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# שמע קולנו

**SHEMA KOLEINU: TISHREI 5782**

DIVREI TORAH FROM OUR REBBEIM, FACULTY, TALMIDIM, AND ALUMNI



# **Introduction**

## **Joy in Teshuvah**

*Rabbi Joshua Kahn*  
*Head of School*

Happiness is an integral value in our lives. In broader society, its role and value has increased exponentially. Beyond this societal emphasis, the centrality of happiness is highlighted in the Torah, when we are told that the horrific curses will befall us,

תחת אשר לא עבדת את ה' אלקיך בשמחה

*because you did not serve Hashem out of joy (Devarim 28:47).*

*Our avodas Hashem is only complete if it includes real joy and happiness. Each Yom Tov is highlighted by our obligation to rejoice. Yet, if we think about the days of Elul and the Yomim Nora'im, we may feel many emotions, ranging from fear and awe to despair and desperation, but joy and happiness do not seem to be a part of this season. Is it possible that teshuvah and the preparation for the Yemei Hadin are void of this critical value?*

In differing ways, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein zatzal and yibadel lechaim Rav Moshe Weinberger shlita both highlight the importance of *simcha* within our *Avodas Hashem* during this *teshuvah* period. Rav Lichtenstein highlights the seudas Yom Tov that we eat on *Motzei Yom Kippur* as evidence that there is joy and rejoicing even to the observance of *Yom Kippur*. Anecdotally, he observes that, “if anybody needed something from him (Rav Soloveitchik), the best time to speak to him was the night after *Yom Kippur* when he was in the best mood of the year” (Return and Renewal, p. 216). *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur* each end the mourning process of *shiva* because the *simchah* that permeates these days overrides the sadness of *shiva*. Rav Moshe Weinberger, elaborating on the writings of Rav Kook, describes the great joy inherent in the *teshuvah* process. *Teshuvah*, to return, is our return to our natural state, and this reconnecting creates a sense of joy. As Rav Weinberger writes, “*Teshuvah* means ‘return.’ The Torah is brimming with life, and the soul of a Jew is exploding with light. The Creator is calling to us from within the dark-

ness and emptiness of physical life to return to Him, to return to our true selves and to live (Song of *Teshuvah*, p. 13)."

How is this obligation of happiness able to co-exist with the feeling of awe and reverence that we feel as part of the *teshuvah* experience? The answer lies in a thoughtful consideration of what happiness means and how we achieve it. The approach developed by Rav Lichtenstein and Rav Weinberger is to embrace the joy in personal growth, to recognize the beauty in *Avodas Hashem*, and to normalize *teshuvah* not as focusing on failure, but rather as a part of the growth process. In this way, *teshuvah* represents the joyful process of becoming a better and more complete person, which is how we achieve real happiness and satisfaction.

As we approach the *Yomim Nora'im*, iy"H with a sense of joy and growth, it is our hope that you enjoy the *Divrei Torah* in this edition of *Shema Koleinu*. This *Shema Koleinu* is the result of the efforts of many individuals. Thank you to Rabbi Dov Emerson who created the vision for this project and nurtured it throughout the process. Thank you to Rabbi Shimon Schenker and Rabbi Baruch Pesach Mendelson for their ongoing efforts in leading *Shema Koleinu*. Thank you to our Editors-in-Chief, Meir Morell ('22) and Yitzchak Hagler ('22), and to our Formatter Aryeh Klein ('22) for leading this project.

Best wishes for a *kesivah vechasimah tovah* – a year of good health, happiness and growth!

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# Rosh Hashanah

## Confidence and Anxiety:

### The Individual and the Congregation

Every year, the Jew is challenged with perceiving and sensing the mood most fitting for *Rosh Hashanah* as it is a holiday in which contradictory motifs manifest themselves. On the one hand, *Rosh Hashanah* is a day of celebration. The *Midrash* as quoted in *Tur* (OC 581) enjoins the Jewish people to distinguish themselves from the “*minhago shel olam*” and in contrast to the dark, depressing mode of dress of those summoned for judgment, the Jew should exhibit a mode of dress in consonance with a favorable verdict—“*lovshim levanim umisatfim levanim*”. In addition, the Jew should project his confidence by cutting his hair, shaving, cutting his nails prior to the holiday and eating and drinking on the holiday itself. All this “*lefi sheyode'in sheHaKadosh Baruch Hu ya'aseh lahem neis...*” According to this *Midrash*, indeed the dominant motif is confidence and joy.

Paradoxically, the *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* depicts man on *Rosh Hashanah* as a petitioner, one who approaches the King of Kings with intense trepidation. Indeed, the existential predicament confronting man on this day precludes any joyous expression of *Hallel*. It is almost inconceivable to sense a quality or theme of joy when our judgment is looming above us. The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 32b) records an exchange between the angels and G-d whereby the angels inquire as to the propriety of omitting *Hallel* on *Rosh Hashanah*. “*amru malachei hashareis lifnei HKBH, Ribbono Shel Olam, mipnei ma ein Yisrael omrim shira lefanecha berosh Hashana uveyom hakippurim? Amar lahem, efshar Melech yosheiv al kisei din, vesifrei chayim vesifrei meisim pesuchin lefanav, veyisrael omrim shira?*” Hashem's response in a rhetorical fashion underscores the urgency of the *Yamim Nora'im*. It highlights the submissiveness of mankind to its Creator and emphasizes the precarious situation of man on *Yamim Nora'im*. It appears axiomatic from this *Gemara's* perspective that *Yamim Nora'im tefillah* be devoid of any joyous expression. *Hallel* and *Yamim Nora'im* do not mix readily.

Rav Moshe Ibn Chaviv, in his *sefer Yom Teruah*, which is a commentary to *Masechet Rosh Hashanah*, provides a rationale for the apparent inconsistency between these two themes and reconciles them as follows: A distinction

must be made between the individual and the community. Each person as an individual must adorn himself with optimism on *Rosh Hashanah*. He is not to focus on the immediacy of the situation. He must not panic nor become paralyzed at the common vortex that is oftentimes elicited in one's mind by the *Yamim Nora'im*. This is unhealthy and counterproductive. The individual must celebrate and be joyous as is manifest by donning and wrapping himself in white garments. He must anticipate a pardoning of his sins and that G-d is reaching out for him as he, as an individual, is vindicated.

However, we must always be mindful that even if we as individuals will emerge triumphant, it is improbable that the same will be true for every other individual or family in *Klal Yisrael*. The greater the number in a given community, the greater probability of physical or spiritual challenges that are divinely ordained on members of that community on the day of *Rosh Hashanah*. There are those who are currently ill or currently experiencing financial hardships which will continue through *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* and may not be ameliorated until sometime after *Yom Hakippurim* or beyond and others who are unaware of the adversity or misfortune that are in store for them in the coming year.

*Hallel* is a song of the *Tzibbur*. We sing it together in unison when we can celebrate as a *klal*. When there are *Sifrei Meisim* open, it would be morally reprehensible for the community to be engaged in *Hallel*. *Hallel* on *Yamim Nora'im* means that I identify with my own needs exclusively. The omission of *Hallel*, on the other hand, means that I identify with the potential needs of the *Tzibbur*.

As we acknowledge the sovereignty of our Creator on *Rosh Hashanah* and crown Him and contemplate His omniscience and omnipotence, we must follow His lead in concerning ourselves with the needs of others. On the one hand, on a personal level, we wear white and thus we remain confident that G-d will care for us and our families. On the other hand, we remain anxious for other members of the community and their uncertain future and we turn our attention, as G-d does, to them. Instead of singing shira through the recitation of *Hallel*, we ponder with apprehension the reality of the potential distress of others, and we vow to commit ourselves to be there for them in the coming year.

## Not all Miracles are the Same

Elisha Price ('23)

On the second day of *Rosh HaShanah* we read about the episode of *Akeidas Yitzchak* (Gen. 22). In that story, Avraham is commanded to bring his son, Yitzchak, as a *korban*, but instead ends up offering an *ayil* (ram). What makes this interesting is that a *mishnah* in *Avos* (5:6) records a list of ten (or fourteen according to the *Yesh Omrim*, which we will follow for the purposes of this article) items which were prepared or created already from the sixth day of creation, even though they only appear much later on in the narrative of *Tanach*. On this list are such items as the rainbow (by Noach), the ground splitting (by Korach), the staff of Aharon, and the *mun* (in the *midbar*). However, the two that stand out as unique are the donkey of Bilaam and the ram of Avraham. Why are these two here? What does it mean for animals to be created (according to the Alshich) or predestinated to a certain purpose (according to the Bartenura) from the time of creation?

In order to understand the purpose of these two animals in the *mishnah*, we must acknowledge the parallel language and themes in their larger stories. By Avraham, the pasuk says “וַיִּשְׁכֶּם אַבְרָהָם בְּבֹקֶר וַיַּחְבֹּשׁ אֶת חֲמוֹרֹ” (Gen. 22:3), and by Bilaam it says “וַיִּקֶּם בִּלְעָם בְּבֹקֶר וַיַּחְבֹּשׁ אֶת אֲתוֹנוֹ” (Num. 22:21). Additionally, both are accompanied on their missions by two “נַעֲרָיו” and both bring an “אֵיל” as a *korban*. Both have the language of “וַיִּשָּׂא” (Gen. 22:4,13, Num. 24:2). During the events of the *Akeida*, Avraham is stopped by a *malach* from doing what he thinks is the word of G-d. So too by Bilaam, he is stopped by a *malach* from doing what he thinks Hashem had granted him permission to do. Also, they both have the ever-confusing narrative which consists of Hashem instructing or acquiescing to a certain command, then “changing His mind” and forbidding it. Finally, the number ‘three’ appears in many places in both stories: Avraham sees the mountain in which he is supposed to offer his son as a *korban* on the third day of his travels; Bilaam attempts to curse *Bnei Yisrael* from three different mountains; the *malach* appears to Bilaam’s donkey three times, and as a result, Bilaam hits the donkey three times, which the donkey emphasizes in her admonishment of her master, asking him “why did you hit me *three times*.”

However, despite these similarities, there is a significant difference between the story of the ram and the donkey. First and foremost, the donkey is miraculous. Talking animals are generally accepted to be “out of the ordinary” and a stretch of nature, thus outside the range of “*teva*”, and therefore a *neis*. If so, why is the ram listed in the Mishnah along with the donkey, appearing as if they are of equal status?

According to the Alshich (Bereishis 22:13), the ram is included in the *mishnah* along with all the other, more miraculous incidents because

while the ram itself was a normal animal, it's body was used for various events that shaped *Tanach* (Dovid used the sinews, Eliyahu used the skins, the left *shofar* was blown at har Sinai, and the right will be blown in the time of *moshiach*).

An alternative approach is to look closer at the ram itself. Even if the ram wasn't miraculous, perhaps its story was. Had the ram appeared an hour - or even just five minutes - before or after Avraham needed it, it would have had no purpose, and no role in the *Akeida*. We would have no mitzvah to blow shofar every year with the horn of a ram, nor would we read this *parshah* every year on *Rosh HaShanah*. The Radak (Gen. 22:13) calls the story of the *Ayil* a *neis* (miracle) by the fact that G-d ensured that it was tangled in the bushes, separated from its flock and that no shepherd had come to find it. Therefore, the words of the pasuk, "וַיִּשָּׂא אֲבֹרָהִם אֶת־עֵינָיו וַיֵּרָא" shows, that Avraham understood that this ram was for him, from *Hashem*.

Indeed, this *mishnah* contains only miracles, but not all are the same. Some of them - like the donkey - are obvious miracles, black on white, out of the ordinary and breaking the laws of nature, like food falling from the sky. Others - like the ram - are more subtle and seem almost natural. Earthquakes happen, so why is it so special that one swallowed up Korach? Rainbows are the reflection of light off of water after a rainstorm, so of *course* there was a rainbow after the *mabul*! And a random ram got stuck in a bush near Avraham, that too seems to be natural. But this *mishnah* is teaching us that there are two types of miracles. There are obvious, open miracles but there are also miracles which on their own are completely ordinary. But when you put them in the context of time, and understand their relevance in their time and place, they too become miraculous. It isn't a miracle when an earthquake shakes the ground, but when it happens exactly when a *navi* calls for it and against those he quarrels with, that's a miracle! It's no *neis* for a rainbow to appear, but when it signifies a renewed *bris* between G-d and his creations, it becomes extraordinary. So too here - a ram getting stuck in the bushes doesn't appear to be miraculous at all. But when it is found at the perfect time, after Avraham is told not to kill his son and he realizes that a ram can be sacrificed instead, it too becomes a miracle.

In short, any act of "*teva*", of plain and ordinary nature can become miraculous if it is the proper time and the proper place to serve in the *ratzon Hashem* and to be involved in furthering the *bris* between *Hashem* and His people.



## Full and Ripe:

### Lessons from the Pomegranate

*Yisrael-Dovid Rosenberg ('23)*

When forced to flee from his home during World War II, my grandfather, Yisrael Dovid Tzvi, traveled with the Lubavitcher Yeshiva as they made their way through Asia to Japan, Shanghai, and ultimately to America. The first stop of the journey was in Vilna as Lithuania was still relatively safe at that point and Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski invited Jews to come to the city for the time being. My grandfather met with Rabbi Chaim Ozer during his stay there. When he told Rabbi Chaim Ozer that he was from a town called "Riki" in Poland, Rabbi Chaim Ozer responded "Riki? *Afilu reikanin shebahen melei'in mitzvos kerimon.*" Even the emptiest of them is as full of mitzvos as a pomegranate is of seeds. This is a line that appears several times throughout the *Gemara*. Thus, with a little Torah and wordplay, Rabbi Chaim Ozer bridged the gap between the *gadol hador* and a young man from a far off town.

Pomegranates are one of the *simanim* eaten on *Rosh Hashanah* over which we recite a *Yehi Ratzon* for a good year, "*shenirbeh zechuyoseinu kerimon*" To those who live in Israel the reason why pomegranates are so popular on *Rosh Hashanah* - both as one of the *simanim* and often as one of the *shehechyanu* fruits on the second night of the holiday - is perfectly clear. Pomegranates ripen right around *Rosh Hashanah* every year and as they are one of the *Shivas Haminim*, the seven agricultural species with which *Eretz Yisroel* is praised, *Bnei Eretz Yisroel* are familiar with the site of the reddening fruit all around the country.

Rabbi Moshe Taragin explained based on a *midrash* in the *Pesikta Derav Kehane* that the *shofar* is used to call to those laboring in the fields to come inside. At that point, the final three fruits are ripening - grapes, olives, and pomegranates - and the workers can put aside their work and focus now on spiritual matters. Similar to its use to declare *Yovel* and release all slaves, the *shofar*, in this sense, is a call of freedom. The workers are now free from working the fields and are themselves ripe for *teshuvah* and growth.

In the statement of the *Gemara* the word "*reikanin*" is often (though not in my grandfather's case) a reference to *resha'im*. Perhaps in that light we can better understand the declaration of the *chazan* on *Erev Yom Kippur* just before the start of *Kol Nidrei*: "*Anu matirim lehispaleil im ha'avaryanim*. We consent to pray with the transgressors. We are recognizing that we all have

certain flaws and must allow everyone to join in this *tefillah*. But even the worst *avaryanim*, bring *zechuyos*, merits, with them. It is part of the idea in the *Yehi Ratzon* said over the pomegranate at the meal: "*shenirbeh zechuyoseinu*" that we should have plentiful privilege and be plentiful in *mitzvos*.

There is a twofold idea present here. Firstly, we are full of *mitzvos* whether we see it or not. Secondly, we on *Rosh Hashanah*, like the pomegranate, are ripe and ready for the day and for the *teshuvah* we now need to do. We wish to be full of *mitzvos* and goodness in the coming year. May we be able to wholeheartedly reach out to come closer to *Hashem* and merit a wonderful year.

## How the *Shofar* Shapes the Year

Aaron Sisser ('23)

When people think of *Rosh HaShanah*, they usually think of things like having a long *Davening* in the morning, having a nice meal after that, performing *Tashlich*, and of course dipping the apple in the honey. There is, however, without a doubt one symbol that transcends all of these images that people conjure up in their minds when they think of *Rosh HaShanah*. This symbol is, of course, the *Shofar*. The *Shofar* is a unique device; It is a sort of trumpet made out of a ram's horn, and it is blown during many circumstances in Jewish life. For example, the Jewish people would blow the *Shofar* when going out for battle, or at the end of the *Yovel* year. The *Shofar* was also blown at *Matan Torah*, and will hopefully be blown again when *Moshiach* comes. The *Shofar* is also famously blown during the *Yomim Noraim*, namely *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*. On each of the two days of *Rosh HaShanah* we blow 100 *Kolos* (blasts of the *Shofar*), and on *Yom Kippur* we blow one solitary blast at the end of the fast. However, one may think to ask: What is the symbolism behind the blowing of the *Shofar*? What is its significance that it should be blown during all of these important circumstances?

We learn from our Rebbeim in the Gemara that when the *Torah* says *Rosh HaShanah* should be a "*Yom Teruah*" for the *bnei Yisroel*, it means that *Rosh HaShanah* should be a day where we are quivering as we speak and quivering in our hearts in our quest for repentance. The sounds emitted from the *Shofar* are meant to be like our crying, our weeping that we do in our path of *Teshuvah*. Thus, we see that the primary reason for the *Shofar* is to strengthen us in our quest for repentance and forgiveness for *Hashem*. After all, *Rosh HaShanah* is the beginning of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* which lead up to the Day of Judgement, *Yom Kippur*.

Rav Mordechai Berkowitz, in his *Sefer, Nof Mordechai*, notes that this explanation of the *Shofar* seems to be in sharp contrast to our actions that we display throughout the rest of the holiday of *Rosh HaShanah*. Rav Berkowitz writes that during days of *Rosh HaShanah*, we do not seem to be putting our want for forgiveness at the forefront of our *Tefillos*. A look in the *Machzor* for *Rosh HaShanah* reveals that most of the *Tefillos* we say are praising God, rather than beseeching God for forgiveness and showing that we want to repent for our misdeeds. By looking at the *Tefillos* we say on *Rosh HaShanah*, one can reasonably conclude that the goal of *Rosh HaShanah* is to praise and honor *Hashem*, recalling many of His great deeds from history, and how He has helped the *bnei Yisroel* in so many ways - and continues to do so. Consequently, there seems to be a confusing contrast between the significance and symbolism of the *Shofar* and our goals during the rest of *Rosh*

*HaShanah*. How can we construct this contradiction into a connection? To help us answer this question, we can look ahead to the latter part of the *Yomim Noraim*, *Yom Kippur*. We see that on *Yom Kippur*, the day of judgement, our goal is unmistakably to beg for forgiveness from *Hashem* in order that he should grant us an amazing year. This is, in fact, the essence of the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* as a whole. Thus, we can see that from the sound of the *Shofar* a sort of double meaning comes forth: We can see that the *Shofar* puts these two values of *Rosh HaShanah* into perspective. While throughout *Rosh HaShanah* we are persistently proclaiming Hashem's greatness, we also must realize that we are striving for a successful sentence from the Master of the World, in the hopes that we should be secure in our situations for the duration of the year. On *Rosh HaShanah*, we are both praising Hashem and praying for our future.

Hopefully we can all take *Rosh HaShanah*, *Yom Kippur*, and all of the upcoming *Yomim Tovim* to reflect on the messages that they bring. We can use the *Shofar* as a vehicle to help us to understand how we should act and how we can improve ourselves leading up to and beyond the Days of Judgement. May we all succeed in accomplishing these spectacular feats, and be תשפ"ב to an amazing year of זזזזקה!

## Aseres Yemei Teshuvah

### *Emes is one of the 13 Middos Harachamim*

*Rav Shimon Kerner*

It was two years ago that my *talmid* Yaakov Weinstock asked me the following question after selichos: One of the key components of the tefillos of *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* and *Yom Kippur* (except for *Rosh Hashanah*) is the formula of the 13 attributes of G-d's mercy. How can *EMES* be one of the 13 middos of mercy? Doesn't *emes* by definition demand that G-d punish a sinner for his sins?

After some contemplation, I suggested four possible answers:

1) G-d knows all and keeps meticulous records. When humans see that someone does wrong or evil, they often will write the person off, and not recognize or acknowledge the good. G-d will never let any negative actions wipe away or erase the good that we have done. ***Emes- the good is never wiped out by the bad.***

2) *Emes* pertains to the expectations that G-d has of us. He knows our skill set, the family we were born into, the environment in which we live, and the community we were born into. G-d calibrates for each person accordingly and then judges. ***That's real emes - but simultaneously it's compassion-*** G-d uses a different scale for each!

3) When judging us, G-d does not do it solely based on our past. Our wrongdoings may cause us to deserve certain consequences. But when we repent with utmost sincerity, ***G-d sees the zechus of all future deeds and judges us based on our potential- what hasn't even happened yet serves as a zechus.*** Thus, *emes* and mercy operate simultaneously. When Moshe asked what *zechus* Bnei Yisrael had to leave Egypt, G-d answered - they will ultimately accept the Torah and serve me on this mountain. That was indeed a future *zechus*.

4) When one does complete *teshuvah*, the person is transformed to the point that he is no longer the same person. That *gezar din* was for the ***other guy***. Hashem uses the compassionate *middah* of *emes* to discern the metamorphosis that has taken place!

One of Yogi Berra's classic phrases was "It's deja vous all over again". Some of us might be despondent that we find ourselves revisiting the same issues in our religious life every year during the *Yomim Nora'im*. We haven't changed drastically. We begin to wonder- are our efforts every year an act of futility? Does the fact that we may have returned to the sins that we repented for last year invalidate the repentance of last year? Among others, the Meiri, in his *Chibbur Hateshuvah*, says that as long as one is sincere in committing

not to sin again at the moment of *teshuvah*, then it is effective even if he falters and repeats the sin at a later date.

Rav Zev Leff Shlita explains with an analogy: A mother bathes her toddler every day and dresses him in fresh clothes, knowing that he will be dirty again and soil the clothes in just a short time. Is this an exercise in futility? Should she wait until he's 7 years old? No mother would do that! The mother might give several reasons for her actions:

- 1) If she waits until he's 7, disease and dirt will set in that is too difficult to remove. Similarly, we do *teshuvah* annually so that the *shmutz* doesn't accumulate on our *neshamos*, making it all the more difficult to get off.
- 2) The dirt would accumulate, and her child would look like a little ball of dirt! One could easily forget that under all that dirt is an adorable little child. On *Yom Kippur*, we rediscover our purity and relate to ourselves differently - both we and G-d are able to see our amazing potential.
- 3) With his daily bath the child feels how nice it is to feel clean. As he matures, he will make an effort to remain clean for longer. Similarly, the beautiful feeling that we will IYH emerge from *Yom Kippur* with will hopefully give us an incentive to remain pure for a longer time after each successive year.
- 4) From the perspective of the mother, she loves her child and feels it's worth the effort. Similarly, Hakadosh Boruch Hu loves us and is willing to say "*titharu*" - for as long as it lasts.
- 5) The potential exists for it to last. So too the cleansing of each *Yom Kippur* has the potential of a lasting effect.

So let us settle in for a *shabbos shabbason*; let's storm the gates of heaven with the 13 *middos* that are guaranteed to be effective, realizing that they are all *rachamim* - including *emes*. Because the good will never be wiped out by the bad; Hashem judges each of us according to our unique set of circumstances; with sincerity Hashem focuses on our potential for future good rather than dwelling on the past; and if we really transform ourselves, regardless of how short-lived, Hashem will not *chas veshalom* punish us for things we didn't do. Let's get to work and put our *neshamos* into the tub and begin scrubbing them back to their pristine purity.

## Aspire Higher

*Akiva Kra ('21)*

The Rambam writes in *Mishneh Torah (Hilchos Teshuvah 2:6)* that “even though repentance and crying out to *Hashem* are always timely, during the ten days from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Yom Kippur* it is exceedingly appropriate and accepted immediately.” The *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah* is a time when we are supposed to reflect more deeply and intensely than usual and work to become better. Yeshayah tells the Jewish nation to repent for their sins. He says, “seek G-d when He may be found; call Him when He is close”(Yeshayah 55:6). When is that? *Chazal* write that this passuk refers to these ten days when G-d is especially close to us.

Rabbi Yitzchok Blazer, former Chief Rabbi of St. Petersburg, wrote in *Ohr Yisrael (Sha'arei Ohr 2)* that *Hashem* removed our instincts of *yiras shamayim* (fear of heaven) from our hearts so that we have to work extra hard on it ourselves. How do we improve and increase our *yiras shamayim*? With the main goal even further from our reach than other goals, what are we supposed to do?

Perhaps, one answer to this question can be suggested based on the following *mashal*: There was once a person born in a room with no windows. For years, he never knew what light was. One day, a crack formed in the wall and the tiniest ray of light revealed what some of the room looked like. The person realized the greatness of the light and tried breaking the wall to see more of it. After much hard work and by breaking down his surroundings, he was exposed to something great he never knew about.

So too for us, we need to realize that there is so much more than what surrounds us every day. If one compares themselves to their friends and feels that they are in an ideal place religiously and have accomplished a fair amount, they need to increase their goals. As many of our *rabbeim* in MTA tell us constantly: what goes on in the building is a first step. But, we need to always push for more. This is why the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Dei'os 6:1*) “it is natural for a man's character and actions to be influenced by his friends and associates and for him to follow the local norms of behavior. Therefore, he should associate with the righteous and be constantly in the company of the wise, so as to learn from their deeds. Conversely, he should keep away from the wicked who walk in darkness, so as not to learn from their deeds.” If we are not surrounding ourselves with great people who, like we hopefully do, have great goals, how will we grow? One of the things that was said amongst our graduates at last year's graduation more than anything else was that people wished they would have set higher goals for themselves.

In *Tehillim* it says (119:162) “I rejoice over Your word, like he who finds great fortune.” The *Vilna Ga’on* explains (*Divrei Eliyahu, Tehillim* ad loc.) that the joy over learning the word of *Hashem* should be like the joy of a person who comes upon a tremendous fortune and scoops up as much as he can. He is indeed happy over what he managed to collect, but he also cries over the fact that he is forced to leave behind more than he got. We hopefully had a meaningful and successful *Rosh Hashanah* and past year. But, as we look back, we also must realize all the treasures we left behind and think about how we will scoop up more of them this year.

The *midrash* in *Shir Hashirim* (5:2) quotes from *Hashem* that “[we should] open for [*Hashem*] an opening the size of a needle and [He] will expand it into a door through which wagons can go through”. May we all be able to seek *Hashem*, find Him, and serve Him to the best of our ability. The ability which we will be able to maximize by looking outside or to the top of the bubble we live in (however great it may be).



## “Your favorite day of the year must be Erev Yom Kippur”: Myth or Mitzvah

Meir Morell ('22)

A few years back, a song titled “Skinny Pinny” surfaced in the Jewish world. It was a parody of the concept of one eating more than is medically safe, (which can definitely be an article, and *hashkafic* discussion, of its own) in order to spread a good cause called “Lose 4 Autism”. In the song, the singer exclaims “Your favorite day of the year must be *Erev Yom Kippur*”. This seems to imply that *Erev Yom Kippur* is a full day eating fest. Is this true? Obviously there is no *mitzvah* to completely stuff oneself on *Erev Yom Kippur* past the point of what would be deemed as unhealthy and dangerous, but is there a *mitzvah* to eat all day on *Erev Yom Kippur*?

We begin our search with the source for the basic *mitzvah* to eat on *Erev Yom Kippur*. There is a *Braisa* quoted on *Berachos* 8b, *Pesachim* 68b, *Yoma* 81b, and *Rosh Hashanah* 9a that says

”דתני חייא בר רב מדיפתי: 'ועניתם את נפשותיכם בתשעה', וכי בתשעה מתענין? והלא בעשור מתענין! אלא לומר לך: כל האוכל ושותה בתשיעי, מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו התענה תשיעי ועשירי.”

*As Chiya, son of Rav from Difsai taught: [The possuk says] “And you shall afflict your souls on the ninth [of Tishrei]”. [Chiya asks] Do we really fast on the ninth? Don’t we fast on the tenth! Rather, this possuk is teaching that whoever eats on the ninth, is considered as having fasted on both the ninth and tenth.*

Rashi in *Yoma* explains that

”והכי משמע קרא ועניתם בתשעה כלומר התקן עצמך בתשעה שתוכל להתענות בעשרה ומדאפקיה קרא בלשון עינוי לומר לך הרי הוא כאלו מתענה בתשעה:”

This [*Braisa*] infers from the *possuk* that ‘And you shall afflict [your souls on] the ninth’ is as if to say that you should prepare yourself on the ninth so that you can fast on the tenth. And since the *possuk* teaches in the terminology of affliction, it teaches that it is as if you fasted on the ninth.

To summarize, Rashi says that the reason for eating on the ninth is to prepare for the tenth. This fits with Rabeinu Asher (*Yoma*, *perek* 8, 22), *Meiri* (*Berachos* 8b), and *Shiltos* (167), among others. However, what is very perplexing is that Rashi himself seems not to stay entirely consistent with this reasoning.

Rashi on *Rosh Hashanah* 9a never mentions the reason for eating- he just explains the *drashah* learned in the *braisa*. It seems that according to Rashi in

*Rosh Hashanah* this *mitzvah* is a stand alone *mitzvah* with no reason needed for its institution.

Before we attempt to reconcile what seems to be a contradiction in Rashi, it is worthwhile to mention a few *nafka minas* (practical differences) which explains why this difference makes a significant difference in our *sugya*. One can learn two practical differences from Netziv in *Ha'emek She'eilah* on *Shiltos* 167, 12: A) if one isn't fasting because they are sick, and B) if one knows they can fast without preparation by eating on *Erev Yom Kippur*. An additional *nafka mina* can be learned from the *Minchas Chinuch* in *Mitzvah* 313, namely, if women must eat. If it is a stand alone *mitzvah*, it would be a *mitzvas aseh shehazeman grama* (a time bound *mitzvah*, that women aren't required to perform) and they wouldn't be *chayav* in eating. But if it was directly linked to *Yom Kippur* as a *mitzvah* of preparation it wouldn't be a *mitzvas aseh shehazeman grama*, and women would be *chayav* in this *mitzvah*.

Now that we see how the difference makes a difference, we can now continue to attempt to offer an answer for the *setirah* in Rashi.

It seems strange that in *Hilchos Shivasas Asor*, Rambam's section in *Mishneh Torah* for *Hilchos Yom Kippur*, he never mentions the *mitzvah* of eating on *Erev Yom Kippur*. And one can offer a simple answer for this, by assuming Rambam didn't hold like the *braisa*, and felt that it wasn't a *mitzvah* to eat on the ninth. However, this answer seems to be defeated when one looks at 3:2 in *Hilchos Nedarim*, when Rambam says

"הנודר שיצום יום ראשון או יום שלישי כל ימיו ופגע בו יום זה והרי הוא יום טוב או ערב יום הכפורים הרי זה חייב לצום"

*If one vows to fast on every Sunday or Wednesday, and they then realize that it falls out on Yom Tov or Erev Yom Kippur, they are required to fast.*

Radbaz adds

"סובר רבינו שאסור להתענות בערב יום הכפורים מן התורה דכתיב בתשעה לחדש וכי בתשעה מתענין והלא בעשרה מתענין אלא כל האוכל ושותה בתשיעי כאילו התענה בתשיעי ובעשירי משמע דאיסור תורה הוא..."

Rambam holds that it's *assur* to fast on *Erev Yom Kippur miDe'oraisa* since it says "on the ninth of the month". And do we really fast on the ninth? Don't we fast on the tenth?! Rather, [this *possuk* is teaching that] whoever eats on the ninth is considered as having fasted on both the ninth and tenth. This implies that it's *assur miDe'oraisa*.

But why would this *Halachah* be placed in such an obscure spot? Wouldn't it fit better in *Hilchos Shivasas Asor*? The *Sefer Avodas HaYom* explains that since Rambam places it in a different spot, he clearly believes it's separate from *Yom Kippur* and thus a *mitzvah bifnei atzmah*, a stand alone *mitzvah*. And this concept is strengthened by the fact that Rambam learned it as an *issur dioraisa*, thus rendering it technically separate from *Yom Kippur*.

But why would the *Chachomim* think to make a stand alone *mitzvah* for no reason? One wouldn't assume that the *chachomim* would randomly institute pointless *halachos*!

My eleventh grade Rebbi, Rabbi Mendelson, explained in the name of his Rebbi, Rav Ahron Soloveichik, that in each *din derabanan* there are two components, the *tzuras hatakanah* and the *sibas hatakanah*, how the *din* was instituted and why the *din* was instituted. In many cases, although the *din* is made for specific reasons, we apply the *din* across the board through a *lo plug*. Rabbi Mendelson then brought this back to our *sugya*. He explained that despite there being a reason for the *takanah*, Rambam chose to focus on the *tzuras hatakanah*, and therefore he does not change the *din* based on the *sibah*. Through this answer we can spring into an answer to our question on the two contradictory Rashi's. For *dinim derabanan*, and even sometimes for *dinim dioraisa*, there are two components to the *din*, the *chiyuv* and the *mechayev*, the simple *din* itself and the reason behind it. In this case the *chiyuv* is to eat on the ninth day, and the *mechayev* is to prepare for the fast. Rashi focused on the *chiyuv* in *Rosh HaShanah* and the *mechayev* in *Yoma*. In order to understand why Rashi focuses on the *chiyuv* in *Rosh HaShanah*, we must see the context of that *gemara*. The *gemara* there discusses the concept of *tosefes shemitah*, preparing before and continuing *shemitah* after the seventh year. One does not need to do much preparation before the seventh year, therefore, in the context of this *gemara*, it wasn't necessary to mention the *mechayev*, preparation, because it doesn't help the *sugya*. Thus, Rashi doesn't mention it.

From the above *sugya* we can derive two concepts in the *mitzvah* of eating on *Erev Yom Kippur*, the *sibah / mechayev*, which is to prepare for *Yom Kippur*, and the *tzurah / chiyuv*, which is the plain *mitzvah* of eating on *Erev Yom Kippur*. Once we have this *chiluk*, we can now apply it to our original question. Is there a *mitzvah* to eat all day on *Erev Yom Kippur*? If you agree with Rambam that we only focus on the *chiyuv*, then yes there would be a *mitzvah* to eat all day on *Erev Yom Kippur*. However, if you agree with most other *shitos* there is only a *mitzvah* to eat as much as you need for the next day's fast, which most probably would not include eating small snacks at the beginning and the middle of the day.

## Yom Kippur

### What Does *Kol Nidrei* Have to do with *Yom Kippur*?

*Rabbi Michael Taubes*

For many people, one of the most solemn and even moving moments of *Yom Kippur* comes at its very beginning. As the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 619:1) writes, it is customary to recite the paragraph commonly called “*Kol Nidrei*” before starting *Maariv*, the first of *Yom Kippur*’s five *tefillos*. At least in Ashkenazic communities, *Kol Nidrei* is chanted emotionally by the *chazzan* in a slow, somber, and melodious traditional tune, as the *tzibbur* stands silently and contemplatively, some members with tear-filled eyes. In a certain sense, this Aramaic paragraph sets the mood and the tone for a special day that will be filled with *teshuvah* and *tefillah*.

And yet, even a quick examination of what the text of *Kol Nidrei* actually states usually yields a measure of disappointment, at least initially. Not a word about *teshuvah* is found therein. Not a word about sins or forgiveness or atonement. There is no confession nor any appeal for Hashem’s mercy. In fact, *Kol Nidrei* is not a *tefillah* at all. What, then, is it? It is a technical *halachic* formula, the declaration of which releases people from various oaths, vows, and commitments; it is thus a form of what is known as *hataras nedarim*, the annulment of vows by a Rabbinic court of three people. It should be noted that there is a dispute among the *Rishonim* as to exactly which vows *Kol Nidrei* is designed to cancel. Some hold that the focus is on past vows, that is, those taken during the year that just ended, which one may have forgotten about and may thus unknowingly violate; this view is presented by the Ran in *Nedarim* (23b, *d’’h u’le’inyan*) and the Rosh in *Yoma* (8:28), among others. Rabbeinu Tam, however, cited by *Tosafos* in *Nedarim* (23b *d’’h v’at*) argues that the goal of *Kol Nidrei* is to “pre-nullify” any vows which one might take during the coming year and subsequently forget about and violate, by proclaiming in advance that they should not be binding. While this dispute impacts, among other things, whether the language of *Kol Nidrei* should be in the past tense or in the future tense, the question that may be raised either way is why, given that *hataras nedarim* is something which can be done at any time and is not inherently connected to *Yom Kippur*, our practice is to make this dramatic public declaration as a prelude to the most unique day of the year.

On a simple level, at least according to the assumption that *Kol Nidrei* focuses upon the past, one may say that given that one of our primary tasks on *Yom Kippur* is to engage in *viduy*, to acknowledge and confess our transgres-

sions, and then to beg for Hashem's forgiveness, it makes sense to remove from the record any promises or commitments which we might have made during the year and failed to fulfill because they were forgotten about. In other words, we have enough troubles when having to take into account only those transgressions, or at least categories of transgressions, which we are all too well aware of; we don't want to have to worry about things like promises and commitments, often so easily and flippantly made, which we failed to keep and long ago forgot about. By reciting *Kol Nidrei*, then, we are able to remove from the equation one major *genre* of transgressions and thus have one less problem area to concern ourselves with on *Yom Kippur*.

Elaborating upon this idea, *Maran* HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, *zt'l*, noted that while *Yom Kippur* certainly effects atonement for our sins, it is our own responsibility to eliminate those sins which we can eliminate by ourselves. Indeed, he explained, the *mitzvah* of *teshuvah* obligates us to do whatever is in our power to "get rid" of any transgressions which may be on our record and hence be granted atonement for them. Now, with regards to most sins, once we have committed them there is nothing at all that we can do in order to "undo" them. The only thing that can get rid of those sins is *teshuvah*, which Hashem mercifully accepts. But any sins which we can, at least to some extent, undo on our own we are indeed obligated to undo on our own and not simply rely on the "power" of *Yom Kippur*.

For this reason, *Yom Kippur*, even in tandem with sincere *teshuvah*, cannot yield forgiveness for transgressions which are *bein adam l'chaveiro*. If one has harmed someone else, in whatever way, whether financially, emotionally, or physically, he will not be forgiven on *Yom Kippur* unless he first appeases and straightens things out with that person, as taught by the Mishnah in *Yoma* (85b); the Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 2:9) and the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 606:1) rule accordingly. Clearly, one who has committed such a transgression must first do everything in his power to rectify the situation himself; only then will he be granted atonement on *Yom Kippur*. Similarly, suggested Rav Soloveitchik, since there is a *halachic* mechanism called *hataras nedarim* to annul vows, we must make use of it in order to attain forgiveness on *Yom Kippur* for any sins in the area of vows and oaths, as *Yom Kippur*, even accompanied by *teshuvah*, will not suffice. The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 1:1) stresses that part of the *teshuvah* process is to feel remorseful and embarrassed by one's sins; if one can in fact eradicate a sin on his own and fails to do so, he has demonstrated that he does not truly feel any sense of remorse and embarrassment about it, and his *teshuvah* is thus incomplete. In short, we must do our own part to "do away" with any sins which we can indeed do away with in order for *Yom Kippur* to be effective; the recitation of *Kol Nidrei* accomplishes this in the realm of oaths and vows.

Rav Soloveitchik also presented another reason for the importance of *Kol*

*Nidrei*, especially at the beginning of *Yom Kippur*, by examining the *halachic* basis for the mechanism of *hataras nedarim*. In theory, once one has taken a vow or made a promise or a commitment, his word should be completely binding and there should be no way for him to be released from it, as he said whatever he said and the past cannot be changed. The *halachah*, however, does allow one to be released from his vow if he claims that he sincerely regrets having taken it and that had he been aware at the time of the consequences which he now experiences, he never in fact would have taken it at all (see the ruling of the Rama in *Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 228:7). This assertion is the basis of *hataras nedarim*, as a result of which the person is viewed as having taken the vow under mistaken pretenses and is thus retroactively considered as if he never actually took it.

Similarly, Rav Soloveitchik explained, one who has sinned should be held fully accountable for his actions and there should be no way for him to be forgiven – after all, he did whatever he did and the past cannot be changed. In theory, *teshuvah* should not work and the person should never be released from his responsibility for his action, as pointed out by the *Mesillas Yesharim* (Chapter 4), who stresses that it is only because of Hashem’s kindness to us that *teshuvah* does work. To this Rav Soloveitchik added that the way it does in fact work is exactly the same way *hataras nedarim* works: the person sincerely regrets having sinned and asserts that had he been aware at the time of what he is now aware of, he never would have sinned at all. If this declaration is accepted, this person is viewed by the *halachah* as having sinned under mistaken pretenses and he is retroactively considered as if he never actually sinned.

When we recite *Kol Nidrei* at the beginning of *Yom Kippur*, then we are, as it were, reminding Hashem that on this day He should accept our *teshuvah* and forgive our sins completely, viewing us as never having committed them, and that He has the “right” to do so in accordance with the very same principles that He Himself built in to the Torah laws of *hataras nedarim*. In this sense, the recitation of *Kol Nidrei* is in fact a most appropriate prelude to *Yom Kippur* because it presents a *halachic* basis for our *teshuvah* being accepted and our transgressions being completely eliminated. May we all, this *Yom Kippur*, sincerely regret all of our sins and thus merit Hashem’s kindness in considering us as if we have never committed them, so that we will all be blessed with a beautiful year of good health, growth in Torah and *Yiras Shamayim*, and success in all of our endeavors.

# Did CNN get it right? Wearing Gold on *Yom Kippur*

*Rabbi Yisrael Apfel*

In an article titled ‘Everything You Wanted to Know about *Yom Kippur*’, CNN reports that “*observant Jews do not bathe on the holiday, they do not wear leather shoes or gold jewelry*”.

Refraining from bathing and wearing leather shoes are two of the five prohibitions on *Yom Kippur*, but is it correct that we should not wear gold jewelry on this sacred day?

The *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 26a) explains that when the *Kohen Gadol* would enter the *Kodesh Kodashim* on *Yom Kippur* he did not wear four of his usual eight garments since they had gold in them. The *Gemara* explains that this practice is based on the principle of *ein kateigor na’aseh saneigor-an accuser cannot become a defender*. Gold represents the sin of the Golden Calf and therefore stands as an “accuser” of *Klal Yisrael*. It would be inappropriate to use that when seeking atonement for *Klal Yisrael* on *Yom Kippur*.

Based on this *Gemara*, the custom developed that people would make sure not to wear gold on *Yom Kippur*. The *Pri Megadim* (*Teivas Gome, Parshas Acharei Mos*) writes that the reason of *ein kateigor na’aseh saneigor* should-strictly speaking- only apply to *Kohanim* and *Yisraelim*, but *Levi'im* and women, who were not involved in the sin of the Golden Calf, would be allowed to wear gold on *Yom Kippur*. However, the *Pri Megadim* writes that for the sake of peace and to prevent any group of people from feeling insulted, everyone should adopt this custom to refrain from wearing gold.

The *Match Ephraim* (609:11 in the *Eleph LeMateh*) raised the following difficulty on this custom based on the *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah*. The *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashana* (ibid) says that this principle of *ein kateigor na’aseh saneigor* only applies to things that are coming to bring atonement. That being the case, if one is wearing a garment such as a *Kittel*, which does not specifically bring atonement to the one wearing it, why should there be a problem to adorn it with gold material? The *Match Ephraim* explains that even though wearing a *Kittel* does not bring atonement, since it hints to ideas of atonement and purity (as it serves to remind a person of the seriousness of the day and the need for *Teshuva*), it is proper not to have any gold in it.

R' Bezalel Stern (*Shu"t B'Tzel HaChochma Vol. 6, Siman 3*) writes that according to the Mateh Ephraim there should be nothing wrong with wearing gold jewelry or a gold watch, as these are items which do not bring atonement nor hint to the concept of *Teshuvah*. He cites further proof to this from the *Gemara* (*Yoma 37a*) that describes how King Munbaz made the handles of the vessels out of gold on *Yom Kippur*. Since these vessels were not involved in the direct atonement of *Yom Kippur*, there was nothing wrong with having them made out of gold.

However R' Stern concludes that a person who does not regularly wear a gold watch should not do so on *Yom Kippur* due to the seriousness of the day. But a person who wears a watch regularly may do so on *Yom Kippur*.

R' Bezalel Stern zt'l (1910- 1988)

R' Stern was born in 1910, in Neihiezel, Czechoslovakia. In 1954, R' Stern was asked by the Adas Yisrael community in Melbourne, Australia, to serve as their Rav. The reason R' Stern agreed to go so far away was, as he writes in his introduction to *B'tzel Hachochmah*, *his interest in building Torah and Yiddishkeit in such a distant place. After 14 years in Melbourne, R' Stern moved to Eretz Yisrael to be closer to his family.*





## ***Teshuvah:*** **Does It Mean Return or Answer?**

*Rabbi Mordechai Brownstein*

Hebrew, as with all ancient languages, is stingy on words, compacting several related concepts into one term. For example, the root ‘GNV’ in Hebrew can refer to illegal possession of property or kidnapping; the root ‘GT’ can refer to a bill of divorce, a certificate of emancipation, or a promissory note. The word ‘*eikev*’ is translated as ‘heel’ but also as ‘compensation’. The same would apply to ancient Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. The legitimate question is therefore posed: When speaking about *teshuvah*, does one mean ‘return’, ‘answer’, or both? Let us unpack the word.

Complicating the question is the text of the *machzor* which forms an outline of the Holy Days and presents two contradictory visions of these ten days of *teshuvah*. One vision focuses on reflecting on past failure by expressing itself in ten confessions within 36 hours- beginning with the *minchah* before *Yom Kippur* until its conclusion- in addition to the confessions in *selichos* beginning in *Elul*. Another contrasting vision is found in anticipating a perfect world, one of devotion to God’s service and His will in the third opening *berachah* of *shemoneh esrei*. So, is this *teshuvah* season one of regret for inadequacies in serving God or is there an implied higher initiative permeating the ten days from *Rosh Hashanah* to *Yom Kippur*? Perhaps an answer to a higher call?

### **Man’s Dilemma**

Man’s dilemma is not simply put ‘sin’. Sin is a mere distraction from a higher purpose. Man, searches for his identity, his purpose, and his destiny.

“Man is inescapably, essentially challenged on all levels of his existence. It is in his being challenged that he discovers himself as a human being. Do I exist as a human being? My answer is: ‘I am commanded – therefore I am,’ wrote a prominent Jewish thinker. [Who Is Man, page 111, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1965]

Man, first determines that he IS, exists, and what he IS, his position in the world, its history and in his role in the trajectory of the Jewish people. Descartes’ man is one who thinks, one who possesses self-consciousness – cogito ergo sum. Descartes’ man merely knows there is a God out there. Jewish man IS, exists, only because God wants him to be, compels him to exist, commands him to exist – knows he IS only because God’s will let him BE.

Man exists within the existence of God. The thinker continues [ibid page 118] “Man in quest for an anchor in ultimate meaning is far from being a person shipwrecked who dreams of a palace while napping on the edge of an abyss. He is a person in full mastery of his ship who has lost his direction because he failed to remember his destination. Man in his anxiety is a MESSENGER WHO FORGOT THE MESSAGE.” Thus, man seeks to find a way out of his confused lack of knowledge. Man tries to recover the message and return to his route.

### **What Happened When Man Fell Lost in His Search? *Teshuvah* from where to where?**

“For Rav Kook, the categories of sin and repentance apply not to man in relation to God, but to man in relation to himself: one sins against one’s ‘self’ and returns to one’s ‘self’...Repentance means revealing the divine within man and, uniting it with divinity in its fullness...Man is essentially good and holy...

In contrast...

Rav Soloveitchik believes that God is God and man is man, and there is a chasm between them; man must CREATE himself if he wants to draw closer to God....He has great potential but must work to actualize it. [Reuven Ziegler, Afterword; On Repentance, Magid Books, New Milford, CT, Pnina Peli, 2017]

### **What does the Rav mean: “Man must Create Himself”?**

“The *Mizbeach*, its location is extremely precise. It is never moved from its place ever, as it states, “This is the *Mizbeach* for sacrifice for Israel”. At that spot Yitzchak, our Patriarch, was bound...That is the spot that Noah built on when exiting the Ark. There stood the *Mizbeach* that Kayin and Hevel offered on and there the first Man offered his sacrifice after his creation. He was created from that spot. Our sages say man was created from the place where he would be forgiven.” [Rambam, *Hilchos Beis Habechirah* chapter two]

God created man from the place of his atonement and man re-creates himself in order to receive that atonement.

In *Halachik Man* [page 110, Jewish Publication Society, 1983] the Rav wrote: “Repentance, according to the *halachik* view is an act of creation – self-creation.... the creation of a new “I”, possessor of a new consciousness, a new heart and spirit, different desires, longings, goals...The desire to be another person, to be different than I am now, is the central motif of repentance.

A person is creative; he was endowed with the power to create at his very inception.” As stated above, man was created from where the *Mizbeach* would be located. Creation and atonement are linked together. Self-creation implies a new longing to recover the route to man’s destiny, an effort to trivialize all else.

### What Is the Process for Self-Creation?

In Reflections of the Rav [Adapted by Rabbi Abraham Besdin, World Zionist Organization, Jerusalem, 1979], the Rav explains: “There are two wills: the *ratzon elyon*, the unmotivated will which derives from unknowable inner promptings; and the *ratzon tachton*, the will which is pragmatically motivated by reason or practical considerations. These two *retzonot* merge into an absolute unity, the Kabbalists say, only in the Almighty; within Him there are no conflicts. However, God gave man two *retzonot*, one of which is intelligible and the other unintelligible. These two are often in conflict; they collide, and clash and man must choose the with which he identifies. Should man be true to his inner light, or should he respond to practical pro and con considerations? This is a dilemma which confronts us daily. Motivated by the *ratzon tachton*, man lives in a utilitarian, pragmatic world. He does only what will be to his practical benefit. But if man aspires to greatness, he must identify with the *ratzon elyon*, which is not concerned with worldly success, progress, business profits. And similar considerations.”

“Without this *ratzon elyon*,” declares the Rav, “great minds would never have made their revolutionary discoveries in science, religion, and other fields.” The Rav, in a footnote, quotes Albert Einstein: “At times I feel certain that I am right without knowing the reason.” He was guided obviously by the *ratzon elyon*.

*Teshuvah* returns one to guidance from the *ratzon elyon* which motivates continuous advance through continuous self-creation.

Although *teshuvah* is obviously the pathway a sinner travels in order to return to his previous pure *status*; *teshuvah* is also the process through which one responds to the challenge of one’s commitment at Sinai; to be the one that God wants him to be, originally created him to be. So, he must activate a process by which he returns to his inner self, a process involving that *ratzon elyon* aspiring to his greatest potential not because he sinned, rather because he hasn’t yet achieved the goal of recreating himself. Man must return not to the image he sees in the mirror of himself but to the image of himself in God’s eyes at Sinai.

In the introduction to *Igeret Hateshuva*, *Likute Amarim*, Rabbi Nisen Mangel elucidates: “The Baal Shem Tov taught clearly that the service of the

*Tzadik*, the saint, must be a constant advance. Today must be a higher step in serving God than yesterday, and tomorrow must surpass today. This is the mood of *teshuvah*. [Kehot Publication Society, 1973, Soncino Press Limited, London 1973]

One grows ever improving inspired by God's inspiration.

"Return O faithless children, says the lord" [*Yirmyahu* 3;14]

"The voice of the Lord cries to the city" [*Michah* 6;9]

"Morning by morning He awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught" [*Yeshyahu* 50;4]

So, *teshuvah* does mean both: Return to what one is supposed to be – through self-creation and to Answer God's daily call!

"We do not have to discover the world of faith; we only have to recover it. It is not a *terra incognita*, an unknown land; it is a forgotten land, and our relation to God is a palimpsest rather than a *tabula rasa*. There is no one who has no faith. Every one of us stood at the foot of Sinai and beheld the voice that proclaimed, I am the lord thy God. Every one of us participated in saying, "We shall do, and we shall hear". However, it is the evil in man and the evil in society silencing the depth of the soul that block and hamper our faith. "It is apparent and known before Thee that it is our will to do Thy will. But what stands in the way? The leaven that is in the dough [the evil impulse] and the servitude of the kingdoms"

In the spirit of Judaism, our quest for God is a return to God; our thinking of Him is a recall, an attempt to draw out the depth of our suppressed attachment. The Hebrew word for repentance, *teshuvah*, means return.

Yet it also means answer. Return to God is an answer to Him... [God In Search Of Man, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1955]

## The Power of Tzedakah

Mr. Murray Sragow

The climax of “*Unesana Tokef*,” which for many is the highlight of all *Yamim Nora'im* davening, is the famous formula that the tzibbur shouts aloud:

“תשובה ותפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רוע הגזירה.”

We voice the assertion that through the power of three acts a Jew can escape the evil decree that otherwise he deserves, namely *teshuvah*, *davening*, and giving *tzedakah*. In the case of the first two, the reasoning is simple. The power of *teshuvah* turns a person into a “*ba'al teshuvah*,” a new person for whom the evil decree is irrelevant. Through davening, a person can appeal for mercy and hope to avoid or mitigate his punishment, even though he is deserving of it.

But *tzedakah*? The reward for *tzedakah* is not unusually large. That reward should not outweigh the person's sins. Why did the composer of this beautiful prayer choose this particular *mitzvah*? He could have chosen *talmud Torah*, arguably the most important *mitzvah* of all. That would also have preserved the alliteration, since it begins with a *tuf*. So what was he thinking? What might be the power of *tzedakah* that could cause a person to be protected from punishment?

Rabbi Yosef Blau, mashgiach at YU, offers an insightful answer. One of the amazing things about HKB”H is that He is able to execute justice in a way that not only gives each person what he deserves, but also harmonizes justice so that its effect on the environment also properly affects everyone. For example, Rashi to *Shemos* 21:13 quotes a *Midrash* saying that if two people commit homicide, one deliberately and one accidentally, and there are no witnesses, Hashem will arrange that they come to the same inn, where there are lots of witnesses. There Hashem will have the one who committed accidental homicide climb a ladder and fall on the deliberate murderer, giving justice to both.

The balance of justice is incredibly complex (and hence possible only for HKB”H) because all of our lives are integrated in certain ways, and therefore the good and bad decrees on one of us affects others. When a father commits a crime and is sentenced to prison, for example, the whole family suffers. How is that fair? But in divine justice, it miraculously all works out.

That is the special power of *tzedakah*. Perhaps I have sinned terribly, and deserve a horrible year. My investments should go bankrupt, and I should lose all my wealth. But if I am a *ba'al tzedakah*, my wealth is not benefitting only me. If I bankroll a destitute *tzaddik*, what will happen to him? If I am an important donor to a *yeshivah*, what will happen to its talmidim? In

order for Hashem's justice to be perfect, He must consider all its effects, not only those on me. Therefore, *tzedakah* can save me from my deserved fate by the way in which it binds me to others. Through their merit, I might retain my wealth in order to provide for them.

## The Issur Achila of Yom Kippur

Yaakov Weinstock ('22)

The *Mishnah* in the last *perek* of *Maseches Yoma* (81a) explains that if one eats items that are considered not fit to be eaten on *Yom Kippur*, he is *patur* from *kareis* and is also not *chayav* to bring a *chatas* if he ate it by accident. What is the definition of something that is “not fit to be eaten” that the *Mishnah* is referring to?

In order to answer this question we need to answer another question: Why is one *patur* for eating something that isn't fit to be eaten? Rabbeinu Manoach on the Rambam (*Hilchos Shevisas Asor* 2:5) explains that the prohibition against eating on *Yom Kippur* is formulated in the Torah through the language of “*te'anu es nafshoseichem*”- *you shall afflict your souls*. This language of a commandment of affliction (rather than a prohibition against eating) teaches that the concern is not simply eating on *Yom Kippur*, it is eating and thereby achieving a level of *yishuv hada'as*, a settling of the mind. When one eats things which aren't fit to be eaten, however, it gives them a feeling of pain, the polar opposite to *yishu vhad'a'as*. Therefore, the person's status of being afflicted remains in effect, allowing there to be no violation of the affliction that the *Torah* mandates on *Yom Kippur*. However, this explanation is challenging within the Rambam himself. The Rambam (*Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros* 14:10) writes that all *issurei achila* are only forbidden on at least a *Torah* level only if it's eaten in the normal way of eating. Based on this Rambam, the Divrei Yechezkel has the following question on the Rabbeinu Manoach. The Divrei Yechezkel wants to know why Rabbeinu Manoach gives the reason for the *ptur* of eating items that aren't meant to be eaten as because ‘eating’ these foods doesn't nullify the affliction status of the person, rather than just explaining that the reason one is *patur* is because it isn't *derech achilaso*? The Divrei Yechezkel explains that according to Rabbeinu Manoach, the *issur* of eating and drinking on *Yom Kippur* is fundamentally different from any other *issur achila*. The *issur* isn't one of eating, rather the prohibition is to remove yourself from affliction which is accomplished through eating. The *issur* is stay away from *yishuv hada'as*. Therefore, one is *patur* only if he eats extremely disgusting foods that don't have the ability to provide a *yishuv hada'as*. To prove that this is the case, he brings a proof from the *Sha'agas Aryeh* where he paskens that one is *chayav* for eating raw meat on *Yom Kippur*. It must be that even though it's not considered “fit to eat” in the normal understanding of this description, *Yom Kippur* is fundamentally different than all other *issurei achilah*, and therefore on *Yom Kippur* the definition of that which is considered “not fit to eat” is different as well. This is also implied in the *Mishnah Berurah* in which he explains that in order to be *patur* the food can't be edible at all. To put it in a

different way, this approach understands the *issur* of eating on *Yom Kippur* as an *issur gavra* in which the food itself isn't inherently *assur*, but there is still an *issur* on the person to have a *yishuv hada'as*.

However, does the Rambam agree with this understanding or does he deviate from this understanding and have a fundamentally different outlook on this prohibition?

In order to answer this, we need to ask two different questions.

1. In *Hilchos Ma'achalos Asuros* (14:10), where the Rambam presents the rule that all *issurei achilah* are only violated on a Torah level if it is performed *derech achila*, he mentions the exceptions of *basar b'chalav* and *orlah*, but doesn't mention *Yom Kippur*. Why not? If he agrees with the Sha'agas Aryeh and Rabbeinu Manoach, it should be counted as an exception too? A very similar issue is mentioned by the Ksav Sofer. The Ksav Sofer points out that in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* (5:8) the Rambam says that in a case of a sick person who is in a life threatening situation, he can be healed through *issurim*, even if to do this he must eat them in the normal way they are eaten. However, a sick person who isn't in life threatening danger is allowed to be healed through *issurim* if the way he is being healed isn't the normal way one would benefit from the item. However, there are two exceptions: *basar b'chalav* and *orlah*. Again, *Yom Kippur* isn't mentioned at all. The *Rambam* in *Hilchos Shivas Asor* (2:7) discusses that a person who eats the proper amount of food through an *achila gasa* is *patur*. (An *achila gasa* is defined as one eating so much that he is completely disgusted from eating anymore, yet still forces himself to eat.) In the end of this halacha, he adds an ambiguous line which reads as follows: "even though the food itself is fit for someone that's hungry, it's still not considered fit for someone who is full". What does the *Rambam* mean to add in this line? What question is he trying to ask, and how does he answer it?

In order to answer this, it could be suggested that the *Rambam* completely disagrees with the understanding of the *Sha'agas Aryeh*. According to the Rambam, maybe the *issur achila* on *yom kippur* is fundamentally the same as any other *issur achila*. Even though its *shiur* of how much is needed to violate the *issur* is based on *yishuv hada'as*, the *issur* is an *issur achila* and therefore conforms to the rules of any other *issurei achila*, namely that if it isn't done *derech achilaso*, it isn't a violation of the *issur*. In other words, according to *shitas haRambam*, the *issur achila* on *Yom Kippur* is fundamentally the same as other *issurei achila* in that it too is an *issur cheftza*. The piece of food is inherently a *cheftza shel issur*. This can answer our first question that the Rambam didn't mention *Yom Kippur* as an exception in *Ma'achalos Assuros* and *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* simply because it isn't an exception to the rule. This can also answer our second question about what question and answer is the Rambam dealing with in the last line in *Shivas Asor*- the answer is that since the *issur* is an *issur cheftza*, since the food itself



is fit to eat, maybe it should be a *cheftza shel issur* for someone who is full just like it is for someone who is hungry. The *Rambam* answers that even though the cheftzah of the food is fit for the hungry person, it isn't considered a *cheftza shel issur* to one who is completely full because for him it isn't fit to be eaten. In terms of *Halacha*, Rav Elyashiv seems to pasken this way, as he defines something that isn't fit to be eaten as something that causes a little pain, but doesn't go to the lengths that the Mishnah Berurah and the Sha'agas Aryeh go to. Therefore, the answer to our original question as to how one defines what is considered *eino raui la'achila* is based on how one fundamentally understands the *issur* to eat on *Yom Kippur*.

Either way one understands the fundamentals behind the *mitzvah*, the structure of the *mitzvah* as formulated by the first *Mishnah* in this *Perek* clearly shows that there are some differences between the *issur achilah* on *Yom Kippur* and general *issurei achilah* that even the *Rambam* would agree to. The formulation of this *issur* in the Torah is one indication of the uniqueness of this *mitzvah*, as it uses the word "*te'anu*" - afflict. Furthermore, the shiur in which one violates the *issur* of *achilah* on *Yom Kippur* is different than all other *issurei achilah*, as in other *issurei achila* the shiur is a *kezayis*, but by *Yom Kippur* it's a *koseves hagasa* (See Yoma 73b). How can this uniqueness be explained?

Ibn Ezra and Ohr HaChaim (*Emor* 16:31) both explain similarly that on *Yom Kippur* there are two types of afflictions taking place. There is an affliction of the physical body, which is achieved through not doing *melachah*, and there is also an affliction of the soul, which is achieved through the *issur achila*. However, this still requires some explanation, because what is it about *Yom Kippur* that requires this affliction of the soul that doesn't exist by any other *Yom Tov*? I believe this can be answered by first recognizing that there seems to be a certain connection between the *issur melachah* on *Yom Kippur* and its *issur achilah*, as seen from the fact that they are both referenced as afflictions. The Ibn Ezra and the Seforno explain in *Parshas Emor* (23:29) that the purpose of not doing *melacha* on *Yom Kippur* is to allow the person to be totally focused on asking Hashem for forgiveness. We can explain that the purpose of the affliction of the soul is similar, in that it too exists to get our entire person on the same page in regards to the goal of the day. This lesson of the two different afflictions are lessons one can take into our daily lives. The *Yom Kippur* presents the ideal form of *avodah*. I don't mean that one should fast every day. Rather, the ideal form of *avodah* is when one doesn't just go through the motions of the routine *mitzvos* one does everyday. Rather, one's physical body and *nefesh* should be on the same page; there should be an inner passion in the person as he performs all the *mitzvos*. *Yom Kippur* is the perfect time to internalize this lesson. As we enter a new year, may our physical bodies and our inner *nefesh* continue to work together to bring our *avodas Hashem* to greater heights.

## Sukkos

### What is the Hardest Mitzvah in the Torah?

*Rabbi Shimon Schenker*

What is the hardest *mitzvah* in the Torah? One can envision many *mitzvos* that could fully satisfy that question, yet the Vilna Gaon famously said that he thinks the hardest *mitzvah* is what the *posuk* in *Devarim* 16:14 teaches us, the *mitzvah* of “*Vahayisa ach sameach*”, that we should have an extra level of Simcha on Sukkos. Similarly the Bnei Yissaschar (Rav Elimelech of Dinov) says that one should try to at least have a little bit of *simcha*, to the best of their ability since it is such a hard mitzvah. The Ibn Ezra says along those lines that If someone can figure how to have this *simcha*, it is a promise he will have *simcha* in the future.

If this *mitzvah* is that difficult, yet so important for us to accomplish, then we need to figure out what it is and how to achieve it? Rav Matisyahu Solomon *Shli”ta*, the *Mashgiach* of *Beis Medrash Gavoah* points every *yom tov* has its special name which highlights its essence, *zman cheirusanu* (a time of freedom), *zman matan torasanu* (a time of giving the Torah), why does specifically sukkos have the moniker *zman simchasnu* (a time of happiness), it could be any *yom tov*? Why is Simcha unique to *Sukkos*?

*Mori V’Rebbi*, Rav Yonasan Sacks *Shli”ta* answers based on the Gra on *Shir Hashirim* (1:4) who explains that the *posuk* says the *simcha* of Sukkos is rooted in that we are happy about receiving the *ananei hakavod*. What was so special about *Klal Yisrael* receiving the *ananei hakavod*? If we look at the timeline of when they appeared, it will become apparent.

10th of *Tishrei* - *Klal Yisrael* made the *eigel*, the original clouds disappeared.

11th of *Tishrei* - *Moshe* came down after *Yom Kippur* and commanded people to build *Mishkan*.

12th and 13th of *Tishrei* - *Klal Yisrael* brought *Korbanos*

14th of *Tishrei* - Everyone gave donations to the *mishkan*

15th of *Tishrei* - *Klal Yisrael* built the *mishkan*, the clouds came back and *Sukkos* begins

The Gra in essence is saying that the *simcha* of *Sukkos* is re-experiencing the forgiveness that *Klal Yisrael* achieved after the sin of the *eigel*. Rav Yeru-

chom Levovitz explains that this is the *simcha* we express at our *Simchas Beis Hashoeva* on *Sukkos*. He brings a proof from the *Gemara* in *Sukkah* 53a that in the *Beis Hamikdash* they danced and sang, praising the people who had done *teshuva* and reconnected with *Hashem*.

However, why did the clouds not return right away as soon as they were forgiven, why did they not return until they built the Mishkan? *Rabbeinu Yonah* in *Shaarei Teshuva* (1:42) explains that one can not achieve true forgiveness unless you do something positive to show your desire for *mitzvos* and then you will receive *siyata dishmaya* in your *teshuva*. On the first *Yom Kippur*, they were happy that they were forgiven, but they still needed to repair their relationship with *Hashem*. Therefore, they didn't get back the clouds until they built the *mishkan* on the 15th. Therefore, we can be *b'simcha* on *motzei yom kippur* but it isn't until we begin doing abundant positive *mitzvos* on *Sukkos* and culminating in "*Simchas Torah*" that we begin repairing our relationship with *Hashem*.

Based on this, perhaps then there is an additional definition of *simcha*, not just happiness, but connection. More importantly, how does this apply to our daily lives as busy Jews? How can we achieve this connection with *Hashem*? Let's explore a number of different areas of Torah and that seem to highlight the concept of *Simcha* and so we can see how it is defined there and perhaps we can get a better understanding of the *mitzvah* of *Simcha*.

By the *Mitzvah* of *Bikkurim* in *Devarim* (26:11), the *Torah* says "You need to be *b'simcha* with all that *Hashem* has given you." It should really say you should be satisfied with that which *Hashem* gives you, why doesn't the *posuk* say "*vi'savata*" or a *lashon* of *maspik*? Why *simcha*? *Rashi* (there) says that this *mitzvah* only can be performed during the time of *simcha*, meaning until *Sukkos*. Why? The *Netziv* writes that when you feel and connect to the spiritual nature of *Hashem*, then you feel true *simcha*.

In *Shmuel beis* (6:12), *Dovid* brought the *Aron Kodesh* to *Yerushalayim* and the *posuk* says he was *b'simcha*. Why was he *b'simcha*? His *simcha* was *simcha shel mitzvah*, not silliness and happiness, connectivity, meaningfulness.

The *Mishna Avos* (4:1) writes, "Who is wealthy?...*Hasameach b'chelko* (he who is happy with his lot). *Rashi* there writes that *simcha* is contentment, being content with that which *Hashem* has given us. The commentary *Yachin* (Yisrael Lifschitz 1782–1860) says that someone who is satisfied with what he has realizes his own purpose and role in this world and recognizes *Hashem's* plan for him. *Yachin* and *Rav Chaim Shmulevitz* say a poor man who wins the lottery does not automatically become wealthy, he remains a *shneuer* with money.

How do we achieve this level of simcha, connection, contentment and happiness?

### **Approach #1 - Happy actions**

The *Mishna* in *Avos* 1:16 says, “Greet everyone with a smile”. *Rabbeinu Yonah* there writes that when we smile we help ourselves become happier. The *Sefer HaChinuch* in *Parshas Bo* explains how your outward actions influence your emotions. The more you smile, it will be better for you. The *Brisker Rav* used to say, your face is a *reshus harabim* so you always need to put on a smile, even if deep down you want to cry. Rabbi Dr. Twerski mentions a study with a psychiatrist that put a paralytic in peoples faces to keep them from frowning, they reported a marked decrease in depression.

One landmark study asked some participants to put a pencil between their lips without letting it touch their teeth. This forced them to make a frowning face as they held the pencil in place. A second group was instructed to hold a pencil between their teeth. This position forced people in the second group to smile. Both groups were then asked to rate a series of humorous cartoons. Even though they were looking at the same cartoons, a clear difference emerged: people who were smiling rated the cartoons as markedly more funny and enjoyable than those who were frowning. It seems the very act of forcing ourselves to grin makes us happier.

### **Approach #2 - Focus on gratitude**

Dr. Robert A. Emmons of the University of California, Davis, and Dr. Michael E. McCullough of the University of Miami found that people who write down things they are grateful for regularly are more optimistic and feel better about their lives. They were also less likely to have to go to the doctor and reported exercising more.

Dr. David Pelcovitz, explores them in his [ELI talk](#), “Jewish Perspectives on Happiness.” He begins with the following question: “How does the secular view of happiness – which is tied etymologically to words like ‘hapless,’ ‘happenstance,’ and ‘haphazard,’ hinting that if you’re lucky enough to have money, if you’re fortunate enough to be living a life where everything falls your way, you’ll be happy, but otherwise maybe not – differ from the Jewish word for happiness, ‘simcha’?” It turns out that some tie the Hebrew word ‘simcha’ (happiness) to putting two words together, ‘sham’ and ‘moach’: “where your head is at.” As Dr. Pelcovitz explains, “If your head is in a place of meaning, happiness will ensue.” This Jewish concept of meaning-making rather than luck as the key to happiness may make intuitive sense. In fact, we learn in this talk that many principles deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition as to how to create meaning and happiness are also findings in the more recent study of positive psychology. For instance, the very word for being Jewish, *Yehudi*, means to thank or to express gratitude. This centrality of gratitude in Judaism is backed up by research in positive psychology demonstrating that gratitude is tied not only to happiness, but also to health.

### Approach #3 - Do something for someone else

Rav Dessler in *Kuntres Hachessed* in *Michtav M'Eliyahu* p. 43 and 44 - In order to build our power of being a giver, it is not enough to feel that we have what we need, we need to feel like our bounty is overflowing and we want to share it with the world. In one 2017 study at the University of Zurich in Switzerland, researchers told a group of 50 people that they were going to be given about \$100 in the coming weeks. Half of the group was asked to start planning how they would spend that money on themselves and half was asked to start planning ways to spend it on someone else they knew. Even before the money was distributed, each group of people began to exhibit marked changes. The people who planned to spend their money on others behaved more generously in all sorts of ways, and also reported feeling happier than those who were planning to spend their \$100 on themselves. Surprisingly, this difference in happiness levels lasted even after the experiment was over. It seems that planning to give to others alters the way we see ourselves: when we begin to think of ourselves as generous, we behave in ways that reinforce that self-image and continue to reap the rewards of feeling that we are giving, good people. Even people who pledged relatively small amounts to others seemed to be happier. Lead author Philippe Tobler explained: "It is worth keeping in mind that even little things have a beneficial effect – like bringing coffee to one's office mates in the morning." Replacing old habits with some of these strategies can help us maximize our joy and sense of well-being.

As we process all of these ways of achieving simcha, the common denominator between all of them is that all roads of *simcha* go through connection to *Hashem* and improving ourselves. BE"H, throughout this *Yamim Noraim* period we can continue to work on ourselves and achieve true *simcha* like they did in the *midbar*.

## The Perfect *Sukkah*

*Zevi Burg ('23)*

In *Marriv* every night we say the expression *ufros aleinu sukkas shelomecha*, yet on *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* at *Mariv* we say *Haporeis sukkas shalom aleinu*. One question on this is what is the connection between *Sukkah* and *shalom*? The more obvious answer that one can offer is that just like Hashem protected us in the *midbar* through the shelter of the *sukkos*, so too He should continue to protect us, and this protection should be carried out with *shalom*.

Rav Kook offers a more meaningful answer. He explains that a *Sukkah* is a structure which, to the naked eye, looks incomplete and lacking many of its parts. For example, a *Sukkah* which only has two and a half walls is still considered to be a halachically complete *Sukkah*, even though it appears to be missing one and a half walls. We see from here that the *Torah* views this structure- despite its many holes and incompleteness- as something that is complete and flawless, even though it looks to be lacking to any person. So when we ask Hashem every day *ufros aleinu sukkos shelomecha*, we are asking for Him to adopt this attitude the *Torah* takes even towards an 'imperfect' *Sukkah* and apply it to us. Just like the *Torah* views the 'incomplete' *Sukkah* as a completed structure, so too we are asking for Hashem to have that same outlook on us and view us as perfect and without blemishes.

Even though each person has their own imperfections and blemishes, they are not considered incomplete. At the same time, we should fill in the holes like the *Torah* does by *Sukkah* with their flaws, and then we'll accomplish true *shalom*.

## A Mysterious *Mitzvah*

*Natan Gemal ('23)*

The *Torah* gives us a reason on *Sukkos* to have a *sukkah*, namely to remind us of the generation that came out of Egypt (since they lived in *sukkos* in the desert). When commanding us to take the *arba minim*, though, the *Torah* does not give a reason. What is so special about these four species that we should take them together on *Sukkos*?

The *Torah* says to celebrate *Sukkos* in the season when we gather produce from the fields. The *Torah* also says we must be happy on *Sukkos*. It would then make sense to celebrate with these *arba minim*, things that come from the field, and use them as a tool to make us happy, as the *Sefer Hachinuch* explains that these species specifically tend to make people happy.

The *halacha* follows the *Rabanan* in the *gemara* in *Sukkah*, that it is a specific *mitzvah* to hold them all together. We shake them all together to fulfill the *mitzvah* to be happy on *Sukkos*, bringing us closer to Hashem on *Sukkos*. Additionally, each of the species represent a different sect of Judaism all coming together to celebrate and make each other happy all throughout *Sukkos*.

We see how important it is to be happy on *Sukkos* from the *mitzvah* of the *arba minim*, and how we should take care to beautify the *mitzvah* so we could all celebrate together happily.

## Live In The Moment or The Mysterious Connection Between Sukkah, Tzitzis, and Tefillin

*Shimi Kaufman ('21)*

There is a fascinating passage in the *Tur* at the beginning of *Hilchos Sukkos* (*Orach Chayim* 625:1), in which the author writes that the reason for the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* is to recall the *ananei hakavod*, the protective clouds which *Hashem* provided for us in the *midbar*. This statement has its roots in a *machlokes* in the *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 11b), where Rabbi Akiva says that the *sukkah* represents literal huts in which *Bnei Yisroel* lived while in the desert, and Rabbi Eliezer maintains that the commemoration is to the divine clouds which protected the Jewish people on their way to *Eretz Yisroel*. What is interesting here is that the *Tur*, whose *sefer* is primarily focused on practical *halacha*, chooses to *pasken* a *machlokes* which would appear to be unrelated to the physical *mitzvah* of *sukkah*. The *Bach* explains that the *Tur* chose to take a side in this *machlokes* because of the *possuk* (*Vayikra* 23:43) which says “*lima'an yeidu doroseichem ki basukkos hoshavti es Bnei Yisroel*” - so that your generations should know that I [*Hashem*] settled *Bnei Yisroel* in *sukkos*. This *possuk* implies that knowing the reason for sitting in the *sukkah* is an essential part of the *mitzvah*; therefore, the *Tur* felt the need to clarify what the true reason for the *mitzvah* actually is.

The *Bach* goes on to write that the *Tur* is consistent in his view that this *possuk* should be classified as a *halachic* requirement. In particular, he presents two other instances (seemingly the only two other instances) in which the *Tur* has similar comments regarding the need for *kavanah* in the performance of the *mitzvah*: the *mitzvah* of *tzitzis*, and the *mitzvah* of *tefillin*. Regarding *tzitzis*, the *possuk* (*Bamidbar* 15:40) says “*lima'an tizkiru va'asisem es kol mitzvosai*” - so that they shall remember and do all of My *mitzvos* - and regarding *tefillin*, the *possuk* (*Shemos* 13:9) says “*lima'an tihiyeh toras Hashem biphicha*” - so that the *Torah* of *Hashem* will be in your mouth. And here, the question emerges: what is unique about these three *mitzvos*, that they specifically require some sort of recognition of their underlying reason? More acutely, what is the connection between these three *mitzvos*, and how does it relate back to this requirement?

There is another interesting link between these three *mitzvos*, which only serves to further the question. There is a famous *machlokes* between the Rambam and the *Ohr Zarua* if the requirement to make *brachos* on *mitzvos* before they are performed (“*over li'asiyasani*”) is a strict requirement, or only a *lichatchilah*; that is, can the *brachah* can still be recited after the *mitzvah*



was performed if one forgot to do so beforehand? The *Ohr Zarua* takes the opinion that this is only a *lichatchilah*, and not a disqualification for reciting the *brachah*. The Rambam, however, *paskens* that *brachos over li'asiyasen* is a strict requirement, without which the *brachah* cannot be recited. However, the Rambam (*Hilchos Brachos* 11:5) lists one exception to this rule, namely, that for *mitzvos* which continue over a period of time, one can make the *bracha* in middle of the *mitzvah*, if he did not do so in the beginning. In particular, the Rambam gives three examples of *mitzvos* which would fit this category - *tzitzis*, *tefillin*, and *sukkah*. Once again, we see a strange connection between these three *mitzvos*. What is the nature of this relationship?

Perhaps a place to begin would be to inspect the connection between *tzitzis* and *tefillin*, which would appear to be far more intertwined with each other than they are with *sukkah*. The *Sefer Hachinuch* (*Mitzvah* 621:2) comments that the reason for the *mitzvos* of *tefillin*, *tzitzis*, and *mezuzah* are all essentially the same. Man is built with an animalistic nature, and without constant moderation, he is at risk of falling into depravity at any given moment. *Hashem* therefore gave us physical reminders, in the form of these *mitzvos*, to remind us that we are meant to strive for something more. We have a *neshamah*, a *chelek Elokal mima'al*, and we are expected to tap into that aspect of ourselves, not simply to give into our base desires. So, it emerges that there is a clear connection between *tzitzis* and *tefillin*. But how does *sukkah* relate to any of this? And, how does *mezuzah*, the other *mitzvah* listed by the *Chinuch*, fit into this equation?

The *Gemara* (*Yoma* 10a) brings a debate between Rabbi Yehudah and the *Chachomim* if a *sukkah* requires a *mezuzah*. Rabbi Yehudah is of the opinion that it does, while the *Chachomim* maintain that it does not. The *machlokes* would seem to connect back to another dispute in the first *mishnah* of *Maseches Sukkah*, regarding the maximum height of a *sukkah*. The *Chachomim* believe that a *sukkah* may not be taller than 20 *amos*, since making the *sukkah* any taller would constitute a *diras keva*, a permanent dwelling, in contrast to the *sukkah's* status as a *diras arai*, a temporary dwelling. Rabbi Yehudah, in contrast, argues that the *sukkah* must be a *diras keva*, and therefore sets no height limit for its construction. In a similar vein, the *Chachomim* believe that the *sukkah* requires no *mezuzah*, since it is not a permanent home, while Rabbi Yehudah believes that a *mezuzah* would be necessary, since the *sukkah* is supposed to be permanent. In any event, it is clear that in *halachah*, we follow the opinion of the *Chachomim*, and therefore, we do not put a *mezuzah* in our *sukkos*.

This would appear to be the fundamental difference between the *mezuzah* and the *sukkah*. Both are representative of a Jewish home, but they are different kinds of homes. The *mezuzah* is a fixture, a constant symbol on the doorway which affirms the Godliness of the house. It is, to use the expression of

the *Gemara*, a “*chovas hadar*” - a requirement incumbent on the dweller, a symbol of permanent residence. In contrast, the *sukkah* is by nature temporal, built to be abandoned after the week has passed. It is a dwelling, but it is not a stopping point. We get up from the *sukkah* after seven days, and we continue with our lives.

We may be able to suggest that for this reason, these three *mitzvos* specifically require *kavanah*. While the same reason is given for *tzitzis*, *tefillin*, and *mezuzah*, there would appear to be a major point of differentiation regarding the first two - namely, that they are portable reminders, while the *mezuzah* is static. And that is where *sukkah* comes in. I heard an insight from Rabbi Mark Wildes, that *Sukkos* is the only one of the *Shalosh Regalim* which does not celebrate a particular event in our history. Instead, it celebrates the journey - how we travelled in the *midbar*, under the protection of *Hashem*. The reason we are told to remember the reasons behind these three *mitzvos* is because they represent the fundamental goal of developing a *Torah* personality - the recognition that *Hashem* is with us, constantly, and with that, the elevation of ourselves to reflect that recognition. The *sukkah* represents the *ananei hakavod*, not the static huts of the *midbar*, because the point of the *sukkah* is to learn to travel with *Hashem*, to live each day as an *eved Hashem*, as the nation walked along with the clouds through the desert. All three of these *mitzvos* serve as reminders that *Hashem* is with us always, not just at spiritual high points. And maybe, this is why the Rambam gives these three *mitzvos* as examples of “continuous *mitzvos*”. It is these *mitzvos* which are intended to be continuous, to represent Dovid *Hamelech*’s ideal of “sitting in the house of *Hashem*, all of our days”. These *mitzvos* serve as symbols for us to live like a Jew, at any moment.

Last year, I had the privilege of hearing Rabbi Dovid Kossovsky speak before *Neilah* of *Yom Kippur* at *Kehillas Torei Zahav*. He developed the idea that the goal of *Yom Kippur* is to weaken our physical bodies, such that at the end of the day, as the gates close, we catch a glimpse of our *neshamah*. We are suddenly infused with strength as we shout “*Hashem Hu HaElokim*” - *Hashem* is the True God! It is a moment like no other, when every single person feels in tune with his or her own personal *cheilek* of *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*. But what happens afterwards? In the days and weeks that follow *Yom Kippur*, are we expected to allow that to slip away? What is the point of this spiritual crescendo if we cannot take anything from it?

*Sukkah* is the answer. In the days following *Yom Kippur*, we enter our *sukkos*, and learn that *Hashem* is to be found not just in *shul* on the holiest day of the year, but every day, no matter where we are. We put on our *tzitzis* and wrap our *tefillin* to remind ourselves of *Hashem*’s presence, and we look to the *sukkah* as a reminder that *Hashem* is to be found in the process of change, in the movement and unpredictability of life. We remind ourselves

that to truly grow in our connection to *Hashem*, to achieve the levels we do by *Neilah*, we have to be situated in a *diras arai*, prepared to meet the *Borei Olam* on whatever path we are on. It's not about the days of *mezuzah*, the days of *Neilah*, when we feel the *ruchniyus* surging around us. These moments are important, to be sure, but they are not the essence of Jewish life. For us, it's not about the destination, the final achievement of closeness to *Hashem* - it's about the journey we take each day to get there.

## How can we connect to the *Ushpizin*?

*Aryeh Klein ('22)*

Isn't it strange that we invite deceased biblical guests to our *Sukkah*? Every night of *Sukkot*, we invite a different famous guest and yet there are very few answers posed as to why. Through analyzing the strange custom of *Ushpizin* we can answer this question.

The custom of *Ushpizin* is based off a passage the *Zohar* writes; "When a man sits in the shadow of faith (the *Sukkah*) the *Shechinah* spreads Her wings on him from above and Abraham and five other righteous ones of God (and Dovid with them) make their abode with him. A man should rejoice each day of the festival with these guests." We see in the *Zohar*'s words this custom of symbolically inviting the *Ushpizin*.

The idea of having guests on *Sukkot* is mentioned in regards to the *Mitzvah* of *Simchat Sukkot*. Upon entering his *Sukkah*, Rav Hammuna Sava would ecstatically rejoice. This idea of inviting the *Ushpizin* is about elevating one's own happiness and including people in one's *Sukkah*. Having guests is so vital that Rambam goes as far as to say that one who eats in their *Sukkah* with no guests, is doing a mitzvah of the stomach and not a *mitzvah* of joy. (Nowadays we fulfill this idea by giving *tzedakah* and helping the poor)

We often think of guests as people who don't have an invitation out that night, which although true, does not convey the entire meaning. If one thinks about the idea of a guest and what it means, a guest is someone who is in a "foreign" place that is not their own. If we look at the *Ushpizin* that we invite to our *Sukkah*, we can see that actually each of them spent time as a guest. Avraham was the man to begin it all, the man who left his land to the land that God would show him. Yitzchak went to Gerar during a famine. Yaakov fled to Lavan while fleeing his brother. Yosef was sold into slavery in Egypt. Moshe after killing a *mitzri* fled to Midian. Aharon wandered the Sinai for forty years. Dovid hid from Shaul. It was with these actions that they were *Ushpizin*. It is with this new perspective that we can understand the meaning of the *Ushpizin*. Throughout life we go through difficulties, in which we are dealing with something challenging and new. In these difficulties we are guests, strangers, as the challenges we are facing are "foreign" and unknown. The *Ushpizin* had many of these difficulties and some of them had great help along the way. In this parable, those who help others are the host. The lesson we can learn from the *Ushpizin* is as follows: when someone you know is going through challenges in their life, make sure that you are a host to them. Ensure them that in these uncertain times, of their wandering as a stranger you will be there to both literally and figuratively host them.

## Hashem is Addicted to Us

*Yitzchak Hagler ('22)*

“Dear, it’s time to go to bed,” you hear your mother yell to your eight year old self. The response is a universal one, one that echoes through the halls of any house nearing bedtime- “just one more game, one more episode, one more chapter,” you instinctively yell back to your mother. “Just give me five more minutes, then I’ll go to sleep”. This back-and-forth routine which is so common in a parent’s day-to-day life, can serve as a very meaningful parable when we understand how we are blessed to experience it in our unique relationship with Hashem.

Rashi (*Vayikra* 23:36) explains that *Shemini Atzeres* is referred to as such because *atzeres* means prevention or stoppage. After so many days of feasting with our father, the king, days of connection and closeness with Him, on this day Hashem says to us: “I know you are supposed to leave now. But it is so hard for me to separate from you. Please, I beg of you, just stay with me for one more day!” And that is *Shemini Atzeres*- it’s the day Hashem stops us from leaving, the day He demands for “just five more minutes” of closeness with us, His beloved nation.

This Rashi seems to be based on the *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 55b) (see Rashi *Bamidbar* 29:35 where he quotes the *Gemara* in full). The *Gemara* there explains that the seventy bulls sacrificed throughout the first seven days of *Sukkos* correspond to the seventy nations of the world, and the single bull offered on *Shemini Atzeres* corresponds to the most singular, unique nation in the world- *Am Yisrael*. This can be compared to a king who tells His servants to make a big feast for Him, and on the last day of the feast he tells His closest loved ones to make an additional smaller feast so He can derive benefit from them. The servants are the nations of the world, who gain their atonement from Hashem through this giant, elaborate feast consisting of seventy bulls; the loved ones are Bnei Yisrael, whose feast of one single bull not only grants them their atonement, but also gives Hashem true pleasure. This version of the story, similar to the one found in Rashi to *Vayikra*, paints a clear picture of *Shemini Atzeres* as the day of our intimate, loving connection with Hashem, a connection He cherishes and never wants to let go of. However, one point the *Gemara* adds to the scene depicted by Rashi to *Vayikra* is that Hashem doesn’t just want us to *be* there for one more day. He expects something from us on this last day. His thirst is not satiated by simply spending more time with us- He wishes for us to prepare for him a feast, He wishes to ‘benefit’ (as if it were possible) from something we provide for Him. What is that something? What does Hashem ask from us on *Shemini Atzeres*? On the most simple level, it is the *korbanos*- the one bull, one ram, seven lambs, and their *mincha* offerings and *nischaos* (*Bamidbar* 29:36-37). If we look at another *Gemara* in *Sukkah*, though, we

will quickly see that *korbanos* don't tell the whole story, that maybe they do not make up the whole *avodah* of *Shemini Atzeres*.

The *Gemara* reads as follows:

משנה: חייב אדם בהלל ובשמחה ובכבוד יום טוב האחרון של חג כשאר כל ימות החג... גמרא: מנא הני מילי? דתנו רבנן: "והיית אך שמח" לרבות לילי יום טוב האחרון

*Mishnah: a person is obligated in hallel, simchah, and kavod [for] the last day of Sukkos like all the other days of Sukkos... Gemara: From where are these words [known]? As the Rabbis taught: "and you will just be happy" comes to include the nights of the last day of Yom Tov. (Sukkah 48a)*

Our pure joy and *simchah*, according to this *Gemara*, seem to be another part of the *avodah* of *Shemini Atzeres*, another aspect of the 'feast' we present to Hashem for the sake of His benefiting from us on this special day. But the Vilna Gaon takes issue with this *Gemara*. He is puzzled as to how the *Gemara* is including *Shemini Atzeres* in the obligation of rejoicing on *Sukkos* through the word *ach*, a word which generally comes to exclude (*Yerushalmi Berachos* 67b). He answers that on all the other days of *Sukkos*, there are three unique *Mitzvos*- *sukkah*, *arbah minim*, and *simchah*, but on *Shemini Atzeres*, these first two *Mitzvos* are excluded, leaving behind just that third *Mitzvah*, the *Mitzvah* of *simchah*. This answer, though, leaves us feeling more confused, because on this very special occasion, the time when Hashem says "it's hard to separate [from my beloved nation]," why would He choose to exclude two of the *Mitzvos* which had been present for the last seven days, two unique avenues for connection with us? Shouldn't He want to include these *Mitzvos* in our "small feast" from which He will derive benefit? Furthermore, asks the Beis Aharon (Rav Shlomo Zalman Horowitz), on a textual level, why does the *Gemara* use the language of including *Shemini Atzeres* in the *Mitzvah* of *simchah*, if really all the *passuk* is doing is excluding it from the other *Mitzvos*?

A person cannot truly multitask, says Tosphos (*Moed Katan* 8b), because whenever we are focused on one task, and we take on an additional task, the extreme level of focus we had had for our first task is lowered substantially, as our attention is split between this old task and the new one. This concept, says the Beis Aharon, can be used to answer our questions. For the textual question, as to why the *Gemara* uses the language of including, the answer is that by removing these other two mitzvos, Hashem is allowing us to no longer have to balance our focus between three different *Mitzvos*, a reality which results in a lower level of fulfillment of all of those *Mitzvos*, but rather we can focus just on the one *Mitzvah* of the day, *simchah*, thereby adding greatly to our performance of this *Mitzvah*.

This can be used, I think, to answer our first question as well. Why does Hashem take away the *Mitzvos* of *sukkah* and *arbah minim* on *Shemini Atzeres*? It is so that on this day, when our relationship with Him is the strongest, we can attain the highest possible heights in our embodiment of one of the most important faucets of our life as *ovdei* Hashem- *simchah*. Unlike the rest of *Sukkos*, when we split ourselves between all the different

*Mitzvos* of the day, on this day we can focus solely on the *Mitzvah* of *simchah*, and this sort of unobstructed concentration on just this one special *Mitzvah* might very well constitute the feast which Hashem can actually enjoy.

To sum up, we began with a *mashal* about a little child asking his mother for “just five more minutes” before bed. We explained that this represents our relationship with Hashem, in that Hashem wants “just five more minutes” with us before we depart from the state of close connection achieved on *Sukkos*, and those “five minutes,” that day of ultra closeness to Him is *Shemini Atzeres*, when Hashem says “it’s hard to depart from you!” We came to the conclusion, based on the *Gemara* in *Sukkah*, that the uniqueness of *Shemini Atzeres* is not just our being with Hashem for one more day, it is our efforts to provide Him with ‘pleasure’ on this day, a feat that we alone have the opportunity to achieve as Hashem’s beloved, cherished nation. Lastly, we suggested, based on another *Gemara* in *Sukkah*, as interpreted by the Vilna Gaon and the Beis Aharon, that our *avodah* on *Shemini Atzeres*, the way we can actually give Hashem what he so desperately wants on this day- to gain pleasure from us- is accomplished through one simple principle. This principle, this concept, is one which fails to be encapsulated in the confines of simple human dialogue, but lends itself to be captured precisely within the limitlessness of a language created by G-d in one common Hebrew word- *simchah*.

