

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

A Breath of Life

In the year that we are now parting with, 5774, it became dangerous once again to be a Jew. Israel, subject to sustained missile attack, discovered how hard it is to fight an asymmetric war against a terrorist group ruthless enough to place rocket launchers beside schools, hospitals and mosques. It found itself condemned by large sections of the world for performing the first duty of any state, namely to protect its citizens from danger and death.

Anti-Semitism returned to the streets of Europe. One hundred and twenty years after the Dreyfus trial, the cry “Death to the Jews” was heard again in Paris. Seventy years after the Holocaust, the call of “Jews to the gas” was heard in the streets of Germany. There were times when it felt as if the ghost of a past we thought long dead had risen to haunt us. More times than was comfortable I heard Jews say, “For the first time in my life I feel afraid.”

Let us stay with those fears and confront them directly. We are not back in the 1930s. To the contrary, for the first time in the almost four thousand years of Jewish history, we have simultaneously independence and sovereignty in the land and state of Israel, and freedom and equality in the Diaspora. Israel is strong, extraordinarily so. The success of the Iron Dome missile defense was the latest in an astonishing line of technological advances — not just military but also agricultural, medical and commercial — designed to protect, save and enhance life.

Israel has lived with the disdain of the world for a very long time. Even the most lukewarm among us knows that it is infinitely preferable to have a state of Israel and the condemnation of the world than no Israel, no Jewish home, and have the sympathy of the world.

The unity Israel showed during the Gaza conflict was deeply moving. It reminded us that in a profound existential sense we remain one people. Whether or not we share a covenant of faith, we share a covenant of fate. That is a good state to be in as we face the Yamim Noraim, when we stand before G-d not just as individuals but as a people.

As for anti-Semitism, rarely has it been more self-evident that the hate that starts with Jews never ends with Jews. The most significant enemies of the Jews today are the enemies of freedom everywhere.

Worldwide we may feel uncomfortable, anxious. But there are parts of the world where Christians are being butchered, beheaded, driven from their homes and living in terror.

As for Muslims, one prominent academic recently estimated that of the hundreds dying daily, at least 90 per cent were doing so at the hands of their fellow Muslims. Bahai are at risk. So are the Yazidis. So in other parts of the world are Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, and for that matter atheists. No historian looking back on our time will be tempted to call it the age of tolerance.

Which brings us back to the Yamim Noraim. There is a note of universality to the prayers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that we do not find on other festivals. On other festivals the key section of the Amidah begins, *Atah bechartanu mikol ha-amim*, “You chose us from among all the nations.” The emphasis is on Jewish singularity. On the Yamim Noraim the parallel prayer begins, “And so place the fear of Lord our G-d, over all that You have made... so that all of creation will worship You.” The emphasis is on human solidarity. And human solidarity is what the world needs right now.

One message resonates through these days: life. “Remember us for life, King who delights in life, and write us in the book of life for your sake, G-d of life.” We sometimes forget how radical this was when Judaism first entered the world. Egypt of the Pharaohs was obsessed with death. Life is full of suffering and pain. Death is where we join the gods. The great pyramids and temples were homages to death.

Anthropologists and social psychologists still argue today that the reason religion exists is because of people’s fear of death. Which makes it all the more remarkable that — despite our total and profound belief in *olam haba* and *techiyat ha-metim*, life after death and the resurrection of the dead — there is almost nothing of this in most of the books of the Bible. It is an astonishing phenomenon. All of *Kohelet’s* cynicism and *Job’s* railing against injustice could have been answered in one sentence: “There is life after death.” Yet neither book explicitly says so.

To the contrary, King David said in a psalm we say daily: “What gain would there be if I died and went down to the grave? Can dust thank you? Can it declare your truth?”

Almost at the end of his life Moses turned to the

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next generation and said to them: "Choose life, so that you and your children may live." We take this for granted, forgetting how relatively rare in the history of religion this is.

Why so? Why, if we believe the soul is immortal, that there is life after death and that this world is not all there is, do we not say so more often and more loudly? Because since civilization began, heaven has too often been used as an excuse for injustice and violence down here on earth. What evil can you not commit if you believe you will be rewarded for it in the world to come? That is the logic of the terrorist and the suicide bomber. It is the logic of those who burned "heretics" at the stake in order, so they said, to save their immortal souls.

Against this horrific mindset the whole of Judaism is a protest. Justice and compassion have to be fought for in this life not the next. Judaism is not directed to fear of death. It is directed to a far more dangerous fear: fear of life with all its pain and disappointment and unpredictability. It is fear of life, not fear of death, that have led people to create totalitarian states and fundamentalist religions. Fear of life is ultimately fear of freedom. That is why fear of life takes the form of an assault against freedom.

Against that fear we say from the beginning of Ellul to Sukkot that monumental psalm of David: "The Lord is my light and my salvation. Whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life. Of whom then shall I be afraid?" On Rosh Hashanah we blow the shofar, the one mitzvah we fulfill by the breath of life itself without needing any words. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, the "anniversary of creation," we read in the Torah and haftarah not about the birth of the universe but about the birth of Isaac to Sarah and Samuel to Hannah as if to say, one life is like a universe. One child is enough to show how vulnerable life is – a miracle to be protected and cherished. On Yom Kippur we wear the kittel, a shroud, as if to show that we are not afraid of death.

Never before have I felt so strongly that the world needs us to live this message, the message of the Torah that life is holy, that death defiles, and that terror in the name of G-d is a desecration of the name of G-d.

The state of Israel is the collective affirmation of the Jewish people, a mere three years after emerging from the valley of the shadow of death, that *Lo amut ki echyeh*, "I will not die but live." Israel chose life. Its enemies chose the way of death. They even boasted, as did Osama bin Laden, that the love of death made them strong. It did not make them strong. It made them violent. Aggression is not strength; it is a profound self-consciousness of weakness. And the main victims of Islamist violence are Muslims. Hate destroys the hater.

Today it is not just Israel or Jews whose freedom is at risk. It is the whole of the Middle East, large parts of Africa and Asia, and much of Europe. Therefore let us approach the New Year with a real sense of human solidarity. Let us show, by the way we celebrate our faith, that G-d is to be found in life. The love of G-d is love of life. Let us take to heart King David's insistence that faith is stronger than fear. No empire ever defeated the Jewish people, and no force ever will.

May G-d write us, our families, the people and State of Israel and Jews throughout the world, in the book of life. And may the day come when the righteous of all nations work together for the sake of freedom, peace and life. ©2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

What is the essence of our faith, the purpose for which the Jewish people have been placed in the world? Fascinatingly enough, the answer is to be found within the central prayer of our Rosh Hashana liturgy: the three blessings, uniquely found within the Additional (Musaf) prayer of Rosh Hashana, of *Malchuyot* (kingship), *Zichronot* (remembrances) and *Shofarot*. These blessings are each punctuated by the sounds of the shofar and, according to the 14th century theologian Rabbi Yosef Albo as well as the 19th-century Franz Rosenzweig, contain the essence of our faith.

The first of these blessings, *Malchuyot*, begins with the more familiar *Alenu* prayer. This prayer teaches that the G-d whom we now accept as the one Lord of the Universe, the G-d of love, morality and peace, will eventually be accepted the entire world.

This axiom of our religion, this prophecy of the ultimate endgame, is especially comforting in the face of the dangerous global village in which we live, a global village in which the specter of nuclear proliferation looms.

This blessing affirms that it is the G-d of compassionate, righteousness and moral justice who will eventually emerge supreme over the totalitarian trinity of Nazi fascism, Stalinist Communism and Islamic fundamentalism. Our broken world will eventually be perfected under the Kingship of the G-d of

righteousness; through the teachings of Abraham "all the families of the Earth will be blessed" (Gen.12:3) with a world of peace.

The second blessing, Zichronot, which is a Hebrew term for history, opens with: "You remember the activities from the beginning of the world, and you are mindful of the deeds [or the potential functions, from the Hebrew tafkid] of every creature from earliest times."

Here is a ringing declaration of faith in the process of history; the clear sense that historical time is on the side of humanity, and that individuals and nations have a unique role to play in the cumulative march of history toward redemption. Israel alone of the nations of the world enjoys a special relationship with G-d, a covenant which ensures its eternity and defines its mission as the messenger of ethical monotheism to all of humanity.

This blessing guarantees that there is an overarching purpose to history, which is not a cyclical, repetitive cycle leading nowhere, but rather a linear pathway leading to peace. Redemption will come about in the fullness of historic time as a result of the cumulative merits of all preceding generations.

How will we carry out our covenantal task of imparting our message to the world? This is told to us by the third blessing, Shofarot, which reminds us of the revelation at Sinai, the 613 commandments which G-d presented to Israel and the seven commandments of morality, centering around "Thou shalt not murder," which G-d presented to the world.

Maimonides, the great codifier of Jewish law, insists that just as G-d commanded Moses to bequeath 613 commandments to Israel, "similarly did He command Moses to coerce the nations of the world to accept the seven laws of morality" (Laws of Kings 8:10).

This is an immensely significant message, especially in our postmodern, relativistic, "everything goes" society, which denies any absolute concept of morality.

"Situation ethics" dominates our conventional wisdom, and the most heinous crime can become transformed into a sacred act "when seen from the perpetrator's point of view." (Hence a suicide bomber who murders innocent children is called a "freedom fighter.") Shofarot tells us that the Seven Laws of Morality which must be accepted by the nations are not options, but absolutes, since - especially in our global village - the lives of all humanity hang in the balance of their acceptance.

Hence the Rosh Hashana Musaf Amida teaches that the nation of Israel must and will teach fundamental morality, or ethical monotheism, to all the nations of the world. Only when this message is accepted, when "this Torah comes forth from Zion and the word of G-d from Jerusalem," only then will "nation

not lift up sword against nation and humanity not learn war anymore"(Isaiah 2:4) and "everyone will sit under his vineyard and fig tree and no one will have reason to fear" (Micah 4:4).

Each of these blessings is punctuated by the shofar sounding. After G-d's kingship we sound the shofar, the means by which the king in the ancient world was crowned. Take note: It is we, the Jewish people, who must bring G-d down into this world and crown Him.

After Zichronot, we sound the shofar as a reminder of the aborted sacrifice of Isaac in favor of the ram whose horns were caught in the thicket. Isaac, the future of the Jewish people, was slated for slaughter, but was set free.

The shofar sound after Zichronot reminds us that the Jews will continue to live despite exile and persecution.

We must live so that we may remain G-d's witnesses and "a light unto the nations of the world" (Isaiah 42:6).

Finally, we sound the shofar after Shofarot since the method by which we must reach out to the world is by teaching our Torah - a teaching revealed at Sinai amid the sounds of the shofar.

And it will ultimately be that when the Almighty Himself will sound the shofar that all of the dispersed will return to Israel, the Temple will be rebuilt and the nations will come to learn from us to beat their swords into plowshares and to live together in peace. ©2014 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah emphasizes to us that the day of Rosh Hashanah is a day of remembrance and of memory. Heaven is able to recall everything and everyone; human beings, less so. Human memory is selective, arbitrary and many if not most times faulty and certainly somewhat inaccurate.

People have often told me that they heard me say such and such in a public lecture and I have no recollection whatsoever of having ever publicly said such an inane sentence. My memory is often faulty and betrays me when I need it. But the hearing of my listeners is often also impaired. People tend to hear whatever they wish to hear even if the speaker never really said those words.

All of this is part of our human condition, our frailties and our mortal nature. And it is a great and truly awesome (how I despise that word as it is used in current society!) experience on Rosh Hashanah to encounter Heaven's perfect memory and ability of total recall.

It is not only that all of our actions and words, thoughts and intentions are remembered and judged,

but it is that they are remembered objectively and truthfully without personal prejudice or bias. That makes Rosh Hashanah the "Day of Remembrance." There are human beings that are blessed with great powers of memory. But even they are fallible. Maimonides, one of the great geniuses of memory of all time, admitted that once he could not at first recall the source in the Talmud that would justify a decision that he rendered in his monumental work, Mishneh Torah. If he forgot, then who will not also forget?! Only Heaven is not burdened with forgetfulness.

This leads us to a basic question regarding our memories...what we choose to remember and what we sublimate and choose to forget? The Torah instructs us over and over again not to forget the basic principles of Jewish life – G-d and the Torah revelation at Sinai, the exodus from Egypt, the sin of slander and gossip, the sanctity of the Sabbath, the continuing enmity of Amalek and much of the non-Jewish world towards the people of Israel, and finally the tendency of the Jews from the time of the Sinai desert till today to anger G-d by backsliding on obligations and covenantal undertakings.

We have chosen to remember other less important things in life – foolish statements and perceived slights, unimportant statistics and wrong opinions, bruised egos and jealousy of others and their achievements – and have consigned the basic memories that should guide our lives as recounted above to the dustbin of forgetfulness.

Rosh Hashanah demands an accounting of our memory and our forgetfulness. The prophet long ago proclaimed that Israel was unfaithful because "I (G-d) was forgotten." It is only forgetting that begets the ignorance of one's heritage, faith and self. And it is that very ignorance that creates the climate of sin and assimilation, secularism and violence, greed and avarice that threatens our very existence as a people and a state. Woe to those who no longer remember, for without awareness of their past, their future is doomed!

On Rosh Hashanah we read in the exalted prayers of the day that there exists, so to speak, a book of remembrances in Heaven – of memory. And in that book, each and every one of us has a page dedicated to our activities and behavior in our life on this earth. Not only that, but our signature and seal appears on that page, attesting to the veracity of what is written there. That page reminds us of what we have forgotten, and whether we willed that forgetfulness or otherwise.

Eventually our true and accurate powers of memory are restored to our souls after we have departed from this earth. And, as the prayer records for us, the page literally speaks for itself, announcing the events and occurrences listed. So the ultimate day of judgment, just as the Rosh Hashanah day of judgment here on earth, is the day of memory and recollection.

Remembering is the true catalyst for

repentance and self-improvement. To put it into the current common vernacular, Rosh Hashanah should serve as one's ultimate "selfie." For that attitude of self-appearance is reflective of our fascination to remember and to know ourselves deeply and truly. On the day that everything is remembered in Heaven, we on earth should also strive to remember our past actions, attitudes and behavior. ©2014 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 central theme of Yom Kippur is teshuva, commonly translated as "repentance." We hear so much about this term, but what, in fact does it truly mean?

On the simplest behavioral level, writes Maimonides, teshuvah involves "returning" to a situation in which one had previously failed, and not making the same mistake a second time. (Laws of Repentance 2:1) It means being given a second chance. No wonder, Yom Kippur has elements of joy. We celebrate being given a second chance. In too many of life's pursuits, we are given only one shot. If we miss, it's all over. On Yom Kippur, G-d says, "no matter if you have failed before; you can still return."

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

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

Another classic story. Reb Zusha was on his death bed, and tears were streaming down his face. "Why are you crying?" asked his disciples. "If G-d asks me why I wasn't like Moses or Maimonides," answered

Reb Zusha, "I'll say, I wasn't blessed with that kind of leadership ability and wisdom." But I'm afraid of another question," continued Reb Zusha, "what if G-d asks, 'Reb Zusha, why weren't you like Reb Zusha? Why didn't you find your inner being and realize your inner potential? Why didn't you find yourself?' That is why I am crying."

A third approach. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, among many other thinkers, understands teshuvah to mean "answer." That is to say teshuvah is a dialogue. On Yom Kippur we stand before G-d, a caring G-d who asks the question(s). We offer the answer(s). A G-d of love seeks us out. As much as we are in search of Him, He is in search of us. A comforting thought on Yom Kippur.

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

It was left for Rav Avraham Yitzchak ha-Cohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel to offer an understanding related to the establishment of the modern State of Israel. Teshuvah, according to Rav Kook, ought be understood eschatologically. It quite literally means "go home," to our homeland. It is not only an individual quest, but a communal mandate to establish a land that is different from all others. A land that is a light to the nations of the world: a land that marks the dawn of redemption, a land at peace. On this Yom Kippur - let it be, let it be. ©2013 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 DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

In the place that Ba'alei T'shuvah (those who have sinned and then repented) stand, the completely righteous do not (or cannot) stand." From the context within which the Talmud (B'rachos 34b and Sanhedrin 99a) says this, it is clear that it means that Ba'alei T'shuvah are on a higher level, and/or will receive a greater reward, than those who have no sins from which to repent. The Maharsha asks how this is possible, as "this appears to be far from logical that Ba'alei T'shuvah should be on a higher level than those who are completely righteous." After all, how could someone who sinned be considered better than one who never succumbed to sin? As the Sefer HaYashar (usually attributed to Rabbeinu Tam) puts it (Gate #10), "for complete repentance of one who is wicked will cleanse him from all of his sins, making it as if he was just born. And just as a newborn is innocent of any sin

but has no merits, so too is someone who is wicked, after having done a complete repentance, cleansed of all of his sins; however he has no merits, and does not merit the level of the pure righteous ones, who in all of their days never sinned." How could the Talmud make a blanket statement that one who has repented is considered better than one who never sinned?

In explaining why the Talmud considers the Ba'al T'shuvah to be on a higher level, the Rambam (Laws of Repentance 7:4) and the Yad Ramah (Sanhedrin 99a) say that it is because they have a harder time defeating their evil inclination than those who never "tasted the taste of sin." Rav Hutner zt"l (Essay #29 on Rosh HaShanah) asks why this "advantage" applies only to one who has repented. Even after sinning we are required to avoid future sins, and doing so is much harder after having sinned in the first place. Therefore, even if the sinner does not regret having sinned, and has not committed to never sinning again, he still must try to avoid each and every sin that he can. If he does win a particular battle, and does not give in to temptation, he should have the same "advantage" as the sinner who repented fully! They both had a tougher fight than the completely righteous, so why does the Talmud say that a "Ba'al T'shuvah" is on the higher level, rather than a "poraish min hachait" (one who avoided sinning)?

One of the steps necessary for complete repentance is to regret having done the action that was wrong. This means that if the sinner could somehow turn back the clock and be faced with that situation again, he would not commit the misdeed. If having sinned and then repenting gets one to a higher level then had he (or she) never sinned in the first place, how could he regret having done it? Imagine if someone stole a dollar in order to buy a lottery ticket, and the ticket bought with that dollar ends up winning a large jackpot. Even if he returns the dollar he stole (or pays back double, etc.), he still must repent for having stolen. Can he really wish he hadn't stolen that dollar while living in his new mansion, or driving his new luxury car? How can one attain full repentance if they end up better off for having sinned?

One of the verses we say in the prayers of the High Holy Days as a sort of defense for having sinned is "for there is no man who is righteous in the land, who has done good and not sinned" (Koheles 7:20). After the building of the Temple was completed, Sh'lomo Hamelech asked G-d to listen to the people's prayers even though they are not perfect, "for there is no man who does not sin" (Melachim I 8:46). If no one is perfect, and everyone has at least some sins to repent, wouldn't we all be in the category of "Ba'alei T'shuvah?" How is there a contrast between the completely righteous and those who have sinned and repented if only the latter category actually exists?

Finally, the Talmud brings a textual proof that

the "Ba'al T'shuvah" is on a higher level than one who is completely righteous: "Peace, peace, for the far and for the near, said G-d, and I will heal him" (Yeshayahu 57:19). Since the one "far away" is mentioned first, he must be on a higher level than the one who is "near," i.e. who never sinned. How can the "far" one refer to the "Ba'al T'shuvah" if he is not really far away any more, as is, in fact on a higher level than the completely righteous? Additionally, if he has already repented, thus warranting the higher level, why does G-d say in the future tense "I will heal him?" Hasn't the healing (the t'shuvah) already occurred, which is why he was placed before the "near" one?

These questions are based on the assumption that the term "Ba'al T'shuvah" refers to one who has sinned and completed his repentance for the sins, and that the term "completely righteous" refers to those who have never sinned. However, the term "Ba'al Ta'aveh" does not refer to one who used to have desires, but has gotten past them. It is used to describe one who is still consumed by his desires. A "Ba'al Habayis" is one who owns a house, not one who once had property but is now homeless. If "Ba'al T'shuvah" refers to someone who is still in the process of doing t'shuvah (rather than one who has completed the t'shuvah process), many of these questions would be answered. If "completely righteous" refers to one who has either never sinned or who has completely repented from his sins, they would all be answered. As the Sefer HaYashar pointed out, and is stated by our sages (Tanchuma Yashan, Vayeira 16), "If a person has numerous sins and he returns to G-d, He considers it as if he never sinned." If he is really considered as if he had never sinned, he could accurately be called "completely righteous."

The reason the "Ba'al T'shuvah" is the one still "far away" is because he still needs to complete his repentance. But because he is sincerely trying, G-d reassures him that He "will (future tense) heal him."

And while it is true that it is nearly impossible to avoid sin completely, we can limit our slip-ups, and can make a full recovery (through repentance), so that we can (once again) be considered "completely righteous" (thereby necessitating the contrast of the two categories in the Talmud).

There are too many variables to compare the levels of different individuals, so generalizations are impossible. A slight slip-up late in life (which is corrected through repentance) cannot be compared to first doing t'shuvah and starting to keep the Torah at that same late stage, even if both went through the t'shuvah process. Nor can years of constant growth despite some ups and downs (and ups) be compared with sin-less consistency that is devoid of attaining richer, deeper levels of closeness to G-d. What can be compared is the amount of effort that must be made in order to accomplish a similar task by people who have varying levels of difficulty accomplishing it. Avoiding a

sin is much easier for one who never fell prey to it than it is for one who has (and has not yet repented for it). It is precisely in this specific area of vulnerability that the sinner must focus his t'shuvah, and therefore work harder than one who never succumbed to that particular sin. Once the t'shuvah process has been completed (no easy task), and the former sinner understands the full devastation that was brought about by the sin, and he has worked on himself to the extent that he no longer sins, makes a commitment to never sin again, regrets having sinned in the first place, and has verbally admitted his sin to his Creator, he will be less tempted to sin again. At this point he need not focus extra energies on avoiding this particular sin, much like one has had never sinned. (As a matter of fact, the Eitz Yosef, in his commentary on B'rachos 34b, says that one who has fully repented will be less tempted than one who never sinned in the first place.) It is this extra effort that must be exerted during the t'shuvah process that gives the Ba'al T'shuvah a spiritual advantage over the completely righteous (i.e. one who has either never sinned or has previously fully repented from sin). Even though the result is the same (avoidance of sin), the Ba'al T'shuvah, while still in the process of repenting, gets more out of it winning the "fight" than one who didn't need to fight as hard.

That doesn't mean that overall the Ba'al T'shuvah is (necessarily) on a higher level, as the avoidance of this particular sin is only a small piece of the overall picture. In this situation (or "place"), though, he will have accomplished more. And since avoiding committing the sin is one of the steps of the t'shuvah process, the Talmud didn't need to mention it more than any of the other steps, merely identifying it as something done by a "Ba'al T'shuvah."

Once the t'shuvah process is complete, this "advantage" is no longer there, hence it is not a problem of ill-gotten gains. Only if the advantage was permanent could it hinder the ability to complete the process of fully regretting having sinned. (Although according to Eitz Yosef there is a permanent advantage, as the "Ba'al T'shuvah" is less likely to commit that particular sin, not needing to fight as hard to avoid sinning counters having needed to fight harder before completing the t'shuvah process.)

The Chidushay Gaonim (Sanhedrin 99a) adds another interesting wrinkle, explaining how the same action could be a step up for one doing t'shuvah, but a step down for those who do not need to. The example given is a "bamah," an altar upon which offerings are made to G-d outside the Temple. After the Temple was built, "bamos" became illegal, and would bring about the wrath of G-d. However, for those (kings) who were worshipping idols instead of G-d, starting to worship G-d in any form, even by bringing Him offerings on a "bamah," was a step in the right direction. For a righteous king this was a huge step down, but for an

idol-worshipping king it was a huge step up. Therefore, a Ba'al Teshuvah has the advantage of getting credit for doing things that a completely righteous person would be punished for.

Whether or not doing the "wrong thing" can be considered the "right thing" to the extent that it does not elicit punishment (as opposed to being punished for it because it is "wrong" yet worthwhile because of the long-term benefit), it can still be said that the "place" where a "Ba'al T'shuvah" can stand, i.e. doing something that brings him closer to G-d even though it is usually prohibited, the completely righteous cannot stand, since it would take them further away from G-d. Either way, one thing we see is that the expression "Ba'al T'shuvah" is understood to mean someone who is still in the process of repenting, not someone who has already repented. By contrast, the term "completely righteous" must refer not only to someone who never sinned (if possible), but also to someone who has fully recovered from sin through repentance. ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YAKOV HABER

TorahWeb

One of the major focal points of the prayer service on Rosh HaShana is the mussaf amida containing blessings with the three themes of malchiyos, zichronos and shofaros. The Talmud (Rosh HaShana 34b) tells us that HKB"H tells us: "Recite before me malchiyos, zichronos and shofaros: Malchiyos -- so that you shall coronate me as your King. Zichronos -- so that your remembrance comes before me for the good. And with what? With the shofar." Notably, even though each theme has its own beracha the Talmud seems to explain the reason for the first two berachot directly. The third beracha is mentioned only in a secondary way -- "With what? With the shofar." This seems to be an explanation of why we blow the shofar. Why isn't the purpose of the beracha of shofaros more explicitly stated?

Furthermore, when we analyze the text of the three berachos, we see that the first, concerning malchiyos, clearly focuses on coronating Hashem as our King. The second clearly focuses on G-d remembering our actions. The third, though, focuses on G-d revealing His presence in the world starting at Har Sinai. Why doesn't the Gemara spell out this theme rather than just vaguely referencing the shofar?

In addition, each beracha contains three verses from the Torah, three from Tehillim, and three from Nevi'im. In the beracha of shofaros, which, as mentioned, focuses on Revelation, the first three pesukim from the Torah focus on the Revelation of Sinai punctuated by the sound of the shofar. The last three highlight the Revelation of the final redemption also accentuated by shofar blasts. But the middle three p'sukim from Tehillim do not seem to focus on

Revelation. One verse speaks of the shofar on Rosh HaShana, "tik'u bachodesh shofar bakesseh l'yom chageinu." One speaks of G-d being elevated with the shofar, "alah Elokim bitru'ah, Hashem b'kol shofar." The final ones of this section, taken from the last psalm, speak of many musical instruments being used to praise Hashem including shofar. How are these verses related and how do they relate to the general theme of Revelation?

Rav Soloveitchik (Yemei Zikaron, "AleI T'eina, v'Kosnos Or") beautifully explains that the pesukim from Tehillim focus on the revelation of Hashem on Rosh HaShana itself. G-d reveals himself to the penitent encouraging him, embracing him, awaiting his return. Elsewhere, (seen in Nifla'os HaRav) Rav Soloveitchik explains that the Torah's statement of "us'machtem lifnei Hashem Elokeichem" indicates that true joy occurs only when in the presence of G-d. The fear of judgment of Rosh HaShana eliminates the ability to recite Hallel which would ordinarily reflect this joy (Arachin 10b). Nonetheless, a hidden Hallel is indeed recited through the verses from the last mizmor of Tehillim indicating all the instruments including the shofar being used to praise Hashem. According to the Rav, then, all of the pesukim do indeed focus on the theme of Revelation.

Based on this idea, perhaps we can answer our other questions as well. The Gemara states "Bameh? Bashofar!" Perhaps the Gemara is referring to both the blessings of malchiyos and zichronos. How are we to coronate G-d? How are we to assure that Hashem remembers us l'tova? The Gemara answers: with the shofar! The shofar represents G-d's revelation to us. But this revelation was not only to be punctuated in the historical record at its endpoints -- at Har Sinai at the beginning of Jewish national history and at the Final Redemption, the last stage of Jewish history. It is also a constant one on both the national and individual levels. G-d constantly reveals himself to us in our lives by exercising His Divine providence over us. His constant knowledge of every, even minute, aspect of our lives, constantly monitoring, modifying, and re-creating all of our life pathways reflect His constant intense connection to us. To be sure, the intensity of the connection to HKB"H depends on our spiritual level, but Hashem's connection to everyone is a given. How are we to coronate G-d, to recognize Him as the ruler of not only the world but also to realize that the entire purpose of our existence is to connect to Him? How are we to assure that we are remembered for the good before the Heavenly court? Bashofar, through being aware of G-d's constant presence in our lives. Not to get caught up in the havlei haz'man which tend to numb ourselves to this awareness of G-d's presence in our lives. The shofar wakes us up (Rambam Hichos Teshuva), breaks down the barriers (Michtav Me'Eliyahu as per the shofar of Yericho) and allows us to start on our journey to

return.

The Haftorah for Shabbos Shuva begins "Shuva Yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha -- Return Israel to Hashem, your G-d!" Rather than viewing the return as a journey toward G-d, perhaps we can characterize this as a return inward to that which is already there, to G-d's constant connection to us which we are not taking full advantage of. May we all "re-sign" on the b'ris with HKB"H on Rosh HaShana and may the awareness of His constant presence carry us through a sweet new year! ©2014 Rabbi Y. Haber and The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

"I will hide my face from them, and see what their end will be. For they are a generation of reversals..."

Be'er Mayim Chaim: "The text does not seem to provide us with any clues concerning the meaning of the 'reversals.' Rashi suggests that the pasuk criticizes us for reversing Hashem's gracious attitude towards His people to one of anger."

Another approach takes note of the fact that almost all personality characteristics and traits -- even those commonly assumed to be "bad" -- can be put to good use. Passion, which so often attaches itself to improper objects, can and should be utilized in the performance of mitzvos with zeal and alacrity. Our pasuk decries our reversal of midos, in using passion for transgressions rather than mitzvos, and laziness in the performance of our Torah obligations. (Perhaps this is alluded to elsewhere: (Vayikra 27:10) "He shall not exchange it -- not good for bad, nor bad for good.")

We might also explain our pasuk as speaking favorably about Klal Yisrael! The navi wrote "In wrath, remember/ mention to be merciful." (Habakuk 3:2) Maharsha (Pesachim 87b) explains this to mean that even when He speaks of Divine anger and retribution, He manages to invoke the concept of compassion, even if only to state that He will not be employing it.

The significance of this is as follows. Hashem's

Parsha Puns!

**YEEH, MON! It'Z EEN your best
interest 2 LISTEN, HONEY so if I KITTEL
u one thing, it'd b 2 have a ROCKin'
shabbos and a year of GREATNESS!**

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uttered dibbur packs a powerful punch. It is not easily changed, even if people have done teshuvah. As a hedge against the repentance that Hashem looks for, He formulates His gloomy forecasts with words that are broad enough to be adapted to a different meaning, should the need arise. In wrath, He mentions being merciful, so that people can reverse the original intent through their teshuvah. "Where it was said to them, 'lo ami / You are not My people,' it will be said to them, "Children of the living G-d/ kel." "Lo" is the word with the greatest punch in the first phrase -- you are NOT my people. The two letters of lo are literally reversed through teshuvah, and become kel, G-d.

So it is with Hashem's gezeros. He phrases His powerful dibbur in such a way that their impact can be turned around in a different direction.

It is important to know, however, that this reversal takes place primarily within Man's heart. Tzadikim react to tragedy and retribution by refusing to accept it as evil. They resolve in their hearts that whatever comes from Hashem must be good and only good. In effect, they reverse din and turn it into rachamim.

This is no game, and no mistake. What they sense is something quite profound -- that din and rachamim are not opposites, not contradictory facets. Only one of those is "real." Chesed and rachamim are primary; din is a necessary outgrowth of the others. While we don't see them or usually experience them as the same -- they do have quite different consequences -- we can intellectually understand that there is chesed at the core of all din.

Some of us, like tzadikim, do a much better job of understanding this than do others. When they do, they actually change the course of His conduct from din to rachamim! The reason for this is that din is restrictive. It limits the display of Divine goodness; it is a form of hester panim. When the tzadik discovers and asserts the presence of Hashem locked into the din, he changes its very nature. By making the presence of Hashem manifest, it no longer functions as din, and can morph into chesed.

Din is thus "sweetened" by chesed, and the person remains enveloped by Divine compassion. (Based on Be'er Mayim Chaim, Devarim 32:20) ©2014 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

