



ניצחון
NITZACHON

Adas Torah Journal of Torah Ideas

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Editors' Preface

"V'talmud Torah kineged kulam".

This is a phrase we've all heard countless times to describe the primacy of Torah study in the hierarchy of Jewish accomplishment. When viewed in its original context, however, this saying – from the famous first *mishna* in *Peah* – is, in fact, teaching us a different lesson. The *mishna* lists the *mitzvos* for which one who performs them is *ocheil peiroseihem ba'olam haze* – reaps the reward of enjoyment and pleasure in his or her everyday life. Ending the list with *"v'talmud Torah kineged kulam,"* the *mishna* teaches that one can find as much satisfaction and enjoyment from one's personal accomplishments in the study of Torah, as from all the other *mitzvos* combined. That's right, all the other *mitzvos* combined.

Forty-six members of our *kehilla* have contributed samples of their accomplishments in *Talmud Torah* to the first four issues of *Nitzachon*. Ask any of them if they agree.

Michael Kleinman Yaakov Siegel Yaakov Rich

Dedicated in Loving Memory of Our Dear
Grandparents & Great Grandparents:

ראובן בן משה ע"ה
לאה חניה בת זאב ע"ה
חונן זאב בן שמואל ע"ה
אברהם בן יצחק ע"ה
רבקה בת נתן ע"ה
יעקב דוד בן יהודה לייב ע"ה

May the learning from this journal
provide an everlasting *zechus* and *aliyah*
for their *neshamos*.



Verity & Gabriel Weisz

In loving memory of our beloved parents
Jacob and Rose Siegel

- And -

In loving memory of our beloved father
Dr. Manfred R. Lehmann
and our beloved brother
Jamie Lehmann



*Yitzchok and Barbara Lehmann
Siegel*

In appreciation of the *Nitzachon* team



Yossi and Bella Essas

Dedicated to the sincere hard work done by
those responsible for putting out this journal.



Alan and Barbara Gindi

החוברת הזאת מוקדשת לזכר נשמת האם היקרה
קמו בניה ויאשרוה
חוה גולדשין בת יעקב ע"ה

This journal is dedicated in loving memory of
Eva Rich



Marilyn & Alan Rich and Family

*Dr. and Mrs. Daniel
Wohlgelernter*

We would like to dedicate this issue to the
memory of our sister Debby Schwarcz-
Friedman *a"h* and Abba Tzvi Schlusel *a"h* for
their courage, great spirit and *Ahavat Torah*



David and Caroline Schwarz

ראש וראשון



Rabbi Dovid Revah

Rabbi Elazar Muskin

Rabbi Daniel Grama

Guest Contributors

Even Without Them, I Will Carry On

RABBI DOVID REVAH



The *mishna* in *Sukka* 2a says,

סוכה שהוא גבוה למעלה מעשרים אמה פסולה

A sukkah which is above twenty amos is invalid.

One of the reasons given by the *gemara* to explain the invalidity of this type of *sukka* is that the *sukka* must be a *diras arai*, a temporary dwelling, and a tall *sukka* cannot possibly be made in a temporary fashion. The *gemara* explains that the main message of the mitzva of *sukka* is

צא מדירת קבע ושב בדירת עראי

Leave your fixed dwelling and enter into a temporary dwelling.

Sukkos immediately follows the *Yamim Noraim*, during which we spend ten intense days reorienting ourselves and engaging in serious introspection. We shake off our preoccupation with our material needs and instead focus on our religious responsibilities. In order to put our newfound commitment into action, we leave the comfort and security of our homes, and enter into a rudimentary and exposed lodging. We hope that this will concretize the heightened spiritual awareness attained over the *Yamim Noraim*.

This explanation has one obvious difficulty. After the seven days of Sukkos, we return to the same secure and comfortable home that we left. What do we achieve by sitting in the *sukka*, when we revert to our *diras keva* exactly as it was before? Would it not make more sense to harness the inspiration of Yom Kippur to make a long-lasting change, like finding some superfluous item in our life and removing it? Would that not be more of a statement of the ephemeral nature of this world?

Rabbi Dovid Revah has served as the *Rav*
and *Mara D'Asra* of Adas Torah since 2005.

The *mishna* in *Avos* (6:4) tells us

כך היא דרכה של תורה פת במלח תאכל ומים במשורה תשתה ועל הארץ תישן וחיי צער תחיה, ובתורה אתה עמל.

This is the way of the Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in a small measure, live on the ground, live a life of deprivation, but toil in Torah.

The *mishna* seems to imply that to be successful in living a Torah lifestyle, one must live a Spartan life, only satisfying the barest minimum of one's material needs. Rav Chaim of Volozhin, in *Ruach Chaim*, comments that throughout history we have found many great *talmidei chachamim* who, besides for achieving great success in Torah, were also financially prosperous. *Chazal* refer to this type of situation as *Torah ugedulah b'makom echad*, Torah and prosperity in the same place. How is this possible in light of the *mishna* in *Avos*?¹

Rav Chaim answers that if we read the *mishna* carefully, we will see that the text is not insisting that a prerequisite to success in Torah is living an ascetic life. He raises an apparent textual difficulty with the *mishna*. The *mishna* begins in the future tense: תישן, תאכל, תשתה, תישן, you will eat, you will drink, you will sleep. The *mishna* should then continue ותורה תעמול, you will learn Torah. Instead, it changes to the present tense, ותורה תעמל, you learn Torah. Rav Chaim explains that the *mishna* is not discussing how many possessions one may or may not have, but rather the attitude of a person to those possessions. Are they viewed as essential parts of one's wellbeing, whose disappearance would be a major catastrophe? Or, alternatively, are they viewed as things that enhance life so long as one has them, but nonessential to one's happiness and contentment? The *mishna* is teaching that in order to succeed in Torah, one's mindset must be that while material possessions are enabling, and gratitude must be expressed for these objects, if ever in the future they are lost and he or she is left with only basic food and shelter, he or she will be able to carry on. Only someone with such a perspective will be successful in navigating the sometimes conflicting demands of material and spiritual success.

There is a story of a chasid who found out that he won the lottery. That evening, his Rebbe knocked on his door and asked for a large donation. The chasid warmly

1 When Rav Meir Shapiro was fundraising for *Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin*, his goal was to build a Yeshiva that would house the students in a dignified and regal manner. He was questioned by several potential donors about how he can reconcile his goal with this *Mishna*. He responded that the correct way to read the *Mishnah* was as a question: "Is it possible to learn Torah if you do not have proper food and lodging?" Of course this was intended as a sharp retort to the criticism, not as the simple understanding of the text.

greeted the Rebbe, and responded that he would be happy to make a very significant donation, but had one question for the Rebbe: why did the Rebbe rush to come that night? Why couldn't he have waited until the next day? The Rebbe answered, "It's very simple. Tonight you just won and you feel that the money is a bonus. By tomorrow, you will already need the money."

This is the message of the *Sukka*. We can enjoy the comfort of our *diras keva*, but always with the knowledge that it is as a luxury and not a necessity. At the same time that we are benefitting from the blessings of the material world, we are aware that we can live without them. In order to instill this idea in us, the Torah commands us to leave our *diras keva* and move into a *diras arai*. For seven days we leave comfort and security and find that we were able manage without them. With the new perspective gained over the course of the *Yamim Noraim*, our possessions are less important to us. At the end of Sukkos we return to the same house and wealth, but they no longer retain the same status in our minds – they have become luxuries, not necessities.

The Alter of Kelm points out that the *gemara* itself implies that we should not completely give up our *diras keva*, but rather change our approach to it. The *gemara* asks: if a *sukka* over twenty *amos* is invalid because of its status as a permanent structure, why do we not also invalidate a well-built *sukka*, even if it is smaller than twenty *amos*, since it is a permanent structure? The *gemara* answers,

עד עשרים אמה דאדם עושה דירתו דירת עראי, כי עביד ליה דירת קבע נמי נפיק
Up to twenty amos, a person can theoretically make his dwelling a temporary dwelling, and thus he fulfills his obligation even if he makes it permanent.

The key to the mitzva is not whether the *sukka* is actually temporary or permanent, but only that it can potentially be temporary. Only a *sukka* above twenty *amos*, which cannot possibly be temporary, is invalid. Thus, we can live in a *diras keva* for the entire year, as long as we could live just as well if it were to become a *diras arai*.

The last day of the *chag* is called Shmini Atzeres. Many explanations are given for the meaning of the word *atzeres*, but one of the most surprising is that of the *Targum Yonasan*. He translates *atzeres* as a day of gathering, and explains that we are gathering ourselves in from our *sukkos*, back to our homes. It seems that we are celebrating our return to the comfort of our homes. Those who have followed the halacha properly and have slept in the *sukka* for seven nights can certainly appreciate the feeling, but this celebration and relief would seem to undermine the entire message of Sukkos.

Rav Mattisyahu Salomon explains that the *Targum* can easily be understood in light of the ideas above. We don't necessarily enjoy those items that are part of our

everyday routine, on which we are generally dependent. We tend to take them for granted and feel entitled to them. Only the possessions which we feel are superfluous and unnecessary are those that we fully appreciate and enjoy. After living in the *sukka* for seven days and acquiring a new perspective on our possessions, we are able to celebrate and enjoy much more of what we own.

הרחמן הוא יקים לנו את סוכת דוד הנופלת.

The Original Sin, Beards, and Havdala: A Study in Jewish Customs and Folklore

RABBI ELAZAR MUSKIN



A number of years ago, a congregant in my Shul asked me if I could explain a folklore that has baffled her since she heard it as a child. Growing up, her father would never allow her, or any of the women present, to drink from the wine used to recite *havdala*. When she inquired why her brothers were allowed to drink from the *havdala* while women were not she was told, “If a woman drinks from *havdala*, she will grow a beard.” Wondering why such a folklore developed, she asked me for an explanation.

After researching this question, I found the answer in a late 19th century work which contained one word that resolved this mystery. To appreciate the answer, one must first understand the *halachic* debate pertaining to women reciting *havdala*.

Our journey begins with a three-way argument among the *halachic* authorities about the obligation of women to say *havdala* on Saturday night. Many authorities, including the Rambam, believe that *havdala* is a Biblical obligation and consequently must be observed by women, much like *kiddush* on Shabbos.¹

Other authorities disagree and claim that *havdala* is not a Biblical mitzva, but rather is Rabbinic in nature. Even according to these authorities, though, there is a debate pertaining to women. A 14th century Spanish *halachist*, the Ritva, suggests that women are obligated to say *havdala* just like men, while his colleague from Provence, the *Orchos Chaim*, disagrees and claims that *havdala* is a separate ritual, independent of Shabbos, and women do not recite it.

¹ Rambam, *Hilchos Shabbos* 29:1.

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After summarizing this debate, the 16th century *halachist* Rabbi Mordechai ben Avram Zev, in his work the *Levush*, offers a conclusive ruling. He writes, “Some rule that women are obliged to make *havdala* just as they are obliged to make *kiddush*; others rule that since *havdala* is not part of the observance of Shabbos - since it is, after all, recited on the weekday - and is derived by the rabbis from indirect Scriptural support, women are exempt. Consequently women should not recite *havdala* on their own behalf, but listen to it as it is recited by a man.”²

Due to the *halachic* debate about women reciting *havdala*, the 16th century *Ashkenazic* authority, the Rama, Rabbi Moshe Isserles, codified the law by writing, “They therefore should not recite *havdala* themselves but should listen to *havdala* made by a man.”³

It was due to this ruling that the 17th century commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*, the *Magen Avraham*, expanded the custom and wrote, “Women have the custom not to drink from the wine of *havdala*. Refer to the *Shlah* (*Shnei Luchos HaBris*) for the reason.”⁴

What is surprising about the *Magen Avraham’s* comment is that he did not suggest the logical conclusion: that since women are encouraged not to say *havdala*, they should therefore refrain from drinking the wine. This would have helped guarantee that women would not say *havdala* on their own. Rather, the *Magen Avraham* tells us that the reason that women do not drink the wine is found in the *Shlah*, a late 16th & early 17th century work from Prague, dedicated to the study of the festivals and Jewish customs, offering moral and mystical insights.

It is also important to note where the *Magen Avraham* places his comment in the *Shulchan Aruch*. He doesn’t make his remark where one would have expected it, namely in reference to the Rama’s comment that women should not say *havdala*. Instead, he places it on the comment of the Rama which lists the various customs associated with the *havdala* cup on Saturday night.

It appears that the *Magen Avraham* was conscious of the placement of his comment and chose this place in order to avoid creating the suggestion that women do not drink from *havdala* based on a *halachic* imperative. By including the comment in conjunction with the other *havdala* customs, the *Magen Avraham* established women not drinking from the *havdala* wine only as a tradition and not a codified

2 *Levush*, Laws of Shabbos, Chapter 296, end of par. 6

3 Rama, *Orach Chaim*, 296:8

4 *Magen Avraham*, 296:4

ruling. It is for this reason that the foremost 15th century *Ashkenazic halachist*, the *Trumas HaDeshen*, is quoted by the *Leket Yosher* as stating that it was his custom to give his wife and the other women in his household to drink from the *havdala* cup.⁵

The *Magen Avraham* certainly knew this, and therefore wanted to indicate that not giving women wine from the *havdala* was based on a custom, not a legal doctrine. Furthermore, it should be noted that the late 19th century *halachist*, the *Aruch HaShulchan* wrote “I was surprised about this for this is only a custom, and many are not concerned with it. It is apparent that when a woman says *havdala* she must drink the wine.”⁶

We can now also appreciate why the *Magen Avraham* instructed us to refer to the explanation offered by the *Shlah*. The *Shlah* states at the end of *Hilchos Shabbos*,

*You already know what our Sages have said with regard to the secret of the sin of Adam that the fruit of the tree of knowledge was the sprouting vine, and they said: to teach us that she gave him squeezed grapes. Correlating to this, women have their menstrual bleeding, which was given to them by the snake. And because she caused herself to be separated from man (because of her menstrual bleeding) via wine, women do not taste the wine of havdala.*⁷

If the *Shlah* is correct that the forbidden fruit that Eve gave to Adam was wine, then why isn't there a custom forbidding women to drink the wine from *kiddush*? The answer may be that Eve's act produced the phenomenon of *nida*, menstrual bleeding, which causes separation between husband and wife. Eve created a “*havdala*,” a separation in life. It is for this reason that this custom is only mentioned in reference to *havdala* and not to *kiddush*.⁸

With this background, and with the help provided by a late 19th century work called *Mattamim* by a Yitzhak Lifitz, we can suggest an explanation for the old wives' tale about women growing a beard if they drink wine from *havdala*. Lifitz notes, “A woman is forbidden to taste the wine from *havdala* because she has no beard.”⁹ Instead of simply writing that women do not drink from the *havdala* because of the

⁵ *Encyclopedia Talmudit* vol. 8 p.81, note 188

⁶ *Aruch HaShulchan* 296:5

⁷ *Sefer Otzar Kol Minhagei Yeshurun*, p. 299-300

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Sefer Mattamim*, p. 300. See Responsa *Tzitz Eliezer* volume 14 chapter 43 for a discussion about women reciting the blessing over the candle during *havdala*. Also see *Sefer Taamei HaMinhagim Umkorei HaDinim* chapter 417 for a discussion about why some women in particular recite the blessing over the candle.

halachic debate, he added the words, “they don’t drink because they have no beard.” It doesn’t take much imagination to appreciate that before long the notion changed to read, “A female who drinks from the *havdala* will grow a beard.”

From a *halachic* debate, an old wives’ tale evolved reflecting the accepted opinion that women should hear *havdala* from a man, if at all possible.

Teshuva: Getting it Right

RABBI DANIEL GRAMA



Viduy on Kol Nidre night: The Question

In the somber atmosphere of *Kol Nidre* night, we gather our thoughts and focus our hearts, preparing for the upcoming 24 hour *teshuva* marathon. Men wrapped in their *taleisim*, women with their heads buried in their *siddurim*, all davening quietly, reflecting and beseeching Hashem for yet another year. After the stirring chanting of *Kol Nidre* followed by a form of *viduy*, we cry out in unison, “ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך,” “And Hashem said, I have forgiven you, as you have spoken.” These words epitomize Hashem’s attribute of forgiveness on *Yom HaDin*.

Ask the average person where these words were spoken or at which event in the Torah these words were used, and the answer you will most likely be given is “the Golden Calf.” This is incorrect, though. At that incident, we were taught the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, and the phrase used by Moshe in his attempt to obtain Hashem’s forgiveness was,

וסלחת לעוננו ולחטאתינו ונחלתנו.

And You should forgive our iniquities and sins and make us Your inheritance.
(*Shemos*, 34:9).

The actual source of the words, “And Hashem said, I have forgiven you, as you have spoken,” is in the story of sin of the spies (*Bamidbar*, 14:20).

The *Daas Zekainim* questions the choice to use these words on Yom Kippur. As we know, Yom Kippur came about as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe came down from the mountain with Hashem’s forgiveness for *Bnei Yisrael* on the tenth of Tishrei, the day that eventually became Yom Kippur. Hence the question, why do we omit the phrase that was actually said at the time of the sin of the Golden Calf, “וסלחת לעוננו ולחטאתינו,” and replace it with the phrase that was said at the time of the *meraglim*, the spies, “סלחתי כדברך.”

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Introduction to the answer based on our war with Amalek

In formulating an approach to understanding this oddity, it is worthwhile to look at a second comment from the *Daas Zekainim*. At the end of *Parshas Beshalach*, we are commanded to eradicate the memory of Amalek. The *pasuk* (17:14) says,

ויאמר ה' אל משה, כתב זאת זכרון בספר ושים באזני יהושע, כי מחה אמחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים.

And Hashem said to Moshe, inscribe this as a remembrance in a book and place it in the ears of Joshua, for I will definitely obliterate the remembrance of Amalek from under the heavens.

The *Daas Zekainim* compares the mitzva to expunge Amalek in this *pasuk* to a similar commandment in *Parshas Ki Seitzei*, where once again we are commanded to wipe out Amalek. The *pasuk* (25:19) says,

והיה, בהניח ה' אלקך לך מכל איביך מסביב בארץ אשר ה' אלקך נתן לך נחלה לרשתה תמחה את זכר עמלק מתחת השמים, לא תשכח.

It will be, when Hashem your God places you, from all of your surrounding enemies, in the land that Hashem your God has given to you as an inheritance, you should obliterate Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget.

The *Daas Zekainim* notes that in *Beshalach* it says, “I will definitely obliterate,” implying that Hashem will wipe them out, but in *Parshas Ki Seitzei* it says, “you shall obliterate,” implying that it is *Bnei Yisrael’s* obligation to annihilate Amalek. The question is obvious: upon whom is the obligation to destroy Amalek, us or Hashem?

The *Daas Zekainim* explains that the answer to this question is based on another *pasuk* in *Parshas Beshalach*. The *pasuk* (17:16), says,

ויאמר כי על יד כס ייה מלחמה לה' בעמלק, מדור דר.

And He said, for that which [His] hand is on the throne of Hashem, there is a battle of Hashem with Amalek, from generation to generation.

While it was *Bnei Yisrael* who did the actual fighting with our archenemy Amalek, the *pasuk* states that it was “a battle of Hashem and Amalek.” Indeed Rashi (*ibid d”h ki yad all kes ka*) writes, “Hashem raised His hand to swear on His throne that He will have an eternal battle with Amalek...” emphasizing that this battle wasn’t being fought solely between the two armies, but rather also with Hashem.

The words “כס ייה” are both incomplete parts of otherwise complete words. כס

meaning seat or, in this context, throne, and יי, a shortened version of Hashem's complete name. Amalek's attack on *Bnei Yisrael* was in essence an attack on their God. Up until that moment in history, the entire world stood in awe of the God of the Jews. The destruction of the superpower Egypt, miracles of the plagues, splitting of the sea, etc. had earned Hashem universal recognition. The attack of Amalek on the physical entity of *Bnei Yisrael* was really a confrontation and challenge to Hashem. They set out to prove that *Bnei Yisrael* were no longer untouchable, beyond arm's reach. Win or lose, Hashem lost.

Amalek wished to lessen the status of Hashem in the world's eyes, and diminish Hashem's kingdom in our midst. Once the perception of greatness was tarnished, the Torah describes Hashem's throne as incomplete. The *pasuk* therefore establishes that this battle was a personal war between Hashem and Amalek. The *Daas Zekainim* suggests that Amalek's attack was twofold: on a physical level, it was against *Bnei Yisrael*, and on a spiritual level it was against Hashem. This is why *Bnei Yisrael* has their own obligation to obliterate the memory of Amalek, as a response to the attack against them. Hashem has His own "obligation" to punish them for their attack against Him, as it says, "I will obliterate."

The foundation of teshuva, based on the *Daas Zekainim*

Beyond providing a novel approach to rectify an apparent contradiction in the *pesukim*, the *Daas Zekainim* brings to light the core feature of our system of checks and balances. Proper retribution and forgiveness can only be obtained from the victim of the transgression. Yes, we, *Klal Yisrael*, can do the physical act of annihilating Amalek, but that won't undo the defamation of Hashem's glory. Needless to say, Hashem can also obliterate Amalek from the face of the earth, but that won't undo the damage caused to *Bnei Yisrael*.

Understanding the sin of the *egel*

After Moshe descended the mountain, he was forced to confront Aharon, his older brother. Aharon's response is very telling as to the nature of the sin and the intent of the people's misguided actions. The *pasuk* (*Ki Sisa*, 32:23) reads,

כי זה משה האיש אשר העלנו מארץ מצרים לא ידענו מה היה לו.
And this Moshe, [is] the man that brought us up from the land Egypt, and we don't know what happened to him.

Hashem is not even mentioned! No reference to idol worship, no implication against *Bnei Yisrael* for their abandonment of their God; only that the one who took

us out of Egypt is gone. Although the act was one of idol worship, the sin stemmed from a lack of faith in Moshe and his leadership.¹

Understanding the sin of the *meraglim*

In contrast to the sin of the Golden Calf, it seems that the sin of the *meraglim*, was a clear affront only against Hashem. A land that was described as one of great wealth and prosperity had been re-branded as a land of suffering and death. The slanderous words of the *mergalim* challenged the core promise and foundation of the covenant between Hashem and Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and in general, undermined His integrity.

Indeed, the *pasuk* (*Shelach* 14:9) says, “Just, against Hashem do not rebel.” Here, Hashem is clearly the target of their doubts. Furthermore, in regards to the *meraglim*, Hashem Himself took a much stronger position as the defendant, which was not apparent with the Golden Calf. At the sin of the *egel*, the *pasuk* (*Ki Sisa*, 32:9), says,

ויאמר ה' אל משה ראיתי את העם הזה והנה עם קשה ערף הוא.
And Hashem said to Moshe, 'I have seen this nation, and behold, they are a stiff-necked nation.

This is a mere slap on the wrist in comparison to His reaction to the sin of the spies. There the *pasuk*, (*ibid.*14:11) says “And Hashem said, ‘until when will this nation anger Me, and until when will they not believe in the signs that I have done in their midst?’” Hashem was clearly the victim in that case.

Intuitively, we would consider the Golden Calf a far greater rejection of Hashem than the slander of His land, yet the Torah implies that Hashem’s response was much stronger after the sin of the spies than after that of the Golden Calf. Based on the above idea, it is clear that the difference between the two isn’t in the severity of each sin, but rather who was the victim of the sin. The slander of the spies was a direct undermining of Hashem’s promise to *Bnei Yisrael*, while the Golden Calf was directed more towards Moshe than Hashem.

A targeted forgiveness

This idea, that forgiveness can only be granted by the one who suffered the iniquity,

¹ This point is highlighted when we contrast it to what was said earlier by *Bnei Yisrael* after the splitting of the Red Sea, “And they believed in Hashem, and in His servant Moshe.” The lack of faith in Moshe expressed through the sin of the Golden Calf was a complete reversal to the expression of unparallel faith that was previously vocalized with great joy.

seems like a basic one, but cannot always be assumed. In a religious system of judgment, a single action can contain within it two offenses. A practical example of this is speaking *lashon hara*. Besides for slandering someone, it is a transgression of Hashem's commandments; in fact, it is only deemed a sin because Hashem decreed it as such. Hence, would it have been wrong to assume that asking forgiveness solely from Hashem would have done the job? We know, though, that true forgiveness is not achieved until the victim is appeased. The same is true for the inverse. Consider the aforementioned attack of Amalek against Hashem. Would it have been wrong to assume that punishment meted out by Hashem would have sufficed? Yet, as was explained by the *Daas Zakainim*, without *Bnei Yisrael* doing their part, the retribution would have been lacking.

The *Daas Zekainim* teaches that it isn't enough that the perpetrator simply regrets his or her actions, but rather should repair, to the best of his or her ability, the actual damage caused. A simple analogy would be, if we damage someone's object, the highest level of retribution is when the object itself is completely repaired and the damage is undone. So too when a sin is committed, the victim must be identified, and then the damage should be repaired.

Two types of *teshuva*

In reality, one can't simply undo a hurtful action or deed, but Hashem created for us the ability to repair the damage, when expressed properly. Based on the *Daas Zekainim*, we established the essence of *teshuva*. Building on this foundation, we can now determine how to formulate our *teshuva* in order to maximize its power.

There is a well-known *gemara* (*Yoma* 86b) that discusses different levels of repentance and their impact upon the person's sins. The *gemara* points out an apparent contradiction in the *pesukim* with regard to the status of a sin after *teshuva*.

In the book of *Hoshea* (14:2) the *navi* says,

שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקך כי כשלת בעוונך.

Return Israel to Hashem your God, for you have stumbled in your iniquity.

The *gemara* analyzes two words: כשלת and בעוונך. The word עון is a term that refers to a transgression done with intent - *bimezid*. The other term מכשול typically implies a transgression done by accident - *bishogeg*. The *gemara* questions whether the *pasuk* is referring to an intentional sin, or one of unintentional nature. The *gemara* concludes that after *teshuva*, even a sin done with intent can be reduced to the status of an accidental transgression.

However, continues the *gemara*, we have a teaching from the sage Reish Lakish that seems to conflict the assumption above. Reish Lakish opines that *teshuva* impacts a person with such intensity, that not only does it reduce the degree of transgression within the scope of wrong-doing, but can even reverse the sin and transform it into a merit. This seems to be a contradiction as to what degree *teshuva* impacts sins.

The *gemara* responds by distinguishing between two types of *teshuva*: one from fear and the other from love. When the *gemara* says that *teshuva* only lowers the status of a sin from intentional to unintentional applies when the repentance stems from fear. *Teshuva* based on love can even transform it into a meritorious act. While we are all familiar with these terms and emotionally understand that there is a difference between an action done out of fear and one done out of love, I would like to analyze this distinction, for ultimately, what difference does it make what the source of the *teshuva* is?

What is a sin?

In general, sin is an outcome of our self-serving interests. A child who is beholden to his or her parent should willingly fulfill every request with passion and joy. Is there anything that I wouldn't do for those who have given me the very breath of life? Is there ever enough a child can do for the mother that carried him or her for nine long months with all the discomfort involved? Yet, we know that we don't always feel that sense of gratitude and indebtedness, and often can act with indifference to their preferences and standards. Indeed, for many people, it is that particular sense of debt or burden that we are rejecting. Similarly, is there any question in the mind of a God fearing Jew as to what we owe our Creator? Yet, we seem to actively reject the "yoke of heaven." We can be rather self-serving.

What is *teshuva*?

The accepted translation for *teshuva* is "return," based on the root of the word being שׁוּב, return. However, we can suggest that the word *teshuva* stems from the word לָשֵׁב, "to sit." Indeed a person "returns" to his "seat," the place where he belongs. However, sitting in his seat is merely an action and does not reflect the reason why the person returned to his place.

As an expression of this sentiment, a wayward child who leaves his home and returns out of fear of suffering or losing out on benefits has not undergone any real change of heart. Perhaps he now recognizes the need for his parents and his dependency on them, but at the core he still has not altered his selfish mindset to

one of appreciation and gratitude. While, in action, he is sitting in his seat back home, and perhaps his behavior might have improved, the emotional gap still exists. Even though he is now living at home, the stain of the sin still exists. Such repentance does not remove the sin, but can lower the status to be less severe, from intentional to unintentional. Indeed, while it isn't the highest level of repentance, at least he ceased to transgress.

On the other hand, if the child returns home out of love, out of regret for the pain that he caused, it expresses to his parents that not only do I appreciate you, but my appreciation for you is greater than my own wants. When love is the motivation for return, it compels the child to recognize that his mistakes have created a distance, a gap that needs to be bridged. Therefore, not only is he no longer transgressing, but the past transgressions now serve as an impetus to return. Of course sinning is wrong, but using the sin to propel himself to return to where he belongs turns the sin into a merit.

In summary, *teshuva* done out of fear isn't targeting the victim, as much as it benefits the person him or herself. If we think about it, on a certain level it is similar to the actual sin itself in that it is a self-serving device. We aren't concerned for the wrong that we have done as much as we are trying to spare ourselves the consequences. However, if the repentance is done to "right the wrong," if we truly regret the pain and hurt caused to the other, then the *teshuva* is targeting the victim, and deemed proper *teshuva*.

Repentance for the Golden Calf vs. Repentance for the Meraglim

We have established that *teshuva* has two basic criteria which stem from a single theme: it needs to center around the victim. The two criteria are: it is directed toward the victim of the offense, and that it is done for the sake of the victim. With this in mind, we can analyze the difference between the repentance done by the sin of the Golden Calf and that which was done by the sin of the spies. Regarding the first, the Torah paints a picture that the sin of the Golden Calf was not a rebellion specifically directed against Hashem, but rather that the people were trying to replace the leader that they thought was gone. Only later, when Moshe turned to Hashem, was there mention of their sin against Hashem. The *pasuk* (ibid. 31) says, "And Moshe returned to Hashem saying, 'please, the nation has sinned a great sin, and they made for themselves a god of gold,'" implying that there was also a transgression against Hashem.

Furthermore, even when Moshe did request forgiveness from Hashem, and

apologized for the golden idol, Rashi interprets it more as a claim against Hashem than an apology from *Bnei Yisrael*. He writes that Moshe claimed, “Had You not given them the gold, they could never have made the calf.” The overall strategy was not to placate Hashem for their transgression, as much as to paint it as less of an offense.

In contrast, Moshe’s approach to beseeching forgiveness for the sin of the spies was totally different. The *pesukim* (ibid. 14:11 - 19) read, “And Moshe said to Hashem, for with Your strength, You have brought up this nation from its midst... for every eye has seen You, Hashem, and Your cloud over them...And the nations that have heard Your reputation will say, ‘For Hashem doesn’t have the ability to bring this nation to the land, and He slaughtered them in the desert.’ And now Hashem, please, lift up your strength, as You have spoken, ‘Hashem is patient...’ Please forgive this nation, as Your kindness is so great, and as You have taken this nation from Egypt until here.”

Moshe’s very eloquent words express his overriding concern solely for the honor of Hashem. Moshe’s pain wasn’t for the potential consequences to *Bnei Yisrael*, nor did he try to minimize or justify their behavior; he simply focused on, “what will people say about Hashem.”² Moshe’s words fulfilled both criteria of *teshuva*. For this reason, immediately after Moshe finished his plea, Hashem gave His resounding response of “I have forgiven, as you have said.”

Our Yom Kippur strategy

On the awesome day of Yom Kippur, as we stand before Hashem to plead our case, we need to plan our approach for a defense strategy. Using our established criteria, it is clear that we must direct ourselves toward Hashem, and repent in a way that expresses our regrets to Him, out of love, and not just because we fear Divine retribution. Although from a historical perspective it would make sense to recite the words said at the time of the Golden Calf since Yom Kippur was an outcome of that event, from a spiritual perspective, those words lacked all of the criteria for proper *teshuva*. This being the case, we opt to focus on the Torah phrase that defines for us the ultimate expression of *teshuva*, and hopefully receive the same expression of forgiveness; וסלחתי בדברך.

As we know, Elul contains within it the theme of “I am for my Beloved and my

² In *Devarim* 9:28 Moshe states that his defense for the Golden Calf was for the honor of Hashem, “Lest they say...Hashem was unable to bring us into the land...” See the Netziv who deals with the difference between what Moshe said by Har Sinai and what he is saying now.

Beloved is for me.” This well-known phrase defines the relationship of love between us and Hashem. One may wonder whether this is antithetical to the sense of awe and trepidation that we should feel in Elul, prior to the Days of Awe. Based on this discussion, it seems clear that genuine and transformative *teshuva* derives from our love for Hashem, just as the words, “I am for my Beloved” precedes “my Beloved is for me.”

שפתי ישנים



Rabbi Yitzchak David Essrig *zt"l*

Rabbi Simon Dolgin *zt"l*

RABBI YITZCHAK DAVID ESSRIG ZT"l

Rav Yitzchak David Essrig was born in 1895 in Tzfat, where his father, Rav Nachum Essrig, was a prominent leader and teacher of Torah in the community. Rav Essrig studied Torah voraciously from a very young age, and soon recognized that it was one of his life's greatest pleasures.

The great sage Rav Yaakov David Wilovsky, the Ridbaz, arrived in Tzfat in 1905 to settle there, and Rav Essrig soon became one of his close *talmidim*. At the inauguration of the Ridbaz's new yeshiva, Torath Eretz Yisrael, following the *drashos* of the Ridbaz and his son-in-law, 14-year-old Yitzchak David Essrig was honored to give his first public *drasha* to all those in attendance at the ceremony. It was during these early years that Rav Essrig had the opportunity to develop close relationships with many great *gedolim* and *talmidei chachamim*, including Rav Kook, the then Chief Rabbi of Yafo, Rav Shlomo Alfandari, who at that time was a leader of the Sephardic Jews in Tzfat, and Rav Moshe Kliers – the Chief Rabbi in Teveria, in whose yeshiva Rav Essrig studied after his marriage to Chana Rachel Trovitz in 1912. All of these *rabbanim*, along with the Ridbaz, endowed Rav Essrig with *semicha*.

In 1914, the Ottoman Empire joined the First World War and began to draft all available young men into the army, where the chances of survival were slim. Rav Essrig fled to Jerusalem to hide. While there he spent his days immersed in Torah study, and by the time he felt forced to leave to America the following year, he had received *semicha* from Rav Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld and Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank. Rav Essrig arrived in New York in 1915 and began studying in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan until, in 1918, he decided to enter the American rabbinate and accepted a position as a Rabbi in Portland, Maine. In 1926, after visiting the Jewish community of Los Angeles, he decided to accept a position there as the Rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel in Downtown L.A., where he served for eight years.

While he was in Los Angeles, he was instrumental in organizing the California *kashrus* laws, establishing a local Mizrachi, fundraising for various causes in *Eretz Yisrael*, and putting together a *bikur cholim* organization for the many local and foreign Jews that found themselves in the hospitals of Los Angeles. He recognized how many Jews were simply ignorant of the basics of Judaism and felt it imperative that they be introduced to the fundamental concepts of their faith. He began to write a column in the weekly "B'nai Brith Messenger" about the essentials of Judaism and the weekly *parsha*. Eventually, he compiled a book, "*Fountain of Wisdom*," about the core concepts of the Jewish religion. Rav Essrig was extremely proud of his congregation and welcomed many distinguished rabbis to his shul, which included, most notably, Rav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, *rosh yeshiva* of Slabodka and later Yeshivas Chevron, who visited Los Angeles in 1927 and stayed in Rav Essrig's home.

In 1933, Rav Essrig's father fell ill in Tzfat, and he and his family left for *Eretz Yisrael*, where he served on the Rabbinical Council in Haifa for three years. When he returned to the U.S. in 1936 (conditions were too difficult then to stay in *Eretz Yisrael*), he became the rabbi of the community in Utica, NY, which became his most significant tenure, serving for 29 years. When he retired in 1965, he moved back to California where most of his family then lived.

One of Rav Essrig's dreams was to write a Talmudic-Halachic encyclopedia, which he began during his time in Utica and continued during his retirement. Beginning in 1952 until his passing in 1976, he published seven volumes of his encyclopedia – *Pri Etz Hadar* – which was highly lauded in the rabbinic world. With this publication he was able to perpetuate what was the utmost delight of his life – the study of Torah in its infinite depth.

The Binding of Isaac (The *Akeida*)¹

RABBI YITZCHAK DAVID ESSRIG



We have read today the portion of Scripture concerning the binding of Isaac upon the altar. The story reads as follows:

Abraham the righteous, the only believer in the one true God in his day, was directed by God to go to Mount Moriah and there sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac.

Acting on this, Abraham proceeded exactly according as it seemed to him to be his duty. He went to the Mount as directed, built an altar, arranged wood, bound his son and placed him on the wood, and stretched forth his hand to take the knife to slay his son. At this moment Abraham heard a heavenly voice commanding him to desist, and he lifted up his eyes and beheld a ram entangled in a thicket by its horns. He took the ram and offered him up for a burn offering in the stead of his son.²

How appropriate to the day of Rosh Hashana is the reading of the *akeida*! Tradition states³ that whenever the *akeida* is read and the ram's horn is blown, the descendants of Abraham are redeemed from their sins and afflictions. Our great sage Rabbi Abahu asks: "Why do we prefer to blow with a ram's horn?" He himself answers: "Because God says: 'When you sound the ram's horn I shall remember the binding of Isaac, and account it unto you as though ye were bound before me.'"⁴

The *akeida* contains a significant lesson for all of us. We should bear in mind that the sacrifice of Isaac was the last and greatest trial of Abraham's faith. Our sages state⁵ that Abraham was tried with ten temptations, and withstood them all, through his faith in God.

The temptation of the sacrifice of his son was the hardest of them all.

Let us understand that Abraham and Sarah had been longing many years for a

1 This essay was published in Rabbi Essrig's "*Fountain of Wisdom*" (1932; pp. 134-141), and is subtitled, "Sermon delivered on Rosh Hashanah, 2nd Day".

2 See Genesis 22.

3 *Midrash Rabba* Genesis 56.

4 *Avos* 5.

5 *Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer* 26-31.

son, and after they were blessed with Isaac, God had promised Abraham that from Isaac a numerous generation would come forth.

Isaac was now grown up, and his character seemed to fulfill his parents' best expectations. Hence, when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son, it was a greater burden to him than to be told to sacrifice himself.

Only parents can understand the burden which must have rested upon Abraham. Furthermore, we must remember that Abraham was a lover of all mankind. His strong sense of justice is indicated in Scripture, when he prayed that Sodom should not be destroyed if even ten righteous people were to be found therein. He said to God: "Far be it from thee... shall not the judge of all the earth not exercise justice?"⁶

Isaiah also says:⁷ "Hearken to me, ye that follow righteousness, that seek the Lord... Look unto Abraham your father... for he was one, when I called him."

Abraham's hospitality was shown by his entertainment of the angels whom he took to be three men. He was just recovering from illness, and God made that day to be very warm, so that wayfarers might not visit him and cause him extra work. But Abraham could not rest in peace without having the opportunity to help the needy and weary, so he sat in the door of his tent in the heat of the day, looking to welcome any strangers who might come. God then caused three angels to descend to visit him in order that he should not be deprived of the merit of serving them.⁸

They were the angels Michael, Gabriel and Raphael.⁹ We see Abraham's hospitable nature revealed when he hastened to make preparations for their welfare.¹⁰

When Job was in affliction, he said to God,¹¹ "Lord of the Universe, have I not fed the hungry, and have I not given drink to the thirsty, or if ever I ate my bread alone and the fatherless did not eat thereof? And have I not clothed the naked?"

Our sages explain that the Holy One, blessed be He, answered him: "Job, yet you have not reached half the performances of Abraham. You sit in your house and wayfarers enter: the one who is used to wheat bread gets wheat bread; the one used to meat gets meat; the one who is used to wine gets wine. But Abraham was in the habit of going out of his house to hunt up wayfarers whom he brought under his roof, and entertained in a better manner than they were accustomed to. He offered wheat

6 Genesis 18.

7 Isaiah 51:1-2.

8 Genesis 18.

9 *Bava Metzia* 86b; *Yalkut Shimoni* 18.

10 Genesis 18.

11 Job 31:16-19

bread, meat and wine to those who at home lived on coarser food. Moreover, he built booths on the road, and supplied them with refreshments, and those who entered ate, drank and blessed God for it."¹²

To such a humane person as Abraham, therefore, the thought of taking a human life, even were it not the life of his beloved son, would have caused anguish of spirit. But Abraham's unlimited love of God and his great devotion to God's commandments prevailed over his parental feelings, and he was happy to fulfill the commandments of God. This trial of Abraham in which he remained faithful to his God was not merely for the sake of Abraham himself, but went much further. R. Chanina b. Dosa¹³ says:

"From that ram which was offered as an offering instead of Isaac, nothing was wasted. The ashes of the ram were the base upon the top of the inner altar; the sinews of the ram were the strings of the harp whereon King David played; the ram's skin was the girdle of the prophet Elijah, as it is written,¹⁴ 'And Elijah was girt with a girdle of leather about his loins'; the horn of the ram, of the left side, was the one whereon the Holy One blew upon Mount Sinai at the giving of the Ten Commandments, as it is written, 'And the voice of the shofar went on and waxed louder and louder: Moses spoke and the Lord answered him with a loud voice.'¹⁵

"The horn of the right side, which is larger than that of the left side, is destined in the future to be sounded at the ingathering of the exiles, as it is written: 'And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great horn shall be blown, and they shall come that were lost in the land of the Assyrians, and they that were dispersed in the land of Egypt, and they shall worship the Lord in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.'¹⁶ (Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer 31)

This means to say, it was the spirit which invested our father Abraham at the time of the *akeida* that invested Elijah (girded, as I have mentioned, with a girdle made from the skin of the ram offered by Abraham), and enabled him to rebuke the wicked King Ahab¹⁷ and fight successfully against the false prophets even at the risk of his life.

¹² *Avos Rabbi Nathan* 7.

¹³ Palestinian 1st century legend relates many incidents of his meekness and piety, and of miracles performed in answer to his prayers. See *Berachot* 34b; 33a; *Ta'anis* 25a.

¹⁴ II Kings 18

¹⁵ Exodus 19

¹⁶ Isaiah 27:13

¹⁷ I Kings 21.

It was the spirit of the *akeida* that inspired Daniel to resist the command given him to abandon his faith and bow to the image.¹⁸

It was the spirit of the *akeida* that inspired Esther to enter the forbidden court of King Ahasuerus and begin pleading for the salvation of her race, as she said: “And I will go in unto the King, which is not according to the law, and if I perish I perish.”¹⁹

In all these cases, it could be said, as God said of Abraham after the *akeida*, “Now I know that thou art a God-fearing man.”²⁰

In all these cases, it was the investment of the spirit which invested our father Abraham—the feeling of answering to a higher call of duty.

This spirit of the *akeida* continued to be manifested in post-Biblical times, as we find in the Talmud many instances of it since the destruction of our holy Temple and our dispersion as a race. For example, it is related that in the time of the Caesars, a Jewish woman named Miriam had seven sons who were brought to the King and were commanded to bow down to idols. Upon their refusing to worship idols, they were slain, one after another. As the youngest was about to be slain, his mother said to him as she embraced and kissed him: “Go to our father Abraham, and tell him, ‘You offered one *akeida*, and I have offered seven.’”²¹

It is also related in Talmud that after the destruction of Jerusalem, four hundred Jewish children of both sexes were captured by the Romans and sent by sea from Palestine, intended to be sold as slaves for immoral purposes in Rome. On the voyage, as they began to realize the fate awaiting them at Rome, they asked amongst themselves whether it would be justified in the eyes of God if they threw themselves into the sea to escape.²²

One of the eldest then quoted the verse:²³ “The Lord said, I will bring them back from the depths of the sea,” and explained to them, that it might apply to them. Thereupon they all threw themselves into the sea.²⁴

Also after the defeat of the Jews at Bethar, the Romans were very bitter against the leaders in Israel. Not only was the practice of the Jewish religion prohibited, but

18 Daniel 10

19 Esther 4

20 Genesis 21

21 *Gittin* 57b

22 Suicide being abhorrent to the spirit of our tradition; see Tos. Sem. 4; *Yoreh Deah* 345; *Responsa Chasam Sofer Yoreh Deah* 32.

23 Psalms 68

24 *Gittin* 57b

the study of the Jewish law was made an offense punishable by death. Rabbi Akiva, a great leader of the Jews in the revolt against the Romans, was seized and barbarously put to death by torture, which he endured with bravery and serenity of spirit. His disciples, who stood by, were astonished at his calmness and fortitude. He said to them, "All my life whenever I read the verse:²⁵ 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul and with all thy strength,' I wished that I could obey it by deeds, and now, when it is required of me to comply with it, shall I not be glad that I can do so?"²⁶

In post-Talmudic times, we find the story of the city of Speyer²⁷ during the time of the Crusades that was attacked by a mob. The majority of the Jews there were left to their own resources and defended themselves, but were overcome by superior numbers. Many Jewish women slew their own children rather than have them fall into the hands of the enemy, and many Jews were massacred while pronouncing the "*Shema*."²⁸

At Cologne,²⁹ when the Crusaders discovered the hiding place of the Jews and demanded that they either abandon their faith or suffer extermination, the old and learned Samuel ben Jehiel set the example for his people by slaying his only son, a handsome youth, after pronouncing a benediction, to which his son responded "*Amen*," and threw the body into the river. Those who stood by recited the "*Shema*," and threw themselves into the river.³⁰

At the city of Worms³¹ similar instances are related, almost passing beyond human belief.

Four centuries afterward, in the time of the Spanish inquisition, the Jews were commanded by the decree of Ferdinand and Isabella, to make the choice of either renouncing their faith, or going into exile. Many of the Jews of Spain at that time were prominent and respected. They remained loyal to Judaism, for the most part, and acted in the ways of Abraham, who did not take from a thread to a shoe latchet from the King of Sodom.³²

25 Deuteronomy 6:5

26 *Berachot* 61b

27 Germany 11th century

28 Graetz, "*History of the Jews*"

29 Germany 11th century

30 Graetz, "*History of the Jews*"

31 Germany 11th century; Graetz

32 Genesis 14

The Jews set forth as wanderers on the earth. Hundreds of thousands were captured as slaves, or died of exposure and sickness, but a remnant survived, and today their descendants are to be found in all countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. They are easily recognizable in that they still speak in Spanish, although have been separated from Spain and Spanish influence for hundreds of years.

Only a few years ago the civilized world was appalled at the savage instincts of man, in the almost incredible reports of the pogroms in Russia. Many instances of the survival of the spirit of Abraham bring light the dark record of that time.

The spirit of the *akeida* is still in existence in Jewish life. The events in Palestine in 1929 demonstrate this, and are as striking as any of the incidents I have mentioned. The events there did not break the spirit of those who remained alive; the spirit of tranquil and complete belief in God, I am glad to say from my personal knowledge, shone out with the same brightness as of old.³³

33 To mention the outstanding events: the massacre at the Hebron Rabbinical college of twenty-five students; at Tzefat, a few days later, Rabbi Cohn, a venerable Rabbi aged 80 years, together with his wife and many other Jews were barbarously murdered by Arabs, among many other atrocities.

RABBI SIMON DOLGIN ZT"l

Rav Simon Arthur (Avraham Yeshayahu) Dolgin grew up in Chicago in the 1920s where he attended the illustrious Hebrew Theological College of Chicago, and received *semicha* there in 1939. Shortly thereafter, his *rebbe*, Rabbi Oscar Fasman, encouraged him to travel to Los Angeles for the *Yamim Noraim*, where a small shul called Beth Jacob Congregation, located in the West Adams area, was in need of a Rabbi. Although Rav Dolgin fully intended to return to Chicago afterwards, Rabbi Fasman urged him to stay and nurture the Jewish community in Los Angeles. And that he did - for 33 years.

Rav Dolgin was extremely dedicated to his community and to his shul. He worked tirelessly to increase Torah knowledge and observance among the members of his community. He knew that a strong sense of Jewish tradition and commitment to *halacha* were the key to the continuity of the Jewish community, and he did everything in his power to promote growth in these crucial areas. Putting a strong emphasis on education, he founded a day school and *talmud Torah* in the shul, which went on to become Hillel Hebrew Academy; by the time the school expanded into its own building in 1949, it was educating hundreds of students. Not only was Rav Dolgin a mentor and role model for his community, but many of his congregants considered him also a friend and a confidant. In this way, he was very connected to his community members and helped them grow personally and spiritually.

In the 1950s, the Jewish community in L.A. was slowly moving westward, and Rav Dolgin felt that the time had come for the shul to move, so long as a *minyán* of families agreed to move with it. In 1954, a building was purchased for the shul in Beverly Hills, where there had never before been an Orthodox shul. It is clear today that Rav Dolgin's vision for a vibrant Jewish community in this area of Los Angeles has been successfully realized, mostly due to his dedication and sacrifice.

Rav Dolgin was passionately in love with the land of Israel, and felt that it was the duty of the Jewish people to contribute to the building up of the land according to the values of Torah and our mesora in the best way that they could. In the early 1950s, he exchanged several letters with Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion about the newborn state of Israel, expressing his desire that the state be built on the values of Torah and the Jewish religion, and his conviction that this was possible. He was concerned about the relationship between the Jews of the Diaspora and the state of Israel in future generations, if it were to be built without a religious foundation. This collection of letters has been published several times both in Hebrew and English.

In 1971, Rav Dolgin and his wife Shirley fulfilled their lifelong dream and moved with their family to Israel, where he soon became the rabbi of the community in the Ramat Eshkol neighborhood and built a shul, also called Beth Jacob. He was encouraged to take the position of Director General of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which he accepted with enthusiasm. He later also became the chairman of the World Mizrahi - Hapoel Hamizrachi organization. He felt that it was extremely important to bridge the gap between the secular and religious Jews in Israel, and worked hard to introduce institutions and programs towards this goal.

Wherever Rav Dolgin went, he made an impact, and it is difficult to overemphasize the lasting impact that he made on Orthodoxy in Los Angeles.

The Lifeguard's Call¹

RABBI SIMON A. DOLGIN



עלה אלקים בתרועה ה' בקול שופר

God Is Gone Up with a Shout, The Lord with the Sound of the Shofar!

(Psalms 47.6)

Much meaning and significance are attached to the call of the shofar which we are about to hear. Through the course of this day's worship, we shall refer to the historical importance of the shofar call: the mountain of Sinai and its revelation of the Almighty, the advent of the Messiah and the redemption of Israel, even as the call to assembly and to armed service. Just prior to his blowing of the shofar, the sexton will recite the words of the Psalmist ... "עלה אלקים בתרועה ה' בקול שופר," "God is gone up in a shout, the Lord with the Sound of the Shofar." These, it appears, are indeed strange words. Where has God gone up, how is the shofar related to His ascent, and what has this to do with Rosh Hashana?

Graphically, however, I believe these words, which attend the call of the shofar, can, indeed, be meaningful to us on this Rosh Hashana day. A few weeks ago, I spent a couple of days at Lake Enchanto. Alongside the little lake, there is a huge, beautiful swimming pool. Watching the activity in that pool, as you have surely noticed at countless other pools, I noticed a rope on floats stretched across the waters at the point of their becoming deep. This life-line was a danger zone; beyond it one would have to be a fine swimmer or exercise extreme caution. At noon, a host of youngsters came to the pool for a swim. The lifeguard climbed up on his elevated seat, megaphone in hand, and eagerly watched the swimmers. As soon as he detected a child out of bounds, from his high seat, he shouted a warning through his megaphone and ordered the swimmer back, behind the lifeline. Once or twice, when the boys didn't hear his shout through the megaphone, he blew a shrill whistle. Everyone returned to safer waters.

¹ This essay was originally published in "The Rabbinical Council Manual of Holiday and Sabbath Sermons" published by the Rabbinical Council Press in 1953 (pp. 86-91).

This, my friends, might be the portrayal by the Psalmist in his words: “עלה אלקים” בקול שופר, “בתרועה ה’ בקול שופר,” “God has gone up with a shout, The Lord with the sound of the Shofar.” Today, the Almighty, as it were, ascends His lofty throne in judgment, and with the shofar sounds, issues calls and warnings to us swimmers in the sea of life. The shofar issues the alarm, to remind us that we may be out-of-bounds; that danger lurks if we go too far astray.

On Rosh Hashana, we must, as the Almighty ascends His throne, hear the alarm, warning us to safeguard the life of American freedom by not going beyond the lifeline, or falling overboard. The shofar must be the call to us from the Eternal Watchman and Lifeguard, to avoid the treacherous waters that would drown America. God has ascended this day, Rosh Hashana, as we look forward to the New Year, to have us alerted by the shofar to safeguard our treasured democracy.

Caution to safeguard the life of the Jewish people is also the message of the shofar today. As a community, we have great responsibilities to our people’s needs overseas and locally. Too many of us have become complacent about Israel. All is well, all is, thank God, settled. How far from true! The Arab League meets in Cairo to plan its program against Israel. The Syrian dictator says in interviews, “The Jews must be pushed into the sea.” And even if the Arab threat were relieved, the burden is great. The Israel balance of trade is growing more and more unfavorable. How could it be otherwise, when a country must be built and penniless immigrants must be absorbed? Imports are bound to be greater than exports; a dollar shortage must ensue. The shofar must call to us and remind us that our indifference to a Bond Campaign or a United Jewish Appeal or any cause in Israel is dangerous. We swim in treacherous waters when we don’t do our full share for Israel; for not only are its inhabitants threatened, but Jews the world over are in the balance. God forbid, if Israel were to fail, we could not face the gentile world; we could not face our own people, our own children, ourselves. The shofar is God’s call to us to move back to safe waters by building Israel devotedly.

And the grave situation exists locally. As a community grows, its needs grow. Demands for social service, for Jewish education, for medical attention, increase. But the response is increasingly more feeble. Costs are rising, demands are greater, money is more scarce. As the shofar sounds, let us heed the lifeguard’s warning, and in the New Year do, each of us, our full share.

The shofar must beckon to us, not only as Americans or part of the Jewish community, but as individual Jews. It must remind us that as we swim away from the springs of the Jewish waters, from the fount of our tradition, and we pass the

lifeline, we may easily be drowned in the deep of assimilation. Does our home float within the waters of Jewish heritage, or has it drifted waywardly beyond the lifeline of Jewish consciousness? What lifeline? Is the word of God inscribed on our doorpost in a *mezuzah*? Not a *mezuzah* trinket which so many wear superstitiously as a pagan good-luck charm. But a *mezuzah*, with the “*Shema Yisrael*” inscribed, which draws the line for Jewish safety. Does *kashrus* prevail in the home? Not *kashrus* because of sanitation or good taste, but *kashrus* dedicated to the sanctity of Godliness, which is an anchor for our home in Jewish waters. The home, without *kashrus*, may easily float into assimilation. And what of that great lifesaver of Jewish values in the home and of the home itself... the Shabbos? A family seated together, which prays together, stays together. The candles, the *kiddush*, the sacredness of Shabbos, keep us afloat in Jewish waters. Lose these values, and you have removed the boundary for Jewish safety. Without the Jewish observances, we are entirely out of bounds, heading to far-removed shores and foreign territory. The shofar, then, is the lifeguard’s reminder to watch our whereabouts and to seek our Jewish safety.

Individually, too, we may lose our directions. The Jew is bid to wear *tefillin* daily to consecrate the thoughts of his mind and the deeds of his hand to service of God and men. But the stream of life is swift. We go into business and forget the Godly command of the Torah:

לא יהיה בכיסך אבן ואבן גדולה וקטנה.

Thou shalt not have in thy bag, diverse weights, large and small.

איפה שלמה וצדק יהיה לך.

A perfect and just measure shalt thou have.

Our mad rush for money often blocks our view of our needy neighbor, or even brother, and we withhold our charity. We forget our humane responsibilities and the injunction of

לא תקפוץ את ירך מאחיק האביון.

Thou shalt not shut thy hand from thy needy brother.

The shofar reminds us that we had better respond to our personal obligations if we mean to swim in safe Jewish waters.

My friends, unfortunately not only individuals, but also so-called Jewish religious movements have disregarded the lifelines in the sea of life, have ignored the warning of the shofar and have gone far adrift. Some of our Reform brethren recognize their

error, and are trying to turn back. But the tide is strong. Their moorings in the faith of a Godly Torah to be obeyed have been severed. Our Conservative brethren are still anxiously swimming away from the waters of real faith, erasing lifeline after lifeline. They face the danger of Jewish disappearance.

On Rosh Hashana, we must recall that God rises as the lifeguard, the shofar offers His signal to us all... American Jews, communally and individually, to watch our strokes, to return to Jewish bounds.

עלה אלקים בתרועה ה' בקול.

God has gone up in a shout, the Lord with the sound of the Shofar.

Heeding His clarion warning, we may recite hopefully as the shofar is sounded.

קולי שמעת אל תעלם אזנך לרוחתי לשועתי.

Thou hast heard my voice, deafen not Thine ear to my call, to my plea.

May we respond to the lifeguard's call with a more devoted life, may He respond to ours with a *כתיבה וחתימה טובה*.

Amen.

Rosh Hashana

Yom Kippur



Rabbi David Mahler
Rabbi Yaakov Siegel
Rabbi Avner Shapiro
Rabbi Yisroel Gordon
Sarah Pachter
Avraham Azizi
Leigh Greenberg
David Manheim
Daniel Feldmar
Robert Millman
Henry Manoucheri
Dr. Abie Mendelsohn

Successful Judgment and the Most Important Job of Every Parent

RABBI DAVID MAHLER



Rosh Hashana is the *Yom HaDin* for *Am Yisrael* and understandably, a very stressful and tension-filled time. At the beginning of the laws of Rosh Hashana, the *Tur* (O.C. 581) quotes a *beraisa* which highlights the uniqueness of the Jewish nation. Ordinarily, an individual on trial for his life is not concerned with his personal appearance before the court. He doesn't necessarily shave or get a haircut, nor dress in any other clothing but black. In sharp contrast, *Am Yisrael* receive haircuts, don white clothing, and eat and drink *Yom Tov* meals on their judgment day, as they are confident that Hashem will perform a miracle on their behalf.

Where does this state of optimism come from? Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv (Broide), the *Alter* of Kelm, explains that each individual must worry and enter Rosh Hashana in a state of personal fear and trepidation. Regarding his personal fate for the forthcoming year in the areas of health, family tranquility and financial prosperity, he has neither an assurance nor a guarantee that what was will necessarily continue to be. However, one thing he can be absolutely certain of is that the Jewish nation as a people will survive, and play a significant role in the continual unfolding of world history.

As individuals, judged on our own merits and demerits, we enter the *Yom HaDin* feeling fearful. As a community, though, we know we will merit a successful judgment. How can we as individuals assure that we will be *zocheh b'din*?

The *Alter* writes that the key to a successful individual judgment is for the person to connect him or herself to the *klal*, to the community, of the Jewish nation. People must prove themselves to be indispensable to the community. The more an individual is needed by the community, for example, by not only studying Torah, but also being part of a Torah study group, the more he encourages others to participate, and the more

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essential he is to the group. The merits of the *klal* will then encompass and embrace him, and lift him to a higher level than he could have achieved as an individual. This is true in regard to his *chesed* as well. A person's involvement in different organizations, assisting society in many different ways, raises his stature from that of an individual to a member of the *klal*. Similarly, related to an individual's *tefilla*, if one contributes not only financially but experientially, through concentration, seriousness of purpose, and involvement in the *minyán*, his personal station and position becomes upgraded, and hence has "forced" Hashem to view him not as an individual but rather as part and parcel of the community. He has bootstrapped himself to the guaranteed survival of the Jewish nation.

Up to this point, we have presented the idea that becoming a vital part of the community, and therefore being judged as a member of it, can be achieved by impacting the community through Torah, *tefilla* and *chesed*.

I would like to advocate for an even more crucial aspect to becoming part of one's community and acquiring the guaranteed *din* of a *tzibbur*. In *Pirkei Avos*, the *mishna* (6:6) states that there are 48 different ways to acquire the wisdom of the Torah. One of those is to be "*nosei b'ol im chaveiro*," sharing a friend's burdens with him.

The paradigm for one who was *nosei b'ol im chaveiro* is Moshe Rabbeinu. Very little is known about Moshe's early years. The Torah is not a psychological novel and is not concerned with satisfying one's biographical curiosity. All that is said on the subject of Moshe's transition from Egyptian prince to champion of his stricken people is "*vayar b'sivlosam*." Before Hashem appeared to Moshe at the burning bush, the only glimpse into Moshe's life that we were given were three episodes where he helped to reduce people's suffering. At approximately the age of 40, the *pasuk* (*Shemos* 2:11) writes that Moshe went out and saw the suffering of *Bnei Yisrael*. The *Midrash* (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:27) highlights the fact that Moshe didn't only feel bad for the Jewish people, he did something about it. We all feel bad when we hear terrible news, but most of us then simply move on with our lives. Yet, perhaps there is a more fundamental answer. There is an important difference between empathy and sympathy. Sympathy is when we simply feel bad for someone and try to deal with it from a distance. Empathy is when we try to connect to the individual who is suffering by being present with him in his suffering. That is exactly what *nosei b'ol im chaveiro* is all about. Moshe Rabbeinu actually experienced the pain of those who were suffering, connected with them, and assisted them through action. After broadly observing the suffering of his people, he then felt the suffering of an individual who was being attacked by a fellow Jew. In Midyan, Moshe stood up for the daughters of Yisro, despite not being in any position

of authority, but rather merely a stranger in a strange land.

Why were these specific instances “chosen” by Hashem to be publicized? Surely there were other events in Moshe’s life which could have been told about and written in the Torah? Many explain that Moshe was selected to be Hashem’s messenger in order to save the Jewish people because Moshe genuinely felt the pain of his persecuted people more than anyone else. His level of empathy, not merely his ability to sympathize, was on an exalted plane.

Empathy lays the foundation for many of our interpersonal *mitzvos*. Judaism, like all other religions, values and endorses charity. And Jews, perhaps more than any other people, are known for their philanthropy. Perhaps our people answer the call of *tzedaka* in greater quantity and quality than others because embedded into the laws of charity is a unique law, not found in other religions. The Torah (*Devarim* 15:8) demands that we not be callous to the requests of the indigent but should rather open our hands and give freely. Additionally, the Torah instructs us to give the poor person “whatever he is lacking.” Rashi, quoting the *gemara* in *Kesubos* (67b), explains that this doesn’t merely mean that we must provide food, drink, shelter, and clothing for them, but we must restore them to their previous status. If they were accustomed to ride on a horse, we should provide them a horse; if they used to have a servant run before them, then a servant should be provided as well. Rashi illustrates for us that the mitzva is not to provide for a destitute person beyond the level to which he is accustomed, but it must provide even excessive luxuries if the pauper was accustomed to these. In his commentary on Rashi, the *Leket Bahir* explains that even if a once wealthy man feels like he is “lacking,” despite the fact that no one else views him as lacking, we are still required to provide for him and restore him to his previous stature. The Torah’s demand for empathy is required even when we lack completely any shared experience. The basis for this level of demand is learned from Moshe. He felt the persecution of his people despite the fact that he never experienced any of it having grown up in the palace.

Being *nosei b’ol im chaveiro* is so central to a successful judgment because this *midda* is found in all three of the world’s pillars. The *mishna* (1:2) in *Pirkei Avos* states that the world stands on 3 things: Torah, *Avoda* (often explained as *tefilla* because prayer is described as *Avodah Shebalev* - worship of the heart) and *Gemilus Chasadim*.

The connection between being *nosei b’ol im chaveiro* and Torah can be illustrated through a story. *Chasidim* tell the story of the second *Lubavitcher Rebbe* (the ‘*Mitteler*’ Rebbe) who was once so focused on his studies that he failed to hear the cry of his baby son. His father (R. Shneur Zalman of Ladi) heard, and went down and took the

baby in his arms until he fell asleep again. He then went into his son, still intent on his books, and said, 'My son, I do not know what you are studying, but it is not the study of Torah if it makes you deaf to the cry of a child.' To live the life of faith is to hear the silent cry of the afflicted, the lonely and marginal, the poor, the sick and the disempowered, and to respond. The world is not yet mended, there is work still to do, and God has empowered us to do it - with Him, for Him, and for His faith in us.

Nosei b'ol's connection to *tefilla* is clear based on myriad sources. For example, the *gemara* (*Berachos* 12b) states that one who has the opportunity to pray for a friend and fails to do so is considered a sinner. The *gemara* adds that a *talmid chacham* should become sick when he hears about the suffering of someone else. Furthermore, the *gemara* (*Sotah* 32b) discusses whether prayer should be recited aloud or quietly and concludes that one's transgressions should be made public because when the public hears about someone's suffering, they will pray for the individual. Additionally, Rav Kook (*Ein Ayah, Berachos* 8a) writes that the reason why communal prayer is more effective is that when we pray with others, we not only think about how we can help ourselves, but are motivated to contemplate how we can help others as well. This is the highest form of prayer, and stands as a prerequisite for prayer.

We have already mentioned that being *nosei b'ol* is at the root of the *halachos* of *tzedaka* in particular, but it is also essentially the foundation for the entire mitzva of *chesed*. The Rambam (*Hilchos Avel* 14:1) explains that the mitzva of "*v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*" includes anything that we would want others to do to us were we in the same predicament. Effectively, we must place ourselves in the shoes of others to determine how we can improve their lives.

Last year, Harvard University released a report entitled, "The Children We Mean to Raise: The Real Messages Adults are Sending About Values." Many parents and educators were surprised to learn that despite all of the talk over instilling character and empathy in children, kids may value academic achievement and individual happiness over caring for others. In the report, the authors explained that the children's values reflected what they believe adults value.

To that end, a project was initiated with the goal of improving children's caring and empathy for others. Empathy goes beyond being able to see another person's point of view, Rick Weissbourd, the co-director of the Making Caring Common Project, explained in an e-mail quoted in the New York Times (June 2014). He pointed out that sales people, politicians, actors, and marketers are able to do this kind of "perspective-taking" in pursuit of their professional goals. Con-men and torturers use this ability to manipulate their victims for personal gain. In order to be

truly empathetic, children need to learn more than simple perspective-taking; they need to know how to value, respect, and understand another person's views, even when they don't agree with them. Empathy, Mr. Weissbourd argues, is a function of both compassion and of being able to see from another person's perspective, and is the key to preventing bullying and other forms of cruelty. With that in mind, the project offered four suggestions for developing empathy in children:

1. Empathize with your child and model how to feel compassion for others because kids develop these qualities by watching us and experiencing our empathy for them.
2. Make caring for others a priority and set high ethical expectations. Prioritize caring when you talk about others, and help your child understand that the world does not revolve around them or their needs.
3. Provide opportunities for children to practice. Empathy, like other emotional skills, requires repetition to become second nature. If another child is unpopular or having social problems, talk about how that child may be feeling about the situation, and ask your child how he or she may be able help.
4. Expand your child's circle of concern. It's not hard for kids to empathize with their immediate family and close friends, but it can be a real challenge to understand and feel for people outside of that circle. Encourage your child to talk about and speculate on the feelings of people who are particularly vulnerable or in need. Talk about how those people could be helped and comforted.

A classroom full of empathetic students simply runs more smoothly than one filled with even the happiest group of self-serving children. Similarly, family life is more harmonious when siblings are able feel for each other and put the needs of others before individual happiness. If a classroom or a family full of caring children makes for a more peaceful and cooperative learning environment, just imagine what we could accomplish in a world populated by such children.

Nosei b'ol im chaveiro is the way to get there.

Outsmarting God

RABBI YAAKOV SIEGEL



Was Adam HaRishon a Ba'al Teshuva?

Adam HaRishon is the most famous sinner of all time. But after Hashem confronted Adam and banished him from Gan Eden, what happened next? Did Adam do *teshuva* and fix the character flaws that caused this great sin, or was he content simply living out the rest of his life with his sin unresolved and his relationship with Hashem unrepaired?

A *midrash* (*Bereishis Rabba* 22:13) appears to address this question:

ויצא קין מלפני ה' - מהיכן יצא? רבי חמא בשם רבי חנינא בר רבי יצחק אמר: יצא שמח... פגע בו אדם הראשון אמר לו: מה נעשה בדיןך? אמר לו: עשיתי תשובה ונתפשרתי; התחיל אדם הראשון מטפח על פניו. אמר: כך היא כחה של תשובה, ואני לא הייתי יודע! מיד עמד אדם הראשון ואמר: (תהלים צב)... מזמור שיר ליום השבת טוב להודות לה' וגו'

Kayin went out from before Hashem. In what way did he go out? ... Rabbi Chama said in the name of Rabbi Chanina the son of Rabbi Yitzchak: he went out happy... Adam HaRishon met [Kayin] and said to him: what happened with your judgement? [Kayin] responded: I did teshuva and came to a compromise. Adam HaRishon began to hit himself on his face and said, "Such is the power of teshuva, and I had no idea!" Immediately Adam HaRishon stood up and said (Tehillim 92:1)... "A psalm and song for the Sabbath day – it is good to confess to Hashem, etc."

At first glance it appears that this *midrash* is saying that Adam did in fact do *teshuva*. With a closer reading, however, what the *midrash* actually says is that after his meeting with Kayin, Adam recognized the value and strength of *teshuva*, but it leaves as a mystery whether Adam in fact ever did *teshuva*. The *midrash* certainly does not address – if Adam did in fact do *teshuva* – what actions he might have taken, or what changes to his life he might have made.

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Another important source on this matter is the *gemara* in *Eruvin* (18b):

היה ר' מאיר אומר אדם הראשון חסיד גדול היה כיון שראה שנקנסה מיתה על ידו
ישב בתענית מאה ושלשים שנה ופירש מן האשה מאה ושלשים שנה והעלה זרוי
תאנים על בשרו מאה ושלשים שנה

Rabbi Meir would say that Adam HaRishon was very pious. When he saw that death was decreed as a result of his actions, he fasted for 130 years, separated from his wife for 130 years, and wore belts of fig branches for 130 years.¹

This behavior certainly connects to his sin. Fasting for a sin of eating forbidden fruit, separating from a wife who encouraged his sin, wearing irritating clothes made from the very fruit with which he sinned (at least according to Rabbi Nechemia in *Brachos* 40a²) sounds like *teshuva*,³ but is not necessarily so. Fasting itself is not *teshuva*, nor does the *gemara* say that his fasts were related to *teshuva*. All of these behaviors could have been signs of mourning, signs of Adam being put in “*nidui*,” excommunication, by Hashem,⁴ or even signs of depression. Even though Rabbi Meir called Adam a “*chasid gadol*” for his 130 years of asceticism, physical self-denial is not the same thing as *teshuva*. *Teshuva*, as described by Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuva* (2:3), is the recognition and expression by the sinner that he or she did wrong, accompanied by a change of heart so great that “the Knower of all secrets will testify” about this person that he or she will never sin in this way again. Is there any indication in any of Adam’s behavior that he recognized his sin, regretted it, and had the change of heart that is the essence of *teshuva*?

To answer these questions, we need to understand Adam’s great sin, and fully comprehend its root cause.

Lost In Translation

“Like a hammer shatters rock into many pieces,”⁵ each word or line of *Chumash* has many meanings at many different levels and in many different contexts – all of them true.⁶ Thus, translating the *Chumash* is nearly a fool’s errand, as choosing a word or

1 The specific number of 130 years is significant, and will be discussed below.

2 And Michaelangelo in the Sistine Chapel – See Rabbi Benjamin Blech’s *Sistine Secrets*.

3 Rav Yosef Chaim from Baghdad’s *Benayahu* on *Eruvin* 18b.

4 This is in fact implied by the previous line of the *gemara* in *Eruvin*.

5 *Yirmiyahu* 23:39.

6 *Sanhedrin* 34a.

phrase in a different language cannot possibly capture more than one or two of its true meanings. One of the most obvious examples of this challenge is found in two consecutive *pesukim* in *Bereshis* (2:25 - 3:1):

ויהיו שניהם ערומים, האדם ואשתו ולא יתבשו.

Adam and his wife were both arumim and they were not embarrassed.

והנחש היה ערום מכל חית השדה אשר עשה ה' אלהים

And the snake was more arum than all of the beasts of the field that Hashem Elokim had made.

These two *pesukim* are in fact the only times in the entire *Chumash* that the word “*arum*” is used, so it is quite obvious that either these words have the same meaning, or there is a reason why the *Chumash* used these two words in such close proximity. All translators translate the two usages of “*arum*” differently – Adam and his wife were “naked,” while the snake was “cunning,” “clever,” or “crafty.”⁷ While traditional *mefarshim* can offer meaningful explanations as to why these two words were used in close proximity,⁸ translators are forced to ignore the added depth of the words which the *Chumash* uses.

There is one notable exception. The *Targum Yonasan* translates the second “*arum*” as “והויא הוה חכים,” the snake was clever, as we would expect. He translates the first “*arum*,” however, exactly the same: “והוה תרוויהון חכימין אדם ואינתתיה,” Adam and his wife were both clever.

What does it mean that Adam and his wife were both “clever”?

Outsmarting God

It is stunning that *Adam Harishon* sinned. He was hand-created by Hashem and grasped the entirety of His power. Adam was given the entire world to enjoy except

7 See for example www.biblestudytools.com/genesis/2-25-compare.html and www.biblestudytools.com/genesis/3-1-compare.html for thirty-five English translations. Adam and his wife are also called “unclothed” but never “cunning” or “crafty.” The snake is also called “astute,” “intelligent,” and “wise,” but never “naked.” Onkelos translates the two differently as well. He translates the first “*arum*” as “ערטילאין” meaning “naked,” and the second as “חכים,” which could mean “clever,” “cunning,” or something similar. Some versions of Onkelos translate the *nachash*’s “*arum*” as “ערים,” which is simply the Aramaic for ערום.

8 While Ibn Ezra (*d”h v’hanachash*) simply explains the common usage of “*arum*” as a literary flourish, many, like Rashi (*d”h v’hanchash*) and Seforno (*d”h v’hanachash haya arum*) for example, explain that it was Chava’s nakedness that aroused the snake’s guile. He desired her and therefore plotted to have Adam killed. Reader’s discretion advised, see also Shadal on *Bereishis* 3:1, who says that the *nachash* being “*arum*” is a reference to the Zoroastrian god of evil, “Ahriman,” meaning that the *nachash* was a physical manifestation of evil tasked with tripping up man.

for one tree, and he could not keep his one command to avoid eating from the tree for more than a few hours. What could Adam possibly have been thinking?

The Arizal⁹ explains that Adam's sin was an *aveira lishma*, a sin with good intentions. He was placed in this world to serve Hashem, but without the challenges of the *yetzer hara*. He had God-given tasks – we know at the very least that he was to have children,¹⁰ rule over the animal kingdom,¹¹ and be responsible to work and keep the land.¹² But for Adam, these tasks would not be accompanied by the associated promiscuous lust, power hunger, or greed. He was to carry out these responsibilities unopposed.¹³ Adam, however, thought he could do better for the sake of Hashem. If he were only to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, he could acquire the knowledge of evil and a *yetzer hara*, and thus sanctify God's name by overcoming adversity to serve Him. How much greater could Adam's spiritual accomplishments be - all for Hashem's sake, of course - if he carried out his God-given tasks dunking over the defender in his face rather than spending his entire life on the layup line.

This, of course, was a terrible miscalculation, for there is “no wisdom, no insight, and no advice when opposed to God” (*Mishlei* 21:30), and certainly no slam dunks in the face of the wily and determined *yetzer hara*. Hashem knows the fragile nature of man far more intimately than man knows it himself. Knowing man's susceptibility to temptation, Hashem commanded Adam to stay away and choose the easier path to Divine service upon which he could succeed, instead of the twisted, treacherous path upon which he would surely stumble. Adam thought he could outsmart God, and on account of this belief, Rav Chaim Friedlander says, *Chazal* call him a “*min*”¹⁴ and a “*kofer ba'ikar*,” a heretic.¹⁵

We now understand why the *Targum Yonasan* describes Adam and Chava

9 This Arizal is quoted unsourced by Rav Dessler in *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* Vol. 2 p.140, and by Rav Chaim Friedlander in *Sifsei Chaim Moadim* 1 p.99. I have not been able to locate an original quote from the Arizal or his students.

10 *Bereishis* 1:28.

11 *Ibid.*

12 *Ibid.* 2:15.

13 See Rambam's *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:2 where he explains that Adam, prior to his sin, did not have choices between good and evil, but did have choices and temptations between *emes* and *sheker*, truth and lies. Thus Adam would not have physical temptations, but could have intellectual temptations.

14 *Sifsei Chaim* *ibid.*

15 *Sanhedrin* 38b. Nonetheless, this does not contradict Rabbi Meir's statement in *Eruvin* 18b that Adam was a “*chaside gadol*.” Adam's heart was in the right place – it was an *aveira lishma* – only his mind wasn't.

as “clever” like the snake. They too were too smart for their own good, using their cunning in an attempt to outsmart God. This was their terrible mistake.¹⁶

Adam’s First Encounter with a Mirror

Past errors notwithstanding, Adam was considered a wise sage by his contemporaries. This is seen from a story found in *Bereishis Rabbah* (23:4) also quoted by Rashi (*Bereishis* 4:25, *d”h vayedat Adam*). After Lemech accidentally killed Kayin, his wives refused to stay with him as they were certain that the punishment inflicted upon their descendants would be comparable to that of Kayin’s:

ויאמר למך לנשיו עדה וצלה שמען קולי. רבי יוסי בר חנינא אמר תבען לתשמיש. אמרו לו: למחר המבול בא נשמע לך ונהיה פרות ורבות למארה!?! ... אמר להן: איתא, ניזיל גבי אדם. אזלון לגבי אדם. אמר לו: עשו אתם שלכם והקדוש ברוך הוא עושה את שלו. ואמרין ליה: אסיא! אסי חיגרתך! כלום פרשת מחוה הרי ק”ל שנה, אלא כדי שלא תעמיד ממנה בן, אתמהא?!? כיון ששמע כן, נזקק להעמיד תולדות. *Lemech said to his wives Adah and Tzila, ‘listen to my voice’* (*Bereishis* 4:23). *Rabbi Yossi bar Chanina said: he asked them for marital intimacy. They said to him, “tomorrow the flood will come, and if we listen to you, we will have children only for them to be cursed” ... [Lemech] said, “come, let us go [and ask advice] from Adam.” They went to Adam. [Adam] said to [Lemech and his wives] “you should do what you are supposed to do and Hashem will do what he is supposed to do.” [The wives] said to him: “Doctor! Heal your own limp! Did you not separate from Chava for 130 years so that you wouldn’t have a child? Astonishing!” Once [Adam] heard this, he returned [to Chava] to have children.*¹⁷

Immediately afterwards, the *Chumash* says “*vayedat Adam od es Chava ishto vateled ben,*” Adam returned to Chava, and together they had a son. Chava conceived Kayin and Hevel immediately after she and Adam were created, and they had no

16 This mistake is perhaps illustrated in an almost comically tragic way when Adam hides from Hashem (*Bereishis* 3:8). Surely Adam cannot outsmart an omniscient God by hiding, and just as surely he cannot outsmart an omniscient God by violating His command, arguing that ultimately it is good for Hashem.

17 The *midrash’s* use of a “limp” to dramatize Adam’s hypocrisy is surely on purpose. Commentators (see for example, *Sefer Hachinuch* 3) understand that when the *saro shel Esav* attacked Yaakov’s thigh leaving him limping (*Bereishis* 32:26), it is to be understood allegorically to mean that even if Yaakov can emerge “complete” from his encounters with Esav (*Bereishis* 33:18), his children (referred to as *yotzai yerech* Yaakov in *Shemos* 1:5) will not. Thus a limp represents difficulties with children, which is certainly an apt description for Adam who was avoiding having children entirely, and would be left only with the cursed Kayin as his son.

children until Shes was born when they were 130 years old (*Bereishis* 5:3). From this, the *midrash* (and the aforementioned *gemara* in *Eruvin* 18b) deduces that Adam and Chava separated for 130 years from when death was decreed upon the world to avoid having children who would be destined to die.

Asmiha! It is indeed astonishing that while Adam criticized Lemech's wives for thinking that they knew better than Hashem's command, he himself was guilty of the same mistake! Not only were Adam's 130 years of abstinence not *teshuva*, they were a replication of the very sin from which he was supposedly repenting – thinking that he knew better than God.¹⁸

Humanity Grows from *Teshuva*

Thus, Adam's return to Chava is his *teshuva*. After 130 years of self-inflicted physical hardship, Adam finally realizes that his sin was not caused by physical and animalistic desires for this fruit, for prior to this very sin he had no physical *yetzer hara*. Rather, he realizes, his sin was intellectual¹⁹ – he thought he knew better than God. The *teshuva* he needed therefore did not include fasting and asceticism, but wholehearted acceptance of Hashem's commands, even if he thought that he had better ideas. Thus, when he returns to Chava to have children, in spite of the fact that he thinks having children is a bad idea because of their destiny to die, he finally recognizes that he must subjugate his own fallible human intelligence to the infinite intelligence of Hashem. Finally his *teshuva* is complete. Finally he has recognized his flawed attitude, rectified it, reversed it, and starts a whole new life with a renewed relationship with his wife and with Hashem.

As we know, all of humanity descends from Shes, the ancestor of Noach. Thus, we are all born from this re-uniting of Adam and Chava which was a *ma'ase teshuva*, an act of *teshuva*. When Hashem created man, he recognized that he was destined to sin and thus chose the dirt from the place of the *mizbeach* – the very place of man's atonement – from which to form him.²⁰ Hashem wanted to give hope to mankind,

18 Perhaps this is why Rabbi Meir in *Eruvin* 18b called Adam a "*chasid gadol*" but not a "*ba'al teshuva*". For 130 years Adam was trying to do *teshuva*, but he was trying in the completely wrongheaded way.

19 See footnote 13 above.

20 See *Bereishis Rabba* 14:8:

מן האדמה: רבי ברכיה ורבי חלבו בשם רבי שמואל בר נחמן אמרו ממקום כפרתו נברא, היך מה דאת אמר (שמות כ) מזבח אדמה תעשה לי, אמר הקב"ה הרי אני בורא אותו ממקום כפרתו והלואי יעמוד.
 "[Hashem Elokim formed man out of dust] from the ground (*Berieishis* 2:7)": Rabbi Berachia and Rabbi Chelbo said in the name of Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman: From the place of his atonement he was created. Like it says (*Shemos* 20:20), "make for me an altar from the ground." Hashem said, "behold I am creating him from the place of his atonement, for I wish him to survive."

saying, “just as sin is in your nature,²¹ so too is forgiveness.” And in turn, when Adam created Man, he did so from an act of *teshuva*. Adam gave hope to mankind, saying, “just as sin is in your nature, so too is *teshuva*.”

21 See *Bereshis Rabba* 17:8 in which it relates man’s inclination toward sin to his creation from dirt:

מפני מה האיש נוה להתפתות... אמר להן אדם נברא מאדמה וכיון שאתה נותן עליה טפה של מים מיד היא נשרית.
[They asked Rabbi Yehoshua:] why is it easy for man to be seduced...? He answered them: man is created from dirt, upon which, if you place even one drop of water, it immediately desolves.

Seeing the Value of Every Individual, and Their *Avoda*¹

Aish Kodesh of the Piacezner Rebbe, Shabbos Shuva 5702/1941,
Warsaw Ghetto

RABBI AVNER SHAPIRO



The sefer *Aish Kodesh* of the Piacezner Rebbe, HaRav Klonymous Kalman Shapira *Hashem yikom damo*, consists of *divrei Torah* the Rebbe delivered in the years 5699-5702 (1939-1942) on *Shabbosim* and *Yamim Tovim*. Rav Shapira was a Rebbe in the area of Warsaw before the war and was a very influential figure due to his greatness in Torah and *tzidkus*, and his role as a *rosh yeshiva* and leader to his chassidim. The *sefer* is greatly valued as it is a collection of beautiful *divrei Torah* in the Chassidic style, with the brilliant creativity and insight of the Rebbe. The *sefer* is also extremely unique given its historical context; the *divrei Torah* were originally given over in the Warsaw Ghetto as Jews were suffering from the tragedies of the time period. The Rebbe himself lost a number of close family members during the time in which he was delivering these words of Torah. The *divrei Torah* were delivered with the clear intention of providing *chizuk* to those in the ghetto. There is almost always a connection between the messages of the *divrei Torah* and the troubles and *nisyonos* of the people who would come to listen to them.

The following is a synopsis of the main points of his *drasha* on Shabbos Shuva 1941, as well as his words at the *kiddush* afterwards.² As we study the *drasha*, as well as what was said at the *kiddush*, the relevance of the words to the times through which they were going will emerge. The Rebbe's message contains both a direct and

1 Much *Hakaras HaTov* to the following people in their assistance in preparation of this article- The members of the Womens' Division of the Beth Jacob Kollel, Mr. Oren Shechter, and Mr. Nick Sandlow.

2 The article will discuss main points, but not all of the sources and *chiddushim* of the Rebbe will be discussed. It is highly recommended to see the original.

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an implicit connection to the particular tragic situation in which his followers found themselves.

Question on *pesukim* from the *haftara*

The *haftara* of Shabbos Shuva opens as follows:

שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך כי כשלת בעונך. קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה', אמרו
אליו כל תשא עון וקח טוב ונשלמה פרים שפתינו (הושע יד: ב-ג)
*Return (sing.) Yisrael to Hashem your God for you (sing.) have stumbled
in your sins. Take (pl.) with you your prayers, and return (pl.) to Hashem,
(pray that-) all sin should be forgiven and good should be accounted, and our
prayers should be a replacement for the cows (of Korbanos)*

ארפא משובתם אהבם נדבה כי שב אפי ממנו (הושע שם ה)
*I will heal them (pl.) from their waywardness, I will love them (pl.) willingly,
for my anger has been withdrawn from him (sing.)*

As highlighted in paranthesis, these *pesukim* contain a grammatical inconsistency. In the *pesukim* in *Hoshea* at the beginning of the *haftara*, the *navi* sometimes chooses to address *Bnei Yisrael* in the plural, and sometimes in the singular. To explain this, the Rebbe presents an analysis of a story in the *gemara* found in *Chulin* 7a about Rav Pinchas Ben Yair going to perform the mitzva of *pidyon shvuyim*, redeeming a captive. His first explanation of the story provides an important initial message, while his second also provides a basis for his explanation of the grammatical inconsistency in the *haftara*.

Gemara in Chulin

דרבי פנחס בן יאיר הוה קאזיל לפדיון שבויין פגע ביה בגינאי נהרא אמר ליה גינאי
חלוק לי מימך ואעבור בך אמר ליה אתה הולך לעשות רצון קונך ואני הולך לעשות
רצון קוני אתה ספק עושה ספק אי אתה עושה אני ודאי עושה אמר ליה אם אי אתה
חולק גוזרני עליך שלא יעברו בך מים לעולם חלק ליה

*Rebbi Pinchas the son of Yair was going to perform the mitzva of redeeming
a captive. He encountered the river of Ginai. He said , "Ginai, split for me
your waters (to allow me to perform the mitzva)" The river responded, "You
are going to fulfill the will of your Creator and I am going to fulfill the will of
my Creator (by adhering to the laws of nature involving the natural flow of
a river). With you, there is a possibility that you will perform the mitzva (of*

redeeming the captive), and a possibility you will not perform (the mitzva. You may not be successful in your pursuit). I certainly will fulfill (the will of my creator, if I refuse to split). He (Rav Pinchas ben Yair) said back, "If you do not split, I will decree upon you that water shall never again flow through you!" The river split for him.

The *gemara* proceeds to list two other individuals, besides for Rav Pinchas ben Yair, for whom a body of water split. In discussing the significance of the event, the *gemara* states the following:

אמר רב יוסף..... כמה נפיש האי גברא כמשה ושייתין רבוון

Rav Yosef states that "this man" is as significant as Moshe and 600,000 other people. The common, most literal understanding of this *gemara* is that Rav Yosef is claiming that Rav Pinchas ben Yair is as significant as Moshe and 600,000 members of *Bnei Yisrael*, for whom the sea was split.

The Rebbe poses the following question: why did the argument of Rav Pinchas ben Yair override the argument of the river? He did threaten the river, but surely there was a justification in his argument that gave the threat validity. What was that justification? After all, the argument of the river seems compelling! Its maintaining a flow of water is certainly following the Creator, while its splitting will lead only to the possibility of Rav Pinchas ben Yair succeeding in redeeming the captive.

Initial explanation and message

The first way that the Rebbe addresses this question is based on the *halachic* rule of *safek pikuach nefesh*. In general, one may violate a mitzva in the Torah in the case of possibly saving a human life. Even if a person's life is only possibly in danger, or if the violation of the mitzva will only possibly save the person's life, we do in fact violate that mitzva.

So too here, Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair was arguing that the "mitzva" of the river, following its Creator by adhering to the laws of nature, should be broken in order to possibly save the life of the captive.

The Rebbe, in his *drasha*, alludes to an esoteric concept in the *midrash* (*Shemos Rabba Parsha 30*) that says that Hashem himself fulfills the entire Torah. The Rebbe utilizes this concept in explaining what takes place in the days of *din* leading up to the final judgment of Yom Kippur. The Rebbe, in defense of all of *Klal Yisrael* who find themselves in times of need, states that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* should follow the principal of *pikuach nefesh* and provide salvation for all those who are undergoing

suffering and in extreme danger.

The Rebbe's application of the *gemara* in *Chullin* to contemporary issues follows an approach common amongst other Chassidic *tzaddikim* and leaders, but whose origins go back to *Avraham Avinu* and *Moshe Rabeinu*; the role of a leader at a time of trouble involves confronting the *Ribbono Shel Olam* and serving as an advocate for the wellbeing of others.

Primary Explanation and Message

In his second explanation, the Rebbe goes through a different type of analysis regarding the claim of the river and the response of Rav Pinchas ben Yair. The river understood that there was a precedent to waters splitting, as seen in the splitting of the sea by the *Yam Suf*. However, the river Ginai felt that this occurrence did not justify its going against the decree of Hashem in His laws of nature, and splitting for Rav Pinchas to perform the mitzva. The river's argument was that saving an entire nation justifies going against its duty and natural laws, especially when someone of the stature of Moshe is part of the nation. This case is only a matter of saving one individual; the *gemara* makes no mention of it being someone of a higher stature.

Rav Pinchas ben Yair did not accept this argument. Rav Pinchas ben Yair felt that attempting to save even one Jew is reason enough for the waters to split. With this understanding, the Rebbe sees this *gemara* as a powerful expression of the value of each individual in *Klal Yisrael*.

The Rebbe uses this new appreciation to creatively understand the ending of the episode. Rav Yosef states, as mentioned above,

כמה נפיש האי גברא כמשה ושיתין רבוון

How significant is this person, like Moshe, and 600,000 Jews.

As stated, the basic way to understand this statement is that "this person" is a reference to Rav Pinchas ben Yair. The Rebbe offers a different understanding. "This person" in Rav Yosef's statement is a reference to the man taken captive. Rav Yosef is stating that this individual, an unidentified man that the *gemara* does not describe as being of great stature, is in reality as significant as Moshe and 600,000 others. Just like waters should split for Moshe and 600,000, so too for just one Jew.

The Rebbe uses this theme of the value of every Jew as a message for Shabbos Shuva. He exhorts his Chassidim to do *teshuva*, and not to be satisfied with a situation where many others in the community are doing *teshuva*. Others being engaged in the *teshuva* process does not absolve a particular individual of his responsibility. After

all, the *teshuva* of many others will not fix the flaws of a particular individual. On this topic, the Rebbe refers to an idea from the *Sefer Etz Chaim*, the teachings of the Ar"i recorded by Rav Chaim Vital. The *sefer* explains that each and every Jew has a unique *kedusha* in their relationship in serving the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. Just as every individual is different, their personal relationship with, and approach to serving, Hashem will be different. The *kedusha* of his approach cannot be replicated by others, no matter how many others are returning and serving the *Ribbono shel Olam*. As the Rebbe explains,

וכשאיש ישראל עובד ה מתגלה מכל אחד אור וקדושה מה שאין מתגלה בחבירו
When a person amongst Klal Yisrael serves Hashem, a Holiness and a "Light"
is revealed from each and every one, which will not be revealed through his
friend.

By describing the value of each and every individual, and the unique *avoda* that each is capable of, the Rebbe is providing a perspective that encourages individual *teshuva*.

Understanding the *pesukim* in the *haftara*

After developing the theme of the value of each and every individual and their unique *avoda*, the Rebbe resolves the textual difficulties in the beginning of the *haftara*, in the inconsistency of verb forms. The Rebbe explains that in talking to the nation, the natural verb tense would be the plural. However, the *navi* at times switches into the singular, to stress the value of every individual and their need to engage in *teshuva*.

The connection between the message and the historical situation, in the words of the Rebbe

As mentioned above, the Rebbe almost always connected his *divrei Torah* with the situation in which the Jews found themselves in the Warsaw Ghetto. His 1941 Shabbos Shuva *drasha* was no exception. After discussing the responsibility and value of every individual to do *teshuva*, the Rebbe writes,

ואפילו עתה בשעת הצרה והריסת ישראל יכול להיות שיתגלה מהם מה שלא היה
 מתגלה מהם בשעת הרווחה
And even now, at a time of trouble and destruction amongst Klal Yisrael, it
is possible that (a light and Kedusha) will be revealed amongst them which
would not be revealed at a time of prosperity.

The Rebbe is stating that just like every person is unique in his or her service of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, so too every situation is unique in serving Him. The Rebbe

is calling upon his followers to transcend their situation, and see in it the unique and valuable challenge in furthering their *teshuva* and *Avodas Hashem*. *Teshuva* and dedication to Hashem in times of distress are distinct and, in a way, more elevated than in times of tranquility.

Speaking at the *kiddush*- The implicit connection between the message and the historical situation, in the words of the Rebbe

The majority of the Rebbe's Shabbos Shuva *drasha* was spent developing the theme of the value of every Jew, and each person's responsibility to do *teshuva*. On that same Shabbos, the Rebbe delivered another speech at the *kiddush* following *tefilla*. From part of what he said at this *kiddush*, it is clear that there is another connection between the Rebbe's message and the tragedies taking place in the Warsaw Ghetto.

The Rebbe discussed a situation he had observed earlier that year. Before Rosh Hashana, the Rebbe thought that the *tefillos* of the congregation on Rosh Hashana that year would be prayed with more *kavana*. He figured that people would pour out their hearts to Hashem to pray for their loved ones and all of *Klal Yisrael*, along with themselves, to be saved from persecution. After Rosh Hashana, he realized that in reality, the opposite was true. The *tefillos* were in fact not as fervent as in previous years. The Rebbe offers two reasons for why this might have been the case; the first is an insight into human behavior and a beautiful *chiddush* on a well-known *pasuk* in *Tehillim*. The second makes it clear that the Rebbe's Shabbos Shuva *drasha* had a strong relevance and connection to his generation's tragic situation.

The Rebbe first explains that, in the past, people had prayed with all their hearts to be saved from the calamities of the time. These people discovered, though, that not only were their prayers not being answered, but that their situations actually got worse. When Rosh Hashana 1941 came, they may have intended to experience days of very intense *tefilla*. Given their past experiences, though, where their *tefillos* were followed by worsened conditions, it was harder for them to *daven* on Rosh Hashana. In connection to this idea, the Rebbe explained the words of King David in *mizmor* 130,

שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתיך ה'

A song of ascensions, from the depths I called to God.

Here, *David HaMelech* is calling out to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* from the depths, "*Mima'amakim*." Asks the Rebbe, why does he mention the "depths" in plural? Why doesn't he say, "from the depth," in singular? The Rebbe answers this question by

explaining that *David HaMelech* is describing a situation similar to that in which Jews of the Warsaw Ghetto found themselves. David prayed more than once. After the first time, instead of his *tefillos* being answered, his situation actually got worse. Instead of being rescued from the depth, he was plunged into a second one, “*mi’ma’amakim*”. However, *David HaMelech* continues to daven. The Rebbe explains David HaMelech’s intention as,

הנני מתחזק ושוב קורא אותך

I strengthen myself, and again call out to You.

In his second explanation as to why *davening* was harder for his congregation that year, the Rebbe writes,

שלכל דבר גם לאמונה גם לשמחה צריכים איש שהוא יאמין והוא ישמח מה שאין
 כן כשכל האיש נרצץ ונרמס אין מי שישמח

For all matters, for Emunah and also for Simcha, there needs to be a person to have Emunah and to have Simcha. This is not so, when a person is broken and trampled upon, there is no one “present” to have Simcha.

Here, the Rebbe is describing the Jews of his time as being broken in spirit. A “person” needs to be present for *tefilla*. If a person is broken, it is hard for him to have the presence of mind to engage in spiritual pursuits, including *tefilla*. This therefore explains why the *tefillos* of the *kehila* were not the same that year as in previous years.

These words of the Rebbe also shed light on his main message of the *drasha*, and specifically on how his message is connected to the historical situation of the time. When a person is broken because of persecution, they also feel dehumanized, as if they do not possess the value and uniqueness inherent in every individual. The Rebbe therefore spoke about the unique value of every Jew and their *avodas Hashem*, and how that should be a motivating force in their recognition and pursuit of *teshuva*.

The Rebbe *Hy”d*, eventually perished in the war on ד' חשוון תש"ד, November 4, 1943. *Klal Yisrael* has moved on from the tragedies of the war. The words of the Rebbe, both in these and in all his *divrei Torah*, can serve as a source of *chizuk*, as an “*Aish Kodesh*” to those who learn his words. People are inspired by the strength and spirit of the Rebbe, and draw from the Rebbe’s words as they relate to the particular *nisyonos* and challenges that confront them in their life.

The Calf, the Goat and the Sanctuary: A Historical Approach to Yom Kippur

RABBI YISROEL GORDON



Yom Kippur can be overwhelming. Confronted by alphabetical listings of our failings, the challenge of *teshuva*, long and difficult *tefilos*, *leinings* and *haftoras*, not to mention the struggle of the fast itself, it is hard to know where to put our focus. Under pressure from all of the *mitzvos* of the day, basic questions often remain unaddressed and unexplained. There is more at stake here than just Jewish literacy – if we lack clarity, we are in danger of being led astray by unrealistic expectations and misguided goals. If we do know the true meaning of Yom Kippur, though, we can harness it to create meaningful and lasting spiritual growth.

The most basic question relating to Yom Kippur gets surprisingly little attention: why is Yom Kippur the Day of Atonement? What is so special about the tenth day of the month of Tishrei? The short answer is that Yom Kippur is the day on which Hashem forgave *Bnei Yisrael* for the events of the *egel*, the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai with a replacement set of tablets on the tenth of Tishrei, proof positive that Hashem forgave the sin that caused the first set to be smashed (Rashi, *Shemos* 11:33). This extraordinary act of divine love embedded itself into the fabric of time. Forevermore, the tenth of Tishrei would be a Day of Atonement for the Jewish people.

This idea sounds wonderful, but unfortunately, things are not so simple. While it is true that Moshe's prayers saved the nation and Hashem did give a second set of tablets, the sin still occurred and is still impactful. Hashem decreed, "On the day of remembrance, I will visit their sin upon them" (*Shemos* 32:34). In other words, "Punishment for the *egel* is included in every punishment of the Jewish People" (*Sanhedrin* 102a). The unforgivable appears not to have been totally forgiven.

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Cleaning the Calf

This obviously presents a problem for us come Yom Kippur. “Why doesn’t the *Kohen Gadol* wear [his usual] golden garments when he enters the inner sanctum to do the *avoda*? Because a prosecutor cannot be a defender” (*Rosh Hashana* 26a). The mere presence of gold “reminds” Hashem of the *egel* and undermines the *Kohen’s* work as our defense attorney.

The *egel* hangs as a dark cloud over the Day of Atonement, but our strategy is more sophisticated than simply to avoid mentioning it. As we shall see, the entire service of Yom Kippur is designed to reverse the spiritual damage caused by the Golden Calf.

The *egel* is not just a sin, it is a belief system, an “ism.” By building an *egel*, the Jews expressed the belief that people can only relate to the Creator through an intermediary (Ramban on *Shemos* 32:1). This is a self-fulfilling heresy, for “Hashem relates to us the same way we relate to Him” (*Midrash* cited in *Nefesh HaChaim* 1:7) and when we step back from the relationship, so does He. “When the Jews made the *egel*, the Clouds of Glory departed” (Vilna Gaon to *Shir HaShirim* 1:4). This explains why Moshe had to break the Tablets. Tablets and an *egel* are incompatible, for the Torah is meant to bring Hashem into our lives, and an *egel* keeps Him at a distance.

Why did the Jews make a Golden Calf? While they may have felt that God was too close for comfort, there was also a theological error in play. The Jews apparently thought that the *Shechina* prefers pure gold to flesh and blood. The reasoning behind this was that since God is perfect, He must only be interested in perfection. This is a disastrous misconception, and nothing could be further from the truth. God wants a relationship with humans, not statues.

On Yom Kippur, Hashem countered the *egel* by giving us tablets of Torah – the “gateway” to a relationship with Him (*Yoma* 72b) – and instructing us to put them in a wooden Ark.¹ Not metallic, lifeless gold, but complex and organic wood, the symbol of man.² The message is clear: when a human being with Torah in his heart enters the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur and stands together with the Ark in the direct presence of the *Shechina*, the intimacy of the God/Jew relationship is restored and *Egel-ism* is neutralized.³

1 “They should make an Ark of cedar wood” (*Shemos* 25:10). The gold *cheruvim* on the Ark also carry an anti-*egel* message. Male and female, they symbolize Hashem’s “marriage” to the Jewish Nation (*Yoma* 54a) and signify that we relate to each other directly, without an intermediary (Rabbeinu Bechaya to *Shemos* 25:18).

2 “For man is a tree of the field” (*Devarim* 20:19). In another clear indication of the Ark as a symbol of man, the Ark was gold-plated inside and out to indicate that “a two-faced sage is no sage” (*Yoma* 72b).

3 This is why the *yetzer hara* for idolatry is located in the *Kodesh HaKodoshim* (cf. *Yoma* 69b). It is at the site of man’s most intimate union with Hashem that the *egel* intervenes.

One of the famous debates between the *Tzedukim* and the *Perushim* revolved around an apparently minor technicality of the Yom Kippur service. Rejecting tradition, the *Tzedukim* claimed that the *Kohen Gadol* must put the *ketores* on the firepan before entering the *Kodesh HaKodoshim* (*Yoma* 19b). Aside from textual support, there is a solid rationale behind this position. “A man cannot see Me and live” (*Shemos* 33:20); the *Tzedukim* felt that in order to survive, the *Kohen Gadol* needs a cloud of smoke to obscure the *Shechina*.⁴ Our *mesorah* insists otherwise (*Yoma* 53a) and in light of the *egel*, this *halacha* has great significance. The *Kohen Gadol* must first enter the *Kodesh HaKodoshim* and stand before Hashem, smoke-free. He need not be in the midst of performing a mitzva, nor may he hide behind a cloud. *Ketores* can wait. On Yom Kippur, Hashem’s greatest desire is simply the presence of man himself.

Even the route to the *Kodesh HaKodoshim* is indicative. According to Rabbi Yosi, the *Kohen Gadol* walked along the north wall of the sanctuary, straight into the Holy of Holies through an opening in the north side of the curtain. Others argue that this behavior lacks the requisite reverence and the *Kohen* should take a roundabout path. “Due to the presence of the *Shechina*, it is inappropriate to walk straight in,” (*Yoma* 52a) “staring the whole time through the opening into the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*” (Rashi ad loc.). The *gemara* goes on to defend Rabbi Yosi’s position. Hashem loves us so much that He wants us to pray to Him directly. If we are so beloved before God, the *Kohen Gadol*, our representative, should feel free to walk straight into the throne room.

Understanding Yom Kippur as a response to the *egel* also explains why the tenth of Tishrei is the *Yom HaChasima*, the day our fate is sealed for the coming year. Hashem decreed that every judgment must include some punishment for the *egel*, but with great compassion, Hashem set the “Day of Remembrance,” the day judgments are finalized, on the very day He pardoned the *egel*! We thus have the benefit of being judged on the anniversary of Hashem’s mercy, and Hashem Himself teaches us how to make the most of the opportunity. Every year the combined forces of our national *teshuva* and the *Kohen Gadol*’s service achieve a little more fixing, a little more cleansing, and a little more forgiveness. As the antidote for the *egel*, Yom Kippur helps us secure a favorable judgement for the New Year.⁵

⁴ According to the *Chizkuni* (*Vayikra* 16:13), this is indeed the purpose of the *ketores*.

⁵ The *gemara* draws a number of striking parallels between the Yom Kippur service and the *para aduma* service, e.g., segregating the *Kohen* seven days prior (*Yoma* 2a), the *tumah* of the person who burns the animal (68b), and the use of a red woolen string (41b; cf. 63b, 68a; see below, note 16). Inscrutable as these *halachos* may be, commonalities are understandable in light of the fact that the *para aduma* also served to cleanse the impurity generated by the *egel* (cf. Rashi to *Bamidbar* 19:22).

Goat Mysteries

The goats of Yom Kippur stand out in a service filled with mystical mysteries. Two lots are drawn to determine the status of two identical goats. One ticket says “*La’shem*.” The lucky goat who wins that ticket is offered as a *korban chatas*, a sin offering. The other ticket says, “*La’Azazel*.” This goat is the loser. He will be cast off a cliff in the desert. While the use of lots is peculiar, throwing a goat off a cliff is, to be frank, utterly bizarre. It flies in the face of everything we know about the service of *Hashem*.⁶ The even greater surprise, though, is the atonement power of the *Azazel* Goat.

The two goats deal with two very different categories of sin. When a person is *tamei*, it is forbidden for him to enter the *Beis HaMikdash* or eat the meat of a *korban*. This is the sin of *tumas mikdash v’kodoshav*, defiling the *Beis HaMikdash* and its offerings with spiritual impurity. The *La’shem* Goat atones for this sin. In contrast, the *Azazel* Goat atones for... everything else! Every other sin is forgiven through the goat that is thrown off a cliff (*Yoma* 61a).

How goats atone is beyond our understanding, but this much we can ask: what is so special about the sin of *tumas mikdash*, defiling the sanctuary? What is it about this one obscure sin that requires its own private goat on Yom Kippur, when all other sins are taken care of by the other goat?⁷ Before we answer this question, we will first strengthen it.

One plus One Equals One

Although the service of the *La’shem* Goat and the service of the *Azazel* Goat could not be more different, the two goats are identical in appearance, height, and cost. They are even purchased together (*Yoma* 6:1). The Torah is creating a bond between these two goats, a bond that transcends their differences. The *Azazel* Goat must stand in the sanctuary when the blood of the *La’shem* Goat is offered (*Vayikra* 16:10; *Yoma* 40b); it is as if his own blood is being offered. These *halachos* all portray a strange, alternate reality; the two goats are not two goats, they are the same goat.⁸

⁶ The service of the *Azazel* Goat is such an anomaly, “the *yetzer hara* tricks the Jews by refuting it, claiming that the Torah must be false” (Rashi on *Yoma* 67b). This is why the Torah states, “Observe my decrees... I am Hashem your God” (*Vayikra* 18:4). “I am Hashem – I have decreed and you have no right to question” (*Yoma* ad loc.). The Ramban (*Vayikra* 16:8) cites *Midrashim* that view the *Azazel* Goat as a stand-in for Esav (cf. *Nefesh HaChaim* 2:7) and as a literal scapegoat, a “bribe” for the angel Samael, i.e. the Satan. Unfortunately, for those of us not versed in *Kabbala* this approach makes the goat more mysterious, not less.

⁷ While it is true that the *musafim* of the *Yomim Tovim* and Rosh Chodesh are dedicated to atoning for *tumas mikdash* (*Shavuos* 1:1), our question is why this would be necessary on Yom Kippur when the *Azazel* Goat atones for all sins. Moreover, the *La’shem* Goat is not a *musaf* (*Yoma* 3a).

⁸ See *Yoma* 40a, *Tosfos*, s.v. *v’azdu*; *Yoma* 61b, *Gevuros Ari*, s.v. *itti afilu b’shabbos*.

According to Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv, the unity of the goats is such that it is difficult to differentiate between them. This is why the usual verbal declaration is insufficient and we need a lottery to establish the separate identity of each goat.⁹ In contrast, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveichik believed it was the lottery itself that united the goats.¹⁰ Either way, the consensus is clear: the goats are two components of a single offering.

Returning now to our question, the problem is exacerbated. If the goats are united, they should work together towards a common atonement. How and why does each goat atone for a different type of sin?

A Goat for Hashem

As a *korban chatas*, a sin offering, the *La'shem* Goat fixes the sin of introducing *tumah* to the *Beis HaMikdash*. But it does more than that. The blood of the *La'shem* Goat actually sanctifies the sanctuary. “With his finger, he shall sprinkle the blood seven times on [the altar], purifying it and sanctifying it from the *tumah* of the Children of Israel” (*Vayikra* 16:19; *Yoma* 59a). Atoning, purifying, and sanctifying are different things; how does one goat do it all?

Although we cannot see nor sense the negative spiritual energy called “*tumah*,” the *gemara* grants us a revealing insight into the meaning of the word.

Sin clogs the heart of man, as the verse states, “Don’t make yourself tamei by [eating rodents], for you will then be tamei because of them” (Vayikra 11:43) – don’t read “for you will then be tamei,” read rather, “for you will then be clogged” (Yoma 39a).¹¹

A synonym for clogged, *tumah* is a dark force that restricts the flow of Divine blessings and reduces Hashem’s ability to be present. Hashem relates to man the way man relates to Him, and if a person sins, Hashem cannot interact with him in a normal, healthy way. “[If a person] defiles himself below, he is defiled above” (*Yoma* ad loc.). It follows that when “he sanctifies himself below, he is sanctified above” (*Yoma* ad loc.).¹²

9 Anonymous, *Heoros B’Maseches Yoma: M’Shiurei Maran Rebbe Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv*, pg. 240-241. This perspective explains the time-sensitive nature of the lottery. If the goats are not used, then after Yom Kippur they revert back to their pre-lottery, undifferentiated status (*Yoma* 65b).

10 Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *Shiurei HaGrid: Avodas Yom HaKippurim* (Mossad HaRav Kook), pg. 84. This opinion is difficult to reconcile with the fact that we can pair an *Azazel* Goat from one lottery with a *La'shem* Goat from a different lottery (*Yoma* 64a).

11 אל תקרי ונטמאתם אלא ונטמטם. Although spelled differently, the Hebrew word for “you will be clogged” is phonetically similar to the Hebrew word for “you will be *tamei*.”

12 Since *tumah* limits Hashem’s relationship with us, the punishment of כרת (spiritual excision) for *tumas*

Teshuva purifies the *tumah* generated by sin and allows “an increased flow of *kedusha* from Hashem” to enter the person (*Nefesh HaChaim* 1:20). In other words, when a sin is forgiven, man is purified of *tumah* and then automatically sanctified by the *Shechina*.

This explains the gravity of *tumas mikdash* and the imperative of cleaning it out, and also why this is prioritized on Yom Kippur, the day dedicated to fixing the *egel*. When we set up a Golden Calf as an intermediary between us and Hashem, we corrupted the proper service of the One God and damaged the spiritual pipelines that connect heaven and earth. In other words: *tumas mikdash*. In order to bring the *Shechina* back into our world, we must first flush out the *tumah* generated by *Egelism*. The *La'shem* Goat functions to accomplish this. It is literally “for Hashem,” as it prepares the sanctuary and the world for His Presence.¹³ There is another goat on this day, however, and it is a goat of even greater importance.

Resurrecting Adam

In his commentary to the Torah, Rabbi Ovadia Seforno advances a fascinating theory. If not for the sin of the *egel*, he writes, there never would have been a *Mishkan* at all. The original plan was for the *Shechina* to rest directly on the people, not in a building. Tragically, the Jews worshipped a Golden Calf and Hashem decreed that they be annihilated. Although Moshe saved the nation through the power of his *tefilla*, Hashem only agreed to return through the medium of a *Mishkan*.¹⁴

A little prehistory will be helpful here. We should remember that there was no *Beis HaMikdash* in the Garden of Eden. There was no need, for the *Shechina* rested directly on Adam.¹⁵ This was Hashem’s original plan for the world, and, according to the Seforno, this was Hashem’s plan for the newly minted Jewish nation. Like the sin of the forbidden fruit in the Garden, the sin of the Golden Calf at Sinai clogged the pipes and shattered Hashem’s vision for the Jewish people. Plan B, a *Mishkan*, was implemented.

mikdash (*Bamidbar* 19:13) is מדה כנגד מדה, measure for measure.

13 According to the Rambam, bringing *korbonos* serves to undermine the pagan belief in sacred animals (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:46). The presence of *Shechina* on Earth is not just a human need, צורך הדיני, but also a “Heavenly need,” צורך גבוה, as the verse states (*Tehillim* 132:13), “For Hashem has chosen *Tzion*; He desires it as a dwelling place for Himself” (Ramban to *Vayikra* 29:46; cf. *Nefesh HaChaim* 2:11).

14 Paraphrased from the commentary of the Seforno to *Vayikra* 11:2. The idea of the *Mishkan* as a response to the *egel* appears in *Chazal*; see for example, *Tanchuma, Terumah* 8 and Rashi to *Shemos* 38:21. Rabbeinu Bechaya (*Shemos* 25:6) goes so far as to say that the only reason the mitzva to build a *Mishkan* preceded the *egel* was because Hashem wanted to provide the cure in advance.

15 “When Adam sinned, he removed the *Shechina* from himself” (*Tanchuma Yashan, Bechukosai* 65). See also *Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer*, chap. 14.

If the *Mishkan* only exists because of the *egel*, it follows that as the *egel* fades, the need for a *Mishkan* fades with it and man can reclaim his original role as God's sanctuary on Earth. This idea may strike us as radical, but the concept is actually well-established. "One who wishes to pour a wine libation on the altar should fill the throat of Torah sages with wine" (*Yoma* 71a). Speaking of a person who achieves the level of a "*Kadosh*," the Ramchal writes, "Such a man is like the *Mishkan*, the *Mikdash* and the altar" (*Mesilas Yesharim*, chap. 26). On Yom Kippur, as we clean out the residue of the *egel*, *kedusha* flows down upon us and the medium of the *Mikdash* is rendered superfluous. This explains how the *Kohen Gadol* faced Hashem in the Holy of Holies¹⁶ and it also allows us to understand the symbolism of the *Azazel* Goat.

Carried by a non-Kohen out of the *Beis HaMikdash* and into the desert, the *Azazel* Goat represents the ability of every Jew to deal with his sins on his own, without the aid of an external sanctuary.¹⁷ We have the power to restore our relationship with Hashem wherever we may be – even when we find ourselves wandering in a spiritual desert. In a word, the *Azazel* Goat represents *teshuva*. In the absence of a *Mikdash*, *teshuva* is all we need,¹⁸ and on Yom Kippur, the *Mikdash* is indeed absent and replaced by man.

This is more than just an inspiring thought; it is a reality with terrifying consequences. If man is a sanctuary, then a sin is not merely a sin. Every sin is an act of sanctuary defilement!

The strange unity of the goats now makes perfect sense: the *La'shem* Goat relates to the *Beis HaMikdash*, while the *Azazel* Goat relates to the *Mikdash* within man. The *La'shem* Goat cleanses ordinary *tumah* from the sanctuary building, and the *Azazel* Goat cleanses all other sins – the *tumah* of man – consecrating a sanctuary of flesh and blood for the Creator.¹⁹ Each goat takes a different route, but their purpose is one

16 The *Kohen Gadol* is compared to Adam (*Tanchuma, Pekudei* 2) and Adam wore the vestments of the *Kohen Gadol* (*Bamidbar Rabba* 4:8). This perspective explains the surprising position of Rebbi Shimon that a *Kohen Gadol* is not liable for *tumas mikdash* (*Horayos* 2:7). As a *Mikdash* himself, the sin of defiling the sanctuary building is mitigated.

17 This is another feature the *Azazel* Goat shares with the *para aduma* (cf. *Zevachim* 14:1). See above, note 5.

18 Rambam, *Hilchos Teshuva* 1:3

19 There are two types of *tumah*: "actual" *tumah* which defiles the *Mikdash* and requires a *mikva* for purification, and "spiritual" *tumah* caused by sin which requires *Teshuva* for purification. Although all sins generate spiritual *tumah* (cf. *Nefesh HaChaim* 1:11), the term "*tumah*" is used explicitly to describe the sins of eating non-Kosher food (*Vayikra* 11:4-7), idolatry (*Yirmiyahu* 2:23), sexual immorality (*Vayikra* 18:24) and murder (*Bamidbar* 35:34) – the common denominator being the departure of the *Shechina* caused by these sins (cf. *Ohr HaChaim* to *Vayikra* 11:45; *Ha'amek Davar* to *Bamidbar* ad loc.). It is no coincidence that the four primary sources of spiritual *tumah* are associated with four primary types of actual *tumah*: the carcass of a non-Kosher animal is

and the same: creating a space where Hashem feels comfortable on Earth.²⁰

The goats may be unified, but they are also in competition. In an astonishing *halacha*, the *gemara* (*Yoma* 66b) rules that if the person designated to escort the goat to the desert becomes *tamei*, he should still enter the *Mikdash* to get the goat, defiling the sanctuary on the very day dedicated to its purification!²¹ It would be an easy matter to find a replacement – indeed if he calls in sick, that is exactly what we do – but during its fifteen minutes of fame, this goat wants make a point. When we cast off our sins on Yom Kippur and bring Hashem back into our lives, then we become the *Mikdash* and the Temple building is downgraded. Encountering Hashem in the *Beis HaMikdash* is not the ideal; what Hashem really wants is for us to find Him within ourselves.²² Experiencing this intimacy with Hashem is the antithesis of the *egel* and the goal of Yom Kippur.

Confession or Blood?

The goats differ not only in the way in which they are offered, but also in the performance of the mitzva of *viduy*, the verbal confession. In the first step of every sin offering, the supplicant places his hands on the animal's head and recites *viduy*, confessing the sin for which his offering will atone. This act “places” the sin onto the animal.

Aaron shall lean his two hands on the head of the living goat, confess upon it all the sins of the Children of Israel... and place them on the head of the goat... and the goat will carry all of their sins into the wilderness...
(*Vayikra* 16:21-22)

Typically, atonement is not achieved until the blood of an offering is sprinkled

tamei (*Vayikra* 11:8,39); worshipping an idol makes it *tamei* (*Avodah Zarah* 3:6); sexual immorality produces semen which is *tamei* (*Vayikra* 15:17); murder produces a corpse which is *tamei* (*Bamidbar* 19:11). *Niddah* and *metzora* are both considered a death of sorts and are therefore also *tamei*.

²⁰ The unity of the goats is evident in a number of ways. According to Rav Shmuel ben Chofni Gaon, the *Azazel* Goat is also “*La’shem*” (quoted by Ibn Ezra on *Vayikra* 16:8). It is fascinating that the word “*La’shem*” in both *Vayikra* 22:27 and *Vayikra* 22:22 refer specifically to the *Azazel* Goat and include it in certain laws of the *korbanos* (*Yoma* 63b). Also indicative is the fact that pushing the goat off the cliff has the *Halachic* status of a *shechita* (*Yoma* 64a). The *La’shem* Goat also shares certain features with the *Azazel* Goat. It is taken outside the camp to be burned (*Vayikra* 16:27) and the person who does the burning becomes *tamei* (*ibid.* 16:28), just like the person who delivers the *Azazel* Goat to the cliff (*ibid.* 16:26).

²¹ Unlike the *Kohen Gadol* himself, who is disqualified and replaced if he becomes *tamei* (*Yoma* 1:1).

²² “My sole intent in the design of the *Mikdash* and all its vessels is only to indicate to you that you should model yourselves after it. Through your pleasing behavior you will style yourselves after the *Mishkan* and its vessels, completely holy, worthy and prepared for Me to literally rest My *Shechina* within you” (*Nefesh HaChaim* 1:4, author’s note).

on the altar, but in the case of the *Azazel* Goat, the *viduy* is the critical part of the service. Once the *viduy* is recited by the *Kohen Gadol*, the *Azazel* Goat can die and it need not be replaced – even if it never makes it to the desert (*Yoma* 40b). In contrast, and in violation of standard procedure, the Goat for Hashem has no *viduy* at all. Its atonement is effected solely through the sprinkling of its blood on the altar (*Yoma* 61a). It is strange indeed that a goat headed for the desert receives a standard *viduy* while a sin offering lacks it.²³

In light of our theory, this discrepancy can be understood. The *viduy* of the *Kohen Gadol* on the *Azazel* Goat represents the mitzva of *teshuva*, the ability to return to Hashem without a *Mikdash*. According to the Rambam, the mitzva of *teshuva* is *viduy* (*Hilchos Teshuva* 1:1), but in order for *teshuva* to be effective, one must first throw his sins away and cease the negative behavior (*ibid* 2:2). *Azivas HaChet*, the abandonment of sin, is an obvious prerequisite for *teshuva*. To recite *viduy* without first breaking the habit is akin to immersing in a *mikva* while still holding on to the dead rodent that caused the impurity in the first place (*ibid* 2:3). This is what is done through *Azazel* Goat. Confessing sins on a goat and then throwing it off a cliff is simply a graphic depiction of ordinary *teshuva*.²⁴

It is indicative that atonement for the *egel* was achieved by the prayer (*Shemos* 32:11-14) and confession (*ibid*. 32:31) of Moshe, and not through animal sacrifice. As we redress the sin of the *egel* annually on Yom Kippur, it is only natural that we would want to make use of Moshe's successful formula, and this is indeed the case. The text of the *Kohen Gadol's viduy* on the *Azazel* Goat is derived from the text of Moshe's *viduy* for the *egel* (*Yoma* 37a).

In contrast, the Goat for Hashem demonstrates not the power of man, but the power of the *Mikdash*. As such, there is no human input and no verbal confession on this goat; atonement is achieved solely through the blood of the sacrifice. With its sanctuary-centric outlook, it is appropriate that this goat atones for no sin other than spiritual defilement of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

The Unfinished Sanctuary

Viewing Yom Kippur in the context of the *egel* shifts the focus off our sins and onto the big picture: the state of our relationship with Hashem. Simply stated, the goal of

²³ *Chizkuni* on *Vayikra* 16:6 asks this question and suggests that since the *La'shem* Goat it is for Hashem, it would be disgraceful for us to confess our sins on it.

²⁴ Just as it is with the goat, so it is with *Teshuva*: a sincere *viduy* is the critical component. Even if, God forbid, one does not live beyond Yom Kippur and never puts his resolutions into practice, nonetheless his *viduy* is still effective and the sins of the past are forgiven (*Hilchos Teshuva* 2:1).

the day is to become a human *Mishkan*. Of course, *teshuva* is imperative, but a person could technically fulfill the mitzva of *teshuva* and still miss the point. For example, someone could regret missing *minyán*, but never ask himself when was the last time he really opened up to Hashem in *tefilla*. A person could resolve to elevate the quality of his shabbos table with *divrei Torah* and *zemiros*, but have no interest in guiding his private life or business affairs according to the dictates of the *Shulchan Aruch*. A person could become scrupulous about *kashrus*, but never thank Hashem for food with a well-articulated and heartfelt *bracha*. The point here is not hypocrisy. The point is that the *egel* is alive and kicking.

Do we relegate Hashem to the medium of a sanctuary or a *shul*, a davening or a shabbos? Or do we instead realize that He expects daily *Azazel* offerings from the cliffs of Los Angeles? Do we yearn for Hashem to enter every aspect of our lives, or do we prefer to keep Him at a comfortable distance?

Being and becoming an Orthodox Jew is a lifelong work-in-progress, and *teshuva*, by definition, is always doomed to fall short; if we understand Yom Kippur correctly, though, then we know it doesn't matter. Yom Kippur is about how we relate to Hashem, and we are in complete control over that. If we make sincere resolutions and take a step towards Him, then He responds in kind and moves towards us. But if we hold back and maintain the status quo, so will He.²⁵

The *gemara* in *Yoma* (57a) tells a story. A *Tzeduki* challenged Rebbi Chanina, “Now that you are in exile you are definitely *tamei* and the *Shechina* is not with you, as the verse states, ‘Her impurity is on her hems’ (*Eichah* 1:9).”

“Come and see what the Torah says about the Jews,” Rabbi Chanina responded. “He dwells with them, in the midst of their *tumah*’ (*Vayikra* 16:16) – even when they are impure, the *Shechina* rests among them.”

“Even when they are impure, the *Shechina* rests among them!” Where, of all places, does the Torah make this radical statement about Hashem's tolerance for *tumah*? In the middle of the Yom Kippur *avodah*, a service dedicated to purifying the sanctuary! This is precisely the point: the human Temple is perpetually under construction and perfection is unattainable and unnecessary, but if we are honest about building a sanctuary, we must hand over the keys. When man invites Hashem into his life and grants Him unrestricted access, then the *egel* is undone and the *Shechina* arrives. This was the goal of the Yom Kippur service of old and this is what we are striving for on Yom Kippur today.

25 This thesis explains why our Yom Kippur *viduy* does not, for the most part, mention specific sins, but is mainly about character refinement. (I am indebted to Benji Ginsberg for this insight.)

Imagination: The Power of Visualization

SARAH PACHTER



When my son was five years old, he loved to pretend to be Kobe Bryant. As I watched him play, sporting his adorable “game face” and look of determination, I knew that in his mind, he wasn’t pretending to be Kobe Bryant—he was Kobe Bryant!

Children’s imaginations are so vivid that when they play pretend or get dressed up in costumes that they aren’t simply pretending to be a certain character; for them, the transformation is real.

As adults, we look at these kids—or even at ourselves—and laugh at the innocent naiveté. What is interesting, though, is that we adults fantasize all the time. How many of us have found ourselves in the car, driving somewhere familiar, routine? As we travel along the route we know so well, our minds begin to wander and suddenly we arrive at our destination, without remembering how we got there. We drove on mental autopilot, as our minds traveled to someplace more interesting or important to us.

Imagination is a powerful tool

Our imagination paints strong images and photographs in our minds, of things that excite and motivate us. Clear, concrete pictures are mentally crafted in ways that can make things seem wonderful, mysterious, or even terribly frightening.

Imagination—the human mind itself—is such a powerful force that it can even make the body endure a physical change when provoked. A whole body can endure these changes. You might inadvertently grimace upon thinking about something embarrassing. When thinking of something fearful, your heart races, your adrenaline pumps, your face heats, and you might even start to sweat. Nothing actually transpired other than a thought passing in your mind, but a real, physical change had occurred.

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As adults, we live more in a state of imagination and fantasy than in any physical, emotional, or spiritual state. In fact, it is fair to say that everything is imagination.

Allow me to explain. How did God create the world? *Yesh me'ayin*: Something from nothing. This world is thus *yesh me'ayin*, but is also *ayin me'yesh*, nothing from something.

Our world is analogous to a dream, in the sense that it does not really exist. What we should consider to be “the real world” is really the world to come, *olam haba*.

“Impossible,” people will say, “If I can feel it, taste it, smell it, and see it, how can it be imaginary?”

Have you ever had a dream that felt so real, you just *knew* it was real life? Suddenly you woke up, however, jolted and snuggled safely in your bed. Sometimes we enjoy the world depicted by our dreams so much that we want to jump back into that fantasy world, but we can't, because it did not really exist to begin with. The truest reality is not what we see with our eyes or what we can taste with our mouths. The most real existence is not in this world at all.

Obviously, even with all that was said above, this world does exist, and we are not merely figments of someone else's imagination. The bottom line is that reality is based on how we understand situations in our own minds. Our minds create our reality, just as the saying goes, “Perception is reality.”

One's perspective, potential for success, and even mitzvos begin as products of the mind—imagination. Imagination has tremendous power, but anything that has the power to do good has equal power to do bad.

How The Satan Uses *Dimyon* to Fool Us

Dimyon, imagination, has very specific facets that can be used to destroy us: *yesh* and *ayin*.

The commentaries (such as *Seforno*, quoted by Rabbi Itamar Schwartz's *Daas Atzmecha*) demonstrate this concept through an analogy: think back to the snake in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. The snake piqued the curiosity of Adam and Eve by offering them the forbidden fruit, thus stirring up their imagination. (*Bereishis* 3:1) He tells them “*Yesh*,” I have something for you, while dangling a metaphorical carrot before their eyes.

Adam and Eve truly thought that major changes would take place as soon as they ate from the Tree of Knowledge.

As a result of this belief, they decided to eat the fruit.

Alas, nothing happened.

For nothing (*ayin*), they lost everything. A transformation did take place—they became mortal. Forever flawed, Hashem banished them from the Garden of Eden.

We can look back at them now and think, “Seriously? We would never let that happen to us.” In reality, though, we actually do this all the time! We may be more mindful of such tricks in the modern world, but *koach hadimyom* can grab onto any of us, and often does. Every one of us acts in ways we know we shouldn’t. The snake entices us, and rejoices at our failure, time and time again. The snake offers us *yesh*, we open our hands, and *ayin*, there is nothing there.

Yesh me’ayin has an additional meaning—jealousy. The voice of jealousy whispers in our ears, “They have it ... I have nothing ... I need what they have.” The voice haunts us more indirectly by saying, “They have it so easy, why is my life so hard? Her family looks so happy and mine is just full of *tzaros*. Life isn’t fair.”

While it is very easy to give in to such jealous thinking, things aren’t always as they appear on the surface. We aren’t always privy to the whole story.

Looking at social media, our friends’ lives seem so glamorous and exciting. We don’t always consider, however, that they may not be having the amazing vacation that they seem to be having, or that they only post the pictures where they look like supermodels, not the dozens of others that they had to delete first. If we look at such photos and posts and react with jealous thoughts, it is really the *dimyom* building up stories in our minds. There is a basic desire to think that if only I had more of this or less of that, life would be perfect. Such jealousy and unhappiness can rot us from the inside out.

So how do I stop the *dimyom* from hurting me, and instead use my imagination to build?

The Lesson of the Manna

The Torah actually has what to say about using our *dimyom* to our advantage. When the Jewish people were wandering in the desert, their food came in the form of *manna*, which fell from the sky.

Even though the Jews in the desert could imagine the *manna* to taste like anything they desired, they still complained. Those in exile desired the fish from Egypt that seemed so good in retrospect. This was the case even though those meals simply came after the Egyptians finished eating and tossed the leftover skin and bones to the starving Jews. The Jews even made the claim of *yesh* and *ayin*: In Egypt we had it, and now we have “nothing” (*Bamidbar* 11:5-6). The *dimyom* painted the mental picture of the fish, telling the Jews that they had something good before, but now, in the desert,

they had nothing.

The question remains, why would *Bnei Yisrael* complain? What complaints could be raised about a gift that Hashem gave to each person individually?

Contrary to popular belief, the *manna* did not simply turn into ice cream after a person imagined ice cream. In reality, it was very hard work. Each Jew had to do a lot of thinking before beginning a meal—he or she had to imagine each and every bite, feel the texture, the taste on his or her tongue. Every bite had to be thought of and considered mentally in order to bring it into existence. Every detail had to be imagined, from beginning to end, and then repeated for the next meal.

Although this process might seem simple, it was quite tedious. Consider our thought processes while eating each bite of our food; most of us can't even concentrate on the first bite.

How many times do we rush through a *bracha*, while speedily inhaling our food, not thinking for a moment about the source of it all? We do not expend the effort to imagine where that food came from, how many people it took to get it to my plate, how hard we had to work to earn the money in order to buy it—that just takes too much effort. *Bnei Yisrael* did not want to think about their food in the desert, and we don't want to think about it now. If we did practice this shift in our thinking on a regular basis, our lives could change so much.

By teaching us the story of the *manna*, Hashem is providing a simple formula for getting what we want out of life. Do you desire something? Do you wish for success? Hashem is telling us how to achieve it. Step one: stop imagining that someone else has it better than you, or that life was better someplace else. You are here now, so embrace the current reality. Step two: think about exactly what it is that you want. Imagine it in detail, and then ask Hashem for help in achieving it. For thousands of years, the Torah has been sharing this secret with us through the story of the *manna*.

The message is simple: dream it, and you can achieve it.

We can have anything we want in life. All we have to do is imagine it, and then ask Hashem to help us attain it. Do you doubt this? We already know that Hashem has made the whole world, creating something from nothing—*yesh me'ayin*. How could we then think that He is unable to give us what we want? Do you have something you want to achieve? Imagine it. Do you have something you want to receive? Visualize it! Imagination gives us the inspiration to achieve our aspirations. Picture the goal first in your mind, and then apply that imagery to your prayers.

This concept is not just feel-good hocus pocus. It actually works, and there is scientific evidence to prove it. Studies have shown that the mind-body connection

is extremely powerful. For example, when exercising at the gym, if you visualize the results you desire as you work, you will actually end up sculpting your muscles more than someone who does not.

How does this happen? The body creates a synapse or pathway that the brain has visualized, thus making the task easier for the body to execute. An established brain pattern makes the task more familiar to you mentally and physically, and is therefore easier to follow through with. If the synapse is in the brain, the person is one step closer to achieving his or her goal, because he or she has already imagined it.

To return to the example of basketball once more: the top basketball players in America are often asked how they have become so successful. Interestingly, many of them attribute their success during games to visualizing the ball going through the hoop while in practice, or even off the court altogether. Some players have admitted to using this strategy in other areas of their lives as well. The self-help genre of literature is practically built upon the concept of visualizing one's goals in order to make them happen in a person's tangible life.

Mentally visualizing and imagining success anywhere and everywhere is the first step to actualizing that success in real time.

On Rosh Hashana we often make resolutions for the upcoming year, yet by the time the next year rolls around we are right back where we started. This year, rather than making vague commitments, try to specifically think about what you want for yourself, who you want to be, and what you want the upcoming year to look like. Just as the Jews imagined their *manna* with clear specificity, imagine specific scenarios which will help create the best you and best year possible. If we set our minds to it, and use our *dimyon* to help build it, Hashem will surely aid us in our endeavors.

Dimyon, imagination, has so much power; it can build or destroy us, and is a tool given to us by Hashem that can transcend us to heights we never thought possible. The choice of how to use our imaginations is ours, and we alone have the power to make that choice.

What will you choose?

Rosh Hashana: Our Personal *Beis Hamikdash*¹

AVRAHAM AZIZI



Both the institution of the *Beis Hamikdash* and the holiday of Rosh Hashana relate to the idea of cleansing one's *neshama*. The *Beis Hamikdash* is referred to as *levanon*² in rabbinic literature, because it can really be referred to as the original "white house," because after bringing a *korban*, a person became "bleached-white" clean. Rosh Hashana achieves this same effect over the course of two intense days of repentance and introspection.

When two words have the same *gematria*, or numerical value, a relationship is said to exist between them. The letters in the words Rosh Hashana and those in *Beis Hamikdash* both add up to 861. Another similarity between the two is that they play a role in the two unique twenty-one-day periods in the Jewish calendar. One such period begins with the seventeenth of Tamuz and ends with the ninth of Av, and is commonly referred to as "the three weeks." The other is from Rosh Hashana through Shmini Atzeres. These two periods are related in that they both revolve around the ideas of cleansing and *kedusha*. During the three weeks, we mourn the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash* - the *levanon*. During the other, we are cleansed from our *aveiros*, just as one would have been required to do in order to enter into the *Beis Hamikdash*. Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch has also written about this topic. Why, he asks, are we not commanded to be *oleh regel* for Rosh Hashana? The answer is that Hashem and all His majesty is with the Jewish people wherever they may be in the many small *Batei Mikdash* around the world. Since Hashem knew we would be in *galus*, He decided to visit us instead.

1. This article is based on a lecture by Rabbi Eli Mansour, which was itself based on a *sefer* called *Imrei Shefer* by Rav Avraham Abulafia.

2 See *Bereshtis Rabba* 15:1.

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Rabbi Sternbuch points out that there is another connection between the two periods: our heartfelt tears. If we are tearful during Rosh Hashana, our connection to Hashem is strengthened and apparent. Our tears for the *Beis Hamikdash* in the other twenty-one-day period show our yearning to have a more tangible and real connection to Hashem, through the vehicle of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

After bringing a *korban* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the repentant person would have become much closer to Hashem. During the *Yamim Noraim*, as well, Hashem is very accessible to us. We can now understand why our calendar is top-heavy with holidays during the month of Tishrei. It is easy to understand why Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur appear in the beginning of the year, but what is the purpose of having Sukkos in this month as well, besides for its completing the twenty-one day period? Sukkos celebrates the fact that our *neshamos* have been newly cleaned, and that we can cling to Hashem even out of the comfort of our permanent homes.

We must remember that going to the *Beis Hamikdash* and having a successful experience over the *Yamim Noraim* depend on us. We yearn so strongly for the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash*, and yet we really have the *Beis Hamikdash* in our grasp every year. In *Bereishis*, when Yosef was born, Rachel says, “*asaf Elokim*.” Her declaration has other meanings besides just that her disgrace had been wiped clean. In one method of calculating *gematriot*, the five word-ending letters continue after *tav*. Therefore *chaf* is five hundred, *mem* is six hundred, *nun* is seven hundred, *pei* is eight hundred, and *tzadi* is nine hundred. In this manner, the *gematria* of “*asaf*” is also 861, teaching that just as Yosef’s slate was cleaned on Rosh Hashana - the day of his release from prison - so too every single Jew’s slate gets wiped away on this day. Just like Yosef at his release, we bathe, shave, and buy new clothes for Rosh Hashana.

Our prayers on Tisha B’Av, the culmination of the end of the three weeks, has hints of the prayers recited on Rosh Hashana, the beginning of the three-week *teshuva* period. *Megilas Eicha* (3:40) tells us explicitly to “examine our ways and do *teshuva*.” A few *pesukim* earlier (3:37), we get a hint of how to obtain long life, which is also the goal of Rosh Hashana - to ask to be written in book of life. The verse asks, “Of what shall a living man complain?” The *pasuk* teaches not to question Hashem’s ways but rather to examine our own lives and decisions.

An elderly man once told his secret of achieving a long life. If a person questions Hashem’s ways, he is called up to the heavens sooner so that the just ways can be shown to him. The elderly man explained that he never complained, but instead looked at his own actions.

Twice a year we mention the death of the *asara harugai malchus*, once in a *kina* on Tisha B'Av (in which they are called "*arzei halevanon*") and again in the Yom Kippur service. The first teaches us that the death of a *tzadik* is akin to loss of the *Beis Hamikdash*; the other teaches that the loss of *tzadikim* atones for our sins.

The *tefilos* of these twenty-one-day periods mourn the loss of the *Beis Hamikdash* and celebrate Hashem's "visit" to our "small *Batei Mikdash*." May we merit in visiting the third *Beis Hamikdash b'meheira b'yameinu*, amen.

To Vow or Not To Vow: That Is The Question

LEIGH GREENBERG



Commandment #406 in Sefer Hachinuch: "If a man vows a neder to Hashem, or swears an oath, to forbid a prohibition upon himself, he shall not desecrate his word; according to whatever comes from his mouth shall he do." (Bamidbar 30:3)

When we were children, we would hear the verse, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me." This sentiment is not a Jewish one, and is not supported in Jewish thought. We believe that words have great power over people, objects, and actions. For this reason, *lashon hara* is considered a great sin. A further demonstration of the power of words can be seen in their ability to alter the status of an object or action, so that it becomes forbidden. Knowing that man makes mistakes, and that sometimes oaths are taken inappropriately and prematurely, Hashem created a path to annul and void *nedarim* and *shevuot* in Commandment #406.

The nature of a *neder* or *shevuah* is always personal. It binds the will of a person with some other object or action. If someone says, "Wine shall be to me as if it were *kodesh* (holy), and therefore forbidden," then he has forbidden the use of wine to himself by a *neder*. If he says, "I swear I will have no use for wine," then he has forbidden the use of wine to himself by a *shevuah*. The difference is that a *neder* can only refer to a concrete object, and not to an abstract idea or action. One can prohibit his own item to himself or to others, or someone else's item to himself. One cannot forbid another person's property to its owner or to anyone else. (R' S.R. Hirsch *Bamidbar* 30:3)

A *shevuah*, on the other hand, is a decision based on the will of a person to do or not to do something, as it applies to an abstract action, for example, "I will not

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sleep tonight.” A *shevuah* to abstain from a duty, however, such as “I will not sit in a *sukkah*,” is invalid, for the will is already duty-bound, and one cannot free oneself from a mitzva. (R’ S.R. Hirsch *Bamidbar* 30:3)

The *gemara* in *Nedarim* (2b) says, “A *neder* makes an object forbidden to the person, while an oath forbids the person from using the object.”

A person who makes a *neder* is charged by the Torah with both a prohibition against desecrating his word, as well as a positive precept to fulfill it. If one intentionally violates a *neder* after having been duly warned, he is liable to a penalty of lashes. The Torah also provides a mechanism of annulment through which a person can be released from his vows, be they *nedarim* or *shevuos*. A person may come before a single sage or a panel of three knowledgeable laymen to ask to have his vows annulled.

If you refrain from vowing, there will be no sin in you. (Devarim 23:23)

The tendency to make vows was strong in ancient Israel. Rash and frequent vows invariably presented difficulties for those who made them. With the propensity to make vows came the additional fear that obligations would be forgotten, not kept, or unintentionally violated. This reality created the need for some means to absolve a vow.

The *gemara* in *Nedarim* (23a) writes, “One who wishes that his *nedarim* should have no force all year long should arise on Rosh Hashana and say, ‘any *neder* that I will declare in the future shall be null,’ provided he remembers this disclaimer at the time of the *neder*.”

Hataras Nedarim (Annulment of Vows) is the nullification or dissolution of vows, and is generally said on Erev Rosh Hashana. Non-fulfillment of vows is considered a grave offense in Jewish law. *Hataras Nedarim* therefore effectively invalidates all *nedarim*, thus nullifying any unfulfilled vows. This action wipes clean the slate of unfulfilled vows, and allows one to avoid entering into Rosh Hashana with the taint of this great sin. At the same time, we declare that any future vows that we may make precipitously during the coming year should also be voided retroactively (*The New Rosh Hashanah Anthology*, Rabbi Aaron Levine, Chapter 2).

Kol Nidre is the best-known ritual of the High Holy Day services and is full of paradoxes. The first paradox is that *Kol Nidre* is not actually a prayer, but a legal formula for the annulment of certain types of vows. The name of Hashem is never once mentioned. The language is a mixture of Aramaic and Hebrew. Finally, although *Kol Nidre* is synonymous with Yom Kippur, it is not actually part of the Yom Kippur liturgy. In reality, it is an introductory declaration which must be recited before sunset

ushers in the holy day. *Kol Nidre* has survived centuries of powerful and persistent opposition, expressed not only by enemies and detractors of Judaism, but even by eminent Rabbis who have challenged the very principle underlying its recitation – the concept of a blanket annulment of sacred vows.

No one has been able to determine when and from where *Kol Nidre* originated. The procedure which was originally established for the day before Rosh Hashana was shifted to the eve of Yom Kippur sometime during the post-Talmudic period. The medieval authorities explain that this was done in order to accommodate the rank-and-file worshippers, who did not come to the synagogue on *Erev* Rosh Hashana, but did attend on *Erev* Yom Kippur.

In the period of the *mishna*, the habit of making vows was held to be a mark of low breeding. Some of the Rabbis permitted the use of vows as a means of reinforcing resolutions to replace bad habits with good ones, but others disapproved of this practice. A favorite Talmudic maxim says, “It is sufficient for you to limit yourself to that which the Torah forbids.” The practice of annulling individual vows through the agency of one sage or three laymen originated in *Eretz Yisrael*, whereas the *Kol Nidre* formula for collective use is found in the legal responsa of the Babylonian *geonim*, beginning in the 8th century.

An important alteration in the wording of *Kol Nidre* was made by Rashi’s son-in-law, Rav Meir ben Samuel, who changed the original phrase “from the last Yom Kippur until this one” to “from this Yom Kippur until the next.” The *Kol Nidre* was thus no longer concerned with unfulfilled obligations of the past year, but dealt with vows that will be made during the ensuing year. Rav Meir ben Samuel also added the words “we do repent them all,” since, according to Jewish Law, real repentance is a condition of dispensation. In support of his opinion, he cited the *gemara* in *Nedarim* (23b) which reads, “Whoever wishes all the vows he may make throughout the year to be null and void shall come at the beginning of the year and say, ‘May all the vows which I vow be annulled.’” This change made by Rav Meir ben Samuel was then built upon by Rabbenu Tam (*Sefer ha-Yashar*) who transformed all of the verbs of the old *Kol Nidre* formula from the past to the future tense. Unfortunately, this tradition was not passed on, creating a grammatical mess, where the time period reads “from this Yom Kippur until next Yom Kippur,” yet all the verbs (which we have vowed, etc.) are in the past tense.

The Jewish defense of *Kol Nidre* has always been that the declaration applies only to the relations between man and Hashem, and not to contractual obligations

between man and man. “For transgressions between man and his fellow man, Yom Kippur does not affect atonement until he has appeased his fellow man.” (*Yoma* 9:9) In 12th century Spain, Rabbi Judah ben Barzillai declared the recitation of *Kol Nidre* to be dangerous, since ignorant Jews might erroneously conclude that all of their vows and oaths were nullified though this declaration and, consequently, would take obligations upon themselves without due caution.

The phenomenal capacity of *Kol Nidre* to withstand so many changes over the centuries cannot be explained in purely rational terms. Due regard must be given to other factors, foremost among them the powerful folk tradition that has long associated *Kol Nidre* with Jewish martyrdom, especially at the time of the Spanish Inquisition.

In some areas, *Kol Nidre* was recited only once, while in others it was said twice so that latecomers could hear it as well (*Likkute ha-Pardes*, p. 12b). In still other congregations, it is recited three times. This last practice is justified by Rabbenu Tam on the grounds that there are many rabbinical formulas which are repeated three times, such as “*Haluz ha-Na’al*” in the *chalitza* process, or “*Muttar Lach*” (“may it be permitted thee”) in the absolution from a vow.

Vows and oaths are created and elevated by the power of words. Though the Rabbis have frowned upon our using *nedarim*, it appears that Hashem knew full well that his human creations would use and misuse them. By creating for man the ability to nullify and void vows, in order not to desecrate one’s word, Hashem set forth a path for the Rabbis to develop the *Erev Rosh Hashana Hataras Nedarim* and Yom Kippur *Kol Nidre*.

The Curious Case of Kol Nidre, 1968 by Herman Kieval

Priceless Integrity, 2003 by Rabbi Daniel Travis

Kol Nidre, JewishEncyclopedia.com

Watch What You Watch

DAVID MANHEIM



טבע האדם הוא להיות נמשך במעשיו אחר רעיו וחבריו ואנשי מקומו.
*A man is naturally inclined to emulate the actions of his friends, acquaintances,
 and those who live in his city. (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 29:10)*

We are warned in many places by *Chazal* to avoid people who display negative behaviors, since a person is naturally inclined to follow them. Similarly, *Chazal* speak of *shmiras einayim*, being careful about what we view, because, as we read in the *Shema*, “*v’lo sosuru acharei levavchem v’acharei eineichem*,” “you should not wander [away from Hashem] after your hearts and after your eyes.” We are also warned against reading “*sefarim chitzonim*,” books that were not written by *Chazal*.¹ In our media-saturated world, these ideas can be difficult to understand, or are even seen as quaint, given our exposure to a much wider world than that in which *Chazal* lived. In this modern world, these types of warnings can seem un-politically-correct, difficult, or even wrong-headed. If we are not exposed to the world, some might ask, how can we interact with others at work? How can we understand what is going on around us? How can we lead meaningful lives without sitcoms, novels, and movies?

Above and beyond the reverence in which we should hold *Chazal* and their advice, there are a number of other reasons to practice caution when considering these issues. These reasons can be explained in light of the modern study of human behavior. As we approach the *Yamim Noraim*, I think it is worthwhile to make a case for a heightened sense of awareness regarding these issues, and to note that there is significant modern research to support the insight of *Chazal* that exposure to something alone is enough to warp our worldview. Modern research about how

¹ For a different and enlightening (albeit less restrictive) view on *sefarim chitzonim* see Yaakov Rich’s article in *Nitzachon* 2:1.

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people make decisions and how their minds work will also provide insight into other *halachos* and *maamarei Chazal*.

An early example of this type of research can be found in the work of Robert Zajonc, who showed that simply exposing someone to the same thing repeatedly makes that person view it more favorably. When two people were shown different things after being exposed to the same thing, they each preferred the object to which they had been repeatedly exposed. This effect is referred to as the “mere exposure bias,” which states that simple repeated exposure to something makes it seem better – or at least less bad. When our neighbors, or others in our city, engage in negative behavior, we are exposed to it over and over again, and it can then have a real effect on us and our mindset.

We are instructed by the Torah not to listen to gossip, or *lashon hara*. This is particularly important because gossip oftentimes is told without any context, though even when context is given, the salacious gossip normalizes problematic behavior.² We might be told, “Mrs. X hit her child in the supermarket,” but we are not told that “this was a single time that I saw this occur, and I have seen her hundreds of other times acting nicely with children, and the other six hundred times I was in public, I’ve never seen anyone else hit a child.” If asked, after hearing this type of gossip, we will overestimate how frequently it happens, how normal it is, and other contextual facts.

This phenomenon is referred to as the “availability bias.” The canonical example of this was found in a study where people were asked about the frequency of words; when asked how many words have “k” as the third letter, people guessed a much lower percentage than when asked about the percentage of words that start with “k”.³ This demonstrates that we are biased towards recalling things that come more easily to mind. In this example, it’s much easier to remember words that begin with “k”.

One might not have understood why it was not enough for the Torah to prohibit speaking *lashon hara*, that Hashem needed to add the prohibition of listening to it as well. It would be easy to think that a simple awareness of these types of biases would be enough to counteract them. This is not the case, though, and many studies

2 This also provides a motive for avoiding watching the so-called “news” on television. As Neil Postman points out, watching the news (as opposed to reading about a subject) provides “decontextualized information... fragments of events from all over the world.” These events happen, but “when news is packaged as entertainment, [it] entertains but does not inform... we are losing our sense of what it means to be well informed.” We are exposing ourselves to all of the *shmutz* that occurs, the raciest and most salacious goings-on in the world, without context or important information.

3 In fact, there are three times as many English words with k as a third letter! (Tversky, Amos; Kahneman, Daniel (1973). “Availability: A heuristic for judging frequency and probability”. *Cognitive Psychology* 5(2): 207–232.)

have been conducted regarding this process of “de-biasing.” Most methods have been found to be completely ineffective, while some have even been shown to exacerbate the problem. Simply knowing that *lashon hara* is wrong is not enough to prevent the negative effects of hearing the gossip from occurring.

Another potentially more disturbing trend in human thought is that we don’t fully differentiate between true and false claims – even when we are told that they are true or false. An example of this was provided in one study,⁴ wherein researchers showed participants crime reports in which details that were true were written in black, and false details in red. Despite being told beforehand that the red details were false, the participants suggested much harsher punishments in cases where the red details were negative than when they were positive – their judgment was swayed even when they knew the details were false. We might want to disregard information contained in *lashon hara*, knowing that they are most likely exaggerations at best, but if explicitly false details are impossible for people to ignore, then true gossip that we are supposed to ignore will be immensely difficult to disregard.

Similarly, when a *dayan*, a judge, oversees a case, he may not allow one party to state their case without the other party present. This seems like an unnecessary precaution if a judge has already been warned not to give unfair preference to either side, but, as noted earlier, knowledge that a bias exists is not enough to overcome that bias when presented with one-sided evidence.

A key issue in this discussion, above simple *lashon hara* between neighbors, is the effect that media has on our understanding of what constitutes normal, appropriate behavior. If we watch movies where people fight, we (presumably) won’t start fighting, but perhaps we will view fighting as more common. You might think that this only applies to situations where we could potentially mistake the portrayed events as actually happening, but, in reality, when exposed to clearly fictional situations, our brains actually adapt (very quickly) to envisioning things that we see on a screen. This reality was first noted in connection to video games, and was entitled “The Tetris Effect.”⁵ Under this theory, players of Tetris begin to see Tetris pieces even when not playing the game. They start mentally re-arranging physical objects to form Tetris rows, and imagine which Tetris pieces would fit into physical places we see. Clearly, the fact that we know that a video game is completely divorced from reality does not prevent our minds from adapting to it. Our exposure to mainstream media is

4 Gilbert, Daniel T., Tafarodi, Romin W., Malone, Patrick S. “You Can’t Not Believe Everything You Read”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, August 1993 Vol. 65, No. 2, 221-233.

5 Earling, Annette, “The Tetris Effect,” *Philadelphia Citypaper*, March 21–28, 1996.

damaging our perceptions. The fact that we see cartoon characters do horrific things to one another imprints these activities in our minds; the simple knowledge that cartoons are not real people is insufficient to stop this mental process from occurring.

In addition to all of these issues, there is a further problem that arises, which one researcher refers to as “generalization from fictional evidence.” This occurs when availability bias, in which easier to remember examples are more likely to inform our judgments, interacts with the difficulty we have in disbelieving false statements. We are aware that movies and books are false, but children still idealize Disney princesses, and adults still think of the latest movie when considering how to interact with others.

When we see bad people do bad things, we are reminded that there are bad people in the world who do bad things. Modern fiction is nuanced, however, and good people do bad things, and bad people do good things. These situations are supposed to mimic reality, at least as it exists in the minds of the writers. If we read a book or watch a television show that discusses or portrays infidelity, our normal and natural revulsion at the idea will be tempered with the thought that these “normal” people engaged in it, and so otherwise-decent people can also engage in that type of activity. This processing occurs even though we are fully aware that the things we read or watch are untrue, and our personal values insidiously adapt to the values of the society producing our entertainment.

All of this is not to say that we are expected to completely close ourselves off to the media, but it is worth reducing our exposure to such harmful material. This heightened sense of awareness is especially important during Elul and the days of awe, where we try to use our time wisely; it may be that your favorite TV show is back after the summer, but instead of watching, perhaps that time can be used to engage in preparation for our judgment. It is the season in which we should attempt to keep our minds in a slightly more elevated state, and limiting our exposure to some of these books, shows, or other media is a good place to start. Don't worry, you can finish reading Nitzachon with all that extra free time.

Choose Life

DANIEL FELDMAR



Everyone has struggles and challenges in life, but some of us handle them better than others. For those who tend to belong to the second group, it can be a very lonely and isolating reality. Although it is not always comforting for those going through tough and trying times to know that many others are facing similar hardships, I thought sharing some of what I have learned from my own experiences may be helpful to someone.

There is an event in the Torah that has always bothered me. At the end of the forty years in the desert, just before they are to enter into the land of Israel, God tells the Jewish people:

החיים והמות נתתי לפניך הברכה והקללה ובחרת בחיים

I place before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; Choose life!
(Devarim 30:19)

The fairly obvious question that arises is, who would choose death? Of the two options, does God really need to sell life? Further, it is odd that there is an implicit threat made later in the *pasuk*; God tells *Bnei Yisrael* that the reason to choose life is so that “you and your offspring will live.” Isn’t that the difference between life and death? Isn’t that what choosing life entails? If that is not clear enough, He calls life “the blessing,” and death “the curse.” Who is so confused about the question posed that the options need such stunning delineations? Further, if it is truly a *bechira* that is being presented—a concept reserved for the realm of free will—then two equally desirable options should be provided, along with the need to select one of them. If the choice is between putting your hand in a fire and having an ice cream sundae, how much free will do you need to make the decision? One would think that if someone offered you to live or die, it would not be a struggle to choose to live! Finally, why tell them this “groundbreaking” idea now? Why at the end of the forty years?

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To make this even more puzzling, there is a *mishna* in *Avos* (4:22) at the end of fourth chapter that states:

שעל כרחק אתה נוצר; ועל כרחק אתה נולד; ועל כרחק אתה חי; ועל כרחק אתה מת
*For against your will you were formed; and against your will you were born;
 and against your will you live; and against your will you die.*

How does a choice between life and death exist if the *mishna* clearly states that the our living and dying is completely against our will?

I was bothered by all of these questions, until certain life experiences actually brought me face to face with this very “choice.” For most of us, we envision certain desired outcomes of our lives, and any deviation from those paths brings up the question, “Why me?”—the banner cry of the victim. We view ourselves as individuals targeted for an unknown reason to face events we “should” not have to. In these situations, the use of that word—should—usually abounds. Our various “shoulds,” expectations, and false sense of knowing what is best for us can quickly turn to depression when we see life heading toward a different than expected outcome. In modern Hebrew, the word for a victim is *korban*, describing the feeling of being sacrificed.

The truth is that the root of the word *korban* is ק-ר-ב (*karov*) meaning connection. Connection is what is meant to be achieved by overcoming the challenges that one so desperately wishes could be avoided. Coming out on the other side, the connection created by overcoming adversity not only strengthens the person, but also creates something (or someone) else entirely—the attribute of greatness!

As in so many areas where spiritual realities can be seen and understood through physical phenomena, here too we can learn from the amazing example of iron and steel. When iron, a “soft” but dense matter that contains many impurities, is put into fire, steel, a far superior substance, is created. One might think that the fire is cleansing the metal of its impurities, thus making it even greater. The truth is that it is actually the sources of the impurities themselves, such as carbon, which give the steel its strength once it comes out of the furnace. The same can be said about life—it is the mistakes, or impurities, that we suffer that are actually the cause of our future strength, once we come out of the situation.

Greatness is forged in the fire of adversity

True greatness and leadership require a triumph over adversity. This can be seen many times in the Torah, where leadership is not determined by wealth or popularity.

Malchus, or kingship, in *Klal Yisrael* emanates from Yehuda and Yosef, two brothers who both overcame great adversity. Yaakov passed over his three oldest sons in favor of Yehuda and granted him the *malchus*, precisely due to his failing with Tamar and prevailing over that situation. One who did not have this type of difficult life experience could not properly succeed in the role of king.

This type of attitude is very easy to say, but very difficult to act upon. For this reason, greatness is so rare, and is also why God must tell us to choose life. Life needs to be “sold,” because, truthfully, it is not easy. Life is full of adversity, hardship, downfalls, and failings. In this way, life needs to be sold to us, and it needs to be made abundantly clear that experiencing challenge is a blessing, and its opposite is a curse. Without this knowledge, we will go down a painfully incorrect path in life. Choosing life over death is considered *bechira* because we often want to take the easy path. God’s formulating the two options as a choice teaches two things; first, that it is possible to be pulled toward life and death in equal measure. Second, that it is within our power, if we work hard at it, to choose the path of life and blessing. That life and death are “placed before us” means that God removed from us any instinctual drive to choose one over the other. Many people choose death and the pleasures of this world; they choose or yearn for a life of ease. If we ask the question, “Why me?” we are essentially choosing “death,” a life without struggle, accomplishment, or greatness. This sort of life is called a curse, in reference to the serpent in *Gan Eden*. The *pasuk* states, “Upon your belly shall you go, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life.” (*Bereishis* 3:14) By converting his food to dust, which will always be available to him, the snake is cursed to a life without struggle.

This choice between life and death was presented to *Klal Yisrael* just before entering into the Promised Land because, until that point, they had lived a life sheltered from these future difficult realities. This inevitable change, says the *Mesillas Yesharim* (Chapter 11), was at the core of the motivation for the *meraglim’s* rejecting the Land of Israel. Entering the land would bring with it many difficulties, and these leaders questioned their ability to lead in such circumstances. They lived under Hashem’s direct care, with no work or worldly responsibilities other than those given by God. Even food in the desert was completely provided in the form of the *manna*. When they entered the land, *Bnei Yisrael* would have to earn a living and be subject to the laws of nature, without the clear *hashgacha* of Hashem. The error of the *meraglim* was that they viewed this change to be a negative one, and preferred a life without struggle.

This can also explain the connection between the end of *Parshas Shlach* to the mitzva of *challah*. The portion we are required separate from our bread, the *challah*, is the exact amount of *manna* that was collected each day in the desert. We do this in order to demonstrate that we choose life, even with the difficulties that come with it, and that we can prevail over them, thereby creating great *kedusha* from the mundane struggles of life.

This, then, is the answer to the *mishna* in *Avos*. Physically, living and dying are of course completely out of our control and against our will. Living “life,” however, is a choice we must make. A careful look at the words of the *mishna* reveals this truth. The *mishna* uses the word “*Chai*”, whereas the *pasuk* says “*Chaim*.” The singular form refers to just the physical fact that our heart is beating, whereas the plural, which is the normal way of referring to life, encompasses the true reason to be alive - to achieve growth and achievement, both in this world and the next.

I have come to know through my own life experiences that great achievements are attained not by strength, but by perseverance. “Living” is a choice we must make every day, and our failings can eventually become our greatest assets. Every day we exchange one day of our life for whatever we did that day. Make sure what you purchased was worth it!

Life is a gift from God, and what you do with it is your gift back to Him. Change and adversity are inevitable—growth from them is not.

Choose Life!

The Bracha of a Cloud

ROBERT MILLMAN



Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, in his magnum opus *Derech Hashem*, “The Way of God,” begins the fifth *perek* of the fourth *chelek* with the following:

ענין התפילה הוא: כי הנה מן הסדרים שסידרה החכמה העליונה הוא שלהיות הנבראים מקבלים שפע ממנו יתברך, צריך שיתעררו הם אליו ויתקרבו לו ויבקשו פניו, וכפי התעוררותם לו כן ימשך אליהם שפע, ואם לא יתעוררו לא ימשך להם. והנה האדון ברוך הוא חפץ ורוצה שתרבה טובת ברואיו בכל זמניהם, והכין להם עבודה זו דבר יום ביומו, שעל ידה ימשך להם שפע ההצלחה והברכה, כפי מה שהם צריכים לפי מצבם זה, בזה העולם.

One of the conditions ordained by the Highest Wisdom was that in order for a person to receive sustenance (shefa) from God, he must first motivate himself in God's direction and turn to God to request his needs. The amount of sustenance depends upon the degree to which he does so. If a person is not awakened in this direction then no Divine sustenance will reach him at all. This is the significance of prayer. God desires and wills to constantly benefit mankind. He therefore arranged that prayer be a daily obligation. Through it, man receives sustenance, success and blessing according to his needs, as dictated by his state of being in this world.

There are a few extraordinary concepts discussed in this piece:

- We must engage in *tefilla*.
- What we receive from Hashem is directly related to the degree to which we pray to Hashem.
- Absent *tefilla*, Divine sustenance will not take place.
- Our *bracha* and success is predicated on prayer according to our individual needs.

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Interestingly, the Ramban does not include *tefilla* in his list of the 248 positive Torah commandments required of every Jew. How is this possible? As Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato makes clear, *davening* is a critical obligation. How could *tefilla* not be one of the 248 positive *mitzvos*?

Our sages describe *tefilah* as:

דבר העומד ברומו של עולם.

An activity that stands at the very top of the universe (Berachos 6b)

In fact, *tefilla* is defined by the *Aruch HaShulchan* as the spinal cord of the *mitzvos*. Similar to the human spinal cord that causes all human limbs and organs to function, *tefilla* is not one of the 248 *mitzvos* because *tefilla* itself is the essential vehicle that gives all human kind the ability to perform each and every one of the *mitzvos*.

The Vilna Gaon also shares this view. In *Meoros HaGra*, the Vilna Gaon states that *tefilla* is the essence of all other *mitzvos* and equal to all of the *mitzvos* in the Torah. This then explains why the Ramban does not list *tefilla* as one of the 248 *mitzvos*. The answer is simple: *tefilla* is the foundation for all of our *mitzvos*.

During the *Yamim Noraim* we state,

ותשובה ותפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רעה הגזירה.

And Teshuva, Tefila and Tzedaka avert the evil decree.

Note the order of the words: *tefilla* is in the middle! *Tefilla* gives centrality and gravitas to the order of the holiest days of the year. What are we doing on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur? We are deep in sincere prayer, coming straight from the heart. Through our *tefillos* we beseech Hashem for a year of health, happiness, *parnassa* and goodness - not only for our families but also for all of *Klal Yisrael*. In short, our *tefillos* on these days are like none other. We are *davening* for another year of life to continue performing *mitzvos* and engaging in *talmud Torah*.

With all of this in mind, and focusing on the tremendous power of *tefilla*, I found the following story. I hope you will enjoy it and appreciate the importance of sincere *tefilla* with the holiest days of the year upon us.

It was a morning in early March 1945, a clear and sunny day. I was a 24 year old Jewish soldier and a member of the U.S. Army's 35th Infantry Division, 137th Infantry. My company, along with several other companies of American troops, were making our way through dense woods in the German Rhineland. Our objective was to reach and take the town of Ossenburg, where a factory was producing armaments that were being used by the Nazis in their war effort.

For hours we had pressed through an unrelenting thicket. Shortly after midday, word was passed that there was a clearing ahead. At last, we thought, the going would be easier. Instead, we approached a large stone house, behind which huddled a handful of wounded, bleeding American soldiers – who had tried to cross the clearing and failed.

Before us stretched at least 200 yards of open ground – bordered on the far side by more thick woods. As the first of us appeared on the edge of the clearing there was an angry rat-tat-tat, and a ferocious volley of bullets sent soil spinning as far as we could see. Three nests of German machine guns, spaced 50 yards apart and protected by the crest of a small hill to the left, were firing at the field. As we got our bearings it was determined that the machine guns were placed in such a way that our weapons couldn't reach them.

To cross that field meant suicide. Yet we had no choice. The Germans had blockaded every other route into the town. In order to move on and secure a victory we had to move forward.

I slumped against a tree, appalled at the grim situation. I thought of home, of my wife, and my five-month-old son. I had kissed him good-bye just after he was born. I thought I might never see my family again, and that reality was overwhelming.

“God,” I pleaded desperately, “You’ve got to do something... Please do something. I’m not ready to leave this world.”

Moments later the order was given to advance. Grasping my M-1 rifle, I got to my feet and started forward. After reaching the edge of the clearing, I took a deep breath. But just before I stepped out from cover, I glanced to the left.

I stopped and stared in amazement. A white cloud – a long fluffy white cloud – had appeared out of nowhere. It dropped from over the trees and covered the area. The Germans' line of fire was obscured by a thick foggy mist.

All of us bolted into the clearing and raced for our lives. The only sounds were of combat boots thudding against the soft earth as men dashed into the clearing, scrambling to reach the safety of the other side before the mist lifted. With each step the woods opposite came closer and closer. I was almost across! My pulse pounding in my ears, I lunged into the thicket and threw myself behind a tree.

I turned and watched as the other soldiers following me dove frantically into the woods, some carrying and dragging the wounded. This has got to be God's doing, I thought. I'm going to see what happens now.

The instant the last man reached safety, the cloud disappeared. The day was again clear and bright. I can't believe this, I thought to myself.

The Nazis, apparently thinking we were still pinned down behind the stone house on the other side, must have radioed their artillery. Minutes later the building we had been in was blown to bits. But our company was safe and we quickly moved on.

We reached Ossenburg and went on to secure more areas for the Allies. But the image of that cloud was never far from my mind. I had seen the sort of smoke screens that were sometimes set off to obscure troop activity in such a situation. That cloud had been different. It had appeared out of nowhere and saved our lives and then it simply disappeared.

Two weeks later, as we bivouacked in eastern Germany, a letter arrived from my mother back in New York. I tore open the envelope eagerly. The letter contained words that sent a shiver down my spine. "You remember Mrs. Shlomovitz from our shul?" my mother wrote.

Who could forget her? I smiled. Everybody called Mrs. Shlomovitz "the prayer warrior." She was always saying *Tehillim*. Frankly, I sometimes thought she carried it a bit far.

"Well," continued my mother, "Mrs. Shlomovitz telephoned me one morning from the defense plant where she works. She said that Hashem had awakened her the night before at one o'clock and told her 'your son is in serious trouble. Get up now and pray for him!'"

My mother went on to explain that Mrs. Shlomovitz had recited *tefillos* for me until six o'clock the next morning, when she had to go to her job. "She told me the last thing she prayed was this . . ." – here I paused to catch my breath – "Lord, whatever danger Chaim is in, just cover him with a cloud!"

I sat there for a long time holding the letter in my trembling hands. My mind raced, quickly calculating. Yes, the hours Mrs. Shlomovitz was praying would have indeed corresponded to the time we were approaching the clearing. And 6:00 a.m.? With a 7 hour time difference, her *tefillos* for a cloud would have been uttered at one o'clock – just the time my Company was getting ready to make its daring dash.

From that moment on, I intensified my *tefillos*. Since the end of the war, I have gotten up early every morning for shul and I always pray for others. I know there is no substitute for the power of prayer and its ability to comfort and sustain

others, even those facing the valley of the shadow of death.¹

Chaim Berger survived the war. He married and had five children who all are *bnei Torah*, as are Chaim Berger's many grandchildren. Chaim Berger went to his eternal rest this past January. May his memory be a blessing for all of us .

May we all be inscribed for a healthy and wonderful new year. May our collective *tefillos* create actual crowns for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* and help bring the *geula bimehera biyameinu*.

¹ The original story was written by Spencer January and can be found at www.whistler4truth.tripod.com./45.htm. It is not known whether the original story is true. I have modified the story in an effort to create a Jewish story for all to enjoy.

Focusing on: The Sanctity of Speech

HENRY MANOUCHERI



With Yom HaDin (Rosh Hashana) and Yom Kippur quickly approaching, we will soon give a cheshbon (accounting) of all the words that we have uttered and pronounced in the past year. Human beings are given the distinct and powerful gift of speech. As a businessman whose work depends on the ability to deliver performance, make commitments, and receive reliable commitments in return, I recognize the power of speech and the importance of the intent behind what comes out of our mouths. Many unnecessary disputes have been resolved by the simple use of good speech, as well as empires built and lasting friendships maintained for many years. On the other side of the coin, reputations, businesses, and relationships that took decades to build have been destroyed due to the abuse of speech.

It is brought down in *parshas Matos*:

“And Moshe spoke to the heads of the Tribes of the Children of Israel saying, this is what Hashem has commanded. If a man makes a vow to Hashem or swears an oath to bind himself with a prohibition, he shall not desecrate his word. According to all that he said, he shall do” (Bamidbar 30:2-3).

Understood literally, these verses speak of the commandment to fulfill a vow, and the prohibition of renegeing on such a vow. However, they can also be explained in a non-literal manner, as a reference to our obligation to guard our speech. The Torah tells us, *“lo yachel devaro,”* we should not desecrate our words by making our speech *chullin*, mundane or trivial. Our power of speech should be reserved for words of Torah and other sacred matters, not idle talk. It certainly should not be degraded by forbidden talk, such as gossip, slander, and profanity. One who sanctifies himself and refrains from lowering his speech to the level of *chullin*, *“all that he said, he shall do.”* This means that all that he says will come to be, since his speech is imbued with great power. Our Sages say that *“a tzaddik decrees and the Holy One, blessed be He, fulfills”* (see *Taanis 23a*).

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The words of a righteous individual have an impact in heaven. His prayers are accepted and his blessings will be fulfilled.

The Lofty Origin of Speech (According to HaRav Yaakov Hillel)

Why does man's speech have the power to sanctify him and elevate him to this high level? It is because speech is man's very essence, the element which raises him above the beasts. "And man's advantage over beast is nothing, for everything is vanity" (*Koheles* 3:19). *Havel*, translated as vanity, can also be understood as a reference to the term *haval peh*, literally the breath or vapor of the mouth, or in other words, man's power of speech. This would imply that the only real difference between man and beast is that man alone can speak. If we fail to sanctify the power of speech bestowed upon us as human beings, we revert to the level of animals and become their equal.

Our Sages speak of the four levels of creation. In ascending order, they are *domem*, inanimate objects, *tzomeach*, plant life, *chai*, living creatures, and *medaber*, man. The title given to each category is the specific quality which elevates it above the one below it. A plant is on a higher level than a stone because it is *tzomeach* - it has the God-given capacity to grow. An animal is greater than a plant because it is *chai* - living. Man's superiority over beast is defined by his being *medaber*. He is not just another living being, but rather a special creation with the power of speech. It is his ability to speak which differentiates him from the lower forms of life.

Speech, man's essence, stems from a most elevated Divine source. The Torah tells us that when Hashem created Adam, He gathered dust from the four corners of the earth to create his body. However, He blew into him the spirit of life from within Himself, as it says, "And He blew into his nostrils a living soul, and man became a living being" (*Bereishis* 2:7). Man's soul was blown into him by the Almighty: "One who blows, blows from within himself" (see Ramban's Commentary on *Bereishis* 2:7 and *Likutei Amarim-Tanya*, Chapter 2). Onkelos translates the words "*nefesh chayah*" (living soul) as "*ruach memalela*," a soul with the power of speech. When the spirit of life was blown into man, he was given the power of speech, which comes from his lofty Godly soul.

Clearly, this amazing power, unique to man alone, was specifically granted to him to be used to speak words of Torah and prayer and other sacred expressions. We find this idea in the prayer composed by the Hidda for *tashlich*,¹ where we request that "the bulk of our speech should be devoted to Your service and Torah study." He specifically

¹ The custom of going to a body of water or a well on Rosh Hashana after *mincha* and reciting the verses "*Mi Kel Kamocha*, etc.," symbolically discarding our sins and casting them into the depths of the sea.

says “the bulk of our speech,” because alongside words of Torah, there is also speech which is essential for our physical survival and unavoidable practical necessities. When we engage in this type of speech with proper intentions, it is also considered a mitzva. By guarding our speech and channeling it properly, we sanctify ourselves to a much higher level.

The Impact on the Higher Worlds

These verses can be understood on a more profound level as well, as they also carry a message of rebuke. “He shall not desecrate his word. According to all that he said, he shall do.” We dare not “desecrate our words,” because “all that we say,” meaning the words that we speak here in this world, are so powerful that they have an impact in the Higher Worlds, for better or for worse. This is not a new idea. The Torah tells us that man was created “in the image of God” (*Bereishis* 1:27), which implies that he has the power to influence all the created worlds. The *Nefesh HaChaim* (*Shaar Alef*, Chapter 3) explains that Hashem created man and gave him control over innumerable forces and worlds. He gave man the power of speech and designated him as the ruler over these forces and worlds.

Through positive deeds, speech, and thoughts, man sustains and gives power to forces and holy Higher Worlds, increasing their sanctity and Divine light, as we learn from the verse, “And I have placed My words in your mouth... to support the Heavens and establish the earth” (*Yeshayahu* 51:16). Our Sages cite the verse, “And all your children will be students of Hashem, and there will be much peace for your children” (*Yeshayahu* 54:13). They add, “Do not read the word as *banayich*, your children, but rather as *bonayich*, your builders” (*Berachos* 64a). Those who engage in Torah study build up and bring perfection to the Higher Worlds, imbuing them with holiness, much as a builder erects a building. The opposite is true as well. Through negative deeds, speech, and thoughts, one destroys countless Higher Worlds and Heavenly forces, God forbid, decreasing their light and giving added strength to the forces of impurity. We find this concept in the verse “Your ruin and destruction emerge from you” (*Yeshayahu* 49:17). What emerges from us - our deeds, our words, and our thoughts - can be a very powerful destructive force.

The *Nefesh HaChaim* goes on to explain that this is the meaning of the Torah’s words, “And Hashem created man in His image, in the image of God He created him” (*Bereishis* 1:27), and “For in the image of God He made man” (*ibid.* 9:6). Hashem is *Elokim*, the God who encompasses all the forces of all the worlds, and constantly arranges and directs them in keeping with His Will. It was also Hashem’s will to grant

man control over many tens of thousands of spiritual forces and worlds.

As we see, then, through his speech, man can have a powerful impact on the higher worlds.

Destructive Speech and Thought

However, we tend to make a very common mistake. We believe that only actual deeds which are physically performed are destructive. For example, we would never dare to steal or commit murder or adultery, God forbid, but we don't see much wrong in mere sinful thought, sights, or talk. This attitude ignores the transgression of "do not stray after your hearts and after your eyes" (*Bamidbar* 15:39) and the laws against forbidden speech. We view such behavior as quite permissible, because there is no physical sinful act involved. After all, what could be wrong with just thinking our own private thoughts, or just enjoying the sight of attractive creations, or talking? Our Sages teach us that there is much wrong that can be done. Even so simple an act as moving one's lips is classified as a done deed (*Sanhedrin* 65a), and "sinful thoughts are more severe than the act of sin itself" (*Yoma* 29a).

Why should thinking sinful thoughts be worse than committing the sins themselves? Let us consider the nature of sinful thought as compared to that of sin in deed. Realistically speaking, how much of our time can we spend engaged in sin? How often will we have the opportunity to sin in any big way? Our options are likely to be rather limited. Our thoughts are with us constantly, however; they accompany us wherever we go and whatever we do. We can easily occupy ourselves with sinful thoughts throughout our waking hours, without hesitation or even the slightest twinge of remorse. What is more, we recognize a physical act of sin for what it is, and once it is over, we will feel shame and regret, both important keys to repentance. But sinful thoughts? What are thoughts? Nothing at all. As we see it, there is nothing wrong with thinking about whatever we please, so there is no room for remorse. As a result, there is no hope of repentance. We make the same mistake concerning viewing immodest or otherwise forbidden sights - we are sure that just looking can hardly be considered a transgression.

This misconception is the work of our evil inclination, which expertly explains why sins in the realm of thought, sight, and speech are completely harmless - it minimizes their severity and reduces them to insignificance. The Torah warns us against this ruse with the words, "He shall not desecrate his word. According to all that he said, he shall do."

Speech properly utilized has the power to rectify the Higher Worlds. It is

frightening to realize that our attempts at rectification can turn into ruin, if our mouth is blemished and our prayers do not ascend favorably. Our only solution is to sanctify ourselves and our speech, transforming ourselves into a vessel for Hashem's service which can receive His Torah. *Tosfos*, citing the *midrash*, writes, "Before a person prays that Torah should enter his innards, let him first pray that delicacies should not enter his innards" (*Kesubos* 104a). If we are submerged in the desire for the physical pleasures of food and drink, we cannot be a suitable receptacle for Torah. The same is true of improper use of our mouths. If they are filled with forbidden speech, they cannot be a vehicle for rectification through Torah and prayer.

Speech and Hashem's Sacred Names

Kol, monotone sound, corresponds to the Divine Name *yud-keh-vav-keh*, and *dibbur*, articulation or speech, corresponds to the Divine Name of *alef-daled-nun-yud* (*Tikune Zohar, Hakdamah*, p.3a). The name *yud-keh-vav-keh* relates to Hashem's concealed involvement in creation. The Name *alef-daled-nun-yud*, which means "Master (*Adon*) of Everything," relates to Hashem's revealed involvement with His created beings, in order to rule and direct them (see *Pardes Rimonim, Shaar 23, Kenafayim*, and Maharal's *Chidushei Aggados, Kiddushin* 71a).

This is why our Sages tell us, "'This is My Name (*Shemi*) forever, and this is My remembrance in all generations' (*Shemos* 3:15). The Holy One, blessed be He, said, My name is not pronounced in the same way that it is written. My name is written with *yud-keh*, but My name is pronounced with *alef-daled*." The word *l'olam*, "forever," is written in this verse without the letter *vav*, so that it can be understood as *l'alam*, "to be concealed." Hashem's name *yud-keh-vav-keh* is not pronounced the way it is written, but rather as *alef-daled-nun-yud*. The written Name *yud-keh-vav-keh* is concealed, while the spoken name *alef-daled-nun-yud* is revealed.

The *Chovas HaLevavos* writes that "the tongue is the quill of the heart" (*Shaar HaBechina*, Chapter 5). Our Sages tell us that the heart is the left brain,² "*Binah* (the left brain) is *liba* (the heart), and through it, the heart understands" (*Tikunim*, Second Introduction in the prayer *Patach Eliyahu*). In other words, that which is hidden in man's heart and thoughts is revealed by means of the mouth, the heart's quill. A person's thoughts, which lay hidden in his heart, are revealed through his power of speech.

² The human mind is divided into three distinct compartments, each a separate function of the mind: the right brain, the left brain, and the brain at the nape of the neck. Every day in our prayers we request *chochma*, *bina*, and *daas*, relating to these three separate parts of the brain. The *mekubalim* teach that each one is related to a different function.

Speech has several stages. The first is in thought. In order for thought to be realized and brought to the ear of the listener, it must be translated into speech. Speech itself is composed of *kol*, a monotone sound, and *dibbur*, articulated words. *Kol*, simple sound without the intonations of speech, implies concealment. *Dibbur*, complex speech, implies revelation, which is comprised of meaning and expression understandable to the one who hears them. *Yud-keh-vav-keh*, the name of Hashem which is concealed, corresponds to *kol*, which is hidden, and *alef-daled-nun-yud*, the name of Hashem which is revealed to His created beings, corresponds to *dibbur*, speech which is audible and revealed.

With this in mind we can understand our Sages' teaching that with every word man utters, he unites the Divine names of *yud-keh-vav-keh* and *alef-daled-nun-yud*, expressing the unification of these separate attributes of the Almighty, Whose "Name is not pronounced as it is written" (*Tikune Zohar, Hakdama*, p. 3a). This is why when we say the name *alef-daled-nun-yud*, we should also have in mind the name of *yud-keh-vav-keh*. The combination of the two names together is called *Sukkas Shalom*, the *sukka* of peace, because the letters of the word *sukka* add up to the same numerical value of these two names of Hashem combined. This unity is called *shalom*, peace.

Every word composed of both *kol* and *dibbur* carries within it an allusion to the unity of the two sacred Names. How dare we then fritter away our words on idle or forbidden talk, defiling that holy unity? This is an important message which should definitely make us stop and think.

Components of Speech

No aspect of speech is simple; there is profound meaning in its every component. Understanding this will inspire us to guard our tongue and sanctify our speech.

Speech is a very lofty entity. The five parts of the speech mechanism, which are the five sources of sound vocalization (the throat, palette, tongue, teeth, and lips), work in coordination to form the words we say. One sound will come from the throat, another from the palette, others yet from the tongue, teeth, and lips, in an endless variety of combinations. Through this complicated process, comprehensible words emerge to express man's thoughts and ideas, produced at an extremely rapid rate. In the span of one minute, we can articulate as many as two hundred words! This involves the effortless pronunciation of thousands of perfectly combined vowels and consonants, a truly amazing phenomenon.

The five parts of the speech mechanism which forms our words have great esoteric significance. The Ari z"l explains that they correspond to the letters *mem*, *nun*, *tzadi*, *peh*,

and *chaf* (known by the acrostic *mantzepach*), which are written differently when used at the conclusion of a word (*Etz Chaim, Shaar Tant"u*, Chapter 3). They symbolize the attribute of *gevura* or *din* - power, strength and strict judgment, corresponding to the five letters of the name *Elokim*.

Speech that is composed of divided sounds is related to the Divine attribute of *gevura-din* (strict judgment). We find this concept in the *Zohar's* discussion of the sounds made by the shofar (*Zohar*, vol. III p. 232a; see Ramban's commentary on *Bamidbar* 10:6). A *tekia*, a simple, unbroken blast, is symbolic of *chesed*, the attribute of lovingkindness, which continually diffuses and spreads. *Shevarim* and *teruah*, blasts, which are broken up into a series of shorter sounds, correspond to the Divine attribute of *din* (strict judgment), the force which causes division. So too, the Levites, who are related to the Divine attribute of *gevura* were the ones who sang in the Tabernacle and the Holy Temple (*Zohar, Bereishis* p. 266b). This is because song is also composed of a series of separate sounds, combined into one unified harmony.

Serving Hashem with Speech

Because speech has such great power and spiritual significance, "All of man's labor is for his mouth" (*Koheles* 6:7). This means that our primary duty in this world is performed through our mouths, since our capacity for speech is our essence. It is also our greatest trial, as it is all too easy to cause damage with our mouths. As we said, speech shoots forth at lightning speed, requiring neither preparation nor effort. We must learn to put our brains in control of our mouths, verifying in advance whether the words we wish to speak are purposeful and related to *mitzvos*, or the opposite, God forbid.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai raises an interesting question (*Jerusalem Talmud Berachos* 8a): why wasn't man created with two mouths, one to be used for Torah and *mitzvos*, and the other for mundane purposes? He answers that we really are better off with things as they are. Even with just one mouth, we manage to produce an enormous volume of idle talk. Can we imagine how much nonsense we would speak if we had two? The *Ben Ish Chai* ironically comments that if man had two mouths, he could always claim that the first mouth, the one intended for sacred purposes, was out of order, unusable and inoperative - and how would anyone be able to disprove him? However, since we do have only one mouth, we cannot use this excuse to evade responsibility. The same mouth that functions perfectly well for forbidden speech can function equally effectively for positive, permitted speech. If we are capable of engaging in pointless chatter, the demand upon us is all the greater to utilize those same capacities

for Torah and sacred matters.

The power of speech is both a great gift and a great responsibility. We should recognize that the mouth is a tool for *avodas Hashem*. The very greatest of *mitzvos* are fulfilled with the mouth, especially Torah study. We should sanctify this sacred vessel with words of Torah and prayer, and guard it from forbidden speech and sin. How can we offer the King of kings sacred words, presented in a vessel sullied by forbidden talk? It would be like giving a monarch a beautiful gift laid out on a filthy tray.

This is why the Torah tells us, “he shall not desecrate his word,” because “according to all that he said, he shall do.” Our every utterance has an impact on the Higher Worlds. Not a single word goes lost, “For the bird of the sky will carry the voice and the winged one will bear words” (*Koheles* 10:20). Our speech is carried to the heavens by the angels, and in the future, we will be called upon to answer for every last word we uttered here on earth. In fact, our Sages teach that man will even have to give an account of his most personal, intimate conversation with his own wife (*Chagiga* 5b). With this in mind, we should learn to guard our precious faculty of speech, the foundation and essence of man’s soul, blown into him by the Almighty Himself.

“Kol” Shofar: Finding our “Voice”

DR. ABIE MENDELSON



Perhaps it might be useful to start our discussion with a playful description of our motivation, by simulating a recurring internal dialogue which plays out each year between *chochma* and *lev* just as the shofar sounds:

Lev: This is it! What we've been waiting for all year, the call to action!

Chochma: Yikes, that's loud... I know the Rambam says the shofar is an alarm clock, but this is a little over the top.

Lev: Stop distracting me, I need to focus on the meaning! The sounding of the Shofar is the essence of the day. If you're going call out the Rambam, then he also says this is the pinnacle today's davening.

Chochma: Huh? What's there to focus on? We're not davening, we're listening to a trumpet! Oh wait, that last tekia was a bit weak – that means the whole day's “davening” is weak?!

Lev: We're concentrating on the mitzva, this is not a concert! Oh great, now it's over – maybe we'll get the true experience next year.

The main conflict that this banter is attempting to portray is that, while each year I know intuitively that the *kol shofar* is a critical portion of our *tefilla avoda*, while I can remember so many of the well-quoted symbolisms and *halachos* which I've learned over the years, I still fight to use that knowledge and apply it during the sounding of the shofar in order to turn an intellectual mitzva into its quintessential experience. Simply put, how can I feel the sound of the shofar as a spiritual part of *davening* while also incorporating the intellectual aspects? This is our motivation.

The mitzva of shofar mid'oraysa

To start towards our goal, we need to understand the mitzva itself which we are attempting to fulfill on Rosh Hashana. The mitzva of shofar on Rosh Hashana has a basis which is also marred in conflict and confusion. The conflict surrounding this

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mitzva of shofar is so pronounced that there is actually no direct mitzva written in the Torah to blow a shofar on Rosh Hashana! The Torah never uses the term “shofar” when describing our activities on Rosh Hashana. Instead, the Torah, in two separate places, describes Rosh Hashana as a “yom terua” and a “zichron terua”:

וידבר יהוה אל משה לאמה דבר אל-בני ישראל לאמר בחדש השביעי באחד לחדש יהיה לכם שבתון וזכרון תרועה מקרא קדש.

Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to Bnei Yisrael saying, in the seventh month on the first of the month, it shall be for you a resting day, a remembrance of [shofar] blasts, a holy event. (Shemos 23:24)

ובחדש השביעי באחד לחדש מקרא קדש יהיה לכם כל-מלאכת עבדה לא תעשו יום תרועה יהיה לכם.

In the seventh month on the first of the month, it shall be a holy event for you; you shall not perform any labor; it shall be for you a day of [shofar] blasts. (Bamidbar 29:1)

Only through learning a *gezera shava* (which, by definition, is a *halacha l'Moshe miSinai*) does the *gemara* in *maseches Rosh Hashana* connect the two “*terua*”s of Rosh Hashana to a third “*terua*” which the Torah uses to describe the *yovel* year:

וספרת לך שבע שבתת שנים שבע פעמים והיו לך ימי שבע שבתת השנים תשע וארבעים, שנה. והעברת שופר תרועה בחדש השביעי בעשור לחדש ביום הכפרים תעבירו שופר בכל ארצכם.

You shall count seven sets of seven years - seven years seven times; and these sets of seven years will be for you forty nine years. You shall proclaim with the blasts of the shofar on the tenth day of the seventh month - on Yom Hakippurim, you shall proclaim with the shofar in all your land. (Vayikra 25:8-9)

The *gemara* learns that just as the sounding of a *terua* on the *yovel* must be accomplished with a shofar, a shofar must also be used for our *terua* on the *Yom HaDin*. So, based on the fact that the *mid'oraysa* mitzva lacks the actual word “shofar”, we can appreciate the decreased significance of the item (or “*cheftza*”) of the shofar itself. Instead, the Torah seems to place the focus on the product of the shofar, namely the *terua*.

The bracha shel shofar

While the textual source for shofar on Rosh Hashana seems to be guiding us towards

the integral nature of the mitzva itself, we may gain additional insight into the true nature of the mitzva by examining the *bracha shel mitzva*. However, just as in our previous discussion, there is a conflict in *maseches Rosh Hashana* relating to the correct wording of the *bracha*, suggesting that there is a *machlokes* (at least according to the Rosh) regarding the essence of the mitzva of shofar altogether. The *machlokes* regarding the *bracha* can be understood as one attempting to identify whether the mitzva is to blow the shofar or to hear the shofar.

The Rambam holds that hearing, or *shmia*, is the *ikar mitzva* and the *nussach* of the *bracha* therefore follows this aspect of the mitzva.

אחר שקוראין בתורה ומחזירין הספר למקומו יושבין כל העם ואחד עומד ומברך
ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לשמוע קול שופר וכל
העם עונין אמן.

After the Torah reading and returning the Sefer Torah, everyone sits and one stands and recites the bracha: "Baruch atta Hashem Elokeinu melech ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvosav v'tzivanu lishmoa kol shofar" [to hear the voice of the shofar]. And everyone responds, "Amen". (Hilchos Shofar V'Sukka V'Lulav 3:10)

However, given the fact that a *baal tokea* can be *pasul*, an assumption could be made that there is an intrinsic aspect of the mitzva that focuses on creating the sound, or blowing the shofar. This argument is based on a comparison with *mitzvas Megillas Esther*, where we say a *bracha* of "*likro megilla*", where everyone has a mitzva to read the megilla and the *baal korei* is going to fulfill the mitzva for everyone by the vehicle of *shomea k'one*. We might therefore suggest that everyone in reality has a mitzva to blow the shofar, and the *baal tokeah* fulfills this requirement for those listening. Yet, most *Rishonim* don't agree with this line of reasoning. So therefore, as the *Shaagas Aryeh* asks, why do we even care about the requirements of a *baal tokea*? He explains that while yes, the *ikar mitzva* is to hear the shofar, we need to hear a "*kol shel mitzvah*" specifically. The sound which is ultimately produced needs to be one that is produced by someone appropriate to be *m'chuyev b'davar* and serves as a representative of the mitzva itself.¹

Based on the general agreement in the *Rishonim*, we also find in the *Achronim* a general agreement with the Rambam regarding the *bracha shel mitzva* as seen in the *Shulchan Aruch* and the *Mishnah Berurah*:

קודם שיתקע, יברך "לשמוע קול שופר" ויברך "שהחיינו".

¹ For a dissenting view regarding the *girsah* of the *bracha*, see Rabenu Tam's discussion within the *Sefer Hayashar*.

Prior to his blowing [the shofar], he makes the bracha: "to hear the voice of the shofar", and the bracha: "Shehechianu". (Orach Chaim 585:2)

דלאו בתקיעה תליא מילתא אלא בשמיעה, שהרי התוקע ולא שמע קול שופר לא יצא.

Since it is not dependent on the blowing, but rather the hearing, as one who blows but does not hear the voice of the shofar does not fulfill the requirement. (Mishna Berura 585:4)

Understanding the "Kol"

At this point, we have seen a general emphasis placed of the sound of the *terua*, along with our accepted *bracha shel mitzva* underscoring the action of *lishmoa kol shofar*, or to hear the "kol" of the shofar. But unfortunately, notwithstanding our brief discussion, we are no closer to resolving our conflict, namely, to or for what exactly are we listening? While there are several explanations to help us understand the spiritual purpose of the *terua* (in particular the Rambam describes several methods to understand the mitzva), I would like to propose a strategy focusing largely on the word "kol", which is classically translated as "voice".

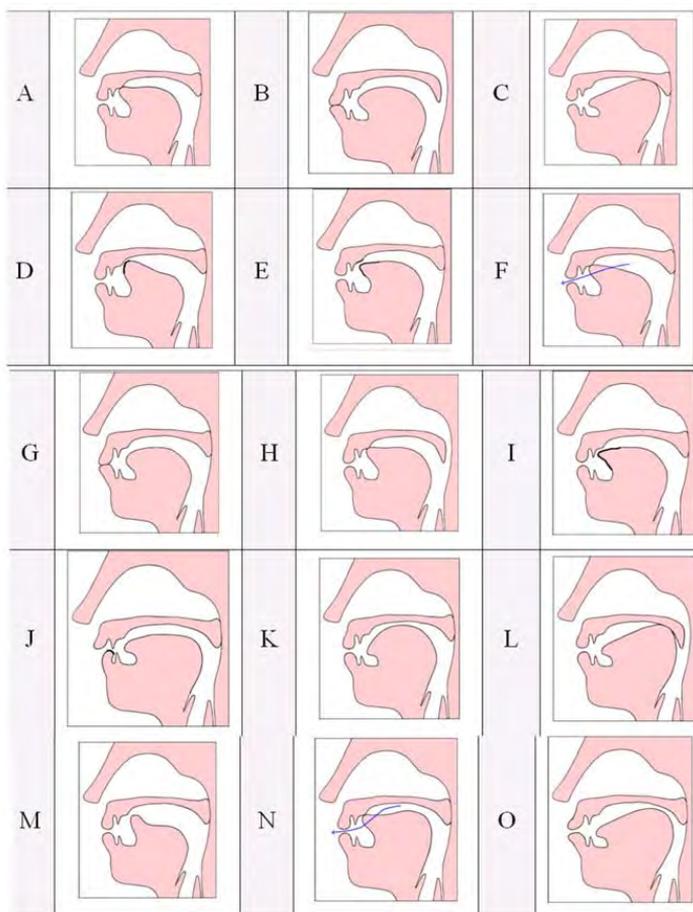
What is a "voice"? We use our voices every day, throughout the day. We appreciate how important our voice is mainly at times when our voice is not functioning, such as when we suffer from laryngitis. But even as our voices are critical to almost everything we do, it is a process that is poorly understood.

The sound of the voice is created at the vocal folds (just behind the Adam's apple in the center of the neck). Air is expelled from our lungs and when we choose to use our voice, our vocal folds close, narrowing the space of escaping air. The result of the drastic narrowing of the vocal folds is that the air is now forced through a very small, slit-like opening. The air rushes at much faster speeds and the jello-like cover of the vocal folds starts to vibrate. The actual frequency (or rate) at which this cover of the vocal folds vibrate will determine the pitch of the voice, but it is approximately 120 vibrations per second for men and 240 vibrations per second for women. The vibrations of the cover produces small puffs of escaping air which are, in fact, the sound waves which the ears perceive as a voice.

At this point, a possible reaction would be: what on earth does a physiological description of voice production have to do with *mitzvas shofar*? Now that we understand that our voice is produced by our vocal fold vibrating, what would we expect the resulting product to sound like? Perhaps like someone producing bland

vowel sound? Perhaps a whistle? Well, point in fact, the sound that is created by our vocal folds sounds most like a goat bleating. Yes, when we produce a voice, we create a very loud bleating sound, similar to a goat. This might seem incredulous because goats can't talk, and goats can't produce the beautiful sounds that some talented humans, such as Luciano Pavarotti or Yaakov Shwekey, can. The reason for this is that there is a difference between the "voice" and "speech". Our voice is what the vocal folds produce with their rapid vibrations, but our speech (and singing) is formed by the throat. See

the chart to the side for many examples, but when we want to communicate a thought through voice, we must continuously shape our throats to allow for precise echoing, which forms the sounds of speech. This throat shaping also creates the echoing which creates beautiful notes of singing. In the field of voice-science, this process of combining the bleating sound of the vocal folds and the echoing of the throat is termed the "source-filter" theory.



***Kol Shofar* – the ultimate source-filter**

The *tefilla* begins, and throughout the early morning we use our voices to *daven* on the *Yom HaDin*. But our *davening* is inherently diminished by this process. Our mind

wanders at times, our heart may be misplaced, and our lips are far from the holy vessels required for this task. Then, the shofar blows. At times, its *terua* sounds sweet, but at times, it has a rough or broken quality. But the *kol shofar* is only the source of the process; we are the filter that sends this form of *tefilla* to *shamayim*. This relationship between the *terua* and us is why hearing is so integral to the process. The sound of the shofar goes through our ears to become the *tefilla* itself. The Rambam's description of the shofar as the ultimate form of *tefilla* may be due to its ability to be performed without the need to daven for a specific request (which, for all we know, may not even be what's ultimately best for us) or to concentrate on some mystical *pesukim*; we simply internalize it and it is automatically transformed, just like the bleating goat sound of the vocal folds transforms into the sweetest song.

This suggested method of interpreting the mitzva of shofar could be supported by a related idea. The *Talmud Yerushalmi* notes that if someone figured out how to blow a *terua* from the wide end of the shofar, this would be no good, citing the *pasuk* in *Tehillim*, "*min ha'meitzar karasi kah*" - "from the narrows I call out to Hashem". Why on earth would this *pasuk* in *Tehillim* which is clearly speaking about *tefilla*, apply to the method of shofar blowing? The reason is because it is related to its character as a pure form of *tefilla*. One who calls out from the figurative narrows does so in complete desperation, devoid of his self. One who calls out from the literal narrows (i.e. the skinny part of the shofar), also does so in the purest form without the inherent weakness of one's "self." In fact, this *pasuk*, recited just before the *bracha* of shofar, is called out, but is the only one whose first letter is not included in spelling out "*k'rah satan*"; it is specifically here to join this the idea of *tefilla* to our *tekias shofar*.

In summary, our task during *tekias shofar* is to hear the sounds, to listen to the sounds, to concentrate on the sounds, and to allow our ears, *lev*, and *chochma* to filter those sounds to *shamayim* as the way to perfect the rest of our *tefilla* of the day. Listening to the sweet sounds of the shofar should provide us all with a *shana tova umisuka*.

Sukkos



Nina Adler

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Hakhel: The Gathering of the Jewish People

NINA ADLER



When the *Beis HaMikdash* stood, each of the three festivals, Pesach, Shavuos, and Sukkos, were quite the events. Three times a year the Jewish people would journey to *Yerushalayim* from near and far to bring sacrifices to Hashem. Imagine what this journey entailed. This was not a plane, car, or even a bus ride. Families would saddle up their donkeys and travel for days, for the opportunity to bring *korbanos* in the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Imagine what that must have felt like. Thousands of people in *Yerushalayim* experiencing something that we can only dream of, the presence of the *Shechina*.

This experience alone would seem to be enough inspiration to last for years, but the Jewish people returned three times a year, and experienced each time, the closeness of Hashem and a feeling of *achdus*.

While the experience of the *regalim* was amazing on its own, every seven years on Sukkos it was expanded upon with the second to last mitzva in the Torah, *Hakhel*. In *Parshas Vayelech*, just before his death, *Moshe Rabbeinu* appoints *Yehoshua* as his successor and writes twelve *Sifrei Torah*. *Moshe* then writes the mitzva of *Hakhel* as follows:

ויצו משה אותם לאמר מקץ שבע שנים במעד שנת השמטה בחג הסכות. בבוא כל ישראל לראות את פני ה' אלקיך במקום אשר יבחר תקרא את התורה הזאת נגד כל ישראל באזניהם. הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף וגרך אשר בשעריך למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו ויראו את ה' אלקיכם ושמרו לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת. ובניהם אשר לא ידעו ישמעו ולמדו ליראה את ה' אלקיכם כל הימים אשר אתם חיים על האדמה אשר אתם עברים את הירדן שמה לרשתה:

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And Moshe commanded them, saying, 'At the end of [every] seven years, at an appointed time, [after] the Shemita year, on the Festival of Sukkos, when all Israel comes to appear before Hashem, your God, in the place He will choose, you shall read this Torah before all Yisrael, in their ears. Assemble the people: the men, the women, and the children, and your convert in your cities, in order that they hear, and in order that they learn and fear Hashem, your God, and they will observe to do all the words of this Torah. And their children, who did not know, will hear and learn to fear Hashem, your God, all the days that you live on the land, to which you are crossing the Jordan, to possess'. (Devarim 31:10-13)

Every seven years, on the Sukkos following the *Shemita* year, the Jews all gathered together at the *Beis Hamikdash* to hear the king read from the Torah. This year, the year following the *Shemita* year, would have been the year for the *Hakhel* gathering during the time of the *Beis Hamikdash*.

I will now explain the mitzva in more depth and answer a few basic questions based on the understanding of the Rambam and the *Sefer Hachinuch*.

What is the purpose of *Hakhel*? Why are the women and children specifically mentioned? What sections of the Torah were chosen to be read? Finally, why is *Hakhel* mentioned in the middle of *Vayelech*?

The *Sefer Hachinuch* explains that the root of this mitzva is to provide a unified sense of community. Having an environment in which the hearing of the Torah is central and unifying will in turn lead to more Torah learning and closeness with Hashem.

משרשי המצוה, לפי שכל עיקרן של עם ישראל היא התורה, ובה יפרדו מכל אומה ולשון להיות זוכין לחיי עד תענוג נצחי שאין למעלה הימנו בנבראים, על כן להיות כל עיקרן בה ראוי שיקהלו הכל יחד בזמן אחד מן הזמנים לשמוע דבריה ולהיות הקול יוצא בתוך כל העם אנשים ונשים וטף לאמר מה הקיבוץ הרב הזה שנתקבצנו יחד כולנו, ותהיה התשובה לשמוע דברי התורה שהיא כל עיקרנו והודנו ותפארתנו, ויבואו מתוך כך לספר בגודל שבחה והוד ערכה ויכניסו הכל בלבם חשקה, ועם החשק בה ילמדו לדעת את השם ויזכו לטובה וישמח ה' במעשיו, וכענין שכתוב בפירוש בזאת המצוה ולמען ילמדו ויראו את ה'.

The root of this mitzva : Because the Torah is the center of Bnei Yisrael and this is what separates us from the other nations, and through the Torah we are worthy of the world to come... therefore it is fitting that we gather together at one time, to listen to the words of the Torah, and people will ask

– among them men, women, and children – “What is the reason that we are all gathered together?” and the answer will be, “To hear the words of Torah which is the source of our glory.” Through this we will come to praise the Torah and speak of its value, everyone will desire to learn Torah, and the nations will desire to learn Torah and to know Hashem. Through this we should be remembered for good and we will rejoice in the ways of Hashem. (Sefer Hachinuch mitzva 612)

The Rambam expounds upon this in *Chagiga* 3:6:

וגרים שאינן מכירין חייבין להכין לבם ולהקשיב אזנן לשמוע באימה ויראה וגילה ברעדה כיום שניתנה בו בסיני, אפילו חכמים גדולים שידועים כל התורה כולה חייבין לשמוע בכוונה גדולה יתרה.

Converts who don't understand are obligated to concentrate and listen with awe and fear like the day the Torah was given at Sinai. Even scholars who already know all of Torah are obligated to listen with great concentration.

He explains that everyone, regardless of their level of Torah knowledge, is required to listen and experience this occurrence. The experience of *Hakhel*, according to the Rambam, is an emotional, not intellectual, one. The Rambam's explanation implies that the *Hakhel* experience was meant to reenact the mass conversion that occurred at Sinai. The Rambam emphatically states that our belief in Moshe and the Torah is not rooted in the miracles that were performed, but rather in the experience of Sinai at which all Jews were present.¹ Judaism is the only religion that contains a mass revelation; we are not merely relying on the words of a prophet, but rather we all witnessed the revelation of Hashem together. The revelation at Sinai is eternal and must be ever present in our lives. Our commitment to preserving the feeling of the revelation experience must withstand the vagaries of life.

This understanding of the purpose of *Hakhel* explains our second question as well. Women are generally exempt from positive time-bound *mitzvos*, and, as such, *Hakhel* should be no exception. Because this mitzva is a national experience that was meant to instill in all people a feeling of closeness to Hashem and a love of *mitzvos* and service to Hashem, women are specifically included. The children (especially the young children), who would most likely not understand the specific instructions, were not there to learn, but rather to experience. Imagine the impression that a gathering of this sort can have on a young child. This demonstration of the importance of

¹ Rambam, *Mishne Torah, Yesodei HaTorah*, 8:1

Torah in our lives and the experience of a reenactment of mass revelation is meant to impress upon the children the importance and power of the Torah and the Jewish nation.²

This idea stresses the significance of providing our children with positive Torah experiences. Children should witness their parents learning, hear their *davening*, and participate in every aspect of Jewish life in the capacity to which they are able. In a compilation of writings by Samson Raphael Hirsh on *chinuch* he states that

“... All lectures and rhetoric fade before the spell cast by the words and the look of a father as he performs his duties with joy and awareness... The father’s concern for every detail of the mitzvos and his joy in performing them will be transmitted to his children to live on in their hearts and be translated into actions all of their days.” (Hirsch, 41)

The actual *pesukim* that were read at the event are from *Sefer Devarim*. Rashi explains that the phrase “*HaTorah hazot*” refers to the Torah written in *Sefer Devarim*. *Devarim* was Moshe’s summary of the *mitzvos* of the Torah, and hearing this *sefer* was a way to listen to a summary of the Torah.

Finally, why is this mitzva in the middle of *Vayelech*? What is the significance? As mentioned above, *Devarim* is a summary of the *mitzvos* of the Torah. Torah has two sides to it: an intellectual side and an experiential side. The purpose of this gathering is to infuse the Torah learning that we do with the correct *kavana*. Moshe, by placing this mitzva at the end of the Torah right before his death, was ensuring that the feeling and importance of Torah would remain strong. Learning Torah for the sole purpose of expanding our intellectual curiosity, without feeling the closeness to the *Shechina* and proper reverence for Hashem, is meaningless.

In today’s world where the depravity of values runs rampant, it is even more important than ever to be a true *ohr lagoyim*. We must bring ourselves closer to the *Shechina* in order to properly act as ambassadors of Hashem. Let us infuse our lives with the *achdus* and sincerity experienced at the *Hakhel* gathering, and may we be *zoche* to experience the *Hakhel* gathering in *Yerushalayim* at the *Beis HaMikdash bimheira beyameinu*.

² It is worth noting that not all *mefarshim* agree that young children were required to be there. For example, the Ramban believed that only children approaching adulthood were required. For the purpose of this article I am basing my understanding of the mitzva on the Rambam.

Hoshana Raba

ADIV PACHTER



In the *Sefer Lamed Vav*, a collection of stories of Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, the following story is told. Thousands of chasidim attended the funeral of the holy Rav Chaim of Sanz. All of his followers were crying. Suddenly, one voice could be heard above all the others wailing, “Oy, what will happen to us now? Our sun has set and it will never rise again...” Another voice was then heard, saying “Sanzer Chasidim, don’t give up hope and don’t despair. Most of you are too young to remember, but I am a very old man. Many years ago I was at the funeral of the Seer of Lublin and somebody there said the very same thing, that the sun has set and it won’t rise again. The sun did rise though... with the birth of our Rebbe, the Holy Sanzer. Although his sun has now gone down, someone else’s will appear. The sun will yet rise again.”

We all strive to become close to Hashem throughout the year. When Elul approaches and we realize that the *Y’mei HaDin* are around the corner, we attempt to buckle down and really hone in on our spirituality, and prepare for the upcoming holy days. At the culmination of Yom Kippur, we hope that our judgment is only for good. However, all too often, this special time period flies by and we feel that we may have missed our opportunity for atonement. What do we do? We learn from the story above never to despair.

In his *sefer Machane Shechina*, Rabbi E. Cohen discusses the special nature of Hoshana Raba. Hoshana Raba is universally recognized as the end of the period of the *Y’mei HaDin*, and on this day we search for any last minute *zechusim*, merits, that we can recall to help us in judgment.

The question arises: during *neila*, we shift our prayer from “write us in the book of life” to “seal us in the book of life.” This seems to indicate that the window of opportunity for merits to help our cause has closed. What is the purpose therefore of Hoshana Raba, if the decree has already been finalized?

Rav Nosson Wachtfogel, the Lakewood *mashgiach*, quoted the following

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midrash in a *sicha* before *hoshanos*: Hashem said to Avraham Avinu: I am a *yachid* in My world and you are a *yachid*; I will give you a special day to atone for the sins of your offspring. Just like Yom Kippur is the Day of Hashem and a day of atonement, so too Hoshana Raba is the day for Avraham Avinu to atone for the Jewish people, his offspring.

The following *mashal* is given on this point: a group of people gathered and created a state. After they worked hard to establish the state, they set out on the much-needed mission of appointing a king to rule the state. They ultimately mutually agreed on a candidate and anointed him as king. Over the course of time, a descendant of one of the founding members of the state sinned egregiously against the king; the sin was so bad that the king did not want to pardon it. The king set a date for a judgment against this sinner. After much deliberation and investigation, the king decreed that the only appropriate punishment for this sinner is death. On the day that the officers came to take this man to his death, the sinner requested that the king grant him one final plea. He said, "My master, the king! I admit my wrongdoing. It is clear to me as day that I sinned against you. I realize that all of the excuses that I presented to you have not been accepted. With all of this, I have one last request. Even if I myself have no merit in your eyes, please have mercy on me in the merit of forefathers who served you loyally. They are the ones who actually appointed you to as king. They enabled you to have this title and throne. For their sake, please have mercy on me." To this the king responded, "Your requesting forgiveness in the merit of your forefathers, is an entirely different request! To such a request I am obliged to pardon you and sweeten your judgment."

This is the *zechus* of Avraham Avinu. Until Avraham, there was no one in the world who referred to Hashem as the Master and King. Avraham Avinu anointed Hashem, so to speak. This is the meaning of Hoshana Raba being the day of Avraham Avinu. On Hoshana Raba, we do seven *hakafos*, corresponding to the seven *Ushpizin*. On Hoshana Raba we say to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, "you gave us Rosh Hashana, the Aseres Y'mei Teshuva, Yom Kippur, and we still have not repented adequately. We now have one last plea: a plea in the merit of our forefathers, the forefathers who were the ones to first call You King."

This teaches us the lesson of *zechus avos*. Hoshana Rabba is the *yahrzeit* of my paternal grandmother, who I never had the merit of meeting. Nonetheless, I feel a strong connection to her through my relationship with my father who observes her *yahrzeit* on this special, holy day; the day that teaches us all about having another chance.

Rav Chaim Zonnenfeld tells the following true story:

There was an established, respected couple who lived in Hungary. The husband was a successful businessman. For many years, the wife made an annual, handsome donation to a Yeshiva on the condition that they designate someone in the Yeshiva to say *kaddish* for those *neshamos* that didn't have anyone saying *kaddish* for them.

One year, her husband unfortunately passed away and the business began to fail. In general, the widow was going through a difficult time period, and her financial state suffered as well. She also needed to marry off her two daughters, which is a financial stress for anyone, all the more so a widow. She realized that she did not necessarily have the money to continue making the annual donation to the Yeshiva. Having *kaddish* said for those *neshamos* was not something on which she was willing to compromise, though. She decided to meet with the rosh yeshiva and requested that they continue designating someone from the Yeshiva to say *kaddish* for those who did not have anyone else. She promised that as soon as her financial condition improved she would resume making the contributions to the Yeshiva. The rosh yeshiva was so touched by this widow's strong commitment to this "*kaddish* request" that they agreed to continue the program as they had been doing.

The widow was thrilled, and went on her way. On the one hand she was ecstatic that they agreed to continue saying *kaddish*, but she was overwhelmed with the thought of how she would be in a financial position to marry off her two daughters. Immersed in these thoughts as she walked home from the Yeshiva, an old Jewish man with a particular shine and white beard began walking next to her and engaged her in conversation. The widow was taken aback by his glow. She didn't recognize him or know him, but politely entertained the conversation. They began talking, and she eventually relayed all of her stresses. The old man cut to the chase and directly asked her how much she would need to marry off her daughters. "What difference does it make? Why would you want to know?! It's a large sum!" she responded. Without blinking, the old man took out a piece of paper from his pocket and wrote specific instructions addressed to the local bank, to release a large amount of money to this widow. Before signing the document, he said "since we are talking about a significant sum of money, I would like two witnesses to watch me sign and hand this document to you." She was extremely confused and shocked by what was transpiring but went along with it regardless. Since she was right near the Yeshiva, she went in and asked two students to come outside and serve as witnesses. He proceeded to sign in front of the witnesses and instructed the widow to go to the bank the following day to retrieve the funds. Again, the entire encounter was highly strange and even suspicious, but the

widow had nothing to lose.

The next morning she woke up and ran to the bank with the signed document. Upon presenting it to the teller, the teller looked at the document and did a double take. She then asked the widow to wait for a few minutes while she went to speak to the bank manager, who happened to be the teller's husband. When the manager saw the document, he turned white and fainted. When they brought him back to consciousness, he asked to speak with the widow. He inquired when she had received this document, and from whom. She relayed the entire story to him and said that she even has witnesses who saw the man sign it. He asked if she thought she could identify the man if she saw a picture, and she affirmed that she could. The manager proceeded to take out a framed picture of his late father without revealing any details to the widow, and asked her if this man looked familiar. She responded, "that is the man who signed the document just yesterday!" The manager proceeded to instruct the teller to release the funds to this widow.

After the lady left, the manager filled in the gaps to those present who witnessed this bizarre event.

The "man" who gave the bank note to this widow was none other than the manager's late father who had passed approximately ten years prior. The previous night, he came to his son in a dream and said, "You should know that ever since you left the *derech* and left religion, intermarried, and stopped saying *kaddish*, my soul had been in utter turmoil. It was not until this widow came along and committed to having *kaddish* said for all of those who don't have anyone saying it that my soul finally was able to rest. This woman will appear in your bank tomorrow morning with a document instructing the release of a certain amount of money to pay for the marriage of her two daughters. Release the funds to her." The manager proceeded to say that he woke up from the dream, told it to his wife (the teller) and laughed it all off. When the widow appeared in the bank as his father had informed him in the dream, he knew that it was indeed true.

Rav Chaim Zonnefeld concluded: who were the two witnesses from the Yeshiva who were called out to witness the signature? "Me and my friend Rav Yehuda Greenwald."

The bank manager was *chozer b'teshuva*, became religious, and his wife converted according to *halacha*. They were *zoche* to build a *bayis ne'eman b'Yisrael*.

What a beautiful expression of *zechus avos* and the concept of a second chance. In the *zechus* of my paternal grandmother and all of the *avos* and *imahos* of *Klal Yisrael*, may we, their *banim*, only see *yeshuos* and *besoros tovos*.

Hoshana Raba: “The Final Judgment?”

DAVID R. SCHWARCZ



Hoshana Raba is celebrated on the seventh day of Sukkos starting at nightfall of the sixth day of Sukkos.¹ The one particular mitzva associated with Hoshana Raba is the *arava* – the willow branch.² The *mishna* in *Sukka* (42b) explains that the mitzva of the *arava* was performed all seven days of Sukkos. It is evident from the *mishna* that the mitzva of *arava* in the *Beis HaMikdash* (the Temple) was separate and apart from the mitzva of *lulav* and *esrog* (viz. the four species).³

The ceremony for the *arava* in the *Beis HaMikdash* as described in the Talmud (*Sukka* 43a) was as follows: there was a place called Motza in Jerusalem where they gathered the *aravos*. The collected *aravos* were placed at the sides of the Altar where the tops of the *aravos* were arched over the Altar. The Levites sounded the Shofar – *tekia-terua-tekia*- and circled the Altar once with the *lulav* and willow branch during the first six days of Sukkos, saying “*Ana Hashem Hoshia Na – Ana Hashem Haztlichia Na.*” Rabbi Yehuda says the *Kohanim*, while others say the general congregation, proclaimed “*Ani V’Ho Hoshia Na.*” In contrast to the first six day of Sukkos, on the seventh day the congregation circled the Altar seven times and said on the departure

1 *Shulchan Aruch* (“SA”), *Orach Chaim* (“OC”), The Laws of *Lulav* and *Esrog*, 664:1. *Mishna Berura* (“MB”) explains that there is an accepted custom (“*Minhag*”) to stay up all evening and review at minimum the Book of *Devarim*.

2 TB – *Sukka* 45a

3 The *gemara* records a difference of opinion as to whether this law has a source in the Written Law or if it is a law given orally to Moshe Rabbeinu. Abba Shaul says, “the Torah writes... willows of the river (Leviticus 23:40) – [the plural form implies] two : one for the *lulav* and one for *Mikdash.*” Rabbi Assi says that Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Nechunyah of Bikas Beis Churtan: “the ten plantings (a law connected with the prohibition against plowing just prior to the Sabbatical year), the *aravah* and *Nisuch Hamayim* (viz. water libations) are *Halacha leMoshe miSinai.*” (TB. *Succhah* 44a)

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‘Beauty is yours – Oh Altar’.⁴ Rabbi Eliezer says they stated, “For God and for you, O Altar .

The Talmud asks (*Sukka* 44a) whether we should recite a blessing over the *arava* just like we recite a blessing over the *lulav*, and further why we do not perform the mitzva of *arava* all seven days of Sukkos just like it was performed in the *Mikdash*.

The *Mishna Berura*⁵ explains that the *arava* and *Nisuch Hamayim* (viz. water libations) are *halacha leMoshe miSinai*.” (*Sukka* 44a) and that after the destruction of the *Mikdash* the *arava* was instituted by the later *Neviim* – Chagai, Zechariah and Malachai – as a custom and not as an ordinance. In marked contrast, the *lulav*, which is derived from an explicit biblical source,⁶ applies for all seven days of Sukkos in the *Mikdash*. In the territories outside of the *Mikdash* and in the provinces in *Eretz Yisrael* (viz. *Gevulim*), the biblical mitzva applied only on the first day of Sukkos. Accordingly, in the post-Temple period the mitzva of *arava* is performed as a commemoration to the service in the *Mikdash*. Today we only practice the mitzva of *arava* on Hoshana Raba since, in the *Mikdash*, the seventh day was considered more holy than the six previous days of Sukkos. This *minhag* is supported by the fact that seven *hakkafos* were performed on that day as opposed to one *hakkafa* on the previous six days.⁷

Indeed, Rashi notes that during the Babylonian exile, the custom of circling the *teva* with the *arava* was lost. After the 70-year Babylonian exile this custom was re-

4 *Sukka* 43b and 45a – there is a difference of opinion as to whether the *hakafa* itself was performed with a *lulav* and *arava* or just the *arava*. Rambam rules it was performed with the *lulav* as is our current practice. Rashi on the other hand explains that the agents of the *Beis Din* brought the *aravos* to the Altar and the *Yisraelim* would first perform the *hakafa* with the *arava* and then the *Kohanim* perform their respective *hakafa* without the *lulav*. (*Shulchan Aruch*, OC 664:1-*Shaarei Ziyun* – par. 6). There is also a disagreement as to whether only the *Kohanim* performed the *hakafa* or if non-*Kohanim* also performed the *hakafa* (*Sukka* 44a). It appears that also non-*Kohanim* performed the *hakafa* as concluded by the *Geonim* based on the *gemara* that the term *Kohanim* in this context is not to be taken literally. See *Otzar HaGeonim*, *Sukka*, secs., 149 and 150, where the *Geonim*, too, are of this opinion, only disagreeing about the manner of circling.

5 MB – *Orach Chaim* 664:2 – 11

6 Leviticus 23:9

7 The *hakafa* of the *arava* in post-Temple times is not mentioned in the *gemara*, but in literature of the *geonic* period many customs are found. Rav Hai Gaon writes that “It is our custom and the custom of our forefathers that every day (of Sukkos) we circle the *teva* three times, and on the Day of the *arava*, seven times. This is an established practice throughout Israel; we have heard of no place which does not follow it. Therefore you should not alter the custom of your forefathers.” (*Otzar HaGeonim* on *Sukka* 43b.) In the *siddur* of Rav Saadia Gaon, published by *Mekitzei Nirdamim*, we find that “it is required to circle around the *teva* - each day one *hakafa*, and on the seventh day, seven *hakkafos*; but in our time there is a custom to circle three *hakkafos* each day and on the seventh day even *hakkafos*.”

instituted throughout *Eretz Yisrael*.⁸

The question that emerges is what is the basis for establishing Hoshana Raba as the “Final Judgement Day”?

Based on the *Zohar*,⁹ Hoshana Raba is the conclusion or the rendering of the final judgment regarding one’s actions. The source for this proposition is the verse in *Shir HaShirim* (“SH”) (chapter 8 verse 6). *Netivos Shalom* (“NS”)¹⁰ distinguishes the Yom Kippur Judgment from the one on Hoshana Raba in that Yom Kippur is the conclusion for judgment for the *Yamim Noraim*, while Hoshana Raba is the conclusion for the judgment for the Sukkos festival. NS further explains that the verse “Place an indelible mark on your heart” (“SH” – first part of the verse 6) refers to Yom Kippur wherein we pour our hearts to our Creator and reveal our inner desire to repair ourselves. On Hoshana Raba on the other hand, we translate our verbal commitment uttered on Yom Kippur into a commitment to action through the symbolic *mitzvos* of the Four Species (viz. *Minim*) and dwelling in the Sukka. This position finds support based on the later portion of the SH verse 6 “place an indelible mark on your forearm” which represents positive action.

NS, citing the verse “Seek Hashem and you will find Him, beseech Him when He is near, the wayward person should change his ways and the iniquitous person his corrupted thinking,” wonders why the verse does not mention that a person “should change his action” rather a “person should his ways”? NS posits, based on the verse the Rambam boldly utilized in the Laws of Repentance (7:3), that the Biblical commandment of *teshuva* is not just for correcting one’s actions but more importantly for transforming one’s ‘Darko’ - orientation, unhealthy thought, psychic

8 *Sukka* 44a –Rashi. Also, refer to *Tosafos* ad loc (*Sukka* 44b-“*Kan BeGuvulin*”) wherein *Tosafos* attempts to clarify the reason why a blessing is not recited over the *arava* even though in the *Mikdash* it was a biblical mitzva – *Halacha liMoshe MiSinai*. *Tosafos* accurately points out that there are many rabbinic *mitzvos* that we recite blessings over, like the recitation of Hallel on various holidays including Rosh Chodesh. As such, why don’t we recite a blessing over the *arava* which is a derivative mitzva from a *Halacha liMoshe MiSinai*? *Tosafos* concludes that since Hallel is recited as part of *tefilla*, a *beracha* is warranted, as opposed to *arava* which is just fulfilled by carrying the *arava* without recitation of Hallel. Note further that Rashi and the Rambam differ as to how to fulfill the mitzva of *arava*. Rashi holds that we should wave the *arava*, and Rambam says we should bang the *arava* on the ground a minimum of three times. See *Sukka* 44b- “*Chavit*” – Rashi says is “*Naanuah*,” waiving, instead of banging on the floor. See Rambam, Laws of *Lulav* and *Esrog*, Ch. 7, Law 23.

9 *Chelek* 3 chapter 32a. The *Talmud Yerushalmi*, *Rosh Hashana* 5:8 – based on verse 58:2 “And they seek Me day by day” explains that the phrase “day by day” refers to the shofar-blast and the day of the *arava*. Reflections of this characteristic of Hoshana Raba as the “conclusion of the Judgment” are much to be found in the writings of the *Rishonim*.

10 Volume 2, Essay 7 - Sukkos - “Hoshana Raba” – page 212-214 (Jerusalem, Israel 5020 – Slonim Yeshiva)

and emotional patterns. Indeed, the finality of the Yom Kippur experience creates an “indelible mark on a person heart’.

Hoshana Raba, on the other hand, is a propitious time to translate an individual’s Yom Kippur mental and psychological resolution into action through the veritable medium of a) dwelling in the Sukka; b) *lulav* and *esrog*; and c) *arava*. NS relates in detail that the Four Species are intricately connected to the following four limbs that govern our actions: a) *Lulav* which represents the spine that controls the central nervous system – creating neural pathways for the brain to transmits signals to our limbs; b) *Esrog* which represents our heart - the seat our of emotions and psychic experience; c) the Myrtle branch (*viz. Hadas*) which represents our eyes or our sensory perception; and d) The Willow branch (*viz. Arava*) which represents our speech or method of expression.

The Yom Kippur resolution(s) are immediately subjected to the Hoshana Raba review, which affords the penitent the unique opportunity to transform thought into positive action. NS emphasizes that internal change(s) of attitude and outlook is solidified by engaging in positive action.¹¹ The Sukkos experience and its related *mitzvos* afford the penitent a special opportunity to test one’s Yom Kippur resolutions and develop a positive attitude and outlook for the coming year. NS emphasizes that positive action creates a corresponding and correlative positive reaction in the spiritual realm. By freely choosing to embark on a righteous course, one ratifies the resolve to meaningfully interact with Hashem with the appropriate *kavana*.¹² Such interaction presents the rare opportunity to confer upon a person *Ruach HaKodesh* - Divine inspiration- in achieving his life goals and mission.

NS opines that since certain matters of the heart and circumstance are out of one’s control, as a person is not aware of his unconscious desires and motives, performing the *mitzvos* of the Four Species and *arava* with *kavana* create a spiritual

11 Modern psychology emphasizes the cognitive approach to behavioral change by committing oneself to positive action. “Every thought you think is created by choice or habit. Every thought you think creates your health and circumstances! Really think about that- you chose your thoughts and therefore create your circumstances! This is an astoundingly simple and powerful way to improve your life.” Leona Graham – *Positive Thoughts*, page 5 (2002).

12 The *kavana* for a mitzva which is relegated to have particular knowledge that one is performing a commandment, as opposed to *kavana* regarding the attitude which reflects a person’s emotional and mental awareness and presence while performing certain actions. Intentionality is the presence of mind to fully commit to transforming mental change into positive action. According to Rav Soloveitchik, this form of *kavana* is a *Halachic* requirement for prayer based on *Berachos* 28b and Rambam *Hilchos Tefilla* 4:16. See “*The Lonely Man of Faith*,” – Rav. J. Soloveitchik, page 23 (Doubleday Press, 1992 – page 71 fn. 1).

bond with the Divine which forges a direct path to promote a full and healthy life. When a person commits to embark on a righteous path towards spiritual fulfillment, he receives Divine affirmation and approval of his actions.

Sefer HaMinhag (*Hilchos Esrog*, section 38) further develops this motif by emphasizing that “On Hoshana Raba, there is a legal confirmation of the signature of the three books which have been opened before the Holy One on Rosh Hashana and signed on Yom HaKippurim; and Hoshana Raba is the culmination of atonement... And the *lulav* which we shake proclaims that we have overcome all who have levelled accusations against us; as it said in the *Yerushalmi* and in *Pesikta*, ‘Like victors who conquer in battle and take the *lulav* in their hands’ – meaning, in the manner of kings who are victorious in capturing cities, and taking a spear, and with [signs of] sovereignty hung upon them, ascend to the top of a tower and wave [the spear] out and back in all directions to proclaim that the king has overcome all.”

NS artfully depicts the interplay between the binding of the heart to the Divine (viz. *Kachotam al Libecha*) and the binding of one’s physical strength to the Divine (viz. *Kachotam al Zaroecha*) as two impassioned and devoted people who share their hearts with each other; they keep the flames of devotion continuous by performing certain rituals at fixed intervals to strengthen their commitment and love for each other. Likewise, the Jewish people demonstrate their deep unconditional love of Hashem by zealously performing mitzvos with alacrity, passion, and devotion. Accordingly, the resolutions undertaken on Yom Kippur are safeguarded by the mitzvos performed on Sukkos: *sukka*, Four Species, and *arava*.

NS further inquires that if the holiday of Hoshana Raba centers around the *arava*, why refer to the holiday as Hoshana Raba and not Yom Arava?

NS responds by way of the following parable:

The authentic Hoshana Raba experience is comparable to a son of a king who is forcibly removed from the royal palace and begins associating with a seedy group of people. Hearing this, the King dispatches his agent to check up on his son only to find out that his son has fallen from grace and is impoverished. Heartbroken, the king’s agent asks the king’s son if he needs anything. The son responds by asking for a pair of rain boots, as his current pair is torn. The agent breaks down and cries over this request as he realizes that this boy has lost perspective. Instead of requesting to return to the royal palace, he just asks for a new pair of rain boots?

Similarly, NS states that the Jewish people are the King’s children and that after the destruction of the Temple we have been scattered among the nations of the world and have lost our way. But on the *Yamim Noraim*, Hashem sends us an agent to see

how we are doing. If our response is to just to continue to survive in exile without requesting a return to our former glory, then we have missed the mark. As such, on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we request that God reign over us and that we once again be restored to the royal palace.

Equally significant, on Hoshana Raba, we gradually transition from the role of God's wayward child flung and dispersed throughout the four corners of the world (represented by the lone scentless willow branch (viz. the *arava*) separated from the *lulav* and *esrog*) to the cherished role as God's beloved child. The *arava* of the Hoshana prayers represents our two lips which lack the ability to fully express our desire to rise up and re-unite with our Creator. In our *tefillos*, we entreat God with our heart and soul to actively reign over the world, and with His full glory and swiftly remove all strife and pain from the world.

Indeed, the appellation of Hoshana Raba fully encompasses the culmination of the *Yamim Noraim*, with our fervent prayer serving as the vehicle to firmly establish God's dominion over the world, via Jewish people's reunification with the Divine. NS adds that the term "*Raba*" relates to "the day of great requests and salvation."¹³ Thus, the format of the *Hoshanos* is a transitional progression commencing with the limited request for one's person needs - like the wayward son's request for rain boots - leading up to the grand request for entering the royal palace as Hashem's beloved children where we experience immanent glory.

In a poetic fashion, NS presents the final act and 'payoff' of the *Yamim Noraim* as - Shemini Azeres – wherein the Jewish nation enters the inner chamber of the royal palace to commune with Hashem in all His glory. The Shemini Atzeres interaction is one of pure bliss with the full realization and cognition of our mutual love and devotion to Hashem, the Torah and Eretz Yisrael.

The Shemini Atzeres experience requires no rituals or *mitzvos*; it is simply a direct outgrowth of our mutual expression and love for Hashem.

13 NS – Volume 2, Essay 7 - Sukkos - "Hoshana Raba" – page 213-214 (Jerusalem, Israel – Slonim Yeshiva)

Joyful Water: Transitioning from *Koheles* to the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*

AVIGAIL MANHEIM



On Sukkos, many of our *tefillos* revolve around water, and when the *Beis HaMikdash* was standing, a centerpiece of our *avoda* was the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*. The *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* involved drawing water from the *mei hashiloach* and pouring it on the *mizbeach*, after which the water flowed back to where it had started. When looking at the process in these terms, it seems to be an act of futility – the exact same feeling that *Koheles* seems to lament throughout his *sefer*. The observation of the endless cycles of nature prompts *Koheles* to ask,¹

מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש.

What profit does man have for all his labor under the sun?" (1:3).

Koheles even highlights water specifically, saying,

אל מקום שהנחלים הלכים שם הם שבים ללכת

To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow once more. (1:7)

Despite the seeming pointlessness of the process, the *gemara* (*Sukka* 51b) details the great celebration that was associated with the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* and even goes as far as to say “*me she’lo ra’ah Simchas Beis HaShoeva, lo ra’ah simcha miyamav*” “someone who hasn’t seen the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* hasn’t seen rejoicing”. Why is this true? Why is water such a central theme? And what about this ceremony makes it the source of the greatest *simcha*?

¹ The ideas developed in this article are based on numerous lectures given by Rav Matis Weinberg. The second half of the article which discusses the idea of transitions was specifically based on the shiur he gave Hoshana Rabba night 5774.

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When Adam was created, the world was lacking trees, plants, and grass. Hashem had already created all of the various types of plant life, but they were dormant beneath the surface of the earth waiting for Adam to be created, look around at his surroundings, comprehend how the world was meant to function, intuit what was missing (vegetation), and then ask for the mechanism that would enable it to be realized (rain).² It was only once a human being recognized the need for rain and requested it from his Creator that Hashem brought rain and the world blossomed. If each one of these steps had not been necessary to bring vegetation, Hashem did not have to engineer this drama. Hashem could have sent rain before Adam was created and have had Adam be born into a verdant world. Alternatively, Hashem could have waited for Adam to be created and afterward sent rain without Adam needing to ask, demonstrating to Adam His nurturing care. The fact that Hashem specifically chose to wait to send rain until after Adam requested it illustrates the role of people in the world. Hashem specifically designed the world in a way that requires the input of human thought, consciousness, and care. We are partners with Hashem in creation, improving the world within a framework that Hashem created for us. Given that the world was created in such a way that requires human attentiveness, it is precisely our thoughts and intentions that transform acts from mundane to meaningful.

We can now return to our previous question about the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*. The *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* was meaningful because the people involved were consciously performing a mitzva – that is, they were doing a physical act to connect with Hashem, and derived happiness from doing so. The physical consequences of the act that they performed (namely, the watering of the ground that occurred while the water flowed back to the *mei hashiloach*) would have been accomplished through the natural water cycle, making their actions seemingly meaningless. *Koheles's* initial despondency is an outgrowth of this perspective. It was the intention of the celebrants that transformed the ceremony to a time of extreme happiness.³ Indeed, the very fact that the mitzva was the only thing being accomplished made it the happiest event, and thus became a catalyst that allowed people to attain *ruach hakodesh*.⁴

2 See Rashi on *Breishis* 2:5

3 In a similar vein, the contradiction in *Koheles* of “*u’l’simcha ma zo osah?*” “Concerning joy – what does it accomplish?” (2:2) versus “*vishbachti ani et hasimcha*” “And I praised joy” (8:15) is resolved by the *gemara* (*Shabbos* 30b) as the difference between *simcha she’eino shel mitzva* (personal joy) and *simcha shel mitzva* (joy emanating from fulfilling God’s will)

4 One explanation for why the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva* was called such, is “*misham shoavim ruach hakodesh*” “from there they would draw divine inspiration” (*Yerushalmi Sukkah Perek 5, Halacha 1*). The imagery of drawing heavenly inspiration like drawing water from a well reinforces the themes being discussed.

The discussion thus far has implied that the insertion of consciousness into an otherwise natural system is a reason for celebration. But human consciousness is complicated, and Sukkos illustrates this reality. Simply examining the names of Sukkos reveals its multiple themes, some of which contradict one another.⁵ *Chag HaAsif* means “the time of gathering”, signifying the end of the harvest and the beginning of the death of the earth during the winter. In contrast to this theme of death and dying, Sukkos is also called “*zman simchasinu*” “the time of our rejoicing.” Sukkos comes in part to address the fact that as conscious human beings, we deal with and try to balance opposites. But how can one holiday encompass such contradictory themes?

The *sukka* symbolizes the dwellings in which *Bnei Yisrael* lived when travelling through the desert, and the *ananei hakavod* which Hashem lovingly provided to protect *Bnei Yisrael* during that time. These *sukkos* were a temporary way of life designed to transition *Bnei Yisrael* from leaving *Mitzrayim* to entering *Eretz Yisrael*. A *sukka* is a place where you go to connect two states that otherwise do not co-exist.⁶ By definition, a transition connects (and thus includes) both states.

Since Sukkos is addressing the dichotomies within the human condition, the transitions that Sukkos deals with are not one-time transitions in which we reach our destination and are done, but rather dynamic transitions, such as the balance between happiness and sadness.⁷ These transitions are cycles, and we as humans are constantly transitioning between states – as *Koheles* says, “*lakol zman*” “everything has its season” (3:1). Sukkos is always listed in the Torah as the last of the *shalosh regalim*, because it is the end of the process of freedom that starts with Pesach. The freedom that Sukkos provides is the recognition that living in a state of transience is exactly what gives life meaning. Trying to maintain control and hold on to one state often ruins what we are trying to preserve.⁸ The acceptance of transience, while

⁵ *Koheles* itself also contains many seeming contradictions which prompted *Chazal* to debate whether it should be included in *Tanach*. Additionally, some commentators take the approach that *Koheles* is read during Sukkos to act as a counterweight to the *simcha* that characterizes the holiday.

⁶ Throughout *Chumash*, a *sukka* is a place of transition. For example, following Yaakov’s encounter with Eisav after re-entering *Eretz Yisrael*, he journeys to a place called Sukkos and builds *sukkos* (*Bereishis* 33:17). Additionally, the *beis* of “*Bereishis*” is referred to as a *sukka* - the three sides of the *beis* are the three walls of a *sukka*, and the tail that sticks out on the bottom is a hint to the *halacha l’Moshe mi’Sinai* (a law orally transmitted from the time Moshe gave us the Torah) that only two-and-a-bit walls are needed. According to the *Zohar*, the tail connects the *ayin* (nothingness) from before *ma’asei breishis* to the *yeish* (existence) after.

⁷ In the *gemara* (*Maseches Sukka*) there is a tension between defining a *sukka* as a temporary dwelling or one that is inhabited temporarily, but is built to last.

⁸ Despite the constant beautiful weather we are privileged to experience here in Los Angeles, as the drought is teaching us, not having a rainy season to counter the dry season isn’t sustainable – transitions are necessary. Similarly, people who cannot let go of the past are pitied, not lionized, and constant fear of change is debilitating.

difficult, removes the fear of loss and enables us to love and appreciate the experiences of life.

On Sukkos we manage to celebrate life and the renewal of life through our conscious involvement in the world (specifically expressed through water), while surrounded by the death of the world that occurs in the harvest season. Life means dealing with opposites. Our engagement with the complexity and somber tone of *Koheles* is married to the beauty and simplicity of purely joyful celebration at the *Simchas Beis HaShoeva*. At a time of year when the death of the world can make you feel that everything is futile, the *ananei hakavod* remind you that your life matters to Hashem and to the universe, and your human consciousness is the most precious commodity.

סוף דבר הכל נשמע את האלהים ירא ואת מצותיו שמור כי זה כל האדם.

In summation, every action is meaningful; so be in awe of God and guard His mitzvos, for this is the purpose of man's existence. (Koheles 12:13)

Chanuka



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The Difference Between “Yeshuos” and “Teshuos” in *Al HaNissim*

RABBI PINCHAS GELB



Chazal were careful with their use of language, and attention to the particular words that they chose can help us understand additional layers of meaning in the prayers that we recite. One example of this occurs with regard to *Al HaNissim*.

The opening word, *nissim*, means miracles. The next word, *purkan*, is Aramaic for redemption. *Gevuros* means strength in overcoming obstacles. And *teshuos* means salvations. The similar sounding word *yeshuos* has the same general meaning as the word *teshuos*—yet, while both of these nouns appear often in *Tanach*, the word *yeshuos* appears more commonly than *teshuos* in liturgy. For instance, in *Birkas HaMazon*, we ask that *Eliyahu HaNavi* be sent to herald *yeshuos* (salvations) and *nechamos* (comfort), but we do not use the word *teshuos* there. Likewise, the paragraph added on Shabbos to *Birkas HaMazon* describes Hashem as being the Master of salvations by using the phrase *ba'al ha-yeshuos*, not *ba'al ha-teshuos*. The second and fifteenth blessings of the *Shemoneh Esrei* similarly use the phrases *matzmiach yeshua* and *matzmiach keren yeshua* to describe that Hashem makes salvation flourish, not *matzmiach teshua* or *matzmiach keren teshua*.

What is the difference between the words *yeshua* and *teshua*, and why did Chazal specifically select the term *teshuos*, instead of *yeshuos*, for *Al HaNissim*?

Meaning of the Word Teshuos

Mr. Jay Braun, an expert in Hebrew language and grammar, suggests that although they have the same general meaning, the words *yeshuos* and *teshuos* derive from different roots: *yeshua* is from the root *י-ש-ע* and *teshua* is from the root *י-ש-ו*. Just like the word *תשובה* is the noun form of the root *ש-ו-ב*, the word *תשועה* is the noun

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form of the root ש-ו-ע . Thus, *yeshua* and *teshua* both mean deliverance/salvation but each of them comes from an independent root.

What do these roots mean? The verb *lehoshia*, similar to the noun *yeshua*, means to save. But the root ש-ו-ע signifies something very different: to cry out in supplication or prayer. Its first use in the Torah states (Ex. 2:23): “And it came to pass during those many days that the King of Egypt died and the Children of Israel sighed from the slavery, and they cried out, and their outcry (שועתם) ascended to God from the slavery.”¹ Accordingly, *shav’a* is included in the *midrash* quoted by Rashi at the beginning of *Parshas Va’eschanan* as one of the ten Biblical expressions of prayer.² The Siddur also emphasizes this meaning of the root ש-ו-ע as an ascendant cry. For instance, the daily morning prayers begin with *Tehillim* 30 that states: “Hashem, my God, I cried out (שועתי) to You and You healed me.” The Shabbos morning prayers include *Tehillim* 34 that states: “The eyes of Hashem are toward the righteous and His ears toward their cry (שועתם).” *Ashrei*, recited twice daily in the morning and once daily in the afternoon, further reflects this meaning of the root ש-ו-ע : “The will of those who fear Him He will do; and their cry (שועתם) He will hear and He will save them.”

In general, the noun structure adhered to by the word “*teshua*” indicates something that is a natural consequence of—a more encompassing realization of—the root’s meaning. For instance, the simple noun form of the root ש-ו-ב (to return) is the word *שיבה*, which means a physical return (see, e.g., Ps. 126:1). The noun *תשובה* conveys another level of related meaning, namely, a verbal response (i.e., an answer) or an emotional/spiritual return (i.e., repentance). The same is true of the word “*tevua*.” Its root is א-ו-ב (to come) and its simple noun form is *ביאה*, i.e., a coming. The noun form at a more actualized level of related meaning is *תבואה*, agricultural produce, which is food that comes from the ground.³ Similarly, the word “*tevuna*” derives from

1 *Shmuel* I 5:12 similarly states with regard to the Divine punishment of the *Pelishtim* for taking the Ark: “The people who did not die were stricken with hemorrhoids, and the cry of (שועת) the city ascended to heaven.” *Shmuel* II 22:7 likewise states in the context of *David HaMelech’s* song of gratitude to Hashem: “In my distress I would call upon Hashem, and to my God I would call; from His high abode He heard my voice, and my cry (שועי) entered His ears.”

2 Rashi on *Devarim* 3:23 cites *Sifri* 26 which lists the following ten expressions of prayer: זעקה, שועה, נאקה, צרה, רנה ופגיעה, נפול ופולל, עתירה, עמידה, חילול, חנון

3 The same noun-verb relationship exists in English where the noun “produce” denotes agricultural harvest which is what the ground “produces.” In the Hebrew language, the ground is a passive conduit for what emerges from it and the active agent is Hashem, while in English the more active role in “producing” the agriculture is attributed the ground itself (see *Oxford English Dict.* (3d ed. 2000)). This nicely matches the view expressed by the Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:46) that a goal of *korbanos* is to refute religious systems that incorrectly had

the root ב-י-נ (to understand), and its simple noun form is בינה, comprehension. The higher level of related meaning is תבונה, which means wisdom or intelligence more generally. Another example is the word “tekuma.” Its verb root is ק-ו-מ (to arise) and its simple noun forms are קימה, standing upright, and קומה, height. Its related meaning at a higher level is תקימה, which means national revival or restoration (see, e.g., Lev. 26:36-37).

This, likewise, applies to the root ש-ו-ע (to cry out): its simple noun formulation is שוּעָה, which means a cry in prayer, and its derivative noun is תשועה, which means salvation brought about in response to prayer. Hence, the words *teshua* and *yeshua* both mean salvation, but with different points of focus. “*Yeshua*” means salvation in general. It might occur in response to prayer or it could be precipitated by another factor. “*Teshua*,” on the other hand, means salvation that results specifically from prayer. It derives from the root ש-ו-ע which denotes prayer, and implies a specific type of deliverance whose catalyst is human prayer.

Use of the Word *Teshuos* in *Al HaNissim*

Accordingly, *Chazal* chose the word *teshuos* in *Al HaNissim* to emphasize that the miracles of Chanuka and Purim occurred as a result of the Jewish people’s cry in prayer to Hashem. This use of the term *teshuos* in *Al HaNissim* underscores that the deliverances we celebrate during these holidays were a proximate consequence of human prayer.

Along these lines, the Rambam explains toward the end of his introduction to the *Mishneh Torah* that every classical Rabbinic enactment expresses a concept already rooted in a verse from the Torah, and, by way of example, he states that the central item to be celebrated on Purim is Hashem’s response to the Jewish people’s prayer which the *Megilla* describes:

[T]he Prophets, together with the Court, enacted and commanded to read the Megilla at its appointed time in order to proclaim the praises of the Holy One, blessed be He, and the salvations (תשועות) that He wrought for us, and that He was near to our cries (שויעני), in order to bless and laud Him and in order to illustrate for all future generations how true is the assurance in the

attributed divinity to domesticated animals. Indeed, the Rambam states (*Hil. Avodah Zarah* 1:1) that idolatry started because people mistook the conduit of blessing for the actual source of blessing, and began to attribute divinity to things that seem to produce bounty rather than to Hashem. So too, the Hebrew language emphasizes avoidance of this error by using the word “*tevua*” to mean agricultural crop, thus accentuating that this only “comes from” the ground. English, not taking care to avoid this error, calls the crop “produce” because the ground ostensibly “produces” the bounty.

Torah (Deut. 4:7): "For what great nation is there that has deities so near to it as Hashem our God is [to us] whenever we call to Him."⁴

It is noteworthy that the Rambam uses the word *teshua* (instead of *yeshua*) in conjunction with his description of Hashem's response to the people's prayer, i.e., *shav'a*. And more to the point, the Rambam's discussion establishes that the central aspect to be celebrated on Purim is that this deliverance resulted from the Jewish people's prayer to Hashem—which exactly dovetails with *Chazal's* selection of the term *teshuos*, rather than *yeshuos*, for *Al HaNissim*.

Yet, the question arises where prayer appears with regard to Chanuka. Indeed, at the beginning of the laws of Chanuka (*Hil. Chanuka* 3:1), the Rambam summarizes the history of the events of Chanuka, but does not include prayer. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik often would ask where prayer was in the recapitulation of this history.

Rav Soloveitchik would answer that the prayer of Chanuka possibly was similar to the prayer in *Shemos* 2:23 which states: "and their outcry (*shav'asam*) ascended to God from the slavery."⁵ The verses in *Shemos* 2:24-25 convey a beautiful description of the process by which Hashem took heed of the cries of the Jewish people: "And God heard their cries and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And God saw the children of Israel and God knew."⁶ In these few verses, we see the unfolding resonance of prayer, *kivyachol*, in the Divine mind. However, Rav Soloveitchik underscores that, while the cries of the Jewish people were wholly received as prayer by Hashem, they were not consciously intended as such by the Jewish people. Rather, they were simply cries in response to the burdens of their servitude in Egypt:

At this point in their slavery experience, Israel had no intention of formulating prayer as such. This initial stage of prayer was little more than a poorly

4 *Mishneh Torah*, Introduction; see Rav Mayer Twersky, "Chanukah" (YUTorah.org, 2013).

5 Rav Mayer Twersky, "Chanukah: The Views of the Rambam and Ramban on the *Chashmonoim*" (YUTorah.org, 2012).

6 The *ya'ale ve-yavo* prayer appears to be modeled after these verses: the words "*ya'ale ve-yavo ve-yagia*" directly correspond to the verse (Ex. 2:23) "*va-ta'al shavasam el HaElokim*;" the words "*ve-yeraeh ve-yeratzeh*" correspond to the verse (Ex. 2:25) "*va-yar Elokim es Bnei Yisrael va-yeda Elokim*;" and the words "*ve-yishama ve-yipaked ve-yezacher*" correspond to the verse (Ex. 2:24) "*va-yishma Elokim es na'akasam va-yizkor Elokim es beriso*." While it is unclear why the *ya'ale ve-yavo* prayer transposes the order of the verbs in the verses, the verbs in *ya'ale ve-yavo* specifically correspond to these verses. Just as this process of Hashem's receiving the prayers of the Jewish people in Egypt resulted in the redemption then, we pray on days that we would otherwise bring a *Musaf* offering (see Rashi *Shabbos* 24a) that this process of Hashem's receiving our prayers should be repeated now, and result in the redemption that is to come.

articulated, instinctive cry. According to the Ramban [Ex. 2:25], Hashem Himself “lifted” their groaning, allowing their cry to rise up before Him.⁷

Rav Herschel Schachter notes that this is reflected in the Haggada as well. *Shemos* 2:23 states that the people’s cries in Egypt were just on account of their servitude, but the Haggada correlates this to the *Mikra Bikkurim* (Deut. 26:7), which states that their cry was considered prayer to Hashem. Rav Schachter explains the Haggada’s hermeneutical insight: “When we say that ‘we called out to God in prayer and that He answered our prayers,’ the *Torah Shebe’al Peh* comments that this is not to be taken literally! The Jewish people never really prayed! God in His infinite kindness considered their crying out from their hard labor under the Egyptians as if they had prayed, and this unspoken prayer was answered.”⁸

This adds textured nuance to the meaning of the word *shav’a*: it is prayer that is heard by Hashem even before it is coherently expressed. The cry of the children of Israel in Egypt was inarticulate. It was barely a stirring of the soul, a half-wakefulness during a prolonged slumber, but it nevertheless resonated with Hashem as a plaintive prayer and prompted Divine response. Hashem heard, deep within this cry, human prayer.⁹

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that this likewise might be the kind of prayer leading up to the miracles of Chanuka.¹⁰ Indeed, the Rambam describes the terrible oppression perpetrated by the Greek kingdom against the Jewish people and then states: “[T]hey pressured them (*lachatzum*) with great pressure (*lachatz*) until the God of our fathers had compassion on them and delivered them from their hands and saved them.”¹¹ The Haggada, based on the *Mikra Bikkurim*, similarly emphasizes that the prayers of *Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt, and Hashem’s response, were bound up with the “*lachatz*” perpetrated by the Egyptians. During Chanuka, as in Egypt, the prayer

7 Arnold Lustiger, *Before Hashem You Shall Be Purified: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on the Days of Awe* (New Jersey, 1998), p. 160.

8 Rav Herschel Schachter, “The Prayer of the Jews in Egypt” (TorahWeb.org, 2004); see also Rav Yaakov Neuburger, “The Prayers Within” (TorahWeb.org, 2013) (“[T]he *Ohr Hachayim* draws the conclusion that the Jews did not initially pray to Hashem and he translates the text to be stressing that the Jews screamed ‘from their servitude.’ In other words, they screamed out of terrible torment and despondent gloom and Hashem responded to their screams as if they had been praying.”); Rav Twersky (ad loc) (citing *Sforno Shemos* 2:23).

9 This is similar to the final line of the “*ana be-koach*” prayer: “Accept our *shav’a* and hear our cry, O Knower of hidden things.”

10 See Rav Twersky (ad loc).

11 *Mishneh Torah, Hil. Chanuka* 3:1.

of the Jewish people could have been a deep-seated but incompletely formulated expression of connectedness with Hashem that He received as prayer. Hashem heard this prayer (*shav'a*) and effectuated the deliverance (*teshua*) of Chanuka.

Conclusion

Thus, both “*yeshua*” and “*teshua*” mean salvation or deliverance, but each of them derives from a different root and conveys a different point of focus. The word *yeshua* means salvation generally, while the word *teshua*, which is the more encompassing realization of the word *shav'a*, connotes deliverance that is specifically precipitated by prayer. *Chazal* selected the term *teshuos*, rather than *yeshuos*, for *Al HaNissim* because Purim is a distinct expression of the verse in *Devarim* 4:7 that “Hashem our God is [near to us] whenever we call to Him,” and Chanuka is a further expression that Hashem hears even undifferentiated strivings brought about in response to national oppression of the Jewish people, and that He understands them, not merely as inchoate cries, but as resonant human prayer.

Seudas Chanuka: A Transformative Opportunity

RAMI GLATT



The holidays of Purim and Chanuka share many similarities. Aside from their respective delicious *minhagim* of *hamentaschen* and *sufganiyot*, both holidays are *mi'derabanan*, both lack a true *issur melacha*, and both require an *Al HaNissim* during *Shemoneh Esrei* and *Birkas HaMazon*. However, one interesting difference that exists between these two holidays is the requirement of a *seuda*.

Perhaps surprisingly, the *Shulchan Aruch*¹ rules that one is not obligated to have a *seuda* on Chanuka, and that *seudos* held on Chanuka are considered voluntary. This declaration is somewhat striking given the general association between holidays and festive meals. As we know, *seudos* are certainly required on the *Shalosh Regalim* based on the requirement to rejoice on these occasions.² This obligation generally holds true by the *Yamim Noraim* as well – while some *Rishonim* maintain that the nature of Rosh Hashana as a day of judgment and introspection precludes a *seuda*, in practice we hold that one must rejoice on Rosh Hashana with festive meals just like other holidays.³ In similar fashion, Rabbeinu Yonah considers the pre-fast meal on Yom Kippur to be a festive one that comes to celebrate the holiday and the atonement it promises.⁴ Given this association between holidays and festive meals, it is not surprising that *Chazal* instituted a mitzva of *seuda* for Purim. The *gemara's* silence on such an obligation on Chanuka is striking, and raises the question as to why such a distinction should exist between the two holidays.

1 *Siman* 670

2 See *Sefer HaMitzvos* (54)

3 *Orach Chaim* (597). Also see *Magen Avraham* there who deems it appropriate to moderate the luxuriousness of the menu in order to facilitate the feeling of trepidation we should have.

4 *Shaarei Teshuva* (4:8-9)

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One of the earliest explanations provided is by Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi. In the introduction to his classic work on *Megilas Esther*, *Yosef Lekach*, Rabbi Ashkenazi explains that because of the many casualties suffered on Chanuka and the days preceding it, we do not celebrate with a *seuda*; on Purim, however, there were no casualties. This idea was elaborated upon more recently by Rabbi Ari Kahn who understands Chanuka to be, among other things, a commemoration of the war between those Jews who were loyal to Hashem and His Torah and the *Misyavanim*, who had adopted Greek cultural practices. Rabbi Kahn explains that since it would obviously be inappropriate to celebrate the death of any Jews, regardless of ideological differences, *Chazal* abstained from instituting a requirement of a *seuda* for Chanuka.

Perhaps the most famous and referenced explanation is offered by the *Levush* (Rabbi Mordechai Yoffe). The *Levush* explains that the threat at the time of Purim was physical genocide, whereas the primary threat at the time of Chanuka was spiritual genocide. Therefore, the predominant expressions of celebration on Purim are physical, as that was the nature of the threat. On the other hand, the nature of the celebrations of Chanuka are focused on more spiritual matters, because that was the achievement of the miracle. The *Taz*⁵ quotes the *Levush's* explanation, but ultimately rejects it. He instead suggests that since the miracle of Chanuka is less apparent than that of Purim, the primary mitzva of the day is to publicize the miracle. In contrast, the miraculous deliverance of Purim was apparent to all, and the celebration can therefore focus upon physical enjoyment in the form of a celebratory meal.

It should be noted that there are those who maintain that a *seudas* Chanuka is in fact required based on the Rambam's characterization of the holiday as "days of *simcha ve'hallel*", rejoicing and praise. Rabbi Zev Boskowitz in his work *Seder HaMishana* writes that the Rambam himself actually meant that a *seuda* is required, and, furthermore, that such a *seuda* would be considered a *seudas mitzva*. Rav Soloveitchik⁶ is cited as sharing a similar understanding. Finally, the Maharshal (Rabbi Shlomo Luria),⁷ based on this same Rambam, explicitly states the mitzva to rejoice on Chanuka, and advocates that a *seuda* should be utilized as an additional means of *pirsumei nisa*.

While the *Shulchan Aruch* ultimately rules against these opinions, the Rama's comments there are particularly noteworthy. The Rama fundamentally agrees that

⁵ *Siman* 670:3. Interestingly, the *Taz's* rejection of the *Levush's* formulation stems from his belief that causing someone to sin (i.e., spiritual destruction) may be an even greater offense than murder(!).

⁶ *Harerei Kedem* 1:272

⁷ See *Taz* in *Orach Chaim* 670:4

Chanuka has no mitzva of *seuda per se*, but explains that *zemiros* and *divrei Torah* carry with them the ability to transform an ordinary *seuda* into a *seudas mitzva*. With this comment, the Rama effectively highlights one of the primary messages and moral charges of Chanuka, and *yahadus* in general: sanctification of the mundane. Indeed, many *gedolei Chasidus* have taken advantage of the holiday of Chanuka as an opportunity to explore the idea of heightening physical experiences (the Munkacser Rebbe in particular was known to have held special Chanuka dinners for this purpose), while others have emphasized the unique opportunity to initiate a spiritual experience.⁸

The Rama's message is a simple one, and one that we must ensure is not taken for granted: a meal on Chanuka can be just that, or it can be used as an opportunity to recognize Hashem's role in the Chanuka miracle, as well as His role in our own lives on a daily basis. In some sense, the *seudas* Chanuka is a manifestation of our larger directive in this world to make the most of every opportunity and experience, while maintaining an appropriate balance between *ruchniyus* and *gashmiyus*. May we all merit to do so.

⁸ *Minhagei Yisrael* 5

Beis Shamai, Beis Hillel and the loss of the Beis HaMikdash

ELI SNYDER



Possibly the best known “rivalry” of the Tannaitic age is between *Beis Hillel* and *Beis Shamai*. In hundreds of aspects of *halacha*, the two houses disagree, and in a vast majority of the cases, the *halacha* follows *Beis Hillel*. Of all of these disputes, one of the best known revolves around the mitzva of how to properly light *neiros Chanuka*. In his incomplete commentary on the *gemara*,¹ the *Ein Ayah*, HaRav Avraham Yitzchak Kook writes a fantastic piece on this section of *maseches Shabbos* which illustrates a very subtle nuance between the opinions of *Beis Hillel* and *Beis Shamai*, and is arguably a reflection of the overall worldviews of the two *tannaim*.

To backtrack a little, the *gemara* in *Shabbos* 21b says there are three levels of observance when lighting the menorah. The first, basic level is “*Ner Ish U’Beiso*,” one candle per home on every night of the holiday. The “*Mehadrin*” or “beautiful” level is “*Ner L’Chol Echad V’Echad*,” each individual in the home lighting his or her own candle. The highest level is “*Mehadrin Min HaMehadrin*,” beauty from within the beauty, which is the contemporary standard and where the aforementioned *machlokes* lies. *Beis Shamai* says one should start with eight candles on the first night and decrease the number daily, while *Beis Hillel* says the reverse, that we should start with one and increase from there. While practice of course follows *Beis Hillel*, in the spirit of, “*eilu v’eilu divrei Elokim chayim*,”² Rav Kook develops a compelling

1 Despite Rav Kook’s prolific writing career, he only wrote his commentary on the *gemara* for *masechtos Brachos* and *Shabbos*. The *Ein Ayah* (literally translated as “The Eye of the Falcon/Vulture” and an acronym for “Avrohom Yitchchak HaKohen”) was written in the style of the *Ein Yaakov*, primarily focusing on the *aggadata*, i.e. non-halachic, elements of the Talmud.

2 In *Eiruvin* 13b, Rav Abba says in the name of Shmuel that for three years *Beis Hillel* and *Beis Shamai* argued that the *halacha* followed their own opinion until a Heavenly Voice came forth and stated, “*eilu v’eilu divrei Elokim*”

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interpretation for *Beis Shamai's* opinion that is worth contemplating.

To begin, Rav Kook explains that the Greeks during the period of Chanuka did not only aim to eradicate the Jews physically, but also to uproot them at their most essential core. Even deeper than actions and attributes, Rav Kook says that the true light of a Jew emerges in his or her family life. From those roots all the other elements of Torah life branch. For this reason, the base level of the mitzva to light Chanuka candles is *neir ish u'beiso*, to counteract the Greek attack on the home by strengthening and focusing on the element of family.

There are those who rise even further in their *avodas Hashem* and perform the mitzva at the level of *Mehadrin*. These people feel the light of the Torah not only in the family realm but also in their own individual lives. Therefore, the *Mehadrin* level is *neir l'chol echad v'echad*, placing a focus on the individual within the family structure.

The highest level is where it becomes more nuanced and intricate, and is where the *machlokes* emerges. When a person looks deeply into his or her self and is fueled by *ahavas Hashem*, it becomes clear that the focus on the individual is not the end point. The same way he or she is *b'tzelem Elokim*, in Hashem's image, it must follow that all of humanity, Jew and non-Jew alike, is *b'tzelem Elokim*. The goal is for the entire world to recognize Hashem and live by Torah principles. *Beis Hillel* and *Beis Shamai* agree on this point, but disagree regarding the proper way to approach achieving that goal. In sum,³ *Beis Shamai* looks directly at the end point i.e. all of humanity unifying under the common goal of living a Torah life. The multiple candles on day one are the multiple philosophies which, through time, are whittled down and forged into the one singular path. *Beis Hillel* agrees with the goal but nevertheless looks first at *Bnei Yisrael*, since we are the means to fix the world. We are meant to be an *ohr l'goyim*, light unto the nations, and begin with a singular flame that throughout time spreads its influence and light. Ultimately, the *halacha* follows *Beis Hillel*.

Rav Kook's perspective fits well with the next discussion in the *gemara*. There is an additional *machlokes* following *Beis Hillel* and *Beis Shamai's*, between Rav Yosi bar Avin and Rav Yosi bar Zveida that revolves around the reasoning of *Beis Hillel* and *Beis Shammai*; a "meta-*machlokes*" if you will. Rav Yosi bar Avin is of the opinion that *Beis*

chayim v'halacha k'Beis Hillel," "This one and this one are words of the Living God (i.e. correct) and the *halacha* follows *Beis Hillel*." The point being, just because we don't hold like *Beis Shamai*, it does not mean his opinion is incorrect.

³ At this point I need to emphasize the gross inadequacy of my translation and summary of Rav Kook's writing. To truly grasp the eloquence, depth, and subtlety of Rav Kook's thoughts, his works must be read in the meticulously crafted original Hebrew, in spite of its difficulty. Borrowing the skillset of one of the esteemed members of our Merkaz HaTorah Kollel is highly recommended.

Shamai is counting down the days remaining and *Beis Hillel* is counting up. Rav Yosi bar Zveida, on the other hand, says the reasoning of *Beis Shamai* is that the candles are “*K’Neged Parei HaChag*,” the number of cows given as *korbanos* over the holiday of Sukkos which also go in descending order, from 13 the first day, 12 the second etc. *Beis Hillel’s* stance, it is argued, is because “*D’Maalin B’Kedusha V’Ein Moridin*,” we ascend in holiness and do not decrease. Rav Kook’s interpretation amazingly fits well with both Rav Yosi’s. According to the first, *Beis Shamai* is again looking at the endpoint, at the totality. He knows there are 8 days of Chanuka and with that eventuality in mind, he lights accordingly. *Beis Hillel* starts at the bottom, at the singularity, and lets the light increase.⁴ The second Rav Yosi is almost saying the same for *Beis Hillel*, as because we only go up in *kedusha*, *Bnei Yisrael* should only continue to increase its influence on the world. The second interpretation for *Beis Shamai* also fits remarkably well. It seems odd that *Beis Shamai* would connect the *korbanos* of Sukkos with the way we should light Chanuka candles. In the context of Rav Kook’s explanation, though, it makes complete sense. The *gemara* in *Sukka* 55b explains that the number of cows given over Sukkos (13+12+11+...) adds up to 70, the number of nations in the world. On Shmini Atzeres we give one cow, corresponding to the “*umah yechidah*,” the singular nation, *Am Yisrael*. Again, we can explain that the philosophies of the nations funnel down to the one true way of life, the way of Torah.

Chanuka marks the last *neis nigleh*, public miracle, recorded in Jewish history, and effectively the transition to the *galus* in which we now find ourselves. Even before the Seleucid annexation, even before the second *Beis HaMikdash* was built, this element of Jewish spirituality was on the decline. In *Ezra* 3:12, during the consecration of *Bayis Sheini*, the *pasuk* says that those who had seen the first *Beis HaMikdash* wept loudly at the sight of the second, and Rashi explains that this was due to its noticeable inferiority. The reason why the *neis* of the menorah lasting for eight days was so significant is because, at that point in Jewish history, miracles were correspondingly that unusual. Keep in mind that the Purim story predated the Second Temple entirely and is the paradigm of finding Hashem hidden between the lines. The events of Chanuka thus bookmarked this period in Jewish history, and we therefore took a relic from that time, a small spark in the form of *neiros Chanuka*, to

⁴ This reminds me of the oft asked question during *Sefira*, why don’t we count down to the receiving of the Torah instead of counting up? Perhaps the answer can be interwoven with these discussions as well. The proposed, not-practiced view is assuming from the first day of *Sefira*, the end point is already known. 50 days from now we will receive the Torah and therefore we can count down to that known entity. In practice, however, we must look at the day to day. Start from Day One and build ourselves up until and build ourselves into an entity worthy of receiving the Torah. The focus is not on what will happen in the future but we can do right now.

remind us of that lost era and guide us through this extended *galus*.⁵

Beis Hillel and *Beis Shamai* agree that *Mehadrin Min HaMehadrin* is really the only way to light the menorah since it represents the imperative for the Jewish people not to lose their eschatological vision. The disagreement only exists regarding how this vision should be manifested. *Beis Shamai* sees the endpoint at the beginning and believes that is how we should determine our actions. *Beis Hillel* knows that in practicality, although we are headed in that direction, we need to focus on *Am Yisrael* and our *bein adam l'chaveiro* since that is the only way to get there. This attitude is reflected in another famous account of Hillel and Shamai. In the *gemara Shabbos 31a*, a story is told of a non-Jew approaching Shamai and asking, "Make me a convert on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot." Shamai angrily rebuffs him whereupon the non-Jew goes and makes the same request from Hillel. Hillel famously states, "Whatever is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah, the rest is commentary, go learn it." *Beis Shamai* has the perspective that the Torah is too large to be neatly summarized; there is too much gravitas to try to support it on one pillar and therefore one must do it right or remove oneself from the *Beis Medrash*. *Beis Hillel* does not disagree with *Beis Shamai's* assertion but disagrees with the approach. Practically speaking, one may not be able to grasp the incredible significance and importance of the Torah and its accompanying lifestyle, to be able to approach its study with the correct sobriety. Knowing this, where does one start? With *mitzvos bein adam l'chaveiro*. With *v'ahavta l'reicha kamocha*. In the ruined world in which we currently live, in the painful *galus* we have found ourselves, we need to start with the basics. We need to improve our relationships with our fellow Jews if we ever want to go on and truly fix the larger world. *Beis Shamai* is of course not wrong and the only thing we can call him is an idealist. *Beis Hillel* is speaking to us on a pragmatic level in our ruined state. In the end, however, *eilu v'eilu divrei Elokim chayim*. When we light the menorah we must keep both perspectives in mind, along with the ultimate end goal and the practical steps necessary to bring us there. By doing so, we will, hopefully sooner rather than later, bask with all humankind in the revealed light of Hashem, *bimheira biyameinu*.

⁵ *Neiros Chanuka* is of course, not the only light that guides us through the *Galus*. What is arguably the most defining element of the Jewish identity, Shabbos, accomplishes the same task. Shabbos is *M'Ein Olam Haba*, a glimpse into the World to Come. Likewise, the days of Moshiach are described as *Yom ShehKulo Shabbos U'Menucha*, the days that are all Shabbos and respite. They are part and parcel and once a week those fortunate enough to keep Shabbos can taste that ultimate goal. It becomes all the appropriate that the *Halachos* of *Neiros Chanuka* appear in *Maseches Shabbos* during the discussion of *Neiros Shabbos*. Both sets of candles illuminating our path towards the ultimate redemption.

Yofi Inside or Out

DANIEL NAGEL



The Greek Conundrum

Chazal's attitude towards Greece paints a perplexing picture. On one hand, the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 580:1) recommends fasting on the 8th of Teves in memory of *Talmey HaMelech* ordering for the translation of the Torah into Greek, which brought darkness to the world for three days. On the other hand, during a discussion of which languages *Tanach* may be written in, the Rashbag (Rav Shimon ben Gamliel) opined that Greek was the only language other than *Ashuris* or Hebrew that the books of *Tanach* can be written in (*Megilla* 9a).

Is there beauty and good in *Yavan*, as evidenced by the *mishna* in *Megilla* which permits *Tanach* to be written in Greek, or is *Yavan* evil and equated with darkness, as evidenced by the *Shulchan Aruch's* recommendation to fast on the 8th of Teves?

Chanuka and Hod

The *Sifrei Kabbala* describe parallels between the holidays and the *sefiros*.¹ The *mida* of *hod*, which is the 8th attribute, corresponds to Chanuka according to the *Tikkunei Zohar*.² In addition, the Arizal states that the *Chashmonaim* rectified the *mida* of *hod* on Chanuka, implying that the *Yavanim* made a blemish in the *mida* of *hod* which the *Chashmonaim* subsequently fixed. This article will explore the answers to the following three basic questions.

1) What exactly is the *mida* of *hod*?

1 See Ramak in his book *Pardes Rimonim Sha'ar* 21 Chapter 8: Pesach corresponds to *midas chesed*, Sukkos corresponds to *midas tiferes*, Rosh Hashana corresponds to *midas gevura*, Sukkos corresponds to *midas yesod*, and Chanuka corresponds to *midas hod*.

The ten *sefiros* are *chochma, bina, daas, chesed, gevura, tiferes, netzach, hod, yesod, malchus*.

2 *Tikkunei Zohar* 13. On a simple level, the eighth *sefira* of *hod* corresponds to the eight days of Chanuka. This article will explore a deeper and more nuanced connection.

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- 2) In what way did the *Yavanim* make a blemish in the *mida* of *hod*?
- 3) How did the *Chashmonaim* rectify the blemish?

Hod (Glory)

The Gra in *Mishlei* (5:9)³ describes *hod* (glory) as being inner beauty (*yofi pnimi*). Inner beauty refers to the effort and work of the individual totally removed from the results. The final result is not relevant as much as the effort put forth by man. *Hod* is the ultimate cultivation of oneself. It is about the personal willingness to struggle and not about achievement.

Torah Sheba'al Peh

We find that *hod* is similarly connected to *Torah Sheba'al Peh* (Chanuka is also connected to *Torah Sheba'al Peh*). *Torah Sheba'al Peh* is measured by the amount of *amal* and *yegia* (toil) that man puts into it. *Torah Sheba'al Peh* is man's ability to create different *svaros* in learning. Even if he is totally wrong, he has still fulfilled his obligation to learn Torah.

The Maharal in the *hakdama* to *Tiferes Yisroel* quotes an amazing *midrash*⁴ which states as follows: If an *am ha'arets* grossly mistranslates "*V'ohavta*" (and you shall love) as "*V'eivata*" (and you shall hate), Hashem still loves his Torah. Hashem does not fault a person for his lack of intellect, or learning disabilities. It is a person's effort that is significant, irrelevant of the final result. This is the essence of *hod* which turns failure into accomplishment, as long as the attempt was made wholeheartedly and completely.

This definition of *hod* is also consistent with Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch's explanation of the *pasuk* in *Bamidbar* which commands Moshe to give "*me'hodcha*" to Yehoshua in order to help Yehoshua be a strong leader. Hirsch explains that *hod* means "*Gedulas Ishiut*" (development of one's personality). Moshe's *hod* (and greatness) came from his tremendous development of self. Moshe reached his potential, and that is the ultimate level of *hod*.

In summary, the definition of *hod* which is loosely translated as glory was first meaningfully defined by the Gra as inner beauty; we described this beauty as man's determination to excel, unrelated to his level of success. Based on the aforementioned understanding of *hod*, we extended the comparison to *Torah Sheba'al Peh* – a type of study whose sole measure of success is based on effort.

3 פן תתן לאחרים הודך ושנתך לאכזורי 3

4 *Shir Hashirim Rabba* 2:1

The *Hod* Perversion

Greece stood for beauty and perfection in this world. Their laser-focus on externalities and outer beauty was epitomized by the Olympic games and the emphasis on sports and competition. A person does very little to attain his large and athletic figure. Physiology differs primarily based on genetics, not self expression. Yet we find that most sporting events are won based on a competitor's superior God-given physical body. How is that a proper measure of man? How can the winner of a competition claim greatness over the common non-athletic man? His "glory" is not his; his glory belongs to his Creator, God! Only his will and effort truly reflect his glory. Sport competitions are ill measures of this type of glory. Winning a competition does not reflect anything truly glorious about the competitors, for the rules of competition measure the winner by a purely physical criterion (i.e. who can run a faster 40-yard dash). *Hod* allows no measurement of man except for the individual's own application of will and potential; sport competitions (and Greece in general) measure all men by the same physical yardstick. An absurdity. The 40-yard dash can only be a true measure of man if the two competitors are completely equal in all physical qualities.

Greece's focus was on the end result. Who crossed the finish line first? Who was the tallest and who had the most beautiful body? They focused totally on the external and concerned themselves very little with the internal. They inverted *hod* and placed outer beauty higher than inner beauty.

Beis HaMikdash* and *Hod

It is for this reason that the Greeks forbade the *avoda* in the *Beis HaMikdash*. The *Beis HaMikdash* is also represented by *hod*. The *gemara* in *Brachos* (58a) exegeses the *pasuk* "Lecha Hashem Hagedulah, V'Hagevurah...V'Hahod" and explains that "*Hod Zo Beis HaMikdash*." The *Beis HaMikdash* certainly was a glorious building and a magnificent structure. All visitors to the *Mikdash* were amazed by its grandeur. However, the glory (*hod*) of the *Mikdash* is more importantly reflected on a much deeper level. The *Beis HaMikdash* was the place where Jews served God. How can physical man serve a purely spiritual Being? What can we offer Him? We only have physical animals and physical food to offer God. The *Beis HaMikdash* was a surprisingly corporeal place. It was a slaughterhouse and a bakery, among other things; many other physical functions were performed as parts of the *avoda* to God. These things have no use to God. God accepts them, though, because that is all that we have. It is irrelevant that in the end God has no use for the torched animals and scorched food. All that matters is our effort and intention. This is the attribute of *hod*. "*Hod zo Beis HaMikdash*."

The Greeks forbade the *avodah* in the *Mikdash* accordingly. They wanted to totally remove this type of *hod* from the world. It was against their *weltanschauung*. Their measure of success was the bottom line, and the bottom line was that God receives nothing from these gifts. They viewed the *avoda* as pointless.

Chashmonaim

The *Chashmonaim* were *Kohanim*, descendants of *Aharon HaKohen*. The attribute of *hod* corresponds to *Aharon HaKohen*⁵ because Aharon was charged with performing the *avoda*. And as mentioned earlier, *hod* is expressed in the *avoda* of the *Mikdash*. It follows, therefore, that the *Choshmanyim* fixed the attribute of *hod* on Chanuka through fighting the battle against Greece and bringing the *avoda* back to the *Mikdash*.

Our relationship to Greece as reflected through *halacha*

We now have the foundation necessary to understand *Chazal's* seemingly schizophrenic attitude towards Greece. Greece's glory revolved around its adulation of outer beauty to the exclusion of inner beauty. *Chazal* found this to be repulsive and representing an outlook which is the antithesis of Torah.

We find this idea reflected in the *Shulchan Aruch*, which encourages fasting on the 8th day of Teves to remember the darkness that consumed the world after the Torah was translated into Greek. The Greeks took the beautiful Torah – so rich with deep meaning – and removed its depth by encasing it in the aesthetically beautiful Greek language. There is no doubt that the Greek language is a beautiful language; however, the outer beauty can not take the place of the deep inner beauty of the Torah.

In contrast, Rashbag was of the opinion that *Tanach* may be written (transliterated) into Greek. The gemara brings a *pasuk* as the source for Rashbag's *halacha*; it reads “*Yaft Elokim L'Yefes V'yishkon B'Ohalei Shem.*” The beauty of *Yefes* (Greece) is truly beautiful when it is joined with *Ohalei Shem*. The greatest beauty and glory in the world is when both the inside and the outside are beautiful. “*Yaft Elokim L'Yefes V'yishkon B'Ohalei Shem*” teaches us that outer beauty has its place in Judaism when that beauty complements the deeper and more important inner beauty. The Rashbag allows *Tanach* to be written/transliterated in Greek because the beautiful script serves as an outward reflection of the deeper inner beauty that is maintained.

⁵ Avraham = *Chesed*; Yitzchak = *Gevura*; Yaakov = *Tiferes*; Moshe = *Netzach*; Aharon = *Hod*; Yosef = *Yesod*; Dovid = *Malchus*.