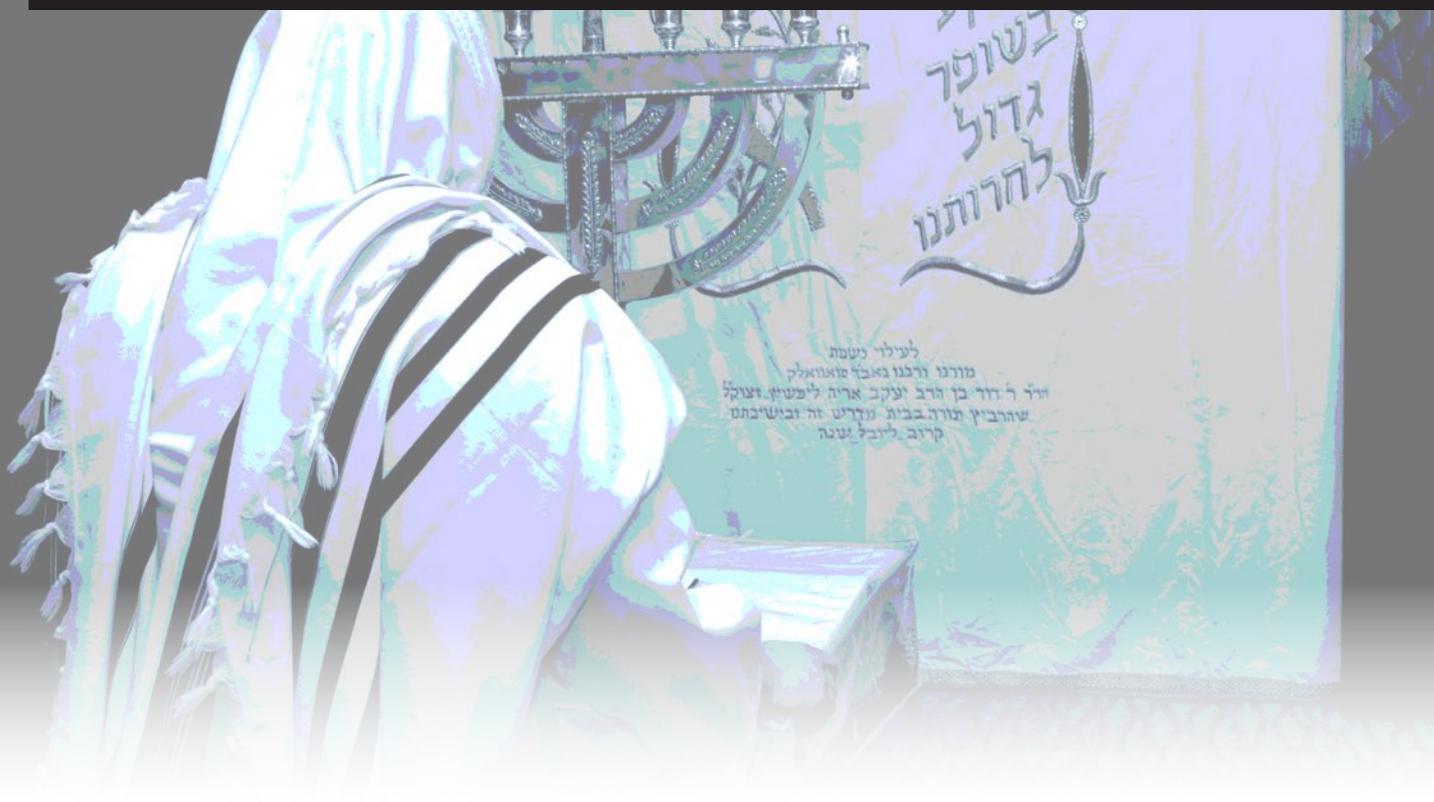


Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary • YU Center for the Jewish Future

# THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO

Established by Rabbi Hyman z"l and Ann Arbesfeld • September 2020 • Tishrei 5781



## In Tribute to Rabbi Hy Arbesfeld z"l

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

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# REFLECTIONS ON THE PAST, PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

Remember last Rosh Hashanah thinking about and planning for the year ahead, with all of its possibilities and opportunities. Who then could have possibly imagined what the year would actually have in store for us? And who now could have any clear sense of what lies in front of us in the coming year? This Yamim Noraim season is like no other, because we live in a time like no other. How do we prepare for the upcoming chagim? How do we prepare for the year ahead?

The start of every new year begins with the blowing of the shofar. There is a dispute among the rishonim as to which aspect of shofar is the essential mitzvah. Rambam (*Hil. Shofar* 1:1), for example, writes that the mitzvah is to hear the shofar, and thus its requisite blessing is “*lishmo`a kol shofar*” (to hear the sound of the shofar). Others, like Rabbeinu Tam, write that the blessing is “*al teki`at shofar*” (on the blowing of the shofar), since the actual act of blowing is the culmination of the mitzvah (see Rosh, *Rosh Hashanah* 4:10). Noting the proofs that support each claim and the internal halakhic contradictions within Rambam’s codifications, Rabbi Soloveitchik cited his grandfather, Reb Chaim, who formulated a hybrid approach. According to Rabbi Soloveitchik, we only fulfill the essential mitzvah of listening by hearing the sound of a shofar that is produced under particular halakhic conditions (See *Reshimot Shiurim, Sukkah* 2a). In this sense, both the *teki`ah* (blowing) and

the *shemi`ah* (hearing) have halakhic content. This hybrid approach not only resolves particular textual tensions in our halakhic sources, it also directs us to a new sense of the message of the shofar.

The sound of the shofar, according to our tradition, is the sound of tears. The representative image for these tears is the crying of a mother waiting and hoping for her son to return from war (*Rosh Hashanah* 33b). Having lived in Israel during a time of war, I know how these tears sound. They are filled with worry, uncertainty, concern, and anxiety. They are guttural and inexpressible. They are prayerful and hopeful, tinged with dread of what could be.

In this sense, the shofar is a tefillah to Hashem, which includes our deepest and most personal *bakashot* (requests). But there is a second layer of the mitzvah that is revealed in Rabbi Soloveitchik’s explanation. For if both the *teki`ah* and the *shemi`ah* are significant, then the mitzvah creates an image of a conversation between the *toke`a* and the *shome`a*. Of one Jew crying out to another. And the essential question that this mitzvah raises is — Are we listening? Do we listen when others around us are in pain? Do we respond to our family, friends, and neighbors who are in need?

When considering the year ahead, this is the message that, now, more than in any other year, should shape our consciousness. We are all in pain.

We are all uncertain. There have been real losses and there is enormous anxiety. We need to first turn to Hashem with all of our *bakashot*.

Not simply asking Him to remove us from trouble but bringing Him into our trouble. Bringing Him into our lives, to walk with us and carry us when there is no immediate end of our current challenges. And we need to turn to each other for comfort and support. To bolster one another and unite together. Now is the time to think of the other. To both cry to and listen to those who are around us. To strengthen the bonds that will help us navigate these uncharted waters. To surround ourselves with our family and friends, rabbis and teachers, neighbors and the broader community, and to walk through this difficult time together.

The shofar has been sounded in every year for thousands of years, through the most triumphant and challenging times throughout Jewish history. It is both the sounding of the shofar and the listening to the shofar that has given us the strength and ability to not only survive but to thrive. *Ashrei ha-am yodei teruah* — fortunate is the nation that understands that message of the shofar, for it is our strength and secret to our success.

Wishing you a ketivah ve-chatimah tovah.

Warmly,

**Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman**

## Remembering Rabbi Hy Arbesfeld z"l

Rabbi Julius Berman

Chairman Emeritus, RIETS



## A TRIBUTE TO RABBI HY ARBESFELD Z"L

To me and to everyone who knew him, Hy Arbesfeld lived for and personified YU, and particularly RIETS. While everyone knows how Hy, after receiving a scholarship to attend Yeshiva University High School for Boys, dedicated his life to paying back that scholarship and then some — I think for every scholarship dollar he received he paid thousands of dollars back to Yeshiva — it was not just the money he so generously donated over the years, but all his years of service on the RIETS Board where he worked tirelessly on behalf of Yeshiva.

I owe a personal debt of gratitude to Hy for getting me involved in RIETS and Yeshiva. While Hy himself was never chairman of RIETS, Hy was the chairman of the RIETS Nominating Committee. It was in that role where,

years ago, he convinced me to seek the chairmanship of RIETS. He constantly gave so much of his time and his sage advice to help the entire RIETS Board in serving Yeshiva.

For Hy, everything, and I mean everything, was about what's best for Yeshiva — what's best for the institution, its Roshei Yeshiva and faculty, its students — and how it could get even better in as many ways possible. He was always focused on the importance of preparing students to assume leadership roles in the Jewish community and of spreading Torah far and wide. He accomplished this in many ways. For example, over 13 years ago Hy and his wife dedicated the popular Sunday morning Kollel Yom Rishon and Midreshet Yom Rishon programs in memory of Hy's parents. These two weekly adult

education programs, where shiurim are given by Yeshiva's Roshei Yeshiva and other scholars, attract hundreds of students to Yeshiva's uptown campus, while thousands more download these shiurim.

Hy was also very intent on making sure that Yeshiva was available to anyone who had a desire to attend, regardless of financial circumstances. For that reason, he established scholarship programs for students to attend Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women as well as Yeshiva's high schools.

Putting aside for a moment Hy's generosity to Yeshiva, which knew no bounds, I will so miss his friendship, his smile, his genuine good-naturedness, and his unparalleled passion for Yeshiva. Yehi Zichro Baruch.

# RIETS PRACTICAL HALACHAH: ROSH HASHANAH

**BY RABBI ARYEH LEBOWITZ**

Director, The Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik Semikha Program  
Rabbi, Beis HaKnesses of North Woodmere

## FROM THE RABBI'S DESK – A QUESTION OF FORGIVENESS

**Question:** Ten years ago, Shimon borrowed \$10,000 from Binyamin. The loan was due one year after the date of the loan. When the loan came due, Binyamin asked Shimon for the money, and Shimon responded that he was aware of the debt, but he simply did not have the money yet. Binyamin was patient and understanding. Every six months thereafter he would check in with Shimon asking for payment of the loan. Each time Shimon would simply say that he did not have the ability to pay back the loan. After years of no payment, and as the Yamim Noraim were approaching, Binyamin decided that he was uncomfortable with Shimon having to face the days of judgment with such a large debt, reasoning that the failure to pay may impact Shimon's *din* in Shamayim. Therefore, on Rosh Hashana, just before davening, Binyamin said, "I am *mochel* the debt that Shimon owes me. Hashem, just as I have forgiven Shimon, please forgive me for anything I may have done improperly." After Yom Tov, Binyamin was going through the mail that had arrived over the last few days, and found an envelope sent by Shimon that contained a check for the full amount of the debt. Binyamin asked if he may deposit the check, or if he must inform Shimon that he had already forgiven the debt.

**Answer:** When I first received this *shaila*, I presented it to Moreinu v'Rabbeinu, Rav Hershel Schachter shlit"a, and also to Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein shlit"a (who subsequently published his response in *Sefer Chashukei Chemed* on *Nedarim* daf 65b).

In order to answer this question, we must discuss two topics. First, it is important to understand whether the *mechilah* (forgiveness) granted by Binyamin, without ever being

expressed to Shimon, is in fact binding. Second, even if we were to ascertain that the *mechilah* is in fact binding, it is possible that we will still allow Binyamin to deposit the check, if we can be certain that Shimon wants Binyamin to do so.

### **Mechilah b'Lev**

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Choshen Mishpat* siman 12) discusses whether one must perform an act of *kinyan* to effect a *mechilah*. The *Ketzos Hachoshen* cites the *Misgeres Hashulchan* who holds

that even a *mechilah b'lev*, forgiving a loan in one's mind, is a valid and binding *mechilah*, even if the fellow still has a *shtar* (loan document). The *Smag* proves this position to be correct based on a Gemara (*Kesubos* 104a) that says that a woman who never asked for *kesubah* payment, even many years after her husband's passing, is assumed to be *mochel* at a certain point, apparently even if she never said she was *mochel*. This Gemara seems to indicate that she was

I would like to dedicate this article l'iluy nishmas Rabbi Hy Arbesfeld z"l,  
whose integrity, generosity and passion for enhancing our beloved yeshiva was a daily inspiration.

only *mochel b'lev* and it is nevertheless binding.

The *Ketzos* disagrees and says that we never find that *mechilah* works with just *machshava* (our thoughts). As far as the Gemara in *Kesubos*, perhaps when it is abundantly obvious that the person is *mochel*, there is no need for a *mechilah*. Therefore, according to the *Ketzos*, in our case the *mechilah* would be invalid.

Moreinu HaRav Schachter *shlit"á* paskened like the *Misgeres Hashulchan* because the *Nesivos Hamishpat* paskens this way, and we would therefore view this *mechilah* as binding. In our case, though, Binyamin actually verbalized his *mechilah*, thereby making the entire discussion of *mechilah b'lev* moot.

### Verbal Mechilah

More relevant to our discussion is whether a verbal *mechilah* is binding. It would seem from the preceding discussion that it certainly is binding. However, in a case where there is a loan document that the lender still possesses, the discussion is further complicated.

The Rama (*Choshen Mishpat* 241:2) writes that if somebody verbally forgives a debt, the verbal forgiveness is binding, even if the lender is still holding on to the loan document. However, the *Shach* (s"k 4) writes that whether a verbal *mechilah* is binding is subject to a dispute in the Talmud Yerushalmi and therefore remains an unresolved issue. The *Sm"á* (ibid 21) rules that so long as the borrower still has the loan document, the *mechilah* is not binding, even if it were verbally expressed to the borrower. Only a full-fledged *kinyan* would affect a binding *mechilah*. Indeed, the *Nesivos Hamishpat* (ibid 14) writes that since

this is an unresolved dispute, the fellow who owes the money may say that he will abide by the opinion that holds the *mechilah* is binding (*kim li*).

However, in our case, it is possible that all would agree that the *mechilah* is not binding, even though Binyamin had verbalized it. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (*Choshen Mishpat* 241:4) writes that if the borrower had not received word of the *mechilah*, even if it were already verbalized to others, the *mechilah* may still be retracted. Since Binyamin did not express his *mechilah* to anyone other than Hashem, he can be confident that Shimon did not know about it. Consequently, Binyamin still has the right to cancel his *mechilah*.

### Mechilah b'Taus

Another mitigating factor in our case is that the *mechilah* may have been made based on a false premise, which would make it no longer binding (see Rama, *Choshen Mishpat* 241:2). Moreinu HaRav Schachter pointed out that had Binyamin known at the time of the *mechilah* that the check was already in the mail, he would not have been *mochel*, and it is therefore a *mechilah b'taus*. If, however, the *mechilah* happened a few days before Yom Tov, then the *mechilah* is binding and the fellow may not cash the check. Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, though, said that there is still room for leniency, for many reasons:

First, Binyamin did not really forgive the debt, just the punishment that Shimon would have received on account of this debt. Clearly, Binyamin's persistently and diligently asking for repayment of the loan over many years, and the timing of his *mechilah* (during davening on Rosh Hashana when Shimon wasn't even present), indicate that Binyamin was interested in getting paid back, but

simply didn't want to be the cause of Shimon's negative judgment in heaven.

Second, Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein argues, it was a mistaken *mechilah* even if the *mechilah* preceded the writing of the check, because Shimon must have been working toward saving such a significant sum for some time. Had Binyamin known that Shimon was working toward paying back the loan, he would never have forgiven the loan.

### The Borrower's Desire to Pay

Even if the *mechilah* was binding, Rav Zilberstein presents two additional reasons that Binyamin may deposit the check.

First, Rashi, *Kesubos* 86, says that paying back a loan is a mitzvah because a person must keep their word. Therefore, Shimon has a mitzvah to pay the money back in order to fulfill his obligation to be honest and keep his word.

Second, even if the *mechilah* was binding, we may assume that Shimon *wants* to pay back the loan in order to maintain his good name in business. The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 15a) suggests that even in particular situations in which the halacha would suggest that there is no binding transaction, the desire for a person to maintain his good reputation will allow a transaction to be binding.

### Halachic Ruling

As a matter of practical halacha, Moreinu HaRav Schachter *shlit"á* ruled that Binyamin may deposit the check since we can be certain that had he been aware that the check had already been written at the time of his *mechilah*, he never would have forgiven the debt.



# SIX PERSPECTIVES ON THE YAMIM NORAIM

## Carving Out our Teshuva Journey

**Mrs. Penina Bernstein**

*Campus Rebbetzin, Stern College for Women, and Tanach Teacher, SKA High School for Girls*

Following the sin of the Egel HaZahav, and the destruction of the first set of the luchos, Hashem commands Moshe Rabbeinu to carve for himself a new set of luchos and then ascend up Har Sinai for Hashem to inscribe them.

בַּעַת הַהוּא אָמַר ה' אֵלַי פְּסַל לִי שְׁנֵי לוחֹת  
אֲבָנִים כְּרָאשׁוֹנִים וְעִלָּה אֵלַי הַהָרָה וְעָשִׂיתָ לִּי  
אֲרוֹן עֵץ.

*Thereupon the Lord said to me, "Carve for yourself two tables of stone like unto the first, and come up unto Me into the mount and make an ark of wood."*

**Devarim 10:1**

This command was an essential

component of the process to rectify the sin that the Jewish people had committed. Unlike the first set of the luchos, which Hashem carved and inscribed for Bnei Yisrael, the second set of luchos was to be carved by Moshe Rabbeinu *himself* on the first of Elul. The process of rectifying the relationship between Bnei Yisrael and Hashem required Moshe's effort on behalf of the nation. *In the process of communal teshuva toward Hashem, human effort was necessary.* Indeed, it was only after Moshe carved this new set of luchos that Moshe was permitted to approach Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and to ascend up the mountain to continue the teshuva process.

The necessity of human effort as part of the process to ascend back up the mountain is a message that was not only relevant to Moshe Rabbeinu, but is critical to understanding our

personal teshuva processes during this time as well. The Rambam explains in *Hilchos Teshuva 5:1*, "*reshus l'chol adam nesunah*" — every man is endowed with free will — namely that everyone has the choice to choose to be a *tzaddik* or a *rasha*. Hashem gave each of us this capacity, and the teshuva process gives each of us the chance to utilize this capacity to improve our ways and our relationship with Hashem.

In other words, the opportunity to ascend up the mountain is there for each person, but we have to choose it. The message of "*pesal lecha*" teaches us that during this time period, we need to first invest our own effort to improve and to make the choices that raise us up, so we can ascend up the mountain, coming closer to HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

Rosh Hashana is the day where we crown Hashem as king. It is the day

we recommit ourselves to embracing the relationship of “*anu amecha, v'ata malkeinu*” — that we are Your nation, and You are our King. During the month of Elul, a month in which “*HaMelech basadeh*,” the King is in the field, we know that Hashem is extra close, waiting for us. And yet, each person’s relationship with the King is dependent on his or her own choices. The King is there, the King is waiting and we have the amazing potential during this time to choose to ascend up the mountain by carving our own tablets through the choices that we make.

It is always possible to get on board and improve, even now. It is never too late. That’s exactly the message for this unique moment that occurs just once a year. You can always improve, no matter where you’ve been all of last year. It does not matter what your Elul looked like. In just another moment we will hear the shofar, and together we will coronate G-d.

## Sculpture and Sculptor: Rosh Hashana Musings on our Inner Landscaping

### Rabbi Tanchum Cohen

Director and Rosh Chabura, Undergraduate Chabura, and Assistant Director, Masmidim Honors Program, Maggid Shiur, Wrubel Beis Midrash Katan, YU High School for Boys, and Assistant Rabbi, Congregation Beth Abraham, Bergenfield, NJ

We will preface our *tefillas musaf* on the first day of Rosh Hashana with a haftara drawn from the opening chapters of sefer Shmuel. This haftara tells the story of Chana’s painful

struggle with infertility and of her tearful prayers at the Mishkan which are ultimately answered with the birth of her son Shmuel. The haftara concludes with *shiras Chana*, her poetic response of joy and gratitude for this Divine gift.

Why does the Gemara<sup>1</sup> prescribe this haftara for Rosh Hashana? The classic explanation<sup>2</sup> relates to the **narrative** portion of the haftara: Rosh Hashana is the day that Chana’s prayers for a child were answered, as was the case<sup>3</sup> for Sara as well (whose childbirth is the topic of the day’s *kerias ha-Torah*).

Perhaps there are timely connections as well between the major themes of Rosh Hashana and the **lyrical** section of the haftara. *Ein tzur kei-lokeinu*,<sup>4</sup> Chana tells us at the outset of her *shira*, there is no Rock like Hashem. Simply put, *Ha-Kadosh Baruch Hu* is the ultimate Source of strength and stability in our lives. The Gemara<sup>5</sup> adds an additional level of interpretation: *ein tzayyar kei-lokeinu*, no sculptor can compare to Him. As the Gemara continues to explain, the Divine artistry that is apparent in the internal scheme and intricacy of human beings is singularly remarkable and inspiring.

The Gemara and several midrashim<sup>6</sup> suggest various aspects of the Divine design of humans which may have particularly inspired Chana. One significant aspect<sup>7</sup> might be the uniqueness of each person. As the Gemara poetically notes elsewhere,<sup>8</sup> the fact that no two people have absolutely identical features reflects a deeper reality that each person is unique within; no two of us share an identical inner landscape.

This singularity and uniqueness of each of us is central as well to Chazal’s earliest thematic sketches of Rosh

Hashana. The Mishna<sup>9</sup> describes Divine judgement on Rosh Hashana as *kol ba’ei olam overin le-fanav ki-vnei maron* — every person on Earth passes before Him like a flock of sheep. Although we are all judged simultaneously, He relates to each one’s inner life and specific situation and circumstances. *Haftaras Chana* can serve to reinforce this central notion. In line with our belief and recognition that Hashem is fully aware of our unique situations and our most private thoughts and decisions, our preparation for *Yom ha-Din* ought to stress not only the need to upgrade our adherence to His **behavioral** expectations of us, but as well our drive to revitalize our **inner** spiritual lives and reawaken our sense of connectedness to Him in our wishes, plans, and priorities.<sup>10</sup>

Especially in this singular time, as so many of find ourselves unable to perform the **activities** of *avodas Hashem* as we normally might — many of us may read *haftaras Chana* ourselves without the benefit of the physical presence of a minyan — it is critical to recognize the genuine significance of undiminished **inner avoda** of the mind, the heart and the will. As Rav Mayer Twersky has shared in the name of the rebbes of Ger, *ein lecha davar ha-omeid lifnei ha-ratzon* may well mean “nothing can stop us from **wanting**,” genuinely and deeply desiring to live in accordance with Hashem’s will.

כתבנו בספר החיים למענה.

### Endnotes

1. *Megilla* 31a.
2. Rashi, *Megilla* 31a, s.v. *Maftirin*.
3. Ran, *Megilla* (11b in the Rif pages) based on *Rosh Hashana* 11a, quoted in *Beis Yosef* (end of siman 584).

4. Shmuel I 2:2.

5. *Berachos* 10a. See also Maharsha, *Chidushei Agados s.v. ve-Ain Tzayar*.

6. See *Mechilta* end of *Beshalach* (*Shira* no. 8); *Midrash Tanchuma* beginning of *Tazria* and *Derashos Ibn Shu'ib* there.

7. Perhaps based on the idea in the *Mechilta*.

8. *Berachos* 58a. See also Maharsha *s.v. ve-Ain*.

9. *Rosh Hashana* 16a. See also, the Gemara further end of 18a.

10. For more on the centrality of our “inner landscape”, the *chovos ha-levavos*, please check “What I Do vs. Why I Do: A Surprising Insight about Intentions and *Penimiyus*” (<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/963084/>) and “Inner Work: The Power of *Penimiyus* and Heart” (<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/965233/>).

## B'Onnes UV'Ratzon: What is True Duress?

### Rabbi Josh Flug

Director of Torah Research, Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future

The special *vidui* that we recite on Yom Kippur begins with the following confession:

על חטא שחטאנו לפניך באונס וברצון.  
*For the sin that we sinned before You under duress and willingly.*

It is somewhat enigmatic that the very first confession we make is for transgressions that we violated under duress. We have a rule, “*onnes Rachmana patrei*” — the Torah exempts us from violations that occur under duress. Why, then, do we need to confess for these violations?

The Vilna Gaon (cited in *Machzor HaGra*) suggests that we can be held accountable for not looking ahead. We may actively create a situation that prevents us from performing a mitzvah

later, or we passively allow such a situation to happen. While we might be under duress at the time of the violation, if we would have had some foresight, the duress could have been avoided. For that lack of foresight and advanced preparation, we need atonement.

R. Meir Dan Plotzki, *Kli Chemdah* (Moadim Vol. I no. 91), notes that there are additional situations of duress that would require atonement. First, if we were forced into a situation that we really wanted to be in. What if, for example, you have a strong desire to eat a cheeseburger. You then find yourself in an unusual life-threatening situation that requires eating a cheeseburger. Although you may eat a cheeseburger to save your life, if you are pleased to be in this situation then atonement is required. Second, if you were initially forced into a situation that required violating the Torah, but as it developed, you became a willing participant, that too requires atonement. Both of those situations involve duress but they also involve *ratzon* (desire), either at the outset or as the process developed. That is why we say *b'onnes uv'ratzon* — under duress *and* willingly. We need atonement for situations that involve *onnes* combined with *ratzon*.

We approach this Yom Kippur with a very legitimate “*onnes pass*.” As a result of COVID-19, there were many mitzvot this past year that we couldn't perform and perhaps we still cannot perform. However, our “*onnes pass*” requires that it truly be *onnes* and not *onnes* mixed with *ratzon*. If our inability to perform certain mitzvot led to a sense of relief rather than agony, we have the ability to rectify that when we say “*al cheit shechatanu lefanech b'onnes uv'ratzon*” and accept

upon ourselves that when the crisis passes, we will enthusiastically participate in all of the mitzvot that were affected.

## Home Shuling: Patience in a Pandemic

### Chaya Sima Koenigsberg, PhD

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Many people will not be in the synagogue this Rosh Hashanah. Others will likely attend abbreviated services and will find themselves home for the bulk of the days. Transitioning from a Rosh Hashanah centered around synagogue service to a Rosh Hashanah centered at home can be difficult. It has been more than a decade since I was last in shul on Rosh Hashanah for more than a brief visit to hear the shofar with little babies or young children in tow. While davening remains part of my Rosh Hashanah service, my central “*avodah*” of the day is not confined to the Mahzor.

There is a well-known idea that our actions and attitudes toward others can affect how Hashem judges us. My “*avodah*” on Rosh Hashanah is to try to imitate Hashem and to remain patient. Be it with children, parents, a spouse or roommate, “Don't get angry,” is the mantra. We do not want our missteps to “anger” Hashem. We hope our past insolence will be overlooked, that our shortcomings and even outright disregard for His commands can be forgiven. In turn, we must overlook the actions or inactions of others that might otherwise anger us. Surely, the sights

and sounds of services in shul more easily inspire, but earthly interactions also hold an opportunity to elevate.

The pandemic and lockdown have revealed the obvious. Extended exposure to people in confined spaces can lead to increased friction, but on Rosh Hashanah it is especially important not to let the pandemic get the better of us. This is the challenge of spending Rosh Hashanah at home, but not alone.

Remaining patient is not only pragmatic on the Day of Judgement, but a first step in the process of character perfection outlined by the kabbalist R. Moshe Cordovero, in his 16th-century ethical work, *Tomer Devorah*. The first of the 13 Divine Middot, or qualities of Hashem that we should emulate, is patience. As described by *Tomer Devorah* on the words מִי אֵל כְּמוֹךָ (Michah 7:18), Hashem is so patient that even in the moments when we sin against Him he does not cut us off, but “endures” the insult of our sins, and continues to provide us with life and the bodily wherewithal to perform the very acts that signify our disregard for Him! “Who is like You Hashem?” we proclaim. To swallow such insolence and to still lovingly provide. Every parent, caregiver, and friend has experienced such moments. The pain of being mistreated by those we provide for the most. As humans created in the Divine image we are meant to learn from Hashem’s endless patience. To tilt the scales in our favor we too need to be “slow to anger,” patient and loving in the face of complaints and non-compliance from those closest to us, and committed to rising to the challenge of providing for those who depend on us, even in their worst moments.

## The Sons of Korach: It’s Never Too Late

**Mrs. Sivan Rahav Meir**

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It is a very special moment: before the blowing of the shofar, the Psalm, chapter 47, is sung seven times, “To the conductor of the sons of Korach, a psalm.”

It is at this very moment that we must remember who Korach's sons were. Korach led a rebellion against Moshe and Aharon. Honor, haughtiness and political interests all fueled the rebellion that ended with bitterness and tragedy. Korach and his followers were swallowed by the earth and died. What happened to the children of Korach? They didn’t die. At the last minute, they changed their minds. They teach us that even today, at the last possible moment, we can repent and be saved.

Did we properly prepare for this moment of blowing the shofar? Have we all been in an atmosphere of learning and repentance and contemplation during Elul? For many of us, the first of Tishrei, Rosh Hashanah, arrives and boom! Rosh Hashanah is here. What do we do? What do we do just before the shofar? To the conductor of the sons of Korach, a psalm!

It is always possible to get on board and improve, even now. It is never too late. That’s exactly the message for this unique moment that occurs just once a year. You can always improve, no matter where you’ve been all of last year. It does not matter what your Elul looked like. In just another moment

we will hear the shofar, and together we will coronate G-d.

## Why Seven Haftorot?

**Rabbi Etan Schnall**

*Rebbe, Stone Beit Midrash Program*

A seven-week transition marked by Sefirat HaOmer links Pesach to Shavuot. Notably, there is also a seven-week transition from Tisha B’av to Rosh Hashana that draws less attention. Prior to Tisha B’av, three weeks of haftorot — *shalosh d’puranuta* — are the gloomy prophecies of churban. Beginning with Shabbat Nachamu, however, we reverse our direction with *sheva d’nechemta* — seven consecutive haftorot of consolation and redemption.<sup>1</sup> We are familiar with the preparatory nature of Sefira, engaging us in self-reflection and anticipation of *kabbalat HaTorah*. Likewise, if we explore the seven weeks following Tisha B’av, we will find that their Haftorot indeed poise us for the Yomim Noraim.

Why seven haftorot of *nechama*? If we signify reversal of the progression of destruction, wouldn't three corresponding positive prophecies suffice? True, Chazal teach us, “*midah tova merubah*,” Divine generosity extends further than Divine retribution.<sup>2</sup> But couldn't that be symbolized with four *haftorot*?

Many explain that “*nechama*” means more than consolation. It denotes a change of mind or perception.<sup>3</sup> In our context, Hashem reversed His direction, as it were, from one of *din* (judgement) to one of *rachamim* (mercy). However, there is also potential for a reversal of *our*

perceptions; what we viewed as pure *din*, can now, following Tisha B'av, be understood through the prism of *rachamim*. In retrospect, we can consider even the tragedies in our history in a new light. For example, Chazal emphasize that the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash was in essence a kindness for the Jews, for the alternative would have been their own destruction.<sup>4</sup>

In this light, perhaps four haftorot would not suffice. True, four might indicate Hashem's *midah tova merubah*. But the additional three *haftorot d'nechemta* demonstrate that we can even look back at the original *shalosh d'puranuta* and adjust our lens to perceive their prophecies more favorably. In hindsight, our personal and communal travails are also orchestrated through the loving providence of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

If so, it is most appropriate for the final four of these haftorot to serve as haftorot of the month of Elul. The name Elul hints to “*Ani l'dodi v'dodi*

*li*,”<sup>5</sup> the expression of mutual love between Hashem and Klal Yisrael.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the essence of this theme empowers us to discern the *midah tovah merubah* and the love of Hashem inherent in how He guides our lives — even when, at the moment, their events seem bleak. When we gain this perspective, we set the stage for the highest level of repentance, *teshuva me'ahava* — teshuva that emerges from love for Hashem.

This insight adds new meaning to our minhag of reciting *Shir hama'alot mima'amakim k'raticha Hashem* (Tehillim 130) between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. This psalm of repentance beseeches God “from the depths” — generally understood as a call to Hashem from the depths of suffering and humility. So pervasive and compelling is this human state, halacha considers it a definitional attitude of prayer.<sup>7</sup>

Homiletically, Rav Eliyahu Lopian reveals another layer that brings our point to the fore. We can avert

the depths of suffering if we call out to Hashem from the depths of contemplation instead. *Mima'amakim*, a prayer emerging from deeper consideration and deeper perception of the kindness and blessings in our world and in Divine Providence; these ignite a love for Hashem and a realization that they are all bestowed upon us in His love. Upon that background, this psalm of teshuva is a tool to bring us to *teshuva me'ahava* during the Yomim Noraim.<sup>8</sup>

## Endnotes

1. *Shulchan Aruch*, OC 428:8.
2. *Yoma* 76a.
3. See, for example, R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, *Beraishit* 5:30.
4. *Medrash Eicha Rabba* 4:14. See Rashi, *Kiddushin* 31a and *Ben Yehoyada*, *ibid*.
5. *Mishna Berurah*, 581.
6. *Shir HaShirim* 6:3.
7. See *Brachot* 10b and *Taanit* 23b.
8. *Kol Dodi Dofek* (Elul), pg. 51.



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## TESHUVA AND REBIRTH

**T**he *Shulhan Arukh* (*Orah Hayim* 606:1) records the well-known practice to immerse in a mikva prior to Yom Kippur:

יכול לטבול וללקות מתי שירצה, רק שיהיה קודם הלילה; ואינו מברך על הטבילה.  
*One may immerse and strike himself (as part of his performance of vidui)*

*whenever he desires, as long he does so prior to evening, and he should not recite a blessing on his immersion.*

Many have advanced suggestions as to the objective of the immersion prior to Yom Kippur.<sup>1</sup> The Maharil, however, offers a most striking explanation:

טבילת ערב יום כפור אמר מהר"י סג"ל יש פוסקים לטבול אחר סעודת המפסקת בערב, כי עיקר הטבילה משום תשובה היא ויותר שיקרבנה לעצומו של יום יפה הדבר... וכן טבילת גר כשנתגייר טובלין אותו משום תשובה.

*Regarding immersion on the eve of Yom Kippur, the Maharil states that according to some posekim, one should*

This essay is dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Hy Arbesfeld z"l, a wonderful neighbor and special personal friend of mine and of my wife, Professor Smadar Rosensweig, as well as of our entire and extended family. R. Arbesfeld was a rare personality who was a giant in Torah philanthropy and Jewish communal leadership. He was deeply involved and impactful in all facets of Torah life. He was incredibly idealistic and principled in his *kelal* work, unequivocally dedicated to advancing Torah study and the centrality of Torah values in multiple venues and frameworks. He was a *marbiz Torah*, a *lomed Torah*, and a *tomekh Torah*. His unbridled enthusiasm and passionate support for our yeshivah — its mission, its values, its *derekh* in *talmud Torah* and life — and his special and reciprocal bond with the Roshei Yeshiva were extraordinary. His loss is irrevocable, but his contribution is everlasting and unforgettable, and his memory will continue to inspire our yeshivah and the broader Torah community.

immerse in the afternoon after his se'uda ha-mafseket because the central purpose of his immersion is for the sake of repentance, and the closer his immersion is to the day (of Yom Kippur) itself the better ... And so too, when a convert immerses as part of his conversion, we immerse him for the sake of repentance.<sup>2</sup>

Maharil argues that our immersion on the eve of Yom Kippur and a convert's immersion share a common denominator: both immersions are for the sake of teshuva.

The *Darkei Moshe* (*Orah Hayim* 606) refers to Maharil as well but interprets the Maharil differently:

וּכְתַב עוֹד מֵהַר"ל (שם סי' ג) דַּאֲף עַל פִּי שְׁטַבֵּל בְּעֶרְבַּ רֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה וְיִוְדַע שֶׁלֹּא רָאָה קָרִי אֶפִּילוּ הֵכִי יִטְבּוֹל בְּעֶרְבַּ יוֹם הַכְּפוּרִים מִשּׁוּם תְּשׁוּבָה כְּגֵר הַמֵּתְגַיֵּיר:

*The Maharil also wrote that although one who immerses on Erev Rosh ha-Shana and knows that he did not experience a seminal emission afterwards, nonetheless, he should immerse prior to Yom ha-Kippurim for the sake of repentance, just like a convert at their conversion.*

According to the *Darkei Moshe*, the immersions of the eve of Yom Kippur and a convert not only share a common denominator, but the immersion on Erev Yom Kippur is actually intended to mimic the immersion of the convert. The Gemara says that a convert experiences a type of rebirth, “ger she-nitgayeir ke-katan she-nolad dami — a convert at their conversion is like a new-born child” (*Yevamot* 22a). Similar to a convert, one who



undergoes the process of repentance also experiences a fundamental rebirth.

The *Darkei Moshe's* understanding compels us to question the character of the rebirth of the repentant. What is the mechanism of such a rebirth and what is its precise nature?

A response to these questions may be formulated through considering the uniqueness of teshuva. The Yerushalmi (*Makkot* 2:6) states:

שֶׁאֵלּוּ לַחֲכָמָה חוּטֵא מֵהוּ עוֹנְשׁוֹ אִמְרוּ לֵהֶם [מִשְׁלֵי יִג כֵּא] חֲטָאִים תִּרְדָּף רַעָה שֶׁאֵלּוּ לְנִבּוּאָה חוּטֵא מֵהוּ עוֹנְשׁוֹ אִמְרָה לֵהֶן [יְחֻזְקָאֵל יַח ד'] הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַחוּטֵאִת הִיא תִּמּוֹת שֶׁאֵלּוּ לְקוּדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא חוּטֵא מֵהוּ עוֹנְשׁוֹ אִמְרָה לֵהֶן יַעֲשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה וְיִתְכַפֵּר לוֹ.

*They asked Wisdom, “What is the punishment of a sinner,” and it responded, “Sinners will chase after evil” (Mishlei 13:21). They asked Prophecy, “What is the punishment of a sinner,” and it responded, “The sinful soul will perish” (Yechezkel 18:4). They asked the Holy One Blessed be He, “What is the punishment of a sinner,” and He responded, “he should repent and attain forgiveness.”*

The Yerushalmi expresses the innovative and rule-breaking character of the concept of teshuva. According to laws of cause and effect, repentance should be impossible. Wisdom and Prophecy assume, sensibly, that sinners must suffer the consequences of their sins because they cannot uproot the past. G-d, however, establishes teshuva as a possibility. Repentance is based not on human logic but on Divine logic, perhaps Divine generosity and compassion.

The uniqueness of teshuva as described in the Yerushalmi presses us to formulate some understanding of its mechanism in human terms. Broadly speaking, there are two approaches.

The first approach is that the efficacy of repentance is rooted in a distinctive view of time. While usually the past is assumed inaccessible, the novel concept of teshuva allows us to redeem or even rewrite our past. Teshuva proceeds on the assumption of access to the past.<sup>3</sup> This access, in turn, enables the neutralization, reconciliation, even the revision



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of past transgressions. Repentance motivated by Divine fear (*teshuvah mei-yirah*) or inspired by *ahavat Hashem* (*teshuvah mei-ahavah*), each of which have the capacity to reframe previous misconduct according to the Talmud (*Yoma* 86b), exemplify this process.

**Teshuva is not a refuge from legal or moral responsibility, but a mechanism that actually assumes greater accountability, allowing for the reconciliation and sometimes even redemption of past infractions.**

The second understanding is that teshuva is possible because teshuva is transformational. This view is subtly articulated by the Rambam. The penitent transforms himself to such an extent that he may declare, “*eini oto ha-ish*, I am not that same person...”<sup>4</sup> If the penitent achieves this comprehensive transformation, then he is no longer held accountable for sins of the past, the transgressions of his previous religious persona. It is this perspective that characterizes the “rebirth” of teshuva. Our past does not define or undermine our present after the experience of teshuva.

However, it is critical to emphasize that even as we undergo a change of identity, the halakha rejects the notion of a “born-again” Jew. No such concept exists in Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Our

transformation through the process of teshuva is limited and not absolute; we cannot fully divorce ourselves from our past. Rather, the authentic *ba'al teshuva* is transformed while maintaining continuity with his past, the constructive and the deplorable; his personal identity continues but is also transformed in the present.

It is significant that the Rambam (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 2:8) himself underscores this balance with his ruling that on Yom Kippur, we should confess all our sins, even transgressions from previous years; our sins from previous years are still a part of our identity, although they are no longer held against us. Moreover, we cannot and do not elude or evade concrete punishment by means of teshuva. Teshuva is not a refuge from legal or moral responsibility, but a mechanism that actually assumes greater accountability, allowing for the reconciliation and sometimes even redemption (*avonot she-na'asot sheggagot o zekhuyot* — *Yoma* 86b) of past infractions. In fact, this consideration constitutes the convergence of the two approaches we have delineated, which conceptually underpin the institution of teshuva. Indeed, proportional, halakhically mandated consequences contribute to and facilitate transformational teshuva by integrating the problematic past with an unencumbered present and future.<sup>6</sup>

## Endnotes

1. See *Tur* (*Orah Hayim* 606) who quotes Rosh (*Yoma* 8:24) as entertaining the possibility that the practice is due to one's obligation to purify oneself prior to a holiday (*RH* 16b).

2. *Hilkhot Erev Yom Kippur*, 3.

3. This is a prominent theme in the Rav's

*Al ha-Teshuva* and relates to the Bergsonian theory of time. For a more extensive treatment of this topic, see my forthcoming article titled “The Relationship Between Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu and Klal Yisrael.” It is worth noting that while the idea of this principle is particularly central and helpful in explaining several anomalies of teshuva, it is a principle that extends to all of *kedushat ha-zman*, and even to other categories of halakha. For example, the notions of *sippur* and *zekhirat yetzi'at Mitzrayim*, the re-enactment of the *Aseret ha-Dibrot* on Shevuot, and the more general notion of *zakhor* which arises in various contexts are tied to this outlook on time. Moreover, this perspective on time also pertains to the notions of *zekhut avot* and the *brit* formulated in Deuteronomy 29:14.

4. Rambam, *Hilkhot Teshuva*, 2:4. For an extensive treatment of this perspective, which the Rambam characterizes as *mi-darkei ha-teshuvah*, see my “*Mi-Darkei Ha-Teshuva: The Authentic Repentance*,” *Kol Hamevasser* (10:2), 5-7.

The themes developed in that article dovetail with the approach developed herein.

5. See Maharal (*Netivot Olam, Netiv ha-Teshuva*, 8:1) who argues that heresy and *arayot* are sins that are so transformative that they are excluded from the process of teshuva in the human world — repentance can only be achieved through death. The Maharal's contention supports the notion that even the genuine *ba'al teshuva* is still connected to his past; teshuva, in its fullest sense, from such defining sin would entail a total disconnection from the past, which is antithetical to authentic teshuva.

6. The concept of *ger she-nitgayer ke-katan she-nolad dami*, though more weighted on new legal status, also does not completely negate the past. Conversion is not a pathway to avoid *No'ahide* punishments, and notwithstanding the new identity of the *ger*, there are certain universalist halakhot (*onshin, pru u-revu*, and *yerushat bekhorei*) which remain connected to his past (*Yevamot* 22a, 48b, 62a, *Sanhedrin* 71b). Either way, it is worth noting that the Maharal's formulation, in contrast to the *Darkei Moshe's*, perceives teshuva as the paradigm for transformation, underscoring the component of integration with the relevant parts of our past. Also see Ritva (*Ketubot* 3b).

## The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

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# THE THIRTEEN ATTRIBUTES AND THE MITZVAH OF CHESED

**T**he essence of the Selichos service is the recitation of the “Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.” However, recitation is only the beginning. The attributes are expressed in response to G-d’s directive (*Rosh HaShanah* 17b) “Any time the Jews are sinning, they should perform before Me (*ye’asu lefanai*) in accordance with this arrangement, and I will forgive them.” This is modeled as a prayer, and indeed the attributes are incorporated in

that form. Still, as the Alshich notes (*Tehillim* 103:7), the command is not “*yomru lefanai*” - say before me, but “perform”; the ideal is that the Jews will not only speak these words, but will live them. Indeed, walking in the path of G-d is the mission of the Jew in this world, and there is no greater road map for that path than the Thirteen Attributes.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the imitation of G-d and the realization of kindness to others are intertwined, and, in a sense, one and the same.

## The Sources for the Mitzvah of Chesed

The word “*chesed*” is often translated as “kindness,” but this rendition remains vague. *Chesed* describes an attitude, a demeanor, a sensitivity, and a worldview, as well as acts of kindness themselves.

The commandment to engage in acts of *chesed* is of undisputed importance; the *mishnah* identifies

In memory of Rabbi Hy Arbesfeld z"l, who was a guide, a mentor, a friend, and an inspiration. There was no greater exemplar of hakaras hatov, and its enormous potential, than Rabbi Hy Arbesfeld. He did far more than express it: he was a force of nature, committing himself fully to supporting the Yeshiva that nurtured him and making sure that its best version was realized so that others could benefit as he did. The positivity he embodied, the energy he harnessed, the good humor that he carried in his magnificent efforts to advance the Torah of the Yeshiva and its faculty was a wonder to encounter. Many a RIETS event was made memorable and impactful with his personality defining the experience. His legacy of hope, potential, and inspiration will continue to speak to us when we need it the most.

“*gemilut chasadim*,” performance of acts of kindness, as one of the three supporting pillars of the world.<sup>2</sup> The Talmud underscores this significance by pointing out that incidents of God’s *chesed* frame the Torah, which begins with God’s provision of clothes for Adam and Eve (*malbish arumim* – He clothes the unclothed) and concludes with His burial of Moses (*kover meitim* – He buries the dead).<sup>3</sup> This is not merely a stylistic flourish; the fact that the Torah “begins and ends with *chesed*” is not simply a point of sequence and structure, but is a dramatic declaration of the underpinnings of the Torah in its totality. R. Yerucham Levovitz, the distinguished *mashgiach* of the Mirrer Yeshiva, noted that this language is meant to convey that *chesed* is not only the most important theme of the Torah, it is the theme of *everything*; all of Torah, and of Creation, flows from the value of *chesed*.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, the *mishnah* teaches that “if there is no *derekh erez*, there is no Torah.”<sup>5</sup> Rabbenu Yonah suggests that *derekh erez*, usually rendered as the possession of refined character traits, is necessary if the Torah’s values are to take root; without *derekh erez*, any Torah the individual studies “lacks a home.”<sup>6</sup> Along these lines, it has been suggested that the prominent placement of *chesed* indicates that *chesed* is equally crucial; it is “the beginning and end” of the Torah personality, and no such personality can exist without it.<sup>7</sup>

*Chesed* as an expression of the Divine is so readily apparent that one lacking this attribute is compared to one who fails to recognize God.<sup>8</sup> The Talmud, citing R. Chama ben R. Chanina, explains the verse, “After the Lord your God shall you walk” (Deut.

13:5) as a command to imitate the Godly attributes of active kindness referred to above.<sup>9</sup> It is impossible to physically walk in the “footsteps” of the transcendent fire of the Divine presence; we “walk in God’s ways” through involvement in loving-kindness:

אלא להלך אחר מדותיו של הקב"ה מה הוא מלביש ערומים דכתיב (בראשית ג, כא) ויעש ה' אלהים לאדם ולאשתו כתנות עור וילבישם אף אתה הלבש ערומים הקב"ה ביקר חולים דכתיב (בראשית יח, א) וירא אליו ה' באלוני ממרא אף אתה בקר חולים הקב"ה ניחם אבלים דכתיב (בראשית כה, יא) והי אחרי מות אברהם ויברך אלהים את יצחק בנו אף אתה נחם אבלים הקב"ה קבר מתים דכתיב (דברים לז, ו) ויקבר אותו אף אתה קבור מתים:

Rather, [the meaning is] to “walk after” the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. As He clothes the naked, for it is written: “And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife coats of leather, and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21), so should you clothe the naked. The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written: “And the Lord appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre” (Gen. 18:1), so should you visit the sick. The Holy One, blessed be He, comforted mourners, for it is written: “And it came to pass after the death of Abraham, that God blessed Isaac his son” (Gen. 25:11) so should you comfort mourners. The Holy one, blessed be He, buried the dead, for it is written: “And He buried him in the valley” (Deut. 34:6), so should you bury the dead.

This mandate to emulate God, “*imitatio Dei*,” is a core mission of Judaism. R. Yisrael Meir Kagan, the “*Chafetz Chaim*,” observes that the commandment appears in one form or another no less than eight times in the Torah.<sup>10</sup> As presented by the Talmud, the fulfillment of this imperative is manifested in the assumption of

a character of active kindness and mercy.<sup>11</sup>

The Talmud, in the name of R. Yosef, cites another verse as a source for the imperative to perform acts of *chesed*: “And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and shall show them the way wherein they must walk, and the work that they must do” (Ex. 18:20).<sup>12</sup> This verse, a portion of Yitro’s advice to his son-in-law Moses, is interpreted by the Sages:

והודעת להם זה בית חייהם את הדרך זו גמילות חסדים ילכו זה ביקור חולים בה זו קבורה ואת המעשה זה הדין אשר יעשון זו לפנים משורת הדין:

“[And you] shall show them” - this refers to their house of life;<sup>13</sup> “the way” - this means the practice of loving deeds; “they must walk” - to visit the sick; “wherein” - to burial; “and the work” - the letter of the law; “that they must do” - [acts] beyond the requirements of the law.

The Talmud further locates an imperative for *chesed* in the declaration of the Jewish people upon the splitting of the Red Sea: “This is my God, *ve-anveihu*” (Ex. 15:2).<sup>14</sup> Rabbinic sources offer many interpretations for the last word of this sentence; one possibility is that the word should be read as a contraction of the phrase “*ani ve-hu*,” or, “I and Him.” Thus, suggests Abba Shaul in the Talmud, the intent is, “Be like Him: Just as He is merciful and compassionate, so you must be merciful and compassionate.”

The multiplicity of sources from the Talmud may give the impression of redundancy, as we are told three times that we are to imitate God through the pursuit of compassion. R. Moshe Troyesh, in his ethical guide *Orach Meisharim*, explains the necessity for this repeated instruction.<sup>15</sup> Each of the three sources addresses a distinct commitment to acts of kindness.

Abba Shaul's source, based on the declaration at the Red Sea, teaches that the Jewish people devoted themselves, in an expression of their own free will, to emulate the God who redeemed them from slavery, and in so doing transmitted this legacy to their descendants.<sup>16</sup> R. Yosef derives his lesson from Yitro, who was speaking neither as a prophet nor as a messenger of God. By necessity, then, his advocacy of *chesed* stemmed from an instinctive ethical morality, and Moses's acceptance of his message arose from agreement with that instinct and sensitivity.<sup>17</sup> Finally, R. Chama ben R. Chanina teaches that the mandate of *chesed* is not only a voluntary commandment accepted by the Jewish people or an ethical necessity of social responsibility, but an actual binding Biblical commandment.

In addition, acts of *chesed* are commanded by another famous source of central importance. Maimonides asserts that all acts of *chesed* are mandated by the verse "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18).<sup>18</sup> Just as we would desire others to extend kindness in our favor, we are bidden to perform *chesed* for others.

## A Multi-Tiered Imperative

Many commentators observe that the different sources for the commandment of *chesed* create a dual-leveled *mitzvah*.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, we are obligated to be involved in acts of kindness, to be *gomlei chasadim*, in order to imitate God, thus fulfilling a requirement in the relationship between Man and God, a *mitzvah bein adam la-Makom*. On the other hand, *chesed* stems from the command to "Love your neighbor," a duty between

one human and another, a *mitzvah bein adam le-chaveiro*.

This distinction is evident from the classification of the commandment in R. Elazar Azkiri's presentation of the *mitzvah* in his *Sefer Charedim*. The obligation to perform acts of kindness as a function of *imitatio Dei* is classified with "Positive *mitzvot* dependent on the heart", even though it appears to call for physical action.<sup>20</sup> As R. Shimon ben Chamu notes, this is because *chesed* activities are the means to an end, the goal of creating a Godly personality.<sup>21</sup> *Chesed*, then, is a necessary part of each individual's religious development, regardless of its actual effect on others; one is obligated to incorporate it into one's natural personality. In general, the approach of Maimonides is that it is necessary to internalize the themes of *mitzvot* whose rationales are basically understood; accordingly, the disposition towards *chesed* must become inherent and instinctual.<sup>22</sup>

Developing such an attitude requires actively pursuing areas of practice, rather than merely passively awaiting opportunities. The *midrash* comments to this effect on the statement of Avimelech, King of Gerar, to Abraham: "God is with you in all that you do" (Gen. 21:22).<sup>23</sup> According to one suggestion in the *midrash*, this assessment was made after Abraham relocated his tent, following the destruction of Sodom, to Gerar, where opportunities for hospitality would be more plentiful. R. Henoah Leibowitz observes that although Avimelech was aware of Abraham's many acts of kindness up to this point, it was only once he noticed the extent of Abraham's actual searching for opportunities to engage in *chesed* (in this case, hospitality) that Avimelech

realized that God was actually with Abraham.<sup>24</sup> Many commentaries note the fact that Abraham's internalization of the quality of *chesed*, to the extent that he suffered anguish when deprived of the opportunity to provide hospitality,<sup>25</sup> is emblematic of the soul that strives to emulate God's *chesed* as a defining trait.<sup>26</sup>

Abraham's efforts created an attitude transmitted to his descendants. In the silent prayer (*Amidah*) recited every day, we request: "Bless us, our Father... for with the light of Your countenance You gave us... the Torah of life and a love of *chesed*." This, explains the Alter of Slobodka, is a reference to the innate inclination of the Jewish soul toward loving-kindness, which is reflected and enhanced by active practice.<sup>27</sup>

## The Unique Quality of Divine Chesed

Another aspect of *chesed* is elucidated through careful attention to the details of a specific *mitzvah* of *chesed*, that of comforting mourners, *nichum avelim*. R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik identified a particular goal of this *mitzvah* that impacts on its performance; a vital part of comforting the mourner, he maintains, is to convince the bereaved that his suffering is temporary, that it is a small part of a masterplan of yet unrevealed nature and scope, one that will ultimately lead to clarity and happiness.<sup>28</sup>

This perspective adds an important element to this *mitzvah*. The founding Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh, R. Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, notes that there is a fundamental difference between the ability of a human to give comfort and that of God.<sup>29</sup> Humans, limited in

their vision, can only offer palliative comments and vague statements of support and encouragement. God, however, cognizant of the past, present, and future, and of all their significance, is capable of expressing with absolute credibility that “all that God does is for the best.”<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, notes the *Sefat Emet*, God is labeled “*Ba'al Ha-Nechamot*,” the “Master of Comforts.”<sup>31</sup>

Thus, there may be another element to acts of kindness rooted in the command of *imitatio Dei*. We are bidden to imitate God’s qualities on two levels – first, by acting with kindness and mercy as He does, and further, by performing kindness in a manner that in itself strives to emulate the Divine, incorporating into its performance aspects particular to God. We tend to the needs of others as an expression of “Love your neighbor,” but beyond that, we aim to fulfill *imitatio Dei* by addressing these needs in a style influenced by the Divine.

Once again, this aspect is particularly highlighted in the context of *nichum avelim*. This *mitzvah* tends to the needs of the deceased as much as those of the living, and is thus comparable to the *chesed* of burial. The *midrash* states that Abraham was praised as having attained the qualities of God when he buried his wife Sarah.<sup>32</sup> This is striking; Abraham, who performed so much kindness in his lifetime, receives singular commendation for an act that any relative, certainly any husband, would be expected to perform.

R. C.Y. Goldvicht suggests that the other services that Abraham provided to humanity were those for which one could expect reciprocity, and thus could be understood as part of a social

contract, recommended without necessarily being rooted in Divine influence.<sup>33</sup> Burial, however, an act of kindness to the departed, is a “*chesed shel emet*,” a pure, selfless act for which no reciprocity can be expected. Thus, it is a clear manifestation not of utilitarianism, but of Godliness.

Here, too, Divinity is evident not only in the performance of the act, but in the integration of a Godly perspective. To a human mind, life ends with death; no one remains to benefit from the kindness of a proper burial. However, to the Divine eye, there is a larger picture, and a wider world, wherein the departed continue to profit. Thus, it is specifically through such acts that God’s influence is manifest, guiding the hand of humanity and giving meaning and profundity to the human soul.

**We are bidden to imitate God’s qualities on two levels – first, by acting with kindness and mercy as He does, and further, by performing kindness in a manner that in itself strives to emulate the Divine, incorporating into its performance aspects particular to God.**

## Conclusion

The prophet Michah (6:8) declares that God asks three things of us: acting with justice, loving *chesed*, and walking humbly with God. This second task focuses on the love of *chesed* rather than the practice of *chesed*; we are bidden to absorb the principles of kindness and compassion, to make them breathe and speak and sing out to the world in a brilliant symphony of ever-increasing devotion and realization.<sup>34</sup> Loving *chesed* implies the realization that the degree to which one’s internal bond with the values of loving-kindness is strengthened is the measure of the Divine image within, and that that image becomes more defined and more realized with every gesture taken beyond oneself.

As we said when we began, *chesed* transcends a simple definition. It is a feeling to possess, an attitude to maintain, an action to perform, a personality to develop, a mindset to cultivate, a habit to acquire, a perspective to apply; it is mandatory and voluntary, basic and extraordinary, routine and outstanding all at once. It is a birthright and an inheritance, and yet it is actualized only through personal initiative and commitment. The Jewish mission is to bring this trait to life in all its manifestations, and to pursue every method and every opportunity to do so.

This essay was adapted from the introduction to this author’s *The Right and the Good: Halakhah and Human Relations*.

## Endnotes

1. See R. Boruch Simon, *Imrei Boruch, Ki Tisa* #6.
2. *Avot* 1:2.
3. *Sotah* 14a.

4. *Da'at Torah*, Exodus, p. 297. Similarly, R. Natan Tzvi Finkel, the “Alter” of Slobodka, notes (*Or Ha-Tzafun* I, p. 107) that even though there are two other “supporting pillars” of the world, Torah and worship, the world was sustained before the Torah was given to the Jewish people and before the Temple was built. Apparently, the existence of *chesed* alone is enough to justify and sustain the world. See also *Avot De-Rabbi Natan*, ch. 4.
5. *Avot* 3:17.
6. See also R. Shmuel Rozovsky, *Zikhron Shemuel, sichot*, p. 544 and R. Baruch Simon, *Imrei Barukh* to Exodus, introduction.
7. R. Yitzchak Isaac Breish, *Mi-Shemani Ha-Aretz, Sotah*, 69. For other interpretations of this passage, see *Shenei Luchot Ha-Brit, Pesachim, Ner Mitzvah*, 51 and R. Yehudah Lowe (Maharal) of Prague, *Netivot Olam, Netiv Gemilut Chasadim*, ch. 1. Concerning Maharal’s interpretation, see R. Elyakim Shlesinger, *Sichot Beit Av*, 66-67.
8. *Avodah Zarah* 17b. See *Netivot Olam*, *ibid.*, ch. 2.
9. *Sotah* 14a.
10. *Ahavat Chesed*, introduction. The sources he cites are Deut. 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 13:5; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; and 30:16.
11. See also R. Herschel Schachter, *Nefesh Ha-Rav*, 59-71, for an exposition of the broad application of this mandate in the thought of R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik.
12. *Bava Metziah* 30b.
13. According to *Rashi (Bava Kama 100a)*, this is a reference to Torah study; in his commentary to *Bava Metziah* 30b, he interprets this as a reference to learning the skills to earn a living.
14. *Shabbat* 133b.
15. *Orach Meisharim*, ch. 17, *Gemilut Chesed*, #1. See also ch. 3, *Ahavat Re’enu*, #7.
16. As R. Asher Anshel Katz notes, the Jews realized that they received compassion that they did not deserve during their salvation from Egypt, and they therefore committed themselves to extend similar compassion to those in comparable situations. *Va-Yaged Moshe*, Exodus, p. 165.
17. See R. Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, *He’arot Be-Massekhet Bava Metziah*, p. 123, who writes that Moshe’s acceptance of Yitro’s advice converted Yitro’s idea into a part of the Torah. Some *Rishonim* understand Yitro’s comments to be an expression of the commandment of *imitatio Dei*, rather than a separate source; see, for example, *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*, #47, who cites both verses as the source for the *mitzvah* of *chesed*.
18. *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Aveil* 14:1. The notion that “Love your neighbor” creates a Biblical obligation of *chesed* is shared by other *Rishonim* as well, such as Rabbenu Yonah. See his commentary to *Berakhot* 3:2; see also *Tosefot Yom Tov*; R. Yerucham Fishel Perlow, *Biur* to *Sefer Ha-Mitzvot* of R. Sa’adiah Gaon, positive commandment 19; and *Arukh Ha-Shulchan, Choshen Mishpat* 426:3.
19. See, for example, R. Yitzchak Hutner, *Pachad Yitzchak, Sukkot*, 21; R. Tzvi Shapiro, *Tziyyon Ha-Amudim* to *Sefer Mitzvot Katan*, 46; R. Yosef Roth, *Siach Yosef* III, 89; R. Chananyah Eizenbach, *Machaneh Yosef, Sotah*, #11; R. Mordechai Carlebach, *Chavatzelet Ha-Sharon al Ha-Torah*, Genesis, pp. 187-188 and 195-200. See also R. Yaakov Nisan Rosenthal, *Mishnat Ya’akov (Hilkhot De’ot 1:5-6)* and *Mishmanei Ha-Aretz* to *Sotah*, 68.
20. *Sefer Charedim, mitzvah* 18.
21. *Cherdat Kodesh* on *Sefer Charedim*, #74. One might question the necessity for this explanation by suggesting that the classification is appropriate because the *mitzvah* involves other aspects, in addition to action, that are clearly “heart dependent.” Note that *Cherdat Kodesh* cites *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol (Smag)*, 7, as stating that the directive of *imitatio Dei* mandates “to accomplish and to do;” this is apparently in disagreement with the above analysis.
22. *Shemonah Perakim* ch. 6. R. Yaakov Emden differs with Maimonides on this point (*Hagahot Ya’avetz on Shemonah Perakim*), as does the *Netziv*, specifically in this instance (*Herchev Davar*, Gen. 27:1).
23. *Gen. Rabbah* 54:2.
24. *Chiddushei Ha-Lev* on Genesis. See also *Or Ha-Nefesh*, cited in R. Moshe Avari, *Chokhmat Ha-Matzpun* (Genesis, vol. II, #314).
25. See *Rashi*, Gen. 18:1, citing *Bava Metziah* 86b.
26. See, for example, among many others, R. Eliyahu Meir Bloch, *Peninei Da’at*; R. David Kviat, *Sukkat David*; and R. Moshe Feinstein, *Darash Moshe*, all on Gen. 18:1.
27. *Or Ha-Tzafun* I, 234-236.
28. Quoted in the journal *Mesorah* V, 47.
29. *Asufat Ma’arakhot, Bereishit*, 47.
30. *Berakhot* 60b.
31. *Sefat Emet, Parshat Va-Yetze*, 5658.
32. *Gen. Rabbah*, 58:9.
33. *Asufat Ma’arakhot, Parshat Chayei Sarah*, pp. 287-290.
34. Accordingly, R. Yisrael Meir Ha-Kohen Kagan (1838-1933), known as the *Chafetz Chaim* (“He who desires life”) after the title of his well-known tract on the laws of prohibited speech, took the phrase *Ahavat Chesed* (“Love of *chesed*”) from the verse in *Michah* as the title of his work on the principles of acts of kindness.



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## SELICHOT: LEARNING TO SAY SORRY

**T**he *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 581:1, states:

נוהגים לקום באשמורת לומר סליחות ותחנונים, מראש חודש אלול ואילך עד יום הכיפורים. הגה: ומנהג בני אשכנז אינו כן, אלא מראש חודש ואילך מתחילין לתקוע אחר התפילה שחרית ... ועומדים באשמורת לומר סליחות ביום ראשון שלפני ראש השנה. ואם חל ראש השנה שני (או) שלישי, אז מתחילין מיום ראשון שבוע שלפניו.

*The custom is to awake before dawn to recite Selichot from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Yom Kippur. Glosses of Rama: This is not the Ashkenazi custom. Rather, from Rosh Chodesh, we begin blowing shofar after morning prayers ... and we awake*

*before dawn to recite Selichot on the Sunday before Rosh Hashanah. If Rosh Hashanah is on Monday or Tuesday, we begin on Sunday one week earlier.*

Ashkenazi practice is to begin recitation of Selichot at least four days before Rosh Hashanah. The *Mishnah Berurah* (6) provides two reasons for this. First, there are people who fast for ten days before Yom Kippur. We may not fast on the two days of Rosh Hashanah, Shabbat or erev Yom Kippur. Therefore, we add four days before Rosh Hashanah to allow those fasting to recite Selichot together with their fast. In order to standardize

the start time, it was instituted that Selichot always start at the beginning of the week. Second, a korban requires four days of *bikur* (inspection).

Regarding the mussaf korbanot of all the holidays, the Torah states “*v’hikravtem olah*” — you shall offer a burnt offering — but with regard to the korban mussaf of Rosh Hashanah, it states “*va’asitem olah*” — you shall make a burnt offering — meaning that we shall prepare ourselves as if we were the korban. Therefore, we inspect all our sins four days prior to Rosh Hashanah and repent for them.

## Kidamnucha Techilah: We First Approach You Ahead of Time

The *pizmon*, the central prayer for the first night of Selichot for Ashkenazim on Motzei Shabbat, begins:

בְּמוֹצָאֵי מְנוּחָהּ, קִדְמָנוּךָ תְּחִלָּה. הֵט אָזְנְךָ  
מִמְרוֹם, יוֹשֵׁב תְּהִלָּה. לְשִׁמְעַע אֶל־הַרְנָה וְאֶל־  
הַתְּפִלָּה: אֶת־יְמִינִי עוֹ עוֹרְרָה, לְעִשׂוֹת חֵיל.  
בְּצִדְקַת נְעֻמָּךְ, וְנִשְׁחַט תְּמוֹרוֹ אֵיל. גְּנוּן נָא גִזְעוּ,  
בְּזַעְקֵם בְּעוֹד לַיִל.

*After the departure of the Sabbath, as we first approach You, incline Your ear from on High, You Who are enthroned upon praises, [and] hear our cry and our prayer! Raise Your mighty right hand to act valiantly [against our accusers] for the sake of [Isaac] the righteous one, who was bound [on the altar], and in whose stead a ram was slain — shield his descendants as they cry to You while it is yet night.*

**Translation adapted from the Metsudah Selichos**

The question is: Since we are reciting this prayer close to Rosh Hashanah, not on Rosh Chodesh Elul like the Sephardim, how then can we say, “After the departure of the Sabbath, we first approach You ahead of time”? We aren’t early. We are late. We are waiting until four days before Rosh Hashanah to recite Selichot.

## Adam Harishon’s Punishment

Let us answer this question with the following approach: On the very same day that Adam Harishon was created, he was also judged. Our rabbis tell us that he sinned on the same day he was created, and through this sin, he forfeited eternal life in Gan Eden. However, the reason for his punishment was not because he ate from the Tree of Knowledge. Let us examine the *pesukim*:

וַיִּשְׁמָעוּ אֶת קוֹל ה' אֱלֹקִים מִתְּהִלָּה בְּגֵן לְרוּחַ

הַיּוֹם וַיִּתְחַבֵּא הָאָדָם וְאִשְׁתּוֹ מִפְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹקִים  
בְּתוֹךְ עֵץ הַגֵּן. וַיִּקְרָא ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶל הָאָדָם  
וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אַיֶּכָּה. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶת קִלְךָ שָׁמַעְתִּי בְּגֵן  
וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי עִירַם אֲנֹכִי וְאֶחָבֵא. וַיֹּאמֶר מִי הַגִּיד  
לְךָ כִּי עִירַם אֶתָּה הַמֶּן הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לִבְלֹתָי  
אֲכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אֲכָלְתָּ. וַיֹּאמֶר הָאָדָם הֲאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר  
נָתַתָּה עִמָּדִי הוּא נָתַתָּה לִּי מִן הָעֵץ וְאֲכָל.

*They heard the sound of the Lord God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. The Lord God called out to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” He replied, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” Then He asked, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?” The man said, “The woman You put at my side — she gave me of the tree, and I ate.”*  
**Bereishit 3:8-12**

Hashem asks Adam, “Where are you?” and the man should have given his precise location within Gan Eden, but instead he answers, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” He never answers the question he was asked. Hashem then asks, “Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?” This is a yes or no question. Did you eat from the tree or not? Here, too, he doesn’t answer the question but blames his wife. Hashem never asked him about her role and yet he uses her to give an evasive answer. Adam ruins his relationship with his wife by blaming her, and he ruins his relationship with Hashem because he wouldn’t answer the questions he was asked.

## Accepting Responsibility

Adam lost his ability to remain in Gan Eden because he didn’t know how to say one word: *selicha* — sorry. If he

would have used this one word, he would have remained. Everything is contingent on this one word because *selicha* means, I accept upon myself responsibility for my actions and therefore I regret what I did.

Parashat Nitzavim opens with a description of a covenant between Hashem and the Jewish people:

אַתֶּם נֹצְבִים הַיּוֹם בְּלַפְנֵי ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם  
רְאִשֵׁיכֶם שְׁבֹטֵיכֶם זְקֵנֵיכֶם וְשֹׁטְרֵיכֶם כָּל אִישׁ  
יִשְׂרָאֵל. טַפְּכֶם נְשִׁיכֶם וְגֵרְךָ אֲשֶׁר בְּקֶרֶב מַחֲנֶיךָ  
מִחוּטֵב עֲצִיף עַד שְׂאֵב מִימִיָּה. לְעֶבְרֶךָ בְּבְרִית ה'  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּבְאֵלֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כָּרַת עִמָּךְ הַיּוֹם.  
*You stand this day, all of you, before the Lord your God — your tribal heads, your elders and your officials, all the men of Israel, your children, your wives, even the stranger within your camp, from woodchopper to water drawer — to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is concluding with you this day, with its sanctions.*

**Devarim 9:9-11**

When telling us that the Jewish people were standing before Hashem, why did the Torah use the word “*nitzavim*” and not the more common word for standing — “*omdim*”? The *Ohr Hachaim* explains that the word “*nitzavim*” implies an acceptance of responsibility. We find in Megillat Rut that Boaz talks to the “*nitzav al hakotzrim*” — the person supervising the farmers. *Nitzav* means responsible. As such, each of us has a personal responsibility for our own actions and for the actions of others that we can influence. Chazal (*Shabbat* 54b) tell us that one who can influence others and doesn’t do so is responsible for their sins. Therefore, when we say “*selicha*,” we are accepting responsibility for what happened.

## Selach Lanu

Reciting Selichot in Elul means saying sorry, even though it's not easy to do. In our Yamim Noraim liturgy we recite, "selach lanu, mechal lanu, kaper lanu" — forgive us, pardon us, grant us atonement. What is the difference between selicha and mechila? Selicha means I am sorry for what I did. Mechila as a noun means a tunnel. As a verb it means to dig. If we say we are sorry, Hashem helps us dig a tunnel to get to a place of atonement.

In our Yom Kippur Amidah, we refer to Hashem as *Melech mochel v'soleach la'avonoteinu* — the King who pardons and forgives our sins. Why is the order reversed? Why does mechila come before selicha? Because from Hashem's perspective, mechila can come first. If He sees that we are interested in selicha, He opens a path for us to reach selicha and then atonement.

## The Thirteen Midot Harachamim

It is very difficult to ask for forgiveness. Our hubris prevents us from lowering ourselves to the level of begging for forgiveness. How do we get to a point where we can properly say that we are sorry? The answer is the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.

The Gemara, *Rosh Hashanah* 17b, states:

ויעבור ה' על פניו ויקרא א"ר יוחנן אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאומרנו מלמד שנתעטף הקב"ה כשליח צבור והראה לו למשה סדר תפלה אמר לו כל זמן שישיראל חוטאין יעשו לפני כסדר הזה ואני מוחל להם ה' ה' אני הוא קודם שיחטא האדם ואני הוא לאחר שיחטא האדם ויעשה תשובה אל רחום וחונן אמר רב יהודה ברית כרותה לי"ג מדות שאינן חוזרות ריקם.

*The verse states: "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed" (Exodus*

34:6). Rabbi Yochanan said: Were it not explicitly written in the verse, it would be impossible to say this. The verse teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wrapped Himself in a prayer shawl like a prayer leader and showed Moses the structure of the order of the prayer. He said to him: Whenever the Jewish people sin, let them act before Me in accordance with this order and I will forgive them. The verse continues: "The Lord, the Lord," I am He before a person sins, and I am He after a person sins and performs repentance, "God, merciful and gracious" (Exodus 34:6). Rav Yehuda said: A covenant was made with the Thirteen Attributes that they will not return empty-handed, as it is stated in this regard: "Behold, I make a covenant."

**Translation adapted from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud**

Rabbeinu Chananel adds:

ה' ה' אני הוא קודם שיחטא האדם שכתוב בו בספר החיים ואני ה' לאחר שיחטא האדם וישוב בתשובה שמקבלו כאלו לא חטא.

*The Lord, The Lord, I am [the Lord] before a person sins and it is still written in the Book of Life and I am the Lord after a person sins and repents. [Hashem] accepts him as if he never sinned.*

The Thirteen Attributes teach us that through teshuva, Hashem accepts us as if we never sinned.

The Torah gives us the following instruction when we go to war:

כִּי תֵצֵא מִחֲנֵה עַל אֹיְבֶיךָ וְנִשְׁמַרְתָּ מִכָּל דָּבָר רָע ... וְיָד תִּהְיֶה לְךָ מִחוּץ לְמַחֲנֶה וְיִצְאֶתָ שָׁמָּה חוּץ. וְיִתַּד תִּהְיֶה לְךָ עַל אֲזִנֶּיךָ וְהָיָה בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ חוּץ וְחִפְרֶתָהּ בָּהּ וְשִׁבְתָּ וְכִסִּיתָ אֶת צַעֲרֶךָ. כִּי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִתְּהַלֵּךְ בְּקִרְבְּךָ מִחֲנֶה לְהִצִּילְךָ וְלִתֵּת אֹיְבֶיךָ לְפָנֶיךָ וְהָיָה מִחֲנֶיךָ קְדוֹשׁ וְלֹא יִרְאֶה בְּךָ עֲרוֹת דָּבָר וְשָׁב מֵאֲחֵרֶיךָ.

*When you go out as a troop against your enemies, be on your guard against anything untoward ... Further, there*

*shall be an area for you outside the camp, where you may relieve yourself. With your gear you shall have a stake, and when you have squatted you shall dig a hole with it and cover up your excrement. Since the Lord your God moves about in your camp to protect you and to deliver your enemies to you, let your camp be holy; let Him not find anything unseemly among you and turn away from you.*

The Ba'al Haturim comments:

ויתד תהיה לך על אונך. בגימ' מדותיה על אונך. כלומר י"ג מדות יהיו כלי זיין שלך. "With your gear you shall have a stake" is the same numerical value as "My attributes shall be with your gear." Meaning that the Thirteen Attributes should be your weapon.

Our weapon during the Yamim Noraim is the Thirteen Attributes. Based on this, we can understand the closing selicha for Ashkenazim at Neilah:

תְּמַכְתִּי יְתִדוֹתַי בְּשִׁלְשׁ עָשָׂרָה תְּבוּת. וּבְשַׁעֲרֵי דְמַעוֹת כִּי לֹא נִשְׁלָבוֹת. לְכֹן שִׁפְכְתִי שִׁיחַ פְּנֵי בּוֹחֵן לְבוֹת. בְּטוֹחַ אֲנִי בְּאֵלֶּה וּבְזִכּוֹת שְׁלֵשֶׁת אָבוֹת. *I plant my stakes with the Thirteen Attributes [of God], and rely on the gates of [penitent] tears, which are never joined; therefore, I have poured out my prayers before Him, Who searches hearts. I trust in these, and in the merit of the three Patriarchs.*

The Thirteen Attributes are our stake. Just like a stake holds down a tent so that it doesn't blow in the wind, our stakes, the Thirteen Attributes, keep us grounded. This is why we recite the Thirteen Attributes seven times during Neilah. These Thirteen Attributes don't provide forgiveness from Hashem nor are they a request from Hashem. Rather, through these, we understand the Creator of the World. He has so many reasons not to forgive us. We have asked for forgiveness so many times, and even

after accepting not to sin, we continue to sin. The Creator has given and continues to give so many chances. However, in His abundant mercy, He has compassion on us after our sins as before our sins. The Thirteen Attributes bring us to understand that we don't deserve anything. Everything we receive from Hashem is a gift. This idea is found in the *pizmon* on the first night of Selichot:

יוצר אתה לכל יציר נוצר. פוננת מאז תרף  
 לחלצם ממוצר. לחוננם חנם מאוצר הפנצרה.  
 מרום, אם טעמו פשעי קהלה. נא סגבם מאוצר  
 המוכן בזבולף. עדיף לחן חנם, באים אליך.  
*You are the Creator of all that is formed,  
 You prepared from of old, a remedy to  
 save them from distress, by bestowing  
 undeserved grace upon them from Your  
 hidden treasure. Exalted One, if the  
 sins of Your congregation are great,  
 strengthen them, we pray from the  
 treasure stored in Your abode; Your  
 community [implores You] to grant them  
 undeserving grace as they approach You.*

Hashem saves us from distress and gives us a gift when we approach Him with the sentiment that we don't deserve anything, "to grant them undeserving grace as they approach You."

Chazal tell us the following:

וחנותי את אשר אחון באותה שעה הראה לו  
 הקב"ה את כל האוצרות של מתן שכר שהן  
 מתוקנין לצדיקים והוא אומר האוצר הזה של מי  
 הוא והוא אומר של עושי מצות, והאוצר הזה  
 של מי הוא של מגדלי יתומים, וכל אוצר ואוצר,  
 ואח"כ ראה אוצר גדול אמר האוצר הזה של מי  
 הוא א"ל מי שיש לו אני נותן לו משכרו ומי שאין  
 לו אני עושה לו חנם ונותן לו מזה שנאמר וחנותי  
 את אשר אחון, וחנותי את אשר אחון למי שאני  
 מבקש לחון, וכן ורחמתי את אשר ארחם.

*"And I shall show favor when I choose to show favor, etc." At this particular time G-d showed Moses all the kinds of reward in store for the righteous, each one in accordance with the deeds he had performed while alive. Moses would look*

*at the various treasures and ask: "Whose treasure is this?" G-d would answer that it was in store for those who perform the commandments. Of a different kind of treasure G-d would say that it was in store for those who raise orphans. There were a number of these treasures. Eventually, G-d showed him another treasure greater than any of the previous ones. When Moses inquired who this treasure was for, G-d answered, "people who had various merits to their credit would receive their reward (part of the treasures Moses had been shown first), those who did not have such merits would receive part of this great treasure for free." This is what is meant by the words: "I shall show favor to the ones I choose to show favor to," to those I decide to favor. Similarly, "I will have compassion to the ones I choose to show compassion." Shemot Rabbah, Ki Tisa no. 45 (adapted from a translation by R. Eliyahu Munk)*

Hashem will give us from this great treasure if we realize that we don't deserve anything. Therefore, at Neilah, we recite "I'ma'an nechdal me'oshek yadeinu" — so that we may refrain from the theft of our hands. Are we really calling ourselves thieves? The idea is that many times we feel that this belongs to me, "My own power and the might of my own hand have created this wealth for me." In this way, we are stealing from the Almighty because He was the one Who gave us everything. Rather, we must feel that this is all from the "free treasure" because we are undeserving.

### **Like a Pauper Knocking on a Door**

If Adam would have said "Sorry, I sinned," he would not have lost his portion in Gan Eden. The sin of Adam Harishon wasn't just a slight

toward G-d. It had a ripple effect on the entire creation. The fact that the land doesn't produce as easily and the rain doesn't come as easily is all a result of his failure to apologize. Therefore, mankind must apologize for desecrating what was created on the first day, on the second day and so on.

This is what we mean when we say, "After the departure of the Sabbath, we first approach You ahead of time." We are not reciting Selichot early. Rather, we are acknowledging that part of our request for forgiveness is not just from Hashem, Who created us on the sixth day, but we are asking forgiveness from the entire creation. Our sin on the sixth day changed the whole order of the universe and that was all our fault.

We can't give anything to Hashem. We can only try to restore what we ruined. Recognizing that He is the Giver of everything removes our hubris. Then we can feel like a pauper who knocks on the door to receive charity, who knows definitively that whatever he receives is only because it was a gift. Only with this perspective can we request "milfanecha Malkeinu reikam al teshiveinu" — Before You our King, please don't turn us away empty.

The days we are engaged in teshuva are days of grace. Hashem wants us to say one word — *selicha*. Then, it is possible to enter Rosh Hashanah with *simcha* as it says:

ויאמר להם לכו אכלו משמנים ושתו ממתקים  
 ושלחו מנות לאין נכון לו כי קדוש היום  
 לאדונינו ואל תעצבו כי חדות ה' היא מעצבכם.

*Nechemiah said to them [on Rosh Hashanah], "Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the LORD is the source of your strength."*

**Nechemiah 8:10**



## THE THIRTEEN MIDDOT AND THE SYMBOLISM OF THE TALLIT

וַיַּעֲבֹר ה' עַל פְּנֵי וַיִּקְרָא ה' אֱ-לֹהֵי רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן  
אֲרֹךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חַסֵּד וְאֶמֶת. נִצַּר חַסֵּד לְאֲלֹפִים  
נִשְׂא עֹן וּפְשַׁע וְחַטָּאת וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקֶה פֶקֶד עֹן  
אֲבוֹת עַל בְּנִים וְעַל בְּנֵי בְנִים עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל  
רְבָעִים.

*The L-rd passed before him and proclaimed: "The L-rd! The L-rd! A G-d compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations."*

**T**hese pesukim in Parshat Ki Tisa (Shemot 33-34) are as mysterious as they are

famous. What is G-d communicating to Moshe? The prophet has been struggling to attain forgiveness for the Jewish People, while, at the same time, trying to understand *why* G-d would, in fact, grant that *mechilah*. G-d does not offer Moshe all that he is asking for; a limited view of G-d's ways is all that the prophet can see.

On the simplest level, the pesukim serve as a partial answer to Moshe's question. How does G-d judge? With tremendous mercy. G-d is more compassionate than we could ever imagine. What is Moshe supposed to do with that knowledge? Perhaps it makes him better prepared to plead on behalf of Bnei Yisrael, should they err again.

Chazal, in *Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashana* 17b, understand that Hashem is providing the Jewish People with a *formula* and a *ceremony* through which they, themselves, may achieve atonement in the future.<sup>1</sup>

"וַיַּעֲבֹר ה' עַל פְּנֵי וַיִּקְרָא": אמר רב יוחנן אלמלא מקרא כתוב — אי אפשר לאומר. מלמד שנתעטף הקדוש ברוך הוא כשליח צבור — והראה לו למשה סדר תפלה. אמר ליה: כל זמן שישראל חוטאין — יעשו לפני כסדר הזה — ואני מוחל להם.  
*"And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed..." (Exodus 34:6). Rabbi Yohanan said: Were it not written in the verse it would be impossible to say this. [The verse] teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, wrapped Himself [in a prayer shawl] like a prayer leader and*

showed Moses order of [the] prayer. He said to him: Whenever the Jewish People sin, let them act before Me in accordance with this order, and I will forgive them.

There are several important details in this account. First, the Gemara specifies that G-d wrapped Himself, *ki'veyachol*, in a *tallit* like a prayer leader. Next, we are told that the Attributes of Mercy somehow form a prayer and that through this prayer ceremony the nation could achieve atonement. Finally, it is noteworthy that G-d tells us to “do” as He does, rather than to “say” as He says. While this atonement ritual is described as a prayer, its performance must be accompanied by some sort of action.

Rabbi Eliyahu de Vidas (*Reishit Chochmah, Sha'ar Ha'Anavah*, chapter 1, in the name of the Geonim) explains this mysterious passage in a way that not only works with the text of the Gemara, but also addresses a fundamental question about the justice of forgiving serious sins in response to lip service. He focuses on the phrase mentioned before “*ya'asu lefanai*” — “do before Me” this procedure, and suggests that G-d asks us to imitate the *middot* of mercy — acting mercifully to others as we hope He will do to us, and forgiving them, as we hope G-d will do for us. We need more than a prayer service; words must be supported by actions. Repeating these words again and again serves not only to sway G-d through heartfelt prayers, but to instill in us the values we must assimilate and build our lives on in order to improve our actions.<sup>2</sup>

On a simple level, however, the phrase “*ya'asu lefanai*” refers to the prayer ritual itself. What action must we do while reciting the *pesukim*? Only one possibility exists: to don a *tallit*, or at

least to have our *shaliach tzibbur* don a *tallit*, just as G-d did before Moshe.

The Talmud mentions the *tallit* requirement only regarding the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy. Rav Avraham Gumbiner (*Magen Avraham* commentary to *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 18:2) quotes Rav Mordecai Yoffe, “the *Levush*,” who says that we should not recite the Thirteen Middot without a *tallit*. The *Magen Avraham* himself, however, extends this practice to every prayer leader. After all, the Talmud says that G-d wrapped Himself “like a *shaliach tzibbur*.” It seems to be a given that every *shaliach*

## A *shaliach tzibbur* stands before G-d not as himself, a single Jew with his own successes and failures, but as a personification of the Jewish People as a whole.

*tzibbur* leader should don a *tallit*.

But is the reason for wearing the *tallit* the same? Does an ordinary *chazan* wear a *tallit* for the same reason as the leader of Selichot? The *Chafetz Chaim* (*Shaar Hatziyun* 581:3) suggests that a typical *shaliach tzibbur* wears his *tallit* for “*kavod ha-tzibbur*,” respect for the congregation. Somehow, donning an additional, ceremonial garment lends gravitas to the *chazan* and to the congregation he leads. But what about the *tallit* worn for the Thirteen Middot? Perhaps the *tallit* serves a different, or additional purpose for Selichot.

Rav Yehuda Amital, founding Rosh

Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion, whose 10<sup>th</sup> *yahrzeit* was recently observed, suggests several reasons why the *shaliach tzibbur* wears a *tallit*.<sup>3</sup>

His first explanation applies equally to all *tefillot*. The *tallit* serves to cloak the identity of the prayer leader, allowing him to better serve as a messenger of the people. A *shaliach tzibbur* stands before G-d not as himself, a single Jew with his own successes and failures, but as a personification of the Jewish People as a whole. Rabbi Soloveitchik, in his very first shiur after arriving in the United States, and in many later *shiurim*, differentiated between the silent *Shemoneh Esreh*, recited by ten people simultaneously, and the repetition of the *Shemoneh Esreh* said by the *chazan*. The former is an example of “*tefillah betzibbur*” — a prayer offered as part of a group. The latter he calls “*tefillat hatzibbur*,” the prayer of the congregation.

The same phenomenon, the Rav points out, exists by *korbanot*. If several people contribute toward a single sacrifice, the offering would be labeled as a *korban shutafim* — the offering of “partners.” Every contributing member has a stake in the animal — and the offering. The *korbanot tzibbur*, however, such as the daily burnt offerings, had only one “owner”: *Klal Yisrael*.

*Chazarat hashatz* is much more than the combined efforts of individual congregants. It is a singular *tefillah* offered by the Jewish People as a single entity. The donning of a *tallit* de-emphasizes the individuality of the *chazan*. He is not coming before G-d as himself, with his own persona. He, like a *korban tamid*, has been converted into something much larger than the individual “parts” of the congregation behind him. He

is not *one* of the people, selected on their behalf to approach G-d. He is the Jewish People, cloaked in a *tallit*, mysteriously hidden away from view.

While this idea is relevant to all *tefillot*, it is particularly important for Selichot. As Rabbi Soloveitchik explained in one of his famous *teshuva derashot* (entitled “*Yachid veTzibbur*” in *sefer Al Hateshuva*), our success in achieving atonement goes hand in hand with our connection to *Klal Yisrael*. An individual Jew has no right to demand *mechilah*. He or she has sinned, and punishment is often appropriate. But *Klal Yisrael*, as an entity, can be assured of the gift of atonement. For this reason, congregations have the custom to sing the *vidui* litany when it is recited in *chazarat hashatz* on Yom Kippur. When said in the silent Amidah, the *vidui* serves as the confession of a broken individual, crying out to G-d and hoping for a reprieve from his sentence. In the repetition, however, the Jewish People as a whole turn to G-d and ask for *mechilah*. Such a request comes with a guarantee of success. The *tzibbur* sings “*ashamnu, bagadnu,*” to almost a merry tune, knowing that a single entity — *Klal Yisrael* — will find favor in the eyes of the L-rd.

*Atifah*, wrapping one’s head with a *tallit* or another garment, has additional meaning. The Gemara (*Moed Katan* 15a) tells us that a mourner and a *metzora* (leper) are obligated to cover their heads. The Meiri (to *Moed Katan*) explains that *atifah* symbolizes *hachna’ah*, submission and humility. Covering our face minimizes ourselves in a way similar to prostrating and putting our face to the floor.

The *metzora* is subjected to a period of debasement in retribution for his

sins. Chazal connect the punishment of leprosy to the sin of *lashon hara*. An individual who repeatedly puts others down is required to now lower himself.

What about the mourner? Rav Soloveitchik connects *aveilut* with repentance in a famous essay composed by Rabbi Abraham Besdin in *Reflections of the Rav, Part II*: “Sitting *shiva* is doing *teshuva*.” The Rav explains that observing *hilkhot aveilut* is “not only a catharsis of sorrow, but also an experience of self-judgement and penitence.”

In this spirit, the *aveil*, like the *metzora*, is obligated to cover himself as an act of self-negation. This *hachna’ah* is a step toward self-reflection and *teshuvah*. As mourners grieve the death of a loved one, they contemplate their own mortality, facing the reality not just of a world without their relative, but without themselves, and remembering that their time in this world is limited.

Rav Amital explains the requirement for *atifah* for Selichot may very well serve a similar purpose. The *chazan* signals for the *kehillah* they must not simply recite the Thirteen Middot Harachamim; as we suggested earlier, they must walk in G-d’s forgiving ways. *Atifah* does more than hide the *chazan*’s individuality; it negates him altogether. He disappears into his *tallit*. And by doing so, he models the behavior most necessary to be forgiven.

What does it mean that G-d forgives? G-d is not just the judge and jury. He is, *k’viyachol*, the offended party! We have sinned against *Him*! To forgive, Hashem doesn’t find us “innocent.” He grants us forgiveness by being *ma’avir al midotav*, forgoing His honor, so to speak, and giving us

another chance. To forgive, Hashem must “look past” the fact that we have sinned against him — despite all that He does for us every day and every moment.

In the words of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (in *Tomer Devorah*):

“Who is a God like You” — This attribute refers to the Holy One as a tolerant King Who bears insult in a manner beyond human understanding. Without doubt, nothing is hidden from His view. In addition, there is not a moment that man is not nourished and sustained by virtue of the Divine power bestowed upon him. Thus, no man ever sins against God, without — at that very moment [emphasis added] — God bestowing abundant vitality upon him, giving him the power to move his limbs. Yet even though a person uses this very vitality to transgress, God does not withhold it from him. Rather, He suffers this insult and continues to enable his limbs to move. Even at the very moment that a person uses that power for transgression, sin, and infuriating deeds, the Holy One bears them patiently ... This then, is a virtue man should emulate — namely, tolerance. Even when he is insulted to the degree mentioned above he should not withdraw his benevolence from those upon whom he bestows it.

Forgiveness is granted to those who model G-d’s behavior. As the Gemara in *Rosh Hashanah* (17a) tells us:

כל המעביר על מידותיו — מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו — שנאמר "נושא עון ועובר על פשע." למי נושא עון? למי שעובר על פשע.

**Whoever forgoes his reckonings with others for injustices done to him, the heavenly court in turn forgoes punishment for all his sins, as it is stated: “He bears sin and forgives transgression” (Michah 7). Whose**

**sins does He bear?** *The sins of one who forgoes his reckonings with others for injustices committed against him.*<sup>4</sup>

We are granted *mechilah* in return for offering others forgiveness. And to reach the point of forgiving others, we need to think beyond ourselves — by nullifying ourselves. The *shaliach tzibbur* sends this message to his congregation, just as Hashem showed Moshe the way millennia ago.

What if, however, the prayer leader is signaling not the *tzibbur* — but G-d? What if, in addition to “reminding” Him of his merciful nature, the *shaliach tzibbur* is “reminding” G-d of another reason that He should forgive? A final explanation for the *tallit* at Selichot relates to a different sort of covering — the veil worn by a bride during the *kiddushin* ceremony.

How can we remind G-d of anything, or, for that matter, convince Him of anything? Those are not simple questions. But from the time of Avraham (when he pleaded for Sedom) through the days of Moshe Rabbeinu (seeking forgiveness for the Jewish People’s misdeeds) and throughout history, Israelites have laid out before the Divine the reasons why He should forgive. Avraham tells G-d, “*chalilah lecha,*” it is not in Your nature to kill the righteous along with the wicked. Moshe reminds Hashem that punishing the Jewish People will lead to negative public relations for G-d on the world stage — “*lama yomeru Mitzrayim?*”

Perhaps, spelling out reasons why G-d should forgive — His merciful nature, His promises to the *Avot*, His reputation among the nations — gives Him the “license” to give the people another chance. Were they to commit a grievous sin and simply be “let free”

without any explanation, they would learn little from the process. The goal of delaying punishment creates an opportunity for correction and growth. But why give people another chance if they can learn nothing from the experience? If anything, poor behavior is thus reinforced. Why better ourselves when there are no consequences for failure? Moshe spells out a rationale for *mechilah* — not for G-d to comprehend what happened — but for the people, so that they can understand that they haven’t merited forgiveness on their own. They have sinned and they deserved punishment, were it not for a host of reasons that G-d preferred a different approach. There is a price to be paid for sin, but this time, G-d chose not to exact punishment.

Reciting the Thirteen Middot Harachamim helps us comprehend the gravity of our mistakes, while maintaining hope for forgiveness. “אנו מלאי עון ואתה מלא רחמים,” “we are rich in iniquity and You are rich in mercy.” Sin is not forgotten, nor glossed over in Heaven; without G-d’s mercy, we would be lost. We must be embarrassed to fall back on G-d’s lovingkindness and that shame, as much as fear of punishment, must drive us to teshuvah.

Perhaps G-d showed Moshe how to reveal G-d’s motivation for forgiveness. It is His nature to be slow to anger and to give us the chance to change course. It is, as we have described, G-d’s nature to “minimize” Himself, to be “*maavir al middotav*” and to forgive.

But there is another rationale for *mechilah* that is connected to the relationship between G-d and *Klal Yisrael*. And here is where the wedding imagery may come into play.

The custom to veil the *kallah* is already mentioned in the Talmud (*Ketubot* 17), and many reasons are given for this practice. Some say the veil serves to hide the beauty of the bride from the audience — and even during the ceremony from her future husband. Many see the veiling of Rivkah as she prepared to meet Yitzchak as the Biblical precedent for this *minhag*. Others see the *act* of veiling as significant in and of itself, symbolizing the husband’s acceptance of his responsibility to clothe (cover) his wife.

The Rema (*Even HaEzer* 31:2), quoting the Rashba, introduces the idea that the bride remains veiled during *erusin* so she cannot get a good look at the ring. In one way, this may serve a quasi-halakhic function. Rabbeinu Nissim (Ran to *Kiddushin* 3b) explains in the name of Rabbeinu Tam that a stone is traditionally not attached to the wedding ring to avoid confusion over the real value of the ring. A bride might assume the ring to be of greater value than it truly is and agree to give herself in marriage based on a false assumption. Such a mistake might render the entire *kiddushin* as a *mekach ta’ut*, a transaction conducted under false pretenses, and could render the marriage null and void. Wearing the veil suggests that the *kallah* agrees to not look closely at the ring, and will not base her decision to accept the *kiddushin* on a precise assumption of its value.

The Rashba himself explains the *kallah*’s “blind acceptance” of the ring in more symbolic terms. Brides, claim the Rashba, are not terribly cautious about the object that they are betrothed with. Perhaps one can say that as she enters the covenant of marriage with her husband, the bride

lays the groundwork for a long-term relationship that will not rise and fall on the value of a gift. Of course, even in a loving relationship, a husband and wife must work hard to please each other. Little things can mean a lot in a marriage. But a successful marriage is also a covenantal one, in which the commitment to maintaining the relationship encourages both husband and wife to forgive certain missteps in the context of the greater picture.

The prophets frequently speak of the relationship between G-d and His people as a marriage. It seems that the recitation of the Thirteen Middot Harachamim plays a central role in maintaining the relationship.

The description of G-d cloaking — or veiling — Himself with a *tallit* in *Rosh Hashanah* 17b is followed by a statement attesting to the power of this procedure:

אמר רב יהודה ברית כרותה לי"ג מדות שאינן חוזרות ריקם שנאמר (שמות לד) "הנה אנכי כורת ברית."

R. Yehuda said, "[A] covenant has been made with the Thirteen Attributes that they do not return empty handed — as it says 'Behold I make a covenant.'" [Shemot 34:10]

Rav Ezra Bik (introduction to *In His Mercy: Understanding the Thirteen Middot*) explains: Ordinary *tefillah* does not come with a guarantee. But prayer rooted in covenant is different. The latter begs the petitioned to not respond based on any merit that the *mitpallel* might have. And not even as an act of *chesed* performed for a stranger. Rather, it recalls a covenant sealed ages ago that asks G-d to allow for the continuation of a millennia-old union despite our misdeeds. We ask Him, in effect, not to look too closely at our recent failures and instead focus on the importance of the relationship in its entirety.

A covenant is also made under a *chuppah*. Yes, the reason might be a technical one — if the *kallah* misjudges the value of the ring, the *kinyan kiddushin* might be invalid. But in a larger sense, the covering of the face is the first step of the spirit of the covenant, to commit to remain in a relationship despite certain offenses and some legitimate complaints between partners.

The *Zohar* states that the Nation of Israel entered its covenant with Hashem like "a beautiful girl who has no eyes" (*Zohar* 2:95a). Perhaps

we have the right to ask Him to accept us as our Husband, flaws and all. In this spirit, Hashem showed Moshe *Rabbeinu* that the force of the covenant, the marriage between G-d and the Jewish People, arranged through the Avot and formalized at Sinai, was perhaps the greatest rationale for forgiveness. The *shaliach tzibbur*, as he reminds G-d of his lovingkindness outlined in the Thirteen Middot, also dons a veil to remind Him of the longstanding bond with *Klal Yisrael*. **Don't look too closely.**

It is noteworthy that the Gemara in *Megillah* (31b) uses strikingly similar language to *Rosh Hashana* 17b in discussing the power of the offerings — and more specifically, specific words — to guarantee atonement.

במעמדות במעשה בראשית: מנא הני מילי?  
א"ר אמי אלמלא מעמדות - לא נתקיימו  
שמים וארץ — שנאמר (ירמיהו לג) "אם  
לא בריתי יומם ולילה - חוקות שמים וארץ  
לא שמתו". וכתוב (בראשית טו) "ויאמר ה'  
אלהים במה אדע כי אירשנה": אמר אברהם  
לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא "רבוננו של עולם! שמא  
חס ושלוש ישראל חוטאים לפניך — ואתה  
עושה להם כדור המבול וכדור הפלגה!" א"ל  
ל"או". אמר לפניו "רבש"ע - במה אדע?" אמר  
ליה "קחה לי עגלה משולשת". אמר לפניו

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*The Mishna states: In the non-priestly watches they read the act of Creation. The Gemara asks: From where are these matters derived, i.e., why do they read the account of Creation? Rabbi Ami said: To allude to the fact that were it not for the non-priestly watches [which were established as part of the sacrificial service — see Taanit 27a], heaven and earth would not endure, as it is stated: “Were it not for My covenant day and night, I would not have set the statutes of heaven and earth” (Jeremiah 33). God’s covenant is referring to the offerings sacrificed in the Temple, which sustain the world. And with regard to Abraham it is written: “And he said, O Lord God, by what shall I know that I shall inherit it?” (Genesis 15). Abraham said before the Holy One, Blessed be He: Master of the Universe, perhaps, Heaven forbid, the Jewish people will sin before You, and You will do to them as You did to the generation of the Flood and as You did to the generation of the Dispersion, i.e., You will completely destroy them? God said to him: No, I will not do that. Abraham then said before Him: Master of the Universe: “By what shall I know this?” God said to him: “Take Me a heifer of three years old” (Genesis 15). With this, God intimated to*

*Abraham that even if his descendants will sin, they will be able to achieve atonement through sacrificing offerings. Abraham said before Him: Master of the Universe, this works out well when the Temple is standing and offerings can be brought to achieve atonement, but when the Temple will no longer be standing, what will become of them? God said to him: I have already established for them the order of offerings, i.e., the verses of the Torah pertaining to the halakhot of the offerings. Whenever they read those portions, I will deem it as if they sacrificed an offering before Me, and I will pardon them for all of their iniquities.<sup>5</sup>*

In its final step, the Gemara connects a prayer service to an upholding of a covenant. Words — and the prayer services constructed around them — can bring ancient agreements to the forefront and assure safety even for sinners. In this case, reciting pesukim about the offerings serves in place of actual sacrifices. Those words thus serve to uphold the covenant established with Avraham’s descendants. In a similar fashion, the Selichot procedure reminds G-d of His covenant with *Klal Yisrael* and assures them a clean slate for the new year.

These themes — the importance of the *tzibbur*, the need for humility in our interpersonal relationships and an almost blind commitment to a cause — aptly describe the life of Rabbi Hyman Arbesfeld, our beloved

longtime RIETS vice-chairman and founding sponsor, along with his dear wife Anne, *tibadli lechaim*, of the RIETS *Torah To Go* series. Hy was a larger-than-life figure who led by empowering those around him rather than taking the reins of leadership for himself. After receiving his formative education at Yeshiva University and the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, he spent the rest of his life repaying his debt of gratitude with exceptional commitment and devotion to Yeshiva. His love for Torah, the Jewish People, and RIETS is the legacy he leaves his family, the community, and the *talmidim* of our great Yeshiva.

## Endnotes

1. Rashi to that Gemara connects this procedure to fast days in particular: שאם יזכרם ישראל בתפלת תעניתם — אינן חוזרות ריקן. This limitation, however, is not mentioned by most other Rishonim and Acharonim.
2. A similar explanation is famously quoted by R. Hanoch Zundel in his commentary *Eitz Yosef* to *Sefer Ein Yaakov* in the name of R. Moshe Alshich.
3. See *Eit Ratzon: Sichot leYamim HaNoraim*, pp. 77-79).
4. Translation (in bold) and commentary from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud.
5. Translation (in bold) and commentary from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud.



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## The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

Rosh Yeshiva and Rosh Kollel, RIETS

Adapted from Rabbi Schachter's article in *Rav Chesed* Vol. II by

Rabbi Mordechai Djavaheri



## KEDUSHAS YISROEL

### Preserving the Tzelem Elokim and Being an Ohr LaGoyim

The pesukim in Parashas Ki Savo (28:9-10) state:

יְקִימְךָ ה' לְעַם קְדוֹשׁ כְּאִשֶּׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְךָ כִּי תִשְׁמֹר אֶת מִצְוֹת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ וְהִלַּכְתָּ בְּדַרְכָּיו. וְרָאוּ כָּל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ כִּי שָׁם ה' נִקְרָא עֲלֶיךָ וְיִרְאוּ מִפָּנֶיךָ.

*The Lord will establish you as His holy people, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your G-d and walk in His ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the Lord's name is proclaimed over you, and they shall stand in fear of you.*

The Gemara in *Brachos* 6a, derives from the verse “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the Lord’s name is proclaimed over you, and they shall stand in fear of you” to refer to the *tefillin shel rosh*. Clearly, this is an additional level of interpretation and not the simple understanding. However, the Gemara in *Sanhedrin*

34a teaches us that “*ein haMikra yotze midei peshuto*” — the simple level of interpretation is also important.<sup>1</sup>

In *Aderes Eliyahu*, they quote the Vilna Gaon as saying that the simple meaning of the pasuk is that it refers to the end of the previous pasuk — “*v'holachta bid'rachav*” — that we have to emulate Hakadosh Baruch Hu, which the Rambam counts as a *mitzvas asei* (8). The Torah tells us that we should preserve our *tzelem Elokim* (image of G-d) by going in the ways of Hashem and emulating His attributes; then, when all of the nations of the world see that we have succeeded in preserving our *tzelem Elokim*, they will learn from us how to act with *yiras Shamayim*. The nations of the world also have *tzelem Elokim*, and they can preserve that *tzelem Elokim* by following the ways of Hashem. When they see that we were successful in preserving the *tzelem Elokim* inside of us, the Shem Hashem that we’re called by, and that they were also created with a *tzelem Elokim*, they

will learn from us the concepts of *yiras Shamayim* and emulating Hashem.

This pasuk in Ki Savo is the source for what Yeshaya HaNavi (49:6) calls “*ohr lagoyim*” — that klal Yisroel has a duty in this world to show the nations of the world the path to follow. It doesn’t mean that we show them the laws of Shabbos, kashrus, and *taharas hamishpacha*. Those laws are not relevant to them. The idea is that we have to teach them to preserve their *tzelem Elokim*.<sup>2</sup>

The pasuk at the beginning of Parashas Kedoshim (19:2) states:

דַּבֵּר אֶל כָּל עַדְת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹקֵיכֶם.

*Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your G-d, am holy.*

We have to be *kedoshim* like HaKadosh Baruch Hu who is *Kadosh*, because we have a spark of *kedushah* in our *neshamos*. We have to preserve the *kedushah* that we were born with.

## Incomplete Kedushah

There is a midrash, *Vayikra Rabbah* 24, that serves as the basis for Rav Shimon Shkop's introduction to *Shaarei Yosher*, which states:

קדושים תהיו יכול כמוני ת"ל כי קדוש אני  
קדושתו למעלה מקדושתכם.  
"You shall be holy," perhaps this means  
that you shall be like Me? The end of the  
verse states "for I am holy," My holiness  
is greater than yours.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu has a higher level of *kedushah* and we can't achieve that level. While the observation of the midrash is true — we cannot possibly achieve the same level of holiness as G-d — the interpretation of the pasuk doesn't seem to reflect the simple meaning of the pasuk. The simple meaning is that we should preserve the *kedushah* that's already in us as a function of our being created with a *tzelem Elokim*. Where did the Tannaim learn that it teaches us that Hashem has greater *kedushah*?

Rav Avraham ben Meir Jacobs, in his sefer *Maleh veChasser beTanach*, suggests that the midrash's *drasha* is based on how *kedoshim tehiyu* is written *chasser* (without a *vav*), while *ki kadosh Ani* is written *malei* (with a *vav*). Hakadosh Baruch Hu's *kedushah* is complete, but the level of *kedushah* He demands of us is one that is incomplete.<sup>3</sup>

## Kedushas Chesed

We have the minhag of reading Megillas Rus on Shavuos. Rav Soloveitchik said in the name of the Vilna Gaon that we read it on Shavuos since many details of *Hilchos Geirus* (the laws of conversion) are derived from the conversation between Naomi and Rus, and Shavuos

commemorates the conversion of the Jewish People. Just like Am Yisrael entered the covenant with Hashem through *milah*, *tevilah*, and a *korban*, so, too, the convert requires these three components in order to convert (*Kerisus* 9a). Ma'amad Har Sinai was the *geirus* of Klal Yisroel, so we read about the *geirus* of Rus on Shavuos.

There's a famous midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 601) that points out the message of Megilas Rus:

אמר רבי זעירא המגילה הזו אין בה לא  
טומאה ולא טהרה לא היתר ולא איסור, ולמה  
נכתבה, ללמדך שכר של גומלי חסדים.  
Rav Zeira said, this book has no [laws  
of] impurity or purity, no ritual matters  
of what is permissible or prohibited. Why  
was it written? To teach you the reward  
for those who perform acts of kindness.

Perhaps these two ideas are one. The primary attribute of *kedushas Yisroel*, which is brought about through conversion, is *gemilus chasadim* (acts of kindness).

Rav Shimon Shkop posits that *kedushah* is total dedication of our energies and actions for Klal Yisroel. When somebody always strives to take care of Klal Yisroel, then everything he does, even taking care of his own personal needs, becomes a part of the mitzvah of *kedusha*. By taking care of himself, he takes care of the *rabbim* who need him. When all of our actions are intended to help others, we partially emulate Hakadosh Baruch Hu, whose entire creation of the world was for the purpose of giving to mankind. That's what He wants: That all of our actions should be sanctified for assisting others. At the same time, we shouldn't crush our natural inclination to take care of ourselves, thinking that we can reach greater heights of *Kedushah* and emulating Hashem through total altruism. That

is what the midrash teaches: Hashem's *kedushah* is complete, and ours is not. We cannot fully reach that level.

Clearly, Rav Shimon Shkop thinks the main idea of *kedushas Yisroel* is *gemillus chasadim*, similar to what Hillel told the prospective *ger* about "*veahavta lere'acha kamocha*" being the whole Torah and the rest is commentary (*Shabbos* 31a). The Gemara (*Yevamos* 79a) also tells us:

שלשה סימנים יש באומה זו הרחמנים  
והביישנים וגומלי חסדים.  
There are three identifying characteristics  
of this nation: they are merciful, bashful  
and they perform acts of kindness.

One of the three identifying characteristics of the Jewish people is "*gomlei chasadim*," and this is codified in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Even HoEzer* 2:2) as well. The Acharonim consider the possibility that lacking any of the three, not just all of them, can make one's lineage suspect — maybe he's lacking in his *kedushas Yisroel*.<sup>4</sup>

## Endnotes

1. See *Ginas Egoz* page 186.
2. See "The Meaning of Am Hanivchar; the Source of Anti-Semitism" (2014) on TorahWeb.org.
3. He makes a similar point about how the person who sprinkles the water mixed with the ashes of the *parah aduma* on someone who is *tamei meis* must be *tahor* — that the word "*hatahor*" is written *chasser* to indicate that even if his *tahara* is incomplete it is also acceptable. Even though this isn't included explicitly on the list of *Middos ShehaTorah Nidreshes Bahem*, the Gemara does employ it in other places as well. In *Kesubos* 40b, the Chachamim hold that a *ketanah* gets *keness* except for *motzi shem ra*, because usually the word "*na'arah*" is written *chasser* to include even a *ketana*, an incomplete *na'arah*. By *motzi shem ra*, *na'arah* is written *malei*, so *ketana* is excluded.
4. See "Incomplete Kedusha" on TorahWeb.org.



## THE TRUTH BEHIND EMET

If we would sum up the underlying theme of the Yamim Noraim and Aseret Yemei Teshuva, it would be change. Teshuva exists as a result of our imperfections as human beings and our ability to reflect on our actions and evolve.

### The Leadership Traits of Moshe Rabbeinu

Even the greatest leader of the Jewish people, Moshe Rabbeinu, the only person ever to speak to G-d *panim el panim* (face to face), evolved in the way he related to Bnei Yisrael. In one of the earliest stories about Moshe, after he demonstrates his empathy for the Jewish slaves by intervening between the Jew and the Egyptian who was beating him, he again intervenes, this time between two Jews fighting:

וַיֹּאמֶר מִי שְׂמוֹךְ לְאִישׁ שׂוֹר וְשׂוֹפֵט עָלֵינוּ הֲלֹהֶרְגֵנִי אַתָּה אֹמֵר כְּאִשֶׁר הִרְגַתְּ אֶת הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּירָא מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אֶכֶן נִודַע הַדָּבָר.  
*He retorted, "Who made you chief and ruler over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses was frightened, and thought: Then the matter is known!*

#### Shmot 2:14

Rashi points out that Moshe's fear was that he did not think Bnei Yisrael were worthy of being redeemed. Now Moshe realized why the Jews deserved to suffer: they fought with each other and there were informants among them.

When Hashem first approaches Moshe in the next perek to go to Pharaoh and bring the Jews out of Egypt, his immediate response is:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים מִי אֲנִי כִּי אֵלֶךְ אֶל פְּרַעֲוִה וְכִי אֹדְעִיא אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם.

*But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and take the Jews out of Egypt?"*

#### Shmot 3:11

Rashi explains that Moshe is questioning both his worthiness as an emissary for Klal Yisrael, as well as whether Bnei Yisrael deserves redemption. He continues by questioning whether Bnei Yisrael will listen to him and believe him. Hashem subtly reprimands Moshe when He tells him to take his staff and cast it on the ground, where it turns into a snake. Rashi points out that the stick was to show Moshe that he should be hit for wrongly suspecting Bnei Yisrael, and the snake was a hint that he was wrong in speaking lashon hara about them (Shmot 4:2-3). Even once they leave Egypt and arrive in Refidim where they complain about water

for the second time, Moshe is still somewhat negative toward them and gets angry:

וַיִּצְעַק מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' לֵאמֹר מִה אֶעֱשֶׂה לְעַם הַזֶּה עוֹד מֵעַתָּה וְסָקְלֵנִי.

*Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "What shall I do with this people? Before long they will be stoning me!"*

**Shmot 17:4**

Hashem again rebukes him and reminds him that he needs to be their advocate and attend to their needs and get them the water they are requesting. The *Midrash Tanchuma* points out that here Moshe is angry and Hashem calms him down, while later in perek 32 after Cheit HaEigel, Hashem is angry and Moshe calms Him. Hashem teaches Moshe to be an advocate for Bnei Yisrael, and a selfless leader, and most important, the ability to forgive them when they transgress — a lesson Moshe learns and demonstrates after Cheit HaEigel.

### The Thirteen Middot Harachamim

After Bnei Yisrael sin with the Golden Calf, Hashem is so angry He wants to destroy them. Moshe argues and implores G-d to remember the covenant with the Avot,

זָכֹר לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לָהֶם בְּךָ וּתְדַבֵּר אֲלֵהֶם אַרְבָּה אֶת יוֹרְעֵכֶם כְּכֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתִּי אֲתוֹן לְיֹרְעֵכֶם וְנָחְלוּ לְעַלְמִים.

*Remember for the sake of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yisrael, Your servants to whom You sworn by Yourself and You told them I shall increase your offspring like the stars of heaven, and the entire land of which I spoke I shall give to your offspring and it shall be their heritage forever.*

**Shmot 32:13**

Later Hashem invokes His Thirteen Middot Harachamim for the first time

and teaches them to Moshe:

וַיַּעֲבֹר ה' עַל פְּנֵי וַיִּקְרָא ה' ה' אֵל-ל רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן אֲרֻךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חַסֵּד וְאֶמֶת. נִצַּר חַסֵּד לְאַלְפִים נִשְׂא עֹן וְפָשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקְיָה לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עֹן אָבוֹת עַל בָּנִים וְעַל בְּנֵי בָנִים עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל רַבְעִים.

*Hashem passed before him and proclaimed, Hashem, Hashem, G-d, Compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in kindness and truth, preserver of kindness for thousands of generations, forgiver of iniquity, willful sin and error and who cleanses yet He does cleanse completely, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations.*

**Shmot 34:6-7**

The midrash, *Rosh Hashanah* 17b, describes how G-d put on a tallit and taught Moshe these Middot as a *shaliach tzibbur*. Soon afterward, Hashem forgives them. These Middot are the cornerstone of teshuva and invoked throughout Selichot and tefilla on Yom Kippur. Hashem is again teaching Moshe how to advocate for Bnei Yisrael through invoking these attributes of G-d, which allow for the teshuva process to exist.

### The Cheit Hameraglim

Moshe learns well. When Bnei Yisrael are on the threshold of entering the Land of Israel in the beginning of Sefer Bamidbar, and the spies return with a negative report and convince Bnei Yisrael not to enter the land, Hashem once again becomes angry and threatens to destroy them. Moshe, having learned from Hashem, advocates on behalf of Bnei Yisrael; but instead of using the argument of *zechut Avot* that he used after Cheit HaEigel, he uses what seems to be a much weaker argument, saying:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל ה' וְשָׁמְעוּ מִצְרַיִם כִּי הִעֲלִיתִי בְּכַחַד אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה מִקִּרְבּוֹ ... וְהִמַּתָּה אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד וְאָמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר שָׁמְעוּ אֶת שְׁמִיעֶךָ לֵאמֹר מִבְּלַתִּי יָכַלְתָּ ה' לְהִבְיֵא אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לָהֶם וַיִּשְׁחָטֵם בַּמִּדְבָּר.

*And Moshe said to the Lord, Then Egypt, from whose midst you brought up this nation with your power, will hear ... and the nations that heard will say because Hashem lacked the ability to bring this people to the land that He had sworn to give them, He slaughtered them in the wilderness.*

**Bamidbar 14:13-16**

In other words, Moshe is telling G-d not to destroy the Jews because it will make G-d look bad. Moshe continues, invoking the Middot of Hashem saying:

וַעֲתָה יִגְדַל נָא כַחַ אֲדֹנָי כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ לֵאמֹר ה' אֲרֻךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חַסֵּד נִשְׂא עֹן וְפָשַׁע וְנִקְיָה לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עֹן אָבוֹת עַל בָּנִים וְעַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל רַבְעִים.

*And now may the strength of the Lord be magnified as you have spoken saying, Hashem, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, forgiver of iniquity and willful sin, and who cleanses ...*

**Bamidbar 14:17-18**

Moshe is clearly using the Middot that G-d had taught him, but at close inspection it is clear that he does not quote the Middot in their entirety. He omits the word “Emet” — the attribute of Truth. The Ramban explains, "כי במדת אמת היו חייבים מיתה" — according to the Attribute of Truth, Bnei Yisrael would be liable to death. Furthermore, he continues, the attribute of "notzer chesed la'alafim" — Preserver of Kindness for thousands of generations — is also omitted because Moshe believes that middah does not apply here since the land of Israel was given to the Avot who loved the land unconditionally. That gift is the

reason Bnei Yisrael are inheriting it now, yet they are now rebelling against their forefathers and rejecting it. This, explains Ramban, is why Moshe is not using the stronger argument of *zechut Avot* when begging Hashem to forgive the Jews. How could he invoke the merit of their forefathers when they are rejecting the very gift that their forefathers were given? And that is why Emet is omitted; Moshe believes that according to the Attribute of Truth, the Jews deserved to be punished and did not merit forgiveness (Ramban on Shmot 14:17-20). Hashem responds to Moshe's argument and the invocation of His Middot by saying "*salachti kidevarecha*" — I have forgiven in accordance with your word. Ramban explains that this *selicha* — forgiveness — means the suspension of punishment and that not only will G-d not destroy the Jews, He will allow their children to inherit the Land of Israel. Hashem is once again demonstrating the power of teshuva and forgiving His people as a result of His Thirteen Middot, Emet included, just as He taught Moshe back on Har Sinai.

### The Middot Invoked in Sefer Yona

There is another time in Tanach that a Navi invokes the Middot of Hashem in their entirety while leaving out Emet, and that is in Sefer Yona (4:2). While other prophets reference G-d's attributes, including Yoel (2:13), Micah (7:18), Nachum (1:3), and Nechemiah (9:17), Yona is the only one who invokes them out of anger, not admiration. Here too, as in Bamidbar, the Middot are referenced in the context of a lesson about teshuva.

Teshuva plays a pivotal role in Sefer

Yona. Read at Mincha on Yom Kippur, and one of the highlights of the tefilla service over the course of the day, the story demonstrates the transformative power of teshuva. A key Ma'amar Chazal that helps shed light on this enigmatic process of teshuva is the Yerushalmi in Makkot 2:6:

שאלו לחכמה חוטא מהו עונשו אמרו להם  
 [משלי יג כא] חטאים תרדף רעה שאלו  
 לנבואה חוטא מהו עונשו אמרה להן [יחזקאל  
 יח ד] הנפש החוטאת היא תמות שאלו  
 לקודשא בריך הוא חוטא מהו עונשו אמר להן  
 יעשו תשובה ויתכפר לו.

*They asked Wisdom, "What is the punishment of a sinner?" and it responded, "Sinners will chase after evil" (Mishlei 13:21). They asked Prophecy, "What is the punishment of a sinner?" and it responded, "The sinful soul will perish" (Yechezkel 18:4). They asked the Holy One Blessed be He, "What is the punishment of a sinner?" and He responded, "he should repent and attain forgiveness."*

According to this Yerushalmi, without Hashem's magnanimous offer of teshuva, there is no opportunity to change our fate and be forgiven. These various approaches to *cheit* — sin and failure as described in the medrash — frame the entire Sefer.

Sefer Yona presents the story of the navi Yona who is commanded to warn the people of Nineveh of their upcoming destruction. Most believe that this story is read on Yom Kippur because it depicts a story of evil people (the people of Nineveh) who ultimately do teshuva and are, as a result, forgiven and escape punishment. Some add that Yona himself, after attempting to run away from G-d's instructions, finally does teshuva and fulfills his G-d-given job after his encounter with a large fish. The problem with that understanding

is that according to this perspective, the sefer should end after the third perek. In the first perek, Yona is commanded by G-d to go to Nineveh, and he runs away. In the second perek Yona is swallowed by a fish, prays to G-d from inside, and is then spit out to safety. In the third perek Yona goes to Nineveh and delivers the message as he was commanded. If this book was just about doing teshuva, this would be the ending. However, the story continues with the fourth perek, which presents a somewhat strange series of events that lead to a very abrupt ending to the story.

The fourth and final perek begins with Yona feeling extremely angry. He prays to G-d, stating the reason he ran away in the first place:

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי ה' הֲלוֹא זֶה דְבַרִי עַד הַיּוֹמִי עַל אֲדַמְתִּי עַל כֵּן קִדַּמְתִּי לְבָרִיחַ תַּרְשִׁישָׁה כִּי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אַתָּה אֱ-לֹהֵי חַנּוּן וְרַחוּם אַרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חַסֵּד וְנָחָם עַל הַרְעָה.

*He prayed to the Lord, saying, "O Lord! Isn't this just what I said when I was still in my own country? That is why I fled beforehand to Tarshish. For I know that You are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, renouncing punishment.*

### Yona 4:2

This hardly seems like a reason to run away from his mission to bring the people of Nineveh to do teshuva. But it is precisely why he ran away; Yona was afraid the people would be granted clemency and allowed to do teshuva, which he believed was a falsification of G-d's judgment. He describes G-d here using some of G-d's Thirteen Middot, clearly omitting the attribute of Emet, truth, which usually follows *rav chesed*. His argument is similar to Moshe's after the sin of the spies; it's not an inadvertent omission on Yona's part. Yona's anger is rooted in his belief

that G-d is not “*emesdik*,” or truthful. The people of Nineveh sinned and deserved punishment. Actions have consequences. It is not truthful or fair that they can do teshuva and then their sins magically disappear. If we drink poison (physical or spiritual), we will die. We cannot “undrink” that poison, or make it simply disappear, which is exactly what teshuva does to sin. Yona is a man of truth. When the boat on which he has attempted to escape from G-d is overcome by a storm and about to sink, the sailors ask him with genuine concern what to do (Yona 1:11). Yona, as a man of truth, calmly tells the sailors to throw him overboard. He knows very well that he is at fault and, therefore, must pay the consequences of his sin (Yona 1:12). He cannot comprehend the concept of G-d’s *middat hadin*, attribute of judgment, being overtaken by teshuva, which allows consequences to disappear. He believes that placating G-d’s *middat hadin* and accepting the consequences of his actions are G-d’s will, and indeed this calms the sea. When he survives because G-d chooses to save him, and when he prays to G-d from within the fish in the second perek, he takes responsibility for his actions and accepts being thrown overboard. He remains a man of rigid truth, stating his personal predicament and despair (Yona 2:4-7), and expressing belief that G-d will save him, but only because he will now fulfill his obligation:

וְאֲנִי בְקוֹל תּוֹדָה אֶזְבְּחָה לְךָ אֱשֶׁר נִדְרָתִי  
 אֲשַׁלְמָה יְשׁוּעָתָה לָּהּ.

*But I, with loud thanksgiving, Will*

*sacrifice to You; What I have vowed I will perform. Deliverance is the Lord’s!*

To Yona, this is all about truth and fulfilling obligation, not the deep irrational love G-d has for His creations that can erase sin and override punishment and natural consequences. Yona’s entire essence, his *raison d’être*, is truth, which is even evident in his name, Yona ben Amitai (אֲמֵתַי). He is so distraught in the fourth perek at the lack of God’s *emet* that he wishes to die. The rest of the perek demonstrates to Yona, and to us, the purpose of teshuva, and G-d’s reasoning behind the concept and creation of teshuva. Yona needs to learn that G-d’s gift of teshuva to mankind, and to all of His creations, is not a contradiction to *emet*, but transcends *emet*, and is rooted in His abundance of love for His creations; this is, in fact, the greatest example of G-d’s true *emet* in the world.

While Sefer Yona ends abruptly with G-d asking Yona a rhetorical question, most meforshim explain that *shetika k’hoda’a*, meaning Yona’s silence at the end of the story, proves that Yona accepts and understands G-d’s message. The epilogue to Medrash Yona in *Otzar Midrashim* offers a deeper glimpse into Yona’s epiphany by describing Yona’s emotional reaction to G-d’s message. The medrash describes Yona, with tears streaming down his face, bursting forth with his newfound awesome revelation of G-d’s *emet* and *rachamim*. Yona realizes that both stem from His deep love for His creations. [Thanks

to Dr. Shneur Leiman who pointed out this medrash in a shiur on Sefer Yona he gave in his home.] Yona, like Moshe previously, needed to learn the meaning of G-d’s *emet*, and that within G-d’s Attribute of Truth there is room for teshuva that stems from the depths of G-d’s love for His creations.

The story of Yona is specifically read at Mincha on Yom Kippur, perhaps because Mincha, which was established by Yitzchak who was a man of *din*, is the time of day when judgment is strongest, and we are beseeching G-d to follow His *rachamim*, as opposed to His *din*, which gives us an opportunity for teshuva. At this pivotal point in the day, immediately preceding the final prayer of Neila, we are reminding G-d of His mercy and His purpose in giving us the gift of teshuva.

Chazal explain Yona’s identity as the son of the Shunamit woman who Elisha haNavi resurrected from the dead (Melachim 2, 4:18-37). Ironically, Yona’s entire existence is based on G-d’s mercy and allowance for teshuva, since in his understanding of *emet* resurrection of the dead would not be possible. Perhaps this theory is a metaphor for our own resurrection on Yom Kippur. G-d’s gift of teshuva allows us to be reborn with a clean slate. By recognizing the source of this gift of teshuva and understanding the place of deep love from whence it comes, we will hopefully be more inspired to take full advantage of this tremendous gift that G-d offers us year after year.

The topic of *emes* is most apropos in an article honoring the memory of Rabbi Hy Arbesfeld z"l. He was one of the most “*emesdik*” people I’ve known — always striving for truth. He supported Torah study staunchly, passionately and so proudly. I personally always felt his support and pride in my teaching, and it was a real *zechut* to have known him.

יהי זכרו ברוך