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ותשובה ותפילה

מעבירין את רוע הגזירה
וצדקה

Dedicated in loving memory of Dr. Harlan Daman
by Carole, Gila and Avi Daman



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary

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Focusing on Tefilla

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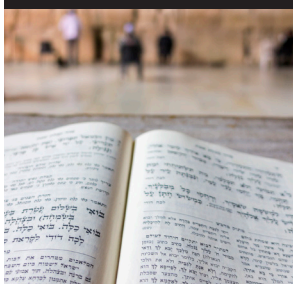
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HEARING OUR OWN AUTHENTIC VOICE

In the month of Elul, the conclusion of our prayers have a different atmosphere. Throughout the year, the sounds of the end of weekday prayers can be characterized as a mixture of people davening at various volumes and the clanking of tefillin boxes as people rush off to work. In Elul, the conclusion of our prayers is pierced by the regal tones of the shofar, jolting us into a mode of existential contemplation. Embedded within our Shachris tefilah, the shofar initiates each day of Elul with a sense of mission and purpose for our personal and religious growth. Galvanizing our spiritual momentum, the daily blasts carry us to Rosh HaShana, which is depicted in the Torah as the Yom Teruah — the day of shofar blasts — and then ultimately the climactic moments of Neilah on Yom Kippur. As we stand in silent

contemplation and listen to the shofar, there are a number of halachos that define the scope of this experience.

The mishnah in Rosh Hashana writes:

התוקע לתוך הבור או לתוך הדות או לתוך הפיטס אם קול שופר שמע יצא ואם קול הברה שמע לא יצא.

If one blows into a pit, or a cellar or a barrel, if he heard the sound of the shofar, he has fulfilled the mitzvah. If he heard the sound of the echo, he has not fulfilled the mitzvah.

Rosh HaShana 27b

The Gemarah proceeds to distinguish between those standing outside the pit, who potentially hear the echo coming out of the pit, and those standing within the pit itself, who are hearing the direct sound of the shofar.

The Meiri, commenting on this Gemarah, reveals that this case refers

to a situation that would occasionally unfold in particular eras of Jewish history:

משנה זו נשנית בשעת השמד שהיו מתחבאים בקיום המצות ופ' בגמ' בבור ודות שהעומדים בבור עם התוקע שומעין קול שופר שאין הקול מתבלבל עד שהוא עולה לאויר הבור ... אבל לעומדים בחוץ או על שפת הבור הוא שאנו צריכים להבחין בין שמעו קול שופר לשמעו קול הברה.

This mishna was taught during a time of persecution when they had to hide their observance of mitzvos. The Gemarah explains that those who are standing in the pit with the blower hear the sound of the shofar because the sound does not get distorted until it reaches the airspace above the pit ... It is for those who are standing outside the pit that we have to distinguish between those who heard the voice of the shofar and those who heard the echo.

Why should it matter? If the mitzvah is to hear the voice of the shofar, why should we care whether we heard it directly or indirectly? The cries and wails that the shofar represents are not diminished by the echoes of the pit. Indeed, the echo is, in some ways, an enhanced, reverberating manifestation of the shofar's sound. Why is it so critical to hear the original sound?

The answer to this question is rooted in a deeper understanding of our Rosh HaShana experience. On Rosh HaShana we read the story of Chana. Chana was a woman with an exceptional dream to bring a child into this world. She was determined that this child would be devoted to G-d and serve the Jewish people. She appeals to her husband, as well as to the leader of the generation, Eli. However, as the pesukim describe, the ultimate turning point is not through appeals to her husband and the prophet Eli. Ultimately, it is not until she turns inward and confronts the deep recesses of her own "self" that her tefilos are answered:

וְהָיָא מֶרֶת נָפֶשׁ וְתַפְלָל עַל ה' וּבָכָה תְּבָכָה.
וְתִדְרֹךְ נֶדֶר וְתֹאמַר ה' צָב-אוֹת אִם רָאָה תִּרְאֶה
בְּעֵינִי אֲמַתְךָ וּזְכַרְתִּי וְלֹא תִשְׁכַּח אֶת אֲמַתְךָ
וְנִתְּתָה לְאֲמַתְךָ יָרֵעַ אֲנִישִׁים וְנִתְּתִיו לָהּ כָּל יְמֵי
חַיָּיו וּמוֹרָה לֹא יִעֲלֶה עַל רֹאשׁוֹ.

In her wretchedness, she prayed to the Lord, weeping all the while. And she made this vow: "O Lord of Hosts, if You will look upon the suffering of Your maidservant and will remember me and not forget Your maidservant, and if You will grant Your maidservant a male child, I will dedicate him to the Lord for

all the days of his life; and no razor shall ever touch his head."

Shmuel I 1:9-10

In contemporary life, there are many voices that surround us. Societal and communal expectations condition us to patterns of personal and religious behavior that is reflective of the world around us. Our ambitions and our actions become an echo of who we are, but do not truly manifest our personal and authentic sense of self.

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Rav Soloveitchik explains that the shofar is an expression of our inner soul (see *Before Hashem You Shall Be Purified* pp. 18-29). In the creation of man, the Torah describes the life force that is infused into man:

וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה
וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.
*The Lord God formed man from the dust
of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the*

breath of life, and man became a living being.

Bereishis 2:7

It is that very primal breath that is exhaled and blown into the shofar to produce the sound that defines Yom Teruah. That voice emanates from the authentic depths of our personality and soul. It represents our true yearning to reach our potential in every facet of our lives. Rosh HaShana is a moment to step back from the myriad of echoes that constantly surround us and listen to ourselves. It is a day to hear — not the replication of our personal shofar, but the shofar itself. It is a day to step away from the cynicism that is sometimes associated with spiritual growth and embrace our true selves, which yearn to draw close to G-d and his people.

Tefilah is the primary way to reach this goal during Elul and the Yamim Noraim. Prayer is often experienced as a ritual echo. Sitting in shul, hearing the same words, observing the same actions, we feel like we are plugging into a program of prescribed observances. This issue of *The Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah To-Go®* focuses on the many dimensions of tefilah that can build our sense of connection to G-d through prayer. Indeed, one of the foundations of this most central experience to Jewish life is rooted in our capacity to connect to ourselves. We can shape the environment that allows us to hear that original sound of the shofar, becoming inspired to move forward in our quest for religious and spiritual growth in our connection with Hashem.



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Yaakov Glasser at
<http://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Yaakov-Glasser>

Focusing on Tefilla

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

Mrs. Michal Horowitz offers weekly classes and shiurim at many venues in her home community of the Five Towns, NY and the greater New York area. Additionally she is a speaker at Yeshiva University's Midreshet Yom Rishon and has been a featured speaker for the last three years at the RIETS Shavuot Yarchei Kallah Program.



PUTTING OUR HEARTS BACK INTO OUR PRAYERS

Miriam Peretz is, by now, a household name. Her son Uriel (1976-1998) fell in battle in the North with Hezbollah, and her son Eliraz (1978-2010) fell in the Gaza Strip in battle with Hamas.¹ Repeatedly bereaved, Miriam is a modern-day symbol of courage, faith, and hope, despite her staggering losses.

Miriam writes:

When they told me that Uriel had been killed, the first thought that went through my head was, "Too bad I wasn't there."

In my imagination, I saw myself going out on the ambush mission, standing in the line of soldiers. I'm a mother, I have good instincts. I would have shouted to Uriel, "Be careful of that rock! There are explosives there!" I also imagined Uriel turning around and asking, "Ima, what are you doing here?" and me answering, "Listen, Uriel, I don't know anything about the army, but I do know how to be a mother.

... When I was told about Eliraz, I reacted differently. I wanted to know whether in that moment he had thought of his children, if he had held their image

in his mind. I wanted to know the last thought that went through his head when he saw the flash, when his last breath left his body.

I'll never have the answers to those questions, but I have a feeling that Eliraz's last thought was of the Jewish people, that even in the last moment of his life, he was occupied with the great mission that stood before him, not with private thoughts. That's my feeling, but in his pants pocket we found drawings that his children made for him. He had taken them with him on the mission. In another pocket was a book of Tehillim.

When they brought me Eliraz'a tallit, I sniffed it. It smelled of the army, of the grease they use on rifles. I pictured Eliraz at the height of his holiness. That grease symbolized the struggle for our spirit and faith; the tallit that belonged to a combat soldier enfolded a book of Tehillim and a rifle.²

בראש השנה יכתובו וביום צום כפור יחתמו.
מי יחיה ומי ימות מי בקצו ומי לא בקצו מי
במים ומי באש ... ותשובה ותפילה וצדקה
מעבירין את רוע הגזרה

And on Rosh HaShana it will be written and on Yom Kippur it will be sealed, who will live and who will die, who in his time and who before his time, who by water and who by fire... and repentance, prayer and charity erase the evil decree.

More than any other time of the year, the Yomim Noraim remind us of the frailty of man and his seemingly absurd place in the cosmos. As we spend much of the month of Tishrei standing before the Creator and King, beseeching and pleading for our wants, needs and desires, we come face to face with the human condition. What is man if not a finite, limited, fragile being, flung into the chaos of this world, compelled by fate to navigate the turbulent waters of life?

My grandfather, Yitzchak Kaftan a'h, wrote in his Holocaust memoirs:

Yom Kippur, when we came from a hard day's work [in the Budzyn labor camp], we quickly went into the barracks so that Neila could still be davened with a minyan, yet for us was heaven closed. However, all of us together vigorously pleaded for help.³

Often forlorn, sometimes confused, facing fears and doubts, what anchors us to G-d in our daily, personal and national lives? In a word: tefillah, prayer. The movement of the lips and the yearnings of the soul. The tenet

of our faith, upon which our avodas Hashem rests.

Which behooves us to wonder: What gives finite man permission to plead with Infinite G-d? Man, who is here today and gone tomorrow, stands before the One Who embodies past-present-future,⁴ and pours out his innermost thoughts and desires, joys and fears.

That grease symbolized the struggle for our spirit and faith; the tallit that belonged to a combat soldier enfolded a book of Tehillim and a rifle.

R' Soloveitchik explains that:

Prayer is a vital necessity for the religious individual. He cannot conceal his thoughts and his feelings, his vacillations and his struggles, his yearnings and his wishes, his despair and his bitterness — in a word, the great wealth stored away in his religious consciousness — in the depths of his soul... Prayer is a necessity. Vital, vibrant religiosity cannot sustain itself without prayer. In sum, prayer is justified because it is impossible to exist without it.⁵

While it may seem preposterous for finite man to beseech, request and plead with Infinity, without prayer, the Rav teaches, man simply cannot exist. It is impossible for the stirrings of the soul, the passions of the heart, and the ideals of the mind to formulate and exist without prayer.

Tefillah, prayer, and the more colloquial verb “davening,” however,

are ambiguous terms. To what, exactly, do we refer when we say, “I have to daven,” “I need to pray” or “It’s time for tefillah”?

The reality is that tefillah is comprised of two distinct elements, which are interdependent, but not interchangeable, and neither component is dispensable. There is the law of prayer and the heart of prayer.

The order, zman, and structure of tefillah are time-bound, word-specific, and governed by the rules and regulations of Jewish law.

The heart, passion, and emotive experience of prayer are unique to each of us, changing from person to person and time to time.

R' Lord Jonathan Sacks writes:

There is tefillah and there is seder ha'tefillah: the act of prayer and the order of prayer, and they are two very different things. We can all relate to prayer in its most primal sense. We turn to G-d in high emotion — fear, joy, guilt, regret, hope, anxiety, or thanksgiving. Something deep within us feels moved to speak to that which is beyond us, to the Soul of the universe, the everlasting arms that hold us in their embrace. Such were the prayers of our ancestors in faith: Yaakov fearing his encounter with Esav, the Israelites as they crossed the divided Sea, Moshe begging G-d to forgive the people, Chanah pleading for a child. Maimonides sees this kind of spontaneous expression — specifically the prayers of the Patriarchs — as the historic and halakhic basis of prayer as such. It has no set times and no set text. It can be long: Moshe once prayed for forty days and forty nights. It can be short: Moshe's prayers for his sister to be cured of tzara'at was a mere five words, “Please G-d, heal her now.”

*Prayer in this sense is a signal of transcendence, an instinct that tells us that we are not alone... There is Someone there to Whom we can speak the single most important word in the entire lexicon of prayer: Atah, You. The poet laureate of this kind of prayer was King David, and to this day, Sefer Tehillim, the Book of Psalms, is its most powerful expression. Prayer is the redemption of solitude.*⁶

With proper guidance and incorporating the order of prayer into our daily routines, generally with training from a very young age, it becomes habitual — and not all that difficult — to fulfill the requirements of the law of prayer.

Our day follows some variation of the same basic pattern: Wake up. Wash up. Get dressed. Pack up for the day at school/work/home. Go to shul and/or daven at home. Get on with the day. Stop sometime before sunset for mincha. Eat dinner. Daven maariv. Hopefully, at some point during the day, we have made time for limud Torah as well.

Our three daily prayers are based on those established by our forefathers, as the Sages teach (*Brachos* 26b):

אברהם תקן תפלת שחרית שנא' (בראשית יט, כז) וישכם אברהם בבקר אל המקום אשר עמד שם ואין עמידה אלא תפלה ... יצחק תקן תפלת מנחה שנאמר (בראשית כד, סג) ויצא יצחק לשוֹח בשדה לפנות ערב ואין שיחה אלא תפלה ... יעקב תקן תפלת ערבית שנאמר (בראשית כח, יא) ויפגע במקום וילן שם ואין פגיעה אלא תפלה.

Avraham instituted the morning prayer, as it is stated, "And Avraham rose early in the morning to the place where he had stood before Hashem" (Gen.19:27), and standing means nothing other than prayer ... Yitzchak instituted the afternoon prayer, as it is stated: "And Isaac went out to converse in the field

toward evening" (Gen.24:63), and conversation means nothing other than prayer ... Yaakov instituted the evening prayer, as it is stated: "And he encountered the place and he slept there for the sun had set" (Gen.28:11). The word encounter means nothing other than prayer.

Hence, we daven Shachris in the morning, Mincha in the afternoon, and Maariv at night. As practicing, believing, observant Jews, the law and order of prayer fits nicely into our daily routine.

What, however, of the other aspect of tefillah, the heart of prayer?

If we are intellectually honest with ourselves (not always a comfortable, or comforting, experience) perhaps we would acknowledge that while many excel in fulfilling the law of prayer, far fewer among us excel in fulfilling the heart of prayer.

What are we davening for, if we utter the words by rote; if we make the minyan because we have to, and not necessarily because we acutely feel the need to. Can we discharge the obligation of prayer if we fulfill the law of prayer without the emotion of prayer?

Of her son, Moshe, who was critically injured while serving in the Israeli Air Force,⁷ Barbara Blum writes:

After physiotherapy, Alex (Moshe's father), with unending patience and love, would put Moshe's tefillin on him and recite the morning prayers. Moshe took his prayers very seriously. Since his vision was affected by his injury, he could not read the prayers from the siddur. Alex would recite the prayers aloud and Moshe would repeat them with his lips. If Moshe thought that Alex was praying too fast, he'd make kissing sounds and Alex would slow down. If he suspected

*that Alex had made a mistake or missed a word, he'd become very upset and would want to start the prayers from the beginning. Sometimes this would happen after half an hour of praying. We tried to convince Moshe that Hashem knows that we are mere humans who make mistakes and He forgives us. But most of the time this didn't satisfy him, and he would insist on praying from the beginning.*⁸

לאהבה את ה' אלהיכם ולעבדו בכל לבבכם (דברים יא, יג) איזו היא עבודה שהיא בלב הוי אומר זו תפלה.

For "To love Hashem your G-d and to serve Him with all your heart" (Devarim 11:3). Which service of G-d is performed in the heart? You must say this is prayer.

Taanis 2a

We are commanded to not only recite the words, but to think of their meaning; to not only stand at attention by rote, but stand in awe and reverence before G-d; to not only bow by habit but bend low out of immense thanks for all that we have; to not only "have" to pray but to understand that we need, and therefore, want to pray.

R' Soloveitchik movingly and powerfully teaches that:

The very essence of tefillah expresses itself in a romance rather than in disciplined action, in a great passionate yearning rather than a limited cold achievement, in a movement of the soul rather than performance of the lips, in an awareness rather than in action, in an inner longing rather than in a tangible performance, in silence rather than in loud speech... Certainly one who does not correlate the experience with an objective symbol, in this case the recital of words, is remiss in his duty. However, the external act is clearly but a side, a formal side, of the full state of mind. The latter turns away from the externals and from physical

efforts; the individual is captivated by the great vision of the supremely impressive and wondrous. The inner activity, free from reaching out for external accomplishment; the inward look which does not call out for outward deeds; the attention that goes entirely to the unseen and is indifferent to the outer show; in brief — the *avodah she'ba'lev* which ceremonial and decorum seem to hinder — this is the essence of prayer.⁹

Imagine — and in our day and age of technology, smartphones, tablets, social media, and the ever constant bombardment of virtual communication, sadly, it is not too hard to imagine — that we are attempting to hold an important and fundamental discussion with a child, a loved one, a student, a confidant, a world leader, while checking the news apps on our phones, a Facebook post, or the latest Twitter feed. Such a discussion is no discussion at all, for while we may physically be present and going through the motions, undeniably, our hearts and minds are elsewhere.

In regard to the action of prayer without proper intent, the Rambam writes (*Hilchos Tefilla* 4:15):

כוונת הלב כיצד כל תפלה שאינה בכוונה אינה תפלה ואם התפלל בלא כוונה חוזר ומתפלל בכוונה מצא דעתו משובשת ולבו טרוד אסור לו להתפלל עד שתתיישב דעתו לפיכך הבא מן הדרך והוא עיף או מיצר אסור לו להתפלל עד שתתיישב דעתו.

Concentration of the heart — how (is this fulfilled)? Any prayer (recited) without concentration is not prayer. And if he prayed without concentration, it must be recited again with concentration. If a person finds that his thoughts are confused and his mind is distracted, he may not pray until he has recovered composure of the mind. Hence, on returning from a journey, and he is weary

or distressed, it is forbidden to pray until his mind is composed.

We are taught from the youngest of ages that tefillah is an integral part of our daily lives, and this is good and well, for it helps establish prayer as the foundation of our faith and Divine service. And yet, it comes along with a caveat: Tefillah tends to become so routine that it is often practiced by unthinking rote.

Hence, it is not for naught that the Sages warn us:

רבי שמעון אומר, הוי זהיר בקריאת שמע [ובתפילה] וכשאתה מתפלל, אל תעש תפלתך קבע, אלא רחמים ותחנונים לפני המקום ברוך הוא שנאמר (יואל ב יג) כי חנון ורחום הוא ארך אפים ורב חסד ונחם על הרעה.

Rabbi Shimon says: Be careful in the reciting of Shema (and praying). When you pray, do not make your prayer fixed, rather prayers for mercy and supplication before the Omnipresent, blessed be He, as it says, "For He is gracious and merciful, long-suffering and full of kindness, and reconsiders regarding the evil."

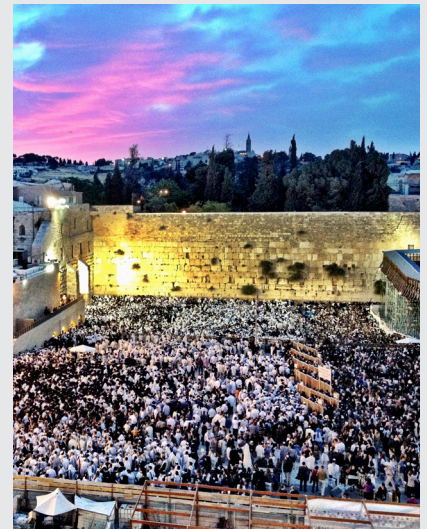
Avos 2:13

Do we daven because we are obligated to do so, because it's another activity to check off on the daily "To Do" list, because I have been davening since kindergarten, and everyone does it... Are my prayers *kevah* — fixed and by rote?

R' Ovadia m'Bartenura (15th C. Italy) explains the Mishna as follows:

קבע - כאדם שיש עליו חובה דבר קבוע ואומר אימתי אפרוק מעלי חוב זה. אי נמי, קבע, כאדם שקבוע לו לקרוא פרק אחד פרשה אחת, שאומר אותה בקריאה בעלמא, ואינו אומרה בלשון תחנונים כאדם שמבקש רחמים:

Fixed: Like a person who has something fixed that he is obligated in and says, "When will I unload this obligation



Tefillah Insights: Simcha l'artzecha v'sason l'irecha — Happiness for Your land and Joy for Your City

Artzecha refers to the Land of Israel and *irecha* refers to Jerusalem. Why is Israel associated with *simcha* and Jerusalem with *sason*? R. Baruch HaLevi Epstein, *Baruch She'Amar, Tefillot* pg 248, suggests that the difference between *simcha* and *sason* is seen in the phrase from Kel Adon, which we recite on Shabbat morning: *semeichim b'tzeitam v'sasim b'vo'am* — they are happy when they depart and joyous when they arrive. *Simcha* seems to refer to the beginning of the process and *sason* refers to its completion. On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, we ask God to bring *simcha* to the Land of Israel by gathering everyone from the exile. That is the beginning of the process of redemption, which culminates with the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash and which brings *sason* to Jerusalem.

Torah To Go Editors

from upon me?" Another explanation is "fixed" — like a person for whom it is fixed that he read a chapter and a section which he says only as a recitation and does not say in the language of supplications, as a person who is requesting mercy.

כי אל חנון ורחום הוא — רוצה בתחנונים,
ועל ידי התחנונים הוא מרחם מיד:

For He is gracious and merciful: He desires supplications, and through the supplications, He immediately has mercy.

Perhaps, if we understand and appreciate the experience of prayer, in addition to the order of prayer, we would find the boundless reward hidden within tefillah itself.

R' Soloveitchik teaches that:

Prayer begins as an obligatory, even compelled act, with rigid requirements of time, location and behavior. We are particularly aware of this during the winter or in inclement weather when we must venture out into the cold for minyan early in the morning and at night. However, as we progress in our relationship to prayer, we feel the rewards of intimate communion with G-d.¹⁰

כי כְּשֶׁמִּיד כֵּן תִּהְיֶה קִשָּׁה לְכַעַס וְנוֹחַ לְרִצּוֹת
כִּי לֹא תִּחַפֵּץ בְּמוֹת הַמֵּת כִּי אִם בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדְּרָכָו
וְחַיָּה וְעַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תִּחַכֶּה לוֹ אִם יָשׁוּב מִיָּד
תִּקְבְּלוּ ... אָדָם יִסְדּוּ מַעֲפָר וְסוּפוֹ לְעַפָּר ...
מִשׁוֹל כְּחָרָס הַנִּשְׁפָּר כְּחֻצִּיר יֵבֶשׁ וְכֻצִּיץ נוֹבֵל
כִּצְל עוֹבֵר וְכֻעָנָן כֹּלָה וְכִירוֹחַ נוֹשֶׁבֶת וְכֻאֲבָק
פּוֹרֵחַ וְכֻחֲלוֹס יְעוּף.

*For Your Name signifies Your praise:
hard to anger and easy to appease,
for You do not wish the death of one
deserving death, but that he repent from
his way and live! Until the day of his*

death You await him; if he repents, You will accept him immediately... A man's origin is from the dust and his destiny is back to dust... he is likened to a broken shard, withering grass, a fading flower, a passing shade, a dissipating cloud, a blowing wind, flying dust and a fleeting dream.¹¹

As we enter into a new year, there is no better time than the present — for if not now, when?¹² — to make a *kabalah al ha'asid* — a resolution to change for the better — in regard to our relationship with G-d through the vehicle of tefillah.

There are a plethora of halachos, seforim, and booklets to help us navigate the letter of the law in regard to tefillah. Let us tap into those resources so that the order and structure of our prayers are acceptable *al pi halacha*. We must recite the proper words, at the correct times, in the set order, so that we discharge our obligation of the law of prayer.

As for the heart of prayer and the emotive journey that goes along with *seder ha'Tefillah*, let us turn inward, to the feelings, joys and trepidations found within our very own hearts, so that we may fulfill, not only the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law of tefillah as well.

When we resolve to make small changes with lasting impact, we will find that our relationship with our Father, our King, will be boundlessly, infinitely and greatly enhanced, as we elevate and ennoble ourselves through the mode, medium, structure, order and passion of prayer.

Endnotes

1. In between the deaths of her two sons, Miriam's husband, Eliezer, died at the age of 56. Of her husband, Miriam says that he "died of a broken heart." (Heard by this author, in a talk Miriam gave at the Young Israel of Woodmere, Woodmere, NY, October 2014.)
2. Shir, Smadar. *The Story of Miriam Peretz: Miriam's Song*, p.313-314. Gefen Publishing House, Jerusalem, 2016.
3. Kaftan, Yitzchak. *Sefer Krashnik - Sefer Zikaron l'Kehilat Krashnik*. "In Seven Camps in Three Years," p. 421. Edited by David Sztokfisz. Tel Aviv, 1973.
4. cf. *Brachos* 33a.
5. Soloveitchik, R' J.B. *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, p.150. Edited by Shalom Carmy. Ktav Publishing House, Jersey City, 2003.
6. Mitoch Ha'Ohel, *From Within the Tent: The Weekday Prayers*, p. xiii-xiv. Edited by Feldman, R' Daniel Z. and Halpern, Dr. Stuart W. Maggid Books, Jerusalem, 2014, emphasis added.
7. Moshe Blum was wounded in April, 1990, at the age of twenty. He lived with his severe and debilitating injuries until his death in August 2003. May his memory be for a blessing.
8. Blum, Barbara. *Against All Odds*, p.120. Menucha Publishers, New York, 2016.
9. Soloveitchik, Rabbi Joseph B. *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer*, p. 21. Edited by Shalom Carmy. Ktav Publishing House, Jersey City, 2003.
10. David, R' Avishai C. *Darosh Darah Yosef*, p. 224. Urim Publications, Jerusalem, 2011.
11. Text from the Mussaf prayers of the High Holidays.
12. *Avos* 1:14



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TEENAGERS AND TEFILLAH: AN APPROACH TO TEFILLAH EDUCATION IN HIGH SCHOOL

The proliferation of commentary on the Siddur over the past decade speaks to the emphasis we, as a community, have placed on the importance of tefillah. Yet the need to focus on tefillah is not a new phenomenon. Over 2,000 years ago, Chazal described tefillah as “an area of critical importance, and yet people seem to disregard it.”¹ While this statement from the Gemara was made millennia ago and to the general population, it is still accurate and especially magnified within the world of adolescents. The challenges adolescents face in connecting with tefillah are many and varied, and are not unique to the Jewish community. Even so, we must find approaches that will help our

adolescents forge a relationship with tefillah and Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Recently, there has been a strong communal emphasis placed on trying to improve our tefillah education, which is encouraging.² In considering methods of enhancing our tefillah, there are a variety of approaches. These range from a better understanding of the words to a deeper understanding of the tefillah structure to enhancing the experience. Recognizing that many educators have written extensively about these approaches, I am going to address ways to enhance the adolescent connection to tefillah by focusing on adolescent development in conjunction with tefillah.

Characteristics of Meaningful Tefillah

Chazal thoughtfully structured Shemoneh Esrei with three parts — *shevach* — praise, *bakashah* — request, and *hoda’ah* — thanks.³ Each aspect is fundamentally important in creating a meaningful tefillah. At the same time, each stands in contradistinction to adolescent development and the lifestyle of our generation, as will be explained.

Shevach — Praise of Hashem

During adolescence, teens are developmentally learning to move into the sphere of abstract thinking.⁴ They are grappling with an ability

to relate to an abstract Being whom they cannot see, touch or hear. As a result, they often struggle with their relationship with Hashem. Praising Hashem fundamentally hinges on an ability to recognize and appreciate Hashem. While we must try to educate toward the words being said, our students will also benefit from a general emunah and G-d awareness curriculum.⁵ By focusing on a greater perception of Hashem in the world, and recognizing Hashem's greatness and His involvement in our lives, our ability to then appreciate the *shevach* aspect of tefillah is enhanced. The notion of "*shivisi Hashem l'negdei tamid* — constantly perceiving Hashem in front of me," is an important and ancient tradition as general guidance for decision making, and also enhances tefillah.⁶

Last year, we initiated a religious growth program in MTA. In it, the sophomore grade focused on enhancing their awareness of Hashem through monthly programs, goal setting, and meeting one-on-one with their rebbeim. Each month, the specific application would shift, ranging from focusing on berachos before eating to other areas of beracha, such as Asher Yatzar, to seeing Hashem's hand in the world. The common theme was to perceive and appreciate Hashem's involvement in the world in general, and specifically in our day-to-day existence.

Bakashah — Requests of Hashem

The identity formation of adolescence includes a focus on developing independence from parents. It is a time when young men and women are more likely to rebel and less likely to ask their parents for help. Adolescents

want to feel they can do everything on their own. In contrast, meaningful tefillah results from a recognition of our complete dependence on Hashem.⁷ This dependence is epitomized through the requests we make of Hashem during tefillah.⁸ As a result, the "muscle" needed to make requests requires "exercise."⁹

Rav Dov Singer, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Makor Chaim in Israel (with whom we share an exchange program), described a program in his yeshiva geared toward strengthening tefilla. In it, he grants permission to his talmidim to spend their birthday out of yeshiva, provided they come

Focus on the area of *bakashah* is particularly important because it runs contrary to adolescent development, but also because of the blessing of the current adolescent generation. The blessing of relative affluence our generation enjoys makes the desperation of *bakashah* less palpable.

to him and request the day off, and explain why they believe their trip is worthwhile. The rationale for this policy, Rav Singer explained, is that it gives his talmidim an opportunity to prepare for something special in advance and to create a compelling request. Focus on the area of *bakashah* is particularly important, as noted, because it runs contrary to adolescent

development, but also because of the blessing of the current adolescent generation. The blessing of relative affluence our generation enjoys makes the desperation of *bakashah* less palpable. David Hamelech writes,¹⁰ "*Tefillah l'ani ki ya'atof, v'lifnei Hashem yishpoch sicho* — the prayer of a poor person when he wraps himself up, and in front of Hashem he pours out his conversation." The association of a poor person being better suited to pour out his heart in making a request is natural. Baruch Hashem, with our blessings, it is more challenging for an adolescent to perceive his dependence on Hashem, which underscores the importance of helping adolescents appreciate the need to make requests of Hashem. In order to inculcate a sense of *bakashah*, we should identify areas of request within the purview of our school setting and use them with intentionality.

Hoda'ah

Shemoneh Esrei concludes with an acknowledgement and expression of appreciation. After we make our requests, we thank Hashem for everything He does for us. Again, this rests on the previous sections in which we express a recognition that Hashem is involved in our daily lives. During the *hoda'ah* section, we focus on our ability to perceive Hashem's involvement and express our appreciation for it. These two aspects, recognizing Hashem's kindness and expressing our appreciation, are challenging for different reasons. In the busyness of life, it is often difficult to pause and recognize the good we are given. Furthermore, expressing appreciation can be challenging because of the implicit acknowledgement that we

relied on others for this success.¹¹ How can we teach these attributes to our adolescents? Like the other aspects, recognition of kindness, and appreciation of what we are given, are also muscles we can develop. Oftentimes, parents teach younger children to say thank you when given something. This lesson helps younger children learn how to say thank you. As children become adolescents, the goal becomes more substantive; we want them to *feel* the appreciation they are expressing.

Programmatically, this can be achieved by celebrating accomplishments and focusing on who helped us achieve these accomplishments. As we begin to recognize these milestones, as well as help our adolescents see who helped them succeed, they begin to more naturally articulate *hoda'ah* properly.

Each of these components requires a significant time commitment to formal and informal education, through class discussion, consistent individual conversation, and policy and programmatic development. Values education requires a holistic approach, which encompasses different modalities to enable the messages and lessons to transform our thinking and action.

Tefillah as a Relationship

Since tefillah is about creating and strengthening our relationship with Hashem, research has shown that meaningful tefillah has a strong correlation with other relationships.

Relationship with Peers

At its core, tefillah represents an opportunity to connect to Hashem,

to develop a relationship with Him. Unsurprisingly, there should be a strong correlation between a person's ability to connect with others and his ability to connect to meaningful tefillah. Studies have shown a strong connection between religious and social development.¹² Adolescents who connect with their peers, demonstrating positive social development, tend to display a stronger sense of religious connection as well.¹³ These findings can be explained in light of the importance that community and connectivity play within religious practice. The value of community in the context of tefillah is evident from a variety of halachot. The Mishnah¹⁴ describes the rule that a minyan is required for all *devarim she'bekedushah*, such as Kaddish, Kedushah, *keriat haTorah* and *Birchat Kohanim*. Furthermore, the text of tefillah, which is written in the plural, reminds us of its communal nature. For example, when asking Hashem to heal us in the berachah of Refaenu, we use the plural form of *refaenu*, not the singular form of *refaeni*. In the next berachah in Shemoneh Esrei, we ask Hashem for help in pursuit of financial success, again using the plural form of Barech Aleinu. The *Sefer Chasidim*¹⁵ articulates this approach, "One who does not consider the needs of others will not have his tefillah answered. Therefore, the text of tefillah was written in the plural form."

Relationship with Parents

A second external factor in the development of adolescent connection to tefillah is the strength of connection with parents, as well as the perceived connection parents have to tefillah. Teenagers who perceive their parents as having a

strong, positive religious connection and who feel a strong and positive connection to their parents are more likely to develop their own connection to tefillah.¹⁶ These findings highlight and emphasize the critical role parents play in the religious development of their children, specifically within tefillah. Rav Moshe Wolfson puts these findings in the context of a fascinating halacha regarding the Menorah in the Beit Hamikdash. The Torah commands us,¹⁷ "The seven candles of the Menorah are to face the middle candle." Rav Wolfson suggests¹⁸ that the middle candle symbolically represents the parent, the anchor and backbone of the family; Hashem is telling us that the candles, representing the children, should be near and facing their parent when davening. In his language, "We should educate our children by having them stand next to us while davening." The connection between tefillah and our relationship with our parents is also magnified by the sense of tradition that permeates our tefillah practices. As Rabbi Jay Goldmintz writes:¹⁹

When I pray, I connect myself to the Jewish people of the past. I use the same words they did, I refer to the experience they had, I recall the beliefs that we all share, in the same language that has been used for thousands of years. In prayer, I become a part of the chain of tradition.

The chain of tradition links us most directly right back to our parents. The more positively we feel connected to this chain, the more likely we are to appreciate tradition as the bedrock of tefillah. Furthermore, the text of tefillah refers to Hashem as a parent.²⁰ It then follows that the strength of our relationship with our parents will impact the manner in which we connect with Hashem as our Father.

Relationship with Extra-Familial Role Models

Teenagers who express a strong sense of connection to extra-familial role models are also more likely to connect to more meaningful tefillah.²¹ Adolescents who admire and develop relationships with older role models, whether camp counselors, teachers, or older students in yeshiva, tend to develop a greater commitment to and appreciation of tefillah. This notion is also brought up by Rav Moshe Wolfson,²² in a creative approach to the story of Yehuda and Yosef. When Yehuda approaches Yosef at the beginning of Parshas Vayigash, Chazal explain that Yehuda approached Yosef through the mode of prayer. Why did Yehuda specifically wait until this point to engage in tefillah? Rav Wolfson explains that Yehuda had also engaged in tefillah before this moment, but now, as he drew close to Yosef, the influence of such a great tzaddik influenced him to daven again. Being connected to a positive role model can enhance our tefillah. This idea is echoed by the Chasam Sofer,²³ who explains that it is a special merit for the acceptance of our tefillah when we stand near a righteous individual. This again highlights the importance of extra-familial role models.

Schools have a special opportunity to capitalize on all three of these aspects of tefillah education: social development, extra-familial role models and parental relationships. Davening in school provides students with role models they can connect to and admire, ranging from rebbeim and teachers to older students. The social environment created in a

school community also enhances the tefillah education. Over the last 20 years, schools have demonstrated a more active commitment to family and parent education, recognizing the importance of the parent-child relationship as valuable in the educational development of their students.

The immense power of tefillah comes from blending our acknowledging Hashem's presence in our life and the development of our relationship with Him. Like all gifts, we must learn how to use them properly and maximize them. May Hashem give us the strength and wisdom to continue to learn about, discuss, and enhance our tefillah and the tefillah of our children.

Endnotes

1. *Berachos* 8a, and Rashi ad loc.
2. Numerous studies have shown the positive benefits of positive religious development among adolescents. See Salmoirago – Blotcher et al. 2011, Reinart, Edwards, & Hendrix, 2009.
3. See *Berachos* 32a.
4. See Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development.
5. See Rabbi Jay Goldmintz, "Helping Students Find Their Own Voice in Tefillah: A Conceptual Framework for Teachers," printed in *Rav Chessed* in which he discusses the convergence of tefillah and emunah for adolescents.
6. *Mishnah Berurah* 1:4 discusses the minhag to have this phrase appear on klaf in each person's siddur.
7. Chazal's description that a person should appeal to Hashem as a servant speaking to his master is a humbling experience.
8. See Rashi, Parshas Vaeschanan, who explains that although Moshe had merits to use in making his request to enter Eretz Yisrael, instead, he asked Hashem for a *matnas chinam*, a gift to enter Eretz Yisrael even as an undeserving prayer.
9. The Torah is sensitive to this challenge for all people, in our warning to not focus on "*kochi v'otzem yadi* — my own power and hard word." However it is more pronounced in adolescents.
10. Tehillim 102:1.
11. In the *Koren Ani Tefilla Siddur*, Rabbi Goldmintz shares a story of two angels who were sent to this world to collect tefillos. At the end of the day, one angel returned with a full bag while the other returned with a bag barely half full. What accounted for the difference? The angel who returned with the full bag was searching for tefillos of request, while the other angel was looking for tefillos expressing appreciation. The story illustrates the more natural tendency to use tefillah to make requests.
12. Meltzer, Dogra, Vostanis, & Ford, 2011; Good & Willoughby, 2006; Good, Willoughby, and Frijters, 2009; Gunnoe and Beversluis, 2009.
13. Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011.
14. *Megillah* 4:3.
15. Siman 1063.
16. Vermeer, 2014; Bengston, Putney, & Harris, 2013.
17. Bamidbar 8:2.
18. See *Sefer Va'Ani Tefillah* page 97.
19. The *Koren Ani Tefillah Siddur* p. 812.
20. Examples include Selach Lanu Avinu and Avinu Malkeinu.
21. Astin, Astin, & Lindholm, 2011.
22. See *Sefer Va'Ani Tefillah* page 97.
23. See *Derashos Chasam Sofer* vol. 2 page 357.

Focusing on Tefilla

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KOL ATZMOTAI TOMARNA: PRAYING WITH BODY AND SOUL

כי כל פה לך יודה וכל לשון לך תשבע וכל ברך
לך תכרע וכל קומה לפניך תשתחוה וכל לבבות
ייראוך וכל קרב וכליות יזמרו לשמך כדבר
שכתוב כל עצמתי תאמרנה ה' מי כמוך ...

*For every mouth will give thanks to You
and every tongue will vow allegiance to
You and every knee will bow to You and
every upright being will prostrate before
You and all hearts will revere You and
all internal organs will sing the praises of
Your name as it states: All of my bones
shall say, "G-d, Who is like You..."*

While tefillah is intrinsic to the daily life of a Jew, it is highlighted even more so now, during the High Holiday season. With the daily recitation of Slichot in the period leading up to Rosh Hashana, with extra tefillot during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva, and with the additional time spent

in prayer both on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, prayer is clearly central to these Days of Awe. The recent articles about prayer in the *Jewish Action* magazine (Fall 2017) and the addition of special classes and yimei iyun in yeshivot and day schools on the topic of making prayer more meaningful are commendable. Rav Tzvi Hersh Weinreb's "The Best Books on Prayer"¹ provides many options to reflect on our prayers and gain a deeper understanding of them. However, despite the resources available, a meaningful prayer experience is elusive for many.

To properly appreciate prayer, we need to arrive to shul early, or at least on time. I have heard Rav Hershel Schachter say, "if you arrive to shul on time, you are already late." How true this is. To properly begin praying at the official

start time, we need to arrive beforehand and prepare. We are obligated to ensure that our surroundings and our bodies are appropriately clean, that the setting has few distractions, and that our minds are in the proper frame for communicating with our Creator. In addition to preparing ourselves before beginning prayer and even more specifically before beginning the Amida, with the recitation of "G-d, open my lips (so that) my mouth can tell your praises," there are several elements during prayer that help to refocus our experience and to remind us that we literally are standing before the Almighty. The countless references to Hashem in second person, as in "Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d..." is an almost continuous reminder that we are communicating directly with the Ribbono Shel Olam. Additionally,

the various movements designed by Chazal and by our traditions heighten our awareness of being in Hashem's presence.

Psychological researchers have codified different modalities with which people experience the world. These are commonly broken down into visual, auditory and kinesthetic (movement). Some people grasp information better when material is presented visually, while others process information more readily when they hear it. A third group learn material best when they are fully drawn into it with movement. Interestingly, the way our tefillot are arranged requires that we use all three modalities while praying, to help us maximize the experience. People tend to be more familiar with the visual and auditory aspects of prayer, while the kinesthetic elements are less obvious and thus warrant more extensive elaboration.

The visual modality is activated by reading the words in the siddur, whether in Hebrew or in translation, and for some people, by closing their eyes and creating a visual image of connecting with Hashem. Using a translated siddur helps us understand the words we are saying, and studying any of the excellent English commentaries on prayer helps us understand the deeper meaning of our tefillot. This undoubtedly helps us focus our attention and have a more meaningful prayer experience. The image of a beautiful shul, a tastefully decorated Aron Kodesh, and being surrounded by others intently absorbed in prayer further heighten our visual sense as we daven.

We are supposed to audibly recite the Shema (*Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim* 62:3), thereby stimulating our auditory system. Additionally, our

prayers are replete with responsive sections. We listen to the shaliach tzibur repeat the Amida and we frequently respond in Chazarat Hashatz, Kedusha, and Kaddish with various exclamations of *baruch Hu uvaruch Shmo* and *amein*. We hear the call of *Borchu Et Hashem Hamivorach*, and we respond in turn. Responsive prayers are even more numerous during Slichot and during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva, including the especially moving prayers of Kol Nidrei, Avinu Malkeinu, the Sh'losh Esrei Middot, and the Yom Kippur Musaf. Meaningful prayer certainly requires much listening, in addition to audibly articulating the prayers.

When we reflect on our own prayer, we typically consider the words we are saying and their meaning, and we think about the experience of what we see and hear during services; however, we usually do not consider the kinesthetic aspects of tefilla to have as deep significance. A newcomer to an Orthodox synagogue once remarked to me how surprised he was by all the movement taking place. He said it seemed loosely choreographed, like an ensemble in a play — sit, stand, turn around, bow, step forward and step backward. The truth is that observant Jews seem to be in almost constant motion while praying.

It seems clear that movement during prayer is meant to heighten the prayer experience and to evoke different emotions at different parts of prayer. Unfortunately, in the same manner that people often recite prayers by rote to merely satisfy the requirement or because they are on autopilot, our movements in prayer are executed in the same way. Movements in prayer are often mindlessly followed as prescribed in the siddur — strike your

chest, bow here and turn around here, with regrettably little thought to their meaning. By increasing our awareness of the many movements we perform in our prayer, we can more appropriately benefit from their execution.

There are three primary functions for the various movements in prayer, which all have the goal of enhancing our prayer. Some of the movements serve to heighten our awareness of the awesome experience of approaching the King of all kings in supplication. At other times, we act out motions related to the specific words we are saying to help us become more keenly aware of these words. And at times, movements are intended to help us feel part of the tzibbur, with all participants following similarly choreographed ritual movements. The list of movements during tefilla is long, so we will highlight only some of them from each category.

Movements that Highlight our Experience

Many aspects of tefilla serve to experientially transport us to another realm. The Rema (95:1) states that we take three steps forward at the start of the Amida as a way of “approaching” Hashem. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (95:3) likens this to other aspects of holiness that warrant preparation beforehand. We also take three steps backward upon completing the Amida as a way of submitting to Hashem and taking leave of Him. We start the steps back with the left (weaker) foot to show our reluctance to depart from our closeness to Hashem.

The most common reason why we specifically take three steps is because of the three times in Tanach where it is recorded that someone “stepped

forward” in prayer (*Aruch Hashulchan* 95:3).² Rav Shimon Schwab (*On Prayer*, pages 401-405) describes how the Amidah relates to the Kodesh Hakdashim (Holy of Holies), and that through tefillah we bring our neshama from the mundane world into the Holy of Holies. Just as the Kohain Gadol on Yom Kippur walked from the Azarah, through the Ulam, into the Heichal and into the Kodesh Hakdashim, we take three steps forward as we begin the Amidah to demonstrate that we are symbolically leaving this world and entering the world of the Kodesh Hakdashim. And just as a korban is bound, so too, we bind our feet together as if to say to Hashem, “I am completely bound up and offer myself as a korban to you.” This evokes the verse “*uneshalma parim sefateinu*” — we will offer the words of our lips instead of bulls (Hosea 14:3) — which indicates a link between our tefillah and sacrifices. Rav Schwab describes (page 538) that following the Amidah:

... we take leave from the Kodesh Hakdashim by taking three steps backwards, which symbolically brings us back, first into the Heichal, then to the Ulam, and then to the Azarah, from where we came. The three steps backwards are to be taken while bowing, as one would reverentially do when taking leave of his master (Yoma 53B).

An additional reason for three steps is that Moshe Rabeinu moved through three distinct levels to ascend to Hashem’s presence on Har Sinai, as indicated in the pasuk describing “darkness, a cloud and opaque darkness” (Deuteronomy 4:11) on Har Sinai.

Rabbi Menachem Penner³ quoted Rav Uri Weisblum’s sefer *Ha’arat Hatfilla*, which likened the three steps forward before the Amidah to an airplane taking

off from a runway. The world around us is dark and as we fly through the clouds, all is grey. But then the plane bursts through the clouds and the sun is shining. Flying above the clouds, we realize that the sun was there the whole time, we just couldn’t see it. The three steps forward could be experienced as our bursting through the clouds to be in the sun, or in the case of tefillah, in G-d’s presence. The steps backward following the Amidah are our return to our earthly existence, albeit bringing G-d’s grace back with us, so that as we face whatever challenges we are experiencing, we can know that Hashem is with us.

We start and conclude the Amidah with two bows at the beginning, in the brachah of Avot, and two toward the end, in the brachah of Hoda’ah (Modim), showing our deference to G-d and our experience of being in His presence. In addition to bowing in the Amidah, we also bow when we say Barchu, both in the morning and evening prayers, and at other times, showing our humility and subservience to G-d. The source for this is in Divrei Hayamim I (29:20), which recounts how:

וַיֹּאמֶר דָּוִד לְכָל הַקֹּהֵל בָּרְכוּ נָא אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וַיִּבְרְכוּ כָּל הַקֹּהֵל לֵה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם וַיִּקְדּוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לֵה' וְלַמֶּלֶךְ.

Dovid said to the people “Bless Hashem your G-d” and the entire congregation blessed Hashem, the G-d of their fathers, and bowed down and prostrated themselves before Hashem.

Although the countless references in Tanach to the Avot and Neviim bowing to Hashem were full prostrations, our custom is to bend our knees and then our upper body (*Brachot* 28b). We fully prostrate ourselves in prayer only during Musaf on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur.

Movements that Highlight Content

Other movements in prayer are meant to heighten our awareness of specific words and themes. We elevate our heels in Kedusha as we say “Kadosh, Kadosh, Kadosh,” (Yeshayau 6:2-3) comparable to the angels who are elevated when they praise G-d with these words. This evokes a feeling of lifting ourselves toward G-d, similar to those who raise their eyes heavenward. We bow specifically when we say Modim, demonstrating our appreciation that all aspects of our very being are entirely dependent on Hashem. We strike our chest over our heart with our fist as we say “we have sinned,” as if to say “I am sorry.” This is based on the verse “*Ve’hachai yiten el libo*” — and the living will lay it on his heart (Kohelet 7:2), and that our misbehavior is due to inclinations of the heart. And we hide our faces as we say Tachanun out of contrition and embarrassment over our sins.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 61:5) explains that we cover our eyes as we recite the first verse of Shema to enhance our concentration and reduce distraction, focusing on accepting the yoke of Heaven and declaring G-d’s oneness. The Talmud (*Berachot* 13b) traces this practice to the great Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi, who would interrupt his Torah lectures to recite Shema and would pass his hand over his eyes as he said the verse. Similarly, many people close their eyes while praying or bury their face in a siddur to increase their concentration and reduce distractions. The *Magen Avraham* (132:2) cites that the custom to bow during Aleinu while saying “*va’anachnu korim u’mishtachavim u’modim*” is so that we should not

appear hypocritical as we say, “they bow to vanity and emptiness... but we bend our knees, bow and acknowledge our thanks before the King over kings of kings, Hakadosh Baruch Hu.”

Movements that Help Connect us to the Tzibur

Another aspect of movement during prayer is a way of joining the *kahal* (congregation) during particular parts of davening. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 65:2) describes a situation in which the tzibur is saying Shema, but the individual is saying a prayer that he cannot interrupt to say Shema. At that point he should pray loudly, in the tune the congregation uses for Shema, while continuing to pray the part he is actually saying. The *Kaf Hachaim* (65:7) writes that he should cover his eyes as well, to demonstrate that he is an active member of the tzibbur, accepting the yoke of Heaven as described in Shema. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 109:1) similarly writes that if the shaliach tzibur, during Chazarat Hashatz, reaches the brachah of Modim while you are still reciting the silent Shemoneh Esrei, you should bow with the tzibbur, in order not to appear as if you deny the message of Modim. A parallel to this in contemporary culture is the American practice of standing and placing our right hand over our heart during the singing of the national anthem. Just as “taking a knee” during the Star-Spangled Banner is seen as offensive to some, not participating in the important prayer rituals which everyone else is doing, can be seen, *l’havdil*, as being a *poresh min hatzibur*, literally one who separates himself from the community and denies the specific declarations being made.

Swaying

Although one of the most obvious movements in Orthodox prayer is the almost constant swaying (also known as *shukeling*), which is the unofficial custom of most Orthodox Jews, swaying is certainly not a halachic requirement. The *Shulchan Aruch* (95:3) states that during Shemoneh Esrei, we should “stand like a slave before his master with fear, awe, and dread,” which some interpret to mean standing still and not swaying. The Rema (48:intro), however, states that those who are careful (*midakdikim*) sway while praying to fulfill the verse “*kol atzmotai tomarnah Hashem mi kamocho*” — All my bones shall say, Hashem, who is like You?” (*Tehillim* 35:10). While the primary reason for swaying is so that we pray with “all of my bones” i.e. literally, my whole body, other reasons are given as well. The *Magen Avraham* (48:4) says swaying shows a humbleness before G-d. The *Zohar* offers a more spiritual explanation for swaying: “When a Jew utters a word of Torah, the light [in his soul] is kindled... and he sways back and forth, like the flame of a candle” (*Zohar* to Numbers, 218b-219a). The *Kuzari* (2:79-80) writes that it was a practical custom because several people studied out of a single large book and moved up and down to make room for the many others who wanted to use that book.

Although the *Mishna Brurah* (95:7) speaks of swaying during the Amida, the *Mishna Brurah* (48:5) also cites other opinions about swaying (*Magen Avraham* and *Eliyahu Zuta*) that we should only sway during Pesukei D’zimra and Birchot Kriat Shma, but not during the Amida. The *Mishna Brurah* (48:5) further quotes the *Magen Avraham* who says that it all

depends on the individual — people who concentrate better while swaying should sway and those who focus more intently while standing in place should just stand and not sway. The *Aruch Hashulchan* (48:3) similarly says that swaying is very person-specific and we should each find our own pattern of movement when praying.

Although our prayers are expressed verbally, tefilla is meant to be more than a mere recitation of words. Chazal created a structure that mandates us to speak our prayers, and to also utilize sight, hearing, and movement as we pray. Prayer is meant to be a full-body experience and a complete immersion into the encounter. When Rabbi Akiva prayed alone, he moved from one corner of the room to another, due to his many bows and prostrations (*Berachot* 31a). Other stories recount how rabbis were so engrossed in prayer they were not aware of things going on around them. Let us recognize the gift we have in being able to approach the Almighty in prayer. Let us focus on the words we are saying, the sights and sounds of prayer, and the movements in which we engage to come closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Let us ask Hashem to open our mouths in prayer, but also to allow our bodies and souls to come close to Him, especially at this time of the year.

Endnotes

1. Available at: <https://jewishaction.com/religion/shabbat-holidays/rosh-hashanah/best-books-prayer/>
2. “Avraham Stepped forward” (*Bereishit* 18:23), “And Yehudah stepped toward him” (*Bereishit* 44:18) and “Eliyahu stepped forward” (*Melachim I* 18:36).
3. Shiur available at: <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/828818/>



SIM SHALOM: THE PERFECT PRAYER

We end the Amidah — both on weekdays and holy days — with a tefillah for peace. This is in keeping with the tradition of concluding our prayers with the hope for shalom:

אמר ר' יהושע דסכנין בשם ר' לוי גדול השלום - שכל הברכות והתפלות חותמין בשלום: קריית שמע - חותמה בשלום - "ופרוס סוכת שלומך". ברכת כהנים - חותמה בשלום - שנאמר "וישם לך שלום". וכל הברכות - חותמין בשלום - "עושה שלום במרומיו".

Said R' Yehoshua of Sachnin in the name of R' Levi: All the blessings and prayers are sealed in peace. The recital of Shema ends in peace with "spread over us a shelter of peace,"; the priestly blessing ends in peace, as it says, "and he will place upon you peace"; and all the blessings end in peace, as it says "He who

makes peace in His heights."

Masekhet Derekh Eretz, Perek Shalom no. 19

There are, however, multiple reasons to question whether Sim Shalom is a mere request for peace.

Indeed, the first half of the berakhah asks for more than peace:

שִׁים שְׁלוֹם טוֹבָה וּבְרָכָה חֵן וְחֶסֶד וְרַחֲמִים
עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל עַמְּךָ: בְּרַכְנוּ, אֲבִינּוּ, כָּלֵנוּ
כְּאַחַד בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ כִּי בְּאוֹר פְּנִיךָ נִתְּתָ לָנוּ ה'
אֱלֹהֵינוּ תּוֹרַת חַיִּים וְאַהֲבַת חֶסֶד וְצִדְקָה וּבְרָכָה
וְרַחֲמִים וְחַיִּים וְשְׁלוֹם:

Grant peace, goodness, blessing, grace, lovingkindness and mercy to us and unto all Israel, Your people. Bless us, our Father, all of us as one with the light of Your face; For by the light of Your face, You have given us, L-rd our

G-d, the Torah of life, love of kindness, righteousness, blessing, mercy, life and peace.

Moreover, the closing (and opening) berakhot of Shemoneh Esreh — Retzei, Modim, and Sim Shalom — are not supposed to be requests at all!

אמר רב יהודה לעולם אל ישאל אדם צרכיו
לא בג' ראשונות ולא בג' אחרונות - אלא
באמצעיות:

R' Yehudah said: A person should not ask for his needs — not during the first three blessing [of the Amidah] and not during the last three blessings. Instead, he should ask during the middle blessings.¹
Berakhot 34b

Instead, Sim Shalom is supposed to be a blessing of thanks. The Rambam (Hilkhos Tefillah 1:2) states:

... חיוב מצוה זו [של תפילה] כך הוא: שיהא אדם מתחנן ומתפלל בכל יום. ומגיד שבחו של הקדוש ברוך הוא. ואחר כך שואל צרכיו שהוא צריך להם בבקשה ובתחנון. ואחר כך נותן שבח והודיה לה' על הטובה שהשפיע לו - כל אחד לפי כחו:

*This commandment obligates each person to offer supplication and prayer each day and utter praises of G-d, then petition for all his needs with requests and supplications, and finally give praise and thanks to G-d for the goodness that He has bestowed upon him; each according to his ability.*²

The *nosei keilim* of the Rambam struggle to identify the source that the final three berakhot are expressions of thanksgiving. Nonetheless, the Rambam's opinion is widely accepted. Sim Shalom, however, doesn't give the impression of gratitude. After all, how are we *thanking* G-d by saying Sim Shalom? Of the three final berakhot, only Modim is an expression of thanks!³ With Sim Shalom, we have fallen back on asking Hashem for more!

Finally, why are the critical requests in Sim Shalom — so central to our lives — *not* included in the middle section of the Amidah? Are peace, goodness, and mercy less imperative than knowledge, forgiveness, health and wealth? If anything, the requests contained in Sim Shalom are more fundamental, more impactful than anything mentioned in the middle section of the Amidah.

The evidence indicates that Sim Shalom is no unassuming request for peace. Instead, as we shall see, it is a fitting culmination of our silent "meditation" with G-d.

The Mishnah in *Rosh Hashanah* (4:5) lists the nine berakhot that comprise the Musaf Amidah on Rosh

Hashanah. Most of the berakhot are listed as expected. Yet Sim Shalom is nowhere to be found!⁴

סדר ברכות: אומר (1) אבות (2) וגבורות (3) וקדשת השם ... (4) קדשת היום - ותוקע. (5) זכרונות - ותוקע. (6) שופרות - ותוקע. ואומר (7) עבודה (8) והודאה (9) ... וברכת כהנים

The Order of the blessings is as follows: (1) Fathers, (2) Might, (3) Sanctity of the Name, (4) Sanctity of the day (and the shofar is blown), (5) Remembrances (and the shofar is blown), (6) Shofar (and the shofar is blown) ... (7) Temple Service, (8) Thanks, and (9) The Priestly Blessing.

The Priestly Blessing refers to the three-sentence berakhah recorded in Parshat Naso (Bamidbar 6:22-27):

יברכך ה' וישמרך; יאר ה' פניו אליך ויחנך; ישא ה' פניו ה' אליך וישם לך שלום.

May the L-rd bless you and keep you. May the L-rd make His countenance shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the L-rd lift up His countenance to you and give you peace.

It is one of the most famous berakhot in our tradition. But we do not consider it to be one of the blessings of the Amidah!

According to the Rambam (*Hilkhos Temidim uMussafin* 6:4), this "*Birkat Kohanim*" refers to the berakhah of Sim Shalom.⁵ The Gemara (*Megillah* 18a) already makes a connection between *Birkat Kohanim* and Sim Shalom:

ומה ראו לומר שים שלום אחר ברכת כהנים - דכתיב ושמו את שמי על בני ישראל ואני אברכם. ברכה דהקדוש ברוך הוא - שלום, שנאמר ה' יברך את עמו בשלום.

Why did they institute saying Sim Shalom after Birkat Kohanim? Because it states "And they will place My name on the Jewish people and I will bless them." The blessing of the Holy One Blessed be

Tefillah Insights: Zochreinu L'Chaim

During the ten days from Rosh HaShanah to Yom Kippur, we insert the phrase *zochreinu l'chaim* — remember us for life — in the first blessing of the Amidah. In general, we don't have any requests in the first three blessings of the Amidah, because we must first praise God and then ask for our needs. How is it that we are permitted to pray for life in the first blessing? Furthermore, why do we pray for life in the first blessing, but in the insertions at the end of the Amidah, we ask for "*chaim tovim*" — good life? R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, *Meshech Chochma*, Devarim 33:2, answers that *zochreinu l'chaim* is not a request, but rather a praise of God. Jewish people, by their nature, praise God. Therefore, we request that He provide life, not for our sake, but for His (*l'ma'ancho Elokim chaim*). We don't ask for a good life in these blessings, rather we reserve that for later, because in these blessings, the focus is on God, and Jewish people praise God even in difficult times.

Torah To Go Editors

He is peace, as it states, "The Lord will bless His nation with peace."

Sim Shalom and *Birkat Kohanim* are integrally linked and form a single unit. The Gaon of Vilna spells out the thematic connections between the two:⁶

שים שלום טוב וברכה ... הם כנגד ששה ברכות שבברכת כהנים: שלום - כנגד "וישם לך שלום"; "טובה" - כנגד יאר ה' ... כמ"ש "וירא אלקים את האור כי טוב";

"ברכה" - כנגד יברך ה'; "חן" - כנגד ויחנך;
 "וחסד" - כנגד וישמרך - כמ"ש (דב' ז:יב)
 "ושמר לך ... את החסד" - כדי שלא נאבד
 בעונינו...; "ורחמים" - כנגד "ישא ה פניו
 אליך" - כי הוא נושא עון - וכובש ונושא פנים
 אלינו...

"Sim shalom tova u'veracha" corresponds to the six berakhot contained in Birkat Kohanim: "Shalom" corresponds to "and give you peace."; "Tova" corresponds to "may the L-rd shine His countenance upon you" — as it is written: "And G-d saw the light and that it was good." ...; "uVeracha" corresponds to "may the L-rd bless you."; "Chen" corresponds to "and be gracious to you."; "Chesed" corresponds to "And he should guard you," as it says "to keep for you ... the kindness," in order that we will not be lost through our sins...; "veRachamim" corresponds to, "may Hashem lift up His face unto you" for He carries our sins and conquers [His anger] and turns His face towards us ...

Sim Shalom is part and parcel of Birkat Kohanim. The kohanim bless the people (or, for Ashkenazic Jews in the Diaspora, the chazzan recalls the Priestly blessing), and the chazan, representing the people, accepts that berakhah by reciting Sim Shalom to conclude Chazarat HaShatz.

This is emphasized in *Nusach Ashkenaz*, in which Sim Shalom is said

only during Shacharit, when *Birkat Kohanim* is (at least theoretically) recited. At other times, we recite Shalom Rav, a shorter request for peace which does not correspond to the multi-faceted *Birkat Kohanim*.

Due to the concern that a kohen might have consumed an alcoholic drink, *Birkat Kohanim* is not recited later in the day (*Taanit* 26a). The only exception is a fast day. On a *taanit*, kohanim can recite *Birkat Kohanim* until sundown. Therefore, Sim Shalom is recited as well.

This clarification — that Sim Shalom is coupled with *Birkat Kohanim* — requires further examination. Everything about *Birkat Kohanim* indicates that the priestly blessing should be offered *after* the Shemoneh Esreh — not *during* the Shemoneh Esreh. Yet Sim Shalom, which follows, *concludes* the Amidah!

In Parshat Shemini (Vayikra 9:22), Aharon blesses the people *after* he completes the sacrificial service. Wouldn't it make sense to do the same in tefillah, by inserting *Birkat Kohanim* *after* the Amidah is finished? After all, isn't *Birkat Kohanim* a *hefsek* in the Amidah? Why not wait for one more berakhah — Sim Shalom — to finish before introducing *Birkat Kohanim*?

Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein (Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Har Etzion)⁷ offers textual support for *Birkat Kohanim* to follow the Amidah — rather precede its conclusion. The Rambam (*Hilkhot Tefillah* 14:14) states this clearly:

במקדש מברכין ברכת כהנים פעם אחת
 ביום - אחר תמיד של שחר... אבל במדינה
 - מברכין אותה אחר כל תפלה - חוץ
 ממנחה....

In the Temple, the priests recite the priestly blessing once a day: After the Morning offering... But outside of the Temple, the blessing is said after every tefillah [Shacharit, Mussaf and Neilah] — except for Minchah.

A similar idea, claims Rav Lichtenstein, is expressed by the Behag (at the end of his commentary to *Berakhot*, chapter 5). The Behag claims that adding the berakhah of Sim Shalom to the Amidah is less problematic than insertions made earlier in the Shemoneh Esreh:

ואפילו זכרנו לחיים במגן לא אמרינן וכל שכן
 זכור רחמין וכבוש כעסך במודים לא אמרינן
 אבל ובספר חיים אמרינן בשים שלום דסליקו
 להו שמונה עשרה והוה ליה כתחנונים.

We do not say even 'Zokhreinu le-chayim' in Magen [Avraham]. All the more so we do not say "Zekhor rachamekha u-khevosh ka'askha" in Modim. However,

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we do recite “Be-sefer chayim” in Sim Shalom **since Shemoneh Esrei has been completed**, and it thus resembles tachanunim [additional prayers recited after the formal Shemoneh Esrei].

Contrary to everything we have learned to this point, Rav Lichtenstein suggests that the Amidah *truly ends* at the conclusion of Modim — “hatov shimecha ulecha na’eh lehodot.” *Birkat Kohanim*, as suggested by the aforementioned sources, is pronounced *after* the formal Amidah is finished. His father, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, zt”l, concurred with this approach.

This idea finds further support in the fact that we bow at the beginning and end of Modim, just as we do at the beginning and end of the first berakhah — *Birkat Avot*. Bowing for both the first and last berakhot of the Amidah, an encapsulating symmetry, is unequivocally significant.

If Modim marks the end of the Amidah, and *Birkat Kohanim* follows the Amidah, then Sim Shalom necessarily comes *after* the conclusion of the Amidah. This explains both the language of the Rambam and the formulation of the Behag. It also, according to Rav Lichtenstein, explains the phenomenon where the text of the final blessing diverges for Mincha and Maariv. If Sim Shalom is recited *after* the Amidah has been completed, it allows for more flexibility beyond the set nusach. But this all further deepens the mystery of Sim Shalom. What is this prayer recited after the conclusion of the Amidah? What is Sim Shalom?

Let me summarize our questions and issues to this point:

- Sim Shalom is known as a prayer for peace. It, however, asks for considerably more.

- The requests made in Sim Shalom are for notions omitted during the middle section of the Amidah, the section reserved for requests.

- The final three berakhot of the Amidah are reserved for thanksgiving. Sim Shalom (and Retzei, for that matter) are devoid of *hoda’ah*, serving instead as an opportunity to ask for additional needs.

- Sim Shalom is so integrally linked to *Birkat Kohanim* that the two are synonymous in the language of the Mishnah.

- There are multiple indications that *Birkat Kohanim* is said *after* the conclusion of the Amidah; necessarily, Sim Shalom forms an *epilogue* to the Amidah. What, then, is Sim Shalom?

- [Parenthetically, a meta-question: How many of these questions have bothered us before? And if the answer is “none of them,” how can we *not* ask these questions? How many thousands of times have we recited Sim Shalom and glossed over these problems? I will admit that, until my late 20s, I did not think much about these glaring difficulties with understanding tefillot. The search for answers to these questions is one of the most exhilarating aspects of my *avodat Hashem*.]

I will share first Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein’s approach to some of these questions. I will then suggest, in my humble opinion, an approach to all of the issues raised above.

Rav Lichtenstein suggests that *Birkat Kohanim* is the **divine response to our prayers**. It is the very blessing that we have been praying for! Whether that blessing comes through the spaces between the fingers of the Kohanim or is merely recited, as in the Diaspora, by the *shaliach tzibbur*, it is G-d’s

response to our requests. We, over the course of the Amidah, praised G-d as an introduction, asked him to satisfy a plethora of our needs, and then thanked Him for His “time” and “consideration.” His response is the blessing — or blessings — of *Birkat Kohanim*.

But aren’t the Kohanim the ones blessing us? No, says the Rambam (*Hilkhos Tefillah* 15:6-7), it is G-d Himself:

כהן שלא היה לו דבר מכל אלו הדברים המונעין נשיאת כפים - אף ע"פ שאינו חכם ואינו מדקדק במצות ... הרי זה נושא את כפיו: ואל תתמה ותאמר "ומה תועיל ברכת הדיוט זה?" שאין קבול הברכה תלוי בכהנים אלא בהקדוש ברוך הוא שנאמר "ושמו את שמי על בני ישראל ואני אברכם" הכהנים עושים מצותן שנצטוו בה — והקב"ה ברחמיו מברך את ישראל כחפצו:

A priest who does not have any of the factors that hinder the recitation of the priestly blessings mentioned above should recite the priestly blessing, even though he is not a wise man or careful in his observance of the commandments... Do not wonder: “What good will come from the blessing of this simple person?” for the reception of the blessings is not dependent on the priests, but on the Holy One, blessed be He, as [Bamidbar 6:27] states: “And they shall set My name upon the children of Israel, and I shall bless them.” The priests perform the mitzvah with which they were commanded, and God, in His mercy, will bless Israel as He desires.

It follows, then, that Sim Shalom is not to be understood as a request in the same way that the middle berakhot are requests. Rather, Sim Shalom is a **response** to G-d’s blessing. “Yes” we say, “May it be Your will to bestow these blessings upon us.” Thus, it is an expression of gratitude to G-d for bestowing His blessings upon us.

If Sim Shalom is a response to *Birkat Kohanim*, however, why is it said by the individual *mitpallel* in the silent Amidah — even before the blessings are bestowed? Perhaps we can argue that, for various reasons, the text of the silent Amidah should match that of the repetition. But then why recite Shalom Rav at Minchah and Maariv? If the Amidah has technically ended with the recitation of Modim, and there will be no mention of *Birkat Kohanim* — and thus no Sim Shalom — why not end the Amidah at that point?

Furthermore, if *Birkat Kohanim* is the divine response to our tefillot, shouldn't it correspond to our requests in the Amidah? We explained, according to the Vilna Gaon, how the requests in Sim Shalom correspond to *Birkat Kohanim*. But wouldn't it make sense to see a relationship between what we've asked for and what we've received?

Perhaps there is a more fundamental way of looking at Sim Shalom — and Shalom Rav for that matter. These berakhot serve as the culmination of our precious moments with G-d, and I believe they reflect a higher spiritual state of awareness than the berakhot with which I began.

Let's take a step backward:

The recitation of the Shemoneh Esreh is more than an act of prayer to fulfill a religious obligation. It is a thrice-daily encounter with the Divine that is meant to serve as a transformative experience. The process of saying the Amidah, especially the weekday Amidah, with its long list of requests covering the gamut of personal and national life, is meant to reorient our priorities and our outlook on the world. Rabbi Sampson Raphael Hirsch, following in the footsteps of

Rav David Kimchi (quoted in *Sefer Avudraham, Seder Tefillot shel Chol*), points out the word *l'hitpallel* means “to judge oneself.” The text of the Amidah allows me to compare the mindset with which I enter the state of tefillah to an ideal crafted by our sages. By reading this sacred text, authored by the Anshei Knesset HaGedolah — among them prophets — I am challenged and uplifted on many levels.

Would I, on my own, make my requests in the plural? Probably not. Given a chance to plead before the King of Kings, I would focus my own needs and the needs of my family.

Would I start my list of requests with intellectual and spiritual requests for knowledge, repentance and forgiveness? Almost certainly not.

Would I use more than half of my requests to pray for the unfolding of the national redemption of the Jewish people (from *Teka b'Shofar* through, and in the opinion of some including, *Shema Koleinu*)?

Similarly, would I choose to join my fellow worshippers in a minyan, emphasizing the fact that we come to G-d as a community, or find a quiet spot to have a spiritually uplifting moment on my own?

The recitation of the Amidah is a process that refines us as it reorients us. For this reason, personal requests precede communal requests in the middle section of the Amidah. We are drawn into a conversation with the Divine about our most basic needs. As we stand before Him, we broaden our perspective, turning to national needs.

The final berakhot of the Amidah take this a step further. Though a true understanding of Retzei and Modim are beyond the scope of this article, let

us make do with a quote from the Rav, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik:

When a Jew says Retzei, he does not refer to the satisfaction of needs and the fulfillment of the desires about which he poured out his heart in the middle, petitionary section. For this he has already prayed in the previous benediction, Shema Koleinu. When he reaches Retzei these ‘petty’ matters no longer concern him. His soul asks G-d to accept the great sacrifice he has just offered, to accept his being that is returned to G-d, cleaving unto the Infinite and connecting itself to the Divine throne. G-d is ‘satisfied’ with this offering. He receives it and restores it to the one who has offered it. The praying individual annuls himself in order to acquire himself. From his prayer man emerges firm, elevated and sublime, having found his redemption in self-loss and self-recovery...⁸

Having asked Hashem for all of our needs, we then thank Him in Modim, recognizing that everything we have is from Him. Our needs have connected us back to our Creator and allowed us to remember that everything is from Him. It is likely, for the hours between our prayers, we forgot, at least on the level of active awareness, that our daily lives were so dependent on Him. We emerge from our encounter reconnected to Him, His people and the truths underlying His world.

But there is still one more step. The final lesson in priorities, and the final step in our transformation, comes from G-d Himself.

If I could only ask for three things (or six, as explained before in the three pesukim of *Birkat Kohanim*) what would and should they be? Only my Creator truly knows. The final refinement of our requests comes from His own words in *Parshat Naso*:

יברכך ה' וישמרך; יאר ה' פניו אליך ויחנך;
 ישא ה' פניו ה' אליך וישם לך שלום.
*May the L-rd bless you and keep you.
 May the L-rd make His countenance
 shine upon you and be gracious to you.
 May the L-rd lift up His countenance to
 you and give you peace.*

What is the sum total of these blessings? I believe that there are three main themes here, none of which have received much attention until this point in the Amidah:⁹

1. The ultimate blessing is (or includes) a feeling of connection to G-d. *Birkat Kohanim* emphasizes blessing that is accompanied by an awareness of G-d's "face."

2. A request for the ultimate blessing doesn't need specific details. G-d knows us better than we know ourselves. Occasionally, that which we pray for isn't even for our good. In *Birkat Kohanim* we are blessed with berakhah as only He knows to give it.

3. All of the blessings in the world are meaningless without conditions that allow us to enjoy and capitalize on them. Each of the three pesukim starts with G-d showering a blessing, but continues with a critical secondary clause. The Kohanim help us not simply to receive divine bounty, but to receive G-d's help in protecting and appreciating it. As Rashi comments on the word *veyishmerecha*:

שלא יבאו עליך שודדים ליטול ממונך שהנותן מתנה לעבדו אינו יכול לשמר מכל אדם וכיון שבאים לסטים עליו ונוטלים אותה ממנו מה הנאה יש לו במתנה זו אבל הקב"ה הוא הנותן הוא השומר.

"That no thieves shall attack you and steal your money. For when one gives his servant a gift, he cannot protect it from all other people, so if robbers come and take it from him, what benefit has he [the servant] from this gift? As for the Holy One, blessed be He, however, He is the One who [both] gives and protects. Similarly, "Rabbi Shimon ben Chalafta said: The Blessed Holy One found no vessel which could hold Israel's blessing except peace." (*Mishna, Uktzin* 3:12)

What then is Sim Shalom? **The perfect prayer.** The tefillah that we weren't ready to offer when we first started. After standing with and engaging the Divine in dialogue, we are now different people from those who begged "G-d, please open my lips and may my mouth say Your praises." We have aligned *our* will with *His*. We thought we knew what we needed. We thought we knew what was important. But we were, certainly before the Amidah — even during the Amidah — misguided, just moving closer to the ideal.

We have grown — even since saying the beautiful berakhot of the middle section. We now introduce more sublime requests: "Grant peace, goodness, blessing, grace, lovingkindness and mercy ... Bless us, our Father, all of us as one with the light of Your face; For by the light of Your face You have given us, L-rd our G-d, the Torah of life, love of kindness, righteousness, blessing, mercy, life and peace."

What are the true goals of those many blessings? One thing: Peace. Though

many details are mentioned in the blessing, the berakhah's conclusion, the *chatimat ha-berakhah*, is clear: "May it be pleasing in Your eyes to bless Your people Israel with peace. Blessed are You, L-rd our G-d, who blesses the People of Israel with peace."

This is more than just a prayer to be spared the horrors of war. The peace that we long for in this berakhah serves as the basis for an idyllic existence, unencumbered by the crippling distractions and hurdles of envy, competition, hate and persecution. Of course we want peace. But what is the ultimate goal? *A peace of mind* that gives us the opportunity to focus on serving the *Ribbono shel Olam* while enjoying His many gifts. As Chazal tell us (*Midrash Rabbah, Vayikra* 9:9), "Great is peace, for it encompasses all other blessings."

The details of our earlier request fall to the wayside. After all, we now feel that G-d is caring for us. Rav Yosef Albo, in the *Sefer Ha-Ikkarim* (4:24), fleshes out this approach to tefillah:

ולוה יהיה מבחר התפלה מה שהיה מתפלל החכם ואומר: רבונו של עולם עשה רצונך בשמים ממעל - ותן נחת רוח ליראיך מתחת ... ואח"כ אמר והטוב בעיניך עשה - כלומר: ובכל דבר שאני מתפלל לפניך - אל תפן לדברי - ולא לבקשתי לעשות מה שלבי חפץ או מה שאני שואל. שפעמים הרבה - אני מבקש ומתפלל על דבר שהוא רע לי - לפי שאני מדמה וחושב שהוא טוב. ואתה הוא היודע יותר ממני אם הדבר ההוא טוב אלי או רע. ועל כן: אתה תבחר - ולא אני. עשה מה שאתה יודע שהוא טוב ...

The best kind of prayer is therefore that of the wise man, who said: "O L-rd, do



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Thy will in heaven above, show kindness to those who fear You here below" ... Then he says: "And do what is good in Your eyes," that is, whatever it is that I pray to You for, attend not to my words or request, to do what my heart desires, or what I ask, for many times I ask and pray for something that is bad for me, thinking it is good. But You know better than I whether the thing is good for me or bad. Therefore, decide You and not I; do what You know is good.

Sim Shalom is thus a *second chance* at tefillah. The sources above indicate that the tefillah ended at the conclusion of Modim. Perhaps so. But though we are finished with our tefillah, and even "heard" from G-d Himself, we are not yet ready to leave His presence. "One more thing!" we say. "Of course, I and the Jewish People need everything I mentioned before. But if there is one thing I can ask for, *achash'alti*, it is true peace. I may, even as I request in this perfected tefillah, appear to be asking for a multitude of things. But it all comes down to peace. *May it be pleasing in Your eyes to bless Your people Israel with peace.*"

Is our perfect prayer a request? Yes, it is. But in a significant way, it is not. We are once again requesting, but now we do so on His terms. We have moved on from our petty requests and yearn to see the world as He sees it. Through the process of asking, thanking and receiving, we give him the greatest thanks that any child can give to a parent: The expression of desire to follow in their ways and adopt their world-view.

I try to stop for a moment at several places in Shemoneh Esreh. One of them is at the end of Modim. I take stock for a moment and think about how distracted and unaware

of G-d I had been for so long before my tefillah. I am glad that I brought Him back into my consciousness and hope that I will stay in that state of awareness for as long as possible after I leave the shul or beit midrash. Then I accept that all that I thought so important just moments before, pales in comparison to the blessings that I received and pray to continue receiving from my Creator in the form of peace, goodness, blessing, grace, lovingkindness and mercy. Only now do I take three steps backward, reconnected to the Divine and in a peaceful state of mind.¹⁰

Endnotes

1. *Shibbolei Haleket* (Siman 28) explains that although the final berakhot do, obviously, contain requests, they differ from the requests in the middle section of the Amidah. The requests made in Retzei and Sim Shalom are for *communal* needs, whereas earlier requests are for *individual* needs. [Thus we are able to add special communal requests during the Aseret Yemei Teshuva.] Furthermore, it *praises* the Master when He is needed by the masses. It is not completely clear, however, how the needs expressed in Retzei are more "communal" than many of the needs listed in the latter half of the middle section. Cf. Tosafot to Berakhot 34a, s.v. *Al*. See as well *Sefer Or Hachamah* by Rav Zundel Krozer to Berakhot 34b who suggests several approaches to this issue.

2. The Rambam's source seems to be *Bavli Berakhot* 34a. The Talmud, however, does not mention giving thanks. Instead, the last three berakhot are characterized as follows: "Rabbi Chanina said: In the first three, one resembles a servant presenting praise before his master; in the middle ones, he resembles a servant requesting a bonus from his master; in the final ones, he resembles a servant who received a bonus from his master and now takes leave." See *Kesef Mishneh* and *Lechem Mishneh*. See also Rabbeinu Manoach who suggests a different source from the final perek of *Masekhet Berakhot*.

3. See *Shu"t Ridbaz* (8:15) who explains that the "*ikkar hoda'ah*" is Modim. Then, as with Kriyat Shema, Chazal were *metakein*

appropriate *berakhot* before and after. We will suggest a different approach.

4. The same phenomenon can be found in *Mishnah Tamid* 5:1. The *Mishnah* there describes the tefillot offered as part of the Temple service. The final *berakhot* are "*Avodah*" (Retzei) and "*Birkat Kohanim*." Interestingly, this *Mishnah* seems to indicate that Modim was completely omitted in the Temple.

5. *Tosafot* to *Bavli Berakhot* 11a, s.v. *Birkat Kohanim*, however, disagree.

6. This comment appears in some versions of the Vilna Gaon's commentary to *Shulchan Aruch* at the end of *Hilchot Rosh Chodesh* (siman 428).

7. R. Mosheh Lichtenstein, "The Blessing of Sim Shalom," available at: <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/blessing-sim-shalom>.

8. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart*, p.179.

9. See the many explanations of these *berakhot* as listed in the *Sifri*.

10. And what about Minchah and Maariv? We switch to Shalom Rav because there is no *Birkat Kohanim*. Rav Uri Weisblum, in *Sefer He'arat haTefillah* (p. 234) explains that while Shalom Rav is *shorter* than Sim Shalom, leaving out the multitude of requests found in the latter, it is actually a stronger request. We no longer ask merely for peace, but "*abundant peace*." Rav Weisblum suggests that when we have *Birkat Kohanim*, we suffice with the simple request for peace. All of the things we ask for, *tova uvracha* etc., join to create the peace we are looking for. In the absence of *Birkat Kohanim*, we add a level of urgency — "grant *abundant peace*," *Shalom Rav*.





REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER FOR THE YAMIM NORA'IM

A. The First Principle of Prayer: Hashem Is Involved in Our Personal Lives and World History

The first Rashi in Chumash notes that the stories of Bereishis and the rest of the Torah are as important as the *mitzvos haTorah*. Hashem commanded us through His mitzvos to do various actions and to abstain from others. These commandments are the mainstay of the Torah. If the Torah is about laws, why are so many stories included in the Torah? We read the stories about Adam, Noach, Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Yosef, Moshe, and

more. There are many stories in the Torah, sometimes containing more detail than certain mitzvos. Why is this? Rashi explains that the stories teach us that Hashem our God is involved in human events. He is more than just the Creator and Lawgiver; He is actively involved in human life. Hashem is part of our everyday life, on the individual level and on the national level.

I remember *davening* as a child in New York in a *Chassidishe shteeble* filled with Hungarian and Polish refugees and wondering, “Who is Hashem?” “He is also a member of the shul,” I told myself. “He is absolutely here in the lives of these people in shul.” Over

the centuries, the Jewish people have been able to both absorb and live this reality.

When we read the stories in the Torah, we see Hashem as a real character, indeed as the prime character, of the stories. He has conversations with Adam, Noach, the Avos, Moshe, and Aharon. He plays a major role. The Torah wants us to make this a living part of ourselves. God is not something abstract. He is not just a lawgiver who gave us a book of do’s and don’ts and a *Shulchan Aruch*. There is a far more important concept of Hashem: as a real, living being, involved in our lives and in the history of the world. He is as

important as presidents and kings, and we have to feel that. Hashem is an important actor in the human story. This concept is the basis of Sefer Bereishis, as Rashi illustrates with his famous first comment.

ומה טעם פתח בבראשית? משום ... שאם יאמרו אומות העולם לישראל: "לסטים אתם שכבשתם ארצות שבעה גוים", הם אומרים להם: "כל הארץ של הקב"ה היא; הוא בראה ונתנה לאשר ישר בעיניו. ברצונו נתנה להם, וברצונו נטלה מהם ונתנה לנו".

For what reason does [the Torah] open with Bereishis (when the first mitzvah to the Jewish people comes only much later)? ... For if the nations of the world will tell Israel "You are thieves, for you captured the land of the seven nations [who previously lived there]," they will reply, "All land belongs to God. He created it and gave it to whoever He saw fit. When He wished, He gave it to them, and when He wished, He took it from them and gave it to us."

Rashi, Bereishis 1:1

At different times Hashem plays the roles of coach, judge, reward giver, and punisher. He is involved in whatever we do. This is why the Jewish people get the Land of Israel. Hashem gave it to us through His involvement in human history. He is a participant in the human story.

Prayer is our way of accessing Hashem and influencing His role in our lives and in history. It is a great gift which He has given to us.

B. The Second Principle of Prayer: A Precious Gift

Tefillah, prayer, is Hashem's gift connected with the spiritual level of the soul, the *tzelem Elokim*. The *Shem Mishmuel* (Noach 5674) defines the word "tefillah" based on the *passuk* in Bereishis 30:8, "*Naftulei Elokim*

niftalti." Rashi there says that *naftulei* means connection, like the word *pesil*, which is a wick comprised of several strands twisted together. Tefillah therefore means connecting to Hashem, directing our own Godliness toward Him. This is the gift Hashem gave to us in order to express the Godly, spiritual side of ourselves.

This process of connecting to God through prayer is also a unifying process within ourselves. Our biological souls may want to eat, drink and be merry, but our emotional, spiritual selves often say no. Sometimes our emotions want to get angry, but our intellect says no. We experience many internal conflicts. How can we settle the contradictions within ourselves? The *tzelem Elokim*, our inherent Godliness, unifies all the elements of our personality into one. Tefillah addresses these issues by making us aware of our own Godliness and connection to Him, thus enabling our spiritual side to be the arbiter of our inner conflicts.

We live at a time of conflict — between people, and between nations. Individuals experience conflict within themselves. A person has many goals, which often conflict. The goal of financial success, for example, drives a person to spend a lot of time working. But we also want to spend time at home. People want power, but power produces enemies. Then enter alienation and anxiety. How can we synthesize our conflicting drives? Prayer connects us with Hashem, and helps us put our competing values in perspective.

When we connect to Hashem, He stretches out a hand, caresses us, consoles us, and tells us to put things into perspective. He shares a bit of His Divine perspective with us

through the power of prayer. Our bodies shake back and forth, our souls sing in emotional rapture, our minds contemplate the greatness of the Almighty and how He can help us. All levels of our personality are involved in one act of connection with Hashem together with our own unified, single soul.

Let us always be strong in tefillah. This is the solution for concerns of health, wealth, peace, and security. Prayer connects us to Hashem and He helps us with our needs. It places *tzelem Elokim* as the prime mover of all the levels within ourselves, instead of conflicting levels of *guf*, *nefesh* and *seichel* (body, soul and mind).

Especially on the Yamim Nora'im, prayer becomes the main focus, enabling us to achieve internal unity as well as unity between all of the Jewish people. Indeed, prayer on Yamim Nora'im enables us to achieve unity with the whole world and of course with Hashem.

C. The Third Principle of Prayer: Using Emotion and Intellect to Serve Hashem

In Parshas Vayigash, the Torah describes the confrontation between Yehuda and Yosef. These two great *tzaddikim*, founders of the Jewish people, are not just models for their respective *shevatim*, but for each and every Jew. In Chassidus, Yehuda represents the heart of the Jew and Yosef represents the mind of the Jew. Every person must possess and develop a combination of a logical, intellectual mind with a warm heart filled with feeling.

There are two great expressions of serving Hashem and keeping His Torah. These two expressions are

Torah study and prayer. “*Talmud Torah keneged kulam*” — Torah study is the most important of all mitzvos a human being can ever do (*Pei’ah* 1:1).” This is primarily an intellectual endeavor. The second method of expressing fealty to God is by praying to Hashem. This is accomplished through arousal and experience of feelings. “...*Le’ahava es Hashem elokeichem ule’ovdo bechol levavchem uve’chol nafshechem*. ...To love the Lord, your God, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul (*Devarim* 10:12).” The Gemara (*Taanis* 2a) asks, how does one serve God with his heart? The Gemara gives a short and profound answer — with emotional prayers. Prayer is not meant to be primarily an intellectual exercise. It should emotionally move us! Just saying the words of prayer is not enough. We must feel the words. We must emotionally beg Hashem for the things that we desire, and thank and praise Him with all of our heartfelt emotions.

We need to see more emotional prayer among us. Too often prayer has become an intellectual exercise, as if going through a checklist, to say this chapter and recite this prayer. Prayer must include emotion! Before you pray, think of yourself as talking to Hashem. Then pray and speak emotionally of your needs and ask for help. “I am your child. I need your help. I am suffering. My family needs your help. My people need your help. Come help us Abba!” How do you serve Hashem with all of your heart? With prayer! We must also sing songs

of joy and praise, including Hallel. Our hearts serve our Creator, Who is our best friend and our father in heaven. Prayer is a service of the heart, *avodah shebalev*.

Before you pray, think of yourself as talking to Hashem. Then pray and speak emotionally of your needs and ask for help. “I am your child. I need your help. I am suffering. My family needs your help. My people need your help. Come help us Abba!”

Torah, however, is in the mind — the cool, collected intellect, logically analyzing, unswayed by emotion. When learning Torah, we must be sharp and to the point. Prejudices and preconceptions have no place in Torah study. We should not take the Torah where we want it to go. We must follow the Torah’s logic to where it tells us to go. This is the only real way to learn Torah, *Torah lishmah, la’amita shel Torah*, no matter where it takes us. In talmud Torah, the heart cannot be our guide; the mind must be the master.

Yehuda was an emotional person, and he was the antagonist of Yosef. He originally had hatred and jealousy

for Yosef. He was almost ready to kill him. Yehuda then instigated the sale of Yosef. This was the downside of his emotional nature. Later, in the story of Yehuda and Tamar, Yehuda repents. Even though Yehuda was the leader of the brothers, he courageously admitted his guilt. Tamar, a young woman, was able to show how terribly he had acted. Yehuda was about to commit the worst of crimes, murder, but he didn’t. “She is right,” announced Yehuda, “and I am wrong.” He succeeded in directing his emotions the other way.

Emotions can be very damaging. Bad emotions can really hurt others and even the person who experiences them. Emotions, though, can be wonderful, especially in terms of changing a person for the good. Positive emotions include the emotions of love and yearning for something better, the emotions of shame and regret, of a desire to do good, the emotions of excitement to do the right thing. These are great emotions and are at the core of repentance.

The Yamim Nora’im are days of repentance. We must be able to say that we have made a mistake. The mind sees things one way. If a person analyzed a situation and concluded that a certain behavior was fitting, the mind will normally maintain that conclusion. The heart, though, can cry and see the pain that one has caused others. The heart has the ability to change.

Change is so important for us! We must be brave enough to admit that we have made mistakes and that



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we can learn from them. From our experience of life we learn that we can and do make mistakes. We can even be happy to grow through our mistakes, and do *teshuvah*, repentance. These emotions encourage a person to experience the catharsis of change. This is the *lev* of a Jew. This is Yehuda.

Yosef is the mind. The mind is very important. When it discovers the truth, the mind knows what it is and will not budge from that truth. If you know that $2 + 2 = 4$, the whole world could oppose you but you would still know that it is the truth. You would surely insist that it is so. We know as truth that Hashem gave us the Torah. No one can budge us from this truth. No matter how much our enemies try to distort history, they cannot succeed, because our minds will not be swayed.

Similarly, no amount of misrepresentation and deceit can ever change the truth that we are the founders of the holy city of Jerusalem and that we had two temples there. No matter how many bulldozers come to the Temple Mount to destroy remnants of our Holy Temple that stood there, they cannot change our awareness of the reality of our history. No one can change the truth for us.

The mind of the Jew knows the truth and will not leave the truth — *Moshe ve'soraso emes* — Moshe and his Torah are true (*Sanhedrin* 110a). This is logical and historical fact.

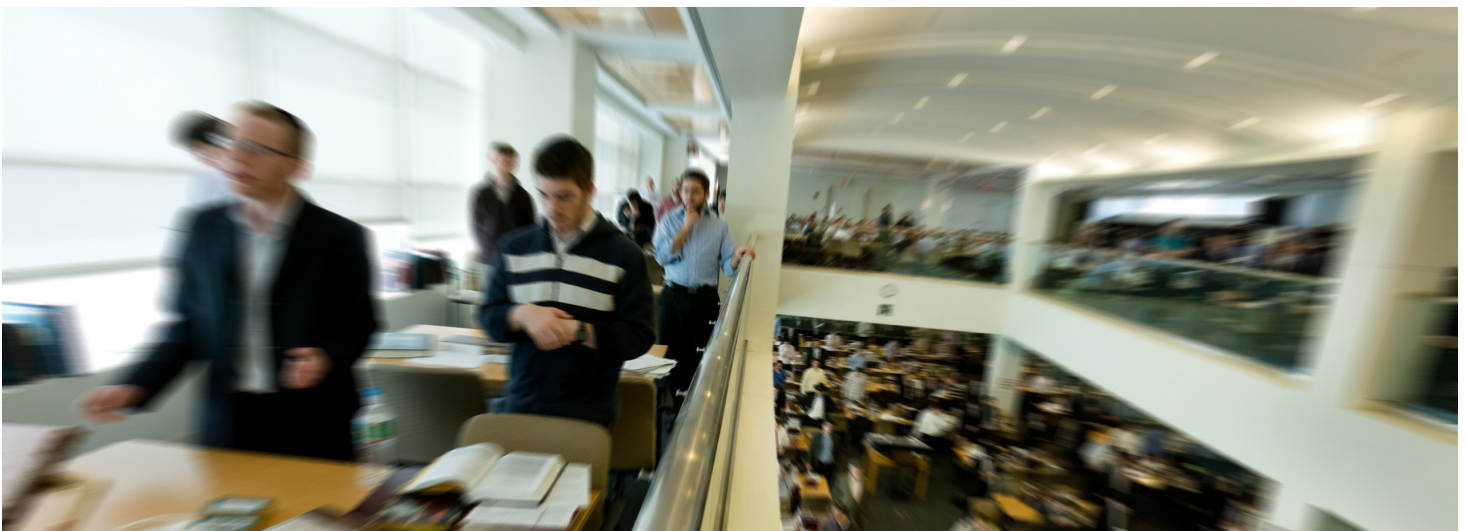
No amount of pressure has ever been able to change us as a nation. Hundreds of thousands of Jews were burned at the stake in the Middle Ages, but we did not abandon the truth of our faith. The Holocaust did not make us abandon our faith that we are the chosen people, the people of Israel and that the Land of Israel is ours. The terrorist attacks of today will not change our awareness of this truth. All of Israel is ours, and Jerusalem is ours. We know this truth, no matter how much they may attack us. We may become frightened by our enemy's attempts to hurt us, but we will never relinquish our recognition of the truth. What our parents taught us is true, and what our teachers taught us is true. We are the chosen people of God, and he gave us the Torah that guides us to this day.

Yosef was the true Jew. Chazal say he was the same Yosef in his father's house, in the house of Potifar, in jail, and then in the palace of Egypt. His steadfastness was rooted in the power of his mind to know the truth and to

remain absolutely committed to his values in all circumstances, whether they were pleasant or horrible.

Yehuda was the first Jewish king. As such he represented the heart of Israel. The Rambam writes in *Hilchos Melachim* (3:6) that the king's heart is the very heart of Israel. As the heart of his people, Yehuda was ready to sacrifice his own freedom, and even his very life for the benefit of Israel. This is why he offered himself as a slave in place of Binyamin. He wanted to preserve Yaakov's life and the burgeoning family-nation of Israel. Self-sacrifice and absolute dedication to the nation of Israel is the very heart of our people.

Thus the reconciliation of Yosef and Yehuda ensured Jewish leadership forever, to have the optimal combination of thought and feelings, to use the thinking Jewish mind and the feeling Jewish heart for the benefit of all Jews. This is the model of King David, and of the King Mashiach who will ultimately lead our holy people at the time of the final redemption. This is the model that we should try to emulate during the Yamim Nora'im when we go through the process of *teshuvah* — which involves our total intellect and heart.





MECHILA IN HUMAN AND HALACHIC TERMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR YOM KIPPUR AND BEYOND

Teshuva is a mitzvah that is incumbent upon us throughout the year, but which takes on unique significance during Aseres Yemei Teshuva.¹ Similarly, achieving interpersonal reconciliation — via asking and granting *mechila* (forgiveness) — applies all year round, but assumes special relevance as Yom Kippur approaches.

Before reviewing the halachic sources pertaining to *mechila*, it is worth acknowledging the complexity of this issue on a human level. The question of how to seek and extend forgiveness should not be reduced to abstract formulations; it must also take into account psychological realities endemic to the human condition.² To ask forgiveness from someone

who we have wronged is no easy gesture. [This is especially true when the overture is done sincerely, rather than in a perfunctory, manipulative or patronizing manner.] It requires humbling ourselves, swallowing personal pride, and assuming genuine responsibility for having caused harm to another person. Likewise, to genuinely forgive someone who has wronged us can be equally challenging. There are times where forgiving doesn't sit right with us — whether because the hurt is too great or because the offender seems undeserving of our forgiveness (perhaps we are convinced that he lacks a genuine sense of remorse, or because we want to reserve the possibility of pursuing legal recourse to redress the crime).

On the other hand, as difficult as it is to forgive, withholding forgiveness can take a heavy toll on our emotional and physical wellbeing. Studies have found that people who rehearse unforgiving responses experience elevated blood pressure, which can eventually compromise the immune system.³ It has been said: "Resentment is like a glass of poison that a man drinks while waiting for his enemy to die."

This article will present not an unequivocal case for forgiving at all costs, but an appreciation of how the halacha engages the complex realities of human relationships. As will be seen, the picture is nuanced. Not every situation demands that we forgive. And yet, even as the halacha creates distinct parameters, it also leaves a measure of

latitude for going beyond the letter of the law when appropriate. It beckons us to aspire to ever greater levels of personal piety, offering us a glimpse of the tangible spiritual dividends that come along with such choices.

Framing the Halachic Issues

Let us begin with a series of five questions. First, what is the source for the obligation to ask *mechila* and to grant *mechila*? Second, are these respective gestures interdependent or are they independent of one another? In other words, does someone whose initial request for *mechila* is rebuffed still have an obligation to seek forgiveness? Conversely, if the offender shows no remorse and has made no overture toward the person he wronged, is it incumbent upon the victim to initiate the process of reconciliation? Is he obligated to extend forgiveness unilaterally? Third, what is the role of *mechila* within the process of teshuva and as a prerequisite for achieving forgiveness? Fourth, are there offenses for which forgiveness need not be granted and for which it should not be sought? Fifth, what is the relationship between the requirement to extend *mechila* and the Torah's prohibition against bearing a grudge — *lo sitor es bnei amecha*? Is refusing to forgive synonymous with bearing a grudge?

Two Sources for Mechila

There are two Mishnaic sources that establish the requirement to seek forgiveness from those whom we have wronged: one appears in Tractate *Yoma* in connection with Yom Kippur; the other in Tractate *Bava Kama* with regard to *chovel bachavero* — monetary obligations resulting from physically assaulting another Jew.

The mishna in *Yoma* (8:9) states a principle regarding the capacity of Yom Kippur to provide atonement:

עבירות שבין אדם למקום יום הכפורים מכפר עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו אין יום הכפורים מכפר עד שירצה חברו - את זו דרש רבי אלעזר בן עזריה: מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו, עבירות שבין אדם למקום יום הכפורים מכפר עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו אין יום הכפורים מכפר עד שירצה את חברו.

Yom Kippur atones for transgressions between a person and God, but for a transgression against one's neighbor, Yom Kippur cannot atone, until he appeases his neighbor. Thus R. Eleazar ben Azariah expounds the text, "From all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed": For transgressions between a person and God, Yom Kippur atones; for transgressions against one's neighbor, Yom Kippur cannot atone, until he appeases his neighbor.

In its discussion of this mishna, the Gemara cites various halachic rulings pertaining to the requirement of asking and granting *mechila*. These halachos are codified by Rambam, (*Hilchos Teshuva* Chapter 2) and *Shulchan Aruch* (OC 606) and include the following: If at first you don't succeed (in achieving the other's forgiveness), try a second and third time, and in the presence of three other friends. If the aggrieved party remains obstinate, one is absolved from pursuing the matter further, unless that person happens to be one's rebbi, in which case it is necessary to make continuous overtures in hopes of gaining forgiveness. If the offended party passes away, one must visit his grave and declare in the presence of ten: "*chatasi la'Shem elokei Yisrael ve'lepeloni ze she'chatasi lo*" — I have sinned against Hashem the Lord of Israel and to this individual whom I have sinned against.

The mishna in *Bava Kama* (8:7), discussing monetary compensation for physical assaults, states the following:

אף על פי שהוא נותן לו אין נמחל לו עד שיבקש ממנו שנאמר (בראשית כ') ועתה השב אשת וגו', ומנין שלא יהא המוחל אכזרי שנאמר (שם) ויתפלל אברהם אל האלקים וירפא אלקים את אבימלך וגו'.

Even when he gives him [the payment], he will not be forgiven until he seeks [pardon] from him, as it says, "Therefore, return the wife of the man [Abraham] for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you" (Genesis 20:7). And from where do we know the forgiver should not be cruel? As it says, "Abraham prayed to God and God healed Avimelech" (ibid 20:17).

Rashi explains that the mishna refers to a situation where a person has been shamed by another in a manner — such as a blow to the ear or the cheek — where *beis din* would impose a monetary fine. The mishna teaches that monetary compensation is insufficient because emotional scars remain, and therefore the offender must also ask the other's forgiveness. Once forgiveness is requested, the victim should respond compassionately and grant forgiveness. The mishna proves this from the episode involving Avimelech's abduction of Avraham's wife, Sarah, which resulted in the kingdom being beset by a strange illness whereby pregnant women could not give birth. G-d threateningly appeared to Avimelech in a nocturnal vision and instructed him to return Sara to Avraham who, as a prophet, would pray to alleviate the suffering. In other words, Hashem directed Avimelech not merely to return Sara but also to procure Avraham's heartfelt forgiveness to such a degree that he would be naturally inclined to pray for Avimelech.⁴ From here we derive

the obligation to seek forgiveness. By extension, Avraham's willingness to pray is the source for requiring us to grant forgiveness when asked. Not to have prayed would have prolonged the suffering and would have been deemed callous.⁵

What is the relationship between these two sources? Are the obligations derived in both instances identical? Or do these sources reflect separate and distinct obligations?

Two Tiers of Mechila

An indication that the two sources reflect different aspects relating to *mechila* emerges from a seeming contradiction between two rulings of the Rambam. In codifying the mishna in *Bava Kama*, the Rambam suggests a fundamental distinction between bodily injury and monetary damages, implying that for the latter, there is no requirement to ask forgiveness:

אינו דומה מזיק חברו בגופו למזיק ממון, שהמזיק ממון חברו כיון ששלם מה שהוא חייב לשלם נתכפר לו אבל חובל בחבירו אע"פ שנתן לו חמשה דברים אין מתכפר לו ואפילו הקריב כל אילי נביות אין מתכפר לו ולא נמחל עונו עד שיבקש מן הנחבל וימחול לו.

A man who inflicts physical injury upon another is unlike one who damages another's property. If one damaged another's property, as soon as he has paid what he is required to pay he obtains atonement. If, on the other hand, he wounded another person, even though he has paid compensation on five counts he does not obtain atonement, and even if he has offered up all the rams of Nebaioth, he is not atoned, and his sin is not forgiven unless he asks forgiveness of the injured person who will pardon him.

Hilchos Chovel 5:9

On the other hand, when codifying the mishna in *Yoma*, the Rambam

includes theft in the list of offenses for which *mechila* must be sought:

אין התשובה ולא יום הכפורים מכפרין אלא על עבירות שבין אדם למקום ... אבל עבירות שבין אדם לחבירו כגון החובל את חברו או המקלל חברו או גוזלו וכיוצא בהן אינו נמחל לו לעולם עד שיתן לחבירו מה שהוא חייב לו וירצהו, אע"פ שהחזיר לו ממון שהוא חייב לו צריך לרצותו ולשאול ממנו שימחול לו, אפילו לא הקניט את חברו אלא בדברים צריך לפייסו ולפגע בו עד שימחול לו.

Repentance and the Day of Atonement atone only for sins committed between man and G-d ... but sins between man and man — for instance, if one injures his neighbor, or curses his neighbor or robs him, or offends him in like matters — are ever not absolved unless he makes restitution of what he owes and begs the forgiveness of his neighbor. And, although he made restitution of the monetary debt, he is obliged to pacify his neighbor and to beg his forgiveness. Even if he only offended his neighbor in words, he is obliged to appease him and implore him till he be forgiven by him.

Hilchos Teshuva 2:9

If monetary restitution suffices for one who caused monetary damage, the same should be true for theft. Why, then, does the Rambam rule that for the sin of *gezel*, we are required, in addition to returning the article or its value, to seek forgiveness from the victim?

The *Lechem Mishneh* (in *Hilchos Chovel*) suggests that in two respects the sin of theft is deemed more serious than damaging another's property. First, because unlike the case of damages, the thief actually profits from the victim's loss. Second, because the victim of a theft feels personally violated. For these reasons, the sin of theft is treated on par with physical assault, for which we are required to ask forgiveness. According

to this approach, for all instances of monetary loss, with the exception of theft, the perpetrator need only offer monetary compensation and would not be required to seek forgiveness from the victim.⁶

However, other commentators⁷ suggest that the two rulings of the Rambam are meant to reflect two tiers relating to the obligation of seeking forgiveness. When distinguishing between bodily assault and property damage, the Rambam refers to the requirement of seeking *mechila* as part of the process of making restitution, in accordance with the law stated in *Tractate Bava Kama*. Along with monetary compensation, the offender owes the victim an apology. Interestingly, the language of the Rambam implies further that not only must the offender seek forgiveness, he must also "attain" forgiveness.⁸ Without seeking — and possibly also attaining — *mechila*, the offender has yet to undo the effects of his actions. By contrast, when damaging another's property, full restitution is achieved merely by restoring the victim financially. Nevertheless, one who causes property damage has a separate obligation to ask his victim's forgiveness as a prerequisite for receiving atonement from G-d. This is based on the derivation of "From all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed." Hence, the Rambam in *Hilchos Teshuva* includes theft in the list of sins for which we must ask for forgiveness as part of the teshuva process, and as a means of attaining forgiveness from G-d.

Based on this analysis, it is conceivable that for physical assaults one must continue to make efforts to attain forgiveness as part of making "emotional restitution," even beyond asking three times, inasmuch as

restitution is not complete until one attains forgiveness.⁹ On the other hand, with regard to attaining atonement on Yom Kippur, what is key is the effort toward seeking the other's pardon — which applies even to monetary wrongs. Under normal circumstances, it is enough to make an honest effort three times, after which there is no longer an obligation.

Obligations of the Victim When the Offender Hasn't Requested Mechila

Are we obligated to forgive without being asked?

The midrash in *Bamidbar Rabbah* (19) states definitively that the obligation to forgive only applies when the offender expresses remorse and asks for forgiveness. The midrash derives this from a verse in the Book of Shmuel where Shmuel agreed to pray for the people after they expressed remorse for having demanded of him that he appoint a king.

ומנין שאם סרח אדם לחבירו ואמר לו חטאתי שנקרא חוטא אם אינו מוחל לו שנא' (ש"א יב) גם אנכי חלילה לי מחטוא לה' מחדול להתפלל בעדכם אימתי כשבאו ואמרו חטאנו שנא' ויאמר העם אל שמואל חטאנו כי עברנו את פי ה' ואת דברך השיב חלילה לי מחטא לה'.

How do we know that if a person sinned against his friend and said "I have wronged you," that [the friend] is considered a sinner if he doesn't forgive him? Because it states, "As for me, far be it from me to sin against the Lord and refrain from praying for you." When did this take place? When they came and said, "we have sinned," as it is stated, "The nation said to Shmuel, 'We have sinned for we have transgressed the word of G-d and your word,'" and he replied "far be it from me to sin against the Lord ..."

Does the halacha require the aggrieved party to do anything to help spur the offender to seek *mechila*?

The Gemara in *Yoma* 87a, records the practice of R. Zera

ר' זירא כי הוה ליה מלתא בהדי איניש הוה חליף ותני לקמיה ומציא ליה כי היכי דניתי וניפוק ליה מדעתיה.

When Rabbi Zera had a complaint against a person who insulted him, he would pace back and forth and present himself, so that the offender would come and appease him.

Rashi explains that R. Zera would purposely make himself available to the person who wronged him — *ulai yevakesh mimenu mechila v'yimchol lo* — perhaps he will ask forgiveness and forgiveness will be granted. The Gemara there records a similar story involving Rav.

These practices, while not rising to a formal obligation, nevertheless suggest that it is appropriate for the offended party to make himself physically available to the offender, thus affording him an opportunity to ask *mechila*. R. Yitzchak Blazer (*Kochvei Or*, no. 5) finds a precedent for this in the fact that Hashem draws close to us during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, in order to give us the opportunity to do teshuva before Yom Kippur. If so, the merit of doing so might be specifically associated with the period before Yom Kippur. Indeed, the Gemara seems to associate the practices of these rabbis with the period just prior to Yom Kippur as a means of ensuring that the offender do what is necessary to attain divine forgiveness on Yom Kippur.

Upon further reflection, however, there may be a firmer halachic basis to require the victimized party to take initiative in the process of reconciliation — not only in

connection with Yom Kippur but throughout the year. This would be predicated on the mitzvah of *hocheiach tochiach es amisecha*. (*Vayikra* 19:17) Although classically understood as a commandment to rebuke someone who is committing an aveira, many Rishonim assume that this mitzvah also refers to a case in which one perceives that he has been wronged by another in a manner that is likely to arouse feelings of hostility. In such a situation, the offended party is obligated to confront the offender and air his grievance rather than keep the resentment within.

The Rambam writes:

כשיחטא איש לאיש לא ישטמנו וישתוק ... אלא מצוה עליו להודיעו ולומר לו למה עשית לי כך וכך ולמה חטאת לי בדבר פלוני שנאמר הוכח תוכיח את עמיתך.

When one person sins against another, [the victim] should not contain it and remain silent ... rather, there is a commandment to inform the offender and say to him, "Why did you do this to me and why did you sin against me on this matter?" as it states, "you shall surely rebuke your neighbor."

Hilchos De'os 6:6

Ramban and several other commentators interpret this pasuk in a similar fashion.

The Ramban explains that part of the rationale for doing so is in order to facilitate reconciliation by affording the offender an opportunity to ask for *mechila*.¹⁰ Thus we see that that one who is wronged is mandated by the Torah to take action and initiate a process by which the offender will be more likely to seek forgiveness for his actions.

Finally, it should be noted that although we are not required to grant forgiveness to someone who has not specifically requested it, there exists a level of *midas*

chasidus — a higher standard of piety — which would encourage us to extend forgiveness unilaterally. Thus, the Gemara (*Megillah* 28b) records that R. Nechunya ben HaKaneh attributed his longevity to the fact that he never went to bed bearing resentment toward his colleagues. The Gemara states that this parallels Mar Zutra's bedtime practice to forgive all those who sinned against him. We see that it is not obligatory to unilaterally forgive someone, but it is commendable to do so. Indeed, the introductory paragraph for *Kerias Sh'ma al HaMita* printed in many siddurim contains a prayer that mirrors Mar Zutra's practice, forgiving those who sinned against us. Such an expression of unsolicited *mechila* is also incorporated in the *Tefillah Zakah* prayer recited by many just before or after Kol Nidrei.

Instances in Which We Need Not Forgive: Slander and the Good of the Offender

The Rama writes:

והמוחל לא יהיה אכזרי מלמחול אם לא שמכיון לטובת המבקש מחילה, ואם הוציא עליו שם רע א"צ למחול לו.

One should not be cruel and withhold forgiveness, unless it is for the benefit of the one seeking forgiveness. If one was a victim of slander, one need not forgive.

Rama, Orach Chaim no. 606

The Rama has identified two categories for which we need not forgive: when our intention is for the benefit of the offender, and when our reputation was slandered.

Let us first explore the latter exemption. The earliest source for this ruling is the following comment of the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Bava Kama* 8:7):

א"ר יוסה הדא דתימר שלא הוציא לו שם רע אבל הוציא לו שם רע אין לו מחילה עולמית.
R. Yosa said: When was this said? When

he did not slander his name; but if he slandered his name he can never be forgiven.

The most obvious rationale for not having to forgive a slanderer is that the damage is irreversible, since there will be people who heard the original slander and did not hear about the slanderer's contrition.¹¹ Additionally, the sin of slander affects not only the person spoken about but also his progeny in future generations.¹² R. Yitzchak Hutner (*Pachad Yitzchak*, Yom Kippur, no. 38) suggests a more innovative explanation. He explains that the obligation to forgive others is modeled after Hashem's forgiveness of us. Just as Hashem forgives us when we sin against Him, so must we emulate Hashem and forgive others when they sin against us. However, since Hashem does not forgive those who commit the sin of *chilul Hashem* — desecrating His name and reputation — so are we not obligated to forgive those who damage our reputation.¹³

The first exception presented by the Rama — that we may be unforgiving if our intent is for the benefit of the offender — requires clarification. According to the *Bach*, the source for this exception is an incident recorded in Tractate *Yoma* 87b. The Gemara relates how on one occasion Rav offended Rav Chanina. Although Rav tried to appease Rav Chanina numerous times, Rav Chanina would not forgive him. The Gemara comments:

ור' חנינא היכי עביד הכי והאמר רבא כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירין לו על כל פשעיו, אלא ר' חנינא חלמא חזי ליה לרב דזקפוהו בדיקלא וגמירי דכל דזקפוהו בדיקלא רישא הוי אמר שמע מינה בעי למעבד רשותא ולא איפייס כי היכי דליזיל ולגמר אורייתא בבבל.
How could Rav Chanina do this? Didn't

Rava say: Anyone who is forgiving will be forgiven for all his sins? Rather, Rav Chanina had a dream and saw Rav hanging on a palm tree, and there is a tradition that one who is hanging on a palm tree will become a leader. He [R. Chanina] said [to himself]: Apparently Rav is destined to be a leader; Let me not appease him so that he will go and teach Torah in Babylonia.

According to Rashi, Rav Chanina's motivation was for his own self-preservation. Since he [Rav Chanina] was already a rosh yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael, he worried that Rav's destiny as a leader, were it to unfold in Bavel, would come at the expense of his own position, thus hastening his own demise. R. Chanina's inflexibility forced Rav to leave Eretz Yisrael and establish a new Yeshiva in Babylonia.

The *Bach* (OC 606) and the *Bi'ur HaGera* (ibid) note that according to Rashi's explanation, there is nothing in this story to support the Rama's ruling that we may refuse to forgive for the sake of the offender since, as noted, R. Chanina's refusal was for his own sake. Rather, the Rama must have interpreted the Gemara differently. Rav Chanina's dream suggested to him that Rav was destined to become a rabbinic leader, which might saddle him with communal responsibilities that would detract from his Torah studies. Therefore R. Chanina refused to forgive Rav so that he would be enticed to relocate to Babylonia, which would allow him to remain focused on his studies. Hence, R. Chanina's refusal to forgive Rav was intended for the benefit of Rav himself. The *Bach* wonders, however, why the Rama chose to interpret the Gemara differently than Rashi and to derive a novel ruling based on such an interpretation.

It should be noted that the *Mishna Berura* 606:9, suggests that the Rama's example of not forgiving for the benefit of the offender refers to a case where the victim senses that the offender lacks a sufficient degree of contrition. Therefore, not granting forgiveness is meant to spur him to a fuller awareness of the gravity of his sin.¹⁴

Offenses for Which We Need Not Ask Mechila

Are there times when asking *mechila* is not required or inappropriate?

In a letter published by the son of the Chofetz Chaim,¹⁵ the story is told that after completing his work on the laws of forbidden speech, the Chofetz Chaim brought the manuscript to Rav Yisrael Salanter for an approbation. After reviewing it, Rav Yisrael demurred, citing what he felt was a problem with one of the rulings. In section I, 4:12, the Chofetz Chaim ruled that if someone spoke lashon hara about someone else, thus causing him harm, and the victim is unaware of the source of the harm, the offender must nonetheless ask for *mechila*. Rav Yisrael asserted that if the victim is unaware of the transgression, letting him know that the offense took place will cause him anguish. Therefore, it is best not to ask for *mechila*.¹⁶

This issue is, in fact, the subject of great controversy among latter-day poskim. Many concur with Rav Yisrael Salanter.¹⁷ Others suggest that in such a situation, one should ask for *mechila* in general terms without referencing the specific incident.¹⁸

Mechila and the Prohibition against Grudge-Bearing

In Parshas Kedoshim (Vayikra 19:18), the Torah presents the prohibition against bearing a grudge toward a fellow Jew — *lo sitor es bnei amecha*. Does this prohibition require us to automatically forgive others, even if they have not explicitly expressed remorse and asked for our forgiveness? If so, why does the midrash (cited above) assume that we are not obliged to forgive when the offender has not asked for forgiveness? Furthermore, why do we derive the imperative of *mechila* from Avraham Avinu and not from this mitzvah?

To understand the relationship between *lo sitor* and *mechila*, it is necessary to explore the paradigmatic example chosen by Chazal for the prohibition of *netira*, as cited by Rashi (19:18) based on the *Toras Kohanim* and *Yoma* 23a:

ואיזו היא נטירה א"ל השאילני קרדומך אמר לו לאו למחר אמר לו השאילני מגלך אמר לו הא לך ואיני כמותך שלא השאלתני זו היא נטירה שנוטר האיבה בלבו אע"פ שאינו נוקם.
What is bearing a grudge? If one says to another, "Lend me your hatchet," and he replies "No!" and on the next day he says to him "Lend me your sickle," and he replies: "Here it is; I am not like you, because you would not lend me" — this is called "bearing a grudge" because he retains enmity in his heart, although he does not actually avenge himself.

In this instance, the individual bearing a grudge is presented with an opportunity to take revenge by refusing to lend the implement. However, at this very same moment, he uses the opportunity to express triumphantly how he chooses to act in a benevolent fashion in stark contrast to how his friend behaved toward him the previous day.

According to many Rishonim (e.g. *Yerei'im* 197-198 and *Semak* no. 131), the prohibition of *netira* is violated only if the grudge is verbalized in the form of "I am not like you" and in the context of the situation described. According to this view, the prohibition of *lo sitor* does not directly relate to the requirement of granting *mechila*. However, other Rishonim such as *Sefer HaChinuch* (no. 241), imply that no verbal declaration is required.¹⁹ We violate *lo sitor* simply by harboring a grudge against another individual. This is also the simple inference from Rashi's comments — "he retains the enmity in his heart." If so, we must consider whether the prohibition of *lo sitor* requires us to extend forgiveness in all circumstances even without being asked. There are two approaches to understand why this may not be so.

First, Rashi, in a responsa (no. 245), discusses the case of two individuals who were involved in a physical altercation, whereupon one of the parties took an oath never to forgive the other. Normally, we cannot take an oath to violate a mitzvah. The question posed was whether this oath constitutes an oath to violate *lo sitor*, in which case it would not be binding. Rashi responded that the oath does, in fact, take effect (and would need to be halachically annulled), since the prohibition of *lo sitor* would not obligate this individual to forgive someone who physically beat him. Rashi avers that *lo sitor* applies only to situations such as lending utensils, where the aggrieved party can be reasonably expected not to bear a grudge against someone for simply denying his request to borrow a tool. However, an individual who suffered physical or emotional anguish at the hands of another would have a far more difficult time resisting such an impulse.

In such instances the prohibition of *netira* does not apply.²⁰ Nevertheless, once the offender expresses remorse for his actions, we are encouraged to emulate the conduct of Avraham Avinu and grant *mechila*, although doing so is not within the purview of the mitzvah of *lo sitor*. It follows that according to this approach, whenever the prohibition of *netira* is operative (i.e. for monetary provocations), we would indeed be obliged to offer the offender unilateral forgiveness.²¹

Alternatively, it may be argued that avoiding the transgression of *lo sitor* need not be accompanied by the granting of forgiveness.²² Perhaps the prohibition against *netira* merely requires that the victim of a slight forget about the episode and not keep the memory alive in his mind. By prohibiting the harboring of a grudge, the Torah wishes to ensure that the victim of a wrong not be held emotionally hostage to the grudging sentiments that the episode generates within his consciousness,²³ thus allowing the victim of the hurt to “move past it,” irrespective of whether the other party has expressed remorse for his affront.²⁴ Granting forgiveness, on the other hand, is a moral obligation that only applies if and when forgiveness is sought out by the party who acted wrongly. Forgiving unilaterally is, at best, a *midas chasidus*, as noted earlier.

Support for such a distinction can be found in the following comments of Ritva:

דנהי דאמרה תורה לא תקום ולא תטור לגמול לו
ברעתו מ"מ לא אמרה למחול לו מחילת שמים.

*Granted that the Torah prohibits taking revenge or bearing a grudge, nevertheless, [the Torah] did not say that one must forgive.*²⁵

Ritva, Rosh Hashanah 17b

Preparing for Yom Kippur: Strategies to Facilitate the Ability to Forgive

As noted in the introductory comments, the topic of *mechila* should also be explored on a human level. The imperative to forgive, even when absolutely required, does not come easy. All the more so if we aspire toward a loftier moral standard. While there may be clear-cut instances where we need not forgive, it is tempting to hide behind lame excuses to withhold our *mechila*, even when we should be letting go of the grievance. Not only might we disregard the model of Avraham Avinu, we may even fall prey to the biblical prohibitions of *nekima* and *netira* — vengeance and grudge-bearing. Rather than giving others the benefit of the doubt, we might ascribe malicious intent without bothering to investigate the facts, and then hypocritically approach Hashem on Yom Kippur and beseech Him to see the best in us.

If we are to be worthy of Hashem's forgiveness, it behooves us to do our utmost to forgive others. As the Gemara (*Rosh Hashana* 17b) teaches: “*hama'avir al midosav ma'avirin lo al kal pesh'a'av*” — one who is less exacting and demanding toward others will merit that Hashem will also be less exacting toward him.

From the language of Chazal and the Rishonim, three strategies emerge that can empower us to forgo petty grievances and extend *mechila* to those who have wronged us.

One approach is to consciously trivialize the wrong. Frequently, we find it difficult to forgive because we perceive the offense as more egregious than it truly is. In elucidating the Torah's prohibition against taking

revenge, the Rambam (*Hil. Deos* 7:7) writes the following:

ראוי לאדם להיות מעביר על כל דברי העולם,
שהכל אצל המבינים דברי הבאי ואינן כדאי
לנקום עליהם.

It is appropriate for a person to not be exacting with regard to worldly matters; for sophisticated people all of these matters are trivial and are not worth taking revenge over them.

Yom Kippur is a day that reframes the priorities of life, and helps us to see things for what they truly are. Having a broader vision about the fragility of life and purpose of creation can inject us with a healthy dose of humility, and enable us to overlook many wrongs that may seem very important at the time but matter far less when considered from a broader perspective.

A second strategy is to remind ourselves that everything we experience occurs by Divine decree. When we see ourselves as masters of our own realities, in control of the events of our lives, it is difficult to forgive others for their misdeeds. If we view our experiences and interactions as expressions of *hashgacha pratis*, we are less likely to lash out at those who are merely unwitting agents to communicate a Divine message. This approach is suggested by *Sefer HaChinuch* as the basis for overcoming the urge to take revenge and bear grudges.

Yom Kippur is a day when we naturally feel a visceral connection to the *Ribono Shel Olam*. Such an intense feeling of closeness allows us to view all that happens to us, including setbacks that seemingly emanate from other people's conduct, as communications from Hashem. The more we deepen our sense of *emuna* in *hashagacha pratis*, the easier it is to extend genuine forgiveness.

There is a third strategy that can serve as a powerful motivation to shed grudges and graciously extend *mechila* toward others: It is the ability to connect with the humanity of the one who offended us, and to recognize that all Jews are, in a very real sense, part of one family. The Talmud Yerushalami (*Nedarim* 9:4) offers the following parable to illustrate how we can avoid the impulse to take revenge. As someone is cutting meat with a knife in one hand, he accidentally cuts his other hand. It would be ludicrous to imagine the wounded hand taking revenge against the “cutting” hand since they are both part of the same organism. Such should also be our perspective on our fellow Jews — we are part of one family.

Yom Kippur: A Day That Epitomizes Jewish Unity

The notion that klal Yisrael are a single family is symbolized by the notion of *shevatim* — each with a distinct path, but all as part of a larger collective. Indeed, in the Yom Kippur liturgy we refer repeatedly to Hashem as “*machalan leshivtei Yeshurun*” — a forgiver of the tribes of Yeshurun. Why is Hashem referred to by this designation? And why is it preceded by the appellation “*salchan le’Yisrael*” — forgiver of Israel?

The *Meshech Chochma* (Vayikra 16:30) explains that “*salchan le’Yisrael*” alludes to *aveiros* between man and G-d — all of which are rooted in the *chet ha’eigel*. The second expression — “*machalan le’sshivtei Yeshurun*” — refers to interpersonal sins (*bein adam lachaveiro*). This is because every sin *bein adam lachaveiro* has its roots in the sin of *mechiras Yosef*, carried out by the *Shivtei Kah* — the sons of Yaakov Avinu, who sold Yosef into slavery. The

very symbol of unity — the notion of *shevatim* — was put to the test early in our history, leading to interpersonal strife and near bloodshed.

The Torah’s description of the happy reunion in Egypt of Yaakov’s family leaves us with the impression that the reconciliation was complete and that no hard feelings remained. However, Rabbeinu Bachyei (Bereishis 50:17) presents a chilling insight. He notes that despite the brothers’ expressing remorse to Yosef for having wronged him, and notwithstanding Yosef’s comforting response and reassurance, Yosef never explicitly forgave his brothers. Apparently, there was no full closure.²⁶ Because their sin remained unforgiven, it came back to haunt their descendants centuries later through the harsh decrees of the *asara harugei malchus* — the ten martyred Sages of Israel, as alluded to in the Yom Kippur liturgy.

Yom Kippur is also a day meant to heal that rift. There is a passage in the Yom Kippur liturgy that enumerates the various halachic restrictions particular to the day.

The passage then continues with the following:

יום שימת אהבה ורעות, יום עזיבת קנאה ותחרות.

A day of establishing love and friendship; a day of forsaking jealousy and competition.

Apparently, Jewish unity is as defining an aspect of Yom Kippur as are the basic restrictions. On Yom Kippur, we emulate the angels not only in our ability to refrain from earthly pleasures, but also in our ability to epitomize peace — as it says “*oseh shalom binromav*” — He makes peace in the heights (Iyov 25). In explaining the basis for asking *mechila* before

Yom Kippur, the *Tur* (OC 606) cites a midrash in *Pirkei de’Rebbi Eliezer*, which states the following:

מה מלאכי השרת שלום ביניהם כך ישראל ביום הכיפורים.

Just like the ministering angels have peace among themselves, so too the Jewish people on Yom Kippur.

Rav Soloveitchik often noted that reconciling with our fellow Jew before Yom Kippur is not merely to remove the barrier to attaining individual atonement. Rather, it is based on the fact that Yom Kippur provides a collective *kapara* for the entire Jewish people. For this reason, we recite a verse at the outset Yom Kippur that emphasizes the communal atonement — “*ve’nislach lechal adas bnei Yisrael*.” To be worthy of that special gift of Divine forgiveness, we must first join together as one people in a spirit of genuine unity and reconciliation.

As we beseech the *Ribbono Shel Olam* for His forgiveness, may we mirror the spirit of forgiveness in our own lives — not just looking at the technical halachic requirements, but connecting to the essence of the attributes of Hashem who is described repeatedly in the Yom Kippur liturgy as *melech mochel vesole’ach* — a King who pardons and forgives. May we use these precious opportunities to shed old grudges, trivialize old slights, see all that happens around us as messages from Hashem, to reach out to others and love our neighbor as ourselves. In this merit, may we achieve reconciliation with Hashem, and may we be worthy of all His blessings in this year and the years ahead.

Endnotes

1. Chazal (*Yevamos* 49b) teach that the verse *dirshu Hashem b'himatzo* — seek out Hashem when He is present (*Yeshayahu* 55:6) — refers to the ten days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur.

2. For an excellent psychological overview of the topic of forgiveness, see *How Can I Forgive You?* by Janis Spring Ph.D. (HarperCollins, 2004).

3. See “Holding a Grudge Can Be Bad for Your Health,” available at: <https://www.webmd.com/depression/news/20000225/holding-a-grudge-can-be-bad-for-your-health>.

4. See the comments of Meiri cited by *Shita Mekubetzes*, *ibid*.

5. For another example equating praying for the offender with granting forgiveness, see Rashi to *Bemidbar* 21:7 (where Moshe prayed to remove the plague of the fiery serpents after the people begged his forgiveness). See also *Midrash Bemidbar Rabbah* (*ibid*) for additional examples. See also *Tosefta Bava Kama* 9:10, which implies that the imperative to pray applies even when the offender did not expressly request that prayers be offered (see *Minchas Bikkurim*).

6. Interestingly, R. Yona (*Shaarei Teshuva* 1:44) implies that with regard to theft, *mechila* is not required.

7. *Maasei Roke'ach*; *Shtei Halechem* (R. Moshe Chagiz) #15.

8. R. Moshe Chagiz tentatively suggests this possibility (“*lulei demistapina...*”) based on the language of the Rambam. However, he subsequently backtracks stating that it is difficult to be that stringent.

9. See previous note.

10. For a lengthy analysis of this obligation as it relates to reconstructing the language of the pasuk, as well as to various hashkafic rationales and halachic implications, see this author’s *Asher Chanan: Shiurim U’Ma’amarim*, pp. 21-44.

11. This reason is quoted by *Magen Avraham* (OC 606) in the name of *Terumas Hadeshen*. See also *Levushi* *ibid*.

12. See *Bach* OC 606 and *Sema* CM 422 6.

13. *Mishna Brura* (OC 606:11) cites the opinion of the *Magen Avraham* that there is a *midas chasidus* to forgive even in cases of

slander. This position seems more tenable according to the earlier rationales but would not necessarily hold according to the explanation of R. Hutner. Additionally, the language of the Yerushalmi, “*ein lo mechila olamis*” (there is no forgiveness) implies that there is not even a *midas chasidus* to forgive in such an instance. Interestingly, the Ramban (*Bereishis* 20:7, interpreting the phrase “*ve’es kol venochachas*”) asserts that although Avraham willingly forgave Avimelech, Sarah continued to quarrel with him and refused to be appeased. Ramban concludes by stating that the Torah informs us of this fact as a credit to Sarah. R. Wolf Boskowitz (son of the *Machtzis Hashekel*) in his commentary *Seder Mishne* (*Hilchos De’os* 6:6) suggests that Avimelech’s sin toward Sarah entailed an element of slander (inasmuch as it created the false impression that Sarah engaged in provocative conduct that led Avimelech to take her), for which she would not be obliged to forgive. This would suggest that in a case of slander there is no obligation whatsoever to forgive, even on a level of *midas chasidus*. (For other innovative interpretations of “*ve’es kol venochachas*,” see the commentaries of Radak and R. Avraham ben HaRambam *ibid*.)

14. It is unclear what Talmudic source serves as a basis for this ruling.

15. *Michtevei Harav Chofetz Chaim*, *Sichos* p. 9.

16. In an interesting addendum to this story, R. Ahron Soloveitchik (*Parach Mateh Aharon, Hil. Dei’os* 7:5 p. 88; *Hil. Teshuva* 2:19, p.187) relates in the name of R. Yitzchak Hutner that the Chofetz Chaim then asked R. Yisrael Salanter if he would write an approbation that would include a sentence stating his disagreement with that particular halacha. R. Yisrael countered that doing so would be insufficient to erase the impression that he agreed with all the sefer’s contents, since many people would not bother to read his appropriation in its entirety. Hence, writing an approbation would constitute a violation of “*lifnei iver lo siten michshol*.”

17. R. Ahron Soloveitchik (*ibid*); R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Halichos Shlomo* 3:6).

18. *Moadim UZmanim* 1:54 in the name of Rav Dessler. See also, *Az Nidberu* 7:65.

19. For an elaboration on the range of views regarding the prohibition of *netirah*, see *Asher Chanan* pp. 45-64.

20. The basis for distinguishing between slighter provocations of a monetary nature and more severe provocations is based on a passage in *Yoma* 23a. For a fuller elaboration, see *Asher Chanan* p. 45 note #2.

21. See *Chizkuni* (*Vayikra* 19:18), whose language suggests that in monetary cases, one would indeed be required to extend unsolicited forgiveness based on the prohibition of *lo sitor*.

22. This distinction would seem to be incontrovertible according to the view of the *Sefer HaChimuch* (no. 241), that one violates *lo sitor* even without verbalization and even in the face of serious provocations.

23. R. Elyakim Krumbein (*Techumin* Vol. 6 pg. 297) suggests that this perspective aligns well with the rationale given by the Rambam, *Hilchos Deios* 7:8, that the prohibition of *netirah* is a safeguard against taking revenge. Once the grudging emotions recede, one is less likely to lash out in retaliation.

24. This notion is reminiscent of a psychological phenomenon discussed by Dr. Janis Spring in her book *How Can I Forgive You*, which she calls “acceptance” and describes as “a healing gift to yourself that asks nothing of the offender.”

25. The Ritva utilizes the aforementioned distinction to explain why the nightly practice of one of the Amoraim to offer unsolicited forgiveness to all who wronged him is deemed “*midas chasidus*,” and would not be mandated by the biblical prohibition of *lo sitor*. It should be noted that while it is clear from the Ritva’s words that *lo sitor* does not require us to forgive, it is not entirely clear whether the Ritva’s intention is to distinguish in the manner presented here (*lo sitor* = detaching emotionally from the episode) or in a slightly different fashion.

26. There is much discussion regarding Rabbeinu Bachyei’s comments. Some suggest (see for example *Ayeles Hashachar* to *Vayechi*) that Yosef couldn’t bring himself emotionally to extend *mechila* because the hurt was so great. Others (see R. Simcha Zissel Broide, *Sam Derech* to *Vayechi* and *Chayim B’yad* no. 57) suggest that Yosef fully forgave the brothers, but didn’t express it verbally. R. Asher Milunil (*Sefer Haminhagos* pg. 21) suggests that Yosef did forgive his brothers, but didn’t pray for them as did Avraham for Avimelech.

Understanding the Teshuva Process of the Yamim Noraim

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TESHUVA IS NOT DEPRESSING

A. The Teshuva/Elul Myth

Tales are told of tzadikim who, upon simply hearing the word “Elul” during the Shabbos Mevorchim prayers at the end of Av, would begin to faint. These stories were probably passed down with the hope of giving us perspective on how powerful the days of Elul could and should be, and to depict the ideal attitude toward the Days of Awe. Unfortunately, the downside of sharing such stories is the creation of a misperception that the days of Elul are days of *fear*, not awe. Early texts describing teshuva by referencing “*charata*” (guilt) and “*busha*” (embarrassment) further reinforce the notion that teshuva is either anxiety-provoking, or simply depressing.

However, a closer look at some of the actual sources describing the teshuva process highlights that, in fact, the exact opposite is true: teshuva in its purest form should be neither anxiety-provoking nor depressing; rather, it is an exciting opportunity, and our mood in Elul and the High Holidays should reflect that mindset.

B. Constructive vs. Destructive Guilt

Perhaps the most famous work on teshuva is the Rambam’s ten chapters of *Hilchos Teshuva*. In the first chapter, he speaks at length about the *viduy* process and teshuva on Yom Kippur. In the second chapter, he addresses the general concept of teshuva and walks us through the process:

ומה היא התשובה הוא שיעזוב החוטא חטאו ויסירו ממחשבתו ויגמור בלבו שלא יעשהו עוד שנאמר יעזוב רשע דרכו וגו'. וכן יתנחם על שעבר שנאמר כי אחרי שובי נחמתי. ויעיד עליו יודע תעלומות שלא ישוב לזה החטא לעולם שנאמר ולא נאמר עוד אלקינו למעשה ידינו וגו'. וצריך להתודות בשפתיו ולומר עניינות אלו שגמר בלבו

What is repentance? The sinner shall cease sinning, and remove sin from his thoughts, and wholeheartedly conclude not to revert back to it, even as it is said: “Let the wicked forsake his way” (Is. 55.7); so, too, shall he be remorseful on what was past, even as it is said: “Surely after that I was turned, I repented” (Jer. 31. 19). In addition, The Knower of all secrets will testify about him that forever he will not turn to repeat that sin again, according to what it is said: “Say unto Him ... neither will we call any more

*the work of our hands our gods” (Hos. 14.3–4). It is, moreover, essential that his confession shall be by spoken words of his lips, and all that which he concluded in his heart shall be formed in speech.*¹

The Rambam identifies three indispensable steps to the teshuva process: regret (“*yis’nachem al she’avar*”), confession (“*l’hisvados bi’sfasav*”), and leaving the sin/committing to not doing it again (“*she’ya’azov ha’choteh chet’o ... vi’yigmor b’libo she’lo ya’asehu ode*”).

Several commentaries note that in contrast to others (such as Me’iri and Rabbeinu Yonah), the Rambam seems to emphasize that the key phase in teshuva is the last one chronologically, the abandoning of the sin and the commitment not to regress.² This is evident from the way the Rambam structures this halacha, where he asks, “What is teshuva?” and responds with the requirement to abandon the sin, removing it from our thoughts, and committing to never recommit the sin. He then adds, almost as an addendum, “*v’chen*,” and the repenter should also regret his deeds. This framework reveals the Rambam’s belief that the crucial step in teshuva is the positive acceptance going forward, and that the component of regret is only required to ensure that he remains genuinely committed moving forward. This is further demonstrated from the verse the Rambam cites, “*acharei shuvi, nichamti*,” after I have completed teshuva, [then] I regret [my previous sins].

In other words, the Rambam believes that although there is a place for guilt in the teshuva process, he only subscribes to “constructive guilt,” which inspires better behavior going forward, and not “destructive guilt,” which ruins a person’s mood, and

distances him further from his goal.³ The most important part of teshuva is to simply be better. A person should work toward changing his actions, and through that process, he has already performed the most significant aspect of teshuva. The feelings of guilt are beneficial only inasmuch as they help a person maintain his commitment for the future. Clearly there is no benefit, or even permissibility, in allowing feelings of guilt to become so overwhelming that they cause a person to continue doing the very deeds that he was upset about in the first place!

When beginning the teshuva process, we must completely forget the past, lest we give up hope when looking back.

This dilemma can be illustrated with the following brief example. A person begins to work toward ceasing to speak loshon hara. If this person commits the sin again, he may struggle with normal disappointment and constructive guilt over his continued speaking of loshon hara. If, however, he also experiences destructive guilt — in the form of self-directed frustration for continued loshon hara-speaking — this can trigger maladaptive feelings of sadness and anger that may not have been present prior. Put simply, he will be worse off than he was before.

At Yeshiva University’s Counseling Center, we often discuss the idea of this Rambam with students who express guilt over their religious

misdeeds. In our role as clinicians, we cannot (and do not) tell students how to behave. However, when a student presents with overwhelming guilt over their misdeeds, we can and do explore with them the source of the guilt. If the guilt is caused by their desire to grow in their spiritual lives, then we help the students recognize that focusing on “constructive guilt,” which produces a stronger relationship with G-d, is useful; “destructive guilt,” on the other hand, often perpetuates their negative cycles of behavior.

C. No Place for Hopelessness

In a similar manner, Rav Moshe Shternbach analyzes another curious detail in the Rambam.⁴ Specifically, he notices that when defining teshuva, as quoted above, the Rambam lists commitment for the future **before** listing regretting the past. By contrast, when the Rambam describes in his first chapter of *Hilchos Teshuva* how to confess (*viduy*), he writes that a person must first acknowledge his regret over past misdeeds and then commit to never doing them again. Why, in the context of *viduy*, does the Rambam list the stages of teshuva in chronological order (regret then commit), when he clearly deviates from that order in defining the essence of teshuva (commit then regret)? Rav Shternbach explains that when beginning the teshuva process, we must completely forget the past, lest we give up hope when looking back. This is the Rambam’s intention in his framing of the general halacha about teshuva: forget the past and worry about the present. Only once a person has succeeded in correcting his ways, and there is no longer concern about his giving up hope, can he properly do *viduy* and reflect back on his past

in a healthy and productive way. Just as destructive guilt can turn a person away from achieving his goals, perhaps its most dangerous outgrowth is hopelessness. The true beauty of teshuva is that regardless of how many times we have failed, we always have hope, and although we may feel otherwise, we always have another opportunity.

D. The Real Me

In describing the process of the *se'ir la'azazel*, the goat thrown off the cliff, the Gemara makes it very clear that the two goats used in the lottery must be nearly identical in price as well as in every detail of their physical appearance.⁵

In explaining this need for total similarity, Rav Yechezkel Yakovson, rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Sha'alvim, points to the history of psychology.

Although a founding father of modern day psychology, Freud had a tragic view of man, defining him as constantly struggling against his innate desires for aggression and sexuality. Later psychologists, such as Abraham Maslow and Viktor Frankl, developed humanistic psychology, which asserts that man, at his essence, is in search of meaning and value in life, and animalistic impulses merely interfere with man's innate desire to achieve spiritual and/or psychological growth.

Rav Yakovson concluded that the *se'ir la'azazel* demonstrates that we side with the humanists. The message that the Jewish people send to Hashem on Yom Kippur, as they send the goat off the cliff, is that at our core, we really are good

people. We may often look like we are doing the wrong thing, but that is not us; it is our doppelganger.

Similar to our own distinction between “constructive guilt” and “destructive guilt,” psychologists have come to a similar conclusion in explaining the fundamental difference between “shame” and “guilt.” According to Helen Block Lewis:

*The experience of shame is directly about the self, which is the focus of evaluation. In guilt, the self is not the central object of negative evaluation, but rather the thing done or undone is the focus. In guilt, the self is negatively evaluated in connection with something but is not itself the focus of the experience.*⁶

Put more simply in recent years by Brené Brown, “Shame is, ‘I am bad.’ Guilt is, ‘I did something bad.’”⁷

The difference between these two concepts is more than semantics; studies confirm that a person's subsequent behavior is affected by whether we experienced shame or guilt. In the case of the former, we are more likely to retreat or withdraw, often leading to addiction and depression, among other potential mental health problems. Contrast this reaction to those who experience guilt, who may possess a more balanced and reasonable awareness of themselves and are therefore less likely to develop those same issues.

Perhaps a case example from our experience can help demonstrate the all-too-common path from destructive guilt to hopelessness to shame. Yaakov presents to us as frustrated and annoyed about a particular behavior that he continues to engage in, though

Tefillah Insights: Avinu Malkeinu

In Avinu Malekinu we refer to God as our father and as our king. These two references parallel what we recite in HaYom Harat Olam after the shofar is blown during Mussaf “*im k'vanim im k'avadim*”— whether we are like children or like servants. Indeed, many congregations use the same tune for Avinu Malkeinu and HaYom Harat Olam.

In HaYom Harat Olam we say that if we are like Your children, please have mercy on us like a father has mercy on his children, and if we like servants, we turn to You until You can be gracious to us. R. Yaakov Etlinger, *Minchat Ani* to Parashat Ha'azinu, asks: If a child got into trouble with his or her father and said, “My master, be gracious to me,” it would be inappropriate and cold. The father might ask, “Are you ignoring the loving relationship that we have?” If a servant of the king said to the king, “Please show me some loving kindness and have mercy,” it would be equally inappropriate. If we are unsure whether we are like children or servants, how can we ask for both mercy and graciousness? Wouldn't we be reciting something inappropriate regardless of our status? R. Etlinger answers that when God presented His Thirteen Attributes to Moshe Rabbeinu, he said “*ani a'avir kol tuvi al panecha*” — I will make all My goodness pass before you (Shemot 33:19) — meaning that we can refer to all of the attributes of God simultaneously. Different people have different relationships with God, and He allows us to reference these multiple relationships simultaneously. That is what allows us to refer to him as Avinu and Malkeinu.

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his shame prevents him from even expressing his primary issue until we have met three or four times. He finally acknowledges that he is behaving in a way contrary to how he wants to live; he desperately wants to stop his behavior and move in another direction. He has attempted to change multiple times but has not yet been successful. Yaakov is aware that he is doing something that he wants to discontinue and although he is trying, he has not yet succeeded. The healthy awareness of knowing and working on what he wants to change, even if not yet successful, falls under the category of constructive guilt. As soon as Yaakov pivots and views himself as a “failure” for struggling to make those important changes in his life, Yaakov enters into the domain of destructive guilt. He attacks himself for being unable to succeed at overcoming his desires, and becomes frustrated and angry at **himself**, identifying with his failures. He becomes less focused on his original goals and behaviors and concentrates more on his inability and failure to change. He begins to feel hopeless about the future, his ability to move forward and behave consistently with what he believes is appropriate. At this point, in addition to his original struggle with changing his target behavior, Yaakov now faces the additional challenge of feeling like a hopeless failure who may as well stop trying to improve. This vicious cycle, which we work with in the Counseling Center, understandably makes teshuva seem hopeless and overwhelming, instead of exciting and inspiring.

E. Living in the Moment

There is one final point in the Rambam worth highlighting. When

describing the necessary extent of our commitment to avoid regressing, the Rambam writes, “*vi’ya’id alav yode’a ta’alumos*,” “The Knower of all secrets will testify about [the repenter]” whether he is indeed sincere in his commitment not to engage in a repeated offense. At first glance, we find yet another trigger for feelings of hopelessness: even as we try to swear off all of our sins, the Omnipresent G-d sits and testifies about our eventual return to our old habits, thereby negating our attempt at teshuva.

Several commentaries suggest an insight into the Rambam, which can elevate our teshuva and hopefully our entire lives.⁸ The Rambam describes G-d as the “*Yode’a ta’alumos*,” One who knows that which is hidden; however, he does not refer to G-d by an equally accurate title of “*Yode’a asidos*,” One who knows the future. The Rambam chose his words carefully to emphasize that Hashem does not actually look into the future to testify about our inevitable relapses. Rather, He seeks complete and sincere repentance in the moment that we reach out to Him. Additionally, this can also mean that He is well aware of, and takes into account, a person’s intent to improve. There is real spiritual and psychological value to wanting and trying to change, even if that change does not occur immediately and is not visibly obvious. Therefore, if a person can focus on constructive guilt when self-reflecting rather than sinking into a self-defeating destructive guilt approach (i.e. he as a whole is not bad, even good, but his behaviors could use some work), it is valuable to The Knower of all secrets regardless of actual results.

Just as Yishmael’s teshuva was accepted by G-d “*ba’asher hu sham*,” as he was in the moment, without considering his progeny, so too G-d looks at each of us as we stand before Him on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and only considers our sincerity and effort in that moment. We all know from past experiences that we may relapse, but G-d wants to know as we stand before Him that our motives are for good.

The months of Elul and Tishrei can unfortunately prompt feelings of fear and anxiety. Throughout the year, but especially now, the concept of teshuva can sound scary and overwhelming. It is crucial that we look back at the words of our rabbis, both of recent generations and many years ago, to remind ourselves that teshuva is a gift from G-d and an inspiring and achievable opportunity for each and every one of us.

Endnotes

1. Translation courtesy of Sefaria.org.
2. See, for example, Rav Noach Isaac Oelbaum’s *Minchas Chen* and Rav Elya Baruch Finkel’s *Poseach Sha’ar*, #9.
3. The terms “constructive guilt” vs “destructive guilt” are our own; they are similar in ideology to distinctions that appear later in this article.
4. *Mo’adim U’zmanim* vol. 6 #19.
5. *Yoma* 62a.
6. *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis* (1971).
7. https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame.
8. See for example, Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz’s *Sichos Mussar*, #57, Rav Aharon Kotler’s *Mishnas Rav Aharon* vol. 2, p. 249, Rav Moshe Shternbach *Mo’adim U’zmanim* vol. 6 #19, and Rav Elya Baruch Finkel’s *Poseach Sha’ar*, #10.



THE HAFTARAH OF SHABBAT SHUVAH: A TESHUVAH PRIMER

Rosh Chodesh Elul ushers in the teshuvah process. During the Yamim Noraim, starting with Rosh Hashanah, repentance intensifies and peaks on Yom Kippur. It is a time to renew our relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu through teshuvah. The Shabbat during Aseret Yemei Teshuvah is an opportunity to accelerate this journey and deepen our commitment to teshuvah, introspection and avodat Hashem.

There are a few explicit *pesukim* in the Torah (Devarim 30:1-10) and numerous passages in Navi that can serve as a guidebook for the teshuvah process. In this essay, we will focus on the haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah,

from Trei Asar. This haftarah contains passages from Hoshea, (the minhag of Ashkenazim is to add additional *pesukim* from Yoel) and Mikhah.

The haftarah begins with Hoshea ben Be'eri's prophecy. Hoshea is the inaugural navi of Trei Asar and the first to promote teshuvah. According to the midrash, *Bereishit Rabbah* no. 84, the prophet Hoshea hails from Shevet Reuven, even though there is no textual mention of Hoshea's ancestry in the book of Hoshea. Hazal attribute the prophet Hoshea ben Be'eri to Be'erah the nasi of Reuven during the Assyrian exile in Divrei HaYamim I 5:6.

Why attribute his lineage to shevet Reuven? The midrash explains that because Reuven was the first of the shevatim to engage in teshuvah, his descendant Hoshea merited commencing Trei Asar. Reuven's teshuvah for the events involving Bilhah is not explicit in the peshat in Breishit, yet Hazal assign his prominent position among the shevatim in future surveys to his embrace of teshuvah. He loses the position of leadership to Yehudah and double portion in Eretz Yisrael to Yosef but retains much of his stature among the *shevatim*. Although Reuven initiates teshuvah, it is Yehudah who is the prime example of complete

teshuvah when he exclaims, “*tzadka mimeni* — she is more righteous than me” (Breishit 28:26) in his dealings with Tamar. It is no coincidence that Yehudah assumes the mantle of leadership among his brothers in the Yosef-Egypt episodes and beyond.

Why start Trei Asar with a prophet from Reuven who succeeded in his teshuvah, but not spectacularly? Perhaps this contains a message to all of us. There is always potential for spectacular teshuvah. Oftentimes, however, due to this very possibility, the expectations are so daunting. We set the bar so high and are reticent to even begin the repentance process. Hazal’s attribution of Hoshea to Reuven and the eventual choice of this haftarah for Shabbat Shuvah empowers us even on our imperfect quest to attain teshuvah.

The haftarah begins with the following:

שׁוּבוּהָ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי כָשַׁלְתָּ בְּעֹנֶךָ.
Return, Israel until the Lord your God, for you have fallen because of your sin.
Hoshea 14:2

Hoshea beckons Israel to return all the way to Hashem, even though Israel is faltering and mired in sin. The beauty of the first words of the haftarah, *shuva Yisrael* — return Israel — is that they refer to Israel in the singular as one unit. Aseret Yemei Teshuvah culminate in Yom Kippur, a day that is set aside for all of Bnei Yisrael to do teshuvah and *viduy* as one community. This theme is articulated explicitly by the Rambam:

יום הכפורים הוא זמן תשובה לכל ליחיד ולרבים והוא קץ מחילה וסליחה לישראל, לפיכך חייבים הכל לעשות תשובה ולהתודות ביום הכפורים.

Yom Kippur is the time for repentance for each individual and for the

community. It is the close of the period of forgiveness and absolution for the Jewish people. Therefore, everyone is obligated to repent and confess on Yom Kippur.

Hilkhot Teshuva 2:7

Every time individuals commit sins, they must repent throughout the year (Rambam, *Hilkhot Teshuva* 2:6). Requests for repentance and forgiveness are included in the Amidah prayer three times daily. However, Yom Kippur is a unique occurrence once a year, when all of Klal Yisrael as one are obligated to repent and do teshuvah.

Hoshea formulates this process as follows:

קחו עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים וְשׁוּבוּ אֵלַי ה' אָמְרוּ אֲלֵיוּ כָּל תְּשׁוּאָה עִוֹן וְקַח טוֹב וְנִשְׁלָמָה פָּרִים שְׁפָתֵינוּ.
Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to Him: "Forgive all guilt and accept what is good; Instead of bulls we will pay [The offering of] our lips."
Hoshea 14:3

How does one initiate the teshuvah process? It is achieved with words. This is the concept of *viduy* (*imru elav*). What words do we say? “*Kol tisa avon*,” Hashem, You should forgive us for all our *hata'im*, “*v'kah tov*,” just take the good deeds that we do, see the good that we do, “*u'neshalmah parim s'fateinu*,” and instead of bringing korbanot, we are offering words.

The Ramban cites the pesukim in Devarim 30:11-14 as the source for teshuvah generally and verbal *viduy*:

כִּי הַמִּצְוָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר אָנֹכִי מִצְוֶה הַיּוֹם לֹא נִפְלְאָתָה הִיא מִמֶּךָ וְלֹא רַחֲקָה הִיא. לֹא בְשָׁמַיִם הִיא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲלֶה לָּנוּ הַשְּׁמַיִמָּה וְיִקְחָהּ לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמַעְנוּ אֹתָהּ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה. וְלֹא מֵעֵבֶר לָּנוּ הִיא לֵאמֹר מִי יַעֲבֹר לָּנוּ אֶל עֵבֶר הַיָּם וְיִקְחָהּ לָנוּ וְיִשְׁמַעְנוּ אֹתָהּ וְנַעֲשֶׂנָּה. כִּי קְרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד בְּפִיךָ וּבִלְבָבְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ.

Surely, this Instruction which I enjoin upon you this day is not too baffling for

you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who among us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to observe it.

The Ramban understands these pesukim in a very uplifting way. *Viduy* and teshuvah are not in the heavens or beyond the sea. They are attainable with our mouths and hearts, any place and any time.

אבל “המצוה הזאת” על התשובה הנזכרת ... כי אין הדבר נפלא ורחוק ממך אבל קרוב אליך מאד לעשותו בכל עת ובכל מקום: וזה טעם בפיו ובלבבך לעשותו - שיתודו את עוונם ואת עון אבותם בפיהם, וישוּבוּ בלבם אל ה'.
But “this commandment” refers to repentance ... Because this thing is not too esoteric or distant for you, but rather is very close to you to do it in every time and in every place. And this is the meaning of “in your mouth and in your heart to do it”: That they should confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors with their mouths and return in their hearts to God.

Ramban, Devarim 30:11

So too in Navi, Hoshea declares: “*k'hu imakhem devarim*” When you recite your *viduy*, the words must be meaningful and transformative. Words create reality. Hashem created the world with words. Words should reflect the true inner self and inspire action.

Radak comments:

שובה ישראל - כי כשלת בעונך כי אתה רואה שכשלת בעונך לפיכך יש לך לשוב אל ה' יתברך כי אין מקימן ממכשולך אלא תשובתך אליו ובאמרו עד כמו אל וכן ושבתי עד ה'

אלקין שובו עדי ואמרו רז"ל גדולה תשובה שמגיעת עד כסא הכבוד שנאמר עד ה' אלקין. *Return Israel — for you have fallen because of your sin, you see that you have fallen because of your sin and therefore, you must return to Hashem because nothing is going to raise you from your lapse except your repentance. The word "ad" (until) is used in place of "el" (toward). We find similar language in the verse, "And you shall return until the Lord your God," and in "Return until Me." Our rabbis teach: Repentance is so great that it reaches to the Throne of Glory, as it states, "until the Lord your God."*

Radak could simply have stated: Return because you have sinned. Yet he adds the words *ki atah ro'eh shekhashalta b'avonekha* — because you see that you have fallen due to sin. With this subtle addition, Radak emphasizes the importance of one's self awareness of sin. Radak accentuates that teshuvah is initiated by reflection. This is *hakarat ha'et*. We have to acknowledge our sin in order to progress. The *pesukim* mentioned above in Devarim and these words in Hoshea correlate to the phases that the Rambam, in *Mishneh Torah*, and Ramban in his biblical commentary present as the proper steps toward teshuvah.

Radak ends with the inspiring rabbinic interpretation of the word *ad*, until (instead of *el*, to), which is that teshuvah allows us to reach the Divine seat of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This signifies that there's no limit to attaining a close bond with Hashem by means of the vehicle of teshuvah. Teshuvah opens the path to directly connect to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. There are no stumbling blocks except those that are self-imposed. We have direct access to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, if we take initiative and start with self-

realization and articulation.

On the following pasuk, the Radak comments:

קחו עמכם דברים - איני שואל מכם בתשובה לא כסף וזהב לא עולות אלא דברים טובים שתתודו בהם עונותיכם ושובו אל ה' בכל לבבכם ולא בשפתים בלבד.

Take words with you — in requesting your return, I am not asking for gold or silver, or for sacrifices. Rather, just good words with which you will confess your sins and return to God with all of your hearts, not just lip service.

The Radak identifies a main component of teshuvah. Hashem does not demand from us any material goods. Wealth does not buy access to Hashem and teshuvah. Hashem wants meaningful words that convey our heartfelt true intentions. These words cannot be hollow or mere lip service. Why is verbalizing the *viduy* so critical? Perhaps, formulating sincere and genuine feelings into coherent and articulate sentences concretizes the originally amorphous thoughts and catalyzes the process. Uttering and expressing the words provide a framework for the actions that will follow. This is *viduy*. For the Rambam and Ramban, *viduy* is an indispensable component of teshuvah. This is why Hoshea begins the process with "*k'hu imakhem devarim imru eilav*," admitting your sin out loud, to yourself, to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* identifies the barrier that obstructs our relationship with Hashem.

The Radak continues:

ונשלמה פרים שפתינו - במקום פרים נשלמה לפניך וידוי שפתינו כי אתה רוצה בדברי תשובה יותר כי אין הקרבנות מועילות בלא וידוי העון כי בכלם נאמר והתודה אשר חטא ובשעיר המשתלח לא היה אלא וידוי דברים כי לא היה קרב ממנו דבר על גבי המזבח אלא הוידוי כמו שנאמר והתודה עליו את כל עונות

Instead of bulls we will pay [The offering of] our lips — instead of [offering] bulls before you, we will provide the confession of our lips because You prefer words of repentance, as offerings don't work without confessing the sin, as we find the Torah states regarding sin offerings, "he shall confess for his sin." Regarding the goat that was sent [on Yom Kippur], the only thing was a confessional because the goat was not sacrificed at all on the Altar, as it states, "He will confess on it all of the sins of the Jewish people."

Articulation is crucial. When Bnei Yisrael proffered korbanot they were accompanied by *viduy*, a declaration. If you sacrificed the korban without a meaningful *viduy*, the korban was lacking. The same standards apply to tefillah: It must be integrated with *kavanah*, real understanding and intent. Otherwise it, too, is deficient.

The Radak subsequently makes a fascinating point. On Yom Kippur, there were two goats — *se'irim*. One goat was sacrificed on the *mizbeah* and one was its counterpart, the *se'ir mishtalei'ah* that was sent down the cliff *l'Azazel*. The only thing that was done with that *se'ir* was *viduy*. The Kohen proclaimed the sins of Bnei Yisrael over the goat. That was effective because the power of *viduy*, especially on Yom Kippur, is so robust. The key to unlock the gates of teshuvah is verbalizing the words, comprehending the words, and internalizing their significance as a vehicle to altering actions.

Hoshea continues:

אֲשׁוּר לֹא יוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ עַל סוּס לֹא נִרְכָּב וְלֹא נֹאמַר עוֹד אֶלְקֵינוּ לַמַּעֲשֶׂה יְדִינוּ אֲשֶׁר בָּךְ יִרְחַם יְתוֹם. *Assyria shall not save us, No more will we ride on horses; Nor ever again will we call Our handiwork our god, Since in*

You alone orphans find pity.

Hoshea 14:4

The haftarah begins with the voice and perspective of the navi. He is speaking the word of Hashem to Bnei Yisrael. He is calling on them to repent and provides them with the method of *viduy* as teshuvah. In this pasuk, Bnei Yisrael internalized the message and are articulating *viduy* and teshuvah.

Radak uses the phrase *viduy*:

אשור לא יושיענו - והתודו לפניו ואמרו אשור
שבטחנו בו עד עתה ידענו כי לא יושיענו כי
אין בו כח להושיענו וזולתך כי לה' התשועה:

Assyria shall not save us — Confess before Him and say that Assyria, which we have trusted until now, we now know that they will not save because the only One who has the power to save us is Your [domain].

Radak, Hoshea 14:4

Radak explains that Bnei Yisrael are admitting that they sinned by relying on Assyria, and prostrating before graven images that they themselves fashioned. These vehicles could not save them. However, just like the orphan relies solely on Hashem because he is disenfranchised, dispossessed, and has no support system, so too Bnei Yisrael came to realize they were in a needy state and turned to Hashem to save them from their iniquity.

אשר בך ירוחם יתום - כי ידענו כי בך לבדך
ירוחם היתום ומי שאין בו כח אתה תתן בו כח
ותציליה וכן תעשה לנו.

Since in You alone orphans find pity — For we know that the orphan finds pity in you alone and for those who don't have the strength, You give them strength and save them. You should do the same for us.

Radak, Hoshea 14:4

The message for us in our day is clear. We frequently seek a quick fix, a magic

bullet to solve our problems without taking the classical path. Sometimes there are no shortcuts. Teshuvah is an example of this. Hashem beckons to us to return to Him and we must resolve to turn to Hashem, with a simple heartfelt pronouncement of *viduy* — of expressing our core failures and a clear acknowledgement of our reliance on Hashem. It is actually the simplest, most straightforward, elegant solution.

The next pasuk states:

אֶרְפָּא מְשׁוּבָתָם אֲהֵבָם נִדְבָה כִּי שָׁב אִפִּי מִמֶּנּוּ.
I will heal their rebelliousness, (meshuvatam), Generously will I take them back in love; For My anger has turned away (shav) from them.

Hoshea 14:5

Now Hashem responds to Bnei Yisrael's *viduy*. He tells the navi and Bnei Yisrael: He heard their cry. He will lovingly take them back. He is no longer angry. The choice of *meshuvatam* and *shav* here are cleverly used by the navi as a play on words. [Rambam *Hilkhos Yesodei HaTorah* 7:3 notes that prophets receive visions and communications from Hashem but take initiative in formulating the message to the wider community]. The two words contain the same root letters as teshuvah, but *meshuvatam* denotes rebelliousness and turning away from Hashem. The same word root is utilized in both instances because distance from Hashem is often more apparent than real. We often feel incapable of traversing the abyss between us and the Divine. Yet once we turn around, we are headed in the right direction. Hashem will heal us and bring us close even in our rebelliousness, but we have to initiate the first step towards Hashem. Furthermore, "*ohaveim nedavah*," I will love Bnei Yisrael generously

and charitably. If you turn back to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, Hashem is going to embrace you lovingly, generously and open heartedly.

The last pasuk from Hoshea in this haftarah states:

מִי חָכָם וְיָבִין אֵלֶּה נְבוֹן וְיָדַעַם כִּי יִשְׁרִים דְּרָכָי
ה' וְצִדִּיקִים יֵלְכוּ בָּם וּפְשָׁעִים יִכָּשְׁלוּ בָּם.
He who is wise will consider these words, He who is prudent will take note of them. For the paths of the Lord are straight; The righteous can walk on them, While sinners stumble on them.

Hoshea 14:10

The key to intelligently and wisely understanding these ideas is that Hashem's ways are trustworthy and just.

Radak offers the following explanation:

לא כאותם שאומרים לא יתכן דרך ה' כמו
שאמר ביחזקאל כי אם תשובו בתשובה
שלמה לא תזכרנה לכם תועבותיכם
הראשונות.

Not like those who say "this can't be the way of God" as it states in Yehezkel. Rather, if you repent properly, your original sins will be forgotten.

Hashem has His ways and we should not question Hashem's justice based on our superficial assessment of our lives and other people's lives. We must cultivate *emunah* that Hashem rewards each person appropriately. This attitude should give us the confidence and incentive to lead a righteous life.

People are puzzled by the concept of teshuvah. Shouldn't sinners be punished? How can teshuvah erase the memory of past misconduct? This underscores the beautiful benevolence of teshuvah. Sincere teshuvah can turn your life around, Hashem will really forgive you. Even though it is not a rational concept, it is the way Hashem runs the world.

Hashem gives us a second chance. If we are alienated from Hashem and could never surmount it, we would be in a constant state of existential crisis. For this reason, teshuvah is such a foundational principle in Yahadut. There's always an opportunity for teshuvah, to heal the relationship between us and Hashem.

After we read Hoshea in the haftarah, there are varying practices. Many Ashkenazi communities read pesukim from Yoel (2:11-27) and then from Mikhah (7:18-20). Sefardim read the pesukim from Mikhah, but not from Yoel. We will elaborate on a few pesukim from Yoel and then conclude with the pesukim from Mikhah.

The message of Yoel is that sincere teshuvah is effective at all times and all places — even in the face of upcoming disaster. It specifically focuses on teshuvah as a public communal event.

Hashem tells us:

וְגַם עַתָּה נֹאם ה' שְׁבוּ עָדִי בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְבִכְי וּבְמִסָּפָה. וְקָרְעוּ לִבְבְּכֶם וְאֵל בְּגֵדֵיכֶם וְשׁוּבוּ אֵלַי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם כִּי חֲנוּן וְרַחוּם הוּא אֲרֹךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב חֶסֶד וְנֶחֱם עַל הָרָעָה.

“Yet even now” — says the Lord — “Turn back to Me with all your hearts, and with fasting, weeping, and lamenting.” Rend your hearts rather than your garments, and turn back to the Lord your God. For He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and renouncing punishment.

Yoel 2:12-13

Radak explains:

בכל לבבכם - שלא תהיה התשובה בלב ולב שתראו דרכי התשובה בנגלה ובנסתר לא תשובו והתשובה תהיה בנסתר כי היא העיקר: ובצום ובכי ובמספד - בנראה להכניע הלבבות ושיראו איש את חברו צם בוכה

וסופד ויכניע לבבו אם לא שב מעצמו:

With all your hearts — Your repentance shouldn't be with a double (insincere) heart, showing repentance in public, but not repenting in private. Repentance should be even in private because that is the main type of repentance. And with fasting, weeping, and lamenting — visibly, in order to humble the hearts and one should see one's friend fasting weeping and lamenting, and this will cause him to humble his heart if he hasn't repented on his own.

Radak, Yoel 2:12

Radak emphasizes the internal and personal aspect of teshuvah. The main effort of teshuvah should be performed privately, away from the public eye. The teshuvah process has to be genuine and not a hollow, showy event. However, the public fasting, crying, and prayer of Yom Kippur inspires others who need encouragement to start the process. Therefore, the public aspect of Yom Kippur is constructive and community building, even though teshuvah is primarily a personal act.

תִּקְעוּ שׁוֹפָר בְּצִיּוֹן קִדְּשׁוּ צוֹם קִרְאוּ עֲצֵרָה.

Blow a horn in Zion, Solemnize a fast, Proclaim an assembly!

Yoel 2:15

אִסְפוּ עִם קִדְּשׁוּ קָהָל קִבְּצוּ זָקֵנִים אֲסֹפוּ עוֹלָלִים וְיִנְקֵי שְׂדֵיִם יֵצֵא חֲתָן מִחֻדְרוֹ וְכֻלָּה מִחֻפָּתָהּ.

Gather the people, Bid the congregation purify themselves. Bring together the old, gather the babes and the sucklings at the breast; Let the bridegroom come out of his chamber, the bride from her canopied couch.

Yoel 2:16

Teshuvah that is performed together by a unified *tzibbur* has a unique potency. This is an additional reason why teshuvah on Yom Kippur has this collective component. The Rambam

Tefillah Insights: The Thirteen Attributes of Mercy

Over the course of the High Holiday season we recite the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy many times. The source for doing so is a comment of the Gemara, *Rosh HaShanah* 17b:

ויעבור ה' על פניו ויקרא א"ר יוחנן אלמלא מקרא כתוב אי אפשר לאומר מלמד שנתעטף הקב"ה כשליח צבור והראה לו למשה סדר תפלה אמר לו כל זמן שישראל חוטאין יעשו לפני כסדר הזה ואני מוחל להם.

[The verse states] “And God passed in front of [Moshe] and He called out.” R. Yochanan said, if not for it being written in the Torah, we could not say this. This verse teaches that the Holy One Blessed be He wrapped Himself in a prayer shawl like a prayer leader and showed Moshe the order of prayer. He said, “Whenever the Jewish people sin, they should do this order before Me and I will forgive them.”

R. Eliyahu Vidas (16th century), *Reishit Chochma, Sha'ar Ha'Anavah* no. 1, asks: Why does the Gemara say “do this order” and not “say this order”? Furthermore, why do we find that so many people recite this order many times and it doesn't seem to work? He answers that we don't just recite these attributes for the sake of reciting them. We recite them so that we will come to emulate God in these attributes. If we become merciful, compassionate, etc. and “do this order” in our actions, then we will be forgiven.

Torah To Go Editors

echoes this concept in *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Teshuvah* 2:6:

אף על פי שהתשובה והצעקה יפה לעולם,
בעשרה הימים שבין ראש השנה ויום הכפורים
היא יפה ביותר ומתקבלת היא מיד שנאמר
דרשו ה' בהמצאו, במה דברים אמורים ביחיד
אבל צבור כל זמן שעושים תשובה וצועקין
בלב שלם הם נענין שנאמר כה' אלקינו בכל
קראנו אליו.

Although it is always good to cry out and repent, but during the space of the ten days' time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is better, and is accepted immediately as it is said: "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found" (Is. 55.6). This is not only regarding an individual, but a community; every time they repent and cry out sincerely they are answered, even as it is said: "As the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for" (Deut. 6.7).

The passage in Yoel describes communal repentance in the face of looming national tragedy. It was chosen by the Ashkenazim as part of the haftarah for *Shabbat Shuvah*, because it highlights the importance of communal fasting and gathering on Yom Kippur.

Whereas the message of Hoshea is teshuvah for Am Yisrael, but especially the power of the individual to initiate and realize complete teshuvah; in Yoel the message is that Am Yisrael joining together and executing teshuvah in a ceremonial congregational fashion surely has an effect. Today we don't have the Beit Hamikdash, we don't have the *se'ir l'azazel*, but we do have

the public communal aspect of Yom Kippur that echoes this powerful national dimension.

Finally, most communities conclude the haftarah with the three culminating *pesukim* of Mikhah:

מִי אֶל-כְּמוֹד נָשָׂא עֹון וְעִבֵּר עַל פֶּשַׁע לְשֹׁאֲרֵית
נִחַלְתּוּ לֹא הִחְזִיק לְעַד אָפוּ כִּי חָפֵץ חֶסֶד הוּא.
יָשׁוּב יִרְחֲמֵנוּ יִכְבֹּשׂ עֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת
יָם כָּל חַטָּאוֹתֵם. תִּתֵּן אֶמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב חֶסֶד
לְאַבְרָהָם אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתָּינוּ מִימֵי קֶדֶם.

Who is a God like You, Forgiving iniquity and remitting transgression; Who has not maintained His wrath forever Against the remnant of His own people, Because He loves graciousness! He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities, You will hurl all our sins Into the depths of the sea. You will keep faith with Jacob, Loyalty to Abraham, As You promised on oath to our fathers in days gone by.

Mikhah 7:18-20

The Mikhah verses are universally chosen as the conclusion of the haftarah and part of the Tashlikh ceremony, because the message of these last three *pesukim* is Hashem's unwavering forgiveness, love and loyalty to Bnei Yisrael. These phrases represent our confidence in the covenantal relationship with Hashem that originated with the Avot and continues to this day. It focuses on Hashem's forgiving, compassionate loyalty toward us. It does not even mention the teshuvah that Bnei Yisrael are obligated to undertake. After the elaborate discussions of Bnei

Yisrael's teshuvah process in Hoshea — and for Ashkenazim in Yoel — the haftarah concludes with our confidence in Hashem's forgiveness that flows from His compassion for His people and His promise to our forefathers.

Our goal on Yom Kippur is to renew and transform our relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. This renewal is achieved through teshuvah. The haftarah of *Shabbat Shuvah* in the midst of Aseret Yemei Teshuvah affords us this opportunity. The haftarah describes the public and private process of teshuvah and *viduy*, and concludes with an affirmation of Hashem's compassion for Am Yisrael because of our longstanding covenantal relationship with Him. It also emphasizes Hashem's interest in helping us come closer to him. If we pursue teshuvah sincerely, Hashem will generously enable us to reach his Throne of Glory:

גְּדוּלַת תְּשׁוּבָה שְׂמַגַּעַת עַד כִּסֵּא הַכְּבוֹד שְׁנֵאמַר
עַד ה' אֵלֶיךָ.

Repentance is so great that it reaches to the Throne of Glory as it states "until the Lord your God."

Yoma 86a

May we all merit His compassion and be inscribed in the book of life, blessing, peace, good health and success.



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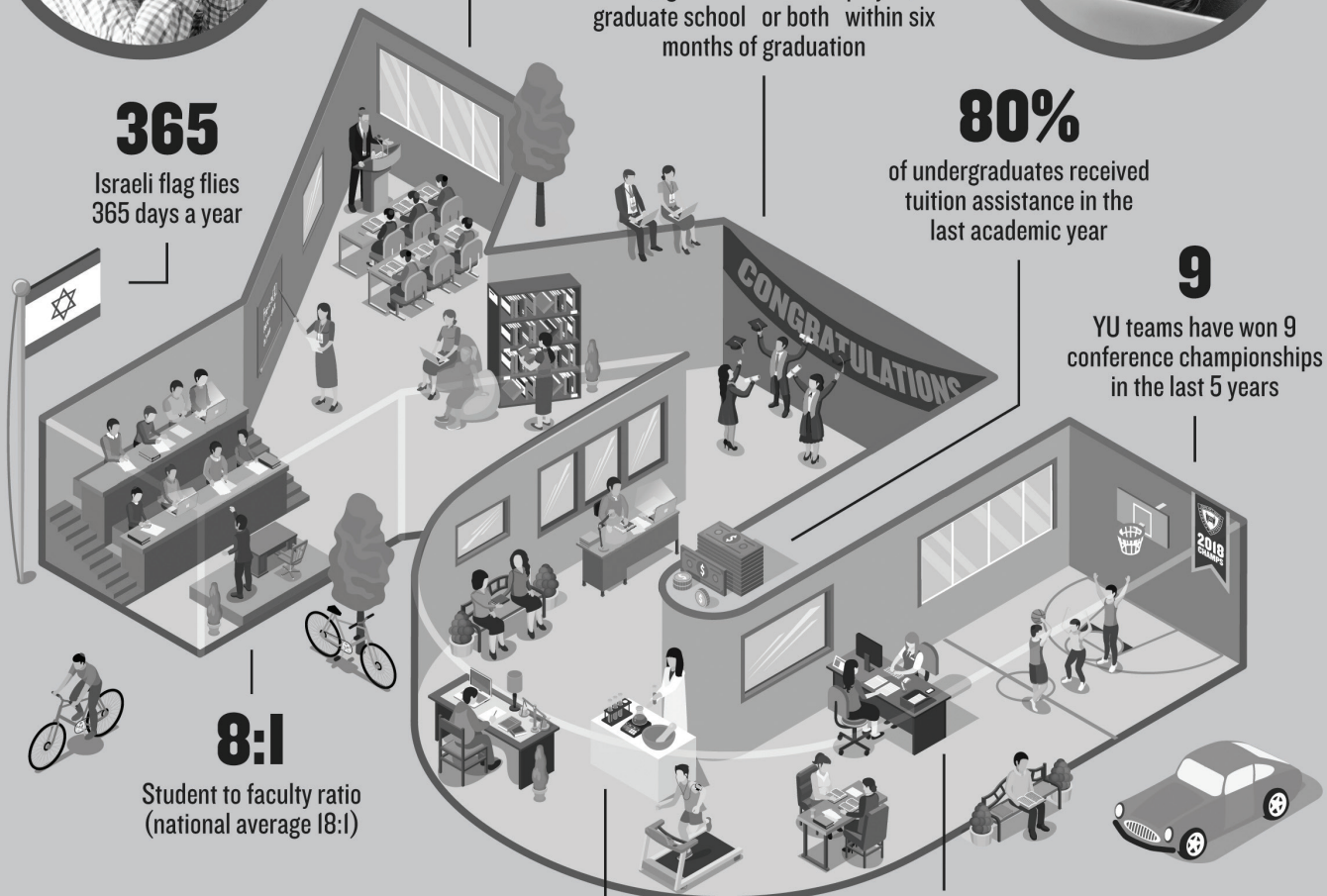
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