

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the more prominent parts of the Yom Kippur prayers are the "Thirteen Attributes" (Hashem, Hashem, Kail Rachum ve'Chanun, etc.). Two of the 13 "attributes of G-d" are "Rav Chesed ve'Emes," that He is abundantly kind and true. However, these two attributes would seem to be contradictory (see the commentaries regarding Yaakov asking Yosef to do "kindness and truth" for him, Beraishis 47:29). Kindness, by definition, means going beyond what is deserved; if G-d is "kind," mustn't He be compromising "truth"?

Numerous commentators define G-d's "kindness" and "truth" in a way that avoids the issue, mostly by defining "truth" as being "true to His word" rather than being "the essence of truth." But even if we can explain His attributes that way, it does not address the basic issue of G-d being "kind" while also being "true." The Talmud (Rosh Hashana 17b) raises the contradiction between these two attributes, answering it by saying that these two attributes are not working at the same time; first G-d uses (or used, or perhaps even wanted to use) "truth," but then switches to "kindness."

The first issue that can be raised with the Talmud's approach is that by incorporating both "Emes" and "chesed" in the "Thirteen Attributes," we seem to be saying that G-d is both, at the same time. Rashi (Beraishis 1:1, see also Beraishis Rabbah 12:15) tells us that G-d initially wanted to run the world with strict justice ("din"), but because He saw that it couldn't survive, He partnered "din" with "rachamim" (mercy). If this were to be consistent with the Talmud's answer, it would mean that G-d uses both, just not at the same time. Aside from needing to understand what this means, it again skirts the issue of how G-d can be described as being the essence of truth if He sometimes suspends that truth to be kind. Also, if the answer to the contradiction in the "Thirteen Attributes" is that first G-d is "Emes" but then switches to "chesed" because the world couldn't survive otherwise (as Rashi explains on the Talmud), shouldn't the attribute of "Emes" come before "chesed" (and "Rachum," "Chanun" and "Erech Apayim," for that matter)? Why do we first describe G-d as being "chesed" and then as "Emes"?

Previously (Rosh Hashana 16b-17a), the Talmud discussed the definition of "chesed" as it applies to the judgment that occurs after death. Those that are righteous merit the world to come, while those that are wicked are doomed to "Gehinum." What about those "in-between"? Bais Shamai says that first they go to "Gehinum" where they suffer temporarily before coming up, while Bais Hillel says that G-d is kind with them (does "chesed"), allowing them to avoid "Gehinum." How is this "chesed" performed? "Rebbe Eliezer says He conquers," which Rashi says means that G-d pushes down on the "merit" side of the scales so that it outweighs the "demerit" side. "Rebbe Yosi bar Chanina says He lifts [the sins] up," which Rashi explains to mean that G-d lifts the "demerit" side up so that the "merit" side goes down. Either way, the "scales of justice" now tip in his favor, so the one being judged comes out favorably.

Before trying to understand what this means, I want to point out that only one of these definitions of "chesed" can apply to the "Thirteen Attributes" being that "lifting up iniquities" is already one of the other 13 attributes.

This discussion is referenced in Arachin (8b), but there Rashi explains Rebbe Eliezer to mean that G-d "hides" some of the sins, allowing the "merit" side to outweigh the "demerit" side. Rav Ovadya Yosef, shelita (Me'or Yisroel vol. 1, pg 183, quoted in "Margelios Hashas") suggests that the two explanations are based on which kind of repentance was done. If the person repented out of "love" ("teshuva me'ahavah"), since the sins are converted to merits (commonly understood to be because they ended up being a vehicle that brought the person closer to G-d), the "merit" side is now heavier. If, however, it was done out of fear ("teshuva me'yirah"), it only turns sins done purposely into sins done inadvertently, thus lightening the load on the "demerit" side.

I found it interesting that the "chesed" done after death would be the conversion of sins to either less serious sins or to merits resulting from repentance, as although they could be referring to the kinds of sins that need death to attain forgiveness, or to sins that need Yom Kippur but were committed after the previous Yom Kippur (and the person had died before the next Yom Kippur), the implication is that this "chesed" only works if the person was "in-between," if he was "wicked," even if the scales would have tipped in his favor had the repentance been accepted, G-d doesn't

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do this "chesed" for him. It is not automatic that repentance is accepted, it is a "chesed", and this "chesed" only applies after the repentance has been done.

Getting back to the "Thirteen attributes," if it is the same "chesed" it is referring to G-d accepting our repentance, and wiping our slates clean (or at least converting our sins to either merits or less serious sins). It is not referring to G-d's not exacting punishment right away (as this is His attribute of being an "Erech Apayim"), or any other "kindness" described in the other attributes. It is specifically His acceptance of our "teshuva" (repentance).

Ideally, we would be able to withstand G-d's strict justice. Because His essence is truth, that is the starting point. We can't ask G-d to just overlook our sins, because that would go against His attribute of "Emes." Nevertheless, because He is also "Chesed," he gives us the opportunity to recover from our mistakes, to do teshuva. And once we have successfully completed the teshuva process, it is as if we never made those mistakes. If those mistakes are erased, if they never really happened, we can come out from a completely truthful verdict favorably.

Only after we take advantage of His "chesed" can we survive His "emes." But it is "emes," completely truthful and accurate, since we have taken advantage of the opportunity to repent. "Rav Chesed ve'Emes," G-d is abundantly kind by giving us the chance to start over, and truthful when judging us favorably if we do. © 2009
Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

According to its biblical description, Rosh HaShanah is "...the day of the sounding of the shofar" (Numbers 29:1). However, the shofar (ram's horn) is not exclusive to Rosh Hashana because Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement and Forgiveness, also includes shofar blasts which follow the poignant Neilah [closing] prayer, dramatically announcing the conclusion of the fast.

What is the biblical basis - if any - for the shofar sound on Yom Kippur, and how does it differ from the shofar sounds on Rosh HaShanah?

Let us first explore the significance of the Rosh HaShanah shofar. The Sages of the Talmud teach that the biblical "...day of the sounding of the shofar" refers to the straight (tekiyah), broken (shevarim, teruah) and straight ram's horn blasts linked to the Mussaf Amidah [additional standing prayer]. Indeed, the initial custom was to sound the shofar even during the silent amidah - the common practice in most Sefardi and Hassidic synagogues, but considered too confusing for most Ashkenazi synagogues (B.T. Rosh Hashanah 33).

Logic would dictate that if the shofar blasts are not considered an "interruption" (hafsakah) of the Amidah prayer, they must be seen as an integral part of the prayer. Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, based upon the rulings of Maimonides and the explication of Rav Haim Brisker, explains the true significance of the shofar sounds as prayer by means of sounds. We pray with words - the verbal formulations of G-d's Kingship (Malkhuyot), G-d's Remembrances (Zikronot) and G-d's rams' horn blasts (Shofarot) - and we pray with sounds: the exultant, victorious tekiyah shout, the sighing and sobbing shevarim-teruah cries, and the concluding exultant, victorious tekiyah once again for added, final emphasis.

The experience of the crafted verbal formulation interconnected with the primal shofar sounds provides a powerful message: G-d is King not only of Israel but of the entire world - and this causes me to shout exultantly with the knowledge that there is an architect to creation, that life is not "...a tale told by an idiot, filled with sound and fury, signifying nothing." But if G-d is truly King, then He rightfully holds us mortals accountable - especially for the fact that His ethical monotheism has not yet been accepted by the world, and not even by the majority of Israel. Hence we express sighs and sobs at our individual failings. Nevertheless we conclude with an exultant shout, since repentance holds out the possibility of forgiveness, reconstruction and repair.

The same is true regarding remembrances. The axiom that there is also a Divine plan for history, with a specific function set aside for nations as well as for individuals, deserves an exultant shout, engendered by the knowledge that history is not happen-stance, that there is a more perfect society towards which we are heading; however, this too occasions sighs and sobs lest we fail to fulfill our particular mission and, as far as one's life direction is concerned, end up on the wrong track, in the wrong ball-park.

And finally shofarot, the ram's horn blast which emanated from atop Mt. Sinai at the time of the Divine Revelation at Sinai. Here too, we express the consummate joy of the tekiyah upon realizing that we have been blessed with the Torah, given to us by G-d Himself, His formula or recipe for a proper and satisfying moral, ethical and spiritual life, His credo of values and societal norms which we must learn ourselves and then communicate to the world. Herein

lies the means through which we can become a "holy nation and a kingdom of priest-teachers" to the rest of the nations. However, sighs and sobs still emanate because all too often we are found wanting; how can we teach others what we ourselves have failed to learn to live by?

In all of these instances, the sound of the shofar is the sound of the Jew, a primal sound emanating from the most essential aspect of his inner "divine portion," his exultant prayer of gratitude and his beseeching request for strength and discipline to fulfill his mission and potential. Indeed, we pray with words and we pray with sounds.

However, there is one crucial difference between the first two instances of Malkhuyot and Zikhronot - wherein the sounds emanate from the individual at prayer - and Shofarot, wherein the shofar's sound initially emanated from G-d Himself: "G-d rose up through the sound of the teruah, the Lord was in the sound of the shofar" (Psalms 47:6). Similarly, at the time of the redemption "All the inhabitants of the world and the dwellers on earth will see, when the banner on the mountains is held aloft; and they will all hear, when [G-d] will blast the shofar" (Isaiah 18:3), and then again, "And it will happen on that day that the great Shofar shall be sounded [by G-d], and those who are lost in the land of Assyria and scattered in the land of Egypt shall come up, and they shall bow down before the Lord on the holy mountain, in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 18:30).

Now we can begin to see the difference between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur: the shofar blast on Yom Kippur is not derived from the Biblical ".day of the broken, staccato sound which is unto you," because the Biblical text there relates to the people ("unto you, lakhem") who sound the shofar at prayer and since on Rosh HaShanah, the major emotion of fervent individuals on this first of the Ten Days of Repentance is that of human inadequacy, sighing and sobbing, teruah, the very day is Biblically defined as a "day of teruah."

The shofar blast on Yom Kippur, on the other hand, is derived from the straight and exultant t'kiyah of Yom Kippur on the Jubilee year, the majestic declaration of "freedom throughout the land," the glorious announcement of redemption. (Leviticus 25:9-11, utilizing the Hebrew word shofar, signifying a beautiful, joyous straight sound rather than a broken sound). This is proper for Yom Kippur, the day when G-d promises - and guarantees - forgiveness and purification after five prayers in which we affirm (and request) that our Temple be a House of Prayer for all nations. And even though the Yom Kippur blast nowadays is only a rabbinical reminder of the Jubilee, every traditional Jew awaits the final shofar blast by G-d with its inherent vision of universal Divine Revelation - when "He will enable us to hear again (the Decalogue) before the eyes of all living beings," the redemptive

shofar call of G-d to the entire world in the days of the Messiah. © 2009 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The final song of Moshe is the main subject of this week's parsha. It is a dark one to contemplate.

Though it promises a happy ending for Israel, at the end it outlines a long list of travail and challenges, tragedies and losses on the way. Moshe raises but does not answer the underlying question of Jewish history: Why are the people of Israel apparently fated to suffer such continuing calamities?

The underlying reasons seemingly are connected to Jewish behavior itself, but to our finite and seemingly rational minds this reason is often deemed to be insufficient to justify the disproportionate troubles of Israel. Factoring our permanent and never ending minority status in the world population, it still seems to be highly unfair for the Jewish people to bear the downturns that Moshe accurately forecasts for them in the song of Haazinu.

It is no accident of chance that the parsha is always read in public in the Yom Kippur season of the Jewish year. It - the Torah reading - combines within it the awe and dread of the day of Yom Kippur coupled with its message of hope, forgiveness and healing. The parsha fits the season of the year with its mood of solemnity - as well as confident hope. The parsha reflects the Jewish story and mood perfectly. Troubles and hope, trepidation and optimism combine to define our personal and national lives. Haazinu speaks to us as a timeless gem of commentary on our current situation and circumstances.

Rashi on Haazinu quotes the two opinions of Rabi Yehuda and Rabi Nechemia regarding who is the main subject of the bulk of the middle part of the parsha - is it the Jewish people or the nations of the world generally? Like many apparent differences of opinion that appear in Talmud and Midrash, here also it is possible to say that both opinions are correct and accurate.

History has shown us time and again that the Jewish people are the canary in the mine and that the fate of other nations and even of the world as a whole is tied to the Jewish story and its happenings. Europe was destroyed in the twentieth century because of the story of the Jews. The Soviet Union disappeared coincidentally and not accidentally because of Soviet Jewry, the State of Israel and Jewish dissidents and refuseniks.

The troubles of the world are many and bitter, dangerous and threatening. Yet they somehow seem to have a connection to the Jewish people, their problems and status in world events, no matter how forced and tenuous it may appear. So both opinions in Midrash are

correct. Moshe's song applies to Israel and to the nations of the world as well.

Their fate is bound up with our destiny and our challenges. And the eventual settling of accounts that Moshe describes at the end of his song of Haazinu affect the general world no less than they do the people of Israel. May the comforting end of the song be the beginning of our great and good new year. © 2009 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

Rabbi Yaacov ben Asher writes that during different times in prayer, there are different physical postures that we take. We stand when reciting the Amidah and fall on our faces when saying the prayer of Tahanun. (Tur, Orakh Hayyim 131)

Could it be that these positions reflect different approaches to G-d? Standing in prayer denotes our preparedness to speak forthrightly with the Almighty as we struggle and even insist that the Lord help us. It is, of course, true that during this service we bow down on four occasions. Still the Talmud insists that if someone wishes to bow more often, he is stopped. (Berakhot 34a) Perhaps this teaches us that in prayer G-d desires that we bring our pleas to him with honesty and candor.

Indeed, when facing challenges in life we are instructed to gather all of our energy to right whatever wrong we face. In this sense, the human being has qualities of dynamism and majesty. Created in the image of G-d, we have the power to act G-dlike, to give selflessly to the other, to transcend and reach what we think are our potentials and do the impossible. This may be the approach we take in the Amidah service as we stand before the Almighty.

In the next prayer, when we fall to the ground, we approach G-d very differently. In the end, no matter how capable we may be, no matter our physical and emotional stature, we are all in G-d's hands. This may be the symbolic meaning of falling on our face. It's as if we are saying to the Almighty-please embrace us, hold us and carry us through the difficulties we face.

The Tahanun comes from the story of King David when he failed to count the Jewish people with the traditional giving of a half shekel for each person. (Samuel II Chapter 24) Censuses in Torah law are taken so that we can indicate how many of us are prepared to give of ourselves to G-d - hence, the half shekel is given to the temple. When counting without that half shekel we are proclaiming that the count is taken for our own honor. The prophet Gad tells David that he will be punished with either war, famine or pestilence. David chooses pestilence as that attack is in the hands of G-d. David had learnt his lesson that it is

better to be in the hands of G-d than at the mercy of human beings.

It is not easy to have this kind of trust. Trust requires a deep openness, a willingness to develop a relationship of intimacy. But such intimacy with a beloved or with G-d is difficult to achieve as one is rendered vulnerable in that one could be rejected. Not withstanding this difficulty, David learns to trust in G-d and as we fall to the ground and recall this David story we try to do the same - giving in and trusting the Lord.

In the High Holiday service we follow a similar format. Standing before G-d we strongly ask that He allow His awe to be felt by all of humankind (Ve-chen Tein Pachdechah). We then add that G-d see to it that Israel be given all of His glory (Ve-chen Tein Kavod Le-amecha). Precisely after these kinds of paragraphs, do we recite the Aleinu wherein we fall literally to the floor. Human strength can take us only so far. Falling to the ground we declare, "Oh Lord, we desperately need your help".

Our service takes it one step further. We begin reciting the prayer in which we ask G-d that He teach us the right words to recite. (heh'yeh im pi'phiyot) Sometimes life can be so confusing that we do not even know the right words. Hence, we turn to G-d and we declare, the darkness is so heavy, the suffering so great, the problems so complex we are not even sure what to ask for. Oh G-d, we say, give us the words. Help us pray for what we need.

These are our feelings these days. No doubt we must, in the spirit of the Amidah, do our share to overcome. But for me, this Yom Kippur I will fall to the ground and say to G-d, "we need you desperately, we need you to intervene, we need you to give us the words and show us the way." © 2009 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.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

We are in a time when we are busy with self reckoning and repentance for our sins, and we are surrounded by concentric circles of repentance. Everybody searches through his or her deeds, since after all the Almighty has us pass before Him like a flock of sheep, and nobody is left out. In the era of the Temple, late in the day, the entire nation would gather in the Temple, watching to see the purple thread become white, showing the entire nation- and not each individual separately-that their sins have been erased, transformed into a bright white. However, there is a broader type of atonement, one that involves not only the past year but the entire range of human history. As is written in this week's Torah portion, "Let the

nations sing the praises of His nation for He will avenge the blood of his slaves, and He will punish His enemies, and His land will be atoned." [Devarim 32:43]. Why is there a need for this atonement? It is for the pursuit, the pogroms, the Crusades, the dungeons of the Inquisition, and for all the horrors of the exile, culminating in the Holocaust in Europe. What is the essence of the atonement? "He will avenge the blood of His slaves." This is the full atonement which will lead all the nations to be happy with Yisrael and to praise them? "Let the nations sing the praises of His nation."

With respect to this general atonement, as in other cases, we may assume that the following applies: "For you do not desire the death of the one who is liable for the death penalty, rather that he should repent his ways and live" [Rosh Hashana prayers; see Yechezkel 18:23]. Thus in principle the other nations might repent and then the revenge will no longer be necessary.

But the Torah implies that vengeance will in fact be needed, as is written: "If I hold my bright sword and I take hold of justice in my hand... I will intoxicate my arrows with blood and my sword will devour flesh, the blood of the dead and the captives, from the enemy's greatest evil." [Devarim 32:41-42]. In order to purify the world from the rivers of blood which have drenched it, it must be shaken by the very foundations, and we know that the evil ones are very far removed from such a deep repentance.

Full repentance of the world must involve a reckoning. How is it that seventy wolves were so cruel for so long to an innocent lamb, how could they continue to pursue it and strike it without mercy even when it had fainted from the pain? Even when it returned home injured and limping they continued to pursue it, limit its steps, and engulf its heritage. The nations put on the garb of morality and have begun to accuse it of occupying territories, trampling human rights, and "crimes against humanity."

In order to uproot the entire pattern of this evil approach, which has even been absorbed within the thought patterns of the victims and has given rise to self hate and doubts about our own legitimacy, what is needed is supreme purity and complete shattering of the evil power. Only by striking a blow to the evil force and eradicating it from the face of the earth will mankind be able to atone for the many years of evil. "Let all evil dissipate as smoke, when you remove the evil government from the earth" [Rosh Hashana prayers]. This will bring joy to the land and happiness to the holy city, and the horn of G-d's servant David will rise up together with a flame in honor of the son of Yishai.

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Never give up hope. No matter how bleak your plight may seem, do not allow yourself to surrender to despair. This is what we are told.

This is what we tell others. This is what we believe. Hope springs eternal in the human heart.

In this week's Torah reading, however, we find an altogether different perspective. On the last day of his life, Moses addresses an evocative poem replete with metaphors and allusions to the Jewish people. With broad strokes, he presents a sweeping view of the past and a searing vision of the future. When will Hashem bring an end to the suffering of His people? He tells them. When the power of their enemies spreads uncontrollably and no one can withstand the onslaught.

What does this mean? The Talmud provides the answer. It is a reference to the Messianic era. Moses is prophesying that the Messiah will come when then Jewish people abandon all hope of redemption, when they despair of salvation.

The commentators are mystified. Why is despair a prerequisite for redemption? Yearning for the arrival of the Messiah is one of the central tenets of Judaism. If so, why does the Talmud contend that this yearning must be forgotten before the Messiah can come?

The commentators explain that the yearning for the ultimate redemption must indeed remain strong and vital among the Jewish people without any interruption. The Talmud, however, is addressing a different brand of hope. What is our first reaction when we face an anti-semitic crisis? Do we turn toward Hashem and plead with Him to save us? Or do we consider other avenues? Do we mobilize our military forces, if we have any? Do we bring all our political and diplomatic influence to bear? Do flex our financial muscles? Do we call upon the press and the media to help us?

This then is the hopelessness that will hasten our redemption. First, we must recognize the utter futility of self-reliance. We must despair of solving our problems on our own. Only then will we turn to Hashem with absolute trust and faith in Him as the sole Source of salvation. Only then will we deserve to be redeemed.

A great sage was sitting in his room, immersed in a pile of holy books. Just then a distraught woman burst through the door and planted herself in front of him.

"You must help me!" she wailed as tears ran down her cheeks. "My husband is desperately ill."

"Come back tomorrow," said the sage.

"Tomorrow?" she shrieked. "I can't wait until tomorrow. He may be dead by tomorrow. I need your help now!"

"If you insist," said the sage. He closed his eyes and pursed his lips. After two minutes of silence, he opened his eyes. The woman looked at him with breathless expectation.

"I'm very sorry," he said. "I can do nothing for your husband."

The woman went deathly pale. She clutched her head and screamed, "Lord in Heaven! Help me! I

am lost. Even the holy sage cannot help me. Only You can save my husband. Please! I beg of you!"

Then she collapsed into a chair, her body wracked by wrenching sobs.

"Go home in peace, my child," said the sage. "Your prayers will be answered. As long as you placed your trust in me, there was no hope. But the hopelessness in your heart led you to our Father in Heaven. He is the only One who can give you what you need."

In our own lives, as we strive for financial and professional achievement, how often do we think to ourselves that the key to success lies in contacts, marketing or other stratagems? But that is not really true. No matter how hard we work or plan or scheme, Hashem can wipe it all away with a flick of His figurative wrist. So what are we supposed to do? Of course, we need to make our best efforts, to go after the contacts and the marketing and whatever else seems to be indicated. But we must always keep in mind that Hashem controls the world, and if we're looking for contacts, He is undoubtedly the Ultimate Contact.

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RABBI DANIEL TRAVIS

Five Days of Yom Kippur

There was once a province of a large kingdom that owed an enormous amount of money in taxes to the sovereign. Upset by the laxity of his subjects in paying their debts, the king decided that the time had come to take action. He summoned his armed forces, and together they traveled to the province in order to collect the overdue tariff.

As the king approached, the leaders of the province came out to greet him. They implored their monarch to have pity on them, as they were poverty-stricken and had nothing to give him. Touched by their words, the king reduced their debt by a third. As the king's retinue advanced closer to the province, the important members of the community came out to receive him. As they repeated the words of the leaders, the king decided to reduce the debt by another third. When the king finally arrived in the province, all the common folk came out to humble themselves before him. Moved by all that had transpired, he canceled the debt entirely.

Our Sages present this story as a parable to the time before and after the ten days of repentance. The residents of the province are the Jewish people; the debt is the year's accumulation of sins. On erev Rosh HaShanah the extremely righteous take the first step toward appeasing HaShem by fasting, and in response, HaShem pardons a third of our sins. During the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, the important members of the community fast, and another third is removed. Finally, on Yom Kippur, everyone refrains from food, and HaShem erases all of our transgressions.

During the four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos, the Jewish people are so involved with building their sukkos and buying their lulav and esrog, that they are too busy to sin. Therefore Sukkos is referred to as "The First Day," for only then does the new record of transgressions begin (Medrash as cited by Tur 581).

Is it in fact possible for every member of the Jewish people to pass through these four days without a single aveirah? Especially when caught up with the hustle and bustle of purchasing a lulav and esrog and building a sukkah, one could very easily stumble and commit a transgression such as damaging merchandise or disturbing the neighbors at night.

From the words of Chazal, it is clear that even if a Jew commits a sin during these days, HaShem immediately forgives it. Our Sages reveal to us that Yom Kippur does not end after Ne'ilah, but actually continues for a total of five days-until the start of the Yom Tov of Sukkos (Biyur HaGra 524:5). How can we understand this?

After much pleading for forgiveness from his loved one, a person will usually agree to overlook the other's misdeeds. Yet we all know that this concession does not mean that the closeness the two once shared has been fully restored. Only if the wrongdoer makes special efforts to show his love for the offended party can he hope to regain that affection.

Yom Kippur and the days that precede it are days of repentance characterized by fear and awe. During this time, the Jewish people fast in order to demonstrate their sincere regret over their transgressions of the previous year. The four days following Yom Kippur are also days of repentance, but now we are in a totally different emotional state. Complete involvement with the mitzvos of sukkah and dalet minim, the four species, shows our tremendous devotion to our beloved King. HaShem responds by extending the atonement that began during Yom Kippur (Shlah HaKodesh, Maseches Sukkah, 193b).

After a whole day of fasting and prayer, we can understand that someone would want to "take a break" before engaging in a new endeavor. The halachah cautions us against such a response, directing those who are scrupulous about their mitzvah observance to start building the sukkah immediately (Rema 624:5). By beginning with the mitzvah of sukkah as soon as we have finished the avodah of Yom Kippur, we actualize King David's words: "They go from strength to strength" (Tehillim 84:8).

The poskim mention the option of learning the Gemara or the halachos of Sukkos as a substitute for actually starting to build the sukkah (Aruch HaShulchan 624:7). Alternatively, one can discuss these topics with his family members (Kaf HaChaim 624:35). Once, after an extremely fervent Yom Kippur in the company of the Vilna Gaon, one of the Gaon's students inquired as to when they would be putting up the "first stake" of the sukkah. The Gaon took out a volume of Maseches

Sukkah and started to learn with him. Toward the end of the night, when they had completed the entire tractate, the Gra commented: "I think we managed to get a 'stake' in the sukkah" (Rav Shlomo Brevda).

Even if a person decides to learn the halachos of sukkah right after Yom Kippur, he should not put off building the sukkah more than one night. Even if the day after Yom Kippur is erev Shabbos, he should get up early to complete his sukkah (Mishnah Berurah 625:2).

With all the mitzvos that we must attend to after Yom Kippur, one would think that it would be a good idea to get a head start by building the sukkah beforehand. Although this might sound very practical, Chazal advise us against doing so. In the event that we have been sentenced by HaShem to receive the punishment of galus, exile, we can fulfill this punishment through building the sukkah (Elya Rabbah 624). Some maintain that since the principal act of building the sukkah is the placement of the schach-so as long as one saves this job for after Yom Kippur, he may build the walls of the sukkah beforehand (Birkei Yosef).

"After a person has been appointed dayan of the community, it is forbidden for him to perform manual labor in front of three people" (Kiddushin 70a according to Yam Shel Shlomo 4:4; Choshen Mishpat 8:4). In view of this teaching, may a dayan construct a sukkah? Since there is no greater honor than involving oneself with HaShem's commandments, even the greatest talmid chacham may build a sukkah in front of others (Sha'arei Teshuvah 625).

One year Yom Kippur fell on a Thursday, and on erev Shabbos the Maharil went to visit his teacher, the Marharam. Although the Maharil was one of the Maharam's closest disciples, since the Maharam was engaged in building his sukkah he did not have time to talk to his close talmid or to any of the other people who had lined up to consult with him on matters of halachah. Quoting Chazal's injunction, "A mitzvah that comes one's way should not be left to sour" (Mechilta, Parshas Bo), the Maharam put all other considerations aside (Maharil, Hilchos Sukkah p. 50).

"Go and eat your bread with joy and drink wine with a good heart, for HaShem is delighted with your actions" (Koheles 9:7). All year long, a wall of sin separates us from our Father in Heaven. After the conclusion of Yom Kippur, the Jewish people are cleansed of their transgressions and the barrier falls away.

How do we celebrate this joyous occasion? Chazal tell us that after Yom Kippur a Heavenly voice proclaims the words of the above verse, urging us to share HaShem's pleasure through a festive meal. This this seudah following the fast takes on the status of a semi-Yom Tov meal (Tosafos Yeshanim, Yoma 87b).

Does this seudas mitzvah take precedence over building the sukkah? The poskim write that if a person has the strength to do so, he should perform

some small act connected with the construction of the sukkah even before he sits down to eat (Kaf HaChaim 624:36). After the meal, those who are scrupulous in their mitzvah observance should try to continue building the sukkah (Responso Devar Yehoshua 2:17).

"Between Yom Kippur and Sukkos is a time of special joy. We do not say Tachanun and we do not fast, even on the occasion of a parent's yahrtzeit. These days are joyful not only because HaShem does not consider our transgressions during this time, but also because during this period King Solomon completed building the Beis HaMikdash." (Levush 624:15).

Although these days have a festive atmosphere, and marriages may not take place on Yom Tov (with the exception of erev Yom Tov), a chasan and kallah are permitted to get married between Yom Kippur and Sukkos. Aside from the practical difficulties of organizing a wedding during this hectic time, weddings are generally not held on erev Yom Tov since the wedding banquet would continue into the holiday itself, inevitably interfering with the simcha of the mo'ed (Magen Avraham 546:4).

Do a chasan and kallah fast before their chuppah if they get married during these days? One of the main reasons that a bride and groom refrain from eating on their wedding day is because the wedding day is compared to Yom Kippur. Since the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos already resemble Yom Kippur in that HaShem does not record one's unintentional transgressions, a chasan and kallah who feel that fasting will weaken them may be lenient with regard to this fast (Mateh Efraim and Elef LeMagen 625:2).

On Yom Kippur, the Jewish people were forgiven for the sin of the golden calf and were given the second set of luchos. Yet even after this tremendous act of pardon, we still did not know if we had found favor in HaShem's eyes. During the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos, the Jewish people gave away much of the wealth that they had taken from Egypt, for the sake of building the Mishkan, the tabernacle in the desert. On Sukkos, HaShem responded by showing His intense love for us when He returned the Clouds of Glory (commentary of the Vilna Gaon on Shir HaShirim 1:4).

Every year from Elul until Yom Kippur, we toil to repair our relationship with our Creator. When Yom Kippur ends, although we are cleansed of our aveiros, our job is not complete. Between Yom Kippur and Sukkos we engage ourselves completely in mitzvos in order to encourage HaShem to show His deep love for us. Perhaps these four days are the most critical in the entire Jewish calendar, for they determine the true extent of our devotion to HaShem. The intense love that is meant to exist between us cannot return until our actions match up to our prayers.

The Chasam Sofer was known for his incredible diligence; he would not squander even a moment of time from his Torah learning. Nevertheless, he wrote an

entire book of songs. When his son the, K'sav Sofer, was asked where his father found the time to compose these verses, he replied that during the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos his father had been so totally overwhelmed with powerful feelings of love toward his Creator that he had difficulty learning Torah. In an attempt to express his deepfelt sentiments, he penned those words (Nachlei Binah, p. 8).

In the merit of our serving HaShem with devotion, may He show His true love to us, His children, and bring us all back to His Home quickly. © 2009 Rabbi D. Travis & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Unstoppable Force

The final song of Moshe's life is read this week. Appropriate as a prelude to Yom Kippur, it talks about the great potential that the Jewish nation has within its very essence. Moshe tells us to "Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation. Ask your father, and he will relate it to you, and your elders, and they will tell you" (Deuteronomy 32:7-8). He reminds us of the glory days, when Hashem asked us to be His chosen people, accepting the yoke of Torah observance. But Moshe does not stop there. Using our tremendous capacity as a role of responsibility, he warns us of the calamitous effect if we waste or misuse our talents.

Despite the harrowing foreshadowing of disaster, however, the verses of misfortune contain a message of hope as well. Moshe once again warns us of Hashem's potential wrath; yet a blessing lies within his curse, defining the very essence of the physiological indestructibility of the Jewish nation.

In predicting calamitous repercussions of sin, Moshe speaks for Hashem and declares, "I shall accumulate evils against them. My arrows I shall use up against them." What does that mean?

Rashi explains the verse according to a Talmudic explanation in Tractate Sotah. "My arrows will come to an end, but they themselves will not come to an end."

The question is obvious. Is G-d's quiver limited? Can the L-rd ever be bereft of ammunition? How is it possible that the Heavenly arsenal, equipped with more power than an atomic armory, will spend its ammunition without achieving total annihilation?

Reb Yosef Friedenson, editor of Dos Yiddishe Vort, tells the story of how he and a group of friends were in a smithy shop in the iniquitous labor camp in the town of Starachowice. The camp was notorious, and though the overseer of the factory in which they worked, a man named Pape, treated them kindly, one mistake meant that a German guard would treat them as saboteurs and shoot them dead.

Assigned to the Herman Goering works one Shmini Atzeres, they were not told what their job was for

that day. And so, to fulfill their holiday spirit, they broke out in a traditional song, Ain Adir kaHashem, Ain Baruch k'ben Amram (There is none as powerful as Hashem nor blessed as Moshe, the son of Amram).

Pape was shocked. Despite the torture the humiliation, and the endless poison-tipped arrows of the Holocaust, these people were singing!

"Why are you Jews singing?" he asked incredulously. "Do you have it so good that you can sing?"

The group explained the words of the song to Pape, going through each stanza, including those that read, "there are no wise men like the scholars of the Torah, and there is no redeemer like Hashem." Pape was astonished. "After all the torture that you have been through, do you really still believe this?" Immediately, one of the younger members of the group, not a particularly religious lad, jumped up with an emphatic, "Yes!" And then each member of the troupe shouted their endorsement as well. "Of course! Surely! Without doubt!" One by one, each of those in the work-force-turned-choir exclaimed his unyielding approval.

Pape soon understood that he was dealing with an indestructible people. He gesticulated wildly with both arms and declared, "I don't know how the F?hrer will ever get rid of you!" With that, he walked away and let them continue their relentless commitment to their unshakeable, indestructible faith.

Noted scientist Isaac Asimov compiled a book of 3,000 interesting facts about the universe, history, and science. In it he deals with a longstanding question: "What would happen if an irresistible force met an immovable body?" Asimov explains that the question is ludicrous. He simply explains a physical fact. "In a universe where one of the above conditions exists, by definition the other cannot exist."

And so the Torah tells us something about the promise that Hashem made to His people. They are an immovable object. Hashem's unremitting commitment for his children has declared Judaism impregnable. And so the physical arrows He may send to chastise them cannot forever continue. They must eventually expire. As long as we understand the immovable body of the Rock of our faith, we are assured that there no longer exists an irresistible force to budge our eternity. © 2009 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

