

**Rosh Hashannah:
Accepting G-d as the
King of the universe
and the cause of
our existence**

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IN THIS ISSUE:

PARSHA: NITZAVIM/VAYELECH	1,7,8
ROSH HASHANA	1,2,3
SHOFAR I & II	1,10-13
DAY OF JUDGMENT	3,4
SHOFAROS	4,5
BOOKS: EVOLUTION	6
PARSHA: HA'AZINU/SHAB. SHUVA	8,9
TANYA'S HERESY II	13-16
LETTERS	16-18

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Weekly Parsha

Nitzavim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"The hidden things are the concern of Hashem your G-d. Regarding the revealed things, it is ours and our children's responsibility forever to observe the words of this Torah." (Devarim 29:28)

The commentaries dispute the

(continued on page 7)

Rosh Hashana



RABBI BERNARD FOX

"How does one confess? He says, 'I beseech you Hashem. I have erred. I have willfully acted wrongly. I have acted rebelliously before you. I have (specify wrongdoing). I have regret. I am

embarrassed with my actions. I will never return to this behavior.'" (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 1:1)

This formulation of the confession is based upon a discussion found in Tractate Yoma. The majority of Sages suggest the formulation adopted by Maimonides. In this

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the SHOFAR

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is the significance of the shofar - the ram's horn? Its primary focus is its blasts, blown during our prayers on Rosh Hashanna. We also have the custom to blow it each morning during the month of Elul. This month precedes the month of Tishrei - the first day of which is Rosh Hashanna. During this month of Elul, the shofar is to act as a "wake-up call". "Uru yshanim mi-shinasschem", "Awaken you slumberers from your sleep." At this crucial time, when we are soon to be judged for life, prosperity, and health, the shofar alerts us to our impending judgment. We are to arouse ourselves, waking up from our routine activities and backsliding during this past year. We are to examine ourselves, detecting our flaws, and responding with a renewed strengthening of Torah values and actions. But why use a shofar? What is its significance?

Purpose of the Blasts

We learn that the blasts of the shofar are meant to resemble the weeping and sobbing of Sisra's mother. This is why we have long and short blasts, as weeping takes on different types of cries. Sisra's mother awaited his return from battle. (Judges, Chap. 5) Sisra delayed in returning. Sisra's mother assumed he was dividing great booty, so this must have taken time. But later, her assumption of good, turned towards reality, and she realized he must have perished at war. Her sobbing was a response to recognizing

(continued on page 10)

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version, first errors or unintentional sins are confessed. Then reference is made to intentional wrong doing. Last acts of rebellion are included. The reasoning underlying this order is that a person should first seek forgiveness for lesser sins and then the more serious wrong doings.

However, the Talmud explains that Rav Meir suggests an alternative form for the confession. He suggests that first the confession should mention the willful sins. This is followed by mentioning acts of rebellion. The confession ends with reference to unintentional errors.

Rav Meir derives his order from the prayers of Moshe. In seeking forgiveness for Bnai Yisrael, Moshe describes the Almighty's attributes of mercy and kindness. He declared that because of these attributes Hashem forgives willful sins, acts of rebellion and unintentional errors. Rav Meir adopted this order for his formulation of the confession.

This observation helps explain the dispute between the Sages and Rav Meir. The Sages order the sins referred to in the confession from the least serious to the most severe. This order is dictated by a clear logic. The confession is a request for forgiveness. It is appropriate to begin with the lesser offenses.

Rav Meir maintains that the confession includes an additional element. It makes reference to the attribute of the Almighty responsible for forgiveness. Therefore the confession alludes to the prayer of Moshe in which the Divine attributes are described. Rav Meir maintains that as we ask for forgiveness, we must acknowledge the benevolence of the Almighty implicit in this forbearance.

Although the opinion of the Sages is accepted, the issue raised by Rav Meir finds expression in halacha. The confession contained in the liturgy is often accompanied by a recitation of the Divine attributes of the Almighty. This is accord with Rav Meir's opinion that confession is associated with recognition of Hashem's kindness. Although this recognition is not incorporated into the confession itself, it is associated to the confession though the liturgy.

“Among the ways of repentance is for the repentant individual to constantly bemoan his sin before Hashem with crying and supplications. And he should give charity according to his ability. And he should distance himself, to an extreme, from the area concerning which he sinned. And he should change his name. In this he states, “I am someone else and not that person who performed those actions.” (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:4)

Maimonides describes, in this halacha, some of the behaviors which accompany repentance. He includes the establishment of a new identity. The sinner sees him / herself as a different person from the individual who committed the wrongdoing.

A person's behavior is strongly affected by self image. Once we establish a behavior or attitude it is difficult to imagine ourselves without this element. This psychological barrier must be overcome if the process of Teshuva is to be successful. The person must become accustomed to a different self-image.

The Talmud discusses the life of Elisha ben Avuyah. This great scholar was the teacher of Rav Meir. In his studies, Elisha ben Avuyah delved into the most difficult areas of the Torah. He eventually discovered truths for which he was not prepared. He could not accept these concepts and rejected the Torah. Elisha ben Avuyah went so far, in rejecting his former life, that he changed his name. Interestingly, he chose the name Acher. Literally translated, this name means “other”. Through adopting this name, he explained that he intended to indicate that he was no longer Elisha ben Avuyah. He was a different person with new attitudes.

The Talmud comments that the Almighty declared that although all humanity has the opportunity to repent, Acher is an exception. He cannot repent his sins.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik ZTL explained that it is not the intention of the Talmud to indicate the Almighty will not accept Acher's repentance. Instead, the message of the Talmud is that Acher simply cannot repent. He

does not have the ability.

Based on the teaching of Maimonides, this message can be easily understood. Elisha ben Avuyah established a new identity of Acher. Acher was an individual who lived a life antithetical to the Torah. As long as Elisha ben Avuyah viewed himself as Acher it would be impossible for him to repent. His self-image would prevent him from establishing a Torah outlook and life. Only once he removed this identity could he hope to repent.

“It is customary to arise in the early morning to recite prayers of supplication from the beginning of the month of Elul until Yom HaKippurim.” (Shulcah Aruch, Orech Chayim 581:1)

It is customary to recite Selichot – prayers of supplication – prior to Rosh HaShanna. Generally, these prayers are recited in the morning. According to Rav Yosef Karo this service is initiated on the first day of Elul. This is the custom generally accepted by Sefardic communities. Rav Moshe Isserles comments that the Ashkenazic custom is to begin reciting the Selichot from the Motzai Shabbat prior to Rosh HaShanna.[1]

The source for these two customs is discussed by Rabbaynu Nissim. He explains that the custom of Barcelona was to begin Selichot on the twenty-fifth day of Elul.[2] The Gaon of Vilna explained that this is the source of the Ashkenazic custom.[3]

In order to appreciate the Gaon's conclusion, we need to better understand the practice of the Barcelona community. Rabbaynu Nissim explains the basis of this custom. This custom reflects the opinion that the sixth day of creation corresponds with Rosh HaShanna. The Almighty chose this day for Rosh HaShanna because it is associated with forgiveness. On this day Adam and Chava, representing humanity, committed the first sin. They disobeyed Hashem. They ate the fruit that the Creator had forbidden. The Almighty forgave this iniquity. On Rosh HaShanna we beseech Hashem for forgiveness. It is appropriate to appeal to the Almighty on the anniversary of the

date that forgiveness was introduced into the universe. If Rosh HaShanna corresponds with the sixth day of creation, what calendar date corresponds with the first day of creation? This date is the twenty-fifth of Elul (Elul having twenty-nine days).[4]

We can now understand the Gaon's comments. The Ashkenazic custom embodies the same message as the custom of Barcelona. The recitation of Selichot begins on the Motzai Shabbat before Rosh HaShanna. This corresponds with the initiation of creation on the first day of the week.

Rabbaynu Nissim explains the custom in Gerona was to begin the recitation of Selichot on the first day of Elul. This date was also chosen because of its association with forgiveness. After the sin of the egel ha'zahav – the Golden Calf – Moshe ascended Har Sinai. He sought forgiveness for Bnai Yisrael. Moshe ascended the mountain of the first day of Elul. He secured the Almighty's forgiveness forty days later. This day – the tenth of Tishrai – became Yom Kippur.

These two customs reflect two different aspects of Divine forgiveness. The forgiveness of received by Adam and Chava was not a result of repentance or prayer. In fact, both Adam and Chava minimized their role in committing the sin. Why were they forgiven? The Almighty created humanity and bestowed within us the unique ability to choose between good and evil. Every human enters life as an imperfect and instinctual creature. It is our responsibility to improve ourselves through the wise exercise of our freewill. It is inevitable that we will sin as we proceed along this path. Hashem forgives us for these failings just as He pardoned Adam and Chava. In short, the very design of creation allows for an imperfect individual and implies the Almighty's forbearance and forgiveness.

The forgiveness at Sinai was achieved through supplication and prayer. Moshe ascended the mountain and beseeched the Almighty to forgive His people. As

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Moshe elevated Himself and rose to a higher spiritual level, he drew closer to Hashem. Through this process his prayers were accepted and Bnai Yisrael was forgiven.

Each custom reflects one of these aspects of forgiveness. The Ashkenazic custom reminds us of the forgiveness received by Adam and Chava. It recalls the forgiveness inherent in the design of creation. The Sefardic custom reminds us of the forgiveness achieved at Sinai. It recalls the forgiveness we can secure through personal spiritual effort and prayer.

“There are those who are accustomed to eat a sweet apple with honey. And they say, “It should be granted to us a sweet year”. (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 583:1)

The Shulchan Aruch lists many foods eaten at the Rosh HaShanna meal. Each food alludes to a specific blessing. The eating is accompanied with a short prayer requesting from Hashem the blessing associated with the food. The eating of the apple is mentioned by Rav Moshe Isserles. In different communities customs vary as to which foods are consumed. However, the apple seems to have been widely incorporated into the Rosh HaShanna meal.

It is somewhat difficult to understand this custom. The Torah vigorously rejects all forms of superstition. It is very surprising that halacha should encourage a practice which seems to be based upon omen.

However, if carefully considered we can appreciate the meaning of this custom. It is not in any way an expression of superstition of primitive beliefs. For most of us the Rosh HaShanna experience is strongest while we are in the synagogue. There we pray for the fulfillment of our wishes in the coming year. We are actually aware of the process of heavenly judgment. Once we leave the synagogue we begin to become distracted. The Yom Tov meal, the opportunity to spend time with family and friends begin to compete for our attention. As the day passes we may forget the

significance of the occasion.

Our Sages had a deep understanding of human behavior. They recognized this tendency towards distraction. Yet, the Rosh HaShanna experience should not be limited to the time spent in synagogue. The atmosphere of judgment should extend throughout the day. In order to accomplish this end the Sages encouraged the custom of eating special foods during the Yom Tov meal. Through this process an element of prayer is incorporated into the experience. Rather than the meal becoming a distraction, it reinforces the special atmosphere of the occasion. ■

[1] Rav Moshe Isserles, Comments on Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 581:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Nissim, Notes to Commentary of Rabbaynu Yitzchak Alfasi, Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 3a.

[3] Rabbaynu Eliyahu of Vilna, Biur HaGra, Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 581, note 8.

[4] Rabbaynu Nissim, Notes to Commentary of Rabbaynu Yitzchak Alfasi, Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 3a.

Day of Judgment?

RABBI RUBEN GOBER

Each Jewish Yom Tov (holiday) has its own ‘Tefilas Musaf’ (added prayer) in which the unique theme of that holiday is expressed. For example, on Pesach the tefila mentions that it is the time of our redemption and on Shavuot it mentions that it is the time that we received the Torah. However, when we look at the Musaf of Rosh Hashana we notice that the essential theme of the day is mysteriously lacking. Everyone knows that the basic theme of this holiday is Yom HaDin—the Day of Judgment. The Talmud in Rosh Hashana 16a says that on this day everyone in the world passes before G-d to be judged. Yet,

when we search the Musaf, we find that there is no mention of this theme at all. The only reference that we find to the Day of Judgment is in the middle bracha (blessing), that of Zichronos (remembrance) where we speak of G-d remembering all creatures on this day and deciding their fate. However, we are still left to wonder why Chazal (our sages) only inserted this in the greater theme of Zichronos, when we focus on ideas about G-d, rather than constructing a blessing that focuses on our being judged.

Even more curious is how Chazal didn’t even construct a bracha that has at its essence a request of G-d to pass a favorable ‘verdict’. When we think of being judged, we naturally think of going before a judge to plead our case or at least asking for mercy in the outcome. Our tefilos contain no such request. With these observations we are left with some strong questions: Why would Chazal leave out the essential theme of Judgment from the tefila? Why would they not construct a blessing in which we can express our request for a favorable verdict?

One may respond simply that there are specific requests that we make with regards to the judgment. There are four extra insertions that we add in to our tefilos on Rosh Hashana and on the following days until Yom Kippur; these additions contain requests, such as “write us in the book of life” and the like. But upon closer examination, we see that this just raises more questions. Firstly, why are our requests for life and a good year limited to additions and not an actual bracha? Shouldn’t there be a specific bracha formulated for this purpose? Furthermore, the Tur, in Orach Chaim Siman 582, says that these additions were allowed by our sages but only with difficulty. This seems extremely problematic—if the additions are appropriate then why were they only allowed with difficulty? If they’re not appropriate, then they shouldn’t be allowed at all!

Apparently, when they constructed the tefila, Chazal did not want to emphasize the idea that we are being judged. What did they want us to focus on? Let us examine the basic



themes they established for the Musaf prayer of Rosh Hashana. There are three brachos unique to this day (what follows is an extremely brief summary of the blessings for reference; a deeper understanding of each one demands analysis beyond the scope of this article). The first one is ‘Malchios’, kingship, in which we speak about G-d as King of the universe and how in the future all of mankind will recognize this idea. ‘Zichronos’, remembrance, is the second bracha; the basic concept here is that G-d is an Omniscient Being who on this day decides the fate of all beings for the upcoming year (again, notice the lack of the term ‘din’, judgment, in the bracha). The third bracha is ‘Shofaros’ which expresses ideas behind the commandment to blow a ram’s horn on this day; here the basic idea is the distance between man and G-d, as it says at the end “and none is similar to You.” All these berachos express ideas about G-d, without any focus on man or man’s needs. Even from our cursory examination we see that on the Day of Judgment, Chazal felt that it is inappropriate for us to focus on ourselves, despite the fact that we are being judged. Just the opposite—man must focus on that which is beyond himself and the physical world. Chazal constructed the Tefila in such

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a way that one must draw his attention to philosophical ideas about God. Of course the question we need to ask is why.

Clearly, Chazal are teaching us that Judaism has a different view of 'Judgment Day'. The Torah's concept of Yom HaDin isn't how most people look at judgment, like a court case for every individual where we sit in front of the judge and argue our case. It's true that we are judged, but in Torah the din, the verdict, isn't based on a simplistic notion of whether we are 'good people' or 'bad people', innocent or guilty. Of course it is true, as many statements of Chazal point out, that there is a verdict passed based on whether we are righteous or evil individuals. However, this really depends on one concept—the state of the soul. Man's level isn't a simple question of his good deeds or bad deeds; it has to do with his perfection and how he has attached himself to the truth. God, of course, is the Ultimate Truth and Existence—He is the Prime Mover of the Universe, upon which all other existences are dependent. For our souls to attain any level of existence we must exercise our 'bechira chofshis', our free choice, to use our G-d given wisdom in pursuit of truth and G-d; only in this way can we attain true metaphysical existence for our soul.

It is based on this concept that we are judged; come Yom HaDin, man really has no right to come before G-d and 'plead his case'. Such a notion is against Torah—G-d knows what level man is on and all that he has encountered in this world. This isn't a court case where man tries to convince the judge of his innocence—such an idea is absurd with reference to G-d. Our notion of Din is totally different—its based on a philosophical, metaphysical foundation of Judaism, that of the state of man's soul. In Torah, the notion of 'Judgment' means that man must reflect on where he stands with regards to reality for ultimately that is how he is judged; for us, it is a chance to reflect on

the true ideas behind the physical universe and give our souls real existence. It is only in this way that we may warrant a favorable verdict.

With this understanding of Judgment, we can see why our tefilos don't mention Yom HaDin and don't have specific requests that pertain to the judgment. Chazal didn't want man to be caught up in his own personal judgment; there's no point in it since it won't accomplish anything. The judgment is based on G-d's knowledge of man and the level of his soul. For man to win a favorable verdict, there is only one thing he needs to do—to reflect on the ideas about real existence, and there is no Real Existence other than G-d.

We may now explain why the Tur writes that the additions in Tefila that contain requests were only allowed with difficulty. Clearly, Chazal didn't want man to focus on his own physical needs on this day and it is for this reason that there is no specific bracha that talks about this. The essential goal is for man to focus on what is true and real, and attach himself to those ideas. However, Judaism doesn't deny human nature, and it is only natural that if man is being judged then he be concerned about himself. Man by his very nature is egoistic and must think about himself and his physical needs. Recognizing this, Chazal made a concession to human nature and allowed for him to ask for a good verdict. However, this was only a concession and Chazal ensured that this idea be clear by only allowing these requests to be expressed as additions in pre-existing brachos. When we look closely at the specific berachos in which the additions are inserted, the first two and last two of the tefila, we notice that these are berachos that focus on G-d and Divine Providence and not man's own needs. It is clear that on this day, the Day of Judgment, our sages wanted to guide us in gaining "real life", focusing on ideas about G-d and giving existence to our souls. ■

Shofaros

RABBI RUBEN GOBER



One of the three main berachos (blessings) of the Tefilas Musaf (literally, added prayer) on Rosh Hashana is Shofaros, literally "horns of rams", referring to the ram's horn which we use in our mitzvah to blow shofar on this day. Generally, the Tefilas Musaf expresses the essential themes of the holiday. For example, on Pesach we mention that it is the time of our redemption and on Shavuot we mention that it is the time of our having received the Torah. The question then becomes: why do we mention the shofar in our tefila? It is true that there is a commandment to do a certain activity with it on this day, but that doesn't necessarily imply that it must be mentioned as an essential theme of the day. Proof of this would be the mitzvah of Lulav—on Succos we are commanded to pick up the Lulav with other objects, but we don't mention this mitzvah in our tefila. What is it about shofar that makes it an essential theme of Rosh Hashana?

Even a cursory reading of the text of the bracha raises a few questions. Firstly, the bracha begins by talking about G-d's Revealing Himself at Mt. Sinai to Bnai Yisrael and how the Shofar was used to create fear in the nation. As the first verse quoted says "...and the voice of the shofar was very strong and the entire nation that was in the camp trembled." Also

in the third verse "And the nation saw...the voice of the shofar...and the nation saw and moved and stood from a distance." Clearly the images of trembling and moving to a distance create an association of fear with the Shofar. On a factual level, we can relate to this; hearing a loud, thunderous blast of noise can certainly put people into a state of fear and panic. The question is, though, why was it important that the people be in a state of fear at the time of G-d's Revelation?

Furthermore, the next verses quoted from Psalms express how the Shofar was used as a means of praising G-d. This seems to be contradictory to the previous function of Shofar; whereas first the shofar was used to instill fear in people and express the concept of distance from G-d, now its used as a means of praising G-d, which implies some type of positive expression of our relationship with Him. How do we resolve these seemingly inconsistent ideas of shofar?

When we look at the verses quoted from the Neviim (prophets) in the bracha, we notice yet another application of the shofar. All the verses express the fact that shofar will be sounded as a prelude to the future redemption and the coming of the Messiah. One must ask why shofar must introduce the

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redemption. In addition, how does this fit with the previous functions and themes of shofar?

Lets start with the beginning of the blessing. As we mentioned above, the first three verses quoted show that shofar took part in producing a state of fear in the people at Sinai. The shofar produces a blasting, thunderous noise that can scare a person, making him feel insecure about the future. This is really the meaning of fear, to feel insecure and unsure about what will happen next. Apparently, this state of insecurity was integral to the event at Sinai, but we need to understand why.

A common notion in the world is that a 'religious' or 'spiritual' experience is one of feeling close to G-d. The person feels some sense of security in what he views as a personal encounter with Him. Often we may hear people speak of how they feel G-d is with them, or that they feel safe with G-d. The common religious man feels that G-d is with him in everything he does and because of that he is not worried about his future.

The Torah, with the description of the event of Sinai, teaches us that such a notion is impossible. Sinai was the ultimate 'experience with G-d' where G-d revealed Himself and communicated directly with man. If any religious experience could be imagined, this was it. Yet, the Torah emphasizes that throughout the event, man felt scared and distant from G-d. Why? Because in Judaism, an encounter with G-d is an opportunity to gain insight into the world and G-d's Wisdom that otherwise would not be known to man. The goal of Sinai wasn't for man to 'experience G-d'; it was for man to gain knowledge of G-d and the correct way of life in this world. However, in gaining such knowledge and perceiving G-d, His Greatness and Wisdom must naturally overawe man. As King David says in Psalms (8:5), "What is man that You remember him?" When man gains insight into the existence of G-d, he must be

overawed by how Great this Existence is and how removed He is from ourselves. The encounter with G-d and gain in knowledge was not an ends to itself, which provided man with a sense of emotional security and comfort; it could only allow for a feeling of insecurity that result from the awareness of his own limited and insignificant existence relative to this Perfect Existence. (At Sinai, G-d did give the Jewish nation a means to achieve true security, that of living in line with G-d's Will and relating to his Divine Providence on this world. As the verse in Psalms says, "Blessed is the man that takes security in G-d"; our knowledge of G-d is our only source of security.)

With this perspective, we may now return to our original questions. At Sinai, there was a danger that man could mistake the experience for a reason to have an emotional sense of security and not have to worry about himself. Man could falsely attribute this 'close encounter' with G-d to a sense of self-worth, so that he feels special and unique in the world because 'G-d is with him'. The shofar was the response to this danger; it created a sense of fear and insecurity, showing that this encounter with G-d, in its own right, doesn't provide any sense of security for man. It was an experience that was awesome and humiliating, making man feel insignificant and distant from this Ultimate Existence, so that he must feel insecure about himself. When man was confronted with the reality of G-d, the only Real and Independent Existence, there was no room for an emotional security that stems from an over-estimation of man's own value, since.

Now we can see why the shofar was used as an instrument to praise G-d. In Judaism, praise of G-d doesn't stem from a feeling of closeness with G-d or positive knowledge of G-d. It's the opposite—we recognize that man's praise of G-d falls way

short of the Infinite Greatness of G-d due to man's limited understanding of G-d. As the verse in Nechemiah (9:5) says "And He is Above all blessing and praise." We praise G-d only because we recognize Him as deserving of all praise but not because the praise contains an accurate description of G-d. In every expression of praise towards G-d, we recognize this distance between man and G-d and how G-d is so great that man is nothing relative to Him. This is why Shofar is used as an instrument of praise; by using an instrument that causes fear and insecurity, we express how part and parcel of our praise of G-d is that we are distant from Him and are overawed by His Existence, so that we must feel insecure about our own self-worth when we talk of His Existence. (See the commentary of the Malbim, on the verse from Psalms 150:3 for support of this idea).

We are now in a position to explain why shofar will be used a prelude to the coming of the future redemption. When we look at the common notion of redemption and the coming of the Messiah, we find that most people look at this as a time in which people will have physical and emotional security. To most, it's a time of 'no worries' where man will be able to exist with all his needs provided for him. He will be able to just sit back and relax, without a worry for what the future will bring. The Torah teaches just the opposite; the only goal and benefit of the time of redemption and the coming of the Messiah is that man will be able to gain knowledge of G-d. The Rambam in Hilchos Melachim (Chapter 12 Law 4) explains that the sages and prophets of the Jewish people desired the days of Messiah, not for its physical and emotional security per se, but for the ability they will have to be concerned only with the Torah and its wisdom and the pursuit of existence in the world to come. In Judaism, redemption is a time

where recognition and knowledge of G-d will be disseminated throughout the world and all will gain insight in His Wisdom. Now we see why shofar is appropriate before the redemption—the correct state of mind in entering the time of the redemption is not one of looking towards emotional security but rather insecurity and fear about seeing the true value of one's personal existence. At this time, mankind will be overawed by new knowledge of a Being and Greater Existence of which previously he had no knowledge. As a result, man will see that his existence is insignificant relative to that of G-d. The goal of this new period in mankind is not for man to feel comfortable with his own existence but rather to see that his own physical existence is worthless if not for his pursuit of knowledge of G-d, which the redemption will give him the optimal opportunity to do. This is what the Shofar teaches us as an introduction to the redemption. It expresses the idea of the proper perspective of this new era in time, namely that man will gain knowledge that will make him feel insecure with regards to his own personal existence.

With this concept of Shofar, we can see why Chazal, our sages, put it in the tefila. The mitzvah of Shofar on Rosh Hashana expresses an idea that is essential on this Day of Judgement. Chazal, in putting Shofaros into the tefila, are teaching us that man must reflect on where he stands in the world; not in the physical world but in the 'real' world, that of the metaphysical and philosophical world which contains the true ideas. The Shofar teaches us that as man stands before G-d to be judged, man must acknowledge that relative to G-d, man is small and must feel insecure about himself. It is only through pursuing G-d and His Wisdom that man can give his soul significance and in that manner warrant a favorable verdict that will allow him to continue this pursuit. ■

Taken from "Getting It Straight" Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity

Evolution

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"OK. I'm really ready this time. Give me a test."

I was confident. I had been practicing rational thinking for weeks now, asking questions, analyzing situations, and doing my best to work on what I'd learned. I was sure I was up to whatever my friend, the King of Rational Thought, could dish out. He smiled across the restaurant table.

"You really want to do this?" he said as our salads arrived.

"Yeah, I'm sure. Give me your best shot."

"Okay," he said with a gleam in his eye. "Picture this. Darwin, explaining his theory of evolution. He's saying that man evolved over time through survival of the fittest. Only the strong survive. The weak die off. The need to continue his physical existence is what has shaped man into who he is today. All of man's capabilities came about through an evolutionary process aimed solely at survival. Got the picture?"

"Sure," I said. "Besides, I'm familiar with Darwin's teaching."

"Okay," he said. "Now tell me. What's wrong with that picture?"

I had just taken a bite of salad, so I had a moment to think. It didn't help.

"What do you mean, what's wrong with it?" I tried.

"What is rationally wrong with that picture?"

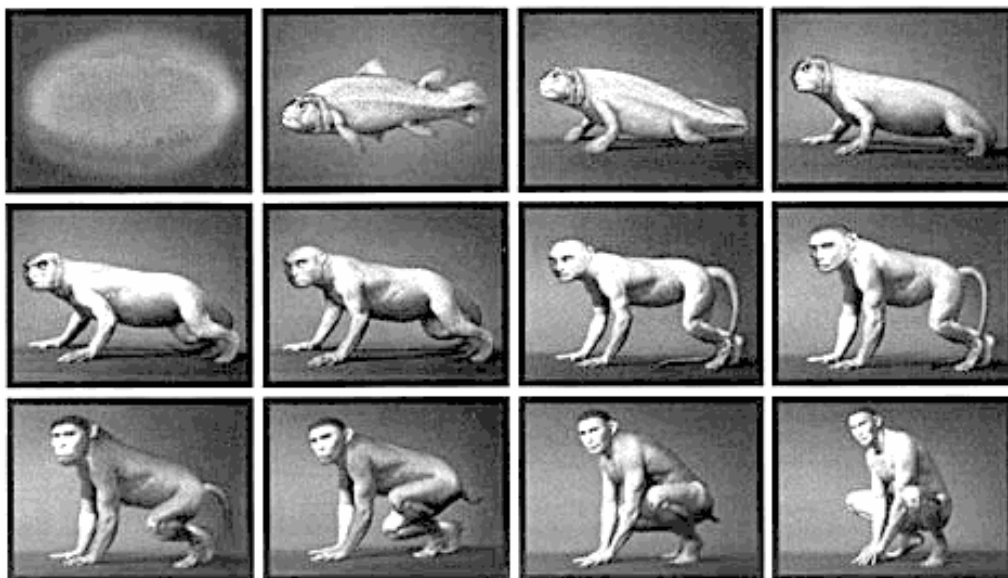
I quickly took another bite of salad, but even roquefort dressing wasn't stimulating enough. I didn't have a clue.

"I'll give you a hint," he said. "Here's another picture. Bertrand Russell, the well-known philosopher, commenting that Einstein's theory of relativity is an abstract concept and that primitive man, since he evolved based on survival of the fittest, didn't think about the theory of relativity because it had nothing to do with survival. You with me?"

I nodded.

"What's wrong with that picture?" he asked.

"That's a hint?" I complained.



"The same thing is wrong with both pictures," he replied.

After five minutes I gave up, frustrated. "I don't know," I said.

"It's like this," he began. "If man evolved based only on survival of the fittest, and if man developed his capabilities only as a means to survive, then how could Darwin talk about the idea of evolution or Russell talk about the idea of relativity? Those ideas have nothing to do with survival. If Darwin is correct, man would only develop capabilities needed for survival. The ability to think about an abstract idea like evolution or relativity isn't needed for survival. In fact, it could even get in the way. Darwin's very contemplation of the idea of evolution disproves his own theory. Ditto for Russell talking about relativity.

"You see," he went on, "one of the man's greatest strengths is his ability to think abstractly, to think about his own existence. That isn't an ability that is necessary for survival. So it couldn't have

developed based on survival of the fittest."

I stabbed a cherry tomato. "But how could those guys have missed that?" I asked. "It seems obvious once you explain it."

"A good question. I can't speak for Darwin, but Russell is normally pretty sharp. It's amazing to me that he missed that point."

"So do you have a theory as to how man did develop?" I asked.

He smiled. "That," he said, "is another subject."

A waitress walked by carrying a large chocolate mousse. "Hmmm," I said, recovering my composure, "I think I have a question for you."

"What's that?"

"Do you see the chocolate mousse that waitress is delivering two tables over?"

"Yes."

"What's wrong with that mousse?" I asked.

He looked at me suspiciously and finally said, "I'll bite. What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know," I said. "I think I'll order one and find out." ■

meaning of this enigmatic pasuk. Rashi explains that the nation was to accept communal responsibility for observance of the Torah. This weighty obligation is not easily fulfilled. Some sins are performed in the open. These can be addressed by the community. However, many of the obligations of the Torah are performed in the privacy of one's home or in the heart. How can the community bare responsibility for these private areas of observance? Rashi understands the pasuk to respond to this issue. The community is obligated to encourage Torah practice in all of its observable forms. This obligation does not extend to those observances that are hidden from the community. In these areas the community is not duty-bound to ensure observance. This is the Almighty's domain. He will deal with the private practices and thoughts of the human being.[1]

Nachmanides offers an alternative interpretation of the pasuk. Not all of our sins are revealed to us. Sometimes we commit a sin unknowingly. The pasuk explains that we are not responsible for these errors. However, we must apply our full attention to repenting from those iniquities of which we are aware.[2]

Nachmanides comments can perhaps be understood on a deeper level. Repentance assumes that we have the ability to control our actions. This is not always the case. Sometimes we are confronted with a behavior we are truly incapable of controlling or altering. In general, these behaviors stem from motivations we do not fully understand. Because these motivations are hidden they are impossible to uproot. We find ourselves powerless to correct our behavior. Possibly, Nachmanides is discussing this issue. These sins are referred to as hidden. This is because the observable sinful behavior is only the outward expression of the hidden aspects of our personality. We are not held responsible for these sins that we cannot control.[3]

“And you will then return to Hashem your G-d and you will listen to His voice as I have commanded you today – you and your children – with all your heart and with all your soul.” (Devarim 30:2)

Moshe tells Bnai Yisrael that they may sin and be exiled from the land of Israel. They will be subjected to the terrible punishments previously described in the Torah. However, Moshe assures the nation that eventually the people will return to Hashem. Our pasuk describes perfect or complete teshuva – repentance. Total repentance involves the heart and the soul. The Torah often describes complete commitment with this phrase. We are to serve the Almighty with all our hearts and souls[4]. Complete love of Hashem is also described with this phrase[5]. What do "heart" and "soul" mean in this context?

Sforno explains each of these phrases. He explains that a complete heart means that the person has no doubts. A complete soul indicates that all desire to

repeat the sin has been uprooted. [6]

We commonly understand the teshuva as abandonment of a sinful behavior. Based on this understanding, we would define complete repentance as total abandonment of the evil behavior. Yet, Sforno seems to require more than mere cessation of the behavior. He asserts that we must also commit our heart and soul. Why is this additional aspect necessary? In order to fully understand Sforno's comments, we must carefully consider the nature of repentance.

Let us begin by considering a related problem. Teshuva must be accompanied by a verbal declaration. This declaration is a confession and a commitment not to return to the sinful behavior. Repentance and confession can take place at any time during the year. Yet, there is a special obligation to repent and confess on Yom Kippur. Let us assume a person sinned. The person regretted the sin. The individual repented and confessed the sin. Now, Yom Kippur arrives. Must the person repeat the confession? Halacha requires that the person repeat the confession. This requirement applies even if the sin has not been repeated. In fact, even if the person never repeats the wrongdoing, the individual is required to repeat the confession each Yom Kippur.[7] Why does halacha demand these repeated confessions?

If we assume that teshuva is a cessation of sinful behavior, it makes little sense to require repeated confessions over a sin that has long been abandoned. However, this is the requirement! This tells us that there must be another aspect to repentance. Beyond the abandonment of the external behavior, an internal reorientation is needed. We must change our attitudes towards our previous behavior. Before, we desired the sinful activity. We were enticed by it. With repentance we come to see the behavior as deplorable and destructive. We no longer harbor the desire to engage in the sinful activity. Teshuva does not end with cessation of a physical activity. The process must continue until one's perceptions of the sin are changed. This requires ongoing review. Through reviewing our behavior annually, we can slowly change our internal attitudes. We can reorient our outlook on the sinful activity. This is the purpose of repeating the confession.

We can now better understand the Sforno's comments. Teshuva mends one's behavior and soul. Repentance involves an external change and an internal reorientation. Sforno is explaining the elements of this reorientation. He is defining the internal elements of teshuva.

The first element is changing one's perception of the sin. The second is the complete uprooting of the desire to commit the sin. Let us consider each of these elements.

Not every repentant individual is completely successful in changing his or her perceptions of the previous behaviors. This is because there are various

motivations for repentance. It is naïve to assume that repentance is uniformly accompanied by a complete conviction in the evil of the previous behavior. For example, teshuva may be motivated by a general sense of unhappiness. In such individuals repentance represents an attempt to begin life anew. This person seeks meaning and self-fulfillment to replace an empty lifestyle. This person cannot identify the specific fallacies of the previous life-style. Neither can the person articulate the benefits of his or her new life-style. This understanding is replaced by a general sense of wellbeing and religious fulfillment. Certainly, this person has repented. However, this repentance lacks a thorough reevaluation. The person's actions have been corrected. The perceptions are still imperfect.

It is also true that repentance is not always accompanied by an uprooting of the desire to commit the sin. One's commitment to a new life-style can also vary. Every individual feels conflicting desires. We choose to pursue some desires and attempt to ignore or suppress others. Few individuals can claim a complete commitment to Torah – devoid of all conflict. Most of us learn to live with some level of personal conflict. A person may observe Shabbat, kashrut and the other mitzvot. Yet, this person recognizes that sometimes the urge exists to ignore a specific commandment or law. This individual is acting properly. However, this person's inner feelings are not in congruity with the individual's behavior.

We can now appreciate Sforno's description of complete teshuva. In complete repentance there exist perfect congruity between action, understanding and feeling. Clear understanding has vanquished conflicting desire. As a result, the internal and external are consistent. In the Sforno's words, the heart and soul are committed to the behavior exhibited by the body.

“And now write for yourselves this song. And teach it to Bnai Yisrael and place it in their mouths. This is order that this song will serve as a witness to Bnai Yisrael.” (Devarim 31:19)

Hashem tells Moshe that the time of his death is approaching. Moshe is to create a written record of the shira – the song that Hashem has taught him. He must also teach the song to the people. What is this song that Moshe must transmit? The Talmud indicates, in Tractate Sanhedrin, that the shira is the Torah. Moshe is to record the Torah and teach it to Bnai Yisrael.[8]

The Talmud further explains that it is a mitzvah for every man of Bnai Yisrael to write a Sefer Torah.[9]

Maimonides discusses this commandment in his Mishne Torah. He explains that this requirement is one of the six hundred thirteen mitzvot. He adds that it can be fulfilled through writing or correcting a single letter in a complete Sefer Torah.[10]

Rabbaynu Asher explains that we no longer fulfill

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this commandment through the writing of a Sefer Torah. Instead, we observe the command through writing copies of the Talmud, its commentaries and other works of the Torah. Why has the mitzvah changed? Rabbaynu Asher explains that the mitzvah is to create the works needed for one's personal pursuit of Torah knowledge. In earlier times the Torah was studied directly from the Sefer Torah. In that period it was appropriate to create a personal copy of the Sefer Torah. Today, the Sefer Torah is kept in the synagogue. It is read before the congregation. It is not used for personal study. We employ other works for learning Torah. Our obligation is to acquire these essential works.[11] Rav Moshe Feinstein Ztl adds that the mitzvah does not require the actual writing of these various works. Today, we can fulfill the commandment through the purchase of these sefarim – books.[12]

Bait Yosef rejects this interpretation of the mitzvah. He argues that we are still required to write an actual Sefer Torah. We cannot fulfill this mitzvah through writing or purchasing other sefarim.[13] This is also the opinion of Maimonides and other authorities.

Rabbaynu Asher's position is difficult to understand. He agrees that the original mitzvah was to write a Sefer Torah. He maintains that the mitzvah is now transformed and can be fulfilled through the purchase of sefarim. How can these sefarim

substitute for the Sefer Torah?

In order to answer this question some background is required. The Torah is composed of two components. These are the Written Law and the Oral Law. The Written Law is the Chumash. The Oral Law is the Talmud and the explanation of the Torah. Both the Written and the Oral Law were given to Bnai Yisrael at Sinai.

Why is the Chumash referred to as the Written Law and the Talmud and commentaries defined as the Oral Law? This is because the Chumash is to be recorded in the form of the Sefer Torah. It is to be studied in this written form. The Talmud and the commentaries are not to be formally recorded. They are intended to be studied as an orally transmitted tradition.

The Talmud explains in Tractate Gittin that it is not permitted to study the Written Law without direct reference to a text. It is also prohibited to transcribe the Oral Law and transform it into a written form.[14]

Today the Oral Law is committed to writing. Why is this permitted? The Talmud explains that this alteration in the very nature of the Oral Law is required in order to assure its preservation.[15]

We can now better understand Rabbaynu Asher's position. Rabbaynu Asher maintains that the mitzvah has always been to acquire sefarim for study. In

other words, the mitzvah is an extension of the obligation to study the Torah. Originally, the Sefer Torah was the only written book of the Torah. The Oral Law could not be transcribed. This meant that the only book required to study the Torah was the Sefer Torah. All other Torah knowledge was to be communicated orally. In order to fulfill the mitzvah one was required to copy the Sefer Torah.

The decision to allow the Oral Torah to be written created an abundant source of other sefarim. The Sefer Torah was no longer the exclusive or primary written work used in Torah study. These other sefarim of the Oral Law became the means through which the Torah was studied. Now, the acquisition of these sefarim fulfilled the mitzvah of securing the means for Torah study. □

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 29:28. [2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 29:28.

[3] Rav Yisroel Chait, Editor's notes. [4] Sefer Devarim 11:14.

[5] Sefer Devarim 6:5. [6] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 30:2. [7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:8. [8] Mesechet Sanhedrin 21b.

[9] Mesechet Sanhedrin 21b. [10] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Sefer Torah 7:1. [11] Piske HaRa'ash al Hilchot Sefer Torah 2b.

[12] Rav Moshe Feinstein, Igrot Moshe, Orech Chayim, volume 4, p 56. [13] Rav Yosef Karo, Bait Yosef Commentary on Tur, Orach Chayim 270. [14] Mesechet Gittin 60b. [15] Mesechet Gittin 60a.

Ha'Azinu / Shabbat Shuva

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“My lesson shall drop like rain. My saying shall flow like dew – like wind-blown rain upon the herb, like a powerful shower upon the covering of vegetation.” (Devarim 31:2)

Rashi explains that in this pasuk Hashem is describing the effects of the Torah upon its students. In the first portion of the pasuk, the Torah is compared to rain and dew. What is the message transmitted through this comparison?

Rashi comments that although the earth needs rain in order to sustain life, rain is not always appreciated. Rain can cause inconvenience. The traveler does not wish to battle inclement weather. A farmer whose harvested crops are still in the field is not pleased with a summer storm.

Dew does not have the life-sustaining power of rain. However, it is more appreciated. Dew provides moisture, without inconvenience. [1]

Rashi understands the pasuk to contain a fundamental lesson. A few preliminary observations are necessary to understand this message. Some activities only provide future reward. Often a person is required to make a tremendous sacrifice in order to secure this future benefit. A person may work fifty years, in a despised job, in order to someday enjoy a dreamed-of

retirement. A parent will sacrifice and endure hardship for years in order to provide the best opportunities for his or her beloved child.

In contrast, other activities provide only immediate and fleeting benefit. These activities offer no long-term gain. For example, an extra-rich dessert is great for a moment. But the consequences are not as pleasant. The pleasure of a drug-user epitomizes this type of activity. The pleasure of the high is short-term. The long-term effect of the activity is a shattered life.

Rashi understands rain to represent an activity with a long-term sustaining effect. Dew, in contrast, symbolizes activity providing immediate joy and benefit. He explains the pasuk to mean that the Torah combines the benefits of rain and dew. Like rain, Torah sustains life. Through observance and study of the Torah we can achieve eternal life in Olam HaBah – the world to come. Yet, the Torah also has the quality represented by dew – immediate gain. We are not required to sacrifice happiness in this life. Instead, the Torah enhances our temporal existence in the material world.

How are these two outcomes accomplished? The Torah provides us with guidance in our everyday affairs. It teaches us a way, an outlook and discipline

designed to help deal with the challenges of life. At the same time, the Torah encourages the development of the human's unique spiritual element. This element is immortal and survives the temporal material world.

The second portion of the pasuk makes reference to wind-blown rain falling upon an herb and a powerful shower falling upon the mantle of vegetation. Again, the pasuk is teaching some lesson about Torah. But we must determine the meaning of the various symbols – wind-blown rain, the individual herb, a powerful shower, and the mantle of vegetation. The association between the symbols also requires analysis. The wind-blown rain is associated with the individual herb. The powerful shower is associated with the mantle of vegetation.

Again, Rashi provides a hint to the interpretation of the pasuk. He comments that the wind-blown rain strengthens the herb it strikes. In a similar way, the study of Torah strengthens the student.

Rashi seems to understand this second portion of the pasuk as a describing two manners in which Torah can be transmitted. These two methods are described as wind-blown rain and as a powerful shower.[2] Apparently, each method has its application. One method is applicable when dealing with the individual – the single herb. The other method is required when teaching a large group – the mantle of vegetation.

Torah is taught in many forums. It may be transmitted from rebbe to talmid – teacher to student. Even in the classroom the rebbe works with a small group of students. In this situation the teacher has the

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(Ha'Azinu continued from previous page)

opportunity and responsibility to recognize the individuality of the pupil. Torah is also transmitted in larger forums. In the synagogue the rav must inspire a congregation. He cannot study the reaction of each individual as he addresses his congregation. He must speak to the group. The rebbe deals with the single herb. The rav must communicate with the entire mantle of vegetation.

Each of these situations requires a unique approach. The rebbe's success depends upon assuming the role of wind-blown rain. The teacher must be demanding. High expectations cause the student to grow and become a scholar. The rebbe can be demanding because each individual student is carefully observed. This allows the teacher to provide measured demands corresponding to the abilities and needs of the pupil.

The rav of a kehila – a congregation – does not have this luxury. He must use a different means to achieve his goal of effectively teaching the lessons of the Torah. He must present his thoughts with power and impact. This requires a clear, sharply-defined message. In this way he inspires his congregation through demonstrating the wisdom and beauty of the Torah.

“To Hashem do you act this way? You are a foolish nation without wisdom. He is your Father and the One who established you. He made you and placed you upon a foundation.” (Devarim 32:6)

The pasuk addresses a future generation of Bnai Yisrael. It is confronting a people who reject Hashem and His Torah. This rebellion against the Almighty and His law is characterized as the action of a nation of fools.

Rashi comments that such people are foolish for they forget the past. The history of the Jewish people serves as testimony to the Almighty's relationship to Bnai Yisrael. The nation has no wisdom for it fails to foresee the outcome of its behavior. The rejection of Hashem can only result in disaster.[3]

Rashi's comments correspond a famous teaching of the Sages. The Sages ask, “Who is wise?” They respond, “One who sees the future.”[4]

This teaching requires some analysis. There are many characteristics that can be associated with a wise person. Why did our Sages specifically associate the wise person with the ability to foresee the future? Another problem stems from the strange phraseology adopted in this teaching. No human can see the future. We can see only the present. Regarding the future, we predict likely outcomes.

The present we perceive with our senses. These sense perceptions are very real. No normal person would purposely walk in front of an oncoming train. We have no doubt as to the reality of the speeding train, and no doubt that crossing its path will result in disaster.

In contrast, we can perceive the future only as an idea. The future cannot be seen through the senses. For this reason the future often seems less real than the present. Mere ideas do not strike us as quite as definite as sense perceptions. It is difficult to take ideational

material completely seriously. However, this denigration of the reality of ideas is an illusion. Ideas are just as real as sense perceptions.

Our Sages did not regard a person as wise simply as a consequence of the accumulation of data. A wise person is an individual who is guided by wisdom. This means that the reality of ideas is as definite to the wise person as input received through the senses. The Sages characterized this quality by referring to “seeing” the future. The future, although only an idea, is as real as the present that is seen through the senses.

The message of the pasuk is now clearer. The rejection of the Almighty will inevitably result in a negative consequence. Why would the people expose themselves to this outcome? The pasuk responds that this behavior reflects a lack of wisdom. The people will become attached to the material life. They will strive to fulfill their immediate desires. These desires will seem very real and pressing. The future consequences of this behavior will be disregarded. The future only exists as an idea. To a people steeped in materialism an idea will seem illusionary and vague. The result is that the future will be ignored in order to enjoy the present.



“Among the repentant behaviors are for the repentant individual to constantly call-out to Hashem with cries and supplications. And one should give charity according to one's ability. One should distance oneself from one's sin. One should change one's name. One is stating that I am a different person. I am not the person who did those inappropriate actions. One should alter all of one's actions so that they are positive and just...” (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:4)

Maimonides describes the behaviors of the repentant individual. One of these behaviors is somewhat confusing. Maimonides suggests that the repentant individual should alter all of his or her actions. One must be positive and just in all actions.

In order to understand the difficulty regarding this suggestion, a short introduction is required. What is

repentance? Repentance is not accomplished through a temporary cessation of the sinful behavior. Teshuva is much more demanding. Teshuva requires that a person make a complete break with the sinful behavior. This complete break is only achieved through a commitment to never again commit the sin. Maimonides' position on this issue is emphatic. He explains that a person who confesses a sin and does not resolve to completely discontinue the sinful behavior has not fulfilled the mitzvah of teshuva. He compares this person to one who immerses in a mikveh – a body of water – while holding an impure object. The immersion cannot affect a state of purity until the person releases the impure object. Similarly, the purification and process of teshuva cannot proceed without a complete break from the sin. This complete break is expressed in a firm commitment to abandon the sinful behavior.[5]

Maimonides suggests that the repentant individual must alter all of his or her behaviors. Does this mean that repentance must be all-encompassing and include all aspects of a person's life? Is Maimonides suggesting that the repentance from a specific sin requires a person to repent from all other inappropriate behaviors? This is not a reasonable interpretation of Maimonides' words. As we have explained, teshuva requires a complete and permanent cessation of the sinful behavior. Maimonides cannot intend to suggest that repentance from a single sin requires that we permanently abandon all other wrongdoing. Such a requirement would render teshuva virtually unattainable!

We must conclude that Maimonides is not suggesting that the repentant individual must permanently discontinue all other inappropriate behaviors. Instead, Maimonides is acknowledging the value of change that is not accompanied by complete commitment. The repentant person should endeavor to discontinue all inappropriate behavior. It is true that such a drastic undertaking will not result in a permanent cessation of all wrongdoing. That is an unrealistic expectation. Nonetheless, temporary change has a value. The sincerely repentant person should appreciate that value and seek change – even temporary change.

This interpretation of Maimonides' suggestion is implied by his carefully chosen wording. He does not suggest that the repentant individual should repent from all other wrongdoing. He suggests that repentant person alter his or her behavior. There is a tremendous difference between altering a behavior and repenting from the behavior. An alteration is achieved even through a temporary suspension of wrongdoing. Repentance requires a complete commitment to permanently discontinue the behavior. This analysis confirms our interpretation of Maimonides' suggestion. He is acknowledging the value of positive change – even temporary change. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 32:2. [2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 32:2. [3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 32:6. [4] Mesechet Tamid 32a. [5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:3.

reality. The shofar blasts are to make us associate to Sisra's mother's sobbings - her return to reality. We too must return to reality, that is, returning to a life of Torah. This is enforced by Rosh Hashanna, a day when we direct our attention to G-d's exclusive role as King, Who knows all our thoughts and actions, and Who rules the entire world. During our last prayer on Yom Kippur, "Neila", we say, "so that we may disengage from the oppression of our hands." Our daily activities of work, family and other pursuits distract us from what our true focus must be - the study and application of G-d's Torah system.

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 26b teaches that a shofar used for Rosh Hashanna must be bent, not straight. This is to resemble man's "bent" state of mind - he is bent over in humility. This parallels a contrast: G-d is King, but we are His creations. Our undistorted recognition of G-d's role as our Creator and King, results in our sense of humility.

The Shofar at Mount Sinai

We find the shofar associated with many events. The shofar waxed increasingly louder at Sinai when G-d gave us His Torah, "And it was that the sound of the shofar went and grew increasingly loud..." (Exod. 19:19) Why was shofar integral to Sinai? Sinai was also much earlier than Sisra. So does Sinai's shofar convey a different idea than sobbing? It would seem sobbing is unrelated to Sinai. What is Sinai's shofar to teach us? Rashi states that it is the custom of man that when he blows for a long period, the sound gets increasingly weaker and more faint. But here, at Sinai, the sound grew louder. Rashi clearly indicates the lesson of shofar is to teach that man did not orchestrate this event. Shofar is to reflect the Creator's presence. Why was this lesson required at Sinai? Perhaps the very act of accepting the Torah is synonymous with our recognition that this Torah is G-d's ideas. Only such an appreciation will drive our studies towards answers, which resonate with absolute truth. G-d's knowledge is the only absolute truth. Truth is the purpose of Torah study. Torah was therefore given with the sound of the shofar, embodying this idea. Rashi also mentioned that the sound of the shofar on Sinai "breaks the ears". This means it carries great impact. Why was this quality of "sound" necessary? The miracles alone proved G-d's existence!

There is one difference between a sound and a visual: sound is perceived unavoidably. You cannot "hide" your ears. Turning away from a visual removes it's cognizance, but this is inapplicable to sound, certainly a loud sound. It would appear that besides the grand spectacle of Sinai ablaze, when receiving the Torah, the Jews required uninterrupted attention. The shofar blast kept them attentive to the divine nature of this event.

Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 16a: "Rabbi Abahu said, 'G-d says blow before Me with a ram's horn, so that I may recall for you the binding of Isaac, son of Abraham, and I will consider it upon you as if you bound yourselves before Me.'" Since the ram is what Abraham offered in place of Isaac, our blasts of the ram's horn are to recall this event before G-d. It is clear from this Talmudic statement that Rosh Hashanna demands a complete devotion to G-d - we must render ourselves as if bound on the altar, like Isaac. We accomplish this via our shofar blasts. This act attests to our commitment to Abraham's sacrifice. We gain life in G-d's eyes by confirming Abraham's perfection. We follow his ways. This merit grants us life. The lesson of Abraham is not to end when Rosh Hashanna ends. This holiday is to redirect our focus from the mundane, to a lasting cognizance of G-d's presence and role as Creator. He is to occupy our thoughts throughout the year. "Bichol diracheha, da-ayhu, vihu yiyashare orchosecha", "In all your ways, know Him, and he will make straight your

paths." (Proverbs, 3:6)

But let us ask: why is the binding of Isaac central to the theme of Rosh Hashanna? There were many instances where great people sacrificed themselves in the name of G-d? Let us take a closer look at that event.

When Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac, and was subsequently commanded not to do so, he found a ram caught in the bushes: (Gen. 22:13) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son." Why did Abraham feel he was to offer the ram "in place" of Isaac? This was not requested of him. Sforno suggests that Abraham understood the presence of the ram as an indication that it was to be sacrificed - a replacement for Isaac. It appears from Sforno, that G-d wished Abraham to "replace" his initial sacrifice of Isaac. It also appears from Sforno that Abraham wished to fulfill the perfect act of sacrifice, although subsequently he had been instructed not to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham wished to express the perfection of adherence to G-d's command. Therefore, G-d prepared this ram. Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 teaches that this ram was one of the ten miracles created at sunset on the sixth day of creation. This clearly teaches that G-d intended this ram to be offered. Why was it so essential that Abraham offer this ram?

My close friend Shaya Mann suggested the following, insightful answer: Abraham was not "relieved" when subsequently, he was commanded not to slaughter his precious Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram displays a subtle, yet important lesson about Abraham. Abraham did not remove his attention from G-d, once 'he had his son back'. Only someone on a lesser level of perfection would suddenly be overcome with joy that his son would remain alive with him, and then indulge that emotion with no attention to anything else. But Abraham's perfection didn't allow such a diversion from the entire purpose of the binding of Isaac. Although commanded not to kill Isaac, Abraham's attention and love was still completely bound up with G-d. This is where Abraham's energies were before the sacrifice, and even afterwards, when his only son was spared. Offering the ram teaches us that Abraham never removed his thoughts from G-d, even at such a moment when others would certainly indulge in such joy. Abraham did not rejoice in Isaac's life, more than he rejoiced in obeying G-d. The ram teaches us this. Abraham remained steadfast with G-d. Abraham's perfection was twofold; 1) he was not reluctant to obey G-d, at any cost, and 2) nothing surpassed his attachment to G-d.

Maimonides on the Binding of Isaac

Maimonides discusses the significance of Abraham's binding of Isaac. I will record his first principle: "The account of Abraham our father binding his son, includes two great ideas or principles of our faith. First, it shows us the extent and limit of the fear of G-d. Abraham is commanded to perform a certain act, which is not equaled by any surrender of property or by any sacrifice of life, for it surpasses everything that can be done, and belongs to the class of actions, which are believed to be contrary to human feelings. He had been without child, and had been longing for a child; he had great riches, and was expecting that a nation should spring from his seed. After all hope of a son had already been given up, a son was born unto him. How great must have been his delight in the child! How intensely must he have loved him! And yet because he feared G-d, and loved to do what G-d commanded, he thought little of that beloved child, and set aside all his hopes concerning him, and consented to kill him after a journey of three days. If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it three days after he had received the

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commandment proves the presence of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of G-d. There is no necessity to look for the presence of any other idea or of anything that might have affected his emotions. For Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that G-d might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man's duty to love and to fear G-d, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment. We have repeatedly explained this. The angel, therefore, says to him, "For now I know," etc. (ibid. ver. 12), that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a G-d-fearing man, all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of G-d. This idea is confirmed in Scripture: it is distinctly stated that one sole thing, fear of G-d, is the object of the whole Law with its affirmative and negative precepts, its promises and its historical examples, for it is said, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy G-d," etc. (Deut. xxviii. 58). This is one of the two purposes of the 'akedah' (sacrifice or binding of Isaac)"

Maimonides teaches that the binding of Isaac, represented by the ram's horn, displays man's height of perfection, where he sacrifices what he loves most, his only son, for the command of G-d. Shofar, the ram's horn, thereby conveys the idea of the most devoted relationship to G-d.

We see why Rosh Hashanna focuses on the shofar as a central command. It is on Rosh Hashanna that we focus not on G-d's miracles, salvation, or laws. Rather, we focus on G-d alone. This means, a true recognition of His place in our minds, as King. He is our Creator, Who gave us existence, the greatest gift. Abraham's sacrifice is the ultimate expression of man apprehending the idea of G-d, and loving G-d. Not the idea of G-d Who saves, heals, or performs miracles, but more primary, as Creator.

Shofar and the Jubilee

Another area requires shofar, the Jubilee year. This is the 50th year in the Hebrew calendar. After the shofar is blown, all slaves are set free, and all lands returns to their original inheritors apportioned by Joshua upon his initial conquest of Israel. What is the role of shofar here? Additionally, the shofar on Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee shofar. We are to use the same shofar on Rosh Hashanna as we use on the Jubilee. It would seem counter intuitive. Doesn't the day of Rosh Hashanna have more significance than a day, which occurs only once every 50 years? Why is the shofar of Rosh Hashanna derived from some area, which on the surface seems less significant? Maimonides states that once the shofar is blown, there is a pause: until ten days later, Yom Kippur, although free, slaves remain in the domain of their masters. Why do they not go free immediately upon the shofar blast?

The Jubilee year teaches us yet another facet in recognizing G-d as Creator: man's "ownership" (slaves and land) is a mere fabrication. In truth, G-d owns everything. He created everything. Our ownership during our stay here is not absolute. We learn from the release of slaves and land, that ownership follows G-d's guidelines. It is a means by which we again come to the realization of G-d's role as our Master.

Perhaps Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee for good reason. The Jubilee attests to a more primary concept: G-d as Creator. Rosh Hashanna teaches us that G-d judges man, but this is based on the primary concept that G-d is Creator. Our recognition of G-d's judgment must be preceded by our knowledge of His role as Creator. Therefore, Rosh Hashanah's shofar is derived from the Jubilee's shofar.

Why don't slaves go free immediately upon the shofar blast? If slaves would be freed, their freedom during the entire ten-day period would eclipse their repentance. The law is perfect: masters cannot work these

slaves anymore for fear of their preoccupation with ownership, and slaves cannot leave their masters homes, for fear that they would be self-absorbed in their new found freedom. Both, master and slave must focus on G-d's role as King during these ten Days of Repentance.

Summary

I all our cases, we learn that shofar has one common theme: the recognition of G-d as our Creator. This recognition was essential for the Jews' acceptance of Torah, for our acceptance of G-d as the true Judge, and for us to view G-d as the absolute "Owner". Abraham expressed the zenith of man's love of G-d, so this event of the binding of Isaac is remembered, and reenacted via our shofar blasts. As a Rabbi once said, G-d created everything, so there must be great knowledge in all we see - I refer to our command of Shofar.

Question to Ponder

What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? The Torah does not record superfluous information.

THE SHOFAR II

In the previous article, we were left with one unanswered question: What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? The Torah does not record superfluous information. Why was this enacted by G-d? Let us review.

Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac. Subsequently, he was commanded not to do so, and saw a ram caught in the bushes:

(Gen. 22:13) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son."

Why did Abraham feel he was to offer the ram "in place" of Isaac? This was not requested of him. Sforno suggests that Abraham understood the presence of the ram as an indication that it was to be sacrificed - a replacement for Isaac. It appears from Sforno, that G-d wished Abraham to "replace" his initial sacrifice of Isaac. It also appears from Sforno that Abraham wished to fulfill the perfect act of sacrifice to G-d, although subsequently he had been instructed not to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham wished to adhere to G-d. Therefore, G-d prepared this ram to enable Abraham's desire to be actualized. Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 teaches that this ram was one of the ten miracles created at sunset on the sixth day of creation. This clearly teaches that G-d intended this ram to be offered. Why was it so essential that Abraham offer this ram?

Abraham's Two Perfections

Last week we mentioned the following, insightful answer offered by my close friend Shaya Mann: Abraham was not "relieved" when subsequently, he was commanded not to slaughter his precious Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram displays a subtle, yet important lesson about Abraham: Abraham did not remove his attention from G-d, once 'he had his son back'. Only someone on a lesser level of perfection would suddenly be overcome with joy that his son will remain alive with him, and then indulge that emotion with no attention directed elsewhere. But Abraham's

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perfection didn't allow any diversion from the entire purpose of the binding of Isaac. Although commanded not to kill Isaac, Abraham's attention was still completely bound up with G-d. This is where Abraham's energies were before the sacrifice, and even afterwards, when his only son was spared. Offering the ram teaches us that Abraham never removed his thoughts from G-d, even at such a moment when others would certainly indulge in such joy. Abraham did not rejoice in Isaac's life, more than he rejoiced in obeying G-d. The ram teaches this. Abraham remained steadfast with G-d. Abraham's perfection was twofold; 1) he was not reluctant to obey G-d, even at the cost of losing his beloved, only Isaac, and 2) nothing surpassed Abraham's attachment to G-d.

The very fact that Abraham was not commanded to sacrifice this ram, but did so of his own desire, demonstrates his perfection.

One might ask, "is there not the rabbinical dictum, 'Greater is one who is commanded and performs, than one who is not commanded?'" Based on this principle, Abraham would be more perfected, had G-d commanded him to offer the ram!

A Rabbi once taught, one is more perfected when commanded and acts, as he overcomes the resistance to the "command". Being commanded in a matter, man has a tendency to rebel. Overcoming the rebellious emotion displays one's higher state. But what about our case, where a command did not apply, i.e., Abraham was not commanded to offer the ram? In such a case, we must compare what the actual possibilities were; either, Abraham offers the ram of his own desire, or he does not. Clearly, Abraham's act of offering the ram is greater than inactivity. The Talmudic dictum applies only when a command is applicable. Now, let's return to the main issue, the significance of the ram.

In reviewing the verses, we note something quite interesting: After Abraham offered the ram, he was addressed a second time by the angel:

(Gen. 22:13-18) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place 'G-d Appears', as he said, 'on this day on the mountain, G-d appeared.' And the angel of G-d called to Abraham a second time from the heavens. And he said, 'by Me I swear, says G-d, on account that you have done this thing, and you have not withheld your son, your only. Behold I will certainly bless you and greatly multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the seashore and your seed will inherit the gates of your enemies. And all nations will bless your seed, on account that you listened to My voice.'"

But in Genesis 22:12, Abraham was already praised for not withholding Isaac! Why the repetition? Klay Yakar states that there were actually two acts of perfection, 1) "on account that you have done this thing", and 2) "and you have not withheld your son." Besides not withholding Isaac, Abraham did one other thing: I believe this refers to the ram offering. This is fully supported by the second, angelic address occurring immediately after Abraham offered the ram. Through the Torah's method of teaching that this second address occurred on the heels of the ram offering, the Torah calls our attention to this offering. It was an act of perfection. It warranted an additional blessing for Abraham. I feel this substantiates my friend's insight. Abraham's sacrifice of the ram was of great importance, as we said, G-d prepared this ram during the six days of creation. It was of utmost importance that Abraham had this opportunity, and that we witness Abraham's perfection in our Torah.

We also learn that Abraham's perfection was not simply his one time sacrifice of Isaac. The ram offering displays his sustained devotion to G-d. Both acts, Isaac and the ram, reveal his inner perfection. The Rabbis teach that Abraham would not have been subjected to this trial, had G-d known he would fail. This teaches that G-d helped Abraham actualize his perfection, which was already present.



The Ram Caught in the Thicket

What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? Perhaps such a phenomenon is unlikely. A ram has its horns to the rear of its head. They are used solely for bucking, and are not engaged when eating the vegetation of a bush. There is virtually no way for the ram to get its horns caught, as they are behind its head, and its mouth is the only thing that comes close to the thicket. Animals are quite agile, and accurately sense their range of safety. Being caught by its horns would not happen. But here it did. Why? Answer: it was divinely intended. Again, why?

Two possible explanations come to mind: 1) Perhaps Abraham saw this oddity, and concluded there was divine intent for his sacrifice of this animal. 2) The Torah records this to underline for us - not Abraham, as he did not have a Torah - so we may understand G-d's intent that this ram offering by Abraham was intended by G-d. The Rabbis deduced such, that G-d created this ram during Creation. This teaching causes us to focus, not just on the attempted sacrifice of Abraham's son, but also on the steadfast and unceasing attachment Abraham had to G-d and His command. Abraham would not remove his attention from G-d, even though others would be tremendously relieved to have their child safe.

Shofar, the ram's horn, is taken from this ram sacrifice of Abraham, and incorporated into our Rosh Hashanna prayers. We are to be as devoted to G-d as was Abraham, even AFTER the return of Isaac. Shofar imbues us with a call for a double-edged perfection; 1) sacrifice in the face of adversity (binding of Isaac), and 2) devotion to G-d while in the best state (having Isaac returned).

Sinai and the Messianic Era

We must now recognize one more area, which deals with shofar. I refer to our most familiar blessing of our daily Tefillah (prayer) of "Tika b'Shofar Gadol", "Blow with a Great shofar". In this prayer, we anticipate the forecast made in Isaiah 27:13:

"And on that day, there will sound a great shofar, and there will come all those lost in the land of Ashure, and those cast away in the land of Egypt, and they will prostrate themselves to G-d in His holy mountain in

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Jerusalem.”

What does shofar have to do with the ingathering? Metsudas Dovid mentions that “holy mountain” refers to Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered Isaac. Interesting.

In Otzar HaTefilos, on the phrase “Tikah B’Shofar Gadol” (weekday shacharis) the Iyun Tefilah says as follows:

“And the matter of ‘great’ (shofar) was explained by the Rabbis at the end of chapter 31 in the chapters of Rabbi Eliezer, ‘There were two ram’s horn shofars, with the left (one) G-d blew on Mount Sinai, and the right horn is greater than the left, and in the future, G-d will blow with it, in the ultimate future, to gather the exiles.’”

Why is the right horn greater? What is greater about ingathering the exiles, than Mount Sinai? This is apparently the lesson of the right horn being “greater”, that the future ingathering is incomparable to Sinai, in some aspect. We also learn that there is some commonality between the two shofars, as both come from one ram - the “left and right” horns indicate this. What’s the connection between Sinai and the Messianic era?

What does shofar have to do with the ingathering? Quoting Rabbi Reuven Mann, “Why is the event of the Messiah part of Maimonides’ 13 Principles? These principles deal with our understanding of G-d. How is the Messiah equivalent to ideas such as the existence, unity, or non-physical nature of G-d, commencing the 13 Principles?” Rabbi Mann answered, “This event marks the fulfillment of G-d’s promise - the ultimate state of perfection for mankind. Messiah is the culmination of G-d’s system for man, coming to its pinnacle of perfection through the validation of G-d’s word. G-d is absolute truth.” (Paraphrased) This Messianic event is the last “piece of the puzzle.” It displays G-d’s perfection that His words do not ‘fall to the ground’. We gain the ultimate appreciation for G-d via the Messiah and the ingathering of the exiles. Long since unfulfilled, man will comprehend the absolute and complete truth of G-d’s word, when His ancient oath is actualized.

Sinai is eclipsed by the Messianic era. Although Sinai gave man indisputable proof of G-d, the Messiah’s arrival and the ingathering, are the completion of the Torah system, only commenced at Sinai. Thus, the Rabbis teach that the horn, the shofar, blown in the future ingathering, is the “right” horn, the greater horn. It is a far greater event, in terms of our recognition of the truth of Torah, via the fulfillment of the Messianic promise.

This now explains what the common thread is between Sinai and the Messianic era: Sinai was the commencement of the system of Torah, and the Messianic era is its completion. Both partake of one theme - the formation of Torah - and are therefore described by the Rabbis as two horns from the same ram. They are the two greatest elements in the formation of the Torah system; Sinai is the guidebook, and the Messianic era is the final circumstance required for man’s perfect fulfillment of the guidebook’s laws.

Mount Moriah

Once messiah arrives, all will prostrate to G-d at His Holy Mountain, as stated by Isaiah. Why? Since Mt. Moriah’s distinction is derived from the binding of Isaac, it embodies the perfection in man (Abraham) that all is rightfully sacrificed in the fulfillment of G-d’s word. In the era of the Messiah, this will be clearly understood, and enacted by all peoples. Messiah will teach with lucid insight, why service of G-d is to be man’s primary focus, where all else is inconsequential. Man will arrive at this knowledge, and will demonstrate this by prostrating at G-d’s mountain.

Again we see that Rosh Hashanna incorporates the shofar in perfectly sound reason: it hearkens back to Abraham’s perfection in service to G-d, and it anticipates our greatest state of recognizing G-d’s perfection and ultimate reality and truth, via His fulfillment of His word. ■

Tanya's Heresy II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The following quote from Tanya was discussed it last week, and for purposes of this continued debate, it is important that we review it, and our explanation, including Job 31:

“The second, uniquely Jewish soul is truly part of G-d above.”

“A part of G-d above” is a quotation from Scripture (Job, 31:2). The Alter Rebbe adds the word “truly” to stress the literal meaning of these words. For, as is known, some verses employ hyperbolic language. For example, the verse describing “great and fortified cities reaching into the heavens” is clearly meant to be taken figuratively, not literally. In order that we should not interpret the phrase “a part of G-d above” in a similar manner, the Alter Rebbe adds the word “truly”, thus emphasizing that the Jewish soul is quite literally a part of G-d above.”

As we stated last week, Maimonides and all the Rabbis affirm that we can know nothing about G-d. Furthermore, G-d has no parts, and is not similar to anything, as the prophets stated:

“And (G-d is) not like one man that may be divided into many individual parts...” and also, ‘...the Chachamim (wise men) denied G-d as being composite or subject to division’, and, ‘the prophet said (Isaiah, 40:25), ‘To what shall your equate Me that I should be similar, says G-d?’ (Principle III)”

This quote from Tanya is heresy, and also corrupts Scripture in the words of Job, 31:1,2:

“A treaty have I made with my eye; for what shall I gaze at a virgin? And what portion shall I have with G-d above, and an inheritance of G-d on high?”

Job declared he never gazed lustfully, for in doing so, one forfeits his “portion with G-d”. But Tanya distorts the word “portion”, not as the end of the verse clarifies as “inheritance”, but wrongly, ascribing “parts” to G-d. This verse in Job simply means that Job admits he will forfeit his “portion” (inheritance) with G-d. Through sin, Job says he will lose this world and the next. Job is not describing G-d, that He has parts, G-d forbid. Job is describing his inheritance.

It is absolutely clear from Isaiah, that we can have no concept whatsoever about G-d: “To what shall your equate Me that I should be similar, says G-d?” Isaiah teaches that nothing equates to G-d. Therefore the concept of “division” is inapplicable to G-d. G-d also told Moses, “...for man cannot

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know Me while alive.” (Exod. 33:21) If Moses, the greatest prophet, could possess no concept of G-d, it is quite arrogant that anyone would defend any positive description of G-d.

It is therefore alarming that we received the following response:

“Anyone can take eight words out of any Jewish masterpiece and make a case that the book is heresy and the author is a heretic. This is exactly what missionaries do - the same missionaries you've been "disproving" the last several weeks. I do believe the Ba'al HaTanya also said Shema at least twice daily. In fact the whole second book of Tanya is about unity of Hashem. Why don't you get an education? Buy a Tanya. It's okay - I know you won't do it. A missionary will never admit they are deceitful and have a hidden agenda. And you're on a mission to spread misinformation and hatred about Chasidim and Chassidus.”

I responded as follows:

“You do absolutely nothing to explain how the quote from Tanya is not heresy. If you wish to do so, then please do. Otherwise, your words have no value, as you simply convict, without any explanation.”

Additionally, we must make note of the tone of this reader, as if he was attacked personally - he responds with no reasoning. He also uses the word “masterpiece”, referring to Tanya. But unless something forms part of Scripture – that which is divinely inspired – it is not infallible. This is not the path of the Torah. For we see that Aaron had no hesitation to contradict his greater brother Moses, and in fact, Aaron was correct. Torah does not ask us to blindly accept a “reputation”, but rather, to seek the truth. Personalities are of no consequence.

Then, this reader and one other replied as follows:

“How can you condemn a group that has done so much for Judaism, where there are tens of thousands of followers. Are they all wrong? We cannot know what the Baal haTanya meant, it takes years of study.”

*“I dont like the fact that you are bad mouthing Tanya. It has done so much good for Judaism and bringing Jews back to Hashem that it's ridiculous. I am not a Jewish scholar and I was about to print this off before shabbos, but this upset me. I am not going to get into this, but to tell me that Hashem is not made up of parts is true, **but to say that inside us is not an actual piece of Hashem - that is false.** If that were the case, we would not have a soul at all. There is nothing but Hashem, it's only where He is manifested more, **our soul has more of a direct manifestation (or link, or revealed piece) of Hashem.***

Thus, our soul is truly a revealed piece of Hashem, and if you don't believe that, I encourage you to do some serious introspection about who you are and what the purpose of life is. Your column does not need to be a place to speak L'shon Hara. NO HERESY.

What else makes us different from Gentiles, if not the soul?”

This first reader accuses, “I don't know what the Tanya meant”, and that I “condemned a group”, when I was in fact, condemning a statement. But simultaneously, he is bereft of any rationale for his view. Even after being asked twice to offer reasoning, he produced none. He thereby contradicts himself: his lack of understanding opens the possibility that he is in fact the one who possesses the wrong understanding of Maimonides. We must ask what compels his conviction in Tanya over Maimonides, if he is in fact, not basing himself on any understanding. I would suggest that he desires to maintain a flawless reputation for Tanya. But such a position is against Torah, as we stated so many times, “For man is not righteous o the land, who does good and does not sin.” (Eccl. 7:20) This means that all men err. Moses and many other leaders sinned, as openly recoded in the Torah. Therefore, it violates Torah to maintain that anyone did not err, when in fact, that position contradicts King Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes, i.e., the Torah.

The argument that “Tanya has done so much for Judaism” cannot defend its error. For a judge who judges properly in all cases but one, has in fact erred in that one case - his past is of no consequence.

But I maintain that these notions that, “G-d has parts”, and “there's a piece of G-d in us all”, do not, as he says, “do so much good for Judaism”. Such views do the converse: they destroy Jews and Judaism. These heretical ideas cause more Jews to fall prey to heresy.

The second reader said:

“but to say that inside us is not an actual piece of Hashem - that is false. If that were the case, we would not have a soul at all”, and, “Our soul is truly a revealed piece of Hashem, and if you don't believe that, I encourage you to do some serious introspection about who you are and what the purpose of life is.”

He maintains that without G-d placing a “piece of Himself” in us, we cannot have a soul. But Genesis states that “G-d created man”, and not that “G-d apportioned a part of Himself” in man. G-d openly states that man is a creation, and this includes man's soul. He also maintains that without G-d being “a part of us”, we have no purpose in life. I wonder what his idea is about man's purpose. He feels that if G-d is not a part of

us, we lack a purpose in life. But the Torah is quite clear as to what is man's purpose: perfection of our values, and the love of knowledge, which culminates in a love of G-d. This true perfection supports the idea that man commences life in an imperfect state. But according to the reader, this “part of G-d in us” is not perfect. We see, that from one heretical view, many corruptions fester.

Judaism's View of Gentiles

His last error is this statement, “What else makes us different from Gentiles, if not the soul?” He claims that a Jew possesses a different soul than a Gentile. According to him, Abraham and all the patriarchs and matriarchs had some “lesser” soul, for there were no “Jews” until Sinai. Additionally, what will he maintain occurs when a Gentile converts? Does his soul now get transplanted? If this is true, then the one who converted, is not the same

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person he was just prior to his conversion. The entire Torah institution of "convert" is thereby rendered erroneous. This reader belittles all others who are not Jewish, as if G-d cares less for the rest of mankind. If this were so, G-d would not have assisted so many Gentiles and Gentile nations in their perfection. G-d sent Moses to educate Pharaoh. G-d gave Elisha prophecy to instruct Naaman – a Gentile – to become healed of his leprosy, and recognize G-d. Jonah was sent by G-d to direct the Gentile nation of Nineveh to repent and return to G-d. G-d desires the good for all mankind, and no one's soul is "better" than another, Jew or Gentile. Our Alaynu prayer says, "and all sons of flesh will call Your name". It does not state "all Jews", but all "sons of flesh." G-d desires the good for all mankind. Any other view contradicts Torah, and is implicit of egotistical drives.

I would remind those who think little of other peoples, of the blessings of Jacob, our great patriarch and prophet. Not his blessings for his own children, but his prophetic endowment of tribal status to Joseph's Egyptian sons, Ephraim and Menasheh. (Gen. 48:4) Earlier, G-d informed Jacob that he would make him into a "people, and an assembly of peoples." A "people" was granted upon Benjamin, while "an assembly of peoples" – plural – Jacob gave to both of Joseph's Egyptian sons. (ibid, Rashi) Even by latter-day Torah standards, Joseph's sons were Egyptian, not Israelites. This teaches that our prophets did not harbor the ungrounded disdain for Gentiles. Jacob gave his Egyptian grandchildren the status of his own sons – tribes of Israel.

And who knows other than G-d, perhaps our reader, who has disdain for Gentiles, is in fact a descendant of Ephraim or Menasheh.

Rosh Hashannah and Gentiles

The very commencing words of our Rosh Hashannah prayers read as follows:

"And so also give trembling, G-d our G-d, on all Your works, and fear on all You created, and there will fear You, all of you works, and there will bow to You, all of your creatures."

No exclusion is made regarding Gentiles, but they too are in our prayers, to come to a fear and worship of G-d. We do not distinguish between our fear and worship, and that of the Gentiles. Thus, all of mankind's souls relate to G-d equally.

In the Unisannah Tokef prayer we read:

"...and You will open the book of remembrance, and from it, it is read, and the seal of every man's hand is in it..."

"...and all those who entered the world pass before You lie members of the flock..."

We see no distinction between Jew and Gentile, on this day of accounting. The second, Musaf prayer of G-d's remembrance refers to G-d's remembrance of Noah. A Rabbi once taught that this teaches of G-d's compassion and knowledge of all humanity – not just the Jews.

Ego and Repentance

What distortion do all of these views unveil? I would suggest that such views stem from man's inability to take responsibility for his sins. By maintaining there is a "piece of G-d in us", such individuals create a false, self-image of unearned piety: "G-d is in me, I have some greatness". This is a fatal mistake, as this view prevents one from repenting – he feels he possesses some inherent greatness. It is this same fallacy that forces them to defend Tanya, deifying its author.

Tanya and Pantheism

Another reader wrote in with a very different tone, adding that not only does Tanya include heresy, but also pantheism - the view that G-d permeates all parts of the universe - that He and the universe are but one and the same. Again, this is a view that contradicts G-d's very words - that He 'created' the universe, and from nothing. Thus, He did not make the universe by taking a part of Himself and mold it. According to this dangerous view, G-d is not only in man, but also in all parts of the physical world. He quoted other sections in Tanya in support:

Shaar Hayichud Vebaemunah, Chapter 7

"Now, although G-d transcends space and time, He is nevertheless also found below, within space and time."

"and there is no closeness in the four elements of which this corporeal world is comprised except through the Holy One, blessed be He, when He is within them."

Shaar Hayichud Vebaemunah, Chapter 8

"and likewise with respect to His will, [as it is written,3] "G-d desires those who fear Him," and4 "He wishes to do kindness," and5 "He desires the repentance of the wicked and does not desire their death and wickedness," — thus we have verses indicating both what He finds desirable and undesirable; [so, too,6] "Your eyes are too pure to behold evil" — yet another thing that He does not desire. From the above verses, then, we see that emotions, wisdom and will are all ascribed to G-d."

This pantheistic view is but a further corruption of their first heretical mistake, that G-d partakes of physicality. This was also the view of certain, early Chassidic sects that maintained, "Even inside of sin, G-d exists, as He permeates everything - even sin." Again, these views contradict the Torah, which states that "man cannot know G-d while alive", and that "nothing equates to G-d".

As Tanya makes positive statements about G-d not found in G-d's own words, it violates these two Torah verses. This last quote, "*emotions, wisdom and will are all ascribed to G-d*" again violates the Torah, and reason: G-d is not governed by His creations, i.e., emotions.

The Loss of Our Souls

Perhaps, because these views have become so commonplace, and have been printed in books, no one gives a second thought that they might be lethal.

However, the Torah went to great lengths to warn man not to invent false ideas about G-d: "And guard your souls exceedingly, for you did not see any form on the day that G-d spoke to you at Horeb (Sinai) from amidst the flames." (Deut. 4:15) Why does Moses warn us to "guard your 'souls' exceedingly"? The reason is, that this area – corruption of G-d's existence – is a matter of our souls. Our very existence on Earth, is but for a few decades. Our ultimate existence is after death, where all that exists is our souls. That which gives life to man's soul, according to Moses' words, is the correct notion of G-d. A false notion of G-d is the destruction of our souls. If man is to exist after death, which is defined as the soul perceiving G-d, it is essential that our idea of G-d be uncorrupted by heresy. Talmud Brachos states, "(in) the next world, there is no eating or drinking, and no intercourse, no business or jealousy, no hatred and no competition, rather, the righteous sit with their crowns on their heads benefiting from the splendor of the shechina (G-d's existence)." (Brachos, 17a)

Books

(Tanya's Heresy II *continued from previous page*)

We must ask, if in the next world, there is nothing physical, and not human emotions, to what do "crowns" refer, and what is meant by "on their heads"? What this metaphor teaches is this: only those who have "crowns" on their "heads" are the one's who benefit in the next world. "Crowns" indicates that which is mankind's 'crowning achievement', that is, his intelligence. "On their heads" (the seat of intelligence) alludes to this. Thus, the Talmud teaches that it is only those who achieve accurate knowledge of G-d, who will be entitled to the next world.

We understand why Moses said we must "guard our souls exceedingly" in connection to forming false notions of G-d: our souls' existence depends on our ideas of G-d. To assist mankind in obtaining correct ideas about G-d, and dispelling heresy, Maimonides formulated his 13 Principles, all of which address our ideas of G-d. Through acknowledging these truths, Maimonides granted eternal life to those who would think otherwise. We must appreciate not just Maimonides' intelligence, but also his care for us.

At this time of the year, when we must realize and accept G-d's exclusive Kingship, it is appropriate and of the utmost importance that we examine our notions of G-d, adhering meticulously and exclusively to the Torah, removing all of our corrupt views. We must not be led astray by heretical notions, regardless of the numbers who follow them, the reputations of those who verbalize them, or the fact that we find them in books.

"And guard your souls exceedingly, for you did not see any form on the day that G-d spoke to you at Horeb (Sinai) from amidst the flames." (Deut. 4:15)

"For man cannot know Me while alive." (Exod. 33:21)

"To what shall you equate Me that I should be similar, says G-d?" (Isaiah, 40:25)

The Torah is clear: man cannot possess any positive notion of G-d. ■

Readers Respond to Tanya's Heresy I

Alan G: Shalom, I have read the Jewish Times for several years, and have contributed to Mesora in the past. I found the small piece in Vol. III 3 #43 on "Tanya's Heresy" to be curiously strained. I do not belong to any Hassidic sect. I simply study many of the writings of the Sages of the past, including the Alter Rebbe's Tanya.

What I found curious was the departure from your normally rigorous intellectual approach to discussions to take a quote "sent by a friend", and "taken from the Tanya" to make a bold claim of heresy against Rebbe Zalman. You did not indicate the chapter the quote was taken from, or provide any context at all to the Alter Rebbe's thinking, as you often do with Rambam. The result had a feeling of intellectual dishonesty and a rush to judgment that would certainly be beneath you.

So I present the following quotes from Tanya. As with any work, it must be studied to understand the language and intent of the author. Taking any one

Letters

small quote, and including with it commentary not from the author's words, is just, well, not intellectually sound. To use a small quote to make a claim of heresy is a serious matter that needs to be challenged at every instance, unless the case is obvious and clear to all.

From Tanya, Shaar HaYichud VehaEmunah - Chapter Seven

"The Holy One, blessed be He, however, is a perfect unity, without any composition or element of plurality at all."

Now concerning the connection between the Holy One and created beings:

"It is not within the capacity of the mind of any creature to comprehend the essential nature of the creation of being out of nothing"... "the infinite One completely fills the whole earth temporally and spatially. Therefore even the earth and that which is below it are naught and utter nothingness in relation to the Holy One..." Accordingly it is written 'You were [the same] before the world was created; You are [the same after the world was created], without any change in His Being'."

"As Maimonides, of blessed memory stated, that He is the Knower, He is the Known, and He is Knowledge itself; all are one."

As we know, this statement from the Rambam has been hotly debated, and could be used in charges of "heresy" against him to indicate that the Rambam thought G-d had "parts", if taken out of context in a dishonest manner.

"For the Holy One, blessed be He, His Essence and Being, and His Knowledge – are all absolutely one, from every side and angle, and in every form of unity".

According to the Alter Rebbe, each creature and being is in reality considered to be naught and nothingness in relation to the activating force and the 'breath of His mouth' which is within it, continuously calling it into existence and bringing it from absolute non-being into being. Created beings derive their life and existence from the life-force issuing forth from the Infinite One to vitalize creation, ex nihilo. This does not indicate any "parts" of G-d whatsoever. The quote you used to claim heresy is weak and taken out of context from the overall thinking of the Alter Rebbe. I feel you have done Rebbe Zalman and his body of work an injustice. Again, I am simply pursuing intellectual honesty, am not a member of a Chassidic sect, and study all the accepted and highly regarded writings of our Sages with a critical eye.

–Thank you, Alan G.

Mesora: Alan, I agree, as you said, "heresy is a serious matter that needs to be challenged at every instance". However, I do not see how my taking a quote "from a friend" in any way disqualifies the quote, as you intimate. Although I agree, that a noted chapter would have helped others locate the exact quote, a photo of the actual page was included with my article. Additionally, I noted the following, immediately after the quote: "Lessons In Tanya," published by "Kehot" with a preface by the Rebbe." What better verification could have been offered? This quote is true to the original.

You write that I made a "bold claim" of heresy against Rebbe Zalman. What do you mean by this? That a human is infallible? Had someone with a lesser reputation stated the exact same heresy, you would not accuse me of making a "bold" statement. You thereby imply that challenging a "greater reputation" demands one to hold his tongue, not speaking what he sees as truth, or in this case, what I see as false. However, what does the Torah say about your opinion: "do not fear him" are the closing words stated in connection with the False Prophet. (Deut. 18:22) Also, Aaron had no

(continued on next page)

hesitation to contradict his greater brother Moses, and in fact, Aaron was correct. Torah does not ask us to blindly accept a "reputation", but rather, to seek the truth. Personalities are of no consequence. The Torah is quite clear, reputation plays no role when determining truth, we are not to fear man, even one who claims he is the Messiah, and even Moses. Certainly Rebbe Zalman may be opposed.

Your subsequent quotes from other chapters do not address what I critiqued. This approach - attempting to remove the heresy from one statement by quoting others - is not reasonable. Analyzing my cited quote, I see no way to render Tanya's statement non-heretical. Additionally, this heresy is supported by an utter distortion of Job, and also violates Maimonides 13 Principles.

In fact, one of your quotes from Tanya makes matters worse:

"the infinite One completely fills the whole earth temporally and spatially."

Did you read that? Tanya suggests that G-d exists in the Earth, both "temporally and spatially". You quote Tanya's other chapters in an attempt to remove heresy, when in fact; this quote supports heresy that G-d exists in "time and space." King Solomon stated just the opposite, "...behold the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You..." (I Kings 8:27).

You write further:

"As we know, this statement from the Rambam has been hotly debated, and could be used in charges of "heresy" against him to indicate that the Rambam though G-d had "parts", if taken out of context in a dishonest manner:

'For the Holy One, blessed be He, His Essence and Being, and His Knowledge - are all absolutely one, from every side and angle, and in every form of unity'. " (Maimonides)

I fail to see your argument. Maimonides speaks nothing of G-d possessing division or parts. Just the opposite is true; Maimonides states that G-d is "absolutely One". Whereas the Tanya clearly states as follows:

Chapter II

"The second, uniquely Jewish soul is truly part of G-d above."

"A part of G-d above" is a quotation from Scripture (Job, 31:2). The Alter Rebbe adds the word "truly" to stress the literal meaning of these words. For, as is known, some verses employ hyperbolic language. For example, the verse describing "great and fortified cities reaching into the heavens" is clearly meant to be taken figuratively, not literally. In order that we should not interpret the phrase "a part of G-d above" in a similar manner, the Alter Rebbe adds the word "truly", thus emphasizing that the Jewish soul is quite literally a part of G-d above."

The Tanya clearly says, "the Jewish soul is quite literally a part of G-d above." This is outright heresy.

You also quote the following:

Shaar HaYichud VahaEmunah - Chapter Seven

"The Holy One, blessed be He, however, is a perfect unity, without any composition or element of plurality at all."

This quote is sound, and certainly contradicts the quote that "the Jewish

soul is quite literally a part of G-d above." I take no issue with Chapter Seven, but with Chapter Two. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon that we find contradictions in man's words. So in addition to the heresy of G-d possessing parts in the form of man's soul, you add that the Tanya contains contradictions. You revealed a second flaw in the words of Tanya.

What is most disturbing, is that you do not offer an alternate explanation for what you suggest is my inaccuracy in understanding Tanya and the book of Job. In both cases, why did you not offer what you consider the "correct" interpretation? By suggesting one is wrong, simultaneously possessing no "correct", you render your argument null.

Not only do you fail to explain away heresy from the statement of Tanya that "that the Jewish soul is quite literally a part of G-d above", but you compound Tanya's flaws, by demonstrating its heretical "consistency" by quoting yet another heretical view, "the infinite One completely fills the whole earth temporally and spatially." You also demonstrate that Tanya is inherently contradictory.

In conclusion you write:

"The quote you used to claim heresy is weak and taken out of context from the overall thinking of the Alter Rebbe. I feel you have done Rebbe Zalman and his body of work an injustice."

You have shown that the context is actually more heretical than I stated. Thus, the only injustice I detect, are these quotes which lead many people astray from the Torah.

-Moshe Ben-Chaim

Readers Respond to Tanya's Heresy I

Eddie: Dear Rabbi, I must praise you for taking a public stand against the heresy in the Tanya. I raised this problem with several "orthodox" rabbis a decade ago. The Chassidim consider the Bal HaTanya as "Moshe Rabbeinu", and are not people with whom one can reason. However, very few Mitnagdim have the knowledge or the courage to deal with such a problem. They generally believe that Tanya is part of the revealed Oral Law, which has been "accepted" and is irreversible.

In all, I found only two Gedolei Torah disputed the content of the Tanya, but I don't wish to name them. One was a Rosh Yeshiva, who is an authority on both Halacha, and philosophy. The other was a Sefardi Gadol who was an expert on Rambam.

The Tanya is in fact also pantheistic, saying that G-d is immanent in all creation. More than this, Tanya, in its Shaar Hayichud, makes the heretical claim that the 10 Sefirot and G-d are one, in every aspect. This is as heretical as the trinity of the Christians.

-Best wishes, Eddie

Honoring Sinful Parents

Reader: At what point can a parent not be honored? My father committed incest. Do I have to honor him? My mother stole from me. Do I have to honor her?

Mesora: In his laws of Rebellion (Mamrim) 6:7, Maimonides describes the extent of one's required parental fear and honor:

"How far must one go in his honor of his parents? Even if they take your purse of gold for before you, and toss it to the ocean in front of you, do not shame them and do not be pained before them, and do not be angry in front of them, rather, accept the decree of the Torah and be silent. And how far must one go in his fear of his parents? Even if one was wearing precious garments, sitting at the head in front of the congregation, and his father and mother came and tore his garments, hit him on the head, and spat in front of him; Do not shame them, but be silent, and fear and tremble from the King, King of all kings, that commanded you in this. Because if a flesh and blood king commanded on you a matter more painful than this, you would not be able to refuse the matter. Certainly (the command) of the One Who spoke and the world came into being - as is His will."

In law 11 he writes: "Even if you father is wicked and one of many sins, honor and fear him."

Maimonides defines "Honor" as feeding him, clothing him, rising upon his entrance, and ministering before him as a servant in front of his master. Honor is defined as "positives". "Fear" is defined as not contradicting him, not sitting in his seat, and not calling him by his name. Fear is defined as "negatives", or rather, not detracting from his reputation or identity.

But we must understand why such sinful parents deserve our honor and fear. What is the Torah principle, which underlies these commands, demanding our honor and fear of those who harm us?

The Torah equated honoring one's father and mother to honoring G-d. The equation is that fear and honor of G-d commences with our initial fear and honor of our parents. A child learns from early on, the concept of "authority". Parents are taller, stronger, more capable, they punish us, and they nurture us. They are the source of our good and evil. We turn to them for all our fears and desires. In short, G-d designed mankind in a manner where he must learn the concept of an 'authority figure'. Had man not been born, but created as Adam, complete, tall, and independent, with all the knowledge needed to survive, he would have no need for parents, and he would forfeit the lesson of authority. But it is vital that this lesson be learned, as it is essential for the greatest objective: Love of G-d. It is only through our state as feeble and dependent infants, that the role of authority may be successfully permeated into our being. Some semblance of authority must be learned

early on, if we are to express "fear and honor" with relation to G-d. Without learning what authority is in our youth, we cannot approach our fear and love of G-d as adults. Once we accept the Creator's authority, we may then excel to a true appreciation of His majesty based on the knowledge we are fortunate enough to acquire during the rest of our lives.

For this reason, in the Ten Commandments, the command to fear and honor parents is rightfully placed in the section dealing with our approach to G-d, not our fellow man – in the first, Five Commands. When the Talmud equated fear and honor of parents to fear and honor of G-d, the equation is not one of commonality - it is an equation of dependency: fear and honor of G-d depends on man's inculcation of parental fear and honor.

Therefore, although our parents may sin and afflict us, this in no way removes the command to fear and honor them. For when we do, we are in fact respecting G-d's command, as Maimonides stated: "Because if a flesh and blood king commanded on you a matter more painful than this, you would not be able to refuse the matter. Certainly (the command) of the One Who spoke and the world came into being - as is His will."

Understanding that you fulfill G-d's will in your act of honoring and fearing your parents, must be your focus. This knowledge should make the performance one you desire to do.

We thereby learn that G-d's will must replace our emotional tendencies, for He knows best what is essential for our perfection. ■