it seems, we have two superfluous words. It should have written simply, "Just as a Mikvah purifies, so too does G-d purify Israel." Why add the extra words, "purify the impure"? We all know that a mikvah is designated to purify someone who is impure! Who else would be going to the Mikvah but someone who is impure? Why state the obvious?

Yet, in these seemingly superfluous two words lies a wondrous secret. But first, we have to understand a little about the functioning of a Mikvah.

Two Types of Impurity

There are different degrees of impurity, and there are different methods of purification from these various states of impurity.

[These were mostly relevant in biblical times and during the days of the Temple, when people had to be very careful to maintain their ritual purity in order to enter the Temple, or eat the sacred food of sacrifices. Today, we don't pay much attention to these ritual patterns; which is why most Jews would not tour the Temple Mount, since you may not enter the space of the Temple if ritually impure.]

For example, if one touches a dead rodent, he becomes impure for a day and can become pure simply by immersing in a mikva and waiting for nightfall. On the other hand, if he touches a human corpse he becomes impure for a week and needs a lengthy process of immersing in a mikvah, as well as being sprinkled with a mixture of water and ashes of the red heifer.

Now imagine if someone has become impure, on both accounts, he both touched a rodent, and a human corpse. He is inevitably impure due to the corpse for a week regardless of whether he goes to the mikva or not for the rodent-tumah. The mikvah, usually potent for purification from rodent-impurity, seems now meaningless and impotent due to the stricter corpse–impurity that remains inevitably for a week. Is there any benefit of him going to the mikvah? It would seem not. He will anyway remain impure because he has also touched a corpse.

However, that is not the case. And here we discover something fascinating. The law is that a mikvah will purify and remove the lesser impurity even if the stricter degree of impurity remains!4

This then is the profound innovation of Rabbi Akiva. "Just as a Mikvah will purify the impure person" who is destined to remain impure, even after going to the mikvah, so too does G-d purify the penitent who still remains, in some ways, distant and separate from G-d!

A person who is not prepared to repent and to return to G-d fully, he is not ready to take the plunge and surrender away all of his sins and pet peeves, this person might think that G-d accepts all or nothing. He might think: Either I truly repent for everything, or I do nothing. Either I entirely change my life, or not bother at all. Since I know that I cannot make so many changes in my life, let me not even begin.

Imagine if someone—a borrower, an investor, a partner—owes you $50,000, but really has neither the desire nor intention to pay you now. It's not that he denies that he borrowed the money, it's just that he cannot be bothered, and maybe does not have the money.

Then one fine morning, perhaps the day before Yom Kippur, your dear ungrateful and audacious borrower or partner shows up at your door announcing proudly: "I want to pay you $5,000!"

"$5,000?? What's that for? You owe me 50,000!!"

"I know, but seriously, I only feel like paying you back 5,000. For now, let's forget about the rest. We will deal with that another time. Ok? Deal, or no deal?"

How would you react? Chances are you would throw this man out head first, with his measly $5,000. And rightfully so. The sheer chutzpah! What is he thinking?

How Lucky!

This is what Rabbi Akiva is talking about. As Jews we turn to G-d each year, and all of us, to some degree or another, feel some sense of remorse or regret for one or two or three things in our life that need to be mended. Not that we are ready to turn over a new leaf, not that we are ready to make the serious changes in our life, not that we are ready for a complete transformation, but there is that one little aveira, that one little sin, that one little lie or cheat, that is nagging me. And I really want to get it off my chest.

I may have hurt someone in a dramatic way and it sits on me; I may have done something wrong that is really perturbing me; I may have insulted someone in a nasty way and I am upset at myself; I may have been involved in something that is eating up on my conscience.

So I repent for just that one thing. I ask G-d, or whoever it was that I wronged, to forgive me for that one act. What is going to be with the rest of my issues I cannot be bothered, and I neither know nor care too much at the moment. I don't have time or energy to deal with all my sins. But this one thing I am ready to deal with.

Is this worth anything? Does G-d care for this type of repentance?

Comes Rabbi Akiva and says:

מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים.

Just as a Mikvah purifies the impure, the one who will remain impure even after the mikvah, the one who either way has contracted a much more severe and serious impurity which he is not dealing with right now, yet, the mikva works and will purify him at that moment for the lesser impurity, exactly so does G-d purify Israel!

Why? Why doesn't G-d act as any normal person would, and throw our measly attempt at reconciliation back in our faces?

To this Rabbi Akiva tells us:

מי מטהר אתכם? אביכם שבשמים!

Because G-d is our "Father in heaven," father who is anxiously waiting for the merest sign of positive movement from, us, his child. A good father will embrace and appreciate the tiniest effort his son makes to connect with him, regardless and oblivious to the fact that the son has done wrong in so many more areas.

Today, all psychologists and educators agree that the way to educate is by focusing and drawing attention to even the smallest positive successes of our children and building on them. Education through criticism has been debunked and proven to be futile at best, and destructive at worst.

But Rabbi Akiva said this almost 2000 years ago. G-d is the ultimate loving parent. When he sees that a Jew makes even the slightest movement of

Teshuva, regardless of how much he has left to go, G-d immediately embraces this movement with the deepest love, and purifies him just as the mikvah does.5

Fix One Thing

How many of us have not attempted something because we are afraid of failure? How many of us give up on our dreams because we know we will never fulfill them perfectly? How many of us remain paralyzed by perfectionism? How many of us look at things as all or nothing, and therefore do not begin jobs that we know we can never fully complete? How many of us deprive ourselves of this gift of a mitzvah that is so dear to us, just because we are scared to become "completely religious?" We feel that if we do not get it all right, we will get nothing right, and it is not worth the effort?

Rabbi Akiva is telling us that a Jew must know, that G-d values and cherishes every single mitzvah a Jew does. G-d embraced and cherished every act of change. Even if I regret one mistake in my life and change that, G-d accepts it fully and purifies me. Whatever you manage to accomplish, any step you manage to take forward, towards a better more inspired, G-dly life, is infinitely treasured by G-d who can purify even the one who still remains impure. It may be one small step for man; but a giant step for G-d.6

1. Mishna end of Yuma 2. In the original verse, mikva means hope. G-d is the hope of Israel. Rabbi Akiva interprets it as a "mikvah," a gathering of natural water. 3. He could have quoted for example the verse in Leviticus quoted earlier in this very Mishnah: For on this day He will forgive you, to cleanse you rom all your sins…" You can't get much clearer than this. 4.See for example end of Ch. 3 of Mishna Berachos. משנה זב שראה קרי ונדה שפלטה שכבת זרע והמשמשת שראתה נדה צריכין טבילה 5. This is an innovation revealed and espoused quite fittingly by Rabbi Akiva, the great lover of Jews, and a man who himself made a long and arduous journey from being an illiterate shepherd who actually hated Torah and Scholars, to becoming the pre-eminent Sage and leader of the Jewish people through one of the most difficult moments in their history. 6. This novel interpretation in the Mishna was shared by the Lubavitcher Rebbe during a public address ("farbrengen"), as he concluded the study of Tractate Yuma on his mother's yartziet, 6 Tishrei 5730, 1969. Part of it was published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 17 Parshas Acharei.

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https://jewishaction.com/web-exclusive/yom-kippur-tips-for-a-focused-energized-day/?utm_source=SilverpopMailing&utm_medium=

Yom Kippur: Tips for a Focused, Energized Day

Chaim Loeb

As we approach Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, many of us are already reflecting on how we can best prepare ourselves spiritually for this holy day. But in addition to our spiritual preparation, there's a physical aspect that requires our attention—namely, the twenty-five-hour fast. The fast is a significant part of Yom Kippur, meant to elevate our focus on davening, introspection and connection with Hashem. However, the physical discomfort that can accompany fasting, such as headaches, fatigue and irritability, can often detract from our ability to fully engage in the day's spiritual practices.

For those who will also be balancing their spiritual commitments with the demands of caring for young children, it's even more essential to approach the fast with a well-prepared body. This way, you can have the energy to focus on davening and be present for your family. The good news is that with some intentional preparation, you can minimize discomfort and enhance your ability to immerse yourself in the holiness of the day.

Begin Your Preparation Three to Five Days Before the Fast

One of the key strategies for a successful fast is to begin your preparation at least three days before Yom Kippur. This may seem like a small detail, but giving your body time to adjust can make a significant difference in how you feel during the fast. This preparation is not just about easing the physical burden; it's a way to help you daven with more energy and focus, free from the distractions of headaches or other discomforts.

Gradually Reduce Caffeine Intake

Caffeine withdrawal is one of the most common culprits behind the headaches that people experience during Yom Kippur. If you're accustomed to having coffee or other caffeinated beverages daily, it's important to start reducing your intake several days before the fast. Begin by delaying your morning coffee a bit each day. For example, if you normally have coffee at 7 am, try pushing it to 9 am on the first day, then 10 am the next and so on. Ideally, you should aim to avoid caffeine altogether by the day before Yom Kippur. This gradual reduction helps your body adjust without the shock of sudden withdrawal, which can lead to those dreaded caffeine headaches.

Increase Your Fruit Intake

Fruits are an excellent source of natural sugars, vitamins and hydration—exactly what your body needs leading up to a fast. In the days leading up to Yom Kippur, try to incorporate more fruits into your diet. Fruits like watermelon, oranges and grapes are particularly beneficial as they not only nourish but also help keep you hydrated. The natural sugars and fiber in fruit provide a steady energy source, which can help sustain you during the fast.

Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate

Proper hydration is crucial for a comfortable fast. Begin increasing your water intake at least three days before Yom Kippur. Aim to drink more water than usual and consider adding electrolytes to your drinks. Electrolytes help your body retain fluids and maintain balance, which is especially important when you won't be consuming anything for twenty-five hours. Drinks that can dehydrate you are those high in sugar and caffeine.

Prioritize Sleep

Sleep is another important factor in preparing for Yom Kippur. A well-rested body is better equipped to handle the challenges of fasting. In the days leading up to Yom Kippur, try to get more and better-quality sleep. This might mean going to bed a bit earlier, reducing screen time before bed or creating a more restful sleep environment. The more rested you are, the more energy you'll have to focus on prayer and family during the fast.

Breaking the Fast: Rehydrate and Nourish

When it's time to break the fast, the focus should be on rehydrating and providing your body with the nutrients it needs to recover. Start with some water and a piece of fruit to gently wake up your digestive system. Water-rich fruits, like watermelon, are ideal. Follow this with a balanced meal that includes a mix of proteins, fiber-rich carbohydrates, such as whole grains and veggies, and supportive fats. This approach will help replenish your energy stores and set you up for a smooth transition back to your routine.

Yom Kippur is a day of profound spiritual significance, and by taking care of your physical needs in the days leading up to it, you can enter the fast with greater focus, energy and peace of mind. This preparation allows you to daven with more kavanah (intention) and be present for your loved ones. It's a way to honor the day, not just with your soul, but with your whole being.

Chaim Loeb, a health and fitness coach, coaches driven Jewish men who desire sustainable change and want to develop the needed tools to prioritize their health and fitness. He can be reached at Chaim@thefityid.com.

We'd like to hear what you think about this article. Post a comment or email us at ja@ou.org.

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https://**thelehrhaus.com**/timely-thoughts/what-is-Neilah/?utm_source=Lehrhaus

What is Ne'ilah?

Alan Jotkowitz

In memory of all our holy soldiers and brethren who fell al kiddush Hashem, and with the fervent hope and prayer that the hostages will return safely and the injured will have a speedy recovery.

Ne'ilah is a singular and unique time of the year. For many Jews, it is when they feel closest to Hashem. And, for thousands of years, Jews of all denominations and beliefs have gathered in their synagogues, sometimes at great personal danger, to pray (and cry) this final prayer of Yom Kippur together.

What exactly are we praying for during Ne'ilah, and what should one think about at this auspicious time of year? Of course, there is no right answer to this question. But I would like to share what I have learned from my teachers over the course of a lifetime.

The Ne'ilah of Teshuvah

For over 40 years, Rav Yehuda Amital led the Ne'ilah prayers in the yeshiva he founded, Yeshivat Har Etzion. And before he walked up to the amud to lead, he gave a short hortatory lecture in a singsong voice. The theme of the lecture each year was usually the same, and he would invariably quote the same two midrashim that illustrated his points:

In order to merit the opening of the gates of heaven, we have to open the gates of our heart. With the words of the prayer "Open us a gate…," we request divine assistance that will allow us to open our hearts – even just the tiniest opening:

"My Beloved is knocking, saying, 'Open for me'"- R. Yissa said "The Holy One, blessed be He, says to Israel, 'My children, open for Me just one opening of repentance, be it as tiny as the point of a needle, and I will open for you openings (so wide) that wagons and carriages could pass through (Song of Songs Rabba 5:2).[1]

Rav Amital thereby taught that Ne'ilah is an auspicious time for teshuvah: Use this opportunity to repent and return to Him. And God promises that He will help.

He continued by referencing a question from the Yerushalmi (Berakhot 4:1): "What is the source of Neilah? R. Levi says: 'Even if you make many prayers' (Isaiah 1:15)—from here we learn that one who prays at length is answered." And the midrash on Song of Songs teaches:

"I rose up to open for my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, and my fingers with flowing myrrh, upon the handles of the lock" (Song of Songs 5:5). "I rose up to open for my beloved"—this alludes to Shaharit. "And my hands dripped with myrrh"—this alludes to Musaf. "And my fingers with flowing myrrh"—this alludes to Minhah. "Upon the handles of the lock"—this alludes to the Ne'ilah prayer.

Ne'ilah is the culmination of all our Yom Kippur prayers and the end of a process that began on Rosh Hodesh Elul with the blowing of the shofar as a call to repentance. It is our final chance to return to God before the gates of heaven close and our fate is determined. As Rav Amital stressed, Ne'ilah is the time to take advantage of this opportunity and gift from God. "Open us a gate…"

The Ne'ilah of Tefillah

Rav Amital's longtime partner Rav Aharon Lichtenstein listened to this sermon for decades and commented: "In these words [of Rav Amital] there is certainly an element of truth… and nonetheless, from my perspective, this is not the main message of the Ne'ilah prayer."[2]

What, then, is the essence of Ne'ilah according to Rav Lichtenstein? The same Yerushalmi provides another basis for Ne'ilah:

R. Hiyya taught in the name of R. Yohanan, R. Shimon ben Halafta in the name of R. Me'ir, "As she [Hannah] was praying at length before the Lord" (I Samuel 1:12)—from this we learn that all who pray at length are answered.

Ne'ilah is fundamentally different from all the other prayers of Yom Kippur, not only on a theological level but from a practical perspective as well; for example, unlike the other prayers, we omit the long vidui and say selihot. And its model is the prayer of Hannah. Her prayer was a plea for mercy from Hashem and so, too, should be our Ne'ilah. At this time, all we can do is cry out to our Father in Heaven and ask for His mercy. The time for teshuvah is over, and all we have left is to place our fate at the mercy of Hashem. Rav Lichtenstein writes:

However, as dusk approaches, when the conclusion of the day and its Atonement is on the horizon, we turn to God and say: Master of the Universe, we have been working on ourselves all year and especially since the beginning of Elul, weighing and measuring our sins, and all of Yom Kippur we have been striving and groping and hoping. But now at the end of the day, we have only one thing left, and that is to cast our hopes and prayers upon You.[3]

This motif is expressed in the unique liturgy of Ne'ilah. As discussed in Yoma 87b, the centerpiece of Ne'ilah is the Mah Anu poem, translated as:

What are we? What is our life? What are our acts of kindness?
What is our righteousness? What is our deliverance?
What is our strength? What is our might? What can we say before You, Adonoy, our God and God of our fathers? Are not all the mighty men as nothing before You? Famous men as though they had never been?
The wise as if they were without knowledge? And men of understanding as if they were devoid of intelligence? For most of their actions are a waste and the days of their life are trivial in Your presence.
The superiority of man over the beast is nil for all is futile.

As the sun is setting on the Day of Atonement, we acknowledge our human limitations and worthlessness before God and put our faith in His goodness and grace. If we are truly worthless and condemned to a life of sin, on what basis can we expect forgiveness? Perhaps the answer to this question is best expressed in the short tefillah we say after the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Ha-Shanah:

On this day, the world came into being… all the creatures of the worlds—whether as children, or as servants; if as children, have compassion on us as a father has compassion on his children!

Just as a parent will always forgive their child, we hope and pray that God will forgive His children.

The Ne'ilah of Love

It has been stated: "R. Yosei ben R. Hanina said: 'The prayers were instituted by the Patriarchs.' R. Yehoshua ben Levi says: 'The prayers were instituted to replace the daily sacrifices'" (Berakhot 26b).

If Avraham instituted Shaharit, Yitzhak instituted Minhah, and Ya'akov instituted Arvit, one can argue that Hannah is the originator of Ne'ilah. Alternatively, if the three prayer services parallel elements of the Temple service, Ne'ilah must also be a reminder of a particular Temple service.

R. Menahem Azariah of Pano ("Rama Mi-Pano"), in his Sefer Avodah U-Musafin, maintains that Ne'ilah was instituted in remembrance of the removal of the spoon and shovel from the Kodesh Ha-Kodashim (Holy of Holies), which was the fourth and last time the Kohen Gadol entered the Kodesh Ha-Kodashim on Yom Kippur.[4]

Hizkuni (on Leviticus 16:23, s.v. u-va Aharon) questions why this "service" was necessary. Why did the Kohen Gadol have to enter the Kodesh Ha-Kodashim again? Why couldn't he have simply left the spoon and shovel there until next year, or alternately dragged it out without entering? It seems that this "entering" is an integral part of the service of the day, entailing immersion and a changing of clothes.

Furthermore, what is the need for this extra encounter with the Divine Presence? The children of Israel were already forgiven with the acceptance of the offering of the goat and the bullock, which were intended to serve as conduits for the atonement of Israel. According to R. Ya'akov Medan,[5] the reason the Kohen Gadol entered the Kodesh Ha-Kodashim one final time was to give him one last opportunity to pour out his heart and soul to God and speak directly to Him without an intermediary, about his hopes, fears, and aspirations for the coming year. The Kohen Gadol enters the Kodesh Ha-Kodashim this last time, not to beg for forgiveness but simply to talk to God.

For 40 days we have been busy with the hard work of teshuvah and changing ourselves. But have we taken the time to talk to Hashem, to express our deepest thoughts, feelings, and fears, and to pray for what is truly important to us? As of Ne'ilah, we have already been cleansed of our sins and have a special time to be with God.

Rav Medan even identifies the exact time of the day when the Kohen Gadol entered the Kodesh Ha-Kodashim this final time, when the congregation chanted:

[Nevertheless], You have set man apart from the beginning, and recognized him [as worthy] to stand before You.

God has given man the unique opportunity to stand before Him, if not as an equal then as a partner.

Indeed, Rav Amital and Rav Lichtenstein similarly emphasized this relationship aspect of Ne'ilah. Rav Amital writes: "Prayer can also express

the second aspect mentioned above – seeking closeness to God… Ne'ila is a new prayer, a prayer of repentance, a sincere seeking of closeness to God."[6] And Rav Lichtenstein: "At the time of Ne'ilah, our connection to Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu isn't an abstract one but rather a direct and emotional relationship with Him."[7]

The Ne'ilah of Tears

Notwithstanding the closing of the gates at the time of Ne'ilah, Berakhot 32b teaches that the gates of heaven are never closed to tears:

R. Eliezer also said: From the day on which the Temple was destroyed, the gates of prayer have been closed, as the verse states, "When I cry and call for help He shuts out my prayer." But though the gates of prayer are closed, the gates of weeping are never closed, as the verse states, "Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear unto my cry; keep not silence at my tears."

The gates of heaven are never closed to our tears. But what are these tears? They may be the tears of teshuvah, as Rambam writes (Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:4) "Among the paths of repentance is for the penitent to constantly call out before God, crying and entreating."

Alternatively, they are the tears of supplication and beseeching of Hashem, as in the prayer of Hannah: "And she was bitter in spirit, and she prayed to the Lord, and wept" (I Samuel 1:10).

But this Yom Kippur, our tears at Ne'ilah will have another dimension, tears of avelut. We all mourn the hundreds of soldiers and civilians who died in sanctification of God's name this year and will be crying together as a people this Ne'ilah. And we will also be praying together as a people that our Father in Heaven hears the final blast of the shofar which heralds our ultimate redemption.

[1] Yehuda Amital, When God Is Near: On the High Holidays (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2015), 251.

[2] Aharon Lichtenstein, Seek Those Who Seek You [Hebrew] (Rishon Le-Tzion: Yediot Aharonot, 2023), 142. My translation.

[3] Aharon Lichtenstein, Return and Renewal: Reflections on Teshuva and Spiritual Growth (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2018), 94.

[4] I thank R. Yair Kahn for pointing out this source to me.

[5] I heard this directly from Rav Medan in a 2019 shi'ur at Yeshivat Har Etzion.

[6] Yehuda Amital, When God Is Near, 256.

[7] Aharon Lichtenstein, Seek Those Who Seek You, 148.

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from: **Michal Horowitz** <contact@michalhorowitz.com>

subject: Yom Kippur 5785: A Sabbath of Sabbaths

Yom Kippur 5785: A Sabbath of Sabbaths

By Michal Horowitz on Oct 10, 2024 08:01 am

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is a day of teshuva, tefilah, and tzedaka (with the giving of tzedaka in advance of this day). It is our heartfelt and fervent prayer that our avodah in these three all-encompassing realms – repentance, prayer and charity – will erase any evil decree against our nation and our Land, and ensure a shana that is both tova (good) and mesuka (sweet) for Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael.

In regard to Yom Kippur, the Torah commands us: אַךְ בֶּעָשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה יוֹם הַכִּפֻּרִים הוּא, מִקְרָא–קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם, וְעִנִּיתֶם, אֶת–נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם; וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אִשֶּׁה, לה – But on the tenth of this seventh month, it is a day of atonement, it shall be a calling of holiness for you; you shall afflict your souls, and you shall offer up a fire offering to the Lord; וְכָל־מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי יוֹם כִּפֻּרִים הוּא לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם – You shall not perform any work on that very day, for it is a day of atonement, for you to gain atonement before Hashem, your G-d (Vayikra 23:27-28); שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן הוּא לָכֶם וְעִנִּיתֶם אֶת־נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם – it is a Sabbath of Sabbaths for you, and you shall afflict your souls… (ibid, v.32).

Just as the weekly seventh day is called Shabbos, so too, Yom Kippur is called a Shabbos day. The root word ש.ב.ת. does not mean 'rest'; it means 'to cease, cessation' (see for example Vayikra 26:6 and Eichah 5:15). When we cease our involvement with the world – with business, with shopping, with our devices, with the news (which is fed to us 24/6) with meetings, school, appointments, cooking, cleaning, and errands – we cease from the world, so to speak, and hence, we suddenly find that we have the time, mind and heart for the RS"O.

If this is true of a regular weekly Shabbos, how much more so is it true of Yom Ha'Kippurim, which is called a Shabbat Shabbaton – a Sabbath of Sabbaths – with a double lashon of the root word ש.ב.ת.

The Haftorah that is read on Yom Kippur morning, after the Keriyas ha'Torah, is from the book of Yeshayahu (beginning in Yeshayahu 57:14, through 58:14). The last two verses of this Yom Kippur haftorah read: אִם–תָּשִׁיב מִשַּׁבָּת רַגְלֶךָ, עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצֶךָ בְּיוֹם קָדְשִׁי; וְקָרָאתָ לַשַּׁבָּת עֹנֶג, לִקְדוֹשׁ ה' מְכֻבָּד, וְכִבַּדְתּוֹ מֵעֲשׂוֹת דְּרָכֶיךָ, מִמְּצוֹא חֶפְצְךָ וְדַבֵּר דָּבָר – If you restrain (lit. 'cease') your foot because of the Sabbath, from performing your affairs on My holy day, and you call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Hashem honored, and you honor it by not doing your ways, by not pursuing your affairs and speaking words; אָז תִּתְעַנַּג עַל־ה' וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל־בָּמֳתֵי אָרֶץ וְהַאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב אָבִיךָ כִּי פִּי ה' דִּבֵּר – Then, you shall delight with Hashem, and I will cause you to ride on the high places of the land, and I will give you to eat the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of Hashem has spoken (Yeshayahu 58:13-14).

In regard to the words of the navi (prophet), Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav zt'l, teaches, "לִקְדוֹשׁ ה' מְכֻבָּד – [If you proclaim] the holy one of Hashem, 'honored one.' The Rambam states that the mitzvah of kibbud, honor, as it applies to Shabbos, requires that one wash one's face, hands, and feet in hot water on erev Shabbos in order to honor Shabbos, and then wrap himself in a tallis and sit with his head covered, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Shabbos as if he were waiting to greet a king. Kibbud is thus manifested in the obligation to wear special clothes in honor of the day, as well as to await its arrival in eager anticipation. This idea is based on the fact that the Gemara in Shabbos (119a), citing the above phrase (from the verse in Yeshayahu) and understanding that it refers to Yom Kippur when there is no eating and drinking, explains that the way to honor the day is by donning fresh clothing…

"Since there is no reason to think that Y"K would not carry the same obligation as Shabbos or any other festival regarding the mitzvah of kibbud, why would the Torah go out of its way to stress that kibbud is somehow specifically applicable on Y"K?

"The Meiri answers that the renewed emphasis regarding kibbud on Y"K suggests that the kibbud imperative on Y"K is even greater than it is on Shabbos. The honor that one accords Y"K should be even more than that displayed on a normal Shabbos; one must wear his absolute best clothes on Y"K" (Machzor Masores HaRav, l'Y"K, p.487).

Rav Soloveitchik expanded on the Meiri's point. "Y"K possesses two aspects of Shabbos, as implied by the Biblical appellation Shabbat Shabbason, literally, a Sabbath of the ultimate Sabbath. Shabbos refers to the injunction to withdraw from work, while Shabbason refers to withdrawal from eating. The magnified kibbud obligation on Y"K reflects this duality; a double Sabbath engenders a double kibbud.

"In contrast to the preparation for Shabbos, when simply washing one's face, hands and feet is sufficient, the augmented kibbud for Y"K is expressed by total immersion in a mikvah. Regarding Shabbos, the purpose of washing is to remove dirt, so that one enters the day in a state of physical cleanliness. Regarding Y"K however, the purpose of immersion in a mikvah goes beyond simple cleanliness; the intent is to achieve spiritual purity. The Vilna Gaon, quoting earlier sources, explicitly states that the purpose of immersion in the mikvah prior to Y"K is to be spiritually cleansed.

"As stated by the Rambam regarding Shabbos, there is a nervous tension, a yearning, a panting expectancy, as we prepare for our encounter with G-d on Y"K. One waits with breathless anticipation for Y"K to arrive. One yearns impatiently, as if continually running to a window, excitedly counting the minutes before Hashem's arrival" (ibid, p.488-489).

As we prepare for Y"K 5785, let us give utmost honor to the holy day. Let us prepare both spiritually and physically for the arrival of HKB"H on this day. Let us appreciate the gift of atonement (teshuva), the power of our prayers (tefillah), and the selflessness through which charity (tzedaka) is given. Let Hashem see the holiness and sincerity of our avodah, and may His Divine Mercy be aroused to save us from our enemies all around.

And then we put our faith and trust in G-d, Avinu Malkeinu, so that all of klal Yisrael, and Eretz Yisrael, will be zocheh to a gmar v'chasima tova, b'karov mamash, bi'mi'heirah b'yameinu, amen v'amen.
בברכת שנה טובה ומתוקה,
Michal

_____

The Seder Avodah of Yom Kippur
By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Rav Goldberg was discussing the tefilos of Yom Kippur with the shul's chazan, Reb Hershel.

"Probably the least understood part of the Yom Kippur davening is the Seder Avodah recited in the repetition of Musaf," the rav began. "Although it is one of the most important parts of the Yom Kippur davening, I have seen many shuls race through it at a pace too fast for comprehension."

"Let me quote you the Me'am Loez," continued Rav Goldberg, pulling a sefer off the shelf. "He writes, 'Many people doze off during the recital of the Avodah. They don't realize that the most important part of Yom Kippur is during the repetition of the Sh'moneh Esrei, when the Seder Avodah is recited.'"

"I didn't realize it was that important," admitted Reb Hershel, "but it is very hard to understand."

"Dozens of piyutim (liturgical pieces) have been written describing the Seder Avodah," explained Rav Goldberg. "Most shuls that daven Nusach Ashkenaz recite the piyut that begins with the words Amitz Koach, which is indeed a very difficult, poetically-written piyut. The piyut used in Nusach S'fard, Atah Konanta, is much easier to comprehend."

"So why do we recite Amitz Koach?"

"That is an excellent question that I cannot answer fully. Already in the time of the Gemara, we see that the Seder Avodah was recited, presumably from some type of piyut, although the text they used is long lost. The Geonim and Rishonim refer to many different piyutim that they had in their times. Amitz Koach was authored by Rabbeinu Meshulam ben Klonymos, who is quoted by Rashi with the greatest respect (see Rashi, Bava Metzia 69b s.v. Mafrin; Zevachim 45b s.v. h"g). In the course of time, Minhag Ashkenaz accepted the use of Amitz Koach, presumably out of respect for the author."

"Why is it so important to recite the Seder Avodah? Is it a Takanas Chachomim?"

"There is no specific takanah requiring the recital of the Seder Avodah. However, reciting it fulfills the concept of 'U'neshalma parim sefaseinu,' 'And let our lips replace the (sacrificial) bulls' (Hoshea 14:3). The Midrash teaches that when we are unable to offer korbanos, our recital of the Avodah is accepted by Hashem as a replacement for the korbanos (Midrash Rabbah, Shir HaShirim 4:3). This implies that we accomplish kaparah (atonement) by reciting the Seder Avodah with kavanah. Therefore, a person who recites the viduy of the Seder Avodah and truly regrets his sins can accomplish atonement; this would be similar to the viduy recited by the Cohen Gadol."

THE ATONEMENT OF YOM KIPPUR

Reb Hershel was curious. "What did the viduy of the Cohen Gadol accomplish?"

"Different korbanos offered by the Cohen Gadol atoned for different sins (see Gemara Yoma 61a). However, the greatest atonement was accomplished by the goat sent to Azazel, which atoned for all the sins of the Jewish people (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 1:2; Mishnah Shevuos 2b)."

"Do you mean that a person could achieve atonement, even if he did not do Teshuvah?"

"Although there is such an opinion in the Gemara, the halacha is that Yom Kippur's kaparah is effective only for those who do Teshuvah (Shevuos 13a). A person who does complete Teshuvah -- which means that he regrets his sins, makes a decision that he will never commit this sin again, and recites viduy -- is forgiven for his sins."

"Does this mean that he will never be punished for them?"

"Not always. For very serious sins, including Chilul Hashem (desecrating Hashem's name), he may still be punished in this world. But someone who completely repented his sins in this world is guaranteed that he will suffer no punishment in the next world (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 1:3-4)."

"At the time of the Beis HaMikdash, did people know when their sins were forgiven?"

"When the Cohen Gadol was a tzadik, part of the Yom Kippur Avodah included a procedure that showed Klal Yisrael whether or not they were forgiven. Let me provide some background. The Beis HaMikdash treasurers purchased two goats at the same time that were identical in height, appearance and value (Mishnah Yoma 62a). One of these goats was a Yom Kippur korban, offered in the Beis HaMikdash, and the other was the Azazel goat."

CHOOSING THE GOAT FOR AZAZEL

"The Cohen Gadol drew lots to determine which goat would be the korban for Hashem and which would be the Azazel. This was an elaborate procedure. The Cohen Gadol stood in the courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash, near the courtyard's entrance, facing the two goats, one opposite his right hand, and the other opposite his left. The S'gan, the Associate Cohen Gadol, stood on the Cohen Gadol's right, and the Rosh Beis Av, the head of the family unit of Cohanim on duty that week, stood on the Cohen Gadol's left.

"The Cohen Gadol thrust his hands into a small wooden box containing two gold lots, one marked 'for Hashem' and the other 'for Azazel,' and removed the lots, one in each hand. He then raised his hands, exposing the lots to the S'gan and Rosh Beis Av. If the lot saying 'for Hashem' was in his right hand, the S'gan announced, 'Master Cohen Gadol, raise your right hand.' If it was in his left hand, the Rosh Beis Av announced, 'Master Cohen Gadol, raise your left hand.'

"The Cohen Gadol then placed each lot on the head of the goat nearest that hand, and decreed, 'For Hashem, a Chatos offering.' The Cohen Gadol used the Ineffable Name of Hashem in this declaration, and everyone assembled responded by shouting 'Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuso L'Olam Vo'ed' (Mishnah Yoma 37a and 39a)."

THE RED THREAD

"The Cohen Gadol then tied a red thread to the horn of the Azazel goat, and another red thread around the neck of the Chatos goat (Mishnah Yoma 41b). Much later in the
procedure, the Cohen Gadol rested his hands and full weight on the head of the Azazel goat, and recited aloud a viduy on behalf of the entire Jewish people. He concluded his viduy by stating, 'Because on this day He will atone and purify you from all your sins. Before Hashem shall you become pure (Vayikra 16:30),' once again using the Ineffable Name of Hashem. When the assembled people heard the Name uttered in purity and holiness by the Cohen Gadol, they all bowed and prostrated themselves, until their faces were pressed to the ground. They then recited again, 'Baruch Shem K'vod Malchuso L'Olam Vo'ed' (Mishnah Yoma 66a). "At one point in the procedure, the red thread tied to the Azazel goat was removed, torn in half, and one part tied again onto the Azazel goat's horns. At the exact moment that the Jews were forgiven, both halves of the thread turned white" (Yoma 67a).

"You mentioned that the red thread was torn in half," Hershel asked. "What happened to the other half?"

"This depends on the period of Jewish history. When the Cohen Gadol was a great tzadik, the Jews were forgiven on Yom Kippur, and the red thread turned white. During those years, the thread was left displayed in a prominent place in the Beis HaMikdash for everyone to see the miracle. However, in the later years of the Second Beis HaMikdash, when the Cohanim Gedolim were often not suitable for the position, the thread did not turn white. To save themselves embarrassment, the thread was placed where it would not be seen (Yoma 67a).

"How frequently did the thread turn white?"

"Apparently, during the period of the Bayis Rishon and the early period of the Bayis Sheni, the thread always turned white. In this period, the position of Cohen Gadol was awarded on the basis of merit. However, after the Cohanim Gedolim in the Bayis Sheni began purchasing the position, often, the thread did not turn white."

THE COHANIM GEDOLIM OF THE SECOND BEIS HAMIKDASH

"You mentioned that there was a vast difference between the Cohanim Gedolim of the First Beis HaMikdash and those of the Second. Could you explain this more fully?"

"Yes, gladly. The Cohanim Gedolim of the First Beis HaMikdash were all great tzadikim who were worthy of their exalted position. Most of them had a long tenure as Cohen Gadol. In contrast, most of the Cohanim Gedolim of the Second Beis HaMikdash bribed the government for the position. Because they lacked the kedusha the position required, they died within a year of securing the appointment (Yoma 8b; 9a)."

"And yet they were eager to bribe the government for the job?"

"People do very strange things for kavod. As Chazal teach us, it is one of the three things that remove a person from this world."

MUST BE DONE BY THE COHEN GADOL

Reb Hershel had many other questions. "What part of the Avodah of Yom Kippur was the Cohen Gadol obligated to perform himself?"

"Certain procedures took place in the Beis HaMikdash every day, such as clearing the two mizbeichos (altars); bringing the daily offerings (Korban Tamid); burning k'tores (incense) twice a day; and cleaning, setting up and lighting the Menorah. In addition, on Shabbos and Yom Tov, there were special korbanos called Korban Musaf, the origins of our Musaf prayers. The Torah mentions these korbanos in Parshas Pinchas. All these could be performed by any cohen.

"On Yom Kippur, in addition to the daily and Musaf korbanos, there was a special procedure unique to Yom Kippur, which is called the Seder Avodah, or the Seder Avodas Yom Kippur. This Avodah, involving the offering of several special korbanos and a unique offering of incense, is described in Parshas Acharei, the Keri'as HaTorah for Yom Kippur morning, and in great length in Mesechta Yoma. For this Avodah, the Cohen Gadol wore special white garments that were worn no other time. Although it was preferred that the Cohen Gadol perform everything in the Beis HaMikdash on Yom Kippur himself, the only part absolutely mandatory for him to perform was the special Yom Kippur Avodah."

WERE LOTS USED ON YOM KIPPUR?

"I am confused," admitted Hershel. "The Piyutim of Seder Avodah mention a lottery to determine which cohanim will bring korbanos on Yom Kippur. But why such a procedure, if the Cohen Gadol was doing everything anyway?"

"A lottery system was used each day to determine which cohanim would perform the different tasks in the Beis HaMikdash. Most poskim contend that the Cohen Gadol performed ALL the service in the Beis HaMikdash by himself on Yom Kippur (even though he was only required to perform the special Yom Kippur Avodah). In their opinion, there was no lottery on Yom Kippur to determine who performed any tasks. Other poskim contend that although the Cohen Gadol was to perform all the tasks in the Beis HaMikdash himself, if he was unable to perform the entire Avodah himself, other cohanim could do some parts of it, in his place. When this happened, the lottery system would determine which cohen was appointed to perform the avodah."

CHANGING CLOTHES

"It is interesting to note," continued the Rav, "that to perform every part of the special Seder Avodah of Yom Kippur, the Cohen Gadol was required to wear his special Yom Kippur vestments (described in Parshas Acharei). However, for every part of the service that was not part of the Yom Kippur Avodah, he wore the eight vestments described in Parshas Te'tzaveh. Thus, the Cohen Gadol changed his clothes five times during Yom Kippur. According to a special commandment received by Moshe Rabbeinu (Halacha l'Moshe mi'Sinai), he immersed himself in a mikveh each time he changed his clothes and also performed a special procedure involving washing his hands and feet twice each time."

"I understand that when the Cohen Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim (The Holy of Holies), no one was allowed to be inside the entire Beis HaMikdash building, even the Kodesh (Vayikra 16:17)," interjected Hershel. "Not only were no humans allowed in, even angels could not enter (Yerushalmi Yoma 1:5, cited by Tosafos Yeshanim, Yoma 19b)."

THE COHEN GADOL SWEARING

"I remember learning that the Cohen Gadol had to swear an oath before Yom Kippur," queried Hershel. "Why was that?"

"The first time the Cohen Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim, he did so with a ladle of specially refined k'tores (incense) and a censer, a type of coal pan for burning incense. According to Halacha L'Moshe M'Sinai, he had to enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim first and then burn the k'tores inside. However, the Tzedukim, who did not accept Torah she'be'al peh, believed that he should kindle the k'tores first and then enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim. In the period of the Second Beis HaMikdash, when the position of Cohen Gadol was often purchased, there was concern that the Cohen Gadol might be a clandestine Tzeduki. Since no one could enter the Beis HaMikdash building while the k'tores was offered, there was no way of knowing what the Cohen Gadol actually did while inside. Therefore, he was required to swear before Yom Kippur that he would perform the service as instructed by the Gedolei Yisrael."

"Were there any recorded instances of a Cohen Gadol who was a Tzeduki?"

"The Gemara records two such instances. In one case, the Cohen Gadol proudly told his father, who was also a Tzeduki, that he had offered the k'tores according to their practices. The Gemara records that this Cohen Gadol soon died a very ignominious death."

"What happened in the other instance?"

"The Gemara records that the cohanim heard a loud sound in the Beis HaMikdash. They raced in to find the Cohen Gadol dead, with obvious signs that he had been killed by an angel (Yoma 19b)."

"But I thought even angels could not enter the Beis HaMikdash while the Cohen Gadol offered the k'tores?"

"This is an excellent question, and it is asked by the Gemara Yerushalmi. The Gemara answers that since the Cohen Gadol had performed the service incorrectly, the angels were permitted to enter."

MULTIPLE ENTRIES INTO THE KODESH HAKODOSHIM

"How many times did the Cohen Gadol enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim on Yom Kippur?" asked Hershel.

"Most people don't realize that the Cohen Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim four times on Yom Kippur. The first time was with the special Yom Kippur k'tores, the second time to begin the kaparah of his special Yom Kippur bull offering, and the third time to attend to the kaparah of the goat offering. During each of these last two visits he sprinkled eight times. These sprinklings have a significant place in the piyutim. These are the places when the chazan, followed by the congregation, shouts out, 'Achas, achas v'achas, achas u'shtayim,' until 'achas va'sheva' to commemorate this part of the Avodah."

"You said that the Cohen Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim four times, but we mentioned only three."

"Much later in the day, the Cohen Gadol changed into a different set of special Yom Kippur white garments and entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim to pick up the censer and the ladle that he had brought in earlier. This was a required part of the Yom Kippur service."

"I reviewed the description of the Avodah mentioned in Parshas Acharei," continued Hershel. "I notice that the Torah does not mention Yom Kippur until the twenty-ninth pasuk of the discussion. Why is this?"

"Although Aaron and the later Cohanim Gedolim never entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim, except on Yom Kippur, the Midrash says that Aaron was permitted to enter it at other times, provided he followed the procedure described in Parshas Acharei. On Yom Kippur, he was obligated to offer these korbanos and enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim. Thus, the beginning of the reading explains how Aaron could enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim, whereas the end teaches that this procedure must be performed on Yom Kippur." (Note that Rashi, in his commentary on these verses in Chumash, seems to have a different approach to this question.)

"Is it true that a rope was tied around the Cohen Gadol's waist before he entered, so that they could pull him out if he died?"

“In actuality, the source, which is a quotation in the Zohar, mentions that a rope was tied around his foot,” responded Rav Goldberg.
“Thanks a lot for all your time,” Reb Hershel concluded. “I now understand the importance of reciting the Seder Avodah carefully, and why some people study the mishnayos of Meseches Yoma before Yom Kippur.”
“You are absolutely correct. Indeed, the Mateh Efrayim maintains that one’s main learning during the entire month of Elul should be devoted to understanding the Seder Avodah properly. So, don’t forget to study the mishnayos and gemaros we’ve just been discussing.”

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YOM KIPPUR – The Biblical Meaning of "Kippurim"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**** A PROTECTION GIFT***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**** PROTECTION MONEY***

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

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

SHORESH K.P.R. AND THE MISHKAN

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

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

**** THE KA'PORET***

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

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

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

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

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

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

KIPPURIM & THE SEVEN DAY MILUIM CEREMONY

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

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

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

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

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

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

and on the KOHANIM.

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

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

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

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

But what would they need protection from?

PROTECTION FROM THE SHCHINA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE MIZBACH KETORET

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YOM HA'SHMINI - THE 8th Day DEDICATION CEREMONY

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

YOM KIPPUR - A YEARLY "YOM HA'SHMINI"

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

inauguration ceremony on YOM HA'SHMINI.

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

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

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

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

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

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

ATONEMENT or PROTECTION

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY ON THE 10th of TISHREI

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

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

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

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

YOM KIPPUR

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

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

gemar chatima tova,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

==========

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sefer Devarim mentions this phrase several times, and

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

SUMMARY – OR NOT?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE CASE ISN'T CLOSED!

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

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

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

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

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

PARTICULAR or GENERAL

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

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

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

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

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

PREVENTIVE MEASURES!

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

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

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

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

A GOOD TEACHER

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

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

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

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

Holiday Reader of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals

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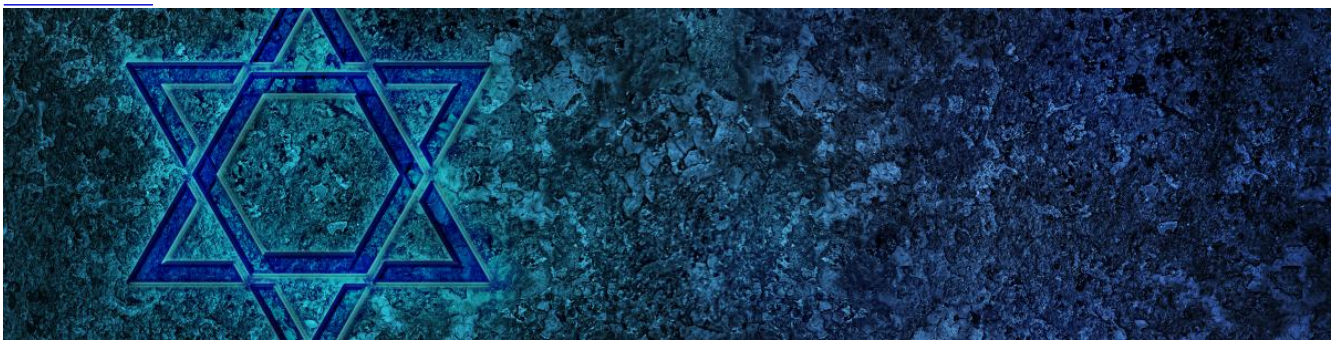

Holiday Reader

For Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Succoth

Prepared by Rabbis Marc and Hayyim Angel

For

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals

Eyes Open, Eyes Shut: Thoughts for Rosh Hashana

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Paul Gaugin, the famous 19th century French artist, commented: “When I want to see clearly, I shut my eyes.”

He was referring to two different ways of perceiving reality. With our eyes open, we see surface reality—size, shape, color etc. But with our eyes shut, we contemplate the context of things, our relationship to them, the hidden meanings.

With our eyes open, a dozen roses are 12 beautiful flowers. With our eyes shut, they may be full of memories and associations—roses given or received on our first date; roses at our wedding; roses growing in our childhood home's back yard; roses on our grandmother’s Shabbat table.

How we see fellow human beings is also very different with open or closed eyes. With our eyes open, we see their physical features. With our eyes shut, we remember shared experiences, friendships, happy and sad moments. When we want to see clearly—comprehensively—we shut our eyes.

Mircea Eliade, a specialist in world religions, has written in his book, The Sacred and The Profane, about the pagan view of New Year. For them, human life is a series of recurring cycles, always on the verge of chaos. On New Year, people descend into this primordial chaos: drunkenness, debauchery, chaotic noise.

The Jewish view is radically different. For Jews, reality isn’t a hopeless cycle of returns to chaos, but a progression, however slow, of humanity. Rosh Hashana is not a return to primeval chaos, but a return to God, a return to our basic selves. Our New Year is observed with prayer, repentance, solemnity, and a faith that we can—and the world can—be better.

The pagan New Year is an example of seeing reality with open eyes. Things really do seem to be chaotic when viewed on the surface. Humanity does not seem to improve over the generations. We always seem to be on the verge or self-destruction.

The Jewish New Year is an example of viewing reality with our eyes shut, of seeing things more deeply, more carefully. While being fully aware of the surface failings of humanity, we look for the hidden signs of progress and redemption. We attempt to maintain a grand, long-range vision. This is the key to the secret of Jewish optimism. While not denying the negatives around us, we stay faithful to a vision of a world that is not governed by chaos, but by a deeper, hidden, mysterious unity.

The problem of faith today is not how to have faith in God. We can come to terms with God if we are philosophers or mystics. The problem is how can we have faith in humanity? How can we believe in the goodness and truthfulness of human beings?

With our eyes open, we must view current events with despair and trepidation. We see leaders who are liars and hypocrites. We see wars and hatred and violence and vicious anti-Semitism. We are tempted to think that chaos reigns.

But with our eyes shut, we know that redemption will come. We know that there are good,

heroic people struggling for change. We know that just as we have overcome sorrows in the past, we will overcome oppressions and oppressors of today.

Eyes open and eyes shut not only relate to our perception of external realities, but also to our self-understanding. During the season of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we focus on penitential prayers. We confess our sins and shortcomings. But as we think more deeply about our deficiencies, we also close our eyes and look for our real selves, our deeper selves, our dreams and aspirations.

Rabbi Haim David Halevy, late Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, noted that the high holy day period is symbolized by the shofar. The shofar must be bent, as a reminder that we, too, must bow ourselves in contrition and humility. But shortly after Yom Kippur comes Succoth, with the lulav as a central symbol. The lulav must be straight, not bent over. The lulav teaches us to stand strong and tall, to focus on our strengths and virtues. The holiday season, then, encourages us to first experience humility and contrition; but then to move on to self-confidence and optimism. Our eyes are open to our shortcomings; but when we shut our eyes, we also can envision our strengths and potentialities.

Rosh Hashana reminds us to view our lives and our world with our eyes open—but also with our eyes shut. We are challenged to dream great dreams, to seek that which is hidden, to see beyond the moment.

Rosh Hashana is a call to each individual to move to a higher level of understanding, behavior and activism. Teshuva—repentance—means that we can improve ourselves, and that others can improve, and that the world can improve.

This is the key to Jewish optimism, the key to the Jewish revolutionary vision for humanity, the key to personal happiness.

Changing the Channel: Thoughts for Rosh Hashana

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

In his short story, “The Last Channel,” Italo Calvino portrays a man who has been deemed to be insane. When this man watched television, he kept clicking his remote control button without watching any program for more than a few seconds. At some point, he started to take the remote control panel outside his house. He clicked it at buildings, stores, banks, neon signs, and at people.

But this man claimed that he was not at all deranged. In his defense, he stated that he kept clicking the remote control button because he did not like what he saw! He was looking for the “true” program, a program without drivel and artificiality and hypocrisy. He asserted: “There is an unknown station transmitting a story that has to do with me, MY story, the only story that can explain to me who I am, where I come from and where I’m going.”

This man flashed the remote control button because he was looking for the “real” program, the “real” city, his “real” self. He wanted to turn off the chaos and senselessness around him and was certain that if he kept clicking the remote button he would at last find the “right” channel.

While the man in Calvino’s story seems to have crossed the line between sanity and insanity, his desire for self-understanding and for the perfection of the world were not insane at all. Don’t we all wish we had a remote control button that we could click and make everything right, find the “real” picture, the “real” world that makes sense to us. When we confront lies and hatred, violence and injustice, hedonism and meanness—wouldn’t it be nice to have a button to click to change the channel to a better picture?

In some ways, the shofar of Rosh Hashana serves as our remote control button! It evokes a world yet in progress, a vision rooted in antiquity, fixed in the present, and arching into the distant future. It alludes to a “real” world, a finer world.

The original shofar dates back to the story of the Akeidah, when Abraham was called upon to bind Isaac on a sacrificial altar. The story teaches that God does not want child sacrifice. We are to demonstrate our faith not by murdering our children but by strengthening them in life. At the end of the episode, Abraham noticed a ram caught in the brambles by its horns. He offered the ram as a sacrifice in lieu of Isaac. The shofar blown on Rosh Hashana evokes memories of the Akeidah.

At the conclusion of the Akeidah narrative, the Torah informs us that Abraham and his retinue “rose up and went together to Be’er Sheva.” Why is this detail provided? Why do we need to know where Abraham went after the Akeidah?

If we look at the passage just before the recounting of the Akeidah, we find that “Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Be’er Sheva, and he called out there in the name of God Lord of the Universe.” The Akeidah was a setting of trauma, terror, spiritual confusion. Such a crisis could have broken anyone. But Abraham clicked his remote control button. He went back to Be’er Sheva and reconfirmed his faith in God Lord of the Universe. He found inner serenity, the power to transcend the vicissitudes and trials of life. He clicked on to a better channel! When faced with overwhelming crisis, it is right and proper to return to our starting point, to our essential selves, to our rootedness in our faith. The shofar prods us to seek a firm and grand framework for life.

Just as the shofar harks back to the Akeidah story, it also reminds us of the Revelation at Mount Sinai. That dramatic occasion was accompanied by “thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the sound of a shofar exceedingly loud.” The voice of God was heard by the trembling assembly. But we might ask: with all the thunder and lightning and voice of God, what need was there for the sound of a shofar?

The shofar’s essential sound is a *teruah*. The Torah refers to Rosh Hashana as *Yom Teruah*. The shofar is alluding to something mysterious and profound.

A *teruah* is a sound without words, a crying plaintive sound that does not verbally articulate anything. The shofar is symbolic of human feelings and thoughts that are too deep for words. The *teruah* transcends glibness; it pushes away banalities and pretenses. In a sense, it is a remote control button that allows us to penetrate beyond surface successes and failures, prompting us to think more carefully about our lives, about the world we live in. The *teruah* is the sound of self-understanding…and the sound of protest against an imperfect world and an unjust society.

And yet another symbol: the messianic age will be introduced with the sounding of the shofar. The shofar calls to mind the utopian vision of Judaism. We do not believe humanity is condemned to live forever with injustice, corruption, hatred and war. We may look at our contemporary world and be overcome with discouragement. The shofar reminds us: click the remote control button! A better time will surely come, redemption will emerge, a messianic age beckons to humanity.

The shofar suggests a grander, truer vision of who we are and who we can become. It cries out to us to keep striving for a better society and a better world. It invites us to strengthen our faith in the Almighty…and in ourselves. One day, we will find the right channel.

Shofar So Good: Thoughts for Rosh Hashana

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

The Shofar plays a central role in the Rosh Hashana liturgy and invariably is one of the highlights of the synagogue service. Its primordial sounds are meant to awaken us from spiritual slumber; and to evoke thoughts and emotions relating to the Akeida story, the Revelation at Sinai, and the Messianic Redemption.

The laws relating to the ritual propriety of a shofar can be understood to convey moral lessons. A shofar must be fashioned from one horn; a shofar that is patched together using different pieces of ram's horn is not kasher for use. The moral: we need to be "whole" human beings, true to ourselves, strong with personal integrity. If we are merely a patchwork of other people's ideas and values, we are not fulfilling our responsibility as autonomous human beings.

The shofar is not to be plated with gold in such a way as to alter its authentic sound. The moral: we are not to allow material prosperity to falsify our authentic voices. Nor are we to be impressed by wealthy individuals whose "voices" have been altered by their riches e.g. who arrogate to themselves rights and privileges simply because of their wealth. A person's human worth is not to be determined by how much or how little "gold" he/she has.

If the sound of the shofar is the result of an echo i.e. the person blew the shofar in a cave or through a microphone, then this does not satisfy the religious requirement of hearing the shofar. The moral: we need to concentrate on the real thing, not on echoes or artificial magnifications. The shofar serves its role not by how loud a noise it can make, but by how natural and authentic a sound it emits.

The shofar is supposed to be bent over into a curve. The moral: we are to be contrite when we come before the Lord, bowing in humility and with honest recognition of our weaknesses.

Thus, the shofar is imbued with important symbolic messages to help us be better human beings and more devoted Jews. May we all be sensitive to the messages of the shofar. May we all be blessed with a meaningful holiday season. May the Almighty bless us and our loved ones with a year of good health and happiness, peace for America, Israel, and the world.

Deeper Meanings: Thoughts for Shabbat Teshuva and Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Eleanor Roosevelt once noted: “Do not hesitate to do what you think you cannot do. Dare to reach beyond your perceived limits. Do not let yourself be trapped within the narrow confines of narrow thinking. Do not let past defeats and failures drag you down."

Yom Kippur is the ultimate day of Jewish optimism in our ability to grow, change, and redefine ourselves. It is a day to cleanse ourselves of our past failings and sins, and to imagine ourselves beginning a new phase in our lives.

Yom Kippur aims at our spiritual selves. It calls for a transformation in the way we see things and the way we experience things. It wants us to confront reality more clearly than we have done in the past. Young or old, this is a time for renewal and re-invigoration.

There is a famous story about a shohet (ritual slaughterer) who came to a new town and wanted to be employed by the community. As was the custom, he came to the town’s rabbi and sought approval. The rabbi asked the shohet to demonstrate how he prepared the knife for the slaughter of animals. The shohet showed how he sharpened the knife; and he ran his thumb up and down the blade checking for any possible nicks. When he completed the demonstration, he looked to the rabbi for validation.

The rabbi asked: “From whom did you learn to be a shohet?”

The shohet answered: “I learned from the illustrious Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov.”

The rabbi replied: “Yes, you have performed the task of sharpening and checking the knife very well. However, you did not do so in the manner of the Baal Shem Tov. When the Baal Shem Tov checks the knife, he always has tears in his eyes.”

Yes, the shohet had learned the technical skills of his trade—but he did not plumb the depths of his work. He had not internalized the emotional, psychological and spiritual elements that were the hallmark of his teacher. He was technically proficient—but he had no tears in his eyes.

Religious life (and life in general!) can sometimes be technically correct; but at the same time it might be missing the inner spiritual content, the tears in the eyes. A synagogue service might be conducted with great accuracy, and yet fail to produce a real religious experience. A person might fast and pray all day on Yom Kippur, and yet be exactly the same person at the end of the day as he/she was at the beginning of the day.

If Yom Kippur is observed without our realizing the deeper significance of the moment, then it is just another lost opportunity.

Yom Kippur offers us purification, a fresh start, a revived spirit. It reminds us of who we are and who we can yet become. It dares us to transcend our past limits. If we experience Yom Kippur deeply and clearly, we will face the adventure of life with renewed strength and wisdom.

The MIshnah (Taanit 4:8) quotes Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel that Yom Kippur was one of the two happiest days on the Jewish calendar (the other being the 15th day of Av). We should draw on this spirit of optimism as we observe Yom Kippur, recognizing that this day offers us a unique gift: the gift of personal renewal.

Thoughts for Shabbat Teshuva and Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Although we popularly refer to the upcoming fast day as Yom Kippur, the Torah calls it Yom haKippurim—the day of atonements (in the plural). The plural form reminds us that there are many roads to atonement. Each person is different and is on a unique spiritual level; each comes with different insights, experiences, memories. The roads to atonement are plural, because no two of us have identical needs.

This season of Teshuvah and Kapparah—repentance and atonement—provides us with a special challenge and opportunity. We are granted a yearly period of time for intense evaluation of our lives. This period should serve as a springboard to deeper understanding and personal growth.

The first step in the process of spiritual renewal is to become humbly aware of our frailties. No matter how successful we think we are, we are mortal! We have limited physical capacities and a limited time of life on this earth. Aside from our physical limitations, we have moral and religious shortcomings that must be confronted. The Spanish thinker, Ortega y Gasset, suggested that a person grows only after confronting deep existential crisis. “These are the only genuine ideas; the ideas of the shipwrecked. All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce. He who does not really feel himself lost, is without remission; that is to say, he never finds himself, never comes up against his own reality.” The first goal of this season is to feel “shipwrecked.”

But when we do “come up against our own reality” we often reach a point of perplexity. How are we to make ultimate sense of our lives? How are we to understand the vagaries of human existence—disease, wars, injustice? How are we to deal with all the social and professional pressures? How can we cope with problems in our families and communities? How can we advance beyond the quagmire of fear and self-doubt?

The famous Hassidic Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk once asked: Where is God? And he answered: Where ever a human being lets Him in! If we want to feel the presence of God, we need to open ourselves to that experience. The season of Teshuvah and Yom haKippurim is a time to restore our relationship with the Almighty, to express our perplexities. This genuine experience of relationship with God gives us the inner strength to cope with our problems and perplexities.

A further step in the process of Teshuvah and Kapparah is balancing the feelings of alienation and belonging. We say to the Almighty: *ki ger anokhi imakh; toshav kekhol avotai*, I am a stranger with You, a sojourner as were all of my ancestors. What does this mean? I feel as though I am a stranger, alienated from God; there are barriers between me and You. But I want to be a sojourner, a permanent resident in Your presence, not a stranger or a passing visitor. I want to come home to the teachings and traditions of my ancestors who have maintained faith and courage for the past 3500 years.

A parable: A person tries to cut down a tree with a dull edged saw. He works very hard but makes little progress. A passerby sees this and asks: why don't you sharpen the saw? The person responds: I don't have time, I can't stop working, I need to cut down this tree. The passerby says: But if you would stop working for a few minutes to sharpen the saw, you would actually save time and effort, and you would better be able to accomplish your goal! The person replies: No, I don't have time to stop working, I must keep sawing.

Without the proper tools, we exert great energy but achieve inadequate results.

In spiritual life, too, we need proper tools. If we work with old habits, with stubborn attachment to stale and futile patterns, we will not grow. We need to think more clearly about our goals and how we can best attain them. Yom haKippurim provides a day when we take off from our usual routine. It is an entirely different kind of day from any other day of the year. It is a time to sharpen ourselves spiritually; to humbly face our limitations; to cope with our perplexities; to seek atonement and purification, to return to our spiritual core.

The season of Teshuvah and Kapparah provides us with a unique spiritual opportunity. Happy are they who can experience this season with an acute mind and alert spirit.

Thoughts for Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Fasting and praying are important ingredients of Yom Kippur and are signs of repentance for our transgressions against God. But, as is well known, Yom Kippur does not provide atonement for sins committed against human beings.

Maimonides teaches (Laws of Repentance, 2:9): "Repentance and the Day of Atonement only atone for sins between human beings and God, but interpersonal sins are never forgiven until a person has made restitution and appeased the one whom he has wronged….Even if he merely belittled a person with words, he must appease him and go to him until he is granted forgiveness."

Rabbinic tradition has it that a person can expect to be judged by God with the same standard of judgment that a person applies to others. If one is mean-spirited and unfair in treatment of fellow human beings, these same qualities will be applied by the Heavenly court.

The Haftarah on the morning of Yom Kippur is drawn from Isaiah, where the prophet reminds the Israelites that God wants purity of behavior, compassion to the poor and downtrodden. God rejects outward shows of piety and insists on genuine righteousness. God chastises those who "bend their heads as a bulrush and spread a couch of sackcloth and ashes" when

in fact they conduct their lives immorally. “Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I choose, to loosen the fetters of wickedness, to undo the bonds of the yoke, sending the oppressed free and breaking every yoke? Is it not to break your bread for the hungry, and that you bring to your house the outcast poor…?”

It is said of the great 16th century sage, Rabbi Isaac Luria, that he would not recite his afternoon prayers until he first paid his workmen for their days’ labor. He reasoned: how can I appear before God if I do not meet my moral obligation to pay my workers on time? It is hypocritical to mouth pious words to God while at the same time being guilty of improper behavior and slander toward one’s fellow human beings.

It is customary among pious Jews to pay their debts on time, and certainly in advance of Yom Kippur. It is customary to make peace with those whom one has mistreated, disrespected, maligned or betrayed. It is customary to increase charitable contributions to those institutions that foster proper Torah values and that provide assistance to the needy.

Maimonides provides another very important lesson in his Laws of Repentance (2:10): “It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and to withhold forgiveness. Rather, one should be easy to pacify and difficult to anger. When a sinner asks forgiveness, one should grant it with a full heart and willing soul. Even if the other had sinned greatly against him and caused him much anguish, he should not take revenge or bear a grudge.”

Yom Kippur can be just another external show of piety; or it can be a transformative occasion. The decision is ours to make.

Am Yisrael Hai: Thoughts for Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Some years ago, my wife and I visited Rome. Among the historic sites we visited was the Arch of Titus--a monument to the Roman conquest of Judea in 70 C.E. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem, razed the Temple, killed and enslaved many thousands of Jews--and sent our people into an Exile that lasted until the rise of the State of Israel in 1948. On the inner wall of the Arch of Titus is a depiction of the Roman victory over the Jews, with the Romans carrying off the Menorah which had graced the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

This is a somber "tourist attraction" for Jews, recalling one of the most horrific times in the history of our people. How painful to see enemies gloating over our downfall! How heart-wrenching to see our Menorah carried off into captivity!

The day we visited the Arch of Titus, we saw a small bit of grafitti which someone had managed to write onto the monument. We obviously do not condone grafitti, but I confess that we derived some inner satisfaction from this particular grafitti. It was written in Hebrew letters, and it said: Am Yisrael Hai, the people of Israel lives.

The great Roman Empire declined and fell, and is no more. The Jewish people are here, alive and well. The Arch of Titus in its arrogant glee over the destruction of the Jews has, in fact, become a symbol of the decadence of the Roman Empire and the ultimate victory of the Jews. Titus, and his Empire, are long gone; the Jews are here: Am Yisrael Hai.

A central feature of the Yom Kippur synagogue service is the description of the rituals performed in the holy Temples in ancient Jerusalem. These structures served as spiritual centers for the people of Israel. They symbolized the unique covenant between God and Israel. The Temples do not exist today; yet, when we read about the services that were conducted in them--we feel the power of the words: Am Yisrael Hai.

The people of Israel has found a way of living and flourishing and transmitting our teachings through the generations--even without these physical structures. Instead of animal sacrifices, we have prayers; instead of a central Temple, we have synagogues; instead of priestly spiritual leadership, we have Torah scholars.

We have not forsaken our covenant with God, nor has God abandoned HIs people Israel. While all of our ancient enemies have vanished, we continue to tell our story, to live and to build.

The Talmud reports that Rabbi Elazar ben Yosei visited Rome during the period following the Bar Kokhba rebellion in the second century C.E. Rabbi Elazar, aside from being a Torah sage, was well-versed in Roman culture; he served as a diplomat of the Jewish people to the government of Rome. While in Rome, Rabbi Elazar saw some of the artifacts that the Romans had stolen from the Temple in Jerusalem. "I saw the Parokhet (the curtain that covered the ark in the Temple) in Rome, and on it were several drops of blood from the Yom Kippur offering." (Yoma 57a)

What was Rabbi Elazar thinking at that moment, when he stood face to face with a tangible vestige of the Temple, when he saw the drops of blood recalling the awesome Yom Kippur Temple ceremonies? What was he thinking at that moment, when he was serving as a representative of the remnant of Israel that had recently been vanquished by the mighty Roman Empire?

I imagine that Rabbi Elazar may have been thinking: Od Avinu Hai, Am Yisrael Hai. The God of Israel lives, the people of Israel lives--and we will ultimately prevail in bringing our message of ethical monotheism, compassion and justice to the entire world.

And that is the faith that has carried us through the generations. And that is the faith that will carry us into the future, proudly and confidently.

Happiness: Thoughts for Succoth

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

The Torah informs us that the festival of Succoth commemorates God's providence over the Israelites during their years of wandering in the wilderness. An old question is: why was this holiday scheduled to begin specifically on the 15th day of Tishri? The dates for Pessah (15 Nissan) and for Shavuoth (6 Sivan) are clearly linked to historical events—the day of the Exodus and the day of the Revelation at Mount Sinai. But the wandering in the wilderness was ongoing for 40 years, with no particular historic connection to Tishri 15?

Rabbi Haim David Halevy, in his *Torat Hayyim al ha-Moadim*, suggests that the Tishri 15 date was specified by the Almighty so as to be parallel to the Nissan 15 date of Pessah. Since the Exodus from Egypt is so central to Jewish thought and observance, Pessah and Succoth

were set exactly six months apart, to the day, in order to ensure that we experience the power of the Exodus on a regular basis every six months.

The great 18th century sage, Rabbi Hayyim Yosef David Azulai (known popularly as the Hidah), offers a different explanation in his *Midbar Kedeimot*. He notes that the lives of our forefathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob overlapped for fifteen years. When Abraham died, his grandson Jacob was 15 years old. In rabbinic tradition Abraham is identified with Pessah, Isaac with Shavuoth, and Jacob with Succoth. (See Tur O.H. 417). Because of the merit of these extraordinary 15 years, the holy days of Pessah and Succoth were both set for the 15th of the month.

The Hidah is alluding to something deeper than the clever confluence of numbers. He suggests that the 15 years of shared lifetime among Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were a period of extreme happiness for the world. These three luminaries literally changed the course of history and brought humanity to a better understanding of the One God. Succoth, which is known in our tradition as the season of our happiness (*zeman simhateinu*), commemorates the extraordinary happiness and enlightenment that emerged at the founding of our nation.

Since Pessah (symbolized by Abraham) and Succoth (symbolized by Jacob) both occur on the 15th day of the month, this highlights the special link between grandfather Abraham and grandson Jacob. When grandparents and grandchildren share ideas and ideals, this is a sign of continuity, love…and genuine happiness. When there is a “generation gap,” there is sadness and alienation. Just as Pessah and Succoth are linked together by sharing the date of 15, so Abraham and Jacob are bound together by their shared 15 years of life.

Pessah and Succoth celebrate the Exodus from Egypt in ancient times. The relationship between Abraham and Jacob suggests the key to the future redemption of Israel—when the traditions are shared, loved and experienced by the generations of grandparents and grandchildren. A teacher of mine once quipped: Who is a Jew? Someone with Jewish grandchildren! While this is not an objectively true statement, it underscores a vital principle in the Jewish adventure: the importance of transmitting our teachings and values through the generations.

The genuine happiness that derives from family and national continuity does not just happen by chance. It is the result of deep devotion, strong commitment, and many sacrifices. There is a vast difference between happiness and amusement. Happiness entails a genuine and deep sense of wholeness. It is not attained casually. Amusement, on the other hand, is a passing sense of enjoyment. It is shallow and ephemeral. We laugh at a joke, we enjoy watching a sports event—but these amusements do not touch our souls in a lasting way. Happiness is achieved through active and thoughtful involvement; amusement is essentially a passive experience in which we sit back and wait to be entertained. Succoth, the festival of our happiness, reminds us to strive for genuine happiness, to be committed to transmitting our traditions through the generations, to distinguish between real happiness and shallow amusement.

Thoughts for Succoth

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Interesting insights about Succoth have come from the pen of Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), the First Earl of Beaconsfield. Disraeli was of Jewish birth, whose family had been associated with the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation in London. Although his father had Benjamin baptized to Anglicanism at age 12, Disraeli never denied his Jewish roots. He rose to become the first—and thus far only—British Prime Minister of Jewish ancestry.

Anti-Semites never forgave Disraeli's Jewishness and constantly identified him as a Jew in spite of his conversion to Anglicanism. In response to a vicious anti-Semitic comment made in the British parliament, Disraeli famously retorted: "Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the Right Honourable Gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the Temple of Solomon."

Disraeli writes about Succoth in his novel, *Tancred*, originally published in 1847. Tancred was a young British nobleman who had a spiritual longing to visit the Holy Land. When he arrived, he spent time with a Jewish family and became acquainted with Jewish religious life. His visit coincided with Succoth, and he was told that this is a great national festival celebrating the harvest. He was shown the lulav and etrog, symbols of the autumn harvest. Tancred was deeply impressed.

Disraeli writes: "The vineyards of Israel have ceased to exist, but the eternal law enjoins the children of Israel still to celebrate the vintage. A race that persist in celebrating their vintage, although they have no fruits to gather, will regain their vineyards. What sublime inexorability in the law! But what indomitable spirit in the people!"

Disraeli notes that it is easier for "the happier Sephardim, the Hebrews who have never quitted the sunny regions that are laved by the Midland Ocean," to observe the festival, since they can identify with the climate and setting of the early generations of Israelites who celebrated Succoth. "But picture to yourself the child of Israel in the dingy suburb or the squalid quarter of some bleak northern town, where there is never a sun that can at any rate ripen grapes. Yet he must celebrate the vintage of purple Palestine! The law has told him, though a denizen in an icy clime, that he must dwell for seven days in a bower…."

He continues with a description of the ignominies which Jews suffer in their ghettos in Europe "living amid fogs and filth, never treated with kindness, seldom with justice....Conceive such a being, an object to you of prejudice, dislike, disgust, perhaps hatred. The season arrives, and the mind and heart of that being are filled with images and passions that have been ranked in all ages among the most beautiful and the most genial of human experience; filled with a subject the most vivid, the most graceful, the most joyous, and the most exuberant…the harvest of the grape in the native regions of the vine."

The downtrodden Jews, in observance of Succoth, find real joy in life. They decorate their Succahs as beautifully as they can; their families gather together to eat festive meals in the Succah. The outside world may be cruel and ugly; but their inner life is joyous and noble. Their external conditions may not seem too happy, but their internal happiness is real.

The Jews, while remembering the glories of the Israelite past, also dream of the future glories of the Israelites when their people will be restored to their ancient greatness.
Disraeli points to an important truth: happiness is essentially an internal phenomenon, a matter of one's attitude and interpretation of reality. External conditions are less vital to genuine happiness than one's internal state of mind.

By celebrating Succoth over the many centuries of exile, the Jewish people was able to maintain an inner strength and happiness, a vivid sense of the past and a powerful vision for the future. We are fortunate today to be living at a time when the sovereign State of Israel has been re-established. We may celebrate Succoth with the added joy of knowing that our historic dreams have begun to be realized.

We have regained our vineyards…we must aspire to the day when we may enjoy our vineyards in peace and security, free from the threats and hatred which continue to be aimed against our people. “A race that persist in celebrating their vintage…will regain their vineyards.” A people who persist in dreaming of a messianic era will ultimately see that dream fulfilled.

Succoth: Transience and Permanence

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Sometimes it takes a crisis to remind us of the transience of life. It might be an illness, the death of a loved one, an accident, a shocking and tragic news report. At these crisis moments, we suddenly and starkly remember that we are mortal, that life on this earth is temporary.

When people confront their own mortality, they often come to the realization that time is precious; that life is too valuable to be frittered away on nonsense; that it is self-destructive to engage in petty feuds or egotistical competitions. It can take a crisis to help us live on a higher, happier level. Facing the transience of life, we take our living moments more seriously.

Succoth is a festival tuned in to the issue of life’s transience. The succah is a temporary structure, reminiscent of the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness in ancient times. It doesn’t have a roof, reminding us that we are subject to the vicissitudes of nature. The lulav, etrog, aravot and hadasim remind us of the harvest, of the recurring cycles of nature, the cycles of birth, growth, decline and death.

Interestingly, Succoth is known in our tradition as *Zeman Simhateinu*, the time of our rejoicing. On one level, this refers to the rejoicing of the harvest. On a deeper level, though, it may be alluding to the joy and inner freedom we attain when we confront the transience of life.

If we sulk in gloomy thoughts of the ephemeral quality of life, we can become grim and depressed. Succoth teaches that thoughts of life’s transience actually lead to happiness—not self-pity. It is our very mortality which provides the intensity and excitement of life.

That being said, we are strengthened when we turn our minds from human mortality to God’s eternality. There is an all-encompassing, undying Power that embraces and transcends all time and all change.

In Psalm 121, the Psalmist muses: “I lift my eyes unto the mountains, whence comes my help? My help is from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth.” Why does the Psalmist look to the mountains? What do mountains have to do with the Psalmist’s call for help?

Most natural phenomena reflect change. The sun rises and sets. The moon goes through its phases. The stars sparkle at night, but are not visible during the day. Oceans, rivers and

lakes are in constant motion. Mountains, though, are steady and unchanging (at least to the human eye). The Psalmist is crying out for help, and is seeking an image of something with permanence, something that can be depended upon: mountains.

In a similar vein, one of the names attributed to God is *Tsur*—Rock. In turning to the Lord, we seek an image of something powerful and unchanging.

While Succoth highlights the transience of life, it also turns our thoughts to the Eternal God who is not transient. The succah recalls the wanderings of the Israelites—but also the Divine Providence that watched over them for forty years. The lulav and etrog remind us of the changing seasons; but also of the Eternal God who created nature and the natural rhythms. We wave the lulav and etrog in all directions, as a symbol that God's presence is everywhere, all-encompassing, and complete.

There is a story of a man who was given one wish by God. The man said: "I don't want to die suddenly. My wish is that You give me fair warning before I die." God agreed to this request.

Years later, the angel of death came to the man and said his time had come. The man objected, and called out to God: "But You promised that I would not die suddenly. You agreed to give me warning before I would die."

God replied: "I gave you plenty of warnings. Look at your hair; it is all gray. Think of how your body has weakened and declined over these past years, how you walk so slowly, how your hands tremble when you write. All of these were warnings. You are not dying suddenly."

The man bowed his head, and gave himself over to the angel of death. He realized that he had been given many warnings, but had never taken heed.

Succoth reminds us to pay attention to the warnings, to keep things in perspective, to appreciate the transience of life and the Eternity of God. It is the time of our rejoicing in the beauties of life, and the meaning of life.

Religion: Public and Private: Thoughts for Succoth

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

Most of our religious observances are indoors--in our homes, in our synagogues. We generally do not like to create a public spectacle of our religious experiences, but we behave modestly and try not to call attention to ourselves as we perform mitzvoth.

There are some exceptions to this. On Hanukkah, it is a particular mitzvah to publicize the miracle by placing our hanukkiyot where they can be seen by the passers-by. Succoth also has some aspects of taking our religious observances into the public square. The Talmud records the custom in ancient Jerusalem where people carried their lulavim into the street when they went to synagogue, when they visited the sick, and when they went to comfort mourners. Even today, many Jews carry their lulavim in public. When it comes to the succah itself, this structure is generally in view of the public: it's built on a patio, or yard, or courtyard etc. i.e. where Jews and non-Jews can see it

Although so much of our religious life is indoors--in the private domain of family and friends--we are sometimes obligated to make a public demonstration of our religious commitments. On Hanukkah, we want to remind the entire world that the Jews heroically defended

themselves against the Syrian Hellenists and won independence for the Jewish people. We want everyone to know that, with God's help, we were victorious against powerful and far more numerous enemies.

On Succoth, we also want to convey a message to the general public. The lulav and etrog are symbolic of weapons; they indicate that we are proud of our faith and we are prepared to fight for the honor of our Torah and for our people. The succah is a symbolic statement that although we wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, God's providence protected us, and we ultimately entered the Promised Land. The public demonstration of these mitzvoth indicates our pride and commitment in who we are and what we represent. If we have respect for ourselves and our traditions, we can expect that the nations of the world will also come to respect Judaism.

Sometimes it is necessary for us to stand up in public on behalf of our faith and our people. When Jews betray their faith and their people in public, this undermines the entire Jewish enterprise. If Jewish storekeepers open their shops on Shabbat and holidays, why should non-Jews respect our Sabbath and holy days? If Jews ignore the laws of kashruth, why should non-Jews respect our dietary laws? If Jews don't live up to the high standards of Torah ethics, why should non-Jews admire the Jewish way of life? If Jewish political figures hold press conferences and public meetings on Jewish holy days, why should non-Jews show any deference to our holy days?

Succoth is an important reminder that being Jewish also entails a public stance, the courage to be who we are and stand for our traditions without embarrassment or apology. If we do not stand up for ourselves, who will stand up for us? And if we do stand up for ourselves, we will be worthy heirs of a great people who have given so much--and have so much more to give--to our world.

Lies, Cries, Arise: Thoughts for Shemini Hag Atsereth

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

The Psalm associated with Shemini Hag Atsereth/Simhath Torah seems to be a strange choice. It is Psalm 12, a Psalm that Martin Buber has described as a prophecy “against the generation of the lie.” The Psalmist cries out: “Help, O Lord, for the pious cease to be…They speak falsehood each with his neighbor, with flattering lip, with a double heart they speak.” The generation is led by oppressors who say “our tongue will make us mighty,” who arrogantly crush the downtrodden.

Buber comments: “They speak with a double heart, literally ‘with heart and heart’…The duplicity is not just between heart and mouth, but actually between heart and heart. In order that the lie may bear the stamp of truth, the liars as it were manufacture a special heart, an apparatus which functions with the greatest appearance of naturalness, from which lies well up to the ‘smooth lips’ like spontaneous utterances of experience and insight.” (*Good and Evil* , New York, 1953, p. 10)

The Psalmist is not merely condemning his “generation of the lie,” but other future generations that also will be characterized by lying, bullying, oppressing; that will be led by smooth talking and corrupt demagogues. But the Psalmist turns prophet in proclaiming that

God will arise and protect the victims of the liars. Truth will prevail. “It is You, O Lord, who will guard the poor, You will protect us forever from this generation.” And yet, the Psalm ends on a realistic note: “But the wicked will strut around when vileness is exalted among humankind.”

Although God will ultimately redeem the world from the “generation of the lie,” this will not happen right away. As long as people submit to the rule of the wicked, the wicked will stay in power. In the long run, God will make truth prevail over lies. In the short run, though, it is the responsibility of human beings to stand up against tyranny, lies, and arrogant smooth talking liars. If the wicked are not resisted, they will continue to strut around and feel invincible.

What does this Psalm have to do with Shemini Hag Atsereth/Simhath Torah, known in our tradition as *Zeman Simhateinu*, the time of our rejoicing? On a simplistic level, the Psalm might have been chosen because it opens with *Lamnatseah al ha-Sheminith*, to the Chief Musician on the Eighth (the “eighth” being a musical instruction). Since it mentions eight, it is thus connected with Shemini Hag Atsereth, the eighth day closing festival.

It would seem, though, that our sages must have had something deeper in mind in choosing Psalm 12 to be associated with this festival. In the Amidah of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we include prayers asking the Almighty to inspire awe in all His creations and to have humanity acknowledge Him as Ruler of the universe. We pray for a time when “iniquity shall close its mouth and all wickedness vanish as smoke when You will remove the rule of tyranny from the earth.” On Succoth, our ancestors offered 70 offerings in the Temple, symbolically praying for the well-being and harmony of all humanity (understood by the rabbis to be composed of 70 nations). Psalm 12 is an appropriate continuation of these themes, and is a fitting reminder at the end of the holiday season that we depend on God to bring truth and peace to humanity.

But Psalm 12 adds an important dimension. Although we certainly must pray to the Almighty for redemption, we also bear responsibility for the sad state of human affairs. Prayer alone isn’t enough to solve our problems. We need to muster the courage to stand up against lies and tyranny, to uproot “the generation of the lie.”

Throughout the world, we see examples of simple people rising up against harsh and powerful tyrants. They risk their lives, their livelihoods, their families—but they have reached the breaking point where they can no longer tolerate the unjust tyrannies under which they live. Many suffer and die in the process—but ultimately, it is hoped that the masses of good people will prevail over the dictators and demagogues. People in power rarely cede their power peacefully and gracefully. The entrenched powers will do whatever they need to do to maintain their control.

Fortunately, we live in free societies. Although we certainly have our share of imperfect rulers and leaders, we also have a system that allows for change and peaceful transition. The people can take control by voting, by peaceful protests, by peaceful strikes. Many people are not willing to stand up and be counted. They are happy to pray for God to bring peace and truth to the world. They are comfortable letting others take the risks of fighting the establishment’s power base. Psalm 12 comes at the end of the holiday season to remind us: yes, God will make truth and justice prevail; but in the meanwhile, evil will persist as long as we let it persist.

Unless we are willing to stand up against the tyrants and demagogues, they will continue to crush us. They will continue their lies and p.r. spins and political manipulations. The concluding lesson we should take from this holiday season is: building a true, just and moral community and society depends on us.

Thoughts for Shemini Hag Atsereth and Simhat Torah

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel

On August 21, 1911, Leonardo da Vinci's "Mona Lisa," one of the world's most famous paintings, was stolen right off the wall of the Louvre museum in Paris. The crime wasn't discovered until the next day. The Louvre was closed for a week due to the police investigation.

When the Louvre was re-opened, a line of people visited the museum to stare solemnly at the empty space on the wall where the "Mona Lisa" had once hung. One visitor left a bouquet of flowers. Indeed, until the painting was ultimately returned to the Louvre on December 30, 1913, throngs of visitors came to the museum to gaze at the blank wall! More people seem to have come to see the blank wall than had come in the previous two years to see the actual painting.

What motivated so many visitors to come to see the blank wall?

Perhaps it was sadness at the loss of a great art treasure.

Perhaps it was due to regret. Why hadn't we come to see it more often while it was hanging? Why was security at the museum so lax?

Perhaps it was concern for the future. Will the "Mona Lisa" ever be found and returned?

Whatever the motivation, thousands of people came to the Louvre to stare at an empty space.

I think this episode can be understood as a parable of life.

Our lives are a collection of pieces of art—our family, friends, experiences, careers, successes.

We come to a blank wall: failures, losses.

We are struck with sadness. We have lost possibilities, opportunities, relationships.

We are struck with regret. We could have and should have done better with our lives.

We are concerned for the future. Can we restore our losses, or can we at least learn to live with our losses and failures?

We have come to the closing days of our holy day period. Rosh Hashana is a time to tour events of our past year and to re-examine the artwork of our lives. Yom Kippur is a time to recount sins and errors and to think about what we could have done better. Succoth is a time to celebrate our accomplishments in a spirit of happiness.

Then we come to Shemini Hag Atsereth—a blank wall. This is a holiday with no frills, no shofar, no fasting, no lulav, no succah. The blank wall symbolizes our sadness, regrets, possibilities, hopes, and aspirations.

After what we have experienced during the holiday season, we now reach a blank wall; we are called upon to start working on our new masterpiece—the life still ahead of us. It is time to rally our strength, our wisdom, our sensitivities to the needs of others.

The “blank wall” attracts us because it is latent with opportunities, it opens new challenges, it calls on us to imagine what we can be and what we can create in the year and years ahead.

It is fitting that Simhat Torah is associated with Shemini Hag Atsereth. This is a reminder that the art of the blank wall can be meaningfully restored if we ourselves rejoice in our Torah heritage. The spiritual power of Torah has infused the Jewish people for thousands of years—and it has the power to help each of us develop our lives into a new, beautiful masterpiece.

Above Tragedy: Thoughts for Simhat Torah

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

We have spent many months reading about the life of Moses. Today, in one of the most dramatic episodes of the Torah, we read about his death—a very agonizing scene. Moses, the great leader, teacher, and prophet, climbs to the summit of Mount Nebo and looks out over the horizon at the Promised Land. As he stands silent and alone, God tells him: “You are beholding the land that I have promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob saying, ‘I shall give it to your descendants.’ See it with your eyes. You shall not cross into the land.”

What thoughts must then have tortured Moses! What anguish must have filled his soul! To dream, to work a whole lifetime for something and then to be told in final terms that your hopes would never be realized…Is this not the heart of tragedy?

Most commentators seek a reason for such a tragic ending to Moses’ life. They look for a sin committed by Moses to explain his punishment. Some say it was the breaking the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Others suggest that it was his striking the stone with his staff, rather than speaking to it.

I could never understand these commentators. Certainly, Moses sinned; but which human being has never sinned? Moreover, his sins were really not serious. He had good reason to be enraged when he found his people worshiping the golden calf. And the difference between striking the stone and speaking to it is, after all, insignificant. The event was still miraculous. Certainly, Moses did so many great things for which he deserved reward. He was the only human being to see God “face to face.” He was the greatest prophet, the greatest teacher, the most dedicated leader. Certainly, he was worthy of entering the Promised Land.

Moses was not being punished for a sin. Rather, the Torah is describing in a very vivid way something about the human predicament. Death is a built-in part of human existence. Though we may have noble ideals, though we may work hard, we cannot expect to fulfill all of our ambitions. Moses, perhaps the most ideal character in the Bible, was plagued by being mortal; and great mortals simply cannot realize all of their hopes. This is a profound truth of the nature of humankind.

Today, we are also introduced to another biblical character, Adam. I think it is very ironic that the birth of Adam and the death of Moses are juxtaposed in today’s Torah readings. Adam was given paradise. He was a man who had no dreams or ambitions, for he had everything

he wanted. He was complacent, satisfied, and untroubled by ideals.
Existing in such a state, though, is problematic, because there is no motivation for living. If there is no place for one to advance, he must fall back. And so, Adam fell. But whereas Moses was a tragic hero, Adam was just plain tragic. Whereas Moses had lived his life working toward a dream so that when death came it tragically cut off a living force, Adam never knew the value of life; his fall from paradise is far less climactic.

Ultimately, being mortals, we each have the choice of being either tragic heroes or simply tragic. In which category do we belong?

Unfortunately, many of us are satisfied with ourselves, with our wealth, with our social position. We are especially complacent in the realm of our religious attainments. We think we practice our religion properly and do enough mitzvoth.

Today, on Simhat Torah, we completed the reading of the Torah. We could have said that we have finished our study, we are content. But we did not do these things. We began immediately to read Bereishith. We started the Torah all over again. We know that we will never fully comprehend the Torah or fully realize its sacred dreams—but we move forward and onward. We cannot rest from the Torah; to rest is to become tragic.

As Jews, therefore, we are part of a tradition that not only thrives on noble ideals, but which loves noble actions. Like Moses, we should seek to keep our religious ideals and practices on fire within us, so that they give light not only to ourselves but to all who come near us. We should devote our lives to attaining religious perfection for ourselves and for our society; and though we may never enter the Promised Land, we will be able to stand on a summit and see our dreams realized in the future through our children. We may never walk into the land, but we will have led an entire generation to the point where they can enter.

Extremely Religious Without Religious Extremism:
The Binding of Isaac as a Test Case for the Limits of Devotion[1]

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel

Introduction

The *Akedah*, or binding of Isaac (Gen. 22:1–19),[i] is a foundational narrative in Jewish tradition. It plays a prominent role on Rosh Hashanah, and many communities include it in their daily morning liturgy.

The *Akedah* is a religiously and morally challenging story. What should we learn from it with regard to faith and religious life? Perhaps more than any other narrative in the Torah, the *Akedah* teaches how one can and should be extremely religious, but also teaches how to avoid the dangers of religious extremism. This essay will consider the ideas of several modern thinkers who explore the religious and moral implications of the *Akedah*.

Why Did Abraham Not Protest?

Although the idea of child sacrifice is abhorrent to us, it made sense in Abraham's historical context. Many of Israel's neighbors practiced child sacrifice. When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, Abraham may have surmised that perhaps God required this of him. Of course, God stopped Abraham and went on to outlaw such practices as a capital offense (Lev. 18:21; 20:2–5). We find child sacrifice abhorrent precisely because the Torah and the prophets broke rank with large segments of the pagan world and transformed human values for the better.[ii]

In its original context, then, the *Akedah* highlights Abraham's exemplary faithfulness. He followed God's command even when the basis of the divine promise for progeny through Isaac was threatened.[iii]

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) was deeply troubled by the *Akedah*. He maintained that nobody is certain that he or she is receiving prophecy, whereas everyone knows with certainty that murder is immoral and against God's will. Therefore, Abraham failed God's test by acquiescing to sacrifice Isaac. According to Kant, Abraham should have refused, or at least protested.[iv]

However, the biblical narrative runs flatly against Kant's reading. After the angel stops Abraham from slaughtering Isaac, the angel proclaims to Abraham, "For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me" (Gen. 22:12). God thereby praises Abraham's exceptional faith and commitment.[v]

Adopting a reading consistent with the thrust of the biblical narrative, Rambam draws the opposite conclusion from that of Kant. The fact that Abraham obeyed God demonstrates his absolute certainty that he had received true prophecy. Otherwise, he never would have proceeded:

> [Abraham] hastened to slaughter, as he had been commanded, his son, his only son, whom he loved…. For if a dream of prophecy had been obscure for the prophets, or if they had doubts or incertitude concerning what they apprehended in a vision of prophecy, they would not have hastened to do that which is repugnant to nature, and [Abraham's] soul would not have consented to accomplish an act of so great an importance if there had been a doubt about it (*Guide of the Perplexed* 3:24).[vi]

Although Rambam correctly assesses the biblical narrative, there is still room for a different moral question. After God informs Abraham about the impending destruction of Sodom, Abraham pleads courageously on behalf of the righteous people who potentially lived in the wicked city, appealing to God's attribute of justice (Gen. 18:23–33).[vii] How could Abraham stand idly by and not challenge God when God commanded him to sacrifice his beloved son?

By considering the Abraham narratives as a whole, we may resolve this dilemma. Abraham's actions in Genesis chapters 12–25 may be divided into three general categories: (1) responses to direct commands from God; (2) responses to promises or other information from God; and (3) responses to situations during which God does not communicate directly with Abraham.

Whenever God commands an action, Abraham obeys without as much as a word of protest or questioning. When Abraham receives promises or other information from God, Abraham

praises God when gratitude is in order, and he questions or challenges God when he deems it appropriate. Therefore, Abraham's silence when following God's commandment to sacrifice Isaac is to be expected. And so are Abraham's concerns about God's promises of progeny or information about the destruction of Sodom. The Torah thereby teaches that it is appropriate to question God, while simultaneously demanding faithfulness to God's commandments as an essential aspect of the mutual covenant between God and Israel.[viii]

The Pinnacle of Religious Faith

Professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz suggests that Abraham and Job confronted the same religious test. Do they serve God because God provides all of their needs, or do they serve God under all conditions? Both were God-fearing individuals prior to their trials, but they demonstrated their unwavering commitment to God through their trials.[ix]

Professor Moshe Halbertal derives a different lesson from the *Akedah*. God wishes to be loved by us, but pure love of God is almost impossible, since we are utterly dependent on God for all of our needs. We generally express love through absolute giving. When sacrificing to God, however, we always can hold out hope that God will give us more. Cain and Abel could offer produce or sheep to God, but they likely were at least partially motivated to appeal to God for better crops and flocks next year. What can we possibly offer God that demonstrates our true love?

Through the *Akedah*, God gives Abraham the opportunity to offer a gift outside of the realm of exchange. Nothing can replace Isaac, since his value to Abraham is absolute. As soon as Abraham demonstrates willingness to offer his own son to God, he has proven his total love and commitment. As the angel tells Abraham, "For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me" (Gen. 22:12).

Halbertal explains that Abraham's offering a ram in place of Isaac becomes the paradigm for later sacrifice. Inherent in all sacrifice in the Torah is the idea is that we love God to the point where we are prepared to sacrifice ourselves or our children to God. The animal serves as a substitution. The *Akedah* thereby represents the supreme act of giving to God.[x]

> The ideas explored by Professors Leibowitz and Halbertal lie at the heart of being extremely religious. Abraham is a model of pure, dedicated service and love of God. Such religious commitment is ideal, but it also comes with the lurking danger of religious extremism. We turn now to this critical issue.

Extremely Religious Without Religious Extremism

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) composed a classic work on the *Akedah*, entitled *Fear and Trembling*. He argued that if one believes in religion because it appears reasonable, that is a secular distortion. True religion, maintains Kierkegaard, means being able to suspend reason and moral conscience when God demands it. Kierkegaard calls Abraham a knight of faith for his willingness to obey God and sacrifice his son.

Although Kierkegaard did not advocate violence in the name of religion, his view is vulnerable to that horrific outcome. In his philosophy, serving God must take precedence over all moral or rational concerns. A fatal problem arises when the representatives of any religion claim that God demands violence or other forms of immorality.

In a powerful article written in the wake of the terrorist attack on New York City on September 11, 2001, Professor David Shatz addresses this urgent question.[xi] He observes that in general, one must create a system that balances competing ideals in order to eliminate ideological extremism. For example, one may place law against liberty, self-respect against respect for others, and discipline against love. In religion, however, there is a fundamental problem: Placing any value against religion, especially if that competing value can prevail over religion, defeats religious commitment.

> Professor Shatz suggests a way to have passion for God tempered by morality and rationality without requiring any religious compromise. One must embrace morality and rationality as *part* of the religion. The religion itself must balance and integrate competing values as part of the religion. This debate traces back to Rabbi Saadiah Gaon, who insisted that God chooses moral things to command. In contrast, the medieval Islamic philosophical school of *Ash'ariyya* maintained that whatever God commands is by definition good.[xii]
> Kierkegaard's reading of the *Akedah* fails Professor Shatz's solution to religious extremism and is therefore vulnerable to the dangers of immorality in the name of God. In fact, Kierkegaard's reading of the *Akedah* fails the Torah itself: God stops Abraham, and then repudiates child sacrifice in the Torah. Whereas Kierkegaard focuses on Abraham's willingness to suspend morality to serve God, God rejects immorality as part of the Torah's religion. The expression of religious commitment in the Torah is the fear of God, which by definition includes the highest form of morality.[xiii] There must never be a disconnect between religious commitment and moral behavior, and Israel's prophets constantly remind the people of this critical message.[xiv] Thus, the Torah incorporates morality and rationality as essential components of its religious system.
> In a similar spirit, Rabbi Shalom Carmy maintains that the *Akedah* teaches religious passion without fanaticism, and that even when a God-fearing individual keeps God's commandments, he or she remains responsive to the validity of the ethical.[xv]

It also is important to stress that people who act violently in the name of religion generally are *not* crazy. Rather, they are following their religious system as they understand it and as their clerics teach it. Such manifestations of religion themselves are evil and immoral. Postmodernism thinks it can relativize all religion and thereby protect against the violence generated by religious extremism. In reality, however, postmodernism achieves the opposite effect as its adherents no longer have the resolve to refer to evil as evil and to battle against it. Instead, they try to rationalize evil away. This position empowers the religious extremists.[xvi]

Professor Shatz acknowledges that, lamentably, there are negative extremist elements among some Jews who identify themselves as religious. However, their attempts to justify their immorality with Torah sources in fact do violence to our sacred texts.[xvii] Such Jews are *not* extremely religious, but rather pervert the Torah and desecrate God's Name. Similarly, all religions must build morality and rationality into their systems so that they can pursue a relationship with God while avoiding the catastrophic consequences of religious extremism. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks has remarked, "the cure of bad religion is good religion, not no religion."[xviii]

Conclusion

The *Akedah* teaches several vital religious lessons. Ideal religion is about serving God, and is not self-serving. We aspire to be extremely religious, and Abraham serves as a paragon of the ideal connection to God. The *Akedah* also teaches the key to avoid what is rightly condemned as religious extremism. Morality and rationality must be built into every religious system, or else its adherents risk lapsing into immorality in the name of their religion.

One of the best means of promoting our vision is to understand and teach the underlying messages of the *Akedah*. We pray that all faith communities will join in affirming morality and rationality as being integral to their faiths. It is imperative for us to serve as emissaries of a different vision to what the world too often experiences in the name of religion, to model the ideal fear of Heaven that the Torah demands, and ultimately to sanctify God's Name.

Notes

[1] This article appeared in Hayyim Angel, *The Keys to the Palace: Essays Exploring the Religious Value of Reading the Bible* (New York: Kodesh Press, 2017), pp. 132-142.

[i] The Hebrew root for *Akedah* appears in Gen. 22:9, and refers to binding one's hands to one's feet. This is the only time that this root appears in the entire Bible.

[ii] Samuel David Luzzatto suggests that this legislation was in part an anti-pagan polemic, demonstrating that the Torah's idea of love of God does not involve the immoral sacrifice of one's child.

[iii] Cf. *Lev. Rabbah* (Margaliot) 29:9.

[iv] Kant was not the first person troubled by the moral implications of the *Akedah*. In the second century BCE, the author of the non-canonical book of Jubilees (17:16) ascribed the command to sacrifice Isaac to a "satanic" angel named Mastemah, rather than God Himself as presented in the Torah. Adopting a different tactic, Rabbi Eleazar Ashkenazi b. Nathan Habavli (fourteenth century) maintains that the *Akedah* must have occurred in a prophetic vision. Had the *Akedah* occurred in waking state, he argued, Abraham surely would have protested as he did regarding Sodom (in Marc Shapiro, *Changing the Immutable: How Orthodox Judaism Rewrites Its History* [Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2015, p. 70]).

[v] See Rabbi Yonatan Grossman, *Avraham: Sippuro shel Massa* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2014), pp. 300–301.

[vi] Translation from *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Shlomo Pines, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 501–502.

[vii] See especially Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, "Does Jewish Tradition Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakha?" in *Modern Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice*, ed. Marvin Fox (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1975), pp. 62–88.

[viii] See further discussion in Hayyim Angel, "Learning Faith from the Text, or Text from Faith: The Challenges of Teaching (and Learning) the Abraham Narratives and Commentary," in *Wisdom From All My Teachers: Challenges and Initiatives in Contemporary Torah Education*, ed. Jeffrey Saks and Susan Handelman (Jerusalem: Urim, 2003), pp.

192–212; reprinted in Angel, *Through an Opaque Lens* (New York: Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2006), pp. 127–154; revised second edition (New York: Kodesh Press, 2013), pp. 99–122.

[ix] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, ed. Eliezer Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 48–49, 259. Cf. Michael V. Fox, "Job the Pious," *Zeitschrift fur die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 117 (2005), pp. 351–366.

[x] Moshe Halbertal, *On Sacrifice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), pp. 22–25.

[xi] David Shatz, "'From the Depths I Have Called to You': Jewish Reflections on September 11th and Contemporary Terrorism," in *Contending with Catastrophe: Jewish Perspectives on September 11th*, ed. Michael J. Broyde (New York: Beth Din of America and K'hal Publishing, 2011), pp. 197–233. See also Marvin Fox, "Kierkegaard and Rabbinic Judaism," in *Collected Essays on Philosophy and on Judaism*, vol. 2, ed. Jacob Neusner (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003), pp. 29–43.

[xii] See Howard Kreisel, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), p. 38.

[xiii] See, for example, Gen. 20:11; 42:18; Exod. 1:17, 21; Deut. 25:18.

[xiv] See, for example, Isa. 1:10–17; Jer. 7:9–11; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21–25; Mic. 6:4–8.

[xv] Rabbi Shalom Carmy, "Passion, Paradigm, and the Birth of Inwardness: On Rabbi Kook and the *Akeda*," in *Hazon Nahum: Studies in Jewish Law, Thought, and History Presented to Dr. Norman Lamm on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Yaakov Elman and Jeffrey S. Gurock (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1997), pp. 459–478.

[xvi] For a chilling study of the virtual elimination of the very concept of sin and evil from much of Western literature, see Andrew Delbanco, *The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995).

[xvii] See Rabbi Yitzchak Blau, "Ploughshares into Swords: Contemporary Religious Zionists and Moral Constraints," *Tradition* 34:4 (Winter 2000), pp. 39–60.

[xviii] Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: God, Science, and the Search for Meaning* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2011), p. 11.

THE MEANING OF THE BOOK OF JONAH[xviii]

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel

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.[xviii] 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.[xviii]

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.[xviii]

Seeking another approach, the twentieth century scholars Yehoshua Bachrach,[xviii] Elyakim Ben-Menahem,[xviii] and Uriel Simon[xviii] 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.[xviii] 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.[xviii] 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.[xviii] 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.[xviii] 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.[xviii] One might argue further that God's enjoining Jonah to return to Nineveh in 3:1-2 indicates that Jonah had indeed not repented.[xviii] 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)[xviii]

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[xviii]:

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?[xviii] 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!"[xviii] This midrash pinpoints the humbling lesson Jonah should have learned from this remarkable episode, and that every reader must learn.

[xviii] This chapter appeared in Hayyim Angel, *Vision from the Prophet and Counsel from the Elders: A Survey of Nevi'im and Ketuvim* (New York: OU Press, 2013), pp. 163-172.

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

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

[xviii] 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.

[xviii] 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.

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

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

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

[xviii] 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.

[xviii] 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*).

[xviii] 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.

[xviii] 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.

[xviii] 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.

[xviii] 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.

[xviii] 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.

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

[xviii] *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.

KOHELET: SANCTIFYING THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE[xviii]

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel

INTRODUCTION

Tanakh is intended to shape and guide our lives. Therefore, seeking out *peshat*—the primary intent of the authors of Tanakh—is a religious imperative and must be handled with great care and responsibility.

Our Sages recognized a hazard inherent to learning. In attempting to understand the text, nobody can be truly detached and objective. Consequently, people's personal agendas cloud their ability to view the text in an unbiased fashion. An example of such a viewpoint is the verse, "let us make man" from the creation narrative, which uses the plural "us" instead of the singular "me" (Gen. 1:26):

> R. Samuel b. Nahman said in R. Jonatan's name: When Moses was engaged in writing the Torah, he had to write the work of each day. When he came to the verse, "And God said: Let Us make man," etc., he said: "Sovereign of the Universe! Why do You furnish an excuse to heretics (for maintaining a plurality of gods)?" "Write," replied He; "And whoever wishes to err will err." (*Gen. Rabbah* 8:8)

The midrash notes that there were those who were able to derive support for their theology of multiple deities from the this verse, the antithesis of a basic Torah value. God would not compromise truth because some people are misguided. It also teaches that if they wish, people will be able to find pretty much anything as support for their agendas under the guise of scholarship. Whoever wishes to err will err.

However, a second hazard exists, even for those sincerely seeking the word of God:

?It is related of King Ptolemy that he brought together seventy-two elders and placed them in seventy-two [separate] rooms, without telling them why he had brought them together, and he went in to each one of them and said to him, Translate for me the Torah of Moses your master. God then prompted each one of them and they all conceived the same idea and wrote for him, God created in the beginning, I shall make man in image and likeness. (*Megillah* 9a)

This narrative reflects the concern that by popularizing the Torah through translation, less learned people may inadvertently derive the wrong meaning from the "plural" form of "Let *Us* make man." For this anticipated audience, God inspired the elders to deviate from the truth and translate with the singular form so that unwitting people would not err.

While this educational discussion is central to all Tanakh, Ecclesiastes probably concerned our Sages and later commentators more than any other biblical book. By virtue of its inclusion in Tanakh, Ecclesiastes' teaching becomes truth in our tradition. Regarding any book of Tanakh, if there are those who wish to err in the conclusions they draw, they will do so. However, our Sages worried that Ecclesiastes might cause even the most sincerely religious people to draw conclusions antithetical to the Torah, thereby causing greater religious harm than good. and consequently they considered censoring it from Tanakh:

R. Judah son of R. Samuel b. Shilat said in Rav's name: The Sages wished to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes, because its words are self-contradictory; yet why did they not hide it? Because its beginning is religious teaching and its end is religious teaching. (*Shabbat* 30b)

Our Sages discerned *internal* contradictions in Ecclesiastes, but they also worried that Ecclesiastes contained *external* contradictions, that is, verses that appear to contradict the values of the Torah. They addressed this alarming prospect by concluding that since Ecclesiastes begins and ends with religiously appropriate teachings, those verses set the tone for the remainder of its contents. If one reaches anti-Torah conclusions from Ecclesiastes, it means that something was read out of context. A striking illustration of this principle is a midrashic teaching on Ecclesiastes 11:9. The verse reads:

O youth, enjoy yourself while you are young! Let your heart lead you to enjoyment in the days of your youth. Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes—but know well that God will call you to account for all such things.

To which our Sages respond:

R. Benjamin b. Levi stated: The Sages wanted to hide the Book of Ecclesiastes, for they found in it ideas that leaned toward heresy. They argued: Was it right that Solomon should have said the following: O youth, enjoy yourself while you are young! Let your heart lead you

to enjoyment in the days of your youth (Ecc. 11:9)? Moshe said, So that you do not follow your heart and eyes (Num. 15:39), but Solomon said, Follow the desires of your heart and the glances of your eyes (Ecc. 11:9)! What then? Is all restraint to be removed? Is there neither justice nor judge? When, however, he said, But know well that God will call you to account for all such things (Ecc. 11:9), they admitted that Solomon had spoken well. (*Lev. Rabbah* 28:1; cf. *Ecc. Rabbah* 1:3)

Were our Sages genuinely worried about people not reading the second half of a verse and consequently adopting a hedonistic lifestyle? Based on the midrashic method of reading verses out of their natural context, this verse likely posed a more serious threat in their society than it would for a *pashtan* who reads verses in context. The best defense against such egregious errors always is good *peshat*. This chapter will briefly consider the challenges of learning *peshat* in Ecclesiastes, and then outline a means of approaching Ecclesiastes as the unique book it is.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

At the level of *derash*, many of our Sages' comments on Ecclesiastes appear to be speaking about an entirely different book, one that is about Torah. The word "Torah" never appears in Ecclesiastes. Such midrashim appear to be radically reinterpreting Ecclesiastes to make it consistent with the rest of Tanakh. Similarly, many later commentators, including those generally committed to *peshat*, sometimes follow this midrashic lead of radical reinterpretation of the verses they find troubling.

This approach is rooted in the dual responsibility of our commentators. As scholars, they attempt to ascertain the original intent of the biblical text. However, they also are students and teachers of Jewish tradition. Their educational sensitivities often enter the interpretive arena, particularly when the surface reading of Ecclesiastes appears to threaten traditional values.[xviii]

For example, Kohelet opens by challenging the enduring value of the two leading manifestations of human success: wealth and wisdom. That Kohelet focuses on the ephemerality of wealth and physical enjoyment is not surprising, but his focus on the limitations and vulnerability of wisdom is stunning:

For as wisdom grows, vexation grows; to increase learning is to increase heartache. (1:18)

Sforno is so uncomfortable with this indictment of wisdom that he reinterprets the verse as referring to the ostensible wisdom of heretics. I often wonder if the *parshan* himself believes that a suggestion of this nature is *peshat*, that is, does he assume that Kohelet cannot possibly intend what he appears to be saying; or is he reinterpreting primarily to deflect such teachings from a less learned readership, as did the authors of the Septuagint in the Talmudic passage

cited above.[xviii]

Some commentators attempt to resolve certain internal and external contradictions in Ecclesiastes by attributing otherwise troubling (to these commentators) statements to other people—generally evil people or fools. Take, for example, one of Kohelet's most life-affirming declarations:

Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God. Let your clothes always be freshly washed, and your head never lack ointment. Enjoy happiness with a woman you love all the fleeting days of life that have been granted to you under the sun—all your fleeting days. For that alone is what you can get out of life and out of the means you acquire under the sun. (9:7-9)

Ibn Ezra—the quintessential *pashtan*—writes, "This is the folly that people say in their hearts." Ibn Ezra maintains that Kohelet's own view is the opposite of what this passage says.[xviii] However, such attempts to escape difficult verses appear arbitrary. Nothing in the text signals a change in speaker (particularly if Kohelet wishes to reject that speaker's views), leaving decisions of attribution entirely in the hands of the commentator.[xviii]

Commentators also devote much energy to reconciling the internal contradictions of Ecclesiastes. See, for example, the lengthy discussions of Ibn Ezra (on 7:3) and Mordechai Zer-Kavod (introduction in *Da'at Mikra*, pp. 24-33). Some reconciliations are more textually convincing than others. Regardless, it is critical to ask why there are so many contradictions in the first place.[xviii] That so many strategies were employed to bring Ecclesiastes in line with the rest of Tanakh and with itself amply demonstrates that this Megillah is unusual. Ecclesiastes needs to be understood on its own terms rather than being reinterpreted away. *Pashtanim* also developed a methodology for confronting Ecclesiastes' challenges directly, as will be discussed presently.[xviii]

ATTEMPTING A *PESHAT* READING: GUIDELINES

In order to approach Ecclesiastes, we must consider a few of its verifiable features. Ecclesiastes is written about life and religious meaning in this world. The expression *tahat ha-shemesh* (beneath the sun) appears twenty-nine times in Ecclesiastes, and nowhere else in the rest of Tanakh. *Tahat ha?shamayim* (under heaven) appears three additional times, and Rashi and Rashbam[xviii] maintain that this expression is synonymous with *tahat ha?shemesh*. In the same vein, people are called *ro'ei ha-shemesh* (those who behold the sun) in 7:11. The word *ani* (I) appears twenty-nine times, and its appearance is not grammatically necessary. The emphasis on *tahat ha-shemesh* demonstrates a this-worldly perspective, while the repetition of the word *ani* highlights the personal nature of the presentation. Michael V. Fox notes the difference between how 1:12-14 is written:

I, Kohelet, was king in Jerusalem over Israel. I set my mind to study and to probe with wisdom all that happens under the sun.—An unhappy business that, which God gave men to be concerned with! I observed all the happenings beneath the sun, and I found that all is futile and pursuit of wind.

Fox then imagines how these verses could have been written without the focus on the personal narrative:

Studying and probing with wisdom all that happens under the sun is an unhappy business, which God gave men to be concerned with! All the happenings beneath the sun are futile and pursuit of wind.

Without the personal reflections that are central to Kohelet's thought, we are left with a series of dogmatic pronouncements. Kohelet's presentation invites readers into his mind as he goes through a personal struggle and process of reflection.[xviii]

Given this starkly anthropocentric perspective, Ecclesiastes *should* reflect different perspectives than the theocentric viewpoint of revealed prophecy. All people perceive the same reality that Kohelet does. On the basis of this observation, R. Simeon ben Manasia maintained that Ecclesiastes was not inspired altogether:

R. Simeon ben Manasia says: The Song of Songs defiles the hands because it was composed with divine inspiration. Ecclesiastes does not defile the hands because it is only Solomon's wisdom. (Tosefta *Yadayim* 2:14)[xviii]

Though his minority view was rejected by our tradition (which insists that Ecclesiastes is divinely inspired), Ecclesiastes is written from the perspective of human wisdom.

The word *adam* appears forty-nine times in Ecclesiastes, referring to all humanity (except for one instance in 7:28, which refers specifically to males). Kohelet speaks in a universal language and does not limit its discourse to a Jewish audience. Torah and other specifically Jewish themes do not appear in Ecclesiastes, which focuses on more universal *hokhmah* (wisdom) and *yirat Elokim* (fear of God).

Similarly, God's personal name—the Tetragrammaton—never appears in Ecclesiastes. Only the generic name Elokim appears (forty times), signifying both the universalistic discourse of Ecclesiastes and also a distant, transcendant Deity, rather than a close and personal relationship with God. In Ecclesiastes, God appears remote, and it is impossible to fathom His means of governing the world. For example, Kohelet warns:

Keep your mouth from being rash, and let not your throat be quick to bring forth speech before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; that is why your words should be few. (5:1)

Since God is so infinitely superior, there is no purpose and much harm in protesting against God (cf. 3:11; 7:13-14). Moreover, Kohelet never speaks directly to God; he speaks *about* God and the human condition in a sustained monologue to his audience.

Tying together these strands of evidence, Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv) attempts to explain why Ecclesiastes is read (primarily by Ashkenazim[xviii]) on Sukkot:

> It is written in Zechariah chapter 14 that in the future the nations of the world will come [to Jerusalem] on Hol HaMo'ed Sukkot to bring offerings…. And this was the custom in King Solomon's time. This is why Solomon recited Ecclesiastes on Hol HaMo'ed Sukkot in the presence of the wise of the nations…. This is why it contains only the name Elokim, since [non-Jews] know only that Name of God. (*Harhev Davar* on Num. 29:12)

Needless to say, this means of justifying a custom is anachronistic from a historical vantage point. Nonetheless, Netziv's keen perception of Kohelet's addressing all humanity with universal religious wisdom captures the unique flavor of this book.

From a human perspective, life is filled with contradictions. Ecclesiastes' textual contradictions reflect aspects of the multifaceted and often paradoxical human condition. Significantly, Ecclesiastes' inclusion in Tanakh and its consideration as a divinely inspired book elevates human perception into the realm of the sacred, joining revelation and received wisdom as aspects of religious truth.

While Ecclesiastes contains truth, it is but one aspect of truth rather than the whole truth. For example, Kohelet considers oppression an unchangeable reality:

> I further observed all the oppression that goes on under the sun: the tears of the oppressed, with none to comfort them; and the power of their oppressors—with none to comfort them. Then I accounted those who died long since more fortunate than those who are still living; and happier than either are those who have not yet come into being and have never witnessed the miseries that go on under the sun. (4:1-3)

Kohelet never calls on God to stop this oppression, nor does he exhort society to stop it. He simply laments that human history repeats itself in an endless cycle of oppression. Kohelet sets this tone in 1:4-7 by analogizing human existence to the cyclical patterns in nature (Ibn Ezra).

In contrast, prophecy is committed to changing society so that it ultimately matches the ideal messianic vision. While a human perspective sees only repetitions of errors in history, prophecy reminds us that current reality need not mimic past history.

Kohelet grapples with the realities that wise/righteous people do not necessarily live longer or more comfortable lives than the foolish/wicked and that wisdom itself is limited and fallible:

> Here is a frustration that occurs in the world: sometimes an upright man is requited according to the conduct of the scoundrel; and sometimes the scoundrel is requited according to the conduct of the upright. I say all that is frustration…. For I have set my mind to learn wisdom

and to observe the business that goes on in the world—even to the extent of going without sleep day and night—and I have observed all that God brings to pass. Indeed, man cannot guess the events that occur under the sun. For man tries strenuously, but fails to guess them; and even if a sage should think to discover them he would not be able to guess them. (8:14-17)

Kohelet maintains both sides of the classical conflict: God is just, but there are injustices manifested in the real world. While Kohelet cannot solve this dilemma, he discovers a productive response. Once a person can accept that the world appears unfair, one can realize that everything is a gift from God rather than a necessary consequence for righteousness.[xviii] We ultimately cannot fathom how God governs this world, but we can fulfill our religious obligations and grow from all experiences. Wisdom always is preferred to folly,[xviii] even though wisdom is limited and the wise cannot guarantee themselves a more comfortable life than fools, and everyone dies regardless.[xviii]

On a deeper level, the human psyche is profoundly attracted to being godlike. This tendency lies at the heart of the sins of Eve (Gen. 3:5, 22) and the builders of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9).[xviii] Kohelet blames God for creating us with this desire while limiting us, rendering this innate drive impossible (7:14; cf. Rashbam, Ibn Ezra on 1:13). Confrontation with our own limitations leads to the extreme frustration manifest in Ecclesiastes. However, once we can accept that we cannot be God, this realization should lead to humility and awe of God:

He brings everything to pass precisely at its time; He also puts eternity in their mind, but without man ever guessing, from first to last, all the things that God brings to pass. Thus I realized that the only worthwhile thing there is for them is to enjoy themselves and do what is good in their lifetime; also, that whenever a man does eat and drink and get enjoyment out of all his wealth, it is a gift of God. I realized, too, that whatever God has brought to pass will recur evermore: Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it—and God has brought to pass that men revere Him. (Ecc. 3:11-14)[xviii]

Michael V. Fox summarizes Ecclesiastes' purpose as follows:

When the belief in a grand causal order collapses, human reason and self-confidence fail with it. This failure is what God intends, for after it comes fear, and fear is what God desires (3:14). And that is not the end of the matter, for God allows us to build small meanings from the shards of reason.[xviii]

While Kohelet challenges us at every turn, he simultaneously provides us the opportunity to find meaning beneath the unsolvable dilemmas.

Similarly, the universality of death tortures Kohelet. Once Kohelet accepts the reality of death, however, he concludes that it is preferable to attend funerals rather than parties, since focusing on our mortality will encourage us to live a more meaningful life:

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to a house of feasting; for that is the end of every man, and a living one should take it to heart. (7:2, cf. Rashbam)

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik expands on this idea, and says that it is not that there can only be meaning in life if there is death:

The finite experience of being arouses man's conscience, challenges him to accomplish as much as possible during his short life span. In a word, finiteness is the source of morality…. For orgiastic man, time is reduced to one dimension; only the present moment counts. There is no future to be anticipated, no past to be remembered.[xviii]

Certain paradoxes and limitations are inherent to human existence, and not even the wisest of all men can make them disappear. Instead, Kohelet teaches us how to confront these challenges honestly and then embark on a process of intense existential frustration that ultimately leads to a greater recognition of the infinite gap between ourselves and God, leading in turn to humility and fear of God, leading in turn to living more religiously in every sense.[xviii]

CONCLUSION

A further word: Because Kohelet was a sage, he continued to instruct the people. He listened and tested the soundness (*izzen ve-hikker*) of many maxims. (12:9)

Kohelet relentlessly challenges received wisdom rather than blindly accepting it. This process is accompanied by formidable dangers and responsibilities; but ignoring that pursuit comes with even greater dangers. Kohelet never abandons his beliefs nor his normative sense of what all God-fearing people should do; yet he also never abandons nor solves his questions and his struggles with human existence. By presenting this process through a personal account with inspired wisdom, he becomes the teacher of every thinking religious individual.

One midrash suggests that Solomon made the Torah accessible in a manner that nobody had done since the Torah was revealed. He taught those who were not prophets how to develop a relationship with God:

He listened and tested the soundness (*izzen ve-hikker*) of many maxims (12:9)—he made handles (*oznayim*) to the Torah…. R. Yosei said: Imagine a big basket full of produce without any handle, so that it could not be lifted, until one clever man came and made handles to it, and then it began to be carried by the handles. So until Solomon arose, no one ?could properly understand the words of the Torah, but when Solomon arose, all began to comprehend the Torah. (*Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:8)

Tanakh needed prophecy so that we could transcend ourselves and our limited perspectives to aspire to a more perfected self and world, and to reach out across the infinite gulf to God. Ultimately, however, it also needed Ecclesiastes to teach how to have faith from the human perspective, so that we may grow in our fear of Heaven and observe God's commandments in

truth.

Notes

This article appeared in Hayyim Angel, *Vision from the Prophet and Counsel from the Elders: A Survey of Nevi'im and Ketuvim* (New York: OU Press, 2013), pp. 288-300.

[xviii] Throughout this chapter, "Ecclesiastes" refers to the name of the book, and "Kohelet" refers to the author. This chapter is adapted from Hayyim Angel, "Introduction to Kohelet: Sanctifying the Human Perspective," *Sukkot Reader* (New York: Tebah, 2008), pp. 39-54; reprinted in Angel, *Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding the Religious Significance in Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2009), pp. 190-204.

[xviii] For a survey and analysis of some of the distinctions between the readings of Rashi and Rashbam on Ecclesiastes, see Robert B. Salters, "The Exegesis of Rashi and Rashbam on *Qoheleth*," in *Rashi et la Culture Juive en France du Nord au Moyen Age*, ed. Gilbert Dahan, Gerard Nahon and Elie Nicolas (Paris: E. Peeters, 1997), pp. 151-161.

[xviii] For a discussion of the interplay between text and commentary regarding the faith of Abraham, see Hayyim Angel, "Learning Faith from the Text, or Text from Faith: The Challenges of Teaching (and Learning) the Avraham Narratives," in *Wisdom from All My Teachers: Challenges and Initiatives in Contemporary Torah Education*, ed. Jeffrey Saks and Susan Handelman (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2003), pp. 192-212; reprinted in Angel, *Through an Opaque Lens* (New York: Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2006), pp. 127-154.

[xviii] It should be noted that Ibn Ezra suggests an alternative interpretation for these verses. Precisely because he is so committed to *peshat*, Ibn Ezra occasionally resorts to attribution of difficult (to Ibn Ezra) verses to other speakers instead of radically reinterpreting those verses. See, e.g., Ibn Ezra on Hab. 1:1, 12; Ps. 89:1; Ecc. 3:19.

[xviii] Beginning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, some critical scholars employed the opposite tactic, i.e., that Eccelesiastes was a work that denied beliefs found elsewhere in Tanakh, and a later "Orthodox glossator" added to the text to correct those errors. One traditional rabbinic commentator—Shadal—actually adopted this argument in his commentary (published in 1860) and expressed the wish that our Sages would have banned Eccelesiastes from Tanakh. Four years after publishing his commentary, however, he fully regretted and retracted that view and expressed appreciation of Eccelesiastes' religious value. For a discussion of Shadal's initial interpretation of Eccelesiastes in light of his anti-haskalah polemics, see Shemuel Vargon, "The Identity and Dating of the Author of Eccelesiastes According to Shadal" (Hebrew), in *Iyyunei Mikra u?Parshanut 5, Presented in Honor of Uriel Simon*, ed. Moshe Garsiel et al. (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2000), pp. 365-384.

[xviii] Ibn Ezra and those who followed his approach assumed that intelligent people do not contradict themselves: "It is known that even the least of the sages would not compose a book and contradict himself" (Ibn Ezra on Ecc. 7:3). However, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik considered this perspective Aristotelian. Jewish thought, in contrast, accepts dialectical understandings of humanity and halakhah (*Days of Deliverance: Essays on Purim and Hanukkah*, ed. Eli D. Clark et al. [Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2007], p. 29). Cf. Michael V. Fox:

“Even without systematically harmonizing the text, the reader tends to push Qohelet to one side or another, because the Western model of rational assent regards consistency as a primary test of truth. But Qohelet continues to straddle the two views of reality, wavering uncomfortably but honestly between them” (*A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* [Grand Rapids: MI, Eerdmans, 1999], p. 134).

See also Shalom Carmy and David Shatz, who write that “the Bible obviously deviates, in many features, from what philosophers (especially those trained in the analytic tradition) have come to regard as philosophy… Philosophers try to avoid contradicting themselves. When contradictions appear, they are either a source of embarrassment or a spur to developing a higher order dialectic to accommodate the tension between the theses. The Bible, by contrast, often juxtaposes contradictory ideas, without explanation or apology: Ecclesiastes is entirely constructed on this principle. The philosophically more sophisticated work of harmonizing the contradictions in the biblical text is left to the exegetical literature” (“The Bible as a Source for Philosophical Reflection,” in *History of Jewish Philosophy* vol. 2, ed. Daniel H. Frank & Oliver Leaman [London: Routledge, 1997], pp. 13-14).

[xviii] See further discussions in Gavriel H. Cohn, *Iyyunim ba-Hamesh ha-Megillot* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Eliner Library, 2006), pp. 253-258; Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, pp. 1-26.

[xviii] *The commentary of R. Samuel ben Meir (Rashbam) on Qoheleth*, ed. and trans. by Sara Japhet and Robert B. Salters (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985).

[xviii] Michael V. Fox, *The JPS Bible Commentary: Ecclesiastes* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), introduction p. xvii.

[xviii] See discussion of sacred scriptures ritually defiling the hands in Sid Z. Leiman, *The Canonization of Hebrew Scripture: The Talmudic and Midrashic Evidence* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1991), pp. 104-120.

[xviii] In Tractate *Soferim* chapter 14, the practice of reading Ecclesiastes is not mentioned when the other Megillot are. The first references to the custom of reading Ecclesiastes on Sukkot are in the prayer books of Rashi and *Mahzor Vitry* (eleventh century).

[xviii] Cf. e.g., Ecc. 2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:17; 8:15; 9:7; 11:9.

[xviii] Cf. e.g., Ecc. 7:12, 19; 8:1; 9:18; 10:12.

[xviii] Cf. e.g., Ecc. 2:13-15; 6:8; 7:15-16, 23; 8:17; 9:1, 11, 16.

[xviii] In relation to the introduction of this chapter, Lyle Eslinger (“The Enigmatic Plurals Like ‘One of Us’ [Genesis I 26, III 22, and XI 7] in Hyperchronic Perspective,” *VT* 56 [2006], pp. 171-184) proposes that the “plural” form of God that appears three times in Genesis expresses the rhetorical purpose of creating boundaries between God and humanity. The first (“Let *Us* make man”) distinguishes between God and the godlike human; the other two occur when the boundaries are threatened by Eve and then the builders of the Tower of Babel.

[xviii] Cf. e.g., Ecc. 5:6; 8:12; 12:13.

[xviii] Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up*, p. 49.

[xviii] *Days of Deliverance: Essays on Purim and Hanukkah*, p. 33.

[xviii] In this regard, Eccelesiastes resembles the Book of Job. While a rigid system of direct reward and punishment is refuted by empirical evidence, this belief is replaced by an insistence on humble submission to God's will and the supreme value of faithfulness to God. Suffering has ultimate meaning even if we cannot fathom God's ways. See Michael V. Fox, "Job the Pious," *ZAW* 117 (2005), pp. 351-366.