

SEPHARDIC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

QOL HA'QAHAL

קול הקהל



Issue 22: High Holidays 5776
Special Anniversary Issue

**DEDICATED IN HONOR OF
HELENE, SALLY, RACHEL SHAMAH & ESTEE GINDI**



*Dedicated in Honor of
Helene, Sally, Rachel Shamah & Estee Gindi*

SCA MISSION

The Sephardic Community Alliance is an organization established to reinforce and preserve the traditional Sephardic way of life of our ancestors based on the principles set forth in our Declaration of Values. Our commitment is to serve as a platform for lay leaders to work in unison with Community Rabbis, institutions and organizations in promoting the perpetuation of these Values. We support all those who embrace our traditions and rich heritage and that uphold and endorse these values.

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QOL HA'QAHAL MISSION

To promote Torah throughout our community
by providing a platform for our rabbis, lay members, students and institutions.

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Editor's Note

It is with gratitude to *Boré Olam* and our many contributors that this special one year anniversary edition is presented. As a platform to share Torah throughout our community and beyond, Qol Haqahal has now attracted readers from the East to West coast and internationally from Europe to South America and Israel. A review of this issue's authors will reveal a wide array of community institutions represented through our many writers: Schools, synagogues, non-profit organizations, Rabbis, women, laymen and so much more. It is with a special thank you to all these contributors and with acknowledgement of their involvement that this beautiful High Holiday issue is possible. As with all of our issues, we strive to bring readers thought provoking material of Torah and Sephardic culture.

Throughout this booklet, many memorable articles by some of our community's leading rabbis and thinkers are offered. Themes of the High Holidays, repentance, the shofar, exegesis of Torah portions and so forth. At some point during the editorial process, of which I am privileged to review I asked myself- What is the most memorable aspect of the high holidays for me? Is it the rabbi's speech, grandma's food, sitting next to a friend during *Sefer* or our deep *kavanah*?

For me the most memorable portion of the holidays are the *piyyutim*- the poetry- the wonderful tunes that we return to year after year- mentioned several times by our authors. Long after the taste of kibbeh or the current event from last year are forgotten, the tunes of the refrains are long remembered. To brush up on some of the tunes, readers are encouraged to visit [pizmonim.org](http://www.pizmonim.org) for authentic Halabi Selihot¹, pizmonim and prayers for the high holidays. Our *piyyutim* are remembered not just by us from year to year, but if we do things right- from generation to generation. This chain of *masoret* speaks loudly to the Sephardic Community

Alliances' maxim of "building our future by preserving our past". For hundreds and in some cases thousands of years the strong emotions and values conveyed in these poems have struck a unique cord in the Jewish subconscious during some of our most introspective moments.

Although English translations abound, post- modern theory dictates that we understand not only the plain meaning of the verses, but the personalities and context behind the verse. Yehudah Halevi, Shelomo ibn Gabirol and Abraham ibn Ezra were far from isolated figures confined to the *bet midrash*. To deny their rich and dynamic backgrounds would be a gross void in understanding these texts. Imagine (according to some historians) the original context of *Kal Nidré*- where conversos would have recited the familiar

refrains in order to disavow their outward affiliation to other religions. Under the threat of being accused of 'Judaizing', our medieval ancestors risked torture and execution in order to recite these *piyyutim* and affirm their commitment to the Jewish Nation. Do we find

commonality between Yehudah Halevi- the personification of a materially successful 'modern' individual who longed to balance his secular life and his Judaism, his dedication to both his Spanish birthplace and our Jewish homeland? How does such a context give more meaning to our recitation of these pieces?

One of the most interesting things I was presented with lately was a contemporary rock and roll version of some of our traditional Sephardic *piyyutim* by Mr. Irving Safdieh. Much like our rabbis from a generation ago who combined Arabic music with our prayers, Mr. Safdieh reinterprets our traditions through an American construct. Although they will not replace what is heard in the synagogue, we welcome such a recording for the days leading up to the high holidays. Most remarkable was the ability of the artists to present a new attractive tune with musical accompaniment while

¹ A wonderful 1952 recording of *Eliyahu Menaged* reciting the selihot can be found via:
<http://www.pizmonim.org/book.php?recording=4476>

How can we incorporate a balanced approach to Torah study, personal growth and achievement while remaining true to tradition? In the next year the SCA hopes to continue to enhance our community and provide valuable programming to our institutions and community members. We aim to maintain stability and create consensus by striving to walk Maimonides' 'golden path' of moderation.

Tizku L'shanim Rabbot

Murray Sion Mizrachi
Editor in Chief

Sunday Night-Tuesday,
September 13-15
Rosh Hashanah

Tuesday Night-Wednesday,
September 22-23
Yom Kippur





OUR CHARACTER TRAITS

Rabbi Harold Sutton

As we enter into the high holidays, otherwise known as the Ten Days of Repentance (Rosh Hashanah to Yom Hakippurim), we are reminded of the words of HaRambam, *Hilkhot Teshubah*, Chapter 2, Halakhah 6:

“Although repentance and prayer are beneficial at all times, they are especially beneficial on the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Hakippurim.”

He continues in Halakhah 7:

“Yom Hakippurim is the time of repentance for individuals and the public and it is a time of forgiveness for Israel. Therefore everyone is obligated to repent and confess his sins on Yom Hakippurim.”

It is clear that HaRambam is telling us that we must focus on improving our actions during this time and he is very clear on the specific steps of Teshubah. Yet HaRambam is also very specific that just as one repents for his inappropriate actions, he must also repent for flaws in his character. Teshubah during this time of year therefore also implies improving one's character traits.

HaRambam in Chapter 4 of *Hilkhot Teshubah* lists 24 things that prevent a person from doing Teshubah. Among them are: 1) A person who ridicules the *missvot*, since they are light in his eyes, he will not pursue them. 2) One who ridicules the rabbis. 3) One who detests rebuke since he will have no one to inform him of his improper behavior.

HaRambam continues that therefore all communities should appoint a scholar to reproach the people for their misdeeds. I chose to elaborate on these 3 because they seem to all emanate from one improper trait that our rabbis call *Lessanut* (ליצנות). Rabbi Moshe Haim Luzzato (Ramhal) defines this trait as lightheadedness (synonymous with קלות ראש). One makes light of things that should be taken seriously. Ramhal quotes Abot 3:13 which states that lightheadedness causes one to sin, since it prevents a person from דעת (“knowledge”). All people who have דעת understand the ramifications of their actions but not so the לץ. He begins to live in his

imaginary existence without understanding that his actions have consequences. The לץ is therefore compared in *Mishlé* to a drunk who is totally oblivious to reality. The Gemara in Abodah Zarah states that לצנות “brings suffering at its onset and leads to total destruction.”



18th-century portrait of Maimonides

In our day, לצנות appears very often in the form of cynicism and skepticism. Skepticism is defined by Miriam Webster as “the method of systematic doubt” and that “all knowledge is uncertain.” The skeptic should not be confused with the critical thinker. The critical thinker demands rational proofs before he adopts a doctrine. The skeptic believes in nothing and ridicules all accepted doctrine. While the critical thinker has an insatiable

desire to know, the skeptic can never really know anything as all knowledge is built on accepted postulated foundations. The Gemara records a story of Hillel who was introduced to a convert who wished to accept only the Written Law and not the Oral Law whose transmission was based on rabbinic tradition. He was told to come study the Hebrew alphabet. He returned the next day and Hillel taught him an alternate identification of the same letters. When questioned, Hillel responded that to begin learning he must trust him to define the correct basic foundations and source of knowledge (in this case the alphabet).

Cynicism and skepticism have found their way into our daily lives with disastrous consequences. When we are presented with the words of our Hakhamim, instead of trying to penetrate and understand, we reply at times with immediate sarcastic comments of disbelief, thinking that somehow that is the mark of an “intellect.” While that may have very negative effects on ourselves (“begins with suffering”) it has disastrous effects on our children (“ends with destruction”). Our children hear the ridicule and forget the rest. When, for example, a child comes to the Shabbat table quoting a Midrash taught in school that may seem to us as “far-fetched,” do we attempt to teach the deeper meaning of that rabbinic statement or do we respond with sarcastic statements of disbelief? HaRambam enumerates 3 groups of Jews who analyze Midrash: 1) Those who understand literally and believe them as such. 2) Scoffers who dismiss them. 3) Those who seek to understand their hidden meanings. While HaRambam chose the third approach, he clearly indicates the second is the most dangerous. This is just one example of how cynicism destroys.

“...just as one repents for his inappropriate actions, he must also repent for flaws in his character.”

During this time of the year, we must seek repentance not only from our actions but from our traits as well. It should be a time that we all perform introspection on our own attitudes towards our holy traditions. We should always encourage rigorous analysis and not simply accept what we are told. However that process should be done through humility, dignity and respect and a true search for knowledge. We have been privileged to be part of a chain of traditions thousands of years old. Our task is to transmit that tradition in a way that is relevant to the next generation. In order to accomplish that, we must think critically and respectfully. Our children are counting on us for that.

Rabbi Sutton leads the SCA summer Minyan and is the Rosh Yeshibah of the Sephardic Rabbinical College.

THE COMPASSIONATE CREATOR¹

Rabbi Nathan Dweck

“Free will is granted to all men. If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his... Since free choice is granted to all men as explained, a person should always strive to do Teshuba and to confess verbally for his sins...”

(Rambam, Hilkhos Teshuba 5:1, 7:1)

HaRambam teaches us in these *halakhos* that man always has the free will to choose between good and bad. Even if one is a sinner, he has the free will to do Teshuba- and he should always strive to return to God. Although it may take a lot of effort to do so, since the sinner must refrain from doing that same action again, it is something available to us every day of the year.

However, how are we to understand such an institution, where any sinner can return to God no matter how severe a sinner he is? Is the sinner even worthy of such attention from God? In order to understand this, we must take a look into the story of a prophet - *Yonah ben Amitai* - who asked these same questions. Yonah, living before the destruction of Assyria in the 8th century B.C.E, was asked by God to complete a mission: Go to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, and tell them that they have 40 days until their complete destruction. In essence, God was giving them the opportunity to repent and amend their ways.

Yonah, however, didn't deem this an appropriate manner for the God of Truth and Justice to deal with his creations. *How can I, the prophet, be asked to go to the most evil city and archenemy of Israel and allow them the opportunity to repent? To what extent should justice be compromised?!*

Yonah was even more bothered after God accepted the immediate Teshuba of these wicked people. But, as impatient as Yonah was with the evil people of Nineveh, God was

¹ Reprinted (with modifications) with permission from *Insights on the High Holidays: A Young Adult Publication* (Tebah Educational Services, 2010), pp. 1-3.

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patient enough to educate Yonah on this matter. After Yonah set camp in a booth outside the city to oversee the city's fate, God provided him with a *qiqayon* to give him shade from the heat. Yonah was very happy about this, but when God took it away from him, Yonah fainted and asked God to die. God then tells Yonah a very powerful statement:

"You cared about the plant, which you did not work for and which you did not grow, which appeared overnight and perished overnight. And should not I care about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not yet know their right hand from their left, and many beasts as well!" (Yonah 4:10-11)

"...man always has the free will to choose between good and bad."

Here, God teaches Yonah that as Creator, He has a bond with every one of his creations, no matter who they are. Every creation is a work of His hands. He taught Yonah that just like we have compassion and strong feelings for our possessions (some of them that we don't even work hard for!), God has compassion for all His creations. Therefore, in any given time, if man sincerely does Teshuba, he is accepted by God with open arms. This approach of God to all allows us to understand the attention God gives even to the most severe sinner among us, and we should be thankful for such a compassionate Creator.

A story in *Massekhet Berakhot* (10a) captures the essence of this idea, and shows us the importance of us mimicking this important quality of our Creator:

There were once some highwaymen in the neighborhood of R. Meir who caused him a great deal of trouble. R. Meir accordingly prayed that they should die. His wife Beruria said to him: How do you make out [that such a prayer should be permitted]? Because it is written "*Let hatta'im* (sinners) cease"? Is it written *hot'im* (sinners)? It is written *hatta'im* (i.e.

Continued on page 32

CREATURE CONSCIOUSNESS

Rabbi Moses Haber

As we celebrate the creation of the universe in all its glory, grandeur and greatness can we suppose to have a modicum of importance or stature when compared to it? In comparison to Everything else, 'Who is man?' or even 'Who am I?' to ask, beg and plead to the Almighty, for anything. What have I done to deserve existence at this very moment in time? What is my level of commitment to deserve such generosity? Have I succeeded in suppressing my desires in place of His desires?

This is the question that the Psalmist asks in Tehillim 8: "מִה-אָנוּשׁ כִּי-תִזְכְּרוּנוּ; וּבֶן-אָדָם, כִּי תִפְקְדֻנוּ" "What is man that you consider him? What is man that you care for him?" This question arises out of what we call 'creature consciousness'. It is at this time of year, as we remember the awesome Creation on Rosh Hashanah as well as God's majesty or Malkhut as he sits on his throne of mercy, that we hopefully become a little less self-centered and a bit *more God-centered*. That is the point of these holidays, called the *yamim noraim*, days of awe! We are supposed to become awestruck from something other than ourselves. When we do confront the greatness of God and His creation, it is cause to reframe the purpose of our own existence. It is the one time a year we are supposed to put ourselves aside and consider Him of Ultimate importance! According to some, by fasting we do exactly that, we put ourselves aside for a sliver of our time to show devotion to Him.

The response and reason for our consideration from God:

"וְתַחֲסֶרְהוּ מַעַט, מֵאֱלֹהִים; וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תַּעֲטֶרְהוּ"

"For he is just a bit less than God, man has been crowned with honor and glory."

The answer the Psalmist gives is remarkable. It can be read in two ways. The stature of man is a 'little less than God' therefore God crowned us with honor and glory *or* because we were crowned with honor and glory we were then considered a 'little less than God'. Both readings have merit but let us concentrate on the second. That because we were given the crown, we are considered to be a little less than God. What is to be done to merit the crown to His

kingdom and the honor and glory that accompanies it?

Sometimes the reception of a reward is not because of the something you did but because of something you will do. In a similar way to what God says to Moses *before* sending him down to take the Jews out of Egypt. I am taking them out of Egypt because of what they will do in the future. The reception of the crown of honor and glory is not because of what original man or mankind did to deserve it, but because of what he will do in the future. So too with the rest of history. It seems as though we, as mankind, are to complete some task to warrant the honor and the glory we are crowned with a task. What is that task?

In an interpretation of this mizmor, Nachum Sarna suggests that there are vestigial memories of the creation of the universe that are we are being reminded of. God's wisdom but much more His might ordered and fashioned *order out of chaos*. By subduing the raw forces of nature and materials into laws of nature, God organized the massive primordial chaos into a beautiful masterpiece. Many examples of this can be found in Tanakh, such as in Iyob chapter 40:25 when God slay the leviathan or in Yeshayahu when he causes Yam to submit to His will.

It seems that we too - mankind, is considered a little less than God when we fashion order out of chaos.

God has given us the crown and the supreme responsibility of being the sovereign to the handiworks of His creation. We, humans, are tasked with keeping the order that the creator set into place. The first act of organization was completed by Adam when he named the animals. The process continues today as we see mankind's progressive organization of nature through science and ordering of society through governance of people using theories of political science.

Simply put, according to this reading of the mizmor, our worth comes from the fulfillment of our responsibility. How we rule His kingdom, on a personal level for self fulfillment or on a global level of larger purpose beyond ourselves, is dependent on whether we are considered a little less than God or something much less than that. We are **ONLY** a 'little less than God', if we use the crown He has given us to suit His purpose, not our own.

We are asked to commit ourselves to this responsibility

as repayment for all God gives us. *To simply use all the tools God has given us for our own personal benefit is a religion of convenience not commitment!*

In essence we are being asked to partner with God, *not in the act of creation but in maintaining the creation through our acts*. Are we truly committed to utilizing all God has given us to build for the greater good or is it only for our own good that we invest in our work and play?

It is a cosmic tease in a way to reward us for something we will do, because it cycles us in a loop of wondering whether we are fulfilling what we are supposed to be doing. we are never really sure we merit the reward in the first place, therefore you are always trying harder to meet the expectation. A bit frustrating at first but you begin to realize its wisdom nonetheless.

“...we hopefully become a little less self-centered and a bit more God-centered”

These questions probe some of the most complex religious and personal issues of mankind. Sometimes, most times, the answers do not come easy. But to spend the time thinking about the questions themselves shows that we are invested in something other than ourselves. It is then that we have recognized that we ourselves are not godly unless you commit to God's plan. It is then that we have uncovered the point of the days of awe, because we have become God centered!

Am I a Jew out of commitment or a Jew out of convenience? Have I, in this past year, met my commitments to deserve all the gifts that God has given me? That is the question to ponder.

Rabbi Haber is the rabbi of the Bene Yitzhak Youth Minyan and teaches Judaic studies in Yeshivah of Flatbush High school. Rabbi Haber is also the Director of the SCA's Summer Women's Learning Program.



Rosh Hashanah

ARE THE ROSH HASHANAH SIMANIM PERMITTED?

Rabbi Isaac Tawil

As a football fan, I have seen people do some pretty foolish things to try and help their teams win on any given Sunday. I have seen someone insist on drinking a glass of orange juice every time their team had the ball because that was what he was drinking when his team won the Super Bowl years before. I have seen people instruct their guests to sit or stand in their respective places because that was the exact position they were in when their team last scored. And of course, my personal favorite, students coming up to me to ask me to bless their Geno Smith jersey on Friday to try and guarantee a Jets' victory on Sunday.

While this seems quite comical when talking about affecting the outcome of a sporting event, it is no laughing matter when it comes to our religious observance and commitment to Torah and *Missvot*. There is a biblical prohibition against using sorcery or intermediaries between us and *Hashem*. The verse in *Vayikra* 19:26 states: “לא תנחשו” -- “Do not engage in sorcery or luck charms” Our rabbis explain what is meant by this verse and these two prohibitions. Rashi explains that “לא תנחשו” means to listen to the “whispers” or random events that may happen. For example, if before a person sets out on a journey, the bread he was eating for breakfast falls out of his mouth or if his staff falls out of his hand, he will take it as a bad sign and not go on his journey. Rambam also agrees with this interpretation in the laws of *Aboda Zara*: 11:4-5. We see different opinions regarding “לא תנחשו”. Rashi and Rambam both explain that the prohibition is to say that a certain time frame or season (from the root word of *עונה*) is better or worse for a certain practice. Ibn Ezra says that the prohibition is to look at the clouds (from the root word of *ענן*) and predict the future or ones fortune.

Many people have a tendency to connect with *Hakadosh Barukh Hu* through trinkets, gizmos and superstitions which

dangerously borders, and sometimes crosses, the line set forth by our Torah with the aforementioned prohibitions. People think “If I wear a red string that was supposedly wrapped around a certain grave, I will have good luck”. “If I bake a key into the first breads baked after Passover, this will somehow affect my livelihood for the better”. “If I dip in a *Mikveh* immediately after a pregnant woman dipped (unnecessarily) into the same pool, *Hashem* will bless me with a child”. These practices seem foolish, yet many people in our community treat them with the same zeal and passion as they should be treating the *Missvot* of working on prayer, helping others and learning Torah!

While it seems obvious that these practices are incorrect and may easily be categorized as sorcery or witchcraft, when we examine our holy Talmud we see some practices that seem very similar to the ones mentioned above, and yet, our sages had no problem with them. In fact, they seem to encourage these practices and some have been canonized into the laws and customs of our Jewish holidays. Let us examine the *Gemara* in *Masechet Horayot*: 12A:

ת"ר: אין מושחים את המלכים אלא על המעיין, כדי שתמשך מלכותם, שנא': (מלכים א': א: לג') "ויאמר המלך להם קחו עמכם את עבדי אדוניכם וגו' והורדתם אותו אל גיחון."

"Our Rabbis Taught in a Berayta: We anoint kings only by a spring so that their reign will endure" as it is stated in Melachim I: 1:33 (when David was anointing his son Shelomo as his successor) "Take with you your master's servants...and bring him down to Gihon".

Gihon was a spring in *Yerushalayim*. The Meiri explains the reason behind this practice; since a spring has an enduring and endless water supply, it is considered “faithful” since man always knows it is there and since it does not dry up due to the seasons. In contrast, rivers can dry up in the summer and their waters can be inaccessible or hidden from man in the winter due to ice and snow that covers them. The hope is that the newly anointed king’s reign will endure like the spring.

The *Gemara* continues and describes many other such

signs that a person can explore in order to get clarity regarding his or her future:

אמר רבי אמי: האי מאן דבעי לידע אי מסיק שתיה אי לא, ניתלי שרגא בעשרה יומי דבין ראש השנה ליום הכפורים בביתא דלא נשיב זיקא, אימשיך נהוריה-- נידע דמסיק שתיה.

"Rabi Am'e stated: if one desires to know if he will live through the year, let him take a candle during the days between Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashanah and light that candle in a room that has no wind blowing through it. If it stays lit during that time period, he should know that he will live that year."

Our Gemara brings up two more signs a person can use:

ומאן דבעי למיעבד בעיסקא, ובעי למידע אי מצלח אי לא מצלח, לירבי תרנגולא, אי שמין ושפר-- מצלח. האי מאן דבעי למיפק לאורחא, ובעי למידע אי חזר ואתי לביתא אי לא, ניקום בביתא דהברא, אי חזי בבואה דבבואה לידע דהדר ואתי לביתא.

"And if one wants to know if he will be successful in business, let him raise a chicken. If the chicken becomes fat, he will be successful in that business venture. And if one wishes to know if he will return safely from his journey, let him stand in a dark house and if he sees the shadow of his shadow, he will safely return home."

The Gemara closes with two seemingly opposite statements:

ולאו מלתא היא! דלמא חלש אדעתיה ומיתרע מזליה. אמר אביי, השתא דאמר: סימנא מילתא היא, לעולם יהא רגיל למיחזי בריש שתא קרא ורוביא, כרתי וסילקא ותמרי

"And a person should not follow these signs! For maybe he will not see his shadow and he will be so downtrodden that he will cause himself harm and it will cause him not to return home safely. Abaye stated, since we see that a sign can help, people had the custom to serve black eyed peas, leek, Swiss chard and dates on Rosh Hashanah."

This Excerpt from the Talmud leaves us with many

questions: 1) How are any of these signs permissible? It seems to be that they are in line with sorcery or witchcraft which is a violation of a Torah law! 2) Is the Gemara in favor of these practices or not? Its last clause states that they should not be practiced, but in the very next breathe, Abaye tells us to bring *Simanim* on Rosh Hashanah as it was the accepted practice! 3) Where does this Gemara leave us in terms of the Rosh Hashanah *Simanim*? We know that the *Shulhan Aruch* explicitly says that one should take the *Simanim* every Rosh Hashanah!

To help answer these questions, the Meharsha on our Gemara in *Horayot* points out the following: Notice how the Gemara never brings the second part of the condition for each sign. Meaning; the Gemara should have also stated, "And if the candle in the room blows out, the person will die that year".

The Gemara ONLY states the positive "if the candle stays lit, he will live out the year". The Meharsha explains that the reason for this wording in the Gemara is that our sages knew that that way Hashem works is that he ALWAYS bestows goodness, mercy and love onto us in a constant flow. The only things that can obstruct this flow are our own personal sins and even when we sin; it is still always in our power to remove that obstruction through repentance. A sign only falls

into the category of sorcery if the person uses the sign to determine that something negative will occur to them FOR SURE. However, a sign to acknowledge the goodness from God that Hashem has already bestowed upon someone is perfectly fine.

So why engage in these signs at all? The Meiri explains that one should not! And that is what is meant by the closing clause of the Gemara "ולאו מלתא היא"—one should not practice these signs because there is nothing that can truly be known from them. Meiri's interpretation is further supported by looking carefully at the difference between how the Gemara describes the person who lights the candle, or fattens the chicken etc. and Abaye's dictum of the Rosh Hashanah *Simanim*. Abaye uses the word "סימן"—an omen or a sign,

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THE STORY OF HANNAH

Mrs. Gitta Neufeld

As we begin to review the prayers and Torah readings for Rosh Hashanah, it is striking that there is a soft undercurrent of women throughout. The Torah readings recall our matriarch Sara. The Haftara (reading from the Prophets) of each day focus on women - Hannah, the mother of Samuel, on the first day, and Rachel, longing for her children's return, on the second. Even the mandate for the number of shofar blasts is rabbinical derived from the actions of a woman - the mother of Sisera who mourned for her son. On Rosh Hashanah, we declare at each series of shofar blasts during the Amida, it is the day on which *harat olam* -the world was conceived - certainly a womanly image!

I would like to focus on one woman in particular - Hannah, the mother of Samuel. Our Rabbis teach us that the tradition of silent prayer is based on her behavior while praying. How appropriate, then, that we study her character as we embark on our prayers for the New Year.

The story begins with a Levite from Har Efraim named Elkana who, unlike most of his peers, would make a yearly pilgrimage to Shilo, where the Mishkan (tabernacle) was. He would bring his entire family - his barren primary wife, Hannah, and his fertile secondary wife, Peninah, and all her children. Year after year, Elkana would give each family member a portion of the sacrifices he offered to eat, with a special portion reserved for his beloved Hannah. But Peninah would tease and provoke Hannah, taunting her about the multiple portions her branch of the family had received. Finally, Hannah could tolerate this no longer. She breaks down and cries. Elkana attempts to relieve her distress by asking her why she is crying, and then stating, "Am I not better to you than ten sons?" This response does not soothe her; if anything, it provokes her to weep even more bitterly. He, too, is now part of her problem. Both Elkana and Peninah operate on the assumption that nothing can be done to alleviate Hannah's infertility; after all, "Hashem had shut her womb. On the simple level, it is Peninah who causes Hannah's distress, taunting her about her barrenness. But the real issue is Elkana. His intentions

are good, but his behavior distresses Hannah on two levels: by giving Hannah preferential treatment, he may be inciting Peninah's jealousy, resulting in her provocation of Hannah, and (on a deeper level); he seems to be urging Hannah to reconcile herself with her situation. His expression, "Am I not better to you than ten sons?" does nothing to soothe her. He places himself at the center. Had he said, "Aren't you better to me than ten sons?" He would at least have alleviated any sense of inferiority Hannah may have had towards Peninah. Instead, he indicates that he is better able to satisfy Hannah's needs than ten children would be. Left at this impasse, Hannah has two choices - she can give up, reconcile herself to her infertility, and try to find comfort in Elkana's love. Or she can try to do something to change this Divinely-ordained situation, by appealing to G-d from the depths of her soul.

Hannah chooses the second option. She tearfully approaches the Mishkan, and prays an unspecified prayer. However, we are privy to a portion of it - her vow to give her child to Hashem all the days of his life. She interweaves a vow into her prayer. In Tanakh; we have come across many

"Hannah demonstrates to us the power of prayer and its ability to change that which may seem unchangeable."

prayers that are not accompanied by vows, and a number of vows that are not accompanied by prayers. Indeed, a vow contains a certain element that is lacking in prayer, and prayer contains a certain element that is lacking in a vow. On the one hand, a vow is better, because not only does the person ask something of God, but he also obligates himself to give something substantial in the event that his request is fulfilled, and thus to express his gratitude and faith in the fact that it was God who answered his prayer. In this very point, however, lies the deficiency of a vow: a person who takes a vow is liable to feel that he is making a deal with God, and that he is paying a fair price for what he receives. This stands in contrast to prayer, where a person stands in his human smallness before the greatness of God and asks Him for a free gift of which he is unworthy.

Hannah's approach allows her to utilize the positive aspect of each. She is ready to give *the very object of her request*. This is different from the usual vow, where something is promised in exchange for being granted that which

was requested. Additionally, she sets her vow within the context of a prayer. She is not standing before God as an equal, engaged in a “quid pro quo.” Rather, she recognizes and expresses God’s greatness and her own smallness. Hannah expresses her belief that her difficult situation is not immutable. By turning to God, she can change her destiny.

Hannah’s story is evocative of Rachel, another woman we refer to on Rosh Hashanah. In both stories, the husband is married to two women, one of whom he loves, and that beloved wife is barren. In both stories, the fertile co-wife seems to taunt the beloved wife about her failure to provide their husband with a child. In both stories, when the beloved wife turns to her husband in despair, the response she receives seems to lack sensitivity. Elkana feels he is a valid substitute for those longed-for children; Jacob says, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” (Bereshit 30:1-20). When both women conceive and give birth, the word “remember” is used to describe their conception. This is unique - the other barren women we are familiar with in Tanakh are not “remembered.” Both women name their sons using expressions which indicate their belief that God had heard their requests.

These similarities only serve to heighten the distinction between these two women. Rachel envies her sister Leah. She turns to Jacob with a demand - “Give me children or I will die.” Jacob’s response, while sharp, tells her that she must turn to God. Yet she tries a different strategy - giving her handmaiden to her husband as a surrogate wife, following in Sara’s footsteps.¹

¹ Rachel seems to be following in Sara’s footsteps, but attention should be paid to two important differences between her and Sara: “And Sarai said to Abram, behold, please (na), the Lord has restrained me from bearing. Please (na), go in to my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her” (Bereshit 16:2-3). First of all, Sarai turns to Abram with a request, twice repeating the term “na” (please), while Rachel’s words seem to be more of a demand. Second, while Sarai is doubtful about the benefits to be achieved through her course of action - “It may be that I may obtain children by her” - Rachel is convinced that “I will also have children by her.”

Rachel then asks Leah for the *dudaim*, which were a fertility treatment in the ancient world. Only after all this, is Rachel remembered with a child. And now, for the first time, Rachel prays. “And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. And she conceived, and bore a son; and said God has taken away my reproach: and she called his name Yosef; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son. (Bereshit 30:22-24).” She prays about the past, thanking God for taking away her reproach, and she prays about the future, asking for another son. She has now reached full trust in God.

Hannah, on the other hand, remains silent in the face of her co-wife’s provocation. Instead of the long and winding spiritual road which Rachel travelled until she turned to God, Hannah prays immediately. Rachel asks for *more*; Hannah gives her child *back* to God.

After her prayer, and a blessing by Eli, the Kohen Gadol, Hannah returns home, conceives, and gives birth to Shemuel. We then experience another confrontation with Elkana. “And the man Elkana, and his entire house, went up to offer to the Lord his yearly sacrifice, and vow. But Hannah did not go up; for she said to her husband, ‘I will not go up until the child is weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and

there abide forever.’ And Elkana her husband said to her, ‘Do what seems good in your eyes; tarry until you have weaned him; only may the Lord establish His word.’ So the woman remained and nursed her son until she weaned him.” Elkana is not ready to confront Hannah directly about what he sees as her failure to fulfill her vow, but he is concerned. Why hasn’t she fulfilled her vow to give the child to God?

Why indeed did Hannah behave as she did? The answer to this question is very simple. Hannah’s vow, like many

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Hannah Prays in the Temple, William de Brailes

'OQED VEHANE'QAD VEHAMIZBEAH

Mr. Joseph Mosseri

The High Holidays are here and the feeling in the air is very unique. I like to attribute it to all the special pieces of poetry that are sung each day of the Selihot, on both days of Rosh Hashanah, and on Yom Kippur. Even though these are days of awe and judgment, we Sepharadim have traditionally kept an optimistic view and as such we sing and chant in a very lively up beat fashion.

All the sections of the High Holiday prayers should be studied and understood all the more so all these fantastic *piyyooteem* (poetic hymns) which are written in a style and fashion that borrows a lot from Biblical language and imagery that many are unfamiliar with. There is one theme though that I have found to reoccur constantly during this season and that is the story of the "Binding of Isaac" (*'Aqedat Yisshaq*). This appears very early on in the Torah (Beresheet 22:1-19) and every Hakham has commented upon it throughout history. In fact this is the portion that is read in our synagogues from the Sefer Torah on the 2nd day of Rosh Hashanah. We also sing about this incident each day of Selihot in the *piyyoot* "*Im Afes Roba' HaQen*", but more famous than *Im Afes* is "*Et Sha'aré Rasson*." This *piyyoot* was most probably written by Yehoodah Shemoel ibn 'Abbas in 12th century Aleppo. Everyone is familiar with this famous *piyyoot* because the entire congregation chants it together on Rosh Hashanah and on Yom Kippur. This metered prose is based upon the Torah, the Midrasheem, and the teachings of our Hakhameem, and it has a remarkable affect on the entire congregation when it is sung before the blowing of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah and once again at Minhah of Yom Kippur, the time tradition tells us that this incident occurred.

Although there is no lack of material to discuss regarding this early incident in our history, there is one point I would like to focus upon. This is based upon the teachings of Rabbi Haim Sabato and the importance it has for each and every one of us.

The Talmud Babli, Rosh Hashanah 16a, states: "Ribbi Abhoo states: Why do we blow on a ram's horn? The Holy One, Blessed Be He, said: 'Sound before Me a ram's horn so that I may remember on your behalf the binding of Isaac the

son of Abraham, and account it to you as if you had bound yourselves before Me.'"

This interpretation is built upon the verse in the Torah (Beresheet 22:13) "*Vehinnech Ayil Ahar Ne-ehaz Bassebakh BeQarnav*", "And behold, a ram was caught in the thicket by its horns". And as per the Mishnah (Rosh Hashanah 3:2) every Shofar is called *Qeren* (Horn) as it is written (Joshua 6:5) "...when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet..."

What is the first *Qeren* we read about in the Torah? It is the very *Qeren* of the ram that Abraham offered up as a sacrifice in place of his son Isaac at the end of the test of the 'Aqedah. The very horns of that ram that were tangled in the thicket appeared to our Hakhameem like the entanglement of each and every Jew in sins. A sin grabs hold of a person, it makes it appear as if there is no way out, and then the sinner despairs. Any which way that he turns he just sees the thicket and he has no idea what the outcome will be. That's where the power of Teshuba (repentance) comes in, it frees a person and allows him to see the light and hear the sound of salvation.

The *Qeren* that is stuck in the thicket shows the merit. Through the strength of that merit the Jew is able to hold himself and prevent despair and annihilation. This is our *Qeren* to hold on to. The horn is hard, it's strong, it's powerful, and everlasting; as such it is a shield to protect us!

What is that very *Qeren*? It is *Mesiroot Nefesh* – Self Sacrifice. Our self sacrifice as we stand before HaShem. The self sacrifice of Abraham, that is unparalleled, to the point that he was put to this test to sacrifice his one and only favorite son from Sarah. He went as far as binding Isaac on the altar and he was ready and willing to do anything God asked of him. This is the *Qeren* that stands as a merit and privilege on behalf of us, his descendents.

Before you say, "What is he talking about? What do Abraham's actions have to do with me?" let us return to the Torah and read verses 16-18:

"By My own self I **swear**, declares the Lord, that because you have done this thing and have not withheld your son, your only one, I will greatly bless you and make your **descendants** as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.

Your **descendants** will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your **offspring** all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.”

This blessing to Abrahams descendents was uttered by HaShem himself, who swore in his own name; such a swear is surely everlasting.

To further clarify, if we look back to verse 14 it says “And Abraham called the name of that place *HaShem Yir-eh* (God Sees), as is said to this day, “On the mount *HaShem Ye-ra-eh* (God will be Seen).” Abraham prayed that the merit and privilege of the ‘Aqedah will always stand out before HaShem. This action is an eternal foundation, because Abraham was able to bequeath to his descendents the strength of his self sacrifice. The power that comes with that ensures that every one of us will never get entangled and fall, because there is always an opening for us, towards the freedom that we get by adhering to the Torah and clinging to God.

The blowing of the *Qeren* and hearing its sound on Rosh Hashanah acts as a guide for anyone who is tuned in, to identify with the strength of this *Qeren*, *Qeren* here meaning horn as well as foundation. This allows us to connect directly to Abrahams self sacrifice and that’s why our Hakameem established reading this perashah from the Torah on Rosh Hashanah.

Let’s go one step further. Our Hakameem in Pirqé Abot 5:6 enumerated the ram of Abraham among the items that were created on Friday evening at twilight. This was to tell us, that already from the dawn of creation; this very ram was prepared to be brought as a sacrifice in place of Yisshaq, and to teach each generation the service of God.

The Yerushalmi (Ta’anit 2:4) recounts the following: Abraham said to HaShem: Master of the Universe! It is well known to you that at the moment you told me to go and sacrifice my son Isaac, I could have responded saying, how can you say such a thing when just yesterday you said (Beresheet 21:12) “For through Isaac shall your offspring be called” and now you’re telling me (22:2) “offer him up as a burnt offering”? But NO, I did not do such a thing. I conquered my own personal inclinations and I went to do your will. May it

surely be your will my God, that when the children of my son Yisshaq encounter any trouble, and they have no one to stand up for them, I want you to be their defense council. HaShem Yir-eh, God Sees! – You will see what I did and recall on their behalf the ‘Aqedah, the binding of their father Yisshaq, and you’ll have compassion upon them. Recall what it says in that perashah (22:13) “And Abraham raised his eyes, and saw and, look... *VeHinneH Ayil, AHAR* caught in thicket by its horns.” What is this word *AHAR*? *Ahar* means after. After what? After so many generations your descendants will cling to sins and iniquities, and they will get entangled in all types of problems, but in the end they will be saved and redeemed through the *Qeren*-horn of this ram, as it says in Zekharyah 9:14, *Vadonai Eloheem BaShofar Yitqa’ VeHalakh BeSa’arot Teman*. And the Lord God will blow the rams horn, and will march in the storm winds of the South. {This is one of the verses recited before blowing the Shofar, and it is also recited in Moosaf of Rosh Hashanah; see Mahzor Shelom Yerushalayim pages 274 and 297}.

“Teshubah (repentance) comes in, it frees a person and allows him to see the light and hear the sound of salvation.”

HaShem himself will sound the very horn of that ram. That *Qeren* that recalls the resilience of the ‘*OQED VEHANE’QAD* –

binder and the bound, Abraham and Yisshaq, their complete unwavering faith, their love and fear, that is the *Qeren* that stands on behalf of Yisrael until it will be blown and sounded to declare the final redemption. Because in reality what is the *Ge-oo-llah* (redemption)? It is the complete release from the thicket.

The *Qeren* that reminds a person of his sins and causes him to tremble in fear is the same *Qeren* that reminds the descendants of Abraham of their forefather’s faith and self sacrifice at the ‘*Aqedah*. This very *Qeren* wakes them up, and brings them to correct their wayward ways and to return to God, at the same time recalling their merits before their creator, bringing about the final redemption which will be heralded with the blowing of the great Shofar!

This is why we can sing with such fervor, gusto, jubilation, and enthusiasm ... ‘*OQeD, VeHaNe’Qad, VeHaMizBeAh!*

Mr. Mosseri is a well-known community member who among other things is highly regarded for his knowledge of hazzanut, Sephardic history, hakhamim, laws, customs, and books.

YOM TERU'AH: THE SHOFAR AND ITS MEANING ON ROSH HASHANAH

Mr. Jack Doueck

Summary:

On July 3 2006 my father in law, Yaacov Nana Ben Geraz Ha'Kohen – known to many as Jack “Noonie” Cohen – passed away. He was a “Toke’ah” of the Shofar in Shaare Zion Synagogue for 40 years and taught many people, both Rabbis, lay-people and children to blow the shofar. I wrote this book in his memory just in time for the holidays. It is a companion book for Rosh Hashanah. There are few books written about the significance and meaning of the Shofar blowing ceremony on Rosh Hashanah and I thought this would be a good book for people to bring to the synagogue with them on the holiday, meditate on the ideas behind the Shofar blowing, and enjoy the day a lot more.

“Rosh Hashanah should be a regrouping of our energies, a recharging of our batteries.”

I always believed that every Jewish holiday has powerful themes and messages which we can use for our everyday life. Rosh Hashanah can be experienced fully by delving into its essence, hearing its sounds, grasping its lessons. The book came out just before Rosh Hashanah and sold a few thousand copies. The response was overwhelming. People have told me that they used the book during the two days of the holiday to help them better experience the days of Rosh Hashanah, to help them better absorb its lessons, and incorporate those lessons into concrete actions. In short, thank God, many lives were enriched, and my father in-law’s memory was honored.

In the book I answered a few important questions:

- What is the purpose of blowing the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah?
- Why is New Year’s Day also named “Yom Teruah” -

sometimes translated as “Day of the Shofar Blasts” or the “Day of the Cry”?

- What should we have in mind or concentrate on when we hear the blasts of the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah?
- How can we use the Shofar and Rosh Hashanah experience to inspire us and enrich our lives?

Excerpt From the Introduction:

Every Jewish holiday has powerful themes and messages which we can use for our everyday life. Rosh Hashanah can be experienced fully by delving into its essence, hearing its sounds, grasping its lessons. As I hope to show you in this book, we can experience Rosh Hashanah, absorb its lessons, and then incorporate them into our actions, our attitudes, our very thinking and mindsets.



Getting a Boost

In every experience (important meetings, occasions, holidays, etc.) we usually want two things: **enjoyment** and **enrichment**. Enjoyment is what we feel while the experience is actually happening. Enrichment is the take-away after the experience is over.

While writing this book the battery of my car died. I called for roadside assistance and a young man promptly arrived to give me a boost. I watched as the man attached one end of a long red cable to his running engine and the other end to the dead battery in my car. After a minute, he asked

me to turn the key in my ignition, and, just like magic, my car started again. In another minute, my battery had gotten its boost and was now running on its own.

Sometimes, in life, we become so entrenched in our routines that our spiritual batteries run low. From time to time we need to give ourselves a boost.

Rosh Hashanah is very much like the running engine. In order to get a boost, we must get the cables and connect to the day.

Then we have to do one more thing. . . We must turn the key.

The better we understand the prayers and sounds of Rosh Hashanah, the better we are able to **connect** to the holiday. This will help us enjoy the day while it is happening. After we make a connection, and enjoy the day, we want to let it enrich our lives so that we are not the same people when the day is over.

Ultimately, we want to be able to quantify our enrichment by taking different actions the day after Rosh Hashanah. That is what we mean by turning the key. When we can do that, we can look forward to the holiday with excitement, enjoy it thoroughly, and use it to jumpstart our lives, to boost our tired batteries!

The goal of this book is to enable you to do this by understanding the meaning, symbolism and importance of the Shofar. It should be used to enhance and enrich your Rosh Hashanah prayers in general and your experience of the Shofar in particular.

The Shofar of Don Fernando Aguilar

A strange, almost forgotten incident from Jewish history suggests that Jews often were willing to exercise this freedom and go to any length to fulfill the *misvah* of listening to the

sounds of the Shofar.

During the Spanish Inquisition, many *Conversos* (Spanish Jews who officially converted to Christianity but many of whom secretly held on to Jewish practices) yearned to hear the sound of the Shofar. This was impossible because they could no longer practice Judaism in the open.

However, in Barcelona word spread among the Jewish community of a special concert to be given to Spanish aristocracy and church officials on a day that just happened to coincide with Rosh Hashanah.

Spanish royalty believed the full house to be due to the prominence of the composer, Don Fernando Aguilar, a secret

Jew who had announced that on that evening he would present a concert featuring unusual native musical instruments and the instrumental music of diverse cultures. He was then the conductor of the Royal Orchestra in Barcelona.

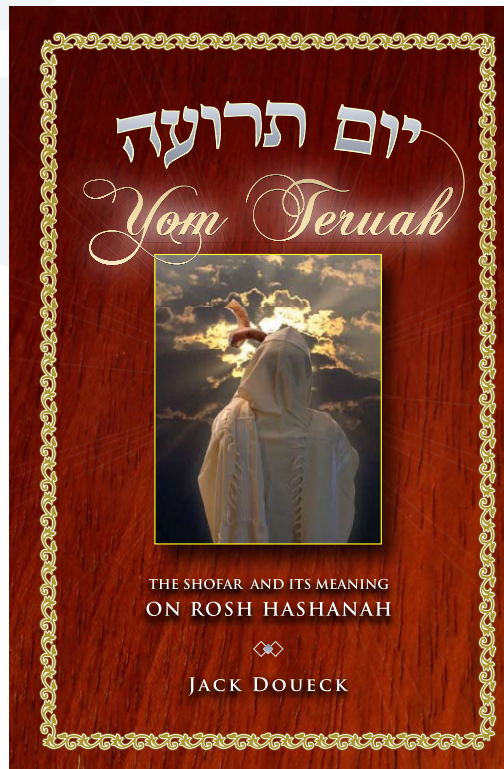
The concert featured various compositions, among them the Shofar was played, complete with all nine required blasts so that the every secret Jew in the audience would fulfill his obligation that day in hearing the blasts of the Shofar. Don Aguilar risked his life as he sounded the *Tekiah*, *Shebarim-Teruah*, *Teruah*, and *Tekiah Gedolah*. At the crescendo of one very moving piece, all the Shofar sounds were heard, in full keeping with Jewish tradition.

The clergy and the Spanish Inquisition authorities, who were sitting in the audience, did not suspect a thing and were never aware of its significance. But many *conversos* got to hear the Shofar thanks to Don Fernando's risky subterfuge.

Freedom in Bergen Belsen Concentration Camp: 1944

Wolf Fischelberg walked among the barracks in Bergen

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ROSH HASHANAH: MEET THE “NEW AND IMPROVED” YOU!

Rabbi Dr. Eytan Michael Cohen

Rosh Hashanah is also referred to as Yom HaDin, the Day of Judgement. Judgement? What Judgement? Who’s judging? Why do we need to be judged? What’s that all about? Our Hachamim teach in the Gemara (*Masechet Rosh Hashanah 8b*) that on Rosh Hashanah, it is decreed what will be at the end of the year. Just imagine the crowning of a King or Queen on the day of their coronation; all the pomp and circumstance!

Along with this coronation comes the recognition that a King or Queen (at least at one time) holds the power to decree and judge throughout their land. So too, we crown HaShem on this day of Rosh Hashanah and recognize the omnipotence of the Almighty, as clearly evidenced by the *Malchuyot* section of the Mussaf of Rosh Hashanah and the changes we make in every Amida until Yom Kippur. This is one of the most important aspects of Rosh Hashanah. Our tradition teaches that all is at stake on this great day – our health, our wealth, and, truly, our very lives. Whatever takes place in the last month of the

Jewish calendar, known as Elul, was already decreed at the very beginning of the year. Thus, Rosh Hashanah, as it is so aptly named, is the head of the year. And, just as the head directs the body (or, at least, most of the time it should), so too, one’s actions, thoughts, and prevailing emotions on Rosh Hashanah will determine the outcome of the rest of the year.

It’s All in Your Head

Rosh Hashanah is a day signifying our creation. Our Holy Books teach that this awesome day corresponds to the day

of human’s creation. Creation and judgment - how does that work? Stop and think about it for a moment. When was the last time you wanted to start a new project or launch a new business? In order to create something new, we all need a sense of judgment and discernment. Should we go ahead? Will we be successful? Rosh Hashanah is no different. It requires, from the side of HaShem, a new creation: a New Year. The year to come has not yet been, and needs to be brought into existence. Creation. Just as the construction of a building requires a blueprint, so too, the construction of the year needs a specific plan. Just as a designer draws up the plans for a room, so is HaShem the designer of the year. The plans of HaShem are prepared and drafted on Rosh

Hashanah. So, Rosh Hashanah is not merely the first day of the Jewish calendar. It is the outline for the entire year.



Now, I know what you’re thinking. What does it matter what I do on Rosh Hashanah? Everything’s already planned! Well, I have news for you: Rosh Hashanah is aptly named the head of the year. Each of us, too, is endowed with a part of this creative power and having our “heads” in the right place on Rosh Hashanah is of paramount importance. Just as the head directs the body (or, at least, most of the time it should), so too, our thoughts, our prevailing emotions, and our actions on Rosh Hashanah

will determine the outcome of the rest of the year. Good, positive thoughts; constant imagery and affirmation of a successful year ahead full of Emunah, gratitude, love, joy, and contentment begin to leave the realm of thought and potential to enter into the domain of action. What do you think all that stuff with apples and honey is about? It’s precisely the symbolic actions that set the stage for a year of sweetness! Everything we think and feel is negotiated through the action of the mind. Every part of our body, all the way down to our toenails, is activated by virtue of what goes on at the head. A lost head is a lost life. Thoughts transforming into actions.

So, you might be wondering - where is the “new and improved” me? It is precisely those thoughts that begin the process of coming closer to our true selves and to *HaQadosh Barukh Hu*. Rabbi Avigdor Miller so poignantly asked and answered, “How do you climb closer to Hashem? First you have to start with things close to the earth - things between you and your employer, you and the people around you. That’s the beginning. If you excel in your attitude and relations with others, Hashem will allow you to go higher on the next step of the ladder.”

Missing the Mark

Sometimes Rosh v Hashanah comes around and we’re bogged down with all this baggage we accumulated throughout the year. Insults, arguments, miscommunications, animosity, grudges, hurt feelings, stereotypes, angry outbursts, shady dealings, etc. Have you done something wrong? Well, the truth is, we all have. Most people misunderstand the concept of sin. They regard someone who sins as a “bad person.”

Actually, the Hebrew word *het* does not mean sin at all. *Het* appears in the Navi in reference to a slingshot which “missed the target.” There is nothing inherently “bad” about that slingshot! Rather, a mistake was made – due to a lack of focus, concentration or skill.

The same is true with us. When we engage in irresponsible or destructive behavior, we have simply misfired. Every human being has a soul, that pure piece of spirituality that raises us above the physical realm. When we do something wrong, it is because the soul’s “voice” has become temporarily muted by the roar of the physical body. This confusion is what we call the “Yetzer Hara.” But our essence remains pure. We only need to make a few adjustments – and we’re back on target!

This brings us to the next stage of the “new and improved you”; it’s time to own up! We examine our ways, identify those areas where we are losing ground, and “return” to our own previous state of spiritual purity. And in the process, we “return” to our connection with the Almighty as well. You guessed correctly - Teshuba!

Alcoholics Anonymous is famous for the 12 steps to recovery. The Rambam in Hilchot Teshuba outlines very clearly the four steps of teshuba.

Step 1: Regret, not Guilt

Sometimes, we try to justify our actions, using a variety of excuses like: “Everyone else is doing it,” or, “At least I’m not like some people who go around killing and stealing!”, and my personal favorite, “Who are YOU to say it’s wrong?!”

Regret is not really possible unless we can clearly distinguish between right and wrong. Otherwise, we will just rationalize and delude ourselves into thinking we’ve done nothing wrong. The ever-changing, sliding standards of society contribute to this lack of clarity. For this reason, it is important to be familiar with *Halakha*, Jewish law, and to have a Rav and Rabbanit who know you personally and can advise you.

How should we feel upon recognizing a mistake? Should we feel guilty, worthless and bad? No! “Guilt” is the negative emotion saying that “I am bad,” whereas “regret” is the positive acknowledgement that while my essence remains pure, I have failed to live up to my potential.

Feeling regret is a positive sign that we’re back in touch with our Godly essence. Our conscience will not let us relax until we’ve corrected the mistake. Would an evil person feel regret over a transgression?

This first step of *teshuba* is indeed the most crucial – because unless a person feels regret, he will most likely continue in his or her errant ways.

Step 2: Just Stop it

The Gemara (*Masechet Ta’anit 16a*) teaches us that a person who made a mistake and admits it, but does not renounce doing it again, is compared to going into the mikveh holding a dead reptile in his hand. For although he may immerse himself in all the waters of the world, his immersion is useless. However, if he throws [the reptile] out of his hand, then upon immersing in 40 se’ah of water (the minimum size of a mikveh), his immersion immediately becomes effective.

Can you imagine trying to ask forgiveness from someone while you continue to wrong him or her at the same time? Without stopping the bad action, all the heart-pounding in the whole world won’t help.

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Step 3: Take Ownership and Ask Like You Mean It

In admitting our mistake, *Halakha* prescribes that it be articulated verbally. Thoughts distilled into words have lasting meaning. Expressing remorse and asking forgiveness is not an easy task. It is painfully difficult for people to admit explicitly that they've done wrong. We excuse ourselves. We refuse to face the truth. We blame others. We deny the obvious. We are experts at rationalization. Hakham Eliyahu Attias, a well-known Rosh Kollel, remarked that man – in general – only needs three things: food, drink, and someone to blame!

The person who takes ownership of the unpleasant truth, “I have sinned,” has performed a superhuman act. The Torah requires us to be humble and contrite as we ask forgiveness. This is crucial in enabling the “victim” to heal. Has someone ever apologized to you and you knew it wasn't sincere? Just grunting the words “I'm sorry” is not going to do it.

Even criminal courts are now championing this concept; some judges are requiring that criminals demonstrate sincere regret and formally apologize to their victims before the court will consider shortening the sentence.

Step 4: Keeping it Real in the Future with No Repeats

During Selihot this whole month and numerous times on Yom Kippur, we say Viduy or the Confession of “*Ashamnu*.” We'll even say the long version of the Viduy which contains an extensive list of mistakes. As a matter of fact, as you go through these lists, you'll see the mention of mistakes covering every conceivable aspect of life! This begs the question: By saying these prayers, are we in effect making a commitment to never sin ever again? Is this realistic?

Imagine a new child taking her first steps in front of the

proud parents. She gets to her feet, takes a few steps – and falls flat on her face. The parents clap with excitement and joy. But if you analyze the scenario, shouldn't the parents be upset? After all, the child fell down!

The answer is obvious. A parent doesn't judge a child based on whether she walks or falls, but rather on whether she took a few steps in the right direction.

So, too, with the Almighty. We are not in competition with anyone but ourselves. What concerns Hashem is whether we're making a sincere effort to move in the right direction. God doesn't ask you to change in an area that is not yet feasible for you to change. We are commanded to be human beings, not angels. This means making a serious commitment to change – and taking the right steps at the right time.



An individual doesn't need to have all the answers right now. The key is the commitment to change. Be aware of situations in which you're likely to stumble, and keep a safe distance from them. The Torah tells us: Strengthen your resolve in a certain area and God will ensure your success. Nothing can stand in the way of persistence and determination. As the Gemara (*Masechet Makkot 10b*) states: “In the way that a person wants to go, he will be led.”

Tefillah with Passion - The Final Key To a New You

Life in the 21st Century isn't simple - there's little time and a ton of distractions. Thus, one of the greatest challenges of our time is our ability to pray properly. We're commanded in the Shema' that we read twice per day, “*U'Yovdo b'chol levavchem*” - “Serve Him with all your heart” (Debarim 11:13). The Gemara (*Masechet Ta'anit 2a*) teaches us that this “service of the heart” is none other than tefillah/prayer.

Ribbi Elazar proclaims in *Masechet Berachot 32b* that “*Gedola tefillah mi'ma'assim tovim* - Greater is tefillah than

good deeds". What an extraordinary statement! What kind of comparison is this? Perhaps Ribbi Elazar is remarking that while *ma'assim tovim* ("good deeds") can be performed for a variety of ulterior motives, when you stand in sincere passionate prayer talking to Ha Qadosh Barukh Hu, only you and the Boreh 'Olam know this: a much bigger measure of *Yir'at Shamayim*.

Passionate Tefillah is hard work. It takes effort, focus, and discipline. One of the great challenges is clearing the mind from other distractions when praying. Realizing and focusing on the fact that while you are praying, you are, in fact, talking with HaShem, will raise your awareness considerably. Ribbi Shimon eloquently states in Pirke Abot 2:13, "U'kshe'atah mitpallel, al ta'as tefilatecha keva', ela rachamim v'tachanunim lifney HaMakom", "When you pray, don't make your tefillah a mere routine."

It is my prayer to all that the blasts of the Shofar be a call to each of us and a real transformation of positive thought into sustained action throughout the upcoming year. May the words of Nehemiah that we ponder at the conclusion of our prayers on Rosh Hashanah ring true for everyone: "Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet beverages, and send portions to those who have nothing prepared, for today is sacred to our Lord. Do not be sad; the enjoyment of HaShem is your strength." *Shanah Toba U'Metuka* (a happy and sweet new year) and may you all be inscribed in the Book of Life.

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...THE STORY OF HANNAH

other vows, has both a formal dimension and a substantive dimension. Formally Elkana was right, for Hannah had vowed to give Shemuel to God all the days of his life. On the practical level, however, what value would there be in giving Shemuel to God prior to his weaning? What benefit could such a young child bring to the Mishkan of God, when he still needs his mother? Hannah is not trying to avoid fulfilling her vow, but she insists on fulfilling it in a meaningful, rather than a formal manner. In both her confrontations with Elkana, Elkana sees only the formal and the routine - things which cannot be changed. Hannah, on the other hand, represents the ability to see beyond the formal framework, and to search out the profound.

What connection does Hannah have to Rosh Hashanah? Hannah demonstrates to us the power of prayer and its ability to change that which may seem unchangeable. Hannah refuses to be satisfied with the *status quo*. Rather, she storms the heavens with her request. Rosh Hashanah is our chance not to settle for "same." It is our opportunity to reflect on what we really want, and on how we can achieve those changes. And, finally, Hannah teaches us the importance of going beyond the formal and the routine. She shows us how we need to look into what it is that we do and say, in whatever context - religious, interpersonal or introspection. Mere routine and satisfaction with "what it is" is unacceptable to Hannah. She shows us, on the brink of a new year, how to aspire to meaningful change.

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THE 7 WORDS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE

Rabbi Richard Tobias

The *Aseret Yimei Teshuba* bring with them certain prayers that are added to the daily tefillah. One of those is the *Abinu Malkenu* prayer that we say after the amidah. It is a tefillah, the theme of which, is basically giving G-d a long list of the things that we would like him to do for us. *Abinu malkeinu hadesh alenu shanah toba* - give us a good year. *Kotbenu bisefer hayyim tobim* - inscribe us in the book of life. *Al teshibenu rekam milefanekha* - do not send us away empty handed. Yet one of the statements that we make in that tefillah doesn't fit the mold. It is in total contrast to the rest of the prayer and stands out as the phrase that does not belong. It is the first statement of the tefillah: *Abinu Malkeinu hatanu lifanekha* - we have sinned before you.

That is not a request, nor is it something we desire. Why is it included on a list of things for which we ask?

Yom Kippur as well, brings with it new tefillot that we do not recite regularly. One of the most notable is the song with which we begin the Yom Kippur nighttime service: *Lecha Eli*. What is so special and significant about that song that it gets to be the front bookend of Yom Hakippurim? At the back end, the day is concluded with the *neilah* prayer. We know why that is so important. But what is it about *Lecha Eli* that warrants it to be highlighted as the first thing we say on one of the holiest days of the year?

To answer the above questions, we need to look at the parasha that always immediately precedes the high holidays, parashat Nesabim. It is a parasha that discusses the *misva* of teshuba, containing the famous line "*lo bashamayim he*" - "it is not in the heavens" - Teshuba is not out of reach. It is not something that is unattainable or reserved for the elite. It is an imperative and a possibility for all of us. The mefarshim (commentaries) explain that with these words, the Torah is not only telling us that we all have the obligation and the ability to repent, but it is actually defining the very essence of what teshuba is.

The pesukim there say (Debarim 30: 11-14), "*lo rehoka he...lo bashamayim he...velo me'eber layam...ki karob elekha hadabar meod*" - it is not far away from you, it is not in the heavens and it is not across a great sea, rather it is very close to you to do. What is the essence of teshuba? It is something only you can do, despite the fact that you do not want to do it. *It is to take responsibility for your own actions.* It is as though Bore Olam is saying, do not claim, "it was not my fault, it was too hard, I could not get there, it was out of touch, it is my wife's fault, my kid's fault, my boss' fault..." The very essence of repentance is '*karob elekha meod*' - it is very close to you. It is to look at yourself for who you really are and who you really are not. That is true teshuba.

We all love to shift the guilt and all year long we play the 'blame game'. However, it is on Yom Hakkipurim that *Hakadosh Barukh Hu* asks us to step out of our comfort zone and say, "G-d, I sinned, I was wrong, I made a mistake and I'm sorry." That is what teshuba is predicated and founded

upon and that answers our questions above regarding *Abinu Malkeinu*.

***"Before we can stand in front of
Hashem with requests, we have to
man up to who we are."***

Before we can stand in front of Hashem with requests, we have to man up

to who we are. Admit our failures, say we are sorry and then ask for something. Hence, *Abinu malkeinu hatanu lifanekha*. G-d, before I list my desires, know that I acknowledge my guilt and take full responsibility. Additionally, we begin the day with *Lecha Eli*. What is that song all about? It is admission of guilt. Consider the words of the song: *viashamti, vigazalti, vitaiti, virashati* - me, I did those things, not anyone else. It is not anyone else's fault but my own. Upon that proclamation and acknowledgement, can the rest of Yom Kippur be built. Now we can talk about a positive year ahead.

But why are human beings so adverse to admitting guilt? Because that is how we were hard wired from day one on this Earth. Adam and Hava sinned. They ate from the one tree that G-d commanded them not to eat. After sinning, Hashem approached Adam and asked what happened. What is Adam's response? My wife did it, it's not my fault. The woman whom you created for me has brought me down, she is the reason for my failure. Embedded in the very fabric of our humanity is to pass the buck. It is as Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski writes in one of his essays. He explains that contrary

to popular belief, man has four basic needs in life (not just three). They are: food and water, clothing, shelter, and someone to blame.

We are so afraid of ourselves. We are fearful of looking ourselves in the mirror. We are terrified of being wrong and so utterly frightened of failure. We are so overprotective of our egos that sometimes we can even know with 100% certainty that we are wrong and still pass the blame. The message of teshuba is to face those fears, swallow our pride and admit our mistakes. It is to realize that humans are frail and humans do fail – and that we are human.

In minha of Yom Kippur we read sefer Yonah. There is an episode that happens in the book that is integral to internalizing the story. Yonah tries to escape his mission by fleeing. He gets on a boat and tries to leave Israel. While on the boat there is a terrible storm, the ship is in danger and the men on the boat are trying to figure out what to do. They decide that they will all pray to their gods to try and appease him/them. What does Yonah do? He gets up and he says stop praying, it's no you, it's me. I am to blame. I am the one who is causing this, throw me overboard and you will be safe. I take full responsibility. That is an underlying message of Sefer Yonah. Stop playing the blame game and own up to your mistakes.

What does G-d want from us during this time of year? He wants seven words. The seven words of highly effective people: *I did something wrong, and I'm sorry*. What do your spouse, parents, friends, teachers and superiors want from you? *I did something wrong and I'm sorry*. For some reason, however, we can't seem to get that down pat. Yom Kippur is not only a daily message, but also a lifelong message. Confident people take responsibility for their actions.

There is a famous gemara in masekhet Aboda Zarah 17A about an incredibly wealthy man named Elazar Ben Durdaya. He was a man who was steeped in promiscuity. At one point, however, he realized the error of his ways and acknowledged

how low he had sunk. He was so shaken by this realization that Elazar ran out to the mountains and he called out to the hills and he said, "please mountains, pray for mercy on my behalf." The mountains responded, "we have our own problems, we can not pray for you." He then cried out to the heavens and the Earth and he said, "heavens and Earth, please pray for mercy on my behalf." They too replied, "we have our own problems, we can not cry for you." Elazar ben Durdaya then cried out to the sun and the moon and he said, "sun and moon, please pray for mercy on my behalf". He was met with the same answer. Lastly, Elazar called out to the stars and the constellations and said, "please pray for mercy on my behalf," and they too responded with the same answer as the rest. Finally, Elazar broke down in tears, he tucked

his head between his knees and he cried like no man has ever cried before. He cried so hard that his soul left his body and went straight up to Hashem's heavenly throne.



לך אלי תשוקתי
בך חשקי ואהבתי
לך לבי וכליותי
לך רוحي ונשמתי

The mefarshim explain the story by way of parable. When Elazar called out to the mountains he was saying, "G-d please forgive me because it wasn't my fault. It was my parents, the mountains, the rocks in my life, who didn't raise me well enough." To that, G-d responded, "Elazar it's not their fault, don't put the blame on them."

So Elazar called out to the heavens and earth as though to say, "G-d please forgive me but it's not my fault, it was the society in which I was brought up that caused me to do it." Hashem said, "don't blame the things around you." Elazar called out to the sun and the moon, the things that shine, as though to say, "Hashem please forgive me but it wasn't my fault. It was because you gave me too much money and the money corrupted me." To which Hashem said, "how to use the money was your choice, don't blame it on the money." Finally, Elazar called out to the constellations, the highest beings on Earth, as though to say, "but G-d, it was because of my stature. If I wasn't so powerful I wouldn't have been able to get away with all of it. It's not my fault, why did you make me so powerful?" To which Hashem said, "that's not an excuse!" Elazar, realizing that he had no one else to blame, then looked deep inside himself and he said,

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From the Archives

A HOLIDAY MESSAGE

Rabbi Ezra Labaton A"H
1999

Rosh Hashanah is about life, introspection, change, love, meaning, and a whole constellation of other Jewish values that we hold sacred. In a certain sense, it is a paradigmatic holiday, intensely trying to communicate to us all Jewish values. The holiday could be a puzzling maze of law, tradition, customs and values or it can be a rock solid reorienting event, a beacon of light, intended to have us refocus our energies and efforts toward a meaningful life.

On Rosh Hashanah, we pray for life, we appreciate how precious and valuable life is yet we don't pray for any life. We pray for a certain kind of life, a life of health, happiness and prosperity. Because we believe so strongly in God's goodness and infinite compassion, we feel that we can ask for this, even if we are undeserving. It is Yom Hadin - the Day of Judgment, but we are so certain that the judgment will be favorable, that we can celebrate it as a holiday. We know that the books are open and that the metaphorical hand is writing, but we are confident

Although we trust Hashem's compassion, we know that something on this holiday is required of us. It is not enough, or even appropriate, to ask without giving something in return. What can we give? A bit of introspection, a bit of reflection, some change. We have to ask ourselves some powerful personal questions: How much good have we done this past year? Have we engaged in Tikun Olam - perfecting the world? Have we brought

more kindness, righteousness, and justice into the world? Hopefully this process of self-analysis, through the lens of Judaic values, will have a cathartic effect, energizing the petitioner to redirect his energies into positive directions.

Change - to grow spiritually in a new direction, to think of new ways of impacting upon the world (I know of one very successful businessman who left his business to pursue a degree in social work, to help more people directly).

Repentance - knowing that we have not been perfect, admitting our flaws to ourselves and before Hashem, and vowing never to repeat them again.

These last two values are the fabric of which we have to weave a meaningful

Rosh Hashanah experience. But there is more. Love and meaning are the glue by which we hold our lives and our families together. In the overall scheme of things, these are probably the most important values we have. It is the

reason why we have respect and do all we can for our parents; why we keep our kids close; why we are willing to sacrifice for others. And though obvious, sometimes members of the family unit miss the point of family life; to love and be loved by others.

We allow extraneous causes, such as business issues, inheritance claims and family pressures, to interfere with the process of family life. The

harmonious, tranquil circle of family living is interrupted, when one family member is only self-interested, ignoring the needs of another member of the family unit. (I even know one wonderful family that was broken up by a family

"On Rosh Hashanah, we pray for life, we appreciate how precious and valuable life is..."



business problem Sound familiar?) Rosh Hashanah and all the values it stands for should place all these issues into their proper perspective.

More than this, Rosh Hashanah should pull us in a certain direction. It should ask us difficult questions about life, love and family. It intends to set the record straight. But we have to be listening.

A tale is told of one who sat in study before the Tsadeek, Rabbi Mordechai of Madorna. Before Rosh Hashanah, he came to the Rabbi to obtain permission to be dismissed. The Rabbi said to him, "Why are you hurrying?" Said he to him, "I am a Hazzan. I must look into the festival rules of the prayer book and get my prayer in order." The Rabbi responded, "The prayer book is the same as it was last year, it would be better if you look into your deeds and put yourself in order."

"... to grow spiritually in a new direction, to think of new ways of impacting upon the world"

Putting one's self in order is no simple matter. It requires deep thought and a sensitive listening to one's own inner self. Not all people are prepared to do this. Yet it is the very essence of Rosh Hashanah, and indeed the very essence of being human. To change direction in mid stream, towards a life of more meaning and more love, though difficult, is what makes life more challenging and more wonderful. May we all enjoy a year of health, peace, prosperity and introspective challenge.

Rabbi Dr. Labaton A"H was the spiritual leader of Magen David West Deal for over 30 years.



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...ARE THE ROSH HASHANAH...

while the word used for the other signs is "לִידַע"—to know for certain. The bottom line is that the *Gemara* was trying to explain that only a SYMBOL of *Hashem's* goodness WITHOUT trying to think that the symbol has any power to manipulate that outcome is what is permitted. The good is always there and based on a person's choices to engage in Torah, *Missvot* and authentic Jewish practices such as intense prayer and helping a person's fellow man, will that good be bestowed upon him. A person's decisions to violate the Torah is the only thing that has the ability to block that goodness and mercy and to, heaven forbid, cause us harm.

When a person believes that painting his face, blessing a jersey or standing up when his team has possession of the ball MUST be done in order to help their team win, it is not only foolish but it is a violation of a Torah law. Everyone knows that only through authentically upgrading your team with a great quarterback, a stellar offensive line and lethal receivers can you win football games. More importantly, when a person thinks that without baking a key into bread, or without putting on a red string or without following another superstition that *Hashem* will not grant them their desire, that individual undermines the entire Torah and comes dangerously close to idol worship. Only through strict adherence to Torah study, mitzvah observance and improving our relationship with our fellow man can we truly connect with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

It is for this reason, the Mordechi explains, that a declaration ("יְהִי רָצוֹן"—"may it be God's will") is said before consuming each of the *Simanim* that are served at the Rosh Hashanah Table. Reciting each "יְהִי רָצוֹן" should awaken a person to the fact that *Hashem* is our king in heaven and inspire us to increase our good deeds before Him from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur and beyond. This prevents a person from treating the *Simanim* as a superstition. Each Siman should remind us about the different types of goodness that *Hakadosh Barukh Hu* is constantly ready to give to us should we deserve it based on our merits.

Rabbi Tawil is the Rabbi of Congregation Kol Israel and Administrator at Magen David Yeshiva.



Yom Kippur

YOM KIPPUR: CHANCE OF A LIFETIME

Rabbi Joey Dweck

Over the thousands of years that the Jewish people have been observing the day of Yom Kippur, the manner in which we observe it has gone through changes. At its inception there was one procedure that was the centerpiece for the day. The Kohen Gadol (High Priest), the only man who performed services on the day, took two identical goats and designated one as a sacrifice in the Bet HaMikdash, and the other was cast off a cliff far away in the desert. This was done to communally commit to casting-away vices and self-destructive behaviours with the aim at rehabilitation. Yet, the way in which the goats were designated was peculiar. They were not simply chosen, rather, a lot was cast to determine the fate of each goat¹.

This peculiarity might easily be written off as a simple way of making a decision, but things get even more peculiar when we begin to see lotteries popping up all around Yom Kippur. The famous haftara read on the day, the Book of Yona, has a lottery at the heart of the story. While we all know that Jonah is swallowed by a great fish in the ocean, we are not as familiar with how he was tossed into the sea in the first place:

And each man said to his fellow, let's cast lots and discover for whom this evil has [come] to us. They cast lots and the lot fell on Yona. (1:7-8)

Even the daily lotteries that were used to determine which kohen would carry out a particular part of the service in the Temple, are oddly inserted in none other than tractate

¹ Vayikra, 16:5-10. Also described in Musaf of Kippur, Day of Atonement Mahzor, Vol. III pg.171.

Yoma² which is predominantly about Yom Kippur!

Chance seems to play a significant role on Yom Kippur, but why? Perhaps it is because chance is what affords us opportunity in life. Although people often say that it is choice not chance that determines our destiny, it is chance that provides the choice in the first place. When we give someone a chance, we are banking on the openness of the world and its possibilities to allow desirable outcomes that may not have been achieved previously, or that are not anticipated. One

“... we have the ability to respond to the chances that life gives us”

can fail time and again, but when we have chances, we assume that failure need not always be the outcome. It is the randomness of the world

— the chance — that gives us the chance to do better.

On Kippur we acknowledge that our lives are filled with opportunities, and we have the ability to respond to the chances that life gives us. In knowing and embracing the world's lack of predictability, we acknowledge that the road



ahead is open to us, and, regardless of what might have come before, it does not determine how events and actions must proceed going forward. Each new day brings us a bundle of fresh opportunities at life, and on Yom Kippur, G-d asks us to step away from our regular, routine world of cause and effect, and spend 25 hours in the world of possibilities. It is in that world that new beginnings, untapped options, recreation and rejuvenation are born.

Yom Kippur is the Day that G-d gives us the expansive gift of chance.

Gemar Hatima Toba

Rabbi Dweck is the current Senior Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregations of the United Kingdom.

² Chapter 2

YOM KIPPUR: ACCEPTING RESPONSIBLY

Rabbi Haim Shaul

HaRambam writes that the entirety of Torah and *Missvot* is to bring us as individuals, communities and the entire humanity to be moral, responsible and to reach spiritual perfection.

Whereas each one of our 613 *Missvot* has a unique purpose, the day of Yom Kippur is characterized as accepting responsibility for our past mistakes, acknowledging our failures and working to correct them.

However, we live at a time when it is very popular to blame anyone but ourselves and our own faults. We blame our parents and our upbringing, or our friends and our culture. Psychologists have a saying that a person only needs three things in life: food, clothing, and someone else to blame (as *Adam Harishon* tried to do by pinning the entire blame on his wife. It seems nothing has changed!)

When we look at the political leaders of today's generation, we see people who never admit to mistakes. Their failed decisions and policies are blamed on faulty information supplied to them or by being misled by others. Their opinions change, not because they were wrong, G-D forbid, but because they have "evolved", as if they were the missing link in the chain of Darwinian evolution! Whenever they are caught in a lie, they claim to have "misspoken", whatever that means.

Our Torah, not surprisingly, takes the opposite view.

The Talmud cites the example of Shaul Hamelech, after being rebuked by the Prophet Shemuel for not fulfilling the commandment to destroy Amalek. Instead of accepting

responsibility for his failures, he put the entire blame at the feet of the people. He was therefore immediately rejected by G-D and replaced with King David.

In contrast, King David, after being rebuked by Nathan Hanabi, immediately accepted full responsibility and declared, "I have sinned." He was ultimately forgiven and was given the Kingship over Israel for all generations.

Moshe Rabbenu, however, took admitting his own mistakes to a different level as described in the Talmud (*Zebachim* 101A). The Torah relates that Moshe angrily demanded to know why the sacrifice of Rosh Hodesh was

not eaten by the Kohanim.

Aharon, his brother, answered that he didn't think it was proper to eat the sacrifice on the day that his two sons, Nadab and Abihu died, since they had the status of "onen", one

whose relative passed away but was not yet buried. Moshe conceded to Aharon that he was indeed correct, and then the Talmud relates, based on Moshe's reaction, that Moshe did not save himself from humiliation by simply saying "I did not hear this law from G-d" instead admitted that he was indeed told by G-D what Aharon had explained but that he had forgotten the law!

"Yom Kippur is an entire day devoted to taking responsibility, coming to terms with our own failures and focusing on self-improvement"



Samuel Rebuking Saul, Hans Holbein the Younger

Even though, by admitting his own mistake, Moshe would be open to criticism that perhaps he could have forgotten other aspects of the Torah, he instead took full blame and admitted the truth.

Yom Kippur is an entire day devoted to taking responsibility, coming to terms with our own failures and focusing on self-improvement and not focusing on the faults and improvements that others need to make, for that we have the other 364 days of the year!

Rabbi Shaul in the Rabbi of Magen David Synagogue.

SEFER YONAH: TRUTH VS. MERCY¹

Rabbi Moshe Shamah

The book of Yonah – a short and concise work of forty-eight verses – addresses a major theological issue and contains several subthemes and messages of great import. As human personality, especially as it concerns one's relationship with God and His ways, is immensely complex and dynamic, subject to the vagaries of human free will, interpreting it correctly in the case of a particular individual is greatly dependent on life context. Accordingly, the Tanakh does not generally transmit its views on such matters through static, rigid assertions. It rather does so by way of narrative and conversation, leaving room for subtle distinctions and nuances. The book of Yonah is unsurpassed in this respect.

God instructs Yonah son of Amittai to go to Nineveh and call out regarding it [that it will soon be destroyed] “for their evil has risen before Me” (Yonah 1:2). Nineveh was one of the foremost cities of the ancient Near East, established in the second millennium B.C.E. It was a major center of Assyrian power for many centuries (established by Sennacherib as the capital of Assyria in the late eighth century B.C.E.). God decided to punish this leading city for its extreme wrongdoing and Yonah was selected to inform its populace of the impending disaster, thus providing them an opportunity to repent from their evil ways and avert destruction.

Surely it is significant to our understanding of this sefer that Yonah is the prophet mentioned in the book of Kings in conjunction with the extraordinary military successes of the expansionist king Jeroboam son of Joash (ca. 785–745 B.C.E.). Jeroboam was the king “who restored Israel’s borders from Lebo-hamath (about fifty miles north of Damascus) to the sea of the Arabah (the Dead Sea), in accordance with the words of Hashem, God of Israel, spoken through His servant Yonah son of Amittai the prophet” (2 Kings 14:25). Jeroboam was an evildoer in God’s eyes, one

who “did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had caused Israel to sin” (v. 24). The tremendous success of this great evildoer required an explanation, which the book of 2 Kings provides: “It was because Hashem saw the affliction of Israel, that it was extremely bitter, without a supporter or sustainer (וְאֵין מְעֻזָּה וְאֵין מְסֻבָּה), and there were none to help Israel; And Hashem had not declared to blot out Israel’s name from under heaven, so He saved them through Jeroboam son of Joash” (14:26-27).

This divine intervention on behalf of a sinful Israel provided Yonah a firsthand experience of undeserved divine compassion on an unrepentant nation. (Such undeserved divine compassion, when the

alternative might have been destruction of the nation, was predicted in *Parashat Ha’azinu* in the statement that describes God manifesting His merciful nature toward Israel when it actually deserved the worst [Deut. 32:27 ff.]. Some key similar terminology is employed in both passages.) Yonah undoubtedly had tried to reform the king and the nation from their evil ways in the manner of other prophets, with frustrating results: his rebukes were rejected and his warnings scoffed at.



*The Prophet Jonah before the Walls of Nineveh
Drawing by Rembrandt, c. 1655*

¹ This article was excerpted (with minor modifications), with permission, from sections of Rabbi Shamah's *Reflections on the Book of Jonah in Recalling the Covenant* (Ktav, 2011), pp. 1077-1087.

Yonah's contemporaries Amos and Hosea describe the perversion of justice and the oppression of the poor that were commonplace during the reign of Jeroboam son of Joash, as well as the debauchery that then prevailed among the wealthy classes and the priests. We will cite a number of excerpts from Amos that illustrate the point:

For three transgressions of Israel, for four, I will not reverse it, because they sell out the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes...the way of the humble they pervert, a man and his father go to the same maiden...you ordered the prophets "Do not prophesy" (2:6-12)...They know not how to do right, declares Hashem, they store corruption and plunder in their palaces (3:10)...who defraud the poor, crush the needy (4:1)...who turn justice to wormwood (5:7)...They hate him who rebukes at the gate, and abhor him who speaks with integrity...you impose a tax burden upon the poor and take a [hefty] portion of grain from him...enemies of the righteous, takers of bribes who turn aside the needy in the gate (5:10-12) ...Who lie on ivory beds, stretched on their couches, eating the choicest of the flock...they sing along with the harp, like David they consider their musical instruments; who drink from wine bowls...but they are not grieved for the destruction of Joseph (6:4-6)... [The priest told him] "at Bethel do not prophesy again" (7:13)...[You] make the ephah small [while selling] and the shekel large [in receiving payment], perverting scales of deceit (8:5).

Utterly detesting such practices, God issued many warnings of coming doom if the nation did not repent. Eventually, regarding the unrepentant kingdom, He declared, "I will destroy it from upon the face of the earth, but I will not totally wipe out the House of Jacob" (Amos 9:8), depicting restoration and rebuilding of the nation for the remnant that will be saved.

One can imagine how difficult it must have been for Yonah, God's servant, to receive prophecies from Him and transmit them to the thoroughly sinful king, informing him that if he proceeded on one or another campaign he would be victorious. And yet, the prophet had to witness the enormous prosperity and consequent pride engendered by Jeroboam's many conquests. One wonders: as the prophet who conveyed the optimistic messages, was Yonah required to participate in victory celebrations – celebrations, after all, of the fulfillment of God's prophecy and favorable intervention – and extend blessings for the king, the royal family and the court, despite the fact that he cannot have had anything but utter contempt for their behavior? Did they maintain a facade of appropriate behavior, superficially accommodating their heritage as well as Yonah? And Jeroboam son of Joash reigned for forty-one years!

"Yonah may very well have been extremely troubled in observing the remarkable degree of mercy God extended to the wicked, affording a sinful kingdom an undeserved yet prosperous reprieve from its destruction."

Yonah may very well have been extremely troubled in observing the remarkable degree of mercy God extended to the wicked, affording a sinful kingdom an undeserved yet prosperous reprieve from its destruction. This background furnishes us insight into why Yonah was totally unreceptive to God's charge to go to Nineveh and attempted to evade it.

Yonah did not fully relate to God's characteristic of truth, considering it unduly eclipsed by His mercy, patience and kindness.

But God's way of thinking is different from Yonah's and He worked toward educating His prophet toward it. Compassion for all His creatures is a higher value than punishment of sinners and considerations related to it, and is still consistent with truth. It is thus eminently understandable why the sages selected the book of Yonah for the *haftarah* reading of *minha* on Yom Kippur (b. Meg. 31a).

Rabbi Shamah is the Rabbi of Sephardic Synagogue and Congregation Ohel Yishak.

13 ATTRIBUTES OF G-D¹

Mrs. Miriam Tawil

“For the mountains shall move, and the hills shall fall, but My Hesed shall not be moved from you, and the covenant of My peace shall not fall, says Hashem who has mercy on you.” - Isaiah 54:10

With the high holidays upon us we look to examine a most significant piece of our Tefilla - the 13 Middot or Attributes of G-d.

In Perashat Ki Tissa we learn about the unique encounter between the human and the Divine, between Moshe and *Boreh Olam*. In response to Moshe's request *את הראני נא* “כבודך”, G-d places Moshe in the crevice of the rock as “G-d's Glory” as it were passes by Moshe. He (G-d? Moshe?) then proclaims the 13 Middot known as *י"ג מדות* הרחמים. Throughout the year we repeat these attributes in our daily Tefila as well as and especially on Yom Kippur when the 13 Attributes are recited no less than 27 times. The question arises: what exactly are we saying? What do these 13 attributes or qualities mean? Moreover, what do they teach us about G-d?

The 13 attributes are also known as *שמות הרחמים* (“names of mercy”). It has been suggested that by calling out to G-d using these *שמות הרחמים*, we increase the presence of these attributes in the world. In other words, the more we call out G-d's Name, the more G-d “appears” in the world. G-d's presence in turn is equated with the manifestation of *רחמים* (“mercy”) - hence the term *י"ג מדות הרחמים*.

When calling out in G-d's Name, we follow in the footsteps of our Father Avraham. Wherever he sojourned Avraham would habitually call out and proclaim G-d's Name in a world that was far from monotheistic. As the Torah states in Beresheet 21:33, *ויטע אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא שם בשם ה'*, קל עולם. The Ramban comments that Avraham would call out G-d's Name in a great voice in front of the altar he built, thereby making G-d's Name known to mankind. An additional question arises: How does calling out G-d's Name using the 13 Attributes increase His presence in the world?

Let's take a look.

1 & 2. **Hashem, Hashem** - Known as *שם הוי"ה*, this first attribute which is repeated twice implies that G-d is with us both before and even after we sin. *שם הוי"ה* teaches us that *כל באה* - all of existence comes from Him [G-d]. In other words all of existence as we know it would not be possible were it not G-d's willing it to be so every minute of the day. Through this attribute of G-d as Creator we seek G-d's mercy and forgiveness as we are taught - there isn't a righteous person who has not sinned, *אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא* (Kohelet 7:20). We beseech G-d upon whom we are totally reliant for help in rebuilding ourselves anew. *אני ה' קודם שיחטא האדם ואני ה' לאחר שיחטא האדם* - I am G-d before and after the person sins.

3. **Kel** - Known as one of the Names of G-d, both Rashi & Ramban explain *קל* in terms of G-d's strength- *לשון תוקף*, as in *מי קל כמך*, who is like you G-d? Kel represents G-d's power. How is G-d's power to be understood as one of the attributes of mercy? One explanation views the necessity of strength in order to forgive. Here we turn to G-d who is omnipotent - all powerful to forgive us through His strength.

4. **Rahum** - Compassionate, an attribute ironically associated with *Din* (judgement of each individual). As the ultimate Judge, *Boreh Olam* takes into account all the circumstances surrounding the person who transgresses, deciding which if any pardons should be granted. The attribute of *רחמים* is based on internal Divine principles which are activated so as to avert an impending punishment. Not so *חנון*....

5. **Hannun** - Gracious. What happens when the person who transgresses is found guilty and deserving of punishment? In comes *חנון*. The penitent calls out to G-d and He forgives *ושמעתי כי חנון אני*. When the first 4 attributes are insufficient, the undeserved gift of *חנון* is activated. As opposed to *Rahum*, *Hannun* is not based on said internal Divine principles or logic. *Hannun* comes from the depths of one's heart and suffering. It is a primal cry to our father who in turn responds to His children crying out - the same children who carry G-d's Name in the world. As the Torah states in Shemot 22:26, *והיה כי יצעק אלי ושמעתי כי חנון אני*.

¹ Based on *In His Mercy* by Rabbi Ezra Bick

6. **Erekh Appayim** - Why is this attribute of ארך אפים in plural form? What is its significance? In its singular form אף ("nose") is synonymous with anger or fury. A person who is angry breathes heavily so that it appears to the on looker that the anger emanates from the nose. He also tends to react quickly most often without thinking the matter through. Not so G-d. The Gemara in Taanit 2:1 states that G-d behaves as follows: מאריך רוחו עם צדיקים ומאריך רוחו עם רשעים - "G-d is patient both with the righteous and the wicked." Hence, the plural form *Erekh Appayim* is used as opposed to the singular *Erekh Af*. מאריך ("lengthens") can be understood as מרחיק ("distances"). We are taught that G-d, as opposed to human beings, distances Himself from His anger and waits. He "overcomes" His anger by distancing the natural practical consequences of it. According to the Gemara, through the attribute of ארך אפים, G-d holds Himself back as it were not reacting to His anger immediately. However, make no mistake. In the end G-d settles the account גבי די Though Merciful and Compassionate, G-d is not to be taken advantage of. How does man benefit if in the end "accounts will be settled?" By using that precious time between the act of sin and the accounting, to make amends and correct the misdeed. In this case, anger joins with the attributes of mercy to help man return to a better state. Through ארך אפים, G-d delays the punishment due as a result of sin in the hope that the person will use the time wisely, repent and thereby avert it altogether.

7. **Rab Hesed** - *Rab* can be understood as Master so as to imply that G-d is "Master of Kindness." Alternatively *Rab* could be interpreted as a verb meaning that G-d does much Hesed - in greater abundance than other attributes according to the Ramban. G-d in this case "tilts the scales" toward kindness overlooking the scale's precise measurement and instead decides in favor of kindness. When reciting the attribute of *Rab Hesed*, we actually call upon G-d to share a part of the responsibility for our negative actions., since all of existence emanates from Him. It is at that point when the scales tilt in favor of kindness and man is forgiven.

8. **Emet** – Truth; would seem to be out of place in a list of descriptions of G-d's Mercy. However on a certain level the side of evil and guilt can actually help us. How so? G-d created man with free will, the ability to choose between good and evil, right and wrong. As a result, man was created with the ability to sin. Counter intuitively it follows that even sins have merit as they serve as the basis of man's improvement. In this way, sins too may be considered merits provided they are the impetus for positive change. Growth can only occur from a flawed state, in which case there is value inherent in sin which is the necessary basis of repentance.

9. **Nosser Hesed LaAlafim** - is generally understood as G-d's "Preserving Kindness for Thousands of Generations" usually referring to *Zechut Abot* or the merits of our ancestors as stated in the beginning of the Amida prayer. Rashi on the

other hand describes Hesed here as referring to human rather than Divine kindness. When a person performs an act of kindness before G-d according to Rashi, G-d preserves it. A good deed creates goodness where it had not been before thereby increasing the *Shekhina* or G-d's

presence in the world. Life is about progress, ascending towards G-d, reflecting His perfection. But what happens to the goodness that a person creates if ultimately it is forgotten? The answer: *Nosser Hesed LaAlafim* - G-d keeps and preserves kindness for thousands of generations in G-d's own reality, which is eternal and beyond time. A good deed may disappear upon completion; however extending G-d's presence in the world lasts forever. When appealing to this attribute we are committing ourselves to continue the path begun by our forefathers, preserving and advancing their values in an effort to improve ourselves and the world.

So far we have seen the purpose of the Attributes of Mercy as helping to sustain the individual by giving him the possibility of existing despite his sin and to possibly annul or mitigate due punishment. While sin effects the human connection and relationship to G-d, nevertheless the All Merciful G-d of Israel has the power to overcome the

"ה' ה' קל רחום וחנון ארך אפים

ורב חסד ואמת:

נצר חסד לאלפים נשא

עון ופשע וחטאה ונקה:"

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damage done and continue to sustain humanity. While the first 9 attributes revolved around man's life and ability to exist in G-d's presence despite having sinned, the next 4 attributes focus not on the sinner but the sin itself. The next attribute begins the next stage of neutralizing and repairing the damage done.

10 & 11 & 12. **Noseh Avon, VaFesha, VeHata'a** - Seeking to prevent the injuries of sin to the soul, G-d forgives 3 types of misdeeds all under the heading of sin - iniquity, transgression and sin. In this case the sequence moves from the most to least severe sin, עון is intentional or purposeful sin; פשע connotes rebellion while חטאה implies an unintentional sin. In this attribute, G-d is נושא which means literally that He "bears" or "carries" the sin. When one's burden is shared by another it is lessened. So too G-d "lightens our load" by helping to carry them, thereby lightening their weight. Sin here in whatever form inflicts spiritual damage on the individual just by its presence within his character, upon his soul. G-d bears the עון and פשע as if they were just חטאה unintentional sin. In addition, the חטאה is borne by G-d Himself. This attribute implies that G-d protects our souls from the effects of the sin. The stain remains but does not harm the person himself. At this point the individual can assume responsibility to repent and improve.

13. **VeNaqeh** - "And Cleanses" is the final Divine Attribute of Mercy which was revealed to Moshe in נקרת הצור, the cleft of the rock during that intimate exchange between Boreh Olam and His trusted servant. While the 12 preceding attributes guaranteed man's existence despite having sinned, alienation and distance from G-d remain. To repair the situation and return man to closeness with G-d "Cleansing" is needed. ונקה ensures that the one who transgresses can recover the connection to G-d and meaning in his life. There is one condition: G-d cleanses only those who truly repent. Before one repents he exists by G-d's Mercy alone. Following sincere repentance one gains an awareness of his alienated spiritual state and seeks to recapture the closeness through ונקה.

In summary, it must be emphasized that "the Attributes of Mercy enable existence in the current condition of a sinner who has yet to repent so that Teshuba (repentance) can eventually be achieved." Teshuba then is "a goal of Divine

mercy, not a prerequisite." Moreover, these attributes "expand the Divine will to include even our corrupted world and allow for its existence." Through the 13 Attributes we achieve closeness to Boreh Olam. It was G-d Himself who "wrapped Himself as a שליח צבור" (BT Rosh Hashanah 17b) leading the prayers as it were standing with us and listening to our prayers. The Gemara continues: "They shall perform this service before Me and I shall forgive them." יהי רצון that it be so.

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...THE COMPASSIONATE CREATOR

sins, not sinners)! Further, look at the end of the verse: "and let the wicked men be no more." *Since the sins will cease, there will be no more wicked men!* Rather, pray for them that they should repent, and there will be no more wicked. He did pray for them, and they repented.

As the Talmud states (b. Shabbat 133b): "Just as He is gracious and compassionate, you should also be gracious and compassionate."

Rabbi Dweck is the Executive Director of Tebah and a Judaic studies teacher at Yeshiva of Flatbush Middle Division. He is also the Rabbi of the Father-Son Minyan at Sephardic Synagogue





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THE LENGTH OF A SHEBER

Mr. Morris Arking

There are three sounds that we sound on the Shofar, they are *Teqi'ah*, *Shebarim*, and *Teru'ah*. The *Teqi'ah* is one long blast and the *Teru'ah* is the quick 9 pulse sound. The middle sound is the *shebarim* which are short blasts. In most if not all Jewish communities the custom is to sound three short blasts for a *Sheber*, but what about the *minhag* of Aleppo?

According to the custom of Aleppo, when blowing the *Shebarim*, each *Sheber* should be a short sound (less than three beats of a *Teru'ah*). This is unlike the custom of both the Jews of Damascus and of the Ashkenazim that blow a longer sound for each *Sheber*. It is also unlike the opinion of many *Aharonim* that require at least three *Teru'ah* beats (*Terumetin*) for each *Sheber*. The reason for this requirement is because at least three *Shebarim* are blown, and between the three *Shebarim*, nine *Terumetin* are required. However in Aleppo **five** *Shebarim* were blown and therefore they fulfilled the requirement of nine *Terumetin* with **five** shorter *Shebarim*.

This custom is documented in the book *Yisshaq Yeranen*, which is a collection of letters written to and from Hakham Yisshaq Shehebar A"H, the former Chief Rabbi of the Halabi community in Argentina. On this topic he corresponded with his teacher Hakham Mosé Tawil A"H the former Chief Rabbi of Aleppo. The reason for this custom is to fulfill the *Missvah* according to the first *Yesh Omrim* in *Shulhan 'Arukh*

O"H 590:3, which is the opinion of Rashi. According to Rashi the minimum length of a *Teru'ah/Teqi'ah* is three *Terumetin*. We follow the opinion of the Rashba that the minimum length of a *Teru'ah/Teqi'ah* is nine *Terumetin* (the second *Yesh Omrim* in *Shulhan 'Arukh*). However if we blow the *Shebarim* according to the second opinion then each *Sheber* would be three *Terumetin*, which according to Rashi would

be three *Teqi'ot* (not one set of *Shebarim*). So in order to fulfill the *Missvah* according to both opinions that are quoted in *Shulhan 'Arukh* (Rashi and Rashba), we blow each *Teqi'ah/Teru'ah* a minimum of nine *Terumetin* (the *Teqi'ot* for *TaShRaT* are 18 *Terumetin*), but each *Sheber* less than three *Terumetin*, and fulfill the requirement of nine *Terumetin* (the second *Yesh Omrim*) by blowing five *Shebarim*. This is based on Maran's comment in the *Bet Yosef* (in that same *Siman*):

"...in Aleppo five Shebarim were blown..."

"VeHa'olam Lo Nahagu Ken, Ella Meqasserim HaSheber Kol Mah She-Efshar", "but the world did not practice as such, rather they shortened the sheber as much as possible."

So pay attention and listen to the blowing of the shofar. How is the shofar sounded where you pray, like *minhag* Halab or like the rest of the Jewish world?

Mr. Arking is a regular contributor to Qol Ha-Qahal on Sephardic customs. He teaches classes in Congregation Beth Torah

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...YOM TERU'AH: THE SHOFAR...

Belsen trying to barter cigarettes for bread. He then noticed a stone flying towards him over the barbed wire from the other sector in the concentration camp. He picked up the stone and the small gray note wrapped around it. He slipped the note into his pocket and kept walking.

When he was back in his bunk he read the note. It was written in Hebrew by a Dutch Jew named Hayyim Borack, who had Argentinian papers. Borack wrote that he succeeded in obtaining a Shofar and he would be able to smuggle the Shofar in one of the coffee cauldrons the morning before Rosh Hashanah.

“When people commit to enriching the lives around them, life becomes kinder, richer, more satisfying. The world changes.”

In doing so, the Jews would lose a cauldron of coffee (as the Shofar would be covered with a tiny amount of coffee, just enough to conceal it), but they would get a Shofar on Rosh Hashanah.

Fischelberg took a vote amongst the Polish Jews and they agreed to sacrifice their coffee rations and get the Shofar for Rosh Hashanah. Obviously, this was not only about the coffee they would miss. If the Germans found out about the transaction, they would pay with their very lives.

The smuggling of the Shofar was a success. No one was caught and the Shofar was not damaged. The Polish Jews risked their lives again as they blew the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah for the inmates.

Miraculously, the Germans did not hear the blasts. The Jews did though. They felt that the sounds of the Shofar had made a dent in the Nazi wall of humiliation and slavery. The blasts of the Shofar gave those Jews a bit of temporary freedom from their oppressors and brought them hope that someday freedom would bring down the barbed wire fences of Bergen_Belsen.

Excerpt from Chapter Ten: **“How Can We Use Rosh Hashanah to JUMPSTART Our Lives?”**

Recharging Our Batteries

Rosh Hashanah should be a regrouping of our energies, a recharging of our batteries. It is a day of introspection and inner reflection. It is a day to refocus our core values; a day of prayer; of resolutions; of faith. The secrets to happiness and fulfillment are hidden in the Rosh Hashanah experience. It isn't about mere confession. It is about new inspiration, renewal, reflection and love.

On Rosh Hashanah we repeat over and over: *“Hayom Harat Olam.”* Today we start again. We get the chance to begin anew. Today we conceive not just a new year, but a new world. This is because every human being can make a difference in the world. When people resolve to improve their lives, all our lives improve. **When people commit to enriching the lives around them, life becomes kinder, richer, more satisfying. The world changes.**

The concept is that every positive action affects everything else. We don't live in a vacuum. When we help another human being, the world changes. When one man prays for the health of another, we all feel better.

The Law of Conservation of Energy is a rule of physics that states that matter cannot be destroyed. Now according to Einstein, energy is matter ($E = MC^2$), thus energy as well cannot be lost. Perhaps a positive act will create positive energy and the repercussions will ripple forward and vibrate back.

Living with integrity liberates us and gives our lives meaning. As Robert Byrne once said, “the purpose of life is a life of purpose...”

We can use the holiday of Rosh Hashanah as a vehicle for change and improvement. We can pray for the courage and strength to carry out the plan. Finally, we can use the sounds of the Shofar to *jumpstart* our internal batteries, to jumpstart our lives.

Tizku Leshanim Rabot!

Mr. Doueck's book is available online and in stores.

BON APPÉTIT! - בתאבון!

Universal among Sephardic communities of North Africa and the Middle East is the custom of eating quince instead of apples. In Arabic this dish is called *sfarjal* or in Ladino – *Bimbrio*



What are the reasons for this custom?

1. In many regions quince tends to grow in abundance at this time of year so it's readily available. Some have even argued that biblical apples are in fact quinces.¹ The reason for this is twofold. Firstly apples were not as common as quince in the Middle East in biblical times and secondly; apples are frequently referred to as *Tapuhei Zahab* (for example *Mishle* 25:11, *Shir haShirim* 2:3 and many other places)- a description more appropriate for a quince.
2. Many rabbinic sources mention having a special food item for *Shehehiyanoo* on the 2nd night of the holiday, quince becomes the go to fruit of choice.
3. As with all the numerous symbolic foods that are eaten on Rosh Hashanah night, our *hakhamim* always looked for a connection with the name of the food and

what sort of play on words could be utilized to praise God and beseech him with our requests. The Quince was no different. This fruit is known to us from early on and in the Gemara (Shabbat 45 and Bessah 26) it is called **Haboosh**. As such certain *Hakhamim* instituted a special *Yehi Rasson* to say over it on the night of Rosh Hashanah.

*Yehi Rasson.....Shetehé Shanah Zo Tobah
Oomtooqah, VeSheyessoo Habooshé 'Ammekha
Yisrael Mimmasaram LeOrah.*

May it be your will.....that this year should be good and sweet, and that all imprisoned members of the Israelite nation should be released and set free.

Regardless of the meaning behind the custom of partaking of quince on this holiday, it is a time honored tradition amongst Sephardim the world over. Let us keep the tradition alive, enjoy its tastiness, and pass on the tradition to future generations.

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...THE 7 WORDS OF HIGHLY...

"it's me. I am to blame. I am at fault. I sinned. I did wrong. I made mistakes and I'm sorry." At that point, his neshamah was taken and he was accepted into *Olam Habbah*.

The message of teshuba is abundantly clear. Too often in life we look to pass the blame. During the *Yamim Noraim*, however, we stand before *Hakadosh Barukh Hu* and we say, "G-d, it was nobody else's fault but my own. I am to blame. I am sorry. I will not do it again, or at least I will certainly try." It is uncomfortable, nobody likes to do it, and it may even be against our human nature, but that is what *Bore Olam* is asking. As we experience the high holidays this year, let us ask ourselves whether or not we can truly and meaningfully utter those seven words: *I did something wrong and I'm sorry*.

Rabbi Tobias is a Teacher at Magen David High School and the Rabbi of Young Beth Torah.

¹ See further; *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food* By Gil Marks



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THE SOUNDS OF THE SHOFAR

Rabbi Abraham B. Hecht A"H

Sha'are Zion, Rosh Hashanah 1969

The primary Mitzvah and the central symbol of the Rosh Hashanah holy day services is the blowing of the Shofar. The Torah itself (Numbers 29:1) commands us to sound the Shofar on Rosh Hashanah and many of the Holy Day prayers revolve about the various meanings and teachings inherent in the Shofar. As we listen carefully to the wailing sounds of the Shofar, our ears become attuned to many other sounds being heard around the world.

We can best understand the importance of certain sounds in our lives by examining an extraordinary Talmudic (Yuma 20b) passage:

“Three sounds travel from one end of the world to the other: the sound of the sun in its orbit, the tumultuous noise of Rome and the sound of the soul as it leaves the body (in death).”

If we penetrate the inner meaning of this statement of our sages, we shall be rewarded with a clear understanding of many of the great events of our present day.

The Sun in its Orbit

The first sound our sages refer to is the sound of the cosmos, the collected sounds of the heavenly bodies and of all that occurs in outer space. When Joshua wished to delay the onset of evening so that the Jews could win their battle with Gibeon, he declared:

“Sun, stand *dom*—still upon Gibeon; and you, Moon, in the valley of Aijalon.”

The Hebrew word *dom* means “be still” and the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 2:22) accordingly asks why the word *amod* which means “stop” was not used. The Midrash answers that each of the heavenly bodies utters a constant praise to its Creator as it moves through the universe. Since Joshua would have stopped the praise of the sun when he ordered it to halt, he substituted his own praise-song for

that of the sun—“Then spoke Joshua to the L-rd”—and commanded the sun to “be still.”

We learn from the Yalkut that the entire cosmos, every element of the stellar scheme—is part of the vast universal symphony, which continually utters praise to the A-mighty.

We, too, recently were privileged to hear sounds and witness extraordinary sights from outer space. An estimated two billion people either saw, heard or read of the momentous occasion of man’s first step on the moon. Since we know that no event, no matter how trivial, occurs without divine reason (Hullin 7b), it is surely manifest that such a global event as the moon-landing must hold many lessons for mankind. Let us attempt to discover what they are.

First, and perhaps most important, the scientific experiments performed on the moon and with the moon rocks back home, prove without a doubt the veracity of the Biblical account of creation. To their utter astonishment, the geologists, astrophysicists, selenologists, etc. all discovered that the sun, earth and moon had come into being at the same time.

For years, various scientific theories had been promulgated postulating dates millions of years apart for the “creation” of the various parts of the solar system. Suddenly, all of these theories must be discarded and even the scientists have been forced to reevaluate the Biblical account of Creation.

If the scientists were to think clearly and objectively for but a moment, they would realize that all of their theories, all their calculations, in fact virtually every phase of the space program, is dependent upon the perfection of G-d’s Creation. The tremendous precision of the planetary orbits, the nearly unbelievable exactitude of the heavenly trajectories, makes possible the meticulous calculations necessary for space travel. In a haphazard universe, in a rudderless universe, the scientists would be lost and no long-range plans would be conceivable.

We cannot help, at this point, but recall the eloquent and timeless words of King David:

“Praise ye the L-rd from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights; . . . Praise ye Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light . . . He has made a decree which shall not be transgressed” (Psalm 148).

Truly the L-rd has arranged the universe so that His Heavenly laws are immutable and unchangeable. They stand as the greatest testimony to the truth of the story of Creation in Genesis and have only been reaffirmed by the recent scientific “findings and discoveries.”

The day of Rosh Hashanah carries an added significance in that our sages (Rosh Hashanah 8a) consider it the day Adam was created “out of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). Is it not worthy of reflection that this year we may understand more deeply the Creator’s plan that some day the “man made from dust” should study the “moon dust” and through his studies return to the truth of his creation and purpose in life!

Clearly, man was meant by G-d to explore the reaches of the universe and to make giant technological strides. Yet each of those “giant steps for mankind” must lead to a new moral reawakening, to a new commitment to the ethical life and to a return to absolute belief in his Creator. Let us glance at a few of the lessons we can learn from the recent moon landing.

As the first astronaut stepped carefully off the lunar module unto the unexplored territory of the moon, he first walked backwards a few steps, with his eyes never leaving the space vehicle. A thought comes to mind concerning the symbolism of those monumental few steps:

No matter how much progress we make; no matter how far into the future we seem to reach, we should never turn our backs on the past. The past is not an expendable article, which, once used, can be discarded and forgotten. It can be a continuous aid and guide in making decisions for

the present and planning for the future. As we remember the past, we cannot help but appreciate the vast knowledge and experience of all those who preceded us and whose efforts brought us to where we are.

As the astronauts walked on the moon, they had to constantly carry oxygen packs strapped to their backs. The lesson to be derived is a double one:

- a. No matter how high man reaches, no matter where he arrives, he must always remember his humble origins; without the precious oxygen, he cannot exist and will soon perish. If for one moment he forgets himself and think he is at home in an alien environment, he will die from neglect to his basic needs.
- b. When man prepares to enter a new element, be it a new job with new temptations, a new neighborhood with unencountered moral perils, he should carry with him an “oxygen pack” of life-giving Torah and mitzvot.



We can learn a profound lesson from the very survival of the astronauts against a multitude of potential calamities. Just as the astronauts overcome the natural forces of gravity, an airless and hostile environment, etc., so do the

Jews continue to survive, by the grace of G-d, in a hostile world. Just as the astronauts “broke out of” moon orbit to return to earth, so are the Jews not controlled by the confines and “spheres of influence” of other nations and peoples. *Ain mazel l’Yisrael* (Shabbat 156a)—The Jewish nation is not controlled by fate but is under the personal and watchful eye of the L-rd Himself.

We may cull another valuable lesson from the careful way in which each astronaut is monitored by instruments on earth. Any change in temperature, blood pressure, etc. registers immediately on carefully watched instruments

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and measures are taken to make sure no permanent damage is done.

If we think of ourselves here on earth as astronauts and our bodies and souls as attached to a great heavenly meter, we will surely be infinitely more careful of our actions and their consequences. Surely, these are great and pragmatic lessons to be learned from man's first adventures in space. Yet, because the event is so monumental, there must be even more that we can learn.

Let us return to Neil Armstrong's very first step upon the surface of the moon. Although he had done the same thing countless times in "lunar simulators," he nevertheless feared to jump with both feet. First, he carefully put down one foot, testing the ground beneath him. All the "simulators" in the — world cannot assure man what the "real thing" will be like.

In the same way, a young man or woman embarking upon the exciting new adventures life has to offer must be cautious and careful about each new experience. "Jumping into" the world of drugs, alcohol, pep pills, etc. can prove disastrous and indeed fatal. Yet, carefully testing all new ground, asking questions, investigating, can often save much misery and even a life. How many young men "enjoy" and then "destroy" themselves in one tragically vicious cycle!

The dangers are many and the pitfalls are ubiquitous. A boy may go out with a non-Jewish girl, thinking it is "just for kicks." Soon he thinks he is in love and has brought anguish and tragedy to himself and his family. The same, of course, happens to the girls, and all because of a lack of foresight and caution in these crucial matters.

If we learned properly the lessons of space, we could eliminate our social problems as well. Total preparation for the complexities of life, the exercise of care and caution, the recognition that every action is "monitored" up above—all these attitudes can help to save our generation from the moral destruction towards which it seems to be heading.

The Sounds of Rome

If we add here the words "lack of" sounds from Rome, we can put our finger upon a sound that "travels from one end of the world to the other." Rome represents the center of Christianity, and certainly Catholicism, in the world. Recently, the Arabs have once again threatened a "holy war" against the Jews, this time because a demented person set fire to a Mosque in Jerusalem.

We may justifiably ask, "Why are the church leaders silent in the face of these threats to annihilate an entire people?" The answer may be found in the eloquent and poignant "Letter to the World from Jerusalem" by "Eliezer ben Yisrael." In this classic document, the religious leaders of the world are fearlessly condemned for not intervening, or at least protesting, the countless times Jerusalem was ransacked and ravaged by Arab forces.

Where were the cries for the internationalization of Jerusalem when the Holy city was being illegally held by Jordan? Where were the cries of outrage when the Jordanians defiled the gravestones of Jewish cemeteries and put them to unspeakable uses? The silence from Rome then clashes sharply with the "sounds from Rome" since 1967, when the Vatican calls shrilly again and again for Israel to give up its precious Jerusalem. Truly, the sounds and silences of Rome can be heard and reverberate around the world.

The Sound of the Soul Leaving the Body

Today we are all witness to the last gasps of society and civilization. What was hailed at the beginning of this century as the beginning of a new era of enlightenment, scientific progress and amazing discoveries, has actually developed into the beginning of the end.

Morality, the cornerstone of Western civilization—the soul of the world—is rapidly exiting, leaving in its place a vacuum which is quickly being filled with deleterious and repugnant philosophical systems.

The rush towards the new and more permissive standards of sexual conduct, which is leading to total promiscuity even amongst married couples, has all but erased the time-hallowed hallmarks of the sanctity of marriage and the sacred nature of sexual relationships.

There is nothing illicit anymore, since all that really matters is the degree of pleasure one receives and gives, be it sanctioned or forbidden.

The increase in teenage pregnancies, the problems of pregnant school children, venereal disease, alcoholism, drugs, violence, murder and rape cases, the growth of the crime rate each year, the corruption of men in the high offices of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, the patent dishonesty of governments in their dealings with world problems, the constant and growing threat of nuclear war, all point to the demise of civilization. If one could put his ear to the world, one would hear its soul leaving, just as the air leaves a large punctured balloon—slowly, laboriously but definitely.

With these conditions prevailing, the piercing, rousing sounds of the Shofar take on a new vibrancy and urgency. The Shofar calls the Jew to heed the message of

morality—a return to G-d, His Torah and Missvot.

Let us resolve on this New Year to learn from the voice of outer space, from the sounds of Rome and to feel the anguish of a world losing its soul. Then we will indeed be inspired to lead a pure and decent life as formulated for us in the Torah and we shall all merit the granting by G-d of a happy and blessed New Year. Amen.

Rabbi Abraham B Hecht A'H served as a rabbi in our community from 1945-1995.

He was The Rabbi of Shaare Zion from 1960-1995.

The above was the speech he gave in Shaare Zion on Rosh Hashanah 1969.

We would like to thank his children for giving us the permission to publish it here.

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Rabbi David M. Tawil

For more than two decades, the Sephardic Rabbinical College (SRC) has been the gold standard for producing rabbinic leaders of the Syrian Community. Whether it is our Yeshibot, Synagogues, Day Camps or Hesed Organizations, it is difficult to find an institution which has not been impacted by an SRC graduate. Under the tutelage of our Rashé Yeshibah, Hakham Shimon Alouf and Rabbi Harold Sutton, our students are challenged daily to think and analyze not only the words of our Sages, but also how to take these lessons and apply them to our modern day world.

After a seven year rigorous program of in-depth study of Halakhah and Gemara, graduates receive five Semikhot (Rabbinic ordinations) in the topics of Shabbat, Issur Ve'Heter (Kashrut), Abelut (Laws of Mourning), Huppah and Kiddushin (Laws of Wedding Ceremonies), and Niddah (Family Purity). In order to produce well-rounded Rabbanim, included in the curriculum which was inspired by Mr. Al Gindi and composed by Rabbi Harold Sutton, are "Ben Adam La'Habero" classes (Laws between fellow men), pedagogy classes and public speaking courses, and most importantly all full-time students must receive a college degree.

The SRC follows a method of study in keeping with its Sephardic heritage. Tradition is a point of emphasis, impressed upon us by our teachers, to continue learning Torah and Halakhah and living in a manner consistent with that of those who came before us, and adapting those values to reconcile with the world we live in today. Rabbi Ike Hanan, a current 4th year student of the *Semikhah* program puts it best: "The SRC is unique in that it enables its students to join

an unbroken chain of tradition in its *derekh halimud* (learning style) and *derekh pesikah* (deciding Halakhic law), passed down from our forefathers from generation to generation all the way to our masters and teachers Hakham Obadiah Yoseph zt"l and Hakham Meir Mazuz shlit"a, who passed it on to our hakhamim at the SRC Hakham Shimon Alouf shlit"a and Rabbi Harold Sutton shlit"a. The SRC is unmatched in its authenticity and loyalty to our illustrious Sephardic tradition. Every student here is a link that will serve to perpetuate our proud heritage."

Over the past few years the Sephardic Rabbinical College has also developed as a hub for boys attending college, many of whom spent a year studying in Israel, to further their Torah studies and skills, while advancing their Middot and relationship

with our community and our Sephardic heritage. With this in mind, last year we created a new Undergraduate Program, to provide a healthy and uplifting environment for boys to study both during the day and at night, while encouraging

their advancement in secular studies as they move towards establishing a career for themselves.

The potential for this track is enormous, as our community is in need of lay leaders both with knowledge of the world as well as the wisdom of our great Sages. "The SRC gives you the necessary tools to build your framework for life", says Edward Benjamin, a graduate of Hillel Yeshivah in 2014 and current student of the SRC undergraduate program; "In all your personal, college, and eventually professional interactions, you have to represent Torah and Hesed and the SRC helps you build that framework to approach the world as a Ben-Torah."

What has been incredibly rewarding for many of our students, has been the side by side interaction between the younger college students and the more seasoned *Semikhah*

students. The atmosphere of the Bet Midrash is intense and exciting, as a palpable 'cloud of spirituality' permeates the room as students pour over text and analyze their lives all in a common goal to get closer to Hashem.

The mantra of the College program is "that there is something for everyone". The centerpiece of the program is the morning Bet Midrash track. We work together with students to arrange their college schedules in order to reserve their morning for Torah study from 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. During this window students experience a Halakhah shiur given by Hakham Shimon Alouf, where text skills are tested and refined through the all-important study of Bet Yosef and Shulhan Arukh. From there students prepare Gemara with partners and have a shiur with Rabbi Yaakov Savdie, a former graduate of the SRC and head of Judaic Studies Curriculum at Magen David Yeshivah High School. "There is truly nothing like starting off your day with prayer and intense Torah study", says Rabbi David Tawil, a current 6th year student of the *Semikhah* program; "Before I entered the program full-

"The SRC follows a method of study in keeping with its Sephardic heritage."

time to become a Rabbi, I studied with Rabbi Sutton for half a day while I attended college. Starting your day off at the SRC puts your entire day into perspective, and gives the subsequent college class tremendous meaning".

For students who have a difficult time blocking off such a large chunk of the day, either because of work or school, there is a two hour a day option from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., where students study practical topics in Halakhah that prepare them for real world situations. Finally, our night program has flourished tremendously and has become a highlight both for those who attend the SRC during the day as well as those who only have free time at night. Under the management of Rabbi David Tawil and Ovadia Sutton, there are a minimum of twenty five students filling the Bet Midrash from 8-10 p.m. Learning is done with partners as well as in class settings. As mentioned, there is something for everyone to enjoy at the SRC, no matter the skill level or schedule one has; our Rabbinical team is committed to providing a

meaningful learning experience for anyone who wishes to attend.

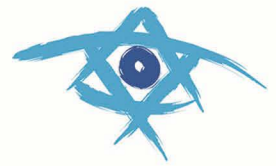
It is written in Abot of R' Natan: "All who make their Torah primary and their work secondary, they make him primary in the world to come". Many commentaries explain one's attitude towards Torah study is not necessarily reflected by quantity of time but more so by quality of time. Even one hour of the day spent entrenched in Torah study can catapult one into the category of being primary in the world to come. With the help of God, the SRC has been able to have both quantity and quality in its students, a standard we committed to maintaining as we continue to run after our goals of educating each member of our community in the path of Torah, Mitzvot and worship of Hashem.

Rabbi Tawil is studying at the SRC and is the Rabbi of the youth minyan for Shaare Shalom



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