



הַמִּזְרָחִי

HAMIZRACHI

PARSHA WEEKLY



PARSHAT VAYELECH
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ISRAEL Parsha Picture

הַקְהֵל אֶת הָעָם הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנָּשִׁים וְהַטָּף
וְגֵרָךְ אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לְמַעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלְמַעַן
יִלְמְדוּ וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָם וְשָׂמְרוּ
לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל דְּבַרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת









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Based in Jerusalem and with branches across the globe, Mizrachi – an acronym for *merkaz ruchani* (spiritual center) – was founded in 1902 by Rabbi Yitzchak Yaakov Reines, and is led today by Rabbi Doron Perez. Mizrachi's role was then and remains with vigor today, to be a proactive partner and to take personal responsibility in contributing to the collective destiny of *Klal Yisrael* through a commitment to Torah, the Land of Israel and the People of Israel.



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Healthy Shame and Neurotic Guilt

The essence of spiritual growth



Rabbi Doron Perez

Executive Chairman, World Mizrachi

Shame is a Jewish trait. This is true to such an extent that feeling shame is one of the three defining characteristics of being a Jew according to the Sages of the Tamud.

שְׁלֹשָׁה סִימָנִים יֵשׁ בְּאוֹמָה זוֹ: הַרְחָמָנִים, וְהַבְּיִישָׁנִים, וְגוֹמְלֵי חַסְדִּים.. כֹּל שִׁישׁ בּו שְׁלוּשָׁה סִימָנִים הֵלְלוּ – רַאוּי לְהִיִּדְבֵק בְּאוֹמָה זוֹ

“This nation (the Jewish people) is distinguished by three character traits: They are merciful (*rachmanim*), feel shame (*bayshanim*) and commit acts of benevolence (*gomlei hasadim*).” (*Yevamot* 79a)

The twin qualities of being merciful and loving kindness are both closely related and are clearly a part of the essence of being Jewish since time immemorial. It was Avraham Avinu, the first Jew and founding father of the Jewish people who, not surprisingly, exhibited these qualities of mercy and loving-kindness, perhaps more than anyone. He was the paragon loving-kindness – not only acting with kindness to all but actively pursuing and loving to do acts of kindness – merciful and literally *loving* kindness.

While these two qualities seem quite self evident, the third quality of being “ashamed” seems peculiar. How did this particular quality make it into the list of the top three defining features of being a Jew? How is feeling shame such a critical part of the essence of the Jewish mission?

In fact, feeling ashamed is one of the central focuses of the Viduy – the confessional

prayer, in general and in the Yom Kippur davening in particular.

In the Ma’ariv prayer of Yom Kippur, we say the following:

”אֵל תְּבֹא בְּמִשְׁפָּט עִמָּנוּ כִּי לֹא יִצְדַק לְפָנֶיךָ כָּל חַי: מִה נֹאמֵר לְפָנֶיךָ ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ, מִה נִדְבֵר וּמִה נִצְטַדֵּק: אֱלֹהֵינוּ בּוֹשָׁנוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂינוּ וְנִכְלָמְנוּ בְּעוֹנֵינוּ: אֱלֹהֵינוּ בּוֹשָׁנוּ וְנִכְלָמְנוּ לְהָרִים אֱלֹהֵינוּ פְּגָנוּ אֵלֶיךָ:”

“Hashem do not enter into judgment with us, for no living being can justify itself before You. What can we say before You Hashem, our G-d? What can we declare? What justification can we offer our G-d? We are **ashamed** of our actions and humiliated by our sins. We are **ashamed** and embarrassed to lift our faces to You, our G-d.”

Shame – A Gift from G-d

What is the nature of this sentiment of shame that is so central to being Jewish and that we are supposed to experience particularly over the Yamim Noraim period?

Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch explains that shame is a feeling of a person who has fallen short of his or her expectations of themselves. **When people do not act in the manner they expect of themselves, they feel ashamed.** Each of us has a picture of our ideal self, of who we would like to be and who we would like to become. When we fall short of our ideal selves, we feel a sense of shame.

This feeling of shame is a gift from G-d, implanted deep within our consciousness. It prods us to an understanding that we have failed to live up to our potential. We do not always fulfil our mission by acting in accordance with the great moral and spiritual teachings of the Torah. Hashem, therefore, gave us a tool that enables us to be our own personal monitors and guardians of our spiritual destiny.

This mechanism of the voice of our conscience, called shame, empowers us to examine that distance between who we are now and the ideal self we would like to be in the future – between the real and the ideal. The condemning verdict when we fall short of our vision is shame, *busha*. [Rav Hirsch on Bereishit (2,25)]

Lowering The Bar

A story is told of a middle aged man who was constantly wetting his bed at night and was feeling embarrassed and ashamed of this recurring habit as he felt it inappropriate at his age and controllable. It was very embarrassing for him everytime and was causing him much shame and angst. He decided to see a psychologist to assist him with his issues. He returned from the session happy as a lark and confident that the issue was solved. A close friend was quite taken aback that one session seemed to solve the whole issue and inquired what outstanding advice the psychologist had given him to deal with the issue. The man replied that the psychologist simply helped him to understand that there's nothing wrong with a middle aged man wetting his bed – he just needs to accept it and not feel ashamed of it.

This could not be further from the truth regarding the focus of Jewish life. Those things which we have the ability to control and change our lives for the better – we are always called upon to do. Wisdom in life, as the Serenity Prayer teaches us, is to change the things that we can change, accept the things we cannot change and to have the wisdom to know the difference.

The Imaginary Red Line of the Kinneret

One of the indicators in Israel of a lack of rainfall is the imaginary red line of the



Wisdom in life, as the Serenity Prayer teaches us, is to change the things that we can change, accept the things we cannot change and to have the wisdom to know the difference.

Kinneret. Whenever the water recedes after seasons of lack of rain, it is often spoken about in the media of how the levels of the Kinneret are dangerously low and they are either approaching or below the red lines signaling a crisis situation. Over the years, when the red line was approached, instead of declaring an emergency, politicians would simply create a new lower red line to give themselves more breathing space instead of implementing restrictions of water usage. Indeed one way of dealing with challenges is to keep lowering the bar and accepting realities which we perhaps could be proactively doing more about.

Too often in life, we cop out of dealing with difficulties by simply lowering our moral bar – instead of confronting challenges and overcoming them, we submit to them. Rather than living with an uncomfortable dissonance between who we would like to be and who we currently are, we lower the bar of what we are prepared to accept about ourselves with the justification of 'this is just the way I am'. This allows us to dispel the discomfort, diverting attention from dealing with the issue at hand.

It Is Beneath Us

This also explains an unusual expression in the Viduy prayer.

סָרַגְנוּ מִמִּצְוֹתֶיךָ וּמִמְשָׁפְטֶיךָ הַטּוֹבִים וְלֹא שָׁוִה לָנוּ.

We have deviated from your good commandments and ordinances, and it is not 'shaveh' for us.

What does it mean that by not fulfilling commandments incumbent upon us, it is not *shaveh* for us?

This is normally translated to mean that it is not worth it for us. In other words it

is not expedient for us to commit a sin as the gain from doing that which is wrong is not worth the spiritual consequences. This expression can also be explained in another beautiful way – these actions are beneath us. These actions are not worth it for us because our **self worth is worth more than them**. They are simply not appropriate for us who aspire to live a noble moral life. It is below the standards we would like to set for ourselves.

Healthy Shame and Neurotic Guilt

Shame must be distinguished from the crippling neuroses of guilt. It is not an overly critical feeling of guilt aimed at undermining our sense of self-worth, eating us up from within and preventing us from being proactive protagonists in shaping our own destiny.

It is rather a healthy, wholesome emotion, which is absolutely integral to spiritual growth. Shame is the first step of teshuva, the impetus to improve ourselves. It has a purpose and a direction. It is future-oriented, opening up to us the creative possibility of self-change – proding us to live up to be the best version of ourselves that we can be.

As we stand before Hashem on Shabbat Shuva and Yom Kippur, may we feel this healthy and wholesome sense of shame. We should constantly strive for our routine daily lives to become an apt and accurate reflection of the ideal image we set for ourselves of our best personal, family and communal lives.

Yom Kippur as Purification



Rabbi Reuven Taragin

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Day of Purification

Though we generally associate Yom Kippur with atonement, the Torah defines *taharah* (purification) as the day's goal:

כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאתכם
לפני ה' **טהרו** (ויקרא טז:ל)

On Yom Kippur, Hashem atones for our sins in order to purify us.

The purification relates to both the Beit HaMikdash and the Jewish People.¹ This is why the Yom Kippur Torah readings detail purification of both the Beit Mikdash (in the morning reading²), and the Jewish people (in the afternoon reading³).

The Damage of Sin

We are, of course, familiar with how the concept of *taharah* applies to the context of **ritual** purity. We are not as familiar with its relevance to the non-ritual sense. What does *taharah* mean in a personal, spiritual context?

Understanding spiritual purity hinges on appreciating the impact that sin has upon us. Sin is not just wrong and damning; it also defiles our soul and spirit. *Mitzvah* fulfillment sanctifies; transgression defiles. Rav Chaim Volozhin⁴ compared sin to the consumption of unhealthy food. Just as the latter damages us physically, so the former taints us spiritually.⁵

The Goal

לב טהור ברא לי אלוקים ורוח נכון חדש בקרבי
(תהלים נא:יב)

David Hamelech links *taharah* to the heart and spirit. The Shaarei Teshuvah⁶ and Mesilat Yesharim⁷ explain that *taharah* hinges upon motivation— the **why** of what we do (beyond what we do). *Tahor* people are motivated by their wisdom and fear of Hashem, not their base desires.

Taharah's focus on the heart helps us understand why the Rambam⁸ sees *teshuvah* as addressing not just sin, but also improper character traits. Purification is not just about correcting action, but, mainly, about personal improvement.

Our Role

The *pesukim* we have seen — about *taharah* in general (Tehillim) and about Yom Kippur specifically (Vayikra) — describe Hashem purifying us. This explains the request we make in each of our Shabbat and Yom Tov prayers: וטהר לבנו לעבדך באמת.

We ask Hashem to purify our hearts so we can serve him in earnest.

The conclusion of the Yom Kippur pasuk — the word “*tit'haru*” — commands us to purify **ourselves**.⁹ The Kohen Gadol used this word at the height of the Yom Kippur atonement service to remind those in the Mikdash of their responsibility to purify themselves. His verbal response to those who prostrated themselves upon his utterance of Hashem's (most) sacred name was “*titaharu*.” He emphasized that his *avodah* alone was not enough. Each person needed to purify himself.

When we make the effort to purify ourselves, Hashem completes the process for us. Shaarei Teshuvah¹⁰ summarizes the process this way:

הזהירנו הכתוב שנטהר לפני ה' בתשובתנו והוא יכפר
עלינו ביום הזה לטהר אותנו¹¹

“The Torah commands us to purify ourselves through *teshuvah* before Hashem so He can purify us through His atonement.”

How We Purify Ourselves

Most of us are familiar with the process and stages of *teshuvah*. But how do we purify ourselves? The *mishnah* at the end of Mesechet Yoma gives us direction by describing Hashem Himself as the

proverbial *mikveh* we are meant to purify ourselves in.¹² Hashem is totally disconnected from all sin and defilement. By reconnecting with Him, we return to a natural state of purity. Like the Kohen Gadol who immerses himself ten times over the course of Yom Kippur and then enters the holy cloud (created by the *ketoret*) within the holiest part of Hashem's sanctuary, we are also ‘immerse ourselves’ within our connection to Hashem.

After elaborating on this notion, the Maharal¹³ emphasizes that, like immersion in an actual *mikveh*, we **only** achieve *taharah* by connecting (through committing) ourselves **fully** to Hashem. Even a small *chatzizah* (separation) renders the “immersion” **completely** meaningless.

Returning to Ourselves

On a deeper (yet simpler) level, our return to Hashem is essentially a return to our natural, true selves.

This applies on two levels. Firstly, because our soul emanates from Hashem¹⁴, we need look no further than inside **ourselves** to find His holiness. As the Torah writes- “It is not in the sky or beyond the seas, but in our own mouths and hearts.”¹⁵

Secondly, because our soul is of G-dly origin, our reconnection with Hashem ultimately reconnects us to our true selves. For this reason, Rav Kook explained that our return to Hashem regenerates our natural, holy soul.¹⁶

We find Hashem by looking inside ourselves and find our true selves by reconnecting with Him.

Though *taharah* is always an important goal, Yom Kippur is the time when this self-purification is most possible and impactful. Let's make sure to take full advantage of the opportunity.

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The Symbolism of Red and White



Rabbanit Shani Taragin

Educational Director, World Mizrahi

The Talmud Yerushalmi¹ contrasts the despair of non-Jews on their days of judgment, manifested through their wearing of black clothing and unshaven faces, with Am Yisrael, who approach *Yemei HaDin* with confidence, shaving their beards and wearing white. The Rema cited the custom of wearing clean white clothing on Yom Kippur to emulate the ministering angels and to wear a *kittel* “which is white and clean and also the garment of the dead; this makes the human heart submissive and broken.”² These explanations may be appreciated through a re-examination of the white clothing the Kohen Gadol wore during the Yom Kippur service.

As we read and learn the Kohen Gadol’s *Seder HaAvoda* on Yom Kippur, we note that he donned special *bigdei lavan* – white linen garments, each time he entered the *Kodesh HaKodashim*. According to the Ramban,³ these clothes give the Kohen Gadol the appearance of an angel,⁴ described as wearing a sacral linen tunic. Perhaps this is the source of the Rema’s first explanation above.

However, there are other times when the High Priest dons linen garments as a reflection of a lower status of importance. When he removes the ashes from the altar in the morning, he does not wear his standard priestly clothing, but the *bigdei haBad* (white linen garments). Similarly, his *michnasayim* (trousers), worn for a technical role of covering and not for “glory and adornment,” are also referred to as *bigdei haBad*. On Yom HaKippurim, he is to be reminded of his lowly stature, facilitating his submission before G-d in the Holy of Holies.

Rashi⁵ explains that on Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol – who generally wears eight golden vestments – officiates as a *kohen hedyot*, a regular *kohen* who wears four priestly garments. As he does so, he is reminded of the time before he became Kohen Gadol, of the seven days of *miluim*, preparing the Mishkan and its vessels. He descends from his ‘golden’ stature as he removes his usual clothing, and humbly prepares the Mishkan for renewed revelation as he changes to his ‘elevated’ priestly garments later in the day; his appointment renewed, revelation re-experienced.⁶

Furthermore, as Aharon HaKohen donned the white garments worn by the regular priests as he entered the *Kodesh HaKodashim* with the sacred incense, I can only imagine the poignant *deja vu* he must have felt remembering the initial *miluim*. After all, his sons Nadav and Avihu wore those garments as they carried the incense only to be consumed by Divine fire. Perhaps Aharon must revisit their deaths every year, reminding himself – and us – to defer to G-d’s commandments, despite his passionate and instinctive desire to come close to Him.

Lastly, the Kohen Gadol’s white garments remind us of the *metzora* – the leper whose healthy skin has turned white and is compared to a dead person.⁷ His state of *tumah* (impurity) interferes with and obstructs his relationship with *kedusha* (sanctity). He must remain outside the community and not enter the Mikdash. To purify the *metzora*, a Kohen must take two live birds, slaughter one, sprinkle the blood seven times on the person and send the live bird out to the field.⁸ The blood, symbolizing life, revives and restores the *metzora* to a healthy state of interacting with people

and with G-d in the Mikdash. Similarly, the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur must wear white, symbolizing the garments of the dead and akin to the skin of the *metzora*, representing the impediments that sin brings to our vibrant relationship with G-d. But just like the *metzora*, he takes two goats (parallel to the birds),⁹ slaughters one, sprinkles the blood on the *kapporet* seven times, and sends the live goat to the desert. And like the *metzora*, whose healthy skin and sensitivity to life are restored, the Kohen Gadol immerses and dons his vestments of scarlet and gold.

As we wear white on Yom Kippur, we each revisit death/*tzara’at*, which is designed to evoke a “submissive and broken” feeling. וְנִשְׁלַמְהָ פְרִים שְׁפִיטוֹ – it also reminds of the blood of the sacrifices, and the gifted opportunity we have to relish life anew each year.

Wishing you all a year of renewed vitality and restored relationships of closeness!

1. Rosh Hashanah 1:3.
2. Shulchan Aruch OH 610:4.
3. Leviticus 16:4.
4. See Ezekiel 9:3 and Daniel 10:5.
5. Leviticus 16:4.
6. See Rav Yoel Ben-Nun’s article in *Megadim* vol. 8, pp. 34-39, where he compares the Yom Kippur service to the initial consecration of the Mishkan.
7. Nedarim 64b.
8. Leviticus 14:4-7.
9. See Ramban Leviticus 14:4.

Halachic Q&A



Rabbi Yosef Zvi Rimon

Head, Mizrahi Rabbinic Council | Founder and Chairman, Sulamot

Question: Nowadays, nobody really uses the lights of the Shabbat candles for its light. What is the function of the Shabbat candles then?

Answer: The modern day reality of artificial lighting presents a fascinating question: What is the purpose of the Shabbat candles? One answer is that although we are not benefiting from the light of the candles themselves, the essence of eating next to lit candles brings us a special simcha (MB 263:40). Lights are used as decor at many events, and so too in our homes this adds a special effect. Another answer is that lighting candles has become a form of kavod Shabbat. A person who forgets to light will feel that something is missing. Therefore, lighting definitely brings a person kavod and oneg shabbat (Shmirat Shabbat Kehilchata).

The Mishnah Berurah does say that it is best for the lights to actually serve as light (MB 263:40), and therefore nowadays it is fitting to have in mind during hadlakat nerot that the electric lighting is lichvod Shabbat.

Question: During maariv on motzei Shabbat, I was finishing my shmone esrei as the shul was up to havdalah. I stopped and listened to the brachot. Was that correct? Is there a concept of shomea keoneh in this case?

Answer: Rashi in Masechet Sukkah writes in the name of Rav Yehudai Gaon that if one is saying shmone esrei and kaddish is being said, he should stop his shmone esrei and listen. This way it is considered as if he answered through listening (shomea keoneh). He should not answer however, as that would constitute a hefsek (interruption) to his shmone

esrei. Tosfot in Brachot (21b) brings the opinions of Rabbeinu Tam and the Ri who argue on Rashi's understanding. If listening really serves as having said it, then according to Rashi, through listening you are interrupting your shmone esrei. Despite their arguments on Rashi, the baalei hatosafot ultimately write to practice like Rashi and pause in shmone esrei in this circumstance.

We see from here that shomea keoneh does not constitute an interruption in tefillah. Shut Har Tzvi deals with the case of hearing havdalah while in the midst of shmone esrei. He writes that one should not stop and listen to havdalah as Rashi only intended to allow for a case when one would otherwise miss kaddish/kedusha. Havdalah, however, can be made up, and therefore one should not stop his shmone esrei.

Additionally, Rabbeinu Yonah writes that one can be yotzei through shomea keoneh during their shmone esrei when listening to something relating to tefillah (such as kaddish/kedusha). Because havdalah does not fall into that category, there is room to say that one is not yotzei in this case.

In practice:

During shmone esrei one should not stop to listen (unless maybe in a sha'at hadachak when there will not be another havdalah). Once somebody is at Elokai Netzor he can pause and listen to havdalah.

Question: In a case where a fast day falls out on a Sunday, could somebody take a caffeine pill on Shabbat if it will help him fast? Does that constitute preparing for after Shabbat?

Answer: This matter is subject to machloket. However, if he takes the pill without saying anything, it seems that this is permissible because it is not nikar (identifiable) that he is taking it for after Shabbat. Additionally, there is also no tircha (exertion) involved in taking the pill and this helps him with the mitzvah of fasting.

Question: Is it permissible to heat up pizza on a plata on Shabbat?

Answer: Even though the cheese may melt, bishul achar bishul does not apply to solids that become liquid. Additionally, because it only melts partially, there is no issue of nolad. Therefore, both Ashkenazim and Sefardim may place pizza (that was made before Shabbat) directly on a hot plate (or on top of something else, based on your minhag).

Question: If I am on a bus and need to use the bathroom (and there is no bathroom available), am I allowed to learn Torah?

Answer: In most cases it is permissible, because it is only forbidden to learn in that state if you cannot hold it in for 72 minutes (MB 92:7) As long as you do not urgently need to use the bathroom, you are allowed to learn.

● Translated from Hebrew and abbreviated by Yaakov Panitch.

תקציר פרשת וילך

הרבנית שרון רימון



גם יגאל אותם; במקביל לכך – עם ישראל מחוייב תמיד לקיים את המצוות, ואף לתקן את דרכיו ולחזור בתשובה. התשובה מאפשרת את שיקום היחסים בין ה' לישראל, וחזרה לקשר הדדי מתוך אהבה וקרבה.

בסופו של דבר, למרות הפסימיות והחששות, משה רבנו נפרד מעם ישראל בברכה (בפרק ל"ג). סיום זה מזכיר לעם ישראל שישנה גם אפשרות אחרת. ישנה אפשרות לחיים על פי ה' מלכתחילה, וישנה גם אפשרות של תשובה, של תיקון הכשלונות והחטאים.

הזיקה בין ה' לישראל היא בעיקר חיובית, ומאפשרת שפע ברכה המושפע על עם ישראל באופן מיוחד מאת ה'. אם ישראל מצליחים לכוון את ליבם אל ה', הם יקבלו מאת ה' שפע ברכות, (כמתואר בתחילת פרק כ"ח ובפרק ל"ג).

מתברר שהחששות הרבים והאזהרות החמורות אינם נובעים מחוסר אמון אלא מדאגה לעם, ומרצון להיטיב איתם. בסופו של דבר משה רבנו נפרד מעם ישראל בברכה, מתוך תקווה שהעם ילך בדרך התורה, שהנבואה על ההשחתה לא תתקיים, ושעם ישראל יהיה ראוי לשפע הטוב שה' רוצה להשפיע עליו.

המסר המועבר לעם הוא קשה מאד: משה כביכול לא סומך עליהם. לא מאמין בהם. וכביכול לא משאיר להם כל תקווה.

אך מיד לאחר מכן, משה נותן להם מענה, ופתח לתקווה: שירת האזינו, המהווה עדות לישראל על נצחיות הברית עם ה'. השירה מעידה שלמרות חטאי ישראל הקשר ביניהם לבין ה' לא יתנתק לעולם, וה' ידאג תמיד לקיומם. בנוסף לכך, גם ספר התורה מהווה עדות לישראל על מחויבותם לקיום המצוות. **שתי העדויות הללו הן קריטיות להמשך קיומו של עם ישראל, בעיקר בשעות קשות.** כאשר העם יחוה "רְעוֹת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת" (כפי שחוו ישראל לאורך שנות הגלות), הוא יזכור **שלמרות הצרות ה' איתו, ושיש לו מחויבות להמשיך לקיים את התורה**, שהיא הבסיס לקשר המיוחד שלהם עם ה'.

הברית הנצחית בין ה' לישראל, הנכרתת בערבות מואב, משפיעה על מהלך ההיסטוריה של עם ישראל לדורותיו, לטוב ולרע:

כשעם ישראל חוטא הוא נענש קשות, ולעומת זאת, אם ישמרו את המצוות יזכו לברכות גדולות; מובטח לישראל שגם אם יעזבו את ה', ה' לא יעזוב אותם, ולמרות העונשים הכבדים הוא ידאג לקיומם ולבסוף

חלקו האחרון של ספר דברים, מפרשת וילך והלאה, משה רבנו נפרד מעם ישראל. נראה כי שתי תחושות מלוות את משה בשעת פרידתו מהעם.

האחת – אהבה לעם ותקווה לעתיד טוב עבורם; והשנייה – חשש גדול מעזיבת דרך ה', ומהאסון שיתרחש בעקבות זאת.

לאורך כל ספר דברים, משה רבנו מעלה חששות כבדים מפני השינויים הגדולים העומדים להתרחש עם הכניסה לארץ: ההיכרות עם התרבות האלילית של עמי כנען; השפע הכלכלי והחומרי שיציף את העם בארץ; והשינוי בהנהגה האלקית – מהנהגה נסית להנהגה נסתרת. שינויים אלה עשויים לגרום להתרחקות העם מדרך ה'. בנוסף לכך, מתוך היכרות עמוקה של משה עם העם לאורך שנות הנדודים במדבר, הוא יודע עד כמה קשה להם להחזיק מעמד בעבודת ה'.

בעקבות החששות, משה חוזר שוב ושוב על האזהרות וברגעי הפרידה, החששות הולכים וגוברים, עד כדי כך שמשה מנבא בוודאות: **"כִּי יִדְעֵתִי אַחֲרַי מוֹתֵי כִּי הַשַּׁחַת תִּשְׁחָתוּ וְסַרְתֶּם מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אֲתֶכֶם וְקָרַאת אֲתֶכֶם הֲרָעָה"** (ל"א, כט).

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- This explains the centrality of purity to Yom Kippur ritual, which can be seen in the need for *tevilah* (ten times by the Kohen Gadol and customarily performed by all males before Yom Kippur) and the custom to wear white.
- Vayikra Perek 16.
- Perek 18 describes sexual sins as defiling us in *pesukim* 20, 23, and 24. The next *pesukim* (25–30) describe how these sins defile the land as well. See also *Bamidbar* 35, which depicts murder as defiling the land.
- Nefesh Hachayim 2:8.
- In addition to the damage caused on the spiritual plane, the Gemara in *Yoma* (39a) depicts how sin damages even one's intellectual capacity (see also *Or HaChayim* to *Vayikra* 11:43).
- 1:9.
- Perek 17 — *Midat Hataharah*.
- Teshuvah 7:3.
- See *Shaarei Teshuvah* (2:14, 4:17), who sees this phrase as the basis of the unique *chiyuv* to do teshuvah on Yom Kippur.
- Shaarei Teshuvah* 2:14.
- The duality of Hashem purifying us and our self-purification is presented by the *Mishnah* 85b. See also *Yoma* 39b.
- See *Rambam Mikvaot* (11:12), who also uses immersion in a mikvah as a model for personal purification. *Shaarei Teshuvah* 4:17 speaks also of teshuvah as necessary for *taharah*. Obviously, purification is only possible once we have distanced ourselves from and atoned for our sins.
- Kitvei HaMaharal, D'Rush L'Shabbat Shuvah*.
- Bereishit* 2:7 with *Rashi* and *Ramban*.
- Devarim* 30: 11-14.
- Orot Hateshuvah* 15:10. The morning prayer of *Elokai Neshama* builds off this idea.

Changing the Whole World



Sivan Rahav Meir and Yedidya Meir
World Mizrahi Scholars-in-Residence

Thus said Rabbi Yaacov Edelstein ZT”L, the rabbi of Ramat HaSharon, about Yom Kippur:

- “How can things that one did be erased? What benefit does regret have? Does it make our inequities disappear? If one ate something that caused indigestion and then regretted it – would this regret help his stomach now? Well, the process of Teshuvah (repentance) is indeed beyond our rational mind, above nature. This is one of the wonders of Creation, one of the greatest gifts that we have received – the possibility to start anew.”

- “There is a wonderful verse that discloses a secret to us: ‘Return, Israel, to the L-rd your G-d’. That is, one must repent and return to the L-rd. If that was about going up to a new place, going to a different place, the verb ‘return’ would not have been used here. From this, we learn that this is indeed our true and original place. Repentance does not mean we should change. It means we should return to our right place, to be the person we are supposed to be.”

- “A man once said, that when he was young, he wanted to fix the whole world. Later, he saw that it was difficult, and he said that he would fix the people in his country alone. Later, he decided to fix at least all of the residents of his city, and when he failed – he tried to fix at least all of his family members. Eventually, he realized that he must fix himself first of all. And then, when he worked on self-improvement, he suddenly realized that he had an effect also on his family, his city, his country and the whole world. Tikkun Olam begins by improving ourselves. Our aspiration tends to be general in nature, but the basis of tikkun is that each and every one of us should improve our own personality.”



An Israeli journalist, Moshe Erlanger, tells the following story: “Several years ago, I was compelled at the last minute to spend Yom Kippur in Frankfurt, Germany. I rented a room in a hotel next to the main synagogue in Frankfurt, put together the pre-fast meal, and went to pray with a feeling of longing for Israel and regret for what I would be missing there.

“The main synagogue was a luxurious building with 2,000 people in attendance, the majority of whom did not pray there at any other time during the year. The cantor began with the Kol Nidrei prayer, and it was evident that he was caught up in a huge storm of emotions. He choked as his voice broke, then rose and fell. The entire crowd was moved together with him.

“At the conclusion of the service, I approached him. ‘It’s a pleasure to meet you. My name is Tzadok Greenwald,’ he said. I asked him why he became so emotional during Kol Nidrei, and he answered as follows.

“For many years, I have been the cantor here during the High Holy Days. As the offspring of Holocaust survivors, it is a great privilege to be a cantor, particularly here, in this godforsaken land. Several years ago, I had an extraordinary encounter as I was leaving the synagogue at the close of Yom Kippur. The last of the crowd had already gone home to break the fast. The gabi had locked the main gate and I was leaving by a side door, tired and hungry. Near the main gate, I saw an elderly man with a white kippa pinned to his hair. He turned to me: ‘Why are the gates of the synagogue locked? When does Kol Nidrei begin? Please, answer me. Why are the gates locked?’ I was silent. My heart was suddenly torn inside me. ‘My dear friend,

listen to me; Kol Nidrei was last night; Yom Kippur was today,’ I stammered. ‘The crowd has gone home; Kol Nidrei will come again next year.’ The man grabbed my hands and began to cry like a little boy. ‘I never missed Kol Nidrei. I promised my father, may his memory be blessed, that I would go every year to hear Kol Nidrei in a synagogue. This is the only connection I have with my father.’

“I knew what I had to do. ‘My dear friend, you missed nothing,’ I told him. ‘I am the chief cantor of this synagogue, come with me to hear Kol Nidrei.’ I opened the side door, I sat him down in a chair, I gave him a prayer book, and I wrapped myself in a tallit. I began to pray Kol Nidrei. This was the most powerful prayer I had ever prayed in my life. Thousands of empty chairs and just me, him, and the Holy One Blessed be He. I forgot about the fast. I was focused only on the connection between a disconnected Jew and his father, which may just as well have been the connection between me and my father – that is, our Father in heaven.

“I never saw that man again but each time I pray Kol Nidrei I think about him, and about a million other Jews like him, and about the side door, through which everyone, in the end, can enter”.



We need to pay special attention, during this time of year, in order to ensure we do not make mistakes while praying. During the Ten Days of Repentance, from Rosh HaShana to Yom Kippur, there are many little changes in the text: Instead of “HaEl HaKadosh” (the holy G-d) we say during this time “HaMelech HaKadosh”(the holy King). Instead of “Melech Ohev Tzedakah uMishpat” (the King who loves righteousness and justice), we say

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For the Shabbat Table



Rabbi Danny Mirvis

Deputy CEO, World Mizrahi

Rabbi at Ohel Moshe Synagogue, Herzliya Pituach

“**A**nd now write this Song for yourselves and teach it to the Children of Israel, place it in their mouths, in order that this Song shall be for me as a witness for the Children of Israel" (Devarim 31:19).

With these words, Hashem presents us with the 613th and final commandment of the Torah – to write a Sefer Torah (or at least one letter of a Sefer Torah – Rambam, Hilchot Sefer Torah 7:1).

Whilst this explains the opening phrase of the Passuk, what is meant by the requirement to "place it in their mouths"? If the intention is for us to teach Torah to others, the verse already commands us to "teach it to the Children of Israel". What does the phrase, "place it in their mouths" come to teach us?

Rav Dessler explains that after commanding us to write a Sefer Torah and teach it to others, "place it in their mouths" comes to tell us how Torah should be taught:

"A healthy person who wants to eat goes and takes the food and eats. A weak person or a young child needs other people to



The role of the educator is to make Torah as appealing, digestible and accessible as possible, whilst suiting it to the student's age, background and needs.

feed him. However, all they can do is place the food in his mouth; to swallow – he must do it himself... If the child does not want to eat and he is forced to swallow the food against his will, he will end up bringing up that which he has eaten" (Michtav Me'Eliyahu, Chelek Bet, p40-41).

There is a commandment to take part in writing a Sefer Torah. There is also a requirement to teach it to others. However, when teaching Torah, we should not shove it down people's throats. The most we can do is "place it in their mouths". They must chew, swallow and digest it for themselves, for Torah which is force-fed is likely to be rejected. The role of the educator is to make Torah as appealing,

digestible and accessible as possible, whilst suiting it to the student's age, background and needs.

The message does not only apply to educators, but to all of us as lifelong students of Torah. As we grow older, we must strive to increase our level of learning, rather than rely on the same food we were fed as children.

To truly understand and internalise Torah, we must chew and swallow it ourselves, rather than relying on the pre-digested conclusions of others. We should not wait to be spoon-fed but make an effort to feed ourselves.

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"HaMelech HaMishpat". There are four more additions: "Remember us for life, oh King Who desires life, and inscribe us in the Book of Life, for Your sake, oh living G-d", "Who is like You, oh merciful Father, Who remembers His creatures for life with mercy", and "And inscribe to a good life all of those who sealed a covenant with You", and lastly: "May we be remembered and inscribed before You in the Book of life, blessing, peace and good livelihood, good

decrees, rescue and consolations, we and all of Your nation Israel for a good life and for peace."

The recurrent, guiding words are: King, Life and Mercy. This is the essence of these days, but it is not just about the contents of the requests. These additions cause everyone to stop for a moment – it does so even for those who rush through the prayer by heart. It causes us to pay attention, to have a different attitude, and to be more

attentive and alert. We do not completely revise the Siddur now, but we refresh it, so to speak, for ten days. Perhaps this is the purpose of all these days of repentance: not only to make big revolutions but specifically to pay attention to the familiar, the mundane; to have a second look at it, to perform small tiny changes in our routine.

Torah as Song



Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks zt"l

Moses' long and tempestuous career is about to end. With words of blessing and encouragement he hands on the mantle of leadership to his successor Joshua, saying "I am a hundred and twenty years old now, and I may no longer be able to enter and to leave, since the Lord has told me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.'" (Deut. 31:2)

As Rashi notes, it is written, "shall not", although Moses is still physically capable. He is still in full bodily vigour, "his eyes had not grown dim, nor his vitality fled." (Deut. 34:7) But he has reached the end of his personal road. The time had come for another age, a new generation, and a different kind of leader.

But before he takes his leave of life, G-d has one last command for him, and through him, for the future. "So now write down this Song and teach it to the Children of Israel. Place it in their mouths, that this Song may be My witness against them." (Deut. 31:19)

The plain sense of the verse is that G-d was commanding Moses and Joshua to write out the song that follows, that of Ha'azinu (Deut. 32:1-43). So Rashi and Nahmanides understand it. But the Oral Tradition read it differently. According to the Sages, "So now write down this Song" applies to the Torah as a whole. Thus the last of all the 613 commands is to write – or at least take part in writing, if only a single letter – a Torah scroll. Here is Maimonides' statement of the law:

Every Israelite is commanded to write a Torah scroll for himself, as it says, "Now therefore write this song," meaning, "Write for yourselves [a complete copy of] the Torah that contains this



We have to take the Torah and make it new in every generation. We have to write our own scroll.

song," since we do not write isolated passages of the Torah [but only a complete scroll]. Even if one has inherited a Torah scroll from his parents, nonetheless it is a mitzvah to write one for oneself, and one who does so is as if he had received [the Torah] from Mount Sinai. One who does not know how to write a scroll may engage [a scribe] to do it for him, and whoever corrects even one letter is as if he has written a whole scroll.¹

Why this command? Why then, at the end of Moses' life? Why make it the last of all the commands? And if the reference is to the Torah as a whole, why call it a "song"?

The Oral Tradition is here hinting at a set of very deep ideas. First, it is telling the Israelites, and us in every generation, that it is not enough to say, "We received the Torah from Moses," or "from our parents." We have to take the Torah and make it new in every generation. We have to write our own scroll. The point about the Torah is not that it is old but that it is new; it is not just about the past but about the future. It is not simply some ancient document that comes from an earlier era in the evolution of society. It speaks to us, here, now – but not without our making the effort to write it again.

There are two Hebrew words for an inheritance: *nachalah* and *yerushah/ morashah*.

They convey different ideas. *Nachalah* is related to the word *nachal*, meaning a river, a stream. As water flows downhill, so an inheritance flows down the generations. It happens naturally. It needs no effort on our part.

A *yerushah/ morashah* is different. Here the verb is active. *It means to take possession of something by a positive deed or effort.* The Israelites received the land as a result of G-d's promise to Abraham. It was their legacy, their *nachalah*, but they nonetheless had to fight battles and win wars. *Lehavdil*, Mozart and Beethoven were both born to musical fathers. Music was in their genes, but their art was the result of almost endless hard work. Torah is a *morashah*, not a *nachalah*. We need to write it for ourselves, not merely inherit it from our ancestors.

And why call the Torah a Song? Because if we are to hand on our faith and way of life to the next generation, it must sing. Torah must be affective, not just cognitive. It must speak to our emotions. As Antonio Damasio showed empirically in *Descartes' Error*,² though the reasoning part of the brain is central to what makes us human, it is the limbic system, the seat of the emotions, that leads us to choose this way, not that. If our Torah lacks passion, we will not succeed in passing it on to the future. Music is the affective dimension of communication, the medium through which we express, evoke, and share emotion. Precisely because we are creatures of emotion, music is an essential part of the vocabulary of humankind.

Music has a close association with spirituality. As Rainer Maria Rilke put it:

Words still go softly out towards the unsayable.

And music always new, from palpitating stones

Builds in useless space its G-dly home.³

Song is central to the Judaic experience. We do not pray; we *daven*, meaning we sing the words we direct toward Heaven. Nor do we read the Torah. Instead we chant it, each word with its own cantillation. Even rabbinical texts are never merely studies; we chant them with the particular sing-song known to all students of Talmud. Each time and text has its specific melodies. The same prayer may be sung to half-a-dozen different tunes depending on whether it is part of the morning, afternoon, or evening service, and whether the day is a weekday, a Sabbath, a festival, or one of the High Holy Days. There are different cantillations for biblical readings, depending on whether the text comes from Torah, the prophets, or the *Ketuvim*, 'the writings'. Music is the map of the Jewish spirit, and each spiritual experience has its own distinctive melodic landscape.

Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it modulates into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings. Music speaks to something deeper than the mind. If we are to make Torah new in every generation, we have to find ways of singing its song a new way. The words never change, but the music does.

A previous Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Avraham Shapiro, once told me a story about two great rabbinic Sages of the nineteenth century, equally distinguished scholars, one of whom lost his children to the secular spirit of the age, the other of whom was blessed by children who followed in his path. The difference between them was this, he said: when it came to



Judaism is a religion of words, and yet whenever the language of Judaism aspires to the spiritual it modulates into song, as if the words themselves sought escape from the gravitational pull of finite meanings.

seudah shlishit, the third Sabbath meal, the former spoke words of Torah while the latter sang songs. His message was clear. Without an affective dimension – without music – Judaism is a body without a soul. It is the songs we teach our children that convey our love of G-d.

Some years ago, one of the leaders of world Jewry wanted to find out what had happened to the “missing Jewish children” of Poland, those who, during the war, had been adopted by Christians families and brought up as Catholics. He decided that the easiest way was through food. He organised a large banquet and placed advertisements in the Polish press, inviting whoever believed they had been born a Jew to come to this free dinner. Hundreds came, but the evening was on the brink of disaster since none of those present could remember anything of their earliest childhood – until the man asked the person sitting next to him if he could remember the song his Jewish mother had sung to him before going to sleep. He began to sing *Rozhinkes mit mandlen* ('Raisins and Almonds') the old Yiddish lullaby. Slowly others joined in, until the whole room was a chorus. Sometimes all that is left of Jewish identity is a song.

Rabbi Yechiel Michael Epstein (1829-1908) in the introduction to the *Aruch*

HaShulchan, Choshen Mishpat, writes that the Torah is compared to a song because, to those who appreciate music, the most beautiful choral sound is a complex harmony with many different voices singing different notes. So, he says, it is with the Torah and its myriad commentaries, its “seventy faces”. Judaism is a choral symphony scored for many voices, the Written Text its melody, the Oral Tradition its polyphony.

So it is with a poetic sense of closure that Moses' life ends with the command to begin again in every generation, writing our own scroll, adding our own commentaries, the people of the book endlessly reinterpreting the book of the people, and singing its song. The Torah is G-d's libretto, and we, the Jewish people, are His choir. Collectively we have sung G-d's Song. We are the performers of His choral symphony. And though when Jews speak they often argue, when they sing, they sing in harmony, because words are the language of the mind but music is the language of the soul.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What links can you find between the Torah and music?
- Why is it important for each Jew to write (or help write) a new Torah scroll?
- How can we take the Torah and make it new in our generation? Can you suggest some ideas?

1. Laws of Tefillin, Mezuzah and Sefer Torah, 7:1
2. Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, London, Penguin, 2005.
3. “Sonnets to Orpheus,” book II, sonnet 10.

Hakarat HaCheit



Rabbi Hershel Schachter

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The first step in the *teshuvah* process is *hakarat haCheit* (recognition of the sin). The natural state of the Jewish *neshama* is that it seeks to be close to G-d. It is considered an aberration for a person to desire to sin. Thus, *hakarat haCheit* stems from the sinner's feeling that he is distant from G-d. He wants to return because of the sense of loneliness he experiences.

The *passuk* says, או הודע אליו חטאתו אשר חטא – “If his sin that he committed becomes known to him” (Vayikra 4:23, 28), to teach that *yediat haCheit* (definite knowledge of the sin) is a necessary prerequisite to bringing a *Korban Chattat*. *Tosafot*¹ questions why the Torah had to specify that *yediat haCheit* is necessary prior to offering a *Korban Chattat*. This should have been understood from the fact that a *Korban Chattat* may not be offered voluntarily. This *korban* may only be offered for a *cheit* one knows he has committed, and so it should be obvious the sinner must know he sinned before bringing the *korban*.

Tosafot explains the *passuk* comes to exclude a case in which the individual merely suspects he may have sinned accidentally and therefore is *mafrish* (sets aside) an animal to be used as a potential *korban* once he ascertains he did, in fact, commit an *aveirah*. The *passuk* teaches that even if he subsequently comes to the realization he did sin, he would not be able to use that animal, because it was sanctified as a *korban* prior to definite knowledge that he sinned. The obligation to offer a *Korban Chattat* does not exist prior to *yediat haCheit*, just as there is no *chiyuv teshuvah* without *hakarat haCheit* and *yedi'at haCheit*.

Rabbeinu Yonah² writes that there is a special *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* on Yom Kippur, beyond the constant obligation to repent



The unique obligation on Yom Kippur is for one to search through all of his actions.

every day. He bases himself on the *passuk*, לפני ד' תטהרו – “before Hashem shall you be cleansed” (Vayikra 16:30), which he understands as a directive to cleanse ourselves on this day. The Rav pointed out a similar statement of the Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:7):

יום הכיפורים הוא ... קץ מחילה וסליחה לישראל לפיכך חייבים הכל לעשות תשובה ולהתוודות ביום הכיפורים.

Yom Kippur is... a specific time of pardoning and forgiveness; therefore, all people are obligated to do *teshuvah* and to confess their *aveirot* on Yom Kippur.

Rav Soloveitchik suggested the nature of the obligation may be different on Yom Kippur than during the rest of the year, specifically in regard to the requirement of *yediat haCheit*. In general, if a person becomes aware of an *aveirah* he committed and thus has *yediat haCheit*, he has an obligation to do *teshuvah*. The unique obligation on Yom Kippur is for one to search through all of his actions. In reviewing all his actions, including those he believed to be permissible in the past, he may well come to the realization he had been committing an *aveirah* all along that he did not recognize. He may find a *yediat haCheit* he was unaware of until this point, for which he is now able to do *teshuvah*.

The Rav suggested a parallel *halacha* that illustrates this additional requirement.

In discussing the destruction of *avodah zarah* specifically in Eretz Yisrael, the Torah commands:

אבד תאבדון את כל המקומות אשר עבדו שם הגויים את אלהיהם ... ואבדתם את שמם מן המקום ההוא.

You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations worshipped... their gods ... and you shall obliterate their names from that place (Devarim 12:2-3).

Based on this, the Rambam (*Hilchot Avodat Kochavim* 7:1) rules, בארץ ישראל מצווה לרדוף אחריה עד שנאבד אותה מכל ארצינו – “In Eretz Yisrael, there is a *mitzvah* to chase after [*avodah zarah*] until we destroy it from our entire Land.” *In chutz laAretz*, no such requirement exists; the *chiyuv* only applies to *avodah zarah* we know about in an area we occupy. The additional *teshuvah* obligation on Yom Kippur is thus similar to the increased obligation to destroy *avodah zarah* in Eretz Yisrael.³

● Adapted from Rav Schachter on the *Moadim*.

1. Shavuot 4b, s.v. vene'elam; see Kovetz He'arot, Yevamot, 63:4.
2. Sha'arei Teshuvah 4:17.
3. See MiPninei HaRav, 2001 ed., p. 320.

We are not Tzadikim



Rabbi Yisroel Reisman
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This week we will talk about a thought on the davening of Yom Kippur, which relates to a Pasuk in this week's Parsha. On Yom Kippur, before we begin the section of *Viduy*, we start by making a unique statement.

”שָׁאִין אֲנַחְנוּ עֲזֵי פָּנִים וְקָשִׁי עֶרְף לִימֵר לְפָנֶיךָ ר' אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ צְדִיקִים אֲנַחְנוּ וְלֹא חָטָאנוּ. אֲבָל אֲנַחְנוּ וְאֲבוֹתֵינוּ חָטָאנוּ.”

We preface the Tachanun by saying to Hashem that we don't claim to be Tzadikim. “We are not brazen and stubborn enough to call ourselves Tzadikim.” This line seems awfully strange. Why would one think we are stubborn enough to call ourselves Tzadikim? And why do we choose, right before we speak about all our sins, to start by praising ourselves, acknowledging that “at least we don't consider ourselves Tzadikim”?

Rav Hutner, in his essays on Yom Kippur, says that this line in the davening is based on a Pasuk in this week's Parsha. In the middle of the Parsha, we talk about the future sins of the Jewish nation, how at some point in history they will forsake Hashem and His Torah. Hashem says that at that point in history, he will switch to running the world with *הסתר פנים*, “hiding His face”, which will result in tremendous tragedies to the Jewish people.

”וְחָרָה אַפֵּי בּוֹ בַּיּוֹם-הַהוּא וְעֲזַבְתִּים וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי פְּנֵי מִקְדָּשׁ.”

The following Pasuk says that in such a situation, the Jewish people will say to themselves that the reason for all of the troubles is that they are all punishments for straying from Hashem. “On that day, you will say that it is because Hashem is not amongst us that these troubles

have found us.” The Jewish people will acknowledge that they are not being punished for nothing, but rather because they did something wrong. The Ramban in his commentary explains that there is a specific *מדרגה* (level) that a person reaches when he acknowledges that he is wrong. Before any form of real Teshuva, when a person at least becomes aware that something is not right, and that it is because he has done something wrong, that itself is very significant. Therefore, the Jewish people are praised for acknowledging that what was going on in the world around them was due to their actions, and as punishments for their misdeeds.

It is a person's nature to desire to be right. It might be very difficult for us to acknowledge that “the troubles have found us because Hashem is not amongst us”. But that is what we are trying to accomplish on Yom Kippur. When we start the *Viduy* with the acknowledgement of us not being Tzadikim, it is not us telling that to Hashem. We are not simply praising ourselves that at least we admit our shortcomings. Rather, we are talking to ourselves, and telling ourselves that ultimately, our misdeeds are ultimately the reason for our punishment. Similar to what the Parsha says the Jews would do at a time of *הסתר פנים*, we are beginning the Teshuva process with an admission to ourselves that we are responsible. Before we begin to elaborate our various sins, and ask Hashem for forgiveness, we must first take a step back and confirm for ourselves that we are at fault for our sins, and that the various punishments that we receive ultimately come because we have forsaken Hashem.

However, we can offer a different understanding of this phrase based on the comments by the *ספר המקנה*. There is a famous concept that when a person sins, and continuously repeats the sin, he begins to think it is allowed to be done, “נעשה לו כהיתר”. This would be known as forming a habit, that very often we struggle with something in the beginning, but after we do it so many times (in this case a bad thing) we begin to do it out of habit. Some of the *מפרשים* try to understand which of these steps require a greater level of Teshuva. Are the first couple of sins worse, at a time when you were still actively deciding to sin? Or perhaps once the sins become a routine part of your life, that requires greater Teshuva. The *ספר המקנה* takes the latter approach, since allowing sins to just become part of your routine represents a much greater rejection of Hashem's will. If this is true, we now have an additional understanding of the opening phrase to the *Viduy*. Even though there are many bad habits that we have formed, and often we may overlook them as consider ourselves “Tzadikim”, we must first acknowledge that even those require Teshuva. Even the sins that have become part of our daily routine require us to break those habits and do proper Teshuva.

May we all be *Zocheh* to approach Yom Kippur properly, and acknowledge that we are responsible for our actions, and even those bad habits, and in that way receive complete *כפרה* from Hashem.

● Edited by Jay Eisenstadt and Ari Levine.

What is the significance of every single letter of the Torah?



Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth

The Lubavitcher Rebbe gave a beautiful explanation. In Parshat Vayelech, which is read this Shabbat, the Torah presents us with the last of the Mitzvot. Mitzvah number 613 states:

”וַעֲתָה כָּתְבוּ לָכֶם אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת וְלַמְדָּה אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמְרָהּ בְּפִיהֶם –

and now, write for yourselves this song, which is the Torah, and teach it to the children of Israel. Place it in their mouths”.

Why is there a mitzvah to write a Sefer Torah? We can fulfil this Mitzvah by writing just one letter of a Sefer Torah and it's attributed to us as if we've written the whole Sefer. But why this imperative to be engaged in the writing of letters of the scroll?

The Rebbe explained, there is a Halakha which we learn from the Gemara in Mesechet Mehachot, Daf 29a. There Chazal tell us that all the letters must be “גויל מוקף – surrounded by blank parchment”. That is to say that no letter can be connected to any other letter. At the



The message of the letters of the Torah, is that each one of us should know that we are unique people.

same time there is also a Halakha that each letter must be visibly part of its own word – and visibly separate from all other words.

Each letter represents an individual. The message of the letters of the Torah, is that each one of us should know that we are unique people. As a result, everyone should respect our own individuality, our unique nature and personality. At the same time, none of us should ever forget that we are an integral part of our nation and as a result, we have an ‘areivut’ – a responsibility, to selflessly care for others and reach out to them.

In addition, if one single letter of the Torah is ‘passul’ – rendered unfit, then the entire Sefer Torah is passul. From here we learn that if there is something with just one of us, then every single one of us is affected as a result.

This is such a beautiful message for us and so apposite on the eve of the commencement of Slichot – a time when we're just about to usher in a new year and when we're engaging in ‘Cheshbon Hanefesh’ – introspection.

At this time, therefore, let us never forget how important each and every one us is and how we should develop ourselves and excel in our own personal way as individuals.

At the same time, we should never forget that everybody depends on us and is looking for us to pull our weight for the sake of our nation and for the sake of the world.

Why is Torah referred to as Shira (Song)?



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וְעַתָּה כְּתוּבוּ לָכֶם אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת

“And now, write for yourselves this **song...**” (Devarim 31:19)

In Parshat Vayelech appears mitzvah number 613 – the mitzvah to write a Sefer Torah. “*And now, write for yourselves this song...*” (Devarim 31:19). Why is the Torah referred to as a “**song**”?

Rav Asher Weiss offers an explanation as to why the Torah is referred to as a “song.” Rav Weiss suggests that just as a symphony requires a variety of instruments to achieve harmonious sound, so too there are “*shivim panim L'torah*” – several different ways of interpreting the Torah. Part of the beauty of studying the Torah are the different perspectives offered by our commentaries and the variety of *hashkafot*. When these are triggered by seeking to attain the truth and conducted within a halachic framework, the words of the Torah play like a true symphony and come together as one cohesive song.

Rav Yosef Soloveitchik (Masoret HaRav) offers a different idea. Typically, learning is an intellectual exercise, while singing is an emotional performance. The intellectual experience (learning) can often be dry and dreary, while the aesthetic experience (music) is dynamic, hypnotic in nature and arouses a passion. When one is immersed in music- it is a total experience. When one adorns headphones and listens to music, they block out their surroundings and are engulfed in the impeccable sound. They feel the tune penetrate their mind. If the intellectual experience



The intellectual experience (learning) can often be dry and dreary, while the aesthetic experience (music) is dynamic, hypnotic in nature and arouses a passion.

would consistently engage the emotions like music does, all students would excel.

The study of Torah needs to be like the art of music. It should be total, comprehensive, all penetrating and stir up our emotions. In Pirkei Avot (3:8) we are told: “*Whoever is guilty of forgetting a single word of his study, Scripture counts it to him as if he were guilty of a crime, the penalty for which is death.*” This severe penalty for forgetting a single word of Torah, is due to the fact that forgetfulness is the result of limited involvement. If the study of Torah had been a total experience, it could never be forgotten.

The Rav relays how after experiencing a year of triple *aveilut* (when he lost his wife, sibling and mother in one year), he survived solely due to his commitment to Torah. Its cathartic, redemptive and mystical nature, enabled him to experience the presence of an unseen companion

and teacher, never being left alone and abandoned.

As we begin this new year, may we be able to approach our study of Torah keeping in mind these two ideas. First, to respect other opinions and *hashkafot*, understanding that is part of the beauty of the “song” of the Torah. May we do our utmost to respect different opinions and live in “harmony” with each other.

In addition, we should focus on Torah and enable it to trigger our emotions as does music. To make Torah the cornerstone of our lives. As the gemara (Shabbat 31) tells us – after 120 years we will be asked “*kavata itim L'Torah?*”. This has been interpreted to mean, have we set aside time to engage in the study of Torah. An alternative explanation is – “*kavata itim L'torah*” and not “*kavata Torah L'itim*”. Did you adapt the Torah to the times, or the times to the Torah? We should not compromise our principles to adapt to modern society. Rather we should adapt modern behavior, so it is consistent with the precepts of the Torah.

As Rav Soloveitchik prescribes, may we be able to experience the all-encompassing nature of the Torah and internalize its messages so that it becomes the sheet of music upon which we script the melody of our lives.

Vayeilech: The Song Of Torah



Michal Horowitz
Judaic Studies Teacher

In Parshas Vayelech, the pasuk tells us: *And now, write for yourselves this song, and teach it to the Children of Israel, place it into their mouths, in order that this song will be for Me as a witness for the Children of Israel; and it will be when they will encounter many evils and troubles, this song will bear witness against them, for it will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring; and Moshe wrote this song on that day, and taught it to the Children of Israel (Devarim 31:19, 20-21).*

Poetic, impactful, moving, prophetic words from Moshe at the end of his life. Though generations come and generations go, from land to land and exile to exile, through millennia of suffering and dispersion, from glorious highs to painful lows, the journey of Knesses Yisrael is marked by the song of Torah, which will never be forgotten by our children, and our children's children.

Rav Soloveitchik zt'l teaches, *"And now, write for yourselves this song.* Based on these words, Maimonides (Hilchos Sefer Torah 7:1) rules that one must commit to writing not only the song of *Ha'azinu*, but all five Books of Moses: *Write the Torah that contains this song.* In fact, the whole Torah is called *shirah*. What is the link between the Torah and song?

"The process of learning is an intellectual performance, while singing is an emotional performance. The esthetic experience, the artistic experience, is more dynamic than the intellectual experience. The intellectual experience can often be dreary, anemic. The esthetic experience is of a dynamic, hypnotic nature; it fascinates, arouses passion, and has the power of awakening hidden desires and aspirations. Music is a most powerful means to arouse man; it shares with the religious experience the tremor and the excitement, the longing and the joy one feels

when confronted with something exalted, beautiful and sublime. If the intellectual experience would consistently engage the emotions like music does, all students would excel, and teachers would have no trouble in the classroom...

"The esthetic musical experience is a total one; the whole of man is immersed in it. *The same should be true of Talmud Torah.* The teacher is the Almighty, and through study we meet the great teacher, as we sit at His feet to listen to Him eagerly. The experience of *Talmud Torah* is total, all-comprehensive, all-penetrating. It is a mystical experience, it is the melody which was once sung by the Shulamite of the Song of Songs when she was yearning for her beloved.

"...If the study of Torah (is) a total experience, it (can) *never be forgotten.* If one only learns with his mind, he is apt to forget. If there is total absorption, the mind stimulated, the heartbeat accelerated, the imagination fired, the emotions awakened, then *Talmud Torah* turns into a beautiful melody which can never be forgotten.

"...The idea of G-d being the teacher changes the whole concept of learning and studying Torah. The study of Torah is not a mere intellectual performance consisting of formal comprehension, but is rather an experience of a cathartic, redemptive, and mystical nature which overwhelms man with vigor and ecstasy and which sinks into the deepest recesses of his personality. *Talmud Torah* can only be understood within the mystical frame of reference" (Chumash Masores HaRav, Devarim, p.253-255).

And now, write for yourselves this song of Torah, and teach it to the Children of Israel... The song of Torah, the lifeblood of our nation, will never be forgotten from the mouths of our

children. V'hi she'amdah la'avosainu – It is this Divine promise that has ensured our survival throughout the millennia.

Of Rebbetzin Tzila Sorotzkin, an aunt to his son-in-law, R' Yisrael Meir Lau *shlita* recalls the following story, which Rebbetzin Sorotzkin related to R' Lau's daughter.

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, Rebbetzin Sorotzkin found herself – a lone survivor – searching for family and friends... "They told me, 'Go to Lodz, that's where the refugees are gathering, maybe you'll find a relative or an acquaintance.

"I went to Lodz, totally exhausted. They showed me the area where the Jews were assembling. With my last remaining bit of strength, I walked through the streets in the twilight. Suddenly, I recognized sounds coming from one of the windows. As in a trance, I opened a gate, entered the courtyard of an ancient building, then opened a door. In the darkness, I made out a row of boys with sidelocks sitting along both sides of a long table. At its head sat an elderly Jew wearing a cap. The children were chanting the *alef-bet* to a tune. I don't remember anything else... Then I found myself on the floor of the room, with people standing over me and pouring water on me.

"The teacher tried to revive me, and asked in a worried voice, 'What happened? Can I help you? Sit up. Who are you? Where did you come from?' Slowly, I recovered, and replied: 'This is the first time I've cried in the past six years. But I'm not crying from pain – I'm crying for joy. I wandered far and wide until I reached Lodz, and finally saw Poland as it once was. And if, after all we've been through,' I said to the teacher, 'little boys in sidelocks are sitting here and an elderly teacher is teaching them

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Kapara – Looking Forward



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Is the Day of Atonement a precise translation for Yom Kippur? In English, the word “atonement” implies amends for certain wrongdoing. In this sense, the Day of Atonement implies expiation for transgressions we may have committed over the course of the previous year. However, in Chumash, we find numerous instances in which the word *kippurim* is used in a very different context.

For example, in Bereishit, when G-d commands Noah to build the ark, we find the very first use of this *shoresh* k.p.r. (כפר), suggesting it implies a sort of protective covering: “you shall coat it from within in and out with ‘*kofer*’ – pitch.” In Shemot (16:4), the Torah employs this same root to describe the *manna* covering the ground like frost. Later in Shemot (25:17), the special lid for the Ark of the Covenant is named the “*kaporet*” – כַּפֹּרֶת. While the typical Biblical word for a covering is *מְקֻשָּׁה*, this special name *כַּפֹּרֶת* highlights its protective nature, for the *keruvim* on this *kaporet* are protecting the Ark (the symbol of our Covenant with G-d) – just as they protect the ‘path to the Tree of Life’ in Gan Eden (see Bereishit 3:24 and Mishlei 3:18).

Therefore, when Vayikra (23:27) informs us that the 10th day of the seventh month is *Yom HaKippurim*, there must be something ‘protective’ about that special day! This simplest understanding might be that this day protects us from punishment

for our sins of the previous year. However, one could suggest a different understanding, one that looks forward to the coming year as well, based on the first time we find the word *kippurim* in the details of the dedication ceremony of the Mishkan (Shemot 29).

Before the Priests could begin their daily service in the Mishkan, there was a need for a seven-day inaugural ceremony where the blood of a sacrificial ram was sprinkled upon them. In a similar manner, the blood of a sacrificial bull was sprinkled on the *mizbayach*. In the summary verses, this act of sprinkling the blood is referred to as *kippurim* (see 29:36).

This suggests that before the Priests can begin their service of G-d in the Mishkan, they require some sort of protection. Most likely, this ‘protection’ is necessary as G-d’s *Shechinah* will dwell in the Mishkan. This encounter with G-d is quite dangerous, for a human who is not worthy of this encounter may deserve immediate death.

In fact, in the aftermath of the Sin of the Golden Calf, G-d warned Moshe that He can no longer dwell among this stiff-necked nation, due to their rebellious nature. Had Moshe Rabeinu not interceded on their behalf, the special covenant between G-d and *Am Yisrael* would have been broken forever. However, in light of Moshe Rabeinu’s famous prayer (see Shemot 33:12-19), G-d establishes a new Covenant, this time including the option of Mercy and Forgiveness for wayward

behavior, thus enabling G-d’s *Shechinah* to dwell among His People even though they may be stiff-necked.

As Yom Kippur, the 10th of Tishrei, marks the anniversary of G-d’s declaration of His attributes of Mercy, and the re-establishment of the Covenant, it is only fitting that on this day we remind ourselves of this special privilege, that G-d continues to dwell in our midst, even though we may not always be perfect. Symbolically, the High Priest entering the Holy of Holies on this day reflects our desire to remain His loyal servants. However, to show G-d that we need ‘protection’ – as we may not be worthy of this encounter – the High Priest must perform a symbolic act of *kapara* (see Vayikra 16:16).

As every Jew is a member of this Priestly nation, we serve G-d not only in His Temple but also in our daily lives by keeping His commandments. Therefore, at the beginning of every year, we must not only ask G-d for forgiveness for our transgressions of the previous year, but we must also prepare ourselves for the spiritual challenges that will face us in the year that now begins, showing our gratitude to G-d for His attributes of Mercy that enable our relationship to remain eternal. Hence, *Yom HaKippurim* serves as a very fitting name for this holiday, as our worthiness to remain His People begins with our humble recognition that we may not always be so worthy.

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the Hebrew alphabet – then no one can defeat us. Let me catch my breath; I feel fine. These are tears of joy, not of pain” (Out of the Depths, p.353-354).

As we usher out the old year and usher in the new, let us reaffirm our commitment to Torah and *mitzvos*, for only in her song will we find eternal life.

The Easiest Misva



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Many of us find Teshuba to be a difficult, grueling process. We often feel too intimidated to even begin thinking about Teshuba and changing who we are.

And yet, ironically enough, the Torah indicates that Teshuba is actually the easiest Misva. Last Shabbat, in Parashat Nisavim, we read, “For this Misva...is not too difficult for you, nor is it distant from you... It is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart...” (Debarim 30:11-14). The Ramban (Rabbi Moshe Nahmanides, Spain, 1194-1270) explains these Pesukim as referring to the Misva of Teshuba. It is regarding this Misva that we are reassured that it is easy, that it is not difficult or distant, that it can be easily achieved.

The Torah does not make this point about any other Misva. We are never told that it is easy to observe Shabbat or Pesah. Yet, specifically when it comes to Teshuba, to changing our characters, which seems to be the most difficult Misva of all, the Torah tells us that is easy. How could Teshuba be an easy Misva?

To answer this question, we turn our attention to an esoteric comment of the Arizal (Rabbi Yishak Luria of Safed, 1534-1572) concerning the widespread custom to wear a Tallit on the night of Yom Kippur. It is generally customary to ensure to put on the Tallit before sundown, so that we are able to recite the Beracha over the Tallit. Since a Beracha is not recited when putting on Sisit at night, and we want to “cash in” on every possible Misva before Yom Kippur, we try to put on the Tallit before sundown so we can recite a Beracha. The Arizal, however, held differently. He writes – astonishingly enough – that one does not recite a Beracha over the Tallit worn on the night of Yom Kippur, even if he puts on the Tallit

before sundown, because the Tallit does not belong to him. Even though he paid for the Tallit and he wears it every day, it is not his. On Yom Kippur, the Tallit belongs to the Almighty.

How are we to understand this concept, that the Tallit on Yom Kippur actually belongs to G-d, and is not ours?

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (1944-2001) offers a beautiful explanation. G-d relates to us in many different ways. On some occasions, He relates to us as a mighty warrior, and at others as a loving father. Sometimes He acts as judge, and other times as a king. Forgive the expression, but we might say that G-d wears many hats, as it were, playing a wide range of different roles in our lives. On Yom Kippur, Rav Pincus says, G-d relates to us as a mother. More often than not, when a father is caring for an infant, he returns the infant to the mother as soon as the infant soils himself and his clothing and needs to be cleaned and changed. Fathers certainly enjoy coddling and spending time with their baby, but they rush to pass on the childcare responsibilities once there is filth involved.

Sin soils the soul. We cannot see the filth with our eyes, but the filth of sin exists, and the great Sadikim are able to sense it. On Yom Kippur, G-d comes to us as a loving, tender, caring mother to clean up our mess, to get rid of our sins and make us clean as new. We enter Yom Kippur like an infant that has just dirtied himself, and we emerge from Yom Kippur like an infant wrapped in his towel after his bath, fresh and clean. The Tallit, Rav Pincus says, symbolizes the “towel” in which G-d wraps us, like a mother wrapping her clean child. This is not our Tallit. After all, on Yom Kippur we are like infants, who own nothing. This is our “Mother’s”

Tallit, the Tallit which G-d wraps us in as He cleanses our souls.

The Sages describe Yom Kippur as one of the happiest days of the year. It is not a sad day; it is an exciting day, because becoming clean is exciting. We are transformed from a state of filth to a state of perfect cleanliness.

And this is why Teshuba is so easy – because it is the only Misva we do with G-d nearby as a loving mother helping us. G-d comes to clean us. As the Mishna says, “Fortunate are you, Israel! Before whom you are purified, and who purifies you? Your Father in heaven!” Hashem cleans us on Yom Kippur, He holds our hand and leads us through the process of repentance, and this is what makes it easy.

There is, however, one condition. A baby must cry out to his mother when he is dirty and needs to be cleaned. The mother won’t come unless she hears the infant’s desperate cries for help. And the same is true of us and our “Mother.” G-d comes to clean us only after He hears us crying for help. This means that at some point on Yom Kippur – and the earlier the better – we have to cry out desperately for G-d to come help us. We need to sincerely feel the discomfort of the accumulated filth on our souls, and to genuinely cry out to G-d to help us. He will then immediately come to clean us off like a mother devotedly tends to her child, and warmly wrap us in His Tallit, eliminating all our sins, leading us back to His service, and granting us complete forgiveness and the precious opportunity to begin the year with a perfectly clean slate.

The Attitude Toward Privacy



Rabbi Moshe Weinberger
Congregation Aish Kodesh, Woodmere

We find ourselves at the culmination of forty days of closeness with Hashem. According to the Shela Hakadosh, the purpose of the year is to reach the ten days of teshuva between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. And the purpose of those ten days is to reach Yom Kippur. And the ultimate purpose of Yom Kippur is to reach the time of Neila, the last hour of the day.

One year on Yom Kippur, the Sar Shalom of Belz quoted the mishna in Shabbos (34a), “ג' דברים צריך אדם לומר בתוך ביתו ערב שבת עם חשכה עשרתם ערבתם הדליקו את הנר,” “a person must say three things erev Shabbos as it gets dark, ‘Have you tithed?’, ‘Have you prepared the eruvim?’, and ‘Light the candle!’” He explained that because Yom Kippur is called the ultimate Shabbos (Vayikra 16:31), this mishna also alludes to our feelings as we enter into Yom Kippur. “עשרתם” means “Have you tithed,” but because the root word is “עשר,” meaning ten, it alludes to the ten days of teshuva, as if to ask, “Have you used the ten days of teshuva properly?” Indeed, the ten days of teshuva have passed and what did we accomplish?! “ערבתם” means “have you prepared the eruvim?,” like the eruv techumim and the eruv chatzeiros. But “ערב” also means “eve,” as if to ask “Have you used the eve of Yom Kippur properly to prepare? Erev Yom Kippur has passed and how did we use it?!”

And the last question relates to kindling the Yom Kippur candles. The Sar Shalom continued “The candles are already lit and look what a state we are in!” He was quiet for a moment and then he concluded, “But ‘הדליקו את הנר,’ does not mean ‘the candle is already lit.’ It means ‘Light the candles!’ Therefore it is not too late! Each and every one of us still has time to light the candle,

which refers to (Mishlei 20:27) ‘נר ה' נשמת אדם,’ ‘the soul of man is G-d’s candle.’”

I heard a story from a friend over the summer about Rav Yitzchak Hutner, זצ"ל, that can help us learn how to reignite the candle inside for these last few minutes of Yom Kippur. Rav Hutner spent the last few years of his life in Yerushalyim. During that time, his Rebbetzin was נפטרת, passed away. Two of the great Musser masters of that time, Rav Shlomo Volbe, זצ"ל, and Rav Meir Chodosh, זצ"ל, paid him a shiva call. Rav Hutner told them the following story during that visit:

He told them that as a yeshiva boy in Slabodka, he was a talmid of the famous “Alter” of Slabodka. He said that in those days, he (Rav Hutner) was known as having a very sharp mind for studying Torah, but also for his sharp tongue, which he unfortunately sometimes used to make other yeshiva boys feel bad. He said that he was known as a “למדן,” a talented Torah scholar, but not as tzadik because of his sense of ישות, self-importance.

A few days before Yom Kippur one year, the Alter sent another boy over to him to ask him something. He replied sharply to the other boy, “I don’t need anyone to send a message to the Alter. I can speak to him myself.” The boy was taken aback. The young Yitzchak Hutner walked over to the East wall of the Beis Medrash to speak to the Alter but as he approached, the Alter yelled to him, “Don’t come within my ד' אמות (near me)!” The Alter was known for his sweetness, so this was a particularly hard slap in the face. Young Yitzchak walked away and did not speak with the Alter about it. He said that he thought about it throughout Yom Kippur, but only from the perspective of his own ego. By the end of Yom Kippur he decided that

if the Mashgiach spoke to him that way, he should find somewhere else to learn.

Motzoi Yom Kippur, he went to the Alter’s home to say goodbye and ask for a blessing before he departed. He knocked on the door and the Rebbetzin answered. He asked for the Alter and she asked who he was. He answered, “Hutner,” and she responded, “So you’re Hutner!” Expecting to get an earful, he waited to hear what she would say. She told him, “For the last six months, my husband has been crying, davening, and fasting for you.” He realized that the Alter saw great potential in him and was very worried about him and was davening very hard for him to improve. He said that because of that encounter, he continued learning in the yeshiva. How could he leave a rebbe who cared so much about him that he spent six months davening, crying, and fasting for him?

It is never too late. Even in the last hour of Yom Kippur, we can make the decision to be better and seek forgiveness. It is well-known that the Amshinover Rebbe of Yerushalyim, שליט"א, lives in his own time zone apart from the rest of the world. But with respect to Shabbos and Yom Tov, he certainly observes those at the regular times. There is a story that one year, erev Yom Kippur, he was eating with the chassidim and it was getting closer and closer to Kol Nidrei. The chassidim began getting very nervous but the rebbe was teaching Torah and eating as if he was in no rush at all. The chassidim asked one of the older men among them to say something to the rebbe. So the chossid held up a watch and called out, “Rebbe, the watch!” The rebbe responded, “Ah, yes, the watch. I’m aware of the time. But I have two watches. One watch says, ‘It’s getting late!’ and the other watch says ‘There’s still time.’”

The Insanity of the Human Psyche



Rabbi YY Jacobson
TheYeshiva.net

A Jewish couple won the lottery. They immediately set out to begin a life of luxury. They bought a magnificent mansion in Knightsbridge and surrounded themselves with all the material wealth imaginable.

Then they decided to hire a butler. They found the perfect butler through an agency, very proper and very British, and brought him back to their home. The day after his arrival, he was instructed to set up the dining room table for four, as they were inviting the Cohens to lunch. The couple then left the house to do some shopping.

When they returned, they found the table set for eight. They asked the butler why eight, when they had specifically instructed him to set the table for four?

The butler replied, "The Cohens telephoned and said they were bringing the Blintzes and the Knishes."

The Torah prohibits a Kohen, from marrying a divorced woman. It also prohibits a Kohen Gadol, a High Priest, from marrying a divorcee and a widow.

Now, one can perhaps make sense out of the former prohibition: Since a priest served as the spiritual agent of the Jewish people in Divine service, he was required to live a life of complete innocence and purity. Therefore, the Torah did not want him marrying a person involved in strife, innocent or not.

But why could the High Priest not marry a widow?

Rabbi Chaim Yosef David Azulaei presents the following interpretation in the name of Rabbi Yehuda HaChassid: The High Priest of Israel was given many great spiritual powers. The most important of

them was his duty on the holiest day of the year, Yom Kippur, to enter into the Temple's Holy of Holies, a place where no other living Jew was ever allowed to enter.

Now, the Torah is concerned that the High Priest may experience infatuation with a particular married woman. What might he do about the fact of her being married? Next Yom Kippur, he will utilize the moment when he utterance G-d's ineffable name in order to bring about a decree of death on her husband. Thus he would be free to marry the widow.

This is shocking idea. On the holiest day of the year, in the holiest place on earth, we are concerned that the man designated to serve in the highest spiritual and holiest position of Israel, while uttering the holiest syllables in the world, might harbor a craving to eliminate an innocent man so that he can marry his wife!

Now, let us contrast this with another biblical statement concerning the High Priest entering into the Sanctuary on Yom Kippur: "No human being shall be in the Tent of Meeting when he [the High Priest] comes to provide atonement in the Sanctuary, until his departure." Not only were there no Blintzes and Knishes allowed during the Yom Kippur service, but also no Cohen's or any other people were allowed to be present at the time.

The Midrash wonders how can the Bible state that no human being should be present at the time of the High Priest's service on Yom Kippur, when the High Priest himself was a human being? At least one man was present!

The Midrash answers that when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies he was not human indeed; he assumed the status of a Heavenly Angel. Indeed, no human

being entered the Sanctuary with him; not even his own.

We are confronted with an uneasy contradiction. One biblical source indicates the potential mind-staggering lowliness of a High Priest, capable of descending into the lowest depths of depraved behavior, while the other biblical source intimates his potential for enormous spiritual heights, capable of transcending the human experience and reaching angelic heights. How do we reconcile the two?

Yet it is here we encounter, once again, Judaism's moving perspective on the nature of the human being. There are two ways in which the Bible speaks of the creation of man. In the first chapter of Genesis, man is described as having been created in the image and likeness of G-d. In the second chapter, man is described as having been formed out of the dust of the earth. Together, image and dust express the polarity of the nature of man. He is formed of the most inferior stuff in the most superior image.

The author of life and of mankind knew full well that sexuality holds men – priests and lay men alike – captive in its enormously powerful grip. Even the greatest of men are capable of falling prey to its momentous temptation. Even a High Priest, on the holiest day of the year, in the holiest space of the world, while uttering the holiest word in the world, is capable of thinking grotesque thoughts about how he can "bump a man off the road" so that he can lay his hands on his woman. Judaism has always been keenly sensitive to the truth that every human being has a demon lurking within. If you don't challenge and tame it each day anew, it can turn you into a monster; you are capable of ugliness in the least expected circumstances. But the author

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Yom Kippur



Rabbi Judah Mischel

Executive Director, Camp HASC; Mashpiah, OU-NCSY

For more than sixty years, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv was married to Rebbetzin Sheina Chaya, a daughter of the Tzadik of Yerushalayim, Rav Aryeh Levin, zt'l. During the shivah for Rebbetzin Elyashiv, a visitor standing in the back of the crowded room seemed visibly emotional, and a family member asked if he had a personal connection to the nifterses. It turned out that he had arrived from Canada that morning to be menachem avel and pay condolences to the wife of the gadol ha-dor, but also to show hakaras ha-tov, appreciation for the Rav and Rebbetzin's efforts in helping his family through a painful and tragic ordeal. The Jew related a bit of his difficult, personal story:

After years of struggling to make a parnassah, the man had moved his family from Eretz Yisrael to Canada to search for a new beginning and greater success. The drastic change and adjustment was very challenging, and his oldest daughter veered away from Jewish practice, abandoning almost every vestige of Yiddishkeit and Jewish identity. She had even married a non-Jew and separated from her family, moving to far away Switzerland. The Yid wept as he explained how he felt responsible for all of this, uprooting his family from Eretz Yisrael, and causing his daughter's descent from the path of Torah and Mitzvos.

Some time after moving to Switzerland, in the beginning of Chodesh Elul, his daughter's marriage ended in divorce, and then, on the day following Yom Kippur, she suddenly died, all alone. As she had intermarried, cut all ties with the Jewish community and lived as a non-Jew for years, the Rabbanim in Switzerland

denied her a burial in the Jewish cemetery there.

"Broken hearted, I called Rebbetzin Elyashiv," the man continued, wiping his tears. "I requested that she ask the Rav for a p'sak, a halachic position on the matter. When the Rav heard the situation, he asked what my daughter had done on Yom Kippur, the day before she passed away. I had heard from a member of the community in Switzerland that on that last Yom Kippur, right before she left the world, she had actually come to shul and spent a few minutes standing in the back of the ezras nashim. When Rav Elyashiv heard this, he was noticeably moved, and paskened with absolute clarity that she must be brought to a kever Yisrael, and buried as a Jewess.

"After receiving the p'sak, the Rebbetzin returned to the phone and shared words of chizuk and consolation, imploring me to forgive myself and to believe that my daughter had done teshuvah...



"And he shall effect atonement upon the Holy of Holies, and he shall effect atonement upon the Tent of Meeting and upon the altar, and he shall effect atonement upon the Kohanim and upon all the people of the congregation. All this shall be as an eternal statute for you, to effect atonement upon the children of Israel, for all their sins, once each year. (Vayikra, 16:33-34)

Our experience on Yom Kippur parallels the entry of the Kohen Gadol into to the Kodesh haKodashim. The Lubavitcher Rebbe explained that on Yom Kippur, the most exalted and holiest day of the year, part of your soul enters the holiest space in existence. We are granted access to

the most hidden, sacred space, which is 'off limits' and hidden away from all but the most intimate of Hashem's beloved ones. In this way we enter lifnai v'lifnim the innermost Divine chamber בְּשֵׁנָה אַחַת" once a year". This phrase hints that the achas, the 'oneness' of Hashem that exists within every Jew, is revealed on this day, and full expression is given to this innermost dimension of the soul, our inner kodesh kodashim.

This most internal space is also referred to as yechidah she-b'nefesh, the hidden part of the soul. This core of the Jewish soul can never be penetrated by outside influences; no negativity can ever corrupt its purity. And direct perception of this level is beyond reach for most of us, most of the time.

Usually, our yechidah she-b'nefesh seems to be buried deep beneath layers of complex subconscious conditioning, and we are generally unaware of the root origin of our motivations and desires or what compels us to make choices in life. As a result, we are often unclear about what we really want and yearn after. We may wander, at least subtly, from our path and our People. Yom Kippur comes to waken the pintele yid, the small but indestructible Jewish spark of faith that lies at the core of who we really are and who we really want to be. On Yom Kipur, our yechidah shines outwardly, revealing our innermost will.

Rav Baruch Oberlander, shlit'a, Av Beis Din of Budapest and the Lubavitcher Rebbe's shaliach to Hungary, relates that a Jew once confided in the Rebbe that he felt like a hypocrite going to shul on Yom Kippur because he did not go to shul the rest of the year. The Rebbe responded that the most natural and appropriate place

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Symbiotic Song

Mrs. Shira Smiles

International lecturer and curriculum developer

The last of the 613 mitzvot is to “write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel.” What song is Hashem referring to? Rashi says that this mitzvah refers to Parshat Haazinu, which immediately follows this parsha. Biblical song is elevating and joyous. Yet, if we look at the text of Parshat Haazinu, we notice that most of it is very depressing. It tells of our straying from the path Hashem has laid out for us in His Torah and the terrible tragedies that therefore will ensue. How is this uplifting and joyous? All the commentators agree that Haazinu is definitely song. The Sefat Emet cites Tehillim where King David writes, “Of kindness and justice do I sing.” Bnei Yisrael have the capacity to see God’s love both in His kindnesses and in His justice, when He chastises us to bring us closer to Him.

While the Netivot Shalom agrees that most of the shira is chastisement, he chooses to focus on the last few verses of Haazinu. There Hashem reassures us that He will avenge the blood of His servants and appease His land and His people. This is Hashem’s promise to us, that even if we are not worthy, He will never forget us. He will redeem us. This promise is a source of great encouragement throughout our history, and a powerful reason to sing.

Most of the Torah commentators, however, believe the “song” referred to here is the entire Torah. They derive from this

verse the mitzvah that every Jew must write his own Sefer Torah, a mitzvah that can be fulfilled by writing even one letter, as a single missing letter can invalidate the entire scroll and filling it in can make the entire scroll kosher again. How can the entire Torah be referred to as a song, especially since it is not written in poetic format? We can answer this question by examining the differences between song/poetry and prose. Haamek Davar notes that prose is generally writing that is meant to be fully understood upon its initial reading. Poetry, on the other hand, is defined by its “economy of language” and the particular elements that add shades of meaning to the lines. Each word and letter of the Torah offers greater insights into meaning, allusions, inferences, and secrets using the four basic elements (PaRDe”S) to uncover as many as 70 different interpretations of the text.

Rav Reiss uses the poetic image from Shir Hashirim to further explain this: “The King brought me into His chambers.” When viewed from the outside, the castle is magnificent. However, as one enters and goes from room to room, his awe grows as he encounters greater richness and beauty. So, too, with Torah study. During a cursory reading, one can already recognize the Torah’s splendor. However, as one delves ever more deeply into the text, one marvels at all the myriad nuances and textures that continue to be

revealed. Shirah, however, is song as well as poetry. Music can only be appreciated when the notes blend together to form a harmonious whole. Similarly, the Torah too must be appreciated as a whole more than any particular part. This is what King David meant, posits Rav Reiss, when he wrote, “The Torah of Hashem is perfect (complete); it restores the soul.” Only when the Torah is studied and observed in its entirety does it have the ability to restore one’s soul.

Rabbi I. Schwartz notes that all the mitzvot have one ultimate goal, to bring us closer to Hashem. This is the same reasoning that Rabbi Jacobson uses. If we were to make a list of everything we do each day it would appear to be very pedestrian. However, if we can find one uniting factor, it would add meaning to it all. We can make a conscious effort to see meaning even in eating and drinking as a means to energize us toward a meaningful life of Torah and mitzvot.

While Torah study and observance can be difficult at times, we can always find the strength to sing. Song is a spontaneous expression of our innermost souls. This is what Torah should be. It must become part of our very essence, as Rav Dessler teaches us. When Bnei Yisroel delve deeply into Torah study and give it voice, they sing the praises of Hashem and bear witness to His sovereignty over earth.

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of life also knew that the human person is capable of incredible greatness. The soul of man being a “fragment of G-d,” he or she is capable of generating infinite goodness and encountering within themselves infinite idealism.

So, the next time you are overtaken by challenging cravings, addictions, temptations and any negative feelings, do not fall into despair. Remember, you are no worse than the High Priest of Israel! You, too, may struggle against horrible demons.

But, you, too, may still enter into the Holy of Holies.

It is up to each of us to define who we are. The rest will become a self-fulfilling prophesy.

This is a Fast I Desire



Rabbanit Yemima Mizrachi
Popular Torah teacher and author

The prophet is angry, in the name of G-d, at those who fast on Yom Kippur, on the verge of fainting from weakness, "bowing their heads like a bulrush" and thinking that they have thus corrected something. The social correction! The prophet will shout, worry about the transparent! The migrants, the orphans and the widows, the hungry, the naked whom we must cover...

We know these election night calls well. Everyone will suddenly remember the cost of living, the poor, the forgotten Holocaust survivors. It seems to me, and I say this with great caution, that the prophet would ask today: Just fast.

Stop talking about social reform, but reduce yourself first, or, in Hebrew: fast.

Only in this way, Rabbi Nachman would say, you may achieve social equality in this physical action.

"For the concept of strife involves a conflicting will; they stand up against him to



You will never reach the heart of others, Rabbi Nachman would say, as long as you are so full and so strong.

negate his will. And the propitiousness of fasting is found in the Zohar (III, 68b): 'On that very day you shall afflict your souls' (cf. Leviticus 16:29, 23:27)—the benefit of fasting is the humbling of the heart, to attach the will of the heart to the Holy One. Through fasting, the heart is subdued and weakened. All his other wills are negated in the face of the will of the Holy One—'to attach the will of the heart....'" (Likutei Moharan 179)

You will never reach the heart of others, Rabbi Nachman would say, as long as you are so full and so strong.

He will always disagree with you and you with him. So it is impossible to meet.

Your relative weakness, which hits you on the day of the fast, suddenly compares to everyone. Both the priests and the people who ask for help kneel and bow and compare themselves in complete social equality, in the face of a greater desire than them. When compared to a third person, two bodies can also compare each other.

It is a physical rule, not a spiritual one.

Cry less about the lack of social equality, and consume less. You can help the hungry more by eating less. Do not underestimate the debilitating, lowering fasting that reminds us to despise the body. It's the only way not to offend anyone.

This is a fast that I will desire.

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for a Jew to be on the High Holidays is in shul. "You're not a hypocrite when you go to shul on Yom Kippur," he said. "You're a 'hypocrite', perhaps, when you don't go to shul the rest of the year!"

This Yom Kippur, as we enter deep within our inner holy of holies, may we believe, even if just for a few minutes, that we are experiencing the life-changing revelation of our truest self, the part of us that is in complete unity with Hashem and our People. And may the recognition of this

achas b'shanah encompass our whole year, our whole life — and all of the congregation of Israel.

Hebrew Language in the Parsha



David Curwin
balashon.com

Parashat VaYeLech is primarily an introduction to the following parasha, HaAzinu. Moshe tells the people that the song of HaAzinu will serve as a deterrent against the risks of spiritual complacency that can accompany the physical comforts of Eretz Yisrael. This dangerous situation is described as follows:

כִּי־אֲבִיאֲנֹו אֶל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאֲבוֹתָיו זָבַח
חֵלֶב וְדָבַשׁ וְאָכַל וְשָׂבַע וְדָשְׁן וּפְנָה אֶל־אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים
וַעֲבָדוּם וְנִאֲצַנּוּי וְהִפָּר אֶת־בְּרִיתִי:

“When I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey that I promised on oath to their fathers, and they eat their fill and grow fat and turn to other gods and serve them, spurning Me and breaking My covenant” (Devarim 31:20)

In the “land flowing with milk and honey” the people will “eat their fill and grow fat,” and in the process forget G-d.

What kind of honey – דָּבַשׁ – is described in this verse?

In almost every mention in the Bible, honey refers to date honey. This should not be surprising, since dates are one of the seven fruits of the land. In fact, in the verse where those species are listed, dates are not mentioned explicitly, but rather are called “honey”:

אֶרֶץ חֹטֶה וְשֵׁעֶרָה וְגִפְנוֹ וְהִתְאַנָּה וְרִמּוֹן אֶרֶץ־זֵית שֶׁמֶן
וְדָבַשׁ

“A land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey” (Devarim 8:8)

However, there are mentions of bee honey as well. They appear primarily at times of famine. For example, when Yaakov sent דָּבַשׁ to the Egyptian leader (Bereshit 43:11), this was likely bee honey (see Midrash Sekhel Tov on the verse). Yaakov only sent “some” honey, because then only wild honey was available, and was difficult to collect. However, by Talmudic times, beekeeping techniques had advanced, so in rabbinic literature, דָּבַשׁ generally refers to bee honey.

One other surprising verse that refers to bee honey is a prediction of Yeshayahu, describing the desolation of the land during the Assyrian conquest:

כִּי־חִמְצָה וְדָבַשׁ יֹאכַל כָּל־הַנוֹתָר בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ ...
“Thus everyone who is left in the land shall feed on curds and honey” (Yeshaya 7:22).

While the mention of curds (a milk product) with honey might first appear as a blessing like the “land flowing with milk and honey,” this is more likely a parody of that idyllic portrayal. A few verses earlier, the prophet mentions an invasion of bees, and so this is a curse, not a blessing. The land will be desolate, and therefore the bees can proliferate. The milk for the curds will also be widely available, because the cows and sheep will be able to graze on the previously tended croplands.

So in this case, the warning Moshe gave in our parasha came to be – as a punishment for their insolence, the people were cursed with “milk and honey.”

Parsha Riddle



Reb Leor Broh
Mizrachi Melbourne

Which Yom Kippur in history was celebrated by eating and drinking?

Answer to the Parsha Riddle

When Shlomo HaMelech dedicated the Beit Hamikdash



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BEIT SHEMESH

Tiferet Midrasha

Kehillat Nofei Hashemesh

Yeshivat Ashreinu

Yeshivat Hesder Lev HaTorah

HERZLIYA

Mizrachi OU-JLIC Herzliya

MEVASERET ZION

Yeshivat Mevaseret

RAMAT GAN

Israel XP at Bar Ilan University

THE NEGEV

Mechinat Ruach HaNegev

MACEDONIA

SCOPIA

Jewish Community

MALTA

Jewish Community

PORTUGAL

PORTO

Rabbi Daniel Litvak

SERBIA

BELGRADE

Rav Isak Asiel

SOUTH AFRICA

JOHANNESBURG

Mizrachi Glenhazel Shul

SWEDEN

The Jewish Community of Stockholm

SWITZERLAND

BERN

Jüdische Gemeinde Bern

ZURICH

Mizrachi

UNITED KINGDOM

Mizrachi UK

UNITED STATES

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Kol Hatorah Kulah

National Council of Young Israel

RZA-Mizrachi USA

CALIFORNIA

Beth Jacob Congregation
Harkham Hillel Hebrew Academy
West Coast Torah Center
Young Israel of North Beverly Hills
YULA High School
Young Israel of Century City

COLORADO

DAT Minyan
East Denver Orthodox Synagogue
The Denver Kehillah

CONNECTICUT

Beth David Synagogue
Congregation Agudath Sholom
Young Israel of West Hartford

FLORIDA

Beth Israel Congregation
Hebrew Academy RASG
PlayHard PrayHard
Congregation Torah Ohr
Sha'arei Bina Torah Academy for Girls
Young Israel of Hollywood-Ft. Lauderdale

GEORGIA

Congregation Beth Jacob
Congregation Ohr HaTorah

HAWAII

Kehilat Olam Ejad Ganim

ILLINOIS

Mizrachi-Religious Zionists of Chicago

MARYLAND

Kemp Mill Synagogue
Pikesville Jewish Congregation
Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion Congregation

MASSACHUSETTS

Congregation Beth El Atereth Israel
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe
Congregation Shaarei Tefillah
Young Israel of Brookline

MICHIGAN

Young Israel of Oak Park
Young Israel of Southfield
Congregation Kadimah-Toras Moshe

MINNESOTA

Congregation Darchei Noam

MISSOURI

Yeshivat Kadimah High School Nusach

Hari B'nai Zion Congregation
Young Israel of St. Louis

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Hillel at Dartmouth

NEW JERSEY

Ahavas Achim
Volunteer Chaplain Middlesex County
Congregation AABJ&D
Congregation Adath Israel of the JEC
National Council of Young Israel
Congregation Ahavat Achim
Congregation Ahavath Torah
Congregation Brothers of Israel
Congregation Darchei Noam of Fair Lawn
Congregation Etz Chaim of Livingston
Congregation Israel of Springfield
Congregation Ohr Torah
Congregation Sons of Israel of Cherry Hill
Ma Tov Day Camp
Ohav Emeth
Pal Foundation
Shomrei Torah of Fair Lawn
Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center
Yavneh Academy
National Council of Young Israel
Young Israel of Teaneck

NEW YORK

Congregation Anshei Shalom
Congregation B'nai Tzedek
Congregation Bais Tefilah of Woodmere
Congregation Beth Sholom
Ramaz
Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls
MTA – Yeshiva University
High School for Boys
Young Israel of Merrick
Congregation Beth Torah
Congregation Etz Chaim of
Kew Gardens Hills
Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun
Congregation Ohab Zedek
Great Neck Synagogue
Iranian Jewish Center/Beth
Hadassah Synagogue
Irving Place Minyan
Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach
Kingsway Jewish Center
Lincoln Square Synagogue
Merkaz Yisrael of Marine Park

North Shore Hebrew Academy
Young Israel of Merrick
NYC Department of Correction
OU-JLIC at Binghamton University
OU-JLIC at Cornell University
Queens Jewish Center
Stars of Israel Academy
The Riverdale Minyan
Vaad of Chevra Kadisha
West Side institutional Synagogue
Yeshiva University High School for Girls
Young Israel of Hillcrest
Young Israel of Jamaica Estates
Young Israel of Lawrence-Cedarhurst
Young Israel of New Rochelle
Young Israel of North Woodmere
Young Israel of Oceanside
Young Israel of Scarsdale

OHIO

Beachwood Kehilla
Congregation Sha'arei Torah
Congregation Torat Emet
Green Road Synagogue
Fuchs Mizrachi School
Heights Jewish Center

PENNSYLVANIA

Shaare Torah Congregation

SOUTH CAROLINA

Brith Sholom Beth Israel
Congregation Dor Tikvah

TENNESSEE

Baron Hirsch Congregation

TEXAS

Mayerland Minyan Synagogue
Robert M. Beren Academy
United Orthodox Synagogues of Houston

VIRGINIA

Keneseth Beth Israel

WASHINGTON

Bikur Cholim-Machzikay Hadath
Northwest Yeshiva High School
Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation

VENEZUELA

CARACAS

Ashkenazi Kehilla
Mizrachi Venezuela



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