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FORGIVENESS

Letting Go and Breaking Free

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



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לעילוי נשמת בן ציון בן אפרים

Ben Jakobovits

Born in Szighet, Romania, emigrated to Israel after the Holocaust and became a חיל in the 1948 war. He later moved to Los Angeles where he married his אשת חיל Betty Jakobovits, and built a beautiful family and became a pillar of the Los Angeles Jewish Community.

Sheila and Ronny Apfel and Family



TESHUVA ON OUR DREAMS

September and October have different religious associations in people's minds. For most Jews it is the time for the High Holidays — Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur always fall out during the early fall months. But for most Americans, there is a different association: baseball. In America's Cathedral, in baseball stadiums throughout the country, October is baseball playoffs time. During a recent trip visiting the Jewish community in Milwaukee, I found myself thinking about both.

On my visit, I had the opportunity to meet with Bud Selig, former commissioner of Major League Baseball and past owner of the Milwaukee Brewers. Mr. Selig told me how proud he was to be the first Jewish commissioner of baseball and how the game reflects and impacts American society. While discussing

the history of segregation in the United States, he told me a moving story about his old friend Hank Aaron, the famed home run hitter. Selig and Aaron were once walking home late one night reminiscing about their respective childhoods. "Who could've dreamed," Aaron told Selig, "when we were kids that some day I was going to break the most famous record in sports and you were going to be the ninth commissioner in baseball." Mr. Aaron was from a poor town in Alabama — as a child he could not even afford baseball equipment. Mr. Selig was a child of a Romanian immigrant. Mr. Aaron and Mr. Selig both had very modest beginnings, but as they progressed in life so did their dreams.

My rebbe, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, once noted that there is a special responsibility to do teshuva during

Yomim Noraim. What makes the teshuva during this time of year, he asked, any different than the responsibility to do teshuva the rest of year? Surely, if you do something wrong it should be addressed immediately — we don't wait to better ourselves just before Yomim Noraim. There are two types of teshuva, Rav Aharon explained. One teshuva, the teshuva of the rest of the year, is focused on whether or not we are actualizing our dreams. We begin with goals, and we spend the rest of the year trying to reach and actualize those goals. During Yomim Noraim, we do teshuva on the goals themselves. We ask ourselves, where are we trying to reach, what are we trying to become? On Yomim Noraim we do teshuva on our dreams.

The Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 10b) notes that Rosh Hashana is the day

when Yosef was freed from prison. As he wallowed in incarceration, his fortuitous interpretation of dreams eventually led to his leadership of Pharaoh's Egypt. This is more than a calendric coincidence. Yosef descended when he focused on his youthful dreams of majesty, but ascended when he attributed his success to God and began to use his gifts in the service of others. At the heart of Rosh Hashana is the question of our personal actualization — do we have the right dreams? Are we dreaming of others submitting themselves to us or how we can submit ourselves in service to others?

Are we dreaming of our own greatness or creating opportunities to spread the greatness of God?

And that is what Hank Aaron's dream taught me. Everyone dreams in their youth of how their life will unfold. We can spend our entire lives measuring ourselves based on our childhood dreams or we can revisit and reimagine the dreams themselves. This was the power of Yosef's dreams. As a child, he dreamed of his own power. Yet he only rose to power when he began to dream for others. This form of teshuva is much more profound than simply fixing past mistakes as it cuts to the core of our

very character and aspirations. Life has a way of creating perspective and clarifying one's priorities. Teshuva on our dreams means teshuva on how we define success and experience true happiness. The Yamim Noraim create an opportunity for us to pause and consider these larger questions, and as such give us the opportunity to find greater meaning and inner joy.

Our dreams must evolve and it is on Yomim Noraim that we do teshuva on our aspirations. It's not that we dream bigger, but that we dream deeper. And we dream new dreams of what we can become.

CORE TORAH VALUES

Yeshiva University is a unique ecosystem of educational institutions and resources that prepares the next generation of leaders with Jewish values and market-ready skills to achieve great success in their personal and professional lives, endowing them with both the will and wherewithal to transform the Jewish world and broader society for the better.

YU.EDU/VALUES

TORAT EMET
אמת
TRUTH

We believe in truth, and humanity's ability to discover it.

The pursuit of truth has always been the driving force behind advances in human understanding, from Socrates' wanderings through the streets of Athens to the innovations of the Industrial Revolution. People of faith, who believe in a divine author of Creation, believe that the act of discovery is sacred, whether in the realm of philosophy, physics, economics or the study of the human mind.

The Jewish people in particular affirm that beginning with the Revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, God entrusted eternal teachings and values to us that we must cherish and study diligently above all else, for they represent the terms of the special covenant that God made with us. All people, regardless of their faith background, should value the accumulation of knowledge because it is the way to truth and a prerequisite to human growth.

TORAT CHAIM
חיים
LIFE

We believe in bringing values to life.

Jewish thought asserts that truth is made available to human beings not simply so that they can marvel at it but also so that they can use it. Students studying literature, computer science, law, psychology or anything else are expected to take what they learn and implement it within their own lives as well as apply it to the real world around them.

When people see a problem that needs addressing, their responsibility is to draw upon the truths they uncovered during their studies in finding a solution. They must live truth in the real world, not simply study it in the classroom.

TORAT ADAM
אדם
INFINITE HUMAN WORTH

We believe in the infinite worth of each and every human being.

Judaic tradition first introduced to the world the radical proposition that each individual is created in the divine image and accordingly possesses incalculable worth and value.

The unique talents and skills each individual possesses are a reflection of this divine image, and it is therefore a sacred task to hone and develop them. The vast expansive human diversity that results from this process is not a challenge but a blessing. Each of us has our own path to greatness.

TORAT CHESED
חסד
COMPASSION

We believe in the responsibility to reach out to others in compassion.

Even as we recognize the opportunities of human diversity, Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of common obligations. In particular, every human being is given the same responsibility to use his or her unique gifts in the service of others; to care for their fellow human beings; to reach out to them in thoughtfulness, kindness and sensitivity; and to form a connected community.

TORAT ZION
ציון
REDEMPTION

We believe that humanity's purpose is to transform our world for the better and move history forward.

In Jewish thought, the concept of redemption represents the conviction that while we live in an imperfect world, we have a responsibility to strive toward its perfection. Regardless of a person's personal convictions about whether social perfection is attainable or even definable, it is the act of working toward it that gives our lives meaning and purpose. This common striving is an endeavor that brings all of humanity together.

The Jewish people's task to build up the land of Israel into an inspiring model society represents this effort in microcosm. But it is part of a larger project that includes all of humankind. If the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, then redemption represents our responsibility to work together in the service of God to move history forward.



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Dr. Berman at <https://www.yutorah.org/rabbi-dr-ari-berman/>



Table Talk: Quotes and Questions for Family Discussions

Prepared by Rabbi Marc Eichenbaum

Yeshiva University's Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein
Center for Values and Leadership

Proactive Forgiveness

It is related that when Rabbi Zeira had a complaint against a person who insulted him, he would pace back and forth before him and present himself, so that the person could come and appease him. Rabbi Zeira made himself available so that it would be easy for the other person to apologize to him.

Yoma 87a

- What did Rabbi Zeira do to encourage another to

seek appeasement?

- We generally consider it the responsibility of the sinner to ask for forgiveness and not the responsibility of the victim to seek forgiveness. Why do you think Rabbi Zeira went beyond the letter of the law in order to forgive?
- What practical steps can you make in your life to seek forgiveness?

Forgiveness as the Antidote to Tragedy

In a world without forgiveness, evil begets evil, harm generates harm, and there is no way short of exhaustion or forgetfulness of breaking the sequence. Forgiveness breaks the chain. It introduces into the logic of interpersonal encounter the unpredictability of grace. It represents a decision not to do what instinct and passion urge us to do. It answers hate with a refusal to hate, animosity with generosity. Few more daring ideas have ever entered the human situation. Forgiveness means that we are not destined endlessly to replay the grievances of yesterday. It is the ability to live with the past without being held captive by the past. It would not be an exaggeration to say that forgiveness is the most compelling testimony to human freedom. It is about the action that is not reaction. It is the refusal to be defined by circumstance. It represents our ability to change course, reframe the narrative of the

past and create an unexpected set of possibilities for the future...In the face of tragedy, forgiveness is the counternarrative of hope. It is not a moral luxury, an option for saints. At times it is the only path through the thickets of hate to the open spaces of coexistence.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference* (Bloomsbury Continuum, 2003): 178-179

- According to Rabbi Sacks, why is forgiveness such an essential idea to freedom?
- How do you think regret relates to forgiveness? Must there be regret in order to forgive?
- Is there an area of your life in which you feel “captive by the past?” What is holding you back from forgiving in that situation?

Connecting to Others

On a more metaphysical level though, the spirit of unity that can be fostered by a humble stance may have profound effects on the teshuva that is attained. Teshuva that is achieved as an isolated individual may have a lower currency or metaphysical value than the same teshuva that is accomplished by one who is connected to the klal (whole). The supplication and transformation of the Jewish people is more readily accepted by G-d when done as a unified nation rather than as disjointed individuals.

Dr. Ilana Turetsky, “Humility, Self-Efficacy, and the Teshuva Process,” (Torah To-Go, Yomim Noraim 5775): 30

- According to Dr. Turetsky, why is humility an essential part of teshuva?
- What evidence in the Yomim Noraim liturgy suggests we are beseeching God as a whole as opposed to as individuals?
- At what points in your life have you felt the most Jewish unity?

Understanding Jonah

We read this book on Yom Kippur not because of Jonah but because of the God of Jonah. If God can change, we can change. If God recruits all of nature to fight human nature in the story of one individual, then surely, we can all overcome the barriers to compassion, the niggling resistance to being different than we are, and the narcissistic pull that keeps our own worlds small and limited. Jonah was unmoved, but perhaps we will read this book as his critics and be moved precisely because he was not. Maybe we will see in the God of Jonah, the God of each and every one of us, a God who cares for us intimately and personally, a God who marshals the world's resources for our reformation, who asks us questions that force introspection. Can we adjust, amend, refine, and modify who we are on this holiest of days because God also changes? Or are

we, like Jonah, secret believers that nothing ever changes, least of all who we are? The God of Jonah changes; that should be motivation enough. It was not enough for Jonah. Will it be for us?

Dr. Erica Brown, *Jonah: The Reluctant Prophet*, (Maggid Books and OU Press, 2017): xiv

- **According to Dr. Brown, why do we read Jonah on Yom Kippur?**
- **How do you understand the concept that “God can change?” Does it pose any theological difficulties?**
- **Why else do you think we read Jonah on Yom Kippur?**

The Opportunity and Obligation of Teshuva

So, if we ask ourselves whether teshuva is an opportunity, a chesed granted by God, or an obligation, a demand imposed upon us, the answer is not only that it is both, independently; it is both, intertwined. The very existence of the opportunity imposes a fresh obligation... It is inconceivable that a person who attaches significance to his own spiritual state should be totally impervious and insensitive to the ability to restore his relationship to God and to cleanse himself. If, indeed, he does not seize the opportunity, this is both a symptom and a cause of spiritual weakness.

Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *Return and Renewal: Reflections on Teshuva and Spiritual Growth* (Maggid Books, 2018): 7

- **According to Rabbi Lichtenstein, how is teshuva both an obligation and an opportunity?**
- **What does the literal reading of the pesukim in the Torah (e.g. Devarim 30:1-10) imply regarding whether teshuva is obligatory or not?**
- **When was the last time you took advantage of an opportunity to do teshuva?**

Encountering God

The most demanding day of the Jewish year, a day without food and drink, a day of prayer and penitence, confession and pleading, in which we accuse ourselves of every conceivable sin, still calls to Jews, touching us at the deepest level of our being. It is a day in which we run toward the open arms of God, weeping because we may have disappointed Him, or because sometimes we feel He had disappointed us, yet knowing that we need one another, for though God can create universes, He cannot live within the human heart unless we let Him in.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, *Ceremony & Celebration* (Maggid Books and OU Press, 2017): 94-95

- **According to Rabbi Sacks, why does God “need” Yom Kippur?**
- **What other Jewish holiday is highly demanding yet is widely observed? How do you explain this phenomenon?**
- **In what area of your life can you do a better job at “letting God in?”**

Partnering with God

Thus, out of the depths of her crisis, Chana proposes a new resolution that she had not yet previously considered. She uses her difficult circumstance as a springboard for a new life course for herself and for her child. In doing so, Chana's personal initiative becomes transformative not only in her own life, but for the entire nation as well. It is Shmuel HaNavi who is finally able to lead the nation out of the darkness and cyclical rut of Sefer Shoftim to an era of teshuva and change, and of ushering Am Yisrael into the era of kingship. Chana's message, in essence, is to call upon God as a partner in growth and change. She exhorts: I am not a victim in the hands of fate, but neither is the entire burden for my life's

outcome upon me alone. With God as my partner, I can shape my own future destiny.

Mrs. Mali Brofsky, *Why Do We Read the Story of Chana on Rosh Hashana?* Torah To-Go, Yomim Noraim 5772:15

- **How did Chana transform her difficult circumstance into motivation for growth?**
- **How does Chana's reaction to her circumstance differ from Jonah's?**
- **How can you transform a current difficult situation into a spiritual experience?**



FORGIVENESS FOR LASHON HARA: REPARATIONS, REPENTANCE & REDEMPTION

An oft-told story involves a man who came to his rabbi to seek advice on how he can repent for the offense of speaking *lashon hara*. The rabbi advised him that it is indeed possible, albeit complicated. He instructed him to take a pillow - the old-fashioned kind, with feathers inside - and to cut a hole in it and then walk around his town, allowing the feathers to escape from the pillow. Having done that, he returned to the rabbi and asked him for the next instruction. The second step was significantly harder than the first: "now pick up all the feathers".

The message was, clearly, that *lashon hara* is uniquely challenging for the penitent. As has been noted, one explanation for the particular severity attributed to *lashon hara* has to do with the impediments to repentance, restitution and repair.¹ Indeed, much

literature is devoted to assessing what can be done after the offense of *lashon hara* has taken place.

One question is whether any restitution is due to the victim. On this front, there is not much to be done, as this offense is generally not enforceable by a rabbinic court through the collection of damages. Damages that are inflicted indirectly are generally not actionable, and *lashon hara*, even when it has a significant negative impact, causes its harm indirectly.

The code of Jewish law, the *Shulchan Arukh*,² rules that one who embarrasses another with words should be excommunicated until he appeases the victim, and R. Moshe Isserles, in his glosses,³ emphasizes that slander is included in this category. Despite

the basic exemption from monetary damages, the victim may legitimately condition his forgiveness on some kind of restitution.⁴ Indeed, throughout the generations, rabbinic courts and individual authorities have considered the question of what actions should be taken against specific perpetrators of disparagement and slander, and have acted accordingly.⁵ In 1965 (with later emendations), the Israeli government, basing itself on the values of Jewish tradition, passed a law that imposes penalties, including imprisonment, for acts of *lashon hara* against another.⁶

However, the question of monetary compensation is actually the less vexing part of the equation; it is the appeasement that is significantly more challenging. As noted, the effects of *lashon hara* are far ranging and often

irreparable. As such, it is often not possible for the offender to come to the victim and claim he has resolved the issue and rectified the problems he has caused, and consequentially, it is understandable if the victim is hesitant to forgive what is essentially an ongoing offense.

Indeed, there is a view in the Talmud and brought in the later codes, that while it is considered "cruel" or even sinful not to forgive someone who is truly penitent, it may be acceptable not to forgive a slanderer.⁷ As the commentaries explain, attempts at rectification are unreliable; too many people may have heard the slanderous accusations but not the correction and apology.⁸ Regardless, it is still laudable and recommended to forgive nonetheless,⁹ but the justification of the hesitancy is instructive. (Presumably, these considerations are not limited to slander, but any of the set of interpersonal offenses that have irreparable consequences are subject to this balance.) Some authorities assert that if the speaker has made a sincere effort to correct his slander in the eyes of the listeners to the greatest intent possible, he indeed has a right to be forgiven.¹⁰

It should also be noted that if forgiveness from the victim is needed following an act of *lashon hara*, an additional factor is then present in the disparagement of a group of people, rather than an individual. In that case, obtaining forgiveness from all the victims is likely impossible, if it is even feasible to identify all of them.¹¹

Asking Forgiveness: The Controversy

However, there is another factor that is very significant in obstructing reconciliation in many cases of *lashon hara*, and it sits at the center of a major

dispute between two giants of Jewish ethical leadership.

One of the primary advocates of the active focus on character development, known as *musar*, was Rabbi Yisrael Salanter (1810-1883). Given this focus, it is to be expected that he would have strongly supported the efforts of the *Chafetz Chaim* in his writings. Nonetheless, according to several reports, he declined to give a written endorsement to the book. Apparently, while he agreed with the work's general message, there was one ruling in it that he felt he could not associate himself with, and that the risk was too great that his endorsement would be seen as concurrence with this ruling.¹²

This single controversial ruling concerns the question of apology and reconciliation following an offense of *lashon hara*. The Talmud teaches that repentance is ineffective for offenses committed against another person unless apology is made to the victim and forgiveness is obtained.¹³ As a general rule, at least the first part, the apology, is in the hands of the offender to do. However, *lashon hara* may present a unique challenge. It is usually expected that in apologizing, one is required to specify the offenses of which one is aware, rather than mouthing a general confession lacking any recognition of the particular manner in which harm has been done to the other.¹⁴ Often, the hurtful comments have been made outside the presence of the subject, who is blissfully ignorant. To apologize under such circumstances would mean the infliction of emotional pain on one who has already been the victim of malicious gossip. Is that warranted?

To R. Yisrael Salanter, the answer was clear. The Torah's strong prohibition against causing emotional suffering is the priority. The offender would have to find some other way to assuage his conscience and set things right; but to

do so at the expense of his victim was not acceptable. However, to the *Chafetz Chaim*, the issue was somewhat more complicated.

If the gossip was ineffectual, causing no apparent damage to the subject, the *Chafetz Chaim* agreed that there is little to be gained by informing the subject in order to obtain his forgiveness. However, if there was indeed harm inflicted by the speech, it would then be necessary to tell the subject what had been done and to apologize.¹⁵ Reportedly, R. Yisrael found this ruling so objectionable that he refused to associate his name with the entire book, despite its immense overall value.

The ruling of the *Chafetz Chaim* had a strong foundation, apparently based on an earlier statement of the great medieval ethicist Rabbi Yonah of Gerondi.¹⁶ Nonetheless, many of the later authorities seemed to be in agreement with R. Yisrael.¹⁷ It is reported that the famed R. Aharon Kotler, who founded and led the Lakewood yeshiva, asserted that R. Yisrael was qualified to argue with the rulings of the great medieval authorities due to his phenomenal expertise and prominence in these matters. Others endorsed R. Yisrael's position while interpreting the view of Rabbi Yonah as being in agreement as well (and in some cases also interpreting differently the view of the *Chafetz Chaim*).¹⁸

If seeking *mechilah* and specifying the offense is indeed contraindicated, options may still exist including asking for a general forgiveness, without identifying a particular wrongdoing. This does tend to arouse suspicion, and in this vein some note that this may be a situation in which a less than ideal social phenomenon may be utilized. As Yom Kippur draws near, many approach all of their friends and associates and ask for forgiveness practically by rote, without identifying (usually even in their own

minds) any specific offense. While this actually falls short of the standard normally required of such apologies, in this case it may be preferable.¹⁹ Some argue, however, that this may be effective only when the gossip is routine. If the *lashon hara* was extensive and egregious, though, it is harder to assume the subject is able to issue any kind of meaningful forgiveness.

Personal Repentance for Lashon Hara

Apart from the question of apology and reconciliation, *lashon hara* is a transgression like any other, and impacts the soul of the offender in addition to any harm it inflicts upon others. In fact, many factors exist that result in a greater spiritual corruption through *lashon hara* than is normally the case with a standard transgression, and *lashon hara* has a dual effect, harming the subject and the speaker at once. As such, in addition to the appeal for forgiveness from the victim, the basic steps of general repentance are called for: confession, regret, and commitment to better behavior in the future. However, there are additional themes that are particularly relevant to *lashon hara*.

The Torah prescribes that one who has been afflicted with *tzaraat*, and is thus assumed to have been guilty of speaking *lashon hara*, must be separated from the Jewish encampment. The Talmud explains the appropriateness of this measure, by noting that the gossip separated people from each other through his harmful speech, and thus it is fitting that he should be separated from the community as a whole.²⁰

The Talmud²¹ also identifies another atoning element for *lashon hara* — the special coat that was worn by the priests serving in the Temple. The coat, which was fitted with bells, made sounds; thus, an item which makes sounds, utilized in the service of God, is invoked to atone for a transgression that involved sound. The Talmud states that the affliction and the priestly coats correspond to two different types of *lashon hara*. The affliction is visited upon one who has inflicted damage through his negative speech. If, however, no harm has actually taken place, then the speech is atoned by the coat.²²

This distinction is not a quantitative one, but a qualitative one. One who has not actually inflicted harm through his negative speech has committed a transgression that is primarily a corruption of his own personality. Thus, the symbolism expressed through the coat is an appropriate tool to address the mental attitude required for internal change. One who has actually injected divisiveness into the community, however, is in need of the more functionally oriented exile that is provoked by the affliction of *tzara'at*.²³

This article is adapted from Rabbi Feldman's *False Facts and True Rumors: Lashon HaRa in Contemporary Culture* (RIETS Press).

Endnotes

1. The early literature extensively refers to *lashon hara* as a transgression that is resistant to repentance; see *Rif, Yoma* 6a with *Ran; Machzor Vitri*, 531; *Sefer HaChinnukh*, 364; *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Teshuvah* 4:1, and 4:5, with *Kesef Mishneh* to 4:1; *Responsa Rambam* 121; *Rosh, Yoma* 8:18; *Sha'arei Teshuvah* 1:52,
2. *Choshen Mishpat*, 1:6.

3. CM 420:38; see *Sma*, #49.

4. See *LeReakha Kamokha*, VII, pp. 317-319.

5. Professor Nachum Rackover thoroughly reviews the history and substance of these rulings in the journal *Sinai*, vol. XXVI, 51, pp. 197-209 and pp. 326-345 and in the journal *Sha'arei Tzedek*, X, pp. 282-294. Much of the literature builds on analysis of a Talmudic passage (*Pesachim* 113b) in which an individual brought testimony against another in rabbinic court, but because he did so without another witness as necessary for any action to be taken, his testimony was considered unproductive disparagement, and the court flogged him. Regarding the question of whether a wife who engages in *lashon hara* forfeits her *ketubah*, see R. Eliyahu Bar Shalom in the journal *Beit Hillel*, p. 63. Concerning the disqualification of one who speaks *lashon hara* from testimony, see R. Kalfun Moshe HaKohen, *Responsa Shoel VeNishal*, II, YD, 52. See also *Resp. Ohalei Yehudah*, pp. 153-158.

6. R. Ratzon Arusi considers the implications of this law from the perspective of Jewish law and rabbinic responsibility in the journal *Sha'arei Tzedek*, X, pp. 267-281.

7. *Yerushalmi Bava Kama* 8:7; *Mordechai, Yoma* 723; *Sefer Chasidim* 613 and 631; *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol, eseh* 16; *Hagahot Maimoniot, Hil. Teshuvah* 2:10; *Resp. Terumat HaDeshen*, 307 and *psakim* 212, and Rama, O.C. 606:1

8. *Magen Avraham*, loc. cit. #5.

9. *Ibid.* Note however *Pnei Moshe to Yerushalmi*. See also *Matteh Ephraim* 606:3; *Responsa Chaim She'al*, II, 13; and R. David Eichenstein, *Responsa Devar Tov*, 6. See as well the discussion in R. Aharon Kahn, *Yismach Avikha*, II, pp. 50-57.

10. See *Arukh HaShulchan* 606:2.

11. See *Birkat Yitzchak*, p. 182.

12. See R. Eliyahu Lopian, *Lev Eliyahu*, vol. 1, p. 108, and *Meorot HaGedolim* 141; *Mishnat Yisrael*, p. 337 in fn; and R. Ahron Soloveichik, *Parach Mateh Aharon, mada*, pp. 186-189. See also R. Yom Tov Zanger, *Ma'adanei Yom Tov*, III, 10. However, it is noteworthy that R. Yitzchak Blazer, perhaps the most prominent



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student of R. Yisrael Salanter, writes in the introduction to his *Responsa Pri Yitzchak* that he does not have an approbation from R. Yisrael, as it was his general practice not to provide them.

13. *Yoma* 85b.

14. See *Bayit Chadash*, O.C. 606:2.

15. *Chafetz Chaim*, part 1, *Klal* 4:12.

16. *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, *Sha'ar* 3:207.

17. See R. Moshe Mordechai Karp, *Hilkhot Chag BaChag*, *Hil. Yamim Noraim* ch. 21 #111, and R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach in *Halikhot Shlomo*, *moadim*. 3:6. See, though, *Aleinu LeShabeach*, *Devarim*, I, responsa, # 138, where R. Yosef Shalom Elyashiv is quoted as emphasizing the spiritual benefits accruing to the victim who is told about the offense, as he can be gracious and forgiving and earn great merit through his suffering for the sake of a sinner's forgiveness. However, this seems more of a consolation after the fact rather than a recommended approach; this is also implied in the presentation R. Yisrael Veinman, *Mishnat Yisrael*, p. 241, who extensively surveys practical approaches to the issue (pp. 233-242). A different approach can be found in R. Elimelech Winter, *Minchat Elimelech*, II, pp. 366-369. R. Moshe Shternbuch, *Responsa Teshuvot VeHanhagot*, V, 397, quotes R. Eliyahu Dessler as endorsing the approach of R. Yisrael Salanter, while ultimately recommending a dual approach of omitting the painful revelations while emphasizing overtures necessary for reconciliation.

18. See, for example, R. Binyamin Yehoshua Zilber, *Responsa Az Nidberu* VIII, 68 who was of the opinion that the *Chafetz Chaim* would certainly agree that the victim should not be informed of negative talk against him

of which he is unaware; it is only when he knows of the gossip but not the source that he would advocate confession. A similar suggestion is made by R. Yisrael Isser Hertzog in the journal *HaDarom* LII, 62-67 as well as by R. Zvi Hirsch Scheinberger in the journal *Beit Aharon ViYisrael*, XVIII, 1 (103), p. 84. See also *Responsa LeChafetz BaChaim*, I, 5. See also *Sh'eilat Shmuel*, in *Orchot Chaim* to *Shulchan Arukh*, and R. Yochanan Segal Vosner, *Responsa Chayei HaLevi*, III, 100, who suggests that the *Chafetz Chaim* was referring to a situation in which the offense would have eventually become known to the victim, and thus it is better heard from the antagonist than from anyone else. (Note *Chafetz Chaim*, *Be'er Mayim Chaim* 48). See also *Chut Shani*, p. 335 and R. David Binyamin Brezacher in the journal *Kol Torah*, *ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

19. See R. Shlomo Wahrman, *Orot Yemei HaRachamim*, 37, and R. Moshe Shternbuch, *Moadim U'Zmanim* 1:54. However, in his *Responsa Teshuvot VeHanhagot* (V, 397), he writes that a completely nonspecific request is insufficient; it should rather be a request along the lines of, "perhaps I spoke some *lashon hara* about you, I don't remember exactly..." without providing the full details. See also the discussion of this in R. Mordechai Babad, *Minchat Machvat* (II, 132) and *Ma'or HaSha'ar* to *Sha'arei Teshuvah*. See also *Yalkut Yosef*, *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh* 2, 606:16, and *Nit'ei Gavriel*, *Hil. Yom HaKippurim*, ch. 17 n2, and see also R. Yosef Lieberman, *Responsa Mishnat Yosef*, IV, 44.

20. See also R. Moshe Shternbuch, *Taam VeDaat*, who suggests, in a homiletic vein, symbolism in the *tzaraat* afflictions regarding the internal attributes that lead to indulgence in *lashon hara*. For one, the Torah uses the word, *se'ait*, which is related to the word

meaning "to lift"; this represents an arrogant individual, who sits in judgment of others and thus derogates them. Another term the Torah uses is *baheret*; this is related to the word meaning "clear", and represents one who finds matters to be so simple and obvious that he can assess their worthiness without consideration of additional factors or broader context.

21. *Arakhin* 16a.

22. The Talmud also mentions another source of atonement for *lashon hara*, the incense, and suggests that the coat atones for *lashon hara* spoken in public, and the incense for that spoken in private. Regarding that distinction, see *Torat HaOlah* of the Rama, 3:7, and *Shemirat HaLashon*, II, 20:9. For a discussion of the symbolism of the incense as an atonement for *lashon hara*, see R. Avigdor Neventzhal, *Sichot LeSefer Shemot*, pp. 325-328 and *Sichot LeSefer Bemidbar*, pp. 156-158; *BiYad HaLashon*, pp. 153-154 and pp. 367-370 (by R. Michel Zilber); R. David Kronglass, *Sichot Chokhmah UMussar*, 20; and *Shmuot Chaim*, *Arakhin* ch. 3, #28. For further observations regarding both the coat and the incense, see *VaYita Eishel* to *Arakhin*, 100, and, at length, *Emek HaLashon*, *Kuntres Keter HaMe'il*, pp. 170-190. Note also the implication of the Talmud Yerushalmi, *Yoma* 5:3 is that the coat atones for all types of *lashon hara*; see *Emek HaLashon*, 17 for an analysis of the difference between the two formulations.

See also R. Yehudah Aryeh Leib Choshki, *Lev Aryeh*, Gen. p. 109, who suggests that Joseph was given a coat as a gift by his father Jacob in order to offset the negative speech he relayed concerning his brothers.

23. See *Divrei Yaakov* to *Arakhin*.

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PARDON ME? PERSONAL MECHILAH AS A TOOL FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

Mechilah (forgiveness) is more than a temporary reprieve to spare the sinner of punishment. It can also be a powerful psychological tool to end the cycle of self-doubt, anxiety, and sadness that we often face when confronting our flawed past.

In the weeks approaching the Yomim Noraim, we often think about *mechilah* as something we seek from others. As Chazal teach us, teshuvah cannot grant us atonement for wrongs committed against others until we first make amends and seek *mechilah* from them (See Mishna, *Yoma* 8:9 and Rambam, *Hilkhot Teshuva* 2:9). So it has become commonplace in our communities to ask for *mechilah* from our family members, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. *Mechilah* is the tool we use to repair our spiritual relationships with others.

But what about our relationship with ourselves? When it comes to our

personal shortcomings throughout the last year — the goals we set but didn't meet, the bad habits we promised to end but didn't — we need *mechilah* from ourselves too. Without the ability to forgive ourselves, we remain psychologically stuck, unable to move forward on a growth-oriented trajectory. As Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (Sacks, 2012, 15:55) put it:

... if there was no forgiveness, we would always be slaves to the past, we would never be able to wipe the slate clean, every sin we committed would be an indelible stain, we would be imprisoned in our past. Because there is forgiveness the slate can be wiped clean. We can begin again and write a new and different story in our lives.

Mechilah is more than a surface-level forgiveness. In describing the process of seeking *mechilah* from others, the Rambam's language is instructive:

אָבֵל עֲבֵרוֹת שְׂבִיבֵי אָדָם לְחַבְרוֹ כְּגוֹן הַחֹבֵל אֶת חַבְרוֹ אוֹ הַמְקַלֵּל חַבְרוֹ אוֹ גִזְלוֹ וְכִיּוֹצֵא בְהוֹן אֵינוֹ

נִמְחָל לוֹ לְעוֹלָם עַד שֶׁיִּתֵּן לְחַבְרוֹ מֵה שֶׁהוּא חָיֵב לוֹ וְיִרְצֶהוּ. אִף עַל פִּי שֶׁהִחְזִיר לוֹ מִמוֹן שֶׁהוּא חָיֵב לוֹ צָרִיךְ לְרְצוֹתוֹ וְלִשְׁאֵל מִמֶּנּוּ שֶׁיִּמְחַל לוֹ.

But sins between man and man, for instance, one injures his neighbor, or curses his neighbor or plunders him, or offends him in like matters, is ever not absolved unless he makes restitution of what he owes and begs the forgiveness of his neighbor. And, although he makes restitution of the monetary debt, he is obliged to pacify him and to beg his forgiveness.

Rambam, Hilkhot Teshuva 2:9

It's insufficient to merely repay the person for the damage we caused. Making them whole is only the first step. *Vi-ratzaihu* means we have to assuage him. It implies comity and social harmony. We must do whatever we can to renew the sense of friendliness or congeniality that our sin severed. *Teshuvah* demands that we address the emotional aspect of sin.

Self-forgiveness demands no less.

Personal *mechilah* sets the stage for a new beginning. It offers a chance to truly and completely forgive ourselves, freeing us from the shackles of the past, and allowing us to begin the hard work of true, lasting, personal growth. Psychologist and Holocaust survivor Edith Eger says about her clinical work with patients, “I can’t heal you — or anyone — but I can celebrate your choice to dismantle the prison in your mind, brick by brick. You can’t change what happened, you can’t change what you did or what was done to you. But you can choose how you live now. My precious, you can choose to be free.” (Eger, 2017, p. 486-487).

One question we can ask ourselves is, How do we dismantle the prison of our minds not to be a slave of the past?

When these unhelpful cognitions of self-doubt and self-deprecation begin to reinforce our negative beliefs about ourselves and others, it becomes difficult to engage in accurate self-reflection, further limiting our ability to develop healthy relationships with ourselves, others, and Hashem.

The Yamim Nora'im call upon us to be active participants in self-forgiveness. Personal *mechilah* provides a mechanism to identify how our conscious negative thoughts about ourselves adversely impact our perception of life, both in the present and the future consistent, with teachings in cognitive behavioral therapy (Beck, 1976). According to rational emotive behavior therapy, negative thought patterns lead to negative associations, further causing us to have a critical attitude towards ourselves and others (Ellis, 2005). This cycle of reinforcing negative patterns similarly impedes opportunities to fully engage in healthy constructive *teshuvah*.

Only when we psychologically give ourselves the gift of *mechilah* — a free

pass, so to speak — true *teshuvah* can begin.

Personal *mechilah* starts with self-compassion. Many who struggle with excessive negative thinking have difficulty speaking about themselves compassionately. According to Rav Nachman of Breslov, self-compassion is a religious imperative.

וְכִן צָרִיף הָאָדָם לְמַצָּא גַם בְּעֲצָמוֹ. כִּי זֶה יְדוּעַ,
שֶׁצָּרִיף הָאָדָם לְזָהָר מְאֹד לְהִיּוֹת בְּשִׂמְחָה תָּמִיד,
וּלְהִרְחִיק הַעֲצָבוֹת מֵאֵד מְאֹד.

Likewise, a person must find [some good point] within himself. It is known that a person must take care to always be happy and to keep very far away from depression.

Likutei Moharan 282:2

Practicing self-compassion, allowing ourselves to see the good in ourselves, makes us more empathetic to others.

זֶה בְּחִינַת (תהילים ל"ז): וְעוֹד מַעֲט וְאִין רָשָׁע
וְהַתְּבוּנָה עַל מְקוֹמוֹ וְאִינְנוּ; הִנְנוּ שֶׁהַפְּסוּק מְזַהֵר
לָדוֹן אֶת הַכֹּל לְכַף זְכוּת, וְאִינְנוּ שֶׁאֵתָּה רוֹאֶה
שֶׁהוּא רָשָׁע גְּמוּרָה, אִינְנוּ שֶׁצָּרִיף אֶתָּה לְחַפֵּשׁ
וּלְבַקֵּשׁ לְמַצָּא בּוֹ מַעֲט טוֹב, שֶׁשֶּׁם אִינּוֹ רָשָׁע

This is the aspect of “[i]n yet a little bit the wicked man is not; you will reflect upon his place and he will not be there” (Psalms 37:10). That is, Scripture warns to judge everyone favorably. Even if you see that he is completely wicked, you must search and seek the little bit of good in him, wherein he is not wicked. We cannot forgive others until we first forgive ourselves.

How can we go about this healing process? What do we do after weathering the storm of a past year — personal failures, psychological and physical illnesses, separations and divorces, breakups and broken engagements, infertility and pregnancy losses, unpredictable financial and emotional upheavals, or simply feeling unfulfilled? The first step is asking ourselves for *mechilah*. The simple act of requesting *mechilah* from ourselves is a powerful statement of our belief in the ability to change.

The Torah’s approach to *teshuvah* reflects the scientific belief in neuroplasticity, that we are always capable of change — deep, profound, long-lasting change (Mateos-Aparicio & Rodríguez-Moreno, 2019). Through hardship, we build resilience. Post-traumatic growth is possible after a crisis. But it is only possible when we give ourselves permission through personal *mechilah*, when we stop ruminating about our own faults and judge ourselves with the same compassion with which we are taught to judge others. Just as we are only entitled to atonement for sins committed against others after we first seek out their forgiveness, so too we cannot expect God to wipe our slates clean until we’ve sought — and granted — forgiveness from ourselves.

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WHY FORGIVE OTHERS?

According to the American Psychological Association's *Dictionary of Psychology*, forgiveness is defined as "willfully putting aside feelings of resentment toward an individual who has committed a wrong or harmed one in some way... It involves a voluntary transformation of one's feelings, attitudes, and behavior toward the individual, so that one is no longer dominated by resentment."

While Rambam's description of the steps of teshuva are well known and readily studied, the process of seeking and receiving forgiveness from others garners less attention. People are generally aware of the "ask for forgiveness three times" rule described by Rambam (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:9*), but are less familiar with Rambam's general description about the importance of forgiving (*Hilchot Teshuva 2:10*):

אסור לאדם להיות אכזרי ולא יתפייס, אלא יהא נוח לרצות וקשה לכעוס. ובשעה שמבקש ממנו החוטא למחול, מוחל בלב שלם ובנפש חפיעה, ואפילו הצר לו וחטא לו הרבה, לא יקום ולא ישור וזהו דרכם של זרע ישראל ולבם הנכון.
It is forbidden for man to be ill-natured

and unforgiving; rather he must be easily appeased but strong to avoid anger; and when a sinner implores him for pardon, he should grant him pardon wholeheartedly and soulfully. Even if one persecuted him and sinned against him exceedingly, he should not be vengeful and grudge-bearing, for such is the way of the Children of Israel and of their upright heart.

Although closely related, repentance and human forgiveness are not interdependent. We can seek atonement and apologize to someone we have wronged, but the wounded party may or may not forgive us. In a similar vein, we are capable of forgiving others, even when they do not seek or deserve our forgiveness. The one who harmed us still is responsible for their behavior and needs to find their own atonement.

Although Rambam clearly speaks of the imperative to forgive others, the question remains, why should I forgive?

Walk in the Ways of Hashem

The Midrash (*Sifre Devarim 49*) explains *vehalachta bidrachav* — walk in His ways (*Devarim 28:9*) — to mean "Just as He is compassionate, so should you be compassionate. Just as He is righteous, so should you be righteous. Just as He is holy, so should you be holy."

A similar thought is expressed by the Tanna Abba Shaul (*Shabbat 133b*) on the pasuk *zeh Keli v'anvehu* — this is my God and I will glorify Him (*Shmot 15:2*) — as follows:

אבא שאול אומר ואנוהו הוי דומה לו מה הוא חנון ורחום אף אתה היה חנון ורחום.
Abba Shaul says: V'anvehu — be similar to Him. Just as he is merciful and gracious, so too you, should be merciful and gracious.

Rashi explains that the word "*ve'anvehu*" is a contraction of "*ani vehu*," "I and He." Just as He is merciful and gracious, so too, I should be merciful and gracious.

The pasuk in *Tehillim (78:38)* establishes that when we speak of

Hashem being *rachum* (merciful), we are referring to His forgiving disposition:

וְהוּא רַחוּם יְכַפֵּר עוֹן וְלֹא יִשְׁחִית
He, the merciful one, is forgiving of iniquity and does not destroy."

Emulating Hashem is codified by Rambam in *Sefer Hamitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 8* "to emulate God in His beneficent and righteous ways to the best of one's ability" and by *Sefer HaChinukh*, in *Mitzvah 74*, where he writes:

וְאִין הַבְּרָכָה מִצְוִיָּה וְחֹלָה אֵלָּא בְּמִתְדַמִּים אֵלָיו
בְּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, לְהִיּוֹתֶם אִמְתִּיִּים כְּמוֹ שֶׁהוּא א-ל-
אִמְתָּ, וְלִהְיוֹתֶם מִרְחַמִּים כְּמוֹ שִׁדּוּעַ שֶׁהוּא
רַחוּם, וְלִהְיוֹתֶם גּוֹמְלֵי חֲסָדִים כְּמוֹ שֶׁהוּא רַב
הַחֶסֶד.

And blessing is only found and resting upon those that make themselves similar to Him in their deeds: to be truthful, like He is truthful; to be merciful, like He is merciful; and to be purveyors of kindness, like He is of great kindness.

Translation, R. Francis Nataf

From these sources, we see clearly that emulating Hashem by forgiving others is a mitzvah and a distinguishable Jewish trait.

Arouse Heavenly Mercy

תְּנִינָא, רַבִּי גְּמַלְיָאֵל בְּרַבִּי אֹמֵר: "וְנָתַן לָךְ רַחֲמִים
וְרַחֲמֶךָ וְהִרְבֶּךָ", כָּל הַמְּרַחֵם עַל הַבְּרִיּוֹת —
מְרַחֲמִין עָלָיו מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם, וְכֹל שֶׁאֵינוֹ מְרַחֵם עַל
הַבְּרִיּוֹת — אֵין מְרַחֲמִין עָלָיו מִן הַשָּׁמַיִם.

"Rebbe Gamliel, son of Rebbe said: All who act mercifully (i.e. forgivingly) toward their fellow creatures will be treated mercifully by Heaven, and all who do not act mercifully toward their fellow creatures will not be treated mercifully by Heaven."
Shabbat 151b

רָבָא אָמַר: כָּל הַמְּעַבִּיר עַל מְדוּתָיו — מְעַבְרִין
לּוֹ עַל כָּל פְּשָׁעָיו, שְׁנַאֲמַר: "נוֹשֵׂא עוֹן וְעוֹבֵר עַל
פְּשָׁע." לְמִי נוֹשֵׂא עוֹן — לְמִי שְׁעוֹבֵר עַל פְּשָׁע.
Rava taught: With regard to whoever forgives his reckonings with others for injustices done to him, the heavenly court in turn forgives punishment for all his sins, as it is stated: "He bears sin and forgives transgression" (Micah 7:18). Whose sins does He bear? The sins of one who forgives his reckonings with others for injustices committed against him.

Rosh HaShanah 17a

The Gemara goes on to tell the story of Rav Huna, son of Rav Yehoshua, who was miraculously healed after being close to death. Following this event, he described that as he was hanging between life and death, he heard Hashem say to the Heavenly court: "Since he does not stand on his rights, i.e. he is ready to waive what is due him, you too should not be exacting with him in his judgment." Hashem granted Rav Huna additional life because of his forgiving nature toward others.

The Healing Power of Forgiveness

Forgiveness has cognitive, emotional, and behavioral benefits for the one who is forgiving. When we find ourselves enveloped in clouds of stress, resentment, and anger, we benefit from finding a way to move toward forgiveness. Forgiving does not magically make the pain go away, but it allows one to move past the hurt and begin healing. Even after being forgiven, the individual who harmed you is still culpable for their behavior and needs to take responsibility for their misdeeds. Withholding forgiveness amplifies the consequences of a misdeed and perpetuates its negative effects. Better to forgive and move on to a brighter future than hold on to an "unforgivable" offense and be stuck in a dark past, without the emotional capacity to move forward.

The psychological benefits of forgiving are described in depth in the book, *Forgiveness and Health* (Toussaint, Worthington, and Williams, 2015). The authors explain that stress relief is probably the chief factor connecting forgiveness and well-being. Forgiveness allows us to let go of the chronic interpersonal stressors that cause us an undue burden. Others understand the benefit of forgiveness as ridding ourselves of "toxic" anger, deep and



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long-lasting anger that negatively impacts those who carry it. When we rid ourselves of this anger, our muscles relax, we become less anxious, and we can have a more positive outlook on life.

In a 2009 lecture, “Forgiveness and the Jewish Tradition,” (available on Youtube) Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said, “Although forgiving benefits the forgiven, it benefits the forgiver still more.” Rabbi Sacks explained that in life, we can face forward, toward a future orientation or we can face backward, toward a past orientation. If we cling to the past, we can’t forgive. As such, we must be able to move from a past orientation to a future oriented mindset. Rabbi Sacks explained that “Forgiving does not mean forgetting. It means living with the past, but not living in the past.”

A similar theme is described in *The Time Paradox: The New Psychology of Time That Will Change your Life*, written by Philip Zimbardo and John Boyd (2009). The authors describe how our attitudes toward time shape our behaviors and decisions. We continually

think about the past, present and future, but at different times with different emphases. In deciding which car to buy, we consider previous cars we owned, how the new car will impact daily life, and the expected future satisfaction with the car and its resale value. In this example, the more energy we exert considering each of the past, present and future time frames will determine which aspects of the car-buying decision are most prominent.

The authors explain that each of us needs a healthy balance of past, present and future “orientations.” Living entirely in one “time zone” can harm our health, relationships, and finances. This is especially true if we are trapped in the darker aspects of a particular past time orientation. If we overly focus on how we were harmed or mistreated by others, we are more likely to experience higher degrees of anger, stress and a more negative outlook on life. The authors of *The Time Paradox* came to the same conclusion as Rabbi Sacks, that people can change their time orientation and choose to forgive past offenses.

Forgiveness does not mean forgetting, condoning, or excusing past offenses; instead, forgiveness brings the forgiver peace of mind and frees us from corrosive anger. In the words of Rabbi Sacks, “Harboring a grudge or resentment is a horrible weight to carry around with you and you have to travel light in this world.” Forgiveness empowers us to recognize the pain we suffered without letting that pain define us, enabling us to heal and move on with our lives.

Think of the anger and hurt you are experiencing from interactions with someone who has wronged you. Regardless of whether they deserve it, consider whether you can forgive them. Forgiving does not absolve them for their behavior and if they are not repentant, the misdeed is still on them. However, forgiving them may remove the anger and hurt from your heart. By forgiving another, you are “walking in the ways of Hashem” and at the same time, opening yourself to a greater degree of Hashem’s mercy and kindness.



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SHORT VORTS FOR YOUR TOM TOV MEALS

1) Feeling the Fear

“A great shofar is sounded ... and the angels, quaking with fear, declare: ‘The day of judgment is here...!’ For even they won’t be acquitted.” (*Rosh HaShanah liturgy*)

Rosh HaShanah. Our annual day of judgment. Life and death, sickness and health, prosperity or destitution — every aspect of our lives in the coming year is decided on this great and holy day. As Rosh HaShanah approaches, we should be shaking in our shoes. Yet many of us aren’t. We go about our business, largely oblivious to what lies ahead. How can we rouse our dormant souls to feel the fear of imminent judgment?

The Brisker Rav offered the following incisive parable.

Crossing the Border

Wartime. Shortages. Contraband smuggled from one country into another. The black market flourished, but the stakes were high: There was much money to be made, but anyone

caught smuggling was a dead man.

One enterprising merchant hired a wagon driver to sneak him and his goods across the border in the middle of the night. No sooner had the two men set out than the merchant’s heart began pounding. The nearer they drew to the border, the more he feared for his life.

As they approached the border, the wagon driver panicked as well. For if apprehended, he’d face a stiff fine. But of course he wasn’t as terrified as the merchant, whose life was in danger.

As they raced through the night, the only ones blissfully unaware of any threat were the horses. They just galloped on.

So too people’s varied reactions to Elul, the month before Rosh HaShanah. Right from the start of Elul, the righteous and G-d-fearing are already trembling, feeling their lives hanging in the balance. The closer they get to Rosh HaShanah, the more frightened they are.

But most people aren’t on this level. Only as Rosh HaShanah nears do they get nervous.

And then there are those whose heart never skips a beat. The High Holy Days come and go without making any impact on them.

Man or Beast?

“When man doesn’t repose in his glory, he is compared to the silenced animals” (*Tehillim* 49:13). Hashem has compassion on all His creations, but only man is privileged to have a relationship with Him. If we opt out, ignoring our Creator, we’re no better than animals.

So let’s make the most of Elul, using it to actualize our glorious potential. Let us tremble in fear and awe of Hashem. And on Rosh HaShanah, our day in court, may we not have to be asked, “Are you man or beast?” (Rabbi Eliyahu Schlesinger, *Eileh Heim Moadai*, vol. 1, *Aggadah*, p. 11)

2) Going for the Gold

“Today is the beginning of Your handiwork, a remembrance of the first day [of Tishrei].” (*Rosh HaShanah liturgy*)

Rosh HaShanah is called “the beginning of [Hashem’s] handiwork,” because on this day man was created (*Rosh HaShanah* 27a). Though other creations preceded man, the Kingdom of Heaven began with him. As the Gemara (*Rosh HaShanah* 31a) states: “What psalm would they recite on the sixth day of the week [when man was created]? ‘Hashem has reigned, donning majesty’ (Tehillim 93:1), because Hashem completed His work and ruled over them [i.e., people].” Hashem’s Kingship became relevant only with man’s creation, for all other creatures lack free will, whereas man alone can choose life or death, and by choosing wisely, he crowns Hashem over himself.

The *Shelah* (*Toldos Adam*, introduction) writes that if man cleaves to Hashem and emulates Him, he is called Adam as in “*adameh l’Elyon* — I will resemble the Most High” (Yeshayahu 14:14) and “on the image of the [Divine] throne was an image like the appearance of Adam” (Yechezkel 1:26). But if man separates from Hashem, he’s called Adam as in “the *adamah* (ground) from which he was taken” (Bereishis 3:23) and to which he will return (ibid. 3:19). Yet *adameh l’Elyon*, resembling Hashem, is man’s essential purpose.

The *Or Gedalyahu* (*Moadim, Rosh HaShanah*, “*Imru LeFanai Malchiyos*,” note 2) adds that Adam encompassed the entire creation. He was created from dust in order to elevate the earth to the loftiest heights. For despite his lowly origins, he can emulate Hashem. He’s even commanded to do so. As the Torah says, “you shall walk in His ways” (Devarim 28:9). Here Chazal expound, “Just as He is merciful, so too you should be” (*Shabbos* 133b).

Dust to Dust

We say in Musaf on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, “Man’s origin is from dust and his end is to dust.” As the holy Alter of Vorka explained, man’s “origin,”

his purpose, is to *distance himself* from dust, yet his end is to dust, for he’s drawn to that.

The *Chiddushei HaRim* was once asked why people cry when they say, “Man’s origin is from dust and his end is to dust.” If man’s origin were gold and his end dust, there’d be reason to cry, but since he begins as dust, what’s so sad about his ending up that way? The Rebbe answered: From this dust we could make gold! We could raise up the dust until it was gathered before Hashem, like the ashes of ram sacrificed in Yitzchak’s stead at the *Akeidah* (*Berachos* 62b). But we don’t. We end up just like we started, as nothing but dust. Can there be any greater tragedy?

3) Consider It Done!

“Remember us favorably ... and may the image of Avraham Avinu’s binding of his son Yitzchak — suppressing his compassion in order to do Your will with a perfect heart — appear before You.” (Musaf, Rosh HaShanah)

Rabbi Saadiah Gaon writes that the shofar reminds us of *Akeidas Yitzchak*, in which Yitzchak Avinu gave over his soul to Heaven. We too must be willing to sacrifice ourselves in sanctification of Hashem’s name, and in that merit, we ask that He remember us favorably on Rosh HaShanah and bless us with another year of life.

The *Akeidah* teaches us a tremendous lesson about the importance of our thoughts.

The only reason it’s ever necessary to do anything, rather than just think it, is that there’s almost always a gap between thought and deed. As much as we may *think* ourselves capable of certain actions, we can’t really know until we’ve done them. Though we may *think* we’d do the right thing if called upon, we

still haven’t done it. As vividly as we may *picture* ourselves acting with self-sacrifice, it’s not the same as doing so. There’s a big difference between theory and practice.

But not for Avraham. In his heart, he sacrificed his son so sincerely and completely that actually doing so was superfluous. For Avraham, the ram he offered instead of Yitzchak *was* Yitzchak. (*Or Gedalyah, Moadim, Likkutei Dibburim al Inyenei Rosh HaShanah*, sec. 4)

Virtual Reality

Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Shapira, *Hy”d*, also known as the Piaseczno Rebbe, served as the rabbi of the Warsaw ghetto. After surviving the uprising there, he was shot dead by the Nazis in the Trawniki labor camp. *Tzav VeZiruz*, his spiritual diary, contains the following entry:

If you want to know if you’ve progressed on your spiritual path over the years, look at your resolve — your inner drive — and not at your wishes. Only the drive with which you work to attain your goal is called resolve. If you don’t work but rather just want, that’s not resolve. It’s just some wish that you wish for yourself... For example, the pauper who works to sustain himself is driven, because he’s doing something constructive toward his goal. But if he simply wishes he’ll find tremendous wealth, that’s just a wish to be rich, not a resolution. Every Jew would like to be a tzaddik, but this is no more than a wish... Only the level and state of being that you seriously work toward can truly be called resolve.

The secret to real change, says the Rebbe, is to be honest with ourselves and distinguish between our wishes and our resolutions.

There are countless things we claim to want to change about ourselves. We want to be more patient, spend more time with our children, learn more

Torah, go to *minyán* consistently, learn what the words of the *siddur* really mean, volunteer for charitable causes, stop speaking *lashon hara*, and so on.

But all these “wants” are just wishes. We wish to wake up one morning and find ourselves suddenly living that way.

The key to change is to stop wishing and start resolving. Personal growth results from making a detailed plan and holding ourselves to it.

Closing the Gap

“A person is where his thoughts are,” says the Baal Shem Tov. The *Akeidah* challenges us to harness the incredible power of our thoughts, to close the gap between ideal and reality, to *create* reality — and perfect it — through our will.

Man is influenced by his actions (*Sefer HaChinuch*, *mitzvah* 324), but Avraham went beyond that. He transformed himself solely from within. May we all strive to reach that level.

4) Postdated Mitzvos

“Our Father, our King, pardon and answer us, though we have no meritorious deeds. Treat us with charity and kindness...” (Avinu Malkeinu)

For ten days straight, from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur, we plead that Hashem grant us life despite our many shortcomings. How do we have the *chutzpah* to do that?

I.O.U.

In his *Eileh Heim Moadai* (ch. 27), Rabbi Eliyahu Schlesinger introduces us to an earnest Russian named Avraham, newly arrived in Eretz Yisrael and learning all kinds of new things. For instance, Avraham was amazed at how different it was to shop in his new country. In Russia one had to pay cash, but in Israel there were banks, and you could write a check. Not only that, but

you could postdate it! Even if you had no money at the moment, as long as you probably would later, you could get by on credit. Incredible!

As for Judaism, Avraham was learning about Yom Kippur, when one’s judgment for the coming year is sealed. He knew he needed to daven for so many things: a place to live, a community, a job, a wife, health, etc. But how could he “pay” for all that? He’d kept Shabbos only five or six times and put on tefillin maybe fifty. He felt as if he were in an appliance store, needing a washer, dryer, oven, stove, and dishwasher but getting to the checkout counter and having no money.

In shul during the Ten Days of Repentance, Avraham heard everyone sing the last stanza of Avinu Malkeinu: “Pardon and answer us, though we have no meritorious deeds. Treat us with charity and kindness...” Then he understood. “Who said I need to ‘pay cash’? I can ask Hashem for everything I need and pay for it over the next year by doing mitzvos. So I wrote 365 postdated checks to Hashem on Yom Kippur, and now I do mitzvos every day to make sure those checks clear.”

“Three books are opened on Rosh Hashanah: one for the completely evil, one for the completely righteous, and one for those in between” (*Rosh Hashanah* 16b). The *Nesivos Shalom* notes that all three are opened before each one of us, so we can inscribe ourselves in whichever one we’d like. Even if a Jew hasn’t done the mitzvos needed to earn a good judgment, the book of the righteous is opened before him, and he can write himself in “on credit,” pledging to be a *tzaddik* from now on.

What Love Means

Rabbi Goel Elkarif relates the following beautiful and touching story:

One day, a nine-year-old girl walked into

a jewelry store in Eretz Yisrael to buy a bracelet. Scanning the glass display cases, she pointed to a bracelet costing three or four thousand dollars. “You want to buy that bracelet?!” the man behind the counter asked. “You have very good taste.” “It’s for my big sister,” the girl explained. “We don’t have a mother or father, so my sister takes care of us. That’s why we want to buy her a present.” She then pulled out of her pocket a handful of coins totaling 7.80 shekels, a little less than two dollars.

The jeweler thought a moment. “Well,” he said, “that’s exactly what the bracelet costs.” Wiping away a tear, he handed the girl her “purchase.”

A few hours later the sister came in. “I’m terribly embarrassed,” she began. “My sister shouldn’t have come here. She shouldn’t have taken this bracelet without paying.” “What are you talking about?” said the jeweler. “This bracelet costs thousands of dollars, so she obviously didn’t pay for it.”

“You couldn’t be more wrong. She paid me in full – with a broken heart. When your sister walked in, for the first time since my wife died years ago, I once again felt what love means. So I gave her the bracelet and wished her well.”

Says Rabbi Elkarif: We come to Hashem seeking to buy something very expensive: life. But we cannot afford it. We don’t have the merits. So we empty our pockets, turning up various resolutions we’ve made: “I’ll keep *chalav Yisrael* during *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*. I’ll phone someone lonely. I’ll learn an extra five minutes. I’ll be kind. I won’t speak *lashon hara* for two hours.”

Then Hashem says, “You don’t know how long it’s been since I’ve felt what love means!” He sees how much we’re willing to do, how much we love Him, and He says, “You know what? You’ve touched My heart. So I’ll give you life, paid in full.”



THERE IS NONE LIKE YOU

How many candles are there in a box of Chanukah candles?

Forty-four. The precise number of candles that are needed to light two candles the first night, three the second, until we light nine on the last night.

How many candles are left in the box at the end of Chanukah?

Zero, of course. But it's not always zero. Often there are a few left and the following year when we take out all of the Chanukah supplies, we find partially filled boxes. How does this happen?

Perhaps we buy extra boxes to coordinate colors? Or maybe we use different candles on Friday night when they need to burn longer? Or maybe we don't light the shamash each night, since it isn't necessary to fulfill the basic mitzvah?

Unfortunately, although those may be the causes for some, for others there seems to be a more obvious reason: people don't remember to light candles each night, hence the remaining candles in the box.

Understanding this phenomenon, I believe, is the key to Rosh Hashanah.

Allow me to explain.

There are three words in the Mussaf Amidah for Rosh Hashanah that have long inspired me, but only recently did I realize they seem completely out of place and perhaps even superfluous.

As we conclude the section of Shofros, prior to the bracha, we recite:

כי אתה שומע קול שופר ומאזין תרועה ואין
דומה לך ברוך אתה ה' שומע תרועת עמו
ישראל ברחמים.

For you listen to the sound of the shofar and heed the call of teruah and there is none like you, blessed are You Hashem Who listened to the sounds of the Jewish people's shofar with mercy.

It is a stirring culmination to the section of Shofros and in fact to the three special sections added into Mussaf of Rosh Hashanah.

There are three words that are true and inspiring on the day we coronate the king, but don't seem to belong. *Ve'ain domeh Lach* — and there is none like You — powerful words. But what are

they doing here specifically? They could fit into any part of the davening, but as a general rule we can conclude a pre-bracha paragraph with words that are *mei'ein hachasima*, similarly themed to the conclusion of the bracha. Why at this bracha? Why at this time?

Rav Moshe Shapiro z"l explained beautifully. There are two other times in our davening where we describe Hashem in a similar way, as *ain domeh Lach*, there is none like You. The first is every single day in the second bracha of Shemoneh Esrei:

מי כמוך בעל גבורות ומי דומה לך.
Who is like You oh mighty one, and who is similar to You (umi domeh Lach).

What is the context?

What is the theme of the second bracha of Shemoneh Esrei?

Techiyas hameisim — the revivification and resurrection of the dead.

Where is the second place?

In Shacharis on Shabbos — *ve'ain domeh Lecha moshi'einu l'sechiyas hameisim* — who is similar to You our savior for the revivification of the dead.

Again, the same praise of Hashem specifically in the context of *techiyas hameisim*.

Clearly then, the praise on Rosh Hashanah must have something to do with *techiyas hameisim* as well, but what and why?

Let's take a step back. What is unique about *techiyas hameisim* that it uniquely expresses that there is no other power similar to Hashem? And furthermore, why does it warrant its own bracha — the second in Shemoneh Esrei, referred to as *Gevuros*, the strength of Hashem? What is so powerful about *techiyas hameisim*?

Hashem created the world, all that exists, the laws of nature, physics, chemistry, everything. What is different about the revivification of the dead?

Perhaps the ultimate expression of Hashem's *gevurah*, His might, His unique might, is overcoming the natural laws He put into place. To clearly show, not just with divine providence behind the scenes, but to upend the natural order of the world and reverse it, in a sense, is greater even than the initial creation of life. That is the *gevurah* of Hashem. That is an aspect that is *ain domeh Lach*, no other has that ability. And it really in its essence is the ultimate expression of Hashem's uniqueness and therefore must be a core principle of our faith in Hashem.

As true a statement as it may be and even with our new understanding, why is it incorporated specifically in the mussaf of Rosh Hashanah? What does *techiyas hameisim* and that unique strength of Hashem have to do with Rosh Hashanah?

Let's return to the Chanukah candles. Why are there extra candles left in the box? It would seem that most people are excited at the beginning of the holiday and then it tapers off, so they don't finish the box. However, Daniel Pink, in his fascinating work *When: The Scientific Secrets of Perfect Timing* cites research indicating that 76% of the Jews surveyed lit on the first night, only 55% on the second, and the number continued to drop to around 40% on night 6, but by night 8 it climbed up again above 55% — creating a U-shape if you would graph it.

What happens in the middle? Why did the *hadlakas neiros* dip and pick back up?

While there are several possible theories, other similar research suggests that it is what Daniel Pink terms the "Uh-oh Effect." When we reach a midpoint, sometimes we slump, but other times we jump. A mental siren alerts us that we've squandered half of our time. That injects a healthy dose of stress — uh-oh, we're running out of time! — which revives our motivation and reshapes our strategy. Some people at the midpoint will yell "oh-no!" and continue the trajectory of their slump and miss lighting candles on subsequent nights, while others will yell "uh-oh," realizing we only have limited opportunity to still light, and it's time to pick back up!

Rosh Hashanah serves as one of those moments where we can pause, even if it isn't in the middle of the year, and assess where we are, what we want to do, what we have done and where we are heading. And then we can choose the "oh-no" or the "uh-oh," and we can

pick a path of teshuva. That in and of itself is a wonderful gift, to have these moments to pause, think and examine; but what Hashem really is giving us on Rosh Hashanah is far greater.

The gift of teshuva on Rosh Hashanah is manifest in this phrase that we append to the bracha of Shofros. As we call out in the primitive cry of the shofar to Hashem the king, we announce *ain domeh Lach*, there is none like You. In what way? We saw that this phrase is associated with *techiyas hameisim*; what does that have to do with Rosh Hashana?

Chazal are revealing to us that just as the unique strength of Hashem is manifested in uprooting the natural course of events and bringing life to the dead, teshuva is not just a process, it gives us a fresh start. It uproots the natural progression of having to be punished for what we have done and allows us to become new people, no longer bound and held back by our past errors and decisions.

As the Rambam so beautifully describes in *Hilchos Teshuva 2:4*, "*aini oso ha'ish*" — I am not the same person — not figuratively, literally, it is comparable to *techiyas hameisim*, and therefore we invoke this unique and special descriptive phrase of *ve'ain domeh Lach*.

May it be the will of Hashem that we take advantage of this special gift and hopefully when we reach Chanukah this year, we will look back at the months from Rosh Hashana proud of what we have accomplished and excited for the days ahead!



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TEN DAYS IN TANACH: STUBBORNNESS, SUSPENSE & SALVATION

The source for Aseret Yemei Teshuva in Tanach is somewhat ambiguous. The Torah (Vayikra 23:23-27) teaches us that the first of the seventh month is “*shabbaton zichron teruah*” (a day of rest commemorated with loud blasts) and the tenth day is “*Yom HaKippurim*,” without specific mention of the significance of the interim days. One may infer that the days from “*Shabbaton*” to “*Shabbat Shabbaton*” (i.e. Yom Kippur), are inherently ridden with sanctity and an opportunity to prepare for atonement, though not explicitly stated.

Rabba bar Avuha teaches us (*Rosh HaShana* 18a) based on Yeshayahu 55:6 — דַּרְשׁוּ ה' בְּהִמְצָאוֹ, קְרָאֵהוּ בְּהִיטּוֹ קְרוֹב — Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him when He is near — that during the ten days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, Hashem is particularly close and should be sought

out by every individual. Maimonides codifies this in his *Laws of Repentance* (2:6), recommending that one repent and cry out during these auspicious days as one's teshuva will immediately be accepted.

The Gemara (ibid.) further expounds that one may learn about the essence of these ten days from the novel and delayed death of Naval the Carmelite (I Shmuel ch.25) who refused to properly compensate David and his servants for assisting Naval's shepherds. Avigayil, his sagacious wife, came to the rescue with lavish provisions and prevented David from slaughtering the house of Naval. Thereafter, the navi described Naval as selfishly feasting without constraint “like the feast of a king and Naval's heart was merry within him, for he was very drunken.” Avigayil wisely waited until morning to speak of the gifts she offered David to save the household.

Unexpectedly, upon hearing her words, “And his heart died within him, and he became as a stone.” Avigayil's account brought Naval to understand the repercussions of his deplorable conduct.

The verse states: “And it came to pass about ten days after that the Lord smote Nabal, and he died” (I Samuel 25:38). These ten days, what are they doing here, i.e., why was there a delay of ten days before Nabal died? Rav Yehuda said that Rav said: They correspond to the ten meals that Nabal gave the servants of David who came to visit him, as out of politeness he allowed David's ten servants to eat, and therefore his punishment was delayed for ten days. Rav Nachman said that Rabba bar Avuha said: These are the ten days between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, during which everyone is given one last opportunity to repent for the sins he committed over the course of

the previous year.

Hashem provided Naval with ten days to complete a process of regret and repair, and therefore Chazal saw these days as paralleling the Ten Days of Repentance (Malbim). Furthermore, this serves as the source for tefillot to be answered within ten days (*Midrash Aggadah Bereishit* 41:1). Naval failed to internalize the lesson and ten-day opportunity to change his ways; when the initial shock wore off, Naval returned to his stubborn and habitual conduct. For this reason, after ten days, God smote him and he died (*Tanna Devei Eliyahu Rabba* 18:10).

Another hint to these cathartic and potentially transformative “ten days” in Tanach may be found in the prophetic narrative following the assassination of Gedalya ben Achikam on Rosh HaShana post-destruction of the First Temple. After Yishmael ben Netanya assassinated Gedalya, Yochanan ben Kereach led the remainder of the farmers of Judea to Egypt seeking asylum from Babylonian vengeance. As they rested near Bet Lechem on their way down to Egypt, they asked of Yirmiyahu ha-navi to appeal to Hashem on their behalf, convinced that God wished them to settle in exile until a future time to return (as he prophesied through Rachel’s cries in ch. 31). Yirmiyahu conceded “And after ten days, the word of Hashem came to Yirmiyahu” (*Yirmiyahu* 42:7). The Abarbanel explains that Yirmiyahu appealed to Hashem throughout the ten days between (i.e.including) Rosh HaShana (when Gedalya was killed) and Yom Kippur.

Amidst his prayers and fasting during Aseret Yemei Teshuva, Hashem answered Yirmiyahu’s supplications on behalf of the people with words of consolation:

אם שׁוֹב תִּשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ הַזֹּאת וּבִנִּיתִי אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא אֶהְרַס וְנִטְעַתִּי אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא אֶתּוֹשׁ כִּי נַחֲמַתִּי אֶל הָרְעָה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לָכֶם. אֵל תִּירְאוּ מִפְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ בְּבֹל אֲשֶׁר אֶתֶם יִרְאִים מִפְּנֵי אֵל תִּירְאוּ מִמֶּנּוּ נְאֻם ה' כִּי אֶתְכֶם אֲנִי לְהוֹשִׁיעַ אֶתְכֶם וְלְהַצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיָּדוֹ. וְאַתֶּן לָכֶם רַחֲמִים וְרַחֵם אֶתְכֶם וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל אֲדֹמְתְכֶם.

If you remain in this land, I will build you and not overthrow, I will plant you and not uproot; for I regret the punishment I have brought upon you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you fear; do not be afraid of him...for I [Hashem] am with you to save you and to rescue you from his hands. I will dispose him to be merciful to you: he shall show you mercy and bring you back to your own land.

Yirmiyahu 42:10-12

These days offer us an auspicious opportunity for repentance, to swing the pendulum of our behavior from stubbornness and haughtiness to humility and change

The last remnant of Judean settlement was assured that they would not have to seek refuge in Egypt; they would be safe and secure in the Land of Israel. They were given a chance to start-

over and rebuild a social and religious infrastructure in preparation for national return.

Unfortunately, like Naval, the people did not take advantage of the opportunity of return and rebuilding. Instead, they accused the prophet of falsehood as they continued to Egypt, leaving the Land bereft of Jewish settlement and running towards their doom. Had they only heeded the prophetic message, not only would they have survived, but they could have and should have started the process of repair!

The righteous and the wicked, explain Chazal, are judged immediately on Rosh HaShana, whereas the *beinonim* — the “average” Jew is provided with the interim days until Yom HaKippurim to acquire merits and prove his righteousness (*Rosh HaShana* 16b). The ten days between the first and the tenth of Tishrei are not only days ridden with sanctity and preparation of prayer, fasting and atonement; they are gifts from God as our individual and national futures are held in abeyance. These days offer us an auspicious opportunity for repentance, to swing the pendulum of our behavior from stubbornness and haughtiness to humility and change, from suspense of annihilation to survival and salvation.



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THE WEEKLY YOM KIPPUR

In honor of the birth of our first grandchild, Shlomo Yosef Goldman. Born on a Shabbos, may he grow to embrace its message.

The Haftara we read on Yom Kippur morning, taken from the book of Yeshaya, is a profound description of what the true meaning of the fast is all about:

הָלוֹא זֶה צוֹם אֲבָחֶרְהוּ פִתַּח חֲרָצוֹת רִשְׁעֵי הַתֵּר אֲגַדְוֹת מוֹטֵה וְשֹׁלַח רְצוּצִים חֲפָשִׁים וְכָל מוֹטֵה תִנְתְּקוּ.

Surely this is the fast I choose: open the bonds of wickedness, dissolve the groups that pervert [justice], let the oppressed go free, and annul all perverted [justice].

Yeshaya 58:6

Yeshaya goes on to describe how focusing on the messages of justice and kindness implicit in the fast day will lead to great rewards:

אִז יִבְקַע כְּשַׁחַר אֲנֹרָה וְאֶרְכָּתְךָ מִהָרָה תִצְמַח וְנִתְחַד ה' תִּמְיֵד וְהִשְׁבִּיעַ בְּצַחְצְחוֹת נִפְשֶׁךָ וְעִצְמוֹתֶיךָ יִחְלִיץ וְהֵייתָ כְּגֹן רֶגֶל וְכַמוֹצָא מִיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִכָּזְבוּ מִיָּמֶיךָ.

Then your light will burst forth like the dawn and your healing will speedily sprout

... then Hashem will guide you always, save your soul in times of drought, and strengthen your bones; and you will be like a well-watered garden and a spring whose waters never fail.

After this stirring description, Yeshaya abruptly switches gears and begins to speak of the observance of Shabbos:

אִם תִּשָּׁבַת רִגְלֶךָ עֲשׂוֹת חֲפָצֶיךָ בְּיוֹם קִדְשִׁי וְקִרְאתָ לְשִׁבְתָּ עֲנֵג לְקָדוֹשׁ ה' מְכַבֵּד וְכַבְּדָתוּ מַעֲשׂוֹת דְרָכֶיךָ מִמְצוֹא חֲפָצֶיךָ וְדַבֵּר דְבָר אֶז תִּתְעַנֵּג עַל ה' וְהִרְפַּבְתִּיךָ עַל בְּמַתִּי אֶרֶץ וְהִאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נְחֹלֶת יַעֲקֹב אָבִיךָ כִּי פִי ה' דִּבֶּר.

If you restrain your feet because of Shabbos, refrain from accomplishing your own needs on My holy day; if you proclaim Shabbos “a delight,” the holy one of Hashem “honored one,” and you honor it by not engaging in your own ways, from seeking your needs or discussing the forbidden. Then you shall be granted pleasure with Hashem and I shall mount you astride the heights of the world, and I will provide you the heritage of your forefather Yaakov — for the mouth of Hashem has spoken.

What is the connection between Yom Kippur and Shabbos?

On the surface, the mood of Shabbos is extremely different from that of Yom Kippur. Shabbos is celebrated with physical delicacies; Yom Kippur represents the ultimate abstinence from the physical world and its pleasures.

And yet, the connection between the two days may be closer than what we think at first glance. Consider the words of the *Sifra* (Vayikra 78):

וּמִיָּיִן שִׂוּם הַכִּיפּוּרִים אֲסוּר בְּאֲכִילָה וּבִשְׂתִייה וּבִרְחִיצָה וּבִסִּיכָה וּבִתְשׁוּמֵי שֵׁמֶשׁ הַמֵּיטָה וּבִנְעִילַת הַסְּנַדֵּל תִּלְמוּד לומר שבתון שבות, יכול תהא שבת בראשית אסורה בכלום תלמוד לומר שבתון הוא לכם ועינינתם, הוא אסור בכולן ואין שבת בראשית אסור בכולן.

“How do we know that on Yom Kippur one may not eat, drink, wash, anoint oneself, wear leather shoes, or engage in marital intimacy? The pasuk teaches us these prohibitions by describing Yom Kippur as a ‘Shabboson.’ Perhaps one is prohibited from engaging in these acts on a typical Shabbos? The pasuk tells us that this is not so when it says that IT [Yom Kippur] is a Shabboson — IT is marked by these prohibitions, not a typical Shabbos.”

The *Sifra* considers the possibility that a typical Shabbos would be observed like Yom Kippur, abstaining from food, drink, and other physical pleasures. Although the *Sifra* rejects the comparison, the very fact that it entertains the possibility of a Yom Kippur-like Shabbos is fascinating. Why would one think of observing Shabbos in a manner similar to Yom Kippur?

Our perplexity at a Yom Kippur-like Shabbos stems from our impression of Yom Kippur as primarily a Day of Atonement — for which abstinence is totally appropriate as a vehicle for atoning our sins — while viewing Shabbos as primarily a day of rest — during which physical pleasures enhance our sense of relaxation and enjoyment. While this is true, both Yom Kippur and Shabbos share a third theme; they both serve as times for us to transcend our physical reality and embrace the spiritual.

In fact, Rabbi Avraham ben HaRambam (*HaMaspik*, pp. 7-8 in the Feldheim edition) suggests that a pious person who truly understands the essence of Shabbos refrains from eating and drinking on Shabbos. He is so connected to the spiritual and so removed from the physical that he feels no desire for food and drink. In this understanding, every Shabbos is ideally observed in a manner similar to Yom Kippur. While the *Sifra* cited above rejects the idea the Torah mandates that Shabbos be observed like Yom Kippur, apparently — according to Rabbi Avraham — the Torah nonetheless believes that it would be ideal to observe a Yom Kippur-like Shabbos every week.

According to this unique position of Rabbi Avraham, we can readily understand why Yeshaya transitions seamlessly into a discussion of Shabbos after describing Yom Kippur. Shabbos is a weekly version of Yom Kippur. Both emphasize the transcendence of the mundane and the embrace of the spiritual. In fact, the truly pious person aims to create a “Yom Kippur” every single Shabbos!

Of course, this position of Rabbi Avraham is quite unique, and, on the surface, seems to fly in the face of the halachic requirement to have three meals on Shabbos. (See footnote 17 in the Feldheim edition for an attempt to reconcile Rabbi Avraham’s position with normative Halacha.) But while his statement that ideally one should eschew eating and drinking on Shabbos is unusual, his general view of Shabbos as a time to escape the mundane is certainly mainstream.

In fact, this very passage in Yeshaya encourages us to see Shabbos as a day on which ordinary pursuits are curtailed.

וכבדתו שלא יהא מלבושך של שבת כמלבושך של חול ... מעשות דרכיך שלא יהא הילוכך של שבת כהילוכך של חול ממצוא חפצך חפצך אסורין חפצי שמים מותרין ודבר דבר שלא יהא דבורך של שבת כדבורך של חול

[If] you honor it — *your dress on Shabbos should be different than your weekday dress; by not engaging in your own ways* — *your manner of walking on Shabbos should be different than that of weekdays; from seeking your needs* — *your needs are prohibited but Mitzvah needs are permitted; or discussing the forbidden* — *your speech on Shabbos should be different than your weekday speech.*

Shabbos 113a

Perhaps according to the normative Halachic position that eating and drinking on Shabbos is mandated, the flow of the verses in Yeshaya is as follows:

Yom Kippur is a day in which we escape the mundane. In truth, every Shabbos is also a day in which we escape the mundane. We do so by changing our dress, our gait, and our speech to focus more on the spiritual. Unlike Yom Kippur, however, Shabbos is a day on which we can escape the mundane while still engaging in the physical pleasure of eating and drinking.

The verses therefore emphasize that, despite our attempts to make our Shabbos dress, gait, and speech unique and sanctified — we still call Shabbos a “delight,” a day on which we engage in the physical pleasures of eating and drinking. It is not coincidental that the verses lay down the prohibitions to treat Shabbos like a weekday in the very same breath in which they speak of the need to celebrate Shabbos with food and drink. Both elements are meant to connect Shabbos with Yom Kippur. In one sense Shabbos, like Yom Kippur, bids us to flee from the mundane and everyday; in another sense, the verses remind us that Shabbos enables us to eschew the mundane while still embracing physical pleasures. In that way it is unlike Yom Kippur.

Whether or not the “ideal” Shabbos includes food and drink, the verses from Yeshaya clearly instruct us that there are elements of Yom Kippur that we can take with us on a weekly basis. Every Shabbos is, in some ways, a mini-Yom Kippur. Let us resolve to carry the message of Yom Kippur with us on a weekly basis throughout the year.



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TWO METHODS TO EXECUTING A PRUZBUL

Separate and distinct from the agricultural restrictions of the shmittah year, the Torah (Devarim 15:1-3) forbids collecting outstanding debts following Rosh HaShanah of the conclusion of Shmittah.¹ However, this prohibition does not apply to loans that beis din has been empowered to collect (*Mishnah Shviis* 10:2). The mechanism of *pruzbul* (*Shviis* 10:3, *Gittin* 36), which should be executed in advance of Rosh Hashanah of this year,² entrusts beis din with the ability to collect outstanding debts,³ allowing their collection even after the conclusion of the shmittah year.⁴

There is a dispute among the rishonim as to whether an individual must execute a *pruzbul* in the actual presence of a beis din or whether it is sufficient to empower a beis din remotely in the presence of witnesses. The *Mishnah* (*Shviis* 10:4) writes that the text of a *pruzbul* contract reads: “I give over to you so-and-so and so-and-so the dayanim in such-and-such a place that any debt that I have I may collect at any time that I want.” The *Yerushalmi* on this *Mishnah* says that one may write a

pruzbul “even if they are in Rome.” *Prnai Moshe* understands this to mean that even if the dayanim are in Rome and the lender is in Israel, he may empower the dayanim to collect his loans in writing in the presence of witnesses and need not appear in front of the dayanim in person. This appears to be the ruling of *Shulchan Aruch* (*Choshen Mishpat* 67:21, who quotes two opinions) and *Rema* (67:20).

However, a number of rishonim (including *Ramban* and *Ran*, *Gittin* 36b; *Shu”t Rashba* 2:313) understand the reference in the *Yerushalmi* to a situation in which the loan documents, and not the members of the beis din, are in Rome. As such the *Yerushalmi* cannot be a source for executing a *pruzbul* remotely. According to this opinion (the first opinion in *Shulchan Aruch* 67:21) one would need to appear in person in front of a beis din in order to execute a *pruzbul*.

There is a further complication in identifying what beis din may be employed (either in person or remotely). The *Gemara* (*Gittin* 36b)

records that according to *Shmuel* one may only write a *pruzbul* in the beis din of Sura (the town of Rav) or Naharda’a (the town of *Shmuel*).⁵ *Ramban* (s.v. *V’ha*) and *Tur* assume that *Shmuel*’s statement is not accepted in practice, and therefore any beis din, even an ad hoc beis din, would be acceptable for *pruzbul* purposes.⁶ *Rema* (67:18) quotes this position and notes that one can rely on it.⁷

Rambam (*Shmittah* 9:17 and *Kesef Mishneh*) and *Ran* (*Gittin* 19a s.v. *Garsinan*) accept the position of *Shmuel*, but understand that *pruzbul* does not require a beis din on the level of Rav and *Shmuel*, but that a competent and knowledgeable beis din in any generation suffices.⁸ *Shulchan Aruch* requires a *beis din chashuv* comprising members who are proficient in the relevant halachos and appointed by the community to their position.⁹

It stands to reason that according to the *Shulchan Aruch* which requires a *beis din chashuv* and allows for the remote authorization of a beis din, it would be preferable to appoint a *beis din chashuv*

remotely rather than appointing an ad hoc beis din in person. Rav Ovadia Yosef (*Yechaveh Da'as* 4:63 and *Yabia Omer* Vol. 3 *Choshen Mishpat* 6) notes that this was the minhag in the Sefardic community of Yerushalayim going back at least 150 years. According to the minhag of the Rema to not require a *beis din chashuv*, there may be more grounds to prefer having a *pruzbul* signed by a beis din of three, even though the Rema does allow for a remotely authorized *pruzbul*. The text of the *pruzbul* used by the Ashkenazic community in Yerushalayim in the late 1800s reflected that it was signed by a beis din of three.¹⁰

Rav Moshe Shturnbuch (*Moadim U'zmanim* 6:18) thinks that is preferable even for Ashkenazim to appoint a *beis din chashuv* in the presence of two witnesses (if they can't appear in person in front of such a beis din), as most rishonim require a *beis din chashuv* and most rishonim allow for appointing a beis din remotely. Rav Asher Weiss (*Minchas Asher Shviis* 61) also recommends that Ashkenazim use this mechanism, since even according to the opinions that one does not need a *beis din chashuv*, the members of the beis din needs a minimal level of competence that not everyone has.¹¹ If one has the ability to sign in person in the presence of a *beis din chashuv* of three that would satisfy all opinions. Some communities and batei din make arrangements for people to sign a *pruzbul* in front of a *beis din chashuv* in advance of Rosh Hashanah. However, this is often not practical.

The Beth Din of America makes available two versions of a *pruzbul*, as standard Ashkenazic practice should allow for use of either version. One version allows for the authorization of a named panel of the *beis din* to be signed by two witnesses. The other provides for the execution of a *pruzbul* in front

of an ad hoc beis din of three. Both forms are available at <https://bethdin.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Pruzbul-5782.pdf>.

Endnotes

1. *Yeraim* (164) rules that *shmittah* does not automatically cancel loans; there is a mitzvah for the lender to formally forgive the loans, but until he does so, the borrower is obligated to repay any outstanding loans. However, most rishonim disagree and assume that *shmittah* automatically cancels loans (see *Or Zarua Avodah Zarah* 108, *Mordechai Gittin* 378). R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (*Minchas Shlomo Shviis* 10:8) entertains the possibility that even though we do not accept the *Yeraim's* position, if a *baal teshuvah* previously collected loans that should have been canceled by *shmittah* he need not return the funds, as he can claim that he holds like the *Yeraim*.

2. Since a *pruzbul* is only effective for loans extended prior to its issuance, one should sign a *pruzbul* as close as possible to Rosh Hashanah. Rosh (*Gittin* 4:20) is of the opinion that one should execute a *pruzbul* at the end of the sixth year of the *shmittah* cycle, since even though *shmittah* cancels loans at the end of the *shmittah* year, the prohibition of *lo yigos*, of attempting to collect loans, applies from the beginning of the *shmittah* year. This appears to be the position of Ibn Ezra (*Devarim* 15:1) as well. However, most rishonim (see Rambam *Shmittah* 9:4, Ramban *Devarim* 15:1) believe that the prohibition of *lo yigos* also does not apply until the end of the *shmittah* year. This is recorded in *Shulchan Aruch* (*Choshen Mishpat* 67:30) and this is the basis of our practice of writing *pruzbuls* at the end of the year. *Shulchan Aruch HaRav* (*Halva'ah* 36) recommends writing two *pruzbuls*, one at the end of the sixth year and one at the end of the seventh year, to account for all opinions.

3. Rashi, *Gittin* 32b s.v. *Mosreini* and *Tosafos* 36a s.v. *Mi* dispute whether the institution of *pruzbul* was simply an application of *moser shtarosav l'beis din* or a new mechanism. See *Toras Zeraim* (*Shviis* 10:3).

4. Rishonim struggle to justify what appears to have been a widespread practice in many communities over centuries to ignore the laws of *shmitas kesafim* and continue to collect loans even without a *pruzbul*. See Rosh *Gittin* 4:13, *Shu"t Rosh* 64:4, *Terumas Hadeshen* 304, and Rema 67:1.

5. The Gemara goes on to refer to the beis din of Rav Ami and Rav Asi. Rav and Shmuel were first

generation amoraim and Rav Ami and Rav Asi were third generation amoraim.

6. Ritva (36b s.v. *Din*) is explicit that even a beis din of *hedyotos* who have no proficiency in the subject matter is sufficient.

7. See R. Moshe Shtunrbuch (*Moadim U'zmanim* 6:18), who suggests that the Rema's leniency does not apply in Eretz Yisrael.

8. Rabbenu Tam (*Tosafos Gittin* 36b s.v. *D'alimi*, *Sefer Hayashar* 138, and *Rosh Gittin* 4:13) appears to have initially held that there was no beis din in his generation that was empowered to oversee a *pruzbul*, and later adopted the position that even according to Shmuel a sufficiently competent beis din in every generation may do so.

9. *Shach* (67:5) quotes Mabit that if one uses an ad hoc *beis din*, the *pruzbul* would be invalid even post facto. See R. Moshe Mordechai Karp, *Mishmeres HaShviis Shmitas Kesafim* Chapter 3 ft. 23.

10. See R. Yechiel Michel Tukitzinsky, *Sefer HaShmittah* Chapter 13. It is not necessarily clear whether the *pruzbuls* were more typically signed by the standing beis din or by an ad hoc beis din. In a smaller community it is more feasible to have people appear in front of a standing beis din of three to execute a *pruzbul*. In a collection of documents from the beis din of Rav Shmuel Salant and later Rav Zvi Pesach Frank (*Pincas Beis Hadin Hachurva* 2 p. 111) the editors included Rav Zvi Pesach Frank's own *pruzbul* from 1924 signed by three dayanim that the editors identified as not being part of the standing beis din. The Yeshiva University Museum is in possession of a 1910 *pruzbul* from the beis din of Yerushalayim signed by three dayanim including Rav Zvi Pesach Frank himself.

11. Rav Asher recommends that the authorization of the beis din should be signed by three witnesses and not just two, so that it could also work according to those opinions that require an authorization in front of a beis din in person. R. Moshe Mordechai Karp (*Mishmeres HaShviis Shmitas Kesafim* Chapter 3 ft. 32) records that this was the practice of Rav Elyashiv.