



# BEIT MIDRASH ZICHRON DOV

# TORONTO TORAH

## ROSH HASHANA

VOL. 15 NUM. 4 (#588) • 1 TISHREI 5784 / SEPTEMBER 16, 2023

This issue of Toronto Torah is sponsored by the Parker family as a thank you to Rabbi Mann and Rabbi Sonenberg for your continued leadership of Beit Midrash Zichron Dov. May you go from strength to strength.



**DVAR TORAH ROSH HASHANA** RABBI NOAH SONENBERG, DEAN

## The Ideal Remembrance

One of the three pillars of the musaf service on Rosh Hashana is Hashem's remembrance. According to Rav Yosef Albo, this section reflects our awareness and belief in Hashem's justice and the concept of reward and punishment. This focus on His judgment though, can often be intimidating, causing trepidation and fear, but a close look at the text of this section reveals that the main focus of His remembrance is on our merit and to provide salvation. This type of remembrance is highlighted in the Torah reading for the first day of Rosh Hashana, which begins with "And Hashem remembered Sarah as He had said...." The Hebrew verb used here for "remembered" is "pakad" and not the usual "zachar". The word "pakad" does not just describe a simple remembrance. According to Rav Hirsch, this word implies "a special intervention action, aimed at an appropriate arrangement of conditions for a person or a nation." Hashem has an awareness of our circumstances and actions as well as our unique needs and knows what is necessary to achieve those needs based upon our situation. He then works to provide what is needed to effect the desired outcome. We are provided with support and direction to fulfill the task that aligns with our purpose in this world.

We all want to be remembered by Hashem in this way and a closer look at the text of the Torah can give us insight in how to achieve this goal. The event in the Torah that immediately precedes our passage describes how Avraham prayed to Hashem to heal Avimelech, his wife and handmaids from their barrenness and that as a result

*If we want Hashem to remember us then the best way to achieve this is to remember others*

of this prayer, they were healed and gave birth. Sarah had been barren for many years and both she and Avraham likely beseeched Hashem about this matter to no avail. Only at this point in time, after Avraham prayed for Avimelech, were he and Sarah remembered. This juxtaposition is used by Rava in the gemara in Bava Kamma (92a) to learn that "anyone who asks for compassion from Heaven on behalf of another, and he requires compassion from Heaven concerning that same matter, he is answered first."

If we want Hashem to remember us then the best way to achieve this is to remember others. This requires a level of concern and awareness that matches what we desire

from Hashem. This follows the principle taught in the Mishna in Sotah (1:7) "With the measure that a person measures, he is measured with it." A person who suffers and is in need, has the unique perspective of truly understanding another person who is going through the same circumstances. This personal insight can be used to better relate to, pray for and help others. It isn't enough just to be aware that other people are having a hard time. We must also realize what they need and what circumstances we are able to provide to help them achieve those needs.

During our prayers on this Rosh Hashana let us focus not only on our own challenges in life but also take time to consider others. The aphorism "misery loves company" reflects an understanding that it is hard to feel like the only one who is suffering from a particular challenge. When we work to realize that we are not alone in our struggles it allows us to pray in a way that removes selfish personal desire and replaces it with an awareness that our true desire would be to remove this cause of suffering from everyone who is afflicted by it. Perhaps a new aphorism should be "company relieves misery."



## Yeshayahu 58 – Rosh HaShanah 5784

In the last part of Chapter 57, Yeshayahu explained to the Jews that their repentance would lead Hashem to take care of them and to bring them peace. That is the start of the Haftorah for Yom Kippur morning; it continues to the end of Chapter 58. Our chapter provides two central messages: 1) A call to fast correctly, and 2) A call to observe Shabbat correctly.

Yeshayahu begins our chapter by observing that the Jews can't understand why their fasting does not lead to success. The answer is that they are only pretending to seek Hashem, but they don't actually spend the fast in repentance. On the fast day itself, they pursue and oppress the people who owe them money (58:1-3)!

Hashem does not want a fast during which people pursue their desires and harm others. Yeshayahu says, "You don't

fast like for that day," meaning that they don't fast in the way that the day warrants (Abarbanel). Striking others betrays the truth about their bowed heads and sackcloth (58:4-5).

What sort of fast does Hashem desire? A fast on which they free those who are suffering, feed and clothe the needy, and take care of their needy relatives. As

### What sort of fast does Hashem desire?

Radak notes, these deeds are the opposite of the violent oppression that Yeshayahu criticized earlier. Fasting will only succeed if they are also benevolent to others (58:6-7).

Yeshayahu promises that when the Jews

fast appropriately, their light will break forth like dawn, cutting through the darkness and growing in power (Rashi, Ibn Ezra). Hashem will respond to their prayers and redeem them, so long as they free their slaves, reform their speech and give generously to the needy. Then their ruins will be rebuilt, and they will be known as the generation that restored the land (58:8-12).

Yeshayahu then returns to a theme from Chapter 56, emphasizing the importance of Shabbat. When the Jews enjoy the day physically and spiritually, when they cease pursuing business and speaking of other affairs on Shabbat, then they will merit "the portion of Yaakov" (58:13-14). Why Yaakov? Radak points out that all of Yaakov's sons received a portion, unlike the sons of Avraham and Yitzchak.



## Week 3: Action

Virtue ethicists believe that it is better to be a good person such that one does not need to struggle to do what is right than to struggle and internally desire to do evil. The former person has **become good** while the latter **may do good things** but is not good or virtuous. Rambam summarizes this view in his introduction to Avot (Shemona Perakim 6). Rambam notes, however, that several statements of Chazal imply the opposite. For example, the Talmud (Sukkah 52a) writes that the greater a person is, the greater is his evil inclination. Furthermore, the Mishna (Avot 5:23) says that *lefum tzaara agra*, according to the pain is the reward, which implies that it is better to struggle. The following Midrash, however, is the greatest challenge.

*R. Elazar b. Azaryah says: Whence is it derived that a man should not say: I do not desire to wear sha'atnez; I do not desire to eat the flesh of a pig; I do not desire to cohabit with ervah (illicit relations). I do desire it, but what can I do? My Father in Heaven has decreed against it! — From*

*"and I have set you apart from the peoples to be unto Me." It is found, then, that he separates from sin because he accepted upon himself the Kingdom of heaven. (Sifra Kedoshim 9, Silverstein translation)*

How does this make sense with Rambam's virtue ethics? A good person should want to do good, not evil! To explain, Rambam distinguishes between mishpatim and chukim, mitzvot whose rationale we can access and those that we cannot. For the former, the purpose is understandable and thus should be embraced because of an identification with their values, in line with virtue ethics. Thus, one would not want a person to desire to murder. On the other hand, with mitzvot that we do not or cannot understand, we fulfill them because God commanded them.

This distinction by Rambam highlights the complexity of his view, as it is not reducible to that of general ethics. We will return to this next week.



## The Simanim of Rosh Hashanah - Law and Order

**Question:** In our family, we take the custom of eating *simanim*, the symbolic foods of Rosh Hashanah, very seriously. At the beginning of the meal, we eat apples, dates, carrots, beets, pomegranate, and more. On which of these fruits and vegetables should we recite a *beracha* (blessing) before eating them?

**Answer:** The Shulchan Aruch, in Orach Chaim 177-1, states that foods eaten during a meal and are a significant part of the meal do not require a separate blessing, because you've already recited the "haMotzi" blessing before the meal. However, if the food is not considered a significant part of the meal but more like a dessert, you should recite a blessing over it. Examples provided by the Shulchan Aruch are fruits like figs and grapes, which should be blessed over during the meal.

As a result, the Mishnah Berurah in the laws of Rosh Hashanah, Siman 583, rules that one should say a blessing over the

apple with honey even if it's eaten after the haMotzi blessing because the apple is not considered a significant part of the meal.

Regarding other vegetables during the meal, there is a debate among the Rabbis whether blessings should be recited over them, since vegetables are usually eaten as part of the meal, like in a salad. Some Rabbis say to make a *beracha* on the Kara (gourd) since this vegetable is not a significant part of the meal. However, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv recommends reciting the "Borei Pri Ha'adama" blessing over a vegetable that is for sure not considered part of the main meal, which may exempt the other vegetables eaten later. Examples he provides are bananas or watermelon. (*Mishna Berura Dirshu, siman 583 footnote 7*).

Another question that the Rabbis have debated on is which fruit to bless first - the apple with honey or the date or pomegranate? While the Mishnah Berurah mentioned earlier suggests reciting a blessing

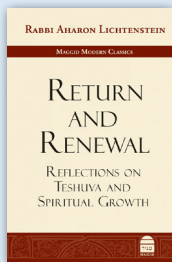
on the apple with honey first, many Rabbis disagree, citing the Mishnah Berurah in Orach Chaim 211 where he himself ruled that it's preferable to bless over one of the Seven Species for which the Land of Israel is praised before other fruits. Therefore, one should prioritize the date or pomegranate over the apple, as they are part of the Seven Species.

However, the Piskei Teshuvot in siman 583 offers advice for those who wish to prioritize the apple over other fruits. He suggests placing the apple alone on the table before or during the meal, leaving the other fruits in the kitchen or some other room, reciting the blessing over the apple first, and then bringing out the other fruits. This way, you're not technically reciting a blessing on the apple before the date or pomegranate as they are not currently on the table.

*Have a halachic question? Share it with Rabbi Mann at [ymann@torontotorah.com](mailto:ymann@torontotorah.com).*



## Week 4: The Power of Pride?



*Return and Renewal: Reflections on Teshuva and Spiritual Growth*  
By Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein  
Maggid Press, 2018

*"If one is defined and conceived as 'dust and ashes' as Avraham declared, or as 'nothing,' based on the self-assessment of Moshe Rabbeinu (Shemot 16:8), that nothingness will be unequal to the task of dismantling an old personality and creating a new one. As admirable as humility may be in many respects, it simply will not suffice for teshuva."* (Page 201, "Humility and Pride in Teshuva")

Humility and modesty are considered of chief importance in Judaism. Indeed, the prophet Micha (Micha 6:8) highlights that walking modestly with God is one of Judaism's three core values

(the other two being pursuing justice and acts of kindness). Taken to its extreme, however, humility can be a dangerous trait. As Rav Lichtenstein explains here, it takes a certain degree of self-esteem and self-efficacy to actually change oneself. If I am too humble and think too lowly of myself, I may skip performing teshuva. Not because I don't want to be different, but because I don't believe I can be different. This year, may we recognize our dynamism and our ability to be better.

Enjoyed reading this column? I invite you to join us, whether you read the book or not, on September 21st at YOC at 8pm for a discussion and debate of Rav Lichtenstein's *Return and Renewal*.

*The book can be purchased from Koren Publishers at [tinyurl.com/KorenBMZD](http://tinyurl.com/KorenBMZD). Use the code TorontoTorah for a 10% discount on this or any other book on their website.*



## TABLE TALK RABBI NOAH SONENBERG, DEAN

Source: Tractate Rosh Hashana, 16b

**And Rabbi Yitzhak said: A person's sentence is torn up** on account of **four types of actions. These are:** Giving **charity, crying out** in prayer, **a change of one's name, and a change of one's deeds.**

### Questions to Discuss

- Which of these methods seem easy?
- Which of these methods seem challenging?
- Which method most aligns with the desired result of tearing up our negative decree?

*After Shabbat, please share your family's answers with us at [nsonenberg@torontotorah.com](mailto:nsonenberg@torontotorah.com) to enter our raffle for a challah and six bilkas from Richmond Bakery to enjoy at your Shabbat table next week!*

## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

<b>Monday</b>	The Torah: A Psychic Turn. Psychological Theories in the Eyes of Tanach	Zoom	2:00 PM	R' Rakovsky
	Men's Halacha – Towards Tishrei	Shomrai Shabbos	8:30 PM	Rabbi Mann
<b>Tuesday</b>	Then and Now: Returning to the Land of Israel – a Study in Tanach	Zoom	1:30 PM - New	Rabbi Horovitz
	Women's Gemara Shiur	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 PM	Rabbi Anstandig
	Women's Contemporary Halacha Shiur	Clanton Park	8:15 PM	Rabbi Mann
<b>Wednesday</b>	The Nature of Sin and the Evil Inclination	Zoom	10:00 AM	Rabbi Sonenberg
	Men's Contemporary Halacha: Tishrei Edition	Clanton Park	After Mincha/Maariv	Rabbi Mann
	Men's Gemara Bekiut	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 pm	Rabbi Sonenberg
	The Binding of Isaac	Shaarei Tefillah	8:00 pm	R' Rakovsky
<b>Thursday</b>	Men's Tzurba M'Rabanan – Halacha	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00 pm	Rabbi Turtel
	Men's Gemara Iyur	BAYT (Milevsky/ Mizrachi Beit Midrash)	8:00 pm	R' Diena
<b>Tues–Thu</b>	Men's Community Night Seder	Yeshivat Or Chaim	8:00–9:00 pm	

## UPCOMING PROGRAMS

Book Club	Yeshivat Or Chaim	Thursday, September 21	8:00 pm
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Our thanks to Continental Press

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