

Aseret Yemei Teshuva: The Bridge Between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur*

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Lost in the Shuffle

What is different about *these days*? When *Rosh HaShana* ends and we return to our daily routine for a week until *Yom Kippur*, this question should loom large. Subconsciously, we tend to overlook this period and treat the Days of Repentance as if we are in a holding pattern between the dramatic poles of *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur*. After hearing the wake-up call of the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashana*, we essentially press the snooze button for an additional week of sleep before begging for forgiveness on *Yom Kippur*. We may make the extra effort to perform mitzvot and refrain from committing sins, thereby increasing our merits during this grace period, but the tension of the Days of Awe is significantly diluted.

The Rambam, however, challenges us to make sure these days do not get lost in the shuffle:

Even though repentance and calling out [to God] are desirable at all times, during the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, they are even more desirable and will be accepted immediately as it states [Isaiah 55:6]: 'Seek God when He is to be found'.

Rambam Hilchot Teshuva 2:6

אע"פ שהתשובה והצעקה יפה לעולם, בעשרה
הימים שבין ראש השנה ויום הכפורים היא
יפה ביותר ומתקבלת היא מיד שנאמר
(ישעיהו נה:ו) דרשו ה' בהמצאו קראהו
בהיותו קרוב.
רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ב:ו

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For the Rambam, *teshuva* during this interim period is different, in terms of both its desirability and its impact, than repentance at all other times of the year. Ideally then, these days should function as a bridge between the initial thoughts of repentance on *Rosh HaShana* and the ultimate cleansing of sins on *Yom Kippur*. An analysis of the *halakhot* and customs of the *Aseret Ymei Teshuva* highlights the singular nature of *teshuva* during this period.

Laws and Customs of Aseret Yemei Teshuva: Kiddush Levana, Din, and Marriage

As a general rule, halakha strongly encourages the performance of as many *mitzvot* as possible before our judgment is sealed on *Yom Kippur*.

A person should always look at oneself as equally balanced between merit and sin and the world as equally balanced between merit and sin. If one commits a sin, that person's scale and that of the entire world tilts to the side of guilt ... If one performs one mitzvah, his or her scale and the scale of the entire world tips to the side of merit ... Therefore, it is customary for all of Israel to give profusely to charity, perform many good deeds, and be occupied with Mitzvot from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur to a greater extent than the rest of the year

Rambam Hilchot Teshuva 3:4

צריך כל אדם שיראה עצמו כל השנה כולה כאילו חציו זכאי וחציו חייב, וכן כל העולם חציו זכאי וחציו חייב, חטא חטא אחד הרי הכריע את עצמו ואת כל העולם כולו לכף חובה וגרם לו השחתה, עשה מצוה אחת הרי הכריע את עצמו ואת כל העולם כולו לכף זכות וגרם לו ולהם תשועה והצלה שנאמר וצדיק יסוד עולם זה שצדק הכריע את כל העולם לזכות והצילו, ומפני ענין זה נהגו כל בית ישראל להרבות בצדקה ובמעשים טובים ולעסוק במצות מראש השנה ועד יום הכפורים יתר מכל השנה.

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ג:ד

The Rambam notes that this stance stems from the fact that each and every mitzvah may tip the scale in favor of a positive judgment. However, there are several striking exceptions to this rule. The first is the custom to refrain from sanctifying the new moon (*Kiddush Levana*) during the Days of Repentance.

The custom is to not sanctify the new moon until after Yom Kippur because we are suspended in judgment and sanctifying requires happiness. I heard from one sage that on the contrary it is preferable to sanctify the moon during this time so as to add this mitzvah to your merits and perhaps tip the scales in favor of one's merits.

Levush (R' Mordechai Jaffe) O" C 602

אין מקדשין הלבנה אלא עד אחר יום כיפור מפני שאנו תלויים בדין וקדושה צריך להיות מתוך שמחת הלב כן הוא המנהג. ואני שמעתי בשם גדול אחד שאדרכא טוב שיקדשו אותה בתוך עשרת ימי תשובה כדי שתבא מצוה זו ותוסיף על זכויותינו הקודמת ואולי תכריע היא את הכף לזכות ביום הדין. וסברא נכונה היא כי זו היא משמחת הלב שתוסיף על זכויותינו ותכריע לזכות.

לבוש אורח חיים תרב

There is a story of a person who encountered an idolater at night and the idolater wished to kill him. The Jew requested from his captor that he be allowed to perform one mitzvah before his death, whereupon he sanctified the

כתב בסוף ספר אורח חיים מעשה בא' שפגע בו עכו"ם בלילה ורצה עכו"ם להרגו ובקש ממנו שיניחנו לעשות מצוה אחת קודם מותו ואח"כ יעשה אתו מה שלבו חפץ. והלבנה

new moon and while jumping up and down as is customary a miracle occurred and the wind picked him up and took him away to safety. I also heard that one who recites the sanctification of the moon is guaranteed to survive the month. I cited this to support the Levush's argument that it is better to sanctify the moon before Yom Kippur so as to ensure that a decree of death will not be issued against you for the coming year.

Elijah Zuta (R' Elijah Shapira) ibid.

היתה בחידושה וקידשה בפניו בכוונה גדולה ונעשה לו נס כשדלג וקפץ ג' פעמים כמנהג ונשאו הרוח וניצל ממנו. גם שמעתי שמי שקידש הלבנה מיום שקדש שוב לא ידאוג שימות באותו חדש. הבאתי זה כאן ללמוד קצת ראייה ללבוש דיותר מסתברא לקדש קודם יום כיפור שלא יגזור עליו מיתה באותו שנה.

אליה זוטא שם

- Why does our custom proscribe reciting Kiddush Levana during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva? Kiddush Levana should be no different than other mitzvot, which we attempt to perform specifically between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur. Indeed, we should attempt to perform Kiddush Levana more than we attempt to perform other mitzvot, because Kiddush Levana is no ordinary mitzvah; it has the power to rescue a Jew from a fate of death! The week before Yom Kippur is the perfect time to take advantage of this phenomenon!

A second counterintuitive custom observed by some during the Days of Repentance is to desist from trying court cases between disputants. The Levush objects to this custom on two grounds.

Some have the custom to not conduct court cases between man and his fellow. It seems to me that it is much better to judge and give decision in human affairs so that there may be peace among men on Yom Kippur. Moreover, our Sages have said: "Where there is justice, there is no judgment; and where there is no justice there is judgment." That is to say, if we do justice on earth below, there is no judgment from above, but if there is no justice below, there is judgment above. This being the case, if we do not judge below, the attribute of Divine Justice will be directed toward us, God forbid! Therefore, it seems to me that it is better to judge below and silence the judgment above.

Levush O" C 603

ויש נוהגין שלא לדון בין איש לחבירו בעי"ת. ונראה לי אדרבא יותר טוב הוא לדון ולפסוק הדין בין הבריות כדי שיהיה השלום ביניהם ביום כיפור ועוד הרי אמרו חז"ל "במקום שיש דין אין דין ומקום שאין דין יש דין" ר"ל אם נעשה הדין למטה אין הדין למעלה ואם אין נעשה למטה נעשה למעלה וא"כ אם לא ידונו למטה הרי מדת הדין מתוחה עלינו ח"ו. על כן נראה לי שיותר טוב הוא לדון למטה ולהשקיט הדין של מעלה.

לבוש אורח חיים תרג

- Why does our custom proscribe judging during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva? After all, judging promotes peace among men. Moreover, when courts judge properly on earth, the harsh judgment from Heaven is silenced. Why not take advantage of this supernatural phenomenon to silence harsh judgment before Yom Kippur?

A third peculiar custom of the Ten Days of Repentance is the prohibition of weddings.

*Question: Is it permitted to marry between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur or not?
Answer: I saw in Sefer Mateh Ephraim that*

שאלה: אי מותר לעשות נישואין בעשרת ימי תשובה או לא.

תשובה: ראיתי בספר מטה אפרים בסי' תר"ב שכתב נוהגין שלא לעשות נישואין בימים אלו (דהיינו בעשי"ת)

the custom is not to get married during these days ... I have found no source for the custom to prohibit marriage ... and I myself was married on the sixth of Tishrei. And on the contrary; the fulfillment of the mitzvah to procreate may tip the scales in favor of merit.

Melamed LeHoil (R' Dovid Zvi Hoffman) 3:1

וכן העתיק הרב ר' שלמה גאנצפריעד זצ"ל בקיצור ש"ע שלו סי' ק"ל ... אמנם יגעתי ולא מצאתי שום מקור למנהג זה וכמדומה מנהג זה לא נתפשט ולא נודע אף מגדולי הדור ואני בעצמי עשיתי נישואין שלי ביום ו' תשרי שנת תרל"ג לפ"ק ... ואדרבה כי קיום מצות פריה ורבי' יוכל להכריע לכף זכות, וכן עשיתי מעשה ואין שום אחד ממורי ורבותי וחבירי פוצה פה לומר שיש בזה שום נדנוד איסור ... אח"כ ראיתי בס' דרכי נועם בשם מו"ר הג' ר' עזריאל הילדעסהיימער ג"כ להתיר.
שו"ת מלמד להועיל ג:א

R. David Tzvi Hoffman, while noting that he himself had gotten married during *Aseret Yemei Teshuvah*, argues that fulfilling the *mitzvah* of *P'ru U'Revu* is sufficient grounds to justify weddings during this period since it may tip the scales of judgment in favor of one's merits. R. Shlomo Kluger (*Hokhmat Shlomo, Orach Chaim* 602:1) notes that getting married before *Yom Kippur* also produces a substantial fringe benefit - all of one's sins are forgiven!

- Why does our custom proscribe judging during the *Aseret Yemei Teshuva*? What better time is there to get married and take advantage of this spiritual rebirth than the Days of Repentance, when we are desperately seeking atonement for all of our sins?

Devices and Deliverance

The reason for the custom not to marry is that since our sages have stated that when one marries all of his sins are forgiven. Thus, before Yom Kippur one should not make attempts to achieve atonement, and if one does so, it is as though one raises his/her hand against the King ...

Hokhmat Shlomo O" C 602

הנה המנהג שאין נושאים עד אחר יום הכיפורים בטעם המנהג הזה נראה ... כיון שאמרו חז"ל הנושא אשה מוחלים לו על כל עוונותיו וא"כ בתחילת השנה אין לו לעשות השתדלות מחילת עוונות עד יוה"כ שהקב"ה בצירוף עצומו של יום מוחלין לו עוונותיו ואם משתדל קודם יוה"כ הוי כמרים יד במלך.
חכמת שלמה אורח חיים תרב

Perhaps we can suggest, along the lines of R. Shlomo Kluger, that the problem with all of these practices is precisely their extraordinary ability to achieve atonement. The *Poskim* deliberately proscribed any behavior or ritual, even full-fledged *mitzvot*, if the action could result in prematurely defusing the anxiety that one should feel during the week between *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur*. Each of the rituals discussed runs the risk of being exploited due to its ability to achieve the goal of a favorable judgment through non-conventional means. Blessing the new moon, with its supernatural powers that guarantee life, the hearing of court cases and its mystical ability to prevent a harsh divine judgment, and marriage ceremonies which trigger atonement for one's sins are all important religious acts. However, they are eschewed during the Ten Days of Repentance because they can be used as shortcuts to meet the objective of a favorable judgment.

We can now fully appreciate the unique theme of the days between *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur* and how they function as a bridge between the two. The focus of these days is not on the

ultimate goal of wiping clean one's slate of sins; if that were the case, we would be permitted to use any method or device to realize that objective. Instead of being goal-oriented, these days are to be viewed as an opportunity to undergo the process of transforming one's religious personality. Following on the heels of *Rosh HaShana* when the *shofar's* call awakens us to change our ways and to repent, the Days of Repentance are intended to facilitate this process of change. These days are not merely a grace period to add merits before we request, and hopefully receive, atonement on *Yom Kippur*. Rather, the inspiration and anxiety experienced on *Rosh HaShana* should be channeled towards comprehensively evaluating one's character and carving out a new, revitalized religious persona. The climax of this process is *Yom Kippur* when we can justifiably beseech God to grant atonement for our sins after having carried out this transformation of self. In a word, the emphasis of Aseret Yemei Teshuva is not forgiveness, but the process of repentance.

Gentile's Bread

This gimmick-free approach to the Days of Repentance, however, appears to be at odds with another custom. There is a custom (see Rema 603:1) to refrain from eating bread baked by Non-Jews during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva, even if one neither observes this stringency during the year nor plans to adopt it on a permanent basis after *Yom Kippur*.

- This practice appears hypocritical and even calls attention to one's past and future failings. How do we justify this practice? Is this custom merely a hollow act to add to one's merits before *Yom Kippur*?

Even one who does not normally refrain from bread baked by Non-Jews throughout the year, it is customary to refrain during the Ten Days of Repentance in order to conduct oneself in a purified manner and in order to recall that these days are different due to their elevated status than all the other days of the year.

Levush O" C 603:1

אפילו מי שלא נזהר מפת של גוי בשאר ימות השנה נוהגין להזהר בו בכל עשרת ימי תשובה כדי להנהיג עצמן בטהרה באלו הימים ולזכור שהם משונים למעליותא יותר משאר ימות השנה.
לבוש אורה חיים תרג:א

The Levush explains that this custom is not about adding to one's list of good deeds merely to attain forgiveness from Hashem on *Yom Kippur*. Rather, refraining from Non-Jewish baked bread is intended to highlight an ideal level of religiosity, even though circumstances may not enable us to maintain these lofty standards throughout the year. It enables us to act before Hashem like our true selves, as defined by our ambitions and aspirations.

This projecting of our true selves is another crucial element of the Days of Repentance. Many of us have experienced a post-*Yom Kippur* letdown over the years. The euphoria of completing *Yom Kippur* with the knowledge that our slates have been wiped free of sin dissipates a short time later, usually right after committing the first sin after *Yom Kippur*. Thoughts of déjà vu naturally creep into one's mind along with the mental image of one's slate filling up, once again, with blemishes between now and the next *Yom Kippur*. However, if we use the days between *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur* to develop a new persona, to reinforce and expand our spiritual

ambitions, and underscore this change by adopting, if only temporarily, certain stringent practices, we can avoid this seemingly inevitable letdown. Atonement will be achieved on *Yom Kippur*. But by shifting the focus from attaining absolution to experiencing process of transformation, the Days of Repentance will gain for us a new lease on life. Even if we stumble sometimes, or, due to practical considerations, we do not maintain the practices adopted during the Ten Days of Repentance, our true self can remain intact.

Seeking and Calling

How, then, are we to go about this transformation and take advantage of this singular *teshuva*?

"Seek (*Dirshu*) God when He can be found, call out to Him (*Kira'uhu*) when He is near" (Isaiah 55:6). *Rabbah the son of Avuha* said: These are the ten days between *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*.

Rosh Hashana 18a

דרשו ה' בהמצאו קראהו בהיותו קרוב ...
אמר רבה בר אבוה: אלו עשרה ימים
שבין ראש השנה ליום הכפורים
ראש השנה יח.

The verse cited by the cited by the *gemara* as the source for the unique repentance during the period between *Rosh HaShana* and *Yom Kippur* provides us with a dual charge: “**Seek** God when He is to be found and **call** out to him when He is near” (Isaiah 55:6). The verse stresses two critical aspects of repentance and the search for God. The first verb, *Dirshu*, emphasizes the need for an intellectual element in repentance. True repentance requires a thorough, thoughtful examination of one’s deeds, similar to the process of *Drisha V’Chakira* performed by *Beit Din* to verify testimony of witnesses. Concomitant with this rational component, only an emotional element that acknowledges the urgency of the moment and involves calling out to God in prayer to assist us in our efforts to change will enable us to fully actualize the potential of the Ten Days of Repentance.