

BS"D



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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON SHABBOS SHUVA (VAYELECH) & YOM KIPPUR - 5766

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Rav Soloveichik ZT'L Notes (Volume 1)

Lecture delivered by Rabbi Soloveichik on Saturday night, October 2, 1976

(Shabbos T'shuvah) Erev Yom Kippur.

[Notice These are unapproved unedited notes of classes given by Rav Soloveichik. We do not know who wrote the notes. However we offer this to the world that maybe someone can get some use out of these notes. A member of the family has looked at the notes and said that look like the real thing. (Rav Soloveichik did NOT write these notes)]

The experience of Yom Kippur is halachically significant. The atonement which is granted to man equals the strength of the day. A man's sins are forgiven but are not abolished completely. There are various degrees of atonement granted to man by the Almighty. Thus, if the day is strong to the individual, the atonement is strong and vice versa.

What is the instrument that can register this phenomenon? The "instrument" is present in each and every individual; it is the experience of the individual. Thus, if a man has a tremor of heart, if he feels the presence of G-d, if he is exalted and different than every other day; then the atonement is very strong and the sins and all the stains are washed away. If it is just another day, if you don't feel different-the strength and the atonement are reduced to zero.

Tonight, we will analyze certain concepts of Yom Kippur. There are three key words in the glossary of Yom Kippur, and they are as follows. 1. Chet (sin) 2. Vidu (confession) and 3. Kaporah (forgiveness). The very essence of the day and the power of forgiveness rests on these three words.

What do we understand by chet? We understand the reality of chet. With vidu there is also reality and there is some for kaporah (an act of chesed (mercy) on the part of G-d).

Chet (sin) is reality because man is a sinner. Thus we have the words in the Torah (Nefesh...Secheto)-(a person when he sins etc.). The word nefesh includes everyone. Why is he a sinner? Because he is a man. There just are no perfect people and the greatest must make errors. This is the reality of chet.

The reality of vidu (confession or repenting) is that man is capable of repenting and changing his life. No matter how faulty he may be, he is able to roar like a lion. There is a declaration in the Torah (Deuteronomy) which states approximately "who will go to the heaven to fetch it for us-" or over seas that we will ask "who will cross the seas to get it for us" (it refers to the words and mitzvot of the Torah)-it is here-right with us etc. ... Rashi interprets this as meaning the 613 mitzvot of the Torah, but Rambam (Maimonides) interprets it as "the power and ability to repent sin."

When a man or a woman commits a sin-no matter how bad, even the most obnoxious-then he or she shall confess the transgression. The road to t'shuvah (repentance) is clear. It is said that when Menashe's sins (the tribe that broke away from Jerusalem, and set up idols in its territory, and blocked the way of the pilgrims to the Temple etc.) were so great that the angels closed all gates of repentance, the Almighty opened the way under his kissay hakavod (seat of mercy).

What is the reality of kaporah (forgiveness)? G-d not only receives the person, but stretches His hand to make it possible. We have in the machzor "Potayach yad l'shuah." (He opens His hand to repentance.)

*(In discussing the three words, Rabbi Soloveichik changed the order-starting with vidu.)

What is vidu? What is it and what is necessary to confess? Is it just a recitation-lip service-or is it an experience? What is the difference between the Hebrew words modeh and misvadeh (both indicate confessing or admitting something). Modeh means "I admit." Mitvadeh means "I am totally involved," heart and soul; it changes my life. This shows that vidu is a shattering experience. We'll delve even deeper. In sedra Ki Tavo, we find the following, "When you have made an end of tithing your goods in the third year and have given it to a Levite and the stranger, to the fatherless and the widow that they may eat within your gates and be satisfied. Then you shall declare to G-d, your G-d, "I have put away the hallowed things from my house, I have given to the Levite and the stranger, the fatherless and the widow just as you have commanded me, and I have not forgotten. I haven't eaten while I was unclean etc." This strangely is what the Talmud calls vidu! This reading and recitation! Vidu applies to a declaration of guilt, but here ... not find a declaration of guilt at all. We have merely declared that we acted as He

wanted us to. How can this possibly be classified as vidu? Here we find a recitation of accomplishment! Here man is praising himself instead of depreciating himself.

We must turn to Sifri to understand the connection. In Sifri there is a cryptic remark which says, "Ize vidu massorat." The text of the Torah which we have to declare (as written above) is a fixed one. But there is a special common denomination between the declaration and vidu. If it was equated, there must be a common denominator, and that is the Hebrew words "Lifnay Hashem Elokecha" (Before G-d, your G-d). Man must find himself before the presence of G-d. The Torah has equated it by requiring that we recite it.

But the question still remains. Why are there two types of vidu? At the first level vidu is always identical to confession. At this level it is always applicable to sin. Certainly we confess crimes, sins etc., but not contributions to charity. He certainly would not say, "I confess that I gave too many dollars." Most likely he would boast rather than confess.

This vidu at a higher level should be rendered by the English word "confide." What is the difference between confide and confess? Confiding is unburdening oneself to a friend-to one he can trust. We need someone to confide in whether what we have to say is of something successful or very bad. When I have someone whom I trust completely, and I confide in him, it is a therapeutic feeling. And to whom can we better confide in than to G-d? We confide in G-d either from the night of darkness (sorrow), or from the height of joy. It is not what we tell G-d when we make the statement listed, but the manner in which we do so. My life finds meaning only in His presence.

When man feels G-d's presence, it is termed mitvadeh. Man then must share both miserable and exalted experiences. If we have not committed a crime, we don't have to confess. Rather we share the good, confiding, being near to G-d. One can confess to G-d even when he is distant from G-d but on the higher level, whether from happiness or misery, one must be in His presence.

What do we do on Yom Kippur? Do we confess or do we confide? Actually, on Yom Kippur we do both. The confessing is called vidu katzar (the short vidu), and it begins with the prayer of Ashamnu (found on page 267 of Mussaf prayer in Machzor Kol Bo), and culminating with the recitation of various "al chets." The long vidu encompasses the entire liturgy of the machzor, beginning on Kol Nidre night with the prayer ya'ale tachnunaynu and continuing right through the day of Yom Kippur. Everything we say on Yom Kippur, all the tefilot are related to chet, and all these prayers are called "confiding." The confessing is the total admission of sin; it is a complete self-indictment. Thus, in the vidu kotzar, when we recite first ashamnu, it is as if we are standing before a judge in a court and are completely confessing to our crimes. We hide nothing, "Ashamnu, bagadnu, gazalnu," and do not try to justify our actions. We don't philosophize or elucidate, but merely state them. Having done so, we begin with the tefilah (on page 269 of Mussaf) atah yadata. Here we throw ourselves at the mercy of the court; we start to plead and defend ourselves, "You know all our weaknesses-Oh G-d." All this is part of confession.

In the Tefilah Zakah, which is recited before Kol Nidre, a most beautiful tefilah in which we share our secrets, we find both vidu kotzar and confiding. We not only confess, but we try to explain our actions. "We are amazed at ourselves that we should do such a acts as we have done." We try to defend ourselves, while indicting ourselves and pleading guilty.

2. What is chet? What motivates a person to sin? Looking at the beginning of Tefilah Zakah, we address ourselves to G-d, Father of mercy. Man is part of the universe and subject to the laws of nature. G-d reveals Himself to man the same as He does to the flying nebulae of the universe. Not only man addresses himself to G-d, but every creature and every creation in the world has its way. On Rosh Hashanah, the entire universe is judged, and man is but part of the universe. Man is subjected

to G-d's cosmic will. But there is a special relationship between G-d and man, quite apart from the rest of creation. Man detached himself from the cosmic and became a unique being. On account of this, there is a third relationship-that of G-d to the people of Israel. Thus, we find three distinct relationships: 1. Cosmic 2. Man as a special creature 3. Special relationships between G-d and His people (an intimate relationship).

Man sins as part of the cosmic and as a unique being. On Yom Kippur we tell two stories of chet-cosmic and non cosmic chet. What is cosmic chet? How is a man sinner at the cosmic level? What motivates him?

The first story is that of a woman who could not resist a beautiful tree. Man in a voluptuary. He is a pursuer of hedonic ways. It is not just a story of the woman, but it repeats itself in the generation of Noah's flood. The bible tells us that the sons of G-d came in unto the daughters of man. It was a generation of lust and wickedness.

It is the crazy chase of hedonism that precipitated paganism. The goal of modern man is to enjoy life as much as possible and to be as successful as possible. Can man resist then the chase of the "beautiful tree of pleasure?" Certainly! Guided by his own self, man is incapable, but he depends upon G-d to defend him. "Have mercy on me and keep me from sin; help me to resist the tempter." Man is entitled to gracious living if it is kosher, but sometimes it is unfortunate that man cannot protect himself from the tempter. This is the story of chet of the cosmic man, high, gracious living (especially the western man).

What of the non cosmic man? It is the same story of the woman who wanted to be free-completely free. She had distorted the illusions of freedom! She wanted to be like G-d. Eve was not satisfied with the freedom G-d granted her. She rejected the one reservation; she reached out for the deity.

G-d said, "I'll make the distinction between morality and immorality. If you ... But I am the legislator!" G-d gave man all the abilities to do, to discover, but not the ability to be the legislator of moral law. Otherwise, disaster is inevitable! This is a sin which is different from pleasure. This is the sin of "desire for freedom," denying the authority of G-d. This was the sin which destroyed the dor haflaga (the people who lived at the time of the building of the tower of Babel after Noah). They did not desire pleasure, but to displace G-d. They wanted to be the legislators.

Among modern men, eastern man, many generations later, was guilty of this sin. This is Marxism or Atheism. What did many say? "We'll write our own moral laws!" The Chinese Communists are not choosing pleasure, but desire their own moral law. Such a man soon finds himself a slave of the superman, such as Mao who wrote the moral laws for the masses. The same thing occurred in Russia where the writers were the Lenins, the Stalins etc., and the people became the slaves. This is so, why let man write your moral laws? Why not let G-d write it?

When we say the prayer of Malchiot on Rosh Hashanah (shofar soundings) it is the greatest pleasure in finding our freedom by surrendering to G-d. Thus, the children of "flesh" equal western man who pursues pleasure. Who are the wicked? The Maos, the Breshnievs, the Stalins who wrote their own moral laws. We pray for both; the gates of t'shuvah are open to both!

3. What is kapporah? How is kapporah justified? Man sins all year, and then comes on Yom Kippur and asks for forgiveness. Philosophers, such as Nietzsche and Spinoza laughed at t'shuvah (repentance). The Jews gave the world the concept.

The answer is found in Kol Nidre. Kol Nidre is the key which opens the gate. Kol Nidre explains kapporah (forgiveness). What is Kol Nidre? One text relates to the vows of the past year. Then, the past tense turns to future vows. If one made a vow of his own free will, and he realizes that it is too difficult, he appears before a court of three individuals and asks to be absolved. Why should he be permitted to request this? What does the court do?... They ask him if he would have made the vow if he had known the difficulties. He answers negatively; they declare three times to absolve him, and thus he is absolved. The vow was taken on the basis of

an inaccurate outlook forced on him by ignorance or stupidity; he didn't consider the difficulties that would arise. He accepted the vow on his own erroneous pressure. The person has had a pseudo identity. They seem to say, "we have never been what we claim to be." Who coerced him? The wrong personality and identity.

Tefilah Zakah we say, "something compelled me to sin." T'shuvah reviles to the man his true identity and his true personality. On Yom Kippur there is a reconciliation between man and man and man and G-d.



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EMES LIYAAKOV
Weekly Insights from
MOREINU HORAV YAAKOV
KAMENETZKY zt"l
[Translated by Ephraim Weiss

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The Aseres Yemei Teshuva, the time period in which we now find ourselves, is a difficult period to understand. If we are judged on Rosh HaShanah, what are the Aseres Yemei Teshuva for? The Rambam in hilchos Teshuva [3:3] explains that actually, the fates of the vast majority of people are not decided on Rosh HaShanah. On Rosh HaShanah, everyone's mitzvos and aveiros are weighed. Those who are found to be tzadikim immediately receive a favorable verdict, and those who are found to be reshaim immediately receive an unfavorable verdict, chas v'shalom. However, beinonim, or those whose mitzvos and aveiros are more or less equal have their judgment deferred to Yom Kippur. If they do teshuva, they merit a positive judgment. If chas v'shalom they squander the opportunity, they receive an unfavorable verdict.

There is a well known question on this Rambam. If a beinoni is someone whose mitzvos and aveiros are in equilibrium, why must he do to teshuva in order to merit a good verdict? He should simply perform one mitzvah, so that the balance shifts in his favor. Why does the Rambam write that he must specifically do teshuva?

Rav Itzele Peterberger offers what is perhaps the most well known answer. He explains that as the Aseres Yemei Teshuva are days in which Hashem draws close to every member of Klal Yisroel, and affords everyone a unique opportunity for teshuva, to not take advantage of this is a grievous sin. As such, even if the beinoni performs many mitzvos, he will be hard pressed to shift the balance to his advantage. As such, the only solution is to do teshuva, in which case he will merit a favorable decision.

HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky, zt"l offers another way to understand this Rambam. The teshuva that the Rambam refers to is not the seder of teshuva that Rabbeinu Yona discusses in Sharei Teshuva, but rather to a more general type of teshuva. The teshuva that must be done during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva is a complete reversal from one's misdeeds. This is not to say that a person must turn himself into a complete tzadik within ten days, but rather that a person must take the first steps towards correcting the flaws in his avodas Hashem. For example, if a person does not live up to the proper standards of emes that the Torah requires, he should accept upon himself during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva to refrain from speaking falsehood one day a week. Hopefully, as the year progresses, he will add on to his commitments, and will ultimately succeed in completely eradicating sheker from his life.

Rav Yaakov compares such a person to a patient suffering from typhus. As the disease progresses, the patient's condition becomes progressively worse, until he is so weak that he is confined to bed, unable to move. However, once the patient starts to talk and move around, even if only a little bit, we know that he is on his way to recovery. Should someone visit such a patient for the first time, he would be horrified by the patient's frail condition; however someone who has been following the patient's case would understand that in reality, the patient is on his way to recovery. So too, if during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva a person accepts even small commitments on himself, Hashem looks at him as being on his way to becoming a complete tzadik.

It is not enough for a beinoni to merely perform one mitzvah in order to merit a favorable gezar din, but rather he must demonstrate that he is on the path to correcting all of his flaws. The only way to portray such an image is by involving one's self in teshuva, and as such, the Rambam mandated that a beinoni during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva must do teshuva, for that alone is what can help him.

During these days of Aseres Yemei Teshuva, let us strive to make lasting corrections in our behavior, so that all of Klal Yisroel may be zocheh to a Gemar Chasima Tova.



From: Rabbi Goldwicht [rgoldwicht@yutorah.org]
Sent: Thursday, October 06, 2005 8:50 PM
The Weekly Sichah - Shabbat Shuvah 5766
WEEKLY INSIGHTS OF RAV MEIR
GOLDWICHT www.yutorah.org

After a bit of an unexpected break, we are b'ezrat Hashem returning to our former system, with a dvar Torah on the parasha or inyanei d'yoma in your inbox every week. We hope you enjoy it and share it at your Shabbat or Yom Tov table, and we encourage you to share it with your friends as well.

With the beginning of the year, we wish you and yours a shana tova and a g'mar chatimah tova, a year in which we all merit to increase kevod shamayim in good health, achdut, and happiness.

Shabbat Shuvah 5766

The Rambam rules in the first perek of Hilchos Teshuva that the process of viduy (confession) includes the enumeration of one's sins, voiced regret and shame for one's actions, and a verbal commitment never to repeat the sin. How can the Rambam suggest that it is even possible for an individual to tell HaKadosh Baruch Hu that he will never repeat his sin? How can he be so sure? Quite the contrary – in general we do repeat our sins!

To answer this question, we must take a brief look at the very interesting sugya (topic) of busha (shame). This sugya begins at the very beginning of Creation, where the Torah tells us that Adam and Chavah were both naked, but "lo yitboshashu, they were not ashamed" (Bereishit 2:25). Busha turns up again when Yosef reveals his true identity to his brothers, who were positively speechless out of shame (Rashi; Bereishit 45:3). Busha makes another appearance at Kabbalat HaTorah, where Moshe Rabbeinu explains that the entire purpose of Ma'amad Har Sinai was "l'va'avur tih'yeh yirato al p'neichem, so that His fear will be upon your faces" (Shemot 2:16). Chazal explain in the gemara in Nedarim that this yirah refers to busha.

The sugya continues on, but the general idea is that busha is a force no one can withstand. If a person is put to shame, but somehow endures it, it is a sign that he was not shamed enough. If he was, he would simply be unable to continue functioning. A person who is truly ashamed loses all his strength; this is in fact what happened to Yosef's brothers when they understood that the brother they had sold into slavery twenty-two

years prior was standing opposite them. The only way to cope with busha is to begin a new life in a place where they don't recognize the individual.

This is essentially the secret of the ba'al teshuva. The ba'al teshuva has achieved a level of true busha, inspiring him to move to a new place spiritually, and sometimes physically as well, and to begin life anew. This is the meaning behind the famous gemara in Berachot: B'makom she'ba'alei teshuva omdin, tzadikin gemurin einam omdin, In the place that the penitent stand, even the completely righteous cannot. This is also why the gemara in Berachot says that one who performs an aveirah, but is then ashamed to stand before HaKadosh Baruch Hu, is forgiven all his sins; through the shame he feels, the sinner moves to a new place and a new life.

This is the meaning behind the Rambam's aforementioned ruling. If a person is ashamed of his ways, he really can pledge never to repeat his ways, since he his busha has inspired him to begin life anew; if he ever performs the sin "again," it is not "repeating" the sin, per se, but rather it is as if it is the first time.

The Rambam sings the praises of teshuva in the seventh perek of Hilchot Teshuva: "How great is teshuva! Yesterday this person was cast away from G-d, his prayers ignored and his mitzvot rejected; yet today, he is attached to the Shechinah, his prayers are answered immediately and his mitzvot are accepted happily." What happened between yesterday and today? He experienced busha, leading him to repent. In fact, in Hebrew the word bosh (be ashamed) is shav (repent) backwards.

Therefore, as we approach Shabbat Shuvah, which contains elements of the entire following week and Yom Kippur, if we contemplate the sugya of busha even just a bit, experiencing busha over even one sin, we are guaranteed forgiveness for all of our sins and will merit a chatimah tovah, and a year of joy and success. Shabbat Shalom, Shana Tovah, and G'mar Chatimah Tovah! Meir Goldwicht

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From: Halacha [halacha@yutorah.org] Sent: Monday, October 03, 2005
Weekly Halacha Overview
BY RABBI JOSH FLUG -
The Mitzvah of Teshuva -
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Teshuva (repentance) is the method in which one atones for one's sins. Although one should repent for his sins throughout the year, Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 2:6, writes that the Aseret Yemei Teshuva period (the period encompassing Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur and the days in between) is the most appropriate time for teshuva. This article will explore the nature of teshuva, and the differences between teshuva throughout the year, and teshuva during Aseret Yemei Teshuva and Yom Kippur.

Is Teshuva a Mitzvah?

Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 1:1, in introducing the concept of teshuva, states that when one repents, he is obligated to perform viduy (the verbal confession of the transgression). Implicit in Rambam's statement is that there is no obligation to repent. However, if one does repent he is obligated to perform viduy. Rambam also reflects this opinion in his Sefer HaMitzvot, where he lists the mitzvah of viduy as

one of the 613 mitzvot, but does not list a mitzvah of teshuva. For this reason, many Acharonim (see Minchat Chinuch 364) conclude that according to Rambam, Teshuva is not a mitzvah but rather a concept. If one wishes to attain atonement for one's transgression, he has the option to repent, and must incorporate viduy in order to receive atonement.

R. Yosef D. Soloveitchik, Al HaTeshuva (pages 38-39) denies the possibility that there is no mitzvah of teshuva. There are verses in the Torah that explicitly mention the obligation of teshuva (see Devarim 4:30, and 30:1-3). Furthermore, Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 2:7, writes that since Yom Kippur is "the culmination of forgiveness for the Jewish people," one is obligated to perform teshuva on Yom Kippur. Rambam does not list the mitzvah of teshuva on Yom Kippur as an independent mitzvah. Therefore, if there is a mitzvah to perform teshuva on Yom Kippur, it can only be reflective of a mitzvah of teshuva that exists throughout the year.

The Unique Aspect of Teshuva on Yom Kippur

Given R. Soloveitchik's approach, one must still distinguish between teshuva throughout the year which is not obligatory (although one who does repent fulfills a mitzvah), and teshuva on Yom Kippur which is obligatory. In what way does this obligation manifest itself?

Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 3:3, writes that on Rosh HaShanah a person's merits are weighed against his transgressions. If his merits outweigh his transgressions he is sealed in the book of life. If his transgressions outweigh his merits, he is sealed in the book of death. If the merits and the transgression are equal, his judgment is postponed until Yom Kippur. If he repents, he is sealed in the book of life. If he neglects to repent, he is sealed in the book of death. Lechem Mishneh, ad loc., asks: the Gemara, Rosh HaShanah 17a, states that if one has equal merits and transgression, G-d will tilt the scales in his favor. If so, why does Rambam write that if one has equal merits and transgressions and neglects to repent that he is sealed in the book of death; the scales should be tilted in his favor and he should be sealed in the book of life? Lechem Mishneh answers that during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva one has an obligation to repent for the transgressions of the previous year. If he neglects to repent, the failure to repent constitutes an additional transgression, and his transgressions now outweigh his merits.

One can question Lechem Mishneh's answer. Rambam states that the fate of this individual is contingent on whether or not he repents. Rambam does not provide him with the option of accumulating other merits so that they outweigh his transgressions. This is because the merits that he accumulates will be registered in the new year and not in the previous year. Teshuva is the only solution because it expunges the transgressions of the previous year. If so, why is the transgression of neglecting to repent registered in the previous year?

Perhaps the intention of Lechem Mishneh is to highlight a unique aspect of teshuva as it relates to Yom Kippur. With regards to teshuva, the obligation to repent sets in the moment a person violates a transgression. However, one is not held accountable for neglect to perform the mitzvah of teshuva until its time has elapsed. Rambam's intention in writing that Yom Kippur is "the culmination of forgiveness for the Jewish people," is to set up a time frame for the mitzvah of teshuva. If one neglects to perform teshuva by the end of Yom Kippur, he is held accountable for neglect to perform that mitzvah. Nevertheless, since the obligation to repent sets in when one violates a transgression, one who is held culpable for neglect to repent is said to have been in neglect of the mitzvah from the time of the initial obligation. Therefore neglect to repent is registered to the year in which the obligation commenced, i.e. the previous year.

One can now understand why Rambam only mentions an obligation to repent on Yom Kippur and not throughout the year. Certainly, the obligation to repent exists throughout the year. However, one is only held accountable for neglect to repent when one fails to repent on Yom

Kippur. Therefore, on Yom Kippur there is an active obligation to repent. This active obligation does not exist throughout the year.

The Method of Teshuva on Yom Kippur

There is another difference between teshuva throughout the year and teshuva on Yom Kippur. Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 1:1, writes that viduy contains three elements. First, one must confess to the transgression. Second, one must show remorse for violating the transgression. Third, one must accept upon oneself to refrain from that transgression in the future. Regarding the viduy of Yom Kippur, Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 2:8, implies that confession is sufficient. Remorse and acceptance of refrain from future transgressions are not included in the viduy of Yom Kippur. Rambam's Siddur as well as most Siddurim available today do not include remorse or acceptance of refrain from future transgressions in the viduy portion of the Yom Kippur services. Why aren't these elements necessary on Yom Kippur?

R. Soloveitchik (in Harerei Kedem 1:44) presents two different approaches to this problem. First, the viduy of Yom Kippur assumes that one has already performed teshuva on one's transgressions. The reason why viduy is recited on Yom Kippur is because there is a special obligation to recite viduy at a time of atonement. This special viduy does not require one to mention all three elements of the standard viduy. It is sufficient to merely confess one's transgressions. According to this explanation, if one did not properly perform teshuva before Yom Kippur, one must mention all three elements in the viduy of Yom Kippur.

Second, there are two ways in which one can receive atonement for his transgressions. He can either perform teshuva in its entirety, or he can receive atonement on Yom Kippur. Regarding the atonement of Yom Kippur, the Gemara, Shavuot 13a, cites a dispute between Rebbi and Chachamim. Rebbi is of the opinion that Yom Kippur provides atonement even to those who don't repent. Chachamim disagree and maintain that if one does not repent, Yom Kippur cannot provide atonement. Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 1:3, rules in accordance with the opinion of Chachamim that Yom Kippur does not provide atonement unless one repents. Nevertheless, R. Soloveitchik notes that even according to Chachamim, the entire teshuva process is not required in order to receive atonement on Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur, in order to receive atonement it is sufficient to confess for one's transgressions. For this reason, the viduy of Yom Kippur only contains the confession, and not the other two elements.

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Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

Teshuvah on Yom Kippur

The obligation to repent (teshuvah) is a central theme in Judaism that applies throughout the year and throughout one's lifetime. Chazal register the effectiveness of teshuvah even at the end of a lifetime of sin - "afilu rasha kol yamav ve-asah teshuvah ba-acharonah ein mazkirin lo avonotav".

However, teshuvah attains special prominence in the period defined as "asseret yemei teshuvah", inaugurated by Rosh Hashanah and culminating with Yom Kippur (Rosh Hashanah 18b). The special requirement of teshuvah during these days cannot be attributed only to the urgent need to achieve a positive judgment for the upcoming year. Nor does the fact that this period, punctuated by the spiritually inspiring experiences of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, is particularly conducive to accomplishing teshuvah sufficiently explain the phenomenon.

The singular status and character of teshuvah in this period is reflected in numerous sources. The Sefer ha-Chinukh (no. 364) concludes his general discussion of the mitzvah of teshuvah by asserting that one who neglects to engage in this ubiquitous obligation of repentance specifically on Yom Kippur is guilty of actively rejecting this imperative.

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 2: 7) formulates the broader mitzvah of teshuvah as the obligation to accompany one's repentance with viduy - confession. Only in connection with Yom Kippur does he actually record an obligation to repent! R. Yonah, in his classic exposition on teshuvah, Shaarei Teshuvah (2:4,17), lists teshuvah on Yom Kippur as an obligation independent of the universal mitzvah of teshuvah, based on the verse "lifnei Hashem titeharu" (Vayikra 16:30), which he interprets not as a promise but as an imperative. What is the special character of repentance on Yom Kippur reflected by these unusual treatments?

The constant obligation to do teshuvah is generated by the act of sin which distances the transgressor from Hashem and triggers punishment. In order to redress this specific violation and absolve oneself, one must engage in the process of repentance and confession. The Rambam begins Hilchos Teshuvah with a description of these factors and this process. The focus of such repentance is the neutralization of each specific sin and the restoration of the relationship with Hashem that prevailed prior to the individual infraction.

However, precisely because the period of aseret yemei teshuvah is triggered by the calendar, by the need to face judgment and by the opportunity to begin a new year with an intensified religious commitment, the focus and orientation of the teshuvah is different. The fact that one needs to address all previous transgressions at once contributes to the singular nature and ambition of Yom Kippur's teshuvah process. In the effort to contend and confront all sins one necessarily engages in a holistic reassessment that includes but transcends individual halachic violations. Moreover, the teshuvah of this period is linked to the central motif of total devotion to Hashem (kulo la-Hashem) that is accentuated on Yom Kippur, a day of pure spirituality in which human beings vie with the angels on high in expressing their absolute and single-minded religious commitment.

The long confession of Yom Kippur (al cheit) begins with accidental transgressions (ones) that do not actually engender punishment and that possibly don't even require repentance according to the rules that govern the rules of teshuvah all year long. The fact that intentional and accidental infractions (ones ve-ratzon) are grouped together at the outset of the process despite evident crucial differences, reflects the wide range and transcendent ambition of a more holistic repentance. The list includes broader categories of sin, as well as the mere intention to sin, alongside specific violations. It is noteworthy that the entire confession litany is recited irrespective of specific guilt. Significantly, the halachah asserts that one continue on Yom Kippur to confess transgressions that were neutralized in years past. Moreover, we seek on this day not merely to restore our relationship with Hashem but to intensify and enhance it. The sense of alienation experienced due to sin becomes a catalyst for the refashioning of one's religious persona.

The confession list introduces olah (burnt offering sacrifices) violations before chatat (sin offerings) transgressions. This seems perplexing since the offering of korban chatat always precedes korban olah [Zevachim 7b. See parallel discussion of Magen Avraham OH 1:5.] However, it is the olah that uniquely captures the opportunity, ambition, and focus of Yom Kippur. While the chatat focuses on neutralizing each individual sin, and that, too, is a priority on Yom Kippur, it is the olah that conveys the total commitment of "kulo la-Hashem", symbolized by the fact that it is totally consumed on the mizbeach. Moreover, the olah addresses the totality of the religious personality and experience, confronting also the neglect of spiritual opportunity (mitzvot aseih) and improper attitudes and intentions (hirhurei aveirah). The teshuvah of Yom Kippur, then, accentuates olah even as it includes chata.

This ambitious, transcendent and holistic approach to teshuvah is conveyed by the independent source for repentance on Yom Kippur that is cited by R. Yonah - "lifnei Hashem titeharu". Taharah (ritual purity) demands a holistic and comprehensive approach; it cannot be achieved piece-meal. Only one who immerses himself fully in the mikveh addressing all of his impurities simultaneously can attain the objective. Sefer ha-Hinuch projects the idea that while ignoring individual violations year-round is an act of neglect and the squandering of an opportunity, the failure to confront the challenge of teshuvah on Yom Kippur in the context of the stakes and opportunities for a comprehensive realignment of ones relationship with the Hashem constitutes an emphatic rejection of the very concept of teshuvah. The Rambam formulates repentance as an obligation only on Yom Kippur precisely because the artificial time-frame underscores and facilitates teshuvah's transcendent orientation.

Despite their assertion of the unique character of the teshuvah of Yom Kippur, it is noteworthy that, unlike R. Yonah, the Rambam and Sefer ha-Hinuch integrated their treatment of teshuvah on Yom Kippur with their discussion of year-round and life-long teshuvah. In fact, the Rambam omits any reference to teshuvah in Hilchot Shevitat Asor, the section dedicated to the laws of Yom Kippur. This reflects a profound truth that is echoed by the Maharsha (Megilah 32a). He notes that Moshe's enactment that one begin to review the halachot of a particular festival in the preceding month was never articulated with respect to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The Maharsha explains that the theme of teshuvah that dominates this period belongs to the entire year, while Moshe's takanah applies only to themes that are unique to a particular festival. The concept of teshuvah, as manifest on Yom Kippur is a paradigm that is meant to inspire us to achieve great spiritual heights and to develop a comprehensive halachic personality all year round. Because of its singular character, Yom Kippur is both the most unique and most relevant day of the year!

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From: **Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column**
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[parshat_hashavua@ohrtorahstone.org.il] Sent: Thursday, October 06, 2005 6:08 AM To: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin's Shabbat Shalom Parsha Column Subject: Shabbat Shalom:Parshat Vayelech - Shabbat Shuvah by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin
Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Vayelech - Shabbat Shuvah (Deuteronomy 31:1-31:30)

By Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel - "And you shall know I am in the midst of Israel, I, the Lord your G-d, and my nation shall never again be ashamed or confounded" (Joel 2:27 Haftorah)

The Beginning of the Ten Day Period of Repentance in which we find ourselves, the two days of Rosh Hashana (New Year) which have recently passed, were considered by many of our Sages to have been days of sadness rather than of rejoicing. Indeed, the question of the fundamental character of this opening or initiating Festival has to do with whether or not an individual may choose to fast on it. Rav Sar Shalom Gaon maintained that one may fast and recite dirgeful penitential prayers (Tahanunim) on Rosh Hashana, Rav Tsemah Gaon concurs with this opinion, and - in both of the great Torah Academies (Yeshivot) in Babylon, in Sura as well as in Pumpedita - permission was granted to fast to those students who wished to do so.

The accepted and now normative opinion is, however, that one may not fast on Rosh Hashana. In a later generation of Gaonim, Rav Hai Gaon (of Pumpedita) cited the verse which commands that the Israelites "eat fatty meats and drink sweet drinks" on Rosh Hashana (Nehemiah 8:10),

and Rabbenu Saadiah Gaon ultimately ruled that Rosh Hashana is no less a joyous Festival than the Pilgrim Festivals (Pesah, Shavuot and Sukkot), and even had the intrinsic joyous power to cancel the seven-day mourning period for an individual who had suffered the loss of a close relative just before its advent. Nevertheless, I believe it's important for us to attempt to understand the view of those who permitted fasting, and perhaps even mourning, on Rosh Hashana. After all, it is listed as one of the major Festivals in the Bible (Lev. 23:23). Why would there even be a minority opinion condoning fasting on this day?

Rosh Hashana is Talmudically and liturgically defined as "the (anniversary) of the day in which the world was conceived," the day of the creation of the human being. At the same time it is Biblically described as "the day of the remembrance of the broken, staccato (Truah - Shofar) sound" (Ibid) and simply the day of the broken, Staccato (Truah - Shofar) sound" (Numbers 29:1). The Talmud attempts to define the precise nature of this broken, staccato sound: it is either a sighing sound similar to three groans of sadness (hebrew Shvarim), or a wailing sound similar to nine sobs of distress (hebrew Truah), or a combination of both together. Why celebrate the creation of the world with such expressions of despair?

Perhaps the reason is because our world has not yet been perfected, has not yet been completed: tragedy abounds, from tsunamis to hurricanes to suicide bombings. Our universe is very much a vale of tears. Neither has humanity succeeded in perfecting itself, in refraining from inflicting pain upon others or from upsetting the precarious ecological balance of our environment. Much the opposite: we have developed science to the point of our ability to wreak havoc and perhaps even destroy civilization with nuclear warfare. If indeed Rosh Hashana is the Day of Judgement for every human being - either for this world or the next world - as the Misheali suggests (Rosh Hashanah 16a), I would submit that most of us would be found wanting - as guilty! Is this not sufficient reason for fasting and mourning on Rosh Hashanah?!

But the oppression of the world and the failure of human nature heretofore is not the whole story. Yes, G-d created the human being as mortal, weak and even instinctively animalistic, but He also endowed him/her with a Divine image, with an actual spark of G-d himself (Genesis 1:26,27: 2:7). The cosmos around us is also filled with much beauty and potential, just waiting to be positively activated. The very freedom of action which has enabled humanity to choose death and destruction could just as well empower humanity to choose peace and perfection. And G-d loves and believes in the children with whom He has peopled His universe: "For the human being is but a little lower than G-d, crowned with glory and majesty."

It is precisely because His belief in and love for us that the Almighty grants us the possibility of repentance, and creates for us a ten day period of repair culminating in Yom Kippur, the Day of Divine Forgiveness. And all of our Sages agree that Yom Kippur is a day of rejoicing. Yes, we may fast on Yom Kippur, but not as mourners who cry over destruction (as on Tisha B'Av) but rather as angels, who have no need of physical blandishments because we too, are qualitatively different from beast as we stand in the direct presence of the Divine. And so the Biblical portion we read last Sabbath guarantees national return - both to the land of Israel as well as to the Torah of Israel (Deut. 30:1-10) - and this week's Haftorah concludes with the Divine promise: "And you shall know (at the time of your return and redemption) that I am in the midst of Israel, I, the Lord your G-d, and my nation shall never again be ashamed or confounded"(Joel 2:27)

It is because of this Divine guarantee that even on Rosh Hashana we do not merely sound the broken, staccato shofar Truah, expressions of sighing and sobbing, but we add the jubilant, exalted and exultant Tikiyah sound; this Tikiyah, we are Biblically told, was sounded on Yom Kippur of the fiftieth jubilee year, when the entire nation was given a foretaste of redemption with all slaves being freed, all debts being

rescinded, and every Jew returning to his family homestead in Israel. Indeed, the real term for ram's horn is not shofar, which literally means beauty (since the antlers are the glory of the animal), but is rather Yovel, or Jubilee, the jubilant sound of freedom, return and redemption.

Our Talmudic Sages deduce that not only is the jubilant sound to be added on Rosh Hashana, but for every broken sound there must be two jubilant sounds; each Truah (or shevarim) must be surrounded by two tekiyot (B.T. Rosh Hashana 33, based on Lev 25:9). And it is this triumphant sound of redemption which concludes the Yom Kippur closing (Neilah) prayer as well. Yes, the world may still be a wall of tears, but we are confident that G-d has empowered us to perfect the world in his Divine Kingship, to repair ourselves and repair the world. At that time all of humanity, joined together in harmony and peace, will cry out, as we do now at the end of Yom Kippur: The Lord (of love and peace) is the G-d of the Universe, "Hear oh Israel, the Lord who is now our G-d will ultimately become the G-d of the universe."

Shabbat Shuvah Shalom and Yom Kippur Sameach

From: **Dr. Sam Friedman** nfried5884@aol.com [Teaneck]

How To Obtain A Good Judgement On Rosh HaShanah And Yom Kippur

Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) writes in the Shulchan Aruch, that Parshas Nitzavim, is always read on the Shabbos that precedes Rosh HaShanah (Orach Chayyim, 428:4). Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan, is known as the Chafetz Chayim and lived from 1839-1933. In his commentary entitled Biur Halacha, the Chafetz Chayim explains that Parshas Nitzavim is always read on the Shabbos that precedes Rosh HaShanah, because portions of Parshas Nitzavim refer to repentance.

Rav Moshe Feinstein, (1895-1986, Dean of Mesivta Tiferes Yerushalayim and one of the foremost scholars and leaders of his era) points out that a sentence towards the end of Parshas Nitzavim teaches a concept that is fundamental to all of the Torah's commandments. "...And you shall choose life, so that you will live, you and your offspring" (Devarim 30:19). Rabbi Feinstein explains that by commanding the Jews to choose life so that they and their children will live, Hashem's desire is that the Jews observe the mitzvos (commandments) with enthusiasm and joy so that their children will also want to choose the path of the Torah.

The Torah wants the Jews to perform the mitzvos with enthusiasm and joy, so as "to leave a lasting impression on our children and students and make them also want to choose the good...For example, some people give the impression that they do mitzvos only because they are required to, since they do, after all, believe that Hashem created the world and commanded the Torah. They seem to take no pleasure in the mitzvos they do and act as if they would prefer to devote their time and energies to more mundane pursuits...Someone who keeps the Torah in such a fashion can only give his children the clear message that Torah is a heavy burden and the best we can hope for is to endure it. The children of such people are likely to feel that they lack their father's will power and to think there is no point in even making an effort to keep the Torah. Obviously, this is not the ideal. Instead, Hashem wants us to study Torah and do mitzvos with joy and enthusiasm...This, then, is the true meaning of the Torah's injunction, 'Choose life!' We are to choose to live a life of Torah and mitzvos with such relish and enthusiasm that our children and everyone around us will want to follow our example." (Darash Moshe, Vol. 1, Parshas Nitzavim, the underlining is my emphasis)

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein repeats this theme numerous times. Rabbi Feinstein writes in another essay "It is extremely important for people to realize that the observance of the Torah is the greatest joy. It is the easiest thing to do for there is no free man but one who heeds Torah...If a person feels this way, there is no doubt that his children and grandchildren will fulfill the mitzvos of the Torah with the same joy and

ease, and will never think that doing so tries the strength of their resolve." (Darash Moshe, Vol. 2, Parshas Nitzavim, the underlining is my emphasis)

Rabbi Feinstein emphasized the importance of maintaining the attitude that the commandments are a privilege to be performed enthusiastically and with joy, and not a burden. Rabbi Feinstein taught that many Jews became irreligious because they heard their parents repeat in yiddish "it is difficult to be a Jew", which implies that the commandments are burdensome.

The commandment "...And you shall choose life..." (Devarim 30:19) teaches another important lesson that is especially important before, and during the High Holy Days. The Gemora discusses several reasons that certain Rabbis lived a long time. Rabbi Nechunia the Great told Rabbi Akiva (who lived about 50-135 C.E. and was one of the greatest of the Tannaim, authors of the Mishna) that one of the reasons he lived a long life was that he was lenient and forgiving (Megillah 28a). Thus, to choose life and live a long time, one should be lenient and forgiving. Rabbi Nechunia the Great taught Rabbi Akiva that if a person is lenient and forgiving, then Hashem will be lenient with him and he will have a long life.

Rabbi Akiva learnt this lesson well, as the Gemora in Taanis 25b teaches that Rabbi Akiva was also lenient and forgiving. The Gemora, in Taanis 25b, relates that there was a terrible drought and Rabbi Eliezer Ben Horkenos added six blessings to pray for rain to the usual prayer, but it didn't rain. Rabbi Akiva offered a very short prayer and it rained. The Rabbis in the study hall began murmuring against Rabbi Eliezer Ben Horkenos, because his longer prayer wasn't answered. The Gemora says that a "heavenly voice" declared that Rabbi Akiva's short prayer was answered because he was a lenient and forgiving person and Rabbi Eliezer's prayer was not answered because Rabbi Eliezer was a strict person. Rabbi Akiva was lenient and forgiving, so Hashem was lenient with Rabbi Akiva and answered his prayer for rain. Perhaps Rabbi Akiva learnt to be lenient and forgiving from Rabbi Nechunia the Great, who had told him that leniency was the secret to his longevity (Megillah 28a). Hashem is characterized as being lenient and forgiving. Hashem is described as "...compassionate and gracious, slow to anger...forgiver of sin..." (Shemos 34:6-7). The Gemora Shabbos 133b teaches that we should emulate G-d's attributes, "Be similar to Him. Just like He is gracious and compassionate, you also should be gracious and compassionate." Rabbi Nechunia the Great and Rabbi Akiva emulated Hashem by being lenient and forgiving.

The Gemora emphasizes, on many occasions, the importance of being easy-going, lenient and forgiving. The Gemora relates that Rav Huna was so critically ill that burial shrouds were prepared for him, but he recovered. The Gemora teaches that Rav Huna recovered because "the Holy One, Blessed is He, said 'Since he is lenient and forgiving, do not take a strict stand against him'" (Rosh Hashanah 17a). This concept is so important that the Gemora, on four occasions, quotes Rava (who died in 352 C.E. and was a great Amora, one of the authors of the Gemora), who teaches, "Anyone who is lenient and forgiving, (the Heavenly Tribunal) forgives all his sins for him" (Rosh HaShanah 17a, Yuma 23a, Yuma 87b, Megillah 28a).

Hillel (lived at the end of the first century B.C.E. to the beginning of the first century C.E. and was one of the greatest of the Tannaim, authors of the Mishna) was known for his gentle personality and lenient opinions (Gemora Shabbos 30b-31a). Even though his contemporary, the great Tanna, Shammai, was known to be stricter, Shammai still teaches us to greet everyone with a cheerful face (Pirkei Avos 1:15). As the High Holy Days approach, Jews worry how can they be worthy of receiving a good judgement. As is said at the beginning of the Selichos prayer that is recited during this period of judgement "...What can we say? What can we declare? What justification can we offer?..." Considering the

obligation to observe the 613 commandments, how can any human being hope for a good judgement?

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger, Shalit" (a Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva University and the Rabbi of the Shul in which I pray), taught that by being easy-going, lenient and forgiving every person can hope for a good judgement. If one tries to follow in the footsteps of Rabbi Akiva, Rav Huna, Rabbi Nechunia the Great and Hillel in this regard, then Hashem has promised to be forgiving. As Rava teaches, "Anyone who is lenient and forgiving, (the Heavenly Tribunal) forgives all his sins for him." Even if the Jews have trouble observing the 613 commandments, they can hope for a good judgement by being lenient and forgiving.

"...And you shall choose life..." (Devarim 30:19), is always read on the Shabbos before Rosh HaShanah. This sentence reminds us of two of the fundamental principles of Judaism. Rav Moshe Feinstein explains, as discussed above, that this sentence teaches us to perform all of the commandments "...with such relish and enthusiasm that our children and everyone around us will want to follow our example," because the commandments are the most fantastic privilege that provide a framework to guide us happily through our lives. The command to choose life also reminds us of the secret to longevity that Rabbi Nechunia the Great told Rabbi Akiva: to always be lenient and forgiving so that Hashem will respond in a similar fashion. By performing Hashem's commandments with joy and enthusiasm, and by being lenient and forgiving, every Jew can hope for a good judgement, as the High Holy Days approach.

From: Peninim-bounces@shemayisrael.com on behalf of Shema Yisrael Torah Network [shemalist@shemayisrael.com] Sent: Thursday, October 06, 2005 5:54 AM To: Peninim Parsha

Peninim on the Torah
by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum -
PARSHAS VAYEILECH

At the end of seven years, at the time of the Shemittah year, in the festival of Succos...Assemble the nation; men, women, and children...that they may hear and that they may learn and come to fear Hashem, your G-d, and that they will observe to do all the words of this Torah. (31:10,12) The entire nation convened for a learning experience, which was to imbue the people with a fear of G-d and engender greater commitment to mitzvah observance. The mitzvah of Hakhel was set for the beginning of the eighth year, immediately following the Shemittah, Sabbatical year, during the festival of Succos. The timing of this event seems to be by specific design. What is the significance of scheduling Hakhel immediately following Shemittah on Succos? It is doubtful that the people were expected to make another trip to Yerushalayim. Since they were already there for Succos, they might as well celebrate Hakhel. The commentators sense a strong intended connection between Shemittah and the impact that the Hakhel experience was to have on the Nation.

In his Akeidas Yitzchak, Horav Yitzchak Aramah, zl suggests that Hakhel was to catalyze a greater awareness of the power of Hashem. This increased yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, would encourage the people to greater observance of and reverence for the Torah. What better time than after the purification process that began on Rosh Hashanah and continued through Yom Kippur and Succos? Following a year of allowing the land to rest, in which the anxiety concerning how they would be sustained was finally over, they could look back at how -- through their faith and commitment -- they were now able to merit the blessings that accompany Shemittah. They were primed and ready to listen and accept with love all that the Torah demands of them. They could see retroactively how a life of Torah is a life of blessing for them.

Then there are our children. If we want our children to follow along the path of observance, then they must see and learn from our level of commitment. In order for our children to adopt our values, they must

witness our sense of mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, for these values. Most of all, they must observe sincerity and integrity in mitzvah performance. How often do we destroy an education for which we have spent thousands of dollars, by doing something foolish in the presence of our children - just to save a few dollars? Sending our children to the finest schools, paying for the best rebbeim, is a lesson in futility every time they are aware that we are really not genuinely committed, and are willing to lie or cheat to get a discount or a better price. While we might find an excuse for our misbehavior, our children have already lost out. They must see mesiras nefesh, not hypocrisy.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twersky relates the story of a first generation eastern European couple who came to this country with their spiritual values intact. There was integrity in their spiritual commitment, mesiras nefesh in their mitzvah observance and emunah peshutah, simple, pure faith, in their belief in the Almighty. They might not have been erudite, but they were deeply devout. Once, the mikveh in the community broke down, and the community leaders took excessive time correcting the problem. What did this simple couple do? The husband moved out of the house and did not return until the mikveh was repaired. While regrettably many of their descendants did not maintain their adherence to Torah and mitzvos, their commitment to this one mitzvah of mikveh has been unwavering. Because they witnessed mesiras nefesh and they heard about this mesiras nefesh, it remained imbedded in their hearts and souls. Horav Moshe Reis, Shlita, supplements this idea. He notes that the phrase, "At the end of seven years," is mentioned earlier in 15:1 concerning Shemittas kesafim, remission of all loans, during the Shemittah year. This is a remarkable mitzvah which leaves a compelling impression on the individual. To cancel all loans, to see one's hard-earned money in another person's hands and not to do a thing about it, is incredible. Furthermore, one may not refrain from lending another Jew money, knowing full well that Shemittah cancels the loan. Is there a mitzvah that empowers middos tovos, refined character traits, more than this one? Hence, at the Hakhel ceremony, all Jews stood together, their middos already refined and tempered. Their bitachon, trust, in the Almighty had certainly been galvanized. Thus, we have achdus, unity, among Jews and bitachon, trust, in Hashem: two ingredients that render this Hakhel experience unprecedented and unparalleled.

We add to this the festival of Succos, which, among its numerous lessons, underscores the frailty and impermanence of our material resources. As we move out of the stability of our homes and settle into a flimsy hut, we realize that the only permanence in our lives, is the stability and security that accompany our trust in Hashem. Shemittah and Succos are two moments in time that convey the timeless messages of Yiraas Shomayim and bitachon in Hashem.

Hashem spoke to Moshe, "Behold your days are drawing near to die." (31:14)

The Midrash Tanchuma comments, "Do then days die?" ("Behold your days are drawing near to die.") This is a reference to the righteous, for when they pass from this world, essentially, it is their "days" that are eliminated from this world, but they themselves live on. Tzaddikim, the righteous, are considered alive, even after they die; on the other hand, reshaim, the wicked, are considered dead, even when they are alive. This is because when the rasha sees the sun rise, he does not make a blessing, and when he sees it set, he also does not make a blessing. He eats and drinks, but does not bless Hashem Who provides him with sustenance. The righteous man, however, blesses Hashem at every juncture. When he eats, drinks, sees, hears, he always thinks of Hashem and proclaims His praise. This continues even after he has left this corporeal world, as David HaMelech says in Sefer Tehillim 149:5, "Let the devout exalt in glory, let them sing joyously upon their beds."

A fascinating Midrash with a profound message follows. Horav Meir Rubman, Shlita, gleans a powerful lesson from Chazal. Previously, we

have been led to think that the definition of one who is alive is one who eats, drinks, sees and hears. One who does not possess these abilities is basically not among the living. Not so, says the Midrash. According to Chazal, only a person who recites a brachah, blessing, prior to eating and drinking -- who, when he hears or sees something, conveys his profound appreciation by blessing the One Who gave him the ability to hear and see - is alive! One who is alive senses Hashem's Presence and responds with a blessing. One who does not bless Hashem is not alive!

Consequently, we can deduce from here that the quality of one's life is defined by how he blesses: how much enthusiasm, fervor and conviction he puts into the brachah. One who blesses passionately - lives. One who blesses complacently - exists. His life lacks vibrance. He needs to be resuscitated, to be spiritually revived before it is too late.

Shlomo HaMelech says in Koheles 9:4, "A live dog is better than a dead lion." Simply this means that hope exists for one who is connected to life. He can grow spiritually. Regardless of his lowly nature and circumstance, as long as he is alive, he can climb up out of the muck that envelops him. When we follow the text and read the next pasuk, however, we develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of life. "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all." The living dog has another advantage over the dead lion: He is aware that life precedes death. A person who lives life with the spectre of death looming over him has a completely different life experience than one for whom life is an end in itself. He who aspires to eternal life knows that following his sojourn in this world, there is a glorious reward of eternal life in store for him - if he has lived properly. Such a life has meaning, value and hope. He who lives as if there is no tomorrow, and no life after death, does not really live. He has already traded away his life.

There is no shortage of stories of people who have "lived" each mitzvah to the fullest. I recently read a captivating story by Rabbi Yechiel Spero in "Touched By A Story" that demonstrates how a person can live in the shadow of death, not knowing what tomorrow will bring, yet be forever hopeful that if there is a tomorrow, he would serve Hashem with his entire being.

It was almost Chanukah, 1944, when the Satmar Rebbe, zl, was transferred to freedom from his internship in Bergen Belsen as part of the famous "Kastner Transport." Together with a small group of Jews, he was taken to the city of Caux in Switzerland to be checked for disease. Excitement reigned as members of the group prepared for their first festival in five years to be celebrated out of captivity. After a group of influential Jews intervened on their behalf, the Rebbe and his entourage were permitted to go to Montreaux to the home of a respected lay leader to light the first Chanukah candle.

When the Rebbe arrived, he was immediately offered food and drink, which he refused. He was interested in only one thing - lighting the menorah. He immediately went over to the menorah that had been meticulously prepared for him, and, with trembling hands, he carefully reached into his pocket and removed his makeshift wick. He replaced the menorah's wick with his own, explaining, "Several weeks ago, when I was interned in the concentration camp, I had no idea where I would be for Chanukah, or if I would even have the opportunity to light a candle. So, I began saving threads for wicks, in the outside chance that an opportunity would arise for me to celebrate the festival of Chanukah. I have been carrying this wick with me, saving it for this purpose."

Those assembled watched silently as the Rebbe began to sway, his body here, but his mind elsewhere. Tears began to slowly flow down his face, as he recited the first two brachos in an emotional and heartbroken voice. As he began the third brachah, the blessing of Shehechyanu, "that He has kept us alive," the tears began to flow even more, for the Rebbe could no longer contain his emotions. His tears of gratitude for having lived, mingled together with the tears of pain a torrent of heartbroken sobs for those who did not survive. Finally, the Rebbe concluded the brachah. Emotionally drained, but with heartfelt inner joy, he looked at

the bright flame of the shining Chanukah light, a symbol of hope and strength and pride in the Jewish nation.

It shall be when many evils and distresses come upon it. (31:21)

In the End of the Days, in the period preceding the advent of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, Klal Yisrael will be besieged by a volley of distresses. Why is this? The Maggid, zl, m'Dubno gives an insightful analogy to explain this phenomenon. At the end of the day, the fruit peddler is in a rush to close his stand and go home. He takes whatever fruits remain, and he puts them all into one basket to sell at half price, because he wants to get rid of them. Likewise, when Klal Yisrael sees a potpourri of distresses befalling them, evils and afflictions of all kinds, it is a sign that Moshiach Tzidkeinu is near. The End of the Days are upon us and we finally are to prepare to go home.

Behold! While I am still alive with you today, you have been rebels against G-d, and surely after my death. (31:27)

The Bais HaLevi explains that when one sins, he creates a sort of second nature, a gravitational pull to that sin. Once he has fallen into the clutches of the yetzer hora, evil inclination, he is more likely to fall again, since his desire for that sin has become more innate. Likewise, his actions create a blemish in the cosmos in which this sin now has greater power. In other words, an individual sin has a negative effect not only on the sinner, but it also directly influences those who view the act and indirectly creates a negative cosmic imprint on the world.

Alternatively, when one performs a mitzvah, he not only increases his personal proclivity to do good, but he also creates a positive cosmic impression, by which it will now be easier for others to triumph over their yetzer hora and gravitate toward activities of a positive nature. Thus, the tzaddik, by his numerous mitzvos, creates a positive surge in the spiritual sphere, which is reflected in increased activity in the area of mitzvos and good deeds.

Moshe Rabbeinu voiced his concerns with regard to the future. He lamented the fact that even during his lifetime, when there should have been a greater tendency towards a positive spiritual experience, the people, nonetheless, rebelled. How much more so should he be disturbed that, with his passing, the situation would deteriorate.

For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, and you will stray from the path that I have commanded you. (31:29)

Moshe Rabbeinu predicted that following his passing from this world, the nation would veer from its commitment to Hashem and act corruptly. While this did not occur immediately after Moshe's death, it did come to pass following the death of his student and successor, Yehoshua. We wonder why Moshe found it necessary to rebuke Klal Yisrael about their actions following his death? His concern should be for the here and the now - not for the future. Otzros HaTorah gives an insightful explanation for this. He cites the following story:

There was a custom in the city of Vilna that the wealthy Jews would arrange to marry off their children in a beautiful hall near the outskirts of the city. The architecture was impressive, the ambiance was exquisite, and the food was lavish as befits the wedding of a wealthy person. It happened once that a shoemaker who had struck it rich decided that now he, too, could marry off his daughter at this fancy wedding hall. After all, now that he had the means, why should he be any different than any of the other wealthy men in the city? His attitude drew the ire of the wealthy members of the community. They could not tolerate this man's sudden rise from rags to riches. For him to have the audacity to marry off his daughter in the hall reserved for the indigenous wealthy was too much for them to bear. As the wedding party was returning from the chupah, filled with joy and good cheer, one of the wealthy men went over to the father of the kallah, took off his "torn" shoe, and, in front of everyone asked him how much it would cost to have it repaired.

The public humiliation of this person spread around the city. When Horav Yisrael Salanter, z.l, founder of the mussar, ethical development, movement heard about the incident, he exclaimed, "I am certain that the distinguished Torah leaders of the previous generation who are presently reposing in Gan Eden are now being called to task for not fulfilling their responsibility to the community. Had they carried out their obligation to teach the people and to raise their awareness of sensitivity to others, this tragedy would never have occurred."

We can now understand Moshe's concern with the nation's behavior after his death. A leader does not lead only for the present. He must inspire his charges, so that they remain infused with the lessons and behavior that he has taught them, even long after he is gone.

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From: Aish.com [newsletterserver@aish.com] Sent:

Monday, October 03, 2005 9:59 AM

Subject: High Holidays - Wings and Prayers

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[Prayers.asp](http://www.aish.com/hhyomk/hhyomkdefault/Wings_and_Prayers.asp)

by Rabbi Avi Shafran

The meaning of Kapparat and Tashlich.

As errors in The New York Times go, it wasn't the worst we've seen. It evidenced neither a misguided sense of "balance" nor a subtle bias -- only simple ignorance.

It appeared last September 16, Yom Kippur, on the paper's front page, in the caption accompanying a photograph of an adorable little girl in Jerusalem with a squeal-smile on her face as a chicken was being swung around her head. The photo, the caption informed us, depicts a pre-Yom Kippur ritual. Indeed it does; it's called Kapparat. But the text went on to explain that "one's sins" are as a result of the ritual "transferred to the hen."

Ah, were expiation of iniquity only so simple.

Needless to say, the Kapparat-ceremony does not transfer sins to the bird (or to the coins that other Kapparat-practitioners use instead). While animal sacrifices were indeed a mainstay of Jewish life when the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, the cancellation of sin still required teshuva, repentance, then, as it does now.

There are, unfortunately, no shortcuts when it comes to taking responsibility for our actions. Repentance is the only effective remedy for sin, though it is an amazing one. For it accomplishes much more than a simple apology; it has the power, Jewish sources teach, to actually reach into the past and change the nature of what we may have done. As such, we are taught, teshuva is a "chiddush," a concept that defies simple logic and expectation. And for erasing iniquity, it is indispensable.

So what's with the chickens?

Well, the definitive primary Jewish legal text, the Shulchan Aruch, or "Code of Jewish Law," notes the custom of Kapparat, but disapproves of its practice. The authoritative glosses of the Rama (Rabbi Moshe Isserles), though, which present normative Ashkenazic practice, note that the custom has its illustrious defenders, and maintains that where it exists it should be preserved.

The custom's intent and meaning are elucidated in the widely accepted commentary known as the Mishneh Brurah, written by the renowned "Chofetz Chaim," Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan. Citing earlier sources, he explains that when one performs the ritual, he should consider that what will happen to the bird -- its slaughter -- would be happening to him

were strict justice, untempered by G-d's mercy, the rule. As a result, the supplicant will come to regret his sins and "through his repentance" cause G-d "to revoke any evil decree from him."

So it seems that the Kapparat-custom is essentially a spur to meditation on the need for atonement, and intended to stir feelings of repentance and recommitment to the performance of good deeds. Indeed, it is customary to provide the slaughtered chicken to a poor person.

Similar to Kapparat is the Rosh Hashana custom of Tashlich, which is likewise commonly misconstrued -- even by people who should be better informed about things Jewish than The Times -- as a magical "casting away of sins." The practice of visiting a body of water and reciting verses and prayers, however, has no such direct effect. It, like Kapparat, is an opportunity for self-sensitization to our need for repentance. The verse "And cast in the depths of the ocean all of their sins," prominently recited in the prayers for the ritual, is a metaphor for what we can effect with our sincere repentance and determination to be better in the future.

As Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchok Sperling writes in his classic work known as the "Ta'amei Haminhagim," or "Explications of Customs," Tashlich reminds us that the day of ultimate reckoning may be upon us far sooner than we imagine, just as fish swimming freely in the water may find themselves captured suddenly in the hungry fishmonger's net -- and that we dare not live lives of spiritual leisure on the assumption that there will always be time for repentance when we grow old.

All too often we moderns tend to view ancient Jewish laws, customs and rituals as quaint relics of the distant past that evoke, at most, warm and nostalgic feelings of ethnic identity.

But, as a closer look at Kapparat and Tashlich suggest, there is a world of difference between Tevya's celebration of "Tradition!" for tradition's sake and the deep meanings that lie in the rites and rituals of Jewish religious life.

Jewish practice is laden with profound significance that speaks to us plainly and powerfully, if only we choose to listen, to confront our spiritual selves, to do teshuva -- with or without the help of chickens or rivers.

This article can also be read at:

http://www.aish.com/hhyomk/hhyomkdefault/Wings_and_Prayers.asp

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From: kby-parsha-owner@kby.org on behalf of Kerem B'Yavneh Online [feedback@kby.org] Sent: Thursday, October 06, 2005 6:37 PM To: Parsha KBY Subject: Parshat Vayeilech

Parshat Vayeilech Elul and the Ten Days of Repentance

Rav Zechariah Tubi shlita

Chazal find an allusion to the month of Elul in the acronym: "Ani l'dodi v'dodi li -- I am my Beloved's, and my Beloved is mine." (Shir Hashirim 6:3) R. Zadok Hakohen of Lublin says: "I am my Beloved's" -- this is the month of Elul; "and my Beloved is mine" -- these are the ten days of repentance. What does this mean?

A person who sins does harm on two levels. First, he violates the commands of the Torah, and it is as if he rebels against G-d. Second, he spiritually damages his soul, as Chazal say: "Sin blocks up a person's heart," and he thereby distances from G-d.

Therefore, the rectification through Teshuva has to be on these two levels. First, to ask forgiveness from G-d for having violated His command, and afterwards to do actions to draw close to G-d.

Therefore, the month of Elul reflects "I am my Beloved's" -- man asks forgiveness and pardon from G-d for having violated His will. Therefore, it is called the month of mercy and forgiveness, and we ask that G-d

forgive us for having rebelled against His rule. Only afterwards comes the stage of repentance, which are the ten days of repentance, in which a person begins to repair the damage that he inflicted to his soul. This is "My Beloved is mine" – which is the stage of atonement, to cleanse the soul of the damage that was done to it. This is called "atonement" (kapara) – i.e., cleansing the soul from the taint of sin that distanced us from G-d.

We can bring proof to this idea from the portion of the golden calf, which caused the breaking of the Tablets. Moshe then went up to heaven to fall in prayer before G-d to atone for the sin of the golden calf during the forty days from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur – which are days of good will and opportune for mercy.

However, we find something very astonishing in that portion. G-d says to Moshe Rabbeinu: "And now, desist from Me. Let My anger flare up against them and I shall annihilate them; and I shall make you a great nation. Moshe pleaded before Hashem, his G-d, and said, 'Why Hashem should Your anger flare up against Your people' ... Hashem reconsidered regarding the evil that He declared He would do to His people." (Shemot 32:10-14) If so, G-d forgave them for the sin of the golden calf.

Yet, immediately afterwards, Moshe comes to the people and tells them: "You have committed a grievous sin! And now I shall ascend to Hashem – perhaps I can win atonement in the face of your sin." (32:30) But Hashem already forgave the sin, as it says, "G-d reconsidered," so why does Moshe say now: "Perhaps I can win atonement" – the sin was already atoned for!

We see that there is forgiveness and there is atonement, and they are two different things. "Forgiveness" is for the rebellion that Am Yisrael rebelled against G-d, about which it says, "G-d reconsidered." However, despite the forgiveness, the harm to the soul of Am Yisrael through the sin of the golden calf remained, and this needs to be erased – this is called "atonement." Therefore, Moshe Rabbeinu now goes up to repair the severe damage of the sin of the calf. Moshe tells the people: "Perhaps I can win atonement in the face of your sin" – I hope that I can erase the sin entirely, so that this will repair the soul of the nation. However, Moshe did not succeed to erase the sin entirely, as it says: "On the day of My reckoning, I will reckon" (32:34) – there is no punishment of Israel that does not contain of the sin of the golden calf.

Therefore, the moth of Elul is a month of mercy and forgiveness, whereas the ten days of repentance are day of Teshuva and atonement, which is cleansing the soul from sin. With this we can understand the Ramban that "There are four levels of atonement," since according to the degree of this sin, so, too, is the magnitude of the atonement. It depends whether the person violated a lav, or and aseh, or Chilul Hashem, which only death atones for. The greater the sin, the greater the damage to the soul, so that in order to rectify the sin there is need for greater atonement. However, forgiveness is the same for all.

This is "I am my Beloved's" – in the moth of Elul, which is the month of forgiveness. "My Beloved is mine" – these are the ten days of repentance, which are days of Teshuva and atonement. May Hashem help us, during these days to draw close to Him with complete worship, and we will approach the coming Yamim Noraim through forgiveness, pardon and atonement.

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From: Eretz Hemdah E-mail Staff [mailto:dana@eretzhemdah.org] Sent: Sunday, October 02, 2005 4:59 AM To: dana@eretzhemdah.org Subject: Parshat Vayelech 5 Tishrei 5766

Moreshet Shaul

(from the works of Hagaon Harav Shaul Yisraeli zt"l)

D'rasha for Shabbat Shuva 5719

(based on Derashot Layamim Hanoraim, pp. 76-77)

"Return, Israel, until Hashem, your G-d, for you have stumbled in your iniquity" (Hoshea 14:2). The gemara (Yoma 86a) says that the teshuva (return or repentance) is to return one until the kisei hakavod (throne of glory). Shouldn't the navi first urge a more basic level of teshuva before making such lofty demands?

The answer is that teshuva is not permanent if it does not reach the kisei hakavod. If the root of the sin is not uprooted, the morally poisonous weeds will grow back. That is why one who sees an adulteress whose sin is uncovered should make a vow not to drink wine (Sota 2a). The root causes which lead to sin must be dealt with.

We learn another thing from here, as well. One makes a vow to abstain from wine not just to distance himself from sin but to help reduce the number of adulteresses. Indeed, the shortcomings of those who are observant cause shortcomings in others. The gemara (Shabbat 114a) says that a talmid chacham who wears stained clothes deserves death. The reason is that it causes him to be hated. If a talmid chacham acts in such a manner, it encourages others to act much worse. From an internal perspective, as well, good deeds influence for the better and bad ones cause blemishes elsewhere.

We are battling over Israel's religious character. If people were not able to point to deficiencies in our camp, our claims would be heard. As it is, people can make the false claim that our religiosity involves ulterior motives. I was once on a bus when an obviously religious woman was caught lying about her children's ages to get out of paying their fare. I saw how that caused chillul (desecration of) Hashem, and this is just one example. The pasuk says, "... for you have stumbled in your iniquity." Stumbling implies unintentional sin, whereas iniquity implies intentional. This is because one intentional shortcoming brings on a snowball effect of unintentional ones.

The midrash says: "Open up an opening like the point of a needle, and I will open up for you an opening like that of an ulam (the word used for the Beit Hamikdash's main sanctuary). In the Mikdash, the "voice of Hashem" sounded with great force but it ceased when it reached the end of the ulam. In our days, we can have a deafening sound of Hashem in Torah study halls, but it ceases at the opening of the hall. It does not influence beyond. It is our job to provide the opening of a needle. The needle represents the joining together of different fabrics. We must use the power of holiness in such a way that it impacts on the secular elements of society.

The joining up of the sacred and the mundane is also at the heart of Yom Kippur. It is regarding Yom Kippur that the Torah teaches us that one must add on time from before Yom Kippur and sanctify it as if it were Yom Kippur proper. If the holiness were limited only to that day, then ultimately it would be impacted by the mundane. The needle must be held by those who deal with the mundane with the precautions of dealing with that which is holy, and in that way the mundane can be infused with sanctity.

The angels asked Hashem why Bnei Yisrael do not recite Hallel (Psalms of Praise) on Rosh Hashana. Hashem responded that it is inappropriate when the books of the living and the dead are open (Rosh Hashana 32b). Didn't the angels know the nature of Rosh Hashana? The angels also ask when Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur will be and are told to go down to human courts for their decision (Devarim Rabba 2:14). Given the great stature awarded in the Heavens to the Jewish court, the angels cannot understand why Bnei Yisrael lack the presence of mind to say Hallel. The answer is that along with the book of the living there is the open book of those slated for death. Until we remove all possible from the dreaded book, no one has completed his task.

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www.aish.com/jewishissues/jewishcommunity/The_Rabbi_and_Katrina.asp

Jewish Society
by Rabbi Yisroel Shiff

A deeper look at the storm's impact from a spiritual leader in New Orleans.

Life can change so quickly. On Sunday, one week before Katrina hit New Orleans, we had a wonderful event at our synagogue: a baby-naming for our new daughter. The entire community attended, and everyone's spirits were high. It was a beautiful way to start the week.

Sure, we'd heard that Katrina was coming, but ongoing projections were that the storm was going to cross over Florida and head north -- nowhere near New Orleans.

So I was rather surprised when I arrived at shul that Shabbos morning, and one of my congregants said, "So, rabbi, are you planning to evacuate?" I hadn't yet heard, but the storm's path had switched dramatically and was headed straight at us.

I stayed up late Saturday night nailing boards over the windows of my house. I caught a few hours of sleep, and then awoke at 4 a.m. to check the weather forecast.

It was clear that we had to evacuate. We threw a few days worth of clothing into a bag, and at 5 a.m. loaded our family into the car and headed for Memphis, a six-hour drive away.

On Monday we received the worst news possible: The levee wall of the 17th Street Canal had been breached. Our neighborhood is protected by that levee, so every building -- including our shul and our home -- was submerged by 8-10 feet of water.

Bottom line: Most of the homes in our neighborhood have been totally destroyed. And we have been thrust into a state of doubt: Where will we live? Where will our children attend school? When will we return to home?

Everyone is being forced to start life anew.

This is the message of Rosh Hashana. There is no guarantee from one moment to the next. Nothing is to be taken for granted. We need to make an accounting of who we are, what we really need, and what is our place in this world. Each moment, we are granted life afresh. Are we deserving? How will we utilize that life?

Accepting Charity

Those displaced by the storm are also faced with one of the most difficult questions of all: How will I support myself? Professionals -- doctors, lawyers, businesspeople, teachers -- have no office, no patients, no clients, no students. Everyone is looking for a job.

In this regard, the Jewish world has been incredible. Just about every Jewish community in America has contacted me offering homes and free day school tuition for any of my congregants who needs.

And therein lies one of the most painful and bittersweet aspects of this storm: Right now, many of us are being supported through charity. My garage here in Memphis is filled wall-to-wall with a truckload of clothing that was sent from the Jewish community of Queens, New York. I've had trouble distributing the clothing, because people are reluctant to take these clothes; the reminder of being homeless and living off of charity is too painful to bear.

I recently spoke with a Jewish man in New York who is sending me a truckload of essential household needs. I expressed to him how difficult it is to be on the receiving end of charity. And this man, whom I've never met, replied: "We are all family, and this is what family does for one another."

So while the tragedy is overwhelming, it is also phenomenal in the positive sense of knowing that everyone cares. It is a great source of comfort to know that we have something to fall back on.

I recently received an anonymous letter, written on notebook paper. It said: "I know this isn't a lot of money, but it's what I saved from babysitting. I'm sending it to you, to let you know that I care." Enclosed was \$10. Deep down, this girl feels that the Jews of New Orleans are her extended family.

Rescuing the Torah Scrolls

In the aftermath of the storm, one of my congregants died. He didn't drown in the flooding. He was old and infirmed, and when they evacuated his nursing home, he died, most likely from the stress.

A volunteer from the search-and-rescue squad Zaka was going to New Orleans to retrieve the body, and we arranged that he would also go to the shul and take out

the Torah scrolls. Our seven scrolls are all over 100 years old from pre-war Europe, and they are precious for both their financial and spiritual value.

About five miles from the synagogue, the Zaka volunteer had to stop because the neighborhood was so flooded. So with the help of various Jewish and governmental agencies, we arranged for a helicopter to fly him within a mile of the synagogue, and from there he boarded a small boat.

The synagogue was still swamped by four feet of water, and the Zaka volunteer had to wear rubber pants up to his waist. When he opened the holy ark, he discovered with great distress that all the scrolls were damaged beyond repair. He removed them and had them buried.

It's heartbreaking. New Orleans is a beautiful historic Jewish community, and for over 100 years, our synagogue has been an oasis of Torah on the Central Gulf Coast. We're known for offering the only regular daily minyan in a 350-mile radius.

Now that is gone.

In Contact

Thanks to email, I have been able to stay in contact with Beth Israel's 175 member families.

For most of them, the future is uncertain. Many have moved into rental apartments -- in Houston, Memphis, Atlanta and elsewhere -- and are trying to return to some level of normalcy: finding a job, furnishing their home, putting their children in school.

Financially, this has been extremely difficult for people. Most have insurance, but it will be months before they can get back to New Orleans, assess the damage, meet with an insurance adjustor, and actually receive a check.

So my primary role right now as rabbi of the community is to assist people financially. I am collecting money and distributing it. That's what people need right now.

Before the storm, nearly all our congregants evacuated New Orleans, but there were a few who stayed. One middle-aged man, for example, refused to evacuate and in the midst of the storm, he called me and said, "Rabbi, it's bad here. Really, really bad."

I didn't hear from him for another week, and I wasn't sure if he'd survived. It turns out that the roof of his one-story house had blown off, and the floodwaters completely engulfed his home. He had a rowboat, and made his way to another rooftop where he was rescued by firefighters. They dropped him off in downtown New Orleans and he had to walk down Canal Street in waist-high water. From there he was taken to the airport where he slept on a runway for two days without food. He was then given a small parcel of food to share with 20 other people.

This man was totally traumatized. Besides the destruction of the storm, and the death of all his pets, what shook him most was what he witnessed during the looting and chaos: other human beings completely degrading themselves. That alone is giving him nightmares.

After a few days, he was so distressed that he stole a bicycle and made his way to one of the suburbs. He has now rented a house and is putting the word out that other members of the congregation are welcome to stay there as necessary. And perhaps that is the most amazing aspect of his story: Amidst his own devastating loss, he is still focusing on ways that he can help others.

Asking 'Why?'

In life, nothing is random. G-d runs the world (quite precisely, in fact) and everything happens for a very good reason. The lesson of Katrina is that material things are totally unimportant. Because when they've been taken away -- as in this case -- you still have what really matters: your relationship with G-d and your family.

I can say that for me personally, since the storm, these relationships have only gotten better. Because I know that to be happy, I don't need much: just my family, G-d, and a little food and shelter.

This is the message of Sukkot, the culmination of the High Holiday season. On Sukkot, we leave the comfort and security of our homes, and spend one week in a flimsy shack, enjoying the company of family and friends, protected only by the Almighty's presence.

And it is precisely when we feel that vulnerability that we can ask life's deepest questions: Where am I going? What am I living for?

They want to know: How do I take this experience and grow? I am impressed and amazed that not one of my congregants has asked, "Why me?" Rather everyone accepts the righteousness of G-d's judgment. What they want to know is: What's next? How do I take this experience and use it to grow?

A number of my congregants have already decided to turn this into an opportunity - to move to a larger Jewish community where, for example, there are broader prospects for children's education and for Torah study.

On some level, people have a sense of relief and gratitude at being given the opportunity to ask these questions, and to ultimately understand themselves better. And I believe that as the initial shock subsides, that feeling will grow.

The Future

So where will we go from here?

I think about the many expulsions the Jewish people have endured over the centuries. And in one respect that gives me strength, for indeed, we are experts at rebuilding from the ashes.

Of course, this time there is a big difference: Historically when a Jewish community evacuates, they are never to return. In our case, there is a group who is strongly committed to going back to New Orleans to rebuild. And thank G-d, with the help of so many people who care, we have the resources, the energy, and the freedom to do so.

We are determined, as the saying goes, that this synagogue "will rise again."

Those wishing to assist Congregation Beth Israel -- to replace the Torah scrolls, rebuild the synagogue, and/or help families in need -- can do so online at: buildbethisrael.org.
