



BS"D

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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON NITZAVIM VAYELECH - 5784

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from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>
date: Sep 26, 2024, 9:38 PM
subject: Rabbi Benjamin Yudin - Powerful Partnerships
Rabbi Benjamin Yudin
Powerful Partnerships

"For this commandment that I command you today - it is not hidden from you, and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, for you to say, 'Who can ascend to heaven for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?' Nor is it across the sea, for you to say, 'Who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us, so that we can listen to it and perform it?' Rather, the matter is very near to you - in your mouth and in your heart - to perform it." (Devarim 30:11-14)

To what mitzvah are the above verses referring? Rashi believes these verses refer to the mitzvah of talmud Torah, and cites the Gemara (Eruvin 55a), stating that were the Torah in heaven, we would be obligated to ascend to heaven in order to study it. The Ramban (v. 11) understands the verses to refer to the mitzvah of teshuva, which the above paragraph clearly addresses.

I'd like to suggest that, in reality, there is no major disagreement between these great commentaries; rather, their

comments merge into a common objective: that the study of Torah leads one to teshuva. These two independent mitzvot combine to produce one transformative and uplifting result. The Zohar (Terumah 161) teaches, "Histakel b'Oraissa u'barah almah," meaning that Hashem looked into the Torah, which served as the blueprint, and subsequently created the world; the Torah was the vehicle for creativity. We are taught, "v'halachta bedrachov" (Devarim 28:9), that we are to emulate His ways. This is understood by our Rabbis (Sotah (14a), to require that we emulate His attributes - just as He is compassionate, gracious, and righteous, so too are we to be. I would like to suggest that just as He studied the Torah and used its energy to create a world, so too is the Jew to study Torah, become energized from it, and create himself. As Hashem created a world, man, who is referred to as a world unto himself (Mishna, Sanhedrin 4:5), is to utilize the same blueprint, namely the Torah, to constantly create and recreate himself.

It is interesting to note that the verse in the opening paragraph of creation (1:5), "And there was evening and there was morning", teaches that this world that Hashem created was not His first creation. Rather, He created prior worlds and destroyed them, and then proceeded to create additional worlds. Rabbi Soloveitchik zt"l understood this to mean not that Hashem was attempting to get it right and needed several tries, but rather to teach us the very important idea that man, too, has the ability to not only create but to recreate. Whether it is due to a significant personal loss or a financial loss, man can pick up the pieces and recreate his environment. Similarly, the mitzvah of teshuva is based on the principle that man can recreate himself. As Hashem utilized the Torah to energize the world, similarly, the study of Torah provides man with the energy and ability to recreate himself.

The idea that Torah is referred to as energy may be seen from an interesting Gemara (Zevachim 16a), which relates that at the time of the giving of the Torah, the entire world understood that an earthshaking event was occurring. They ran to their prophet, Bilam, and inquired about the nature of the event. Our Rabbis understand this to be the meaning of Psalms (29:10-11), where they inquired if Hashem was bringing another flood to the world, to which Bilam answered that "Hashem oz l'amo yitan," meaning Hashem is giving strength to His people; Hashem is giving the Jewish nation the Torah. The psalmist refers to Torah as strength. It is this strength that enables the Jew to constantly strengthen his faith and character.

We are taught (Avos 3:7) that not only when a group engages in Torah study together are they joined by the Shechinah, but even an individual by himself/herself is privileged to have Hashem at his side. The very presence of the Divine that accompanies the study of Torah enables the individual to imbibe holiness, which has a transformative effect upon him, motivating him toward greater personal holiness and teshuva.

The study of Torah not only educates and provides the actual blueprint for our daily living, but is also transformative. We see this from Eicha Rabba (Pesikta 2), where Rav Huna and Rav Yirmiyah teach the meaning of the verse (Yirmiyahu 16:11), wherein Hashem explains the forthcoming destruction of His Temple to be because "Me they forsook, and My Torah they did not observe." The Rabbis understood this verse to mean that Hashem was proclaiming, "Halivei! Were it only that My people forsook Me but studied My Torah! For had they studied My Torah, the ma'or sh'eba - the illumination contained within the Torah - would have returned them to righteous character and the return to teshuva." Rav Huna continues in this passage and teaches the famous dictum that one is to study Torah shelo lishma, even without the proper motivation; the exalted subject matter itself will have the proper transformative effect on one's character and eventually one's studying and indulgence in Torah will lead to proper motivation, bringing the individual closer to G-d. It is understandable that doing teshuva and changing one's behavior is most difficult. It is attributed to Rav Yisrael Salanter that it is easier to study the entire Talmud than to change one's character. It is, therefore, understandable that in our section of requests in the Amida the first request is to ask Hashem for wisdom and intelligence, and secondly, to assist us in the process of repentance. Note, however, that the blessing begins with the words "Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah," again indicating that the study of Torah is a powerful means toward repentance.

The Midrash Tehilim understands the verse (Tehillim 102:19) "So that the newborn people will praise Hashem," to refer to the forthcoming yom tov of Rosh Hashanah, when the Jewish people are reborn not only by virtue of Hashem judging them favorably for the forthcoming year, but also by virtue of the people using their lofty capacity to recreate themselves on Rosh Hashanah.

I pray that the strong, powerful partnership between Torah study and repentance adds an additional level of excitement and enthusiasm for our renewed commitment to the study of Torah in this forthcoming year, and may our personal resolve add strength to our soldiers on the front lines in Eretz Yisrael. Given the unity and responsibility of one Jew for another, our personal commitment to Torah and subsequently to teshuva will not only enrich our lives but, please G-d, theirs as well.

More divrei Torah and shiurim from Rabbi Yudin

More divrei Torah on Parshas Netzavim

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WALKING THE LINE WITH RABBI JACHTER

Earlier Generations Obligating Later Generations By Rabbi Haim Jachter

The Sages of Aragon's Question

Later generations obligate earlier ones. How can that be? Nonetheless, Devarim 29:14 records Moshe Rabbeinu, including those present and those not present in the brit he renewed between Hashem and Bnei Yisra- el near the end of his life. Rashi—citing the Midrash Tanchuma—explains that "those not present" refers to future generations. Abarbanel cites the Chachamim of Aragon (a region in Spain), who questioned why earlier generations generate an obligation for future generations. We begin by noting three classic solutions to this fundamental question.

Abarbanel's Answer

Abarbanel responds that just as one passes his assets to his inheritors, so does he transmit his obligations to the next generation. In addition, as Eretz Yisrael is a collective "possession" of Am Yisrael, so is Torah and our brit with Hashem. It is jointly "owned" by all Jews past, present and future. Thus, the brit is entered equally between earlier and later generations.

Rabbeinu Bachayei's Answer

Rabbeinu Bachayei compares earlier generations to the seeds of a tree and subsequent ones to the tree's branches. The roots and the branches are the same. Therefore, the earlier and later generations are identical; thus, the former entering the brit obligates the latter.

Malbim

Malbim invokes the Talmudic principle of "Zachin l'adam shelo befanav." While one cannot confer a chov (obligation) to others without their consent, we can grant someone a zechut, a benefit, without the latter's agreement. The Torah is the best possible lifestyle for every human being. The Torah is the Creator of the universe's guide to the best possible way to live. Earlier generations accepting the brit confers the greatest gift in the universe—a magnificent lifestyle leading to an eternal special relationship with the world's Creator.

A New Answer Based on Shemot 20:2: Our Enhanced Relationship With Hashem

We offer a new answer based on Rashi's approach to Shemot 20:2. Rabbi Yehuda Ha- Levi (in his Sefer Kuzari and see Ibn Ezra to this pasuk) famously asks why Hashem introduces Himself at Sinai as the One who took us from Mitzrayim, instead of the One Who created the world. Rashi resolves the issue by saying that Hashem releasing us from Mitzrayim is sufficient to obligate us in mitzvot. Rashi explains why Jews are obligated to more mitzvot than others. Hashem has invested more in us; therefore, we must reciprocate and invest more in Him. Creation alone is an insufficient reason to obligate us in 613 mitzvot. Creation generates the universal obligation to obey the seven Noachide mitzvot. Moreover, our pre-Sinai consent to follow the Torah is not the primary reason to observe the Torah. Rather, Hashem's enhanced investment

in us at Yetziat Mitzrayim and His ongoing enhanced relationship with us drive our lasting relationship with Him. “Ani I’do- di v’dodi li—I am for my Beloved, and my Beloved is for me,” (Shir HaShirim 6:3). We match His investment in us with our investment in Him. In this manner, Rashi resolves why succeeding generations are obligated to mitzvot because our ancestors accepted the yoke of mitzvot. Based on Rashi, we answer that our ancestors’ agreement is not the driving force behind our obligations. Rather, it is the ongoing intense relationship between Hashem and Am Yisrael. For example, the miraculous survival and thriving of Medinat Yisrael and the Torah world’s reconstitution (after near extinction in the post-World War II period) are but two manifestations of our eternal and special connection that generates our eternal and unending obligation in mitzvot. No wonder why immediately before we accept the yoke of mitzvot in Kriat Shema, we mention the ahavat olam—Hashem’s never- ending love for us. Conclusion: Our Repeated Daily Acceptance of the Brit The answers to the Chachmei Aragon’s question are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, each contributes power that drives our eternal covenant with the Master of the Universe. One final thought, each generation accepts the Torah—not only on Shavuot when we reenact Matan Torah—but every day during tefillah. At the end of each tefillah, we recite Aleinu—where we express our gratitude for the extraordinary privilege of being Jewish. Each morning, early in Shacharit, we say, “ashreinu mah tov chelkeinu—how fortunate we are to accept Malchut Shamayim,” in Kriat Shema, each morning and evening. After Kriat Shema, we describe the Torah daily as nechmad venaim, beautiful and pleasant. Besides reinforcing this central message in tefillah, we must quietly reflect on how fortunate we are to be among the few people in the world who enjoy a special relationship with Hashem and live a life permeated with meaning, respect and love. Therefore, may we all embrace and successfully convey this message to succeeding generations. Rabbi Jachter serves as the rav of Congregation Shaarei Orah, rebbe at Torah Academy of Bergen County and a get administrator with the Beth Din of Elizabeth. Rabbi Jachter’s 18 books may be purchased at Amazon and Judaica House

 from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com> date: Sep 26, 2024, 5:39 PM

Potomac Torah Study Center
 Vol. 11 #51, September 27-28, 2024; 24-25 Elul 5784; Nitzavim-Vayeilech; Rosh Hashanah

As I write, Rosh Hashanah is less than a week away.* How has the year gone by so quickly? Rabbi David Fohrman, as usual, provides a key insight to Moshe’s message to B’Nai Yisrael on the final day of his life. Moshe has just concluded his long description of the blessings of following the mitzvot and the horrifying curses that will chase us if we ignore the mitzvot (Ki Tavo). As part of the ceremony of bikkurim (bringing some of the first fruits to the Kohenim), B’Nai Yisrael are to be glad before Hashem (26:11; 27: 7). Moshe adds that

part of the joy of having plenty and being able to share that joy with Hashem includes sharing with others. We are to share this joy and plenty with the Levite and the proselyte in our midst (26:11). We are also to share with the orphan and widow (26:12). We are to testify to Hashem that we have met these obligations.

Nitzavim and Vayeilech continue with this message from Moshe, as he reminds B’Nai Yisrael that this covenant is binding on all generations of Jews. The message of our obligation to share with the priests, widows, orphans, immigrants, and other needy members of our community comes through in numerous parts of the Torah. To select only one example, Mishpatim, which provides 51 concrete examples of mitzvot from the Aseret Dibrot (Rambam’s count), focuses primarily on laws that protect the weak and needy in society. The messages of the prophets also focus heavily on chiding the people for not assisting the needy enough.

In our community, Bikur Cholim of Greater Washington, which devotes itself to chesed every day, has had an explosion of requests for assistance in recent years. This outstanding organization and its many volunteers assist the needy in our community, those whom the Torah and our prophets have been asking B’Nai Yisrael to remember for more than three thousand years. Our tradition of chesed goes back to Avraham Avinu. Many Jewish communities throughout the world follow the examples of Avraham, Moshe, and Jewish tradition in helping the needy. As we prepare for the High Holy Days, hopefully many of us will increase our levels of support for Bikur Cholim – both in terms of financial donations and volunteer work. You can join Bikur Cholim by donating now and signing up for the Hope and Healing Gala. This is our Annual Campaign, during which we aim to raise the funds necessary to sustain all of our free services and programs. A part of every Jew was present at Har Sinai for the Revelation. Our people have always had a tradition of chesed – kindness – toward the needy. As we approach the judgment of the balance between our mitzvot and our sins, chesed is an important part of earning another year of life. Hannah and I have always tried to teach this lesson to our children and now to our grandchildren. In his Rosh Hashanah message, Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander asks: [H]ow ever can we approach these Days of Awe, when every day of this year has felt so awful? Why must the King return to the palace when we so desperately need his presence in the fields with our soldiers, our hostages, our displaced families and our broken people? [He recommends that] we pray that God will see the extraordinary efforts we’ve made in our fields this year.

Perhaps He will then agree, just this year, not to retreat to the King’s palace, but continue to plant His divine throne in these new fields and stay with us here. Or perhaps God will return to the heavenly abode, but will transform it, from what is perceived by so many of us this year, to be an impenetrable palace to an inviting homestead where the God of mercy welcomes us all. With Hashem’s help, may 5785 be a year of teshuvah, tikva (hope), and renewed blessings for Israel and for our people throughout the world. Shabbat Shalom. Kativah vchatima tovah.

Hannah and Alan

* Because of a lack of time, I am using my message from last year as a starting point rather than writing an entirely new Dvar Torah. I am likely not to be able to post again until after Yom Kippur. Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations. Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah,

Raizel bat Rut; Chai Frumel bat Leah, Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you. Shabbat Shalom Hannah & Alan Shabbat Shalom Hannah & Alan

Parshat Nitzavim-Vayelech: “Not in the Heavens”

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander * © 5784 (2024)

President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Dedicated in memory of Israel's murdered and fallen, the refuah shlayma of the wounded, the return of those being held hostage in Gaza, and the safety of our brave IDF soldiers.

From ancient times to today, Jewish tradition has emphasized the importance of human engagement with the divine words of Torah and its continuity. This concept is rooted in this week's parsha, which reminds us that Torah is not “up in the heavens” or “across the ocean,” but is in fact, “very close to us, wherever we may find ourselves” (Devarim 30:11-14).

This approach is demonstrated exceptionally well in the teachings and life of the Vilna Gaon, one of the greatest Talmudic scholars of all time. His student, Rav Chaim of Volozhin, recounts how the Vilna Gaon would refuse divine assistance from maggidim (celestial beings) in his own Torah studies, stating:

I do not want that my knowledge of God's Torah be communicated by any type of medium. Only what my eyes should be able to perceive [the wisdom of Torah] according to what God wishes to reveal to me [through my studies]. God should give me a portion in His Torah through my toils, struggles which I pursue with all my strength. (Introduction to Sifra di-Zeni'uta from Rav Chaim of Volozhin)

For the Vilna Gaon, the essence of Torah is now in the hands of mankind, with God's wisdom and words sanctified through our own discovery.

The Talmud further reinforces this notion of human authority, albeit within established protocols of our tradition. In the famed story of ‘the oven of Achnai,’ (Bava Metzia 59b) the sages push the bounds of these verses even further, insisting that these verses are not merely about accessibility to Torah, but about who has authority over Torah. When R' Eliezer enlists the help not only of miracles and wonders, but even of a Bat Kol, a heavenly voice, to demonstrate that his interpretation of the Halakha is correct, his interlocutor R' Yehoshua declares “it is not in the heavens!” This bold statement asserts that the authority to interpret and apply Torah has been entrusted to humans.

This trust and authority to interpret and reapply Torah goes beyond just studying and observing Jewish laws. When we have knowledge of the halakhic theorems which Jewish ideals and law are predicated upon, God entrusts us to take part in crafting the Torah to engage in every generation, demonstrating God's desire for partnership with us in building up new levels of Torah, guaranteeing the immortality of our covenantal relationship. Particularly in the face of new and

emerging challenges that arise over the course of human and Jewish history, God seeks out our active participation in the development of the Torah.

In fact it is in the face of new challenges that this responsibility becomes especially crucial. This past year, we have witnessed and experienced unprecedented circumstances that have required innovative halakhic thinking as poskim and as a people. How should Shabbat observance be managed, with soldiers, doctors, social workers, and so many others required to move from one place to another, in what is now the second longest war in the country's history? Am I allowed to travel back home from telling a family that their soldier son was killed in battle, if Shabbat has already begun? Can I eat kosher food that was brought to the base by a family that traveled on Shabbat? How do I search for chametz before Pesach if there are soldiers who keep such foods with them in our barracks? What are our obligations and prioritizations towards charitable giving, with thousands of Israelis still wounded, displaced, emotionally scarred, laid off, and grieving?

These and so many more questions I have heard over the last year aren't directly addressed in the canon we've inherited, leaving it to us, with God's permission and help found in the rabbinic literature, to forge new pathways in Torah as we face realities that are directly related to the messianic age. We continue this work daily. While this opportunity arises from tragedy, it simultaneously demonstrates the beauty of the enduring relevance and eternity of our Torah traditions, and how they hold a message for every generation.

The final words in Talmud regarding the oven of Achnai incident are as follows:

Years after, Rabbi Natan encountered Elijah the prophet and said to him: What did the Holy One, Blessed be He, do at that time, when Rabbi Yehoshua issued his declaration [that we don't follow the word of God in heaven]? Elijah said to him: “The Holy One, Blessed be He, smiled and said: Nitzchuni banai Nitzchuni banai.”

These final words can be translated in one of two ways. The first is that “My children have triumphed over Me; My children have triumphed over Me.” Indeed our parsha reminds us that the axiom of rabbinic protocols takes precedence over divine pronouncements. Or that final comment can be translated “My children have immortalized Me; My children have immortalized Me.” Reading it this way, we see how by taking responsibility for the development of the Torah we help guarantee its immortality and the future of our covenant with the Divine.

As we approach a new cycle of Torah reading after the holidays this year, we hope for resolution to the many halakhic dilemmas, the return of our hostages, calming of tensions, and healing for our people. Through our continued engagement with Torah, may we fulfill our role as partners with God in bringing more light into our world. Shabbat Shalom.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.

from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>
date: Sep 26, 2024, 8:24 PM
subject: Families of Hostages Share Urgent Message at OU HQ; Commemorating the Anniversary of Oct. 7; Understanding the Jewish Vote
PARSHAT NITZAVIM-VAYEILECH
September 27-28, 2024 / 25 Elul 5784
SPECIAL DAYS

Ashkenazim begin Selichot motzaei Shabbat, September 28.
Rosh Hashana begins Wednesday night, October 2, and is celebrated through Friday, October 4.
L'ma'an Achai v'Reiai: Hareini Mekabeil Alai – I Accept Upon Myself – Elul 5784

By Rabbi Moshe Hauer

26 Sep 2024

Within the OU and its departments, we are focusing meaningful effort on considering and addressing the issue of *sinat chinam*, providing both food for thought and practical action points that can help us begin to demonstrate care for each other and ameliorate our nation's divisions by adjusting both our thinking and actions. We invite you into this process in the hope that you may find it meaningful and helpful, add your own energies to this effort, and be in touch to contribute your own thoughts and ideas. Thank you to all who have already shared their thoughts and ideas.

We began by pulling out our ear pods to try to notice those around us a bit more, went further to provide someone with a sense of "imach" by taking a bit of time to check in, and then moved towards building mutually appreciated relationship with others who may not have it elsewhere, inviting them into our homes or reaching out into theirs.

How should a Jew prepare for Rosh Hashana and the Yamim Noraim? The Alter of Kelm, one of the great Mussar masters, had a simple and surprising approach: focus on *v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho*, work on loving others more.

He returned to this theme year after year, undertaking personally and along with his students to recall at every time of prayer the mitzvah to love others. In this, he was faithful to the custom instituted by the great Kabbalist, Rav Yitzchak Luria, and followed by many hasidim and others, to declare before every prayer: "Hareini m'kabeil alai mitzvah as'eh shel v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho. I accept upon myself the mitzvah to love my fellow man as myself." The Sefardic version of this declaration is even more exquisite, adding a declaration of actual love for every Jew *k'nafshi u'me'odi*.

The idea is both beautiful and puzzling. How does expressing our commitment to other people – *bein adam la'chaveiro* – fit the intense religious moment of prayer *bein adam la'Makom*? Notice however that the original Jewish prayer recorded in the Torah was offered by Avraham on behalf of the people of Sodom. Avraham did not resort to prayer in search of mystical or spiritual communion. He approached God out of a deep concern for his fellow man. Sodom was in trouble, its future was threatened, and Avraham stepped forward to plead with God on their behalf. That is evidently what prayer is supposed to look like. We approach God with others in mind. And, as the Alter of Kelm himself explained, when we approach God with Klal Yisrael in mind, we stand before Him empowered by the history and the destiny of our nation.

This practice of beginning davening with that commitment to our fellow Jews has not previously been part of my routine, but I intend to do it now as the next step on working on *sinat chinam*. Davening can easily be an experience of turning inward or looking upward while focusing on our own needs, but when we bring the Klal into those prayers it makes us bigger. When making that commitment to love my fellow Jews, I will try to think of a specific part of my community or of the Jewish people that I do not strongly identify with for ideological, religious, cultural, or any other reasons. I hope in that way to stand before Hashem not as an individual but as part of the unbreakable and ultimately indivisible Jewish people.

Every day of the year, most of our prayers focus on the overwhelming need for a better world. Particularly on Rosh Hashana, the Alter of Kelm would remind his students via a note he would hang on the door of the *beis hamedrash* that our main request of God is that He build His kingdom and bring us all together in His service. We can only sincerely make that request when we ourselves come together, when we stand with our fellow Jews in love and commitment, prioritizing the unity of our people and of the kingdom of God for which we pray. Hareini m'kabeil alai mitzvah as'eh shel v'ahavta l'reiacha kamocho

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>
date: Sep 26, 2024, 6:54 PM
subject: The Final Parsha of the Year!

Rav Soloveitchik on Vayelech: Everyone is Welcome
Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters (Ktav, 2023)

Parashat Vayelech introduces the mitzvah of *hakhel*, the special gathering of the entire Jewish people every seven years. This is supposed to take place on Sukkot, "When all Israel comes to appear before the

Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 31:11). Hakhel is about the nation coming together as a whole—men, women, and children—to hear and rededicate themselves to God’s word. It is fitting that it should be observed during Sukkot, a holiday with motifs of inclusiveness and unity, as demonstrated by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

To bring this into sharp relief, let us begin by examining Yom Kippur, which occurs only a few days before Sukkot. When the Temple stood, it was the avodah (Temple service) of the day that brought atonement for all, but only the kohanim, a group with a genetic barrier to entry, were able to perform it. A select few of Yerushalayim’s nobles also helped with the rituals of the day and were privy to hear the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton.

By contrast, on Sukkot we take the four species. The Sages explain that they symbolize four levels of Jewish observance and spiritual accomplishment. The fragrant and tasty etrog is the Jew who learns Torah and does mitzvot; the succulent palm is someone who performs the mitzvot even if deficient in Torah; the aromatic hadas (myrtle) represents the Jew who learns Torah but does not carry out mitzvot sufficiently; and the aravah (willow) symbolizes the Jew deficient in both Torah study and mitzvah performance.¹ The mitzvah is to bind three species together and to hold all four as one. We are a single people and should visualize ourselves as such.

The kohanim play a key role in Judaism, particularly when the mishkan (Tabernacle) and Temples stood, but the Torah has never been considered the inheritance of any elite. “Every Jew has a portion in the Torah; all stood at Mount Sinai/” said the Rav. “Keneset Yisrael can only be built and survive with the participation of all Jews.”² While Pesach is also all-inclusive, given that all four children, even the wicked, are invited to reexperience the Exodus

as a family,³ it does not have an entire day devoted to this theme like Sukkot does—Hoshana Rabbah.

On Hoshana Rabbah, we select the aravah to be used in a second mitzvah. Although seemingly the least obvious choice in the rabbinic scheme of representation, it is precisely the unpalatable and nonaromatic aravah that we used to take for the aravah ceremony in the Temple (and still do today at the end of the prayer service). In the Rav’s words:

Those who are represented by the aravah cannot manifest themselves in the same way that the other three species can. But beyond the surface, deep in the soul, the aravah has the same potential as the other species. The difference is that the other species have had the opportunity to develop, to actualize themselves, to build on their strengths, while the aravah has not.⁴

If Yom Kippur featured the elite, Sukkot focuses on those who might be considered, and therefore consider themselves, “the lower class.” Sukkot demands that those on the periphery take center stage in the assembly of the entire people at the Temple.

The aravah Jew has the same potential as the sage, if only given the opportunity.

The Talmud relates that the aravot were gathered for Temple use from a place below Yerushalayim, to which one has to descend.⁵ This is a beautiful image, the Rav said. The mitzvah of the aravah is fulfilled by reaching out to people who are “lower,” that is, not yet proficient in Torah and ritual observance. One goes to where they are and brings them up to the Temple. At that moment, when they are welcomed into this sacred setting, they will experience the warm embrace of their community and be inspired.⁶

Exploring the Rav’s Insight

Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook saw in the sukkah this same motif of unity that characterizes Sukkot. The Talmud offers the imagery of a Sukkah large enough to surround the entire Jewish people. “For seven days...

all who belong to the Jewish people will live in sukkot’ (Leviticus 23:14). This teaches that it is fitting for all of Israel to sit in one sukkah.”⁷ Obviously, no sukkah is large enough to hold millions of people, so to what does the Talmud refer?

Rav Kook explained that after the teshuvah and transformation of Yom Kippur, the nation is purified of its pettiness and can again behold the positive and the potential in one another. Harmony can now be restored, and even increased. This Talmudic dictum is therefore

a call to construct a sukkah intended to accommodate every member of the nation, a sukkah where every single individual is and feels welcome.⁸

Footnotes 1. Leviticus Rabbah, ch. 30. 2. Chumash Mesoras Harav, 5:249. 3. See Genack, Exalted Evening, 46. 4. Lustiger, Derashot Harav, 128. 5. Sukkah 45a. 6. Lustiger, Derashot Harav, 130-131. 7. Sukkah 27b. 8. Neriah, Moadei ha-Re’iyah, 148-149. The importance of harmonized diversity recurs throughout Rav Kook’s writings. For example, about the statement “Torah scholars increase peace in the world,” he said that their divergent opinions express the fullness of truth and knowledge of God (Siddur Olat Re’iyah, 1:330-331).

Tidbits for Parashas Nitzvaim-Vayeilech

From: Ira Zlotowitz <Iraz@klalگووah.org>

Tidbits in memory of Rav Meir Zlotowitz ZT"l

Parashas Nitzavim-Vayeilech • September 28th • 25 Elul 5784
Selichos (for Ashkenazim) begin this Motzaei Shabbos, September 28th. Selichos are generally recited each morning before davening, although some say it the night before (after chatzos, according to many). One should say Birchas Hatorah each morning prior to reciting Selichos. Selichos, and especially the Yud Gimmel Middos (Hashem, Hashem...), should be said with concentration and sincerity. It is more worthwhile to daven at one’s own pace than to rush through to keep up with the minyan. However, when the congregation

reaches the Yud Gimmel Middos, one should say it along with them. When the congregation reaches Tachanun, one should say Tachanun along with the congregation and need not return to make up for what he skipped. Someone saying Selichos without a minyan omits the Yud Gimmel Middos, as well as the Aramaic passages following Tachanun (Machei Umasei etc.). There is a minhag for the Sheliach Tzibbur of Selichos to serve as the Sheliach Tzibbur for the other Tefillos that day. There is no Shabbos Mevorchim for Chodesh Tishrei. The molad for Chodesh Tishrei is Thursday morning 3:21 AM and 13 chalakim.

Vehi Noam is omitted on Motzaei Shabbos.

As the precarious situation in Eretz Yisrael unfortunately continues, each person should increase reciting tehillim and performing other mitzvos as a zechus for the many Acheinu Beis Yisrael in travail and captivity as well as for the soldiers in battle.

Pirkei Avos: Perek 5-6

Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Bava Basra 95 • Yerushalmi: Orlah 9 • Mishnah Yomis: Bava Metzia 3:5-6 • Oraysa: Next week is Beitza 5a-7a

Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!

Rosh Hashanah begins next Wednesday evening, October 2nd.

Tzom Gedaliah is on Sunday, October 6th (nidcheh).

Yom Kippur begins on Friday evening, October 11th.

Succos begins Wednesday evening, October 16th.

Parsha in a Paragraph

NITZAVIM: On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers the people to enter them into an eternal covenant • If one goes astray and serves other gods thinking he will be spared, the curses stated in the Torah will be visited upon him • Hashem will not punish for hidden sins of another, rather only for not uprooting known misdeeds • When you witness the fulfillment of the berachos and kelalos you will be inspired to repent • The mitzvah of Teshuvah (alternatively, learning Torah) is not difficult; it is well within reach • Hashem lets you choose between life and death; choose life!

VAYEILECH: Moshe takes leave of Klal Yisrael • Moshe encourages Yehoshua in front of all of Klal Yisrael • Moshe writes a Sefer Torah • Moshe teaches the mitzvah of Hakhel • Moshe and Yehoshua enter the Mishkan together and receive prophecy • The mitzvah of writing a Sefer Torah • Moshe's Sefer Torah is placed alongside the Aron as a testimony
Haftarah: The haftarah of Nitzavim is leined. The haftarah of "Sos Asis" (Yeshaya 61:10-63:9) is the final haftarah of the Shiva D'nechemta. Yeshaya Hanavi proclaims that we will rejoice in Hashem with the final redemption when we emerge triumphant from exile, enveloped in glory and royalty, similar to a chassan and kallah.

Taryag Weekly

Parashas Nitzavim: 40 Pesukim • No Mitzvos listed

Parashas Vayeilech: 30 Pesukim • 2 Obligations

1) Hakhel: In the year after shemittah, on the second day of Succos, all of Klal Yisrael gathers to hear the king read portions of Mishneh Torah (Sefer Devarim). 2) Write a Sefer Torah or, alternatively, commission one to be written.

Mitzvah Highlight: The mitzvah to write a new Sefer Torah is for the purpose of making Torah accessible. Even if one inherited a Sefer Torah, the mitzvah still applies, as writing another sefer will allow others to benefit from it. A newer sefer is also more appealing to the reader. For these reasons it is important to publish new sefarim and publications on Torah topics (Sefer HaChinuch).

For the Shabbos Table

בְּדָלִים וּבְרָשִׁים דְּפָקְנוּ דְּלִתִּיךְ

(Selichos)

We begin Selichos with the words, בְּדָלִים וּבְרָשִׁים דְּפָקְנוּ דְּלִתִּיךְ - Like poor and destitute people we knock on your door.

A person who falls on hard times financially and finds himself in need of assistance is still very hesitant to approach others for help. At first, he'll perhaps try to drop a hint to people close to him that things aren't going well. Then perhaps he will try some other subtle attempt. However, once a poor man reaches 'rock-bottom', he'll just walk up to the nearest rich man's door and bang in desperation.

The Gemara (Rosh Hashana 16b) says kol shana sherasha b'tchilasa misasheresh b'sofa. Any year which begins in poverty, with weak financial markets, will ultimately be a prosperous year. In reality this doesn't seem to always be the case. How can we understand this gemara?

Rav Shlomo Heiman zt"l quotes Rav Naftali Trup zt"l: We often find that those with immediate needs, such as those facing a health crisis or who are in need of a shidduch, daven most intently on Rosh Hashanah. The person who just lost his job is concentrating much harder than the fellow next to him who is in a secure senior position at his firm. But this is not reflective of reality. The reality is that on Rosh Hashana we are all between years and thus we are all "between jobs". Although we often get to keep our positions, we are not guaranteed anything. K'dalim uch'rashim dafaknu delasecha, we come into selichos asking, begging, like one who knows that all their possessions are only due to Hashem's graciousness and mercy.

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Klal Govoah 481 Oak Glen Road Howell, NJ 07731

From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

Parshas Netzavim

An Enigmatic Medrash Explained

This dvar Torah was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1393 – The Baal Tokeah Who Could Only Blow From His Left Side and Other Shofar Issues. Good Shabbos.

The pesukim in Parshas Nitzavim say, “For this commandment that I command you today – it is not hidden from you, and it is not distant. It is not in heaven, for you to say, ‘Who can ascend to the heaven for us and take it for us so that we can listen to it and perform it?’ Nor is it across the sea, for you to say, ‘Who can cross to the other side of the sea for us and take it for us so that we can listen to it and perform it?’ Rather, the matter is very near to you – in your mouth and in your heart – to perform it.” (Devorim 30:11-14).

There is a dispute among the early commentaries regarding what the expression “hamitzvah hazos” (this commandment) refers to. We will focus on the view of Rashi (and others as well), who say that the expression refers to Torah. According to this approach, the pesukim are saying that Torah is accessible to every Jew. They need not go up to Heaven to access it.

There is an enigmatic Medrash Rabbah here (Nitzavim 8) which states: “Lest you think that it was to your detriment that I gave you the Torah, that is not the case – I gave it only for your benefit! The proof is that the malachay hashares (ministering angels) also wanted it, but it was hidden from them. The Torah is beyond the malachay hashares, but for you, my sons, this is for you, as it is written ‘Lo niflais hi mimcha.’”

The difficulty with this Medrash is two-fold. First of all, what on earth does it mean “You might think that it was to your detriment that I gave you the Torah”? The Torah is called a “lekach tov” (Mishlei 4:2). Who would have ever thought that it was given to our detriment!? Second of all, what kind of proof is it that it was not to our detriment because the malachay hashares wanted it as well?

I would like to share an interpretation from Rav Elya Baruch Finkel, but I want to introduce that thought with an idea I found in the Daas Zekeinim M’Baalei Hatosfos. On the pasuk, “Mi Ya’aleh Lanu Hashamayma” (Who will go up for us to Heaven), the Daas Zekeinim write that the first letters of those four words (Mem, Yud, Lamed, Hay) spell out the word milah (circumcision). What allusion is the Daas Zekeinim pointing out to us with this comment?

Perhaps we might relate this comment to something the Sefer Hachinuch famously writes. The Sefer Hachinuch asks why the Torah gave us a mitzvah of milah. After all, if the Almighty did not want us to have a foreskin, we could have been born without one and there would have been no need for the mitzvah of milah. Yet, He gave us a foreskin and commanded us to remove it. Why is that?

The Sefer Hachinuch writes that the Ribono shel Olam wanted us to become more perfect human beings. He wanted us to make the effort to improve ourselves. Therefore, He did not create us from the womb as perfect human beings – the proof being that we have a foreskin, which needs to be removed. This symbolizes the following: Just like man is able to improve his physical body, so too he is able to improve his

spiritual essence. Mitzvas milah sets the tone for a person’s life. Man is born imperfect specifically to impress upon him the message that human beings are far from perfect and man is charged throughout his life to try to become a more perfect human being.

This is all alluded to in the pasuk “Mi Ya’aleh Lanu Hashamayma” because milah is really an indication of what Torah is all about. Torah, too, was given to us as a way for us to become closer to the Ribono shel Olam and to become holier people.

With this introduction, we return to Rav Elya Baruch Finkel’s interpretation of the above-cited Medrash: There are two reasons why the Ribono shel Olam gave us the Torah. Number one is as an antidote to all the bad things about human beings. “I have created the Yetzer Hara (Evil Inclination); and I have created Torah as its antidote.” (Yalkut Shimoni Parshas Ekev) We come into this world as very physical and materialistic people. We have all sorts of lusts and all sorts of personality faults – anger, haughtiness, etc., etc. Part of the reason for mitzvos is “for your detriment” (l’ra’aschem) – to go ahead and take away the negativity that exists within you, to purify yourselves from the dross that encompasses every human being.

You may think, says the Medrash, that the whole purpose of Torah is just to take away the bad. However, that is not the case. “It is for your benefit” – meaning, that not only is there a “sur me’rah” (depart from evil) aspect to Torah but there is also a major “aseh tov” component in it as well. The “aseh tov” component is that you become better people by virtue of the Torah. You become better baalei midos; you become greater baalei chessed; you become better people – l’tovaschem (for your benefit).

By learning the Torah and keeping the Torah, you become G-d-like and you elevate yourselves. This is a far cry from merely taking away the bad. This is the proof from the malachay hashares. The malachim clearly don’t need a Torah to take away the bad. They have no Yetzer Hara. They are not physical. They are totally spiritual. They have no anger or jealousy. Then why did THEY want the Torah if they had no “bad” to be taken away? The answer is that they wanted it because they themselves realized that the way to come closer to the Ribono shel Olam is through Torah.

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This week’s write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Nitzavim/Vayeilech is provided below: ... A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit

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date: Sep 25, 2024, 6:37 AM

subject: Who Knows Thirteen?

Who Knows Thirteen?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Sneak Preview My grandmother told me how she remembers that the first night of selichos people used to go from shul to shul sampling the davening of each of the chazzanim, and deciding which shul they would attend for Rosh Hashanah. Is there any halachic basis in having the chazzan also daven the first night of selichos?

Question #2: Bemotza'ei Menucha – At the end of Shabbos Why do Ashkenazim begin reciting Selichos on Motza'ei Shabbos or Sunday morning?

Question #3: More or Less? Levi asks me: “Because of my work schedule, on most days I do not have a lot of time to recite selichos. Is it better to recite just a small amount of the selichos in the time that I have, or to race through as much as I can say?” Answer: In this article, we will address these basic questions: What is the source for the practice of reciting selichos? Does it have the halachic status of a custom or is it something that Chazal instituted? To begin, let us note that our structured prayers can be classified into three categories: I. Daily Davening Our daily tefillos. Through these we fulfill our mitzvah to serve Hashem every day, as the Rambam says, IOt is a positive mitzvah to pray every day, which fulfills what the Torah states “and you shall serve Hashem your G-d.” The oral mesorah teaches that the service referred to here means prayer (Hilchos Tefillah 1:1).

II. Fasts and Emergencies Tefillos that we say on fast days and other times of difficulty. These fulfill a different Torah mitzvah, and again I quote the Rambam: There is a positive mitzvah of the Torah to cry out and blow trumpets on every travail that befalls the community (Hilchos Taanis 1:1). One day, I hope to write an article on the topic of trumpets and why we do not blow them today. The selichos we recite following the repetition of shemoneh esrei (or according to some old minhagim, during the repetition of shemoneh esrei) on most of our fast days, including the Tenth of Teves, Taanis Esther, the Seventeenth of Tamuz, and Behab after Sukkos and Pesach, are all reflective of this mitzvah.

III. Selichos Even though teshuvah and prayer are always good, during the ten days that are from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur they are exceptionally good and they are immediately accepted (Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 2:6). The selichos that I am discussing in this article are the special prayers for teshuvah and forgiveness with which we supplicate during Elul and the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah.

Structure of Selichos

Although there are numerous variant customs, most of Klal Yisrael structures selichos in the following way: We begin with ashrei, followed by a half-kaddish, then recite many introductory verses of

Tanach, which in turn lead into some small prayers that culminate with a paragraph that begins with the words Keil Erech Apayim. Keil Erech Apayim directly introduces the focal point of the selichos – the recitation of the thirteen attributes of Hashem’s kindness. After the Jewish people sinned when we worshipped the Eigel Hazahav, the Golden Calf, Hashem taught Moshe to use these thirteen attributes of His kindness to achieve absolution for the Jewish people.

The recitation of the thirteen attributes is followed by a few verses that refer to Hashem pardoning our iniquities. We then recite several poetic supplications, each of which leads into another recital of the thirteen attributes. This is followed by some closing prayers which include the viduy (confession) and tachanun (a prayer customarily said while sitting in a bowed position). Selichos concludes with the chazzan reciting full kaddish. In all Ashkenazic customs with which I am familiar, there are numerous different poetic supplications, variously called selichos, akeidos, pizmonim, etc., and each day we recite a different series of these prayers. The purpose of these prayers is to introduce and set the mood for the recital of the thirteen attributes.

If we stop to realize, we will notice that our selichos prayer is structurally similar to our daily mincha prayer (without the aleinu and mourner’s kaddish at mincha’s end). However, the most noticeable difference between mincha and selichos is that the shemoneh esrei recited as the primary part of mincha is replaced in selichos by the repeated recital of the thirteen attributes of Hashem’s mercy and the numerous prayers that introduce those recitals. The Thirteen Midos Why is the recital of the thirteen midos of Hashem’s mercy so important? Let me quote the Talmudic passage that is the basis for our recital of selichos. Rabbi Yochanan said: ‘Were it not for the fact that the Torah itself wrote this, it would be impossible to say this. The Torah teaches that Hashem wrapped Himself in a talis like a chazzan and demonstrated to Moshe the order of prayer. Hashem told Moshe: “Whenever the Jews sin, they should perform this order [i.e., the thirteen middos] and I will forgive them” (Rosh Hashanah 17b). Rabbi Yochanan noted that the anthropomorphism of his own statement is rather shocking, and without scriptural proof we would refrain from saying it. Nevertheless, the Torah compelled us to say that Hashem revealed to Moshe a means whereby we can be pardoned for our iniquities. According to the Maharal, Moshe asked Hashem to elucidate, to the extent that a human can comprehend, how Hashem deals with the world in mercy. Hashem did indeed enlighten Moshe, and this enabled him to implore that the Jewish people be forgiven, and taught him how to lead the Jews in their prayers (Chiddushei Agados, Rosh Hashanah 17b s.v. Melameid).

Source for Selichos

This, then, is the basis for selichos. Indeed, it is not a takanah, but a custom; yet who would not avail himself of the opportunity to prepare early for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur! To quote the Leket Yosher: Someone who goes to daven on the High Holidays and did not say selichos in preparation can be compared to an individual who desires to approach the king with an urgent request, and manages to acquire the key to the king’s inner sanctum, but fails to arrange how he will enter the outer office. All his efforts are therefore completely in vain, because he failed to prepare himself adequately. This can be compared to someone moving to an unsettled area who installs a modern kitchen, expecting to be able to turn on the tap and produce water, but there are no connecting water pipes!

More or Less

Since we understand how important it is to say selichos with feeling, it is obvious that one with limited time to recite selichos, should say a smaller amount and understand what he is saying, rather than rush through what he says (see Tur Orach Chayim Chapter 1).

Praying Truthfully

We should bear in mind that many of the selichos state that we are arising while it is still dark and similar expressions, all of which reflects the custom of earlier generations of reciting selichos either at halachic midnight (chatzos) or very early in the morning well before sunrise. Someone reciting selichos anytime after sunrise should be careful to modify these passages so that he is not lying while he pleads to Hashem (Aruch Hashulchan).

Who Should Be the Chazzan?

The above-quoted Leket Yosher concludes: It is therefore logical that the individual leading the selichos should be someone who will lead the services on Yomim Nora'im. In other words, since selichos are the introduction to our Yomim Nora'im supplications, the same chazzan that the community desires to plead on its behalf on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur should be called upon to lead their selichos entreaties. By the way, other authorities mention another reason why the chazzan who will be leading services on Yomim Nora'im should also be chazzan for selichos, particularly if the chazzan is paid for his services. The halacha forbids paying someone for performing work on Shabbos or Yom Tov, even if it is work that is otherwise permitted, such as babysitting, being a kashrus mashgiach or a chazzan. This forbidden payment for Shabbos work is called sechar Shabbos, literally, Shabbos wages. So how does one find a babysitter for Shabbos when one needs to attend a simcha, if I cannot pay him or her? The way to avoid the prohibition of sechar Shabbos is to hire someone for an entire job that also includes weekday work, without calculating how much is being paid for Shabbos or Yom Tov. Making the payment into one big package is called havlaah (literally, "absorbed") and is permitted, provided no computation is made for specific Shabbos or Yom Tov work and the wages are not paid on a calculated hourly basis (since this also means that one is paying for the hours worked on Shabbos or Yom Tov). Now we have a curious problem. It is a practice of at least a thousand years to hire chazzanim. How does one pay a chazzan to perform his job on Shabbos and Yom Tov, when there is a prohibition of sechar Shabbos to pay for Shabbos work? The answer is that one also hires the chazzan to perform some weekday activity, such as giving bar mitzvah lessons, teaching in the congregation Hebrew school, or running the shul's youth activities. None of these solutions resolve the sechar Shabbos concern regarding a chazzan who is hired to daven only on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. To avoid the sechar Shabbos problem, the custom developed for the chazzan to lead one of the selichos, and thereby he is paid a "package deal" remuneration that includes some weekday work (Elef HaMagein 585:24; Shemiras Shabbos Kehilchasah Chapter 28 note 145). What if the chazzan is traveling from a distance for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and it is not worthwhile to pay his transportation for a third trip to daven selichos? In this instance, there is a simple solution to the sechar Shabbos predicament, since the chazzan is also being paid for his travel time, and this itself becomes the havlaah. Note that a halachic difference results between the two approaches I have presented why the chazzan also leads selichos. According to the Leket Yosher's approach, the chazzan should preferably daven every one of the

selichos days, whereas according to the sechar Shabbos reason, it is adequate if he davens any one of the selichos days. According to both approaches I have mentioned, there is no particular reason why a chazzan should daven specifically the first night of selichos.

Why Begin Motza'ei Shabbos?

Indeed, why do Ashkenazim begin selichos on Motza'ei Shabbos? "We always begin reciting selichos on Sunday because it is close to Shabbos, and everyone learns Torah on Shabbos since he does not deal with his financial matters and therefore has time to learn Torah... and since people are happy and joyous because of the mitzvah of learning Torah that they were able to do on Shabbos, and also because of the Shabbos pleasures that they celebrated, and we say that the shechinah rests when one is happy because of performing a mitzvah, therefore it is good to pray then (Leket Yosher). Others explain the reason we begin selichos on Motza'ei Shabbos is because the beginning of the week represents the beginning of creation, and we are performing teshuvah for man who is the goal of all creation (Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chayim 581:3).

At Least Four

Ashkenazic custom is that, when Rosh Hashanah begins on Monday or Tuesday, we begin selichos the week before, to make sure that we recite selichos for at least four days before Rosh Hashanah. One reason mentioned for this practice is because originally people fasted on the days of selichos, and they wanted to fast a total of ten days. Since there are four days during the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah that one may not fast – Shabbos, the two days of Rosh Hashanah and Erev Yom Kippur – we recite selichos for at least four days before Rosh Hashanah (Tur, Levush, Taz, Magen Avraham Orach Chayim 581).

A Word about Attributes

We mentioned above that the main "prayer" of the selichos is mentioning the thirteen merciful attributes of Hashem. What exactly are the thirteen attributes? For that matter, can we attribute personality characteristics to Hashem? Humans are not capable of understanding who Hashem is. The Torah requires that we understand that Hashem does not have moods (Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 1:11). When we describe Hashem's different attributes, we are explaining Hashem in a way that we as human beings will be able to comprehend Him, since we cannot comprehend Him in any other way (Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 1:9). Thus, providing thirteen different attributes of Hashem's mercy is simply a human way for us to appreciate more specifically and in a greater way what Hashem does and has done for us, and what is our responsibility to fulfill the mitzvah of being like Hashem, which I will explain shortly. To quote Rabbeinu Bachyei: Although we no longer know how to beseech, nor do we properly understand the power of the thirteen attributes and how they connect to Hashem's mercy, we still know that the attributes of mercy plead on our behalf, since this is what Hashem promised. Today when we are without a kohein gadol to atone for our sins and without a mizbei'ach on which to offer korbanos and no Beis Hamikdash in which to pray, we have left only our prayers and these thirteen attributes (Kad Hakemach, Kippurim 2).

Who Knows Thirteen?

To quote the Haggadah, I know thirteen! Thirteen are the attributes. What are the thirteen midos? The Torah says: Hashem, Hashem, who is a merciful and gracious G-d, slow to anger, and abundant in kindness and truth. He preserves kindness for thousands of generations by forgiving sins whether they are intentional, rebellious

or negligent; and He exonerates (Shemos 34:6-7). There are many opinions among the halachic authorities exactly how to calculate the thirteen merciful attributes of Hashem. The most commonly quoted approach is that of Rabbeinu Tam, who includes each of the names of Hashem at the beginning as a separate attribute.

What Do I Do?

At this point, I want to return to the above-quoted Talmudic source of the selichos, and note a curious and very important point. Hashem told Moshe: “Whenever the Jews sin, they should perform this order and I will forgive them.” The Hebrew word that I have translated as should perform this order is yaasu, which means that the Jews must do something, definitely more than just reading the words. If all that is required is to read these words, the Gemara should have said simply: They should read these words. Obviously, action, which always speaks louder than words, is required to fulfill these instructions and accomplish atonement. What did the Gemara mean? Emulate Hashem

To answer this question, we need to realize that the most important of the 613 mitzvos is the commandment to emulate Hashem. To quote the Gemara: Just as Hashem is gracious and merciful, so you should become gracious and merciful (Shabbos 133b). When Hashem told Moshe: Whenever the Jews perform this order I will forgive them, He meant that when we act towards one another with the same qualities of rachamim that Hashem does, He forgives us. Reciting the thirteen attributes of Hashem’s mercy is the first step towards making ourselves merciful people who emulate Hashem’s ways. Yaasu means learning to internalize these attributes by doing them, and thereby making ourselves godly people. “Doing” the thirteen attributes means not only understanding the absolutely incredible amount of tolerance that Hashem manifests, but also includes realizing how accepting we must be of people who annoy and harm us! This sounds great in theory. What does it mean in practice? Here are several examples, all taken from the sefer Tomer Devorah, to help us comprehend what our job is:

1. Whenever someone does something wrong, Hashem is always at that very moment providing all the needs of the offender. This is a tremendous amount of forbearance that Hashem demonstrates. Our mitzvah is to train ourselves to be this accepting of those who annoy and wrong us.
2. We should appreciate the extent to which Hashem considers the Jews to be His people, and identify with the needs of each Jew on a corresponding level.
3. Hashem waits with infinite patience for the sinner to do teshuvah, always being confident in this person’s ability to repent and change, and continues to provide the sinner with all his needs. Similarly, we should not stand on ceremony to wait for someone who wronged us to apologize.
4. Hashem emphasizes the kindnesses that a person does, and continues to shower the person with good, while in the interim overlooking the sins a person has committed. Similarly, when I know that someone wronged me, but at the same time I have received chesed from him or her, I should ignore that they wronged me – after all they also have helped me. The Tomer Devorah emphasizes specifically the chesed that one receives from one’s spouse, which should, without question, supplant any criticisms one has of him or her.
5. When a person does teshuva after sinning, Hashem loves him more than He loved him before he sinned. As the Gemara states: In a place where baalei teshuvah stand, full tzadikim are unable to stand.

The parallel responsibility incumbent on a person to someone who wronged him is that when he sees that the person wants to make amends, he should befriend and accept him at a greater level than he had previously. Conclusion: We see that the recital of the thirteen attributes serves not only that we should appreciate all that Hashem does for us but also as a training ground to teach how we should constantly treat our fellowman.

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subject: The High Holidays as the Language of Love - Essay
by Rabbi YY

The High Holidays as the Language of Love

**The 5-Step Program of Spiritual Courtship, Engagement,
Marriage, Honeymoon, and Real Life**

To Be In Bliss

If G-d is "perfect", as Judaism teaches, what prompted Him to create us? What void was He seeking to fill?

One answer provided in Kabbalah and Chassidus, based on many a verse in Tanach and in Talmud, is that G-d desired marriage. The most accomplished and self-sufficient bachelor—and G-d is the "perfect single," lacking nothing—can not marry himself. Marriage necessitates the existence of someone distinct from yourself with whom to share your life, a union of husband and wife. G-d chose the Jewish people as His bride.[1] In this relationship, the bride would experience bliss with the loving core of all consciousness, and reveal the Divine oneness pervading the entire cosmos.

What a marriage this has been—a roller coaster of romance, affection, but also deep pain, quarrel, and estrangement. In every generation, many counselors advocated a divorce, while others proclaimed the Groom dead. Yet, the relationship has endured, because both the soul is real and G-d is real. When all layers are removed, the human person yearns for meaning, for union with G-d, and G-d craves a relationship with us.

The high-holiday season is the annual re-experience of the marriage between G-d and His people.[2] The five primary milestones of this season parallel the five phases of a conventional courtship and union.[3] The holidays invite us to journey through this process again to rejuvenate the relationship.

The Courtship

The Hebrew month of Elul precedes the high holidays. This month is described in Chassidic teachings as a time when "The King goes out to the field to meet with His people, greeting them with kindness and tenderness, displaying a joyous face to all." [4]

In our present-day slang, we would call this a date.

Just as the conventional dating process allows the two people involved to become acquainted with each other, with joy and serenity, so too the month of Elul provides us with an

opportunity to get to know G-d genuinely and profoundly. G-d comes out to the field, as it were, longing to meet you where you are, to connect with you in your natural and authentic state.

The Groom Proposes

G-d, apparently, is not a fan of drawn-out dating, neither is He fearful of commitment. Four weeks later, on the eve of Rosh Hashanah, He makes His proposal. "I'm crazy over you. Will you marry me?" is the question communicated to the heart of each of us as the sun sets over the horizon of the year gone by. This is not an easy decision to make. To be married to G-d is a formidable task. It means to live with transcendence, discipline, and endless mystery. It means to challenge myself daily to go beyond my ego and insecurities and align my posture with Divine infinity. It is the constant readiness to challenge my moral failures and to stand by the highest levels of integrity and truth. And yet, a whispering voice within persists that if we will avoid this relationship we will deny ourselves the fulfillment and happiness we are capable of achieving in our lives. We were designed to be G-dly human beings, conduits for the cosmic heart.

"Let me sleep on it," we tell G-d.

What a night this is! The world goes haywire, says Master Kabbalist Rabbi Isaac Luria.[5] "During the night of Rosh Hashanah," he writes, "the consciousness animating the universe becomes weak." [6] The great Jewish mystics would feel physically weak during the night of Rosh Hashanah.[7] All of existence was brought into being for the sake of this marriage. If we refuse Him, the entire creation is in vain. The entire cosmos—every galaxy, every blade of grass, every grazing animal, every electron, genome, plant, and speck of dust—awaits our decision with trepidation.

The Bride Commits

On the morning of Rosh Hashanah, a piercing sound rises from the earth: The cry of the Shofar. It is a simple, unsophisticated cry, expressing a person's quintessential yearning to touch heaven.

We have decided. Our answer is, yes.[8]

The Wedding

The wedding day arrives. Yom Kippur is a day described as "the time of oneness"[9] in which the cosmic bride and groom forge a bond for eternity.[10]

In the Jewish tradition, the bride and groom fast on their wedding day.[11] On the day we unite with G-d, we abstain from food or drink as well.[12] The Talmud[13] teaches that upon marriage, all the sins of the groom and bride are forgiven.[14] That's why this day is called Yom Kippur, "the day of atonement (12)."

The marriage ceremony begins with the stirring melody of "Kol Nidrei," in which we annul our vows for the coming year. What is this all about? It is the courage we cultivate to remove the power from all those promises, vows, and addictions that tie us down, opening our neural pathways to new possibilities.

During these profound moments, we attempt to free ourselves from compulsive behavior and toxic habits and let go of the traumas, pains, resentments, animosity, anger, fear, and envy, that hold us hostage to dysfunction.[15]

The traditional Jewish marriage ceremony culminates with the bride and groom entering a secluded room ("cheder yichud" in Hebrew) to spend time alone with each other. Yom Kippur as well culminates with the Neilah, or closure prayer. As the sun of Yom Kippur sets, the gates of heaven close—with you inside.

During Neilah, every soul is alone with G-d.[16]

The Celebration

When the bride and groom exit their private room, the party begins. From Yom Kippur, we leap into the seven-day festival of Sukkot, described in the Torah[17] as "the time of our Joy." These days are filled with feasting and ecstatic happiness. Every Jewish family builds a hut, a Sukkah, outdoors, where they celebrate for seven days the marriage between G-d and His people.[18]

We eat, drink, sing, dance, and just enjoy being one with Oneness.

Intimacy

The wedding feast is over. The guests and relatives have returned home. In the consummation of the relationship, bride and groom experience intimacy, their lives melded together as husband and wife.

So too, following the seven days of Sukkot, we reach the zenith of the High Holiday season: Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah, described in the writings of the Arizal, the Tanya, and the Vilna Gaon[19] as the "time of intimacy with the Divine." During these two charged days the joy reaches its peak, as G-d and His people merge into a seamless whole. A Divine seed is planted in each of our hearts.

That's why we recite special prayers for rain on the festival of Shmini Atzeret. What is rain? In the midst of intimacy between heaven and earth, procreative drops from heaven are absorbed, fertilized, and nurtured by mother-earth, which in time will give birth to its botanical children.[20] Shmini Atzeres is the day of intimacy when all new souls to be born that year are spiritually conceived.

The Ordinary Month

The honeymoon comes to an end and the excitement begins to fade. Now the marriage becomes about caring for each other and demonstrating trust and loyalty, as husband and wife work through the daily grind of life.

Out of the twelve months in the Jewish calendar, the only one lacking a single festive day is the one that immediately follows the High Holiday season, the month of Cheshvan. Why? Because this is the time to build a genuine relationship with our marriage Partner in our everyday lives. No fanfare or drama, just learning to find meaning and love in the daily chores of life.[21]

This is the time to discover the joy born out of a continuous relationship with G-d, during the mundane days and nights that define the bulk of our life on planet earth. It is time to discover how ordinary moments and experiences can be extraordinary -- as long as the love is flowing in your veins.

(Please make even a small and secure contribution to help us continue our work. Click here.)

[1] See King Solomon's Song of Songs. Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah chapter 10. Tanya Shaar Hayechud V'haEmunah chapter 7. This theme pervades a large part of the Kabbalistic and Chassidic literature. In the Jewish mystical terminology, it is described as the creation being motivated by "Sefiras Hamalchus," i.e. G-d desire for a relationship with somebody outside and independent of Him (Cf. Tanya ibid; Likkutei Torah Tzav Maamar Hayam Raah and countless more discourses of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi and other Chassidic Masters.) [2] See Mishnah Taanis 26b. [3] The following ideas are based on various sources in the Kabbalistic and Chassidic literature. All of my sources are noted in the following footnotes. [4] Likkutei Torah Reah p. 32b. [5] Rabbi Isaac Luryah, the Arizal, passed away in Sefad on the 5th of Av 1572. [6] See Pre Eitz Chaim Shaar Rosh Hashnah. Cf. Sefer Hasichos 5752 Parshas Vaeira and references noted there. [7] See references in Sefer Hasichos ibid. [8] See Talmud Rosh Hashanah p. 16a and p. 34b. Cf. Pre Eitz Chaim Shaar Rosh Hashanah how the blowing of the Shofar accomplishes "Binyan Hamalchus," the dynamic relationship between man and G-d. [9] This is how the Mishnah (referenced in footnote #2) defines the day of Yom Kippur, "yom chasunaso." [10] Likkutei Torah Pinchas Maamar Kodesh Yisroel L'Hashem. Likkutei Sichos vol. 4 p. 1154. [11] Rama Even Haezer section 61., 63, 65. The first source for this custom, apparently, is Terumas Hadeshen section 109. [12] See Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:27-29. Numbers 29:7. [13] Talmud Yerushalmi Bikkurim chapter 3, p. 65. [14] See Beis Shmuel to Even Haezer 61 section 109, quoting Maharam Mintz section 109, that one of the reasons for fasting on the day of the wedding is because of it being a day of atonement. [15] Likkutei Torah Matos p. 85a. [16] Likkutei Sichos vol. 4 p. 1154. [17] This is the description of the holiday in all of the Amidah services of Sukkos, based on Deuteronomy 16:13;15. [18] See Sefer Haamarim Melukat vol. 1 p. 177 and references noted there. [19] Pre Eitz Hachaim Shaar Halulav chapter 8; Mishnas Chassidim Mesechte Sukkah chapter 12 Mishnah 8. Tanya Igeres HaKodesh section 20, p. 130b. [20] Sources in the previous footnote. The spiritual birth as a result of this "intimacy" occurs, according to the above sources, on the seventh day of Pesach. This is the mystical significance behind the splitting of the sea on that day, representing the "opening" of the cosmic "mother-womb" to give birth to the souls. Cf. above sources and Likkutei Torah Tzav Maamar Hayam Raah. [21] Sefer Hasichos 5749 pp. 38-47.

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Let's Be Zionists!

by R. Gidon Rothstein

Parshat Nitzavim

Lest I forget, this is the last Torah reading before Rosh HaShanah, so let me with you a ketivah ve-hatimah tovah. It's a double parsha, so instead of a concluding paragraph bringing together the ideas in this essay, I'll challenge you up front—what in the four comments I chose for Nitzavim justifies my title? Answers welcome to my email address, my first initial, first six letters of my last name (rothst) and it's a gmail address. Prize is satisfaction.

You Can Figure It Out

Among Moshe Rabbenu's encouragements, 30;11, he says the Torah is lo nifleit (in translations on Sefaria, not too baffling, abstruse, extraordinary, or hidden; the multiple readings are somewhat ironic in light of R. Mecklenburg's comment). HaKetav VeHaKabbalah thinks the verse comes to reassure us, despite difficulty we may face in understanding all the Torah's meanings.

Torah's depth of expression challenges us to find the full connotations of each word, particularly synonyms, or where the Torah uses two different words to the same effect. He chooses famous examples from the Aseret Ha-Dibberot, the Torah says zachor and shamor regarding Shabbat, lo tachmod and lo tit'aveh for the prohibition against coveting another's possessions.

Indubitably, he says, the words vary in meaning, intend different ideas. Unless we understand all their imports, we will not have plumbed the text's message.

It's hard work, R. Mecklenburg concedes, so Moshe wanted us to know it was doable, not beyond our capabilities.

Fighting One Battle, Misreading the Other

Three verses earlier, 30;8, the Torah promised the Jews would return to God and perform all the mitzvot. R. Hirsch points out verse two had already said much the same. He resolves the redundancy by assigning the earlier verse to exile, it speaks of Jews' return to full observance of what's doable outside Israel. This later verse speaks of repentance in the Land, once Hashem has restored us there. There is only one possible way to read the blessing in this section of the Torah, he says, three times, there will be an ingathering of exiles, brought to the promised Land. The prerequisite is Jews' return to full observance, after which their scatterings will be ended. Adherence to the Torah in Israel will fulfill the purpose of their being brought there.

Thank God, it seems God has granted us more of an ingathering, despite our many failings of observance, than R. Hirsch thought possible.

I think he was also more focused on the end of his comment, where he dismissed claims the Torah was outdated. In his time, mid- to late 1800s in Germany, many Jews (especially Reform) denied any continuing role for Israel in Jewish life, and R. Hirsch, staunch defender of the faith, was telling them how wrong they were.

No Matter How Far We Are Flung

Malbim picks apart the choice of adjective in 30;4, if *nidachacha*, your outcasts (or exiled ones), be at the end of the heavens. *Lehadiach* someone, says Malbim, is harsher than throwing away, means the object has been cast as far as possible, until there is nowhere else to cast him/them/it. There will be some Jews who are *nidachim*, who are as far away as possible (before World War I, I think the Jews of America were thought of as exactly that).

Now the verse switches roots, promises Hashem will be *mekabetz* those Jews, gather them in. (Malbim very much adopts the Vilna Gaon's concern with the connotations of synonyms. Here, the people will be *nidachim*, thrown away as far as could be, yet will be *mekubatzim*, regathered.) *Kibbutz* is not the reverse of *hadachah*, casting out; to Malbim, the word indicates Hashem will take us each individually (as *Yeshayahu* 27;22 says).

Indeed, in another outcome I'd have thought hardly imaginable in Malbim's time, so many of us have personal *Aliyah* stories, how Hashem worked it out for us to get here.

Can We See It?

R. David Tzvi Hoffmann was dissatisfied with the many readings he knew of the first verse chapter thirty (I'll leave out that discussion). Instead, he thinks it is telling us what will lead to the repentance promised in the rest of the chapter. When we experience God's blessings and punishments, and pay attention to the link, to how our lives go well when we fulfill the Torah, how we have hard times when we abandon it, we will see the underlying course of history.

In his view, the verse speaks of "among all the nations" to tell us we will arrive at this conclusion even there, since Hashem will have given us no peace or rest. In his view—accurate for some Jews in the past century, sadly not yet of others—the course of Jewish history will certify God's "Hand" in that history, will make clear to us the link between how we do in our relationship with God and how we progress in this world. May it become ever clearer for those who do not yet see it!

Parshat VaYeLech: Guideposts to Goodness

History Should Be Transparent

HaKetav VeHaKabbalah read Moshe's prediction of the people's sinfulness after he passes away, 29;29, similarly to what R. Hoffmann wrote for the beginning of chapter thirty. The upcoming song, *Ha'azinu*, will predict their troubles when they go wrong, to forestall their treating it like happenstance. Moshe is saying it now, to Source for *Selichos* Jews from saying it was unpredictable. It was in fact predicted, along with the reaction we are supposed to give it.

Contending with God

I once saw an idea of Elie Wiesel's, the angel gives Ya'akov the name *Yisrael ki sarita im Elokim*, for you have struggled with God. Jews struggle with God, Wiesel said. R. Hirsch infers something similar from the way Moshe phrases his description of the Jews' rebelliousness, 31;27. Rather than saying they were *mamrim bo*, rebelled against Him, or *oto*, at Him, as it were, Moshe says they were *mamrim im*, rebelled with.

Throughout Jewish history, starting already in the desert, Jews were never fully faithful, but also never fully sundered their ties to God. Always somewhat *mamrim*, and somewhat *im*, somewhat in rebellion, somewhat still with.

It is, says R. Hirsch a bit poetically, the root of all our troubles and the source of all our comfort.

The Experience of Hakhel

The middle of chapter thirty-one sets up a ceremony to occur once every seven years, during the *Sukkot* of the *shemittah* year, *Hakhel*. Jews are to gather in all their masses, to hear the Torah read, to be reminded of the importance of adhering to the Torah and its dictates.

Malbim to verses ten and eleven articulates ways the event was calculated to maximize its impact on attendees. First, seven years is rare enough for people to take note (it doesn't become common or rote, like saying *Tehillim* after every service). Second, people had more free time than usual during a *shemittah* year (the farmers, anyway), would have spent that time studying Torah, so this ceremony would build on what they had already done, would cap their year.

Third, when coming to Jerusalem, in some sense "more" in the Presence of God, people would focus on their spirituality, knowing God can see inside of them. This would be helped by the place itself, where God's Presence was palpable (as Ya'akov *Avinu* had already said, adds Malbim). Fifth, the king would read the Torah, and people always pay attention to what a king does. The words of the Torah themselves, being direct from God, would do their part, as would the size of the gathering, big crowds always making an impression.

A ceremony structured to be remembered.

Bible Critics Don't Know Better Than Chazal

The last comment we will see of R. David Tzvi Hoffmann's—he didn't write about *Ha'azinu* or *VeZot HaBerachah* that I could find—dismisses translations of 31;7 that led Biblical critics to amend the text. Back in 3;21, Moshe had told *Yehoshu'a* he would enter the Land with the elders of the Jewish people, *ata tavo*, where our verse has Moshe adjuring *Yehoshu'a* to bring the people to Israel, *tavi*.

Some translations—the *Peshitta*, *Vulgate*, and *Samaritan*—mitigated *tavi*, treated it as a *hif'il*, cause them to enter. Sensing the problem, others called to amend the text, have it read *tavo*, to fit the earlier verse.

R. Hoffmann first cites the *Septuagint*, which coheres with *Sanhedrin*8a, where R. Yochanan puts the two together.

Yehoshu'a is generally to lead the people with the elders at his side, but is also to remember, a la Harry Truman, where the buck stops, to remember he is the leader, will sometimes need to lead forcefully (R. Hoffmann singles out military strategy as a place for this).

Jews have never found it easy to serve God, R. Hirsch told us, although Hakhel and the course of history should have made it clear, Malbim and R. Mecklenburg added, even when we have had proper leadership, such as Yehoshu'a, who balanced sometimes working with the elders, sometimes being the one leader of the generation.

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subject: Meshech Chochmah on Nitzavim

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Nitzavim

Close at Heart

כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדְבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹ

For the matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart to do it (30:14)

Natural Assets

Hashem has endowed man with numerous assets and faculties which can serve him faithfully, provided he does not impair them. For example, the five senses are there to serve man, but can become de-sensitized through excessive and unhealthy behavior. Similarly, the world's resources are available to man, yet can prove inadequate if he engages in them excessively, turning yesterday's luxuries into today's necessities. With this in mind, the Meshech Chochmah explains the Mishnah's famous statement[1] regarding why humans can sometimes find it hard to make a living: "הִרְעוּתִי אֶת מַעֲשֵׂי וּקְפַחְתִּי אֶת פְּרוֹנְסוֹתַי – I corrupted my deeds and (thus) frustrated my livelihood." The relationship between these two phrases is that when one "corrupts his deeds" and becomes dependent on luxury items, making a living that requires their inclusion thereby becomes a frustrated endeavor.

The same is true with regards to matters of morals. Man has been endowed with a natural moral sense, valuing good and kindness while rejecting evil and injustice. However, these senses, too, can become dulled. If a person gives in to his baser drives, he can come to dull or even corrupt his natural sense of right and wrong. These forces serve to blind the person to basic truths which were once clear to him. Indeed, the person himself can sometimes recognize this blinding effect, for once his wrongful activity is over he regrets it, with all the justifications and rationalizations that accompanied it falling away. This is the meaning of the Gemara's statement[2] that after a person passes away, "his soul testifies against him." The recognition of the immoral nature of the person's acts is something that originally existed within the soul while the person was alive, but was then robbed of it by his desires.

Now, free of the skewing influences of the person's selfish drives, his soul is free to testify concerning these deeds with full clarity and conviction.

So, too, with regards to recognition that the world has Creator. The natural unfettered response to seeing a world which caters for all of man's needs is to conclude that Someone ordered it in this way. This was the way Avraham came to an awareness of Hashem. Here, too, one can choose to give in to forces which are not prepared to recognize Hashem, at which point he will be forced to come up with much more elaborate explanations as to how all these things came into being and exists in the way that they do.

All of these ideas are summed up in Shlomo Hamelech's words in Koheles:[3]

אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים – יִשָּׂר אֶת הָאָדָם יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּקִשּׁוֹ הַשְּׂבִנוֹת רַבִּים

For God made man upright, while they pursued many calculations.

Hashem created man in a state which was "upright" (yashar) where certain key truths and values were clear to him. Part of man giving into corrupting influences is that he is then forced to "pursue many calculations" in propounding ideas that fit in with the way he wishes to live his life.

"The Book of Man's Source"

The implications of the above idea is that man innately possesses the ability to make correct moral decisions, as well as the capacity to recognize Hashem based on his observation of the world. These are the two areas the basics of which comprise the seven Noachide laws. With this in mind, the Meshech Chochmah offers a fascinating explanation of a statement in the Talmud Yerushalmi.[4] R' Akiva famously says that "וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ – love your neighbor like yourself,"[5] is a "כלל גדול בתורה" – major principle in the Torah." To this Ben Azzai responds, there is a greater principle still, contained within the verse: "זֶה סֵפֶר תּוֹלְדוֹת אָדָם – This is the book of the generations of man." [6]

This response of Ben Azzai is quite difficult to understand. It is not readily apparent how that verse about the generations of man constitutes a principle at all, much less the greatest of all principles!

The Meshech Chochmah explains that Ben Azzai expounds this verse as saying that not only is man obligated by the Torah to treat his fellow fairly and correctly – man himself is a book where that command can be read! The word "תולדות" refers to how things emanate. As long as man is close to his initial uncorrupted mode of emanation ("תולדות אדם" – the emanation of man), his natural sense is in accord with moral behavior, which makes his very being the equivalent of a book or moral instruction. It is with this in mind that verse concludes by saying that man was created "בְּדְמוּת אֱלֹהִים – in the likeness of God." Hashem, the ultimate Source of moral instruction, has made Man in his likeness, endowing him with a sense of moral behavior to instruct him on Hashem's behalf.

The Jewish People and the Torah

