

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

There are three curious aspects about this period of the Days of Awe which I would like to attempt to analyze. First of all, what is the real message of the sound of the shofar, especially since the Bible itself says about our Jewish New Years Day, "A Day of the broken sound of the shofar - Truah shall it be for you". Secondly, during the month of Elul as well as the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we recite special Penitential Prayers (Slichot), which should actually be said very early in the morning before sunrise. What is the significance of these prayers? And Finally the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) is commanded to enter the inner most part of the sanctuary - known as the Holy of Holies - only twice a year on the same day, Yom Kippur the day of Forgiveness. The first time he enters he offers incense in a very difficult act of Divine service. The second time, towards the end of the day, he goes in to this most sacred of places without any specific function mandated by the Bible. What could possibly be the significance of this second entry into such a holy place?

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

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

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

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

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

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

An individual once went to Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov and asked the proper way to repent. He told him to make a large fire and to cast into its flames two separate piles of papers. In one pile he should write the names of all those people for who he did favors; in the other pile he should write the names of all those people who wronged him. He must destroy both piles in order to demonstrate that if G-d loved us unconditionally, we must love every other human being unconditionally as

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well - and we must never expect any reward or thanks for the good things we do.

Shabbat Shalom and may you all enjoy a good, blessed and unconditional New Year. © 2006 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**R**abbi Yochanan said, “teshuvah is great, as it tears up a person's decree” (Rosh Hashana 17b). This reassuring statement is subsequently modified by the Talmud, in order to reconcile it with another statement that indicates that only if done before Yom Kippur ends (and the decree is sealed) can teshuvah (usually translated as “repentance,” but more accurately and literally translated as “returning,” signifying a “return” to G-d, which most certainly requires “repentance”) negate the decree. Rabbi Yochanan, the Talmud concludes, meant that if a community does teshuvah the decree against it will be removed. For an individual, however, the decree remains intact even if full teshuvah is achieved.

However, since it is universally accepted that full teshuvah done anytime (whether before or after the decree has been set) will bring complete forgiveness (see Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 1:3), if the decree was made based on misdeeds that have since been corrected (and forgiven), why would it remain intact? Shouldn't it be “deleted” once its cause was? And why is there a difference between a decree made against a community and one made against an individual? If, for whatever reason, once it has been stamped by the King's royal seal a decree cannot be overturned, how can it be for a communal decree? Additionally, the wording of Rabbi Yochanan's statement was that teshuvah can annul “a person's decree,” not just “a decree.” How can the Talmud say that Rabbi Yochanan was only referring to a community if he said explicitly that it refers (even) to an individual?

The Turay Even asks how the Talmud can say that an individual's decree cannot be removed once it has been set when elsewhere (Berachos 10a) it says that despite it being decreed that King Chizkiyahu would die, he was able to reverse course and have 15 more years added to his life. The Turay Even provides

two possible answers; first he suggests that Chizkiyahu was such a righteous individual that he was considered like a “community,” then he suggests that a decree against the king is like a decree against the entire community. Although the second possibility is self-explanatory (as all are affected by the king's death), his first suggestion needs further explanation as to why an extremely righteous person would be considered like a community.

“On Rosh Hashana every person passes before G-d [individually]” (Rosh Hashana 16a). Each of us are judged, and based on the judgment, decrees are set, waiting for Yom Kippur before they are sealed. But since G-d is all-knowing, what does this special once-a-year “individualized inspection” mean? I have previously (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5764/nitzavim.pdf) discussed G-d's daily interaction with His creations. Although G-d is involved at every level in our lives, and (for example) is giving me the ability and strength to type these very words you are reading, He does not choose which words I should type (although I'd like to believe He helps me choose what to write). Choices are usually left to run their course, unless certain guidelines are met that causes G-d to either prevent the choice from being made or prevent all of the normal consequences of that choice from occurring. The same is true about the laws of nature. Fire will (almost) always burn, and if something will be destroyed by fire that G-d does not want to allow be destroyed, He will either prevent the fire from starting, prevent it from spreading to that item, or make sure that the item is not near the fire. But He will almost never suspend the rules of the physical world that He set up. What gets complex is the divide between what G-d *wants* to happen, and what he *allows* to happen. Something that was done specifically for that consequence is the result of a direct decree intended to bring it about. There are many, many things that are not the result of a direct decree, but are sort of “collateral damage” of a decree intended for another item (or person). These “indirect” results are also known by G-d, and although He would not necessarily have made a decree specifically for this result to happen, he *allows* it to happen as a result of the other specific decree. This is what the Rishonim (early commentators) refer to as “mikre.” Usually translated as “happenstance,” mikre is nothing more than the result of something that was not its primary purpose. G-d specifically wanted us to have free will, but he allows our choices to affect others even if those affects were not specifically decreed. All of the physical laws fall under this category, as G-d specifically wanted each law of nature to work exactly as it does, even if, as a result, things occur that were not part of the specific decree. Similarly, a specific decree against a community may not have been directed at every member of that community even though they are all affected by it. Unless.

Unless what? Unless someone is so close to G-d, so connected with the Creator, that He protects him from mikre. G-d does not allow the extremely righteous, those close to Him, to be adversely affected by things that He did not specifically direct towards them. As Rabbeinu Bachya puts it (Beraishis 18:19), "His supervision of it (the world) to [the extent of] saving him (a person) from mikre does not include every person, not even every "Yisrael," but rather the righteous among them. For the Holy One, Blessed is He, saves the righteous from things that the rest of humanity is given over to." In other words, one must attain a high spiritual level in order to qualify for personalized divine intervention. Without it, the Ramban says (Eyov 36:7), one can even lose his life despite there being no transgression that, in its own right, warranted the death penalty.

When the Rambam discusses this concept (Moreh Nevuchim 3:51, see also 3:18), he points out that even those who are usually connected to G-d, and therefore protected by Him, have moments when they are disconnected (intellectually) as they must temporarily focus on things other than G-d. During these moments, they too are susceptible to the affects of mikre.

The Sefornu (Vayikra 13:47) tells us that very few people reach this level of divine attachment; G-d's level of involvement in most circumstances is usually limited to knowing what is happening without preventing it from happening. But does G-d ever "adjust" the circumstances for those unattached? He can at any time, of course, but we have just seen that His normal way of dealing with His creations is to only get involved (to the point of intervening) on rare occasions, for those close to Him.

Except on Rosh Hashana, when "everyone passes before Him individually," even those that don't deserve special attention the rest of the year. They are judged and decrees are made specifically for them. Until Yom Kippur we have the opportunity to undo these decrees, but only until the decree is sealed.

I have seen sources for the three previously mentioned components of mikre (the laws of nature, the affects of others' free will and decrees made against a community). I have not seen this inside (yet!), but I would suggest that another component of mikre is the decree made against an individual who has since repented (and been forgiven). The decree was made on Rosh Hashana/Yom Kippur based on the window of "personal divine intervention," and become a decree like any other, to be fulfilled no matter what, with the only ones protected from the decree being the extremely righteous who are connected to G-d. Even if he was forgiven for the sin that brought about the decree, if he is not connected to G-d at the moment it takes affect, he will be affected.

A community, on the other hand, is different. G-d does not insist that the entire community be attached to Him before intervening. It is therefore much more difficult for G-d to allow things to happen to a community unless He specifically wanted it to happen. And He removes decrees even after they have been sealed (after teshuva).

The righteous/connected individual is similar to a community in that things that occur only happen if G-d specifically wants it to happen, not merely because He allows it to happen. Therefore, a decree made against him that is no longer applicable (post-teshuva) retains its status as mikre, which G-d protects him from. This may have been why Rabbi Yochanan tells us that teshuva is so great that it tears up even an individual's decree, i.e. the righteous/connected individual. Chizkiyahu certainly qualified as one, so was able to avoid death after he repented. We, on the other hand, must take advantage of the opportunity that the Ten days of Repentance affords us.

May G-d inscribe each of us individually, and as a community, for a happy and healthy 5767. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YEHUDAH PRERO

Yom Tov

Meir was nervous. He had barely been out of his village during his lifetime. Now, he was on his way to the city, about to embark on a major journey. No, this would not be a wagon ride. It would not be a train trip. Meir was about to get on a large ship, crossing the ocean, to meet family he had never seen on the other side.

As Meir neared the port, he saw the large boats docked. To him, they appeared like buildings, huge buildings, the like of which he had never seen. How these monstrosities stayed afloat was on Meir's mind. He knew people crossed the seas all the time. Yet, as he took his first step on the gangplank to embark, he was shaking. He gripped the railing until his knuckles were white, breathing slowly, trying not to feel faint.

The captain greeted him, along with others traveling on the ship, once he got on the boat. The captain sensed that Meir was nervous, and he attempted to assuage his fears. He explained to Meir how the ship worked, how many times he had made the trip, how safe and seaworthy the vessel was. Jokingly, the captain said to Meir, "Look, just in case worse comes to worse, I want you to have this." He handed Meir a round, doughnut shaped object-a life preserver. The humor was lost on Meir, however, and the gift of the life preserver absolutely terrified him. He took his belongings, and his nerves, to his cabin.

Unfortunately for Meir, the trip did not go well. The seas were stormy, and for much of the time, the ship rocked and rolled, swaying precariously from side to side. Many a time, Meir thought, his end was rapidly

approaching. And then, as the shore was in sight, the worst happened: the ship began to sink. The constant battering of the sea had been too much for the craft. The ship began to go down rapidly. Panic and pandemonium prevailed. Meir remembered his "gift" from the captain, and clutched onto it for dear life. As the ship began disappearing under water, and Meir saw others frantically looking for some method of salvation, Meir was incredibly grateful that the captain had given him the life preserver. What initially had caused him fear and anguish now literally saved his life. To say that Meir was happy with his gift of the life preserver would be an understatement.

Sefer Inyano Shel Yom quotes a query cited in Sefer HaMichtam (Sukkah 46a): Why is it that we do not find that a person who fashions a shofar makes the blessing of "Shehechyanu," "Who has kept us alive, sustained us, and brought us to this season?" The Ra'avad answers that the fashioning of a shofar reminds a person of what the shofar is used for and when the shofar is used: It is used when we are standing in judgment, to arouse feelings of repentance within us. It is an object associated with judgment, and the fear of judgment makes that time one we would rather not recall. Hence, the recitation of the Shehechyanu bracha would be inappropriate.

However, we know that on Rosh HaShana itself, the very day on which we are judged, we make the bracha of Shehechyanu prior to the blowing of the shofar. Why, then, if we fashion a shofar six months prior to the Day of Judgment, we have cause to fear and we do not make a bracha, but in the midst of judgment itself, we can make the bracha, and fear is not an impediment to making the blessing?

Rav Chaim Kanievsky answered simply: once you are in the midst of judgment, you are happy to have the opportunity to perform a mitzvah, to do something that helps tip the scales in your favor. Just as the life preserver was initially a source of concern and fear, yet ultimately a source of salvation, so too, is the shofar. It reminds us of a time that rightfully inspires fear. Yet, while in the midst of judgment, when we need help, any opportunity we have to perform G-d's dictates is welcome. It is therefore appropriate at that time to say the blessing of Shehechyanu. © 2006 Rabbi Y. Prero & torah.org.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

We live in a world where people emphasize history-their past, or the future-their hopes and dreams. Does the present really occur? After anticipating a particular event it passes in an instant and becomes a memory.

Interestingly, in every Shabbat portion read between the Ninth of Av and Yom Kippur, the word Ha-

Yom (today) appears. Perhaps the most famous is read on the Shabbat preceding Rosh Hashanah-where the Jewish nation is told "You are standing this day (Ha-Yom) all of you before the Lord your G-d." (Deuteronomy 29:9)

Indeed, the Rosh Hashanah service reaches its crescendo as we recite the famous Ha-Yom prayer, which states, "May you strengthen us this day (Ha-Yom), may you bless us this day (Ha-Yom)."

The word Ha-Yom may remind us that sometimes one has the chance to change the world today; but if one misses that chance, the opportunity may be lost forever.

For me, the narrative, which most powerfully teaches this idea, is the binding of Isaac story, which, not coincidentally, is read on Rosh Hashanah. Consider the image of Avraham (Abraham), Yitzhak's (Isaac's) father who was old enough to be his grandfather, taking his son to Moriah. After a three-day trek Avraham binds Yitzhak, lifts his knife and is prepared to slaughter him.

Now consider the second image. An angel of G-d appears at a distance, intent upon interceding. As I become older, I have started to read this story with a different perspective. Now that I am a father and grandfather, I wonder whether the angel will intervene in time.

When mentioning this to one of my students, she responded, "You've missed the point rebbe-angels always make it on time, people don't."

No doubt, Ha-Yom teaches that when performing an action we should consider how it is influenced by the past and impacts on the future-merging into the present deed.

No doubt, also, Ha-Yom teaches us to hold on to the good times. Those moments come and go too quickly.

But in this season Ha-Yom reminds us of the importance of proper timing. In the words of the rabbis, "Do no say when I have time I will do, lest that time never come."

What an appropriate message especially on Rosh Hashanah, the day of repentance which emphasizes our being given a second chance. Ha-Yom reminds us that sometimes that is not the case-sometimes and opportunity arises only once - Ha-Yom. © 2006 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.

BRIJNET/UNITED SYNAGOGUE - LONDON (O)

Daf HaShavua

by Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

“Remember us for life, O King who delights in life, and write us in the book of life for Your sake, O G-d of life." This short prayer, with its fourfold repetition of the word "life", eloquently tells us

what is at stake on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and the days between. The high holy days are traditionally known as Yamim Noraim, "the days of awe". It is no less accurate to call them "the days of life".

Think first about the subject of our Torah readings on Rosh Hashanah. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah we read about the birth of Isaac, the first Jewish child. In the haftarah we read about the birth of Samuel. Two previously childless women, Sarah and Hannah, give birth to new life. Hearing their stories, we are invited to experience again the wonder of human life, the birth of a child. On the second day we read about the binding of Isaac: the great trial designed to show Abraham-and us, who are his heirs-that G-d does not want us to sacrifice our children.

"Do not lay your hand on the child" says Heaven to Abraham. The haftarah, taken from the book of Jeremiah, speaks of "Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted." "Restrain your voice from weeping," says the prophet. "There is hope for your future, declares the L-d. Your children will return to their own land" (Jer.31:15-17).

If on the first day we think about the birth of life, on the second we think about the restoration to life of those whose lives were in danger. Even the blowing of the shofar, the distinctive mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah, conveys the same message. It is the only mitzvah of the 613 that is performed by breath alone. In Judaism, all the words for soul-nefesh, ruach, neshamah- come from verbs meaning "to breathe". In Jewish medical law, life is defined not by brain activity but by respiration. To live is to breathe. "Let everything that has breath praise the L-d" says the last line of the Book of Psalms. In Genesis 2:7, G-d gives life to man by breathing "into his nostrils the breath of life".

We may be "dust of the earth" but within us is the breath of G-d. Yom Kippur teaches the same lesson, but in the opposite way. For one day in the year we deny ourselves the things on which life depends: food and drink. Men wear the kittel, symbol of the shroud in which the dead are buried. It is as if for a day we enact death to remind us, in the sharpest way possible, of the preciousness of life. "I do not desire the death of the wicked," says G-d through the prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 33: 11), "but rather that they turn from their evil ways and live."

Supreme among the world's faiths, Judaism is a celebration and sanctification of life. The Sabbath may be broken to save life: "You shall keep my statutes and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them, says the L-d" (Lev. 18: 5). "And not die by them", added the Sages. Hence, with only three exceptions (murder, adultery and idolatry), the rule is: transgress and live, for life itself is supremely holy.

A new fear has entered our world: religiously motivated terror, the celebration and sanctification of death. Terror is worship of death in a double sense. It

deliberately aims at killing the innocent. And it is often undertaken by suicide bombers who turn themselves into weapons of death. Not only is life desecrated by such actions. So too is language, the other great gift of G-d. Suicide bombers are described as martyrs. But martyrdom is the willingness to die for your faith, not to kill for your faith. The willingness to kill for your faith has another name: murder.

Our situation has been described as a "clash of civilizations". There is a better way of putting it. We are living through a test of civilization. There are times when the future of humanity hangs in the balance. At such times it is as if Heaven itself were calling us, asking, as once G-d asked Adam in the Garden of Eden: "Where are you?"

This life that I have given you: what are you doing with it? Are you honouring life or endangering it? That is the ultimate religious question.

Before us lies the choice Moses set out, shortly before his death, to the Israelites: "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, so that you and your children may live" (Deut. 30: 19).

To honour G-d is to choose life, because G-d is "the King who desires life". Life on earth is at risk in the twenty first century, secular time, but not because of terror. A billion of the earth's inhabitants live in poverty. 115 million of the world's children go without any education whatsoever. 30,000 children die every day from preventable diseases. AIDS is robbing much of Africa of entire populations. We are rapidly depleting earth's supply of non-renewable sources of energy. The delicate atmospheric balance on which life depends is being eroded. Global warming is a real and present danger.

Seen against this background, terror reveals itself for what it is: a cruel, heartless, self-destructive distraction from the real problems facing humanity. The poor, the hungry, the sick, the powerless, do not commit acts of terror. They suffer silently, and all too often helplessly. It is their cry, not the vengeful rage of the suicide bomber, humanity must heed.

Our unprecedented powers to heal or harm have raised the stakes of human responsibility. As John F. Kennedy said in 1961: "man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and all forms of human life." He added: "In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger." In explicitly religious language, he called on humanity to honour "the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state, but from the hand of G-d."

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are G-d's call to cherish life and hold it sacred. "I will not die but live, and tell what the L-d has done" (Psalm 118: 17).

"What gain would there be if I died and went down to the grave? Can dust thank You? Can it declare Your truth?" (Psalm 30: 10).

G-d is life. Therefore in honouring life, we honour G-d. Respecting humanity we pay respect to His "image and likeness". Rarely have these truths been more urgent. Rarely have they been more at risk. This year let us do what we can to honour and cherish, celebrate and sanctify life-our lives, the lives of our fellow Jews, and the lives of our fellow human beings. Each day brings its unexpected opportunities, and every life is precious. And let us meditate on those simple or perhaps not-so-simple words: "Remember us for life, O King who delights in life, and write us in the book of life for Your sake, O G-d of life." © 2006 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI LEVI COOPER

Mutual Responsibility

The Jewish people have a strong sense of mutual responsibility. We have a long and proud tradition of helping others and we rightly feel a duty to look after our brothers and sisters. Our sages have termed this sense of shared responsibility areivut, often repeating the adage that each Jew is responsible for every other Jew (for example B. Shavuot 39b).

The concept of areivut is not just a nebulous ideal; areivut has tangible legal implications (B. Rosh Hashana 29a). Even people who have discharged their own obligation to fulfill a divine commandment - for instance, to say kiddush on Shabbat - still have a broader duty to facilitate others in discharging their obligation. Thus they are permitted to recite kiddush a second time to assist others in fulfilling their kiddush requirement. One commentator describes the situation in lucid terms: Since your peer has not discharged the incumbent obligation, it is as if you yourself have not discharged your obligation (Ran, 14th century, Spain).

There appears at first blush to be an exception to this rule - blessings recited over food, drink and scent. In this case, the law requires that the recitor of the blessing partake of the substance. Recitors who have not eaten, drunk or smelled, cannot say the blessing for others. This rule, which appears to run contrary to the theme of areivut is actually rooted in the areivut principle - since you have no obligation to smell a rose, therefore I have no duty to facilitate that act by reciting the appropriate blessing for you (Rashi, 11th century, France).

There is a limitation to the areivut principle (M. Rosh Hashana 3:8). The source of the obligation of the facilitator needs to be of equal or weightier value than that of the one being assisted. Thus a minor, fool or deaf-mute who is essentially not obligated to fulfill the precepts, cannot blow the shofar for others on Rosh

Hashana. This restriction is expressed in the words of the Talmud: One who is not obligated cannot discharge the obligation of others.

This limitation is at the root of a question asked in the Talmud (B. Berachot 20b): Is a woman's obligation to recite grace after meals a Torah obligation or a rabbinic enactment? Without answering the question, the Talmud pounces, asking, What difference does it make? Regardless of the source of the law a woman must recite grace. The Talmud answers that we need to categorize the requirement so that we can determine whose obligation she can discharge. If her obligation is of Torah standing, then she can discharge another person who has a similar level of obligation. If however her obligation is the product of rabbinic decree, she cannot discharge someone else's Torah level obligation.

This limitation is colorfully illustrated in a fantastic tale (B. Berachot 48a). Yannai, king from the Hasmonean dynasty and High Priest in the Temple, and his queen were dining together with members of the court. When the end of the meal came there was no one to be found who could recite grace after meals. Indeed, Yannai had previously massacred the rabbis after one of them had suggested that he was not halachically fit to serve in the Temple (B. Kiddushin 66a). Turning to his wife, Yannai pined, "Who can bring someone who is able to recite grace?"

The queen responded, "Swear to me that if I bring you someone you will not persecute him."

The king gave his word and his wife presently brought her brother, Shimon ben Shetah, who had been in hiding. Yannai offered Shimon ben Shetah the seat between the two monarchs. "Do you see how much honor I am according you?" he pointedly asked the sage.

Shimon ben Shetah swiftly responded, "It is not you who accords me honor, rather it is the Torah!"

The ruler turned to his wife, "You see that he does not accept authority!" intimating that massacring the rabbis was justified (Rashash, 19th century, Vilna).

A cup was brought over which Shimon ben Shetah was to recite grace, the assumption being that the sage could discharge the obligation of those who had dined. Yet Shimon ben Shetah had not partaken of any food: "How should I recite the blessing," he enquired, "Shall I say - 'Blessed is He of whose bounty Yannai and his friends have eaten?'"

The sage promptly drank that cup of wine and another was brought for him to recite grace. The Talmud qualifies Shimon ben Shetah's conduct stating that normative opinion does not follow the sage's course. To recite grace, drinking wine is insufficient; the recitor must have eaten bread. The principle, however, holds true for all opinions: we have a shared responsibility to discharge each other's obligations.

Where entering this obligation is of a voluntary nature, only one who has similarly benefited can assist others.

Until now we have explored the legal implications of the areivut principle. Areivut, however, demands far more than the mere discharging of obligations for others.

The forerunner of the Hasidic movement, Rabbi Yisrael Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760), is often quoted as offering an explanation with a deeper quality for the rule that one who is not obligated cannot discharge the obligation of others. Leaders who are not obligated, meaning they have no common ground with the masses, cannot liberate their constituents from their quagmire.

Leaders cannot hope to help their people unless they are truly committed to them. They must be bound to the people and obligated by their every action. Only then can they hope to fulfill their duty as leaders and more importantly provide for their constituents.

Mutual responsibility is not just about discharging the obligations of others. As a sole expression of areivut this is mere cosmetic Judaism. Areivut involves much more; in words attributed to the Besht - You cannot pull someone from a muddy bog by standing at a safe distance intent on not getting dirty. A deep concern for our brothers and sisters may at times require us to descend into their morass. This is sincere areivut. © 2006 Rabbi L Cooper. Rabbi Levi Cooper is Director of Advanced Programs at Pardes. His column appears weekly in the Jerusalem Post "Upfront" Magazine. Each column analyses a passage from the first tractate, of the Talmud, Brachot, citing classic commentators and adding an innovative perspective to these timeless texts.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In the blessing for Rosh Hashanah established by the sages, the holiday is called "A Day of Memory," based on a phrase in the Torah, "A memory of a teruah" [Vayikra 23:24]. However, one may wonder about the meaning of this concept with respect to the Almighty: Is this relevant at all for Him? After all, "There is no forgetting in front of your Throne of Glory!" [Rosh Hashana prayers]. The concepts of memory and forgetting seem to be more appropriate for human beings, such as in the verse, "And the chief of the cupbearers did not remember Yosef, and he forgot him." [Bereishit 40:23]. What does G-d remember on this day that he does not remember all through the year?

Evidently the concepts of memory and forgetting with respect to the Almighty are different than what they mean with respect to human beings. In general, humans are prone to the effect of time and life. But to say that the Almighty "remembers" somebody

means that He is paying special attention to him, for good or for bad. For example, the verse, "And G-d remembered Noach" [Bereishit 8:1] does not mean that until that moment G-d had forgotten that Noach existed, rather that from that moment on G-d paid attention to Noach and ended the flood. Similarly, the verse "And G-d remembered Rachel" [30:22] means that in response to her prayers the Almighty moved Rachel out of her natural course of life, which would have left her barren, and allowed her to become pregnant. As noted above, a Divine memory can also have a bad effect. For example, here is a prayer: "Rise up, G-d, and engage in your battle, remember how the scoundrels shame you every day" [Tehillim 74:22]. That is, if nature followed its course the enemies might continue in their success, but the prayer that G-d should remember their deeds implies that He will punish them beyond the regular limits of nature.

A similar approach is also true about the opposite concept of forgetting. It is true that nothing is forgotten before the Divine Throne, but it is still written, "G-d has forgotten, he has hidden His face" [Tehillim 10:11]. That is, forgetting refers to hiding the Divine influence-the person being punished remains under the influence of nature, without any Divine guidance or protection, as is written in another verse: "I will hide my face from them... and many different evils and troubles will happen to them" [Devarim 31:17]. The act of hiding G-d's face is especially harsh, since when He metes out punishment directly the person at least senses that G-d is at the root of the events. With "forgetting," on the other hand-hiding the Divine face -- it is as if the Almighty does not act directly but abandons the human beings to the forces of nature. This is also the meaning of the prayer, "Till when, G-d, will you forget me forever, till when will you hide your face from me?" [Tehillim 13:2]. It is a prayer to light up G-d's face and to be relieved from distress.

As we noted above, Rosh Hashanah is a day of the "memory of a Teruah." This blast of the shofar is a call and a prayer to the Almighty (see: "A cry will be heard in the morning and a teruah in the afternoon" [Yirmiyahu 20:16]). We use it as a device to raise up our memory before the Almighty and ask Him to remember us for good, meaning that we want Him to pay special attention to us. In this way, He will redeem us from the difficulties that might befall us along our natural paths, as a nation and as individuals.

"Remember us for life, King who desires life, and write us down in the Book of Life, for your sake, the G-d of life."

The Hollow Shofar Declares: A Revolution!

by Rabbi Shlomo Schock

The ability of the shofar to produce different sounds can be attributed to the hollow space within it, from which the shevarim, the tekiyah, and the teruah

burst forth. The sounds of the shofar, as they shatter the silence of the synagogue, make a declaration about the deep bond between our nation and the Almighty, who is beyond words and the meanings of words. The sounds that issue from the empty and hollow part of the shofar have become the most important sound of Rosh Hashanah.

We usually measure ourselves based on achievements and production: what have we accomplished and how much are we worth? The year 5766 has ended, and together with it all the achievements of the year have ended. It is good and proper to take stock and prepare ourselves before the start of the year 5767, filling every mouth and every corner with prayer asking for additional achievement.

The mitzva of blowing the shofar puts a limit on our moving straight from one year to the next. As if nothing at all had happened, we would like to transfer the entire package that burdened us in 5766 to the coming new year. But the move to 5767 will be better if instead we begin to identify with the sounds of the shofar, which burst out of the empty and hollow spaces. Our identification with the mitzva of the day, the shofar, should transform us into empty and hollow shofarot, so that we will be able to make sounds that are unexpected and unfamiliar even to us. If instead we block our ability to fill up, maintaining thoughts, speech, and actions from the previous year, we will prevent ourselves from being able to infuse our personality with new sounds appropriate to the new year.

Usually we strengthen those traits in which we are already strong. Creating a turning point in our service of G-d requires us to become completely empty and to develop a capability for new absorption. Rejuvenation is not simply a continuation of the old and familiar. It must come to us from an unexpected source - from beyond the mountains of sound with which we are already familiar from last year.

The Divine infinity invites us to come and "visit His Temple" from new and unexpected directions. If we have become weary of the types of the links to the Almighty, we must become infused with a new vitality based on the sounds that burst forth from the shofar, like an animal that is instinctively ready for the unexpected. The holy animal within us will awake to stand at the entrance to the new year, making a transformation within the hollow space of our personality, which opens up for a blessed movement of a good and new life. There are some parts of this which are not yet known, but we can be sure that G-d will provide for us a good year.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The centerpiece of our Rosh Hashana observance, prayers, and sounding of the shofar is the remembrance of the akeidah - the binding of

Yitzchak to the altar and Avraham's apparent willingness to sacrifice him as worship to G-d. The akeidah has followed us throughout our long history. There have been millions of akeidot in Jewish history and most of them ended in the death of the victim and not in him or her being spared. Yet it is the utter devotion and tenacity of Israel to do G-d's will no matter what the cost that has sustained us throughout our long and difficult journey through time. Rosh Hashana therefore serves to remind us of the price that may be demanded yet of us to protect our Jewishness and project it into future generations. The tests need not be ones of physical life and death. They are usually more complicated and subtle than that. Overcoming one's own weaknesses and desires, swimming against the current of the prevailing value system of much of modern society and being steadfast in our faith and behavior against all comers and events - these are the terms of our own akeidah. The price of easy Judaism is assimilation and forfeiture of one's Jewish future. Rosh Hashana is uncompromising in its demands upon us. The Baal Shem Tov stressed that a person is judged not only by what a person is at that moment but also by what a person aspires to be. Rosh Hashana is the time for renewed commitment to our higher and nobler aspirations, to dismiss pettiness and selfishness and direct ourselves to the fulfillment of Torah and Jewish values in our lives and our society.

The shofar therefore serves as our call to arouse our better self. The rabbis phrased it thusly: "Let one always arouse one's better nature to do battle against one's evil desires." Passivity in attempting to improve our nature and behavior is doomed to being a failed tactic. Rosh Hashana demands from us enthusiasm in the cause of G-d and Torah and a willingness to struggle with ourselves - the hardest struggle that we will ever encounter is with ourselves - in order to arouse our better nature and aspire to moral greatness and holy behavior. The shofar is proactive. Its sounds are penetrating and turbulent. It demands and does not soothe. It is the byproduct of the akeidah. But our rabbis have taught us that our prayers on Rosh Hashana ascend heavenward through the medium of the shofar. Only by aspiring to be better and stronger and more Jewish can we hope to have good standing before the heavenly court on the Day of Judgment. The sounds of the shofar therefore goad us towards this goal and achievement in the service of G-d and humans. In the sounds of the shofar do we hear our own struggles with ourselves to improve and ascend. This struggle is an eternal one but so are its rewards and benefits. © 2006 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/jewishhistory.