

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS**

### Who Wrote Sefer Devarim?

I'm always baffled on the differences in style and content that appear in the book of Devarim in contrast to the preceding four books of our Torah. Any serious student of Torah would notice a host of variations between these texts and the obvious question is "Why?"

Let me explain. First the language is different. In Devarim, Moshe our teacher often speaks in the first person something that is not found in the first four books of the Torah. Second, there are blatant disparities when contrasting the book of Devarim to the preceding books. For example, the differences in the language of the Ten Commandments. The obvious inclusion of additional words in the text in Devarim as well as a host of laws which do not appear in the preceding books. The section dealing with the blessings and rebukes are markedly different. One can therefore ask the question as to why this discrepancy? Was this book written by someone else? Is it G-d driven as the other books or was it written by Moshe?

These questions are indeed the discussion of our sages as well.

When one reads the commandments of Shabbat as it appears in the book of Shmot and Devarim, two divergent languages appear; "Zachor" and "Shamor". Which one appeared on the Ten Commandments? Or did they both appear? Our Rabbis state that these two languages were said at one time, something that no human can achieve. So that each time the Decalogue appeared, the second language was also used.

But the questions still abound? What about all the other dissimilarities in the book of Devarim? The additional laws-the additional curses and blessings-how were they written? Were they written and given by G-d or were they Moshe's words?

Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky author of the book "Emes L'Yaakov" develops an interesting approach. He claims that there are times in the Torah that we see the word written in one way yet we read it in another way. Examples of this can be found in the portion of Ki Tavo, in which the Torah writes one language, yet we vocalize it very differently. This phenomenon is referred

to as the axiom of "Kri and Ktiv". He therefore posits the innovative notion that the differences between the text in Dvarim and the conflicting texts in the other sections of the Torah are just an example of this principle of "Kri and Ktiv", in which one time it appears as we should read it and the next time it appears as it is written or visa versa.

I believe that perhaps there is another explanation to these apparent differences.

In defining how the Torah was given to the Jewish people, the Bais Halevi states that on the original Decalogue were written the unwritten Torah as well ( The Torah shbeal Peh). When the second set of tablets were given however, the Oral Torah was omitted. This omission made the Jewish people an integral part in the transmission of the Torah. Before they were outsiders looking at the text as it appeared in writing. Now that the Oral law was not written, the Jewish people were charged to be intimately involved in the transmission, and they became the conduit for the receiving and the transmission of the Oral Torah. They fundamentally became the unwritten law!

It is this line of reasoning that I believe explains the blatant disparities from the book of Deuteronomy to the other four preceding books. I would like to offer the theory that the book of Dvarim is the first example of the Oral law as interpreted by our teacher Moses. Its importance and value remains equal to the other books but it represents the beginnings of the elucidation and expounding of the preceding written Torah and the meanings of those words. In essence then, Moshe our teacher in the book of Devarim provided the first example of the exposition of the preceding books of the Torah; the "Torah Shbeal peh", the unwritten Torah. Using this reasoning we can easily explain the contrast in language, style and content of the book of Devarim when compared to the other books and arrive possibly at the conclusion that one book is an explanation of the others.

When I presented this theory to my esteemed colleague and Rabbi in West Hartford he commented that perhaps this is the intent of the words that appear at the beginning of Devarim that "Hoil Moshe beer et hatorah hazot", Moshe began to explain this Torah.

I believe it is! © 2008 Rabbi M. Weiss. Rabbi Mordechai Weiss is the Principal of the Bess and Paul Sigel Hebrew Academy of Greater Hartford. Any comments can be e-mailed to him at [ravmordechai@aol.com](mailto:ravmordechai@aol.com)

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## JEWISH WORLD REVIEW

# The Shofar and the Echo of Sinai

by *Rabbi Yonason Goldson*

**T**he Israeli army stands on alert, poised to attack. Opposing the Jewish force is an uncompromising enemy claiming sovereignty over the land that has been the cornerstone of Jewish tradition for centuries. Neither reason nor diplomacy has had the slightest impact upon the enemy's outlook, permitting no other recourse than a full-scale military offensive.

These were the headlines only a few years ago, and circumstances in Israel are not so different now. But the same conditions prevailed more than three thousand years old, when the Jewish people crossed the Jordan River to occupy the land that had been first promised to their patriarchs five centuries earlier.

To establish and preserve an ethically and spiritually elevated society, the Jews could not live along side peoples steeped in immorality. And so Joshua, the leader of the Jews, sent forth his message to the inhabitants of the land: if they agreed to renounce murder, theft, idolatry, and adultery, then they could live together with the Jews as neighbors; if they were unwilling to accept these terms, then they were free to leave; but if they refused either option, then they should prepare for war. With few exceptions, the Canaanite nations chose war over either conformance to an ethical code or repatriation elsewhere.

The first military encounter drew near with the encampment of the Jewish army opposite the fortified city of Jericho. Intimidated by the size of the Israelite camp, the residents of Jericho shut themselves inside the great walls that surrounded the city and prepared for the Jewish onslaught.

The Jews, however, employed an unorthodox strategy. For six consecutive days the Jewish army marched around the perimeter of the city; and on the seventh day, when the Jews sounded the shofar, the walls of the city sank into the ground, enabling the Jewish soldiers to swarm into the city and easily conquer the astonished inhabitants.

Since the Almighty does not perform miracles haphazardly, why did Jericho have to fall through divine

intervention? Could the Jews not have defeated the city conventionally, as they had in the desert and would in their subsequent battles? And what is the special significance of their victory coming about through the blowing the shofar?

The battle of Jericho followed only a few days after the Jewish people's entry into the Land of Israel. Throughout the preceding forty years, the Jews had lived in the desert, fed by the manna from heaven, guided by the pillar of fire, and protected by the clouds of glory. But from the moment they crossed over the Jordan River, all the open manifestations of the divine presence departed instantaneously and left them to live according to the natural laws of the physical world.

From that time forward, the Almighty concealed His presence, requiring us to seek Him out by recognizing the intelligent design behind the intricate workings of nature. Instead of allowing ourselves to become numb to the wonders that surround us, it is our obligation to find inspiration in the multifaceted miracle that is Creation.

The great danger of physical existence, however, is that we easily forget that we are essentially spiritual beings. All the gratification offered by that the material world seduces us, while our own mastery over the world we live in makes us arrogant. And when we convince ourselves that success and prosperity reside in our own might and the strength of our own hands, we lose our appreciation for our place in the community of Man and come to believe that there is no power or authority greater than ourselves.

And so, at the moment of their transition from supernatural to natural existence, the Jewish people received a dramatic reminder that even within the natural course of events, success or failure depends not upon military armaments or tactics, but upon our own sense of place in the natural order. As the Jews circled the walls of Jericho, the call of the shofar summoned them back to when they stood together at Sinai, as one man and with one heart, to accept upon themselves the mission that defines the Jewish people as a nation, to strive together toward spiritual and moral self-perfection.

Tragically, we often fail to take the call of the shofar to heart. Rather than fostering appreciation and unity, we respond to our successes with disregard for both our fellow Jews and our national destiny, so that lasting success slips repeatedly through our fingers.

Jewish history illuminates our failures in the harshest light. The glory of the first Temple gave way to civil war and national humiliation. The accomplishments of the Hasmoneans devolved into the murderous reign of Herod and the Roman occupation. The golden age of Spanish Jewry culminated in the Inquisition and the Edict of Expulsion. And the pillars of the Jewish communities of Europe splintered before the wanton violence of the Crusades and vanished amidst the

ashes of the Holocaust. Today, more than ever, when Israel continues to face military aggression from every side, and when militant secularism and religious extremism threaten people of faith throughout the world, Rosh HaShonah offers every one of us a priceless opportunity. When we hear the call of the shofar, let us hearken back to the time when Jewish national identity was forged at Sinai and remember that, ultimately, our success depends not upon the strength of our hands but upon our commitment to our identity and our commitment to one another. © 2008 Rabbi Goldson and jewishworldreview.com

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**B**eing held accountable for our actions, and required to make a conscious decision to improve our ways, is built on the notion that we have the ability to decide what to do and not to do. This ability is called "bechira," literally "choice," or free will. "Everything is controlled/decided by heaven except for fear of heaven" (Berachos 33b). The only thing we have ultimate control over is whether or not we are (or will be) righteous.

When a mitzvah is done, it can be described as being made "mai'ahavah," out of "love" for G-d, a recognition of His ultimate wisdom and that we are better off following His commandments, or "mai'yirah," out of "fear" of the punishment we will experience for disobeying Him. Rav Yitzchok Hutner, z"l (Pachad Yitzchok, Rosh Hashanah, Ma'amar 7), asks why our sages, of blessed memory, phrased the concept of free will in a way that refers only to obeying G-d out of "fear" rather than out of "love." He presents the idea of having the responsibility to make choices being dependant on our full realization of the consequences of those choices. Only if we are truly afraid of what would happen if we make the wrong decision are we truly worthy of having the ability to choose in the first place.

Previously ([www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/bo.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5765/bo.pdf), [5768/yomKippur.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5768/yomKippur.pdf) and [5768/sukkot.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5768/sukkot.pdf)) I have discussed the concept put forth by Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, z"l, regarding "nekudas habechira" (Michtav Me'Eliyahu I, pg 113). He writes about the "point of the battle" between our "yeitzer tov" (good side) and "yetzer hara" (evil inclination), and how "free will" only comes into play when there is a recognition (on some level) that the choices before him represent good (or truth) and bad (or falsehood disguising itself as truth) and the ability to choose either side. If we are not on the level (yet) to choose this particular "good," or on such a level where stooping to this "bad" would not even be considered, there is no real "choice" here, and no battle between "good" and "evil." Similarly, if a decision has no bearing on "right" or "wrong," such as, after deciding to eat a jellybean, whether to eat a yellow one or an orange one, is not a function of "free will," but

of preference, and it entails the same kind of decision-making that animals (who do not have "bechira") make. Not being able to recognize that one choice is "good" and/or the other being "bad" would fall into the same category (since there is no internal struggle between "right" and "wrong").

It should be noted that we are responsible not only for the decisions we make that were a function of our free will, but also for the decisions that we could have made (or wouldn't have considered making) had we won those battles. Going to a ball game instead of learning Torah may not be a battle once the tickets were paid for, even if the decision to buy them knowing that the game will be played when learning could/should be done did qualify as within the range of free will. Similarly, every victory over our evil inclination allows us to fight battles we couldn't have previously fought, and moves other battles out of range, as we would no longer even consider not doing what's right in those. This, Rav Dessler says, is what is meant by "mitzvah goreres mitzvah" and "aveirah goreres aveirah," as performing one mitzvah moves our "nekudas habechira" up and makes it easier to do even more mitzvos, while transgressing makes it more likely for other transgressions to occur.

Since our "nekudas habechira," the point where free will is in play, is limited to areas where there is a battle between our "yeitzer tov" and "yeitzer hara," mitzvos we do without having that battle are not a function of free will, but a result of having previously used our free will to choose right over wrong. I would like to suggest that any mitzvos done "mei'ahavah," out of love for G-d, are not done as a result of a decision made where this struggle occurred. Someone on the level of doing the mitzvah "mei'ahavah" is not struggling between whether or not to do it. He has already placed G-d above himself, and fully realizes that the best thing for him to do is follow G-d's commandments, to do G-d's will. If the person is struggling within himself, trying to decide whether to do what G-d wants or what he wants, or struggling to be objective enough to realize what G-d really wants, the motive for not making the wrong decision cannot be said to be because He loves G-d so much, but because despite his own desire to do one thing, he knows that G-d wants him to choose otherwise, so he better do what G-d wants or else. If doing a mitzvah "mai'ahavah" means not even considering not doing it, we can understand why the Talmud describes our having free will to be specifically within the framework of "fear of heaven."

In the merit of making the right choices, and committing to continually make the right choices in order to be able to accomplish even more, may G-d grant us all year of peace, health and happiness, including providing us with all of the resources to make 5769 a successful and monumental year. Tihiyeh Shenat Siman Tov. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

## AISHDAS SOCIETY

## Aspaqlaria

by Rabbi Micha Berger

**A**s 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 take a step back and look at s'char va'onesh—reward and punishment. Perhaps if we understood what punishment is, we would understand why teshuvah can "pass through the evil of the decree" (Yamim nora'im mussaf).

Psychologists have developed many methods for changing an undesired character trait. Among them is a technique called "behavior modification." 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.

Behavior modification focuses on teaching a child that actions have consequences. 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 more safe, 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?

In Eichah 3:38 Yirmiyahu Hanavi writes, "From the 'Mouth' of the One Above, come neither the evil nor the good." Rashi comments on this, using two pisukim from this week's parashah.

Yirmiyahu is not implying that what happens to us is by chance. "Chai gever al chata'av—a man lives on his sins." The evil does not come from Hashem, because it is a natural consequence of the sin. Similarly, R. Yochanan comments on the more famous pasuk, "Behold I have placed before you, the life and that which is good, and death and that which is evil. Choose life!" Choosing between good and evil is not choosing between whether Hashem will reciprocate with life or death. By choosing between good and evil, you bring on yourself one or the other. R. Chaim Vilozhiner (Derech Hachaim 1:21) shows the same idea from the Gemara in Eiruvin. "The wicked deepen

gehennom for themselves." What you get in the World to Come is merely the consequence of the mitzvos you do. R. Chaim takes this one step further. Each sin, he writes, causes a flaw in your soul. The punishment that is the consequence of this flaw heals it. The Derech Hashem states (1:4:5) "sin detracts from one's perfection". The Michtav Me'Eliyahu explains the expression "Aveira goreres aveira" 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.

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 illuminates another complex point. We learn that a man gets a minor punishment for Aveiros Bishogeg (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.

When Hagar and Yishmael 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. Yishmael was not judged for the evil he did that made him unacceptable to Avraham's home, or the evil he will do, and his children still do. Yishmael was repaid in terms of "ba'asher hu sham—as he was there". The way your soul stands at that moment is the direct cause of reward or punishment.

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, in Hilchos Teshuvah (2:1) 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. Rav Yoseph Ber Soleveitchik ("Al Hateshuvah") explains, "the Baal Teshuvah says that he is a new man; the man who performed the sin no longer exists."

Since, as R. Chaim Vilozhiner writes, punishment is the natural consequence of the flaw in

your soul, by taking the effort to remove that flaw, the punishment disappears on its own.

Teshuvah meahavah, teshuvah caused by love of the Creator, causes the aveiros not just to be ignored, but even to be considered as mitzvos. Through teshuvah a person can improve himself to the extent of being beyond where he would have been had he not sinned. Each aveira should become something to regret, motivation for learning a lesson, so that each brings him closer to the ideal Hashem has for him.

Lishana tovah tiekateivu viteichateimu! May Hashem take our teshuvah and fulfill another pasuk of this week's parsahah, "And Hashem will return your captives, and have mercy upon you." (30:3) © 1995 Rabbi M. Berger and aishdas.org

### RABBI MORDECHAI WOLLENBERG

## Weekly Thoughts

**T**his Shabbat is known as Shabbat Shuva or, according to some, Shabbat Teshuvah. It takes its name from the period we are currently in, between Rosh Hashona and Yom Kippur, known as the Ten Days of Teshuvah. Teshuvah is often incorrectly translated as penitence or repentance which, whilst giving some idea of what Teshuvah is about, tends to conjure up a very stark image of a 'sinner' who needs to 'repent' etc.

Judaism looks at it differently. The literal translation of Teshuvah is 'return'. This is because Judaism teaches us that humanity is intrinsically good and that if we should happen to stray from the path once in a while, this does not make us wicked or evil. It is simply a question of acknowledging our failings, gathering our bearings and returning to the right path, from whence we came. Teshuvah is the process of returning to the ideal which we originally and intrinsically possess. A much more positive way of looking at things than is suggested by the word 'penitence'.

This period, between Rosh Hashona (the New Year) and Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) is a time for introspection, for reflection on the past and for taking on good resolutions for the future, to improve and to grow over the new year which has just started on Rosh Hashona, to return to our roots, to G-d and to ourselves.

This idea also fits in with this week's Torah portion, Vayeilech, describing the last days of Moses' life. The title of each Torah portion highlights an important concept which is taught in that particular portion. Vayeilech literally means 'and Moses went' from the root of the word Halicha, meaning 'going' in Hebrew. 'Halicha' also means the idea of being on the move, of not being stagnant. By subjecting ourselves to an honest reckoning, using this time for introspection and self-assessment and drawing the necessary conclusions, we are able to move on and to grow as

people, rather than remaining stuck where we are. We have the capability to 'go', to reach very high moral and spiritual levels. We cannot remain standing still, we must be 'mechalchim' - 'goers', movers and shakers, people who grow, who make a difference to what is going on.

May we all be granted health, happiness and success, may each of us grow and develop, both as individuals and as a community, and may each of us, together with all the world, be judged favourably on Yom Kippur and blessed with long life and happiness.  
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### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**T**ashlikh, the ceremony of walking to the water on Rosh Hashanah is first mentioned by Rabbi Jacob Moelin (1355-1427) in his Sefer Maharil. It is commonly associated with the casting of sins into a running stream. Are there other ways of understanding this custom?

Perhaps tashlikh reminds us of the creation story in which "the spirit of God hovered upon the face of the waters." (Genesis 1:2) This is appropriate as Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of creation. Standing near the waters, beholding the beauty of nature, we are able to better feel the presence of the Holy One blessed be He, creator and sustainer of the world.

Another thought comes to mind. Water is invariably involved at key moments of the Jewish people's expression of nationhood. After leaving Egypt we marched through the split Red Sea. Indeed, we crossed the Jordan as we entered into Israel. As we walk together to the water on Rosh Hashanah, we recall those moments when we became a nation and reflect on the challenge that a nation can only sustain itself if its people, no matter their political or religious bent, give dignity and respect to each other.

Still another idea comes to mind. In the Bible water is associated with love. Eliezer, looking for a wife for Yitzhak (Isaac), encounters Rivka (Rebecca) at the well; Yakov (Jacob) also sees Rachel for the first time at the well; and Moshe (Moses) meets his wife to be Ziporah at the water. The tashlikh ceremony reminds us of the importance of maintaining wholesome family relationships and our responsibility to do all we can to engender a spirit of love in our homes.

Taken together, these approaches to tashlikh relate to universal national and personal concerns.

Some final reflections. Rabbi Akiva notes that just as the mikvah purifies the impure, so does God purify Israel. (Yoma 85b) From this perspective tashlikh recalls for us the power of the mikvah waters to purify—a purity we seek on Rosh Hashanah.

And water of course, is the symbol of life. Hence the walk to the waters on Rosh Hashanah is our

way of petitioning God for a year of goodness, fulfillment, health and life. May we all be so blessed. © 1997 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

*[Editor's note: This dvar Torah was written in 1988]*

**A**s a concept of freedom, Passover is easy enough to grasp. It relates to a specific time and place—the creation of a nation almost 3500 years ago, in effect the birthday of the Jewish people. But Rosh Hashana, commemorating the day G-d created our planet, is much harder to grasp because the idea of the birthday of the world is more abstract and ephemeral than the birthday of a nation. Even the essential symbol of Rosh Hashana, the cry of the shofar, is something which exists in time. Sound, by its very nature, can not be touched or felt or tasted like a piece of matzah; it enters one's being but who knows where it ends up.

How do we celebrate the beginning of a new year? The Jewish New Year is not a media event orchestrated with a chiming clock as we breathlessly count down the last dying seconds of Elul to welcome a reborn and revived Tishrai. We don't roll out the old and ring in the new, we certainly don't spent the last seconds of 5748 in a state of inebriation, wearing funny hats, and kissing our partners' cheeks.

Although it's not hard to pinpoint the split second when 5749 starts, the fact is that the new year is not so much a specific moment as it is a process which begins as far back as the first of Elul, a month before Rosh Hashana. Each morning in the synagogue the shofar's plaintive call reminds us of the approach of the days of awe. The Slichot, special dawn penitential prayers which begin in Elul, (the beginning of the month for Sefardim and toward the end for Ashkenazim) takes the daily morning service and turns it into a cry for compassion. The days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are called the ten days of repentance, and chassidim teach that one's fate is not sealed until Hoshana Raba, thirteen days after Yom Kippur. Indeed, for many the real new year won't even begin until a month after Rosh Hashana when we complete the five books of Moses and begin again with the opening words of Genesis.

In fact, our new year really covers a seven week stretch, and instead of speaking of 49 shopping days left, what our tradition teaches is that this period of time is suitable for 'tshuva,' return, coming home, repentance.

Conceptualizing the Torah's commandments into categories we find three basic types. Obligatory commandments such as tefillin, Sabbath, or tzedaka, incumbent upon everyone. Into a second group fall the

conditional commandments: if I wear a four cornered garment I must attach ritual fringes, if I build a house with a flat roof I must provide a parapet. In the third category we find what are called post-facto commandments—we never want to see it happen, but should the crisis arise, like divorce or war, the Torah's commands are clear.

The question is into which category do we place the commandment of 'tshuva' (repentance)? According to Maimonides, when a person commits a sin the process of repentance requires three steps: recognition of sin, the feeling of regret for past misdeeds, and resolving never to do it again. Although 'tshuva' (repentance) is a mitzvah, its essential dynamic is post-facto: hopefully we will never come to the point where we will need to repent, but if we do sin, Maimonides gives us the cure.

In Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook's work "Orot Hateshuva" (Lights of Repentance) we find a different approach to repentance. Not only isn't it post-facto, or even conditional, but 'return' is seen as the fundamental movement of the universe; the purpose of creation is 'repentance.' Therefore, the only category this mitzvah can fall into is the one incumbent upon everyone, such as tefillin or the Sabbath.

"...I am the Lord and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil." [Isaiah 45:6-7] According to Isaiah, G-d created this world imperfectly; repentance (cleaning up one's will) casts light where there is darkness and creates peace where there is evil. The world is incomplete, imperfect, flawed. Were it perfect, we'd all be angels, nothing for us to do except sing praises. Kabbalists speak of Creation as an act of 'tzimtzum', G-d restricting himself because the vessels couldn't contain His light, His goodness, His love, and as a result of this restriction it was inevitable that pockets of chaos, darkness, and evil would remain intact until the human being would do his part by becoming a partner with G-d and striving to perfect the world.

Rav Kook teaches that not only does the human being have to 'return' but the world itself has to 'return.' According to Rashi in Genesis, G-d's intention was for the bark of the tree to taste as sweet as its fruit, but nature rebelled. The implication is that all of Creation must return to the harmony of G-d's perfections, and the promise and dream of the Torah is that one day it will come to be; when humanity perfects itself, the world will reflect that perfection. 'Tshuva,' (the word itself is reflexive), contains the idea of returning to oneself, one's inner self, one's truest self, the self, created in the image of G-d, which yearns for perfection.

I remember once searching in Meah Shearim for the perfect etrog, going from counter to counter, when an older Jerusalemite turned to me and asked if I'd ever heard of the story of the clever young man in

Posen who decided to test the skill of Rabbi Akiva Eiger by creating the perfect synthetic etrog. When he brought his merchandise to the home of the revered sage, no sooner did the rabbi pick up the synthetic etrog, examine it, inhale its fragrance, look at it in the light, that he put it down, and went to another etrog. This happened several times until he finally chose another, less perfect, etrog. When the young man asked why he'd chosen the other etrog, the sage smiled and said, "Nothing in this world is perfect."

The irony is that only when we come to realize the truth of Rabbi Akiva Eiger's words do we, in our own modest ways, have a chance of starting the process of bringing about perfection. © 1988 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### RAV SHLOMO AVINER

## Each to His Own

**A** story appears in the Gemara: "Rav Sheshet said, 'a yeshiva student who sits in fast - a dog has gained his meal'". Yet isn't fasting one of the ways to do teshuvah, both the Torah and prophets established fast days? But extra fasts are not suited to that student. His repentance must be by adding study, not by fasting. Chazal define his teshuvah: if he was used to studying one page, he should study two pages and so on. This is what Rav Kook wrote too, "A Torah scholar has no correction by teshuvah except with the Torah and via the Torah". Moreover, if a student is a profound thinker, it's not enough that he increases the quantity of his study but his repentance must be by delving deeper into the Torah as well.

On the other hand, the repentance of an irresponsible state worker is not to study two pages, neither is the repentance of a glutton and a drunkard to study two pages, but to fast. Each depends upon the circumstances. Each person has his own service and his own mitzvah. Sometimes the Gemara will emphasize, "What is it you are most careful in?" For each person also has his own personal sin. This is why the expression in Pirkei Avot is "Anyone whose fear of his sin precedes his wisdom...", not that he is sin-fearing but he fears "his" sin. Each person has a particular sin which is his own, from which all his other sins emanate, and that person must make a special effort to overcome that sin. Each person has his own mitzvah, his own sin and his own task.

Obviously the whole Torah belongs to the whole of K'lal Yisrael, yet each individual still has his own special emphasis. This can be compared to a highroad which, although it is a public thoroughfare, has special lanes. Each person has his own teshuvah, each person has his own mission in his world. We end the Yom Kippur prayers with "My G-d, before I was created I was insignificant", Rav Kook explains, "Before I was created - all the unlimited time from the beginning of time until I was created, there was obviously nothing

in the world which had any need for me, for if I had been lacking for any purpose or to complete something then I would have been created and since I was not created until then, that is a sign that there was no purpose for my creation until then and there was no need for me except for the time at which I was created. For the time had arrived at which I must fulfill some purpose of completing reality", but, "Now that I have been created, it is as if I had not been created" - for I have not fulfilled my task, even though the task itself has been imposed upon me, I have not achieved it, therefore I am still insignificant.

Let us all strengthen ourselves to fulfill our own task and to complete our own teshuvah, "Each man at his camp and each man at his flag". © 1997 *Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org*

### RABBI YAAKOV HABER

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**R**abbi Tanchum said: "If someone, who has recited the Shema every day of his life, misses it just one evening, it is as if he has never said the shma at all. (Berakhot, 63a). Imagine that! Here is someone, aged perhaps 85, who has faithfully said the Shema every day since before his Bar Mitzva (and how many of us can say that we have done that?), and he feels under the weather just one evening and skips it, and he's blown the lot! A lifetime of reciting the Shema wasted!

How can we understand this? The Dubnow Magid explains it with an analogy. In parts of Europe, before the advent of the telephone or telegraph, it was the custom to transmit messages quickly from town to town by having a chain of men on mountain tops stretching from one town to the other, shouting the message down the line. As we know, there was a similar arrangement in Israel at the time of the Second Temple, to spread news of the date of the new month, by lighting fires on successive mountain tops. Anyway, suppose we have a chain of fifty men on mountain tops from one town to the next, and one man in the chain does not shout the message, or light the fire, when it is his turn. We can't say: Well, it's only one man out of fifty, the message system is still 98% perfect. The failure of that one man spoils it for everyone else, before and after him, down the line. So it is with that one missed recitation of the Shema.

On Rosh Hashana we recite Psalm 24, which includes the line: "Who may climb the mountain of G-d, and who may stand in the place of His holiness?" The Baalei Mussar explain this in the following way. There are two stages in attaining new levels of observance. The first ("climbing the mountain of G-d") involves trying out a new mitzva, and the second ("standing in the place of His holiness") involves constancy in its performance. The first stage corresponds to having a spiritual high, which most of us have had at some time

or other. Such highs may last a few minutes, or a few months. They are valuable for giving us a taste of new levels of observance. But the important thing in Judaism, in the long run, is not such spiritual highs, but constancy in our observances. How do we reach this second stage? The best way is to make a commitment.

There seems to be an attitude prevalent in the modern world, certainly in America, of not making commitments, of keeping one's options open, of holding back as long as possible. I know many people who come to minyan for a week or two, and then drop out for a month or so, and then reappear at minyan, and so on. Imagine someone who wanted to boil water to make tea, but instead of boiling it for ten minutes at a stretch, he boiled it for one minute, then let it cool for an hour, then boiled it for another minute, and so on. At the end of ten hours he still wouldn't have boiling water!

In my classes, I have noticed that one mitzva which always goes down well is the mitzva of avoiding making oaths. ("Will you come to mincha tomorrow?" "B'li neder!") This is an important mitzva, but I get the feeling that people sometimes use it to avoid making commitments. Perhaps that is why the Kol Nidre prayer is so popular!

According to the Torah once you make a commitment for some greater level of observance, whether it be spending more time learning, or more time visiting the sick, or stricter Shabbos observance, or whatever it is, you immediately get the reward for it, even before you have started performing the mitzva, provided the commitment was sincere.

Now, in the period of the Ten Days of Penitence leading up to Yom Kippur, is the time to search our souls and see what new commitments we should make. I am not asking for the impossible. Everyone knows what mitzvos they are ready to accept, and what level of observance they are ready for. May you all be inscribed and sealed for a good year. © 1983

*Rabbi Y. Haber*

### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## **Knock, Knock!**

**T**he repetitive nature of everything associated with Rosh Hashanah is noteworthy. During the entire month of Elul, we blow the shofar at the end of shacharis (morning prayer). Unlike Matzo, where many have a custom to abstain during the month of Nisan - 15 days before the festival of Passover - and others will not eat Matzo for a month in joyous anticipation of the spiritual crunch, anticipating Rosh Hashanah seems different. Instead of creating excitement by not blowing the shofar, we diminish the level by becoming accustomed to it. Of course, we must prepare ourselves. There is a lot at stake on Judgement Day, but wouldn't an extemporaneous and unrehearsed blast of the shofar send more of a shiver down the spine and more forcefully a call for

repentance, rather than a shofar-sounding ritual performed for 30 days prior that may by now feel quite rote?

The Selichos services are also a lead-up to the great day. Sefardic Jews have the custom to recite the pre-dawn prayers for the entire month of Elul. Moreover, Ashkenazic Jews can recite the selichos for more than a week before Rosh Hashanah. Would there not be a consideration that many Jews would get prayed-out from the pre-holiday supplications? Isn't there a chance that they would get blown-away by the repetitive nature of the month-long shofar exercise?

In the Selichos service, we beseech the Almighty as if we were destitute. "Like beggars and paupers we knock on Your door. On Your door, we knock, Merciful and Compassionate One" (from the first Selichos prayer L'cha Hashem hatzedaka). Again, we knock - not once, but twice! Isn't once enough? Surely G-d is not in the kitchen. He can hear us the first time!

My brother-in-law, Rabbi Simcha Lefkowitz, Rabbi of Congregation Toras Chaim in Hewlett tells the following story: A meshulach (a man who raises funds for charity) came on sunny Sunday morning to a large home in the Five Towns of Long Island. Eagerly he rang the bell, and simultaneously knocked on the door. A woman, quite displeased, swung open the ornate portal to her home and, knowing the man's intent, she began to shout. "What do you want? I never met you in my life! How do you expect me to give charity to someone I have never seen? I'm sorry, but this is my policy and I just can't give you!" The meshulach was not perturbed. Slowly, he walked around the block and fifteen minutes later he was back at the same door. Again he rang the bell, and again the woman came out shouting. "I told you I never met you in my life! How do you expect me to give charity to someone I have never seen! Didn't I clearly explain my policy to you?"

The meshulach just smiled as he replied. "You are absolutely correct. However, you forgot one small thing. You know me already! After all, we met ten minutes ago!"

The weeks before Rosh Hashanah we must be wary that we may have to knock a few times to get into the big door. Of course, Hashem knows who and what we are, but we may be a little foreign to him. The daily shofar blasts, the recital of chapter 27 of Tehillim, L'Dovid Hashem Ori, twice daily in our prayers and the recital of daily selichos are all summarized in the words we recite, "like beggars we knock...we knock on Your door, Merciful One." We realize that we must reacquaint ourselves with the commitments and the great resolutions that we accepted upon ourselves one year ago. But if we knock once and knock again, ultimately we, too, can smile at the One standing at the door and ask for all our desires. After all, we were just there. And He knows us already! © 1997 *Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org*