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date: Oct 3, 2019, 8:41 PM  
subject: Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky - Days of Completion  
**Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky**  
**Days of Completion**

"And [Moshe] said to them 'I am a hundred and twenty years today, I can no longer go forth or come in..." (Devarim 31:2)

The Gemara, focusing on the word "today", explains this possuk as indicating that Moshe had turned one hundred and twenty on the very day of his death; his birthday and day of departure were the same. This, the Gemara indicates, is the mark of the death of righteous people, as Hashem, "completes their lives from day to day and month to month." It is unclear what exactly is the significance of this. Given a choice of living a long life without "rounding out" the days, or living a shorter life with the days and months "rounded out", would one not rather have the longer life?

The Maharal (Chiddushei Aggados, Sotah 13b) associates another Chazal with this point. He points to a midrash about Sara's life, and uses the verse, "Hashem takes note of the lives of temimim (righteous, literally - complete)"; just as they are "complete" so too are their years "completed". Although it is not clear from the midrash what exactly is referred to by this "completeness", the Maharal compares it to our Gemara, indicating that the point of our Gemara is to delineate the temimus quality of tzaddikim.

But what exactly does this "completeness" mean? It is unreasonable to say that this refers to "complete in the sense of "perfect", for we know the dictum that, "there is no tsaddik in this world who never sins" (Koheles 7:20). So what particular quality of the righteous are we referring to with the metaphor of "complete"?

Indeed, the quality of temimus is not a measure of total righteousness, but rather a perspective on man's mission. One can look at the world simply as a place with many opportunities for mitzvos, which in turn add up to many wonderful rewards. In that perspective man has no particular mission and no all-encompassing accomplishment, but rather mitzvah by mitzvah we attain more and more reward. This frames the world as a sort of carnival where you can earn reward cards through various activities, and more cards you collect the greater your prize.

But there is a much deeper perspective on life. A person's life is a discrete unit of avodas Hashem, and there is a specific mission to be carried out. The subdivisions of time, i.e. years, months, and days, are meaningful subdivisions, each one in turn containing a discrete subdivision of that big picture. Thus, a complete month is a complete unit of avodas Hashem which, together with the other months, forms a complete year. The same is true of days adding up to a month.

A true tzaddik is someone who has this deeper perspective on life. He is not busy collecting mitzvos, but rather fulfilling a clear and distinct mission. An incomplete month, or a partial year, is a total failure from a tzaddik's perspective; one has done good things but has not really "accomplished" anything. Thus, Hashem's reward for the tsaddik is to have his life come to fulfillment - full years, full days.

Moshe Rabbeinu emphasizes this point with the continuation of his statement, "I can no longer go forth or come in." Rashi explains that this

can't be referring to physical infirmity, for the passuk emphasizes his total health. Rather, Rashi says, his "wellsprings of wisdom" had dried out. This does not mean that his mental acuity had dulled. Rather the "wellspring had dried out". There was no longer any new wisdom coming forth from his studies. For the true tzaddik who finds meaning in the unique mission that each day and month brings, a simple repetition of "what was, will be" is contrary to his approach to life.

As we begin our new year iy"H, we must bear in mind that a new unit of time is not just a yardstick for "how much more of the same will we have". Rather it is a new phase of avodas Hashem, with a starting and ending point at Rosh Hashana. Our job is to undertake the new year as a new mission and iy"H Hashem will give us the opportunity to wholly complete the mission of our lives, so that when we finish our mission in this world, it will be with a sense of completeness: days, months, and years.

More divrei Torah from Rabbi Lopiansky

More divrei Torah on Parshas Vayeilech

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from: **Rabbi Yisroel Ciner** <ciner@torah.org>

to: parsha-insights@torah.org

date: Oct 3, 2019, 8:44 PM

subject: Parsha Insights - Was Moshe a Bad Neighbor?

Dedicated to the speedy recovery of Mordechai ben Chaya

Parshas Vayeilech

Was Moshe a Bad Neighbor?

This week we read Parshas Vayeilech. "Vayeilech Moshe... vayomer aleihem ben me'ah v'esrim shana anochi ha'yome... {And Moshe went... and said to them (Bnei Yisroel) I am one hundred and twenty years old today...}{32:1-2}." Moshe informs Bnei Yisroel of his imminent death and relates his final instructions.

Hashem then speaks to Moshe: "Hein karvu yamecha la'moos {Behold, your days have drawn close (it's time) to die} [31:14]."

What is meant by the word 'hein'?

The Ohr HaChaim explains that by saying 'hein', Hashem was confirming that which Moshe had told Bnei Yisroel earlier. Yes, it is time for you to die. The Medrash offers a glimpse of the behind-the-scenes proceedings. Moshe challenged Hashem: "I praised You with the term 'hein' when I said: 'Hein l'Hashem Elokecha hashamayim ushmay hashamayim' {Behold, the heavens and the 'heavens heavens' are Hashem's). Now, you are decreeing death upon me with that same word 'hein'!?"

Hashem thunders His response to Moshe: "Shachain ra! {Evil tenant}.

When I sent you to redeem Bnei Yisroel from Mitzraim, you, using the word 'hein', spoke derogatorily about Bnei Yisroel. You said: 'v'Hein lo ya'a'minu lee' {and they will not believe me). You therefore deserve to have your death decreed with the word 'hein'."

Why was Moshe called a shachain ra {evil tenant}?

The Ohr Yahel explains that there are three types of people involved in rental properties: the owner, a good tenant and an evil tenant.

The owner is totally at peace with himself as he collects his rent — he deserves compensation from the tenant who is living in and benefiting from his property. A good tenant, though he is cognizant of the fact that he's paying for an abode that isn't his and that he'll own no part of it even after the payment, he still clearly recognizes his responsibility to pay for the benefit he is receiving. This emanates from the crystal-clear understanding that the house belongs to the owner and he's only passing through. An evil tenant, on the other hand, denies the benefit that he's receiving from the owner. Taking it even a step further, he feels that he's doing the owner a favor by guarding the house!

Hashem is the Master-Owner of the world. Man is the transitory tenant. A 'good tenant' doesn't feel that he's 'helping' the Owner. He recognizes that the head and arm upon which he places his t'filin do not belong to him. The doorpost to which he affixes his mezuzah also does not belong to him. He

goes through life without ever feeling that he deserves, that things are coming to him. He recognizes the world's Owner and his responsibility to 'pay' for his usage. The evil tenant thinks he's doing Hashem favors by fulfilling the mitzvos. Hashem therefore owes him. He doesn't appreciate the fact that Hashem is the 'Adon Kol' — the Master of All.

With this we can understand the Medrash quoted above. Moshe mentioned what he felt was a merit — that, using the word 'hein', he had praised Hashem. Any feeling of "I deserve" reveals a lacking in the recognition of Hashem as the Master-Owner. He was immediately labeled an evil tenant. At another time you used that same word 'hein' in a very different context. You spoke badly about Bnei Yisroel saying: "v'Hein lo ya'a'minu lee' {and they will not believe me}!" You saw that they doubted Hashem's ability to redeem them. You discerned in them a lacking in the recognition of Hashem as the All-Powerful, Master-Owner. Yet, you failed to discern that same lacking in yourself... Hashem therefore tells Moshe: "Hein karvu yamecha la'moos {Behold, your days have drawn close (it's time) to die}." On this Shabbos T'shuva (the Shabbos between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is known as Shabbos T'shuva — the Shabbos of Repentance) we must find things we can do which will impress upon ourselves Hashem's mastery in this world. We also must look for ways to merit the spiritual cleansing that Yom Kippur offers.

Rav Chaim Shmuelovitz writes that a way to merit in the judgment of these Yomim Nora'im {Days of Awe} is to be willing to forgive any trespasses that others might commit against us. Hashem's dealings with us reflect our dealings with others... The ability to overlook and forgive what others might do to us both emanates from and contributes toward the understanding that this world is Hashem's and not ours.

The following story took place at the time of year that we presently find ourselves. When Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld was serving as the leader of a Rabbinical court, there came before him a complicated, bitter dispute between a husband and wife. After hearing both sides and much serious investigation and thought, the judges reached and rendered their decision. The side that 'lost' the decision felt that they had been wronged. They angrily burst into the house of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld and began shouting at him in an insulting and threatening way. Throughout their tirade, Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld sat quietly and continued to study from the volume of Talmud that lay open before him. When their shouts and insults had reached a new crescendo, he suddenly arose to his full height and turned to face them.

"Listen carefully to what I want to say," he said to the suddenly quieted room. "If your claims against me are correct and I and my court have erred, you have already stated your case against me before the heavens. I hope Hashem will forgive us — a judge must base his decision on what his eyes honestly see and understand and that we did. However," he continued, raising his voice to a roar, "if we were correct and judged the case correctly and you are the ones who made a mistake... then... then..." and he paused... The faces of those who had burst into his house turned white with fear, wondering what harsh condemnation they would receive. "Then," Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld continued, "I want you to know that... I forgive each and every one of you for all of the anguish you have caused me and my family and I bless you all that you should be written and sealed for a good and peaceful year."

In shocked reticence, they left his house...

One of the neighbors who had entered when the commotion began turned to the Rav, asking him why he had decided to immediately forgive them publicly. Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld explained that the Days of Judgment had already arrived. "I was concerned that when the eve of Yom Kippur would arrive, they would feel bad about what they did. They'd want to come and ask my forgiveness but would be too embarrassed to approach me. In order to rationalize their not asking forgiveness, they'd convince themselves that they had acted correctly all along. This would further entrench them in their sin and they'd ultimately be punished as a result of me. I therefore

announced from the start that I forgive them. This way, if they'll have thoughts of regret, there won't be anything holding them back from doing a complete t'shuva {repentance}.

May we live our lives as 'good tenants', recognizing our humble place in this world, and may we be blessed with a year of life, health and redemption.

Good Shabbos and a g'mar chasima tova,

Yisroel Ciner

Mazel Tov to Reuven Ibragimov and Nalini Aboody on their upcoming wedding. May their bayis ne'eman b'Yisroel serve as a guiding light as to the way that 'good tenants' are supposed to live!

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### **The Torah as God's Song**

#### **Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks**

At the end of his life, having given the Israelites at God's behest 612 commands, Moses gave them the final mitzvah: "Now therefore write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be My witness against the people of Israel" (Deut. 31:19).

According to the plain sense of the verse, God was speaking to Moses and Joshua and was referring to the song in the following chapter, "Listen, O heavens, and I will speak; hear, O earth, the words of my mouth" (Deut. 32:1). However, Oral Tradition gave it a different and much wider interpretation, understanding it as a command for every Jew to write, or at least take some part in writing, a Sefer Torah:

Said Rabbah: Even though our ancestors have left us a scroll of the Torah, it is our religious duty to write one for ourselves, as it is said: "Now therefore write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be My witness against the people of Israel." (Sanhedrin 21b)

The logic of the interpretation seems to be, first, that the phrase "write down for yourselves" could be construed as referring to every Israelite (Ibn Ezra), not just Moses and Joshua. Second, the passage goes on to say (Deut. 31:24): "Moses finished writing in the book the words of this law from beginning to end." The Talmud offers a third reason. The verse goes on to say: "That this song may be My witness against the people" – implying the Torah as a whole, not just the song in chapter 32 (Nedarim 38a).

Thus understood, Moses' final message to the Israelites was: "It is not enough that you have received the Torah from me. You must make it new again in every generation." The covenant was not to grow old. It had to be periodically renewed.

So it is to this day that Torah scrolls are still written as in ancient times, by hand, on parchment, using a quill – as were the Dead Sea Scrolls two thousand years ago. In a religion almost devoid of sacred objects (icons, relics), the Torah scroll is the nearest Judaism comes to endowing a physical entity with sanctity.

My earliest memories are of going to my late grandfather's little beit midrash in North London and being given the privilege, as a two or three-year-old child, of putting the bells on the Torah scroll after it had been lifted, rolled, and rebound in its velvet cover. Even then, I had a sense of the awe in which the scroll was held by the worshippers in that little house of study and prayer. Many of them were refugees. They spoke with heavy accents redolent of worlds they had left, worlds that I later discovered had been destroyed in the Holocaust. There was an air of ineffable sadness about the tunes they sang – always in a minor key. But their love for the parchment scroll was palpable. I later defined it as their equivalent of the rabbinic tradition about the Ark in the wilderness: it carried those who carried it (Rashi to I Chr. 15:26). It was my first intimation that Judaism is the story of a love affair between a people and a book, the Book of books.

What, though – if we take the command to refer to the whole Torah and not just one chapter – is the significance of the word "song" (shira): "Now therefore write down for yourselves this song"? The word shira appears five times in this passage. It is clearly a key word. Why? On this, two nineteenth-century scholars offered striking explanations.

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, 1816–1893, one of the great yeshiva heads of the nineteenth century) interprets it to mean that the whole Torah should be read as poetry, not prose; the word shira in Hebrew means both a song and a poem. To be sure, most of the Torah is written in prose, but the Netziv argued that it has two characteristics of poetry. First, it is allusive rather than explicit. It leaves unsaid more than is said. Secondly, like poetry, it hints at deeper reservoirs of meaning, sometimes by the use of an unusual word or sentence construction. Descriptive prose carries its meaning on the surface. The Torah, like poetry, does not.[1]

In this brilliant insight, the Netziv anticipates one of the great twentieth-century essays on biblical prose, Erich Auerbach's "Odysseus' Scar." [2] Auerbach contrasts the narrative style of Genesis with that of Homer. Homer uses dazzlingly detailed descriptions so that each scene is set out pictorially as if bathed in sunlight. By contrast, biblical narrative is spare and understated. In the example Auerbach cites – the story of the binding of Isaac – we do not know what the main characters look like, what they are feeling, what they are wearing, what landscapes they are passing through. The decisive points of the narrative alone are emphasised, what lies between is non-existent; time and place are undefined and call for interpretation; thoughts and feelings remain unexpressed, only suggested by the silence and the fragmentary speeches; the whole, permeated with the most unrelieved suspense and directed towards a single goal, remains mysterious and "fraught with background." [3]

A completely different aspect is alluded to by Rabbi Yechiel Michel Epstein, author of the halachic code Aruch HaShulchan. [4] Epstein points out that the rabbinic literature is full of arguments, about which the Sages said: "These and those are the words of the living God." [5] This, says Epstein, is one of the reasons the Torah is called "a song" – because a song becomes more beautiful when scored for many voices interwoven in complex harmonies. I would suggest a third dimension. The 613th command is not simply about the Torah, but about the duty to make the Torah new in each generation. To make the Torah live anew, it is not enough to hand it on cognitively – as mere history and law. It must speak to us affectively, emotionally. Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it breaks into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. There is something about melody that intimates a reality beyond our grasp, what William Wordsworth called the sense sublime/Of something far more deeply interfused/Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns/And the round ocean and the living air. [6] Words are the language of the mind. Music is the language of the soul.

The 613th command, to make the Torah new in every generation, symbolises the fact that though the Torah was given once, it must be received many times, as each of us, through our study and practice, strives to recapture the pristine voice heard at Mount Sinai. That requires emotion, not just intellect. It means treating Torah not just as words read, but also as a melody sung. The Torah is God's libretto, and we, the Jewish people, are His choir, the performers of His choral symphony. And though when Jews speak they often argue, when they sing, they sing in harmony, as the Israelites did at the Red Sea, because music is the language of the soul, and at the level of the soul Jews enter the unity of the Divine which transcends the oppositions of lower worlds.

The Torah is God's song, and we collectively are its singers.

[1] "Kidmat Davar," preface to Ha'amek Davar, 3. [2] Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 3–23. [3] *Ibid.*, 12. [4] Aruch HaShulchan, Choshen Mishpat, introduction. [5] Eiruvin 13b; Gittin 6b.

[6] Wordsworth, "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, On Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour, July 13, 1798" (Favourite Poems [Mineola, NY: Dover, 1992], 23).

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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

**Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Vayeilech**

**Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

**פרשת וילך תש"ט**

**ויאמר ד' אל משה הן קרבו ימיו למות קרא את יהושע והתיצבו באהל מועד ואצונו**

**Hashem said to Moshe, "Behold, your days are drawing near to die.**

**Summon Yehoshua and both of you shall stand in the Ohel Moed, and I shall instruct him." (31:14)**

Moshe *Rabbeinu* had great difficulty accepting his imminent death. He felt that as long as he lived he could serve Hashem, thus achieving greater and loftier spiritual heights. He asked to trade positions with his student and successor, Yehoshua. He would be the student. Hashem agreed. Moshe went to Yehoshua's *bayis/home/tent*. When Yehoshua saw his revered *Rebbe* coming toward him, he became frightened. "Why would my *Rebbe* come to me?" He immediately left his home and went out to greet Moshe. Moshe stood to the left of Yehoshua (as Yehoshua had done until now). They walked to the *Ohel Moed*, where the Pillar of Cloud descended and separated them. (Yehoshua received the prophecy from Hashem, while Moshe was left outside of the Cloud.) Once the Cloud ascended, Moshe approached Yehoshua and asked, "What did Hashem tell you?" Yehoshua replied, "When the Almighty spoke to you, did I know what you were being told? (Obviously, Hashem was speaking with you alone and others [like myself] were not to be privy to this conversation.) Now that Hashem has spoken with me, I have no permission to reveal this conversation without Hashem's command." When Moshe heard this, he cried out, "One hundred deaths, but not one envy!"

Moshe *Rabbeinu* refused to fall prey to envy. *Chazal (Bava Basra 21a)* teach that *Kinaas sofrim tarbeh chochmah*, "While envy is usually destructive, the (proper) envy among scholars stimulates more and greater scholarship. At times, envy can spur us to greater ambition, and consequently, to achieve greater knowledge. Moshe's envy was certainly not petty jealousy. It was *kinaas sofrim*. He wanted to know what Hashem told Yehoshua, because it would allow him to have a deeper insight into the Divine. Is this not to be commended? Why then is this *kinaah* (Moshe had of Yehoshua) considered the negative attribute that provoked Moshe's disgust with such a life?

*Horav Yitzchak Aizik Sher, zl*, explains that Moshe had abrogated his entire self-hood. All that he desired was to enter into *Eretz Yisrael*. He was prepared to enter as an animal, anything – as long as he could enter the Holy Land. He felt that being in the Holy Land would allow him to increase his profundity of Hashem's wisdom. Therefore, when the Cloud separated him from Yehoshua, he realized that he had reached a spiritual impasse. He could go no further.

Moshe came to the sad realization that he had reached the end of the proverbial (spiritual) rope. He could go no further, because he could gain no more. This is why he declared, "*Meah missos v'lo kinaah achas*." This was no longer *kinaas sofrim*, because there was nothing to be achieved. Competition among scholars is commended, as long as they grow spiritually. If there is no potential spiritual achievement, then it is pure envy. This, Moshe did not want.

*Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*, came home from *shul* one *Shabbos* morning and related the following incident. The head of the *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society, had told him that shortly before *Shabbos* he had completed arrangements for the body of a Jewish woman buried in a Christian cemetery in the United States to be exhumed and reinterred in a

Jewish cemetery. She had died five years earlier; yet, when her body was exhumed, they noticed that it was in perfect condition. There were absolutely no signs of decay. Even her skin appeared to be no different than that of a person who had just died. Apparently, this woman must have had an unusual *z'chus*, merit, to deserve this.

Almost a century earlier (ninety-five years ago), this girl had left Russia with her parents and sister to settle in America. While in America, her sister passed away, a victim of a childhood disease. The deceased (at the age of seventeen) had sustained a serious blow to the brain (the result of an accident), which had rendered her mentally incapacitated. She remained in a vegetative state, housed in a medical facility, until she died 73 years later. She was ninety years old at the time of her death.

Hearing the sad story of this poor woman's life, *Rav Chaim* explained why she had merited such Heavenly blessing that her body did not decompose. "*Chazal (Shabbos 152b)* teach (based upon a *pasuk* in *Sefer Mishlei 14:30*) that 'Envy brings about the rotting of the bones.' The *Talmud* concludes that only those who are plagued with the negative *middah*, character trait, of envy experience rotting of the bones in death. This woman had no one of whom to be envious in the United States ninety years ago. She certainly had no reason to be envious of the gentiles (with whom she might have interacted), and Jews were a rarity in those days. After she received her injury at age seventeen, she did not experience any envy through the end of her life, 73 years later. Thus, this woman left this world without having experienced envy in her life. This is the reason that her body did not decompose."

So many spoil the good fortune they have in life due to their preoccupation with what their neighbor has. The story is told of a man who had a store that was being outperformed by a similar store across the street. It did not make sense: two stores, both exactly alike; yet one was doing well, while the other one barely made ends meet. The store owner went to a *rav* to ask his advice to ascertain what it was that he was doing wrong. The *rav* visited the store, and, after determining that all – location, merchandise, accessibility – were equal, he realized the core of the problem: "The other store owner is occupied with his place of business. He throws himself fully into his own business. You, on the other hand, busy yourself with constantly looking out your window at his business. You are minding two businesses without really applying yourself solely to your business." By constantly comparing ourselves to someone else, we are robbing ourselves of the joy we can experience in our successes.

**הן קרבו ימיו למות**

**Behold, your days are drawing near to die. (31:14)**

The *Midrash Tanchuma* distinguishes between: *tzaddikim*, the righteous, who, even in death are considered very much alive, and *reshaim*, the wicked, who in life are viewed as lifeless. They support this with a *pasuk* in *Devarim (17:6)*: "On the evidence of two or three witnesses shall the dead be put to death." Does someone who is (already) dead deserve another death? It means that someone who is wicked is considered dead. Why? Upon seeing the rising morning sun, he does not say the proper blessing; when it sets, he does not bless Hashem accordingly, nor does he recite blessings upon eating or drinking – as do the righteous. Furthermore, the righteous bless not only when they are alive, but even after death they (their souls) praise G-d and bless Him.

*Chazal* inform us of a powerful lesson: Blessing and prayer do not end when our bodies cease to breathe, and our mortal remains are interred in the ground. One prays to Hashem and recites blessings in Heaven as well. In his *hesped*, eulogy, for his father-in-law (*Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl*), *Horav Eziel Erlanger, Shlita*, quoted the *Mishnah* in *Berachos (9:5)*, "All of the conclusions of blessings (*choshmei brachos*) that were in the *Bais Hamikdash* would say *min ha'olam*, forever (literally: as long as the world continues in existence); once the *tzedukim*, sectarians, perverted their ways and claimed that there was only one world (*Olam HaZeh*, This World), they decreed that (it should be changed) they should say, *Min ha'olam v'ad*

*ha'olam*, “From the end of the world to the end of the world” – (meaning that there are two worlds – *Olam HaZeh* and *Olam Habba*, the World to Come). The *Tosefta* adds that this decree was enacted to teach that this world is only an ante chamber, a vestibule, in which one prepares himself for *Olam Habba*. One does not negate or belittle this world; rather, it is the training ground where one prepares for his destiny in *Olam Habba*. He does this by reciting blessings and prayers fervently in this world in order to become accustomed to these forms of service which are of critical significance in the World to Come.

*Rav Erlanger* derives an almost frightening lesson from here: prayer in this world is not only an agency through which our Heavenly requests are fulfilled. Prayer is a medium for expressing *emunah*, faith in Hashem. We demonstrate via our activities in this world the value we place on the next world. So... if we mumble jumble, fly through *davening*, because we arrived late (in time to catch *Shemoneh Esrai*); if our *brachos* recitation does not coincide with what, how much and how often we partake of Hashem's gifts, we are showing by our actions (or lack thereof) what we really think of – and how much we really believe in – *Olam Habba*. Frightening!

*Rav Erlanger* comments how his saintly father-in-law would *daven* every word slowly, with feeling, arriving early to go to *shul*, so that he would never have to rush. Indeed, *Rav Wolbe* commented that he could not understand how it was possible to *daven* quickly. “What kind of life is this?” he would ask.

*Avodas ha'tefillah*, serving Hashem through prayer, is a form of service that has been exemplified by many of our Torah leadership. While stories abound concerning their manner and devotion to prayer, I have selected two individuals: one, a distinguished *Rebbetzin*; and the other, the man who is known as the architect of Torah in America – because of the value that they each placed on *tefillah*. In connection with what I wrote earlier, to them *davening* was not only for this world; they were preparing for the World to Come.

*Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky, a"h*, had a tremendous longing not only for *tefillah*, but also to the *makom*, place, (of) *tefillah*. If she would notice any litter on the path to the *ezras nashim*, she would bend down and pick it up. She considered it an honor to clean and prepare the *makom ha'tefillah* for the *mispallelim*, worshippers. In her younger years, she would personally scrub the floors of the *ezras nashim* on Friday afternoon in preparation for *Shabbos*. Prior to her marriage, she *davened* at home thrice daily and was frequently found weeping over a *sefer Tehillim*. After her marriage she continued *davening* the three *tefillos* daily at home – in addition to completing all of *sefer Tehillim* daily. When her mother-in-law, the *Steipler Rebbetzin*, passed away and her husband, *Maran Horav Chaim Kanievsky, Shlita*, was a mourner (thus leading the service), she attended *Maariv*, evening service, in order to answer *amen* to his *Kaddish*. Once her children no longer needed her at home to watch them, she began to attend *Minyan* for all three daily *tefillos*. At that point she was the only woman who attended the *Minyan*. Obviously, with time – and once word spread – women from all over flocked to the *shul* to *daven* alongside the *Rebbetzin*. During the last decade of her life, many women joined her in what was perhaps the largest daily gathering of women *davening* together in an *ezras nashim* during the week. The *neitz*, sunrise, *minyan*, would often have as many as 100 women joining the *Rebbetzin* as she *davened* with a *minyan*.

Coming to *shul* meant coming early. Wanting to be there prior to the time when crowds thronged around her, she would arrive forty minutes before the *tefillah* began. In later years, she would usually arrive fifteen minutes before *Shacharis*. The *Rebbetzin* would *daven* at least once every day for each of her children and grandchildren – praying that they be devout and healthy. She also *davened* for many other Jews who contacted her. *Rebbetzin Kanievsky* was the daughter and granddaughter of *gedolim*; she was married to the preeminent *gadol* of our day. Yet, she earned her own unique place among the great and holy leaders of *Klal Yisrael* – as a result of

her lifelong devotion to *tefillah*. After all, *tefillah* is man's conversation with G-d. Can we even begin to imagine the meaning of those words: “man's conversation with G-d”? Perhaps the next time we open up a *siddur* and prepare to *daven*, we should consider to Whom we are speaking.

*Horav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, zl*, was a *mechanech*, Torah educator, par excellence, and the individual who is considered to be the architect of Torah in America. He never sought or tolerated accolades. His life was devoted to serving Hashem – both personally and by disseminating His Torah through the many students he created, taught, nurtured and imbued with a fiery mission to raise the banner of Torah and the glory of Heaven wherever they could. *Rav Shraga Feivel* left the *shiurim*, complex Torah/Talmud lectures, to his handpicked *Roshei Yeshivah*. He personally focused on teaching those subjects which were not commonly taught as part of a *yeshivah's* curriculum. It was through this personal Torah interaction with his students that he was able to imbue them with a sense of responsibility for *Klal Yisrael*. In order to disseminate Torah, however, one must personally be in prime spiritual condition. Much is taught by example. He shaped and molded those “exemplars” of Torah, the future *mechanchim* of America.

Few *shiurim* left as long a lasting mark on his students as the classes he gave on the *siddur*, during which he went through most of the *siddur* word by word. He emphasized *pirush ha'milos*, translation and understanding of the words, of prayer. One who does not comprehend what he is saying robs the prayer of its soul, transforming it to a purely physical act. It is no longer the *avodas ha'lev*, service of the heart; rather, it is merely a mechanical expression. He considered an intimate knowledge of the *siddur* so crucial that he would test rabbinical candidates (who were about to be tested for *semichah*, ordination) on the difficult passages of *Sefer Tehillim* (from which much of the *siddur* is derived).

His lectures compelled his students to confront the meaning of every word in the *siddur* for the first time. The words of *Modeh ani Lefanecha*, “I give thanks, before You,” which are the first words that we utter upon rising in the morning, took on a rich new meaning in his classes. This short – but very significant – prayer brings home the realization (as we begin our new day) that we exist at this moment only because it is Hashem's Will that we exist. We reflect upon the meaning of the word *ani*, “I,” and *Lefanecha*, “(before) You.” In order to convey the depth and richness of these words, he would relate the story of *Horav Avraham Yehosuah Heshel, zl*, of Apt, who was known as the *Ohaiv Yisrael*.

A Jew once entered the *shul* (to recite morning prayers) together with the *Ohaiv Yisrael*. Being a scholar, the man studied a full chapter of *Mishnayos*, then *davened Shacharis*, followed by a *blatt*, folio, of *Talmud*, which he studied intensely. When he concluded his morning “ritual,” he noticed that the *Ohaiv Yisrael* was still immersed in his preparations for *davening*. He was taken aback, but said nothing at the time. One did not disturb the *Apter Rav* in his spiritual consciousness. Later, he asked the *Rebbe* what possibly could have taken him so long to prepare for *davening*. The *Apter* replied, “As soon as I commenced with *Modeh Ani*, I began thinking, ‘Who is this *ani*, “I,” and who is *Lefanecha*, “You,” before Whom I stand?’ I was immediately thrown into such confusion, from which I could not quickly emerge. I needed to calm myself before I could *daven*.”

It goes without saying that *Rav Shraga Feivel* underscored the importance of not only *davening b'tzibbur*, with a congregation, but also of coming on time/early, in order to organize one's thoughts in preparation for his encounter with the Divine. Decorum in *shul* was emphasized. Conversation of any kind was strongly eschewed. He had an aversion to any physical manifestations while *davening*. He was against those who raised their voices excessively in the *Rosh Hashanah davening*. Once, overhearing someone crying out loudly in his *davening*, he remarked with a smile, “To permit oneself to use so much *chitzonius*, external display, one would require very deep resources of *penimius*, internal devotion. Where can one obtain such *penimius*?”

## Va'ani Tefillah

שמע קולינו ד' אלקינו – *Shema koleinu Hashem Elokeinu*. Hear our voices, Hashem, our G-d.

When Chizkiyah prayed to Hashem to spare him from his present illness, he detailed his spiritual achievements which he hoped would stand in merit for him. Among the services he had performed for the Jewish People, he felt that the *genizah*, hiding, of the *Sefer Refuos*, Book of Cures, a volume (written either by Adam *HaRishon* or Shlomo *Hamelech*) which detailed the cure to every ailment, was a critical contribution. Apparently, Chizkiyah observed that people no longer prayed to Hashem when they became ill. Rather, they relied on the medicinal answers in this book, so he decided that the book did more harm than good. People needed to pray, to plead with Hashem. A quick fix derived from a book might solve their physical ailment, but not the spiritual precursor that catalyzed it.

What about *pikuach nefesh*, saving a life? If this book could save lives, what right did Chizkiyah have to hide it? He was putting the lives of Jews in mortal danger. *Horav Mordechai Gifter*, *zl*, explains that Chizkiyah's intrepid act was ratified both by Hashem and *Chazal* (*Pesachim* 56b). Chizkiyah taught a powerful lesson – one which we all should reiterate constantly: A life devoid of sincere, heartfelt prayer – a life bereft of a constant, mindful relationship with Hashem – is not worth living, and hence, not worth saving! Life has intrinsic value and meaning. It is sacred only when it is a medium to cling to Hashem, the Source of all life. When man has lost his direction and purpose, when man places his trust and faith in books, people and mundane cures – disregarding G-d – he is not truly alive.

*Sponsored in loving memory of*

*אליהו בן לוי ז"ל ז"ל*

*By his children and grandchildren, Birdie and Lenny Frank and Family*

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*prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum*

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### Teshuvah for the Generation of Rebirth

#### Rav Kook Torah

“For some time I have been struggling with an inner conflict, and a mighty force impels me to speak about teshuvah (penitence). All my thoughts are focused on this topic. Teshuvah holds a primary place in Torah and in life. All the hopes of the individual and of society depend on it.”

So begins Rav Kook's introduction to *Orot HaTeshuvah* (Lights of Penitence), perhaps his most popular work, first published in 1925. The compact book was beloved by its author, and Rav Kook himself would study its teachings during the month of Elul after morning prayers.

One student reported hearing Rav Kook say, “I worked extensively on *Orot HaTeshuvah*. Whoever studies it properly will find light in every word.” He also declared: “*Orot HaTeshuvah* should be studied endlessly.”

What is so special about the book's outlook on teshuvah?

Teshuvah - a Return to Life

*Orot HaTeshuvah* illuminates the concepts of sin, punishment, and penitence. It explains that sin primarily harms the one who sinned, as it cuts him off from the roots of his very being, from the light of his soul. This estrangement is sin's worst punishment. Teshuvah, on the other hand, redeems the sinner from this darkness. It rejuvenates him, restoring his previous state of life and joy.

The word teshuvah literally means “return.” It is not an escape from the world. On the contrary, it is “precisely through genuine, pure teshuvah that we return to the world and to life” (*Orot HaTeshuvah* 14:30).

Already in his introduction, Rav Kook described teshuvah as an underlying force that influences all aspects of life, not only the realm of the sacred:

“Teshuvah holds a primary place in Torah and in life.” Thus one who frees himself from unhealthy habits – this is also a type of teshuvah. Additionally, Rav Kook posited that this powerful force is not limited to the failings and triumphs of the individual. It also applies to failures and successes of the nation and the entire universe: “All hopes of the individual and society as a whole depend on it.”

National and Spiritual Revival

Rav Kook firmly believed that a secular national revival, the entire program of rebuilding the Land and the nation, could not succeed without a parallel revival in holiness, with lofty manifestations of this holiness expressed in both personal and public spheres.

But what path would lead the generation of rebirth to the gates of teshuvah? The routine approach is doomed to failure. One cannot reach out to the idealistic youth of such a generation, brimming with life, vigor, and creativity, with a severe demeanor and punctilious demands of small, everyday deeds - demands that they consider to be a sign of weakness and a feeble spirit.

No, the generation must be awakened via an optimistic spirit of greatness and courage. “Teshuvah comes not to embitter life,” Rav Kook taught, “but to make it pleasant” (15:6). “Teshuvah is essentially a return to our origins, to the source of supernal life and existence in their wholeness” (12:8).

In an article printed in *HaYesod* in 1934, he explained:

“Teshuvah is the great key to redemption. Many things inhibit teshuvah, but the major obstacle, particularly to collective teshuvah, is the misconception of Teshuvah as atrophy of the soul, as the enfeebling and debilitation of life. This false image also impairs the teshuvah of the individual. But more than anything, it hinders collective teshuvah, the teshuvah of the nation.

“We must disclose the secret that the genuine teshuvah of the entire nation of Israel is a mighty, powerful vision that provides reserves of might and strength, imbuing all of our spiritual and pragmatic values with a lofty spirit of vigorous, surging creative energy from the power of the Rock of Israel.

This living teshuvah flows not from isolated, fragmented souls, but from the treasury of the nation's collective soul, *Knesset Yisrael* .... In this way, the united soul of Israel is prepared to return to its former strength, as in days of old.”

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org>

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#### Shabbos Shuva

#### Rabbi Immanuel Bernstein

שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך כי שגלת בעונך. קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה'  
*Return Yisrael, unto Hashem your God, for you have stumbled in your sin.*  
*Take words with you and return to Hashem.* (Haftarah, Hoshea 14:2-3)

#### Reuven's Teshuvah and Hoshea's Message

After Yosef had been sold by the brothers, the pasuk states, “וַיָּשָׁב רְאוּבֵן אֶל הַבּוֹר – Reuven returned to the pit.” [1] Commenting on this pasuk, we find the following in the Midrash: [2]

והיכן היה? בשקו ובתעניתו... אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא, מעולם לא חטא אדם פני ועשה תשובה, ואתה פתחת בתשובה תחילה, חייך שכן בנג עומד ופותח בתשובה תחילה, ואיזה? זה “הושע, שנאמר “שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך”

*Where was he [returning from]? From his sackcloth and fasting. Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, to him, “No one ever sinned before Me and did teshuvah. You were the first one to open with Teshuvah. By your life, it will be your descendant who stands and opens first with teshuvah.” And who is this? It is Hoshea, as it is written, ‘Return Israel, to Hashem your God.’*

The sin to which the Midrash refers for which Reuven was doing teshuvah was the episode with Bilhah, as mentioned earlier on in Bereishis. [3] The Gemara [4] explains that when Rachel died, Yaakov moved his bed into the tent of her maidservant, Bilhah. Reuven felt that this was an affront to the honor of his mother, Leah, and moved his father's bed into her tent. It was for this sin of counteracting his father's wishes that Reuven was repenting.

A number of questions arise concerning this Midrash:

1. Was Reuven the first person ever to do teshuvah? There are sources in Chazal which trace the idea of teshuvah back to as early as Adam and Cain.
2. Similarly, was Hoshea the first *navi* to exhort the Jewish people to do teshuvah? Practically every *navi* since the time of Moshe Rabbeinu himself exhorted the people to do teshuvah!
3. Why does the pasuk allude to Reuven's teshuvah over the episode with Bilhah in the section which deals with the sale of Yosef?
4. What is the meaning of the phrase "פתחת בתשובה תחילה – You opened with teshuvah first"? Is the one who "opens" not *by definition* the one who is "first", leaving one of these two words basically redundant?

#### Teshuvah for an Aveirah Bein Adam Lechaveiro

The Meshech Chochmah explains. As we know, the mitzvos of the Torah can be divided into two groups: "*bein adam laMakom* – between man and Hashem" and "*bein adam lechaveiro* – between man and his fellow man." It is easy to see how if a person commits a sin between himself and Hashem then in order to do teshuvah he needs to ask Hashem for forgiveness. Likewise, if one sins against his fellow man, he will naturally need to ask that person for forgiveness in order to atone for his aveirah. It is also important to realize, however, that even after he has apologized to his fellow, he still needs to teshuvah toward Hashem for sinning against his fellow man. The reason for this is that if he has sinned against his fellow, it is a symptom of the fact that he has moved further away from Hashem and his Torah; for if a person was fully connected to Hashem, he would never treat his fellow man in an objectionable or unacceptable way. It is only by distancing himself from Hashem and His ways that a person can allow himself to act in a cruel or insensitive way towards others, perhaps even developing an ideology which condones and supports such behavior.

This was Reuven's contribution to our understanding of the teshuvah process. Reuven's sin was essentially in the realm of *bein adam lechaveiro* – denigrating his father's honor by countermanning his wishes. The reparative act for that sin, therefore, came in the form of him putting himself out to save Yosef, thereby upholding his father's wishes even at his own expense. Yosef had, in some respects, already superseded Reuven himself as Yaakov's firstborn. Nevertheless, Reuven set all personal considerations aside to honor his father's wishes.[5] With this act, his earlier infraction had seemingly been resolved. Yet the Torah informs us that it was specifically at this stage that Reuven engaged in teshuvah. He realized that his actions toward Yaakov were the result of his having distanced himself from Hashem and hence he sought to resolve the matter at its root by returning to Hashem.

This is what Midrash means when it says that Reuven was "פותח בתשובה," for he introduced (פותח) the idea of seeking the beginnings (תחילה) of his sin, recognizing that they ultimately lay in a shortcoming in his relationship with Hashem.

Likewise, it is this idea that Hoshea introduces to the Jewish people, saying "שובה ישׂראל עד ה' אלקינו כי כשלת בעונך" – Return Israel to Hashem you God, for you have stumbled in your sin." The message is that even when the sin you have committed is "your sin," i.e. in matters that exist between members of the Jewish people, nevertheless, you have to return to Hashem over those sins as well. This idea is further explicated in the following pasuk which states: "קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה'" – Take for yourselves words and return to Hashem." The first part of the pasuk, "take for yourselves words," refers to the words of appeasement with which one needs to approach his fellow Jew against whom he has sinned. The second half of the pasuk states that after the aggrieved party has granted him forgiveness, the person needs to then return to Hashem over the distance between them which allowed him to sin against his fellow.

In light of these words of the Meshech Chochmah let us suggest that the words of the pasuk which we recite so many times on Yom Kippur, "מכל חטאתיך לפני יהוה תטהרו" – From all of your sins, before Hashem you shall be purified,[6] remind us that purity from *all* of our sins – including *bein adam lechaveiro* – comes from being in a state of closeness "before Hashem."

גמר חתימה טובה

[1] Bereishis 37:29. [2] Berieshis Rabbah 84:19. [3] 35:22. [4] Shabbos 55b. [5] See Berachos 7b, cited in Rashi to Bereishis 9:32. [6] Vayikra 16:30.

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Vayelech 5779

Sep 5, 2018

by **Rabbi Kalman Packouz**

GOOD MORNING! One of my favorite stories is of the house painter who deeply regretted stealing from his clients by diluting the paint, but charging full price. He poured out his heart on Yom Kippur hoping for Divine direction. A booming voice comes down from Heaven and decrees -- "Repaint, repaint ... and thin no more!" Yom Kippur begins Tuesday evening, September 18th.

Rabbi Avraham Bukspan once shared with me an insight into Yom Kippur -- The Day of Atonement. "Atonement" is a conjunctive of "At One-ment" -- of reconnecting, strengthening the relationship with the Almighty, the reconciliation of the Almighty with each of us. Yom Kippur is our opportunity to reunite our spiritual essence -- our soul -- with the Almighty. Intuitively, each of us knows that we have a soul -- that part of us which contains our conscience and drive to do the right thing. The Torah tells us, "... and He blew into his (Adam, the first human being) nostrils the soul of life ..." (Genesis 2:7). If we realize that our essence is spiritual -- and eternal -- it places a whole different perspective on life. We need to be concerned about our bodies and our health and make every effort to sustain them, but the real importance is the soul, because that is our true self. Yom Kippur is about the soul.

Throughout the year we either bring merit to the soul or sully the soul through our actions and behavior. The 613 mitzvot of the Torah are there to help each of us develop our soul and perfect it. From the beginning of the Hebrew month of Elul through Yom Kippur (40 days) we introspect, review the year and our interactions with the Almighty and our fellow human beings. We work on repairing what needs repairing. Yom Kippur is the culmination.

The Torah gives us special mitzvot, commandments, for Yom Kippur to help us see more clearly that we are souls and to help us relate to life on a soul level. The Torah states, "This shall be an eternal decree: In the seventh month [counting from the month of Nissan] on the tenth of the month you shall afflict yourselves and all manner of work you shall not do, neither the native born nor the convert amongst you ... before the Almighty you shall be purified" (Leviticus 16:29-30).

These "afflictions" are ways for us to minimize the body's control over our lives. What are they? There are five "afflictions" on Yom Kippur (from before sunset Tuesday, September 22nd until nighttime -- when the stars come out -- Wednesday evening, September 23rd) -- we are prohibited from: eating/drinking, wearing leather shoes, marital relations, anointing the skin with salves and oils, and washing for pleasure.

By negating the body, we give preeminence to the soul. Life is a constant battle -- between the yetzer tov (the desire to do the right thing, which is identified with the soul) and yetzer hara (the desire to follow your desires, which corresponds with the body). The Talmud compares the body to a horse and the soul to a rider. It is always better to have the rider on top of the horse -- to have the rider controlling the horse and not the horse controlling where the rider is going!

Jewish tradition teaches that on Yom Kippur the yetzer hara, the desire to follow your desires, is dead. If we follow our desires, it is only out of habit. On Yom Kippur we can break our habits! Here are three questions to think about on Yom Kippur to help you develop your life plan:

Am I eating to live or living to eat?

If I am eating to live, then what am I living for?

What would I like written in my obituary or on my tombstone? Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the anniversary of the day Moshe brought down from Mount Sinai the second set of Ten Commandments. This signified that the Almighty forgave the Jewish people for the transgression of the Golden Calf. For all times this day was decreed to be a day of forgiveness for our mistakes. However, this refers to transgressions against the Almighty. Transgressions against our fellow human being require us to correct our mistakes and seek forgiveness. If one took from another person, it is not enough to regret and ask the Almighty for forgiveness; first, one must return what was taken and ask for forgiveness from the person and then ask for forgiveness from the Almighty.

In the prayer service we say the Viduy, a confession, and the Al Chet, a list of transgressions between man and God and between man and man. It is interesting to note two things. First, the transgressions are listed in alphabetical order (in Hebrew). This not only makes a comprehensive list, but gives a framework to include whatever transgression you wish to include under the proper letter.

Secondly, the Viduy and Al Chet are stated in the plural. This teaches us that we are one people and that we are responsible for each other. Even if we did not commit a particular offense, we carry a certain measure of responsibility for those who transgressed -- especially if we could have prevented the transgression.

The Rambam, Maimonides, teaches that each individual's life is always on a balance -- like the old-time scales where the weights were put on one side and the produce on the other side -- and that each of us should think before doing an action that this transgression or that this mitzvah (commandment) could tip the scales.

Likewise, Rambam teaches that each community, each country and ultimately the world is judged in the same manner. Thus, an individual should not only think that his transgression or fulfillment of a mitzvah tips the scale for him alone, but may very well tip the scale for all of mankind! On Yom Kippur we read the book of Jonah. The lesson from the story is that God readily accepts the repentance of anyone who sincerely desires to do Teshuva, to return to the Almighty and to the path of the Torah -- just as He did with the people of Ninveh.

There is still time to get a copy of Inspiring Days and Beyond Survival to get a better understanding of the holiday, the prayers, the prayer services and the opportunity that is afforded to you to grow in spirituality, to come closer to the Almighty, to perfect yourself and to perfect the world! It is available at your local Jewish bookstore, at JudaicaEnterprises.com or by calling toll-free to 877-758-3242.

By the way, if you wish to keep focused that you are a soul and not a body, train yourself to say "My body is hungry" and not "I am hungry"! May you have a meaningful Yom Kippur and a sweet and healthy year!

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from: Project Genesis <genesis@torah.org>

to: weekly-halacha@torah.org

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subject: Weekly Halacha - The Origin And Purpose Of Kol Nidrei  
Weekly Halacha

**By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt**

### **The Origin And Purpose Of Kol Nidrei**

The holiest day of the year, the day which the Torah designates as a Day of Atonement for the sins of the Jewish people, begins with the little understood but emotionally charged Kol Nidrei service. For reasons which are not completely known to us, the compilers of the Yom Kippur machzor chose Kol Nidrei, which is basically a halachic procedure for annulling certain oaths and vows, as the opening chapter of the Yom Kippur services. Obviously, then, there is more to Kol Nidrei than meets the eye. Let us take a deeper look.

It is known that Kol Nidrei dates back to ancient times, possibly as far back as the era of Anshei Keneses ha-Gedolah[1]. The earliest written version,

though, is in the Siddur of Rav Amram Gaon, who lived in the ninth century. Already then, the exact reason for reciting Kol Nidrei on Yom Kippur was not clearly understood, and the Geonim and the early Rishonim struggled with its exact meaning and purpose[2].

Halachic background – vows and oaths

In earlier times, much more so than today, individuals were inclined to “accept upon themselves” different types of self-imposed obligations or restrictions. In order to ensure that these would actually be kept, people would label their self-imposed obligation as either a neder, a vow, or a shevuah, an oath, thus giving it legal force. The binding status of vows and oaths and the horrific and tragic consequences of violating them are discussed in several places in the Torah and Rabbinic literature[3].

But the Torah also recognizes that sometimes these vows and oaths were undertaken without due consideration of the consequences. More often than not, the individual making the oath did not realize how difficult it would be to keep it. Sometimes, an oath was declared in anger or out of spite and eventually the individual regretted his words and wished to revoke them. To that end, the Torah provided a legal formula called hataras nedarim, allowing a petitioner to present his case before a beis din in order to find a legal loophole and extricate the petitioner from his plight. This process involves complex halachos, and indeed, not always can the court release the petitioner from his vow.

The view of the early authorities

Before beseeching God for atonement of sins on Yom Kippur, it is imperative that each individual absolve himself of any vows or oaths that he may have made and subsequently violated. The severity of violating a vow or an oath is such that it may block or interfere with the entire atonement process[4]. Consequently, one who is aware of any violations of oaths or vows that he may have committed is strongly urged to petition a Jewish court in order to find a way out of his self-imposed obligations. Indeed, it has become customary that already on erev Rosh Hashanah, all males petition a beis din for hataras nedarim.

But not everyone is familiar with the procedure of hataras nedarim, and not everyone who has violated a neder or a shevuah realizes that he has done so. To avert and to solve this problem, Kol Nidrei was instituted. Kol Nidrei declares that in case an individual made a vow or an oath during the past year and somehow forgot and violated it inadvertently, he now regrets his hasty pronouncement. In effect he tells the “court” – comprised of the chazan and two congregational leaders – that had he realized the gravity and severity of violating an oath, he would never have uttered it in the first place. He thus begs for forgiveness and understanding[5]. This explanation of Kol Nidrei, put forth by many of the early authorities and endorsed by the Rosh, fits nicely with the traditional text of Kol Nidrei, which reads, “from the last Yom Kippur until this Yom Kippur,” since we are focusing on vows and oaths which were undertaken during the past year[6].

The view of Rabbeinu Tam

Other authorities – led by Rabbeinu Tam – strongly object to this interpretation of Kol Nidrei. Basing their opinion on various halachic principles, they question if it is legally valid to perform hataras nedarim in this manner. In their view, Kol Nidrei was instituted to deal with the problem of unfulfilled vows, but from a different angle: Instead of annulling existing vows and oaths, Kol Nidrei serves as a declaration rendering invalid all future vows and oaths which may be uttered without due forethought – “null and void, without power and without standing[7].” Accordingly, the text was amended to read “from this Yom Kippur until the next Yom Kippur,” since we are referring to what may happen in the future, not to what has already happened in the past.

Which approach do we follow?

Most of the later authorities have accepted Rabbeinu Tam’s explanation of Kol Nidrei and this has become the accepted custom in most congregations[8]. Nevertheless, in deference to the first opinion, many congregations include both versions as part of the text. Thus the text in some



machzorim[9] reads as follows: From the last Yom Kippur until this Yom Kippur [accounting for vows already made], and from this Yom Kippur until the next Yom Kippur [referring to future vows], etc.

It is important to note, however, that Kol Nidrei, whether referring to the past or to the future, does not give one the right to break his word. As previously explained, Kol Nidrei is valid only for additional obligations or personal restrictions that an individual undertakes of his own volition. By no means can hataras nedarim or Kol Nidrei exempt an individual from court- or beis din -imposed oaths, etc.

A practical application

As stated earlier, vows and oaths are not too common in our times. It would seem, therefore, that the halachic aspect of Kol Nidrei has little practical application. But when properly understood, Kol Nidrei can be used as a tool to rectify a fairly common halachic problem. There is a well-known ruling in the Shulchan Aruch[10] that any proper custom, once accepted and followed, may not be dropped without undergoing hataras nedarim. People who adopt even “simple” proper customs which they are not obligated to practice, such as reciting Tehillim daily, without making the bli neder (without a vow) stipulation, require hataras nedarim should they decide to discontinue their practice[11].

This is where Kol Nidrei[12] can help. As stated above, Rabbeinu Tam explained that Kol Nidrei is a declaration that invalidates the legal force of certain future vows. Contemporary poskim[13] rule that “proper customs” from which an individual wishes to absolve himself although he neglected to make the bli neder stipulation initially, are included in the Kol Nidrei declaration invalidating such vows. The “proper custom” may now be discontinued.

Rules

Since Kol Nidrei is an halachic procedure for nullifying certain, specific future vows, the following conditions must be met:

Each individual must understand exactly what is being said during Kol Nidrei. Since a legal declaration is being made, if one does not understand what he is declaring, his statement cannot have legal force[14]. The difficult Aramaic text should, therefore, be studied and understood before Yom Kippur eve.

Each individual must verbally recite Kol Nidrei along with the chazan. Obviously, the chazan cannot make such a declaration for anyone but himself[15]. It should not be recited in an undertone, but loudly enough for a person nearby to hear[16]. If it is whispered too softly, it may be invalid[17]. Kol Nidrei should be recited while it is daylight, since the process of annulling vows [and the declaration of voiding them in the future] should not be done on Shabbos or Yom Tov[18]. Kol Nidrei: A Symbolic Idea The above discussion sums up the halachic analysis of Kol Nidrei. But as noted earlier, there is more to Kol Nidrei than meets the eye. If Kol Nidrei were merely a “dry” halachic procedure concerning vows and oaths, it would hardly evoke such deep emotional sentiment throughout the Jewish world. Why are the Sifrei Torah removed from the Aron ha-Kodesh, a haunting centuries-old melody chanted and an atmosphere of sanctity and awe created if all that is taking place is hataras nedarim? While the commentators offer various answers, we will quote just one, which is based on the teachings of the Zohar.

In Kabbalistic teaching[19], Kol Nidrei is a plea to God to nullify His oath that He will punish or exile the Jewish people because of their sins. The Talmud (Bava Basra 74a) relates that Rabba bar Bar Chanah heard a Heavenly voice saying, “Woe is Me that I have sworn to exile My people, but now that I have sworn, who can annul it for Me?” Kol Nidrei implies that just as we seek to absolve ourselves of vows and oaths that burden us, so, too, may God annul His oath to withdraw His Presence from the Jewish people. In this sense, Kol Nidrei is a prayer and a supplication to God to quickly end the bitter exile and bring salvation to the Jewish nation. Thus, it is a very appropriate prayer for inaugurating the holiest and most awesome day of the year. It is this hidden message and prayer, cleverly

camouflaged[20] by what seems to be a technical, halachic procedure, that evokes those deep emotions, and brings almost every Jew, observant or otherwise, scholar or student, to shed a tear and resolve to better his ways in the coming year, a year which we hope will bring the final redemption that we so eagerly await.

1. Shitah Mekubetzes (Nedarim 23b). 2. Indeed, some well-known Geonim, including Rav Netronai Gaon and Rav Hai Gaon, were adamantly opposed to the Kol Nidrei service and ordered their congregations to omit it entirely; see Tur, O.C. 619. 3. For a sampling see Shabbos 32b; Yevamos 109b; Nedarim 20a and 22b; Vayikra Rabbah 37:1; Koheles Rabbah 5:2; Tanchuma, Matos 1. 4. Shibbolei ha-Leket. 5. It is important to stress that, even according to this opinion, Kol Nidrei is a “last ditch effort” to guard a person from his own words and to save him from certain punishment. It is not meant as a crutch to rely on l’chatchilah. 6. According to this opinion, Kol Nidrei is similar to the first part of hataras nedarim which is recited on erev Rosh Hashanah. 7. The halachic basis for this type of declaration is in the Talmud (Nedarim 23b) and is not within the scope of this discussion. Note that according to this opinion, Kol Nidrei is similar to the second part of hataras nedarim which is recited on erev Rosh Hashanah. 8. Mishnah Berurah 619:2. 9. This “compromise text” was introduced by the Radvaz (4:33) and later adopted by Rav Y. Emdin (She’elas Yaavetz 145) and other poskim; see Kaf ha-Chayim 619:17. 10. Y.D. 214:1. 11. See The Weekly Halachah Discussion, Parashas Vayeilech, for a full discussion of this subject. 12. Or the second part of hataras nedarim on erev Rosh Hashanah. See Minchas Yitzchak 9:60, who explains why it is proper (but not obligatory) to recite both texts. 13. Rav S.Z. Auerbach in Minchas Shelomo 1:91, based on Teshuvos Shalmas Chayim 2:38. See also Yabia Omer 2:30 and 4:11-9, who relies on this as well. 14. See Chayei Adam 138:8 and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 128:16. 15. Mishnah Berurah 619:2. 16. Shulchan Aruch Harav 619:3 based on Y.D. 211:1. On the other hand, it should also not be said too loudly, so as not to confuse the chazan and other worshippers; Mateh Efrayim 619:11. 17. Minchas Yitzchak 9:61. 18. Mishnah Berurah 619:5. Mateh Efrayim 619:11, explains that as long as Kol Nidrei begins during the daytime it does not matter if it continues into the night. [See Halichos Shelomo 1:17, note 43, where Rav S.Z. Auerbach questions the custom to recite Tefillah Zakah before Kol Nidrei, since Tefillah Zakah contains in it an acceptance of Yom Kippur.] 19. This idea is reflected in the section of the Zohar (Rav Shimon stood up...) which is recited by many individuals before Kol Nidrei. 20. Possibly, to confound the Satan. Weekly-Halacha, Text Copyright © 2010 by Rabbi Neustadt, Dr. Jeffrey Gross and Torah.org. Rabbi Neustadt is the Yoshev Rosh of the Vaad Harabbonim of Detroit and the Av Beis Din of the Beis Din Tzedek of Detroit. He could be reached at dneustadt@cordetroit.com Weekly Halacha © 2019 by Torah.org

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5758-yomkippur/>

**Call to Arms**

**Yom Kippur**

Posted on September 28, 2017 (5778) **By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky** | Series: Drasha | Level: Beginner

Yom Kippur, the ultimate day of repentance, has the Jewish nation simultaneously praying, fasting and asking for forgiveness. It begins with the somber, quiet, and melodious intonation of Kol Nidrei and ends with the entire congregation shouting Hashem hu HaElokim (G-d is the Al-Mighty) seven times after various requests of forgiveness. It seems that at the time when our strength is waning our greatest and loudest pleas are spent. Shouldn't we begin the day with the strong requests for forgiveness and save the subdued prayers for when our bodies are weak from hunger and our lips parched from lack of water?

Rav Eichenstein, the Ziditchover Rebbe, tells the following story:

One Friday, a man entered the study of the Tchockover Rebbe with a request that was very common in those days.

“My son was drafted into the army,” the man began. “However, we have a way out. On Sunday, we are going to a doctor who will falsely declare him unfit for service. This way he will be spared certain misery, perhaps even death in that terrible army. Rebbe,” he asked, “I need your blessing that he evade the draft.”

The Rebbe quietly told him that Shabbos was nearing and he could not concentrate on blessings. The man should return to him on Friday evening after his tisch (ceremonious chasidic table).

The man did so. After most of the chasidim had left, the man repeated his request, almost verbatim. Again the Rebbe was non-committal. “Return to me after the morning service.”

Unperturbed, the man noted that he would really like to resolve this matter before Sunday morning.

Shabbos morning, after services, the man approached the Rebbe again. Calmly he repeated the predicament. “Sunday morning I am going to a doctor who will falsely declare my son unfit for military service. Please pray that we will evade conscription.” The Rebbe was not moved. Again, he deferred until the afternoon.

At the third Shabbos meal, the scene repeated again, precisely the way it had the previous three times. “I understand that you are leaving Sunday morning. Come back to me late Saturday night,” said the Rebbe. “By then I will have an answer for you.”

By this time, his Chasidim’s curiosity was piqued. They had never seen their Rebbe so reluctant to mete a blessing, especially when it was one that would save a Jewish soul from the frightful Polish army.

Saturday night a large crowd gathered as the man approached with his request. Frustrated and disgruntled, the man, once again, repeated his story, almost verbatim, for the fifth time.

Immediately, the Rebbe sprung from his chair and began to shout. “What are you asking me? Why would one even try to evade the service of our wonderful country? How dare you ask me for a blessing of that sort? Your son would make a fine soldier for our country. I wish him the best of luck in the army!”

The man quickly scurried from the room and left town. The Chasidim stood shocked and bewildered. Never had they heard such an uncharacteristic outcry from the Rebbe.

“I will explain,” said the Rebbe. “The man was a fraud. He had no son, and if he did, he wanted him in the army. He was sent by the government to test our loyalty. Thank G-d we passed the test.”

“But, Rebbe!” cried the chasidim, “how did you know?”

“Simple,” explained the Rebbe. “I watched the level of intensity. From the moment he met me until tonight there was no increase in intensity nor feeling of desperation with each request. The moment I heard his request tonight and it contained no more passion or desperation than his first request on Friday night, I knew he was a fraud.”

We stand a whole entire day in prayer, and end with a ne’ilah prayer, after nearly 24 hours of pleading. The litmus test of our sincerity comes as the heavenly gates are being closed. As the sun begins to set, our pleas should intensify. That crescendo assures our sincerity. It also should assure us a Happy & Healthy Sweet New Year.

Dedicated by Larry Atlas in honor of his engagement to Marcia Taitelman Good Shabbos!

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subject: Jewish Prime Time; Hidden Blessings of Anti-Semitism; Decoding the Parsha

**We Are All Yonah**

**Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

September 27, 2019

The dramatic story of Yonah being swallowed by a whale exhibits classic teshuva themes. An entire metropolis of Ninveh, condemned to death, ultimately rallies, repents and is spared. Both Jew and non-Jew alike possess G-d-given and unlimited freedom of choice rendering teshuva a universal experience. Ninveh’s last minute redemption also highlights that it is never too late for teshuva or character transformation. In fact, Yonah himself is caged in the belly of the beast, a few breaths from death until he is born anew. Though he is swallowed by a male he prays and is reborn in a female; his tomb has become a womb! Yonah’s story captures so many teshuva messages!

Yet Yonah’s initial fleeing remains perplexing. Where is he running and what exactly is his plan to abscond from G-d? Yonah, a prophet, should know better and is well aware that G-d can easily trace his journey. Where is he running and what is he thinking?

A careful read of his initial “steps” provides a partial understanding. He is described as walking away “MiLifnei Hashem” from the “presence of G-d” rather than the more common term of walking away “MeiHashem” which would connote simply departing from G-d. Yonah isn’t parting with G-d but fleeing from the intense encounter with the presence of G-d. Of course, it is obvious to him that he can’t flee from G-d and cannot hide from the Divine grasp; without question, G-d will discover his whereabouts. He isn’t seeking to hide but merely to detach and disengage. He wants to quit the condition of standing in the presence of G-d to avoid a state of intimacy, mindfulness and religious “focus”. Standing in the presence of G-d creates religious pressure, expectation and challenge, is a charged and intense encounter, and mandates responsibility and mission. Yonah craves a more relaxed and chilled mindset – one without intimidating challenges bearing down on him. He flees to Tarshish, a major commercial port, and hopes to blend in within the hustle bustle of daily life. In this busy environment, he isn’t forced to face the prospect of religious expectation and isn’t forced to wrestle with his Divine mission to stir Ninveh to mass repentance.

Interestingly enough, the exact same phraseology is employed to describe Kayin’s parting from G-d after his vicious crime. Living in a prehistoric age, Kayin like Yonah, could not possibly have believed that he could “lose” G-d or hide in a “mass of humanity”. He doesn’t flee G-d, but seeks a world without His presence and of course without guilt and without facing the consequences of his murderous act. He and Yonah are “escape artists” looking to flee from the pressure of religious mission or the pressure of moral guilt. Neither is running away from G-d but each is searching for a laid-back getaway without the pressure of moral expectations which religion creates.

At some point or another, we are all Yonah and we are all Kayin- we all part with G-d when we need to. At various points in our lives it is more convenient to create “distance” between ourselves and G-d. To enable our disobedient behavior, we require a degree of cognitive dissonance-imagining that G-d isn’t present and isn’t observing. We know this to be false, but we adopt a false reality to create space for misbehavior. We all experience the flight of Yonah.

The core viduy confession of Yom Kippur includes a trifecta of “chatanu, vinu, pashanu” with the latter phrase referring to moments of rebellion. Most of us aren’t hardened rebels denying G-d’s presence or outright revolting against His authority. Instead we are passing rebels- temporarily asking G-d to leave the room or momentarily leaving the room ourselves so that we can attend to our “needs”. We, as Yonah, acknowledge that this is fiction but yet

we all walk out- even temporarily- from religious encounter with G-d. For this we all must confess “pashanu”- we have not denied Your presence but momentarily ignored it. However, Yonah’s mad dash to Tarshish is more than just departing from the intense glare of the Divine presence. As a prophet, he knows that sooner or later he will travel to Ninveh and fulfill his mission. However, he would greatly prefer that this be later rather than sooner. The timing is not right, the situation is too tense and ‘hot’, and Yonah would rather defer this journey to a different date. He isn’t fleeing as much as he is delaying. Chazal warn us against this type of religious procrastination. “If a person plans to sin and to repent, to sin and to repent, he isn’t afforded the ability to perform repentance” (Yoma 85b). Of course, this warning doesn’t address an outright hypocrite who flagrantly sins with the ridiculous plan of atoning tomorrow for today’s sins. Such two-faced behavior requires no admonition because it is beyond absurd. Instead, Chazal refer to someone who desires teshuva and desires religious growth but delays and defers to some future date. It is this person whose teshuva is foiled. Theoretically, every human being retains a perpetual ability for repentance. However, throughout life, we develop deeply conditioned habits which become ever more difficult to shatter. We all hope to excel at religion, but we often schedule that opportunity for “later in life”, after we have succeeded in other areas we evaluate as more important or pressing. These patterns of religious procrastination become hardened and we are ultimately trapped in an invisible prison of habit and religious mediocrity. We are very much alive but severely constricted by the power of habit and conditioning. Of course, we retain the theoretical ability to achieve teshuva and growth but with each deferral it becomes less and less likely. The tragedy of Yonah urges us to halt our procrastination and immediately face religious challenge and strive for religious excellence.

[http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2012/moadim/rsob\\_yk.html](http://www.torahweb.org/torah/2012/moadim/rsob_yk.html)

**Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky**

**Torah and Chessed - The Secrets of Kaparah**

As Yom Kippur approaches, the concept of kaparah - atonement - is foremost on our minds. There are many ways to achieve different degrees of kaparah. When the Beis Hamikdash stood, korbanos were brought to atone for various aveiros. The elaborate service of korbanos offered in the Beis Hamikdash on Yom Kippur included several mechaprim. Korbanos offered on behalf of the kohein gadol, the regular kohanim, and all the Jewish People culminated with the sa'ir hamishtaleach - the goat sent out for atonement - completing the kaparah process. After we reenact the avodas Yom Hakipurim through our tefilas Mussaf on Yom Kippur, we lament in great detail our inability to achieve the level of kaparah once available to us. Chazal teach us that there is a method of kaparah even greater than korbanos. The study of Torah and the performance of acts of kindness can achieve kaparah even in a situation that korbanos are not effective. Chazal comment concerning the house of Eli Hakohein, that although their sins cannot be atoned for through the mechanism of korbanos, talmud Torah combined with gemilus chassadim can bring them atonement. We who do not have the opportunity to offer korbanos can still avail ourselves of talmud Torah and gemilus chassadim as our mechaprim. While talmud Torah and gemilus chassadim are two fundamental aspects of avodas Hashem, why should they have the ability to be mechaper for aveiros? In the tefilah of Hineni recited by the shaliach tzibbur before Mussaf on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we beseech Hashem, "u'pesha'einu techaseh b'ahava - cover all of our sins with love." This request expresses a basic concept concerning kaparah. Chazal observe that the ultimate mechaper, teshuva, elicits different levels of kaparah depending on the type of teshuva that is performed. Teshuva mei'ahava - a teshuva that results from an expression for one's love for Hashem and from a sincere desire to return to a close relationship based on that love - is the highest form of teshuva. Teshuva that merely emanates from yiras Hashem - fear of Hashem - is more

limited in nature and cannot accomplish a complete kaparah. As such, as we strive to obtain kaparah, it behooves us to perfect our ahavas Hashem which is the prerequisite for teshuva mei'ahava. As we reach higher heights in our ahavas Hashem, we can beseech Hashem to express His love for us by covering our sins with that love. How do we practically demonstrate ahavas Hashem and thereby merit the highest level of kaparah? It is precisely talmud Torah and gemilus chassadim that express and strengthen this love, and as such are our ultimate mechaprim. Regarding the obligation of "v'ahavta es Hashem", the Sifrei comments "eich attah ohev - how do we attain this love?" The next passuk answers this dilemma: "vehayu hadevarim ha'eileh"; the mitzvah of Talmud Torah is the key to ahavas Hashem. As the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva develops the principle, "lefi ha'de'ah tihiye ha'ahava - according to one's knowledge of Hashem will be one's love for Hashem." Knowledge of Torah is our way of attaining knowledge of Hashem, enabling us to experience ahavas Hashem. There is another way we express our ahavas Hashem. Acts of gemilus chassadim are the way we imitate Hashem and fulfill the mitzvah of "v'halachta b'derachav - you should walk in His ways." Modeling our behavior after Hashem's is a testament to the love and admiration we have for Him, since we try to imitate that which we love. These two manifestations of ahavas Hashem - talmud Torah and gemilus chassadim - are our most sincere expressions of teshuva mei'ahava, and as such are our most effective methods of teshuva. May Hashem grant us the privilege to be chozer b'teshuva shleima and fulfill for us, "u'peshaeinu techaseh b'ahava." Copyright © 2012 by The TorahWeb Foundation.

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**Yom Kippur The Avoda of the Cohen Gadol**

**Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller**

One of the most significant forms of service on Yom Kippur was the ritual of the two goats. Two identical goats were brought to the kohein gadol. Lots were drawn and one goat was designated l'Hashem, offered as a sacrifice in the Beit Hamikdash and the other was designated l'Azzazel, to be thrown off a cliff. The word korbon comes from the root word karov (to come near). The function of a sacrifice is to take what is far and bring it near. The animalistic part of a person was given to him to elevate, to let the voice of the spiritual soul shine through. The self that enjoys physical pleasure, that is imperfect, can be uplifted. All of the korbonot have the function of elevating the animal self. This is why it is called isha. The Shelah explains that there are ten categories of angels and one of them is called isha, humanoids. The part of us that's angelic, that's connected, is revealed through the korbonot. Goats frolic, eat, and reproduce and there's an aspect within us that would be very happy doing that a ll the time. The korbon redirects us to elevate those aspects to Hashem. The second goat is sent l'Azzazel. Azzazel comes from the root word az, a desolate, rocky, mountaintop. The goat was thrown off a jagged cliff and by the time it hit bottom it was in pieces. A confession was said before both goats met their fate. Back in the Beit Hamikdash there was a red string that would miraculously turn white to symbolize that the sins of the Jews were forgiven. The whole service begins by saying l'Hashem, it's to Hashem. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that both goats were l'Hashem, but signify two different approaches. One approach is self- sanctification represented by the goat offered on the altar. The other approach is self-conquest. The second goat had to be taken to a place of desolation. There's a form of goat- like energy that says frolic, don't think, don't move on. This ultimately leads to desolation. There's a part of us that doesn't want to hear the spiritual voice, that doesn't want to listen to obligation and responsibility. When we

overcome that, when we recognize that sometimes you have to deny yourself, that sometimes the answer is no, that too turns us into noble people.

In Kabbalistic terminology the inner self is called *atkafya* which means conquering and *eschafya* turning it around. Both approaches are needed. The *yetzer hara* signifies aggressive energy. When a person feels attacked he loses control. If we didn't have help from Hashem, if the Torah didn't give us direction, we could never overcome it. The goat is brought to a place of desolation signifying the *yetzer hara* that takes us towards desolation. Getting lost in the feelings and drives of the moment drives us away from eternity. Although the *yetzer hara* is a permanent part of every person, it's very easy to bribe it.

Don't fight the *yetzer hara*. Bribe him and blind him and then it will be easier to say no to him because his voice has now become dimmed. This is why it says about the *Sair l'Azazel* that our sins are transferred to him. In the *Beit Hamikdash*, on Yom Kippur, the Jews saw how the red string turned white symbolizing that the *yetzer hara* had been vanquished.

This Yom Kippur, may we too merit to achieve self-conquest, forgiveness and complete atonement.

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Teshuvah on Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur (Leviticus ch. 16)

Sep 5, 2010

by **Rabbi Zvi Belovski**

### **Teshuvah on Yom Kippur**

Let us examine two aspects of the process of teshuvah (repentance) and the return to God, which constitutes the major theme of Yom Kippur.

Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa asked Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman, "What does the following verse mean? And for me, may my prayer be to You, God, at a favorable time (Tehillim 69:14)." He replied, "The gates of prayer are sometimes open and sometimes closed, but the gates of teshuvah are always open." Rabbi Chanina responded, "How do we know this?" He replied, "The verse says, With wondrous acts in Your righteousness You answer us, God of our salvation, the trust of all corners of the earth and the distant seas (ibid. 65:6). Just as a mikveh is sometimes open and sometimes closed for purification, so too, the gates of prayer are sometimes open and sometimes closed. However, just as the sea is always open for purification, so too, the hand of God is always open to accept penitents." (Devarim Rabbah 2:12)

To understand the gist of this, let us discuss the general idea of taharah (purification). When a vessel, or a person, requires taharah, a mikveh, a specially prepared body of water, is used. It is a basic requirement of this procedure that the entire person or vessel must be totally submerged in the water. If even the most minute area of the person remains outside the water, the *tevilah* (immersion) is completely invalid and must be repeated. However, if water itself becomes impure, it need only touch the waters of the mikveh in the slightest way, and it immediately becomes *tahor*. A detailed discussion of the laws of *tumah* and *taharah* (impurity and purity) and how they apply is beyond the scope of this essay. We are primarily concerned here with the symbolic aspects of different sorts of taharah.

We may compare the purifying effects of water with *tefillah* (prayer). The purpose of *tefillah* is to enable the supplicant to cleave to God. Every part of one's being is supposed to be involved: all of one's physical senses and certainly the whole of one's spiritual makeup must be concentrated on the act of *tefillah*. If one fails to muster one's entire physical and spiritual abilities to prayer, then the situation is similar to the person who uses the mikveh but leaves part of his body outside the water - his *tefillah* is ineffective.

However, if it is a time of special Divine grace, the "favorable time" described above, then the situation is somewhat different. This produces a particular relationship between God and *klal Yisrael*, one of a more "face-to-face" variety. At this time of favor, a similar sort of favorable nature is awakened in the individual with which he may approach God. Since this permeates his entire being, it encompasses all his senses, enabling him to connect directly with God.

This helps us understand the above midrash. A mikveh is sometimes useful for purification and sometimes not. It is only effective if a person is able to immerse himself completely in the water. So, too, *tefillah* is usually only effective if a person can invest his entire being in it. But when water becomes defiled, the smallest contact with the mikveh is sufficient to restore its purity. Teshuvah literally means return - return to the essential self. When a person performs sincere teshuvah he reestablishes contact with the root of his soul - the pristine holiness that is within him. The slightest connection with this innate holiness removes the defilement of sin from him. Just as the

sea is always open and available, so too, the path to this sort of purification is always open to him. During the Ten Days of Repentance and especially on Yom Kippur itself, it is much easier to achieve this sort of relationship with God. As our Sages tell us: Seek out God when He is to be found (Yeshayahu 55:6) - these are the ten days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. (Rosh HaShanah 18a)

Perhaps the two sorts of taharah that we have mentioned correspond to the two sorts of offerings brought on Yom Kippur, the *mussafim* and the special once-a-year sacrifices. The *mussafim*, as their name suggests, are additional to the usual, daily, continual offerings. As such, they represent the special holiness of every Yom Tov, which finds its expression in the Yom Tov Kiddush:

You chose us from all people and raised us above all tongues. (Siddur, Kiddush of Yom Tov Eve)

This corresponds to the extra closeness and special favor God feels for His chosen people. As we have said, this awakens a favorable nature in *klal Yisrael* and gives them the ability to connect completely with God, like a person who achieves purity by immersing totally in the waters of the mikveh. This happens on every Yom Tov, and Yom Kippur is no exception.

However, with the special offerings of Yom Kippur, we find a new idea, which occurs nowhere else:

For on this day He will atone for you, to purify you; from all sins before God you will be purified. (Vayikra 16:30)

*klal Yisrael* come before God on Yom Kippur and are purified by a slight touch, for just coming into contact with the day brings atonement. This is like the case of the impure water, which merely requires contact with the mikveh to achieve purity. This, of course, corresponds to the teshuvah aspect of Yom Kippur, a feature shared by no other Yom Tov.

\* \* \*

### CLEANSING THE WHOLE PERSON

As we have seen, the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* (Ten Days of Repentance), which last from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur, are an opportunity to repent of our misdeeds and reestablish our relationship with God. If this is so, then we must be given the possibility to change every aspect of our lives and thus our personality. Every person consists of three major parts: the body, the soul, and the intellect. Let us see how the *Yamim Nora'im* provide us with the chance to revise the direction of each of these primary components.

Rosh Hashana is the "head of the year," as its name suggests. It is not, however, just a name for the festival. Rosh Hashana is literally the "head" of the whole year. Just as the intellect of a person reposes in his head and directs his actions, so too do the occurrences on Rosh Hashana affect the success of the entire year. On Rosh Hashana, the focus of the day is an intellectual acceptance of God's rulership of the entire world. Rosh Hashana, then, is the Jew's chance to revise the direction of his intellect and harness it to the service of God.

Once we have established the correct frame of mind on Rosh Hashana, the remaining days until Yom Kippur provide a framework within which to work on the soul, that is, the emotional part of the personality. During this time, we perform the ritual of *kapparos*, in which we symbolically transfer our misdeeds onto a chicken or money. This is, as it were, a "soul for a soul." We are expected to examine our deeds during this time and arouse within our souls a great longing for repentance and our lost connection to the Divine.

Finally, after all this preparation, we are ready to refine our bodies, our most physical component, through the act of eating. We may not ingest food on Yom Kippur itself, so we eat our meal shortly before the fast commences. This has the status of a *mitzvah* meal, in which we demonstrate our ability to use the food for holy purposes, in this case, strengthening our bodies for the fast ahead.

It is only now, having worked on every aspect of his being during the preceding days, that the Jew can enter Yom Kippur, a day with special powers. As we saw above, God promises:

For on this day He will atone for you, to purify you; from all sins before God you will be purified. (Ibid.)

This verse has three phrases, implying the three sorts of purification we just mentioned. The cleansing process of this holiest of days can only start once one has already sublimated one's physical, intellectual, and emotional powers as much as possible. After we have cleansed ourselves as much as we can, we enter Yom Kippur, on which God guarantees that He will complete the task. This opportunity comes but once a year. If we utilize it to the best of our abilities, we are assured of a fine and sin-free start to the new year.

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