

Potomac Torah Study Center

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

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

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may 5787 bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

While I am used to being flooded with requests for donations at this time of year, the requests are different this year. Numerous Jewish charities this year have increased their levels of intensity while saying that their request for help are especially high and donations are substantially lower than normal. While 2026 has not been a recession year, we are in a period where inflation is higher than it has been for some years, and real income has been slightly lower – not growing in recent years the way we had expected in recent decades. As we approach Yom Kippur, many of us are drawing down our checking accounts with donations while still unable to meet all the urgent requests all around us to increase our tzedakah.

One of the organizations very high on my favored tzedakah lists is Alephbeta.org. This organization, under the leadership of Rabbi David Fohrman, studies intertextual relationships. These scholars look at key words in a section of Torah and search for other places in Torah (and elsewhere in Tanach) that use the same words, in the same (or even opposite) order. This pattern often leads them to discover parallel passages in the Torah – patterns that help us understand hidden relationships.

For one example, Rabbi Fohrman asks why the Torah raises the subject of Yom Kippur in such an indirect and hidden way. After the death of Aharon's two oldest sons, Hashem tells Moshe to warn Aharon not to enter the Holy of Holies in the Mishkan casually, because it is very close to God's presence and therefore very dangerous for a human. Hashem then presents the only safe way for Aharon to enter beyond the curtains around the Ark. The Kohen Gadol is to prepare carefully, avoid being with his wife for three days, fast, avoid malachah, enter the mikvah, and wear his special garments. He may then enter inside the curtains on the afternoon of the tenth day of the seventh month, present an olah (burnt offering), and permit the smoke of his korban to rise and mix with Hashem's cloud, which is on top of the Ark. This mixing of the Kohen Gadol's smoke with Hashem's cloud is the only way that a human (except Moshe) may connect directly with God since Adam and Chava's sin required that they be expelled from Gan Eden.

Rabbi Fohrman asks why the Torah describes Yom Kippur in such an indirect way. In our times, we focus on Yom Kippur as a time when Hashem wipes away our sins and makes us pure again (until our next sin). In the Torah, a by-product of the Kohen Gadol successfully entering the Holy of Holies and presenting his korban is that the process wipes away our sins. However, reading the discussion in Acharei Mot, two thousand years after the destruction of the Temple (and end of korbanot, at least for now), a Jew reading Acharei Mot might not understand how and why the action of the Kohen Gadol leads to clearing away the sins of the Jewish people.

My discussion describes some of the process of Kapparah, covering our sins. The discussion at Alephbeta.org is much more complete and extends the analysis to several other fascinating subjects.

Hannah and I have been dealing this week with the death of one of our closest friends, Merry Lymn, a brilliant and remarkable attorney, scholar, and artist. Merry fought cancer for many years yet continued to live an amazing life. Visiting the home she shared with her husband Richard, one immediately notices walls covered with framed art – the vast majority by Merry Lymn. Merry used various paint media and collage. Her collages often include selections from the Talmud and Torah that extend the themes of her paintings. She entered paintings in numerous art contests throughout the greater Washington area, and she was a frequent winner.

Professionally, Merry was an attorney for the government and later in private practice. A brilliant advocate who prepared exceptionally well, she was highly successful in her legal career. Merry was active in Israeli dance, book clubs, movie clubs, theater, and music. Merry was an avid collector – she especially collected synagogues and rabbis. Merry followed top rabbis all over the world in studying Torah and Talmud by Zoom. Our Rabbi mentioned that Merry frequently had insightful comments during his classes. Merry and Richard introduced us to an opera company that I now serve as a Board member. We attended concerts, operas, and theater events often, and we were together for numerous Shabbat and Yom Tov meals. When our shul had Shabbat dinners or luncheons, we would always sit together. Merry was incapable of having a casual friendship. All her friendships were deep and satisfying to both parties. We learned a lot from her friendship and cherish the too few moments we had before her final illness.

We cannot criticize a person for not being another Moshe, Esther, or Golda Meir. We must, however, praise a woman like Merry Lymn for being the best possible Merry Lymn. Throughout her life, Merry studied, worked, gave of herself to many friends, and lived as the best possible version given her many talents. I suspect that dozens of people lost their closest friend with the passing of Merry Lymn. Baruch Dayan H'Emet.

Gmar chatima tova,

Hannah & Alan

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. 2026 has been an especially difficult year for AlephBeta.org, so please consider donating now.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezi Esther; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, 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; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, 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.

Haftarat Shabbat Shuva: To Walk or to Stumble

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander

President and Rosh HaYeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone 5787 (2026)

On this dramatic Shabbat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, as we read the impassioned pleas of the prophet Hoshea for repentance, one verse in particular stands out for its enduring relevance to every generation: *“He who is wise will fathom these words; the insightful will grasp them, for the ways of the Lord are just, and the righteous will walk in them, but sinners will stumble over them”* (Hosea 14:10). These are the words of the prophet after he denounces the Israelites for putting their trust in foreign powers rather than in God. They point to an unsettling truth: the same path can lead either to faithfulness or to failure, depending upon how one walks it.

On the surface, this idea is puzzling: What does it mean to “stumble” over God’s ways?

The Sages offer two approaches. The first, formulated by the Targum Yonatan and cited by Rashi, is straightforward: The evil stumble “because “ they did not follow” God’s ways at all. In this interpretation, stumbling means ignoring God’s commandments and evading responsibility.

A second approach suggests that “God’s ways” themselves can become a stumbling block. The Talmud in Bava Batra (89b) describes one who assiduously studies the halakhot governing fraud – not to act with integrity, but to learn how to exploit customers or deceive business partners. This possibility drives Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai to declare: “Woe to me if I teach these halakhot, and woe unto me if I do not!” If he teaches them, swindlers may refine their methods; if he does not, they may exploit ignorance, unchecked.

This line of thought — that Torah itself can be misused — is expressed even more sharply elsewhere. The Talmud (Yoma 72b) teaches: “*If one is deserving, the Torah becomes a potion [sam] of life for him. If one is not deserving, the Torah becomes a potion [sam] of death.*” Torah is not merely information. It is a force that amplifies the moral direction of the one engaged in it. When approached with integrity, it refines and elevates. But when distorted — whether through self-interest, cynicism, moral blindness or rationalization — it can become weaponized, becoming a means for justifying precisely what it seeks to prevent..

This danger is not theoretical nor confined to any particular era, community, or controversy. In every generation, people are tempted to enlist the language, laws, and values of Judaism in the service of behavior that the Torah clearly does not condone, and even outright forbids. We can invoke peace to excuse passivity, zeal to license cruelty, modesty to control others, communal loyalty to suppress uncomfortable truths. We may rely on halakhic technicalities to obscure dishonesty, or even turn Torah study itself into an excuse to evade responsibilities that the Torah itself demands.

The rationalizations vary, but the underlying pattern remains the same. Too often, we emphasize the teachings that affirm what we already wish to believe, while muting those that demand sacrifice, courage, accountability, or change. We may become exacting about ritual while remaining careless about character; fiercely protective of sacred institutions while becoming indifferent to the people they are meant to serve. In such moments, we do not simply depart from God’s ways. We stumble over them, transforming the path itself into an obstacle.

Hoshea’s warning is addressed to each of us. The line between “*the righteous who walk*” and “*the sinners who stumble*” does not run neatly between communities, or between the religious and the secular. It runs through every human heart. Each of us is capable of turning partial truths into complete justifications. Each of us must constantly ask ourselves whether the Torah is refining our conscience, or merely furnishing it with more sophisticated arguments.

The question, then, is not only whether we study Torah and observe its commandments, but how that study and observance shape us. Do they make us more honest, more responsible, more compassionate, and more attuned to the needs of others? Do they deepen our commitment to God, to Am Yisrael, and to the dignity of every human being created in God’s image — or do they provide us with the language to explain why less should be expected of us?

The beit midrash must remain a place of integrity and spiritual growth. A true study house is one in which self-justification is challenged, not perfected, and from which we emerge prepared to engage with society according to God’s wishes.

This awareness should deepen rather than diminish the perennial mitzvah of loving our fellow Jews, with all of their imperfections. Yet love does not demand silence in the face of distortion, just as criticism does not permit us to cast others away. We must be able to speak honestly about religious misuse and the communal fracture, while also continuing to support one another with empathy and care. Even those who “*stumble over the ways of God*” remain our brothers and sisters. On Yom Kippur, we stand together and declare: “*In the yeshiva on high, in the yeshiva below, we permit praying with transgressors.*”

We pray together not because transgression is trivial, but because repentance is communal, because no one stands beyond the possibility of return. All of us need the Torah to be a potion of life.

The question of Shabbat Shuva is therefore not simply whether Torah is in our hands, but what we do with it — and what it, in turn, makes of us?

Shabbat Shalom

* President and Rosh Yeshiva, Ohr Torah Stone.

OTS offers a collection of reflections for the High Holiday period, **Seeds of Renewal**. You may download this publication at: https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/1/messages/AABmg2Qsk2uKH8eGEHheqO6eYMn?.src=ym&reason=n8_norrin

<https://ots.org.il/haftarat-shabbat-shuva-rabbi-brander-5787/?pfstyle=wp>

Parshat Vayelech/Shabbat Shuva: Certainty and Uncertainty in Divine Forgiveness

By Rabbanit Hannah Abrams *

Are we really sure of an answer to our tefillot for forgiveness?

On Rosh Hashanah we wore beautiful clothing and ate and drank with our hearts at ease, because, says the midrash, we know that Hashem will make a miracle to save us and forgive our sins. Not to mention the astounding gemara in Rosh Hashanah 17b, which teaches us that Hashem promised Moshe that if Bnei Yisrael would invoke the 13 middot harachamim before Him, He will forgive them!

Perhaps the picture is more complex. There are also indications that although forgiveness is not automatic and disregarding of circumstance, there are tools we have at our disposal which guarantee success. In Unetaneh Tokef, we declare to the heavens that although the judgment has already been passed, we have the power to overturn it, activating the tools of teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah. Likewise, in the gemara in Berakhot 32b we learn that anyone who lengthens their prayer will not leave empty-handed. Hashem is sure to answer.

These two approaches are similar to the disagreement between the Chachamim and Rebbe (Shavuot 13a) regarding whether the essence of the day of Yom Kippur confers forgiveness on Jews. Rebbe holds that nearly regardless of your behavior, whether or not you have done teshuvah, the day of Yom Kippur provides atonement. The Chachamim disagree and assume that it is only if you have done teshuvah that the day works as promised.

Now it may not be easy to do teshuvah (tefillah and tzedakah), but there is a confidence in this narrative according to both Rebbe and the Chachamim that is at once comforting and also confusing—how can we really be so sure that Hashem will forgive us?

We may have the tools to impact our history and our fate, but isn't the whole premise of tefillah that we ultimately don't know what is going to happen? That everything hangs in the balance? What do our constant supplications to Hashem mean if not an implicit recognition that there could be another answer? One that we don't want to hear!

In the words of the Nevi'im, we see a similar confidence, a refrain throughout the many prophecies exhorting us to behave better, to repent and to return to Hashem. The assumption underlying their prophecy is that teshuvah will bring tangible returns! Consider Yechezkel 18:21-23:

(21) But if the wicked person turns from all his sins that he has committed, and keeps all My statutes, and does that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. (22) None of his transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him. In his righteousness that he has done he shall live. (23) Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked?' says Hashem; 'and not rather that he should return from his way, and live?

But there are hints, scattered through Tanach, that it isn't certain that Hashem will forgive.

Tzefaniah 2:3: *Seek Hashem, all you humble of the land, who have kept His ordinances. Seek righteousness. Seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden on the day of Hashem's anger.*

Amos 5:15: *Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts. It may be that Hashem, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

Although the Nevi'im are telling the people to do teshuvah, it is still not a certainty that their teshuvah and pursuit of godly ideals will lead to salvation or mercy.

Furthermore, in Eicha 3:29, after going through all the horrific punishments that Am Yisrael experienced, it is still uncertain whether these punishments will be enough to save them: *Hate evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts. It may be that Hashem, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

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Furthermore, in Eicha 3:29, after going through all the horrific punishments that Am Yisrael experienced, it is still uncertain whether these punishments will be enough to save them: *Let him put his mouth to the dust — perhaps there is hope.*

The Amoraim in Chagigah 4b ask this question in tears about all three of the above pesukim, leaving it unanswered:

Could it be that in all these cases, after Bnei Yisrael did so much to do teshuvah, suffered such punishments, and yet still it is אולי — it is still just a maybe? After all we have said about our unshakeable faith in our relationship with Hashem? And what about our knowledge that we have the tools in our hands to mend this relationship?

Sefer Yonah, which we read on Yom Kippur, assumes this harshness in our relationship with Hashem. This uncertainty carries through from the sailors begging Yonah to pray (*"maybe your God will save us!"*) to the King of Nineveh who tells the people to repent (*"who knows, maybe our actions will have an impact!"*). Yonah himself also reflects this harsh attitude in his response to God's forgiveness of Nineveh — he is furious with Hashem for saving Nineveh.

The answer, of course, to these conflicting narratives of relationship is that both are true. We must simultaneously hold both ideas in our head when we approach Hashem, as encapsulated by the phrase *"Avinu Malkeinu"* — our Father, for whom forgiveness is obvious and automatic, and our King, for whom justice and truth hold greater sway.

Sometimes we do not see the answers to our tefillot. That is the truth of the world. Although we know that they are heard, we do not understand Hashem's decision-making process; we do not know what could have happened.

But at the end of the day, the answer is simply expressed by Rabbi Chama bar Rabbi Chanina (Berakhot 32b):

"If a person sees that they have prayed but have not been answered, they must return and pray again, as it says (Tehillim 27:14): 'Hope in Hashem; be strong and let your heart take courage, and hope in Hashem.'"

* Director of the Chief Rabbi's Shalem Fellowship in London. Alumna of OTS's Midreshet Lindenbaum. Hebrew text omitted because of software issues across various word processing programs.

<https://ots.org.il/rabbanit-hannah-abrams-on-parshat-vayelech-shabbat-shuva/>

Yom Kippur: Call to Arms

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1997

Yom Kippur, the ultimate day of repentance, has the Jewish nation simultaneously praying, fasting and asking for forgiveness. It begins with the somber, quiet, and melodious intonation of Kol Nidrei and ends with the entire congregation shouting *Hashem hu HaElokim* (G-d is the Al-Mighty) seven times after various requests of forgiveness. It seems that at the time when our strength is waning our greatest and loudest pleas are spent. Shouldn't we begin the day with the strong requests for forgiveness and save the subdued prayers for when our bodies are weak from hunger and our lips parched from lack of water?

Rav Eichenstein, the Ziditchover Rebbe, tells the following story:

One Friday, a man entered the study of the Tchortkover Rebbe with a request that was very common in those days.

"My son was drafted into the army," the man began. "However, we have a way out. On Sunday, we are going to a doctor who will falsely declare him unfit for service. This way he will be spared certain misery, perhaps even death in that terrible army. Rebbe," he asked, "I need your blessing that he evade the draft."

The Rebbe quietly told him that Shabbos was nearing and he could not concentrate on blessings. The man should return to him on Friday evening after his tisch (ceremonious chasidic table).

The man did so. After most of the chasidim had left, the man repeated his request, almost verbatim. Again the Rebbe was non-committal. *"Return to me after the morning service."*

Unperturbed, the man noted that he would really like to resolve this matter before Sunday morning.

Shabbos morning, after services, the man approached the Rebbe again. Calmly he repeated the predicament. *"Sunday morning I am going to a doctor who will falsely declare my son unfit for military service. Please pray that we will evade conscription."* The Rebbe was not moved. Again, he deferred until the afternoon.

At the third Shabbos meal, the scene repeated again, precisely the way it had the previous three times. *"I understand that you are leaving Sunday morning. Come back to me late Saturday night,"* said the Rebbe. *"By then I will have an answer for you."*

By this time, his Chasidim's curiosity was piqued. They had never seen their Rebbe so reluctant to mete a blessing, especially when it was one that would save a Jewish soul from the frightful Polish army.

Saturday night a large crowd gathered as the man approached with his request. Frustrated and disgruntled, the man, once again, repeated his story, almost verbatim, for the fifth time.

Immediately, the Rebbe sprang from his chair and began to shout. *"What are you asking me? Why would one even try to evade the service of our wonderful country? How dare you ask me for a blessing of that sort? Your son would make a fine soldier for our country. I wish him the best of luck in the army!"*

The man quickly scurried from the room and left town. The Chasidim stood shocked and bewildered. Never had they heard such an uncharacteristic outcry from the Rebbe.

"I will explain," said the Rebbe. *"The man was a fraud. He had no son, and if he did, he wanted him in the army. He was sent by the government to test our loyalty. Thank G-d we passed the test."*

"But, Rebbe!" cried the chasidim, *"how did you know?"*

“Simple,” explained the Rebbe. “I watched the level of intensity. From the moment he met me until tonight there was no increase in intensity nor feeling of desperation with each request. The moment I heard his request tonight and it contained no more passion or desperation than his first request on Friday night, I knew he was a fraud.”

We stand a whole entire day in prayer, and end with a ne'ilah prayer, after nearly 24 hours of pleading. The litmus test of our sincerity comes as the heavenly gates are being closed. As the sun begins to set, our pleas should intensify. That crescendo assures our sincerity. It also should assure us a Happy & Healthy Sweet New Year.
[Emphaasis added]

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5758-yomkippur/>

Yom Kippur: A Thought for Shabbat Shuva and Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Dov Linzer

Rosh Yeshiva, 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 we 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)

From my archives.

Insights from Chassidic Tradition

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

[Ed. note: Rabbi Katz is on hiatus for July and August. His outstanding parsha messages, including insights from the Chassidic tradition, will resume when he returns.]

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY.

Angel for Shabbat: Teshuva/Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Dr. Bruno Bettelheim wrote that "today's popular conviction is that life is a rat race." People have become so engrossed in the battles to get ahead materially in this world, that they tend to put aside the claims of the soul.

As we compete in the rat race, we may not even realize how thoroughly we have abandoned our inner freedom, our quest for ultimate meaning. We want to win the rat race even if it means compromising or abandoning the values that imbue life with genuine meaning.

Some people wake up one day and ask: why am I doing this? What is my life all about? How can I get out of this rat race? They respond by trying to reorganize their lives and reclaim their autonomy. Others may go through life without responding to these questions, ignoring them, suppressing them. They are so busy competing and trying to outdo everyone else that they do not allow themselves the luxury of thinking too deeply about the meaning of life.

We cannot genuinely "win" at life unless we "lose" the rat race. A life well lived is characterized by calm wisdom, a transcendental sense of life's meaning, and an ability to love, empathize with and help others. It does not view life as an eternal and meaningless battle to get "ahead."

People in the rat race usually are not evil or corrupt, although some are. Many are simply drawn into the race because they have not thoroughly thought through their philosophy of life or do not have the independence of spirit to stand up for their values and ideals. They are driven by conformism or quasi-totalitarianism. They surrender their freedom and autonomy in order to play the game of life according to the rules of the rat race.

As we enter the days of Shabbat Teshuva and Yom Kippur, we will have ample time to re-evaluate our lives. The season of repentance offers us a new opportunity to review our past, and re-direct our futures. Life doesn't have to be--and should not be--a rat race. We each have the power and responsibility to assert our freedom and autonomy, to consider our souls as well as our bodies. May the forthcoming holy days be a time of spiritual growth and purification.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City. This column is drawn from the book, *Losing the Rat Race, Winning at Life*, by Rabbi Marc D. Angel. The book may be ordered through the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please send your request to info@jewishideas.org

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Thoughts for Shabbat Teshuvah 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: Wherever 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.** [emphasis added]

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.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

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<https://www.jewishideas.org/article/thoughts-shabbat-teshuvah-and-yom-kippur>

Angels For a Day... and Beyond

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

One of the distinctive features of Yom Kippur is that we are compared to angels. We wear white clothing, like the Kittel, to be like the angels (Ramoh 610:4); we recite Boruch Sheim (the statement which follows Shema Yisroel) aloud, just like the angels (Mishna Berura 619:8). Which raises the question: What exactly is an angel?

Rav Elya Lopian explained that angels are unique beings in that they have free choice but also have moral clarity because they are not physical beings like humans are. Rav Matisyahu Salomon illustrated this by comparing it to a flame, into which no person would want to place his hand. Although we have free choice, the clarity that we would get burned, and that would be painful, stops us from doing it. Similarly, angels have free choice, but because they have clarity of Hashem's greatness and the damaging effect of choosing to do bad, they choose (generally) to do the right thing.

After all, if angels didn't have free choice, what good would all their praises to Hashem be worth? It would be nothing more than turning on a synthesized voice player to play a preprogrammed text. Clearly, angels have free choice. But because they have clarity, they choose correctly and can serve as role models for us.

This is how we describe angels every morning in Birchos Krias Shema, *"They accept Hashem as king."* On Yom Kippur, we too have clarity, and we are compared to them.

One of the drawbacks of being human is that we are deeply embedded in the physical world and see things through the eyes of nature. It is sometimes hard for us to recognize Hashem as all powerful. Angels have an easier time with that clarity because they exist above nature and can see that nature simply obeys that which Hashem decides.

Recently I had the opportunity to watch a child playing army. I noticed how he enacted battles and wiped-out armies on whim. I realized that this could well be an analogy to how Hashem, all powerful creator, relates to this world. To us, big armies are formidable. To Hashem it is child's play. He can wipe out the Spanish armada by a simple change in the weather and winds; He can enable General George Washington's army to escape a British ambush with his cannon intact by simply causing the ground to crust over with frost.

On Yom Kippur we sing many stanzas that pay tribute to Hashem's might. Not only are they true, but they help us connect with that clarity.

Rabbi Doniel Schwab (Clifton, NJ) provided a powerful analogy to our goal during this special time of year. Consider if the king of Morocco would come visit the United States and we would pay tribute to him, according him all the honor that a visiting monarch deserves. We would roll out the red carpet; together we would chant, *"Long live the king!"* All of the tributes would be so impressive that the king might actually start thinking that there is something to them. Yet, one of his advisors would then inform him that although the tributes are nice, they aren't really all they are made out to be. *"After all,"* the advisor would say, *"these are Americans. Even if they say you are wonderful, they are not your subjects. They have their own President, their own government, and their own system that they pay tribute to."*

Similarly, there are two ways that we can experience Yom Kippur. One way is as observers, simply stating how wonderful it is that Hashem is (a) king, but still have a long list of things that we personally pay tribute to. The other way is to make it personal. To have clarity, like angels, to realize that Hashem is the king. To view our lives as a gift from Him and to strive to serve Him well in all aspects of our lives.

As Moshe told the angels when he went to receive the Torah, mankind is very different than angels. The entire Torah with its many mitzvos is clearly meant for mankind. It is we who have the challenges of balancing the physical and spiritual both in action and in the clarity of perspective. For one day a year we ascend to the clarity and purity of the angels.

May Hashem enable us to maintain that clarity throughout the year.

For Family Discussion:

Regarding Rav Matisyahu Salomon's example of a flame: Nobody needs willpower to keep his hand out of fire. What's something you avoid without even thinking about it — and what's something you have to fight yourself over every time? What's the difference between the two?

In Rabbi Schwab's analogy to the king of Morocco: The crowds cheer, but they go home to their own president and their own system. What are the other "governments" in our lives that we quietly pay tribute to the rest of the year?

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos and a meaningful Yom Kippur.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of over 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Parshat Ha'azinu

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 5782

In Parshas Ha'azinu we read of a powerful and stirring warning and promise that Moshe shares with his beloved people as he prepares to leave this world. There is much subtlety and nuance, and it is well worth a careful study of the commentaries to understand the depth and import of Moshe's words. As it contains Moshe's words of rebuke, encouragement and warning for all future generations, it is of special importance during the Ten Days of Repentance. What better way is there to encourage ourselves to growth and change than a careful study of Moshe's closing words?

One verse which I find particularly striking and inspiring is one of Moshe's opening expressions. As Moshe first turns his attention to future errors he exclaims with astonishment *"Is it to Hashem that you repaid such, base and unwise people?!"* (Devarim 32:6) Rash"i explains that Moshe's astonishment was not directed at the wickedness nor at the corruptness of sin. Rather, Moshe's shock was at how we could do this to ourselves. As the verses go on to explain, Hashem has been uniquely involved in our nation's survival and success for generations. Hashem has not only rescued us from our tormentors and persecutors but has also elevated us and raised us to the upper echelons of society throughout history. Furthermore, it is Hashem who holds the keys to our future and determines our future success or failure, whether our future holds difficulty or tranquility. How could we turn away from Hashem after all the love, care and concern He has already showered upon us, when our future lays in His hands?!

Moshe's astonishment at our sins lies not in the level of evil or perversion in our sins. Moshe is only astonished at how we could be so foolish as to give up on the great gift of a true relationship with the Creator and Master of the world, and how we could do so at our own risk.

The Gemara Shabbos (31a) teaches us that this message is not only a powerful tool for growth and repentance but lies at the very center of a Torah life. The Gemara famously relates how a non-Jew came to Hillel the Elder and asked him to convert him while he was standing on one foot. Hillel responded *"What is hated upon you, do not do to your friend. The rest is commentary. Go learn."* Rash"i (ibid.) explains that Hillel's message was about our relationship with G-d. The Torah life of a Jew is rooted in the feeling that G-d is likened to a beloved friend who has always been with us. As Shlomo Hamelech says (Mishlei 27:10) *"Do not abandon your Friend and the Friend of your father."* It is from this perspective that we properly approach Torah – once G-d has shown His love for us, we must show our love in return. We would not want anyone to violate or ignore what is important to us. How can we ignore or violate that which is important to Hashem?

The Chofetz Chaim gives a powerful parable to illustrate this concept with regards to mitzvos between man and man. Imagine two sons who go off into the world and forge their own paths in life. One son is extremely successful, while the other lives a life of poverty. After many years, the sons return home to see their ailing father and share precious time with him. The father turns to the poor son and talks to him at length, seemingly not even noticing the wealthy son. Eventually the wealthy son tearfully speaks up saying "Dad, I'm here, too." The father turns to him and asks "Who are you? You see this poor man here in rags. He is my son and important to me. If you were my son, he would also be important to you." We can apply this parable to all areas of Torah. If we are G-d's children, whatever is important to Him, must be important to us.

Hashem has displayed His willingness and His desire to be our Father and to shower His love and blessing upon us. We now have to ask ourselves, *"Am I ready to be G-d's child? Do I care about G-d's will and what's important to Him?"* May we all merit to live up to our heritage, and the great gift of being G-d's children.

From my archives.

* Rav at Sha'arei Tefilla and the co-founder of the RI Torah Network in Providence, Rhode Island. For several years, Rabbi Singer was the Rabbi at Am HaTorah Congregation in Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer's recent Devrei Torah normally come as podcasts rather than texts.

Yonah – Jonah, Wake Up!

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * (2014)

Faithful to Sephardic tradition, we have started Selichot this week (Ki Tetze), not because we are more sinful than other contingencies, but because we love the atmosphere of Selichot at early dawn, permeated with soulfulness and longing. The Selichot appropriately open with the poem:

Son of man, how dare you sleep, wake up and pray with supplication.

This line makes direct reference to the famous biblical narrative of Jonah which we will read at Mincha of Yom Kippur, thus completing a full circle from the beginning to the end of the High Holidays period.

The story of Jonah is the story of the decline and fall of the human being, which occurs when we refuse to face our fears, our anger and our problems. Jonah runs away from God and in the process keeps descending lower and lower: he goes down to Jaffa and boards a ship (lit. goes down on the ship), goes down to the stern, and sinks in deep sleep. He is sound asleep amidst a terrible storm which could claim his life along with all the others on board when the captain approaches him and shakes him: *"how dare you sleep? Rise and call out to your God!"*

Many of the tragedies and hardships which befall us are a result of a Jonahesque behavior. When we allow ourselves to give up, to cease trying, to become indifferent and apathetic because we think that nothing is going to change, we seal our fate together with that of many others.

Globally, this proclivity to inaction is well demonstrated by the oblivious and carefree approach to the destruction the human race is wreaking on the planet. Decades of spilling pollutants into our waterways, sinking chemicals into the ground and releasing poisonous and harmful gasses to the air have placed us at the eye of a terrible ecological storm, but most governments and individuals are still sleeping, cuddling in their little patch of heaven.

Nationally, we see now a replay of the horrific events which led to 9/11, when the U.S. chose to ignore a series of attacks, signaling the terrorists that it is tired of monitoring its facilities or enforcing security measures. The lack of proper response to the attempt at the Twin Towers in 1993, the bombings of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 and the USS Cole in 2000, emboldened Al Qaida and encouraged it to carry out attacks on a much larger scale, which left the U.S. devastated and embroiled in a decade long military quagmire.

The same chilling scenario is playing out now as the U.S. and European powers choose to ignore the true danger of extremists and nationalists around the world, focusing instead on Israel in the hope that if the great nations will kneel before the altar of terrorism and will sacrifice on it this tiny state, the aircraft carrier of the Middle East, the blood thirsty leaders will be appeased and those nations will be able to go back to their ignorantly blissful slumber. The shortsighted leaders of those nations refuse to acknowledge that millions of refugees in Africa, hundreds of kidnapped girls in Nigeria, hundreds of thousands murdered and displaced in Syria and who knows how many tortured by ISIS, are all, in one way or another, a result of the indifference and apathy of world powers.

Inaction and submissiveness to difficult reality lead to exacerbation of the situation as we can see in the Parasha of this week, Ki Tetze. Ignoring a child's emotional needs might turn him into a criminal (Det. 21:15-23); A strong warning against ignoring a neighbor's potential loss (22:1-4); Negligence to take safety measures results in tragedy (22:8); The apathy of the Ammonites and Moabites toward the plight of the Israelites caused their alienation from them, and as we know now, their

disappearance from the stage of world history (23:1-7).

But let us return to the Selichot and to the state of the individual. The Torah goads the human being towards Tikkun Olam, the improvement and perfection of life on earth, and that lofty goal can only be achieved by the combined power of determined, dedicated and most importantly, alert, individuals.

The Selichot are a pressing call for inspection and evaluation. The opening verse, drawing on the story of Jonah, asks us directly: Are you awake? Do you know what is going on around you? And as we sail through the Selichot, we can add many more questions:

Who are my kids' friends? How am I treated by or treating my spouse? When will this day be over? When will the prayers be over? If I had a chance to do things over, would I change anything? What have I learned last year, week, or day? How did I apply this knowledge to my life? What am I doing to make this world a better place? Do the people I interact with on a daily basis love, respect, revere, or detest me? Am I sleeping, and if so, when I am going to wake up? Did I set up the alarm clock? Is this a nightmare?

Let us all rise and shine, take to mind, take to heart and take action.

Shabbat Shalom.

Many 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 rights to this material.

Note: Rabbi Ovadia posted this Dvar Torah for Ki Tetze in 2014, but it fits perfectly for Mincha on Yom Kippur.

* Senior Rabbi, Congregation Ramath Orah (New York, NY); Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Previously, 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 include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *

Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

Shanah Tovah everyone,

I hope you are all doing well and that your year has started on the right foot.

It was really great to see such a full Shul and such a nice crowd throughout Rosh Hashanah. There was a beautiful atmosphere in shul, and I want to thank everyone who came, participated, and helped make the chag so special. I look forward to seeing even more of you on Yom Kippur, and I hope we can keep this attendance and this energy going throughout the year.

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the year, and there is something very powerful about starting off with the right momentum. We have just experienced a beautiful chag together, and now the question is how we take that feeling, that connection, and that commitment into the rest of the year. The way we begin something often sets the tone for what follows, and I hope we can use these first days to build a year of more tefillah, more learning, more community, and more

connection with one another.

And hopefully, if we keep seeing numbers like these, we will be forced to build a bigger shul very, very soon!

We have a lot of events coming up, so please keep an eye on the emails and make sure you are aware of everything happening in the community.

But just for this weekend, before Yom Kippur, there are two important things I want to mention.

1. Musical Tashlich – Sunday at 10:00 AM

We are doing something a little different and out of the box: a small community hike and musical Tashlich to the beach. I encourage as many of you as possible to come. It will be a beautiful opportunity to spend some time together, enjoy the outdoors, and continue the spirit of Rosh Hashanah as we prepare for Yom Kippur.

2. Kaparot – Erev Yom Kippur

There is a custom on Erev Yom Kippur of Kaparot, traditionally done by swinging a chicken or money above one's head. We will not be doing it here with a chicken, but those who wish to do Kaparot with money are welcome to do so.

You can say the following (Hebrew omitted); transliteration:

Zeh chalifati, zeh temurati, zeh kaparati. Zeh hakesef yelech l'tzedakah, va'ani elech l'chayim tovim aruchim u'leshalom.

Translation:

"This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This money will go to charity, and I will proceed to a good, long life and peace." The money used for Kaparot goes to tzedakah. You are welcome to send that money to AHC as well.

Finally, we are on the first Shabbat of the year, and we are starting with our right foot forward. We are having a BA Shabbaton this Shabbat, with lots of ruach in shul. I look forward to seeing many of you join us and add to that atmosphere. Let's take the momentum of Rosh Hashanah and carry it into the year ahead.

Wishing you all a Gmar Chatima Tova, a Shanah Tovah, and a Shabbat Shalom.

B'Ahavat Yisrael,
Rabbi Netanel

* Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobi, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

** Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: <https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher> .

Rav Kook Torah

Haazinu: The Diversity of Israel

An anecdote relates how a certain Jew was stranded for many years on a deserted island. When he was finally rescued, he boasted of his many accomplishments on the island, including the construction of two synagogues.

“Very impressive,” responded his rescuers. “But why two synagogues?”

“This is the synagogue that I attend,” explained the man, pointing at one structure. “The other one is the synagogue I refuse to step foot in.”

The joke would not be humorous if it did not contain a kernel of truth. The Jewish people often seem to be “blessed” with an overabundance of infighting. Why is there so much division and conflict?

The Borders of the Nations

The song of Ha’azinu compares the heritage of Israel to that of the other nations of the world:

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance... He set up the borders of the nations, corresponding to the number of Israel’s children. (Deut. 32:8)

What are these “borders of the nations”? And in what way do they correspond to the “number” of Jewish people?

Every nation is blessed with unique national traits. Each nation possesses special talents and makes a unique contribution to the world. This specialty may lie in the arts, sciences, organizational ability, and so on. The verse refers to these areas of specialization as “borders.”

All of the talents that can be found among the nations of the world also exist in the “number” — that is, in the diversity — of the Jewish people. Historically, we have seen that Jews were always at the forefront of a remarkably diverse range of professions and disciplines.

Seventy Souls

The Midrash describes the diversity of Israel by comparing the size of Jacob’s family who went down to Egypt — seventy souls — with the seventy nations of the world. This number represents the seventy archetypical souls, each with its own unique characteristics and talents. When God commanded Moses to organize leaders to govern the people, He told Moses to gather seventy elders (Num. 11:16). With these leaders, Moses brought together the people’s diverse range of outlooks and natural gifts.

The multi-talented diversity of the Jewish people, however, has a downside; it makes them more prone to internal friction and conflict. Each talent strives to express itself fully, often at the expense of other talents. The Sages noted that “*The greater the person, greater his evil inclination*” (Sukkah 52a). This insight is true not only for the individual, but also for the nation. When a nation is blessed with great talents, it has a greater potential for internal strife.

The Floating Palace

The Midrash uses a striking image as a metaphor for the Jewish people. It compares the nation to a palace constructed on top of many boats. As long as the boats are tied together, the Midrash notes, the palace will remain secure.

It is natural for each boat to try to make its own separate way in the sea. It is only the palace on top that keeps the fleet of boats together and ensures that they sail together in the same direction.

What is this palace? It is the force that guards against internal strife and unifies the Jewish people — the Torah itself. In its highest state, the Torah encompasses all areas of knowledge. The seventy elders, representing the full range of souls, gathered together to unite the people under one flag, “to perfect the world under the reign of God” (from the Aleinu prayer).

Diverse disciplines are harmoniously united when they can emphasize their contribution to the common good, as developed and refined under the guidance of the Torah. Then the diversity of the Jewish people becomes a blessing, as the nation is united via the root of its inner being — the Torah.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Orot* p. 169, paragraph 6; Midbar Shur, pp. 110-115.)

<https://ravkooktorah.org/haazinu58>

Yom Kippur: The Challenge of Jewish Repentance (September 16, 2017)

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

The Ten Days of Repentance are the holy of holies of Jewish time. They begin this Wednesday evening (ed: this year, last Friday night) with Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and culminate 10 days later with Yom Kippur, our Day of Atonement. At no other time do I feel so close to God, and I suspect the same is true for most Jews.

These days constitute a courtroom drama like no other. The Judge is God Himself, and we are on trial for our lives. It begins on Rosh Hashanah, with the sounding of the shofar, the ram’s horn, announcing that the court is in session. The Book of Life, in which our fate will be inscribed, now lies open. As we say in prayer, “*On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed, who will live and who will die.*” At home, we eat an apple dipped in honey as a symbol of our hope for a sweet new year.

On Yom Kippur, the atmosphere reaches a peak of intensity in a day of fasting and prayer. Repeatedly we confess our sins, whole alphabetical litanies of them, including ones we probably had neither the time nor the imagination to commit. We throw ourselves on the mercy of the court, which is to say, on God Himself. Write us, we say, in the Book of Life.

And at the end of a long and wrenching day, we finish as we began 10 days earlier, with the sound of the ram’s horn - this time not with tears and fears but with cautious yet confident hope. We have admitted the worst about ourselves and survived.

Beneath the surface of this long religious ritual lies one of the more transformative stories of the human spirit. The sociologist Philip Rieff pointed out that the movement from paganism to monotheism was a transition from fate to faith. By this he meant that in the world of myth, people were pitted against powerful, capricious forces personified as gods who were at best indifferent, at worst hostile, to humankind. All you could do was try to propitiate, battle or outwit them. This was a culture of character and fate, and its noblest expression was the literature of Greek tragedy.

Jews came to see the world in a completely different way. The book of Bereishit opens with God making humans “*in His image and likeness.*” This phrase has become so familiar to us that we forget how paradoxical it is, since for the Hebrew Bible, God has no image and likeness. As the narrative quickly makes clear, what humans have in common with God is freedom and moral responsibility.

The Jewish drama is less about character and fate than about will and choice. To the monotheistic mind, the real battles are not “*out there,*” against external forces of darkness, but “*in here,*” between the bad and better angels of our nature. As the religion writer Jack Miles once pointed out, you can see the difference in the contrast between Sophocles and Shakespeare. For Sophocles, Oedipus must battle against blind, inexorable fate. For Shakespeare, writing in a monotheistic age, the drama of *Hamlet* lies within, between “*the native hue of resolution*” and “*the pale cast of thought.*”

The trouble is, of course, that faced with choice, we often make the wrong one. Given a second chance, Adam and Eve would probably pass on the fruit. Cain might work a little harder on his anger management. And there is a straight line from these biblical episodes to the destruction left by Homo sapiens: war, murder, human devastation and environmental destruction.

That is still our world today. The key fact about us, according to the Bible, is that uniquely in an otherwise law-governed universe, we are capable of breaking the law – a power that we too often relish exercising.

This raises an acute theological dilemma. How are we to reconcile God's high hopes for humanity with our shabby and threadbare moral record? The short answer is forgiveness.

God wrote forgiveness into the script. He always gives us a second chance, and more. All we have to do is to acknowledge our wrongs, apologise, make amends, and resolve to behave better – and God forgives. It allows us to hold simultaneously to the highest moral aspirations while admitting honestly our deepest moral failings. That is the drama of the Jewish High Holy Days.

At the heart of this vision is what the post-Holocaust writer Viktor Frankl called our “*search for meaning*.” The great institutions of modernity were not constructed to provide meaning. Science tells us how the world came to be but not why. Technology gives us power but cannot tell us how to use it. The market gives us choices but no guidance as to which choices to make. Modern democracies give us a maximum of personal freedom but a minimum of shared morality. You can acknowledge the beauty of all these institutions, yet most of us seek something more.

Meaning comes not from systems of thought but from stories, and the Jewish story is among the most unusual of all. It tells us that God sought to make us His partners in the work of creation, but we repeatedly disappointed Him. Yet He never gives up. He forgives us time and again. The real religious mystery for Judaism is not our faith in God but God's faith in us.

This is not, as atheists and skeptics sometimes claim, a comforting fiction but quite the opposite. Judaism is God's call to human responsibility, to create a world that is a worthy home for His Presence. That is why Jews are so often to be found as doctors fighting disease, economists fighting poverty, lawyers fighting injustice, teachers fighting ignorance and therapists fighting depression and despair.

Judaism is a supremely activist faith for which the greatest religious challenge is to heal some of the wounds of our deeply fractured world. As Frankl put it: The real question is not ‘what do we want from life?’ but ‘what does life want from us?’

That is the question we are asked on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. As we ask God to write us in the Book of Life, He asks us: what have you done with your life thus far? Have you thought about others or only about yourself? Have you brought healing to a place of human pain or hope where you found despair? You may have been a success, but have you also been a blessing? Have you written other people in the Book of Life?

To ask these questions once a year in the company of others publicly willing to confess their faults, lifted by the words and music of ancient prayers, knowing that God forgives every failure we acknowledge as a failure, and that He has faith in us even when we lose faith in ourselves, can be a life-changing experience. That is when we discover that, even in a secular age, God is still there, open to us whenever we are willing to open ourselves to Him.

Footnote:

1. Questions to ask ourselves each new year. Rabbi Sacks first published this article in The Wall Street Journal, 16 September 2017.

<https://rabbisacks.org/archive/challenge-jewish-repentance/>

Life Lessons From the Parshah: Haazinu: Our Eternal Covenant

By Yehoshua B. Gordon, z"l *

The Torah portion of Haazinu consists largely of a 70-line shirah — a poetic song delivered by Moses to the Jewish People on the last day of his life, which functions as an eternal covenant that Moses entered the Jewish People into on that day.

The shirah is unique, unlike any other section in the Torah. Even the way it is written stands out: instead of the usual wide columns, each column is split into two narrow ones. The song is entirely poetic and quite cryptic; much has been written about its interpretations and symbolism. At its core, it is a prophecy about what will transpire for the Jewish People — the good and the bad — until the end of time.

The shirah is so significant and such a vital part of our heritage that, throughout the ages, parents would encourage — even cajole or sometimes bribe — their children to memorize it. In doing so, this covenant of testimony, which Moses gave to every man, woman, and child on the day of his passing, would be known by all.

Celestial and Terrestrial Witnesses

Moses begins, *“Listen, O heavens, and I will speak! And let the earth hear the words of my mouth!”*¹ Moses is tasking Heaven and Earth with bearing witness to this covenant.

Why heaven and earth?

“I am but a human being of flesh and blood,” Moses said. *“Tomorrow, I will have passed on. If the Jewish People say, ‘What covenant? We never took a covenant upon ourselves. Do you have proof?’ there will be nobody to refute them.”*² So, he calls upon heaven and earth to bear witness — these witnesses will exist forever; as long as there is a world, there will be Heaven and Earth.

In addition, Moses chose heaven and earth so that when the Jewish People adhere to the covenant — when they keep the Torah and mitzvot — it will be heaven and earth that give them their reward. *“The vine will give its fruit, the earth will yield its produce, and the heavens will give their dew.”*³ And when, G d forbid, the Jewish People forsake the covenant, the hand of the witnesses will inflict punishment upon them, as it says in the Shema prayer which we recite three times daily, *“And He will close off the heaven that there will be no rain, and the soil will not give its produce.”*⁴ There will be hunger, famine, and suffering, brought by the heavens and the earth.

History as a Guide

“Remember the days of old; reflect upon the years of [other] generations. Ask your father, and he will tell you; your elders and they will inform you,” the shirah continues.⁵

In other words: *“Those were the days, my friend.”* Remember them. Consider what happened in each passing generation. Those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are doomed to repeat them. Examine and learn from your history. And if you are too young to remember, ask your parents, grandparents, or the elders, and they will tell you.

Rashi explains that Moses is not only referring to biological parents and grandparents but also to spiritual ones — the prophets and the sages.

The fathers, grandfathers, prophets, and sages will tell you what G d Almighty did to those who angered Him in previous generations.

Consider the generation of Enosh. Enosh was Adam’s grandson, and idol worship began in his days. In describing how a G dly world could become idolatrous, Maimonides writes, *“During the times of Enosh, mankind made a great mistake, and the wise men of that generation gave thoughtless counsel. Enosh himself was one of those who erred.”*⁶ People began

worshiping symbols of stars and planets, but they quickly dropped the symbolism, and the symbols themselves became the gods. And G d, in His anger, brought the lesser-known biblical flood — a tsunami of sorts — that flooded a third of the inhabited world, to punish the sinners.⁷

“When things are going well,” Moses warns, *“When life is good and the economy is booming and you are comfortably settled in the Land of Israel, don’t forget about G d and wander off into exotic idol worship.”* For the umpteenth time, Moses is warning the Jewish People not to be lured by the idolatrous practices of the Canaanites. Remember what happened to the previous generations that angered G d. If you want to know your future, look to your past.

But look hopefully to the future as well, said Moses. G d can and will do wondrously good things for you, bringing you to experience the days of Moshiach, the wonderful days of the World to Come.

G d’s Children

“Because the L-rd’s portion is His people Jacob, the lot of His inheritance.”⁸

Moses refers to Jacob, the third of the patriarchs, as the *“lot of His inheritance.”* Rashi, quoting the Midrash,⁹ explains that Jacob and his merits are like a rope, which in Hebrew shares a root with the word *“inheritance.”*

When the Jewish People sinned with the Golden Calf, G d wanted to destroy them and establish a new nation from Moses. Hearing this, Moses argued:

“If a chair with three legs can’t stand, how is a chair with one leg going to stand? The Jewish people have three pillars: our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The third, Jacob, is crowned with three merits. He is the only one who can claim to descend from both a righteous father and a righteous grandfather. While Isaac had a righteous father, he did not have a righteous grandfather, as Abraham’s father, Terah, was a seller of idols.

Jacob thus had a triple merit — the merit of his grandfather and father, as well as his own. Jacob was strong like a three-stranded rope: each strand may be weak on its own, but when twined together they become a strong core.

The great sage Rabbi Akiva, himself a descendant of converts, understood the greatness of every single human being. He said every person is created in the image of G d, and every human being is precious to G d. But the Jews have an added distinction — we are the children of G d. We, who descend from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, are G d’s children, the lot of His inheritance.

It is the Children of Israel — Jacob’s descendants — who have been selected with the responsibility to bring G d’s light into the world. Every Jew has a special mission given to us by G d, to illuminate not only our own house, our own family, our own people, but to bring light to the entire world.

In the Desert, Love Bloomed

“He found them in a desert land and a desolate, howling wasteland. He encompassed them and bestowed understanding upon them; He protected them as the pupil of His eye.”¹⁰

G d was overjoyed by our dedication to Him while we were in the desert. It was there that G d offered the Torah to all the nations but the Jewish People were the only ones to accept it.

We deserve a lot of credit, says Moses, for following G d into the barren, desolate, scorpion-filled desert.

It would have been understandable if the Jewish People said, *“Moses, a desert? Are you kidding? You want us to leave civilization and follow you there?!”*

But we didn't say that, we didn't bail on Moses, we followed him. Every year in the Rosh Hashanah prayers, we quote from Jeremiah: So said the L-rd, *"I remember to you the lovingkindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me in the desert, in a land not sown."*¹¹

Hidden Blessing

*"I will link evils upon them. I will use up My arrows on them."*¹²

On the surface, this appears to be a curse, part of Moses' admonition of what will happen when the nation turns to sin. But dig a little deeper, explains Rashi, and this reveals a tremendous blessing. *"I will use up my arrows,"* G d says, *"and you, My children, will still be around."*

In a similar vein, G d promises to destroy the Holy Temple when the Jews are undeserving, but He will not destroy us! *"Instead of destroying the Jewish people, G d poured out His wrath on sticks and stones."*¹³

The Holy Temples may have been destroyed, we may have been exiled to the four corners of the earth, but the Jewish nation is eternal. We will always survive.

We have a tremendous protective shield: the merit of our forefathers. Every time we stand to pray the Amidah, the first thing we say is, *"G d, you are the G d of our grandfathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."* We have the protection of our zaidies, our grandfathers.

We are confident in G d's protection, in His love, and in His treating us as His children, even — especially — in the face of national tragedy and pain.

With this shirah, Moses empowers us to hold on throughout all the generations. When the suffering hits us, when the calamities befall us, we take comfort in knowing that it was all predicted long ago — we have the shirah as a witness. And we know that good times will come, too.

Our ancestors experienced the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Our people have endured unspeakable suffering throughout the ages. Our grandparents survived the Holocaust. And in our time, we are experiencing the brutal savagery of Islamic terrorism.

The Rebbe repeatedly emphasized that good times and redemption are right around the corner; if we just listen closely, we can hear the footsteps of Moshiach.

We Will Be Avenged

At the end of the shirah, G d addresses the nations who dared to harm us: *"Sing out praise, O you nations, for His people! For He will avenge the blood of His servants, inflict revenge upon His adversaries, and appease His land and His people."*¹⁴

Anyone who harms My people, says G d, will receive their just desserts. Yes, I predicted that nations would harm the Jews, but they went overboard and I will exact vengeance.

"I will intoxicate My arrows with blood, and My sword will consume flesh, from the blood of the slain and the captives, from the first breach of the enemy."

This is G d's message to those who have murdered the Jewish People for no reason; for those who take innocent Jews captive, for those who wreak death and destruction and calamity upon His children: You don't mess with G d's children and get away with it.

The last time I was privileged to spend Shabbat with my father, Rabbi Sholom B. Gordon, of blessed memory, was at his home in Maplewood, New Jersey, about six weeks before his passing.

We were on our way home from the synagogue on Friday night, and my father, weak from the illness that would soon take his life, struggled to walk. As we made our way down the road, we suddenly heard a booming voice shouting at us from across the street. *"Forgive me! Forgive me!"* a man shouted over and over. *"Rabbi! Forgive me!"*

At first, my father pointedly ignored him, but then he looked across the street at the man, and with a strength I didn't imagine he had left, he said loudly, *"I will not forgive you. I will not forgive you!"* I was shocked, as I had never heard my father say that to anybody. My father was a gentle, loving soul.

But then my father explained:

That's the captain," he began. "He is an officer from the concentration camps in Nazi Germany. He once visited me in my office. He came to tell me that he can't find peace. He became an alcoholic; he can't sleep at night; he can't live with himself. He is overcome with guilt for his role in the Holocaust. 'You're a rabbi,' he said to me, 'You're a spiritual leader representing the Jewish People. I am filled with remorse; please forgive me.'"

"I will not forgive you," I said. 'I can't forgive you. How can I forgive you? Only G d can forgive you. I will not forgive you.' He started drinking more and more, and whenever he sees me, he asks me to forgive him. But I cannot. Who are we to forgive the spilling of the innocent blood of six million Jews?"

This was Moses' message to his people right before he passed away. We will not forgive those who spill innocent Jewish blood.

We will not forgive, and we will never forget.

And neither will G d.

That is the message we must always remember. For every calamity predicted by Moses in the shirah, we must remember that we will survive and our enemies will be dealt with. And most importantly, good times are coming.

"Remember the days of old; reflect upon the years of [other] generations."

Good times are coming. They always do. Just ask your father and your grandfather.

May we merit to see all of the good that was promised, with the advent of the Ultimate Redemption, when "death will be swallowed up for eternity, and G d will wipe the tears off of all faces,"¹⁵ with the coming of our righteous Moshiach, may it be speedily in our days. Amen.

Footnotes:

1. Deuteronomy 32:1.
2. Rashi to Deuteronomy 32:1.
3. Zechariah 8:12.

4. Deuteronomy 11:17.
5. Deuteronomy 32:7.
6. Laws of Idol Worship 1:1.
7. Mechilta, Yitro 6; Genesis Rabbah 23:11.
8. Deuteronomy 32:9.
9. Sifrei 32:9.
10. Deuteronomy 32:10.
11. Jeremiah 2:2.
12. Deuteronomy 32:23.
13. Eicha Rabbah 4:14.
14. Deuteronomy 32:43.
15. Isaiah 25:8.

* Rabbi Yehoshua Gordon directed Chabad of the Valley in Tarzana, CA until his passing in 2016.

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https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6599641/jewish/Our-Eternal-Covenant.htm

Ha'azinu: Riding High

By Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky *

G-d told Moses to encourage the people to remember their history, recalling how G-d chose them to be His people, gave them the Torah, and shepherded them through the desert on their way from Egypt to the Land of Israel.

He made them ride on the highest place on earth, in order that they might eat the produce of its fields. He nurtured them with honey from a rock, and oil from a flint-stone. (Deut. 32:13)

Our task in life, as reflected in this verse, is squarely centered “on earth,” to refine and elevate the physical world by raising its Divine consciousness.

Nevertheless, in order for us to effectively do this, G-d has figuratively placed us “on the highest place on earth,” that is, He has made us intrinsically separate and aloof from the downward pull of materiality. Moreover, “He made us ride” on this “highest place,” meaning that He put us in control of steering the world toward its true and ultimate goal.

Thus, as the humble representatives of G-d and His Torah on earth, we should view ourselves as the world’s stewards, selflessly and devotedly inspiring humanity to realize its fullest potential and teaching it how best to do so. When we assume this attitude, we are assured that the world will respond respectfully and lovingly.

– From *Daily Wisdom* 3 *

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* by Rabbi Moshe Wisniefsky.

With wishes for a sweet and blessed new year.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Moses the Man

That very day the Lord spoke to Moses, "Go up this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, opposite Jericho, and view the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the people of Israel for a possession. And die on the mountain which you go up, and be gathered to your people ... For you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel." Deut. 32:48-52

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

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

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

Other sages were more radical still. For them Moses was Rabbeinu, "our rabbi" – not a king, a political or military leader, but a scholar and master of the law, a role which they invested with astonishing authority. They went so far as to say that when Moses prayed for God to forgive the people for the Golden Calf, God

replied, "I cannot, for I have already vowed, 'One who sacrifices to any God shall be destroyed'" (Ex. 22:19), and I cannot revoke My vow." Moses replied, "Master of the Universe, have You not taught me the laws of annulling vows? One may not annul his own vow, but a sage may do so." Moses thereupon annulled God's vow (Shemot Rabbah 43:4).

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

For Maimonides, Moses was radically different from all other prophets in four ways. First, others received their prophecies in dreams or visions, while Moses received his when awake. Second, to the others God spoke in parables obliquely, but to Moses He spoke directly and lucidly. Third, the other prophets were terrified when God appeared to them but of Moses it says, "Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11).

Fourth, other prophets needed to undergo lengthy preparations to hear the Divine word; Moses spoke to God whenever he wanted or needed to. He was "always prepared, like one of the ministering angels" (Laws of the Foundations of Torah 7:6).

Yet what is so moving about the portrayal of Moses in the Torah is that he appears before us as quintessentially human. No religion has more deeply and systemically insisted on the absolute otherness of God and Man, Heaven and Earth, the infinite and the finite. Other cultures have blurred the boundary, making some human beings seem godlike, perfect, infallible. There is such a tendency – marginal to be sure, but never entirely absent – within Jewish life itself: to see sages as saints, and great scholars as angels, to gloss over their doubts and shortcomings and turn them into superhuman emblems of perfection. Tanach, however, is greater than that. It tells us that God, who is never less than God, never asks us to be more than simply human.

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

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

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

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

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

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

By David and Sarah Maslow
on the occasion of the yahrzeit
of David's mother,
Tovah bas Nissan, a"h, 9 Tishrei

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United States, identified not with a Christian figure but with Moses.

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

Franz Kafka gave voice to a different and no less compelling truth: He is on the track of Canaan all his life; it is incredible that he should see the land only when on the verge of death. This dying vision of it can only be intended to illustrate how incomplete a moment is human life; incomplete because a life like this could last forever and still be nothing but a moment. Moses fails to enter Canaan not because his life was too short but because it is a human life.[1]

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

In one of its most powerful statements about Moses, the Torah states that he was "one hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were undimmed and his strength unabated" (Deut. 34:7). I used to think that these were merely two sequential phrases, until I realised that the first was the explanation for the second. Why was Moses' strength unabated? Because his eyes were undimmed – because he never lost the ideals of his youth. Though he sometimes lost faith in himself and his ability to lead, he never lost faith in the cause: in God, service, freedom, the right, the good, and the holy. His words at the end of his life were as impassioned as they had been at the beginning.

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

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

Dvar Torah Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What is the correct title for this coming Shabbat, the Shabbat which takes place between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur? Some people call it Shabbat Shuva, others call it Shabbat Teshuvah. Now actually both are fine, but which one is better?

If you are going to call the day Shabbat Shuvah, then it would be consistent with our rationale for Shabbat HaGadol, Shabbat Chazon, Shabbat Parah and Shabbat Nachamu – where the title of the Shabbat is taken from a key term in the special reading for that day. And seeing as our haftarah this coming Shabbat will commence with the prophetic words "shuvah Yisrael" – "return O Israel to the Lord your God", it would therefore be Shabbat Shuvah. On the other hand, the Shabbat takes place during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah, the ten days of penitence, so therefore it would be correct to call it Shabbat Teshuvah.

Actually, it all depends on our motivation for engaging in Teshuvah, in repenting and improving our ways – similar to our motivation for the performance of all the mitzvot.

Why do I perform a mitzvah? Is it because God has commanded me to? Or is it because I want to? Ideally, it is best if it is for both reasons.

Our sages tell us, in many places in the Talmud, "gadol ha'metzuveh ve'oseh mi mi'she'eino metzuveh ve'oseh" – "somebody who performs a good deed, because God has commanded them to is greater than somebody who performs the deed of their own volition".

Now you might think it should be just the opposite. Surely, if somebody is performing a good deed with no connection to religion, what a pure heart has motivated that outstanding act! But, let us illustrate this with the example of charity – if I am giving money to charity, if I perform the deed because God has commanded me to, and I also feel charitable and it comes from my heart, then not only am I engaging a good deed, in addition I have the bonus of a spiritual connection with my creator who expects me to be a good person.

You know, when I say thank you because somebody does kind deed for me, why do I express gratitude? It is actually for two reasons. I say thank you because my parents insisted when I was a child that I had to. They were the two magic words which I could not get away without saying. I was obliged to say thank you. And I also say thank you because I am grateful, I am showing appreciation.

Likutei Divrei Torah

When the two come together, I am showing appreciation correctly and I also have a connection to my parents, *zichronam livracha*. And that therefore is the bonus of doing things because God has commanded us to.

Therefore, coming up to this Shabbat, let us have a combination of both. Let the entire Jewish people engage in shuvah. Let it be Shabbat Shuvah because God has commanded us to be better people and at the same time let it be an occasion of Teshuvah. Let it come naturally from our hearts because we know that that is truly what we want to do.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

To Walk or to Stumble

Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

On this dramatic Shabbat between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, as we read the impassioned pleas of the prophet Hosea for repentance, one verse in particular stands out for its enduring relevance to every generation: "He who is wise will fathom these words; the insightful will grasp them, for the ways of the Lord are just, and the righteous will walk in them, but sinners will stumble over them" (Hosea 14:10). These are the words of the prophet after he denounces the Israelites for putting their trust in foreign powers rather than in God. They point to an unsettling truth: the same path can lead either to faithfulness or to failure, depending upon how one walks it.

On the surface, this idea is puzzling: What does it mean to "stumble" over God's ways?

The Sages offer two approaches. The first, formulated by the Targum Yonatan and cited by Rashi, is straightforward: The evil stumble "because 'they did not follow' God's ways at all. In this interpretation, stumbling means ignoring God's commandments and evading responsibility.

A second approach suggests that "God's ways" themselves can become a stumbling block. The Talmud in Bava Batra (89b) describes one who assiduously studies the halakhot governing fraud – not to act with integrity, but to learn how to exploit customers or deceive business partners. This possibility drives Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai to declare: "Woe to me if I teach these halakhot, and woe unto me if I do not!" If he teaches them, swindlers may refine their methods; if he does not, they may exploit ignorance, unchecked.

This line of thought—that Torah itself can be misused—is expressed even more sharply elsewhere. The Talmud (Yoma 72b) teaches: "If one is deserving, the Torah becomes a potion [sam] of life for him. If one is not deserving, the Torah becomes a potion [sam] of death." Torah is not merely information. It is a force that amplifies the moral direction of

the one engaged in it. When approached with integrity, it refines and elevates. But when distorted—whether through self-interest, cynicism, moral blindness or rationalization—it can become weaponized, becoming a means for justifying precisely what it seeks to prevent..

This danger is not theoretical nor confined to any particular era, community, or controversy. In every generation, people are tempted to enlist the language, laws, and values of Judaism in the service of behavior that the Torah clearly does not condone, and even outright forbids. We can invoke peace to excuse passivity, zeal to license cruelty, modesty to control others, communal loyalty to suppress uncomfortable truths. We may rely on halakhic technicalities to obscure dishonesty, or even turn Torah study itself into an excuse to evade responsibilities that the Torah itself demands.

The rationalizations vary, but the underlying pattern remains the same. Too often, we emphasize the teachings that affirm what we already wish to believe, while muting those that demand sacrifice, courage, accountability, or change. We may become exacting about ritual while remaining careless about character; fiercely protective of sacred institutions while becoming indifferent to the people they are meant to serve. In such moments, we do not simply depart from God's ways. We stumble over them, transforming the path itself into an obstacle.

Hoshea's warning is addressed to each of us. The line between "the righteous who walk" and "the sinners who stumble" does not run neatly between communities, or between the religious and the secular. It runs through every human heart. Each of us is capable of turning partial truths into complete justifications. Each of us must constantly ask ourselves whether the Torah is refining our conscience, or merely furnishing it with more sophisticated arguments.

The question, then, is not only whether we study Torah and observe its commandments, but how that study and observance shape us. Do they make us more honest, more responsible, more compassionate, and more attuned to the needs of others? Do they deepen our commitment to God, to Am Yisrael, and to the dignity of every human being created in God's image—or do they provide us with the language to explain why less should be expected of us?

The beit midrash must remain a place of integrity and spiritual growth. A true study house is one in which self-justification is challenged, not perfected, and from which we

emerge prepared to engage with society according to God's wishes.

This awareness should deepen rather than diminish the perennial mitzvah of loving our fellow Jews, with all of their imperfections. Yet love does not demand silence in the face of distortion, just as criticism does not permit us to cast others away. We must be able to speak honestly about religious misuse and the communal fracture, while also continuing to support one another with empathy and care. Even those who "stumble over the ways of God" remain our brothers and sisters. On Yom Kippur, we stand together and declare: "In the yeshiva on high, in the yeshiva below, we permit praying with transgressors."

We pray together not because transgression is trivial, but because repentance is communal, because no one stands beyond the possibility of return. All of us need the Torah to be a potion of life.

The question of Shabbat Shuva is therefore not simply whether Torah is in our hands, but what we do with it—and what it, in turn, makes of us?

O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" - Leora Schechter Har-tzvi

Why did the Titanic sink? The Titanic sank because it collided with an iceberg in the Atlantic Ocean. Or perhaps it sank because of a serious mistake made by several people.

Or perhaps, ultimately, we should say that it sank because that was God's will.

These are different answers to the same historical question, yet all of them are correct and can coexist simultaneously.

In the Song of Haazinu, the Torah gives us the essence of the history of the Jewish people. It describes not only what happened to the Jewish people up to the end of the Book of Devarim, but also future events: it recalls the Exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah; the entry into the Land of Israel; the sins of the People of Israel; the punishment that will come at the hands of the nations; and, finally, how the very nations that harmed the People of Israel will ultimately fall.

But the Song of Haazinu is more than a mere historical account. It also offers remarkable glimpses into the Divine plan behind history. Thus, for example, in the midst of the painful description of the nations' war against the People of Israel, of how they will destroy our land and strike us without mercy, the Torah suddenly seems to give us a glimpse behind the scenes. It reveals God's interpretation of the events:

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"O that they were wise, that they understood this,
That they would consider their latter end!
How could one chase a thousand,
And two put ten thousand to flight,
Except their Rock had sold them,
And the Lord had delivered them up?"
(Devarim 32:29–30)

God is, as it were, mocking the nations, who believe that their own strength and the might of their hands brought them victory over us.

Had they been a little wiser, however, they would have understood clearly that behind their human warfare is God, who is helping them achieve victory.

After all, "How could one chase a thousand?" How did they achieve such excessive and disproportionate success against Israel, to the point that one of their soldiers was able to pursue a thousand Israelites?

As Rashi explains: "All this should have led the enemies to understand that the Lord had delivered them [Israel] up, and that the victory was not theirs or that of their god, for until now their god had been unable to accomplish anything against our Rock." (Rashi on verse 31)

Why were the nations victorious? Because this was the will of the Almighty: that Israel should be punished.

However, the nations — the "messengers of God" — are unaware of this! They have no idea that they are merely puppets on a string within a Divine plan.

In various places, the Torah tells us about the relationship between history — the events that unfold on the human plane — and the Divine plan behind them. One of the unique qualities of human beings is their ability to understand the spiritual meaning of history.

And this is the purpose of the Song of Haazinu. It repeatedly emphasizes that the events the Jewish people will encounter in this world come at the command of the Almighty.

At times, they come as God's response to our actions — as reward and punishment reflecting our moral level as a nation. Thus, for example, God declares the reason for the troubles that will come at the hands of another nation:

"They have roused My jealousy with a no-god,
They have provoked Me with their vanities;
And I will rouse their jealousy with a no-people,
I will provoke them with a vile nation."
(Devarim 32:21)

At other times, however, our history is also driven by a greater Divine plan, one that is not a direct consequence of our actions in a particular generation, but rather forms part of a broader process determined “in advance” by the Almighty, without being contingent upon people’s choices.

Something of this nature is implied by the Song of Haazinu in its description of God’s initial choice of the Jewish people as His nation:

“He found him in a desert land,
And in the waste, a howling desolation;
He encompassed him, watched over him,
He guarded him as the pupil of His eye.”
(Devarim 32:10)

God describes His drawing the Jewish people close to Him as His nation without offering any explanation or justification based on their actions, but rather as an established fact, because “so it arose in His thought.”

It follows then that we cannot always understand the spiritual reason behind every hardship or salvation that befalls the Jewish people. What is clear, however, from the Torah’s message is that we must not regard events as mere coincidence. There is judgment, and there is a Judge. There is a plan and there is order within the “chaos” visible to the human observer.

“See now that I, I am He,
And there is no god beside Me;
I deal death and give life;
I wound and I heal;
And none can deliver from My hand.”
(Devarim 32:39)

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaCohen Kook was careful to spell the Hebrew word for history, *historia* (היסטוריה), with the Hebrew letter tav (הסתר), thereby conveying the meaning *hester Y-H* (ה-הסתר) — “the concealment of God’s Name” — as if to say: the historical process is merely the foreground, while behind the scenes stands the Almighty Himself, with the complete picture!

In his book *Ein Ayah*, Rav Kook explains that for every event that occurs in the world, three types of “causes” can be identified:

“There are three causes: a natural cause, a volitional cause, and the overarching providential cause, which is brought about through the hand of God, who has designated a purpose for everything and every matter, since there is nothing that does not have its appointed time. Therefore, we have learned that even when we know the providential cause, we must nevertheless, in most cases,

investigate the natural cause, as well as the volitional cause, for from all these together our knowledge of the ways of Divine providence is completed...” (Ein Ayah, Berachot II, pp. 219–220)

As we saw in the example of the Titanic, the same event can be understood as resulting from three different causes. The natural cause is the physical sequence of events: the ship collided with an iceberg. The volitional cause lies in human involvement: human beings possess will and free choice and are capable of making decisions that influence reality, for better or for worse. And there is always also a providential cause — the recognition that God watches over reality and is involved in events, even when they arise from the actions of human beings who possess free choice.

And so it is also with the work of repentance. What is repentance? A person moves through a world that proceeds according to its own course, seemingly governed by the forces of nature.

In the liturgical prayer *Unetaneh Tokef*, we mention these same natural circumstances: “Who by water and who by fire,” “Who by earthquake and who by plague.” But repentance represents the “volitional cause.”

The entire idea of repentance is based on this wondrous feature of our world known as free will. The Creator determined that human beings have a role in the unfolding of events in this world. We are therefore called upon to strive and choose what is good.

This insight stands at the heart of the Days of Repentance and the *Selichot* prayers. And then comes the stirring conclusion of that same prayer: “But repentance, prayer, and charity avert the severity of the decree.”

Indeed, a human being is small and powerless in this world, yet through his small actions and small choices, he has the power to alter the laws of nature and even to redirect his own destiny and the destiny of others.

And perhaps the highest and most comprehensive insight of the Days of Awe is the “Divine cause.” It is the knowledge that between nature and human choice stands the will of God.

This is a sublime idea, and at times a difficult one to grasp; in fact, it is an age-old question concerning free choice and Divine providence.

Yet during the Days of Awe, we once again accept and internalize the harmony that the Almighty maintains among these three parallel forces: nature, free choice, and Divine

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providence. In other words, what a person chooses with complete responsibility is somehow incorporated into the “will of God.”

The Master of the Universe calls upon us to repent and choose to become “the best version of ourselves,” and at the same time, whatever is destined to occur in the coming year and throughout history as a whole will be the will of the Creator.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

The Name of Hashem, the Words of Torah

ה' שם - אקרא - When I call the name of Hashem” are the introductory words to פרשת האזינו. Upon calling out the name of Hashem, Moshe instructs us, “הבו גדל לאלוקינו” - give greatness to Hashem”. Chazal derived from this passuk that before we learn Torah we must recite a beracha.

Apparently, Chazal understood that ה' שם is synonymous with the words of Torah. How did Chazal know to compare the study of Torah to the recitation of the name of Hashem? In פרשת כי תשא, Moshe requests from Hashem to see His presence. Hashem responds that a human being cannot see Hashem. However, Hashem agreed to give Moshe a partial view: “וראית את אחורי” - you will see My back”. We would expect that immediately following this passuk we would read about a very powerful revelation of Hashem to Moshe. Yet, in the very next passuk Moshe is told to prepare the second set of *luchos* for Hashem to inscribe the עשרת הדיברות which will be given to the Jewish people. What happened to seeing Hashem? The Torah is teaching us that the way we see Hashem in this world is through the words of Torah.

A name describes an individual. Similarly, the name of Hashem describes His essence. Hashem teaches us about His essence through the words of His Torah. When we are involved in talmud Torah, we are connecting to the שם ה', and we must first praise Hashem, which we do by reciting ברכת התורה. The talmud Torah experience as a means of strengthening our relationship to Hashem is true for all ימים טובים, but has a unique dimension for סוכות. In the introduction to the עשרה in ברכה we recite on יום טוב, we elaborate on the special, close relationship we have with Hashem. The phrases “אתה בחרתנו” - You have chosen us”, “אהבת אותנו” - You love us”, “ויקדשתנו במצותיך” - You sanctified us with Your commandments” all highlight the unique bond between Hashem and Klal Yisrael. Yet, there appears to be a phrase missing. No explicit mention is made of the giving of the Torah itself. It is the last phrase in this tefillah that refers to matan Torah: “וישמך הגדול והקדוש עלנו קראת” - Your great and holy name has been called upon us”. The שם ה' is the Torah. The

culmination of all of the appreciation for the great gifts Hashem has bestowed upon us is the acknowledgment of the greatest gift - His name through His Torah has been given to His beloved people. The first Yom Kippur culminated with Hashem forgiving bnai Yisroel for the חטא העגל and the giving of the second set of לוחות, and Yom Kippur thus became a day of קבלת התורה for eternity. We refer to the שם many times throughout Yom Kippur; from "ויקרא בשם ה'" to the שם said during the עבודה, and the שם of Torah is given to us as Yom Kippur concludes.

Upon receiving the great gift of Torah, we immediately celebrate the weeklong יום טוב. This celebration culminates with the days of שמחת תורה and שמיני עצרת. The most meaningful way for us to express our joy of having Hashem so close to us is by committing ourselves to a life of "ושמך הגדול והקדוש עלנו" קראת. It is not enough to only learn Torah. We must appreciate its value as Hashem's name which is bestowed upon us. This is the essence of ברכת התורה. Perhaps it is for this reason that there is a custom that everyone receives an Aliyah on שמחת תורה, which is an added opportunity to say the words of ברכת התורה. As we celebrate the culmination of reconnecting to the שם, may we all merit to be included in the greatest gift of "ושמך הגדול והקדוש עלנו" קראת.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perez - The Return Home

This Shabbat is Shabbat Shuva – the Shabbat of return. In Hebrew, teshuva does not mean repentance but return – a homecoming. Rav Soloveitchik defined redemption itself as "a return from the periphery of one's existence to its center." At its core, Jewish life is animated by this longing: to return to Hashem, to the essence of who we are meant to be, and to live aligned with our deepest mission.

The world speaks of love, power, and meaning as the primary human drives. But Judaism teaches that the truest drive is higher still – the yearning to return to G-d, to live lives of spirit, faith, and moral greatness.

Return is never only personal. The Torah links the Jewish people's spiritual return with our physical return to the Land of Israel – and we are living that reality, with millions home again in our land. Yet our return is still incomplete. Forty-eight hostages – twenty alive and twenty-eight whose bodies are held – have not yet returned. Their homecoming, and our collective homecoming, remain at the heart of our tefillot.

As Yom Kippur approaches, may this be a time of return on every level – personal, national, and spiritual. A time to come home to

who we truly are, to Hashem, and to the destiny of Am Yisrael.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

The Source of Corruption

Rav Yaakov Beasley

Moshe Rabbeinu begins his final song to the people with a dramatic, poetic declaration of faith:

The rock – His work is perfect
For all his ways are just;
A G-d of faith without iniquity
Righteous and fair is He. (32:4)

For us, this statement is an axiom of our belief. To this day, this verse is a central part of the funeral service, of the process of tzidduk hadin, our "acceptance of the justice" of the bad things that happen to us. Despite being overwhelmed by a sense of loss, we choose to forego our anger at what may seem like the capricious winds of fate. Without question or hesitation, we proudly declare that God is just.

If so, then where is the source of evil and iniquity? Moshe answers immediately and succinctly:

SHIHET LO LO – BANAV MUMAM:
Corruption to him is not – His children the blemish is; A crooked and twisted generation.

Despite the curt, concise response of five short Hebrew words, however, the peshat (simple meaning) of the verse has baffled commentators for generations. The mangled translation above reflects the difficulties that the commentators faced in ascertaining Moshe's deeper message. Rashi, the father of all commentators, understands the verse as the Targum renders it, functionally switching the words LO (to him, spelled with a Vav) with the second LO (is not, spelled with an Aleph), and understanding the "to him" as referring to Hashem. Therefore, he reads the opening as "Corruption is not His!" – the responsibility for the Jewish people's condition lies solely with themselves. With the words BANAV MUMAM, where the possessive should have been expressed as MUM BANAV (the blemish of His children), Rashi understands he inverted order as indicating a contrast with others through admonition – the Jewish people were once Hashem's children, but through their corrupt behavior, that is not presently the case.

The Rashbam differs with Rashi on to whom the word LO (to him) refers. Whereas his grandfather understands the word as referring to Hashem, the Rashbam argues that it refers to the Jewish people, and with no other. He would then punctuate the verse as "SHIHET LO! LO." – reading "Corruption is his (the Jewish people) – not others." The second half of the verse he views as parallel to the first –

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the people, the children of Hashem, caused the blemish to themselves.

Through Rashi's reading found support among other medieval commentators, they did not hesitate to offer alternative interpretations. After explaining the verse as Rashi, the Da'at Zekeinim Ba'alei Tosafot bring a radical new suggestion from Rabbi Menachem of Pontieres, who, based on the difficulty of having to switch the words LO (to him, spelled with a Vav) with the second LO (is not, spelled with an Aleph) divides the verse differently: SHIHET LO! LO BANAV MUMAM – "Corruption is his [the Jewish peoples]! They are not Hashem's children in their blemishes." As proof that Hashem disowns his relationship with the Jewish people when they transgress, he brings the metaphorical opening words of Hoshea - "For she is not My wife, and they are not My children, they are children of iniquity".

The Italian commentator the Seforno looks for the historical roots of the corruption in his commentary, and finds it in the people's first great failing – the sin of the Golden Calf:

"A generation crooked and perverse, that are not His children, has corrupted His ways (and this is) their blemish." – But a generation (that is) crooked and perverse, [they] are not His children, who are characterized by perfection, for behold, their blemish [manifested itself] through the sin of the Golden Calf, which corrupted the intent of Hashem, the Exalted One, as it stated "For your people have acted corruptly" (Shemot 32:7). Because He indeed intended to sanctify the Jewish people, and to sanctify His name through them in His world, that they should be luminaries for humanity, to understand and instruct, as it says "For all the earth is Mine; and you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests" (ibid. 19:5-6), but they perverted all this through idolatry.

The Seforno punctuates the verse like Rabbi Menachem of Pontieres, while understanding the first LO (with a Vav) as referring to Hashem, like Rashi. Since corruption cannot be attributed to Hashem, the Seforno understands the verse as referring to the Divine plan and aspirations that had guided the people out of Egypt instead. With their first sin, they prevented the ultimate sanctification of Hashem's name.

The Abrabanel makes a clever suggestion as he wrestles with the above issues. He suggests that the verse be read as a form of dialogue, punctuating the opening three words would be punctuated as a form of question and rejection - "SHIHET LO? LO!" (Corruption to Him? Certainly not!) Instead, the responsibility for the people's blemishes lie in their behavior, as others have stated above. This approach is also taken by the 18th century German

commentary the Bi'ur, who adds a new dimension in suggesting that the word SHIHET is not the noun corruption, as all the previous commentators have stated, but a verb referring to the word MUM – the people's blemishes. Did Hashem corrupt His children's blemishes? Certainly not. As such, the Bi'ur functionally reorganizes the verse as follows: SHIHET LO (with Vav) BANAV MUMAM? LO!

The final approach that we shall bring regarding this complicated verse is that of the 19th century Italian commentator Rabbi Shmuel David Luzzato. Unlike all the other commentators above, who place these words within the framework of Moshe's final discourse to the people, Rabbi Luzzato suggests that Moshe is in fact giving voice to a potential claim that the people may attempt to make when confronted with the dire consequences of their actions. Should they attempt to deflect the responsibility for their failings upon Hashem, arguing that as Hashem's children, they should have been protected for the evil effects of their behavior, Moshe will have already warned them that such evasions of ultimate responsibility will not be considered. Rabbi Luzzato reads the verse as follows: [Should the Jewish people claim] The corruption is His (Hashem's) – Not to His children are their blemishes! [Moshe immediately responds] – You are a crooked and twisted generation – would you ascribe such to Hashem!

Despite the differences and variations in interpreting this extremely difficult verse, one important thread runs through the all of the commentaries that we have encountered. Without exception, all place the mantle of responsibility fully upon the shoulders of the Jewish people. If the Torah wished to convey one message, it would be that humanity was given not only the gift of free choice, but also the responsibility to acknowledge and accept the consequences of those choices. In these days of repentance and introspection, no finer message could be given.

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah
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Yom Kippur Issue 5787

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Gmar Chatima Tova

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Unique Joy Because of Physical

Deprivation? - Yom Kippur is my favorite festival of the year. This may sound strange, especially since the gentile world – and also a good part of the non-observant Jewish world – see Yom Kippur as a very bleak and sad day, the very antithesis of a festival. That is no surprise, since this “Jewish festival” is a twenty-five-hour complete fast – no eating or drinking – on which we also are commanded to refrain from wearing leather shoes, using fragrant creams or oils, or engaging in sexual relations. It is almost as if those observing Yom Kippur are somehow in mourning; in fact, many of the prohibitions of the day are the same prohibitions that Jewish law prescribes for those mourning a close relative: not wearing shoes, so that one can actually feel the stones and sharp pebbles beneath his feet, refraining from the pleasures of sexual relations, and from the use of creams and oils used for pampering the physical body. Indeed, it is true that on Yom Kippur we are enjoined from performing acts of physical creativity – use of electricity, cooking, and so forth – exactly as on the Sabbath, but without the Sabbath's concomitant pleasures – sumptuous meals, singing around the table, relaxing and communicating with spouse and children. So, where is the festivity of this festival?

In order to begin to answer this question, let us look at what the Bible has to say about Yom Kippur. In Leviticus (23:32), the Bible describes the character of Yom Kippur: “It shall be a Sabbath of Sabbaths to you.” The Bible is calling Yom Kippur not only Shabbat, but Shabbat Shabbaton, a double expression of Shabbat – a kind of “Shabbat on steroids.” Shabbat, we know, is a day of great festivity and joy, and so it would seem that the Bible, with its double expression of the Shabbat character of Yom Kippur, is declaring Yom Kippur to be an especially festive day.

I believe that the key to understanding Yom Kippur is to be found in an earlier biblical verse: “For on that day [Yom Kippur] He will forgive you, to purify you; from all of your sins before God shall you be purified” (Lev. 16:30). And so it is that, while Rosh HaShana

is the first of the Ten Days of Repentance, Yom Kippur is the last and the zenith of those ten days, in which we are promised forgiveness as a result of our repentance, and even, according to one view in the Talmud, being granted automatic forgiveness on that day – even if we have not repented![1]

And so, how could I not be ecstatic about this festival? Our God of Love promises that, on this day, we receive the greatest gift of all – forgiveness – and, once forgiven, I feel myself in the presence of a God of overwhelming love. Indeed, on Yom Kippur, God even invites us into His home for a twenty-five-hour period, during the waking hours of which we are expected to be in the synagogue.[2] As the psalmist says (27:4): “One thing do I desire of the Lord, that which I truly seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the sweetness of God, and to be a welcome visitor in His abode.”

Note that being in God's presence is to be in the midst of a spiritual and supernal sweetness, flowing not from physical blandishments, but rather from the more profound delight in the spiritual. Remember that one can become “overstuffed” with food, drink, and other physical pleasures, but never from elation emanating from the spiritual. It is only in matters of the spirit that more is always better. A very important aspect of this spiritual joy and sense of well-being is that we ourselves see not only that we are capable of rising above physical temptations and seductions, but also to what extent we can truly delight in the sacred and the spiritual. This is the experience of Yom Kippur!

Our souls sing on Yom Kippur.[3] We are together with a compassionate, loving God who forgives us. And so, I cannot imagine a day more enjoyable than Yom Kippur – a true gift from God. The prayers during the full day that we remain in the synagogue, while steeped in the solemnity of a day full of import, have a festive quality to them, often expressed in their tunefulness. The very confessional section of the prayers, the Vidui, in which we mention a catalogue of sins, is sung in a major key! Yes, we are confessing our sins; but we also know that God has promised divine forgiveness, and we rejoice with the confidence of that promise. A recurring line in the Vidui states: “And for all of them, O God of forgiveness, forgive us,

pardon us, purify us.” Although this can sometimes sound like a request, it is meant here to be interpreted as a categorical statement: You forgive us for “all of them.” Yom Kippur brings complete forgiveness.

On Yom Kippur there is no food or drink; we rather imbibe the spiritual. Even our intimacy on that day is reserved for God. The mourner removes his shoes because, in his grief, he feels uprooted from the material world; on Yom Kippur, we remove our leather shoes in God's house because we have no need to be rooted in the material world.[4] On Yom Kippur we are much more connected to heaven than to earth.

In God's presence, I am in the presence of eternal love, and nothing can give greater joy. For the individual who treasures the opportunity of spending a full day with God's love and in God's realm, no period in time could be more filled with elation. Hence, one may refer to Yom Kippur as a consummate God-fest by means of a love-fast.

The First Yom Kippur in History

The very first Yom Kippur in history eventuated from the egregious “sin of the desert” – the building and worshipping of the Golden Calf by the Israelites, replete with sexual orgies and bestial conduct toward animals and humans, just weeks after receiving the Torah from God. In a sense, so many of our own wrongdoings emerge from a source all too similar to the great “sin of the desert.” The idol that the Israelites constructed was that of an animal, alluding to the bestial desires within themselves. And the substance used to construct the calf – gold – alludes clearly to how, often, in pursuit of riches, we commit serious moral infractions.

As the Bible recounts, after the intercession of Moses, God agreed to forgive the nascent Jewish people for this treachery of licentiousness – an affront to the God who had shown them so much love and had revealed Himself to them with His gift of the Torah. This forgiveness came on the tenth day of the month of Tishrei – our Day of Forgiveness, Yom Kippur – forever enjoining that day as one full of love and the promise of forgiveness.[5]

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Rephael Zev Ben Yisrael, z"l, (10 Tishrei)
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On that same primordial Yom Kippur, God revealed Himself once again, in the same place as the initial revelation – Mount Sinai – a revelation of equal importance to the revelation of all of the laws of the Torah. This “second revelation” was not a revelation of laws, like the first, but rather it was a revelation of love, of the names – and, therefore, the characteristics – of God, each of which is an expression of His love: “The God of Love, the God of Love,[6] a God who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abundant in loving-kindness and truth, showing loving-kindness to thousands, bearing iniquity, transgression, and sin, and purifying...” (Ex. 34:6–7). Through this revelation, God defines Himself, first and foremost, as a loving forgiving God, with His very first name repeated twice to signal that he loves us both before we sin, and even after we sin.[7]

[1]See Shevuot 13a. Note, however, that this refers only for forgiveness for transgressions against God. Transgressions against other people can only be forgiven by the wronged people themselves.

[2]In many Eastern European communities of the previous generation, the Jewish householder would remain in the synagogue even during the night of Yom Kippur and study together with the rabbi the details of the Holy Temple service.

[3]The source for the deprivations we observe on Yom Kippur is the continuation of the same verse we quoted regarding Yom Kippur as a “Sabbath of Sabbaths” (Lev. 23:32). The Hebrew reads *ועניתי את נפשתיכם*, usually translated as “And you shall afflict your souls.” However, the root of the Hebrew word for “affliction” is *ע-נ-ה*, a root that can also mean “to sing” or “to respond by singing,” as “And Miriam sang (*וַתִּזְכֹּר*), from the same root) to them: Sing to God...” (Ex. 15:21). The Mishna in Sukka 38a uses the same root to express the singing of Hallel prayer, the Psalms of Praise. Regarding Passover, the Talmud understands the additional meaning of *lehem oni* (from the same root), the “bread of affliction,” to also mean “the bread over which we sing” (the psalms of praise) at the Passover Seder. And so, this phrase, ostensibly about Yom Kippur deprivations, could actually be understood to read, “And you shall enable your soul to sing.”

[4]When Moses stood in God’s presence at the burning bush, God instructed him, “Remove the shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground” (Ex. 3:5). Shoes, representing material rootedness, had no place as Moses stood in the realm of the purely spiritual. In our early-morning blessings, we recite the blessing thanking God for “providing for all my needs.” This blessing (now usually recited in the synagogue) was originally recited just before the individual put

on his shoes in the morning. Once again, shoes are the symbol of physical rootedness.

[5]See Rashi on Taanit 30b, where he examines the chronology of the events of the year following the Exodus and concludes that the second set of tablets – representing atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf – were given on the Tenth of Tishrei.

[6]YKVK in Hebrew, understood to mean “love.”

[7]See Rashi ad loc., based on Rosh HaShana 17b.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

The Integrity of Teshuva

Based on a shiur by Harav Aharon

Lichtenstein [Adapted by Rav Aaron Ross]

The term “integrity” has two possible meanings: the first denotes wholeness as opposed to fragmentation; the second has moral overtones, portraying a sense of honesty and total opposition to any form of falsehood. Our goal here will be to see if these two definitions can be interrelated in the context of teshuva (repentance). Can teshuva be both true and limited, genuine yet partial? Can fragmented teshuva be subjectively sincere? In other words, can one repent for violating one commandment and not for another, yet still believe that both are the word of God? On an objective level, can we speak of God accepting such repentance?

Our investigation begins in Devarim 10:12-13. There, Moshe tells the Jews:

“And now, Yisrael, what does God ask from you? Only to fear the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to love Him and to serve the Lord your God, with all your heart and all your soul; to keep the mitzvot of God and His ordinances that I am commanding you today, to be good for you.”

The gemara (Berakhot 33b) notes that at the outset, it seems that Moshe is telling the Jews that God wants very little, “just” that they be God-fearing individuals. How can this be considered a minor request? To Moshe, however, it was a relatively easy level to attain, and the two verses taken together demonstrate how this it is to be accomplished. The first verse speaks of major religious values – fearing God, loving Him, walking in His ways. The second verse is more particular, describing various categories of commandments that the Jews are to perform. Together, these two elements are characteristic of the ideal of Avodat Hashem (service to God) that Moshe wished to pass to the Jews for posterity. We are asked to move along a dual axis: a grand majestic approach to service of God, paralleled by a detailed, somewhat mundane form of service that is rife with rituals and procedures.

The world of Halakha is both teleological and formal. It wants us to strive for the grand and the ultimate in *deveikut ba-Shem* (attaching oneself to God), yet it does so by commanding us to involve ourselves in the minutiae of daily life, seemingly far removed from the grandiose view that one would envision. In a similar sense, the first two paragraphs of the Shema express the themes of accepting the yoke of mitzvot and accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven. While each theme is the focus of a separate paragraph, Rambam notes that they are actually two sides of the same coin, together comprising up the single obligation of reciting the Shema. They both lead to the ultimate goal of following and pursuing God and cleaving to Him.

Rambam's prime Biblical source for the mitzva of teshuva is the verse of “ve-hitvadu, and they will confess” (Bamidbar 5:7), a verse that comes in the context of the laws of one who steals from a convert (*gezel ha-ger*). The second source comes from the laws concerning the Yom Kippur service – “for on this day you will be forgiven...” (Vayikra 16:30). While this latter verse is often read as a promise, Rabbeinu Yona notes that it refers to a special mitzva of repentance on Yom Kippur.

There is a marked contrast between these two sources. In Bamidbar, the focus is on a very specific act that may be very limited in import – a person atones for one instance of thievery. On the other hand, in the verse in Vayikra, the word “*ti'haru*” (you will be purified) does not focus on any particular sin, and no verbal confession is mentioned in the verse. Unlike the *viddui* (confession) that we say nowadays in our prayers, the gemara in Yoma lists several suggested forms of *viddui*, all of which are general in nature. In marked contrast to the Bamidbar approach, the gemara seems to focus on a general acknowledgment of sin as a sufficient form of confession.

This contrast is reflected in the Rambam's writings as well. He begins his *Hilkhot Teshuva* by saying that when a person transgresses “one” of the mitzvot in the Torah, he then has to recite *viddui* and thus fulfills a positive commandment. This *viddui* that is said over transgressing a particular commandment is described by Rambam as itself being specific; one must name the sin he committed. However, in chapter two of *Hilkhot Teshuva*, Rambam speaks of teshuva and Yom Kippur, and there the focus is once again on the general – “*Aval anachnu chatanu, But we have sinned.*” There is no mention of particulars, but rather a simple seeking out of God when He is near.

These two different approaches to teshuva address themselves to different aspects of sin. In any sinful act, one can speak of multiple

facets: the misdeed itself; the fact that any sin constitutes a denial of God and His priorities; the impact on the self, as sin defiles an individual and renders him impure and dirty; the inherent rebellion against God and, as it were, against the Kingdom of Heaven; and the fracturing of the relationship between God and man. Taken as a whole, these five elements can be categorized under two rubrics: moral, focusing on the wrong as such, and religious, focusing on one's relationship to God.

Ramban (Shemot 20:3) notes that when God is described as "jealous" regarding those who worship idols, that description describes only God's relationship to the Jews, an idea that fits in with the imagery of God and the Jews as man and wife. This idea, however, can be extended beyond idolatry to the entire purview of religious experience. It can be applied to anything that ruptures the intimate relationship between man and God.

If sin is to be viewed as a multifaceted event, then it is logical to assume that teshuva is similarly multifaceted. There is teshuva that reasserts God's authority, and there is teshuva that responds to the contamination of the self. In one case, we are instructed to make up "to" God, and in the other, we are implored to make up "with" God – "ve-hitvadu" and "tit'haru."

Let us return now to our original dilemma. While the goal is obviously that we strive for total teshuva, there nevertheless exists the possibility of a partial and particular teshuva through "ve-hitvadu." We rule (Horayot 11a) that one who is known to eat forbidden fat (mumar okhel chelev) may nevertheless bring a sin-offering if he eats blood, yet one who is known to worship idols (mumar le-avoda zara) may not bring a sacrifice if he commits any other sin. In the former case, his habitual sin of eating fat is particular in nature, while in the latter case, the individual has damaged his relationship to God. Similarly, a person may repent for one instance of a sin while not repenting for a second instance of the same sin, unless he is such a repeat offender that his repentance is effectively a sham.

That is all good and well for "ve-hitvadu," the particular form of teshuva, but what are we to say about "tit'haru," the more general approach? Can one partially repair his relationship with God? Instinctively, it would seem not; either we are committed to Him or we are not. There are no middle-of-the-road approaches to be had.

However, there are qualifications in both directions. Rambam (Hil. Teshuva 7:7) notes that, when a person is steeped in sin, God may throw that person's mitzvot back in his face. Any mitzva can come to be seen as an abomination. In the Yerushalmi (Kiddushin

1:9), Ben-Azzai discusses, based on a verse in Kohelet, how one fly can ruin an entire jar of oil that is to be used for anointment purposes. In a similar sense, it can be suggested that a single sin can reach a level of severity that it offsets all of one's merits.

While these examples may be a bit extreme, we also must consider the reverse qualification. The holistic or systemic teshuva of "tit'haru" makes sense because one cannot be "tovel ve-sheretz be-yado," one cannot purify himself while still holding the very object that is the cause of his defilement. Rav Soloveitchik noted, in the name of the Chavot Yair, that the last line of Yoma, comparing God's purification of the sinner to that of a mikveh (ritual bath), is not as enthusiastic as it is usually made out to be. The gemara first notes that Yom Kippur does not atone for sins committed between man and his fellow man. Then it concludes with Rabbi Akiva's statement of that the Jews are fortunate that they come to purify themselves before God Himself, and that He serves, as it were, as their mikveh. Why are these two lines juxtaposed? The Rav answered that when God purifies the Jews, he does so acting as a mikveh - one cannot purify himself partially. If one has not yet cleansed himself of his sins against his fellow man, then not even God Himself can purify that individual. It is either all or nothing when it comes to one's relationship to God.

The mishna (Avot 3:8) states that a person who forgets part of what he has learned is held accountable for his life - a very harsh statement indeed. What is one to do if extenuating circumstances, as are extremely common in our lives, cause one to forget? To answer this problem, the mishna states that one is held accountable only if he actively uproots his learning from his heart. What does this mean? Rabbeinu Yona says that the failure to review adequately is included in the concept of uprooting what one has learned. Either way, the message is clear. One who forgets, even if due only to the conditions around him, yet is not bothered by that fact, is equivalent to one who uproots the Torah from his heart. To him, ignorance of a certain part of Torah is not a matter of major importance. Yet this harsh verdict does not apply to one who learns and wishes that he could do more, yet finds himself limited, despite his thirst for Torah and his concern for his spiritual development. His forgetfulness is not equivalent to uprooting.

The same is true when we speak about teshuva. If one aims for total teshuva, then, regardless of how slowly his teshuva progresses, he can feel confident that his teshuva will purify him of sin. However, if one repents in some respects, yet is unperturbed about his failure to do so in other areas, then his teshuva is sorely lacking. "Ve-

hitvadu" without an eye towards "tit'haru" cannot work. Yet if the ultimate goal of total purification is kept in sight, then even a "partial" teshuva can be made to work, and can help an individual along the path to complete repentance.

[Based on a teshuva lecture delivered at Kehillath Jeshurun in New York in Elul 5757 (1997).]

The State of Hashem in Our World — 5787 Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Rosh Hashana is the Day of Judgment. The fate of individuals is weighed, and the course of nations and empires is determined. We stand before Hashem, examining our conduct, appealing for mercy, and praying to be inscribed in the Book of Life.

Yet Rosh Hashana carries a wider significance. It marks the anniversary of creation, when Hashem brought the world into existence. By judging humanity, He reasserts His sovereignty over the world He created. On Rosh Hashana, we turn beyond our own lives to the larger movement of history, asking how clearly Hashem's presence can be discerned in His world.

History has both an origin and a destination. It begins with creation and moves toward redemption. At the end of that journey, Hashem's presence will become unmistakable as humanity comes to recognize Him.

Each Rosh Hashana, as history advances along its difficult and uneven path toward that destination, we consider the year that has passed. Which developments have made Hashem more visible in our world, and which have pushed His presence further into concealment?

On this day of awe and majesty, we ask: What is the state of Hashem's presence in the world of 2026?

We cannot decode providence or confidently explain why particular events occur. Yet people of faith can still ask whether the broader movement of history has made Hashem's presence easier or harder to discern.

Rescue and Victory - Perhaps the most moving event this past year in which we sensed divine intervention was the return of our hostages. Their abduction was among the most agonizing elements of October 7, compounded by the unimaginable suffering many endured in captivity. For much of the war, the return of every hostage seemed almost beyond hope. We assumed that Hamas would retain at least a few as bargaining chips or human shields. Yet over the course of the war, 168 hostages were brought home alive, and ultimately every hostage who had been murdered or died in captivity was returned for burial in Israel.

Again and again, we welcomed home people whose names and faces had become seared into our consciousness, people for whom we had prayed for months and, in some cases, more than two years. Their return reminded people of faith that history is never limited by what appears possible at a particular moment.

We also continue to sense His hand guiding us through history as we return to our homeland and reclaim our place within the historical arena. Over the past year, Israel achieved remarkable military successes. Iran, our most dangerous enemy, was severely weakened, while much of the “ring of fire” it had constructed around Israel through murderous proxies was dismantled or substantially degraded.

The contrast with the days following October 7 is striking. Israel then appeared painfully vulnerable, surrounded by enemies and threatened on multiple fronts. Three years later, the strategic landscape of the Middle East has been dramatically altered. None of this should obscure the terrible cost of the war or suggest that every danger has disappeared. Yet developments that once seemed improbable became reality, and for many Israelis the hand of Hashem felt unusually close as the regional landscape was transformed.

Faith Resurfaces - We have also witnessed a renewed visibility of faith. Israel today is a very different country from the one founded nearly eight decades ago. Even among Israelis who are not personally observant, many speak comfortably about faith, prayer, Jewish destiny, and Hashem’s presence in our national story. This shift had been developing gradually for years, but October 7 accelerated it dramatically. Faith has been tested under harsh conditions and has repeatedly surfaced in public life: among soldiers, bereaved families, hostage families, and ordinary Israelis confronting fear and uncertainty. Hashem has become a more explicit part of the language through which many Israelis understand their lives and the history unfolding around them.

The renewed currents of faith in Israel have been mirrored by a strengthening of Jewish identity among Jews abroad. The hatred unleashed after October 7 forced many Jews to reconsider identities they had previously worn lightly. Some became more conscious of their Jewishness, more attached to Israel, and more determined to display an identity they might once have kept private.

This awakening does not always take an explicitly religious form. Yet Jewish identity is never entirely detached from Hashem. To identify more deeply with the Jewish people is to reconnect, even indirectly, with a people

whose history, memory, and destiny were shaped by divine covenant. Every strengthening of Jewish consciousness therefore creates another opening through which Hashem can reenter Jewish life. Hopefully, this renewed peoplehood will mature into deeper spiritual and religious commitment.

Just as Hashem’s presence has become more visible in certain areas, other developments have obscured it. On Rosh Hashana, we pray that these trends will be reversed.

An Ancient Hatred - Antisemitism is raging at levels unseen since the Holocaust. More disturbing, it has moved from the fringes toward the mainstream, voiced openly by prominent politicians, activists, and influencers. Antisemitism has social, economic, political, and cultural causes, but beneath them lies a deeper spiritual impulse. The Jewish people were chosen to represent Hashem in history, and hostility toward Hashem’s presence often expresses itself as hostility toward the people who carry His name. The resurgence of antisemitism therefore reflects a retreat of Hashem’s presence from our world.

Without welcoming or romanticizing antisemitism, this hatred has also clarified an important truth: the State of Israel lies at the heart of the Jewish future. Much of today’s antisemitism is expressed through hostility toward Israel, extending beyond criticism of particular policies to denial of Israel’s legitimacy and right to exist. That hostility is directed at Jews regardless of whether they personally place Israel at the center of their identity. Our enemies are teaching us a truth that some Jews have not yet fully embraced: the future of Israel and the future of every Jew are inseparably bound.

Fractured Again - Unfortunately, we have not succeeded in preserving the remarkable unity that emerged immediately after October 7. Many old divisions have returned, while new tensions, especially surrounding Charedi non-enlistment, have deepened fractures within Israeli society. When the Jewish people stand together, Hashem’s presence is felt more powerfully among us.

When legitimate disagreements harden into bitterness and estrangement, that divine presence recedes. Rosh Hashana should remind us that even deep disagreement cannot erase the covenant that binds us to one another.

The Assault on Truth - Finally, we live in a world in which truth itself is becoming increasingly difficult to discern. The rise of individualism has helped fuel moral relativism, in which truth and morality are often reduced

to perspective, circumstance, and context. Even acts of obvious evil are sometimes explained away by the setting in which they occurred. Hashem’s signature is truth, and when confidence in truth erodes, His presence becomes more obscured.

At the same time, the rapid development of artificial intelligence is making the distinction between fact and fabrication increasingly fragile. Photographs can be manufactured, videos fabricated, and voices reproduced with remarkable accuracy. We are entering a world in which seeing and hearing may no longer provide reliable evidence of what actually occurred.

It is therefore no surprise that AI-generated falsehoods have already been adopted and weaponized by those who demonize Israel and spread hatred of Jews. The Jewish people represent Hashem in history, and our return to our homeland is part of the divine drama of Jewish destiny. Those who seek to delegitimize that return often distort not only our history but truth itself. There is something deeply troubling about this convergence. The assault upon the people who carry Hashem’s name is increasingly accompanied by an assault upon truth, which Chazal describe as Hashem’s own signature.

The year leaves us with a divided picture: Hashem’s presence has felt startlingly close in the course of Jewish history, even as it has grown more obscured in the moral and cultural world around us. The task of 5787 is to make His presence harder to miss.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

A Powerful Tool in Our Toolbox

Thus, we see that man is truly placed in the midst of a raging battlefield. For all matters of this world, whether for the good or for the bad, are trials (tests) for a man... – The Mesilas Yesharim

With Yom Kippur rapidly approaching we find ourselves in an awkward position. We would love to take this sacred opportunity to correct the mistakes we have made in the course of our lives. Classically, this involves a few necessary steps; 1) Sincerely regretting what was done 2) Admitting to HASHEM verbally 3) Accepting upon one’s self to never do it again. 4) In matters between man and man there is still a need to make reparations and ask for forgiveness. These are the basic requirements. Admittedly, it is not very easy and each step has its unique challenges. Let’s focus on number four on our list, “Accepting upon one’s self to never do it again”.

That may present a major problem for even the most sincere and devoted repentant. How can

one guarantee that this and that will not happen again. It can only happen if through the Teshuvah process the person becomes a completely different person. That was me “then” and this is me “now”. How do we travel from “then” to “now”? I may feel this way “now”, but who can really promise when it becomes “then” again?! That is the question!

I think Einstein was credited with the phrase, “The definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again and expect a different result”. Something about us has to change. What can we possibly change? One arena is in the realm of thought. In the mystical books there are a companion of terms referred to as, “MOCHIN D’KATNUS” and “MOCHIN D’GADLUS”. Literally translated they mean, “THE SMALL MIND” and “THE BIG MIND”. Practically speaking, we are referring to a visceral way of reacting versus a mature approach to a given situation. Sure, we have all learned throughout our lives and from our earliest days how to get our way with certain strategies that may have worked well for us in the particular and peculiar circumstances in which we developed them.

Some like to call these “triggers” nowadays. However, as life progresses, we all could benefit from gaining more tools, “coping mechanisms”. Abraham Maslow famously stated, “To a person with a hammer, every problem will tend to be a nail.” The BIG MIND is a fuller toolbox with a wider variety of wise responses to more complex situations.

A man came to the Divrei Chaim, the Sanzer Rav for important advice. When he met privately with the Rebbe he shared his terrible predicament. He claimed to be an angry man that was given to fits of uncontrollable rage. Life was becoming unbearable for him and the people around him. In desperation he came to the Rebbe for some wise advice. The Rebbe listened and then began thinking and thinking. He told the man that this is a very difficult case and he would have to think about it even more. He asked the man to wait, in the meantime in an anteroom nearby.

The Rebbe then called over his loyal Gabai/attendant and asked him if he had any good ideas about how he could get the gentleman waiting in the other room to become upset. The Gabai agreed to the unusual challenge and cooked up a scheme. A few moments later the Gabai was passing by that man with a tray full of drinks and creamy cakes and he intentionally tripped and spilled it all over the man sitting there. Adding insult to injury the Gabai then began to berate the man and blame him for tripping him and causing the whole accident. The man sat there with perfect equanimity enduring the obvious abuse.

Then the Rebbe asked the man to come back in and, noticing his messy appearance, the Rebbe feigned wonder and asked him what happened. The man told over the incident. The Rebbe asked rhetorically, “And you didn’t get upset?” The man confessed, “I overheard the conversation that you had with the Gabai and I knew you were testing me.” The Rebbe told him, “That is the answer to your dilemma. You see that you can control yourself when you realize that you are being tested. HASHEM is testing you! He tests all of us.” Living life with that realization is a powerful tool in our toolbox.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm’s Derashot Ledorot

Matters of Life and Death

Perhaps the most devastating comment ever made on the nature of Man’s whole life and all his so-called accomplishments, is contained in the words we recite after the *תפילה* prayer: *בנפשו יביא לחמו משול, מעפר יסודו אדם וסופו לעפר כצל עובר, וכחציץ נובל, כחציר יבש, כחרס הנשבר, פורה, וכאבק יעוף וכחלום, וכרוח נושבת, וכענן כלה*, Man’s origin is dust, and his end is also in dust. He earns his livelihood at the risk of his life. He is like fragile earthenware, like a fading flower, like the passing shadow, like dissipating clouds and blowing winds and floating dust and a transient dream.”

Yes, Man’s life is like all these things, and especially – woe unto him – like a passing shadow. For a young man who today worships may next year lie mangled on a cold, bloody battlefield. The mature head of a household who today is substantial and assured of financial security for himself, his wife, and his children, may next year be driven to seek “relief.” The man, woman and child who today is in the best of health, may soon be victimized by crippling paralysis, by dreaded heart disease, by terrorizing cancer. The world which today laughs and cries and goes about its usual business may next year be only a dim memory in the grim mushroom-cloud of atomic or hydrogen destruction. May G-d forbid such things to happen. But such things do happen. For all of Life is *k’tzeil oevir* – like a passing shadow – nothing more. But does that mean that Man must abandon himself to hopelessness? Is Man to despair because his life is so short, so insecure, and insubstantial? If life is only a passing shadow, does that therefore mean that man can do nothing about it or with it, that it is meaningless? Our Sages were quick to point out that such is not the case. For while Life is a shadow, it is still up to us to decide what kind of shadows our lives are going to be. For a shadow, insubstantial and immaterial though it be, does have constructive uses. For the weary traveler on a hot, dusty summer road, a shadow is a G-d-send. For the Bedouin in the blazing desert, the shadow of the oasis is Life’s greatest relief.

The shadow of a loving mother bending over the cradle will calm and soothe the weeping child. And the shadow of a strong father or a beloved mate will instill gladness and a sense of security in any soul. So, a shadow though Life is, it is our duty to make it the right kind of shadow.

Our Rabbis meant just that when they declared, in their great wisdom, that: *u’lvai k’tzilo shel kossel o k’tzilo shel ilan ve’lo k’tzilo shel ofe b’sha’ah she’hu af*. “If Man’s life can be no more than a shadow, let it be at least like the shadow of a wall, or certainly like the shadow of a tree, but never, never like the shadow of a bird in flight.” The shadow of a bird in flight is absolutely of no use to anyone. It gives no shade, no comfort, no gladness. Even while the bird lives and does cast a shadow, that shadow is shiftily and gives no benefit.

Let Man make sure that his life is not that sort of passing shadow, where even while alive it is worthless... The shadow of a wall is somewhat better. For while the sturdy wall exists, it casts a strong and beneficial shadow, under which others may rest and find comfort and security. Better than the bird, yes. But not good enough. For once that wall has toppled over, once it has “died,” or ceased to exist, no shadow can be cast, and its use is a thing of the past. A man whose life is like the shadow of a wall will also be of use and comfort while alive. But Death will certainly kill him, and he is gone and forgotten; Life’s shadow has passed. What should the passing shadow of Life be like? Like the shadow of a tree. The majestic oak, even after it has died, cut by the woodsman’s saw or cracked by the lightning of heaven, even then the shadow continues – somewhere, sometimes. For a branch or seed of that tree has no doubt been planted someplace, and that branch or seed has become a new tree and given birth to a new, beautiful shadow. The shadow of a tree is only a shadow – but an eternal one. Death does not vanquish it. The shadow of a tree outlives the woodsman, the electric storm, it outlives even old age.

Poor man, cry our Sages, you who on this Holy Day and at these Memorial Services feel yourself at the mercy of Death, your life only a passing shadow, do not despair. See to it that your life is not like the passing shadow of the bird in flight, do not let it be even like the shadow of the wall. Do not allow Death to win. Be rather like the tree – cast your shadow onto Eternity. Continue to live even after Death. Continue the lives of your loved ones even after they have gone. Squeeze the pain and misery and sorrow out of Death. Yes, mortal man, let Death give birth – to Life. *K’tzilo shel ilan*. Like the shadow of a tree.

As a Rabbi, I can testify that I have seen such things happen. Countless individuals who were religiously empty have drifted into the synagogue like derelict ships. People who

ordinarily would not look into a synagogue, but have come only because of the death of a parent or spouse or child. And as a result of a year of Kaddish, they found the faith of Torah, they saw new horizons, their life took on new meaning.

Death gave birth to Life. The comforting shadow of parents continues on and on. Life may be a passing shadow, but such a Life is not the passing shadow of a darting bird, nor that of a crumbling wall – but that of a majestic tree.

An old legend, which has become part of our Jewish folklore, tells of a famous Hebrew poet who sprouted Life even while he was in the grave. The tragic, melancholy, gifted poet Ibn Gabirol died in his early twenties – terribly lonely and forlorn. But before his death, the tale goes, he asked that he be buried with a fig in his hand. His will was carried out. And years later, a fig tree grew out of that grave, and it bore the most beautiful fruit that was ever seen in all of Spain. The story is not only a legend. It is also a powerful moral lesson. And that is – that Death need not be the victor. Death can disfigure the face, drain the blood, stop the beating heart. But it need not snuff out the last seed of Life which can sprout afresh even from the grasp of Death itself. K'tzilo shel ilan. What, you will ask, is the way to do this? How can I draw a spark of Life out of the darkness of Death? Well, one way has been prescribed by Yehudah Halevi, a contemporary of Ibn Gabirol. This noble and inspired Jewish poet wrote, and I quote in translation: "When I remove from Thee, O G-d, "I die whilst I live; but when I cleave to Thee, in Death I live again."

So that cleaving to G-d, living an inspired and religious and holy life, sticking to the ideals of our Torah, coming to shul every Sabbath rather than only on High Holidays, that is one way of cheating Death and being assured of Life Eternal, of "in Death I live again." Living for a principle and dying for a reason is not dying at all – it is only planting a new seed which will cast the same shadow. Let no one speak, therefore, of the millions of martyrs tortured and killed in Europe as having been finished and destroyed by Death. Indeed, let no one tell me that the 6 million death-cries which shrieked across the accursed continent of Europe were really death-cries. No, no, no. They were 6 million voices crying out in chorus that their death-agonies were really birth-pangs, that in dying they were giving birth to a new and blessed revival of Judaism, that from their blood and ashes would rise the new, reconstituted State of Israel. If not for the 6 million, there might never have been an Israel. This was not ordinary Death. This was a hard way of creating eternal Life. Tsaddikim b'missasam nikra'im chayyim, say our Rabbis, "The righteous, in death, are called living." When a man dies for righteousness, he is more alive than ever. I wonder how many of us

remember that terrific novel by Herman Melville, "Moby Dick." The very last few paragraphs will always haunt my memory. Ishmael, the narrator, and the rest of the whale-hunting crew had been tracking down the white whale, Moby Dick, for many months. Finally, they found the mighty and awful sea-monster in Oriental waters and gave him battle. But Moby Dick proved too strong for his pursuers. He quickly capsized the small harpoon vessels sent out after him, and all hands drowned. In the churning, mad waters, he set upon the main ship, the Pequod, and in a few mighty strokes, the giant whale wrecked the ship, and it too began to sink with all aboard it facing certain death. Ishmael was the last man off the Pequod. He jumped into the violent, foaming waters, and prepared for a watery grave. On his right, the Pequod was slipping out of sight; through the spray, he saw, to the left, the departing Giant of the Deep, leaving only destruction and ruin in his wake. But as the water gathered round him and began to cover him, as the ocean was about to swallow him, he grabbed hold of a wooden object which suddenly floated past him. He managed to hold on to the strange object and was thus the only man to survive the ordeal. Then he looked upon the wooden object which saved his life – and, lo and behold, it was a coffin! A box of Death saved his Life. He found Life through Death.

And indeed, 1800 years before the author of this story was born, history recorded a similar incident not as fiction but as fact. The great, saintly sage, R. Yochanan B. Zakkai, was condemned to rot in a Roman prison in Jerusalem. But his students fooled their captors by carrying out their teacher in a closed coffin, telling the guards they were going to bury their dead master outside the city. The trick worked, and R. Yochanan proceeded to build the great academy of Yavneh, wherein were forged the Laws and Traditions which have sustained Jewish life until this very day. Two thousand years of great living – by virtue of a coffin. Life through death. It is the shadow of the tree. My dear friends, we are gathered here on this Holy Day for Yizkor Services – to remember dear departed parents, relatives, and children. And at a time of this sort, I appeal to you in the name of this synagogue, in the name of the Torah, in the name of dear life itself, DO NOT LET DEATH HAVE THE LAST SAY! Do not, on this great day, merely "remember" your departed loved ones. DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT! What is it that you can do? You can recreate the lives of your parents and loved ones by implanting the seed of eternal life, of toras chayim, of Jewish Education in the ways of the Living G-d, in the hearts and minds of West Side youngsters who study in our Hebrew School and are not charged one cent for this instruction. Our school board does not press an impoverished parent to the wall and ask for a tuition fee or else no school. We

invite the children, teach them Hebrew and History, and Bible, and we are only too glad to do it.

But friends, this cannot be done without your help. We cannot instill a living faith and a lively knowledge and prevent the increase of dead souls and dead minds and dead hearts, unless you, at this occasion of remembering dear dead, respond liberally to our appeal and thereby perpetuate their lives into Eternal Life.

Let not Death be the victor on this Holy Day. Help us create Life. And if the lives of us and those who have gone before us are but as passing shadows, let them not be like the flighty shadow of the bird, nor the stolid, short-lived shadow of the wall; but the eternal, recreating, self-perpetuating shadow of the shade-tree. Like Ibn Gabirol, let a fruitful Tree of Life be fertilized by the cold grip of Death's Hand. Like Judah Halevi, let your parents live again in Death, and do so yourselves, by cleaving to G-d and His Torah. Like R. Yochanan ben Zakkai, help us to build our Yavneh too, our school of learning, by grasping the coffins of the beloved, by acting in the name and memory of those we remember, and giving with an open hand to our noble cause. Let us hear your noble responses. Let us hear a chorus of voices singing out in sanctity, bila ha'mavess la'netzach, "Death hath vanished into Life Eternal." Death has certainly not put an end to our loved ones, for we, by our actions today, shall perpetuate their lives into Eternity by raising a generation of G-d-fearing, intelligent Jews and Jewesses.

May we, by our philanthropy, defeat the finality of the malach ha'mavess, and declare the victory of the forces of Life. Amen.



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON HAAZINU Shabbos Shuva & YOM KIPPUR - 5787

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Regarding my note last week, I was able to arrange for new hosting and fixes to [Parsha.net](http://www.parsha.net). What I will do instead of getting partners for the website, is to increase the **sponsorship** from \$36 to **\$50 per weekly sponsorship** (hasn't gone up in 30 years!) and to ask sponsors to send any weekly sponsorships to me *Chaim Shulman*, 632 Norfolk Street, Teaneck, NJ 07666 with or without a dedication (or email me at cshulman@gmail.com). Once I recoup [Parsha.net](http://www.parsha.net) expenses each year, I will forward the balance to a worthy Tzedaka.

Separately, the Yom Tov Tzedakas are listed at tinyurl.com/yk83-tzedaka & tinyurl.com/yk85-tzedaka

Wishing everyone a Gmar Chasima Tova! Chaim

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 על התשובה by Rav Soloveitchik,

Chapter 1. Yom Kippur: Kapparah and Taharah

Yom Kippur does two things for us. The Torah says כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהרו - *For on this day He will atone for you, to purify you from all your sins; before Hashem you shall be purified* (Vayikra 16:30). The two parts of the pasuk are not saying the same thing twice. Yom Kippur brings *kapparah*, forgiveness for the sin, and *taharah*, cleansing of the person who sinned. We need both.

Forgiveness and Cleansing

When a person sins, two things happen. First, the sin creates consequences. It leaves a debt, so to speak. *Kapparah* removes that debt. Rashi explains ונראה - *Every use of kapparah in connection with sin has the sense of wiping away and removing* (Rashi, Bereishis 32:21). Hashem can forgive what the sinner has brought upon himself.

But sin does something else as well. It changes the sinner. The Navi describes purification from sin in the language of water: וזרקתי עליכם מים - *I will sprinkle pure water upon you and you will be purified from all your impurities* (Yechezkel 36:25). The next pasuk speaks of לב חדש ורוח חדשה - *a new heart and a new spirit* (Yechezkel 36:26). That is *taharah*. Sin can harden a person and dull his spiritual sensitivity. Purification means that the person himself is restored.

The distinction has a concrete halachic expression. Certain aveiros can make a person unfit to testify. That is not simply another punishment added to the first one. His status has changed. The person after the sin is not quite the person he was before it. True *teshuvah* therefore cannot end with having the punishment forgiven. It seeks to repair the person as well. At its highest level, it can even lift him higher than he stood before.

No One Can Become Pure for You

Here the Gemara records a machlokes. The Mishnah teaches מיתה ויום הכיפורים מכפרין עם התשובה - *death and Yom Kippur atone together with teshuvah*. Rebbe disagrees: על כל עבירות שבתורה בין עשה תשובה בין לא עשה - *for most Torah transgressions, whether or not a person did teshuvah, Yom Kippur atones* (Yoma 85b; with limited exceptions stated there). Rambam follows the first view: ועצמו של יום הכיפורים מכפר לשבים - *the essence of Yom Kippur atones for those who repent* (Hilchos Teshuvah 1:3).

This machlokes concerns *kapparah*, not *taharah*. Yom Kippur itself has a special power of atonement, but there are two dimensions to that *kapparah*. We say מלך מוחל וסולח לעוונותינו ולעוונות עמו בית ישראל - *a King Who pardons and forgives our sins and the sins of His people, the House of Israel*. The first refers to the individual; the second to Klal Yisrael as a whole.

According to Rebbe, one who has not done *teshuvah* cannot receive complete individual *kapparah*, but he can still share in the communal *kapparah* of Klal Yisrael, a מקצת כפרה - *measure of atonement*. The Chachamim, whose view Rambam follows, do not separate the two: without personal *teshuvah*, the individual does not receive the *kapparah* of Yom Kippur. This distinction is developed further later in *The Individual and the Community*.

But even Rebbe's broad view of עיצומו של יום - *the essence of the day* - concerns only *kapparah*. It does not cleanse or restore the personality changed by sin. No one can become pure through the *teshuvah* of the community or of another person. *Taharah* remains personal: אין שליח לטהרה - *there is no proxy for purification*.

There is also a difference in when the two dimensions of Yom Kippur come to the foreground. *Kapparah* is especially connected with the korbanos and the *avodah* of Yom Kippur, which take place during the day. *Taharah*, however, begins with the entrance of Yom Kippur itself, with the *kedushas hayom*. Purification begins when a Jew draws near and stands לפני ה' - *before Hashem*.

No one can go to the *mikveh* for someone else. In the same way, no one can appoint a *shaliach* to become pure in his place. There are therefore two kinds of *vidui* on Yom Kippur. There is the public *vidui* of *kapparah*, said together with the community, and there is the deeply personal *vidui* of *taharah*, in which each person stands alone before Hashem. The Kohen Gadol could

pleasure from hearing a theory or an insight concerning that field of study. For example — physics. If one tells over to a physicist a “chiddush” in his field of expertise, he will get great pleasure from it. If, however, one shares this same insight with someone who has never studied and never been interested in physics, he will be totally unmoved by it. The same applies to many, many other disciplines. However, this is not the case with music. When Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony is played — regardless of whether one is a concert master or a plain simple person — there is something one will get out of it. Music is something that everyone on their own level can enjoy and have a relationship to.

Rav Herzog says, that’s why Torah is called “Shirah”. One can be a great Talmid Chochom and learn “Bereishis Barah Elokim...” and see great wisdom therein. On the other hand, one can be a five year old child, just beginning to read, and learn “Bereishis Barah Elokim...” and also gain something from it. Every person, on his own level can have an appreciation for Torah. Therefore Torah is aptly referred to in the verse when it says “And now, write for yourselves this ‘song’...” Menachem Tzion on “Binu Shnos Dor V’Dor”

The verse says in Parshas Ha’azinu [32:7] “Remember bygone days; understand the years of each generation; ask your father and he will tell you, your grandfather and he will say it over to you”. This pasuk, even on a very simple and basic level is telling us that a person has to have an appreciation for history.

A Jew, especially, has to have an appreciation of what was before him. If a person has an appreciation of what was, of tradition, of what has transpired over the years, then he is a person that can deal with the present even better. A person has an obligation to remember and to understand and to try to see the Hand of G-d (Hashgocha) in history.

Willaim Shirer used as an epigraph to his Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (1959) the quote from U.S. philosopher George Santayana: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” This is a truth. One needs to remember past history (Zechor Yemos Olam).

On a simple level, Binu Shnos Dor V’Dor (Understand each and every generation) is redundant. It would appear to be a poetic restatement of the beginning of the verse. On a homiletic level however, the Menachem Zion offers a very nice interpretation of this expression.

Yes, one must understand history and take the lessons of history and apply it to our generation, but also Binu ‘Shnos’ dor v’dor. He homiletically says the word ‘Shnos’ is derived not from the word ‘Shana’ (year) but from the word ‘Shoneh’ (different). The meaning is that you must understand the changes from one generation to the next.

A person can not blindly apply the same rules that worked in the past to the present situation. If he tries, he will fall short. Each generation is different. A person can not glibly say “That’s the way it was; therefore that’s the way it has to be”. Binu Shnos Dor V’dor — take the lesson of history, but bear in mind the changes from generation to generation. Times change, people change, and circumstances change. Sometimes a person has to alter and redirect and not merely go with what was.

If someone today were to send a half million troops to the beaches of Normandy, he would rightly be called a “meshuganer”. While 50 years ago there was indeed a need to fight a battle on the beaches of Normandy, that battle is now over; that battle has already been

fought; and that battle has already been won. We cannot always continually fight the same battle over again.

Understand the changes (‘shnos’) in each generation. Understand that each generation has its own set of problems and own set of rules and own set of circumstances. We must remember the days gone by, but couple that remembrance with an understanding of the changes that take place in each generation.

In this connection, I have quoted in the past the ‘Chassideshe vort’ of Reb Levi Yitzchak that Eliyahu (rather than Moshe Rabbenu or anyone else) was the one designated to resolve all of the Gemarah’s “Teykus”. The reason, the Berditchever says, is because Chaz”al say Eliyahu never died — he has been around in all generations. To pasken shaylos we need someone who has an understanding of each generation to pasken the Shaylah for that generation. Therefore only Eliyahu who was present during all generations will be qualified to resolve the “Teykus”.

Rav Gedaliah Schorr on Revealed and Hidden Manifestations of G-d The verse says [32:39] “See now that I myself (Ani, Ani) am the One, there is no other god with me; I will kill and I will resurrect. I will hit and I will also heal, there is no one to save from My Hand”. The commentaries are here bothered by the two “Ani”s. It should just say the word Ani once.

The Kli Yakar explains, that the verse is coming to contradict those schools of thought that believe there are two Supreme Forces in the world: The Force that Gives us Good and the Force that Gives us Evil. The verse comes and says this is incorrect. The same G-d that Kills is the G-d that Resurrects. The same G-d that gives illness is the G-d that heals. Ani Ani Hu. (I, myself, am the One). There are no two “Domains”.

Rav Gedaliah Schorr, zt”l says that the Kabalistic works discuss two ways in which G-d deals with the world — the Revealed Way (Gilui) and the Hidden Way (Hester). The Revealed Way is referred to in this literature as “Ani” — we can see clearly that it is “I – G-d” who is dealing with us. But when the Hidden Way is talked about it is referred to in Kabalistic terminology as “Hu” — the third person. As if it were not G-d acting, but another Force, as it were, — “Him” not “I”.

Using these terms, Rav Schorr offers a beautiful interpretation of the verse: “Ani, Ani, Hu” means that the attribute that deals with you as “Ani” is in fact identical to the attribute that deals with you as “Hu”. When G-d deals with us in a mysterious way such that we cannot understand His Ways, we must nevertheless believe that it is the same Force; the same Ribbono Shel Olam as the one Whose Presence is clearly evident to us.

A very short time ago, we beat our breasts with the confession for the “sins we have committed against You with ‘Timhon levav’”.

‘Timhon Levav’ means that we have ‘Temihos’ (questions) because we have not seen the Ribbono Shel Olam as the First Person (I), but as the Hidden Third Person (Hu); we have failed to believe with a complete belief that the Hidden and the Revealed manifestations are from one and the same Ribbono Shel Olam.

Personalities & Sources: Rav Yitzchak Herzog (1888-1959) — Chief Rabbi of Ireland and later Palestine – Israel. Menachem Tzion — Rabbi Menachem Ben-Zion Zachs. Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev – (1740-1810) – famous Hassidic Rebbe, disciple of Dov Baer of Mezritch. Rav Gedaliah Schorr (1910-1979) — Rosh Yeshiva, Mesifita Torah V’Daath; Brooklyn, N.Y. Kli Yakar — Bible commentary by R. Shlomo Ephraim Lunshitz (1550-1619); Prague.

Transcribed by David Twersky Assistance by Dovid Hoffman This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#67). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: #67 is: The Mitzvah of Writing a Sefer Torah. The other halachic portions for Parshas Ha'azinu from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are: Tape # 296 – Ha'azinu: Does Eating Mezonos Require a Succah? Shiurim can be ordered from:Yad Yechiel Institute <https://www.yadyechiel.org/>

Adapted by CS from

Reflections & Introspection

by Harav Moshe Shapiro

Yom Kippur: The Day of Truth

Two Judgments

We ordinarily think of Rosh Hashanah as the Day of Judgment and Yom Kippur as the day of *kapparah*. Yet Chazal describe a more complex structure.

שלושה ספרים נפתחין בראש השנה אחד של רשעים גמורין ואחד של צדיקים גמורין ואחד של בינוניים - *Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah: one for the completely wicked, one for the completely righteous, and one for those in between* (Rosh Hashanah 16b).

The completely righteous are written and sealed immediately for life, the completely wicked for death, while the judgment of the *beinoni* remains suspended until Yom Kippur. On the surface, this suggests that Rosh Hashanah is the real Day of Judgment and Yom Kippur merely completes the unresolved cases. But the deeper structure is that there are two judgments, each addressing a different dimension of existence.

The Lunar Year and the Solar Year

The Torah gives Klal Yisrael authority over the calendar:

החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים - *This month shall be for you the first of the months* (Shemos 12:2).

The Jewish calendar is lunar, but it must remain aligned with the solar year. A lunar year of twelve months is roughly eleven days shorter than a solar year, so the two systems must periodically be reconciled. The months follow the moon, while the year remains connected to the solar cycle.

The ten days from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur correspond approximately to that gap. Rosh Hashanah begins the new lunar year, while those same days can also be understood as completing the previous solar year. Yom Kippur therefore occupies an extraordinary position. From one perspective it is the tenth day of the new year; from another, it stands at the completion of the year that has passed.

This explains why Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur can both be days of judgment. Rosh Hashanah judges existence as it enters a new cycle of time. Yom Kippur reaches the point at which the cycle itself is brought to completion and judged from its source.

Beyond the World Beneath the Sun

Koheles describes human existence as life *תחת השמש* - *beneath the sun*. *מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש* - *What advantage does man have from all his labor that he performs beneath the sun* (Koheles 1:3).

The phrase *תחת השמש* is more than poetic language. The sun represents the fixed order of the created world, the regular structure of nature and time in which we live. The solar year encompasses that order. Yom Kippur stands at its boundary, at the point where the completed world is brought before its Source.

This is why Yom Kippur is not simply a second chance after Rosh Hashanah. Rosh Hashanah judges the world within time. Yom Kippur reaches toward the root from which time and the created order themselves receive existence.

The Day Torah Is Given Again

The first Yom Kippur was the day Moshe Rabbeinu descended with the second *Luchos*.

פסל לך שני לוחות אבנים כראשונים - *Carve for yourself two tablets of stone like the first ones* (Shemos 34:1).

The first *Luchos* had been shattered after the sin of the Golden Calf. The second *Luchos* therefore represent far more than replacement. They reveal that Torah can be given again after sin. Yom Kippur becomes the day on which the bond between Hashem, Torah, and Klal Yisrael can be renewed. Torah is not merely one institution within the created world. It expresses the Divine will upon which the world itself rests. The day on which Torah is restored is therefore also the day on which the world can be restored to its proper relationship with Hashem. Judgment, *kapparah*, Torah, and Hashem's Kingship are not separate themes. They meet at the same point: the world returning to the will that gives it existence.

The Two Goats and the Nature of Sin

The *avodah* of Yom Kippur gives this idea a human form. At its center stand the two goats. The Mishnah requires that they resemble one another as closely as possible, equal in appearance, height, and value. Yet their destinies are utterly different. One is brought *לפני ה'* - *before Hashem*; the other is sent to *Azazel*.

ומאת עדת בני ישראל יקח שני שעירי עזים לחטאת - *From the congregation of the Children of Israel he shall take two he-goats for a sin offering* (Vayikra 16:5).

They begin as a pair and are only afterward separated. They therefore represent two possibilities within one person. A person can contain that which belongs *לפני ה'* and that which must ultimately be cast away. Sin can become deeply attached to a person. Habit can become identity, and repeated failure can make a person believe that this is simply who he is. But Yom Kippur teaches that the sin, however real, need not be the deepest truth of the person. It can be separated from him.

This is the meaning of *kapparah*. A stain can be wiped from a garment because the stain and the garment are not the same thing. So too, sin can be removed because it does not necessarily belong to the essential self.

Once Each Year

The Torah concludes the *avodah* of Yom Kippur with the words: והייתה זאת לכם לחקת עולם לכפר על בני ישראל מכל חטאתם אחת בשנה - *This shall be for you an eternal statute, to bring atonement upon the Children of Israel for all their sins, once each year* (Vayikra 16:34).

The phrase *אחת בשנה* - *once each year* can be heard as more than a statement of frequency. Yom Kippur is the point of *achdus* within the year. Throughout the year, life appears fragmented into days, events, choices, successes, and failures. On Yom Kippur, all of those fragments are brought back toward their single source.

The Day of Truth

This is the point toward which the entire structure leads. Yom Kippur is a day of *emes*, truth.

We ordinarily live among layers. What we have done becomes mixed with who we think we are. Habit begins to look like essence. Failure begins to seem permanent. A person may no longer know what belongs to his true self and what merely accumulated around it.

Yom Kippur separates the two. Falsehood can disappear; truth cannot. A person may know that he sinned and may have to confront years of repeated failure. But he need not grant those sins the status of *emes*. He need not say: this is what I am.

The sins remain real acts for which he must take responsibility, confess through *vidui*, regret, and change. But they need not become the final truth of his being. What is false can be cast away. What is true remains.

That is the deeper meaning of *kapparah*. It is not pretending that the past never happened. It is revealing that the past does not have the power to define the essence of a person forever.

And this is why judgment and *kapparah* ultimately coincide. The judgment of Yom Kippur is a judgment of truth. Once everything is brought before Hashem, what is secondary and accidental can fall away and what is essential can emerge. The person is judged, the world is judged, and both are returned to the point from which they derive their existence.

Hashem will be King over the entire earth; on that day Hashem will be One and His Name One (Zechariah 14:9).

This is not a new reality imposed upon the world. It is the revelation of the reality that was always there.

Yom Kippur gives us a glimpse of that revelation each year. The world *תחת* beneath the sun reaches its limit. Torah reconnects creation to its Source. Hashem's Kingship is revealed. Sin is separated from the person who has attached himself to it. What can be removed is removed, and what is true remains.

That is why Yom Kippur is both the Day of Judgment and the Day of *kapparah*. It is the Day of *Emes*.

Adapted by CS from

Shabbos u'Moed V3 by Rav Yitzchok Kossowsky

From Fasting to Inner Light and Joy: Standing Upright Before Hashem on Yom Kippur

Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright of heart (Tehillim 97:11).

לא הכל לאורה ולא הכל לשמחה צדיקים לאורה וישרים לשמחה צדיקים לאורה - *Not everyone merits light, and not everyone merits joy. The righteous merit light, as it is written, Light is sown for the righteous; the upright merit joy, as it is written, And joy for the upright of heart* (Taanis 15a).

The Joy of Yom Kippur

The holiest hour of the year is the entrance of the holy day, Yom Kippur. The Torah calls it a *mikra kodesh* even as it commands *את נפשתיכם ועניתם עד מערב עד* - *you shall afflict your souls* (Vayikra 23:27), and requires the fast *ערב עד* - *from evening to evening* (Vayikra 23:32). Yet we enter the day with *Shehecheyanu*. The fasting body receives no physical pleasure from this joy. It is a joy of the soul, purified of material enjoyment and directed entirely to Hashem.

I praised joy (Koheles 8:15), which Chazal explain as *the joy of a mitzvah* (Shabbos 30b). The Rambam therefore writes, *השמחה שישמח אדם בעשיית המצוה ובאהבת האלקים שצוה בהן* - *The joy a person experiences in performing a mitzvah and in loving Hashem Who commanded it is a great form of divine service* (Hilchos Lulav 8:15).

אור זרוע לצדיק ולישרי - This is why the verse recited as the holy day begins is *Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright of heart* (Tehillim 97:11). External light brings the joy of physical life; inner light, the light of knowing Hashem, brings the joy of the soul. *מתוך האור וטוב לעינים* - *Light is sweet, and it is good for the eyes to see the sun* (Koheles 11:7). So too, spiritual light opens the soul to joy.

the Shechinah does not rest upon a person through sadness, but through joy (Shabbos 30b).

לא הכל לאורה ולא הכל לשמחה צדיקים - But Chazal make a striking distinction: *Not everyone merits light and not everyone merits joy; the righteous merit light, while the upright merit joy* (Taanis 15a). The *tzaddik* receives light, but joy belongs especially to the *yesharei lev*. Rashi explains, *הישרים עדיפי מצדיקים* - *the upright are on a higher level than the righteous*. To understand the joy of Yom Kippur, we must therefore understand what it means to become *yashar*.

What It Means to Be "Yashar"

The pesukim repeatedly place the *yesharim* beyond the *tzaddikim*: *רננו צדיקים בה' לישרים נאווה תהלה* - *Rejoice, righteous ones, in Hashem; praise is fitting for the upright* (Tehillim 33:1), and *אך צדיקים יודו לשמך יישרים* - *The righteous will give thanks to Your Name; the upright will dwell in Your presence* (Tehillim 140:14).

Chazal tell us that *אברהם, יצחק ויעקב נקראו ישרים* - *Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were called yesharim* (Avodah Zarah 25a). Bilam himself longed,

Let my soul die the death of the upright (Bamidbar 23:10).

עשה האלקים את האדם ישר - What is this special uprightness? Koheles says, *Hashem made man upright, but they sought many calculations* (Koheles 7:29). This cannot mean that a person is created already righteous, for righteousness depends on human choice. Rather, Hashem created the human being with an upright form and an upright purpose.

Chazal describe man as sharing qualities with both the *malachei hashareis* and the animals (Chagigah 16a). Most significantly, *מלאכים בקומה זקופה* - *human beings walk upright like the ministering angels*. Unlike the animal whose head is bent toward the earth, man was created with his head raised toward heaven, able to fulfill *שאו מרום עיניכם וראו מי ברא* - *Lift your eyes on high and see Who created these* (Yeshayahu 40:26). The human body itself reflects this double existence. The lower part serves eating, digestion, and reproduction; the upper part contains the head, speech, and understanding. Man stands between earth and heaven. His task is to keep the heaven within him above the earth within him, *כימי השמים על הארץ* - *like the days of heaven over the earth* (Devarim 11:21).

When the higher rules the lower, the person stands straight. When bodily desire rules the spirit, the order is reversed. *I sinned and distorted what was upright* (Iyov 33:27). Sin bends the *yashar* within a person and turns the head that was created to look upward back toward the earth.

The Avos embodied the opposite possibility. Chazal teach that the *yetzer hara* did not rule over them and that Hashem gave them in this world a taste of *Olam Haba* (Bava Basra 17a). Their earthly lives were therefore genuinely *כימי השמים על הארץ* - *like the days of heaven over the earth*. They were called *yesharim* because they preserved the straight order of creation. And where that inner uprightness is complete, the result is the joy promised to *the upright of heart*.

Yom Kippur: Standing Upright Again

The deeds of the Avos have not, because of our sins, fully become the pattern of their children. The *yetzer hara* that did not rule over them rules powerfully over us. It draws us after our hearts and eyes and after the very needs in which we resemble the animals. Our upright stature bends beneath the burden of sin, and our head, meant to be raised toward heaven, is pulled toward the earth.

Out of His love and compassion, Hashem therefore gave us Yom Kippur. For one day there is no eating or drinking and no ordinary pursuit of bodily satisfaction. We are given a day of freedom from the body's constant claims. This is the meaning of *Loosen the bonds of wickedness and untie the straps of the yoke* (Yeshayahu 58:6). The purpose of the day is not suffering for its own sake. It is to loosen the bonds that keep us bent, to straighten our backs, raise our heads, and restore the heaven within us to its proper place above the earth.

The five *inuyim* of Yom Kippur help create that transformation. Chazal picture Israel on this day as resembling the *malachei hashareis*: *מה מלאכי השרת יחיפי רגל כך ישראל יחיפי רגל ביום הכפורים מה מלאכי השרת אין להם קפיצים ועומדים כך ישראל עומדים ביום הכפורים מה מלאכי השרת אין בפייהם אכילה ושתייה כך ישראל אין בפייהם אכילה ושתייה ביום הכפורים* - *Just as the ministering angels are barefoot, so Israel is barefoot on Yom Kippur; just as the angels stand, so Israel stands on Yom Kippur; and just as the angels have no eating or drinking, so Israel has no eating or drinking on Yom Kippur* (Yalkut Shimoni, remez 578; see Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer, ch. 46).

The absence of eating is readily understood. But why is being barefoot part of the comparison?

The Dust of the Road

The answer begins with Avraham Avinu and the three angels. When he said, *Let a little water be brought and wash your feet* (Bereishis 18:4), Chazal say that the angels understood him to suspect them of worshipping the dust of their feet (Bava Metzia 86b).

The image becomes meaningful in light of the Torah's warning against saying *הוא החיל הזה* - *My strength and the power of my hand made me this wealth*, instead of remembering *לך כח לעשות* - *He is the One Who gives you strength to achieve* (Devarim 8:17-18).

A person who attributes success entirely to his own movement, skill, and exertion can come to worship, in effect, himself and the dust raised by his own feet.

Chazal connect this danger with a life absorbed in commerce and ceaseless movement: *It is not beyond the sea; Torah is not found among merchants and traders* (Eruvin 55a). In the setting described here, constant travel and business can fill a person's consciousness until he imagines that his own going and coming are what sustain him. The dust on the feet becomes the symbol of restless human striving.

Avraham's call was therefore *Wash your feet and rest beneath the tree* (Bereishis 18:4). Stop the rushing. Wash away the dust of self-reliance and remember the G-d of heaven and earth Who gives the power to accomplish.

The same idea appears at the entrance to the Mikdash: *ואל יכנס להר הבית - במקלו ובמנעלו ובפנדתו ובאבק שעל רגליו* - *A person may not enter the Temple Mount with his staff, his shoes, his money belt, or the dust upon his feet* (Berachos 54a). Before entering holiness, a person must leave the dust of ordinary striving outside.

Standing Before Hashem

We can now understand why the angels are described as *עומדים* - *those who stand*. The endless rushing of ordinary life can make a person forget his Maker. Standing still creates the possibility of *חשבון* של עולם - *an accounting of one's world*, a moment in which a person can ask what he is living for.

At the burning bush, Moshe was told, *של נעליך מעל רגליך כי המקום אשר אתה, עומד עליו אדמת קדש הוא* - *Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground* (Shemos 3:5). Holiness becomes perceptible when the running stops and a person realizes where he is standing.

This is the unity of the angelic qualities we imitate on Yom Kippur. The angels do not eat or drink, they are barefoot, and they stand. They are not driven downward by physical need or outward by restless pursuit.

On Yom Kippur we too stop. For a day we step out of the ordinary race, put aside the demands of the body, remove the dust from our feet, and stand before Hashem. In that stillness a bent person can become upright again.

Light and Joy

This is why the *inuyim* of Yom Kippur need not lead to sadness. They can become a source of inner delight and joy, filling the soul with the light of *ורה* - *Light shines in the darkness for the upright* (Tehillim 112:4).

As the day begins, we straighten ourselves and remember what Hashem created us to be. We are not only fasting. We are becoming *yesharim* again, lifting the heaven within us above the earth, standing still before Hashem, and recovering the inner light from which true joy grows.

This, then, is the precious gift of Yom Kippur. Once each year Hashem frees us from the demands of the body and the endless movement of ordinary life, so that we may straighten our bent posture, lift our heads, and remember the purpose for which we were created. On this day we stand before Him like the *malachei hashareis*, no longer running after the things that pull us downward, but turning our eyes upward toward Heaven.

Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright of heart (Tehillim 97:11). The fasting and *inuyim* of Yom Kippur are therefore not ends in themselves. They restore us to *yashrus*, to inner light, and from that light comes true *simchah*. We enter the day with awe, but also with gratitude and joy, for Hashem has given us one day each year in which we can stand upright again and return to Him.

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

An Odessa Jew meets another one. "Have you heard, Einstein won the Nobel 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 Nobel 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.

(i) אמר רבי עקיבא, אשריכם ישראל! לפני מי אתם מטהרין ומי מטהר אתכם? אביכם שבשמים! שנאמר (יהזקאל 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. (ii)

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 [700] 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. (iii)

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. מטוהר 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 aesthetic 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 included 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 simply been written, "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! (iv) 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. I don't have the energy for the rest of my issues, 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 מטוהר 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. (v)

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. (vi)

(i) Mishna end of Yuma. (ii) 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. (iii) 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 from all your sins... You can't get much clearer than this. (iv) See for example end of Ch. 3 of Mishna Berachos. משנה זב שראה קרי וגדה שפלה שכבת זרע. (v) 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. (vi) 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 yartzeit, 6 Tishrei 5730, 1969. Part of it was published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 17 Parshas Acharei.

Adapted & summarized by CS from

by שפתי חיים by **Rav Chaim Friedlander**

Teshuvah: The Road Back to the Kisei HaKavod

Moshe Rabbeinu had to cross the heavens to reach the *Kisei HaKavod*. A *baal teshuvah* can reach it by turning around.

When Moshe ascended to receive the Torah, Chazal describe him rising from one firmament to the next until he reached the *Kisei HaKavod*, the highest level of closeness to the Shechinah attainable by a human being. Each stage required another ascent. Yet Chazal say something astonishing about *teshuvah*: גדולה תשובה שמגיע עד - *great is teshuvah, for it reaches all the way to the Throne of Glory*. The *baal teshuvah* need not climb the same ladder. *Teshuvah* itself can carry him there.

This is the depth of the Navi's words עד ה' אלקיך - *Return, Yisrael, unto Hashem your G-d* (Hoshea 14:2). *Teshuvah* is not merely a way to erase a sin or repair the past. It is a return to Hashem, a return to the spiritual place from which the *neshamah* came.

When There Is No Road Back

Chazal say, במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין - *in the place where baalei teshuvah stand, even complete tzaddikim do not stand* (Berachos 34b). How can someone who has fallen rise beyond the *tzaddik gamur* who never fell?

The *tzaddik* rises through his own avodah, step after step. The *baal teshuvah* may begin far below him, sometimes in a place from which he cannot possibly climb back by his own strength. But once he truly turns toward Hashem, another force enters his ascent: *siyata diShmaya*. Hashem helps him rise beyond what his own powers could accomplish. His fall does not become a virtue, but his return opens a path that ordinary spiritual ascent could never provide. Menashe is the most dramatic example. After a life of terrible sin, he finally cried out to Hashem. Chazal relate: באותה שעה אמר הקב"ה אם איני מקבלו בתשובה הרי אני נועל דלת בפני כל בעלי תשובה מה עשה - *At that moment Hakadosh Baruch Hu said: If I do not accept him in teshuvah, I am closing the door before all baalei teshuvah. What did Hakadosh Baruch Hu do? He made an opening for him beneath the Kisei HaKavod* (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin; Ruth Rabbah 5:6, as cited in the Hebrew article).

Menashe had reached a place from which, by the ordinary rules, there was no road back. So Hashem made one. That is one of the great gifts of *teshuvah*: when a person sincerely turns toward Hashem, his past need not determine how high he can still rise. The first movement matters. הבא לטהר מסייעין אותו - *one who comes to purify himself is given assistance* (Yoma 38b). A person must begin. He must turn away from the old direction and want to come back. Then Hashem helps him continue. As the Navi says, יעזב רשע - *let the wicked man abandon his way and the man of iniquity his thoughts, and let him return to Hashem, Who will have mercy upon him* (Yeshaya 55:7). *What Are We Returning To?*

The word *teshuvah* itself means return. But return to what? The deepest answer is: return to ourselves, to the source of the *neshamah*. Chazal teach that before birth a person is charged, כל הנשמות גזורות מתחת כסא הכבוד - *all souls are hewn from beneath the Kisei HaKavod* (Zohar, Vayikra 29b). Sin distances the soul from that source. *Teshuvah* brings it home.

This explains why *teshuvah* is not only for the sinner. Even a *tzaddik* must continually return toward the level for which his *neshamah* was created. Chazal teach that before birth a person is charged, תהי צדיק - *be a tzaddik and do not be a rasha* (Niddah 30b). Life itself is a journey of return, an effort to bring the soul closer to its true place.

Why the Soul Is Never Satisfied

This also explains something we experience constantly. A person wants something and imagines that once he has it he will be satisfied. He gets it, enjoys it, and soon wants something else. The desire changes, but the hunger remains.

Chazal give a *mashal*: משל לעירוני בן כפר שנשא בת מלך אם יביא לה - *It may be compared to a villager who married a king's daughter. Even if he brings her everything in the world, it is all insignificant to her, because she is a king's daughter* (Koheles Rabbah, ch. 6, as cited in the Hebrew article).

The *neshamah* is that princess. It comes from beneath the *Kisei HaKavod*, and therefore nothing merely material can finally satisfy it. Hashem implanted within the soul a *she'ifah*, an urge to reach

higher. The Yetzer Hara does not create that longing; it redirects it. Instead of seeking closeness to Hashem, the person seeks one pleasure, possession, or achievement after another. But a spiritual hunger cannot be filled with material things.

When that same *she'ifah* is turned toward Torah, mitzvot, Tefillah, and growth, the endless desire to rise finally has a worthy destination. There is still a desire for more, but it is no longer the emptiness of someone who thought the last pleasure would satisfy him. Spiritual growth can bring genuine fulfillment even while awakening a desire to climb higher.

This is *teshuvah* in its deepest sense. It is not only turning away from what we did wrong. It is turning the deepest longing of the *neshamah* back toward what it was always seeking. The soul came from beneath the *Kisei HaKavod*, and it wants to return there.

That is why *teshuvah* can reach so high. It is not carrying the soul to a foreign place. It is bringing it home.

Adapted from: **From the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

The parsha of Haazinu begins with Moshe's words, Give ear, O heavens, and let the earth hear. The Midrash notes that Moshe speaks to heaven with the language of closeness and to earth with the language of distance. Yeshayahu reverses the order: Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth. Moshe was close to heaven and distant from earth, while Yeshayahu was close to earth and distant from heaven.

At first, Yeshayahu's position seems to represent a lower spiritual level. If the Torah teaches every Jew to strive for Moshe's closeness to heaven, why would Yeshayahu stand closer to earth?

The answer is that Yeshayahu represents not a retreat from Moshe's level, but its completion. First one must become close to heaven.

Then one must reach an even greater achievement: to bring that closeness into the world itself, becoming close to earth without losing one's connection to heaven.

This theme is especially appropriate to the time when Haazinu is read, during or near the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*.

The Ari taught that one who does not shed tears during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* has an imperfection in his soul. This seems understandable for one who has sinned, but why should it apply even to a complete *tzaddik*?

The Alter Rebbe explains that *teshuvah* means more than repentance for sin. It is the soul's return to its source, as the verse says, והָרוּחַ תָּשׁוּבָה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים אֲשֶׁר נָתַנָּה - *the spirit shall return to God Who gave it*. Even the *tzaddik*, who serves Hashem with love and fear, lives within the limitations of physical existence. His soul is no longer united with Hashem as it was before descending into this world. His tears therefore arise not necessarily from sin, but from an awareness of distance.

Yet the soul did not descend into this world by mistake. Hashem placed it here because precisely within this world it can attain something higher. The goal is not to escape earthly existence, but to transcend the sense of independent self and reveal Hashem within it. This is the meaning of מִן הַמִּצָּר קִרְאתִי יְהוָה עֲנֵנִי בִמְרֹחֶב הָיָה - *From the narrow place I called to Hashem; Hashem answered me with expansiveness*. The *meitzar*, the narrow place, is not only sin. It is the limitation inherent in seeing ourselves as separate beings. When a Jew feels that confinement and calls out to Hashem, the very awareness of distance becomes the path to a deeper closeness.

During the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, when Hashem is especially close, this dimension of *teshuvah* becomes accessible to every Jew. *Teshuvah* is no longer only regret for wrongdoing. It is the longing of the soul to return to Hashem and overcome the boundaries that ordinarily separate the finite human being from the Infinite.

This also illuminates the *shofar*. Its very shape moves from narrowness to expansiveness. Through the *shofar* we proclaim Hashem as King. The Gemara teaches that Hashem says: Recite before Me verses of kingship, remembrance, and *shofar* so that you make Me King over you, and through what? Through the *shofar*.

But how can performing the mitzvah of *shofar* make Hashem King? Does not obeying His command already assume His kingship?

The answer lies in מִן הַמִּצָּר קִרְאתִי יְהוָה. The deepest barrier to Hashem's kingship is the sense that we exist independently of Him. When a Jew recognizes that *meitzar* and calls out from within it, he breaks through the separation itself. Hashem's kingship is then revealed not by fleeing the world, but within the world.

This is the movement from Moshe to Yeshayahu.

During the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, a Jew first becomes close to heaven and distant from earth. He senses the limitations of ordinary existence and longs to rise beyond them. But that cannot be the final goal. Hashem's answer is to bring the *merchav*, the expansiveness of the Divine, into earthly life itself.

Moshe teaches the first stage: become close to heaven. Yeshayahu teaches the second: bring heaven into earth.

The same pattern defines Jewish life throughout the year. Heaven represents Torah, the word of Hashem; earth represents mitzvot, the Divine will carried into action. Through Torah, a Jew draws close to Hashem. Through mitzvot, he brings Hashem into the world.

One must first become close to heaven. But ultimately, לֹא הַמִּדְרָשׁ עֵיקָר - *not study, but action, is the essential thing*. The purpose is to transform the world itself into a dwelling place for Hashem.

Yeshayahu, the prophet who spoke so powerfully of the future redemption, therefore completes Moshe's message. The ultimate goal is not to leave earth behind, but to reveal within earth itself the presence of the Infinite.

Adapted from *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. IX, pp. 204–214.

Summarized from:

Peninei Halakha <https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/> by Rav Eliezer Melamed

Chapter 6: Yom Kippur

Full text <https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/category/15/15-06/>

- **The Gift of Atonement.** Yom Kippur is Hashem's gift to Israel, enabling not only improvement for the future but forgiveness and purification from the past. כִּי בְיוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהָר אֶתְכֶם - *For on this day He will atone for you, to purify you* (Vayikra 16:30). Rabbi Akiva compares this purification to immersion in a *mikveh*: just as a *mikveh* purifies the impure, Hashem purifies Israel (Yoma 85b). The more fully one returns to Hashem, the more completely the effects of sin are removed.

- **Mitzvot of the Day.** Yom Kippur shares with other holy days the obligations to sanctify and honor the day, refrain from *melakha*, and, in Temple times, bring *Musaf* offerings. Three mitzvot are distinctive to Yom Kippur: fasting, *teshuvah* and *vidui*, and the special Temple *avodah* culminating in the Kohen Gadol's entrance into the *Kodesh Ha-kodashim*. Today, the day itself, together with fasting, *teshuvah*, and prayer, provides the framework for atonement.

- **The Atonement of Yom Kippur** *Kapparah* conveys several related ideas: covering, cleansing, neutralizing, ransom, and appeasement. Yom Kippur is the unique day when the normal prosecution of sin is suspended and the underlying holiness of Israel is revealed. The entire day atones, but the

process reaches its culmination at the end of Yom Kippur, giving *Ne'ila* its special intensity.

- **Atonement on Yom Kippur and the Covenant with Israel.** Yom Kippur rests upon Hashem's eternal covenant with Israel, dramatically renewed when Moshe descended with the second *luchos* after the sin of the Golden Calf. That covenant cannot be destroyed by sin. Sin still has consequences and may require suffering and *teshuvah*, but Israel's underlying bond with Hashem remains. This also explains why Yom Kippur prayer and *vidui* are formulated primarily in the plural, as the atonement is first that of Klal Yisrael.
- **The Power of Yom Kippur to Atone for the Individual.** The individual draws his Yom Kippur purification from the collective holiness of Klal Yisrael. As that deeper identity becomes revealed, a person recognizes that his true desire is to be close to Hashem and live according to Torah. Connecting himself to Klal Yisrael therefore strengthens, rather than diminishes, his personal *teshuvah*. This also helps explain why the communal *vidui* is recited in the plural.
- **The Meaning of Fasting.** Fasting is not simply suffering. By temporarily withdrawing from bodily needs, the soul is freed from the material distractions that obscure its deeper aspirations. On Yom Kippur we become somewhat like the *malachim*, allowing the soul rather than the body to dominate. The diminished blood and fat of the fasting body are even compared to an offering brought before Hashem.
- **Sins for Which Yom Kippur Does Not Atone.** Yom Kippur does not eliminate every consequence of sin. Obligations such as korbanos or punishments imposed by *beit din* remain, and interpersonal sins are not fully atoned until the injured person has been appeased. Likewise, one who deliberately sins on the assumption that Yom Kippur will erase the offense undermines the very purpose of the day. Genuine *teshuvah*, however, can overcome even this obstacle.
- **The View of R. Yehuda Ha-Nasi.** Rebbe maintains that Yom Kippur provides a basic *kapparah* even without personal *teshuvah*, because the day reveals the eternal covenant between Hashem and Israel. Yet even on this view, sin can damage the soul, and that damage is not necessarily repaired without *teshuvah* or suffering. Yom Kippur can remove punishment demanded by strict justice without automatically restoring the sinner spiritually. Rebbe also excludes fundamental rejection of Hashem, Torah, or the covenant.
- **The View of the Sages.** The Chachamim disagree and maintain that Yom Kippur atones for the individual only together with *teshuvah*. The halakhah follows their view. Nevertheless, a person need not attain perfect *teshuvah*: observing the day, fasting, praying, and revealing a sincere wish to return to Hashem can itself constitute meaningful repentance.
- **Levels of Atonement.** Complete atonement depends on both the severity of the sin and the quality of the *teshuvah*. Some sins are repaired through *teshuvah* alone, while more serious sins may require Yom Kippur, suffering, or other forms of correction. *Teshuvah* from fear reduces the severity of sin; *teshuvah* from love reaches higher, transforming the person's life toward Torah, charity, kindness, *kiddush Hashem*, and service of Klal Yisrael.
- **The Jubilee, Repentance, and Freedom.** *Teshuvah* is liberation from slavery to desire, anger, jealousy, ego, and habit. This explains the connection between Yom Kippur and *Yovel*: on Yom Kippur of the Jubilee year slaves went free and ancestral lands returned to their owners. The shofar at the end of Yom Kippur similarly symbolizes the soul's release from the chains of sin and its return to its true self.
- **Matchmaking.** The Mishna records that Yom Kippur was once one of Israel's happiest days, when young women went out in borrowed white clothing and marriages were arranged. The practice reflected the holiness of marriage and its parallel to the bond between Hashem and Israel. Although such matchmaking is no longer appropriate on Yom Kippur, singles may especially pray for a proper match, while married couples can use the day to reflect on the holiness of their relationship.

Chapter 7: Laws of Yom Kippur

Full text at <https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/category/15/15-07/>

- **Honoring the Day.** Although there is no festive meal, Yom Kippur is a *mikra kodesh* and should be honored with dignified clothing, a clean home and synagogue, and other appropriate signs of respect. The physical honor normally expressed through food is redirected toward the sanctity of the day.
- **The Prohibition of *Melakha* and the Mitzva to Desist from Work** The same thirty-nine categories of *melakha* prohibited on Shabbat are prohibited on Yom Kippur. There is also a positive obligation of *Shabbason*, to preserve the day's restful character and avoid burdensome weekday activity even when it does not technically constitute *melakha*.
- **The Mitzva of Confession (*Vidui*).** Yom Kippur carries a particular mitzva of *teshuvah* and verbal confession. *Vidui* gives concrete expression to regret and the resolution to change, completing the process of repentance. The minimum confession acknowledges having sinned, done wrong, and rebelled, though specifying sins may sometimes deepen *teshuvah*.
- **The Laws of *Vidui*.** The Kohen Gadol confessed on behalf of Klal Yisrael, and our *vidui* therefore remains communal and is recited in the plural. Even a person who did not commit every offense listed says *Ashamnu* and *Al Chet*, because all Jews share responsibility for one another. One stands during *vidui*, generally bows somewhat, and customarily strikes the chest.
- **The Times of *Vidui*.** *Vidui* is first recited at Mincha before the pre-fast meal and then throughout Yom Kippur at Ma'ariv, Shacharis, Musaf, Mincha, and *Ne'ila*. The repeated confessions reflect the fact that *teshuvah* is the mitzva of the entire day. The traditional synagogue service produces ten confessions, paralleling the Kohen Gadol's ten utterances of Hashem's explicit Name.
- **Specifying Sins in *Vidui*.** One can fulfill *vidui* without naming each sin. Specifying a sin privately can be valuable when it increases regret and strengthens *teshuvah*, but shame and modesty also have value. A person may confess again for sins from an earlier year when he senses that his previous *teshuvah* was incomplete or that, at a higher spiritual level, further purification is necessary.
- **Public *Vidui*.** Sins between a person and Hashem generally should not be unnecessarily publicized. A public sin that caused *chillul Hashem*, however, may require public repentance. Interpersonal wrongdoing may likewise require a public apology when that is necessary to restore the victim's honor, but not where publicity would cause additional harm or embarrassment.
- **The Beginning, End, and Other Relevant Times of Yom Kippur.** Yom Kippur begins before sunset and ends after nightfall, with a mitzva of *tosefes Yom Kippur*, adding some weekday time to the sacred day at both ends. Acceptance of the day should be verbalized; women commonly accept it through candle lighting and *Shehecheyanu*, while men ordinarily accept it in synagogue.
- **Accepting Yom Kippur: Candle Lighting.** Candles are lit to honor Yom Kippur and promote *shalom bayis*. The widespread custom is to light and recite the appropriate berakhah, followed by *Shehecheyanu*. A woman who needs to drive afterward should specifically intend not to accept the sanctity of the day with her lighting.
- **Accepting Yom Kippur: *Kol Nidrei*.** Communities differ as to whether *Kol Nidrei* is completed before or after sunset. In all cases, the sanctity of Yom Kippur must be accepted before sunset to fulfill *tosefes Yom Kippur*. Where *Shehecheyanu* will not be reached in time, the congregation should explicitly accept the day beforehand.
- **Ma'ariv.** Yom Kippur begins by welcoming every Jew, even habitual sinners, into the congregation, expressing the unity of Klal Yisrael. *Kol Nidrei*, verses of forgiveness, *Shehecheyanu*, the *talit*, and the evening prayers establish the themes of repentance and communal holiness. Torah study after Ma'ariv is also especially appropriate.
- **Barukh Shem Kevod Malkhuto.** Throughout the year *Barukh shem kevod malkhuto le-olam va-ed* is recited quietly. On Yom Kippur it is said aloud because, freed from bodily concerns, Israel resembles the *malachim*.

The practice expresses the day's revelation that even this physical world can be brought fully under Hashem's kingship.

- **Torah Reading and Pledges.** The morning reading describes the Yom Kippur *avodah*, while the *haftarah* from Yeshayahu emphasizes authentic *teshuvah*. At Minḥa the Torah reading addresses forbidden relationships and the *haftarah* is Sefer Yonah, with its message of Divine providence and repentance. Charity is traditionally pledged in memory of the departed, whose continuing influence through their descendants can add to their merit.
- **Bowing During Musaf.** During the *avodah* section of Musaf, most communities bow in remembrance of those in the Beis Hamikdash who prostrated themselves when the Kohen Gadol pronounced Hashem's Name. Because of the prohibition against prostrating on a stone floor outside the Temple, a barrier is placed between the face and the floor.
- **The Meaning of Bowing.** Prostration expresses surrender and attachment to Hashem. The body itself acknowledges that its life comes from Him. Although full prostration largely disappeared from ordinary prayer, Yom Kippur's intense holiness and *teshuvah* preserve the custom during the *avodah*.
- **Birkat Kohanim During Ne'ila.** *Birkat Kohanim* is recited at *Ne'ila*, when there is no concern that a kohen has consumed wine. It generally is not recited at Minḥa. The service should be timed so that *Birkat Kohanim* can preferably be completed before sunset.
- **Ne'ila.** *Ne'ila* is the final and climactic prayer of Yom Kippur, as the gates of the day begin to close and the judgment is sealed. One should gather whatever strength remains to pray with particular concentration and resolve. The language accordingly shifts from asking to be inscribed to asking to be sealed.
- **Declaring Faith and Blowing the Shofar.** The day concludes with a communal declaration of faith: *Shema Yisrael, Barukh Shem*, and seven repetitions of *Hashem Hu HaElokim*. The shofar then recalls the freedom of *Yovel* and symbolizes release from the chains of sin. The conclusion of Yom Kippur therefore carries not only solemnity but spiritual freedom and joy.
- **The End of the Fast, Ma'ariv, and Kiddush Levana.** The fast ends only after nightfall plus the additional time added to the sacred day. Many recite *Kiddush Levana* afterward, when the tension of judgment has given way to confidence and joy in Hashem's acceptance of our *teshuvah*.
- **Havdala.** Eating and drinking remain prohibited until *havdala*. Unlike ordinary Motzaei Shabbat, no spices are used. The *berakhah* over fire is normally made over a flame that burned throughout Yom Kippur, emphasizing that fire was present but forbidden for use during the sacred day. After *havdala*, it is customary to eat joyfully and then begin preparing the *sukkah*, proceeding immediately from one mitzva to another.

Chapter 8: The Laws of the Fast

Full text at <https://ph.yhb.org.il/en/category/15/15-08/>

- **The Mitzva to Fast.** Fasting on Yom Kippur is a Torah commandment. Eating or drinking even a tiny quantity is prohibited, although the punishable quantities are a *kotevet* of food or approximately a cheekful of liquid. The fast is the central form of *inui*, with the other forms of deprivation discussed separately.
- **The Sick Who Are Not at Risk.** According to the chapter, an illness that is painful but not life-threatening generally does not exempt a person from the fast. It is preferable to remain home and fast rather than eat or drink in order to attend synagogue. Necessary tasteless medication may generally be swallowed without food, subject to the details given there.
- **Someone Sick with a Life-Threatening Illness.** When fasting poses a genuine danger to life, eating and drinking become a mitzva, because *והי בהם* - the mitzvot were given so that a person should live by them. One may not endanger himself by insisting on fasting. At the same time, remote or merely theoretical risks do not automatically eliminate the obligation to fast.
- **Who Determines Danger?** The chapter places significant weight on competent medical judgment while emphasizing that both the sanctity of Yom Kippur and the protection of life must be taken seriously. When genuine doubt about danger remains, *safek pikuach nefesh* is treated

stringently in favor of preserving life. A patient's own sense that he is in danger can also be halakhically significant.

- **Eating and Drinking Minimal Quantities (*Le-shi'urim*)** A dangerously ill person who does not need large quantities immediately should, when medically appropriate, eat or drink less than the halakhic *shiur* at intervals. If doing so might compromise his health or recovery, he should eat and drink normally. The source gives the relevant quantities and intervals, but the controlling concern remains the patient's safety.
- **The Psychological Aspect.** Severe anxiety or weakness during the fast must not be dismissed, since apparent fear may sometimes reflect real danger. Food or drink may initially be given in small quantities when appropriate, but if medical danger exists the person should eat as needed. Someone instructed to eat for health reasons should do so without guilt, since preserving life is itself the Torah's command.
- **Laws of Eating for Those Who Must Eat.** Those permitted or required to eat recite the normal *berakhah*. The chapter discusses *berakhah acharonah*, *netilat yadayim*, *Ya'aleh Ve-yavo*, and related details. The overriding rule is that *le-shi'urim* is preferred only when it can be done safely and practically; otherwise the patient eats and drinks normally.
- **Pregnant Women.** The source rules that a normal pregnancy does not by itself exempt a woman from fasting, while a high-risk pregnancy or a situation posing possible danger to mother or fetus requires individualized medical evaluation. If danger develops during the fast, she should eat or drink as necessary.
- **Childbirth and Postpartum.** From the beginning of active labor, a woman is treated as dangerously ill and should eat and drink as necessary. The source applies this automatically for the first seventy-two hours after birth. From seventy-two hours through seven days postpartum, the decision depends upon her condition; when danger remains uncertain, she does not fast.
- **Nursing Women.** The chapter's general rule is that nursing women fast, but it recognizes exceptions where a vulnerable infant has a particular medical need for the mother's milk and fasting may substantially impair the supply. It recommends preparing before the fast and, when necessary, obtaining appropriate medical and halakhic guidance.

Adapted from

Revivim by Rav Eliezer Melamed

The Six Questions a Person Is Asked at Judgment

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, it is fitting to consider the questions a person is asked when standing before the Heavenly Court. Torah, work, family, redemption, and wisdom, the six questions encompass the life and mission of a Jew in this world, provided that fear of God underlies them all. They also help explain why so much of the Rosh Hashanah prayers is devoted to praise of God.

As the Days of Judgment approach, it is fitting to return to the words of the Talmud (Shabbat 31a), which summarizes the six questions a person is asked when brought before the Heavenly Court:

Rava said: When a person is brought to judgment, they ask him: Did you conduct your business dealings faithfully? Did you set aside regular times for Torah study? Did you engage in procreation? Did you anticipate salvation? Did you engage in the wisdom of Torah? Did you understand one thing from another?

The Question About Work: Did You Conduct Your Business Dealings Faithfully?

Did you conduct your business dealings faithfully? That is, did you work diligently and honestly, and conduct your financial affairs with integrity? This is the first question because working to develop the world and provide for one's family is among a person's most basic responsibilities. From the beginning, when Hashem created the world, He left it incomplete, giving man, created in His image, the opportunity to become His partner in developing and perfecting it. Even in Gan Eden, before the sin, Adam was given work to do, as the Torah says: ויקח ה' אלהים את האדם ויניחהו בגן עדן לעבדה

Hashem God took the man and placed him in Gan Eden to work it and guard it (Bereishis 2:15).

Likewise, our Sages taught אהוב את המלאכה - *Love work* (Avos 1:10).

Rabbeinu Bachya explains that a person should love productive work, whatever form it takes, because work removes the disgrace of idleness and is fundamental to a person's life and purpose in this world.

But working is not enough. One must work faithfully. A person should not waste the time he has committed to his work, and should complete it on time and to the standard he undertook to provide. His financial life must likewise reflect integrity and generosity. A farmer must properly separate *terumos* and *maasros*, and one who earns money should give *maaser kesafim*. A person who lives this way can answer: Yes, I conducted my business dealings faithfully.

Did You Set Aside Regular Times for Torah Study?

The mitzvah of Torah study is equal to all the mitzvos (Peah 1:1; Yerushalmi ad loc.; Moed Katan 9b). This is true for two reasons. Without Torah study, a person cannot know how to fulfill the Torah's mitzvos or live according to its values. And Torah study is itself among the loftiest mitzvos, because it engages a person's highest faculty, the intellect.

A person must therefore establish regular times for Torah study each day and night. The Shulchan Aruch teaches that this time should be fixed, so that one does not cancel it even for the prospect of substantial financial gain (Orach Chaim 155:1).

Did You Engage in Procreation?

The third question is: Did you engage in procreation?

After securing his physical existence through work and his spiritual existence through regular Torah study, a person's mission is to add life to the world.

פרו ורבו ומלאו את הארץ וכבשה - *Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it* (Bereishis 1:28). Our Sages similarly taught that the world was created to be inhabited, citing לא תהו בראה - *He did not create it for emptiness; He formed it to be inhabited* (Gittin 41b).

By fulfilling this mitzvah, a person follows the ways of Hashem. Just as Hashem created and sustains the world, parents bring children into the world, care for them, and raise them. In doing so, they become partners with Hashem, as our Sages taught: שלושה שותפין הן באדם הקדוש ברוך הוא ואביו ואמו - *There are three partners in a person: the Holy One, blessed be He, his father, and his mother* (Niddah 31a).

The more deeply a person appreciates the life Hashem has given him, the more he wishes to add life to the world and fulfill the mitzvah of *pru urvu* in its fullest sense, with gratitude and joy for the children Hashem gives him.

Did You Anticipate Salvation?

The Jewish people were created to follow the ways of Hashem and help bring redemption to the world. Every Jew should therefore anticipate salvation, hope to see it in his lifetime, and act according to his ability to help bring it about.

As described in the Torah, the Neviim, and the teachings of our Sages, redemption begins with the ingathering of the exiles and the settlement of Eretz Yisrael. It continues through the building of a great educational system, care for those in need, the establishment of a just society, and ultimately the rebuilding of the Beis HaMikdash and the extension of blessing to all humanity.

This aspiration to bring redemption and blessing to the world is rooted in Hashem's charge to Avraham: ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה - *Through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Bereishis 12:3).

For this reason, the central focus of Rosh Hashanah is not merely our personal health, livelihood, or family needs, but the revelation of Hashem's glory and kingship in the world. The Zohar describes Hashem saying of Israel: See My beloved children, who set aside their own suffering and concern themselves with My honor (Zohar III 22a).

When Israel turns its attention from its private troubles to Hashem's kingship and the redemption of the world, the accusations against it are silenced, and it merits another year in which to advance toward *tikkun* and redemption.

Anticipating salvation is also connected to procreation. Our Sages taught that just as Israel was redeemed from Egypt in the merit of being fruitful and multiplying, so too future redemption is connected to the continued growth of the Jewish people, as the verse states כי ימין ושמאל תפרצי ורעך גוים יירש - *You shall spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants shall possess nations and settle desolate cities* (Eliyahu Zuta 14; Yeschayahu 54:3).

Did You Engage in the Wisdom of Torah?

Once a person has fulfilled his basic responsibilities to himself through work and regular Torah study, and has added blessing to the world through family and the pursuit of redemption, he must strive for a deeper level. The final two questions concern depth and wisdom in Torah study.

Did you engage in the wisdom of Torah?

In other words, did you strive to understand Torah deeply and clearly?

Depth, however, can deteriorate into convoluted or empty *pilpul*. The question is therefore not simply whether one analyzed Torah, but whether one did so with wisdom. As the Maharsha explains, the goal is not empty argumentation but *pilpul* guided by intellect, wisdom, and understanding.

Did You Understand One Thing from Another?

Once a person has understood Torah deeply, he can derive from it broader principles that illuminate the rest of life. As our Sages say in Avos, וממנו עצה ותושיה בינה וגבורה - *From it come counsel and sound wisdom, understanding and strength* (Avos 6:1).

This is how the anticipation of redemption can become practical. Through deep Torah study and the ability to draw further understanding from it, Torah can elevate the individual, the family, society, the Jewish people, and ultimately the entire world.

Establishing regular times for Torah study connects a person to Torah and guides him along its path. But to bring its blessing into the wider world, one must also understand Torah in depth and learn to derive one thing from another.

Fear of God Is a Prerequisite for Everything

Our Sages add that even if a person can answer all six questions affirmatively, his accomplishments endure only if הוא אוצריו - *the fear of Hashem is his treasure*. Without *yiras Shamayim*, even great accomplishments may fail to endure.

The Gemara offers a parable. A person told his agent to bring wheat up to the attic. When the agent returned, he asked whether he had mixed in a *kav* of *chumton*, salty earth used to preserve the wheat from worms. When the agent answered no, the owner replied that it would have been better had he not brought the wheat at all (Shabbat 31a).

Fear of Heaven is the preservative. Without it, even good deeds and profound Torah learning can ultimately lose their value and direction. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa therefore taught: כל שיראת חטאו קודמת להכמתו חכמתו - *Anyone whose fear of sin precedes his wisdom, his wisdom endures*. But if his wisdom precedes his fear of sin, it does not endure. He likewise taught that one whose deeds exceed his wisdom will retain his wisdom, while one whose wisdom exceeds his deeds will not (Avos 3:9). And our Sages taught אין חכמה אין יראה אם אין יראה אין חכמה - *If there is no wisdom, there is no fear; if there is no fear, there is no wisdom* (Avos 3:17). Torah scholars, like all Jews, should therefore devote part of their time for Torah study to *emunah* and *mussar*, so that their learning is accompanied by continuing growth in faith, fear of Heaven, and refinement of character.

I kept essentially all of the substance, but made it sound less like a literal translation, especially in the sections on work, redemption, and the final two questions. I also cut repeated formulations where the same point was being made twice without adding much.