

PEIROS HAESHEL

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YOMIM NORAIM
EDITION

פירות האשל

• In loving memory of Beatrice Feigelman by her children, Michael and Linda Elman • לעילוי נשמת בנויא בת חיים אשר

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WELCOME

Welcome to our Yomim Noraim edition of Peiros HaEshel. We are encouraged by the positive responses that we received from the first two issues. We received a lot of great ideas and comments that we have incorporated into this new edition. We hope to continue to improve and grow and so we are grateful for all feedback that we get.

Reflecting back on this past year and the great work that Eshel Publications has done, we want to express our gratitude to the Ribbono Shel Olam for giving us the opportunity to be involved in this avodas hakodesh. We are also so grateful to you, our partners and sponsors for allowing us to carry out our mission: to spread the Torah of Eshel Publications

We are also eagerly looking forward to the coming year. The long awaited Malbim on Shir HaShirim is ready to print and we hope to have it to you in time for Pesach! Golden Apples on Vaikra is also in its final stages. The launch of our new app was a great success and we hope to build on that with additional upgrades and technology improvements.

As always, we invite to reach out and get involved with these and other exciting opportunities. You can email us office@eshelpublications.com. We look forward to hearing from you soon!

Wishing you a Ksiva VaChasima Tova

What You Come Back to in The End

We tend to understand Elul as being a preparation for the Yomim Noraim. In this perspective, Teshuva culminates on Neilah of Yom Kippur; Elul is just a way of reaching that finale. While that perspective is not wrong, if you think about it, the opposite is true as well. Rosh Chodesh Elul is when Hashem told Moshe to reascend Har Sinai. This means that Elul was the beginning of the process of Teshuva; Yom Kippur was just when that process finished. Rather than Elul being the result of Yom Kippur, in a sense, Yom Kippur is a result of Elul. But what exactly is it about Elul that makes it a time for Teshuva?

R' Moshe Shapiro said that Elul is referred to in the Passuk of אֶרֶץ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ דֹרֵשׁ אֶתְּךָ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּהַ מְרִשִּׁית הַשָּׁנָה וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה - "A land that Hashem your G-d seeks out, the eyes of Hashem are constantly upon it from the beginning of the year and until the end of the year."

While the 'beginning of the year' is Rosh HaShannah, the 'end of the year' is Elul. If the Torah had only wanted to tell us that Hashem is always watching, it could have ended the Passuk after אֱלֹקֶיךָ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּהַ, the eyes of Hashem are constantly upon it. The fact that the Torah specifies both מְרִשִּׁית הַשָּׁנָה - from the beginning of the year... וְעַד אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה - until the end of the year, " indicates that these are two different perspectives that Hashem looks at the world through. However, this

is somewhat puzzling. We can fairly easily understand what is special about the Rosh HaShannah and the beginning of the year. But what is special about אַחֲרִית שָׁנָה, the end of the year?

The answer to this is hinted at in the Mahral's explanation of a Gemora in Shabbos (קנג):

רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אָמַר: שׁוּב יוֹם אֶחָד לִפְנֵי מִיתָתְךָ. שְׁאֵלוּ תַלְמִידָיו אֶת רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר: וְכִי אָדָם יוֹדֵעַ אִיזְהוּ יוֹם יָמוּת? אָמַר לָהֶן: וְכָל שָׁבִן, יָשׁוּב הַיּוֹם, שְׂמָא יָמוּת. לְמַחֵר, וְנִמְצָא כָּל יָמָיו בְּתִשְׁבָּה.

Rebbi Eliezer said: "Do Teshuva one day before you die." His students asked him: "But does a person know which day he will die?" He said to them: "All the more so; do Teshuva today, for maybe he will die tomorrow – and it turns out that all his days are spent in Teshuva."

The Mahral explains that Rebbi Eliezer did not just mean that a person should always do Teshuva because they never know when it might be too late. Rather, Rebbi Eliezer was telling us that in truth, the time for Teshuva is right before death. It happens to be that we do not know when we will die; in that case, a side benefit is that we are constantly doing Teshuva. But why is it that the best time for Teshuva is specifically at the end of one's life?

Returning to the Source

When we think about the process of Teshuva, we tend to think of a person turning over a new leaf and starting anew. However, that is not what the word Teshuva means. The word Teshuva comes from the root of שָׁב, returning. Teshuva is not just a process of creation, like גֵּר שֶׁנִּתְּגִיר כְּקֶטֶן שֶׁנּוֹלַד דְּמִי. Rather, Teshuva is something deeper.

On the Passuk (ברשאית בא, כא) that tells us that Hagar got a wife for Yishmael from Mitzrayim, Rashi quotes a powerful phrase from the Medrash: זרק חוטרָא לאַוירָא, – “Throw a stick into the air, and it will land on its root.” Even though Hagar had spent time with Avraham Avinu to the point that she had gotten used to seeing Malachim, when push came to shove, she ended up right back where she started. Chazal compare this to a stick which, when tossed up into the air, tends to land on its thicker end which is where it began. So too, there is tendency among people to return to their roots when their lives are thrown up into the air in disarray.

Being thrown about and then reconnecting with one's roots has in it a revelation that one living a life of calm does not. If a stick happens to be standing upright, there is no evidence of just how steadfast it is in position. But if a hurricane comes and sends the stick spinning and flying, and it still ends up standing upright, it serves as a revelation of just how determined that stick is to remain upright. The same is true for all of us. Hashem created this world to serve as a revelation of His goodness. Some people's lives serve as a straightforward revelation of this Divine goodness; they are always doing what is right, and their every action reflects Hashem's goodness into the world. But if somebody spends time disconnected from all of that, yet does Teshuva, his life serves as a different sort of revelation. The fact that at the end he returns to Hashem shows that this is where he really belongs, and that this is what the world itself is really about. The Seforim speak about the גילוי of the ability to snap back into position after being dislodged is a testament to who a person really is in a way that the life of a גמור is not.

I want to share a story that shook me when I was a young boy growing up on the Lower East Side. The Yeshiva was on Henry St, and a few blocks away was a street where broken people would spend their days drinking among broken bottles. One morning, I was the first to enter Yeshiva, and I was greeted by two sleeping drunks who must have wandered into the Yeshiva overnight. They were a very difficult sight, with bloated veins

and wet and smelly clothing. One of them stirred when he heard me, and asked me if I knew a certain name. I was taken aback; this was a boy in the Yeshiva. “That’s my nephew”, the drunk told me. “I’m garbage, and I’m gone; but he’s going to be a big Rabbi one day.” After everything this man had been through, this is what he saw as what he had left. It is precisely the darkest and most desperate moments that reveal אַעיקרא קאי, what we come back to and what our עיקר is.

This is what Teshuva is. Teshuva is not just a fresh start; it is a return to where we came from; and that act of returning serves as a revelation that of where we really belong.

The End Reveals What Always Was

We can now understand why it is that Teshuva rectifies what has been done in the past. Teshuva reveals what our innermost desire and most integral connection always was. The fact that, at the end of the day this is where we return to, shows that this was our עיקר the entire time.

This explains why the truest time for Teshuva is at the end of one's life. What one returns to at the end is what one was truly connected to the whole time. A comparison may be illustrative. When a person gets old, they tend to forget things, and they essentially lose pieces of themselves. But the last thing that remains is the very core of their identity. So too, if what a person comes back to at end is Hashem and His Torah, that is the greatest proof that this is what they were really about their entire life.

With this idea, we can understand why the Torah refers to Elul as the אחרית שנה, the end of the year. The year begins with an injection of Ruchniyus, with the Shofar and the Malchus of Rosh HaShannah. But what is left at the end? If during Elul what we are focused on is returning to Hashem, that means that this is what our year was really about, even if distractions and detours may have occurred in the middle.

This approach is particularly important for us to take when we are a bit later on in life. A younger person experiences Elul first and

foremost as an opportunity for change, to reach heights that they have never yet ascended. This is in sync with the nature of youth, who are more likely, and often have more of an ability, to make radical changes in their lives. But as time goes on, Yom Kippur follows Yom Kippur, and the responsibilities of life pile up. There comes a point in our lives when sudden or radical change becomes very unlikely. At that point in life, what is Elul about? The answer is what we have discussed. The Avodah is no longer about great changes; it is about returning to where we came from, and revealing that this is really who we always were. If a person finally manages to carve a half hour of his day to learn, it is easy for him to feel that this is insufficient. “I used to learn three Sedorim a day, and now with all my Kabbolos and efforts, all I can manage is half an hour? What is it all worth?” The answer is that those few minutes is the עיקרא קאי of a person. It is what we return to, even when everything is pulling us away, because it is who we are.

This Shiur is being said to Chabura that comes together to learn Night Seder. You all spend a long and hard day at work, and at night, people are naturally exhausted. But the value in coming to learn when you can is far more than whatever time is spent in the learning. When at the end of the day you resurface in the Beis Medrash, you are showing what it is that defines you, what you are really about. This can be compared to a bath toy that is designed to float; while a child can hold it under the water, the minute it is released it snaps back into its natural position. When at the end of the day, Hashem and His Torah is what we come back to, no matter what vicissitudes we go through, that is the greatest testament to who we really are. ■



The Meaning of Life on Rosh Hashana

Every year on Rosh Hashanah, each and every one of us beseeches the Ribono Shel Olam for one thing above all else: life.

Our tefillos revolve around this request—that HaKadosh Baruch Hu grant us life. In its simplest sense, we are asking Hashem to allow us to live another year, since the most natural instinct within every human being is the desire to live and not die.

Therefore, on the Day of Judgment, we turn to Hashem and ask that He remember us for life. After all, we do not want to die.

For many people, this is the basic understanding of what we are seeking on Rosh Hashanah.

Unfortunately, this is not merely an oversimplification of our tefillos—it is a fundamentally mistaken understanding of what we are asking during the most awe-inspiring days of the year.

This cannot be the meaning of our request because HaKadosh Baruch Hu Himself is called: Kel Melech Chai & Elokim Chaim

If life were merely a synonym for existence, we would not describe Hashem using these titles.

The Rambam, in Shemonah Perakim and Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah (2:6), explains that Hashem and His life are one and the same. Life, therefore, cannot simply mean existence. It must mean something deeper.

What Is Life?

To better understand this question, let us examine two references to life that appear in connection with the Yamim Nora'im.

The Book of Life and the Book of Death
The Gemara teaches that on Rosh Hashanah:

- Tzaddikim are immediately written in the Book of Life.
- Reshaim are immediately written in the Book of Death.

Tosafos explains that this does not mean the wicked die immediately, but rather that their death is determined for some future time. This raises an obvious question.

Everyone dies eventually.

What, then, distinguishes the wicked from everyone else? The phrase "immediately written in the Book of Death" creates the impression that they have already lost something essential, as if they were once destined for immortality but have now descended into the realm of mortality.

The Placement of "Zachreinu LeChaim"

A second question emerges from our tefillos.

During the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, we insert passages such as:

- Zachreinu LeChaim
- Mi Chamocha
- U'chsov LeChaim Tovim

into Shemoneh Esrei. Their placement is unusual.

Ordinarily, requests and personal petitions belong in the thirteen middle brachos. The first three and last three brachos are reserved primarily for praise of Hashem.

Why, then, are these requests for life inserted into sections devoted to praise?

The answer lies in understanding what "life" truly means.

Life Versus Entropy

The Rambam writes repeatedly in the Moreh Nevuchim that this world is a world of: "הויה והפסד" becoming and destruction.

Everything in the physical world eventually breaks down into simpler components until it ultimately disintegrates.

In modern scientific language, this process is known as entropy.

Energy continually transitions into less organized and less useful forms until it dissipates completely. Eventually, energy becomes dispersed heat, incapable of performing useful work.

The natural tendency of the physical world is toward:

- Erosion
- Decay
- Destruction
- Extinction

Yet there is one extraordinary exception, that exception is life.

Life constantly renews itself. Old cells die and are replaced. Living organisms repair themselves, adapt, and regenerate. Life stands in direct opposition to entropy.

Not only does it exist outside the normal process of decay, but it actively fights against it. Creation seems to contain two opposing forces, entropy & life.

Yet another paradox emerges. If every cell in the body is constantly dying and being replaced, why do we age?

If many of our cells are relatively new, how does every cell somehow "know" how old the organism is?

The mysteries of life and death point toward one of the deepest secrets embedded in creation.

The Wicked Are Called Dead Even While Alive

The Maharal provides the key, commenting on the statement of Chazal:



"רשעים אפילו בחייהם נקראים מתים" - The wicked are called dead even during their lifetime.

The Maharal explains in Gur Aryeh at the end of Parshas Noach that true life is something that never ends. This is why the Torah refers to a flowing spring as, "מים חיים" - living water.

The defining characteristic of living water is continuous flow. Life means uninterrupted continuity. A wellspring.

Something that never ceases. Because the wicked will ultimately perish, they are already considered dead. Their existence has an endpoint. Anything with a final ending cannot truly be called life. The righteous, however, are called alive even after physical death because their existence continues beyond death. They are destined to live again.

Therefore, they remain "alive."

Life Is Eternity

The Maharal reveals that life and eternity are fundamentally the same thing.

Life is that which completely transcends the cycle of entropy. Anything destined to terminate is already, in some sense, dead. Imagine the difference between a perpetual-motion machine and a wind-up toy.

The wind-up toy may spin rapidly and flash brightly, but its motion is only temporary. It possesses the appearance of life without genuine permanence. The only thing capable of true eternity is something whose existence derives entirely from itself.

Anything dependent upon an external source is inherently finite. There is only one Being Who possesses absolute self-sufficiency. That Being is Hashem.

The Divine Connection

Human beings contain within themselves a spark of the Divine.

Rabbi Lopiansky describes it as the lowest

point of an umbilical cord whose source remains attached to HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

This connection explains why human life stands apart from ordinary entropy. However, Adam HaRishon was dissatisfied with this arrangement.

Following the counsel of the serpent, he imagined that by separating himself from Hashem he could become independently godlike. Only afterward did he realize that his connection to Hashem was not a limitation — it was the source of his life itself.

The moment Adam severed that bond, he lost immortality, entered the world of entropy and became mortal.

In a profound sense, Adam died on the very day he ate from the Eitz HaDaas.

True, he physically remained alive for another 930 years, but his eternity ended on that day.

Returning to Rosh Hashanah

On Rosh Hashanah, Adam was created.

On that day, HaKadosh Baruch Hu bestowed life upon mankind and connected humanity to Himself.

Hashem is Kel Melech Chai & Mekor HaChaim, He is not merely the Giver of life, He is the Source of life. We were created as extensions of that source.

As long as we remain connected to Him, we retain access to eternity.

However, on the very day Adam was created, he severed that connection, and so, every year on Rosh Hashanah, the Books of Life and Death are opened once again.

When we ask for life, we are not merely asking "Please don't let me die during the next twelve months." Rather, we are expressing our yearning to restore the connection that once bound us to Hashem.

Why These Prayers Belong in the Opening Brachos

This understanding explains why the prayers for life are placed within the sections of Shemoneh Esrei devoted to praising Hashem rather than among the personal requests.

The middle brachos deal with our physical existence:

- Wealth
- Health
- Wisdom
- Strength

Prosperity

But life in its truest sense is not one more physical need.

Life means attachment to the Source of Life.

It belongs among the praises of Hashem because it is not primarily about us at all.

It is about our relationship with Him.

True life begins where our independent existence fades and the Divine spark within us takes precedence.

The Real Prayer of Rosh Hashanah

When we ask to be inscribed in the Book of Life, we are not simply asking for:

- Beating hearts
- Functioning organs
- Another twelve months of physical existence

We are asking Hashem to place us among those who cling to Him.

Among those who achieve eternity through attachment to Him.

Among those whose lives are defined by Avodas Hashem.

May we all merit to be written and sealed in the Book of Life and to strengthen our connection to the Source of all life. ■

**Hashem
gave us the
power to do
as we wish,
but He never
gave us the
ability to
accomplish
as we wish.**

Deeds and Achievements

We have just about reached the three-year anniversary of the dreadful Shemini Atzeres massacre. We rebounded with ferocious will, vowing that this time will be different. We committed ourselves to finally destroying the menace that is Hamas/Hezbollah/Houthi/Iran and—with the wisdom of hindsight—the budding terror groups in Yehudah and Shomron.

Biden gave us a relatively free hand at the beginning of the crisis. Then, when Trump took office, it seemed that we not only had a free hand, but we actually had a like-minded partner in disarming and defanging the Islamist threats. We won victory after victory, destroyed many important defense systems, assassinated many evil leaders, and killed many soldiers. As of now, we directly control about half of Gaza, and in Lebanon, we control a huge swath of the land that has provided a staging ground for Hezbollah. Iran has been smashed in every way possible.

And yet, it all seems to have been to no avail. Hamas is waiting for the moment to spring up again, Hezbollah has to be kept constantly at bay, and Iran may be battered to smithereens but it just keeps doing what it's always done. What are we to make of this?

One of the most vexing and confounding issues in Torah is the relationship between hishtadlus and hashgacha. They seem to be mutually exclusive concepts, yet we know that both are ongoing factors in the unfolding of events. At the philosophic level, there is no easy answer to this conundrum (See Rambam, Hilchos Teshuvah 5). But on the practical, experiential level, we do have a way to understand it.

When Yosef confronted his brothers, he told them that although they had planned to harm him, Hashem had directed their deeds toward a very positive result. He was telling them that while we have bechirah and can choose to do evil, Hashem's

hashgacha directs the consequence of the evil we have done.

This gives us a new perspective on the relative roles of man and Hashem in all our affairs. We might fight battle after battle with tremendous heroism, sacrifice, brilliance and cunning. Indeed, we might even win battle after battle, as we have done. And yet no victory is in sight. Victory is a result, and results are under Hashem's control. Winning all the battles should not be a reason to reduce our tefillah, for winning battles is a different dynamic than winning the war.

This dynamic is true of so many activities in which we are engaged. A person works hard at his business and makes a great deal that will double his company's sales. He's on the road to becoming a member of the millionaire's club, and while he never fails to punctuate his tales of business savvy with "Boruch Hashem," he feels deep inside that his know-how set him up for success. However, the deal goes sour. A competitor steals the market. Although the businessman did everything right—he worked hard, he focused, he was aggressive and creative, and he davened three times a day—Hashem did not hand him the accomplishment he was reaching for. For His own good reason, which the businessman may or may not discover, Hashem wanted something different. Or, he may even accomplish the deal or deals he wanted to. But making money is not an end unto itself. It is happiness that we're really pursuing. Are we happy? We should be, and we would be, but something got in the way.

Hashem gave us the power to do as we wish, whether or not our goal aligns with His will, but He never gave us the ability to accomplish as we wish. In that realm, only Hashem's desire becomes reality.

This concept can also help us understand the sharp distinction between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur is a day that deals with human actions and activities. We try to itemize our deeds as much as possible and focus on what we have done and neglected to do. It is a day that deals

with our world, specifically, the aspect of the world that we control. Yom Kippur examines and evaluates our hishtadlus. Rosh Hashanah, in contrast, is a day that deals with Hashem's world. Our avodah on this day is to impress upon ourselves that Hashem is the ultimate Master of the World, and that ultimately, it is as He wishes it to be. Rosh Hashanah teaches us to submit ourselves to Hashem's hashgacha, regardless of how it aligns with our hishtadlus.

The Gemara finds an allusion to Rosh Hashanah in the pasuk that says, "m'reishis shanah ad acharis shanah—From the beginning of a year to its end. (See Rosh Hashana 16b)" This means that on Rosh Hashanah, we focus on the "big picture," a sweeping view of the entire year, and acknowledge that it is all Hashem's world. Our efforts really have no effect on this, no matter how successful they are. However, action is ours to perform. We are obligated to work as hard as possible to do what's right.

If we're successful, we will experience the joy and satisfaction of having our actions serve as the catalyst for the result Hashem seeks to accomplish. It can be our experiment that finds the cure, our army that destroys evil, our words that inspire someone to return to Hashem—but only if these are the results Hashem desires to accomplish. ■



The Road of Teshuva

The Sefer Akeidah raises a profound question.

If a person is honest with himself and looks at the state of the world, it appears that people spend their entire lives failing various nisyonos, making some progress, failing again, repairing themselves, and then repeating the process. Human growth often seems like a patchwork of successes and setbacks.

What does HaKadosh Baruch Hu want from us? Why is it acceptable that people spend their lives struggling, constantly doing teshuvah, and never fully achieving perfection?

The Akeidah begins by presenting the philosophical view associated with Aristotle. Suppose there are two people:

One person has a strong desire to steal but restrains himself. The other person genuinely desires only good and has no inclination toward wrongdoing.

According to Aristotle, the second person is clearly superior.

The Rambam, however, takes a different approach. On one hand, the Rambam cites a verse in Mishlei indicating that a

person should be disgusted by evil, which appears to support Aristotle's position. Yet elsewhere, the Rambam writes that a person should not say, "I find chazir or kilayim disgusting." Rather, he should say, "I would enjoy them, but I refrain because the Ribbono Shel Olam commanded me not to." This seems to be the exact opposite of Aristotle's position.

Chok and Mishpat

The Rambam resolves this contradiction by distinguishing between Mishpatim and Chukim. This distinction is not merely that one category is understandable while the other is not. Rather, they represent two fundamentally different types of obligation.

Consider a man courting a woman for marriage. If it is cold outside, he understands that just as he needs a coat, she probably needs one as well. If it is raining, he understands that she needs an umbrella. This is a matter of common sense and empathy.

That is **Mishpat**.

However, suppose she wants something that he personally does not understand. The point is not whether it makes sense



to him. The point is that it matters to her. Because he values the relationship, he fulfills her wishes even without understanding them.

That is **Chok**.

When it comes to mitzvos, a person should not spend his life wishing he could steal while merely restraining himself because Hashem said not to. Stealing belongs to the category of Mishpat. It is something we understand to be wrong. Therefore, one should genuinely recoil from such behavior. However, when it comes to matters such as kashrus—which belong to the realm of Chok—the situation is different.

Following those mitzvos demonstrates affection and devotion to the One Who commanded them. Precisely because they transcend our understanding, our observance expresses loyalty to the Ratzon Hashem. Therefore, regarding kilayim or chazir, one's attitude should be, "I may desire this, but I refrain because Hashem commanded otherwise." The greatness lies in obeying despite not fully understanding.

The Akeidah's Question

The Akeidah challenges the Rambam. If,

regarding Mishpatim, the ideal person is one who is naturally repulsed by wrongdoing and has no inclination toward evil, then someone who sinned and later repented should surely be inferior to someone who never sinned at all. Yet Chazal teach:

"במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדים אין צדיקים וגמורים יכולים לעמוד שם" - "In the place where baalei teshuvah stand, even complete tzaddikim cannot stand."

How can this be reconciled with the Rambam? Rabbi Lopiansky notes that perhaps the question is not entirely compelling. The Rambam is describing the finished product. A person who has overcome his yetzer hara and no longer desires evil is considered complete. A baal teshuvah who has reached the same state is also complete. The Rambam's discussion concerns one's current spiritual condition, not one's personal history. Meanwhile, the statement of Chazal may simply be highlighting unique advantages possessed by those who struggled and overcame challenges. Nevertheless, the Akeidah treats the issue as a significant question. Some commentators explain the Gemara in a way that diminishes the stature of baalei teshuvah, but the Akeidah finds those approaches unsatisfying. Instead,

he proposes a completely different understanding.

Torah and Philosophy

The Akeidah argues that Torah and philosophy view the world through fundamentally different lenses. Philosophy evaluates reality as it presently exists. From that perspective, a person who has always been good and possesses no inclination toward evil is superior to someone who struggles with destructive tendencies. Torah, however, measures something entirely different.

Before explaining this, Rabbi Lopiansky notes an important point.

At first glance, it may seem strange to speak of a disagreement between Torah and philosophy. If Torah is true, why should philosophy matter?

The answer is that the Rishonim respected logical thought. Aristotle was considered the greatest philosopher of the ancient world, and many Rishonim valued his insights. The issue is that all logical systems depend upon underlying assumptions—axioms. A conclusion can be perfectly logical while still being incorrect if the

underlying assumptions are wrong. The Torah provides the true axioms through which reality must be understood.

Therefore, philosophy can be internally consistent and yet still fail to arrive at ultimate truth.

The Torah's Definition of Success

According to the philosophers, the world is static. People are what they are. Some are good, some are not. Therefore, a person who never fails is better than one who sometimes fails.

The Torah's perspective is radically different. The purpose is not perfection. The purpose is the journey toward perfection.

A person who struggles, falls, improves, falls again, rises again, and eventually reaches greatness is far more impressive than someone who began life already close to perfection. The value lies not merely in the destination but in the effort required to get there. HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not need us to produce a perfect esrog. He can create endless perfect esrogim Himself.

A baal teshuvah may begin at 10—or even below zero—and eventually reach 65. Although his final score is lower, his growth may be far greater. This is the essence of teshuvah.

The Goal Is the Journey

The avodah of Yom Kippur is not to become the Chofetz Chaim. It is not to become the Vilna Gaon.

The goal is to travel as far as possible along the road that Hashem placed before us. Constant teshuvah is not evidence of failure. It is the very purpose of life. Growth is never complete. It is an ongoing process.

When people are young, they often imagine that they will become the next gadol hador and learn twenty hours a day.

That aspiration is wonderful. But as life unfolds—with work, family responsibilities, and countless obligations—they discover that their learning will often come in small pieces.

At that point, a person may think, "I'm never going to accomplish anything significant. I'm not even making a dent.

And then we move forward once more. The objective is not the finished product. The objective is the journey itself. Aveiros will occur. Teshuvah will be necessary. Growth will be gradual. The struggle to improve is what HaKadosh Baruch Hu desires.

Conclusion

With this understanding, we can approach Yom Kippur differently. Our task is not to emerge as perfect people.

Our task is to continue moving forward.

If generation after generation contributes its share to the journey of teshuvah, perhaps our generation will be the one that reaches the final destination Hashem has in mind.

May we merit to see the completion of that process and the coming of Moshiach במהרה בימינו. ■

The purpose is not perfection. The purpose is the journey toward perfection.

What He desires is the effort involved in searching for the perfect esrog. The statement:

במקום שבעלי תשובה עומדים אין צדיקים - גמורים יכולים לעמוד שם - teaches that spiritual achievement is measured not only by where a person ends up, but by how far he has traveled.

A tzaddik gamur may finish life with a spiritual score of 100. That is wonderful, but if he began at 50, his progress was 50 points.

What's the point?"

That attitude misses the entire purpose. The goal is not that our learning should rival the Gedolim. The goal is that we continue traveling the road. The road is difficult.

What HaKadosh Baruch Hu wants is that we continue working, continue making choices that help us grow, and continue progressing little by little. We stumble. We get back up. We stumble again.



Understanding the Tefillos of Yom Kippur

On Yom Kippur we have a very special haftara read during Mincha, This is the haftara of Maftir Yona. The makor comes from the Gemara which says we are "maftirin biyona."

Kol Bo gives two general reasons. One is the fact that a person can't run away from HaKadosh Baruch Hu, and that's something that Yona tried to do for good reasons, but ana elech mipanecha; there's no way a person can run away from Ribono shel Olam. A second reason is to be meorer to teshuvah. The whole event was an event of a whole city being chozer b'teshuvah, and those are general reasons why it's very fitting for this day.

Deeper Teshuvah Meaning Behind Maftir Yona

Unfortunately, somewhere along the line, the inyan of ashirut got tagged on as a segula. It's not clear at all what the makor is. There's no makor kadmon that anyone is aware of; it's very recent.

Al kol panim, people miss out on the real reason, which is the inyan of teshuvah and so on. But Maftir Yona carries in itself a much, much deeper element of teshuvah. Certainly, there are inyanim on the surface: the inyan of the city doing teshuvah and the idea that he couldn't run away. Be'emet, Maftir Yona carries in itself a tremendous omek in the inyan of the teshuvah of Yom Kippur that's meyuchad.

This is especially appropriate; Mincha is a special zman of tefillah, the Chazal list נענה בקול בשעת המנחה. Chazal tell us that Yona HaNavi comes from Eliyahu; he was the talmid of Eliyahu, and has some connection with Eliyahu. Other mekorot in Chazal say that he is sort of a ruchniyusdige child of Eliyahu. And therefore, if Eliyahu is ne'ena b'sha'at haMincha, then certainly Yona is appropriate.

Let's try to understand the yichud of this inyan of Yona and the teshuvah and

the special kneitch of teshuvah that's meyuchad to this sefer.

Rambam's View of Yom Kippur as a Zman Teshuvah

The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuvah says that Yom Kippur is a zman teshuvah lakol, layachid ulerabim; it's a zman teshuvah for everybody, for yachid and rabim, והוא קץ מחילה וסליחה לישראל. And it's a קץ מחילה לישראל. What exactly does this word keitz mean over here? It is indeed a zman mechila u'selicha, but what does the word keitz mean? How does it exactly express itself? I really would like to be b'etzem mitbonen on something deeper. The inyanim of the yomim tovim are inyanim of certain gilluyim: HaKadosh Baruch Hu had to be megaleh geula to the world, so Pesach; Torah, Shavuot; yira, Rosh Hashanah; simcha, Succos. Each and every one is megaleh something.

Be'emet, teshuvah is not lechatchila. Teshuvah is when things became wrong, things went awry, then there's a way to fix it.

If so, it shouldn't be given as a zman; it should be given in case of emergency. Which day of the year do you use the emergency exit? Well, in the shul you use the upstairs for Shabbos, the downstairs for weekdays, the side room for a simcha, and you use the emergency exit when there's an emergency; it doesn't go with a zman.

The idea that HaKadosh Baruch Hu gives a zman that's meyuchad for teshuvah and for kappara, is sort of a tarti d'sasri. It's ke'ilu that teshuva is a regular part of something or other. This is something that's meant to be megaleh something. But we're really talking about something that shouldn't be. Geula is a positive attribute of HaKadosh Baruch Hu, it reflects a positive development in the world.

The same thing is true with Torah, the same is true with everything. But teshuvah is, "in case of emergency, do this." If you messed up or took a wrong turn, recalculate. But why in the world is this a zman?

And that's the point the Rambam is making when he says "יום כיפור הוא זמן תשובה לכל." It's a z'man teshuva. Always is good, it's Hakadosh Baruch Hu is more na'aneh to rabim or yachid, Rambam says, this z'man, but it's because it's a z'man. What does it mean that this z'man is the z'man of teshuva?

Yedias HaBechira Placed in Hilchos Teshuvah

Another point about the Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva that is fascinating.

The Rambam discusses the idea of yedias habechira in Hilchos Teshuva. That seems very, very strange. For the Rambam, yedias habechira is a fundamental issue in understanding darkei Hashem and the bechiras adam, obviously. The right place to put it logically would be in Yesodei HaTorah.

Yesodei HaTorah is where the Rambam discusses the fundamentals of Yiddishkeit and all the inyanim of emuna that are basic: yedias Hashem, Hashem is echad, and He's eino guf. He then goes on to nevuah. These are all basics. So yedias habechira would have its place there.

To put yedias habechira into teshuva seems to be a little far-fetched. Why in the world would that be the place to discuss yedias habechira? Yedias habechira is relevant way before teshuva. It's relevant for mitzvas Krias Shema. A person does Krias Shema, does he have bechira to say Krias Shema? Every mitzvah has the same paradox.

And whatever answer you give, you're going to have to provide for kol HaTorah kulah. So, if it has a place in Mishneh Torah, the place lekahura should have been Yesodei HaTorah, not Hilchos Teshuva. I think this leads us to a much deeper understanding of the musag of teshuva.

Teshuvah: Personal Remedy vs Cosmic Purpose

Normally, teshuva is like we said.

Somebody does something wrong. Hakadosh Baruch Hu berov chasdo berov tuvo allowed us to be mesaken. Teshuva is there as a personal rectification, rehabilitation of something we did wrong, or where we weren't good, and so on. That's teshuva in its lower form, meaning, in the form that's relevant to us.

It's personal, and it's relevant to people's personal errors and so on. But teshuva has a much deeper component. When we layn דרשו השם בהמצאו קראו בהיותו קרוב actually refers to these days, the pasuk says,

יעזוב רשע דרכו ואיש און מחשבותיו, כי לא מחשבותי מחשבותיכם ולא דרכיכם דרכי נאם השם, כי גברו שמים מארץ כן גברו דרכי מדרכיכם ומחשבותי ממחשבותיכם.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu says your machshavos and my machshavos, your drachim and my drachim are very, very far apart. My drachim, כי גברו שמים מארץ כן גברו דרכי מדרכיכם ומחשבותי ממחשבותיכם.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu's drachim and Hakadosh Baruch Hu's machshavos are beyond machshavos adam and beyond darkei adam.

כי כאשר ירד הגשם והשלג מן השמים ושמה לא ישוב כי אם הרור את הארץ והולידה והצמיחה

When geshem and sheleg comes down to this world, it does not return until it's accomplished its mission.

ונתן זרע לזורע ולחם לאוכל כן יהיה דברי אשר יצא מפי לא ישוב אלי ריקם כי אם עשה את אשר חפצתי והצליח אשר שלחתי

So Hakadosh Baruch Hu says that the devar Hashem comes to this world and it does not stop until it accomplishes what it sought to accomplish. And this is something that is described in the pesukim as being מחשבותי מחשבותיכם לא דרכיכם דרכי.

This description of the Dvar Hashem as coming and having accomplished what it sought to accomplish is something that is unique to Darchei Hashem. So yes, Hakadosh Baruch Hu is more powerful than we do. So Melech basar vadam can do a lot of things. Hakadosh Baruch Hu can do many more things, can do everything.

But regarding this merchak of machshavotai, Hashem says כי גברו שמים מארץ כן גברו. What is that referring to?

Not only can I choose where to go tomorrow, I can choose what I did yesterday.

Divine Commands, Free Will, and Their Fulfilment

It's referring to the following: Hakadosh Baruch Hu speaks to us in tzivuyim and he tells us what we have to do. And those tzivuyim are given to us and we have bechira to do them or not to do them. We're ba'alei bechira, and yet, Hakadosh Baruch Hu's dibbur never goes back reikam.

It's given to us as tzivuyim and we have bechira to do it or not to do it. And it may take a very long time, but it never comes back to Hakadosh Baruch Hu reikam. I have a raya, a zeche ledavar at least from the Rambam.

Rambam in Hilchos Melachim brings an incredible raya from the Torah for Moshiah. He says that there was a tzivuy to Moshe Rabbeinu that they should separate six arei miklat, three here, three here, and ve'yarchiv another three. And they'll expand, there'll be another three that they'll have a chiyuv to do. The Rambam said they never ever made those arei miklat.

So it's will have to come true. But it's not a nevuah, it's a tzivuy. Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave a commandment, it's a mitzvah, it's a chiyuv. So, what's the raya? I mean, if someone will come and say, "Hayitachen that the Eibershter gave you so many mitzvot and take a look how little you did," my answer will be, "Well, I have bechira.

That's the metzius. So what's the Rambam's raya? The answer is: yes, we have bechira, and we could choose not to do it. At the end, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gets it done. If there was a tzivuy to have another three arei miklat, then someday it'll have to happen. Every one person has bechira and anyone could just shrug it off, but the Dvar Hashem will be mitkayem.

And why it's in the asara ma'amarot is not this tosfos on it. But the point is that Hakadosh Baruch Hu's dibbur, even if it's given to us as a tzivuy with bechira, still has a point where it realizes itself. That's the Dvar Hashem.

כי גברו שמים מארץ כן גברו דרכי מדרכיכם

If we give a choice to somebody betoras bechira and tell him, "If you'd like to, do this or that," there's no guarantee mitzad minei dibbur that it'll happen. If it's a melech with a very strong army and he gives a tzivuy that you have to do something, then you have to do it. But my dibbur is merely a suggestion if I leave it at that.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu's dibbur is a very different world, and that's why it's not a stira to our bechira, like the Rambam says, that this yediyah of Hakadosh Baruch Hu belongs to the world of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

We have bechira within the context of our understanding and our world, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu's dibbur is מצד הקדשו and it's from a different world and therefore it will realize itself. Someplace, sometime, it'll come to realize itself. So, when we're talking about people's personal lives and personal teshuva, then the answer is: yes, everybody has bechira and everybody could choose to do or not do. We could mess up. And then Hakadosh Baruch Hu gives us a chesed that we could

do teshuva, and that works anytime. But the briyah as a whole was created so that Hakadosh Baruch Hu could accomplish what He wanted to accomplish.

It's true that He gave us bechira on the way for us to accomplish it, but the world must accomplish what Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave it to accomplish. And therefore, Hakadosh Baruch Hu set in the briyah itself a musag of teshuva, not teshuva that by far surpasses the personal tikkun, but teshuva as a way of realizing what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants to realize. And that's perhaps why the Rambam puts this inyan of bechira and yediah in Hilchos Teshuva. Hilchos Teshuva on our level deals with personal inyanim, personal chatoim, personal tikkun.

Teshuva with a capital Tuf, the big sweeping gamut of teshuva, deals with the fact that despite the fact that we have bechira, the world will come to the place that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants it to come. That's the musag of Teshuva in its big fanfare. And that's why we answer the stira of yediah and bechira, that despite the fact that we're all going to do teshuva and the world will be good, it doesn't take away from our bechira, and the Rambam kema rephrases the pasuk of **כי גבהו שמים מארץ** **כי גבהו דרכי מדרכיכם**. That is the reason why yediah and bechira is dealt with in teshuva, and this is where we understand that the mahalach of our bechira and the mahalach of tikkun olam mitzad Hakadosh Baruch Hu are shenei mahalachim that for us are soser, but Hakadosh Baruch Hu is gavo shamayim and gavo drachai midarcheichem and therefore it has no stira and it will come true.

Yom Kippur is the zman of that gilluy. Yom Kippur is the zman when the Rambam says **קץ מחילה וסליחה לישראל**. One hears in it in those words ketz mechila u'slichah; that derher of a ketz, a ketz in the sense that things come to a final tikkun, like the keitz hayamim. Ketz means something that's cut off, e.g., ketz sam lachosech; it comes from the outside, a certain stop to the world of choshech.

So too, Yom Kippur is the zman when the ra of the world will come to an end through mahalach of teshuva. Kiyadu'a the Ramban, Rabbeinu Bachaye and others learn in

the parsha of teshuva, ve-shav ve-shav'ta is psukim of havtacha. There's a chiyuv, a mitzvah of teshuva, and there's a havtacha of teshuva. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu told it to us in a lashon of havtacha.

The place where the tzivuy and the havtacha come together is teshuva, because it's the one mitzvah that represents both together, the ketz of the zman kappara lakol and the ultimate in bechira that a person not only can make a decision going forward, but a person can also make a decision on what was. That's the ultimate in bechira. So, take a look at this extraordinary paradox: on the one hand teshuva expresses our bechira to the ultimate degree, not only can I choose where to go tomorrow, I can choose what I did yesterday, and teshuva represents the ultimate degree of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's yediah when He says ve-shav, you'll go back, you'll do. V'shavta, you'll go back, you'll do teshuva, the world will come back to me.

The ultimate in both of them come together in this extraordinary paradox because teshuva comes from a world that is beyond. This is the place where we express **כי גבהו שמים מארץ כן גבהו דרכי מדרכיכם**.

Yonah's Mission and the Forced Teshuvah

Yonah Hanavi was sent out to address the lowest elements of human society. This wasn't the metukanim of them.

This wasn't the best; this was the powerful, the arrogant, the cruel, the bad, everything. That's who he was sent to be mesaken. And he decided to use his bechira not to go.

Chazal give us the reasons why he thought that for Klal Yisrael's sake he should not go. Hakadosh Baruch Hu forced him to go, and Hakadosh Baruch Hu forced him to do it, even though he had bechira. Because Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted to bring the koach of teshuva into the world in terms of tikkun olam. Let's understand the final vikuach between Yonah Hanavi and kavyachol the Ribbono Shel Olam.



Hakadosh Baruch Hu brought the kikayon, the kikayon dried out. Yonah was very upset, hamaiteiv charah lach and Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him you know you're upset about a kikayon that **בן לילה היה** **בן לילה** this and that and a city that's so full of people and so on. He told him also you didn't work for this kikayon, the implication k'ilu kavyachol that there's some sort of amal. What Hakadosh Baruch Hu was telling him is that the reason why Hakadosh Baruch Hu is chas at every nivra is because every nivra has in himself some amal of Hakadosh Baruch Hu kavyachol. Every nivra has a dvar Hashem and so long as there's a nitzutz in the briya extant that is not bitikuno, Hakadosh Baruch Hu will go all the way to bring it to its tikkun because it is not only because it's good for it—that's just teshuva on a personal level. It's also because it's Ribbono Shel Olam's nitzutz. This is a nekuda of tov, of chayus that Hakadosh Baruch Hu put in the briya. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu's havtacha is that he'll redeem it at the end.

It's not only havtacha, it's muchrach. There's nothing of the dvar Hashem that came to this world without accomplishing. It may take its time, bechira is chal on the time it takes, bechira is chal on the twists



and turns. Bechira is not chal on whether the dvar Hashem will actualize itself or not.

And Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him this is a place that has nitzutzos, nekudos, inyanim, it's my nivraim and whatever could be mesukan from it will come to its tikun. The Arizal says Sodot HaRayom about Yonah, he speaks about Yonah, his connection with Eliyahu and he associates Yonah with Mashiach ben Yosef. We don't know what these

things mean, but what it means is this is the beginning of the redemption; when we understand that every dvar Hashem will come to its tikun, then we've started the process of geula.

Once we dehart that it's mochrach that will happen. These are dvarim neviim. This is something that after Yom Kippur of avoda we're able to dehart and understand this mission of Yona and where it's headed to and what it carries in itself. Let's try to give it some sort of personal sense as well.

One, we all have different inyanim that we've struggled with, to do and not to do, and at some point, a reasonable person throws up his hands. For example, a person invests in a business; a cautious person gets bitten once and he drops it. Another person might persist, and a third person persists even further, but at some point, genug—how much more? That's because we have no assurance that it'll be successful, and therefore, if we use rational measurement sticks and say to ourselves: one time, two times, three times, okay; if not, it doesn't work, whatever it is.

That's all true about physical things and things that shayach to this world. But the world of teshuva in its big picture is כגבה שמים על הארץ. It's something that is above

and beyond.

Therefore, there is always hope. A person needs to use sechel and daas to determine what to work first on, how to work, and how to go about it. He can look for eitzos, he can think about it, and he can prioritize. Using darkei sechel is definitely right, but being miyaesh doesn't have a makom be'etzem because every nekuda of a person's neshama is muvtach at some point that it will come to its tikun. And if a person zoiche, then he's the one who brings it to it. That's us personally after Yom Kippur, in terms of our avoda and taking heart that there's always reason to push forward.

There's another area where I think it obligates us. And this is a very painful area.

Personal Struggles, Giving Up, and Persistent Hope

Unfortunately, many people suffer from close people who've gone astray. It's something we never thought would happen.

Baruch Hashem we've passed the door where everything was falling apart, and Baruch Hashem today everything is going forward and such Baruch Hashem Siyata D'shmayaribuy of everything. And yet, here and there, there are all sorts of things and it's a tremendous agmas nefesh. And one of the ways to deal with that agmas nefesh is to give up on a person. Now, lefi inyan dinei nefashos, if a person shatters other people, there are all sorts of inyanim why I might need to take certain steps.

Be'etzem to give up on a Yiddishe neshama has no makom. Even if it's tefilla from a heart that is sorry for the other person; a heart that yearns for the other person, not anger. For that, there's surely no reason to give up, and even to reach out again and again and again.

If we are ma'amin be'emuna sheleima that there's a keitz of teshuva and every single nekuda in the world has its time and place but it'll come back. Yona was sent to Ninveh and Yona thought that the idea of Ninveh coming back is destructive to the briya to the world; of course he had his

cheshbonos. Yet Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him no—in Ninveh there's something good that needs to be brought back. Despite all the layers of garbage and mesiras nefesh and who knows what, there's a havtacha, if Hakadosh Baruch Hu sent a neshama to this world, there's a havtacha. That's Maftir Yona, and I've seen incredible things where things you'd never believe turned out in certain ways.

When to Push Away vs. Face the Issue Again, these inyanim are inyanim where people need to ask shailos from people who understand, and there are times to push it away for a while or deal with it in different ways because of other reasons. But mitsad ha'etzem inyan of a person understanding that Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave a havtacha of veshavta, Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave a havtacha of veshav; every single neshama is a dvar Hashem that came to the briya. It may take a long time, and it may be misgalgal in mud and in incredible amount of schmutz. But there's a havtacha that Hakadosh Baruch Hu will take it back and Hakadosh will bring it back. We, if we're lucky, can bind our koach habechira to that, and we can be partners to that if we do it minimally, if we keep our hope and our tfillos and do what it takes, as difficult as it is, to bring that nitzutz back, to bring that neshama back.

Maftir Yona, Achris Hayamim, and the Keitz of Redemption

So Maftir Yona is perhaps the higher moment of Yom Kippur, it's when we elevate ourselves above our personal chetayim and our personal shortcomings and our personal need for tikun and teshuva, and we take a look at the vision, at the vista of achris hayamim and understand achris hayamim and teshuva is hainu hach. Achris hayamim is when the mitzvah that's most talui be'bechira of teshuva becomes the hachrach in the briya, and that every single dvar Hashem that was in this world flowers and blossoms. The keitz of Mashiach and the keitz of teshuva is one keitz, and the person who tried to run away from it is the person who brought it to us and gave us that vista and that havana and that nitzchius of Hakadosh Baruch Hu's dvar Hashem and ultimate teshuva. •

A Day Shrouded In Mystery

Looking through the חומש, the spirit of every יום טוב, to a large degree, is explained by its פסוקים in the תורה. However, ראש השנה it is different. All the Torah tells us is that it is a "יום תרועה" - day of blowing." No hint to the Yom Hadin, or any other part reflecting the seriousness of the day. Only to blow. The רמב"ן addresses this question and points out that there is another angle to ascertain the theme of ראש השנה. He writes that within each month's Rosh Chodesh lies a glimpse of the coming ימים טובים in that month. Therefore, since the Rosh Chodesh Tishrei (i.e. ראש השנה) contains the יום טוב of יום כפור – a Yom Slichah VaKapparah, as the פסוקים tell us – Rosh Chodesh Tishrei (i.e. ראש השנה), must also have a hint of כפרה.

The רבינו בחיי explains this vacuity in the פסוקים differently. He explains that the Torah avoids describing spiritual things. And limits itself to descriptions of physical events or ideas. For example, יציאת מצרים was a physical event that happened, and therefore the Torah can define it in the same concrete terms that it occurred in this world. ראש השנה, however, is not a physical event. ראש השנה is not a physical reality. It is a spiritual occurrence happening in שמים. Therefore, the Torah does not discuss this idea. Additionally, since spiritual notions are abstract, they are easily misused, misunderstood, or even corrupted. Using our שכל to understand a spiritual concept can lead us to false conclusions. למשל, I can reason that if kosher food is good for your נשמה and we can reason perhaps it is good for your body. Then, therefore, it must be

even better to eat organic Kosher food. This is wrong, but the limits of the human שכל can mislead someone to thinking this. That kind of misunderstanding is why the Torah does not describe things which are abstract and spiritual.

If you look at the Torah, there is no mention of an afterlife. The reason is because the afterlife is not a physical experience. If a person's query is "What kind of food do they have in Olam Haba?", such a person has no business discussing Olam Haba. Just like a fish does not consider what they would do in case there was a fire, we don't discuss these



topics since they are so far removed from our physical existence, and our limited comprehension. The Torah only describes things we can comprehend in a physical sense. Hence the Torah only tells us about the physical things we can do in connection to the יום טוב. The Yom Hadin is not a physical reality. It is only a spiritual reality. We would only corrupt it if we were to try to put it into our terms. This is how the רבינו בחיי explains the lack of the Yom Hadin being expressed in the Torah.

But what now? If this is the case, how are we supposed to understand ראש השנה? How do we relate to it? There is another description of ראש השנה which the רמב"ן explains. He says that the Shofar blast, Teruah, signifies battle, war, and

by extension, the day of Judgement. The sound of the Teruah is the short-broken sound; it sounds like crying. Tekiah, however, is a long strong sound, and is Meorare Rachamim. Let us further explore this.

If someone were to ask me, do you want to stand in Judgement? The answer would be; what is the purpose of this Judgment? If the judgment is to get into a college, where everyone gets in, except for the few people who do poorly, they will be and should be weeded out. That is a type of din, where the test is solely for the sake of determining whether I should be excluded.

Exclusionary Din, so to speak. But if I was a basketball player, trying to get into the NBA, and I am given a chance to showcase my skills, because everyone here is locked out of the NBA, except for the select few who are able to get in, this test would be considered an opportunity. This is something I would want to take since it is for the sake of my benefit. In this light, Din becomes something to take advantage of.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu started a world where ideally every single person must earn the right to continue living in this world. If they did מצות and earned their way, they could continue. If not, the

opposite would occur. However, this kind of world – one operated solely on Judgement alone – cannot survive. Therefore, Hashem changed the way He ran the world. Instead of requiring each person to earn their right to live each day, Hashem drew out the process and said that even if you are not worthy of living today, I will Judge you based on a longer period. So even if you cannot justify your existence today, perhaps over time you will grow to justify your existence. Just like in a country where borrowing is extremely restricted, the economy can't survive, we too can borrow time, so to speak. We say that I will use the time to pay back the loan over time, and by that which time, my business will grow into something that can be profitable, and worth the money that was borrowed. So

too, Hashem allowed us to live our lives on credit. Even though we cannot justify our existence on a day-to-day basis.

למשל, imagine if I was the headmaster of an elitist school. I would have a test to keep students who are not elite out of the school. If you fail the test, you are out. Finished. However, if I am a parent, and my child fails the test, I am not going to discard the child for failing the test. Because the test is only a small part of the bigger picture. My goal is to allow my child to succeed. If he fails, I will continue to work with him until he gets better.

Hashem brings every נשמה into this world is hopes that we can enter the world to come – our very purpose of our existence. However, the system in which the world was created provides that one must earn it. The goodness in the world to come World to Come ought to be gained through Din. However, in Hashem's ultimate kindness, He mixed in רחמים, for the sake of giving us a chance to succeed long term.

This is what we do on the day of Judgement. We blow the Teruah, expressing the idea of Din – the essence of the Day. Identifying the ideal of being able to justify our existence on our own merit. And yet, as the רמב"ן noted, this day is brought to us with a Tekiah before it, and a Tekiah after it. The Tekiah is a sign of רחמים; that even if we haven't justified our existence just yet, we will eventually be able to given a little more time. That's what the Tekiah does for us. Yes this day is a Yom Teruah, a day of Din and reverence. Yet, we must understand and accept that we can only attain this רחמים. Relating to Hakadosh Baruch Hu as our father will gain us the benefits that a father grants his son. Just like the father who helps the son who fails the test. However, if we reject Him as our Father, then we won't have the zechus to be given credit to prove our worth in a longer context. If we don't look to our Father and accept Him as our Father, He will treat us like the headmaster who turns aside the failing student. This is what we need to contemplate, as we head into the day of Judgement. ■

Sukkos of Daas

There are seminal events in the history of כלל ישראל that are marked through the yearly cycle of the שלש רגלים. Returning to our origin, we celebrate פסח commemorating ה' taking us as a nation. Our essential אמונה comes from this. After becoming a nation, we need a roadmap. On שבועות the giving of the תורה marks who we are, what we are, and what our mission is. It is the unprecedented contact of the mortal and divine. פסח and שבועות are marking cosmic events that are essential to our identity. On the other hand, סוכות commemorates the סוכות in which כלל ישראל journeyed and lived in throughout the מדבר. This seems like a weak reason to be included with the other שלש רגלים. And even if you want to say that the סוכה is commemorating the ענני הכבוד, there were other נסים in the מדבר that were far more miraculous! The באר מרים that never ceased to give water, the מן which sustained כלל ישראל perfectly, or even the fact that their clothing never got worn out. It behooves us to investigate: what exactly is סוכות coming to express? And why does it rank next to the formation of our nation and the giving of the תורה?

First, we need to look at the פסוקים discussing the שלש רגלים. In פרשת ראה, In (16:1-16) tells us that we must refrain from eating bread in order to למען תזכר את יום צאתך מארץ מצרים – remember we were once slaved in Egypt. And similarly, after depicting זכרת כי, say, the חג השבועות – remember we were once slaved in Egypt. Both פסח and שבועות serve as a Zecher for יציאת מצרים. By סוכות the פסוקים tells us how to perform the יום טוב but there is no Zecher. In פרשת אמור, there is a different description of סוכות. The (פסוק 23:42) says, למען ידעו דרתיכם, that we should Know instead of remember. This is unique. It is different from a Zecher.

What is the significance of למען ידעו? It is also important to note that the word זכר is in the singular, a command on

the person. Yet, the למען ידעו of המשך is in the plural. Why does זכר get pinned on the masses, yet the זכר is on the person?

The Vilna Gaon's commentary on חבקוק can help us begin to understand this. The פסוק states, ה' שמעתי שמעך יראתי, ה' שמעתי שמעך יראתי – Hashem, I have heard of You, and I am awed by Your deeds. Bring Your deeds to life during these years; make them known during these years. In Your anger, remember to have compassion." The פשוט understanding of this פסוק is that the נביא is describing our feelings during Galus.

However, the Gaon gives us a glimpse of the depth of this פסוק. He writes that this פסוק is a רמז to the cosmic experience and journey of the Jewish soul. First, a person is shaken out of a mundane life and hears the call of God. Having recognized that there is a God, he is forced to change his raison d'être. This change requires a manual — and, more importantly, a way to channel this newfound focus. This manual consists of doing מצוות and refraining from sin. Ending this journey is marked by the visceral knowledge that one has arrived at their true existence.

This cosmic journey, says the Gaon, is the yearly experience provided by the cycle of ימים טובים.

It begins with the יום טוב of פסח, when we found our אמונה and became the עם הנבחר. The חבקוק in נביא says the words "ה' שמעתי שמעך" – Hashem, I have heard you." Having heard the call, we now need the manual. שמעך means I hear the content of what You are calling us to do. This is the יום טוב of שבועות, when the תורה was given. We received the roadmap of מצות to achieve our goal. Then finally, בקרב שנים תודיע, we arrive at a place of viscerally knowing our purpose – this is סוכות. The words בקרב שנים תודיע – make them known during these years – are a call for ה' to

bring the ultimate coming of שלישי. This is the truest form of knowing our purpose. The connection between the המקדש and סוכות is that its original dedication was on סוכות. Also, the בית המקדש was called סוכות. Additionally, after the שלוחות שניות were brought, we received the command to begin building the משכן.

However, what is most striking is that here again in reference to סוכות we have the word דעת in the words תודיע. This calls us back to explain the connection between סוכות and the יום טוב. Additionally, why does בקר שנים – “To keep alive for many years,” which alludes to an element of eternity have to do with סוכות?

To explain this divergence in wording – from סוכות by למען ידעו זכר – we need to look at the ספר נחלת דוד where he explains the difference between a “Zecher” – “Remembering” and “Daas” – “Knowing.” The זכרה of מצות, remembering, found by the ימים טובים of פסח and שבועות, is to take something from the past and bring it into the present. Zecher is holding onto something that is, by definition, not part of the self. Whereas Da’as, נחלת דוד, is the level of “Knowing” to the point of a physical experience.

למשל a medical student studying for an exam drills endless anatomical terms into his brain for the test. And he aces the test. Contrast this with a practicing doctor, who sees patients every day. He doesn’t struggle to drill information into his head to treat his patients. The Medical Student exercising “Zecherah” takes a lot of effort and force to hold down this information. And, furthermore, the moment the test is over, he thinks, ‘Good Riddance, I am never going back to this,’ and begins to forget. On the other hand, the practicing doctor lives it. He may not have the best memory or be the greatest genius. His knowledge is not alien cargo that takes energy to hold down. His medical knowledge has become part of the fabric of who he is. One never loses this level of knowledge.

This element of Knowledge described here is also expressed in the words the תורה uses to describe the relationship between husband and wife. The בראשית (4:1) פסוק says, “וַהֲאָדָם יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ” – “And Adam Knew Chavah his wife.” Expressing a deepening of

the relationship achieved by physical union, Da’as is the integration of two separate units to become one. This means the knowledge of the other really becomes equivalent to the knowledge of oneself. In marriage, his experiences become hers, and hers become his. That is true דעת.

These two events, פסח and שבועות – both of which are a Zecher – are part of a progression. We don’t simply remember God’s miracle just to keep the faith going. The progression begins with being divorced from God, from being separated, and ultimately results in becoming bonded to God.

First יציאת מצרים awakened us to God’s Being. On מתן תורה with שבועות we became aware of what God wants from us. Both are outside events that require Zechira. They are outside events that were imposed on us. And finally, סוכות, reflecting the המקדש – בנין בית המקדש – the house of ה' – represents the marriage or union of ה' and כלל ישראל. This bonding of ה' and כלל ישראל is parallel to “וַהֲאָדָם יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ” – “And Adam Knew Chavah his wife.” This is a permanent feature of כלל ישראל alluded to in בקר שנים. For something to last forever there needs to be a union. Something foreign never lasts.

This is why סוכות is referred to as למען ידעו. דורותיכם. This is because ידעה is something that lasts forever.

This has important implications. The Gaon writes that there are only two מצות that incorporate the entire body. They are סוכות and ארץ ישראל. This reflects our point. סוכות is a יום טוב of bringing ה' into our lives at the level of ידע which means ה' is part and parcel of ourselves. ארץ ישראל is the place of בית ה' – the household that includes us and ה'. סוכה is the מצוה that includes us and ה'.

To wrap this all up, we must zoom out on the ראש השנה. ראש השנה is a day that shakes us up. It gives us awareness. This is the calling. Next, we give an accounting of our actions. This is כפור. This is the content of what ה' wants from us. But no matter how much shaking up, or how much detailing of our shortcomings we do, it all fades unless we have something to make it permanent. This is the role of סוכות. The pervading feeling of the יום טוב of סוכות is

Simcha. So long as מצות and תורה are divine impositions, they won’t have permanence. However, when a person is b’simcha, it means they are thriving. It means their actions have become a part of the person. A person like this is willing to keep that forever. One never tires of something that is truly oneself. Simcha is the content of this יום טוב.

This is why the mitzvah of סוכה is דורותיכם – for generations. When we do things because we feel duty-bound to do them, our children may admire us, but they will not necessarily imitate them. Children don’t absorb it. They may think, ‘This is just what my father does.’ In contrast, if a child feels that this is what my father is all about. In contrast, a child can feel that this is what his father is. When מצות are performed not as divine obligations imposed from outside, but with passion – because they’ve become part of who we are – then they become דורותיכם, carried forward for generations. This is why סוכות is the capstone of the ימים טובים. It eternalizes everything. It is a Zman that, if done right, transforms תורה and מצות into our very essences. May we all be Zocheh to feel the Simcha of this יום טוב and have in become a deep part of us – ingrained לדורותיכם. ■



Building One's Tzurah

There are two settings or components to the יום טוב of סוכות. Classically, as the פסוק states, סוכות is a יום טוב where we come together and celebrate. Yet, from another angle, סוכות is the culmination of the ימים נוראים of ראש השנה and יום הכפור, carrying with it a sense of כפרה. In fact, it is brought down in the Seforim that during סוכות, on Hoshana Raba, there is an element of a final כפרה. This needs to be better understood. סוכות is seemingly straddling two opposing worlds: Joy and Atonement. Exactly what role is סוכות playing?

The משנה in 1:18 (אבות) says,

“על שלשה דברים העולם קיים: על הדין, ועל האמת, ועל השלום”

The שפת אמת comments that these three מדות correspond to each of the ימים טובים in the month of תשרי. Beginning with ראש השנה is אמת, then יום הכפור is דין, and finally, סוכות is שלום. But this isn't so linear. Both אמת and דין are two sides of the same coin. אמת is getting to the truth and דין is living up to it. But שלום doesn't seem to fit on the same axis. Why is it here? How does it connect to סוכות?

We must deeply explore the יום טוב of סוכות to understand: Exactly what is the role of סוכות? Why is שלום the מדה of סוכות? And finally, what can it accomplish for us in our רוחניות?

The Shelah HaKadosh says that the שלש רגלים correspond to the אבות. Avraham is פסח. This is easily understood as פסח reflects the birth of ישראל עם. Yitzchak representing Shavuot is also understandable. Shavuot is מתן תורה and Yitzchak was כולו קדש just like Torah. And finally, Yaakov is סוכות. Yes, there is a passuk (Bereishis 33:17) – ויעקב נסע סכותה, – Yaakov traveled to סכותה. But what מדה of Yaakov connects him to סוכות?

The גמ' in Chulin writes that Yaakov Avinu's Tzurah is engraved on the Kisei Hakovod. The גמ' in Bava Metzia tells us that Yaakov's beauty is like Adam HaRishon's, and Adam HaRishon was created in the image of God. How do we understand this emphasis that חז"ל are surrounding Yaakov Avinu with? What is so important about the Tzurah of Yaakov Avinu?

To better understand this, let us begin by describing a משל of eyesight. There are two types of neurological stages behind eyesight. This is described by the neurologist Oliver Sacks in his book, The Man Who

Mistook His Wife for a Hat. He explains that, first, light strikes the eye, allowing one to perceive the raw visual details. The mind sees a map of various features. Then, second, the mind integrates all the features and puts together a meaningful understanding of what one is seeing. Sacks tells of a patient who lost this second ability, and as a result could no longer recognize close relatives.

This idea is precisely the crossover from רוחניות to גשמיות. Seeing only the scattered details of life in their raw form is the vantage point of גשמיות. And piecing together everything into a meaningful existence is the vantage point of רוחניות. The Maharal explains this notion as Chomer and Tzurah. It is easy to size up mankind in their details. We eat, we drink, we sleep. Or we can see mankind as something much greater than that. The entrance into the world of רוחניות begins when one can stop looking at the pieces and begins to see the bigger picture of what life is about.

In addition to the previously mentioned symbolism connecting the שלש אבות to the שלש רגלים, each of the אבות also has a מדה which describes their essence. The מדה of Avraham Avinu is חסד. While this מדה is powerful, could it ever encapsulate ה' ? Of course not. In a world of complete חסד everything becomes acceptable. Boundaries are blurred. There are no consequences, and all distinctions disappear. A Higher Power of only love is a Christian concept, and we can see the results of such an approach.

Yitzchak Avinu represents the opposite. He represents extraordinary sacrifice. He gave himself up to Hashem – the ultimate expression of Avodas Hashem. But this too, isn't the complete picture of what the ideal should be.

Yaakov Avinu was the final Av because he was able to encompass both of these מדות. Imagine you are painting a picture: at the most basic level, you need at least two different colors. Avraham and Yitzchak could not, by themselves, reflect the full דמות (image) of הקב"ה. Only Yaakov Avinu, who integrated both of these מדות, was able to develop a Tzurah that reflected the complete שלמות of דמות הקב"ה – a reflection of true דמות.

We are meant to emulate this same integration process. Hashem is not merely a

G-d of חסד, nor merely a G-d of דין. Emulating Him, then, cannot mean perfecting a single מדה either. It requires cultivating a דרך in which each מדה has its proper place. Our roadmap to accomplish this is through the מצות. Yet, each מצוה alone is incomplete. The מצוה of giving צדקה only reflects one aspect of ה'. In this sense, each מצוה is only a single point, a piece of Chomer, not yet a Tzurah. What is required of us is והלכת בדרכיו – fashioning an entire דרך that connects all the dots. Avodas Hashem is never about the one mitzvah.

Seemingly random events become an established pattern once they occur three times. This is also true in a Halachic sense, with regard to a Chazakah. Avraham and Yitzchak, each on their own, remained separate points, limited in what they could achieve, and so each produced descendants who went on to become רשעים. Yaakov Avinu, by contrast, fathered only צדיקים, because he represented the third stage – the point at which a pattern finally emerges. And that pattern is a unity of all the parts, the מדה of Shalom.

This is precisely why סוכות is positioned where it is. On ראש השנה we are judged, and then on יום כיפור we are forgiven. Those are the ups and downs. סוכות is when we begin to develop and come into ourselves, building a picture of what a complete Tzurah is meant to look like. If in the סוכה we simply learn and daven, that is incomplete, we must also eat and sleep there. The סוכה invites both the lofty and the mundane within its walls, uniting all the parts of one's Avodas Hashem.

It is apropos that שלום, the מדה of balance and common ground, is the מדה of סוכות. Our goal on this יום טוב is to cultivate and discover that balance among all parts of the human experience, directing them לשם שמים. By taking all the complexities of life, untangling the strings that pull our focus in every direction, and aligning them toward the Ratzon Hashem, we are building the true Tzurah of והלכת בדרכיו – walking in the ways of Hashem.

May we all be Zocheh to understand this מדה of Yaakov Avinu, to hear this calling, to build our עבודת ה' by seeing the big picture of דמות ה', and to live a life of והלכת בדרכיו. ■



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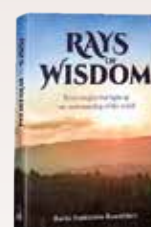
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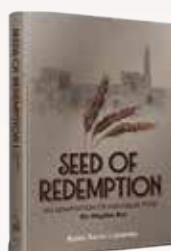
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