In this Issue

- **M'oray Ha'Aish** *by Rabbi Ari Kahn*
- **Mayanot** *by Rabbi Noson Weisz*
- **Parsha Potpourri** *by Rabbi Ozer Alport*



By Heaven

In Ha'azinu, the penultimate parashah of the Torah, Moshe delivers his message in song. Although the parashah is replete with poetic allusions, the starting point for Moshe's address is his call upon heaven to bear witness.

> Give ear, oh heavens and I will speak, and hear, oh earth, the words of my mouth. (D'varim 32:1)

This is not simply a case of poetic license; Moshe's opening statement is a crucial part of his message. In fact, in the verses that lead up to this poetic speech, Moshe gives notice of his intention to call upon heaven and earth as witnesses:

> Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call **heaven** and earth to **witness** against them. (D'varim 31:28)

This testimony was mentioned earlier, as well:

> I call **heaven** and earth to **witness** on this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live. (D'varim 30:19)

What is the purpose of calling heaven as a witness? The simple answer is that Moshe will soon be leaving the stage; he knows that his death is imminent, and that he will no longer be there to chastise the people should they go astray. Therefore, he informs them that there are other, more permanent witnesses who will always be there to testify in his stead.

Similarly, in his treatise on the Laws of Teshuva (repentance), Rambam refers to a different sort of "supernatural testimony:"

> What constitutes *teshuvah*? That a sinner should abandon his sins and remove them from his thoughts, resolving in his heart never to commit them again.... Similarly, he must regret the past, as [Jeremiah 31:18] states: "After I returned, I regretted." **He who knows all mysteries will testify that he will never return to this sin again** … He must verbally confess and state these matters which he resolved in his heart. (Rambam *Teshuva* 2:2)

Rambam states that one of the critical elements of *teshuva* is that "He who knows all mysteries," God Himself who alone knows the future behavior of each and every one of us, testifies that this particular person will never repeat this sin. This passage has been much debated, with some opining that it indicates Rambam's belief that the recidivist sinner's behavior voids his penitence. The sin of which he was originally guilty still stands, unforgiven and uncleansed, because his later repetition of the sin proves that his penitence was insincere. In this view, a sinner is forgiven only if he or she never backslides or regresses into old, die-hard behaviors. Only when God Himself is able to attest that the sin was never revisited is the sin expunged from the sinner's record.[1]

Rav Yisrael Salanter took issue with this interpretation, noting that if this were the case, the stages of repentance in Rambam's formulation would have appeared in a different sequence: The reference to Divine testimony should have followed the words "resolving in his heart, never to commit (that sin) again." Instead, the testimony of "He who knows all mysteries" regards the penitent's regret. Therefore, Rav Yisrael Salanter theorized, Rambam's statement regarding God's testimony is not telling us as much about the penitent's future behavior as it is about his or her current sincerity: A person must express **regret** for their sin with such sincerity that they are willing to call upon God as their witness. God's testimony regards the penitent's sincerity in the present tense, and does not attest to events that may or may not transpire in the future.[2] Therefore, if a person is sincere in their *teshuva*, they are forgiven – even if they stumble and fall again in the future.[3]

This reading of Rambam's comments reveals a far more realistic view of human nature: There are – and always have been – times when even sincere penitents succumb to the Evil Inclination. The Talmud teaches that part of the insidiousness of sin is that it becomes habitual.

> … R. Huna said: 'Once a person has committed a sin once and twice, it is permitted to him.' Permitted?! How could that occur to you? Rather, it appears to him as if it were permitted. (Talmud Bavli Yoma 86b)

While it may be the case that before a first offence a person undergoes an internal struggle, at a certain point the battle is won or lost and the struggle is over; the desire for immediate gratification overcomes the voice of long-term, logical thinking. The habitual sinner, on the other hand, no longer struggles; he creates a "new normal." However, if this person gathers the strength to do sincere *teshuva*, and, despite the sincerity of his or her remorse and resolve never to sin again nonetheless falls prey to the Evil Inclination, he or she will experience a new struggle – perhaps even more fierce than the first. This sin is not a case of "business as usual;" the habit of sin has not been allowed to dictate behavior. The burning desire he or she once had for that particular sin had already been extinguished through sincere *teshuva*. The more recent sin is the result of a new struggle, a new "fire," unrelated to the previous episode for which he or she had already been forgiven.[4]

Rabbi Soloveitchik focused on the significance of God's involvement in this process: By virtue of being descendants of the matriarchs and patriarchs, each and every Jew is endowed with a special holiness. This holiness was given full expression in the covenant of Mount Sinai. It is this covenant that insures that an individual's status as a Jew, and the status of the Jewish People as God's chosen nation, can never be forfeited.

However, in the book of D'varim another covenant was forged between God and each Jew as an individual. When a person transgresses, it is this covenant that is broken. Behavior that violates this covenant will result in the forfeit of the privileges that this covenant with God endows.

Sin has a way of corrupting us; beyond the bad behavior, it sullies the sinner's soul. *Teshuva* seeks to correct sin on two distinct levels, first by achieving forgiveness for the behavior itself, but also by cleansing the soul, freeing it from the burden with which sin has saddled it. Sin creates a distance between the two parties to the covenant; even when the misdeed itself is forgiven, the estrangement remains. Trust must be rebuilt; the sanctity of the covenant must be restored. By bringing God into the equation, by summoning God as a witness of one's repentance, we replicate the forging of the covenant, in a manner akin to renewing vows. Just as heaven was called as a witness by Moshe, so, too, must the penitent invoke Heaven as a witness when he or she renews the covenant. The process of *teshuva* described by Rambam, in which God testifies to the sincerity of the *teshuva*, creates a parallel with the testimony of heaven and earth Moshe invokes before his death. Both are intended to enable us to connect – or reconnect – with the holiness our souls sorely need.[5]

The Mishnah in which the Yom Kippur ritual is described in detail, Tractate Yoma, concludes with an optimistic teaching by Rabbi Akiva:

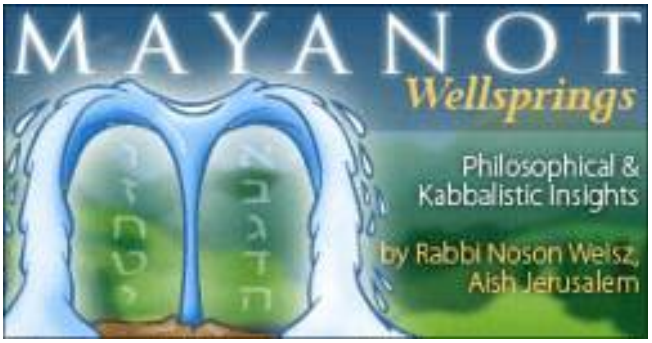
> Rabbi Akiva said: Fortunate are you, Israel! Who is it before whom you are purified? And who is it that purifies you? Your Father in Heaven, as it is said: 'And I will sprinkle pure water upon you and you shall be pure.' And it further says: 'The hope (*mikveh*) of Israel is the Almighty!' Just as the *mikveh* purifies the impure, so does the Holy One, blessed be He, purify Israel. (Mishna Yoma 8:9, Talmud Bavli 86b)

In this uplifting summary of the process of *teshuva*, Rabbi Akiva leads us away from the cold, impersonal accounting of sin and punishment, atonement and purity that is the world of jurisprudence; indeed, a judge would be likely to "throw the book" at the recidivist sinner. Instead, Rabbi Akiva draws a metaphor from the world of ritual purity. Surely, this metaphor supports a more forgiving understanding of *teshuva*: A person who immerses in the purifying waters of the mikveh will most certainly – inevitably, unavoidably – become impure again. And yet, this in no way impacts or diminishes the purity that is achieved in the present moment. So, too, a person who sins and repents – sincerely and wholeheartedly enough to invoke God as their

witness – is forgiven, even if they repeat their sin in the future.

Regret is a powerful tool; it allows us to erase the past. Standing before God and expressing regret not only liberates us from the past, it allows us to renew our personal covenant with God. Sincere *teshuva* creates a moment of purity, in which God purifies us as if with pure waters of the mikveh, leaving us cleansed and holy. Even if we subsequently stumble, and are in need of cleansing once again, that moment of purity is not sullied by the specter of whatever missteps lurk in the future.

1. See R' Yitzchak ben Nisim Rietbard, ***Beit Yitzchak***, Drasha for Yom Kippurim.
2. Rav Yisrael Salanter, ***Kochvei Ohr***; also see Rabbi Menachem Krakowsky, ***Avodat Hamelech*** Laws of Teshuva 2:2.
3. This position is taken by Rav Sa'adya Gaon, ***Ha'emunot v'Hadeyot*** maamar 5. It may also be the intention of the ***Sefer HaChinuch*** Mitzva 311.
4. R. Yaakov Lorberbaum (1770-1832), ***Nahalat Yaakov***; Rambam, Laws of Teshuva 2:2.
5. Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, ***Reshimot Shiurim***, Nedarim 8b.



Judgment Tempered With Mercy

For on this day he shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before the Lord shall you be cleansed. (Leviticus 16:30)

A day of atonement and cleansing does not feel like a day of judgment. Yet we know that the final seal on a person's fate for the following year is stamped on Yom Kippur. It is the final day of the Days of Awe, which are all days of judgment. In what way does Yom Kippur differ from the rest? What is the meaning of this day of judgment, on which decisions regarding life and death are finalized, and which is considered a day of spiritual cleansing?

Nachmanides (Vayikra, 23,24) explains that the difference between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur is that Rosh Hashana is a day of judgment that is tempered with mercy, whereas Yom Kippur is a day of mercy that is tempered with judgment. We shall attempt in this essay to plumb the deeper meaning of these words.

Let us begin our search for the quality of this day with the Talmud.

Rabbi Ami taught: "The numerical value of the word *haSatan*, meaning 'the Satan' in Hebrew is 364 (*heh*=5, *shin*=300, *tet*=9, *nun*=50, for a total of 364)." Explains the Ran: "The days of the solar year are 365; there is one day where the Satan has no permission to do his thing; that day is Yom Kippur" (Nedarim, 32a).

Does this mean that man has no free will on Yom Kippur? Obviously not! The Torah itself outlines the consequences of failing to observe the fast of Yom Kippur or the prohibition against work; obviously people have the free will to do as they wish on Yom Kippur as on any other day. What significance does the Satan's day off have for us? And for that matter who is the Satan?

WHO IS SATAN?

Reish Lakish taught: "Satan, the Evil Inclination, and the Angel of Death are all one and the same" (Baba Basra, 16a).

Thus the negative force is subdivided into three parts:

- it urges people to commit sins, (evil inclination);
- it then prosecutes them for performing these sins in the heavenly court, (the Satan);
- and finally carries out the sentence of death issued by the heavenly court as retribution for the commission of sins.

These negative phenomena are all elements that exist in the world as it is today. In the World to Come, there is no death. Just as there is no death, there is no Evil Inclination, and there is no sin and nothing to prosecute. Thus the entire personality of the Satan is one that exists only in our world. We all hope to experience the sphere of existence where the Satan will not be present at all.

This world has wars and tribulations. The Evil Inclination, the Satan, and the Angel of Death has power to rule in this world, but the World to Come has no tribulation or sighs or subjugation; it has no Evil Inclination, no Satan and no Angel of Death as it is written, "He will eliminate death forever and my Lord God will erase tears from all faces" (Isaiah, 25:8) (Ozer Midrashim, 146).

If the Satan has a day off on Yom Kippur, this means that Yom Kippur is really a day that belongs to the World to Come rather than this world. Indeed the Yom Kippur service attests to this in many ways. The one that is most germane to our topic is the following: The *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest, called out the forbidden God's name in public 10 times on Yom Kippur. The significance of this is clear from the following passage of the Talmud.

"And God will become King over all the earth; on that day God will be One and His Name will be One" (Zechriah, 14:9). Is He not One today? Rabbi Acha bar Chanina said: "The World to Come is not like this world. In this world upon hearing good tidings one says, 'Blessed are you etc. Who is good and does good,' and upon hearing bad tidings one says, 'Blessed are you etc. the True Judge.' But in the World to Come all the blessings will be, 'Who is good and does good.'"

"And His name will be One" -- is His name not One today? Rabbi Nachman bar Yizchok said: "The World to Come is not like this world. In this world God's Name is written with the letters Y/H/V/H, whereas it is pronounced with the letters A/D/N/Y (spelling *Adonay*, meaning Lord or Master), but in the World to Come it will be all one. It will be both pronounced with the letters Y/H/V/H and written with the letters Y/H/V/H" (Pesachim 50a).

The *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur was referring to God by the name He has in the next world, not by the name He goes by in this one. The Satan has power in our world, and therefore God can only be described here as A/D/N/Y, the Lord and Master, whereas in the next world, where the negative force of the Satan does not exist, God is clearly the only Being.

Thus the first point about Yom Kippur is that it is a slice of time that belongs to the next world rather than this one. By fulfilling the commandments of the day Jews are elevated temporarily to the heady existence of the World to Come where there is no Satan.

13 ATTRIBUTES OF MERCY

The next point concerns the 13 Attributes of Mercy. One of the things we do on Yom Kippur in each of the prayers is recite the 13 Attributes of Mercy several times. The recitation begins each time with a special emphasis on the introductory phrase, which is repeated separately by the reader and the congregation each time the 13 Attributes of Mercy are recited, as though it was a significant phenomenon in and of itself, not merely an introduction to what follows: "God passed before him and proclaimed..." (Exodus 34:6).

Rabbi Yochanan said: "If this wouldn't be expressly written in the Torah, we would not even be allowed to think it. This teaches you that God wrapped Himself in a prayer shawl like the leader of the congregation (who is a messenger of the entire congregation) and showed Moses a method of prayer. He told him, "Whenever Israel sins, they should pray in this manner in front of Me, and I will forgive them" (Talmud, Rosh Hashana, 17b).

But what is so unthinkable about this? How does this differ from other matters that God taught Moses?

Jewish tradition offers the following interpretation. The difference between this world and the next is based on the manifestation of God that is present in each. God created this world and manifests Himself in it with His name *Elohim*. It is for this reason that the Divine Name *Elohim* is interpreted to refer to the Attribute of Justice. This world is a place where the Satan is also allowed to have power, where the fierce battle between good and evil is constantly raging, and where there is judgment.

In the World to Come, God manifests Himself under the name YHVH. In the World to Come, there is no evil, there is no battle with the Satan, and therefore no judgment.

Although we refer to the world in which the name YHVH reigns supreme as the World to Come, implying that it follows this one we live in now and will only come into being at some future time, this is actually a misnomer. This is true only from our point of view, for we must pass through the travail and battle of this world in order to get to that one. But from God's point of view that world comes first. It is closer to His Absolute Unity and in the process of creation when God assumed His mantle of Creator, He was manifest first as a single entity that is the sole source of all being, with no negative anti-force in existence. From God's point of view, the World to Come already exists.

HIDDEN LIGHT

Because He wanted man to work for his reward, He hid part of the brightness of the light shed by His Presence and made possible the existence of an anti-force in order to provide an arena for man's exercise of free will. From God's point of view, this sphere of revelation where the existence

of an anti-force is possible, represents a second, lower level of existence. This is the separate world in which we live at present, where the holy name *Elohim* is the proper designation for the revelation of God's presence that is manifest.

As we have explained however, Yom Kippur is really a slice of time cut out of the World to Come. In order to achieve this, the manifestation of God in the next world must temporarily replace the manifestation of God in this one. There must be a divine presence that sheds such an overpowering light that the forces of the Satan are temporarily shut down.

On Yom Kippur ordinary reality is pushed out of the way. The divine presence usually present in our world that gives shape to our ordinary reality is intensified and brightened. Since the presence of the anti-force of the Satan is inversely proportional to the brightness and intensity of God's divine presence, as the light of God's presence intensifies, the presence of the Satan is diminished. The voice of the anti-force is turned down. The only voice that is heard throughout the world is the benign voice of the 13 Attributes of Mercy.

We now have made two points. Yom Kippur corresponds to a level of being that is really appropriate to the World to Come, and we access this level of being through our prayers by reciting the 13 Attributes of Mercy.

ROSH HASHANA VS. YOM KIPPUR

Let us now look at Nachmanides once again. We explained in the essay on Rosh Hashana that even though the judgment of Rosh Hashana involves the decisions that are made regarding a person's life in this world, these decisions are reached by determining his status in the next world. The basis of consideration on Rosh Hashana of a person's suitability for the next world is his performance in this world.

But this world is the one in which the Satan has a say. He is allowed to prosecute and state his case. The decision whether the person belongs in the next world can only be reached after giving full hearing to what the prosecution has to say, and being able to present an adequate defense.

Yom Kippur begins from the opposite direction. Suitability for the next world is judged in terms of the next world itself, where there is no Satan, and therefore no prosecution. There is no need to present a defense to establish suitability. Thus one is automatically judged suitable. This part is the mercy.

The judgment of Yom Kippur is a consideration of feasibility. On the assumption that a person is suitable for admission into the next world, is it feasible to help him attain entry there given the way he is in this world and given the fact that he has free will? Is it possible to provide him with a life in this world that will guide him into achieving entry to the next one?

The matters under consideration on both Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur are identical. The difference is the starting point from which they are being considered.

On Rosh Hashana, which is a day of judgment mitigated by mercy, a person must establish his right to be present in the next world by answering

the objections of the prosecution. One must pass through the dark corridors of justice before he can bask in the sunshine of mercy. On Yom Kippur one is armed with the benefit of the decisions of mercy before he is subjected to the harsh scrutiny of justice.

INTEGRATION OF THE SOUL

Let us attempt to bring these ideas down to earth a little more. Jewish tradition teaches us that a person has five levels to his soul. The three main ones are:

- *nefesh* which is in his body,
- the *neshama* which is the point where he is joined with God,
- in between, there is the *ruach* which unites the *nefesh* with the *neshama*.

The *neshama*, which is with God, is in the next world already. The *neshama* is at the root of being, the *nefesh* at the furthest extremity.

As long as all the parts of his soul constitute a single integrity, no matter how porous such an integrity may be, a person stretches all the way to the next world. He is a single entity at all levels. He belongs in the World to Come in some fashion. What he needs to do is to straighten out the contradictions and inconsistencies between the various levels of his soul till they fit together in perfect harmony.

But what if he is a split personality, a spiritual schizophrenic?

His *nefesh* is so far away from expressing the personality of his *neshama*, that for all intents and purposes there is no correspondence between the two. As all the levels of the soul are fully alive in themselves even when considered independently of each other, such a person really breaks into two people. He is one person down here in this world, on the level of his *nefesh*, and a totally different person at the level of the *neshama*, which is with God in the World to Come.

Such being the case, he is treated by God as two separate people who have nothing to do with each other. The *nefesh* being of this world as it is in the body has one fate and the *neshama* another.

The commandments of Yom Kippur are two:

- to refrain from any sort of work as on Shabbat, and
- to fast (the rabbis extended the commandment to fast to include washing, wearing shoes and sexual intercourse).

The commandments of Yom Kippur are designed to demonstrate that our *neshama* and our *nefesh* are parts of a single integral unit that is inseparable. Our *nefesh* behaves in the same way as our *neshama*. It neither eats or drinks, or engages in intercourse or labor. It sits the entire Yom Kippur in the synagogue, engaged in prayer and basking in God's divine presence.

Integration of the soul is called teshuva, which means "to return" in Hebrew. Through teshuva we return to ourselves. As long as we are ourselves there is no need to return to God. We are already fully united with His presence.

A day of atonement can be a day of judgment after all. Atonement allows the various parts of the soul to integrate and return to each other once again. When we succeed in this endeavor, the

united soul is automatically assured of being able to pass judgment.

Atonement, spiritual purity and judgment really do fit together very well.



Scapegoat

One of the most remarkable elements of Yom Kippur in ancient times, when the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, was the ritual of "the Two Goats."

Two indistinguishable members of that species were brought before the High Priest, who placed a randomly-pulled lot on the head of each animal. One lot read "to God" and the other "to Azazel" – the name of a steep cliff in a barren desert.

As the Torah prescribes, the first goat was solemnly sacrificed in the Temple, attention given to every detail of the offering; the second was taken to the cliff and thrown off, dying unceremoniously before even reaching the bottom.

Some moderns might find the fates of both goats troubling, but there are depths to Jewish rituals of which they don't dream.

I lay no claim to conversance with those truly deep meanings. But pondering the "two goats" ritual before Yom Kippur (and anticipating its recollection during the day's prayer-service), a thought occurs, and it may bear particular import for our times.

> Our existence is either a result of intent, or of accident. Our lives are meaningful, or they are not.

There are two ways to view human life, as mutually exclusive as they are fundamental. Our existence is either a result of intent, or of accident. And a corollary follows directly: Either our lives are meaningful, or they are not.

If the roots of our existence ultimately lie in pure randomness, there can be no more meaning to good and bad actions than to good or bad movies; no more import to right and wrong than to right and left. Human beings remain but evolved animals, their Mother Theresas and Adolf Hitlers alike. To be sure, we might conceive a rationale for establishing societal norms, but a social contract is only a practical tool, not a moral imperative; it is, in the end, artificial. Only if there is a Creator in the larger picture can there be ultimate import to human life, placing it on a plane meaningfully above that of mosquitoes.

The Torah, of course, is based on the foundation – and in fact begins with an account – of a Divinely directed creation; and its most basic message is the meaningfulness of human life. Most of us harbor a similar, innate conviction.

Yet some resist that innate feeling, and adopt the perspective that what we can perceive with our

physical senses is all that there is in the end. The apparent randomness of nature, in that approach, leaves no place for Divinity. It is not a difficult position to maintain; the Creator may be well evident to those of us primed to perceive Him, but He has not left clear fingerprints on His Creation.

Might those two diametric worldviews be somehow reflected in the Yom Kippur ritual?

The goat that becomes a sacrifice on the Temple altar might symbolize recognition of the idea that humans are beholden to something greater. And the counter-goat, which finds its fate in a desolate, unholy place, would then allude to the perspective of life as pointless, lacking higher purpose or meaning.

It's not an unthinkable speculation, especially in light of how the Azazel-goat seems to be described by the Torah – so strangely – as carrying away the sins of the people.

The traditional Jewish commentaries all wonder at that concept. Some, including Maimonides, interpret it to mean that the people will be spurred by the dispatching of the Azazel-goat to repent.

If, indeed, the Azazel-goat alludes to the mindset of meaninglessness, we might approach an understanding of the inspiration born of its dispatching. The animal's being "laden with the sins" of the people might refer to the recognition that sin stems from insufficient recognition of how meaningful in fact are our lives. The Talmudic rabbi Resh Lakish in fact said as much when he observed that "A person does not sin unless a spirit of madness enters him" [Sotah 3a].

And so the sending off of the Azazel-goat could be seen as an acknowledgement of the idea that sin's roots lie in the madness born of our self-doubt. And those who witnessed its dispatchment might well have been spurred by that thought to then turn and consider the other goat, the one sacrificed in dedication to God. So stirred on the holiest day of the Jewish year, they might then have been able to better commit themselves to re-embracing the grand meaningfulness that is a human life.

We may lack the Two Goats ritual today, but we can certainly try all the same to absorb that eternally timely thought.

© 2010 AM ECHAD RESOURCES

Get more great parsha content: aish.com/weekly-torah-portion