

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

If, when enacting a marriage, a conditional statement is added, the condition must be met for the "kiddushin" (usually translated as "engagement") to be valid. Nevertheless, if the condition made is that "I am righteous," even if he is completely wicked the "kiddushin" is considered valid, as perhaps he mentally committed himself to repent (Kiddushin 49b). Although it is not definitely valid (as indicated by the "perhaps"), and therefore if she then accepts "kiddushin" from someone else she must get divorced from both before marrying anybody else (or either of them), the fact that she must get a divorce at all from this completely wicked person (before marrying anybody) shows that one who has decided to repent without having actually repented qualifies as being a "righteous person" (thereby fulfilling the stipulation).

But how can just committing to repent turn someone wicked into someone righteous? Isn't there a whole process that must be followed before one is considered to have done teshuva (repented)? How can this person be considered righteous before his sins have been forgiven? Especially if the sins committed include something like theft, where the stolen property is still in the thief's possession at the time of the "kiddushin." Shouldn't full amends have to be made in order to consider the condition fulfilled? And since the condition wasn't that "I will become a righteous person" but that "I am already a righteous person," even if he becomes the most righteous person in the world, since he wasn't at the time of the "kiddushin," how was the condition fulfilled?

Last week I discussed the Ramban's approach to G-d still "hiding His face" even after the nation recognized that their suffering was due to having turned their backs on G-d (Devarim 31:17-18). Since they did not complete the teshuva process, they were not yet worthy of being redeemed (so G-d's face was still "hidden"). Nevertheless, because they started the process by recognizing that they must change their ways, they were no longer being actively punished. Their "hirhur teshuva," recognition that they had to improve, "stopped the clock" so to speak, giving them a respite from their suffering as G-d waits for the teshuva process to be completed. After the teshuva process has been completed, the sins are completely wiped

away, as if they were never done. Since there aren't any sins, they should be considered completely righteous. And they are. But from what point are they considered "righteous?" It couldn't be from before they started doing teshuva, while they were sinning (even if it is now as if they never sinned), as although any impression left by the sin has been erased, they were actually doing the sinful actions (and being punished for them). Is it only from the point when the teshuva was completed? If they weren't sinning from the time they committed to change, and, once the teshuva was done, the sins are removed retroactively, it would seem that they should be considered righteous from the time the teshuva process started, not from when it was completed.

This can be applied to the groom who made his engagement conditional upon his righteousness. Although he hasn't completed the teshuva process yet, once he completes it he will be considered to have been righteous, retroactively, from the time he started it. Therefore, as long as he started doing teshuva before the "kiddushin," it is valid, since, as it turns out, at the time he made the condition he was already righteous.

This seems to be the focal point of Rosh Hashana. Despite it being the Day of Judgment, we don't focus on achieving repentance; we focus on proclaiming the Creator as our King. We recognize His dominion over us and the entire world, and that we are being judged by Him. We recognize our shortcomings but don't seem to agonize over them just yet (we'll have a whole week to do that). Instead, we come home and enjoy a festive meal, temporarily putting aside the knowledge that we must change our ways. Isn't it a bit surreal to recognize that our fate for the entire year hangs in the balance, that we must make major improvements in our lives to come anywhere close to what G-d expects and demands of us, while, at the same time, proceeding with life as normal, eating, drinking, socializing, etc? The key, however, is not to change overnight, it is to recognize that we must change, and commit to doing so. After deciding to improve, we can then lament the poor choices made prior to this decision, and try to achieve forgiveness by Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashana, though, is for "hirhur teshuva," the decision to "stop the clock" and start anew. Then, when we complete the process on Yom Kippur, the decrees made on Rosh Hashana will have

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been made for someone who was already righteous, rather than having to try getting the decrees of a sinner torn up and rewritten. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“May all your creatures be blended together in one united bond to do Your will with a whole heart...Our G-d and G-d of our ancestors, rule over the entire world in your glory...May every creature know that You were its Producer, let every creature know that You were its creator..." Rosh HaShanah Amidah Prayer.

Rosh Hashanah is our New Year's Day, the anniversary of the creation of the world. But when we think of all the possible symbols of this awesome day, we have to ask why a primitive ram's horn is the focus of our celebration of creation. Would not a majestic mountain or a breakthrough sunrise, or even a magnificent product of human achievement, be a far better way to mark the glory of creation than an animal's horn?

Furthermore, if sounding the ram's horn is the essential mitzvah of Rosh Hashana, why does its triplicate sounds of tekiyah, truah, tekiyah (straight, staccato, straight) derive from the laws of Jubilee (Lev. 25:9)? What does the Jubilee year have to do with the creation of the world?

Thirdly, we sound so many times and in so many permutations the three sounds of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah that the Sages of the Talmud query: "Why do we blow straight sounds (tekiyah) and broken, staccato sounds (t'ruah, nine sobs and also shvarim, three sighs, and also sighs and sobs together) both when the congregation is "seated" (after Torah reading) as well as when the congregation is standing (during the Amidah Additional Standing Prayer)? In order to confound Satan!" (B.T. Rosh HaShanah 16a, 16b). What does Satan have to do with all our shofar sounds?

Fourthly, we derive the necessity to sound one-hundred shofar blasts, and indeed the very definition of t'ruah, from the mother of Sisera, the Midianite general whose mother sobbed through the lattice work of her window as she watched the returning survivors of the vanquished Midianite army, and did not see her son

amongst them (B.T. Rosh Hashanah 33b). Why link the shofar command of Rosh Hashanah to the sobs of the mother of our arch-enemy?

Fifthly, one view of the Mishnah prohibits using as the shofar the horn of the "cow" because additional layers grow on to that horn each year, making it appear like several horns ("gildi, gilde." B.T. Rosh HaShanah 26 a). What is the problem with a more enhanced horn as a result of the additions?

And finally, why is the shofar blown by one individual and rest of us listen? The mitzvah could just as well have been for everyone to bring his own shofar in the way that a lulav is brought to shul, and everyone would blow the shofar together.

I believe that the answer to all of our questions may be found in a brief incident recorded in Talmud Gittin (52a): "There was a husband and wife in whose home also lived Satan; every Friday evening the couple would get involved in a loud and angry dispute. Rabbi Meir moved in with them, and after three Friday evenings - when he served as referee-peace-maker - he succeeded in bringing peace to the home. He then heard Satan crying, "woe is me, Rabbi Meir has expelled me from this house." We see from this story that Satan represents strife, disunity, dissension - the causeless hatred which brought about the destruction of our Holy Temple and which is truly the root of all evil.

Rosh HaShanah is our anniversary of the creation of the world, a world whose creatures emerged from the womb of our One Divine Presence (Shekhinah), a world which must be united if humanity is to endure.

Hence, the laws of shofar blowing are derived from the laws of jubilee. There is no greater time of unity and peace than the 50th year, when all the lands return to their original owners, when slaves are freed and debts are rescinded. It is a year virtually devoid of social divisions, when distinctions between landowners and serfs, master and slave, rich and poor, disappear. It is a year of social unity.

Of course we add all possible permutations to unite all the differing customs as to whether the "truah" is a sighing sound, a sobbing sound, or both together after all, the most strident and even vicious arguments breakout among observant Jews who criticize those with a differing custom as transgressing the law (witness Mitnagdim vs. Hassidim in the 19th Century). R. Abbahu of Kesari certainly confounded Satan when he brought all the customs together by including all possible permutations in the sounding of the shofar (B.T. Rosh Hashanah 34 a)

And it's not only unity with the Jewish people, but a oneness between the Jewish people and the nations of the world which we must strive for on Rosh Hashanah. The Talmud, in Rosh Hashana, quotes a verse in Shoftim as evidence that trua means a sobbing sound, yevava in Hebrew. "The mother of Sisera

looked out at the window and sobbed through the lattice" (Judges 5:28). The Jerusalem Talmud says she cried 100 times, and that's why we blow the shofar a total of 100 times. Sisera may be the enemy of the Jewish people, but the pain a mother feels when her son is killed transcends Jewish-gentile divisions. Rosh HaShanah reminds us of the evil of war, the unity of all peoples in their love for their children and their desire for life, and the necessity for peace in the world.

And even beyond the unity of all humans, is the unity of all creatures. And the shofar, after all is said and done, is the horn of an animal, a ram. In the sound of the shofar we hear how the very desire for life is something irreducible; it combines and connects and unites every creature of the world. And if Rav Aharon Karlier once taught that anyone who cannot say Shabbat Shalom to a dog (or a ram) doesn't understand the message of the Sabbath, that is certainly true of Rosh HaShanah, the anniversary of the Creation of the world. The universal symbol of the ram's horn must itself be united, without any appearance of separations or divisions. Yes, this is the day when we must blend together in unity with every creature to do G-d's will with a united heart in order to unify a fractured world. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

The epic poem of Haazinu (Devarim 32:1-43) has an introduction (31:14-30) and a summary (32:44-47), both written by Moshe. Studying these passages leads to the conclusion that there are two ways of looking at the goal of the poem, and that the two approaches are radically different from each other.

The introduction to the poem defines its objective very well. It is clear to the Creator of the world that Bnei Yisrael will sin in the future and will be punished very severely. "And this nation will rise up and follow the G-ds of the strangers in the land where they will go, and they will leave me and disobey the covenant which I made with them... And they will be devoured, and many evil and varied misfortunes will befall them." [31:16-17]. Moshe tells Bnei Yisrael that the process of sin and punishment cannot be stopped. "I call on the heaven and the earth to bear witness about them, for I know that after my death that you will become corrupt and you will turn away from the path which I have commanded you. And the evil of the final days will happen to you." [31:28-29]. Moshe's certainty is based not only on G-d's words to him but on simple logic. "...For I know your rebelliousness and your stiff neck. Even while I still live among you, you continued to rebel against G-d, and also after my death." [31:27]. In view of all this, the role to be played by the epic poem is clear: "And it will happen, when these many

misfortunes happen to you, that this poem will make a declaration as a witness, for it will never be forgotten by their descendents" [31:21]. The poem is dedicated to the harsh times after the sin and the punishment, and it will provide some consolation in that everything that happened to Bnei Yisrael was expected in advance, such that there is hope for the distant future.

On the other hand, in the summary of the poem at the end a different goal is presented. "Pay attention to all the things that I testify for you today, and you shall teach your descendents to observe all the commandments of this Torah. For this is not something that is vain for you, it is your very life. And in this way you will increase the number of days on the land which you are crossing the Jordan to possess." [32:46-47]. This implies the role of the poem is not only aimed at the distant future but that it is relevant for the present too: Perhaps the misfortunes described in the poem cannot be prevented in the long run, but every generation has the free choice to observe the commandments. And every generation can extend its stay on the land as a reward for observing the commands of the Torah. The epic poem is not only geared towards the distant future. Bnei Yisrael are asked to internalize its message immediately.

Thus, from the two statements made by Moshe, one before the poem and one afterwards, it is clear that the poem has two main objectives: It serves as a consolation after terrible misfortunes and also as an incentive to observe the commandments of the Torah, which can delay the onset of the troubles described in the poem for a specific generation.

The Poem of Redemption

by Rabbi Chaim Fogel, Rabbi of Emunah College and Midrashat Techeilet

The epic poem of Haazinu has a unique and special significance. The Ramban explains that the passage includes a summary of everything that has happened and will happen to the nation of Yisrael, from the time it was formed until the very end of days. This begins from the time that "G-d gave the nations their heritage" [Devarim 32:8] until "the other nations will praise His people" [32:43]. Here is what he writes: "This epic poem, which presents true and faithful testimony, explains in detail everything that will happen to us. It begins with the kindness that the Almighty did for us ever since He took us as His own, and continues with the good things He did for us in the desert, and that He gave us possession of lands belonging to great and powerful nations... And the poem states that in the end G-d will avenge those who oppress the nation and repay those who hate them... It is clear that this is a promise with respect to the future redemption... This epic poem is a clear promise of the future redemption." [Ramban, Commentary on Devarim 32:40]. As we well know, the angry prophecies and the strong rebukes

were fulfilled in full during the harsh times that we experienced in the past.

The phrase in the poem, "I have struck and I will bring a cure" [32:39], refers to two time periods. The first is the era of fear and misfortune, when the Almighty struck us terrible blows because of our sins. The second is the era of healing, leading up to the time of the fulfillment in full of the verse, "And I will take hold of justice in my hand, I will return vengeance to my enemies" [32:41].

The way to achieve full healing is to precede it with repentance and begging for forgiveness, in the same sequence as appears in the Shemona Essrei prayer. The root of teshuva, repentance, is not only individual remorse but first and foremost repentance of the community, preceded by the nation of Yisrael returning to our land. This is the first stage of our healing, as we are told by the prophet Yechezkel: "And I will take you out of the other nations, and I will gather you from all the other lands and bring you to your land" [36:24]. And this is to be followed by the stage of internal repentance, as is written, "And I will sprinkle holy water over you, and you will be purified... and I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you" [36:25-26].

In our generation we are experiencing great instability, which is part of the cure involved in the promise, "I have struck and I will bring a cure." In this season of repentance, we must wake up and return to the root of the repentance of Bnei Yisrael, with the nation returning to its holy source in the land, with complete and absolute faith in the Almighty.

RABBI ZVI MILLER

The Salant Foundation

The Torah (Shulchan Aruch) advises us to approach Rosh HaShanah with absolute confidence that HaShem will find us meritorious. Therefore, we trust that we will emerge from the day in great happiness and joy.

However, Rosh HaShanah is a day of judgement. All of our deeds are weighed and our fate is decided for "life or death." We know that we have not always done our best. If so, why are we advised to assume a confident attitude?

The following parable sheds light on this question: Once a king invited all of the citizens to attend a royal banquet. He had his chefs prepare the most delicious and plentiful meals. Moreover, the king himself attended the banquet and sat amongst the people-on his golden throne. The good king listened to everyone's request and granted whatever they desired.

So too, on Rosh HaShanah, HaShem, prepares for us a spiritual banquet and invites us to attend. He reveals Himself, dwelling amongst us in the great light of Rosh HaShanah. He extends His mercy and love to all of His people, as we say in our Rosh

HaShanah prayer, "Who is like You, Merciful Father, Who compassionately remembers all of His creations for life." The understanding that HaShem is our Merciful Father, Who love us, and Whose only desire is to grant us every blessing, is the true knowledge of "knowing HaShem." When we approach Rosh HaShanah with this awareness, we will be confident that HaShem, our merciful Father, will find us worthy for life.

Our recognition of HaShem's goodness, mercy, and kindness is the very purpose of our existence. The attainment of this true understanding of HaShem- is the very factor-that merits our being pleasing to HaShem!

May we reflect upon HaShem's unconditional love for us, His unabated mercy, and His unceasing kindness. As a result of our "knowing HaShem" we will be confident that He will find us meritorious in judgement-and bless us and all Israel with countless blessings of peace, joy, and deliverance!

TODAY: Envision yourself emerging from Rosh HaShanah with great joy, closeness to HaShem, and countless blessings! ©2007 Rabbi Z. Miller & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI SIMCHA BARNETT

Sub-Prime Meltdown

Over the last few months Wall Street has been on a roller coaster ride, with the markets gyrating wildly in response to the sub-prime mortgage melt-down. World central banks have stepped in to add liquidity to the credit markets, and talk of a savings and loan style bail-out has been bandied about in Washington.

As a former investment banker, I find the financial details of the crisis fascinating, but what intrigues me even more is the psychological lessons that we can learn about human nature from this unfolding debacle.

It seems that mankind knows no limits to the lengths it will go to hide from reality, when it is more comfortable-or in this case lucrative- to believe instead in some self-styled illusion. And the more you look at the unraveling story, it seems that from all sides parties with a variety of interests came together to build a house of cards, which would inevitably have to fall, because it was built upon air.

Credit was easy, as the Fed pumped money into the economy in response to the Asian financial crisis of the late '90s, the bursting of the tech-stock bubble, and after 9/11. The flood of overseas savings and easy credit fueled a surging housing market and leveraged buyouts with seemingly no end in sight. In stepped investment banks, hedge funds and rating agencies who designed and pushed a whole new genre of securities backed by these sub-prime mortgages.

Standards for getting a mortgage were in free-fall, yet because house prices kept rising, defaults were low, so rating agency's boosted the credit rating on the

bonds above their realistic risk levels. Everybody held onto a piece of this dream: home owners, speculators, mortgage companies, investment banks, rating agencies, and a whole host of their buy-side clients.

The only thing that could keep this financial Titanic afloat was a continual rise in the price of housing. But housing prices had been going up steadily for a decade. A decline was inevitable. Yet the longer the market surged, the greater and more risky mortgages were written and packaged to be sold on Wall Street. Fees and greed kept the blinders on everyone. I can almost hear the crash!

All this tells us something really important about life. We have an incredible propensity to deny realities that we would rather not consider, in favor of holding onto illusions that make us feel good- or line our pockets. And we easily forget the last time we were burned by the same affliction. Wasn't it just six years ago that Wall Street was burned last when the dot.com bubble burst with just the same type of wishful thinking?

Another point seems to be worth making. Sometimes denying reality involves purposely looking away from facts that will upset the apple cart. A libertarian website, The Daily Reckoning, made the following observation: "The Law of Stupidity tells us that useful information declines by the square of the distance from its Source. As the lending business became more 'sophisticated' and layered, lenders and borrowers took leave of each other. Finally they forgot that they had ever met. It didn't matter, as long as the fees kept piling up at every stage of the transaction."

On Rosh Hashana, we hear the shofar blow. It is a call to wake us up from our slumber, from our dreams. It beckons us to take a good look at the various aspects of our lives, and to save ourselves from the illusions that have seduced us, sometimes through complacency, sometimes from less pure motivations.

Why is it better ultimately to live in reality than in comfortable illusion? It's like the kid who thinks that his greatest pleasure will be eating the five-pound jar of jelly beans after the baby sitter has fallen asleep on the couch. However, the short-live pleasure pales in comparison to the eventual pain he will experience in the emergency room later that night. When our illusions get smashed on the jagged rocks of reality, the result is pain-physical, emotional and spiritual.

Keeping our eyes on reality, in all aspects of our lives is our best opportunity for real, enduring pleasure-without unnecessary pain. The shofar calls us back to Reality. It also calls us back to our Source; into a renewed relationship with our Creator. The unraveling of the mortgage bubble began with the growing distance between lender and borrower. Our own spiritual sub-prime meltdown also begins with a distance from our source-G-d.

We have strayed from His mandate, from His Torah, from our relationship. The shofar beckons us to

reconsider how this relationship has frayed, and how much we lose because of it. The shofar is a cry from deep within to be more. To be better. To love living in the beautiful, solid, happy world of Reality. To come home. © 2007 Rabbi S. Barnett & aish.org

RABBI YAAKOV SALOMON

My Life List

I know of 67 people who would like to build an igloo. There are at least 4050 people who say that they intend to "be a better friend" than they have been. And 5996 others plan to start waking up when their alarm clocks goes off. These are just three of the items that members list as life goals on the Web site 43Things.com. In the past three years, more than 1.2 million idealists have signed up and posted their customized lists of things they would like to accomplish on this world before they die. Sky diving ranks 24th in popularity, but the leading life goal is quite predictable: weight loss.

The idea of having people ponder their mortality and then charting their life's road map has truly arrived. Besides the millions of people who publish their lists on Web sites like the one mentioned, millions more are buying and reading best sellers like, "1001 Books You Must Read Before You Die," "101 Things To Do Before You Turn 40," and, "1000 Places to See Before You Die."

A film by Rob Reiner, "Bucket List," about two terminal cancer patients who set out on a series of life-list adventures, is due out in December. And Visa is running a popular ad campaign called, "Things to Do While You're Alive."

What's going on? Why are people becoming so contemplative, goal oriented, and focused on dreams of accomplishment? It's hard to say, but it does seem that people are coming to terms with the reality that life is precious, finite, and made for productivity.

Of course, not everyone's definition of achievement is the same. The lists are testimony to that. Living with the head hunters of New Guinea, climbing the Matterhorn during a blizzard, or retracing the route of Marco Polo through all of the Middle East, Asia, and China may be fulfillment to some, while changing your name for a year, pulling 101 great pranks, or re-structuring your closets at home may be dreams come true to someone else. No matter. To each his own. People just seem to want to get things done. And making these Life To Do lists seems to help.

The most famous success story of this genre is John G-ddard. When he was but 15 years of age, John took out a plain yellow pad one day, wrote the words, "My Life List," at the top and proceeded to compose a collection of 127 goals.

These were not simple or easy goals. They included climbing the world's major mountains, exploring from source to mouth the longest rivers of the

world, piloting the world's fastest aircraft, running a mile in five minutes and reading the entire Encyclopedia Britannica. Now in his 70's, this real-life Indiana Jones claims to have accomplished 109 of these quests, and has logged an impressive list of records in achieving them.

But while the recent development of considering one's objectives and designing a plan of action may be trendy, or at least newsworthy to the general populace, it is nothing new to Judaism. In fact, it happens to be the hallmark of the annual process that Jews everywhere should be engaged in every year before Rosh Hashana. It is an integral part of the teshuva (return) procedure that enjoins us to make a cheshbon hanefesh, a spiritual inventory of what our time, effort and resources should be invested in.

Ideally, this soulful stock-taking should really be a constant, ongoing, almost daily process where, with the proper awareness, a person would always know what his Life List looks like and what items need some additional attention. Those who live their lives with that level of cognizance are always seeking to better themselves and are getting the most out of life.

But sadly, you and I know few people whose lives are permeated with that kind of dedication to self-improvement. Somewhat more common are those who take advantage of the Holiday season and, at least once a year, give some pause to what they would like to accomplish.

So, if the reflective mood hits you, and you want to take this seriously, the first step is to take out that yellow pad of paper and write, "My Life List" on it. But be forewarned. You may find this very simple, seemingly trivial task quite difficult. It means that you are embarking on something potentially sublime, and that can be very scary. But the good news is that once this terribly uncomplicated task is accomplished, you've already overcome a major obstacle and you are on your way.

The next step is to write-just write-any idea that comes to mind. Don't filter and don't falter-just write. The ideas may seem silly, impractical, superficial, or out of reach, but this is not the time to sharpen your editing skills. If it strikes you that you might want to shoot pictures at a friend's wedding, buy a high-powered telescope or invite 50 people for Shabbat dinner-write it down.

After you have compiled this unedited list of your potential life goals, put the list away for at least 24 hours. You need a full day of breathing space before you can return to the job. Now examine the list again with a fine eye and delete the impossible stuff. Imagine that your best friend is reading your list. Which items would he/she immediately declare as undoable? Take only those out. Finally, feel free to add any additional goals that strike your fancy now. But allow me to add one more point.

People who are sincere about using this tool to increase their chances of accomplishing more in life, should take advantage of the opportunity by making a majority of their targets truly meaningful ones.

There may be nothing wrong with becoming a world class sudoku player, learning how to whistle while standing on your head, or memorizing the lyrics to every Lynryd Skynyrd song ever recorded. And perhaps a few of those "less serious" objectives should be included on your list. But primarily, you don't want to "waste" your choices on the frivolous or the mundane.

Take these examples, chosen from actual Life Lists. I guess learning jujitsu has merit, but why would owning a coyote qualify as a goal in life? Alphabetizing my CD collection is probably a functional thing to do, as is learning how to weld, but are they really dreams that must be realized? Some people yearn to floss more often, or to type with ten fingers-nothing wrong with that, I suppose, but appearing in a Tarzan movie? Or lighting a match with a .22 rifle?

Rosh Hashana is swiftly approaching. It is a time when Jews worldwide seek ways to crown the Almighty as the true king of the Universe. Reflecting on your purpose on this planet and then actualizing your quest to reach that end may just be the greatest way possible to coronate Him.

Tithe your earnings, intensify your prayers, call your folks and your grandparents, keep Kosher for a month, affix a mezuzah to your door, donate blood, attend a lecture series, have a catch with your son once a week, bring soup to Nursing Home residents, make a date with your soul, learn how to say, "I was wrong,"-and practice it, drive with courtesy, smile- the list could go on forever. But we won't go on forever. Maybe now would be a good time to get started.

Forget the igloo and the coyote. You've got important things to do.

Have a wonderful... and productive new year.
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DR. NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

It helps to begin with some background information. In parshas Emor, the Torah presents many halachos which pertain to the Yomim Tovim. As we would expect, that material includes a section on Sukkos. That section, in turn, includes the halachos of the "arba minim"-the "Four Species"-i.e., the esrog and the items that we take with it.

The Torah presents these mitzvos with the following pasuk [Vayikra, 23:40]: "U'lekach'tem la'chem ba'yom ha'rishon..." [ArtScroll: "You shall take... on the first day"]. This sounds like a straightforward message, which ends further discussion of the pasuk. But Chazal?in Medrash Tanchuma on this pasuk-see the pasuk's words as conveying another level of meaning. Reacting to the pasuk's mention of the "first day", the

Medrash asks: Why do you speak of taking the arba minim on the first day? In reality, the day on which we begin taking the arba minim is the fifteenth day [of the month of Tishrei].

If the Torah referred to the initial day in which we take the arba minim as "the fifteenth day" [of Tishrei], it would be providing additional information-namely, when do we begin the mitzva. By contrast, referring to the initial day as "the first day" tells us nothing new. For we already know that the "first day" on which we take the arba minim is the "first day". Why, then, did the Torah prefer to use the less informative expression? [Note: The Medrash is fully aware of the difference between the first day of the mitzva and the first day of the month. The medrash is simply using the superficial inconsistency between the Torah's reference to the "first" day and the "fifteenth" day as a trampoline to catapult us into a new perspective.]

What is the new perspective that Chazal are proposing? As you may recall from past years, the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos are extremely busy. People are working on their Sukka, selecting arba minim, doing the Igud on the lulav, and preparing special food and clothing for the Yom Tov. There are only four days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos. Consequently, the long list of things to be done faces a tight deadline-the arrival of the Sukkos holiday.

Chazal experienced these acute time pressures. They also noted an unexpected phenomenon. People were so busy during these four days that they lack the time to do aveiros [to sin]! This much diminished level of aveiros continued until the first day of Sukkos.

Further, because people have been too busy to commit sins during that time period, another special feature also surfaced. No aveiros worth talking about means that the days between Yom Kippur and Sukkos have a special kedusha. For all intents and purposes, during these four days there are no sins to record. This unique time period comes to an end with the arrival of Sukkos. On that day, there are sins to record, and they are duly recorded. Thus the "first day" on which the Medrash has focused is a "first day" that we have not yet mentioned: namely, the first day "le'chesh'bon avonos". That is, the first day of Sukkos is also the first day on which HaShem resumes reckoning our accounts with Him.

Ahd Kan (so far) with necessary background information. We move now to the text of the Sfas Emes on Ha'azinu, 5634, paragraph 3.

The Sfas Emes begins by referring to the Medrash cited above and by citing a question that the Taz had asked about it. The Taz pointed out that- as we would expect-the Medrash assumes a hierarchy of values. That is, implicitly the Medrash considers some things to be more important than other things. The problem is that the Taz found the hierarchy with which

the Medrash works unacceptable. Thus the Medrash assumes that the four days of preparing the mitzvos-e.g., arba minim-are "yoseir gedolim" [on a higher level] than the actual mitzva of taking the arba minim. The Taz asked: How could that be? Apparently he found the idea unthinkable, and left it at that.

By contrast, the Sfas Emes finds it eminently thinkable that hachonos [preparation] for a mitzva could pack more "ko'ach ve'hatzolo" [power and rescue] than the mitzva itself. [The Sfas Emes's use of the word "hatzolo" ("rescue") is noteworthy. "Rescue" implies having previously been captured by enemies, or swept away by overwhelming forces of nature... The Sfas Emes's mention of "hatzolo" implies that he knew of such states? from personal experience and/or as Gerer Rebbe.)

The Sfas Emes explains what he has in mind when he tells us that the hachonos for a mitzva are more powerful than the mitzva itself. Preparing oneself to perform the mitzva involves getting into a proper intellectual and emotional state. Achieving that state may take a long time-the Sfas Emes actually says "le'olam" [forever]. By contrast, a person can perform the mitzva itself in brief, finite time. That is: 1, 2, 3, ve'gomar'nu [and it's done]!

The Sfas Emes presents another reason why getting to a state of readiness for doing a mitzva can be more important than actually doing the mitzva itself. He asks: who can do a mitzva properly [ke'mish'pata]? The answer to his rhetorical question is: "very few". By contrast, preparing oneself to perform mitzvos with focus and joy is within our grasp-once we have been alerted to the importance of hachonos. This ma'amar sounds that alert, loud and clear. Finally, the Sfas Emes quotes a pasuk in Devarim (4:6) which he reads as saying that performing mitzvos is contingent upon first giving the mitzvos our prior intellectual and emotional attention. In the words of the pasuk: "U'she'martem ve'as'isem..." ArtScroll: "You shall safeguard and you shall perform" [the mitzvos].

Good. In fact, excellent! The Sfas Emes has just given us an insight to help us in our Avoda, an insight that is as powerful as it is radical. But just because the doctrine is so bold and innovative, we must be careful to examine its validity. In particular, did the ideas of the Sfas Emes resonate with the religious life of his contemporaries (and their descendents) to a degree that they took him as their Rebbe? (What a dumb question; but it had to be asked). The many thousands of chassidim who followed the Sfas Emes as their Rebbe attest to the doctrine's validity. © 2007 Dr. N.C. Leff & torah.org

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

After Moses' final oration (the book of Devarim) to the Children of Israel, he prepares for death. His

death is orchestrated directly by G-d. Of course, this is the case for every man's death, but in Moses' case all the orchestration was explicit and is recorded in the Torah. A drash that must be understood to be fully appreciated. "And Hashem spoke to Moses on that self-same day saying." (Deut. 32:48)

"And Hashem spoke to Moses on that self-same day"-Rashi: "In three places it says 'on the self-same day.' It is said about Noah: 'on the self-same day Noah entered, etc.' when the light of day was in full view. Because his contemporaries said, 'By this and by that (an oath) if we sense him< [entering the ark] we won't let him enter the ark and not only that, we will get sledgehammers and axes and smash the ark!' The Holy One, blessed be He, said, 'I will bring him [into the ark] in mid-day. Let anyone who has the power to protest, do so.'

"Concerning Egypt, it is said, 'on the self same day Hashem took out, etc.' Because the Egyptians had said 'By this and by that, if we sense [them leaving] we won't let them go. And not only that, we will get swords and other weapons and kill them.' The Holy One, blessed be He, said 'I will take them out [of Egypt] in mid-day. Let anyone powerful enough to protest, do so.' Here as well, concerning Moses' death, it is said 'on the self same day.' Because the Israelites said 'By this and by that, if we sense him [leaving] we won't let him [go]. The man who took us out of Egypt, split the Sea for us, and brought down the Manna for us, brought us the quail and raised up the well and gave us the Torah-we won't let him!' The Holy One, blessed be He, said 'Behold I will take him in mid-day etc.'"

This is a beautiful midrash which emphasizes the people's love and appreciation of Moses. It is important to stress this, considering all the trouble the people had made for him during the forty years of his leadership. The drash is based on the fact that the Hebrew word "etzem," translated here as "self-same" and in the drash as "mid-day," is superfluous. The verse would have the same meaning were it omitted. The drash takes the word to mean "in the strength of the day." This is because the word "etzem" shares the same root as "strength."

As in Deut. 8:17: "My power and the strength of my hand ("otzem yadi") made for me this wealth."

Thus the "strength of the day" becomes "in mid-day," when the sun is strongest. Now let us question Rashi. Some Rashi commentaries have questioned Rashi's statement: "in three places it says 'on the self-same day.'" They point out that there is another place, which Rashi doesn't mention here, where the words 'on the self-same day' appear. This is in parshat Lech Lecha (Genesis 17:23): "And Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his home... and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskin on that self-same day as G-d had spoken to him."

Rashi even comments on this verse in Genesis and says: "By day and not by night. He was not afraid of the scoffers so that his enemies should not say: 'Had we seen him we would not have let him do the circumcision and fulfill G-d's commandment!'"

Since Rashi commented on the verse, he was aware of it when he wrote his commentary on our verse. The question is: Why didn't he include it in his list of verses that had the words "on that self-same day"?

Can you see why? Can you see a difference between this verse and the three that Rashi does cite?

An Answer: The verse in Lech Lecha, while it has the same phrase, isn't used in the same way as the other three are. The three verses that Rashi cites all tell us that G-d made certain that no one would interfere with His plan. Noah was allowed to enter the Ark; the Israelites were allowed to leave Egypt. But in Abraham's case the point of the verse was different. It was Abraham's courage, not G-d's intervention, that was the issue. And since Rashi's whole point on our verse is to show how Hashem made sure that His plan was executed, he cites only those verses that are relevant to this point.

But as we look at the last part of Rashi's comment, which refers to Moses' death, we could ask a question. Rashi says: "Here as well, concerning Moses' death, it is said 'on the self-same day.' Because the Israelites said 'By this and by that, if we sense him [leaving] we won't let him [go]. The man who took us out of Egypt, split the Sea for us, and brought down the Manna for us, brought us the quail and raised up the well and gave us the Torah-we won't let him!'"

A Question: How is our verse about Moses' death similar to the case of Noah entering the Ark or to that of Israel leaving Egypt? A jealous mob could conceivably stop Noah from entering the Ark; incensed hooligans could possibly stop Israel from escaping their country, but how can any human stop another person from dying? How could the anxious Israelites prevent Moses' death? What does Rashi mean?

An Answer: The next verses (32:49,50) tells us what G-d said to Moses on that "self-same day":

"Go up to this Mount Ha'avarim, Mount Nevo, which is in the land of Moab, that faces Jericho... and die on the mountain, upon which you are going up there..."

We see that a precondition for Moses' death was that he go up the mountain. He was to die on the mountain and first had to ascend the mountain. It was this ascension that the people thought they could prevent. If they stopped Moses from going up Mount Nevo, they would prevent his imminent death. Or so they thought. That is exactly what Rashi means when he says: "Because the Israelites said 'By this and by that, if we sense him [leaving] we won't let him [go].'"

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