

BS"D



To: Parsha@YahooGroups.com  
From: crshulman@aol.com

## INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHABBOS SHUVA / HAAZINU & YOM KIPPUR - 5764

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I just hosted a fund-raiser for Nechomas Yisroel (an organization founded by Rav Pam zt"l and currently headed by Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky Shlit" a that funds yeshiva education for immigrant children) [see <http://tinyurl.com/p4ky>]. Nechomas Yisroel is at 1160 42nd St., Brooklyn NY 11219.

This is not an all-inclusive list. See individual divrei torah for other contact information.

RABBI MOSHE SHULMAN

Shaarei Shomayim Congregation, Toronto

[From two years ago]

The Book of Life

There is a remarkable story in the Talmud of Elazar b. Dordai - a man who had committed practically every conceivable sin. And at a moment of particular vulnerability, was shocked into contrition when a harlot he was with proclaimed that All can repent except Elazar b. Dordai:

He thereupon went, sat between two hills and mountains and exclaimed: O, hills and mountains, plead for mercy for me! They replied: How shall we pray for thee? We stand in need of it ourselves, for it is said, For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed! So he exclaimed: Heaven and earth, plead for mercy for me! They, too, replied: How shall we pray for thee? We stand in need of it ourselves, for it is said, For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment. Sun and moon... Stars and constellations... Finally he said: The matter then depends upon me alone! Having placed his head between his knees, he wept aloud until his soul departed. Then a voice from Heaven was heard >Rabbi Elazar b. Dordai is destined for the life of the world to come! Hills and mountains, heaven and earth, sun and moon, stars and constellations - to these he prayed that they should plead for mercy for him!?

I believe that we, living in the dawn of the 21st century, can perceive a new and profound meaning to this passage.

Throughout these High Holy Days, we speak of the Book of Life: Inscribe us in the book of life On RH it is written, and inscribed on YK - who will live and who will die...

Well, today, scientists have truly discovered this Book of Life - they have decoded the human genome, one of the greatest achievements of modern science. This script, written in four letters, consisting of some 3.1 billion letters - enough information to fill a library of five thousand books - has been called by President Clinton the A language of creation. Scientists say they are learning how to read the Book of Life.

This is truly a wonderful discovery, for it will save lives. It will allow scientists and doctors to eradicate diseases that have hitherto been killers!

It will allow us to extend the human life cycle. Indeed, it truly contains within it the language of the creation of the human body!

But what of the human spirit!?

There have been, throughout the human genome project, those who have claimed that we are on the threshold of discovering the genetic basis of human behaviour as well! They claim that not only are diseases and physical conditions hereditary, but so are personality traits such as aggression, violence, even criminality. From here it is but a short step to genetic determinism - the idea that our fate is written in our genes, and we are not responsible for our actions - for good or for bad!

This, perhaps, was the argument with which R. Elazar ben Dordai was struggling: He was looking for the root cause for his sins, and his evil behaviour: - The hills and mountains - the environment - is responsible. - The heaven and earth - nature - is responsible. - Sun and Moon, stars and constellations - the cosmos, the sources of Creation, even G-d himself made me this way. I am not responsible!

But in a moment of honesty and understanding, Elazar b. Dordai realized that these are all excuses! And ultimately, *éá àià éáiú óáää ïéà* - The matter depends upon me alone!

Millennia ago, our sages in the Talmud recognized that there are certain character traits that are with us from birth. In the Talmud, these are defined as connected somehow to the time of one's birth. >He who is born under Mars will be a shedder of blood. Today, scientists would call this a genetic makeup. But the result is the same. The question is not what basic characteristics a person is created with. The question is what he or she does with these traits, and with the life he has? What choices does he make? Whether in the words of Rav Ashi - R. Ashi observed: Either a surgeon, a thief, a slaughterer, or a circumciser.

That's the basic most fundamental truth of Judaism: We are responsible for our own behaviour, we are accountable for our own deeds! - The matter depends upon me alone!

That is why Maimonides interrupts his discussion of the laws of repentance to include 3 chapters dedicated solely to establishing this truth: Free will is granted to all men. If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his.

From the moment of Creation, and Adam's choice to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, to the closing chapters of the Bible in which the Jewish people are exiled from their land and the Temple is destroyed as a punishment for abandoning their covenant with G-d - the Bible speaks of nothing else except of the human being's accountability before G-d!

The very creation of the human being in G-d's Image means that the human being was created with the freedom to choose! And ultimately choice is the greatest expression of freedom!

Maimonides defines repentance, true repentance, as when we find ourselves in exactly the same situation as we were when we committed a sin, but this time we CHOOSE not to repeat it. All the factors are the same save one - our decision! Circumstances do not determine what we do! We can change! We are determined by nothing except our own will!

And so many of our prayers of these High Holy Days reflect this basic truth: UNETANEH TOKEF - Everything is written - the book of chronicles, or human behaviour is open before G-d, and from it G-d will determine who will live and who will die.

But: - It is our signatures that write in that book. The entries in that book are written by our own hand! Therefore - teshuva tefillah tzedakah - therefore we have the power to change that decree, and write a new future for ourselves!

It's up to us!

Every great figure in the Bible goes through some form of teshuva, some transformation at some point in his or her life:

- Joseph - transforms from a young self-centered dreamer into a decisive leader, who saves his family, and his people. - Moses - tongue tied, becomes the most eloquent of prophets - Ruth - the Moabite, becomes the great-grandmother of King David. - Esther - who sees herself helpless, becomes the savior of our people.

Yom Kippur teaches that no fate is final, no destiny is inevitable! The power of Redemption rests in each one of US!! - The matter depends upon me alone!

There is a midrash of a conversation that took place between Elija the prophet and a fisherman. Elija asked him: What will you reply to your creator on your day of judgement? The fisherman responded, "I will say that I was ignorant, had no way to learn, and must be excused my transgressions." Whereupon Elija said; "Where did you learn to make your nets, where to cast them, how to draw them up with the fish?" "I'm talented that way", said the fisherman. "It is a faculty with which G-d endowed me." "You were given this faculty by G-d," said Elija, "then you certainly have no excuse not to exercise your faculty, also given by G-d, of being able to learn His word and apply it."

We each have strengths, genetic dispositions - wisdom, insight, empathy, understanding, agility, patience - we each have been given a chance in life to make something of ourselves, and our society around us! What we have to answer for is not whether we have stronger or weaker genes - but whether we use the genes G-d endowed us with to better ourselves, better the world, and be more loyal to G-d, and to Torah!

That's the lesson of YK: that we are each responsible for what we are, and what we do!

- If we abandon our Judaism - then we are responsible. - If we attack other Jews for behaving differently than ourselves - then we are responsible. - If we secularize our beloved state of Israel - then we are responsible. - If we reject our history and our heritage, and abandon our covenant with G-d - then we are responsible.

On the other hand - - If we reach out to one another in love and respect - then we are also responsible. - And if we lead moral exemplary lives - cry out in prayer, and in public anguish - when our brothers and sisters in Israel are in danger, - or when fellow Jews are imprisoned in Iran - then we are responsible! - If we return to G-d, and choose to start all over again, take our Judaism more seriously, in order to guarantee a new generation of Jews loyal to G-d and to Israel - then we are also responsible!

YIZKOR:

At Yizkor, we recall our loved ones - parents, grandparents, siblings, unfortunately sometimes even children - who are no longer with us. We remember what they gave us - life, love, traditions. In many ways, our ancestors invested their lives in us - so that we could become their future! Those who believe in the scientific determinism of the human genome believe that OUR future is in the past - in the DNA that they bequeathed us! We, however, believe that THEIR future is in our hands - and in the CHOICES we make - to be a better people - better spouses, better parents, better citizens, better Jews.

The Book of Life that sits open before the Almighty is written not by our past - but by our future! More than any other time of the year - now - at Yizkor - it is critical that we consider - how that book will read. In the words of R. Elazar b. Dordai: - The matter depends upon me alone!

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From: torahweb@zeus.host4u.net Sent: Sept. 26, 2003 To: weekly1@torahweb.org  
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RABBI MICHAEL ROSENSWEIG  
A BLUEPRINT FOR TESHUVAH

In parshat Nezavim, which is generally designated to be read in advance of Rosh Hashanah, the Torah records several crucial sections that depict the highs and lows of the national destiny of the Jewish people - the devastating impact of sin, exile, loss and destruction (Devarim 29:19-27), and the equally impressive phenomenon of rebirth and return to prosperity and Divine providence (30:1-11). After this wide range culminates with a direct reference to teshuvah ("ki tashuv el Hashem Elokehah be-khol levavekhah u-bekhol nafshekhah"), the Torah (30:11-14) dramatically introduces an ambiguous mitzvah - "ki ha-mitzvah hazot"-, strikingly indicating that it is neither wondrous (nifleit) nor distant (rehokah), nor in the heavens ("bashamayim"), nor across the sea (me-eiver la-yam). Rather, this unspecified imperative is within our grasp - "befikhah ue-belevavkhah laasoto". The effect of the continuation, in which the Torah presents the choice of life and good or death and evil (30:15) is to convey urgency of implementation. Clearly a major principle of Judaism is being projected here, notwithstanding the ambiguity of the phrase "ki hamitzvah hazot"

While the gemara in Eruvin (55a) and Rashi (op.cit), and Rambam (hil. talmud torah 3:8) interpret this imperative as a reference to study of Torah, deemed as "keneged kulam" (Peah 1:1), the source for Jewish education and values, as crucial an institution as exists in Jewish life, the Ramban (30:11) suggests that the reference is to the obligation of teshuvah-repentance. His reading is reinforced by an analysis of the context and language of the previous sections, as noted.

The Ramban's view is consistent with prominence of teshuvah as vehicle for personal, communal, and national transformation. The Rabbis perceived the very existence and possibility of teshuvah, the ability to extricate oneself from past behavioural patterns, and to neutralize sin and past inadequacy, to literally reinvent oneself, a philosophically problematic notion as it denies moral and behavioural causality, as a gift, even a miracle. This is particularly true of the more ambitious forms of teshuvah mi-yirah (fear of Hashem) and teshuvah me-ahavah (love of Hashem) that have remarkable transformative impact on sin (Yoma 86a).

Yet, teshuvah is a centerpiece in Jewish -halakhic outlook. That man can and must mold his spiritual destiny is axiomatic, and particularly urgent in the period beginning with Rosh Hashanah and concluding with Yom Kippur (R. H. 18a).

An analysis of these pesukim according to Ramban's reading constitutes a blueprint for the process of teshuvah. It contributes significantly to our understanding of challenges and possibilities, and illuminates the process and methodology of this crucial institution-mitzvah. Before the yamim noraim, such an assessment is indispensable to our own personal and collective preparation for what lies ahead.

The first element is accessibility (lo rehokah hi, befikhah ubelevavkhah laasoto), which is conveyed repeatedly and emphatically in these verses. Meiri begins his work on teshuvah (Hibbur ha-Teshuvah) by emphasizing the importance of not despairing in the quest for teshuvah. Being cognizant of our capacity to succeed not only dispels counterproductive frustration, but also reflects the nature of teshuvah and, by extension, of the halakhic concept of religious growth more generally as a meaningful challenge.

Furthermore, the Torah's intriguing formulations preclude and reject a decisive role for extraneous factors, while at the same time, they hint at the obstacles that need to but most definitely can be overcome. They also underscore that misguided or overstated nostalgia or overidealization of other eras or circumstances are generally counterproductive unless they inspire and motivate rather than frustrate by raising the bar to unattainable levels. In any case, a brief examination of what teshuvah is not is also indispensable to the effort to achieve a proper teshuvah.

The concept of "lo bashamayim" declares that Judaism and by extension the process of teshuvah does not demand an angelic or other-worldly posture nor does it require perfection, either in deed or commitment. It is important to note that this verse is invoked by the Rabbis in a celebrated passage (B.M. 59a -tanur shel akhnai) to establish the principle of man's partnership with G-d in the development of the halakhic system. The Talmud explains that precisely because of the perfection and self-sufficiency of the Torah given at Sinai, and due to its ambition for man's spiritual growth, there is no need for Divine intervention in halakhic decisionmaking. The tools and methodology of interpretation and adjudication are all part of the Torah, and man is charged with implementing that system through its Divinely ordained rules. The sincere halakhist who is properly trained in these rules, and who is fully committed to Torah and yirat shamayim, willing to surrender to its rule and sensibilities, becomes a significant partner in the endeavor of Torah, making Divine intervention- lo bashamayim hi- unnecessary. The fact that the halakhist's sincere input is indispensable, even decisive, reflects Hashem's ambition for man, as well as the enormous responsibility that accompanies and is the basis for his prerogatives. Man's significant, if subordinate role in the world of halakhah, also constitutes a leitmotif in the writings and thinking of the Rav zt"l. Rav Soloveitchik contrasts halakhic man's creative contributions with the more generally passive posture of the admired- heroic figures of other religions. This view reflects man's inherent value and potential for spirituality and sanctity. This remarkable perspective attesting to man's vast potential qualifies man qua man (not as angel), as a candidate for the gift of teshuvah. Man need not relinquish his humanity to restore his relationship with Hashem. Instead, he needs to elevate and sanctify his physical and human dimension and channel it to Hashem's service. In Judaism, man is always superior to angels. Because, not despite his humanity, he is privileged to have and observe the Torah.

The motif of "lo nifleit hi" is equally important. In his magnificent depiction of the uniqueness of halakhic Judaism, "Ish Halakhah", Rav Soloveitchik contrasts what he calls standard Religious Man and Halakhic Man. He demonstrates that unlike other religions, Judaism first and foremost focuses on concrete this-worldly norms and the sanctification of the real world, not on mysticism and the flight to a more spiritual realm. The process of teshuvah, by extension, is neither mysterious nor mystical. It is rooted in the accessible exoteric categories of the halakhah. Man's ability to sanctify the mundane and the physical world that he inhabits is the basis for berakhot, family laws like taharat mishpahah, as well as Hoshen Mishpat, the comprehensive code of civil law that governs every aspect of human interaction. Halakhah's vast scope contrasts with other religions that focus almost exclusively on the more obvious "spiritual, ritual" sphere. The halakhic approach reflects not compromise of spirituality, but the contrary a greater ambition.

In teshuvah, this consideration of "lo nifleit", is particularly acute. It is a crucial irony since sin reflects man's failure to attain his lofty goal, having succumbed to the pressures or temptations of the concrete world. Yet, in the process of teshuvah, man is not asked to reject the physical world, but to rededicate to the struggle and ambition to sanctify his existence and the world around him. Teshuvah is a rigorous, lengthy process, exoteric and human in every way.

At the same time, teshuvah is also not "me-eiver la-yam". Halakhah rejects a decisive normative role for the social-cultural environment in human behaviour. This is most certainly not due to a denial of its profound impact. Indeed, the concept of "shakhen ra" (bad neighbor-influence) and the admonition to avoid "moshav letzim" (clique of scoffers) etc. are pervasive and powerful themes in Hazal who were keenly sensitive to the power of environment and prevailing sensibilities and norms. Rather, it is a testament to the ability and obligation to overcome such negative influences, and to the dominant concept of personal responsibility, the foundation for all reward and punishment. Personal choice (behirah hafshit) stands at the center of teshuvah. (In Rambam's work it appears in the fifth and sixth of ten chapters dedicated to teshuvah!) According to the halakhic view, man has the capacity, and therefore the obligation to insulate himself from unacceptable attitudes and conduct, to extricate himself from or overcome his environment when necessary by strengthening his inner world that dictates his own responses, and when possible to help shape the world around him. See, Rambam, Sefer Hamitzvot, no. 3.] Yaakov indicated as much to his brother Esav when he declared that he was able to fulfill the 613 commandments in Lavan's home (Rashi, Vayishlah). He ultimately left that home when he felt

Lavan's influence had become to intoxicating or confusing. Rav Soloveitchik often emphasized his belief that Judaism can thrive in any society with the proper yirat shamayim and level of commitment. This conviction is predicated on the theme that Torah and its values are capable of fortifying one, providing a powerful foundation enabling man to meet his challenges.

The concept of "lo rehokah" encourages man to reject the sense of frustration and hopelessness due to the apparently overwhelming distance that separates him and Hashem, particularly as a consequence of sin. This feeling can impede the effort toward teshuvah. The Torah perceives the formidability of the task as a catalyst for greater effort, as the experience of loss and distance underscores the inimical effects of sin. Since man's purpose in the world is only to develop a relationship with Hashem, the sense of purposelessness and insignificance that results when he loses his spiritual bearings and anchor, must trigger his motivation to return.

Finally, we turn from the challenge and misconceptions to the methodology. The words "befikah u-belevavkhah laasoto" constitute a remarkable guarantee that, notwithstanding all of the misconceptions, which are really reflections of enormous challenges, teshuvah is within man's grasp and can be attained with nothing more than the basic core tools of his inner life. The first is the power of prayer through articulation. By virtue of a mechanism to reach Hashem and simultaneously achieve self-knowledge (from the reflexive "le-hitpaal"), man is able to place his needs and relationship to his Creator in better perspective. According to the Ramban, "befikah" also refers specifically to the vidui- the confession stage that is indispensable to teshuvah, as it formulates, and concretizes man's failings, stripping away rationalization and denial, paving the path for honest introspection and ultimately, for change. The second component, "belevavkhah" projects the emotional-intellectual resources of heart and mind that can reshape and regulate man's inner world and dictate his hierarchy of values and priorities. Finally, "laasoto" establishes the role of actions that concretely implement the values of Torah through halakhic norms. The this-worldly nature of halakhic religious commitment alluded to earlier, which is not a concession to the physical world but a reflection of higher spiritual ambition, demands that profound inner change be concretized into physical and measured actions that also impact upon others.

The promise of accessibility of teshuvah and the delineation of a well-defined program to achieve it does not dismiss, or ignore the challenges and obstacles, as noted. Moreover, the pesukim indicate that success is contingent upon the intensity of one's commitment. As the gemara in Erubin and Rashi note, one need not storm the heavens, simulate conditions of "ever layam", immerse oneself in esoteric study and mystical actions to attain the goal and gift of teshuvah, but one's devotion and dedication and conviction to religious self-improvement must match the intensity that would have been required had these radical, formidable standards been established as the sine qua non of teshuvah! The gift of accessibility and attainability should not be misconstrued or exploited as a license for a tepid or mediocre effort to achieve so crucial a goal. At the culmination of the teshuvah period, on Y.K., we withdraw temporarily from physical world, imitate the angels on high by standing and reciting the "barukh shem kevod malkhuto", etc. precisely to project the intensity of our commitment, our willingness to go to any lengths if they are demanded, and to project that our more balanced spiritual program springs from the same devotion that would have characterized a more ascetic and esoteric approach, and is just as passionate and tenacious. In this sense, "befikah , belivavkhah, laasoto"s simplicity does not belie the absolute comprehensiveness and ambitiousness of the task. The willingness to scale the heavens in our efforts to refashion our relationship with Hashem combined with the accessibility guaranteed by the Torah challenge and inspire each and every one of us to aspire for a complete teshuvah (sheleimah), as individuals and as a community in the yomim noraim period ahead. The multidimensional program outlined in the Torah is the blueprint for personal and collective introspection and transformation. May we achieve this goal- "ki hamitavah hazot befikah ubelevavkhah laasoto".

Subj: Yonah Essay Date: Wed, 24 Sep 2003  
From: "Michael Hoenig" <MHoening@herzfeld-rubin.com>  
TO SINK OR SWIM: THE POWER OF TESHUVAH  
MICHAEL HOENIG

The Sages fully understood the utter majesty implicit in the story of the Prophet Yonah. They ordered that his book be read on Yom Kippur, the Day of Awe. Yet, no doubt due to our own shortcomings, many readers view the tale and its message as a kind of tall story, a relic from a bygone era, a whimsical footnote of history involving a minor Prophet in a distant land. Secular recountings seem partially to blame. Caricatures of Yonah being swallowed by a "whale" have, in effect, swallowed up the transcendent message and the Sages' intent. Yonah deserves better. To be sure, his time slot is difficult. By Mincha of Yom Kippur even those hardy souls remaining in their seats find attention spans challenged by the inevitable headache, dreams of the missed cup of coffee, the steady creep of a need to sleep. Into this swirl of conflict between bodily limitations and soaring spirits enters a story that boggles the modern mind. Popularized notions of the story largely inaccurate induce skepticism by many. Though we live in the space and computer age, literally an era of modern miracles, we appear insensitive to the well founded recordings of past miraculous events. We should lament our ineptitude and lack of sensitivity. We should summon our energies to get closer to the Navi (prophet) and his travails. If we do, we will see a poignant message not just for the Day of Awe but all year round. The bottom line is that the book of Yonah is not a fable. Its theme is very modern. A person can get into deep water well over one's head but can emerge. One need not sink but can swim to safety. The life preserver, life raft, scuba apparatus or oxygen is readily at hand. The mechanism is repentance, Teshuvah. Though Yom Kippur is a focal point for obvious reasons, Yonah's message reverberates daily. Many readers of the Yonah episode see the Teshuvah of Ninveh, a sin city to whom the Navi successfully prophesied, as the dominant illustration of repentance. Although Ninveh's genuine turnaround is a powerful event well worthy to record, readers should focus more fully on the Navi himself. His story is the really inspirational message of Teshuvah. And, it is imbued with interesting Halachic implications frequently overlooked by serious readers. In other words, the Yonah chapter bristles with elements of Halacha, perhaps obscure in our age, that contribute to an understanding of the process of repentance.

Here we briefly focus on a tiny sliver of Halachic issues that lends emphasis to Yonah's transformation. When one recognizes the irony that the holy Navi, commanded by Hashem to bring about the repentance of an entire evil city, was himself a sinner who had to invoke the mechanics of true repentance, the message of Teshuvah is seen as a more relevant tool for daily existence, a guide for modern man to throw off the impure weights that drag him down. It is Yonah who repents by invoking the classic formula for Teshuvah a formula well within reach of each of us. Two interesting questions of Halachic importance, about which the Sages offer vigorous debate, are (1) the consequences if a Navi does not give over his Nevuah and (2) whether a Yachid, an individual, can be given over or sacrificed for Hatzolas Harabim, to save the many. In simplified form the short answers to these questions are (1) the Navi who intentionally fails to effect his Nevuah is a sinner liable for the ultimate sanction (Chayav Missah) and (2) an individual can be given up or sacrificed to save the many only if the individual is validly liable for the ultimate penalty (Chayav Missah). Each of these complex questions is reflected in the Yonah chapter. By understanding them, the sublime, near miraculous but simple to achieve formula of Teshuvah is understood. Yonah's quandary so long ago in a distant land is that of modern-day man. The Prophet's successful invocation of Teshuvah then is the same solution for our emergence from sinful existence today.

1. Yonah's refusal to prophesy in Ninveh rendered him "Chayav Missah." However, since he fled aboard a ship, the absence of a Bes Din rendered the sentence incapable of execution except by Divine means (Chayav Missah LeShomayim). The inevitable happens. Divine retribution comes in the form of a deadly sea storm that imperils not only Yonah, the sinner, but also the sailors aboard the ship.

2. When the sailors engage in the Goral (casting of lots) and Yonah admits he is the cause of the Divine threat to life, Yonah agrees (is Maskim) to be hurled into the sea. He understands both his sin and the penalty. The sailors (upon whom Yiras Shamayim fell and who later were Nisgayer), with Yonah's consent, were within "rights" to sacrifice the Yachid to save the Rabim. The two Halachic conditions were met (Chayav Missah LeShomayim; clear and present danger to the Rabim). We can better

understand Yonah's acquiescence in his fate when it is considered within Halachic framework. 3. From the sea's depths, however, a material transformation occurs. Yonah cries out in prayer, confession, regret (Charata), with genuine intent and declaration to forego further sin of that kind. Classic elements of the Teshuvah formula are thereby invoked. Through Divine intervention, the Navi's invocation of the formula results in physical salvation. He emerges from the depths.

4. But one element of complete Teshuvah is still absent. Invocation of the first elements, important as they are, still requires the "Teshuvah loop" to be closed. The true repentant must now act righteously when confronted by the very same circumstances that led to the sin originally. The genuine intent to "return" and sincere regret must be turned into proper deed. Given his repenter's second chance, Yonah indeed goes on to Ninveh and prophesies successfully. His Teshuvah is complete.

5. This leads to a main point for serious readers of the Yonah chapter. Al derech Hapeshat, much of the text (and therefore the attention of readers) focuses upon the sweeping grandeur of the Teshuvah of Ninveh, a decadent hotbed of immorality, as the main nexus for reading the episode on Yom Kippur. But, on a deeper level, the truly impressive lesson of Teshuvah is that of Yonah himself. His use of the relatively simple formula for massive and immediate repentance a formula existent in this very day -- reflects such Teshuvah and subsequent events confirm that it was accepted. 6. By personalizing the character of Yonah, a holy man who sins, a Navi who "returns" (rather than aiming one's exclusive focus on the spectacular turnaround of the sin city), we more easily can identify with a single human being literally brought to the brink of fatal disaster. The classic, time honored formula for Teshuvah readily can be seen as a relevant, contemporary concept not just for Yom Kippur but for one's personal growth each day. Additionally, by focusing on the Halachic implications that permeate the Yonah episode, we are aided to recognize that each verse of Navi text is imbued with clues harmonizing the behavior of Biblical personalities with applicable law or customs. The historical accuracy of the account is thereby fortified.

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From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: October 02, 2003 To: Yhe-holiday@etzion.org.il Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Yhe-Holiday: Special Yom Kippur Package

#### HOW DOES THE SCAPEGOAT ATONE? YOM KIPPUR'S MESSAGE OF MERCY AND HOPE BY RAV YOEL BIN-NUN

Translated by Kaeren Fish

Seemingly, there should be no such day as Yom Kippur. How can there possibly be any rectification of sins committed intentionally? Repentance certainly has its place, for it comes to repair the deformed personality; but how can a sacrifice bring forgiveness and atonement for anything other than an unintentional sin?

The prophets steer well clear of speaking about a sacrifice that atones for a sin committed intentionally. It is quite audacious to read the words of Yishayahu in the haftora of Yom Kippur itself. What the prophet is asking is whether the community has ensured that, at the end of the fast, a meal will be waiting not only for those who have plenty, but also for the less fortunate: "Offer your bread to the hungry and bring the bitterly poor into your house" (58:7). Fasting, beating one's breast, bowing one's head and wearing sackcloth and ashes by themselves have little meaning for the prophets: "I desire kindness rather than sacrifices," Hoshea declares (6:6). Religious worship that does not uproot moral wrongdoing, and which is sometimes regarded as a "bribe" to G-d to continue engaging in interpersonal corruption, is regarded in a most serious light.

The Torah teaches that if a person sinned unwittingly and then became aware of his sin, he should bring a sin offering. But does the Torah mention anywhere a sacrifice that brings atonement for a sin performed knowingly?

Yom Kippur atones for intentional sins, although this seems impossible. For unintentional sins, we don't need Yom Kippur to atone, while for intentional sins there can be no atonement (in the sense of erasing punishment). The door to repentance is always open, but punishment for sins committed knowingly should be unavoidable.

Yom Kippur is thus a paradox, and the Torah itself points to this, just as it does to the exceptional laws concerning the red heifer used for ritual purification. All these laws are puzzling: why do we need a heifer; are not

all ritual impurities purified through water? Why, when the impure person is purified through the ritual of the heifer, is the priest who performs the sprinkling (and who was ritually pure) simultaneously rendered impure?

The red heifer and the scapegoat are paradoxical exceptions to the general laws of purity and sacrifices, and are very difficult to understand. In fact, our Sages teach that the nations of the world ridicule Israel because of the scapegoat and the red heifer. It is not so difficult to understand why these sacrifices render impure those who have been involved with them, for they belong to the category of sacrifices prepared outside the camp, and these have the characteristic of rendering impure. But the need for these "external sacrifices" is itself problematic. Generally, we are forbidden to offer sacrifices outside the Temple. Why does the Torah make an exception here and command the banishing of the goat outside the camp?

In Vayikra 17, a chapter lodged between the Torah reading of Shacharit of Yom Kippur and the Torah reading of Mincha, there is an emphasis on the prohibition, "They shall no longer offer their sacrifices to the 'se'irim" (demons); anyone who slaughters a sacrifice outside the camp is considered to have given an offering to demons! But what about the two goats offered on Yom Kippur? Are we – heaven forbid – hinting at two deities? To whom are we sacrificing the scapegoat in the barren land?

On the Day of Judgment – Rosh Ha-shana – we do not fast, nor do we beat our breast over our sins, nor do we recite Selichot. It is a day of truth, a day of remembrance, a day of judgment. Our fear of heavenly judgment makes this day a fearful one, and we feel awe and dread upon hearing the shofar and reciting Malkhuyot, Zikhronot, and Shofarot. We fear G-d's judgment of our actions.

But the Torah teaches that fasting has an effect, that man can repent and be given a second chance, that G-d relates to us not just in justice but in mercy as well. The presentation of the second set of Tablets of Testimony, on Yom Kippur, symbolizes this. The Holy One reveals that there is another dimension to His providence over the world – the attribute of mercy. This is a dimension that has no place according to justice, truth and judgment. The essence of Yom Kippur, explains the Ramban in parashat Emor, is "mercy within judgment." Therefore, we confess and we cry out Selichot. The Selichot even "spread backwards" all the way to the week preceding Rosh Ha-shana, or to Rosh Chodesh Elul.

During the period of "the Days of Mercy," Rosh Ha-shana is a day (today, two days) of truth, without Selichot. It is a day of judgment based on strict justice. But the Torah nevertheless gives us – against all logic – a day of atonement, where our sins are forgiven and punishment cast away. After all, we are only human, and we cannot deal with the attribute of truth. The Holy One saw that the world cannot exist based only on the attribute of justice, and so He added to it the attribute of mercy.

The haftara – the Book of Yona – teaches us faith, prayer and repentance, in that order. But the haftara does not end after chapter 3, when the people of Ninveh repent. The story continues with the tale of the gourd in chapter 4, teaching us of the attribute of mercy: "Shall I not then have mercy on Ninveh, the great city?" The world cannot exist only in the attribute of justice, and the Holy One performs a great kindness for the world, and a great kindness for Israel, in giving us Yom Kippur. It is a great and wonderful message of hope.

However, the sins and iniquities that are placed upon the goat cannot be offered on the altar. The altar does not accept the offering for an intentional sin.

This goat, then, cannot be offered up, but we must confess and send away our sins, for we cannot stand before the attribute of truth. Therefore, we banish these sins committed knowingly to the wilderness, to a barren wasteland. That is why the Torah commands – almost in the same breath, as it were – "They shall no longer offer their sacrifices to the 'se'irim," but on one day of the year you shall send all your intentional transgressions out of the camp with the goat. "And he shall confess over [the scapegoat] all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions and all their sins...."

(See the first Mishna of Massekhet Shevuot for the parallel between atonement for the Sanctuary from its impurity by means of the Kohen Gadol entering the Kodesh Kodashim, and the scapegoat, carrying all the rest of Israel's sins and wrongdoings to the wilderness.)

The first half of Sefer Vayikra – up to the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur – deals with sacrifices and ritual purity. From there onwards, the second half discusses the sanctity of the congregation (prohibited sexual relations), "You shall be holy," the holiness of the land,

holiness in time, etc. By allowing us to cast out even our intentional sins, Yom Kippur connects the sanctity and the purity of the Temple with the daily life of the congregation.

Like the story of Yona, Yom Kippur teaches us that without mercy, the world cannot exist at all. Despite all logic, justice, truth and judgment, Yom Kippur brings us a message of hope, atonement, and great possibility.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH ALON SHEVUT, GUSH ETZION 90433 E-MAIL: YHE@ETZION.ORG.IL or OFFICE@ETZION.ORG.IL Copyright (c) 2003 Yeshivat Har Etzion. All rights reserved.

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From: Yeshivat Har Etzion Office [office@etzion.org.il] Sent: October 02, 2003 To: Yhe-holiday@etzion.org.il Yeshivat Har Etzion Israel Koschitzky Virtual Beit Midrash (Vbm) Yhe-Holiday: Special Yom Kippur Package SENSING GOD'S PRESENCE BASED ON A SICHA BY HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ADAPTED BY YITZCHAK BARTH Translated by Kaeren Fish

"And G-d passed over before him, and he called out" – Rabbi Yochanan said: Were it not for the text itself saying this, such a thing could never be said. This teaches us that the Holy One wrapped Himself (in a tallit) like a 'shaliach tzibbur' (prayer leader) and showed Moshe the order of prayer. He said to him: Whenever Israel sins, let them perform this order before Me, and I shall forgive them... Rav Yehuda said: There is a covenant made concerning the Thirteen Attributes that they do not return empty, as it is written, 'Behold, I make a covenant.'" (Rosh HaShana 17b)

At the center of our prayers and supplications on the days of Selichot, culminating with Yom Kippur, stands the recitation of the "Thirteen Attributes." What is the meaning of the expression, "The Holy One wrapped Himself like a shaliach tzibbur?"

Moshe Rabbeinu asked G-d: "Show me Your glory" (Shemot 33:18). Rambam explains (Hilkhot Yesodei HaTorah 1:10) that it never entered Moshe's mind to know G-d's essence; he asked only to know the truth of His existence. The Holy One is unique and beyond our ability to grasp. The world's existence is not necessary, but existence without G-d is completely impossible. Moshe Rabbeinu asked to apprehend the truth of G-d's existence in a distinct manner,

"so that the knowledge of G-d in his heart would be just like knowing someone whose face he had seen, and whose image was engraved in his consciousness, such that that person would be distinguished in his mind from other people. Thus Moshe Rabbeinu asked that the existence of the Holy One would be distinguished in his heart from the existence of all else." (ibid.)

In response to Moshe's request, the Holy One enwrapped Himself, as it were – teaching that mortal man cannot completely grasp His reality: "You shall see My back, but My face you shall not see" (Shemot 33:22). But there was a sense of complete presence; it was clear that behind the tallit covering, there was something great and mighty – and this finds expression in the uttering of the Thirteen Attributes.

We are far from the level of Moshe Rabbeinu. The desire to know the real essence of G-d's existence does not concern us; we are satisfied with the Rambam's explanation (ibid., laws 1-4) that the existence of G-d – in contrast with the existence of the world – is uncontingent and unconditional. At the same time, we still feel a strong desire and we pray: "Show us Your ways!" We want to see and understand the Kingship of G-d, His rule over the world.

There are times when the Divine ways of ruling the world are not clearly seen: the Holy One enwraps and covers Himself, as it were. Sometimes, because of a period of suffering – a week, a year, an era – we cannot see the complete picture.

Sometimes G-d is altogether wrapped; at other times He "peeks through the lattice," and we see His mercies and His small miracles. This year we saw the Holy One peeking through the cracks: through the war against Iraq, He saved us from one of the greatest existential dangers facing the State of Israel. But what we have seen in the last few weeks – the terrible, murderous terrorist attacks – and also during the last few years: here the paths of G-d's providence are hidden from us. Nevertheless, specifically now we must declare that we sense G-d's presence with certainty!

A lecturer in philosophy once told me that today we know that there are more than five senses. There is an additional sense, called the "sense of presence." A person who is in a room senses if someone else is with him. I do not know whether this is scientifically correct, but as far as we are concerned, it is true with regard to G-d. Even when the Holy One is wrapped, as it were, we sense that there is something behind that outer wrapping; we sense that He is with us.

The gemara quoted above reveals to us G-d's ways in the covenant of the Thirteen Attributes: "The Holy One wrapped himself like a shaliach tzibbur." The gemara continues with a practical instruction: "Let them perform this order before Me". G-d revealed the Thirteen Attributes in order that we may learn from them about His ways, that we may learn how to act.

We should learn from this covenant that every one of us must radiate kindness, mercy and other positive attributes, but his inner essence should remain "enwrapped." A person's presence should be felt: he need not nullify or hide himself; he must act and achieve, but he should do so without advertising his own self, his personality. When a person sins, when he feels depressed or despairing, "Let them perform this order before Me" – every person should consider himself a shaliach tzibbur, and radiate a sense of emulating G-d's attributes. The Midrash teaches:

"And I shall be gracious to whom I shall be gracious' – At that time G-d revealed to Moshe all the treasures stored as reward for the righteous. Moshe asked, 'This treasure – for whom is it meant?' And G-d answered, 'For those who perform mitzvot.' 'And this treasure – for whom is it meant?' 'For those who raise orphans.' And so on, for each treasure. Then G-d showed him a great treasure, and Moshe asked, 'Whose treasure is this?' G-d answered him, 'Whoever has his own [treasure, due to his actions] – I give him from his own reward; whoever has not – I give him for free, from this. As it is written, 'And I shall be gracious ("chanoti," connected here as denoting a free gift) to whom I shall be gracious.'" (Shemot Rabba, 45)

Someone who gives G-d the feeling that there is nothing at all that is rightfully his, and that all that he possesses is thanks to G-d's mercy; one who recognizes that it is the Holy One Who has blessed him with all of his strengths and talents ("Yours, G-d, is charity, we have shame; I am embarrassed and ashamed to lift my face to You"); those people who say that they deserve nothing – for them G-d reserves the greatest reward.

These, then, are the two pieces of advice stemming from these aggadot: to wrap oneself like a shaliach tzibbur, and to feel that we have nothing owing to us, and that we rely on G-d's free gifts.

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On the first night of Selichot, we say, "At the end of the day of rest we greet You first... to hear THE SONG AND THE PRAYER." This expression is taken from the prayer offered by Shelomo after the Beit Ha-Mikdash was completed. Prayer has an element of exalted song, declaring G-d's praise. Elsewhere, song ("rina") refers to the most heartfelt prayer:

"Arise, sing in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before G-d..." (Eikha 2:19)

One of the commentaries explains that "singing" here refers to silent prayer – prayer that does not make itself heard, prayer of the heart. King David prayed:

"A lesson ('maskil') of David, when he was in the cave, a prayer: I cry with my voice to G-d; I make my supplication with my voice to Him... Hear my song, for I am very low..." (Tehillim 142). There is a prayer that turns into inner song: when a person understands that he has no hope of salvation and that only G-d, in His great mercy, can help him, then like King David – after all his crying out – he asks: "Hear my song!"

We use this time of the year to take stock; each person knows what afflicts his soul. We see what is happening to us: for years we prided ourselves on having solutions to every problem, and now – "We do not know what to do." We turn to G-d and cry,

"Yours, G-d, is charity... the is Yours and the body is Your work; have mercy on Your nation!"

Our soul is thirsty for You; it cannot exist without You. "We are called after Your Name; G-d, act for the sake of Your Name!" At this point our prayer turns into rina, into silent song. We must learn to pray, and recognize that we have no solutions other than prayer.

May the Holy One hear our prayers, and may we and all of Israel merit to be inscribed and sealed for a good year!

(This sicha was delivered on the first night of Selichot, Elul 5763 [2003].)

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#### IN THE PALACE OF THE KING BY RABBI NOAH WEINBERG

A parable is told about a young prince. He was kidnapped from the palace and was raised as a peasant laboring in the field -- far away from the glory and riches of the king's house. The king sent emissaries throughout the kingdom to find the prince, and finally, after many years, he was located. When the king heard the news, he sent messengers right away to bring his son to the palace. The prince was reluctant to go -- he knew nothing of being the son of the king. The son, who had never seen anything more than a village hut, did not even know what a "palace" was! But the king's messengers were persistent. They gave the son a set of clothes befitting of a prince, put him on a horse, and rode him towards the capital.

When the prince got to the palace, he was struck with fear. Everything seemed so immense and imposing. He didn't know what to do in a palace. He thought, "I'm a stranger here. This can't be mine. Is the king going to want to have anything to do with me?"

The messengers brought him to a door and told him that inside this room sits the king. The boy was scared. How would the king receive him? The doors opened slowly. The boy saw the king, the most powerful man in the kingdom, by whose word vast numbers lived and died. He trembled with fear. He couldn't approach. And then, the boy realized -- it's not the king, it's my father! They fell into each other's arms.

#### PARABLE EXPLAINED

This is Yom Kippur. From the first of Elul, a month before Rosh Hashana, we begin our journey to see the King. On Rosh Hashana, we're in the palace of the King -- scared, standing in judgment before Him. On Yom Kippur, we're His children.

Living in the modern world, it's hard for us to relate to loving a benevolent king. The kings we think of are monster dictators -- the target of revolutions to overthrow the king!

The Jewish concept of a king is different. The king of Israel has his power limited by the Torah: He may not amass excessive personal wealth, and he must carry a small copy of the Torah with him at all times to remind him of his obligations. The Israelite king was required to go into the actual heat of battle and fight on the front lines with his people! A Jewish king has awesome power, but he uses it all as a servant of the people. He uses his power to ensure a society where people can live peacefully and develop their full potential.

#### HOLY LOVE

The Biblical "Song of Songs" is a love song between a man and a woman. Yet the Talmud calls it the "Holy of Holies" -- the most sacred biblical text. Why? Because love is really an expression of our deep desire for the ultimate unity: to connect with G-d.

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, because your love is better than wine... Pull me after you, we will run, the King has brought me into His chambers, we will take joy and gladness in you, we remember your love more than wine, unswervingly they love you. (Song of Songs 1:2-4) Consider a woman who received as a gift a beautiful diamond ring. She's ecstatic. Everywhere she goes, she shows people the ring -- a flawless diamond. Then one time she shows it to a jeweler. He looks at it with his magnifying glass and announces: "There's a flaw in it!" She'll never show the ring to anyone again. She may never even wear it again. It's the same diamond, it looks beautiful -- but now she knows it's not a truly flawless diamond, it's not perfect.

So what? Why doesn't she just pretend it's perfect? No one but an expert jeweler will know! It's because she's longing for something in life that is real and perfect. If she knows it's not real, even if no one else does, she can't take pleasure in it.

So too, deep down, no human being wants to settle for anything less than the ultimate.

The Hebrew letters of the verse, "I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine" (Song of Songs 6:3), spell out "Elul," the month leading up to Rosh Hashana. We long for G-d and He longs for us.

#### LONGING FOR MEANING

Now let's look at another situation. A man is working at the airport taking bags off the baggage carousel. It's boring, but it's a living. We could do it, if we had no alternative.

Imagine one day that the airport manager comes to this man and makes him an offer: "I'll triple your salary. The only condition is that from now on,

when you take a bag off the carousel and put it on the floor, you have to then pick up the same bag and put it back on the carousel. Then take it off again. Then put it back on again..."

It's the same physical effort, and the salary is triple. But who could do such a job?

Why not? Because a human being longs for meaning. Working in the luggage department of an airport may be boring, but at least there is the satisfaction of accomplishment and helping people. If you take away that purpose, a human being can't stand it!

We long for what's real and what's meaningful. We long for G-d, the ultimate reality.

Yet sometimes we lose sight of what we want. We get distracted by other things. How many times have we been inspired by a book or a movie, and thought afterwards: "I want to be great, I want to really experience living." Sometimes we followed up on those resolutions, but most of the time we just forgot.

In Judaism, we call that a "mistake." The word for "sin" in Hebrew is chet, which literally means "mistake." Our biggest mistake is that we want to relate to G-d, be close to G-d.

But we forget.

#### GIVING UP

We know what it's like when we're challenged. It's so hard sometimes to summon the effort. We think: how can we do it, it's such a hassle. So what happens? We end up thinking G-d is far from us. He's a tough, stern G-d, He wants too much from us, He doesn't really love us. Then we deny His existence. We construct a layer of cynicism -- there's really no meaning, why bother struggling. Let's just go back to bed...

Consider the words of King Solomon:

I sleep, but my heart wakes. Hear, my beloved is knocking, saying, Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one...I have put off my coat how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how can I make them dirty? My beloved put his hand on the door, and my heart was thrilled for him. I rose up to open to my beloved, but my beloved had turned away and was gone. My soul failed when he spoke; I sought him, but I could not find him, I called him, but he did not answer...I make you swear, daughter of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved tell him that I am sick with love. (Song of Songs, 5:2-8)

#### BREAKING THROUGH

There is a true story of an Israeli boy sitting in the hospital waiting room while his mother was having a minor operation. Since he was religious, he was reciting Psalms, the holy words of King David which comfort and inspire us during difficult times.

In the same waiting room was a kibbutznik, an older man. The kibbutznik saw the boy saying Psalms and came over to him. "Why are you doing this? This religious stuff is old-fashioned. It can't possibly do any good!" The boy asked him, "Why are you here at the hospital?" The kibbutznik answered, "I came to pick up the body of my son. He's having an operation, but the doctors say there's no chance."

A few minutes later, the doctors came out and announced to the kibbutznik: "It's a miracle. The operation was successful. Your son will live."

The kibbutznik stood on his feet and proclaimed in a loud voice: Shema Yisrael -- "Hear O Israel, the Lord our G-d, the Lord is one."

What's the meaning of this story? What type of man attacks a boy for saying Psalms for his mother?

Only someone who desperately wants to do it himself, but can't. At a time when his son is dying, he wants to be back in touch with his G-d. But he's spent so many years denying His existence, on building his life on the principle that G-d is not there...

But G-d is not really far from us. Just like we're longing for G-d, He's longing for us.

#### SMALL, STILL VOICE

How do we connect to the Almighty in everyday life? If deep down we are all longing for G-d, how can we capture that feeling?

The Bible tells us about the prophet Elijah. The Jewish people were being influenced to worship the idol Baal, so Elijah set up a test. He gathered all the people together at Mount Carmel (in Northern Israel), where he set up one altar, and had the priests of the Baal set up another altar. Elijah declared that whichever offering would be consumed, then that would prove who is the true G-d.

A fire came down from heaven and burned the offering on Elijah's altar. All the people shouted out: "The Lord, He is G-d!" (We say this seven times at the end of the Yom Kippur service). Then the people -- angry for having been misled -- turned on the priests of Baal and killed them.

It was a big miracle, but it didn't work. The evil Queen Jezebel sent messengers to kill Elijah, and he had to run for his life. While Elijah was hiding, G-d appeared to him:

And behold, G-d passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke the rock in pieces before the Lord. But G-d was not in the wind. And after the wind -- an earthquake. But G-d was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake -- a fire. But G-d was not in the fire. And after the fire was a quiet voice... (1-Kings 19:11-12)

What was G-d trying to teach Elijah with the wind, the earthquake, the fire, and the quiet voice? It is that G-d talks to us with a quiet voice of love. The pleasure we get when we're with someone we love, or when we do something meaningful, or witness the beauty of a sunset, or discover the depths of Torah --this is when G-d shows us that He is really with us. The entire world is G-d's message of love to us. Yom Kippur is the time when we are most open to receive this message.

#6 of 22 in the Aish.com High Holidays Yom Kippur Series

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From: Aish.com [newsletterServer@aish.com] Sent September 30, 2003  
Subject: High Holidays - Amos the Righteous: A Yom Kippur Fable High Holiday Family Guides Let Shriilly the Shofar take you and your family on a guided tour of the High Holidays, uncovering the deeper meanings of the most awesome days in the Jewish year!

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AMOS THE RIGHTEOUS: A YOM KIPPUR FABLE\_

BY: TED ROBERTS

On Yom Kippur, it is fitting to remember that our Torah says that deeds are the primary currency of Judaism. Not faith, not meditation, not even worship. First bring your sick neighbor a bowl of soup. Then pray. But first, the soup.

No one understood this better than Amos Goodheart.

One day in early spring Amos, a wealthy merchant, received a summons to appear before his King. So, next morning, dressed in his finest apparel, Amos the Righteous stood before the throne. Solemnly, the King told him that he must prepare for a journey to another kingdom. "Tomorrow," said his ruler, "you must depart. Be at the throne room at dawn and I will show you the way. And be prepared for your journey," he cautioned.

A thousand questions, like the lights that flashed in the huge candelabra over the throne, danced in Amos's mind. But before he could turn doubts into questions the King spoke. "Amos, you may only take with you that which cannot be carried."

The voyager was left with his unanswered questions. But one did not interrogate the King.

Not much time, thought the apprehensive traveler. By dawn tomorrow he must be provisioned for a trip of unknown duration to a foreign destination.

But what to carry in the light of the puzzling riddle?

What was necessary for life in a new land but "cannot be carried"? After consultation with his advisors, he deduced that his ruler intended him to carry whatever bundles did not require the labor of his hands and arms. Aha, he would fill his pockets. But due to his many possessions what voluminous pockets they must be.

First, gold. He must bring his gold coins. A new enterprise in a new land would require much capital as well as credit. Gold had universal value. And there was his lock-box full of contracts, documents of legal ownership, and titles. He must bring his titles. But wait -- what about provisions for the trip?

A chartless journey of indeterminate length? He would need food: many wheat cakes flavored with sesame oil and honey. But he recalled the king's riddle. He could "only carry that which could not be carried." And pockets were only pockets; there were hard choices to make.

He summoned his tailor. "Make me a suit of clothing, immediately!" he commanded, "with many pockets. Huge pockets. Deep and wide. For tomorrow our ruler is sending me on a lengthy journey to a faraway kingdom."

Late that night the tailor returned with his creation. The merchant smiled. It was made exactly to his specification. A row of pockets lined the front and back of the pants. And the coat -- by use of the lining -- was one gigantic pocket. Tomorrow, thought the merchant, he would load up and appear before his Master.

And so he did. But he was a ludicrous figure. His pockets, stuffed with gold coins, oily wheat cakes, and reams of titles, deeds, and letters of credit, pulled him down like an invisible hand. His pants, had he not

clutched them with both hands, would have descended below his knees. Even worse than his sagging pants, his weighty coat slumped his back and shoulders. His dignity had fled. This was no way to appear before the King. Amos the Righteous was now Amos the Clown. But what could he do? Every pocket held a commodity that could mean survival in a new kingdom. Loaded like a mule, he stumbled to the palace. The throne room was empty. The jeweled candelabra had vanished. It was as dim as a moonless midnight when only a single star glitters between the clouds.

Where was the King? How to reach the new kingdom without the guidance of the Master Navigator? He was surrounded by shadows. Behind him, unreachable, lay his former home. Ahead, there was only a foreboding mystery.

Amos Goodheart slumped on the dirt floor that once was graced with a rug of the purest fleece. A gust of wind chilled his face like the breath of the Angel of Death. Instinctively, he looked up to direct his lamentations to the Master before whom he kneeled. Now he saw that there was no solid ceiling in the throne room. He was in a deep well of time. Above him only a pale light, like dawn, silhouetted shadowy figures, half-human, half-mist. "Help me, please help me," sobbed Amos. "The King is gone and I don't know the way to the land over the mountains."

Suddenly over the hum of the wind, he heard voices. First a child. "Amos Goodheart, have no fear. You paid the doctor to straighten my leg. I chased the rabbits in the meadow, thanks to you."

Then an older couple: "Amos, you were a loving son to us. You brought gratitude and loyalty, like sweet music, to our union."

A pale woman said, "When I was sick you brought me meat broth. Hunger and loneliness, you banished from my life."

"You helped me one cold winter night, pulled my donkey from the ditch," said a neighbor. "And inspired me to do the same for others."

"And I'm the beggar boy. Everyday on your way to the shul, a coin you put in my cup. I grew up without bitterness because of you."

Benedictions from a life of good deeds anointed the head of Amos Goodheart. He stood tall. His clown clothes dissolved at his feet. And he smelled like honey clover in the meadow.

"Here, here is the way," they said. And they all set off together on the longest journey a man can make. Amos the Righteous carried nothing except his good deeds.

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From: Rabbi Dovid Siegel [rdsiegel@torah.org] Sent: October 01, 2003 To: haftarah@torah.org Subject: Haftarah - Shabbos Shuva  
Shabbos Shuva Hoshea 14:2-10; Yoel 2:11-27; Micha 7:18-20  
by RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

This week's haftarah quite appropriately focuses on teshuvah - repentance. In the previous verses, the prophet Hoshea strongly rebukes the Jewish people for straying after practices of idolatry. He predicts terrible tragedies for the Jewish nation because of their atrocious behavior towards Hashem. Hoshea concludes his harsh words by saying, "Shomron will be put to shame because she rebelled against Hashem; they will fall by the sword with her sucklings and pregnant women split open." (14:1) But, Hoshea then invites the Jewish people to return and promises them in return all the blessings of Hashem.

Hoshea quotes Hashem saying, "I will heal them from their rebelliousness and love them through My generosity because My anger has turned away from them." (14:6) Metzudos Dovid sees in this passage the revelation of one of Hashem's unbelievable merciful attributes. Although the Jewish nation had been heavily involved in sin, one act of repentance would undo all wrong. The prophet describes the process of repentance in the following words, "Take along words and return to Hashem, say to Him 'Remove all sin and grab hold of goodness and we will replace bullocks with our lips of confession.'" (14:3) Hoshea says that Hashem requires one act of them, confession. Repentance for them means a sincere statement of recognition that they have strayed and will not continue doing so. One statement which reflects a sincere desire for Hashem to remove sinful practices from them will fulfill all requirements.

But, Hashem adds an unbelievable dimension to this and concludes, "I will love them out of generosity." 'This', says Metzudos, indicates Hashem's commitment to completely erase their wrong from His mind. Once they repent with sincerity, their past is non-existent. Furthermore, Hashem will

increase His love for them in proportions that were never seen before. Although they have no new good track record to show, Hashem accepts their pledge and responds with perfect faith, showering them with love. This mirrors the beautiful words of Rambam regarding one's relationship with Hashem after repenting. Rambam says, "How great is the merit of repentance! Yesterday one was separated from Hashem and today, after repenting, one merits to cleave to the Divine Presence. Today, one does Mitzvos which are pleasantly and happily accepted and Hashem even craves for them!" (Hilchos Teshuva 7:7)

However, Rambam adds a significant requirement to the Teshuva process. In addition to ones regret over sin and his conviction never to repeat such acts, one must bring Hashem to testify to the sincerity of this conviction. (Hilchos Teshuva 2:2) Apparently, even the Teshuva process can have different degrees of commitment but we are required to make our statement with perfect sincerity. During our confession we must feel - from the bottom of our heart - that we will not return to our shameful, sinful ways. The extent of this is reflected through our willingness to look Hashem "straight in the face" and declare to Him our sincere commitment. The source of Rambam's words is our haftarah wherein it states, "Take with you words of repentance and say to Hashem.. we will never again declare a status of deity to our hands' craftwork." (14:4) Yes, true repentance includes an affirmative statement directly to Hashem that we will never return to our sinful ways. (see commentary to Kesef Mishna to Rambam ibid.) The Jewish people had been involved in serious levels of idolatry and their repentance included an affirmation said directly to Hashem that they would never repeat that sin.

Meirei in his masterful work on repentance sensitizes us to the realistic demand this places upon us. Using the analogy of a beautiful garden now covered by weeds, Meirei warns us of a potential shortcoming in the Teshuva process. In order to clear the garden of the weeds, the uneducated gardener removed every one of them by mowing them down to ground level. For a few weeks his fields was cured of its problem. However, shortly thereafter, the weeds began reappearing. Upon consultation he discovered that weed removal required uprooting the weeds from their source and not merely cutting away their exposed section. In this same manner one must search deeply into his heart to determine the source of his wrong doing. Then, and only then, can he say with some degree of sincerity that he will do his utmost to secure that his wrongful actions will never be repeated.

This idea is alluded to by the commentary of Nachmanides in this week's parsha (Devarim 31:21) In upcoming Parshas Ha'azeinu, the Torah foretells that the Jewish people will engage themselves in very sinful practices and Hashem will respond in very serious measures. Eventually Hashem will redeem His people and bring the world to its perfect state. Nachmanides questions the nature of such prophecy. Generally, the Torah predicts that misfortune will follow if the Jewish people act in sinful ways and blessing if they act in a proper way. We never find the Torah stating as a fact that the Jewish people will definitely follow a sinful course. How then can the Torah make this prediction here?

Nachmanides responds with an insightful comment to this week's parsha. Hashem says, "Because I know what your evil inclination does today before I bring you into the promised land." (ad loc.) Nachmanides sees in this passage the answer to his puzzling question. He explains that the exposure of the Jewish people's imperfect conduct thus far is a clear indication of their future actions. The inception of the Jewish people is happening now and all imperfections in their character will inevitably expose themselves in the future. Although no specific generation will necessarily fall into sin, sinfulness will inevitably occur at some point. In essence, an imperfect seed cannot produce a perfect tree.

These ten days of repentance are the incubating period for all our actions during the year. The basic nature we possess now will inevitably expose itself throughout the year. Viewing character traits as the root of all our actions it is imperative that we address these traits and direct them towards perfection. (see Vilna Gaon on Mishle) If we attack the problem at its root, we stand a fighting chance to rectify it in the future. Only with this approach can we readily bring Hashem to testify to our sincerity of rectifying our sinful ways. When He gazes into our souls He will now see the purity of intent in them with a sincere commitment to follow a perfect path.

Such repentance is readily accepted by our merciful Creator and, in response to this sincere pledge, Hashem erases the past and pleasantly accepts our service and even craves for it! May we merit to attain this level



of sincerity which ultimately yielding Hashem's desire and interest in all of our service.

Rabbi Dovid Siegel

Kollel Toras Chaim Kiryat Sefer Israel E-mail: rdsiegel@torah.org  
Haftorah, Copyright © 2003 by Rabbi Dovid Siegel and Torah.org. The author is Rosh Kollel (Dean) of Kollel Toras Chaim, Kiryat Sefer, Israel. Rabbi Siegel's topic-of-interest lectures are available through Kollel Toras Cheshed's Tape of the Month Club. Torah.org: The Judaism Site <http://www.torah.org/> Project Genesis, Inc. learn@torah.org 122 Slade Avenue, Suite 203 (410) 602-1350 Baltimore, MD 21208

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemaisrael.com] Sent: October 02, 2003 Peninim Parsha  
PENINIM ON THE TORAH  
BY RABBI A. LEIB SCHEINBAUM  
PARSHAS HAAZINU

Like gentle raindrops upon the vegetation and like pelting raindrops upon the blades of grass. (32:2) The weeks prior to Yom Kippur have a certain mood to them, since during this time we are enjoined to do our utmost to repent and return to Hashem. At times, Hashem "avails us" the opportunity to realize that repentance would be appropriate. Hopefully, we do not stand on ceremony, waiting for Hashem's little reminders. We understand what is expected of us, and we act accordingly. In his commentary to the above pasuk, the Ohr HaChaim Hakadosh presents an enlightening thought which can inspire us and direct us to the path of teshuvah during this propitious period.

He cites the Midrash Socher Tov on Sefer Mishlei 10, which depicts the judgment man faces after his life on this earth reaches its conclusion. If he has studied Chumash, the Heavenly Court will ask him why he did not advance one step higher and study Mishnah. If he has studied Mishnah, he will be questioned concerning why he did not study Talmud. If he has studied Talmud, they will want to know why he failed to master the more difficult parts of Torah. Even if he has achieved proficiency in the entire Torah SheBaal Peh, Oral Law, they question why he did not delve into Kabbalah, the mystical aspects of Torah. He who mastered even the most profound areas of Kabbalah will be asked why he did not master the most esoteric portion of Kabbalah, which deals with Maaseh Merakavah which deals - in turn - with the composition and structure of the Heavenly Throne. There is a powerful lesson to be derived from Chazal: Hashem does not expect us to do the impossible. He wants us to maximize our potential. If Chumash was all one could master, due to one's limited abilities, he will not be questioned as to why he did not study Kabbalah, because it is clearly beyond him. He will be queried, however, about why he did not study Mishnah, because it was within the reach of his intellectual capacity. If Mishnayos was his forte - great, but why did he not push a bit more and study Talmud? Do not go beyond your reach, but, by all means, achieve what is within your grasp.

The Ohr HaChaim derives this lesson from this pasuk. Hashem created variegated raindrops: each to nourish different types of plant life. Vegetation and herbage require a soft, gentle drizzle - consistent, but not heavy. Grass, on the other hand, needs to be drenched in order to thrive. Drizzle does not fulfill the needs of grass, while heavy rain will not serve vegetation well. The same idea applies to the life-sustaining waters of Torah. Each person is created with his own individual abilities and intellectual capacity. If he can study Mishnah, then he must strive to go a bit further and master Talmud. He must excel in his area of Torah and a bit more, because that is all part of his potential. All that is expected from him is within his grasp. He must live up to his own individual potential - not that of someone else.

This concept can have both a positive and negative connotation. While one is not expected to do more than he is equipped to do, he must reach and achieve the highest heights if he is endowed with superior capacities. Regardless of one's success, if he could have accomplished more, he will have to answer for not fulfilling his potential. One can never be satisfied with anything less than his own full capabilities. What is considered success for one person may simultaneously be viewed as utter failure and dereliction of duty for another. It all depends upon his unique potential. Horav Avraham Pam, zl, cites the Gaon m'Vilna, who distinguishes between the concept of din and cheshbon. Din is judgment for one's actions, while cheshbon refers to the good that one could have achieved during the time that he was involved in carrying out his transgression. In Pirkei Avos 3:1, Chazal exhort us to remember that we will one day have to

give a din v'cheshbon, judgment and reckoning before Hashem. This means, for example, that if a person speaks lashon hora, slanderous speech, against someone, he will not only be punished for his iniquity, he will also have to answer for all the good that he could have accomplished during this time.

Rav Pam posits that this idea is the basis for the Torah's comment regarding Moshe Rabbeinu's "sin" of Mei Merivah, Waters of Strife, where Moshe struck the rock instead of speaking to it. The pasuk in our parshah 32:51 describes the sin as consisting of two aspects: trespassing against Hashem and a lack of sanctifying Him among Klal Yisrael. Moshe violated Hashem's command and did not speak. Simultaneously, he caused the potential for a great Kiddush Hashem to be lost.

At a time when teshuvah should be foremost on our minds, we should remember that everything is within our ability to correct. Hashem does not impose upon us anything that is beyond our capacity to execute. Likewise, we must keep in mind that our repentance should focus not only on what we did, but, also, on what we could have done, but failed to do.

Recall the days of the world. (32:7)

The Yalkut Shimoni comments on this pasuk, "Moshe Rabbeinu said to Klal Yisrael, 'Whenever Hashem brings suffering upon you, recall how much benefit and consolation He is destined to give you in Olam Habah, the World to Come.'" The Maggid m'Vilna explained this Yalkut with the following mashal, parable:

A Jew rented a house from a Polish nobleman for three hundred rubles per year, which he paid on a designated day every year. Once, the nobleman took a vacation and left an unscrupulous, anti-Semitic official in charge of his estate. The official jumped at the opportunity to harass the poor Jew. He immediately raised the rent to five hundred rubles per year. On the designated day for payment, the corrupt official was at the Jew's home early in the morning to demand his payment. Regrettably, the Jewish tenant had only four hundred and eighty rubles. He requested a delay of a few days in order to get the remaining twenty rubles. The evil official refused to wait even a day. When night fell and the Jew had not paid, the official decided to whip the Jew twenty lashes, one blow for each ruble. This practice was carried out a number of times with other Jews, as the crooked official had found a helpless group of people upon whom he could prey.

The day that everyone had awaited had finally arrived: the nobleman returned home. It did not take long before the Jewish tenant who had been beaten went to notify the nobleman of his ill treatment by the nobleman's agent. The nobleman enjoyed a good relationship with his Jewish tenants. Consequently, he became furious at the corrupt official. He decreed that the Jew would receive one hundred rubles for every blow that he had received: a total of two thousand rubles. The official's property was valued at four thousand rubles. The Jew now became part owner of the official's estate as payment for the abuse that he had sustained.

When the Jew returned home, he related to his wife all that had occurred with the nobleman. His wife was excited to hear that they now owned half of the nobleman's estate. Looking at her husband's face, his wife noticed that he did not seem as happy as he should have been. "What is wrong?" she asked. "You should be ecstatic with the valuable gift we have received."

"It is not that I am not happy," he said. "It is just that the pain of the blows is long gone. Now I wish that the official had given me forty lashes. That way, I would now own his entire estate."

This is the story of life. We suffer in this temporary world. For some, the suffering is great and painful. When a person is struck with misfortune, his suffering feels overwhelming. When he goes to his future place in the Eternal World, however, where payment is in eternal currency, where the reward he receives for every moment of pain and anguish is immeasurable, he will think to himself, "How I wish I had suffered many more yissurim, pain and troubles, in the lower world. I would now be receiving much more reward."

Horav Yaakov Galinsky, Shlita, relates the following powerful story, underlining its inspiring message. A terminally ill person was attached to an artificial respirator and lay in bed suffering excruciating pain. His doctor, a compassionate man, hoping to spare him more suffering, decided to disconnect the life-support system. The man died soon afterwards. It seems like the end of the story, but there is more.

A few days later, the deceased man appeared to the doctor in a dream and said the following to him, "I had four more days left to live. During this time I was to suffer terrible yissurim, which would have catapulted me directly into

Gan Eden. Their cleansing effect was all that I still needed. Because you caused me to die four days before my time, I lack that measure of suffering. Now, I have no idea how long I will have to be in Gehinnom, Purgatory, to be purified. Suffering on earth has a greater effect than suffering in Gehinnom."

The doctor woke up from his dream completely shaken. He eventually became a baal teshuvah due to his fear of the Final Judgment. Life and death are in Hashem's hands. We must learn not only to accept His decisions, but, also, to trust in them.

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From: Ohr Somayach [ohr@ohr.edu] Sent: Wednesday, October 01, 2003 1:30 AM To: weekly@ohr.edu Subject: Torah Weekly - Parshat Ha'azinu TORAH WEEKLY - For the week ending 4 October 2003 / 8 Tishri 5764 - from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu

Parshat Ha'azinu -- <http://ohr.edu/hiy/article.php/1234>  
It's My Party!

"The Rock - perfect is His work... righteous and fair is He." (32:4)  
Last year was a difficult year for the Jewish People. May it be His will that the one that has just commenced will be easier for us! The following might help to put the events of the past year in their true perspective.

Once there was a rich man whose son fell ill with a bizarre and unknown malady. Try as they might, none of the doctors could fathom the boy's deepening sickness. In desperation, the rich man sent for a world-famous professor to check his son. The professor arrived and immediately set to work. He diagnosed a rare dietary sensitivity that precluded the son from ever eating meat. Such was the sensitivity of the son to meat, that to consume even a small amount could jeopardize his life. (No, this is not an advertisement for vegetarianism, it's a mashal, a parable. If you hadn't guessed...)

Slowly the boy's condition improved, and eventually he was cured.

Accompanied by profuse thanks - and a large check - the professor returned to his ivory tower. Not long after, the rich man went abroad on business. Before he left, however, he gave strict instructions to his household that his son was to be given no meat whatsoever.

A week passed, then two. One day, the son was passing the dining room. A delectable smell of roast beef wafted up from the table and played around his nostrils. The warning of the professor started to evaporate in the aroma of the roast beef, and, unable to resist, he peeked around the door. Seeing that no one was there, he made his way furtively to the table, wrapped up a large slice of juicy beef in a napkin, placed it pocket and whistling nonchalantly, he sidled from the room. Once outside, he devoured the beef with relish.

Needless to say, before you could say, "I told you so," he was prostrate on his bed in a total relapse. The rich man was summoned from abroad and he returned to find his son hovering between life and death. He begged the professor to try and save his son. On the spot, he promised him that never again would he venture abroad on business, that he himself would be the constant guardian of his son's health. Under these terms, the professor agreed to return once more and do what he could for the boy.

With enormous care and diligence on the part of the professor, the boy slowly returned to health.

The father decided to make a large meal to celebrate his son's recovery. He invited all of his family and friends and rented a suite at the finest hotel. On the night of the meal, his son arrived at the party beaming from ear to ear. All the guests were seated at the tables in deep communion with their main course. The father arose, and as his son was making his way to his place, the father told him to leave the hall immediately. The clink of china and cut glass gave way to an embarrassed hush. In spite of the son's requests to be allowed to stay, the father was adamant and the son left the hall. Slowly, the conversation resumed. And of course, the topic was the bizarre behavior of this cruel father.

Only the father knew the reason for his actions.

Similarly the Master of the World "runs" His creation. Sometimes He expels the most righteous people first from this earthly dining room. However, it is always for their own good. And if we, the guests, fail to understand His conduct, we must know with total clarity that it is always for their good.

For "righteous and fair is He".

- Based on the Chafetz Chaim

Written and compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

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From: RABBI RISKIN'S SHABBAT SHALOM LIST  
[parsha@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Oct. 01, 2003 To:  
Shabbat\_Shalom@ohrtorahstone.org.il Subject: Shabbat Shalom: Shabbat Shuvah and Yom Kippur by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin  
Shabbat Shalom: Shabbat Shuvah and Yom Kippur By Shlomo Riskin  
Efrat, Israel - As we come to the climax of the Ten Days of Repentance, as the Sabbath of Repentance (Shabbat Shuvah) and the great white fast Day of Atonement draw near, - and if we, indeed take this period as seriously as we ought, - the overwhelming question each of us must answer for him/her self is: towards which category of transgression ought we direct most of our energies of repentance? Should we concentrate on our failings in our relationship to G-d, to the Synagogue, to the study of Torah? Or should we look to the probity of our business dealings, to the nature of our relationships with our friends and neighbors?

I believe we can take our cue from the Torah reading on Rosh Hashanah, the opening two days of the ten Days of Repentance. Since Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the Creation of the world and the birth of humanity - "today the world was conceived" (hayom harat olam)- we should have expected the Torah reading to have begun with "In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth" and to have continued with "And G-d created the human being in His image." This would even have perfectly fit in with the conclusion of the yearly cycle of Torah readings (with some minor adjustment) - and what could be more suitable than beginning the New Year with the beginning of the Torah!  
This logic notwithstanding, we are ordained instead to read of the birth of Isaac, the tension between Hagar and Sarah, the banishment of Ishmael, and the dramatic binding of Isaac; in effect; we read of the development of a family, albeit the original family of the Israelite nation. Apparently our Sages are teaching us that G-d has given us "a grousse welt mit kleine weltelach," a large world with small sub-worlds, and each individual family must be seen as a world unto itself.

Furthermore, according to the tradition of Beta Yisrael, Ethiopian Jewry from the tribe of Dan, Yom Kippur falls out on the tenth of Tishrei because this is the precise date when Joseph met his father Jacob after an estrangement -- or at the very least absence -- of twenty-two years. Certainly both father and son harbored resentments one for the other, Father Jacob couldn't understand why Joseph - certainly once he had risen to pre-eminence as the Grand Vizier of Egypt - hadn't thought to send a message that he was alive and well to his grieving father; Joseph couldn't understand how such an intelligent patriarch could have managed the family with such ineptitude. After all, Jacob openly demonstrated so much favoritism towards the eldest son of his beloved Rachel that he sowed the seeds of jealousy and thoughts of murder in the hearts of Joseph's envious siblings. Nevertheless, father and son meet together in heartfelt rapprochement - and serve as a symbol of and model for the rapprochement between our Parent- in- heaven and His children on the Day of Atonement (At-one-ment).

Furthermore, the third and final blessing surrounding the recitation of the Shema each morning - indeed the blessing of redemption, ga'al yisrael (just before the Amidah) - declares that G-d is "the Master of your nation and the powerful King who pleads their cause." The text of the Edot Mizrah Prayer Books adds the ending "in disputes between parents and children," apparently a category of dispute which is most common and most troubling.

Finally, the Mishnah teaches us that Elijah the prophet, herald of the final redemption and hero of the haftarah of the Sabbath of Repentance, will come neither to establish proper tribal ancestry as a pre-condition for the renewal of the Temple Service and the allocation of parcels of land in Israel, nor to distance men of violence, nor to even bring back those who have wandered into far-away and foreign pastures, but it is rather "to restore the hearts of the parents to the children and the hearts of the children to the parents."

What wells up from all of this is that our most important, complex and potentially explosive relationship is the familial one and especially the relationship between parents and children. It is the relationship between husband and wife which provides the atmosphere in the home, which teaches our children what it means to work together and give to others. It is our parents whose initial and consistent love give us our sense of self-worth, the confidence which comes from the belief that we are worthy of being loved, and the ability to love others. It is our parents whose initial establishment of the limits to our actions, the boundaries within which we may - and beyond which we may not - live our lives teach us how to live in

society and provides us with the discipline and self-restraint which are so necessary if we are to become responsible citizens and productive human beings. And it is the natural and built-in tension between parents and children -- the need of children to individuate, the desire of parents to dominate, - which trains us in the act of compromise between our desire for self-expression and our obligation to past and future. And of course it is the unique support system which only a strong inter-generational relationship can provide - for both the older as well as the younger generation - which guarantees a bulwark of security in a world which always brings change and often brings tragedy.

Is there a pat formula for a successful family life? As a very young rabbi I thought I had all the answers, but as a much older grandfather I am left with many more questions. Nevertheless, I do believe that opening our Yom Kippur Prayer with Kol Nidre -- thereby stressing the power of words to establish reality -- teaches us the importance of developing the art of communication, the necessity of expressing feelings and emotions honestly but lovingly. And the fact that repentance for Maimonides begins with confession of sin (his proof text is the verse, "And they shall confess the sin which they committed," Laws of Repentance 1,1) tells us that especially those we love, those to whom we are closest, must hear from us that we are sorry for deeds committed or omitted, that we were wrong when we said certain words which we never should have said, which we didn't really mean.

I can still feel the pain of the father whom, while sitting in mourning for the tragic loss of his daughter, desperately asked me, "Do you think she really knew how much I appreciated and loved her - even though I never told her so once she entered adolescence - and often criticized her?" I can still hear the at-peace-ment of the spouse who had tirelessly nursed her sick and difficult husband during the pain-ridden period before his death, when she said, "It was all worth it when two days before he died, he asked my forgiveness for specific incidents and omissions during our married life." True communication - even and especially within families - requires sensitivity, time and great emotional energy. Especially during this period of the year it is of primary importance to reach out in love and contrition to those whom are closest to us - to take nothing "for granted," and to attempt to express our innermost feelings. And when we bless our children before the Yom Kippur fast begins, I believe it is proper for parents to ask their children for forgiveness. It is difficult to be a parent, and it is difficult to be a child, at no matter what age.

Shabbat Shalom and Hag Sameach.

You can find Rabbi Riskin's parshiot on the web at:

<http://www.ohrtorahstone.org.il/parsha/index.htm>

Ohr Torah Stone Colleges and Graduate Programs Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Chancellor Rabbi Chaim Brovender, Dean

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From: RABBI MENACHEM LEIBTAG [tsc@bezeqint.net] Sent: October 02, 2003 [Par-reg]HAAZINU - the shira & its message

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [<http://www.tanach.org>] In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag PARSHAT HA'AZINU - Part One

The song and its message

Who's to blame when

something goes wrong? In regard to tragedy that befalls the people of Israel, Parshat Ha'azinu offers a very bold, yet fundamental answer. In the following shiur, we will study the introduction to 'shirat Ha'azinu' (found at the end of Parshat Vayelech) to show how it can help us understand what that song is 'all about'.

**INTRODUCTION** Even though the words of shirat Ha'azinu are quite difficult to translate, its overall theme and purpose is quite easy to decipher. To do so, our shiur will first discuss the interesting introduction to this 'song' - which explains not only its purpose, but also the important questions that it is supposed to answer. Then, we will show how the shira follows this theme, and answers those questions.

**THE INTRO IN PARSHAT VAYELECH** At the conclusion of Parshat Vayelech we find a new 'parshia' that begins in 31:14. [Before continuing, it is recommended that you first quickly review that entire section, i.e. 31:14-30.] This section begins with a rather depressing prediction, as G-d summons Moshe and Yehoshua to the 'ohel mo'ed', to inform them that Yehoshua (and whoever may take leadership afterward) can 'expect the worst': "And G-d said to Moshe, you will soon die, but this nation may thereupon go astray after strange gods of the land... and they will leave Me and [hence] break My covenant... Then [therefore] on that day I will kindle My anger against them, and I will [appear to] abandon them, and

hide My face from them, and many terrible things and tragedies will befall them, and they will say on that day, surely - it is because G-d is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us" (see 31:14-17).

Even though G-d does not want this to happen. He appears to be quite sure that this scenario is inevitable. [G-d's experience with Bnei Yisrael over the last forty years in the desert may have led to this conclusion.] However, the purpose of G-d's statement is not simply to depress Moshe and Yehoshua. Rather, it is to provide Am Yisrael with the necessary 'tool' that will help them cope (and properly respond) should such a situation arise. To prove this, simply read the next two psukim, noting how this introduction to the shira continues: "And I will hide My face from them, for they have done evil and turned to other gods. Therefore - write down this shira [song] and teach it to Bnei Yisrael... in order that this poem be My witness against the people of Israel - for when I bring them to the land flowing with milk & honey, as I swore to their forefathers, and they will eat and become satiated and grow fat - and will then turn to other gods and worship them, hence breaking My covenant." Then, when these terrible things befall them, this song shall confront them as a witness, for it shall never be forgotten from their offspring - for I know their yetzer [evil inclinations], even before I bring them into the land..." (see 31:19-21). Based on this introduction, we now know what to expect from shirat Ha'azinu. However, to fully appreciate its purpose, we must return to a key pasuk in this introduction (31:17), whose meaning (at first glance) appears to be unclear.

**WHO'S TO BLAME?** Recall how G-d not only 'predicted' how Bnei Yisrael will stray after other gods, He also foresaw how they would react: "And I will kindle My anger against them on that day [i.e. at that time] and leave them, for I will hide My face from them, and terrible things will befall them - and they will say on that day [at that time] - it is because G-d is not in our midst that these evils have befallen us" (31:17).

At first glance, the meaning of (Bnei Yisrael's response) : "it is because G-d is not in our midst" - is not clear. Are Bnei Yisrael blaming G-d for these terrible events, or are they blaming themselves! In other words, does their statement reflect a sense of: \* remorse [teshuva], understanding that they are at blame for they have left G-d. or, \* anger with G-d - blaming Him for abandoning His people. [See Seforno.]

However, the answer to this question lies in the next pasuk: "But I will hide My face from them, for they have done evil and turned to other gods" (31:18). G-d's insistence that He will continue to hide His face from them implies that Bnei Yisrael statement in 31:17 reflected their anger with G-d (and not their remorse from their deeds). Thus, we appear to have reached an impasse, as G-d blames His nation for unfaithfulness; while Am Yisrael blames G-d for not caring. [See also Ramban on 31:17, where he indeed understands Bnei Yisrael's statement as minimal teshuva; however (most probably due to 31:18), Ramban understands this teshuva as superficial, and hence G-d continues to hide His face, waiting for Am Yisrael to perform more intense teshuva before they can be deserving of redemption.]

Therefore, to prepare Bnei Yisrael for this inevitable 'showdown' of 'who's to blame', Moshe charges the nation before his death, teaching them shirat Ha'azinu - so that the 'answer' is ready for any future generation (see 31:22-30). With this background, we can begin our study of the shira, with the goal of showing how it relates directly to the points raised in this introduction.

**32:1-3 / THE PREFACE** Review the first three psukim (32:1-3), noting how they form a preface. In fact, 32:3 explains who Bnei Yisrael should answer with a 'praise to the Lord' whenever Moshe will mention G-d's Name (and hence our custom to this day of saying 'baruch Hu u-varuch shmo' - when ever we hear G-d's Name mentioned in a blessing.) [In regard to the 'shamayim' and 'aretz' being called upon to witness, see Part Two of this shiur.]

This observation is important, for if 32:1-3 forms an introduction, then we can conclude that 32:4 forms the opening (and cardinal) statement of the shira. 32:4-6 / THE OPENING STATEMENT [Who's to blame!] To confirm this point, review 32:4-6, noting how these psukim deal directly with the key question of 'who's to blame!' [i.e. G-d or the people]: The Rock [i.e. G-d] - His deeds are perfect, all His way are just. A steadfast G-d [emuna' - see TSC shiur on 'mei meriva!'] and no injustice. He is just and upright.

If so, then who should Bnei Yisrael blame when something goes wrong? Once again, the shira provides the answer: [Do you attribute] injustice to Him? [shichet lo'] no - [lo' - with an 'aleph'] It is his children's fault [banav mumam'] - A generation so crooked and perverse. Shall you

blame this on G-d? - so foolish a nation- and unwise For He is your father who created you He made you and established you. [And therefore, why would He want to cause you harm, unless there was a purpose. Based on our introduction, it is clear why this must be the opening statement - for this is exactly the question that Bnei Yisrael will ask when they are confronted with tragedy. Since they are G-d's nation, they expect their G-d to protect them and save them from trouble. However, this question stems from a terrible misunderstanding of the special relationship between G-d and His people. G-d did not promise to be a like 'fairy godmother', taking care of every tiny need of a spoiled child. Rather, G-d entered a covenant with Bnei Yisrael for a purpose - to represent Him before the nations of the world. [See TSC shiurim on Sefer Breishit., Noach, Lech Lecha, Vayera etc.] This covenant contains not only privileges (i.e. promises of protection), but also responsibilities. Because the goal of this covenant is so important, G-d threatens to punish Bnei Yisrael should they be unfaithful to this covenant, just as he promises to be helpful should they be faithful. [This theme is repeated numerous times in Chumash, especially in the 'tochachot', and throughout Sefer Devarim.] Therefore, the purpose of divine punishment is to remind Bnei Yisrael of their covenantal responsibility should they go astray. [Note the Torah's use of the word 'brit' in 31:16 & 20!] Hence, the shira opens by telling us not to blame G-d when the nation is plagued by tragedy. Instead, blame yourselves, for G-d has no reason to punish you - unless you have gone astray.

32:7-12 / REMEMBER WHY & HOW YOU WERE CHOSEN The last point made in this section (i.e. 31:6) forms the introduction to the next section of the shira. Recall G-d's last remark: "Shall you blame this on G-d - so foolish a nation- and unwise? For He is your father who created you, He made you and established you." Now, G-d explains how and why we should remember this point, by providing a quick review of Jewish History, from the time of Creation. Remember the days of old, consider the ages past. Ask your father, and he will tell you, so too your elders. When Elyon [G-d] gave each nation its land, As He divided up the nations [i.e. Migdal Bavel narrative] He fixed the borders of these nations, According to the numbers of Bnei Yisrael - For G-d's portion is His people - [The children of] Yaakov - is His allotment (32:7-9).

In other words, when G-d first established mankind, dividing them up into nations, He already had in mind this purpose of Bnei Yisrael to represent Him amongst these nations. [See TSC shiur on Parshat Noach - re: Migdal Bavel.]

The next three psukim (32:10-12) describe how G-d took Bnei Yisrael through the desert, taking care of their needs, and preparing them for their existence in the land of Israel: He found them in the desert land... & watched over them as the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle watches over his nestlings... G-d alone guided them (thru the desert) No other god assisted Him.

32:13-15 / From PROSPERITY to AFFLUENCE At this point, the shira now shifts from past to future, projecting what may happen when Bnei Yisrael will enter the land; i.e. warning how prosperity may lead to affluence, and then to idol worship, and then to divine punishment. In other words, all of the points described in the introduction (see 31:16-20), are now described in poetic detail. He set them up atop the highlands To feast on the yield of the earth He fed them honey from the crag And oil from the flint of the rock... The best lamb, and rams, and goats With the very finest wheat, and foaming grape drink. So Yeshurun [Israel] grew fat and kicked Fat, gross, and coarse. He forsook the G-d who made him (compare 32:16) And spurned the Rock (see 32:4) of his salvation.

32:16-18 / From AFFLUENCE to IDOL WORSHIP They incensed Him with alien things, Vexed Him with abominations. They sacrificed to demons, no-gods. G-ds they had never known, new ones.... You neglected the Rock that gave birth to you Forgot the G-d who brought you forth. (again, compare with 32:4-6!)

32:19-25 / GOD'S WRATH IS KINDLED As Bnei Yisrael have broken the covenant, G-d has no choice but to punish them, for what is the point of their existence if they are not fulfilling their covenantal purpose! Therefore, the next section describes this punishment. Once again, we find how the topic of 31:17 (& 31:21) is described in poetic detail. The Lord saw and was vexed He spurned His sons and daughters, saying: I will hide My face from them ['hester panim' (see 31:17- 18)] Then see how they will fare in the end! For they are a treacherous breed, Children with no loyalty. They incensed Me with no-gods... I will incense them with a no-folk Vex them with a nation of fools. For a fire has flared in My

wrath... [read the rest on your own] The sword shall deal death without As shall the terror within To young man and maiden alike, The young babies as well as the aged.

32:26-38 / SAVED BY THE BELL In the next section, G-d continues to explain how and why His anger is kindled, however He also explains why sooner or later, He must come to the aid of His nation (even though they may not be deserving). I might have reduced them to nothing Made their memory cease among men - But, for the fear of the taunts of the foe Their enemies who may misjudge and say - "Our own hand has prevailed; none of this was caused by the Lord

A comment is now added, noting how foolish the nation was for not recognizing the Hand of G-d in these events. Were they wise, they would think upon this (compare 32:7) Gain insight into their future: How could one have chased a thousand, And two put ten thousand to flight. Unless their Rock had sold them.... [32:32-25 continues the rebuke] Then, G-d explains how and why He will save His nation, so that this disgrace in the eyes of other nations should not become too great.

When G-d will judge His people And have mercy upon His servants For He will see that they are helpless... Lest [the other nations] say - Where is their G-d? The rock in whom they sought refuge... [See Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Ramban, vs. Rashi]

32:39-43 / A CALL FOR REFLECTION Even though G-d has promised ultimate redemption, He still calls upon Am Yisrael to recognize that He was the cause for both their punishment and salvation: See, then, that I - I am He There is no god beside Me I bring death, and I cause life I wound and I heal No one can deliver from My Hand...

Finally, the shira concludes with a call to other nations to recognize the hand of G-d in the wake of these events: O nations, acclaim His people - For He will avenge the blood of His servants Bring vengeance on His enemies And His land shall protect [or cleanse] His People. [translation of last phrase is difficult, see commentators.]

This final point is important as well, for it reflects back on the very purpose of G-d's covenant with Am Yisrael, to represent G-d among the nations. In the 'bottom line', G-d hopes that even when Am Yisrael (unfortunately) needs to be punished; the manner of that severe punishment may still lead to the recognition of G-d by other nations, hence serving the same underlying purpose

A HARSH CONCLUSION As difficult as the message of shirat Ha'azinu may be, its theme is congruent not only with its introduction at the end of Parshat Vayelech, it also follows the very same underlying theme of Chumash that began with G-d's choice of His nation back in Sefer Breishit, and the demanding terms of G-d's covenant with Bnei Yisrael at Har Sinai [see shiur on the 13 middot]. Even though Am Yisrael may reach the mistaken conclusion that G-d is 'hiding His face from them', the primary point of the shira is that G-d is always there, even though it may appear otherwise. [See 32:29!] It also not by chance that G-d is consistently referred to (in the shira) as the 'tzur' - a large rock, or bolder, that does not move. It is always there and can even provide protection, even though it often remains unnoticed, or may be taken for granted. [In my opinion, the Torah's use of the word tzur may also relate to the events at 'nikrat ha-tzur' at Har Sinai - where G-d first explained to Moshe His attributes of mercy / see Shemot 33:19-22, and its context from 33:12- 19, as well as our shiur on the 13 midot - 've-akmal' - i.e. a topic for a future shiur.]

Obviously, the goal of Chumash is that we should never need to experience the sequence of events described in this song. However, the shira remains as an eternal reminder for Am Yisrael to remember their covenantal purpose, as well as a call for proper teshuva in times of national misfortune. As Yom Kippur approaches after a year of such terrible sorrow and tragic events, we pray to Hashem that He speedily fulfill His promise of ultimate redemption, as well call upon ourselves to fulfill our destiny to become His special nation. [In Part Two will discuss other aspects of the shira.]

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