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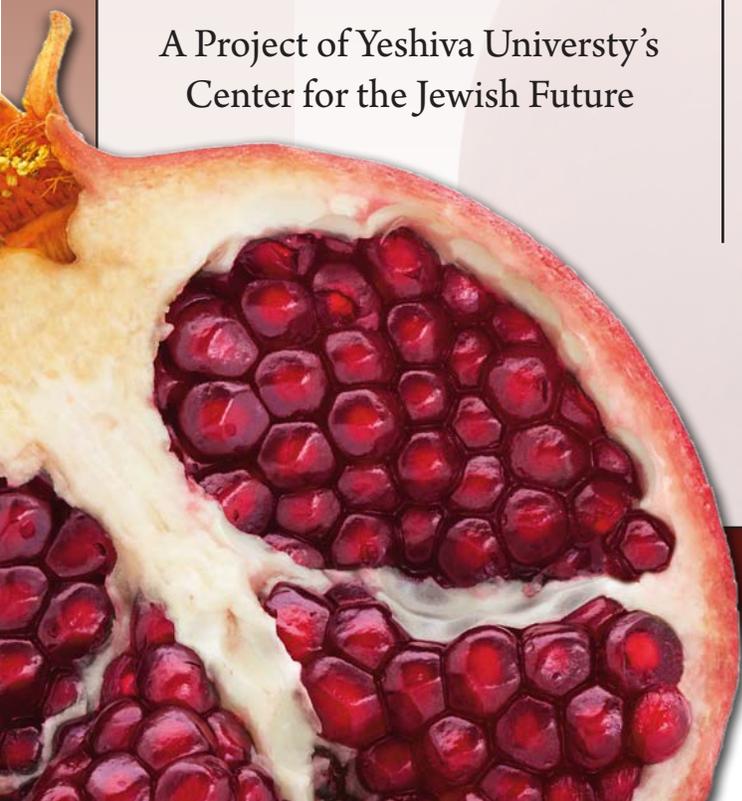
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*Dedicated in loving memory of
Dr. Harlan Daman
by Carole, Gila and Avi Daman*

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Introduction

שבעת ימים קודם יום הכפורים מפרישין כהן גדול מביתו ללשכת פרהדרין.
מש, יומא ב.

Seven days preceding Yom Kippur, we separate the Kohein Gadol from his family, and sequester him in the Parhedrin Chamber.

The Lishkas Parhedrin becomes the home of the Kohein Gadol for the week preceding his service on Yom Kippur. It is in this chamber that he will prepare himself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually to represent the Jewish people on Yom Kippur. One can only imagine the mixed emotions of apprehension and anticipation as the reality of his awesome responsibility set in throughout the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*. The Gemara, *Yoma* 10a-10b, relates an interesting halachic anomaly regarding this chamber relative to the other rooms of the Beis HaMikdash:

תנו רבנן: כל הלשכות שהיו במקדש לא היו להן מזוזה, חוץ מלשכת פרהדרין שהיה בה בית דירה לכהן גדול. אמר רבי יהודה: והלא כמה לשכות היו במקדש שהיה להן בית דירה, ולא היה להן מזוזה. אלא, לשכת פרהדרין גזירה היתה. מאי טעמא דרבי יהודה ... שלא יאמרו כהן גדול חבוש בבית האסורין.

Our rabbis taught: all of the chambers in the Temple did not have a mezuzah except for the Parhedrin chamber, which served as living quarters for the Kohein Gadol. Rabbi Yehuda said: Weren't there other living quarters in the Temple that did not have a mezuzah? Rather, this was a specific institution for the Parhedrin chamber. What is the reason for Rabbi Yehuda? ... so that they should not say that the Kohein Gadol is locked in prison.



Rabbi Yaakov Glasser

David Mitzner Dean, YU Center for the Jewish Future
Rabbi, Young Israel of Passaic-Clifton

What is the nature of Rabbi Yehuda's concern? Why would anyone assume the Kohein Gadol is incarcerated, and how does placing a mezuzah on the door mitigate this concern?

The answer to this question reveals how the entire Yom Kippur experience truly strikes at the heart of our fundamental challenge in perpetuating our Torah values to the next generation. To the outsider, uninitiated and unfamiliar with Kohein Gadol's preparatory journey, the sequestering of this great leader, indeed appears as a form of incarceration. Cut off from his family and friends, he is constrained and limited to function exclusively within the narrow parameters of the Parhedrin chamber. However, in reality, this environment provides the Kohein Gadol with the foundation to encounter the most profound moment of Divine connection imaginable. One who is intimately familiar with the inner workings of the Temple world, can appreciate the solemnity and sanctity of the experience. Chazal were deeply concerned that people not characterize a religious experience of meaning and purpose as a confining suppression of opportunity and freedom. Therefore, they mandated a mezuzah to be placed upon the door of this chamber, proclaiming

to all the eternal message of *ahavas HaShem*, love of God, as the defining character of the religious experience.

We find ourselves raising and teaching a generation that increasingly views the lifestyle of Torah and mitzvos as a "*beis ha'asurim*" — a restrictive environment comprised mostly of expectations and demands that undermine our natural ambition for individuality and freedom. It is our responsibility to affix mezuzos on the doorways of our religious experience and inspire our children to recognize the deep meaning and purpose that Torah and mitzvos provide to our lives. The month of Tishrei is a unique opportunity in this regard. One can view these weeks as a "*beis ha'asurim*," with an endless set of expectations and demands. Alternatively, one can view the month as one of opportunity. The chance to project the "*vehavta es HaShem Elokecha*" dimension to our religious life. To recognize how the Yamim Noraim, and chagim which follow, are an eternal gift that provide our lives with reflection, transformation, and celebration.

Wishing you and your family a Shana Tova

Salvation of Man and Beast: Noach, Shofar and the Ultimate Mercy

The Rosh Hashana liturgy is a window into the character of this extraordinary day. Often, a familiar theme is given vivid expression via the Machzor's rich and poetic language. Occasionally, the message only emerges through a careful analysis of the text and its linguistic nuances.

Vayizkor Elokim Es Noach: The Lead Reference of the Zichronos Blessing

A passage from *Zichronos* — one of the three core blessings of the Musaf Amida — exemplifies the latter phenomenon.

After affirming G-d's omniscience, the prayer segues into a string of scriptural proof texts. The lead reference states that Hashem remembered Noach along with the beasts and animals that were his companions in the *teiva*; He caused a wind to pass over the earth and the waters subsided. The Machzor introduces this verse as follows:

וגם את נח באהבה זכרת ותפקדהו בדבר
ישועה ורחמים, בהביאך את מי המבול לשחת
כל בשר מפני רוע מעלליהם. על כן זכרוננו בא
לפניך ה' אלהינו להרבות זרעו כעפרות תבל
וצאצאיו כחול הים. ככתוב בתורתך. ויזכר
אלהים את נח ואת כל החיה ואת כל הבהמה
אשר אתו בתבה ויעבר אלהים רוח על הארץ
וישכו המים
תפלת מוסף לראש השנה

*You also remembered Noach with love
and You were mindful of him with
salvation and mercy when You brought*



Rabbi Elchanan Adler

Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS

flood waters to destroy all flesh because of their evil deeds. Therefore, his memory comes before You, G-d our Lord, to make his descendants like the dust of the earth and his progeny like the sand of the sea. As it states in Your Torah "And G-d remembered Noach and all of the beasts and the cattle that were with him in the ark, and G-d caused a wind to blow over the land and the water calmed."

Mussaf for Rosh Hashana

It is interesting that the remembrance referenced here lacks an overt Jewish connection. On the one hand, this is understandable given that universal motifs overlap comfortably with the central themes of Rosh Hashana and find expression within its liturgy.¹ On the other hand, there are indications that something more profound is at play with regard to this particular verse.

First, this verse's universalism is in marked dissonance with the subsequent citations, all of which speak of Jewish destiny.² Additionally, aside from being first in the list, this citation distinguishes itself from the rest by virtue of the elaborate introduction that provides its background ("You also remembered Noach with love etc."). Finally, to the degree that Rosh Hashana embraces universal themes, these aspects are ancillary to

Israel's covenantal relationship with Hashem; it is, after all, the Jews who are commanded to affirm His Kingship, and who fervently seek favorable mention in the merit of the Patriarchs. How puzzling then that of all the verses cited to affirm G-d's omniscience, it is the one that seemingly lacks any Jewish connection that is accorded the greatest prominence!

The Remembrance of Noach: A Symbol of Jewish Survival

These linguistic clues would suggest that, notwithstanding its universal overtones, this verse carries powerful symbolic significance for the Jewish people.

This finds support in Yeshayahu's prophecy, which links Hashem's promise not to abandon His chosen Nation to His promise never to bring another flood upon the world, with the latter serving as a metaphor for the former:

כי מי נח זאת לי אשר נשבעתי מעבר מי נח
עוד על הארץ כן נשבעתי מקצף עליך ומגער
בך: כי ההרים ימושו והגבעות תמוטנה וחסדי
מאתך לא ימוש וברית שלומי לא תמוט אמר
מרחמך ה':

ישעיהו נד: ט - י, הפטרה לפרשת נח

This is for me like the waters of Noah: as I swore that the waters of Noah will never pass over the earth, so have I sworn not to be angry with you or rebuke you. For the mountains will move and the hills will falter but My kindness will never move from you and My covenant of peace will never falter, said G-d Who has compassion on you.

Yeshayahu 54:9-10

R. Yehuda Halevi (1075-1141), the prolific poet, incorporates this notion in the popular Shabbos hymn, “*Yom Shabason Ein Lishko’ach*”:³

העם אשר נע כצאן טעה יזכור לפקדו בריית
ושבועה
לבל יעבר בם מקרה רעה כאשר נשבעת על
מי נח.

The nation that has wandered like a straying flock — May He remember for them the covenant and the oath

So that no harm should happen to them, as You swore regarding the waters of Noah.

If the Divine promise to never again destroy the world “doubles” as a guarantee for the viability of the Jewish people, then, by extension, the promise’s harbinger stage — G-d’s remembrance of Noah and the animals — should likewise embody within it a favorable element for Klal Yisrael.

Yeshua Ve’Rachamim: Allusions and Associations

The connection between “*Vayizkor Elokim es Noach*” and Hashem’s

everlasting love for His people may be sharpened by analyzing the phrase *yeshua ve’rachamim*, used in the Machzor to provide context for this verse:

וגם את נח באהבה זכרת ותפקדהו בדבר
ישועה ורחמים.

You also remembered Noah with love and You were mindful of him with salvation and mercy.

What is the origin of this phrase? What is the significance of the juxtaposition of its two words — *yeshua* and *rachamim*? Why is this particular word combination used to describe the remembrance of Noah?

Abudarham (14th cent.) identifies two verses which he pairs, respectively, with the words *yeshua* and *rachamim*. Both carry contextual associations with the story of Noah:

ותפקדהו בדבר ישועה ורחמים. ישועה על שם
(תה’ לו, ז) אדם ובהמה תושיע ה’, ורחמים
על שם שכתוב גבי מי נח (ישעיה נד, י) אמר
מרחמך ה’.

You were mindful of him with salvation and mercy. “Salvation” is based on [the verse] “G-d saves man and animal; “mercy” is based on the verse regarding the waters of Noah “said G-d Who has compassion on you.”

The first reference, “*Adam u’ve’heima toshi’a, Hashem*,” speaks of a salvation that encompasses man and animals. This aligns well with the verse at hand which describes Hashem remembering Noah along with the animal inhabitants of the *teiva*.

The source of the second reference, “*amar merachameich Hashem*,” is the aforementioned prophecy in Yeshayahu — “*This is for me like the waters of Noah ...*” — that links Hashem’s eternal love for His people with His promise to never bring another *mabul* upon the earth.

In light of the above, it is surely no coincidence that the very choice of words used to depict Hashem’s remembrance of Noah contains an allusion to Hashem’s bond with His Nation.

In this vein, it is noteworthy that the phrase *yeshua ve’rachamim* recurs in the closing paragraph of the *Zichronos* blessing:

אלקינו ואלקי אבותינו זכרנו בזכרון טוב
מלפניך ופקדנו בפקודת ישועה ורחמים משמי
שמי קדם.

Our Lord and the Lord of our forefathers, remember us with a favorable remembrance before You and be mindful of us with a directive of salvation and mercy from the most ancient of heavens.

In beseeching Hashem to remember us favorably, we harken back to the phrase that appeared in conjunction with the verse “*Vayizkor Elokim es Noach*.” Apparently, the special quality of mercy extended to Noah remains available for the Jewish People to draw on as well.⁴

In beseeching Hashem to remember us favorably, we harken back to the phrase that appeared in conjunction with the verse “*Vayizkor Elokim es Noach*.” Apparently, the special quality of mercy extended to Noah remains available for the Jewish People to draw on as well.

**Rav Aharon Lichtenstein
zt"l on the Value of
Ramban's Commentary on
the Torah**

זה אבד הספר "מורה נבוכים", היה זה הפסד אבל לא כביר; עם ישראל היה מחזיק מעמד. אבל אם פירושו של הרמב"ן לתורה היה הולך לאיבוד אני מרגיש שהייתה קטסטרופה ... דמותו של הרמב"ן ופירושו לתורה מעמידים את עולמו הרוחני של עם ישראל ... מבחינה היסטורית, הרמב"ן הוא חיבור של תורת אשכנז ותורת ספרד, חיבור של רש"י ואבן עזרא, חיבור של כל מיני מקומות. אבל לא זו בלבד. יש בו גם סינתזה מורכבת הרבה יותר, סינתזה מבחינת התחומים.
מתוך ספר "מבקשי פניך" - שיחות עם הרב אהרן ליכטנשטיין, עמ' 40

If the *Guide for the Perplexed* would have been destroyed (and never published), it would have been a loss, but not a huge loss. The [Torah theology of the] nation of Israel would have been sustained. However, if the commentary of Ramban on the Torah would have been destroyed, I feel that it would have been catastrophic ... The image of the Ramban and his commentary to the Torah support the spiritual world of the Jewish nation ... From a historical perspective, the [commentary of] Ramban is an amalgamation of the Torah of Germany and the Torah of Spain, of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, of all different places. But this is not all. It also contains a multi-layered synthesis, a synthesis of disciplines....

From Mevakshei Panecha: Sichot Im HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein p. 40

**Yeshua Ve'rachamim: A
Transcendent Ethereal Mercy**

Let us explore additional liturgical associations of the phrase "yeshu'a ve'rachamim." When requesting the benevolent remembrance of yeshu'a ve'rachamim at the close of Zichronos, we describe it as emanating "mishmei shmei kedem" — from the most ancient of Heavens. Whatever its kabbalistic connotations,⁵ this appellation indicates, at the very least, that the mercy being described has a transcendental quality and descends from a loftier channel than does ordinary mercy.

We may discern the connection between the phrase *yeshua verachamim* and transcendental mercy in the *Yaa'le VeYavo* prayer whose entire theme is remembrance.⁶ After a lengthy list of entreaties to be remembered favorably — "*ya'ale ve'yavo veyagi'a ... zochreinu Hashem Elokeinu bo le'tova* etc." — the closing words incorporate a plea for *yeshua verachamim*:

ובדבר ישועה ורחמים חוס וחנונו ורחם עלינו
והושיענו.

In accord with the word of salvation and mercy, spare us and be gracious to us, have compassion on us and save us.

At first glance, this request seems anticlimactic. Many appeals to remembrance and mercy have already been made — why beg for additional mercy?

Apparently, the mercy implicit in the phrase *yeshua verachamim* refers to a heretofore unmentioned type of grace that transcends the bounds of ordinary mercy⁷ and serves, in effect, as "the mercy of last resort."

**Vayizkor Elokim es Noach:
A Reemergence of the
Primordial Will**

What makes "yeshua verachamim mercy" so transcendent? What sets it apart from ordinary mercy?

I believe that the answer is found in the comments of the Ramban on "Vayizkor Elokim es Noach" (Bereishis 8:1).

The Ramban is troubled by the verse's description of the animals being the beneficiaries of Hashem's mindfulness. Whereas human beings who exercise free will are rewarded in a manner that is commensurate with their accrued merit, animals are creatures of instinct and should not be singled out for special remembrance. What, then, is the meaning of G-d's "remembering" the animals?⁸

The Ramban offers a profound explanation:

ויזכור אלהים את נח ואת כל החיה ואת כל הבהמה - הזכירה בנח מפני שהיה צדיק תמים וזכרת לו ברית להצילו. ונח יכלול זרעו אשר אתו שם, ולא הזכירם כי בזכותו ניצולו. אבל הזכירה שאמר בחיה ובבהמה אינה בזכות, שאין בבעלי נפש זכות או חובה זולתי באדם לבדו.

אבל הזכירה בהם, כי זכר את דבר קדשו שאמר והיה העולם, והרצון אשר לו בבריאת העולם עלה לפניו ורצה בקיום העולם במינין אשר ברא בו, והנה ראה עתה להוציאם שלא יכלו בתיבה. ולא הזכיר העוף והשרץ, כי זכירת החיה שוה עמהם, ויגיד עליו רעו:

And G-d remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle. The remembrance of Noah was because he was a perfectly righteous man, and He had made a covenant with him to save him. The word "Noah" here includes his children that were there with him. Scripture did not mention them specifically, though, for they were saved by his merit. However, the remembrance

stated concerning beast and cattle was not on account of merit, for among living creatures there is no merit or guilt save in man alone. **But the remembrance concerning them was “Because He remembered His holy word” which He had spoken, causing the world to come into existence, and the Will which was before Him at the creation of the world arose before Him and He desired the existence of the world with all the species that He created therein.** Thus He now saw fit to bring them forth so that they should not perish in the ark. Scripture does not mention the fowl and the creeping things for the remembrance of “the living thing” is similar to their remembrance, and “the companion thereof telleth us concerning it.” (Chavel Translation)

According to the Ramban, the remembrance of the animals is a manifestation of the primordial will which brought the world into being, complete with the animal kingdom and all of its distinct species. While the *mabul* raged, this aspect of the Divine Will lay dormant, and reemerged at the pivotal juncture referred to in this verse.

Building on Ramban’s thesis, we may extrapolate that the manifestation of the primordial process was not limited to animals but extended to Noach and the human race as a whole. For all intents and purposes, the *mabul* constituted a suppression of the primordial Will with respect to mankind and animals alike. Only now did Hashem allow it to resurface⁹ on both of these levels.¹⁰

The Ramban’s insight provides a valuable frame of reference to conceptualize the mercy epitomized by the phrase *yeshua verachamim* and why it is said to emanate from *shmei shmei kedem* — the ancient heavens. By definition, this manifestation of primordial mercy cannot be predicated on the normal pathways of reward that are commensurate with the human exercise of free will that are a part of a post-creation world. Rather, it is a unilateral gesture of Divine grace that is self-justifying, and independent of the recipient’s worthiness. Just as He “Willed” the world into existence — “*amar ve’haya ha’olam*” — with a boundless sense of infinite mercy - so did He “Will” - “to make his [Noach’s] descendants like the dust of the earth and his progeny like the sand of the sea.”

The Primordial Will and the Survival of Am Yisrael

How does this serve as an inspiration for the Jewish People? How does Klal Yisrael tap into this reservoir of primordial mercy?

Axiomatic to a Torah-based theology is that the Jewish People are indispensable to the world’s existence. Through fidelity to Hashem’s commandments, Am Yisrael serves as *or la’goyim* — ambassadors to the world at large, leading the world toward its state of *tikun*. Consequently, Am Yisrael’s continued existence is forever bound up with the act of Creation itself.

This concept is explicated by the Ramban as one of the central motifs

of *Shiras Ha’azinu*, the song taught by Moshe Rabeinu to bnei Yisrael on the last day of his life. Among other things, *Shiras Ha’azinu* foretells dire circumstances that will befall the Jewish people at the end of days. The Song concludes on a positive note, stating that when all seems lost, Hashem will intervene on behalf of His people so that the enemies of Israel not gloat and attribute Jewish suffering to their own military prowess. The unmistakable impression is that despite their failings, and even when their collective merit is depleted, the Jewish People will still have recourse to a Divine grace that assures their continuity. The Ramban (Devarim 32:26) explains that in such instances, the Divine intervention is performed for “His own sake”. He eloquently summarizes this idea as follows:

והנה יאמר הכתוב, כי היה במדת הדין להיותנו כן בגלות לעולם, לולי כעס אויב [אגור]. ויורה זה, כי בגלותנו עתה תמה זכות אבות ואין לנו הצלה מיד העמים רק בעבור שמו, כענין שאמר ביחזקאל (כ מא מד) וקבצתי אתכם מן הארצות אשר נפוצתם במ ונקדשתי בכס לעיני הגוים, וידעתם כי אני ה' בעשותי אתכם למען שמי לא כדרכיכם הרעים וכעלילותיכם הנשחתות בית ישראל, וכן נאמר עוד (שם פסוק ט) ואעש למען שמי לבלתי החל לעיני הגוים וגו': ולכך הזכיר משה בתפלתו (במדבר יד טו) ואמרו הגוים אשר שמעו את שמעך לאמר וגו', והשם יתברך הודה לו בזה (שם פסוק כ) ויאמר ה' סלחתי כדברך. והטעם בטענה הזאת, איננו כרוצה להראות כחו בין שונאיו, כי כל הגוים כאין נגדו מאפס ותוהו נחשבו לו. אבל השם ברא את האדם בתחתונים שיכיר את בוראו ויודה לשמו, ושם הרשות בידו להרע או להטיב, וכאשר חטאו ברצונם וכפרו



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בו כולם לא נשאר רק העם הזה לשמו, ופרסם בהם באותות ובמופתים כי הוא אלהי האלהים ואדוני האדונים ונודע בזה לכל העמים. והנה אם ישוב ויאבד זכרם, ישכחו העמים את אותותיו ואת מעשיו ולא יסופר עוד בהם, ואם אדם יזכיר כן, יחשבו כי היה כח מכחות המזלות והכוכבים וחלף ועבר. והנה תהיה כוונת הבריאה באדם בטלה לגמרי, שלא ישאר בהם יודע את בוראו רק מקעים לפניו, ועל כן ראוי מדין הרצון שהיה בבריאת העולם, שיהיה רצון מלפניו להקים לו לעם כל הימים, כי הם הקרובים אליו והיודעים אותו מכל העמים:

Thus Scripture states that according to the attribute of justice we should remain in this condition of Exile forever “were it not that I was in dread of the wrath from the enemy.” This teaches that, in our present exile, [the protecting influence of] the merits of the patriarchs have ceased and we have no deliverance from the hands of the nations except for the sake of His Great Name, similar to what He stated in the Book of Ezekiel (20:41), “when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations. And ye shall know that I am the Eternal, when I have wrought with you for My Name’s sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, O ye house of Israel.” And so also it is further stated, “But I wrought for My Name’s sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nation’s etc.” Therefore Moses mentioned in his prayer (Numbers 14:15), “then the nations which have heard the fame of Thee will speak, saying etc.” and G-d, blessed be He, acknowledged him in this (Numbers 14:20), “And the Eternal said: I have pardoned according to thy word.”

This plea is not meant to demonstrate His power among His enemies, for “All the nations are as nothing before Him; they are accounted by Him as things of nought, and vanity.” (Isaiah 40:17)



*Rather, [the explanation thereof is as follows:] G-d created man among the lower creatures in order that he acknowledge his Creator and be thankful to His name, and He placed in his hand the choice to do evil or good. But when people sinned willingly and they all denied Him, only this people [Israel] remained devoted to His name, and so He made known through them by means of signs and wonders that “He is G-d of gods, and Lord of lords,” (Devarim 10:17) and this became known to all nations. Now, if He were to reconsider and their memory [i.e., of Israel] be lost, the nations will forget His wonders and His deeds and they will no longer recount them. And if a person should mention them, they will think that it was [done by] one of the powers of the constellations which is “overflowing as he passeth through,” (Isaiah 8:8) and thus the purpose of the creation of man will be annulled completely, for no one will be left among them who knows his Creator — only those who provoke Him. **Therefore, it is appropriate as a consequence of the [Divine] Will which existed at the creation of the world to establish for Himself a***

people for all time, who are nearer to Him and who know Him more than all the [other] peoples. (Chavel Translation)

In providing a theological rationale for Divine intervention in the face of *chilul Hashem*, the Ramban equates the force that ensures Israel’s continuity with the Divine Will integral to the act of Creation. Pieced together with the Ramban’s own comments on the verse “*vayizkor Elokim es Noach*,” it becomes abundantly clear that the latter verse embodies the extraordinary secret of Jewish survival; hence, the prominent place that it holds among the verses of *Zichronos* is most appropriate.

Activating the Channels of the Primordial Mercy: Instinct over Intellect

Let us sketch the main ideas developed thus far:

1. The message of Hashem’s eternal concern for Am Yisrael is metaphorically linked to His promise to never again destroy the world.

2. This promise was foreshadowed by Hashem's remembrance of Noah and the calming of the raging waters.

3. This remembrance is a manifestation of an attribute of mercy associated with the phrase *yeshua ve'rachamim*, which emanates from the "Ancient Heavens" (*shmei shmei kedem*) and is synonymous with the Primordial Will of Creation.

4. Inasmuch as the Jewish People are essential for the world to achieve its purpose, their survival is vital to the world's continued existence.

5. Consequently, the same attribute of mercy that keeps the world going is what sustains Klal Yisrael, and when all else fails, can serve as the mercy "of last resort."

Our analysis raises something of a paradox. Presumably, "*yeshua ve'rachamim* mercy" may be accessed at any given time, on a collective or individual level.¹¹ But if becoming a beneficiary of this transcendent mercy is not contingent on merit, then what factors, if any, contribute to the opening of such channels? Is there a process by which the flow of this transcendent mercy is generated?

Perhaps an answer lies in the phraseology of the verse "*Vayizkor Elokim es Noach*" which identifies Noah and the animals, despite their vast dissimilarities, as joint beneficiaries of the Divine grace. This depiction is reminiscent of the verse "*Adam u'veheima toshi'a Hashem*" (cited by Abudarham as the source

for the word *yeshua* in the phrase *yeshu'a verachamim*), which speaks of a salvation that bridges man and animals.

Taken homiletically, the message of this verse is that the "equalizing" of man and animals holds the key to opening the channel of primordial mercy. The quality common to animals and humans is that both are creatures of G-d. However, the driving force behind animal behavior is instinct while a human being's actions are rooted in cognition and free will. While the human ability to think and act autonomously is a gift that is meant to be channeled in the service of G-d, there are occasions when one's rational human qualities should be sublimated in favor of an instinctive loyalty to G-d. Otherwise, one's intellectual capacities can potentially compromise basic faith.

This concept is accentuated by Chazal in the following homiletic interpretations on the verse "*Adam u'veheima toshi'a Hashem*":

אדם ובהמה תושיע ה', ואמר רב יהודה אמר רב: אלו בני אדם שהן ערומין בדעת ומשימין עצמן כבהמה.
חולין ה:

[The verse states] "G-d saves man and animal," Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: This refers to people that are sophisticated yet conduct themselves [humbly] like animals.

Chullin 5b

אדם ובהמה תושיע ה', אדם בזכות בהמה תושיע ה' אמרו ישראל רבש"ע כאדם אנחנו כבהמה תושיענו לפי שאנו נמשכין אחריו כבהמה.

ויקרא רבה פרשה כז ד"ה שור

[The verse states] "G-d saves man and animal," G-d will save in the merit of animals. The Jewish people said: Master of the Universe, we are like man, please save us like [You save] animals because we are drawn after You like an animal.

Vayikra Rabbah, Parsha no. 27

Thus, the secret to becoming the beneficiary of special Divine grace may be the ability of a human being to suspend his sophisticated, rational faculty in favor of simple faith,¹² amidst a recognition that when all is said and done, he, along with the animals and beasts of the field, are merely creatures of the One and Only G-d who fashioned us all.

Dependency on Hashem: Our Eyes Turn To You

The self-awareness of being a "creature of G-d" reinforces within oneself a faith and dependency on the One above. On the most instinctive level, this visceral sense of dependency spans humans and animals and is aptly captured in a verse recited thrice daily:

עיני כל אליך ישרו ואתה נותן להם את אכלם בעתו.
תהלים קמה, טו



The eyes of all turn to You with hope and You give them their food in the proper time.

Tehillim 145:15

In effect, gaining access to the primordial mercy entails a measure of subverting our cognitive-based, autonomous self-image and adopting the mindset of being a creature that is dependent on its Creator for its basic needs.

This paradigm shift may be discerned in the phraseology accompanying the closing request of the *Yaale VeYavo* prayer — “*U’vidvar yeshu’ah verachamim ...*” — which, as noted earlier, is a reference to the transcendent mercy that is tied to the primordial will of creation:

ובדבר ישועה ורחמים חוס וחננו ורחם עלינו והושיענו כי אליך עינינו כי א-ל מלך חנון ורחום אתה.

In accord with the word of salvation and mercy, spare us and be gracious to us, have compassion on us and save us because our eyes are turned to You, because You are a G-d, a King who is merciful and compassionate.

Our appeal for the ultimate mercy is followed by three words that capture succinctly the sentiment of dependency on G-d that is necessary for eliciting this extraordinary level of mercy — “*ki eleicha eineinu*” — because our eyes are turned to You. We conclude with “because You are a G-d, a King who is merciful and compassionate” to reinforce the idea that the mercy is a manifestation of G-d’s extraordinary grace.

Accessing this mercy is not a function of merit, nor of erudition or cognition; it lies deep in the recesses of one’s inner being — in the instinctual awareness of being a “creature of G-d” and in a feeling of utter dependence upon Him.

The Power of the Shofar: Embracing an “Animal-like Temimus”

Chazal teach us that the Jews’ blowing the shofar has the capacity to transform the attribute of judgment into mercy:

עלה אלהים בתרועה ה' בקול שופר (תהלים מז) בשעה שהקב"ה יושב ועולה על כסא דין בדין הוא עולה ... ובשעה שישראל נוטלין את שופריהן ותוקעין לפני הקב"ה עומד מכסא הדין ויושב בכסא רחמים דכתיב ה' בקול שופר ומתמלא עליהם רחמים ומרחם עליהם והופך עליהם מדת הדין לרחמים ויקרא רבה פרשה כט ד"ה יהודה ברבי

[*The verse states*] “*The Lord rose with a blast, God, with the sound of the shofar.*” *When the Holy One Blessed be He ascends and sits on the throne of judgment, He rises with judgment ... And when the Jewish people take their shofars and blow them before the Holy One Blessed be He, He rises from the throne of judgment and sits on the throne of mercy as it states “God, with the sound of the shofar.” He fills them with mercy, has compassion on them and transforms strict judgment to mercy.*

Vayikra Rabbah, Parsha no. 29

In Summary

1. The message of Hashem’s eternal concern for Am Yisrael is metaphorically linked to His promise to never again destroy the world.
2. This promise was foreshadowed by Hashem’s remembrance of Noach and the calming of the raging waters.
3. This remembrance is a manifestation of an attribute of mercy associated with the phrase *yeshua ve’rachamim*, which emanates from the “Ancient Heavens” (*shmei shmei kedem*) and is synonymous with the Primordial Will of Creation.
4. Inasmuch as the Jewish People are essential for the world to achieve its purpose, their survival is vital to the world’s continued existence.
5. Consequently, the same attribute of mercy that keeps the world going is what sustains Klal Yisrael, and when all else fails, can serve as the mercy “of last resort.”
6. The secret to becoming the beneficiary of special Divine grace may be the ability of a human being to suspend his sophisticated, rational faculty in favor of simple faith.
7. Accessing this mercy is not a function of merit, nor of erudition or cognition; it lies deep in the recesses of one’s inner being — in the instinctual awareness of being a “creature of G-d” and in a feeling of utter dependence upon Him.
8. By blowing shofar, a Jew momentarily sets aside his autonomy and embraces his fragile existence as a creature of G-d, not unlike the animals. This very gesture generates a measure of reciprocity on the part of HaKadosh Baruch Hu in the form of a primordial mercy that emanates from the ancient heavens.

What is the nature of the shofar's transformative power? What kind of feeling does it evoke?

In light of what we have seen, it would be compelling to equate the mercy engendered by the shofar with the primordial grace synonymous with creation.¹³ The transformative quality inherent in this mitzvah is based on a Jew's ability to set aside his rational faculties and embrace an "animal-like simplicity" as symbolized by the origin of the physical shofar itself.¹⁴ This motif also lies at the heart of the episode of *akeidas Yitzchak* whose symbolism the Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 16a) invokes in connection with the mitzvah of shofar.¹⁵

The blowing of the shofar is the epitome of simplicity — without illusions, trappings, or pretensions. By blowing shofar, a Jew momentarily sets aside his autonomy and embraces his fragile existence as a creature of G-d, not unlike the animals. This very gesture generates a measure of reciprocity on the part of HaKadosh Baruch Hu in the form of a primordial mercy that emanates from the ancient heavens.

May we be the beneficiaries of this extraordinary manifestation of Heavenly grace; inscribed, individually and collectively, for a *shana tova umesuka*.

Notes:

1. For example, the prayers repeatedly acknowledge that Hashem is Sovereign over the entire universe and that His inscrutable judgment extends to every human being.

2. As, for example, the repeated references to recalling the covenant, or of Israel's loyalty in following Hashem into the wilderness.

3. Interestingly, the first part of the song's refrain "*Yona matz'ah vo mano'ach*" also contains an allusion to the story of Noah.

4. Additionally, it should be noted that this phrase appears in the prayer "*Av harachamim Hu yerachem am amusim*," recited as the sefer Torah is brought from the Aron Kodesh to the bima. The tefila focuses on the welfare of the Jewish people and concludes with a petition that our wishes be fulfilled in good measure (*bemida tova*) with *yeshua ve'rachamim*. Here, too, it is evident that this mercy has special significance for Jewish destiny.

5. Within a Kabbalistic framework, the allusion is most likely to the *sefira* of *keser*, the loftiest of the ten *sefiros* through which the Divine celestial energy flows into the world below.

6. See *Tur* (OC 591) who cites approvingly a custom to recite the prayer of *Ya'ale VeYavo* within the *Zichronos* prayer.

7. It is fascinating to note that according to the Gaon of Vilna (*Siddur Ishei Yisrael*, quoted also in printed editions of *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* at the beginning), the various expressions connoting remembrance that appear at the outset of the *Ya'ale VeYavo* prayer (*ya'ale, yavo, yagi'ah* etc.) correspond to the seven Heavens listed by the Talmud (*Chagiga* 12b), each with its own designated name and unique description. Hence, it would be appropriate for the closing request of "*u'vidvar yeshu'a verachamim*" to be linked to a source that transcends the standard seven Heavens. This may correspond with the "*shemei shmei kedem*" (the ancient heaven of heavens) — the appellation that is used in connection with this very phrase at the close of the *Zichronos* prayer.

8. See Rashi *ibid* who cites an answer based on a midrash. By contrast, Ramban's resolution reflects a more peshat-oriented approach.

9. For an elaboration on the concept of Hashem's "activating" an attribute of mercy at a given time, see *Chidushei HaGriz al HaTorah* on this verse.

10. Apparently, the rescuing of the *teiva* inhabitants need not constitute a reaffirmation of the primordial will to repopulate the earth, but may be interpreted as merely providing safe haven in the interim. Interestingly, this approach may shed light on Rashi's comments to 6:17 that Hashem, in informing Noah about his intention to bring the flood, was acceding to the angels' argument against the creation of man. Ramban questions Rashi's explanation given

that in the very next verse Hashem instructs Noah to build an ark, thus ensuring the future of mankind. In defense of Rashi, we may suggest that Hashem's instructions to Noah to build an ark notwithstanding, there was as yet no renewed commitment to the continuity of life thereafter; hence, the mass destruction of the world still represented a concession to the argument put forth by the angels. (See, however, 7:3 which implies that at least with regard to birds there already existed a Divine mandate to perpetuate the species in the aftermath of the *mabul*. For further elaboration, see *Yekev Ephraim* 6:17.)

11. It is undoubtedly this transcendental mercy that underlies a mystical concept associated with the 13 attributes of mercy in which Hashem promises: "*vechanosi es asher achon - af al pi she'eino hagun*" — "I will show grace to whomever I show grace — even if they are unworthy" (*Berachos* 7a). Elaboration goes beyond the scope of this essay.

12. Interestingly, the Ramban, in the continuation of the passage quoted above that ascribes the Divine intervention on behalf of Israel to the primordial will, highlights Israel's loyalty and steadfastness to Hashem in bearing the hardships of the long exile. This suggests that displaying simple loyalty is a prerequisite to benefiting from the Divine grace.

13. This would parallel the notion suggested by many Hassidic works that the blowing of the shofar is reminiscent of the verse depicting the creation of man through Hashem's "blowing into him the breath of life" — "*Vayipach be'apav nishmas chayim*" (*Bereishis* 2:7).

14. Additionally, the wordless sound of the shofar lacks the sophistication that is characteristic of human verbal communication.

15. Apropos the *akeida's* association with the primordial mercy, it is noteworthy that the *parshas ha'akeida's* appearance in the daily liturgy (after *Birchos HaShachar*) features an introductory prayer reminiscent of the petition at the end of *Zichronos*: "*u'fakdeinu bifkudas yeshu'a ve'rachamim mishmei shmei kedem*" — "and be mindful of us with a directive of salvation and mercy from the most ancient of heavens."

Did Yonah Teach Nineveh to Repent?

One central issue in the interpretation of Sefer Yonah is assessing the thoroughness of the people of Nineveh's repentance. A simple reading of Chapter 3 leads the reader to conclude that God was very pleased with their repentance, as the chapter closes:

וַיִּרְא הָאֱלֹקִים אֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם כִּי שָׁבוּ מִדְרָכָם
הַרְעָה וַיִּנָּחֵם הָאֱלֹקִים עַל הַרְעָה אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר
לַעֲשׂוֹת לָהֶם וְלֹא עָשָׂה.

God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways. And God renounced the punishment He had planned to bring upon them, and did not carry it out” (3:10).¹

But Sefer Yonah continues for one more chapter in which God and Yonah argue about whether He should have spared Nineveh. The last word goes to God, and He appears to justify His decision to forgive as an act of compassion rather than something which Nineveh rightfully earned through repentance:

וְאֲנִי לֹא אֶחָוֶם עַל נִינְוֵה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ
בָּהּ הֶרְבֵּה מִשָּׂרְתִּים עֹשְׂרֵהָ רַבּוֹ אֲדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא
יָדַע בֵּין יְמִינוֹ לְשִׂמְאֹלוֹ וּבִהֶמָּה רֶבֶה.

Should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!

This conclusion leaves the reader wondering, did Nineveh merit forgiveness due to thorough, sincere repentance, or did God spare them through His infinite mercy while deeming their repentance to be insincere or incomplete?



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The Favorable View of Nineveh's Repentance

As one reads through chapter 3, one struggles to find any major flaws in Nineveh's attempts to earn God's forgiveness. Upon hearing about their imminent destruction, they "believed God" and "proclaimed a fast" (3:5). This grassroots response was complemented by the king lending his support by donning sackcloth and ashes (3:6), decreeing a fast (3:7) and imploring his people to change their sinful behavior (3:8). This last aspect is particularly important, since it seemingly belies the suggestion that the people of Nineveh engaged in perfunctory rituals without improving their behavior. Indeed, the Mishnah holds up Nineveh as the model of a successful fast that inspires people to change their ways:

סדר תעניות כיצד מוציאים את התיבה לרחובה של עיר ונותנים אפר מקלה על גבי התיבה ובראש הנשיא ובראש אב בית דין וכל אחד ואחד נותן בראשו הזקן שבהן אומר לפניו דברי כבושין איחנו לא נאמר באנשי נינוה וירא אלהים את שקם ואת תעניתם אלא וירא אלהים את מעשיהם כי שבו מדרכם הרעה.

What is the order of service on a fast? They carry the ark out to the open area of the town, and they place burnt

ashes on the ark, and on the head of the Nasi, and on the head of the chief justice, and everyone else puts ashes on their heads. The elder among them says words of admonition before them: "Our brothers, it is not said about the people of Nineveh: 'And God saw their sack cloth and their fast,' but rather: 'God saw what they did, how they were turning back from their evil ways.'"

Ta'anit 2:1

Ibn Ezra shares this favorable view of Nineveh's repentance and describes it as complete and unparalleled (תשובה גמורה אין כמוה). Moreover, in light of the verse's assertion that the people of Nineveh "believed God," Ibn Ezra concludes that they were God-fearing monotheists who had only recently begun to sin. Ibn Ezra observes that the king's orders focused on interpersonal sins (וישבו איש מדרכו הרעה) "Let everyone turn back from his evil ways and from the injustice of which he is guilty". He thus suggests that the king did not order people to rid themselves of idols, because they were monotheists and hence did not possess any idols. Given their past history as monotheists, God calculated that a prophet could likely succeed at convincing them to repent. Ibn Ezra

thus paints a picture of a city that had only recently begun to sin — and even then, only in the area of interpersonal behavior — and swiftly repented from that negative behavior.

The Unfavorable View of Nineveh's Repentance

Not all commentators share Ibn Ezra's unreservedly favorable view of Nineveh's repentance. In the Jerusalem Talmud (*Ta'anit* 2:1), R. Shimon b. Lakish refers to Nineveh's repentance as an act of deceit (שובה של רמיית). Some of the flaws that this Talmudic passage raise appear to have a very weak basis in the Biblical text, such as the claims that thieves in Nineveh did not return stolen items that they had already stored away.² One of the proposed flaws in their repentance, however, is quite intriguing. It also appears in the parallel passage in the Babylonian Talmud:

מאי הוּו עבדי? אסרא הבהמות לחוד ואת
הוולדות לחוד, אמרו לפניו: רבונו של עולם
אם אין אתה מרחם עלינו - אין אנו מרחמים
על אלו.
תענית טז.

How did they act? — They separated the animals from their young and they said, Master of the Universe, if You will not have mercy upon us, we will not show mercy to these.

Ta'anit 16a

This claim speaks to a fundamental question about their fast: Were they fasting as a means to inspire character improvement, or were they fasting out of a belief that the ritual of fasting could somehow compel God to spare them regardless of whether they changed their ways? The aforementioned Mishnah assumed the former and thus held them up as

role models for an ideal fast. But one minor detail of their fast calls that assumption into question. The king ordered: “No man or beast — of flock or herd — shall taste anything (האדם והבהמה הבקר והצאן אל יטעמו מאומה)!” If the purpose of the fast is to inspire repentance, then there would seem to be little reason to coerce animals to fast. Accordingly, the king's proclamation might reflect the belief that the act of fasting could itself force God to spare Nineveh. The Talmud takes this perspective to its extreme by portraying the inclusion of animals as a form of blackmail: “If You will not have mercy upon us, we will not show mercy to these,” as if God must spare Nineveh — whether or not they repent — or else innocent hostages will be hurt. Indeed, God's closing argument to Yonah could certainly be understood to mean that He spared them because He succumbed to this blackmail. He admits to sparing them because Nineveh had “more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well,” implying that His main concern was for those who were not guilty in the first place.

Ibn Ezra's claim that Nineveh was a monotheistic city can be questioned as well. Ibn Ezra derived this claim from the absence of any mention of destroying idols as part of their repentance. However, that same piece of information leads Abarbanel to precisely the opposite conclusion. He suggests that the text makes no mention of idolatry when describing their repentance because — like all Gentiles at that time — the people of Nineveh had always been pagans and continued to be pagans even as the text describes their repentance from “their evil ways.” According to

Why Do We Read Yonah On Yom Kippur?

The Gemara (*Megilla* 31a) states that we read Yonah for the haftarah of Mincha on Yom Kippur.

- a. Rashi (*Siddur Rashi*, #214) writes that we read it because of the teshuva of the people of Nineveh.
- b. R. David Avudraham (*Seder Tefilot Yom Hakippurim*) writes that we read it because we learn from Yonah that you cannot run away from your aveiros.
- c. R. Yehuda Shaviv (*Bein Haftarah LaParsha* pp. 216-223) notes another connection to Yom Kippur: There is an element of lottery in both. The *se'ir lazazel* was chosen through lottery. Similarly, the sailors used a lottery to determine who was at fault for the sinking ship.

Abarbanel, God forgave them on the basis of their repentance from interpersonal sins of corruption and injustice, but He knowingly turned a blind eye to their paganism, since He recognized that He could not destroy them for worshipping idols unless He wished to destroy every Gentile in the world.

Yonah's Role

Rather than focusing exclusively on the behavior of the residents of Nineveh, it is also worth asking what role Yonah played in prompting the people of Nineveh to repent. After failing to escape from his mission in chapter 1, Yonah does travel to Nineveh in chapter 3 and warns them:

“Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown (עוד ארבעים יום ויגוה נהפכת)” Thus, it seems that Yonah ultimately fulfills his mission as God instructed him to do. However, a closer look at Yonah’s conduct raises several questions about the manner in which Yonah executed his mission:

1) If Nineveh is described as being “a three days’ walk across (*mahalach sheloshet yamim*)” (3:3), then why did Yonah only enter the city “the distance of one day’s walk (*mahalach yom echad*)” (3:4), implying that he only went one third of the way into the city?³

2) Why did Yonah limit himself to a terse proclamation that the city would be destroyed in forty days? Shouldn’t he have specified which God sent him, why that God was angry, and which improved forms of conduct would convince that God that Nineveh had fully repented?⁴

3) Did Yonah make any serious attempt to contact Nineveh’s leadership? A simple reading of the text implies that “the news reached the king of Nineveh” (3:6) as it spread from person to person (*vayiga hadavar el melech Nineveh*), but not because Yonah ever met with the king directly.

The sum of these questions leads one to conclude that even when Yonah finally traveled to Nineveh, he nevertheless limited himself to doing the bare minimum to be able to claim that he was no longer disobeying God. He avoided any additional steps that might have guided Nineveh toward repentance.

God’s Response to Yonah

Let us now return to God’s final remarks to Yonah. Earlier, we questioned why God cited the large number of humans “who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts” in order to justify His decision to spare Nineveh. After all, if the sinners repented, shouldn’t God have told Yonah that He spared Nineveh due to their repentance and not due to the size of their population?

The great medieval French commentator R. Eliezer of Beaugency suggests that Yonah left Nineveh without witnessing the city’s repentance. Hence, Yonah mistakenly believed that God had spared an unrepentant Nineveh. Rather than correcting Yonah by informing him of Nineveh’s repentance, God decided to educate Yonah about the importance of mercy and compassion by arguing that it would have been reasonable to spare



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Nineveh out of mercy even if the adults had not repented:

ולדבריו ולשיטתו השיבו; שאף אם היה כמו שהוא סבור, לא היה לו לכעוס על כך.

[God] answered [Yonah] according to [Yonah's] words and opinion: Even if it was as Yonah thought, he should not have become angry over that.

According to R. Eliezer of Beaugency, God's final conversation with Yonah is based on the false premise that the people of Nineveh did not repent. Based on our discussion above, however, we can suggest that God did not base His comments on a false premise. If we are correct that Yonah only partially entered Nineveh, that he offered no information or guidance to them beyond a vague threat of destruction, and that he never spoke directly to Nineveh's leadership, then perhaps the repentance that sounds so impressive in chapter 3 was only considered impressive in light of the people's ignorance. Given that they received no meaningful guidance from Yonah, God was impressed by the manner in which the residents quickly mobilized to fast and how the king — who only heard of the threat secondhand — added his own call to fast and further implored his people to repent. God thus embraced their repentance despite its aforementioned shortcomings.

On some level, therefore, Yonah was correct to believe that this repentance was a quick-fix, executed by pagans whose perception of fasting was so ritualistic that they forced their animals to fast — as if

the act of fasting had the intrinsic ability to manipulate God and was not merely a means for sinners to inspire themselves to repent. Yonah argues (4:2) that his entire mission was pointless, “for I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment” (כי ידעתי כי אתה אל חנון ורחום ארך אפים) (ורב חסד ונחם על הרעה). In essence, Yonah laments that God's attribute of mercy prompts Him to settle for hasty, superficial repentance. In His response, God implicitly acknowledges that Nineveh's repentance was less than optimal. However, He defends this decision on the grounds that Nineveh is filled with people who do not “know their right hand from their left.” While this phrase might refer specifically to children who are too young to know right from wrong (Rashi, Radak), it could also allude to the fact that even the adults in Nineveh lacked meaningful knowledge of how to repent.⁵ After all, Yonah told them nothing about the God who sent him or His value system, hoping that the people of Nineveh would perish in their ignorance. God responded that in truth, Yonah's failure to educate them ensured that their incomplete repentance would suffice to save them. Without knowledge of why they were facing destruction, and without knowledge of how to properly repent, God accepted their best effort at repentance while implicitly blaming Yonah for failing to embrace the educational role of a prophet

and instead leaving the residents of Nineveh as people who do not “know their right hand from their left.”

Notes

1. All translations of Biblical verses come from the new JPS translation.
2. מה שהיה בכף ידיהם החזירו מה שהיה בשידה. תיבה ומגדל לא החזירו. The parallel passage in the Babylonian Talmud (*Ta'anit* 16a) cites Shmuel as insisting that they returned all stolen items, including stolen construction materials that they had already built into new buildings (אפילו גזל מריש ובנאו בבירה - מקעקע כל) (הבירה כולה ומחזיר מריש לבעליו).
3. I am interpreting this phrase to mean that they city's diameter was a three-day walk, which is Radak's view. However, Ibn Ezra claims that the city's circumference was a three-day walk, in which case Yonah would have crossed the entire diameter in one day.
4. Malbim raises these issues and thus concludes from these omissions — as we shall also conclude — that Yonah hoped Nineveh would fail to repent and would thus be destroyed.
5. Abarbanel interprets that phrase “who do not know their right hand from their left” in this vein. Based on his aforementioned claim that God overlooked Nineveh's idol worship, Abarbanel explains that the adults of Nineveh knew nothing about the true God and therefore were not culpable for the sin of idolatry.



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Rosh Hashana as the Beginning of the Teshuva Process

When we look at the sequence of events that takes place at the beginning of the year, the holidays seem to be out of order. One could argue that Yom Kippur should come before Rosh Hashana so that we can atone for all of our sins and start the new year with a clean slate. Why does Rosh Hashana come first?

דרשו ה' בהמצאו ... אלו עשרה ימים שבין ראש השנה ליום הכפורים.
ראש השנה יה.

[The verse states] “Seek out G-d when He can be found” ... These are the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

Rosh Hashana 18a

The Gemara teaches us the concept which we know as the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*, the Ten Days of Repentance, and Rosh Hashana is included in those ten days. What is the connection between Rosh Hashana and repentance? There doesn't seem to be any mention of repentance in the Rosh Hashana liturgy!

When one examines Rosh Hashana, one finds that the core theme of Rosh Hashana is coronating Hashem, declaring and accepting Him as the king. We pay very little attention to ourselves and our own needs and place all of our attention on accepting Hashem as the ruler over us. This is a critical component of teshuva. It is a prerequisite of the teshuva process because if we don't first fully accept Hashem's sovereignty, our entire



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enterprise of teshuva is meaningless. How could we possibly spend the rest of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* knocking our hearts and saying “we have sinned before You” if we don't know who Hashem really is? Without first making that recognition, the rest of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* would be eight days of empty promises.

I am often asked by my students what they should be thinking about when they reach a part of the prayer on Rosh Hashana that they don't really understand. I tell them that if they can't understand the nuances of that particular prayer, they should think in general terms about coronating Hashem and what that means in their lives. This is the essence of Rosh Hashana.

While Rosh Hashana is part of the teshuva process, it has a unique and distinct role in the process, which is why certain practices from the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* are not observed on Rosh Hashana. First, we try to avoid any mention of our sins. We don't recite *Viduy* (confessional). According to the Vilna Gaon, we leave out *chatanu lifenacha* — we have sinned before You — from the *Avinu Malkeinu* prayer. The Rama, *Orach Chaim* 583:2, writes that we don't

eat nuts on Rosh Hashana because they have the same numerical value as *cheit* (sin). The basis for all of these practices is that mentioning our sins detracts from the message of Rosh Hashana — coronating Hashem. We cannot focus too much on our own actions. We will have time to do that during the rest of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*. On Rosh Hashana, we have to build the foundation upon which we can truly repent and we must leave our own struggles and interests out of that foundation.

The poskim discuss whether personal requests in our prayers are permissible on Rosh Hashana (See *Mateh Efraim* 584:25). While common practice is that they are permissible, the argument to forbid them is based on the principle that we have presented. Perhaps asking for personal requests would detract from the primary focus of coronating Hashem as king.

The Netziv, *Devar Ha'Emek*, Nechemiah 8:10, was of the opinion that prayers and thoughts that lead one to cry is inappropriate on Rosh Hashana. Why is it inappropriate? Isn't Rosh Hashana a very serious and somber day? The answer is that the thoughts that would lead one to cry on Rosh Hashana would be thoughts

rooted in one's shortcomings or one's difficult predicament. These thoughts should be the focus of the next eight days of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva*, but the two days of Rosh Hashana should be focused on Hashem.

If Rosh Hashana is not about us, not about our sins, how do we explain Tashlich? Doesn't going to a body of water to cast away our sins conflict with the coronation of Hashem? How can we focus on ourselves?

Perhaps we can explain Tashlich in a different manner. The Gemara quotes the following dispute among the Tannaim:

שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד מלכות דברי ר' יוסי ר' יהודה אומר אינה מלכות. ראש השנה לב:

The verse "Hear O Israel, G-d is our Lord, G-d is one" qualifies as kingship. These are the words of Rabbi Yosi. Rabbi Yehuda says, this does not qualify as kingship.

Rosh Hashana 32b

What is lacking in the verse that would make it unqualified for *Malchuyos* according to Rabbi Yehuda? Rav Yitzchok Hutner, *Pachad Yitzchok*, Rosh Hashana no. 24, explains that there is a difference between coronating a king and reaffirming the kingship of an existing king. All of the other verses that are recited for *Malchuyos* represent a form of coronation. The verse "Sh'ma Yisrael" represents a reaffirmation of a kingship that already exists. For R. Yehuda, the only way to fulfill *Malchuyos* is to actively coronate Hashem.

While we follow the opinion of Rabbi Yosi and include it among our ten verses, we can still view *Malchuyos*, and Rosh Hashana as a whole, as a coronation ceremony. The Gemara teaches us that about where a king's coronation should take place:

אין מושחים את המלכים אלא על המעיין כדי שתמשך מלכותם. הוריות יב.

Kings should only be anointed by a spring to symbolize that their kingdom should flow.

Horayos 12a

Perhaps Tashlich is not primarily about throwing away our sins. The primary reason to go to the water on Rosh Hashana is to coronate Hashem. Since coronating kings was traditionally done by the water, we too coronate Hashem by the water. Once we are already at the water, we recite the verses that discuss how sins can be cast into the water, but that is not our primary goal.

This idea explains why our judgment takes place on Rosh Hashana, before we fully engage in the teshuva process. In order to coronate Hashem, there has to be absolute acceptance of Him as our King. It cannot be transactional or conditional on our own actions. Those details can be figured out after the coronation. Only after the coronation can we look at our actions and plead for mercy.

How Do we Coronate Hashem?

One way to coronate Hashem is

through acts of kindness. The verse in Nechemiah 8:10, records the charge Nechemiah gave the Jewish people on Rosh Hashana (see Nechemiah 8:2):

ויאמר להם לכו אכלו משמנים ושתו מממתקים ושלחו מנות לאין נכון לו כי קדוש היום לאדונינו ואל תעצבו כי חדות ה' היא מעזכם. *He said to them: Go and eat delicacies, drink sweet drinks and send packages to those in need because today is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad because joy in G-d is your strength.*

Why is Nechemiah insisting on sending packages to the needy on Rosh Hashana? Rav Hutner, *Pachad Yitzchok* no. 1, writes that we see from Nechemiah that engaging in acts of kindness is an integral part of Rosh Hashana. Rav Hutner explains that *chesed* (kindness) is the basis for the creation of the world. Hashem created the world out of total kindness to humanity. If we want to coronate Hashem on Rosh Hashana, we have to show that we follow the values that Hashem's Kingdom was built on. We have to recognize that all of mankind was created in the image of Hashem and that Hashem wants all people to be the beneficiaries of kindness.

One of the verses we read in the *Malchuyos* section comes from *V'zos Haberacha* (Devarim 33:5):

ויהי בישרון מלך בהתאסף ראשי עם יחד שבטי ישראל.

And there was a king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the nation gathered, all of the tribes of Israel were together.

The key word in this verse is *yachad*, together. If we want to coronate Hashem, we have to be unified. The



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Maharal, *Tiferes Yisrael* no. 21, writes that the first two commandments were given to all of the Jewish people together and not individually because without unity, there is no nation, and without a nation, Hashem cannot be a king. We achieve this unity by engaging in acts of kindness on Rosh Hashana and by committing to be kind people throughout the year.

This is also why there is a *minhag*, recorded in the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 128:14, to ask forgiveness from our friends and family before Rosh Hashana. The *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 606:1, writes that we should ask forgiveness from our friends and family before Yom Kippur. Asking for forgiveness before Yom Kippur makes sense because we want to rid ourselves of all of our sins before Yom Kippur. If Rosh Hashana is not about our sins, why should we ask for forgiveness before Rosh Hashana? Perhaps the *minhag* to ask for forgiveness before Rosh Hashana serves a different purpose. The purpose is to unify us, to make sure that each person is whole with everyone else. We are trying to create a sense of unity in order to coronate Hashem and in order to do that, everyone must put all of their gripes and grudges behind.

Another way to coronate Hashem is by freeing ourselves from our desires and from our selfish attitudes. The Torah never identifies which instrument should be used for the blasts of Rosh Hashana. The Gemara explains why we specifically require a shofar:

תנו רבנן מנין שבשופר ת"ל והעברת שופר
תרועה אין לי אלא ביובל בראש השנה מנין
תלמוד לומר בחדש השביעי שאין תלמוד
לומר בחדש השביעי ומה תלמוד לומר בחדש
השביעי שיהיו כל תרועות של חדש שביעי זה
כזה.
ראש השנה לג:

Our rabbis taught: How do we know that one must use a shofar? We derive it from the verse "And you shall sound a broken blast." This verse refers to the jubilee year. How do we know [that one must use a shofar] on Rosh Hashana? The verse states "in the seventh month." In the seventh month seems extraneous. What is it teaching? That all of the blasts in the seventh month should be the same.

Rosh Hashana 33b

The Gemara not only derives the requirement to use a shofar from the shofar of yovel, the ensuing passage derives some of the laws relating to how to blow the shofar from the shofar of yovel.

The Maharam Brisk in his *Derashos*, (Rosh Hashana 5695) asks: Why are so many fundamental laws relating to Rosh Hashana derived from yovel? He answers that one of the key elements of yovel is *shichrur*, the freeing of slaves. The shofar symbolizes freedom and therefore on Rosh Hashana, we blow the shofar to symbolize that we are free from all that enslaves us. This perhaps is why the Gemara, *Rosh Hashana* 11a, highlights the fact that Yosef was freed from prison on Rosh Hashana.

The verse in Tehillim states:

אנה ה' כי אני עבדך אני עבדך בן אמתך
פתחת למוסרי.
תהלים קטז:טז

*Please G-d, for I am Your servant,
I am Your servant the son of Your
handmaiden, you freed me from my
shackles.*

Tehillim 116:16

The verse seems to have an internal contradiction. How can we declare that we are servants of G-d and at the same say that He freed us from our shackles? I heard from *mori v'rabi* Rav Hershel Schachter shli"ta that there is no contradiction. If we want to be truly free, if we want to release the shackles that bind us, we have to subjugate ourselves to the service of Hashem.

This is why there is an emphasis on *shichrur* on Rosh Hashana. Part of the coronation process is accepting upon ourselves to be the King's servants, to carry out his will. If we want to be His servants, we can't be enslaved to anything else. We have to allow Hashem to remove those shackles.

May this year be a year when we can truly coronate Hashem. May this Rosh Hashana set a precedent of unity and *chesed* for the entire year. May this Rosh Hashana be a time when we remove the shackles that bind us from truly serving Hashem and may we merit that our acceptance of His sovereignty propels us to properly perform teshuva and leads to us having a *kesiva vachasima tova*.

Perhaps the *minhag* to ask for forgiveness before Rosh Hashana serves a different purpose; to make sure that each person is whole with everyone else. We are trying to create a sense of unity in order to coronate Hashem and to do that, everyone must put all of their gripes and grudges behind.

Does God Want You To Work At Zappos? Malchuyot Reclaimed

In 2013, online shoe and clothing retailer Zappos decided to fire their bosses — all of them. For a company that touts its mission to “create fun and a little weirdness,” even this seemed beyond the pale. The unorthodox move by CEO Tony Hsieh came as part of a companywide embrace of holacracy, a management philosophy that replaces work teams with “circles.” Employees start or join a circle based on the type of work they want to do, and each circle has a “lead link” who is similar to a project manager with limited authority. In holacracy, circle members decide their roles and responsibilities in a series of “governance meetings” and track progress in “tactical meetings.” There are no managers, no chains of command, no org charts. The workplace is completely bossless.

While Hsieh (pronounced SHAY) has praised holacracy’s ability to produce faster idea flow and transparency, the transition has not been smooth.¹ Approximately 14%, or 210, of Zappos’ 1,500 employees found the new management philosophy too confusing and quit. Workers claimed that governance and tactical meetings consumed up to five extra hours of productivity. It isn’t clear what will happen to 269 ex-managers whose jobs were upended by holacracy, or how employees can advance in a company devoid of job titles.



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Amid the rise in bossless workplaces (including the likes of MorningStar Farms and W.L. Gore and Associates, the maker of Gore-Tex) comes new research that casts doubt on their efficacy. Researchers at Northwestern’s Kellogg School of Management measured the productivity of traditional “mixed-power” work teams and found that tiered groups outperformed flat ones. Teams in which everyone has high power — like the circles in holacracy — are more likely to experience elevated levels of conflict, reduced role differentiations, less coordination and integration, and poorer productivity than teams with a more defined distribution of power and status.² The pecking order, researchers concluded, is the “universal default for human social organization,” perhaps one indicator behind the employee defections at Zappos.

As Jews worldwide submit breathlessly to the judgement of *Yom HaDin*, the implications of a bossless

culture should give pause. How do we preserve religious authority in an age of workplace parity? Does belief in an Almighty suffer when all are mighty? And when places of work become flatter and more flexible, do places of worship seem overly hierarchal and rigid? The inverse relationship between man and God means that as man’s self-concept grows, God’s presence shrinks, crowded out by our own expansiveness. This troubling dynamic has deteriorated our ability to pray, study and perform other religious functions — not because the tasks are harder, but because we have become hardened. For a generation that is perhaps more outwardly “religious” than any other in recent history, ours is scrupulously unaware — unswerving in practice, but uncertain in purpose. As Rabbi Moshe Weinberger has put it, all that is missing from today’s religious renaissance is the soul.³ As people grow fonder of their own specialness, it becomes harder to experience God-consciousness in everyday life. On

I wish to dedicate this essay to my family and to the students of Akiba Academy of Dallas, who continue to push me to become a better educator.

Rosh Hashanah, the void may even severely inhibit our recitation and appreciation of *Malchuyot*, the soaring description of God’s sovereignty in the Mussaf Amidah. If we don’t need a boss, then why bother with a king?

To that point, we ought to reassess the meaning and message of *Malchuyot*. While this prayer section records the word “*melech*” (king) or other permutations some twenty-six times, its genesis appears to be unrelated to kingship of any kind. The Talmud⁴ records a debate between Rebbi and Rabbi Yosi ben Yehudah over its origins:

וּבְקִצְרְכֶם אֶת קְצִיר אֲרֻצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פְּאֵת שְׂדֵךְ בְּקִצְרְךָ וְלִקֹּט קְצִירְךָ
 לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעֵנִי וְלִגֵּר תִּעֲזֹב אֹתָם אֲנִי הִיא אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.
 ויקרא כג:כב

When you reap the harvest of your Land, you shall not completely remove the corner of your field during your harvesting, and you shall not gather up the gleanings of your harvest. [Rather,] you shall leave these for the poor person and for the stranger. I am the Lord, your God.

Vayikra 23:22

For Rebbi, the *Malchuyot* imperative emerges from the juxtaposition of the shofar (Vayikra 23:23) with the preceding description of the laws of *pe’ah*, the law requiring land owners to allocate a corner parcel of land for the poor to glean. Here, the concluding phrase of “I am the Lord, your God” functions as a prelude to the laws of shofar and its holiday motifs, which follow in the next verse.

Rabbi Yosi ben Yehudah reaches a similar conclusion, but from a different, if more direct proof text:

וּבְיוֹם שְׂמִחְתֶּכֶם וּבְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם וּבְרֵאשֵׁי חֲדָשֵׁיכֶם וּתְקַעְתֶּם בַּחֲצֹצְרוֹת עַל
 עֲלֵיתֵיכֶם וְעַל זְבָחֵי שְׁלֵמֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִכְרוֹן לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲנִי הִיא
 אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.
 במדבר י:י

On the days of your rejoicing, on your festivals and on your new-moon celebrations, you shall blow on the trumpets for your ascent-offerings and your peace sacrifices, and it shall be a remembrance before your God; I am the Lord, your God.

Bemidbar 10:10

By his estimation, the appearance of the same verse, “I am the Lord, your God” alongside the silvered trumpets (which functioned much like the shofarot of then and now) is the basis for reciting *Malchuyot* on Rosh Hashanah. Remarkably, neither Rebbi nor Rabbi Yosi traces the origins of *Malchuyot* to a verse that mentions



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R. Yosef Albo *Sefer HaIkarim* 1:4, notes that the three additional blessings in the Mussaf Amidah represent the three most fundamental principles of faith.

Malchuyot represents belief in God — that God is the King of the Universe.

Zichronot is about reward and punishment.

Shofarot is about *Torah min HaShamayim*, that the Torah is Divine. This is why it begins with a discussion about the revelation at Sinai.

the word *melech*, even overlooking the ten themed verses that appear within the *Malchuyot* section itself! Could this be an indication that the opening act of this holiday troika (*Malchuyot*, *Zichronot*, and *Shofarot*) is about more than just monarchy?

A wider view of these two sources reveals another commonality beyond shared language. Both the passage of *pe'ah* favored by Rebbi and the selection of the *chatzotzrot* preferred by Rabbi Yosi show communal frameworks organized around a central figure. The social welfare of *pe'ah* is channeled through a land owner (think Boaz in the story of Megillat Rut) whose individual priorities (compassion, selflessness, justice) shape communal practices.

Sharing of resources is mandated by Divine order, but ultimately sustained by human choice. One person — not an organized group or central office — orchestrates an entire movement. A similar dynamic is at work with the *chatzotzrot*, the clarion call that in Biblical times summoned the nation (for travel, war or holidays) and in subsequent eras impassioned the people (during public fasts or other national crises).⁵ Here, too, one individual (the kohen) literally becomes an instrument for mass change — in the people's location, dispositions or beliefs. Be they technical or transcendent, the trumpet blasts emanate from a central figure, a single voice whose sound echoes inside a community chamber. As the backdrop for *Malchuyot*, both sources demonstrate the extent to which an empowered individual can stir communal consciousness.

That seems to be the conclusion of researchers in the aforementioned Kellogg study, who reported a strong correlation between mixed-power teams and success rate when projects involved complex tasks. Work that requires lots of coordination or interdependence among colleagues is best tackled using the straight lines of hierarchy rather than the round circles of, say, holacracy. When it comes to the nuanced act of mobilizing large groups of people, power prevails. Performance of the team is enhanced by clear leadership design, not strangled by it. Decisive action at the top flows down to the bottom, providing the clarity, consistency and occasional control needed to move people forward. If the Zappos experiment is any indication, more people would gladly live with the authority of having a boss than the aimlessness of having none.

Seen this way, *Malchuyot* is an attempt to reaffirm our faith in God — not simply as our sovereign, but as an organizing force in our lives. By declaring God as the ultimate authority, we become His direct reports, charged with executing a business plan for humanity. Commandments are opportunities, not just obligations. Tradition is a toolkit for leading inspired lives. As the *Melech*, God is not concerned with power, but influence — creating the possibility that we, and others around us, will lead lives of nobility, righteousness, and consequence — “to perfect the universe through the Almighty's sovereignty.”⁶ At the moment that our vision aligns with God's, we move toward a “bossless” religious experience in which there is no pressing need for external management or controls, no artificial lines between rules and response. In a world of *Malchuyot*, there is total cohesion between the will of God and the will of man. We accept the premise of Divine authority and human fragility, and appreciate how God stands at the center, beckoning us to move closer to it.

Notes

1. Rachel Emma Silverman, “At Zappos, Banishing the Bosses Brings Confusion.” *Wall Street Journal*, 20 May 2015.
2. Adam Galinsky, “The Path to Glory Is Paved with Hierarchy: When Hierarchical Differentiation Increases Group Effectiveness.” *Psychological Science*, 23:6 (2012): 669-677.
3. Moshe Weinberger, “All That is Missing is the Soul.” *Klal Perspectives*, (Spring 2015): 5-9.
4. Talmud Bavli, *Rosh Hashanah* 32a.
5. See *Masechet Ta'anit*, chapters 2-3.
6. *Aleinu* prayer.

Two Gifts to Give Your Children this Rosh Hashana

Throughout the liturgy on the Yamim Noraim we refer to Hashem as “Our Father.” We talk to Hashem as *Avinu Malkeinu*, the father who is also the king. We appeal to Hashem’s fatherly side when we look for Hashem to act *ke’rachim av al banim* — we ask that Hashem be forgiving to us as parents are to their children. The gifts we can give our children this Rosh Hashanah are the same as those we are asking Hashem to give all of us as He tallies the *cheshbon* (calculation) of our lives. The Jewish calendar has many more scheduled opportunities for *cheshbon hanefesh* (introspection) than we have as parents. We can take advantage of this time of year for the reflection that will help us learn and grow as parents.

The parent-child relationship is only one paradigm of a caring, nurturing relationship. Though Rosh Hashana offers the metaphor of *av al banim*, it is also an important time to reflect on all of our meaningful relationships. The gifts we may offer our children may also be needed by others in our lives. Consider how a parent, spouse, sibling, or friend might benefit from these gifts as well.

Gift #1: See Them as They Are

Developmental studies tell us that five year olds need to be seen so that they can be free to venture off, leaving the enclosure of the teacher for new experiences to play and work. Six year



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olds need to be seen so they will not climb walls. But I have also found that seven, ten, and thirteen year olds need to be seen just as they also need their private nooks and crannies. They need the encouragement and validation that comes from our best attention to their efforts. They need the safety that comes from the belief that their teacher sees them, knows them. Mutual trust grows from this security. When all children feel seen, they are released to work.

Ruth Charney, *Teaching Children to Care*

When we work with teachers, we often talk about the importance of getting to know our students. Like all people, children have an intense desire to be seen, known, and understood. No child wants to be “the one in the blue shirt” or “the one with the curly hair.” Children are complex, and each child has characteristics that make him unique and different from the child sitting next to him. Sometimes, a child can be camouflaged by misleading behavior. A teenager can shrug and murmur a

bored “whatever” while burying their passion, resentment, or fear below. A middle-schooler can laugh to cover embarrassment or hurt feelings. A disrespectful kindergartener might actually be overtired or hungry. Children count on us, as teachers and parents, to see beneath the surface to who they are and how they feel on the inside. When Yonah runs to Tarshish rather than doing what is asked of him, Hashem doesn’t label him as the “rebellious prophet.” Hashem digs deeper, throwing him into the mouth of a fish, covering him with a *kikayon* until Hashem and Yonah both understand the reason for Yonah’s rebellion. It is only then that Hashem can teach Yonah the importance of his mission so that Yonah can grow into the prophet that Hashem wants him to be. It is our duty as parents and teachers to scratch beneath the façade our children present to really “see” what might be hiding just beneath the surface. Then, we, too, can teach our children to be the type of people we want them to be.

Hashem provides another model for us. We know from Yirmiyahu that Hashem “explores the heart and examines the inner spaces” (17:10). As teachers and parents, we have an obligation to engage constantly in getting to know our children — especially their hearts and their inner spaces. Though it is something we ought to do every day, our daily observations are not sufficient. The rush of daily life may cause us to focus on whether a child has said please and thank you, whether the table has been cleared, or the homework completed. Ensuring that children meet the benchmarks of family and school life can be consuming and we may come to neglect their inner selves. It might be hard to take the time to reflect upon what type of person she actually is, and what her needs are at this stage in her development.

Rosh Hashana is a time to look deeply. As we complete our own *cheshbon hanefesh*, examine our own souls, we must also turn to our children. Parents should reflect on their children’s strengths and challenges. We must take a step back from our daily parenting duties to reflect on the inner workings of each of our children. What will you see when you are really looking deeply?

For teachers, the beginning of the year lends itself to this kind of exploration, and many teachers devote a great deal of time to ice breakers and community-building activities. We encourage teachers to go further and ask students about their hopes and fears about the current school year. We want teachers to inquire about how individual students learn best, what their favorite activities are, and what makes them feel excited about school. We ask teachers to listen

beyond a student’s answers to **how** he might be answering a question or what he might **not** be saying. Getting to know each child individually takes time and strategy. Looking at the general picture of a child often leaves out the most important details.

In our tefilla on Rosh Hashana, we recite *Unetaneh Tokef*. We say:

וכל באי עולם יעברון לפניך כבני מרון, כבקרת
רועה עדרו מעביר צאנו תחת שבטו כן תעביר
ותספור ותמנה ותפקוד נפש כל חי.

All mankind will pass before You like members of the flock. Like a shepherd pasturing his flock, making sheep pass under his staff, so shall You cause to pass, count, calculate, and consider the soul of all of the living.

Hashem is assessing us constantly throughout the year, hoping to see our growth. Nevertheless, Rosh Hashana serves as a special time for a holistic review; a time that Hashem uses to focus on each person — one by one — to see us as we are. Though our powers of perception are infinitely poorer — Rosh Hashana and year round — we can follow Hashem’s example and turn extra attention to each child, one by one.

Gift #2: Allow Them to Change

As teachers, we often interact with children who are not in our classrooms. We see them in the hallway or at lunch. We might even have taught an older sibling of theirs. From these cursory interactions it is easy to make a snap judgment about a child. At the beginning of the year, when these children have made their way to our classrooms, we are often working hard to debunk those “first impression” stereotypes. What we know about Sara from her fourth-

The Judgment of Yishmael

One of the messages of the Torah reading for Rosh Hashana emerges from the episode involving Yishmael’s expulsion from his home. The Talmud comments on why God listened to Yishmael’s prayers:

וא”ר יצחק אין דנין את האדם אלא לפי מעשיו של אותה שעה שנאמר כי שמע אלהים אל קול הנער באשר הוא שם.
ראש השנה טז:

R. Yitzchak stated: a person is only judged based on his [state of] actions at the current moment as it states: Because God heard the voice of the child where he is [now.]

Rosh Hashana 16b

Despite the fact that Yishmael and his children were destined to sin, God judged Yishmael based on his current state and didn’t look into his future actions. This is an important lesson to keep in mind as we embark on the teshuva process.

grade experience in the lunchroom may or may not shape the way she acts in her fifth grade Mishnah class. Sara might have changed over the summer, or she might look very different in the classroom than she does in the lunchroom. Rambam teaches:

אמש היה זה שנאו לפני המקום משוקץ ומרוחק ותועבה והיום הוא אהוב ונחמד קרוב וידיד.
רמב”ם, הלכות תשובה ז:ו

Yesterday this person was hated before God, defamed, cast away, and abominable; today, he is beloved, desirable, a favorite and a friend.”

Rambam, Hilchot Teshuva 7:6

In a moment, everything can change.

Seldom do we think more about growth, change, and teshuva than we do during this time of year. Our belief in our ability to change is central to what makes the Yamim Noraim meaningful. In fact, as we change and improve ourselves, we actually change who we are. When we look at our own children, we see that they are not only bigger, more articulate versions of their younger selves. They have become different individuals — more generous, thoughtful, and complex — than the toddlers they once were. Rabbi Dr. Abraham J. Twerski tells a story about an alcoholic who said, “The man I once was, drank. And the man I once was, will drink again. If I ever go back to being the man I once was, I will drink again.” He is describing transformational change in which an old identity is cast aside in favor of a new one. As adults, transformational change is difficult and rare. For children, it is a natural part of growing up.

And yet, children are often held back from change. If we are successful in our first gift, of seeing and knowing our children, we may fall into the trap of expecting them to stay that way. We may still say that an absent-

minded child would “forget his head if it weren’t attached to his neck” long after he develops a new sense of responsibility. A disorganized child who now keeps a tidy room may retain her reputation for being sloppy. A child who has outgrown his selfishness may still constantly be given meaningful glances and reminded to share.

At this time of year, when as a community we are focused on teshuva, we must not only remember that people can change. We need to allow that change by embracing and accepting it as a new reality. We learn in the Mishna that it is forbidden to taunt a ba’al teshuva with tales of his past misdeeds (*Baba Metzia* 4:10). All the more so we should not unintentionally force our children into roles that they have cast off. Just as we want Hashem to allow us to turn over a new leaf, we must allow our children to reinvent themselves as their identities mature and develop.

Through these two gifts, it is possible that you will change who you are as a parent, a child, a spouse or a friend. Just as you have acknowledged the changes made by those you love, you

would like them to acknowledge yours in turn. Brene Brown devotes an entire chapter to her book *Daring Greatly* to parenting. In it she writes “I’ve sworn off the good-bad parenting dichotomy simply because on any given day you could file me under both good parent and bad parent, depending on your perspective.” She then goes on to talk about what really matters in parenting: engagement. “Are we paying attention? Thinking through our choices? Open to learning and being wrong? Curious and willing to ask questions?” Just as we would like Hashem to see who we are today and what we are doing right now, we need to do the same for our children. We need to treat our children as the flexible people that they are, capable of changing for the better. Just as Hashem saw the true Yonah and offered Yonah multiple opportunities to show his true self and to change his ways, we must offer the same to our children at home and in school. We should dedicate time during these Yamim Noraim to emulate the true reflection that Hashem offers us and make a deep *cheshbon hanefesh* of ourselves as Jews and as Jewish parents.



Strive for Perfection but don't be a Perfectionist

As we approach the *Yamim Noraim* — the High Holidays — the themes of teshuva and self-improvement are on everybody's mind. It seems that every year, we dutifully beat our chests and recite the same *Al Cheits*, but are these actions getting us where we want to be? Though we remedy some of our sins, it seems that there are always new ones to atone for and spiritual challenges to meet. Where does our yearly mandate of self-improvement lead us? Are we expected to achieve perfect spirituality?

Strive to be Perfect

One doesn't have to go beyond the first sentence of Rav Moshe Chayim Luzzatto's *Mesilat Yeshrim* for one approach. Rav Luzzatto (known as the Ramchal) writes:

יסוד החסידות ושרש העבודה התמימה הוא שיתברר ויתאמת אצל האדם מה חובתו בעולמו ולמה צריך שישים מבטו ומגמתו בכל אשר הוא עמל כל ימי חייו. מסילת ישרים, פרק א

The foundation of true piety and the root of perfect service of Hashem are formed by a person's clarifying and verifying to himself what is his obligation in his world and toward what goal he should direct his outlook and ambition in everything he strives for during all the days of his life.

Mesilat Yesharim Chap. 1

The Ramchal delineates what our outlook and ambition should be and



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in great detail expands the sequence listed by R. Pinchas Ben Yair (*Avodah Zara* 20B)¹ for attaining this perfect service of Hashem. Ultimately, in the final stages, all of a person's actions and intents, physical and spiritual, are purely for the sake of Heaven and culminate with an almost complete negation of the physical and complete attachment to Hashem.

In a similar vein, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year when spiritual strivings find their fullest expression, we divest ourselves of our physical trappings and liken ourselves to angels. According to the Rama (*O.C.* 610:4), one of the reasons we wear white on Yom Kippur is “*dugmat malachei hashareit*” — to be likened to angels. We also recite “*Baruch shem k'vod Malchuto leolam va'ed*” aloud during the Yom Kippur service because, as the *Mishnah Berurah* (619:2) explains, “This is the song of angels and on Yom Kippur, Jews are compared to angels.” Is our demeanor on Yom Kippur indicative of what our lifetime goal should be — to achieve “angelic” spiritual perfection?

But We Can't be Perfect

On the other hand, there are countless

sources that seem to imply that spiritual perfection is unattainable for mortals. From the outset, our world was created with inherent spiritual pitfalls, and sin is almost inevitable. Kohelet clearly tells us:

כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא.
קהלת ז:כ

For there is no righteous man on earth who does good and does not sin.

Kohelet 7:20

Given these conditions, humans could not withstand a world guided solely by *midat hadin*, absolute justice, which demands perfection and swift punishment for any infraction. Therefore Hashem partnered *midat harachamim* (compassion) with *midat hadin* (absolute justice) to create the world (Rashi, Bereishit 1:1).

In Vayikra, the verse states:

אֲשֶׁר נָשִׂיא יִחָטָא; וְעָשָׂה אֶחַת מִכָּל מִצְוֹת ה' אֲלֵקָיו אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תַעֲשֶׂינָהּ, בְּשִׁגְגָה--וְאָשָׂם.
ויקרא ד:כב

When a ruler sins, and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done — unintentionally — and becomes guilty.

Vayikra 4:22

The S'forno suggests that this verse begins with the term “*asher nasi yecheta*” — when a ruler sins — implying that committing sin is inevitable, because all people, even our leaders, are going to sin.

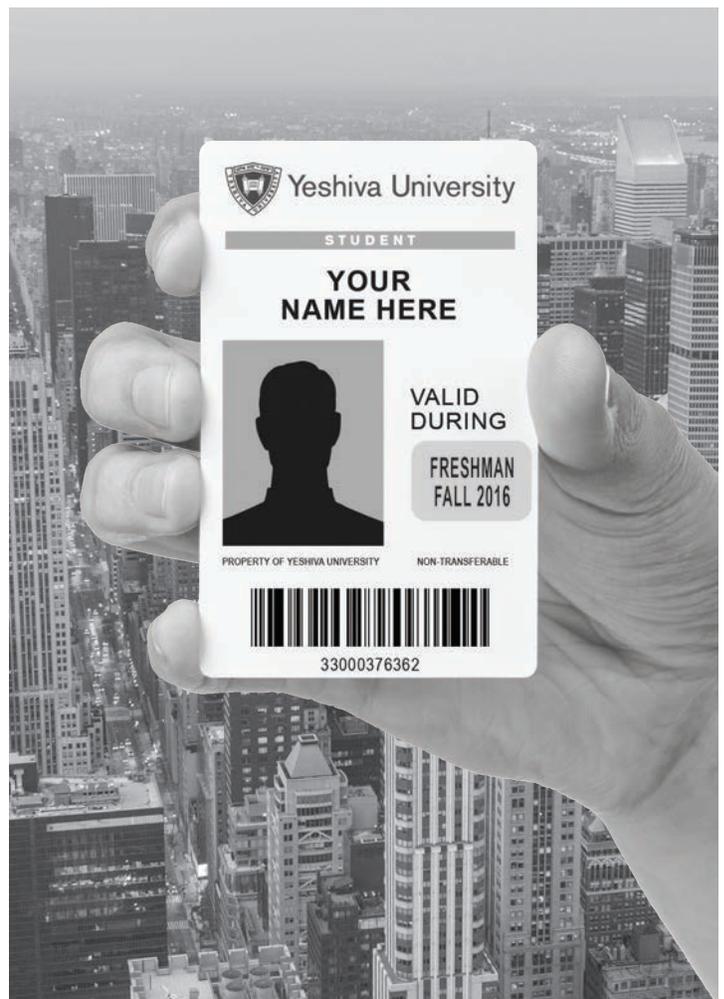
The Talmud in four instances² discusses cases that factor in human failings. One example is the discussion (*Kiddushin* 54a) of whether the kohein may derive personal benefit from the *bigdei kehuna*, the priestly garments. After the kohein has completed the Temple service, he cannot immediately remove the holy garments but must walk to the designated changing area. The Talmud posits that perhaps there is a problem that during this time, he is wearing the holy clothing merely to protect his body and not for the Avodah, the holy Temple service. The Talmud responds that this is not a problem because “*Torah lo nitna lemalachei hashareit*” — The Torah was not given to ministering angels. The Torah was designed for human beings and takes into account our imperfections and physical needs.

From these teachings, one may draw the conclusion that spiritual perfection is unattainable and despite our greatest attempts, it is beyond our reach. Should this leave us paralyzed or even despondent? If we can't achieve perfection, what's the point of trying?

Pitfalls of Perfectionism

Perfectionism is commonly defined as a refusal to accept any standard short of perfect. People who are prone to perfectionistic thinking do not accept any failings on the road to achieving their goals, and their fear of failure leads to great distress. They typically engage in “all or nothing” thinking and evaluate their performance in black and white terms. Perfectionists cannot move beyond any shortcomings and begin to view themselves and the whole enterprise as a failure. In a sense, perfectionists set themselves up for failure because achieving their expected lofty accomplishments without any setbacks is often impossible. The anxiety that perfectionists experience about making mistakes leads to procrastination and avoidance and may hold them back from ever achieving success.³

This mindset can manifest itself in any realm of a person's life but is primarily experienced with the issues a person cares most about. This can include religious observance, and many perfectionists expect their religious behaviors to be 100 percent unwavering, with no setbacks. Once



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they have sinned at all or achieved less than the unrealistically high standards they've set for themselves, they perceive total failure. They then turn a negative behavior into a negative identity. They cannot say, "I am basically a good person with behavior I must correct." Rather they say, "I am a total failure, a bad person and a bad Jew." This train of thought is sometimes followed by "How can I stand before Hashem to daven or learn when I am a sinner?" The overwhelming guilt leads to their feeling empty and worthless, which can then lead to feelings of despair.⁴ The destructive guilt which perfectionists experience does not lead to their improving themselves, but rather leads them to becoming paralyzed and paradoxically being unable to correct the sinful behavior.

Earlier we mentioned the paradox of striving for spiritual perfection on the one hand and the impossibility of achieving such perfection on the other. For one who has a perfectionistic outlook on his or her religious behavior, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur can be particularly challenging. Remorse, which is a necessary step in the teshuva process (*Hilchos Teshuva* 2:2), becomes destructive guilt. Even though Hashem is the benevolent God who has compassion on the individual, the perfectionist cannot have compassion on himself or herself.

The following concepts can help people struggling with all types of perfectionism, and most certainly those struggling with the religious variety of perfection at this time of year.

1. Optimalist vs. Perfectionist⁵

Alongside the perfectionist is the optimalist. Both may have equally high ambitions and both will try to avoid failure. However, whereas perfectionists intensely fear failure and setbacks, optimalists recognize that there will be ups and downs on the way to achieving their goal. An optimalist has a healthy attitude toward failure, namely that all humans make mistakes, and that is OK. A success that was arrived at after a series of difficulties is as much a success, or perhaps even greater a success, than one that was setback-free. As King Shlomo said:

כִּי שֶׁבַע יְפוֹל צְדִיק וְקָם.
מִשְׁלֵי כֹד: טז

A righteous person falls seven times and rises.

Proverbs 24:16

This is not a *rasha* who sins — it's about a *tzaddik* who learns from his sins. Despite multiple failings, he gets up immediately and rights his improper behavior and is still referred to as a *tzaddik*.

Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, known as the Steipler, writes about life's spiritual ups and downs:⁶

לכן אין מה לפחד אלא יבין בדעתו שכך הוא
טבע האדם וסדר חייו שפעמים יש עליות
ופעמים ירידות, וכמעט בלתי אפשרי להחזיק
מעמד במצב נעלה ומרומם בתמידות. ובאמת,
יותר מזה הוא, שאי אפשר לאדם להגיע
לעלייה יותר גדולה בלי ירידה.

Therefore, there is nothing to fear. But understand that this is human nature and the pattern of life, that there are at times ups and at times downs. And it is almost impossible to withstand high and exalted status constantly. More than that, it is impossible for man to achieve

Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky



Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, known as The Steipler or The Steipler Gaon (1899–1985), was a rabbi, Talmudic scholar, and posek ("decisor" of Jewish law). He was born in the Ukrainian town of Hornostaypil, from which his appellation, "the Steipler", was later derived. Having progressed rapidly and gained a reputation as a talmid chacham, around the age of 19 he was sent to set up a branch of the yeshiva in Rogochof. However, the Bolshevik Revolution was in full swing and Rabbi Kanievsky was conscripted into the Red Army. In spite of the harsh conditions, he continued to strictly observe all the mitzvot. In 1934, he moved to Israel, settling in Bnei Brak, where his brother-in-law Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz (the Chazon Ish) had already been living for a year and a half. For many years he was head of two yeshivas there. Though known as a world-class scholar, Rabbi Kanievsky shunned publicity and lived in humble surroundings, teaching, writing and devoting himself to Torah and good deeds. The Steipler is most well-known for his *Kehillot Yaakov*, a prolific analysis of most volumes of the Talmud.

Adapted from Wikipedia

even greater heights, without some downward movement.

2. Productive vs. Destructive Guilt

When setbacks do occur, guilt and remorse are necessary components of the teshuva process and the distress experienced motivates us to change and improve. But this can only occur if the guilt experienced is productive guilt. Destructive guilt, on the other hand, effectively blocks teshuva and leads one to give up trying to improve.

The Steipler also writes about destructive guilt:⁷

ואולם האדם אשר נכשל בחטא ... ומרגיש רגשי אשמה עד כדי שיעסיקו את מחשבותיו כל היום, וכל הזמן הוא עושה חשבונות מדוע ועל מה קרה ככה וכדומה, ואינו יכול לרכז מחשבתו, ואינו לומד ומתפלל כראוי כיון שמחשבתו טרודה ואינו נותנת לו שום מנוחה — ידע שאין זה רצון הבו"ת, ואין זה אופן הראוי להשתמש בכוח זו.

When a person sins ... and he is wracked with guilt all day, and he constantly questions why and how this occurred and the like, and he cannot concentrate and cannot learn and pray as usual because he is obsessed with these thoughts and he cannot find any rest, He should know this is not what Hashem desires and this is not the proper function of guilt.

The Steipler's advice for a person overcome with unremitting guilt is to designate a short period each day, "such as 15 minutes," to contemplate his sins and feel remorse. He should not, however, think of his sins while learning Torah or praying, because these activities need to be done *b'simcha*, with joy.

Every night at Maariv, in the paragraph beginning with "Hashkeveinu," we say "Vehaser satan melifanenu u'meachareinu" — Hashem

should remove the Satan from in front of us and from behind us. We request that Hashem remove the Satan from "in front of us" to prevent us from sinning. But why do we need to ask Hashem to remove the Satan from "behind us?" Perhaps it's because after the sin, the Satan tries to distance us from the proper behavior with destructive guilt. Rather than healthy reflection which can empower one to improve, destructive guilt generates a sense of *ye'ush* (despair). This causes one to feel that all is lost and that he or she cannot get back on track.

An example of this difference can be seen in the way we diet, and many who have tried dieting have experienced this destructive guilt. There are two distinct emotional reactions one may have after eating a "forbidden" cookie while on a diet. One might feel remorseful and consequently refrain from having the second cookie. This is healthy guilt, and the likelihood is that one will be back on track with the diet. But if one feels so upset about eating the cookie and thinks in an "all or nothing" mindset, the dieter will convince himself or herself, "It's hopeless. What's the point in trying to diet? I failed my diet; I might as well eat another three cookies." This is destructive guilt.

When we fall short of any undertaking, we have to acknowledge that we made a mistake, and we can then continue moving toward our goal.

Rambam in *Hilchot Teshuva* describes three categories of people:

כל אחד ואחד מבני האדם, יש לו זכויות ועונות. מי שזכויותיו יתירות על עונותיו, צדיק. ומי שעונותיו יתירות על זכויותיו, רשע. מחצה למחצה, בינוני. הלכות תשובה ג:א

Each and every person has merits and sins. A person whose merits exceed one's sins [is termed] righteous. A person whose sins exceed one's merits [is termed] wicked. If [one's sins and merits] are equal, one is termed an in-between (Beinoni)."

Teshuva 3:1

Rambam further describes how one should perceive oneself:

לפיכך צריך כל אדם שיראה עצמו כל השנה כולה כאילו חציו זכאי וחציו חייב. הלכות תשובה ג:ד

Therefore a person should always consider oneself as equally balanced between merit and sin.

Teshuva 3:4

Why should one picture oneself as a *beinoni*, as being in the middle? Perhaps if one imagined oneself as a *rasha*, one would more strongly feel the need for teshuva? The answer is that when someone experiences himself as a *rasha*, the chances of improving actually diminish. One is more likely to give up and say "What's the point? I am too far gone to return; all is lost." The individual experiences a break in his or her relationship with Hashem and feels there is no way back. Hence the proper self-assessment is that of a *beinoni* who says, "I acknowledge the good that I've done and I have significant merits and unique talents that I can feel proud of. I also have sinned and done terrible things for which I feel awful and must do teshuva."

Not only must one avoid the perfectionist's fear of failure and the pitfall of "all or nothing" thinking described above; the perfectionist should also try to cultivate a healthy sense of self.

3. Realistic Self-Assessment vs. Superhuman Expectations

Underlying a perfectionist's fear of failure is often a deficiency in self-esteem. The individual who lacks an overall sense of self-worth and personal value may feel "I can only be successful by achieving, without any mistakes or setbacks. A truly competent, worthwhile person would have gotten it right the first time." Working on self-esteem involves realistically recognizing our accomplishments and failings while holding on to the notion of our inherent goodness and potential. We must remember that we are children of Hashem and just as parents accept their child with his or her imperfections, Hashem accepts us even when we are off track.

The Rebbe Menachem Mendel Mi-Kosov writes an incredible insight in the *Sefer Ahavat Shalom to Parshat V'Zot Habrachah* (pg. 330). The Mishnah in *Pirkei Avot* (4:1) says "Aizehu ashir? Hasameach b'chelko" — Who is considered rich? One who is happy with his portion. While the traditional understanding is regarding physical possessions, being happy with what you own, the Rebbe Mi-Kosov says this is also true with spiritual matters. When one feels depressed over a sin or a lapse in behavior and is feeling that all is lost, he should recognize and acknowledge the portion of mitzvot and good deeds that he has. "Sameach b'chelko" — Be happy with your portion, meaning your collection of accomplishments, and be content. The Rebbe Mi-Kosov goes as far as to say that even while one is experiencing guilt, one should sustain one's happiness and in this manner better serve Hashem.

Toward a Lasting Spiritual Perfection

The Talmud (*Shabbat* 55b) recounts that there were actually four people who never sinned: Binyamin the son of Yaakov, Amram the father of Moshe, Yishai the father of David, and Calev the son of David. These individuals were spiritual giants who warrant our admiration and deepest respect. Yet others, such as the Avot, Moshe Rabeinu and Aharon Hakohein, who by tradition did sin, are deemed our greatest role models and occupy the highest levels of esteem as foundational leaders of our nation. As Rabbi Zevulun Charlop, Dean Emeritus of RIETS, explained,⁸ these four did not sin because they did not step out of their comfort zone to overcome life's challenges. It is those who take risks to lead and inspire others who will inevitably make mistakes and sin, but will also continue to reach even greater heights. Being able to look back on a life devoid of sin is undoubtedly a lofty goal, but perhaps sinning, overcoming that challenge, and continuing to rise up is even greater. Our most exalted leaders provide us with a more realistic depiction of what our spiritual journey will look like, detours, disruptions and all.

So, where should a lifetime of self-improvement lead? Most definitely in the direction of spiritual perfection.

As Chazal say:

כל אחד מישראל חייב לומר "מתי יגיעו מעשי למעשי אבותי אברהם יצחק ויעקב."

תנא דבי אליהו, פרק כה

Every Jew is obligated to say "When will my actions reach those of my forefathers — Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov?"

Tanna D'bei Eliyahu, chapter 25

We must aspire to reach the level of the Avot and continually work on ourselves

to attain the greatest heights possible. But as much as we would like the path between where we are spiritually holding today and where we want to go to be in a straight line, it will likely not be — and that is OK. The process and the direction in which we are moving matter more than the end result. As long as we keep the goals of spiritual perfection in view and use its guiding principles to help us navigate, we will always be on the right track.

Notes

1. ת"ר: ונשמרת מכל דבר רע - שלא יהרהר אדם ביום ויבוא לידי טומאה בלילה. מכאן א"ר פנחס בן אייר: תורה מביאה לידי זהירות, וזהירות מביאה לידי זריזות, זריזות מביאה לידי נקיות, נקיות מביאה לידי פרישות, פרישות מביאה לידי טהרה, טהרה מביאה לידי (חסידות, חסידות) (קדושה, קדושה) מביאה לידי ענוה, ענוה מביאה לידי יראת חטא, יראת חטא מביאה לידי (קדושה, קדושה) (חסידות, חסידות) מביאה לידי רוח הקודש, רוח הקודש מביאה לידי תחיית המתים
Our Rabbis taught: The words, Thou shalt keep thee from every evil thing, mean that one should not indulge in such thoughts by day as might lead to uncleanness by night. Hence R. Phineas b. Jair said: Study leads to precision, precision leads to zeal, zeal leads to cleanliness, cleanliness leads to restraint, restraint leads to purity, purity leads to holiness, holiness leads to meekness, meekness leads to fear of sin, fear of sin leads to saintliness, saintliness leads to the [possession of] the holy spirit, the holy spirit leads to life eternal. (Soncino Translation)

2. *Berachot* 25b, *Yoma* 30a, *Kiddushin* 54a, and *Meilah* 14b.

3. Flett, G. L. and Hewitt, P. L. (2014), A Proposed Framework For Preventing Perfectionism And Promoting Resilience And Mental Health Among Vulnerable Children And Adolescents. *Psychology in the Schools* 51: 899–912.

4. B.A. Fedewa et al. (2005), Positive and negative perfectionism and the shame/guilt distinction: adaptive and maladaptive characteristics. *Personality and Individual Differences* 38 1609–1619.

5. In *The Pursuit of Perfect*, Tal Ben-Shahar devotes pages 7-36 to develop this topic.

6. *Eitzot V'Hadrachot, Aliyot Veyeridot* pg 76.

7. *Eitzot V'Hadrachot, Rigshei Ashamah*, pg. 86.

8. Personal communication.

Fulfilling A Mitzvah When It Isn't a Mitzvah

Rabbi Chaim Yaakov Rottenberg (1909-1990) served as the Chief Rabbi of the Chareidi community in Paris, where he was instrumental in establishing Jewish education and creating kashruth standards. During the Holocaust, Rabbi Rottenberg reportedly defied the Nazi regime by building a sukkah while he was in concentration camp. He constructed a sukkah of some form prior to the onset of Sukkot, ate a *k'zayit* of bread — a minimum volume to fulfill the mitzvah but a relatively substantial amount in a concentration camp — and immediately dismantled the sukkah to avoid being caught by the Nazis and potentially be put to death. Rabbi Yitshak Zilberstein, an eminent rabbinic authority in Israel and son-in-law of the late Rabbi Shalom Yosef Elyashiv, discusses Rabbi Rottenberg's incredible sukkah, and records the perspective Rav Elyashiv shared with him.¹ The focus of those discussions is the questionable validity of a sukkah structure built under the conditions Rabbi Rottenberg faced. Due to its inherent lack of standing for any real period of time, and the environment of fear that existed resulting in the inability to properly “live” in the sukkah, are two factors that may invalidate the halakhic integrity of a sukkah. Rabbi Elyashiv is quoted by Rabbi Zilberstein as describing that Rabbi Rottenberg assembled the sukkah just before sunset at the beginning of Yom Tov



Rabbi Richard Weiss, M.D.

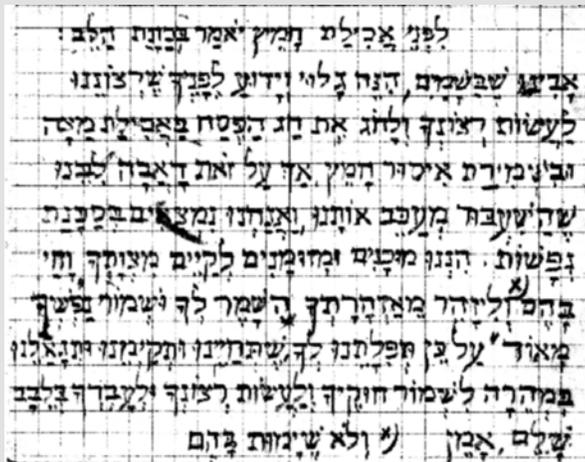
Adjunct Assistant Professor of Biology, Stern College
For Women ▪ Rabbi, Young Israel of Hillcrest

and dismantled it immediately after nightfall, which, he felt, allowed the minimal environment necessary to fulfill the mitzvah without excessive fear. Their discussion also focuses on the appropriateness of constructing a sukkah with the clear intent to dismantle it during Yom Tov, which is normally a prohibited activity on Yom Tov.

What is not addressed specifically, though the issue is raised by Rabbi Zilberstein, is whether one can fulfill a mitzvah in a situation where one is categorically exempt. In particular, when the potential exists that attempting to fulfill a mitzvah may result in a threat to one's life, would proceeding with implementing the mitzvah be credited as a mitzvah? It is true that at times one is technically exempt from performing a certain mitzvah, yet one is definitely credited if one does so in spite of the exemption. The basic idea is that of “*aino metzuveh v'oseh*” — one who is not mandated to perform a mitzvah but does so voluntarily. The Talmud explicitly assigns reward for such a fulfillment.² Certain mitzvot which, for example, women are technically exempt from, are clearly credited

to a woman if she performs them.³ The situation of a potentially life-threatening consequence is, however, fundamentally different than simply being exempt. Rabbi Yosef Engel presents a difference of opinion regarding situations of “*annus*” where a person is unable to perform a mitzvah due to circumstances beyond his/her control.⁴ One example he refers to from the Talmud involves a man who was never circumcised due to his two elder brothers dying as a result of the circumcision procedure. That case, as Rabbi Dr. Lord Immanuel Jakobovits explains, refers to the genetic condition of hemophilia.⁵ Due to the potential complication of uncontrolled bleeding, this condition prevents a person from performing the mitzvah of *milah* due to the life-threatening consequences. The debate Rabbi Engel presents, based on a dispute between Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam, is whether for such an individual, the mitzvah of *milah* is non-existent or whether the mitzvah persists while the person is technically exempt from performing it. Rabbi Engel suggests that the first perspective is based in part on the notion that G-d only obligates

The Mitzvah to Eat Chametz on Pesach in Bergen Belsen



This prayer was compiled by Rabbi Yissachar-Bernard Davids who, prior to World War II, served as Chief Rabbi in Rotterdam, Holland. During the war, he and his family were transferred to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. On Pesach in Bergen-Belsen, Rabbi Davids instructed his fellow prisoners to eat chametz due to the Jewish principle of *pikuach nefesh*—the paramount rule that preserving life takes precedence above all other commandments. During the clandestine Pesach seder held at Bergen-Belsen, the rabbi recited the regular blessings for matza, but then added the above prayer for the specific situation.

אבינו שבשמים, הנה גלוי וידוע לפניך שרצוננו לעשות מצותך ולחוג את חג הפסח באכילת מצה ובשמירת איסור חמץ, אך על זאת דאבה לבנו שהשעבוד מעכב אותנו ואנחנו נמצאים בסכנת נפשות. הננו מוכנים ומזומנים לקיים מצותך וחי בהם ולא שימותו בהם' וליזהר מאזהרתך: "השמר לך ושמור נפשך מאד" (דב' ד:ט), על כן תפלתנו לך שתחינו ותקיימו ותגאלנו במהרה, לשמור חוקיך ולעשות רצונך ולעבדך בלבב שלם, אמן.

Heavenly Father, it is apparent to You that our will is to do Your will and to celebrate Passover by eating matzah and by refraining from chametz. But on this our hearts are distressed, because the oppression prevents us [from fulfilling these commandments] and we find our lives in danger. We are ready and willing to fulfill Your mandate that we 'live by the commandments and not die by them.' And we are observing Your warning: 'Protect yourself and sustain your soul greatly.' We therefore beseech You to keep us alive, sustain us and redeem us speedily, so that we may observe your statutes, carry out Your will and serve You wholeheartedly. Amen."

From Rabbi Kenneth Brander's Introduction to Torah To-Go, Pesach 5774.

individuals in mitzvot which are realistically possible to perform. If that pre-condition is absent, then G-d never directed that mitzvah to that individual in that situation. Interestingly, he suggests a difference between *mitzvot bein adam Lamakom* and *mitzvot bein adam lachaveiro*, where in the former G-d never has an interest in obligating the person if it is not feasible. Thus, according to this view, the mitzvah of *milah* in cases of potential life-threatening consequences does not exist as a mitzvah at all. In the latter, however, where the benefit of the mitzvah for another person can still be accomplished, the mitzvah exists, albeit with an exemption. The implication of this fundamental disagreement regarding *onnes* and mitzvot, posits Rabbi Engel, is that according to the first view, performing a mitzvah in a case of *annus* when one's life may be threatened, accomplishes and fulfills nothing as no mitzvah actually exists in the Torah for this person. It is as if a person performed some act that has no religious origin or significance. According to the second view, the performance of the mitzvah would be credited and can be of religious significance, in spite of the absolute exemption to do so in a potentially life-threatening situation.

As Rabbi Yair Hoffman writes in reference to Rabbi Rottenberg's act of courage in attempting to fulfill the mitzvah, "ours is not to question the dedication ... of those ... who gave their all to fulfill Hashem's mitzvos during those times..."⁶ That remarkable act does, however, serve as a basis from which to analyze the fulfillment of mitzvot under the potential of life-threatening conditions, several aspects of which Rabbi Hoffman himself addresses. One very practical application I wish to present involves fasting on Yom Kippur. It is not uncommon for an individual who is instructed by a physician to not fast on Yom Kippur to persist in fasting despite medical advice. Assuming that the medical restriction on fasting is based on a real potential for the person to develop a life-threatening complication, would fasting result in a fulfillment of the mitzvah on Yom Kippur? Rabbi Mosheh Shternbukh was asked by a person with some form of cardiac, or heart, condition whether he may fast on Yom Kippur that year.⁷ He explained that the year before he fasted just fine, in spite of being instructed by physicians to refrain from fasting. Rabbi Shternbukh describes that he emphatically and sensitively conveyed to this individual that eating/drinking on Yom Kippur to protect his life was itself a mitzvah of *pikuah nefesh*. He continued to explain in his responsum that the possibility of a life-

threatening complication does not have to have the potential to develop on Yom Kippur itself. If fasting may compromise the person's health to the extent that in the future — near or distant — the person's physiologic resilience may be weakened resulting in death sooner than otherwise might have been the case, then one should not fast this Yom Kippur. Rabbi Shternbukh presents the theology that just as it is G-d's will for people in general to fast on Yom Kippur, it is equally His will for certain individuals to not fast when a life-threatening complication may result. He goes so far as to suggest that for this individual, the mitzvah of eating/drinking on Yom Kippur in fulfilling the mitzvah of *pikuah nefesh* is greater and of higher value than the basic mitzvah of fasting on Yom Kippur.

Based on Rabbi Shternbukh's analysis, it seems that he sides with the first view presented by Rabbi Engel, and that for a person suffering from a significant heart condition, the mitzvah of fasting on Yom Kippur does not at all exist. Indeed, at the conclusion of his discussion, Rabbi Shternbukh refers to the opinion of rabbinic authorities that one who fasts on Yom Kippur against medical advice in a potential life-threatening situation, does not fulfill the mitzvah of fasting on Yom Kippur. However, it may be that Rabbi Shternbukh's rationale differs from that of Rabbi Engel. For Rabbi Engel, in such situations no mitzvah was ever intended by G-d through His Torah. Rabbi Shternbukh emphasizes a different point. The very presence of

the counter-mitzvah of *pikuah nefesh* is what supersedes, displaces and perhaps cancels the mitzvah of fasting. The mitzvah of fasting may exist a priori for this person at the onset of Yom Kippur, yet it is cancelled by the greater mitzvah of preserving life — *pikuah nefesh* — at the point on Yom Kippur that the person fulfills the mitzvah of *pikuah nefesh* by eating/drinking. It could be argued that until the point on Yom Kippur that the person eats/drinks he/she is in fulfillment of the mitzvah of fasting and is credited with that. According to the first view Rabbi Engel presents, there was never a mitzvah this particular year for this person to fast, and there isn't any fulfillment of fasting even prior to the point at which he/she eats/drinks.

The *Mishneh Brurah* records the definitive view of rabbinic authorities which seems to go even further than invalidating the mitzvah of fasting in potential life-threatening situations.⁸ The statement he quotes includes a strong criticism of those who should not fast on Yom Kippur but still do. The verse in Genesis, 9:5, "And I shall indeed demand your blood for your lives..." This suggests that fasting against medical advice is a violation of Torah law, and not simply neglect of the mitzvah of *pikuah nefesh*. It suggests that for such individuals, no mitzvah of fasting exists, and fasting would then be equivalent to endangering one's own life, which is a Torah prohibition. A fuller analysis of this perspective is required, but is not the focus of this article.

The mindset suggested by Rabbi Shternbukh regarding the greater value of eating on Yom Kippur to preserve life, should highlight for us how precious G-d and the Torah views our lives. Therefore, what we do with our lives, and how we treat others' lives is a cornerstone of our focus on Yom Kippur. In addition, Rabbi Rottenberg's amazing act of defiance, independent of its halakhic implications, expresses a profoundly meaningful perspective for this year's Sukkot celebration. It is incredibly remarkable that in a relatively short period of time since the end of the Holocaust, Judaism has flourished in so many ways, and that sitting in a sukkah this year should be experienced as a precious freedom that we have to be able to fulfill G-d's will.

Notes

1. Zilberstein, Yitshak. *Kav V'Naki*. Vol. 1. 2012. *Orah Haim*, Sections 199, 200.
2. *Kiddushin* 31a.
3. Cf. *Shulhan Arukh* and Rama, *Orah Haim*, 17:2, 589:6.
4. Engel, Yosef, *Atvan D'Oreyta*, Principle 13.
5. Jakobovits, Immanuel. *Jewish Medical Ethics*. Bloch Publishing Company, New York, 1975. pp.198-199.
6. Hoffman, Yair. *The 5 Towns Jewish Times*, September 28, 2012. Retrieved online at 5tjt.com.
7. Shternbukh, Mosheh. *Responsa Teshuvot V'Hanhagot, Volume 2, No. 291. Yerushalayim, 1993.*
8. *Mishneh Brurah* 618:5.

What we do with our lives, and how we treat others' lives is a cornerstone of our focus on Yom Kippur.

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Keshet Israel Cong. <i>Harrisburg, PA</i>	NY Hospital - Queens <i>Flushing, NY</i>	SKA High School for Girls <i>Hewlett Bay Park, NY</i>	Young Israel Of Baychester Traditional Synagogue <i>Bronx, NY</i>	Young Israel of Oceanside <i>Oceanside, NY</i>	
Keshet Israel <i>Washington, DC</i>	Ohab Zedek <i>Belle Harbor, NY</i>	South Fallsburg Hebrew Association <i>South Fallsburg, NY</i>	Young Israel of Brookline <i>Brookline, MA</i>	Young Israel Of Orange County <i>Irvine, CA</i>	
Kew Gardens Synagogue <i>Kew Gardens, NY</i>	Oheb Zedek Cedar Sinai Synagogue <i>Lyndhurst, OH</i>	Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue Of Montreal <i>Montréal, QC</i>	Young Israel of Canarsie <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	Young Israel Of Ottawa <i>Ottawa, ON</i>	
Kingsway Jewish Center <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	Ohev Sholom Cong. <i>Williamsport, PA</i>	Suburban Orthodox Synagogue Toras Chaim <i>Baltimore, MD</i>	Young Israel of Century City <i>Los Angeles, CA</i>	Young Israel Of Passaic-Clifton <i>Passaic, NJ</i>	
Knesset Beth Israel <i>Richmond, VA</i>	Ohr Shalom <i>Bet Shemesh, Israel</i>	Synagogue of the Suburban Torah Center <i>Livingston, NJ</i>	Young Israel Of Chomedy <i>Chomedy, QC</i>	Young Israel of Plainview <i>Plainview, NY</i>	
Knesset Israel Cong. <i>Birmingham, AL</i>	Or Chaim <i>Toronto, ON</i>	The Beachwood Kehillah <i>Beachwood, OH</i>	Young Israel of Deerfield Beach <i>Deerfield Beach, FL</i>	Young Israel of Queens Valley <i>Flushing, NY</i>	
Kohelet Yeshiva High School <i>Bala Cynwyd, PA</i>	Orot Hacarmel <i>San Diego, CA</i>	The Frisch School <i>Paramus, NJ</i>	Young Israel of Flatbush <i>Brooklyn, NY</i>	Young Israel of Riverdale <i>Bronx, NY</i>	
Koschitzky Minyan <i>North York, ON</i>	Orthodox Union <i>New York, NY</i>	The Jewish Center <i>New York, NY</i>	Young Israel of Forest Hills <i>Forest Hills, NY</i>		
KSY <i>Beit Shemesh, Israel</i>	Petah Tikva <i>Toronto, ON</i>	The Jewish Center of Atlantic Beach <i>Atlantic Beach, NY</i>			
Lechu Neranana <i>Ra'anana, Israel</i>	Queens Jewish Center <i>Forest Hills, NY</i>				
Lido Beach Synagogue <i>Lido Beach, NY</i>	Rambam Mesivta <i>Lawrence, NY</i>				