

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

MACHON MEIR

Each to his Own Repentance

by Rabbi Shlomo Aviner

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". © 1996 Rabbi S. Aviner

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

One of the main aspects of Rosh Hashanah as you are all aware is the sounding of the shofar. This ceremony is the main commandment of the day and Rosh Hashanah in the liturgy and in the Torah is called a "day of teruah - of sounding the shofar."

In the prayer itself one of the three main components of the awe inspiring musaf service is that of shofrot - verses of the Bible that refer to the sounding of the shofar. The sounding of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, as are all other Jewish rituals, is intended to touch our collective memory and to stir our souls to a closer relationship with eternity and our Creator.

The sound of the shofar that we hear in our synagogues on Rosh Hashanah is not meant to be an isolated sound and incident. Rather, its true and overriding purpose is to remind us of the two great shofrot that essentially can be considered the bookends of Jewish thought, belief and history.

These two shofrot are described in the Bible of Israel as being the great shofar that was sounded at Mount Sinai - the sound of that shofar became exceedingly stronger unlike a human shofar sound that eventually must waver and weaken - and the second shofar is the shofar of the final redemption of Israel - the shofar of the Messiah, if you will - that will signal the coming of the great era at the end of days.

Our shofar sound on Rosh Hashanah comes to complement these eternal sounds of the two shofrot of Jewish life - the shofar of Sinai and the shofar of redemption.

The shofar of Sinai is that of the granting of the Torah to Israel. This shofar's sound is ongoing. In fact it

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gains strength throughout Jewish history. Its sound gains volume as time passes. There is no record of any type of scholarship in human history or society that equals the scholarship devoted to Torah study and interpretation by the Jewish people over the ages.

One of the saddest aspects of the overriding Jewish experience in current Jewish society is its abysmal ignorance of Torah scholarship and its importance in the Jewish story of survival and accomplishment. The sound of the shofar of Sinai is muted except for a certain section of Jewish society that continues to insist that Torah is and should be the main component of Jewish education and life.

But without the shofar of Sinai being heard and its echo constantly reverberating within the Jewish world, we are doomed. Assimilation today is not so much born out of malice or ideology - the old time apikorsim are long since gone from the Jewish scene, victims of their desertion of Jewish tradition and practice. Assimilation is more a product of ignorance of everything Jewish. Non-Jewish values have been adapted to be the new Jewish religion, adorned with fancy slogans such as tikun olam.

But, if the shofar of Sinai is not heard, then all of these innovations, attractive as they may seem, are soon to be consigned to the dustbin of Jewish history as so many other "good progressive" ideas of times past have been. A concerted effort to hear the shofar of Sinai is certainly one that should be high on our list of intentions for the new year.

The shofar of redemption initially sounds very softly - one has to strain to hear it. But it eventually it becomes stronger and more vibrant. The land and State of Israel continues to grow and in many ways prosper no matter its military, political, diplomatic and economic obstacles. It contains within it the prospect of great accomplishment for the Jewish people and the world generally.

Just as there are Torah and Sinai deniers, there are Israel and redemption deniers. The sound of that shofar is also not heard in large sections of Jewish society. It is fashionable in many Jewish circles to support Israel's enemies with money and media attention. Somehow, certain groups of Jews hear the siren song of exile and belonging in non-Jewish societies and are deaf to the sound of the shofar of redemption.

In the height of hypocrisy they campaign against Israel and Jewish values while stating piously that everything they do is really for the benefit of the Jewish people and the State of Israel itself. One needs a clear mind and perceptive ears to hear the two shofrot of Jewish life. They can be heard on this Rosh Hashanah if we only listen carefully to the sound of the shofar of the day and internalize its meaning and message within our mind and hearts. © 2010 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

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

There are three curious aspects about this period surrounding the Days of Awe that I would like to attempt to analyze. The Bible defines our Jewish New Year's Day, "A Day of the broken sound of the shofar - it shall be a truah for you." What is the real message of the sound of the shofar?

Secondly, throughout this period, we recite special Penitential Prayers (Slichot). What is the significance of these prayers?

Finally, the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) is commanded to enter the innermost part of the sanctuary - known as the Holy of Holies - only twice a year on the same day, Yom Kippur - the Day of Forgiveness. The first time he enters he offers incense in a very difficult act of Divine service. The second time, towards the end of the day, he goes in to this most sacred of places without any specific function mandated by the Bible. What is the significance of this second entry into such a holy place?

The broken, staccato sound of the shofar (truah) is identified by the sages of the Talmud as either three sighs or nine sobs. These sounds cannot but remind us of an infant's wailing, which is perhaps the most primal sound we know. What is the baby seeking when he looks up at his mother and cries in this way? The most primal need within every human being is the need for love. The most frightening experience is to feel alienated, alone, and unloved. Our most fundamental human need is to be loved unconditionally.

It is precisely this unconditional love which our Parent in Heaven is willing to give to His children on earth. The Hasidic disciples of the revered Rebbe Menahem Mendel of Kotzk once asked him, "Why is it that in Kabbalistic and Hassidic lore the Almighty is referred to as the Shekhinah, usually translated as 'Divine presence.' After all, the Hebrew noun Shekhinah is a feminine noun, and as we are living in a very patriarchal society, ought G-d not be referred to by a masculine noun?"

The Kotzker Rebbe smiled and explained with an analogy which might be a bit anachronistic, but

which contains a most profound message. "It is the way of the world," he said, "that when a father comes home after a difficult day's work, he derives great relaxation from playing with his infant child, but once the baby messes its diaper, he gives the baby to its mother to clean it up. Still the father watches his wife as she changes the diaper, sees how she tenderly kisses the baby as she cleans. She accepts her child with its filth and that is precisely the way G-d accepts us with His Divine and unconditional love."

This is the true meaning of our Penitential Prayers. Again and again we repeat the names or partial descriptions of G-d which the Almighty revealed to Moses as the great prophet stood at the cleft of a rock: "Lord, Lord (Y-HVH) G-d of Compassion (Rahum) and Freely-giving Love (Hanun), long suffering, full of kindness and truth..." (Exodus 34:6) Our sages explain that "the Lord of Love" is written twice because G-d loves us before we sin and because G-d still loves us after we sin. The Hebrew word for compassion (raham) is built on the Hebrew noun rehem which means womb. G-d loves us unconditionally, just like a mother loves a child of her womb unconditionally. The shofar sound is a human cry for love. The Penitential Prayer is G-d's loving response to our tearful request.

The High Priest, who serves as a representative of the entire Jewish people spends Yom Kippur engaged in presenting sacrificial offerings to the Divine. At the end of the day, he enters the Holy of Holies just as he is, with no offering at all. He is asking G-d to accept him just as he is. And this is precisely the meaning of the very last request of the Penitential Prayers, "Avinu Malkaynu" (Our Father, our King): "Be gracious to us and answer us, because we have no worthy deeds to speak up for us; do for us an act of charity, an unconditional loving kindness and save us." And we actually sing these words out loud in order to express our joy in a G-d who loves us unconditionally.

Someone once went to Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov and asked him what was the proper way to repent. The rabbi told him to make two separate piles of papers. On one pile, he should write the names of all those people for whom he did favors; in the second pile he should write the names of all those people who wronged him. He must then make a fire and cast both piles into the flames in order to demonstrate that just as G-d loves us unconditionally, we must love every other human being unconditionally as well - and we must never expect any reward or thanks for the good things we do. © 2010 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Even those that do not refrain [from eating] bread baked by non-Jews [all year long] must refrain [from eating it] during the Ten Days of Repentance." Rabbi Yosef Cairo included only two laws

regarding the Ten Days of Repentance in the Shulchan Aruch (O"C 6:02-603), this being the second one. (The first is that we say additional prayers and supplications during these days;

Rama adds additional details and laws.) The notion that we should do things (or refrain from things) during these days of judgment even if we have no intent of continuing after Yom Kippur seems rather strange. Are we trying to fool G-d? Doesn't He know that we intend on reverting to our old behavior shortly after Yom Kippur ends? What's the point of keeping a law temporarily if it does not bring about any permanent change?

Additionally, why is this particular law (or "chumra") the one chosen, as opposed to any other? Why not "Cholov Yisrael" or "Chudush/Yushun"? If I get hungry at work next week, and would have considered buying Entenmann's rich frosted donuts, there are three possible reasons why I shouldn't (four if you count the requirement to be healthy): (1) It has non-Cholov Yisroel ingredients, and eating it may violate the rabbinic decree against ingesting milk that did not have Jewish supervision from the time it was milked; (2) Since wheat harvested last month has already entered the market in fresh-baked products, there is a real possibility that it contains grains that are biblically forbidden to be eaten until after Pesach; and (3) it falls under the category of "Pas Palter," a rabbinic decree against eating baked goods that were not baked by Jews. Yet, the reason the Shulchan Aruch tells me not to eat it is the latter issue, not the other two. There are "heterim" (leniencies) for all three aspects (see Shu't Chasam Sofer Y"D II 107 and Shu't Igros Moshe Y"D I 47-49 regarding Cholov Yisroel, Aruch HaShulchan Y"D 293 1-28 and Mishneh Berurah/Bayur Halacha on O"C 489:10 regarding Chudush/Yushun, and Y"D 112 regarding Pas Palter), yet Pas Akum is the one the Halachic Decisors focus on. Why?

Pas Palter is unique among the three in that despite the rabbinic decree, it was never universally accepted. Those places that did accept it follow the restrictions all year long, but the places that never accepted it when it was first introduced are not required to keep it now either. It is these places that the Shulchan Aruch says must keep this restriction during the Ten Days of Repentance; the other places must already do so all year long. Aruch Hashulchan says that this is precisely why this halacha was chosen, as if there was a real reason to keep it the rest of the year, doing so during these ten days would create an obligation to do so even after Yom Kippur. Therefore, a halacha such as Chudush/Yushun is not recommended to be kept just for these ten days, because once started, it would need to be kept all year. According to Aruch HaShulchan, it is the lack of a real reason to keep it the rest of the year (for those that don't) that allows it to be kept for this short time. The question

remains, though, what the point of keeping it temporarily is.

Levush doesn't position avoiding Pas Akum/Palter as a requirement, but as a custom. The reason for this custom is "so that a person will conduct himself in purity during these days, and remember that they (these days) are different in that they are on a higher level than the rest of the days of the year." This is consistent with the source of the custom/law (see Tur); Rebbe Chiya having instructed Rav to eat everything in purity (even "chulin," which can be eaten if ritually impure) during this week. If the goal is "purity" and Pas Akum affects this, it is understandable why Pas Akum (and Pas Palter) should be avoided during this "pure" week, even if it is permitted the rest of the year. Other halachic issues, which do not affect "purity," are therefore not included in this law/custom. [This fits very nicely with how the Torah describes Yom Kippur: "For on this day G-d will bring atonement upon you, *to purify you, from all your sins before G-d, you will be purified*" (Vayikra 16:30). If "purification" is a major theme of Yom Kippur, it makes sense for us to engage in acts of purification, and avoid things that negatively affect it, in the days leading up to it.]

Chayei Udum (143:1), after describing how we should prepare for our judgment on Yom Kippur by repenting and being involved in more mitzvos, good deeds, Torah study and charity than the rest of the year adds, "and therefore it is appropriate for a person to conduct himself during the Ten Days of Repentance with [additional] manners and stringencies, even if he does not keep them all year, for the Holy One, Blessed is He, also acts with extra benevolence with His creations. And those who eat Pas Palter all year, during these days it is appropriate not to eat anything but Pas Yisroel, and so it is with all matters." The two things I found relevant to our discussion are that the notion of doing something extra is not necessarily limited to Pas Palter, and that taking this extra stringency temporarily is a means of remembering to do more in other, more primary areas (good deeds, mitzvos, Torah study and charity). If the purpose is to help us remember to do more during these days, it is understandable that the prescribed way to do so is through baked goods, a staple of the human diet.

The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (130:2) focusing on the last part of the Chayei Udum's formulation, writes: "During these days it is appropriate for a person to keep even stringencies that he doesn't keep the rest of the year, for we are also asking G-d to act with us with benevolence. And one who eats Pas Palter all year should not eat, during these days, anything but Pas Yisroel, and so to with things similar to this." Again, Pas Palter is not seen as the only halacha that fits into this category of "things to keep only during the Ten Days of Repentance. However, whereas the Chayai Udum puts these extra stringencies in the same category as doing other extra things and adds a comparison to G-d doing

extra for us during this time, the Kitzur says that the reason to keep extra stringencies is to make our request that G-d do more for us more reasonable.

The High Holiday season is of primary importance because it causes us to examine our lives, reassess where we are, what we should be doing and where we should be headed, and it focuses our attention on correcting what needs to be corrected. This "forced" introspection can have varying levels of success. It can slow a process of descent, it can recalibrate those who may have started to veer off course, it can reverse a trend by redirecting the ebb and flow of spiritual growth back towards G-d, or it can help increase the rate of that growth. There are always ups and downs in life, but one of the keys to long-term success is making sure things are generally moving in an upward direction, so that the "lows" are not as low as they once were (and may even be the equivalent of previous highs) and the "highs" exceed previous highs. Along with reassessing how we've handled our day-to-day (and moment-to-moment) battles (and figuring out how to do better the next time a similar battle is upon us), it is important to examine the long term prospective as well. Where are we this year compared to last year? Are we trending upwards, or are we at the same basic place we were last year at this time (and two years ago, and three years ago)?

Being judged on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur forces us to take a closer look at how we did on a micro level (how we did at each point of confrontation between good and bad, between truth and falsehood) as well as on a macro level. Minimizing a move away from G-d (chas v'shalom) is an important accomplishment of this process, as is helping stay the course (from a year-to-year perspective) rather than ending up further away than had there been no process. Ideally, though, we should come away from the process in a better position than we were after last year's process, growing from year to year so that we can accomplish that much more in our lifetime.

Assessing our lives on a macro level takes more than just looking backwards, seeing where we are now compared to where we were in past years at this time. It also means looking forwards, to what we hope to accomplish in the future, whether it be this coming year or in the years after that. However, it is very difficult to look forward and recognize where we should be in the future (distant or otherwise) while not being there yet. If I know I should be doing something a year from now, even if am not ready to do it just yet, how can I accept not doing it right now? For the most part, we can only know about things we can and should be doing once those things are "within range." Nevertheless, "looking forward" means recognizing that there are things I am not ready to do to at this point in time, that I will, with G-d's help, be ready to do at some future time. What those "things" are may be impossible to know ahead of time (as once we become aware of what we

should be doing it is usually within reach), but it is important to recognize that there are things I am not doing now that I will hopefully be doing at some point down the line.

Perhaps this is why we avoid Pas Palter (or similar things) during the Ten Days of Repentance even though we have no intent of continuing after Yom Kippur. Sure there are things that I should have done, or should have avoided, that the "wake up call" of the Shofar reminded me to start or stop doing (and to try to maintain throughout the year). But there are also things that I will hopefully be ready for in the future that I am not ready for just yet. By taking upon myself an extra "stringency" temporarily, I am reminded that the introspection taking place this week is not limited to individual courses of action, things that I must be doing (or avoiding) right away, but includes making sure that I am heading in the right direction and working towards reaching those new levels that I cannot yet (permanently) commit to. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah quite appropriately focuses on teshuvah-repentance. In the previous verses, the prophet Hoshea strongly rebukes the Jewish people for straying after practices of idolatry. He predicts terrible tragedies for the Jewish nation because of their atrocious behavior towards Hashem. Hoshea concludes his harsh words by saying, "Shomron will be put to shame because she rebelled against Hashem; they will fall by the sword with her sucklings and pregnant women split open." (14:1) But, Hoshea then invites the Jewish people to return and promises them in return all the blessings of Hashem.

Hoshea quotes Hashem saying, "I will heal them from their rebelliousness and love them through My generosity because My anger has turned away from them." (14:6) Metzudos Dovid sees in this passage the revelation of one of Hashem's unbelievable merciful attributes. Although the Jewish nation had been heavily involved in sin, one act of repentance would undo all wrong. The prophet describes the process of repentance in the following words, "Take along words and return to Hashem, say to Him 'Remove all sin and grab hold of goodness and we will replace bullocks with our lips of confession.'" (14:3) Hoshea says that Hashem requires one act of them, confession. Repentance for them means a sincere statement of recognition that they have strayed and will not continue doing so. One statement which reflects a sincere desire for Hashem to remove sinful practices from them will fulfill all requirements.

But, Hashem adds an unbelievable dimension to this and concludes, "I will love them out of generosity." 'This', says Metzudos, indicates Hashem's commitment to completely erase their wrong from His

mind. Once they repent with sincerity, their past is non-existent. Furthermore, Hashem will increase His love for them in proportions that were never seen before. Although they have no new good track record to show, Hashem accepts their pledge and responds with perfect faith, showering them with love.

This mirrors the beautiful words of Rambam regarding one's relationship with Hashem after repenting. Rambam says, "How great is the merit of repentance! Yesterday one was separated from Hashem and today, after repenting, one merits to cleave to the Divine Presence. Today, one does Mitzvos which are pleasantly and happily accepted and Hashem even craves for them!" (Hilchos Teshuva 7:7)

However, Rambam adds a significant requirement to the Teshuva process. In addition to ones regret over sin and his conviction never to repeat such acts, one must bring Hashem to testify to the sincerity of this conviction. (Hilchos Teshuva 2:2) Apparently, even the Teshuva process can have different degrees of commitment but we are required to make our statement with perfect sincerity. During our confession we must feel- from the bottom of our heart- that we will not return to our shameful, sinful ways. The extent of this is reflected through our willingness to look Hashem "straight in the face" and declare to Him our sincere commitment. The source of Rambam's words is our haftorah wherein it states, "Take with you words of repentance and say to Hashem.. we will never again declare a status of deity to our hands' craftwork." (14:4) Yes, true repentance includes an affirmative statement directly to Hashem that we will never return to our sinful ways. (see commentary to Kesef Mishna to Rambam ibid.) The Jewish people had been involved in serious levels of idolatry and their repentance included an affirmation said directly to Hashem that they would never repeat that sin.

Meirei in his masterful work on repentance sensitizes us to the realistic demand this places upon us. Using the analogy of a beautiful garden now covered by weeds, Meirei warns us of a potential shortcoming in the Teshuva process. In order to clear the garden of the weeds, the uneducated gardener removed every one of them by mowing them down to ground level. For a few weeks his fields was cured of its problem. However, shortly thereafter, the weeds began reappearing. Upon consultation he discovered that weed removal required uprooting the weeds from their source and not merely cutting away their exposed section. In this same manner one must search deeply into his heart to determine the source of his wrong doing. Then, and only then, can he say with some degree of sincerity that he will do his utmost to secure that his wrongful actions will never be repeated.

This idea is alluded to by the commentary of Nachmanides in this week's parsha (Devarim 31:21) In upcoming Parshas Ha'azeinu, the Torah foretells that the Jewish people will engage themselves in very sinful

practices and Hashem will respond in very serious measures. Eventually Hashem will redeem His people and bring the world to its perfect state. Nachmanides questions the nature of such prophecy. Generally, the Torah predicts that misfortune will follow if the Jewish people act in sinful ways and blessing if they act in a proper way. We never find the Torah stating as a fact that the Jewish people will definitely follow a sinful course. How then can the Torah make this prediction here?

Nachmanides responds with an insightful comment to this week's parsha. Hashem says, "Because I know what your evil inclination does today before I bring you into the promised land." (ad loc.) Nachmanides sees in this passage the answer to his puzzling question. He explains that the exposure of the Jewish people's imperfect conduct thus far is a clear indication of their future actions. The inception of the Jewish people is happening now and all imperfections in their character will inevitably expose themselves in the future. Although no specific generation will necessarily fall into sin, sinfulness will inevitably occur at some point. In essence, an imperfect seed cannot produce a perfect tree.

These ten days of repentance are the incubating period for all our actions during the year. The basic nature we possess now will inevitably expose itself throughout the year. Viewing character traits as the root of all our actions it is imperative that we address these traits and direct them towards perfection. (see Vilna Gaon on Mishle) If we attack the problem at its root, we stand a fighting chance to rectify it in the future. Only with this approach can we readily bring Hashem to testify to our sincerity of rectifying our sinful ways. When He gazes into our souls He will now see the purity of intent in them with a sincere commitment to follow a perfect path.

Such repentance is readily accepted by our merciful Creator and, in response to this sincere pledge, Hashem erases the past and pleasantly accepts our service and even craves for it! May we merit to attain this level of sincerity which ultimately yielding Hashem's desire and interest in all of our service. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

G-d protects His people. This is the message of this week's portion which proclaims that G-d can be compared to an eagle stirring it's nest, hovering over it's young (Deuteronomy 32:11)

The biblical term for hovering is *merahfet*. What is the precise meaning of this term? An essay penned by the late Rabbi Milton Steinberg several decades ago sheds some light.

Writing after a long illness, Rabbi Steinberg stresses the importance of holding on to what one has.

Hold on to the sunlight he urges, hold on to those who are close to you. Having survived a life threatening disease he had come to realize the importance of the everyday.

But then, Rabbi Steinberg beautifully begins to preach a different message. When you hold, he suggests, don't hold too tight. Because, in his words, "nothing could be more grotesque and more undignified than a futile attempt at holding on. Let us think of the men and women who cannot grow old gracefully because they cling too hard to a youth which is escaping them. Of parents who can not let their children go free to live their own lives. This is the great truth of human existence, one must not hold life too precious, one must always be prepared to let it go."

How can this tension between holding on and letting go be resolved? Here, Rabbi Steinberg suggests, that belief in G-d is the answer. Bearing in mind that G-d created the world, everything in it is infinitely precious. However, when considering that whatever is in the world, ultimately belongs to G-d, it is easier to let go because these things do not belong to us.

Rabbi Steinberg's analysis may explain the meaning of *merahfet*. G-d hovers over us like a mother bird over its nest. Protecting but not suffocating, shielding but not crushing.

A message to be considered on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. As G-d hovers over us, caring, while giving us the space to participate with Him in redeeming the Jewish people and the world, we, in the spirit of G-d, should reach out to those who are closest to us, to life itself, and "embrace it, with open arms." © 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 RAYMOND BEYDA

You Cannot Hide

There once was a French Emperor who was fleeing from Russian troops that wanted to kill him. He ran into a shop owned by a Jewish fabric merchant. The merchant hid the Emperor under piles of fabric and the soldiers were unable to find him. After the enemy had left the Emperor thanked the merchant saying: "Ask for any three things that your heart desires and I will do all in my power to fulfill your requests".

The poor tailor thought for a moment and then said: "It would be wonderful if the Emperor could arrange to have the leaky roof in my shop repaired".

The Emperor responded angrily: "Is that all you can think of for a man of my stature and wealth to do for you. That is embarrassing for me."

"Well," said the simple peasant, "perhaps Your Majesty could remove the merchant who occupies the store opposite mine and eliminate the competition that affects my financial well being so negatively."

Again the ruler retorted in anger: The poor fabric merchant then presented his third wish. "Maybe the Emperor can reveal to me how he felt when the enemy troops were searching my premises and the King was lying motionless under the piles of piece goods."

"You arrogant one", cried the angry despot, "you will pay for your behavior with your life".

One minute before the executioner carried out the sentence the Emperor ordered him to release the prisoner. The Emperor turned to the trembling peasant and said, "Now you know how I felt while lying under the yards and yards of your fabric while my pursuers searched for me."

Rabbi Yaakov Naiman zt'l explains: When we pray to Hashem we ask for sustenance and a good, comfortable life. It is not proper to waste the opportunity to speak to the King of Kings about such petty matters. The top of our "wish list" should be: "Reveal the glory of your sovereignty upon us speedily". The halakha does not require one to go back and repeat his or her prayers if one were to neglect to recite the High Holy Day insertion of "Remember us for life". However, should one forget to say: "And therefore place your fear upon all of your creations..." one must repeat the Shemoneh Esre – because it is the essential thought of the entire Rosh Hashanah service. If we merit this then we have it all. It is as if a King asked a man what he would like. A wise person would request the hand of the princess in marriage and all other good things would follow naturally. So too—we should pray for Hashem to reveal His sovereignty and power and all other good things would follow "naturally".

If one prepares the prayers for the crucial days of Tishre one will notice that although everyone is being judged on Rosh Hashanah one only praises Hashem's sovereignty at this crucial time. No phrases of remorse or repentance are mentioned just praise to the King and request that He reveal Himself to the entire World. If He should respond positively to this noble request—THEN all good things would follow.

May we all focus our prayers properly and may Hashem respond positively by revealing His power and His love for us and may we see only good and blessing in the new year with the coming of Mashiah speedily in our days. Shanah Tobah. © 2004 Rabbi R. Beyda and torah.org

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

This week's Torah portion is actually a song that Moses told to the Jewish people. In one of its verses, Moses foretold the future and warned the Jews that they would: "become fat... and... desert G-d..." (Deuteronomy, 32:15)

Why does becoming fat—or having material success—lead to deserting G-d? The answer lies in a

powerful human nature reality. This universal truism states that ego and success go hand in hand. When a person has success of any kind it can cause his ego to become instantly inflated.

Let's walk through a typical cycle. If a person is down on his luck and believes in G-d, he'll ask Him to make things better. When G-d turns things around, this person is certainly connected and appreciative to the One who did it.

Once someone has success in a particular area of his lives, the Law of Attraction then comes into play. This Law, put simply, is that you will attract more of what you already have. So, when someone is successful it almost inevitably "attracts" and leads to more success. Success does beget success. This Law is at work in countless different areas of your life.

And when the Law of Attraction kicks in, something fascinating happens: A person's ego springs into action. When the initial success that G-d gave to a person attracts more success, this person has a natural tendency to believe that it was he—not G-d—who got him the increased amount of success. His thinking—either consciously or sub-consciously—is that while G-d got him out of the starting gate, it was he who took the ball and made the most of the initial success.

While this might be true, there's one key and crucial element missing in the thought process. Yes, you did work hard and you did make the most of the opportunities you had BUT it was G-d that allowed the success to come to you. This last part is counter-intuitive and it's the exact thing that G-d is warning us against. Most people can see G-d's hand in their lives when they "catch a break" and something quickly changes and goes their way. But when they begin to ride their new found success to higher levels, they completely believe that it was their effort making the results happen.

While a person must put forth effort, it's only because of G-d's desire as to whether or not he'll be successful. (An even more enlightened person takes this one step further and understands that even a person's own effort was made possible only because G-d allowed him to have the desire, strength, and ability to put forth this effort.)

When you live with the truism that G-d controls everything, it becomes incredibly liberating. This is because if you put forth the effort and don't get the "success" you desired it was only because G-d knows that at this point it's the perfect and precise outcome that's tailor-made for you. Just as you don't beat yourself up over the color of your eyes, the time the sun sets, or the temperature of the Atlantic Ocean, so too, you don't beat yourself up if you don't succeed in a particular endeavor. Put in the necessary effort and then see what G-d thinks is best. (Therefore, those who live with this reality understand just how silly it is ever to lie, cheat, or steal in business.)

G-d wants you to be successful and He very much wants you to use your talent and brains to become even more successful. He just also wants you never to look back and realize that you "became fat... and... deserted G-d."

Start off this brand new year knowing Who's really filling in all the numbers on your check—and know that He wants to make it huge. ©2006 Rabbi A. Lieberman and aish.com

RABBI SIMCHA BARNETT

Sub-Prime Meltdown

Over the last few months Wall Street has been on a roller coaster ride, with the markets gyrating wildly in response to the sub-prime mortgage meltdown. World central banks have stepped in to add liquidity to the credit markets, and talk of a savings and loan style bail-out has been bandied about in Washington.

As a former investment banker, I find the financial details of the crisis fascinating, but what intrigues me even more is the psychological lessons that we can learn about human nature from this unfolding debacle. It seems that mankind knows no limits to the lengths it will go to hide from reality, when it is more comfortable-or in this case lucrative- to believe instead in some self-styled illusion. And the more you look at the unraveling story, it seems that from all sides parties with a variety of interests came together to build a house of cards, which would inevitably have to fall, because it was built upon air.

Credit was easy, as the Fed pumped money into the economy in response to the Asian financial crisis of the late '90s, the bursting of the tech-stock bubble, and after 9/11. The flood of overseas savings and easy credit fueled a surging housing market and leveraged buyouts with seemingly no end in sight. In stepped investment banks, hedge funds and rating agencies who designed and pushed a whole new genre of securities backed by these sub-prime mortgages.

Standards for getting a mortgage were in free-fall, yet because house prices kept rising, defaults were low, so rating agency's boosted the credit rating on the bonds above their realistic risk levels. Everybody held onto a piece of this dream: home owners, speculators, mortgage companies, investment banks, rating agencies, and a whole host of their buy-side clients.

The only thing that could keep this financial Titanic afloat was a continual rise in the price of housing. But housing prices had been going up steadily for a decade. A decline was inevitable. Yet the longer the market surged, the greater and more risky mortgages were written and packaged to be sold on Wall Street. Fees and greed kept the blinders on everyone. I can almost hear the crash!

All this tells us something really important about life. We have an incredible propensity to deny realities

that we would rather not consider, in favor of holding onto illusions that make us feel good- or line our pockets. And we easily forget the last time we were burned by the same affliction. Wasn't it just six years ago that Wall Street was burned last when the dot.com bubble burst with just the same type of wishful thinking?

Another point seems to be worth making. Sometimes denying reality involves purposely looking away from facts that will upset the apple cart. A libertarian website, The Daily Reckoning, made the following observation: "The Law of Stupidity tells us that useful information declines by the square of the distance from its Source. As the lending business became more 'sophisticated' and layered, lenders and borrowers took leave of each other. Finally they forgot that they had ever met. It didn't matter, as long as the fees kept piling up at every stage of the transaction."

On Rosh Hashana, we hear the shofar blow. It is a call to wake us up from our slumber, from our dreams. It beckons us to take a good look at the various aspects of our lives, and to save ourselves from the illusions that have seduced us, sometimes through complacency, sometimes from less pure motivations.

Why is it better ultimately to live in reality than in comfortable illusion? It's like the kid who thinks that his greatest pleasure will be eating the five-pound jar of jelly beans after the baby sitter has fallen asleep on the couch. However, the short-live pleasure pales in comparison to the eventual pain he will experience in the emergency room later that night. When our illusions get smashed on the jagged rocks of reality, the result is pain-physical, emotional and spiritual.

Keeping our eyes on reality, in all aspects of our lives is our best opportunity for real, enduring pleasure-without unnecessary pain.

The shofar calls us back to Reality. It also calls us back to our Source; into a renewed relationship with our Creator. The unraveling of the mortgage bubble began with the growing distance between lender and borrower. Our own spiritual sub-prime meltdown also begins with a distance from our source-G-d.

We have strayed from His mandate, from His Torah, from our relationship. The shofar beckons us to reconsider how this relationship has frayed, and how much we lose because of it. The shofar is a cry from deep within to be more. To be better. To love living in the beautiful, solid, happy world of Reality. To come home. ©2007 Rabbi S. Barnett & aish.com



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