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from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org> to: weeklydt@torahweb2.org
date: Wed, Sep 9, 2015 at 8:32 PM subject: Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky - Reaching our Destination

**Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky
Reaching our Destination**

Closeness to Hashem is a primary theme of the upcoming Aseres Yemei Teshuva. The navi Yeshayahu describes a time when Hashem is especially close and Chazal have the tradition that this is referring specifically to this time of the year. In Parshas Nitzavim Moshe beseeches the Jewish people not to view "this mitzvah" as being far away but rather it is very near to us. According to the Ramban "this mitzva" is teshuva and thus these pesukim are especially appropriate to read right before Aseres Yemei Teshuva.

How does one attain closeness to Hashem? When a person is distant from a geographic location he desires to reach he must travel on the road that will take him there. Similarly, there is a road to travel to reach Hashem. In addition, just as there are impediments that prevent one from reaching a physical destination, so too there are factors that prevent one from achieving spiritual goals.

In Sefer Melachim we learn that Yeravam, the king of the northern kingdom, was concerned that his position would be weakened if the Jews under his rule would travel to Yerushalayim which was located in the southern kingdom. He therefore implemented a two pronged system to prevent the people from being influenced by Yerushalayim: he set up physical roadblocks to turn back those who wished to travel to Yerushalayim and he also set up an idolatrous temple that would serve as an alternative for those seeking the religious experience of visiting the Beis Hamikdash.

When traveling on a physical journey there are two things that can prevent us from reaching our destination: there are "roadblocks", such as traffic or construction which we often encounter on today's roads, and there is also the possibility of getting lost. A wrong turn can take us miles in the wrong direction.

As we travel on a spiritual journey we are faced with similar challenges. First, there are "roadblocks" of different types on the way. When we feel we are not accomplishing our goals we often want to turn around and go back; frustrated by the "traffic and construction" we question whether we will ever reach our desired destination. Second, there are also wrong turns - thinking we are heading to "Yerushalayim" we may end up in a very different place. One small detour can lead us in the opposite direction from the one we want to reach.

When traveling today many of us avail ourselves of technology that addresses these two potential obstacles on our course. We are no longer as concerned about traffic since Waze weaves us around the most difficult traffic jams and also gives such precise directions that we no longer fear making a wrong turn and getting lost for miles. Even if we miss a turn, we are immediately rerouted to enable us to reach our correct destination.

As we travel down the road of spirituality there is a time-tested system that will enable us to reach our final destination and avoid any roadblocks or wrong turns: closeness to Hashem. The mitzvah we read about in Parshas Nitzvaim which is described as being so close to us and was understood by the Ramban to refer to teshuva is understood by Rashi to refer to Talmud Torah. These two views are not contradictory, but rather complimentary. Teshuva to attain the desired closeness to Hashem can only come through Torah. Studying Torah will prevent us from getting stuck in the obstacles along the way or getting lost.

Especially at this time of the year let us be certain we are traveling in the right direction and not getting delayed by obstacles along the way. Let us listen carefully to the directions the Torah gives us as we are guided to our destination. Only the Torah will enable us to reach our desired goal of closeness to Hashem. May we all merit attaining that closeness during the

days ahead and may we remain inspired to maintain that closeness throughout our lives.

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Sep 10, 2015 at 5:19 PM

Why Is It So Hard to Change? Six Obstacles to Teshuva
Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski

September 19, 2012 in Jewish Living

“Of course a person should do teshuvah, but I am a bit puzzled. I observe Shabbos, I keep kosher and taharas hamishpachah. I daven every day, I attend a Daf Yomi shiur and I am honest in my business dealings. What exactly should I do teshuvah for?”

People may not actually say this, but some certainly think this way. Yet King Solomon said, “For there is no man so fully righteous that he always does good and never sins” (Ecclesiastes 7:20). Even the greatest tzaddik is not free of sin. How, then, can a person who is quite far from being a perfect tzaddik not feel a need to do teshuvah?

Several psychological defense mechanisms tend to discourage an individual from changing, from doing teshuvah. The obstacles to teshuvah are denial, rationalization, trivializing, projection, habituation and ego.

1) Denial Throughout Tanach, the prophets repeatedly exhorted the Jewish people to abandon their errant behavior, but as is evident from the Scriptures, they were not very successful. Isaiah explains why. “Surely you hear, but you fail to comprehend; and surely you see, but you fail to know. This people is fattening its heart, hardening its ears and sealing its eyes, lest it see with its eyes and hear with its ears and understand with its heart, so that it will repent and be healed” (Isaiah 6:9-10). No psychology text can improve on Isaiah’s description of denial. Because people are intent on doing whatever they wish, they resort to denial, one of the best-known defense mechanisms so that they are unaffected by the reality of what they see and hear.

We are creatures of habit, and we are comfortable when we can do things without the need to exert much effort. Change is uncomfortable, and in order to avoid this discomfort, our minds block out those realizations that would call for change. The natural state of all matter—including human beings—is inertia, but one must force himself to overcome inertia in order to grow and change.

2) Rationalization Denial enables a person to maintain the status quo. When reality threatens to overcome denial, the mind employs other defense mechanisms to reinforce the denial—such as rationalization. One of the themes in Proverbs is the tendency to rationalize. Ramchal says, “If a person is confronted with one’s laziness, one will doubtless come back with many quotations culled from the sages and the Scriptures and with intellectual arguments, all supporting, according to his misguided mind, his leniency with himself” (Mesillas Yesharim, Chapter 6).

Denial is not always possible, so the mind is very clever in rationalizing; in other words, justifying one’s actions by giving logical-sounding reasons for them. The Torah stresses the gravity of speaking lashon hara, for example, which requires both teshuvah vis-à-vis Hashem and forgiveness from the victim. Oftentimes one who speaks lashon hara may attempt to justify his behavior by claiming “But it’s the truth!” Defamatory speech is lashon hara, even if it is true.

3) Habituation The Talmud says that when a person does a forbidden act several times, it loses its opprobrium. Habituation enables one to think that these transgressions are permissible. His conscience is lulled into thinking, It’s really not so terrible. Thus, even though the morning minyan begins promptly at 6:30 am and ends at 7:05, there are some minyannaires who habitually show up at 6:45 and leave before everyone else. They are so accustomed to arriving late and davening at breakneck speed, they see nothing wrong with it.

4) Projection One who projects onto another will not be able to do genuine teshuvah. Sins committed against another person are not forgiven on Yom Kippur unless one has obtained forgiveness from the offended individual. The defense mechanism of projection turns things around: I did not offend him. He offended me. He should really be apologizing to me.

5) Trivializing The tendency to trivialize halachah is another impediment in the road to teshuvah. I missed Minchah, but I was so busy at the office. Anyway, it’s not a big deal. Or, I chatted with my friend during the Reading of the Torah, but doesn’t everybody? (This is the only sin for which the Shulchan Aruch says, “There is no forgiveness.”)

6) Ego Inasmuch as teshuvah for an offense against another person requires that one make amends and ask forgiveness, there is ego resistance to humbling oneself, apologizing and making restitution where required.

One of the axioms of human behavior is that a person will always choose to do that which is most comfortable for him. We find that an addict will not agree to change until he hits “rock-bottom,” i.e., that the pain incident to the addiction is greater than the pleasure it provides. This is equally true of the non-addict. Therefore, oftentimes individuals only agree to change when they have reached rock-bottom.

But what can constitute rock-bottom for the non-addict? A person who contemplates his life goals and sees that his behavior is jeopardizing his reaching those goals may reach rock-bottom. But this requires giving serious thought to defining one’s goals and purpose in life. Confronting death can usually lead to such introspection. I recently attended the funeral of a great talmid chacham. A man next to me said somewhat somberly, “Reb Z. is taking along with him much Torah and mitzvos. What will I be taking along?”

The first chapter in Mesillas Yesharim is entitled “A Person’s Obligation in His World.” The theme of Mesillas Yesharim is the refinement of one’s character. Changing one’s character traits is a major challenge and is usually met with great resistance. Many times real change won’t happen until one realizes that unless one does so, his life is meaningless.

Uncompromised honesty is necessary to see through the psychological defenses that are a barrier to teshuvah. Rosh Hashanah, the Ten Days of Penitence and Yom Kippur are days in which one should be inspired to evaluate the meaning of one’s life. Only when we are aware that we need “fixing” will we do teshuvah.

The founder and medical director emeritus of Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, Rabbi Abraham Twerski, MD, is one of the country’s leading experts on drug and alcohol rehabilitation. He is the author of numerous books and his column is regularly featured in Jewish Action.

This article was featured in Jewish Action Fall 2012.

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The Fast of Gedalyah

The Measure of a Man

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Rosh Beit Midrash, YU Torah Mit Zion Zichron Dov Beit Midrash of Toronto

The Fast of Gedalyah, Version 1 In the fourth year of the reign of Persian King Darius, a small band of Jews made its way from Babylon to Jerusalem, where the new Beit haMikdash was under construction. Acting on behalf of Babylonian Jewry, they put a question to the prophet Zecharyah: “Shall we continue to fast in the fifth month,” observing Tishah b’Av?1 As explained by Radak, the Jews of Babylon knew of the struggles of the Jews who had returned to Israel, and they were uncertain whether to view the troubled restoration of Jews to their ancestral land as full redemption.2 To this Zecharyah responded that the fasts had never been of central importance to G-d; rather, the Divine emphasis was on heeding the words of the prophets. The fasts themselves would be abolished in the Second Beit haMikdash,

transformed into days of joy.³ As part of his response,⁴ Zechariah listed "the fast of the fourth, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth." The Talmud explains each numerical reference, offering the following commentary regarding "the fast of the seventh," the Fast of Gedalyah: "The fast of the seventh"—This is the third of Tishrei, on which Gedalyah ben Achikam was killed. And who killed him? Yishmael ben Netanyah killed him. This teaches you that the death of the righteous is equal to the burning of the house of our G-d. And why does the text call it "the seventh"? [It is in] the seventh month. Rosh haShanah 18b This passage states we fast on the third day of Tishrei because a righteous person, Gedalyah, was murdered. The existence of a fast memorializing the death of a righteous person teaches that such a tragedy must be viewed as equal to the event that triggered other fasts, the destruction of the Beit haMikdash.⁶

The Fast of Gedalyah, Version 2 The Talmud's catalyst for the Fast of Gedalyah seems to be contradicted by Rambam, in his enumeration of fast days in Mishneh Torah: The third day of Tishrei: when Gedalyah ben Achikam was killed and the remaining ember of Israel was extinguished, leading to the completion of their exile. Hilchot Taaniyot 5:2 Rambam alludes to the greater context of Gedalyah's death: After Babylonian King Nevuchadnezzar destroyed the Beit haMikdash, he permitted a small population of Jews to remain in Israel under the leadership of a Jewish governor, Gedalyah ben Achikam. Ba'alis, king of Amon, hired a Jew from the royal line, Yishmael ben Netanyah, to assassinate Gedalyah.⁷ Gedalyah received word of the plot, but he dismissed the rumors, and Yishmael killed him in the month of Tishrei.⁸ The rest of the Jews, fearing that Nevuchadnezzar would see the assassination of his representative as a revolt against him, fled to Egypt. Thus ended a millennium of formal Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel.⁹ Certainly, Rambam's added cause for fasting resonates with the reader, but it seems to fly in the face of the Talmud's version of the Fast of Gedalyah, which emphasizes the death of a single righteous person. Why does Rambam make this the central feature of the fast?

A Tale of Two Fastes Chatam Sofer¹⁰ sought to resolve the competing versions of the catalyst for the Fast of Gedalyah. Basing himself on passages from the traditional kinot of Tishah b'Av, Chatam Sofer contended that after the Beit haMikdash was destroyed, no additional loss would warrant a new day of mourning. Instead, all future tragedies would be commemorated on Tishah b'Av.¹¹ The sages of the Talmud knew this, and in our passage they addressed two implicit questions: • Why is Gedalyah's death mourned on a day other than Tishah b'Av? • If there is to be a special fast to mark the death of the righteous, why choose Gedalyah's death, as opposed to the death of some other righteous person? To these questions the Talmud responded in two parts: • "The death of the righteous is equal to the burning of the house of our G-d," which is why we need a distinct day to mark the loss of righteous individuals.¹² • "Who killed him? Yishmael ben Netanyah killed him," precipitating the end of the Jewish community in Israel, which is why this death, in particular, is chosen for commemorating the death of all righteous individuals.¹³ As Chatam Sofer explains, Rambam mentioned only the answer to the second question—the end of the Jewish community in Israel—in order to emphasize that the Fast of Gedalyah commemorates the death of righteous individuals through the ages, because of the great national devastation which resulted from the death of this individual.

The Measure of a Man Chatam Sofer's approach resolves the apparent conflict between the Talmudic and Maimonidean explanations for the Fast of Gedalyah, but it raises a new question: Why do we need to learn the lesson that "the death of the righteous is equal to the burning of the house of our G-d"? We know well the value of a righteous person's life! We who are taught to violate almost every biblical law in order to save a life, we who have seen the impact of a Moshe, a Miriam, a King David upon the Jewish people, we who have suffered the passing of thousands of righteous people through the ages, surely we recognize that the loss of a righteous person can devastate the nation as a whole? Another version of the Talmudic lesson may offer

some insight; the Tosefta records a slightly different text: "The fast of the seventh"—This is the third of Tishrei, on which Gedalyah ben Achikam was killed, for Yishmael ben Netanyah killed him. This teaches you that the death of the righteous is as harsh before G-d as the destruction of the Beit haMikdash. And why is it named "seventh"? For it is in the seventh month. Tosefta Sotah 6:10 This Tosefta teaches that the lesson of the Fast of Gedalyah is not regarding the gravity of human grief when a righteous person passes on. Rather, the prophetic institution¹⁴ of the Fast of Gedalyah sends the message of Divine grief at the passing of a righteous human being.

In truth, our sages teach that only one's spouse¹⁵ or one's beneficiaries¹⁶ are truly affected by one's death, but perhaps that only refers to the human plane. According to our Tosefta, G-d mourns as well, and His grief at the passing of the righteous matches even His grief at the burning of the Beit haMikdash. Although G-d has suffered no distancing from the deceased—indeed, the soul of the righteous is said to be bound at the Divine throne¹⁷—nonetheless, the righteous person is no longer active in this world, and for this G-d is described as "grieving" as well. Or as King David averred, "The death of His pious ones is difficult in His eyes."¹⁸ Thus the Fast of Gedalyah teaches humanity the measure of its existence and potential; we harbor within ourselves the G-d-given capacity to become a living equivalent of the Beit haMikdash, a sanctified and sanctifying home for G-d on earth.¹⁹ The loss of that capacity is tragic in the celestial realms. If Tishah b'Av is a fast for the Divine loss of His wood and stone home on Earth, then the Fast of Gedalyah is a fast for the Divine loss of His flesh and blood home on Earth, the loss of a place where the Shechinah could rest even without grand architecture, and the loss of the one home is equal to the loss of the other.²⁰

The Fast of Gedalyah: Day of Inspiration The Fast of Gedalyah, with its statement about human potential, comes at an ideal time on our calendar. True, the murder of Gedalyah is made more shocking by the realization that it occurred during the Ten Days of Repentance,²¹ but observing this fast between Rosh haShanah and Yom Kippur also may provide an infusion of inspiration. Our sages²² teach us to see our world as balanced between good and evil, and our own actions as the added weight that could incline it either way. The Fast of Gedalyah, for all of its grief, provides the same empowering message. Twice in our past, for a collective period of 900 years, a sanctuary offered humanity the opportunity to sense the presence of the Divine, and to draw close. But each and every morning, for the more than 33 centuries since Sinai, we have woken up with the potential to match the achievements of that building, to bring the presence of G-d into this world. This is the message of Tishah b'Av's twin, the Fast of Gedalyah. May we absorb the message, and live up to our potential in the year to come.

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The Future of the Past

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

It's strange, very strange. Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of the aseret yemei teshuvah, the ten days of repentance. We reflect on the past year, recall the bad we did and the good we failed to do, apologise, confess and ask for forgiveness.

Yet there's almost none of this on Rosh Hashanah. There is no confession, no Ashamnu bagadnu, no Al chet, no reference to the past year, no looking back. One of the few references to the fact that we are embarking on a process of teshuvah is the Unetaneh Tokef prayer reminding us that today our fate is being written: who will live and who will die.

Surely the beginning of the days of repentance should begin with repentance? The answer is one of the deepest truths of Judaism. To mend the past, first you have to secure the future.

I learned this from the Holocaust survivors I came to know. They were among the most extraordinary people I've ever met, and I wanted to understand how they were able to survive, knowing what they knew, seeing what they saw.

What I came to realise was that many of them did not speak about those years, even to their spouses or their children, sometimes for as long as forty or fifty years. Only when they had secured the future did they allow themselves to look back at the past. Only when they had built a life did they permit themselves to remember death.

That was when I understood two strange characters in the Torah, Noah and Lot's wife. After the flood, it seems, Noah looked back. Overwhelmed by grief he sought refuge in wine. Before the flood he was the only person in the whole of Tanakh to be called righteous, yet he ended his days drunk and dishevelled. Two of his sons were ashamed to look at him.

Lot's wife disobeyed the angels, turned back to look at the destruction of Sodom and was turned into a pillar of salt. I think the Holocaust survivors knew that if they turned and looked back they too would be reduced to the salt of tears.

Jews survived every tragedy because they looked forward. When Sarah died, Abraham was 137 years old. He had just lost the woman who had shared his life's journey and who had twice saved his life. He might have been paralysed by grief. Yet this is what we read: "Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and weep for her. Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife" (Gen. 23: 2-3): a mere ten words in Hebrew.

We then read how Abraham bought the first plot of land in Israel and arranged for a wife for his son. Long before, God had promised him children and a land. By the time Sarah died he owned no land, and had one unmarried child. Instead of complaining to God that He had not fulfilled his promises, he understood that he had to take the first step. First he had to build the future. That was how he honoured the past.

And that's what we do on Rosh Hashanah. The Torah readings are about the miraculous birth of two children, Isaac to Sarah and Samuel to Hannah, because children are our deepest investment in the future. We proclaim God's sovereignty as if the day is a coronation, the beginning of a new era. Then, having committed ourselves to the coming year, on the intervening days and Yom Kippur we can turn and apologise for last year. Paradoxically in Judaism the future comes before the past.

This one insight could transform the world. After the Holocaust, Jews didn't sit paralysed by grief. They built the future, above all the land and state of Israel. If other nations really cared about the future instead of trying to avenge the wrongs of the past, we would have peace in some of the world's worst conflict zones.

And so it is with us. First we have to focus on building a better future. Then and only then we can redeem the past.

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Parshat Nitzavim 5775- Rabbi Berel Wein

SELICHOT Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
SELICHOT The custom of reciting special penitential prayers before Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is an ancient one. It certainly dates back to the time of the Geonim in Babylonia, if not even earlier. The custom of the Sefaradim is to recite these prayers beginning with the entire month of Elul until Yom Kippur. The custom of the Ashkenazim is to begin the recitation of these prayers the week before Rosh Hashana and to continue their recitation also until Yom Kippur. These prayers have been layered over centuries though the format that is currently used in most synagogues has been pretty much established since the seventeenth century. Tens of scholars and poets have contributed to composing the liturgy of these prayers, within which much of the history of the Jewish people and their exile has been recorded. Since the prayers are almost all written in a poetic form, their vocabulary and structural format is often times difficult for the average Jew to fathom and appreciate. Nevertheless, these prayers have become hallowed in Jewish tradition and have stood the test of time in a tireless and amazing fashion. The choice of which prayers were to be recited was really a democratic one – with the people reciting the prayers themselves choosing which prayers to

recite – and a practical one dictated by the printers who produced these special prayer books. The printers were interested in space on the page and as a result some of the greatest and most poignant prayers were never included in the printed version. Some were too long or too short or too unwieldy to fit neatly fit onto the printed page. Jewish tradition treated this anomaly – the luck of the draw, so to speak – as being heavenly inspired and not just random human choice. Because of this belief in a supernatural hand guiding the ritual of selichot, this prayer service has remained static for most of the last five centuries. The rebirth of the Jewish people in the State of Israel over the past decades has forced us to take a new look at the format and contents of these penitential prayers. There has been much experimentation regarding the traditional service here in Israel. There are those who feel that our return to national sovereignty in our ancient homeland dictates a new look at the words that we recite. We have seen that in the kinnot recited on Tisha B'Av, new prayers have been inserted to commemorate the tragedy and disaster of the Holocaust of World War II. There also exists an entire special prayer service to mark Israel Independence Day and also Yom Yerushalayim. Even though these additions to our established prayer services are not yet fully adopted by all sections of the Jewish world, it is fair to say that they have secured some sort of place of permanence within religious Jewry. However, there certainly is a built-in resistance to any sort of change, be it addition or subtraction, in the established format and ritual of our time honored services. A new format for the selichot services has recently been published and here in Israel. It is entitled Selicht Eretz Yisrael. It was edited and revised by a number of scholarly rabbis of the national religious Zionist movement. It uses modern Hebrew and has eliminated much of the prose and style of the prayers of old. It has considerably shortened the surface itself and contains new prayers, composed to be more relevant and understandable in current Israeli society.

After perusing this work, I decided for myself to stick with the old format and its contents. Of course I realize that this is partially a generational thing and that people of my hoary age are very reluctant to accept change to long-held and time-honored traditions, rituals and habits. Yet, I must say that the new version is an almost heartless work. There is very little emotion in modern Israeli Hebrew as it is spoken and written. And it certainly lacks the overlay of tradition and the innate feeling that one has knowing that one is praying not only to the God of one's fathers but using the same words that his father and grandfather did in faraway places and under different circumstances. To me the old selichot, archaic and obtuse as they may be are the proper introduction to the days of judgment and mercy that are upon us. The new version will undoubtedly gain in popularity amongst certain sections and perhaps later generations of Israeli society. But it does not yet speak to me or for me. Shabbat shalom Berel Wein

NITZAVIM Rabbi Berel Wein

One of the more obvious lessons taught to us by the book of Dvarim is the eternity and immutability of the covenant between God and the Jewish people. There are all sorts of difficulties and tragedies forecast for the Jewish people from the time of Moshe forward. And, unfortunately, these sad events have all come to pass. Nevertheless, nowhere is it indicated that the covenant between God and Israel will be broken or ended. There will be punishment galore for violating the covenant but the covenant itself remains untouched, viable and binding for all eternity. It is this understanding of the covenant that makes the situation and history of the Jewish people so unique and singular. Deep down in our inner souls we are all aware that we are bound to one another and to our Creator by this unchanging and unbreakable covenant. It haunts us in our daily and national lives. It is the unseen hand of our diplomatic and foreign policy. It alone explains the survival of the Jewish people throughout all of the vicissitudes of our long and painful history. It alone explains why there are currently well over six million Jews living in the State of Israel in spite of all the inherent superficial problems and dangers that this poses. We may, in weak moments, not live up

to our obligations under the covenant, but we have never truly forsaken it nor believed that it could somehow be annulled or canceled. The reinforcement of this idea by Moshe in his final oration to the Jewish people is meant to reassert the timelessness and effectiveness of this covenant. This message reverberates in our ears and hearts to this very day. Usually, covenants and contracts are mutually dependent. A breach of the covenant by one of the parties almost automatically frees the other party from its obligations. However God's covenant with Israel is an exception to this rule. We have breached the covenant many times but we are all aware that somehow the Lord is still bound on His end of the deal. This is implicit in the words of the prophet Malachi that "I, the Lord, have not changed, and you, the people of Israel have not been destroyed." God, so to speak, will not backtrack on His end of the covenant. Therefore it should be apparent that we cannot avoid the consequences of that covenant. We are bound to the covenant because the Lord God, the other party, will not allow us to withdraw from its obligations and consequences. It is interesting to note that in spite of centuries of denial by Christianity and Islam, much of the world still believes that there is a covenant between God and the Jewish people. This belief reflects itself in many different ways and attitudes (not all of them positive) of the non-Jewish world to the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Nevertheless, the instinct of humanity reaffirms that the covenant referred to in this week's Torah reading is binding and effective, demanding and challenging. We should also be aware of this truth. Shabbat shalom

From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> reply-to: do-not-reply@torah.org to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Thu, Sep 10, 2015 at 12:05 PM subject: Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Netzavim These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: CD # 1000, Ta'Amei Hamikra – The Tropp: How Important Is It? Good Shabbos!

Parshas Nitzavim begins with the words "You are standing today (Atem Nitzavim Hayom), all of you, before Hashem, your G-d: Your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your officers – all the men of Israel." [Devorim 29:9]

The Baal HaTurim in Shmos [19:4] notes that there are only four pasukim in all of Tanach that begin with the word "Atem" [You, plural]. The four places are:

Shmos 5:11 - "You go take straw from wherever you find it (Atem k'chu lachem teven), for nothing will be reduced from your work."; Shmos 19:4 - "You saw (Atem re'eesem) that which I did to Egypt and I carried you on the wings of eagles and I brought you to Me"; The above quoted pasuk at the beginning of our Parsha (Atem Nitzavim); and Yeshaya 43:10 - "You are my witnesses said Hashem (Atem Ayday ne'um Hashem) and My servant who I have chosen, so that you will know and believe in Me, and understand that I am He; before Me nothing was created by a god nor will there be after Me!" This is a classic enigmatic comment of the Baal HaTurim. What is the connection between these four occurrences of "Atem" at the beginning of a pasuk? What is the common denominator here?

The Sefer HaDrash v'ha'Iyun from the Reische Rav suggests an explanation. [The Reische Rav, besides being a tremendous Talmid Chochom, was also a member of the Polish Parliament. He happens to also be the grandfather of the famous constitutional lawyer Nathan Lewin of Washington, D.C.] HaDrash v'ha'Iyun says we see a fundamental change in the history of the Jewish people. When we first began as a nation, we were the beneficiaries of open miracles (nissim geluyim). The Almighty performed acts for us that openly defied nature. The whole story of the Exodus, beginning with the burning bush and continuing throughout all the plagues, was full of open miracles. We were living an existence in which the Ribono shel Olam literally changed the laws of nature on our behalf. That miraculous era lasted throughout the whole sojourn in the wilderness. The man, the Clouds of Glory, the Well of Miriam were all super natural phenomenon.

As they approached the Land of Israel, they still experienced open miracles but open miracles were on the decline. Nowadays, we no longer experience open miracles. Our history started out with many open miracles and today we are in a status where open miracles do not occur at all.

The Reische Rav says that this is a misreading of history. It is not true that we no longer have "nissim geluyim" today. An ongoing open miracle is still occurring – namely, the mere fact that we still exist to tell the tale.

Rav Yakov Emden (Yavetz), in the introduction to his Siddur, writes: "As G-d Lives, when I think about the miracle of the continued existence of our nation it is as amazing to me as the Exodus from Egypt." It is certainly a documented fact (as we say in the Hagaddah) that in each and every generation they rise up against us to destroy us and (miraculously) the Holy One Blessed Be He saves us from their hand. The Yavetz goes on to marvel that the miracle of the continued existence of the nation (against such odds and in the face of such persecution) is not a one-time miracle (as were the events surrounding the Exodus) but is a constant miracle which occurs in each and every generation and throughout the generations.

When Fredrick the Great asked the wise men of his court for a succinct proof of the existence of G-d, he was given a two word answer: "The Jews". One needs no greater proof that there must be a G-d in Heaven than the fact that we still exist as a people.

I am sure we are all familiar with the famous essay ("Concerning the Jews") that Mark Twain published in Harper's Magazine in 1899 in which he makes exactly the same point.

The Reische Rav says that with this thought in mind we can understand the four times when a pasuk begins with the word "Atem", as pointed out by the Baal HaTurim. When Klal Yisrael were in Egypt, enslaved and oppressed by wicked people, they wondered: How could it be that "You must now take straw from wherever you can find it"? How could they be subject to such degradation? The answer to that question is the nest "Atem". "You saw what I have done to Egypt..." You saw that the situation of enslavement and persecution was only a temporary condition. You are in fact the Am Segulah [Treasured Nation], the Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation. In spite of the fact that you had to endure the terrible hell of Egypt, ultimately this was for the good of the nation as our Sages tell us. In the end "You saw (Atem Re'eesem) that which I did to Egypt."

However, there will come a point in Jewish History when Klal Yisrael will ask a different question. The question will be "Why don't we see miracles anymore? Why do we feel this sense of abandonment?" The answer to that question is "You are standing today, all of you (Atem Nitzavim hayom, kulchem)." You still exist. This is the biggest proof that there is a G-d who Loves us and Keeps us and continues to take care of us in spite of what we sometimes think is abandonment.

At the end of the days, Atem Aidai – You will be the testimony to that. The mere fact that Klal Yisrael still exists is the biggest proof that the Ribono shel Olam is still in heaven, He still cares for us, and He still watches over us.

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From: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com> to: daf-hashavua@shemayisrael.com date: Thu, Sep 10, 2015 at 8:48 PM subject: Daf Hashavua by **Kollel Beis HaTalmud** - Parshas Nitzavim

Close Encounters

by Rabbi Yosef Levinson

In this week's parsha, The Torah states: "For this mitzva that I command you today... is not distant ... rather the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and heart, to fulfil it." (Devarim 30:11-14). The Rambam explains that the passuk is referring to the mitzva of teshuva, repentance. Even if you are living in the farthest corners of the earth amongst the nations of the world, you can still repent. It is not too difficult or distant, rather, it is very close whatever time or place. Teshuva is in your mouth and in your heart. All that is necessary is to verbally confess your sins and return in your heart to Hashem and to accept upon yourself to observe the Torah. This passuk can also be understood as a reference to tefilla - it is in your mouth - through tefilla we are able to return to Hashem. This was discussed last year (see Tefilla - the "Rite of Return").

Rashi, however, explains that the passuk refers to limud HaTorah, Torah study. In this vein, Rashi writes that the Torah is not in heavens, that you can say who can ascend to the heavens - for if it were in the heavens, we would have to go up to learn it. Rashi continues, "Rather the Torah is very close... it is in your mouth and in your heart" - the Torah was given to us in writing, Torah Sheb'Kasav, and orally, Torah Sheba'al Peh.

Yet how can man ever hope to understand the Torah, which is the Davar Hashem, the Word of G-d and is therefore beyond the scope of human comprehension? And why don't we have to ascend to the heavens to learn it?

Reb Yerucham writes that before the Giving of the Torah, it was truly in Shamayim and no human could relate to it (with the exception of a few select individuals such as Avraham Avinu upon whom Hashem bestowed His knowledge). However, Moshe ascended to Shamayim, staying there forty days and nights and afterwards he brought it Torah down to us. Now it is within our ability to learn. Furthermore, the Torah is actually part of our very essence. The Gra writes that the phrase "v'chayei olam nata b'socheinu", and He implanted within us eternity (Birchas HaTorah and U'va L'Tzion), refers to Torah Sheba'al Peh. When we learn, we are not acquiring new knowledge, but rather, we draw out the Torah knowledge that is implanted within each Jew. We are all living Sifrei Torah. When we apply ourselves, we bring forth this dormant inner wealth.

Today, every section of Torah is available in print, and a wealth of Torah is available in the vernacular. This provides a tremendous opportunity for all Jews, no matter where they live and regardless of their background to open a Jewish book and experience Torah learning. Even a non-Jew could do so, however, Torah remains the possession of the Jewish people. Reb Yerucham relates that the Czar of Russia was once taught a certain section from the Talmud. And although he reviewed it many times, he said afterwards that he could not understand the Gemara.

The Shela Hakodesh also maintains that this passuk refers to limud HaTorah. He writes that each of the 248 positive mitzvos corresponds to one of the 248 limbs of the body and each of the 365 negative commandments corresponds to one of the 365 veins and arteries of the body. Each positive mitzvah that one fulfils and each negative commandment that one is careful not to transgress nourishes its corresponding limb or vein. However, if one neglects one of the mitzvos or commits a sin, he blemishes the parallel limb or vein of his neshama. The Shela then notes that it is impossible for any one individual to observe all 613 mitzvos. Some mitzvos apply only to kohanim; others, only in Eretz Yisrael or when the Beis Hamikdash stood. Still, others apply only in rare circumstances, e.g., if one's brother dies without children and there is a mitzvah for him to marry his brother's widow (yibum). If that is the case, how can one properly prepare his neshama for the Next World and prevent his neshama from being a ba'al mum (blemished)?

The Shela answers that if one fulfils those mitzvos that he is capable of performing and learns the sections of the Torah related to all the mitzvos, it is considered as if he fulfilled the entire Torah. This is alluded to in the passage here. "For this commandment that I command you today is not hidden from you...". This refers to those mitzvos that are hidden from one and are impossible to fulfil, e.g., mitzvos that apply to kohanim. "...And it is

not distant...". This refers to mitzvos that are possible to fulfil but circumstances are rare, e.g., Yibum. "...Nor is it across the sea...". This refers to mitzvos that can only be performed in Eretz Yisrael thereby exempting one who lives across the sea. The Torah says that one should not say that it is hidden, far, in the heavens or across the sea. Rather, it is very near to you, in your mouths and in your hearts to learn and delve into it. The passuk ends with the words "to perform it". All that precedes these final words is given on condition that one performs those mitzvos that he can fulfil.

Let us appreciate the Torah that Hashem has given us. Although it is heavenly and beyond man, not only did Hashem give us the Torah, but He also placed it in our souls. It is our essence. If one knew there was a treasure buried under his house, he would do all he could to retrieve it. We must realise that we possess that treasure and it is not under our houses, but part of our very being, so let us access this wealth. Ashreinu, ma tov chelkeinu - How fortunate are we, how good is our lot!

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Peninim on the Torah

by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum
Parshas Nitzovim

PARASHAS NITZOVIM You are standing today... before Hashem, your G-d. (29:9) Hayom, today, alludes to the special day, Rosh Hashanah, when we all stand in judgment before Hashem. This day is different, for on this day, as Horav Nosson Wachtfogel, zl, comments, we enter into the palace of the King. We have a private conference, during which we think of nothing else: not of the past; not of the future; just the present. Our conversation does not revolve around ourselves; it is not for our personal requests. Rather, on this day we coronate Hashem; we praise Him and pray that today will be the beginning when all creatures, all peoples, will recognize and acknowledge that He is the Creator of us all. "Today" is "His" day. It is a day that allows us to divest ourselves of "ourselves" and focus on what is really important - Hashem.

When someone approaches Rosh Hashanah with the realization that today he has the unique good fortune to stand lifnei Hashem, before Hashem; when he understands the significance of this moment, this private meeting, he will not waste it on personal issues. The difference between a small person and a big person lies in what is important to each of them. True, our lives, and the lives of everyone that we hold dear to us, are all-important, but, in the larger scheme of things, in terms of the purpose of our existence, in light of our own personal raison d'etre, is this not somewhat selfish? Imagine being allowed one request from the king, one favor. What would we ask for? Would we ask the king for a new suit, a better lunch, a nicer car, or would our request be more sweeping, more global, less self-serving?

It is all about V'yeida kol pa'ul ki Atah pi'alto, v'yavin kol yetzur ki Atah yitzarto, "Let everything that has been made know that You are its Maker, and let everything that has been molded understand that You are its molder." Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, says that, on Rosh Hashanah, Hashem wants to maintain a Panim el Panim, face to face, relationship with us. This means that nothing is on our minds but Hashem. Our every thought, comment, nuance, should be focused on the Almighty.

The first step is to recognize that, when we enter Rosh Hashanah, we have just completed an entire year of life. We tend to focus immediately on the future, without recognizing our obligation to offer gratitude for the past. As we begin the New Year, we should commence it by thanking Hashem for allowing us to reach this juncture in life. Furthermore, as the Brisker Rav, zl, comments, we enter the New Year with nothing from the past year to support us, no promises, no chazakos, status quo. Just because we have a job, good health and money in the bank, does not mean that our good fortune is on autopilot and will continue. It is a New Year - a completely new judgment. It

begins over again. Your driver's license has expired; your passport is no longer valid. It is a new year, a new list, a new judgment. Whatever we have been fortunate to have had until now is no guarantee for the future. Hayom, "Today," is a new day.

The hidden (sins) are for Hashem, our G-d, but the revealed (sins) are for us and our children forever, to carry out all the words of the Torah. (29:28)

An abundance of commentary is available to explain the application of the nekudos, dots, above u'l'vaneinu, "And for our children." We will address the commentary of the Chafetz Chaim, zl, because of its depth - despite its apparent simplicity. When a person writes a note, pens a statement, and he wants to make a point, underscore a certain idea, he will underline, bold, or highlight it in some noticeable manner. Hashem sought to teach Moshe Rabbeinu an important lesson, one that he should impart to the Jewish People, one that He wanted them to underscore in building their future: it is all about the children. Chinuch ha'banim, educating our children, is the only guarantee of our nation's future survival. If Hashem "dotted" the word children, it is a clear indication of its overriding significance.

The Steipler Gaon, zl, was wont to emphasize the change in the way contemporary children are raised compared to the way in which they were raised in the small villages of Europe, where abject poverty was a way of life, such that having "nothing" actually meant having nothing. Children grew up quickly knowing that one does not necessarily get what one wants. Indeed, the basics to which we are today accustomed were rare in those days. Children grew up hungry. They learned to realize that a mere meal was a luxury, and certain foods were an impossible dream. When children grow up with the awareness that one does not always get what he wants and life is not always a hedge of roses, they learn to accept those later moments when challenges confront them and a decision has to be made either to accept the situation as it is or to be bitter and complain.

The Steipler observes that this spoiled attitude can play itself out, having a devastating effect on a child's educational development. Imagine a child growing up in a home in which parents hold nothing back, giving their child whatever they can put their hands on. While this is feasible with regard to food, shelter, comfort and other physical staples and amenities, they cannot give their child: respect, honor, acceptance. This is something one earns on his own. When a child who is accustomed to receiving whatever he wants attends a school/yeshiva, he suddenly discovers that he is not the smartest, the most diligent, the most caring student. As a result, he does not earn the respect for which he yearns, and he might develop serious issues. He is not prepared for this. His parents have led him to believe that he could have whatever he wants. Apparently, they were wrong.

For this mitzvah... it is not hidden and it is not distant... it is not in Heaven... nor is it across the sea... rather, the matter is very close to you. (30:11-14) The Ramban interprets "this mitzvah" as a reference to the mitzvah of teshuvah, popularly called repentance. The word teshuvah is thrown about very much at this time of year. It is especially appropriate on this last Shabbos of the year to focus on its meaning and necessary impact on our lives. The word repentance is a powerful word and truly does not define the essence of teshuvah. The process of teshuvah is the process of return. Thus, a baal teshuvah is not simply a "born again"-- repentant -- person, but rather, someone who is returning - either to his original state; or to the state in which he should be.

Many people wonder, "How can I be worthy of doing teshuvah? How can I become a baal teshuvah, knowing the difficulties that lie ahead?" Horav Yisrael Salanter, zl, answers that a person should neither lose himself, nor give up before he even starts. Every slight change for the better, every reversal from the path he is presently following, connotes a step toward teshuvah. To make up one's mind to change completely is difficult and dangerous.

The Rambam's vernacular in explaining the mitzvah/process of teshuvah is very exact: "He who sins should leave his bad ways, remove it from his mind, and make a serious commitment in his heart not to return to the aveiros, sins, that he had committed in the past." Interestingly, the Rambam does not say that the sinner should "leave his sin," but rather, he says, "He should leave his bad ways." What is the Rambam teaching us about teshuvah? The Alter, zl, m'Novarodok, quotes the Talmud Kiddushin 20a in which Chazal teach that one who performs the same aveirah more than twice is already viewing this activity as something which is permissible. The stigma surrounding this sinful act has dissipated. He is no longer acting outside of his comfort zone. The first time one acts against the Torah, he is troubled. It bothers him. He is hurt. If chas v'shalom, Heaven forbid, any one of us would consume unkosher food, we would be devastated - the first time. We would be heartbroken, miserable, trying to find the deepest hole in which to bury ourselves. After we have done the dastardly act a number of times, the shame vanishes, the pain dissipates, the hurt is no longer.

The Alter explains that a person, at times, will commit an aveirah, but it remains a singular occurrence. It is not something that he is used to doing. To refrain from doing it again is to "abandon one's sin." This is much different than "abandoning one's ways." "Abandoning one's ways" means that this activity is already part of his "ways." It has become his way of life. He has already decided that the path of sin is something with which he can be comfortable. To perform teshuvah means to begin the process - to turn around, to change direction. One has a long journey until he reaches his destination, but, unless he changes his course, he will never reach his destination. One who is walking slowly, carefully, trudging along a path which is ten miles long, will reach the end of the road, as long as he sticks to the path. If he is going the wrong way, however, regardless of his speed, he will never reach his destination.

Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, tells the story of Reb Moshe Friedman, an intrepid member of the Yerushalayim community some ninety years ago. He helped establish the Batei Brodie. It was during the 1920's that the first cars were introduced to Yerushalayim. While the automobile has today become a way of life, in those days it was hardly accessible to the majority of the observant community. Many of these early settlers lived in abject poverty. Truth be told, they really had nowhere to go. Thus, for the most part, the automobile was a source of transportation for those who were not mainstream Orthodox. The first time Reb Moshe saw a Jew driving a car on Shabbos, he went out and began to sing, "Shabbos, Shabbos." The sight of this pious Jew walking around singing, "Shabbos, Shabbos," whenever he saw a Jew driving on Shabbos, was, at best, interesting. Someone approached him and asked, "Rabbi Friedman, he (the driver) does not hear you. Why do you keep singing, 'Shabbos, Shabbos'?"

Rabbi Friedman replied, "My dear friend, you are mistaken. I am not singing, 'Shabbos, Shabbos,' because of him. I am singing, 'Shabbos, Shabbos,' for myself. I want to hear the words, 'Shabbos, Shabbos,' because, once I see chillul Shabbos, Shabbos desecration, it sadly becomes less of an outrage to me. When a person is mechallel Shabbos once, it hurts him greatly. Once he repeats this behavior, however, it no longer hurts him. It has become his lifestyle." The pasuk implies that the mitzvah which, according to Ramban, is a reference to teshuvah, "is not hidden, nor is it far; it is not in the Heaven, nor is it in the sea; rather, it is very close to you." The geographic analogy must be clarified to say that an object for which one is searching is not in Tel Aviv, but rather, in Bnei Brak, is understandable. The distances are reasonable, and erring between them is not unusual. If, however, one were to say that it is not in Tel Aviv, but rather, in Alaska, that would be highly irregular. These areas are too far apart. One neither makes such a mistake, nor is this a normal manner of speech. Horav Moshe Aharon Stern explains this pasuk, applying to it a well-known episode in the Talmud Avodah Zarah 17a.

The Talmud tells the story of Elazar ben Durdaya, who was an individual who had plunged to the nadir of depravity. His reputation as a sinner was so

well-known that he quite possibly had reached the position of greatest sinner of his generation. There was not an aveirah of which he was aware that he did not transgress. He acted with impunity. He did it all. The Talmud relates that one time he was in the process of committing a sin, when a Heavenly Voice declared, "If you do this, you will be lost forever. You will never be able to perform teshuvah."

When Elazar ben Durdaya heard that he was lost, he immediately halted his activity and stopped doing the aveirah. He went to a valley that was situated between two mountains, and he spoke to the mountains, "Mountains and foothills, ask for mercy on my behalf." (Exactly what this means and the significance of mountains and foothills is beyond the scope of this thesis. In any event, he was seeking their help in returning.) They replied, "Before we can ask for mercy for you, we must first ask for mercy for ourselves."

Hearing this, Rav Elazar turned to the Heavens and earth and asked them to intercede on his behalf. They, too, shared the same feelings as the mountains and foothills. They had to address their own deficiencies before they could pray on behalf of others.

Rav Elazar received similar responses from the sun and moon and later from the stars and constellations. When he saw that he had nowhere to turn, no one could help him, he cried out, "The matter depends solely on me." He then put his head between his knees and began to cry bitterly. He cried incessantly until his neshamah, soul, left him. As soon as he died, a Heavenly Voice declared, "(Rav) Elazar ben Durdaya is destined for life in Olam Habba, the World to Come."

Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi heard the Bas Kol, Heavenly Voice, and immediately conferred the title "Rav" on Elazar ben Durdaya. Imagine going from being the greatest sinner of the generation to being granted the title Rav from Rabbi HaKadosh! Rabbi began to cry, "Some people earn their Olam Habba in the course of a few years; some earn it in one moment." There are people who live a full life, eighty, ninety years, and, by their actions and devotion, warrant and earn a place in Olam Habba. There is also that individual, who earns it in the space of a few moments.

Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, asks why did Rabbi cry? Does it matter how long it takes to achieve Olam Habba? The bottom line is that one made it; he has achieved the ultimate reward. Rav Elya explains that Rabbi was concerned with the waste of time that is characteristic of some people's lives. If a person can become a ben Olam Habba in one hour, how much time is wasted to become a ben Olam Habba when a person has to spend a lifetime of eighty, ninety years to earn the same reward!

Employing the lesson implied by the episode of Rav Elazar ben Durdaya, we are now able to give meaning to the geographical discrepancy of our pasuk. Rav Elazar ben Durdaya came to his senses and realized that, unless he did teshuvah, all would be lost. It was the last straw. It was now or never. Wherever he turned, the answer was no. This is what is meant by, Im ein ani li - mi li? "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" It was up to him - no one else could do it. He sincerely wanted to return, to repent, to seek atonement for all the wrong that he had committed. He cried his heart out, putting his heart and soul into the endeavor, until he became a baal teshuvah. His sincere teshuvah was accepted. What is the explanation of all this?

The Mashgiach puts it succinctly. If a person wants others to help him become a baal teshuvah, it will be very difficult and distant from reality. This is much like saying that the teshuvah is in the heavens or the deepest oceans. It is a stretch to reach. If a person makes a serious decision to return, however, knowing fully well that it is all up to him and no one else-- if he realizes that the entire matter is dependent upon him, so that if he wants to change, he will be able to change -- then there is hope of achieving success. It is that "easy." One must have the initiative and resolve to see it through and stop relying on everyone else for support. He can only succeed if he does teshuvah.

Izchus u'lilui nishmas R' Baruch ben R' Zev Yehuda z"l niftar 24 Ellul 5751 In memory of Baruch Berger z"l Whose contribution to Peninim was immeasurable. Peninim mailing list Peninim@shemayisrael.com

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from: Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com> reply-to: rav-kook-list+owners@googlegroups.com to: **Rav Kook List** <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com> date: Thu, Sep 10, 2015 at 1:21 AM subject: [Rav Kook List] Psalm 32: Praying for Results

Psalm 32: Praying for Results

What should a truly pious individual, a chasid, pray for?

"Every chasid should pray to You for this - at a time of Metzoh." (Psalm 32:6)

The Hebrew word Metzoh is not clear. It may mean 'finding' or 'leaving' or 'results.'

This "time of finding" or "time of leaving" must be something that is very important to the pious chasid. Something that may not be within his power to control. The Talmud records no fewer than five opinions as to what a chasid should pray for:

1. A good wife. This is a 'time of finding', as a good wife is a 'good find' or 'good catch.' Rav Kook adds that finding an appropriate wife is an occasion which determines the 'results' and the lot of his life. The right partner in life can be a critical factor in determining one's spiritual and material success, while the wrong partner may lead to emotional and financial instability.

2. Torah enlightenment. Maimonides wrote that revelations of truth are like one who is walking in the dark and lightning suddenly lights up the way. For some, these illuminating bolts of lightning are constant; for others, they occur frequently; and for others, only rarely. It is fitting to pray to merit these illuminations of truth on a constant basis, so that one may successfully find the path of truth and arrive at the highest level of human perfection.

3. Death. Death is the ultimate 'hour of departure.' It is also the ultimate barometer of life and the path one followed in life. For the wicked, death is a time of absolute darkness, as their lives were spent exclusively in the pursuit of material pleasures. But for the Chasid, who values spiritual goals, and whose life was guided by righteousness and piety, the day of death is not so tragic. "And she will laugh at the final day" (Proverbs 31:25). His soul was not overly immersed in physical pleasures, while love for spiritual life and its pleasantness are deeply ingrained in his soul.

4. Burial. Also, a time of departure, and a time for results. One should strive to achieve an impact on others that will cause good even after one's death. One should desire an honorable burial - not as a platform for honor and self-aggrandizement - but as sign of one's stature in order to provide inspiration and a positive influence on future generations.

The final opinion is the most surprising, even a bit shocking. Yet this is the opinion favored by the Talmudic sages in the Land of Israel:

5. A bathroom. We usually focus on the great, momentous occasions of life. Yet one must also attend to the smallest, most technical aspects of life. We constantly rely on God's benevolence. Even the most banal matters can become the insurmountable obstacles to spiritual growth. A clean body, a hygienic environment, and a properly functioning digestive system may appear to be of minor significance. But without these basic prerequisites, one lacks the necessary peace of mind to advance spiritually. We should not overlook the need for Divine assistance even in the most physical, mundane aspects of life.

(Adapted from Ein Eyah I:39-40, on Berachot 8a)

from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com> date: Wed, Sep 9, 2015 at 4:32 PM subject: Advanced Parsha - Nitzavim

Blueprint of Creation by Rabbi Ozer Alport Parsha Potpourri

Nitzavim(Deuteronomy 29:9-30:20)

Blueprint of Creation Since the Torah is the blueprint for the entire Creation, it inherently contains within it allusions to everything which will

ever exist or occur in the universe. The Vilna Gaon explains that the Torah's recounting of the episode of Creation contains the events which transpired in the first 1,000 years of history, with the second 1,000 years hidden in the remainder of Genesis, the third 1,000 years in Exodus, the fourth 1,000 years in Leviticus, the fifth 1,000 years in Numbers, and the final 1,000 years in Deuteronomy. Since the Book of Deuteronomy contains 10 parshas (counting Nitzavim and Vayeilech as one, as they are often read together as a double portion), each portion hints to the events of one century of the sixth millennium. Based on this explanation of the Vilna Gaon, it has been noted that the early years of the Holocaust, the greatest national tragedy in modern history, fall out in the century which is hinted to in Parshas Ki Savo, which contains words of rebuke and hair-raising threats of terrible suffering which will befall the Jewish people. However, consolation may be found by recognizing that we are currently living in - the century which corresponds to Parshas Nitzavim-Vayeilech, which is commonly referred to as the portion of repentance (Deut. 30:2). Not surprisingly, the years since World War II have seen an extraordinary wave of uneducated Jews returning to their roots on an unprecedented scale, precisely as predicated by the Torah. * * * EASY TESHUVA

The Ponovezher Rav once traveled to South Africa to strengthen and encourage the Jews there in their religious observance. Prior to his journey, he asked his teacher, the illustrious Chafetz Chaim, what message he should relate to the Jews there in the name of the leader of the generation. The Chafetz Chaim replied that he should tell them that it is actually quite easy to do the mitzvah of teshuva - repentance. The minimum requirements to fulfill this obligation are few and are within the reach of every Jew: ceasing to transgress, confessing one's past actions and expressing regret over them, and accepting upon oneself not to transgress again. Unfortunately, the evil inclination attempts to convince a person that proper repentance is so difficult and involves so many complex components that he will never succeed in correctly doing so, thereby causing him to give up the effort without even trying. In this vein, Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel notes that in our verse (Deut. 30:14), Moshe describes one of the commandments as not being hidden or distant from a person. It isn't in the heavens or across the sea as one might have thought, but rather it is very close - in one's mouth and heart. What is this commandment which a person might mistakenly conclude is so far beyond him that its observance requires him to travel thousands or millions of miles, yet in reality the keys to its performance lie inside of him? Not surprisingly, Nachmanides writes that the mitzvah to which Moshe is referring is the mitzvah of teshuva. The Talmud (Kiddushin 49b) discusses a case in which a wicked man betroths a woman on the condition that he is completely righteous. Surprisingly, the Talmud rules that she may be legally engaged, explaining that perhaps he had thoughts of repentance in the moment prior to his proposal. We may derive from here that a person can literally transform himself from one extreme to the other in a mere moment of sincere reflection and regret, a lesson which should inspire and motivate us during the approaching High Holidays. * * * REPETITIVE MISTAKE

Moshe reminded the people (Deut. 29:15-16) of the abominable idols which they saw in Egypt and other lands through which they passed. Why was it necessary to warn them against worshipping these idols if they themselves had witnessed how deplorable they were? The Brisker Rav (Nesivos Rabboseinu) answers that exposure to something sinful and forbidden such as idols, even if a person intellectually recognizes that it is vile and repugnant, still leaves an emotional impression. Although one's initial reaction is to be repulsed, his senses are also dulled in the process and the next time that he sees them his response won't have the same intensity and he may even be convinced that they're not so problematic after all. After sufficient exposure, he may even come to see positive qualities in them, and for this reason Moshe had to warn the people against worshipping the idols, which they had originally viewed as detestable but to which they may have become desensitized over time.

<http://www.jewishpress.com/>

The Teshuvah Of Rosh Hashanah

Rabbi Raphael Fuchs

September 10th, 2015

The Rambam famously wrote in Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4 that "Although the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a decree from Hashem, there is a *remez* (reason) behind its blowing. The reason is that the sound of the shofar is to remind us to wake up from our slumber and inspect our actions, do teshuvah, and remember our Creator. And those who have forgotten the truth and wasted their time should look into their souls and inspect their way of life. They should leave the wrong path that they find themselves on."

Evidently, the Rambam believes that on Rosh Hashanah one should do teshuvah, as he says that the shofar is intended to awaken us to do teshuvah. Similarly it would seem that one should do teshuvah on Rosh Hashanah, as it is part of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* (10 Days of Repentance).

The Rambam says in the second perek of Hilchos Teshuvah that the mitzvah of teshuvah is comprised of four components: *vidui* (confession), *charatah* (regret), *azivah* (stopping oneself from sinning again), and *kabbalah* (resolution). The Rambam also says that one must verbalize his confessions in order for it to be valid (*vidui b'peh*).

The Achronim are bothered by the following question: Why don't we find the teshuvah process to be a part of the Rosh Hashanah davening – as we do on Yom Kippur? Similarly there are no *minhagim* to do teshuvah on Rosh Hashanah. Some even have the custom to not eat foods that have the same *gematria* as the word "chet" (sin). So if the shofar blasts remind us to do teshuvah, why don't we do any of the teshuvah process on Rosh Hashanah?

The Gemara in Kiddushin 49b says that if one says to a woman "be *mekudeshes* (betrothed) to me on the condition that I am a *tzaddik gamur* (complete tzaddik)" and she accepts, the *kiddushin* is valid even if he is known to be a *rasha gamur* (complete sinner). This is because perhaps he was *meharher b'teshuvah b'libo* (thinking of teshuvah in his heart). The *Minchas Chinuch* (Mitzvah 364) is bothered by how the *kiddushin* can be valid when it was contingent on the fact that the man was a *tzaddik gamur*, while he was known to be a *rasha gamur*? In order for him to become a *tzaddik gamur* he would have to go through the lengthy process of teshuvah that, at the very least, entails a verbal confession. How could he have accomplished all of that so quickly, and how did the witnesses not hear him repent?

The *Sefer Harirai Kedem* and Rav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, *zt"l*, explain that the teshuvah of Rosh Hashanah is different from that of Yom Kippur, and that of the mitzvah of teshuvah in general. The mitzvah of teshuvah indeed requires the abovementioned four-step process, and that is what we do on Yom Kippur as well. This form of teshuvah atones for and wipes clean one's sins. However, on Rosh Hashanah we do not do teshuvah on individual sins; rather, as the Rambam said regarding the shofar blasts, this teshuvah is to awaken us from our sleep, remember our Creator, look into our souls, stop wasting our time with nothingness, and leave the wrong path and return to the right path. With the teshuvah of Rosh Hashanah, one does not remove any of his individual sins; instead he changes his direction, and outlook on life. Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the 10 Days of Repentance, is the first step in the teshuvah process. The days following Rosh Hashanah are focused on the mitzvah of teshuvah for individual sins – with Yom Kippur at the climax.

Based on this, the *Sefer Harirai Kedem* explains the abovementioned Gemara in Kiddushin. With the form of teshuvah, similar to that of Rosh Hashanah, a person becomes a *tzaddik* even though he has not done the mitzvah of teshuvah to remove his individual sins. Once he decides with conviction that he will abandon the wrong path and is determined to start following the right path, he attains the status of a *tzaddik*. Therefore, when the individual proposed *kiddushin* on condition that he is a *tzaddik gamur*, we can assume that perhaps he had this form of teshuvah in mind, namely to change direction – which does not require anything verbal and is not lengthy. Thus the *kiddushin* is valid, as he attained the status of a *tzaddik* even though he

still has not atoned for his sins.
May we all be zocheh to fulfill the mitzvah of teshuvah in its entirety. Amen.

<http://www.koltorah.org/ravj/roshhashanna2001.htm>
From Parshat Nitzavim & Rosh Hashana Vol.11 No.2
Date of issue: 27 Elul 5761-2 Tishrei 5762 -- Sept. 15-19, 2001

Is There a Mitzva to Rejoice on Rosh Hashana?

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

The Torah (Devarim 16:14) commands us to rejoice on Yom Tov, "Vesamachta Bechagecha." In this issue, we will explore the question of whether there is a Mitzva to experience Simcha on Rosh Hashana or not. This is a challenging question, since on one hand we are terrified of the fact that Hashem is judging us on this day but, on the other hand, the Ashkenazic custom to greet each other with wishes for a "Gut Yom Tov" on Rosh Hashana might indicate that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana. We will see how the traditional authorities grappled with this question. Our discussion will be based on an essay written by Rav Betzalel Zolti (who served as the chief rabbi of Jerusalem) on this topic (Mishnat Yaavetz Orach Chaim 50). We will present the dispute between the Rishonim about this point, an analytical basis for this dispute, five ramifications of the dispute, a possible proof for one side of the dispute, and a somewhat new analysis of the dispute.

The Dispute - Rambam vs. Hagahot Maimoniot

There are at least two passages in the Rambam that demonstrate that the Rambam believes that there is a Mitzva of Simcha on Yom Tov. In Hilchot Chanukah 3:6, the Rambam explains why we do not recite Hallel on Rosh Hashana (or Yom Kippur). He explains "these are days of Teshuva, awe, and fear and not days of excessive joy." Accordingly, although Rosh Hashana is not a day of excessive joy, it is a day on which there is some measure of joy. Moreover, the Rambam writes (Hilchot Yom Tov 6:17), "The seven days of Pesach and eight days of Sukkot along with the other Yamim Tovim are all forbidden to have fasts and eulogies occur on them; and one must be happy and joyful on these days." The "other Yamim Tovim" must refer to Shavuot and Rosh Hashana. The Rambam (ibid. 6:18) writes that Simcha includes the eating of meat and drinking of wine.

On the other hand, the Magen Avraham (introduction to chapter 597) cites the Hagahot Maimoniyot who writes that one should not eat meat or drink wine on Rosh Hashana. This authority must believe that there is no Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana, because part of the Mitzva of rejoicing on a Yom Tov is eating meat and drinking wine (see Pesachim 109a).

Analysis of the Dispute

Rav Zolti offers an explanation of this debate. He writes that the debate emerges from a dispute regarding the fundamental nature and scope of the Mitzva of Simcha on Yom Tov. Tosafot (Moed Katan 14b s.v. Asei Deyachid) associates the Torah obligation to rejoice on Yom Tov with the consumption of Korbanot (Shalmei Simcha) that are offered as part of the Mitzva of Aliya Leregel that we are obligated to perform on the Shalosh Regalim. In the absence of the offering of the Shalmei Simcha, the Mitzva of Simcha is merely rabbinic in nature. According to Tosafot, argues Rav Zolti, the scope of the obligation to rejoice on Yom Tov cannot apply on Rosh Hashana, since there is no obligation to offer Shalmei Simcha on Rosh Hashana.

The Rambam, however, believes that the biblical obligation to engage in Simcha extends beyond the obligation to offer and consume Shalmei Simcha. The Rambam (Hilchot Yom Tov 6:17-18) writes:

A person is obligated to be happy on these days, he, his children, his wife, his grandchildren, and all those who have joined his family, as the Torah states, "and you shall rejoice on your holiday." Even though the Torah is referring to the obligation to offer and consume Korban Shelamim (the Shalmei Simcha), included in this obligation to rejoice is for a person and his entire family to rejoice in the manner that is appropriate for him. How is this practiced? One distributes parched grain, nuts, and delicacies to the children.

One purchases, depending on what he can afford, clothes and beautiful jewelry for the women in the family. The men eat meat and drink wine, as there is no rejoicing without meat and wine.

We see that the Rambam believes that the Torah obligation of Simcha on Yom Tov extend beyond offering and eating the Shalmei Simcha. Thus, according to the Rambam, the obligation to rejoice can encompass Rosh Hashana even though Shalmei Simcha are not offered on this holiday.

Five Ramifications of the Dispute

The dispute between Tosafot and the Rambam has at least five significant ramifications. One is whether it is permissible to fast on Yom Tov. The Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 597:1) writes, "we eat, drink, and rejoice on Rosh Hashana and we do not fast." The Rama (ibid. 597:3) cites the opinion of the Terumat Hadeshen (number 245) that it is a Mitzva to fast on Rosh Hashana. Moreover, the Taz (ibid. 597:1) cites the Kol Bo who notes that some authorities believe that one should fast on Rosh Hashana. The Magen Avraham (597:3) cautions, though, that all agree that it is forbidden to fast during the night of Rosh Hashana. The Shulchan Aruch clearly adopts the approach that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana and thus one should not fast on Rosh Hashana. The authorities that permit or encourage fasting on Rosh Hashana seem to believe that there is no Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana.

A second ramification regards a dispute that is recorded by the Rosh towards the conclusion of his commentary to Masechet Rosh Hashana. The argument is whether the phrase "Vatitein Lanu Moadim Lesimcha Chagim Uzmanim Lesasson et Yom Hazikaron Hazeh" ("and You have given us holidays on which we rejoice, festivals and times for jubilation, this day of remembrance") should be incorporated into the Tefillah and Kiddush of Rosh Hashana. Only if one believes that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana is the phrase of Moadim Lesimcha relevant.

A third ramification might be the dispute whether to say the prayer of Tzidkatcha Tzedek at Mincha when Rosh Hashana falls on Shabbat. Sephardim follow the opinion of the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 598) that one should recite Tzidkatcha and Ashkenazim follow the opinion of the Rama (ibid.) that it should be omitted. The Rama believes that since Rosh Hashana is a Yom Tov it should be omitted just as it is omitted on any other festive occasion. Similarly, we have mentioned the Ashkenazic practice to greet others on Rosh Hashana by saying "Gut Yom Tov," which signifies that Ashkenazic tradition accepts Rosh Hashana as a day of rejoicing. The Shulchan Aruch does not subscribe to this approach. We should take notice that the Shulchan Aruch and the Rama appear to contradict their aforementioned ruling regarding fasting on Rosh Hashana.

A fourth ramification might be the dispute recorded in the Mishna (Moed Katan 19a) whether Rosh Hashana cancels the Shiva and Shloshim mourning periods. The reason why Yom Tov cancels Shiva and Shloshim is that the Mitzva of Simchat Yom Tov and Aveilut are utterly incompatible (see Moed Katan 14b). The opinion that believes that Rosh Hashana does not cancel Shiva or Shloshim apparently believes that there is no Mitzva of Simcha on Rosh Hashana and thus mourning is appropriate on Rosh Hashana. The Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 399:6) rules that Rosh Hashana does cancel Shiva and Shloshim observances.

I heard from Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (in a Shiur he delivered at Yeshiva University in September 1985) that a fifth ramification might be the question debated in the Gemara (Rosh Hashana 26b) regarding the shape of the Shofar that we blow on Rosh Hashana. One opinion believes that the Shofar should be bent (which is the accepted view) since the more one is bent (i.e. subservient to the Creator) on Rosh Hashana the better. The other opinion believes that the more upright (i.e. confident) one is during Rosh Hashana the better. Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the opinion that one should be confident on Rosh Hashana is more compatible with the opinion that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Yom Tov.

A Proof that There is a Mitzva to Rejoice on Rosh Hashana

Rav Zolti marshals a passage from Berachot 49a to support the Rambam's

view that there is a Mitzva of Simcha on Rosh Hashana. The Gemara presents the formulas to recite on Shabbat and Yom Tov if one forgot to recite the appropriate addition in Bircat Hamazon for Shabbat and Yom Tov, and realized the error immediately after completing the Beracha of Bonei Yerushalayim. The formula for Shabbat notes that Shabbat is designated for Menucha, the formula for Yom Tov notes that Yom Tov is intended for rejoicing, and the formula for Rosh Chodesh notes that the day is for remembering. Rav Zolti observes that the fact that there is no separate formula for Rosh Hashana indicates that Chazal regard Rosh Hashana to be included with other Yamim Tovim in the Mitzva of Simcha. The fact that we accept the opinion that Rosh Hashana cancels Shiva and Shloshim also demonstrates that there is an element of Simcha on Rosh Hashana.

Rav Zolti defends the authorities that believe that there is no Mitzva of Simcha on Rosh Hashana by saying that these authorities must concede that there is some degree of rejoicing on Rosh Hashana. We have mentioned that the Magen Avraham asserts that all agree that one may not fast during the night of Rosh Hashana. Rav Zolti explains that this is because all agree that there must be some element of rejoicing on Rosh Hashana.

One might add that all agree that there is muted joy on Rosh Hashana as demonstrated by our omission of Hallel on Rosh Hashana, our practice to use a bent Shofar, and the Sephardic practice to recite Tzidkatcha when Rosh Hashana occurs on Shabbat. Thus, we have significantly narrowed the gap between the opinions that we cited at the beginning of our essay. It seems that the dispute is not a broad one but a matter of emphasis, namely, to what extent is the Simchat Yom Tov muted on Rosh Hashana, for example, that we might tolerate or even encourage fasting on Rosh Hashana or describe the day as a time of joy.

Conclusion

It seems to be accepted that there is a Mitzva to rejoice on Rosh Hashana. Similarly, it is accepted that the Simchat Yom Tov of Rosh Hashana is diminished because our fear of God's judgment. However, Rishonim seem to dispute to what extent is the Simcha on Rosh Hashana diminished by our fear of God's judgment. Let us pray that Hashem will judge all individuals, the Jewish People, and the world favorably this Rosh Hashana.

<http://www.theyeshivaworld.com/news/headlines-breaking-stories/340332/no-tuition---no-readmission.html>

By Rabbi Yair Hoffman for the Five Towns Jewish Times

THE HEROES

They are the true heroes behind our Yeshivos and Day Schools. They work 50, 60, sometimes 80 hours a week to ensure that the teachers, Rabbis, and staff get paid. They are the Yeshiva administrators, whose job it is to seek philanthropists to pay for student scholarships, to keep down expenditures, and to nudge parents for tuition.

THANKLESS TASK

Their's is a thankless task. It is hard work, both in terms of the nature of the job and in terms of the impact upon their social lives. At times, they must refuse raise increase requests of employees. At other times, they have to be very tough on parents who have fallen severely behind on tuition.

But may they avail themselves of the ultimate weapon? Can they actually bar entry? Can they say and act upon the headline of this article, "No tuition – no re-admission?"

CASE IN POINT

Two siblings were in two local schools. The father of the older boy told the Yeshiva that he needed a major reduction in tuition or he was pulling the boy out. The Yeshiva told him, "Sorry, we don't do that." The boy was yanked out and placed in public school.

That boy's younger sibling was in another institution. They understood the family's precarious finances. They were as accommodating as can be.

The final outcome? The older boy married a gentile. The younger sibling studied in Eretz Yisroel and now, after returning to the United States, teaches in a Yeshiva. Hundreds of our local students have been inspired by the latter, and it all could have turned out very differently – just by virtue of the tuition policy of an executive director. This is a true story that has unfolded recently – very recently.

HALACHIC SOURCES

The Gemorah in Sanhedrin (91a) states, "Whomsoever denies halacha from the mouth of a student, it is as if he has robbed him of the inheritance of his fathers, as it states, Morasha kehilas Yaakov – it is an inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. The Gemorah further writes that even the fetuses in the wombs of their mothers curse such a

person who denies anyone their Jewish heritage."

The Maharal, comparing the Torah to a bride, writes in his *Drush Al HaTorah* (p.109) that the Torah is engaged not just to select individuals within the nation of Israel – but to all of Israel equally. Thus denying the poor the chance to learn Torah is tantamount to the greatest of sins. Indeed, the Maharal further explains that it belongs more to the poor than to the wealthy, as the Gemorah in *Nedarim* says (81a), "Take heed of the poor, because through them will come Torah." His explanation is that the Torah was given in a bare wilderness with no worldly materials – the equivalent of an atmosphere of complete indigence.

Rav Meir Shapira zt"l, the founder of the *Daf HaYomi* gave a different explanation to the Gemorah in *Nedarim* of taking heed of the poor. He explained that it is because the parents, who paid even a minimal tuition, had paid whatever they could pay with dearly earned money. They had given up their hard-earned funds with mesiras nefesh, immense dedication, in order that their children should be able to learn Torah. It is impossible for such Mesiras Nefesh to not yield anything but Torah.

THE RULING IN SHULCHAN ARUCH

The Ramah in *Choshain Mishpat* (163:3) rules that in a city where there is a Melamed Tinokos – a Rebbe for children, and the father or fathers cannot afford to pay, the obligation rests upon the community to collect funds based upon the wealth of each individual. He rules likewise in regard to the hiring of a Chazan referencing the *Shulchan Aruch's* chapter in *Orech Chaim* (53:23). This ruling of the Ramah is based upon a *Rabbeinu Yerucham* (*Nesiv* 29 Vol. III).

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l ruled that this Ramah, which formed the basis of the Cheder payment system in Europe for many centuries throughout the European exile, still applies in today's age with the modern Yeshiva system (See *Mechitzas Rabbeinu* page 106). If, however, the father is wealthy enough that he can adequately pay, then the Yeshiva may refuse the child entry until the father does so. Otherwise, however, they may not do so.

Rav Yitzchok Zilberstein in *Shailos UTeshuvos b'Hilchos Chinuch* (responsa #61) rules that it is absolutely forbidden for a Yeshiva to actually refuse admission to a child based upon non-payment. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky ruled the same way (see footnote 106 in *Emes L'Yaakov* to *YD* 245:4).

MAY A YESHIVA THREATEN?

In recent years, a system has evolved to ensure that parents settle previous obligations before they can register their child to classes. This system is called the admission card – without which one cannot receive a schedule, be placed on the attendance sheets, and receive books and materials. It is said from Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l said that one may threaten not to admit but actually carrying out the threat is not permitted.

What happens if a parent receives such a letter, does not get an admission card, and actually does not register his child as a result? Poskim have ruled that there is an obligation upon the school to follow up with the parent and ensure that things can be worked out. It is forbidden to issue such a threat without ensuring that everyone who received such a letter is contacted.

But what is a school to do when faced with no payments? Most philanthropists are tapped out already on "more exotic Tzedakos" rather than the local Yeshiva. Some communities have worked out a special scholarship fund that each school can go to when the parent has no funds to pay. This is the situation in Chicago, for example. Other communities have not had such innovative developments. As a result, many Jews are lost to their people.

Indeed, in our times, the situation might be significantly worse than the case of the Ramah in *Choshain Mishpat*. Within the great melting pot that is America, it is highly likely that attending a public school will directly lead to shedding one's Jewish identity – no matter how strongly affiliated the family is at home. Poskim have ruled that such a move could directly lead to abandonment of Shabbos, Kashrus, Judaism. As in the local case cited above, it can also lead to intermarriage. It is thus, by far, a greater obligation than that which was discussed in the *Shulchan Aruch*. By virtue of this latter ruling, the halachos of denying a Yeshiva education applies to both boys and girls.

The situation has entered into a crisis mode. These are children in our communities that are now in public schools by reason of financial hardship of the parents. In out-of-town communities too, the crisis is reaching epic proportion.

The Ramah in *Choshain Mishpat* continues that even those who no longer need the particular need of the community must still be forced to pay. The Ramah further indicates at the end of paragraph three that those who are older and have no need for a wedding hall or Mikvah must still contribute. We need individuals to step forward in the Yeshivos and schools that they are affiliated with, and form just such scholarship fund. We need our own "No child left behind" program.

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