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### **Yom Kippur - Taking Responsibility For Our Lives by Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz**

People sometimes view Yom Kippur as a day of somber doom and gloom, full of long unintelligible praying, physical deprivations, and fears and anxieties about the future. Yet our Sages view Yom Kippur in quite a different light.

The Mishna in Masechet Ta'anit (26b) tells us that Yom Kippur was one of the two most joyous days of the Jewish year (the other being the 15th of Av, as explained there). Yom Kippur is a day of forgiveness, reconciliation and opportunity for a new beginning, unencumbered by the crushing deadweight of past failure. Yom Kippur is a wondrous gift of love from the Creator, the gift of a second chance. As such, despite the lengthy prayers and the physical discomfort of no food or drink, and our backs, knees and feet being sore from long hours of standing, one should cherish every moment "like the sweetness of honey" (an expression I heard from my revered Mashgiach Rav Dovid Kronglass, zatzal). For an all too brief 25-hour period we are with G-d, in whose presence there is "strength and joy" (Chronicles I 16:27).

If a blind person were given one day in which to see, what would he do? How he would rush to savor the memory of color, of pattern, to notice the green of the grass, the colors of flowers, the smiles of his children. How he would hold on to everything he could see so he could imprint it on his mind and soul and consciousness, even as the physical image fades away. This last hour of Yom Kippur, as we say the Ne'ilah prayer, is very much the same. We spend most of our lives only half-seeing. If not blind, then we are at least color-blind, missing so much of the essence. On Yom Kippur, when we really focus, we can begin to see. On this day the Shechina (Divine Presence) is particularly close and the gates of Heaven are open to our prayers. But toward the end of the day that time is ending, and we will go back to our regular life, our life of half-seeing. The prayer of Ne'ilah is shorter than the rest of the Yom Kippur prayers. There are no long "al chets". We are pressed for time and we are pushing to get those last few requests in. We are trying and striving to hold on to the special moments when G-d is closer to us than at any other time of the year, to remember them so we can continue to keep some of the holiness within us.

And teshuva can be earned in a moment if we do it right. The gemara in Avoda Zara (17a) relates the story of Elazar ben Dordaya who was a notoriously degenerate person. He was so degenerate that he traveled the world looking for prostitutes. Finally he heard of one he hadn't been with, far away. He made the trip, but she was so disgusted that he had spent so much effort to find her that she refused to be with him. This woke him up. In an instant he realized what he had become. In despair, he turned to the mountains and hills and asked them to pray for him. They answered him that they couldn't — they had to pray for themselves. Next he turned to the heaven and earth and asked them the same. Again he got the same answer. Next he turned to the sun and moon, and again was turned down. Finally he turned to the stars, and they, too, refused him. At last he cried out that the only one who could

save him was himself. All of it was on his shoulders. With this realization he cried such a pitiful cry to G-d that his soul left his body. At that instant a voice from Heaven sounded, "Rabbi Elazar ben Dordaya has earned a share in the World-to-Come." He had been given rabbinic ordination posthumously. When the rabbis of the Talmud told this story they would cry with the realization that in an instant someone could ascend so high-to and acquire his share in the World-to-Come in one minute — and yet so many of us waste so much time. And so many years.

The great Reisher Rav, zatzal ( Rabbi Aaron Levine who died in the Holocaust) explains this story further. What is the meaning of Elazar ben Dordaya's dialogue with the elements? What earned him his passage into the next world? He explains that the hills and mountains are often a reference to parents. When Elazar realized what he had become, his first impulse was to look for someone to blame. He called to his parents, as if to say, "It's not my fault. You raised me poorly and that's why I became what I became." But in his heart of hearts he knew the truth. Hearing the echo of his parents' response in his own heightened consciousness, he understood that whatever his parents may have to answer for is between them and G-d, but that he and all of us remain free actors responsible for the life we choose. Next, in his restless, frenetic efforts to find a scapegoat and an excuse, he turned to the heaven and earth, which are symbols of the environment. Perhaps his environment could be blamed — his friends, his society, the predominant culture to which he was exposed. He got the same answer. Next he turned to the sun and moon, which control the crops, and are symbols of economic circumstance. A person might be led to sin because of poverty, or conversely the pressures of success might be a crushing insurmountable burden. Again he received the same answer. Finally, he turned to the stars, his DNA, as it were, his predetermined characteristics. All these things he looked to blame, and each one refused. Finally, he realized it all lay in his own power. Though parents and environment and economics and inborn traits all weigh on a person, ultimately we have free choice. We are not a product of rigid determinism. This is what Elazar ben Dordaya realized, and in realizing it, he took responsibility for himself. This is what earned him his life in the World-to-Come. He approached G-d with honesty, simplicity and directness. We certainly cannot fool G-d, but we must be careful not to fool ourselves either!

The Maggid of Kelem used to tell a story, a famous parable, in which for one half hour the inhabitants of the city's graveyard were brought back to life for the purpose of fixing what they had not done right in life. He described the frenzy of the dead, rushing from their graves to learn a page of gemara, or to give charity, or to try to make something right with their loved ones. And all the time they had their eyes on the clock. Twenty five minutes left, then only fifteen, finally five, and then the clock strikes, and with a wail the dead are again gone. The Maggid of Kelem would finish by asking his audience, "And my friends, what's so bad if we have more than a half hour? And my friends, who says we have a half hour?"

Life is precious. Opportunities are legion. Let us use the gifts that G-d in His infinite kindness has given us and may we and all of Israel merit a good and sweet year of health, holiness and growth. © 2013 Ohr Somayach International - all rights reserved

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### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Yom Kippur 5773 Thoughts About Prayer Before Yom Kippur**

We believe with complete faith that all which will transpire during the coming year – both on a personal level and on a national level – is determined during the period of the Ten Days of Repentance. We are all familiar with the concept "Seek out G-d when He is to be found, call out to Him when he is near" [Yeshaya 55:6]. This is the time of year when

the Master of the World is particularly close and therefore the normal obstacles that might exist to making our prayers effective are removed so that our sincere prayers to Him will certainly be heard. I always tell myself -- and everyone who listens to me -- that we must take advantage of this time of year, like no other ten day period on the calendar. Particularly, regarding prayer and asking for all that we need, this is the time to do it. No matter what your practice is the rest of the year in terms of minyan attendance or in terms of focus (kavanah) during davening or in terms of how quick you daven, that should all be set aside this time of year where each Shachris, Mincha, and Maariv is a unique opportunity for communication with Heaven in a way that is unique to this time of year. We cannot waste these golden opportunities. Therefore, I think it is worthwhile to spend a few minutes talking about the concept of prayer. Normally, I say over a "dvar Torah", a Torah thought, an insight and then I end with a story. Tonight I am going to begin with a true story that I think is amazing and which has a very important lesson for us. The story was told and written up by Rabbi Aryeh Lev Ginsberg, a Rav in New York. Rabbi Ginsberg had a congregant, who had a son, who went to learn in Eretz Yisrael. The son became very attached to Eretz Yisrael and decided to enroll in a Hesder Yeshiva which combines Torah study with military service. He became a member of the Israeli army and in fact rose to a position of leadership in the Israeli Defense Forces. In the summer of 2005, the Israeli government decided to give back Gaza to the Arabs. The army had to forcibly remove the Jewish settlers who refused to voluntarily abandon their settlements. The American student was very distraught about the assignment. He felt it was the wrong thing to do; but as a soldier he followed orders and participated in the forced evacuation. His unit came to a certain settlement in Gaza. It was his job to see to it that the settlers boarded the buses to be evacuated. He worked with the Rabbi of the settlement. All the settlers gathered in the town's synagogue. The Rabbi spoke, the soldier spoke, they all cried and finally they all filed out of the shul and boarded the bus. After everyone had evacuated the building, this soldier took out a siddur from his backpack. He knelt down on the ground, dug a hole, and buried his siddur. The Rav of the settlement asked him why he did that. The soldier replied that maybe a year from now or 5 years from now or 50 years from now, we will come back to this place, people will rebuild here and maybe they will find this siddur and will realize that we left our hearts and prayers behind in this place. Fast forward 11 months. It is now the summer of 2006. Gilaad Shalit was captured by Hamas militants in Gaza. Israel decided to reinstate Gaza in an attempt to find him. The unit of this American soldier was sent back into Gaza to set up a camp as a base of operations. They entered Gaza under the cover of darkness. They did not know exactly where they were, but they stopped at a certain deserted place to set up camp. The next morning, the soldier looked around. He was totally disoriented. He did not recognize anything. All he saw was rubble from the houses and the greenhouses and the buildings that were destroyed. He did not really know where he was. He got a feeling that he should look for his siddur. He knelt down on the ground and started digging. Lo and behold, he found the siddur. There were overwhelming odds against this happening and he was literally shaken by his find. He called his father in America and told him the amazing story and told him to ask his Rabbi to interpret the significance of this find for him. Rabbi Ginsberg himself was astounded, and could not bring himself to interpret the meaning of the story. However, he arranged a meeting between the soldier and Rav Chaim Kanievsky to allow the soldier to hear the opinion of a great and holy man in Israel regarding the meaning of this incident. Rav Chaim Kanievsky asked him, "What did you do when you knew you were going to need to evict the settlers from Gaza?" The soldier replied, "I went to my commanding officer and I went up the chain of command trying to convince everyone that it was a mistake and that we should not go ahead with the operation." "What else did you do?" persisted Rav Kanievsky.

The soldier added that he prayed to the Master of the World that it should not happen and that He should please show Mercy. Rav Chaim then asked, "So when it happened, and you had to evict them, so what did you do then?" The soldier responded, "At that point I stopped davening for it to not happen." Rav Chaim Kanievsky said, the Master of the World is telling you: Never stop praying for something! This is why you found your siddur. You buried the siddur because you felt it was futile to daven anymore. G-d caused you to find it so that you will realize that it is never too late to daven for something! "All is lost?" G-d tells you: "No. All is not lost. Get the siddur and start davening again." This is the lesson we must bear in mind as we approach the High Holidays. "Hope to G-d. Strengthen your heart. And hope to G-d." [Tehillim 27:14]. The Talmud interprets this pasuk to mean that if a person prays and sees that his prayers are not answered, he should pray further. [Brachos 32b] This is one of the great mistakes we make. We think we pray for so many sick individuals who do not get better. We pray for so many miserable situations that do not improve. We pray for so many things and our prayers are apparently not answered. This is a mistake. No prayer ever goes "wasted". It may not help us for a particular time or a particular place but all prayers go up to heaven and at some time and in some place they have an effect. The Talmud says that prayer is one of the things that stand at the peak of the world, yet people treat it lightly [Brachos 6b]. The Baal Shem Tov interprets the reason people treat it lightly is precisely because its effects take place "at the peak of the world" (b'rumo shel olam) and so it may take centuries for the effects to be noticed here on earth. We may pray for ourselves and maybe the prayer will take hold, but only affect a great-great grandchild of ours. We do not see the effects, so sometimes we treat it lightly. We live in the computer age where we can type our question into a search engine and get an instant answer. We cannot relate to the concept of a prayer that will take three centuries to be answered. We are not used to that and we treat it lightly. This is the lesson of the story with the Siddur: Do not stop davening. Finally, there is one more thing we must bear in mind. As important and as crucial as these days are to us personally, we dare not forget about the needs of Klal Yisrael and the Jewish people. When we hear leaders of powerful countries, who may one day have nuclear weapons talk about annihilating Israel off the face of the earth, we have to cry bitter and frightened tears to beg for Mercy that our enemies not achieve their aims. There is a famous pasuk that we read in the HafTorah on Shabbos when Rosh Chodesh comes out on Sunday. "...And Saul said to Yonasan his son, 'Why does the son of Yishai (Dovid) not come – neither yesterday nor today – to the bread (el haLechem)' [Shmuel I 20:27]. Homiletically, this pasuk is interpreted: "Why does the son of Yisai (the Messiah) not come – neither yesterday nor today?" We keep asking for Moshiach year after year and he does not come. Why not? The answer is "el haLechem" – because we keep asking for bread in our prayers, instead of asking for Moshiach. We are interested in making a living. That is the focus of our prayers. So our prayers are answered and we make a living. However, we do not sufficiently pray for the coming of Moshiach. Were we to do so, those prayers would have been answered by now as well. We need to pray, not just for our personal needs, but we need a macro perspective as well. We must keep in mind that the Jewish people are in danger. It does not take imagination on our part to wonder "what might go wrong?", "what might happen to the Jewish people?" Just read the paper. Listen to the news. Look at what they are saying in Iran and in the other Arab countries. If we are only interested in "el haLechem" [our needs of earning bread], this is the reason that "the son of Yishai" has not yet come. Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD RavFrاند, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Yissocher Frand and Torah.org.

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**"Who Purifies You" – The Repentance of Yom Kippur  
 By Harav Yehuda Amital zt"l**

Translated by Alex Tsykin

For on this day He will atone for you to purify you, of all of your sins before God you shall be purified. (Vayikra 16:30) Rabbi Akiva said: Happy are you, Israel! Before whom are you purified, and who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven. (Mishna Yoma 8:9) In this verse and mishna we read about two processes of purification: God purifies Israel and Israel purifies itself. What is the purification for which we are responsible? Rabbeinu Yona explains: It is a commandment that a person should waken his spirit to repent on Yom Kippur, as it says: "Of all your sins before God you shall be purified" (Vayikra 16:30). Accordingly, Scripture commanded us that we should purify ourselves before God with our repentance and He will atone for us on this day to purify us. (Sha'arei Teshuva 2:5) The great innovation of Rabbeinu Yona is that there is a special commandment to repent on Yom Kippur; we are required to purify ourselves on this day. On the other hand, God also purifies us on Yom Kippur. This leads us to ask: How does God purify us on Yom Kippur? To answer this question we will explore the importance of repentance. Repentance is the central commandment of Yom Kippur, and the Rambam strongly emphasized its significance: Great is repentance, as it draws man close to God, as it says: "Return, O Israel, to Hashem your God" (Hoshe'a 14:2)... That is to say, if you repent – you will cleave to God. Repentance brings closer the distant; yesterday he was despised by God, repudiated, distanced and made disgusting, and today he is beloved and desired, close and a friend... How great is the significance of repentance! Yesterday he was separated from Hashem, the God of Israel... and today he cleaves to God... (Hilkhos Teshuva 7:6-7) Even so, there is something fundamental that troubles us about repentance. Can we truly repent? We are troubled by the despair of Adam, who did not believe in his ability to repent. Adam said to God after the sin: "The woman whom you placed with me, she gave me the fruit and I ate it (va-okhal)" (Bereishit 3:12). Chazal expounded upon this verse: "And I ate" (ve-akhalti) is not written here, but rather, "and I will eat" (va-okhal) – I ate and I will eat. (Bereishit Rabba 19:12) Adam thought he would never merit repentance, for after his exile from the Garden of Eden, he would certainly eat again from the forbidden fruit; he would surely sin again. In light of this, we similarly ask ourselves: Is there really any chance that we will not return to our own sins in the future? This question is strengthened by the Rambam's words: And what is repentance? That a person should leave behind his sin and banish it from his thought and should resolve in his heart that he will not do it again... and he should regret the past... and the Knower of Mysteries [i.e., God] will attest about him that he will never return to this sin... (Hilkhos Teshuva 2:2) The Rambam sets a high standard here – that the Knower of Mysteries should attest that the person will never return to this sin; but who can attain this level of piety? The Lechem Mishneh here notes that the simple meaning of the Rambam's words is different. It does not say that he should never sin again, but that God "will attest about him that he will never return to this sin," as though he were asking God to testify on his

behalf. Here too we are puzzled: Who has the strength to ask God to bear witness for him that he will not return to the sin? After the Confession service on Yom Kippur, we say “and strengthen our hearts that we should leave the way of evil,” but is this sufficient? Is repentance effective if it is unaccompanied by certainty that the sin will not be repeated?

To answer this question, we must return to the words of the Rambam, and examine the apparent contradiction within them. At the beginning of *Hilkhot Teshuva* the Rambam writes: How should one confess? One says: “Please, O God, I have sinned inadvertently, I have sinned deliberately, I have rebelled against You, and I have done such and such, and I hereby regret and am ashamed of my actions, and I will never return to this”; this is the essence of confession. (1:1) The Rambam writes something similar in the second chapter as well: And the Knower of Mysteries will attest about him that he will never return to this sin... And he should confess verbally and say these things that he has resolved. Anybody who confesses verbally and does not resolve to leave [the sin] behind is as one who immerses himself in a mikveh while holding an insect, in which case the immersion is ineffective until he discards the insect. (2:2-3) Based on these two halakhot, the element of “resolution for the future” forms an integral part of confession. Even so, later on in the same halakhot, the Rambam writes: The confession which Israel has practiced is: “However, we have sinned,” and that is the essence of confession. (2:8) The Rambam records the standard formulation for confession and says nothing about resolution for the future. As we noted above, resolution for the future is not a part of the Confession of Yom Kippur. Rather, we suffice with the prayer requesting “that we should not sin again.” To explain the words of the Rambam, we should examine the difference between the usual commandment to repent and that of Yom Kippur. In principle, resolution for the future is an integral part of repentance. However, on Yom Kippur there is a special kind of atonement. The Tana'im disagreed over whether Yom Kippur atones only for those who seek repentance, or if it atones even for those who do not repent. The Rambam ruled that Yom Kippur only atones for penitents; however, it seems that there is a distinction between the repentance of Yom Kippur and repentance throughout the year. During the year, we need to repent “by the book,” making sure to resolve not to sin again. However, on Yom Kippur, anyone who merely says “we sinned” is considered a penitent and is automatically entitled to request that he not sin again. It is true that this form of repentance lacks a true resolution for the future; however, the great power of Yom Kippur is that even this repentance is effective. We asked above how it is that God purifies Israel on Yom Kippur. The answer is that the repentance of Yom Kippur, though lacking a resolution not to sin again, is nonetheless accepted by God. God purifies all of us and enables us to be counted among the “penitents,” even though the process of repentance is not truly complete. To be among the purified penitents on Yom Kippur, one’s repentance must be sincere. Chazal expounded: “Listen to my song and hear my prayer from lips without deceit” (*Tehillim* 17:1): “hear my prayer” – that is the regular prayer; “from lips without deceit” – that is *musaf*. What is written afterward? “From before You will come justice.” (*Yerushalmi Rosh Ha-shana* 4:8) Penitents are accepted and purified, as long as they speak honestly. \* The perspective that God does not denigrate repentance, even when it is not complete, is also present in the story of Cain. The verse states: “And Cain left from before God” (*Bereishit* 4:16). The Midrash explains that it is as though Cain “deceived Heaven.” Even so, the Midrash adds: Adam encountered [Cain] and asked: “How were you judged?” He said: “I repented and it was received.” Adam began to weep: “This is the power of repentance and I had not known!” Immediately Adam stood and said: “A song of praise for the day of Shabbat: It is good to confess (*lehodot*, usually meaning ‘to thank’) to God...” (*Tehillim* 92:1-2). (*Bereishit Rabba* 22:13) Adam says a song of praise for the day of Shabbat, and acknowledges that it is good to confess before God. Adam sees the

disgraceful repentance of Cain, who deceived Heaven yet whose words were accepted. Now he understands that even partial repentance can be effective, and it too is accepted by God. \* We still need to ask: How can we suffice with the short statement: “However, we have sinned?” Is there not a need for a deeper and more comprehensive confession? The answer to this is based upon a Gemara in Yoma: Rav Huna said: If a person sinned and then repeated the sin, it becomes permitted to him. Is that possible?! Rather, it is as though it were permitted to him. (*Yoma* 86b) A person who loses control of the brakes in the way of sin, as it were, cannot stop. The sin diminishes one’s awareness of the commandment and therefore one begins to feel that every sin is permitted to him. To combat a sin that is so wide-ranging, there is a need to accept the Torah, through which one gains both an awareness of being commanded and a recognition of sin. Yom Kippur is the day on which the second tablets were received; it is a day on which we return to the Torah, and we return to Him who gave the Torah. Therefore, the basis for the repentance of Yom Kippur is the recognition of sin. For this recognition, the simple statement “however, we have sinned” is sufficient. This is the essence of repentance on Yom Kippur. \* This short statement of confession on Yom Kippur – “however, we have sinned” – reveals the individual’s inner will. The Rambam discusses the question of one’s inner will in his ruling regarding the court’s forcing a man to give his wife a get: If a person who may be legally compelled to divorce his wife refuses to do so, the court may lash him until he says, “I consent”... One whose evil inclination attacked him, causing him to ignore a commandment or to transgress a prohibition, and was lashed until he did what he was required to do or refrained from what he was prohibited from doing – he cannot be regarded as a victim of duress; rather, he has brought duress upon himself by submitting to his evil thoughts. Therefore, this man who refuses to divorce his wife, inasmuch as he wants to live as one of Israel, to fulfill all commandments and to distance himself from all prohibitions, and it is his evil inclination that is forcing him – therefore once he is lashed until his inclination weakened and he says, “I consent,” he has granted the divorce willingly. (*Hilkhot Geirushin* 2:20) We learn from the Rambam that there are two opposing forces within each Jew: the basic desire to “live as one of Israel, to fulfill all commandments and to distance himself from all prohibitions,” and, on the other hand, the impulsive desire to sin which is brought on by the attack of the evil inclination. We must determine which is one’s main desire: the deep, permanent desire to good, or the temporary desire to do evil? The answer can be found in the Midrash: “I am black and beautiful” (*Shir Ha-shirim* 1:5) – I am black during the week and I am beautiful on Shabbat; I am black during the year and beautiful on Yom Kippur. (*Yalkut Shim’oni, Shir Ha-shirim*, 982) On Yom Kippur, Israel’s secret is revealed: their main desire is to do the will of their Father in Heaven. The relationship between Yom Kippur and the days of the year is similar to the relationship between Shabbat and the days of the week. On Shabbat nature returns to its original form, and it becomes beautiful once again. Adam, who realized the power of partial repentance – such as that of Yom Kippur – sang a song of praise for the Shabbat, a song of praise for the revelation of the internal desire which certainly wishes to do good. The internal desire is revealed on Shabbat, and with even greater strength on Yom Kippur, which is called “Shabbat Shabbaton.” The central blessing of Amida on Yom Kippur ends with the words, “and aside from You, we have no king to pardon and forgive us.” This is strange. Would we have thought that anybody else could pardon us, such that it was necessary to emphasize that God pardons and forgives us? The answer is that God not only pardons us, but He descends to the depths of our desires as well. Only God knows that our inner desire is to do His desire. When one says, “However, we have sinned,” he reveals that his desire is to do the will of his Creator, that he wishes to belong to the community of penitents, about whom it is said, “Who purifies you? Your Father in Heaven.”

## **Repentance: Theory and Practice**

**Based on a sicha by Harav Yaakov Medan**

**Adapted by Immanuel Meier** Translated by Jonathan Ziring

### **How is Forgiveness Possible?**

On Shabbat Shuva we read: Yet even now, says the Lord, turn back to Me with all your hearts, and with fasting, weeping, and lamenting. Rend your hearts rather than your garments, and turn back to the Lord your God. For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, and renouncing punishment. Whoever knows shall repent and regret, and it shall leave after it a blessing, a meal offering and a libation to the Lord your God. (Yael 2:12-14) When the prophet promises forgiveness, is it based on “mercy” or “concession”? While mercy is a fine attribute, it would seem that the attribute of concession involves injustice and dishonesty. Ramchal expressed this in Mesilat Yesharim (chapter 4): And this is what Moshe, peace be upon him, said: “The Rock, whose works are perfect, whose ways are all those of justice, a God of faithfulness, with no crookedness...” (Devarim 32:4). Since God desires [a world of] justice, it would be a violation of justice to turn a blind eye either to merit or to misconduct. Consequently, if there is meant to be justice, He must repay each person in accordance with his conduct and the results of his actions – both for good and for bad, with the strictest of precision. This is what Chazal said: “A God of faithfulness, with no crookedness, righteous and upstanding [is He]’ – for the righteous [as well] as the wicked.” This is the standard, He judges everything, and for every sin He punishes and there is no escape. How, then, can God forgive the sinner and not give him the punishment he deserves? The Maharal explains that when a person repents, it becomes clear that the sin was never a part of him, of his essence. Therefore, he succeeds in shaking off the sin, and he can be forgiven for it. This can be compared to a car’s chassis that was damaged in an accident and lost half of its market value. If a person sells the vehicle without informing buyers of the defect, the sale would be considered deceptive and therefore would be invalid. However, if the headlight doesn’t work, there is a piece missing that is not part of the car’s “essence.” The seller will have to compensate the buyer and pay for a new headlight, but the sale will not be voided. In other words, repentance makes it possible to completely sever the sin from the sinner’s essence. This severance becomes clear upon the sinner’s complete turning away from his sinful paths. But there is still a nagging question: practically, how do we go about regretting sins and atoning for them? Practical Guidance Can a person decide overnight to set out on a new path? We commonly use the expression “to turn over a new leaf.” The implication is that it doesn’t matter that the previous leaves or pages were scribbled on or filled with obscenities. When the old pages are covered, only the new one will be before our eyes. However, if we don’t examine the scribbled pages and take the time to erase them, we can assume that the new page will soon be as scribbled on as the previous ones. But again, how do we erase and restore the pages? Can any of us truly regret all our evil actions from the past year? Can we do this every year? I doubt it. But I am convinced that each of us can, though with no small amount of effort, make a fundamental change in two, three or four things in our lives. Some things we change should be in the realm of holiness, Torah study and prayer, and others in the realm of ethics, integrity, loyalty, righteousness and justice. Each of us can identify a small number of defects, and decide to take it as our task for the coming year to remedy them. If we do this, we can stand before God on the day of mercy as penitents and pray for ourselves and our nation, that we should all have the strength and ability to repair ourselves. One who decides to undertake this challenge will have to establish checkpoints throughout the year, maybe on Yom Kippur Katan (the day before Rosh Chodesh) every month. He will then

assess whether he is succeeding in his task, coming close to it, or, God forbid, remaining stagnant or moving away from it. At each assessment, he will have to determine what he must do to improve his performance. Come the next Yom Kippur, he will evaluate where he succeeded and where he did not, what he should continue to work on and what he can add to his mission for the subsequent year. Confession In anticipation of the holy day, we should remember the vidui, confession, which is the primary mitzva of the day. True confession is not trivial. The words of vidui are too general and vague; as such, there is a concern that by saying them we add the sin of insincere confession to the list. The author of the Chayei Adam sensed this, and added a long list of specific sins in alphabetical order. But what is the point of reciting a list of sins written by someone else, even if the author was a great and saintly person?! We all must devote time to dig through our past and make a list of all the sins we remember. We should arrange them alphabetically and say them along with the vidui in the siddur. How many times were we careless when driving? How many times did we “steal” another car’s turn at the intersection? How many times have we ignored asher yatzar (the blessing made upon exiting the restrooms), and so on? The recognition of sin is an important step even if we cannot get ourselves to the point of total remorse. However, it is an important step only if we have a real desire to improve, even if we know that right now we cannot expend so much emotional energy on our endless sins. The Ten Days of Repentance A final point: Logically, the Ten Days of Repentance should have been at the end of the year and not the beginning, as they repair last year’s sins. They are like a makeup test to improve our grades for the year that just passed. Yet, the Days of Repentance are put at the beginning of the year. Repentance is return to, not returning from. Its essence is not an escape from sin, as important as that is, but a return to God. We begin the new year by saying how essential it is to return to God, to be close to Him, without having our sins separate us from Him.

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<http://www.koltorah.org/ravj/artificialfeeding.htm>

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### **Artificial Feeding on Yom HaKippurim**

**by Rabbi Howard Jachter**

Introduction One of the most difficult decisions a Rabbi must make is whether a sick individual may eat on Yom HaKippurim due to medical concerns. Nevertheless, Rabbis do not recommend intravenous feeding or any other form of artificial feeding to sick people to avoid the necessity to eat on Yom HaKippurim. In this essay, we will explore why Rabbis do not make such a recommendation. The essay will be based on a discussion of this issue by Rav J. David Bleich that appears in his work Contemporary Halachic Problems 3:129-140.

The Suggestion Many have questioned great Rabbinical authorities whether one must attach an IV to a sick individual to avoid the need to eat on Yom HaKippurim. They argue that although a sick person is excused from fasting, it is Halachically desirable to put him into the position of being obligated to perform Mitzvot (see Tosafot Pesachim 113b s.v. V’ein). The Gemara explains that Moshe Rabbeinu craved to enter Eretz Yisrael, in order to obligate himself to observe the Mitzvot Hateluyot Baaretz (Mitzvot that are performed only in the Land of Israel). Men wear a four-cornered garment in order to obligate themselves to wear Tzitzit. Similarly, one might think that a sick individual should attach himself to an IV to enable himself to fast on Yom HaKippurim.

Moreover, one should try to make advance preparations to avoid having to violate the Torah in order to preserve life. For example, the Mishna Berura (330:1) cites the Sefer Chassidim, which says that a woman in her ninth month of pregnancy should prepare on Friday whatever might be necessary for her in the event that she begins labor on

Shabbat. The Rama (Orach Chaim 328:12) rules that, if possible (i.e. it will cause no delay and danger), one should ask a non-Jew to do the work necessary for a dangerously ill person or perform the action in an unusual way. For example, if one must call for emergency services on Shabbat, one should do so in an unusual manner.

**Artificial Feeding on Yom HaKippurim - Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski's Ruling** An individual suggested to Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinski (Teshuvot Achiezer 3:61) that even artificial feeding on Yom HaKippurim should be forbidden because it satisfies the patient's hunger. The questioner noted that the volume of food and drink necessary to incur punishment on Yom HaKippurim is determined by the amount of food that satiates an individual and not by what otherwise constitutes a formal "act of eating" by Halachic standards (Yoma 79a). The questioner thus concluded that the prohibition on Yom HaKippurim essentially is to satisfy one's hunger or thirst.

Rav Chaim Ozer responded that nonetheless Halacha defines only oral ingestion as eating. He cites the Gemara's discussion (Yoma 74b) of the source of the assumption that when the Torah commands us to "afflict ourselves on Yom HaKippurim" it refers to refraining from food and drink. The Gemara refers to the verse (Devarim 8:3) that states that first Hashem afflicted us and then he fed us the manna. We see that the term "affliction" as used in the Torah refers to not eating or drinking. Rav Chaim Ozer argues that since the Torah records that Hashem fed us the manna to satisfy our hunger, we see that only oral ingestion of food satisfies hunger. Thus, Halacha defines one as afflicting himself if he does not ingest food or drink orally. Indeed, people do not find artificial feeding particularly satisfying.

**Rav Moshe Shternbuch's Approach** Rav Moshe Shternbuch (Moadim Uzmanim 1:60) writes that Halacha does not require one to engage in extraordinary means to enable oneself to fast on Yom HaKippurim. He notes that the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch make no mention of a requirement for a sick individual who must eat on Yom HaKippurim to eat very bitter food instead of regular food. Although eating very bitter food on Yom HaKippurim is only rabbinically forbidden, Chazal apparently felt that eating bitter food instead of conventional food is an extraordinary step that is not required to avoid the necessity to eat on Yom HaKippurim.

**Support for Rav Shternbuch's Approach** Although Teshuvot Binyan Tzion (35) recommends that a very sick person eat very bitter food instead of regular food on Yom HaKippurim, Rav Shternbuch's approach appears to be accepted among rabbinical authorities. We will cite a number of rulings of various rabbinical authorities in a variety of areas to demonstrate this point.

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe Yoreh Deah 2:74) writes that one is not obligated to induce labor early in the week in order to avoid giving birth on Shabbat. Rav Moshe writes a general statement "that one is not obligated to utilize Tachbulot (extraordinary means) in order to have to avoid violation of Shabbat." Parenthetically, Rav Moshe strongly opposes inducing labor except in the case of an emergency. The consensus agrees with Rav Feinstein about this point (see Nishmat Avraham 2:105).

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited in Nishmat Avraham 4:187) rules that if a man is diagnosed with cancer he is not obligated to bank his sperm so that he can have children after chemotherapy treatment. Rabbis debate whether he is permitted to do so if he wants to, but Rav Auerbach feels that he certainly is not obligated to do so, even if he is married. For further discussion of this issue see Rav Eliyahu Bakshi Doron, Teshuvot Binyan Av 2:60.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Teshuvot Minchat Shlomo 1:7) also rules that one is not obligated to engage in heroic measures to avoid working on Shabbat to save lives. He presents numerous examples of this principle. One is not required to wake his neighbor in the middle of the night in order to avoid the need to turn on a light for a dangerously

ill individual. One is not required to summon a neighbor to drive a dangerously ill individual to a hospital to avoid having to telephone for an ambulance. Rav Shlomo Zalman cites as a precedent the ruling of the Rama (Yoreh Deah 374:2) that a Kohen is not required to hire someone to bury a Meit Mitzva (a dead person who has no one to bury him) instead of the Kohen burying him.

Accordingly, Halachic authorities do not require a dangerously ill person to take heroic measures to avoid eating on Yom HaKippurim.

**Rav Moshe Feinstein's Approach** Rav Moshe Feinstein (Teshuvot Igrot Moshe 3:90) presents an intriguing approach to this issue. He suggests that it may be forbidden for one to attach himself to an IV to avoid having to eat on Yom HaKippurim. He notes that the Gemara (Bava Kama 85a) states that Hashem sanctioned doctors to heal. We see that employing medical procedures is not a human right; rather, it is permitted only because of Hashem's permission. Rav Moshe argues that it is possible that the Divine sanction is limited to resolving medical problems and does not extend to utilizing medical procedures to enable people to fast.

Other rabbinical authorities that address this issue do not mention this concern. Indeed, we commonly engage in medical procedures for Halachic purposes, such as drawing blood to take a bilirubin count to determine if a Brit Mila can be performed. Indeed, Rav Soloveitchik did not agree with Rav Moshe's suggestion, as Rav Soloveitchik was fed by IV on Yom HaKippurim when he was an elderly man. Rav Soloveitchik explained to his student-assistants that one is not required to attach himself to an IV if he must eat on Yom HaKippurim. However, The Rav found it profoundly traumatizing to eat on Yom HaKippurim, and artificial feeding was the only viable option for him.

**Conclusion** Virtually all Rabbinical authorities agree that one is not required to attach himself to an IV to avoid having to eat on Yom HaKippurim. For further discussion of this interesting issue, see the many sources cited in Rav J. David Bleich's aforementioned essay.

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Weekly-Halacha by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt - The Origin and Purpose of Kol Nidrei

to me <http://www.torah.org/advanced/weekly-halacha/5771/yomkippur.html>

### **Weekly-Halacha by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt Yom Kippur**

#### **The Origin and Purpose of Kol Nidrei**

The holiest day of the year, the day which the Torah designates as a Day of Atonement for the sins of the Jewish people, begins with the little understood but emotionally charged Kol Nidrei service. For reasons which are not completely known to us, the compilers of the Yom Kippur machzor chose Kol Nidrei, which is basically a halachic procedure for annulling certain oaths and vows, as the opening chapter of the Yom Kippur services. Obviously, then, there is more to Kol Nidrei than meets the eye. Let us take a deeper look.

It is known that Kol Nidrei dates back to ancient times, possibly as far back as the era of Anshei Keneses ha-Gedolah[1]. The earliest written version, though, is in the Siddur of Rav Amram Gaon, who lived in the ninth century. Already then, the exact reason for reciting Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur was not clearly understood, and the Geonim and the early Rishonim struggled with its exact meaning and purpose[2].

Halachic background – vows and oaths

In earlier times, much more so than today, individuals were inclined to "accept upon themselves" different types of self-imposed obligations or restrictions. In order to ensure that these would actually be kept, people would label their self-imposed obligation as either a neder, a vow, or a shevuah, an oath, thus giving it legal force. The binding status of vows and oaths and the horrific and tragic consequences of violating them are discussed in several places in the Torah and Rabbinic literature[3].

But the Torah also recognizes that sometimes these vows and oaths were undertaken without due consideration of the consequences. More often than not, the individual making the oath did not realize how difficult it would be to keep it. Sometimes, an oath was declared in anger or out of spite and eventually the individual regretted his words and wished to revoke them. To that end, the Torah provided a legal formula called *hataras nedarim*, allowing a petitioner to present his case before a *beis din* in order to find a legal loophole and extricate the petitioner from his plight. This process involves complex halachos, and indeed, not always can the court release the petitioner from his vow.

The view of the early authorities

Before beseeching God for atonement of sins on Yom Kippur, it is imperative that each individual absolve himself of any vows or oaths that he may have made and subsequently violated. The severity of violating a vow or an oath is such that it may block or interfere with the entire atonement process[4]. Consequently, one who is aware of any violations of oaths or vows that he may have committed is strongly urged to petition a Jewish court in order to find a way out of his self-imposed obligations. Indeed, it has become customary that already on *erev Rosh Hashanah*, all males petition a *beis din* for *hataras nedarim*.

But not everyone is familiar with the procedure of *hataras nedarim*, and not everyone who has violated a *neder* or a *shevuah* realizes that he has done so. To avert and to solve this problem, Kol Nidrei was instituted. Kol Nidrei declares that in case an individual made a vow or an oath during the past year and somehow forgot and violated it inadvertently, he now regrets his hasty pronouncement. In effect he tells the “court” – comprised of the *chazan* and two congregational leaders – that had he realized the gravity and severity of violating an oath, he would never have uttered it in the first place. He thus begs for forgiveness and understanding[5]. This explanation of Kol Nidrei, put forth by many of the early authorities and endorsed by the Rosh, fits nicely with the traditional text of Kol Nidrei, which reads, “from the last Yom Kippur until this Yom Kippur,” since we are focusing on vows and oaths which were undertaken during the past year[6].

The view of Rabbeinu Tam

Other authorities – led by Rabbeinu Tam – strongly object to this interpretation of Kol Nidrei. Basing their opinion on various halachic principles, they question if it is legally valid to perform *hataras nedarim* in this manner. In their view, Kol Nidrei was instituted to deal with the problem of unfulfilled vows, but from a different angle: Instead of annulling existing vows and oaths, Kol Nidrei serves as a declaration rendering invalid all future vows and oaths which may be uttered without due forethought – “null and void, without power and without standing[7].” Accordingly, the text was amended to read “from this Yom Kippur until the next Yom Kippur,” since we are referring to what may happen in the future, not to what has already happened in the past.

Which approach do we follow?

Most of the later authorities have accepted Rabbeinu Tam’s explanation of Kol Nidrei and this has become the accepted custom in most congregations[8]. Nevertheless, in deference to the first opinion, many congregations include both versions as part of the text. Thus the text in some *machzorim*[9] reads as follows: From the last Yom Kippur until this Yom Kippur [accounting for vows already made], and from this Yom Kippur until the next Yom Kippur [referring to future vows], etc.

It is important to note, however, that Kol Nidrei, whether referring to the past or to the future, does not give one the right to break his word. As previously explained, Kol Nidrei is valid only for additional obligations or personal restrictions that an individual undertakes of his own volition. By no means can *hataras nedarim* or Kol Nidrei exempt an individual from court- or *beis din* -imposed oaths, etc.

A practical application

As stated earlier, vows and oaths are not too common in our times. It would seem, therefore, that the halachic aspect of Kol Nidrei has little practical application. But when properly understood, Kol Nidrei can be used as a tool to rectify a fairly common halachic problem. There is a well-known ruling in the *Shulchan Aruch*[10] that any proper custom, once accepted and followed, may not be dropped without undergoing *hataras nedarim*. People who adopt even “simple” proper customs which they are not obligated to practice, such as reciting *Tehillim* daily, without making the *bli neder* (without a vow) stipulation, require *hataras nedarim* should they decide to discontinue their practice[11].

This is where Kol Nidrei[12] can help. As stated above, Rabbeinu Tam explained that Kol Nidrei is a declaration that invalidates the legal force of certain future vows. Contemporary *poskim*[13] rule that “proper customs” from which an individual wishes to absolve himself although he neglected to make the *bli neder* stipulation initially, are included in the Kol Nidrei declaration invalidating such vows. The “proper custom” may now be discontinued.

Rules

Since Kol Nidrei is an halachic procedure for nullifying certain, specific future vows, the following conditions must be met:

- Each individual must understand exactly what is being said during Kol Nidrei. Since a legal declaration is being made, if one does not understand what he is declaring, his statement cannot have legal force[14]. The difficult Aramaic text should, therefore, be studied and understood before Yom Kippur eve.
- Each individual must verbally recite Kol Nidrei along with the *chazan*. Obviously, the *chazan* cannot make such a declaration for anyone but himself[15]. It should not be recited in an undertone, but loudly enough for a person nearby to hear[16]. If it is whispered too softly, it may be invalid[17].
- Kol Nidrei should be recited while it is daylight, since the process of annulling vows [and the declaration of voiding them in the future] should not be done on *Shabbos* or Yom Tov[18].

Kol Nidrei: A Symbolic Idea

The above discussion sums up the halachic analysis of Kol Nidrei. But as noted earlier, there is more to Kol Nidrei than meets the eye. If Kol Nidrei were merely a “dry” halachic procedure concerning vows and oaths, it would hardly evoke such deep emotional sentiment throughout the Jewish world. Why are the *Sifrei Torah* removed from the *Aron ha-Kodesh*, a haunting centuries-old melody chanted and an atmosphere of sanctity and awe created if all that is taking place is *hataras nedarim*? While the commentators offer various answers, we will quote just one, which is based on the teachings of the *Zohar*.

In *Kabalistic teaching*[19], Kol Nidrei is a plea to God to nullify His oath that He will punish or exile the Jewish people because of their sins. The *Talmud* (*Bava Basra* 74a) relates that *Rabba bar Bar Chanah* heard a Heavenly voice saying, “Woe is Me that I have sworn to exile My people, but now that I have sworn, who can annul it for Me?” Kol Nidrei implies that just as we seek to absolve ourselves of vows and oaths that burden us, so, too, may God annul His oath to withdraw His Presence from the Jewish people. In this sense, Kol Nidrei is a prayer and a supplication to God to quickly end the bitter exile and bring salvation to the Jewish nation. Thus, it is a very appropriate prayer for inaugurating the holiest and most awesome day of the year. It is this hidden message and prayer, cleverly camouflaged[20] by what seems to be a technical, halachic procedure, that evokes those deep emotions, and brings almost every Jew, observant or otherwise, scholar or student, to shed a tear and resolve to better his ways in the coming year, a year which we hope will bring the final redemption that we so eagerly await.

1. *Shitah Mekubetzes* (*Nedarim* 23b). 2. Indeed, some well-known *Geonim*, including *Rav Netronai Gaon* and *Rav Hai Gaon*, were adamantly opposed to the Kol Nidrei service and ordered their congregations to omit it entirely; see *Tur*, O.C. 619. 3. For a sampling see *Shabbos* 32b; *Yevamos* 109b; *Nedarim* 20a and 22b; *Vayikra Rabbah* 37:1; *Koheles Rabbah* 5:2; *Tanchuma*, *Matos* 1. 4. *Shibbolei ha-Leket*. 5. It is important to stress that, even according to this

opinion, Kol Nidrei is a "last ditch effort" to guard a person from his own words and to save him from certain punishment. It is not meant as a crutch to rely on l'chatchilah. 6. According to this opinion, Kol Nidrei is similar to the first part of hataras nedarim which is recited on erev Rosh Hashanah. 7. The halachic basis for this type of declaration is in the Talmud (Nedarim 23b) and is not within the scope of this discussion. Note that according to this opinion, Kol Nidrei is similar to the second part of hataras nedarim which is recited on erev Rosh Hashanah. 8. Mishnah Berurah 619:2. 9. This "compromise text" was introduced by the Radvaz (4:33) and later adopted by Rav Y. Emdin (She'elas Yaavetz 145) and other poskim; see Kaf ha-Chayim 619:17. 10. Y.D. 214:1. 11. See The Weekly Halachah Discussion, Parashas Vayeilech, for a full discussion of this subject. 12. Or the second part of hataras nedarim on erev Rosh Hashanah. See Minchas Yitzchak 9:60, who explains why it is proper (but not obligatory) to recite both texts. 13. Rav S.Z. Auerbach in Minchas Shelomo 1:91, based on Teshuvos Shalmos Chayim 2:38. See also Yabia Omer 2:30 and 4:11-9, who relies on this as well. 14. See Chayei Adam 138:8 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 128:16. 15. Mishnah Berurah 619:2. 16. Shulchan Aruch Harav 619:3 based on Y.D. 211:1. On the other hand, it should also not be said too loudly, so as not to confuse the chazan and other worshippers; Mateh Efrayim 619:11. 17. Minchas Yitzchak 9:61. 18. Mishnah Berurah 619:5. Mateh Efrayim 619:11, explains that as long as Kol Nidrei begins during the daytime it does not matter if it continues into the night. [See Halichos Shelomo 1:17, note 43, where Rav S.Z. Auerbach questions the custom to recite Tefillah Zakah before Kol Nidrei, since Tefillah Zakah contains in it an acceptance of Yom Kippur.] 19. This idea is reflected in the section of the Zohar (Rav Shimon stood up...) which is recited by many individuals before Kol Nidrei. 20. Possibly, to confound the Satan.

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### Rabbi Yakov Haber - The Two Goats and the True Self

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Rabbi Yakov Haber Rabbi Yakov Haber The Two Goats and the True Self

One of the most prominent aspects of the Avodas Yom HaKippurim in the Mikdash is the service of the sh'nei has'irim, the two goats. The halacha requires them to be identical in height and appearance (Yoma 6:1). A lottery was performed on them with one being designated as a korban laShem, its blood being sprinkled in the Holy of Holies, something done with no other korban other than the bull of the Kohein Gadol also offered on Yom Kippur. The second was designated as the sa'ir la'Azazel to be thrown off a steep cliff which, in the language of the Mishna, "did not reach halfway [down] until it was turned into a pile of limbs" (ibid. 6:6).

This out of the ordinary service is clearly one of the chukim of the Torah, with no explicit reason given for it. However, many approaches have been taken attempting to uncover a glimpse into the Divine messages inherent within this service.[1] I have heard an approach whose source I do not recall which seems to match the details of the mitzvah well.[2] This approach can serve as a central focus of what we attempt to accomplish on the "Shabbat Shabbaton".

G-d created Man originally pure without a tendency toward Evil (see Koheles 7:29). The Yeitzer Hara was external as represented by the Primeval Snake. When man sinned, the Evil Inclination became internalized. This led to a state of "tov v'ra", where good and evil were seemingly intermingled in the human mind. Confusion, lack of clarity, and indecision became the new reality for mankind. Only by studying and performing the Torah would mankind be able to rise beyond the confusion of this new reality. However, the ultimate plan of the Creator is to restore the original state of perfection which will occur in the Messianic era when the circumcision of the heart will occur (see Ramban

to Nitzavim 30:6), meaning the elimination of the evil within each and every one of us.

However, even before that era, Yom Kippur gives us a glimpse of our real selves. The two goats similar in appearance both represent the same individual. Each of us has a "split-personality": the fundamental, true personality and the superimposed, fake persona infused into us with the entrance of the Yeitzer Hara. On this day, we separate the real from the fake, the fundamental from the artificial. The real personality, represented by the sa'ir laShem, created in the Image of G-d, is brought into the Holy of Holies, symbolizing Man's calling to cleave to G-d throughout his existence. The fake persona is dispatched and meets a violent end on a rocky mountain. This represents the end of Evil, the end of confusion, the end of indecision.

Yom Kippur is the day when we "take a break from the world", when we rest not only from labor, but we "rest" from most aspects of Olam HaZeh (see Rambam Hilchos Sh'visas Asor 1:5-6). The numerous drives and desires inherent in the world, when channeled properly, elevate us, and even make us higher than the angels who do not have the ability to elevate the physical. This occurs when we listen to our real personality. But the drives of the world also have the potential to, and often do, drive us away from G-d when we view these drives and desires as reality itself. This is a result of the fake persona within us. On Yom Kippur we rediscover who we really are.

This concept is further highlighted by a beautiful insight of the Maharal (Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Ha'Avoda). We recite the phrase "Baruch Sheim k'vod mal'chuso l'olam va'ed" silently during the whole year but aloud on Yom HaKippurim. The Midrash explains that Moshe Rabbeinu heard the angels reciting this verse and taught it to the Jews. But since it is an angelic declaration of Divine sovereignty, we recite it silently. Why then do we recite it at all if we are not angels? Maharal explains that we do so because there is part of us that is angelic; the soul, the core of who we really are, is constantly on the level of the angels capable of declaring this angelic form of acceptance of Mal'chus Shamayim. But this part of us is seemingly inaccessible to us, hidden as it were in the inner recesses of our existence. We recite "Baruch Sheim" silently the rest of the year because only the silent, hidden part of us is on that level. On Yom Kippur though, when the "soul emerges", we are capable of reciting this verse aloud. Yom Kippur shows us who we really are.

With this renewed awareness of the intense sanctity of the human personality and especially of the covenantal, Jewish people coupled with our repentance, may we achieve, with Divine mercy, forgiveness for our sins and the re-awakening of the central attitude necessary to face the "regular world" as we march one step closer to the era when evil will be eradicated forever.

[1] See Ramban, Rav Hirsch, and Rav Soloveitchik in 'Al HaTeshuva for various approaches.

[2] I would be indebted to a reader who can provide the source.

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from: **Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald** <ezbuchwald@njop.org> via njop.ccsend.com reply-to: ezbuchwald@njop.org to: internetparshasheet@gmail.com date: Mon, Sep 9, 2013 at 4:13 PM subject: Weekly Torah Message from Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald Yom Kippur 5774-2013

### "Chesbon Hanefesh – Introspection" by, Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

The High Holy Days are meant to be a time of profound introspection. Every person is to review their actions in their mind's eye, from the past year, identify those that are good, and those that were not. Actions and thoughts that need improvement are to be the object of Teshuva, repentance and correction.

But even positive actions are subject to introspection, as well. Could we have done better? Is there room for self-improvement?

One of the definitions of a Jew that I particularly favor is that a Jew is a person who's always in tension with himself/herself and with his/her environment. A

“good Jew” is one who is always striving to be better, endeavoring to climb higher on the ladder. A good Jew is someone who is in the “growth mode,” in a constant quest to improve the person that he/she is at this moment.

I recently came across a powerful quote from one Israel Knox, excerpted from his book entitled *An Ethical/Humanist View of Rosh Hashanah*. (How wonderful that even non-believers are moved by the High Holidays!). Knox writes:

There is a wonderful Hebrew term, that is often used in Yiddish as well, known as *Cheshbon Hanefesh*. It means taking an accounting of one’s soul, sitting in spiritual judgment of one’s self. When we make this self-accounting, we, in effect, acknowledge our failure to bridge the gap between our conscious and our conduct, between the standards we profess to believe in and the actions that we, in effect, performed or failed to perform. “Sin” is the gap between our promise and our conduct, between our standards and our actions.

Although *Cheshbon Hanefesh* has long been part of Jewish tradition, introspection became a staple of contemporary Jewish life with the rise of the Mussar movement in the mid-1800s. Rabbi Israel Salanter (1810-1883), the founder and primary mover of the Mussar movement, encouraged his followers to study three basic ethical texts: *Chovot Halevavot* (Duties of the Heart), *Mesilat Yesarim* (The Paths of the Righteous), and *Cheshbon Hanefesh* (Introspection).

While the major focus of the curriculum in the classic yeshivot was always on Talmud, as a result of Rabbi Salanter’s exhortations, many yeshivot adopted the idea of Mussar study as an ancillary part of the curriculum. It is widely acknowledged that Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar movement have had a major impact on Jewish life and Jewish study.

The average layperson, however, almost never really has the opportunity to study Mussar. Consequently, for most Jews, the most important time for introspection has always been the High Holidays.

Each person is required to ask him- or her-self, “What could I have done better last year, and what can I do better this year? How can I improve myself and my relationships? What impact have my actions had on others and on the world? Am I truly achieving my potential?”

These very powerful personal questions are, for the most part, intimidating, which is probably why they are most often eschewed throughout the year.

Fortunately, the annual arrival of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur make it much harder to avoid these questions.

When I look back on my own life, I know that, somewhere along the way, it took a sharp turn. As a young boy and young man, I constantly dreamed of being either an electrical or chemical engineer. I even began as a chemistry major in college. But, somehow, I felt powerfully drawn to Jewish education.

Because of the Hebrew-speaking summer camp that I attended for many years, I had a strong Hebrew cultural background. The Hebrew camping experience served as a wonderful supplement to the intensive Hebrew day school education that I had gotten. I rose steadily in the ranks at camp, from counselor to division head to head counselor. Eventually, I became the director of a summer camp in Israel. Although sports and recreation were an important part of programming at both camps, Jewish culture and Jewish education were always a central element.

It was indeed fortuitous that I was asked to serve as a substitute teacher in Hebrew school one day. As a result, a consultant from the Board of Jewish Education who had walked into my classroom got on my case and insisted that I, at least, pursue a second degree in Jewish education. Little did I know then that this would change the course of my life.

To be sure, I am not the typical Jewish teacher. To a certain extent I often imagine that I deserve to be in the “Smithsonian Institution for Jewish Educators.” Being a Jewish educator is often a thankless, frustrating, and at times, demoralizing experience. Jewish teachers are grossly underpaid and often unappreciated (unfortunately, this is true of most teachers). Many young teachers who begin with enthusiasm, end up rather discouraged and leave the profession for, hopefully, greener pastures.

I, on the other hand, have had nothing but extremely positive experiences, challenging, but, ultimately, positive experiences. I imagine that there are very few veteran Jewish educators who could rival the, almost exclusively, favorable experiences that I’ve had, and the incredible opportunities afforded me in my career—one that now spans almost fifty years.

In my career as a Jewish educator, I have been exposed to great mentors, have had the support of wonderful individuals, leaders and educators, and happened to be at the right place at the right time to experience some of the most amazing breakthroughs in formal Jewish education, adult Jewish education, and informal Jewish education.

When I finally decided to leave the world of science (it wasn’t hard at all!) and convinced myself that I would try to impact on the Jewish world, I was determined to make certain to always be in a position to influence the largest number of people

in the most positive way Jewishly. The losses to Jewish life were so immense, that I felt I had to do something on a large scale. While impacting on two or three people in a profound manner is certainly a rewarding experience, the needs of the community were far beyond that.

My dear cousin, the late Edward S. Gordon, who was, at one time, among the most successful real estate leaders in America, often expressed pride in my achievements at the Lincoln Square Synagogue and NJOP. He suggested (although I have my reservations about his conclusion) that had I entered the field of real estate, I would have been a great success. Although, at times, I think about the twenty acre estate in the Hamptons that could have been mine, it is really a passing fantasy. Besides, with the critical needs of the Jewish community, who has time to fantasize about such things?

Could I have done more? I don’t think there is an honest person alive who would say that they couldn’t have done more. We all could do more. Could I be a better husband, father, and have been a better son to my parents? I don’t think there is a question that we all could do better.

Making a sincere *Cheshbon Hanefesh* is often a painful process. It requires supreme fortitude to confront ourselves in the mirror, look at where we went wrong, acknowledge the wrongs and mistakes, and devise ways for us to improve ourselves. It is, in reality, a veritable wrestling match with one’s soul.

That is what the High Holidays and the Ten Days of Penitence are all about—intense introspection, leading, hopefully, to profound self-improvement. It can only be achieved if we are candid with ourselves, and prepared to take the courageous steps to acknowledge our faults and improve our deeds.

Clearly, the High Holy Days are a most propitious time for “*Cheshbon Hanefesh*,” that must not be frittered away.

May you be blessed.

Wishing you a Shana Tovah and a Chatima Tovah, a very Happy and Healthy New Year. May we all be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Life, and may all our prayers be answered favorably.

Yom Kippur will be observed this year on Friday evening, September 13th through nightfall on Shabbat, September 14th, 2013. Have a most meaningful fast.

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from: Shabbat Shalom <ShabbatShalom@ounetwork.org> date: Thu, Sep 12, 2013 subject: Yom Kippur - Shabbat Shalom from the OU  
**Fractured Man, Whole Man**  
**Rabbi Eliyahu Safran**

A fisherman living near the banks of a river was making his way home one evening, exhausted from his long labors. As he trudged along the path, he dreamed of what his life might be like if he were suddenly rich. Just then, his foot brushed against a leather pouch on the path. He picked it up only to discover it filled with small stones. Falling back into his reverie, he absent-mindedly began throwing the pebbles into the water.

“When I am rich,” he told himself, “I will live in a large house. I will have one servant to serve me food and another to serve me wine...”

He dreamed of a carriage lined with gold! Of fine clothes! Of herds of goats and sheep! On and on, a glorious image per stone until there was only a single stone remaining. As the fisherman held the final stone in his hand, the last of the sun’s rays caught it and burst into a brilliant rainbow. His eyes widened as he realized that he held in his hand a valuable gem – and that he had been tossing away genuine wealth while dreaming of illusory riches that would never be his.

He fell to his knees in astonishment and despair. Meanwhile, a philosopher observing the fisherman would have recognized in his behavior and subsequent agony nothing more than an example of the human condition.

Each of us is made up of the real and the illusory, of the obtainable and the fanciful. More fundamentally, at our core there exists duality. Perhaps even contradiction. Whether at war with ourselves or in uneasy compromise, our essential duality is a constant source of anxiety and dis-ease in our lives.

How can it be otherwise? The duality is woven into the very nature of our being. We are both corporal, like every other creature that walks the face of the earth, and spiritual, uniquely imbued with the dignity and divinity of our Creator. At each step of our lives, we teeter and totter, seeking balance between these dual, often competing, facets of our

nature. At our best, we seek to imbue the natural with the spiritual, lending grace to the most basic of tasks, and to lend humanity to the divine, bringing holiness to our everyday lives. At our worst, we give in wholly to our most base instincts, seemingly powerless to find any balance with our better natures.

No moment in our lives is more rife with the tension of our duality than our confession on Yom Kippur. The process of repentance and its accompanying recitation of the confession – Viddui – shines a bright light on this essential contradiction of our nature. On the one hand, Viddui is a singular manifestation of courage, creativity and spiritual and psychological strength. On the other, it is a powerful statement of self-defeat, a clear eyed recognition of the pathetic nature of human frailty, inferiority and unworthiness.

The ability to repent then, is not only at the core of our nature, but it is the singular endeavor by which we can yoke the two aspects of our nature in an enduring balance. Sincere and authentic repentance cannot exist but for the strength, ability and insight to accuse oneself not only of doing wrong but of possessing a nature that makes such failure inevitable. Viddui is an acknowledgement that our intentions and deeds are unworthy and tarnished, a shameful cry to Heaven that, “I have sinned.”

Repentance is a merciless and boundless expression of self-accusation. However, the irony – and beauty – of this admission of necessary failure is wholly dependent on our man’s unique spiritual capacity. Without our inherent holiness, self-accusation would not only be impossible, it would be a futile and frustrating expression. It is only when we are cognizant of freedom, that we can recognize guilt, fragility and temptation and then – and only then – contemplate genuine repentance.

Even if it were possible, the Viddui experience would be meaningless without both aspects of our duality. Praise and shame in equal parts. Regret and recognition. All useless. All futile. Unless... unless we simultaneously have faith in our sacredness; in our creativity and goodness; the aspects of our being which allow us to repent, to be renewed and reinvigorated.

It is irony. It is contradiction. It is an impossibility. It is the nexus of our being. It is what defines our humanity. And it causes us to wallow in our sin at the exact moment that it allows us to genuinely confess and embrace holiness. To live with this duality is to be human. To have one without the other is to live a life bereft of meaning.

Rav Soloveitchik Z’L derived these two inseparable elements of the repentance experience from the Viddui recitation of the Jew who apportions his Ma’ssrot during the fourth and seventh years of the Sh’mitta cycle. Such a Jew boasts that he has not violated not even one iota of the commandments; he has fulfilled the Mitzvah of Ma’ssrot to the letter. “According to all your Commandments which You have commanded me: I have not transgressed any of Your commandments, neither have I forgotten. I have hearkened to the voice of the Lord my God, I have done according to all that You have commanded me.” Such statement in praise of a man extolling his virtues as a God-fearing and obedient servant is categorized by the Sages as a ‘confession?!’ How is it possible to ascribe ‘confession’ – a word which conjures up images of weakness and helplessness – to a man elevated to the point of not having ‘transgressed any of Your commandments?’ the Rav Z’L asked. But, that is precisely the point. Only a person proud enough to announce that he has done “all that You have commanded,” is also to be expected to humbly submit and admit that he has “not done according to all that You have commanded.”

The one who possesses the insight and strength to do right likewise has the capability to know – and do – that which is not right. The ability to recognize success is a prerequisite to admission of failure. Both emanate from the same source; both lead to mutually exclusive conclusions, that is, the nullity of being and the greatness of being.

It is the nullity of being that leads directly to the Yom Kippur confession. The greatness of being leads to the Ma’ssrot confession. Both are rooted in our humanity, our humanness, created from earth’s dust in the image of God. There are moments, glimpses of holiness, when the two forms of confession can be integrated. The grace of human experience is that the greatness of being can, for fleeting moments of experience, for wisps of time, indeed overshadow the nullity of being.

One such moment was when the Klausenberg Rebbe Z’L addressed survivors from Hungary, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia in the Feldafin DP Camp on Kol Nidre night in 1945. In that moment, the greatness of being overpowered the nullity of being, despite the dire circumstances and the horror of the historical context, which might have led a “rational” thinker to see only the nullity of existence. Lieutenant Birnbaum reported that he “had never heard so powerful a speech and never will again. When he finished, more than two hours later, I was both emotionally drained and inspired for the best davening of my life.”

What did this great Rebbe, who himself had lost his wife and eleven children to the Nazis, say to those beaten and degraded humans still damned with the stench of the crematoria in their nostrils? What could he say in the presence of the millions of lost fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives and children?

The Rebbe stood with his Machzor in hand, calmly flipping through its pages. Periodically he would ask rhetorically, “Wher haht das geshriben – who wrote this? Does this apply to us? Are we guilty of the sin enumerated here?”

One by one, he went through each of the sins listed in the Ashamnu (we have become guilty) prayer and then the Al Chait and concluded, reasonably, that those transgressions had little to do with the experience of those who had managed to survive the camps.

Ashamnu. “Have we sinned against Hashem or man?” He shook his head. “I don’t think so.”

Dibarnu dofi. “We spoke no slander. Indeed, we didn’t speak at all. If we had any strength to speak, we saved it for the SS guards so that we could avoid punishment.”

Latznu. “But we were so serious in the camps. There was no scoffing; no such thing as smiling or making a joke.”

Moradnu. “Rebbed? Against whom should we have rebelled? The Nazis? If we had tried, it would have been our last rebellion. Who then? Hashem?”

And so, one by one, the Klausenberger dismissed each transgression and concluded with the Ashamnu prayer and turned his attention to the more detailed Al Chait. Once again, he concluded with the pride of one whose greatness of being supersedes the nullity of being; that the recitation of sins enumerated in Al Chait hardly applied to the minyan of Feldafin Block 5A.

Al Chait she’chatanu lifanecha b’ones uvreratzon – for the sins that we have sinned before You under duress and willingly – “We certainly did not observe the mitzvot in the camps because we were forced to.”

Bevili daas – for the sins that we have sinned without knowledge – “Our minds were in such a state that we did not have knowledge of anything.”

B’tipushus peh – for the sins that we have sinned with foolish speech – “That’s a gelechter (funny). Who spoke foolishly or lightheartedly in the situation we were in?”

B’yetzher hara – for the sin that we have sinned with the evil urge – “To sin with the yetzer hara you must first have possessions of your physical sense of touch. We were barely skin and bones, incapable of the delight of touching. The only thing we could feel were the corpses we carried out every morning. We heard only the commands of our guards. Our eyes looked only to see whether our guards were watching when we chanced to take a rest. Smell – yes, we had a sense of smell. Would that we didn’t! The stench of death filled our nostrils, making us sick. Taste – the only taste we knew was the thin soup they gave us so we could have

enough strength for another day's work. On these, I forget, we did have the yetzer hara for food, for the slop that we saw thrown to the pigs. What the SS officers would not eat they threw to the pigs." He sighed. "How we envied the pigs."

And so the Rebbe Z'L eliminated the Al Chait's one by one, emphasizing how not a single one of these transgressions applied to his broken and sad congregation.

In conclusion, he quietly brought the cover of the Machzor to a close.

Seeing the Rebbe close the Machzor, Lieutenant Birnbaum was certain the Rebbe was finished. But then the Rebbe asked once again his original question, "Who wrote this Machzor? I don't see anywhere the sins that apply to us, the sins of losing emunah and bitachon (faith and trust in G-d)!"

"Where is the proof that we have sinned in this fashion? How many times did we recite Krias Shema on our wood slats at night and think to ourselves: Ribbono shel Olam, please take my neshama, so that I do not have to repeat once again in the morning. 'I'm thankful before You who has returned my soul to me.' I do not need my soul. You can keep it. How many of us went to sleep thinking that we could not exist another day, with all bitachon lost? And yet when the dawn broke in the morning, we once again said Modeh Ani and thanked Hashem for having returned our souls."

"None of us expected to survive. Every morning, we saw this one didn't move and that one didn't move, and as we carried the dead out we gazed upon them with envy. Is that emunah in Hashem? Is that bitachon in Hashem?"

"So, yes, we have sinned. We have sinned and now we must klop al Chait. We must pray to get back the emunah and bitachon that lay dormant these years in the camps. Now that we are free, Ribbono shel Olam, we beg You to forgive us. Forgive everyone here. Forgive every Jew in the world."

Rav Soloveitchik Z'L taught that every confession expresses itself in the outcry: "I am black, and I am beautiful, Oh daughter of Jerusalem." For, when we fail to see the "beauty" we cannot hope to discern the "blackness."

Genuine repentance demands that the sinner view himself from the seemingly two antithetical viewpoints, the two fundamental truths of his being – from the nullity of being and the greatness of being.

The Klausenberger Rebbe Z'L clearly saw both.

May He grant us the strength, courage, humility and wisdom to see both as well.

Shanah Tovah

Rabbi Dr. Eliyahu Safran serves as OU Kosher's vice president communications and marketing.

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[Weeklychizuk] Weekly Chizuk by **Rabbi Eliezer Parkoff** - Yom Kippur

Shema Yisrael Torah Network 5:51 AM (17 hours ago)

to Weekly Yom Kippur

### **Your Benevolence and Your Judgment**

**Adapted from Chochmas Chaim**, a new collection of previously unpublished shmuezim by **Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz**, zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, Yerushalayim. Your charity is like the mountains of G-d; Your judgments are [like] the vast deep. (Tehillim 36:7)

The middos of Hakadosh Baruch Hu have two opposite aspects. On the one hand, He shows unlimited benevolence and chessed, a treasure house of bounty flowing from Heaven. All it takes is a little bit of contemplation to realize that wherever one turns he can spot tremendous goodness. The Midrash (Vayikra Rabba Emor 27) tells that R. Yehoshua ben Levi was visiting Rome. He saw there beautiful marble columns covered in tapestry to protect them from cracking in the summer heat or becoming brittle in the winter cold. He recited the possuk "Your charity

is like the mountains of G-d." "You are the one who gives (the Romans the wealth to erect such columns) and when You give, You give in abundance." R. Yehoshua ben Levi contemplated on everything that he came into contact with, and he was able to see the heights of Hashem's bounty. Wherever one turns a person can see it if he will only pay attention to his surroundings.

The gemara in Erchin (16b) states, "What is the limit of torments? (Meaning to what extent can an incident be labeled a Heaven sent torment.) Mar the son of Ravina said, even if he put his shirt on inside out (and now he has the bother of taking it off and putting it on again). Rava... said even if he reached into his pocket to take out 3 coins and pulled out 2 (and now he has the bother of reaching in his pocket to get the third coin)."

These minor annoyances are definitely a nuisance. But they're a normal part of life. We've gotten used to all these minor inconveniences. In spite of this, in Heaven they are called torments. According to the original plans of Creation Man should not suffer even such minor annoyances. Even after the curse of "By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread," still nothing should happen to bother or upset him. This is so foreign to us being that we've become so used to a life of constant minor hassles. That's life. However, on the real scale of Creation, all these "hassles" are all a result of our transgressions. Sin ruins our situation. If we could be free of sin, we would live a life of peace and tranquility, without even the smallest bother.

This is an example of how far reaching is "Your charity is like the mighty mountains." If only Man would not ruin his world, his situation would be perfect. He would be given a perfect world of pure peace and simcha.

On the other hand, "Your judgments are [like] the vast deep." Even those extreme examples of petty torments, the torment of being bothered to put your hand in your pocket a second time, even such a petty torment is called a Heaven sent torment. It is Your Mishpat.

The above Midrash continues that R. Yehoshua ben Levi saw in Rome an indigent who had no clothes and covered himself with reed mats. He then recited the possuk, "Your judgments are [like] the vast deep." He saw the severity of punishment and disgrace. It's a terribly degrading to walk around naked and all one has to cover himself is just a bit of reed mat. Such is what happens to a person after sin.

Let's take this example of the poor man one step deeper. This poor man, walking around with no clothes on his back, in the cold, with no home or family or friends to look after him, this poor soul in his loneliness, this is the most extreme example of personal loss. This is a prime example of the depths of Your Judgments.

And at one and the same time if we look even more deeply, we can see Hashem's loving mercy and charity. In spite of everything, this poor soul is alive. Hashem is sustaining and feeding him and taking care of him. At one and the same time we see the depths of judgment, we see the heights of love and charity.

R. Yehoshua ben Levi looked around him and observed Hashem's justice. On one hand he saw mountains of tzedaka. And on the other hand he saw the depths of judgment.

A person is totally surrounded with tzedaka and judgment. Wherever one turns he sees both sides of the coin. If a person wants to know his spiritual position, he only has to evaluate himself with the Heavenly measuring rod: "The way a person measures, is the way they (Heaven) measure him." It is as if Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends him a prophet to teach him where he is really holding and what he has to fix up. With a little bit of thought on how he is being measured by Heaven, with "charity" or "mishpat," he can learn how he has to measure others and behave. Unfortunately, most of us are blind to all this and don't see the message being sent. A person evaluates himself with sweet glorious dreams of who he really is and corrupts any message being sent him.

I want to tell you an incident that I saw which exemplifies this lesson, how much a person is blind to the Heavenly "measure for measure." A certain family with which I am acquainted, was offered a wonderful shidduch. The boy was an outstanding genius and accomplished in all ways. However, he had one shortcoming. He had a slight limp in one foot. The girl and the rest of the family had already agreed to the shidduch in spite of the limp, being that the boy was so outstanding. Only the mother stubbornly refused because of the limp. Because of the mother's adamancy the shidduch fell through.

One day, this woman went to give her husband a cup of coffee. She tripped and broke her leg. This taught her a lesson: be careful even when you're walking in your own house. You can trip and break your leg.

That's it. That's all she learned. Nothing more. Instead of contemplating on Hashem's deep judgments, to see the measure for measure in what happened and realize it was a result of her refusal of an excellent shidduch for her daughter. Instead of all this, she saw something entirely different: that's life.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends us messengers in the form of measure for measure and we distort the message. Even when we pay attention to everything going on around us, even when very clear messages are sent, we don't want to see them. This teaches us how weak our minds are and how influenced it is from even a slight personal blindness.

The holy Zohar tells us, "A person walks this world and thinks he will live forever." How can that be? Doesn't he know that every generation comes to an end as a new generation is born? Is he denying reality? How can he honestly think that the whole world is his?

The answer is that in spite of the fact that everyone understands intellectually in his mortality and that eventually his time will come. Still, that doesn't affect his daily life. He goes around on this earth and acts as if the world belongs to him and he will live forever. That is the power a person has to distort his otherwise clear vision.

May we all merit being sealed in the Book of Life.

Wishing everyone A Gut Gebensht Yahr!

© Rabbi Eliezer Parkoff 4 Panim Meiro, Jerusalem 94423 Israel Tel: 732-858-1257 Rabbi Parkoff is author of "Chizuk!" and "Trust Me!" (Feldheim Publishers), and "Mission Possible!" (Israel Book Shop Lakewood). If you would like to correspond with Rabbi Parkoff, or change your subscription, please contact: rabbi.e.parkoff@gmail.com Weeklychizuk mailing list Weeklychizuk@shemayisrael.com [http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/weeklychizuk\\_shemayisrael.com](http://shemayisrael.com/mailman/listinfo/weeklychizuk_shemayisrael.com)

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### **Rabbi Wein - Yom Kippur**

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Yom Kippur

Getting in Touch With Ourselves Yom Kippur is not only the day of holiness and forgiveness of sin – it is also the great day of hope and optimism. To a great extent each of us is born anew on that day. Each one of us has an opportunity to reexamine ourselves. Though we spend much of our prayer time admitting our sins, failures and shortcomings, we do so confident that these errors will be erased in God's compassion for His creatures. We confess to the entire litany of sins listed in our prayers so that we will be cleansed of all possible guilt and allowed to move forward unburdened by past impediments.

Long ago when I was an attorney in Chicago I knew a colleague who was a specialist in guiding people through the process of voluntary bankruptcy. He told me that most of his clients, on a consistent basis, were guilty of not listing all of their debts and liabilities in their original application for bankruptcy protection. They either forgot that liability, or for some strange but prevalent psychological reason, were too embarrassed to list that matter in their bankruptcy petition. It is one thing to default on a bank loan. It is another matter to do so to those who are near and dear to you.

When we ask for Divine forgiveness on the holiest day of the year, the litany of sins and shortcomings, which are the core of the Yom Kippur prayer service, comes to correct this psychological and emotional deficiency. We confess to every sin possible, because humans are able, if not even prone, to commit every sin possible. Our memories are selective and often times faulty.

Embarrassment before our Creator is a human trait inherited from Adam who displayed it in his confrontation with God at the dawn of human civilization. Therefore the complete listing of all possible sins is a necessary component to obtain forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

As mentioned above, Yom Kippur is a singular day of opportunity. Freed from the mundane tasks that encompass our existence all year long, we have time to think about the things in life that ultimately matter – family, community, tradition and our legacy to those that come after us. We honestly confront our mortality and human state of being.

We also think about our souls, that we have oftentimes ignored and neglected because of the pressures of our daily pursuits. We can recharge that reservoir of Jewish pride that lies within each of us – how special we are as individuals and as a collective nation. Identifying as a Jew, and understanding the demands and privileges that this identity bestows, gives one a true sense of importance and purpose in life.

The alienated, the scoffers, the confused and the ignorant will find little comfort for themselves on this holy day. But for those who seek to know themselves and thereby glimpse their Creator and their own immortality, the day of Yom Kippur is one of unmatched opportunity and wrenching satisfaction. It is akin to the renewal of an old and cherished friendship and of finding a long-lost object of emotional value. Our inner essence, uncovered by the holiness of the day of Yom Kippur is that long-lost valuable object; it is our old and best friend.

The physical deprivations that Yom Kippur demands of us are a reminder that nothing in life that is important and lasting can be achieved without sacrifice and some form of deprivation. Judaism does not preach a life of asceticism. The Torah looks askance at those who willfully deprive themselves of the permitted pleasures of life. The rabbis taught us that the rewards and benefits of life are commensurate to the effort and sacrifice that we invest in achieving these goals.

There is no free lunch in the physical and spiritual worlds that we inhabit. The mandated deprivations of our bodily wants on Yom Kippur serve to remind us of this truism. In the prayers of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we confess that we risk everything in order to place food on our table. Yom Kippur and its bodily restraints teach us that we must also risk discomfort in order to attain any form of spiritual level and composure.

The absence of the chomping sound of eating, the gurgle of drinking and the clicking sound of sturdy leather shoes, allows us to hear the still small voice within us, the sound which our soul generates. It is that voice that elevates us and puts us in touch with our Creator. And that is what makes the day of Yom Kippur the supreme day of human greatness and opportunity – the holiest day of the year.

Shabat shalom Gmar chatima tova

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