

**BNEI
AKIVA**
UNITED KINGDOM



ALAH B'KOL SHOFAR

DAILY THOUGHTS FOR THE ASERET YEMEI TESHUVAH FROM BOGRIM AND MADRICHIM



Elul 5779

Shalom Chaverim,

“עֲלֶה אֱלֹקִים בְּתוֹעָה ה' בְּקוֹל שׁוֹפָר” (תהילים מז:ו)

“God rises up with the blast; the Lord with the sound of the shofar” (Tehillim 47:6)

The psalm we recite seven times as an introduction to Tekiat Hashofar on Rosh Hashanah is a triumphant, joyful announcement to the world of God's glory. With each reading, the excitement mounts, until the point where we can almost hear the fanfares.

The might of the shofar is seen in perek vav of Sefer Yehoshua. Over seven days, the tension builds as seven kohanim blow seven shofrot while circling the city of Yericho. On the seventh day, after the seventh circuit, Bnei Yisrael let out a mighty shout, and the city walls came tumbling down. The shofar, it would seem, is a symbol of Divine power. When using it to express our awe of Hashem, the feats we can achieve are the stuff of legend.

This jubilant portrayal of the shofar contrasts with another description, one found in the Unetaneh Tokef prayer read on Yom Kippur:

“וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה דַּקָּה יִשְׁמַע”

“And a great shofar will be sounded, and a thin still voice shall be heard.”

This thin, still cry penetrates our soul and fills us with a trembling awe. This voice too recalls God's power, but with it the realisation of how insignificant we are by comparison.

We are entering the period of the Yamim Noraim – the Days of Awe. This is the time to focus on developing our Yirat Shamayim, a pure, emotional reaction to the greatness of God. Both narratives of the shofar provoke this emotion, albeit from two different angles.

“Alah b'Kol Shofar” is a collection of ten articles providing a short thought for each day of the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah, written by madrichim and bogrim of Bnei Akiva. We're beginning the year as we hope to continue it, sharing the voices of our Chavrei Tnua and encouraging the whole community to engage in Limmud Torah from a range of perspectives.

With thanks to our sponsors and to all those who contributed to this publication.

We hope you enjoy these Divrei Torah and can draw some inspiration from them over the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah. Wishing you all a Ktivah v'Chatimah Tovah and a happy, sweet new year.

B'Virkat Chaverim l'Torah v'Avodah,

Chana Bernstein

(Chinuch Worker)

T'KA B'SHOFAR GADOL L'CHERUTEINU

OSCAR KOSLOVER | SHEVET EITAN



Every Jew who comes to shul on Rosh Hashanah knows that the shofar is a central aspect of the day. There is even a Beraita that states that if there was a

direct choice between hearing the shofar or davening with a minyan, one should hear the shofar (Rosh Hashanah 34b). To fulfil this mitzvah, there is a long discussion about which shofar is ideal, with three conclusions reached. The best shofar is that of a ram, failing that the shofar from any kosher animal and the least optimum being any other non-kosher animal, with no bracha said.

The shofar blasts are classically interpreted as a wake-up call for Bnei Yisrael to repent and change their ways, to break from bad habits and to try reach a higher spiritual level. The shofar is linked intrinsically to our spirituality, with it being a pure crying out to Hashem, no words required. This can be seen in the weekday Amidah, during the paragraph about the ingathering of exiles: "T'ka b'shofar gadol l'cheruteinu", asking Hashem to "sound the great shofar of redemption". This redemption is spiritual, and only here is the shofar mentioned.

During his sermon on Rosh Hashanah in 1933, Rav Kook linked these three types of shofrot that we can use on Rosh Hashanah discussed in the Gemarah to three types of spiritual redemption, Divine calls for the Jewish people to return to Eretz Yisrael.

The first shofar of redemption is the ideal shofar, that of the ram. This shofar is the one that awakens holy motives to a true faith in Hashem. A ram's horn is linked to Akeidat Yitzchak, and the unwavering trust Avraham showed to Hashem. It was this call of the shofar that inspired people like Ramban, Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura, the students of the Vilna Gaon, and the disciples of the Baal Shem Tov (and bogrim of Bnei Akiva!) to ascend to Eretz Yisrael. This is the "shofar gadol" that we pray for daily in the Amidah.

The second shofar of redemption is a slightly less optimal form of spiritual awakening. This

is a call for the Jewish people to return to our land, to live as a free people in a Jewish country and culture where our ancestors and ancient prophets once lived. Though not perfect, this is still a kosher shofar and therefore we still recite a bracha on it.

There is a final type of redemption. At this point in the sermon Rav Kook breaks down into tears (for some historical context, Hitler had just risen to power in Germany and the oppression of Jews in the lead up to the Holocaust was already taking shape). The least desirable shofar comes from the horn of a non-kosher animal. This shofar corresponds to the wake-up call that comes from the persecutions of anti-Semitic nations, warning the Jews to escape while they still can to their homeland. Enemies force the Jewish people to be redeemed, blasting the trumpets of war, bombarding them with threats of harassment and torment, giving them no respite. Given that Hashem has promised the redemption, by any means necessary. The shofar of non-kosher animals, of desperation is thus transformed into a shofar of redemption. Whoever failed to hear the calls of the first two shofars will ultimately hear the call of this last shofar. However, over this shofar of redemption, no bracha is recited, as "One does not recite a blessing over a cup of affliction" (Berachot 51b).

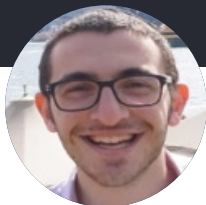
We pray for not just redemption, but the perfect redemption represented by the shofar of the ram. We pray that we are awakened not by oppression and desperation, nor simplistic nationalistic goals but by a higher calling, one befitting a holy nation driven by true spirituality and freedom. May we all hear this shofar of redemption this year, Shanah Tovah and may we all be inscribed in the book of life.

**OSCAR WAS SGAN ON BET BASE MACHANE
5779**

1ST TISHREI | א' תשרי

SEEKING GOD

RAFI KLEIMAN | SHEVET AVICHAI



דַּרְשׁוּ ה' בְּהִמְצָאוֹ
קְרָאֵהוּ בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ קְרוֹב:

“Seek Hashem
where He can be
found, call to Him while He is near.”

(Yishayahu 55:6)

Chazal derive these words to refer to the time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah (the Ten Days of Repentance). The following question is subsequently begging to be asked - how exactly is Hashem particularly 'found' in the days between the 1st and 10th Tishrei? Isn't God 'found' around all the time? Hence that beloved childhood classic, "Hashem is here, Hashem is there, Hashem is truly everywhere!?!"

Rabbi Binyamin Werzburger, in his recent release, 'A Festival of Torah', aids our challenge through presenting the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah as a day-by-day chain of stepping stones towards the big finale of Yom Kippur. He cites the Mikdash Mordechai's explanation of an interesting comment of the Rokeach; that the ten days of repentance correspond to the ten tests with which Hashem tested Avraham Avinu. The Mikdash Mordechai explains that just as Avraham's ten tests gave rise to our forefather reaching lofty spiritual highs, so too, the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah have the potential to bring about a similar effect if we utilise the days properly.

Amid our personal growth over these ten days, it is perhaps easier to under-

stand the answer of the Chasdei Dovid (Rabbi Dovid Pardo) to our central question:

The word 'Dirshu' comes from the root 'Drosh' meaning 'to seek'. This is the stem of a form of prayer known as 'Derishat Elokim' ('seeking God') which, explains the Ramban, is a particular form of prayer in which the petitioner wishes to know whether Hashem will grant their specific request.

Therefore, perhaps we should interpret our verse in question as follows:

'During the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah, one may seek Hashem through Tefillah and Teshuvah with the expectation that He will show us clearly if we have been successful in our prayer for a good year.' So, how could Hashem be possibly more 'found' right now than just a couple of weeks ago?

Our answer here seems to reflect the journey of the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. One founded in genuine personal growth, enabling us to be more conscientious of where we are directing our prayers towards and thus increasing the likelihood of realising what we seek.

RAFI IS THE ROSH OF SALFORD SVIVA.

ב' תשרי | 2ND TISHREI

TZOM GEDALIAH: A ZIONIST IDEAL

MADELEINE FERRIS | SHEVET MORASHA



As the fast occurring during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, Tzom Gedaliah is often viewed as an especially sombre occasion with the purpose of mourning the death of Gedaliah, the governor appointed by the Babylonian king. To create an entire day of mourning for the death of a singular great ruler of the Jewish nation is seemingly inconsistent, seeing as if we were to mourn the death of each great ruler of our nation, we would surely be mourning for a significant portion of the year. However, we learn that Tzom Gedaliah is in fact one of the four fasts that will be converted to a day of joy and feasting with the coming of the Mashiach. It therefore seems that there is more to Tzom Gedaliah than only mourning the death of this great governor.

At first, ceasing to mourn the death of Gedaliah due to the coming of the Mashiach seems not to make logical sense, as one might question why the coming of the Mashiach would in any way lessen the grieving of the Jewish people for the catastrophes of the past. The answer to this question can be found by examining Yochanan's response to Yirmiyahu's prophecy; Yochanan's army avenged Gedaliah's death by killing Yishmael, after which he requested that Yirmiyahu pray on his behalf, pledging that he would follow whatever God commanded of him.

Hashem commanded Yochanan to remain in the land and to not seek refuge in Egypt, claiming "I will plant you and not uproot you", and that he would "re-

turn you to your land" (Yirmiyahu 42:10-12). This promise from Hashem is something that modern Zionist Jews aspire towards, as Jews settling in the land of Israel and facing the threat of removal by forces who oppose the Jewish state is something that the IDF and Israeli government struggle with daily. However, upon hearing Hashem's promise, Yochanan refused to listen to Hashem's commandments, and continued onwards to Egypt.

Whilst Tzom Gedaliah is seemingly mourning the death of Gedaliah, a deeper understanding of the story can bring to light the true tragedy; The Jewish people had Hashem's approval and full support via prophet to settle in the land that was given to them, and yet they refused!

Therein lies the true tragedy of Tzom Gedaliah, and the reason that the sombre fast day in the time of the Mashiach will become a day of joy, as the act of Yochanan rejecting the land given to the Jewish people would have finally been reversed. Therefore, the day of mourning which we will observe should reflect the yearning of the Jewish people to return to the promised land that Hashem showed us.

**MADELEINE IS ON HACHSHARAT TORANI
5780 AT MIDRESHET HAROVA.**

ג' תשרי | 3RD TISHREI

A TRUE CONNECTION



DALIA BORNSTEIN | SHEVET HINEINI

We are all familiar with the three key themes of the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah as mentioned in Unetaneh Tokef: teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah. But what do they really mean

and how can we connect to Hashem through these activities?

Teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah are commonly translated as “repentance”, “prayer” and “charity”. However, these English translations are entirely inaccurate and are in fact opposite meanings of the words that exist only in the realm of Judaism.

Teshuvah is not repentance. Tefillah is not prayer. And tzedakah is not charity.

We engage in these three activities between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in order to bring us closer to a “good and sweet year”. We partake in these mitzvot as a service to cause God to grant us yet greater benefits, by doing three things that avert evil and attract good.

The translation of teshuvah as “repentance” implies someone is becoming a ‘new man’, or ‘turning over a new leaf’ – the resolve to start afresh, in Hebrew this idea is known as “charatah”. Whereas in fact teshuvah means “the return” – returning to one’s original nature.

What is your original nature?

A Jew is intrinsically good; desires and temptations may make us think otherwise, however these things deflect us temporarily from being ourselves and does not affect our original nature. Teshuvah is a return to one’s self. While repentance involves dismissing the past and starting afresh, teshuvah means going back to one’s roots in God and exposing them as one’s true character. The Alter Rebbe of Lubavitch writes, teshuvah is the concept of “the spirit shall return to the God who gave it”: the soul continually strives to come closer to God, its source.

For this reason, while the righteous have no need to repent, and the wicked may be unable to, both may do teshuvah. The righteous, though they have never sinned, have constantly strived to return to their innermost. And the wicked, however distant they are from God, can always return, for teshuvah does not involve creating anything new, only rediscovering the good that was always within them.

The translation of tefillah as “prayer” implies requesting and beseeching God, in Hebrew this concept is known as bakashah. However, “tefillah” actually means “to attach oneself”, illustrating the idea of a person striving to achieve union with God. In praying, the person begs God to provide what they lack, and by this translation, prayer becomes redundant for a person who feels no desire for anything more.

However, in tefillah, the individual reaches towards God to strengthen and renew the bond between the Almighty and the individual soul. Whilst some need not pray as they are satisfied with their lot in its entirety, there is no-one who does not need to attach themselves to the source of all life and partake in tefillah.

The translation of tzedakah as “charity” implies that the recipient has no right to the gift, and the donor is acting out of the goodness of their kind heart; they are acting out of virtue rather than duty, in Hebrew this is known as chessed. As a matter of fact, tzedakah literally means “righteousness” or “justice”, thus illustrating that the donor gives because it is their duty. Ultimately, all worldly possessions belong to God and are not in a person’s hands by right, rather God entrusts us with His blessings on the condition that we give to those who are in need. Moreover, we have a duty to act towards others as we ask God to act towards us; as we now spend our time asking God for His blessings to be showered upon us, it is only right and just that we give those who ask us.

The real meaning of teshuvah, tefillah and tzedakah, then, is a Jew returning to their innermost, true self, achieving a union with God and distributing one’s possession with righteousness. These are the three paths which turn the promise of Rosh Hashanah into the abundant fulfilment of Yom Kippur – a year of sweetness and plenty.

The ideas above are derived from the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and from the translations and adaptations of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks and Yosef Loebenstein.

DALIA WAS A CHANICHA ON ISRAEL MACHANE 5779

ד' תשרי | 4TH TISHREI

THE 13 ATTRIBUTES OF HASHEM

LOUISA STAGNI | SHEVET TZION



The Aseret Yemei Teshuvah between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are a time for self-reflection and evaluating our actions.

The end goal of this period is to ensure that one repents for one's sins; between man and man and between man and Hashem.

The Thirteen Attributes of Hashem, also known as the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, originate in Parashat Ki Tisa. This Parasha details the Golden Calf incident in the history of the Jewish people. After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe reascended Mount Sinai and asked Hashem to detail a method of repentance for the Jewish people. The response given was the Thirteen Attributes of Hashem. This is significant for the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah as these thirteen attributes ensure that, as a nation and as individuals, we are able to understand the process of repenting. This is an innate part of self-reflection as by reflecting on our own actions we must understand how to seek forgiveness from others and from Hashem. Even though Ki Tisa usually occurs during wintertime the Thirteen Attributes of Hashem are highly relevant to the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah as we recite them during the Yom Kippur service multiple times.

ה' א-ל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורבחסד ואמת נצר
חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה ונקמה

"The LORD! the LORD! a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and pardoning."

Why do we repeat these attributes on multiple occasions throughout Yom Kippur, from Kol Nidre, the evening service which begins Yom Kippur, to the concluding service of Neilah?

Rashi states that the meaning of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy is that Hashem does not

easily forgive us for our sins. However, over time, as we grow up and begin to understand right from wrong and take responsibility for our actions, God begins to forgive. With the right level of maturity, we can recognise that the aim is that after you have done something wrong, you must admit you have made a mistake. Only then can you start to rectify your error and seek forgiveness. From this, we can understand that by repeating the Thirteen Attributes of God we start to take ownership of our actions with the aim of rectifying our errors and seeking forgiveness.

In Judaism we use repetition as a form of adding intention to the prayer. We chant this sentence several times throughout the duration of Yom Kippur to try to prove to Hashem that we are seeking forgiveness; that we will attempt to do better next year.

Our actions as humans, though sometimes impulsive, have an element of conscious thought. We consciously repeat this sentence in a mantra-like way to ensure that Hashem is merciful and mighty in compassion. We are all created in the image of God and during this time of self-reflection in order to improve on our own self-awareness it is important to consider the process of forgiveness. In order to forgive someone else, there must be an understanding that the individual seeking forgiveness has realised what they have done wrong. This self-awareness as a result of this period of reflection ensures that we right those wrongs between us and others and at the closing of Neilah we have begun to right the wrongs between us and Hashem.

Wishing the entire Tnua Chag Sameach and Gmar Chatimah Tovah.

LOUISA WAS FIRST AIDER ON SUMMER MACHANE 5779

ה' תשרי | 5TH TISHREI

LEARNING TO FORGIVE

ANOUSHKA GOLDMAN | SHEVET AVICHAH



In the lead up to Yom Kippur the importance of mechilah is something that is often spoken about, whether it be on WhatsApp people sending messages asking for forgiveness for any harm they have caused or a heartfelt conversation. Because of course, how could it be that we could stand in front of Hashem and beg for mechilah if we ourselves cannot grant it to others. We should all be attentive of this all year round, but during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah it takes on a special significance as Yom Kippur approaches.

To ask forgiveness from someone we have hurt is no easy gesture; this is especially true when it is done genuinely and not in a blasé manner. On the other hand giving forgiveness can be an equally hard task, there are times when someone can seem unforgivable, when our hurt is too much or when the offender seems as though they lack remorse for the pain they may have caused.

While thinking about mechilah over the past month I kept pondering upon the story of Yosef's life and how his brothers treated him and how he responded when he was reunited with them. Yosef's brothers really made his home life quite unpleasant throughout his childhood and then they chucked him in a hole (with snakes unbeknownst to them) and sold him to strangers as a slave... yet when Yosef reveals himself to his brothers he says the following:

וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אֶחָיו גְּשׁוּנָא אֵלַי וַיִּגְשׁוּ וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי יוֹסֵף
אֶחָיִכֶם אֲשֶׁר-מָכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי מִצְרַיִם: וְעַתָּה אֵל-תִּמְצְבוּ וְאֶל-
יָחַד בְּעֵינֵיכֶם כִּי-מִכְרַתֶּם אֹתִי הַנֶּה כִּי לִמְחִיָּה שָׁלַחֲנִי אֱלֹקִים
לְפָנֵיכֶם: כִּי-זָה שְׁנַתִּים הָרִעֵב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ וְעוֹד חֹמֶשׁ שָׁנִים
אֲשֶׁר אֵין-חֲרִישׁ וְקָצִיר: וַיִּשְׁלַחֲנִי אֱלֹקִים לְפָנֵיכֶם לְשׂוּם לָכֶם
שָׂאֵרִית בְּאָרֶץ וְלִהְיֹתֶם לָכֶם לְפָלִיטָה גְדוֹלָה: וְעַתָּה לֹא-אֲתֵם
שָׁלַחְתֶּם אֹתִי הַנֶּה כִּי הָאֱלֹקִים וַיְשִׁימֵנִי לְאָב לְפָרֹעַ וּלְאֲדוֹן
לְכָל-בֵּיתוֹ וּמִשָּׁל בְּכָל-אָרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

"I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me

ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God." (Gen. 45:4-8)

Yosef is one of the most powerful men in Egypt, he could have chosen to have them thrown into the pits and exacted his revenge on all the brothers, an "eye for an eye", right? Yet instead he forgives them for their previous actions. After revealing himself he even goes as far as to reassure his brothers that he holds no ill will towards them.

Here we see how Yosef is able to see the bigger picture. He sees that it was Hashem's will for him to end up in Egypt at the time of the famine and that the brothers were simply instruments in his plan.

I feel as though this parashah really puts things into perspective for me. Yosef had quite a challenging life from his tumultuous relationship with his brothers to false imprisonment. I think that if he can give mechilah to his brothers who caused him so much pain, his brothers did not even ask for forgiveness so he really goes above and beyond the commandment here.

I think we can all say that we should let go of our petty grudges and our prejudices based on how people may have behaved towards us in the past when we can see such great examples of granting mechila from Yosef in such an extreme situation. Even if a grudge maybe isn't so petty it's still worth thinking of people merely as instruments of the Almighty to get you where you need to be, perhaps this will make it a little easier for us all to truly fulfill the commandment of giving mechilah.

Best wishes for a Ktivah v'Chatimah Tovah and a gut gebentched yahr.

ANOUSHKA WAS TO ON SUMMER MACHANE 5779

ו' תשרי | 6TH TISHREI

CREATING A HAPPY AND SWEET NEW YEAR

SARAH MURGRAFF | SHEVET AVICHAJ



A first impression of the Yamim Noraim (Days of Awe) seems to give the message that teshuvah (repentance) should be carried out in a mellow, gloomy state of mind. The prophet Amos writes 'Will a shofar be sounded in the city and the people not quake? The loud blasts of the shofar are meant to instil within us a sense of fear, and alert us of our need to get closer to God. During Selichot, we cry out to Hashem for mercy using his 13 Divine attributes, and with our heads bowed, we strike our chests as we confess our wrongdoings of the past year.

This atmosphere of guilt and fear seems not only to be an emotional response but has a textual origin. Rabbeinu Yonah lists the sense of mourning and tragedy as a primary principle of teshuvah: one is told that they 'should see that there is much sadness in his heart, and gasp in bitterness'. He then continues to say that 'the different levels of teshuvah are a function of the extent of bitterness and the intensity of sadness'. This is powerfully expressed by King David, after the Prophet Natan forced him to face his transgression – "Against you alone have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight...indeed I was fashioned in iniquity; with sin my mother conceived me" (Tehillim 51:6).

The experience of sin, and therefore teshuvah speaks about the grief of the past present and future, and a feeling of being trapped and broken. Rav Lichtenstein asks the question; 'Can it be that the world of teshuvah – one of the major axes of divine service – is so wholly morose and depressing, with nothing to provide encouragement? Does the sun never pierce the clouds of guilt induced crisis?' He then brings in Yom Kippur as evidence that this isn't case. In the Shulchan Aruch, there is a ruling that on the night after the fast, one should eat a semi-festive meal, as it is partly a festival.

There is a halachah that if Yom Tov comes in

the midst of sitting Shiva, the Yom Tov nullifies the Shiva. The Tannaim debate in Moed Kattan if Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur also nullify Shiva, and we rule that they do. Rav Soloveitchik points out that this can only be if joy was part of the day.

There is a practical beneficial outcome in serving Hashem with joy in this particular Avodah. The Gemara in Yoma discusses about how if teshuvah is motivated by love, then sins become regarded as merits, whilst if teshuvah is motivated by fear, then intentional sins are considered only as unintentional. Performing a mitzvah out of love is the ideal state in which to perform it. Teshuvah out of love, with no regard for any possible reward, is a tool to deepen the mutual love between us and God.

So, is there joy in the teshuvah process? Rav Lichtenstein certainly seems to think so: 'We do not have the type of joy that is oblivious to tragedy, disregards pain, and tries to paper over the failure'. However, according to him, 'we are there to feel the full power and glory of the momentous encounter between ourselves and God in the experience of teshuvah, in particular teshuvah me-ahavah, which is the purest and noblest form'.

The Yamim Noraim give us an incredible opportunity of self-reflection. Davening in this period gives us a chance to look into ourselves, analyse the way we interact with others, ourselves and God, and work out how we will become the people we strive to be. Gmar Chatimah Tovah!

SARAH WAS A MADRICHA ON GIMMEL SUMMER MACHANE 5779

ז' תשרי | 7TH TISHREI

THE GODLINESS IN A SIN



SHIRA DULBERG | SHEVET NE'EMAN

עשרת ימי תשובה it's important we prepare for the ultimate day of judgement, יום כיפור, and essentially a very

challenging but reflective way to do that is by way of looking at the sins we have carried out in the past year. We spend time before and during shul on both ראש השנה and יום כיפור meditating on 'could've's' and 'why did I's'. This analysis of the how we acted in the past can turn our first חגים of the year into a negative experience instead of an enlightening and Godly one. We should focus on improving ourselves in the future rather than dwelling on what we cannot change of the past.

The Hebrew word for sin is חטא. The Baal Shem Tov explains that the aleph on the end represents Hashem. Not only does aleph (א) in Gematria equal to 1, but if you were to break up the aleph into each individual part that makes it up, you would have a vav (ו) and a yud (י) and another yud (י). Both the number 1 and the Hebrew letters which make up the aleph are representations of Hashem and therefore we know, according to the Baal Shem Tov that the aleph depicts Hashem in the word חטא.

What does this show us about the significance of the word חטא when it comes to תשובה in these ten days of the Hebrew calendar?

One idea that the Baal Shem Tov reveals is that when a person sins, Hashem, the א, is still with them. He will never abandon a person for a mistake or a transgression from their true path. Not only that, but notice that the aleph in the word חטא is silent. As too is Hashem and our Godliness silent when we sin. We sometimes we allow ourselves to ignore the yearning of our souls to do good and to choose what we know is right and so the aleph becomes silent. Our temptations

of the physical world drown out the sound of our Neshamot and we do things which we eventually need to do תשובה for.

The successor to the Baal Shem Tov added to his teachings by conveying to us that the aleph is also the potential of Godliness within us when we do תשובה for the right reason. In this sense, not only do we become redeemed for our sins on יום כיפור and hope to gain a 'clean slate' from Hashem, but our sins turn into merits. We learn from each mistake we make in life and we even spiritually gain recognition in שמים for the hard work we do when we beg Hashem for forgiveness.

The aleph at the end of the word חטא represents the end result of a process of sinning whereby we come out more holy than we were before as we do תשובה and try to never revert back to the place we were when we had once sinned.

As opposed to believing that on יום כיפור we must fall down and tremble at the thought of our judgment, when we think about תשובה we must feel enlightened and excited for how much potential we have to reach a place of true Godliness. It is true that Hashem will take into account our sins and for any God-fearing Jew that is truly terrifying, but Hashem is understanding and He knows that in actuality our sins of the past are what will make us improve this year and help us to start making the right choices and get us to where we need to be.

Wishing everyone גמר חתימה טובה and a שנה טובה!

SHIRA WAS A MADRICHA ON ISRAEL MACHANE 5779

ח' תשרי | 8TH TISHREI

YOM KIPPUR: A TWO-DAY CHAG

GILA SCHAJER | SHEVET OROT



Yom Kippur is the only fast day that is commanded in the Torah. In Vayikra 23:32:

שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן הוּא לָכֶם
וְעֵינֵיכֶם אֶתֵּן שְׂתִיכֶם

בְּתַשְׁעָה לַחֲדָשׁ בְּעֶרְבֹ בַּמִּצְוָה עַד־עֶרְבֹ תִשְׁבַּתוּ שַׁבָּתְכֶם:

"It is a Sabbath of Sabbaths to you, when you must fast. You must observe this sabbath on the ninth of the month in the evening, from evening until [the next] evening."

As we already know, every word, every letter, in the Torah has a purpose and a place. It seems odd that the Torah goes out of its way to tell us that Yom Kippur starts on the evening of the 9th and lasts until the next evening. We already know that the Jewish 'day' starts at nightfall - it seems strange that for Yom Kippur the Torah makes it explicit that Yom Kippur starts on the evening of the 9th.

In the gemara of Brachot 8b the rabbis learn from this that the ninth day is part of Yom Kippur.

If, as the gemara says that the ninth of Tishrei is also part of Yom Kippur then shouldn't we also fast on the ninth as well - a two day fast? After all if the formula for repentance involves fasting on the tenth, shouldn't we also fast on the ninth too?

However our Rabbis teach us the opposite. They say that on the ninth it's a mitzvah to eat. They even go as far as to say that anyone who eats and drinks on the ninth of the month, it is considered as if he has fasted for the ninth and tenth of the month.

So why do our Rabbis go to such great lengths to say that we are commanded to eat on the 9th?

There are a number of reasons suggested as to why eating on the day before Yom Kippur is so important.

One suggestion is a simple act of preparation - if our bellies are full and we are satisfied then we are better equipped to go into Yom Kippur. We will be able to concentrate on fasting and asking Hashem for forgiveness without worrying about

where our next meal will come from. Interestingly, just like all types of diet and nutritional advice, the The Shibleh HaLeKet thinks the opposite happens. He says that when one eats and drinks on Erev Yom Kippur, the fast the next day is harder for us because our stomachs are expecting more food. And by doing this one fulfills the verse, "You shall oppress yourselves."

Another suggestion offered by the Sefat Emet is that when somebody has eaten properly and is satisfied then we feel more charitable and happier so that when someone asks you for forgiveness you will be more amenable to forgive them.

A final suggestion is that teshuvah is two sided. One one hand it is a spiritual process where by restricting ourselves and not eating we are able to concentrate on purifying our souls. This spiritual detox, so to speak, achieved through not eating, not wearing leather shoes and spending time contemplating our relationship with Hashem through prayer and thought.

On the other hand, we live in the physical world, where our teshuvah needs to be more practical and down-to-earth. Through our relationship with food - contemplating the efforts required to plant the seeds, or raise the animals that will be turned into food. The care needed to bring that food to our tables and the relationships with others, be it our family, friends or the poor, when we come to eat and share what we have.

The genius of having a two day Yom Kippur is that we are able to set ourselves up for a year ahead where our souls are rejuvenated and our relationship with Hashem has been strengthened and at the same time we are able to appreciate, with wonder and awe, the world around us.

GILA WAS A MADRICHA ON ALEPH CHALUTZI MACHANE 5779

ט' תשרי / 9TH TISHREI

AN HONEST CONFESSION

RAFI HAMBLING | SHEVET NA'ALEH



The Vidui is written in alphabetical order, אָשְׁמֵנוּ, בָּדַדְנוּ, גָּזַלְנוּ etc. The exception is the first word, as Vidui technically begins with וְחָטְאוּ. Therefore, the first letter of Vidui is a Chet rather than an Aleph. The Reishit Chochmah explains that is it important to begin the Vidui with וְחָטְאוּ, because this one word removed the Satan who proclaims out sins, and we are now able to say Vidui without the Satan speaking out against us. This demonstrates the power of saying a single word, וְחָטְאוּ; imagine the power of saying the whole of Vidui, with extreme kavanah.

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa taught that the primary judgment on a person isn't necessarily on the sins, but on why we didn't do teshuvah. People often have many excuses why they may act as they do, such as "I didn't have teachers to show me the right way" or the like. Heaven may accept these excuses and alibis, but the main question should always be "Why didn't you regret your sins?! Why didn't you say Vidui? Why didn't you at least try?"

The Midrash (Naso 13:3) states that after Adam ate from the Tree of Knowledge, Hakadosh Baruch Hu pleaded with him to do teshuvah. "If you will do teshuvah, I will accept you," but Adam didn't repent, and that was the worst part of his sin. He was therefore banished from Gan Eden. Adam had excuses for his sins. He said, "The woman... gave me from the tree..." The problem wasn't the sin, as much as that he had no regret for what he did.

The Torah tells us the story of the Ma'apilim who decided to go up to Eretz Yisrael without Hashem's permission, after the sin of the calf.

They said ה' אָמַר אֵל הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַר ה' "We will go up to the place that Hashem said,"

כי חָטְאוּ "because we sinned". This pasuk can also be read as הֲנִינוּ וְעָלִינוּ אֶל הַמָּקוֹם "We will go up to the place" ה' אָמַר ה' כי חָטְאוּ "because Hashem said we sinned." (Bamidbar 14:40). According to this second reading, they thought they did nothing wrong, only "Hashem said we sinned." This act of denial prevents people from doing Teshuvah. We must recognise our sins and regret doing them, and then Hashem will forgive us.

During Yom Kippur we say the Al Chet's, "For the sin that we committed before You." Rebbe Asher of Stolín explained that our primary regret is that we sinned before You and we caused Hashem distress. People can regret their sins for several reasons, but the most ideal regret is to feel bad that we sinned before Hashem, similar to the feeling a child has when they sin before their parents.

Vidui is important, it is powerful, it can change the outcome of everything in a split second. But, how should we say Vidui? As it is a mitzvah, it should be performed with joy. Hence the tune; it helps give the correct feel. We should also say Vidui with intent, if one says Vidui but doesn't feel that they did something wrong, or if they don't care, then the Vidui doesn't have much value and will do nothing.

Teshuvah is powerful, and we should grasp it at every chance we get. May this Yom Kippur be meaningful, may we all be sealed in the book of life, and may all our Tefillot be answered in full.

RAFI WAS THE CAMPS AND SOCIAL ACTION DIRECTOR IN 5779 AND WAS ROSH OF ALEPH CHALUTZI 5779

י' תשרי | 10TH TISHREI

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