High Holidays Reader

Articles with Insights on the High Holidays

High Holidays Reader (2nd Edition)

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High Holy Days Concepts of Maimonides

Excerpts from Hilkhot Teshubah

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon z"l, also known as the Rambam or Maimonides, was born in Cordoba, Spain on March 30, 1135, and died in Egypt on December 13, 1204. He was a rabbi, physician, and philosopher in Spain, Morocco and Egypt during the Middle Ages. He was the preeminent medieval Jewish philosopher.

Chapter One

Halakha 1: If a person has transgressed any one of the Torah precepts, affirmative or negative, willfully or unintentionally, he must confess before God, blessed be he, when repenting and turning away from his sin; for it is written: "If a man or woman commits any of the sins into which men fall... they must confess their sinful act" (Numbers 5:6-7); This means verbal confession….How does one confess? He says: "O Lord, I have sinned, I have done evil, I have rebelled against you and have done this… I regret now and am ashamed of my acts; I will never do it again." This represents the essential part of confession. The more any one confesses the more praise he deserves. Similarly, those who have to bring sin-offerings, or guilt-offerings, are not forgiven through those offerings for sins committed unintentionally or willfully unless they repent and confess, as it is written: "He must confess the sin he has committed" (Leviticus 5:5). So too, those sentenced to death by the court and those sentenced to lashes are not forgiven through death or lashes unless they repent and confess. Furthermore, one who has injured a person or damaged his property, even though he pays what he owes him, is not pardoned unless he confesses and resolves never to commit such an offense again, as it is written: "If a man or woman commits any of the sins…" (Numbers 5: 6).

Halakha 3: At this time, when the Temple no longer exists, and we have no atonement altar, there is nothing left but repentance. Repentance atones for all transgressions. Even if a man was wicked throughout his life and repented at the end, we must not mention anything about his wickedness to him, as it is written: "A wicked man's wickedness shall not bring about his downfall when he gives up his wickedness" (Ezekiel 33:12). *Yom Kippur* itself atones for those who repent, as it is written: "Atonement shall be made for you on this day" (Leviticus 16:30).

Chapter Two

Halakha 1: Perfect repentance is where an opportunity presents itself to the offender for repeating the offense and he refrains from committing it because of his repentance and not out of fear or physical inability….If, however, one repents only in his old age, when he is no longer able to do what he used to do, his repentance, though not the best, will nevertheless do him some good. Even if a person transgressed all his life and repented on the day of his death and died during his repentance, all his sins are pardoned, as it is written: "Before the sun grows dark, and the light goes from moon and stars, and the clouds gather after rain" (Ecclesiastes 12:2), that is, the day of death. This implies that if he remembers his Creator and repents before death, he is forgiven.

Halakha 3: Anyone who makes a verbal confession without resolving in his heart to abandon his sin is like one who takes a ritual bath while grasping a defiling reptile. The bath is useless unless he first casts the reptile away.

Halakha 9: Repentance and *Yom Kippur* effect atonement only for sins committed against God, as when one has eaten forbidden food; …sins committed against a fellow man, as when a person either injured or cursed or robbed his neighbor, he is never pardoned unless he compensates his neighbor and makes an apology. Even though he has made

the compensation, the wrongdoer must appease the injured person and ask his pardon. Even if he only annoyed him with words he must apologize and beg his forgiveness.

Halakha 10: One must not show himself cruel by not accepting an apology; he should be easily pacified, and provoked with difficulty. When an offender asks his forgiveness, he should forgive wholeheartedly and with a willing spirit. Even if he has caused him much trouble wrongfully, he must not avenge himself, he must not bear a grudge. This is the way of the stock of Israel and their upright hearts….Concerning the Gibeonites who refused to forgive and be appeased, it is written: "The Gibeonites did not belong to the people of Israel" (II Samuel 21:2).

Chapter Three

Halakha 4: Even though the sounding of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah* is a biblical decree, it has an intimation, as if to say: "Arise from your slumber, you who are asleep; wake up from your deep sleep, you who are fast asleep; search your deeds and repent; remember your Creator. Those of you who forget the truth because of passing vanities, indulging throughout the year in the useless things that cannot profit you nor save you, look into your souls, amend your ways and deeds. Let everyone give up his evil way and his bad purpose." Everybody should, therefore, regard himself throughout the year as half innocent and half guilty; so too, he should consider the entire world as half innocent and half guilty. If then he commits one additional sin he presses down the scale of guilt against himself and the entire world, and causes his destruction; if, on the other hand, he performs a good deed he presses down the scale of merit in his favor and that of the entire world, and causes salvation and deliverance to reach him and his fellow men, as it is written: "The just man is the foundation of the world" (Proverbs 10:25); that is, he who acts justly presses down the scale of merit in favor of the world and saves it.

For this reason the whole house of Israel has formed a custom to engage in the performance of charity and good deeds between *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* to a much larger extent than during the entire year. Besides, during these ten days they are all accustomed to rise in the night and to pray and supplicate in the synagogue until daylight.

Entering The Holy of Holies: The Kippur Experience in Tanakh and Liturgy

Rabbi Hayyim Angel

Introduction

Our religious experiences are shaped profoundly by the narratives and laws in Tanakh and subsequent rabbinic interpretation. Kippur—the most sacred day on the Jewish calendar after Shabbatot—anchors the High Holiday season and helps transform us as we reinvigorate our relationship with God and our communities. This essay will explore some of the key biblical texts underlying Kippur and how they should impact our experience.

Leviticus 8-10: The Tabernacle Dedication

After months of building with raw materials such as gold, silver, bronze, wood, and fabric, the Tabernacle was transformed into the place where heaven meets earth. Chapter 8 describes the seven-day dedication of the Tabernacle and the priests. Chapter 9 relates the eighth day closing ceremony, dramatically climaxed by a fire from heaven that consumed the offerings. Chapter 10 then reports the shocking and tragic deaths of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu after they offered alien incense.

Ramban (on Ex. 25:2) explains that the Tabernacle was built to constantly re-enact the revelation at Sinai. Aside from the religious services that generate an ongoing encounter between God and humanity, the Tabernacle (and later the Temple) was divided into three realms: the Holy of Holies, which represented the top of Sinai where only Moses could go; the Holy, which represented a lower part of Mount Sinai where Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and seventy elders stood during the revelation (Ex. 24:9); and the

Courtyard, which represented the base of Sinai where people stood.

The text reports that during the seven-day dedication, the entire nation gathered to watch the ceremony—just like at Sinai. On the eighth day, the people conducted a ceremony to inaugurate the Tabernacle. The Divine Presence entered (9:6). The *hattat* (purification offering[1]) was offered on the outer altar and then burned outside the camp (9:11; see Rashi, Hizkuni). At the conclusion of the ceremony, Moses and Aaron blessed the people—perhaps using the priestly blessing (see *Torat Kohanim Shemini* 30, Rashi, Ramban)—and then the Divine Presence appeared. Fire emerged to consume the offerings:

> Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he stepped down after offering the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the offering of well-being. Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Presence of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came forth from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat parts on the altar. And all the people saw, and shouted, and fell on their faces (Lev. 9:22-24).[2]

Tragically, Nadab and Abihu then offered incense, meeting instant death:

> Now Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the LORD alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them. And fire came forth from the LORD and consumed them; thus they died at the instance of the LORD (Lev. 10:1-2).

Though they were religiously motivated, they died because they had performed a service that was not commanded.

Leviticus 16: Kippur

The Torah explicitly links the laws of Kippur to the deaths of Nadab and Abihu:

> The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of the LORD. The LORD said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die; for I appear in the cloud over the cover (Lev. 16:1-2).

In chapter 10, the sin of Nadab and Abihu is cast in terms of their performing a service that was not commanded; in chapter 16, however, their sin appears to be framed in terms of their drawing too close to God's Presence. They met the threatened fate of anyone who would touch Mount Sinai during the revelation (Ex. 19:12-13, 21-24). Ibn Ezra (on 16:1) infers from the beginning of chapter 16 that Nadab and Abihu must have attempted to enter the Holy of Holies.[3] God now teaches the people how they may approach Him in an appropriate manner. The intervening chapters 11-15 contain the laws of ritual purity and impurity, which govern when people must refrain from going to the Tabernacle, and the procedures necessary in order to return (Ramban on 16:1).

The Kippur ceremony addresses a primary concern of ancient Israelites and later readers: How can anyone approach a God who is so powerful and potentially destructive? In this vein, the very last words reported of the first generation in the desert, in the wake of the Korah rebellion, also involved illegal incense and a fatal fire from heaven. The people feared that they never would be able to safely approach God:

> But the Israelites said to Moses, "Lo, we perish! We are lost, all of us lost! Everyone who so much as ventures

near the LORD's Tabernacle must die. Alas, we are doomed to perish!" (Num. 17:27-28).

Tying together these laws and narratives, Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun[4] explains that the two exceptional cases of the Tabernacle dedication and the Kippur ceremony represent two aspects of the continuum in people's relationship with God. The Tabernacle is divided into two sections, the Holy and the Holy of Holies. Despite the similarity of their names, the Holy of Holies is not simply quantitatively holier than the Holy; rather, it is an entirely different domain. The priests who represent the nation enter the Holy and light the candelabrum, offer incense, and arrange the showbread. The Holy is the human realm where people perform services to God. In the Holy of Holies—the Ark, Tablets, Torah, and several other items all are objects from God to the people. God speaks to the people from between the Cherubim. The Holy of Holies is God's realm. A curtain (*parokhet*) separates the two domains, clearly separating God's realm from the human realm.[5]

During the eighth day dedication ceremony, nothing was brought into the Tabernacle, even in the Holy where people normally can enter. The *hattat* needed to be burned outside the camp, the only time this ever occurred. The Divine Presence descended onto both sections of the Tabernacle. Even the fire to consume the offerings came from heaven. Aaron's very first day as the functioning High Priest did not include his performing the daily service in the Holy. For that one day, the Holy became a part of the Holy of Holies—the Divine realm. Kippur represents the opposite phenomenon, when people (represented by the High Priest) may enter the Holy of Holies.

Rabbi Bin-Nun explains that Nadab and Abihu blurred the two realms on the eighth day by bringing human fire. They confused God's revelation with human input (cf. Rashbam on 10:1). So how should people approach God, if He is so dangerous? The Kippur ceremony addresses this

dilemma. God temporarily "withdraws" from the Holy of Holies. The High Priest brings incense even into the Holy of Holies—the antidote to Nadab and Abihu's error. A close relationship with God requires recognition of the boundaries between God's realm and the human realm. On Kippur, God invites people behind the curtain, in order to repair and re-energize the connection. People then retreat to the Holy for the duration of the year.

Different aspects of the dynamics of the relationship between God and humanity are manifest in the Song of Songs and Isaiah's vision. We will now turn briefly to these components.

The Song of Songs

In the Song of Songs, the passionate relationship between the man and woman constantly renews itself and expands as the lovers alternate pursuing one another. Even in the final verse, the woman calls to her lover to flee like a deer (Song of Songs 8:14). Yehuda Feliks explains that when deer go into heat, they do not mate immediately. The males and females first seek each other and flee from one another. The abundant references to deer in the Song of Songs attest to this type of relationship.[6] Their love is an ongoing story that will continue to develop even after the Song of Songs closes, rather than the fairy tale-esque "and they lived happily ever after."

The loving relationship between God and Israel takes a similar form between the eighth day Tabernacle ceremony and Kippur. God and Israel pursue one another in order to constantly build their relationship, while maintaining the proper boundaries.[7]

Isaiah's Vision

The mechanism of purification on Kippur introduces another dimension to the relationship between God and

Israel. The High Priest first atones for himself and his family, and only then turns to the service for the people:

> Aaron is to offer his own bull of sin offering, to make expiation for himself and for his household (Lev. 16:6).

This service is reflective of the dual-role of the priesthood in general, as priests remain individual people but also represent the nation. The High Priest cannot represent others until he first atones for his own sins.[8] Aaron went through the same process on the eighth day dedication as well (9:7). In addition to the *hattat* that purifies the Tabernacle, the High priest brings incense into the Holy of Holies, at least in part to create a cloud of smoke that prevents him from looking directly at the Ark (Hizkuni, Boleh[9]).

There are strong parallels between the Kippur ceremony in the Torah and Isaiah's exalted vision:

> In the year that King Uzziah died, I beheld my Lord seated on a high and lofty throne; and the skirts of His robe filled the Temple. Seraphs stood in attendance on Him... And one would call to the other, "Holy, holy, holy! The LORD of Hosts! His presence fills all the earth!" The doorposts would shake at the sound of the one who called, and the House kept filling with smoke.
>
> I cried, "Woe is me; I am lost! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my own eyes have beheld the King LORD of Hosts." Then one of the seraphs flew over to me with a live coal, which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. He touched it to my lips and declared, "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt shall depart and your sin be purged away."
>
> Then I heard the voice of my Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me" (Isa. 6:1-8).

In his vision, the prophet stood in the Holy of Holies and perceived God and the angelic host. The room filled with smoke—as does the Holy of Holies from the incense of the High Priest—and the vision consequently shifts from Isaiah's seeing God to hearing His voice.[10] Isaiah's initial reaction was one of dread. He felt that his human shortcomings created an insurmountable barrier between him and God. He felt unworthy. Through this experience, though, he became purified and attained *kapparah*—atonement. Isaiah belonged in the company of angels precisely because he felt that he did not belong there. With profound humility, he understood the boundaries between God and humanity.[11]

Immediately after this process of purification, God asked the heavenly host, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" Isaiah responded as though he were an angel himself, "Here am I; send me." Isaiah transformed from being one who felt unworthy to one who was purified and filled with a spirit of volunterism.

Our Experience of Kippur

Our observances and liturgy of Kippur draw much inspiration from the foregoing biblical precedents. For one day, we refrain from human experiences such as eating, drinking, washing, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations. We enter the angelic arena, crossing symbolically into the Holy of Holies. We are exhilirated by standing in God's Presence like angels, but also are filled with inadequacy and guilt as we feel unworthy to stand before God. It is precisely these feelings of inadequacy that purify us.

A brief review of the liturgy highlights these themes. Of course, liturgical customs differ widely, particularly when reciting medieval *piyyutim*. Our discussion will follow the Shearith Israel (Spanish-Portuguese) ritual, using Dr. David de Sola Pool's translations.

Rabbi Yehuda Halevi's introduction to the *Nishmat* makes us feel small and confined by our human desires:

> I know not how to approach You, how worship or serve You…How can I serve my Creator while still I am slave to my passions and thrall of my evil desires? ... Though my days and my nights may be sweet unto me, the stuff of my life they consume till I be consumed… (Shearith Israel Day of Atonement Prayer Book, p. 128).

Beginning with the *Nishmat*, we move into higher and higher realms until we join the angels in purity. This upwards trend continues as we recite *Barukh Shem Kevod* aloud during the *Shema*.

The introductions to the *Kedushah* of *Shahrith*, composed by Rabbi Joseph ibn Abitur and Rabbi Yehuda Halevi respectively, bring us into the chorus of angels:

> Angels robed in purity before God who abhors evil declare Him holy; His people on earth before Him who created the ends of the earth declare Him blessed. Angels shining in fire before God who forms them of fire declare Him holy; His people tested by fire and by water, twice daily proclaiming His unity declare Him holy and blessed (Shearith Israel Day of Atonement Prayer Book, p. 147).
>
> By the forms of His service He led [Israel] on to refine them even as the first realm of light, as ministering angels proclaiming His holiness and singing His praises in hallowing. With soul-cleansing entreaty of favor they declare the praises of God. Enwrapping themselves as Seraphim and Erelim, they become like unto angelic ministrants…Robing themselves in awe and humility, they gather resolved to serve You, revering and sanctifying You with triple "Holy", O God revered in the assembly of the holy (Shearith Israel Kippur Day of Atonement Prayer Book, p. 154).

We then ask for forgiveness in the *Amidah*, and this reference to sin sets us off in a downward spiral until we reach the confession-*Viddui* where we feel unworthy to even ask for forgiveness:

> I am not worthy to crave atonement, pardon and forgiveness. For what am I and what is my life? ... (Shearith Israel Day of Atonement Prayer Book, p. 159).

We fluctuate throughout the day between feelings of angelic awe and power, and feelings of lowliness and unworthiness. As Isaiah experienced these emotions when crossing into the realm of the Divine, so too we are humbled as we experience Kippur. Ideally, we transform through this encounter, so that by the end of the day we can truly say as did Isaiah, "Here I am! Send me!" Like the High Priest in Leviticus 16, we first address our own spiritual state, and only then look outward toward becoming one with the community.

Conclusion

> R. Simeon b. Gamaliel said: there never were in Israel greater days of joy than the fifteenth of Ab and the Day of Atonement (Mishnah *Ta'anit* 26b).
>
> I can understand the Day of Atonement, because it is a day of forgiveness and pardon and on it the second Tables of the Law were given (Gemara *Ta'anit* 30b).[12]

Kippur is intended to be the most joyous day of the year. The attainment of authentic religious joy is a life-long process, involving self-reflection, improvement, study, and acts on behalf of others. May we reflect on the meaning of our prayers and actions as we symbolically enter the Holy of Holies, and ultimately be transformed and energized into a higher spiritual realm in the year ahead and beyond.

Notes

[1] For discussion of the *hattat*, see Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), pp. 444-447; Rabbi Eitan Mayer, "Parsha Themes Tzav," at http://www.yu.edu/faculty/emayer/parsha_shiurim/26tzav.html.

[2] Translations of biblical passages are taken from the New Jewish Publication Society *Tanakh* (Philadelphia, 1985).

[3] Ramban (on 16:2) considers it inconceivable that Nadab and Abihu would deign to enter the Holy of Holies; rather, their flaw was simply that they brought non-commanded incense, as per the formulation in chapter 10 (and in Num. 3:4; 26:61). However, his interpretation does not account for the language in chapter 16, which appears to present a different facet of the sin of Aaron's sons.

[4] Rabbi Yoel Bin-Nun, "The Eighth Day and the Day of Atonement" (Hebrew), *Megadim* 8 (Sivan 5749-1989), pp. 9-34.

[5] The idea of the two realms approaching one another without meeting is expressed poignantly in a talmudic passage: "It was stated, Rab, R. Hanina, R. Johanan and R. Habiba learned: the ark [of the covenant] was nine handbreadths high, and the ark cover one handbreadth, making a total of ten handbreadths, and it is written, 'And there I will meet with you, and I will speak with you from above the ark-cover' (Ex. 25:22). And it has been taught, R. Jose stated: Neither did the Shekhinah ever descend to earth, nor did Moses or Elijah ever ascend to Heaven, as it is written, 'The heavens are the heavens of the Lord, but the earth has He given to the sons of men' (Psa. 115:16). But did not the Shekhinah descend to earth? Is it not in fact written, 'And the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai' (Ex. 19:20)? — That was above ten handbreadths [from the summit]…" (*Sukkah* 4b-5a). Translations of talmudic passages are taken from Soncino.

[6] Introduction to *Da'at Mikra: The Song of Songs* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1973), p. 16.

[7] For a discussion of how the realms of human love and Divine-human love interrelate in the Song of Songs, see Hayyim Angel, "Rabbi Yuval Cherlow's Interpretation of the Song of Songs: Its Critical Role in Contemporary Religious Experience," in Angel, *Revealed Texts, Hidden Meanings: Finding the Religious Significance in Tanakh* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV-Sephardic Publication Foundation, 2009) pp. 171-189.

[8] For a discussion of priesthood in the Torah, see Rabbi Eitan Mayer, Parsha Themes Tetzaveh, at http://www.yu.edu/faculty/emayer/parsha_shiurim/21tetzaveh.html.

[9] Menahem Boleh, *Da'at Mikra: Leviticus vol. 2* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, Mossad HaRav Kook, 1991), p. 10.

[10] See Amos Hakham, *Da'at Mikra: Isaiah* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, Mossad HaRav Kook, 1984), pp. 68-69, esp. n. 10.

[11] Prophecy and humility are intimately linked. Moses' superior prophecy and humility are joined in Numbers 12:3-8. One talmudic Sage builds on Isaiah's vision to highlight this correlation: "A Master has said: If one walks with a stiff bearing even for four cubits, it is as if he pushed against the heels of the Divine Presence, since it is written, 'The whole earth is full of His glory' (Isa. 6:3)" (*Berakhot* 43b).

[12] Soncino footnote: According to a tradition in *Seder Olam* 6, Moses spent three periods of forty days and forty nights in the Mount beginning with the seventh of Sivan and ending on the tenth of Tishri when he came down on earth with the Second Tables.

Abraham, Hagar and Their Moments of Truth

Rabbi Joseph J. Beyda

Andy Warhol once said, “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes.”

If we may, we believe that every person, sometime during his or her life, faces a Moment of Truth. Moments of Truth are critical moments in our lives when we are challenged to act, and thereby define whom we are, and sometimes, who our children will be.

Over the course of the two Torah portions read on Rosh Hashanah, the children of Abraham, Yitzhak and Yishmael, have their very existence put to the test. Interestingly, it is the parental figure in each narrative that experiences the Moment of Truth. Let us examine each story to see how the parental figure in each story acted when faced with their Moments of Truth.

Hagar

Hagar has been expelled by her husband Abraham, at the urging of his wife, Sarah. She is sent packing with some food and water to seek out some place else to live and raise her son. Hagar is fully aware that her son Yishmael has the potential to grow into a great nation. Now, she has the responsibility of raising him to be the person that could realize this goal. This is her moment. This is her time to stake her place in history. What does she do? “*Vatelekh Vateta‘ Bemidbar Be’er Shava‘*— And she wandered about in the wilderness of Be’er Sheva” (Beresheet 21:14). She wanders aimlessly around in the wilderness. Instead of seizing the moment, Hagar is paralyzed with fear and is unable to do anything at all. She walks a bowshot away from her teenage son and waits for him to die. At this point an angel of God calls out to her, “What’s with you Hagar?”

Pick up yourself and your child "*vehaḥaziqi et Yadekh*— and strengthen your hand," you have a major task in front of you. You must become a great nation. At this point the Torah recounts "*Vayifqaḥ Elokim et 'Enehah*— God opened her eyes" and she saw a well of water. The Torah is careful not to say that God miraculously caused a well to appear, rather, "he opened her eyes," the implication being that the well was there the whole time. Hagar, at her Moment of Truth, was so consumed with worry she did not see her true salvation, which was right there, staring her in the face. Hagar and, more importantly, Yishmael, are saved. Yishmael goes on to become a great nation, but we really never hear from Hagar again. She fades into the pages of history, another person who could not quite step up at her Moment of Truth.

Abraham

As we turn our attention to the reading for the second day, we find Abraham's challenge of *'Aqedat Yitzhak*. Hashem calls to Abraham and tells him that he must take his beloved son, Yitzhak, and sacrifice him at an unidentified location. Aside from this command going against all of the ethics and morals that Abraham had dedicated his entire life to teaching, his one and only son, his future, is being placed in peril. Yet, God commanded him. This is Abraham's Moment of Truth.

What does he do? He wakes up early in the morning, packs up his donkey, brings his son, and even brings wood and a knife; and he sets out purposefully on his journey – even though he is not exactly sure where he is going. Unlike Hagar, who wandered in the wilderness, Abraham marches forth with a sense of direction and mission.

After traveling for three days, Abraham lifts up his eyes and sees the place he is heading to from afar. Hagar was sitting in direct sight of a well yet couldn't see it. God must open her eyes. Abraham, on the other hand, is a man of

vision – he lifts up his own eyes and can see his mission from a great distance.

At his Moment of Truth, Abraham walks "*Yaḥdav,*" together with his son, hand-in-hand, and is ready to stay with him until the end. Hagar had set her son down to watch him from a distance as he suffered his fate. Abraham stands right alongside his son and together they march up the mountain, prepared to face whatever God has in store for them.

When the time comes to do God's will, Abraham is ready to pounce. Whereas the angel had to tell Hagar, "*Haḥaziki et Yadekh,*" Abraham needs no such cajoling – "*VaYishlaḥ et Yado*– and he sent out his hand." Abraham shows that he has the decisiveness to act definitively in his Moment of Truth. Of course, Yitzhak ends up becoming a great nation – the subject of the remainder of the Torah.

In their moments of truth, Hagar and Abraham could not have responded more differently. Hagar faltered and floundered, she let her destiny control her. Abraham conducted himself like a man on a mission and passed his test with flying colors. At his Moment of Truth, his greatness shined through.

Implications for Our Times

Each one of us will one day face his or her Moment of Truth. Like Abraham and Hagar, we are likely to get little notice as to when that moment will arrive. A moment of truth can come in business— an "opportunity" that comes one's way that is not entirely honest. One may be tempted to increase his wealth, but is he willing to violate his integrity? A moment of truth can come in a social sense. A person may be in a situation that pressures her to violate what she knows is right and good. Will she stand up for her ideals, or will she succumb to peer-pressure? A moment of truth can come in a parental sense. A child needs attention, will the parent get involved and act decisively, or will the

parent "let the problem handle itself"? Moments of Truth can come in many different forms, but rest assured, we all have them. There is no escaping the notion that each and every person must define who he or she is.

The question is obvious: how can we make sure that when our Moment of Truth comes, we act as an Abraham and not as a Hagar?

A person does not become an Abraham overnight. Rabbinic tradition maintains Abraham had the experience of nine prior tests. Standing up in "crunch time" came naturally to him. His experiences gave him not only the confidence to carry on purposefully, but also the clarity of vision to know what he was looking for. Where others couldn't see the right answer even though it was directly in front of them, Abraham was able to see the answer from afar.

How can we gain this necessary experience? How can we build our vision to discern right from wrong, good from bad? How can we make sure that we see clearly at our Moments of Truth?

Our experience is our tradition, our *Mesorah.* When we act in a manner consistent with the way of our grandparents and their grandparents before them, we have a certain clarity of vision that cannot be matched by a person who makes decisions only on his own, based purely on what his heart tells him. Like with Hagar, the heart can falter.

The centerpiece of our tradition has always been, and must always be, the Torah. Through study and learning, we must absorb and internalize the ideals and values that allow us to shine at our Moments of Truth.

Each one of us will have our moment. Will we be prepared? Will we be controlled by destiny, or will we write our own history?

Yom Hakippurim: God As The Model For The Shaliach Tzibbur

Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. God as the Model "Shaliach Tzibbur"

The Torah, in its description of God's forgiveness in the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf, tells us of God's declaration of the "13 attributes of compassion":

> So Moshe carved two tablets of stone, like the first, and early in the morning he went up on Mount Sinai, as YHVH had commanded him, taking the two stone tablets with him. YHVH came down in a cloud, He stood with him there, and proclaimed the name YHVH. YHVH passed before him and declared: "YHVH, YHVH a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin..." (Shemot 34: 4-7).

Commenting on the peculiar phrase, "God passed before him and declared," the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 17b) presents a most cryptic image in the name of R. Yohanan:

> **And God passed before him and proclaimed...** R. Yohanan said: If it were not written this way, it would be impossible to suggest (i.e. we never would have the temerity to suggest such a thing were it not for the testimony of the text) - this teaches us that God wrapped Himself like a *Shaliach Tzibbur* and showed Moshe the order of Tefillah. He said to him: "Whenever Yisra'el sins before me, *ya'asu kaseder hazeh* (they should perform this order) and I will forgive them."

Besides the difficulties inherent in this anthropomorphic *Aggadah*, which must surely be

understood metaphorically, there is a theological problem in the underlying assumption of the statement. Following the conventional reading of this *Aggadah*, the declaration of the thirteen attributes (or some other form of Tefillah – it isn't clear from the text) is an automatic ticket to Divine forgiveness. Imagine – the Jewish people can be guilty of any number of heinous crimes and, in order to gain God's atonement and cleansing, all they need to do is recite a formula! Needless to say, this conclusion raises our philosophic eyebrows, to say the least. Do we really imagine a "formula" which automatically effects atonement?

Before suggesting a resolution, let's take a look at a seemingly unrelated perspective in Jewish ethics.

II. *Imitatio Dei*: The Basis of Jewish Ethical Behavior

As we have discussed in some earlier *shiurim*[1], the basis for Jewish ethics is the imitation of the Divine, known by the Latin term: *imitatio dei*. This notion is best expressed by the Gemara in Shabbat (133b), in offering an explanation for the enigmatic word ***v'Anvehu,*** which appears near the beginning of the Song at the Sea (Shemot 15:2):

> This is my God and I will ***Anvehu***; Abba Sha'ul says: ***Anvehu*** [means] be like Him [Rashi explains – ***Anvehu*** is ***Ani*** (I) & ***Hu*** (He) – I will make myself to be like Him by adhering to His ways]; just as He is gracious and compassionate, you should also be gracious and compassionate.

In other words, the ultimate model of character traits is God – by imitating these "traits," we approximate (as much

[1] Note the *shiurim* on Parashat Kedoshim and Parashat Behar in the Vayyikra archives, http://www.torah.org/advanced/mikra/va.html.

as is possible) the Divine and we ignite the spark of God within us.

III. *Ya'asu Kaseder Hazeh - Let Them Perform This Sequence*

Imagine, for a moment, the following scene (which, we hope, is only the product of imagination and not the bitter fruit of experience):

A person stands in the synagogue, beating his breast and pleading for God's forgiveness on Yom Kippur. While he is engrossed in his prayers, his neighbor's young child crawls onto his own seat: such that when he finishes this heartfelt supplication, his seat is occupied. Now, imagine that his reaction is, "Get that kid out of my seat!"—imagine the Divine eyebrows raised in question, if you will– "how do you ask Me for forgiveness and patience? How patient and forgiving are you?" The shame of such a picture is almost too much to bear.

Perhaps this picture is too harsh for even the most fertile of imaginations – but don't we say *S'lach Lanu* three times a day? How easily do we forgive our friends, neighbors and loved ones? Isn't it *chutzpadik* to come before the Almighty and ask for His compassion – without stirring and activating our own?

With the message of this picture in mind, we can return to our text and, with the help of a careful reading of the original, gain some insight:

> He said to him: "Whenever Yisra'el sins before me, ***ya'asu kaseder hazeh*** (they should perform this order) and I will forgive them."

Note that God is not purported to have told Moshe that B'nei Yisra'el should SAY these words (in which case, it would have read ***Yom'ru kaseder hazeh***); He told Moshe that they should ***Ya'asu*** – (Fulfill) these words. In other words, God declared the attributes of compassion and then

told Moshe: Teach the Jewish people that if they want My forgiveness, let them become more forgiving people. Our greatest appeal to Divine compassion is a demonstration of our own compassion towards each other; the most powerful tool we have in our legal arsenal as we enter the Divine Court is our own ability (and will) to approximate Divine Compassion.

May we all merit complete participation in a complete Teshuvah, personal and national; may we merit Divine grace as we learn to act more graciously with each other and may we all be inscribed in *Sefer HaHayyim*.

Yom Kippur and Mitzvot *Ben Adam LeḤabero* (Man to Man)

Communal and Business Concerns for the 21st Century

Rabbi Moses Haber

HaRambam writes in his *Mishne Torah Hilkhot Teshuba* 2:9 that:

> Teshuba or the day of Kippur itself atone only for sins committed against the Almighty (*Ben Adam LaMakom*) like eating non-kosher or having illicit sexual relations and the like, but have no efficacy on sins committed against one's fellow man (*Ben Adam LeḤabero*), like physical damages, cursing/disgracing ones fellow, theft and the like. These transgressions are **not** forgiven until one returns what one owes (monetarily) and appeases his fellow (*viyraṣehu*). Even the returning of money cannot fully atone for the sin; one must appease the person he wronged (*LeRaṣoto*) and ask him for forgiveness…"

The words of HaRambam above help to clear up a commonly held misconception that confession and subsequent commitment to abstain from repetition of a sin during Yom Kippur is a panacea for 'all' sins committed during the past year. To clarify, Yom Kippur is a day to atone for ones sins both against God and against Man, but while the *Vidui* we say includes both sections of transgressions (man against God and man against man) one receives atonement only for sins committed against God, while those sins against man are not atoned for unless one has received prior forgiveness from that man directly. Simply put, even God himself cannot forgive you for a sin you committed against your neighbor!

The prayers we read on Yom Kippur itself help to facilitate proper confession if they are properly utilized.

While the *Vidui HaGadol* (‘*Ase* and *Lo-Ta’ase*) leaves little room for elaboration because of its already detailed form, the *Al Het* said during the *‘amida* allows more time for introspection. The *Al Het* is a listing of 25 ways of transgression. Being quite ambiguous in tone this prayer lends itself to being defined more freely/personally than the specific sins listed in the *Vidui HaGadol*.

In his book, *Al Chet: Sins of the Marketplace,* Dr. Meir Tamari seeks to break the complacency that might have settled in over many years of repetition and expand an understanding of the *Al Het* to include sins of *act* and *mind* that are committed against one’s ‘fellow neighbor’ and not only against God. By exploring the *Al Het* in this way, Dr. Tamari brings to light transgressions that are committed in the marketplace that at times might not be seen as going against the values of the Torah. While many topics are dealt with in his book, one stands out as being appropriate to introduce when talking about sins committed against one’s fellow neighbor, namely *Al Het shehatanu lefanecha begalui ubaseter* – on sins we committed before you in the “open” and in “secret.”

An example of how this statement can be used as a confession for a sin committed against one’s fellow neighbor (*LeḤabero*) follows. According to Jewish law, a *ganab*, a thief who steals in secret (e.g. by night) (*Mishne Torah Hilkhot Genebah* chap. 1) is penalized by having to pay a fine equal to 100% of the value of the stolen item *in addition* to returning the stolen property itself (Exodus 22:3), while a *gazlan* (a thief who does not steal under the cover of darkness or in secret) simply must return the stolen item. The *Hakhamim* (*Talmud Babli, Baba Qamma 79b*) explain that the *ganab* is penalized the extra 100% for making the crucial error of thinking that he committed a secret crime, namely from the Almighty.

Awareness that there is above us an all-seeing eye and hearing ear should prevent most sins that are committed

behind closed doors. In actuality, it is precisely behind those closed doors of conference rooms that unethical practices are committed. Planning and care is taken to perform secret corporate malfeasance, tax evasion and questionable management decisions. Documents are shredded, hard drives wiped and emails erased all in order to protect the secrecy of illegal practices.

It is exactly this point that one needs to have in mind when repenting to the Lord on Yom Kippur. "Have I made the mistake of thinking that I can hide from my Creator? Have I committed the offense of believing that I can get away with an illegal activity if I cover my tracks well enough?"

With the competitive business style that is currently all pervasive in today's society, a young businessman or woman new to a company needs to do all it takes to succeed. But at what point does one say, "enough, something I did in private (without the knowledge of the customer) borders on the unethical or even the illegal. And if not totally *assur*, should I not go *lifnim mishurat hadin* (go the extra mile) and be *maḥmir* and take a personal loss financially, instead of spiritually?" The *Hida* states (see *Sede Hemed ma'arechet kaf*) that *ḥumrot* should be applied to laws of *Ben Adam LeḤabero* (man to man) and not to *Makom* (man to God) for God does not need our *ḥumrot,* our fellow neighbors do!

An example of a questionable business practice that is dealt with in Jewish law is one of weights and measurements/balances. It is no less applicable to a woman shopping in a supermarket or a multi-millionaire businessman producing goods for a customer. The Torah takes the issue of weights and measurements so seriously that it states in the Talmud (*Babli Baba Mesi'a 61b*) that the purpose for the Exodus from Egypt was to enable the Jews to observe the laws of just weights and balances, and that one who transgresses this mitzvah is equated with

those who deny the entire event of *Yesiat Misrayim*. This halakha applies to even the smallest amount (*mashehu*) of discrepancy, in contrast to that of *geneba/gezela* (theft), which has a minimum quantity of *shaveh peruta* (*Hilkhot Geneba ch. 8; Shulhan Arukh Hoshen Mishpat 231*) and likewise does not distinguish between Jew and non-Jew.

Sins committed in secret against one's fellow, beyond the scope of others (although not from the Omnipresent) can be the most damaging. Some examples to think about on Yom Kippur are: switching fabric qualities at production time without the knowledge of the customer, real estate sales made on the basis of non-disclosure of details which take advantage of the buyer's ignorance, defective goods shipped without notification, purchase of stolen goods which are then sold as new, theft of music and software CD's by illegal copying.[2]

Dr. Tamari states, "All these actions destroy the moral equilibrium and blur the distinction between right and wrong until lying becomes a way of life in all areas." He quotes the *Shach,* who comments on the *pasuk* in Leviticus 19:11: "'You shall not steal nor deal falsely nor lie one to another.' The verse does not detail which things one should not steal, but simply forbids it. *Nothing, not money, not other people's perceptions, and not the perception of God himself.*"

While the misconception that all sins can be atoned for on Yom Kippur, without proper recourse for those committed against one's fellow, can be easily clarified for the layperson, a larger more overwhelming issue might be more difficult to impress. That is, the equal importance placed on transgressions against a fellow man as those that are committed against God.

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[2] I am aware that, according to some authorities, this specific issue might be *asur* because of *Dina De-Malkhuta* (the law of the country) and not *geneba*.

Unfortunately, the balance between these two types of transgressions seems to have faltered recently. Why is it that in today's society we are plagued by individuals whose profession it has become to manipulate the laws of society for personal gain? Sins against one's fellow are committed consciously with the goal of receiving more and more financial wealth. All is seen as fair game, where dog-eat-dog rules apply to everything from corporate takeovers to a simple purchase in a retail store. Unfortunately, whether consciously or not, the larger Orthodox Jewish community has been affected in more ways than one. It begs the question, how has this change occurred, where sins committed against God are given more importance than those committed *LeḤabero*? The answer can only be a lack of awareness and education.

While the increase in religious observance within the larger American Jewish Orthodox community can only be applauded, and the rabbinic leadership driving this new momentum be praised, a deeper analysis of the effects of this transformation needs to take place. That is, are the Torah classes being taught leading to an increase in observance in both types of mitzvot, both *Ben Adam LaMakom* and *LeḤabero*? While the current wealth of classes on *musar* topics are useful in stimulating better treatment of one's fellow neighbor, at what point do the classes only end up addressing issues of halakha (*mutar vs. asur*) according to the accepted halakhic opinion of the *Shulhan Arukh* on limited topics of ritual observance?[3] Are specific laws of fair competition, price fraud/gouging, employer-employee relations, copyright infringement, interest, personal negligence, and tax evasion given equal time in the many classes we attend? There are many classes on the laws of Shabbat and kosher kitchens but few or none on the laws of *mekah umemkar* (business law) in general,

[3] Shabbat, Kashrut, Prayer etc.

or more specifically on issues of *geneba* and *gezela*, partnerships, interest, contracts and neighbors.

While it seems as if these laws in recent times have fallen out of favor they have no less importance to the whole of the ethic of Judaism. It should be mentioned that the previous generation of men in the Syrian Jewish community of Brooklyn, NY awoke each morning to a class on the laws of business, found in the *Bet Yosef* and *Shulhan Arukh* (*Hoshen Mishpat*), before setting out to work.

Judaism requires each of us "to do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord" (Deut. 6:18), and to "walk purely with Hashem our God" (Deut. 18:13). There can be no better way to achieve this height of spirituality and fervor than a balanced approach to increasing levels of observance in both worlds, both the heavenly (*LaMakom*) and earthly (*LeḤabero*). Many of the *mishpatim* delineated in the Torah deal with issues of civil society and social justice. These laws run the gamut from details on how to establish court systems (in order to enforce Torah laws) to helping the downtrodden Jew and non-Jew alike (*Babli Gittin 61a; Tosefta; Mishne Torah, Hilkhot Shemittah 8:8*). In order to be a "whole" person, one needs to concentrate his efforts on the entire set of laws and values in the Torah, not only some!

To be absolutely clear, the only way to become a true *shomer Torah uMisvot* Jew is to follow the entire corpus of the Torah *Shebe'al Peh* (e.g. every section of the *Shulhan Arukh*), both mitzvot that find favor in the eyes of God as well as in the hearts of your peers. One who wishes to increase his or her personal spiritual level cannot choose to follow only part of our halakhic tradition while ignoring the rest.

It can be said (although mistakenly) that it is simply too hard to act in accordance with the halakhot of *Ben Adam LeḤabero* while trying to make ends meet. Why not concentrate on an area that I can improve upon alone

(within myself). ***This mindset only works to unhinge the whole of the Torah from within. Our Torah is concerned with the society as a whole, as well as the individual within***. As an aside, that is precisely the reason we ask Hashem daily for the return of the kingdom of David and the coming of the *Mashiyah*, so we can live within a world society that recognizes the way of God, namely *Sedaka uMishpat* (justice and righteousness), and conducts its business so.

The current stress on some topics/mitzvot of the Torah while others have fallen into disregard is only an outcome of the society that we live in. The *galut* (exile) we live in has proved itself a true punishment from the Almighty; it has allowed us to veer off the path of balance into one of imbalance. To continue on a path that favors some of the values of Judaism and not others would only mask the true beauty of Judaism itself.

To conclude, Yom Kippur need not be the only time one thinks about the sins committed against one's neighbor. In an effort to educate oneself in these matters of the halakhot of business and building a society based on Torah values, many books and articles have been made available. Dr. Tamari's book is not the only one that speaks about business laws and issues of *halakhot* of *Ben Adam LeḤabero*. Dr. Aaron Levine also writes on this subject, as well as *Dine Mamonot* (in Hebrew) by Rabbi Basri, and the more currently published *Malve Hashem* by Hakham Moshe Levi (in Hebrew). There is even a website dedicated to these issues, founded by Dr. Tamari and run out of the Machon Lev instituion in Jerusalem (www.besr.org). A community of business men and women who are bent on increasing their spiritual awareness and observance cannot adopt a negligent approach to these issues and laws that are part and parcel of fulfilling the Almighty's will of building a just and righteous society.

Don't Worry, Be Happy!

Rabbi Dr. Henry "Ronnie" Hasson

There are days of the year and times in our lives when Judaism requires us to be happy and others when we are supposed to be sad. These days carry such importance that it is imperative we learn the correct emotional frame of mind in order to observe each holiday most appropriately.

The first of *Tishri,* and now the second of *Tishri* as well, are highly significant dates in the Jewish calendar. Various events have become associated with this date. Some have associated this date with the day the world was created; some associate it with the day Abraham took Isaac to be sacrificed. It has become the first day of the calendar year, it is a holiday, and it is observed as the Day of Judgment. Ten days later is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Although we often lump these two dates together as the *Yamim Noraim*, "Days of Awe", they are very different. Rosh Hashanah is called *Yom Hadin*– Judgment Day, *Yom Hazikaron*– Remembrance Day, and *Yom Teru'ah* – Day of Sounding the Shofar. The variety of characteristics of this day has led to some controversy over various *halakhic* requirements. For example: may one or should one fast? Should one have a festive meal? Is one required to be joyous? Do we recite '*Ṣidkatekha*' on Shabbat Rosh Hashanah? Does Rosh Hashanah interrupt a mourning period for a relative, etc...?

In addition to the question of *halakhic* requirements associated with the holiday, there is the question of how one should approach the holiday emotionally. Regarding Yom Kippur, the Torah specifically commands that it be treated as a day of '*innuy*– withholding of certain pleasures. The Torah is unclear, however, about the emotional status of Rosh Hashanah.

Several *Geonim* and *Rishonim* learn from different verses that one may not fast on Rosh Hashanah and that one must be happy. Firstly, the Torah mentions Rosh Hashanah as a *Zikhron Teruah*– a remembrance of Shofar blowing. The Gemara in *Masekhet Sukkah* comments on the verse "And on your joyous days, and your holidays, and your firsts of the month…" (Numbers 10:10) that Rosh Hashanah is included in these happy days, as it is a first of the month. The Rosh quotes Rav Sar Shalom Gaon who uses this as a proof that one may not fast on Rosh Hashanah. Another source supporting this frame of mind is the passage from Tehillim 81:

> Sing joyously to God, our strength; raise a shout for the God of Jacob. Take up the song, sound the timbrel, the melodious lyre and harp. Blow the horn [*Shofar*] on the new moon, on the full moon for our feast day… In distress you called and I rescued you… (vv. 2-4, 7)

The rabbis interpret this verse as referring to Rosh Hashanah, and it is described as a holiday. Based on the above passages, many Rabbis have decided that one may not cry or be sad on Rosh Hashanah, rather the prayers should be sung in an up-beat tune, with gladness in the heart. The Shulḥan Arukh codifies as law that on Rosh Hashanah one must eat, drink and be merry (Oraḥ Ḥayim 597:1).

One noteworthy exception among the rabbis is Rabbi Ḥaim Vital, a kabbalist and student of the Ari. He wrote that the Ari used to cry on Rosh Hashanah and said that if one does not cry it is an indication that his soul is not complete, for who could possibly not cry on such an awesome day? In a similar way, Rabbi Akiva would cry when reading Shir Hashirim on Shabbat. His students questioned the permissibility to cry on Shabbat. Rabbi Akiva responded that he has such a deep understanding of the passage that for him crying is pleasurable, and on the

contrary, it would be suffering to hold it in. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef mentions that both Rabbi Akiva and the Ari were on such a high spiritual level that their behaviors were exceptions to the rule. For us, on the other hand, one should not try to cry and it is only permissible if it came about without intention.

Those who established the Sephardic tunes for this holiday established them as up-beat and joyous ones. We are taught the custom of saying *Tizku L'Shanim Rabot Ne`imot V'tobot* to each other— may you merit many happy years. The prayers were written with positive outlooks; *Ahot Ketana*, the introductory prayer to Rosh Hashanah which sets the mood for the holiday, ends with the line "Let the New Year begin with all its blessing." We are turning over a new leaf from here on, and everything is going to be better, and for this we are joyful. We are also taught to be confident that since we are intending to change our ways and we are praying to Hashem, we have full faith and confidence that our prayers will be answered. We can see an example of this confident frame of mind from "Ḥoni the Circle Maker," whom we mention in the Selihot. He was so confident that Hashem would answer his prayers that he drew a circle in the ground and refused to leave the circle until God answered his prayer for rain.

One may feel an instinct to cry on Rosh Hashanah as we are looking back on the past year and introspecting on our lives. We remember everything we have done wrong, we pray to Hashem to answer our prayers, and we hope for a positive response. However, the leaders of the generations tell us not to cry, but to have faith and confidence that Hashem loves us and will certainly answer our prayers. Even if not immediately, He will always answer our needs. We have faith that once we do our part and pray to Hashem, He will listen.

We read about Rosh Hashanah at the time of the return of exiles to Jerusalem in the eighth chapter of the book of

Nehemiah. Ezra brought a large group of people back to Jerusalem to build the second temple after the first one was destroyed. The people in exile had not followed the teachings of the Torah for many years. Ezra read the Torah to them on Rosh Hashanah and the people were crying. They were very upset about how they had acted over the years, not in accord with the Torah's laws. Ezra scolded them for crying.

> This day is holy to the Lord your God: you must not mourn or weep," for all the people were weeping as they listened to the words of the Teaching. He further said to them, "Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the Lord is the source of your strength. (Nehemiah 8: 9-10)

Some people were planning on fasting and had not prepared food for the holiday. Nehemiah tells them to send *Mishloaḥ Manot* (similar to Purim, one of the happiest days of the year) to each other so that everyone would have a festive meal.

We also see that the Torah and *Haftara* passages selected for Rosh Hashanah by our rabbis all have upbeat and celebratory messages. In these passages, our ancestors turned to God in their time of need and were answered. The Torah portion for the first day speaks of the barren Matriarch Sarah's prayer finally being answered, and her giving birth to the next patriarch, Isaac. The second day's Torah reading consists of the famous blessing to Abraham as a reward for bringing Isaac to God for a sacrifice. The *Haftara* portion of the first day speaks of the barren Hannah having her prayer for a child answered. She gives birth to one of the greatest prophets, Shemuel, and we read her thanksgiving prayer to Hashem. I noticed an interesting connection between the story regarding Hannah and Eli,

and the holiday of Rosh Hashanah. The rabbis explain that this event took place on Rosh Hashanah, and this is one reason it is read as the *Haftara* of the day. Hannah is praying to Hashem on Rosh Hashanah and Eli the priest sees her in deep sorrowful prayer and accuses her of being drunk. Hannah explains to him that she is not drunk, rather she is pouring out her soul to Hashem for she is most distraught and angry. Eli responds that she should no longer be upset; rather she should go in peace, for Hashem will answer her prayer. She asks Eli not to be upset with her and she goes on her way, she eats, and no longer has a sad face. Here, similar to the passage in Nehemiah, is a strong example of someone praying without eating and with a sad affect. The leader at the time corrects her way, and reminds her that Rosh Hashanah is a festive day of eating and of prayers being answered. The second day's *Haftara* is a passage from the book of Yirmiyahu (chapter 31). This passage mentions the joyous return of the people to their land. Here again, we see the rabbis chose to read a passage that mentions different terms for joy many times throughout the chapter. Another place we see the concept of correcting the sadness and changing it to joy is in verse 12, where God says, "I will turn their mourning to joy, I will comfort them and cheer them in their grief." Again, in the next and final paragraph of the *Haftara*, we read of Rachel crying for her descendants that are now exiled. Hashem tells her, "Restrain your voice from weeping, your eyes from shedding tears; for there is a reward for your labor."

Based on these three passages that we read on Rosh Hashanah, we are reminded that even though sometimes it is our natural instinct while introspecting to be afraid, upset, and to cry over the mistakes we have made over the year, we need not be solemn and sad, for Hashem will surely hear our prayers. We should be happy and confident in His salvation. During these days we are told to repent

and regret all the wrong we have done, but it is also a time to turn over a new leaf, put last year behind us and start the new year with happiness, confidence and good intentions. Someone depressed over what he has done in the past has little strength to motivate himself to change. On the other hand, someone who reflects on his accomplishments of the past year and is happy when given a new year with a clean slate will be confident in Hashem listening to his prayers and will have much motivation for the coming year. This explanation also helps us understand the dichotomy of the Ari crying, and others telling us to have joy and feasts. Crying may feel like a natural emotion when thinking of what we have done wrong when pleading with God. Happiness is what we should strive to feel, knowing that our prayer will be answered.

We should all smile and feel good because we have the belief in Hashem that this year is going to be the best year ever in our personal lives, for our community, for Israel, and for the world at large. Even Yom Kippur, which is a day of fasting, repenting and begging for forgiveness, should have a festive meal. However, since we cannot eat on Kippur day, we must make the festive meal the day before. Yom Kippur culminates with the *Ne'ila* prayer quoting a passage from Kohelet (9:7): “Go, eat your bread in gladness, and drink your wine in joy; for your action was long ago approved by God.”

Make Yourself Available to Forgive[1]

Rabbi Dr. Richard Hidary

Yom Kippur offers us an opportunity to renew our relationship not only with God, but also with our fellow man. However, repairing damaged relationships with other people is often more complicated and demanding than atoning for our sins against God. The Mishnah in *Yoma* 10:9 spells this out:

> Yom Kippur atones for transgressions between man and the Omnipresent. Yom Kippur does not atone for transgressions between man and his fellow until one pacifies his fellow. This was learned from a verse by R. Eleazar b. Azariah: "*From all your sins before Hashem you shall be purified*" (Leviticus 16:30) - Yom Kippur atones for transgressions between man and the Omnipresent but Yom Kippur does not atone for transgressions between man and his fellow until one pacifies his fellow.

Yom Kippur is sufficient to atone for most sins that one commits against God. However, sins one has committed against other people require that one first ask them for forgiveness before procuring atonement. While the wrongdoer may have felt himself superior when putting down his fellow, the wrongdoer now ironically takes on the inferior position since his fate lies in the hands of his victim.

The Gemara (*Bavli Yoma* 87a) commenting on this Mishnah subdivides the sins we commit against others into two categories of verbal sins and monetary sins:

[1] This article is based on a lecture given by Moshe Halbertal on December 3, 2005 at Sephardic Synagogue and sponsored by Merkaz Moreshet Yisrael.

> R. Isaac said: Whoever offends his neighbor, even if he does it only through words, must pacify him, as it is said: "My son, if you have [indebted yourself and] stood surety for your fellow, given your hand for another, you are snared by the words of your mouth…do this, then, my son, and deliver yourself, for you have come into the power of your fellow. Go, grovel and badger your fellow" (Proverbs 6:1-3). If he has a claim of money upon you, open the palm of your hand to him, and if not, send many friends to him.

For monetary wrongdoing, one must repay the damage or the debt. For verbal wrongdoing, one must apologize so that the victim will be pacified from the insult he has received. The Gemara further recommends that one apologize not directly but through intermediaries:

> R. Ḥisda said: He must pacify him through three rows of three people each, as it is said: "He declares to people, 'I have sinned and perverted what was right, and it did not profit me'" (Job 33:27).

Why does the Gemara recommend sending three groups of three people rather than apologizing directly? Often, the victim is so hurt and angry that he does not want to see the wrongdoer. If the victim is not ready to forgive, then he will be even more angered by the wrongdoer just showing up and apologizing, even if it is sincere. In other words, the victim must be available to forgive even before any meeting takes place or else the meeting may only add insult to injury. By using a third-party, however, the wrongdoer is able to express his remorse without being so presumptuous as to expect immediate forgiveness.

Until now, the Gemara has focused on the responsibilities of the wrongdoer to repay or apologize with sensitivity and patience. The next line of the Gemara shifts to the less obvious responsibility of the victim:

> R. Yose b. Ḥanina said: One who asks forgiveness of his neighbor need not do so more than three times, as it is said: "*Forgive (sa na), I urge you (ana). . . therefore, please forgive (sa na)*" (Genesis 50:17).
>
> And if he [the person who was wronged] had died, he [the wrongdoer] brings ten people and stands them by his grave and he says: "I have sinned against Hashem, the God of Israel, and against this one, whom I have hurt."

Just as the wrongdoer has a requirement to apologize, so does the victim have a responsibility to forgive. He may not be ready to forgive after the first or second approaches, but by the third attempt, assuming that the apology is heartfelt, the victim must find it within himself to let go of his anger and accept his friend's apology. If he does not, the wrongdoer is absolved of his obligation and the sin now lies in the hands of the victim (cf. *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Teshubah* 2:9).

The next law in the Gemara deals with another person who is also not available to forgive, but this time it is not because of his stubbornness but rather because he has passed on. In such a case, the wrongdoer must demonstrate his remorse in a public quorum, which stands in the place of the deceased victim.

Up until this point, the Gemara has been using the genre of law. The Mishnah stated one legal principle and the Gemara elaborated on that law with further details and prooftexts formulated as additional legal statements. Next, the Gemara turns to a series of narratives that serve to bring the law to life, show real examples, and bring out further some of the complexities involved in the process of forgiveness. Here is the first story:

> R. Abba felt aggrieved by R. Jeremiah. He [R. Jeremiah] went and sat down at the door of R. Abba and as the maid poured out water, some fell on his head. Then he [R. Jeremiah] said: "They have made a dung-

> heap of me," and he applied this passage about himself: "He raises up the poor from the dung-heap" (Psalms 113:7). R. Abba heard that and came out to him. He [R. Abba] said to him, "Now I must appease you, as it is written: "Go, grovel and badger your fellow" (Proverbs 6:3).

R. Jeremiah caused R. Abba to feel hurt. R. Jeremiah wished to apologize but was apparently apprehensive about doing so. Notice that R. Jeremiah does not knock on the door but only sits on the stoop waiting for something to happen. He must have felt too ashamed to face R. Abba, perhaps because he was afraid that R. Abba might not be ready to forgive him in which case R. Jeremiah would only be further insulting him.

When the maid of R. Abba, presumably by accident, threw the sewage water on the head of R. Jeremiah (throwing waste out of the window was the normal way of taking out the garbage in Roman cities) the tables were turned. R. Jeremiah who at first owed R. Abba an apology for a previous wrongdoing now has a right to receive an apology from R. Abba. This should not be understood as an act of revenge – i.e., R. Abba was insulted so he in turn humiliates R. Jeremiah – first, because it was done by mistake, and second, because R. Abba recognizes that the two actions do not cancel each other out but rather that he must now apologize.

This story does, however, encapsulate the element of shame that is present and required in the act of apology. A victim who has been humiliated by a wrongdoer is not likely to be pacified until he sees the wrongdoer put himself down by asking for mercy. At the same time, the self-humiliation of the wrongdoer in his act of apology almost forces the victim to accept the apology or else he will seem stubborn and hard-hearted by ignoring the display of shame presented by the original wrongdoer. This is the psychological mechanism that is behind the legal principle

noted above—that one who refuses to be pacified even after three apologies incurs the guilt upon himself.

R. Jeremiah's apprehensiveness about apologizing is understandable and common. R. Zera, in the next story, addresses this problem:

> When R. Zera felt aggrieved by any man, he used to walk back and forth before him and would make himself available to him so that he [the wrongdoer] would come and appease him.

R. Zera did not want to hold a grudge against those who did him wrong. However, recognizing that it is difficult for people to gain the courage to apologize, often because they are afraid of being turned down or unwilling to humiliate themselves by asking for mercy, he would make himself available—both physically and psychologically—to receive the apologies of those who harmed him. R. Zera certainly possesses the highest degree of self-effacement as well as kindness and caring, even for those who harmed him. R. Zera made it easy for his wrongdoers to apologize by indicating in advance his willingness to accept and by requiring from them only the most minimal display of regret. Even though by law, a victim only has the responsibility to accept an apology after three times, this story shows an example of a victim who goes beyond the letter of the law.

The next story picks up on this theme of going beyond the letter of the law but shows the complexities and pitfalls involved in the process of forgiveness:

> Rab once felt aggrieved by a certain butcher. The butcher did not come [to appease Rab]. On the eve of Yom Kippur, he [Rab] said: "I will go to him to pacify him." Rav Huna met him [Rab] and asked: "Master, where are you going?" He replied, "To pacify that man." He [Rav Huna] said [to himself]: Abba [=Rab] is going to kill someone. He [Rab] went there and stood

> before him [the butcher]. [The butcher] was sitting and splitting open an [animal's] head. He raised his eyes and saw him [Rab]. He [The butcher] said to him: "You are Abba! Go away. I have nothing to do with you." While he was splitting open the head, a bone flew off, struck his throat, and killed him.

Rab, one of the most important *Amoraim* in Babylonia, felt insulted by a butcher, a profession reserved for crude and low-class people in Babylonian culture. Rab acted beyond the letter of the law just like R. Zera in the previous story by going out to the butcher to show his availability to forgive. When Rab bumps into his student Rav Huna, Rav Huna is able to foretell that the outcome of Rab's actions will be disastrous. What did Rav Huna see that Rab did not?

We noted above that a wrongdoer can act presumptuously by coming into the presence of his victim to apologize before the victim is ready to receive the apology. Rab here seems to have been caught in the opposite problem. He has acted presumptuously by coming into the presence of the butcher and assuming that the butcher was ready to recognize his own wrongdoings and would be willing to apologize. Rab's display of availability, which was meant to make the butcher feel at ease, ironically backfires when the butcher takes his approach as an accusation of guilt. The crude butcher, who would not admit any wrongdoing, interprets Rab's attempt at reconciliation as an attack, which causes the butcher to lash out at Rab. The butcher is immediately punished for disrespecting so great a sage.

As in other stories involving disastrous interactions between great sages and vulgar commoners (cf. Ketubot 67b), it is not clear who here is at fault. Certainly, the butcher should not have been rude to Rab and should have recognized his own wrongdoings and apologized for them. But Rav Huna foresaw that Rab's actions would be met

with such a reaction and cause the butcher's death. Therefore, Rab also should have foreseen what might happen and taken steps to avoid such a confrontation. Apparently, Rab was not able to forgive the butcher without some sign, even if small, of recognition of guilt and regret by the butcher. But perhaps he could have waited longer (although, time was running out before Yom Kippur when the fate of the butcher would be decided) or sent messengers as a buffer. Even doing nothing and letting the butcher be judged without atonement for whatever previous insult he had committed would have led to a better outcome than his instantaneous and self-inflicted death.

While the legal principles set out in the Mishnah and the beginning of the Gemara lay out the basic framework of responsibilities of the wrongdoer and the victim, the subsequent stories flesh out those principles, showing that each situation requires careful calibration and application of those principles. The complexity in understanding the psychological makeup of one person is multiplied exponentially when we try to evaluate the dynamics between two people in tension. Sometimes, as in Rab's case, even the best of intentions can lead to disaster when all factors are not considered carefully enough. The complexity of this *sugya*, which intertwines law and narrative and interchanges victim and wrongdoer, reflects the complexity of the reality of our relationships.

Yom Kippur is the day when Hashem approaches us and shows that He is available to receive our repentance. But atonement from Hashem is only granted after we put in the careful planning and hard work necessary for repairing our relationships with others. May we have the courage and humility to apologize with sincerity to those we have harmed and the compassion necessary to make ourselves available to forgive.

Shofar – Facing Uncertainty

Rabbi Alex Israel

The shofar is veiled with a certain mystery. The Torah fails to reveal its precise intentions when it instructs us to sound the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. All we hear from the Torah is a vague description of Rosh Hashanah as *"Yom Teruah"* or *"Zichron Teruah",* but how are we to interpret those phrases?

In our study, we will look at a few leads from Chazal as to the sources for *tekiat shofar*. I think that we shall emerge with an interesting angle upon this familiar ritual.

The Shofar and War

The shofar is frequently mentioned in the context of war. In the Torah:

> When you are at war in your land against an aggressor who attacks you, you shall sound the *Teru'ah* on the trumpets that you may be remembered before the LORD your God and be delivered from your enemies. (Numbers 10: 9)

This war context continues in Chazal. The Mishnah in Rosh Hashanah proves the identity of the shofar from the battle against Jericho. But what aspect of war are we relating to? Is it the triumphant victory of war? The fear of the battlefield? How would we define the function that the shofar is to play, how would we categorize the emotion that the shofar should evoke?

Sisera's Mother

For an answer, we shall turn to the Gemara. One of the most unusual proofs for the sound of the shofar comes from the biblical figure of the mother of Sisera. The Gemara is trying to identify the correct sound that a shofar should make and is interested in defining the word *teru'ah*:

> The Torah states: 'It shall be a day of *teru'ah* for you.' The Targum translates the phrase as *'Yom Yevava'* – a day of sobbing based on the verse: 'At the window Sisera's mother looked out, and cried (*teyabev)*.' (Talmud Bavli Rosh Hashanah 33b)

Who is Sisera and who is his mother? Why should Sisera's mother become the source for the sounds of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah?

The scene is the military victory of the Israelite army, under the leadership of Devorah and Barak ben Avinoam. The enemy is Sisera, a formidable army commander who has wrought havoc for years in the north of Israel. Now God has assisted *Am Yisrael*. Sisera's army is defeated and Sisera is dead. But Sisera's mother doesn't know this. Sisera's mother awaits his arrival. The prophet Devorah tells the story in the following way:

> Through the window peered Sisera's mother,
> Behind the lattice she sobbed:
> "Why is his chariot so long in coming?
> Why so late the clatter of his wheels?"
> She too replies to herself:
> "They must be dividing the spoils,
> A damsel or two for each man…" (Shoftim 5:28-30)

Sisera's mother is crying. Why? That morning her beloved son went out to battle. She expects him to come home at a particular time, victorious, just like every other battle that he had fought in the past. Sisera had never suffered defeat. Today, Sisera is late. Why? The possibilities gnaw at her mind. She paces up and down, staring repeatedly out of the window, squinting into the distance for a distant image, a cloud of dust, which may signify the approach of his chariot. Hours go by and she hears nothing. No word. "They must be dividing the spoils," she says to herself, in attempt to reassure herself. But it is just an excuse. She knows that. All the worst

scenarios are running uncontrollably through her mind. Where could he be? Could he have suffered defeat? Or maybe he is just choosing himself a new maid from the captive women? Or maybe, possibly, what? Sisera's mother cannot withstand the tension. She bursts into a flood of tears.

We have all experienced it as kids. Our parents yelling at us because we arrived home late, a few hours after the time they had expected us. We have all been at the receiving end of those impassioned speeches about how our mothers were "worried sick," phoning the neighbors, etc.

What is that feeling? I would put it in the following way. It is the feeling of absolute uncertainty. It is the emotional turmoil of endless possibilities. We all know how to cope when we know what has happened. If someone is in the hospital, if a person has been in a car crash, we then have the ability to cope. We know how to deal with the insurance, the doctors, etc. But the situation of not knowing, of the endless possibilities, somehow manifests itself in frantic worry, a panicked rush of thoughts, the worst thoughts. This state is truly unbearable. For some reason, when we sense a situation in which we entertain the possibility of the worst, but we don't yet know what has really happened, we are consumed with an unexplainable sense of dread. The experience of waiting for the doctor's diagnosis, for sensitive medical test results, is far more difficult than coping with the results, however good or bad. Sisera's mother is experiencing that traumatic feeling of uncertainty, with its dark guesswork, the overwhelming sense of the unknown. These are her tears.

And this too is the voice of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah. When the books of life and death are open before us, and we are standing in judgment, all the options are open. What is God thinking about us? What shall my fate be this year? We stand on Rosh Hashanah in an uncertain twilight zone, hanging suspended between guilt

and innocence, between life and death. This uncertainty, this lack of knowledge is the embodiment of tension on Rosh Hashanah. We cry, just like Sisera's mother. And if we do not cry, the shofar cries for us.

A Perspective From the Mishnah

But is our position on Rosh Hashanah one of paralyzed helplessness? Are we required to stand frozenly inactive, or is there a more active role that one can play?

To answer this question, I would like to study a *perek* of Mishnah together. By surveying the development of a theme within the Mishnah, I hope that we will be able to sense some of Chazal's thinking regarding the philosophy behind the shofar.

Here is the text of the Mishnah in the third chapter of Masekhet Rosh Hashanah:

> **2.** All kinds of shofar are valid [for Rosh Hashanah], except that of a cow because it is a "horn." R. Yossi said: But are not all shofarot referred to as a "horn"? – as it states: When they sound a long blast with the ram's horn (Joshua 6:5).
>
> **3.** The shofar of Rosh Hashanah was of a wild goat, straight, and its mouthpiece was overlaid with gold. There were two trumpets at the sides. The shofar sounded a long note, but the trumpets a shorter one, for the mitzvah of the day is the shofar.
>
> **6.** A shofar that is split and was glued back together is unfit. A shofar which shattered into pieces and is glued together is unfit. If there was a hole in the shofar and it was filled in, if it hinders the sound of the blast of the shofar, then it is unfit. But if not, it is valid.
>
> **7.** If someone blew a shofar into a well, or an underground room or into a large cask, and one heard the sound of the shofar, one has fulfilled his obligation. But if he heard the sound of the echo, he has not fulfilled his obligation.

> Likewise, if one was passing by a synagogue, or if his house was close to the synagogue and he heard the sound of the shofar or the reading of the Megilla; if he concentrated his mind on it, he has fulfilled his obligation. If not, he has not carried out his duty. Even though they both heard the sound, this one focused his mind, whereas the other person did not.
>
> **8.** "And it was that when Moshe held up his hands, Israel prevailed and when he lowered his hands, Amalek prevailed" (Shemot 17:11). But could the hands of Moses win a war or lose a war? Rather it comes to tell you that whenever Israel looked upwards and committed their hearts to their father in heaven, they prevailed, and if not, they fell…

This is the essence of the chapter of Mishnah that outlines the laws of shofar. Let us examine this chapter and try to understand its content.

We shall begin with the most prominent question that this chapter raises: What is the final Mishnah (8) doing here? How does it relate to the shofar? It is a nice *derash,* but it would seem to have little connection with the command of sounding the shofar. Is this true?

I would claim that the key to answering this question is to identify the structural pattern that underlies the chapter as a whole. The *mishnayot* here are ordered in a particular way that reflects the thinking behind the mitzvah of shofar. Let us elaborate.

Concrete to Abstract

The *mishnayot* are structured in a particular order. Note how the Mishnah progresses thematically.

Mishnah 2: The origin of the shofar

Mishnah 3-5: The appearance of the shofar

Mishnah 6: The physical shofar – does it have to be a single unit?

Mishnah 7a: The sound of the shofar – objective
(authentic sound or echo?)

Mishnah 7b: The sound of the shofar – subjective
(the question of concentration)

Through this simple breakdown, we can identify the journey that the Mishnah takes us through. We begin with the physical, and we end with the ephemeral. Note how the *mishnayot* begin with the origins of the shofar, then progress to its physical appearance and its physical integrity. Our attention then shifts higher, away from the physical object that is the shofar, to its sound, and the degree to which that sound is heard with accuracy. But the Mishnah progresses further to a higher level, to the effect that the shofar sound has upon the listener and the degree to which the listener is connecting with the sound. The Mishnah raises the question: Is the listener focusing upon the notes he is hearing? Is he concentrating upon the sound?

All the *mishnayot* are attempting to determine and circumscribe the correct and valid performance of *tekiat shofar;* however, there is a progression. It is a movement from the concrete to the abstract, from the objective to the subjective. This is the way that the Mishnah orders the *perek*.

Now, upon the backdrop of this analysis, we may be able to understand Mishnah 8. We read Mishnah 7 and we develop an understanding that one must have a certain "*kavanah*" in order to fulfill the mitzvah of shofar. At a simple level, we can see this mental focus as a basic need for the fulfillment of any mitzvah. But especially with shofar, which is performed by somebody else, the person hearing the shofar must be aware that the sounds he is hearing are indeed a shofar, and that through the hearing of these shofar sounds he will be fulfilling a Torah obligation. Indeed, this is how the Mishnah should be perceived.

War in the Balance

Mishnah 8, however, takes things further. It gives us an image of a nation at war. Israel, an untrained slave army, faces a formidable foe – Amalek. What is the key to their success? It is the focus that they have. If they focus their minds upon God and their commitment to Him, then they win. If they lose sight of God, then the tables turn and they begin to flounder. *Kavanah* is the key. But here *kavanah* is not the technical awareness of obligation or the understanding that the sounds are those of the shofar. Rather, the *kavanah* here is an orientation of commitment and subjugation to God, a realization that when the future lies in the balance, our success relies upon God.

This brings us full circle to our opening image of Sisera's mother. Here again, everything is up for grabs. The future is unknown and undetermined. What will be the deciding factor as to which way the war will go?

In our Mishnah, the deciding factor is whether the nation will have their minds fixated upon God. Where will their *kavanah* be?

The Missing Piece

Maybe this Mishnah provides the missing piece in the puzzle which is shofar. The Mishnah has discussed the physical attributes of the shofar, and its sound. But how does that sound produce an effect of *"Zikaron"* before God? How does the shofar connect with God at all?

Our Mishnah presents a classic scene. There are three "actors," three players: 1. Moses, 2. The people, and 3. God. The people need saving. Their future existence lies in the balance. By Moses' symbolic raising of hands, they are directed to connect their hearts to God. This brings them sure success.

In our shuls there are also three "actors": 1. The *Ba'al Tokea* (shofar blower), 2. The people, the congregation, and 3. God. The imagery is totally parallel. The people's future

lies in the balance, undetermined at this point. The people stand in shul on *Yom HaDin* in need of a future of life and prosperity. God is the key to their success. How do they achieve this effect though? It is simple. The *Ba'al Tokea,* by virtue of his shofar, directs the people's minds and hearts to God. If this is effective, the people are saved.

I even feel that the visual imagery is similar. Moses on a mountain, above everyone, but surrounded by them, holding up his hands. And the *Ba'al Tokea*, on the *bima* in shul, a little above everyone, but surrounded by them, directing the hearts of the community towards heaven.

In Summary

We have presented two images of the shofar. One represents the problem. The other gives a direction for a solution.

The shofar as pictured in the image of Sisera's mother represents the desperation and tension that pervades in a situation in which "the books of life and death are open" before God. Where our future is unknown, an intense feeling of trepidation holds sway.

Our second image is the understanding of the imagery of Moshe in the war of Amalek and its relationship to shofar. With this understanding, we can see the shofar as a compass, directing our hearts and minds, our heartfelt prayers and our desperate pleas, heavenwards to God, directly. In this image, a certain reassurance prevails, whereby we feel that if only we can hold our focus, if only the shofar will direct our minds, then we are certain that the outcome will be a positive one that we will emerge from the uncertainty to a future of life and progress.

In conclusion, let us only pray that uncertainty will herald life and that our current confusion will lead to peace. May the shofar guide us towards true prayer, and may God hear our prayers.

Self-Deception as a Factor in *Teshuba*

Rabbi Ezra Labaton

One easily can make the argument that *teshuba* is the most complex concept in our sacred literature. There are many dimensions, aspects and issues that have to be raised in discussing the notion of *teshuba*. We will raise some of these issues before honing in on the factor of self-deception and the role it may play in the dynamics of the *teshuba* process.

Outwardly and at first glance, the process of *teshuba* is simple. A person sins, feels the pangs of guilt, is racked by self doubt to the depths of his soul and resolves to engage in the process known as *teshuba* – repentance, or more precisely, return to the proper way. Sin, guilt, confession, and resolve are the building blocks of the *teshuba* concept.

Yet, we are perplexed. The sinner has engaged in *teshuba* – has "returned" – and is now a completely different person. Should we truly forgive him? Indeed, yes. He is no longer that sinful, evil person who arrogantly defied the will of the Almighty. The sinner is fully transformed, reborn and is now another person.

Given this transformation, should we still prosecute the child abuser? The murderer? *Teshuba* says no, while Justice demands its due. *Teshuba* challenges the demands of justice: "Whom are you prosecuting? Whom are you putting in jail? You are accusing the wrong person. This is not the same person who committed the sin/crime. That person was here yesterday but this is someone else - a new person." Justice, no doubt, responds, that the sinner's *teshuba* was not sincere. It's a game that he is playing. The sinful soul knows the consequences of a guilty verdict and knows that forgiveness is his – with *teshuba*. "The sinful soul shall die" (הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחֹטֵאת הִיא תָּמוּת, Ezek. 18:4) is the just solution to this scenario. A sin/crime was committed –

a price must be paid. Justice further argues that even if the *teshuba* was sincere, the repentant person must still pay the price. The scales of Justice must be balanced; punishment must follow transgression.

The above dialogue suggests three difficult questions. A) If a sinner/criminal does *teshuba*, should he be forgiven with no further consequences? B) If so, is this Justice? C) How do we know the so-called *teshuba* was sincere? None of us would want to see, nor want to bear the consequence of setting an insincere murderous person free. Without attempting to address all aspects of these questions, let's analyze.

Though there are many dimensions to the concept of *teshuba*, we can minimally point to two aspects as significant. A) A sinful deed was committed. B) The attitude of the transgressor towards this deed and future deeds. Regarding the deed, can the past be changed? No, it cannot. The past is over and done with – a closed book. All that can be done is for the sinner to resolve never to repeat the evil deed. *Teshuba*, however, demands more. There seems to be a psychological component that has to be considered as part of the *teshuba* process. *HaRambam*, in his classic work on *teshuba* (*Mishneh Torah,* Laws of Repentance), states that we need: A) הַכָּרָה– awareness that a sin has been committed; B) וִדּוּי – confession/verbalization of the transgression; C) חֲרָטָה - regret over the past deed; D) עֲזִיבָה - abandonment of the sinful deed; E) קַבָּלָה עַל הֶעָתִיד – resolution never to repeat. Regret and resolution are psychological categories that don't invoke the deed, but relate to the attitude of the sinner towards the deed. Though one cannot change the past, his attitude towards the past deed can change. The sinner must feel disgust, and more, towards his (former) sinful ways. If the (former) sinful soul does not feel this disgust, was his *teshuba* sincere? Is the process complete? How are we to view the sinner who resolves sincerely to never repeat the deed – and indeed we

are convinced that he won't– but cannot bring himself to see his past behavior with disgust? The child pornography in which he engaged brought much delight! He simply cannot bring himself to that point of necessary disgust with himself. Do we accept this penitent person as a *Ba'al Teshuba*? Rambam seems to say no. To achieve the honorific title of *Ba'al Teshuba*, the Rambam demands more. One must engage in all of the above, including sincere regret over the past deed. Upon reflection, we find that *teshuba* is not only about the deed, but involves a psychological dimension as well.

Let's further complicate the matter. The most nuanced concept in all of psychology must be "self-deception." Although difficult to define precisely, we could probably all agree that a self-deceiving person is one who "knows" – on some level – that the deed is wrong but convinces himself that it's right. And indeed the "sinner" really believes in the integrity and honesty of his rationalization. The dieter knows that the chocolate cake is disastrous to his diet, knows that he shouldn't engage in eating "the whole thing." But he tells himself that eating the cake would give him enough energy to continue his diet! And he completely, sincerely buys into this rationalization. He is convinced. The smoker convinces himself– "really" – that smoking is good for him – because it calms his nerves. But when caught, he shamefully tries to explain away his indiscretion. The slum lord rationalizes his corrupt practice of building with sub-code materials with the notion that he will eventually be able to build a hospital that will save lives. (Would your synagogue accept his donation – ours didn't.) Often, the rationalizer sees his deed as righteous – benefitting mankind in some wonderful way. The self-deceiver always believes in the righteousness of his cause. He has convinced himself that this is so.

The difficult lot of the self-deceiver expresses itself in the following dilemma: How can he do *teshuba*, if he

doesn't even realize that he has transgressed? He has deceived himself into thinking that his transgression is completely allowed. That is, on some level, he really knows that it was a wrongful, horrendous, inappropriate deed - that the chocolate cake, cigarette, and sub-code materials were all wrong – but that he is allowed to play by a different set of rules. He has convinced himself that the deed is acceptable – forever Kosher. Self-deception is that powerful – the forbidden is permitted. The mirror image of the self-deceiver is picture perfect.

To clarify this nuanced concept, certain biblical and Talmudic models would be helpful. Remember, the evil sinner who knows he did wrong does not qualify as a self-deceiver. It is only the person who convinces himself that the wrong is right who can enlighten, or at least help us understand, this dimension of *teshuba*.

Adam HaRishon transgressed. Does he know he did wrong? Beresheet 3:8, 10 indicate that he hid because he was afraid/ashamed of his wrongful deed. Does he try to escape punishment by "rationalizing" that he should not be held responsible for his transgression? In answering the Divine challenge/question whether he ate, he responds, "The woman that you gave me…." Does Adam really believe that Eve should be held responsible and not he? Or is this a knowing rationalization? Or, does Adam know that he sinned and deceives himself into thinking that really she is responsible? Does he really believe his own (perverted) logic? Has he convinced himself that in fact he should be let off– scot-free?

How about Kayin? He murders, and violates a basic biblical commandment. Does he know this? Beresheet 4:9 indicates that he lies to the Almighty in his attempt to cover up his crime. Kayin obviously knows he is guilty. (How he knows this, at present, is unimportant. Perhaps, attribute it to G-d given conscience or intuitive moral sense.) Does the world's first murderer try to rationalize? Not at all. But

what does the key phrase, "גדול עוני מנשוא" mean? Is it a question or a statement? If we see it as the former, then perhaps Kayin, though not rationalizing, is still saying: Is my sin too great for You, the Master of forgiveness, to forgive? Has Kayin convinced himself – now that he is caught and can't escape responsibility with, "Am I my brother's keeper" – that his sin is not all that terrible and that he warrants a lesser punishment? If, on the other hand, we see this phrase as a declarative, then, indeed, Kayin is stating remorsefully his sin is too great for atonement. Note the Medieval argument between Rashi and Ibn Ezra as to whether Kayin did *teshuba*. Both read the biblical text carefully to see if Kayin is forgiven. It seems to us that both readings are legitimate. This may be a classic case of "intentional ambiguity" – reflecting the very ambiguity of the *teshuba* concept. Kayin realizes that he has sinned, and regrets – or convinces himself – that he sincerely regrets the deed, and therefore, deserves a more lenient sentence. Does his concern for self-preservation expressed in verse 14 – "וְהָיָה כָּל-מֹצְאִי יַהַרְגֵנִי" – enlighten? Ultimately, he who commits the first fratricide is not only not put to death, he is not even a wanderer. He builds a city and names it! It seems that this murderer is granted clemency. Why? Was there *teshuba*? Was the Judge of all the land "convinced," as Kayin convinced himself, that he should not be held fully accountable for his deed? As noted, verse 14 indicates that Kayin is only concerned with escaping the death sentence. Yet, if he really believed in his innocence – or convinced himself somehow that he doesn't deserve this – it would have been appropriate to commute the sentence. If he believes or convinced himself that he didn't deserve to wander the face of the earth on death row, then we understand why this sentence was not fully carried out. Again, the psychological trappings of the mind are difficult to fully fathom. Even a master judge would have a difficult

time with one who self-deceives into thinking that his deed should not be fully punished.

As a final biblical example of the power of self-deception we point to Ahab – the ninth century King of Israel. Ahab covets the vineyard of Nabot. The latter refuses to sell. Ahab is deeply distressed and depressed. Izevel, his wicked wife, plots against Nabot. The deed is done – Nabot is capitally punished on trumped up charges. The vineyard is "legally" confiscated by the Kingdom. Ahab goes down to enjoy his newly acquired piece of real estate. Does he see himself as guilty? Is he ashamed of the deed? Apparently not. He asks no questions. Ahab is happy that Nabot has been killed (murdered) and now he may enjoy the fruits. Yet Eliyahu confronts him with the rhetorical question, "הֲרָצַחְתָּ וְגַם-יָרָשְׁתָּ"- "Have you murdered and now you will inherit?" (1 Kings 21:19). Ahab does not consider himself a murderer. He thinks, "How can I be held responsible? I did nothing wrong. This was the doings of the *Anshe Beliya'al* (wicked people) under the direction of my wicked wife. They plotted– why am I held responsible?" The *Nabi*, however, clearly sees Ahab as the guilty party. He obviously knew of the plot, as Eliyahu's words indicate. Yet, Ahab sees himself as completely innocent. He rationalizes: "Nabot was offered a fair deal for his land. He refused. Denying the king's (my) request is rebellious act, Nabot deserves death for causing the King (me) such grief." We wonder, how can the King fail to see the obvious? What is obvious to the *Nabi* is obvious to all of us. "*Atah Ha'ish*" are the provocative words that come to mind. Is Ahab not simply a victim of his own rationalizing tendencies? Simply, he convinced himself that he who is not directly involved bears no responsibility for the deed. He sees himself as completely innocent. Again, the mind knows how to manipulate itself to escape punishment. Yet, how responsible is Ahab if he is

in fact convinced that he did no wrong? How could he engage in *teshuba* if he sees himself as innocent?

The Talmud, as well, provides a case of such self-deception – or at least as interpreted by Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik. Elisha ben Abuya was a great talmudic sage. He, however, turns from the path of righteousness. There are a number of views in the Talmud as to what caused this tragedy. One view states that Elisha saw the tongue of the great *Meturgeman* (Torah translator) dragged by a pig through the streets of Judea during the Hadrianic persecutions. Elisha couldn't tolerate the sight. "The tongue that spoke pearls of Torah wisdom – Divine Knowledge – should be so treated?" Another view is the more famous one. A father asks his son to climb a ladder and engage in the mitzva of *Shiluaḥ Haken* (sending away the mother bird). Here, the child, respecting his father's wish, is engaged in the mitzvah of Kibud Av Va'em and performs the mitzvah of *Shiluaḥ Haken*. Both mitzvot guarantee long life. The child falls from the ladder and dies. This indicates to Elisha, לֵית דִּין וְלֵית דַּיָּן – "There is no Divine Providence" – no Judge and no Judgment.

The story continues with Elisha's foremost student accompanying his master on Shabbat. They are about to leave *teḥum Shabbat* – the distance one is allowed to travel outside the city's limit without violation – and the Master tells the student to return so that he not violate Shabbat. The student replies, *Ḥazor Bekha* – do *teshuba* and return to your people. Elisha replies that he has heard from the upper world that all can do *teshuba* – except for "the other" (as he is the other). Elisha understood – or convinced himself – that his transgressions were so evil, so far removed from Divine approval, that there was no possibility of *teshuba*. Ordinarily, we conceive of *teshuba* as absolute. No matter how evil the person, how horrifying the deed – sincere *teshuba* absolves the sinner of

wrongdoing. How can we reconcile our view of *teshuba* as absolute with Elisha's view?

Rabbi Soloveitchik sees this as an act of self-deception. Elisha knew that his deeds– all deeds– can be forgiven with *teshuba*. How could so great a sage not know the full power of *teshuba*? Yet, he convinced himself that he was beyond the pale of *teshuba*. Such is the power of the mind. One can even convince oneself, contrary to all biblical and Talmudic messages, that *teshuba* was, for at least one person, an impossibility; self-deception at its best.

Teshuba is never easy. It involves not only the will that should result in a different behavioral action, but the mind as well. The mind has great power over us and could convince us that what we thought to be true is false, and vice-versa. Yesha'ya, the *Nabi*, says it best: "האומרים לרע טוב ולטוב רע" – People can convince themselves of (almost) anything. And once we convince ourselves – or engage in self-deception – how do we escape? How do we atone? How do we engage in *teshuba*? "Surely we are innocent of all wrongdoing!" Or so we have self-convinced. Indeed, the mind must enjoy many such moments during this season of repentance. The mind is able to persuade many who know, on one level or another, that they are guilty of some misdeed, yet convince themselves that they are paragons of righteousness. Complete denial becomes this person's defense mechanism. How can one escape the trap that the mind sets? This is an important question for all of us to ponder on Rosh Hashanah.

All the World's a Wedding[1]

Rabbi Norman Lamm

Each Jewish holiday has its own tone and style, and offers its individual insight into the relationship between Israel and God.

Thus, Passover presents God as the Liberator, and Israel as the newly-emancipated and grateful freemen. Shavuot shows us God as Teacher, and Israel as disciples. On Sukkot we look to God as the great Protector, and Israel as the protected. Yom Kippur shows us God as the merciful Father, and we as his pitied and forgiven children.

What insight does Rosh Hashanah offer into this relationship? Usually we envision God as the awesome and majestic King, and we as His loyal and worshipful subjects. That is true. However, it is not the entire story. It represents only the insight of the first of the three themes of Rosh Hashanah, that of *Malkhuyot*, the celebration of God's royalty or sovereignty over the world. But the second theme, that of *Zikhronot*, which speaks of God's awareness of and concern for humankind, gives us an entirely different insight. Here we see God as the Lover and Israel as the beloved, God as the divine Husband and Israel as the loving wife. Notice, as you recite the words, the marvelous emphasis in the *Zikhronot* passages on the word *ahavah*, love. Even Noah of flood fame, who was a righteous but not necessarily likeable character, is remembered by God *be'ahavah*, in love.

Thus it is that the composer of the *Zikhronot* prayer quotes the famous verse from the Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 2:2):

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[1] This article was written for Rosh Hashanah 1969 (and it was delivered originally at the Center on 01/11/64, Shabbat Va'era; and at Auxiliary Services, Rosh Hashanah 09/69).

כֹּה אָמַר יְקוָק, זָכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּרַיִךְ, אַהֲבַת כְּלוּלֹתָיִךְ– לֶכְתֵּךְ אַחֲרַי בַּמִּדְבָּר, בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא זְרוּעָה.

Thus says the Lord, I remember your youthful devotion, the love of your bridal days, how you followed me through the wilderness, through land unsown.

"The love of bridal days" – a touching and insightful metaphor that characterizes the relationship between Israel and God. This is, indeed, a classical prophetic theme, and one which reaches its highest expression in the words of the Prophet Hosea (Hos. 2:21-22):

וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי לְעוֹלָם; וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי בְּצֶדֶק וּבְמִשְׁפָּט, וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים: וְאֵרַשְׂתִּיךְ לִי, בֶּאֱמוּנָה; וְיָדַעַתְּ, אֶת-יְקוָק.

I will betroth you to Me forever; I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice, in kindness and in mercy. I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.

It is appropriate, therefore, on Rosh Hashanah to speak of the metaphor of God as a loving spouse and Israel as the beloved one. And if we follow through on this metaphor, we find that we can interpret the entire Jewish religious commitment in terms of – a wedding.

That this is so can be seen – though it is far from self-evident – from a remarkable Talmudic passage. The Talmud (*Eruvin 54a*) tells of the Amora Samuel counseling his younger contemporary Rav Yehudah *ḥatof ve'ekhol*, *ḥatof ve'ishti, d'alma d'azlinan mineih ke'hilula dami* – hurry and eat, hurry and drink, for the world we are leaving is like a wedding. What an unusual simile: all the world's a wedding!

What did the Talmud mean by that? According to some commentaries (Rashi and others), Samuel offered some sage and brooding advice: enjoy yourself with legitimate pleasures as long as you can because life is all too short, it is like a *huppah,* which is put up and then quickly put away again; the wedding party doesn't last forever.

There is, of course, much wisdom in that remark. Some of us tend to put off enjoying life's bounties, we begrudge ourselves God's gifts to us. We keep on saving for a rainy day so intensely that we fail to enjoy the sunshine. What the Talmud means, then, is that what the Torah permits us to benefit from, ought to be accepted cheerfully and happily. It is good Jewish doctrine.

However, Samuel's advice still sounds a bit too Epicurean for a Talmudic Sage. I therefore prefer an interpretation by the great Hasidic teacher, Rabbi Jacob Joseph of Polonne, one that goes back to the metaphor of God as Lover and that illuminates not only an obscure passage in the Talmud, but an obscure aspect of our passage through life. All the world's a wedding. At a wedding there is much going on: food is eaten, drink is imbibed, cigars are smoked, toasts are exchanged, there is dancing and music and camaraderie and posing for photographers and enjoying floral arrangements… a great deal of motion and activity. All of it is enjoyable and exciting. However, all of this is meaningful only if there is a groom and a bride and he says to her *harei at mekudeshet li*, "you are hereby betrothed to me." If there should be no *harei at*, if there should be no act of marriage, then all the rest makes no sense; it is a matter of going through grotesque, empty motions. Then the guests have come in vain, the eating is gluttony, the comradeship is irrelevant, the toasting is a meaningless gesture, the dancing is weird. With the *harei at*, everything makes sense; without it, nothing does.

So is all of life. It is filled with all kinds of diverse activities of every description. We work, make money, spend it, socialize, build families, experience joy and sadness, join groups and are active in politics. Does all this make sense? Does it have any meaning? The answer is: the world is *kehilula dami*, like a wedding. If we are conscious, throughout all these activities, of an ultimate purpose, of a goal, then that purpose unifies all our deeds and gives them

meaning and inspiration. Without that purpose, we merely go through motions that are incoherent, dull, and utterly insignificant. We may be expert at our particular individual activities, but yet we remain, from an over-all view, madmen – for the paranoiac, too, is brilliant in individual insights but lacks an integrating factor and a sense of unity in his life.

And what is that ultimate purpose? It is – the same as in a wedding – a marriage formula. Like the formula expressed by groom to bride, *harei at mekudeshet li*, "you are hereby betrothed to me," so the Almighty has betrothed the people of Israel with the word *li*, "to Me": in the words of Hosea, *v'erastikh li le'olam*, "I betroth you to Me forever!" The wedding of God and Israel, the intensely close and loyal relationship that finds its fulfillment through Torah and the Jewish way of mitzvot, is the purpose of all life. And if that purpose exists for us consciously, then all else that we do somehow fits into the picture of a meaningful life. Without it, we have a life that is like a wedding party without a bride and a groom, without a wedding.

It is no exaggeration to say that especially we of the 20th century stand in great need of this teaching that *alma ke'hilula dami*, that life is worth living only if it makes sense, that it makes sense only if there is a purpose, and that the purpose is loyalty to God, the wedding of our talents and substance and destiny with the will of God as taught in Torah. For we moderns have developed as never before the "perfection of means" – science, the exploitation of nature, is a highly refined skill; business, commerce, trade are complicated arts; communication and transportation are effected with consummate speed. We know "how" to do things like never before. The trouble is, we do not always know "why" we are doing them. We have an elaborate technology in which we are so intoxicated with means that are efficient, that we have "forgotten the

ends." Never before have we been able to go so fast; never before have we been so unsure of where it is we want to go. We can land a man on the Moon, but after having done so triumphantly, we begin to wonder what we are doing there in the first place. Proof of this uncertainty of goal, despite the perfection of technique, is the fact that after man landed on the Moon, our country was flooded with all kinds of diverse and sometimes contradictory explanations of why we went there. As Shakespeare said, "Methinks the lady doth protest too much." We simply had the capability and we exploited it – but we did not really know why.

Indeed, all the world's a wedding! – and in our ever-smaller world of this century we have elaborate caterers, fabulous photographers, the most gifted musicians – and we have neglected to inquire whether a wedding is taking place. The Groom is absent, and the *harei at mekudeshet li* and the *v'erastikh li le'olam* are nowhere heard.

It is told of the great Hasidic master, "The Holy Yud," that he accosted a man in the marketplace and asked him to accompany him to the synagogue, and there recite the Psalms and study Torah. The man was honored by the Rabbi's request, but refused, explaining that he was busy making a living. But, the Rabbi asked, what do you need to make money for? Why, of course, answered the man, I have to make money to provide for my children. The Rabbi seemed satisfied with the answer. Some twenty years later, he again accosted a young man and the same conversation ensued. Suddenly the Holy Yud recognized that the young man was the son of the very man with whom he had had an identical conversation two decades earlier. Whereupon the Rabbi raised his eyes to Heaven and said, "Almighty God, when will I meet that man for whom all the generations have labored so strenuously!"

Certainly, we are engaged in frenetic activity, and invent transparently senseless goals, simply postponing from generation to generation the consideration of what we

are doing in life and what our real purpose is on this planet.

That is what Torah and Judaism can and should mean to us, and what in effect does mean to those who are committed and practicing Jews. It is the one element that makes all the rest of life livable. It is the wedding formula that makes all of the motion and the movement sensible. It is the response to God's proposal of, "and I will betroth you to Me." If we hear that divine proposal, and we respond with an appropriate kind of life, then the entire adventure of living is a happy and purposeful one. But, if there is no God, no Torah, no mitzvot, then all our efficiency, all our wealth, all our achievements, are like the macabre dance of an intoxicated guest who dances in a darkened hall where the wedding has been called off.

What, more specifically, is it that Judaism considers the purpose of life? The verses from Hosea, the wedding formula between God and Israel, present us with a three-stage definition of this purpose. They represent a systematic method for the modern Jew to arrive at Jewish purpose in his life, a consummation of the wedding of existence.

The first thing Hosea asks us to do is to respond to God's proposal of, "I will betroth you to Me forever." The emphasis is on "forever." I interpret this as a simple commitment to Jewish survival, regardless of the quality of that survival. I identify myself with those modern Jewish thinkers who have maintained that after Auschwitz, simple survival becomes a great mitzvah, for by saying "Yes" to the perpetuation of the Jewish people, we are saying "No" to Hitler and Stalin and all the anti-Semites. In a world in which our people has been decimated by genocide and threatened by assimilation and intermarriage, the simple desire that we continue our unhampered existence becomes a religious imperative. It is the first step in defining a purpose in life. "Forever."

The second step is, "I will betroth you to Me in right-eousness and in justice, in kindness and in mercy." This

means that, "as Jews," we must approach the problems of life and society with a commitment to the ideals of righteousness and social justice and compassion and pity for the underdog and the disadvantaged. It means that we must not rush, in the irrational panic of feeling threatened, to undo the general traditional Jewish values of humanitarianism and concern for the poor, the wronged, the underprivileged. It means that our espousal of justice and righteousness must not be of the American Civil Liberties Union kind, not of the political liberal, but of the practicing Jew, whose advocacy of these concepts and these attitudes is firmly engrained in his faith and in his tradition.

Finally, the highest and most critical and most vital step: "I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness and you shall know the Lord." Faithfulness for the Jew means the response to God by the performance of mitzvot by the observance of Jewish life in all its respects. It is something we cannot do unless we first "know the Lord." That means that we must betake ourselves to a study of the sources of Jewish tradition and Jewish history – to "Talmud Torah," the study of Torah.

This is the way a Jew in the 20th century can restructure the purpose of his life and find that all of it, in all its manifold aspects, truly makes sense.

Let Rosh Hashanah and the theme of *Zikhronot*, the love-relationship between God and Israel, inspire us to ever greater loyalty to Judaism, so that all else will be touched with grace and endowed with meaning. Through Jewish survival, through Jewish compassion and justice, through Jewish faith, we will achieve a purposeful life.

Then our year, and years without end to follow, will be blessed with *mazal tov*, with good fortune and happiness as befits a joyous wedding. *Ḥatof ve'ekhol, ḥatof veishti*, let us eat and drink and in every way enjoy the bounty of God's goodness to us – but let us never forget that *alma ke'hilula dami*, that all the world's a wedding.

Repentance and Redemption[1]

Nehama Leibowitz

After the chapter of Reproof with its message of dire retribution and the making of the Covenant with its accompanying curses come words of consolation in which are clarified the relationship between Teshuvah (repentance) and Geulah (redemption). Here is the relevant passage (Devarim 30: 1-10):

> And it shall come to pass when all these things befall you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you and you take them to heart amidst the various nations to which the Lord your God has driven you. (1)
>
> And you shall return unto the LORD your God and hearken to His voice according to all I command you this day, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul. (2)
>
> Then the LORD your God will turn your captivity and have compassion upon you and turn and gather you from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. (3)
>
> If any of you that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from there will the LORD your God gather you and from there fetch you. (4)
>
> And the LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. And He will do you good, and multiply you above your fathers. (5)
>
> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart, and the heart of your seed to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you mayest live. (6)

[1] The following was reprinted from Nehama Leibowitz's "Studies in Devarim," *parashiyot Nitzavim-Vayelekh.*

> And the LORD your God will put all these curses upon your enemies, and on them that hate you, that persecute you. (7)
>
> And you shall return and hearken to the voice of the LORD, and do all His commandments, which I command you this day. (8)
>
> And the LORD your God will make you over-abundant in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your land for good: for the LORD will turn again to rejoice over you for good, as He rejoiced over your fathers. (9)
>
> If you shall hearken to the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes, which are written in this book of the law: if you turn unto the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. (10)

Commentators have already drawn attention to the unusual structure and arrangement of this passage. We are not confronted by the normal progressive arrangement of: sin – punishment – repentance – redemption. The motif word "turn" or "return" (Hebrew-*shuv*[1]*)* indicates a reciprocal movement: (2) "you shall return unto the LORD": (3) "Then the LORD shall return": (8) "and you shall return and hearken to the voice of the LORD": (9) "if you shall turn unto the LORD."

We see how this reciprocity recurs, from below to above (i.e. man to God) and from above to below and then again from below to above and above to below. It may well be asked: Which comes first? The return of Israel to their God or the return of God to His people? Is Teshuvah before Geulah or Geulah before Teshuvah?

Arama has observed that the process of redemption is not one single act, a leap from the abyss of sin to the pinnacle of purity. This is not the case, and the Torah describes it otherwise. In his *Akedat Yitzhak,* Arama elaborates on this theme, finding in Isaiah's words on individual repentance the clue to national repentance:

> Isaiah stated: "Let the wicked forsake his path and the iniquitous man his thoughts and return to the LORD." We may ask: Surely if the wicked has forsaken his path, why "return to the LORD?" Surely the forsaking of the wicked path is itself repentance? But there are two stages – the first preliminary movement back to God which is furthered but feebly and with difficulty, but which is sufficient to leave the evil path behind, and the second, achieved after a greater effort, as momentum increases to attain the opposite extreme, as progress is made to draw near to God…

Arama now proceeds to explain our passage dealing with the repentance of the nation, beginning with the darkness of exile. He notes how the passage opens with a demand to the people to return to God:

> They have to make the first step and arouse themselves from the depths of their lethargy and despair. Until they have aroused themselves to the best of their ability "in the land of their enemies", they cannot hope for any encouragement, any redemptive sign from God. If that but small amount of moral initiative is not forthcoming, they will progressively become demoralised altogether. On the other hand, their first step in the right direction is immediately reciprocated, and "the LORD your God will return your captivity."
>
> This redemptive action must be immediately followed by further spurt of repentance "and you shall return and hearken to the voice of the LORD." This second act of repentance will be followed by a further flow of Divine Blessing- redemption: "the LORD will make you over abundant in all the work of your hand." This is to be climaxed by a final and yet stronger spurt of redemption: "if you shall return to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."
>
> Strengthen yourself in your weakness to make a beginning to return "to Him" and hearken to His voice "according to all I commanded you this day, you and

> your children with all your heart and with all your soul." At least, let your hearkening be willing and devoted, even if, at this juncture, while you still suffer under the yoke of the Gentiles, your deeds cannot be perfect: but do your best in the circumstances…
>
> The beginning of Teshuvah is to "bethink yourself among all the nations whither the LORD hath driven you and return to the LORD" – even when you suffer under their heavy yoke, you should bethink yourselves of your spiritual future. If you but open like the eye of a needle, He will open for you like the portals of a hall. "He will turn your captivity, gather you from the uttermost parts of heaven and bring you to land…"

Arama thus describes the first stage of repentance. With his own experience of the inroads made by the Inquisition as the Spanish Expulsion he foresaw how this return of Israel to God would also be followed by a healing of the people's internal wounds, as the rifts between one section and another brought about by the dispersion would be bridged and distant brothers united both physically and spiritually.

Arama thus describes the gradual process of repentance, how it gains momentum and each new stage is passed and aptly finds all this respected in the structure and unusual repetitions of our passage. The first stage is described in verse 2, where the initial spiritual awakening of the heart is alluded to. The whole hearted and whole-souled will is there, but practical deeds are still lacking: "you shall return to the LORD and hearken to His voice…with all your heart and with all your soul." Our passage ends with a description of the final stage of repentance where the return to God is whole hearted and whole-souled in thought and *deed* – "to *keep* his commandments and His statues written in the Torah."

Between these beginning and final stages comes the intervention of the LORD, in redeeming them from the

bondage of exile, since repentance "with all your heart and soul" is inconceivable without the removal of various obstacles.[2] The nations itself cannot redeem itself from all of them single-handed. But God will not lend His helping hand unless the first steps are taken by the nation itself in at least returning to God, in its heart and soul alone. In this connection, Arama cites the dispute between the Talmudic sages as to which comes first: Teshuvah or Geulah.

> Rabbi Nathan stated: Repentance is great since it brings Redemption nearer, as it is stated: "do justice and perform righteousness for my salvation is near and come to pass." R. Eliezer stated: Repentance is great because it follows immediately after Redemption, as it is stated: "And the redeemer shall come to Zion and to those who return from transgression."

Both views, Arama observes, "are the words of the Living God."

According to Rabbi Nathan, Teshuvah must preceed Geulah. According to R. Eliezer, Teshuvah comes only after Geulah and is impossible before that. According to Arama both views can be reconciled, since Teshuvah comes in different stages and requires salvation and a helping hand.

Notes

[1] For details see previous chapter.

[2] The same idea that full repentance is impossible in the unnatural conditions of persecutions and suffering in the Exile is found in Maimonides (Code, Teshuvah 9 and Introduction to Ḥelek) "It is impossible for man to perform the commandments properly when he is sick and famished or thirsty of in time of war or siege. God therefore promised the removal of all these obstacles and that we should enjoy health and tranquility…"

Have No Fear

Rabbi Francis Nataf

Another High Holiday season upon us. Another opportunity slipping away.

As important a place as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur occupy on every Jewish calendar, they are the holidays perhaps least in sync with our zeitgeist. Classically referred to as Days of Awe (*Yamim Noraim*), these days do not suit a generation so unaccustomed to awe and its accompanying fear. Indeed, much of progress has been aimed at understanding phenomena that frighten us. What has become in man's power to control medically, financially, or politically, gives us great emotional comfort.

Fear is certainly not a desirable emotion, but it may be a very useful one. Traditionally, those afraid of Divine retribution would be effectively motivated by the current holiday season to mend their ways. In Dr. Haym Soloveitchik's seminal article, "Rupture and Reconstruction," he recalls a few generations ago the trembling of the average Jew during this season– something we are unable to experience anywhere in our own time. This issue is not cognitive but emotional; believing in Divine retribution is not the same as fearing it. Today this fear belongs to the very few, who have managed to isolate their personalities from the culture at large. What about the rest of us: how do we make the Days of Awe real?

A re-examination of Divine retribution is in order. In one of his most brilliant essays, "Ben Sorer u'Moreh" (*Collected Writings*, vol. VII), Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch addresses the tricky theological problem of God's punishing children for the sins of their parents. He points out that the Torah is simply presenting empirical consequences of behavior. In other words, just as a polluted atmosphere has measurable negative impact on our bodies,

a polluted parental environment has measurable negative impact on our children. Similarly, whenever the Torah warns of consequences to moral depravity, it doesn't mean that God will "decide" to punish us in His anger. Rather, it is saying that all actions have natural, albeit not always immediately apparent, consequences. The Torah thus posits that all vice, no matter how small, will lead to some level of self-destruction in the long run.

We spend so much of our time rationally planning our careers, finances and purchases. This is done by looking at empirical evidence of the results of each possible choice. I choose to buy car X because it offers me the most desired results at the minimal possible cost. Although buying a car is generally not a choice between a good one and a bad one but rather a question of "how" good a car, the difference between a good car and a better car may end up being just the feature that could save our life in the event of an accident. Being aware of this, we try to be careful and not make a mistake.

When it comes to moral choices, we rarely give them the same type of serious thought we give to our commercial choices. We generally think that we are ok, but what we don't pay attention to is "how" ok. Since the causes may not be so clearly determined, it is quite easy to shrug our shoulders at some of the misfortunes that befall us. It is easy to look elsewhere for the blame since we do not see any major flaw in ourselves. The counter productivity of such an approach is self-evident. How often do we see marriages souring due to lack of the extra effort often needed in such a demanding relationship? For the reader who is more frightened by the consequences of his car purchase, the Talmud reminds us that a bad marriage is worse than death.

While some may want to view honesty, kindness and other moral issues as radically different from buying a car, it all comes down to self-interest. Along with many of the

modern philosophers, Judaism views man as primarily motivated by self-interest. This is viewed as neither good nor bad, but simply true. Self-interest is what rationally determines which car we purchase and should also rationally determine our moral choices.

That poor decisions and inadequate treatment of character flaws lead to disaster need not be a modern observation. Indeed, this is the stuff of classical Greek tragedy. While all cultures that value reason should admit the critical nature of a person's actions, 21st-century Western man seems to be too sheltered to accept any harsh reality.

When gripped by desire for sin, the Talmud advises us to contemplate our own death. This was patently easier when the mortality rate was so much higher and life expectation so much lower. While poverty, serious illness and death are less common than in the past, they have in no way disappeared– we simply have much less exposure to such things. Our sanitized society isolates most things unpleasant and makes them more removed from our own experience. Presumably to give better medical care, the critically sick and aged are tucked away in institutions. Our large urban and suburban neighborhoods are bastions of socio-economic segregation. As comfort levels become higher and higher, we also make conscious efforts not to expose ourselves or our children to anything that will make us unhappy. That being the case, it is difficult to internalize that bad things could happen to us.

Fear can be rational and can fit into our Weltanschauung. More difficult, however, is internalizing even this more cerebral fear. Perhaps we should spend these days going through lung cancer and AIDS wards just to bring home the point that our actions can cause our own demise. If this makes us too uncomfortable, we may well want to focus on the reason for that discomfort.

Before we go to pray on the High Holidays, we need to realize that our futures are largely in our control, and the ten days starting on the first of Tishri is the time to actualize that control. A little fear may well be in order.

The Significance of Yom Kippur

Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

What is the essential significance of Yom Kippur– especially since it doesn't seem to fit within the general universal theme of our Fall festivals? After all, the Jewish calendar is divided into two holiday periods: The Spring Passover- Shavuot season, which highlights the birth of the Jewish nation and our religio-legal heritage of Torah, and the Fall Rosh Hashanah- Yom Kippur- Sukkot season, which emphasizes the creation of the world and the sacred character of all of nature, as well as that of the seventy Gentile nations. But Yom Kippur, the very center-piece of this period, right in-between the Rosh Hashanah vision of "perfecting the world under the Kingship of God" and the Sukkot waving of the four species of nature's bounty in all directions of the compass, seems to focus in on the very nationalistic purification of Israel and our narrowly religious rituals of the Holy Temple sacrifice. Why does Yom Kippur shift our attention from universalism to particularism?

I believe that the answer is to be found in the curious Torah reading of Rosh Hashanah, the very beginning of our Festival period. One would expect us to celebrate the anniversary of the creation of the world by publicly reading the first verses of Genesis, which majestically describe the first primordial week of creation. Indeed, the yearly cycle of Torah portion is nearing its end anyway with the advent of Rosh Hashanah, so that it would be in complete accord with the pattern of the portions to celebrate our New Year by intoning, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Instead we turn to the birth of Isaac on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, and the binding of Isaac on the second. Why? What's the connection?

I believe that the Jewish message is most profound. The vision of Rosh Hashanah is that we must perfect the imperfect (Latin, incomplete) world created by God, that we must accept responsibility as God's partners to "cause all the wicked of the earth to turn to ethical monotheism." But one begins perfecting the world by perfecting oneself; one recreates the world by creating one's private world, one's family.

Yes, Rosh Hashanah invokes the "macro" by praying for the time when "every creature will know that You (the God of love and compassion) created it, and every formed being will understand that you formed it." But the "macro" is comprised of many "micros"; recreate the world by recreating yourself, redirect the world by redirecting your family– towards the Godly ideals of loving-Kindness, truth and peace. Indeed, on this very Sabbath of Repentance we invoke the figure of Elijah the Prophet, herald of redemption, declaring that his most awesome challenge and greatest accomplishment will be "to turn the hearts of the parents to the children and the hearts of the children to the parents." If the Chinese taught that the longest march begins with the first mile, Rosh Hashanah- Judaism teaches that perfection of world begins with perfection of one specific family!

It is told that a devoted disciple of Rav Yisrael Salanter, founder of the Ethicist (Mussar) Movement in Judaism, told his teacher of his desire to leave Lithuania and spread the ideals of perfecting one's ethical characteristics to the Jewish community in Berlin. "Are all of the people so perfect in our town of Salant that you can afford to go off to Germany? And are the people on your block so perfect that you can afford to teach in another part of town? Are the members of your family so deeply involved with ethicism that you can begin to preach to strangers? Are you yourself so morally and ethically developed that you can allow yourself to motivate others?" The message is

hopefully indubitably clear: universal perfection must begin with personal and familial re-creation.

The second day's Torah reading, the binding of Isaac, continues this theme. Mount Moriah, the scene of the binding, is our Temple Mount, the most sacred locus in the Jewish tradition. Mount Moriah, even more than Mount Sinai. Although the Torah was given on Mount Sinai, Moses ascended that mountain alone; Abraham ascended Mount Moriah with his son Isaac, making it a familial rather than an individual experience. Moreover, God gave the Israelites the gift of Torah on Mount Sinai; Abraham and Isaac were willing to present God with a sacrifice on Mount Moriah. There can be no re-creation, there can be no perfection, without the willingness to sacrifice!

Rosh Hashanah provides the universal vision, and its Torah reading explains the steps we must take to get there: sacrificially dedicating oneself and one's family to the ideals of ethical monotheism.

Yom Kippur is the Rosh Hashanah Torah reading applied in practice. The individual retreats for a twenty-four-hour period from the maelstrom– and majestic macrocosm– of the world around him. He understands that often by retreating we advance, by stepping back we step forward. He devotes a complete day to personal introspection and self-creation. As God revealed to Abraham and Isaac, when He demanded that Abraham not trick his son or do him any harm, the most profound sacrifice lies in living for God rather than in dying by His name. And so we fast on Yom Kippur, mindful that by so doing we all become veritable Isaacs, in accordance with the words of Rav Sheshet after a fast:

> Master of the Universe, at the time of the Holy Temple, a sinner would bring a sacrifice by offering on the altar the fat and blood of the animal, and would be forgiven. Now I have fasted, and some of my fat and blood have been offered up to You. May this be accepted as though

I had offered myself before You on the Temple Altar. Please accept me" (B. T. *Berakhot* 17a).

Hopefully, Yom Kippur enables the individual to re-create himself in dedication to God's will. As the day nears, we read the Book of Jonah– reminding us of our obligation to then reach out to the world, even to our enemies like Assyria, and teach them God's will. And if the Day of Forgiveness has succeeded, we are ready to confront the world of nature and nations on the festival of Sukkot, prepared to sanctify every aspect of creation and cosmos to the glory of the God of love and peace.

The Sacrificial Crisis[1]

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

"On this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins" (Lev. 16: 30).

On the holiest day of the year, the Day of Atonement, the holiest of people, the High Priest, entered the holiest of places, the Holy of Holies, and made atonement for all Israel. It was a moment on which the fate of Israel depended. For their destiny depended on G-d; and G-d in turn sought their obedience. Yet a sinless nation is inconceivable. That would be a nation of angels, not women and men. So a people needs rituals of collective repentance and remorse, times at which it asks G-d for forgiveness. That is what the Day of Atonement was when the Temple stood.

It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for us to understand the crisis represented by the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in the year 70 CE. It was, to be sure, a military and political disaster. That, we have no difficulty in imagining. But it was also a spiritual catastrophe. Judaism and the Jewish people survived. We would not be here otherwise. But that survival was by no means assured at the time. How does a nation, defined in terms of a religion, centered on the Temple and its sacrifices, live on after the loss of its most basic institutions? That is the question of questions.

The destruction of the First Temple was no less tragic. But in those days, Israel had prophets – men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel – who gave the people hope. There were no such prophets in the first century CE. To the contrary, from the time of the Maccabees onwards, prophecy gave way to

[1] The following article was taken from Rabbi Jonathan Sack's weekly parasha studies: *Covenant and Conversation - Ahare Mot-Kedoshim* 5766.

apocalypse: visions of the end of days far removed from the normal course of history. The prophets, despite the grandeur of their visions, were for the most part political realists. The apocalyptic visionaries were not. They envisaged a metaphysical transformation. The cosmos would be convulsed by violent confrontation. There would be a massive final battle between the forces of good and evil. As one of the Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Qumran put it: "the heavenly host will give forth in great voice, the foundations of the world will be shaken, and a war of the mighty ones of the heavens will spread throughout the world."

People foresaw disaster. Josephus (*The Jewish War*) tells us about one of them. Four years before the war against Rome, "at a time of exceptional peace and prosperity", a certain Jeshua son of Ananias, "a very ordinary yokel," began to cry "Woe to Jerusalem" wherever he went. People beat him; the authorities had him sentenced to corporal punishment; yet he continued his lament undaunted: "All the time till the war broke out he never approached another citizen or was seen in conversation, but daily as if he had learned a prayer by heart he recited his lament: 'Woe to Jerusalem'… For seven years and five months he went on ceaselessly, his voice as strong as ever and his vigour unabated,"[2] until he was killed by a rock flung by a Roman engine during the siege.

What does a nation do in the wake of "sacrificial crisis," the loss of its rituals of atonement? We are in a position to trace this precisely, because of the exceptionally candid confession of one who chose another way, Paul of Tarsus, the first and greatest theologian of Christianity.

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[2] G.A. Williamson's translation of Josephus' *The Jewish War* (pp. 327-8, Penguin Classics, 1959).

Paul tells us that he was obsessed by guilt. He said of himself that he was "sold as a slave to sin." The good he sought to do, he failed to do. The sin he sought to avoid, he committed. The very fact that he was commanded to do something provoked in him the opposite reaction, an overwhelming desire to do it. So powerful was this antinomian streak within him that it led him to conceive of a religion without commands at all – quite unlike the sermon on the mount, in which the founder of Christianity said: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets… I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven…"

Paul famously attributed the sinful nature of humanity to the first sin of the first human being, Adam. This sin was lifted by the death of the Messiah. Heaven itself had sacrificed the son of G-d to atone for the sin of man. G-d became the High Priest, and His son the sacrifice.

Paul lived and taught shortly before the destruction of the Second Temple, but his teaching – like that of the members of the Qumran sect and Josephus' visionary Jeshua – fully anticipated that catastrophe and constituted a pre-emptive response to it. What would happen when there were no more physical sacrifices to atone for the guilt of the nation? In their place, for Paul, would come the metaphysical sacrifice of the son-of-G-d. In Paul, sacrifice is transcendentalized, turned from an event in time and space to one beyond time and space, operative always.

Judaism could not take this route, for many reasons. First, because the message of the binding of Isaac (Genesis 22) is that G-d does not allow us (let alone Him) to sacrifice sons. Second, because not one, but all members of the people of the covenant are sons or daughters of G-d:

"My child, My firstborn, Israel" (Exodus 4: 22). Third, because despite the many messianic movements to which it has given rise, the Jewish answer to the question, "Has the Messiah come?" is always, "Not yet." While there is still violence and injustice in the world, we cannot accept the consolation of believing that we live in a post-messianic age.

Only against this background can we appreciate the astonishing leap implicit in the famous statement of Rabbi Akiva (*b. Yoma* 85b):

> Happy are you, Israel. Who is it before whom you are purified and who purifies you? Your Father in heaven. As it is said: And I will sprinkle clean water upon you and you shall be clean. And it further says: You hope of Israel, the Lord. Just as a fountain purifies the impure, so does the Holy One, blessed be He, purify Israel.

According to Rabbi Akiva specifically, and rabbinic thought generally, in the absence of a Temple, a High Priest and sacrifices, all we need to do is repent, to do teshuvah, to acknowledge our sins, to commit ourselves not to repeat them in the future, and to ask G-d to forgive us. Nothing else is required, not a Temple, not a priest, and not a sacrifice. G-d Himself purifies us. There is no need for an intermediary. What Christianity transcendentalized, Judaism democratized. As the Yiddish dramatist S. Ansky put it: Where there is true turning to G-d, every person becomes a priest, every prayer a sacrifice, every day a Day of Atonement and every place a Holy of Holies.

This really was the parting of the ways between Judaism and Christianity. At stake were two quite different ways of understanding the human person, the nature of sin, the concept of guilt and its atonement, and the mediated or unmediated relationship between us and G-d. Judaism could not accept the concept of "original sin" since Jeremiah and Ezekiel had taught, six centuries before the

birth of Christianity, that sin is not transferred across the generations. Nor did it need a metaphysical substitute for sacrifice, believing as it did in the words of the Psalmist (Ps. 51: 17): "The sacrifices of G-d are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O G-d, you will not despise." We are all sons or daughters of G-d, who is close to all who call Him in truth. That is how one of the greatest tragedies to hit the Jewish people led to an unprecedented closeness between G-d and us, unmediated by a High Priest, unaccompanied by any sacrifice, achieved by nothing more or less than turning to G-d with all our heart, asking for forgiveness and trusting in His love.

Israel's Repentance[1]

(Devarim 30: 1-10)

Rav Elchanan Samet

The Covenant of Devarim

Parashat Nitzavim is always read on the last Shabbat of the year, and the ten verses with which chapter 30 opens – generally called *parashat ha-teshuvah*, the section on repentance – thus serve to prepare us for the days of judgment and atonement that await us. Let us examine this parasha more closely.

Parashat ha-teshuvah depicts Israel's future return to God and God's return to them. This parasha is a continuation and conclusion of the lengthy section of "the blessing and the curse" enumerated previously in parashat Ki-Tavo, as is easily demonstrated by a linguistic comparison between them. Together, they form "the covenant of *Sefer Devarim*."

On the basis of a close analysis of the differences between the "blessings and curses" in *Sefer Vayikra* (*parashat Bechukkotai*) and in *Sefer Devarim*, the Ramban (on Vayikra 26:16) concludes that the curses in *parashat Bechukkotai* refer to the first exile (to Babylonia), while "the covenant in *Mishneh Torah* (*Sefer Devarim*) hints at our present exile and the redemption from it." Regarding the covenant in our *Sefer*, he continues as follows:

> At first glance, it seems that there is no hint at an end or conclusion, and that no redemption is promised; it is dependent solely on *teshuvah*... The redemption in this second covenant is a more complete and elevated redemption than the others... and the things promised

[1] The following was translated by Kaeren Fish, and is available in Hebrew online at www.daat.ac.il/daat/tanach/samet/d8-2.htm.

for the future redemption are a more complete promise than all the visions of Daniel.

Precondition or Promise?

Let us now closely analyze the first three verses of chapter 30. These contain a clause of precondition and a clause of result, but the distinction between them is unclear.

The syntax of the Torah gives rise to certain instances where only exegetical considerations, based on the content of the verses, can aid us in deciding whether a certain clause is to be understood as the condition or as the result. A sentence beginning with the letter *vav* can be interpreted either way. Such is the case in our instance. Let us examine the various interpretive possibilities and their ramifications.

> **I. Condition:** "And it shall happen when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have given before you;
>
> **Result:** You shall recall them to your heart among all the nations where God has driven you... And you shall return to Hashem your God and listen to His voice, and God will return your captivity and have mercy on you..."

According to this analysis, the condition defines the time frame for the consequence. But the consequence itself can be understood in two different ways:

i. "And you shall recall them to your heart," "and you shall return to God" – this is a prophetical promise as to what will occur at that time. The Rambam (*Hil. Teshuvah* 7:5) seems to adopt this understanding.

ii. "And you shall recall them," "and you shall return" – this is a commandment, and it becomes obligatory in exile, when the blessings and curses have been realized. This is the Ramban's understanding.

II. Condition: "And it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse... and you recall them to your heart... and you shall return to Hashem your God and listen to His voice..."

Consequence: "Then Hashem your God will return your captivity and have mercy on you, and come back and gather you from among all the nations..."

According to this analysis, the condition defines both the time-frame and the circumstances for the consequence: only if in exile you engage in soul-searching and then return to God and listen to Him, **then** you will merit redemption from that exile. This would seem to reflect the understanding of the Ibn Ezra (beginning of chapter 30).

The variety of interpretive possibilities for these verses, and their ramifications concerning the *teshuvah* of *Am Yisrael* in exile – whether it be a promise or a mitzvah – are quite confusing. It seems that this characteristic of biblical style, which sometimes blurs the distinction between a conditional clause and a consequent one, is employed intentionally in order to create different exegetical possibilities and intentional equivocations. (This applies in particular in places where there is a string of verbs, some of which represent the consequences of preceding ones, while simultaneously serving as preconditions for subsequent ones.)

There is no qualitative contradiction between these two readings: it may be that the *teshuvah* of Israel in exile is a mitzvah, and at the same time that the fulfillment of this mitzvah represents a precondition for their redemption. It may even be that the *teshuvah* of Israel in exile is a promise, but only after this promise is fulfilled can the process of redemption and the ingathering of the exiles begin, and therefore this promise is a precondition for the fulfillment of the other promise.

It appears, therefore, that all the possibilities raised by the various commentators quoted above are indeed included in these verses, and that the verses are intentionally formulated in such a way as to allow for different readings among which some compromise should be sought.

Israel's Return and God's Return

This stylistic feature continues to characterize *parashat ha-teshuvah* up until just before the end. The parasha contains a series of verbs beginning with the letter *vav* which is simultaneously both conversive (changing the tense of the verb from past into future) and also conjunctive (adding each new verb onto those that precede it). Thus each action described in this parasha is both the consequence of its preceding one and the condition for the subsequent one. In this way the Torah describes two processes, which promote one another and are interdependent: a human act – the *teshuvah* of Israel, and a Divine act – their redemption.

Let us present *parashat ha-teshuvah* in such a way as to highlight the distinction between the human act of *teshuvah* and the Divine act of redemption, and at the same time to highlight the alternating order of verbs and the order of their connection with one another. We will assign a capital letter to each section (section A, section B, etc.), and will denote human action by (i) and divine action by (ii).

> "And it will be when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I give before you,
>
> (i) A. And you **recall** them to your hearts among all the nations where Hashem your God has driven you,
>
> And you **return** to Hashem your God and listen to His voice in all that I command you this day, you and your children, with all your hearts and with all your souls,

(ii) B. Then God will **return** your captivity and have mercy on you, and **He will come back** and gather you from all the nations where Hashem your God has dispersed you.

Even if your outcasts are at the ends of the heavens, from there Hashem your God will gather you and from there He will take you, and Hashem your God will bring you to the land which your forefathers possessed, and you shall possess it, and He will perform good for you and multiply you more than your fathers.

(i) C. And Hashem your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants to love Hashem your God with all your hearts and with all your souls, in order that you may live.

(ii) D. And Hashem your God will place all these curses upon your enemies and upon those who hate you, who have persecuted you.

(i) E. And you will **return** and obey the voice of God and perform all His mitzvoth, which I command you today.

(ii) F. And Hashem your God will make plentiful all your endeavors; the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your animals and the fruit of the land – for the good, for God **will again** (lit., return to) rejoice over you for good, as He rejoiced over your fathers.

(i) G. If you will listen to the voice of Hashem your God, to observe His mitzvot and statutes written in this book of the Torah, (and) if you will return to Hashem your God with all your hearts and with all your souls."

Understanding the Progression

Let us now try to understand the development of this dual process described in *parashat ha-teshuvah*, stage by

stage, with the assistance of the above table. Firstly, let us look at the general structure of the parasha. It begins with a sort of introduction, containing the only clause that we can say with certainty is a conditional one: "And it will be when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse..." This lays the groundwork for all that follows: the realization of the blessing and – more importantly – the curse will give rise to the process of Israel's *teshuvah* in exile, while the process of their redemption is aimed at nullifying the curse and bringing back the blessing.

Subsequently, *parashat ha-teshuvah* continually alternates between Israel's *teshuvah* towards God and their redemption by God's hand, because these two processes are interdependent. Note that the process described in the parasha begins and ends with Israel's *teshuvah*, denoted by (i).

The root "sh-u-v" (return) is repeated seven times in the parasha and serves as a leading word. Four of these seven appearances are to be found in the "*teshuvah*" section ('i'), while three occur in the "redemption" section ('ii'). Nevertheless, the use of a common root for the description of these two processes indicates their reciprocity: Israel returns to God, and God returns to Israel and returns them to His land – as summarized by the prophet Malakhi: "**Return** to Me and **I shall return** to you."

Another leading word in the parasha is God's name, which appears 14 times (of which 12 are in the form of "Hashem your God"). Here, interestingly, there is equality between the two halves.

Let us now look at each stage of the process independently as well as in context:

Section A: The starting point for the process is Israel's *teshuvah* in exile. Whether this *teshuvah* is defined as a mitzvah or as a divine promise, it nevertheless simultaneously serves as the precondition for the beginning of the process of redemption in stage B.

The root "sh-u-v" appears twice here, but with different meanings. We first encounter it in the causative case – "And you shall recall it to your hearts," meaning that "You shall take it to heart, to observe with attention." But the object of the sentence is absent: what is it that we are to recall to our hearts? The answer is to be found in the "introduction" to the parasha: you shall take to heart that all the things concerning which you were forewarned– the blessing and the curse– have come upon you. This observation of the historical fate of Israel gives rise to the conclusion that, as we say in our prayers, "Because of our sins we were exiled from our country." This national soul-searching then brings about the second appearance of the root "sh-u-v," namely, Israel's *teshuvah*: "And **you shall return to** Hashem your God and listen to His voice... **you and your children**, with all your hearts and with all your souls."

Section B: Although section A and section B each contain two appearances of the root "sh-u-v," seeming to set up an equivalence, in truth God's movement towards Israel exceeds their movement towards Him. "Open for Me one opening of *teshuvah* as small as the eye of a needle, and I will open for you openings through which entire wagons will enter" (*Shir Ha-Shirim Rabba* 5:3). While only the second verb in section A expresses a movement of Israel towards God, in section B both verbs express a movement of God towards Israel. There are several additional verbs, which express this even more strongly: "He will have mercy on you... He will gather you up... He will take you... He will bring you... He will perform good for you and multiply you." The Divine action for the benefit of Israel in section B is composed of many stages, encompassing a vast scope of time and space. This action includes the ingathering of **all** the exiles - from every place to which they have been dispersed, bringing them to Eretz

Yisrael, causing them to possess the land and multiplying them there for the good.

The superiority of B over A is expressed quantitatively in the number of verses and the number of words (38 vs. 27), as well as in the number of times that God's name is repeated (4 vs. 2).

Section C: The inclusion of part C in section 'i' of the parasha at first seems incorrect: it appears to be a direct continuation of the Divine action towards Israel that was described in part B. But the content of this part justifies its placement here: God's action towards Israel here is not in the sphere of their physical redemption (as it was in part B), but rather in the spiritual realm. "Circumcision of the heart" means removal of the covering that seals it; it is a metaphor for spiritual freedom to open the heart to positive spiritual action. This action is "to love Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Clearly, love of God is an action undertaken by Israel of their own free will, and therefore this part properly belongs in the half of the parasha that describes Israel's *teshuvah*. The vocabulary of this part likewise indicates this: "Your hearts and the hearts of your children" corresponds to what was said in part A – "you and your children"; "with all your hearts and with all your souls" is an expression that is repeated in A and in F. Thus, all three of its appearances occur in section 'i' of the parasha.

Why, then, is Israel's *teshuvah* at this stage attributed to God who has "circumcised their hearts"? The answer to this is connected with the fact that part C follows part B: the spiritual change that occurs in Israel in C is the result of the same bold Divine action on behalf of Israel and their redemption. The ingathering of the exiles and the good that God brings to Israel in their own land are what lead to the "circumcision of their hearts." Israel, in returning to the land of their forefathers, "recall to their hearts" (as in A) all the good that God has bestowed upon them, and their hearts

are opened to **love** God. Here we notice the difference between the *teshuvah* that took place in exile (in A) and that that takes place later in *Eretz Yisrael* (in C). In exile, observation of Israel's historical fate – the troubles and suffering that God brought upon them – brought about *teshuvah* towards God and listening to His voice. Although this *teshuvah* is wholehearted and sincere, it is born of fear. But in *Eretz Yisrael* the observation of the great good that God has bestowed upon Israel – in bringing them to their land and granting them great favor – brings about an opening of the hearts, and renewed love on the part of Israel: love of God with all their heart and soul.

Section D: Parallel to the "circumcision of the hearts" in the sphere of Israel's *teshuvah*, referring to a sort of surgical procedure, as it were, to remove that which is redundant and harmful, there is a similar action that takes place in the sphere of redemption: "And Hashem your God will place all these curses upon your enemies and those that hate you, and have persecuted you."

Israel's return to the land and their dwelling in it surrounded with good and comfort does not erase the injustices shown towards them by their enemies while in exile. The process of *teshuvah* and redemption described here rests on the basis of continuous contemplation of the past. Not only is Israel required to do this, but God too, in coming to redeem His people, remembers the hatred and persecution suffered by Israel in exile, and He transfers "these curses" suffered by Israel to their enemies and those who hate them. God's revenge on the enemies of Israel who have spilled their blood is a central foundation of the descriptions of redemption in the Torah, starting with our parasha, continuing through the song of Ha'azinu (32:40-43) and up until the visions of redemption in the Prophets.

The root "sh-u-v" does not appear in part D, nor in the preceding part C. The reason for this may be that what is described in these parts is not a **return** to what happened in

the past, but rather new levels of *teshuvah* and redemption, unique to the process described in our parasha.

Section E: The similarity between part E and part A is confusing. Where is the progress here in the *teshuvah* process?

In A we read, "And you **will return to god**," and in E we are told, "You will **again** (lit. "come back and") obey God's voice." Here the use of the word "come back" means a return to a previous stage. When in the past was Israel in a situation of obeying God's voice and performing His mitzvot? The answer is that this previous time refers to A, when Israel was still in exile!

Section F: Israel's **return** to the situation of previous generations – obeying God and performing His mitzvot – causes God in turn to **again** relate to Israel as He related to their forefathers in the early generations, before they sinned and were punished: "For God will **again** rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your forefathers." The practical significance of this attitude on the part of God towards Israel is described in the first part of verse 9: "And God will make you plentiful in all your endeavors; in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your animals and in the fruit of your land, for the good." At this stage there are two developments – a promise of the good that God will perform for Israel, and a specification of the areas in which it will be expressed. But more important than these is the relationship revealed here between God and Israel: "to rejoice over you for the good." An expression of a "psychological" relationship with Israel is to be found at the beginning of the description of the redemption (C): "And He will have mercy on you," and at its conclusion – "to rejoice over you." Thus all the actions that God performs for His nation in coming to redeem them are surrounded by prior mercy and subsequent rejoicing over them.

Section G: The final part of the parasha is comprised of two sentences that start with the word "if" (*ki*): "If you listen" and "if your return." The true meaning of this word here seems to be "since," and if this is so then this part contains a reason for God's actions towards Israel as described in the previous part, and perhaps in all the preceding parts (B, D, F). This reason is set out in chiastic order in contrast with the description with which the process opens, in A:

> A: "And **you will return to Hashem your God**,
> **and obey his voice** in all that I command you...
> G: "Since **you shall obey** Hashem your God, to observe His mitzvot...
> Since **you shall return to Hashem your God**..."

The return to the same idea with which the parasha opened (although in reverse order) is a common biblical technique for the conclusion of a literary unit. Nevertheless, a careful reading shows that the conclusion describes a stage higher than that depicted at the start: *teshuvah* **towards** (*'el'*) God expresses a greater degree of closeness to God than *teshuvah* **to** (*'ad'*) God. This greater closeness of Israel to God is obviously the result of God's closeness to Israel in the previous stages.

Another Level of Purification: The Yom Kippur Rites[1]

Rabbi Moshe Shamah

I. Introduction

Since the Tabernacle represents God's dwelling place among Israel, it is incumbent upon each member of the nation to observe its sanctity. Thus, any Israelite who encountered one of the impurities enumerated by the Torah is prohibited from entering the Tabernacle, or its precincts, or eating of sacrificial flesh, until completing the appropriate process of purification.

In addition, in the pure conceptual construct of the Torah and in accordance with its ideal standards, it appears that any impurity contracted by an Israelite is regarded as defiling the Tabernacle to some extent. This is the case even when the impurity was encountered outside the Tabernacle and the individual did not enter it or its precincts or partake of sancta while defiled. Of course, becoming defiled does not imply that any transgression had been committed. But when people are in such a state that the Torah forbids them to enter the sanctuary they are considered unable to fully relate to it; in a subtle manner, its function to continuously promote purity and holiness in the nation is interfered with and its impact upon the nation diminished. (See our study, "Parashat Tazri'a Part I: On the Laws of Impurity," p. 569.)

In the course of time, impurities are sensed to "accumulate" in the Tabernacle as well as among the people. These effects occur despite the cleansing procedures that each individual and the sanctuary undergo,

[1] The following was reprinted with permission from "Parashat Aḥare Mot Part II" of Rabbi Shamah's book, *Recalling the Covenant* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 2011), pp. 598-602.

as called for on each occasion in accordance with instructions that were mostly prescribed in the preceding chapters in Leviticus.

Although of a different order, transgressions also create impurity both within the individual and the sanctuary.

It is understood that God, patient as He may be, would eventually not abide the increasingly impure situation and would withdraw His presence from a defiled sanctuary and nation. (This is another aspect of the exegetical principle, "The Torah speaks in the language of man.") Consequently, immediately following the chapters that legislated the laws for bodily impurity (Lev. 11–15) the Torah prescribed annual purification rites for sanctuary and nation – the Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) ceremony.

II. Higher Level of Purification

In the Yom Kippur program, which includes special annual sacrifices, blood-sprinkling services and other rituals, the Torah invests the day with significance far beyond the realm of cleansing from ritual impurities. The day's ceremonies also provide for purification of both sanctuary and people from the effects of the sinning that inevitably occurred in the course of the year. Several rituals of the day's services directly address such cleansing, including the symbolic "scapegoat" ceremony.

In this ritual, Israel's sins are placed on a goat and sent to the remote wilderness (Azazel). Before the goat is sent away the high priest places his hands on the goat's head and recites a confession of Israel's sins: וְהִתְוַדָּה עָלָיו אֶת-כָּל-עֲוֹנֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת-כָּל-פִּשְׁעֵיהֶם לְכָל-חַטֹּאתָם ("and he shall confess over it all the iniquities of the Israelites and all their sins, for all their transgressions" [Lev. 16:21]). Mention of the various categories of sins (*'avonot*, *pish'ehem* and *ḥaṭṭotam*, whatever the specific definition of each) indicates that this confession must be comprehensive.

The implied corollary of the confession of sin is repentance; it would be hypocritical without it. It is impractical for each individual to enter the sanctuary precincts for a personal acknowledgement of transgressions and express his desire to be granted a fresh start. This meant that the high priest was to represent all the people in the sanctuary, but surely each individual was expected to repent privately wherever he or she may be. By definition, this requires contrition, regret for past wrongdoing, and a resolution of faithfulness going forward.

The high priest, in his attire, must set the tone and reflect the humble feeling conducive to contrition and confession. To perform his Yom Kippur–related services he is required to dress in the four basic priestly garments, similar to the common priest, and all are to be made of plain linen (assumed to be white), rather than don his usual eight vestments that are made of elaborate materials. (He does wear the latter at those times when required to perform the everyday services of the day.) In accordance with the special sanctity of the day he must wash his whole body (understood as ablution) both before donning the "white garments" as well as upon changing out of them. For services with the "golden garments" he merely washes hands and feet.

With the riddance of personal sin and the opportunity for a fresh start, the institution that provided annual inspiration for spiritual renewal for each individual in the nation was established. The key clause reads: כִּי-בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם מִכֹּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם ("For on this day it will be atoned for you to purify you from all your sins" [v. 30a]). It is understood that this benefaction is effective only for those who identify with the purpose of the protocol. Thus, the conclusion of the bodily impurity section was elevated from the realm of rite and ritual to the moral sphere and to improvement of the moral standing of each individual in the nation.

III. Azazel

The term עֲזָאזֵל (Azazel) appears nowhere else in Tanakh besides in our chapter. Various opinions have been expressed in the Talmud, Midrash and commentators concerning its meaning. Many have assumed that it was a throwback to a supernatural being of one sort or another or to the domain of such a being, a vestige of pre-Torah notions that identify the wilderness as a realm where forces inimical to human welfare reside. Surprisingly, several traditional expositors assumed Azazel was an active being to whom some sort of annual offering was sent – of course, under Hashem's auspices – for the purpose of a bribe or distraction (see *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* 45; Ramban); such interpretations approached what other traditional authorities deemed irreconcilable with biblical monotheism and totally unacceptable as they opened the door to the heretical, if not worse.

Mishnah Yoma 6:6 speaks of pushing the goat off a cliff to its death rather than merely "sending" it away, as prescribed in the biblical text. Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman (1953, 1:305) takes it as a symbol that stresses that death is associated with Azazel, in contrast to life that is associated with Hashem. But perhaps the Mishnah's "interpretation" of the ritual was to prevent a misunderstanding that "sending" the goat to Azazel constituted an offering.

Ibn Ezra cryptically appears to suggest that the term Azazel was derived from the word for goat (עֵז), and the symbolism underlying it related to the "goat-demons" that were then an idolatrous snare to Israel (as explicitly attested in the next chapter [Lev. 17:7]). Sending a sin-laden goat to Azazel, the supposed chief of the goat-demons, in contrast to the sinful Israelite practice of sacrificing to the goat-demons, was an act of deriding and degrading that idolatrous belief. It is a concrete symbol of an ultimate rejection of that divinity attached to a ceremony that gives

the people an opportunity to achieve cleansing from having been committed to its service, an act of national atonement.

In any event, it should not be thought that mention of Azazel implies belief in its existence; it is no more than a figure of speech. It is the style of Scripture to speak in such a manner, without any suggestion of belief in the actuality of the expression. Consider the Israelites' joyful tribute upon crossing the sea, "Who is like You among the *elim*, Hashem?" (Exod. 15:11); Moses' prayer, "…for which god in heaven or on earth can do as Your deeds" (Deut. 3:24) or the psalmist's praise of God, "He is awesome above all the gods, for all the gods of the nations are idols" (Ps. 96:4b-5a). In any event, the riddance of sins in the form of banishment to an inaccessible place is well-attested imagery of the ancient Near East. Thus, the ritual had meaning even to those who had no belief whatsoever in Azazel. The term came to signify terrain of a rough nature and, because of the association with sin, a hellish place.

It is significant that the goat to Azazel is not a sacrifice. Before being selected it is to be standing with another goat before Hashem while the priest chooses by lot which is to be a sacrifice to Hashem and which is to be sent to Azazel. Drawing lots means that the goats are essentially equal and there is nothing inherent in either that makes it more fit for either purpose. In this way, the selection is seen as made by Hashem ("The lot may be cast into the lap, but from Hashem is its decision" [Prov. 16:33]).

IV. Additional Features

After concluding the regulations for the sacrificial service the Torah prescribes several regulations that further the purpose of the day (Lev. 16:29-31). First, Yom Kippur ceremonies are to be performed yearly. Second, everybody is required to [what is termed in Hebrew] וְעִנִּיתֶם אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם, literally meaning to engage in self-affliction, but a locution

that in Scripture clearly refers to the affliction of fasting.[2] Third is the prohibition to engage in labor on that day. Abstention from food and drink (this is the only fast day mandated in the Pentateuch) emphasizes the importance of the day and focuses an individual on matters of the spirit. Refraining from work provides the time for reflection as well as the opportunity to gather together for services. In the Leviticus section dealing with the sacred days, the law provides that Yom Kippur is to be a complete day, from evening until evening: וְעִנִּיתֶם אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם בְּתִשְׁעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ בָּעֶרֶב מֵעֶרֶב עַד-עֶרֶב תִּשְׁבְּתוּ שַׁבַּתְּכֶם ("and you shall afflict yourselves on the ninth of the month in the evening, from evening until evening, you shall keep your Sabbath" [Lev. 23:32]).

The three requirements – being an annual ceremony, a day of self-denial and of cessation from labor – are repeated in reverse order after provision of a central verse, in standard chiasm format. (In the second cluster of clauses, cessation from labor is denoted by שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן הִוא לָכֶם, "A Sabbath of restfulness it shall be for you." [23:32]) The center verse articulates the monumental nature of the day: "For on this day it will be atoned for you to purify you from all your sins; before Hashem you shall be purified" (16:30).[3] It speaks of atonement and purification from sin as definite and certain (taking for granted that the Israelites would fulfill their responsibility sincerely), since God mandated the service and pledged His receptivity to it.

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[2] In Isaiah 58:3, the word צַמְנוּ ("we fasted") corresponds to עִנִּינוּ נַפְשֵׁנוּ ("we afflicted ourselves") and in verse 5 the word צוֹם ("fast day") corresponds to יוֹם עַנּוֹת אָדָם נַפְשׁוֹ ("a day that man afflicts himself"). In Psalm 35:13, עִנִּיתִי בַצּוֹם נַפְשִׁי translates, "I afflicted myself with fasting."

[3] In the Mishnah (Yoma 8:9): "Rabbi Eleazar the son of Azariah expounded as follows: מִכֹּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' תִּטְהָרוּ ("from all your transgressions before Hashem you shall be purified" [Lev. 16:30b])– transgressions between man and G-d, the Day of Atonement atones, transgressions between man and his fellow man, the Day of Atonement does not atone until he [the sinner] appeases his fellow man (corrects the wrong and receives forgiveness from the injured party)."

Accordingly, a confident and optimistic spirit is appropriate. The chiasm surrounding that central verse fosters a celebratory spirit commemorating the glorious institution that God granted Israel, while emphasizing the importance of the associated rituals.[4]

The linkage with the preceding chapters is clear. The instructions for the Yom Kippur ritual thus belong here rather than in Leviticus 23, the section in which the sacred days of the year, including Yom Kippur, are described.

[4] As a day for fasting and repentance there is a serious and somber character to Yom Kippur, but as the day G-d cleanses Israel from its transgressions it is a celebratory occasion. At times in the past this celebratory feature has been taken in a way that seemed to eclipse the serious nature of the day and deemed praiseworthy, when marriage-age girls would go out to the fields and sing and dance before the boys, as brought out in *Mishnah Ta'anit* 4:8:

> Rabbi Simeon the son of Gamliel stated: "There have not been good days for Israel comparable to the fifteenth of Ab and the Day of Atonement, for on those days the daughters of Jerusalem [alternate texts: Israel] would go out wearing white garments that are borrowed, in order not to embarrass those who do not have…and dance in the orchards. What did they say? 'Young man, lift your eyes and see what you would choose for yourself. Do not focus your eye on beauty, look at family…'

Teshuvah is Not Repentance: The Price of Atonement

Dr. Moshe Sokolow

Part One: Can the "Evil Decree" ever be "Abolished"?

As the solemn *piyyut* of ונתנה תוקף (in Ashkenazi liturgy) reaches a crescendo, the congregation and *hazan* recite: וּתְשׁוּבָה, וּתְפִלָּה, וּצְדָקָה מַעֲבִירִין אֶת רוֹעַ הַגְּזֵרָה. With all due deference to the English translators, *Teshuvah* is not "repentance," *Tefillah* is not "prayer," *Tzedakah* is not "charity," *le-ha`avir* is not "to abolish," and *ro`a ha-gezeirah* is not "the evil decree."

Teshuvah

In English, "repentance" derives from the same Latin root (*poena*) which produces the words "penalty" and "penitentiary," and it complements the ostensible derivation of "sin" from the Anglo-Saxon "evil, or wickedness." No such pejorative connotation, however, exists either in the Hebrew חָטָא [to miss (a goal), or to err] or תְּשׁוּבָה [literally, return]. The compensation for a missed goal is a "do-over," or "second chance."

Tefillah

While "petition" is a constituent part of תְּפִלָּה (in Hebrew, it would yield בַּקָּשָׁה), it is hardly synonymous with the whole enterprise of prayer whose derivation from the verb פלל, "to judge," suggests the translation "self-judgment" or "introspection."

Tzedakah

Finally, "charity," from the Latin *caritas* (=love), implies an interpersonal relationship based upon entirely subjective emotions. The Hebrew צְדָקָה, quite to the contrary, preserves the root significance of "just," or

"righteous," implying a more objective basis for that relationship.

> NOTE: In spite of the objections raised, here, to these translations, I will continue to use such words as "prayer," "repentance," and "sin," throughout this essay in their established, normative, sense. By challenging their effectiveness, I hope to sharpen our awareness to both linguistic and theological nuances; not to rewrite the prayer book.

It is the translation of the continuation of the *piyyut*, however, which does the gravest injustice to the Hebrew. "The evil decree," to begin with, would require הַגְּזֵרָה הָרָעָה in Hebrew, and "to abolish" would require לְבַטֵּל. Grammatically, רוֹעַ הַגְּזֵרָה is a construct, or possessive, of two nouns (Hebrew: *semikhut*), and means "the worst of the decree." מַעֲבִירִין, from the verbal root ע.ב.ר, "to pass, or hover (over)," implies a suspension of judgment, rather than annulment of the verdict.

Translated into programmatic terms, this means that the most that we can expect is a suspension of the worst consequences of a decree that is enacted on account of our guilt; we cannot anticipate the total elimination of the evil for which we are ourselves responsible. This is entirely consistent with the Rabbinic adage that: "One who would sin and repent is not provided with the opportunity." Were it otherwise, there would be no demonstrable advantage to strict observance of the law over its transgression.

Lest this appear to be "pop" theology, let me hasten to cite, as evidence, the commentary of Rashi on the proclamation of God's attributes in Exodus 34:6-7. In interpreting the oddly ambivalent phrase "וְנַקֵּה לֹא יְנַקֶּה", he notes:

לפי פשוטו משמע, שאינו מוותר על העון לגמרי אלא נפרע ממנו מעט מעט.

According to the plain sense, it signifies that He never entirely exonerates the transgressor, but He requites him incrementally.

Rashi, too, is opposed to the suggestion that a guilty party could expect to get off scot-free.

Part Two: Is there a "Formula" for Pardon?

The second horn of our conceptual dilemma is contained in the following statement of Rabbi Yohanan (BT Rosh ha-Shanah 17b):

"ויעבר ה' על פניו ויקרא": א"ר יוחנן: אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאומרו. מלמד שנתעטף הקב"ה כשליח צבור והראה לו למשה סדר תפלה. אמר לו: כל זמן שישראל חוטאין יעשו לפני כסדר הזה ואני מוחל להם.

"The LORD passed before him [Moshe] and declared:" Rabbi Yohanan said: Were it not an explicit verse, we would not dare to imagine it! God enveloped Himself like an emissary of the congregation and demonstrated to Moshe a prayer service, saying: Whenever the Jewish people sin... let them perform this service before me, and I shall pardon them.

Here we encounter a theme contrary to that which we developed previously, namely that there exists an "order of prayer" whose mere recitation is guaranteed to attain forgiveness.

Which of the two, then, is correct? Can we anticipate, as Rabbi Yoḥanan would have it, the total exoneration of sin, or, does God never totally exculpate the transgressor--as we maintained earlier, with the tacit support of Rashi?

Part Three: God as a Shali'aḥ Tzibbur

Where does the verse cited by Rabbi Yohanan evoke the imagery of an emissary of the congregation (i.e.,

hazan)? I believe this evocation is partly literary and partly metaphorical. Literarily, the phrase "וַיַּעֲבֹר...עַל פָּנָיו" strongly resembles the Mishnaic idiom לעבור בפני התיבה, which is the standard designation of a *shali'ah tzibbur*. Metaphorically, just as a *tebah* is the repository of the Torah scrolls, so was Moshe, metaphorically, a *tebah* in that he was secluded in the cleft of the rock while grasping the two tablets of the covenant.

Moshe descended Mt. Sinai, witnessed the frivolity that accompanied the golden calf, and smashed the tablets to pieces. God threatens the Israelite nation with annihilation and Moshe successfully intercedes on their behalf. After the Levites exact a partial penalty of the wrongdoers, God indicates His continuing displeasure by stipulating that, henceforth, only an angel will accompany them ("הִנֵּה מַלְאָכִי, יֵלֵךְ לְפָנֶיךָ"). He adds, ominously, "וּבְיוֹם פָּקְדִי, וּפָקַדְתִּי עֲלֵהֶם חַטָּאתָם", "on the day of accounting I will debit them for this crime" (32:34).

The plain sense of this verse, too, is consistent with the theology that we advocated in Part One, of divine punishment being suspended rather than annulled. Here, too, Rashi comments:

> עתה שמעתי אליך מלכלותם יחד. ותמיד תמיד כשאפקוד עליהם עונותיהם, ופקדתי עליהם מעט מן העון הזה עם שאר העונות.
>
> At this moment I have complied with your wish not to completely annihilate them. In the future, however, whenever I settle with them on account of their [newer] sins, I will debit them, slightly, on account of this sin, too.

Indeed, Rashi's continuing remark, here, is a working theology of Jewish persecution: ואין פורענות באה על ישראל שאין בה קצת מפרעון עון העגל, "Every catastrophe which befalls the Jewish people is partial retribution for the sin of the golden calf." If we bear in mind that Rashi was contemporary not only to isolated exiles and persecutions,

but also to the systematic and relentless massacres of the First Crusade, then we might extrapolate—בדחילו ורחימו—a kind of Holocaust theology from here, as well.

Part Four: A "Passing" Grade

Moshe appeals to God to specify, more precisely, the nature of His continued association with the Jewish people. In so doing, Moshe presumes upon his continued favor in God's eyes, coupled with God's singular relationship with him, which he describes as "knowing [him] by name" (33:12). God acknowledges both the continuing favor and the special acquaintance (vs. 17), and promises to "proclaim the name of the LORD" before him (19). Having instructed Moshe to "station yourself" upon the mountain (וְנִצַּבְתָּ לִי שָׁם, 34:2), God, reciprocally, "stationed Himself there" (ויתיצב עמו שם) and "proclaimed His name" (34:5), just as He had promised earlier (33:19). [We read – along with the cantillation marks— ויקרא בשם: ה׳, "He called His name: the LORD," assuming, according to Biblical syntax, that the subject of the declaration: "He called by name" (ויקרא בשם) is the same as that of the descent and station.] God then proceeds to "pass before him [Moshe]" (as in Rabbi Yohanan's aforementioned aphorism), and--with Moshe secreted in the cleft of the rock--makes the proclamation of His attributes (34:6-7).

Epilogue: Kapparah is "At-One-Ment"

We first encounter the root כ.פ.ר in the form of כופר, the ingredient (pitch or tar) with which Noah was instructed to seal his ark against the ravages of the flood (Bereishit 6:14). Elsewhere, we encounter כופר as ransom, which we are enjoined to accept in lieu of a per capita census (Shemot 30:12), but are prohibited to accept in lieu of capital punishment (Bemidbar 35:31).

The nexus between pitch, ransom and atonement is provided by Rashi in the selfsame context we have been studying: the scene following the sin of the golden calf. On the verse: וַיְהִי מִמָּחֳרָת וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָעָם אַתֶּם חֲטָאתֶם חֲטָאָה גְדֹלָה וְעַתָּה אֶעֱלֶה אֶל ה׳ אוּלַי אֲכַפְּרָה בְּעַד חַטַּאתְכֶם (Shemot 32:30), Rashi says: אשים כופר וקנוּחַ וּסְתִימָה לנגד חטאתכם, להבדיל ביניכם ובין החטא, i.e., I shall place a sealant over your breach of faith to render you impervious to sin.

The English word “atonement” is, etymologically, a composite of: “at one;” to atone is to be reunited. *Het* separates us from God and *teshuvah* enables us to be reconciled with Him. The medium that effects the reconciliation is כפרה, which lies at the root of the name יום הכיפורים.

Man's Singularity[1]

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

How is man's uniqueness manifested? – In his central aspiration, in that single goal towards which all the strings of his soul's yearnings are attuned. Man's singularity is expressed in his life's innermost prayer. It may be what others want too– but each wants it in his own individual way. Every man has a dream of his own, and he strives and yearns for what modern psychology terms self-fulfillment. And this he achieves when he realizes his private dream towards the fulfillment of which all his hopes and desires are directed.

It is man's otherness, his singularity, his personal isolation even when in the midst of a multitude, that determines his lifestyle, that shapes the quality of his thought and actions. In the familiar phrase of the Sages, "Everything is in accordance with the measure of each person."

On a pleasant summer's night a man goes out and sees above him a velvety dark-blue sky filled with softly-shining stars, signaling from vast distances, from hidden worlds; and he is aware of the tranquility which encompasses nature. At such a moment, what are his thoughts? All depends on his system of associations, upon the type of person he is. If he is a man whose religiousness permeates his being, one who in addition to fulfilling all the other commandments, fulfills that specific command *leida'*– knowing that there is a Primary Being – what will he discover on this wonderful night when tens of thousands of

[1] The following is a selected excerpt from the chapter "The Relationship Between Repentance and Free Choice" from "On Repentance" by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l.

stars whisper to him from remote worlds, if not the existence of the Creator of the Universe who spread forth His Divine presence throughout the enchanting tranquility round about, across the silent treetops which listen tremulously to His Voice coming from beyond the purifying mists spread around them? What will that man discover in a miraculous, mystery-filled night such as this, if not the breath of Eternity blowing tenderly on his weary countenance? What will he do at that moment, if not respond spontaneously and without aforethought, by singing "Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, You art very great; You art clothed with glory and majesty." One of the astronauts thus reacted spontaneously, when the majesty and splendor of the universe were revealed to him and he began to recite the passage: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." His natural associative stream led him to quote from Holy Scriptures.

If a man was not privileged to be born into a religious home – or to have developed a religious sensibility through his education – he does not deserve our ire but rather our sympathy and pity. Such a man lacks a dimension which would endow his life with a breadth of scope. What will such a person think of when he goes out into an enchanted summer's night? What will his thoughts be? He will think how empty and futile, how hollow and meaningless the world is that operates according to cold mechanical laws. He will see nothing but the desolation of the howling wilderness conforming to certain physical laws. If scientifically inclined, he will attempt to apply these laws to the natural phenomena confronting him. If he is a hedonistic person, how many dark powerful passions and how many hidden lusts will the silence of this many-splendored night awaken in him? For such a man, the dark night will become a symbol of pleasure-seeking. If he has long arms and is avaricious, it may occur to him that there is nothing like the silence of a summer's night for breaking

into a bank in order to empty its vault… Indeed, man's thoughts and his trains of association are determined by the type of person he is; all follow the manner in which he has styled the course of his life, all follow the individual nature of his quest: What he wants more than anything else, what his lips whisper when he bows in supplication before the Lord of the Universe, is something between himself and His Creator, which is not meant for the ear of any stranger.

A man's chain of associations depends on his aspirations, upon that personal supplication – whispered in the hour of silent. Some seek the nearness of the Master of the Universe, some long for power or fame; others want to expand their knowledge; and there are those who seek pleasures or money. This prayer represents man in his totality. It represents everything he is and does.

Judaism has always held that it lies within man's power to renew himself, to be reborn and redirect the course of his life. In this task man must rely upon himself; no one can help him. He is his own creator and innovator. He is his own redeemer; he is his own messiah who has come to redeem himself from the darkness of his exile to the light of his personal redemption.

The best example of man's ability to create himself anew, to change his life's inner prayer, is demonstrated in the act of conversion, of which repentance is but a reflection. Conversion is not, as many in *Eretz Israel* and in the United States believe, a mere matter of immersion in the ritual bath. It is not a mere ceremony. Certainly, immersion is crucial to it, but it is a mistake to believe that the conversion begins and ends with this ritual. Conversion means a radical, decisive and complete change of the person's identity, and the immersion is but a symbol indicative of this transformation. A man descends into the waters to immerse himself, and when he emerges, he is a new person. If I may paraphrase Scripture, it is written: "when you lose it, you find it" – one personality is lost and

a second, different one has been found. “Go forth out of your country, and form your kindred, and from your father’s house” (Genesis 12:1) – as Abraham, our forefather, the father of all righteous converts, was told. “Go forth” is not a matter of geographical change of movement from one locality to another, but a deep human and spiritual event. As the *Halakha* puts it: “A person having converted, is like a new-born babe.” Being born again means a definitive change in his style and way of life, inwardly and outwardly. Without such a change, true conversion does not take place, not even partially.

Like conversion, repentance is also seen as new birth in the sense of receiving new identity, a whole new personality, a new life. In Chapter Seven of the Laws of Repentance, therefore, Maimonides – when speaking of the repentance of *redemption* – talks of repenting not only over deeds and transgressions but also over evil character traits, a subject not mentioned in connection with repentance of *expiation* in Chapters 1 and 2. This time, he is dealing with a total transformation of personality and not only in regard to a specific transgression. For this, it is not enough to resolve not to commit the same transgression again; this calls for a re-molding of the whole personality, including its character traits. If a man refrains from every possible transgression but retains his accustomed traits of anger, jealousy or hatred, he will be incapable of acquiring the new personality which is imperative for redemptive repentance.

Discussion for Shabbat Shooba[1]

Rabbi Ralph Tawil

Shabbat Shooba is the Shabbat before Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Many aspects of Yom Kippur occupy our minds on the day of Yom Kippur itself. Shabbat Shooba gives us an opportunity to talk about some aspects of this special day. For our young children, this discussion can bring them to accept the fact that their parents will be otherwise occupied on Yom Kippur. For older children, discussion on Shabbat Shooba will cause them to appreciate some of the elements that make the day of Yom Kippur special.

Fasting

The most jarring aspect of the day is that we fast. Young children might be told to fast for a few hours so they can feel that they participated. Yet it is more important to speak about the meaning of the fast than the fact that a person refrained from eating.

Why do we fast? (The Torah commands us to afflict ourselves on this day. The most prevalent way that affliction is defined is fasting. The fasting is not the goal of the day, but one way to achieve the goal, which is a "return" to the proper Torah way. Another answer is that we are so busy and worried about our lives and improving ourselves that no one has time to eat.)

What should we be thinking about when we fast? (This very special day should be spent considering how we can improve ourselves. What we should not be thinking about is, "how many more hours until I can eat again.")

[1] The following is from Rabbi Tawil's Shabbat-Table Talks for Shabbat Shooba.

Forgiveness

What must we do in order to be forgiven by Hashem? (We must be aware of our transgressions and regret doing them. We must accept upon ourselves not to repeat those actions.)

Which transgressions does Hashem forgive on Yom Kippur? (Hashem forgives the transgressions between "man and God." However, only the person who was wronged can forgive the transgressions between "man and man.")

If only the person can forgive someone for wronging him, what must we do? (We must ask that person for forgiveness. This can be difficult, but it is a necessary aspect of the day. We must approach people and ask for their forgiveness, in general, and then ask for their forgiveness if we have done anything to hurt them.)

This might be a good time for parents to model this behavior of asking forgiveness. Ask forgiveness from one another or from the children regarding specific transgressions that were done during the course of the year. Encourage the children to take a turn and ask for forgiveness from one another. Yet do not press them on this. A phony, mouthed request for forgiveness is not to be encouraged.

By the way, there is a formal confession that we say during the prayers, several times during the day, including in the *minḥa* prayer before Yom Kippur officially begins. One could make one's own confession to be recited during the day, so that not only will we be confessing the sins of all of the people of our nation, but we will also be confessing and repenting for our own specific transgressions. Remember, the confession for sins committed against another person have to be first confessed to that person. We must ask his forgiveness before we speak to Hashem about it.

Kal Nidre

The evening of Yom Kippur begins with the *Kal Nidre* service. The Torah Scrolls are removed from the ark, and the *Hazan* and congregation recite the prayer that renounces all vows made in past year and all that will be made in the future. We are reminded of the importance of our vows and obligations by the fact that to be freed from our vows we need a bet din (a court of three sages) to annul our vows.

Bowing on the Floor

One aspect of Yom Kippur that might attract attention is the custom that we have of bowing prone on the floor at certain times during the prayers. These occur during the description of the *Kohen Gadol*'s service in the temple, which we recite during the *mussaf* prayer. The *Kohen* would pronounce God's name (as it was written, without any euphemism) and all the people who heard God's name would immediately bow down. In our service, the Hazan does not pronounce God's name, yet he describes how the *Kohen Gadol* would do this in the time of the *Bet Hamiqdash*. We react the way *Bene Yisrael* reacted in the time of the *Bet Hamiqdash*—we bow prone to the floor. When bowing, we think about how we give ourselves completely to the will of Hashem.

Not Wearing Leather Shoes

A very conspicuous aspect of Yom Kippur is that we do not wear leather shoes and many people wear sneakers with their fine holiday attire. In the past, leather shoes were more comfortable to wear than other kinds of footwear and the tradition of not wearing leather shoes is not to have that extra comfort and pampering on a day that we should not be concerned with such comforts.

Ne'ilah—Shofar Blowing

The last prayer of Yom Kippur's five prayers is the prayer of *Ne'ilah* or "locking [of the Gates"]. This corresponded to the closing of the gates in the temple at the end of the day of service. It also corresponds to the closing of the Day of Atonement. At the end of the service the Shofar is sounded. This reminds us of the Torah's commandment to blow the Shofar on Yom Kippur of the Jubilee year, ringing in that year's special laws.

Yom Kippur in Israel—Remembering the War

In Israel, in addition to the original solemnity of Yom Kippur, the eve of Yom Kippur is spent remembering the Yom Kippur War. In 1973, the Arab nations used the sanctity of this day to catch Israel off-guard. Many Israeli soldiers were killed in this war, especially in its first hours. Egypt crossed the Suez Canal at 2 P.M. on Yom Kippur, moving 100,000 troops across, as 200 warplanes attacked Israeli positions in the Sinai. Facing them were 8,000 reservist IDF troops. Syria attacked at the same time, capturing the Golan Heights with almost no resistance. Eventually, the early losses were turned around. Through unbelievable courage and heroism, the enemy was stopped. Many still remember the sound of the sirens piercing the Yom Kippur prayers of 1973.