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Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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Rosh Hashanah 5772



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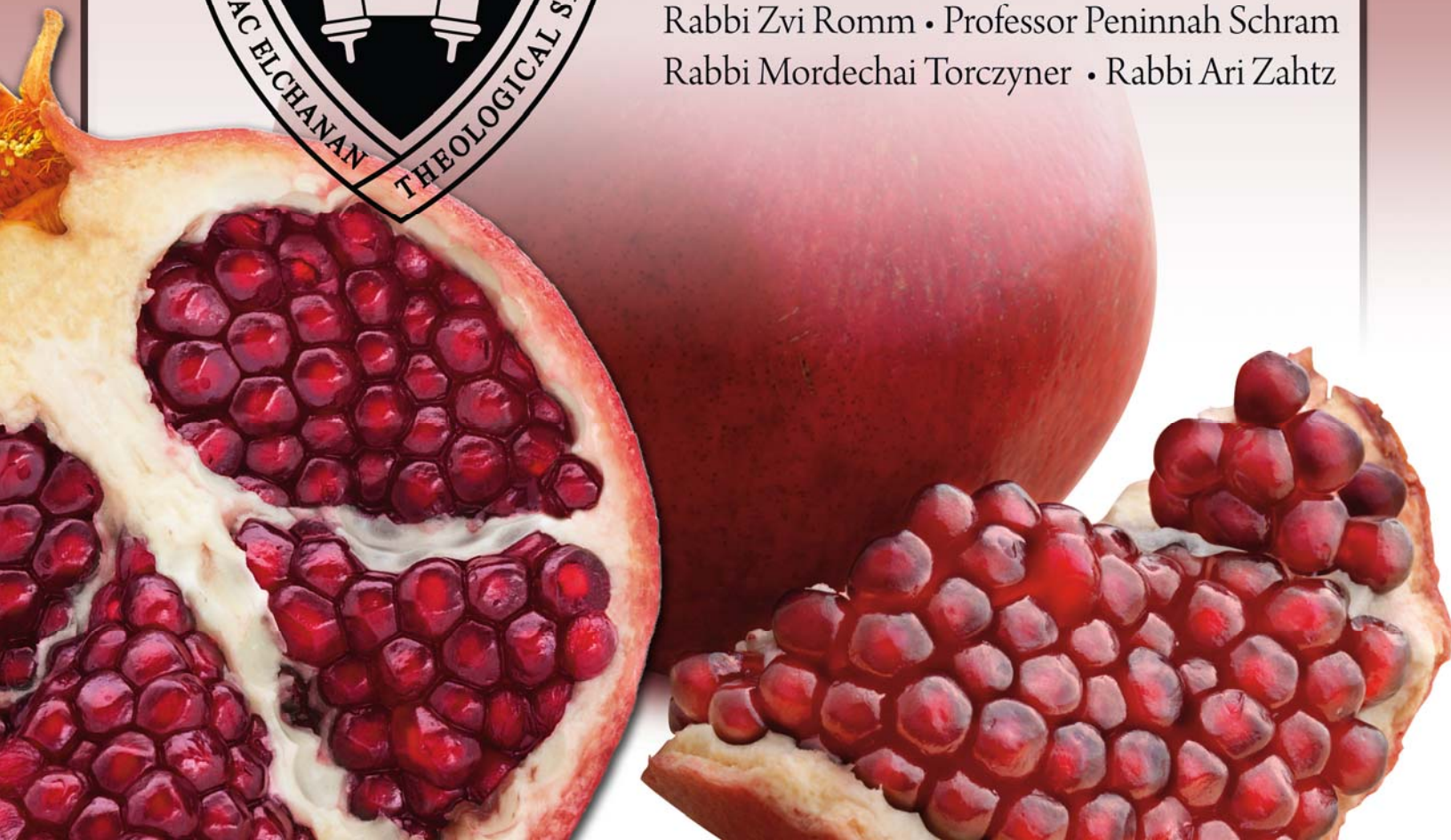
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YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

Tishrei 5772

Dear Students,

I would like to take this opportunity to applaud your decision to spend the coming months learning Torah in Eretz Yisrael. You have reached a pivotal moment in your life with great potential to achieve spiritual and intellectual growth.

It is my pleasure to present to you this year's first issue of Yeshiva University's "To-Go" series. It is my sincere hope that the Torah found in this ספר may serve to enhance your יום טוב (holiday) and your לימוד (study).

We have designed this project not only for the individual, studying alone, but perhaps even more for a חברותא (a pair studying together) that wish to work through the study matter together, or a group engaged in facilitated study.

With this material, we invite you to join our *Beit Midrash*, wherever you may be, להגדיל תורה (to enjoy the splendor of Torah) and to engage in discussing issues that touch on a most contemporary matter, and are rooted in the timeless arguments of our great sages from throughout the generations.

Wishing ktiva v'chatima tova to you and your families.

Bivracha,

Rabbi Kenneth Brander

The David Mitzner Dean, Yeshiva University
Center for the Jewish Future



500 WEST 185TH STREET FH 425 • NEW YORK, NY 10033 • TEL. 212-960-5227 • FAX. 212-960-5450 • brander@yu.edu

Richard M Joel, President, Yeshiva University

Rabbi Kenneth Brander, The David Mitzner Dean, Center for the Jewish Future

Rabbi Robert Shur, General Editor

Rabbi Joshua Flug, Editor

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Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future

500 West 185th Street, Suite 413, New York, NY 10033 • office@yutorah.org • 212.960.5400 x 5313

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Let There Be Light

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

Chancellor and Rosh Hayeshiva, Yeshiva University

This article was originally delivered by Rabbi Lamm as a derasha in the Jewish Center in NYC on Rosh Hashana in 1961

One of the fascinating minor themes in our rabbinic literature concerning the Shofar is that of confusing and confounding Satan, the devil or angel of evil. Thus, we blow the Shofar all during the month of Elul, *larbev et ha-satan*, in order to confuse Satan as to when Rosh Hashanah falls. Before sounding the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah we recite six verses from the Psalms, beginning with Koli shamata. The initial letters of these lines spell *kerá satan*, destroy or confound Satan. And, finally, we sound the Shofar twice, one series before the Amidah and another during its repetition by the cantor, again *l'arbev et ha-satan*, to confuse Satan.¹

What does all this mean? Are we involved in a kind of game with the devil? Is this an echo of a non-Jewish mythology?

I believe not. I believe that there is a far deeper Jewish thought in these words, one for which the expression *l'arbev et ha-satan* is a kind of poetic garment. This idea, of which Shofar comes to remind us, is that we right-thinking, well-meaning, loyal Jews — that we must not be confused! Satan always seems to be better organized and more efficient. The forces of evil and tyranny on the international scene are usually far more effective and disciplined than these of democracy and peace. The Satan within each of us is usually far more competent and energetic than our yetzer tov, our inclination for the good.

For most people concentration, single-mindedness, and determination are more prevalent when they are in the casino than when they are in the synagogue. On Rosh Hashanah we are invited *l'arbev et ha-satan*, to change roles with Satan, to confound him and, in turn, to learn from him the secret of how not to be confused.

Confusion is, indeed, the hallmark of our times. We are confused by the daily anxieties of existence, the senseless anguish and the seeming emptiness of life all about us. We are confused by the apparently suicidal inclinations of world leaders who explode atom bombs with no thought to the irreparable damage inflicted upon generations unborn. We are confused by the conflicting claims pressed upon us by the different interpretations of Judaism, both those to the right and to the left of us. We are confused by the clash of religionists and secularists in the State of Israel. We are confused by the strange kind of world in which our children are growing up — indeed, by our children themselves, their dreams and ambitions, their fears and piques, their paradoxical, ambivalent attitudes towards us: rebelliousness on the one hand, love on the other.

¹ See Rosh Hashana 16b, esp. Yerushalmi quoted in Tosafot.

Those of the younger generation are especially bewildered. The intense competition of diverse doctrines and different philosophies for the mind and heart of a young person invariably leave him or her deep in doubt and perplexity. Around his head there swirls a series of smiling salesmen, as if in some weird nightmare, each offering his product and clamoring for its acceptance. Which shall it be: Genesis or Evolution? Moses or Marx? Determinism or Free Will? Shabbat or Ethical Culture? Neture Karta or Ben Gurion? Loyalty to parents and past or a clean break and new horizons? A generation is growing up that is genuinely confused.

Of course, confusion is not a good thing. Philo taught that "confusion is a most proper name for vice." Indeed, many a sinister crime in our society has been lightly dismissed as the doings of "that crazy mixed-up kid," as if confusion were some delightful affectation to be expected of an adolescent.

On Yom Kippur we confess to the sin of confusion: *al cheit she-chatanu lefanekha be'timahon levav*. And R. David Kimhi, the great grammarian, tells us that the word *l'arbev*, to confuse, is related to the word *erev*, evening or nighttime, because then all is confused and dim. Confusion is, surely, a darkness of the mind and heart.

And yet the person gripped in confusion ought not to despair. The fact that it is regarded as a *chet* or sin means that it can be avoided or voided and banished. Confusion is often a necessary prelude to clarity and creativity.

Before the world took the form it's Creator ordained for it, it was *tohu va-vohu*, void and chaotic, all confusion. Only afterwards, after the darkness on the face of the deep, the *erev of irbuv*, did God command *yehi ore*, let there be light - and there was light. Creative thinkers or writers or artists know that immediately before the stroke of inspiration there must be a period of *tohu va-vohu* and *irbuv*, of true confusion.

In this spirit and with this knowledge, let us think of how we of this confused generation ought to respond to the challenge of Shofar to achieve clarity and emerge from our perplexity.

Three ways of emerging from this perplexity commend themselves to us. The first way is consciously to have a scale of values. There can be no meaningful existence unless one knows what is more important and what less so, what is right and what is wrong. In Judaism, this scale of values is not a matter for every individual to invent for himself. It is contained in the Torah. To know values therefore, one must learn Torah. That is the first great requirement.

Of course, that sounds so self-evident as to be a truism. Yet it is not always accepted. I have more than once been exasperated in discussing this fundamental question of the values of life with young people who prefer to argue from a confusion born of ignorance, and who are dogmatically certain that they cannot be enlightened by Torah. It is remarkable how a single semester of comparative religion can qualify a youngster to pass judgment on religion without ever having to read the Bible, study the Talmud, or even glance at the insides of a siddur. So it must be stressed again; the first way to climb out of the web of religious confusion is to study Torah — not just to read a bit, or discuss, but to study. After the *tohu va-vohu*, the chaos and the void, as we mentioned, there came the creation of light. Our Rabbis (Genesis Rabbah 3:4) observed that light is mentioned five times in this portion, and they asserted that it was *ke'neged chamishah*

chumshei Torah, corresponding to the Five Books of Moses. Only through the study of Torah can there be that enlightenment that will form creative clarity out of formless chaos. Ignorance leads to a distorted scale of values and even greater confusion. Study alone can clear up perplexity.

The second way of banishing confusion also sounds deceptively simple. It is faith. By this I mean not only faith in G-d but faith in the soundness of your values and faith that ultimately they will be clear to you even if now you are somewhat vague and do not understand them completely. You must have patience and confidence if you are to dissipate the clouds of confusion. When the Psalmist spoke those glorious words of faith, "even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil for Thou art with me," he may have had in mind our problem, too. Even when mentally we walk through the valley of doubt and emotional perplexity, covered by the dark shadows of intellectual chaos, when our problems mount up on both sides of us like steep cliffs so that we seem dwarfed in a deep valley, even then we must not fear, for G-d is with us. Confusion can be cleared up by the faith that it will be cleared up.

Here we can learn a lesson from Satan who always has faith in the persuasiveness of his case. The grafter is deeply convinced of the irresistibility of corruption. The unscrupulous advertising man knows for certainty that the shameless exploitation of sex will sell everything from cigarettes to convertibles. What we need is *l'arbev et ha-satan*, to change roles with Satan and learn from him confidence in our convictions and values. We must not be diffident in presenting our case to the world. We must not so lack confidence in our tradition that we allow the salesmen for Judaism to be not the genuine gedolei Torah, but outright secularists or half-assimilated political leaders. We must have sufficient faith in the irresistibility — and invincibility — of Torah that we will spare no effort in increasing the number and quality of day schools in the United States this year. During the year when we celebrate Diamond Anniversary of Yeshiva University, our faith is doubly justified - and must be twice as effective. *Ha-Shem ro'i lo echesar*, "the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" — or fail — was interpreted by one Hasidic sage to mean, I shall never fail (*lo echesar*) to know every moment that the Lord is my shepherd (*Ha-Shem ro'i*). With this confidence and faith and patience, we can overcome our confusion.

Finally, in addition to obtaining a scale of values through the study of Torah, and having faith and confidence in them, we must be prepared to live practically and decisively by these same values. It is not enough to "have" values; one must live by them, or else they are meaningless. Just studying and having faith is not enough. One must act by them clearly and constantly. The eminent Harvard professor, the late George Foote Moore, once said that the difference between philosophy and religion is that religion does something about it. There must be a commitment in action. No young person - or even ancient person - can ever emerge from doubt or perplexity merely by pondering Judaism. You have got to take the plunge into the deep waters of the Torah and Talmud and actually swim in it, live it, you must experience Shabbat and Tefillin and the striving for Kedushah, you must practice Kashrut, refrain from Lashon Hara and Shaatnez. Unless you have tasted Judaism in actual practice, you cannot escape from your perplexity. You may study the doctor's prescription and have faith in his competence, but if you do not take the medicine you will not get well.

In the Pirkei Avot we read that *az panim le'gehenom*, *bosh panim le'gan eden*. That means, literally, that a brash, brazen person will go to Gehennom, whilst the quiet, shamefaced person will enter a more cheerful residence - Paradise. One Rabbi, however, interprets this Mishnah as a complaint rather than a prediction. Why is it, he says plaintively, that when it comes to Gehennom, to doing evil and cooperating with Satan, we are always *az panim*, bold and decisive and brash? When it comes to *gan eden*, however, to good causes such as charity or attending Minyan or a lecture of Torah, we suddenly become *bosh panim*, shy, reticent, hesitant, withdrawn. If we are to escape the confusion of our times, we must be willing to live Judaism as decisively and as boldly as we ordinarily would be bold and decisive in indulging our own pleasures.

My words, my friends, are meant for all people who are sensitive to the crises and demands of our times, but especially for young people who, in their first encounters with our bewildering civilization, still feel acutely and poignantly the anguish of confusion, the collision of cultures, and the impact of opposing standards and principles clashing head on. To you I emphasize that you have in Judaism, the ancient-yet-new Judaism, values tested in the crucible of history and found to be durable for ages yet unborn. Throughout all vicissitudes these values have been available to all who have been willing to study its sacred literature and discover its eternal light. Have patience with it, even as it has had patience with you and us for so long. Have faith that it will stand by you and justify your loyalty to it. But above all, do it, live by it, make it an integral part of your life, now not later, today not tomorrow.

That is what Shofar tells you; *ha-yom harat olam*, today is the birthday of the world, today you create your own private world anew, and a great, noble, exciting, and meaningful world it shall be.

For those of us who agree with this proposition, but who by nature tend to take their time and procrastinate, who promise themselves to think the matter through but not right now — let me leave you with this one story told by Rabbi Hayyim Sanzer. A poor village woman with a large family one day luckily found an egg. She called her family about her and beamingly told them of the good news. "But," she said, "we are not going to eat it now. First we shall borrow a hen so that the egg will hatch, then this new chicken will lay eggs, and they will hatch more chicks. When we have enough we shall buy a cow, and by selling its milk we shall be able to buy many cows, then a wagon, and then ..." And then, to her utter dismay, the woman looked down and realized that the precious egg had fallen to the ground and broken.

Let us dispense with all the grand plans for the future. Let us put aside our well-intentioned promises and resolutions about how we shall pay attention to our Jewishness when we finish school - or when we are married - or when we have children - or when our children are grown up - or when we have retired. We must, like Abraham responding to G-d's command to proceed with the *akedah*, arise early in the morning. We must begin not later but now, this moment, with an iron determination to emerge from our confusion and live by Torah. For if we wait, time passes all too quickly, the egg has broken and the bubble of life has burst.

Ha-yom harat olam. Today is the birthday of the world. Today each of us must create anew the patterns of his life. With the clear call of the Shofar, let us determine *l'farbev et ha-satan*, to confound all that is evil and bring clarity to our lives. Through Torah let there be light - and may we see the light, Amen.

The Yom Kippur Mikvah

Rabbi Reuven Brand

Rosh Kollel, YU Torah Mit Zion Kollel of Chicago

Rabbi Akiva said "fortunate are you, Israel, in front of whom do you get purified, and who purifies you? Your Father in heaven, as it is written "and I will sprinkle pure water upon you and purify you" and "God, the mikvah of Israel" – just as a mikvah purifies the impure, so too God purifies Israel."

Mishna Yoma 8:9

אמר רבי עקיבא אשריכם ישראל לפני מי אתם מיטהרין מי מטהר אתכם אביכם שבשמים שנאמר (יחזקאל ל"ו) וזרקתי עליכם מים טהורים וטהרתם ואומר (ירמיה י"ד) מקוה ישראל ה' מה מקוה מטהר את הטמאים אף הקדוש ברוך הוא מטהר את ישראל:
משנה מסכת יומא ח:ט

Rabbi Akiva, the perennial optimist of the Mishnaic era, presents us with an inspirational message. It is recorded here as the conclusion of the tractate which presents the practices of Yom Kippur. We can hear the voice of this larger than life sage encouraging us from the war-torn, post Temple era, uplifting us and reminding us that we are the beloved children of the Master of the Universe. He calls upon us to remember that Hashem, our Father in heaven, purifies us just as a mikvah purifies. This model of mikvah that Rabbi Akiva proposes is rooted in the Biblical text and is the capstone of the Mishna's presentation of the Yom Kippur experience. This imagery opens for us a world of profound learning and further inspiration. We can draw several insights from the parallels between the mikvah and our experience of Yom Kippur.

Immersion

How do we achieve the purification- that refreshing feeling of spiritual renewal that we seek each year on the holy day? It is through immersion in the sanctity of the day itself that we become pure, as the Rambam teaches:

Nowadays, when the Temple is not in existence, and we have no altar to effect atonement and we only have repentance, repentance atones for all sins. Even one who is wicked all his life and repents at the end does not get reminded of his wicked ways ... and the day of Yom Kippur itself atones for those who return, as it is written "on this day it shall atone for you."

Rambam Hil. Teshuva 1:3

בזמן הזה שאין בית המקדש קיים ואין לנו מזבח כפרה אין שם אלא תשובה, התשובה מכפרת על כל העבירות, אפילו רשע כל ימיו ועשה תשובה באחרונה אין מזכירין לו שום דבר מרשעו שנאמר רשעת הרשע לא יכשל בה ביום שובו מרשעו, ועצמו של יום הכפורים מכפר לשבים שנאמר כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם.

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה א:ג

What does it mean that the day itself atones? Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903- 1993) addressed this question in a *Teshuva Drasha*, summarized by Rabbi Hershel Schachter:

It is the Divine presence which permeates our

כתוב ב' אחרי מות, לפני ה' תטהרו. כשהבגד

world on Yom Kippur. It itself is what cleanses us, for on this most exalted day, the Divine presence fills our world. Our encounter itself with the Divine cleanses us.² Perhaps this is the meaning of Rabbi Akiva's statement that Hashem purifies us like a Mikvah: just like the immersion in the waters of the Mikvah cleanses, so too, our immersion within the Divine presence cleanses.

Nefesh HaRav p. 25 fn 41

מתלכלך צריכים לנקותו ע"ז כמשפשים אותו במים ובנותר להעביר את הכתמים. וכמו כן כשהאדם חוטא ונשמתו מתלכלכת, צריכים לנקותה להנשמה ע"י כן שהשכינה באה ומשפשת אותה. וזהו ענין אמירת ה' הוא הא' בסוף יום הכיפורים שהוא סימן לסילוק השכינה למעלה דרך ז' הרקיעים, כי ביוה"כ - לפני ה' תטהרו, שהטהרה באה ע"י כן שיש עמנו השראת השכינה מיוחדת, וכשנשמת האדם נפגשת בהשכינה ומשתפשת בה, בזה היא מטהרת.

נפש הרב דף כה אות 41

Intent

The basic requirement for purification that we have described above (immersion) is achieved by all on Yom Kippur. Hence, there is an opinion in the Talmud (Yoma 85b) that just being alive on Yom Kippur is sufficient to achieve atonement:

[The Mishna states] "Death and Yom Kippur provide atonement when accompanied with repentance." [This implies] that they only provide atonement together with repentance but not independently. This seems to contradict the opinion of Rabbi who states: **regarding all of the transgressions of the Torah, whether one repents or not, Yom Kippur provides atonement ...**

Yoma 85b

מיתה ויום הכפורים מכפרין עם התשובה עם התשובה אין בפני עצמן לא נימא דלא כרבי דתניא רבי אומר **על כל עבירות שבתורה בין עשה תשובה בין לא עשה תשובה יום הכפורים מכפר ...** אפילו תימא רבי תשובה בעיא יום הכפורים יום הכפורים לא בעיא תשובה.

יומא פה:

This is difficult to understand. What then, according to Rabbi, is the purpose of *teshuva*, which occupies our energies and focus for the entirety of Yom Kippur? Why is there a need for constant *vidui*, confession, and the gut wrenching process of examining ourselves for improvement? Here too, the model of mikvah can provide clarity. The Mishna teaches:

One who immerses for non-holy items is prohibited to eat *ma'aser*. One who immerses for *ma'aser*, is prohibited to eat *teruma* ... immersing for a holy item will allow one to eat a less-holy item, but not for a more-holy item.

Mishna Chagiga 2:6

הטובל לחולין והחזק לחולין אסור למעשר טבל למעשר והחזק למעשר אסור לתרומה טבל לתרומה והחזק לתרומה אסור לקדש טבל לקדש והחזק לקדש אסור לחטאת טבל לחמור מותר לקל טבל ולא החזק כאילו לא טבל:

משנה מסכת חגיגה ב:

Although one does achieve a basic level of purification by simply being submerged in the waters of a mikvah, nonetheless, that is not the full accomplishment. To attain higher levels of

² This is why, according to Rabbi Soloveitchik, when the chazzan recounts the words of the confession of the Kohen Gadol during the Avodah service of Mussaf on Yom Kippur, the chazzan should pause a moment between the word אָנָּה, I beg of you, and the word בְּשֵׁם, through your name, attaching the latter attaching it to the phrase which follows it regarding the atonement (see Gemara Yoma 37b and commentary). The idea is that on Yom Kippur the atonement is granted via the name of Hashem (*Machzor Mesores Harav*, Hanhagos Harav, no. 86)

purification, one must have intent. The Mishna is teaching that if one has intent to purify a vessel for a basic degree of holiness (i.e. for *terumah*) the vessel is not pure with reference to higher degrees of purity (i.e. *kodshim*). For this higher level of purity, one requires intent. The silent, internal process of reflection and resolution that is the heart of renewal and *teshuva* is the essence of the mikvah experience, as the Rambam explains:

Just as one who intends to be purified accomplishes this with immersion in the mikvah, even without any physical change, so too one who intends to purify their soul from impure thoughts and feelings is purified with immersion in pure thoughts when he decides to be rid of those thoughts.

Rambam Hilchos Mikvaot 11:12

כשם שהמכוין לבו לטהר כיון שטבל
טהור ואע"פ שלא נתחדש בגופו דבר כך
המכוין לבו לטהר נפשו מטומאות הנפשות
שהן מחשבות האון ודעות הרעות, כיון
שהסכים בלבו לפרוש מאותן העצות
והביא נפשו במי הדעת טהור
רמב"ם הלכות מקוואות יא:יב

This, explains Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner (1906- 1980) is why every day in our Tefillah we preface the section of *teshuva* (השיבנו אבינו) with the section of knowledge (אתה חונן). Attention and thoughtfulness are critical prerequisites to *teshuva*; this is the meaning of the verse which the Talmud cites about these two sections of the *Amida*:

Why was [the bracha of] teshuva established to be said after [the bracha of] wisdom [in the amida]? As it is written "And his heart will understand, and he will repent and be healed"

Megillah 17b

ומה ראו לומר תשובה אחר בינה -
דכתיב (ישעיהו ו') ולבבו יבין ושב
ורפא לו.
מסכת מגילה דף יז.

Even Rebbi agrees that to achieve the pinnacle of spiritual renewal on Yom Kippur it is not sufficient to simply exist on Yom Kippur. One must engage in the thoughtful, introspective process of *Teshuva* to attain ultimate spiritual purity.³

Transformation

The process of *Teshuva*, spiritual renewal, is a remarkable watershed for an individual. The Rambam describes this dramatic transformation:

How wonderful is teshuva, yesterday this person was separated from God ... he cried out and was not answered ... did mitzvot and they were torn up in front of him ... and today cleaves to the Divine Presence ... cries out and is answered immediately ... does mitzvot and they are

כמה מעולה מעלת התשובה, אמש היה זה
מובדל מה' אלהי ישראל ... צועק ואינו
נענה ... ועושה מצות וטורפין אותן בפניו
... והיום הוא מודבק בשכינה ... צועק
ונענה מיד ... ועושה מצות ומקבלין אותן

³ Perhaps this can explain the Rambam's curious presentation of *Hilchos Teshuva*. After his initial first four chapters which describe the descriptions, requirements and impediments of *teshuva*, the Rambam digresses in the fifth and sixth chapter to a discussion of *בחירה* - free will. At the start of chapter seven the Rambam states, "since free will is given to all men, as we have explained, man should exert himself to do *Teshuva*" He continues for the duration of the chapter to discuss the achievements and descriptions of *teshuva*. We are left to wonder, why the interruption? Why the repetition of aspects of *teshuva* again in the seventh chapter? Based on our understanding that a person's attention and intention are key for ultimate *Teshuva*, free will becomes an integral part of the *teshuva* process. While one can perform the basic level of *teshuva* mechanically, one's volition enables them to achieve the highest levels of renewal. This notion is similar to an idea I once heard expressed by Rabbi Mayer Twersky regarding this Rambam.

It is astonishing to consider how a momentary process can effect such a transformation. Yet, the requirements of this process seem overwhelming, if not impossible. The Rambam enumerates four steps in the *teshuva* process: cessation of sin, regret of the sin, verbal acknowledgment of the sin and resolution not to regress. Regarding the final step, the Rambam states:

He should regret the past, as it is written "after I repented I regretted" and God shall give testimony that he will not return to his sin ever again ... and he needs to confess with his lips and to say these things that he has decided in his heart.

Rambam Hilchot Teshuva 2:2

וכן יתנחם על שעבר שנאמר כי אחרי שובי נחמתי, ויעיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם שנאמר ולא נאמר עוד אלהינו למעשה ידינו וגו', וצריך להתודות בשפתינו ולומר עניינות אלו שגמר בלבו.

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה ב:ב

This requirement seems to slam the door in the face of anyone who seeks repentance. How many of us can honestly say that our resolve is so steely that we would never in fact return to the mistakes of the past? Perhaps, the model of the mikvah can again open the door to understanding. The process of purification in a mikvah is an instantaneous transformation. Before immersion, a person is distanced from Mikdash- the house of Hashem- under severe penalty, and yet, a moment later, this same individual is welcomed to the sanctuary. The Torah demands one essential step on the part of the one seeking purification: total immersion, which means one must be completely submerged in the waters of the mikvah to attain purity. We strive even further to ensure that when one is fully submerged that no barriers separate the individual from the water; certain barriers even invalidate the immersion.

We can suggest that *teshuva* follows a similar process. *Teshuva* can be accomplished in an instant, as quickly as an immersion in a mikvah.⁴ *Teshuva* can be accomplished if even if one in fact returns later to the same sin, much as purification in a mikvah is effective even if one returns to a state of impurity shortly. The key ingredient in the *teshuva* process is whether the person is fully immersed. We all know that in the future we may regress. The core issue is whether at the time of *teshuva* we are fully committed to Hashem. No one can spend their life in the waters of the mikvah maintaining absolute purity, and we cannot stand before Hashem year round wrapped in the Divine serenity of Yom Kippur. The question becomes whether in our moment before Hashem, when we do have that opportunity and responsibility of *teshuva*, we are fully connected with Hashem. If we are fully in a state of being focused and connected with Hashem, then we can say that in this state we would in fact, never return to any of our old ways again.

Creation

Our tradition teaches that the minimum size of a mikvah is a contained body of water that contains 40 *seah* (approximately 150 U.S. liquid gallons) of water. This measurement is absolute and precise; any amount less than that is not satisfactory under any circumstances.

⁴ This notion is best expressed by Rebbe in the Gemara, Avodah Zara 17a: יֵשׁ קוֹנֵה עוֹלָמוֹ בְּשֵׁעָה אַחַת - one can acquire their world in one moment, when describing the transformation of Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya.

This specific number forty seems to have special significance, as it is found elsewhere in the Torah and our tradition: forty days of downpour during the flood of Noach, a fetus is formed after forty days of gestation and the forty days of purity after the birth of a baby boy. What is the meaning of the number forty, and how is it related to the mikvah?

To appreciate this aspect of mikvah, we must begin by examining the root of this word. On the third day of creation, Hashem charged that the waters beneath the heaven gather together to enable space for dry land. He refers to these waters as מִקְוֵה מַיִם - a gathering of water, which He named seas. Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (1934- 1983) in his classic work *Waters of Eden: the Mystery of the Mikvah*, observes that these gathered waters represent the womb of all life. Water is the essential life source of all existence and it was the first primordial substance which existed, as it says “and the spirit of Elokim was hovering over the water.” From these waters Hashem began His creation and from the gathered waters below the heavens He fashioned our world. When one immerses in a mikvah one is returning to those first days of creation, to the pristine reality that was before anything existed. When one emerges from the mikvah they are reborn, just as the world was born from water at the beginning of time. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch summarizes this concept in a lengthy discourse illuminating the concepts of purity and impurity at the close of his commentary to Parshat Shemini:

When a person immerses his entire body in such water, (viz. water that has not lost its' elemental character) and sinks completely, בְּלִי חֲצִיצָה, into this element, all connections between him and the realm of impurity is severed. He leaves the ground of man, and returns for a moment to the world of elements, in order to begin a new life of purity. Symbolically, he is reborn.

We can now understand the significance of the number forty and the contexts in which it is mentioned. Each instance mentioned above is connected with the concept of rebirth. The fetus and the resulting period of purity and impurity after its birth clearly reflect this notion. The forty days of rain during the flood represent a return to the original water and chaos of creation and a subsequent rebirth of the world during the lifetime of Noach.

This leads us to the mikvah of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the day of *teshuva*, which literally means return. The origins of Yom Kippur as a day of *teshuva* are found after the sin of the Golden Calf. This mistake caused a profound rift between us and Hashem and precipitated the shattering of the heavenly tablets. On the tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur, Moshe returned to the Jewish nation with a new set of tablets, signaling a return to our prior relationship with Hashem. This *teshuva* and its accompanying atonement was a forty day process, which began when Moshe ascended to Hashem on the first day of Elul and culminated when he returned on Yom Kippur. At the conclusion of this forty day period, we were a nation reborn, and each year we relive that renewal.

The *Tur* (*Orach Chaim* 606) records a custom of the Gaonim to immerse in a mikvah before Yom Kippur. With this practice we seek to recreate ourselves through the process of immersion in the mikvah of creation and rebirth, which parallels our process of rebirth through *teshuva*. It is our aspiration that we then fully immerse ourselves in the spirit of Yom Kippur itself and transform ourselves. In this way, we will emerge from the Yom Kippur experience with our souls and ourselves recreated for חַיִּים טוֹבִים - a new, full life in service of Hashem.

Why Do We Read the Story of Chana on Rosh Hashana?

Chana and the Essence of Effectual Prayer

Mrs. Mali Brofsky

Faculty, Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim • SCW '93, BRGS '94, WSSW '10

On the first day of Rosh Hashana, we read as the *haftara* the story of Chana (*Shmuel Aleph, perakim aleph and bet*) – Chana's struggle with childlessness, her reaching out to God in prayer, God's response in the birth of her son Shmuel, and her consequent prayer of thanksgiving. Clearly, Chazal recognize a fundamental connection between the account of Chana's experience and the themes of Rosh Hashana. This correlation is strengthened by the following Talmudic passages:

On Rosh Hashana, God remembered [for childbirth] Sarah, Rachel, and Chana

Rosh Hashana 11a

How many most important laws [regarding prayer] can be learned from these verses relating to Chana!

Berachot 31a

בראש השנה נפקדה שרה רחל וחנוה
ראש השנה יא.

כמה הלכתא גברותא איכא למשמע מהני
קראי דחנוה
ברכות לא.

Evidently, Chazal see Chana as an exemplary role model for efficacious prayer. What is unique about the prayer of Chana? When thinking about prayer, we often focus on God's role - praising God, asking things from God, thanking God. Chana teaches us to look at *tefilla* from another viewpoint as well. As we shall see, for Chana, the experience leading to effectual prayer was first and foremost an experience of introspection, a dialogue within herself, as a precursor to her dialogue with God. Chana teaches us that transformative *tefilla* begins with an intense internal experience which enables and empowers us, with God's response and help, to affect change in our lives.

Chana's Process of Change

Let us consider Chana and the dilemma in which she finds herself. As the *perek* opens, Chana is at a fixed point in her life. Every year, she accompanies her husband Elkana on his pilgrimage to

Shiloh, and as the years pass, Chana finds herself returning to the same place, to the same circumstances. Chana wants change – she wants a child. Presumably, Chana hopes each year that the following one will be different, and she experiences the bitterness of recognizing that the change she desires has not occurred.

And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she vexed her; therefore she wept, and would not eat.

Shmuel 1 1:7

וכן יעשה שנה בשנה מדי עלתה בבית ה'
כן תכעסנה ותבכה ולא תאכל:
שמואל א א:ז

Let us now reflect upon the central people in Chana's life, and their impact upon her: her husband Elkana, and his other wife, Penina.

And it came to pass upon a day, when Elkana sacrificed, that he gave to Penina his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions; But unto Chana he gave a double portion; for he loved Chana, but the Lord had shut up her womb. And her rival vexed her sore, to make her fret, because the Lord had shut up her womb.

Shmuel 1 1:4-6

ויהי היום ויזבח אלקנה ונתן לפננה
אשתו ולכל בניה ובנותיה מנות:
ולחנה יתן מנה אחת אפים כי את
חנה אהב וה' סגר רחמה: וכעסנה
צרתה גם כעס בעבור הרעמה כי
סגר ה' בעד רחמה:
שמואל א א:ד-ו

According to Chazal (cited on the *pasuk* by Rashi) Penina's intentions are motivated by piety – she wishes to induce Chana to pray (presumably translating the word *har'imah* to mean “to make a loud noise”, as in the *pasuk* "ירעם הים ומלואו" - Let the sea, and all its fullness, roar" (Divrei HaYamim I 16:32). On the *peshat* level, the tension between the two wives is palpable: Chana watches as Penina and her many offspring receive multiple portions of food from Elkana, reinforcing her own lone and forlorn status, and Penina watches as Chana receives the choice portion from Elkana, reinforcing Elkana's preference for Chana over Penina. According to the *peshat*, then, we can deduce that as result of the jealous tension between herself and Chana, Penina is attempting to make Chana feel angry, frustrated and hurt, and trying to induce Chana to cry out against God in anger or rebellion.

Elkana, out of love and caring for his wife, implores her to accept her situation. He says to her

And Elkana her husband said unto her: 'Chana, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons?'

Shmuel 1 1:8

ויאמר לה אלקנה אישה חנה למה תבכי
ולמה לא תאכלי ולמה ירע לבבך הלא
אנכי טוב לך מעשרה בנים:
שמואל א א:ח

Penina urges Chana to bitterness; Elkana urges her to make peace with her lot, and accept her fate as it is.

Elkana and Penina have very different motivations and goals in their communications to Chana, but ultimately, the message to Chana from them is the same. They are both implying to Chana that she is powerless to effect change.

Chana, however, listens to neither of them, and instead does something quite different and even daring. She does not become angry or embittered, but neither does she become passive and hopeless. Rather, she decides to take action. If God will not come to her, she decides, she will go to God. Chana, quietly and resolutely, telling no one of her plans, brings herself to the *mishkan* in Shiloh, and engages in a prayer so personal and private that we are not told of its content, and which Chazal consider the ground-breaking template for silent and personal prayer. Chana “*midaberet al liba*” (1:13), she speaks to and within her heart. Only after this introspective experience does she turn to God. Chana engages in an inner transformative experience, which culminates in her *neder* –her vow to dedicate her son to God, committing herself to a different life course, a new course of action and personal initiative. In other words, Chana uses *tefilla* as a medium of personal change.

Chana’s Vow

By committing her unborn child to a life of *nezirut* and service of God, Chana is proposing something quite radically different from what *Bnei Yisrael* in this era have experienced up to this point. It is a time of spiritual darkness for *Bnei Yisrael*. *Sefer Shoftim* has closed on a note of sinfulness, anarchy, and distance from God (consider the last stories – those of the idol of the house of Micha, the rape and murder of the *pilegish* in Giv’a, and the civil war between the tribes in which the entire tribe of Binyamin is almost entirely wiped out). It is instructive to consider the parallels between the story of the last *shofet*, Shimshon, and the story of Chana. Both Shimshon and Shmuel are *nezirim*, both attain this status pre-birth from the experience of their mothers. Why then, does Shimshon’s leadership, while ending in a blaze of glory, nevertheless produce no lasting results for the people, while Shmuel haNavi ushers in the era of the kings?

It is precisely in the uniqueness of Chana’s *neder* that we find the solution. Shimshon is a final opportunity provided by God, engineered primarily by Divine communication through an angel, to effect change and salvation in this time period characterized by passivity and despair. By contrast, Chana’s attempt at achieving salvation depends not on passivity or on reliance solely on deliverance from Above, but rather on initiative and action from below.

Thus, out of the depths of her crisis, Chana proposes a new resolution that she had not yet previously considered. She uses her difficult circumstance as a springboard for a new life course for herself and for her child. In doing so, Chana’s personal initiative becomes transformative not only in her own life, but for the entire nation as well. It is Shmuel HaNavi who is finally able to lead the nation out of the darkness and cyclical rut of *Sefer Shoftim* to an era of *teshuva* and change, and of ushering *Am Yisrael* into the era of kingship.

Chana’s message, in essence, is to call upon God as a partner in growth and change. She exhorts: I am not a victim in the hands of fate, but neither is the entire burden for my life’s outcome upon me alone. With God as my partner, I can shape my own future destiny. The outcome of this belief is the promise that she makes to God, and when she given a child, this dual perspective and partnership with God is reflected in the name she gives the child.

And it came to pass, when the time was come about, that Chana conceived, and bore a son; and she called his name Shmuel:

ויהי לתקפות הימים ותהר חנה
ותלד בן ותקרא את שמו שמואל כי

'because I have asked him of the Lord.'

Shmuel 1 1:20

Therefore I also have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he is lent to the Lord.' And he worshipped the Lord there.

Shmuel 1 1:28

מה' שאלתיו:

שמואל א א:כ

וגם אנכי השאלתהו לה' כל הימים אשר היה הוא שאול לה' וישתחו שם לה':

שמואל א א:כח

Ki meiHashem She'altiv -- God has given him to me – *vegam hu sha'ul LaShem* – and at the same time, I have given and consecrated him to God.

Shirat Chana

These themes continue to be reflected in *Shirat Chana*, Chana's song of thanksgiving after Shmuel is born. In *Shirat Chana*, Chana asserts that God is in control of all, but that with insight into man's innermost thoughts and heart, God can bring about the most unexpected and extreme changes⁵. Essentially, Chana is championing the philosophy expounded by Rav Soloveitchik many centuries later in *Kol Dodi Dofek*, when he reflects upon the question of man's role in shaping his destiny.

Rav Soloveitchik describes the unconstructive experience of the man of fate, who is powerless in the face of his suffering. He describes two responses, which correspond entirely with the approaches suggested by Penina and Elkana.

*The fear of extinction assails him and crushes his body and soul. The sufferer wanders lost in the vacuousness of this world, with God's fear spread over him and his anger tensed against it, he is entirely shaken and agitated.*⁶

From the question and the inquiry ... he comes to terms with the evil and attempts to gloss it over. The sufferer employs the power of rational abstraction to the point of self-deception.

Neither of these attitudes, states Rav Soloveitchik, is the desired response to suffering. Instead, Rav Soloveitchik insists upon a different approach, that of the man of destiny:

*According to Judaism, man's mission in this world is to turn fate into destiny – an existence that is passive and influenced into an existence that is active and influential ... full of vision, will, and initiative. ... Thus he becomes God's partner in the work of creation.*⁷

⁵ See for example verses 2 and 3

אין-קדוש כיהוה, כי אין בלתי; ואין צור, כאלהינו. אל-תרבו תדברו גבהה גבהה, יצא עתק מפיהם: כי אל דעות יהוה, ולא (ולו) נתקנו עלולות.

"There is none holy as the Lord, for there is none beside Thee; neither is there any rock like our God. Multiply not exceeding proud talk; let not arrogance come out of your mouth; for the Lord is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed."

In the *shira*, Chana brings multiple examples of radical changes that God can effect in human experience: moving from poverty to wealth and vice versa, from childlessness to childbirth and from parenthood to losing children, power and weakness, life and death, etc.

⁶ *Kol Dodi Dofek*, Soloveitchik, R. Joseph B. Translated by David Z. Gordon. Edited by Jeffrey Woolf, New York: Yeshiva University and Hoboken, NJ: Ktav 2006. P.3-6.

⁷ Ibid.

Man, writes Rav Soloveitchik, should neither view himself as a victim of a jesting and meaningless fate (as Penina implies), neither should he acquiesce in passive silence to what he perceives as God's will (as Elkana suggests), rather he should view himself as an active participant, together with God, in shaping his own life outcome.

Chana and Rosh Hashana

The link between *Shirat Chana* and Rosh Hashana is reinforced when we consider the central themes of the day as they are expressed in the *kedushat hayom* – the portion of the *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer of *musaf* that is unique to Rosh Hashana – *Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot*. Essentially, these themes are the themes of *Shirat Chana*: *Malchuyot* - God is King and is in control of the universe, *Zichronot* - God's ways are just, and God hears, retains memory of, and responds to human initiative and supplication, and finally, *Shofarot* - ultimately God's rule and justice will be revealed to all in the era of the final redemption. As the concluding *pasuk* of *Shirat Chana* states:

... The Lord will judge the ends of the earth; and He will give strength unto His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed.

Shmuel 1 2:10

... ה' ידין אפסי ארץ ויתן עז
למלכו ויירם קרן משיחו:
שמואל א ב:י

This, then, can be seen as the essence of *tefilla*, and this is the lesson we can learn from Chana. *Tefilla* is about reaching inward, confronting, facing, and discovering our innermost selves, and then turning toward God in the recognition that we need Him and His help to accomplish and achieve our goals.

In the words of Rav Soloveitchik in his essay *Redemption, Prayer and Talmud Torah*:

*In short, through prayer, man finds himself... It tells man the story of his hidden hopes and expectations. It teaches him how to behold the vision, and how to strive to realize this vision. In a word, man finds his need-awareness, himself, in prayer.*⁸

May we all experience the ability and opportunity to deepen our understanding of *tefilla*, to engage in sincere prayer, and, like Chana, to learn how to become partners with God in shaping and creating a meaningful personal destiny, this Rosh Hashana and always.

⁸ *Redemption, Prayer and Talmud Torah*; Tradition 17:2, Spring, 1978, p55-73.

Sachar V'Onessh?

Addressing Suffering as We Look to the New Year

Mrs. Norma Mintz

Faculty, Rae Kushner Yeshiva High School · AGS '05

The eleventh principle [of the 13 principles of faith] is that God rewards those who keep His commandments, and punishes those who transgress them.

Rambam, Mishna Sanhedrin chapter 10

והיסוד האחד עשר שהוא יתעלה משלם גמול
טוב למי שמקיים מצות התורה, ומעניש מי
שעובר על אזהרותיה, ושגמולו הגדול הוא
העולם הבא, ועונשו החמור הכרת
פירוש המשנה לרמב"ם סנהדרין פרק י

Each year as Rosh Hashanah approaches, we must reflect upon the previous year and consider each of our spiritual levels, striving to attain righteousness so that we may be granted sweet new years. And yet, as adults we understand that things are not nearly so black and white. While as children we can understand Rosh Hashanah by envisioning scales that concretely weigh our *mitzvot* and *aveirot*, as we encounter complex situations in the world we begin to see that things are not quite so simple. Those scales seem to have no recognition of the realities of this world in which events do not necessarily correlate with individuals' acts of good and evil.

As such, we continuously struggle to make sense of notions of righteousness and sin, reward and punishment. Theodicy stands as perhaps the most difficult theological question, but it is difficult to consider the notion of God's punishing us at all. As believing Jews, we stand before God on Rosh Hashanah in attempts to do teshuvah, at least partially so that we may avoid suffering. But to what extent can we understand how and why suffering occurs?

A study of instances of punishment and suffering in Tanach allows us to gain a sense of how certain voices have addressed this question over time. In particular, the stories of our kings, culminating in the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash, give us varied perspectives on how to understand suffering, as more than one book of Tanach focuses on that critical period in our history.

Most obviously, *Sefer Melachim* discusses this time period. Chazal tell us that Yirmiyahu wrote *Sefer Melachim* after witnessing the destruction of his country and people. He was a man who lived a life of great sadness and isolation, knowing what was to come but doing everything possible to prevent it. In fact, according to Chazal, Yirmiyahu wrote three books in Tanach, and

while there is overlap among them, each has a distinct function and purpose: *Sefer Eichah* is a poem of lamentation, in which Yirmiyahu bemoans the fate Bnei Yisrael were forced to endure as a result of their abandonment of God and His ways. *Sefer Yirmiyahu* tells us Yirmiyahu's personal story, in which we encounter his attempts to save *Malchut Yehudah* as well as his hardships. *Sefer Melachim* is an account of the history of Bnei Yisrael that led to the destruction of the Mikdash, and Yirmiyahu tells it with a constant underlying question: What went wrong?

Consistently, Yirmiyahu feels that there is one primary answer to this question: Idolatry. In Yirmiyahu's own time, Hashem made clear to Yirmiyahu that *avodah zarah* was causing the collapse of the nation. We find in *Sefer Melachim* and even more so in the various prophecies by Yirmiyahu in *Sefer Yirmiyahu* that the navi beseeches his people to stop committing idolatry in order to overturn God's prescribed punishment.

And yet, in Yirmiyahu's account of history, reward and punishment do not always correspond to individuals' acts as expected. Yirmiyahu knows that God gave him the formula for reversing God's anger and setting things right, but his histories include kings who flagrantly disobey God but who avoid punishment. For instance, in *Melachim* I, 17: 23-28, the text describes Omri, a king of *Malchut Yisrael*. Omri was one of the most powerful and successful kings of *Malchut Yisrael*, establishing the area of Shomron as the capital of his kingdom and building considerably in his time. However, in Yirmiyahu's worldview, this makes no sense. Omri was not only "evil in the sight of the Lord," but he even "dealt wickedly above all that were before him" (v. 25). Omri was the worst that there had even been, and yet, God allowed him to flourish politically and even enabled him to begin a new dynasty, something that *Malchut Yisrael* had not seen consistently in some time.

By contrast, Yirmiyahu later introduces the reader to Hoshea, the final king of Yisrael. In Hoshea's time, Ashur invades Yisrael and exiles the ten tribes from the land. This calamity scatters the people of Yisrael and effects the phenomenon we call "the ten lost tribes." According to Yirmiyahu's "training," we should expect to find that Hoshea is a terrible idolater who flagrantly violates God's will, as the final straw who breaks the camel's back; however, Yirmiyahu describes the situation otherwise. In this instance, Yirmiyahu once again compares a king to his predecessors, and once again this comparison highlights a troubling issue. In *Melachim* II, *perek* 17 *passuk* 2, we do find that Hoshea was an evil king, "yet not as the kings of Israel that were before him." After years of evil and sin, the exile occurred during the reign of a man who was not quite as bad as those who ruled before. One may argue that Bnei Yisrael were so mired in sin that God had decided prior to Hoshea's rule that the time had come to bring the punishment, but this explanation does not resolve the issue that those of Hoshea's generation must have felt, and that Yirmiyahu must have felt when looking at the facts: Things fell apart when the king was not even as bad as those that came before.

There are many more examples of these sorts of injustices in *Sefer Melachim*. One of the most striking is that of Menashe. Menashe was king of Yehudah and the son of the great Chizkiyahu. Menashe likely could have turned the tide for *Malchut Yehudah* and saved the Beit Hamikdash had he followed in his father's footsteps, but instead, he fervently embraced idolatry and evil. As a result of his evil, God decrees that he will wipe out *Malchut Yehudah*:

Therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I bring such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle. And I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. And I will cast off the remnant of Mine inheritance, and deliver them into the hand of their enemies; and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies; because they have done that which is evil in My sight, and have provoked Me, since the day their fathers came forth out of Egypt, even unto this day.'

Melachim II 21:12-15

לכן כה אמר ה' אלהי ישראל הנני מביא רעה על ירושלם ויהודה אשר כל [שמעיו] שמעה תצלנה שתי אזניו: ונטיתי על ירושלם את קו שמרון ואת משקלת בית אחאב ומחיתי את ירושלם כאשר ימחה את הצלחת מחה והפך על פניה: ונטשתי את שארית נחלתי ונתתים ביד איביהם והיו לבז ולמשסה לכל איביהם: יען אשר עשו את הרע בעיני ויהיו מכעסים אתי מן היום אשר יצאו אבותם ממצרים ועד היום הזה:
מלכים ב כא: יב-טו

In this account, Hashem declares that as a result of the atrocities that Menashe and his generation performed, *Malchut Yehudah* will one day be destroyed. While there is no denying that Menashe's actions deserved punishment, there is one glaring philosophical question that arises from this story: Why is Menashe left unpunished? Menashe abandoned the teachings of his righteous father, Chizkiyahu, and he violated God's precepts in an extraordinary fashion, yet he ruled for 55 years, the longest reign of any king of Yehudah, enjoying power and prosperity.

In this example and others, *Sefer Melachim* paints a picture of suffering that is at times justifiable and necessary, as a punishment for our abandonment of God and His principles, but one that is at times confusing and seemingly unjust. This tension exists throughout the *sefer*, and it seems that it exists because of the book's historical context. We must remember that *Sefer Melachim* was written by Yirmiyahu, the *navi* who lived and prophesied in the final years of the first Beit Hamikdash. He witnessed firsthand the suffering that his people were forced to endure, and this experience no doubt shaped him.⁹ This personal connection and this proximity to the event inevitably affect Yirmiyahu's perspective.

This perspective becomes even more prominent when it is compared to another *sefer* from Tanach that accounts for all of that same historical period: *Sefer Divrei Hayamim*. While *Divrei Hayamim* covers a much larger period of time than *Sefer Melachim*, the vast majority of the *sefer* discusses the same time period that is presented in *Melachim*; however, many discrepancies arise in their respective presentations.

⁹ It is no wonder, then, that the entire *sefer* is framed by the history of the Beit Hamikdash. *Sefer Melachim* opens with the story of the David Hamelech's final days, but the story really serves to set up David's successor: Shlomo, the ultimate builder of the Beit Hamikdash. The *sefer* then describes Shlomo's planning, building, and dedicating the Beit Hamikdash. After Shlomo's death, the *sefer* explains how and why the kingship split into two separate entities: the kingdom of Yehudah, under the rule of David and Shlomo's descendants, and the kingdom of Yisrael, under the rule of varied individuals who mostly did not follow any familial descent. The *sefer* then recounts hundreds of years of history leading up to the Assyrian exile of *Malchut Yisrael*, and later the Babylonian exile of *Malchut Yehudah*, coupled with the destruction of the Mikdash.

Sefer Divrei Hayamim focuses specifically on the kings of Yehudah,¹⁰ so Omri and Hoshea do not figure prominently, but the example of Menashe serves to show how very different the presentations are. In *Divrei Hayamim*, the text describes Menashe's evil deeds as it did in *Melachim*, but it also gives a reason as to why Menashe was not deserving of the horrific punishments that future generations ultimately receive:

And when [Menashe] was in distress, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. And he prayed unto Him; and He was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Menashe knew that the LORD He was God. Now after this he built an outer wall to the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entrance at the fish gate; and he compassed about Ophel, and raised it up a very great height; and he put captains of the army in all the fortified cities of Judah. And he took away the strange gods, and the idol out of the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built in the mount of the house of the LORD, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city. And he built up the altar of the LORD, and offered thereon sacrifices of peace-offerings and of thanksgiving, and commanded Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel. Nevertheless the people did sacrifice still in the high places, but only unto the LORD their God.

Divrei Hayamim II 33:12-15

וכהצר לו חלה את פני ה' אלהיו
ויכנע מאד מלפני אלהי אבתיו:
ויתפלל אליו ויעתר לו וישמע תחנונו
וישיבהו ירושלם למלכותו וידע
מנשה כי ה' הוא האלהים: ואחרי כן
בנה חומה חיצונה לעיר דויד מערבה
לגיוחון בנחל ולבוא בשער הדגים
וסבב לעפל ויגביהה מאד וישם שרי
חיל בכל הערים הבצורות ביהודה:
ויסר את אלהי הנכר ואת הסמל
מבית ה' וכל המזבחות אשר בנה
בהר בית ה' ובירושלם וישלך חוצה
לעיר: [ויכן] ויבן את מזבח ה' ויזבח
עליו זבחי שלמים ותודה ויאמר
ליהודה לעבוד את ה' אלהי ישראל:
אבל עוד העם זבחים בבמות רק לה'
אלהיהם:

דברי הימים ב לג:יב-יז

In *Divrei Hayamim*, we learn that Menashe underwent a dramatic process of *teshuvah*, which helps us to reconcile his great success with his earlier terrible behavior. The inclusion of this story is representative of the tendency of *Divrei Hayamim* to present history as correlating directly with people's behaviors. *Divrei Hayamim's* guiding principle is that of *Torat Hagmul*, the idea that God rewards righteousness and punishes evil. As such, the very same historical stories that seemed unjust in *Sefer Melachim* are presented in *Divrei Hayamim* so that they make sense according to this philosophical principle.

Having said that, it is very difficult to understand how such a significant detail could have been omitted from *Melachim*. If Menashe truly turned his life around and did *teshuvah*, then why did Yirmiyahu not write that information in his account?

Ultimately, we can only speculate as to the answer, but it seems likely that its omission is once again related to the book's historical context. It is difficult to appraise history when one is so close to it. People have very emotional responses to the disasters that they feel very acutely. It is quite possible that Yirmiyahu was not able to view Menashe, an extreme evildoer who caused the

¹⁰ This is a product of the *sefer's* historical perspective, as is the *sefer's* very different perspective on suffering, though it is beyond the scope of this article. In brief, this focus is due to the fact that Ezra, the author of *Divrei Hayamim*, was primarily trying to convince the remnants of Yehudah and Binyamin (*Malchut Yehudah*) to return to Yerushalayim to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash.

deaths of many, as having truly done *teshuvah*. As such, when presenting the kingship of Menashe, he presented the information that he truly believed was representative of Menashe's reign and the part that he played in the destruction of the Mikdash.

This is representative of the tension that exists between trying to understand human suffering while recognizing our limits in understanding, particularly when we find ourselves in historical proximity to the event. For example, even if we ourselves are not survivors of the Holocaust, the terrors of the Holocaust are still an open wound. Perhaps for that reason, when Harav Ovadia Yosef in 2000 stated that the victims of the Holocaust were in fact reincarnations of people who had sinned in previous lives, he faced a tremendous backlash. The pain of the Holocaust is too near and too great to tie it neatly together with a bow. The idea of characterizing the victims of the Holocaust as being in any way deserving of what they experienced was too difficult to consider. Similarly, if one tries to give a pat reason as to why September Eleventh occurred or why any of our loved ones may suffer, it is extremely difficult to accept. A person's readiness for reasons and explanations is limited when one is so close to the painful situation.

By contrast, *Divrei Hayamim* was written in a very different time period than the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash. Chazal explain that Ezra wrote *Sefer Divrei Hayamim* during the period of *Shivat Tzion*. During *Shivat Tzion*, the king of the Persian Empire, Koresh, gave Bnei Yisrael permission to rebuild the Beit Hamikdash. Ezra was one of the leaders of the time and it is clear that he saw this as an opportunity to correct his nation's history. Unfortunately, Ezra found that much of his nation was not interested in uprooting itself in order to rebuild Yerushalayim and the Beit Hamikdash. As such, Ezra's *Divrei Hayamim* is a consideration of the history leading up to Koresh's proclamation, in an attempt to convince Bnei Yisrael of the importance of taking hold of the moment and returning to Israel.

Perhaps for this reason, *Divrei Hayamim* is so focused on *Torat Hagmul*. While Yirmiyahu is too close to the situation to gain a real perspective on the big picture, Ezra is able to look at the broader perspective. The wound is no longer raw and he is thus able to take a larger view of history and use it as an impetus for change. He emphasizes the benefits of clinging to God and the perils of abandoning Him. He uses his nation's history as a learning tool so that it will shape Am Yisrael and motivate the nation to choose wisely.¹¹

¹¹ There are many more examples for how each of the two books follows these patterns. In one striking example in *Melachim II, perek 23*, the text describes Yoshiyahu's dramatic acts of *teshuvah* and his reinstatement of the *brit* with Hashem. Toward the end of the description, the text states:

כה וְכִמְהוּ לֹא-הָיָה לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ, אֲשֶׁר-שָׁב אֶל-יְהוָה בְּכָל-לִבּוֹ וּבְכָל-נַפְשׁוֹ וּבְכָל-מְאֹדוֹ--כָּלל, תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה; וְאַחֲרָיו, לֹא-קָם כָּמֹהוּ. **כו** אֲךָ לֹא-שָׁב יְהוָה, מִחֲרוֹן אָפוֹ תַּגְדֹּל, אֲשֶׁר-תָּרָה אָפוֹ, בִּיהוּדָה--עַל, כָּל-הַכְּעָסִים, אֲשֶׁר הִכְעִיסוּ, מִנְּשָׂאָה.

25 And there was no king before him who was like him, that turned to the LORD with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him. **26**

However the LORD turned not from the fierceness of His great wrath, wherewith His anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations wherewith Menashe had provoked Him.

Once again, Yirmiyahu's text emphasizes the unfairness of the world, that Yoshiyahu's great and extraordinary acts were not enough to overturn the fate that was pronounced in Menashe's time. *Melachim* then continues to describe Yoshiyahu's death at the hands of Par'oh-nechoh, an unfortunate end for such a great and righteous king.

In this manner, we find a second approach to understanding suffering. With distance, one is able to reflect on the past and use it to move forward. In one famous example, we are taught that the cause of the destruction of the second Beit Hamikdash was *sin'at chinam*, baseless hatred. Today we learn this and we consider it as a means of correcting our behavior so that we will not repeat the same mistakes. Among those who took this lesson to heart was Menachem Begin, former Prime Minister of Israel. When asked at the end of his life what his greatest accomplishments was, Begin stated that it was avoiding civil war in Israel twice. In the years leading up to the establishment of the State of Israel, Begin headed the Irgun, a group that believed in actively fighting the British Mandate in Palastine. The majority of Jews in Israel at that time however sided with the Haganah, which, under the leadership of David Ben Gurion, believed in defending the Yishuv against attack but generally opposed military offensives against the British. A number of times armed confrontations arose between these two groups that could have led to civil war amongst the Jewish people, and each time Begin made sure that would not happen. He even commanded his fighters to go quietly when Hagana members came to arrest them and turn them over to the British. In Yehuda Avner's *Prime Ministers*, he quotes Begin as explaining his reasoning:

Twenty centuries ago we faced the bitter experience of the destruction of the Second Temple, the destruction of our capital Jerusalem. And why? Because of our senseless hatred of each other, a hatred that led to civil war and to our utter ruin: bechiya ladorot—generations of tears. And, therefore, I long ago took a solemn oath that no matter the provocation, no matter the circumstances, I would never be a party to civil war, NEVER! (80)

Begin understood that our history serves us best when it teaches us to correct our behaviors so that we may better do God's will.

Today, as we approach Rosh Hashanah and as we feel the gravity of God's judgment to come, we must take the messages of both *Melachim* and *Divrei Hayamim* to heart. First, we must recognize that we may not be able to see God's plan and things may seem unjust. As is clear from *Melachim*, we are entitled to our pain and it is not realistic for us to expect ourselves to accept all of God's decrees without question or protest. And yet, ideally, we should hope to be able to use the message of *Divrei Hayamim* as well, so that we may be able to learn lessons from pain and use experiences to help us to grow and learn from our mistakes as we move on.

Accordingly, *Divrei Hayamim* presents this story with a somewhat different emphasis. While it also acknowledges that the Korban Pesach of Yoshiyahu was unlike that of any other, it does not juxtapose this concept with God's continued decree to destroy the nation, and it even provides an explanation for why Yoshiyahu dies as he did. (*Divrei Hayamim* II 35: 21-22)

כא וַיִּשְׁלַח אֵלָיו מַלְאָכִים לֵאמֹר מֵה-לִּי וְלִךָ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה, לֹא-עָלִיךָ אֶתָּה הַיּוֹם כִּי אֶל-בֵּית מִלְחָמָתִי, וְאֱלֹהִים, אֲמַר לְבַהֲלָנִי: חִדְל-לָךְ מִלְּאֲלֵהִים אֲשֶׁר-עָמְי, וְאֶל-יִשְׁחִיתָךְ. **כב** וְלֹא-הִסָּב יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ פָנָיו מִמֶּנּוּ, כִּי לְהִלָּחֵם-בּוֹ הִתְחַפֵּשׂ, וְלֹא שָׁמַע אֶל-דְּבָרֵי נָכוֹ, מִפִּי אֱלֹהִים; וַיָּבֹא, לְהִלָּחֵם בְּבִקְעַת מְגִדּוֹ.

21 But [Par'oh Nechoh] sent ambassadors to him, saying: 'What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war; and God hath given command to speed me; forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that He destroy thee not.' **22** Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and hearkened not unto the words of Neco, from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo.

According to this account, Yoshiyahu's attack of Par'oh Nechoh was actually an act of disobedience against God, and for that reason he was killed as result.

Even Ephraim

Rabbi Zvi Romm

Faculty, Isaac Breuer College, Yeshiva University
Rabbi, The Bialystoker Synagogue, New York, NY

The Haftara for the second day of Rosh HaShana (Jeremiah 31:2-20) movingly describes the redemption of the Jewish people. “I will build you again, and you will be built, virgin of Israel! ... I will bring them from the north country and gather them in from the ends of the earth.” In immortal words, the Prophet Jeremiah speaks of Rachel weeping for the Jewish exiles. “So says G-d,” Jeremiah intones. “Refrain from crying ... Your children will return to their borders.” The Haftara concludes with a verse which plays a prominent role in the Musaf service of Rosh HaShana. “Is not Ephraim a dear son to Me? Is he not a delightful child? The more I speak of him, the more I remember him. I therefore yearn for him; I will show him my mercy, says G-d.”

It is a hauntingly beautiful Haftara. Yet, the passage’s relevance to Rosh HaShana is not readily obvious. National redemption – the major theme of the Haftara – is not an explicit theme of Rosh HaShana. Why was this Haftara chosen by the Sages for recital on Rosh HaShana?

Rashi (Megilla 31a) indicates that the choice of this Haftara for Rosh HaShana stems from the Haftara’s conclusion. The mention of G-d’s merciful remembrance of Ephraim parallels the Musaf prayers of *Zichronos*, which focus on G-d’s benevolent memory. It is difficult, however, to imagine that the sole connection between this beautiful Haftara and Rosh HaShana is an isolated verse!

I believe that a closer analysis of the Haftara yields a message which we all desperately need to hear on Rosh HaShana.

Reading the passage from Jeremiah which serves as the Haftara, one is struck by the numerous references to Ephraim and the Shomron:¹²

“You will once again plant vineyards on the mountains of the Shomron.” (v.5)

“There will be a day when the watchmen on Mount Ephraim call out, ‘Come, let us rise up to Zion, to our G-d.’” (v.6)

“... Ephraim is My firstborn.” (v.9)

“I have heard Ephraim agitating: ‘You have chastised me ... Allow me to repent!’” (v.18)

“Is not Ephraim a dear son to Me? Is he not a delightful child? The more I speak of him, the more I remember him. I therefore yearn for him; I will show him my mercy, says G-d.” (v.20)

The identity of Ephraim in these passages is unclear. Some (e.g. Mahari Kara) see “Ephraim” as a poetic term for the Jewish nation as a whole. Although this understanding fits the context of

¹² In writing this essay, particularly the section which follows, I benefitted greatly from reading “*Havein yakir li Ephraim*,” pp. 558-561 in *Iyunei Haftara* (vol. II) by *mori v’rabi* Rabbi Avraham Rivlin *shlit”a*, *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh.

Jeremiah's prophecy, it is problematic when viewed against the broader canvas of the Tanach. Throughout Tanach, "Ephraim" refers to the Northern Kingdom of Israel, which was created after the death of King Solomon and destroyed by the Assyrians in the Jewish year 3205.¹³ It would be atypical for the term to be applied to the Jewish people as a whole.

Another possibility is to see the Haftara as referring to the Northern Kingdom specifically. According to this reading, Jeremiah is predicting the restoration of the lost Ten Tribes of the north. But this is also a difficult reading. A prophecy predicting the return of the Ten Tribes would not have likely resonated with Jeremiah's audience, the Jews of the remaining Southern Kingdom of Judah.¹⁴ Jeremiah began his prophetic career during the reign of King Josiah, who ascended the throne in the Jewish year 3285 – eighty years after the Assyrian exile. In all likelihood, Jeremiah's prophecy was uttered to a group of Jews in the South at least one hundred years after the Assyrian exile; why would they be interested in a prophecy concerning the Northern Kingdom's restoration?¹⁵

An interpretation of Abarbanel can help us navigate between these two difficult readings. As mentioned above, one of the most famous passages in the Haftara describes how "a voice is heard on High Rachel is crying for her children, refusing to be comforted over her children because he is no more." Abarbanel points out the grammatical difficulty in the verse: Rachel refuses to be comforted over her **children** (plural) because **he** (singular) is no more! Abarbanel explains:

*Rachel had two sons: Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, were part of the [Northern] Kingdom of Israel and were exiled with the Ten Tribes. They never returned, and nothing is known of their fate ... But Benjamin was part of the [Southern] Kingdom of Judah, and was exiled to Babylonia, returned ... and was exiled again. Thus, Rachel cries over **both** her sons, who both experienced exile, but her full anguish ... is [expressed] over Joseph, who did not return ... **He** is no more.*

In his interpretation of this passage, Abarbanel shows us how the Haftara is holding out a promise of hope for both parts of the exiled Jewish people. Rachel is troubled by the exile of all the Jews. She is comforted by G-d that the members of the Southern Kingdom will return in the

¹³ See, for example, the Book of Hoshea from chapter 5 and on, as well as Ezekiel 37:19-28, and Isaiah 7:1-17.

¹⁴ Rabbi Binyamin Lau in his *Yirmiyahu: Goral shel Chozeh* (pp. 47-52) argues that Jeremiah's audience in this prophecy was exclusively those Jews in the North who remained after the Assyrian exile. If we assume, as many commentators do, that chapters 30 and 31 in Jeremiah form one unit of prophecies of consolation, Rabbi Lau's view seems difficult to maintain. Those chapters contain many references to the restoration of the people of "Israel and Judah," concluding with a description of a rebuilt Jerusalem (31:37-39). The audience of these prophecies is certainly (at least in part) the residents of Judah, whom Jeremiah had already warned about the destruction of Jerusalem.

¹⁵ The Talmud (Megillah 14b) records a tradition that Jeremiah "went to bring back the Ten Tribes" in 3303, during the reign of King Josiah, and thereafter they were ruled over by the Kings of Judah until the Babylonian Exile. Even according to this tradition, however, it would seem that the Northerners lost any sense of being a distinct national unit, such that it is still possible for Jeremiah to speak of a restoration of "Ephraim" which has yet to take place. See Rashi to Ezra 2:64 who writes, based on Seder Olam, that remnants of the Ten Tribes comprised close to a quarter of the Jews who returned to Israel after the proclamation of Cyrus. As individuals they were not "lost," but they had lost any sense of a national identity.

near future, but even the members of the Northern Kingdom, who seem to be lost forever, will come back one day as well.

Thus, the Haftara is addressed to the residents of the Southern Kingdom, who are still in Israel at the time of the prophecy. The comfort delivered by Jeremiah is that not only will they ultimately return from Exile, but **even** Ephraim -- whose very name, a century after the Assyrian Exile, has become synonymous with being lost forever -- will one day return as well. The references to "Ephraim" and "the Shomron" in the Haftara indeed refer to the Northern Kingdom, but the message of hope, that even those seemingly lost forever will one day return, is meant to inspire their brothers in the South.

What is true of the Jewish people's national redemption -- that it will include even those who have wandered beyond the point of no return -- is just as true of every Jew's personal redemption: the process of repentance. Herein lies the link between our Haftara and Rosh HaShana: Any Jew can be an "Ephraim."

In the realm of personal redemption, "Ephraim" is that Jew who is so far lost, so thoroughly exiled, that he or she despairs of redemption. The message of the Haftara is that even an Ephraim can and will be brought back from exile. Even a Jew who has strayed very far afield can preserve the hope of true *Teshuva*.

Indeed, this is what Rashi means when he points to the divine remembrance of Ephraim as being the reason for this passage's choice as the Haftara of Rosh HaShana. The entire Haftara builds up to this verse, poignantly describing how Ephraim is seemingly abandoned, and then dramatically informing us that G-d loves and remembers even Epharim.

"Is not Ephraim a dear son to Me?" Let us never give up on an Ephraim!

Telling Stories at Rosh Hashana: The Orality of Jewish Tradition

Professor Peninnah Schram

Professor of Speech and Drama, Stern College for Women

Throughout Tanakh, there are indicators of the great importance placed on the senses in the Jewish tradition. The sacred texts refer to various textures, colors, fragrances, sounds and foods, appealing to each of the senses - and beyond. An example of the beyond we find in Shmot 20:15: After receiving the Ten Commandments, the Israelites 'see' or 'witness' thunder, forging the senses of seeing and hearing together for this powerful awe-inspiring experience.

All the Jewish holy days, too, involve the senses with the various rituals and ritual objects used to heighten the beauty of each yom tov. Just to give a few examples, there's the smell of the fragrant etrog and myrtle at Sukkot; the taste of wine at Pesach; the sight of the lighted Havdalah candle as Shabbat is ending; the taste of matza at Pesach; and the vocal sound of L'Chaim when a blessing over wine is recited. With all of the emphasis on the senses in our sacred texts and on our sacred days, perhaps we can call Jews the People of the Senses (in addition to being the People of the Census).

From the beginning, sound has been a significant sense emphasized both through specific sounds, such as the golden bells on the hem of the High Priest's robe (Shmot 28:34) and the orality exhibited in the dialogic exchanges in Torah and the dialogue of the rabbis in the Talmud.

Biblically, the world was created with the spoken word ("Blessed is He Who Spoke, and the world came into being – blessed is He. Blessed is He Who maintains creation; blessed is He Who speaks and does..."). At the time of the giving of the Written Law (*Torah shebikh'tav*), God also gave to Moshe the Oral Law (*Torah sheb'al peh*). During the centuries when the Talmud remained as the Unwritten Torah, teachers/scholars, called *Tannaim* (Aramaic for "repeater"), transmitted these teachings orally. Often referred to as "living books," these *Tannaim*, who lived in the first two centuries C.E., during the Talmudic period, served as an important link between the periods of the oral and the written texts. Written texts of the Oral law had been interdicted up to that time (Elman, 1994, p. 302). The Talmud was finally codified in 2nd-3rd C.E. From then to the present, the Jewish people have had a dynamic compenetration between text and the oral tradition. There is even a 'warning' in *Eruvin* 54a that one

should study with a loud [sounded] voice in order to retain the learning. Throughout the Torah, orality and the spoken word are reinforced by the repetition of the aural verbs ‘speak,’ ‘listen,’ ‘hear,’ and so on. In addition to the orality of the structure of these texts, there are clues throughout the Torah text that oral speech, especially dialogue, along with hearing/listening, are emphasized and valued.

Several selected examples from the Torah (English translations are adapted from Everett Fox’s *The Five Books of Moses*) highlight orality, with the dual emphasis on speaking and listening:

[Moshe] took the account of the covenant and read it in the ears of the people. They said: All that the Lord has spoken, we will do and we will hearken!

Shmot 24:7

וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם
וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' נַעֲשֶׂה
וְנִשְׁמָע:
שמות פרשת משפטים כד:

While hearken (*v'nishma*) may mean “obey,” it also can mean “listen!” since the root is the same as *Shma* (hear or listen). Similarly, in Sefer Devarim, God speaks to Moshe and tells him:

if you hearken (tishma) to the voice of the Lord your God... It is not in the heavens, (for you) to say: Who will go up for us to the heavens and get it for us and have us hear it, that we may observe it? And it is not across the sea, (for you) to say: Who will cross for us, across the sea, and get it for us and have us hear it, that we may observe it? Rather, near to you is the word, exceedingly, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it

Devarim 30:10, 12-14

כִּי תִשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמּוֹר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו
הַפְּתוּכָה בְּסֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה כִּי תָשׁוּב אֶל ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ
כָּל לְבָבְךָ וְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ: ... לֹא בַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא
לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲלֶה לָּנוּ הַשְּׁמַיְמָה וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָּנוּ וַיִּשְׁמַעֲנוּ
אֹתָהּ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה: וְלֹא מֵעֵבֶר לַיָּם הוּא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲבֹר
לָנוּ אֶל יָם סוּף וַיִּקְחֶהָ לָּנוּ וַיִּשְׁמַעֲנוּ אֹתָהּ
וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה: כִּי קְרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדִּבָּר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ
לַעֲשׂוֹת:

דברים פרשת נצבים ל:י-יד

So Moshe spoke in the ears of the entire assembly of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended: Give ear, O heavens, that I may speak, hear (v'tishma), O earth, the utterance of my mouth. Let my teaching drip like rain, let my words flow like dew, like droplets on new-growth, like showers on grass.

Devarim 31:30; 32:1-2

וַיְדַבֵּר מֹשֶׁה בְּאָזְנֵי כָּל קְהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵת
דִּבְרֵי הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת עַד תִּמָּם: הָאָזִינוּ
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאִדְבְּרָה וְתִשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ אִמְרֵי כִּי:
יַעֲרֹף כַּמָּטָר לִקְחִי תִזְל כַּטֹּל אִמְרֵתִי
כַּשִּׁיעָרִים עָלֶי דָּשָׁא וְכַרְבִּיבִים עָלֶי עֵשֶׂב:
דברים פרשת וילך פרק לא

Focusing on Rosh Hashana, the sense of sound, specifically that of the shofar, is central to this High Holiday. That distinctive all-encompassing sound enters the heart and resounds deeply in the *nesheama*. As it says in Bamidbar 29:1, “... You shall observe it as a day when the horn is sounded.” In the *Unetaneh Tokef*, it is written, “The blast of the shofar calls out, and a small, quiet voice is heard.” Each of those calls brings forth from the shofar-blower almost-human sets of weeping and longing. It becomes a call to review our lives, remember those who brought us life and also those who had great influences on us, to reexamine our values and actions, to reflect on our assumptions, to renew our energies for mitzvot, and repent so that we may do *teshuvah* – to return to G-d as a more worthy person.

As we move through the Days of Awe it is a time to use our voices to better ourselves and renew our lives – above all, to use our spoken words. Walter Ong (1982) writes, “The spoken word is always an event, a movement in time, completely lacking in the thing-like repose of the written or printed word” (p. 33). He observes: “Sight isolates, sound incorporates...” (p. 72). There is no substitute for the dramatic

sound of the shofar and the sound of the human voice chanting prayers and also telling stories. It is the sound of the human voice that transmits learning and memory. It is through the voice, a person's exquisite musical instrument, that the words create technicolor worlds that remain long-lasting memories.

Stored memories are the key to life-review stories. We all have plenty of story-producing memories, once we retrieve them, activate them, and then keep them active by telling our stories. The legacies we inherited from our parents may come through only as we review their actions, way of life, and the stories told in the family.

In *A Celebration of American Family Folklore* (Pantheon Books, 1982), Wayne Dionne expresses the wish many of us have about listening and remembering the exchanged stories at family gatherings: "I remember my relatives talking and talking and talking, and yet as a kid, I didn't listen. I'd love to go back now and listen" (p. vii). Rosh Hashana, a time to sit around a table with people and talk, restores this focus on the oral tradition to tell and listen to our family stories. Storytelling is always a dynamic interactive experience, whether in the synagogue, in the classroom and in the home.

Along with the study of sacred texts, storytelling in the oral tradition can be a powerful tool in transmitting the faith, history, values and traditions of the Jewish People. While the written word is greatly revered and provides a rigid framework for the religion, the spoken word remains a key focus in Judaism and has always been treated with respect, as Mishlei 25:11 illustrates: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." "Apples of gold" may be the content of the word, its weight and value after generations of gathered wisdom, while "settings of silver" may be the verbal form and frame – much of which, in Judaism, has already been established for millennia.

The Jewish People has a rich oral tradition of personal and family stories, as well as sacred stories and traditional folktales. We need to retell all of these stories, to review the values our people lived by and to restore our balance in life so we can fulfill our potential and grow fully into our names. What better time to do this than at Rosh Hashana.

The first story we must start with, then, is that of our name and retrieve the story of who we were named after and why that name. Our name is the longest and shortest story we can tell. It reveals so much of who we become and what characteristics we grow to own. In three sources, *Kohelet Rabba* 7:3, *Tanhuma Vayakhel* 1, and in *Midrash Shmuel* 23, it says in essence that each of us has three names: the name given to us, the name others give us, and the name we give or make for ourselves. Our names are a blessing.

Rosh Hashana is closely connected to me because my name is found in the First Book of Samuel (I Samuel 1:1-2:10), the Haftorah read on the first day of Rosh Hashana. In this narrative, Elkanah has two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. This is the archetypal trio that mirrors the reading of Abraham with Sarah and Hagar that we read on the first of the two days (Bereshit 21:1-34). In the biblical story, Peninnah is the fertile wife who is not as loved as the barren wife Hannah. Peninnah is the vilified wife because she taunted Hannah for her barrenness and "vexed her sore" (I Shmuel 1:6). You might then say Peninnah was unkind, insensitive, and unjust to her "rival".

However, I have turned this dilemma over and over throughout the years trying to understand why my parents gave me the name Peninnah, even though it was my father's mother's name Perel. Why would they give me a name that I would not want to own or live up to – to be like Peninnah? I knew Peninnah

meant “pearl”. Suddenly, one day I realized that a pearl is created through an irritant, a grain of sand, serving as the catalyst to initiate the process of creating the pearl. Only then are the luminous layers added on one-by-one to form this precious jewel. If Peninnah, the irritant, had not taunted Hannah, Hannah would not have found her strength to pray even harder to God for a child with such *kavannah*, mouthing a prayer without sounded words and deep tears. Remember the priest thought Hannah a drunken woman. (It is said that Hannah’s weeping is reflected in the broken blasts of the shofar.) Because only then does God hear Hannah’s prayer and open her womb and she gives birth to Samuel. She becomes fruitful as a result of the creative catalytic force of Peninnah. That is a splendid legacy for me to continue so as to inspire and instill Jewish values and traditions through my stories. I have become Peninnah.

More recently I discovered the concept of a person’s *pasuk*, a verse in Tanakh that begins and ends with the first and last Hebrew letters of one’s name, and connects that person’s name with Torah. My son, Hazzan Mordechai Schram and his wife, Sonia Gordon-Walinsky, a Jewish artist/calligrapher (pasukart.com), researched a *pasuk* for me and chose Mishlei 31:26: “Her mouth is full of wisdom, her tongue with kindly teaching.” Sonia then created for me an artistic rendering of that *pasuk* with both Hebrew and English texts surrounding my name in Hebrew.

In the meditation, “*Elokai Netzor*” found at end of the *Amidah*, it is the tradition for a person to say their name *pasuk* before “*y’hi’yu l’ratzon imrei phi and oseh shalom.*” At the end of life, according to tradition, when a person reaches the Gates of Gan Eden, that person will be asked for his/her *pasuk*.

There is a story about Reb Zusya of Hannipol who felt he had failed because he was not a teacher like Moshe or a scholar like Akiva. When G-d saw Zusya so down-fallen, G-d says to him, “Zusya, in the World-to-Come, the angel at the gate will not ask you why you were not Moshe or why you were not Akiva. The angel will ask you only, ‘Were you Zusya?’” Each one of us, in reviewing the story of our lives, especially at Rosh Hashana, can anticipate how we would answer that question.

There are many folktales that focus on various themes and motifs explored on Rosh Hashana, such as “God wants the Heart” (*rakhmana lieba ba’ee*), *teshuva*/forgiveness, *selichot*, tears, *tzedakah*/charity, justice, trying to understand G-d’s ways. At the end of this article, I have compiled a selected bibliography of stories that incorporate these various themes of Rosh Hashana. There are also many biblical and Talmudic stories as well as *midrashim* about the various characters in the Torah readings for the two days. I also suggest several books that contain these types of stories. After all, *Bereishit* is a narrative filled with many relationships and the dynamics between people that we constantly wrestle with and that continue to connect to our lives.

All of our stories - personal and family stories, sacred stories and traditional tales – have enriched the lives of all people and created in us a need to continue the tradition of “planting” stories in the minds and hearts of our next generation. Taking a storytelling approach to life review makes our heritage and history vital because it gives context. When a generation can empathize with its ancestors’ feelings, share their ideas and sorrows, the lessons of their lives will live on. The Torah associates wisdom with the heart, not with the mind. So we must direct our stories to the heart, where truth and wisdom can be found by those who care to listen. There is always a time for telling stories, and there is always a story to fit the time. Storytelling not only reflects but perpetuates life. Rosh Hashana is that right time to tell stories, listen to stories and share our lives through stories.

STORIES FOR ROSH HASHANA

“Elijah’s Mysterious Ways” in Peninnah Schram’s *Tales of Elijah the Prophet*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, an Imprint of Rowman & Littlefield, 1991. pp. 3-6.

“Gates of Tears” in Peninnah Schram’s *Stories Within Stories: From the Jewish Oral Tradition*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, an Imprint of Rowman & Littlefield, 2000. pp. 49-50.

“A Question of Balance” in Peninnah Schram’s *Jewish Stories One Generation Tells Another*. . Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, an Imprint of Rowman & Littlefield, 1987. pp. 323-325.

“The Pomegranate Seed” in Peninnah Schram’s *The Hungry Clothes and Other Jewish Folktales*. NY: Sterling Publishing, 2008. pp. 25-29.

“If Not Still Higher” in Esther Hautzig’s *The Seven Good Years and other stories of I. L. Peretz*. Philadelphia: JPS, 1984. pp. 71-77.

“The Cottage of Candles” in Howard Schwartz’s *Gabriel’s Palace: Jewish Mystical Tales*. NY: Oxford University Press, 1993. pp. 124-126.

“The Seven Good Years” in Beatrice Weinreich’s *Yiddish Folktales*. (Translated by Leonard Wolf) NY: Pantheon, 1988. pp. 167-168.

“The Apple Tree’s Discovery” by Peninnah Schram and Rachayl Eckstein Davis in Peninnah Schram’s *Chosen Tales: Stories Told by Jewish Storytellers*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, an Imprint of Rowman & Littlefield, 1995. pp. 3-4. (To be published as an illustrated book by Kar-Ben/Lerner Publishing, January 2012.)

“The Journey of a Lost Princess” by Debra Gordon-Zaslow in Peninnah Schram’s *Chosen Tales: Stories Told by Jewish Storytellers*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, an Imprint of Rowman & Littlefield, 1995. pp. 126-131.

“The Most Precious Thing in the World” by Joan Sutton in Peninnah Schram’s *Chosen Tales: Stories Told by Jewish Storytellers*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, an Imprint of Rowman & Littlefield, 1995. pp. 371-375.

“The Samovar,” “The Shepherd,” and “Rabbi Eleazar and the Beggar” in Eric A. Kimmel’s *Days of Awe: Stories for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur*. NY: Viking, 1991.

“More Valuable Than Gold” in Daniel and Chana Sperber’s *Ten Best Jewish Children’s Stories*. Jerusalem, Israel: Pitspopany Press, 1995. pp. 28-29.

“Drawing the Wind: A Rosh Hashanah Tale” in Howard Schwartz’s *The Day the Rabbi Disappeared: Jewish Holiday Tales of Magic*. NY: Viking, 2000. pp. 15-21. Howard Schwartz’s “The Cottage of Candles: A Yom Kippur Tale” is also in this volume, pp. 22-27.

For more stories on the various themes of the High Holidays, such as Charity, Faith, Repentance, Prayer, etc., you will find references to stories, along with books where you can find these stories, in this excellent resource book: Elswit, Sharon Barcan. **The Jewish Story Finder: A Guide to 363 Tales Listing Subjects and Sources**. Foreword by Peninnah Schram. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2005.

BOOKS OF BIBLICAL-TALMUDIC-MIDRASHIC STORIES

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It's the Thought That Counts

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

Rosh Beit Midrash, Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Zichron Dov Beit Midrash of Toronto

The will to goodness is everything; all of the skills in the universe are only the means of completing it.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook, Orot haTeshuvah 9:1

הרצון הטוב הוא הכל, וכל
הכשרונות שבעולם אינם אלא
מלואיו
אורות התשובה ט:א

Is Teshuvah in my Thoughts, or in my Speech?

Lulav. Matzah. Talmud Torah. Tzedakah. Teshuvah.

When the Rambam (*Hilchot Teshuvah* 1:1) adopted Rabbi Meir's phraseology (*Mishna, Yoma* 9:3) describing a process of "performing *teshuvah*," he framed our understanding of the mitzvah as action-based. This is cemented by his description of *viduy* as a verbal enumeration of our failings.¹⁶ Just as we wave a *lulav*, ingest matzah, study Torah and give *tzedakah*, so we perform *teshuvah* with our speech, listing our sins and articulating our regret.

Of course, speech is crucial: Speaking our sins aloud makes the admission concrete, and compels us to confront the reality of our criminal record. But is there no intrinsic value in the thoughts which lead to these words? Is my regret merely a *hechsher mitzvah*, preparation and catalyst for the declaration which is the mitzvah? Or are my thoughts also an "act" of *teshuvah*?

The Talmud itself indicates that thoughts can constitute *teshuvah*:

If a man proposes, "Marry me on condition that I am a tzaddik," then even if he is fully wicked, she is married; perhaps thought of teshuvah in his mind.

Kiddushin 49b

על מנת שאני צדיק אפילו רשע
גמור מקודשת שמא הרהר תשובה
בדעתו
קידושין מט:

They said regarding Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya that he omitted no zonah in the world... He then sat between two mountains and hills and asked, "Mountains and hills, pray for mercy for me!" They replied, "Before we ask on your behalf, let us ask for ourselves!"... He then asked, "Heavens and earth, pray for mercy for me!" They replied, "Before we ask on your behalf, let us ask for ourselves!"... He then asked, "Sun and Moon, pray for mercy for me!" They replied, "Before we ask on

אמרו עליו על ר"א בן דורדיא שלא
הניח זונה אחת בעולם שלא בא עליה...
הלך וישב בין שני הרים וגבעות אמר
הרים וגבעות בקשו עלי רחמים אמרו
לו עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על
עצמנו... אמר שמים וארץ בקשו עלי
רחמים אמרו עד שאנו מבקשים עליך
נבקש על עצמנו... אמר חמה ולבנה
בקשו עלי רחמים אמרו לו עד שאנו

¹⁶ Rambam, *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah* 2:2. Indeed, the Rambam's *Hilchot Teshuvah* never identifies regret as a stage in *teshuvah*; he only mentions that one's *viduy* declaration includes a statement that one regrets his past deeds.

your behalf, let us ask for ourselves!" ... He then asked, "Stars and constellations, pray for mercy for me!" They replied, "Before we ask on your behalf, let us ask for ourselves!" ... He then said: The matter depends only upon me. He placed his head between his knees and cried out in tears until his soul departed. A voice emerged and declared, "Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is prepared for life in the next world!"

Avodah Zarah 17a

מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו... אמר כוכבים ומזלות בקשו עלי רחמים אמרו לו עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו... אמר אין הדבר תלוי אלא בי הניח ראשו בין ברכיו וגעה בבכיה עד שיצתה נשמתו יצתה בת קול ואמרה ר"א בן דורדיא מזומן לחיי העולם הבא **עבודה זרה יז.**

But these sources are puzzling: The transforming effect of verbal confession is clear, but why should the cycling of a synapse suffice to translate "fully wicked" into "tzaddik"? If a listing of sins is critical to *teshuvah*, how could Elazar ben Durdaya earn the next world, not to mention ordination, for repentance which amounted to internal thought and an animal wail?

Teshuvah: A Return to Greatness

Rav Avraham Yitzchak haKohen Kook proposed a concept of internal *teshuvah*, repentance played out on a stage within the heart. While Rav Kook acknowledged our obligation to speak in confession and act in correction, he emphasized that our first step is to think in contrition.

As Rav Kook explained, we are created as pure souls, but entry into a material realm dulls our sensitivity to the sacred and so makes us vulnerable to sin. We are challenged to assert our spirit over our material trappings, strengthening our holiest aspect and committing ourselves to life on a higher plane. This is the process of repentance:

Entities come into existence as a descent from the Divine realm to worldly realms – a form of descent and of terrible "death" – to which no earthly descent... can compare. This is engineered on the higher calculation of justice, which gauged the justice of existence before anything was created... But this descent has the foundation for greater ascent stored within... as it is written, "Before mountains were birthed and earth and foundation were formed, You were G-d for all eternity. You laid man low, and declared, 'Return, sons of men!'"

Orot haTeshuvah 11:4

ההיות מתגלות בתור ירידה מאלקיות לעולמיות, שהיא כמו השפלה ו"מיתה" נוראה, אשר כל הירידות שבעולם... לא ישוו לה. וכל זה מעשה על פי המשקל העליון של שפיטת הצדק המשערת את משפט ההיות בטרם כל יציר נברא... אמנם ירידה זו הלא יסוד העליה העליונה גנוז בה... בטרם הרים ילדו ותחולל ארץ ותבל ומעולם עד עולם אתה קל תשב אנוש עד דכא ותאמר שובו בני אדם **אורות התשובה יא:ד**

Our pure thoughts are our return to greatness

Within this philosophy, perfection is always present, albeit hidden, within the human being. As Rav Kook promised,¹⁷ "*Teshuvah* always resides in the heart; it is stored in the heart even during the sin itself." This pledge did not originate with Rav Kook; its roots are in the Talmudic¹⁸

¹⁷ Orot haTeshuvah 6:2

¹⁸ Nedarim 39a

statement that repentance was created before the universe itself. Embedded in the Divine schematic is our pristine core, and the route via which we restore it as our identity.

Certainly, the journey back to this truest nature of our soul involves actions, as described by the Rambam, but it is not defined by those actions. Rather, *teshuvah* – literally "return" – is a spiritual quest during which we retrieve the ethereal identity hidden beneath material layers. We seek the Divine message, and this search, taking place in our thoughts, is itself a revelation of our purity:

Via thoughts of teshuvah, one hears the voice of G-d calling to him from within the Torah, from within his heart's emotions, from within the world, its fullness and all therein... Thoughts of teshuvah reveal the depth of one's desire, and the strength of the soul is revealed in all of its glory through those thoughts. The greater the thought of teshuvah, the greater its liberation.

Orot haTeshuvah 7:3-4

The will to goodness is everything; all of the skills in the universe are only the means of completing it. The content of one's will [to goodness] is imprinted upon his soul by the light of return that is affixed within, and as a result, the great flow of Divine inspiration is manifested upon him continually, and a will which is great in its holiness, beyond the trait embedded in other human beings, grows powerful within him.

Orot haTeshuvah 9:1

על ידי הרהורי תשובה שומע האדם קול ד' הקורא עליו מתוך התורה, ומתוך כל רגשי הלב, מתוך העולם ומלואו וכל אשר בו... הרהורי התשובה הם הם מגלים את עומק הרצון, והגבורה של הנשמה מתגלה על ידם בכל מילוי הודה, ולפי גדלה של התשובה כך היא מדת החירות שלה.

אורות התשובה ז:ג-ד

הרצון הטוב הוא הכל, וכל הכשרונות שבעולם אינם אלא מלואיו, נעשה תוכן מוטבע בנפשו על ידי אור התשובה הקבוע בו, וממילא חל עליו שפע גדול של רוח הקדש בתדירות, ורצון נשגב בקדושה, למעלה מהמדה הקבועה של בני אדם רגילים, הולך ומתגבר בו.

אורות התשובה ט:א

This may explain how a man can declare himself righteous and be granted that status instantly, such that his proposal of "Marry me on condition that I am a *tzaddik*" is accepted on the basis of an intellectual decision – he has revealed his unsullied core, and therefore he is now a *tzaddik*.

This may also explain how Elazar ben Durdaya could, in the words of Rebbe, "acquire his world in a single moment," despite a career of immersion in immorality. The sinner had done nothing to correct his sin, but his immense regret displayed his native character.

To cite the words of Rav Kook:

One who feels within himself the depth of regret of teshuvah, and the exasperated desire in his thoughts to mend his flaws – those he is already capable of mending and those he is not yet capable of mending but for which he anticipates Divine mercy – can already count himself among the righteous.

Orot haTeshuvah 8:6

וכל המרגיש בעצמו עומק נחם התשובה והתמרמרות המחשבה לתקון פגמיו, בין אותן שתקונם כבר עולה בידו בין אותם שתקונם אינו עולה עדיין בידו והוא מצפה עליהם לרחמים, יכלול את עצמו בזה בכלל הצדיקים.

אורות התשובה ח:ו

Using our thoughts to create our tongues anew

This idea can help answer a challenge put forth by the Chida,¹⁹ regarding the acceptability of our verbal *viduy*.

We are taught "אין קטגור נעשה סניגור," that a prosecutor cannot switch sides to serve as a defense attorney. Based on this principle, gold may not be used for the garments worn by the Kohen Gadol when he enters the Holy of Holies to appeal for forgiveness; gold represents the sin of the Golden Calf.²⁰ How, then, can a mouth which has spoken *lashon hara* offer acceptable *viduy* before G-d – is this not a case of the agent of sin becoming a defense attorney? If gold represents ancient idolatry and is therefore ineligible before G-d, then a tongue which was used for evil should certainly be unacceptable for *viduy*!

The Chida sought to resolve the problem by explaining that once a person repents, he becomes a new creature. Therefore, the tongue in his mouth is no longer the same tongue that sinned, and it may be used for *viduy*. However, others objected to this answer: If *teshuvah* is effective only via the *viduy* declaration, then the conversion of sinner to *tzaddik* does not take place until the *viduy* is complete!

Rav Michael Yaakov Yisrael, a 19th century Turkish Rav and author of *שנות ימין*, answered the objection, explaining that once a person produces thoughts of *teshuvah*, he is already recreated as a new person. Therefore, the tongue is "new" before we ever arrive at the *viduy* declaration. This mirrors Rav Kook's conception of *teshuvah*: Our thoughts of repentance are our return to greatness, restoring us to our spiritual greatness.

First, then, we engage ourselves in thoughts of repentance, returning to the pristine spirit inside, removing obstructions and awakening our spiritual talents. Only afterward do we embark upon the process of actualizing those thoughts through the speech of *viduy* and through the actions of correction.

We are promised that when we commit ourselves mentally to a path of repentance, G-d will take this as a down payment, and ease the remainder of our journey:

When one's thoughts are bound to holiness and to the desire for teshuvah, one should not fear at all. Certainly, HaShem will prepare all of the paths via which complete teshuvah – illuminating all of the dark spaces with the light of its life – is acquired.

Orot haTeshuvah 7:5

כיון שהרעיון קשור לקדושה ולחפץ
התשובה, אין מה לפחד כלל, ודאי יזמין
השי"ת את כל הדרכים, שהתשובה
הגמורה, המאירה את כל המחסכים באור
חייה, היא נקנית על ידם.
אורות התשובה ז:ה

May we commit ourselves to return to internal purity, and follow up with practical steps, and so merit a *כתיבה וחתימה טובה*.

¹⁹ Cited in *Sdei Chemed Maarechet*, *Klal* יח

²⁰ Talmud, *Rosh haShanah* 26a

Strategies for Transformative Teshuva

Rabbi Ari Zahtz

Assistant Director, Yeshiva Masmidim Honors Program, Yeshiva University
Assistant Rabbi, Congregation Bnai Yeshurun, Teaneck, NJ

One of the most frustrating Elul experiences is reflecting back on the past year and seeing that many goals for change that had been laid out last year on Rosh Hashana did not go as planned and are still in need of *teshuvah*. After a year, it's a very depressing thought to think "I'm right where I was last year."

It may lead one to wonder, as much as I am anticipating the impending *yemei hadin*, what's the point? What am I doing wrong? Why can't I make the changes last?

Two insightful comments from *gedolim* of the past generations are in fact strategies that can help the teshuvah of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur be more than sudden inspiration, rather substantial transformation.

Rav Yisrael Salanter

Hashem says, my children, create for me a small opening of Teshuvah, as tiny as the head of a pin, and I will open for you openings that even wagons and chariots can pass through.

Shir HaShirim Rabbah 5:2

בני פתחו לי פתח אחד של תשובה כחודה
של מחט, ואני אפתח לכם פתחים שאפי'
עגלות וקרונות נכנסים בו
שיר השירים רבה ה:ב

Apparently it is not necessary and perhaps we are not even expected to do a full *teshuvah gemura* all by ourselves, rather, our task is to do a little bit and Hashem guarantees us that he will respond in kind and make our *teshuvah* even more expansive.

As beautiful as the words of this Midrash are, they are very perplexing. What does it mean to do just a little bit of *teshuvah*? The Rambam tells us in *Mishnah Torah* (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:2-3) that there are three central components to *teshuvah*: regret, *viduy* and leaving the sin permanently. The Rambam writes that we must do all three parts to reach the point of removing ourselves from a sin to the extent that Hashem Himself can testify about us that we will never

return to such a sin! How do we do just a little bit, part of the whole, that's not enough? If I have to pick one of the three which should I pick? Is the Midrash teaching that if we regret our sins Hashem will take care of the rest? That's certainly not the impression the Rambam gives, rather it's all or nothing. What then is the Midrash relating when it says that a small hole of *teshuvah* is sufficient?

Rav Yisrael Salanter, father of the mussar movement, explains in *Ohr Yisrael* (letter 6), a collection of letters written to his students, a fundamental principle that in turn sheds light on the words of the Midrash in Shir hashirim. He says that different people can do the exact same mitzvah or the exact same *aveirah* and receive different rewards or punishment. The same person can even do the exact same thing at two different times and be rewarded (or punished) differently. How is that possible? The Mishna says in *Pirkei Avos* (5:19) לפיכך צערה אגרה, the reward is set according to the pain and effort involved in a mitzvah pursuit. Not every action is viewed the same, there is a context to the action that affects the exertion involved. He therefore suggests that every mitzvah or *aveirah* can be divided into two categories those that are קל, easy, and those that are כבד, difficult. Whether something is easy or difficult is determined based on the overall picture, a person's natural tendencies, the pressure of the particular situation and any other pertinent factor. Based on the principle of the Mishna in *Avos*, the reward for an easy mitzvah is less than that of a difficult one, but the flipside is true as well, the punishment for violating an *aveirah* that was easy to circumvent is greater.

For example, if one attends minyan daily it is an easy mitzvah, while for that very same person the mitzvah of *Talmud Torah*, finding time to engage in Torah study may be very difficult. *Davening* with a minyan is an "easy" mitzvah while learning Torah is a "difficult" mitzvah, thus the reward for the performance of the mitzvah will take into account how difficult the mitzvah is for this person at this time.

Rav Yisrael Salanter then takes this idea one step further. The difference between the easy and the difficult within the same mitzvah is as stark as the difference between two different *mitzvos* or *aveiros*.

For example, regarding *lashon hara*, there is a difference between speaking *lashon hara* about a random acquaintance versus a spouse or very close friend. It's much easier not to say *lashon hara* about someone close to us who we care dearly about such as a spouse or good friend than an acquaintance with whom we don't have a very personal relationship. Therefore, the reward for overcoming the desire to speak *lashon hara* about a random acquaintance is much greater than avoiding *lashon hara* about a spouse. [Certainly, though, the reverse is also true; the punishment if we do speak about someone close to us, when it is easily avoidable, is much more severe.]

With this idea we now can understand the Midrash in Shir haShirim. Opening up a small amount of *teshuvah* does not mean to do a partial *teshuvah* on everything (one of the three components) that in fact is a deficient *teshuvah*, rather Rav Yisrael teaches an astounding *chidush*, the same way one who was steeped in a particular *aveirah* and leaves all aspects of it completely is considered a *ba'al teshuvah* for that specific *aveirah*, so too a person who has a real *kabala* (plus the other aspects of *teshuvah*) to never go back to even just the easy aspects of a

particular *aveirah*, is considered a בעל תשובה גמור, a complete *ba'al teshuvah* on that matter. It's not enough to do part of a whole, but a whole of part is enough!

That's the strategy we learn from Rav Yisrael Salanter, if we want change that will last, start with correcting those items that are easier to fix, with a full *teshuvah*, and Hashem will help making the *teshuvah* even broader to reach those areas that are more difficult and ultimately ensure that the *teshuvah* will be transformative.

Chafetz Chaim

"And now", the word "now" refers to *teshuva*, as it is written
"and now, Israel, what does Hashem [ask of you]..."

Midrash Rabbah 21:6

ועתה, אין ועתה אלא תשובה, שנאמר
(דברים י) ועתה ישראל מה ה' אליהך
בראשית רבה כא:ו

The words of this Midrash are difficult to understand, how does the word *ועתה* imply *teshuvah*, if anything it's the continuation of the *passuk*, the part that is not even cited by the Midrash that implies something similar to *teshuvah* as the *passuk* continues that G-d asks of us to fear him and follow in His paths?

The Chafetz Chaim (*Ahavas Chesed Perek 11*) explains that the lesson of this Midrash is that one needs to realize that the most potent weapon that the *Satan* uses against *Bnai Yisrael* is procrastination. One will plan on beginning to learn or fulfill a *mitzvah* properly and the *Yetzer Hara* will tell the person, "sure, no problem, fulfill this *mitzvah*, but do it tomorrow". Each and every day the *Yetzer Hara* tries the same thing and in the end the inspiration dies and no change has been made.

The Chafetz Chaim writes about procrastination in very powerful language:

If one contemplates this he'll realize that this [procrastination] is the greatest factor of all factors that prevent one from serving Hashem, and because of it a person remains naked of Torah and mitzvos and repentance, because the person who is lazy will always push off everything until tomorrow or to another future date.

ובאמת כשנתבונן בזה, היא הסבה
הגדולה שבכל הסבות המונע את האדם
מעבודת השם יתברך, ועל ידה נשאר
האדם ערום מתורה ומצוות ומתשובה
כי מטבע העצל לדחות כל דבר ודבר
למחר וליומא אחרא

This, the Chafetz Chaim suggests, is the explanation of the Midrash. The word *ועתה*, and now, means *teshuvah*, not because of the continuation of the *passuk*, rather because it, the word *ועתה*, contains a fundamental principle for effective *teshuvah*; *teshuvah* has to be done now, if a person procrastinates and waits until tomorrow then the chances of the change he is hoping to implement succeeding decreases.

When you're ready to improve in any way, learning, *davening*, being a better friend, whatever it may be, if you try and implement the change immediately instead of waiting for what you may think is the opportune moment you'll be more likely to succeed.

The *Chafetz Chaim* adds an *eitzah*, advice, that he says he heard from a *gaon echad*, a certain great *talmid chacham*, on how to defeat the *Yetzer Hara* that tries to push off realizing our spiritual gains until tomorrow.

He says a person needs to contemplate two points. The first is that he only has a single day to live, there is no tomorrow – I need to do what needs to be done today. The second point is that he only has one page of Gemara to learn, I only have the task in front of me- as overwhelming as a task may be don't push it off, my responsibility is only to the task at hand.

This, says the *Chafetz Chaim*, is essential for a *teshuvah* that is going to be transformative. When the inspiration comes and you're ready to make changes, ועתה, it needs to be done now, worry about later at another time, for now focus on the task at hand and you'll have a better chance to succeed.

If we combine these two strategies, Rav Yisrael Salanter's lesson that it's more critical to do a full *teshuvah* on part of a mitzvah (even the easier part), than a partial *teshuvah* on a whole mitzvah, and the *Chofetz Chaim*'s lesson of acting with immediacy without procrastination, then hopefully we'll succeed in doing our partial *teshuvah* without procrastinating and, as the Midrash says, Hashem will see that small opening of *teshuvah* and widen it and our *teshuvah* will transform us for the coming year and we'll all be written in the book of life, health and happiness.



Shabbat Table Discussions
ENGAGING CONVERSATIONS TO ENHANCE YOUR SHABBAT EXPERIENCE
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ADMITTING MISTAKES

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On June 2, 2010, Armando Galarraga, 28 pitched what seemed to be a perfect game, a feat only achieved twenty times in Major League Baseball's 130 year history. However, on the very last play of the game, umpire Jim Joyce, 65, mistakenly called the runner safe at first base, ruining the perfect game. After the game, understanding the mistake he had made and the implications to Galarraga, with tears in his eyes, Joyce went over to Galarraga and apologized, admitting his mistake. Galarraga graciously accepted his apology saying "Nobody's perfect. Everybody's human." They are currently writing a book together titled "Nobody's Perfect."

R. Yosef D. Solovetichik was known for his intellectual integrity when delivering a shiur (lecture). On one particular occasion, he spent the bulk of a two and half hour shiur developing a particular idea. Many questions were asked by the students during that shiur and after the shiur, R. Soloveitchik summoned one of the students and told him "you were right and I was wrong. Tomorrow we will restudy the topic based on the question you raised."

Memories of a Giant pg. 325

Admitting a mistake is not easy, and requires a certain degree of self-sacrifice that can be humiliating. Sometimes we have to admit that we are wrong even when it is questionable whether or not there was an actual error. Admitting to such an error may be the simplest solution to a problem, but may create negative consequences.

Let's look at the following scenarios

CASE ONE	Michael worked very hard to prepare for the presentation in his history class. One of his friends asked a question during the presentation, though, that caused Michael to think that his entire theory may be incorrect. While Michael has a satisfactory answer to the question that will spare him the embarrassment of acknowledging that he was wrong, deep down, he feels that in all honesty, his theory is wrong. What should Michael answer?
CASE TWO	Miriam and Esther have been ignoring each other ever since they had an argument a few weeks ago. Miriam knows that she can repair their friendship by admitting she was wrong and apologizing, but she doesn't really believe that she was wrong. Should she apologize anyway?
CASE THREE	Steven and Chaim are partners in a used car dealership. A customer bought a car from them, and now claims that he was misled about the quality of the car. Steven thinks that the customer may be correct and would like to admit to the customer that they were wrong, but Chaim disagrees. If Steven does admit that they were wrong, both Steven and Chaim will lose out. What should he do?

Examining the sources

The Greatness of Admitting a Mistake

There are a number of stories in Tanach where someone is praised for admitting a mistake. For example, after the death of Aharon's children, Moshe Rabbeinu criticizes Aharon and his remaining sons for burning the remainders of a *chatat* (sin) offering and not eating it (they felt that because they were mourners, they should not eat the offering). Aharon maintained his belief that he acted correctly and following a short debate (The details are recorded in Zevachim 101a-101b) Moshe Rabbeinu concedes to Aharon:

Aharon said to Moshe: Today, [my children] offered their sin and burnt offerings before God and [died], would it be good in God's eyes had I eaten that sin offering today? Moshe heard and was satisfied [by the answer].

Vayikra 10:19-20

וַיִּדְבֹר אֶהָרֹן אֶל-מֹשֶׁה, הֵן הַיּוֹם הִקְרִיבוּ
אֶת-חַטָּאתָם וְאֶת-עֹלֹתָם לִפְנֵי ה', וַתִּקְרָאנָה
אֹתִי, כְּאֵלֶּה; וְאֶכְלֹתִי חַטָּאת הַיּוֹם, הַיֵּיטֵב
בְּעֵינַי ה'. וַיִּשְׁמַע מֹשֶׁה, וַיֵּיטֵב בְּעֵינָיו.
ויקרא י:יט-כ

Moshe Rabbeinu received the Torah at Sinai and was the authority on all matters of Jewish law. How is it possible for Aharon to disagree? Wasn't this law discussed at Sinai?

'He was satisfied by the answer' Moshe was not ashamed. [He could have excused himself] saying 'I never heard the law (at Sinai that a mourner does not eat that offering),' rather he said "I heard it and I forgot (about it)."

Zevachim 101b (adapted from Soncino Translation)

וַיֵּיטֵב בְּעֵינָיו לֹא בּוֹשׁ מֹשֶׁה
לֹא שָׁמַעְתִּי, אֲלֵּא
שָׁמַעְתִּי וְשָׁכַחְתִּי.
זבחים קא:

Questions for the Table

- Why does the Talmud praise Moshe Rabbeinu for admitting his mistake? Isn't this something we would expect of anyone?
- Moshe Rabbeinu is praised for choosing "I heard and I forgot" over "I never heard it." Does "I never heard it" imply 'because I never heard it, it must not be true' or does it imply 'Aharon is correct and the reason I questioned him is because it was something I didn't know about'?
- Did Moshe Rabbeinu admit his mistake despite the potential for embarrassment or was he simply not concerned about embarrassment when admitting the mistake? Should we be embarrassed when admitting mistakes?

Why was
Moshe
praised?

It is the nature of a person to justify themselves even if they are wrong because the idea of "admitting without being ashamed" (a term used by Rashi, Vayikra 10:20) is very difficult and intimidating.

R. Chaim Zeitchik, P'ri Chaim page 43

Moshe could have protected his honor by saying 'I never heard it at all' than to say "I heard and I forgot" because saying I never heard is a positive attribute of a Torah scholar (see Avot 5:6) [and a response that does not damage the scholar's reputation.]

R. David HaLevi Segal, Divrei David Vayikra 10:20

היינו שבטבע האדם ללמד זכות על עצמו,
אפילו שטעה כי קשה ואיום הוא הענין של
הודאה של "הודה ולא בוש."
פרי חיים עמ' מג

שיותר כבוד היה לו למשה לומר לא
שמעתי כלל ממה שיאמר שמעתי ושכחתי
שמאמר לא שמעתי הוא מעלה בת"ח.
דברי דוד ויקרא י:כ

R. Zeitchik highlights that when we are confronted about mistakes we might have made, our natural inclination is to justify our actions. Moshe Rabbeinu could have stood by his position and won the debate, but instead opted to admit his mistake. While this may not have been a great challenge for Moshe Rabbeinu (see R. Yehuda L. Chasman, *Ohr Yahal to Parashat Shemini*), it is a challenge that many of us struggle with on a regular basis.

R. Segal notes that Moshe Rabbeinu could have simply responded that he never discussed this particular question with God when he received the Torah, and protected his dignity. Such a response would not have affected the final outcome and Aharon would have been informed that his argument was correct. Moshe Rabbeinu, however, opted to tell the truth despite the potential for embarrassment (see [Shabbat Table Discussion on Lying](#)).

Application to Case #1

How would you apply this discussion to case #1? Does it make a difference if Michael admitting his mistake will negatively impact his grade? Is it reasonable for Michael to ask for more time to think about the question before drawing any conclusions?

Legal Rights and Moral Obligations (Cases #2 and #3)

Before discussing cases # 2 and #3, let's distinguish between what halacha *obligates* one to do and what one *should* do. In case #2, if Miriam is truly free of any blame for the dispute, she has no legal obligation to apologize, even though apologizing may bring an end to the dispute. Yet, Miriam certainly has the option to apologize and making peace and it is certainly recommended for her to do so. The Talmud states:

Those who are forgiving of others will be forgiven for their own wrongdoings.

Rosh HaShanah 17a

כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו.

ראש השנה יז.

While this source only addresses the importance of getting along with others in general terms, *Avot D'Rabbi Natan*, an addendum to *Pirkei Avot*, relates how Aharon would make peace between two disputing parties:

[If there were] two people who had a dispute, Aharon would sit with one of them and tell him, "My son, see what your friend is saying. He is beating his heart, tearing his clothes and saying 'Woe unto me, how can I even look at my friend, I am embarrassed from him because I am the one who wronged him'." Aharon would sit with him until the jealousy is removed from his heart. He would then go and sit with the other and say "My son, see what your friend is saying etc. And when the two would meet, they would hug and kiss one another.

Avot D'Rabbi Natan 12:2

שני בני אדם שעשו מריבה זה עם זה. הלך אהרן וישב לו אצל אחד מהם ואמר לו בני ראה חברך מהו אומר מטרף את לבו וקורע את בגדיו ואומר אוי לי היאך אשא את עיני ואראה את חברי בושתי הימנו שאני הוא שסרחתי עליו. הוא יושב אצלו עד שמסיר קנאה מלבו והולך אהרן ויושב לו אצל האחר וא"ל בני ראה חברך מהו אומר וכו' וכשנפגשו זה בזה גפפו ונשקו זה לזה.

אבות דרבי נתן יב:ב

Questions for the Table

- Why wasn't Aharon concerned that his plan would backfire when the two parties finally spoke to each other?
- Why wasn't Aharon concerned that one of the parties was actually correct and that he would weaken their claim?

What was
Aharon trying
to accomplish?

Aharon knew that the root cause of a contentious dispute is often "the jealousy of the heart." An honest dispute may arise over money, or friends or some other matter, but the way to find peace, especially when the dispute is emotional is to first have the parties make peace and only then can they work out the original issue. Aharon wasn't interested in working out any monetary dispute or other legal claim. He was interested in finding a way for the two parties to come to the table as friends.

Application to Case #2

In every dispute, there are two sides to the story. Is it possible that Miriam is absolutely free of blame? How would she honestly determine that? Even if she does verify that she is not at fault, what can we learn from Aharon about whether one should admit a mistake that may not have happened in order to promote peace?

Case # 3 also requires us to examine the tension between legal and moral obligations. Shulchan Aruch discusses a case of two partners where one partner admits to a claim of a plaintiff while the other denies it:

Reuven claims that he lent money to two people, one of them denies it and the other admits that they took the loan in partnership, [the one who admits] is not believed regarding the partner and the one who admits must pay the whole sum.

R. Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 37:4

ראובן תבע לשנים שהלוה להם וכפר א' והודה השני שהוא וחבירו (חייבים) אם אותו ממון לקחו בשותפות אינו נאמן על חבירו והוא לבדו יתחייב בכל. שלחן ערוך חושן משפט לז:ד

Let's assume we are not dealing with outright fraud. If it were fraud, Steven would have no choice but to refund the money and Chaim would have to agree. The disagreement between Steven and Chaim is more likely about a situation that is not so clear. For example, the customer found a flaw and Steven is unsure if the flaw arose after the purchase. Steven feels that since it is possible that the flaw existed beforehand, the proper thing to do is offer the customer some compensation and Chaim disagrees.

Application to Case #3

- If Steven feels that legally, the customer has no claim but morally, he should be given compensation, should Steven try to convince Chaim to agree?
- If Chaim claims that there was no wrongdoing and there isn't even a moral obligation to pay, should Steven offer to pay Chaim's share or should he just give partial compensation?

Vidui commonly translated as a confessional, is found throughout the High Holiday liturgy. R. Meir L. Weiser, however, has a different definition of *vidui*:

The term "vidui" is the opposite of denial or refutation, rather a public acknowledgement of something that people naturally hide. This can be either admitting the praises of someone else, or one's own shortcomings.

Malbim, Vayikra no. 319

גדר הוידוי הוא הפך הכפירה וההכחשה והוא שמפרסם בפיו דבר שטבע בני אדם להעלימהו, והוא שמודה שבת חברו או שמודה גנות עצמו. מלבי"ם ויקרא ס' שיט

One of the main components of *teshuva* (repentance) is to admit when we are wrong. This not only includes admitting to actions that harmed others, it also includes acknowledging our own shortcomings so that we can work on improving ourselves.

Rosh HaShanah celebrates the birth of man and the greatness of man. The ten days of repentance, culminating with Yom Kippur also focus on improving oneself and becoming a better person. The Torah highlights Moshe Rabbeinu's admission of error to teach us that admissions of error don't lower

us, rather they elevate us. Whether we are confronted by situations similar to Jim Joyce, Michael in case #1 or any other situation, we should realize that admitting and acknowledging our mistakes can make us better people.

Compiled by Rabbi Josh Flug, Director of Torah Research, CJF

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF AUTHORS CITED

R. YEHUDA LEIB CHASMAN (1869-1936) was one of the leaders of the Mussar Movement. He was born in Vilna and held a number of positions in Europe before moving to Israel in 1926 to serve the spiritual guide (*menahel ruchani*) of the Chevron Yeshiva.

R. YOSEF KARO (1488-1575) is most well known for his Shulchan Aruch, The Code of Jewish Law. Born in Toledo Spain, his family was forced to leave Spain in 1492 when they settled in Portugal and then Bulgaria. He eventually settled in the Land of Israel about 1535. Aside from Shulchan Aruch, he authored numerous works including Kesef Mishneh and Beit Yosef.

R. DAVID HALEVI SEGAL (Taz c.1586-1667) was a Polish scholar. He is most well known for his Turei Zahav, a commentary on Shulchan Aruch. His commentary includes discussions about rulings of his father-in-law, R. Yoel Sirkes.

R. YOSEF D. SOLOVEITCHIK (1903-1993) was born in Pruzhan, Poland, the son of Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, and grandson of Rabbi Chaim HaLevi. In 1932, he moved to America and settled in Boston. He founded Yeshivat Rambam—the Maimonides School—and delivered weekly shiurim there for many years. In 1941, he succeeded his father, upon the latter's passing, as rosh yeshiva at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (Yeshiva University), commuting from Boston to New York each week for over four decades. His shiurim in halachah and aggadah, which reached to the ends of the Jewish world, made a profound impact on Torah learning in our times. He was known by many as "The Rav" to connote that he was his generation's quintessential teacher of Torah, ordaining more rabbis than any other in his generation.

R. MEIR LEIBUSH WEISER (Malbim 1809-1879) is known for his commentary on Tanach which places a specific emphasis on the language of the text and apparent synonyms. He held numerous rabbinic posts in his lifetime throughout Europe.**R.**

CHAIM ZEITCHIK (d. 1989) began his career teaching in the Novardok Yeshiva in Poland and ended his career teaching in Jerusalem. He authored more than a dozen volumes on Jewish values.

וכבר הערנו בזה במק"א להתבונן מה זה שבח- שיחקק בתורה לנצח – שהודה על האמת, ולא שיקר ח"ו מפני הבושה לומר לא שמעתי? והרי אפי' על אדם פשוט, לא היה בידינו להבין ההתפעלות מה שלא עבר על "לא תשקרו איש בעמיתו" ... יוצא לנו מזה כלל גדול! שכשם ששוקלין לאדם קלות כחמורות... כמו כן גם להיפך בצד הטוב! לא נאבד מכל אדם לשלם לו שכרו – אף להגדול שבגדולים.

We have discussed this matter elsewhere in addressing why is it praiseworthy- to the extent that it is engraved in the Torah eternally- that he admitted the truth and didn't lie, God forbid, because of embarrassment, by saying "I never heard it"? Even if we were dealing with a simple person, we shouldn't necessarily be amazed by the fact that someone chose not to violate the commandment "don't lie to one's friend." ... We see from this an important principle! Just as a person's "serious" and "light" transgressions are given consideration ... so too, regarding fulfillment of commandments. A person receives the proper reward [no matter how easy], even the greatest of people.

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