

Toras Aish



Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

A Breath of Life

I don't know whether you ever noticed, but teshuvah, the whole cycle of repentance and forgiveness, plays no part in the early dramas of humankind. It doesn't in the story of Adam and Eve. As for Cain, G-d mitigates his punishment but he doesn't forgive him for his crime. There is no call to repentance to the generation of the Flood, or the builders of Babel, or the people of Sodom and the cities of the plain.

The first time G-d forgives is after the sin of the golden calf. He hears Moses prayer and agrees. "Although this is a stiff-necked people," he said, "forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance." And G-d did. Moses pleaded again after the sin of the spies: "Forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time they left Egypt until now." And G-d replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked."

Why the change? Why does G-d forgive in the book of Exodus but not in the book of Genesis? The answer, I think, is extraordinary and it made a huge difference to me when I realised it.

The first recorded instance of forgiveness in all of literature is the moment when Joseph, by then viceroy of Egypt, revealed his identity to his brothers, who had long before sold him as a slave. He forgives them. He says, it wasn't you, it was G-d. He said: "Don't be distressed or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that G-d sent me ahead of you." And it wasn't only then that Joseph forgave them. After their father Jacob had died, the brothers were anxious that now Joseph would take revenge. Once again Joseph forgave. And on that note the book of Genesis ends.

G-d did not forgive human beings until human beings learned to forgive. It took Joseph to bring forgiveness into the world. That is what G-d was waiting for. Had G-d forgiven first, He would have made the human situation worse, not better. People would have

said, 'Why shouldn't I harm others? After all, G-d forgives.' We have to forgive others before G-d can forgive us.

So, before Yom Kippur, take time to apologise to others you may have offended. Forgive others who have offended you. Resentment is a heavy load to bear. Let go of it and you will travel more lightly. Now is the time to heal the wounds of the past. Then you will have more energy for the future.

G-d's Faith In Us

Professor Reuven Feuerstein who died aged 92 in April 2014 was one of the great child psychologists of the world, a man who transformed lives and led severely brain-damaged children to achievements no one else thought possible. I knew him and admired him, and I was recording a tribute to him when his son told me a wonderful story.

Feuerstein had been working with a group of Native American Indians and they wanted to show their gratitude. So they invited him and his wife to their reservation. They were brought into the Indian chief's wigwam where the leaders of the tribe were sitting in a circle in full headdress.

As the traditional welcome ceremony began, the professor, an orthodox Jew from Jerusalem, was overwhelmed by the incongruity. He turned to his wife and said to her in Yiddish, "What would my mother say if she could see me now!?" To his amazement, the Indian chief turned to him and replied in Yiddish: "And what would she say if she knew I understood what you just said!"

The Yiddish-speaking Indian chief told Feuerstein his story. He had grown up in Europe as a religious Jew, but having survived the horrors of the Holocaust, he decided that he wanted to spend the rest of his life as far away as he could from Western civilization, so he joined the Indians and became their doctor. Feuerstein was the first Jew he had met in his self-imposed exile.

There are certain people around whom strange things happen and Reuven Feuerstein was one. Born in Romania, he studied psychology in Bucharest, but was forced to flee by the Nazi invasion. He settled in Israel after the war, and began by treating traumatised child survivors of the holocaust. Returning to Europe he completed his education at Geneva and the Sorbonne. Later he returned to Israel where he established the

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in loving memory of my dear parents
Chayim Yitchak ben Yehudo Hakohen
Paul Kahn
and Mirjam bas Hachover R'Yehoshua
Irma Kahn-Goldschmidt
by Fernand Kahn

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Institute for the Enhancement of Learning Potential.

He dedicated his life to children with disadvantages, some physical – autistic, brain-damaged and Down Syndrome children – and others cultural or social. His methods have been adopted in more than 80 countries. He was a genius, a magician, a small, slight man with twinkling eyes. Children opened up to him like flowers in the sun.

I tell his story because he was a deeply spiritual Jew. His methods were elaborate and his theories complex, but seeing him at work you knew that there were three reasons he achieved miracles. First, the basis of his work was love. He loved the children and they loved him. Second, he had transformative faith. Under him children developed skills no one thought they could because he believed they could. He had more faith in them than anyone else.

Third, he refused to write anyone off. He insisted that children with disabilities should be included in society like every other child. They too were in the image of G-d. They too had a right to respect. They too could lead a full and meaningful life.

I learned from Professor Feuerstein that faith really does change lives. The one thing that can rescue us from despair and failure to fulfil our potential is the knowledge that someone believes in us more than we believe in ourselves.

That is what G-d does. He believes in us more than we believe in ourselves. However many times we fail, He forgives us. However many times we fall, He lifts us. And He never gives up. As we say in Le-David Hashem ori ve-yishi: "My father and mother might abandon me but G-d will gather me in." (Psalm 27: 10).

At the heart of Judaism is one utterly transformative belief: our faith in G-d's faith in us. That, as Reuven Feuerstein, showed can lead us to a greatness we never knew we had. © 2014 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The climax of Yom Kippurim is its closing Ne'ilah prayer when the sun is beginning to set, when the day is beginning to wane and when

we are nearing our last chance for the opportunity to receive G-d's loving forgiveness for the year. The excitement of these last moments is palpable within the synagogue. The prayers are at a much higher pitch and the voices are filled with intensity. During the periods of our national sovereignty, with the closing of the day, the holy Temple doors would close as well. Post Temple, with the setting sun, the very heavens, the pathway to the Divine Throne, and the gateway to G-d seems to be closing. "Don't lock me out" says the Jew during Ne'ilah. Don't close the doors or the gates in my face as long as there is still time, let me come in.

But there is another way of looking at this, a very opposite way. "Don't lock me in!" cries the Jew during Ne'ilah. Yes, I've been in the Temple, or I've been in the synagogue almost the entire day. I've truly felt G-d's presence and I've truly been warmed by His loving embrace. I feel G-d's divine and gracious acceptance and His total forgiveness. I've spent an entire twenty-five hours in His house, in which I've seen the sweetness of the Lord and visited in His tent.

But now, as the doors to His house are closing, I don't want to be locked in. After all, I began this penitential period with Rosh HaShanah, the day of G-d's kingship. The prayers on Rosh HaShanah taught me that G-d did not choose Israel to live with Him in splendid and glorious isolation; He chose Israel to be a "kingdom of priest-teachers and a holy nation" to bring the message of compassionate righteousness and moral justice as a blessing for all the families of the earth. We are meant to be a light unto the nations, a banner for all peoples.

It goes without saying that we need our moments of quiet contemplation, of anguished repentance and of personal outpouring to the G-d who gave us life and Torah. But the ultimate purpose of this day of divine fellowship is for us to be recharged to bring G-d's message to the world, a world crying out for G-d's Word of love, morality and peace. We must leave the ivory tower of Yom Kippur and descend into the madding and maddening crowd in the world all around us.

And so, just four days after Yom Kippur we go out into the Sukkah; indeed, walking home from the synagogue, one will be able to hear many people already beginning to build their family Sukkah. And the Sukkah is the next best thing to living within the bosom of nature, feeling at one with the world around you. The walls are usually flimsy and even see-through, and the vegetation- roof must enable you to see through the greens up above to the sky. We pray together with the four species- the citron, the palm branch, the myrtle and the willow which all grow near the refreshing waters of the earth- and we pray during this week not only for ourselves or for Israel, but for all seventy nations of the world. Indeed, we are Biblically mandated in Temple times to bring seventy bullocks

during the week of Sukkot on behalf of all the nations of the world.

The Sukkah teaches us one more lesson, perhaps the most important of all. The major place for us to feel G-d and His divine presence - after the heavy dose of Yom Kippur - is not in a Temple or a synagogue, but is rather in our familial homes. In order to go out into the world, we must first go out into our family.

The homes we build need not be that large, that spacious, or that fancy. You don't need chandeliers in the bathroom in order to feel the warmth of your home. It can be an exceedingly simple dwelling place but it must have two critical ingredients. First and foremost it must be suffused with love, love of G-d, love of family and love of Torah. The meals must be permeated with gratitude and thanksgiving to the G-d who gave us food, with words of Torah and with the realization that it is ultimately not the walls of the home which provide our protection, but it is rather the grace of the G-d who gives us life. And the major guests in our home are not to be Hollywood idols or sports heroes. We should invite into our home the special Ushpizin guests: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Joseph and David, Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Devorah and Rut (as you can see, in my Sukkah we add Ushpizot!).

And you will remember that the Biblical reading for Rosh HaShanah, the anniversary of the creation of the world was not the story of the Creation; it was rather the story of the first Hebrew family, the family of Abraham. Yes, we have a mandate to teach and perfect the world. But at the same time, we must remember that the first and most real world for each of us is our own individual family. We must begin the new year of reaching out to the world with a renewed reaching out to our life's partners, our children and grandchildren- and then to our neighbors and larger community and then to include the other and the stranger as well. ©2014 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The holiest day of the year is upon us. The time of atonement and forgiveness, of introspection and self-analysis has again arrived. The unique quality of the day of Yom Kippur is that it is a day of cleansing. Just as our refraining from food and drink on that day helps cleanse us physically, so too does our participation in prayer, serious thought, recognition of personal faults and a new commitment to do better in the future cleanse our souls.

We are all well aware that the buildup of plaque in one's arteries is dangerous to health, and that surgical and medicinal intervention is often necessary. Unfortunately, during the year a great deal of plaque

has built up in the mental, emotional and spiritual arteries of our being. Yom Kippur is an opportunity to remove or reduce that plaque buildup and to focus our attention on staying healthy both physically and spiritually.

There is no easy way or shortcut to accomplish this goal. The Talmud records for us opinion, in the name of the great Rabi Meir, that merely passing through the day of Yom Kippur itself can accomplish this end without our active participation. However, Jewish law and tradition does not accept Rabi Meir's opinion as binding. Instead, human repentance is required in order for the cleansing process of Yom Kippur to be effective.

Yom Kippur is not to be viewed as a passive day of restraint and refraining but rather as a day of active participation in the process of cleansing our souls and purifying our emotions.

Because of this required conscious and active effort of repentance, Yom Kippur is transferred from being purely a day of rest into a day of wrenching emotional and spiritual activity. It is possible to sleep away the entire day and technically not violate any of the prohibitions. But it is unimaginable that if one does so that one has really experienced Yom Kippur.

The most difficult part of the day is not, in my opinion, hunger, thirst or physical fatigue - it is the necessity to honestly confront ourselves and face up to our weaknesses. We are required to focus on those areas in our life and in our relations to others that need attention and improvement.

We are all born with the gift of denial. Original man in the Garden of Eden, when confronted by G-d with the enormity of his sin, does not readily admit fault at all. He casts about to put the blame on others, and the others in turn lay their guilt upon still others. The ability to admit error is one of the most difficult psychological and emotional traits encountered in life.

Yet, without that ability and by remaining in constant denial of one's shortcomings, there is little hope for improvement and for achieving a more balanced and productive life. Yom Kippur can cleanse us and create us anew. But it cannot do so unless we are willing to face our own failings.

When the Temple stood in Jerusalem and the High Priest of Israel performed the public rituals of Yom Kippur, forgiveness, cleansing and personal improvement were somehow meant to be easier to obtain. However, even then under such optimal circumstances, the Jewish people did not truly exploit the opportunity of repentance. The result was that both Temples were destroyed.

In a strange way, Yom Kippur, over the almost two millennia since the destruction of the Second Temple, has become even more of a spiritual and emotional day. Since we can no longer rely on the Temple services or on the intercession of the High

Priest on our behalf, we have become well aware that much depends upon us - and only upon us.

The removal of denial is the first step towards becoming a better person, building a stronger family, creating a more just and righteous community and strengthening our nascent state here in the Land of Israel. We should make a great effort not to allow Yom Kippur to slip away from us merely as a day of rest and restraint.

The gift of Yom Kippur is that for at least one day in the year we can be honest with ourselves and truly unite with our inner self and soul. Whether we do so or not is completely dependent upon each and every one of us - solely upon our attitude, thoughts, behavior and commitment on this holiest day of the year. ©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. ©2010 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

After the Talmud (B'rachos 34b) tells us that a verse in Y'shayahu (57:19) teaches us that a smoothly recited prayer indicates that it was accepted, it digresses by quoting several statements Rabbi Chiya bar Abba made in the name of Rabbi Yochanan regarding the positive prophesies of our prophets. These statements were likely quoted here because they lead into a statement made by Rabbi Avahu which uses the same verse in Y'shayahu as a proof text; "in the place where Ba'alei T'shuva are

standing, the completely righteous are not standing." Numerous approaches have been suggested to explain Rabbi Avahu's statement, with some assuming that the term "Ba'alei T'shuva" refers to individuals who have sinned and repented for their sins, while others assume it refers to those still in the process of repenting for their sins.

One of the more widely quoted/suggested approaches to explain how Rabbi Avahu could imply that those who have sinned are on a higher level (after repenting) than those who never sinned in the first place is based on Reish Lakish's statement (Yoma 86b) that repentance done to get closer to G-d (as opposed to repentance done to avoid His punishment), turns sins into "mitzvos." Therefore, after repentance, there is such an abundance of mitzvos that the Ba'al T'shuva is on a higher level than one who never sinned.

Obviously, this approach assumes the term "Ba'al T'shuva" refers to an individual who has completed the t'shuva process, as otherwise the sins would not yet be considered "mitzvos." However, there are several issues with this approach. For one thing, it assumes that those who repent had committed more sins than the amount of mitzvos done by the completely righteous (or they wouldn't end up with more mitzvos), which is a very difficult assumption to make. After all, if the completely righteous person was studying Torah whenever he could, it would take a really, really wicked person to commit so many sins that they would surpass the mitzvos being racked up for each word of Torah learned. And if the righteous person wasn't studying Torah whenever he could, he would need to do his own t'shuva for the "bitul Torah" he committed, and wouldn't be considered "completely righteous." Additionally, repentance is needed for even one sin; how could Rabbi Avahu make a blanket statement that "Ba'alei T'shuva" are on a higher level if some "only" need to repent from a few sins? And since it is only those who repent in order to get closer to G-d whose sins become "mitzvos," what about those Ba'alei T'shuva who repented because they were afraid of the consequences of their sins? Isn't Rabbi Avahu's statement misleading if it only applies to one category of Ba'alei T'shuva?

Chiddushay G'onim (Sanhedrin 99a) quotes Akeidas Yitzchok (Gate #97), who compares the spiritual ailment of sinning to being physically sick. If the normal cycle of illness includes aches and pains followed by a severe illness, and when returning to being healthy the severity lessens but the aches and pains return, the stage of having aches and pains is a bad thing for someone who is healthy, but a good thing for someone recovering from illness. Similarly, he continues, since it is impossible to jump from being a habitual sinner to being completely righteous, there are stages in-between that are a good place for the sinner to be (as it is on the road to recovery) but a bad place

for a righteous person to be (as it means no longer being righteous). The example given is a "bamah," an altar outside the Temple, which is forbidden even if it is used to bring offerings to G-d. Nevertheless, for an idol-worshipper, bringing offerings to G-d on an outlawed altar is a step in the right direction; a step that would be highly problematic for anyone who had been bringing his offerings to G-d in the Temple. This, it is suggested, is what Rabbi Avahu meant when he said that "in the place where Ba'alei T'shuva are standing the completely righteous do not stand," as there are "places" that are appropriate for the Ba'alei T'shuva but highly inappropriate for the completely righteous.

Obviously, if such "places" are only appropriate when recovering from sin, but inappropriate if there is no [longer a] need to recover from it, the term "Ba'alei T'shuva" must refer to those who are still in the process of repenting, not those who have completed the process. Last week (<http://tinyurl.com/lj9d8nt>), I presented several arguments making the case that this is what the term means, and that the term "Tzadikim G'murim" (the completely righteous) refers not only to those who have never sinned, but also to those who had sinned and completed the process of repentance. For example, a "ba'al ga'avah" refers to someone who is currently haughty, not someone who has become a master over his haughtiness and is now humble. Similarly, a "Ba'al T'shuva" must refer to someone who is still repenting, not someone who has already "mastered" his repentance. However, the context of how the Talmud quotes Rabbi Avahu's statement presents a powerful argument against this.

After Rabbi Chiya bar Abba quoted Rabbi Yochanan saying that all of the "good" prophesies apply to Ba'alei T'shuva, as what await the completely righteous is indescribable, the Talmud says that this statement is incompatible with Rabbi Avahu's (who statement is then quoted). If Rabbi Yochanan was saying that the completely righteous are on a higher level than Ba'alei T'shuva (which seems to be the case) and Rabbi Avahu was saying that Ba'alei T'shuva are on a higher level, the incompatibility of these two statements is obvious. But if Rabbi Avahu just meant that there are advantages the Ba'al T'shuva has during the t'shuva process, whether those advantages are being able to do things a righteous person shouldn't or the positive outcomes of having to work harder to overcome sin, his statement would not necessarily be incompatible with the notion that, overall, the completely righteous deserve a greater reward than those who have not yet successfully completed the t'shuva process.

The Talmud (M'nachos 29b), referencing B'reishis 2:4 (see also 5:2), says that G-d created this world using the letter "hei" because it has a large opening on the bottom which allows anyone who wants to leave (by sinning) to easily escape, and a small

opening above it's left leg so that if they want to repent, they can enter via that opening. Re-entering through the same opening on the bottom won't work, the Talmud says (likely because it would be too easy to fall back out), and re-entering via the higher opening, which takes much effort (by repenting), only works because G-d helps those returning to Him. Tomar D'vorah (1:7) says that this is what Rabbi Avahu was referring to when he said that the completely righteous do not stand in the same place as Ba'alei T'shuva (needing to use the higher, smaller opening, although in the interest of full disclosure, he seems to understand the term "Ba'al T'shuva" to refer to those whose repentance is complete). This is consistent with how Rabbi Avahu understands the verse in Y'shayahu, as G-d is "closer" to the one trying to repent because He "helps" the sinner overcome his mistake, whereas the completely righteous do not need such help. [Incidentally, once repentance has been achieved, and, with G-d's help, the former sinner is able to re-enter the "hei," he is now in the same place as the person who never left (i.e. never sinned); both are now considered "completely righteous."]

Rabbi Yochanan, on the other hand, understands the one who is "closer" to G-d to be the one who is farther from sin. It would seem, according to him, that even though the sinner needs divine help in order to repent, G-d is still closer to the person who never sinned (or has fully recovered from sin) than with the sinner He is helping. [It would be difficult to say that Rabbi Yochanan understands the term "Ba'al T'shuva" as referring to one who has completed his repentance, as if he did, his response to Rabbi Avahu's proof text should have been that the verse only applies before repentance is complete, when the sinner needs the extra help, whereas his statement refers to afterwards, when such help is no longer needed.]

The prophesies refer to "the days of Moshiach" (as one of the other statements of Rabbi Yochanan attests), not to "the world to come." Rambam (Hilchos T'shuva 9:1-2) tells us that the reward for keeping the Torah is given in the next world, not this one, and any "good" bestowed upon us in this world is designed to help us continue to keep the Torah (and be more successful at doing so). If G-d bestows good upon us to help us do a better job keeping His Torah, and G-d is closer with those trying to repent than with those who are completely righteous, we would expect more "goodness" to be bestowed upon Ba'alei T'shuva than on Tzadikim G'murim. Yet, Rabbi Yochanan says that the good described in the prophesies applies to Ba'alei T'shuva, as the good that will be experienced by Tzadikim G'murim is indescribable. This, the Talmud tells us, is incompatible with Rabbi Avahu's statement, since according to Rabbi Avahu, G-d is closer to Ba'alei T'shuva (as He is helping them repent), and He would bestow at least as much good upon them as He does

for Tzadikim G'murim. © 2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

I would like to share a thought about Yom Kippur. As Rav Dovid Kronglass used to say, this is the most important week of the year. We have a tremendous task in front of us and that is the work of repenting. We should always bear in mind one very important fact: how desperately the Ribono shel Olam wants us back.

Every day in Shmone Esrei, we recite a blessing about Teshuva. The blessing begins with the words "Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near, our King, to Your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You." The blessing ends with the words "Blessed are You, Hashem, WHO DESIRES REPENTANCE (haRotzeh b'Tshuva)."

We recite these words so many times during the year that perhaps they lose their impact. However, haRotzeh b'Tshuva does not merely mean that the Almighty will accept our repentance. It means He WANTS our repentance. His desire for us to come back is so enormous that as long as we make even a minimal effort, He will be waiting there to take us back.

I recently read a short story from a Gentile author. The story is fictional but I believe it is very powerful and has a beautiful message that is directly related to the idea I just mentioned. The story encapsulates what it means when we say the Ribono shel Olam is a Rotzeh b'Tshuva.

In the story, there was a boy who finished high school and, as is quite typical of youth that age, he told his parents he wanted to discover and see the world. His father told him, "No, I want you to start college." The boy would not accept his father's advice: "I need to spread my wings a little and see what the rest of the world is like. I want to travel and see the rest of America."

The father told his son "If you leave, do not bother ever coming back. You can start college now or you can leave this house and keep on going because you will never be welcome in my house again." The boy decided to leave anyway.

He left his home in Maryland and began hitchhiking across America. He picked grapes in California and he did odd jobs here and odd jobs there just to keep himself going. As is often the case, after some time, the boy became home sick. He missed his parents. He missed home. He missed having a permanent roof over his head. He missed knowing where his next meal would come from. He started hitchhiking back to the east coast, which was his point of departure.

He got as far as Iowa, sat down on a curb somewhere and wrote a letter home: Dear Mom, I'm tired. I'm hungry. I'm lonely. I want to come home. But I

don't know if Dad will let me home. Mom, you know the train track crosses our farm and near the farm is an apple tree. If Dad will let me in, I want you to tie a white towel around a branch of that tree. I will get on the train and I will look for the apple tree and check to see if there is a white towel wrapped around one of its branches. If dad still feels the same way he did the day I left when he told me not to ever come home again, I understand that there will be no white towel there and I will know that I can't come home.

The boy made it back to the east coast, near Maryland, boarded a passenger train, and started heading towards home. As the train approached the farm, he became terribly nervous. Would there be a towel there or would there not be a towel? As the train came closer and closer, he turned to the fellow sitting next to him on the train and said, "I want you to do me a favor. We are going to pass a farm with an apple tree right near the tracks. I am going to close my eyes. Just tell me if there is a white towel wrapped around a branch on that tree. I am too nervous to look myself." He was so scared that the towel would not be there, he was afraid to even look directly at the tree!

He sat on the train with his eyes tightly shut and the train passed the farm and passed the tree. The boy said to the man sitting next to him, "What happened?" He said, "Son, there is a white towel around every branch on that tree." This said, in effect, that the father could not wait for the son to come home.

This, l'havdil (distinguishing between a trivial story and a weighty spiritual lesson), is a parable of what it means "HE DESIRES REPENTANCE". The Ribono shel Olam wants us back, passionately. Just like any father who may have had disagreements with his son, at the end of the day, "as a father has mercy on his children," how much more so in the case of the Mercy of our Father in Heaven, which knows no bounds. He certainly wants us back as much as any flesh and blood father would ever want his son back.

May we all merit to do a complete repentance and be sealed for a long good life of shalom, a year of redemption and salvation, and peace upon Israel.
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RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah tells us in Leviticus 23:40 a special commandment for Sukkot -- to take the arbah minim, the Four Species (etrog, lulav, hadassim, and aravot). We wave them in the four directions of the compass as well as up and down. The symbolism of the waving in all directions is to remind us that G-d is everywhere. However, why are these four species designated for the mitzvah?

Our rabbis teach that these four species are symbolic of four types of Jews: the etrog (citron) which has a fragrance and a taste represents those Jews who

have both Torah wisdom and good deeds; the lulav (date palm branch) which has a taste (from the dates), but no fragrance represents those Jews who have Torah wisdom, but no good deeds; the hadassim (myrtle branches) have a fragrance, but no taste representing those Jews who have good deeds, but no Torah wisdom; and lastly, the aravot (willow branches) have neither a taste nor a smell representing those Jews who are lacking in Torah wisdom and good deeds.

What do we do on Sukkot? We symbolically bind together and recognize every Jew as an integral and important part of the Jewish people. If even one is missing, the mitzvah is incomplete. Our People is one; we must do all we can to bind together the Jewish people and work to strengthen the Jewish future!
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RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

A little girl and her father were crossing a flimsy bridge. The father was scared so he asked his little daughter: "Sweetheart, please hold my hand so that you don't fall into the river." The little girl said, "No, Dad. You hold my hand." "What's the difference?" asked the puzzled father. "There is a big difference," replied the little girl. "Dad, if I hold your hand and something happens to me, chances are that I may let your hand go. But, if you hold my hand, I know for sure that no matter what happens, you will never let go."

On Yom Kippur we remember that Hashem (G-d) loves us with an infinite and unconditional love, and is waiting to hear our prayers. Just as a parent will always yearn for a child to return, G-d is there to offer us a stabilizing hand to help us navigate the flimsy bridge of life. © 2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Rabbi Klonimus Kalman Halevi Epstein z"l (died 1827) writes: Teshuvah requires dedicating our hearts to loving our fellow Jews. Each person must focus on the ways in which each other person serves the Creator better than he, and never on the other person's faults. We must distance the troublemaker [i.e., yetzer hara] whose desire is to make divisions among us. Particularly in our times, this is the primary aim of the yetzer hara, and we must fight it with all of our capabilities. This is especially necessary during the High Holidays, when we are judged by Heaven and need mercy. Teshuvah requires being united with the common goal of serving Hashem. This is hinted at by the Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 18a) which teaches that each person is judged individually, but all are "looked upon as one," i.e., the degree to which we are one is looked at by Heaven. (Ma'or Va'shemesh [Yerushalayim 5746] II p.229)

R' Menachem Simcha Katz shlita (Brooklyn, N.Y.) writes: The words of the Ma'or Va'shemesh find support in the midrash Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer which says that, on Yom Kippur, the Jewish People are like angels. "Just as peace reigns among the angels, so peace reigns among the Jewish People." We must understand, however, that loving all Jews does not mean being apathetic about the existence of sinners among us. Rather, R' Moshe Sofer (the Chatam Sofer; 1762-1839) explains, we must pray for sinners to repent. Loving Hashem means loving all Jews, but we do not love them at Hashem's "expense." And, loving another Jew means wanting the best for him, and the best thing for a person is teshuvah. Thus, much of our High Holidays prayers ask that all of mankind come to recognize and accept Hashem. (Simcha L'ish p.409-410)

On the Importance of Appeasing Those We Have Hurt

Our Sages teach that one cannot achieve atonement unless he appeases those against whom he has sinned. Some say that one cannot achieve atonement even for his sins against G-d unless he has properly atoned for his sins against man, and received forgiveness. (Kaf Hachaim 606:3)

Why? Because atoning for only some sins is like immersing only part of one's body in a mikveh. Obviously, one does not attain purity by doing so. (Mussar Hamishnah)

R' Avraham Halevi Horowitz z"l (16th century; father of the Shelah Hakadosh) observes:

The obligation to ask forgiveness from those we have offended does not mean doing what is commonly done, i.e., that shortly before Kol Nidrei, one approaches his friends and asks their forgiveness. Inevitably, the friend responds, "You didn't do anything for which I have to forgive you." Then, these two friends forgive each other, something that was not necessary at all, since they were always dear to each other and would never wish each other harm.

In contrast, R' Horowitz continues, enemies

tend not to ask forgiveness from each other. Rather, each one says, "If he were interested in peace, he would come to me." A wise man, however, would recognize that the true sign of strength is humility, and he would take the initiative to appease his enemy, even if his enemy is in the wrong. (Emek Berachah)

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l writes: Requesting general forgiveness for all sins that one has committed against another is effective only for minor offenses. [If one committed a more serious offense, he must specify it when he requests forgiveness.] (Quoted in Halichot Shlomo: Moadim p.44)

If one who has sinned against you does not come to you to seek forgiveness, you should make yourself available to him so that he might ask forgiveness. (Mateh Ephraim)

Because Yom Kippur does not atone until one appeases his neighbor, one should be certain to recite the following prayer (part of Tefilah Zakkah) which is printed in many machzorim:

"I extend complete forgiveness to everyone who has sinned against me, whether physically or financially, or who has gossiped about me or even slandered me; so, too, anyone who has injured me, whether physically or financially, and for any sins between man and his neighbor--except for money that I wish to claim and that I can recover in accordance with halachah, and except for someone who sins against me and says, 'I will sin against him and he will forgive me'--except for these, I grant complete forgiveness, and may no person be punished on my account."

"And just as I forgive everyone, so may You grant me favor in every person's eyes so that he will grant me complete forgiveness." © 2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.



Parsha Puns!

**FOOD 4 thought on this FASTidious day:
KIPPURsuing your goals, bend a KNEE,
LAy down pretense, DRINK it all in & have
a FORGIVING shabbos!**

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