

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“On Rosh Hashanah it is written and on Yom Kippur it is sealed.” These words, from the “Unesaneh Tokef” prayer said on both holidays, describe how the judgment against each of us, which determines how successful or troublesome the new year will be, is recorded. However, when closely compared to the formula described in the Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 16b), they do not seem to match.

“Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah, one of the fully wicked and one of the fully righteous and one of those in-between. Those who are fully righteous are written and sealed for life immediately (i.e. on Rosh Hashanah), the fully wicked are written and sealed for death immediately, [and] those in-between are suspended and remain that way (lit. standing) from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur. If they merit it they are written for life; if they don't merit it they are written for death.” If so, who exactly has their year's fate written on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur? The fate of the righteous and the wicked are written and sealed on Rosh Hashanah, and those in-between aren't written until it is determined what kind of year they will have, and even then it is only “written,” not sealed. There is much discussion about if and how these two “sources” can be reconciled.

The Vilna Gaon (commenting on O”C 582:9 and on the Rambam's Hilchos Teshuva 3:3) tells us that it can only be reconciled according to the way Tosfos explains the Talmud, but not with how the Ran (and Ramban) does. These Rishonim (early commentators) are bothered by a different issue: How can the Talmud say that the righteous are always put down for a good year and the wicked for a bad one if there are very righteous people that die young (and have other misfortunes) and really wicked people that live, and live well, to a ripe old age. Besides, the Talmud itself (Kiddushin 39b) tells us that the righteous

are purposely punished in this world so that in the next world they won't have to suffer at all, and the wicked are purposely given their reward in this world so that they can't enjoy the next world despite doing some mitzvos. How can the Talmud say that the righteous are written and sealed for a year of life if that isn't necessarily the case? Or that the wicked are immediately sentenced to death if more often than not they survive the year? Tosfos' response is that when the Talmud says that they are written and sealed for life or death, it doesn't mean in this world, but in the next world. Based on this, the Vilna Gaon says that the Talmud is referring to the judgments regarding what will happen in the world to come, while the prayer (as well as the Talmud on Rosh Hashanah 16a that says people are judged on Rosh Hashanah and the decrees sealed on Yom Kippur) is referring to the judgments made pertaining to what will happen in this world. The other Rishonim, however, understand the Talmud to be referring to what will occur in this world, and redefine the term “righteous” and “wicked” to refer not to how pious one is, but whether they are given a positive or negative judgment. The terms “life” and “death” do not only refer to literally whether or not one will make it to next Rosh Hashanah, but include any positive or negative judgments as well. If something good is decreed on someone, in that regard he was found to be “righteous,” while a decree that is not good means he is considered “wicked” for that specific judgment. (Those “in-between,” or, more precisely according to these Rishonim, those with judgments that are “in-between,” have not had their judgment completed yet, although it is not explained why these judgments could not be finalized on Rosh Hashanah while the others could be.) The Gaon says that since the judgments referred to in both the Talmud and the prayer are for things that will occur in this world, the two cannot be in agreement about when decrees are written and sealed. However, the Ramban (in his Derasha for Rosh Hashanah, which might not have been available to the Gaon) indicates that the Talmud on 16b is consistent with the statement on 16a (that decrees are sealed, or more literally, signed, on Yom Kippur), which leaves us wondering how.

There is some discussion about what Tosfos means as well, and it is difficult to imagine that they meant that it is decided on Rosh Hashanah who goes to Gan Eden and who goes to Gehenim, as that

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

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).
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precludes things changing from year to year, and negates the actions done since Rosh Hashanah (as far as where the deceased ends up). Based on the Tosfos HaRosh (the version of Tosfos written by the Rosh in order to allow those in his new home in Spain to benefit from the teachings of the Tosafists, who were in Germany where he was born) it is apparent that Tosfos' intent is that decrees are made that affect the righteous and wicked in this world in order that they do not receive the punishments or rewards in the next world. This would mean that, using the Vilna Gaon's model, the Talmud is referring to what will happen to us over the year because of what G-d wants us to ultimately receive in the next world, while the prayer (and Talmud on 16a) is referring to what will happen over the year in order to either help us grow even more (by providing our needs so that we can focus on spiritual growth or sending us messages of either approval or disapproval) or to prevent the wicked from doing mitzvos and needing to be rewarded (see Rambam's Hilchos Teshuva 9:1).

The Maharam Shick was asked how the Talmud could be reconciled with the prayer, and responded (O"C 300) with two possibilities. First he suggested that the Talmud doesn't mean that their fate can only be written on Yom Kippur, but that it will be written down on any of the days from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur, whenever their actions tip the scales to classify them as either "righteous" or "wicked." According to this, the prayer is referring to those "in-between," whose fate can be written on Rosh Hashanah, but could also be written on the subsequent days until Yom Kippur. The Talmud doesn't mention when it is sealed, assuming we will know it is towards the end of Yom Kippur. However, the wording of the prayer implies that it is specifically on Rosh Hashanah that decrees are written (not on the days between RH and YK) and the Talmud says that those in-between are "suspended and standing," indicating that their status doesn't change until Yom Kippur.

His second possibility is that the "seals" made on Yom Kippur refers to the general decrees that apply to the community as a whole (such as if there will be peace or war). Since the situation that applies to a community affects the individuals in it, even those individuals whose personal judgments were completed

on Rosh Hashanah are really in a state of limbo until the communal decrees are sealed on Yom Kippur. The Talmud would be referring to personal decrees, while the prayer is referring to communal ones. This also seems difficult to accept, as part of the prayer includes "who will live and who will die," which is as personal as decrees can get. It is hard to imagine that all personal decrees come with the caveat of "unless there is a plague, or a war (etc.)," as even if a personal decree can include being subject to outside circumstances, it would be part of what was sealed on Rosh Hashanah, with repentance needing to come on a communal level in order to change the communal decree. (If the personal decree was already sealed on RH, repentance couldn't change the individual's status to no longer being subject to outside circumstances.)

The Turay Even (the Sha'agas Aryeh's commentary on the Talmud) suggests that being "sealed" (as used by the Talmud on 16b) doesn't mean it can't change, only that it is now harder for it to change. If the decree (of the righteous and wicked) weren't sealed, any additional good or bad deeds would cause a reassessment. Now that it was sealed, only a major sin or major improvement can affect the decree (whereas for one "in-between" anything positive or negative, not just observing or disobeying commandments, will tip the scales). Once Yom Kippur ends, though, a change of actions will not change the decree. According to this, the Talmud is referring to the "seal" that makes it harder to change the decree, while the prayer (and the Talmud on 16a, which is what the Sha'agas Aryeh is addressing) refers to the kind of "seal" that cannot be undone by changing one's actions.

There is another possibility as well, based on the wording of the Talmud Yerushalmi (Rosh Hashanah 1:3). "There are three ledgers, one of the fully righteous and one of the fully wicked and one of those in-between. The one of the fully righteous was already sealed for life on Rosh Hashanah; the one of the fully wicked was already sealed on Rosh Hashanah; [as far as] the one for those in-between, they were already given 10 Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. If they repented they are written with the righteous, and if not they are written with the wicked." No "sealing" or "signing" of the decree occurs in the third book, the one for those in-between. Rather, their status was written in this book on Rosh Hashanah, but on Yom Kippur they are either written in the book of the righteous (the book of "life") or in the book of the wicked. Being written in one of those two books is final, only done once the decree has been finalized. This is the "sealing" referred to in the prayer. Since the righteous and wicked are already written in their respective books on Rosh Hashanah, their decree has already been sealed. Those in-between have their names written in the third book on Rosh Hashanah,

with the implication that if they do not change their ways they will be transferred to the book of the wicked on Yom Kippur. Their fate is sealed on Yom Kippur, when their name is written in one of the other two books. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The central theme of Yom Kippur is teshuva, 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. No wonder, Yom Kippur has 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, G-d 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 G-d gives us the opportunities we need to succeed."

The mystics understand teshuvah differently. For them, teshuvah means "returning," to being righteous. But 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 G-d 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 G-d 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 G-d 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." That is to say teshuvah is a dialogue. On Yom Kippur we stand before G-d, a caring G-d who asks the question(s). We offer the answer(s). A G-d of love seeks us out. As much as we are in search of Him, He 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 G-d," 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 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 - let it be, let it be. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Once, during the days between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, known as the Ten Days of Repentance, a simple hassid (disciple) of the famous Rebbe Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (founder of the Hassidic movement) asked his master two questions. First: what is the most fitting request to make of the Almighty during this period when we are taught to "...seek out G-d when He is most available." Since the Bible promises that "on this day (of Yom Kippur) you shall be forgiven of all your sins... before G-d shall you be purified," it seems superfluous to ask for Divine forgiveness. So should we ask for another year of life, should we ask for a year of good health, for a job that will pay a good salary, or shall we ask for "nachas" from our children? After all, we don't want to bombard the Almighty with too many requests lest He see us as spoiled and demanding children who don't deserve anything at all.

And the hassid's second question was why Sukkot falls out only four days after Yom Kippur? Was it fair or reasonable that so soon after we get up exhausted from our fasting that we must immediately begin to build a substitute house and decorate it. Why

doesn't G-d leave us a little breathing space between Yom Kippur and Sukkot?

The Holy Baal Shem Tov ("Master of the Good Name") sent his hassid to the neighboring town of Yampol, to seek out Rav Yehiel Mikhal of Zlotchov. "Send him my regards, stay with him a short while, and you will receive the answer to your questions without even saying a word."

Arriving at Yampol, the disciple inquired as to the whereabouts of Rav Yehiel Mikhal, and was greeted with strange looks from everyone he approached. An elderly man offered the visiting hassid the following explanation: "Yehiel Mikhal - and we don't know him to be a rabbi-is a very holy man, but also a very peculiar kind of Jew. He studies the Holy Zohar all day, never looking up from the sacred letters of the text except when he prays. He prays vehemently and even violently, hitting his head against the wall until blood starts flowing. But despite his prayers, he is very poor, to the extent that there is generally no food in his house and he never shops for himself. The door is always open, there is a chair set out for wayfarers who may stop by, and after sitting in the room for about an hour, Reb Yehiel Mikhal manages to scrape up a meal for the stranger. You are welcome to visit him, and it's even beneficial because when he feeds his guest, he also remembers to eat something himself..."

The perplexed hassid was directed to the hovel of Yehiel Mikhal, opened the door and found a chair as if he were expected. Just as the townspeople had warned him, after about an hour Reb Yehiel motioned for him to wait a little while longer. He removed a book from the bookcase, which seemed to be the only furniture in the room, and left. After a while he returned without the book. Apparently he had sold it, trading it for some herring and a loaf of bread, inviting his guest to eat, even taking a morsel of food for himself.

As the meager meal progressed, the hassid brought greetings from Rebbe Yisrael baal Shem Tov, but could not restrain himself from asking his host-whom he had seen engaged in fervent prayer as if he were physically confronting the wall-why he didn't pray for such basics as food, for a real home instead of a hovel, for a family of his own. Before answering, Yehiel Mikhal smiled a faraway smile. "Such prayers are meaningless, even arrogant. Let me give you an analogy. You are invited to the wedding of the year, the wedding of the century; the King is about to marry his beloved bride, and the entire populace is celebrating. The fancy invitation even includes the menu, delectable course after delectable course.

"But alas, the young bride falls ill and tragically dies barely an hour before the ceremony was scheduled to take place. Most of the guests have already arrived at the Palace, and so they quietly and tearfully return to their homes. One individual remained, however. He went over to the royal chef, pointed to the

invitation in his hand, and requested each of the courses he had been promised. Can you imagine how disappointed the King must be in that individual, even if he did instruct his chef to fulfill his culinary requests? In the wake of the cancelled wedding, how could the guest even think about the nuptial dinner menu?

"And so it is with us," concluded Yehiel Mikhal. "We are in exile, our King is in exile, the Sacred Marriage between G-d and Israel has been at best put off, postponed. Shall we request to partake of the wedding feast? We can only pray for the wedding to take place as soon as possible..."

When the disciple returned with his report to Rebbe Yisrael Baal Shem Tov, the Master added another principle to the words of the holy Rav Yehiel Mikhal of Zlotchov:

"On Rosh HaShanah we pray that G-d be proclaimed King over the entire world, that the Sacred Marriage, which will bring unity to the world, shall come about immediately. On Yom Kippur we are transported to the Holy Temple, the nuptial canopy; the High Priest proclaims everyone purified, we hear the triumphant trumpet-shofar of the Almighty, we cry out: "Hear Oh Israel, the Lord our G-d, The Lord is One, Blessed be the Name of His glorious Kingdom forever, the Lord (of Israel) he is G-d (of the world).

"But alas, this is all a dream, a glorious dream, but not yet a reality. And so immediately after we awaken from the dream, with the blast of the shofar, we must build our modest sukkah, symbol of the exile of the Divine Presence, move into that sukkah with our entire family, and pray that the 'Merciful One re-establish for us the fallen tabernacle of King David' and transform our small sukkah into the Eternal Temple; at that time all nations will flock to attend the Sacred Marriage of the Divine and the redemption of all humanity."

The hassid had received the answers to all his questions. © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

The epic poem of Haazinu can be divided into two main parts. The first one is a historical description of the events surrounding Yisrael in the past, the present, and the future, as reviewed by Moshe (Devarim 32:1-18). The second part contains future quotes of what G-d will say after the sins of Yisrael (32:19-35) and with respect to vengeance against the Gentiles (32:36-43). In the first part Moshe turns to Bnei Yisrael most often in the third person. He describes the processes in which the nation is involved, starting with G-d's revelation in the desert and His watching over the people? "He found him in a desert land, a desolate desert. He surrounded him and gave him understanding. He watched over him like the pupil of

His eye." [32:10]. He then goes on to the nation settling the land? "He will dwell on the heights of the land, and eat the produce of my fields" [32:13]. And he finally describes the sin of idol worship which stems from the feeling of being satiated? "He will be made jealous by strangers, they will anger G-d with abominations. They will make sacrifices to demons, not G-ds, and they do not know G-d." [32:16-17]. G-d's words to Bnei Yisrael in the second part of the epic poem are also mostly in the third person.

But there are two places in this long description where Moshe turns directly to the people, in a meaningful declaration (aside from 32:14? see Ramban). The first is, "You have become fat and thick" [32:15], and the second is, "You have forgotten He who gave birth to you, and you have forgotten the G-d who created you" [32:18]. What is the reason for this change of style?

First of all we should note that both of these statements are a repeat of previous declarations that were written in the third person. The first phrase is a repetition of what appears in the first part of the same sentence, "And Yeshurun became fat and kicked out" [32:15]. The second phrase is also a repetition of something that appeared before, "He abandoned G-d, who made him, and he had contempt for the rock of his salvation" [32:15]. But this repetition makes the above question even stronger: Why does Moshe change his style by moving from third person to second person specifically with respect to two items which were already mentioned before?

Evidently the Torah wants to teach us the true significance of this matter. In essence, the epic poem was not written for the people standing with Moshe, who had not yet entered the land, but rather for future generations, who will sin, according to the prophesy. Moshe, a leader and a prophet, describes what will happen in the future, out of a goal that "this poem will serve as testimony, since it will not be forgotten from its offspring" [31:21]. But then, suddenly, Moshe clearly sees the sins and the sinners who will later on appear on the scene, and he cannot refrain from stating his rebuke: "You have become fat... You have forgotten He who gave birth to you..." Will this terrible thing really happen? Thus, the change to second person in this rebuke is Moshe's spontaneous reaction in the midst of the perfectly organized poem, one that is printed in a visual pattern which looks like one brick carefully placed on top of another. This enhances the power of the poem.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The "one day in the year" has arrived and is upon us. The day to "afflict our souls" and pause and contemplate our humanity and mortality is the day of Yom Kippur. Afflicting our souls applies not just to

the fasting and other deprivations of normal comforts that the Torah prescribes for us on this holiest of days. The true affliction of our souls occurs in our own self contemplation, in our thoughts, regrets and hopes.

People very rarely have an opportunity to talk to themselves. In fact people that do so on a regular basis are thought to be disturbed. A wag once remarked that he enjoyed talking to himself since it was probably the most intelligent conversation that he would have all day. Jewish tradition is replete with great men of saintly character, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditechev and the Chafetz Chayim, two of many for example, who would discuss the day's events and their behavior that day with themselves before retiring for the night.

If such behavior is beyond the usual norm for most of us, at least on Yom Kippur we can afford the luxury of such a conversation. More than that, the holiness of the day demands of us that we conduct such a conversation with our souls and selves. Because we are not in the habit of creating such conversations on a regular basis, we oftentimes find such a conversation to be painful, awkward, troubling and difficult. No wonder the Torah calls it a method of "afflicting one's soul."

The main topics of the conversation are to determine what we really want out of life and what we are willing to demand of ourselves to achieve our goals. The current worldwide economic crisis, bringing with it so many lost jobs, shrunken assets and portfolios, has perhaps concentrated our minds wonderfully to attempt to answer these existential questions.

Many of the certainties in our lives that were rock hard just a few short months ago now wobble in the winds that suddenly buffet us. A good friend of mine made a certain commitment to a very worthwhile Torah educational institution last year. He delayed payment of his pledge because he wished to pay it to the institution in shares of stock that he was holding. He wanted to wait till the stock traded at a certain high price before transferring the stock to the institution. As the stock approached that high trading price the institution pressed him to pay the pledge even if the stock was still a point or two below his target goal.

His business acumen betrayed him and he was determined to hold on till the last possible dollar could be wrung out from the transaction. The stock since then has declined by seventy percent. He moaned to me that he not only lost the money but he is now unable to redeem his pledge and attain the reward of the mitzvah potentially involved. I think that the problem was that he never had that conversation with himself three months ago. Had he done so, things might have turned out differently for him.

Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzatto in his immortal work, Mesilat Yesharim, begins the book with the question "What is the obligation and purpose of a person in his life in this world?" This deceptively

appearing simple question begs no easy answer. In Jewish tradition, the general answer has always been service to G-d and to man, to Jewish tradition and continuity, and to creating a personal and national sense of holiness and morality.

The details to this answer lie in observance of Torah commandments and in a sense of spiritual soulfulness in our everyday mundane activities. But the answer only comes alive and becomes meaningful to us if we are able to internalize its message and make it a part of our being and personality. A great mentor of mine would always comment regarding certain situations and problematic decisions that one should always ask one's self "What does G-d think about this matter?" Having the conversation with one's self before acting or implementing one's thoughts many times avoids having to have the conversation with others when it will be more embarrassing and painful to do so.

Yom Kippur allows us to ask ourselves "What does G-d think of me, my behavior, my goals and my relations with others?" Yom Kippur strips us of all pretenses and slick answers. It forces us to look at ourselves honestly, deeply into our personality, and to the very recesses of our soul. That is why Yom Kippur is in reality "the one and only day of the year." © 2008 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.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Echoes from Heaven

This week's portion begins with Moshe's poetic plea, "Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and may the earth hear the words of my mouth." (Deuteronomy 32:1)

The verb tense differs dramatically from the beginning of the sentence to the end. Normally a plea is said in the active tense. It is uttered as a command. "Give ear O heavens." "Listen my people." "Lend me your ear." When it comes to the heavens, Moshe expresses his appeal in an active manner. When it comes to the earth however, the expression becomes passive: "May the earth hear." It is almost as if he is not commanding but submissively acquiescing. "I cannot command the earth to pay attention, rather, may it overhear my pleas."

The Ohr HaChaim points out this anomaly and wonders why Moshe tells the heavens to listen, but he does not include the earth in that directive. Instead Moshe says that the earth shall hear, almost as if the proverbial earth is listening in the background to the prophecy he directed toward their heavenly counterparts.

Rabbi Yissachar Frand, Magid Shiur in Yeshiva Ner Israel, Baltimore, and noted author and lecturer,

tells a story that he heard from a Rabbi in Dallas, Texas.

One day a man walked into the office of his orthodox shul in Dallas. The man was obviously not an observant Jew. In fact, the Rabbi never saw him in the synagogue before.

"Rabbi," he said, "I'd like to make a contribution." He proceeded to hand over a check for ten thousand dollars.

The rabbi was flabbergasted. He did not know this man, nor had the man ever seen the Rabbi. Yet, he just handed over a tremendous gift to the synagogue. "Please," said the rabbi. "There must be a reason. After all, you are giving this donation to a rabbi whom you do not know and to a shul in which you do not participate. Please tell me the reason."

"The man answered very simply. "Not long ago I was in Israel. I went to the Wall. There I saw a man. He was obviously a very observant Jew. He was praying with such fervor, with unparalleled enthusiasm and feeling. I just stood there and listened. I heard his pleas and supplications, I saw him sway with all his might, I saw his outpouring of faith, love, and devotion all harmoniously blending as an offering to G-d. From the day I saw that man pray, I could not get him out of my mind. If this is Judaism, I want to be part of it. I want to help perpetuate it." Perhaps Moshe is teaching us the significance of an active, forceful, message and its passive ramifications. Effective influence may not only come when talking to a particular individual, rather it may also come when others hear.

My grandfather, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky of blessed memory, explains that the word for influence in the Hebrew language, hashpa'ah, comes from the same root as the word slant or incline, shipuah. There are two ways to water a garden; one is to douse the vegetation directly. That takes effort and constant wetting. A better way that is more practical is to build a slated roof from which the steady flow of rain will irrigate the vegetation. Moshe teaches us that to the heavens we may have to shout. But we don't have to shout at the earth. Because when we speak to the heavens with fervor and enthusiasm, the earth listens as well. © 2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

I was describing a scene recently that had occurred in a crowded shul where I had gone to pray the afternoon service. A fellow walked in near the end with a look that was rather tenuous and uncertain. He got the siddur open to a page on the back of the book with his finger poised at a certain point. He looked around as if awaiting some cue. The service ended and people started to exit. Seeing that, he asked the fellow next to him if it's over and in a semi-panic state he

began to recite haltingly the mourners kaddish from the transliteration at the back of the siddur. Some people gathered around him and afterward he told them that his mother had just died and he had come to say kaddish for her. I was relating the story partially in admiration of his courage to enter a strange environment and recite strange words in a foreign language aloud, and partially in awe of the powerful lure of an adult child to do something significant for a deceased parent.

My meaning was misunderstood and someone in the group suggested that maybe the people there considered him to be a hypocrite for only coming then to the synagogue. Nothing had been farther from the truth. Actually, that person had been immediately swallowed into a sea of concern and empathy.

It's a little like the bad joke about the boy who hadn't say a word for fifteen years and his parents thought him incapable of speech until one night at dinner when he threw his spoon down in disgust and declared, "Arrrrrrgg! The soup is terrible!" His mother jumped with joy and exclaimed, "John, you spoke! But, how come you didn't say anything till now?" To which he blithely answers, "Till now the soup was good!"

The parent cares less why he didn't speak till now and focuses on the fact that now he speaks. Even if a person opens his mouth in prayer only in a time of pain and sorrow, that kaddish, that tearful sincere expression is certainly received with joy. Why a person didn't pray till now is less important to the Receiver of prayer. Till now the soup was pretty good! Life was smooth and creamy.

Furthermore, there is a crucial distinction between being a hypocrite and being inconsistent. If a person comes to lay a carpet in my living room and somewhere in the middle of the job I spot him going out to his truck I am not ready to condemn his work on the spot and report him to The Better Business Bureau. Even though the rug is full of bumps and not every corner is buckled down, still, if he goes out to his truck and eats his lunch, the lack of job completion is only an indicator that more work is yet to be done. Why should I panic and come to false conclusions? However, if he enters his truck, revs the engine, heads home and sends me a bill, thereby declaring that he considers the job is complete, then I'll have Ralph Nader on the phone in the drop of a carpet nail.

When person says that he is the archetype of virtue and the model of perfection, as if the job is done, crowning personal errors or institutionalizing human foibles as ideals; these are the boldest invitations to be titled hypocrite.

I asked a great man what the definition of a positive self-esteem is and he answered simply; "Knowing your good points and your bad points!" When striving for goodness, inconsistencies will continue to appear. The moment a person improves in one area

there are other areas to be updated. When one dish is being koshered the other dishes may not yet be koshered. If that's being a hypocrite then we could not afford to try to be perfect until we actually were!

There are two faults here. The first is to pretend to be perfect and the other not to at least try to become better. I have seen it displayed on the fancy buildings in Manhattan when under renovation, "Pardon our appearance, work in progress." When we stand honestly before our Father in heaven on the holy day of Yom Kippur it is important to neither feign perfection or to fall into despair.

The healthiest way to succeed may be to hang a sign on the wall of your heart simply declaring, "Pardon my appearance I am a work in progress!"

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RABBI YAAKOV MENKEN

Legacy

“Corruption is not His—the blemish is His children’s, a crooked and twisted generation.

Behold, to HaShem you have done this, your Maker and the One who established you.” [32:5-6]

The Shaar Bas Rabim provides a homiletic interpretation of these verses. He says that they provide a profound lesson in parenting.

Some people, he says, behave incorrectly—and they know it—and yet, it does not bother them. Although they do not follow the Mitzvos, they feel no guilt for their actions, nor do they try to improve.

And yet, at the very same time, they expect exemplary behavior from their children. They expect their children to follow the path of Torah, to study and perform the Commandments. And if, or when, their children deviate from that path, it causes them a great deal of anguish.

Says the Shaar Bas Rabim—they have been ensnared. They are making a tragic mistake. They need to understand: just as they expect their children to follow the straight path, the Holy One, Blessed be He, wants that from His children as well.

The children see that their parents do not listen to the voice of their Father in Heaven—so why should they do any differently? By not listening to their parents, they follow their parents’ example in two ways: through their misbehavior itself, and through their rejection of their parents’ wishes. This is exactly what they should be expected to do—so the parents should not be surprised if their children go off course.

This is what the verse says, translating just one or two words at a time: “his corruption”—the fact that he himself is corrupt—“no”—this doesn’t bother him at all; but “his children”—the same corruption from his children—“their blemish”—it is a painful blemish in his eyes. This is “a crooked and twisted generation”—such a person is mistaken, crooked in his thinking. “It is to HaShem that you do this”—you yourselves are doing

precisely the same thing to HaShem, Blessed be He, and "He is your Maker, the One who established you." He wants from you, as His child, that you follow the good and straight path—and if you do not listen to your Father, how can you then expect from your children that they should listen to their parents?

If you would like to have children who are upright in their behavior, says the Shaar Bas Rabim, then you must be upright in your behavior. If you listen to your Father in Heaven, then your children will listen to your own voice.

We all want our children to be good people—I think it is natural for parents to want their children to "turn out better than we did!" We want our neighbors and friends to be good as well. The Shaar Bas Rabim is telling us that the way we can influence others—especially our children—is to influence ourselves first.

This is, of course, the ideal time for us to reexamine our actions, and improve them. On Yom Kippur we can start anew, and set ourselves in the right direction. We can only lead by example!

Good Shabbos, and may you be Sealed in the Book of Life, © 1999 Rabbi Y. Menken & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Chazal say that the song contained in this parashah contains allusions to the past, the present, and the future (of this world), and the World-to-Come. Our Sages divided it into six parts (plus the concluding verses read by the seventh person). The first letters of each of the six aliyot spell "heh-zayin-yud-vav-lamed-kaf" (see last paragraph below).

R' Yitzchak Karo z"l (15th century; uncle of R' Yosef Karo) explains that the reason the midrash divides up the aliyot of this parashah, whereas it does not do so for any other parashah, is that this parashah contains alternating curses and blessings. If the gabbai or reader stopped in a place that the person receiving the aliyah didn't approve of, a fight would ensue.

Alternatively, each one of the six sections is an allusion to a different aspect of G-d's relationship with man. For example, the first section describes G-d's kindness to mankind in general, the second describes His kindness to Yisrael in particular during their sojourn in the desert, the third part describes G-d's kindness to the Jewish People in their role as inhabitants of Eretz Yisrael, etc.

Also, R' Karo explains, this parashah ordinarily (though not this year) is read during the period of judgment. Thus, the midrash attempts to "brighten" our week with the allusion contained in the initials listed above: "Ha'ziv lach" / "The light is yours." (Toldot Yitzchak)

"Were they wise they would comprehend this, they would discern it from their end." (32:29)

R' Simcha Zissel Ziv z"l (the Alter of Kelm; died 1898) writes: It is human nature that simple folk follow the lead of wealthy individuals. What the wealthy declare to be good, the simple folk will desire. What the wealthy declare to be undesirable, the simple folk will disdain.

In contrast, very few individuals pay attention to what the King of the Universe desires. We are called upon to have Yirat Hashem / Fear and Awe of G-d, which Rashi interprets (in his commentary to Shabbat 31a) as despising that which G-d despises. Why is this the case? Simply because we are not aware of our obligations. Such knowledge can come about only through deep study and analysis. This is what our verse refers to when it states: "Were they wise they would comprehend this." If man would apply sufficient study and analysis to the matter, he would be very conscious of his eventual end and he would discern what his real task in this world is.

The Gemara (Shabbat 153a) relates that Rabbi Eliezer taught: "Repent one day before you die." His students asked, "Does one know when he will die?" "Therefore, one must repent every day," Rabbi Eliezer replied.

To whom was R' Eliezer speaking? R' Ziv asks. His students were not simpletons; rather, they included the likes of Rabbi Akiva. Therefore, there must be a deeper message in his words, specifically that one must always reflect on the approaching day of death. Only this can instill in a person proper Yirat Hashem. (Ha'sefer Ha'kattan ch.19)

"For I shall raise My hand to Heaven and say, 'As I (Anochi) live forever'." (32:40)

R' Moshe Hager shlita (the Vizhnitzer Rebbe in Bnei Brak, Israel) observes: Raising one's hands to Heaven refers to prayer. This verse teaches that one's prayer should be primarily motivated by a desire to increase G-d's honor, the honor of "Anochi" (a reference to G-d, as in the first word of the Ten Commandments). We are taught that the Shechinah shares in our pain (see Tehilim 91:15). [One way to understand this concept is that G-d created the world as an act of kindness, and He is disappointed (so-to-speak) when our deeds force Him to punish us.] Therefore, if we pray for the Shechinah's pain to end, any pain or suffering we are experiencing will necessarily end as well. (Sichot U'ma'amarei Kodesh p.213) © 1999 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org

