

**Devotion**

At the core of Rosh Hashanna is the sacrifice of Isaac. However, we sound the ram's horn, largely due to its miraculous creation by G-d. Having forfeited Isaac, why was the ram essential?

ESTD  
1997Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification  
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

# JewishTimes

Volume II, No. 49...Sept. 26, 2003

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

**IN THIS ISSUE:**

ROSH HASHANNA	1,5,6
SHOFAROS PRAYER	1,2,3
SHOFAR II	1,7,8
AKEIDAS YITZCHAK Q&A'S	3,4
FALSE CLAIMS OF MIRACLES	5
SHOFAR BLASTS & 10 DAYS	9
SELICHA-FORGIVENESS	10

**SUGGESTED READING:**

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

**Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES**THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS  
MUST KNOW AS TRUE. WE URGE YOU TO READ THEM:  
[www.mesora.org/13principles.html](http://www.mesora.org/13principles.html)**God's Existence:  
Belief or Proof?**[www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html](http://www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html)**God's Land  
Without God?**AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:  
[www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html](http://www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html)**Rosh Hashanna****RABBI BERNARD FOX**

"If a person violates any commandment of the Torah – a positive or a negative command – whether this violation is intentional or unintentional, when one performs repentance and repents from the sin, he is obligated to confess before G-d, Blessed Be He ... This confession is a positive command." (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, laws of Repentance 1:1)

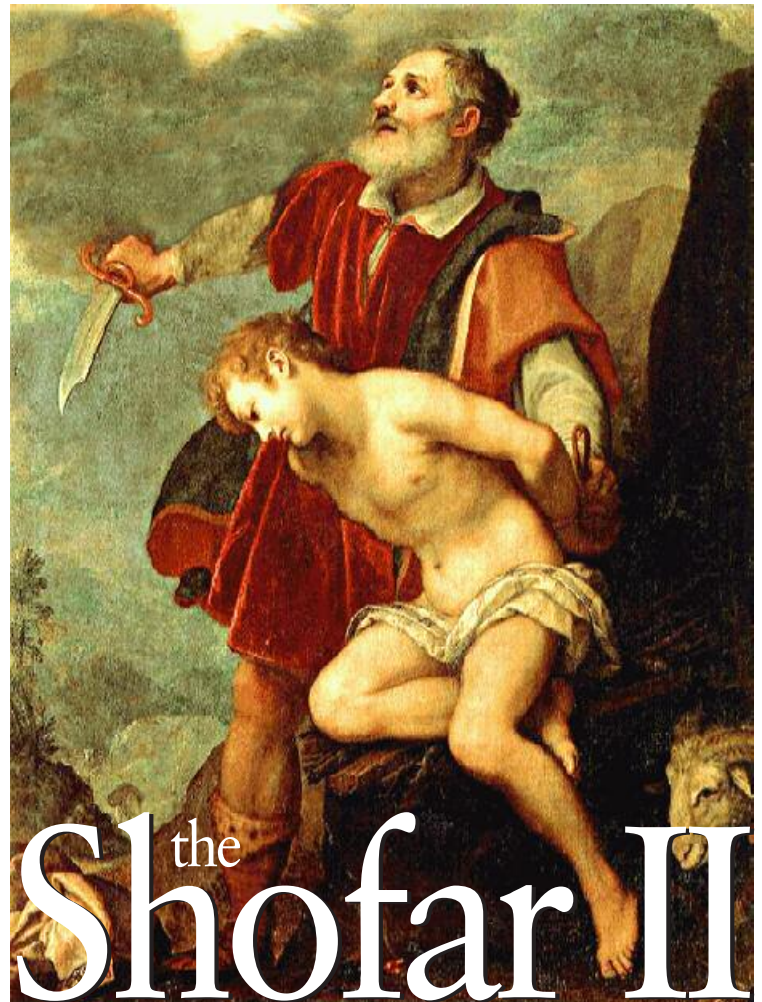
(continued on page 5)

**THE SHOFAROS PRAYER****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.

(continued on next page)

**the Shofar II****RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

In last week's article, "The Shofar", 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."

(continued on page 7)

# THE SHOFAROS PRAYER

RABBI RUBEN GOBER

(continued from previous page)

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 it's 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 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

(continued on next page)

# THE SHOFAROS PRAYER

RABBI RUBEN GOBER

(continued from previous page)

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. ■

## AKEIDAS YITZCHAK Q&A'S

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Ibn Ezra (Exod. 20.1)

"...The second category (of commandments) are commands which are hidden, and there is not explained why they were commanded. And G-d forbid, G-d forbid, that there should be any one of these commands which goes against human intelligence. Rather, we are obligated to perform all that G-d commands, be it revealed to us the underlying "Sode" (principle), be it hidden from us. And if we find any of them which contradict human intelligence, it isn't proper that we should understand it as implied. But we should consult the books of the wise men of blessed memory, to determine if such a command is a metaphor. And if we find nothing written (by them) we (must) search out and seek with all our ability; perhaps we can fix it (determine the command). If we can't, then we abandon that mitzvah as it is, and admit we are ignorant of it".

**Reader:** According to the Ibn Ezra you quoted, "abandon that mitzvah as it is", refers to commands which do not comply with human reason. My question is why Abraham accepted the command of slaughtering his only son. Isn't this in opposition to human reason? To kill your own child? This question is strengthened as the Ibn Ezra's very example of incomprehensible laws is the command "circumcise the foreskin of your hearts". This is a matter of killing as well, but here, Ibn Ezra says it is impossible that we should take this literally, i.e., to cut out our hearts. If this is so impossible on the literal level, what made Abraham so willing to sacrifice his son? Shouldn't he abandon the command from G-d, just as Ibn Ezra says we should?

**Mesora:** Your question is very good. There is one distinction I would make. Regarding the Ibn Ezra, if a command FOR ALL JEWS would exist, of literally "circumcising the foreskins of our hearts", this would cause the end of Jewish people, a direct contradiction that Jewish people should exist. Additionally, the second half of that verse reads, "and your necks shall no longer be stiff". This means that the command of "circumcising the foreskins of your hearts" targets man's improvement, where he is no longer stubborn. Clearly, the command of "circumcising the foreskins of your hearts" is not a directive to kill ourselves, but rather to improve our ethics - to eradicate our stubborn nature in connection with Torah adherence. If it was literal, how would be fulfill the latter statement, "and your necks shall no longer be stiff"?

**Reader:** That is not the reason that the Ibn Ezra says though. He doesn't mention the last part of the Posuk (verse) or anything about it contradicting another part of the Torah, namely that the Jewish people should exist to perfect themselves.

**Mesora:** But that last half of the Posuk does in fact exist, and is divinely connected with the first half. We do not require all to be written by Ibn Ezra. You must learn the Ibn Ezra, not simply read him, and you must use reasoning. If G-d placed two ideas in one posuk, they are inherently intertwined and related.

**Reader:** Ibn Ezra says, "does He (Hashem) wish to murder us like a cruel person?" In other words there would be no benefit what so ever in taking the commandment literally, just the opposite it is totally destructive and makes no sense, and so it goes against reason. It is for this reason alone that he mentions the example of "circumcise the foreskin of your hearts". He doesn't say that if one commandment goes against another part of the Torah that we have to reinterpret it. He says if it goes against "reason" we can't take it literally. That is his point.

**Mesora:** But isn't that which opposes another part of the Torah something which you consider going against reason"? Of course. So we must look at the entire verse, and the entire Torah.

(continued on next page)

# AKEIDAS YITZCHAK Q&A'S

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from previous page)

**Reader:** So my question on the Akeida stands. Forget about the example of "circumcise...". The fact is the Ibn Ezra (and not just him, Rav Saadia Gaon as well as many others mention this) says that if our understanding of a Mitzva goes against reason "it is not proper to believe it literally". So my question on the Akeida stands.

**Mesora:** A command to Abraham to slay his son doesn't contradict anything. It is not unreasonable for him to kill his son at G-d's command. He is only killing one person, and not the entire nation. A Rabbi taught, Abraham questioned G-d upon His decision to destroy Sodom. Why did Abraham question G-d on Sodom, but at the command to kill his own son, Abraham did not question? The Rabbi answered that in terms of determining G-d's justice, man may investigate and arrive at reasons. What G-d commands man must be appreciated in man's terms of justice. But how killing Isaac would perfect Abraham, here, Abraham felt, "G-d may have a method unknown to me how this will be a benefit". If G-d commands me in this act, it must have a perfection somewhere, although I may not be able to see it. My ignorance does not remove the perfection of this act. Punishment is a different story, it is meted to man as a result of his actions, as a lesson to man or mankind. As such, "lesson" means that there is comprehension, there is understanding. Therefore, Abraham inquired about areas of justice - Sodom's destruction - but did not inquire into the command to kill Isaac. A command is G-d's knowledge, far beyond that which mortal man comprehends.

Again, nothing in the act of killing Isaac contradicted reason - but wiping out the entire nation by taking literally "circumcise the foreskin of your hearts" is unreasonable, and must be interpreted. We do not allow our ignorance to question G-d's commands. However, contradictions are different, and that which is contradictory cannot be followed. G-d gave us a mind to lead our actions, This means, by definition, that "contradiction" goes against G-d's wish for man's actions. Abraham slaughtering Isaac presented no contradiction. Jews following a command literally of "circumcising the foreskins of our hearts" is a contradiction to G-d's plan that mankind endures.

Now, you might say it contradicts G-d's very promise to make Abraham's seed as numerous as the stars and the sands. Perhaps Abraham thought there were new considerations to which G-d reacted, altering His original plan. I do not know.

**Reader:** How can Hashem change his mind? First He tells Abraham to bring his son as a sacrifice, then He tells him not to. Either Hashem changed his mind or, Chalila, one of the commands was not true since contradictory statements cannot both be true! (Even Hashem can't do that, that's not possible). Many commentaries ask this question.

**Mesora:** In truth, G-d does not "change His mind." This connotes ignorance, i.e., He didn't know the future, so an adjustment was required. This is foolish. One Who creates eyes, can He not see? So too, One Who created time, does He not know the future? Certainly He does.

Yes, G-d "altered" His plan that man live forever, but this was built into creation. After the first sin, man caused death to become a reality. Why cannot G-d create a universe where man's actions effect how Providence relates to him? Ibn Ezra teaches that G-d initially desired the firstborns to serve in the Temple, but they were exchanged for the Levites subsequent to their sin of the Golden Calf. Here too G-d "changed" His plan, in the sense of "change" that I mentioned. In reality, G-d never intended that Isaac die, only that Abraham be tried by G-d's command. Once Abraham prevailed, just before cutting Isaac's throat, G-d told Abraham the truth, that Isaac is not to be killed, but that it was a trial.

**Reader:** Another question could be asked. If Hashem came to you and asked you directly to sacrifice your son would you be able to refuse? What was such a great test that Abraham went through?

**Mesora:** Jona refused G-d's command, anyone can refuse. The greatness of Abraham is that he didn't refuse, and was willing to sacrifice his beloved son.

**Reader:** The Ralbag points out that really there can be two understandings of Hashem's initial command to Abraham. 1) Bring him as a sacrifice. 2) To bring him up the mountain to bring a sacrifice with him, to educate him in bringing sacrifices. Using this insight of the Ralbag I would suggest that Abraham was in a dramatic dilemma. Should he interpret Hashem's words literally and go against his reason? Or should he use his reason to reinterpret Hashem's words? Abraham simply did not know what to do! Don't forget, for the first period of his life Abraham discovered G-d using his intellect alone as the Rambam so beautifully describes. Then he merited prophecy later in life. But now these two "chords" that attached him close to Hashem contradicted each other! What should he do?

Now, Abraham could have taken the easy way out. He could have reinterpreted Hashem's command to fit with reason. But he didn't! This was Abraham's great test! He figured that, if in doubt, he should show the maximum sacrifice to Hashem. This shows Abraham's Yiras HaShem.

**Mesora:** The Talmud (Sanhedrin 89b) presents the story of Abraham traveling to the mountain to kill Isaac. Satan - a metaphor for Abraham's own instincts - is recorded as trying to convince Abraham to abandon G-d's command, now that following G-d will prove to be the death of Isaac. What was the Satan (Abraham's instincts) saying? He was saying a principle we hear so often, "Why serve G-d when things go bad?" Satan was saying that adherence to G-d is worthless unless life is 100% good. But we know this life cannot be 100% good, as G-d gave all mankind free will. At some point in life we must be confronted with the harmful effects of corrupt individuals using their free will to harm others. But this is exactly what King David said in Psalms, "Many evils befall the righteous, but they are saved from them all". This means that although, due to free will, many evils must exist, nonetheless, G-d will remove their harmful effects from reaching the righteous. G-d does not alter the free will of the evildoers - this cannot be, as this violates the institution of "reward and punishment". But G-d does protect the righteous. Satan (Abraham's instincts) was attempting to avoid killing his precious son. However, Abraham prevailed over Satan's arguments.

Abraham struggled further with his instincts, and posed another possibility to himself, (the Talmud continues), "Satan said, 'I heard behind the curtain (in heaven) 'the sheep for a sacrifice, and not Isaac'. Again this illustrates Abraham's conflict, 'Perhaps I am to sacrifice an animal - not Isaac'. The Talmud entertains the idea that Abraham's instincts created confusion about his command to kill Isaac. What was Abraham's response? The Talmud continues, quoting Abraham, 'This is the punishment of a liar, that even when he tells the truth, he is not listened to.' Abraham's instincts presented the fantasy that he was to kill a sheep, not Isaac. But these were his emotions (Satan) talking, not his intellect. But then, Abraham said to Satan (to himself) "that even when Satan tells the truth, he is not listened to". Abraham was saying that since this idea came from his instincts, it validity is inconsequential. As this thought originated from the instincts, it is not trusted. Abraham completely discounted any value that his emotions tried to produce through these rationalizations to spare Isaac. Abraham prevailed over Satan - over his strong emotions.

Another thought: When faced with the emotional appeal that an animal was to be killed and not Isaac, Abraham reasoned, "It is purposeless that G-d would make a statement so vague, allowing me to be doubtful as to which one I shall slaughter. If He wished an animal, He would say so clearly." Perhaps Abraham saw that his confusion is just the workings of the emotions, and he did not heed to his emotions. This is what is meant by, "that even when Satan tells the truth, he is not listened to", that is, "even when my emotions present rational possibilities, I cannot follow them." ■

# False Claims of Miracles

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**Reader:** What is your opinion of miraculous stories happening to Rabbis?

**Mesora:** I heard this question before, as well as an answer: One must not accept stories of miracles, unless witnessed by masses. This is the reason why G-d created the event of Mount Sinai as "proof" of His existence. G-d understands that man must not accept miracles, unless he either sees them, or learns by proof that there were masses at the event who witnessed the miracle. There were no masses at event such as you describe, so by Torah standards, and rationality, we cannot accept such stories.

**Reader:** So you are saying not to read the stories of Rabbis' miracles?

**Mesora:** I am saying that without proof, we do not accept stories of miracles, be it about Rabbis, or about Moses. Proof is the basis from our knowledge. We don't "believe" stories because they are popular, found in books, or repeated by Rabbis. The only proof is what is rational, and what G-d instructed: that masses be verified at the event, and the miracle was intelligible by a regular person.

I don't mean that we don't fully accept all the miracles in the Torah about Moses. We most certainly do. This is because all miracles G-d performed in connection with Moses and the Jews, were witnessed by masses. If we were told about someone as great as Moses, that a miracle happened, we would not accept this as truth,...unless there were masses who witnessed it.

It is for this reason that we don't believe in Jesus. There were no masses of witnesses, so the stories of his supposed miracles cannot be true.

G-d wanted a proof for Judaism, so he made a miracle for masses. This is the purpose for the miracles at Mount Sinai. G-d wants man to use his mind, and follow only what is provable, and reasonable. That is why He gave us intelligence.

I hope this is clear. □

# Rosh Hashanna

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from page 1)

The period from Rosh HaShannah through Yom Kippur is devoted to the process of repentance. Each of us must attempt to engage in this fundamental process. What are we attempting to accomplish? What do we hope to achieve through this process?

Maimonides, in his Mishne Torah devotes ten chapters to the Laws of Repentance. The quote above is a portion of the first law in this section. Maimonides explains that the violation of any commandment engenders a requirement to perform teshuva – repentance. Whether we sin through commission or omission, whether the sin is intentional or unintentional, we are required to repent. This repentance must be followed by vedoi – a verbal confession of the sin and a commitment to change our behavior. Maimonides emphasizes the importance of this verbal declaration. He explains that this declaration is a positive commandment of the Torah.

In short, Maimonides teaches us that wrongdoing requires a twofold response. We must perform teshuva and vedoi. Vedoi is a verbalization of the process of teshuva. We put into words our regret for past behavior and our commitment to change.

Which of these two responses is more fundamental – teshuva or vedoi? We would imagine that teshuva is the more essential element. However, Maimonides seems to indicate that vedoi is the more fundamental component. He explains that the vedoi is a positive command.

Apparently, Maimonides maintains that repentance requires that a person address the Almighty and declare one's contrition. Without the declaration, the process of repentance is incomplete. An unstated, internal sense of regret is inadequate. The repentant person must address Hashem and accept responsibility for his or her misdeeds.

This suggests that the process of teshuva is a prerequisite to vedoi. A person cannot make a meaningful declaration without an internal commitment. Therefore in order to perform vedoi, teshuva must occur. Maimonides confirms this interpretation of his comments in the next chapter of his discussion of repentance. There, he explains that one who performs vedoi without an internal commitment to change accomplishes little or nothing.[1]

**“What is repentance? It requires that the sinner abandon the sin. And one must discontinue any contemplation of it. One must commit to not return to the behavior ... In addition, one must regret the past ... One should call upon Hashem as a witness that he will never return to the sin ... And one must declare these matters to which one has made an internal commitment.”** (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 2:2)

Here, Maimonides describes in detail the process of repentance. He identifies five elements within the process. First, one must discontinue the sinful behavior. Second, one must refrain from even contemplating or fantasizing about the behavior. Third, the person must review past behaviors and feel sincere regret. Fourth, one must make a firm commitment to not return to the behavior. Maimonides then adds the person must verbalize these matters. This is the process of vedoi.

What is Maimonides telling us about teshuva and vedoi? Maimonides begins with a question. He asks, “What is teshuva?” The then responds. He explains that the verbal vedoi must follow the internal process. This is part of his description of teshuva. This strongly suggests that vedoi is part of the process of teshuva. It completes the process. How does vedoi complete the process? It seems that vedoi provides substance and finality to one's commitment. Through expressing one's thoughts in word, the person becomes more firmly committed to change.

It seems that Maimonides provides two different views on the role and significance of vedoi. In this chapter vedoi is characterized as a part of the teshuva process. It is the element that lends finality to the process. This is a very different characterization than that provided in the first chapter. That characterization is described above. In the first chapter, Maimonides explains that vedoi is the fundamental response to sin. Teshuva is a prerequisite to a meaningful vedoi. How can these two views be reconciled?

(continued on next page)

# Rosh Hashanna

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from previous page)

**“One should not imagine that teshuva is limited to sins that involve some action – for example promiscuity, theft or larceny. Rather, just as one must repent from these, so one must seek out one’s improper attitudes and repent from them – for example from anger, hatred, jealousy ...”** (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 7:3)

In order to answer our question, we must consider another apparent contradiction in Maimonides’ treatment of repentance. We have discussed Maimonides’ description of the process of repentance. Let us now consider his position regarding the type of behaviors that require repentance.

In the law quoted above Maimonides explains that the requirement to repent is not engendered solely by the violation of a commandment. We are also required to repent from improper attitudes or character traits. For example, we must attempt to abandon our hatreds and to temper and control our anger. We must evaluate all of our attitudes, identify our character flaws and address them. In other words, even if a person has not violated a specific commandment, teshuva is required.

This conclusion does not seem to agree with Maimonides’ statement in the opening law of this section. In that law, Maimonides explains that teshuva and vedoi are required when a person violates a law of the Torah. This means that the violation of a commandment engenders the requirement to perform teshuva and vedoi. Some commission or omission must occur. This implies that poor attitude alone does not create an obligation to repent! How can these two positions be reconciled?

Let us return to our opening question. What are we attempting to accomplish through teshuva? What do we hope to achieve through this process? First, we must recognize that in sinning we violate the Torah. We disregarded the will of the Almighty. We rebel against the ultimate King. The vedoi that accompanies teshuva begins with the acknowledgment that we have sinned against the Torah. Through repentance, we attempt to earn atonement for this sin. We wish to avoid retribution or unpleasant consequences. In short, one objective of teshuva is atonement – kapparrah. But does teshuva have any other objective?

**“Since one is granted volition ... one should endeavor to perform teshuva and vedoi in response to sin ...”** (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Repentance 7:1)

Maimonides does outline another objective in the process of teshuva. In order to identify this objective, we must consider the above quote. Maimonides explains that human beings are unique. We are endowed with freewill. We have the ability to choose between right and wrong. He explains that as a result of this faculty we are required to engage in teshuva.

Why does the element of human volition engender an obligation to perform Teshuva? Freewill means that we are in charge of our self-improvement. To a great extent, we determine the degree to which we fulfill our individual potential. We decide whether we will squander our talents and lives or whether we will strive to fulfill our potential.

We can only achieve personal fulfillment through an ongoing process of teshuva. In this process we constantly reevaluate our lives and attitudes. We reconsider our personal mission and constantly seek self-improvement. The objective is not to atone but to purify – tahara.

In short, teshuva has two objectives. One objective is kapparrah – atonement for our sins. The second objective is tahara – personal improvement.[2]

This explains Maimonides’ position regarding which sins engender the obligation to perform teshuva. In the first chapter, Maimonides indicates that teshuva is a response to violation of the law. Maimonides is discussing the teshuva of kapparrah. Atonement is required when the law is violated. If the law has not been violated, the obligation to seek kapparrah is not engendered.

However, Maimonides teaches us that we should repent from improper attitudes and character traits. This is because in addition to kapparrah, teshuva has a second objective. This objective is tahara – self-improvement. In order to achieve this objective, we must engage in an ongoing process of introspection. This process requires that we consider and evaluate our attitudes and character traits.

We can now explain Maimonides’ treatment of vedoi. In the first chapter of the Law of



Repentance, Maimonides is explaining the process of atonement. In this process the vedoi is the fundamental element. We have sinned against Hashem’s Torah. It is appropriate to verbally appeal to Hashem for forgiveness and atonement. Accordingly, vedoi is fundamental to achieving atonement. In this context, the vedoi is not merely the final step in teshuva. It is the essential element in the process of kapparrah.

However, teshuva is not merely a prerequisite in the process of achieving atonement. It is also a process that purifies and improves a person. In this process, the internal element is essential. Self-improvement requires thorough introspection. In the second chapter of the Laws of Repentance, Maimonides is explaining the process of teshuva. He describes it as a process of self-improvement. Its objective is internal change. In this context, vedoi completes and teshuva. It finalizes the internal commitments that result from the process of introspection. Therefore, in this context Maimonides describes vedoi as the final element in the process of teshuva. □

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:3.

[2] See Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Al HaTeshuva (Jerusalem, 5739), Part 1.



# The Shofar II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

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 a close friend: 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 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 "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 in activity. The Talmudic dictum applies only when a command



*Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac. But he displayed one other perfection with his sacrifice of the ram. What was it?*

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 have this

(continued on next page)



# The Shofar II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from previous page)

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 the 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. Such was deduced by the Rabbis, 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 Tefilah (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 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, the Iyun Yosafe 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.

Listen to the shofar. Understand its significance. ▣



# Shofar Blasts and The Ten Days of Repentance

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I wished to convey some basic ideas regarding Rosh Hashanna. Below, I have categorized various ideas contained on the holiday, the shofar, and statements from the Talmud.

## The Shofar

A reader asked why we are commanded in shofar blasts on Rosh Hashanna. It is a basic question, and an essential one.

A story of a Sisra occurs in Judges 4:16. After his army was completely wiped out, Sisra fled on foot to seek a hiding place. Yael deceived him that she would protect him. As a charade, she hid him. He asked for water, but she gave this wearied general some milk. He drank and fell asleep, as Yael planned. Using this opportunity as Sisra was completely vulnerable, she drove a peg into his skull and killed him. Sisra's mother anticipated her son's return from war with great booty. Upon his delay, her hopes disintegrated into weeps of despair as the grim reality set in that Sisra was not returning - he was dead.

Sisra's mother's weeps form the basis of the shofar blasts, as her cries displayed her acceptance of reality. Our shofar blasts - mimicking her sobbings - represent acceptance of the ultimate reality, the recognition of G-d as the King. We must awake from our slumber, "uru yshanim may-shinaschem", "awake you sleepers from your sleep." Blowing the shofar in the form of long and short blasts - like the long and short sobs of Sisra's mother - we cry in recognition of a reality abandoned, and strive to realize the reality of our Creator, and a time now to make amends.

Mount Sinai also contained the shofar blast as a central theme, in that eternally, unmatched miraculous event that was witnessed by millions. The shofar at Sinai again - indicates the ultimate reality, that G-d revealed proof of His very existence at this one-time event. The shofar prayers

actually commence with the account at Sinai, showing just how essential that event was, and that it is eternal. Additionally, the account of Sinai repeats the shofar's presence many times. It was highly significant. The shofar stands out as a powerful reminder of our acceptance of the reality of G-d - the Ruler of the universe.

The Talmud cites the reason for our selection of the ram's horn, Rosh Hashanna 16a:

"Rabbi Abahu asked, 'why do we blow with the shofar of a ram?' G-d said, 'blow with the shofar of a ram, in order that I recall the sacrifice of Isaac son of Abraham. and I will render it as though you sacrificed yourselves before me.'

The ram is what Abraham offered in place of Isaac. G-d saw Abraham's complete devotion to His will, instructing Abraham not to slay his only son. The ram was caught in the thicket by its horns. So the rams' horns have significance before G-d - significantly, the event of sacrificing oneself to G-d.

A bent shofar is also used - as opposed to a straight shofar. This embodies the concept that we are to be bent over physically before G-d.

## Malchyos (Kingship) Zichronos (Remembrance) Shofros (Shofar)

Our prayers comprise these three categories. The Talmud (Rosh Hashanna 16a) says as follows,

"G-d said, say before Me on Rosh Hashanna, Kingships prayers, Remembrance prayers and Shofar prayers. Kingship-so you make me your King, Remembrance-so your Remembrance rises before Me for good, and with what shall you accomplish all this? With Shofar prayers."

Accepting G-d as King is first and foremost. This day, we focus on the pinnacle upon which all reality is supported - G-d's existence as our Creator. What we see during our entire lives is nothing other than all

that G-d created. We therefore praise G-d for all His creation. G-d is King.

Remembrance prayers means to teach that G-d takes notice of our lives and doings. And not only Jews, but all mankind. For this reason, we state that G-d remembered Noah and the Flood. He was not a Jew, but he was G-d's creature. And this alone suffices G-d's recognition. He wills all people to exist. The prayer contains the sentiments that G-d sees all, nothing is hidden, that He sees to the end of all generations, and judges all of mankind. Even unto man's innermost thoughts, all is clear as day to G-d. G-d knows all.

Now that we have come this far in the prayers, i.e., 1)we understand that G-d is King (Kingship), and 2)He knows all (Remembrance), therefore we make recourse to relating to Him via shofar in our Shofros prayers - third in the sequence. He is the One to relate to - 1)the King. He will 2)recognize our call, so we conclude with calling out to Him 3)via the shofar. We thereby demonstrate that we desire to follow the only true reality that G-d is our central focus.

To demonstrate that these three themes are not singular experiences, we quote numerous verses from all three sections of Scriptures, from Torah, from Prophets and from Writings. This teaches us that they are divinely, intended "themes", permeating the Law, and central ideas by which to live.

## Written and Sealed

What is the concept of being written for a fate on Rosh Hashanna, but not sealed with a fate until Yom Kippur?

Talmud Beitzah, 16a states, "Kol mezonosav shel adam ketzuvim lo m'Rosh Hashanna ad Yom Kippur..."

"All man's needs are decided for him from Rosh Hashanna until Yom Kippur, excluding his needs for Shabbos, the Holidays and his son's Torah learning. If (in these three) he spends little, he is given little, if he spends much, he is given much."

The reason for G-d's intervention in these three areas is that they represent man's view of reality. Man's expenditures on Shabbos, the holidays and Torah education, represent man's true value system. Shabbos highlights G-d as Creator, the Holidays as G-d's intervention in our lives, and Torah education for his son as a wish for his child, to continue in his path of recognition. Throughout the year, man may alter these values, and thereby receive varying degrees of providential support from G-d. Such providence underlines when man is functioning in the right path, and when he is not.

Similarly, during these Ten Days of Repentance, man understands that G-d is about to seal his fate for the coming year. This terminality is inescapable, and hence, man is acting without distortion. His true values surface. It is therefore the one time where man demonstrates his innermost virtues, and it is now, that he is most fit to be judged.

It is interesting that Rosh Hashanna is both the catalyst of man's best performance, and simultaneously, it is the focus of his attention, in that he recognizes G-d as King. It is both the means and the end. An unusual phenomena.

Let us use Rosh Hashanna as it should be, as a chance to refocus ourselves on the reality of G-d's existence and ultimately a redirection of our energies from the mundane to the sublime, as this is how G-d says we will find our utmost fulfillment and happiness. G-d created man 'long ago'. He did so as an act of kindness that other beings may recognize and appreciate His infinite wisdom. He created a world which exudes wisdom at every turn. Let the shofar wake us up from emotionally attractive, trivial and temporal involvements, and let us realize what is eternal, of unmatched value and what is truly best for us as G-d's creatures.

May we all be written and sealed for good. ■

# Forgiveness - Selichah

RIVKA OLENICK

"...nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people." Leviticus 19:18.

"If your brother has wronged you in your property, forget it at once even if he has not asked you to do so; what he took was not yours, and he did not take anything from you. Where injury has been done to your person or honour, be easily appeased as soon as your brother asks for forgiveness and desires to be reconciled. He who soon forgives is soon forgiven. If you are really good, if humility is one of your qualities, you will forget hurts and insults without pardon being asked of you; like the well known chasid, you will never lie down to sleep without being reconciled with the whole world, all of which God covers with the wings of His peace." Samson Raphael Hirsch from Horeb.

In order that we can to "return to God" Who covers the whole world with the wings of His peace there must first be a genuine desire for selichah, forgiveness from those we have sinned against and to those who desire our forgiveness. Asking to be forgiven by God must be rooted in love and fear of God and love for our fellow Jew. Doesn't that make sense? Shouldn't we try much harder to realize that we are really one nation, designated to be His holy nation, chosen by Him? In asking for God's forgiveness shouldn't we be aware that we have lost our way, and that only through the process of tshuvah can we find our way back to the Master of the World? Tshuvah itself is not so difficult, being humble and admitting we are wrong is difficult. God commanded us to do tshuvah because we are capable of it just as we are capable of facing the truth about our flaws and asking for forgiveness.

But before we ask God to forgive us for the sins we commit against each other shouldn't we first reflect on the purpose of our lives? If we don't understand the purpose of our life why should it matter that God forgive each of us? Why should we want our fellow Jew to forgive us? Are we really sincere when we ask for each other's forgiveness? Are we asking for His forgiveness in order to truly return to Him, or is it just "lip service." Are we trying to get through another day, month or year, to try to make it "under the wire" with the hope that our fate will be sealed with life or that God hears our daily plea of repentance? Do we really try to reflect at the end of our day and ask ourselves: How did I act, what did I say or do, or didn't say or do that might have harmed myself and/or another person? Can I really go to sleep in peace with the whole world?

"Who can discern one's own errors? Clear me from hidden faults" said King David in his Psalms 19:13. We can help each other to discern our errors and faults by pointing out to each other with compassion when we are doing wrong and what we are doing wrong. We are each obligated to rebuke with kindness and concern for each other's well being. In doing, so we enhance the potential for greater perfection that we each have by helping each other move closer to it. It is easier to be objective concerning other people's flaws, if we do this with genuine thoughtfulness and not harsh judgment. At the same time, we should look more closely at our own flaws and weaknesses and honestly ask: "How am I living my own life?" instead of judging other people's lives negatively. It is much easier to point our finger at others, but what do we gain from that? Nothing. When we constantly do that, there is no growth, we continue to live in denial and never use the potential that was given to us as a gift from God. It is a gift, even though most people are convinced they themselves create their own potential.

Truthfully, most people waste their lives by pursuing things that will

never utilize one's real potential! Think about it. A Jewish person cannot afford not to do tshuvah. No one can afford to miss or ignore the opportunity to repent at any time, only a fool would choose not to. How many of our brothers and sisters have we lost to the vile, filth of Arab nations who call themselves servants of God. Who have absolutely no fear of God, and no love for His divine Torah, but who want to destroy every trace of His chosen people. They refer to Jews many times in their corrupt book, Koran as infidels and non-believers. We, the Jewish people were designated as the "true servants of God." It is our job to make every effort possible, with our heart, our soul and with all our might as we say daily in the Shema. Our purpose is to demonstrate continuously to the world what our purpose is, which is to be an eved Hashem, a servant of God. We are supposed to be "the light" unto the nations but pathetically we still are "the target" of the nations. Every single day we have the opportunity to talk to God through real prayer, prayer that we merit only because of the Avos, the Fathers. Prayer that God hears, that He listens to. The so-called prayer of the non-Jew is not listened to when he prays to a non-god. It is the tefilos of the Jew who prays to the true God - Hashem - that is heard.

In the Selichot prayers we say: "Thy people and thy heritage hunger for thy goodness, thirst for thy kindness, and long for thy salvation; let them know and understand that mercy and forgiveness belong to the Lord our God." We are asking God through our tshuvah to forgive us individually and as a community to restore us as the Klal, His "holy" nation. We beg Him to answer us as He answered Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, our Forefathers at the Red Sea, Moses at Horeb, Aaron, Phineas, Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Hezekiah, Hannaniah, Mishael and Azariah, Daniel, Mordecai and Esther, Ezra, the righteous, the pious, the perfect and the upright. He answers the poor, the broken-hearted, the widow, the orphan, the lowly in spirit, yes He does answer!

Do not pass up any opportunity to save your own life at any time by engaging in the process of tshuvah, and to be written in the Book of Life - what could be more important? Start now with doing tshuvah. Read Selichos and continue during the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. A person can do tshuvah all year and strengthen the opportunity so that at the designated time when God is closer to us, one's fate will be sealed. Every day in the Shemona Esrei we say the blessing for repentance, "hashivenu Avinu l'Torahtecha", bring us back, our Father to Your Torah. We ask God to bring us back, but we can make much greater effort to return, too! Give Tzedaka that brings justice to those people who benefit from what you give. So that our fellow Jews do not feel abandoned, visit the sick and sit and listen to them with your heart. Look into their eyes and say that you care and will include them in your tefilos and will help them in whatever way you can. Honestly look into yourself with the serious intent to work on your flaws by admitting to them, and then move forward and begin to remove those flaws. Attach yourself to learning and be more involved in thought, because this is what we were created for. The Torah has all the tools and instruction needed in order to live in line with the will of The Creator. Be optimistic in your goals and be strong in your commitment in the process of tshuvah, and just "do it."

"Hillel said: Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving the created beings and bringing them closer to Torah." Pirkei Avos. "Lord in heaven, we entreat thee, as a slave entreats his master. We are oppressed, and dwell in darkness; our souls are afflicted with much distress. We have not the strength to propitiate thee, O Lord; do it for the sake of the covenant which thou didst make with our forefathers." Selichos. ■