

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

One of the highlights of the Yom Kippur liturgy is the reading of the Book of Jonah, a small book of four chapters which contains a world of philosophy. Undoubtedly the major message of Jonah is likewise the major message of Yom Kippur, so that the proper understanding of the former will most certainly illuminate the latter.

G-d comes to Jonah, son of Amitai, sending him to call the people of Ninveh to repentance. Jonah refuses to do so, and believes he can escape the G-d of the heavens of the earth by sailing to the sea. The central issue of the Book of Jonah is why the prophet should have found a mission to Ninveh so objectionable. We must remember that Ninveh is the capital city of Assyria and Assyria was then the arch enemy of Israel. Indeed, Assyria defeated the ten tribes and banished them into exile in the 8th century B.C.E. Jonah cannot understand why G-d is interested in Assyria's repentance. After all, as long as the Jews have more merits than the Assyrians, the chances of an Israeli victory in battle are far greater. Hence Jonah seeks to escape G-d by boarding a ship bound for Tarshish.

A raging storm develops at sea, and a drawing of lots makes it clear that Jonah is responsible for the storm. It is fascinating to note that water is both the major symbol of the Book of Jonah as well as the major symbol of the Tishrei period of festivals. Water is both the symbol of life as well as of destruction. The Bible opens "and the spirit of G-d hovered over the face of the waters" and no life can grow without the presence of water. At the same time the Bible tells us right before its description of the life giving waters that "there was darkness on the face of the tehom", usually translated as the depth of the cavernous waters of the netherworld. It was after all the waters of the flood which threatened to destroy the world.

**This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in loving memory of my dear parents
Chayim Yitchok ben Yehudo Hakohen
Paul Kahn
and
Mirjam bas Hachover R'Yehoshua
Irma Kahn-Goldschmidt
by Fernand Kahn**

At the same time, the Mishna tells us that the Festival of Sukkot is when G-d judges our merit for the life giving rain which enables fruit and vegetation to provide sustenance for the coming year. Rain is therefore a symbol of G-d's gracious bounty, His purification of His children on the Day of Forgiveness. As the prophet Yezekiel says in words which we repeat again and again during the Yom Kippur penitential prayers, "And I shall sprinkle upon you the waters of purification and you shall become pure." Hence the festival of Shemini Atzeret in which we thank G-d for rain has a double meaning: G-d's waters bring physical sustenance as well as spiritual purity, the combination of the two bringing to redemption. It goes even one step deeper. We begin giving G-d praise as the One whom "causes the winds to blow and the rains to flow" on Shemini Atzeret—and these words of praise are incorporated in the Amidah blessing of the G-d "Who causes the dead to live again." G-d's purifying waters can even revive us from death and bring us eternal life.

Jonah is cast overboard into the raging waters. Has challenged G-d, endeavored to escape the Divine mission, and is therefore worthy of death. G-d, however, in His infinite compassion provides a whale—a creature of the water—to follow Jonah and bring him back to life. In Jonah's own words "I called, in my distress, to G-d and He answered me. From the belly of the grave I cried out. You heard my voice. You cast me into the depth of the heart of the sea... your waves passed over me... yet You lifted my life from the pit O Lord my G-d." (Jonah 2:3-7).

The waters almost destroyed Jonah and the waters in the form of a water-creature sent by G-d saved his life. G-d is trying to teach the crucial lesson that Assyria, who has been so evil and destructive, can and must make a complete turnaround if the world is to be redeemed. And G-d is also teaching that He, G-d, is willing to overlook the evil Assyria has committed if she will indeed repent. Jonah refuses to accept this. He is after all the son of Amitai, a name which is derived from emet, truth. Truth demands that evil never be overlooked; evil must be punished. This is precisely how Jonah explains why he refused G-d's mission ".... This is why I hastened to flee to Tarshish; I knew that you are a gracious and merciful G-d slow to anger abundant in loving kindness and forgiving of evil." (Jonah 4: 2) This is not the G-d in whom I want to believe, the G-d who described Himself earlier to Moses as the G-d who is "abundant in loving kindness and

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truth" (Exodus 34:6). But Jonah has forgotten that his first name means dove, and that just as the dove was saved from the flood so was he, Jonah, undeservedly saved from the raging waters. G-d is trying to teach him that the G-d of compassion will bestow His life giving purity even upon those who have sinned.

On Yom Kippur each of us descend into the "waters of death". We wear the white reminiscent of shrouds, we remove ourselves from all physical necessities and pleasures such as food, drink, and sex, and we wear non leather shoes of the mourner. For whom are we mourning? We are mourning for ourselves who have died because of our sins.

However G-d in his compassion returns us to life on Yom Kippur, reborn and purified. G-d sprinkles upon us His life giving waters "because on this day you shall be forgiven of all your sins; before G-d shall you stand pure" All of us experience the death and the rebirth of Jonah. As the final mishnah in Yoma says, "how fortunate are you O Israel! Before whom are you purified, and who purifies you? Our Father in Heaven".

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The central theme of Yom Kippur is teshuvah, commonly translated as "repentance." We hear so much about this term, but what, in fact does it truly mean?

On the simplest behavioral level, writes Maimonides, teshuvah involves "returning" to a situation in which one had previously failed, and not making the same mistake a second time. (Laws of Repentance 2:1) It means being given a second chance. In contrast to what many may think, Yom Kippur has many elements of joy. We celebrate being given a second chance. In too many of life's pursuits, we are given only one shot. If

we miss, it's all over. On Yom Kippur, God says, "no matter if you have failed before; you can still return."

A chassid once asked his rebbe, "why pray on Yom Kippur, after all, we'll inevitably sin again." In response, the rebbe asked him to look out the window behind him. Outside was a toddler learning to walk. "What do you see?" asked the master. "A child, standing and falling," replied the disciple. Day after day the chassid returned to witness the same scene. At the week's end, the child stood and didn't fall. The child's eyes expressed the achievement of having attained the impossible. "So with us," said the rebbe, "We may fail again and again, but in the end, a loving God gives us the opportunities we need to succeed."

The mystics understand teshuvah differently. For them, teshuvah, in its truest essence means "returning," to being righteous. But this begs the obvious question: Suppose one has never been righteous, what does one return to? Says the Sefat Emet, the soul of every person is fundamentally righteous. There may be a layer of evil obscuring the inner being, but all people created in the image of God are inherently good. Teshuvah then, means to return to the inner kernel of goodness we all possess. And so, we sing, and dance on Yom Kippur. We celebrate the opportunity to discover our true selves.

Another classic story. Reb Zusha was on his death bed, and tears were streaming down his face. "Why are you crying?" asked his disciples. "If God asks me why I wasn't like Moses or Maimonides," answered Reb Zusha, "I'll say, I wasn't blessed with that kind of leadership ability and wisdom." But I'm afraid of another question," continued Reb Zusha, "what if God asks, 'Reb Zusha, why weren't you like Reb Zusha? Why didn't you find your inner being and realize your inner potential? Why didn't you find yourself?' That is why I am crying."

A third approach. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, among many other thinkers, understands teshuvah to mean "answer." In this way, teshuvah is a dialogue. On Yom Kippur we stand before a caring God who asks the question(s). We have to search into ourselves and offer the answer(s). A God of love seeks us out. As much as we are in search of God, God is in search of us. A comforting thought on Yom Kippur.

Yet another chassidic legend. A young girl came to the Ba'al Shem Tov – the father of chassidism – crying. "Why do you cry?" the rebbe lovingly asked. "I was playing hide and seek," said the young girl, "but no one came looking for me." "So, too, is it with God," reflected the Ba'al Shem Tov. "He, too, is crying. For as much as He is looking for us, we rarely look for Him."

It was left for Rav Avraham Yitzchak ha-Cohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel to offer an understanding related to the establishment of the modern State of Israel. Teshuvah, according to Rav Kook, ought to be understood eschatologically. It quite literally means "go home," to our homeland. It is not

only an individual quest, but a communal mandate to establish a land that is different from all others. A land that is a light to the nations of the world: a land that marks the dawn of redemption, a land at peace.

On this Yom Kippur – may we repent, return, dialogue, and be blessed as individuals and as a nation.
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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The description of the commandments of Yom Kippur in the passage of the holidays (Vayikra 23:26-32) has a noteworthy duplication in the discussion of the special mitzvot of the day. The beginning is similar to the other openings about the holidays, "However, the tenth day of this seventh month shall be Yom Kippur, let it be declared a holy day for you." Then, the two mitzvot of the day are noted: (1) "You shall torture your souls;" (2) "And do not perform any work in the middle of this day" (this is in contrast with other holidays, where the prohibition is only for "melechet avoda"—work that entails labor). This is followed by an explanation for these two unique laws. "For it is Yom Kippur, to atone for you before your G-d." The Torah then returns to warn once again how important it is to observe the two mitzvot, "For any soul that is not tortured in the middle of this day will be severed from its nation. And if any soul performs work in the middle of this day, I will cause it to be lost from its nation." This could have conceivably been the end of the passage. However, the Torah now repeats the two mitzvot of the day. "Do not perform any work, it is an eternal law, for all your generations wherever you settle. This is a total day of rest, and you shall torture your souls—on the ninth day in the evening, from nightfall to nightfall, you will observe your Shabbat." What is the meaning of this repetition?

Evidently the duplication stems from the two different reasons for the holy day mentioned in the passage. The reason for prohibiting work and for the mitzva of torture is that "it is Yom Kippur, to atone for you before G-d." The fact that on this day the Almighty forgives the sins of Bnei Yisrael shows how important the day is and leads to a prohibition of work while at the same time requiring bodily suffering, so that man will be worthy of atonement. Thus, the atonement is the basic foundation of both mitzvot.

In the second part of the passage, on the other hand, the reason given for the mitzvot is because the day is declared as a "Shabbat Shabbaton," a total day of rest. In contrast to other holidays which are called "Shabbaton," Yom Kippur has a status that is similar to Shabbat, which is also called "Shabbat Shabbaton" in various places. Therefore, on Yom Kippur as on Shabbat, all work of any kind is prohibited, without exceptions (on regular holidays, for example, it is

permitted to cook food). The innovation in this part of the passage is the indication that the command to suffer also stems from the extra holiness of the day. The prohibition of eating is not only meant to cause bodily suffering, it is mainly an expression of the fact that we have been commanded to cease all normal activities. The day is so holy that this prohibition even includes eating and drinking. One day every year Bnei Yisrael follow in the footsteps of Moshe, who did not eat or drink when he was on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights, not as an expression of atonement but because of the awe inspired by his close approach to the Almighty.

This dual meaning of the fast on Yom Kippur can evidently also be seen in the words of the Rambam. In Sefer Hamitzvot (positive commandment 164), the Rambam defines the mitzva as follows: "To fast on the tenth of Tishrei." This is similar to the description in the first part of the Torah passage. On the other hand, in the Mishna Torah, the definition of the Rambam corresponds to the second part of the passage, "to refrain then from eating and drinking" [Hilchot Shevitat Assor 2:4].

Let us pray that we will be written into a book granting us life, blessings, peace, and a good livelihood, together with the entire nation of Bnei Yisrael.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the most moving and inspirational piyutim (liturgical poems) we say during the High Holidays is "Unesaneh Tokef." In it, the awesomeness and gravity of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are described. Even the "malachim (administering angels) become "gripped with fearful anticipation and trembling," for they too "will not be vindicated in Your (i.e. G-d's) eyes." But how could malachim not come out on the favorable side of the judgment? After all, they fulfill G-d's will faithfully, and either have no free will to stray from His command, or are so aware of His presence that they are unable to not carry out their mission dutifully. Either way, they always execute exactly what G-d wants of them, so why would they have to be judged at all; and if they are, why do they not come out favorably?

One possibility is that they are not being judged on their own merits, but are affected by the verdict of humans (and humanity). For example, when the ultimate redemption arrives (may it be soon), the angels that represent the nations of the world will have to be "defeated" before their respective nations are.¹ These angels fear this inevitability, and despite having done nothing "wrong" are affected by the judgment against these nations. Similarly, the specific actions malachim will be commanded to perform will be based on what must be done to, or for humans. Their very existence is

¹ See Ibn Ezra on Yishaya 24:21

dependant on our actions (i.e. the malachim created when we make a blessing), and they therefore will not be "vindicated" if we are not.

However, there is a parallel verse whose context indicates that the judgment that determines whether or not the malachim are vindicated is independent of the judgment made on man(kind). "What is man that he should be vindicated; can one born of woman be considered righteous? Even His holy ones He cannot confide in, and the heavens will not be vindicated in His eyes."² Elifaz is telling Eeyov that if even the angels do not come out favorably when G-d judges them, how can (any) man escape the consequences of an unfavorable judgment. If the "judgment" of the angels was really an extension of the judgment of man, this argument would be pointless. It is only because there is a separate case made against the heavenly messengers of G-d— which they do not, and cannot, win— that Elifaz shows how impossible it is for man to win his case. Which brings us back to our original question: How can beings that perform their tasks flawlessly end up with an unfavorable judgment?

"On Rosh Hashanah it is written, and on the fast of Yom Kippur it is sealed." These words, also from Unesaneh Tokef, allude to a seemingly separate issue. The decree— determining what kind of year we will have— is made on Rosh Hashanah, the first day of the 10 Days of Repentance, but not finalized until the last of those days, Yom Kippur. We go out of our way to do good deeds during this time, even keeping stringencies that we otherwise would not. Although the introspection that will hopefully lead to improvement started the month before Rosh Hashanah, the bulk of the teshuvah (returning, i.e. repentance) is concentrated in the days after it, especially on Yom Kippur.³ As the Rama puts it,⁴ "every person should search and examine his actions and repent from them during the ten Days of Repentance," a law he does not codify as applying before Rosh Hashanah.

However, it is easier to avoid a harsh decree before it is made than to try to change it after it has already been "written."⁵ Why do we focus more on having an unwanted decree redone than having a better one written in the first place?

Our original premise was built on the notion that the malachim are being judged based on their actions. Since they have done everything they were supposed to, they should be judged favorably. The Metzudas Dovid,⁶ however, understands their judgment to be based not on how they performed vis-à-vis their potential (which they fulfilled), but against absolute

perfection, namely G-d. The word for "vindicated is "zaku," which comes from "zach," or "pure." As "pure" as angels might be, they are not as pure, not as perfect, as G-d. When the measuring stick is absolute perfection (as opposed to how close to it one can potentially come), no being, not even the malachim, can measure up.⁷

My fourth grade rebbe, Rabbi Yitzchok Brody, shlita, never gave any student a grade above a 98. Only Hashem can get a perfect score, he would explain, and only the malachim can get just below that.⁸ Even if every question on the test was answered absolutely correctly, the grade would only be a 98.⁹ Elifaz was telling Eeyov that man can't be considered perfect, as even the angels aren't perfect; only G-d is.

It is possible, therefore, that our judgment on Rosh Hashanah is not based on whether we have fallen short of our potential, but whether we have fallen short of pure perfection- absolute "din." Using that scale, we cannot be found to be "pure," as even the angels are not. It is only on Yom Kippur that the judgment changes from "din" to "rachamim" (mercy), from how far we are from being perfect to how far we are from fulfilling our potential.

This would explain why our teshuvah process is focused more on Yom Kippur, as no matter how much closer to perfect we come before Rosh Hashanah, the decree will reflect our imperfections. Sure, the better we are the less we will need to have the decree changed.¹⁰ But we will still have to have the decree adjusted no matter what, so we appeal to G-d's attribute of mercy-promising to come as close to our potential as we can, and changing those areas that need improvement.

It might also explain how Rebbe¹¹ can state that even if one does not repent, Yom Kippur brings atonement for every sin but three. If Yom Kippur changes the scale from perfection to potential, all actions (and inactions) that fall within that gap are automatically eliminated!¹²

If the scale is eventually moved to the more reasonable "potential" anyway, why would there even be a judgment based on "perfection," a judgment doomed from the outset? While it's true that ultimately we will have to answer as to why we did not become the person we could have become (and not why we were

⁷ See Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim 3:13 for a similar approach

⁸ He never discussed with his fourth graders the issue of humans reaching higher than angels when they do good despite having the opportunity to choose bad

⁹ I remember it well, as my grandfather, z"l, would give his grandchildren a dollar for every 100 we received, and no matter how hard I tried to explain that in Rabbi Brody's class a 98 was really a 100, the dollar(s) remained in my grandfather's pocket

¹⁰ Which is why we start the process in Ellul

¹¹ Yuma 85b

¹² The three that require teshuvah along with Yom Kippur are all related to purposely rejecting G-d and His Torah, which is not within that range

² Eeyov 15:14-15

³ For example, we don't start asking G-d to inscribe us for a year of life until Rosh Hashanah itself, and continue through Yom Kippur. Similarly, we first start saying Avinu Malkainu on Rosh Hashanah.

⁴ Orach Chaim 603:1

⁵ See Rosh Hashanah 17b

⁶ Eeyov 15:15

not another Moshe Rabbeinu), there is no way to know what our potential really is. By setting our sights on perfection, we stand a better chance of reaching our true potential. As the expression goes, when you reach for the stars, you can't get your hands stuck in the mud.¹³

If we can conceptualize what the ideal is, we can strive to attain a level as close to it as possible. Rosh Hashanah forces us to visualize how short we are from that ideal, while Yom Kippur allows us to commit to a more realistic goal.

May we make that commitment, so that G-d will bless us all with a happy, healthy and successful 5765.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Though on Yom Kippur our prayers and thoughts are directed heavenward, the real Yom Kippur must take place within us. It is far easier to confess one's sins and shortcomings to an unseen God than to confess them truly to one's self. The Torah teaches us that the High Priest of Israel entered the holy sanctuary - the inner sanctum - of the Temple on Yom Kippur. The Talmud called that entrance of the Kohein Gadol, the High Priest, as entering "Lifnai u'lfanim." This phrase meant entering deep within. The rabbis of the Talmud were not only referring to the physical entering into the chamber of the Holy of Holies in the Temple in Jerusalem but they were obliquely referring to entering our own very most inner chambers of heart, mind and soul. All of us are bidden on Yom Kippur to enter "Lifnai u'lfanim." For without true self-examination and true commitment to self-improvement, Yom Kippur can, God forbid, be an exercise in futility if not even a meaningless charade. That is what the prophet Isaiah warns us of in the great haftorah of his that we read on the morning of Yom Kippur: "Is this the fast day that I ask of you? That you should bend your head to Me like a reed or that you should beat your breast with your fist?" All such public contrition is meaningless if it is not accompanied by a heartfelt conviction for self-improvement and for better behavior towards God and man consistent with such convictions and self-analysis.

Yom Kippur allows for such a deep entrance into one's inner self. It is a day of abstinence from food and drink and from other physical activities. It is an escape from the stress and pressures of our everyday lives and their attendant problems and frustrations. We always are concerned about others - family, friends, Israel, the world, the economy, etc. Yom Kippur gives us a chance to be concerned and preoccupied about ourselves - not in a selfish way but in a meaningful and positive fashion. It is the one day of the year that we are able to enter deep into ourselves and find meaning and

purpose to our existence. This is not a simple manner. It may very well not be achieved in one day - even if that one day be the holy day of Yom Kippur. But Yom Kippur at the very least focuses for us the necessity of attempting to reach deep within ourselves in order to make our lives more meaningful and serene. The prophet Isaiah describes evil people as being tossed about in a raging sea of their desires and frustrations. The Lord wishes us to sail on calm waters of serenity, belief, commitment and holy behavior. The day of Yom Kippur can mark the beginning of that journey of tranquility and godly purpose. The day should not be squandered only in external behavior of piety and contrition. It should help us reach deep within ourselves to touch and polish our souls and be the day of repentance and renewal that God intended. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

YESHIVAT NETIV ARYEH

Shiur List

by Rabbi Lipman Podolsky

This is it. Yom Kippur. One last chance. Hashem is offering us a deal we can't refuse. Just do teshuvah; rewrite history. If we do so out of love, our past iniquities will magically metamorphose into mitzvos (Yoma 86b). Yes, we will retroactively become greater than tzaddikim who never sinned (Brachos 34b)!

There's only one problem. Every year we try our best to do teshuvah. Every year we introspect, we regret, we make resolutions for the coming year. We fast, we cry, we beg forgiveness. And I believe that most of us truly mean what we say.

But then Yom Kippur ends. Already during Maariv, our minds and stomachs are deeply devoted to the sumptuous repast lovingly prepared by Bubbie. Shortly afterwards we are inundated with the Succos rush. No time to think, to reflect. And we soon find ourselves right back where we started. Teshuvah implies lasting change. Why do we fail? How can we, this year, execute a teshuvah that will endure?

Teshuvah is to become one with Hashem. "And you shall return until Hashem your G-d (Devarim 30:2)." Why are we not one with Hashem to begin with? In older times, the Divine presence dwelt within us, in our Bais HaMikdash. You only had to ascend to Yerushalayim to become imbued with the intense spirituality of Reality.

Since, there has been destruction, exile, loneliness. The Shechinah has retreated to its Heavenly abode, and we are left empty, hungry. Moreover, an iron barrier—created by our sins—separates between us and our Creator, impeding our every attempt at direct communication (Brachos 32b). We fervently shout our

¹³ Although you still must be careful not to be too disappointed when falling short, as it is inevitable

prayers Heavenward, but we hear only a faint echo in response.

Teshuvah is to eliminate, or at least to breach that wall, to penetrate to the other side, the side of Truth. The Iron Curtain of the twentieth century serves as an apt analogy to depict the difficulty of such an endeavor.

I think that intuitively, each of us feels the need to raze this wall in our effort to return. We make commitments that we can't possibly fulfill, in a desperate, last-ditch effort to re-open the lines of communication. We promise ourselves that we will change, that we will become tzaddikim, that we will become perfect. And of course, we always fall short of our goal, if not miss it entirely.

The problem is that we set our sights far too high. Chazal teach us, "Tafasta meruba lo tafasta, tafasta muat tafasta (Yoma 80a)," which basically means, don't bite off more than you can chew.

In Maariv we plead, "Remove the Satan from in front of us, and from behind us." The Satan in front of us is the Yetzer Hara who constantly places stumbling blocks and land minds in front of our every step. This is the Yetzer Hara with whom we are all too familiar. But who is the Satan behind us? He is the Yetzer Hara who prods us from behind, persuading us to try to accomplish too much too fast, to skip steps, to demolish the entire wall in one fell swoop. He wisely knows that we will end up with nothing but feelings of guilt for having undershot our goal.

We may be surprised to hear, but Hashem doesn't expect us to knock down the whole wall all at once. He doesn't intend for us to become tzaddikim, to amend and refine all of our actions overnight. Rather, He wants us to concentrate all of our energies and efforts on the perfecting and polishing of a single mitzvah, to focus our strengths on drilling a tiny hole clear through the barrier.

"Says HaKadosh Baruch Hu to Yisrael, My children, open for Me one opening of teshuvah the size of an eye of a needle, and I shall open for you openings that wagons and cars can pass through (Shir Hashirim Rabba 5:2)." Our charge is only to penetrate the wall; Hashem will do the rest. "Return to Me, and I shall return to you (Malachi 3:7)."

When a person consolidates his efforts on a single mitzvah, on boring a tiny, enduring hole, he will most likely be successful. When photons are concentrated into a laser beam, energy that would otherwise barely illuminate a room is now capable of boring through steel. When the Karate master focuses his entire being into his forefinger, he becomes capable of smashing bricks with no apparent effort. One should not spread oneself too thin. Focus breeds lasting success.

As we approach this Yom Kippur, let us each choose one mitzva, one midda, to perfect. We may be surprised to find that the resultant teshuvah will not be

restricted to a tiny hole, but to a wholehearted bond with our King. © 2004 Rabbi L. Podolsky

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar by quoting the Gemara in Yoma (2b): "Seven days before Yom Kippur, the kohein gadol (the High Priest) would be away from his wife [in preparation for the] one day."

So far, so good. But then the Sfas Emes moves on to a theme that seems totally unrelated to what came before. He tells us that Yom Kippur is truly unique. Why? Because this is the one day in the year in which this world (olam hazeh) even distantly resembles the world-to-come (olam haba). How so? Because by not eating or drinking on Yom Kippur, we take on the behavior of mal'achim (who neither eat nor drink).

The Sfas Emes now proceeds to develop a new perspective on some features of Yom Kippur. He starts by noting a second way in which Yom Kippur resembles olam haba. In the world-to-come, life is le'ma'ala min ha'teva (above—and hence, unconstrained, by Nature). So, too, on Yom Kippur, we can more easily conduct ourselves in a way that defies normal rules of human behavior.

What behavior does the Sfas Emes have in mind when he says that we may in principle conduct ourselves in a manner that is "le'ma'ala min ha'teva"? He has in mind Teshuva ("return to one's true self"; repentance). For teshuva requires changing one's behavior. And if you think about it, you will soon agree that such change is truly "above" Nature. How so? Because Nature would have a person's past misconduct continue, and thus reinforce itself. As the proverb says: "Hergeil na'aseh teva". That is, a person's habitual behavior becomes his (second) nature.

Into this context comes teshuva, transforming the person's long-time way of living. Such change is "above Nature"; i.e., "supernatural". Hence, the close fit between teshuva and Yom Kippur, the most "holy" (that is, le'ma'ala min ha'teva) day in the year. Continuing in this vein, the Sfas Emes tells us that Yom Kippur is also the day in the year in which teshuva is most feasible. In support of this statement, the Sfas Emes quotes a pasuk in Tehillim (139:16). (Before you see this pasuk, be aware that it is exceptionally hard to understand. Also, I am not sure whether the English translation makes it easier or harder to understand.) With this warning in mind, here is the pasuk: "Galmi ra'u ei'necha, ve'al sifre'cha kulam yi'ka'seivu; ya'mim yu'tzaru ve'lo echad ba'hem." (ArtScroll: "Your eyes saw my unshaped form, and in Your book all were recorded; though they will be fashioned through many days, to Him they are one.")

Q: What is this pasuk saying? Read on and see.

The pasuk is saying: one day in the year is unique ("ve'lo echad ba'hem"). Unique in what way? Unique inasmuch as on that day, one can more easily break out of the mold within which we are constrained and to which the pasuk refers ("Galmi ra'u ei'necha..."). On which day of the year are we granted this special chessed that reforming ourselves is easier? Rashi—quoting Yalkut Shim'oni on the pasuk—answers: "Zeh Yom HaKippurim".

The Sfas Emes has given us new perspectives on some basic features of Yom Kippur. He has told us not to regard our fasting on Yom Kippur as a negative (e.g., as a punishment). On the contrary, he views our fasting on Yom Kippur in potentially positive terms. For ideally fasting can put us in the mode of the mal'achim, who neither eat nor want to eat. Our fasting on Yom Kippur makes that one day in the year in which we demonstrate (to ourselves) our ability to live in a state above our physical wants. That liberation can make it easier to aspire to live at a higher level of ruchniyus the rest of the year.

The Sfas Emes has also taught us not to see our fasting as a "stand-alone" mitzva. Instead, we should view our fasting as part of a comprehensive spiritual CARE package designed to help us reach a higher level of ruchniyus. The Sfas Emes articulated this possibility when he said that on Yom Kippur, we can experience some olam haba. Thus, note the contrast between fasting on Yom Kippur and fasting on Tish'a Be'Av. Fasting on Tish'a Be'Av conveys a message of bereavement and mourning. By contrast, the Sfas Emes has told us to view fasting on Yom Kippur as an instance in which we strive to rise above our physical needs. The message conveyed can be the aspiration for a life with more spirituality. The difference in messages comes out clearly if we consider the very different moods of these two fasting days. Tish'a Be'Av is a sad day; Yom Kippur can be a happy day.

The Sfas Emes's other lesson focuses on Teshuva. Changing one's behavior—i.e., Teshuva—is the ultimate in le'ma'ala min ha'teva, and hence, very hard to do. But help is at hand. HaShem has designated Yom Kippur as the day in the year on which overcoming Nature—that is, transforming ourselves by doing teshuva—is unusually feasible.

Before concluding, we must address one more question. We know—from long experience—that the disparate parts of a Sfas Emes ma'amar all fit neatly together. We may therefore wonder: why did the Sfas Emes begin this ma'amar with the quotation from the Gemara in Yoma? To a naive observer, that quotation seems totally unconnected with the rest of the ma'amar.

I suggest that we can find a possible answer if we have another look at the text: "Seven days... the one day". Adding these two numbers gives us the number eight—a number well known to indicate special kedusha. For example, bris mila takes place on the eighth day. Likewise, Shemini Atzeres is a day of

unique kedusha. Most tellingly, the significance of the text—"Seven days... the one day"—is clear if we consider another context in which the Gemara makes the very same statement. Chazal make that statement in the context of the seven days of the Mishkan's inauguration. As with the kohein gadol and Yom Kippur—which the Gemara and the Sfas Emes cite—the seven days were preparation for the—you guessed it—eighth day ("...bayom ha'shemini.")

What is special about the number eight? A cube—the prototype of a "thing"; i.e., Nature—has six sides. With its internal point, a cube has seven aspects. If Nature (teva) is seven, eight is le'ma'ala min ha'teva—above and unconstrained by Nature. As we have seen, Yom Kippur is about teshuva. Teshuva, in turn, is about trying to live "le'ma'ala min ha'teva". Similarly, fasting is also a prime feature of Yom Kippur. For a human being to abstain from food and drink for 26 hours is also behavior unconstrained by Nature. Hence, we can see why the Sfas Emes began his ma'amar by citing a passage from Yoma which refers to the number "eight". Referring to that number immediately brings to mind "le'ma'ala min ha'teva." That reference sets the stage for the Sfas Emes's discussion of two features of Yom Kippur—fasting and teshuva. © 2004 by Rabbi N.C. Leff and Torah.org.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

The Haftarah for Mincha on Yom Kippur is the entire book of the prophet Jonah ben Amitai. The connection to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is obvious. The entire book deals with Jonah's mission to the gentile people of Ninveh, urging them to repent—to do teshuva. And Yom Kippur is the day for doing teshuva.

But beyond that there are many issues which remain unclear. Why did Jonah rebel against God's command to bring this message to Ninveh? And what good would it do for him to run away? Did he really think he could escape God by leaving Eretz Yisrael? The Jewish God is the God of the Universe! Certainly the prophet Jonah knew this! What was his thinking in these matters?

After Jonah received God's command to go to Ninveh, we read the following: "And Jonah went to flee to Tarshish from before Hashem, and he went down to Yaffo, and he found a boat which was going to Tarshish and he paid the fee and went down with them to Tarshish, from before Hashem." (Jonah 1:3)

"To flee to Tarshish"—Rashi: "Tarshish was outside of Eretz Yisrael. He thought 'I'll flee to the sea, for the Holy Spirit does not reside outside of Eretz Yisrael.' So God said to him: 'By your life! I have many messengers to send for you and bring you back from there....' And why did Jonah not want to go to Ninveh? He thought: 'These pagans are quick to do teshuva. If I

tell them to do so and they in fact do teshuva, this will be an indirect condemnation of Israel who do not heed the words of the prophets."

So Rashi has answered our questions above. Jonah certainly knew that Hashem was everywhere and not just in Eretz Yisrael. But he thought he could escape the prophetic message by being far from the Holy Land. This finds support in the words "milifnei Hashem" "from before Hashem." It doesn't say "from Hashem" which would mean "from God's presence," for His presence is everywhere. It says instead "from before Hashem," which implies the closeness of the prophet who stands "before" Hashem. Also if we look at verse 4:2 Jonah says: "Were these not my thoughts while I was on my land, therefore I fled to Tarshish..." So Jonah tried to flee the Shechina and the prophetic experience which could only take place in Eretz Yisrael.

And the reason Jonah refused going on this "outreach" mission, Rashi tells us, was that if the pagans of Ninveh did teshuva this would reflect badly on the Jews who had heard many prophets castigate them and urge them to do teshuva but they nevertheless resisted to do so.

A Question: Is Jonah's fear that this would reflect badly on the Jews, a justified reason to prevent the pagans from doing teshuva? If they were willing to do so, why should they be refused the opportunity? And might not their teshuva inspire the Jews to do teshuva as well?

Perhaps we can find a more satisfying explanation for Jonah's refusal.

An Answer: Jonah says he knew God was a forgiving God: "I know that You are a gracious God, merciful, long to anger, much kindness and One who forgives evil."

Compare this verse of God's attributes with the thirteen attributes of Hashem listed in Exodus 33:7. There it says "God merciful and gracious, God is long to anger and [has] much kindness and truth."

Which attribute did Jonah leave out?

An Answer: Jonah leaves out the attribute of "truth"! For Jonah, God is kind and merciful but He is not a God of truth! Jonah thought that if God could forgive and forget the sins and evil acts of people as if they never happened, then this is not ultimate truth. Murders murdered people who were forever dead, robbers robbed individuals who suffered, rapists raped women who were scarred forever—how can the act of verbal teshuva erase all this? Is this truth? This is what Jonah could not understand. This is what he tried to run away from. The mystery of teshuva, the impossible feat which it accomplishes, turning history on its head, this is what Jonah could neither fathom nor accept. Imagine Hitler doing teshuva. After all the destruction, pain and suffering he caused, could that be acceptable to God? It is unimaginable, but if somehow it were true teshuva, it might be.

That is the mystery of teshuva. That is the mystery of Yom Kippur. Its power is beyond our comprehension. But Hashem sent Jonah—forced Jonah—to deliver this message. It is our message on Yom Kippur. © 2004 by Dr. A. Bonchek & aish.org

TORAH CENTER OF DEAL

The Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

There was once a discussion as to why the Al Het, the prayer in which we enumerate all the sins we have committed, proceeds according to the Aleph Bet. Rabbi Bunim of Pshischa offered a characteristically sharp, yet deceptively simple explanation: "How else would one know when to stop?"

Is our list of sins really endless? In The Path of the Just, Luzzato points out the importance of reflecting on everything we do, as to whether the action we are about to take contributes to our ultimate goal or not. He insists that many of our improper acts are not as much a result of distorted thinking as of failure to think at all. A wise business person, whose goal is to further his gains, deliberates over everything he embarks upon, examining whether it will result in a profit, and if not, avoiding the endeavor even if it does not clearly result in a loss.

If we would give similar consideration to everything we do, in light of our goal which is to fulfill the Divine will, we would probably find too many things that simply deserve no space in our spiritual baggage. At the very least, the amount of talking we do would be sharply curtailed. Indeed, if we had to confess all our actions that were not goal directed, the entire day of Yom Kippur might not suffice to list them, let alone express remorse. Mercifully, we focus on the gamut of sin expressed so succinctly in the Aleph Bet formulation, with the hope perhaps being that we will take to heart the Aleph Bet of proper Jewish living—thoughtful approach to all our actions. (Smiling Each Day)



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