

The YULAMDAN

The Wilf Campus Torah Journal

SEPTEMBER 2014 • TISHREI 5775

Volume IV Issue I

Inyana D'yoma

Elul: A Time for New Beginnings

RABBI MARC PENNER

Elul is a time for new beginnings: a new zman, a new year at Yeshiva, and opportunities to rethink and restart the way we conduct our lives.

But beginnings are not simple. As the midrash tells us (Midrash Sechel Tov, Shemot): “kol hatchalot kashot” - “all beginnings all difficult”. The Maharal explains that beginnings are difficult because all beginnings represent a shinui - a change - and change is inherently difficult. There is an inertia that drives our daily lives and propels us to continue on the path that we have been travelling. A new beginning requires us to challenge our assumptions and to actively choose a new way of thinking and acting.

Every year, I look to a powerful sentence penned by Rav Yitzchak Arama some 500 years ago. He writes that “ha-hatchalah hi yotair mei-chatzi ha-kol,” - “the beginning is more than half of the entire thing!” Making the decision to change, to forge a new path, and take the first steps on that new road, is actually more than half of what we need to do! We are often intimidated by the possibility of real change and what it will mean for us down the road. The Akeidat Yitzchak tells us that those fears are the product of the yetzer hara. The yetzer hara makes us

think too hard about the consequences of our good decisions. The way to succeed is by committing to change and by starting the process of a new way of thinking and new way of acting. By succeeding in the hatchalah - we bring ourselves much of the way towards lasting change.

Perhaps this helps us understand the many chumrot that are associated with the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah. The Shulchan Aruch quotes a particular chumrah to eat pat Yisrael exclusively during the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah. For ten days we may change our diet, but whom are we fooling? Do we really think that the Judge believes that we are different people because of chumrot that we accept for ten days?

Many years ago, I heard Rav Rosensweig shlit”a suggest that we are trying to motivate ourselves much more than we are trying to “clean up our act” while under Heavenly scrutiny. By taking upon greater levels of observance during these ten days we make a hatchalah. Perhaps we will not continue to keep these practices beyond Yom Kippur. But we will have started a process, and according to the Akeidat Yitzchak, we have even made great progress, in the process of becoming more punctilious ovdei Hashem.

Meir Goodman
Editor-In-Chief

Ephraim Meth
Elchanan Poupko
Editorial Board

Jeremy Perlow
Tzvi Goldstein
Editors



For submissions or questions,
please email:
TheLamdan@gmail.com



Visit us online:
www.thelamdan.com

It is interesting to note that the Rambam in Hilchot Teshuvah seems to present two sequences for the process of teshuvah. In perek alef, as the Rambam describes the process of vidui, he describes the following order: (1) confession, followed by (2) regret which is, in turn, concretized with (3) commitment to change in practice. Then, in perek bet, he reverses the order. What is teshuva, asks the Rambam? A person must first act by distancing himself from the sin in deed and thought. Once he has committed to change he will be driven to regret the past.

It could be that the Rambam is describing two different paths to self-improvement. In perek alef, a person is asked to list his sins. Having done so, he or she is overcome by regret and driven to action. In perek bet, however, a commitment to change leads the way. Neither confession, nor guilt, initiates the process. Instead, action leads the way. It is only after realizing that the change is - and always was - possible, that regret sets in for having not acted sooner. The hatchalah - the decision to do better and the first steps towards that goal - is what leads the way and makes

everything possible.

The Midrash Rabbah on Devarim brings a fascinating explanation of the pasuk in Mishlei (24:7) "Wisdom is as pearls to the fool; in the gate he will not open his mouth". The Midrash tells a story of a simple man who entered the study hall and saw people learning. He was impressed by their enthusiasm, and therefore asked one of them what he needs to do to learn the Torah. The man told him that he must begin with the written law, once he has mastered that, he moves on to Mishnah, then Gemara, then Midrash and so on. The fool only sees the magnitude of the Torah - the expensive pearls - and gives up before he has begun. Though he has come through the gate of the beit midrash, he fails to capitalize on his opportunity for greatness and quietly disappears from view.

We will not all finish, and we will not finish all things. But the hatchalot that we bravely take in Elul without focusing on the long road of change ahead can propel us to great heights. May the merit of such hatchalot secure us a ketiva vachatima tova.

OUT OF THE BLESSING AND THE CURSE

RABBI HERSHEL REICHMAN

Parashat Nitzavim talks to us in a very specific way: "When these things shall come upon you - the blessing and the curse - which I have placed before you, repent with your hearts, amongst all the nations where Hashem, your G-d, has sent you."

Our generation has lived with the blessing and the curse. We have suffered from the Holocaust and have been part of the rebirth of our national homeland in Israel. And more, we continue to experience the blessing of a burgeoning Jewish life in Israel while at the same time suffer with the curse of innocent Jews wantonly and cruelly murdered by Jewish enemies.

As Ramban points out in his Torah commentary, the frightening accuracy of the Torah's predictions of Jewish history, beginning with Parshat Ki Savo until the end of Sefer Devarim, is perhaps the greatest vindication of the truth of all of Torah. It thus behooves us to pay close attention to what the Torah challenges us to do when these events occur.

The challenge that the Torah issues can be described in one word: return! "Return to Hashem your G-d and listen to His voice in accordance with all I have commanded you today, you and your children with all of your heart and soul." We are the generation of the curse and blessing. Our challenge is to be the generation of return.

How do we return? There are two ways. Sometimes, teshuva is fast - a total transformation - a leap of faith. A boy from the cornfields of Iowa, with no formal Jewish education, gets on a plane, and the next day he is a yeshiva bachur in New York.

At other times, teshuva is a painstaking, gruelling, step-by-step process. A totally frum person tries to tackle lashon hara, evil gossiping. Some days he can go a whole day free from this evil. Other days he falls into his old habits. Progress is slow, with ups and downs. Nevertheless, he is participating in a form of teshuva.

For some of us, the first category of teshuva, the total transformation of self, is doable. For these people, teshuva is such a sweet blessing. Sin is totally abandoned and a life of holiness ensues.

For most of us, though, teshuva is a slow, step-by-step process. We have successes and failures. Hopefully, with Hashem's help, we make noticeable progress over time.

I would like to mention a few areas to the bachurei hayeshiva where I humbly feel we should focus our efforts:

1) Chazal say that our troubles in Galus are a result of sinat chinam, blind hatred of Jew to Jew. Clearly, we see the midah k'neged midah, G-d's trait for trait justice, when unfortunately, Heaven forbid, Muslim extremists,

in their blind hatred for Jews, launch rockets at innocent civilians. If we would only love Jews blindly and unconditionally, then certainly we would be doing a great deal towards removing this horrendous phenomenon. Everyone can change in his daily interaction with others. We should treat every Jew as our dearest brother and friend no matter how much they may annoy us.

2) Chazal say our Golus is a result of lack of respect for Rabbanim. Do we give our Torah teachers and Rabbis the respect they deserve? It begins with the Mitzvah to stand up for a Torah scholar, but includes so much more. In every aspect, our attitude, rhetoric, and actions, should reflect the greatest respect, awe, and admiration for our

Rabbanim.

3) Torah study is the greatest protection for Jews. We should be as diligent as possible in our sedarim schedules, and maximize Torah learning.

4) Israel and its Jews are suffering. We are one people - one body and soul. We are hurting together. We should visit Israel at least once a year (winter/summer break). We should help the tragic survivors of terror in any way possible. Their problem is literally ours.

None of the above is doable overnight, but we have no choice. We must do this no matter how long and painstaking it is, and our Father in Heaven will help us and listen to our prayers for a ktiva v'chatima tovah.

VA'ASITEM OLAH: SELF SACRIFICE IN THE ROSH HASHANAH DAVENING

YOEL EPSTEIN

Rav Chaim Volozhiner makes a startling, yet basic observation regarding the Rosh Hashanah davening. In Nefesh Chaim Sha'ar Beis, Perek Yud Aleph, Rav Chaim points out that the text of the Amidah for Rosh Hashanah makes no mention of our personal desires for the new year. Instead, the Rosh Hashanah liturgy consists chiefly of requests concerning the future enhancement and increased manifestation of Hashem's kingship and glory in our world. Furthermore, Rav Chaim states that even the weekday Shmoneh Esrei, which on the surface appears chiefly concerned with personal needs, is really meant to be directed towards a higher purpose. While reciting Shmoneh Esrei, we should try to consider how our needs are also important to Hashem. By keeping this in mind we are no longer davening just for ourselves but also for Hashem. Rav Chaim proves this idea from the fact that the t'filos were created as a replacement for the korban tamid, which was a korban olah - a sacrifice which was entirely consumed on the mizbeach, leaving no portion behind for human use. Similarly, even as we pray for own needs in our daily t'filos, we must focus as much as possible on what Hashem wants.

What emerges from Rav Chaim's words is that the Amidah of Rosh Hashanah and the Amidah of the rest of the year share a basic commonality and yet are also very different. They are similar in that they both are intended to guide us to think about Hashem's desire rather than our own. At the same time, the two Amidos are different in that the year-round Amidah guides us to reach out to Hashem by way of our own needs, while the Rosh Hasha-

nah Amidah guides us to reach out to Hashem by ignoring our own needs and instead completely focusing on what He wants.

Rav Chaim's insight into both the commonality and difference between the Rosh Hashanah and daily t'filos - and specifically his allusion to the korban olah - is echoed and amplified by an idea mentioned in the Mishnah B'rurah. In Siman Taf Kuf Tzadei Alef, Sif Katan Vav, the Mishnah B'rurah discusses the custom of reciting Selichos during the four days that lead up to Rosh Hashanah. One of the reasons cited for the custom is that a person is required to examine a potential korban for blemishes (mumim) for a total of four days, before it can be deemed as acceptable to be brought on the mizbeach. How does saying Selichos parallel checking for mumim? The Mishna B'rurah explains this with an incredible insight from the pesukim about the korbanos of Rosh Hashanah. Usually, the Torah describes our obligation to bring a korban olah with the words "V'hikravtem olah" "You shall offer an olah" (e.g. Bamidbar 28:19); however, with regards to Rosh Hashanah the Torah says "va'asisem olah" "You should make a korban olah" (Bamidbar, 29:2). This difference alludes to the idea that the true korban olah of Rosh Hashanah is not the animal we bring; rather, we must "make" a korban by working on perfecting ourselves and sacrificing our desires for Hashem's sake. Since we are offering ourselves as korbanos, it follows that we should examine ourselves for four days- and this is accomplished through the four days of Selichos and t'shuvah which precede Rosh Hashanah.

The Mishnah B'rurah's characterization of our daily service as bringing an olah echoes Rav Chaim's conception of the daily t'filos. Additionally, the Mishnah B'rurah's further characterization of the Rosh Hashanah service as making ourselves into an olah sheds further light on Rav Chaim's differentiation between the t'filah of Rosh Hashanah and that of rest of the year. The t'filos of the whole year involve recognizing our own desires and

yet trying to uplift them and connect them as much as possible to Hashem's will. This highly significant, yet incomplete, sublimation of our desires is akin to bringing an olah. The t'filah of Rosh Hashanah neglects to mention our personal desires and guides us to focus entirely on the enhancement of God's presence in this world, as it reflects the unique opportunity of Rosh Hashanah as a time to offer ourselves as korbanos.

REPENTANCE: A CHANGE WE CAN BELIEVE IN?

ELCHANAN POUPKO

As we approach the *Yamim Nora'im* and the ten days of repentance, we tend to feel a déjà vu; we feel a déjà vu that is not necessarily always a positive one. As we reflect, introspect, and examine what it is that we have done wrong this year, as we wonder "what is it that I could have done differently this year?" and see what it is that we can do going forward, we uncomfortably realize that it is these very same thoughts that we had last year at this same time of the year. We realize that there are many things which we would like to change now that we wanted to change last year at this time of the year. We realize that there are resolutions that we are about to make now, that we made last year, but failed to live up to. This can become depressing and disabling as we approach the process of change and *Teshuva* (repentance). How can we possibly attempt to do *Teshuva* when we know that similar attempts have failed so much in the past? Sometimes we even feel that we are embracing hypocrisy as we pay lip service to the concept of *Teshuva* while knowing very well that the changes we are aspiring to may be well beyond our reach.

This difficulty becomes all the more serious when looking at Maimonides' prerequisites for *Teshuva*. The Rambam states: "What constitutes *Teshuva*? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart, never to commit them again...[He must reach the level where] **He who knows the hidden will testify concerning him that he will never return to this sin again...**"

This standard of repentance seems to be so difficult that it is difficult to think of a person who indeed meets this standard; whom can we point to in confidence and say that the Master of the world can testify that he will never commit this sin ever again? How then, can we properly and sincerely attempt to commit ourselves to a lasting change and embark on this spiritual journey with the confidence that we will indeed find it to be rewarding?

In order to properly approach this issue we must address the concept of *Teshuva* as a process and not as an isolated action. Jewish thinkers of the modern era have outlined the following approach, though each in their own unique style.

While *Teshuva* can be looked at as an isolated action, it can also be looked at as a process. Indeed the act of *Teshuva* and regret for a given sin can be a one-time action in which one quickly realizes that they have done something wrong and immediately resolves never to return to such an action. This act of *Teshuva*, if sincere and determined, has an immediate impact allowing one to rid himself of the guilt associated with the sin and absolving oneself of the punishment and impurity that result from sinning.

At the same time, another aspect of *Teshuva* is the process of *Teshuva*¹. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, author of the *Tanya*, writes that "Teshuva is not only in he who sins, but it is rather for every person because the concept of *Teshuva* is to bring the soul (*neshama*) to its original source and root...where it was included in its Creator blessed be He"². Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, the father of the modern day Mussar movement in his famous letter, also explains *Teshuva* as a process of approaching where we truly belong. He suggests that by learning the halakhot of the field one violated, one begins to go on a path of cleansing himself and ridding himself of the potential to go on this path again.

We are thus reminded of the Midrashic account wherein (Midrash Rabbah 5:2) God tells the Jewish people "open for me an opening the size of a needle-hole, and I will open for you an opening the size of a large hall." The notion of *Teshuva* especially in the context of sins that are deeply embedded in our identity, is a notion of a process, a striving, a quest, and an ascent towards a higher form of self.

So as we begin the process of introspection and our

quest towards a change for the better, let us remember that the process matters just as much as the final product; let us not be discouraged by previous attempts which have not been as successful as we would have liked them to be³. Let us be assured that no attempt and no striving for good goes unnoticed, and that the process matters just like the final product, transforming us and making sure that indeed this is a change that we can really believe in.

1 This idea is implicit in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Makkot 7:1) and other sources which refers to Teshuva as a “path” implying it being beyond just a one time action.

2 Torah Ohr, Vayechi page 41a. Similar reflections are made by Rabbi Yehuda Leib Aletor, the *Sefat Emmet* (SEfat Emet Al HaTora, Nitzavim, 1880), , Rav A.Y. Kook (Orot Hatshuva Chapter 15) and other great thinkers. CF Rabbi Shlomo Aviner *Echta Veashuv*

3 See Rabbi A.Y. Kook (Orot Hateshuva chapter 7) who speaks of the great value of the smallest forms of Teshuva and the power of even one thought of Teshuva.

From the Masechta

THE CHARITY OF DIGNITY

EPHRAIM METH

The Talmud (Kesubos 68a) writes that, under certain circumstances, poor people must sell their silverware, dishes, etc. before accepting charity. Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam argue when this is necessary.

Rashi explains that poor people already receiving charity who inherit fancy silverware or dishes must sell their inheritance before accepting further charity. Selling such tableware does not deprive them of any essential comfort to which they might have been accustomed. Nonetheless, poor people who had, while wealthy, accustomed themselves to using fancy silverware, may keep that silverware even while accepting charity. It would be improper for the community to forcibly deprive these individuals of the status symbol upon which they have come to depend.

Rabbeinu Tam, however, offers the opposite interpretation. The once-wealthy must sell their fancy tableware before accepting charity, in spite of their having become accustomed or dependent upon supping with such tableware. In contrast, even indigents-from-birth who inherit fancy dishes need not sell that inheritance. This is in spite of the fact that such a sale would not deprive them of an essential comfort or status symbol. Why does Rabbeinu Tam adopt such a counterintuitive approach?

We customarily think of charity as providing for the physical needs of those who cannot afford to provide for those needs on their own. We seldom ponder the price that paupers pay by accepting charity, namely, their sacrifice of dignity. Something that was received in exchange for nothing is called *nahama deKisufa*, bread of shame. *Nahama deKisufa* is one of the greatest shames, and is certainly more severe than the shame of wearing shabby clothes or dining on simple fare. Halakhah demands that we sacrifice to maintain our dignity. Someone who can

support himself, albeit at the cost of comfort or pride, must do so. Hence, the once-wealthy person must sell his silverware before accepting charity. In contrast, once someone has already surrendered his dignity and registered to accept charity, he need not sell his silverware. Such a sale would not save him from surrendering his dignity, for he has already lost it. Therefore, Halakhah does not demand such a sale.

Similarly, the *Sefer haChinuch* (66) explains that it is a greater mitzvah, to give a gift to someone who is still self-sufficient, but in danger of toppling into dependence than to give charity to someone already dependent upon others. By preventing the wealthy person's descent into dependence one saves his dignity as well as his comfort and pride. In contrast, one who gives charity to the indigent may be providing them with comfort, but is doing nothing for their dignity.

In other instances, too, Halakhah prioritizes charity with dignity over ordinary charity. The Talmud (Kesubos 67b) writes that there is no greater charity than meeting the wedding expenses of an orphaned bride. The community must take out a loan in order to meet these expenses and funds collected for other purposes may sometimes be diverted to pay for the orphan's wedding. The *Shach* (Y.D. 249) infers from the fact that the Talmud specifies “orphaned” that a bride whose father is alive and available, even if he absolutely cannot afford to pay for the wedding, is not entitled to similar privileges. This is puzzling, since both brides face identical financial difficulties. One might suggest, however, that the orphaned bride is lonely and ashamed of her loneliness. Hence, we have an extra obligation to protect her dignity and self-esteem.

IN APPRECIATION OF HAGAON RAV GERSON YANKELEVITZ ZT”L

RABBI ELCHANAN ADLER

(excerpts from a hesped given at Yeshiva, Sept. 3. 2014)

Alongside the attention-grabbing headlines that characterize life at Yeshiva University, there is a lesser known story that has yet to be told. Its locus is a small office on the fifth floor of Furst Hall, inhabited by an elderly tzadik – a link to the past who studied at the feet of the Gedolim of pre-war Europe and spent almost six decades teaching at Yeshiva. In recent years, up to and including this past June, Rav Gershon Yankelevitz would spend mornings at his desk in his tiny, windowless office, huddled over a gemara. Aside from teaching a daily shiur, he remained on call at all times to learn individually with American talmidim a fraction of his age, irrespective of their backgrounds and abilities. For each talmid that he taught and interacted with, Rav Yankelevitz displayed enormous patience and concern. From the daled amos of Furst Hall Room 508 emanated a majestic aura that elevated the entire campus. That extraordinary light was extinguished on 23 Menachem Av, 5774 (Aug. 19, 2014), four months shy of Rav Yankelevitz’s 105th birthday. May his remembrance bring blessing.

Chazal tell us that a tzadik’s departure leaves an impression. They describe the impression in terms of three aspects: hod, ziv, and hadar. When a tzadik is present in a city “he is its hod, he is its ziv, he is its hadar”. When a tzadik leaves, each of these three aspects leaves with him. According to Maharal, these expressions correspond to three distinct realms of a tzadik’s influence: Yiras Shamayim, Chochma, and Middos Tovos.

Hod, which comes from the word meaning praise or thanks, refers to the quality of Yiras Shamayim which is, by its very nature, worthy of praise and accolades – as the pasuk (Mishlei 31:30) states: “A woman who fears Hashem, she should be praised.” Ziv which means “shine” represents Chochma as the pasuk (Koheles 8:1) states: “A man’s wisdom lights up his face.” Hadar, which connotes beauty, is a reference to midos tovos, just as the mishna in Avos (2:1) describes such qualities as “teferes le’oseha” – a beauty for one who displays them.

For almost 60 years, our Yeshiva merited to have a tzadik in our midst who exemplified all of these aspects to the utmost.

Rav Yankelevitz’s yiras shamayim was palpable – his meticulousness in shemiras ha’mitzvos - kala kevachamura. He would stand during Kerias haTorah well past his 100th birthday, he would make sure to wash netilas yadayim for davening and not rely on having done so in the morning, and as recently as this past Tisha B’Av he insisted on sitting on the ground like everyone else. When his son objected, he remarked: “This is how I always did it”

His Torah: Rav Yankelevitz left notebooks filled with chidushim, including shiurim that he heard from the Brisker Rav.

His hasmada was remarkable – he could easily spend hours at a time over a gemara. And of course, all of the Torah that he taught to his many talmidim for close to six decades.

Finally, Rav Yankelevitz’s extraordinary midos: Rav Yankelevitz was a gentleman in every sense of the word. He was always quick to offer compliments and to express his genuine sense of appreciation for others. At a reception several months ago at the home of President Joel, Rav Yankelevitz turned to Mrs. Bronstein, the wife of Rabbi Chaim Bronstein, RIETS administrator, and said; “So much of the Yeshiva rests on the shoulders of your husband.” And he could never be heard saying a word of lashon hara or speaking badly about anybody. His attitude toward life was a positive one. He had a wonderful sense of humor; yet not an ounce of cynicism. He treated everyone, young and old, with respect and would freely compliment the talmidim of the Yeshiva saying things like “you are tops”.

A YU musmach who recently retired from the rabbinate shared with me that he had Rav Yankelevitz as a Rebbe some 50 years ago in MTA. I asked him what he recalled most: he said that Rav Yankelevitz never raised his voice in class. But it goes beyond that: his son Reb Moshe told me that Rav Yankelevitz never raised his voice at all.

For Rav Yankelevitz, these three components were not discrete aspects of his personality; they were part of an organic whole and inseparable from one another. His Torah, his yiras shamayim and his midos tovos were chativa achas – an integrated entity. Rav Yankelevitz was an integrated personality – he embodied a sense of shleimus. Like a polished diamond, there were no rough edges.

His passing leaves an indelible void within our Yeshiva – its hod has left, its ziv has left, its hadar has left.

We, at Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, were zoche for these many years to have a giant in our midst. Someone who offered a window into a Torah world of the past. Someone who bore the imprint of that mesora in every fiber of his being. Someone who was a walking musar sefer – whose Torah, yiras shamayim and midos tovos were all fashioned from the same cloth and were part of one integrated musar personality. Someone who personified the mida of anava - whose gadlus was contained within his pashtus.

We, the talmidim, need to reflect on what he stood for – and strive to live our own lives with a sense of shleimus – and with the genuine sense of anava that epitomized his life.

Chazal say: gedolim tzadikim be’misasam yoser mibechayehem – tzadikim have enormous hashpa’ah on the world even after their soul leaves their bodies.

May Rav Yankelevitz zt”l be a meilitz yosher for his family, for his talmidim, for our Yeshiva, and for all of klal Yisrael.