

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Nitzavim-Vayelech

NOT WRITTEN IN STONE

“And the L-rd your G-d will circumcise your heart and the heart of...” (30:6)

Don't you sometimes feel like your life is written in stone? That you can't change? Sometimes we want to go back to a more innocent time, a time when we were pure and our hearts unsullied. But we feel we can't break the mold we're stuck in. We've created a treadmill from past bad decisions, and now we seem doomed to run like a rat round and round, visiting and re-visiting all the mistakes we've ever made.

Hopelessness is the feeling that things are forever written in stone.

When the world came into being, it first existed as primordial matter without form: *“Darkness on the face of the deep, and the Divine Presence hovering on the face of the water.”* The world was then a world of water, the ultimate symbol of matter without form. Water flows where it may, taking any shape at all, waiting for the vessel that holds it to give it shape, to give it true purpose.

There are times when we lose contact with our true purpose. Times when the form that we have made for ourselves is not what the Creator intended. We have become sealed and unresponsive to spiritual reality. In Hebrew this is called *tuma*, impurity. Impurity means to be cut off from the Source. To be “sealed”. The landscape of that sealed existence is a world of hopelessness.

If only we could return to a world where things were not written in stone, where we could refashion ourselves in the form that the Creator intended for us!

The waters of the *mikveh* are like an amniotic world

where existence has no shape, like a world of formless matter yet to be defined. When we enter the waters of the *mikveh* we regress to an earlier stage of creation, to that primordial world before definition and form. And in that water we are re-formed, as new.

The word *mikveh* comes from the same root as the word *tikveh* — “hope”. The essence of hope is that we are not bounded and trapped by our present reality. Hope says that we can connect to that which is outside and beyond ourselves — to the Source. Every *mikveh* is like a little sea. The *gematria* of *yam* (sea) is 50. The number 50 represents the transcendent. It represents the gateway to that which is “beyond”.

This is the essence of purity, of *taharah*. Life is not written in stone. Hope tells us that we can return to the world of water to be become purified. This is the essence of hope: That things can be re-made, that we can change ourselves, that we can break the treadmill. The *mikveh* tells us that we can go back to the world of water, to that world of pure matter. The *mikveh* tells us that we can regress to a world before form, that we can re-make ourselves and become pure.

The astrological sign of the month of Elul is “*Betula*” — the Maiden — the essence of purity. *Betula* is a water sign. The sign of the Hope.

“Your heart and the heart of...”

The first letters of this verse spell “Elul”, the month of *teshuva*, in which we can return to a state of unsullied purity. And the last letters spell *tichatev* — “You will be written” — to hint that through *teshuva* – a return to pristine selves — may we be written and sealed for the

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PARSHA OVERVIEW

NITZAVIM

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers all the people, young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women, in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations yet unborn. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship because, in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality. Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will result from failure to heed G-d's *mitzvot*. Descendants of that generation and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all — the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them in favor of powerless idols. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually G-d will bring them back to *Eretz Yisrael*. Moshe tells the people to remember that fulfilling the Torah is not an impossibility; rather it's within the grasp of every Jew. The *parsha* dramatically concludes with Moshe's comparing the Jewish People's choice to follow the Torah to a choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

VAYELECH

On the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent bidding farewell to his people, encouraging them to “keep the faith.” Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, G-d is with them. He summons Yehoshua, and, in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as leader of the Jewish People. Thus, he strengthens Yehoshua's status. Moshe teaches the *mitzvah of hakhel*: Every seven years on the first of the intermediate days of Succot, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather at the Temple to hear the king read from the Book of Devarim. The sections read deal with faithfulness to G-d, the covenant and reward and punishment. G-d tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the *Mishkan*, where G-d will teach Yehoshua. G-d tells

Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land the people will be unfaithful and worship other gods. G-d will then completely “hide His face”, so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, hunted by all. G-d instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song — *Ha'azinu* — which will serve as “witness” against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to *Bnei Yisrael*. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah and instructs the *levi'im* to place it to the side of the Holy Ark, so that no one will ever write a new Torah Scroll different from the original, for there will always be a reference copy.

HA'AZINU

Almost all of *Ha'azinu* is a song, written in the Torah in two parallel columns. Moshe summons the Heavens and the earth to stand as eternal witnesses to what will happen if the Jewish People sin and do not obey the Torah. He reminds the people to examine the history of the world and note how the Jewish People are rescued from obliteration in each generation — that G-d “pulls the strings” of world events so that *Bnei Yisrael* can fulfill their destiny as His messengers in the world. G-d's kindness is such that Israel should be eternally grateful, not just for sustaining them in the wilderness, but for bringing them to a Land of amazing abundance and for defeating their enemies. But this physical bounty leads the people to become over-indulged. Physical pleasures corrupt the morals of the people. They worship empty idols and powerless gods and indulge in all kinds of depravity. G-d will then let nations with no moral worth subjugate Israel and scatter them across the world. However, their only purpose is as a rod to chastise the Jewish People. When these nations think that it is through their own power that they have dominated Israel, G-d will remind them that they are no more than a tool to do His will. The purpose of the Jewish People is fundamental — that man should know his Creator. Neither exile nor suffering can sever the bond between G-d and His people, and, eventually, in the final redemption this closeness will be restored. G-d will then turn His anger against the enemies of Israel, as though they were His own enemies, showing no mercy to the tormentors of His people. G-d then gives His last commandment to Moshe: That he should ascend Mount Nevo and be gathered there to his people.

שמע ישראל

The Ohr Somayach Family wishes you and yours and all of Israel a year filled with happiness, health and peace.

PARSHA Q&A ?

Nitzavim

1. Why did Moshe gather the Jewish People together on the day of his death?
2. Who are the wood-cutters and water-drawers mentioned in verse 29:10?
3. How do two parties “pass” into a covenant?
4. What is the connection between the verse “*Atem nitzavim*” and the curses in the previous parsha?
5. Why can't G-d disassociate himself from the Jewish People?
6. How many curses were listed in *Parshat Ki Tavo*?
7. Which two leaders followed Moshe's example and assembled the people at the end of their rule?
8. With whom did Moshe make the covenant and oath?
9. Why did the Jewish People see only idols of wood and stone in Egypt?
10. What is meant by the punishment of “adding drunkenness to thirst (29:18)”?

Vayelech

1. How old was Moshe when he died?
2. Why was Moshe unable “to go out and come in”? (31:2)
3. What happened to Moshe's Torah knowledge on the day of his death?
4. How did Moshe foresee the relationship between Yehoshua and the Elders?
5. What did G-d tell Yehoshua concerning his relationship with the Elders?
6. How often does the *hakhel* (assembly of the Jewish People) take place?
7. Why does the Torah call the year of the *hakhel* the “*shemita* year”?
8. What sections of the Torah does the king read at the *hakhel*?
9. In what physical location does the king read at the *hakhel*?
10. Why were the men commanded to come to the gathering?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to This Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

Nitzavim

1. 29:9 - To initiate them into the covenant with G-d.
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who came to join the Jewish People.
3. 29:11 - The two parties place objects in two parallel lines and pass between them.
4. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, “Who can survive such curses?” Moshe comforted them, saying, “You've done a lot to anger G-d, and yet — ‘*Atem nitzavim*’ — G-d didn't destroy you ...you're still standing before Him.”
5. 29:12 - Because He told them He wouldn't and because He swore to the *Avot* (Patriarchs) that the Jewish People would always remain His nation.
6. 29:12 - Ninety-eight.
7. 29:12 - Yehoshua and Shmuel.
8. 29:14 - With the people standing before him and all future generations.
9. 29:16 - Because these were exposed openly. The idols of gold and silver, however, were locked away by their owners for fear of theft.
10. 29:18 - Even unintentional sins will be considered by

G-d as if they were committed intentionally.

“Drunkenness” refers to sins committed unintentionally. “Thirst” refers to sins committed intentionally.

Vayelech

1. 31:2 - Exactly 120.
2. 31:2 - G-d did not let him because the power of leadership was being transferred to Yehoshua.
3. 31:2 - The well-springs of knowledge were closed up for him.
4. 31:7 - He foresaw that they would work in partnership.
5. 31:7 - That he alone would be the leader — for there can only be one leader in each generation.
6. 31:10 - Once every seven years, in the first year of the new *shemita* period.
7. 31:10 - Because the laws of *shemita* still applied to the harvest.
8. 31:11 - From Devarim: 1:1-6:9; 11:13-21; and 14:22-28:69.
9. 31:11 - On a wooden platform erected in the *azara*.
10. 31:12 - In order to learn.

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PARSHA Q&A ?

Ha'azinu

1. Why were heaven and earth specifically chosen as witnesses?
2. How is the Torah like rain?
3. How is G-d "faithful without injustice"?
4. Why is G-d called "tzaddik"?
5. How many major floods did G-d bring upon the world?
6. What group of people does the Torah call "fathers"? Cite an example.
7. Why did G-d separate the world's nations into exactly 70?
8. Why is the merit of the Jewish People's ancestry called a "rope"?
9. How is G-d's behavior toward the Jewish People like an eagle's behavior toward its offspring?
10. Regarding the Jewish People's punishment, G-d says, "I will spend my arrows on them." What is the positive aspect of this phrase?
11. How does the idea of "chillul G-d" prevent the nations from destroying the Jewish People?
12. What will happen to the nations that conquer the Jewish People?
13. When G-d overturns a nation that persecutes the Jewish People, His attribute of Mercy is "replaced" by which attribute?
14. When G-d punishes the heathen nations, for whose sins does He exact punishment?
15. How will G-d's punishment change the way the nations view the Jewish People?
16. On what day was *Ha'azinu* taught to the Jewish People?
17. Verse 32:44 calls Yehoshua "Hoshea." Why?
18. In verse 32:47, what does "it is not empty from you" mean?
19. Why did G-d tell Moshe that he would die a similar death to that of Aharon?
20. If Moshe had spoken to the rock rather than striking it, what would the Jewish People have learned?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Ha'azinu's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 32:1 - They endure forever.
2. 32:2 - The Torah gives life and promotes growth like rain.
3. 32:4 - He is "faithful" by rewarding the righteous, and "without injustice" by rewarding even the wicked for any good deeds.
4. 32:4 - All will agree that His judgments are righteous.
5. 32:7 - Two. One in the time of Adam's grandson Enosh and one in the time of Noach.
6. 32:7 - The Prophets. Elisha called the Prophet Eliyahu "My Father." (*Melachim II 2:12*)
7. 32:8 - To correspond to the 70 *Bnei Yisrael* who entered Egypt.
8. 32:9 - Their merit is "woven from" the merits of the *Avot*.
9. 32:12 - He mercifully wakes them gently, hovering over them, and carrying them on His "wings".
10. 32:23 - "The arrows will be spent" implies that the afflictions will cease but the Jewish People will not.
11. 32:27 - The nations would attribute their success to their might and the might of their gods. G-d would not let His name be desecrated like this.
12. 32:35 - They will eventually be punished.
13. 32:41 - His attribute of Justice.
14. 32:42 - For their sins and the sins of their ancestors.
15. 32:43 - They will view the Jewish People as praiseworthy for cleaving to G-d.
16. 32:44 - The Shabbat upon which Moshe died.
17. 32:44 - To indicate that although he was the Jewish People's leader, he still maintained a humble bearing.
18. 32:47 - That you will receive reward for studying Torah and that there is nothing meaningless in the Torah.
19. 32:50 - Because Moshe wanted this.
20. 32:51 - The Jewish People would have reasoned as follows: If a rock, which receives neither reward nor punishment, obeys G-d's commands, all the more so should we.

LIIOR REMSON

Age 28 - Spring, Texas

Texas A&M University BS – Mechanical Engineer, 2011

Carnegie Mellon University – MBA (expected in 2019)

Mechina Program, 2017

Unlike the University of Texas, the campus of Texas A&M University is not a hotbed of Jewish activity. It caters to the “real Texan” — the cowboy, the farmer and the budding oil field engineer; not the liberal arts “New York transplant” to Houston or Dallas. Lior Remson falls into the former category. His father, who is a chemical engineer and a safety consultant to the oil and gas industry, settled in Spring to be near the oil fields. Lior followed in his footsteps. His degree in Mechanical Engineering is geared towards the manufacture of products used in oil and gas production.

Lior’s Jewish upbringing was fairly traditional. His family was a member of a Conservative synagogue, and he and his younger brother attended a Young Judaea camp for a number of summers where they were exposed to the concepts of Shabbat and *kashrut*. Lior also worked for two summers in that camp when he was older. While in college his Judaism was similar to that of most young American Jews — he was aware and proud of his Jewish identity, but it had no practical impact on his campus life.

After graduation Lior got a job in Houston as a mechanical engineer with Halliburton, the giant oilfield production company and then for Bray Controls, another international oilfield production company. After a few years in Houston he got a job offer from an Australian mining company operating in Edmonton, Alberta. The company, Bradken, manufactures “consumables” — pipes, crushing equipment and other metal components for the oil and gas and mining industries. Lior was involved as a design engineer at first and then in manufacture. Professionally he was feeling quite fulfilled. Lior is also an avid skier, and Edmonton, situated near the Canadian Rockies, offered him many opportunities to pursue that hobby. Looking for social interaction, he sought out the small, but well-organized Jewish

community of Edmonton, and he made a number of friends.

In 2015 his younger brother dropped a bombshell on the family. He had decided to be baptized as a Mormon. A student at Trinity College in San Antonio, he had a number of Mormon friends. Even earlier, back in Spring, Texas, he had also been close to a Mormon family which lived nearby. He travelled all over the world, and while in India he stayed with that same family who was in Mumbai on the husband’s extended business trip. It was there that he became convinced to convert. The Mormon Church sent Lior’s brother to Ecuador for two years as a missionary.

His brother’s decision caused Lior to examine his own life and beliefs. In the summer of 2015 he went on a Birthright trip to Israel and was greatly moved. Upon his return to Edmonton he started attending an Orthodox shul, and began learning Torah with a rabbi in the Ghermezian Kollel. He was a frequent guest at the rabbi’s Shabbat table. Eventually he started putting on *tefillin* daily, keeping kosher and became

shomer Shabbat, even though this entailed his giving up long weekends of skiing in the Rockies.

Earlier this year, Lior made a decision to get an MBA, and is now starting a two-year course at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh. Before doing so, he spent the last few months at Ohr Somayach’s Mechina Program in Jerusalem on the recommendation of Rabbi Yitzchok Becker, a former member of the Ghermezian Kollel and now on the staff of Ohr Somayach.

In June, Lior’s grandmother, mother and father came to Israel. His father was here on consulting business, and they all came to visit Lior at the Yeshiva. After meeting with Rabbi Dr. Guy Matalon for dinner they were even happier with Lior’s decision to come to the Yeshiva to learn. Lior has loved his time at Ohr Somayach and plans to return.



BY RABBI MOSHE NEWMAN

SANHEDRIN 58 - 92

Rav Nachman said, "It is forbidden to make fun of anything except for making fun of idolatry, which is permitted."

Rav Nachman explains the source for this teaching in the *gemara* as being based on verses in Isaiah (46:1) which ridicule, mock and laugh at idols: "Bel squats; Nebo soils himself..." Rashi (in Sefer Yeshayahu) explains that the prophet is making fun of these two Babylonian idols: The deities of Babylon squatted and soiled themselves. This is an expression of ridicule of the idols. Rashi on our *daf* expounds on the nature of this ridicule: Even though the idols are not animals and don't have excrement, the verse speaks in this manner in order to make fun of idols and idolatry.

A practical example of making fun of idols in our day is the jeering at the name of the wicked Haman and the merrymaking we enjoy each year on Purim, when we celebrate the miracle of being saved from the genocidal plan of the wicked Haman who demanded being treated as an idol.

• Sanhedrin 63b

Rabbi Meir said, "The tree that Adam ate from was a grapevine, because nothing brings weeping to the world except for (drinking) wine."

The *beraita* on our *daf* quotes three opinions regarding the identity of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Rabbi Meir says it was a grape, Rabbi Yehuda holds it was wheat, and Rabbi Nechemia contends that it was a fig. Overdoing the consumption of wine is known to cause a person to act foolishly and even dangerously. Although other opinions of the identity of "Adam's fruit" are cited in the Talmud, there is no mention of "the apple" as the forbidden fruit.

• Sanhedrin 70a

The Rabbis taught: "Concerning one who loves his wife like himself and honors her even more than himself, raises his children properly and marries them off at an early age, it is written 'You will know that there is peace in your home'." (Iyov 5:24)

• Sanhedrin 76b

A child shouldn't say to his parent, "You are transgressing a law of the Torah"...

Thus begins a *beraita* on our *daf* that teaches the manner in which a child should address a parent in a "sticky" situation. Although a person's child has a mitzvah of honoring his parents, if the child sees one of them transgressing, however, the child is not exempt from speaking up, but should be careful not to rebuke the parent directly. This would be the opposite of honoring a parent since it would cause the parent embarrassment and sadness. Rather, what should the child say?

According to the Rambam the child should pose a rhetorical question to the parent: "Is that (what you're doing) written in the Torah (as being permitted)?" This is not *directly* telling the parent that the action of the parent is wrong.

Rashi, however, asserts that even speaking to the parent in this way would be lacking in showing honor to the parent. Rather, the child should say, "There is a verse in the Torah that says such-and-such", quoting a verse that is evidence that the parent's action is wrong. By respectfully quoting a relevant verse in this manner, the parent will understand by himself that his action is wrong, and will cease doing so without suffering embarrassment or humiliation from his child's words.

• Sanhedrin 81a

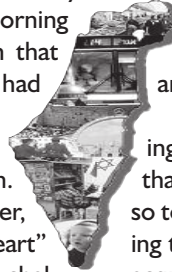
"The punishment of the chronic liar is that he is not believed even when he tells the truth."

This teaching in our *gemara* sounds eerily like the message of the fable about "the boy who cried wolf". I have heard from many rabbis and Torah educators over the years that all of the important lessons to teach our children can be found in Torah sources, and that these "Jewish story-lessons" are the only appropriate "bedtime stories" to read to our children.

• Sanhedrin 89b

A SOURCE FOR SIMCHAT TORAH

“**S**hlomo awoke and behold it was a dream.” (*Melachim I 3:15*) How can one be awake and still dreaming? The solution offered by the Midrash to this mystery is that when King Shlomo awoke in the morning something happened which demonstrated to him that the dream he had experienced the night before had come true.

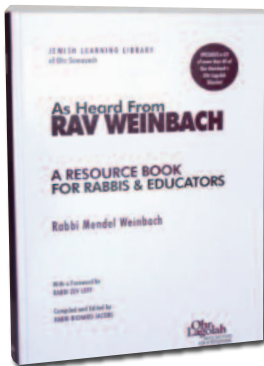


In his dream G-d appeared to the king and asked him what he wished to be granted from Heaven. Shlomo did not ask for long life, wealth or power, rather for the wisdom of “an understanding heart” which would enable him to properly rule such a challenging nation from the throne he had inherited from his father David at such a young age. This found favor in the eyes of G-d who promised him wisdom surpassing that of

anyone before or after him.

Upon arising Shlomo heard birds chirping and donkeys braying. When he sensed that he was able to comprehend the language of these creatures he realized that his dream had come true. He then came to Jerusalem and made a great feast for all of his servants.

This is the source, concludes the Midrash, for celebrating the completion of Torah study. Just as Shlomo realized that a feast was in order upon gaining such great wisdom, so too do Jews who complete an entire year of publicly reading the entire *Sefer Torah*, portion by portion, celebrate their acquisition of wisdom with singing, dancing and feasting on *Simchat Torah*. This is also the source for the festive meal which celebrates the *siyum* completion of an entire tractate of the Talmud.



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Nitzavim

Renewing the Contract

This section of the Torah begins with the renewal of the covenant between G-d and the Jewish People which first took place at Mount Sinai 40 years earlier. Here Moshe emphasizes that the entire nation is gathered together for that renewal: “The heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers...all the men of Israel, your small children, your women and your proselytes...from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water.” By contrast, in the description of the first covenant, the Torah states that “the people” accepted the covenant, but individual groups are not specified.

The difference can be explained as follows: In Nitzavim, Moshe is reminding them that they have seen a wide variety of idolatries in Egypt, Midian, Moav and the kingdoms of Sichon and Og. They have encountered individuals of great wisdom and understanding. As a result, he cautions them, “There may be among you individuals who, deep inside, have been influenced by these experiences, contacts and ideas, and may have doubts about your commitment to the Torah.” Moshe did not want these issues to fester in private. Rather, he wanted them to be aired in public so that he could remove these doubts from their minds.

The first words of this *parsha* are, “You are standing today, all of you, before G-d”. The Hebrew for standing — *nitzavim* — connotes a gathering for debate, discussion and argument. The same word is used several other times in the Torah with the same connotation. Moshe’s intent was clear. Everyone, regardless of age, status or level of learning, was encouraged to voice his or her opinions and doubts publicly, before G-d and Moshe. Moshe was eager to listen, respond, and convince them of the truth. Moshe knew that there were doubts and issues. He did not want the people to feel that they were coerced into accepting the covenant. He wanted them to choose it freely after having had their doubts addressed properly.

If Moshe was concerned about the doubts of a nation that had just experienced 40 years of direct providential guidance, and encouraged debate and discussion, how much more relevant is his insight in today’s world where the truth and relevance of the Torah is under unremitting assault!

Vayelech

National Repentance

As the time of Moshe’s death approaches, G-d says to him, “The people will rise up and stray after the gods of the foreigners of the land... and they will

forsake Me and annul My covenant... I will conceal my face from them... and many evils and distresses will encounter the nation.” Then G-d tells him that the people will repent and will say, “Is it not because my G-d is not in my midst that these evils have come upon me?” But, strangely enough, even after they have repented, G-d says that they will not be forgiven: “But I will surely conceal My face on that day because of all the evil that they did, for they turned to gods of others.”

All the commentators are puzzled by G-d’s refusal to accept the repentance of the nation. Abarbanel offers a unique insight into the behavior of the people, which is certainly relevant today as well. He says that the people were guilty of two transgressions: 1) The idolatrous practice of serving other gods. 2) Drifting away from the covenant and their essential connection to G-d. When the nation was punished as a result of these two transgressions, they repented by reaffirming their connection to G-d and the covenant, but did not give up their idolatrous practices. They felt that they could serve G-d as a “partnership” together with idolatrous practices. However, G-d makes it clear that this misconception is even more egregious than moving away from the covenant with G-d in the first place. Therefore, G-d says that he will *surely* conceal His face from them.

This misconception has been repeated throughout Jewish history. One cannot separate commitment, belief and attachment from specific behavior. One’s attachment to G-d and Torah cannot be in “partnership” with practices that are antithetical to the Torah.

Ha’azinu

A Torah of Kindness

Abarbanel relates that this Parsha consists of 6 separate sections:

- General Introduction
- The benefits that G-d has granted to the Jewish People
- The transgressions of the Jewish People
- The punishments that will follow these transgressions
- G-d’s initial intention to annihilate the Jewish People
- Consolation and G-d’s revenge against the enemies of the Jewish People

In reference to G-d’s benefits, verse 6 in chapter 32 alludes to four specific types of kindness: “Is He not your *Father*, your *Master*? Has he not *created* you and set you up as a firm *foundation*? The verses that follow proceed to explain this verse:

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“Your Father” is a reference to the fact that G-d is the ultimate father. Just as He created the universe, He also created mankind. This is what is meant in verse 7, “Remember the days of yore, understand the years of generation after generation.” G-d tells us to trace back through human history all the way to its very beginning, and to recognize Him as mankind’s ultimate Creator.

“Your Master” is a reference to the Exodus from Egypt, when G-d ‘acquired’ us as His people. Even though succeeding generations did not experience the Exodus, verse 7 continues, “Ask your father and he will relate it to you, and your elders, and they will tell you.”

“Has he not created you” is a reference to the Torah

as a possession of the Jewish People. Verse 8 relates that G-d granted each of the nations of the world its particular portion. But the Jewish People received “G-d’s portion”. This refers to the giving of the Torah at Sinai, as it says in verse 10, “He discovered him in a desert land... He granted him discernment.” By giving us the Torah, G-d “created” the Jewish people — a new creation that is unique and distinct from the other nations.

The final kindness is giving the Land of Israel to the Jewish People. This is the meaning of verse 13, “He will make him ride on the heights of the Land.” This refers to the conquest and settlement of the Land of Israel.

PARSHA INSIGHTS

continued from page one

Ha’azinu

NOTHING LIKE THE TORAH

“*And Yeshurun became fat and kicked*” (32:15)

Sir Moses Montefiore (1784-1885) was one of the greatest and best-loved statesmen and communal leaders in the history of the Jewish People.

He was born in Leghorn, Italy and grew up in London. In 1827, he made his first visit to Eretz Yisrael. His stay in the Land had a profound effect on him. He became religiously observant and from then until the end of his life, Sir Moses was scrupulous in all areas of mitzvah observance.

It happened that one Shabbat the great Sage known as the Chatam Sofer stayed with Sir Moses. Sir Moses was overjoyed to have the honor of hosting such a great Torah scholar and he did not stint to honor his guest in every way. And not just physically. As was his way, Sir Moses was more concerned with the spirituality of Shabbat than its physical side.

Sir Moses was a humble man. He did not want to pass up

the opportunity of correcting even the smallest infraction of halacha, and so after Shabbat Sir Moses took the Chatam Sofer aside and said to him, “May I please ask your honor if there was anything you saw about our Shabbat that was not in accordance with that which is written in the Torah?”

The Chatam Sofer replied immediately, “I saw nothing here this Shabbat that was in accordance with what is written in the Torah!”

Sir Moses’ jaw dropped. Could he really believe his ears? Continued the Chatam Sofer, “It says in the Torah: *And Yeshurun became fat and kicked*. Rashi explains this means that the Jewish People became rich and prospered because of G-d’s kindness, but neglected the service of their Creator. “I have spent a Shabbat with someone whom the Creator has blessed with great wealth, and yet everything is done in the service of the Most High. So you see, nothing I have seen here this Shabbat is accordance with what is written in the Torah!”

• Source: Heard from Rabbi Yehuda Samet

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BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

NEW TESHUVA

From: Netanel

*Dear Rabbi,
I became a ba'al teshuva years ago. Since then I did teshuva on all my sins and haven't done any serious new ones. So what should I be focusing on during this whole period of repentance spanning Elul, Rosh Hashana, the Ten Days of Teshuva and Yom Kippur?*

Dear Netanel,

As I'm sure you know, the term "*ba'al teshuva*" literally means "one who has mastered repentance".

Although the situation you describe certainly sounds as if you have mastered repentance, it is highly unlikely that one could properly recall and fully repent for literally *all* of his transgressions. This is actually an important safeguard against complacency, and encourages one to continually improve and grow.

So if you're mistaken about not having anything to repent and improve, you can do *teshuva* for not reviewing and reckoning your transgressions properly, taking them too lightly, being complacent and possibly apathetic.

But let's say, theoretically, you assess your situation accurately. You currently have no transgressions because you've done *teshuva* on the old ones and haven't done any new ones.

Still, there's room for new *teshuva*.

For one, as a person grows spiritually his new awareness enables him to realize the limits of his prior perceptions. Thus, his earlier *teshuva* becomes insufficient relative to his current understanding and sensitivity. On his current higher level he has a greater revulsion for his prior transgressions, the awareness of which now necessitates new *teshuva*! This is a never-ending process referred to as "*teshuva upon teshuva*" and is relevant even if he's done (what turns out to be only partial) *teshuva* on past sins and accrues no new ones.

In addition to this form of *teshuva* upon *teshuva* over not

having recognized the true magnitude of one's sin, another form of new *teshuva* is repenting over not properly appreciating the greatness of the King against whom one has transgressed. As before, since one's perception of G-d should always increase, this subtle form of *teshuva* is also unending.

The following story illustrates this latter point:

Once, a student of Rav Sa'adiah Gaon found the rabbi rolling in the snow as a form of repentance for sin. The student queried, "Does the master indeed have sins of such severity to warrant such extreme *teshuva*?" The rabbi replied that he did not, but that he learned to do so from a simple innkeeper. And so Rav Sa'adiah Gaon explained:

"I was once a guest at an inn, and the host did not know that I was a scholar of Torah. He extended to me the courtesy accorded to any regular visitor. Later, a report spread that I had arrived in town and the city residents came to pay their respects. When my host saw this, he too accorded me utmost honor and accommodation for the rest of my stay. Upon my departure he fell at my feet and wept and begged forgiveness for not having treated me respectfully enough. I reminded him that, on the contrary, since his revelation he had treated me as a king. The host replied, "I regret and apologize for the earlier period in which I did not realize the greatness of the master and thus did not honor him sufficiently".

Rav Sa'adiah Gaon concluded to his student: "If he fell to the ground in weeping and supplication asking forgiveness for the lack of honor he showed me before knowing who I was, which I didn't deserve and is only the honor of flesh and blood, all the more so it should be concerning the Creator, whose greatness we recognize more and more each day. Surely we must weep, plead, afflict ourselves and beg Divine forgiveness for the shortcomings of our worship, fear and love of G-d from past days!"

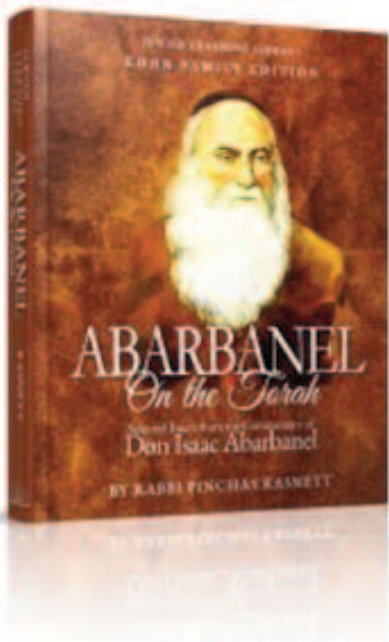
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ROSH HASHANA: A TALE OF TWO BEGINNINGS

BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

The Mishnah teaches that on Rosh Hashana all the inhabitants of the world pass before G-d like the animals of a corral, and G-d passes judgement over the entirety of creation. In this way Rosh Hashana is considered the Day of Judgment (*Yom ha'Din*). However, Yom Kippur is *also* called the Day of Judgment. This begs the question: What is the difference between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur if they are both called the Day of Judgment?

The Ramban explains that Rosh Hashana is the day of *din be'rachamim* (judgment in mercy) and Yom Kippur is the day of *rachamim be'din* (mercy in judgment). This cryptic distinction must be further clarified before we can fully understand how the Ramban resolves the issue. In this essay we will focus on explaining why Rosh Hashana is the day of *din be'rachamim*, leaving our discussion about Yom Kippur for a different time.

As you probably know, Rosh Hashana (literally, “the Head of the Year”) marks the beginning of the New Year. However, besides serving as the first day of the New Year, Rosh Hashana has another role: It is the beginning of the month of Tishrei; it is like Rosh Chodesh. Rosh Hashana is both the beginning of a moon-related time (a month) and a sun-related time (a year). It is the first day of the year and the first day of the month. In this way Rosh Hashana represents the beginning of two cycles. Thus, it is the nexus of two opposing systems — of the sun and of the moon. The conflict between these two forces is highlighted by the concept of a solar eclipse, whereby the moon can block the light of the sun (a rare phenomenon which Americans experienced this year on Rosh Chodesh Elul).

As is well-known, the Jewish calendar is neither solar nor lunar, but is rather a synthesis of both forms of keeping time. The months of the Jewish calendar are lunar-based because they are tied to the appearance of the New Moon, and the years of the Jewish calendar are comprised of twelve or thirteen such months. The year of the Jewish calendar roughly follows a sun-based system, because the movement of the sun determines whether the year will have twelve or thirteen months. The purpose of adding a thirteenth month is to synchronize the seasons of the solar year with the lunar months. This intercalated month compensates for the discrepancies between the amount of days in twelve lunar months and the amount of days in one solar year. (Nowadays, we add a thirteenth month at set intervals: In a nineteen-year cycle, years 3, 6, 8, 11, 14, 17, and 19 have thirteen months, while the rest have only twelve.)

When we talk about the sun and the moon, there is an interesting dynamic which they represent. The sun and moon represent the concepts of “he who gives” and “he who receives”. The sun represents the idea of giving, as the sun gives off light, while the moon does not radiate from its own light. The moon inherently does not illuminate anything. Rather, the light that comes from the sun, reflects off the moon, and bounces into our eyes.

It is really sunlight which appears to be the light of the moon. So the moon is not a giver, the moon is a receiver.

Another difference between the sun and the moon is that the sun always appears the same — it always looks like the same circle up in the sky. This is also characteristic of the giver. The giver constantly and reliably gives; there is no fluctuation or instability. In contrast, the moon plays the role of the receiver. Depending on the time of the month, there may sometimes be more of the moon visible, and sometimes less. In the beginning of the new month the new moon is but a small, barely-discernible sliver of white, but as the month progresses the moon waxes and waxes until it reaches its apex at the fifteenth of the Jewish month. At that point, the moon is visible as a full circle. Afterwards, it wanes smaller and smaller until the end of the month, when it finally disappears and restarts its cycle with the advent of the next month.

In short, there are two major differences between the sun and the moon. Firstly, while the moon’s image fluctuates throughout the month, the sun’s remains stagnant and consistent. Secondly, the moon epitomizes the concept of the receiver, while the sun represents the giver.

In an esoteric way, the relationship between the sun and the moon can be looked at as a parable for understanding two seemingly conflicting methods by which G-d interacts with the world. There are essentially two basic ways in which He manifests His presence in creation: There is *din* (justice or judgment) and *rachamim* (mercy). The Kabbalists may sometimes use other terms to express these ideas: *duchra* and *nukva* — male and female, respectively in Aramaic — whereby the male force personifies the giver and the female force, the receiver; *mashpia* and *mekabel* (influencer and influencee), and others. But the meaning is always the same. What are these concepts of *din* and *rachamim* that G-d uses in running the world? How does He use these two opposing methods to run the world?

We can compare this to the case of two philanthropists: Two people donate tremendous amounts of money. The first man does not care to whom he gives money, he simply gives out an indiscriminate amount of cash to all and sundry. The second philanthropist also gives money — perhaps even the same amount or more — but he requires any recipient to undergo a thorough vetting process. They must submit an application, meet with him, and explain to him their cause. Then, depending on how much he believes in their cause and what he feels is appropriate,

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he will give them a donation. The amount, of course, is based on what he feels the individual coming to him deserves. What is the difference between these two philanthropists?

The difference is in their focus: the first philanthropist focuses on the giver (i.e. himself) because it does not really matter to him who the receiver is and what he wants. He is simply giving away donations whether or not the receiver deserves it. With the second philanthropist, the focus is on the receiver: does he deserve a donation or not, exactly how much, *et cetera*.

With this in mind we can understand the difference between *din* and *rachamim*: Certainly, every element of creation needs a constant flow of influence from G-d in order to continue to exist, but sometimes G-d might temporarily stop his influence or curtail it. Which way do we want G-d to act with us? Sometimes He acts with what we call *rachamim*, in which the focus is on the giver (i.e. Himself), and He gives an influx of His good to the world without any questions asked. But when He focuses on the receiver (i.e. us), that is called *din*, and under that rubric He also gives — but He also examines whether or not the receiver deserves His Divine influence, how much he deserves, when he deserves it, *et cetera*.

As mentioned above, the sun, as the never-changing celestial body that emanates light, represents a focus on the consistent, reliable giver. Conversely, the moon suggests a focus is on the receiver, for when the focus is on him, the flow of goods can fluctuate depending on what the receiver truly deserves, just like the image of the moon fluctuates throughout the month. These two ideas of *din* and *rachmim* meet on Rosh Hashana. It is the meeting point of the solar year and the lunar month — the marriage of the sun and the moon, the *rachamim* and the *din*. It is truly the best of times and the worst of times.

In different places in the Bible we use different words to denote G-d. Sometimes He is known by His four-letter ineffable name (referred to as the Tetragrammaton) — what we might colloquially call “Hashem”, literally “the Name”. And sometimes, we refer to Him as simply *Elokim*, “G-d”, or *ha'Elokim* “the G-d”. Tradition tells us that when encounter His four-letter name, it alludes to His mode of acting through *rachamim*, while the word *Elokim* refers to God as the Divine judge who metes out *din*. In fact, the word *elohim* sometimes appears in the Bible as a word that means a human judge. When we refer to Him as *Elokim* we mean to conjure His role as the ultimate Judge of creation.

The contrast between these two characteristics is accentuated in Psalms 47 — the chapter of Psalms that we read seven times before blowing the *shofar* (ram’s horn) on Rosh Hashana. That passage discusses the universal recognition of G-d’s sovereignty, and one verse reads, “*Elokim* ascends with the *teruah*, Hashem, with the voice of the *shofar*”.

There are two types of sounds that the *shofar* makes on Rosh Hashana: a *tekiah* is a simple straight sound, while a *teruah*, on the other hand, is comprised of multiple short blasts together (there is a halachic uncertainty regarding whether they are 3 longer sounds, 9 shorter sounds, or 3 longer sound followed by

9 shorter sounds). A *tekiah* is one straight, consistent sound, while a *teruah* is a composite of several broken-up, fragmented sounds. In this way, the *tekiah* represents the concept of *rachamim*, because when the focus is on the giver, there is a consistent stream of giving. The *teruah* is related to the Aramaic word *rauah*, which means broken (like the expression that appears in the Talmud *sulam rauah*, a ladder with broken rungs). It represents *din* because it is not a constant flow, but is separated and fragmented depending on whether the receiver deserves to receive or not. The *teruah* focuses on the receiver. We especially associate *Elokim* with the *teruah* because *Elokim* represents the *din* aspect of G-d’s administration of the world, while *tekiah* is associated with *rachamim*, so it is linked to the name Hashem.

When we blow the *shofar* on Rosh Hashana every *teruah* sound has a *tekiah* sound before and after. The *teruah* is always sandwiched by a *tekiah*. The idea behind this is because even though Rosh Hashana has the properties of *din* and *rachamim* (for it begins the solar year and lunar month), we strive to “hide” the *din* of Rosh Hashana. We say in Psalms 81, “Blow the *shofar* on (the first of) the month, on the hidden part of the holiday.” This alludes to the notion that the Rosh Chodesh aspect of Rosh Hashana is hidden, because we are trying to hide the fact that there is a *din* on Rosh Hashana. It is the concealed facet of the holiday. The *teruah*, which represents *din*, is something that we want to suppress, so we hide it in between two instances of *rachamim* — the *tekiah* before and after. All that is visible from the outside of the sandwich is *rachamim*, not *din*.

This idea is known in Kabbalah as *mesikas ha’din*, “sweetening the *din*”. This is also the underlying principle at work when we dip the apple in honey on Rosh Hashana. Because honey is sweet it too represents *rachamim*, so we dip the apple in the honey to make the *rachamim* component of Rosh Hashana its dominant aspect.

But how does all of this work? Can we just close our eyes to the *din* of Rosh Hashana and then it won’t affect us? What are we doing by hiding from the *din*? Whom do we think we are fooling?

The answer, of course, is that we are trying to change ourselves for the better by changing the object of focus. If there is a judgment on us, then we are the object of focus, because G-d looks at us and judges whether or not we deserve His good. We do not want to be the object in focus because then we will almost inevitably be in trouble due to our sins. To resolve this, we do not talk about sins on Rosh Hashana. Instead we focus on G-d and His kingship. Throughout the prayers of Rosh Hashana we continually speak about His greatness, His universal kingship, and how He is so powerful. In doing so we switched the focus from being on the receiver to being on the giver; from being on ourselves to being on G-d. When the focus is on the giver, then the *rachamim* paradigm is in play, and God will give even without our deserving it. In this way Rosh Hashana is essentially the day of *din*, but is immersed in *rachmim* and sweetened on the outside.

OFFERING OF ROSH HASHANA

BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

The Mishnah says: *Four times during the year the world is judged: on Pesach, for the grain; on Atzeret (Shavuot), for the fruits of the tree; on Rosh Hashana all the people of the world pass in front of Him like sheep, as it says: "Who fashions their hearts together, Who perceives all of their actions"; and on the Chag (Succot), the world is judged on water.* (Rosh Hashana 16a)

The Ran asks: if everything is judged on Rosh Hashana, then grain, water, and fruits are also included in the judgment. If so, what purpose do the judgments of Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot serve? The Ran offers an approach that creates a whole new understanding for the judgment of Rosh Hashana. Explaining the above *mishna*, the Ran says that on Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot, *the world* is judged on how much grain, fruits, and water *the world* will receive collectively. However, on Rosh Hashana *each individual* is judged to determine how much of the grain, fruits, and water will be allotted to him personally (Ran to Rosh Hashana 3a (*b'dapei Harif*), "*b'arba'a perakim*"; see also Maharsha, Chidushei Aggadot to Beitza 16a, "*kol*", who answers similarly).

Based on the Ran, we can begin to understand the following *gemara*:

Rabbi Yehuda said in the name of Rabbi Akiva: Why did the Torah say to bring the Omer (offering on Pesach)? Because Pesach is the time (when we are judged regarding) grain; therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu said "Bring before Me the Omer on Pesach so that the grain of the fields will be blessed." And why did the Torah say to bring the bread offering on Atzeret (Shavuot)? Because Atzeret is the time (when we are judged regarding) the fruits of the tree; therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu said "Bring before Me the bread offering on Atzeret so that the fruits of the tree will be blessed (see Rashi there how bread is considered a fruit)." And why did the Torah say to bring the water offering on the Chag (Succot)? Because the Chag is the time for rainfall; therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu said "Bring before Me the water offering on the Chag so that the rains of the year will be blessed for you." (Rosh Hashana 16a)

The above *gemara* illustrates that the way to have a good judgment is by dedicating to G-d the very thing for which we are being judged. Through the offering we declare our inner desire to use the grain, fruits, or water — which is what G-d is judging us for — toward His ser-

vice. In turn, just like a father provides his son with everything that will help him succeed, so too, G-d will abundantly provide us with all that we need to serve Him. Based on the Ran's understanding above we can also understand why one offering suffices for the entire *Klal Yisrael*. Since on these days the world is judged collectively, the obligation of the offering falls on the entire congregation as a whole. Therefore one offering fulfills the obligation of the entire congregation. With this idea we need to ask ourselves: What should be our offering to G-d on Rosh Hashana when *each individual* is being judged for *everything* he will receive the upcoming year? How do we apply the formula of offering the very thing that is being judged on the day when we are being judged for our very own lives?

The *gemara* continues further:

Similarly Hakadosh Baruch Hu said: "Say before Me on Rosh Hashana *malchiut zichronot* and *shofrot*... with what? With the *shofar*. Rabbi Yitzchak said: why do we blow the *shofar* of a ram? Hakadosh Baruch Hu said: "Blow before Me the *shofar* of a ram so that I will be reminded of the sacrifice of Yitzchak the son of Avraham for you, and consider it as if you offered yourselves before Me."

Just like by offering the *karbanot* of the *Chagim* we sweetened their judgments, so too on Rosh Hashana, where we are being judged for our entire lives, we must dedicate ourselves entirely to G-d (see Eliyah Rabbah 581:6). How is this done practically? One way of having a favorable judgment on Rosh Hashana is by dedicating everything in our lives, all that G-d gives us, as a tool to serve Him.

For example, one can ask for *parnasah* (livelihood) to sustain himself so that he may serve G-d and spend money on *mitzvot*, like *mehudar tefillin*, *mezuzah*, *lulav* and *etrog*; to perform *mitzvot* that involve money, like paying one's workers on time, *ma'aser*, *tzedakah*, supporting Torah learning; keeping *kashrut*; paying *yeshivah* tuition. One can ask for health so that he may be able to do acts of *chesed*,

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WHICH WAY IS UP?

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

Finding the Right Place

“**T**he place where you are standing is holy.” This was said to Moshe when G-d appeared to him on Mount Sinai. This idea, in some way, applies to each one of us as well. The verse tells us (Isaiah 6:3), “The entire world is filled with G-d’s glory;” and similarly the Zohar states that there is no place in the world void of G-d’s presence. G-d is here, there is no question about that; the real question is: Where are we?

Going Up or Down?

Spiritually a person is sometimes drawn to be in the places that he visits. According to some commentaries, this is one of the deeper meanings why the Torah records the journeys of the Jewish People in the desert. These forty-nine journeys teach us that in every place that we find ourselves we have an opportunity to elevate ourselves, to attain a higher level of spirituality and sanctity. Through our life journeys we can either climb the forty-nine levels of holiness, or fall into the forty-nine levels of negativity and impurity. The choice is ours.

Making the Right Choice

G-d gave us free choice. We can use our time in this world to maximize our potential elevating ourselves and the world we live in through our positive actions, or we can allow our selfish and egotistical element within to lure us away from the straight path, bringing us and the world spiraling downward to destruction. If we let our jealousy, honor and desire all go unchecked, they can lead to the worst of sins, such as murder, adultery and idol worship.

Of course I don’t mean bowing to stones. This is rarely done today. I mean the more subtle forms of worship we practice today, like materialism and the idolizing of the self. This destruction begins first on a personal level and ultimately progresses to a global one. This point is self evident with one look at the news headlines.

Each of us has a choice to make. Do we want to live in the world G-d created, or the one that we re-create, tailor-made to fit our wants and desires? Do we want the real truth or the illusion of truth that fits into our little box that we can take out and put away at our convenience? It is up to us to choose a life of truth — then we will be privileged to partake of this world together with its Creator.

OFFERING OF ROSH HASHANA *continued from page fourteen*

to take care of one’s children, and to learn Torah and perform *mitzvot*. One can pray for G-d to grant him a home so that he may be able to perform the *mitzvot* of mezuzah and *ma’akeh* (building a fence around one’s flat roof or porch), for a place to host Torah *shiurim*, and for a place for the *Shechinah* to dwell. One can pray for G-d to grant him a marriage partner to give him the opportunity to fulfill the *mitzvah* of procreating; so that one may build a *bayit ne’eman b’Yisrael*; to save one from sinning; and to help him emulate G-d by having someone to give to. One can ask G-d for children so that he can educate them properly and nurture a new generation of *yirei Shamayim*, *talmidei chachamim* and *neshei chayil*.

The idea of offering oneself can also take the form of giving up something that is dear to us for G-d. Every person has things that he is very attached to and finds very hard to give up, even though they are halachically unac-

ceptable, such as immodest clothing, and in this way one can fulfill the concept of making an offering to G-d. This is all one way we may emulate Avraham Avinu, who was willing to sacrifice the son he was praying for his whole life, and Yitzchak Avinu, who was willing to give up his very body by assisting Avraham Avinu fulfill his commandment of bringing him up as a *korban* (see Rashi on Bereshet 22:6).

On this day we must reflect within and declare wholeheartedly that we are willing to sacrifice even those things that are very dear to us so that we may serve G-d properly. This is one way we can fulfill the idea of offering our lives on the day we are being judged for life. Through this willingness, G-d will, in turn, write us for a year full of goodness, both physically and spiritually, so that we may dedicate ourselves to His Torah and *mitzvot*. May we all merit receiving a sweet judgment on Rosh Hashana!

CONFESSION, TESHUVA & KAPPAROT

In these days we have neither the Beit Hamikdash nor an altar to atone for our sins — all we have is teshuva, repentance.

Teshuva atones for all sins, even for someone who was wicked his entire life. If he does teshuva even at the end of his lifetime, none of his sins will be counted, as it is written: “The wickedness (i.e. sins) of the wicked will not cause him to stumble on the day he repents.” (Ezekiel 33:22)

The day of Yom Kippur also contains within it the power to atone for sins when a person repents, as it is written (Vayikra 17:30): “For on this day (Yom Kippur) He shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you from all your sins, before G-d shall you be cleansed.” (Laws of Repentance 1:3)

The seventy-third command is to confess one’s sins and transgressions to G-d when repenting.

One should say, “Please G-d, I have sinned inadvertently and wilfully. I committed such-and-such (specify the transgressions you can remember). I am regretful and embarrassed by my actions and will never repeat such behavior.” Afterwards ask to be forgiven (Based on Sefer Hamitzvot 73; Rambam, Laws of Repentance 1:1). The above ruling is based on the verse, “Speak to the Children of Israel: A man or woman who commits any of man’s sins, by committing treachery towards G-d... They shall confess their sin that they committed.” (Bamidbar 5:6-7)

The Custom of “Kapparot”

Regarding the custom to perform the practice of kapparot on the day preceding Yom Kippur, which is to ritually slaughter a male chicken for all males and to recite verses over it, one should refrain from this custom. Rema: It is the custom to give the chickens to the poor. (Shulchan Aruch 605:1)

The Beit Yosef writes that the Ramban and Rashba forbid the practice of this custom because of “*Darkei Emori*”, a prohibition against following idolatrous customs. The Rema writes in his notes to this ruling that, nevertheless, this custom is recorded by the *Geonim* and many *Rishonim* and it has become an established custom that one should follow.

It is well known that Ashkenazic Jewry follow the rulings of the Rema, Rabbi Moshe Isserles, while Sefardim follow the Mechaber, Rabbi Yosef Karo. However, the Kaf Hachaim writes that in this case the Sefardim also practice the custom. The reason is most likely because the Arizal was very careful to perform this custom, explaining its deep Kabbalistic reasons in *Sha’ar Hakavanot*.

If *kapparot* is in fact practiced with a chicken, it is the widespread custom to give it immediately to a poor family for eating before the Yom Kippur fast. If done with money instead, the money is given to the poor in order to buy food.

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

אחינו כל בית ישראל

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

FORTHWITH IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION

BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

The concept of a space-time continuum presumes that the three dimensions of space can be joined with the dimension of time to create a 4D mathematical model. Under this template, time itself is the fourth dimension. While this notion has only entered the study of physics and metaphysics in the last hundred years, the idea has already been expressed by the Maharal of Prague (1525-1609) and is even reflected in the Hebrew language. Amazingly, some words in Hebrew (and even in English!) share both a temporal and spatial meaning, illustrating the interconnectivity between time and space. For example, the word *olam* refers to infinity or at least vastness, both in a spatial sense (the entire world) and a temporal sense (forever). The Hebrew words *lifnei* and *acharei* (“before” and “after”, respectively) can also be used in terms of space (“I stood *before* the Lincoln Memorial.”) and in terms of time (“I came home *before* my mother did”). This idea may help shed light on some of the four Hebrew words for “immediately after”: *teikef*, *mi'yad*, *le'alter*, and *otyom*. Although none of these words appear in the Bible, they are all definitely used in Rabbinic Hebrew.

The word *teikef* has a double-meaning. On the one hand, it means “closely pressed together”, yet, on the other hand, it also means “rapidly succeeding each other”. This demonstrates the interconnection between the spatial and the temporal in the Hebrew language. In other words, two objects which are spaced close to one another, and two events which transpire close in time, share the word *teikef*. So, *teikef* means “immediately after”, but it also means “spaced closely together.”

Another Hebrew word that means immediately, or forthwith, is *mi'yad*. If translated hyper-literally, the word *mi'yad* means “from hand”. This word also suggests a correlation between time and space, for the most readily transferable object is that which sits in one’s hand so it can be directly transferred to someone else’s hand. This is conceptually similar to the time-related concept of immediacy, which denotes the speedy flow of chronology from one event to the next one immediately afterwards. (I once thought that the English expression “off-hand” might be

related to the Hebrew word *mi'yad*, such that when one says, “I don’t remember off-hand...”, he means “I don’t immediately remember...”)

The third Hebrew word which denotes the concept of immediately *post haste* is *le'alter*. Most famously, some Jews have a custom to greet others on the first night of Rosh Hashana with the words, *le'shanah tova tei'katev ve'tei'chatem le'alter le'chaim tovim u'le'shalom* (meaning, “For a good year, shall you be written and inscribed, immediately (*le'alter*), for a good life and peace”). How can we break down the word *le'alter*? Some commentators, including Rabbi Yishaya Pick-Berlin (1725-1799) and Rabbi Yaakov Emden (1697-1776), explain that *le'alter* is portmanteau of the phrase *al atar* (“on the spot”). In light of this explanation we again find a connection between space and time, because “on the spot” literally refers to location, yet the word *le'alter* refers to an occurrence straightaway in time.

The fourth word in our set is commonly pronounced *otyom*, but some argue that it should really be read *evteos*. This term appears once in the Mishnah (Niddah 2:2) and clearly means “immediately thereafter”. Rabbi Emmanuel Chai Ricci (1688-1743), in his commentary to the Mishnah, writes that the word *otyom* is an abbreviation of a Hebrew phrase which characterizes the halachic definition of “immediately” in the context in which the word appears. However, Rabbi Betzalel Ronsberg (1762-1821) disagrees with Rabbi Ricci’s interpretation and points out that it is inconsistent with the conclusions reached by the Talmud regarding the halachic definition of “immediately” in that context. He instead prefers the approach of Rav Hai Gaon (in the commentary to Niddah ascribed to him), *Sefer HaAruch*, Rashi (to Yoma 6a and Keritot 17b), and Rashba (Torat HaBayit 7:3) who all write that *otyom* is actually a Greek word. Indeed, the Ancient Greek word εὐθέως (pronounced euthéōs) means “immediately”.

Author’s note:

Le’Zechut Refuah Shleimah for Bracha bat Chaya Rachel

ROSH HASHANA Q&A ?

1. Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?
2. Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tisrei is Rosh Hashana?
3. We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?
4. What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?
5. Which Book of *Tanach* does the beginning of the *Tashlich* prayer come from?
6. What three barren women were 'remembered' by G-d on Rosh Hashana?
7. A person's yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashana, except for three types of expenses. What are they?
8. We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: "Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah..." What was Abraham's prayer on Mount Moriah?
9. Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashana, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?
10. What halacha applies to the *shehechyanu* blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashana which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

ROSH HASHANA Q&A!

Answers to Rosh Hashana's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah.
 - *Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*
2. Nowhere. The Torah calls it "a day of shofar blowing." (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai).
 - *Bamidbar 29:1*
3. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which G-d has blessed..." (*Bereishis 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this "field" as an apple orchard.
 - *Ta'anis 29b, Biyur Hagra*
4. "Blessed are You... who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar," and the *shehechyanu* blessing.
 - *Orach Chaim 581:2*
5. The Book of Micha (7:18-20).
6. Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashana it was decreed that these barren women would bear children.
 - *Tractate Rosh Hashanah 10b*
7. Expenses for Shabbat, Yom Tov, and the cost of one's children's Torah education.
 - *Ba'er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1*
8. He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations (*Onkelos 22:14*). Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac.
 - *Rashi 22:13*
9. Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The "two-day festival" arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashanah. Since Rosh Hashana occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.
10. On the second night of Rosh Hashana it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the *shehechyanu* blessing. Thus, the *shehechyanu* blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no *shehechyanu* blessing be said on the second night of Rosh Hashana.)
 - *Taz 600:2*

1. Passover commemorates the going out from Egypt. Shavuot commemorates the giving of the Torah. What historical event can Yom Kippur be said to commemorate?
2. For what kinds of sins does Yom Kippur not atone?
3. What should someone do if the person he wronged does not forgive him the first time?
4. Why is the vidui confession included during the mincha prayer the afternoon before Yom Kippur?
5. On Yom Kippur we refrain from: Working, eating, drinking, washing, anointing, family relations and wearing leather shoes. Which three of these prohibitions are more severe than the others?
6. In what two ways does the prohibition against eating food on Yom Kippur differ from the prohibition against eating pork the entire year?
7. Who wrote the prayer "Unetaneh Tokef" said during the chazan's repetition of musaf?
8. Why do we read the book of Yona on Yom Kippur?
9. In what two ways does havdalah after Yom Kippur differ from havdalah after Shabbos?
10. Ideally, what mitzvah should one begin immediately after Yom Kippur?

Answers to Yom Kippur Questions!

1. Moshe came down from Mount Sinai on the tenth of Tishrei with the second set of Tablets, signifying forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf. Yom Kippur can be said to commemorate this event, the first national day of forgiveness for the Jewish People.
2. Sins committed against other people, including hurting someone's feelings. Yom Kippur does not atone for these sins until the perpetrator gains forgiveness from the victim himself. (Orach Chaim 606:1)
3. He should try at least two more times to gain forgiveness. (Orach Chaim 606:1)
4. Lest one choke while eating the pre-Yom Kippur meal and die without atonement, or lest one become intoxicated and unable to concentrate on the prayers at night. (Mishna Berura 607:1)
5. Eating, drinking, working. (Mishna Krisus 1:1)
6. Although any amount is forbidden, eating on Yom Kippur is not punishable by a Sanhedrin until one has eaten food equal in volume to the size of a date. Eating pork, on the other hand, is punishable for eating even an olive-sized piece, which is smaller than a date. (Mishna Berura 612:1)
Eating on Yom Kippur incurs the punishment of kares - spiritual excision, whereas eating pork does not.
7. "Unetaneh Tokef" was written by Rabbi Amnon of Mainz, Germany about 1000 years ago.
8. The repentance of the people of Ninveh serves as an inspiration to us to repent, and shows us that repentance can overturn a Divine decree. (Shelah Hakadosh)
9. After Yom Kippur, the blessing over spices is omitted from havdalah. Also, the source of the flame used for havdalah after Yom Kippur must be a fire kindled before Yom Kippur. (Orach Chaim 624:3,4)
10. Building the succa. (Rema, Orach Chaim 624:5)

גמר חתימה טובה

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TESHUVA THROUGH MUSSAR

BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

Sefer Mishlei says: “The parables of Shlomo, the son of David, the king of Israel: to know *chochmah* and *mussar*, to understand sayings of wisdom” (1:2). The commentaries differentiate between *chochmah* and *mussar* by explaining that *chochmah* is the knowledge to distinguish between what is and what is not permitted. *Mussar*, though, is meant as a tool to help bring those ideas into action (see Sha’arei Teshuva 3:3; Meiri on Mishlei 1:2). In a previous article we explained that without knowledge of the relevant *halachot*, learning *mussar* is not enough to help one do the right thing. For example, one may learn all the *mussar* literature about how horrible it is to speak *lashon hara*, but without the knowledge of what is considered *lashon hara*, no amount of *mussar* can prevent him from speaking *lashon hara*. This is what Chazal mean that without wisdom, there is no fear of Heaven (Pirkei Avot 3:23).

However, Chazal also tell us that without fear of Heaven, there is no wisdom. The commentaries explain that just like every government has a ruling body and enforcers of law, so too, *halacha* is the law and *mussar* is its enforcer (see Alei Shor I p.87). There are many things we hold to be true intellectually, but without *mussar* we don’t live by them practically. For example even though we know that we are talking to G-d during *tefillah*, and that prayers can change decrees, yet it can still be difficult to come to shul on time and pray with the proper concentration. Since we don’t see G-d while praying, we often take a meeting with people more seriously than a meeting with G-d. Even though we intellectually know that everything we have comes from Him, there still exists the spiritual challenge of exerting too much *hishtadlut*, effort, to attain our needs. Since our *parnasah* comes through a check from a boss or money from customers, and not straight from the Heavens like the *manna*, it is a challenge for us to act according to the knowledge that everything is from G-d.

Even though we know that the damage that *aveirot* (transgressions) cause to our *neshamot* (souls) is not worth the petty pleasure of a few moments, it is still an ordeal to avoid those transgressions. Even though we may realize that every second of our existence in this world is precious, and it is foolish to waste time, many moments are wasted without thinking twice. Since we only see our physical desires instantly gratified, not the instant spiritual damage that *aveirot* bring or the instant spiritual benefit *mitzvot* bring, it becomes a challenge to avoid *aveirot*, and not waste precious time.

The *gemara* says that a person doesn’t sin unless a *ruach shtut* (a spirit of insanity) enters him (Sotah 3a). It is illogical to commit a transgression, but one does so anyway because his knowledge stays only in his intellect. This idea is neatly captured by the verse “You should know it on this day, and enter it to your heart” (Devarim 4:39). It is one thing to have the knowledge, but another thing to bring it to one’s heart and live by it (see the Chafetz Chaim’s *Shem Olam*).

To combat what we are being fed by our senses we need to be constantly reminded of the truths we don’t tangibly see or aren’t always on our minds. Chazal frequently feed us with vivid parables and sayings that help us internalize some of these ideas. For example, Chazal abundantly discuss the transience of this world, and compare this world to a corridor, only meant to be a passageway to the main banquet hall, which is *Olam HaBa* — the World-to-Come (Avot 4:21). They also stress the growing opportunities of this world by telling us: He (Rabbi Ya’akov) used to say, “Better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the entire life of the World-to-Come” (Avot 4:17). Someone who repeatedly occupies himself with such concepts will feel it much harder to waste time and perform *aveirot*.

It is not always subconscious forgetfulness, but rather a person’s physical desires that deter one from doing the right thing. For such a *yetzer hara* (inclination to transgress), the *aggadot* in the *gemara* and *mussar* teach us ways to wage battle. For example, Chazal tell us that one should consider three things that will prevent him from sinning: He originated as a putrid drop, he will end up under the earth with the worms and maggots, and he will eventually account for his actions before G-d, the King of kings (Avot 3:1). Studying Chazal’s *mussar* also helps us spiritually battle our physical desires. The *gemara* says, “I (G-d) created the *yetzer hara*, and I created the Torah as its cure” (*Kiddushin* 30b; see also *Succah* 52b). The commentaries explain that this is only true if one also learns *mussar* (see *Birkei Yosef* 1:9; *Tov Ayin* 18:2; *Peleh Yo’etz*, “Mussar”). As it says in *Avot d’Rabbi Natan* (29), “Someone who learns *halachah* and not *midrash* has not tasted *yirat chet* (fear of sin)”.

Learning *mussar* also helps us by guiding us on how to work on our *middot*, such as pride, anger, jealousy, and improper flattery. The *mussar sefarim* give us guidelines on how to improve ourselves by expanding on each *midah*, and explaining how it takes a positive or negative form, as each trait may be channeled in either direction. See, for example, *Orchot Tzaddikim*, which goes through each *middah*, describ-

continued on page twenty-two

THE SUCCAH, A TEMPORARY HOME

BY RABBI CHAVIV DANESH

There is a well known principle in Jewish thought that explains how a name always expresses its possessor's essence. By studying the depth behind a name, a person can glean an understanding of the spiritual nature of that which bears the name. Similarly, the names of the holidays reflect their core (Michtav M'Eilyahu II p.17). Based on this idea we should analyze why the holiday of Succot is named for the mitzvah of dwelling in the succah instead of the mitzvah of the *arbah minim* ("four species" — etrog, lulav, myrtle and willow). In what way does the name *Succot* encapsulate the essence of this holiday?

The commentaries say that one way to make *teshuvah* last is by getting to the underlying reason for committing the transgression, and thereby attack the problem at its root. Therefore, we must ask ourselves: *What is the underlying root of all sins?* The Talmud teaches that a person only sins because a spirit of foolishness entered him (Sotah 3a). The reason for this is because a person is choosing the trivial and temporary pleasures of this world when committing a sin, over the permanent and indescribable pleasures of the World-to-Come. No one in his right mind would make such a decision. However, the *yetzer hara* magnifies the pleasures of this world, while making us forget about the World-to-Come, so that we may sin. The *gemara* calls this trickery a *spirit of foolishness*, and is the underlying cause of all sins. This implies that our tendency to forget this world's *transience* is the root of sinning.

On Yom Kippur, the day when the soul speaks louder than the body, we see the temporary nature of this world clearly, and we thus make all sorts of resolutions to change ourselves for the better. However, with the passage of time we forget the lesson of Yom Kippur. As we go further away from Yom Kippur the body begins to speak louder and louder, to the point that we choose the pebbles of this world over the diamonds of World-to-Come. The mitzvah of dwelling in the succah is meant to make the clarity of Yom Kippur last (see the Chida's *Simchat Haregel*, Succot 1). How is this so?

The Alshich explains that every soul is taken from its permanent home in the spiritual world to a temporary home in this physical world at birth, to accomplish its unique task. Once its job is done, the soul is removed from this temporary dwelling, back to its permanent home in the World-to-Come (Torat Moshe on Vaykra 23:33). Throughout the course of the year, people often forget that the physical world is only a means to an end, and not an end in and of itself. By leaving our seemingly permanent homes for seven days and dwelling in the temporary succah we put our bod-

ies in a state where the dilemma of the soul can be felt, which left its permanent spiritual home and entered this temporary physical world. This mitzvah, therefore, reminds us of the fact that our stay here in the physical world is a temporary one. This is one message behind the mitzvah of succah.

If we carry the message of dwelling in the succah with us throughout the year it would be much easier to live up to our own moral standards. When the *yetzer hara* tempts us to sin we should remind ourselves not to give up our permanent lives in the World-to-Come for the fleeting and temporary ones in this physical world. This is the only way to fight the *yetzer hara*. Perhaps this is the depth behind the custom of beginning to build the succah immediately after breaking the fast of Yom Kippur (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 624:5 & 625:1). The succah, with its message of the transience of this world, is the perfect way to begin anew following Yom Kippur.

To what extent does this idea go? It is told about the Chafetz Chaim that he was once visited by a high-standing official. Upon seeing the Chafetz Chaim's humble home, the official asked him where all of his belongings were. The Chafetz Chaim responded by asking where the official's belongings were.

The official replied, "But I am only a visitor, passing through the city. All my furniture and possessions are in my home."

The Chafetz Chaim responded, "Ah, so am I just a visitor, passing through this world. All my real possessions, which are much more valuable than anything I could ever own here, are waiting for me in the World-to-Come."

The Chida suggests that this may also be a reason why we read Megillat Kohellet on Succot. In Kohellet, Shlomo HaMelech, who owned nearly every physical possession of any value or worth, speaks of the transience of this world. Its main lesson is that pursuing the physical will never satisfy a person's spiritual soul, as in the statement in the *Midrash* that no one dies with even half of his wishes fulfilled (Kohellet Rabbah 1:34). This is the perfect message for the holiday of Succot.

We can now address the question of why the holiday of Succot is named after the mitzvah of sitting in a succah and not after the *arbah minim*. The Alshich explains that since the lesson we gain from dwelling in the succah is so fundamental, it becomes the primary theme of the holiday (Torat Moshe on Vaykra 23:33). It is this mitzvah and the ideas behind it that can help us carry our *teshuvah* into the new year.

YOM KIPPUR — REPETITIVE REFLECTION

BY RABBI MOSHE BORGER

Every year we bang our chests, declaring all of our misdemeanors of the previous year. We say “*al chait*” for this sin, and “*al chait*” for that sin. We cover all the areas one could conceive of, and with a contrite heart we attempt to return to G-d, asking for His forgiveness. If you count the number of times we perform this ceremony in all of the Standing Prayers and the repetitions, beginning with the afternoon of the eve of Yom Kippur until the repetition of the Afternoon service on the day itself, it is no less than nine times that we go through this unchanging list.

Rabbi Shimshon Pinkus asked: Why do we need to confess so many times? Seemingly it would make more sense to do so only once — either at the beginning, when we feel the novelty of the declaration, or at the end, as a culmination of our repentance. Why repeat these words so many times? He answers with a parable:

Imagine rushing into your local Synagogue on Yom Kippur night and accidentally slamming the door into an elderly man, sending him flying. After the man gets up, you apologize and quickly retire into your seat. As you do so, your neighbor tells you, “By the way, you do realize that elderly gentleman is the founder of this Synagogue and personally paid for the building, don’t you?” You feel a little bit more foolish when you hear that. Later that evening somebody tells you that he’s actually the “Scholar in Residence”, and you then hear a powerful sermon from him all about the topic of “Negligence”. You now feel a bit worse. Then, the next morning somebody tells you that he actually was your

grandfather’s best friend before the War, and personally arranged visas to save him and your entire family. Now you feel terrible. Then a bit later in the day someone tells you how he supported your family for years, and was personally responsible for taking care of each of their career paths, making sure they ended up in the right jobs. At this point your apology seems really underrated, and you feel a need to ask him again for a true forgiveness. Finally, you hear that this special man was actually the godfather at your circumcision, and paid for all of your schooling that led to your financial success. That’s really awkward, but not as bad as when you find out that he was the one who suggested your wife for you, and helped your parents pay for your wedding in full. Right now you feel downright horrified and pathetic!

As far fetched as this parable may seem, it encapsulates our relationship with G-d. How could we “knock Him flying” carelessly, many times purposefully ignoring his requests of us that are so pitiful in comparison to the magnitude of goodness He does for us. As the day of Yom Kippur goes on, the feeling of regret should deepen, and our declarations become more and more meaningful and heartfelt, as we begin to internalize throughout the day what He means to us and how treacherous were our rebellions against Him. The repetition of the *vidui* confession on Yom Kippur allows us to think and repent more sincerely, as this realization will hopefully truly set in.

Teshuva through Mussar continued from page twenty

ing its positive and negative usages. *Mussar sefarim* also explain how one may overcome a negative character trait. These concepts are not elaborated in halacha works, so the only way to really “work on them” is by learning the *mussar sefarim* that discuss them (see *Minchat Chinuch*, 611).

Based on above it is clear why the *poskim* write that one should dedicate specific time everyday to studying *mussar* (see *Mishnah Berurah* 1:12 & 613:2, which quotes the Rosh, the Arizal, the Chida, the Vilna Gaon, and the Chayei Adam). This is especially so when performing *teshuva*, as Rav Yisrael Salanter said: Someone who wants to change his ways without learning *mussar* is analogous to someone who wants to

see without eyes, or hear without ears (Ohr Yisrael, 14).

We conclude with the Baal Shem Tov, who says that often the *yetzer hara* wouldn’t tell someone to stop learning Torah altogether, because, for many, it is not something he would accept. However, the *yetzer hara* might tell a person to ignore areas that will help him change. This is why he says there is a big *yetzer hara* not to learn halacha and *mussar* — because these areas have the largest impact on changing a person. May we all be *zocheh* to defeat this *yetzer hara* and perform proper *teshuva* by knowing the will of G-d through learning halacha, and bringing it to our hearts through studying *mussar*.



IT'S THE THOUGHT THAT COUNTS

The most important part of a mezuzah is invisible. The thoughts and intentions of the *sofer* breathe soul into the letters, transforming a piece of animal hide into a pulsating “power-pack.”

As the *sofer* sits down to write a mezuzah he must focus and say: “Behold I am writing for the sake of the holiness of mezuzah.” If these words were in the *sofer*'s mind but not verbally expressed at the outset, the mezuzah is invalid. Although this one declaration is effective for the duration of the entire writing process, if the *sofer* takes a break for eating, sleeping, or other activities, ideally, he should repeat the declaration upon resuming.

That's not all. A special declaration is verbalized before the writing of every one of the many Divine names in the mezuzah: “Behold I am writing for the sake of the holiness of the Divine Name.” Before adding this enhanced level of intention, the *sofer* first sanctifies the ink on his quill by writing a letter in the scroll.

Aside from these thoughts, exceptionally learned *sofrim* infuse their writing with kabbalistic intentions, especially when inscribing the Divine names. A *sofer* must also keep in mind at all times the many intricate rules and protocols of proper halachic writing.

Once he begins writing the name of G-d he is forbidden to interrupt. I once arrived at the home of a *sofer* for a meeting. I knew he was there, but for some reason he did not respond to the doorbell. Finally, he appeared and explained apologetically that even if I was David, King of Israel, he could not have come to the door earlier, as he was in the

middle of writing the Name of G-d.

The Mishnah records that a certain scribe had mastered a special method of writing the four letters of G-d's name simultaneously with four quills tied to his fingers. He mastered this to ensure that the Name would never be in an incomplete state.

All of this requires extraordinary focus, diligence, and devotion. It is no wonder that the Sages write that the most important quality of a *sofer* is his “fear of Heaven” — even more important than the beauty of his script. Additionally, our Rabbis have asserted that the piety of the *sofer* enhances the holiness and power of the *mezuzot* that he writes. Many *sofrim* are accustomed to purifying themselves before writing by immersing in a mikveh.

Fear of Heaven is a crucial quality for a more basic reason. Many of the errors that disqualify a mezuzah are undetectable, and some cannot be corrected later. An unscrupulous *sofer* can pass on an invalid mezuzah as kosher, with only Heaven as his witness. This is another reason why a person should be careful to purchase his scrolls from a reputable source.

We often are happy to spend money purchasing a beautiful mezuzah cover to grace our home. But we are in shock when we discover what a properly written kosher scroll costs. We must just remember: It's the thought that counts!

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SUCCOT Q&A ?

1. According to the Torah, what three basic requirements define a material as valid for use as a succah roof?
2. If the succah causes discomfort (e.g., it's too cold) to the extent that under similar conditions you would leave your very own house, you are exempt from the mitzvah. Why?
3. What two things are forbidden to do outside of the succah all seven days of the festival?
4. What is the absolute minimum number of meals a person is required to eat in the succah during the seven-day holiday?
5. Besides referring to the tree and its fruit, what does the word "etrog" mean literally?
6. What is the minimum length of a lulav?
7. What is the maximum percentage a person is required to add to the purchase price of his etrog in order to obtain an etrog of greater beauty?
8. On the Shabbat that occurs during Succot, we read the Book of Kohelet, in which King Solomon refers to himself as "Kohelet." Why is King Solomon called Kohelet?
9. What prohibition could a person transgress simply by sitting in the succah on the eighth day of Succot?
10. We hold a tallit over the heads of the people who read the end of the Torah and the beginning of the Torah. Why?

SUCCOT Q&A!

Answers to Succot Questions!

1. It must grow from the ground, no longer be connected to the ground, and not be receptive to tumah (ritual defilement).
2. Because the commandment of living in a succah is to dwell in the succah for seven days the same way you dwell in your house the rest of the year. (*Mishna Berura 640:13*)
3. Eat (an 'established' meal) or sleep. (*Orach Chaim 639:2*)
4. One. Eating a meal in the succah the first night of Succot is a requirement. During the rest of the festival a person can eat 'snacks' which are not required to be eaten in a succah. (Outside Israel, one must eat a meal the second night of Succot as well. However, there is no requirement to live outside Israel!) (*Orach Chaim 639:3*)
5. Beauty. (*Ramban Vayikra 23:40*)
6. Its spine must be at least 4 tefachim (halachic hand-breadths).
7. 33.3% (*Orach Chaim 656:1*)
8. Because he gathered (*kihale*) vast wisdom, and because he, as king, gathered the nation on Succot after the Sabbatical year. (*Rashi, Kohelet 1:1*)
9. Bal Tosif - "Do not add to the mitzvot." The commandment to live in the succah applies for only seven days. To sit in the succah on the eighth day with intent to fulfill the mitzvah transgresses "bal tosif." (*Orach Chaim 666:1*)
10. It represents the wedding canopy, symbolizing that through the Torah we wed ourselves to G-d.

תג שמח

ohr.edu wishes all of Israel a Happy Succot

TOTAL MITZVAH

BY RAV NOTA SCHILLER

It is said in the name of the Vilna Gaon that there are only two opportunities among all the 613 *mitzvot* to physically “enter the mitzvah.” One is the opportunity to live in Eretz Yisrael, and the other to be in the succah you have constructed for the Festival of Succot. When you cross the border into the Land of Israel, or walk into the succah, you have “entered” the mitzvah. What is the connection between the succah and the Land of Israel?

Judaism is unique to the world in that Jewish national and religious destinies are identical. The concept of a successful Jewish nation in the Land of Israel is fundamental to our religious destiny. Other nations have holy places and live elsewhere, but for us, our Land is our home, our holy soil and the necessary setting for the ideal fulfillment of *mitzvot*. Accordingly, the Torah includes both civil and reli-

gious law, instructing us in our everyday behavior and our acts of worship, both of which are equally holy. The way we live in the Land is part of our service to G-d. Thus we see in the Book of Joshua that the first decisions Joshua made when the Jewish nation entered the Land of Israel were for urban planning, as important to their spiritual lives as the transportation of the Holy Ark. Living in Israel gives the Jewish People the opportunity to sanctify every little act that they do. Merely going to the corner store to buy a carton of milk is part of the fulfillment of the Jewish destiny when it is done in the Land of Israel. Similarly, during the festival of Succot a Jew has a chance to make every little act he does a holy act by being in the succah. Eating a celebratory meal or even sleeping in the succah is a mitzvah, a symbol of the total fulfillment of G-d’s plan for the Jewish People.

ABARBANEL on Succot

BY RABBI PINCHAS KASNETT

The Succah and the Four Species

Abarbanel offers several insights into the holiday of Succot and the succah itself. First of all, the temporary nature of the succah is a reminder of our temporary life on earth. The seven days of the festival correspond to the seven decades of the average lifespan. The number of bulls which were brought as sacrificial offerings decreases with each day of the festival. This is to remind us that each passing decade brings us closer to the inevitable end, and encourages us to make the best use of our time to develop our spiritual potential. The first and last days of the festival represent the first and last decades of life. In the first decade — the years of our youth — we revel in the delights and pleasures of the physical world. This is to remind us that we are not prohibited from enjoying those delights. However, in the last decade we are enjoined to make the physical world secondary to spiritual accomplishments. The eighth day, the separate festival of Shemini Atzeret, reminds us that if we have merited living into an eighth decade we have attained a special level of holiness and spiritual purity.

Abarbanel offers a unique insight into the deeper meaning of the four plant species which we use on Succot. The Torah prescribes that the citron, palm branch, willow and myrtle

be held together on the first day of Succot. (According to Rabbinic law they are held together on the intermediate days of the festival as well.) Each of these species, as they are named and described by the Torah, hints at the sweetness and pleasures of the physical world as previously indicated by the first decade of life. The citron is described as the “fruit of a beautiful tree” — which is pleasing to the eyes of all who gaze upon it. The palm tree is also beautiful and pleasing to the eye. The myrtle is described as the “branches of a braided tree”. The Hebrew word “*avot*” is normally translated as “braided” since on each branch there is a series of three leaves that grow closely together like a braid. Abarbanel, however, states that the word ‘*avot*’ is actually derived from the word ‘*aveit*’ which means fat or corpulent, and is a reference to the beautiful, dense arrangement of the leaves on each branch. Finally, the Hebrew word for the willow, “*arava*” has the same root as the word “*arav*” which can mean pleasant and sweet. After describing the four species the Torah states immediately that “You shall celebrate it as a festival for G-d.” This is a clear indication that the pleasures and delights of the physical world are to be enjoyed only according to the parameters of the Torah in order to serve G-d properly.

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SHABBAT PARSHIOT BEREISHET-NOACH · TISHREI-CHESHVAN 5778 · OCT. 2017 · VOL. 25 NO. 2

PARSHA INSIGHTS

Bereishet

LIFE'S REAR-VIEW MIRROR

“And G-d saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good.”(1:31)

Wouldn't life be so much easier if we had eyes in the back of our heads? No need for rear-view mirrors in our cars! No need to worry when walking down dark alleys at night that someone is going to jump you from behind! For teachers, the highly dangerous practice of writing on the blackboard would lose its trepidation! Come to think of it, wouldn't life be much easier if we had three feet? Think of how much more comfortable standing in shul on Yom Kippur would be! People would be able to shift from one foot to the other to the other. Shoe and sock manufactures would be able to make a bet-

ter living! Another thing: Why is it that only the chosen few of us can walk on our hands, and then only with some difficulty? If we could walk on our hands we would be able to see the world from an entirely different perspective! We could revitalize the cerebral cortex with all the blood flowing to the brain! We could do yoga and aerobics at the same time! And: What about if we had four kidneys? We could donate two of them to people in need with much less problem! And why not two hearts? While we're on the subject, I really don't understand why aren't our faces coated with plastic so we don't need to use soap? Just a

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Noach

THE WISDOM OF WINE

“Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself and planted a vineyard.” (9:20)

Jews are not known for their alcoholic indulgence. Statistically, the incidence of alcoholism amongst us is among the lowest in the world. On the other hand, alcohol is not taboo in our tradition. On Purim, we have a holy obligation to become drunk enough not to know the difference between “Mordechai the blessed” and “Haman the cursed.” A Jewish child grows up with Friday night Kiddush wine on his lips. The same is true on Shabbat morning. And at the close of Shabbat, wine is part of the *Havdala* ceremony that guides our re-entry into the week. In addition, wine features in the Four Cups on Pesach, at weddings, *Yamim Tovim*, *Brit Mila* and other events in

Jewish life. Jews seem to have no problem combining wine with an essentially sober lifestyle.

What is the secret of this combination of wine and wisdom?

In this week's portion, after Noach emerged from the ark he planted a vineyard and subsequently became drunk. The Torah describes Noach's action as “*Vayachel* “. This word is from the root *chol* meaning the opposite of holy. Rashi explains that Noach made himself un-holy, for he should have involved himself in planting something other than a vineyard. Rashi's words here need some explanation. Why was Noach's un-holiness connected

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continued from page twenty six

Bereishet

damp cloth would do the trick!

When G-d created the world He consulted with His Heavenly court. G-d premeditated the creation of every organ. The evidence of G-d's wisdom shines from every creature. If you assembled all the greatest Nobel Prize winners throughout history and gave them unlimited funds they still wouldn't be able to put life into the tiniest insect. And even if we can admit that G-d knew exactly what He was doing with the physical creation, sometimes we question His wisdom in other areas. For example: "Why does

this guy have so much money? If G-d had given it to me, I'd use it much better." Or: "Why did G-d give this person such talent, such a mind? It's wasted on him. I'd have put that talent to much better use."

Just as G-d created the physical world with perfection, and we need neither eyes in the back of our heads, nor hands on which we can walk, nor a third leg, so too each one of us is uniquely and perfectly equipped to fulfil our mission in creation.

• Sources: *Midrash Hagadol 1:26, Bereshet Rabbah 39:21*

continued from page twenty six

Noach

with his failure to plant some other species than the grape?

In the language of the spiritual masters the word wine is synonymous with pleasure. This is why the ultimate pleasure of being close to the Divine Presence in the futureworld is described as "*the wine preserved from the grapes of the Six Days of Creation.*" Before we experience the wine of the World-to-Come, however, we must first cultivate something other than the vineyard. Here we must labor to raise the level of the un-holy, the *chol*, to the level of the holy, and not the other way around as Noach did.

In this world our experience of wine must always be connected to holiness. For we exist in neither the place nor the time that the wine can be experienced in itself.

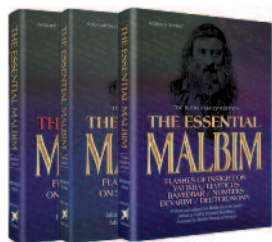
The Talmud tells us that there is something in this world that no eye has seen except for G-d. It is beyond our eyes to see. It is a secret and hidden. That is what is meant by "*the wine preserved from the grapes of the Six Days of Creation.*" The *gematria* (numerical equivalent) of *yayin* (wine) is 70 — the same as that for "Sod", which means secret.

If we spend our life seeking the "wine" of this world we will find our end in degradation, but if we connect to the wine that is hidden in the grape, the future world that is promised to the righteous, then we will enjoy the ultimate closeness to G-d.

• Sources: *Midrash Tanchuma, Rabbeinu Bachya, Sanhedrin 70, The Midrash Says*

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BEREISHET

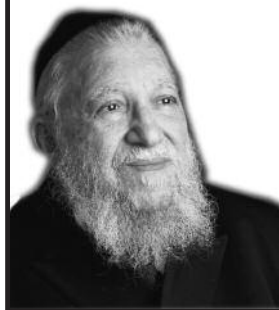
In the beginning, G-d creates the entire universe, including time itself, out of nothingness. This process of creation continues for six days. On the seventh day, G-d rests, bringing into existence the spiritual universe of Shabbat, which returns to us every seven days. Adam and Chava — the human pair — are placed in the Garden of Eden. Chava is enticed by the serpent to eat from the forbidden fruit of the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil” and in turn gives the fruit to Adam. By absorbing “sin,” Adam and Chava render themselves incapable of remaining in the spiritual paradise of Eden and are banished. Death and hard work (both physical and spiritual) now enter the world, together with pain bearing and raising children. Now begins the struggle to correct the sin of Adam and Chava, which will be the main subject of world history. Cain and Hevel, the first two children of Adam and Chava, bring offerings to G-d. Hevel gives the finest of his flock, and his offering is accepted, but Cain gives inferior produce and his offering is rejected. In the ensuing quarrel, Cain kills Hevel and is condemned to wander the earth. The Torah traces the genealogy of the other children of Adam and Chava, and the descendants of Cain, until the birth of Noach. After the death of Sheith, Mankind descends into evil, and G-d decides that He will blot out Man in a flood which will deluge the world. However, one man, Noach, finds favor with G-d.

NOACH

It is ten generations since the creation of the first human. Adam’s descendants have corrupted the world with immorality, idolatry and robbery, and G-d resolves to bring a flood which will destroy all the earth’s inhabitants except for the righteous Noach, his family and sufficient animals to

re-populate the earth. G-d instructs Noach to build an ark. After forty days and nights, the flood covers even the tops of the highest mountains. After 150 days the water starts to recede. On the 17th day of the 7th month, the ark comes to rest on Mount Ararat. Noach sends out a raven and then a dove to ascertain if the waters have abated. The dove returns. A week later Noach again sends the dove, which returns the same evening with an olive leaf in its beak. After another seven days Noach sends the dove once more; the dove does not return. G-d tells Noach and his family to leave the ark. Noach brings offerings to G-d from the animals which were carried in the ark for this purpose. G-d vows never again to flood the entire world and designates the rainbow as a sign of this Covenant. Noach and his descendants are now permitted to slaughter and eat meat, unlike Adam. G-d commands the Seven Universal Laws: the prohibition against idolatry, adultery, theft, blasphemy, murder, eating meat torn from a live animal, and the obligation to set up a legal system. The world’s climate is established as we know it today. Noach plants a vineyard and becomes intoxicated from its produce. Cham, one of Noach’s sons, delights in seeing his father drunk and uncovered. Shem and Yafet, however, manage to cover their father without looking at his nakedness, by walking backwards. For this incident, Canaan is cursed to be a slave. The Torah lists the offspring of Noach’s three sons from whom the seventy nations of the world are descended. The Torah records the incident of the Tower of Babel, which results in G-d fragmenting communication into many languages and the dispersal of the nations throughout the world. The Parsha concludes with the genealogy of Noach to Avram.

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Rav Bulman *zt”l*
on the
Torah Portion of the Week

PARSHA Q&A ?

Bereishet

1. Why does the Torah start with the account of Creation?
2. What happened to the light that was created on the first day?
3. Why isn't the word "good" associated with the second day?
4. How was the wood of the trees supposed to taste?
5. On which day were the sun and moon created?
6. G-d blessed the birds to be fruitful and to multiply. Why did He not do so for the beasts?
7. In whose likeness was man fashioned?
8. What kind of food did Adam eat?
9. Why is "the sixth day" written with the definite article "the"?
10. At the end of the sixth day what was the world still lacking?
11. Why was man made from dust gathered from the entire earth?
12. How is man superior to the animals?
13. Why was it not good that man be alone?
14. Where do we learn that one must not add to a commandment from G-d?
15. What does it mean that Adam and Chava "knew that they were naked?"
16. Why did Hevel choose to be a shepherd?
17. What was the marital practice of the generation who lived before the flood?
18. What did Tuval-Cain invent?
19. Why did Chanoch die at a young age?
20. What was the sign that Shem was born with great propensity for righteousness?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Bereishet's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 1:1 - So that when the nations accuse us of stealing *Eretz Canaan* from the Canaanites, we can respond that G-d, as Creator, has the right to give the land to whomever He sees fit, and He gave *Eretz Canaan* to us.
2. 1:4 - G-d saw that the wicked would be unworthy of it so He hid it for the righteous.
3. 1:7 - Because the work with the water wasn't completed until the third day. Anything that is incomplete is not "good."
4. 1:11 - The wood was to have the taste of the fruit.
5. 1:14 - They were created on the first day and suspended in the firmament on the fourth day.
6. 1:22 - He did not want the serpent, who was to be cursed, to receive a blessing.
7. 1:26 - In the likeness of the angels.
8. 1:30 - Vegetation.
9. 1:31 - "The" in Hebrew is the letter *hey*, which has a numerical value of five. G-d created the world on the condition that it will endure only if the Jewish People accept the Five Books of the Torah.
10. 2:2 - Rest.
11. 2:7 - So that wherever he might die, the earth would receive his body.
12. 2:7 - He was given understanding and speech.
13. 2:18 - If he were alone, he would appear to be a god. The creation of woman emphasized man's dependence.
14. 3:3 - From Chava. G-d commanded not to eat from the tree, but she added not to touch it. Because she added to the command she eventually came to transgress it.
15. 3:7 - They had been given one commandment and they had stripped themselves of it.
16. 4:2 - Since the ground had been cursed he refrained from cultivating it.
17. 4:19 - They married two wives, one with whom to have children. The other one was given a potion which prevented her from bearing children.
18. 4:22 - Murder weapons.
19. 5:22 - Though he was righteous, he was easily influenced; therefore G-d took him before his time to protect him from sinning.
20. 5:32 - He was born already circumcised.

PARSHA Q&A?

Noach

1. Parshat Noach begins by describing Noach as “perfectly righteous.” Yet later in the parsha, G-d says to Noach “For I have seen that you are righteous” but not “perfectly” righteous. Why not?
2. What sin sealed the fate of the flood generation?
3. Why did G-d tell Noach to build an ark, as opposed to saving him via some other method?
4. The ark had three levels. What function did each level serve?
5. What indication do we have that Noach was familiar with the Torah?
6. Why did G-d postpone bringing the flood for seven days?
7. The flood began “in the second month.” What is the second month?
8. Why did the first water of the flood come down as light rain?
9. What did people say that threatened Noach, and what did G-d do to protect him?
10. What grouping of creatures escaped the punishment of the flood?
11. How deeply was the ark submerged in the water?
12. What did the olive branch symbolize?
13. When did humans receive permission to eat meat?
14. What prohibition was given along with the permission to eat meat?
15. Why does the command to “be fruitful and multiply” directly follow the prohibition of murder?
16. Name two generations in which the rainbow never appeared.
17. Why did Noach curse Canaan specifically? Give two reasons.
18. Why does the Torah call Nimrod a mighty hunter?
19. The sin of the generation of the dispersion was greater than the sin of the generation of the flood. Why was the punishment of the former less severe?
20. Why was Sarah also called Yiscah?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to Noach’s Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi’s commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 7:1 - Because one should not tell the entire praise of a person in his presence.
2. 6:13 - Robbery.
3. 6:14 - So that people would see Noach building the ark and ask him what he was doing. When Noach would answer, “G-d is bringing a flood,” it might encourage some people to repent.
4. 6:16 - The top level housed the people, the middle level housed the animals, and the bottom level, the refuse.
5. 7:2 - G-d told him to take into the ark seven of each kosher-type animal, and two of each non-kosher type. “Kosher” and “non-kosher” are Torah concepts.
6. 7:4 - To allow seven days to mourn the death of Mesushelach.
7. 7:11 - Rabbi Eliezar says Marcheshvan; Rabbi Yehuda says Iyar.
8. 7:12 - To give the generation a chance to repent.
9. 7:13,15 - People said, “If we see him going into the ark, we’ll smash it!” G-d surrounded it with bears and lions to kill any attackers.
10. 7:22 - The fish.
11. 8:4 - Eleven *amot*.
12. 8:11 - Nothing. It was a leaf, not a branch. (The olive leaf symbolized that it’s better to eat food “bitter like an olive” but which comes directly from G-d, rather than sweet food provided by humans.)
13. 9:3 - After the flood.
14. 9:4 - The prohibition of eating a limb cut from a living animal.
15. 9:7 - To equate one who purposely abstains from having children to one who commits murder.
16. 9:12 - The generation of King Chizkiyahu and the generation of Shimon bar Yochai.
17. 9:22,24 - Because Canaan is the one who revealed Noach’s disgrace to Cham. And because Cham stopped Noach from fathering a fourth son. Thus, Noach cursed Cham’s fourth son, Canaan.
18. 10:9 - He used words to ensnare the minds of people, persuading them to rebel against G-d.
19. 11:9 - They lived together peacefully.
20. 11:29 - The word “Yiscah” is related to the Hebrew word “to see.” Sarah was called Yiscah because she could “see” the future via prophecy. Also, because of her beauty, everyone would gaze at her.

Bereishet

CAIN AND ABEL

The narrative of Cain and Abel (Kayin and Hevel) presents numerous difficulties. Why did they choose their respective professions? Why was only Hevel's sacrifice accepted? Why does G-d challenge Kayin's justifiable anger? Why does Kayin murder his brother, and why does he lament his punishment of being forced to wander? He should have been executed for murder!

Kayin, the farmer, saw that the ground was the source of all life. His name, which means "acquisition", indicates that he was rooted in materialism. Hevel, as a shepherd, pursued the less material objectives of leadership, honor and power, as the shepherd is the leader of his flocks. The word "hevel" which connotes the ethereal is an indication of his lack of concern for materialism. Kayin, the firstborn, chose farming, since plant life precedes animal life, just as acquisitions precede honor. Hevel, on the other hand, viewed shepherding as a higher and more honorable profession, as evidenced later by the Patriarchs.

Each brought a sacrifice in order to substantiate his claim to superiority, not in order to give thanks to G-d. Kayin felt that farming was most important since it was the foundation of man's physical existence, providing food, clothing and shelter. He felt that shepherding was without substance and required little effort. Hevel, however, felt that it was much more honorable to deal with animals, whereas Kayin was dealing with the ground which had been cursed to produce thorns and thistles. He brought his offering from the choicest of his flocks to show the absence of this curse.

G-d's acceptance of Hevel's offering was an indication that his life was on a higher plane. His pursuit of honor actually brought him to a level which shielded him from other negative characteristics. He was in control of his occupation while Kayin was enslaved to the ground and its material products. There is no honor in material possessions, and when one is not concerned with his own honor he is more likely to lapse into dishonesty and theft. Kayin was constantly involved with the demands of working the ground, while Hevel was free from the hazards of materialism and able to concentrate on higher contemplations.

Kayin was upset as he saw himself subservient and inferior to his younger brother. But G-d tells him that the actual problem is his failure to fulfill his own potential. G-d tells him that he does not have to be a slave to the material world, but that he can rise above it and conquer it. G-d also tells him that Hevel was not a paragon of perfection; he had a desire for power and fame. Kayin was afraid that Hevel having chosen a life of control over others would also exercise that control over Kayin and his descendants, even to the point of usurping his land. He felt that he had no choice but to kill Hevel to prevent this from happening. Kayin would then be left alone to do G-d's work.

In terms of Kayin's complaint that his punishment was more than he could bear, Abarbanel relates that he actually means just the opposite. He is actually referring to the fact that his transgression was so heinous that G-d cannot bear to forgive him, even though G-d's power to forgive can overcome even the

most grievous transgressions. Furthermore, when Kayin complained that someone was likely to kill him during his wanderings from place to place, he was actually expressing his desire to be killed because of the severity of his act of premeditated murder.

Noach

THE GREAT FLOOD

At the end of Parshat Bereishet the Torah states, "And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great upon the earth... I will blot out man, whom I created, from the face of the ground" (Ber. 6:5-7). G-d is stating clearly that man's evil nature is the cause of the destructive flood. However, in Parshat Noach, at the conclusion of the flood, G-d says, "I will not continue to curse again the ground because of man, since the nature of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I continue to smite every living being." (Ber. 8:21). Here G-d is saying that man's evil nature is the reason for *not* bringing another flood.

Abarbanel explains that man's being "evil from his youth" is not a reason to be forgiven for transgressions. Rather, the punishments will take place over the course of a lifetime, beginning in his youth and extending into his old age, instead of being one cataclysmic event. Additionally, the verse concludes "...seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter... shall not cease." This indicates that future punishments will occur in the context of earth's natural cycles of drought, famine, and extremes of heat and cold.

Prior to the flood, the earth's rich physical environment led to gross materialism. Just as the first stage of an individual's life is characterized by spiritual emptiness, so too the first stage in the development of mankind was characterized by spiritual emptiness, materialism and sensuality. The phrase "man's heart is evil from his youth" is a reference to this first stage. The flood obliterated this first stage and led to an attachment to spiritual pursuits, obviating the need for another flood.

The rainbow is then presented as the sign of the covenant that G-d will not bring another flood. Abarbanel points out a difficulty in understanding this narrative. First of all, a rainbow is a natural phenomenon which must have existed prior to the flood. If G-d is promising a new relationship with mankind, the sign should be something new as well. He answers that after the flood there was a change in the physical nature of the clouds themselves. During the flood they were so dense that no sunlight could penetrate to produce a rainbow. From this point onward they will no longer be so dense as to envelop the entire atmosphere in cloud. This would allow for the refraction of light necessary to produce the rainbow. This new atmospheric reality hints to the new status of mankind. There will no longer be one unified, immoral society. Some societies will sink into immorality, others will not. Just as rain will now fall in some areas and not in others, so too some regions will suffer due to the behavior of their inhabitants and others will not.

The rainbow is a reminder to mankind that G-d has modified nature and diluted the density of the atmosphere, precluding the possibility of another catastrophic deluge.

NEW BEGINNINGS

BY RABBI YEHUDA SPITZ

As is customary in many shuls and yeshivos around the world, Ohr Somayach makes a special *kiddush* on Shabbat Bereishis. The question is: Why? Why is this making a special *kiddush* on this particular Shabbos such an almost universal custom?

Those readily partaking in the *kugel* and *cholent* might just say “Why not?!” But there must be more to a widespread *minhag* than simply indulging in gastronomical pleasures.

Some might say, “Well, it must have something to do with Simchas Torah, or the ending and restarting of the Torah cycle”, but others might contend that we already celebrated that on Simchas Torah itself. If so, what is the deeper meaning of celebrating in particular on Shabbos Bereishis?

I would like to preface the answer with a story I recently heard from Rabbi Yaakov Minkus, a *rebbe* in Yeshivas Beis Yisrael:

Once during the Simchas Torah *hakafos*, the Rav of a certain shul noticed two congregants just standing in the back schmoozing away the time. Concerned, he approached them and asked them to come join in the traditional dancing. Politely, they refused. “Rabbi”, they told him, “This dancing is not for us. For you as the Rabbi to dance with the Torah, it makes perfect sense, but not for us! You see, to tell you the truth, we didn’t learn anything this past year, nor did we set aside any specific time to learn at all. Any time we had the chance to learn, we spent the time schmoozing and wasting time. So on Simchas Torah we are doing the same. We have no right to dance with the Torah.”

The Rabbi replied “You are right and you are wrong. As you know, there are two different *kibbudim* (public honors) that are given out on Simchas Torah: that of the “Chassan Torah” and that of the “Chassan Bereishis”. The Chassan Torah is the *aliyah* where we celebrate the concluding of the Torah. This is customarily given to the Rabbi or another *Talmid Chacham* who has made great strides in his Torah learning over the past year. According to your own admission you are correct, you do not have much to dance for.

But there is another aspect to our dancing on Simchas Torah, and that is of the Chassan Bereishis. This is the *aliyah* where we celebrate the starting anew of the Torah. Anyone can receive this *kibbud*. So for this aspect of Simchas Torah you should also join in! It’s a new cycle, a new starting point. So even if last year you fell short, now is the time to pick yourselves up and get dancing for all the Torah you *will* succeed in learning, G-d willing, over the next year!”

This starting point, this new beginning is now – Shabbos Bereishis. We see it clearly in this week’s *parsha* – Bereishis.

Aside from reading about the actual creation of the world from nothingness, (which if not a terrific example of a new start I don’t know what is) there is also the story of Kayin and Hevel (Cain and Abel).

After Kayin murders Hevel in cold-blood, G-d confronts him about his crime. After first denying any wrongdoing or even knowledge of the murder (“Am I my brother’s keeper?”), G-d then pronounces sentencing and Kayin finally admits to the crime. He says just three words: (Gen. 4:13) “*Gadol avoni minso*” — meaning that “this sin is too great for me to bear”.

We then find something astounding: G-d reduces his sentence in half! In verse 12 Kayin’s sentence is that of “*Na v’nad*” — wandering and exile in seclusion. Yet, after his admission, in verse 16, it states that Kayin settled in the land of Nod, meaning exile and seclusion. What happened to the decree of constant wandering?

Chazal explain (Sanhedrin 37b, see also Torah Temimah to verse 13) that we see that his *teshuva* – even though it was half-hearted, and even though it was only given when actually confronted, and even though he at first denied any wrongdoing, and even though he committed such a despicable act and the potential for all mankind for all time was halved — even so it caused his punishment to be halved! Not only that, he merited to see seven generations of his own offspring! One of whom, Na’ama, was a very righteous *tzaddekes* and the wife of Noach, through whom mankind propagated after the Mabul (Great Deluge) — another excellent example of a fresh start. All because of three words.

This is an unbelievable lesson to take from *Parshas Bereishis* — the power of renewal and new beginnings.

This is the message we need to take from this *kiddush* on Shabbos Bereishis.

Even if last year we didn’t accomplish as much in learning as we could have or even should have.

Even if Elul *zman* didn’t work out as well as we would have wanted.

G-d is giving us now a chance for a new start, potential for *zman* anew.

That is the reason *klal Yisrael* celebrates on Shabbos Bereishis.

May we all be *zocheh* to utilize this message for the upcoming *zman*, and *iy”H* next year on Simchas Torah everyone here will be able to say that that the reason they are dancing is due to their own personal *aliyah* in learning, and are therefore worthy of being the “Chassan Torah”!

Ohr Somayach Jerusalem

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Simchas Beis Hashoeva

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"Emulating Aharon:
Feeling Joy for Others"

12:15 am-RABBI DR. DOVID GOTTLIEB
"Strict Justice and Mercy:
Understanding G-d's Plan"

10:15 pm- RAV NOTA SCHILLER
Rosh HaYeshiva
"The Whole Sum or Wholesome"

1:15 am- RABBI AVRAHAM ROCKMILL
"Singing for the Rain"

11:15 pm- RAV YITZCHOK BREITOWITZ
Rav, Kehillas Ohr Somayach
"Vulnerability & Faith:
The Hut, the Cloud & the Willow"

2:15 am -
RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR
"It's Good to be Jewish"

3:00 am - RABBI REUVEN LAUFFER
"A Blessing on Your Head:
The Final Message"