

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In the glorious song with which Moses addresses the congregation, he invites the people to think of the Torah - their covenant with G-d - as if it were like the rain that waters the ground so that it brings forth its produce: Let my teaching fall like rain and my words descend like dew, like showers on new grass, like abundant rain on tender plants.

G-d's word is like rain in a dry land. It brings life. It makes things grow. There is much we can do of our own accord: we can plough the earth and plant the seeds. But in the end our success depends on something beyond our control. If no rain falls, there will be no harvest, whatever preparations we make. So it is with Israel. It must never be tempted into the hubris of saying: "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me" (Deut. 8: 17).

The sages, however, sensed something more in the analogy. This is how the Sifri puts it: Let my teaching fall like rain: Just as the rain is one thing, yet it falls on trees, enabling each to produce tasty fruit according to the kind of tree it is - the vine in its way, the olive tree in its way and the date palm in its way, so the Torah is one, yet its words yield Scripture, Mishnah, laws and lore. Like showers on new grass: just as showers falls upon plants and make them grow, some green, some red, some black, some white, so the words of Torah produce teachers, worthy individuals, sages, the righteous and the pious.

There is only one Torah, yet it has multiple effects. It gives rise to different kinds of teaching, different sorts of virtue. Torah is sometimes seen by its critics as overly prescriptive, as if it sought to make everyone the same. The midrash argues otherwise. The Torah is compared to rain precisely to emphasize that its most important effect is to make each of us grow into what we could become. We are not all the same, nor does Torah seek uniformity. As a famous Mishnah puts it: When a human being makes many coins from the same mint, they are all the same. G-d makes everyone in the same image - His image - yet none is the same as another. (Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5)

This emphasis on difference is a recurring theme in Judaism. For example, when Moses asks G-d to appoint his successor, he uses an unusual phrase:

"May the Lord, G-d of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over the community" (Num. 27:16).

On this, Rashi comments: Why is this expression ("G-d of the spirits of all mankind") used? [Moses] said to him: Lord of the universe, You know each person's character, and that no two people are alike. Therefore, appoint a leader for them who will bear with each person according to his disposition.

One of the fundamental requirements of a leader in Judaism is that he or she is able to respect the differences between human beings. This is a point emphasized by Maimonides in The Guide for the Perplexed: Man is, as you know, the highest form in creation, and he therefore includes the largest number of constituent elements. This is why the human race contains so great a variety of individuals that we cannot discover two persons exactly alike in any moral quality or in external appearance ... This great variety and the necessity of social life are essential elements in man's nature. But the well-being of society demands that there should be a leader able to regulate the actions of man. He must complete every shortcoming, remove every excess, and prescribe for the conduct of all, so that the natural variety should be counterbalanced by the uniformity of legislation, so that social order be well established. (Guide, II:40)

The political problem as Maimonides sees it is how to regulate the affairs of human beings in such a way as to respect their individuality while not creating chaos. A similar point emerges from a surprising rabbinic teaching: Our Rabbis taught: If one sees a crowd of Israelites, one says: Blessed be He who discerns secrets - because the mind of each is different from that of another, just as the face of each is different from another. (Berakhot 58a)

We would have expected a blessing over a crowd to emphasize its size, its mass: human beings in their collectivity. A crowd is a group large enough for the individuality of the faces to be lost. Yet the blessing stresses the opposite - that each member of a crowd is still an individual with distinctive thoughts, hopes, fears and aspirations.

The same was true for the relationship between the sages. A Mishnah (Sotah 9: 15) states: When R. Meir died, the composers of fables ceased. When Ben Azzai died, assiduous students ceased. When Ben Zoma died, the expositors ceased. When R. Akiva died, the glory of the Torah ceased. When R. Hanina died, men of deed ceased. When R. Jose Ketanta died, the

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pious men ceased. When R. Jochanan ben Zakkai died, the luster of wisdom ceased ... When Rabbi died, humility and the fear of sin ceased.

There was no single template of the sage. Each had his own distinctive merits, his unique contribution to the collective heritage. In this respect, the sages were merely continuing the tradition of the Torah itself. There is no single role model of the religious hero or heroine in Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible. The patriarchs and matriarchs each had their own unmistakable character. Moses, Aaron and Miriam emerge as different personality types. Kings, priests and prophets had different roles to play in Israelite society. Even among the prophets, "No two prophesy in the same style", said the sages. Elijah was zealous, Elisha gentle. Hosea speaks of love, Amos speaks of justice. Isaiah's visions are simpler and less opaque than those of Ezekiel.

The same applies to even to the revelation at Sinai itself. Each individual heard, in the same words, a different inflection: The voice of the Lord is with power (Ps. 29:4): that is, according to the power of each individual, the young, the old, and the very small ones, each according to their power [of understanding]. G-d said to Israel, "Do not believe that there are many gods in heaven because you heard many voices. Know that I alone am the Lord your G-d." (Shemot Rabbah 29:1)

According to Maharsha, there are 600,000 interpretations of Torah. Each individual is theoretically capable of a unique insight into its meaning. The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas commented: The Revelation has a particular way of producing meaning, which lies in its calling upon the unique within me. It is as if a multiplicity of persons ... were the condition for the plenitude of "absolute truth", as if each person, by virtue of his own uniqueness, were able to guarantee the revelation of one unique aspect of the truth, so that some of its facets would never have been revealed if certain people had been absent from mankind.

Judaism, in short, emphasizes the other side of the maxim *E pluribus unum* ("Out of the many, one"). It says: "Out of the One, many".

The miracle of creation is that unity in Heaven produces diversity on earth. Torah is the rain that feeds this diversity, allowing each of us to become what only we can be. © 2013 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and aish.com

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“On the seventh month, the first day of the month, shall be a Holy Convocation for you... it will be a day of the broken shofar sound [terua] for you...” (Numbers 29:1)

Each of our festivals, biblical as well as rabbinic, derives its sanctity from a miraculous occurrence which took place on that day. For example, Passover begins on the date the Hebrews left Egypt, and Hanukka on the date the Maccabees achieved victory over the Greek-Syrian Hellenists.

In the case of Rosh Hashana, our liturgy repeats again and again, "Today the world was conceived" (Hayom harat olam), and the Midrash explains that this phrase refers to the day on which the first human being was created. Hence Rosh Hashana is the most universal of our celebrations, urging us to give thought to and thanks for the emergence of humanity. This leads us to ponder the most existential of questions: Why are we here? What is our purpose? And - each in his/her own personal way - are we making the most of our allotted time in this world? It is to be expected that the commandments of the day will help us on this crucial existential journey. The introductory verse to this commentary defines a commandment unique to Rosh Hashana: On this day we must sound the shofar, the ram's horn, and it is to be the broken, staccato sound of the horn, the terua. The Talmud defines this sound as either three sighs (shevarim), nine sobs (terua) or a combination of the two.

What is this commandment teaching us? Is it that this world, this life into which we were born, is a vale of tears, a series of sighs, a sojourn of suffering? If so, why is Rosh Hashana considered a festival, a day on which we are enjoined to rejoice, a day in which we must drink wine and eat meat, a day which cancels a bereaved person's seven days of mourning? Does our Bible not teach us, at the conclusion of its account of the primordial week of creation, "And G-d saw all that He had made and behold it was very good" (Genesis 1:31)? Does not the entire corpus of Jewish law teach us about the ultimate value of each human life, the necessity of even desecrating Shabbat to preserve life, that he who preserves a human life is considered as though he preserved the entire world?

To be sure, there is an additional sound of the shofar: An exultant, victorious sound; the straight, clear sound which announced the coronation of the kings of Israel; the tekiya sound. But the source of this sound is not a description of our Rosh Hashana celebration; rather it belongs to the Yom Kippur of the Jubilee year, the 50th year which in biblical times proclaimed freedom for all inhabitants throughout the land, when each person was to return to his family and ancestral

heritage, a year which presaged the period of redemption for all humanity.

The Talmud links Yom Kippur to Rosh Hashana, and joins the tekiya of Yom Kippur to the terua of Rosh Hashana as well.

But why is the day the first human being was born biblically linked to the sighing, sobbing sound of the terua? My revered teacher, Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik, explained that in truth the Almighty created an imperfect, incomplete - even broken - world. The prophet Isaiah says it clearly: "The Former of light and Creator of darkness, the Maker of peace and Creator of evil - I am G-d, the Maker of all these things" (Isaiah 45:5).

Rav Haim Vital explains, in the name of the Holy Ari, that G-d - who is first and foremost a G-d of love - had to constrict Himself (tzimtzum) as it were, and leave room for "other." He had to leave room for a human being with the freedom of choice to do even that which G-d would not wish him to do, leave room for a world which would also contain chaos, darkness and evil.

Thus the human being would not merely be an extension of G-d (for if so, in loving the human being, G-d would only be loving Himself); the truly free human being would then act not merely as a pawn or puppet, but rather as a full partner with G-d, charged with the possibility of repairing the broken world, or perfecting the imperfect, incomplete world in the Kingship of the Divine.

G-d promises His chosen people, Israel, that we will ultimately choose the good, repent, perfect ourselves and teach the world G-d's love, morality and peace, so that the world may be redeemed (Deuteronomy 30:1-10, Isaiah 2, Micah 4). Hence our mission is to repair the broken world, each in his/her own way, each in his/her environment with the gifts with which we were blessed by G-d. Each of us must communicate Abraham's compassionate righteousness and moral justice however we can do it best.

The terua, the broken sound of Rosh Hashana, tells it to us the way it is, from the depths of the broken vessels within the world. The exultant tekiya sound tells us that ultimately we can and will succeed - personally, universally and cosmically.

For every broken sound, there are two victorious sounds - because our Creator loves us, believes in us and guarantees our ultimate success and redemption. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The special nature and all of the events of Jewish history are outlined for us in this week's parsha.

Ramban in the 13th century comments that anyone who can, so many centuries earlier, accurately foretell

the later fate of a people is an exceptional prophet. Moshe certainly fits that description and test. And what more can we add to this phenomenon, now seven hundred-fifty years after Ramban!

The rabbis of the Talmud attributed the crown of wisdom to the one who has a vision of the future. Even though Moshe is the greatest of all prophets, his title amongst the Jewish people is Moshe the teacher, indicating his wisdom and knowledge are translated into his ability to view the future.

Moshe lays down the basic pattern of all of Jewish history -- the struggle to remain Jewish and not succumb to the blandishments of current cultures and beliefs, the illogical and almost pathological enmity of the world to Judaism and the Jewish people, the awful price paid by Jews throughout history and the eventual realization of Jews, and the non-Jewish world as well, of G-d's guidance in history and human life.

This entire, very complex story is foretold to us in this week's most remarkable parsha. It is no wonder that Jewish tradition dictated that Jewish children should commit this parsha to memory, for within it is recorded the entire essence of Jewish history.

Though we never really know the exact details of the future of the Jewish people, the broad outlines of the story have been known to us for millennia. Just read and study the words of this parsha.

Moshe establishes heaven and earth as witnesses to the covenant and the historical fate of the Jewish people. Rashi explains that not only are they honest and objective witnesses but most importantly they are eternal witnesses. Human witnesses are mortal and passing. Later generations cannot hear their testimony, and even though current video technology attempts to correct this deficiency, much of the personal nuance and force, which colors all human testimony, is lost.

So we rely on heaven and earth to reinforce our belief and commitment to the eternal covenant. It is the very wonders and mysteries of nature itself that point to the Creator. And it is all of human history that rises to testify as to the uniqueness of the Jewish story and the special role that the Jewish people played and continue to play in human events.

The witness testimony of heaven is found in the wonders of the natural world. The witness testimony of earth is found in the history of humankind and of the role of the Jewish people in that amazing, exhilarating and yet depressing story. Moshe begs of us to listen to these two witnesses for it is within their and our ability to know our past and future through their testimony.

Much of their testimony is frightening and worrisome but it is even more frightening to be unaware of our past and future. We should listen carefully to the parsha. It has much to teach us about our world and ourselves. © 2013 *Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on*

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

We live in a world where people emphasize history-their past, or the future-their hopes and dreams. Does the present really occur? After anticipating a particular event it passes in an instant and becomes a memory.

Interestingly, in every Shabbat portion read between the Ninth of Av and Yom Kippur, the word Ha-Yom (today) appears. Perhaps the most famous is read on the Shabbat preceding Rosh Hashanah-where the Jewish nation is told "You are standing this day (Ha-Yom) all of you before the Lord your G-d." (Deuteronomy 29:9)

Indeed, the Rosh Hashanah service reaches its crescendo as we recite the famous Ha-Yom prayer, which states, "May you strengthen us this day (Ha-Yom), may you bless us this day (Ha-Yom)."

The word Ha-Yom may remind us that sometimes one has the chance to change the world today; but if one misses that chance, the opportunity may be lost forever.

For me, the narrative, which most powerfully teaches this idea, is the binding of Isaac story, which, not coincidentally, is read on Rosh Hashanah. Consider the image of Avraham (Abraham), Yitzhak's (Isaac's) father who was old enough to be his grandfather, taking his son to Moriah. After a three-day trek Avraham binds Yitzhak, lifts his knife and is prepared to slaughter him.

Now consider the second image. An angel of G-d appears at a distance, intent upon interceding. As I become older, I have started to read this story with a different perspective. Now that I am a father and grandfather, I wonder whether the angel will intervene in time.

When mentioning this to one of my students, she responded, "You've missed the point rebbe-angels always make it on time, people don't."

No doubt, Ha-Yom teaches that when performing an action we should consider how it is influenced by the past and impacts on the future-merging into the present deed.

No doubt, also, Ha-Yom teaches us to hold on to the good times. Those moments come and go too quickly.

But in this season Ha-Yom reminds us of the importance of proper timing. In the words of the rabbis, "Do not say when I have time I will do, lest that time never come."

What an appropriate message especially on Rosh Hashanah, the day of repentance which emphasizes our being given a second chance. Ha-Yom reminds us that sometimes that is not the case-sometimes and opportunity arises only once - Ha-Yom.

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RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Holy Smokes!

Every Holiday has its particular observances. Most of them are clear and finite mitzvos and rituals. On Pesach we abstain from eating chametz. We make a Seder, drink the four cups of wine and eat matzoh. On Sukkos we take the lulav and esrog and sit in the Sukkah. But the period of the High Holidays is different. In addition to the rituals performed on Rosh Hashanah, the blowing of the shofar and the various customs of eating certain fruits, the ensuing days are replete with a variety of nuances, that seem to pop up at different hours of the day and affect us some subtly and others more overtly at varying times of the day. Morning, noon and night there are activities that keep the spirit of the holidays sustained -- all the way to Yom Kippur and beyond.

Walk into the synagogue. It looks different. It is bedecked in white. The bima. The ark. The Torahs. The alarm clock rings at least a half hour earlier for slichos -- additional supplications. And that is not enough. The daily weekday prayers have insertions and acts that constantly remind us of the days of awe. Smack in the middle of the prayers, even before the shema, we open the Aron to say a verse of Psalms. The Shemoneh Esrei itself contains insertions and substitutions that refer to Hashem as King as opposed to His usual title G-d; forgetting certain of these changes can render the entire recitation of the prayer invalid! And, of course there are insertions in the tefilah that remind us about G-d's power as a Judge and Purveyor of life. The Kadesh is altered with seemingly subtle amendments that bear the weight of fundamental change.

Our foods are different as well. We abstain from tart and sour substances, replacing acidic foods with sweet ones. Those of us who are less stringent with eating bread baked by gentiles during the rest of the year are told that they should only eat bread baked by Jewish bakers. And though I can understand the reasons for these insertions and nuances, I often wondered: What is the objective of these insertions? Will they change our attitude toward life. Will they accomplish more than the prayers and tears and the shofar blasts of Rosh Hashanah and fasting and praying all day on Yom Kippur?

In the mid 1920s a chasid once approached the Imrei Emes, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter of Ger. "Rebbe, I am traveling to Paris on a ten day business trip. Would the Rebbe give me a bracha (blessing) that I be successful in my venture?"

After a warm blessing the Rebbe continued to make his own request. "In Paris they sell an exclusive cigar brand that is reputed to be the best in all of

Western Europe. I would appreciate if you would find that brand and bring me back a box."

The chasid was puzzled by the request, but responded enthusiastically.

"Of course, Rebbe! No problem. I will find out which is the best brand in all of France and bring you back two boxes!"

The men went on his trip and indeed returned two weeks later. He visited the Rebbe to thank him for his blessing.

"Do you have the cigars?" asked the Rebbe.

The man blushed. "Rebbe, you have to forgive me. When I was in Paris, I was so immersed in business that I totally forgot about your request. But do not worry. On the way back I made a special stop in Belgium and got you the best Belgium cigar available. I was assured that it is of equal quality to the French cigar if not better!"

The Rebbe shook his head. "My dear chasid, I did not need cigars. The reason I asked you to get me the cigars while you were in France is because I wanted those cigars to be on your mind. In that manner you would remember during your stay there that you have a Rebbe."

Of course each one varying nuances may represent an important symbolism and each insertion of prayer or change of language may offer a powerful supplication, but I believe that there is something more. During these days we must keep on inserting tiny wake up calls that shout to us, "Remember the rebbe!"

Switching words, opening the Aron Kodesh, watching our foods all may be minor acts but in the greater view they are reminders that we are living in a very spiritual and holy period and the King is waiting for us to remember him.

We live in a world that is fraught with distraction. We become immersed in our mundane world and often forget about the greater spiritual picture. During the ten days of penitence it is so important to have subtle roadblocks inserted in the daily rote of our mundane lives and even in the middle of our spiritual ones. We have to insert an extra booster of spirituality in all that we do. Because during this period we have to ensure that even the search for the perfect cigar is indeed the quest for a holy smoke. © 2013 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Three books are opened on Rosh Hashana, one for those who are completely wicked, one for those who are completely righteous, and one is for those in between. The completely righteous are written down and sealed right away for life; the completely wicked are written down and sealed right away for death; those in between remain suspended from Rosh Hashana through Yom Kippur. If they merit

it, they are written down for life; if they don't merit it, they are written down for death." (Rosh Hashana 16b, and echoed, in different words, by Rambam, Hilchos T'shuvah 3:3)

While the Talmud tells us the consequences of being righteous or wicked, it doesn't define for us who are considered such. Rambam (3:1-2) tells us that whoever has good deeds that outweigh their bad deeds is "righteous," those whose bad deeds outweigh their good deeds are "wicked," and those whose "good" and "bad" deeds are exactly even are considered "in between" (or "middling"). However, if those whose fate is not determined on Rosh Hashana is limited to only those whose good deeds weigh exactly the same as their bad deeds, it would seem that only a small number of people have until Yom Kippur to mend their ways in order to improve their upcoming year. Yet the wording of our prayers indicate that the heavenly decrees that will affect us for the next year aren't sealed until Yom Kippur. Are these prayers meant only for the few whose deeds are exactly "half and half?" Why is there so much focus on improving ourselves before Yom Kippur, rather than on or before Rosh Hashana, if the decrees issued on Yom Kippur apply to only a few people?

Lechem Mishneh (3:2), answering a different question, says that Rambam's definition of who is righteous and who is wicked is only meant for the judgment made upon death, not the yearly judgments made on Rosh Hashana. He says that for Rosh Hashana, the Rambam would define "righteous" and "wicked" the same way Ramban does (at the beginning of Sha'ar HaG'mul), with the terms referring to the outcome of this particular judgment; even a wicked person who is given a year of life is considered "righteous" vis-à-vis that decision. Aside from the semantic gymnastics, Rambam gives no indication that the terms are different for this judgment than they were for the previously discussed judgment). Additionally, if these terms refer to the outcome of the judgment, and are not a description of the person being judged (and the reason for the judgment), the Talmud's statement doesn't read well; saying the "righteous are given a good judgment" is superfluous, since the reason they are considered "righteous" is precisely because there was a positive outcome to their judgment! Also, this explanation does not apply to the person referred to as "in between," unless the term is a euphemism for "to be determined." How can there be a separate book opened on Rosh Hashana for each category, if the categories don't really apply until after the judgment?

"The essence of a human being is his desires." These are the opening words of Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler's essays on the High Holy Days (Michtav Mei'Eliyahu volume II, page 62). He explains how these desires remain with the person even after death, and are the source of most of the reward and punishment in the next world. After all, how can one satisfy a physical desire in a world that exists only on a spiritual plane?

Rav Dessler applies this concept to the above Talmudic quote; the completely righteous are those whose "wants" are completely spiritual, the completely wicked those who have only physical cravings, and those in between have both physical and spiritual longings. Therefore, as almost everybody fits into the latter category, it is not until Yom Kippur that the King of kings seals our decrees. (The goal is to improve ourselves so that our primary cravings are for the spiritual, which would move us from the category of being "in between" to being among the "righteous.") Nevertheless, since Rambam discusses deeds, not desires, it would be difficult to suggest that this was what he meant.

Rav Yitzchok Hutner (Pachad Yitzchok, Rosh Hashana 18) discusses this Rambam as well, including the differences between his wording and that of the Talmud. When describing those who are "in between," the Talmud says that if they merit it, on Yom Kippur they are written in for life, while if they don't, they are written down the other way. Rambam, on the other hand, specifies that in order for those "in between" to be sealed "for life," they must repent (and if they don't, they will be sealed "for death"). Aside from needing to explain why Rambam changed the verbiage at all (including why those "in between" are "sealed" rather than "written"), stating that the "in between" have to repent has larger implications. If the reason they are "in between" is because their good deeds are exactly equal to their sins, shouldn't all they need to do be to "unbalance" the scales by adding more good deeds? [This becomes more difficult based on Rambam's own words in the very next law (3:4), where he explains why we make an extra effort between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur to give more charity, do more good deeds and fulfill more mitzvos.] Why is the only way for those "in between" to merit "life" to repent past misdeeds, thereby making their "positive side" heavier than their "negative side," rather than being able to make their "positive side" heavier by adding to it?

Rav Hutner has a similar approach to Rav Dessler's, but rather than changing the definition of "righteous" and "wicked," Rav Hutner changes the definition of "having a majority of merits or sins" to be a description of the person rather than of the number of his good deeds or bad deeds. (Bear in mind that Rav Dessler is explaining the Talmud, while Rav Hutner is explaining how Rambam understands the Talmud; the Talmud never discusses the actions, only how the person is categorized.) Still, Rambam's wording (3:1), "if he has more merits than sins," sounds like a description of his actions, not a categorization of the person.

When discussing the decrees made regarding the "righteous" and "wicked," the Talmud says they are "sealed" on Rosh Hashana. This indicates that the reckoning based on their previous actions is complete; good deeds and bad deeds done between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur will be counted next Rosh Hashana, when the next year's reckoning is done, but

are not part of the calculation of the previous year. There is no reason to think that this isn't true for those who are "in between" as well. [Although the Talmud does use the word "written" for them, it is rather obvious that by Yom Kippur it is sealed. The word "written" is most likely used because until Yom Kippur their fate is not "sealed"; not repenting before Yom Kippur doesn't mean they won't do so sometime before Yom Kippur is over, and repenting doesn't "seal the deal" if they can still "un-repent" before Yom Kippur ends. In order to avoid confusion, Rambam uses the term "sealed" for those "in between" as well, referring to the end of the process, i.e. their status after Yom Kippur is over.] Since good deeds done after Rosh Hashana do not count for the judgment made about the previous year, the only way to "tip the scales" after Rosh Hashana is to repent, thereby retroactively removing sins that had prevented the "merit" side from being heavier. (Not removing them, leaving the "scales" as they were, means not being given "life.")

[As far as Rambam promoting increasing good deeds between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, the context indicates that this was not meant to affect the judgment, but the way we live our lives. As he says explicitly, we should try to do every good deed we can all year long. However, many are "asleep" spiritually, and need to be woken up (which is why we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashana). As part of our "reawakening," we increase our amount of good deeds, something we are always supposed to do.]

Although Rambam only mentions those "in between" needing to repent, he is referring to what it takes for those "in between" to be granted "life." But just as repenting helps those in between by removing sins from their scale, repenting removes sins from the scales of the righteous as well. True, they were granted "life" even beforehand (when their original decree was sealed on Rosh Hashana), but there are many more aspects to decrees than just "life," and their situation will be much improved after some of their (fewer) bad deeds are removed retroactively. As Rambam wrote earlier (2:6), even decrees that were sealed can be changed during the Ten Days of Repentance (especially if it is part of a public repentance). Yom Kippur providing us the opportunity to cleanse ourselves of our sins is enough of a reason to take advantage of it, but even if a decree of "life" was given on Rosh Hashana, the more affective our repentance is, the better our final decree will be.

Despite the Talmud saying that the decrees regarding the righteous and wicked are sealed on Rosh Hashana, the liturgy refers to the decrees made on Rosh Hashana as being "written" because it is literally true for those "in between," and true from a practical standpoint for everyone else, since we can improve on the decrees made by improving ourselves through repentance. Therefore, even though it is only those "in between" who first have their decrees "sealed" on Yom

Kippur, its benefits apply to all of us. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Eternity Has Its Limits

“When I call out the Name of Hashem, declare the greatness of our G-d.” Rashi: “The word ki [which can be translated in many different ways, including ‘because’] in our pasuk means ‘when.’ The verse therefore means, ‘When I call out and mention Hashem’s Name, you are to declare His greatness in response, and bless His Name.’ From this pasuk Chazal therefore derived the obligation of answering Baruch Shem kevod malchuso le-olam va’ed / ‘Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and for all time’ in the beis hamikdosh.”

Maharal: “Rashi seemed utterly reasonable -- until his last phrase. If the pasuk calls for a response by people when they hear Hashem’s Name, why would it be limited to the beis hamikdosh, rather than anywhere that someone calls out His Name? More accurately, where is there any hint of this in the pasuk? Because Rashi is committed to providing access to the plain meaning of the text -- and not to amplify it with halachic tidbits -- his comment has to be sourced in the understanding of the text itself.”

Rashi’s halachic source is the gemara; (Taanis 16B) it states that the Baruch Shem response is limited to the beis hamikdosh, and replaced by the simple “amen” everywhere else. The reason must be as follows. The Name mentioned in our pasuk is the Explicit (i.e. Four-Letter) Name. We know (Yoma 69B) that the Explicit Name was uttered only in the Temple. Everywhere else, we substitute the Name that substitutes the notion of adnus/ mastery for the Ineffable Four-letter Name. The response “Baruch Shem...” is appropriate only after the explicit recitation of Hashem’s Name as it is actually written.

Here is why. (What follows is R. Hutner’s explication of the Maharal, but not explicit in his words.) Our pasuk speaks of declaring His greatness upon hearing His Name called out, or pronounced explicitly. The gemara makes two assumptions about “declaring His greatness.” It stipulates that it should come as a berachah/ “blessing.” It requires that this blessing be of the kind that can continue “forever.”

“Forever,” it turns out, is relative. We never pronounce the Four-Letter Name as it is written -- other than in the beis hamikdosh. We substitute the adnus-Name. This is not a permanent feature, however. The gemara (Pesachim 50A) observes that this substitution is limited to the here and now. In the messianic future, we will all pronounce the Name as it is written. This means that at the moment we have a disjoint approach to the Name we refer to in the Baruch Shem kevod response. The adnus-Name is a legitimate Name in its own right. It is a Name today, and will always be. Were

we to respond to it with the Baruch Shem formula, the “forever and for all time” reference would make complete sense.

But this is not the entire picture. We also use the adnus-Name as a substitute for the Four-Letter Name, which we refuse to explicitly pronounce today. When we use the Baruch Shem formula (as we do in reciting the Shema), we mean something very different when we speak of “forever.” We can only mean a passing, temporary eternity -- the eternity of the current phase of human civilization. We know about (and look forward to!) a new kind of society, in which under the aegis of Moshiach, we will pronounce the Four-Letter Name as it is spelled, mirroring what will then be a much fuller appreciation of its meaning. When we speak today of His Name evoking our declaration of greatness, we mean a limited “forever” -- one that will come to an end with the messianic enlargement of its pronunciation.

Ironically, were we to stand in the beis hamikdosh of old, the “forever” would be a fuller one. The Name is recited there as it is written; this will not change even in the future. Its “forever,” therefore, has no expiration date.

The formula “Baruch Shem kevod malchuso” attempts to satisfy our pasuk’s requirement of declaring Hashem’s greatness upon hearing His Name. As Rashi writes, the declaration is the blessing of His Name. Here, then, is the crucial point. Berachah always implies going beyond the essential. It means surpassing limits, rather than staying within them. [Elsewhere, Maharal observes that the most important legal part of the Torah -- The Ten Commandments -- begins with the letter aleph, whose numerical value is one. Law is monolithic. It doesn’t bend for this individual or that group. It is uniform and predictable. The Creation story, however, begins with the beis of Bereishis. Beis is the first plural number, and therefore a good symbol of plurality, of going beyond. The purpose of Creation is to bring His berachah to the world, and the beis gives it a good start.]

In the beis hamikdosh, where the Name was read and will be read in the future in the same way, without change, the Name can indeed be blessed. Even more of the fuller nature of that Name can be revealed to us. That revelation is the berachah of the Name.

Outside of the beis hamikdosh, however, the Name will not expand but contract. Whenever we read the Four-Letter Name, we substitute the adnus-Name. That component will cease to exist in the future. Our projection for the Name, therefore, is one of limitation and shrinking. Meeting it with a Baruch Shem is therefore inappropriate.

The gemara (Berachos 21A) sees our pasuk as the source of answering Amen in all places outside of the beis hamikdosh. We now understand why. The “greatness” that we are asked to declare cannot come in the form of a berachah like “Baruch Shem.” Amen is

the best substitution and response. (Based on Gur Aryeh, Devarim, 32:3; Pesach 60:8-10) © 2013 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

JON ERLBAUM

High Holidays and Sound Investments

Imagine the world's wealthiest investor finally gives you a meeting, after you've waited an entire year for meaningful face-time. You know all too well that if you can only manage to get him on board with your vision, he can effortlessly transform your creative dreams into a concrete reality. After painstaking preparation, you arrive at the meeting and begin to present him with a PowerPoint summary of your strategic plan: you take him through your mission statement, demonstrate the market needs, point to your track record and articulate why you are the right person for the project. Then comes the climactic moment: you request the amount you would need to turn this plan into a reality. He pauses, sighs, and regretfully responds: "in theory, the amount would not be a problem at all -- but your project is not in line with my investment priorities".

During the High Holidays, we get meaningful "face-time" with the World's Wealthiest Investor, and He Himself wants to make sure that we don't blow the pitch. Even though He has given us opportunities to meet with Him all throughout the year, He now offers us 10 focused days of "power-meetings", inviting us to not only present Him with our strategic plan, but to also solicit Him to stand behind it (these are known as the 10 "Days of Awe", beginning with Rosh Hashanah and culminating on Yom Kippur). The great news is that G-d -- the ultimate Investor -- already believes in us and is tremendously eager to invest in our projects. Amazingly, He even takes it upon Himself to steer us away from pursuing the wrong proposals. Do you hear what a tremendous kindness this is? The very same Investor that we are coming to with our strategic plan is focused on making sure that we don't blow the pitch to Him. How does He go about this?

Since He realizes that we may not have researched His investment priorities so carefully, He begins our 10-day meetings with an interactive, 2-day orientation symposium: allowing us to discover more about this Investor's "background"; to explore what types of ventures He values and supports; and more. During those 2 days -- known as Rosh Hashanah -- He watches us to get a sense of our sincerity and integrity: Are we awake during the seminar? Are we alertly paying attention to the content? Do we seem to be getting the big picture? Are we internalizing its message? In short: are we viable candidates worth sinking major resources into?

Once we understand where this magnanimous Investor is coming from, He grants us 8 more days to revise our proposal. He urges us to spend at least a

little extra time going through His brochures and "corporate literature" -- available in the form of Prayer Books and Torah texts -- to maximize our chances of creating revisions that will attract His support. And He even lets us practice our pitch on Him -- as many times as we need to get it right!

Over the next 10 days, we all have a golden opportunity: to spend quality time with the Investor that can truly supply the resources we need to make great things happen in this world. He only wants to know what we will do with those resources. What will we do with the health; the strength; the wisdom; the money[1]? If we really tap in to what's going on during the 1st two days -- during the awesome orientation opportunity available on Rosh Hashanah -- we can clearly understand how the Investor would want us to use these blessings. May we all merit to perceive that message clearly, and may we be worthy recipients of abundant investments in the year to come!

(Important Note: G-d's annual determination for how (and how much) to invest in each of His beloved creations is certainly more complex than how it is presented in this article. In no way am I purporting to represent all of the factors that go in to the infinite, multi-faceted "formulas" that He uses in His process of carrying out judgment and mercy. Clearly, for example, there are many righteous people who are allotted sparse financial resources even though they would use increased money to promote good in the world. Our Sages tell us, nonetheless, that the primary apportioning of reward is reserved for the Next World. Therefore, the ideas presented above merely reflect one important component for how G-d decides to bestow blessings in this world (i.e. the assessment of what will we DO with those blessings), but there are clearly many other factors that He considers.) © 2013 J. Erlbaum and torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“Yeshurun [i.e., Yisrael] became fat and kicked.” (32:15) R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: We have a tradition that there will be a spiritual revolt in Eretz Yisrael and among the Jewish People in the very era in which the national life of our People reawakens. The reason is that the material tranquility that part of our nation will experience will lead it to believe that it already has attained its ultimate goal, thus causing the soul to become smaller, so-to-speak. Yearning for lofty and holy ideals will cease, and, as a natural consequence, the spirit will sink. Eventually, a storm will come and cause a revolution, and then it will be apparent that Yisrael's strength lies in the Eternal Holy One, in the light of His Torah, and in the desire for spiritual light. (Orot p.84) © 2013 S. Katz & torah.org