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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON YOM KIPPUR - 5772

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from Chanan Morrison ravkooklist@gmail.com
Rav Kook List <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com>

Date Tue, Oct 4, 2011 at 9:21 AM

subject [Rav Kook List] Yom Kippur: "You Know the Mysteries of the Universe"

Before reciting the Yom Kippur viduy (confessional prayer), we offer a special prayer, Atah yodei'ah razei olam:

"You know the mysteries of the universe and the hidden secrets of every living soul. You search the innermost chambers of the conscience and the heart. Nothing escapes You; nothing is hidden from Your sight. Therefore, may it be Your Will to forgive all our sins." Why do we introduce the Yom Kippur viduy by acknowledging God's infinite knowledge? What does God's knowledge of the hidden mysteries of the universe have to do with our efforts to repent and atone for our deeds?

Three Components of Teshuvah

There are three components to the teshuvah process, corresponding to the past, the present, and the future. Teshuvah should include regret for improper conduct in the past, a decision to cease this conduct in the present, and resolve not to repeat it in the future. And yet, as we shall shortly demonstrate, complete performance of all three aspects of teshuvah requires profound knowledge. In fact, teshuvah sheleimah, complete repentance, requires a level of knowledge far beyond our limited capabilities. Regretting the Past

For example, only if we are fully aware of the seriousness of our actions will we truly feel remorse over our past failings. The Kabbalists taught that our actions can influence the highest spiritual realms. The more we are aware of the damage caused by our wrongdoings, the greater will be our feelings of regret. For this reason the request for forgiveness in the daily Amidah prayer only appears after the request for knowledge. Certainly, the one most aware of the significance and impact of our actions is the One Who created the universe and all of the spiritual worlds.

Uprooting the Behavior

The same is true regarding the second component of teshuvah. In order to completely free ourselves from a particular negative behavior or trait, it is not enough to desist from its outward manifestations. We need to remove all desire for this conduct; we need to dislodge its roots from the inner recesses of the soul. But how well do we know what resides in the depths of our heart? We may think that we have purified ourselves from a particular vice, and yet the disease is still entrenched within, and we will be unable to withstand a future re-awakening of this desire. The only one to truly know the inner chambers of our soul is the One Who created it.

Resolve for the Future

The third component, our resolve to refrain from repeating this behavior in the future, means that we commit ourselves not to repeat our error, no matter what the situation, even under the most trying circumstances. Again, a full acceptance for the future implies knowledge of all future events and their impact upon us - a knowledge that is clearly denied to us. Only God knows the future.

So how can we aspire toward true teshuvah, when the essential components of the teshuvah process require knowledge that is beyond our limited abilities?

Complete Teshuvah

God promises us that the mitzvah of teshuvah is within our grasp - 'it is not too difficult or distant from you.... Rather, this matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can fulfill it' (Deut. 30:11-14). God graciously accepts the little we are able to accomplish as if it were much. We ask that the degree of regret, change, and resolve that we are capable of, even though it is limited by our capabilities, be combined with God's infinite knowledge. For if we were able to fully recognize matters in their true measure, we would feel them with all of their intensity in our efforts to better ourselves.

This then is the meaning of the Yom Kippur prayer:

"You know the mysteries of the universe" - only You know the full impact of our mistakes and how much remorse we should really feel - "and the hidden secrets of every living soul" - for we fail to properly regret our actions.

"You search the innermost chambers of the conscience and the heart" - You see that traces of our failings still lurk deep within us. Only You know to what degree we need to cleanse ourselves of character flaws that we have not fully succeeded in conquering.

"Nothing escapes You; nothing is hidden from Your sight" - You know all future events, including situations that will tempt us and perhaps cause us to stumble again.

Nonetheless, since we can only perform the various components of teshuvah according to our limited capabilities, we beseech God, "May it be Your Will to forgive all of our sins." Then we can attain the level of "complete repentance before You" - a teshuvah that is complete when our sincere efforts are complemented by God's infinite knowledge.

(Silver from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. II, p. 353)

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Shabbat Shalom: Yom Kippur by Shlomo Riskin "What does God want?"

Efrat, Israel - "For on this day He shall forgive you to purify you from all of your transgressions; before the Lord shall you be purified." This last phrase, "before the Lord shall you be purified," is for me the truest meaning of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is, after all, the most complex and comforting day of the year: a day of self-sacrifice and divine forgiveness, a day of discipline and deprivation and a day of overflowing love and never-ending compassion, a day of mortal fear, and a day of divine embrace and loving-kindness. We may enter Yom Kippur laden with guilt, but we leave it redeemed. Above all, Yom Kippur involves standing before God - just you and Him - and becoming pure.

From this perspective, the most striking image of Yom Kippur is the very last act of the High Priest in his Yom Kippur garb. He bathes a fourth time, puts on his white linen garments, and enters the Holy of Holies, the space sanctified with the overwhelming sense of the Divine Presence. Earlier, he had performed in that place a difficult and even trying sacrificial offering, his gift of fragrant incense. This time, he enters the Presence and stands there, without performing a divine service, without reciting a formal prayer. Then he leaves, bathes a fifth time, and dons the golden garments of the regular daily afternoon sacrifice.

His solitary moment with God has ended; the magic of the special Day of Forgiveness is over. But what did it mean? What did he, and what do we, take out of that singular meeting with the divine, devoid of ritual or

ceremony, at the conclusion of the most sacred day of the year in the most sacred space in the world? Let us for a moment re-visit last week's commentary on the akeda. Abraham and Isaac walk a solitary walk during those three momentous days of performing God's awesome commandment: A tense silence between father and son permeates the atmosphere, punctuated by brief, difficult and ambiguous words. The air is heavy with God's unspoken command, heard only by Abraham, fearfully sensed by Isaac. But what was God's command? He asked Abraham to take Isaac as an olah - but what does this mean? Is it a whole-burnt offering, a slaughter-sacrifice, or is it merely a dedication of Isaac's life to God's will? The midrash (Genesis Raba, Vayeira, 56:4) has an extra "character" show up during this journey - Satan. He cries out to Abraham, "Old man, old man, have you lost your mind? Are you about to slaughter the son given to you at 100 years of age? Tomorrow I shall charge you with spilling blood, with spilling the blood of your own son." And Abraham must now be pondering, "Is this attempt to turn me away from doing what God ordered the word of Samael? Perhaps what I thought I heard yesterday was the word of Samael? Perhaps God only wants me to dedicate Isaac in life, and it is Satan- Moloch who wants me to murder my beloved child!" Let us now skip many generations, and perhaps we will understand why the divine command is ambiguous, why God used a word, olah, which could be interpreted in two ways. Rav Oshri, the rabbi of the Kovno Ghetto at the time of the Holocaust, wrote a book of Responsa, "Mima'amakim" ["From the Depths"] based on his experience. One question came from a distraught father, whose only son had been taken for a kinderaktion - a 5 a.m. children's round-up to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. "I have a gold tooth," wept the father. "The kapo will take it from me and free my son - but he will have to substitute someone else's son to meet the quota. What must I do?" Rav Oshri tearfully responded that he could not give the father an answer. All that night, he saw the agitated man walking back and forth in front of his house. When the Rav walked out at 4:45 a.m., the tearful father could only say two words, Akedat Yitzhak. He did not give the kapo his tooth. Each of us must stand alone, in the fullness of our being, before God, and attempt to understand what God wants of us. What is the right path? Is it God's voice we are hearing, or Satan's? This is the meaning of the meeting between God and the High Priest - without ritual or formal prayer - at the conclusion of our Holy Fast. And since this divine-human confrontation takes place on the day of forgiveness and purity, we may be reasonably certain that if we are honest with ourselves, we will correctly interpret God's words of love, compassion and grace.

Shabbat Shalom

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I KNOW NOT MY SOUL

By RABBI NISSON E. SHULMAN

Lo Yadati Nafshi Samatni (Shir Hashirim 6:12) "I know not my soul that You have placed within me!"

These are the words of the wise King Solomon. They apply to us now. At Yizkor we pray for the souls of our dear ones who are departed. We pray for their souls and for our own, so that we may be remembered in after years. Do we understand the soul?

Do we recognize and readily assume the responsibilities implied in the prayer for our soul's immortality? King Solomon says we often don't. And that is one of the deepest tragedies of Jewish life.

Our Rabbis teach us the lesson of the soul from the passage immediately preceding my text. El ginas egoz yoradti. "I went down," said the Lord, "to a garden nut!"

Commenting on this passage, our Rabbis tell us that a nut has certain characteristics which teach us a threefold lesson about the nature of the People Israel, and its soul: Amar Rabi Yehoshua Ben Levi Nimshalu Yisrael LiEgoz, Mah Egoz Zeh Im Nafal LToch Hatnofes Atah Notlo ... Umeidicho Yafeh Liochlo. The nut can stand a great deal of rough and dirty handling without harming or soiling its fruit.

The same is true of the People of Israel. We, too, have often had to stand a great deal of abuse. Our enemies said to us "Lie down so that we may trample upon you." And we bent our back to the oppressor - but we did not bend our soul. Our soul has remained pure and unassailable, through the study of the Torah and the observance of Gd's commandments.

Secondly, Nimshalu Yisrael LiEgoz Lifi Shekol Hanitiyos Im Atah Michaseh Shirasheihen Bishaas Nitiasam Heim Matzlichos. All other plants and trees must have their roots covered when they are planted, in order to thrive. But the young seedling of the nut tree must have its roots exposed in order to grow properly. In the same way, if Israel is to thrive, if its soul is to live, then its young shoots and seedlings, its children, must be taught their origin, must know where they come from, and how grand is their heritage. They must have their roots exposed.

Finally, Nimshalu Yisrael LiEgoz, Mah Egoz Zeh Atah Notel Echad Min Hakri Vikulam Yordin Umisgalgilin Zeh Achar Zeh Kach Yisrael Laka Echod Mehen Kulam Margishim. A nut has this characteristic. If you pull one out of the pile, the pile will fall, and they will all scatter. So too, Israel is one group. If one Jew is hurt, we all suffer. If one is pulled away, cut off, killed, we are all in mortal danger.

This is the threefold secret that the wise King Solomon told us.

It is a secret that could help us to know our souls. But, says the King, "Lo yodati nafshi," the tragedy is that our people don't recognize their natures. They do not apply these characteristics to themselves. And this is a fatal mistake.

We have great survival ability. Our Jewish soul is protected from harm by Gd's blessing. Yet there sometimes comes a day -like our present day - when many of our people forget the lesson of the soul. The temptations of the times are too strong to pay much attention to developing the protective shell around Judaism. If G-d forbid, that shell should break, then we are lost.

There are many things to tempt us.

Business problems drain so much of our energy that we have none left for the synagogue. The evening "out with the boys" is always Monday night. It really is too much to ask that we should attend the synagogue study group on that night of 71 nights. That new car we bought last year has taken so much of our savings that we can't afford to give much to Yeshivos any more. That vacation cruise that we always wanted is too good to pass up this year - so what if it isn't kosher - it is only for two weeks...

There sometimes are greater temptations; temptations for which we sacrifice our health, love, even truth and honor, and our faith. And yet, if we were asked which values are the more important, we would, with little hesitation, list our faith, our Torah, our Jewish survival very high on our list.

No one is asking you to give up the luxuries you enjoy. No one asks you to stop in your pursuit of a high standard of living.

But if the Yizkor service means anything, it must mean that you pay attention to some of the more important things in life, especially to your survival as a Jew. It demands that you honestly face some of the deeper questions of life and death.

Tell me, my friends, would you give up your children and their future for any of the luxuries or even necessities of life?

If we don't educate our children properly, they become exposed to the plague of indifference that has recently swept our people. Ask the average American child what happened in 1492 and he will tell you that that was the year Columbus discovered America. Ask him what else happened, and the chances are he will look blank. He will perhaps add that Columbus was helped by the good and great couple, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, and that without their help the discovery would have been impossible. He will not be able to tell you that that was the year of the climax of the Spanish Inquisition. He will not be able to tell you that that was the year that Ferdinand and Isabella expelled all faithful Jews from Spain. He won't know of the heroes of our people, of Don Isaac Abarbanel and others like him who chose exile within their faith, and hardship, rather than nobility, power, and Spanish glory on the path of conversion.

Ask him about the Crusaders. He'll answer you with a glow, about the glory of the knights and their achievements of chivalry.

He will not know that for us the Crusaders wrought the bitterest havoc, the most terrible persecution. He won't know that they caused the rivers of Europe to run red with the blood of our fathers and mothers about thirty generations ago. He won't know of our heroism, our martyrdom, our steadfastness of soul, our purity of soul, our strength, and our spirit that could not be crushed, whatever the cost.

Do you want your children to stay with you? Do you want them to carry on the faith into which you were born? Then expose these young shoots to their roots. Do you want them to be proud, honorable, secure, and happy Jews? Then teach them, teach them, teach them. Spare no pains, spare no expense, but teach them with the best and most modern methods that you know. Make them love Judaism as you never had the chance to learn; give them the opportunity you never had, opportunity so vital to carrying on the life of our people, vital to the existence of our souls.

If you don't do this, then our children's Jewish spirit will wither and die. And if they die, spiritually, G-d forbid, so do we, and with us our parents' memory, which no Yizkor service will ever be able to revive.

If we do rise to our responsibilities, however, if we do read our souls aright and fulfill our Jewish duty, then the prophecy our Rabbis read into the parable of Solomon will come true. "I descended to the garden saith the Lord - this is the world. "To see the rushes by the brook - this is Israel. "To see if the vine is ripe - these are the sages, the synagogues, and the schools. "If the pomegranates bloomed - these are the children who sit and study the Torah."

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The Bull, the Goat and the Ketoret

Author: HaRav Avigdor Nebenzahl

Article Date: Thursday September 16, 2010

THE KOHEN GADOL IN THE KODESH HAKODOSHIM

As Yom Kippur approaches, we are all doing some soul searching and trying to come closer to Hashem. What must our tshuva focus on? The simple answer is that we must try to ascertain which mitzvot we were lax in our observance, or could have observed in a stronger fashion, and take upon ourselves to strengthen our observance of those particular mitzvot.

Perhaps an analysis of the Kohen Gadol's avoda on Yom Kippur will give us some insight into what we should have in mind this coming Yom Kippur. The Kohen Gadol would bring the blood of the bull, the blood of the goat, and the ketoret - the incense offering - into the Kodesh HaKodoshim. The bull was purchased by the Kohen Gadol with his own funds, while the goat was purchased with public funds.

In addition to their halachic requirements, what do these offerings symbolize? The bull offerings is said to atone for the chet haegel - the

sin of the Golden Calf, while the bull offering is said to atone for the sin of mechirat Yoseph - the sale of Yoseph by his brothers. Given that Aharon HaKohen was the one who made the egel, the atoning bull must come from the personal funds of his descendant, the Kohen Gadol. The symbolic nature of the goat as atonement for the sale of Yoseph is that following the sale of Yoseph the brothers slaughtered a goat and dipped Yoseph's tunic in the blood.

We require atonement for so many sins on Yom Kippur, why were these two singled out? These two sins are representative of the two categories of mitzvos: the chet haegel was the first public sin in the realm of bein adam laMakom, while the sale of Yoseph is the source of all future sins in the area of bein adam lachavero - it is the first sin of its kind involving a significant portion of the nation.

HaGaon HaRav Yoseph Chaim Sonnenfeld zt"l refers to the above idea in his analysis of the bracha we recite annually on Yom Kippur: "for You are the Forgiver of Israel and the Pardoner of the tribes of Yeshurun" He explains that "for You are the Forgiver of Israel" refers to the sins which are bein adam laMakom beginning with the chet haegel as the Jewish people proclaimed: eileh elohecha Yisrael, while umachalan leShivtei Yeshurun, Pardoner of the tribes of Yeshurun, alludes to the tribes who sinned in the sale of Yoseph making this incident the source of sins in the category of bein adam lachavero. Yom Kippur is the time to repent for all our sins, but special emphasis is placed on these two sins because they are representative of all sins in these two main categories of mitzvoth (the Mishna adds that sins bein adam lachavero require seeking forgiveness from the person we have wronged).

HOW COULD THEY HAVE GONE SO WRONG?

How are we to understand the chet haegel? Moshe Rabenu ascends Har Sinai to receive the Torah and it seems he has failed to return: "The people saw that Moshe delayed in descending the mountain" (Shemos 32:1)

Rashi relates in the name of Chazal: "They thought that Moshe was late, because when Moshe went up to the mountain, he said to them: 'at the end of forty days I will come within the first six hours of the day', they thought that the day he ascended was part of the count but he had told them forty full days, forty days along with the nights. But the day that he ascended did not have its night with it, for he ascended on the seventh of Sivan, thus the fortieth day was on the seventeenth of Tammuz. On the sixteenth, Satan came and confused the world and displayed an image of darkness, gloom, and confusion, to imply: 'Moshe must certainly have died, that is why confusion has come to the world'. He said to them: 'Moshe has died, for six hours have passed and he has not come.'" (Rashi Shemos 32:1)

The Gemara adds that Satan showed them the image of Moshe's coffin being carried in heaven in an attempt to convince them that he was no longer alive.

The Satan obviously did not succeed in totally convincing the people that Moshe had died, for they make no mention of his death. They just said: "for we do not know what became of him" (Shemos 32:1). What was the people's response? "And the people gathered around Aharon (al Aharon) and said to him: 'rise up, make for us gods who will go before us, for this Moshe, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what became of him'" (ibid.) What could they possibly mean by "make for us gods who will go before us?" Did they for a moment believe that a human being could make a god? G-d makes human beings, not the other way around! Furthermore, Satan had only convinced them that Moshe was no longer alive, he never said anything about Hashem no longer existing, G-d forbid. They needed a new Moshe Rabenu not a new god! What makes this more difficult to comprehend is that we are not speaking of fools - this was the dor deah, the generation of wisdom. They were certainly not foolish enough to believe that they could create a god for themselves! The text cannot possibly be interpreted based on its simple understanding.

SEEKING HOUSING FOR THE SHCHINA

There is another aspect to this incident which is equally puzzling - after the Golden Calf was produced, the people declared: "This is your god, O Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt." (Shemos 32:4) Even if they truly believed that this calf was their new god, how could they believe that a calf which was just created had taken them out from Egypt three months ago? Only an insane person could believe such a thing, certainly not the generation that merited receiving the Torah! If they really were insane, Hashem would not have been angry with them - what could He expect from lunatics! What was going through their minds when they sinned?

BUILDING A TANGIBLE HOUSING FOR THE SHCHINA

The people became desperate and they felt the need to create a physical housing for the Divine Presence. Up until that point Moshe Rabenu had filled that role for them: "Who caused His splendorous arm to go at Moshe's right side?" (Yeshayahu 63:12) Moshe's passing meant the loss of their ability to see and feel the Shchina, they needed some sort of replacement. (See Kuzari 1:97) They were not looking for a G-d, they felt the lack of Moshe Rabenu: "For this man Moshe who brought us up from the land of Egypt - we do not know what became of him." (Shemos 32:1) Moshe was able to produce miracles such as raising his hand and splitting the sea, not because he was a god but because he was the housing for the Divine Presence. With Moshe gone, the people now needed a new housing for the Shchina so they built the Golden Calf. This may not be classified as actual Avoda Zara, but it was a terrible sin nonetheless, as is evidenced by Hashem's wrath at their behavior and His desire to destroy His nation.

This idea in and of itself does not appear so preposterous and deserving of Divine wrath, on the contrary, should they not rather be praised for desiring a place for the Divine Presence to reside? Did Hashem not command Moshe to construct a place specifically for that purpose? Although it was not to take the place of Moshe, for Moshe was still alive, yet Hashem did command the construction of an edifice to house the Divine Presence. The Jewish people themselves proclaimed together with Moshe when they left Egypt: "You will bring them and implant them on the mount of Your heritage, the foundation of Your dwelling-place that You, Hashem, have made - the Sanctuary, my L-rd that Your hands established" (Shemos 15:17).

There was clearly destined to be a Mikdash constructed for this purpose. Is it therefore such a grave sin for Am Yisrael to wish to construct a place for the Shchina to reside? Was it so wrong of them to decide that now was as good a time as any to construct this Mikdash? While it may be true that they had not yet arrived at the final location of the Mikdash - but did Hashem Himself not command the construction of a temporary Mishkan during their sojourn in the desert? They decided to build what they considered a tangible Presence of Hashem in the shape of a calf, rather than in the shape of Cherubim as Hashem desired. Why did Hashem bring upon them a punishment so severe that it was to effect all future generations, as the Torah writes: "On the day that I make My account, I shall bring their sin to account against them" (Shemos 32:34) Their motivations appear to be sincere - should they not rather have been praised for desiring closeness with the Shchina?

HASHEM - REASON FOR ALL REASONS

Their motivation for building an edifice to house the Shchina is in itself commendable. However, who told them however that it should be in the guise of a Golden Calf? Did they have a right to dictate to Hashem where His Shchina should reside? They believed that they could construct a Golden Calf and force the Divine Presence to reside there. We have no right to dictate anything to Hashem! We declare three times daily in Shmoneh Esrei that Hashem is: Kel Elyon. He is "the highest of all high and the reason for all reasons." (Zohar) Man lives his life based on reason, he thinks in a causal manner - there is cause and effect. The Gemara asks a question and then provides an answer.

Tosafos pose a difficulty and then arrive at a conclusion. We lead our daily lives in such a manner as well: we are hungry so we go and buy food. We need money to buy food so we go out to work. Every action of ours has a "must" - even acts in life that are not necessary have their "must". If a person wishes to play football then he must either purchase a ball or borrow one from someone else. There is no "must" when it comes to Hashem for He is the reason for all reasons. Nobody can tell Hashem that He must place His Shchina in something which they constructed. What right did they have to decide for themselves what Hashem must do?

IGNORING EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS

Had this been the nation's only violation in the chet haegel, perhaps Hashem would not have become so angry. They meant well, perhaps their sin was unintentional. There is, however, another aspect to this sin that better explains Hashem's anger. Prior to Moshe's ascending Har Sinai, Moshe left explicit instructions regarding what to do in his absence: "Behold! Aharon and Chur are with you; whoever has a grievance should approach them" (Shemos 24:14). If there is anything you do not understand, you must turn to Aharon and Chur - they are the gedolei hador who will take my place during my prolonged absence. If the Jewish people truly believed that Moshe was no longer alive, they should have spoken to Aharon and Chur and said: "Esteemed Rabbanim, Moshe is gone, where must we turn now?" Aharon and Chur either would have responded using their great Torah wisdom - perhaps Aharon, Chur, Nachshon ben Aminadav, Yehoshua, or someone else would have been appointed as the new leader. In addition to being a Gadol HaDor, Aharon was a prophet who could have inquired of Hashem as to the proper course of action.

What did the people do? Rather than asking Aharon, they dictated to him what they thought must be done: "rise up and make for us gods" (Shemos 32:1). The pasuk describes the people's gathering around Aharon as: vayikahel haam al Aharon rather than el Aharon. The words el Aharon would have implied that they approached him and gathered around him to hear his words of wisdom. On the other hand, al Aharon implies a certain imposing of their will on him, as if they were above him. Chur in fact opposed this suggestion and paid for it with his life (Rashi Shemos 31:5). With this in mind we can no longer suggest that their sin was unintentional. They were instructed to seek the guidance of the Torah sages and their neglecting to do so, even going so far as to dictate to the sages what they must do and killing anyone who stood in their way, deems this sin intentional.

This takes place only too often in public as well as private lives. The public decides that the Rabbanim must rule in a particular way. Rather than seeking guidance from the Rabbanim the public demands that they must rule in a particular way, usually leniently. This is all part of the sin of the Golden Calf. Throughout the history of the State of Israel there has been friction between the government and the Chief Rabbinate. The Jerusalem Post once conducted a survey among government officials regarding how to view the role of the Chief Rabbinate. My father z"l, who was State Comptroller at the time, was one of those interviewed. He stated that it was not up to us to determine the tasks of the Rabbinate, rather the Rabbinate should be instructing us on how to run the government! This was where Am Yisrael went wrong - rather than allowing Aharon and Chur to teach them what must be done, they decided for themselves what course of action to follow. The tikkun for this is to accept what our Rabbis tell us.

UNDERSTANDING MECHIRAT YOSEPH

Let us now try to understand the sale of Yoseph for which the goat atones. What were the tribes thinking? How could they possibly first consider killing their brother and in the end sell him into slavery? The Torah tells us that Yoseph would bring bad reports about his brothers to their father and that he had dreams in which they were bowing down to him. The brothers judged Yoseph as a rodef and felt they had no choice

but to rid themselves of him, first they considered killing him until Yehuda intervened and suggested selling him to the Ishmaelites. How could they have reached such a preposterous conclusion regarding a tzaddik the caliber of their brother Yoseph?

They recalled that their great grandfather Avraham had many sons. In addition to Yitzchak, there were Yishmael and the children of Ktura. Out of all of them, the entire spiritual inheritance was given to Yitzchak. Yitzchak had two sons: Yaakov and Esav. Only Yaakov inherited all of Yitzchak's vast spiritual wealth. Yoseph's brothers thought that he had similar plans - to take the entire spiritual inheritance for himself, away from his brothers. The best case scenario they felt, would be that they would be slaves to Yoseph, just as Yitzchak told Yaakov: "be a lord to your kinsmen, and you mother's sons will prostrate themselves to you" (Bereishit 27:29). Being that Yoseph had already dreamt that they were bowing down to him, this conclusion seemed quite obvious.

Yoseph of course had nothing of the sort in mind. All Yoseph had intended to do, was to inform their father that the brothers were straying off the path and were risking losing their share in olam haba. Perhaps, he felt, Yaakov should speak words of mussar to them.

JUDGING OTHERS FAVORABLY

Each side in this dispute was guilty of not judging the other favorably - this was the mistake of the tribes and it is our job to always judge others favorably. The Gemara teaches us that the ketoret atones for the sin of loshon hara. It was Yoseph's loshon hara and the brothers not judging him favorably that led to the sale. What led Yoseph to assume that they were eating ever min hachai perhaps there is another explanation (ben pakua, etc.). If they all had one view and he disagreed, perhaps they know something he does not and it is they who are right.

I would like to add that the idea of judging another favorably applies only when there is a need to judge - when there is no need then it is better not to judge at all. In the end Yoseph accepted Hashem's decree and saw the good in his being sold - that he eventually ended up in Egypt and became viceroy eventually saving a large number of people.

Our task this Yom Kippur is to return to Hashem Who is waiting for us. This tshuva should include what we have just discussed - judging others favorably and following the guidance of our Rabbanim. May Hashem grant all of us a Gemar Chatima Tova.

gmar chatima tova From: Kaganoff Sent: Sunday, October 02, 2011
The Seder Avodah of Yom Kippur
by Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Rav Goldberg was discussing the tefilos of Yom Kippur with the shul's chazan, Reb Hershel. "Probably the least understood part of the Yom Kippur davening is the Seder Avodah recited in the repetition of Musaf." The Rav began. "Although it is one of the most important parts of the Yom Kippur davening, I have seen many shuls race through it at a pace too fast for comprehension." "Let me quote you the Me'am Loez," continued Rav Goldberg, pulling a sefer off the shelf. "He writes, 'Many people doze off during the recital of the Avodah. They don't realize that the most important part of Yom Kippur is during the repetition of the Sh'moneh Esrei, when the Seder Avodah is recited.'" "I didn't realize it was that important," admitted Reb Hershel, "but it is very hard to understand." "Dozens of piyutim (liturgical pieces) have been written describing the Seder Avodah," explained Rav Goldberg. "Most shuls that daven Nusach Ashkenaz recite the piyut that begins with the words Amitz Koach, which is indeed a very difficult, poetically-written piyut. The piyut used in Nusach S'fard, Atah Konanta, is much easier to comprehend." "So why do we recite Amitz Koach?" "That is an excellent question that I cannot answer fully. Already in the time of the Gemara, we see that the Seder Avodah was recited, presumably from some type of piyut, although the text they used is long lost. The Geonim and Rishonim refer to many different piyutim that they

had in their times. Amitz Koach was authored by Rabbeinu Meshulam ben Klonymos, who is quoted by Rashi with the greatest respect (see Rashi, Bava Metzia 69b s.v. Mafrin; Zevachim 45b s.v. h.g.). In the course of time, Minhag Ashkenaz accepted the use of Amitz Koach, presumably out of respect for the author.” “Why is it so important to recite the Seder Avodah? Is it a Takanas Chachomim?” “There is no specific Takanah requiring the recital of the Seder Avodah. However, reciting it fulfills the concept of ‘U’neshalma Parim Sefaseinu,’ ‘And let our lips replace the (sacrificial) bulls’ (Hoshea 14:3). The Midrash teaches that when we are unable to offer korbanos, our recital of the Avodah is accepted by Hashem as a replacement for the korbanos (Midrash Rabbah, Shir HaShirim 4:3). This implies that we accomplish kaparah (atonement) by reciting the Seder Avodah with kavanah. Therefore, a person who recites the viduy of the Seder Avodah and truly regrets his sins can accomplish atonement; this would be similar to the viduy recited by the Cohen Gadol.

THE ATONEMENT OF YOM KIPPUR

Reb Hershel was curious. “What did the viduy of the Cohen Gadol accomplish?” “Different korbanos offered by the Cohen Gadol atoned for different sins (see Gemara Yoma 61a). However, the greatest atonement was accomplished by the goat sent to Azazel, which atoned for all the sins of the Jewish people (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 1:2; Mishnah Shevuos 2b).” “Do you mean that a person could achieve atonement even if he did not do Teshuvah?” “Although there is such an opinion in the Gemara, the halacha is that Yom Kippur’s kaparah is only effective for those who do Teshuvah (Gemara Shevuos 13a). A person who does complete Teshuvah, which means that he regrets his sins, makes a decision that he will never commit this sin again, and recites viduy is forgiven for his sins.” “Does this mean that he will never be punished for them?” “Not always. For very serious sins, including Chilul Hashem, (desecrating Hashem’s name) he may still be punished in this world. But, someone who completely repented his sins in this world is guaranteed that he will suffer no punishment in the next world (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 1:3-4).” “At the time of the Beis HaMikdash, did people know when their sins were forgiven?” “When the Cohen Gadol was a tzadik, part of the Yom Kippur Avodah included a procedure that showed Klal Yisrael whether they were forgiven. Let me provide some background. The Beis HaMikdash treasurers purchased two goats at the same time that were identical in height, appearance and value (Mishnah Yoma 62a). One of these goats was a Yom Kippur korban, offered in the Beis HaMikdash, and the other, was the Azazel goat.

CHOOSING THE GOAT FOR AZAZEL

“The Cohen Gadol drew lots to determine which goat would be the korban for Hashem and which would be the Azazel. This was an elaborate procedure. The Cohen Gadol stood in the courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash, near the courtyard’s entrance, facing the two goats, one opposite his right hand, and the other opposite his left. The S’gan, the Associate Cohen Gadol, stood on the Cohen Gadol’s right, and the Rosh Beis Av, the Head of the family unit of Cohanim on duty that week, stood on the Cohen Gadol’s left. “The Cohen Gadol thrust his hands into a small wooden box containing two gold lots, one marked ‘for Hashem’ and the other ‘for Azazel,’ and removed the lots, one in each hand. He then raised his hands, exposing the lots to the S’gan and Rosh Beis Av. If the lot saying ‘for Hashem’ was in his right hand, the S’gan announced, ‘Master Cohen Gadol, raise your right hand.’ If it was in his left hand, the Rosh Beis Av announced, ‘Master Cohen Gadol, raise your left hand.’ “The Cohen Gadol then placed each lot on the head of the goat nearest that hand, and decreed, ‘For Hashem, a Chatos offering.’ The Cohen Gadol used the Ineffable Name of Hashem in this declaration, and everyone assembled responded by shouting ‘Baruch Shem K’vod Malchuso L’Olam Vo’ed’ (Mishnah Yoma 37a and 39a).

THE RED THREAD

“The Cohen Gadol then tied a red thread to the horn of the Azazel goat, and another red thread around the neck of the Chatos goat (Mishnah Yoma 41b). Much later in the procedure, the Cohen Gadol rested his hands and full weight on the head of the Azazel goat, and recited aloud a viduy on behalf of the entire Jewish people. He concluded his viduy by stating, ‘Because on this day He will atone and purify you from all your sins. Before Hashem shall you become pure (Vayikra 16:30),’ once again using the Ineffable Name of Hashem. When the assembled people heard the Name uttered in purity and holiness by the Cohen Gadol, they all bowed and prostrated themselves until their faces were pressed to the ground. They then recited again ‘Baruch Shem K’vod Malchuso L’Olam Vo’ed’ (Mishnah Yoma 66a). “At one point in the procedure, the red thread tied to the Azazel goat was removed, torn in half, and one part tied again onto the Azazel goat’s horns. At the exact moment that the Jews were forgiven, both halves of the thread turned white” (Yoma 67a). “You mentioned that the red thread was torn in half,” Hershel asked. “What happened to the other half?” “This depends on the period of Jewish history. When the Cohen Gadol was a great tzadik, the Jews were forgiven on Yom Kippur, and the red thread turned white. During those years, the thread was left displayed in a prominent place in the Beis HaMikdash for everyone to see the miracle. However, in the later years of the Second Beis HaMikdash, when the Cohanim Gedolim were often not suitable for the position, the thread did not turn white. To save themselves embarrassment, the thread was placed where it would not be seen (Yoma 67a).

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

THE COHANIM GEDOLIM OF THE SECOND BEIS HAMIKDASH

“You mentioned that there was a vast difference between the Cohanim Gedolim of the First Beis HaMikdash and those of the Second. Could you explain this better?” “Yes, indeed. The Cohanim Gedolim of the First Beis HaMikdash were all great tzadikim who were worthy of their exalted position. Most of them had long tenures as Cohen Gadol. In contrast, most of the Cohanim Gedolim of the Second Beis HaMikdash bribed the government for the position. Because they lacked the kedusha the position required, they died within a year of securing the appointment (Yoma 8b, 9a).” “And yet they were eager to bribe the government for the job?” “People do very strange things for kavod. As Chazal teach us, it is one of the three things that remove a person from this world.”

WHAT PART OF THE YOM KIPPUR SERVICE MUST BE DONE BY THE COHEN GADOL?

Reb Hershel had many other questions. “What part of the Avodah of Yom Kippur was the Cohen Gadol obligated to perform himself?” “Certain procedures took place in the Beis Hamikdash every day, such as clearing the two mizbeichos (altars); bringing the daily offerings (Korban Tamid); burning k’tores (incense) twice a day; and cleaning, setting up and lighting the Menorah. In addition, on Shabbos and Yom Tov, there were special korbanos called Korban Musaf, the origins of our Musaf prayers. The Torah mentions these korbanos in Parshas Pinchas. All these could be performed by any cohen. “On Yom Kippur, in addition to the daily and Musaf korbanos, there was a special procedure unique to Yom Kippur, which is called the Seder Avodah, or the Seder Avodas Yom Kippur. This Avodah, involving the offering of several special korbanos and a unique offering of incense, is described in Parshas Acharei, the Keriya HaTorah for Yom Kippur morning, and in great length in Mesechta Yoma. For this Avodah, the Cohen Gadol wore special white garments that were worn no other time. Although it was

preferred that the Cohen Gadol perform everything in the Beis HaMikdash on Yom Kippur himself, the only part absolutely mandatory for him to perform was the special Yom Kippur Avodah.”

WERE LOTS USED ON YOM KIPPUR?

“I am confused,” admitted Hershel. “The Piyutim of Seder Avodah mention drawing lots to determine which cohanim will bring korbanos on Yom Kippur. But why draw lots, if the Cohen Gadol was doing everything anyway?” “A lottery system was used each day to determine which cohanim would perform the different tasks in the Beis HaMikdash. Most poskim contend that the Cohen Gadol performed ALL the service in the Beis HaMikdash by himself on Yom Kippur (even though he was only required to perform the special Yom Kippur Avodah). In their opinion, there was no lottery on Yom Kippur to determine who performed any tasks. Other poskim contend that although the Cohen Gadol was to perform all the tasks in the Beis HaMikdash himself, if he was unable to perform the entire Avodah himself, other cohanim could do some parts of it in his place. When this happened, the lottery system would determine which cohen was appointed to perform the avodah.”

CHANGING CLOTHES

“It is interesting to note,” continued the Rav, “that to perform every part of the special Seder Avodah of Yom Kippur, the Cohen Gadol was required to wear his special Yom Kippur vestments (described in Parshas Acharei). However, for every part of the service that was not part of the Yom Kippur Avodah, he wore the eight vestments described in Sefer Shmos. Thus, the Cohen Gadol changed his clothes five times during Yom Kippur. According to a special commandment received by Moshe Rabbeinu (Halacha l’Moshe mi’Sinai), he immersed himself in a mikveh each time he changed his clothes and also performed a special procedure involving washing his hands and feet twice each time.” “I understand that when the Cohen Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim (The Holy of Holies), no one was allowed to be inside the entire Beis HaMikdash building, even the Kodesh (Vayikra 16:17),” interjected Hershel. “Not only were no humans allowed in, but even angels could not enter (Yerushalmi Yoma 1:5, cited by Tosafos Yeshanim Yoma 19b).”

THE COHEN GADOL SWEARING

“I remember learning that the Cohen Gadol had to swear an oath before Yom Kippur,” queried Hershel. “Why was that?” “The first time the Cohen Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim, he did so with a ladle of specially refined k’tores (incense) and a censer, a type of coal pan for burning incense. According to Halacha L’Moshe M’Sinai, he had to enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim first and then burn the k’tores inside. However, the Tzedukim, who did not accept Torah she-bal peh, believed that he should kindle the k’tores first and then enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim. In the period of the Second Beis HaMikdash, when the position of Cohen Gadol was often purchased, there was concern that the Cohen Gadol might be a clandestine Tzeduki. Since no one could enter the Beis HaMikdash building while the k’tores was offered, there was no way of knowing what the Cohen Gadol actually did while inside. Therefore, he was required to swear before Yom Kippur that he would perform the service as instructed by the Gedolei Yisrael.” “Were there any recorded instances of a Cohen Gadol who was a Tzeduki?” “The Gemara records two such instances. In one case, the Cohen Gadol proudly told his father, who was also a Tzeduki, that he had offered the k’tores according to their practices. The Gemara records that this Cohen Gadol soon died a very ignominious death.” “What happened in the other instance?” “The Gemara records that the cohanim heard a loud sound in the Beis HaMikdash. They raced in to find the Cohen Gadol dead, with obvious signs that he had been killed by an angel (Yoma 19b).” “But I thought even angels could not enter the Beis HaMikdash while the Cohen Gadol offered the k’tores?” “This is an excellent question, and it is asked by the Gemara Yerushalmi. The

Gemara answers that since the Cohen Gadol had performed the service incorrectly, the angels were permitted to enter.

HOW MANY TIMES DID THE COHEN GADOL ENTER THE KODESH HAKODOSHIM?

“How many times did the Cohen Gadol enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim on Yom Kippur?” asked Hershel. “Most people don’t realize that the Cohen Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim four times on Yom Kippur. The first time was with the special Yom Kippur k’tores, the second time to complete the kaparah of his special Yom Kippur bull offering, and the third time was to attend to the kaparah of the goat offering. During each of these last two visits he sprinkled eight times. These sprinklings have a significant place in the piyutim. These are the places when the chazan, followed by the congregation, shouts out, ‘Achas, achas v’achas, achas u’shtayim,’ until ‘achas va’sheva’ to commemorate this part of the Avodah.” “You said that the Cohen Gadol entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim four times, but we mentioned only three.” “Much later in the day, the Cohen Gadol changed into a different set of special Yom Kippur white garments and entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim to pick up the censer and the ladle that he had brought in earlier. This was a required part of the Yom Kippur service.”

“I reviewed the description of the Avodah mentioned in Parshas Acharei,” continued Hershel. “I notice that the Torah does not mention Yom Kippur until the twenty-ninth pasuk of the discussion. Why is this?” “Although Aaron and the later Cohanim Gedolim never entered the Kodesh HaKodoshim, except on Yom Kippur, the Midrash says that Aaron was permitted to enter it at other times, provided he followed the procedure described in Parshas Acharei. On Yom Kippur, he was obligated to offer these korbanos and enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim. Thus, the beginning of the reading explains how Aaron could enter the Kodesh HaKodoshim, whereas the end teaches that this procedure must be performed on Yom Kippur.” (Note that Rashi on Chumash seems to disagree with this approach.) “Is it true that a rope was tied around the Cohen Gadol’s waist before he entered, so that they could pull him out if he died?” “In actuality, the source, which is a Zohar, mentions that a rope was tied around his foot,” responded Rav Goldberg. “Thanks a lot for all your time,” Reb Hershel concluded. “I now understand the importance of reciting the Seder Avodah carefully, and why some people study the mishnayos of Meseches Yoma before Yom Kippur.” “You are absolutely correct. Indeed, the Mateh Efrayim maintains that one’s main learning during the entire month of Elul should be devoted to understanding the Seder Avodah properly. So, don’t forget to study the mishnayos and gemaros we’ve just been discussing yourself.”

http://torahweb.org/torah/2011/moadim/rwil_noraim.html

Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Fear and Love, Truth and Peace

I

The upcoming Yomim Noraim, Days of Awe, evoke fear of Hashem and His judgment. Rosh Hashana is the day that every person passes before Hashem individually (Rosh Hashana 18a). The dramatic Unesaneh Tokef, recited with great intensity and devotion, speaks of fear and trembling in the face of the Divine verdict of life and death. This universal theme is the central motif of the "sanctity of the day" on Rosh Hashana: Hashem is the King of the entire world, and all will recognize His sovereignty when He will appear with the splendor of His strength. The shofar awakens us to teshuvah, primarily out of fear of Hashem and His judgment (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 3:4).

Yom Kippur emphasizes the need for complete atonement. Just as a mikve purifies the impure, so Hashem purifies Am Yisrael (Yoma 85b). Just as a mikve requires total immersion, Yom Kippur requires total teshuva. Teshuva out of fear is incomplete, a step towards Hashem, and

only mitigates one's sins. Yom Kippur is a day of total teshuva, out of love, that converts sins into merits and reaches all the way to Hashem (Yoma 86a-b [1]). Heartfelt confession, conspicuously absent on Rosh Hashana, is the central theme of Yom Kippur. It reflects a sincere recognition of one's mistakes, recited out of love of Hashem and a resolve to improve, which is a meritorious result of the sins.

While Rosh Hashana is the universal day of judgment, Yom Kippur is a special gift to Am Yisrael. "You gave us with love this Day of Atonement so that we can return to You wholeheartedly" (Ne'ilah). "In Your abundant mercy, You have given us this fast day of atonement" (Musaf). Hashem's love of Am Yisrael in granting us Yom Kippur is reflected by our complete teshuva out of love.

II.

Fear is praiseworthy only with respect to Hashem. Fear of Hashem should remove fear of man (Berachos 60a; Rabbeinu Bechaye, Introduction to Ki Sisa; Al Hateshuva p. 140-141). Love, on the other hand, is praiseworthy with respect to man, as well. A sincere Torah scholar is praised as one who loves Hashem and who loves His creatures (beriyos) (Avos 6:1).

On Rosh Hashana, the day of fear, we, as individuals, beseech Hashem for a good year and declare His kingship. On Yom Kippur, the day of love, we add the dimension of interpersonal forgiveness and closeness. It is a day of no jealousy, hatred or competition (Musaf), when even sinners pray with us (Kol Nidrei) and fast with us (Kerisos 6b).

Rosh Hashana is a day of truth, as we end its central beracha, "purify our hearts to serve You in truth, for You are the Lord of truth and Your word is true." Yom Kippur is a day of peace, as we make amends for our misdeeds and seek and grant forgiveness to foster peace with others.

On every holiday, we implore "bring us to Yerushalayim in eternal joy." On the Yomim Noraim, we add a prayer for "joy in Your city" and for Hashem's rule in "Yerushalayim Your holy city." On Rosh Hashana, we cite the prophecy that all will return from exile and "will bow to Hashem on the holy mountain in Yerushalayim" and on Yom Kippur we recall and anticipate the service of the Kohen Gadol in the Beis Hamikdash in Yerushalayim.

How and when will Yerushalayim be rebuilt? Hashem promises to convert fasts into feasts of joy and gladness, when the Beis Hamikdash will be rebuilt, if only we love truth and peace (Zechariah 8:19, R.H. 18b, see Rabbeinu Chananel). The very themes of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur hold the key to our ultimate redemption.

III.

Indeed, the very name Yerushalayim reflects this duality. The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 56:16) teaches that Shem called the city "Shalem" (Bereishis 14:18, see Rashi) and Avraham called it "Yireh." Hashem combined both names and called the city Yerushalayim.

The Meshech Chochma (22:14) explains that Shem saw that theft filled the world (6:11) and led to its destruction (6:13). Therefore, he devoted himself to improving interpersonal behavior. As such, he called his capital Shalem to emphasize character perfection and the idea that all of mankind comprise one organic whole, each person influencing and being influenced by one another.

Avraham, on the other hand, fought to teach mankind that Hashem is the Master of the world, a basic fact that had been forgotten (Rambam Hilchos Avodah Zara 1:1-3). To emphasize this message, he called his capital, the site of the akeidah which demonstrated his fear of Hashem (22:12), "Hashem will see...and on the mountain Hashem will be seen" (22:14).

Rosh Hashana, on which we read of the akeidah, and Yom Kippur, when we must appease others, improving our interpersonal behavior to achieve atonement (Yoma 85b), follow immediately the seven weeks of consolation. In the seven haftoras of consolation, Yeshaya describes our glorious future.

"All your children will be students of Hashem and abundant will be your children's peace" (54:13). The two aspects of Yerushalayim, recognizing Hashem and achieving peace, will lead to its redemption.

In the previous pasuk (54:12), Hashem promises to rebuild Yerushalayim with a stone called "kadchod." The Gemara (Bava Basra 75a) interprets that the angels (see Netzach Yisrael 51) or the scholars (see Shev Denechemta) debated if the stones should be shoham or yashfeh. Hashem said to them, "Let it be both" (kedein ukedein). Hence the word "kadchod," representing both stones.

The Meshech Chochma (Shemos 28:9) notes that shoham stones adorned the efod. This garment of the Kohen Gadol atones for idolatry (Zevachim 88b). The shoham represents its opposite, knowledge and fear of Hashem.

Yashfeh was the final stone of the choshen (28:20). The choshen mishpat (28:15), as its name implies, represents justice, interpersonal propriety. Yerushalayim will be rebuilt when both the themes of its name will be fulfilled. The two stones, shoham of the efod and yashfeh of the choshen, parallel Yireh and Shalem, truth and peace, respectively. When we love and pursue both, Hashem will rebuild Yerushalayim with both stones. All of Am Yisrael will be students of Hashem, bein adam lamakom, and will be blessed with abundant peace, bein adam lachaveiro.

The Yefe To'ar asks, why does Yireh precede Shalem? Chronologically, Shem preceded Avraham, so Shalem should precede Yireh. He answers that Avraham was a greater tzaddik, so his name, Yireh, takes precedence.

Alternatively, Yireh precedes Shalem conceptually. First we must establish our faith in Hashem and our adherence to the Torah's religious principles and observances. Only then can we develop appropriate interpersonal relationships, guided, and limited, by yiras Shamayim. Fear must precede love, truth must precede peace. Yireh must precede Shalem, even as Rosh Hashana must precede Yom Kippur.

May our teshuva, out of fear and love, lead to a year of truth and peace, and to the rebuilding of Yerushalayim.

[1] See Teshuva and Tefillah: Two Paths to Hashem; see also footnote 1 to Reuven's Teshuva: A Model for Life-Long Growth; see also "One Step At a Time" in the forthcoming Mitoch Haohel (Yeshiva University Press, Tishrei 5772)

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Jerusalem Post

RABBI BEREL WEIN

YOM KIPPUR

Friday, October 7, 2011

The "one day" of the year is now upon us. Yom Kippur carries with it a fascination for all concerned. The concept of forgiveness, that transgressions can be forgiven, that words can be retracted and that actions and commitments can somehow be annulled is a most radical one. For after all, in our real world of mundane life we remember yet every slight and insult hurled against us even decades later. We may be able to move on from that experience but we remember it. But Yom Kippur creates a situation that spiritually erases the experience. It allows for a clean slate unfettered by past transgressions and failures. This makes Yom Kippur the greatest gift that Heaven can provide for us while we are alive. This concept of forgiveness and starting again is in turn one of the greatest of the many gifts that Judaism has granted to humankind but, there are few gifts in life that do not also carry with it obligations and responsibilities. Forgiveness on Yom Kippur comes with the requirement of introspection and resolve to do better and not to continue to repeat the errors of the past. In the listing of the sins that we recite in the Yom Kippur prayers emphasis is placed upon the words that we have

uttered, the legs that carried us to transgression and the hands that are usually the culprit in our actual sinning. The listing of these body parts, so to speak, is not done unintentionally or merely poetically or metaphorically. They describe for us the areas of our lives that demand constant improvement and care. As such they deserve a modicum of study and understanding. Life and death depend on one's speech. It is difficult many times to be truly careful in speaking to others or most often about others. We often truly believe that talk is cheap. Yet talk can be very damaging. The rabbis stated that there are three victims of bad speech or even of careless speech. They are the speaker, the listener and the person that that was the subject of the remark or the speech. Bad speech is thus a serial killer, a multiple murderer. We all misspeak at times, most of the time unintentionally, but nevertheless consequences follow. As one whose profession is to constantly speak and teach I am well aware of how easily statements can be made that are not completely accurate and many times not wise at all. I truly regret those misspoken words. That is the hazard of my profession but it is a hazard for all of us as well. Care in speaking is a commitment that should be at the top of our list of improvements that we pledge to ourselves on Yom Kippur. And in many respects it is probably the most difficult commitment to achieve. We are accustomed to speaking from our infancy so we do so almost out of rote. I once saw a sign that said: "Do not engage mouth unless brain is in gear." Truer words were never written or expressed.

Our legs move quickly when we are enthusiastic about where we are heading. King David said about himself that his legs almost automatically took him to the house of Torah prayer and study. Our legs carry us where we really want to go to. Thus they are a true measure of our goals and ambitions. They tell us what is important in our lives and what we truly value and prioritize. Our legs and where they carry us do not allow ourselves to be fooled by pious platitudes that we may sometimes utter. There are times that we go places where we should not attend and participate in activities that are improper. Our legs brought us there and thus they revealed to us our true intent and uncovered weaknesses that we prefer to deny exist within us. How careful and measured our steps in life must be! Yom Kippur also teaches us to guard our hands from doing wrongs. In haste and frustration we strike out at those that we feel have harmed or insulted us. The arch enemies of Moshe and the prototypes of evil men in the Torah, Datan and Aviram, are introduced to us in the Torah as two people striking each other. Unfortunately we live in a climate of violence, from the school yard, to the parking lot, to everyday life and domestic abuse. Basically Yom Kippur teaches us to maintain silence except where it is necessary to speak, walk slowly and in the right direction and to keep our hands to ourselves in almost all life circumstances. Gmar chatima tova Shana tova

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Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks REFLECTIONS FOR YOM KIPPUR

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Yom Kippur is the day of days, when we give an account of our lives. We reflect on what has happened to us and what we plan to do in the coming year. To help this process I've written some thoughts that may evoke reflections of your own, for each of us must make his or her own decisions and no one can make them for us. I've cast them in the form of letters written by a father to his children who've just become parents in their own right. I've done so because it's a way of discussing the big decisions that shape the rest of our life for us and those close to us. They are fictional letters, but the issues they raise are real. Not all of us are married; not all are blessed with children; yet we can each

make a unique contribution to the Jewish people by the life we lead and the kindness we show to others. Rashi wrote: "The main descendants of the righteous are their good deeds". Every good deed is like a child. The single most important lesson of Yom Kippur is that it's never too late to change, start again, and live differently from the way we've done in the past. God forgives every mistake we've made so long as we are honest in regretting it and doing our best to put it right. Even if there's nothing we regret, Yom Kippur makes us think about how to use the coming year in such a way as to bring blessings into the lives of others by way of thanking God for all He has given us. May God bless all of us for the coming year. May He hear and heed our prayers. May He forgive us and help us forgive others. May He grant you, your family, and the Jewish people throughout the world, a year of health and peace and life. Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Tishri 5770

The booklet is dedicated in memory of Susi and Fred Bradfield k"z who, in their lifetime, instilled in their children and grandchildren a deep love of Judaism and the importance of its values. Their commitment to Judaism, the Jewish people and to Israel has remained an inspiration to their family and to all who knew them. Their lives were "letters to the next generation". May their memory always be for a blessing.

Letter 1: The most important legacy
DEAR SARA, DEAR DAVID, I am writing these letters to you as Yom Kippur approaches, because it's the day on when we ask the deepest questions about our lives. Who are we? How shall we live? What chapter will we write in the Book of Life? It's also a time to say the things we've left unsaid. The most important thing your mother and I want to say is that you are our beloved children. You have given us more joy than you can ever know. In all of life, you were God's most precious gift to us. Perhaps there were times when we said things to you, or you to us, that we later regretted. Please wipe them from your memories. God forgives us: let us forgive one another. Life is too short for anger or anguish. Now you have both married and become parents. May your children give you the joy you gave us. What inspired me to write these letters is the old Jewish custom that parents write their children Tzavaot, "ethical wills". It's based on the idea that the most important legacy we can give our children is not money or possessions, but spiritual ideals. I truly believe that. Give your children too much money or material gifts and you will spoil them. They will grow up unhappy and unfulfilled, and in the long run they won't thank you. It will damage them and your relationship with them. Tradition was right. The best things any of us can give our children are values to live by, ideals to aspire to, an identity so that they know who they are, and a religious and moral heritage to guide them through the wilderness of time. Children grow to fill the space we create for them, and if it's big, they will walk tall. Ideals are big; material possessions are small. Ideals are what make life meaningful. People may envy others for what they earn or own, but they admire others for what they are and what principles they live by – and it's better to be admired than to be envied. That is what Yom Kippur is about. Judaism sets the bar high. It's a demanding, challenging religion, but that is its greatness. If I were to define what it is to be a Jew, I would say it is to be an ambassador for God. We were never asked to convert the world, but we were asked to be living role models of justice, compassion, chessed and tzedakah. We are the people of the Book, who put learning and study at the pinnacle of our values, to show that faith is neither ignorant nor blind. We were asked to live our faith, day by day, act by act, through the complex choreography we call halakhah, the intricate beauty of Jewish law. Judaism is a religion of high ideals translated into simple daily deeds. That's what we received from our parents. It's what we have tried to give you. It's what we hope you will give your children. Not expensive

clothes or holidays or the latest mobile phone. These are distractions from life, not life itself. Life is made by what you live for. I say this to you at this holy time because I've seen too many people make the same mistake. Their marriages fail or they have a breakdown in relationship with their children and they ask, "What did I do wrong? I gave them everything". True, but not true. They gave them everything except what mattered: time, attention, selfless respect, and genuine, ethically demanding, spiritually challenging values. Ideals will bring happiness to you and your children.

Letter 2: The price of things and the value of things

SARA, DAVID, these have been tough times. Financial collapse, economic recession, and uncertainty ahead. People have lost their savings, their jobs, even their homes. What do you do in times like these? The best answer was given by an American politician: Never waste a crisis. You learn more in bad times than in good. The Chinese ideogram for 'crisis' also means 'opportunity'. Perhaps that's why the Chinese have been around so long. Only one language I know goes one further, and that is Hebrew. The Hebrew word for 'crisis' is *mashber*, which also means a birthing-stool. In Hebrew, crises are not just opportunities; they are birthpangs. Something new is being born. That's why Jews have survived every crisis in 4,000 years and emerged even stronger than they were before. What the financial collapse should teach us is that we were becoming obsessed with money: salaries, bonuses, the cost of houses, and expensive luxuries we could live without. When money rules, we remember the price of things and forget the value of things. That is a bad mistake. The financial collapse happened because people borrowed money they didn't have, to buy things they didn't need, to achieve a happiness that wouldn't last. The whole of consumer society is based on stimulating demand to generate expenditure to produce economic growth. This involves turning genuine values upside down. Advertising creates a thousand blandishments that focus our minds on what we don't have, while real happiness (as *Pirkei Avot* tells us) lies in rejoicing in what we do have. So in a curious way a consumer society is a mechanism for creating and distributing unhappiness. That is why an age of unprecedented affluence also became an age of unprecedented stress-related syndromes and depressive illnesses. The most important thing any of us can learn from the present economic crisis is: think less about the price of things and more about the value of things. There was one moment in the Torah when the people started worshipping gold. They made a Golden Calf. The interesting thing is that if you read the Torah carefully you'll see that immediately before and after the Golden Calf, Moses gave the people a command, the command of Shabbat. Why that command, then? Shabbat is the antidote to the Golden Calf because it's the day when we stop thinking about the price of things and focus instead on the value of things. On Shabbat we can't sell or buy. We can't work or pay others to work for us. Instead we spend the day with family and friends around the Shabbat table. In shul, we renew our contacts with the community. We listen to Torah, reminding ourselves of our people's story. We pray, giving thanks for all the blessings God has given us. Family, friends, community, the sense of being part of a people and its history, and above all giving thanks to God: these are things that have a value but not a price. Or, to put it another way: a basic principle of time management is to learn to distinguish between things that are important and things that are urgent. During the week, we tend to respond to immediate pressures. The result is that we focus on what's urgent but not necessarily important. The best antidote ever invented is Shabbat. On Shabbat we celebrate the things that are important but not urgent: the love between husband and wife, and between parents and children. The bonds of belonging. The story of which we are a part. The community that we support and that supports us in times of joy or grief. These are the ingredients of

happiness. No one's last thought was ever, "I wish I'd spent more time in the office". Hard times remind us of what good times tend to make us forget: where we came from, who we are, and why we are here. That's why hard times are the best times to plant the seeds of future happiness.

Letter 3: Being a Jewish parent

SARA, DAVID, I want to talk about children. God has blessed you both with children. They are the joy of our life, as of yours. Enjoy them. Spend time with them. Play, learn, sing, *davven* and do *mitzvot* with them. On nothing else will your time be better spent. The love you give them when they are young will stay with them throughout their lives. Like sunshine it will make them flower and grow. Having children is more than a gift. It's a responsibility. For us as Jews it's the most sacred responsibility there is. On it depends the future of the Jewish people. For four thousand years our people survived because in every generation, Jews made it their highest priority to hand their faith on to their children. They sanctified marriage. They consecrated the Jewish home. They built schools and houses of study. They saw education as the conversation between the generations: "You shall teach these things repeatedly to your children, speaking of them when you sit at home or travel on the way, when you lie down and when you rise up". They saw Judaism the way an English aristocrat sees a stately home. You live in it but you don't really own it. It's handed on to you by your ancestors and it's your task to hand it on to future generations, intact, preserved, if possible beautified and enhanced, and you do so willingly because you know that this is your legacy. It's what makes your family different, special. To lose it, sell it or let it fall into ruins, would be a kind of betrayal. And that is the point. Today, on average throughout the Diaspora, one young Jew in two is deciding not to marry another Jew, build a Jewish home, have Jewish children and continue the Jewish story. That is tragic. Your mother and I didn't spend too much time talking to you about our own family histories. But the truth is that virtually every Jew alive today has a history more remarkable than the greatest novel or family saga. It tells of how they were expelled from one country after another, how they lost everything and had to begin again. They were offered every blandishment to convert, but they said 'No'. They sacrificed everything to have Jewish grandchildren. And today when being a Jew demands almost no sacrifice, when we are freer to practise our faith than ever before, Jews are forgetting what it takes to have Jewish grandchildren. So how do you hand your values on? By showing your children what you love. Rabbi Moshe Alshich, the sixteenth century rabbi, asked in his commentary to the Shema, "How do we 'teach these things' to our children? How can we be sure that they will learn?" His reply? "The answer lies in the verse two lines earlier: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might'. What we love, they will love. There are many reasons for the high rates of assimilation in Jewish life, but one is fundamental. We are heirs to several generations of Jews who were ambivalent about being Jewish. I don't pass judgment on them, neither should you. Between the 1880s and the 1930s they lived through an age of antisemitism. Then came the Holocaust. Who would blame anyone in those days for saying, as did Heinrich Heine, "Judaism isn't a religion, it's a misfortune". But we are long past those days. One of the greatest gifts you can give your children is to let them see you carry your identity with pride. Your mother and I tried to show you as best we could that for us Judaism is our legacy, our stately home, our gift from those who came before us; the greatest attempt in all of history to create a life of justice, compassion and love as a way of bringing the Divine presence down from heaven to earth so that it etches our lives with the soft radiance of eternity. We can't live our children's lives for them. They are free. They will make their own choices. But we can show them what we love. If you want Jewish grandchildren, love Judaism and live in it with a sense of privilege and joy.

Letter 4: Jewish education

SARA, DAVID, send your children to Jewish schools. They are the pride of our community. They are our best investment in the Jewish future. A generation ago, Jewish schools were often seen as second-best. They're where you sent your children if they couldn't get in elsewhere. Today, rightly, they are a first choice for many. That is a tribute to their excellence. But they are more than that. For Jews, education is not just what we know. It's who we are. No people ever cared for education more. Our ancestors were the first to make education a religious command, and the first to create a compulsory universal system of schooling – eighteen centuries before Britain. The rabbis valued study as higher even than prayer. Almost 2,000 years ago, Josephus wrote: "Should anyone of our nation be asked about our laws, he will repeat them as readily as his own name. The result of our thorough education in our laws from the very dawn of intelligence is that they are, as it were, engraved on our souls." The Egyptians built pyramids, the Greeks built temples, the Romans built amphitheatres. Jews built schools. They knew that to defend a country you need an army, but to defend a civilisation you need education. So Jews became the people whose heroes were teachers, whose citadels were schools, and whose passion was study and the life of the mind. How can we deprive our children of that heritage? Can you really be educated without knowing Shakespeare or Mozart or Michelangelo or the basic principles of physics, economics or politics? Can you be an educated Jew without at least a basic familiarity with Tanakh and Talmud, the classic Torah commentaries, the poetry of Judah Halevi, the philosophy of Maimonides, and the history of the Jewish people? Jews in Eastern Europe used to say, "To be an apikores (heretic) is understandable, but to be an am ha'aretz (ignoramus) is unforgivable". My children, I hope we taught you enough to know that the first duty of a Jewish parent is to ensure that their children have a Jewish education. For almost a century that whole value-system was in disarray because Jewish life was in disarray. Jews were in flight from persecution, first from Eastern Europe, then from Western Europe, then from Arab lands. They were preoccupied by rebuilding their lives and ensuring that their children were integrated into the wider society. Jewish education was a casualty of those times. But not now. Today we've begun to recover something of the tradition. Yet our standards are still far too low. The world is changing ever faster. In a single generation, nowadays, there is more scientific and technological advance than in all previous centuries since human beings first set foot on earth. In uncharted territory, you need a compass. That's what Judaism is. It guided our ancestors through good times and bad. It gave them identity, security, and a sense of direction. It enabled them to cope with circumstances more varied than any other people have ever known. It lifted them, often, to heights of greatness. Why? Because Judaism is about learning. Education counts for more in the long run than wealth or power or privilege. Those who know, grow. "All you children shall be taught of the Lord" said Isaiah, "and great shall be the peace of your children". Give your children a deep and wide Jewish education and you will be giving them the peace of knowing who they are and why. There are only two other things more powerful still. First, practise at home what your children learn at school. Children need to see consistency. Otherwise they become confused, and eventually rebel. Second, let your children be your teachers. Over the Shabbat table, let them share with you what they have learned at school during the week. You will be amazed at the pride you give them because you have allowed them to give something to you.

Letter 5: On being Jewish

SARA, DAVID, you may wonder from time to time why your mother and I care so much about being Jewish. It's a fair question, and this is

my honest answer: Somehow, long ago, Jews were touched and transformed by a truth greater than themselves. They were the first to encounter God as a presence within yet beyond the universe. This changed everything, for if there is only one God and every human being is in His image, it means that every human being has non-negotiable dignity. It means that human life is sacred. It means that in some ultimate sense we are all equal. And if the universe is the free creation of the free God, then we, in His image, are also free. From this flowed the system we call morality and all it implies by way of personal and collective responsibility. Jews were the first people to understand the significance of human responsibility and freedom, the first to conceive of a society of equal dignity, the first to understand that right matters more than might, and a whole list of other insights that eventually revolutionised Western civilisation. Judaism inspired two other religions, Christianity and Islam, that between them today count more than half the six billion people on earth as their adherents. And even when Jews rebelled against Judaism, they did so in world-changing ways: Spinoza, the founder of political liberalism, Karl Marx, the revolutionary, and Sigmund Freud, the doctor of the soul. I think all three were profoundly wrong, but they were all profound. And Judaism is as relevant today as it ever was. Non-Jews admire Judaism for our strong families and communities, our commitment to education and the excellence of our schools, the emphasis we place on chessed and tzedakah, on practical acts of kindness and generosity. The Jewish voice is sought on questions of medical, social and business ethics. People respect Judaism for its wisdom and insight. It has integrity without fanaticism. It has strong principles without seeking to impose them on others. It has humour and humanity. Of course, Judaism is demanding. There are so many laws, so many details, that you can sometimes lose sight of the big picture. It's like the first French impressionists. At first people could see only brushstrokes and confusion. It took time before they realised that Monet, Renoir, Pissarro and the rest were capturing the play of light on surfaces and producing a whole new way of seeing. Judaism can look like a blur of laws and customs, until you realise that it's a whole new way of living. Halakhah, Jewish law, is about translating the highest of ideals into the simplest of acts. Here's the paradox: Most people think that more people would keep Judaism if only it were easier, less demanding. Why all the commandments, 613 of them? Wouldn't it be better if we made being Jewish simpler? Let's see. Think of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot. Which of the three is kept, on average, by the greatest number of Jews? More people keep Pesach than Sukkot. More people keep Sukkot than Shavuot. That's true wherever you go in the Jewish world. Now ask, which is the most demanding? Pesach is by far the most difficult. It involves cleaning the house, koshering the kitchen, using special utensils, and much else besides. Next comes Sukkot. You have to buy a lulav and etrog. You have to make a Sukkah. Easiest by far is Shavuot, which has no special mitzvah, unless you count staying up late on the first night for a Tikkun. So, the harder a festival is to keep, the more people keep it. Now think of the hardest day of all, one in which there is no eating or drinking, no joy or celebration, on which you spend the entire day in shul, thinking of all the things you did wrong. A perfect formula, you would have thought, for making sure that no one keeps it at all. But of course the opposite is true. Yom Kippur, when all these things happen, is the day on which more Jews come to shul than any other in the entire year. It's counterintuitive but true: the things we value most are the things that are the most demanding. That's true of study; it's true at work; it's true in sport; and it's true in matters of the spirit. Things that cost us little, we cherish little. What matter most to us are the things we make sacrifices for. If Judaism had been easier, it would have died out long ago. Never doubt that it's a privilege to be a Jew. Head for head our people have done more to transform the world than any other. There are easier ways to

live, but none more challenging. God asks great things of our people. That's what made our people great.

Letter 6: Jewish wisdom

DEAR SARA AND DAVID, wisdom is free, yet it is also the most expensive thing there is, for we tend to acquire it through failure or disappointment or grief. That is why we try to share our wisdom, so that others will not have to pay the price for it that we paid. These are some of the things Judaism has taught me about life, and I share them with you:

- Never try to be clever. Always try to be wise.
- Respect others even if they disrespect you.
- Never seek publicity for what you do. If you deserve it, you will receive it. If you don't, you will be attacked. In any case, goodness never needs to draw attention to itself.
- When you do good to others, it is yourself, your conscience and your self-respect, that will be the beneficiary. The greatest gift of giving is the opportunity to give.
- In life, never take shortcuts. There is no success without effort, no achievement without hard work.
- Keep your distance from those who seek honour. Be respectful, but none of us is called on to be a looking glass for those in love with themselves.
- In everything you do, be mindful that God sees all we do. There is no cheating God. When we try to deceive others, usually the only person we succeed in deceiving is ourselves.
- Be very slow indeed to judge others. If they are wrong, God will judge them. If we are wrong, God will judge us.
- Greater by far than the love we receive is the love we give.
- It was once said of a great religious leader, that he was a man who took God so seriously that he never felt the need to take himself seriously at all. That is worth aspiring to.
- Use your time well. Life is short, too short to waste on television, computer games and unnecessary emails; too short to waste on idle gossip, or envying others for what they have, too short for anger and indignation; too short to waste on criticising others. "Teach us to number our days", says the Psalm, "that we may get a heart of wisdom". But any day on which you have done some good to someone has not been wasted.
- You will find much in life to distress you. People can be careless, cruel, thoughtless, offensive, arrogant, harsh, destructive, insensitive, and rude. That is their problem, not yours. Your problem is how to respond. "No one", a wise lady once said, "can make you feel inferior without your permission". The same applies to other negative emotions. Don't react. Don't respond. Don't feel angry, or if you do, pause for as long as it takes for the anger to dissipate, and then carry on with the rest of life. Don't hand others a victory over your own emotional state. Forgive, or if you can't forgive, ignore.
- If you tried and failed, don't feel bad. God forgives our failures as soon as we acknowledge them as failures – and that spares us from the self-deception of trying to see them as success. No one worth admiring ever succeeded without many failures on the way. The great poets wrote bad poems; the great artists painted undistinguished canvases; not every symphony by Mozart is a masterpiece. If you lack the courage to fail, then you lack the courage to succeed.
- Always seek out the friendship of those who are strong where you are weak. None of us has all the virtues. Even a Moses needed an Aaron. The work of a team, a partnership, a collaboration with others who have different gifts or different ways of looking at things, is always greater than any one individual can achieve alone.
- Create moments of silence in your soul if you want to hear the voice of God.
- If something is wrong, don't blame others. Ask, how can I help to put it right?
- Always remember that you create the atmosphere that surrounds you. If you want others to smile, you must smile. If you want others to give, you must give. If you want others to respect you, you must show your respect for them. How the world treats us is a mirror of how we treat the world.
- Be patient. Sometimes the world is slower than you are. Wait for it to catch up with you, for if you are on the right path, eventually it will.
- Never have your ear so close to the ground that you can't hear what an upright person is saying.
- Never worry

when people say that you are being too idealistic. It is only idealistic people who change the world, and do you really want, in the course of your life, to leave the world unchanged?

- Be straight, be honest, and always do what you say you are going to do. There really is no other way to live.

Letter 7: Living Jewishly

IN MY LAST LETTER I spoke about some of the things I learned from Judaism about life. In this, I want to share some of the things I have learned from life about Judaism.

- Never ever be embarrassed about being a Jew. Our people has survived so long and contributed so much, that you should see being Jewish as an honour and a responsibility.
- Some people look down on Jews: they always have. In which case, we have to walk tall, so that, to see our face, they are forced to look up.
- Never compromise your principles because of others. Don't compromise on kashrut or any other Jewish practise because you happen to find yourself among non-Jews or non-religious Jews. Non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism. They are embarrassed by Jews who are embarrassed by Judaism.
- Never look down on others. Never think that being Jewish means looking down on gentiles. It doesn't. Never think that being a religious Jew entitles you to look down on nonreligious Jews. It doesn't. The greatest Jew, Moses, was also, according to the Torah, "the humblest person on the face of the earth". Humility does not mean self-abasement. True humility is the ability to see good in others without worrying about yourself.
- Never stop learning. I once met a woman who was 103 and yet who still seemed youthful. What, I asked her, was her secret? She replied, "Never be afraid to learn something new". Then I realised that learning is the true test of age. If you are willing to learn, you can be and still young. If you aren't, you can be and already old.
- Never confuse righteousness with self-righteousness. They sound similar, but they are opposites. The righteous see the good in people; the self-righteous see the bad. The righteous make you feel bigger; the self-righteous make you feel small. The righteous praise; the self-righteous criticise. The righteous are generous; the self-righteous, grudging and judgmental. Once you know the difference, keep far from the self-righteous, who come in all forms, right and left, religious and secular. Win the respect of people you respect, and ignore the rest.
- Whenever you do a mitzvah, stop and be mindful. Every mitzvah is there to teach us something, and it makes all the difference to pause and remember why. Mindless Judaism is not good for the soul.
- When you davven, reflect carefully on the meaning of the words. Remember too that in davenning we are part of a four-thousand-year-old choral symphony, made up of the voices of all the Jews of all the countries in all the centuries who said these words. Some said these prayers in the midst of suffering; others as they faced exile and expulsion; some even said them in the concentration camps. They are words sanctified by tears, but now we are saying them in the midst of freedom. The prayers of our ancestors have come true for us. Therefore our prayers honour them as well as God, for without them we would not today be Jews, and without us carrying on their tradition, their hopes would have been in vain.
- Don't worry if you can't keep up with the congregation. One word said from the heart is greater than a hundred said without understanding or attention.
- Always be willing to share your Judaism. On Shabbat or the festivals, invite guests into your home. Once a week, learn with people who know less than you. The difference between material and spiritual goods is this: with material things – like wealth or power – the more you share, the less you have. With spiritual things – like knowledge or friendship or celebration – the more you share, the more you have.
- Never be impatient with the details of Jewish life. God lives in the details. Judaism is about the poetry of the ordinary, the things we would otherwise take for granted. Jewish law is the sacred choreography of everyday life.
- God lives in the space we make for

him. Every mitzvah we do, every prayer we say, every act of learning we undertake, is a way of making space for God.

Letter 8: Faith

SARA, DAVID, these are difficult times, times of risk and danger, recession and uncertainty. Don't think I am being naïve if I say: these are the times when we need faith. Not blind faith, naïve optimism, but the kind of faith that says, we are not helpless and we are not alone. The Jewish people have been around for longer than almost any other. We have known our share of suffering. And still we are here, still young, still full of energy, still able to rejoice and celebrate and sing. Jews have walked more often than most through the valley of the shadow of death, yet they lost neither their humour nor their hope. Faith is not certainty; it is the courage to live with uncertainty. Faith does not mean seeing the world as you would like it to be; it means seeing the world exactly as it is, yet never giving up the hope that we can make it better by the way we live – by acts of chesed and chessed, graciousness and kindness, and by forgiveness and generosity of spirit. In Judaism, faith does not mean “believing six impossible things before breakfast”. No faith respects human intelligence more. Jews argue: we take nothing for granted. We say, “The Lord is my shepherd”, yet no Jew is a sheep. We are commanded to teach our children to ask questions. Ours is a questioning religion. What then is faith? Faith is the knowledge that we are here for a reason, and that in our journey through life God is with us, lifting us when we fall, forgiving us when we fail, believing in us more than we believe in ourselves. This is not wishful thinking. It is a fact. But it is not a simple fact. Just as we have to train ourselves to listen to great music or appreciate great art, so we have to train ourselves to sense the presence of God in our lives. That training comes in two forms. One is Torah, the other is mitzvot. Through Torah we learn what God asks of us. Through mitzvot, we practise doing God's will. That is how we open ourselves to God. Faith allows us to take risks and face the future without fear. Sometimes we think that matters of the spirit are insubstantial compared to the battles of the real world. But consider this: the financial collapse came about because of a loss of confidence in institutions. Banks stopped lending because of a breakdown in trust in the ability of borrowers to repay. Trust and confidence are spiritual things, yet the market depends on them. The word ‘credit’ comes from the Latin ‘credo’, which means, Ani maamin, ‘I believe’. After an earlier great crash, Franklin D. Roosevelt famously said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself”. Faith defeats fear, and gives us the confidence to survive every loss and begin again. Don't believe that faith is a small thing. It isn't. Whatever else you do in the coming year, practise your faith and renew it daily. The Jewish people kept faith alive. Faith kept the Jewish people alive. So what do you do if, God forbid, you find yourself in the midst of crisis? You lose your job. You miss the promotion you were expecting. You find yourself with a medical condition that requires a major change of lifestyle. You make a bad investment decision that costs you dearly. You find an important relationship in your life under stress. Any of the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, can plunge you without warning into crisis. How do you survive the trauma and the pain? There's one biblical passage that's deeply helpful. It's the famous, enigmatic story in Genesis 32 in which, at night, Jacob wrestles with an unknown, unnamed adversary: “Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak”. It was this passage that gave the Jewish people their name, Israel, meaning, “One who struggles with God and with man and prevails”. The key phrase is when Jacob says to the stranger, “I will not let you go until you bless me”. Within every crisis lies the possibility of blessing. Events that at the time were the most painful, are also those that in retrospect we see most made us grow. Crisis forces us to make difficult but necessary decisions. It makes us ask, “Who am

I and what really matters to me?” It plunges us from the surface to the depths, where we discover strengths we didn't know we had, and a clarity of purpose we had hitherto lacked. So you have to say to every crisis, “I will not let you go until you bless me”. The struggle isn't easy. Though Jacob was undefeated, he “limped”. Battles leave scars. Yet God is with us even when He seems to be against us. For if we refuse to let go of Him, He refuses to let go of us, giving us the strength to survive and emerge stronger, wiser, blessed. The oldest question in religion is: “Why do bad things happen to good people?” But there are two ways of asking this question. The first is, “Why has God done this to me?” Never ask this question, because we will never know the answer. God cares for us, but He also cares for everyone and everything. We think of now; God thinks of eternity. We could never see the universe from God's point of view. So we will never find the answer to the question: “Why me?” But there is another way of asking the question. “Given that this has happened, what does God want me to learn from it? How is He challenging me to grow? How is He calling on me to respond?” Asking it this way involves looking forward, not back. “Why did God do this?” is the wrong question. The right one is: “How shall I live my life differently because this has happened?” That is how to deal with crisis. Wrestle with it, refusing to let it go until it blesses you, until you emerge stronger, better or wiser than you were before. To be a Jew is not to accept defeat. That is the meaning of faith.

Letter 9: Making a blessing over life

SARA, DAVID, Yom Kippur is the day on which we give a reckoning of our life, remembering how short life is, and how important it is, therefore, to live it well. “Teach us to number our days”, says the Psalm, “that we may get a heart of wisdom”. What we know we can lose, we learn to cherish. That's why the Jewish people at the dawn of its history suffered slavery so that ever after they would value freedom and fight for it. It's why Abraham had to come almost to the point of losing his child, so that Jews would love and cherish children. Those lessons were so deep – burned into our collective unconscious – that they've lasted for thousands of years. It's no small thing that on the holiest day of the Jewish year we think about the possibility of death, so that for the rest of the year we will love life. Jews are the people who more than any other see God in life – this life, down here on earth. Many other religions didn't do this. They thought that God was to be found in life-after-death, or in a monastic retreat, or in mystical ecstasy. For them the holy was somewhere else. For us the holy is in the here-and-now. The Jewish toast is le-chayim, “To life”. Moses' great command was Uvacharta va-chayyim, “Choose life”. From Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur we pray: “Remember us for life, King who delights in life, and write us in the Book of Life for Your sake, God of life”. To find God you don't need to climb mountains, cross oceans or travel to a fabled land. God is in the breath we breathe, the acts we do, the prayers we say, the love we give. God, vaster than the universe, is closer to us than we are to ourselves. Our first prayer every morning is Modeh Ani, “I thank You, living and eternal King, who has restored my soul in mercy”. Thank You, God, for giving me back my life. The whole of Judaism is a sustained discipline in not taking life for granted: the thanks we say in our prayers, the blessings we make over every pleasure, the way kashrut turns eating into a holy act and the laws of Jewish family life sanctify the act of love. Shabbat stops us from travelling through life so fast that we never get to enjoy the view. The financial crash should teach us something. You can invest in the stock exchange, but the market can crash. You can invest in a house but prices can fall. You can follow secular trends but they can deceive and disappoint and leave you counting the cost. The best investment is in a life well lived, a life of meaning and principle and purpose, if possible framed by a happy marriage, a warm and embracing family, and a strong and supportive community. Judaism helps us find these things. It

sanctifies our families and homes. It gives us values to share with our children. As a way of life, it's been tested for longer than any other. As a source of wisdom, it is unparalleled in its depth and breadth. Judaism gives us roots to keep us grounded and wings to help us fly. Mitzvot train us in healthful habits of the heart. Prayer is the renewable energy of the soul, and faith is its satellite navigation system. Every blessing we make is a way of saying Yes to life. God is the God of life and Judaism is the religion of life. Throughout history the pendulum has swung between two kinds of society: puritanical cultures that distrust pleasure, and hedonistic cultures that worship it. We do something better than either: we sanctify pleasure, taking our most physical drives and dedicating them to God. There are many faiths throughout the world, but none that has led a tiny people for so long, so profoundly, to find joy in life. And yes, life can be hard and full of the possibility of loss, pain, disappointment and grief. But the solution is not to avoid taking risks. It is to cultivate the things that give us strength: the love of family and friends, the support of a community, the habit of prayer that allows us to lean on God, and the faith that God has faith in us, forgiving our faults and giving us the strength, after every failure, to begin again. Judaism was the first religion in history to place love at the heart of the spiritual life: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might. Love your neighbour. Love the stranger. The greatest love song in all religious literature is Shir ha-Shirim, The Song of Songs. And what we love most – because that is where God is to be found – is life itself. That is our greatest strength. It enabled our ancestors to survive every persecution. It helped Holocaust survivors to survive. It gave the Jewish people the courage to rebuild the land and state of Israel. That's why our greatest prayer on this day of days is: "Write us in the Book of Life". We don't ask for wealth or fame, stardom or success. We don't pray to be spared trials and tribulations. We just ask for life. That is what Judaism is: a life of love and a love of life. All the rest is commentary.

Letter 10: Finding happiness

SARA, DAVID, not everything in the coming year will be under our control. It never is. "On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed..." The book is being written now but we don't get to read it in advance. Even in the twenty-first century, when human beings have decoded the genome and photographed the birth of galaxies, there is one thing not even the greatest Nobel prize-winning scientist knows: what tomorrow will bring. We live with uncertainty. That is the human condition and always will be. But what matters will be under our control. How will we act and react? Will we behave honourably, graciously, generously? Will we help others? Will we make sacrifices for the sake of our ideals? Will we live for something bigger than the self? Will we honour, praise, respect, admire? Will we give hospitality to the lonely, comfort to the bereaved, and support to those in need? Will we give our family time? Will we give our soul the space to breathe? Will we love and thank God? Will we enhance other people's lives? These are the questions we should ask ourselves on Yom Kippur. For it is not what happens to us on which our happiness depends. It depends on how we respond to what happens to us. So in this, my last letter to you before Yom Kippur, let me share with you ten secrets I've learned from Judaism. They will bring you happiness whatever fate has in store for you in the coming year.

1. Give thanks. Once a day, at the beginning of the morning prayers, thank God for all He has given you. This alone will bring you halfway to happiness. We already have most of the ingredients of a happy life. It's just that we tend to take these for granted and concentrate instead on our unfulfilled desires. Giving thanks in prayer focuses attention on the good and helps us keep a sense of proportion about the rest. It's better than shopping – and cheaper too.
2. Praise. Catch someone doing something right and say so. Most people, most of the time, are

unappreciated. Being recognised, thanked and congratulated by someone else is one of the most empowering things that can happen to us. So don't wait for someone to do it for you: do it for someone else. You will make their day, and that will help make yours. Alenu leshabe'ach means, "It's our duty to praise".

3. Spend time with your family. Keep Shabbat, so that there is at least one time a week when you sit down to have a meal together with no distractions – no television, no phone, no email, just being together, talking together, celebrating one another's company. Happy marriages and families need dedicated time.
4. Discover meaning. Take time, once in a while, to ask the Yom Kippur questions, "Why am I here? What do I hope to achieve? How best can I use my gifts? What would I wish to be said about me when I am no longer here?" Finding meaning is essential to a fulfilled life – and how will you find it if you never look? If you don't know where you want to be, you will never get there however fast you run.
5. Live your values. Most of us believe in high ideals, but we act on them only sporadically. The best thing to do is to establish habits that get us to enact those ideals daily. That is what mitzvot are: ideals in action, constantly rehearsed.
6. Forgive. This is the emotional equivalent of losing excess weight. Life is too short to bear a grudge or seek revenge. Forgiving someone is good for them but even better for you. The bad has happened. It won't be made better by your dwelling on it. Let it go. Move on.
7. Keep growing. Don't stand still, especially in the life of the spirit. The Jewish way to change the world is to start with yourself. Anne Frank once wrote: "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world".
8. Learn to listen. Often in conversation we spend half our time thinking of what we want to say next instead of paying attention to what the other person is saying. Listening is one of the greatest gifts we can give to someone else. It means that we are open to them, that we take them seriously, that we accept graciously their gift of words. The keyword in Judaism is Shema, which simply means "Listen".
9. Create moments of silence in the soul. Liberate yourself, if only five minutes daily, from the tyranny of technology, the mobile phone, the laptop and all the other electronic intruders. Remember that God is in every breath we breathe. Inhale the heady air of existence, and feel the joy of being.
10. Transform suffering. When bad things happen to you, use them to sensitise you to the pain of others. The people who survived tragedy and became stronger as a result did not ask, "Who did this to me?" They asked, "What does this allow me to do that I could not have done before?" They didn't curse the darkness; instead they lit a candle. They refused to become victims of circumstance. They became, instead, agents of hope. Life's too full of blessings to waste time and attention on artificial substitutes. Live, give, forgive, celebrate and praise: these are still the best ways of making a blessing over life, thereby turning life into a blessing. Sara, David, our beloved children: you will never know how many blessings you have given your mother and me. The best we can give you is to pray that God help you to be a blessing to others. Be the best you can, be an ambassador for Judaism and the Jewish people, use each day to do something demanding, and never be afraid to learn and grow. We love you. May God write you and your children in the Book of Life.