

Aspaqlaria

Aseres Yemei

Teshuvah

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Spiritual Planning

At one point in my career I was working at a bank that took on a large initiative to formalize its processes. Everything done within the bank had to follow procedures, with the requisite paperwork completed, and every procedure had to conform to a standard called “Six Sigma”.

Part of Six Sigma is an idea called Hoshin Kanri, or in something a little closer to English, a Hoshin Plan. “Hoshin” is a Japanese word that means “shining metal”, “compass”, or “to show the direction”.

In a Hoshin Plan, upper management comes up with measurable goals for the firm. Each division head takes those goals that his division could help reach, and translates its items into smaller goals for his division. His group heads to the same to his goals, team heads... etc...

This way, the individual programmer can be shown how his program, which people much above him in the hierarchy may never hear of, fits the team’s goal, the group’s goal, and so on all the way up to the firm’s goals which must reflect its Mission Statement.

Also, Hoshin Planning is an iterative process, at the end of the year, one can review the firm’s goals against its accomplishments, and make more informed decisions about the goals to set for the next year.

Picture if one Elul we did this for our *Avodas Hashem*... Picture being able to tie why you’re going to the store to what it is you plan on accomplishing in your life’s *avodah*. I think it would be very powerful in making all of life, even recreation or side interests, holy.

A second advantage would be added a year later. Elul calls upon us to do a special *cheshbon hanefesh* (spiritual accounting) to see what areas require *teshuvah*. But against a Spiritual Hoshin Plan, one has a tool for taking that introspection and inspection of the past, and apply it towards how one lives in the future. Perhaps one mis-estimated their abilities in some area, or overestimated a challenge in their lives. They thought their *avodas Hashem* would require attention on the point, but now they can set goals that better reflect who they are and the life Hashem actually gives them.

Enough hand-waving theory. I think an example would be illustrative.

I personally would pick the following quote from Rav Shimon Shkop as my Mission Statement:

[O]ur greatest desire should be to do good to others, to individuals and to the masses, now and in the future, in imitation of the Creator (as it were). For everything He created and formed was according to His Will (may it be blessed), [that is] only to be good to the creations. So too His Will is that we walk in His ways.

Spiritual Planning

Subdividing this into three target ideals:

1. *Torah* – internalizing His Will
2. *Avodah* – connection to G-d
3. *Gemillus Chassadim* – being a conduit of Hashem’s Good into the lives of those I touch.

Subdividing again:

1. Internalizing His Will
 - 1.1. Daily learning
 - 1.2. Daily Mussar work
 - 1.3. Regular in depth learning

Notice at this point I can start filling in actual tangible projects that I can meet by year’s end. What daily learning will I start the year with? Should I raise the bar by year end or aim my year’s growth elsewhere? And if so, what should the year-end goal be?

Hopefully, by month end when this “Spiritual Hoshin Plan” is done, I can pause in the middle of the workday and be able to say for myself that I’m putting up with this irate trader on the phone so that I can pay for tuition (goal 3.2.4.2.5 or some-such), I can develop my personal creativity (as per 1.2... as being in the image of the Creator is something I view as a *Mussar* goal), etc.. And thereby give sanctity to an otherwise mundane (and stressful) activity.

9/11 and How to Effect Permanent Change

I

The most powerful High Holidays experience of my life was ten years ago. A week before I went to an office from which one could still see the World Trade Center. By that *Rosh haShanah* I hadn't yet returned to work after the nightmare of the attack a few blocks away. The charley horse from walking down 42 flights of stairs and up several miles of Manhattan had faded, and my ash-covered clothes long since went into the trash. I had a hacking cough, my lungs trying to get rid of the burnt airplane fuel, building, and human suffering that was forced into them. My life's stride was broken, and I hadn't yet found it again.

Remember how we said the poem "*Unsanah Toqef*" that year? "Let us give consideration to the holiness of the day, for it is awe-inspiring and fearful..." That year, who could say "Who will live and who will die? ... Who in chaos? Who in fire? ... Who by suffocation and who by falling or hurtling?" The chaos came alive in my mind. The floor shaking beneath me from the wave of noise. The ball of fire, the bits of metal falling to the street like confetti. The cloud of smoke that rushed at us as we were trapped on the southern tip of the island. And the bits of falling debris that hid within it. The sight of those "windows" that fell from the buildings, that I realized a moment later in horror weren't windows. My throat clenched, unable to speak, the prayer flowing as tears from my eyes.

The notion that our lives literally were in the "Hands" of the Almighty was very real and etched in the core of our beings. That *Rosh haShanah*, I didn't need to hear the *shofar* to be woken up to repent. The thunder of falling buildings, the cries of Wall Street workers suddenly frightened, had already pierced my shell. And it wasn't just me or those of us who were there. The entire country – people across the world – talked about how everything was different now. We all experienced some awakening from our comfortable and sometimes petty routines.

And in the following months, you stopped on the road to help a stranger stranded on the side, regardless of their ethnicity. We all proudly flew our flags in a show of unity. Even the dynamics and unity with our community of American Jews was markedly stronger. But now? The flag got dirty and faded into a grey, sky blue and pink, and was taken down, not replaced. And if the fellow on the shoulder of the road is identifiably Jewish, and I have time, or if it's not a stretch of highway frequented by many other Jews who might have pity on him... then I would stop to give him a hand.

There is a *pasuq* in Devarim which reads "The 'Eyes' of G-d are on [the Land of Israel] *mireishis hashanah ad acharis shanah* – from the beginning of the year until the end of a year." The Satmar Rav points out the asymmetry; first the use of "*hashanah*", "the year", but it closes with just "*shanah*", "a year".

The Yismach Moshe notes that unfortunately that is the way with most of us. Every year, when it begins, we are all excited and determined. "This is going to be THE year!" The year I finally have the patience my children deserve, the year I get to synagogue regularly, the year... But the year goes by, and by the end, it's just

“a year”, another span on the calendar.

In VaYoel Moshe, the Satmar Rav adds that this can be read in the words *nusach Sfard* quotes at the conclusion of *Qedushah*, “*hein ga’alti eschem acharis kereishis* — here I [G-d] will redeem you in the end [of our history] as in the beginning [i.e. in Egypt]”. Hashem will redeem a people for whom “the end is like the beginning”. When we can end the year with the same determination to be better as we had when we began it, we will have merited the redemption.

So we return to me in synagogue, crying in my seat. I swore to myself — “Who will live and who will die?” Me. **I** will live because everything I don’t like about the old me will die. This is **the** year, finally, the one where I turn over that new leaf, when the old me departs and the person I want to be will be born.

And then we leap ahead to a year later, as *Rosh haShanah* again approached. I looked over my spiritual accounting for the year and I saw something very depressing. My list of things to commit to working on didn’t differ all that much from one made in 2001 after all. In general, the list of things I wish to do *teshuvah* [repent] for one year closely resembles the changes I promised myself the year before.

What happened? Why couldn’t we hold onto that feeling? (Ironically, I ask myself *that* question annually as well!)

II

My son and I went on a trip to Northern Israel at the end of the Lebanon II war. We brought food and supplies to Tzefat’s poor and to our soldiers at and heading to the front, and we also stopped by Chaifa and the Rambam Hospital. There we met Yechiel ben Zoharah. Yechiel left his bunker, unaware that they were actually situated *north* of Hezbollah trenches. He was shot from behind, with shrapnel destroying much of his liver, part of his right lung (which the initial bullet went through as well), and his right shoulder. He was waiting for the other wounds to heal sufficiently for him to be up to reconstructive surgery on the shoulder. And yes, he is a righty.

What made him stick out in my mind was something he did when it wasn’t war-time. There are people capable of a moment of bravery, being in the line of fire to save another. It is a different skill (not greater or lesser, just different) to be able to live “heroically” for long stretches of time.

Yechiel lived alone, working the land and building at a spot near the Kineret for a year. I unfortunately forgot the name of the town in the Golan, at nearly 50 families, that he build around his efforts. (And of course, he had to brag about his daughter, who since turned 1.)

What we try to do most *Rashei haShanah* is closer to the moment of heroism. We think of *teshuvah* in terms of being at a new place by the end of Yom Kippur.

Rav AY Kook describes two ways of doing *teshuvah* (*Orot haTeshuvah* ch 2). The first is sudden, “coming from some kind of spiritual thunder that centers the soul. In one moment he recognizes the evil and disgustingness of sin, and turns

into a new person.... This sort of *teshuvah* comes from some influence of inner gift, by some great spiritual influence, that it's worthy to seek its roots in the deepest of mysteries.... The higher *teshuvah* comes from the thunder of universal good, the Divine Good which underlies all the worlds....”

The second sort of *teshuvah* is gradual. “He feels that he must progress and improve his ways and his lifestyle, his desires, his thought patterns. In his travels on this path he conquers, bit by bit, the ways of righteousness, repairs his *middos*, improves his actions, teaches himself how to become more and more proper until he reaches the pinnacle of brightness and repair.”

The first *luchos*, “G-d’s manufacture they were, and the writing was G-d’s writing” (Shemos 32:16). They were a “thunder from heaven”, spirituality as a gift from the Almighty. As something unearned, there was no guarantee that they could be kept.

The Benei Yisrael sought to maintain this lofty experience; they had a need for further inspiration that could not await Moshe’s return. They built the calf, and it all unraveled. That which was quickly gained was just as quickly lost.

For the second *luchos*, Moshe is told to “quarry for yourself two stone tablets like the first” (ibid 34:1). Man must take the first step. This is the gradual, incremental path. It’s not a thunderous gift from Hashem, it is a call to which Hashem responds. He “will write on the *luchos* the ideas that were on the first *luchos*” (v. 2). But man must invest the effort.

Perhaps we can say that the first sort of *teshuvah* is embodied by the *pasuq* “*Hashiveinu Hashem eilekha venashuvah* – Hashem, bring us close to You, and we will return.” (Eikhah 5:21) Hashem taking the first step. The second, harder but more likely to be permanent *teshuvah* is “*Shuvah eilai ve’ashuvah aleikhem* – return to Me, and I will return to you.” (Malakhi 3:7) We take the initiative, and Hashem promises to respond.

The kind of rapid change we typically aspire for over *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* is similar to that Rav Kook compares to the first *luchos*. It is rapid, because it is gifted from G-d. But it is much harder to keep permanent.

Buried under the all the rubble of 9/11 was a gift, an environment that called upon us to grow as people. But like the first tablets, it didn’t come from within. As the world slowly returned to something more like (although never again the same) it was before, so did we lose much (but not all) of that personal growth.

III

The Kotzker Rebbe once asked his students: There are two people on a ladder, one on the fourth rung, and another on the 10th, which one is higher?

The book where I saw this thought doesn’t record his students’ answers. I assume some recognized it as a trick question, and answered that it was the one on the fourth, some answered the 10th figuring the *rebbe* was leading them somewhere, and others were silent. But the *rebbe*’s answer was succinct, “It depends who is climbing the ladder, and who is going down.”

Once I told the story, the idea is familiar. The idea of spirituality is not where

you are, as that is largely a function of forces beyond your control (your upbringing, your genetics, etc...) Rather, it's the direction you're heading in, and how rapidly you're getting there. To apply a notion from Kierkegaard, it's not about **being** a good Jew, it's about the process of **becoming** one. The journey, not the destination, is what matters.

Holiness is measured by our engagement in **becoming**, so why do we think of *teshuvah*, repentance, in terms of who to **be** by Yom Kippur? My dream of having "**the** year" was my deciding to **be** someone new. *Teshuvah* as motion, getting from point A to the desired point B. Fighting motion is always inertia, and this dream was really my expecting to shift that on the proverbial dime. Expecting sudden relocation to get to that point B is as unreliable as setting oneself a destination without planning the journey.

A different metaphor: *teshuvah* as acceleration – changing the direction and speed we're taking in our lives, changing the course of life's journey to aim for that "point B", rather than simply expecting to leap there. Not "getting there" by Yom Kippur, but turning to head toward the right direction, and taking more effort to pick up speed.

We must realize that "the work is long", that the entire year will be one in which we will need to slowly, incrementally, work toward our goals.

The goal to set for the season is that by the end of Yom Kippur we have a plan for that year's growth, and are more engaged in the **process** of change. It is a time for gathering the means to implement holiness in our lives, and for starting to use them. Through such efforts, we will hopefully look back on this year as "the year" even as it comes to an end.

Through such efforts, we can hopefully look back on this year as "**the** year" even as it ends.

Teshuvah and Submission

Common parlance breaks *teshuvah* down into four steps: *charatah* (regret), *azivas hacheit* (abandoning the sin), *vidui* (confession) and *qabbalah al ha'asid* (resolving to do better in the future).¹

Charatah is inherently depressing. I could even see someone explain “*charatah*” to a child as “feeling sad over something I did”. On the other hand, while *qabbalah al ha'asid* isn't *inherently* joyous (in that it is theoretically possible to make such a *qabbalah* without joy), if properly considered it would be joyous – a renewed and positive state, new opportunities.

Teshuvah doesn't so much call for an emotional paradox or for ambivalence as require the involvement of different emotions at different stages in the process.

I think the fact that we today have a problem dealing with the historically “the depressing tone of Elul” is a particularly modern malaise. With modernity we assigned a strong value to autonomy. In extreme cases, this becomes the entire moral code. Why restrict what consenting people do, assuming they harm no one but themselves?

Autonomy means doing what I want to do rather than being coerced. People therefore relate well to the carrot, but do not respond to the stick the way we used to. Rather than chastising people into submission, it causes anger, resentment, and in many cases, rebellion.

In fact, R' Shlomo Wolbe says that parenting and *mussar* in our generation must use the carrot, it must be “*zeri'ah ubinyan*” (as the title of his seifer puts it), not pruning. Yes, Shelomo haMelekh tells us “one who spares his rod spoils his child” (Mishlei 13:24). But we can use another *pasuq* to help us understand which rod. “And I took unto me two staves; the one I called Graciousness, and the other I called Binders; and I fed the flock.” (Zecharia 11:7) Who said Shelomo was speaking of the first rod? Do not spare the rod of Graciousness! At least, that is what Rabbi Wolbe writes we need today. We have a self-esteem movement, we today speak Slabodka's language of “the greatness of man”, not Novardok's humility.

In fact, the entire concept of submission is in disfavor. We speak of connecting to mitzvos, being moved by *mitzvos*, singing “*Mitzvah gedolah lihyos besimchah tamid*” (“It's a great *mitzvah* to always be happy.” -Rav Nachman of Breslov) and “*ivdu es Hashem besimchah*” (“Serve Hashem with joy” -Tehillim). But the counterbalancing value of “*ana avda deQudshah berikh Hu*” (“I am a servant of the Holy One, blessed be He” -Zohar, and appears in the *siddur*) and “*ani avdeKha ben amaseKha*” (“I am Your servant, the son of your handmaiden” -Tehillim, Hallel) is totally absent. We serve G-d to be happy, to have meaning, and we do *mitzvos* to enjoy thoughts of deeper meanings.

But simply serving Hashem to serve Hashem, because He is King? To

¹ These are usually sourced in the Rambam, but see “*The Path to Deep Change*”, pg. 9.

Teshuvah and Submission

submit our will before His? Not really the language found in contemporary literature.

And I think that is why we can relate to “*qaballah al ha'asid*” and focus on that growth and clean slate, but can't do the same when it comes to confronting the ugly parts of our past. Carrot, not the stick.

Rabbi Wolbe is correct, that we must address the needs of this generation. And it is for this reason I focus on such ideas in the other essays on *teshuvah*. However, we must realize that they are insufficient and we and our *teshuvah*, incomplete.

The Path to Deep Change

In the previous section,¹ we discussed the four steps of *teshuvah* commonly discussed and attributed to the Rambam. But I want to take a step back at the steps listed in Hilkhos Teshuvah 2:2, because when I think there is a message there about how to effect deep change that is missing from the usual presentation. The Rambam writes:

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| <p>ימה היא התשובה? הוא</p> <p>א. שיעזב החוטא חטאו</p> <p>ב. ויסירו ממחשבתו</p> <p>ג. ויגמר בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד. שְׁנֵאָמַר (ישעיה נה:ז) "יעזב רשע דרכו" וגו'.</p> <p>ד. וכן יתנחם על שעבר. שְׁנֵאָמַר (ירמיה לא:ט) "כי אחרי שובי נחמתו".</p> <p>ויעיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם. שְׁנֵאָמַר (הושע יד:ד) "ולא נאמר עוד אלקינו למעשה ידינו" וגו'.</p> <p>וצריך להתודות בשפתינו ולומר ענינות אלו שגמר בלבו:</p> | <p>And what is <i>teshuvah</i>? It is [when]:</p> <p>1. The sinner will abandon their sin,</p> <p>2. remove it from their thought</p> <p>3. and concludes in their heart that they won't do it again, as it says, "Let the evil person leave their ways..."</p> <p>4. Similarly, they reconcile themselves (<i>yisnacheim</i>) with the past. As it says "After I returned, I was consoled..."</p> <p>The One Who knows secrets will testify about him that he would not ever return to this sin. As it says, "Nor ever again will we call our handiwork 'our God'..."</p> <p>And he must confess verbally and say those things which he concludes in his heart.</p> |
|---|--|

The Rambam lays out 4 steps to *teshuvah*, then detours from what the person does to something Hashem will "testify" about them. So it seems that *teshuvah* means doing these steps.

Then the Rambam returns to what the person must do by saying that we are also obligated to say *vidui*, that is, to confess verbally. But the Rambam already separated *vidui* as distinct from *teshuvah* in his opening to the whole section (1:1), "Any of the *mitzvos* of the Torah, whether obligation or prohibition, if a person would violate one of them, whether intentionally or by mistake, when they do *teshuvah* and return from their sin, they must confess before haKel Barukh Hu..." So to the Rambam, *vidui* is a separate obligation that is incumbent on someone who does *teshuvah*. (In fact, subsequent authorities dispute whether the Rambam counts *teshuvah* as a *mitzvah*, or whether only *vidui* is technically the *mitzvah*.)

The four steps he lists are in a non-intuitive order. If we were to think about *teshuvah*, you would think that being bothered by the sin would come first, followed eventually by acting on that regret. But that's not what the Rambam lists. Not doing the sin any more is first.

¹ "Teshuvah and Submission", pg. 7.

For that matter, the Rambam doesn't actually use the word *charatah*, regret. Nor is his placement consistent with this element of teshuvah being about regret; if I didn't regret the past, I wouldn't be trying to change. Regret would only make sense as a first step.

The word the Rambam actually uses here is "*yisnacheim*", from the same root as "*nichum aveilim* – comforting mourners." Which is why I rendered it "reconciled" in English. *Nichum* does seem to refer to one change in attitude since the past. Such as before the flood, the Torah anthropomorphizes Hashem as saying "... *ki nichamti ki asisem* – I 'feel' *nechamah* that I created them." There is an idea here much like regret, but apparently one that comes from observing consequences and already having started on the new path.

I think the Rambam is laying out the following process, starting from the easiest, changing the most external, to the deepest – not just changing the imperfect *middos* but addressing their cause:

- 1- **Action:** abandoning the sin. Start with building the right habits.
- 2- **Mind:** removing it from thought.
- 3- **Heart:** conclude in the heart not to do it again. Internalizing what one knows intellectually into their core selves.
- 4- **Resolving with the past:** *Vekhein* – And then, once they processed the change going forward, they addressed the symptom, and they can look at fixing the underlying problem that caused the inappropriate desire that led to the sin.

The sequencing takes us from the outside in, from action to mind to heart. And only after the symptom is fully addressed can we work on the past and addressing the origin of the problem. This way of reading the Rambam is far from Freud's path of analyzing childhood trauma or some such. Rather, he begins with behavior, thought, and *middos*, and analysis of history and causes finding what we are compensating for or wrongly addressing is only tackled after the symptoms are addressed.

Notice when describing Hashem's testimony that the person will not sin again it doesn't refer to His knowledge of the future. The Rambam isn't saying that someone who ever returns to the sin again didn't do real *teshuvah*. Rather, the Rambam emphasizes Hashem's knowledge of what's hidden. A person who changes habit, thought and *middos*, uprooted the sin. Once we break old patterns and then work on the cause of how we went astray, Hashem will "testify" that there is nothing within us now, even within the hidden recesses of our unconscious, that would cause us to sin in this way in the future.

We already see the Rambam refer to *Vidui*, Confession, as something external to teshuvah. He opens Hilchos Teshuvah (1:1) saying, "... when a person does *teshuvah* and returns from his sin, he is obligated it confess before the G-d, blessed be He..." Here too, confession is after the internal work necessary for Hashem to testify about the secrets that lie within our souls. When we articulate our errors, we take the potential that *teshuvah* generated, and actualize it in the physical world.

The Baal Teshuvah and the Tzadiq

What does “*todah*” mean? As it stands, it means “thanks”. The same root conjugated as “*vidui*” means to “confess”. Last, when the *mishnah* wants to stress that something is outside of a dispute, “*hakol modim*” — “all agree”. What do thanks, confession and agreement have in common?

When I thank someone, I acknowledge his actions had an impact on me. When I confess, I am admitting that my actions had an impact on him. And when we are *modim*, we realize that an idea isn’t mine or yours, but ours. The point in common in the three uses of the root is a realization of connectedness.

Yehudah was named for *hoda’ah* with more of a connotation of gratitude:

תָּהָר עוֹד וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן, וַתֹּאמֶר “הַפַּעַם אוֹדָה אֶת ה’”; עַל כֵּן קָרָאָהּ שְׁמוֹ “יְהוּדָה”; וַתַּעֲמֵד מִלְּדוֹתָּהּ.

And [Leah] became pregnant again, and said “This time I will thank [*odeh*] Hashem”; therefore she called his name “Yehudah”; and she finished birthing children.

—Bereishis 29:35

And yet, Yehudah may be most noted for his readiness to do *teshuvah* and confess his mistakes — the *vidui* sense of the root for which he was named. Tamar held out his signet ring, cords and staff, and identified Yehudah to himself as the one who had gotten her pregnant, while still keeping his guilt a secret from others. Yehudah, however, confesses his guilt — and her innocence — in public.

וַיִּכַּר יְהוּדָה, וַיֹּאמֶר “צִדְקָה מְמֹנִי! כִּי עַל כֵּן לֹא נִתְתִּיחַ לְשִׁלָּה בְּנִי, וְלֹא יָסַף עוֹד לְדַעְתָּהּ.”

And Yehudah recognized them and said, “She is more righteous than me! Because I didn’t give her to Sheilah my son, and I did not allow anyone else to know here.”

—Bereishis 38:26

The gemara¹ credits this example as what then teaches Reuvein the art of confession. A merit that Moshe hints at in his blessing in veZos haBerakhah, “יְחִי וְיִרְבֶּה וְיִשְׁלַח וְיִשְׁלַח וְיִשְׁלַח... — Let Re’uvein live and not perish, that his number not become few. And this is for Yehudah...”² Phrasing the opening of Yehudah’s blessing so that it can also be heard as referring back — “and this” Re’uvein’s blessing “is for Yehudah...”

Yehudah’s path in Torah observance, for which his tribe is named, the Kingdom of Judea (*Malkhus Yehudah*) was named, and for which we survivors of that kingdom today are called “Jews” is as much about the centrality of gratitude as the importance of confession.

The story of Yehudah and Tamar³ is adjacent to that of Yosef’s servitude in

¹ Makkos 11b

² Devarim 33:6-7

³ Bereishis ch. 38

Potiphar's home, and his resisting Potiphar's wife's attempt to seduce him.¹ This placement invites us to compare and/or contrast the two stories. Yehudah succumbs to temptation, but confesses and repents, becomes an exemplar of a *ba'al teshuvah*. Yosef is tested and stands up to the challenge, and the Zohar states (1:194b) it is for this that Chazal call him "*Yosef haTzadiq*".

Perhaps it is an example of Rav Avahu's famous words:

דאמר רבי אבהו: מקום שבעלי תשובה עומדין – צדיקים גמורים אינם עומדין, שנאמר: (ישעיהו נז:ט) "שְׁלוֹם שְׁלוֹם לְרֵחוֹק וְלְקְרוֹב" – "לְרֵחוֹק" בְּרִישָׁא, וְהַדֵּר "לְקְרוֹב".

... As Rabi Avahu said, "In the place where baalei teshuvah stand – the fully righteous cannot stand. As it says "Peace, peace, to those who are afar, and those who are near." (Yeshaiiah 57:19). "To those who are afar" – initially, and after, "to those who are near."

–*Berakhos 34b*

Both rise to royalty. Yosef, in the house of Par'oh, and in his eventual descendent, the *mashiach beis Yosef* who is destined to lead the war against Gog uMagog, and fall in battle. But it is Yehudah from whom the Jewish People's true royal house descends, and from whom the *mashiach* who brings world peace will be born.

Yehudah's progeny are not only given a position Yosef's family is not as suited to fill, but it is the matter of war vs peace that distinguishes the two *mashiachs* – as per the *pasuq* Rav Avahu quotes – "Peace, peace, to those who start out afar, and come near!"

¹ Ibid. ch. 39

A Good and Sweet New Year

The Bostoner Rebbe^{zt"l} (of Boston) commented once on the expression “*Shanah tovah umsuqah* - a good and sweet new year”, which is related to the famous custom of having apple and honey on Rosh haShanah. What does “*umsuqah* – and sweet” add, beyond the notion of “*tovah* – good”? As Rabbi Aqiva often said, “All that the All Merciful does, He does for the good”. An echo of the words of one of his *rabbeim*, Nachum ish Gamzu, who would greet events that would disappoint or depress most of us with “*Gam zu letovah* – this too is for the best.” So actually, wishing one another a good year could be thought of as being redundant. Everything is good, how could this year be any different? However, not everything I was told was “for my own good” was particularly pleasant.

Therefore, the *rebbe* teaches, we wish that the year not only be *tovah*, good, but also be *mesuqah*, sweet to our perception as well.

Along the same lines, I had a thought about a phrase in Shabbos and Yom Tov *davening*:

Our L-rd, and the L-rd of our fathers, sanctify us ***bemitzvosekha*** (through Your *mitzvos*), and put our portion ***beSorasekha*** (in Your Torah), satisfy us ***mituvekha*** (from Your Goodness), and make us (or: our souls qua living force) ***biyshuasekha*** (in Your salvation)...

The predicate prefix has an oddity: it says ***bemitzvosekha***, ***beSorasekha***, and later, ***beyshu'asekha***. But by goodness, the prefix is “***mituvekha***” – “from”, not “***be-***” (“in” or “through”) like by the others.

The reason, I believe, is because we are asking for something inherently different. We can ask G-d to make us more holy by allowing us to do more *mitzvos*, or give us the opportunity to learn more Torah, or make us happier by saving us more often. This is “***be-***”, we are asking for more of a gift by asking for more of the vehicle He uses to give it to us.

Since everything G-d does is good, we can't be asking for G-d to give us more good, and thereby make us more satisfied. There is no more good for us to get. Rather, we are asking for more satisfaction with the goodness He already provides. This is why the “*mi-*” prefix is used.

This is also in contrast to Rebbe's words (Berakhos 50a) about benching, that a wise person says “*uvtuvo chayinu* – and through His good we live”, and a boor, “***umituvo*** *chayinu* – and from His good, we live”. Rebbe says that “*umituvo*” is incorrect because it says that we live through some of His Good, implying that Hashem gives meagerly. Perhaps it's different here, when we ask for happiness, because the truth is that if we had a full realization of even a small part of His Good would be enough to satisfy. Like the piyut we sing at the seder. We list fifteen things Hashem did for us when taking us out of Egypt. But had He done any one of those 15 alone, “*Dayeinu*”!

R Shelomo Wolbe^{zt"l} would part someone's company wishing him “*shetir'eh batov* – may you see the good!” This is both a *berakhah* and a *mussar shmuess*. A

blessing that Hashem allow him to see all that's good in his life, and advice to the person to take the initiative and look for it. To aspire to the *middah* of Nachum ish Gamzu and Rabbi Aqiva of realizing the Hand of G-d in everything, and looking to see how even the tragedies in our lives are necessary steps to something bigger which He has in store for us. It's a beautiful greeting, one worth adopting. Wishing others could taste the sweetness.

And with that, may we all have a *Shanah tovah umsuqah!*

Dip the Apple in the Honey

The symbolism of our practice of eating an apple in honey goes beyond the words we say with it, “the good and sweet new year” we just explored. (And even beyond that ear-worm you or your kid learned in preschool that starts with the words in the post’s subject line.)

A second thought: A bee flies from flower to flower collecting nectar to make honey. A single bee makes about 1/12 of a teaspoon of honey in its entire lifetime, and it takes about 21,000 flowers to make that teaspoon of honey for your tea. (Think of the teamwork a whole jar of honey represents!)

In nature, apples are pollinated by bees. Exclusively. What the bee colony does to survive “just so happens” to benefit the trees as well. From the apple’s perspective, the sweetness of the honey is a byproduct of the journey of survival.

So, dipping that apple in honey gives us an occasion to think about everything it took to get that apple to our holiday table. Perhaps a lesson we can take is that the sweetness we seek for the new year can come from taking time to appreciate the depth of every miracle Hashem already provides us.

Third: Rav Meir Shapiro (Rosh Yeshiva Chakhmei Lublin, 1887-1933) notes that bee honey is the only food that is kosher yet comes from a non-kosher source, and can even contain dissolved bee parts and still be kosher. This is due to a *pasuq* that implies that honey is kosher (and reasoning about how bees don’t actually add to the nectar is post-facto explanation). This property — something permissible and tasty coming from something prohibited — makes it very representative of *teshuvah*.

Meanwhile, the apple also has symbolic meaning on its own. When Yaaqov came before Yitzchaq to receive the blessing dressed up like Eisav, he seemed to be Eisav to the touch and what was left of Yitzchaq’s sight. But as for smell, Yitzchaq declared, “the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which G-d has blessed.” (Bereishis 27:27). In Qabbalah, this field is identified as an apple orchard, which is a metaphor for heaven, and for immersion in Torah.¹

¹ Or at least the smell is described as that of a tapuach orchard, and tapuach is normally translated apple. Tosafos hold it’s an esrog. Apples are not native to Israel, and Yitzchaq was never outside of Israel to speak of orchards found in colder parts of the world. And besides, the Gemara says that the esrog is a rarity that the tree tastes like the fruit. Therefore, a person who walked through an esrog orchard and brushed among its trees, would smell pleasantly like esrog. Not so of apple trees. But in most opinions, the translation of “tapuach” to mean the apple is pretty firmly entrenched. And that’s all a mnemonic practice needs.

And combined, the apple dipped in honey creates an image the sinner who is restored to purity, and returns to the path to heaven. *Teshuvah* itself. It teaches us that the route to the “sacred apple orchard” is

כִּי שִׁבַּע יִפֹּל צַדִּיק וְקָם וְרָשָׁעִים יִכָּשְׁלוּ בְרָעָה:

Because seven times the righteous person falls and gets up, while the wicked are vanquished by tragedy.

– Mishlei 24:16

Crowning Hashem My King

I

Melukhah (kingship) is a major theme, if not **the** major theme of *Rosh haShanah*. Aside from the ubiquity of the word in our liturgy for *Rosh haShanah* and the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*, we find another indication in the *Amidah* for *Rosh haShanah*'s Mussaf. Three blessings are inserted to the middle of that *Amidah* – *Malkhios* (statements about G-d being King), *Zikhronos* (about His acting on His “Memory”) and *Shoferos* (about shofar, about the glory and noise of divine intervention). Like every holiday and Shabbos, though, there also has to be a *Birkhas haYom*, a blessing about the day. For *Rosh haShanah Mussaf*, *Malkhios* is fused with the *Birkhas haYom*, because kingship is the message of the day.

When Yoseif tells his brothers his dreams, they ask, “מֶלֶךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ אִם־מְשׁוֹל” (Bereishis 37:8), which the JPS translation renders “Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us?” Usually this is taken to be a repeated question, the two halves meaning roughly the same thing.

The Ibn Ezra suggests otherwise. When commanding us to appoint a king, the phrase is “שׁוּם תִּשְׂיִם עָלֶיךָ מֶלֶךְ” – appoint for yourselves a king” (*Vevarim* 17:15). A *melekh* (king) is appointed by the masses, he rules by the acclamation of the people. This stands in contrast to the *mosheil* (ruler) who, however well intended, has to rule by imposing his (or His) will on them.

The brothers are saying that they weren't ready to place Yoseif as a king over themselves. “You think you would be *melekh*, an accepted king over us? No, you would only stand as *mosheil*, in opposition to our will.”

The Vilna Gaon takes this idea and applies it to several verses we know from the *siddur*.

“כִּי לֹא הָיָה הַמְּלוּכָה וְיִמְשֵׁל בְּגוֹיִם:” – For G-d's is the Kingship, and He rules over nations...” (*Tehillim* 22:29) Hashem has the *Melukhah*, in potential He is King. However, as the nations do not yet accept Him willingly as their King, Hashem serves for them as their *mosheil*.

“מְלֻכּוֹתֶיךָ מְלָכּוֹת כָּל־עֲלָמִים וְיִמְשֵׁלְתֶךָ בְּכָל־דּוֹר וָדוֹר:” – Your kingship is a kingship for all eternity; and/but your rule is in every generation and generation.” (*Tehillim* 145:13, said in “*Ashrei*”) *Malkhus* is truly eternal. *Memshalah* will only last from generation to generation, through the course of history.

Then, at the culmination of history, “וְהָיָה ה' לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יְהִי־ה' אֶחָד וְשִׁמּוֹ אֶחָד:” – Hashem will be King over the entire world, on that day Hashem will be One, and His reputation will be One.” (*Zechariah* 14:9, *Aleinu*) In the messianic age, after the “generations”, Hashem will be *Melekh* over the other nations as well. At that time, “*veyei'asu kulam agudah achas la'asos ritzonicha...* – and they will all make a single union to do Your will” (High Holiday *Amidah*) as willing subjects of the King.

II

In *Pachad Yitzchaq* for *Rosh haShanah* (*ma'amar* 11), Rav Hutner discusses a curious question in the *gemara*. The *gemara* in *Rosh haShanah* describes the structure of the *Mussaf Amidah* for the day, and tells us that each of the three additional *berakhos* should be buttressed with 10 verses from *Tanakh*: three from the Torah, three from *Kesuvim*, three from *Navi*, and a final verse from the Torah. In practice, this last verse is the opening verse of *Shema*. But the *gemara*, while our norm was still developing, asks whether that verse, “*Shema Yisrael...*” may be used as one of the verses for *Malkhios*. (*Rosh haShanah* 32b)

Rav Hutner asks: What is the question? The first paragraph of *Shema* is said as a daily acceptance of G-d as King! *Qabbalas ol malkhus Shamayim* – accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of [the One in] heaven. If we say this very verse every day for the sole purpose of accepting Hashem as King, how could it not be viable for the very same declaration on *Rosh haShanah*?

More so, the *gemara's* source-text on the previous page (32a) for saying *Malkhios* altogether is from the end of *Shema*, “*ani Hashem E-lokeichem* – I am Hashem your G-d.” How can this be the entire basis of the obligation, and yet the words “*Hashem E-lokeinu Hashem Echad*” (conveying the same idea and adding the notion of Unity) are not only non-ideal, but the *gemara* can ask whether they are even sufficient to fulfill it?

Second problem: How is it that *Shema* does qualify as our daily *qabbalas ol malkhus Shamayim*? Nowhere in the paragraph does the word “*Melekh*” actually appear! In what sense is *Shema* accepting Hashem's Kingship? We might be able to use this to begin an answer to our first question; perhaps the *gemara* needs proof that a *pasuq* that doesn't say the word “*Melekh*” is still usable. But if this were so, that we need the actual word, wouldn't it doesn't pose a problem for the daily acceptance of Hashem as King using *Shema*?

Third, in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *qabbalas ol Malkhus Shamayim* that is part of *Shema*, one must also say the words “*Hashem Echad* – G-d is One”. So then why is the source for *Malkhios* given as “*ani Hashem E-lokeichem*”, a formulation that doesn't declare Hashem as One? Why wasn't the first verse of *Shema* cited?

It would seem from the *gemara's* question that we're talking about two different concepts of *Malkhus*, that the manner in which this daily acceptance of *ol malkhus Shamayim* without actually calling Him “*Melekh*” but making sure to remember that He is “*Echad*” is fundamentally different in kind than what we are trying to accomplish on *Rosh haShanah*.

Rashi explains *Shema* as saying, “Listen and accept Israel, Hashem, Who is our G-d now, in this world, will be, in the World to Come, One G-d [accepted by all].” In what way is G-d's presence in this world not unified? We do not perceive Him as One. As we learn in *Pesachim* (50a), it is because we do not perceive Hashem as one that we have two distinct blessings. When something good happens, we say “*haTov vahaMeitiv* – the Good and the Bestower of good”, but

when something bad happens we say a *berakhah* that calls Him “*Dayan haEmes* – the Judge of truth”.

(The Ketzos haChoshen understands this *berakhah* as accepting G-d’s judgment as to when to hide truth, and when to allow it to be visible. The process of revealing the truth, of letting “the truth spring forth from the ground” is what we call *ge’ulah*. And so, this judgment of the truth only occurs before the final redemption.)

In the redeemed world, we will be able to see the good in everything, and thus Hashem’s Oneness. As we quoted from Zechariah, “Hashem will be King over the entire world, on that day Hashem will be One, and His reputation will be One.” One name, i.e. one perception.

In the first verse of *Shema*, we are speaking of this future time, when Hashem will be King over everything. For this idea, speaking of the latent “*Hashem Echad*” which we know is there, but can’t be perceived, is a critical component of the obligation. The *gemara*’s conclusion, that the verse may be used for Malkhios after all (which we do, as the last, 10th verse) is based on the clarification given in the rest of the paragraph, “Ve’ahavta – And you shall love Hashem your G-d and serve Him...” that the intent is also making that Platonic Kingship manifest in this world. Even though this is not explicit in the verse itself.

We also touched on this kind of Kingship along the way in our previous discussion. On the verse “כִּי לַה' הַמְּלוּכָה וְיִשְׁעַל בְּגוֹיִם:” – For G-d’s is the Kingship, and He rules over nations...” my explanation took it for granted that when speaking of *malkhus* as Hashem’s possession, we were referring to Kingship in potential.

Similarly, we say in Adon Olam,

אֲדוֹן עוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר מֶלֶךְ בְּטָרָם כָּל יְצִיר נִבְרָא
לְעַת נַעֲשֶׂה בְּחַפְצוֹ כֹּל אֲזִי מֶלֶךְ שְׁמוֹ נִקְרָא

Eternal Master Who was King before all things were created

Once He, with His Will, made all, then his name was called “King”.

Hashem is unchanging, He was King in some ideal sense even without creation. (Note that before the creation of man, Hashem is called by a single name, “*E-lokim*”. It is only in chapter 2 where the Torah begins to use a multiplicity of Divine names, calling the Creator who man relates to by the pair “*Hashem Elokim*”. And it is from there that history has to start its progression to the messianic ideal of “*Hashem Echad*” and everything is seen as coming from “*haTov vahaMeitiv*”.) But to be a king, “*ein melekh belo am* – there is no king without a nation” declaring Him their King.

In *Shema*, we are referring to “*asher Malakh*”. On Rosh haShanah the goal is to make that manifest in this world – “*azai Melekh shemo niqra*”. Not the theory of Kingship, but actually declaring Him as King. “*Hashem E-lokeikhem*” even before we reach the point of “*Hashem Echad*”.

This is why the *gemara* can be unsure if *Shema* can be used for the obligation of Rosh haShanah. It describes the ideal of Kingship but lacks an

outright statement of calling Him “*Melekh*”.

III

Why is it so essentially part of Rosh haShanah to declare our active acceptance of Hashem as King?

As we saw from *Adon Olam*, this is one of the reasons for which man was created. The shift from *Asher Malakh* before we existed to “*Melekh*” shemo *niqra*. We therefore declare His Kingship on the anniversary of the creation of Man, Rosh haShanah.

It’s interesting to note that the man-*Melekh* relationship is a sub-theme in Purim as well. There is no over mention of G-d in the book of Esther. However, the Talmud tells us that each occurrence of the word “*melekh*” that appears in that book (without naming the king) can be understood midrashically as a reference to G-d. When Esther approaches the king, which is apparently Achashveirosh but has some parallel in her approaching the King as well, she opens her request with the word “*Uvchein*” (“therefore” or “with this”). Similarly as do a number of requests in the blessing of the day for the High Holidays (and therefore the *Rosh haShanah Mussaf berakhah* about Divine Kingship).

When Moses asked “הֲרָאֵנִי נָא אֶת־כְּבוֹדְךָ:” – Please show me Your Glory” (*Shemos* 33:18), Hashem’s answer was to give to him the 13 terms describing the aspects of Divine Mercy. Hashem’s Glory is his Mercy. And so, on Rosh haShanah we ask, “*Meloch al kol ha’olam kulo bichvodecha* – be King over all the entire world in Your Glory” (*Siddur*). Thus, his “throne” is Mercy, as we say in Selichos “*Keil Melekh yosheiv al kisei rachamim* – G-d, King, “sitting” on the throne of Mercy.

A *Melekh* need not impose His will in the same way that a *Mosheil* does. A *Melekh*, therefore, has the opportunity to act with kindness and mercy at times when a *Mosheil* could not. We therefore introduce High Holidays, the days of judgment, by declaring G-d’s *melukhah*. By voluntarily accepting Him as king we obviate the need for G-d to direct us on the right path through trials and tribulations. The point of *Rosh haShanah* is accepting Hashem as our *Melekh* not just in theory, but declaring our acceptance of His Reign, thereby changing His relationship to us from one of *Mosheil* to that of *Melekh*.

We, on the anniversary of Hashem creating His subjects, declare Him as King, and thereby enthrone Him as a Merciful one.

Epilogue: Pragmatics

I was discussing the ideas in this essay, and the person I was talking to asked what should have been an obvious question. “Okay, so how do we go about doing that?” And I surprised myself by realizing I didn’t know. How can I have ever said Shema, a *tefillah* described as *qabbalas ol malkhus Shamayim* (accepting the yoke of [the One in] heaven), and not know what it is I’m supposed to be doing? So, I

put some thought to the subject.

Looking at Shema, we start by joining the community of Jewish (*Shema Yisrael*), and then proclaiming that despite our disparate perceptions of Him, Hashem is one and unique. This is an awareness of G-d's uniqueness and power. True of a *melekh* or a *mosheil*, although here we're actively acknowledging it. We accept the fact of Hashem's rule.

And then, before the list of pragmatic *mitzvos* for keeping this message an active part of our day, we are told to "Love Hashem with all your heart (*kol levavekha*), all your soul, and all your resources." Willingly bowing to that rule. This is the step of which we're speaking, the shift from realizing Hashem is *Mosheil* to accepting Him as our *Melekh*.

Chazal comment (and quoted by Rashi) perhaps on the word "*kol*", perhaps on the use of the two-*veis* word for heart "*levavekha*" rather than "*libekha*", that this is with both of our inclinations — our good inclination and our evil one.

... *veyishtachavu lefanekha kol haberu'im,*
veyei'asu kulam agudah achas la'asos Retzonekh beleivav shaleim,
kemo sheyadanu, H' E-lokeinu, shehashalton/shehashilton
lefanekha...

... and all those who were created will bow before you, and they will all be made into a single union to do Your Will with a whole heart. For as we know, Hashem our G-d, that the rule/scepter is before You...

- Amidah for Yamim Nora'im

Bowing before Hashem because we acknowledge His rule is obvious. However, note again that this global union of worship is "with the whole heart", a two-*veis* heart. Both inclinations. This too is because we know that He rules. But how does that cause us to engage our baser inclinations?

On Shabbos we say, "*Yismekhu beMalkhusekha shomerei Shabbos veqor'ei oneg...* — They shall rejoice in Your Kingship, those who keep Shabbos and call it pleasure.." It's not enough to keep Shabbos. To be happily a subject of Hashem as King, we must find it an *oneg*, a pleasure.

It would seem that *qabbalas ol malkhus Shamayim* involves accepting the idea that following His plan is what is best for your life. Not just fulfilling the *mitzvos*, but seeking to do so *beleivav shaleim* and with *qeri'as oneg*.

How does one do it? I must start with the first mitzvah that I don't do and think I can. And with the first mitzvah I do begrudgingly and search the sources and the experiences it brings me to find its beauty. Then the second...

That is working toward the day when our *teshuvah* is rewarded, and "*vehayah Hashem leMelekh al kol ha'arets* — Hashem will be *Melekh* over the whole world." *Bimheirah beyameinu, amein!*

Memories of His Dear Child Ephraim

I

Why is it that we established the custom to read the Torah once annually from Shemini Atzeres to Shemini Atzeres, thereby turning the second day of Shemini Atzeres (the only day, in Israel) into Simchas Torah? What's the connection between completing the Torah and Shemini Atzeres in particular?

Second, Rosh haShanah is called "*Yom haZikaron*", or "*Yom Zikhron Teru'ah*" (the Day of Remembrance, or the Day of Remembrance of the Broken Shofar Cry). At of the three *berakhos* that make up the heart of the Rosh haShanah Mussaf, *Zikhronos* is the longest. But what do we mean when we praise Hashem for remembering? What does He remember? For that matter, what does "memory" mean when speaking of the One Who created time, rather than a person who lives within its flow? When a person remembers, his brain is reliving now something that happened in the past. For Hashem, though, there is no first-hand experience of time, no "now" and no "past". What then does *Zikhronos* mean?

I assume you're now wondering a third question – what do the previous two questions have to do with each other?

II

When we look at the Jewish Year, we find the holidays mentioned in the Tanakh are grouped around two seasons: fall and spring. In the fall, we have the Yamim Nora'im, Sukkos and Shemini Atzeres. In the spring: Purim, Pesach and Shavu'os. The *gemara* compares each season's opening holidays – Purim and the holiday the Torah calls "*Yom haKippurim*". It learns many laws from Pesach to Sukkos and the reverse, on the basis of a *gezeira shava* (comparison due to similar terminology) because both middle holidays are placed on the 15th of the month. And Shavu'os is called by our sages "*Atzeres*", a parallel to Shemini Atzeres.

Within the spring Purim commemorates the completion of the process that began on Shavu'os. On Shavu'os, we accepted the Torah because "He held over them the mountain like a barrel", Hashem threatening to crush the Jewish people if they would decline. This situation lasted all through the prophetic period, where sin often had supernatural consequences. It's only after G-d "Hides his 'Face'" on Purim, acting while hiding through nature, that "*qiyamu vekiblu haYehudim*", the loyalty to the Torah took on a higher level. (And the centrality of willing acceptance by the Jewish People is also why Purim had to be rabbinic, from us, rather than decreed by Hashem.) The last holiday of the spring season commemorates the start of the process that ended on the day celebrated on the first holiday of the season.

Similarly, we would expect the Yamim Nora'im to stand for the completion of the idea celebrated on Shemini Atzeres, as there should be a connection between them similar to that between Shavu'os and Purim.

On each day of Sukkos there is a different number of bulls offered in the

mussaf offering. On the first day, 13 bulls; the second day, 12, and so on until on the 7th day 7 were brought. All together, 70 bulls. The *gemara* (Sukkah 55b) teaches that these 70 bulls are one each for the 70 nations of the world. The *medrash* (Yalkut Shim'oni, Bamidbar 684) references Tehillim “Instead of My love – they hated Me.” (109:4) “R' Yehudah said, 'How foolish are the nations! They lost something, and they don't even know what it is they lost! When the Beis haMiqdash stood, the *mizbei'ach* would bring them forgiveness.” – Through these 70 bulls – “Now - who will bring them forgiveness?”

And then on Shemini Atzeres, one bull. An offering for the Jewish People. “This can be compared to a king of flesh and blood who said to his servants:, 'prepare for me a great banquet.' On the final day he said to his beloved, 'prepare for me a small meal so I may enjoy your [company].’” (Sukkah 55a)

The connection between Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah is that expressed in the *berakhah* said before studying Torah. When the *gemara* asks what that *berakhah* should be, Rav Hamnunah's answer, “*asher bakhar banu mikol ha'amim venasan lanu es Toraso...* – Who has chosen us from all the nations and given us His Torah... who gives the Torah” is called the elite of the various suggestions. To be “the Chosen People” is to be the “*benei beris*”, people of the covenant. Shemini Atzeres, the one day at the end of the fall holiday series dedicated to the special relationship between G-d and the Jewish People is therefore also the day of commemorating that He gave us the Torah.”

And, as I suggested above, that implies that we should expect the notion of covenant to be central to the *Yamim Nora'im* as well.

III

The Zohar writes, “אברהם | אברהם (Bereishis 22:11) has a *pesiq* [a pausal *trop* mark “|”] between the two names, whereas משה משה (Shemos 3:4) has no break.” When Hashem calls Avraham at the *Aqeida* He uses Avraham's name twice and there is a mark there telling us there is a pause, in how we read it. When Moshe is called, also with a doubling of his name, as the Burning Bush, there is no pause. What is this distinction the Zohar is drawing our attention to?

Rav Chaim Volozhiner (Ru'ach Chaim 1:1) answers this question using a description from the *gemara*. In Yevamos 49b, the prophecy of most prophets is compared to seeing through a cloudy lens or mirror (*aspaqlaria shei'na mei'ra*), but Moshe's prophecy was through a clear lens or mirror (*aspaqlaria hame'ira*). Even the prophets have a layer of physicality which clouds up their view, which divides our souls into a higher level that is more aware of the Divine and a lower level that lives in a body. For most of us, our consciousness stays with our lower selves. A prophet can sometimes “see” from the perspective of the higher soul above that barrier. But it's a cloudy vision. Moshe entirely lacked that barrier. He had only one self.

Rav Chaim explains that for all his greatness, Avraham too experienced that split. Therefore Hashem calls two Avraham's – the one where his awareness resides, and the higher soul in heaven. Moshe's call lacks that “*pesiq*”, that pausal

line, representing a lack of barrier, a unity of the lower “Moshe” and the upper one.

At the moment a person is first born, he is entirely potential. Everything that baby will accomplish in life lies before him. He didn't yet build that line, that gap between who he is and who Hashem created him capable of becoming.

IV

The contents of *birkhas Zikhronos* doesn't describe a memory of the past, it describes remembering for the future. “You remember all the actions of the world... And upon the nations, it is sentenced: which to the sword, and which for peace....” The *berakhah* continues asking Hashem to remember us the way He remembered Noach, “and also Noach you remembered in love, and You appointed him in a statement of salvation and compassion...” And then citing the *pasuq*, “And G-d remembered Noach and all the living things and all the animals with him in the ark, and Hashem made a wind pass over the earth, and the water subsided.”

The other nine verse of *Zikhronos* are also about Hashem remembering his covenants with us. More so, His remembering that which He found in us making us worthy of the covenants. Among them:

“And G-d heard their cries, and G-d remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzchaq, and with Ya'aqov.”

“And I will remember My covenant of Yaaqov, and also My covenant of Yitzchaq, and also my covenant of Avraham I will remember, and I will remember the land.”

“He gave food to those who are in awe of Him, and He always will remember His covenant.”

“Go our and call in the ears of Jerusalem to say, 'So says Hashem: I remembered for you the lovingkindnesses of your youth, the love of your wedding, your walking behind Me in the wilderness, in the unfarmed lands.”

“I remembered my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I established with you an eternal covenant.”

And finally, “My dear child Ephraim, isn't he a delightful child? For often I speak about him, I will remember him still...”

Yahadus has a focus on the notion of *beris*, of a covenant where two parties join together for their common good. (Unlike a contract, where each is aided in their own good in exchange for helping the other.) Man is redeemed through the covenant, through joining together with other and with G-d to work for a good that is greater than Himself.

Teshuvah on our part is critical. But Hashem controls the situations we face. Whether we live in a world that poses challenges to our efforts or makes them easier.

Shemini Atzeres, the day of celebrating our chosenness as a people, naturally became Simchas Torah, the day we celebrate the covenant, the mission

for which we were chosen. So too *Zikhronos* is a call to remember the person who entered the *beris*, the person for whom hopes were so high. But since we are speaking of the Creator, when say the word “*Zokheir*” we really mean “acting in a manner that, if done by a person, would be interpreted as being driven by memory”. When we ask Hashem to “remember”, we're asking Him to help us reignite the plans we made together.

Zikhronos is G-d remembering our potential, and from that, His plans for us. As it closes “... *Zokheir haberis* – Blessed are You ... the Rememberer of [or: Who Remembers] the Covenant.” It is our calling out to Hashem to invoke that *beris*. To remember the “delightful child” He created us as, and to make that potential manifest.

We can use this idea to enhance the notion of *teshuvah* – which literally translates to “return”. Not only is it a person’s return to Hashem, it’s a person’s reapproachment to the person Hashem created him to be, and the role for which He was created.

This is the “dear child Ephraim” of the *berakhah* of *Zikhronos*.

And with What? With a Shofar

אמר רבי יהודה משום רבי עקיבא ... אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: ... ואמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות. מלכיות: כדי שתמליכוני עליכם. זכרונות: כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה. ובמה? בשופר.

Rabbi Yehudah said an idea from Rabbi Aqiva ...: The Holy One, blessed be He said, "... say before Me on Rosh haShanah, *Malkhios*, *Zikhoronos* and *Shoferos*.

"*Malkhios*: so that you shall make Me King over you;

"*Zikhoronos*: so that your memories shall come before Me;

"And with what? With a *shofar*."

- Rosh haShanah 16a

(Sidenote: There is a dispute as to what this implies as to the nature of the obligation. Rashi holds that these *berakhos* are mandatory from the Torah, if said with / as part of *shofar* blowing. He says that *Malkhios* is the essence of the day, as we see in practice we combine it with the usual holiday blessing for the day. And the words "*yom zikhron teru'ah* — a day of memory of horn-blasts" obligates us in *Zikhoronos* and *Shoferos*. The Ritva in general holds that *asmachtos*, usually translated as mnemonic devices, are actually hints from G-d that an idea is a good one, but not mandatory. Thus a law from an *asmachta* is one that was suggested by G-d but made obligatory by the Chakhamim. Here, the Ritva says it's an *asmachta* — G-d said "say before me", but it wasn't made mandatory until the Chakhamim codified it.)

מתנ': כל השופרות כשרים חוץ משל פרה מפני שהוא קרן אמר רבי יוסי והלא כל השופרות נקראו קרן שנאמר (יהושוע ו) במשוך בקרן היובל:

גמ': ... עולא אמר היינו טעמא דרבנן כדרב חסדא דאמר רב חסדא מפני מה אין כהן גדול נכנס בבגדי זהב לפני ולפנים לעבוד עבודה לפי שאין קטיגור נעשה סניגור

Mishnah: Every *shofar* is *kosher* except for that of a cow, because it's called "*qeren*". Rabbi Yosi said: but isn't every *shofar* called "*qeren*", as it says "In the middle of the *qeren* of the *yoveil*" (Yehoshua 6)?

Gemara: Ula said: What is the reason for the Rabbanan [the unnamed first opinion in the *mishnah*]? [They rule] like Rav Chisda. For Rav Chisda said: Why doesn't the *kohein gadol* wear the *bigdei zahav* — [his full uniform, including] the golden clothes when *lifnai velifnim* — before Me and within [the Holy of Holies]? Because a prosecutor can not be turned into the defense attorney.

- Rosh haShanah 26a

Rav Dovid Lifshitz addressed these *gemaras* in his pre-Rosh haShanah shiur of 1989.

Notice that the *kohein gadol* did wear the full *bigdei zahav* the rest of Yom Kippur, including when doing the other parts of the service of the very same qorban! The notion that *ein qeteigor naaseh saneigor*, that the prosecution can't become the defense, is not a law in atonement; it's a law in *lifnai velifnim*.

What then does it mean when this rule applies to *shofar*? Rashi points out that the *gemara* is assuming a comparison — listening to the *shofar* is tantamount to entering the Holy of Holies, only performed by the kohein gadol on Yom Kippur!

To add something of my own to this concept, in the Sifra's version of the thought Rabbi Yehudah repeated from R' Aqiva, it concludes, “במה? בשופר של חרות — And with what? With a *shofar* of freedom.” As Yeshaiiah writes (27:12) “וְהָיָה אִי בַיּוֹם הַהוּא יִתְקַע בְּשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל וּבָאוּ הָאֲבָדִים בְּאֶרֶץ אַשּׁוּר וְהַנְדָּחִים בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָהּ בְּהַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בִּירוּשָׁלַם: — And it will be on that day, he will blow a great *shofar*, and those lost in Ashur and those taken captive in Egypt will come and they will bow to Hashem on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.”

Similarly, the *shofar*'s blow at the *shemittah* year declared the freedom of slaves. A slave who refuses his freedom, preferring to live under his master's patronage, has his ear pierced. The ear that heard “*ki avadai heim* — for they are My servants” (Vayiqra 25:42) should know “My servants — and not servants to my servants” (Bava Metzi'ah 10a).

Cheirus appears associated with the tablets, which rested in the ark in the center of the Holy of Holies. “חֲרוּת עַל-הַלְחָת - אל תקרי חרות אלא חרות” — ‘engraved (*charus*) on the tablets’ (Shemos 32:16) — don't read ‘*charus*’ (engraved), rather ‘*cheirus*’ (freedom).” Note also how Yeshaiiah associates the *shofar*'s call with coming to the Temple Mount. The *shofar*'s call to freedom would seem to be an echo of the freedom engraved on the *luchos*.

Back to rebbe's shiur...

Remember the feeling when you first came to the Kotel. That moment when you turned the corner, emerging from the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem, reached the steps, and saw the Kotel and the Temple Mount for the first time. The scene had a majesty the post cards simply can't prepare you for.

Perhaps you pause to tear your shirt as a mourner. Or maybe you came on Shabbos.

You descend down the steps from the Quarter to the Kotel area. Your eyes never leaving The Wall. You feel yourself choking up. Every footstep with its solemnity.

And after a brief trip through security, you emerge among the many others there. Perhaps you hear ululation from the women's section, as a Sepharadi woman gives voice to her excitement at hearing her grandson called up to the Torah as a Bar Mitzvah.

You make your way to the ramp over on the men's side. Wash your hands. Check your kippah. Pause to answer a Kaddish shouted at one of the *minyanim* you pass.

Finally, you reach the Kotel. You touch the stones. The wall that Hashem promised us would stand until the end of time, whose persistence is testimony to our relationship with Him. You cry out to G-d and you feel connection to Him forged by millennia of prayer there.

And with What? With a Shofar

Remember that moment. That feeling of connection. That feeling of majesty. The *Yir'ah* and the Love.

That's "just" at the retaining wall of the platform upon which the Temple and its courtyard stood. Picture the emotions one would have being able to actually enter the courtyard. In the days of the Temple, you would have approached from the south, and climb up steps that lead under the floor of the Temple Courtyard so that you emerge within the courtyard, not going through a doorway in the wall. There are Jews and non-Jews worshipping here. All turning to G-d in need, in love, as children or as lovers, as servants or as subjects of the King. We go closer, though the courtyards. We pass childless couples turning to Hashem for His aid, and a couple sanctifying the joy of their wedding, births and deaths, someone thanking G-d for success in business. A new widower, asking G-d for consolation.

If we were kohanim, we would approach closer, to the sink and the altar, to enter the building itself – perhaps to light the menorah, change the showbread, or burn the incense.

And once a year, the Kohein Gadol would spend a week preparing Himself to bring the prayers of his family, the clan of kohanim, the Jewish People and the world before the Shechinah.

For a moment like that... nothing tainted with sin should be present.

And that is what Ulla compares the blowing of the shofar to.

When the shofar blows, it shouldn't only be the blower's lip that is trembling.

The moments we spend hearing the blowing of the shofar we stand in the presence of the Shechinah the way the Kohein Gadol stood at the ultimate moment of the Yom Kippur service.

*Ivdu es Hashem beYir'ah – Serve Hashem with Yir'ah
vegilu bir'adah – and celebrate in trembling!*

How does one accept Hashem as *Melekh*, and remember our faults so that He remembers our potential? At that moment – “with the *shofar*.”

(Rebbe actually presented this thought before giving a source. After the students were entranced with the rebbe's great *chiddush*, his personal novellum, he asked one of them to read the Rashi and Tosafos. Had they known it was “just a Rashi”, they wouldn't have listened the same.)

The Simplicity of the Shofar¹

Halachically, a *shofar* must be a simple instrument. If it has a crack or anything that might shape the note, it is invalid. A cow's horn, which is layered and therefore not a *shofar* but a *shefarferet*, is not usable for the mitzvah. It has no keys, no valves, no strings to tune.

And yet from an aggadic perspective, the sound of the shofar is quite complex:

1. We associate the *shofar* with crying. We blow 100 sounds because Sisera's mother cried 100 times when learning her son (off to war against the Jews) was killed and would not return. There is a dispute whether the broken sound required by the Torah is more like *yehulei yalal* (uneven wailing) or *genunei ganach* (sobbing), so we blow both the *teru'ah* and the *shevarim*, as well as the two together as a pair.

2. The *shofar* is also a royal sound. "With trumpets and the sound of a *shofar*, call out before the King. The *mishnah* describes Hashem as saying, "Call before Me with the blast of the Shofar - to show that you accept of Me as your King." In the same way they blow trumpets to announce that the king or queen is entering the room, we blow *shofar* on Rosh haShanah to announce a new year of Hashem's rule.

3. The *shofar* is used by the army, to alert the troops that it's time to break camp and go off to war. Similarly, in the desert, they also blew *shofar* to tell everyone it was time to move each time the Benei Yisrael broke camp. Rav Hirsch explains the *shofar* of Rosh haShanah similarly. It is a warning to get ready, to stop what we were doing all last year and do something new and better this one.

Then there are the historical reminiscences associated with the shofar:

- The horn of the ram that Avraham found when told not to sacrifice Yitzchaq at the *aqeidah*.
- The sound of the *shofar* heard during the revelation at Mount Sinai.
- The shofar blast declaring the future ultimate redemption.

These might be additional meanings, or they might derive from the previous ones, that Hashem orchestrated the history to involve a *shofar* in this way for one of the prior three reasons.

We are required that the *shofar* be something that looks simple at first, and yet what it says to us is complicated. A *shofar* expresses many different emotions at once. If you just look at it without spending real time, you miss the whole thing!

This in itself is an important lesson of the *shofar*, one critical to prioritizing our lives and to *teshuvah*: If we rush through life, everything looks trivial. It is only when we take the time to look deeper do we see the real beauty within.

¹ Hat tip to my daughter Shifra, who made this point the centerpiece of her speech at her *bas mitzvah* celebration.

From Qeren to Shofar

The Ramban, in his Derashah leRosh haShanah, writes that a *shofar* is a *keli*, a formal utensil in the halachic sense. For this reason, while most *rishonim* hold that a hole in a *shofar* invalidates the *shofar* only if the hole is such that it changes the produced sound, the Ramban holds that any hole disqualifies it, just as any other utensil with a whole is no longer a *keli*. He emphasizes that we take a raw natural *qeren*, a horn, and produce a new thing from it with a new name — *shofar*, from *leshapeir* (to improve).¹

Literally a *qeren* is a horn (or something shaped like a horn, like a beam of light from Moshe's head, or the corner pieces of the *mizbeiach*). Idiomatically, *qeren* refers to might or pride. As we say in Shemoneh Esrei, “The sprout of David may You quickly cause to bloom, *veqarno* — and his pride — You shall uplift with Your redemption...” Or in Tehillim (75:5), “אָמַרְתִּי לְהוֹלִלִים אֶל תְּהַלְּנוּ, וְלִרְשָׁעִים אֶל תִּרְיֵמוּ — I said to the arrogant, do not brag; and to the evil, do not ‘lift a horn’ [i.e. boast].”

So we take this symbol of pride, and we bore a small hole at the end. What used to hold air or liquid now amplifies the cry of another. By sharing the pain of another, self-interest gets harnessed to aid this community of suffering.

And once this horn is sublimated and refined, *meshaperes*, we have the *mitzvah* of *shofar* which we are to blow before G-d.

As we saw, we associate the sound of the *shofar* with crying, with coronation, and with an army marching forth to war, and there are perhaps other associations. We now might be able to harmonize these seemingly conflicting concepts, to some extent.

אמר ר' יוחנן כל מקום שאתה מוצא גבורתו של הקב"ה אתה מוצא ענוותנותו דבר זה כתוב בתורה ושנוי בנביאים ומשולש בכתובים כתוב בתורה (דברים י) כי ה' אלהיכם הוא אלהי האלהים ואדוני האדונים וכתוב בתריה עושה משפט יתום ואלמנה שנוי בנביאים (ישעיהו נז) כה אמר דם ונשא שוכן עד וקדוש וגו' וכתוב בתריה ואת דכא ושפל רוח משולש בכתובים דכתיב (תהילים סח) סולו לרוכב בערבות ביה שמו וכתוב בתריה אבי יתומים ודיין אלמנות

R' Yochanan said: Every place where you find the Might of HQBH, you find His *anvanus* (humility). This is written in the Torah, seconded in the *Nevi'im*, and stated a third time in *Kesuvim*.

Written in the Torah: “For Hashem your G-d, He is the G-d over all powers and the L-rd over all lords”, and it says after it “who performs justice for the orphan and the widow.” Seconded in the *Nevi'im*, “As said the High and Exalted Who dwells eternally and Holy...” and it says after it, “and the broken and low of spirit.” And stated a third time in the *Kesuvim*, as it says, “Extol He Who rides on the skies,

¹ Students of R JB Soloveitchik might note that he, RJBS, often referred to the shofar as a raw animal cry, emphasizing how un-technological a shofar is. The shofar sits at the edge between natural and artificial, and thus either aspect could be emphasized. These two approaches appear to be in conflict. This essay is from the Ramban's perspective.

through ‘Kah’ His name” and it says after it, “the Father of orphans and judge for widows.”

G-d’s greatness isn’t just that He is Infinite, but that He is so Infinite that He not only set the stars on their paths and keeps the laws of physics running, but that limitations of time, attention and resources do not impede His ability to care for the needy. Hashem is Great enough to attend to even the most downtrodden person’s smallest need.

To serve Hashem as a soldier serves his country, I must accept upon myself the duty of bestowing His Good upon others. The person who can share another’s cry is the very one who declares Hashem’s Majesty. From this perspective, all three associations are one.

That is what it means to take a *qeren* and making something new of it, something *shofar* – refined. It is in imitation of Hashem’s unity of Greatness and Humility.

And with what? With a Shofar – Conclusion

אמר רבי יהודה משום רבי עקיבא ... אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא: ... ואמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות. מלכיות: כדי שתמליכוני עליכם. זכרונות: כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה. ובמה? בשופר.

Rabbi Yehudah said an idea from Rabbi Aqiva ...: The Holy One, blessed be He said, “... say before Me on Rosh haShanah, Malkhios, Zikhoronos and Shoferos.

“Malkhios: so that you shall make Me King over you;

“Zikhoronos: so that your memories shall come before Me;

“And with what? With a shofar.”

– *Rosh haShanah* 16a

Hashem as King is an important concept. But it can’t remain a concept. Similarly, it is important to realize that He Remembers us when we were young, when we entered into a covenant with Him, before we buried our potential under a pile of missed opportunities and other mistake

But the ideas cannot remain ideas, concepts held only in the head. People make decisions all the time knowing we made the wrong choice, but unable to resist temptation. As we quote every day in Aleinu, “וַיִּדְעַתְּ הַיּוֹם וְהַשַּׁבָּת אֶל לִבְךָ” — and you will know today, and you will respond to your heart.”¹ There are things we know already and yet still have to work to get fully in our hearts.

¹ Devarim 4:39

And with What? With a Shofar

When the Jewish People at Mount Sinai proclaimed “נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע” — we will do and we will listen”, a voice from heaven demanded to know who revealed to us the angels’ great secret.¹ What brings an idea the one ammah from head to heart is to do, and then to listen to what the experience tells us.

Rabbi Aqiva teaches us the same thing: We contemplate Malkhios, we discuss Zikhronos. But through what do we make Hasme our King, and bring ourselves before HQBH? Through the non-verbal experience of the shofar.

¹ Shabbos 88a

Unesaneh Tokef

The *piyut* “*Unesaneh Tokef*” consists of two paragraphs added immediately before Kedushah in the Chazan’s repetition of the Amidah of Mussaf on these days. As a *piyut*, it is not technically part of the Amidah, and in some communities – for example, the personal synagogue of R. Chaim Brisker – it was not said on Rosh Hashanah on a weekday, as it would be an interruption in the middle of shofar blowing. (The Amidah itself is an inherent part of the same mitzvah as *shofar* blowing, a very interesting, and long, topic.) It is part of Ashkenazic tradition only.

The prayer opens: *Unesaneh tokef kidushas hayom* – let us convey the sanctity of the day, for it is awe-inspiring and frightening.

And on it *we will carry* Your Kingship. The word is “*tinasei*” we will carry. It is for us to declare Him king. As David wrote: “*ki Lashem hamluchah umoshiel bagoyim* – For G-d has the kingship, but he is a dictator over the nations.” Until the day we describe in Aleinu “and they will all accept the yoke of your kingship”. The difference between a king and a dictator is the acclamation of the people.¹ The king, because his rule is accepted, rules through kindness. A dictator must impose his will by force.

R. Eliyahu Shaviv, of Yeshiva Gush Etzion, creates a fascinating mental image. Rosh Hashanah is on Rosh Chodesh, the day of the new moon. It was up to Sanhedrin to accept two witnesses who saw the new moon, and then they sanctify the month.

We cannot picture the heavens, but traditionally we use imagery to convey the events on an emotional level. In this light, *Unesaneh Tokef* draws a picture of G-d “sitting” on His throne, which, we are told, is His Kindness. The kindness a king can afford beyond that of even a benevolent dictator. All the *tziva’os hashamyim*, the legion of angels of the heavens, stand ready to declare G-d’s kingship over the universe(s). Malkiel (the angel whose name means G-d is my king) stands ready with “crown” and “scepter”. And they stand there, and wait. For what? For two *pushete yidden*, two simple Jews, to say “we have seen the new moon” so that Sanhedrin will declare the day the first of Tishrei.

A little later it describes, “a great *shofar* will be blown, and a quiet, thin sound will be heard”. “Quiet, thin sound” is a reference to a lesson Hashem teaches Elijah in Kings I. First the prophet is buffeted by a powerful wind, and G-d says, “I Am not in the wind”, then he hears a loud crash, “I Am not in the crash”, then a fire, and G-d says that He is neither there. Then “a small thin voice”. G-d’s voice in this world is within us, if we would only listen.

The great *shofar* is blown – today is judgment day! And finally, we can hear the voice of G-d calling within us. This sets the angels atremble. They have no free will, no consciousness nor conscience, they are automata, pushed and pulled like leaves in the spiritual wind.

“*Uvo sinasei malchusechah* – on this day we will carry Your Kingship.” It is

¹ See “Crowning Hashem My King”, pg. 13.

the task of the Jewish people alone. People, human beings with free will, loftier than angels because we have the potential for growth, to hear and head that small thin voice. It is our task as Jews to bring that message to the rest of humanity. If two Jews do not declare it so – it is not coronation day!

This is the theme of *Aleinu*, which we say daily, and which is taken from the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Mussaf.

Then, the prayer seems to shift theme. It goes from G-d's Kingship to that of Divine Justice. That shift, though, is the entire purpose of this period on the calendar. The days upon which we accept G-d as King, as *Melech*, and not a *Mosheil*, a Dictator, are the days of mercy – because of our acceptance of his role in running the universe(s).

G-d counts us, lovingly, as individuals; the way a shepherd counts is flock as he lets them pass single file past his crook and through the gate.

“On Rosh Hashanah we are inscribed, and on Yom Kippur we are sealed into the Book of Memories that reads itself,” as the poet describes it. And this Book of Memories has each deed in it, signed by the hand that did it. G-d doesn't judge by evidence, but weighs the actual facts. All is known with certitude.

Not just in the actuarial manner of a community – “how many will be pass away, and how many will be created.” Not just the major life events, the ones that people often think of as “fate”: “who will die in their destined time, and who will die early, who in their sleep and who will [G-d forbid] die a violent death.” But even exactly how they will die, how much money they will earn, who will get sick, who will get honor, who will be humbled. The Chassidic masters teach that even when you stub your toe, or don't find your money until you search your *second* pocket as opposed to getting it right away, G-d is trying to tell you something.

Nothing drove this point home to me more than witnessing the events of 9/11. The morning began much like any other; my usual morning routine. If anything, the only thing noteworthy about my early morning and commute was the beautiful weather, the clear blue sky, a sunny day. And then, the words of the poem came to life. Who could explain how suddenly the day turned dark, the promise hidden in a cloud of smoke? And who could explain why these people survived, and they “who [died] before their time”? “Who by fire .. who in noise and chaos ... who by suffocation ... and who by falling or buried in debris?” Suddenly, the usual turned into a dramatic expression of G-d meting out for each person their own fate.

Three things “pass through” the evil decree: *Teshuvah*, *tephillah* and *tzedakah*. Now, when you are in the throes of accepting G-d as a willing subject, use that chance for mercy, and change yourself, improve the things you've been weak in.

How do we relate to these words? Yes, many times we can find the justice. Why this person merited their outcome, how that person's life turned around after they refined themselves. But more often, the questions outnumber the answers. Returning yet again to the events of 9/11, can we explain why one trader, who lived for the next deal, returned home to his family, but Avremel Semanowitz^{Hy}^d who stayed with wheelchair-bound co worker, wasn't blessed with that chance to escape? In general, why the righteous suffer is a problem we must struggle with,

we must continually try to see Hashem's role in our lives. But we cannot hope for resolution.

But note that we do not say that repentance, prayer and charity destroy the evil decree, or erase the evil of the decree. Rather, they "cross over" the evil, allow us to get past it. We should not be good in this world in exchange for promises of an idyllic life. There is no idyllic life. Nor would such a life be a "good one; it would simply be living by informed greed. We should act so as to have a purposive life, a meaningful one, one in which even the worst of tragedies or one's own end can be faced with a belief that it has a purpose.

As the Vilna Gaon put it: We say in Shema "*asher Anokhi metzaveh eskhem hayom*" which instinctively we would translate "which I [Hashem] command you today". But did Hashem actually command us today to perform *mitzvos*? Rather, the verse is to be translated "for today", telling us that the mitzvah opportunity we face today is "today's *mitzvah*". Every moment I am alive, every act that I do, I should be thinking: I was placed here by the Creator. Hashem created the universe such that this needs to be done. Only I can accomplish this task. It could only be done here and now. And so I stand here and now to do this essential duty, one which is a permanent feature of the universe.

Victor Frankel describes an attitude much like this in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*. In his study of how various people managed through the Holocaust (including himself), he found it was those who associated meaning with their lives who fared the best. And this was the one thing the Nazis could not rob of him. Even if all they left him was the ability to suffer, his suffering too is a task only he could accomplish, only at that time and place, and the universe is different than the one it would have been had he chosen to suffer differently.

In Judaism, nothing ends with philosophizing. We focus on *halakhah* because the primary question should always be: what does this situation empower me to do?

Teshuvah – a return. The Chief Rabbi of the British Commonwealth, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, likens *teshuvah* to the waves of immigrants to Israel. The Yemenites, the Moroccans, the Russians and the Ethiopians. They stepped off the plane to a land they never saw before, and suddenly "We are home!" *Teshuvah* is return to a religious home. Even if you've never been there before.

These three things, *teshuvah*, prayer and charity (which, we should remember, Jews call *tzedakah* – justice), parallel the three relationships that dominate our lives. And so quite literally, *teshuvah*, *tefillah* and *tzedakah* give us the tools to repair the pillars upon which the world, and our lives, stand.

Teshuvah – improve your self. Are you too quick-tempered? Haughty? How much Torah do you know? How much Torah do you feel?

Tephillah – pray to G-d. Remind yourself that you have a Third Parent, Someone Who wants you to grow, be more than merely a sentient animal.

Tzedakah – How are you doing in your relationships to other people? Do you give charity? Do you speak charitably? Do you help a neighbor? Smile when you greet people? Say hello to the old man sitting on the porch that you pass on the way to the train station? Thank your parents or your spouse lately? Let your

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children know when they've done well?

It would behoove us, I when I write this monologue, you, as you read it, to choose one thing, something we can commit to and have a real chance of succeeding at, just one thing from each of these facets of our lives, to add to our current behavior.

Ideals and Yokes

I had been wondering about the first two paragraphs of Shema. The first paragraph is an exercise of accepting *ol Malkhus Shamayim*, the yoke of the Kingdom of [the One in] heaven. The second — *ol Mitzvos*, the yoke of the commandments. Here was the question where my train of thought began:

Those *mitzvos* are the commands of that King. So... How does the intent I am supposed to have when saying each of these paragraphs differ? The metaphor of “yoke” tells me that we’re talking about some kind of burden that is necessary if I am going to live productively. But how is the yoke of Hashem’s Rule different than that of His *mitzvos*? Aren’t I accepting to try my best to listen to Him either way?

And somehow this distinction relates to the difference between the goals of Rosh haShanah and Yom Kippur. On Rosh haShanah we talk about accepting Hashem as our King. We do not even directly speak about *teshuvah*. On Yom Kippur we talk about abandoning sin, embracing *mitzvos*, and changing our *middos* so that the correct behaviors come more naturally to us. Rosh haShanah — *ol Malkhus*. Yom Kippur — *ol mitzvos*.

We use the word “ideal” in two ways. (Yes, I need the jump in topic to build to a proposed answer. Actually, I’ll need two such jumps before we’re done.)

The first I think of as “the mountain peak”. This is the ideal we strive for. The person with perfect *middos*, who is compassionate, generous, learned, righteous, G-d fearing...

But that perfection never existed. Even Moshe sins. (And notice that the *beraisa*’s list of four people who hadn’t sinned are all named in relation to their more accomplished relatives (Bava Bara 17a), “Benyamin, ben Yaaqov, Amram, father of Moses; Yishai, father of David; and Khil’av ben David.”)

כִּי אָדָם אֵין צְדִיק בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב וְלֹא יִחָטָא:

For there is not one good man on earth who does what is best and doesn’t err.

— Koheles 7:20

So, the ideal life is not one on the mountaintop. It’s the life lived reaching toward it.

כִּי שֶׁבַע אֶיפּוֹל צְדִיק וְקָם וְרָשָׁעִים יִפְּסְלוּ בְּרָעָה:

Seven times the righteous man falls and gets up, While the wicked are tripped by one misfortune.

— Koheles 24:16

It is inevitable that in the kind of life we want to lead, we will at times be trapped in periods of darkness. Setbacks. Struggling with our faith. But we don’t aim for a life of struggling with faith. This is a second usage of the word “ideal”. Not the mountain top we aspire to reach, but the path up that mountain.

We are in the “image” of the Divine. We cannot reach that Infinite Perfection mountaintop. But we are called upon to head up the mountain.

Two different meanings of the word ideal: the mountain top we aspire to, and the ideal process to strive for that aspiration. (And now, our second and last topic jump.)

If you ask someone who isn't dieting if they want to diet and they say "yes"... Stop and think for a moment; then why aren't they actually dieting? It's the right thing to do. Usually it's not a logistical issue. If they really want to diet, why didn't they actually make the choice to diet? Because the truth is that they want something else more.

It is not so much that the person wants to diet as they want to be the kind of person who really wants to diet. They don't want dieting more than they want lasagna, but they want to be the kind of person who does.

Which dovetails with our discussion of the two definitions of the word "ideal". The person we are describing doesn't want to be traveling that path, and yet they still want to be the kind of person who gets to the mountain top. Inconsistent? Yes. But people's feelings and desires often are.

We need to start with the "eye on the prize", the desire for the aspirational goal. That's what gives us the motivation to continue hiking up the mountain toward it.¹

And that brings me back to the opening question — the difference between *ol malkhus Shamayim* and *ol mitzvos*. Between the goals of the first and second chapters of Shema, between Rosh haShanah and Yom Kippur.

Malkhus Shamayim is accepting Hashem as King. It's the aspirational goal — I want to be on His team. Not to be an obstacle, that the betterment of the world and of myself must happen at my expense. To work with the Ruler to make it happen. To accept *ol malkhus Shamayim* is to want to be a particular kind of person, one whose will matches Hashem's Will.

¹ I believe this same distinctions underly the roles of Written and Oral Torah, respectively. For example, the text of the written Torah famously says "עַן תַּחַת עֵין – an eye for an eye." (Vayiqra 24:20) And, yet the *halakhah* is not based on the literal text. Instead, we know the obligation is to repay the injured for their pain, medical expenses, loss of earning potential, etc...

Halakhah always derives from rules of *derashah*, hermeneutical principles. And where those rules produce laws that differ from the literal text, it is the Oral derivation that is binding.

So why the literal text? In the words of the Rambam (Hil' Choveil 1:3), the Torah is telling you what the person deserves. Whereas the Oral Torah allows for a *kofeir*, a "ransom", instead. And this is true in general. In all of Tanakh we are taught ideals; but both *halakhah* and the *derashos* that produce it are specific to the Torah.

The mountaintop ideal is in the Written Text. The ideal to strive for is that one is as loathe to risk harming someone else as if they would thereby harm themselves. But it seems (going beyond the Rambam's words) that *halakhah*, the way to reach that ideal, is somewhat less severe.

Similarly, the text is quite condemning in its depiction of King David when he falls in love with Bat Sheva and sends her husband off to die in the wore. But the Oral Torah tells us, "Whomever says King David sinned is nothing but erring." (Shabbos 56a)

The text, considered with "mountain top" ideals, is about an ideal in the first sense of the word, and how a real human always falls short. We strive for it; we don't ever actually reach it. The problem with being "in the 'image' of the Divine" is that our ideal selves are always infinitely far away.

The Oral Torah depicts King David as being an ideal in the second sense of the term "ideal". He falls short of perfection in an absolute sense, but is always progressing. When he falls, it's not as complete of a fall as it looks compared to absolute perfection.

Ol Mitzvos is accepting the path there, all the nitty-gritty work of attitudes, desires, priorities, virtues and behaviors. When someone accepts *ol mitzvos*, they are reprioritizing their wants so that they actually want to do Hashem's Will. Doing the work to become the person that someone bearing *ol malkhus Shamayim* wants to become.

The first paragraph of Shema as well as Rosh haShanah is about aiming for the right mountain top, the aspirational ideal. The wanting to be the kind of person who wants the right thing. It comes first because it's the draw that gets us to the next step, the actual desire to do the work to get there. The second paragraph, *Vehayah Im Shamo'a*, is about *ol mitzvos*, *halakhah* — the art of walking (\הלכ = walk / travel) up the mountain. Yom Kippur is for taking that next step forward.

Selichah, Mechilah, Kapparah, Yir'ah and Simchah

In Mesilas Yescharim ch. 24, the Ramchal describes the various types of *yir'ah* (awe / fear):

1- *Yir'as ha'onesh*: fear of punishment. This is the lowest of the three. However, since even fear of punishment is a motivator, even *yir'as ha'onesh* is viewed positively.

2- *Yir'as Shamayim*: fear of [the One in] heaven. This is the lofty goal. It, in turn, comes in two flavors:

2a- *Yir'as hacheit*: fear of sin. This is distinct from the fear of punishment; it is a fear of the sin itself, of the possibility of erring. Mesilas Yescharim continues that when a traditional source speaks of “*yir'ah*” without specification, it means *yir'as hacheit* (fear of the sin [itself]).

It is a kind of fear of heaven in that one is worried about letting G-d down, about doing something that would ruin the relationship.

The Maharal (Nesivas Olam, Nesiv Yir'as Hashem chapter 1) writes that “*yir'as hacheit*” (fear of the sin itself, which the Ramchal called the default definition of “*yir'ah*”) comes from a love of Hashem. When you love Someone, you give great importance to not disappointing Him.

2b- *Yir'as haRomemus*: fear of the Grandeur [of G-d].

Note that as the Ramchal progresses, the translation for *yir'ah* as “fear” becomes steadily less compelling, and that of “awe”, or acting with “awareness of the magnitude of what one is engaging in”, seem more appropriate.

In *Vidui*, we ask for three things: *selichah*, *mechilah* and *kapparah*. (According to Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch these are in descending order — *selichah* is full repair of the sin, whereas *kapparah* is the containment of its punishment. I would like to suggest an explanation of the terms consistent with the Avudraham's position that they are an ascending sequence.)

According to the Avudraham, *selichah* is being pardoned from any due punishment. This may also be the meaning of “*veHashem yislach lah* – and Hashem will forgive her” of her vow (Bamidbar 30:6,9,13), where the vow being annulled has not been violated. It is the release from a debt or responsibility.

Mechilah is forgiveness. There are no ill feelings remaining from the act. As Rashi writes (*teshuvah* #245), ““If he hugged him and kissed him, there is no *mechilah* greater than this.” The same idea is echoed by the Chasam Sofer (Derashos, Shabbos Shuvah). We do not obtain forgiveness from Hashem for sins done against another without first trying to obtain *mechilah* from the person offended. However, the Chasam Sofer writes, “In the time when the *Beis haMiqdash* stood, we do not find that there was an obligation for every Jew to seek *mechilah* from his friend on *erev Yom Kippur*. For it is the nature of the *qorbanos* to bring the hearts of men closer, and to make peace among them on their own.”

Kapparah is from the same root as “*kapores*”, the cover of the Aron, the

“*kofer*”, pitch, used to cover wood for waterproofing, and the cover of “*kefor*”, frost, atop the manna (Shemos 16:14). And thus, the preposition usually used with it is “*al*” (on), as we shall see, as it is also in the descriptions of *kaparah* through *qorban* in Vayiqra, 4:20, 26, 31, etc.... For whatever it’s worth, the cognate in arabic is /*gfr*/ which refers to covering or hiding. (This translation is that of the Ibn Ezra and Ramban, but not necessarily that of Rashi. See their respective commentaries on Bereishis 32:22, where Yaaqov’s appeasement gift to Esav is intended so that “*akhaperah panav*”. Also Rashi on 1:10. With thanks to R’ Avi Fertig for this last citation which pushed me to find the other *rishonim*.)

I would therefore suggest that *kaparah* is the containment of the inclination that led to the sin. This also explains the verse “*Ki bayom hazeh yechapeir aleichem litaher eschem mikol chatoseichim, lifnei Hashem titeharu* — for on this day, it will provide *kaparah* upon you to make you *tahor*, before *Hashem* you will become *tahor*” links *kapparah* to *taharah*. *Taharah*, purity (as in the “*zahav tahor*”, pure gold, of the *menorah*), is freedom from adulterations, negative habits inculcated into the soul. *Kaparah*, then is a prior step, where they are still present but contained. Beyond pardon from punishment and restoration of the relationship, but starting the healing of the very self.

These three stages parallel the three types of *yir’ah* described above.

Selichah, pardon from punishment, is a resolution of the sinner’s *yir’as ha’onesh* (fear of punishment).

Someone with *yir’as hacheit*, who values His relationship with the Creator, is concerned with the impact of his actions on that relationship. That concern is resolved through *mechilah*, a restoration of that relationship.

Kaparah, by containing the cause of the sin, isolating off the personal flaw, is a step toward closing that gap between my finite self and the *romemus*, the greatness of the Almighty. From that *kaparah*, one can become a person with a healthier relationship with Hashem and with others, and from there all his debts to them would naturally be pardoned.

Teshuvah can thus be described as a return to *Yir’ah*.

This thought might explain why the last *mishnah* in *Ta’anis* includes *Yom Kippur* when it says, “There were no more joyous days for Israel than *Yom Kippur* and the Fifteenth of *Av*.” We can compare the Ramchal’s *yir’as hacheit* (fear of sin) to Rav Avraham Elya Kaplan’s definition of *yir’ah* in *BeIqvos haYirah* (tr. R YG Bechhofer):

... To what may *yir’ah* be likened? To the tremor of fear which a father feels when his beloved young son rides his shoulders as he dances with him and rejoices before him, taking care that he not fall off. Here there is joy that is incomparable, pleasure that is incomparable. And the fear tied up with them is pleasant too. It does not impede the freedom of dance... It passes through them like a spinal column that straightens and strengthens. And it envelops them like a modest frame that lends grace and pleasantness... It is clear to the father that his son is riding securely upon him and will not fall back, for he constantly remembers him, not for a moment does he forget him. His

son's every movement, even the smallest, he feels, and he ensures that his son will not sway from his place, nor incline sideways – his heart is, therefore, sure, and he dances and rejoices. If a person is sure that the “bundle” of his life's meaning is safely held high by the shoulders of his awareness, he knows that this bundle will not fall backwards, he will not forget it for a moment, he will remember it constantly, with *yir'ah* he will safekeep it. If every moment he checks it – then his heart is confident, and he dances and rejoices...

When the Torah was given to Israel solemnity and joy came down bundled together. They are fused together and cannot be separated. That is the secret of “*gil be're'ada*” (joy in trembling) mentioned in Tehillim. Dance and judgment, song and law became partners with each other... Indeed, this is the balance... A rod of noble *yir'ah* passes through the rings of joy... {It is clear from the original Hebrew that this is a reference to the rods that held the boards together to make the walls of the Tabernacle. -mb} [It is] the inner rod embedded deep in an individual's soul that connects end to end, it links complete joy in this world (eating, drinking and gift giving) to that which is beyond this world (remembering the [inevitable] day of death) to graft one upon the other so to produce eternal fruit.

Awareness of magnitude brings more weight to the event. It's the difference between the joy of dancing at a *siyum* and that of dancing at wedding, or dancing at a friend's wedding and dancing at one's daughter's. Because the wedding is so momentous, the joy is that much more intense. To return to R' Avraham Elya Kaplan's metaphor, the depth of my love for my son adds to the joy of dancing with him. Without the *yir'ah*, the awareness of what a big thing it is to put one's son atop one's shoulders, the joy wouldn't be there.

Yom Kippur is a day of returning to *yir'as Shamayim*. And thus, a day on which we realize the depth of the gifts we receive, the accomplishments we have, and even begin to see meaning on the tribulations in our life. A day of joy.

Aval Asheimim Anachnu

In *parashas Vayigash*, the brothers admit to the viceroy of Egypt their guilt in selling their brother. They declare, “*Aval asheimim anachnu*, ... – But we are guilty, over our brother, that we saw the pain of his soul when he called to us and we didn’t listen...”¹

The Rambam offers a similar text for *vidui*, confession. He writes, “The *vidui* that all of Israel practice is ‘*Aval anachnu chatanu*’ – But we have sinned.”² The Lechem Mishnah³ points us to the origin of this three word *Vidui*. R’ Mareidah⁴ recalled that the only part of *vidui* that Shemu’el stood for was these three words, and from this the *gemara* deduces that this is the *iqar vidui*, the essence of confession. One is obligated to stand for *vidui*, so if Shemu’el held that standing for this alone was sufficient, then it alone is the essential *vidui*.

However, the Rambam opens his discussion of *teshuvah* with a totally different formula for *vidui*. “... How does one confess? One says, “Please, Hashem! I erred, I sinned, I acted rebelliously before You, and I did such-and-such. Now I regret and I’m embarrassed of my actions, and I will never repeat this thing.”⁵ Here the definition of confession is described as having a number of components: (1) approaching G-d, (2) admitting guilt, (3) spelling out the particular sin, (4) embarrassment, and (5) abandoning the sin.

The *vidui* said when giving a *qorbon* holds four of these elements. “How does he confess? He says, “I erred, I sinned, I acted rebelliously, and I did such-and-such, and I return in *teshuvah* before You. And this is my atonement.”⁶ This confession is said after the actual repentance, which must precede the offering. We can suggest that the missing element, the “Please Hashem!” of formal approachment to G-d, is unnecessary for someone who actually traveled to the *Beis haMiqdosh* with a *qorban* – a word that means “approach”. For similar reasons, repentance should leave the person with feelings of embarrassment. (For example, the prohibition against causing embarrassment to a *ba'al teshuvah* by reminding him of his sin. But these differences pale in comparison to our original text.

Why does the Rambam give two different texts? And the confession is defined as requiring 5 different elements, how can a simple “But we have sinned” be sufficient?

R Zeligman Baer, in the Roedlheim Siddur,⁷ has the text of “We are not stubborn, ... *aval*, but we have sinned.” He translates “*aval*” as “*ela*” along the lines of “but” or “rather”. What does “rather” mean? We use it to connect two

¹ Bereishis 42:21

² Hilkhos Teshuvah 2:8

³ Ad Loc. 8

⁴ Yuma 87b

⁵ Hilkhos Teshuvah 1:1

⁶ Hilkhos Ma’aseh Qorbanos 3:15

⁷ Vidui for Yom Kippur. Interestingly, his *siddur* reads “but we have sinned” unlike our version which reads “but we and our forefathers have sinned.”

propositions, both considered true simultaneously (like the word “and”), where the first is stated in the negative and the second elaborates in the positive. For example, “I won’t be going to work tomorrow, rather I will be observing Yom Kippur.”

How does that work here? Doesn’t R’ Mareidah start their confession with the word *aval*? What’s the first clause being contrasted? Baer answers that the *gemara* meant that *Shemu’el* stood for the whole paragraph. However, as the *Talmud* does in many quotes, it only cited part of the full text.

With all due respect, there are a few difficulties with this answer. First, it’s rare if ever that the *gemara* quotes the end rather than the beginning portion of a longer text. Second, the Rambam and Lechem Mishnah treat this *halakhah* as a stand-alone quote; they don’t discuss combining this *Vidui* with the other. Third, in our text the brothers begin their confession with the word “*aval*”.

I would like to suggest that in this case the first proposition of the “*aval*” is not a stated text, but to all of the person’s life until this point. It’s a succinct statement of abandonment of the sin. More than that — this first “clause” of life is explained by the second clause of confession. It’s the realization that life until now was sinful that motivates the contrast point to by the word “*aval*”. Akin to Reish Lakish’s statement that *teshuvah* motivated by love can turn them into merits.¹ This fits the translation the Targum gives our verse for “*aval*” – “in truth”², a translation that removes the normal connective use of “*aval*”, leaving the meaning that the following clause is true. Yes, this is the underlying reason, the truth, behind why I’m avowing to stop.

The words of the *siddur*, “*Aval anachnu chatanu*” could have just been “*Aval chatanu*” with no change in translation. I think it is significant that we draw attention to “*anachnu*”, our selves. Unlike a guilty party saying that “violence erupted”, we stress that it was I who did it. An admission that not only the act has to be addressed, but also the self and the personality that lead to it.

If we take the brothers’ *Vidui* as the origin of this one, it’s even more so— “*Aval asheimim anachnu*” doesn’t describe an activity, that’s in the rest of the *pasuq*. “*Asheimim*” is an adjective, a self-description. Perhaps we change it into “*chatanu*” for reasons similar to why so many social workers and psychologists avoid labeling. If someone defines themselves as “an angry person”, they minimize their ability to change. “What can I do? That’s what I am!” Perhaps this motivated Chazal’s change, making the language into something less definitional.

But even without this speculation, we have a means of explaining why the Rambam provides two different versions of *vidui*, and why our *siddur* ask us to say both. The first *vidui* is on the act, which is why it must include an itemization of the particular sin. The second on the whole attitude that lead to the act. There are in essence two kinds of repentance.

It’s not until Yosef reveals himself that the brothers learn the full extent of how the post “*aval*” world is a truth that is built upon their pre-confession life.

¹ Yuma 86a, as Reish Lakish is explained by subsequent *gemara*

² Followed also by Rashi ad loc.

“Hashem sent me before you to give a remnant in the land...”¹ This is a critical lesson for the *ba'al teshuvah*. Rather than regret the “wasted years”, the false steps taken. They become like merits, steps in the positive result, a critical part of the ovoid Hasiem the person is today. The “*aval*” of personal change is not only a contrast; it is also a critical connection.

Anu ma'amirekha ve'Atah ma'amireinu

“*Anu ma'amirekha ve'Atah ma'amireinu.*” Artscroll renders this line from the *machzor* as referring to us as Hashem's designated, and Him as our Designator. I would like to suggest a second translation.

The *mishnah* says that Hashem created the world with “*eser ma'maros* — ten utterances”. *Ma'amar* means utterances, and in particular, Chazal associate it with the ten statements through which Hashem created the world. Existence is words. *Devarim*, objects, are from *diburim*, statements. The Ba'al Shem Tov stresses that the idea is speech, not writing. Texts are written, and then continue to exist afterward. Spoken words exist as long as they are being spoken. For light to exist now, it means that Hashem is still saying the words “*yehi or*” even today. The words themselves are the phenomenon we call light.

I therefore believe the relationship described is actually “We are Your statement, and You are the One Who speaks us.”

¹ Bereishis 45:7

Invoking The Thirteen Middos

The Jews were impatient for Moshe's return from atop the mountain and teach them Hashem's Torah. They made themselves a new go-between for relating to G-d, a Golden Calf. After forty days they received the Torah anew. But Moshe was not content; he ascended Mount Sinai a third time, seeking to heal the rift opened between the Jewish People and their Creator. It was the end of a third set of forty days, the date that Hashem would subsequently consecrate as Yom Kippur. Moshe Rabbeinu knew of nothing left to do. Rabbi Yochanan explains, "*Had the Torah not said it, it would be prohibited to say. It teaches that Hashem wrapped Himself in a tallis like a chazzan, and taught Moshe an order of prayer. [Hashem] said to him, 'Whenever Israel sin, they can perform this order before Me and I will forgive them. 'Hashem Hashem...'*"¹ Rav Yehudah adds, "*Hashem made a covenant that the Thirteen Attributes will never return empty. As it says, 'Behold I am making a covenant'*"^{2,3}

Based on this *gemara*, the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy were made into the centerpiece of selichos. After all, they come with a guarantee of forgiveness.

And yet... We all know people who say these words with deep conviction and with every fiber of their being in Elul and the Aseres Yemei *Teshuvah* but don't have perfect years. In fact, the entire concept doesn't seem to fit; are we really saying an unrepentant murderer simply recite a couple of verses and be forgiven?

Unfortunately, it can't and shouldn't be so simple. Hashem is Just, everything He does for us is for the best. A simple recitation of a few words can't bribe Him to give us something we want. If it is appropriate, we would get it without asking; if it were not, Hashem would not give to our pleas to give us something He knows would harm us overall. The verb *tefillah* is generally conjugated in the reflexive; to pray is "*lehitpalel*", something one does to oneself. Prayer is not bribery, it is changing oneself into the kind of person who deserves more and would be better served by having.

When Hashem promises that "they can perform this order before Me and I will forgive them", He is speaking of actual performance. Not just saying the words, but imitating Hashem by relating to others with the same aspects of mercy that we see in how He relates to us.⁴

Rav Moshe Cordevero reaches this conclusion from another direction. In Tomer Devorah, he explains the 13 attributes of Divine Mercy, in particular showing them as exemplars for us to follow — "just as I Am Merciful, so too you be

¹ Shemos 34:6-7

² Ibid 34:10

³ Rosh HaShanah 17b

⁴ Alternatively, one can relate this idea to the two forms of *teshuvah* delineated by R' AY Kook (see pg. 2). The idea of the covenant of the Thirteen Attributes being about their recitation is more of R' Kook's first approach. It's the notion that redemption originates from G-d, as a gift to be requested. To be guaranteed real life change, though, one must invest significant effort in the second sort of *teshuvah*. It's a slow, sometimes tiring process.

merciful.” “*It is proper for man to emulate His Creator, for then he will attain the secret of the Supernal Form, Image and Likeness.... For the essence of the Supernal Image and Likeness are His actions... Therefore, it is appropriate that he emulate the actions of Keser, which are the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.*”¹

It is not enough to learn the *gemara* and see the first *middah*, “Hashem ... – before man sins”² (Rosh Hashanah, *ibid.*) One must take the lesson to heart. Am I kind to others before I have any interaction with them? I might be inclined to be nice to “one of our own”, but how am I toward outsiders, toward strangers? “... Hashem – after he sins and repents” Do I really forgive someone when I accept his apology? Do I violate the prohibition against taking revenge, and feel justified in wronging those who wronged me? Or, do I sin in the reverse, by making a point of telling the person that I will not wrong them as they did to me?

Rabbeinu Tam³ counts out and explains the attributes. We can look between his words for ways in which we can try to embody them. And, using the trope and the connective *vav*’s linking the *middos*, we can group them into four sets to help us break the list down into manageable pieces.

Set 1: Before the Sin, After the Sin

The *gemara* writes, “Hashem, Hashem’ – He is the G-d of Mercy before one sins, and the G-d of Mercy after one sins and repents.” What is the mercy necessary before one sins? Rashi explains that even though Hashem knows that we are going to sin, He still shows us mercy. How much more so we, who do not know how relationships will turn out, need to show kindness. It’s sometimes difficult to be kind to someone we haven’t yet met, someone with whom we do not yet have a history.

Rather than following the original revelation of these attributes in *seifer Shemos*, Rav Moshe Cordevero uses the version found in *seifer Mikhah* (7:18-20) that we say during *tashlikh*. It begins by describing this first *middah* with the words “*Mi Keil Kamokha – Who could be Divine like You...*” Using that quote, he explains this attribute in a different but somewhat similar way.

Picture a father determined to teach his son how to pitch a baseball. This boy starts picking up the basic skill while at the same time he develops anger toward his father, or perhaps simply gets so caught up in pitching that he altogether forgets his father is there. And so, each time the father returns the ball, the son throws the ball powerfully, right at his father. The father overlooks the offence once, twice... but how many times would he continue returning the ball just for it to be used as a weapon against him?

Hashem sustains existence. We are here in this moment, with the energy to act and the wisdom to plan my actions because of His Mercy. When someone sins, he is using the very existence and power Hashem granted him to violate Hashem’s Will. And yet, He gives us another opportunity again, and again, and again. Perhaps this is the motivation for the prohibition “*lo siqom* - do not take revenge”.

¹ Tamar Devorah, ch. 1

² Rosh HaShanah, *ibid*

³ Ad loc

Punishment for the sole sake of revenge can be pointless; it is only when punishment is instructional that it become constructive. Anger and impatience are usually not the path to the resolution of the problem, but rather convince us to stop traveling that road before we get there.

The father in our parable should punish the son if that is educational and constructive. But not to stifle him out of anger.

This, the Tomer Devorah tells us, is the meaning of “*Mi Keil Kamokha...*” and thus, of the first appearance of Hashem’s name in the *Middos*. To have the patience to carry someone even while they offend you, to wait for someone to realize their foolishness. Allowing others the room to be partners in a resolution, rather than vengefully imposing one’s will on them. When we are first starting a history with someone, or are starting a new stage in our relationship, do we give them time for the relationship to form or change?

And after one sins, Hashem allows us to repent, to let the relationship heal. Do we too have the strength to let bygones be bygones? When someone asks for forgiveness, do we truly let go of the hurt, and treat them the way we did before?

Set 2: Sharing All That You Have

“*Keil*” – Even though it’s related to the name “*E-lokim*”, which denotes Divine Justice, “*Keil*” refers to His Mercy. As a different *gemara* points out, David cries “*Keili Keili, lamah azavtani* – My G-d, my G-d, why have You abandoned me?” *Keil* is the Master of All Forces in creation. When someone asks us for help, do we invest the same effort and financial resources we would do for our own wants and needs, or only do what’s convenient and wouldn’t put us out overly much?

“*Rachum*” – The root of the word “*rachum*” is “*rechem*”, womb. *Rachamim* is mercy and empathy as it derives from maternal compassion. A mother loves a child knowing it as an extension of herself. Hashem shows us mercy for we too are His children.

Rav Shim’on Shkop describes this as the key to being able to give.¹ A person most readily provides for himself. He has little problem sacrificing for his children and immediate family. Slightly more noble is sacrificing for one’s extended family. Even more, one’s community. Extending further, one’s country. One’s people. The world. If one could see the interconnectedness, that others are part of my sphere of concern, my greater self, I would be able to utilize selfishness itself to be a giving person.

Hillel asks, “If I am not for myself (*li*), who will be for me? And when I am for my lonesome (*li’atzmi*), what am I?” Rav Shim’on explains: If I am not for this greater self, who will be? And when I am for the narrower perspective of myself, I am nothing.

That is *rachamim*. Sharing in the pain of others and working to resolve it because one realizes that it’s not their pain, it’s our pain.

“*Vechanun*” – undeserved kindness. Esther asked if “*matz’asi chein*”, found favor, in Achashveirosh’s eyes. *Chein* is found, not worked for or earned. To be

¹ Sha’arei Yosher, introduction

chanun is to give simply for the sake of giving. It is listed here with the prefix “*ve-*”, and, because it is a further development of the theme introduced by “*Rachum*”. Our love for ourselves is also unconditional and doesn’t need to be earned. Do we give to others simply, as a child would say, “because”?

Section 3: Tolerance vs. Enabling

“*Erech apayim*” – slow to anger. Hashem gives us opportunity to do *teshuvah*. How often do we make snap judgments, losing our temper before knowing all the facts, before seeing the situation from the others’ perspective, without taking into account that they too are human and can err?

“*Verav chesed*” – *Chesed*, the simple giving of One Who has to the one who has not. Hashem answers those who seek His help in accomplishing their goals, purposes, and desires in life. Beyond “*Erech apayim*”, taking others’ frailties and imperfections into account and giving them time and opportunity to correct their own course. Hashem gives because He has, and we do not. He is perfect, we – not so.

Every person is limited in some way. Some are physically disabled, others don’t have sufficient financial resources, others may lack some mental skills, or think slowly in general, people have emotional handicaps, life problems that overwhelm them or use up their patience and energy be constantly threatening to, intellectually or emotionally handicapped, or even someone who lacks the upbringing or background to know how to make proper and moral choices.

Chesed is to share our talents and gifts to those that are lacking in those particular areas.

“*Ve’emes*” – Truth. *Chesed* and *emes* are often at odds. When someone does something wrong, *emes* requires that he live with the consequences of his actions. *Chesed* would have us protect him from them. The key is to know when we’re following Hashem’s trait, as described in *Shemoneh Esrei*, of “*Gomeil chassadim tovim* – He Who supports others through good generosity” and when the *chessed* is neither good nor supporting.

Most often we take the limited-me perspective. When it comes to *atzmi*, to I myself, I want *chessed*. I look at the excuses and dodge blame. I am not wrong, I am flawed. When it comes to others, we are more likely to insist on *emes*. Evil! Destructive! Root it out!

The key to Divine *Tov*, Divine Good, is to know the proper synthesis of *chessed* and *emes*.

Set 4: Counting the Gifts, Not the Hurts

“*Notzeir chesed la’alafim*” – Hashem keeps kindness for thousands. *Hakaras hatov*, acknowledging and recognizing the good that others do for us, requires not only crediting them for their actions, but also for the myriads of consequences of those actions, and the consequences of those consequences, etc.... Hashem rewards good for the thousandth generation, as the impact of the good trickles down through time.

Evil, on the other hand, is destructive and therefore self-destructive. G-d, in his Goodness, created the world such that the effects of evil naturally dampen out

over time. Punishment for evil is later described as being to the fourth generation, one five-hundredth of the consequences of good.

We, however, tend to remember our hurts far more than our blessings. When relating to other people, we more readily dredge up past wrongs than past favors. To master *hakaras hatov* we need to reverse that tendency.

“*Nosei avon*” – He Who carries intentional sin. Hashem loves us even when our values do not align with His, when we choose sin.

“*Vafesha*” – He also carries our burden of careless sin. While *pesha* is less severe than willful sinning, in another sense it shows a more significant flaw. The one who commits an *avon* has concern for G-d. The *poshei'ah* is apathetic about something Hashem considers significant.

“*Vachata'ah*” – Greater kindness than His bearing with our poor judgment, or our lack of concern, Hashem even maintains His love for us during a moment of rebellion against Him.

“*Venakeih*” – Hashem cleanses. Even when He punishes, the purpose of the punishment is not revenge or somehow balancing the ledger. His punishment cleans the effects of our actions for us.

To approach Hashem with the Attributes doesn't merely mean to use them to ask Hashem for mercy. Rather, it's the development of the self so as to better embody those attributes. It is someone who is working on that change who is guaranteed not to leave one empty handed.

These aren't quick and easy changes. Each *middah* can take years of effort. But through effort we earn and acquire our *teshuvah*, we guarantee its permanence.

This is a hard message to accept, particular living in the culture that we do. The Alter of Kelm, Rav Simcha Zisel Ziv, reassures us. “The work is long, it will take a lifetime. But that is exactly why you were given a lifetime in which to do it.

Mastering all thirteen *middos* is quite obviously too large of a task to tackle in one Tishrei. Perhaps by incrementally working on each, developing the skills piecemeal in manageable steps, and looking to the general themes of each of the categories of *middos* we can reach for the Almighty.

May we come to Hashem this Yom Kippur from the midst of the ascent through the Thirteen *Middos* so that He may fulfill His covenant and grant you and all of us a year of blessing and peace, of comfort, health, happiness and plenty, of meaning and *mitzvos*, Torah, and sanctity.

Appendix: The Mechanism of Teshuvah

As the *Yamim Nora'im* approach, it is only logical to wonder about the phenomenon of *teshuvah*. Chazal tell us that *teshuvah* is a gift from Hashem Yisborach, that Divine Justice alone would not allow a man to be freed from accountability for one of his actions. What is *teshuvah*? By what mechanism does it work?

Let's start by taking a step back and looking at *sechar va'onesh* – reward and punishment. Perhaps if we understood what punishment is, we would understand how *teshuvah* works and how it can “pass through the evil of the decree.”¹

There is a school of psychotherapy called “Behavioral Therapy” (and its child, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) -- CBT, which merges its ideas with a second prong of attack focusing on the thought behind the behavior). Theorists have found that by consciously deciding to behave a certain way, your character will change to fit that behavior. It is inevitable to compare this to the halachic concept “*Mitoch shelo lishma, ba lishma*” – “From [doing a *mitzvah*] without proper intent, one will come to do it with proper intent.” The goal of a *mitzvah* is not only to express ones love of G-d and his fellow man, but also a way to generate those feelings.

Part of Behavior Therapy and CBT is a commonly used parenting tool, changing patterns of behavior through reward and punishment. By making the consequences of the behavior more clear, the person will choose more constructive ones. These consequences are broken down into two classes: they can be imposed, a punishment meted out by the parent; or they can be natural, the normal consequences by cause and effect. For example, a child could learn not to touch a stove by either getting slapped on the hand each time she reaches for it, or by touching it once and getting hurt. The first is safer, the other is more effective. Which does Hashem use?

To ask the question another way: Does Hashem punish us to correct evil behavior, or did He build the world so that sin causes punishment as a natural consequence?

One answer² is quite clearly stated in this *parashas Nitzavim*. “*Hatzur tamim pa'alo...* The Archetype, His work is perfect, for all of His ways are just; a reliable G-d with no flaw, He is trustworthy and without iniquity. Is corruption His? No – His children's is the blemish, a crooked and perverse generation.”³ Any tribulations in our lives are not His corruption, but ours.

Similarly, Yirmiyahu Hanavi writes, “From the ‘Mouth’ of the One Above,

¹ Mussaf, Yamim Nora'im

² We will see in “The Gift of Justice”, pg. 45, that this is not the only true answer, and how two seemingly conflicting answers don't really contradict.

³ Devarim 32:4-5

come neither the evil nor the good.”¹ Yirmiyahu is not implying that what happens to us is by chance. “*Chai gever al chata’av* – a man lives on his sins.”² The suffering of the sinner is not attributed to Hashem, because it is a natural consequence of the sin. Rashi³ explains the prophet by invoking R. Yochanan’s comments on a *pasuq* we read the prior week, in *Ki Savo*, “I have placed before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; choose life so that you shall live!”⁴ Similarly, Bildad says to Iyov, “Since your children sinned to Him, He relegated them to the control of their iniquity.”⁵ And Rashi there explains that “sin iniquity was made a messenger to destroy them.” (However, it is possible to say that Bildad, a character in a dialog with whom we are not all that sympathetic, is necessarily correct.) Choosing between good and evil is not choosing between whether Hashem will reciprocate with life or death. By choosing between good and evil, you are choosing to bring upon yourself one or the other.

Along these lines, the *Ikkarim* describes *gehennom* a natural consequence of one’s actions. He writes that the “fires” of *gehennom*” are those of shame.⁶ Rabbeinu Yonah compares a sinful soul to a sick person. Just as a sick person suffers from his illness, the sinner suffers from his sins.⁷ From his perspective, *mitzvah* is a commandment more in the sense of “Doctor’s orders” than of “military orders”.

R. Chaim Vilozhiner derives a similar idea of *gehennom* as consequence of sin from a *gemara* in *Eiruvim*. “The wicked deepen *gehennom* for themselves.”⁸ What you get in the World to Come is the consequence of the *mitzvos* you do. R. Chaim takes this one step further to also make the full sequence sin to changes in the soul to reward and punishment in general. Each sin, he writes, causes a flaw in your soul. In true Divine Mercy, the punishment is both the natural consequence of this flaw and a key tool for healing it.⁹

The *Ramchal* too writes, “Sin detracts from one’s perfection.”¹⁰ Rav Eliyahu E. Dessler explains the expression “*aveirah goreres aveirah* – one sin is followed by [another] sin” by saying that after repeatedly doing a given sin, it becomes part of one’s nature; so that no conscious decision is required next time the situation arises.¹¹

We read on *Rosh HaShanah* that when Hagar and Yishma’el were kicked out of Avraham’s home, and were on the verge of death from thirst in the desert, G-d gave them a well. Yishma’el was not judged for the evil he did that made him

¹ Eikhah 3:38

² Ibid v 39

³ Ad loc

⁴ Davarim 30:19

⁵ Iyov 8:4

⁶ *Ikkarim* 4:33

⁷ *Sha’arei Teshuvah* 4:1

⁸ *Eiruvim* 19a

⁹ *Derech HaChaim* 1:21

¹⁰ *Derech Hashem* 1:4:5

¹¹ *Michtav MeiEliyahu* vol 1, pp. 113-114

unacceptable to Avraham's home, or the evil he will do, and his children still do. Yishma'el was repaid in terms of "*ba'asher hu sham* – as he was there."¹ The way your soul stands at that moment is the direct cause of reward or punishment.

This point is reiterated in the Yerushalmi². In the book of Job, Bildad tells the protagonist, "*im zakhar veyashar atah, ki atah ya'ir alakha...* -- If you were pure and honest, He would surely wake for you..." Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi points out the tense in the verse. Bildad does not say "*hayisa*", if you were pure and honest, but rather "*atah*" – if this description fit you now. As the Shaarei Teshuvah explains³ that if one were to do *teshuvah* and be pure now, it is on that he is judged, and not how he behaved in the past.

Notice that this implies a major statement. *We are not judged for what we did, we pay the consequences for who we are.* As the *midrash* states, one of the first three questions the Almighty will ask as part of the final judgment is, "Why did you not fulfill your potential?" Man is judged based upon the gap between reality and potential. Mitzvos were given as vehicles for closing this gap.

This also gives us a means to start addressing another difficult point. We learn that a man gets a minor punishment for *aveiros beshogeg* (accidental sins). Why would a man deserve any punishment for a crime he did not intend to commit? Now we can understand that Hashem is not pinning blame, but rather the damage caused by the wrongful act is correcting itself. An action can be destructive whether we intended it to be or not.

The key to *teshuvah* is to make a basic character change, to take the character flaw associated with a given sin and eradicate it by conscious decision. As we said above, man is judged by what he is. After *teshuvah*, he is no longer the person who is capable of such a sin. By removing the flaw, he is that much closer to his potential. He no longer needs punishment to correct his behavior. The gap is that much smaller, and so the punishment is so much less.

In this context, *teshuvah* is more understandable. The Rambam says: "What is complete *teshuvah*? When the opportunity to do an *aveira* he did earlier comes to him, and he is able to do it, but he refrains from it, and doesn't do it – because of the *teshuvah*."⁴ Rav Yoseph Ber Soleveitchik explains, "the Baal *Teshuvah* says that he is a new man; the man who performed the sin no longer exists."⁵

Since, as R. Chaim Vilozhiner writes, punishment is the natural consequence of the flaw in one's soul, by taking the effort to remove that flaw, the punishment disappears on its own.

Teshuvah mei'ahavah, *teshuvah* caused by love of the Creator, causes the *aveiros* not just to be ignored, but even to be considered as mitzvos.⁶ Each *aveirah* can become something to regret, motivation for learning a lesson, so that each

¹ Bereishis 21:17

² Rosh haShanah 1:3, Vilna ed. 7b

³ 1:41 / 1:47, depending on edition

⁴ Hilchos Teshuvah 1:2

⁵ Al HaTeshuvah

⁶ Reish Laqish, Yuma 86b

Appendix: The Mechanism of Teshuvah

brings him closer to the ideal Hashem has for him. Through *teshuvah* a person can improve himself to the extent of being beyond where he would have been had he not sinned. And in that way, it serves the role of a *mitzvah*, a tool for self-improvement.

Lishana tovah teikateivu veteichateimu! May Hashem take our *teshuvah* and fulfill another *pasuq* of this parshah *Nitzavim*, “And Hashem will return your captives, and have mercy upon you.” (30:3)

Of Empty Cups

In the previous essay we looked at how Yishma'el was judged "as he is there". Not for what he did or will do, but the state of his soul at the moment. Thus, *teshuvah*, by healing the soul, can make the person one who no longer deserves the punishment in question.

Now I would like to look more closely at exactly how sin affects the soul, such that the soul no longer receives maximal Divine Good. And how various positions on how to answer this question lies at the foundation of how we follow the Torah today.

If one puts a cup in the sink, and the cup doesn't fill as it ought, it could be for one of at least two basic reasons.

The first is that the cup's mouth isn't properly in the stream; this is the assumption that the utensil is fine, but not properly connected to the Source. Taking this approach to the human condition is suggested by the notion of the Ran (Derashos haRan ch. 10) and his student R' Yosef Albo (Seifer haIkarim 4:13), who hold that the effects of sin are to dirty the soul and that the punishment of sin is that barrier blocking the soul's access to Divine Good.

The implication is that the sinful soul itself is fine, but it made for itself a layer blocking it from the Light. And in fact, the Ramchal (in the opening paragraphs of Mesilas Yesharim), among many others, articulates this as the goal we seek to accomplish with *mitzvos*, that they are acts that bring us closer to G d. In contemporary terminology, we would call this a *deveiqus* (/dbq/ = attach) approach.

The other approach would be to assume the cup is flawed, perhaps its mouth could be widened, or there is a hole to repair. In this opinion, the purpose of life is to give us opportunities to perfect the self. Apparently this is the position of Rabbeinu Yona (Shaarei *Teshuvah* 4:1), who compares the soul of a sinner to someone who is sick. Just as a sick person suffers from his disease, so does a sinner feel the effects his deeds had on his soul. *Teshuvah* is a repairing or healing process. This leads to an approach to *mitzvos*, equally well represented (by R' Yehudah haLevi in the beginning of the Kuzari as just one example) as the previous¹, the idea of man's quest as *temimus*, or "*sheleimus ha'adam*", the completion of man. Man's goal in life is to strive for self-perfection.

Note that the *rishonim* cited, the Ran, R' Yosef Albo and Rabbeinu Yona, all define punishment as a consequence of sin, whether that sin causes imperfection or a barrier. Both sides of this debate are within the context of seeing *mitzvos* as "preparing on *erev Shabbos* so that one may eat on *Shabbos*." Or as we put it earlier², they are more "following doctor's orders", orders given for our own benefit, than dictates.

¹ See the previous essay, pg. 37

² Page 38.

The mitzvah of *beris milah*, the first mitzvah given to us as a people, is introduced with the words, “*Ani E-l Shad-ai, his-halekh lifanai v’heyei tamim* — I am *E-l Shad-ai*, walk yourself before Me, and be whole.” (Bereishis 17:1) How are we supposed to read this quote? Is the walking before G-d, *deveiqus*, that is primary, and being whole is a side effect? Or, is being whole the focus of the *pasuq*, and walking before G d is a means to reach that *temimus*?

Similarly, we say in the *Amidah* for Shabbos and Yom Tov, “*vetaheir libeinu le’avdecha be’emes* – purify our souls to serve You in truth.” One can see this in two ways: We request from Hashem that He purify us, so that we may reach that *deveiqus* to serve Him truthfully and reliably. Alternatively, we could be requesting *temimus*, that purity which we are describing by its enabling us to serve Him.

On another level, these two approaches are different aspects of the same idea. To achieve wholeness, so that the entire person is working harmoniously, he would necessarily be walking in Hashem’s path. The converse is equally true. If one strives for *deveiqus* to a singular G-d who has a single goal, how could he be a chaotic battleground of warring urges? Cleaving to G-d forces His priorities to be yours, thereby causing *temimus*, a wholeness and harmony of self.

This is not to say that there is no distinction in approach. By stressing different elements, there are profound practical implications. For example, consider the debate between Chassidim and non-Chassidim on the importance of davening in the appointed times. (We should be clear that the Chassidic position is that one must invest time to prepare for *davening*, even if this is at the expense of timeliness — it is not blanket permission to ignore the clock.) *Chassidus* is a *deveiqus*-based *hashkafah*. Therefore, when weighing the relative merits, it is more important to be able to invest time to prepare one’s mind and heart for the act of *tephillah*, for relating to Hashem, than when the *tephillah* actually begins. To someone with a *temimus* orientation, however, *zehirus*, meticulousness, care in how each facet of the *mitzvah* is done, is the more important consideration. *Zerizus*, haste to do what’s right, is an important *middah* (personality trait). Both come into play when considering the timeliness of *tephillah*.

Contemporary Orthodox Jewish thought embraces a number of variants of these two basic approaches.

Most forms of *Chassidus* consider the route to *deveiqus* to be the experience of each act, with the focus on having one’s feelings in line with those we can perceive in the Creator. The Ba’al HaTanya, on the other hand, focused on *Chaba”d* (insight, comprehension and knowledge), to make one’s thoughts G-dly. In this he follows the Rambam, (Moreh Nevuchim III ch. 51) who writes that one’s connection to Hashem is strictly determined by the extent of one’s knowledge of Him.

Similarly, there has been variation in the understanding of *temimus*. The Vilna Gaon writes, “the whole purpose of the Torah is to shatter the [evil] *middos*.” (Even Sheleimah, title, ch. 1) The *Ba’alei Mussar* took the idea further, and committed themselves to character improvement through means beyond *halakhah* as well. In Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch’s Neo-Orthodoxy, *temimus*

translates to a well-rounded individual, using *derekh erez* in service of Torah. To Rav Yosef-Ber Solovetichik zt”l, the goal of man is to maximize his creativity, to be in the image of the Creator (this is a major part of the thesis of Halachic Man; c.f. pg. 109)

Perhaps this plurality is the whole point of the Torah’s doubled phraseology. Because there many approaches to accomplishing the same end, Hashem didn’t specify one to the exclusion of the other. “*Derakheha darchei no’am*, its ways are ways of pleasantness” (Mishlei 3:17) – ways, in the plural. Each community or person can pick out a *derekh* that best suits him – as long as the goal is “*his-halech lifanai v’heyi tamim*”.

What we see is that our basic lifestyles can be understood in terms of a causal nature of reward and punishment. We may have different approaches, but we share a common theme. Hashem tells us which acts keep “dirt” from blocking His Light from reaching us and cause disease to the soul. Someone who violates the “Doctor’s orders” is simply incapable of receiving Hashem’s Good.

The Thermodynamics of History

When you drop a drop of ink into a cup of water, the ink spirals around in some chaotic pattern and eventually diffuses until the entire liquid is a uniform light blue. Even though each time you repeat the experiment the dance and spiral is different, something about it in the general is predictable. If you had different snapshots of the sequence that were far enough apart in time, you could place them in historical order – overall the blue area will get larger. Entropy always increases until it reaches the maximum. The system runs a certain way, reaching equilibrium.

History also has a known final state – the Messianic Era. The colorless, pure potential of this world will be eventually assigned a meaning represented by the sky-blue of *techeiles*, of the vision of sapphire paving stones under the heavenly throne during the revelation at Sinai (Exodus 24:10). Even though people have free will, and therefore how the process unfolds is not fixed, the general parameters are known. And, like the ink in the water, it's hard to understand the purpose of any particular dance or spiral in the process of history. But, we are tending toward an equilibrium.

And that means anything not in the equilibrium state will eventually cease to exist. At the end, there is no clear water. And, at the end, there is no evil. Evil must inherently destroy itself, or else there could be no guarantee of that Messianic equilibrium.

Perhaps this is the intent of Rabban Gamliel in the Mishnah:

הוא היה אומר: עשה רצונו כרצונך, כדי שיעשה רצונך כרצונו; בטל רצונך מפני רצונו,
כדי שיבטל רצון אחרים מפני רצונך.

He [Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah the Prince] used to say: Make that His Will should be your will, so that He should make your will to be as His Will. Nullify your will before His Will, so that He should nullify the will of others before your will.

- Pirquei Avos 2:4

This guarantee is inherent in the definition of good and evil. The word “*tov*” (like the English word “good”) has two meanings: functional and moral. When we say “This is a good pen”, we are speaking functionally – the pen is very effective at doing what pens are supposed to do. Similarly, a “bad pen” is one that leaks, is dried out, or is otherwise not a good writing tool.

Hashem created the world with a *tachlis*, a purpose, He placed each of us in it with a *tachlis*, and what is righteous is righteous because it is in accordance with furthering that *tachlis*. This fits Rav Hirsch's etymology for “*ra*”, being related to /רעע/, to shatter. It also explains why the word “*tov*” means both good in the moral sense (not evil) as well as in the functional sense (not ineffective, as in “a good toothpaste prevents cavities”). To prepare the menorah's lamps is called “*hatavas haneiros* – causing the functional usability of the lamps.” Moral *tov* derives from the functional *tov*. Hashem chose “Do not steal” over “Take whatever makes you happy” because that's what makes us better receptacles for His Good. According to this line of reasoning, “good at its job” is the underlying meaning of *tov* in the moral

sense of the word as well. One meaning derives from the other. Hashem defined moral good in terms of our function.

Therefore it's not only that the system is designed to lead to a particular end-state which lacks evil, and therefore we know that the forces of history must prune it away. Rather, evil is — by definition — that which isn't part of Hashem's ideal state for man. We are warned not to do it, we are told it has the label "*ra*", because choosing it will be part of it that which is destined to be pruned away. The labeling of an act as "*ra*" or "*cheit*" (sin), is akin to hanging up a sign warning of a cliff; Hashem is warning us to avoid that which causes suffering. Because they run counter to both our design and our future end-state, one is joining that which will be destroyed — and therefore are *ra*, shattering, breaking, activities.

This is, perhaps, what Hashem means in Devarim (30:19), when He says, "... I set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse, so that you shall choose life..." The commandments and prohibitions are simply a list of what happens to cause blessing, because it fits the plan, as well as the reverse.

From this perspective, not only isn't punishment seen as meted out, it's logically prior, not the consequence, of evil.

The Gift of Justice

In the past couple of essays we showed ways in which reward and punishment are the effects of the person's actions, and connected this to the ways in which we approach our Judaism today and our day-to-day *avodas Hashem*. We can look from the perspective of our own souls, that sin changes who we are which in turn changes how we experience reality, as we did in "The Mechanism" and further in "Empty Cups". Or, as we did in the previous essay, that in order for us to succeed, our goals must align with Hashem's goals for existence, and what reality will become. And yet...

Avraham pleads with Hashem to show pity on Sedom and Amora. Moshe repeatedly begs (and in one case demands!) pity for the Jewish people. We ask Hashem to reward the righteous and punish the wicked in separate *berakhos* of Shemoneh Esrei three times every weekday. Doesn't all this presume that Hashem is personally meting out reward and punishment, that we can ask Him to temper it with Divine Mercy?

The two perspectives co-exist in the Torah's description of the generation of the flood.

And Hashem saw that the wickedness of man was great in the world, and that every dream of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all day. Hashem "regretted" that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His "Heart". Hashem said, "I will erase this man that I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and creeping thing, and fowl of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them." ...

The earth was corrupt before G-d, and the earth was filled with violence. G-d saw the earth, and, behold, it was destroyed; for all flesh had destroyed their way upon the earth. And G-d said to Noach, "The end of all flesh has come before me, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; Here, I will destroy them with the earth."

- Bereishis 6:5-7,11-13

The "end of all flesh" is described as occurring on its own, something which Hashem observes – punishment as a consequence. And yet, the actual destruction is something Hashem declares He will do Himself, due to His "regret" – meting out punishment.

The chapter asks us to hold both perceptions simultaneously, neither to the exception of the other.

The Sifri on *parashas Re'ei* notes that Hashem "places before you a blessing and a curse; a blessing that you listen and a curse if you do not listen" implies that the blessing is inherent in the listening. Similarly, Hashem's words to Qayin (Bereishis 4:6), "Why are you angry? And why are you crestfallen? For if you do good, you would be lifted up, and if you do not do good, your sin will pursue..." Here too, Qayin's fate is described as being caused by his action, to the point that Hashem questions why Qayin turns to Him.

The Sifri presents two opinions. (And a personal point of satisfaction, the

debate is between two sons of R' Yosi haGelili. Brothers arguing, how familiar!)

Rav Eliezer b"R Yosi haGelili supports the "causal" position. In one version, he brings another supporting *pasuq* from Mishlei (18:21) "Death and life are in the control of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit (consume its dividends).' One who loves [good] speech eats its fruits; one who loves evil eats its fruits." In the second version brought by the Sifri, his proof is another verse (11:31), "The righteous in the world *yeshulam* are paid (in the passive, with no one named as payer), even more so the evil and sinner!"

Rav Yosi ben Rav Yosi haGelili disagrees. "The Torah says (Mishlei 16:4), 'All of Hashem's actions are for His sake, and even the wicked for the day of evil.'" Punishing the wicked is Hashem's action, not the wicked person himself's.

As we already noted¹, *caused* punishments are more effective than imposed ones. A child learns faster when the unwanted outcome flows directly from the act rather than being arbitrary and blamable on another.

The causal approach also mitigates the problem of theodicy, "why bad things happen to good people", a central religious issue and one that notoriously lacks a definitive solution. It is obviously desirable to remove G-d from being the direct cause of human pain.

On the other hand, a G-d who does not directly and personally punish evil and rewards good, appears far too distant and irrelevant. It is difficult to worship or pray to such a Deity. In fact, in order to become the kind of person who deserves better, we *daven*, engaging in a personal relationship with the Almighty. The causal perspective demands the personal one.

This could well be the key to why we have both perspectives.

And in truth, there are hints that the contradiction is an illusion created by the human perspective.

It's akin to the question of omnipotence and miracles: Since Hashem knows everything and can do everything, there is no reason for nature to be imperfect. Why then would He need to "tweak" things with *nissim*? Many answers are offered. The Ramban offers two answers in *parashas Bo*, the Maharal and R' Hutner argue (in two very different ways) that *nissim* are not tweaks but actually part of the mechanism, etc... One of the Ramban's answers is that *nissim* were written into the rules when they were created. (As I understand him, that the law is that fluids seek the lowest point except for the 22nd of Elul, when the Jews reached the Red Sea, and again 40 years later when they reached the Jordan.)

The same resolution that would explain how miracles can exist while the rules don't need second-guessing would explain how a "Personally" given reward and punishment can exist even while being causal and a "natural consequence". Each option is a simplification of the Divine Truth whittled down to fit into the human mind. It seems possible to get a glimpse of how they could be describing

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the same reality.

Hashem is the both the One Who created the system of supernatural law that would cause any automatic *sechar va'onesh*, as well as the One Who would be imposing it personally. When he set up the law, Hashem did it cognizant of every outcome of it. The law would include knowledge of each instance, no less than if Hashem intervened at each instance. The difference is merely when the decision was made. And since Hashem has no time, no “when”, do they really differ?

The duality of natural vs. imposed is a consequence of a duality central to our perception of Hashem: The imminence of the personal Giver verses the transcendence of the One Who set up perfect rules of justice. And this, in turn, is the product of the basic paradox in the human condition – that the ultimate good we can receive from Hashem is the opportunity to create our own good rather than passively receive.

It is the nature of good to have someone to whom to be good.

- Derekh Hashem 1:2:1¹

With these words the Ramchal explains Hashem’s purpose for creating man. In the Torah, Hashem introduces the idea of creating people with the words “let Us make man in Our Image, like Our Semblance”. The ultimate good the Creator has to share with us is His own “Nature”. The gift of being free-willed, having the capacity to make meaningful decisions, and to create. On the one hand, man exists to receive good. On the other, he exists to be G-d-like, and therefore create it himself, to positively influence others. Man the creature, receiver of G-d’s Good, vs. man the creator who lives in His Image.

Man the recipient sees reward and punishment, miracles, all the ways in which G-d interacts with us as things we get from Him. A gift perspective.

Man the creative being sees these things as the tools with which he works. Reward and punishment et al are systematic because only in that way can we use them as tools with which to create.

And *teshuvah* is the opportunity to reconnect to the Source, and thus receive the gift of Good, as well as to recreate ourselves, and cause the Good we receive.

¹ The same idea is also found at the other end of the Qabbalist-Rationalist spectrum in Rav Saadia Gaon’s *Emunos veDei’os*, and elsewhere.