

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

I vividly remember the surprise and delight I had when I first read Jane Austen's Emma. It was the first time I have read a novel in which you see a character changing over time. Emma is an intelligent young woman who believes she understands other people better than they do. So she sets about arranging their lives - she is an English shadchan - with disastrous consequences, because not only does she not understand others; she does not even understand herself. By the end of the novel, though, she is a different person: older, wiser and humbler. Of course, since this is a Jane Austen story, it ends happily ever after.

In the more than 40 years that have passed since I read the book, one question has fascinated me. Where did Western civilisation get the idea that people can change? It is not an obvious idea. Many great cultures have simply not thought in these terms. The Greeks, for instance, believed that we are what we are, and we cannot change what we are. They believed that character is destiny, and the character itself is something we are born with, although it may take great courage to realise our potential. Heroes are born, not made. Plato believed that some human beings were gold, others silver, and others bronze. Aristotle believed that some are born to rule, and others to be ruled. Before the birth of Oedipus, his fate and that of his father, Laius, have already been foretold by the Delphic Oracle, and nothing they can do will avert it.

This is precisely the opposite of the key sentence we say on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, that "Teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah avert the evil decree." That is what happened to the inhabitants of Nineveh in the story we read at Mincha on Yom Kippur. There was a decree: "In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed." But the people of Nineveh repent, and the decree is cancelled. There is no fate that is final, no diagnosis without a second opinion - half of Jewish

jokes are based on this idea.

The more I studied and researched, the more I realised that Judaism was the first system in the world to develop a clear sense of human free will. As Isaac Bashevis Singer wittily put it, "We have to be free; we have no choice."

This is the idea at the heart of teshuvah. It is not just confession, not just saying Al chet shechatanu. It is not just remorse: Ashamnu. It is the determination to change, the decision that I am going to learn from my mistakes, that I am going to act differently in future, that I determined to become a different kind of person.

To paraphrase Rabbi Soloveitchik, to be a Jew is to be creative, and our greatest creation is our self. As a result, more than 3000 years before Jane Austen, we see in Torah and in Tanakh, a process in which people change.

To take an obvious example: Moshe Rabbenu. We see him at the start of his mission as a man who cannot speak easily or fluently. "I am not a man of words." "I am slow of speech and tongue." "I have uncircumcised lips." But by the end he is the most eloquent and visionary of all the prophets. Moses changed.

One of the most fascinating contrasts is between two people who were often thought to resemble one another, indeed were sometimes identified as the same person in two incarnations: Pinchas and Elijah. Both were zealots. But Pinchas changed. G-d gave him a covenant of peace and he became a man of peace. We see him in later life (in Joshua 22) leading a peace negotiation between the rest of the Israelites and the tribes of Reuben and Gad who had settled on the far side of the Jordan, a mission successfully accomplished.

Elijah was no less a zealot than Pinchas. Yet there is a remarkable scene some time after his great confrontation with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. He is at Mount Horeb. G-d asks him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" Elijah replies, "I have been very zealous for the Lord G-d Almighty." G-d then sends a whirlwind, shaking mountain and shattering rocks, but G-d was not in the wind. Then G-d sends an earthquake, but G-d was not in the earthquake. Then G-d sends fire, but G-d was not in the fire. Then G-d speaks in a kol demamah dakah, a still small voice. He asks Elijah the same question again, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" and Elijah replies in exactly the same words as he had done before: "I have been very

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Paul Kahn
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zealous for the Lord G-d Almighty." At that point G-d tells Elijah to appoint Elisha as his successor (1 Kings 19).

Elijah has not changed. He has not understood that G-d now wants him to exercise a different kind of leadership, defending Israel not criticising it (Rashi). He is asking Elijah to make a similar transformation to the one Pinchas made when he became a man of peace, but Elijah, unlike Pinchas, did not change. Even his words do not change, despite the momentous vision. He had become too holy for this world, so G-d took him to heaven in a chariot of fire.

It was Judaism, through the concept of teshuvah, that brought into the world the idea that we can change. We are not predestined to continue to be what we are. Even today, this remains a radical idea. Many biologists and neuroscientists believe that our character and actions are wholly determined by our genes, our DNA. Choice, character change, and free will, are - they say - illusions.

They are wrong. One of the great discoveries of recent years has been the scientific demonstration of the plasticity of the brain. The most dramatic example of this is the case of Jill Bolte Taylor. In 1996, aged 37, she suffered a massive stroke that completely destroyed the functioning of the left hemisphere of her brain. She couldn't walk, talk, read, write, or even recall the details of her life. But she was very unusual in one respect. She was a Harvard neuroscientist. As a result, she was able to realise precisely what had happened to her.

For eight years she worked every day, together with her mother, to exercise her brain. By the end, she had recovered all her faculties, using her right hemisphere to develop the skills normally exercised by the left brain. You can read her story in her book, *My Stroke of Insight*, or see her deliver a TED lecture on the subject. Taylor is only the most dramatic example of what is becoming clearer each year: that by an effort of will, we can change not just our behaviour, not just our emotions, nor even just our character, but the very structure and architecture of our brain. Rarely was there a more dramatic scientific vindication of the great Jewish insight, that we can change.

That is the challenge of teshuvah.

There are two kinds of problem in life: technical and adaptive. When you face the first, you go to an

expert for the solution. You are feeling ill, you go to the doctor, he diagnoses the illness, and prescribes a pill. That is a technical problem. The second kind is where we ourselves are the problem. We go to the doctor, he listens carefully, does various tests, and then says: "I can prescribe a pill, but in the long-term, it is not going to help. You are overweight, underexercised and overstressed. If you don't change your lifestyle, all the pills in the world will not help." That is an adaptive problem.

Adaptive problems call for teshuvah, and teshuvah itself is premised on the proposition that we can change. All too often we tell ourselves we can't. We are too old, too set in our ways. It's too much trouble. When we do that, we deprive ourselves of G-d's greatest gift to us: the ability to change. This was one of Judaism's greatest gifts to Western civilisation.

It is also G-d's call to us on Yom Kippur. This is the time when we ask ourselves where have we gone wrong? Where have we failed? When we tell ourselves the answer, that is when we need the courage to change. If we believe we can't, we won't. If we believe we can, we may.

The great question Yom Kippur poses to us is: Will we grow in our Judaism, our emotional maturity, our knowledge, our sensitivity, or will we stay what we were? Never believe we can't be different, greater, more confident, more generous, more understanding and forgiving than we were. May this year be the start of a new life for each of us. Let us have the courage to grow. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel: 'Be strong and of good courage; for thou shalt go with this people into the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them; and you shall cause them to inherit it'" (Deuteronomy 31:7).

In last week's commentary on Rosh Hashana, the anniversary of the day on which the world was conceived, I explained the sighing-sobbing sounds of the shofar as the natural response of the Jew to an incomplete, imperfect world of evil as well as good, of chaos as well as order. We are entrusted with the mission of bringing down the Divine attributes of lovingkindness and courage, of compassionate righteousness and moral justice, to suffuse society with freedom and peace in order to perfect and complete the world in the Kingship of the Divine.

This is the message of the firm, exultant and victorious tekiya sound of the shofar, when we crown G-d as King of the Universe.

This task is not a simple one; it requires our becoming a holy nation and a kingdom whose every citizen is a successful teacher of morality to the world.

Hence, Rosh Hashana begins a period of teshuva, or repentance, which must continue until it succeeds - however long that may take. It will require the cumulative commitment of many generations to the retelling and then reliving of the biblical narrative and to scrupulous observance of G-d's will.

Rosh Hashana is a joyous festival because we have G-d's biblical promise that we will eventually succeed.

We recite those verses of our success again and again in our Yom Kippur liturgy.

But there is a second significance to the broken, crying sound of the shofar. It is the existential sound of the individual who is living life within a vale of tears, who often doubts that this world will ever be perfected in the Kingship of the Divine, who always doubts that he will have the strength of will and character to make the world any better and who even doubts that the world had a Creator in the first place.

Although such a train of thought may initially release the questioner from certain ethical and ritual responsibilities, it can only lead to a dead end. If life is merely a "tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing," (Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5) why go through the struggle? The specter of a Sartrean world to which there is No Exit other than suicide hardly leaves one with a life worth living or worth reproducing. It only leaves one trembling in fear before a dark, black hole of nothingness.

These questions plagued the children of Israel in the wake of the sin of the Golden Calf. Having experienced the concern, the miracles and wonders of the Lord during the Exodus, as well as the riveting Revelation at Sinai at which they actually heard the Word of the Divine, how could they possibly have fallen prey to the orgiastic abandon of wild Dionysian debauchery? Moses, the source of their connection to G-d, had seemingly disappeared; they felt bereft and abandoned and so they lost themselves in a momentary "escape from freedom" and responsibility.

Moses is so frustrated that he smashes the sacred tablets. He beseeches G-d first to forgive Israel and then to teach the next generations how to deal with probable recurrences in the future. He says, "Make Your ways known to me," now the Israelites must act to find favor in your eyes, and "Show me Your glory in this world" - what truly characterizes You and Your relationship to us.

G-d then tells Moses to stand in the cleft of a rock in the mountain range of Sinai, to ready himself for the second Revelation, the continuation of the Ten Commandments; G-d will reveal to Moses His Name, His face, as it were, the aspect of G-d that may be grasped by the human mind.

And this is the Divine Revelation on the 10th day of Tishrei, Yom Kippur: "Havaya Havaya..." the Ineffable Name of G-d, of Havaya, which means literally "to bring into being, to create," and which the Talmudic

sages identify as the G-d of infinite and unconditional love. The name is repeated twice, which our Sages interpret as, "I am the G-d who loves you before you sin and I am the G-d who loves you after you sin" - unconditional love (see Rashi to Exodus 34: 6). The first Havaya explains that since G-d's essence is love, His first human emanation, the human being, also has most fundamentally the transcendent power to love another and thereby to perfect himself and the world. The second Havaya explains that although the human being will fail and will sin along the way, G-d will always be ready to forgive us as long as we seek forgiveness.

And G-d goes one step further. Yes, in our imperfect and incomplete world, it is often difficult to find G-d, to sense His presence and recognize His concern. It is even more difficult to bring the Divine Majesty to this often corrupt and evil world. But once a year, G-d will seek us, G-d will "come down" to us in His cloud of glory, G-d will knock on our door with His gift of unconditional forgiveness. All we need do is open the door for Him and let Him in - into our hearts, where He can already be found and into our homes and our families. This is the magical gift of Yom Kippur, the day of consummate love.

Shabbat Shalom and Ktiva V'Chatima Tova.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Yom Kippur is not only the day of holiness and forgiveness of sin - it is also the great day of hope and optimism. To a great extent each of us is born anew on that day. Each one of us has an opportunity to reexamine ourselves. Though we spend much of our prayer time admitting our sins, failures and shortcomings, we do so confident that these errors will be erased in G-d's compassion for His creatures. We confess to the entire litany of sins listed in our prayers so that we will be cleansed of all possible guilt and allowed to move forward unburdened by past impediments.

Long ago when I was an attorney in Chicago I knew a colleague who was a specialist in guiding people through the process of voluntary bankruptcy. He told me that most of his clients, on a consistent basis, were guilty of not listing all of their debts and liabilities in their original application for bankruptcy protection. They either forgot that liability, or for some strange but prevalent psychological reason, were too embarrassed to list that matter in their bankruptcy petition. It is one thing to default on a bank loan. It is another matter to do so to those who are near and dear to you.

When we ask for Divine forgiveness on the holiest day of the year, the litany of sins and shortcomings, which are the core of the Yom Kippur prayer service, comes to correct this psychological and emotional deficiency. We confess to every sin possible,

because humans are able, if not even prone, to commit every sin possible. Our memories are selective and often times faulty.

Embarrassment before our Creator is a human trait inherited from Adam who displayed it in his confrontation with G-d at the dawn of human civilization. Therefore the complete listing of all possible sins is a necessary component to obtain forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

As mentioned above, Yom Kippur is a singular day of opportunity. Freed from the mundane tasks that encompass our existence all year long, we have time to think about the things in life that ultimately matter - family, community, tradition and our legacy to those that come after us. We honestly confront our mortality and human state of being.

We also think about our souls, that we have oftentimes ignored and neglected because of the pressures of our daily pursuits. We can recharge that reservoir of Jewish pride that lies within each of us - how special we are as individuals and as a collective nation. Identifying as a Jew, and understanding the demands and privileges that this identity bestows, gives one a true sense of importance and purpose in life.

The alienated, the scoffers, the confused and the ignorant will find little comfort for themselves on this holy day. But for those who seek to know themselves and thereby glimpse their Creator and their own immortality, the day of Yom Kippur is one of unmatched opportunity and wrenching satisfaction. It is akin to the renewal of an old and cherished friendship and of finding a long-lost object of emotional value. Our inner essence, uncovered by the holiness of the day of Yom Kippur is that long-lost valuable object; it is our old and best friend.

The physical deprivations that Yom Kippur demands of us are a reminder that nothing in life that is important and lasting can be achieved without sacrifice and some form of deprivation. Judaism does not preach a life of asceticism. The Torah looks askance at those who willfully deprive themselves of the permitted pleasures of life. The rabbis taught us that the rewards and benefits of life are commensurate to the effort and sacrifice that we invest in achieving these goals.

There is no free lunch in the physical and spiritual worlds that we inhabit. The mandated deprivations of our bodily wants on Yom Kippur serve to remind us of this truism. In the prayers of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we confess that we risk everything in order to place food on our table. Yom Kippur and its bodily restraints teach us that we must also risk discomfort in order to attain any form of spiritual level and composure.

The absence of the chomping sound of eating, the gurgle of drinking and the clicking sound of sturdy leather shoes, allows us to hear the still small voice within us, the sound which our soul generates. It is that voice that elevates us and puts us in touch with our

Creator. And that is what makes the day of Yom Kippur the supreme day of human greatness and opportunity - the holiest day of the year. © 2013 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The normative approach to Yom Kippur is that it is a day set aside when we as individuals and as part of the larger community ask for forgiveness. Hence the term Yom Kippur which means the Day of Atonement.

It's not uncommon however, for Yom Kippur to be referred to as Yom Hakippurim-the day of Atonements. Why in the plural...why does the very term imply an atonement beyond that of the individual human being.

Some suggest that its in the plural because we seek not only our atonement but atonement for our beloved who have died. Others suggest that we seek atonement for ourselves as individuals and also for the community as a whole. A delightful tale offers an insightful idea.

One Yom Kippur a congregant of the father of the Hasidic movement Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov entered into the synagogue, prayed for several moments and left.

The rabbi was stunned. The congregant was well known in the community and had finished his prayers in such haste. "Why," the rabbi asked him, "were you so quick?"

"I'll tell you," the man replied. "I felt that the prayer I offered connected to G-d. I sensed deep inside that G-d had heard my requests."

"What did you say," the Baal Shem Tov asked, "What did you say that made you believe G-d listened?"

"I admitted before the Holy One, blessed, be He, all my sins. I indicated that there were days that I missed prayer, and yes, as a butcher there were times I was not honest in measurements. Looking up to the Ark I said to G-d, "I'll make a deal with you. If you forgive me, I'll forgive you for all the pain that too often suffuses the world."

The Baal Shem Tov looked at the man, embraced him and said. "Naarishe kind - foolish child, you had G-d by the coattails. You could have asked him to forgive the entire Jewish people, indeed the entire world."

Thus, Yom Kippur is Yom HaKippurim in the plural. It is a day when we are in search of G-d, even as it is a day when G-d is in search of us.

And it is a day when we seek forgiveness of G-d and G-d seeks forgiveness of us. © 2011 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 MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Call to Arms

Yom Kippur, the ultimate day of repentance, has the Jewish nation simultaneously praying, fasting and asking for forgiveness. It begins with the somber, quiet, and melodious intonation of Kol Nidrei and ends with the entire congregation shouting Hashem hu HaElokim (G-d is the Al-Mighty) seven times after various requests of forgiveness. It seems that at the time when our strength is waning our greatest and loudest pleas are spent. Shouldn't we begin the day with the strong requests for forgiveness and save the subdued prayers for when our bodies are weak from hunger and our lips parched from lack of water?

Rav Eichenstein, the Ziditchover Rebbe, tells the following story:

One Friday, a man entered the study of the Tchorokover Rebbe with a request that was very common in those days.

"My son was drafted into the army," the man began. "However, we have a way out. On Sunday, we are going to a doctor who will falsely declare him unfit for service. This way he will be spared certain misery, perhaps even death in that terrible army. Rebbe," he asked, "I need your blessing that he evade the draft."

The Rebbe quietly told him that Shabbos was nearing and he could not concentrate on blessings. The man should return to him on Friday evening after his tisch (ceremonious chasidic table).

The man did so. After most of the chasidim had left, the man repeated his request, almost verbatim. Again the Rebbe was non-committal. "Return to me after the morning service."

Unperturbed, the man noted that he would really like to resolve this matter before Sunday morning.

Shabbos morning, after services, the man approached the Rebbe again. Calmly he repeated the predicament. "Sunday morning I am going to a doctor who will falsely declare my son unfit for military service. Please pray that we will evade conscription." The Rebbe was not moved. Again, he deferred until the afternoon.

At the third Shabbos meal, the scene repeated again, precisely the way it had the previous three times. "I understand that you are leaving Sunday morning. Come back to me late Saturday night," said the Rebbe. "By then I will have an answer for you."

By this time, his Chasidim's curiosity was piqued. They had never seen their Rebbe so reluctant to mete a blessing, especially when it was one that would save a Jewish soul from the frightful Polish army.

Saturday night a large crowd gathered as the man approached with his request. Frustrated and disgruntled, the man, once again, repeated his story, almost verbatim, for the fifth time.

Immediately, the Rebbe sprung from his chair and began to shout. "What are you asking me? Why would one even try to evade the service of our wonderful country? How dare you ask me for a blessing of that sort? Your son would make a fine soldier for our country. I wish him the best of luck in the army!"

The man quickly scurried from the room and left town. The Chasidim stood shocked and bewildered. Never had they heard such an uncharacteristic outcry from the Rebbe.

"I will explain," said the Rebbe. "The man was a fraud. He had no son, and if he did, he wanted him in the army. He was sent by the government to test our loyalty. Thank G-d we passed the test."

"But, Rebbe!" cried the chasidim, "how did you know?"

"Simple," explained the Rebbe. "I watched the level of intensity. From the moment he met me until tonight there was no increase in intensity nor feeling of desperation with each request. The moment I heard his request tonight and it contained no more passion or desperation than his first request on Friday night, I knew he was a fraud."

We stand a whole entire day in prayer, and end with a ne'ilah prayer, after nearly 24 hours of pleading. The litmus test of our sincerity comes as the heavenly gates are being closed. As the sun begins to set, our pleas should intensify. That crescendo assures our sincerity. It also should assure us a Happy & Healthy Sweet New Year. © 2013 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And Yonah prayed to Hashem, his G-d, from the innards of the fish” (Yonah 2:2). After being inside the fish that had swallowed him for three days, Yonah asked G-d to save him. Considering that Yonah had previously chosen to drown at sea rather than ask G-d to save him and his shipmates from the storm (1:12, see M'chilta, introduction to Bo), it is a bit surprising that Yonah all of a sudden wakes up and decides he wants to live. His perspective on getting Nin'vey to repent hadn't changed (see 2:4), and he still preferred to die rather than being the cause of their repentance (2:5) even after they had already repented (and his death wouldn't prevent it from happening). If Yonah still preferred dying to fulfilling G-d's mission of warning Nin'vey, why did he ask to be saved?

One possibility (see Otzer HaMidrashim, Yonah 5) is that although he could accept death, he couldn't tolerate the suffering. After three days in the belly of the fish, Yonah couldn't take it anymore, so asked G-d to end his suffering; He even committed to fulfill the mission he detested so that G-d would spare his pain. However, the language of Yonah's prayer, which included re-establishing his relationship with G-d (2:5)

and his life being saved (2:7), indicates that it wasn't just because he couldn't take the pain anymore that he decided to ask G-d to save him. Although enduring hardship is often a catalyst for rethinking one's position, since after enduring the hardship Yonah still preferred death, this doesn't seem to be what changed while he was in the fish.

After mentioning that the suffering was a catalyst for his prayer (2:2), Radak (2:5) explains Yonah's change in perspective: "For I thought, when they threw me into the sea, that I would die, and was driven from Your eyes, which means to say from Your involvement with me (i.e. divine intervention), to the point that I thought You had hidden Your face and Your eyes from me. However, now that You have performed for me this great miracle and I am still alive inside the belly of the fish, I know that I will once again see Your holy Temple, and You will again bring me back to the place (source) of prophecy and the place (source) of Your supervision, despite my fleeing from it." (See Abarbanel and Malbim for similar ideas.) Yonah had made a conscious decision to remove himself from G-d's presence, severing the relationship he had with Him, rather than fulfilling His mission by speaking to Nin'vey, and was surprised that even so, G-d did not give up on him, and didn't remove His supervision from him, as evidenced by the miracles He performed to keep him alive. It was this realization that caused Yonah to want to live despite not wanting to go to Nin'vey. If G-d could believe in him, and work with him, despite his reluctance to fulfill His mission, he could work with G-d despite his reluctance as well.

There are several approaches given to explain why Yonah didn't want to go to Nin'vey. If Nin'vey repented, it would make Israel look worse for not repenting (Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 11:5). If Nin'vey repented and Yonah's warnings of their imminent doom did not come about, Israel would be far less likely to take his warnings that they have to repent seriously (see Pirkay d'Rebbi Eliezer 10). If Nin'vey didn't repent, G-d would not let them become powerful enough to destroy Israel; if they did repent, they would once again become a world power and cause the destruction of (what was left) of the Northern Kingdom (see Abarbanel). Yonah was so repulsed by Nin'vey's corruption and immorality that he couldn't accept G-d giving them another chance (see Da'as Mikra, introduction to Yonah). Whatever the reason was that Yonah decided to run away rather than listening to G-d, obviously Yonah didn't just say "if G-d wants me to do it, I better do it even if I don't agree with it or don't understand it." He was conflicted about undertaking such a mission (much as Moshe and Yirmiyahu were hesitant to accept theirs), and decided to break all ties with G-d—even if it meant losing his life—rather than doing something he was so opposed to. Being saved from drowning by the fish, and being kept alive inside the fish, showed Yonah that G-d did not give up on him,

did not reject him outright, even if he was conflicted about fulfilling this mission. He still had his reservations, as evidenced by his reaction after Nin'vey repented, but was now willing to do what G-d asked of Him despite his reservations. Knowing that G-d wanted to maintain their relationship, and wanted him to fulfill the mission, despite his being uncomfortable with it, changed Yonah's perspective on things. Now he was willing to do what G-d asked of him despite being conflicted about it.

There are several poignant messages embedded in Sefer Yonah that make it an ideal Haftarah for Mincha on Yom Kippur. We can change our ways, just as the people of Nin'vey did. G-d wants us to change our ways, no matter how badly we've behaved, just as He wanted the people of Nin'vey to change, despite how corrupt they were. G-d will accept our repentance, just as he accepted theirs. One of the messages of Sefer Yonah is that He wants us to maintain a relationship with Him even if we are conflicted about something. Whether regarding theological issues, textual issues, or western values seeming to be incompatible with the Torah's values, being uncomfortable with an aspect of our religion doesn't necessarily mean we shouldn't maintain, or try to improve, our connection with G-d and His Torah.

One of the category of sins we specifically ask forgiveness for on Yom Kippur is "for the sins that we sinned before You with a confused heart." Being uncertain about things can lead to a lack of enthusiasm for fulfilling G-d's commandments to their fullest extent, and we ask G-d to forgive us for doing things we shouldn't have, and not doing things we should have, based on our lack of clarity. Like Yonah, who was conflicted about doing what G-d wanted of him, G-d knows that we are a work in progress, and wants to maintain a connection with us despite our imperfections. Yom Kippur gives us the opportunity to atone for all of our sins, and return to G-d with a full heart. Or even with a conflicted one. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

THE TORAHWEB FOUNDATION

The Two Goats and the True Self

by Rabbi Yakov Haber

One of the most prominent aspects of the Avodas Yom HaKippurim in the Mikdash is the service of the sh'nei has'irim, the two goats. The halacha requires them to be identical in height and appearance (Yoma 6:1). A lottery was performed on them with one being designated as a korban laShem, its blood being sprinkled in the Holy of Holies, something done with no other korban other than the bull of the Kohein Gadol also offered on Yom Kippur. The second was designated as the s'air la'Azazeil to be thrown off a steep cliff which, in the language of the Mishna, "did not

reach halfway [down] until it was turned into a pile of limbs" (ibid. 6:6).

This out of the ordinary service is clearly one of the chukim of the Torah, with no explicit reason given for it. However, many approaches have been taken attempting to uncover a glimpse into the Divine messages inherent within this service. (See Ramban, Rav Hirsch, and Rav Soloveitchik in 'Al HaTeshuva for various approaches.) I have heard an approach whose source I do not recall which seems to match the details of the mitzvah well. (I would be indebted to a reader who can provide the source.) This approach can serve as a central focus of what we attempt to accomplish on the "Shabbat Shabbaton".

G-d created Man originally pure without a tendency toward Evil (see Koheles 7:29). The Yeitzer Hara was external as represented by the Primeval Snake. When man sinned, the Evil Inclination became internalized. This led to a state of "tov v'ra", where good and evil were seemingly intermingled in the human mind. Confusion, lack of clarity, and indecision became the new reality for mankind. Only by studying and performing the Torah would mankind be able to rise beyond the confusion of this new reality. However, the ultimate plan of the Creator is to restore the original state of perfection which will occur in the Messianic era when the circumcision of the heart will occur (see Ramban to Nitzavim 30:6), meaning the elimination of the evil within each and every one of us.

However, even before that era, Yom Kippur gives us a glimpse of our real selves. The two goats similar in appearance both represent the same individual. Each of us has a "split-personality": the fundamental, true personality and the superimposed, fake persona infused into us with the entrance of the Yeitzer Hara. On this day, we separate the real from the fake, the fundamental from the artificial. The real personality, represented by the sa'ir laShem, created in the Image of G-d, is brought into the Holy of Holies, symbolizing Man's calling to cleave to G-d throughout his existence. The fake persona is dispatched and meets a violent end on a rocky mountain. This represents the end of Evil, the end of confusion, the end of indecision.

Yom Kippur is the day when we "take a break from the world", when we rest not only from labor, but we "rest" from most aspects of Olam HaZeh (see Rambam Hilchos Sh'visas Asor 1:5-6). The numerous drives and desires inherent in the world, when channeled properly, elevate us, and even make us higher than the angels who do not have the ability to elevate the physical. This occurs when we listen to our real personality. But the drives of the world also have the potential to, and often do, drive us away from G-d when we view these drives and desires as reality itself. This is a result of the fake persona within us. On Yom Kippur we rediscover who we really are.

This concept is further highlighted by a beautiful insight of the Maharal (Nesivos Olam, Nesiv Ha'Avoda). We recite the phrase "Baruch Sheim k'vod mal'chuso l'olam va'ed" silently during the whole year but aloud on Yom HaKippurim. The Midrash explains that Moshe Rabbeinu heard the angels reciting this verse and taught it to the Jews. But since it is an angelic declaration of Divine sovereignty, we recite it silently. Why then do we recite it at all if we are not angels? Maharal explains that we do so because there is part of us that is angelic; the soul, the core of who we really are, is constantly on the level of the angels capable of declaring this angelic form of acceptance of Mal'chus Shamayim. But this part of us is seemingly inaccessible to us, hidden as it were in the inner recesses of our existence. We recite "Baruch Sheim" silently the rest of the year because only the silent, hidden part of us is on that level. On Yom Kippur though, when the "soul emerges", we are capable of reciting this verse aloud. Yom Kippur shows us who we really are.

With this renewed awareness of the intense sanctity of the human personality and especially of the covenantal, Jewish people coupled with our repentance, may we achieve, with Divine mercy, forgiveness for our sins and the re-awakening of the central attitude necessary to face the "regular world" as we march one step closer to the era when evil will be eradicated forever. © 2013 Rabbi Y. Haber and TorahWeb foundation

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

The days which stretch from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur are known as the 'Aseres Y'may Tshuva' -- the Ten Days of Repentance. As difficult as it is to shake ourselves from the stupor of our set patterns and ways, we need to try to find some concrete way of improving ourselves during these crucial days.

Thankfully, Chaza"l discuss a beautiful concept -- one that can be worked into our daily dealings -- and teach that it has the capacity to cause Hashem to 'pass by' our sins and shortcomings. The Siftei Chaim explains it in the following way.

The Talmud [Rosh Hashana 17A] teaches: Rava said: One who is maavir {passes by} his middos {attributes}, his sins are also 'passed by.'

Rav Dessler explains that this concept of 'maavir' is analogous to a road being almost totally blocked but one can still pass by. One who hasn't completely eradicated a bad middah but has minimized it to the degree that he can get past it. Anger is the usual response when wronged. If that anger totally fills the person he will be unable to get past it -- to understand the other side and give the benefit of the doubt. If, however, he is able to hold that anger in check and minimize it to the degree that he can get past it, he

will be able to understand the other side and forgive the perpetrator.

When one treats others in such a fashion, Hashem's attribute of middah k'negged middah {reciprocity} dictates that His judgment will also be minimized. Hashem will 'get past' that person's sins and will judge with chessed {kind mercy}.

This will not only affect a person's station in the World to Come but will even nullify harsh decrees aimed at a person in this world. The Talmud there relates that Rav Huna was so ill he was on the verge of death. After he had fought off death and was once again well, he related what he had experienced. "The heavenly court had decreed death but Hashem intervened arguing that since I had been maavir on my middos, the court must also look past some of my actions."

A person actually has the capacity to dictate how he'll be judged by the heavens. Two people can perform identical deeds and yet be judged totally differently. One who was maavir and found the good in others will have his sins mitigated and his merits magnified. The second, who refused to cut others some slack, will have his actions meticulously scrutinized and unceremoniously rejected unless they were completely pure. This is not necessarily a punishment. It is simply a reflection of the person himself.

With this, the Chofetz Chaim explains a seemingly difficult passage in the 'Avinu Malkainu' prayers that are recited during these days. We implore our Father and King to inscribe us in the Book of Merits. Why do we need to ask Hashem to do this? If we have merits then we should automatically be inscribed. If we don't have such merits, then even asking to be inscribed in that book should be considered quite audacious!

He explains that every person has performed some good deeds and as such has merits. However, close scrutiny of these deeds may leave nothing more than a bare skeleton of the original act. We might have donated charity to a needy cause but our feelings of pride, guilt and honor might not leave much of a balance. It might no longer deserve to be inscribed in that heavenly Book of Merits. As such, we implore Hashem not to dissect our actions too thoroughly. If we did a good deed, inscribe it in the Book of Merits.

The way that we can push that decision to go in our favor is, of course, through middah k'negged middah {the attribute of reciprocity}. If we accept the good that others do for us at face value without overly analyzing it, if we are willing to get past the less savory aspects of other's deeds, then middah k'negged middah will dictate that we and our deeds will be inscribed in the Book of Merits.

It all depends on how we look at things...

The great Chassidic leader, Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev, once witnessed a seemingly boorish sight. A simple wagon-driver, in the midst of his prayers,

began greasing the axle of his wagon. Other shocked bystanders couldn't help but commenting on the crudeness they had witnessed. "Imagine a person greasing an axle while praying!" they cried out in dismay.

Rav Levi Yitzchak, whose love for Israel seeped out of his every pore, had a totally different slant on the situation. "Imagine such a Jew!" he excitedly exclaimed. "He even prays when he greases his axle!"

A g'mar chasima tova. May we all be inscribed and sealed in the Book of Merits and the Book of Life.
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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

Rabbi Shmuel Sasson; Head of Torah Garin in Haifa

When we read the passage describing the special service performed by the High Priest on Yom Kippur, we can see a special emphasis on the confession over the goat sent into the desert ("to Azazel") as compared to no mention of a confession over the goat sacrificed to G-d. The confession linked to the ox is also quite long.

In addition, at the end of the passage, the Torah describes the fact that the sins of Yisrael are loaded onto the goat. "And the goat will carry their sins on it to a desert land" [Vayikra 16:22].

The Ramban notes that the confession over the goat to Azazel is quite long, and he explains that sacrifices that are brought to G-d atone and lead to forgiveness for sins, but the goat that is not sacrificed to G-d is received by Satan, who is not interested in atonement but rather is forced to reply Amen, because G-d commands him to do so. On this holy day a "gift for atonement is given," and Satan is forced to accede. Only then will the red thread hung in the Temple turn white, signifying that the people have been forgiven.

This approach of the Ramban thus implies that Satan atones for the sins that were not forgiven by G-d. However, if we know to bring our sins to G-d with humility, the process of atonement will be much faster, and we will not have to load so much onto the goat sent to Azazel.

Every generation has its own goat... In our generation it seems that many people find it easier to visit a therapist/a tzadik/a personal trainer than to stand upright before G-d. Let us pray that we will indeed stand directly before G-d, and that He will forgive us.

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Translated by Moshe Goldberg

