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9:37 PM subject Rabbi Mordechai Willig: Communal Atonement; 6
Other Y"K divrei Torah

Rabbi Mordechai Willig Communal Atonement

I

The scapegoat atones for all sins if one repents. Otherwise, it atones only for lesser sins. Grave sins, punishable by kares or misas beis din, as well as false or vain oaths, are not atoned. (Rambam Teshuva 1:2) Two questions arise. First, atonement without repentance, achieved vicariously via a scapegoat, seems impossible. After all, an offering of a wicked person is abominable (Mishlei 21:27). Second, why the distinction between lesser and grave sins?

Rav Soloveitchik zt"l answered both questions based on the Rambam's introductory phrase: "The scapegoat... is an atonement for all Israel." A wicked, unrepentant person has no individual atonement. However, he partakes of the communal atonement granted to Am Yisrael as such. Grave sins remove the person from the nation and preclude participation in the national atonement. Kares cuts the soul off from its people (Bamidbar 19:13).

The Rav zt"l cited the bracha recited on Yom Kippur: The King who pardons and forgives our sins and the sins (avonos) of His people Israel. Hashem forgives individuals, and the nation as a whole. He also removes our guilt (ashma), a term associated with desolation (shmama, Ramban Vayikra 5:19). Since Klal Yisrael will never be destroyed, the term guilt (ashma) is limited to individuals (On Repentance, 1996 ed., p. 97-109).

Presumably, removal from the nation by capital punishment resembles kares. And one who swears falsely or in vain is distanced by everyone, because others are punishable when one close to them swears falsely, more so than for other sins (Shevuos 39a,b). As such communal atonement is not possible for these sins.

Yom Kippur itself achieves atonement even in the absence of complete teshuva [see Atonement on Yom Kippur]. We can postulate that this, too, is a national atonement, as the bracha implies.

According to Rebbe (Yoma 85b), Yom Kippur atones for (nearly) all sins without teshuva. Why, then, was the Bais Hamikdash destroyed? [See Tosfos Yeshanim, who ask this question and suggest that the atonement is only partial.]

A nation is judged based on the majority of its people (Rambam Teshuva 3:1). Therefore, as the sins of Am Yisrael increased, the scapegoat no longer achieved full national atonement symbolized by red thread turning white (Yoma 39a, 67a). Similarly, Yom Kippur lost its effectiveness according to Rebbe. As a communal atonement, Yom Kippur requires a majority of individuals who repent and deserve atonement. Only then can the unworthy be included.

II

Yom Kippur does not atone for interpersonal sins until one appeases [yeratzeh] the wronged person. (Yoma 85b) Even if the appeasement is continually rebuffed, Yom Kippur atones. It does not state until the wronged person is appeased [yisratzeh] (Pri Chadash O.C. 606:1). Conversely, if one grants forgiveness without being asked, it is not fully effective. For this reason, Rav appeared before the butcher who had wronged him, hoping that the butcher would appease him (Yoma 87a). Rav did not merely forgive him from afar.

Nonetheless, forgiving from afar is partially effective. This is evidenced by our forgiving all those who wronged us in Tefila Zakka on Yom Kippur eve. We pray that no one should be punished on our account, a phrase many say nightly. Forgiving others nightly results in longevity (Megilla 28a, M.B. 239:9).

Apparently, forgiving sins is comparable to forgiving money. It removes punishment on account of the one who was wrong and forgives. But it does not entitle the sinner to the atonement of Yom Kippur.

This can be explained based on our earlier analysis. One cannot enjoy communal atonement when removed from the community. Interpersonal sins remove the sinner from the wronged person and, by extension, from the community. If he appeases his fellow and asks repeatedly for forgiveness, he has done all that he can to make amends. As such, he reenters the community and benefits from Yom Kippur's communal atonement.

By contrast, the wrong person who does not grant forgiveness after three requests is the sinner. For this reason one should not ask forgiveness more than three times (Rambam Teshuva 2:9). It is now assumed (chazaka) that the wrong person will not grant forgiveness. Asking him again would only make him a bigger sinner and, as such, is not allowed.

III

It is customary to ask forgiveness on Erev Yom Kippur, as the midrash teaches: Hashem ordained ten days of teshuva, during which even if one person repents, his teshuva is accepted like the teshuva of the community. Therefore, all Israel should repent and make peace between a man and his fellow, and forgive one another on Erev Yom Kippur so that their repentance and prayer should be received by Hashem with peace and with love. (Mordechai, Yoma 723) This citation proves the aforementioned thesis. Yom Kippur is special because an individual's repentance is treated like that of a community. If one asks forgiveness of his fellow, he is included in the community, since he seeks closeness with everyone, even someone whom he has wronged and had been distanced from him.

The midrash adds two points. It includes all the ten days of teshuva, and mentions prayer as well. This is based on the Gemara (Rosh Hashana 18a):

Hashem is close to us whenever we call Him (Devarim 4:7). Yet it states (Yeshaya 55:6): Call Hashem when He is close, i.e., in Aseres Yemei Teshuva. The former refers to the community, the latter to an individual. The midrash interprets that even in Aseres Yemei Teshuva, we require the merit of the tzibbur, but the teshuva of an individual is treated like that of a community. This is achieved only by asking forgiveness of one's fellow, which reintegrates the petitioner into the community and its atonement.

"To whom does Hashem grant atonement? To one who forgives others who wrong him" (Rosh Hashana 17a). One who overcomes his natural inclination to respond in kind to a person who pained him, but rather forgives the wrongdoer, belongs more strongly to the community. As such, he is granted the all-important communal atonement.

The angels asked, "Why does Yisrael not say Hallel on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur?" Hashem said, "The King judges, the books of life and death are open, and Israel should say Hallel?" (Arachin 10b) The angels' very question is perplexing. It must be based on the statement, "There was no greater holiday for Yisrael than Yom Kippur" (Taanis 26b), "a day of atonement" (30b). Am Yisrael is guaranteed atonement. This warrants Hallel, as the angels asked. Hashem responds that no individual is guaranteed to be part of the communal atonement. The individual fears judgment and death and cannot recite Hallel (Rabbi C.Y. Goldvicht z"l).

As we approach Yom Kippur, we should do all that we can to become more strongly connected to the tzibbur. We should both ask and grant forgiveness. We should do more to help other individuals and the community at large.

On Yom Kippur itself, we must include even sinners in our fast (Krisus 6b) and prayers (introduction to Kol Nidrei). It is a day to institute love and friendship and to forsake jealousy and competition (Mussaf).

May each and every one of us merit both the individual and communal atonement of Yom Kippur. May Am Yisrael forsake the baseless hatred which caused the Churban and merit the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash and the restoration of the powerful communal atonement of the Yom Kippur service.

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'I'M A CHAZZAN, BUT I DON'T PUT ON A BROADWAY SHOW': AN INTERVIEW WITH LINCOLN SQUARE SYNAGOGUE'S CANTOR SHERWOOD GOFFIN

Sherwood Goffin has had a storied career. The cantor of Lincoln Square Synagogue since 1965, Goffin started his musical career as a folk singer. From 1961-1995, Goffin sang on major stages worldwide, recorded six albums, and was known as the "Voice of Soviet Jewry," singing at all the major Soviet Jewry UN Solidarity Day rallies from 1964-1991.

Today, Goffin is a faculty member at Yeshiva University's Belz School of Jewish Music, principal of the LSS Feldman Hebrew School, and honorary president of the Belz School-affiliated Cantorial Council of America (CCA) - the only exclusively Orthodox cantorial organization in the world - which will soon celebrate its 50th anniversary with a Shabbos Chazzanus on Memorial Day weekend.

The Jewish Press recently spoke with Cantor Goffin about the CCA and the fascinating history of Jewish liturgical music.

The Jewish Press: What is the CCA's mission?

Goffin: To educate the Orthodox world on the proper way to daven.

What do you mean by "the proper way to daven"?

There are halachos and traditions that must be maintained.

The modern idea is: If a guy knows two Carlebach niggunim, he's a chazzan and can do whatever he wants. But imagine if a guy got up on Kol Nidrei night and, instead of singing the traditional tune, sang the latest Carlebach melody. How would you feel? It would destroy your entire kavanah, and that is assur. The Shulchan Aruch rules that one cannot change a community's customs, even its melodies, because the people will become confused and upset.

Most people know better when it comes to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, but the same halacha also applies to the shalosh regalim, Shabbos, even weekdays.

But is there really one "proper" way to daven? Aren't there many different variations of traditional tunes among different communities?

Yes, there are variations. But, as you go up in kedushah - from weekday to Shabbos to shalosh regalim - there are more and more things that are fixed. In Ne'ilah on Yom Kippur almost every paragraph has to be done a certain way.

Are you talking about specific tunes or something else?

We have seven modes of music. Modes are like colors or textures, and every single paragraph of tefillah has its own musical mode. Each mode gives a certain feeling and aura. For example, you can't do Kaddish before Mussaf in minor; it has to be in major.

If you know how to daven properly, you raise the level of the tzibbur's kavanah. I tell all my students that the kavanah of your tzibbur rests on your shoulders.

Where did today's tunes for davening come from?

From the Maharil, Rabbi Jacob Moelin (1365-1427), who was the chief rabbi of the Rhineland, where the majority of Jews lived at that time.

He was concerned that the melodies of the Troubadours, Minnesingers and jongleurs - early European folk singers - were infiltrating into shuls and that chazzanim were copying church melodies. He was afraid that a whole tradition that went back to the Beis HaMikdash was getting lost. So he took it upon himself to standardize the nusach, and we follow it to this day. (If you look at Hilchos Tefillah in the Shulchan Aruch, you will see the Rema constantly citing the Maharil.)

The Maharil took this matter very seriously.

Yes. One of the Maharil's students records that the Maharil once went to another city or country and changed the nusach. The local people said to him, "Rabbeinu, we don't do it this way here," but he didn't listen. Two months later he went home and found that his daughter had died while he was away. According to the Maharil, his daughter's death was

punishment for changing the nusach in that city. That's how strongly he felt about it.

You said earlier that the Maharil believed traditional Jewish music to have originated in the Beis HaMikdash. But wouldn't the music in the Beis HaMikdash have sounded more Middle Eastern?

Yes, but it became Europeanized. Did you ever play telephone when you were a kid? You line up ten kids, whisper something in the first kid's ear, and it comes out different the other end. But there's a chain that connects them. The Maharil was trying to maintain that chain.

I should add that among the musical modes we use in davening is Freygish - the Arabic Hijaz - which you don't find it in any Western mode in the world. It's Oriental [which demonstrates a linkage to our Middle Eastern roots].

How do Sephardim daven today? Do they also use different musical modes for different paragraphs?

No. They have one mode for each Shabbos, depending on the parshah. If the parshah is sad, it's a sad mode; if the parshah is happy, it's a happy mode.

So whose tradition is more accurate: ours or theirs?

Probably theirs. For instance, the Yemenites were shut away for 15 centuries and were forbidden by their rulers from having any communication with the outside world. So they really kept their minhagim [faithfully], and they claim their niggunim go back to the Beis HaMikdash. Now we can't prove that, but it's interesting: The Gregorian melodies of the Catholic Church - standardized between the years 400 and 600 - were also reputed to have come from the Temple in Jerusalem, and Professor Avraham Tzvi Idelsohn, the great Jewish ethnomusicologist [died 1938], found in quite a number of places that Yemenite melodies and Gregorian chants were almost note for note the same.

Switching topics slightly, what do you say to those Orthodox Jews who dislike chazzanus because they view it as a performance rather than tefillah?

Look, I'm a chazzan, but I don't put on a Broadway show. I don't repeat words and I don't sing long cantorial recitatives. That world has gone. Even the most professional chazzanim today don't do more than one or two long pieces on a Shabbos. When I was a kid, Moshe Koussevitzky did maybe 12 or 15.

What changed?

The chazzan is a reflection of his shul. Koussevitzky davened until 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon because that's what his congregants wanted. It developed in Europe when the Jews couldn't go to the opera. So they brought the opera into their shuls by asking their chazzanim to expand and become more elaborate. But that world has gone.

Is that good or bad?

I don't know. But the most important thing is the nusach - the proper way to daven - not the cantorial recitatives.

Why, then, is the CCA holding a Shabbos Chazzanus on Memorial Day weekend?

The chazzanim are going to reflect the CCA's philosophy; they will daven properly. People will certainly hear chazzanus, and there is a grand concert Sunday evening, but the davening won't be overly repetitious or over the top.

The rest of the convention - Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday - is dedicated to education about nussach ha'tefillah and sessions on congregational singing, the future of the chazzan, and other matters

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Two Types of Teshuvah The very first halachah in the Rambam's famed presentation of Hilchot Teshuvah has generated much debate, analysis and discussion, via both the printed word and through shiurim and derashot.¹²² The Rambam writes:

If a person has transgressed any of the commandments of the Torah, whether positive or negative, whether intentionally or unintentionally, when he does teshuvah and repents from his sin, he is obligated to confess before God, blessed is He, as it is stated (Numbers 5:6-7): A man or a woman who commits [any sins]...they shall confess the sin that they committed - this refers to a verbal confession. [The requirement to verbalize] this confession is a positive commandment. How does one confess? He says, "I beg of You, Hashem, I have sinned, been iniquitous and willfully rebelled before You, and I have done such and such; and I regret and am ashamed of my deeds, and I will never repeat such a thing again." This is the fundamental form of confession, and one who elaborates on his confession and lengthens [his presentation of] this matter is indeed praiseworthy. Hilchot Teshuvah 1:1

Rather than explaining what exactly is meant by "teshuvah," what its goals are and what Scriptural evidence there is that the notion even exists, which one might expect him to do in his opening comments,¹²³ the Rambam here begins instead by outlining some of the technical requirements of the teshuvah process, stressing that a particular formula of vidui, generally understood as confession, is an absolute necessity from a procedural perspective.¹²⁴ According to his description, the individual reciting the vidui must express three primary feelings: recognition of the sin(s), remorse for past deeds, and a resolve to not repeat such acts in the future.¹²⁵ His reference to teshuvah in this passage, however, is limited to the words "????? ?????" "when he does teshuvah," implying that teshuvah, the essence of which he does not define here, is in effect the backdrop, or perhaps the psychological and emotional underpinning, for the mitzvah of vidui, and it is to the specifics of that mitzvah that the Rambam devotes his attention in this section.

It is not until the second chapter of Hilchot Teshuvah that the Rambam gives us his precise definition of teshuvah. There he writes: What is complete teshuvah? That is [what is attained by a person] when the very circumstance in which he [previously] sinned presents itself to him and he has the ability to commit the sin [again] but instead turns away and does not commit it because of teshuvah, and not because of fear or weakened capability. If, for example, a man had illicit relations with a woman and after some time was alone with her [again], still in love with her, still physically capable, and in the same place where he sinned with her previously, and instead he turned away and did not transgress [again], such a person has attained complete teshuvah. This is in line with what [King] Solomon said (Ecclesiastes 12:1): So remember your Creator in the days of your youth. But if one did not repent until the days of his old age and until a time when it was not possible for him to do what he had done, even though this [kind of teshuvah] is not the preferred teshuvah, it still helps him and he has attained [a level of] teshuvah. [Indeed,] even if one transgressed for all his days but he did teshuvah on the day of his death and he dies having done teshuvah, all his iniquities are forgiven, as it is stated (ibid. v. 2): Until the sun, the light, the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain. - which is [a reference to] the day of death. And what is teshuvah? It is [what is attained] when a sinner abandons his sin, removes it from his thoughts and concludes in his mind that he will not do it again, as it is stated (Isaiah 55:7), let the wicked one abandon his way, etc. And [the sinner] likewise should regret the fact that he transgressed, as it is stated (Jeremiah 31:18): For after my returning, I regretted. Moreover, [his resolve should be such that] he should be able

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On Teshuvah and Complete Teshuvah

to call He Who knows all that is hidden as a witness that he will never return to this sin ever again, as it is written (Hosea 14:4): nor will we ever again call our handiwork 'our gods,' etc. And he must verbally confess and declare these matters that he has concluded in his mind. Hilchot Teshuvah 2:1-2

An examination of these two halachot reveals that the Rambam is actually providing two different definitions of teshuvah, speaking in '????' of "complete" teshuvah, and in '????' of "plain" teshuvah. At least two questions may be raised here. First, what is the essential difference between the two? And second, assuming that "complete" teshuvah is somehow a higher or more perfect level of teshuvah, why does the Rambam discuss that first? Wouldn't it have made more sense to first present the more basic or simpler level before detailing the greater or more exalted level?¹²⁶ Understanding Complete Teshuvah In discussing "plain" teshuvah here, the Rambam in effect restates the ideas mentioned at the beginning of '????', writing that the individual must acknowledge and regret his sin and commit to change his behavior in the future. One who has done this, and indeed succeeds in avoiding the repetition of his sin, has apparently done teshuvah on this level. In describing the individual who has attained complete teshuvah, however, the Rambam stresses that he has to confront the same situation in which he previously had sinned, having both the opportunity and the ability to repeat the transgression, and this time show the necessary restraint to resist doing the forbidden act again. It clearly cannot be, however, that the distinction between this greater level of teshuvah and the basic level is only a matter of circumstance, a function solely of whether or not the individual happened to have been "tested" with the chance to repeat his misdeed. There must be a substantial qualitative difference between the two types of teshuvah as well. It would appear that "complete" teshuvah entails more than just making sure not to repeat one's past mistakes, significant an accomplishment though that undoubtedly is. One who finds himself tempted by sin should surely make every effort to avoid that temptation, just as one who knows that certain things are dangerous for his physical health should avoid those things.¹²⁷ If that requires him to stay away from the conditions in which the particular temptation presents itself, then so be it. One who knows, for example, that when walking along a certain block he has been and still is strongly tempted to enter into a non-kosher food establishment there and partake of its delicacies would be well advised to seek out another suitable route where he will not be similarly tempted. And yet, while a person should certainly be admired for keeping himself away from that which tempts him to sin, and can be considered, if he has fulfilled other pre-requisites, to have indeed done teshuvah, he has not, by merely having avoided the circumstances in which he sinned in the past, achieved "complete" teshuvah according to the Rambam. Complete teshuvah requires something deeper. Complete teshuvah is attained only when a person has undergone a transformation of character to the point that he now no longer has to avoid a particular temptation because he has completely overcome his desire for that temptation. He has altered his way of thinking, reconsidered his motivations and goals, and shifted his path in life. He has developed the ability to control his behavior and is now in fact a totally different person. The fact that he has been confronted with the opportunity to repeat his sin and did not do so is proof of the fact that this major change, this transformation, has in fact taken place. Complete teshuvah is identified with newly mastered self-control, resulting in a change in one's very nature and personality. In describing the person who has achieved this level of teshuvah, the Rambam writes later: Teshuvah brings close those who are far away; yesterday (i.e., before doing teshuvah), he was hated before the Omnipresent – disgusting, distant and abominable. But today (i.e., after having done teshuvah), he is loved, desirable, close – a friend. Rambam Hilchot Teshuvah 7:6

How exalted are the benefits of teshuvah! Yesterday, this person was alienated from Hashem, the God of Israel, as it is stated (Isaiah 59:2): your iniquities have separated between you and your God; he would cry out and not be responded to, as it is stated (ibid. 1:15): even if you were to intensify your prayer, I will not listen; he would fulfill commandments and they would be thrown back in his face, as it is stated (ibid. v. 12): who sought this from your hand, to trample My courtyards, and (Malachi 1:10): If only there were someone among you who would shut the [Temple] doors, so that you could not kindle upon My Altar in vain! I have no desire for you, said Hashem, Master of Hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand, and (Jeremiah 7:21): Add your burnt-offerings to your peace offerings and eat [their] meat [yourselves]. But today, he is attached to the Divine Presence, as it is stated (Deuteronomy 4:4): But you who cling to Hashem, your God; he cries out and is responded to immediately, as it is stated (Isaiah 65:24): It will be that before they call I will answer; and he fulfills commandments and they are accepted with pleasure and joy, as it is written (Ecclesiastes 9:7): for God has already approved your deeds, and not only that but there is a longing for them, as it is stated (Malachi 3:4): Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to Hashem as in the days of old and in previous years. Hilchot Teshuvah 7:7

How can such a sharp distinction, such a dramatic turnabout, be explained? The answer is that the person who has done complete teshuvah has undergone a dramatic change. He is now no longer the same person as he was before. And his relationship with Hashem is thus also markedly different. This is the nature of complete teshuvah, and it is indeed significantly different qualitatively than the basic kind of teshuvah where the essence is developing the ability to avoid sin through the discipline that comes as a result of the three stages of recognition, remorse and resolve. Complete teshuvah involves making changes in one's very character and becoming a different person. The Ultimate Goal and the Process of Teshuvah The second question posed above as to why the Rambam began '????' by describing complete teshuvah before defining the more basic elements of teshuvah, a seemingly out of order presentation, may perhaps be addressed by analyzing what teshuvah is really all about. It is possible to understand that what the Rambam defines as "complete" teshuvah is something beyond the fundamental requirement of teshuvah – a goal to be striven for, certainly, but essentially an "extra" – an option for one who wants to "go all out" and engage in doing "teshuvah-plus." If that is the case, then it is true that the Rambam should perhaps have begun with a discussion of the general obligation before moving on to the optional "extra." It is possible, however, to suggest that complete teshuvah is in fact the ultimate goal; it is that level which in truth defines the very obligation of teshuvah. All "lesser" forms of teshuvah, while significant, indeed quite significant, can be considered as means toward the end of complete teshuvah. Teshuvah, according to this approach, is a process, consisting of several steps, each of which, though important in its own right, is a prelude to another step, with the final purpose being the change in personality. If this is true, the Rambam's formulation makes good sense. He begins in '????' by stating the goal of teshuvah, namely, transformation of character. Then, in '????', he discusses the key steps needed on the way to that goal. It is obvious that not everybody in every circumstance is able to redefine himself as part of the teshuvah process; in many cases, doing teshuvah by disciplining oneself to avoid the temptation of sin, accompanied by the requisite feelings of remorse, is the best one can hope to achieve. As even that accomplishment is often rather elusive, such teshuvah is nothing to be embarrassed about. But it still falls short of complete teshuvah. The person who attains this level of teshuvah has taken steps – big steps – but he has not reached the target. The Rambam thus chose to begin his definitions of teshuvah by setting the target. With this approach, another answer may be

offered to a famous question raised by the Minchat Chinuch (364:1) and others.¹²⁸ The Gemara in Kiddushin (49b) teaches that if a man says to a woman, “Become betrothed to me on the condition that I am a righteous person,” even if he (until now) was a completely wicked person, she is considered betrothed to him because it is possible that at that moment, he had made a mental commitment to do teshuvah. That thought in his mind suffices to categorize him as a righteous person because he has done teshuvah. The question is, if, as noted above, vidui, a verbal confession, is such an integral component of the teshuvah process, how can this mental commitment be enough to characterize this person as a righteous man – he cannot be viewed as having properly done teshuvah, because he made no confession. According to the aforementioned understanding of the Rambam, though, the answer is clear. Teshuvah, as explained, is a process, consisting of many steps. A mental commitment to mend one’s evil ways is one of those steps – possibly the very first step. The vidui, consisting of the three components outlined above, is another, later step. But even that brings one to only one level of teshuvah; the ultimate teshuvah, “complete” teshuvah, is further yet down the road. The individual who mentally committed to change his behavior for the better has certainly not done complete teshuvah. He has not even done teshuvah on the basic level, as he did not recite vidui. But he has taken a step; he is on the road. And concerning at least this particular law of betrothal, his being on the road is sufficient to qualify the person as righteous.¹²⁹ It should be pointed out that this idea that teshuvah is in fact a process with a number of steps, and that a mental decision to do teshuvah is an early one of those steps, can be shown to emerge from the words of the Rambam himself. As alluded to above, the Rambam in 1:1, when introducing the formula for the text of vidui, prefaces his presentation of the mitzvah of vidui with the words “????? ?????,” “when he does teshuvah.” This implies that the decision in the person’s mind to do teshuvah has already happened; the first step has been taken. The notion is even more clearly evident in the words of the Rambam in describing the procedure followed when bringing certain sacrifices: How does one confess? He says, “I have sinned, been iniquitous and willfully rebelled, and I have done such and such; but I have returned through teshuvah before You, and this [sacrifice] is my atonement.” Hilchot Maaseh HaKorbanot 3:15 can this mental commitment be enough to characterize this person as a righteous man – he cannot be viewed as having properly done teshuvah, because he made no confession. According to the aforementioned understanding of the Rambam, though, the answer is clear. Teshuvah, as explained, is a process, consisting of many steps. A mental commitment to mend one’s evil ways is one of those steps – possibly the very first step. The vidui, consisting of the three components outlined above, is another, later step. But even that brings one to only one level of teshuvah; the ultimate teshuvah, “complete” teshuvah, is further yet down the road. The individual who mentally committed to change his behavior for the better has certainly not done complete teshuvah. He has not even done teshuvah on the basic level, as he did not recite vidui. But he has taken a step; he is on the road. And concerning at least this particular law of betrothal, his being on the road is sufficient to qualify the person as righteous.¹²⁹ It should be pointed out that this idea that teshuvah is in fact a process with a number of steps, and that a mental decision to do teshuvah is an early one of those steps, can be shown to emerge from the words of the Rambam himself. As alluded to above, the Rambam in 1:1, when introducing the formula for the text of vidui, prefaces his presentation of the mitzvah of vidui with the words “????? ?????,” “when he does teshuvah.” This implies that the decision in the person’s mind to do teshuvah has already happened; the first step has been taken. The notion is even more clearly evident in the words of the Rambam in describing the procedure followed when bringing certain sacrifices: How does one confess? He says, “I have sinned, been iniquitous and willfully rebelled, and I have

done such and such; but I have returned through teshuvah before You, and this [sacrifice] is my atonement.” Hilchot Maaseh HaKorbanot 3:15

According to this, the individual, as an actual part of the text of his vidui, declares, “????? ?????,” “and I have returned through teshuvah.” Note that this phrase is in the past tense; the person is thus stating when he recites his vidui that he has already done teshuvah, at least in some sense. Some form of teshuvah comes first, the formal, technical vidui comes a little later, and, if all goes well, “complete” teshuvah is attained later still. It seems clear from all of the above that at least according to the Rambam, there are many steps which must be taken as part of the overall teshuvah process, and each one is important in its own right. It is conceivable that one may never fully achieve the total personality change identified with complete teshuvah, and the attainment of these other levels of teshuvah is thus to be encouraged and is commendable as well, as each step brings the individual closer to Hashem. At the same time, however, the ultimate goal of teshuvah remains the transformation of one’s character, the metamorphosis into a person no longer even tempted by the sins which were previously violated, difficult though reaching that goal may be.

The Sin and the Sinner Put in different words, the teshuvah process may be said to address two entities: the sin and the sinner. When one has sinned, he has committed an act that is in violation of Hashem’s Will. This act has consequences, and depending upon the specific nature of the transgression, the person is subject to certain punishments; we thus find throughout the Torah that different punishments are associated with different sins. In addressing “sin,” the goal of teshuvah is to expiate that misdeed, to remove it, as it were, from the person’s ledger. What is needed for that to happen depends again upon the nature of the transgression. The Mishnah in Yoma states: The chatas offering and the definite asham offering atone [for sin]. Death and Yom Kippur atone [along] with repentance. Repentance [alone] atones for lesser transgressions, whether [in violation of] either positive or negative commandments. And for severe [transgressions], it [i.e., repentance] suspends [punishment] until Yom Kippur comes and atones. Mishnah Yoma 85b

A subsequent gemara at there elaborates: R’ Masya ben Charash asked R’ Elazar ben Azaryah: “Have you heard the four categories of atonement that R’ Yishmael expounds?” He said [in response]: “There are three, and repentance [is needed] with each and every one. If one violated a positive commandment and repented, he does not [have to] move from there until he is forgiven [i.e., he is forgiven immediately], as it is stated (Jeremiah 3:22): Return O wayward children. If one violated a negative commandment and repented, repentance suspends [punishment] and Yom Kippur atones, as it is stated (Leviticus 16:30): For on this day He shall atone for you...from all your sins. If one violated [sins punishable by] premature death or death at the hands of a Beit Din and repented, repentance and Yom Kippur suspend [punishment] and suffering purges [the sin], as it is stated (Psalms 89:33): Then I will punish their willful rebellion with a rod and their iniquity with plagues. But [for] one who has [the sin of] desecration of the Name [of Hashem] in his hand, repentance does not have the capability to suspend [punishment], nor Yom Kippur to atone, nor suffering to purge. Rather, all of them [together] suspend [punishment] and death purges, as it is stated (Isaiah 22:14): And it was revealed in my ears by Hashem, Master of Hosts, “This sin will not be atoned for you until you die.” Yoma 86a

It is clear that repentance plays a significant role in purging or expunging sin, and that more may be needed if the sin is of a greater type.¹³⁰ For this reason, Rabbeinu Yonah writes in his Shaarei Teshuvah (III:1-2) that one must examine the severity of his sins as part of the teshuvah process. But in addition to committing the technical act of a transgression, one who sins does something else as well. The person, the ????, becomes a sinner. The sin becomes a stain on his

personality, regardless of the punishment associated with it, and he suddenly has a different identity. The teshuvah process for this consequence is thus different. It is not enough to deal with the sin; the individual must do something to change his personal status as a sinner. It is to this consequence which complete teshuvah addresses itself. While teshuvah responds to the sin, “complete” teshuvah responds to the sinner. Perhaps for this reason, each line of the long vidui recited on Yom Kippur includes the words “?? ??,” “For the sin,” and “?????” , “that we have sinned.” We have sinned and we have become sinners. It is noteworthy that the Rambam, when defining complete teshuvah in ' ??? ? , mentions nothing about the different gradations of atonement; he refers to them only in his discussion of general teshuvah (' ??? ?' ??? ?-?). This may be because when considering the sinner, as opposed to the sin, the severity of the transgression is less critical. The issue is the impact on the person’s character and that can depend on numerous other factors. Regardless of the nature of one’s misdeed, then, he has become a sinner, and he must do whatever he can to change that status; he must try to transform his personality. The Mishnah states: Be as careful with a “minor” mitzvah as with a “major” one, for you do not know the [true] reward given for the mitzvot. Pirkei Avot 2:1

The Rambam, both in his Peirush HaMishnayot to that Mishnah and in ??' ????? ??:? explains that we are incapable of evaluating the relative worth of mitzvot; only Hashem is capable of so doing. Despite the fact that we do know the severity of the punishment for many mitzvot, we are still incapable of properly assessing their true value and weight, as there are many other factors relating to mitzvot, including very subjective ones, which we are not able to take into account.¹³¹ In light of our presentation here, it may perhaps be added that the Mishnah is teaching as well that nobody really knows the impact that an act can have on one’s personality (whether positive or negative); the omission of even a seemingly minor mitzvah, or the commission of even a seemingly minor transgression can categorize someone as a sinner. “Complete” teshuvah is needed to address one’s failure to have learned the lesson of this Mishnah, and to change the character of someone who is, in any other fashion, considered a sinner.

Redirecting One’s Traits Finally, it is worth pointing out that the “transformation of character” which defines complete teshuvah does not necessarily demand a total and sweeping alteration of all of one’s inner tendencies and natural proclivities. On the contrary, sometimes those very same characteristics, if channeled in the right direction, can lead a person to greatness. Complete teshuvah is, in one sense, attained when one has learned to use for positive things the very abilities that in the past led him to sin. Indeed, the Yeitzer HaRa, the so-called “evil inclination,” itself can be used and is actually needed for productive purposes, as demonstrated by the Gemara in Sanhedrin (64a). The Midrash in Bereishit Rabbah (9:7) cites an opinion that the words “very good” found in the Torah regarding the creation of the universe (Genesis 1:31) actually refer to the Yeitzer HaRa! How can this be understood? The answer is that a person can use even his Yeitzer HaRa for very good purposes; the Gemara in Berachot (5a) thus directs one to use his Yeitzer Tov to combat his Yeitzer HaRa, to control it, to sublimate it – but not to eliminate it. This may be the true meaning of the line in the Yom Kippur vidui which states, “ ?? ?? ???? ???? ???? ??” , “For the sin that we have sinned before You with the Yeitzer HaRa.” The subject here is perhaps not the temptations of the Yeitzer HaRa in general, for many individual transgressions are expressly listed; such a general statement is not needed. Rather, the confession here is for failing to use the Yeitzer HaRa in a positive and constructive fashion, the way it should be used. With this idea, we can perhaps better understand the following fascinating passage in the Gemara in Yoma: Reish Lakish said: Great is repentance, for [through repentance] intentional transgressions are considered as unintentional transgressions, as it is stated (Hosea 14:2): Return, O Israel, unto

Hashem your God, for you have stumbled through your iniquity. Now an iniquity is an intentional transgression, yet [the verse] calls it “stumbling” [which implies something unintentional]. Is this so? But Reish Lakish [himself] said: Great is repentance for [through repentance] intentional transgressions are considered as merits [and not as unintentional transgressions], as it is stated (Ezekiel 33:19): And if the wicked man turns away from his wickedness and behaves with justice and righteousness, he shall live on account of them. This is not a question. Here [in the second statement, the reference is to teshuvah motivated] by love, there [in the first statement, the reference is to teshuvah motivated] by fear. Yoma 86b

Even aside from the details relating to teshuvah motivated by fear and teshuvah motivated by love, this passage requires some analysis. It is understandable that the power of proper repentance is such that it can “downgrade” intentional sins and allow them to be viewed as though they were actually committed unintentionally; teshuvah can release a person from liability for his misdeeds. But how does it make sense, even when motivated by the very best of motivations, for teshuvah to have the power to transform sins into merits? Can it really be said that all of this person’s previous transgressions are now accounted for him as positive actions?¹³² The answer is that when a person changes his character and reforms his personality, such that he is now a different person, all of those very traits and all of those very experiences which previously enabled him and led him to become a sinner can now be used in a proper manner.

The same Yeitzer HaRa will now be used for good things, and this person’s future good deeds will build on the foundation of his earlier misdeeds, leading to constructive results. The prior sins thus, in a way, now lead the person to great heights and are therefore viewed as merits.¹³³ Teshuvah is a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional process. Change, as a rule, does not happen in a fleeting moment, but rather in stages. One who does teshuvah takes steps; steps to avoid sin, to improve his behavior and to become a new and better person. “Complete” teshuvah is achieved when one has reached the final destination: when he has redefined his character to the extent that even his prior misdeeds now help motivate him to do what is right, where all aspects of his personality contribute to his service of Hashem. That is the ultimate, if difficult to attain, goal of teshuvah.

http://www.ou.org/torah/article/yom_kippur_contradictions/

OU TORAH Yom Kippur: Contradictions

By Rabbi Nachman Kahana

At the beginning of every New Year, the halacha creates within us a schizophrenia of sorts. On the one hand, we are obliged to treat Rosh Hashana as Yom Tov replete with holiday apparel and festive meals accompanied by singing in the knowledge that the “Judge” of all things will certainly deem us worthy of going through another calendar year. On the other hand, we are obliged to reflect on our behavior and misbehavior, not only over the past year, but for as long back as we can remember. However, these honest reflections on our “indiscretions” suffice to quench any emotions of optimism, which we are required to adopt on this day.

Indeed, this duality of emotions is not a contradiction nor does it manifest a mental or emotional problem within us. It is part of the inherent nature of this world, as planned and implemented by the Creator, where each element is compromised into limiting its primary characteristics. The world exists not despite its apparent contradiction but because of it.

There are two necessary, competing and contradictory constant forces at work in the world. One can be defined as a thrust which initiates change, and the other as a force which resists change.

A common example is electricity. At any given moment, a power station produces electric power measured in millions of volts. Now since our homes are wired to function on 220 volts, if the full force of the voltage produced in the power station were to follow along the entire circuit, it would destroy everything in its path. In order to reduce the enormous force generated by the power station to the level of 220 volts, step-down transformers are placed along the path of the circuit, reducing its initial thrust until it reaches a level which is productive and not destructive.

The Gemara in Shabbat 88:b relates that Hashem created the torah 974 generations before creating anything else. The Zohar in Shmot 161:a informs us that Hashem then used the torah as a blueprint for creating the world. Hence, it is a mistake to conclude that since we, as physical creatures, must by necessity eat, the rabbis enacted the saying of brachot. Rather, since Hashem wanted the Jewish nation to bless Him, He created the necessity for humans to eat.

Hashem authored the Torah containing expressions of His love for the Jewish nation and its privileged state. His will, by its very essence, is a surging force aspiring for immediate fulfillment. But, since Hashem willed that mankind should go through evolutionary stages of development leading up to the realization of Hashem's mastery over all creation as perceived by the Jewish people, it was necessary to create forces to decelerate the final redemption of Am Yisrael. These destructive forces take the form of resha (evil), whose function in every generation is to deny the Jewish God and that He is a "religious-Zionist".

This force and counterforce have been functioning without cessation since creation – the positive forces driving all creation towards the final wholeness for which it was created versus the negative elements whose purpose is to slow down the ambitions of ge'ula.

In our time, this bipolar phenomenon has been manifested through many people who achieved positions of leadership where they served the forces of anti-redemption. In 1948, the soldiers of the Irgun Tzva'i Le'umi (Etzel) and Lechi had conquered half of the Old City and were just a few hours away from reaching the Temple Mount, when they received orders to retreat. In the Six Day War of 1967, the heroic soldiers of Tzahal could have taken the entire Middle East. There was no force capable of standing up against our soldiers, because we were pushed forward by angels. We could have liberated the entire area of the Biblical promised borders of Eretz Yisrael from the River Prat to the Nile. But then the order came from Moshe Dayan to stop at the Jordan River. In the Yom Kippur War, we reached 35 kilometers from Damascus and 101 from Cairo. It was in our power to demilitarize Egypt and Syria for the next 50 years. Instead, our forces were told to stop the advance. So today, we find ourselves with an Egyptian army, which is the largest in the Middle East. In the first Lebanese War, we were on the outskirts of Beirut and could have destroyed those elements who today constitute the terror organizations of Hamas, Al-Queda, etc. And today, we are being told by our leaders to retreat from areas of Eretz Yisrael and hand them over to Islam.

History, when viewed in the above manner, attains a perspective which otherwise presents human events as chaotic in God's otherwise orderly universe.

We are not very proud of many of our leaders, but we do not have a monopoly on those who prevent the redemption of Am Yisrael at a time when the forces of redemption should be dominant. In chutz la'aretz, there is no lack of leaders who show no interest in rebuilding Eretz Yisrael and even convince well-meaning Jews to remain and build their sanctuaries in the Galut. They too belong to those negative forces that hinder and repress the healthy elements of Am Yisrael in our long trek towards ge'ula.

In these "days of awe", we can understand the relationship between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur on the background of the above scenario.

On Rosh Hashana, we stand on trial before Hashem. The aim of His judgments is to be effective immediately, as befits the commands of a king. However, since Hashem, our merciful King and Father, does not wish to punish but waits for the sinner to turn from his evil ways, He created a counterpoint to Rosh Hashana - Yom Kippur. The purpose of Yom Kippur is to decelerate the g'zar din (judgment) of Rosh Hashana and, dependent on our behavior, even change the harsh judgments.

At this critical junction in the history of our people and in the history of mankind, we are confident in the acceptance of our prayers that the creative, positive forces of redemption will soon overcome the intrusive and destructive elements in our lives. And we shall soon witness the fulfillment of the prophecies which long to burst forth as willed by Hashem 974 generations before the world was created.

from **Rabbi Josh Flug** <yutorah@yutorah.org> reply-to yutorah@yutorah.org to internetparshasheet@gmail.com date Tue, Sep 7, 2010 at 10:36 AM subject Immersion in a Mikveh Prior to the High Holidays

Immersion in a Mikveh Prior to the High Holidays

There are many people who have the custom to immerse in a mikveh before Rosh HaShanah or Yom Kippur. In this issue, we will explore the various reasons presented for this custom and the practical differences between these reasons.

The Requirement to Purify Oneself Prior to a Festival

The Gemara, Rosh HaShanah 16b, states that there is an obligation to purify oneself prior to a festival. Rambam (1138-1204), Hilchot Tumat Ochlin 16:10, codifies this statement and explains that the purpose of this obligation is so that one can enter the Beit HaMikdash and eat Kodshim (sacrificial meats). According to Rambam, the custom of immersion prior to Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur is ostensibly not based on the obligation to purify oneself prior to a festival. On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur there are no sacrifices that one must eat. Furthermore, nowadays, we do not offer sacrifices and even if we had the ability, immersion is not a sufficient form of purity for one who was come in contact with a corpse.

R. Yechezkel Landa (1713-1793), Tzelach, Beitzah to Rashi 18a, s.v. D'Lo, suggests that other Rishonim disagree. R. Eliezer ben R. Yoel HaLevi, (c. 1140-1220), Sefer Ra'aviah no. 529, writes that the obligation to purify oneself before a festival applies on Rosh HaShanah. R. Landa notes that Ra'aviah must be of the opinion that the obligation to purify oneself prior to a festival is not a function of being able to eat the sacrifices. Rather, there is an independent obligation of purity before all festivals, including Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. This obligation would also apply nowadays.

Rabbeinu Asher (c. 1250-1327), Yoma 8:24, seems to present a middle position. Rabbeinu Asher states that one cannot apply the obligation to purify oneself before a festival to the custom of immersion before Yom Kippur because the obligation to purify oneself is only fulfilled if one becomes fully purified in the process. Nowadays, we are all ritually impure because we have come in contact with a corpse and immersion is insufficient to remove that type of impurity. Rabbeinu Asher implies that theoretically, the obligation to purify oneself before a festival applies on Yom Kippur (and ostensibly on Rosh HaShanah). However, practically, we have no means of fulfilling this obligation nowadays.

R. Aryeh Leib Ginsburg (1695-1785), Sha'agat Aryeh no. 67, prefers Rambam's position and therefore questions Rabbeinu Asher's logic. First, there should be no obligation to purify oneself for Rosh HaShanah or Yom Kippur when there is no obligation to eat korbanot. Second, even if one were to find the ashes of a parah adumah, there is still no obligation to purify oneself before a festival if there is no possibility of offering a sacrifice.

R. Yosef S. Nathanson (1808-1875), Sho'el U'Meishiv Vol. III 1:123, writes that the practice of purifying oneself prior to the festivals should be continued as part of our obligation to observe practices that were in place at the time of the Beit HaMikdash (zecher laMikdash). He does not directly address whether this requirement would apply prior to Rosh HaShanah or Yom Kippur.

Removal of Tumat Keri

If one experiences any release of seminal fluid, he acquires tumat kerī and is called a ba'al kerī. Tumat kerī has ramifications outside of the Beit HaMikdash. The Mishna, Berachot 20b, notes that a ba'al kerī may not learn Torah or recite berachot until he enters a mikveh. The Gemara, Berachot 22b, states that this institution dates back to Ezra HaSofer. Nevertheless, The Gemara, Berachot 22a, records that many people adopted the ruling of R. Yehuda ben Beteirah that the original institution was repealed. While there is considerable debate regarding the extent of R. Yehuda ben Beteirah's ruling (see Beit Yosef, Orach Chaim no. 88), Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 88:1, adopts the position that the original institution was totally repealed and no purification is required in order for a ba'al kerī to learn Torah or recite berachot.

Kol Bo (anonymous author, 14th-15th century) no. 64, writes that the repeal of the original institution was based on the difficulty of observing it. Therefore, we observe the institution prior on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur because their prayers require a higher level of sanctity.

Immersion as an Act of Repentance

Maharil (c. 1365-1427), Hilchot Erev Yom Kippur, presents a third reason for immersion prior to Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. Maharil suggests that it is considered part of the repentance process. He compares it to the immersion of a convert who immerses (as part of the conversion process) in order to signify that there is now a change in his life.

Maharil notes a number of practical differences between his approach and the approach that immersion is to remove tumat kerī. First, if the immersion is to remove tumat kerī, one can immerse whenever one pleases. However, if it is for the purpose of repentance, one should immerse as close to Yom Kippur as possible. [Maharil only discusses immersion prior to Yom Kippur. Perhaps he does not require immersion prior to Rosh HaShanah because repentance is not a main theme of Rosh HaShanah.] Second, Maharil notes that if the purpose of the immersion is to merely remove tumat kerī, it would only apply to those who are actually impure. Those who are not impure would not require immersion. However, if the purpose is for repentance, everyone, including women and young children, should immerse. [See Sha'agat Aryeh no. 66, regarding a woman's obligation to purify herself prior to a festival.]

R. Moshe Isserles (1520-1572), Darkei Moshe, Orach Chaim 606:3, presents two additional differences between the reasons for immersion. First, he notes that Maharil states that one should immerse three times and recite vidui. R. Isserles notes that this is only applicable if the reason for immersion is for repentance. If the purpose of immersion is for purity, a single immersion is sufficient and there is no reason to recite vidui. Second, Kol Bo, op. cit., notes that Maharam MiRutenberg (1215-1293) did not immerse in the mikveh before Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. Rather, he poured nine kav (approximately 12-20 liters) of water on himself. R. Isserles notes that use of nine kav is a remedy that is only mentioned in the context of allowing a ba'al kerī to learn Torah and recite berachot (see Berachot 22a). It is not a standard purification process. Therefore, Maharam was certainly of the opinion that immersion before Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur is a function of tumat kerī.

As a matter of practical halacha, R. Isserles, in his glosses to Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 606:4, writes that reason for immersion is to remove tumat kerī. Therefore, one is only required to immerse one time and one may rely on the use of nine kav. R. Avraham Gombiner

(c.1633-1683) Magen Avraham 606:8, records that there are those who are of the opinion that the immersion is for the purpose of repentance and therefore require three immersions. R. Chaim C. Medini (1833-1904), S'dei Chemed, Ma'arechet Yom HaKippurim 1:6, rules that single women should not immerse prior to Rosh HaShanah or Yom Kippur. R. Moshe Meth (c.1551-1606), Mateh Moshe no. 841, rules that in general, immerse prior to Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur is not applicable to women.

Recitation of a Beracha on the Immersion

Rabbeinu Asher, op. cit., cites the opinion of R. Sa'adiah Gaon (882-942) that one should recite a beracha after immersing in the mikveh. Rabbeinu Asher disagrees and maintains that the purpose of the immersion is only to be more stringent regarding tumat kerī prior to Yom Kippur. Since there is no fulfillment of a mitzvah or even a minhag, no beracha is warranted.

R. Sa'adiah Gaon's position may be that the purpose of the immersion is to purify oneself prior to a festival. As such, there is a fulfillment of a mitzvah or a minhag in the immersion. Alternatively, he may be of the opinion that the immersion is an act of repentance. This may also qualify as a type of minhag that warrants a beracha. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 606:4, rules that one does not recite a beracha on the immersion.

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Yom Kippur: From My Very Bones
Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

We usually speak of the heart rejoicing and praising God. "My heart and my flesh sing out to the living God" (Ps. 84:3). Yet we find the psalmist also speaks of his bones exclaiming God's praise:

"All of my bones will say, 'God, Who is like You?'" (Ps. 35:10) Can bones praise God?

Yom Kippur in the Janowska Road Camp

"This particular story is one of those stories that deserves to be published in a book," said the Rabbi of Bluzhov, Rabbi Israel Spiro.

In the Janowska camp there was a Jewish foreman from Lvov by the name of Schneeweiss, one of those people that one stays away from if he values his life.

Yom Kippur was nearing and fears in the camp mounted; everyone knew that the Germans especially liked to use Jewish holidays as days for inflicting terror and death. Nevertheless, a group of Hasidim asked the Rabbi of Bluzhov to approach Schneeweiss and request that on Yom Kippur his group not be assigned to any of the thirty-nine main categories of work, so that their transgression of the law by working on Yom Kippur would not be a major one.

The rabbi knew that the foreman had little respect for Jewish tradition. Before the war, Schneeweiss had publicly violated the Jewish holidays, and in Janowska, he was a merciless man. Despite his fears, the rabbi agreed to speak with him.

"You probably remember me. I am the Rabbi of Pruchnik, Rabbi Israel Spira." Schneeweiss did not respond. "Tonight is Kol Nidrei night," the rabbi continued. "There is a small group of Jews who do not want to transgress any of the major prohibitions of the day. It means everything to them. It is the essence of their existence. Can you do something about it? Can you help?"

The rabbi noticed a hidden shiver went through Schneeweiss. He took his hand and said, 'I beg you to do this for us so that we may still find some dignity in our humiliating existence.'

The stern face of Schneeweiss changed. For the first time, the rabbi saw in it a human spark. "Tonight I cannot help you," Schneeweiss replied. "But tomorrow, on Yom Kippur, I will do whatever I can."

Even the Transgressors in Israel

The following day, the rabbi and a small group of young Hasidim were summoned to the foreman's cottage. He arranged for them to clean in a way that would not transgress any of the thirty-nine major categories of work.

The rabbi was standing on a ladder with rags in his hand, cleaning the huge windows while chanting prayers, and his companions were on the floor polishing the wood and praying with him. The floor was wet with our tears. You can imagine the prayers of that Yom Kippur...'

At about twelve o'clock noon, the door opened wide. Into the room stormed two angels of death, S. S. men in their black uniforms. They were followed by a food cart filled to capacity. The room was filled with the aroma of freshly cooked food, such as they had not seen since the German occupation: white bread, steaming hot vegetable soup, and huge portions of meat.

The tall S. S. soldier commanded, "You must eat immediately or you will be shot on the spot!" No one moved. The rabbi and the Hasidim remained in their places. The German repeated the orders. The Jews remained glued to their places. The S.S. men called in Schneeweiss. "Schneeweiss, if the dirty dogs refuse to eat, I will kill you along with them!"

Schneeweiss pulled himself to attention, looked the German directly in the eyes, and said in a quiet tone, "We Jews do not eat today. Today is Yom Kippur, our most holy day, the Day of Atonement."

"You don't understand, Jewish dog," roared the S. S. soldier. "I command you in the name of the Fuhrer and the Third Reich - fress!"

Schneeweiss, composed, his head high, repeated the same answer. "We Jews obey the law of our tradition. Today is Yom Kippur, a day of fasting."

The German took out his revolver from its holster and pointed it at Schneeweiss's temple. Schneeweiss remained calm. He stood still, at attention, his head high. A shot pierced the room. Schneeweiss fell.

The rabbi and the Hasidim remained frozen in their places, not believing what their eyes had just witnessed. Schneeweiss, the man who in the past had publicly transgressed against Jewish tradition, had sanctified God's Name publicly and died a martyr's death for the sake of Jewish honor.

"Only then, on that Yom Kippur day in Janowska," said the rabbi, "did I understand the meaning of the statement in the Talmud: 'Even the transgressors in Israel are as full of good deeds as a pomegranate is filled with seeds' (Berachot 57a)."

Even the Bones

There are inner powers of the soul that are ordinarily not felt. They are only awakened at special times, in times of need. These powers may be compared to our bones. Unlike the flesh, which is more sensitive, our bones do not seem to be so 'alive.'

Nonetheless, bones are a basic part of our bodies. They break when we are injured, and they mend when we are healed.

When we sanctify our soul, we reveal our hidden light. And all of our inner powers are revealed - even those spiritual resources that are usually hidden. This then is the intent of the verse. Deep down, even our bones, even our hidden powers, will express our wonder, 'God, who is like You?'

(Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. II, p. 97. Story condensed from Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust by Jaffa Eliach, pp. 180-184.)

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Praying with All of Israel

Based on a sicha by Harav Aharon Lichtenstein

Summarized by Aryeh Dienstag Prior to Kol Nidrei, we recite the following declaration (Al da'at ha-Makom): With the approval of the Almighty and with the approval of the congregation, in the convocation of the court above and in the convocation of the court below, we sanction praying with transgressors. The real purpose of Kol Nidrei is to allow the "transgressors," those who have been excommunicated from the community, to rejoin the congregation for the Yom Kippur prayers. This proclamation is the opening of the Yom Kippur prayers in the liturgy of all Ashkenazic Jewry. In Ashkenaz, the cherm (excommunication) was a powerful form of punishment and an effective tool to protect the community from negative influences. Nonetheless, the Ashkenazic Torah leadership established Kol Nidrei as a mechanism to allow these people to rejoin the congregation for Yom Kippur. This is not simply a nice gesture to an excluded part of the community during times of trouble; this inclusion is based on a clear mandate of Chazal. The Gemara in Keritot (6b) states: Rabbi Chana bar Bizna said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Chasida: Any fast that does not include the sinners of Israel, is no fast, for the odor of galbanum (chelbona) is foul, and yet it was included among the spices for the incense. The Gemara states that a fast that excludes the sinners is no fast - and presumably this implies that the prayers offered in such a fast will not be answered. Rabbi Shimon Chasida is teaching us an important rule, that whenever we have a fast, it is not enough for those who follow the Torah to beseech God for mercy; the entirety of the Jewish community must be included in the prayer. Moshe Rabbeinu was the quintessential model of this trait. After the sin of the spies, Moshe does not simply ask for mercy on himself or on those who remained clear of sin. Rather, he pleads: Pardon, I beseech You, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your mercy, as You have forgiven this people from Egypt until now (Bemidbar 14:19). Moshe prayed on behalf of the entire nation. Similarly, when the children of Israel were fighting against Amalek, Moshe took part in the pain of the nation as a whole. The Gemara in Ta'anit (11a) states: A person should share in the distress of the community, for so we find that Moshe, our teacher, shared in the distress of the community, as it is said (Shemot 17:12), "But Moshe's hands were heavy; and they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat upon it." Did Moshe not have a bolster or a cushion to sit on? This is what Moshe meant [to convey], "As Israel are in distress I too will share with them." He who shares in the distress of the community will merit to behold its consolation. Moshe sat on a rock so that he would feel the pain the nation was experiencing. The Torah even considers the eventuality that an entire community might commit a sin, and it then prescribes a specific sacrifice whereby the community can gain atonement for this act: Then it shall be, if anything is committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bull for a burnt offering... And all the congregation of the people of Israel, and the stranger who sojourns among them shall be forgiven; seeing as all the people were in ignorance. (Bemidbar 15:24, 26) We see from here the only proper way to seek mercy from God and be answered is to include the entire nation. These verses reinforce the message that Rabbi Shimon Chasida learns from the incense, that even sinners must be included in the community in a time of trouble. This notion can be relevant at any time of the year. Yet, it is particularly pertinent to Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashana is both a universal day and a day for the individual. It is the day that commemorates the creation of the world, and thus a day for judgment of the entire world. There is judgment on the global scale, as well as individual judgment. However, the special significance of the Jewish people is not inherent in the definition of the day. On the other hand, the opposite can be said about Yom Kippur.

Regarding Yom Kippur, the day is entirely focused on the Jewish people as a nation. The concluding blessing recited in the central kedushat ha-yom blessing, which speaks to the definition of the day, refers to God as “Melekh mochel ve-sole’ach la-avonoteinu, ve-la-avonot ammo beit Yisrael, the King Who pardons and forgives our iniquities and the iniquities of His people, the house of Israel.” It is a day when the community as a whole receives forgiveness from the Almighty. The elaborate, intricate, critical Temple service of Yom Kippur is performed on behalf of the entire Jewish people – the community as a whole; the vidduy, confession, undertaken by the Kohen Gadol, High Priest, is recited on behalf of the entire nation – not just those who observe all the mitzvot. However, Yom Kippur ought not be conceived as a day of unity for the Jewish people in a geographic vacuum. The land of Israel is the locus for the unity of the Jewish people. The Rambam writes in numerous places of the special status the land of Israel regarding the establishment of the Jewish people as a community. Only in the land of Israel is the Jewish nation seen as one cohesive, organic, indivisible entity. One such source is in the Sefer Ha-mitzvot (mitzvat asef 153), where the Rambam writes that any kiddush ha-chodesh (sanctification of the new moon) – even when it must be performed in the Diaspora – must trace its roots back to the land of Israel to be effective. For this reason, on Yom Kippur it is essential that our mindset in prayer is one focused on the Jewish people in toto – not just those with whom we pray in the immediate sense. When we ask God that “the memory of Your entire nation Israel should come before You,” we must have in mind the entirety of the Jewish people, regardless of the religious observance of any particular Jew. There are those in the Religious Zionist community who speak now about “disengaging” from the nation as a whole, since they do not approve of the actions of some fellow Jews. This is not the proper Jewish approach, this is not the way to beseech God for mercy, this is not the way to observe Yom Kippur, and this is not the proper understanding of the unifying message of the land of Israel. We need to integrate the message of Rabbi Shimon Chasida that “Any fast that does not include the sinners of Israel, is no fast,” and include all of the Jewish people in our prayers. This way we will follow the prescription for beseeching God, properly celebrate Yom Kippur, and fulfill the mission of the land of Israel. This way we will, God willing, merit a good year, achieving forgiveness and atonement for ourselves and for the entire Jewish people. [This sicha was delivered on leil Yom Ha-kippurim 5766 (2005).]
