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ON **ROSH HASHANA** - 5768

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U N I T E D S Y N A G O G U E - L O N D O N (O)  
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**Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks**

I was visiting a Jewish old age home in the provinces. There I was introduced to a lady who was 103 years old. What astonished me about her was not her age but her youth. There was a sparkle in her eyes that belonged more to a seventeen year old than a centenarian. What, I asked her, was her secret of eternal youth? "Be thankful for all life brings; work hard," she said, and then added, with a mischievous smile "and never be afraid to learn something new." Hearing that from a 103-year-old was quite something. It was then that I understood. We are as young as our capacity to learn.

Rosh Hashanah is about life itself - about the use we make of life, the most precious of all G-d's gifts. It asks: how have we used our time in the past year?

Have we turned G-d's blessing into a source of blessing for others? Have we grown? Have we changed? Have we learned?

Moses Maimonides (Rambam) said that the shofar is G-d's wake-up call. It is possible, he said, to sleepwalk through life, focusing on trivialities and forgetting the real challenges. Modern time-management theorists say something similar, using different terminology. There are, they say, tasks that are urgent and others that are important. The things that tend to get neglected are those that are important but not urgent: time with the family, being part of a community, helping others in need, studying, exercising the spirit as well as the body, making a difference to people's lives.

We sometimes miss out on these things because they aren't urgent. But they make a difference, sometimes the biggest difference of all. Recent research findings have shown that the best predictor of happiness is the sense that you have a purpose in life. Those who own the most are only half as happy as those who are content with what they have. Life satisfaction increases 24 per cent with the level of altruistic activity. Those who hold strong spiritual beliefs are typically satisfied with life, while those who have no spiritual beliefs are typically unsatisfied.

The Torah was given 3,300 years before these research findings, yet it speaks to them with uncanny precision. Ben Zoma taught: "Who is rich? One who rejoices in what he has." The sages said the world rests on three things:

1 Torah study (the way in which we discover our purpose in life), 2 prayer (the expression of spiritual belief) and 3 acts of kindness (altruistic activity).

Not surprisingly, Judaism is about celebrating and sanctifying life, and about "serving G-d with joy".

Much of Jewish life is a daily, weekly, yearly discipline in learning how to live. The blessings we make are a tutorial in thankfulness. They remind us to rejoice in what we have rather than waste our emotions on what we don't yet have. Prayer connects us to the world beyond the self. The laws of kashrut remind us that eating is more than a physical act we share with the animals. It can become a spiritual act. Mikveh and the laws of family purity invest marriage with sanctity. We have seen what happens when marriage loses its sanctity. Throughout the West, the institution of the family is in tatters.

Shabbat, the unique institution Judaism brought into the world, is a weekly seminar in the things that are important but not urgent. We spend time with the family. In shul we renew our links with the community. By not using mobile phones and laptops, we remind ourselves that technology is there to serve us; we are not here to serve it. Being available to the pressures of work seven days a week is not freedom, nor does it bring happiness. And the fact that on Shabbat we can't buy or spend is the most powerful protest I know against the consumer society. Not everything that matters can be bought in a shop - especially the quality of our relationships with others.

Mitzvot lift our spirits beyond the morning papers, the television news, rush-hour traffic and the daily flurry of events. We are always rushing - but at the end of a year, what have we achieved? The pace of modern life is

brehtaking. But unless we know where we are going, speed simply accelerates the pace at which we move in the wrong direction. Maimonides was right: unless something like the shofar makes us stop and think, we can waste our days on the urgent while neglecting the important.

Unless we stop, once a year, to examine our lives, we can almost unconsciously drift into bad habits and dysfunctional behaviour. The Ten Days of Teshuvah, beginning on Rosh Hashanah and culminating in Yom Kippur are just that: a time of profound self-examination. Teshuvah itself means "return, getting back on the right track". It involves

- \* charatah, remorse, the ability to admit that sometimes we were wrong;
- \* vidui, confession, having the courage to say so out loud; and
- \* kabbalat he-atid, the resolve to act differently in future.

If it is all so easy, why is it so hard? Why do we find ourselves making the same mistakes this year as last? The answer is that we fear change. We say: If I did not keep Shabbat in the past, why do so in the future? If I have managed to live a lifetime without studying Torah, why begin so late in life? We tell ourselves it's too late to change. That sounds honest, but it isn't. It's not a fact but an excuse. That is the secret my 103 year-old lady taught me. Never be afraid to learn something new. When are you old? When you are too old to change.

"Remember us for life, O King who delights in life, and write us in the book of life, for You are the G-d of life." We live when we connect to something larger than ourselves -

- \* the Jewish people;
- \* our 4,000-year-old heritage;
- \* the Torah, God's word to us;
- \* the life of mitzvot through which we sanctify each day;
- \* the act of prayer when we share our fears and hopes with G-d; and
- \* teshuvah, the ability to change.

Does this add years to our life? I don't know. But of this I am sure: it adds life to our years  
Shanah tovah!

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From: **Rabbi Goldwicht** [[rgoldwicht@yutorah.org](mailto:rgoldwicht@yutorah.org)] Sent: Thursday, September 21, 2006 10:03 PM Subject: Rosh HaShanah 5767 WEEKLY INSIGHTS BY RAV MEIR GOLDWICHT After an unexpected break, we are b'ezrat Hashem returning to our former system, with a dvar Torah on the parasha or inyanei d'yoma in your inbox every week. We hope you enjoy it and share it at your Shabbat or Yom Tov table, and we encourage you to share it with your friends as well.

With the beginning of the year, we wish you and yours a shana tovah and a g'mar chatimah tovah, a year in which we all merit to increase kevod shamayim in good health, achdut, and happiness.

Rosh HaShanah 5767

The minhag in many communities is to say Tashlich on Rosh HaShanah itself. This raises an interesting question. Rosh HaShanah is no time to be dealing with our aveirot. Our sole concern should be appointing Hashem as King over the world. The fact is that many communities say tashlich between Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. Why, then, are there nevertheless many communities which say Tashlich on Rosh HaShana itself?

Additionally, in Yechezkel 37, HaKadosh Baruch Hu says to Yechezkel HaNavi that in times of war, there are warriors with the unique task of scouting out the enemy camp to help prepare for battle and be spared needless death. These warriors are called "tzofim." HaKadosh

Baruch Hu says to Yechezkel, "Tzofeh n'taticha l'veit yisrael, I have made you a scout for the House of Israel." You, Yechezkel, are like this scout. If you warn the people of the pending danger if they do not repent, you have fulfilled your purpose. If not, you will die. Yet every prophet that does not carry out his mission is liable to death. What is unique about Yechezkel that HaKadosh Baruch Hu calls him a scout and reminds him of his liability to death?

The answer to these questions can be found in Parashat Ha'azinu. The parasha describes how upset HaKadosh Baruch Hu is over our abandonment of Him. Among the pesukim, B'nei Yisrael are referred to as "banim lo eimun bam, children who cannot be trusted." R' Meir, in Kiddushin, explains that this passuk demonstrates that whether we fulfill Hashem's will or not, we are always considered His children. The difference between being considered His children and not being considered so is great. When the nations see what Hashem has done to His own land, as described in Parashat Nitzavim, they will explain that Hashem cast us away (hishlich) because we did not heed His commands. But this is not the case, Hashem explains. He did not cast us away, but rather pushed us away (hidi'ach). As the Malbim explains, this is not an issue of semantics, but a fundamental difference. When you cast something away, you remain distant from the object. But as you push something, you remain close to it. Hashem never threw us; He never became distant from us. No matter how much He pushes us, He remains near. This is what Hashem says to Yechezkel. Don't just tell the nation to do teshuvah; tell them not to lose hope, that I am near. Tell them that they can be close to Hashem no matter the situation.

The recitation of Tashlich on Rosh HaShanah is in recognition of this truth that Hashem has not cast us away; in return, we do cast away our sins. Tashlich is therefore an additional expression of Hashem's kingship.

How amazing, then, that in all of Creation, the letter samech does not appear. The first time it does, Chazal point out, is when HaKadosh Baruch Hu creates woman and seals Adam's flesh, "vayisgor basar tachtenah." The letter samech is completely closed. HaKadosh Baruch Hu did not use this letter to express the fact that nothing is closed; it is always possible to start anew. As we approach Rosh HaShanah, haba aleinu l'tovah, we must remember this truth. Hashem has not cast us away and has not closed any doors. Thus, we are motivated to enter the new year with the desire to increase the glory of Heaven and to carry out Hashem's will.

Shanah tovah, ktivah vachatimah tovah! Meir Goldwicht  
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**Rabbi Yakov Haber**  
**Shabbos and Teshuva: Remaking the World, Remaking the Self**

Shabbos Shuva, the name for the Shabbos between Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur, most directly gets its name from the first verse of the dramatic and poignant Haftora read on this Shabbos: "Shuva Yisrael ad Hashem Elokecha ki chashalta Ba'Avonecha" - "Return O Israel to Hashem, your G-d, for you have stumbled with your sin."

Many contemporary writers have noted additional connections between the themes of Shabbos and repentance. Among these explanations is a fascinating exposition presented by the late Slonimer Rebbe z"l, Rav Shalom Noach Berzovsky, in his Nesivos Shalom. The language of the Torah concerning the first Sabbath of Creation, "And Hashem finished His work on the seventh day" implies that something was created on Shabbos. This seemingly contradicts other verses indicating that the work of Creation was completed in six days. Expanding on statements by Chazal, Rav Berzovsky explains that Shabbos was the first day of re-creation. Nothing in the world exists fundamentally. It is only through the continued Will of G-d that all of the billions of molecules in the universe and all its myriad laws continue. In the language of the prayers, "M'chadeish b'tuvo b'chol yom tamid ma'asei b'reishis" - "He renews with His kindness each day, constantly, the acts of creation." [1] This phenomenon of re-creation rooted in the very Creation, first occurring on the first Shabbos, serves as the cornerstone of the ability to change. Through the teshuva process, the individual breaks with his past and becomes a new being. R. Moshe Chaim Luzzato and others point to this aspect of repentance as that which allows for the erasure of the past evils acts. They are not attributed to the person who sinned because he is now someone else.

Rav Aharon Kahn shlita, suggested a similar approach in his analysis of a midrashic statement on a passage oft-recited on Rosh HaShana. "Tik'u bachodesh shofar, bakesseh lyom chageinu" - "Blow the shofar at the time of the renewal of the month...." Yalkut Shomoni, expanding on the verb-forms of the words "baChoDeSH" and "SHoFaR", comments: "CHaDSHu ma'aseichem, SHaPRu ma'aseichem" - "Renew your actions, better your actions." Sometimes one may merely "fine-tune" one's past actions to achieve perfection. Quite often though, one needs an entirely different outlook, one which is G-d-centered and not self-centered, in order to properly repent. This is the mystery of the human being's ability to take advantage of the G-d-granted ability to perform true teshuva: to re-create one's life and devote it to the service of HaKadosh Baruch Hu just as the Creator Himself constantly re-creates His world.

[1] There is an interesting physical, natural phenomenon highlighting this very concept - that of constant cell division, the emergence of new cells and the death of the old while the organism remains the same.

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<http://www.rabbiwein.com/Jerusalem-Post/2007/09/251.html>

**Rabbi Berel Wein**

September 15, 2007

The days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and the intervening days of repentance are called in Hebrew yomim noraim – days of awe, of terrible mightiness. In English the term has been somewhat downgraded and these times are called the High Holy Days.

Holy is a nice sounding word but it does not, in my opinion, convey the sanctity, serenity and tension of this period of the Jewish calendar. In general, I would think that the entire concept of holiness is absent in modern Western society. Nothing is sacred, everything is dumbed down to be equal, no standards of behavior, speech or dress are necessary to be observed, so it is pointless to speak of holiness in such an atmosphere and society.

Holiness requires an ability of detachment from the mundane and an ability to rise to levels of thought and behavior heretofore thought to be unattainable. G-d commanded the Jewish people to be a holy nation. He commanded every individual to be a holy person. He demands of us that the extraordinary be our usual and that we always realize our special role in life and history.

Rabbi Yisrael Lipkin of Salant stated regarding the month of Elul – the month of introspection and repentance – that all year around a Jew must

feel like it is Elul and that during Elul – why that is certainly Elul! This same thought can be applied to holiness. We are bidden to be holy year round and certainly so on the days of holiness that characterize the yomim noraim.

Though I am far from being an expert on holiness, and on much else for that matter, there are a few ideas on the subject that I wish to share with you on the matter.

Holiness begins with thought. With all of the surroundings of the media and the secular society that engulf us it is very difficult to have a holy mind. Our brains need a constant shower to wash away the filth that invades us regularly. Studying Torah on a regular daily basis can certainly provide such a shower of cleanliness. For minds that can encompass holiness inevitably lead to holy actions and behavior as well. There are many campaigns mounted in the religious Jewish world warning of the dangers of television and the internet. Though the technology itself is certainly neutral and there are many things of value that appear on both of these types of media, one cannot deny that there is great potential harm that exists there as well. It is difficult to have a holy mind when it is filled with the memories of unholy images and fantasies. The rabbis taught us that holy behavior is not only a product of observing the rules, so to speak. Even when performing permissible acts one must have a sense of holiness in so doing. It is part of the realization that life itself is special and that therefore nothing should be deemed ordinary or mundane. Taking what we think to be mundane for granted is a block to achieving a sense of holiness and Godly purpose.

Holiness is naturally reflected in our behavior. But it is also reflected in our personalities. The Torah bids us to be cheerful and not morose, accepting and not resentful, optimistic and not doleful. The Talmud states that the Divine Spirit cannot rest upon people who are constantly sad, pessimistic and feel cheated and frustrated by everyday life. A cheerful personality is a great aid to achieving the level of holy speech, free from slander, anger and vulgar obscenities.

In a world where the concept of freedom of speech has lost all proportions, the Torah demands that we control our tongues and words. Holiness of the mind leads to holiness of the tongue. And this in turn will lead the person to holiness of behavior and a sense of holiness in all aspects of life as well.

Interpersonal relationships can only have long run success when a sense of specialness, of holiness, is injected in that relationship. It is that sense of holiness that begets appreciation of others and sensitivity to their needs and even to their foibles.

Holiness is also achievable through dedication and commitment. Many humans live aimless lives, confronted by boredom and routine. Dedication to the values of the Torah, to its study and observances as well as to the concepts of service to G-d and humans, ultimately bring a sense of holiness and even excitement to one's life existence.

Acquiring a sense of holiness is difficult and even once acquired it can be easily lost. The yomim noraim are meant to be an aid in acquiring and maintaining holiness in our lives and homes.

Kiiva V'chatima Tova.

Berel Wein

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### **The Final Stage Of History**

#### **Rav Moshe Lichtman**

Shirat Ha'azinu is basically a synopsis of Jewish history, starting with HaShem's choice of Am Yisrael and culminating in the final redemption, for which we so sorely yearn. It therefore behooves us – the generation living so close to the End of Days – to study this Song and learn its lessons.

Chazal tell us that this Song can be divided into six sections (see Rosh HaShanah 31a and the Sforno on verse 7). Because of recent events, I

would like to concentrate on the last section – more specifically, the last verse – which speaks of the final redemption: – Sing, O nations, the praises of His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants; He will bring vengeance upon His adversaries, and He will appease His Land and His people (32:43). Rashi comments:

Sing, o nations, the praises of his people: At that time [when G-d takes vengeance on them], the nations will praise Israel, [saying]: "See how praiseworthy this nation is. They clung to the Holy One Blessed be He amidst all the troubles that befell them, and they did not forsake Him. They knew His goodness and praise..." And he will appease his land his people: He will appease His Land and His people for the troubles that befell them and [for what] the enemy did to them... And he will appease his land: And what is His Land? His people. When His people are comforted, His Land is comforted, as it says, – You have desired, O Lord, Your Land (Tehillim 85:2). How did you desire your Land? – You returned the captivity of Ya'akov (ibid.).

The Malbim states explicitly that this verse refers to the War of Gog and Magog:

And he will appease his land and his people: After [the Jews] settle in Eretz Yisrael, [God] will bring their adversaries upon them for a war. This is the war of Gog and Magog. And there, on the mountains of Israel, they will fall. Then, both His Land and His people will be appeased simultaneously.

The following scenario emerges from these and many other sources (e.g., Yechezkel 38-39 concerning the War of Gog and Magog): The Jews will return to their Land after terrible persecutions (see Sforno on v. 26). There they will find partial tranquility (see Yechezkel 38:8), but G-d will eventually incite their enemies against them. Then, He will destroy these enemies in retribution for all of the evils they did to His people throughout history.

Sound familiar? Sound a little like current events? Perhaps you think that all of this is a little unrealistic? Read the following Ramban, which sums up the Shirah:

This Song, which serves us as a true and faithful witness, tells us clearly everything that happens to us. First, it mentions the kindness that the Holy One Blessed be He did for us ever since He took us as His portion. It mentions the good things He did for us in the desert, and the fact that He bequeathed us the lands of great and mighty nations. [It tells about] the wealth and honor that He bestowed upon us in the Land, and how [the Jews] rebelled against HaShem and served foreign gods amidst all this good. It also mentions how He became so angry with them that He sent pestilence, famine, wild animals, and war upon them in their Land. Afterwards, He scattered them in every direction and to every corner. It is well known that all of this actually happened.

The Shirah says that in the end, [God] will bring vengeance upon His adversaries and take retribution upon those who hate Him. The reason being, because they did all those evil things to us out of their hatred for the Holy One Blessed be He... It is clear that this is a promise regarding the future redemption, for during the Second Temple the nations did not sing the praise of His people; rather, they mocked them... And in those days He did not bring vengeance upon His adversaries, and His Land did not appease His people.

Behold, this Shirah does not contain any condition of repentance or [Divine] service. Rather, it is a document testifying that the evil deeds were done... and that the Blessed One will rebuke us with anger, but He will not wipe us out. Rather, He will once again show compassion and take retribution on [our] enemies with a harsh, great, and strong sword; and He will atone our sins for the sake of His name. Thus, this Song is a clear promise about the future redemption, in spite of the heretics...

[Even] had this Shirah been written by one of the astrologers, who foretold the end, it would be fitting to believe it, because all of its words have come true so far, not one word has fallen short...

May we all be zocheh to see this come true, speedily in our days. Amen.

Rav Lichtman's book "Eretz Israel in the Parasha" is available at: [www.devorapublishing.com](http://www.devorapublishing.com)

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SHABBAT SHALOM: PARSHAT HA'AZINU(Deuteronomy 32:1-32:52) 3 Tishrei, 5768 - 15 September, 2007 ROSH HASHANAH 5768

"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 product know that You were it's Producer, let every creature know that You were its creator..."

-- Rosh Hashanah Amidah Prayer

Efrat, Israel - 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 Hashanah, why do 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 (truah, 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 100 shofar blasts, and indeed the very definition of truah, 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 archenemy? 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 26a). 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 while the 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 by each individual to shul, and everyone would blow the shofars 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/peacemaker - 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 (Shekchinah), 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 break out 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 Hashanah, 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, 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 Karier 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, Rosh Hashanah 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.

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**Peninim on the Torah by  
Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

- Parshas Haazinu mailed-by shemayisrael.com

PARSHAS HAAZINU May my teaching drop like rain; may my utterance flow like the dew. (32:2) The effect of rain and dew on the products of the earth is not noticeable. Indeed, it is primarily when it does not rain, when the earth is left dry and parched, that one realizes the critical contribution that rain makes to the finished product. When it rains, the moisture seeps into the soil, and the objective observer does not notice a change. When the earth produces verdant blossoms, fruit and grain, one realizes what the innocuous rain has accomplished. Likewise, when one studies Torah, the change is not immediate. One can learn and learn, and he does not seem to change. He becomes more knowledgeable, but no change in his personality is evidenced. Wait. Be patient. Nothing is wasted. The Torah enters his neshamah, soul, so that in due time, a marked change will become obvious.

It happens in the world of Torah chinuch, education, all of the time. One teaches a student and, at the end of the year, there does not seem to be any change. Has it all been a vain effort? Are some students destined not to make it? Are they doomed? No. Be patient. It might take years, but just as rain takes effect under the ground, hidden from the human eye, so, too,

does the Torah work behind the scenes. It softens the heart and enters his soul, and, in due time, one sees fruit. Torah is never wasted.

The Rock! - Perfect is His work; For all His paths are justice. (32:4) Hashem judges fairly, meting out justice in an exact and perfect manner. To the human eye, it may seem to be slow in coming, or it might seem questionable, but we trust that, since it emanates from Hashem, it is perfect. The word perfect applies to the totality of life throughout the continuum of time. We do not always understand what Hashem presents to us, but He takes everything into consideration and adds the happiness and sadness, pain and joy, failure and success - throughout time and puts it all together in His Master calculator to determine the perfect reward or punishment for this person. We do not understand, but we do believe.

Horav Aryeh Leib Shteinman, Shlita, addresses the fact that lately we have heard of individuals who at one point have possessed enormous wealth, but suddenly overnight have become poor men. People, who had until recently lived in palatial homes, are now relegated to live in homes that barely would have housed their servants. This occurs also to individuals who until recently had been earning a decent to fine living and are now compelled to reach out to others for assistance in supporting their family. Why? What is the catalyst for this sudden downfall? Is it a punishment or does it have a silver lining?

He cites the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna, in his commentary to Divrei Hayamim I 16:8, Hodi'u ha'amim alilosav, "Make His acts known among the nation." Alilos is a reference to the chesed, kindness, that Hashem manifests to a person when He provides him with great benefit, with extremely good fortune, only to suddenly take it away from him. We perceive this as kindness because the sudden loss of so much good fortune cleanses him of his earthly sin. The great loss, which seems to be a tragedy, is really an act of mercy that spares him a worse fate. The Gaon cites the sefer Shaarei Rachamim that defines alilosav as referring to Hashem's attributes of rachum, chanun, etc., merciful, compassionate, etc. He explains that a person could have sinned in such a manner that his actions would incur the punishment of death. Hashem "provides" him with a poor man who is in dire need, so that the individual contributes to helping the poor man. Tzedakah tatzil mimaves, charity saves from death. In an act of mercy, Hashem has just spared the individual, by availing him of an opportunity in which he could circumvent the punishment that was due him.

People complain-- at times bitterly-- about their financial predicament, not realizing that the challenges that they are undergoing are actually for their benefit. Rav Shteinman exhorts us to wake up and realize once and for all that Hashem is the source of everything that occurs in our lives - whether good or perceived as not good. Hashem sends everything for a reason. Furthermore, it is inescapable and unavoidable. If, however, we do teshuvah, repent, Hashem, in His infinite mercy, might manipulate the punishment in such a manner that we pay our dues out of a "different pocket." Who knows if the financial crisis that one sustains does not take the place of a severe illness that could have struck him or a member of his family. He should be grateful for what he has and for what he receives. By repenting, he expiates his sin.

Is it to Hashem that you do this, O vile and unwise people? (32:6)

The word naval, vile, is not used anywhere else in the Torah. It is a strong term to describe an ungrateful nation. Why does the Torah use it here? Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, illustrates the lack of gratitude which Klal Yisrael demonstrates with the following analogy. A young couple won the grand prize: one year in a resort, all expenses paid. There had to be some catch to this prize. Who would give away such an incredible prize - and why?

They arrived at the small town which was at the outskirts of the palatial resort. The town hosted a small Jewish community among whose members was the wealthy sponsor of their prize. "Why did we win?" they asked him. He explained, "Our community needs a fresh infusion of spirituality. We need a young, vibrant couple that will raise the community's consciousness,

elevate its spirits, and increase its commitment to serve the Almighty. We chose you because we feel that you have the potential to create this environment."

The young couple did not waste any time. As soon as they obtained the keys, they set to work - fixing up the cottage where they would be staying. Money was no object. They had a credit card to spend whatever they needed to produce positive results. First, however, they had to fix up the cottage, so that it would be more comfortable and give off a "positive" feeling. Every day, something else occupied their time. After all, it was not a small cottage. After a day of shopping, they were tired and had to rest. A person must eat well in order to have the strength to do "so much." They ate well. They slept well; they enjoyed. They did everything, but what they had been asked to do.

Six months went by and they now needed a vacation. All of this "strenuous" shopping, eating and sleeping had taken its toll on them. Two weeks at a spa to "rest up" was not asking too much. When they returned, they discovered that their cottage was locked.

Their key did not work. Indeed, the locks had been changed. What chutzpah! They immediately went to town to confront their benefactor and demand an explanation.

"I am very sorry, but I cannot allow you to use the cottage any longer. Also, I must ask you to return the credit card. You will have to find another place to live and another source of income," the wealthy benefactor told them.

"How dare you do this without any warning?" the young man demanded angrily. "Is this the way you treat your guests? You invite us out here, and then you throw us out without so much as a roof over our heads!"

"You are surprised?" the man asked. "Well, I am also surprised. What possessed you to think that you could move in, spend all of that money and accomplish nothing? What have you done in the six months since your arrival? You have wallowed away your days shopping, spending, sleeping, vacationing - everything except the one thing that I asked you to do. You were supposed to raise the community's religious consciousness, and you did nothing but satisfy your own physical desires. You had everything, and you did nothing. How dare you complain?"

We have just read an analogy on life. When something goes wrong; when we are struck by troubles, illness, financial disaster, we ask the classic question, "Why me? What did I do to deserve this?" Then we become angry. It is wrong that we should have it so "bad."

Hashem responds with a powerful Ha'THashem, "Is it to Hashem that you do this? I gave you everything. Where is your gratitude? Did you think that it was all for nothing?"

Nobody gets a free ride in this world. I provided you with life. I provided you with shelter, with health, with food, with family, and what did you do in return?

"Am naval, O vile nation!" Instead of sanctifying My Name in the world, you profaned it. Instead of acting like a moral and ethical nation, you became like all of the other nations. At times, you even attempted to outdo them. Now, when things are not going exactly the way you had planned, you come to Me to complain. After all of this ingratitude, you expect Me to give you back the keys to the house? What made you think that you could get away with it, live a life of abandon, taking and taking, and giving nothing in return? How dare you complain?"

There is one difference, however, between the analogy and reality. Hashem is not merely a human benefactor, who, when betrayed, responds negatively. Hashem is a loving Father, who never turns away from His children. He chastises and He punishes, but He embraces us lovingly when we return. We know what we have done. Now we must undo it. He is waiting.

O' vile and unwise people. (32:6)

Rashi explains the word naval, vile, as applying to Klal Yisrael for their lack of gratitude to Hashem. They conveniently forgot what He had done

for them. Sadly, we have not changed over the years. Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, relates an episode that occurred concerning a couple who were on the verge of divorce. Apparently, the husband felt that his wife absolutely refused to do things "his" way. They had already gone to counseling and therapy to no avail. The therapists all agreed that his wife was not going to change, and, if it bothered the husband that much, they should get a divorce. There was no other alternative. Baruch Hashem, the couple saw beyond the shortsightedness of the counselors and sought out Rav Zilberstein as a last attempt at saving their marriage.

After listening to the husband present his criticism of his wife, Rav Zilberstein understood that much of what he was saying was not critical. His wife was really not guilty, considering the prevailing attitude in the house and some of the impossible demands the husband was imposing on her. After speaking to the wife, he saw a woman who was heartbroken, who did not want a divorce, but simply could not live up to her husband's onerous standards and demands.

Rabbi Zilberstein turned to the husband and said, "I know of a chosson, a bridegroom, who, one thousand years after the wedding, remembered the favors that his wife performed for him when they were first married. He took pity on her and remained committed to her."

The husband was certain that his ears were playing tricks on him. One thousand years after the wedding! "Who is this elusive chosson that lived for so many years?" he asked the rav. The rav was adamant. Yes, this chosson existed, and it was true. His devotion had not waned.

"Would you like to know the identity of this chosson?" the rav asked. "He is none other than Hashem! One thousand years after yetzias Mitzrayim, the exodus from Egypt, He says to Knesses Yisrael, that He remembers her love as a young bride. Yirmiyahu HaNavi says, I recall for you the kindness of your youth, the love of your nuptials, your following Me into the Wilderness, into an unknown land.' (Yirmiyah 2:2) Hashem remembered how His nation followed Him out of Egypt, without anything but the basic essentials which they were able to grab during their liberation. A nation with so many children and infants left the 'protection' of Egypt to travel through a dangerous wilderness. Why? Because they followed Hashem - as a woman follows her husband.

"Tell me," the rav continued, "when you first married your wife, did she not leave her home and her family to follow you to the city of your choice? Did she complain? Yet, you have the audacity to sit in judgment against her. Where is your shame? Why do you not consider what she has done for you?"

"How many years have elapsed since your marriage took place? Ten, twenty, thirty? Certainly not as long as Hashem spent with the Jewish People - and He remembered. Why are you acting differently? If, after all of this, you insist on going through with the divorce, I suggest one thing. On Rosh Hashanah, when you recite the Mussaf Shemoneh Esrai, and you come to the passage of Zocharti lach chesed ne'urayich, I recall the kindness of your youth,' skip it! You have no business reciting this pasuk.

"Indeed, it might even serve as a prosecuting counsel against you. After all, you do not remember; you do not fulfill the meaning of this pasuk."

Rav Zilberstein concludes by exhorting us to remember what Hashem constantly does for us. Every Jew must remember his obligation to appreciate Hashem's beneficence. He cites Horav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zl, who said, that to make a brachah, blessing, without kavanah, intention, purpose or meaning, is iniquitous, but to recite the Nodeh lechah, "We thank you Hashem," of Bircas HaMazon, Bentching, without kavanah, is much, much worse. To forget Hashem is the nadir of ingratitude.

He was like an eagle arousing its nest, hovering over its young, spreading its wings and taking them, carrying them on its pinions. (32:11)

Rashi explains that Hashem led the Jewish People with mercy and compassion similar to the manner in which an eagle displays his mercy towards its young. He does not enter his nest suddenly. First, he flaps and

shakes his wings above his children. He shakes between one tree and another tree, between one branch and another, so that his children awake and have the strength to receive him. Furthermore, he hovers above his young, careful not to rest his weight upon them. Rather, he covers them in such a manner that he touches, yet does not touch them. When he comes to take them from place to place, he does not take them with his feet like other birds. This is because other birds are afraid of the eagle which soars high and flies over them and must protect his young by holding them with his feet, thereby protecting them with his body. The eagle fears only the arrow. Therefore, he carries his young on his wings, implying, "Let the arrow enter my body, but not harm my children." Likewise, Hashem protected us from harm when the Egyptians shot arrows at us and catapulted stones. Likewise, when Hashem comes to redeem us, He will not come suddenly, but He will first make noise to arouse us so that we can prepare ourselves for the special moment.

Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl, sharpens the contrast between the eagle and other birds. When other birds come to retrieve their young, they simply enter the nest, pick up their young, and leave. Not so the eagle, who first stirs up the nest and then spreads his wings above the nestlings so that, with keen, courageous eyes, they fly up to the nest upon the wings of their parent. They trust themselves to make this brave, upward flight because they have been imbued with courage and trust by their parent. So did Hashem first awaken His nation, giving them the opportunity to get in the habit of having the courage to trust themselves with free-willed decision and full consciousness to His guidance. This conscious, free-willed guidance was the preliminary condition that served as the basis for the future additional guidance that was to make them worthy of His Presence. The young eagle has the courage and self-confidence to leave the security of his warm nest and trust himself to fly upward into the isolating heights where his parent hovers. Anybody who has ever taken a chance, left a well-paying position to gamble on the future, knows that it takes courage and trust to make that move. Most people adjust very well to security - and want to remain that way. Everywhere, men and nations feel themselves secure only in the comfortable life established on the principles of power, money and strength.

To sacrifice a life built upon the foundation of material exaltation and imagined security-- and transition into a life founded in the spirituality and morality that men are supposed to live-- does require courage and nobility of character. The world is used to self-worship, to the veneration of man and nature. To eschew all of this adoration in order to reach the lofty heights of morals and intelligence for which man should strive, to give it all up for a life of submission to Hashem, takes enormous courage. In order to obtain this courage, it was necessary for the nascent Jewish nation to receive its training by wandering in the stark wilderness under the guidance of the Almighty. The experiences which they sustained, as well as the teachings they received, provided them with an education and an awakening that inspired them to loftier goals. Indeed, they went from being a people of this world into becoming a People of G-d.

As the eagle trains and imbues his young, so did Hashem guide us to the realization that there was more; we should strive for it. We can obtain it, if we believe in ourselves enough to believe in Hashem.

Va'ani Tefillah Ha'maalcha mei'eretz Mitzrayim harchev picha va'amaleihu. Who took you out from Egypt, open wide your mouth and I will fill it.

Ibn Ezra comments that belief in Hashem as the guiding force Who implemented the entire exodus from Egypt is a pre-requisite for us to receive His favor. When we believe that He - and only He - took us out of Egypt, then we can fill our mouths with requests, so that all that we ask will be granted. The Chasam Sofer questions the use of the words, "open wide your mouth" and "I will fill it." Also, why is the word ha'maalcha, "Who takes you up," used rather than ho'tzeiticha, "took you out." Furthermore, if the emphasis is on "going up," it should have written he'elisicha, "took you up." Why is the present tense used?

The Chasam Sofer cites an analogy to a prince who attempted to scale a very high tower. As he was climbing, he slipped and fell down into a deep cellar, ending up lower than he was when he had begun his upward trek. His father encouraged him to attempt to climb once again. This time, however, the prince was already weakened by his fall. Thus, they would have to drop down into his mouth vitamins and other supplements to give him the strength to continue. At every step, the prince, in his weakened state, holding on for dear life to the ladder, opened his mouth as the vitamins were dropped in. Likewise, our Patriarchs began the spiritual trek "upwards," so that they could partake in the spiritual Presence of Hashem. Regrettably, they fell into the deep cellar of Egyptian contamination. In taking them out, Hashem again prepared the ladder for them to be able to rise up to their aspirations. They must, however, keep their "mouths" open in order to receive the spiritual supplements which Hashem provides them with on a daily basis in the way of Torah and Tefillah. Thus, Hashem is taking them up. He enables this by their opening their mouths, so that He can fill them with His spiritual life source.

Bircas K'siva V'chasima Tova!

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