

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Even more than the yearning voice of the cantor during the High Holy Days, I remember the palpable weeping of the worshippers, especially that of my grandmother together with her contemporaries in the women's gallery of my childhood synagogue in Brooklyn (Congregation Etz Chaim Anshei Lubien, on Dekalb Avenue), reaching a crescendo when the congregants would cry out, "Do not cast us into old age." To this day I cannot forget the haunting, heart-broken melody of that prayer.

But who doesn't want to live to a ripe old age? It is certainly better to die when one is old rather than when one is young. So why all the tears associated with this prayer? My beloved maternal grandmother z"l would explain that the stress here is on the verb 'Do not cast us or throw us into old age.' What a person could wish to be 'eased' into old age, little by little, in control of all his faculties, particularly the mind, and if the body has to fail, let it fade ever so slowly. The tragedy is when a healthy, vital person, even if advanced in years, suffers a sudden stroke or a massive heart attack, and overnight the body is overwhelmed with the sudden fact of being imprisoned in a helpless body or bereft of the ability to remember even our loved ones.

A second way to take this prayer is to understand it to mean, "Do not cast us out in our old age." All too often, especially in modern Western society, the old are seen as super-annuated, unnecessary adjuncts who have outlived their usefulness and lived a little too long. Alongside of the excellent medical strides to prolong the average life-span must come societal and familial ways to make old age a useful and significant period in one's life, when healthy advantage can be taken of the elderly to make their years meaningful and beneficial for themselves and those around them.

But in order to truly understand the significance of this prayer, it is important to note that the Yom

**This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated
in loving memory of my dear parents
Chayim Yitchok ben Yehudo Hakohen
Paul Kahn
and Mirjam bas Hachover R'Yehoshua
Irma Kahn-Goldschmidt
by Fernand Kahn**

Kippur text slightly modified the original verse in Psalms 7 1:10. There, King David is speaking for himself: do not cast 'me' into old age, while we turn the 'me' into 'we' - we do not cast us into old age.

It may seem minor, the last 'yud' in the word tashlichaini changed to a 'vuv,' but this change from the 'one' to the 'many' must be significant if the author of the mahzor prayer book changed the text of a Biblical verse in order to express his point.

On the most obvious level, the use of 'us' alerts us to the idea of a collective: that the Jewish people and its historical traditions shouldn't be cast unto to the mode of the outworn and outdated, thrown into the junk-heap of history. In effect, every person's ancestors in our historic grave-sites and all of those memorial plaques on the synagogue walls, are saying: don't cast us out, don't relegate us to a once a year sexton's click of the tiny lamp lighting up each name. Our sacred books and our holy days are imploring us to study their texts and incorporate their dates unto our contemporary calendar, to keep them relevant and meaningful for the younger generation.

On a similar vein, we the Jewish leadership and the active Jewish laity dare not become old in our thinking, out of touch with the times. At the same time that we must remain true to our tradition, we dare not be reluctant to address the generation's questions and dilemmas. The message of 'tshuvah' (repentance) is that we have to listen every year to that year's unique message. We pray to G-d to be alive to change, and not to become cast into a mold - old-thinking and too set in our ways. We pray that G-d not make us into an old nation, with all the frailties of the weak and infirm, too old to fight, too tired to develop creatively. Of course we must remain true to the halakhic structure; but within that structure we must find solutions for the agunah, and additional meanings for the Sabbatical year as one of true dedication to study and spiritual refreshments (rather than merely debate what vegetables we can buy from whom, and in which homes we cannot eat). And these are only the first two examples which come to mind! Some 60 years ago it looked as if the Nazis had cast the Jewish people into sudden 'old age,' if not actual death throes for the millions. Yet, while the Jews were being slaughtered in Europe, the prayer of 'not being cast into old age' was being answered in Israel where one of the oldest peoples on earth was being transformed into one of the youngest among the

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family of nations. This experience, from the depths of exile to the crown of redemption, should make us value what it means to live in an age of miraculous beginnings, and help us in guiding other nations in their own quest for a world of peace. ©2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“May it be Your will, Hashem - our G-d and the G-d of our ancestors - that You forgive us for all of our sins and pardon us for all of our iniquities and grant atonement for all of our rebellious acts." With this introduction, we begin a long list of categories of sins that we have committed, must repent for, and are asking G-d to wipe away. The first pair of categories mentioned are sins that were done "b'o-nes uv'ratzon," against our will and willingly. However, we are not held responsible for things we are forced to do (Avodah Zarah 54a), and they therefore do not require atonement (see Rambam's commentary on Yoma 8:8). If so, why are we asking for forgiveness for things we did against our will?

It can be argued that nothing is ever really done "against our will," only that circumstances are such that we are forced to "want" something less than ideal. If someone is threatened with a gun to turn over his wallet, he still has a choice; he can either surrender his wallet or risk being shot. Given that choice, most people would choose the former. True, they would prefer not to face that choice, but once they are, they "willingly" give up their wallet. This can be applied to many sins as well. We might prefer to not be asked to work on Saturdays, or to be offered a higher paying job that doesn't require (or even strongly encourage) cheating, but that doesn't excuse violating the Sabbath or stealing. Wouldn't we prefer that kosher food was as readily available (and as inexpensive) as non-kosher food? Those that have eaten lobster rave about how it tastes. Is wishing there were a kosher alternative enough to classify eating it as doing so "unwillingly?" Where do we draw the line? What amount of pressure (that we preferred not exist) changes a choice from being made "willingly" to "against our will?"

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler, zt"l (Michtav Me'Eliyahu I, pgs. 113-116), says that the concept of free will does

not apply to everything, only to those situations where a choice really existed, and the choice was made by choosing between right and wrong (or good and evil, or truth and falsehood). For example, if there are two flavors of (kosher) jellybeans (putting aside any discussion about eating unhealthy foods), and a person can choose to eat one or the other, that decision is not based on free will ("bechira chafshis"), as the choice has no bearing on good vs. evil. The motivation for "choosing" one flavor over the other is purely based on which one is perceived to taste better (see Sefer Hazikaron Leba'al Michtav Me'Eliyahu II, 1:5). This is also true of any decision, even if it does impact right vs. wrong, if that impact was not part of the decision-making process. The only decisions that fall under the category of "free will" are those where there is a battle within the person between truth and falsehood (which is the same as right and wrong, and good and evil), and the choice is made either because it is the what G-d wants (at least in part, with the other part being "shelo lishma," for non-spiritual reasons) or despite knowing that G-d does not approve of the choice. By the same token, an addict, who is not capable of any other choice, does not have the "free will" to resist what he is addicted to. These "flashpoints," where tension exists within the person who has the capability to choose right from wrong (and is cognizant of the fact that this is part of his choice when the decision is made), is what Rav Dessler calls the "nekudas habechira," point of free will.

Although the "nekudas habechira" is different for each person, every human being has one. For some, stealing falls within their "nekuda," and they can be tempted to steal while having the ability to refrain. For others, they would never consider stealing, even if they knew they wouldn't get caught, so this "choice" is outside (below) their "nekudas habechira." There is no battle, so it can't be considered a "choice" to not steal. On the other hand, there are unfortunately some who, when confident they won't get caught, would never consider not stealing, which puts it outside (above) their "nekudas habechira." This concept is true for everyone, at every level; there are things that they would never consider because it is beneath them, things they cannot consider because they are not on the level (yet) to overcome, and things that they have the ability to either do or not do.

What determines where a person's "nekudas habechira" is? The starting point, Rav Dessler says, is how we were brought up in conjunction with our inborn character traits. However, each choice made (of those things that fall within the "nekuda") causes it to move up or down. This, he says, is what is meant by "mitzvah goreres mitzvah" and "aveira goreres aveira" (Avos 4:2). Doing a mitzvah brings about the fulfillment of another mitzvah, because it now becomes easier to choose right from wrong (even for those things still within the "nekuda") as well as making it impossible not

to do some mitzvos that had been, prior to this, a battle whether or not to do them, while creating the possibility of doing some mitzvos that until now could not have even been contemplated (as they had been outside the "nekuda" but are now within it). Similarly, sinning (choosing to sin despite having the ability to resist) makes it harder to resist other sins within the "nekuda" while bringing sins that had been outside it (and therefore impossible to transgress) within it and making sins that could have been overcome now impossible to (as they moved above the "nekuda"). Each of our choices impacts not only the choice itself, but our future ability to choose as well (besides impacting others, including, or especially, our descendants, and where their "nekudas habechira" is or will be).

Because the choices we make affects where the "nekudas habechira" is, we are responsible for the impact of its movement. Therefore, if fulfilling a mitzvah had been a battle (which we could have lost), but no longer is, we are still credited with "choosing" to fulfill those mitzvos that are not really choices anymore. By the same token, we are held accountable for sins that we had been able to resist but no longer can. As a result, there are sins we commit that are not done "willingly," as they are outside our ability to choose, that we are still responsible for. We may not be able to repent for that specific sin, but we can repent for having put ourselves in a situation (or allowing ourselves to remain in a situation) where we had no choice but to sin.

It is therefore possible that when we ask G-d to forgive us for those sins that were done "against our will," we are referring to sins that were outside of our "nekudas habechira," but could have (and should have) either been within it (where we have the ability to overcome them) or on the other side of it (where we would never even consider doing them). And we ask G-d for another chance to improve ourselves, committing to taking each step, little and big, that will enable us to move our "nekudas habechira" ever higher. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

This year Yom Kippur is on Shabbat, a combination that emphasizes the link between the two holy days. This link can be viewed from many different points of view, in various areas. Some obvious examples are the description "Shabbat Shabbaton," which is applied to both days (see for example Shemot 31:15 with respect to Shabbat and Vayikra 16:31, referring to Yom Kippur) and the common punishment of "Karet" (being cut off from the community of Yisrael) for desecrating either of the two days. A special link between the two days can be seen in the Haftara of Yom Kippur, in Chapter 58 of Yeshayahu.

This chapter does not relate specifically to Yom Kippur but rather to a fast day in general. In any case, the last two verses in the chapter take a sharp turn from fast days to Shabbat and from the need to refrain from becoming involved in weekday matters on Shabbat. "If you restrain your feet because of Shabbat and do not attend to your own affairs on my holy day, but rather you declare Shabbat to be a joy set aside for the sanctity of G-d, and you honor it, refraining from doing your own affairs and speaking about secular matters, then you will be happy with G-d..." [58:13-14]. What is the relationship between Shabbat and a fast day?

Some commentators have indeed interpreted this as a separate prophesy, not related to the rest of the passage, which is concerned with the fast day. However, it is not hard to see a link between the verses about fasting and those about Shabbat. First of all, with both subjects there is a condition consisting of a command accompanied by the promise of a reward. We quoted the verses about Shabbat above, and a similar conditional sentence appears with respect to a fast day. "Then you will call out asking for help and G-d will respond, and He will say, Here I am, if you remove perversion from within you" [58:9]. Second, there is a clear linguistic link between the end of the first section, about the fast day, and the beginning of the second section, about Shabbat. "And you will be considered one who breaks through a boundary. If you restrain your feet because of Shabbat..." [58:12-13]. In addition, we may note that different forms of the word "cheifetz," object, appear in this short chapter five times, some in the first section and some in the second one. With all this, we can return to our original question: What is the connection between a fast day and Shabbat?

The simple answer to this question can be seen by looking at the verses. With respect to fasting, most of the chapter is involved in giving a harsh message: The Almighty is not interested in external facets of the fast. "Will this be a fast day which I choose, a day when a human being will make his soul suffer? Shall he turn his head as a reed and put on sackcloth and ashes? will this be called a fast day and a day that G-d desires?" [58:5]. As opposed to these outward signs, the prophet describes the fast desired by G-d, a day accompanied by worry for the weak and the poor. "Is this not the fast day that I will choose, opening up the fetters of evil... and to set the oppressed free... Should you not give your bread to the hungry..." [58:6-7].

And this is exactly the message that the prophet tells us with respect to Shabbat. It is possible to observe the letter of the law with respect to Shabbat even though it loses any true meaning. It may not be strictly forbidden to be involved in weekday matters and to talk about them on Shabbat, and for this reason the prophet claims that on Shabbat? just as on a fast day? the observance of the formal obligations without taking

into account the need to maintain the spirit of the day and its meaning does not have true value.

RABBI ZVI MILLER

The Salant Foundation

When Yaacov Avinu blessed his sons at the time of his passing, he informed them: "In future years, a man like me will bless you. His blessing will begin from the place where my blessing left off."

Generations later Moshe Rabenu blessed the People of Israel. He started his blessing with the words, "And this is the blessing." Meaning, "This is the completion of the blessing" that Yaacov told you would ultimately come about through "a man like me."

Moshe then asked the people a rhetorical question, "When will you receive the fulfillment of these blessings?" When you accept the Torah, as it says, "And this is the Torah." Moshe revealed the word "this" links the blessings of Yaacov and Moshe, i.e., "This is the blessing" to the study of Torah, i.e., "This is the Torah." In addition, the Torah in this passage refers to Moshe as an Ish Elokim, i.e., "a man of G-d." Signifying that the blessings of Moshe will be fulfilled, unequivocally; for Moshe, the "man of G-d," blessed them.

We understand the importance and value of meeting great Rabbis and Tzadikim. Many of us have traveled great distances to consult with Torah leaders of esteem. Now, imagine if you were granted the opportunity to have a personal audience with Yaacov Avinu and Moshe Rabenu! Wouldn't you travel anywhere in the world in order to receive their blessings? Each time we engage in Torah study-the precious and powerful living blessings-of Yaacov and Moshe flow into our souls. There is no greater happiness or fruitful endeavor than receiving these wonderful blessings.

May we merit studying the holy Torah and, in turn, receiving all of its countless blessings of goodness, success, and peace! [Based on the commentary of the Ramban] © 2007 Rabbi Z. Miller & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI ARI KAHN

MeOray HaAish

The objective of Yom Kippur is to bring about forgiveness for the entire people: "For on that day I will forgive you, to purify you from all your sins, in front of G-d you will become pure." (Leviticus 16:30)

Aside from the entire nation, special attention is given to the Sanctuary and the Kohanim, the priests: "He [the Kohen] shall atone for the Holy Sanctuary and for the Tent of the Meeting, and for the altar, he will atone; for the Kohanim and for the entire people of the congregations, he shall atone." (Leviticus 16:33)

Clearly, part of the service deals with improper behavior on the part of the Kohanim. The Torah tells us that Aaron himself should not enter the inner sanctum

at all times, only at the proper time, and in the proper sequence of worship. When Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, entered the Sanctuary and approached G-d in a moment of ecstasy, Aaron is given very specific instructions on the manner and conditions for service.

"G-d spoke to Moses: 'Speak to your brother Aaron that he not come at all times into the Holy Sanctuary that is inside the curtain before the Ark cover that is on the Ark so that he not die, for in a cloud I shall appear on the Ark cover.'" (Leviticus 16:2)

The meaning is clear-the line between service of G-d and self-styled service may be a thin one, but that line may be the difference between life and death. In order to understand this better-and with it, the service of Yom Kippur- we must draw a comparison with the actions of the sons of Aaron which led to their deaths.

The Shem MiShmuel suggested that the sin of Nadav and Avihu resulted from unbridled passion and love of G-d. This passion was generated by the events of the eighth day of the inauguration of the Tabernacle. The Talmud also tells us that this day was especially beloved for G-d: "It was taught, on that day there was as much joy in front of G-d as the day of creation of heaven and earth." (Talmud - Megillah 10b)

Reacting to the joy, and acting out of a feeling of ecstasy, Nadav and Avihu approached G-d in an improper manner and died as a result. The seriousness and somberness of Yom Kippur stands in stark contrast to the ecstasy of Nadav and Avihu. And its message is clear: The pitfall of religious experience born of ecstasy is trying to create a relationship which is not wanted by G-d. To act out of ecstasy alone is to make the experience a subjective and selfish one-one desired by the worshiper but not by the object of worship. The end result may mean that the worshiper is crossing the line between creating a G-d in his image instead of manifesting the image of G-d within himself.

This does not mean that Judaism does not recognize that a sincere act of worship can come out of ecstatic experience. Indeed it can. We all desire a joyful relationship with G-d, but such a relationship can only be developed from a desire to please G-d in the manner He has taught us He wants to be pleased.

This is the balance between "love of G-d" and "fear of G-d" that the Sages speak of. Only after the Yom Kippur service in which we follow G-d's detailed instructions, may we find ourselves relating to G-d through love. In the days of the Temple, the Yom Kippur service concluded in a great outpouring of joy: "Rabban Shimon ben Gamiliel taught: There were not joyful days in Israel like the 15th of Av and Yom Kippur." (Mishnah Ta'anit 4:8)

The Sages tell of the streets of Jerusalem filled with well-wishers. The High Priest would not arrive home for hours after the services were complete. The greatest spectacle of celebration known as the Simchat

Beit Hasho'eva would follow Yom Kippur by a week. "It was said, he who never saw the Simchat Beit Hasho'eva never saw joy in his life." (Mishnah Sukka 5:1) The balance between fear of G-d (demonstrated by strict adherence to the details of observance) and joyous celebration of the love of G-d is highlighted by this festival.

Another-perhaps the archetypal example-of the ecstatic expression of love for G-d was demonstrated by King David (Samuel II 6:16), but David also possessed a profound sense of fear of G-d, as the Book of Psalms bears witness. The ecstasy of Nadav and Avihu was missing this second most important balancing component. As a response to their behavior, therefore, we see the detailed instructions for the service of Yom Kippur. The incense which they offered is replaced by the incense which Aaron is commanded to offer, and one error in the performance of this task could be fatal. The food and drink of the sons of Aaron is replaced by a day of complete abstinence from food and drink. Other details of the service of Yom Kippur also take on new meaning when seen in contrast to the actions of Nadav and Avihu. The central worship of the day involved two goats-one offered in the Sanctuary, the other sent into the desert. This practice would seem to be a response to the different types of worship- in the Sanctuary, for G-d, and the other that had no place in the Sanctuary, or even among the living at all, sent to a place of desolation.

This worship is quite bizarre. Why would we take a goat simply to reject it and send it away? The law seems to teach us about the stark difference between service of G-d which is accepted and beloved by G-d, versus the "scapegoat" which represents that which has been rejected by G-d. Yet there is more: "The two goats on Yom Kippur; the mitzvah is for them to be identical in appearance, size, and value, the two shall be chosen together." (Talmud - Yoma 62a)

The Talmud teaches that these two goats should look identical-like twins. This seems strange. Why would the goats need to be identical, especially when their purpose is so different?

The idea of twins-twins who are opposites-is a familiar theme in the Torah. The most famous twins in the Torah are, of course, Jacob and Esau. They were complete opposites, one good, the other evil. No one could ever confuse them. On the other hand, perhaps they did possess some similarities. Rashi (Genesis 25:27) tells us that until the age of 13 they were indistinguishable, as does the Midrash: "Esau was worthy to be called Jacob and Jacob was worthy to be called Esau." (Midrash Zuta Shir HaShirim 1:15)

They were so similar that at times their similarity caused confusion. One dressed as the other, one spoke like the other. It is strange that the divine plan required twins? Perhaps just being siblings would have been enough? Evidently the Torah wanted these

two, Jacob and Esau, to be almost the same. Perhaps their similarity represents the thin line between acceptable behavior and idolatry, between good and evil.

Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner noted this parallel, and suggested that when things look alike from the exterior, it is a sign that one must look within-at the essence-in order to discern the difference (Pachad Yitzchak, Purim, p.43). The idea of the two goats is intrinsically related to the personalities of Jacob and Esau, identical on the outside but so different in terms of their essence. The reason that we need to offer the second goat-the scapegoat- is that so often we find ourselves dressing up like Esau instead of behaving like the Jacob/Israel that we are. The origin of the two goats themselves may very well be found in that famous episode when Jacob is persuaded by his mother to dress up like his brother. Rebecca instructs him: "Go now to the herd and bring me two good goats..." (Genesis 27:9)

The Midrash expands on this idea: How do we know that it was in the merit of Jacob [that we take the two goats]? These are the goats that his mother referred to "Go now to the herd and bring me two good goats..." Why are they called "good"?

Rabbi Brechia said in the name of Rabbi Chelbo: "They are good for you and good for your children. They are good for you when you enter, and take the blessings from your father, and they are good for your children, when they soil themselves in sin all year round. Then they will bring these two goats, and offer them and be cleansed." (Pesikta Rabbati 47)

Jacob's entrance to his father may be paralleled with the once-yearly entrance of the Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, into the Holy of Holies. Jacob prepared for this appearance with the two goats, as his descendants would in the future. While we may now understand the symbolism of the two goats, we have not gained any insight into why the goat sent into the wilderness was called a goat "for Azazel." Rabbi Menachem Azarya DeFano, in his work "Sefat Emet," explains that the name Azazel is an acronym for ze le'umat ze asa Elokim-"G-d has made one as well as the other," as it says: "In the day of prosperity be joyful, in the day of adversity consider: G-d has made the one as well as the other." (Ecclesiastes 7:14)

According to Rabbi DeFano, the contrast between good and evil, with the recognition that both emanate from G-d, is encapsulated by this verse. In explaining further, the Midrash makes a link that G-d made both Jacob and Esau (Pesikta D'Rav Kahana Chapter 28). It is fascinating that the quintessential example brought to illustrate that both righteousness and evil are from G-d is none other than the case of Jacob and Esau. We understand from this that, in a sense, good needs evil in order to exist, if for no other reason than to have something to reject. It is the contrast with evil which allows good to shine.

Problems arise when man adopts the ways of evil, identifying with them instead of rejecting them. This path is a rejection of G-d and the image of G-d within us, as is illustrated by another detail of the Yom Kippur service: Lots were drawn to determine which of the two identical goats will be sacrificed in the Sanctuary and which will be for Azazel. The idea of drawing lots is apparently a concession to the "random" element of human existence. And yet this attitude that life is randomly determined, rather than orchestrated by G-d, is considered evil and associated with the nation of Amalek, whom Israel was commanded to obliterate from the face of the earth.

"Remember what was done to you by Amalek on the way as you left Egypt. When they happened upon you..." (Deut. 25:17-18) Rashi explains "they happened upon you" as "by coincidence." In his brief comment, we can discern the difference between Judaism and the philosophy of Amalek. We believe in a G-d who is involved in history, while for Amalek life is no more than a series of coincidences. Haman, one of the most famous descendants of Amalek, used lots to determine the best day to attack and destroy the Jews. The Jews, in response, turned to G-d and put their faith in His involvement in history (and were saved). Similarly, Moses lifted his hands heavenward in prayer while the battle against Amalek raged around him, signaling to the Jews that faith in G-d is the only ammunition against Amalek.

When the Jew has sinned and has begun to act like Esau, forgetting G-d Who is constantly involved in history, G-d invites him to enter the Sanctuary, represented by the High Priest. The drawing of the lots forces us to examine our behavior and the underlying philosophy of chance or coincidence. The breeding ground for sin is in this forgetfulness. Therefore, on Yom Kippur, nothing can be forgotten, every detail is important.

Every detail is recognition of G-d's involvement in our lives. The day is filled with awe and fear, a fear which can only spring from the understanding that G-d is intimately involved in our lives. This fear, in turn, gives birth to the joy which can only spring from the understanding that the same G-d whom we fear is the G-d of forgiveness and unlimited love. © 2007 Rabbi A. Kahn & aish.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The central theme of Yom Kippur is teshuvah, 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. In contrast to what many may think, Yom Kippur has many 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, in its truest essence means "returning," to being righteous. But this begs the obvious question: 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." In this way, teshuvah is a dialogue. On Yom Kippur we stand before a caring G-d who asks the question(s). We have to search into ourselves and offer the answer(s). A G-d of love seeks us out. As much as we are in search of G-d, G-d 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 to 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 - may we repent, return, dialogue, and be blessed as individuals and as a nation. © 2007 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 NOSON WEISZ

Mayanot

“**T**he goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities...” (Leviticus 16:22) One of the most perplexing topics that we encounter in the Torah concerns the "scapegoat"-the goat that was offered on Yom Kippur carrying on its back all the sins of the Jewish people. Maimonides tells us that the "scapegoat": "...brings atonement on all the sins in the Torah, whether they be light or grave, whether the transgression was committed unintentionally or with deliberation, whether the sin is known to the perpetrator or whether it is not..." (Laws of Teshuva 1:2)

And the Talmud adds: This goat (sair) refers to Esau, as it is written: 'but my brother Esau is a hairy (so'ir) man.' (Genesis 27:11) [The Hebrew words sa'ir, "goat," and so'ir, "hairy" are spelled identically.]

[It is further written]: The goat will bear upon itself all their inequities (avonotam). In Hebrew this word avonotam can be split into two words: avonot tam, meaning "the inequities of the innocent." This is a reference to Jacob about whom it is written: 'Jacob was a wholesome (tam) man' (Genesis 25:27). The word wholesome in Hebrew also is tam. (Midrash-Bereishit Raba 65:15) Thus the goat represents Esau, and somehow he is made to carry the sins of the Jewish people, the descendants of Jacob. Is there any way we can bring this strange idea a bit closer?

At the very beginning of the Laws of Teshuva, Maimonides explains that teshuva requires confession, and he describes this confession as consisting of three elements: (1) An enumeration of the actual sin (2) An expression of regret for having done the sin (3) An expression of firm resolve never to do it again.

He then goes on to discuss Yom Kippur: Yom Kippur, is a time of teshuva for everyone-for the individual as well as the congregation. It marks the final stage of forgiveness and pardon for Israel, therefore, everyone is commanded to repent and confess on Yom Kippur... The confession that Israel has adopted to say

on Yom Kippur is: "But we have sinned," and this is the essence of confession. (Laws of Teshuva 2:7-8)

It is perplexing to note that two of the three elements Maimonides himself earlier stated as essential requirements of confession are missing from the confession recited on Yom Kippur-regret, and the undertaking never to repeat the sin. If this confession is the final act of teshuva adopted by Israel, how is it that the most important parts of this act of contrition are absent from it? To be able to answer this question, it is important to understand the role that confession plays in teshuva. Jews do not confess to a priest who gives them absolution. The confession is done in private and is made directly to G-d. As teshuva is an act of the heart, what possible role does such a confession play in it?

The rationale of teshuva is change. A person's actions reflect his beliefs, his character and his personality. When he repents, he is making a statement: "I am not the same person today as the one who committed the sin. I have changed and such an act no longer expresses the person I am today. I look back at the person who committed the sin, and I no longer see myself in him or identify with that act."

When this is a sincere process, G-d accepts it and takes note of the change. Since the person has changed, and the sin no longer reflects his character and personality as they are today, it is impossible to hold the person of today morally responsible and liable for the acts of a person who no longer exists, and G-d duly pardons the sin.

As we humans are unable to see into a person's heart, and we can only see each other's deeds, we cannot take note of teshuva in human justice systems. Nevertheless we are able to relate to the principle-if the sinner becomes a genuinely different person we can recognize the justice of excusing him from having to suffer the consequences of actions that do not reflect the character of the person he has become and who does not deserve to be punished.

In effect then, teshuva involves the shedding of old character. We are unable to alter our height, our IQ, or our age, but we can alter our character. When we repent we are changing our inner furniture, leaving only the outer shell intact. The shedding of character is in effect externalizing what was, until then, the innermost core of our beings, our old operating system, the primary source of our past behavior and motivation. We shed these like a snake sloughs off his old skin and emerges with a brand new one.

To externalize the inner man requires speech. It is through speech that what is inside the heart and mind of a person becomes a part of the outer world. The verbalizing of teshuva in the form of confession is the act of shedding old thoughts and attitudes, rejecting them and making them part of the external world instead of our inner environment.

Change is difficult. We often regret our actions as soon as they are finished, but rarely do we succeed in really changing ourselves. Most often we repeat our mistakes and suffer the regret all over again each time we repeat the mistake. The resolution never to do this again is what generally defeats our sincere desire to be better than we are at present. This is where Yom Kippur comes in.

On Yom Kippur, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies. This is a special environment, and entering at the wrong time caused the deaths of Aaron's two sons: "And G-d said to Moses: "Speak to Aaron your brother-he shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary (the Holy of Holies) within the curtain, in front of the cover that is on the Ark, so that he should not die; for in a cloud will I appear on the Ark-cover." (Leviticus 16:2)

In order to understand the significance of entering the Holy of Holies, we have to understand how we ourselves are put together. The human soul has five levels, of which the lower three are connected to our physical realities. At the core of our being we have a neshama which is always connected to G-d, to an extent that it is difficult to tell where the divine presence ends and the person begins. This neshama is connected to our ruach, our spiritual selves, which in turn is connected to our nefesh, the life force that burns within us and is the engine that drives us.

As the Holy of Holies in the Temple is the place that the Shechinah inhabits, the High Priest who enters this sanctuary on Yom Kippur, enters it on the level of neshama. The point of life is self-definition. Were we aware of ourselves on the level of neshama, and were we conscious of our connection to G-d, the point of our lives would be quite clear to us. We wouldn't be at all confused as to why we exist and what we are supposed to do with our lives. But the point of life is to live with free will, and therefore such soul-consciousness is ordinarily withheld.

Instead, we are torn between our raging life force, our nefesh, and the awareness of our spirituality, our ruach, and this conflict creates within us a confusion as to who and what we are. This confusion is the source of our transgressions, and is the dilemma that forms the backdrop against which we exercise our free will. Of the neshama, we are ordinarily totally oblivious. Thus, we are always engaged in the battle of self-definition, and we can never attain total resolution.

Stepping into the Holy of Holies eliminates the confusion and provides total clarity of vision as to the source of our being. But to enjoy such clarity runs contrary to the purpose of life in this world, and thus to enter the Holy of Holies is to step out of life as it must be lived in this world. When Aaron's two sons took this step, they terminated the point of their existence here.

And yet, such clarity is a necessary part of the existence of every Jew. We must be able to obtain an

occasional glimpse at our origins, otherwise the accumulation of the errors of existence will move us steadily further and further away from our origins until the way back is so unclear that it is impossible to attain. That would also serve to eliminate the point of our existence, because when we totally lose the ability to find our way back to our origins we also lose our free will.

That is why G-d gave us Yom Kippur. On this one special day, G-d allowed us to step out of our ordinary selves and gave us a glimpse of our true connection to Him, and allowed our representative, the High Priest, to become self aware on the level of neshama. This allowed us to return to our origins, to temporarily resolve our conflicts, and to be able to push out the things separating us from G-d.

Now we can easily comprehend the difference between the confession of the penitent, and the confession we utter on Yom Kippur. In the confusion of ordinary life, when we are not self aware on the level of neshama, changing of character and self-definition is an extremely difficult process. To attain the levels of sincere regret and firm resolution never to return to past misdeeds- the necessary concomitants of all character change-are extremely arduous tasks. Therefore, teshuva is extremely difficult to attain, and the penitent must reach very lofty spiritual levels on the basis of his own efforts.

On Yom Kippur-when we are offered a glimpse of our origins and the confusion of self-definition is largely eliminated-the rejection of all our negatives becomes a matter of course. We are able to push out all our sinful activities as being truly unreflective of our true selves, because we are provided a glimpse of who we really are. Thus the confession of Yom Kippur is simply that we have sinned. We regret our inequities and can truly resolve never to return to them not through our own efforts, but through the clear vision of ourselves that the holiness of the day provides.

Isaac's twins, Jacob and Esau, attained this total clarity of self-definition on their own, through freedom of choice. Jacob defined himself as a neshama- a wholesome man, totally consistent and whole and free of contradictions. Esau declared, "Look I am going to die," thus openly defining himself as a creature of this world only, a man of the field.

During the rest of the year we lose the clarity of vision that allows such sharp definition, but on Yom Kippur, this original distinction between Jacob and Esau reestablishes itself. This then is the secret behind the idea of the "scapegoat." The loss of the Temple and the sacrifice of the "scapegoat" does not mean that we have entirely lost Yom Kippur. But as we inhabit a world of action rather than spirit, we are always hampered by an inability to translate our thoughts into deeds. Today, Yom Kippur still helps us to attain the spiritual level of true teshuva. © 2007 Rabbi N. Weisz & aish.org