

I wouldn't normally begin a Yom Kippur sermon with a joke, but this one epitomizes what I'm really struggling with on this day - the theology and psychology of keeping score - with God and with each other.

It's the story of the guy who is late for a job interview, and he's looking desperately for a parking spot. He's circling around the building, and as every second passes, he knows he's going to lose the job because of how unprofessional it is to show up late. Finally, he calls out to God, "Listen, God, I know I haven't always been ethical and kept all the commandments, but I promise, if you just help me find a parking spot now, I'll start going to shul every day, give more charity, and be kind to others." No sooner has he closed his mouth than he sees someone pulling out of a spot right in front of the building. He looks heavenwards, and says, "Ok, never mind, God, I found one!"

I laugh, and at the same time, I deeply identify. Keeping score, quid pro quo, bargaining, and accounting behaviors with each other and God, is one of the most basic instincts and fraught areas of life and faith. And this idea is perhaps no more strongly expressed in our tradition than today.

וְכֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם וְסוֹפֵר וְמוֹנֵה וְתִזְכּוֹר כָּל הַנִּשְׁכַּחַת - God is writing and sealing, counting and numbering, and remembering even that which has been forgotten.

This is the classic image of today. We're down here - praying, focusing, reflecting, accounting, singing, working on ourselves. God is up there, with the family of angels and the great shofar, seated in Judgment. Today is about the gavel, the scales, the courtroom. Today is the day when our deeds are counted up and weighed, and a final score is determined: Did we net a higher total of good or bad deeds?

And today is the day when we are written for judgment.

As powerful and inspiring as it is, I truly struggle with this approach - theologically, and as a healthy motivation for action - for two reasons.

First, this does not seem to accord with reality as we experience it! We see people who seem to do all the right things, and suffer. We all have our examples.

Every commentary has offered an attempted resolution to this issue in judgment - we don't truly know the weight of every deed, we don't know people's intentions, and maybe there is a system in which the righteous sometimes suffer in this world to receive merit in the world to come, and vice versa for the wicked. This is a perennial challenge in faith and life.

But in my mind, there is an equally big problem, and one I want to grapple with *today*. Even if the accounting seemed fair and just to us, is it right? Is it a good way to live?

A central tenet of Jewish values is והלכת בדרכיו, imitatio dei - we should walk in God's ways. If God is up in the sky keeping track of who did what when and what they earn or deserve as a result, is this, then, the way we should live? If God does this, is it a model for *our* lives?

Let us turn to our own relationships - and allow me to share with you something I think about, and wrestle with, almost every day, in my personal and professional relationships. Perhaps my greatest struggle in relationships with close friends, family and colleagues is this yetzer hara - this destructive inclination - which I call "keeping score".

You're asking me to do the dishes? I did the laundry and the shopping!

You were away on vacation all last week, and I covered for you. The least you could do is fill in for me when I'm in a pinch and can't make it to my class. You owe me.

And it gets bigger and bigger - in our relationships, in tense moments, we all start to tally: who sacrificed more for family, for friends, for community.

When we expect quid pro quo from a friend, a family member, a work partner - we just build resentment when we don't get it. And since we tend to remember what we've done more than what they've done - and this has been studied and proven - we always think we're getting less back than what we're giving.

In a survey of couples, when each member of the couple was asked what percentage of the time they each did a given chore, the total of their two estimates consistently exceeded 100% - meaning they usually both thought they did it more than they really did, and they thought their partner did it less than they really did.¹

¹ In a study done by Ross and Sicoly, couples were asked to estimate what percentage they contributed to taking care of specific household chores. If the husbands and wives had been accurate in their assessments (say the husband said he took out the trash 60% of the time, while the wife said she did it 40% of the time), when they added up their respective percentages, each total should have come out to around 100%. But that's not what happened; the totals consistently *exceeded* 100%. In other words, each partner overestimated their respective contributions to each chore. And the same result was found for other social contexts as well (such as group projects for school or work). (<http://www.artofmanliness.com/2012/04/10/beware-the-tit-for-tat-trap/>)

How many times, when a friend or loved one asked me to do something I didn't want to do, did I start thinking, well, I did this or that for them recently, so I should be off the hook? Or, what have they done for me lately that I should do this for them?

So, I would argue, this system of "keeping score" is counterproductive – and also, as the studies have shown – based on false perceptions, **even though** it is so deeply ingrained in us, and it comes from a sense of what is just. It's very unhealthy - and unhelpful - in our interpersonal relationships, because it means that every decision about whether we should or shouldn't do something for someone else is dependent on where we're at in the scorekeeping, not whether it is the right or good thing to do. Or even whether we want to. It is a cover for the deeper questions we should really be asking ourselves about our motivations for actions.

When I find that "scorekeeping" inclination rising inside of me, and it is often, I always try to say to myself: "mutuality, not reciprocity". Mutuality, not reciprocity.

In a better world, our interpersonal relationships should be built on mutuality – which I understand as the genuine goodwill we each have towards each other as צלם א-הים, as beings in the Divine image, worthy of putting our best foot forward for. If I *can* do something for you, I should want to - just because. And if I can't, I can't. Not because it's not my turn, but because I'm not able to in the moment.

But this is not so easy when we're patterning our human behavior after a Divine system which, as we read and feel today, is totally accounting-based. Why should we be better than God? Or, perhaps, *how can we be expected to be better than God?*

I think the Sages struggled with this fundamental issue in Judaism - in essence, the issue of strict reward and punishment.

And today I'd like us to go back and ask, is this reward and punishment system really the way God works?

I think the Rabbis themselves weren't so sure. While there is a strong tradition in Chazal to see God as counting everything up and putting it on the scales today, there is also an alternative tradition within Chazal, encapsulated in an amazing midrash about Yom Kippur.

The midrash says that on Yom Kippur God and Satan go head to head, Satan itemizing our sins, and God itemizing our merits, each piling on their own side of the scales. They balance. Satan goes looking for more sins for his side, and while he's gone:

... הקדוש ברוך הוא נוטל את העונות מתוך הכף ומטמינם תחת פורפירה שלו, והשטן בא ואינו מוצא שם עון (פסיקתא רבתי מה - אשרי נשוי פשע ד"ה לדוד משכיל).

... God takes the sins from the scale and hides them under God's purple royal robe. When Satan returns, he finds no sin (Pesikta Rabbati 45 - Ashrei nesuy pasha s.v. ledavid maskil).

So much for a fair and just system! This is a merciful and compassionate God, even without teshuvah, removing sins out of love.

So perhaps it's not so simple - the God who counts and weighs and measures, also doesn't let the simple scorekeeping approach win out.

But even this midrash still has an aspect of "keeping score" hanging over it. God is so to speak "cheating" in the scorekeeping system – cheating for a good, merciful purpose, but the framework is still the scales of judgment.

If we believe in mutuality, not reciprocity, is there a model from God of pure mutuality in God's relationship with us today? One we can base ourselves on in our human relationships?

There is. I think the liturgy of Yom Kippur is structured around a model of God's mutuality.

We see it at the crescendo of one of the most powerful tefillot of YK, one that we recite today in the viduy service 5 times, at Maariv, at Shaharit, at Mussaf, at Minhah, and at Neilah. It is a prayer which relates our relationship to God in all different ways, which we sing in an upbeat melody - כי אנו עמך ואתה א-הינו, אנו בניך ואתה אבינו - We are your nation, and you are our God. We are your children, and you are our father. We are your sheep, and you are our shepherd.

We spell out 12 different relationships in this powerful song. Many of these are unequal relationships that potentially perpetuate the dynamic of scorekeeping. They are relationships which have caring and protection, but they are not relationships of mutuality. Ruler and subjects. Shepherd and sheep. Parent and children. Until we come to the very last one: אנו מאמירך ואתה מאמירנו. Suddenly, each side has the same word. We are to God exactly what God is to us.

What does this strange phrase mean, and why is it the last one we sing on Yom Kippur? We can hear from its very language that it is the only one in which the relationship is completely

mutual. We are to God what God is to us. No longer parent-child, slave-master. So what is a מאמיר? The word appears in Parashat Ki Tavo twice:

(ז) אֶת יְקוֹק הָאֱמִירָה הַיּוֹם לִהְיוֹת לְךָ לֹא-הֵיִם וְלִלְכֶת בְּדַרְכָּיו וְלִשְׁמֹר חֻקָּיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו
וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְלִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹלוֹ:
(יח) נִיקְנָק הָאֱמִירָה הַיּוֹם לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְעַם סִגְלָה כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לְךָ וְלִשְׁמֹר כָּל מִצְוֹתָיו: (דב' כו)

17 You have “he’emir-ed” this day that the Lord is your God and that you will walk in obedience to God, keep God’s decrees, commands and laws—that you will listen to God. 18 And the Lord has “he’emir-ed” this day that you are God’s people, God’s treasured possession as God promised, and that you are to keep all God’s commands (Deut. 26).

This word has no parallel in Scripture. It is a singular moment of genuine mutuality. It is a covenantal moment, in which God is saying to Bnei Yisrael - you have chosen to make me your God and follow in my ways. And I have chosen to take you as my nation.

And - the text has no causal link between the two. It doesn't say you chose me because I chose you, or I chose you because you chose me. No - we each, mature parties in the relationship chose each other out of love. It's no surprise that some of the commentaries choose to translate האמיר as love. You loved God today - to become God's people and follow in God's ways. And God loved us today, to take us as God's very own nation.

We love each other, and we make each other the center of our affection. And even if we felt God wasn't doing God's part, we would do ours. And even if God felt we were not doing our part, God would do God's. This is mutuality. Trust and faith in the love and goodwill.

This is what the Sages talk about in Pirkei Avot (5:16) when they describe an enduring love - אהבה שאינה תלויה בדבר - a love not dependent on any thing, on anything. That is the love that lasts.

And love - the Sages also tell us - מקלקלת את השורה - destroys the natural order of things.

That is a reference, I believe, to keeping score. Love destroys keeping score. If we truly love God, we are not expecting quid pro quo for our actions, nor making our actions dependent on what God does for us. And we strive to believe that God wants to do good for us even independent of how we have behaved this year. This love is the countermodel to the scales.

And so it is in my personal relationships – in all of our personal relationships. When I get bogged down in scorekeeping, I try to tell myself - it's not about who did what for whom when. It's about genuinely desiring to do good for another whom I love. And feeling and knowing that they genuinely desire to do the same for me.

אנו מאמירך, ואתה מאמירנו - *Anu mamirecha ve-ata mamirenu*. We designated you. You designated us. We strive to love each other. Not to ask, what have you done for me in order for me to do something for you? Not to ask, what's the score? Do you owe me one or do I owe you one?

Scorekeeping is a most basic human instinct. That's why it is all over our religion, our theology, our Torah, and our liturgy for today. It is one of the tools we have to motivate ourselves to do the right thing. And it has its place in the world.

But we cannot - and must not - let scorekeeping overtake our lives. And I think that our constant repetition of *Ki Anu Amecha* is meant to constantly remind us of the need to return from scorekeeping to mutuality. In those moments when the scorekeeping instinct creeps to the surface and clouds our true relationships, we must say to ourselves - looking at a spouse, a friend, a relative, a colleague, or even in our mind's eye at God: put down the scorecard. Remember our love for each other? It's not about who owes who what. It's about what I want to do for you because I care about you.

Anu mamirecha ve-ata mamirenu. You are my beloved, and I am yours. So let it be a year of putting down the scorecards. May our relationships be guided by love and goodwill, by honest assessment of the motivations of our actions.

And may we be remembered with love for a year of health and happiness.