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by Carole, Gila and Avi Daman**



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Table of Contents **Rosh Hashana 5782**

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

Introduction

4 **Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman:** Of Ghosts and Ancestors

Faith, Providence and Human Initiative



6 **Rabbi Netanel Wiederblank:** Introducing Divine Providence

11 **Rabbi Daniel Mann:** Rosh Hashana, Human Initiative and Personal Responsibility

15 **Mrs. Racheli Taubes:** Yonah: The Lonely Prophet of Faith?

19 **Rabbi Mordechai Becher:** Sukkos and Emunah

Rosh Hashana Insights



23 **Mrs. Penina Bernstein:** Sarah and Chana: Two Models for Prayer on Rosh Hashana

26 **Rabbi Benjamin Blecht:** The Two New Years & The Two “New Beginnings”: Nissan Vs. Tishrei

37 **Rabbi Etan Schnall:** Are We Judged Twice? New Fruits, New Suits and an Introduction to Masechet Beitza

41 **Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Weinberg:** Overcoming Shame and Self-Doubt to Answer the Call to Teshuva



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OF GHOSTS AND ANCESTORS

Perhaps the most common global experience of this past year was disruption. Due to lockdowns, social distancing, closures and health protocols the patterns of our lives were disrupted in ways like never before. What was the effect of this change? Were we happier? More fulfilled? Nervous or anxious?

Studies show that despite all of the disruption — our personalities have stayed the course. According to one study from Florida State University, most personality traits showed no change at all. Contrary to most expectations, our underlying personality traits proved quite durable during the disruption. “You can’t get away from yourself,” wrote Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*, “by moving from one place to another.” Even when a world changes, the

patterns of our own selves can prove to be quite stubborn.

Whenever I think about teshuvah and change, I return to the thought of famed German Jewish psychoanalyst Hans Loewald. In a 1998 article by Stephen Mitchell entitled, “From Ghosts to Ancestors,” examining the work of Hans Loewald, Mitchell tells the story of a woman named Kate. After a difficult childhood, Kate struggled to develop romantic relationships. She was stuck in a destructive cycle of developing relationships with men who were emotionally unavailable.

Mitchell understood Kate’s cycle of arrested development by referring to Loewald’s description of two relationships we have with our past: As ghosts and ancestors. He writes:

Those who know ghosts tell us that they long to be released from their ghost-life and led to rest as ancestors. As ancestors they live forth in the present generation, while as ghosts they are compelled to haunt the present generation with their shadow-life... In the daylight of analysis the ghosts of the unconscious are laid and led to rest as ancestors whose power is taken over and transformed into the newer intensity of present life...

Ghosts haunt, ancestors nourish. Our past unattended, unexamined, unredeemed is like a ghost. It lurks in our mind, haunts our present, and sabotages our future. A ghostly past creates cycles of spiritual and emotional dysfunction that can be difficult to escape.

But the remedy can be found in the halakhic notion of teshuva as explained by Rambam. In the

beginning of the second chapter of the Laws of Repentance, Rambam writes:

אי זו היא תשובה גמורה. זה שבא לידו דבר
שעבר בו ואפשר בידו לעשותו ופרש ולא
עשה מפני התשובה. לא מיראה ולא מכשלו
כה.

Who has reached complete teshuvah? A person who confronts the same situation in which he sinned when he has the potential to commit [the sin again], and, nevertheless, abstains and does not commit it because of his teshuva alone and not because of fear or a lack of strength.

This is a strange formulation. Why would complete repentance require someone to place themselves in the very situation that led them to sin? Ostensibly, that should be the *one* place to be avoided.

Loewald's notion of our past as ghost or ancestor helps shed light on this textual shadow. Without confronting and redeeming our past through teshuva, we are bound to repeat the same cycles of error. Whether literally or figuratively, we will wind up *b'oto makom*, in that very same place that created our spiritual suffering. As Mitchell writes, "each of us weaves and unravels, constructing our relational world to maintain the same dramatic tensions, perpetuating – with many different people as vehicles — the same longings, suspense, revenge, surprises and struggles." Our lives can be cyclical rather than progressive, stuck in the same patterns unable to move forward. No wonder, our underlying personalities remained

intact even through the pandemic. If you were irritable at work before COVID that same unhealthy dynamic entered and exited the pandemic with you as well. When we run away from our ghosts instead of confronting them, they continue to haunt.

How do we lay our ghosts to rest? So often, we are stuck in recurring patterns, the same mistakes, in the same context, with the same people. Escaping these repetitive patterns is not easy. The answer I believe is the primacy we place on conscious action in the process of teshuva. We need to consciously make different choices than before to chart a new path from our past. Teshuva is not just reflection and confession, it is about making new choices, creating a new set of actions. Vidui makes conscious what was previously subconscious. But a full complete teshuva is not realized *on* Yom Kippur but *after* Yom Kippur. It is about forging a new path for our actions that reimagines your past as a roadmap for a new sense of self.

As we approach the Days of Awe, I am thinking about how our past is functioning in our lives. Surely over the past two years, we still have many ghosts. While the world changed, much of the patterns of our self did not, and each of us needs to ask ourselves individually what haunts us? And through teshuva, we can consciously chart a new plan of action and transform our ghosts into ancestors. The experiences of our past can nourish instead of negate. Each of us can and should approach the

coming year with a renewed sense of mission, purpose, and confidence. Allowing our past to nourish and laying our ghosts to rest.

More broadly, I think of this in the context of our community. What role does Judaism play in our lives: Does Judaism feel like a ghost or ancestor? When we think of our religious community and commitments, does it haunt or nourish? Does our relationship with our past upend our relationships in our present? With our family, with our friends, with God?

It seems to me that over the past year, the Yeshiva University community evinced a great deal of spiritual confidence in our leaders, our values, and our responsibility to each other. We saw in our halakhah, history and heritage the ancestors who nourish and sustain our present. And this is important, not just for us. With the polarization of the Jewish people and the broader society, our community and our values are essential for the future. By believing in ourselves, we can best impact those around us. We honor our future by charting a new past, transforming our ghosts into ancestors.

My berakhah to all of you is that we emerge from our past with good health and happiness for a nourishing, enriching, and enlivening new year — each of us ready to create a new future, together.

Shanah tovah u'metukah,

Ari Berman



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INTRODUCING DIVINE PROVIDENCE

God's involvement in the world is without a doubt a fundamental principle of faith. And yet, remarkably, the nature and scope of divine providence is fiercely debated. In this article we seek to introduce this vital yet elusive topic. We hope you emerge not just with a better understanding of the events of world history, but with an approach to deal with the vagaries and vicissitudes you encounter in your own life.

Divine providence (*hashgacha*) is a central theme stressed throughout the Torah. Indeed, the Torah emphasizes that the primary purpose of the 10 plagues was not merely to punish the Egyptians or facilitate the Exodus, but to demonstrate God's involvement in the world.

לְמַעַן תֵּדַע כִּי אֲנִי ה' בְּקִרְבְּךָ הָאָרֶץ:

In order that you know that I am the

Lord in the midst of the earth.

Shemot 8:18

The plagues taught the world that God is not only God of the heavens, nor is He a deity who created the world but no longer interacts with it, but He is God of the earth and master of the world. While miracles overtly demonstrate providence, *hashgacha* extends beyond the blatantly supernatural. Rambam, at the end of *Moreh ha-Nevuchim* (3:54), notes that Yirmiyahu highlights this point.

אֲנִי ה' עֹשֶׂה חֶסֶד מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדָקָה בְּאֶרֶץ:

I am the Lord Who practices kindness, justice, and righteousness on the earth.

Yirmiyahu 9:13

Rambam comments that this verse reflects one of the Torah's foundational principles — that God did not abandon the land; He is intimately involved with it. Rambam

here indicates that His providence is not limited to miraculous punishments. It can be seen in the gentle guiding hand that escorts us throughout our lives — in His kindness, justice, and righteousness upon the land. At the same time, Rambam maintains that providence is not all-encompassing, but varies from person to person.

In Chapter 38 of *Illuminating Jewish Thought* (forthcoming), we shall explore Rambam's fascinating view about the exact scope of providence. For now, let us note that the notion of providence is assumed in so many of the Torah's stories. Throughout Scripture we encounter people beseeching God to favorably intercede on their behalf, like Yaakov did before interacting with Lavan and Eisav and Chana did when pleading for a child. Individual petitionary prayer,

which is ubiquitous throughout Torah, presumes Divine involvement in personal affairs, and that human requests can influence how He acts.

While innumerable verses speak to the nature of His involvement, let us presently consider one in particular.

גְּדֹלַת הַעֲצָה וְרֹב הָעֲלִילָה אֲשֶׁר עֵינֶיךָ פִּקְחוֹת עַל כָּל דְּרָכֶיךָ בְּנֵי אָדָם לְתַתּ לְאִישׁ כְּדַרְכּוֹ וְכַפְרֵי מַעֲלָיו:

Great in counsel and mighty in deed, Your eyes are cognizant to all the ways of mankind, to grant each man according to his ways and the consequences of his deeds.

Yirmiyahu 32:19

This verse highlights two of fundamental principles:

1. God is aware of all that happens in the world (עֵינֶיךָ פִּקְחוֹת עַל כָּל דְּרָכֶיךָ (בְּנֵי אָדָם)).
2. God intervenes to ensure justice (לְתַתּ לְאִישׁ כְּדַרְכּוֹ וְכַפְרֵי מַעֲלָיו).

The first principle is relatively uncomplicated — God is omniscient. The second requires analysis, since the world seems to be filled with injustice.

Statements in Chazal on Hashgacha

While Scripture refers to providence, it leaves many questions unanswered. Chazal describe the scope of providence in greater detail than Scripture, though they, too, do not outline a comprehensive approach to the topic, while many of the Rishonim do. Here, let us briefly consider several prominent sources in Talmudic literature.

ואמר ר' חנינא: אין אדם נוקף אצבעו מלמטה אלא א"כ מכריזין עליו מלמעלה, שנאמר: מה' מצעדי גבר כוננו, אדם מה יבין דרכו.

R. Chanina said: No man bruises his finger here on earth unless it was so

decreed (literally — announced) against him in heaven, for it is written: "It is from the Lord that man's goings are established" (Tehillim 37:23).

Chullin 7b

The above passage indicates a robust perspective on God's providence: even small things, such as stubbing one's toe, are the result of God's decree.¹

Another source that assumes even the smallest happenings in a person's life are divinely ordained is *Arachin* 16b. This passage considers the minimal degree of suffering (*yisurin*) that would be considered divine retribution. It concludes that even minimal frustrations (someone puts his hand into his pocket to take out three coins and he takes out but two) constitute *yisurin*. The Talmud then wonders what difference it would possibly make to know the exact degree that *yisurin* extend to (וכל כך). R. Yishmael answers that this is to teach us: "Anyone upon whom forty days have passed without any form of sufferings (*yisurin*), has received his portion in the world to come" (כל שֶׁעָבְרוּ עָלָיו אַרְבַּעִים יוֹם בְּלֹא יִסּוּרִין - קִיבַל עוֹלָמוֹ). We might have expected that divine protection from all annoyances is a good thing. Actually, the reverse is true. Anyone spared even the smallest annoyances — his shoes never untie and he always pulls from his pocket perfect change — is evidently being divinely protected in order to ensure he is compensated for his good deeds exclusively in *this* world.²

This passage presumes that even the smallest annoyances, such as pulling out the wrong number of coins, stem from God, and are in fact gifts insofar as they are intended as both (a) punishment (which thereby allow for fuller remuneration in the next world)

and (b) divine messages to encourage improvement.

Because even the most trivial irritations are divinely ordained, the Talmud admonishes that a person respond to such tribulations with repentance:

אמר רבא ואיתימא רב חסדא אם רואה אדם שיסורין באין עליו יפשפש במעשיו שנא' "נחפשה דרכינו ונחקורה ונשובה עד ה'."

Raba (some say, R. Hisda) says: If a man sees that sufferings (yisurin) visit him, let him examine his conduct. For it is said: Let us search and try our ways, and return unto the Lord.

Berachot 5a

Misinterpreting the Divine Message

While tribulations should prompt general introspection, we must be wary of offering definitive explanations of why certain things happened to us. Only through prophecy can we know definitively why God caused particular events to take place. Indeed, R. Tzadok (*Tzidkat ha-Tzadik* 39) offers a fascinating example from *Shoftim* 17:13 of the dangers of misunderstanding God's message. Micha commissioned a silver statue and made a shrine in his home, appointing one of his sons as a priest. Then, an itinerant Levi came passing by, from whose tribe come real Jewish priests. Micha was thrilled and appointed him as priest, misinterpreting his good fortune as divine approval.

וַיֹּאמֶר מִיכָה עֲתָה יִדְעֵתִי כִּי יֵיטִיב ה' לִי כִּי הָיָה לִי הַלְוִי לְכֹהֵן.

Then said Micah: "Now know I that Hashem will do me good, seeing I have a Levite as my priest."

Micha's colossal mistake highlights the danger of interpreting God's

providence. We should not claim to understand why God harms or helps us. At the same time, the Talmud teaches us, we must respond. Excessive tribulations or no tribulations are divine reminders instructing us to examine our ways. However, we should discover our shortcomings through introspection rather than interpretation or prognostication.

Is All Suffering a Response to Sin?

Thus far we have seen how *yisurin*, whether big or small, serve two purposes. The suffering can serve as atonement for sin. Moreover, *yisurin* are a wakeup call, a divine reminder that we need to improve our ways. But this cannot be all — there are times when people experience *yisurin*, though they are pure. Thus, we must add a third component: *mazal*. The Talmud in *Mo'ed Katan* 28a notes that certain matters, such as lifespan, children, and sustenance, are not only dependent on merit but *mazal*. For instance, Rabbah and R. Chisda were both equally great sages, yet one had an exceedingly difficult life while the other's was marked by pleasantness. The Talmud concludes that the only way to justify this discrepancy is *mazal*.

Mazal should not be seen as luck or randomness, rather that the things that happen to a person, such as sickness, can happen for two types of reasons. Sometimes they are responsive, as we considered above.

For example, a person may have made certain low-level choices. God may be sending the disease to punish us for these choices, or to wake us from our slumber and encourage us to reevaluate the life we are living. God hopes, as it were, that this disease will cause us to repent and change direction.

Other times the disease may have nothing to do with the choices a person has made. Instead, the disease is meant to allow us to fulfill our mission in life. For example, this individual is uniquely suited to serve God through adversity, to remain committed despite hardship, and to teach others the degree of devotion we must have toward God. Each of us are given the tools to fulfill our *tafkid* (mission) — these tools are our *mazal*. In other words, the things we get based on our *mazal* are not random, rather they are specific.

In both instances we experience sickness for our own good, either to help us reform or to allow us to fulfill our mission. The difference is that the former is responsive (*be-zechuta talya milta*) and the latter has nothing to do with the choices a person has made, at least in this life (*be-mazla talya milta*).

Is it possible that some *yisurin* are random? The matter is subject to debate. We examine this question in Chapters 38-41 of *Illuminating Jewish Thought*.

Finally, it is worth stressing that there are aspects of *yisurin* we will never understand. We cannot, for example,

explain the suffering of the innocent or the tranquility of the wicked, אין בידינו לא משלות הרשעים ואף לא מיסורי הצדיקים (*Avot* 4:15).

Thus, while the cause of *yisurin* is not always clear, Chazal emphasize that, generally speaking, our response is. Without interpreting exactly why something happened, we must respond with reflection. *Yisurin* should trigger repentance; lack of *yisurin* should prompt us to alter our focus from one that fixates on the temporal to one guided by the eternal.

Not only should suffering prompt reflection, but salvation should as well. The Talmud (*Shabbat* 121b) informs us that escaping a near death experience, such as an encounter with a poisonous snake, indicates that one should have died (due to his sins) and was miraculously saved. This, too, should prompt not just gratitude, but repentance.³

Chazal's First Limitation on Hashgacha: Free will

While the above passages all seem to indicate that all (or nearly all) happenings are divinely ordained, other texts imply that matters are not so simple. Indeed, the Talmud itself states that, at the very least, two types of occurrences are not generally subject to providence. The first relates to free will.

Indeed, one obvious objection to the notion that God controls everything is that it seems to contradict the principle of free will. If it is the case



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that God controls everything, then what room is there for me to choose my course of action? Moreover, the notion of free will would seem to presume that a person has the capability to harm somebody else regardless of God's decree or even the victim's worthiness.

אמר רבי חנינא: הכל בידי שמים - חוץ מיראת שמים, שנאמר ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלקיך שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה.

Said R. Chanina: Everything is in the hands of God (ha-kol bi-ydei shamayim) except for fear of God (yirat shamayim), as it says, "And now, Israel, what does Hashem, your God ask of you but to fear Him."

Berachot 33b

The Talmud deduces that if *yirat shamayim* is what God asks of us, it must be in our hands. What, then, is meant by *ha-kol bi-ydei shamayim*? What remains in God's hands? Rashi explains:

כל הבא על האדם ביד הקדוש ברוך הוא; כגון ארוך, קצר, עני, עשיר, חכם, שוטה, לבן, שחור, הכל בידי שמים הוא, אבל צדיק ורשע אינו בא על ידי שמים, את זו מסר בידו של אדם, ונתן לפניו שתי דרכים, והוא יבחר לו יראת שמים.

Everything about a person is in the hands of God. For example, whether he will be tall or short, poor or rich, wise or foolish, light-skinned or dark-skinned; all this is in God's hands. However, whether he will be righteous or wicked is not determined by God; this power God granted to man, placing before him two paths, and man should choose fear of heaven.

Rashi informs us that free will does not extend to everything. In fact, many things are not in our control. Whether we will be tall or short, wealthy or impoverished, wise or foolish, etc. are largely beyond our control. This passage indicates that certain things

are in our hands (matters pertaining to *yirat shamayim*), while other matters are in God's hands.

This prompts an obvious question. Can a free agent harm someone undeserving of pain? Alternatively, will God intervene and prevent unwarranted pain, while at the same time somehow preserving the agent's freedom? This question is the subject of a major debate. Numerous thinkers, among them R. Saadya Gaon, R. Bachya ibn Pakuda, *Sefer ha-Chinuch*, Abarbanel, and Gra, seem to deny the possibility of harming someone whom God has not decreed be harmed.⁴ Others, like *Ohr ha-Chaim* and the simple reading of the Zohar, seem to disagree.

Chazal's Second Limitation on Hashgacha: Negligence

The next exception to providence relates to negligence. Chazal use identical language to present this limitation.

אמר רבי חנינא: הכל בידי שמים חוץ מצנים פחים, שנאמר: צנים פחים בדרך עקש שומר נפשו ירחק מהם.

Rabbi Chanina said, "Everything is in the hand of Heaven, except for tzinim u-pachin [cold and hot]," as it says [in Mishlei (22:5)]: "Cold and heat is in the troubled path, and one who guards his health will keep distance from them."

Bava Batra 144b

This statement indicates that it is within a person's ability to avoid cold and heat, and sicknesses that may result from exposure to extreme temperatures in winter and summer. The scope of R. Chanina's statement is subject to a dispute among Rishonim.

Rashi (*Ketubot* 30a) explains that generally speaking, a person's suffering reflects a divine decree. However,

sometimes suffering is the result of negligence. For example, if a person goes outside without a jacket, he may get sick. Tosafot (*Ketubot* 30a) add that this notion is not limited to "hot and cold," but reflects the general notion that if we do not take reasonable precautions we may be harmed due to our laxity. Thus, we may not stand next to an unstable wall. After all, "it is certainly in a person's power to kill himself." Thus, the upshot of the Gemara is that if we act safely then all suffering we experience will be the result of divine decree. If, however, we live perilously, we may bring about our own downfall.

While Tosafot take for granted that a person can harm himself, R. Elchanan Wasserman (*Kobetz Ma'amarim*) notes that R. Bachya ibn Pakuda appears to disagree. According to R. Bachya, just as a person may not kill someone unless God wishes them dead, so too one cannot kill himself if he is not meant to die.⁵ Of course, if a person freely chooses to commit suicide, they are held responsible for their offense, even though they would not have succeeded were it not for the divine decree that they die, just as a murderer is punished for the death of his victim even though God would not have allowed the victim to succumb unless his expiration had been decreed. For this reason, even R. Bachya maintains that we may not stand near an unstable wall, since failure to live safely and care for our wellbeing constitutes a sin.

What remains unclear, according to this approach, is with respect to what are *tzinim u-pachin* [cold and hot] not in God's hands. If I cannot harm others or myself without God's decree, then everything is in God's hands. Perhaps, according to R. Wasserman's

understanding, a person might get sick (though not kill himself) due to negligence, but can never harm someone else or kill himself due to divine decree.⁶

It is noteworthy that R. Chanina, who presented the expansive view on providence cited above, himself presents these two limitations.

The Mystery Remains but We Must Change

Studying the topic of providence often leaves us confused for two reasons. First, there are a number of opinions concerning the precise scope of *hashgacha*. More problematic is that it prompts the question of how God allows for the suffering of the innocent. If God is involved in history, and we know He is, then we wonder how He allows so much suffering and seeming injustice. Anyone who studies theodicy and has a sensitive heart will undoubtedly emerge befuddled. As noted, Chazal (*Avot* 4:15) acknowledge that the matter is inexplicable.

Ramban addresses this point in an enlightening way. Having extensively discussed the topic of why the righteous suffer and wicked prosper and concluded that there is indeed an aspect to the problem of evil that we cannot understand, Ramban wonders why we should even study the matter in the first place, since ultimately we must accept divine justice. His answer is that this is the attitude of fools — those who are wise always seek to understand all that can be understood, even if they know that they never will complete the task.

ואם תשאל עלינו כיון שיש ענין נעלם במשפט, ונצטרך להאמין בצדקו מצד שופט האמת יתברך ויתעלה, למה תטריח אותנו ותצונו

עלינו ללמוד הטענות שפירשנו והסוד שרמזנו, ולא נשליך הכל על הסמך שנעשה בסוף שאין לפניו לא עולה ולא שכחה אלא שכל דבריו במשפט, זו טענת הכסילים מואסי חכמה, כי נועיל לעצמנו בלמוד שהזכרנו להיותנו חכמים ויודעי אלקים יתברך מדרך הא-ל וממעשיו, ועוד נהיה מאמינים ובוטחים באמונתנו בנוגע ובעולם יותר מזולתנו.

Those who are wise always seek to understand all that can be understood, even if they know that they never will complete the task.

If you ask: since there is a hidden matter anyway... why bother studying the claims (made by the various characters in the book of Iyov) and the secret that we alluded to? This is the attitude of fools who despise wisdom. For we shall benefit ourselves through the aforementioned study by becoming wise men who know God in the manner in which He acts and in His deeds. Moreover, we shall become believers endowed with a stronger faith in Him than others.

Torat ha-Adam, Sha'ar HaGemul

We must become lovers of wisdom, and therefore we are right in studying this topic even if we fail to emerge with a satisfactory resolution.

Yet, Ramban also writes (in his introduction to *Torat ha-Adam*), that we must accept that there are mysteries too deep for the human mind to penetrate: “ideas that are elevated above all creations (i.e. that nobody understands), further than that which will be and deeper than that which was.” Nobody knows all

the answers, “So, who is a poor man [unable to comprehend] to question the king? Rather, he must justify the judgment and verify the verdict, for God is a God of justice, fortunate are those who wait for Him.” Despite all he wrote, Ramban is the first to acknowledge that the answer is incomplete, and we must acknowledge and accept our ignorance. Thus, when we encounter the unanswerable, we must trust that it is right, though we cannot imagine how.

Endnotes

1. Some Rishonim limit the scope of *hashgacha*. How might they respond to this source? There are two reasons this source is not conclusive. First, the Talmud merely states that all earthly events are announced. This does not necessarily connote providence. What, then, would be the significance of such an announcement? Meiri (*Chulin* 7b) derives from this passage a fundamental principle of faith — divine justice. Indeed, regardless of what perspective one takes concerning providence, divine justice is a principle of faith. For example, even Rambam, who maintains that many of the occurrences in a typical person's life are natural and not the result of divine decree, concedes that nothing that happens to a person is unjust. Thus, Meiri suggests that the divine announcement referred to by R. Chanina emphasizes this point. Accordingly, writes Meiri, when one experiences suffering, one must consider why he deserves this hardship and mend his ways.

The second and more important reason this passage is not definitive vis-à-vis the question of the scope of divine providence emerges when we examine its context. Briefly, as explained by R. Chaim of Volozhin, R. Chanina in the passage adjacent to the above text maintains that someone who has internalized the reality that there is nothing but God cannot be harmed by malicious spiritual forces like magic. R. Chanina lived in a reality where there is nothing but God. All that happens in the world is from God. From this perspective, the forces of evil have no power and affect. However, most people do not live in this reality. Just as the Talmud indicates that they must take precautions

Continued on page 22



ROSH HASHANA, HUMAN INITIATIVE AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

A Jew's main *avoda* (service) from Rosh Hashana to Yom Kippur is to do teshuva, a task that requires great wisdom, humility, and summoning of strength. However, there is another basic element to the *avodat hayom* (service of the day) of Rosh Hashana that we expend less energy on, not because of its lack of centrality but because it is easier: the coronation of Hashem as King of the entire world. This centrality finds expression in the fact that *Malchuyot*, the section of tefilla most focused on this coronation, is merged with the main beracha of Musaf of Rosh Hashana.

It is in *Zichronot*, though, not *Malchuyot*, that we mention a special,

“secret” significance of the day, albeit one not all agree to — Rosh Hashana is the anniversary of the completion of creation.

כמאן מצלינן האידינא זה היום תחלת מעשיך
זכרון ליום ראשון, כמאן — כרבי אליעזר,
דאמר: בתשרי נברא העולם

*According to whom do we now pray,
“This is the day of the beginning of Your
actions, a remembrance to the first day”?
It is like Rabbi Eliezer who says that the
world was created in Tishrei.*

Rosh Hashana 27a

The major themes of *Zichronot* are man's accountability for his actions to Hashem and Hashem's Divine providence. On this anniversary of creation, Hashem decides what

man deserves and will receive. And this too is likely connected to the “world birthday” motif, as we repeat throughout the order of shofar blowing: “Today is the conception of the world; on this day He shall place in judgment all the world's creations.” And the world He created is classically the instrument through which we receive punishment or reward:

איזו לְחַרְב, וְאיזו לְשָׁלוֹם? איזו לְרָעַב, וְאיזו לְשִׂבְעָה?

“Who will receive the sword (i.e., punishment carried out by our fellow human creations), and who will have peace? Who will experience famine (i.e., when the natural world fails us), and who will have plenty?”

The goal of most shul-goers in prayer and action — to obtain a good year of life and blessing — is focused on their own lives and that of their close family. However, the rabbis tell us that there are at least three levels of judgment that can and should be of interest to us. The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 40b) is apparently the main source for the following thesis of the Rambam (*Teshuva* 3:1-2):

כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד מִבְּנֵי הָאָדָם יֵשׁ לוֹ זְכוּת וְעוֹנוֹת: מִי שֶׁזְכוּתוֹ יִתְרוֹת עַל עוֹנוֹתָיו - צְדִיק; וּמִי שֶׁעוֹנוֹתָיו יִתְרוֹת עַל זְכוּתוֹ - רָשָׁע; מִחֻצָּה לְמִחֻצָּה - בִּיגוּנִי. וְכֵן הַמְדִינָה: אִם הָיוּ זְכוּת וְכָל יוֹשְׁבֵי הָמְרָבוֹת עַל עוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם - הָרִי זֶה צְדִיקָתוֹ; וְאִם הָיוּ עוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם מְרַבִּין - הָרִי זֶה רָשָׁע. וְכֵן כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוֹ. אָדָם שֶׁעוֹנוֹתָיו מְרַבִּין עַל זְכוּתוֹ - מֵיָד הוּא מֵת בְּרָשָׁעוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "עַל רֹב עֲוֹנוֹתָיו" (ירמיה ל"ד; שם ל"ט; הושע ט"ז). וְכֵן מְדִינָה שֶׁעוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם מְרַבִּין - מֵיָד הִיא אוֹבְדָת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "זֶעֱמַת סֹדִם וְעִמְרָה כִּי רָבָה" (בראשית יח, כ). וְכֵן כָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוֹ: אִם הָיוּ עוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם מְרַבִּין - מֵיָד הוּא נִשְׁחָתוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיִּרְא ה' כִּי רָבָה רַעַת הָאָדָם" (שם ו, ה).

Each and every person has virtues and vices. He whose virtues exceed his vices is a just person, and he whose vices exceed his virtues is an evildoer; if both are evenly balanced, he is mediocre. Even so is a nation. If the virtues of all of its inhabitants exceeded their vices, it is, indeed, a just nation; but if their vices exceeded, it is, indeed, a wicked nation. Even such is a standard for the whole world.

A man whose vices exceed his virtues presently dies in his wickedness, even as it is said: "For the multitude of thine iniquity" (Hos. 9. 7). So is a nation whose vices exceed presently destroyed, even as it is said: "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great (Gen. 18. 20). So, too, is the whole world, if their vices exceeded their virtues they are presently destroyed, even as it is said:

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great" (6. 5).

In other words, man should realize that he is judged and subject to Divine decree not only as an individual, based on his personal actions, but also as part of a nation, and even as part of the world as a whole.

Presumably, almost all of us have seen wonderful blessings and horrible hardships befall individuals. We have seen nations experience good and hard times. Nevertheless, the last 18 months has arguably been the first time we have personally witnessed a single great hardship that has deeply affected mankind as a whole. What started as a mysterious new virus taking the lives of dozens of people in a part of the globe few of us even expect to visit was of limited interest to most. Then it started spreading to one country after another until it hit virtually every community on the globe. Indeed, while the virus never threatened full destruction of mankind in the manner of Noah's deluge, a heavy shadow has enveloped civilization. According to our belief system, this pandemic was decreed upon us, i.e., humanity in the broadest sense, on Rosh Hashana 5780, and was renewed, with its British and Delta variants but also with its effective vaccines, on Rosh Hashana 5781.

Could any individual have made the difference between there being such far-reaching decrees, or not? The Gemara (*Kiddushim* 40b) seems to indicate that when approaching our own moral status, we should view this as a realistic possibility:

ר' אלעזר בר' שמעון אומר: לפי שהעולם נידון אחר רובו והיחיד נידון אחר רובו, עשה מצוה אחת אשריו שהכריע את עצמו ואת כל העולם לכף זכות; עבר עבירה אחת, אוי

לו, שהכריע את עצמו ואת כל העולם לכף חובה שנאמר: "וחוטא אחד וכו'". בשביל חטא יחידי שעשה זה, אבד ממנו ומכל העולם טובה הרבה.

R. Elazar b. R. Shimon says, for the world is judged by its majority, and the individual is judged by his majority. If he did one mitzva, he is fortunate, for he brought himself and the whole world to the side of merit. If he did one aveira, woe unto him, for he brought himself and the whole world to the side of liability...

Those who are drawn to mathematics/statistics may not find this enormous opportunity and responsibility compelling. After all, what are the chances that my next actions will serve as the "tiebreaker," especially the tiebreaker for the whole world?! On the other hand, having been taught morality with a worldview that what each of us does is significant and that we are at least as responsible as the next person, the opportunity and responsibility should be viewed at least in the following measured manner:

לא עליך כל המלאכה לגמור, ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה.

It is not your responsibility to complete the whole task, but neither are you free to make yourself idle from it.

Avot 2:16

For this reason, I vote in elections, while never imagining that my vote will be the deciding vote. For this reason, I used to diligently stand guard as an IDF soldier, while never considering it likely that during my shift, a terrorist would attack. And for this reason, during the era of Corona, I followed the rules (and a little more) and got vaccinated even if there was no way of knowing if it would make a major difference in my health or the health of those around me. Indeed,

this is the way most responsible people act.

Many of us took the unique situation of a pandemic to notice, contemplate, and internalize matters of providence more poignantly than before.

Believers in Divine providence see Hashem's Hand behind this pandemic, whether His initial "agent" was a bat, a Wuhan lab technician, or something else. Hashem decreed for reasons known to Him that many people from many countries would die from it. Yet, that does not necessarily mean that the exact numbers, identities, and locations of victims were decreed, based on the moral state of each. Several classic sources speak of plagues and similar broad calamities as lending themselves to a reduced and different type of providence, and this is reason for even and especially those with a solid "moral bill of health" to avoid danger or pay a harsh price (see Yeshayahu 26:20; *Bava Kama* 60a; see *Yalkut Bi'urim* p. 251 for additional sources).

Furthermore, in general, those who are not otherwise deserving of such a decree can die or suffer negative consequence due to their neglect to properly avoid danger. We start with the Gemara in *Shabbat* (see understanding of *Tosafot*, *Ketubot* 30a on it):

לעולם אל יעמוד אדם במקום סכנה לומר
שעושיין לו נס שמא אין עושיין לו נס, ואם
עושיין לו נס, מנכין לו מזכויותיו.

One should never put himself in a dangerous place, saying that a miracle

will save him, lest a miracle not save him, and if a miracle saves him, it is reduced from his merits.

Shabbat 32a

Even Yaakov Avinu (see *ibid.* and *Bereishit* 32:5-12) and Shmuel HaNavi (*Shmuel I*:16:2; see *Pesachim* 8b), in the midst of carrying out Divine commands, were unwilling to rely on Divine intervention alone to extricate themselves from dangerous situations, but instead took far-reaching steps to avoid dangers.

This approach of not relying on Divine providence alone in the face of specific danger, which then requires taking practical steps of self-protection, is adopted by Rishonim such as the Rambam (*Moreh Hanevuchim*, III:18) and Rabbeinu Bachyei (*Chovot Halevavot*, *Sha'ar Habitachon* 4).

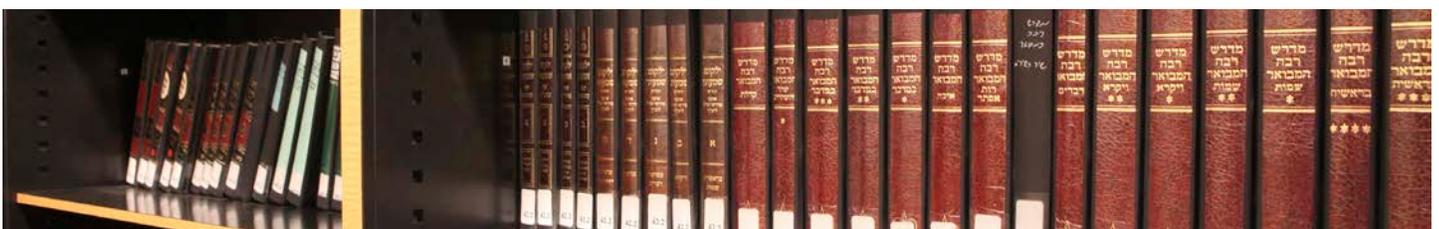
Therefore, the great majority of *poskim*, notably including our own Roshei Yeshiva, ruled that it is absolutely necessary to heed the recommendations of health authorities. The theological or political views of these experts were not relevant, as Halacha requires following the experts in their field. While many who conformed also fell victim to COVID-19 and many who did not conform were spared, observations and statistics bear out the correlation between precautionary steps and rates of survival.

Let us also look not just at avoiding clear danger but at charting a course

Hashem does not frown upon those who ostensibly try to overcome Divine decrees of human hardship by taking practical actions and creating innovations to improve mankind's lot.

to rectify unseen danger. Our belief system teaches that Hashem can and does decree that a certain person, nation, or the world will undergo a hardship and that nothing (other than teshuva) will change it, certainly not natural steps. However, we find in Tanach and Chazal and up to the approach of contemporary *poskim* that we are allowed and recommended to act to naturally "improve our chances" in the health, financial, and other realms.

The Gemara (*Berachot* 40a), for example, gives dietary recommendations unrelated to anything religious. It then says that if we follow the guidelines, we will "not be damaged" or "not have intestinal problems," and if we fail to follow the advice, we should be concerned about serious maladies. This approach is cited in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chayim* 179:6). Thus, these basic sources expect that practical, not just moral, steps bear practical fruit. While the nature of the Divine mechanism



may be subject to debate, the correlation is Rabbinically recognized.

Hashem does not frown upon those who ostensibly try to overcome Divine decrees of human hardship by taking practical actions and creating innovations to improve mankind's lot. Perhaps the starkest example was Noah. Hashem decreed that thistles and thorns would torment mankind due to Adam's sin, yet Noah developed technology (ploughshares) to mitigate this anguish (see Rashi to Bereishit 5:29). Hashem allowed Noah to succeed, and not only was he not vilified, he emerged as his generation's one *tzaddik*. Perhaps he found justification from the language of the curse to Adam: "With the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread" (Bereishit 3:19). Mankind would eat; they would just have to toil to produce the food. Perhaps Noah reasoned: "If I toil to invent an efficient agricultural tool and people 'sweat' in making and using it, Hashem will happily let us enjoy the net gain."

Indeed, while we can never pinpoint Hashem's ways, we are to act as if our attempts at improving our lot may work. We should not be surprised that since the world began putting great efforts and resources into medical knowledge and technologies, life expectancy has more than doubled since 1800 and increased by more than a decade since 1950. Might we conclude that Hashem has looked favorably on our attempts to save each other? I daresay yes.

Let us put the indications together. We have seen that Chazal motivate us to do good not just for our own sake or for our nation's sake, but also for the sake of the whole world. The *Sefer HaChinuch* (Mitzva 311) also writes of the importance of the judgment

that impacts the world as a unit. It should be part of our mindset that we are part of humanity, and we can impact on it and be impacted by it, positively or negatively.

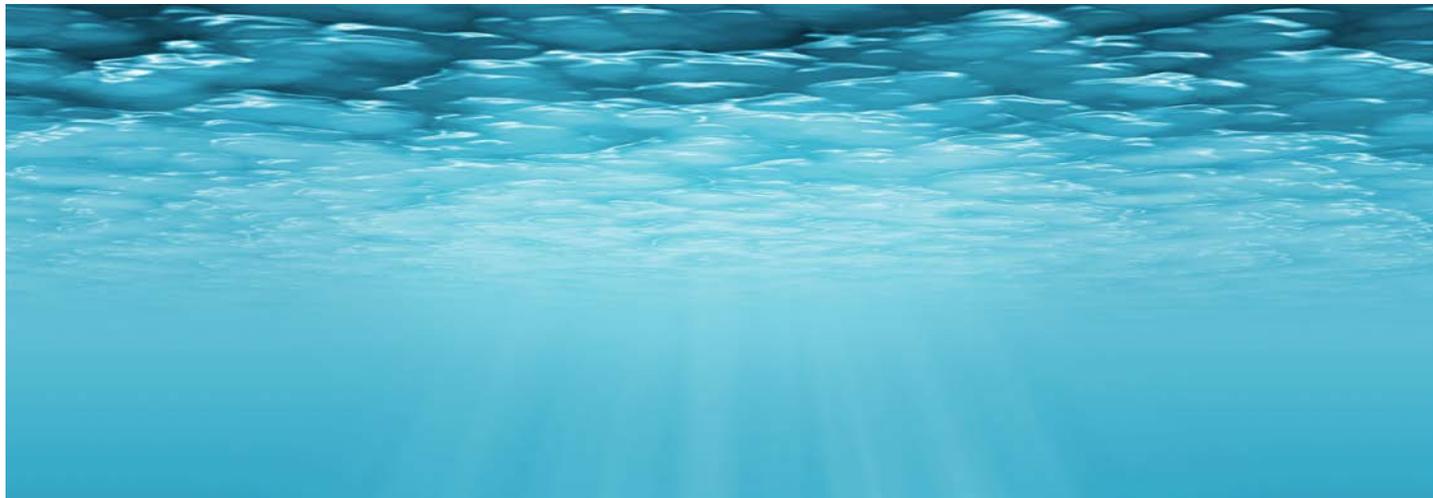
This idea seems of little practical consequence, since our nation is but a small part of the world, and of course each of us are just a small part of our nation — but it is both a practical and a *hashkafic* point. If there were ever a Rosh Hashana in our lifetimes to contemplate global interdependency it would be last year's and this one — when Hashem showed us how what happens in one corner of the world can have a deadly effect on the entire world. We can also think positively — how noble and possible it is to have a positive impact. Is it not wonderful that Jews played critical roles in companies that produced vaccines and medications to fight COVID-19, thereby taking their part in apparently saving tens if not hundreds of thousands of lives already? We can take pride in the State of Israel for the wisdom and guts of becoming a nation of fortunate guinea pigs and showing the world (who were indeed watching) how to save lives.

The tests if we, as individuals and as a nation, internalize this approach, do exist. Will the State of Israel and Jews, as influential members of U.S. and even world society, internalize the concept that we have no right to ignore the needs of the world even though we cannot save it alone? We can do this, for one, by being (or continuing to be) responsible and idealistic in the hopefully winding down, worldwide fight against COVID-19.

We do not know what surprise crises Hashem might send our way. However, those who adopt the

halachic approach of listening to the consensus of experts in various fields of science (see *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim* 328:10) know, with close to certainty, that the world is in the early stages of an expected great crisis, generally known as "climate change." Those who take the time and use their integrity to learn what the consensus is (and not take comfort in the 2-3% of relevant scientists who are called climate skeptics) should know what is at stake. There are differences between climate crisis and COVID-19. For one, COVID-19 started with a patient zero. Global warming comes from many geographical places and from many human activities. The solutions (which Hashem will hopefully enable us to find and help us implement) we will need to at least partially adopt to mitigate the crisis will be many. They will probably include adapting personal consumption and major investment in technologies (a strength of our nation).

Rosh Hashana is not the time to get bogged down on such details, but we might want to reason as follows: Regarding personal growth and teshuva, I am my own master, and my critical goal is to do Hashem's Will as best as I can. This year, in light of Hashem's sending us a rare, truly global crisis, part of my *avodat Hashem* is to see myself as a responsible, idealistic part of the broader world. I then should employ the age-old adage, "It is not your responsibility to complete the whole task, but neither are you free to make yourself idle from it." Where this takes us in the future remains to be seen.



YONAH: THE LONELY PROPHET OF FAITH?

The Book of Yonah, which is read as the haftarah at Minchah on Yom Kippur, is typically understood as conveying a message of *teshuvah*, repentance, and its power to prevent disaster. From another perspective, however, it can also be understood as containing a message of true *emunah*, faith. In fact, the entire concept of repentance is ultimately dependent upon an individual accepting and firmly believing in the fact that God is, as it were, both capable of and interested in accepting repentance. Traditionally understood, proper *teshuvah* can completely erase all sin and consequences of sin. To illustrate the nature of this idea, consider the act of erasing words or pictures drawn with a pencil. When complete, we can still see a faded outline of the images. Only Hashem has the ability

to create and maintain a process in the world that completely erases certain actions and their effects. Moreover, the Gemara writes that when *teshuvah* is done correctly, the sins can actually become mitzvot; again, something only Hashem has the capacity to effect.¹ *Emunah*, unwavering faith in Hashem, is a prerequisite for *teshuvah*. We must accept that there is a God who can forgive in order to attain His forgiveness. It is this message of a deep sense of faith as a basis of repentance within the Book of Yonah that will be explored in this essay.

The book commences with Hashem commanding Yonah the prophet to convey a Divine message about the forthcoming destruction of the city of Nineveh, because the Ninevites have sinned greatly. Yonah's immediate reaction is to run away, fleeing on a

boat to Tarshish, a location in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Yonah's motivation to abandon his mission is unclear from the text.

וַיִּקַּם יוֹנָה לְבָרֵחַ תְּרִשִׁישָׁה מִלְּפָנֵי ה' וַיֵּרֶד יָפוֹ
וַיִּמְצָא אֲנִיָּה בָּאָה תְרִשִׁישׁ וַיִּתֵּן שְׂכָרָהּ וַיֵּרֶד בָּהּ
לְבוֹא עִמָּהֶם תְּרִשִׁישָׁה מִלְּפָנֵי ה':

But Yonah arose to flee to Tarshish from before Hashem's Presence. He went down to Jaffo and found a Tarshish-bound ship; he paid its fare and boarded it to travel with them to Tarshish from before Hashem's Presence.

Yonah 1:3

Traditional commentaries, including Rashi, explain that Yonah runs away toward Tarshish because he does not want to receive the prophecy.²

לברוח תרשישה - ים ששמו תרשיש והוא
בחוצה לארץ. אמר אברה לוי הים שאין
השכינה שורה בחוץ לארץ...

To flee to Tarshish — i.e., to a sea named Tarshish, which is outside the Holy Land. He said, “I will flee to the sea, for the Shechinah does not rest outside the Holy Land...”

Rashi 1:3

Rashi’s interpretation seems to be based on the words, “from before Hashem.” Yonah does not run away from Hashem, but rather from before Hashem’s face because he does not want to accept the mission of prophecy; he does not want to “see” Hashem’s face. In other words, he does not run away because he questions Hashem’s existence or doubts any of His powers; on the contrary, he has such a strong belief in Hashem that he runs away specifically because he believes in Hashem and he believes in His so-called “rules” of prophecy. He thus thinks and hopes that if he flees somewhere outside the Land of Israel he will not receive any Divine word. Indeed, the Midrash in *Shemot Rabbah* compares Yonah to Moshe Rabbeinu and Yirmiyahu, prophets who likewise initially refused their Divine missions and only reluctantly accepted their roles as prophets.³ Yonah is associated with other leaders who are known for their faith in Hashem and not with people who lacked conviction about Him or His singular greatness.

To further prove that Yonah does not seemingly have a problem with *emunah*, we may note that while Yonah is on the boat, he is interrogated by the sailors and the captain of the ship — they are frightened by the sudden storm and wake him up from his deep slumber, looking for answers. He responds with a strong declaration of faith:

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו הַגִּידָה נָא לָנוּ בְּאֲשֶׁר לָמִי הָרָעָה
הַזֹּאת לָנוּ מֵהַמַּלְאָכָה וּמֵאֵינן תְּבוּאָה מִהָאָרֶץ
וְאֵי מִזֶּה עִם אֶתְהָה. וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם עֲבָרִי אֲנֹכִי

וְאֵת ה' אֵל-לְהִי הַשָּׁמַיִם אֲנִי יֹרָא אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה אֶת
הַיָּם וְאֵת הַיַּבְשָׁה.

They said to him, “Tell us, now: in regard to whom has this calamity befallen us? What is your business? From where do you come? What is your country? And of what people are you?” He said to them: “I am a Hebrew and Hashem, the God of the Heavens, do I fear, Who made the sea and the dry land.”

Yonah 1:8-9

Usually, when prompted with a question such as, “What do you do? What is your profession?” and the like, a person responds, “I am an electrician, an educator, a doctor, a lawyer.” But that is not how Yonah responds. Instead, he explains his essence and his soul’s mission: “I fear God.” He is a runaway prophet attempting to avoid his mission, but he is a prophet nonetheless and he believes completely in Hashem.⁴

What, then, is Yonah’s flaw?

At the end of the book, Yonah is sitting and sulking outside the city of Nineveh. He is greatly distressed as he watches the Ninevites repent and thereby avoid destruction. He grows angry at Hashem for showing mercy towards the people of the city.

וַיִּרַע אֵל יוֹנָה רָעָה גְדוֹלָה וַיִּחַר לוֹ. וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל
ה' וַיֹּאמֶר אָנָּה ה' הֲלוֹא זֶה דְּבָרִי עַד הָיִיתִי עַל
אֲדָמָתִי עַל כֵּן קִדַּמְתִּי לְבָרִיחַ תְּרַשִּׁישָׁה כִּי יִדְעָתִי
כִּי אֶתְהָה אֵל-לֹ חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם אֶרְךָ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חַסֵּד
וַיִּנְחַם עַל הָרָעָה.

This displeased Yonah greatly, and it grieved him. He prayed to Hashem, and said: “Please Hashem, was this not my contention when I was still on my own soil? I therefore had hastened to flee to Tarshish for I know that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in kindness, and relenting of punishment.”

Yonah 4:1-2

Here, Yonah clearly states that his motivation for running away was his deep sense of justice and righteousness. Many traditional commentaries explain Yonah’s anger as a reaction toward Hashem’s act of benevolence. Yonah actually wants Hashem to exact punishment on the Ninevites for their sins because he believes that they deserve it. He is thus furious that Hashem is compassionate and allows the Ninevites to repent from their evil ways, thereby avoiding the consequences of their earlier behavior.⁵ Why would this disturb him so much?

וּמָה רָאָה יוֹנָה שֶׁלֹא רָצָה לִילֵךְ אֶל נִינְוֶה? אָמַר,
הֲעֵכָז"ם קְרוּבֵי תְשׁוּבָה הֵם אִם אוֹמֵר לָהֶם
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ תְשׁוּבָה נִמְצָאתִי מַחִיב אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁאֵין
שׁוֹמְעִים לְדַבְרֵי הַנְּבִיאִים.

Now what did Yonah see that he did not wish to go to Nineveh? He said, “The gentiles are quick to repent. Should I prophesize to them and they repent, I will be found condemning Israel, who do not heed the words of the prophets.”

Rashi 1:3

Rashi explains that as a Jewish prophet, Yonah sees himself as the defender of his people. He is concerned (and rightfully so) that if a non-Jewish nation would heed the words of Hashem’s prophet and repent by showing remorse for and correcting their wrongful actions, the Jewish people would be seen in a negative light, since they did not listen to their prophets and repent for their sins.

An alternative interpretation, however, is that it is Hashem’s benevolence and compassion that greatly bothers Yonah. He is angry that Hashem does not exact justice, but rather displays benevolence toward the Ninevites, giving them an opportunity to do *teshuvah* and ultimately not destroying them.

As noted, Yonah genuinely believes in Hashem. But true *emunah* means something more than just acknowledging Hashem's existence and His greatness. A deeper sense of *emunah* is achieved by also believing in Hashem's mercy in terms of His interaction with the world, even if we don't understand His ways. It is this type of *emunah* that Yonah was lacking. Yonah is introduced as the "son of Amitai," a phrase that can also suggest a title "Man of Truth."⁶ It is precisely because he is a "man of truth" that Yonah questions the entire concept of repentance and its impact.

bad people. We may contrast this to the Book of Iyov, which describes the terrible suffering of a good man and his conversations about it, addressing the topic of *tzaddik v'ra lo* — why bad things happen to good people — otherwise known as theodicy. Yonah cannot understand why the people of Nineveh are deserving of Hashem's mercy. But true belief in Hashem requires not just having complete faith in Him when things make sense and when only the righteous are recipients of His kindness, but also maintaining that same conviction when those who are seemingly undeserving are

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

Yonah 4:10-11

These two verses conclude the Book of Yonah; Yonah's reaction or response to Hashem is not recorded in the book. Generally, silence indicates acceptance and agreement.⁷ However, this particular ending has puzzled many because it seems like a strange conclusion, since there seems no closure. In fact, though, there is a clear closing message. Hashem declares: *I can have mercy on my creation even if you do not understand it. To have true faith in Me you must accept that.* This is actually similar to Hashem's final message to Iyov. Hashem rhetorically asks Iyov where he was at the time of creation of the world and how he could possibly expect to understand Hashem's ways. In essence, Hashem taught Iyov that His ways are incomprehensible to man.

True *emunah* means something more than just acknowledging Hashem's existence and His greatness. A deeper sense of *emunah* is achieved by also believing in Hashem's mercy in terms of His interaction with the world, even if we don't understand His ways.

To him, Hashem's mercy and kindness cannot coexist with the notion of true justice and fairness.

Often, when people lose their faith, it is because they think and claim that Hashem is not benevolent. They question and doubt how Hashem could allow something — typically a terrible tragedy, whether personal or communal — to occur. They maintain that whatever happened should not have been allowed by Hashem to happen. Yonah, however, presents the opposite reaction: the tragedy at hand does not, in fact, take place when he believes it should have. In this sense, the Book of Yonah is about the theological question of *rasha v'tov lo* — why good things can happen to

recipients of His benevolence. This is what Yonah could not come to terms with.

This point is underscored in the very last verse of the book. Hashem says that even when His creations may be undeserving, He responds to repentance and shows compassion.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵתָּה חֲסֵת עַל הַקִּיקַיִן אֲשֶׁר לֹא עֲמַלְתָּ בּוֹ וְלֹא גִדַּלְתּוֹ שָׁבוֹן לַיְלָה הָיָה וּבֶן לַיְלָה אָבָה. וְאֲנִי לֹא אֲחֹס עַל נִינְוָה הָעִיר הַגְּדוֹלָה אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ בָּהּ הַרְבֵּה מִשְׁתִּים עֲשָׂרָה רְבוֹ אָדָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע בֵּין זְמִינּוֹ לְשִׁמְאֵלוֹ וּבִהְמָה רָבָה.
Hashem said, "You took pity on the kikayon for which you did not labor, not did you make it grow; which materialized overnight and perished overnight. And I — shall I not take pity

אֵיפֹה הָיִיתָ בְּיַסְדֵי אֶרֶץ הַגֵּד אִם יָדַעְתָּ בִּינָה.

Where were you when I founded the earth? Tell if you know understanding.

Job 38:4

This same type of question — and lesson — ends the Book of Yonah. Hashem tells Yonah He is merciful on His creations even if Yonah cannot understand why.

On Yom Kippur afternoon, after finishing the Book of Yonah, we conclude the haftarah by appending some verses from the Book of Micah. We don't end the Yom Kippur reading with an open question. Instead, we read the verses from Micah that complete Hashem's list of His thirteen attributes of mercy, as a response to Yonah's anger against Hashem and to his own edited version of the thirteen

attributes, expressed earlier in the book.⁸

מי א-ל כְּמוֹךָ נִשְׂא עוֹן וְעֵבֶר עַל פְּשַׁע לְשֹׂאֲרֵית
נִחַלְתּוֹ לֹא הִחְזִיק לְעַד אַפּוֹ כִּי חָפֵץ חֶסֶד הוּא.
יָשׁוּב יְרַחֲמֵנו יִכְבֵּשׂ עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בַּמַּצְלוֹת
יָם כָּל חַטְאוֹתָם. תִּתֵּן אֶמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב חֶסֶד
לְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתָּינוּ מִימֵי קֶדֶם.

Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity and remitting transgression; who has not maintained His wrath forever against the remnant of His own people, because He loves graciousness! He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will keep faith with Jacob, loyalty to Abraham, as You promised on oath to our fathers, in days gone by.

Micah 7:18-20

On Yom Kippur, we bring this deeper lesson of *emunah* back to *teshuvah*, which works even when it perhaps should not. Through the verses of the Book of Micah we profess our faith that Hashem has mercy and will bestow it upon us, even if we are not fully deserving, something that only Hashem can do. Indeed, “*Who is a God like you*” — *who else can do this?* The verses from the Book of Micah

constitute a proclamation of faith. And in as much as these verses are read at the conclusion of the Book of Yonah, we may understand Yonah’s silence as reflecting his ultimate acquiescence and acknowledgement of Hashem’s benevolence in accepting *teshuvah*, even from the otherwise undeserving.

We learn from Yonah that Hashem is benevolent, and that we must believe in that attribute as the basis for *teshuvah*. True faith means believing that Hashem may behave in ways that we cannot comprehend, such as by accepting *teshuvah*; that is the message of faith which Yonah teaches us. As Yom Kippur nears its end, we must acknowledge that we have faith in Hashem and faith that this *teshuvah* process works, even when this doesn’t seem to make sense. The Book of Yonah proposes the need for a fair standard for justice and raises doubt about the *teshuvah* process, but also presents a firm statement of faith that *teshuvah* works and that it works precisely because we have faith in Hashem and His mercy and kindness even toward the undeserving. Yonah knows that Hashem is a benevolent

God and that is what he initially challenges; the lesson he experiences sets an example for us. It is from Yonah’s ultimately clear message about true faith that we learn about the power of *teshuvah*.

Endnotes

1. *Yoma* 86b.
2. See also *Mekhilta* Bo, Hakdamah; Malbim 1:2, *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 10.
3. *Shemot Rabbah* 4:5. Note that the Midrash says that Yonah was different in that he didn’t verbalize his refusal; he simply got up and ran away.
4. See Radak 1:10.
5. *Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer* 10; *Yalkut Shimoni* 550.
6. The description “the son of Amitai” in 1:1 can be understood to mean that Yonah’s father was named Amitai, or that Yonah was a man of truth (root: e.m.t.), similar to someone who is called a “ben/bat Torah,” meaning not that s/he is the son or daughter of Torah, but that s/he is a Torah-learned or a Torah-inspired person.
7. See *Yevamot* 87b where we are taught that silence is akin to an admission or an acknowledgment.
8. See *Yonah* 4:2.

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SUKKOS AND EMUNAH

As we enjoy sitting in the Sukkah under the “shade of *emunah*” (*Zohar, Vayikra* 3:103b), I would like to reveal a dimension of *emunah* that may differ somewhat from our standard understanding. In Samurai tradition there is a concept called *bushido*, The Way of the Warrior. This creed requires absolute, unconditional loyalty to one’s leader. There is no place in this system for a man to confront the problem of personal responsibility, of individual values different from, if not actually contrary to those of his society. The incredible story of Lt. Hiroo Onoda is a graphic illustration of this tradition. Lieutenant Onoda was an Imperial Japanese Army intelligence officer who was sent to the Philippines in 1944 to conduct operations against Allied forces. When the war ended in 1945, he did not surrender, since he assumed

that leaflets dropped ordering Japanese troops to surrender were Allied propaganda. Despite repeated attempts to contact Onoda and convince him that the war was over, he continued his military activities. Since he never received an official command from an authorized military commander, he continued the task that had been given to him years earlier. It was not until Onoda’s former commander, Major Yoshimi Taniguchi, was brought to the Philippines and ordered Onoda to surrender that he was willing to give up the fight. This occurred on the 9th of March 1974 (!!), 29 years after he first arrived in the Philippines. This is one of the most extraordinary examples of the Samurai ideal of loyalty I have ever heard. My revered teacher, Rav Moshe Shapiro zt”l, always translated the word *emunah* as “loyalty,” *ne’eman* as “trustworthy”

or “secure.” He based this translation on numerous verses throughout the Tanakh, where it is clear that the word does not mean only “belief,” but also loyalty, security and trustworthiness. For example:

לֹא־כֵן עֲבָדִי מֹשֶׁה בְּכָל־בֵּיתִי נֶאֱמָן הוּא:
Not so with my servant Moses, for he is trustworthy ne’eman one in all my house.
Bamidbar 12:7

וַיְדִי מֹשֶׁה כְּבָדִים וַיִּקְחוּ־אָבֹן וַיִּשְׁימוּ תַחְתָּיו
וַיֵּשֶׁב עָלֶיהָ וְאַהֲרֹן וְחֹזֵר תָּמְכוּ בְיָדָיו מִזֶּה אֶחָד
וּמִזֶּה אֶחָד וַיְהִי יָדָיו אֶמּוּנָה עַד־בֹּא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ:
But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat on it; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady emunah until the going down of the sun.
Shmot 17:12

והקימתי לי כהן נאמן באשר בלבבי ובנפשי
יעשה ובניתי לו בית נאמן והתהלך לפני
משיחי כל-הימים:

*And I will raise me up a loyal ne'eman
priest, who shall do according to that
which is in my heart and in my mind;
and I will build him a secure ne'eman
house; and he shall walk before my
anointed forever.*

Shmuel 1:2:35

ותקעתיו יתד במקום נאמן והיה לכסא כבוד
לביית אביו:

*And I will fasten him as a tent peg in a
secure ne'eman place; and he shall be for
a glorious throne to his father's house.*

Isaiah 22:23

The Torah, however, does not laud loyalty as a virtue independent of all other considerations. The Torah requires truth as a condition of that loyalty. Onoda's loyalty was impressive, but it was not loyalty to the truth. In the siddur we find that the words truth and *emunah* are juxtaposed several times.

אמת ואמונה חק ולא יעבר

*Truth and emunah, a statute that will
not pass away...*

Shacharit

אמת ואמונה כל זאת, וקיים עלינו, כי הוא ה'
אלקינו ואין זולתו, ואנחנו ישראל עמו.

*All of this is truth and emunah, and
established upon us...*

Maariv

מנוחת אהבה ונדבה, מנוחת אמת ואמונה
*A rest of love and generosity, a rest of
truth and emunah....*

Mincha for Shabbat

The holy *Zohar* even describes truth and *emunah* as a married couple:

*"...he is truth, emet, and she is loyalty,
emunah..."*

Zohar, Re'aya Meheimnah 3:230a

Rabbeinu Bachya emphasizes this idea in his article on *emunah* when he says that "included in *emunah* is that a

person should love the truth, choose it and speak it..." (*Cad HaKemach, Emunah*). What we have seen until this point is that *emunah* requires *emet*; loyalty must be tied to the truth and is only meaningful and moral if allied with truth.

We will now see that the reverse is also true; *emet*, truth, needs *emunah*, loyalty, in order to survive and in order to have an impact on our lives and on the world.

Emunah is listed by the Rambam as the first of all the 613 commandments (*Sefer Hamitzvot* 1) and is the first halachah in his *Mishneh Torah* (*Yesodei HaTorah* 1:1), where he also states that "knowing this [that there is a G-d] is a positive commandment" (*ibid* 1:6). Some of the commentaries consider it problematic to list belief as an individual commandment, since it is the logical prerequisite of all the commandments — without a commander one cannot possibly have a commandment (Ramban, *Critique of Book of Mitzvot*, *Mitzvah* 1, Abarbanel, *Rosh Amanah*, Ch. 4). Various answers have been suggested to this critique, but I believe that the approach of Rav Menachem Mendel Schneersohn (Tzemach Tzedek) is the most relevant to our discussion.

אמנם הרמ"ם וסיעתו ר' יונה וסיעתו שמנו זה במנין המצוות עעמם כי הציוי הוא על העמקת הדעת וההתבוננות בדבר זה הידוע שע"ז יתכן ציוי כי גם שהדבר ידוע אעפ"כ אם לא יתבונן תמיד בזה ויסיח דעתו לדברים אחרים לא יועיל כלום ואפ"י שיחשוב זאת במחשבה והרהור לבד אינו כלום אלא צריך להעמיק דעתו דוקא ואז יפתחו המדות וכו' וע"ז נאמר וידעת היום והשבות אל לבבך.

However, Rambam and his school of thought... do include emunah as a mitzvah; their reasoning is that the mitzvah involves deepening one's understanding and contemplation of that which one already instinctively

knows. And to do this one can indeed be commanded. For even a truth that one already knows, if one does not think about it and contemplate it; if one's mind is completely distracted from this truth; then the knowledge of this truth is useless. And even if one does think about it, that is not sufficient, one must invest the intellect in deep thought about this truth, and then it will have an impact on one's character and personality. And regarding this it states, (Devarim 4:39), "Know therefore this day, and consider it in your heart, that the Lord is G-d in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath; there is no other."...

Derech Mitzvotcha, The Mitzvah of Emunah in Hashem

The Tzemach Tzedek maintains that knowing truth intellectually is not sufficient, it must be something we think about and meditate upon; it must be what directs our behavior and character. In other words, to the same degree that loyalty must be married to truth, truth must be married to loyalty. Without being devoted and loyal to the truths that we know, those truths remain theoretical, ephemeral and without impact.

Another dimension of *emunah* is its ability to reveal truth in this world through the power and courage of those loyal to the truth. When Rambam defines the commandment of *kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of the Name of G-d, he writes that the mitzvah requires us to publicize the truth of our *emunah*, not to be fearful of any tyrant or of any threat whatsoever in following this truth and not even to give the impression that we have denied Hashem, even when internally we are still loyal (*Sefer HaMitzvot*, *Mitzvah* 9). So, the prestige, honor and absolute nature of the truth is manifested by its followers' loyalty, courage and stubborn

attachment to the truth through all circumstances. Throughout history the Jewish people have been the bearers of the torch of the Torah's truth by not giving in to those who wish to see Judaism disappear. Our survival and the survival of Judaism have shown the eternity and power of truth by the persistence and power of our *emunah*, our loyalty.

Finally, *emunah* connects us to the redemption and to Olam Haba, eternity. As the Midrash states:

אז ישיר, ויאמינו בה'. לפיכך זכו לירש את הארץ. אתה מוצא בשכר אמנה שהאמין אברהם אבינו בה', ירש העולם הזה והעולם הבא, שנאמר (בראשית טו, ו): "והאמין בה' ויחשבה לו צדקה". וכן (שמות ד, לא): "ויאמן העם". וכתוב (תהלים לא, כד): "אמונים נוצר ה' ומשלם על יתר עושה גאוה". וכן במשה (שמות יז, יב): "ויהי ידיו אמונה עד בא השמש". ואומר (תהלים קיח, כ): "זה השער לה' צדיקים יבואו בו". אלו בעלי אמנה, שנאמר (ישעיהו כו, ב): "פתחו שערים ויבא גוי צדיק שומר אמונים".

Then sang Moshe (Shmot 15:1). They had emunah in Hashem (ibid. 14:31) and therefore merited acquiring the land. You find that because of his emunah in Hashem, our patriarch Avraham inherited both this world and the world-to-come, as is written: And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness (Bereshit 15:16). Similarly, because the people believed (Shmot 4:31), it is written: The Lord preserves the faithful... (Tehillim 31:24)... Scripture states: This is the gate of the Lord, the righteous shall enter it (Tehillim 118:20). Who are the righteous ones that will enter? The

faithful ones, as it is said: Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation that keeps emunim faithfulness may enter in (Isa. 26:2)..."

Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach 15

I believe that this is a slightly different understanding of *emunah* — as faith and confidence but also hope. The Midrash informs us that having confidence that Hashem will indeed redeem us is what will cause the redemption. It is interesting to note that the word for hope, *tikvah*, is also the word for string, as in *tikvat hashani* (Yehoshua 2:21), or line, *kav*, (e.g. Isaiah 28:10) because our hope for the redemption is indeed the line that connects us to the redemption. Similarly, when we lose something and give up hope (*ye'ush*) then we sever the connection to the lost object. If the owner continues to hope for its return, he is, so to speak, still connected to his possession by the line, *kav*, of hope, *tikvah*. The Jewish people have never given up hope of redemption or of return to the Land of Israel and therefore, wherever we are, and whatever situation we are in, the thread of hope still connects us to our future.

Rav Yeshaya Halevi Horowitz describes the desert journeys of the Jewish people as the "pillar of *emunah*" (*Shnei Luchot HaBrit, Masechet Taanit, Drush Matot-Masei* 18). He bases this idea on Hashem's praise of the Jewish peoples' loyalty for following Him into the desert:

וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֵלַי לֵאמֹר. הֲלֹךְ וְקִרְאתָ בְּאָזְנִי
יְרוּשָׁלַם לֵאמֹר כֹּה אָמַר ה' זְכַרְתִּי לָךְ חֶסֶד נְעוּ

רִיךְ אֶהְבֵת כְּלוּלְתֶיךָ לְכַתֵּךְ אֶחָרִי בַמִּדְבָּר בְּאָרְץ
לֹא זְרוּעָה. קֹדֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לָהּ רִאשִׁית תְּבוּאָתָהּ
כָּל אֲכָלְיוֹ יִאָשְׁמוּ רְעָה תָּבֵא אֲלֵיהֶם נְאֻם ה':
And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus said the Lord; I remember you, the devotion of your youth, your love like a bride, when you went after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not cultivated. Israel is holy to Hashem, and the first fruits of his produce; all who devour him shall be held guilty; evil shall come upon them, said Hashem.

Yirmiyahu 2:1-3

Emunah is particularly necessary during the long night of exile. As the Talmud states:

אמר רבה בר חנינא סבא משמיה דרב כל שלא אמר אמת ויציב שחרית ואמת ואמונה ערבית לא יצא ידי חובתו שנאמר (תהלים צב, ג) להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות.
Rabba bar Chinena Sava said in the name of Rav: One who did not recite: True and Firm, emet veyatziv, at the beginning of the blessing of redemption that follows Shema in the morning prayer, and: True and Trustworthy, emet ve'emunah, in the evening prayer, he did not fulfill his obligation, as it is stated: "To declare Your kindness in the morning and Your faith (Emunatcha) in the nights" (Tehillim 92:3)."

Berachot 12a

In the morning, one must mention Hashem's loving-kindness, while in the evening one is required to emphasize the aspect of faith. As Rashi explains:

וברכת אמת ויציב כולה על חסד שעשה עם אבותינו היא שהוציאם ממצרים ובקע להם



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הים והעבירים וברכת אמת ואמונה מדבר בה אף על העתידות שאנו מצפים שיקיים לנו הבטחתו ואמונתו לגאלנו מיד מלכים ומיד עריצים ולשום נפשנו בחיים ולהדריכנו על במות אויבינו כל אלה הנסים התדירים תמיד: *The blessing of emet veyatziv is completely about the kindness that He did to our ancestors, whom He took out of Egypt and for whom He split the Red sea... Emet veemunah speaks about the future, that we look toward Hashem fulfilling His promises and His faithfulness to redeem us from the kingdoms and the oppressors and to give us life, to cause us to tread over the forts of our enemies, all the miracles that are with us always.*

Rashi, Berachot 12a

Emunah is a bond of love between Hashem and the Jewish people:

וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי לְעוֹלָם וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי בְצֶדֶק
 וּבְמִשְׁפָּט וּבְחֶסֶד וּבְרַחֲמִים: וְאֶרְשָׁתִּיךָ לִי
 בְּאֵמוּנָה וְיָדַעַת אֶת־ה':

And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in grace, and

in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness, be'emunah; and you shall know Hashem.

Hoshea 2:21-22

However, the bond of *emunah* is not a unilateral relationship, one that only involved our loyalty to Hashem. *Emunah* also involves Hashem's loyalty to us. The Sifrei comments on the verse in Ha'azinu (Devarim 32:4) that describes Hashem as "God of faith" "*Kel Emunah*" and says that Hashem has faith in His world, which is why He created it — *Shehe'emin b'olamo uvera'o* — He believed in His world and created it (*Sifrei*, Ha'azinu Piskah 2). It is clear that the word *he'emin* does not mean "believe" in the sense of apprehending its existence, rather it means that Hashem created the world because He had (and still has) confidence that it would succeed. Hashem loyally sustains the world and ensures the continued existence of the Jewish people, because He knows that we are a good investment. We

express this idea every single morning when we end the *Modeh Ani* prayer with the phrase, *rabbah emunatecha* — abundant is Your faith. It is a very optimistic and encouraging way to start the day by affirming the fact that Hashem, our Creator has confidence and trust in us.

Our ancestors followed Hashem loyally into the desert and dwelt under His clouds of glory. They marched through the desert of our long exile and were loyal to Hashem and His Torah, and they had hope even in the darkest of times. We too, when we dwell in our *sukkot* manifest this same loyalty, confidence and hope and hence our *sukkot* may correctly be called "shelters of *emunah*." May the merit of our study of *emunah* during the night of exile bring us to the moment when we will tell of Hashem's kindness in the morning of the redemption (Rashi, *Berachot* 12a) and to see Him "spread over us His *sukkah* of peace."

Introducing Divine Providence (continued from page 10)

against supernatural forces such as witchcraft, so too they must take natural forces (*teva*) into account. If this interpretation is correct, then, perhaps R. Chanina's statement that no man bruises his finger here on earth unless it was so decreed against him in heaven may reflect his own personal reality; it does not definitively point to an all-encompassing providence.

2. While this passage indicates that small annoying occurrences are sometimes the result of divine providence it may not imply that all such occurrences are providential.

3. This explains the language used in *birkat ha-gomel*, הגומל לחייבים טובות שגמלני שגמלני (Who bestows good things upon the guilty, Who has bestowed every goodness upon me). Why do we call ourselves guilty? In fact, the *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 376) rules explicitly that one may not say that he has

not been punished as he deserves (לא יאמר) אדם: לא נפרעתי כפי מעשי, או כיוצא בדברים אלו, (שאל יפתח פיו לשון exactly this when we proclaim our guilt and unworthiness in *birkat ha-gomel*? The answer, however, is that in this case of a near-death experience, God has warned the person that he is deserving of punishment, and, accordingly he must take note of this, as Rashi writes: - לא הרגן בידוע שנודמנו לו להרוג אותו - והראה לו הקב"ה שחטא אלא שנעשה לו נס.

4 Some thinkers may distinguish between death, where God does not allow free will to cause the demise of someone undeserving, and other forms of pain, where free will can cause undeserved pain.

5 Along similar lines, *Tosafot Yeshanim* question Tosafot's assumption that a person can terminate their own life in light of the

Mishna in *Avot* (4:22) that states a person lives against their own will (על כרחך אתה חי).

6 It is not clear that *Chovot ha-Levavot* would even allow for that. In *Sha'ar* 4, *Bitachon* ch. 3, he writes:

שאין ביד אחד מהברואים להועיל את נפשו ולא להזיקה ולא לזולתו, כי אם ברשות הבורא יתברך

This line indicates that a person cannot even harm themselves without God's approval. However, one could respond simply that if a person goes out without a coat, God may allow them to get sick. Thus, their getting sick was with God's permission, but it is not *bi-dei Shamayim* in the sense that it was not part of God's initial plan. Rather, their decision to act negligently resulted in God's allowing them to get sick. However, should they have acted responsibly, then they would not get sick unless it was part of God's original plan.



SARAH AND CHANA: TWO MODELS FOR PRAYER ON ROSH HASHANA

If we were to ask a child what they might expect to learn about from the Torah reading at shul on Rosh Hashana, the child might respond with an answer related to shofar, the creation of the world, or details related to the holiday itself. Most children would be surprised to learn that we do not actually read about these ideas, but rather about two famous and inspiring women: Sarah Imeinu and Chana, two of the *sheva neviot* (seven prophetesses). This choice is not one that came without debate. Indeed, *Masechet Megillah*, 31a, records a dispute about the Torah reading and haftara of Rosh Hashana.

בְּרֵאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי וּמִפְטִירֵינוּ הֵבֵן
יִקְרֶה לִּי אֶפְרַיִם וְיֵשׁ אֹמְרִים וְה' פָּקַד אֶת שָׂרָה
וּמִפְטִירֵינוּ בַּחֲנָה.

On Rosh Hashana, the Torah reading is, "In the seventh month etc. [Bamidbar 29:1-6] and the haftara is "Ephraim is dear to me" [Jeremiah 31]. There are those that say "And Hashem

remembered Sarah" [Bereishit 21] and the haftarah is [the story of] Chana [Shmuel I 1:2-10]

The Gemara explains that the first opinion holds that the Torah reading for Rosh Hashana should be from Bamidbar, 29:1–6, which details the korbanot offered in the Mikdash on Rosh Hashana, while the haftara should be from Sefer Yirmiyahu 31:1–20, which contains pesukim that remind the reader of Hashem's love for the Jewish people. The second opinion states that the Torah reading should be from Bereishit 21, which describes how Hashem remembered Sarah and granted her a child, while the haftara should be from Shmuel I 1:2–10, which tells the story of Chana. Rashi, commenting on this Gemara, explains that the reasoning behind this second opinion's choice of haftara is that Chana was "remembered" on Rosh Hashana.

Rashi's comment is based on a Gemara in *Rosh Hashana* 11a, which states that Sarah, Rachel and Chana were all remembered on Rosh Hashana, namely that they conceived on Rosh Hashana. Rabbi Elazar explains that this understanding is based on a connection utilizing the word *zechira*. This term is used to describe Hashem remembering Chana (*vayizkereha Hashem*, Shmuel I 1:19) and Rachel (*vayizkor Elokim et Rachel*, Bereishit 30:22). It is also used with regard to Rosh Hashana itself, "*Shabbaton zichron teruah*" — It is a day of rest "remembered" through the blast of the shofar (Vayikra 23:24). Rabbi Elazar continues to explain that since the word *pakad*, remembrance, is then used to describe Chana and Sarah, we can derive that the way Chana was remembered on Rosh Hashana, so too Sarah was remembered on Rosh Hashana.

When examining both of these

passages in the Gemara, we must ask two important questions: Why were the stories of Sarah and Chana selected over the first option presented in the *braita* to serve as our Torah reading for Rosh Hashana? Second, what can we learn from both of these stories as inspiration for ourselves on Rosh Hashana?

I would like to propose two potential understandings as to why we read about Sarah and Chana on Rosh Hashana, rather than reading about the communal korbanot offered and Hashem's love for Bnei Yisrael. According to the Mishna, *Rosh Hashana* 1:1-2, the first of Tishrei is a significant date for many reasons. The first of Tishrei is a marker for counting years, as well as many of the agricultural mitzvot of Eretz Yisrael, namely *shemita*, *yovel*, *orla* and *maaser*. In addition, it is also the date where all the creations of the world are judged. The Mishna states:

בְּרֵאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה כָּל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם עוֹבְרִין לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תהלים לג) הַיּוֹצֵר יַחַד לִבָּם, הַמְבִּין אֶל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם.

On Rosh Hashana, all creatures pass before Him like sheep [benei maron], as it is stated: "He Who fashions their hearts alike, Who considers all their deeds" (Psalms 33:15).

According to Tosfot Yom Tov, *Rosh Hashana* 1:2, the imagery of sheep is significant in this Mishna. The same way that a shepherd analyzes his sheep one by one, so too, Hashem analyzes and examines each individual, one by one, on Rosh Hashana. This theme is included in the tefillot of Rosh Hashana and is emphasized specifically in the tefillah of U'Netaneh Tokef, one of the highlights of the Chazzan's repetition of Mussaf Shemoneh Esrai. U'Netaneh Tokef elaborates on this

idea, detailing it in a chilling and inspiring manner:

וְכָל בְּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבְרוּן לְפָנָיו כְּבָנֵי מְרוֹן. כְּבִקְרַת רוּחָה עֶדְרוֹ. מֵעֵבִיר צִאֲנוּ תַּחַת שִׁבְטוֹ. כֵּן תֵּעֲבִיר וְתִסְפֹּר וְתִמְנֶה. וְתִפְקֹד נַפְשׁ כָּל חַי וְתִחְתֹּף קִצְבָה לְכָל בְּרִיּוֹתָיו. וְתִכְתֹּב אֶת גְּזֵר דִּינָם:

As a shepherd inspects his flock, making his sheep pass under his rod, so do You cause to pass, count, number, and review the soul of every living being, determining the lifespan of every creature; and You record the decree of their judgment.

Perhaps this focus helps us understand the choice of our Torah reading and haftara. Rosh Hashana is a day that is more primarily focused on the judgement of the individual, as opposed to the judgement of the nation. Therefore, the Torah reading and haftara are specifically focused on the stories of individuals, stories that give us true examples of how closely Hashem is involved in each and every individual's life.

Another significant theme of Rosh Hashana is the concept of *zichronot*. This idea also plays a large role in our Rosh Hashana tefillot, since one of the three primary brachot in the Mussaf Shemoneh Esrai is *zichronot*. The bracha of *Zichronot*, as well as the brachot of *Malchuyot* and *Shofarot*, are composed of pesukim taken from all three portions of Tanach, serving as proof-texts of the larger concept and themes of the day. Perhaps the Torah reading and haftara fit into this concept of proof-texts as well. They are an elaboration of one of the significant themes of the day, two examples that demonstrate Hashem's strength in the area of *zichronot* and the impact this power could have on our lives.

The choice of using these two texts, stories of individuals who were remembered for the good, reminds us that each Rosh Hashana presents a new opportunity for the individual to be judged anew, due to Hashem's *koach hazikaron*.

A deeper analysis of both of these stories, however, finds that they contain a tremendous insight into the power of tefillah, perhaps making them appropriate to our reading on Rosh Hashana as well. When we look closely at both of these stories, we might notice that there is a significant difference in the sequence of events leading up to the remembrance of Sarah and Chana. In the story of Sarah Imeinu, we might notice that there is an absence of tefillah in the *peshat* of the pesukim. We assume Sarah must have davened as a barren woman yearning for a child, based on the midrash, *Bereishit Rabba* 45:4, and Gemara, *Yevamot* 64a, which emphasize that the reason Hashem made the Avot and Imahot barren was that Hashem desires the prayers of tzadikkim. However, from a midrashic standpoint, Sarah's conception came both as a response to the tefillot of Avraham and Sarah, as well as a response to Avraham's tefillah for another with a similar need. Rashi, *Bereishit* 20:1, citing the Gemara, *Bava Batra* 92a, explains that the juxtaposition of the story of Avimelech and Hashem remembering Sarah is not happenstance, but is meant to teach us an important lesson: When we pray for mercy on behalf of another when we are also in need of that very thing, we will first receive a positive response from Hashem. Avimelech desired that his wife conceive again, and it was Avraham's tefillah for him that made it possible for Sarah to conceive as well.

Chana's story, on the other hand, seems to be the exact opposite. Chana's story heavily emphasizes the prayer experience that she goes through prior to her conception of Shmuel HaNavi. Malbim explains that there are four key elements to Chana's tefillah that made it accepted by Hashem. The pesukim, Shmuel I 1:10-11 state:

וְהִיא מָרַת נַפְשָׁהּ וַתִּתְפַּלֵּל עַל ה' וּבָכָה תְּבָכָה.
וַתִּדְרֹךְ נֶדֶר וַתֹּאמֶר ה' צֶבֶךָ-אֹת אִם רָאָה תִרְאֶה
בְּעֵינֵי אֲמָתְךָ וּזְכַרְתָּנִי וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת אֲמָתְךָ
וְנָתַתָּה לְאֲמָתְךָ יָרֵעַ אֲנָשִׁים וְנִתְּתִיו לָהּ כָּל יְמֵי
חַיֶּיהָ וּמִזְרָהּ לֹא יַעֲלֶה עַל רֹאשׁוֹ.

And she was bitter in her soul, she prayed to Hashem, cried heavily, and made an oath and said, Hashem, Lord of Hosts if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the Lord for all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head.

Malbim explains that each of these phrases in the pasuk is a key component of what made her tefillah successful. 1) She was *marat nefesh* (bitter in her soul) and Hashem listens to the prayers of those who are broken-hearted and vulnerable. 2) She prayed to Hashem, namely that she had complete *kavanah*, praying directly to him, with no hope in anyone else. 3) Chana cried deeply from her soul, and tears are a direct access point to Hashem — through the gate of tears in Shamayaim that is never sealed. 4) Last, she made an oath, an acceptance upon herself, which always helps in a time of need.

According to Malbim, Commentary to Shmuel I 1:9, the tefillah process mentioned in this pasuk is the first time that Chana prayed completely for a child. Until now, Chana had

relied on the prayers of her husband, Elkana, who she viewed as a righteous individual. She believed that his tefillot were powerful enough to grant her a child. However, upon hearing his response to her despair, Chana understood that Elkana was no longer praying with the fervor they needed to be granted a child, and so she took it upon herself to pray for herself — which made the difference. Abarbanel explicitly says that it is these tefillot that cause Hashem to grant Chana a child, as he explains that the phrase “*vayizkereha Hashem*” does not only mean that Hashem remembered her, but also means Hashem remembered her prayers and granted her a child.

Comparing these two stories highlights an important, fundamental difference in what may have prompted Hashem to remember both women. For Chana, the opening of her womb seems to be due to her own efforts toward Hashem, her own sacrifice and her complete devotion to the depth of her tefillah. For Sarah, Hashem's response was not only due to Sarah's own tefillot, but also Avraham's tefillah for another human being. The care and compassion demonstrated by Avraham toward Avimelech not only impacted Avimelech, it also prompted a difference in their own situation as well.

Another difference in analyzing these two stories reveals two modalities of prayer as well. Relying on the midrashic understanding that Sarah did pray for a child, we might view Sarah as a model of private prayer, prayer that is done independently by the individual with only Hashem knowing about it. It is done in quiet and in secret, hidden from the view of others, the way that Sarah's prayer is hidden in the *peshat* of the text. Chana's tefillah, on the other hand, is

a tefillah that was done publicly, in a place where others could see. It's the kind of prayer that has the potential to inspire others and move others to participate in the experience as well.

When looking at these stories together, we are presented with many models of prayer that have the potential to prompt Hashem's *koach hazikaron*. The story of Chana highlights the power of an individual's own tefillah, especially when the tefillah emanates from a place of sincerity, dedication and depth. The story of Sarah teaches us about the power of an individual's prayer for another, and the impact it can have for both the individual and the one being prayed for. Together, these women teach us about the power of prayer, whether publicly or privately, for the world to see or for only ourselves to experience.

Perhaps these teachings provide us with a third reason as to why these stories were selected to be read, together, on Rosh Hashana. These stories give those of us davening — whether in shul or at home — on Rosh Hashana inspiration as to what our tefillah can look like, and hope that our tefillot might be answered. They push us as individuals to remember to pray sincerely for ourselves, as well as for those sitting around us. Their contrast highlights that there is not one model for Hashem's *koach hazikaron*, but rather that Hashem has the ability to alter the decree of each individual, *ba'asher hu sham* — each person on an individual basis.

May we be *zoche* that through our collective tefillot, both for ourselves and for others, on this Rosh Hashana to find all our tefillot answered *l'tovah*.



THE TWO NEW YEARS & THE TWO “NEW BEGINNINGS”: NISSAN VS. TISHREI

Someday the world will have a new beginning. Messiah will come. Nations will no longer lift up swords against other nations nor will they learn the art of war anymore. Peace and prosperity will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas and the knowledge of God’s rulership over the entire world will be the spiritual heritage of all mankind.

It is surely tempting to seek the date for this global transformation. If only we knew the time of Messiah’s arrival! But much as we have struggled to find clues to the time for the fulfillment of this fundamental belief of our faith, we have been told that this information remains part of the biblical category of, “The hidden things belong to the Lord our God.” [Deuteronomy 29:28]

Moreover, the Talmud tells us it is sinful to attempt calculations predicting the end of days:

א”ר שמואל בר נחמני אמר ר’ יונתן תיפח עצמן של מחשבי קיצין שהיו אומרים כיון

שהגיע את הקץ ולא בא שוב אינו בא אלא חכה לו שנאמר אם יתמהמה חכה לו

R. Samuel b. Nahmani said in the name of R. Jonathan: Blasted be the bones of those who calculate the end. For they would say, since the predetermined time has arrived, and yet he has not come, he will never come. But [even so], wait for him, as it is written, Though he tarry, wait for him.

Sanhedrin 97b

Human calculations may be mistaken. Deferred hope may lead to national despair. Better to remain with the certainty of faith that Messiah *will* come than to permit the possibility for the desolation of hopelessness brought on by unfulfilled erroneous expectations. The history of failed messiahs, most powerfully illustrated by the tragic story of Sabbatai Tzvi, surely validate the Talmudic prohibition against predicting an exact date for Messiah’s arrival.

In light of all this, it is certainly

amazing to find a Talmudic dispute centering around the date marking our final redemption — true, not by year, but even more specifically by actual month.

The source is a passage in the Babylonian Talmud, *Rosh Hashanah* (10b – 11a):

תניא רבי אליעזר אומר בתשרי נברא העולם בתשרי נולדו אבות בתשרי מתו אבות בפסח נולד יצחק בראש השנה נפקדה שרה רחל וחנה בראש השנה יצא יוסף מבית האסורין בר”ה בטלה עבודה מאבותינו במצרים בניסן נגאלו בתשרי עתידין ליגאל ר’ יהושע אומר בניסן נברא העולם בניסן נולדו אבות בניסן מתו אבות בפסח נולד יצחק בר”ה נפקדה שרה רחל וחנה בר”ה יצא יוסף מבית האסורין בר”ה בטלה עבודה מאבותינו במצרים בניסן נגאלו בניסן עתידין ליגאל

It has been taught: R. Eliezer says: In Tishrei the world was created; in Tishrei the Patriarchs were born; in Tishrei the Patriarchs died; on Passover Isaac was born; on New Year Sarah, Rachel and Hannah were visited [remembered on



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high to be blessed with having a child]; on the New Year [i.e. in the month of Tishrei but more specifically on the very first day] Joseph went forth from prison; on the New Year the bondage of our ancestors in Egypt ceased [six months before their actual deliverance]; in Nissan they were redeemed but in Tishrei they will be redeemed in the time to come. R. Joshua says: In Nissan the world was created; in Nissan the Patriarchs were born; in Nissan the Patriarchs died; on Passover Isaac was born; on the New Year Sarah, Rachel and Hannah were visited; on the New Year Joseph went forth from prison; on the New Year the bondage of our ancestors ceased in Egypt; in Nissan they were redeemed and in Nissan they will be redeemed in the time to come.

The dispute between these two rabbinic giants revolves around both past and future. It concerns the exact time in terms of month for the events of greatest historic importance. The creation of the world, the birth of the patriarchs [with the exception of Isaac whose birth on Passover is indisputable], and the date for final redemption share the focus of their differing opinions. And we cannot help but wonder, what motivates these scholars to choose either Tishrei or Nissan? Why does each one of them believe that the month they favor is more propitious to have been chosen by God as worthy for these major moments? And, perhaps most striking of all, why ignore the injunction against “reckoning the end” by delving into something as specific as the actual month of final redemption?

The answer is implicit in something that Jewish tradition maintains is a central feature of specific times of the year. Months have their own special meaning. Seasons bring with them specific messages.

Passover is in the spring. Although Jews biblically follow a lunar calendar, it is adjusted with a leap month seven out of 19 years, precisely to ensure that Passover always remains *chag ha-aviv* — a festival of the spring. Spring is a time of love. Passover is the love story between God and the Jewish people, the story of Shir Ha-Shirim, the biblical book of the canon other than the Five Books of Moses selected for communal reading on this holiday.

The Midrash makes clear that God redeemed us in Nissan solely as an act of love. He redeemed us although we did not deserve it. He took us out of the land of Egypt even though we were still far from perfect. Passover was an unearned and unmerited redemption. And that is why it happened in Nissan, the month set aside for God’s attribute of total loving-kindness and grace.

There is another month, though, in which we are meant to deepen an awareness of God’s judgment and justice. It is the month of Tishrei in which God calls us to reflect upon actions. It is when our sins are weighed against our merits. Tishrei is the month of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Tishrei reminds us that we dare not rely on God’s love alone without also acknowledging personal responsibility. God’s kindness dares not be taken for granted; God’s compassion may not be used as exemption from our own obligations.

Where Nissan emphasizes love, Tishrei speaks of law. Where Nissan offers grace, Tishrei demands compliance. Where Nissan emphasizes *rachamim*, Tishrei stresses *din*. These are nothing other than the two aspects of divinity stressed by the two different names of God, Hashem and Elokim.

The two rabbis, Rabbi Eliezer and

Rabbi Joshua, dispute the relative importance and relevance of these two months for the Jewish people — as well as for the world.

There is a remarkable synergy between the names of these two rabbis and the ideals they espouse in this controversy. Names have profound meaning. In the words of the Bible, “As his name, so is he” [1 Samuel 25:25]. Both rabbis have a Hebrew word for God in their name. The first two letters of Eliezer are the short form of the name Elokim, God in His attribute of strict justice. Joshua — Yehoshuah — begins with the first two letters of the four-letter name of God that represents divine mercy. Rabbi Eliezer is spokesman for the month of Tishrei, the month of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the month of divine judgment. Rabbi Joshua is more attuned to the month of Nissan, the month of Passover, the month in which God chooses to defer the demands of justice to the greater blessings rooted in overriding love.

There are two ways in which the Hebrew language expresses help and deliverance.

וַיִּוֹשַׁע ה' בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם — “And God delivered on that day Israel from the hands of Egypt” [Exodus 14:30] reflects on the meaning of the word *yeshua*. When Moses feared what would happen to the Israelites as the Egyptian army approached, with no seeming possibility for escape, the Lord reassured him. Moses then told his people:

אַל תִּירָאוּ הַתִּיַצְבוּ וְרֵאוּ אֶת יְשׁוּעַת ה' אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם הַיּוֹם — “Do not fear; stand firm and see the deliverance of the Lord that he will do for you today.” [Ibid. 14:13] — ה' יִלָּחֶם לָכֶם וְאַתֶּם תִּחַרְשׁוּן. — “The Lord will fight for you and you shall remain silent.” [Ibid. 14:14]

The word *yeshua* implies total reliance upon God. It asks nothing of man. It is divine help without human assistance. And it is what Rabbi Joshua [Yehoshuah] believed represents the most fundamental description of our relationship with the Almighty.

Small wonder that Rabbi Joshua felt it necessary to claim that the world was created in Nissan. The world could only come into existence on a foundation of love and the world can only survive as recipient of divine grace, even if unearned. The patriarchs had to be born in Nissan to emphasize that truth. The first redemption, the compassionate deliverance from Egypt commemorated by Passover, had to take place in Nissan. In Nissan we were redeemed in the past and it is in Nissan that we will be redeemed in the future as well. Redemption will come independent of our worthiness. Redemption will be mandated by God's love even if not validated by the strict standards of God's law.

Rabbi Eliezer, the man whose very name emphasized God's identity as strict judge and ruler, could not abide a theology rooted in the message of Nissan. True, at the very outset of our history as a people, we may not have been wise enough to be worthy. We may not yet have sufficiently absorbed God's teachings to *earn* redemption, so the Almighty was willing, for a time, to ignore our deficiencies. He chose, in our early youth, to overlook our failings and to redeem us in Nissan — solely out of love — in the expectation that with the passage of time we would mature sufficiently so that we might finally earn by our own actions what had previously been granted to us as gift.

The redemption of Passover, Rabbi Eliezer admits, came in Nissan but

surely the final messianic redemption — just as the creation of the world as well as the birth of most of our patriarchs — will be a Tishrei experience. In the spirit of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, our deeds will be carefully weighed to decide if we be found worthy. The world itself was created on that premise in Tishrei so that we forever know it is we who must join with God in order to ensure its survival.

Rabbi Eliezer saw God as partner to our own efforts. Remarkably, that is presaged in the second part of his name. *Ezer* means help — but it is the kind of request for assistance which assumes personal effort as well. The first time we meet the word in the Torah is when God informs us that he will create an *ezer k'negdo* for Adam, “a help-meet opposite him” [Genesis 2:18]. Adam was not meant to face the challenges of the world alone. God granted him support. But help is no excuse for personal abdication of responsibility. Eve was not meant to replace Adam but rather to assist him.

So too with regard to God, the Psalm of David calls out:

שְׁמַע ה' יְהוָה עֲזֵר לִי — Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me; O Lord, be my helper. [Psalms 30:11].

We ask God to be our helper, not our sole support. We ask for God's love, but only as reward for our commitment to live up to our obligations to the very best of our abilities.

Tishrei or Nissan are the metaphors used by the Talmudic rabbis who differ about our roles in the drama of the major historic events of our history. And if we might have failed to grasp what these sages really had in mind in their dispute, there is another passage in the Talmud that clarifies

beyond doubt the ultimate meaning of their controversy.

In the tractate of *Sanhedrin*, we are taught:

אמר רב כלו כולו כל הקיצין ואין הדבר תלוי אלא בתשובה ומעשים טובים ושמואל אמר דיו לאבל שיעמוד באבלו כתנאי ר' אליעזר אומר אם ישראל עושין תשובה נגאלין ואם לאו אין נגאלין אמר ליה רבי יהושע אם אין עושין תשובה אין נגאלין אלא הקב"ה מעמיד להן מלך שגזרותיו קשות כהמן וישראל עושין תשובה ומחזירין למוטב.

Rav said: All the predestined dates [for redemption] have passed, and the matter [now] depends only on repentance and good deeds. But Samuel maintained: it is sufficient for a mourner to keep his [period of] mourning. [Israel's sufferings in the exile in themselves sufficiently warrant their redemption, regardless of repentance.] This [very same] matter is disputed by Tannaim: R. Eliezer said: if Israel repent, they will be redeemed; if not, they will not be redeemed. R. Joshua said to him, if they do not repent, will they not be redeemed! [Of course they will, even if they do not deserve to be redeemed.] [Rabbi Eliezer responded] But the Holy One, blessed be He, will set up a king over them, whose decrees shall be as cruel as Haman's, whereby Israel shall engage in repentance, and he will thus bring them back to the right path [so that repentance will in fact be the reason for their final redemption].

Sanhedrin 97b

The argument between Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua for choosing either Tishrei or Nissan was apparently just another way of couching their views about the role of repentance as requirement for redemption. Rabbi Joshua saw messianic fulfillment as a sequel to Passover. The undeserved love shown in the biblical story will similarly be sufficient to bring about the glorious end of days. Nissan will

once again be the key to the final chapter of our history. Rabbi Eliezer, however, believed that our destiny demands our full commitment and cooperation. We have struggled so long throughout our long exile with the hope that we will have earned our final redemption. The end of days will be a divine response to our collective repentance on Tishrei.

Indeed, we cannot know the year of Messiah's coming. However, to decide on the month is to make us aware of the extent of our responsibility. The dispute between the two rabbis deserves a final answer. Who is right? Which view has achieved the approbation of the sages?

Remarkably, Maimonides in his major work of Jewish law, *Mishneh Torah*, clearly chose to side with Rabbi Eliezer:

כל הנביאים כולן צוו על התשובה ואין ישראל נגאלין אלא בתשובה. וכבר הבטיחה תורה שסוף ישראל לעשות תשובה בסוף גלותן ומיד הן נגאלין שנאמר והיה כי יבאו עליך כל הדברים וגו' ושבת עד ה' אלקיך ושב ה' אלקיך וגו':
All the prophets commanded [the people] to repent. Israel will only be redeemed through teshuvah. The Torah has already promised that, ultimately, Israel will repent towards the end of her exile and, immediately, she will be redeemed as [Deuteronomy 30:1-3] states: "There shall come a time when [you will experience] all these things ... and you will return to God, your Lord ... God, your Lord, will bring back your [captivity]."

Maimonides, Laws of Repentance, 7:5

For those of us who believe that the modern-day return of the Jewish people to Israel as well as the reestablishment of the Jewish homeland after almost two millennia of exile carry the seeds of final redemption, there is one last insight into the dispute between the two

rabbis which still bears consideration.

Until now we have understood the view of Rabbi Joshua as linked specifically to the month of Nissan. What is somewhat strange in the Talmudic text in *Rosh Hashanah* further explaining his source for the belief that all the patriarchs were born in Nissan is the following:

ר' יהושע אומר מנין שבניסן נולדו אבות שנאמר (מלכים א ו, א) ויהי בשמונים שנה וארבע מאות שנה לצאת בני ישראל מארץ מצרים בשנה הרביעית בחדש זיו בירח שנוולדו בו זיותני עולם.

R. Joshua said: Whence do we know that the patriarchs were born in Nissan? Because it says, and it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year in the month of Ziv [I Kings VI, 1] — that is, the month in which the brilliant ones [zivtanei] of the world were born.

Rosh Hashanah 11a

Rashi immediately addresses the problem. The month of Ziv is not another name for Nissan. It is in fact Iyar, the month following. How can Rabbi Joshua prove a point for Nissan from a text that really doesn't refer to it? A suggested answer is that Nissan speaks also of the season, the spring equinox of three months to which Iyar is central. The time of love that is linked to Passover and Shir HaShirim includes Iyar and that, too, is what Rabbi Joshua had in mind with his emphasis on Nissan.

Perhaps, then, contemporary Jewish history validates the view of Rabbi Joshua. Yom Ha-Atzmaut is observed on the fifth day of Iyar. Yom Yerushalayim is on the twenty-eighth of that same month. Both are still in the period of love, the time — just as Passover — which demonstrates that even when we are not yet deserving

of redemption by our deeds, the Almighty may grant us undeserved gifts before our complete repentance.

Yet Maimonides decided Rabbi Eliezer was right.

Perhaps here is another example of the classic formula regarding a dispute between two rabbinic giants that *elu v'elu divrey elokim chayim* — these and those, both of the words of the living God. Both rabbis were right. How can that be? How can opposing views be correct?

Redemption, in the words of our prophets, has two moments. There is *atchalta d'geulah*, the first stage of redemption, and there is *geulah shlemah* — the complete and final redemption. Rabbi Joshua and Rabbi Eliezer made no distinction between them. They assumed the same date for both. God, however, chose to begin the process of redemption in the season of Nissan, in the month of Iyar, even before the Jewish people were truly worthy of Yom Ha-Atzmaut and Yom Yerushalayim. These were momentous illustrations of God's compassion, of God's kindness, of God's love for his children despite their imperfections. Yet, as Maimonides pointed out, complete redemption requires complete repentance. God wants us to earn Messiah's coming. The firm conviction that Messiah will come is a belief not only in God's grace but in our own potential for greatness. Messiah will come because we will deserve his arrival. The certainty of Jewish repentance is the corollary to our faith in Moshiach.

Let us thank God for the fulfillment of the Nissan/Iyar stage of redemption in our own lifetimes. And let us hopefully help to hasten the day of the Tishrei completion when our teshuvah serves to usher in the *geulah shlemah*.



ARE WE JUDGED TWICE? NEW FRUITS, NEW SUITS AND AN INTRODUCTION TO MASECHET BEITZA

Dating back to *yetzias Mitzraim*, the Jewish people relied on *kiddush hachodesh al pi hare'iah* (establishing a new month based on testimony) to determine the beginning of each lunar month and the start of holidays observed in that month. Individuals would come before *beis din* to testify that a new moon appeared. If their testimonies were verified, Rosh Chodesh would be declared. This declaration established that the previous month extended for 29 days, and that the day of the testimony, the thirtieth day, would be the first of the new month. Occasionally, if the new moon was not visible or testimony could not be entered in time, this thirtieth day would remain the final day of the previous month, and day 31 served as day one of the following month.¹ In this instance, a holiday occurring in the new month began one day later than otherwise.

When the Jews settled Eretz Yisrael and the population decentralized, word of the new month had to be shared with distant communities through various means. Ultimately, messengers were employed to announce the dates of Rosh Chodesh and holidays.² However, messengers could not always arrive in time for an upcoming holiday. Therefore, certain distant populations observed two days of Yom Tov: the first day, in case Rosh Chodesh was declared on day 30, and the second day in case Rosh Chodesh was declared on day 31. As a result, remote communities would not inadvertently violate any prohibited activity such as performance of *melacha* on Yom Tov or consumption of chametz on Pesach.

This system remained in use through the days of Abayei and Rava,³ several hundred years into the Common Era, when our long-term calendar was fixed by Hillel.⁴ At that point, Rosh

Chodesh and holidays were no longer subject to doubt, and distant localities had no need to rely on messengers. Nonetheless, the sages foresaw that the challenges and persecutions of Diaspora could result in communities losing track of the Jewish calendar. Thus, they instructed the Jews outside of Eretz Yisrael,⁵ the predominant dependents on the messengers, to always observe two days of Yom Tov as a precaution.⁶ Indeed, history has shown that during certain times of persecution, some Jews had but the moon (or less) to rely upon to keep track of the calendar.⁷ Most parts of Eretz Yisrael observed only one day of Yom Tov, and so Chazal instructed Jews in these areas to continue that practice.

The obvious exception to the above is Rosh Hashana, which is observed universally for two days. Rosh Hashana coincides with Rosh

Chodesh Tishrei, and so as soon as Tishrei is declared, Rosh Hashana begins. When *kiddush hachodesh* was based on witnesses, even cities in Eretz Yisrael could not immediately know that Rosh Hashana began for some time until messengers arrived. Perhaps this explains why cities distant from the Sanhedrin observed two days of Rosh Hashana — but why is it that even in Yerushalayim, the seat of the beis din, Rosh Hashana is observed for two days even now? In Yerushalayim, there could never be a doubt as to the date of Rosh Hashana.

As discussed, witnesses would come to testify that they saw the new moon on the evening before, the evening of the thirtieth day. In the case of Tishrei, this meant that retroactively, Rosh Hashana had begun the night before. As a result, even in Yerushalayim, because of this possibility, no *melacha* would be done from the previous evening, in case it would be declared Rosh Hashana.

Kiddush hachodesh was also critical to assign the appropriate service performed in the Beis HaMikdash in the event that it was a holiday. At some point, if witnesses arrived late and the weekday service was performed, it could not be reversed. Therefore, a deadline was imposed at which point testimony was no longer accepted, automatically making the following day the first of Tishrei. Because most of the day had already been treated as a possible Yom Tov, it was completed as such. Essentially, the result was 48 hours of Rosh Hashana, even though the primary observance was technically only the final 24 hours. Because even at the Sanhedrin in Yerushalayim, Rosh Hashana could be observed as two days, and certainly elsewhere, it remains celebrated today in the same fashion.⁸

Why Are These Two Days Different Than All Other Two Days?

“Shehechyanu,” the bracha of “zman,” is recited on each Yom Tov to recognize the arrival of a unique holiness, or *kedushas hayom*. Interestingly, we recite this bracha on each Yom Tov Sheni, as well, although we have recognized the arrival of the same *kedushas hayom* on Yom Tov Rishon. Rishonim explain that Yom Tov Sheni is generally viewed as distinct from Yom Tov Rishon because it emerged from a doubt as to which one day, and only one day, was the holiday. One opinion in the Gemara actually holds that havdala be recited between these two days.⁹ In any event, they are seen as unique *kedushos hayom* and each warrants a new bracha.¹⁰

On the other hand, it could be known which day was Rosh Hashana, even when two days were observed. The deadline for testimony established a two-day continuum of Rosh Hashana — definitely, without any associated doubts.¹¹ This extended *kedushas hayom* (*mi'dirabanan*) begins at the conclusion of Elul. The term “*yoma arichta*” [long day] has been applied to Rosh Hashana to denote this fundamental difference. Some even suggest that Shehechyanu be omitted on the second day of Rosh Hashana because both days are a single unit.¹² The accepted position is to recite the bracha nonetheless; one reason is that even during the times of the Sanhedrin, the second day of Rosh Hashana was established as the first of Tishrei and the basis for all subsequent holidays.¹³

However, in deference to the opinion that Rosh Hashana’s status

as *yoma arichta* does not warrant a new Shehechyanu, our practice is to place a new fruit on the table during Kiddush that would obligate us to recite the bracha regardless. Alternatively, we may don a new suit or piece of jewelry that would normally warrant a Shehechyanu.¹⁴

One Long Day or Two?

Whether two days of Yom Tov are viewed as one or two *kedushos* carries several practical implications.¹⁵ The Gemara in *Meseches Beitza* teaches that an egg that was laid on Yom Tov following Shabbos may not be eaten, because the principle of *hachana D’Rabba* requires food items to be designated as edible foodstuff while still a weekday. In this case, the egg was not fully formed until Shabbos and so it remains prohibited when laid on Yom Tov.¹⁶ If the egg was laid on Yom Tov Sheni, it is permitted: If Yom Tov Sheni is the actual day of Yom Tov, the egg was fully formed on a weekday. Alternatively, Yom Tov Rishon was the actual day of Yom Tov and no new limitations of *hachana* apply. However, this logic cannot be applied to Rosh Hashana. The two days of Rosh Hashana are *yoma arichta*, and we may not bifurcate them. An egg laid on Rosh Hashana is treated as if laid during a 48-hour continuum of Yom Tov, and is prohibited under *hachana D’Rabba*.¹⁷

Another example: Rav Chisda is of the opinion that on a Torah level, one may cook on Friday that is Yom Tov for the purpose of Shabbos, because a Yom Tov leading into Shabbos forms a *kedusha achas* continuum (rabbinically, we require an *eruv tavshilin* in this case).¹⁸ On the other hand, because Yom Tov Rishon is distinct from Yom Tov Sheni, as if

they are independent holidays, we cannot prepare from one to the next. Even when no *melacha* is involved it is prohibited as *tircha shelo l'tzorech* (effort unnecessary for the day).¹⁹

Should we surmise that as a result, the *yoma arichta* status of Rosh Hashana allows us to prepare from one day to the next? This suggestion is rejected because most rishonim only accept the notion of *yoma arichta* when it produces a stringency.²⁰ Across Hilchos Shabbos and Yom Tov, Halacha views the starting point of the day as the critical juncture at which their respective laws set in.²¹ Therefore, Halachic factors that are in place when the day begins will continue as long as the *kedusha* persists.²² For example, although the prohibition of *refuah* (taking medication) applies to Yom Tov just as on Shabbat,²³ Chazal relaxed this restriction for Yom Tov Sheni. However, this leniency does not apply to Rosh Hashana; the second day is a continuation of the first, and so the prohibition that sets in when Rosh Hashana begins must extend until its conclusion, when the *kedushas hayom* ceases. We generally cannot introduce a change in the laws unless the two days are *shtei kedushot*.²⁴

Why reject a leniency due to *yoma arichta*? Even though Rosh Hashana would sometimes be observed as a single day, that did not necessarily happen. Very often, the witnesses would present early and only the first day would be treated as holy.²⁵ Furthermore, perhaps the unique status we have attributed to Rosh Hashana was only relevant at the time when *kiddush hachodesh al pi hareiah* was operative. Nowadays, it is certainly possible that Rosh Hashana could revert to a status of *shtei kedushos*, following the pattern of all

other Yomim Tovim.²⁶ In summary, it is questionable how far to extend the *yoma arichta* designation.

Two Days of Judgement

Our discussion has revolved around the need and nature of a two-day Rosh Hashana. But the unique quality of Rosh Hashana is Yom HaDin, a day of judgement. We can understand blowing shofar each day if both days must be observed, but our tefillos also fervently reflect a repeat of divine judgement.²⁷ How can this be? Our practice of wishing friends and family an inscription in the Book of Life is discontinued at midday of Rosh Hashana, when judgement is complete. Nevertheless, *Taz* writes that we resume on the second night of Rosh Hashana.²⁸ Can there be *two* days of judgment?

Indeed, the Zohar²⁹ explains that the Divine Judgement is repeated because it is incomplete after day one. One explanation of this is as follows. The first day of judgement focuses entirely on the individual: reward and punishment befitting that person and his or her actions in the previous year. The second day, however, uses a wider-angle lens to see this person's judgement in the broader context of friends, dependents, and others in his or her environment. Unlike human judges, God's infinite wisdom includes endless calculations that determine how one person's destiny may impact negatively on someone who is undeserving. And so, even if the individual may not deserve it on his or her own, Heavenly mercy will be extended for the benefit of someone else. Perhaps a person did not merit a favorable *parnasa* for the year, but for the sake of that person's child, who is deserving, the funds will be granted.

Perhaps one is deserving of certain suffering, G-d forbid; this may be averted if it would cause undue pain for a relative.³⁰

Broadly, this aspect of Divine providence is intimately linked to reward and punishment. A fascinating example of this is found in the writings of the *Sfas Emes*.³¹ The Gemara³² explains the advice of Mishlei to mean, "If a man should have a worry, he should share it with another." This is commonly associated with the psychological benefits of unburdening oneself. However, Chidushei HaRim explains that we would assume that we would share our stress with a confidante, an empathetic friend. Naturally, the friend would feel the pain personally. Heaven, assessing the resulting undeserved suffering of the friend, mercifully removes the suffering from both people.³³

This is the "*yashrus*" and perfection of Divine judgement. It is this type of judgement that Hashem utilizes on the second day of Rosh Hashana. Rav Yisrael Salanter explains that this kindness of Hashem in *din* is the meaning of Moshe Rabbeinu's praise, "*Kel emunah v'ain avel, tzadik v'yashar Hu*" — A faithful G-d, never false, True and upright is He.³⁴ To say that Hashem exhibits no iniquity is hardly a compliment. Rather, it refers to the infinite calculations employed when He examines the broad-ranging impact of judgement so that not even the smallest aspects of *din* could be perceived as injustice.³⁵

This also highlights a new dimension of the interconnectedness of each member of klal Yisrael: *mi k'amcha Yisrael, goy echad b'aretz* — Who is like you, Israel? A unique (and unified) nation on earth³⁶ The *achdus* or unity that we strive to achieve in

relationships with others is not merely a goal; in this respect, it is already a reality that exists. The goal is to tap into that *achdus* by making our lives more meaningful in the lives of others. The more that our behavior benefits someone else — emotionally, financially or otherwise — the more that our judgement extends beyond day one and reaches day two of Rosh Hashana.

We often underestimate or underappreciate the potential positive impact of our actions. For example, we often measure our presence in shul on a personal barometer, accruing the merit of *tefilla b'tzibur*. Rav Soloveitchik noted that we must also recognize how much that presence can propel and improve the *tefillos* of other members of the *tzibbur*, just as each and every instrument, even the smallest, completes the symphony orchestra. The same can be said of our consistent attendance and study in a yeshiva or community beis medrash.³⁷ The Zohar's insight into the two days and two judgements of Rosh Hashana adds new dimensions to this interconnection and *achdus*.

Yes, there are two days of judgement. The more that we make a difference to others, the more Hashem sees our futures and our destinies inextricably linked to those of others. It matters *bein adam l'makom* when we matter *bein adam l'chaveiro*.

That this aspect of judgement is so critical as to be highlighted on Rosh Hashana, the day of man's creation, brings new depth to the mantra of Rav Chaim of Volozhin, "Man was not created for himself; only to provide for others with any powers that he can muster."³⁸

1. *Rosh Hashana* 25b.
2. *Rosh Hashana* 18a.
3. *Mishneh Torah, Kiddush HaChodesh* 5:3.
4. See Ramban in *Sefer HaZechut, Pereq HaSholaiach* and *Sefer HaChinuch* 4.
5. See Ritva *Rosh Hashana* 18a. See also *Mishneh Torah, Kiddush HaChodesh* 5:12.
6. *Beitza* 4b.
7. See: Rosen, Alan. *The Holocaust's Jewish Calendars: Keeping Time Sacred, Making Time Holy*. Indiana University Press, 2019. See also *Matnas Chaim, Shabbos/Rosh Chodesh*, pg. 212.
8. *Beitza* 4b-5a and Rashi; see also *Mishneh Torah, Kiddush HaChodesh* 5:8.
9. See Rashba *Beitza* 4b that we do not fundamentally reject this position. We do not follow it simply because it could cause a laxity in attitude toward Yom Tov Sheni. See also Meiri *ibid.* and *Tzlach*.
10. Another consideration is the desire to reinforce the gravity of Yom Tov Sheni; we repeat all blessings whenever relevant so that the second day is observed as seriously as the first, even though it emerges from a doubt (see *Shabos* 23a and *Sha'ar HaTziun* 473:3).
11. See Ran and Ritva, *Beitza* 4b.
12. Tosfos (*Sukka* 44b) even suggest that for this reason, there is no question as to how we may recite a bracha on blowing the shofar on the second day of Rosh Hashana (unlike brachos on Yom Tov Sheni of other holidays that require explanation). See also Ran (*ibid.* 22a, *Dapei HaRif*).
13. See *Beis Yosef* O.C. 601.
14. This also relates to the suggestion of achronim to have the one blowing the Shofar wear a new suit on the second day when Shehechyanu is repeated, as well (*Magen Avraham* 600:3, *Mishna Berura* 600:7). It should be noted, however, that contemporary poskim question the general practice of reciting Shehechyanu on fruits nowadays when such items are more readily available throughout the year. Rav Soloveitchik also questioned if it is appropriate nowadays to recite the bracha on a new suit (see forthcoming *Batei Yosef, Yomim Noraim*).
15. See *Aruch HaShulchan* 600:3. See also *Shut Hisorres L'Teshuva* 2:120 regarding Yom Tov Sheni and *panim chadashos* for sheva berachos.
16. *Beitza* 2a-3a; *Mishna Berura* 322:1; *Shaar Hatziun* 503:3. The Mishna teaches that an egg laid on a Yom Tov that does not follow Shabbat is also prohibited to avoid permitting the current case; *Mishna Berura* 513:1.
17. *Beitza* 4a-4b; *Mishna Berura* 513:13,14.
18. *Pesachim* 46a, Rashi *ibid.*
19. *Mishna Berura* 503:1; 667:5.
20. See Ra'avad *Hilchos Eruvin* 8:8; *Magen Avraham* 503:1. See also *Biur HaGra* and *Biur Halacha* (*ibid.*) and *Keren Orach, Eruvin* 39a, discussing if the Rambam disagrees and allows for leniencies as well, or only in unique contexts (see footnote at conclusion of this section).
21. Rather than understand the "chalos" [onset] of *kedushat hayom* as perpetually renewed at every moment of Shabbat or Yom Tov, the halachot are determined by their application at the beginning (see *Kovetz Shiurim, Beitza* 18).
22. See, for example, regarding *muktza*: *Mishna Berura* 667:2. Regarding *eruvim*, see *Shulchan Aruch* 516:2. See also *Eretz HaTzvi* chaps. 7, 9.
23. *Beitza* 22a; *Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 496:2.
24. See, however, *Magen Avraham* 516:1 for possible exceptions.
25. See *Biur HaGra* O.C. 503.
26. Rashba *Beitza* 5b s.v. *Kasav*. See also *Rosh, Rosh Hashana* 4:14 quoting *Shut Rashi, Tosfos Rid Eruvin* 39a, *Meiri Beitza* 4a, *Shulchan Aruch HaRav, O.C.* 503:3, *Mishna Berura* 501:34, *Shut Avnei Nezer* O.C. 451:1-11 and *Igros HaGrid HaLevi, Hilchos Eruvin*.
27. See *Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 591:8. See also *Mateh Ephraim* 583:2 regarding eating of the *simanim* on the second night of Rosh Hashana, as well.
28. See *Mishna Berura* 582:25.
29. *Pinchas*, pg. 231.
30. *Kuntres Eitzos L'Zakos B'Yom HaDin* (Rav Chanoch Karelenshtein), pp. 45-46 [cf. *Michtav M'Eliyahu* 2:74, where Rav Dessler explains that in the times of *kiddush hachodesh al pi hare'iah*, Providence would orchestrate the timing of the arrival of witnesses depending on whether the entire Jewish people were more in need of one or two judgements on Rosh Hashana].
31. *Likutei Yehuda, Mishlei* 12:25.
32. Second interpretation, *Yoma* 75a.
33. See also *Agra D'Pirka* 114.
34. *Devarim* 32:4.
35. *Lev Eliyahu, Ma'arachos HaTeshuva* (5), vol. 3 pg. 296.
36. See Shmuel II, 7:23.
37. *Divrei Harav*, pg. 149
38. Cited by his son, Rav Yitzchok of Volozhin in the introduction to *Nefesh HaChaim*.

Endnotes



OVERCOMING SHAME AND SELF-DOUBT TO ANSWER THE CALL TO TESHUVA

In the early 1930s the Nazis ym”s had gained significant political standing in Germany and were becoming a growing threat to the Jewish people. Rav Yerachmiel Cofnas recalled¹ a particular Shabbos, late in the afternoon, sitting in the home of the saintly Chofetz Chaim.² The room had already grown dark and the Chofetz Chaim pierced the silence when he began to speak in a low tone about the *chevlei mashiach* (the birth pangs of the redemptive process). It was clear from the tremor in his voice that he saw or at least sensed the atrocities of the Holocaust that tragically lay ahead.

Klal Yisrael are in a grave situation and are approaching a very difficult period of time. We have to do teshuvah, daven, and accept upon ourselves to improve our ways so that HaKadosh Baruch Hu will save us... We must make a group of baalei teshuvah, to help bring the Mashiach. I will be the first to be registered on the “Chevras Baalei Teshuvah.” I accept upon myself to increase my Torah and mitzvos as a merit for Klal Yisrael. Who is going to be the next one on the list? Who is the next one to put his name down on the “Chevras Baalei Teshuvah?”

The room remained silent. From the yeshiva leadership to the students who

were present, nobody uttered a word. The Chofetz Chaim banged on the table.

“Who is next? Why are you silent?” He continued to bang as he began to cry bitter tears. “*Eis tzora hee l’yaakov, a tragic time is upon us, it is the chevlei mashiach. You have no idea of the pain that Klal Yisrael is going to go through...*”

We may wonder: Why did those holy Jews gathered in the Chofetz Chaim’s home hesitate to respond to his desperate pleas? Or said differently, what impediments hinder us from confidently and wholeheartedly returning to Hashem?

The Necessity and Apparent Simplicity of Teshuvah

It appears that the Chofetz Chaim drew his instruction from Chazal (see *Yoma* 87b) as clearly codified in the words of Rambam, that *teshuvah* is a prerequisite for *geulah*.

כל הנביאים כולן צוו על התשובה ואין ישראל נגאלין אלא בתשובה וכבר הבטיחה תורה שסוף ישראל לעשות תשובה בסוף גלותן ומיד הן נגאלין שנאמר והיה כי יבאו עליך כל הדברים וגו' ושבתי עד ה' אלקיך ושב ה' אלקיך וגו'.

All of the Nevi'im commanded concerning repentance; the Jewish people will not be redeemed except by way of repentance. Indeed, the Torah long since assured us that in the end, at the close of the period of exile, Bnei Yisrael will turn to repentance and be immediately redeemed...

Hilchos Teshuvah 7:5

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 31a) describes six questions that each person will be called upon to answer when brought to judgment at the conclusion of our earthly existence. The questions address and reflect upon our commitment to fundamental Torah goals and values. However, the *Avodas Yissaschar*³ of Volbroz [Poland] speaks of a broader overarching question that we will have to confront as part of our heavenly accounting as well. The question, rhetorical in nature, is: why did we hesitate to actualize the opportunity of *teshuvah*? Sin is an unfortunate but inevitable part of the

human experience.⁴ Yet Hashem has granted us the gift of *teshuvah* to right some of our wrongs. Why then do we often act as if *teshuvah* remains beyond our grasp?

Ironically, it seems from the Torah's presentation of *teshuvah* that it is in fact meant to be accessible and easily achieved.

כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו.

The matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

Devarim 30:14

If “the matter”⁵ is indeed so close, why do we live with a sense, albeit a false perception, that repentance is not so easy at all?

Facing the Shame and Finding Comfort in Our Unbreakable Bond

The Selichos that lead us to Rosh Hashana and officially begin the Yamim Noraim period⁶ open with the phrase, “*lecha Hashem hatzedaka v'lanu boshes ha'panim*” — You Hashem are charitable, and we are shame-faced. While the Jewish soul craves the opportunity to return to Hashem, the shame and embarrassment of sin is perhaps what makes it so difficult for us to face our Creator. We feel burdened by the failed promises of years past that weigh heavily on our minds and our hearts. But ultimately, we must find a way to “perform this mitzvah” despite

the uneasiness and discomfort that we often feel in this spiritual cleansing process.

The sin of the *Cheit Ha'egel* was particularly shameful and devastating given the timing and context in which it occurred. Such a hurtful betrayal seemed like a sin from which the Jewish people would never truly recover. In fact, Rabbi Yitzchak is cited in the Gemara, *Sanhedrin* 102a, as stating that, “there is no punishment that comes to the world in which there is not a small portion of the sin of the Golden Calf,” indicating that we are still repaying our debts and living with its consequences until this very day.

Yet it is precisely after such an egregious sin as *Cheit Ha'egel* that the Jewish nation is introduced to a new and unique *teshuvah* “prayer technique” in the form of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.⁷

וַיַּעֲבֹר ד' עַל פְּנֵינוּ, וַיִּקְרָא, ד' ד', א-ל-ל רַחוּם וְחַנוּן אֲרֻךְ אַפַּיִם, וְרַב-חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת. נִצַּר חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים, נִשְׂא עוֹן וְפָשַׁע וְחַטָּאָה, וְנִקְּהָ, לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד עוֹן אָבוֹת עַל בְּנֵים וְעַל בְּנֵי בְנֵים, עַל שְׁלֹשִׁים וְעַל רַבְעִים.

Hashem passed before him and proclaimed: “Hashem! Hashem! a God 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.”

Throughout the Yamim Noraim, we return time and again to these expressions of Divine favor to guide us through the *teshuvah* process. The Gemara (*Rosh Hashana* 17b) notes how remarkable a gift these words are and emphatically recommends

It is precisely after such an egregious sin as *Cheit Ha'egel* that the Jewish nation is introduced to a new and unique *teshuvah* “prayer technique” in the form of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.

that they be used to achieve true forgiveness.

"ויעבור ה' על פניו ויקרא" א"ר יוחנן אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאומר, מלמד שנתעטף הקב"ה כשליח צבור והראה לו למשה סדר תפלה. אמר לו כל זמן שישראל חוטאין יעשו לפני כסדר הזה ואני מוחל להם. *The verse states: "And Hashem 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, as it would be insulting to God's honor. 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 [i.e. let the prayer leader wrap himself in a prayer shawl and publicly recite the thirteen attributes of mercy] and I will forgive them.*

Rosh Hashana 17b (Translation from The William Davidson digital edition of the Koren Noé Talmud)

The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy begin with the phrase "Hashem Hashem,"⁸ which the Gemara, *Rosh Hashana* 17b, so beautifully interprets, "I am Hashem before a person sins, and I am Hashem after a person sins and performs repentance."

Hashem is encouraging us and inviting us into the *teshuvah* process by reminding us, despite our shame, that there is a constant bond we share with Him from which to draw strength.

Hashem calls out to us: "I knew the

essence of your being before you sinned. I had awareness of your sin before you even committed it and I certainly know now what you have done. Nonetheless, I willingly choose to remain as your God. There is an eternal relationship that we share that sin cannot sever. We are bound with an unbreakable connection that no sin can dissolve. Your sin has left you with a (false) perception that we are no longer connected. But if you return to Me with sincerity, humility and heartfelt *teshuvah*, you will recognize that "Hashem, Hashem" — our bond was never truly broken.

This lesson finds full expression⁹ in a costly failure that occurred in the early stages of settling the Land of Israel. After defeating Yericho, Yehoshua very clearly warns the nation to refrain from taking of the spoils of war; all is to be consecrated to Hashem. *Achan*, a member of the tribe of Yehuda, surreptitiously violates Yehoshua's command by taking from the consecrated possessions. As a result, Divine protection is somewhat withheld, and it leads to the tragic death of 36 Jews in the following battle against Ai. Hashem expresses His disappointment:

חָטָא יִשְׂרָאֵל וְגַם עָבְרוּ אֶת בְּרִיתִי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אוֹתָם וְגַם לָקְחוּ מִן הַחֲרָם וְגַם גָּנְבוּ וְגַם כָּחֲשׂוּ וְגַם שָׂמוּ בְכַלְיָהֶם.

The Jewish people have sinned. They have broken the covenant by which they were commanded. They have taken from the consecrated possessions.

Yehoshua 7:11

The Gemara, *Sanhedrin* 44a, in a startling series of comments, makes every effort to identify additional sins committed by Achan ranging from broad violations of the Five Books of the Torah to sexually immoral activity.

Why does the Gemara delve beyond the text of the Navi to place additional guilt upon Achan? Why would Chazal actively seek to highlight the array of sinful behavior displayed by Achan?

The Chasidic master Rav Tzaddok hakohen of Lublin¹⁰ (1823-1900) resolves this very question by emphasizing the depth of the surprising and ironic conclusion to this Talmudic analysis of Hashem's rebuke of Achan and the entire Jewish nation.

חטא ישראל אמר רבי אבא בר זבדא אע"פ שחטא ישראל הוא.

"Chata Yisrael" R. Abba bar Zavda said that from here it may be inferred that even when the Jewish people have sinned, they are still called "Israel."

R. Abba continues by citing the colloquial adage:

היינו דאמרי אינשי אסא דקאי ביני חילפי אסא שמיה ואסא קרו ליה.

Even when a myrtle is found among thorns, its name is myrtle and people call it myrtle.

Rav Tzaddok explains that even in those painful moments of realization that we have been "caught" in a state of sin, at times an abundance of sin, we are still lovingly called "Yisrael." Hashem's outstretched right hand remains extended for those who



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have the courage and confidence to take hold of it. *“I am Hashem before a person sins, and I am Hashem after a person sins and performs repentance.”*

Rav Soloveitchik painted a picture and outlined a roadmap of the Yamim Noraim which helps us to overcome this self-doubt that can infiltrate the stability of our relationship with Hashem.

Im ki’banim, Im ki’avadim. On Rosh Hashanah, our relationship to Hashem is in doubt, as is evident from our equivocation in this liturgical portrayal, possibly as children, possibly as servants... In contrast, Yom Kippur represents “mercy in judgment.” Hashem then does not render his verdict as a monarch, but as a father, in accordance with R’ Akiva’s last statement in the Mishna of Yoma (8:9): “Happy are you, O Israel! Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you?”

Your Father in Heaven.” A father does not generally render unmitigated strict judgment on a son. On Yom Kippur, we emerge victorious in judgment, because mercy is an intrinsic part of the judgment. Our relationship is no longer in doubt...¹¹

The Chofetz Chaim’s cry to join his “*Chevras Baalei Teshuva*” has yet to be fully answered. We should all believe that Hashem still desires us, despite our shortcomings, and answer his call.

Endnotes

1. *Paneach Tzafunos: Rabbi Yerachmiel Cofnas* (Biography) by Rabbi Moshe Boruch Katanka [pg. 71].
2. Rabbi Yisrael Meir haKohen Kagan Zt”l (1838-1933).
3. Rabbi Yissachar Dov (Berish) haKohen Tornheim Zy”a (1803-1877).
4. *Koheles* (7:20) states, “For there is not one righteous man on earth who does good and

doesn’t sin.” Note, however, *Shabbos* 55b for a discussion of four who never sinned.

5. There is, in fact, a discussion as to which “matter” the pasuk is referring to. This essay is following the understanding of Ramban, Sforno and Abarbanel who indicate that the specific mitzvah “matter” at hand is the mitzvah of teshuvah.

6. See *Magen Avraham, Orach Chaim* 88:3.

7. Different suggestions are offered how to divide the phrases of the thirteen attributes. Rabbeinu Tam (cited in Tosafos, *Rosh Hashanah* 17b) has one approach; while the Arizal (*Shaar Hakavanos – Drushei “va’yaavor”, drush* 3) has a different understanding.

8. This follows the position of Rabbeinu Tam that the first two *middos* (attributes) are (1) Hashem and (2) Hashem.

9. See *Sefer Yehoshua* chapters 6-7.

10. *Pri Tzaddik Parshas Tetzaveh, Siman* 12; *Lech Lecha Siman* 3.

11. *Before Hashem You Shall Be Purified: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik on the Days of Awe*, pgs. 135-156 (Arnold Lustiger, 1998).



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