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Table of Contents:

- Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz on the Slumber of Habit
- Rav Hershel Schachter - Musaf Amidah of Rosh Hashana
- Rav Yitzchok Kossowsky on Teshuvah Before Creation
- Chaim Ozer Shulman - Teshuva: A Mitzvah or a Gift
- Rav Dessler on Malchuyos, Zichronos & Shofaros
- Rav YY Jacobson - The Night I Choose Trust Over Despair
- Rav Ahron Lopiansky - Between Malchus and Adnus

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שיחות מוסר by Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (1902–1979)
The Slumber of Habit: The Power of a Single Awakening תרומת ההרגל

The Slumber of Habit. The Torah describes *teshuvah* as something very close to us. כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו. - *the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it* (Devarim 30:14). The Ramban and Sforno explain that this entire passage refers to the mitzvah of *teshuvah*. It is not in heaven, nor is it beyond the sea. Anyone who sees this will be astounded. If the mitzvah of *teshuvah* is so easy, why does not everyone turn away from their evil ways? Why are true *baalei teshuvah* so rare? A person may know perfectly well that his conduct is wrong. Why, then, does he fail to choose the path of *teshuvah* that is so close to him? A person only needs to confess with his mouth and reflect in his heart, and he is like a newborn child.

The Danger of Getting Used to Sin. The answer is that a person's tragedy is getting used to his situation. He makes peace with his condition, no matter how low it is. This is the power of habit. Because of this, he does not feel the need to do *teshuvah*. If he were to suddenly see his situation, he would definitely awaken to repent and become a different person. Imagine a person who never knew that everyone eventually dies. If he suddenly witnessed someone's death, would not he be completely shaken? His heart would turn over, and he would become a complete *baal teshuvah*.

We can say this is what Chazal meant in the Gemara. The Gemara asks, דאמר רבה מאי דכתיב זה דרכם כסל למו - *Rabba said, what is the meaning of the verse, this is their way, their folly* (Tehillim 49:14). The Gemara explains, וידועים רשעים שדרכם למיתה ויש להם חלב על כסלם, - *the wicked know their path leads to death, but they have fat on their flanks* (Shabbos 31b). This means they are so accustomed to it that death makes absolutely no impression on them. The Gemara continues, שמא תאמר שכוחה היא מהן, - *perhaps you will say they forget about it, the verse therefore says, and after them, they speak of it with their mouths, selah*. If they simply forgot, they could be fixed. If they saw a friend die or were reminded of the day of death, they would become *baalei teshuvah*. Instead, their bitter end is constantly spoken of in their mouths, and because constant familiarity has dulled even this knowledge, it no longer awakens them.

The Story of Yaakov's Burial. The Gemara discusses how Eisav tried to stop Yaakov's burial. Eisav claimed the plot was his. The brothers told him they bought it. Eisav demanded the deed. They told him the deed was in Egypt, and they sent Naftali to get it. The Gemara then says, חושם - *Chushim the son of Dan was there, and his ears were heavy, he said to them, what is this* (Sotah 13a). They told him Eisav was delaying the burial until Naftali returned from Egypt. Chushim responded, ועתה נפתלי מארעא דמצרים יהא אבי אבא, - *and until Naftali comes from the land of Egypt, will my grandfather lie in disgrace? He took a club and struck him on the head*.

This seems puzzling. Why did not any of the other brothers ask Chushim's question? How could the sons of Yaakov tolerate such a situation?

The answer is exactly this. They argued and debated with Eisav. With every claim and argument, they thought they were defeating him. From one statement to the next, Yaakov remained lying in disgrace. Through this gradual process, they got used to the situation. It is human nature to get used to even the worst situations. This was not the case for Chushim ben Dan. Since he was hard of hearing, he did not know about the argument at all. The terrible situation suddenly appeared before his eyes. Because he was not used to the situation, he couldn't tolerate it, and he ended the matter without delay.

The Power of a Sudden Awakening. In several places, Chazal explain that saving a person depends on an awakening. He must suddenly see the situation he has fallen into.

The Midrash relates the story of Yakum ish Tzeroros, the nephew of R Yosi ben Yoezer. Yakum was riding a horse on Shabbos while they were leading R Yosi to be executed. Yakum mocked him, ראה הסוס שהרכיב אותי,

see the horse my master let me ride, and see the horse your master let you ride (Bereishis Rabbah 65:22). R Yosi replied, אם כן למכעיסיו קל וחומר לעושי רצונו, *if it is so for those who anger Him, how much more so for those who do His will*. Yakum asked, עשה, *has any man done His will more than you?* R Yosi answered, אם כן לעושי רצונו קל וחומר למכעיסיו, *if it is so for those who do His will, how much more so for those who anger Him*. The Midrash says, *the matter entered him like the venom of a snake*. Yakum immediately went and subjected himself to the four death penalties of the Beis Din. R Yosi dozed off and saw Yakum's bed flying in the air, and he said, לשעה קלה קדמני זה לגן עדן, *this one beat me to Gan Eden by a short hour*.

Here was a man who had been completely wicked his entire life. His uncle certainly tried constantly to bring him back to the right path, but to no avail. Yet, through a single awakening that struck him suddenly, he transformed in an instant. He became a different person.

A similar thing happened to R Elazar ben Dordaya. He was deeply immersed in sin. A single statement of rebuke about his terrible situation moved and awakened him. He put his head between his knees and cried bitterly until his soul departed. A heavenly voice declared, רבי אלעזר בן דורדיא מזומן לחיי העולם הבא, *R Elazar ben Dordaya is destined for the life of the World to Come* (Avodah Zarah 17a).

This is the power of a sudden awakening. Habit kills all the holy feelings of renewal that come to change a crooked path. A single awakening can break the grip of routine.

How to Awaken Oneself. The way to reach this awakening is to awaken oneself deliberately. A person must reflect on his situation and ask himself the question that Chushim ben Dan asked, מאי האי, *what is this?* Where do I stand? Through this, the matters will enter his heart, as it says, *the matter is very near to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to do it*.

The Midrash states, רבנן אמרי שבעה דברים אמר שלמה על העצל ומה שאמר משה, *the Rabbis say, Shlomo said seven things about the lazy person, and what Moshe said was greater than all of them* (Devarim Rabbah 8:6). Shlomo showed seven levels of laziness. But the lowest of all is the level Moshe spoke about when he said, *in your mouth and in your heart, to do it*. You just have to take the word out of your mouth. Chazal teach us that someone who does not do *teshuvah* is suffering from laziness. There is no greater laziness than this, since he only needs to speak a word from his mouth.

It is an established halacha that if a man betroths a woman on the condition that he is righteous, she is betrothed even if he is completely wicked. The Gemara explains, שמא הררה תשובה בדעתו, *perhaps he had thoughts of teshuvah in his mind* (Kiddushin 49b). The Rambam rules similarly, *she is doubtfully betrothed, perhaps he had thoughts of teshuvah in his heart* (Hilchos Ishus 8:5). The Lechem Mishneh asks why this does not apply when someone betroths a woman in front of invalid witnesses. Why do not we suspect they had thoughts of *teshuvah* and became valid witnesses? He answers that in our case, the man explicitly says in front of us that he is righteous. Since he said it in front of us, we suspect he might have had thoughts of *teshuvah*.

Since he speaks in front of us, we see at least the beginning of an awakening in him. Because of this, we suspect he might have become righteous. This is not the case with invalid witnesses. Since we see no sign of awakening in them, they definitely remain in their habit and laziness.

The Method of Asking Questions. We learn the way to awaken a sinner from his slumber from the story of Yakum ish Tzeroros. R Yosi did not give his second answer right away. At first, Yakum's ears weren't listening, and he would not have been awakened to return. R Yosi acted wisely and gave his first answer. This caused Yakum to awaken and ask a question. Once he was asking rather than mocking, his ears were open.

He was then able to absorb the second answer. This was the right moment to give an answer that would enter him like snake venom. We learn from this that the way to create emotion is to bring a person to a state of wonder and questioning. Then, the rebuke of *teshuvah* is heard and absorbed well.

Making the Old Feel New. This is why we fulfill the mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt through questions and answers. It is difficult to fulfill this mitzvah properly because everything has been known for many years, and everyone is used to it. What will it add if a person just repeats the story by rote? The story needs to make him feel as if he just left Egypt. It is impossible to reach this feeling without great emotion. Therefore, Chazal established that the mitzvah is fulfilled through a question and answer. Through the question, the answer sounds new, and everyone will come to the proper awakening.

The Gemara says, אם אין לו בן אשתו שואלתו ואם לאו הוא שואל לעצמו, *if he has no son, his wife asks him, and if not, he asks himself* (Pesachim 116a). This shows that the awakening does not only happen when someone else asks. A person can ask himself, and this will help him hear the answer and be awakened by it.

Internalizing the Doubt. During his famous judgment, Shlomo HaMelech listened to the claims of the two women. Then he repeated them, ויאמר המלך זאת אומרת זה בני החי ובנך המת וזאת אומרת לא כי בנך המת ובני החי, *and the king said, this one says, this is my living son and your son is dead, and this one says, no, your son is dead and my living son* (I Melachim 3:23). The Shulchan Aruch rules this as halacha, צריך הדיין, *a judge must hear the words of the litigants and repeat them* (Choshen Mishpat 17:7). Here too, the judge must make the doubt in the case feel like his own doubt. Through this, he will strive with all his might to find a true judgment. The way to reach this is by repeating the litigants' words with his own mouth.

The Gemara says, אמר רב הונא כיון שעבר אדם עבירה ושנה בה הותרה לו הותרה, *Rav Huna said, once a person commits a sin and repeats it, it becomes permitted to him. Could you think it becomes permitted? Rather, it becomes like something permitted to him* (Yoma 86b). Why did not Rav Huna say from the start that it becomes like something permitted? This is also a technique to help the listener truly hear the words of Chazal. When he hears Rav Huna say it becomes permitted, he will ask in astonishment, could it actually become permitted? Then he will listen carefully, and the words will enter his heart.

Breaking the Habit. The Gemara says, מכריו רבי אלכסנדר מאן בעי חיי כנוף, *ואתו כולי עלמא לגביה אמרי ליה הב לן חיי אמר להו מי האיז החפץ חיים וגו מצור* *R Alexandri announced, who wants life? Everyone gathered and came to him, saying to him, give us life. He said to them, who is the person who desires life, guard your tongue from evil* (Tehillim 34:13-14, Avodah Zarah 19b). R Alexandri wanted to explain that the verse means actual life. If he had just shown them the verse, they would not have seen anything new. They had already read it many times. But when he asked, *who wants life?* and everyone jumped up to hear the announcement, it was the perfect moment to explain the true meaning of the verse. It means actual, literal life.

The difficulty of *teshuvah*, then, is not that it is distant from us. The Torah tells us that it is exceedingly close. The difficulty is that habit makes even the most important truths seem old. The *avodah* is to ask ourselves מאי האי, *what is this?* - and to look again at what we have ceased to notice, until what we already know becomes new enough to enter the heart. A single moment of genuine awakening can then accomplish what years of familiarity could not.

Rav Schachter on the Moadim - Insights and Commentary Based on the Shiurim of **Rav Hershel Schachter** Adapted by Dr. Allan Weissman available at <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0FL5876LH>
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MUSSAF AMIDAH OF ROSH HASHANAH

1. Teki'os al Seder HaBerachos

The *Mishnah* in *Rosh Hashanah* (4:5) records the *halachah* that we are supposed to blow the *shofar* על סדר הברכות – within the order of the *berachos* of the *Mussaf Amidah*, after *Malchuyos*, after *Zichronos*, and after *Shofaros*. *Rashi*, both in his commentary on the *Mishnah* and on the Torah (*Vayikra* 23:24), seems to imply that this is a *d'oraisa* requirement. In fact, the Torah requires three sets of *shofar*-blowing, each consisting of a *teki'ah*, *teru'ah*, and *teki'ah*, and the three sets correspond to these three themes of the *Mussaf Amidah* – *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros*.

The *Ramban* disagrees, questioning *Rashi*'s view based on a *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (34b) that discusses the case of one presented with the choice of traveling to a city in which he will be able to hear the blowing of the *shofar* but not the recitation of *Mussaf*, or traveling to a different city in which he will be able to listen to the recitation of *Mussaf* but not the blowing of the *shofar*. The *Gemara* considers it obvious that traveling to the city with the *shofar* takes precedence because hearing the *shofar* is a *mitzvah d'oraisa*, whereas the *mitzvah* of reciting *Mussaf* is only *miderabbanan*. Obviously, if *Mussaf* itself is only *miderabbanan*, the *din* of *teki'os al seder haberachos* can only be a *takanah d'rabbanan*.

Rav Soloveitchik was fond of relating the following explanation in defense of *Rashi* (see *sefer Yom Teru'ah*). *Rashi* only meant that the recitation of *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* is a *mitzvah d'oraisa* when it comes in conjunction with the blowing of the *shofar*. Then, the *mitzvah* of *teki'os al seder haberachos* has been fulfilled. In the situation described above, in which the city with a *shali'ach tzibbur* to recite *Mussaf* will not have *teki'as shofar*, the recitation of *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* is only *miderabbanan*. However, when one combines *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* with *teki'as shofar*, he has fulfilled a *d'oraisa* obligation according to *Rashi*.

In fact, the *Rav* would often caution his *minyán* on *Rosh Hashanah* to wait to hear the final syllable of the last word of each *berachah* of *chazaras hashatz* from the *chazan*, and only then to answer *amen*. A correct response of *amen* to the *berachos* of *chazaras hashatz* is necessary for the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of *teki'os al seder haberachos*. This is especially relevant on the *Yomim Nora'im*, when the tune is such that the pronunciation of the final word of each *berachah* is elongated. [See *MiPninei HaRav*, 2001 ed., pp. 127, 128-129; *Eretz HaTzvi*, p. 49.]

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that the idea that there is a unique *mitzvah* when *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* are recited in conjunction with *teki'as shofar* is based on a *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (29b), which discusses the reason for the absence of *shofar*-blowing when *Rosh Hashanah* falls on *Shabbos*.

At first, the *Gemara* understood that the Torah alludes to this *halachah* in the two *pesukim* that describe *Rosh Hashanah*: שבתון זכרון – "a rest day, a remembrance of *teru'ah* blasts" (*Vayikra* 23:24), and, יום תרועה יהיה לכם – "It shall be a day of *teru'ah* blasts for you" (*Bamidbar* 29:1). The first description of *Rosh Hashanah* implies that the *shofar* must merely be spoken of. This refers to a year in which *Rosh Hashanah* falls on *Shabbos*, on which the *shofar*-blast is only mentioned, but the *shofar* is not actually sounded. The second *passuk* refers to a year in which *Rosh Hashanah* falls on a weekday, when we are commanded to actually sound the *shofar*.

The *Gemara* proceeds to reject this interpretation of the *pesukim* and concludes that the absence of *shofar*-blowing on *Shabbos* is merely a rabbinic decree, the *gezeirah d'Rabbah*, instituted lest one carry the *shofar* through a public domain and desecrate *Shabbos*. The *Gemara* never returns to explain the meaning behind the description of the day of *Rosh Hashanah* as זכרון תרועה.

Rav Soloveitchik suggested that once we reach the conclusion of the *Gemara*, that זכרון תרועה is not an allusion to the absence of *shofar*-

blowing when *Rosh Hashanah* falls on the *Shabbos*, the phrase may have a totally different connotation – *teki'as shofar in conjunction with davening*.

Indeed, we find the usage of the word זכרון in connection with *davening* in a different context. The *Gemara* in *Rosh Hashanah* (26a) teaches that a cow's horn may not be used as a *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*. The *Gemara* explains that using such a *shofar* would be equivalent to the *Kohen Gadol* wearing his golden vestments inside the *Kodesh HaKodashim* on *Yom Kippur*. Both recall the sin of the *eigel hazav*, and so, both are prohibited based on the principle of אין קטיגור נעשה סניגור – an "accuser" cannot become a "defender." It is only in the *Kodesh HaKodashim* that we apply this principle, according to which a *mitzvah*-object is disqualified even if it merely belongs to the same category as an object used for an *aveirah*.

In explaining the comparison between the *mitzvah* of *shofar* and the *avodah* of the *Kohen Gadol* inside the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, the *Gemara* advances the reasoning: כיון דלזכרון הוא כבפנים דמי – "Since [blowing the *shofar* on *Rosh Hashanah*] is for the purpose of remembrance, it is equivalent to [an *avodah* performed] inside [the *Kodesh HaKodashim*]." The connotation of the *Gemara* seems to be that *teki'as shofar* is for the purpose of זכרון – combining with the *davening*, during which one is considered

to be standing in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*. That is why *teki'as shofar* is equivalent to an *avodah* performed inside the *Kodesh HaKodashim*.

The *Gemara*'s use of the term זכרון as a reference to *davening* seems to be based on its understanding of the Torah's description of *Rosh Hashanah* as a זכרון תרועה. The Torah insists that on *Rosh Hashanah* we are to engage in *tefillah* along with the *teru'ah* of the *shofar*. This *passuk*, then, is *Rashi*'s source. It teaches us that if the *shofar* is sounded, then there is also a *d'oraisa* obligation to recite *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros*, to blend the *tefillah* together with the *teru'os*. If the *teru'os* are absent, *Mussaf* is only *miderabbanan*.

In what way can we understand the connection between *shofar*-blowing and *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros*? Indeed, we may ask why the fulfillment of the seemingly extraneous *mitzvah* of *teki'as shofar* is not considered a *hefsek* (interruption) in the middle of the *Shemoneh Esrei*.

[*Rav Soloveitchik* pointed out a similar situation, the *na'anu'im* (waving) of the *lulav* in the middle of the recitation of *Hallel*. The reason this does not constitute a *hefsek* is that these two *mitzvos* are integrally connected. The waving of the *lulav* during *Shemoneh Esrei* would be considered a *hefsek*; only in *Hallel* is it not an interruption.

Tosfos on *Sukkah* (37b, s.v. *beholdu*) teaches that the *na'anu'im* that are performed during the *Hallel* are a fulfillment of the *passuk*, אז ירננו – "Then, the trees of the forest will sing joyously" (*Divrei HaYamim I* 16:33). We shake the *lulav* to convey the notion that the trees are dancing in front of *Hashem*, and we wave the *lulav* to symbolize that the trees are bowing before *Hashem* (*Orach Chaim* 651:9). We demonstrate that all of nature is engaged in the praise of *Hashem*, together with mankind. Thus, the *na'anu'im* of the *lulav* are not extraneous; quite the contrary, this *mitzvah* blends together with the recitation of *Hallel*.

2. Rav Schachter on Birchas Kohanim in Chazaras HaShatz

Another *mitzvah* performed in the middle of *chazaras hashatz* is that of *Birchas Kohanim*, colloquially referred to as "*duchening*." The *Gemara* in *Sotah* (38a) derives from the following *passuk* that this *mitzvah* takes place at the conclusion of the offering of the *korbanos tzibbur*: וישא אהרן את ידיו אל העם ויברכם וירד מעשות החטאת והעולה והשלמים *Aharon raised his hands toward the people and blessed them; then he descended from having performed the chattas-offering, the olah-offering, and the shlamim-offering.* (*Vayikra* 9:22)

For this reason, *Rav Yaakov Emden* (*Mor U'Ketzi'ah*) writes that nowadays, the *mitzvah* of *duchening* must be only rabbinic in nature,

given the lack of a *Beis HaMikdash* in which to offer *korbanos*.

The *Mishnah Berurah* (in a footnote to *Orach Chaim* 128:44) brings this opinion, but explains based on multiple sources in the *Gemara* and *Midrash* that *duchening* remains a *mitzvah d'oraisa* even nowadays. Similarly, the *Keren Orah* (*Sotah* 38a), quotes his older brother, the *Mishkenos Ya'akov* (*Orach Chaim*, *Teshuvah* 90), who explains that *duchening* remains a *mitzvah d'oraisa*, despite our inability to offer actual *korbanos tzibbur*.

Rav Soloveitchik expanded upon this theme in light of the *berachah* of *Retzei* in the *Shemoneh Esrei*. *Retzei* immediately follows *Shema Koleinu*, in which we ask that *Hashem* accept our prayers: וקבל ברחמים – "and accept, with compassion and favor, our prayer." What, then, is added by the beginning of the very next *berachah*, רצה ד' – "Be favorable, *Hashem*, our G-d, toward Your people Israel and their prayer," which seems to be a restatement of our previous request?

Rav Soloveitchik explained that the *berachah* of *Retzei* was recited by the *Kohanim* in the *Beis HaMikdash* after the sprinkling of the blood of the *Korban Tamid*, in order to ensure that the *korban* would be accepted with favor (*Mishnah Tamid* 5:1). Indeed, the term "*ritzui*" is a technical term that appears in connection with *korbanos* (in the vast majority of its usage in *Tanach*). Examples of this usage are, ונרצה לו לכפר עליו – "and it shall become acceptable for him, to atone for him" (*Vayikra* 1:4), and, – "[If it shall be eaten on the third day] it is rejected; it shall not be accepted" (*Leviticus* 19:7).

The *Ba'al HaTanya* (*Iggeres HaTeshuvah*, perek 2) explains that – הכזה יהיה צום אבחרהו ... הלזה תקרא צום ויום רצון לך, *passuk*, "Can such be the fast I choose ... Do you call this a fast and a **day of favor** to *Hashem*?" (*Yeshayah* 58:5), uses the term "*ritzui*" in relation to a *ta'anis* because a fast day shares this element with the offering of *korbanos*. This is in line with the *tefillah* that Rav Sheshes added at the conclusion of his *Shemoneh Esrei* when he observed a *ta'anis*: "May it be Your will to consider my fat and blood that have been decreased as if I had offered them before You on the *mizbe'ach*, and **favor** me" (*Berachos* 17a). [See *B'Ikvei HaTzon*, p. 82.]

Thus, the innovation of *Retzei* is that in this *berachah* we request that *Hashem* consider our *tefillas* as if we had brought a *korban*. It is not only that our *tefillas* correspond to the *korbanos*, but that the *tefillas* themselves are considered to be as *korba- nos*. The element that serves to convert the *tefillah* into a *korban* is the *berachah* of *Retzei*.

Rav Soloveitchik explained that when one recites *Retzei* in his private *Shemoneh Esrei*, his *tefillah* is accepted by *Hashem* as if he had brought a *korban yachid* (of an individual). When a *shli- ach tzibbur* recites *Retzei*, the *chazaras hashatz* is then converted into a *korban tzibbur* (of the community). This is because of the concept of תפילת הציבור, which is distinct from תפילה בציבור. A תפילה בציבור is accomplished when each individual recites his own silent *Shemoneh Esrei* at the same time as the other members of a *minyan*. However, תפילת הציבור is the *chazaras hashatz*, in which the *chazan* serves as the representative of the *tzibbur*

to offer **one tefillah** on behalf of the **entire tzibbur** as a whole. In this way, the *chazan* is comparable to a *Kohen* offering a *korban tzibbur* in the *Beis HaMikdash* – one *korban* on behalf of the entire *tzibbur*.

Rav Shlomo HaKohen (*Binyan Shlomo*, *siman* 1), *Av Beis Din* of Vilna in the late 1800's and *magi'ah* of the *Vilna Shas*, adds that this is the intent of the *tefillah*, ותעבר לפניך עתירתנו כעולה וקרבן, "May our entreaty become pleasing before You as an *olah*-offer- ing and as a sacrifice," which we recite just prior to *Birchas Kohanim* on *Yomim Tovim*. Absent *korbanos tzibbur*, we are unable to engage in *Birchas Kohanim*. This is really the theme of the beginning of the *berachah* of *Retzei* as well; we re-emphasize it in תעבר because the transformation of our *tefillas* into *korbanos* is indispensable to *Birchas Kohanim*.

We can also understand the requirement for the *Kohen* to ascend to the *duchan* (platform) during the recitation of *Retzei* in particular (*Sotah*

38b), since it is this *berachah* that establishes the *chazaras hashatz* as a *korban tzibbur*, which in turn makes it possible for the *Kohen* to *duchen*.

Thus, when the *shliach tzibbur* recites *Retzei* in the *chazaras hashatz*, the communal תפילת הציבור is transformed into a *korban tzibbur*. This occurs on the level of *d'oraisa*, allowing for the *Bir- chas Kohanim* to be *d'oraisa* as well, even nowadays. The *Birchas Kohanim* does, in fact, take place at the conclusion of *korbanos tzibbur*. [The *Mishkenos Ya'akov* adds that although *tefillah* on a daily basis may be only rabbinic in nature (according to the *Ramban*), if it is a *tefillah* with *chazaras hashatz* and *duchening*, that *tefillah* would attain the status of a *d'oraisa*.] Accordingly, we can well understand the necessity of the placement of *Birchas Kohanim* in the midst of the *chazaras hashatz*. Not only is the *duchening* not a *hefsek*, but it is integrally related to the *chazaras hashatz*. [See *Nefesh Harav*, 1994 ed., pp. 121-122; Rav Schachter on the *Parsha*, *Parshas Shemini*.]

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Teshuvah Before Creation

Rav and ABD of Iyve, Volkovysk, and Johannesburg

Seven Things Before Creation

Rosh Hashanah marks the creation of man and opens the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*. In the *Machzor* we say, וזה היום תחלת מעשיך זכרון ליום ראשון, *This is the day that marks the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day*. On the day when Creation is renewed in judgment, man is summoned to renew himself through *Teshuvah*. The joining of these themes raises a fundamental question: why was *Teshuvah* necessary from the very beginning?

What power does *Teshuvah* possess that allows it to overturn a decree and straighten what sin has made crooked? *Chazal* taught, שנבעה דברים, נבראו קודם שנברא העולם אלו הן תורה ותשובה גן עדן וגיהנם כסא הכבוד ובית המקדש ורשמו של משיח – *Seven things were created before the world: Torah, Teshuvah, Gan Eden, Gehinnom, the Throne of Glory, the Beis Hamikdash, and the name of Mashiach* (*Pesachim* 54a; *Nedarim* 39b). *Bereishis Rabbah* gives a related list. It names the *Torah* and the Throne of Glory as having been created before the world, and the *Avos*, Israel, the *Beis Hamikdash*, and the name of *Mashiach* as having arisen in the Divine thought. It then adds *Teshuvah* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:4). Another Midrashic version adds *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom*. The lists differ in form, but each presents realities that had to precede the world because the world could not fulfill its purpose without them.

Torah is readily understood. *Chazal* say, קודשא בריך הוא אסתכל באורייא, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu looked into the Torah and created the world* (*Zohar*, *Terumah* 161a; see *Bereishis Rabbah* 1:1). *Torah* is the plan of Creation. Why, however, must the other things precede the world? More particularly, why is *Teshuvah*, itself a *mitzvah* of the *Torah*, counted separately?

These things were not merely earlier in time. They express the Divine purpose that preceded Creation. *Chazal* distinguish between what was actually created and what first arose in the Divine thought, יש מהם שנברא, ויש מהם שעלו במחשבה להבראות – *Some were created, and some arose in thought to be created* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 1:4). That which appears last in action is first in intention. The realities that preceded the world reveal the end for which the world was brought into being.

Kayin, the First Penitent and the First Murderer

Kayin was the first sinner to discover the power of *Teshuvah*, and Adam learned it from him. When Adam later met Kayin, he asked what had become of his judgment. Kayin answered, עשיתי תשובה ונתפשרתי – *I performed Teshuvah, and my judgment was mitigated*. Adam struck his face and exclaimed, כך היא כחה של תשובה ואנכי לא הייתי יודע, *Such is the power of Teshuvah, and I did not know* (*Bereishis Rabbah* 22:13). Adam then entered the waters of the Gichon up to his neck and fasted for seven weeks, until his body became like a sieve. He prayed, רבון כל העולמים העבר נא חטאתי מעלי וקבל את תשובתי וילמדו כל הדורות שיש תשובה ואתה

Master of all worlds, remove my sin from me and accept my Teshuvah, so that every generation will learn that Teshuvah exists and that You accept those who return. Hakadosh Baruch Hu extended His right hand, removed Adam's sin, and accepted his *Teshuvah* (Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer 20). Kayin thus became a sign for all *baalei Teshuvah*.

Kayin was also the first murderer. The *Torah* states, *ויהי בהיותם בשדה ויקם* - *When they were in the field, Kayin rose against Hevel his brother and killed him* (Bereishis 4:8). *Chazal* identify three matters over which the brothers quarreled: possession of the world, the future site of the *Beis Hamikdash*, and the extra twin sister born with Hevel. In each account, Kayin coveted what had fallen to his brother. The first murder thus contained the three recurring causes of war: greed for land and wealth, religious rivalry, and uncontrolled desire. Kayin became a sign not only for penitents, but also for murderers. His descendant Tuval-Kayin refined Kayin's craft by fashioning weapons for killers, *He refined and perfected Kayin's craft by making weapons for murderers* (Rashi to Bereishis 4:22, based on the Midrash). From Kayin's first weapon would develop the increasingly terrible instruments of war.

The appetite for wealth and territory has no natural limit. One who has one hundred desires two hundred, and one who has two hundred desires four hundred (Koheles Rabbah 1:13). This hunger has repeatedly driven rulers and nations to seize the lands and possessions of others. Religious jealousy has likewise kindled war. The cross and the crescent became emblems beneath which nations fought and shed blood. Each claimed that its road alone led to Heaven, and each sought to force that road upon others.

The holy faith of Israel did not spread by the sword. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* gave the *Torah* to Israel so that the nations might merit through it, but that merit could never be imposed by force. Truth bears witness to itself. *Converts were not accepted in the days of David or Shlomo*, when conversion might have been sought for wealth, grandeur, or political advantage (Yevamos 24b). A sincere convert is welcomed only after his motives have been tested and he freely accepts the *Torah* even while Israel is afflicted and persecuted. The *Torah* can command, *Do not despise an Edomite, for he is your brother* (Devarim 23:8), because its path is not conquest by the sword.

The third cause is desire. The episodes of Dinah and the *pilegesh b'Givah*, along with wars recorded among the nations, show how unrestrained passion can set entire peoples against one another. The ancient Midrashic account of two brothers thus contains the recurring sources of human bloodshed.

Regret and the Certainty That Teshuvah Is Possible

Yet the same Kayin who opened the path of murder also revealed the path of *Teshuvah*. Rabbeinu Yonah and the *Chovos HaLevavos* identify *regret and abandonment of sin* as foundations of *Teshuvah*. A person first recognizes the evil of his deed, then regrets it, and finally leaves it behind. Before any of these steps, however, he must believe that return is possible.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* explains that a person must know with certainty that *Teshuvah* is the remedy for rebellion and the path to healing from corrupt deeds. Through it, he can repair his error and recover what he has lost. Without this conviction, he may despair of *Hashem's* forgiveness and never seek pardon. That despair is expressed in the words, *Our transgressions and sins are upon us, and through them we waste away; how then can we live* (Yechezkel 33:10).

Kayin's cry, *Is my sin too great to bear* (Bereishis 4:13), can be read both as confession and as a question. *Chazal* hear him pleading: You bear the upper worlds and the lower worlds; can You not bear my transgression? Adam had violated a single command and was

expelled from *Gan Eden*. Kayin initially thought that the far graver sin of murder must place him beyond return. Yet he turned to *Hashem*, Who is *forgiving iniquity and passing over transgression*, and discovered that even his judgment could be mitigated.

Adam, by contrast, initially despaired. After his sin, *they knew that they were naked* (Bereishis 3:7), which *Chazal* understand to mean that they had been stripped even of their one *mitzvah*. When confronted, Adam's words suggested that he had eaten and would eat again. Only after Kayin emerged from judgment with a measure of hope did Adam grasp the strength of *Teshuvah*.

From where does regret itself come? When *Hashem* said, *Let us make man* (Bereishis 1:26), *Chazal* explain that He consulted Heaven and earth, or all the works of the preceding days. Man therefore contains traits found throughout the created order. He resembles the angels in some ways and the animals in others (Chagigah 16a). Regret, however, has no model elsewhere in Creation. It is a unique faculty implanted in man from the wisdom that preceded the world.

David said, *I bless Hashem* - אברך את ה' אשר יעצני אף לילות יסרוני כליותי, *Who counsels me; even at night my conscience instructs me* (Tehillim 16:7). The sinner's unrest is itself counsel from *Hashem*. Yeshayahu says, *There is no peace, says Hashem, for the wicked* (Yeshayahu 48:22). The Divine Name used in this verse teaches a striking lesson: the fact that *Hashem* does not allow the wicked to feel at peace with evil is itself an expression of mercy. Their unease can become the beginning of return.

Hashem does not desire the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his way and live (Yechezkel 33:11). The end of *Teshuvah* is therefore peace.

Chazal say, *Great is peace, for it was granted to those who perform Teshuvah* (Sifrei Bamidbar 42:2). If a person repeats a sin, however, his conscience can grow dull, *Once a person commits a sin and repeats it, it becomes as though permitted to him* (Yoma 86b).

The Inner War and Three Levels of Teshuvah

The *Masorah* joins three verses through the word *from his youth*: *For the inclination of man's heart is evil from his youth* (Bereishis 8:21); *a man of war from his youth*; and *Moav has been tranquil from his youth* (Yirmiyahu 48:11; Baal HaTurim to Bereishis 8:21). The *yetzer hara* begins its attack in youth, and man must therefore become a warrior in youth. If the *yetzer hara* defeats him, the struggle gives way to the false tranquility of Moav, a life no longer disturbed by conscience.

Of the wicked it is said, *For there are no pangs at their death, and their strength is sound* (Tehillim 73:4). *Chazal* explain that the wicked feel no fear or anguish over death; their heart is as broad and untroubled as a great hall (Shabbos 31b). Such calm is not spiritual health. A living conscience should ache when a person has betrayed it.

The *Chovos HaLevavos* describes three levels of *Teshuvah*. The highest is spontaneous return, when conscience awakens before punishment. This is *If you return, Israel, return to Me* (Yirmiyahu 4:1). The second comes when a person sees punishment befall others and takes warning. The lowest begins only after suffering reaches the sinner himself.

The *Torah* sets out these three levels in the passage of return (Devarim 30:1-10), proceeding from the lowest to the highest. First, after the blessings and curses have come upon Israel, *Hashem your G-d will restore your captivity and have mercy upon you* (Devarim 30:3). Next, *Hashem* places the curses upon Israel's enemies, *Hashem your G-d will place all these curses upon your enemies and pursuers, and you will return and listen to the voice of Hashem* (Devarim 30:7-8).

Finally comes return prompted neither by personal suffering nor by the

Usually *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* refer to reward and punishment after death. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai wept before his death because two roads lay before him, one leading to *Gan Eden* and the other to *Gehinnom*, and he did not know on which he would be led (Berachos 28b). *Chazal* likewise say, גן עדן לצדיקים וגיהנום לרשעים - *Gan Eden is for the righteous and Gehinnom for the wicked* (Eruvin 19a).

Yet *Chazal* also use these names for conditions within this world. Rava warned scholars who learned *Torah* without proper inward commitment not to inherit two *Gehinnoms*, suffering in this world without acquiring life in the next (Yoma 72b). By contrast, the *Avos* tasted a measure of the World to Come during their lives (Bava Basra 16b). Yaakov entered with the fragrance of *Gan Eden*, while Esav entered with *Gehinnom*. Yaakov's way was peace. Even when angered by Lavan, ויחר ליעקב וירב בלבן - *Yaakov became angry and contended with Lavan* (Bereishis 31:36), the Midrash observes that his contention consisted of conciliatory words, not blows (Bereishis Rabbah 74:10). Esav, by contrast, lived by the sword. The Midrash therefore also speaks of the *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* that human beings create on earth. The path of *Torah* and peace can make the world a garden; the path of Kayin and the sword can turn it into hell. *Hashem* placed both before man and commanded, ובהרת בחיים - *Choose life* (Devarim 30:19). Rashi compares this to a father who points out the best portion to his son and tells him to choose it.

Only one *tefach*, the width of a human hand, separates the two. The choice is expressed through human action. Another opinion says that a single wall stands between them. Walls separate brother from brother, nation from nation, rich from poor, ruler from subject, and oppressor from oppressed. The desire to rule erects these barriers, עת אשר שלט האדם - *the time when one man rules another to his harm* (Koheles 8:9).

The *Navi* cries, הלוא אב אחד לכלנו הלוא אֵל אחד בראנו מדוע נבגד איש באחיו - *Have we not all one Father; did not one G-d create us; why then do we betray one another* (Malachi 2:10). If humanity heard that voice, its walls could fall and brotherhood could replace rivalry.

Sedom was overturned in anger, באפו ובהמתו - *which Hashem overturned in His anger and wrath* (Devarim 29:22), because ואנשי סדם - *the people of Sedom were exceedingly wicked and sinful toward Hashem* (Bereishis 13:13). *Hashem* said, זעקת סדם ועמרה כי - *The outcry of Sedom and Amorah is great, and their sin is exceedingly heavy* (Bereishis 18:20).

Yechezkel identifies the social root of that evil, גאון שבעת לחם ושלות השקט - *Pride, fullness of bread, and tranquil ease were hers and her daughters', yet she did not strengthen the hand of the poor and needy* (Yechezkel 16:49). *Sedom* was wealthy, but its people wanted no travelers and resolved, נשכה את הרגל מבינותינו - *Let us cause travelers to disappear from among us*. *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* answered that He would cause them to be forgotten.

In our own days, nations have closed their gates to Jews fleeing destruction. Walls have risen between rich and poor, the sated and hungry, rulers and ruled. One nation's attempt to create a paradise for itself by excluding and subjugating others has helped create *Gehinnom* for the world.

The opinion that *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* are equal and gaze into one another describes peoples who live side by side while jealousy burns between them. Proximity without fellowship becomes rivalry. Envy destroys the peace of life until the garden itself becomes hell. These are the *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* that had to precede the world, because man had to be shown both roads from the beginning. The *Torah* places before him the הרע ואת המות ואת הטוב ואת החיים - *life and good, death and evil* (Devarim 30:15). The cherubim point toward life; the turning sword points toward death.

The variant lists of what preceded Creation can now be read as different arrangements of the same underlying ideas. One version names *Torah*, with the *Avos* and Israel, who receive and embody it, included within its

purpose. Another names the *Avos* and Israel, while *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom* are contained within the *Torah's* choice between life and death. In each version, the Midrash identifies the foundations established before the world so that it could reach its intended end.

The Choice That Preceded Creation

The world thus stands between two images: the cherubim and the turning sword. The sword is the inheritance of Kayin, the path of jealousy, conquest, and destruction. The cherubim stand above the *Aron*, their wings raised heavenward and their faces turned toward one another. They represent the world as it was meant to be, with man preserving the purity of his beginning and *Torah* directing his strength toward peace. Only a *tefach*, the measure of a human hand, separates *Gan Eden* from *Gehinnom*. The same hand can grasp a sword or perform a *mitzvah*; it can build a wall between one person and another or help bring that wall down. Yet man is not left to struggle alone. Before the world was created, *Hashem* prepared both the *Torah* that reveals the path of life and *Teshuvah* that allows one who has strayed to return to it.

Rosh Hashanah brings us back to that first purpose. זה היום תחלת מעשיך - *This is the day that marks the beginning of Your works, a remembrance of the first day*. The day recalls not only the beginning of the world, but also the Divine purpose and mercy that preceded it. Before man could sin, *Hashem* prepared *Teshuvah*. Before the sword could dominate history, He gave the *Torah* that points toward life.

Kayin's sign is therefore a sign for every generation. The first murderer became the first to teach that even deliberate sin need not place a person beyond return. On *Rosh Hashanah*, as we stand before judgment, that lesson brings both hope and obligation. *Teshuvah* is possible, and therefore man must not surrender to despair or make peace with evil. The road back was prepared before the world itself, and *Hashem* still calls to every person, ובהרת בחיים - *Choose life*.

TESHUA: A MITZVAH OR A GIFT?

Chaim Ozer Shulman

A threshold issue regarding *Teshuva* is whether the *Torah* imposes an obligatory *mitzvah* to do *Teshuva*, or whether *Teshuva* is primarily a gift from *Hashem* for a person who sinned and wants to be absolved of the sin and obtain atonement. The Ramban clearly takes the first approach. The Rambam, however, appears to take a different approach, though his language in different places requires careful analysis.

The Ramban: A Mitzvah of Teshuva – ושבתי עד ה' אלקיך מצוה שיצוה אותנו לעשות כן

The most direct source for *Teshuva* as an obligatory *mitzvah* is the Ramban (1194–1270) on Parshas Nitzavim. The *Torah* says ושבתי עד ה' - *and you shall return to Hashem your G-d and listen to His voice* (Nitzavim 30:2), and later says כי המצוה הזאת אשר אנכי מצוה היום - *for this mitzvah that I command you today is not hidden from you and is not distant* (Nitzavim 30:11). The Ramban explains that the phrase "this mitzvah" refers specifically to *Teshuva*. He writes המצוה הזאת על התשובה הנזכרת - *this commandment refers to the Teshuva mentioned above* and then adds ושבתי עד ה' אלקיך - *and you shall return to Hashem your G-d is a mitzvah by which He commands us to do so* (Ramban Al Hatorah Nitzavim 30:11). On this reading, *Teshuva* itself is an obligatory *mitzvah* to return to *Hashem*.

The Ramban also explains ובלבבך לעשותו - *in your mouth and in your heart to do it* (Nitzavim 30:14), as referring to both verbal confession and inner return. He writes שיתודו את עונם ואת עון אבותם בפיהם - *that they will confess their sin and the sin of their fathers with their mouth and return in their heart to Hashem* (Ramban Nitzavim 30:11). Thus, for the Ramban, Vidui is included within the *mitzvah* of *Teshuva* itself.

Rabbeinu Yonah. *Rabbeinu Yonah* (c. 1200–1263) in *Shaarei Teshuvah* also speaks of *Teshuva* as an obligation. He writes והזכרנו על התשובה בכמה

we were commanded on Teshuva in several places in the Torah (Shaarei Teshuvah 1:1). This is essentially the same approach as the Ramban.

The Rambam: A Mitzvah of Vidui – כשיעשה תשובה וישוב מחטאו חייב להתודות

The formulation of the Rambam (1138–1204) is more complex. In Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1, he writes כל מצות שבתורה בין עשה בין לא תעשה אם עבר אדם על אחת מהן בין בזדון בין בשגגה כשיעשה תשובה וישוב מחטאו חייב להתודות – *all the mitzvos of the Torah whether positive or negative, if a person violated one of them whether intentionally or inadvertently, when one does Teshuva and returns from his sin, one is obligated to confess before the blessed G-d* (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1). He then concludes עשה מצות עשה – *this Vidui is a positive mitzvah* (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1). The crucial phrase is כשיעשה תשובה. The Rambam does not write that there is a mitzvah asah to do Teshuva. He writes that when one does Teshuva, one must confess. This sounds as if the mitzvah counted by the Rambam is Vidui.

In Sefer HaMitzvos, Aseh 73, the Rambam writes היא שצונו להתודות על – *we are commanded to confess the transgressions and sins that we sinned before G-d and to say them together with Teshuva*. The commanded act is – *to confess*, but the confession is not detached from Teshuva. It must be עם – *together with Teshuva* (Rambam Sefer HaMitzvos Aseh 73). The Rambam also writes that מיני העונות והקטנים ואפילו מצות עשה – *all kinds of sins, great and small, and even failures of positive commandments, require confession* (Rambam Sefer HaMitzvos Aseh 73). The Chinuch also states in Mitzvah 364 that מצות דודי על החטא שנצטוונו להתודות לפני השם על כל החטאים שחטאנו בעת שנתנחם עליהן – *We are commanded to confess before G-d our sins that we have sinned, at such time that we feel remorse for them*.

A Major Approach to the Rambam: Teshuvah Is Not the Counted Mitzvah

The Minchas Chinuch (R' Yosef Babad (1801–1874)) takes the Rambam's conditional language literally. He writes מכאור בדבריו דאין התשובה מצות עשה דלא כתב מצות עשה שיעשה תשובה רק אם בא לעשות מצות עשה – *it is clear from his words that Teshuva is not a positive mitzvah, for he did not write that there is a positive mitzvah to do Teshuva, but only that if one comes to do the mitzvah one should confess with his mouth*. He then states לא עשה תשובה אין לו עונש כלל על מה שלא – *if one did not do Teshuva, one has no punishment at all for not doing Teshuva, but only for the aveirah one committed* (Minchas Chinuch Mitzvah 364 sec. 1). The punishment remains for the original sin; what is absent is an additional punishment for violating a separate mitzvah asah of Teshuva.

On this approach, Vidui is the Torah-defined form of Teshuva and kapparah. The Torah says in Parshas Naso אשר עשו – *and they shall confess the sin that they committed* (Bamidbar 5:7). According to the Minchas Chinuch, this does not mean that the sinner is automatically obligated to enter the process of Teshuva as a new mitzvah. It means that once one wants or needs to do Teshuva and obtain kapparah, the Torah commands that Teshuva be done through Vidui. The Meshech Chochmah (Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843–1926)) gives the conceptual reason why the Rambam may not learn like the Ramban. He asks איך נחשב למצוה שיישוב מכסלו ולא יחטא עוד הלא בלא המצוה – *how can it be considered a mitzvah that one return from his folly and no longer sin, since even without this mitzvah he is already commanded not to violate the mitzvos of Hashem* (Meshech Chochmah Vayeilech 31:17). After one sinned, the original command not to sin remains. Therefore, the Torah does not need a new command simply to tell him not to continue violating the old command. The separate post-sin mitzvah is Vidui. As the Meshech Chochmah

writes, *if one sinned and leaves his sin, there is a mitzvah to confess* (Meshech Chochmah Vayeilech 31:17). The Yismach Moshe (Rav Moshe Teitelbaum of Ujhel (1759–1841)) makes a similar point. Since the essence of Teshuva is regret, it is difficult to command regret itself. If the person already regrets the sin, the command is unnecessary; if he does not regret it, he remains in rebellion. Nor is a separate command needed merely to stop sinning, since he is already commanded not to sin. The special command is that once the person regrets and is no longer rebelling, *he should confess verbally* (Yismach Moshe, Parshas Naso, s.v. והתודו את חטאתם).

Why Teshuvah Is Still Crucial

This does not mean that, according to this reading of the Rambam, a person can safely ignore Teshuva. A sin creates guilt, distance, and liability. If the person does not do Teshuva, the sin remains unresolved. The Rambam himself writes ישתדל האדם לעשות תשובה ולנער כפיו מחטאיו כדי – *a person should strive to do Teshuva and shake his hands free of his sins so that he dies as a baal Teshuva and merits the life of the World to Come* (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 7:1), and לפיכך ישוב מחטאיו מיד – *therefore one should return from his sins immediately* (Hilchos Teshuvah 7:2). Thus, even if Teshuva is not separately counted, the Rambam treats it as an urgent spiritual necessity: the means of repairing the sin and beginning the process of kapparah.

Rav Yitzchak Blazer, Reb Itzele Peterburger (1837–1907) in Kochvei Ohr, goes one step further. Rabbeinu Yonah writes כאשר יתאחר לשוב – *when he delays returning from his sin, his punishment becomes very heavy upon him each day*, because והמנוס – *the escape is Teshuva* (Shaarei Teshuvah 1:2). Rav Yitzchak Blazer applies this to the Rambam's beinoni in Hilchos Teshuvah 3:3. Even if failure to do Teshuva is not a separate sin according to the Rambam as understood by the Minchas Chinuch, once Teshuva is available and the sinner refuses to use it, the failure to repair increases the severity of the sin. On Yom Kippur, he writes, failure to do Teshuva is *a very great and awesome sin added to all his sins* (Kochvei Ohr siman 5).

The Rambam's כותרת and the Kiryas Sefer

The strongest textual challenge to the Minchas Chinuch is the Rambam's heading, to Hilchos Teshuvah. The heading reads הלכות תשובה מצות – *Hilchos Teshuvah contains one positive mitzvah, namely that the sinner return from his sin before Hashem and confess* (Rambam heading to Hilchos Teshuvah). This sounds much like the Ramban, because the mitzvah is not described as Vidui alone.

The Kiryas Sefer, written by the Rav Moshe Trani, the Mabit (c. 1500–1580), reads the heading at face value. He writes התשובה והיודוי מצוה אחד – *Teshuva and Vidui are one mitzvah* (Kiryas Sefer Hilchos Teshuvah perek 1 mitzvah 16). He explains שאין יודוי בלי תשובה כי מי – *there is no Vidui without Teshuva, because one who confesses but does not resolve in his heart to return from his sin is like one who immerses while holding a sheretz* (Kiryas Sefer Hilchos Teshuvah perek 1 mitzvah 16). At the same time, והיודוי הוא גמר התשובה, – *Vidui is the completion of Teshuva* (Kiryas Sefer Hilchos Teshuvah perek 1 mitzvah 16).

Those who learn in the Rambam that Vidui is the mitzvah and not Teshuva might explain the heading as – *overall framework of the mitzvah*: the mitzvah concerns a sinner returning from his sin before Hashem, and the Torah-required form of that return is Vidui. But the operative halachic definition appears in Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1: כשיעשה – *and especially עשה* and ישוב מחטאו חייב להתודות. A second possible answer is suggested by Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903–1993) in Al HaTeshuvah, in his discussion of כחו של יודוי. Rav Soloveitchik explains that according to the Rambam, the מעשה המצוה is Vidui, while the קיום המצוה is Teshuva. Thus, Hilchos Teshuvah 1:1

identifies the mitzvah act, כשיעשה תשובה וישוב מחטאו חייב להתוודות. The Ramban describes the broader fulfillment of the mitzvah: שישוב החוטא מחטאו. לפני ה' ויתודה. On this approach, Vidui is the act through which Teshuva is fulfilled before Hashem. On a different reading, both the מעשה המצוה and the קיום המצוה are Vidui, while Teshuva is the necessary setting or condition for that Vidui.

Is Vidui Optional Once One Does Teshuvah?

The Minchas Chinuch appears to go a step further and suggest that even when one is attempting Teshuva, Vidui remains optional in the sense that the person has not violated a separate chiyuv by failing to confess, though the Teshuva will presumably fail. He writes על יעשה תשובה יהי' על – if one does Teshuva it must be in this form, namely to confess, and אינה מצוה מחויבת רק דהתורה כתבה דתשובה אם ירצה לעשות יעשה על – it is not an obligatory mitzvah; rather, the Torah wrote that Teshuva, if one wants to do it, must be done in this form (Minchas Chinuch Mitzvah 364 sec. 1).

Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin (1888–1978), in HaMoadim BaHalachah, strongly objects to this further chidush. He cites the Rambam's language in Sefer HaMitzvos, חובה לחוטא על כל חטא שחטא, – an obligation upon the sinner for every sin that one sinned, and describes the Minchas Chinuch's position as בלתי מתקבל על הדעת – difficult to accept (HaMoadim BaHalachah, Yom Kippur ch. 1). This does not necessarily mean that Rav Zevin holds Teshuva itself is a separate mitzvah chiyuv like the Ramban. His point is narrower: once one has sinned, Vidui itself is a real obligation, not merely an optional procedure.

Yom Kippur as a Separate Obligation

Yom Kippur may be different even according to the Minchas Chinuch's reading of the Rambam. In Hilchos Teshuvah 2:7, the Rambam writes יום הכיפורים הוא זמן תשובה לכל ליחיד ולרבים והוא קץ מחילה וסליחה לישאל לפיכך – Yom Kippur is the time of Teshuva for all, for the individual and the community, and it is the culmination of pardon and forgiveness for Israel; therefore everyone is obligated to do Teshuva and confess on Yom Kippur (Rambam Hilchos Teshuvah 2:7). Here the Rambam does not use the conditional language of כשיעשה תשובה. He writes חייבים הכל – everyone is obligated. That sounds like a day-specific obligation of Yom Kippur.

The source and character of this Yom Kippur obligation require some care. Rabbeinu Yonah explicitly derives a special Biblical mitzvah of Teshuva on Yom Kippur from the Torah's description of the day: כי ביום זה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו – for on this day He shall atone for you to purify you from all your sins; before Hashem you shall become pure (Vayikra 16:30). He writes ומצות עשה מן התורה להעיר – אדם את רוחו לחזור בתשובה ביום הכיפורים שנאמר מכל חטאתיכם לפני ה' תטהרו – there is a Biblical positive mitzvah for a person to awaken his spirit and return in Teshuva on Yom Kippur, as the verse says, from all your sins, before Hashem, you shall become pure (Shaarei Teshuvah 2:14). The Rambam does not cite תטהרו לפני ה' as the source of Hilchos Teshuvah 2:7. His formulation nevertheless fits the same structure: because Yom Kippur is קץ מחילה וסליחה – the time of Teshuva for all and the day itself requires Teshuva and Vidui as part of its avodah of kapparah and taharah.

Mitzvah and Gift Are Not Opposites

There is, however, a deeper sense in which Teshuva remains a gift even according to the Ramban. My great-grandfather, Rav Yitzchok Kossowsky (1877–1951) in Shabbos uMoed, explains that if an aveirah itself creates spiritual damage, regret after the act should no more erase that damage than regret can undo the effects of poison already consumed. The very possibility of Teshuva is therefore an expression of Hashem's extraordinary mercy, a power of repair beyond the ordinary order. In the language of Chazal, Hakadosh Baruch Hu answers the sinner יעשה תשובה ויתכפר לו – let him do Teshuva and gain atonement. Thus, the alternatives in the title are not really opposites: according to

the Ramban, Teshuva is indeed a mitzvah, but the fact that Hashem allows it to erase the imprint of the past is itself one of His greatest gifts.

Conclusion

The disagreement is not whether Teshuva is necessary. All agree that without Teshuva the sin remains unrectified and the future has not yet been changed. The question is whether the Torah counts entering the Teshuva process as a separate mitzvah, as the Ramban and Rabbeinu Yonah hold, or whether, according to the Rambam as understood by the Minchas Chinuch, Meshech Chochmah, and Yismach Moshe, the counted post-sin mitzvah is Vidui, the Torah-required expression of Teshuva when the sinner seeks repair and kapparah. The Kiryas Sefer reads the Rambam more broadly, as one integrated mitzvah of Teshuva and Vidui.

With Rosh Hashanah upon us, the practical lesson is therefore sharper. Whether Teshuva is itself the counted mitzvah or the indispensable setting for Vidui, Hashem has given us a path to repair what was done and redirect what comes next. The obligation and the gift point in the same direction: back toward Hashem.

Adapted by CS from

Michtav MeEliyahu v2 by Rav Eliyahu Dessler (1892–1953)

Malchuyos, Zichronos, and Shofaros

The three central brachos of Rosh Hashanah Mussaf – *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* – form a single unit. Indeed, the halachah treats them as an integrated unit: the brachos are mutually indispensable, and their order is significant (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 593:1; Mishnah Berurah 593:5). Chazal give the inner structure of that unit: אמר הקב"ה: אמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות ושופרות מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם וזכרונות – כדי שיעלה זכרונכם לפני לטובה ובמה בשופר – *Hakadosh Baruch Hu said: Recite before Me on Rosh Hashanah Malchuyos, Zichronos, and Shofaros. Malchuyos, so that you make Me King over you; Zichronos, so that your remembrance rise before Me for good; and through what, through the shofar (Rosh Hashanah 16a; see also the Mussaf structure in Rosh Hashanah 32a-32b).*

These are not three disconnected themes. They describe one movement of the soul. *Malchuyos* asks what it means truly to accept Hashem as King. *Zichronos* asks what it means for the *Akeidah* and the deeds of earlier generations to stand before Hashem together with us. *Shofaros* is the power that awakens that remembrance and carries the avodah to its deepest point: our own *mesirus nefesh* and our acceptance of Hashem's din out of love.

Malchuyos - From Submission to Unity

The Gemara records a dispute over which *pesukim* may be counted among the verses of *Malchuyos*. Regarding שמע ישראל ה' אחד – *Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One* (Devarim 6:4), R' Yosi says that it is a *pasuk* of *Malchus*, while R' Yehudah says that it is not. They disagree similarly regarding וידעת היום והשבת אל לבבך כי ה' הוא – *You shall know today and take it to heart that Hashem is G-d in the heavens above and on the earth below, there is no other* (Devarim 4:39), and אתה הראת לדעת כי ה' הוא – *You were shown in order to know that Hashem is G-d, there is none besides Him* (Devarim 4:35) (Rosh Hashanah 32b). [CS: Rav Yitzchok Hutner notes that the dispute between R' Yosi and R' Yehuda regarding שמע ישראל is particularly striking because Shema is itself the classic expression of kabbalas ol Malchus Shamayim. How, then, can R' Yehudah maintain that it is not a *pasuk* of *Malchuyos*? Rav Hutner points to this difficulty in Pachad Yitzchak and distinguishes between two concepts that can easily be confused: kabbalas hamalchus, accepting the authority of the King, and hamalachah v'hacharah, actively crowning Him as King. Shema unquestionably accomplishes the first. R' Yehudah can nevertheless maintain that the special *Malchuyos* of Rosh Hashanah requires the second. Rav Hutner accordingly reads אמרו לפני – Recite *Malchuyos* before Me so that you will

crown Me King over you - quite literally: the recitation is to become an act of coronation, not merely an acknowledgment of authority (Pachad Yitzchak, Rosh Hashanah, Maamar 24). Rav Dessler approaches the same dispute from a different direction, focusing on what this coronation must accomplish within the human heart.]

The disagreement reveals two very subtle forms of *Malchus*, and with them two paths in the avodah of Rosh Hashanah.

There is first *mora shel Malchus*, awe of the King. Even this can operate on more than one level. A person may fear the King enough to push aside the fulfillment of his desires, while the desires themselves remain hidden and alive within his heart. He still wants what he wants, but he restrains himself because he accepts the authority of the King. The desire has been suppressed, not uprooted.

There is a deeper form of that same awe. The awareness of the King's authority can become so absolute that the heart no longer experiences fulfillment of the forbidden desire as a real possibility. Once the heart feels that the desired act is simply unavailable, the desire itself can fade and disappear. Rav Dessler compares this to the Ibn Ezra's explanation of *לֹא הָחֵמְדָּ - You shall not covet* (Shemos 20:14). A commoner does not ordinarily covet the king's daughter, because in his inner world marrying her is not a possibility. In the same way, sufficiently powerful awareness of Hashem's Kingship can remove a forbidden desire from the realm of possibility until the desire itself is extinguished.

Yet this remains an avodah whose defining qualities are *kefiyah atzmis* and *kabbalas ol*: self-compulsion and acceptance of the yoke. The starting point is still that I possess a will of my own, and I bring it under the rule of the King.

There is, however, a still higher form of crowning Hashem: *hamlachas hamelech b'avahavah*, accepting His Kingship through love. Here the heart does not experience Hashem's will as an external force compelling it to surrender. Rather, its deepest desire is itself to fulfill the will of the King. Other desires lose their significance because they are overwhelmed by a greater desire, the desire to do Hashem's will. This is the level of *achdus v'avahavah*, unity and love.

This is the depth of *Malchuyos*, *so that you make Me King over you*. Complete *Malchus* means that no independent desire remains in the heart apart from the longing to fulfill Hashem's will with love.

This also explains why the climax of the pesukim of *Malchuyos* is שמע *Hear O Israel, Hashem is our G-d, Hashem is One*. The Shema is not merely another declaration that Hashem possesses sovereign power. It expresses *achdus gemurah*, complete unity. Any separation, even the finest trace of an independent desire existing only in thought, is already a blemish in that unity. If a private will remains standing apart from Hashem's will, then His Kingship has not yet penetrated the whole heart.

Rav Dessler understands R' Yehudah's position as emphasizing the subjugation of our will through a vivid awareness of the awe of Hashem's Kingship. He understands R' Yosi's position, which is accepted in halachah, as pointing toward a still higher *Malchus* toward which we should aspire is *hisbatlus* before Hashem's unity through love. The goal is not merely to conquer a competing will, but ultimately to cease experiencing ourselves as possessing a will independent of His.

The Shofar of Malchuyos

Chazal continue: מלכיות כדי שתמליכוני עליכם זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרונכם לפני *Malchuyos, so that you make Me King over you; Zichronos, so that your remembrance rise before Me for good; and through what, through the shofar*. The shofar therefore serves each part of the day's avodah. What is the shofar of *Malchuyos*?

Its task is to awaken an overwhelming perception of Hashem's Kingship. Through the sound of the shofar, a person is to picture the majesty of the King until no point remains within the heart to which the *yetzer hara* can attach itself and turn him aside. This is the inner meaning of *irbuv*

hasatan, the confounding of the Satan, of which the Gemara says that his words become stopped (Rosh Hashanah 16b). The Satan's prosecution is not merely an accusation made somewhere outside us. Its inner counterpart is the very seduction of the *yetzer hara* within the heart. If that foothold disappears, the prosecution loses its basis.

Here Rav Dessler insists that the standard is extraordinarily fine, *k'chut hasa'arah*, literally as thin as a hair. The Gemara teaches that a cow's horn may not be used for shofar because it evokes the sin of the Golden Calf, and אין קטיגור נעשה סניגור - *a prosecutor cannot become a defender* (Rosh Hashanah 26a).

At first this seems difficult. Would a person who hears a cow's horn actually begin thinking about the *Chet HaEgel* and then be drawn toward sin? Rav Dessler answers that the danger does not need to reach conscious thought. Because the cow is the mother of the calf, the faintest association can be registered deep within the heart. Through that almost imperceptible suggestion, the *yetzer hara* can gain an opening. Chazal do not describe this merely as a remote possibility. They state categorically אין קטיגור נעשה סניגור - *a prosecutor cannot become a defender*. Beneath the threshold of conscious awareness, every subtle hint can be absorbed. Even *mashehu min hamashehu*, the slightest trace of an association, can implant a corresponding trace of temptation. That is why the cow's horn is disqualified. The problem is not simply that the ceremony should avoid an embarrassing reminder of an ancient sin. Complete *Malchus* requires *yichud*, an inner unity in which no point of resistance to Hashem's will remains. If even the finest subconscious suggestion can provide the *yetzer hara* with a foothold, then even that infinitesimal division compromises the completeness of Hashem's Kingship.

We generally measure avodah by conscious choice: Did I obey Hashem? Did I overcome the temptation? Rav Dessler is describing something deeper. The aspiration of *Malchuyos* reaches beneath behavior and even beneath conscious thought, into the hidden movements of the heart. The shofar must proclaim Hashem's Kingship so completely that even there no rival attachment remains.

Zichronos - When the Past Becomes Present

There are several levels of memory. A person may simply remember something. Something may be deeply engraved in his memory. But there is a still higher form of remembering: the event may be so vivid that it is as though it were alive and taking place before him now.

Hashem's *zechirah* must be understood in this highest sense. Rav Dessler is not describing Divine memory as the retrieval of something that might have been forgotten. Rather, he describes the person and his deeds as standing before Hashem without the temporal distance that characterizes human memory. *Zikaron* means that the person and his deeds stand before Hashem as a living present reality.

This idea is reflected in the Rosh Hashanah davening: זכר כל היצור לפניך *The remembrance of every created being comes before You*.

Everything comes *lifanecha*, before You, now. The same idea appears when we invoke the *Akeidah*: ותראה לפניך עקידה - *And may the Akeidah appear before You*. It is as though Avraham Avinu stands before Hashem at this moment and binds his son.

Rav Dessler takes the idea further: all generations and all their deeds stand before Hashem in one encompassing view. כולם נסקרים בסקירה אחת - *all are surveyed in a single glance*. In this sense, the deeds performed from the six days of Creation onward stand together before Him as one present reality.

That means that I, too, stand there. I stand before Hashem with my sins at the very same time, as it were, that the holy Avos stand before Him sanctifying His Name through *mesirus nefesh*. Their *Kiddush Hashem* and my conduct are present in the same spiritual scene.

This makes the invocation of *zechus avos* and *zechus haAkeidah* far more demanding than we usually imagine. We naturally assume that the presence of Avraham and Yitzchak can only help us. But is their

presence necessarily a merit for me? If, in the very same *maamad*, the Avos sanctify Hashem's Name through complete *mesirus nefesh* while I, chas v'shalom, do the opposite, then their greatness may make my failure more conspicuous rather than less.

Rav Dessler illustrates this with Lot. Lot was afraid of remaining in Avraham's vicinity because he knew that next to Avraham his own deficiencies would become much more visible. Greatness creates a standard of comparison. A flaw that may not appear so glaring elsewhere becomes painfully evident when placed beside Avraham Avinu. ומה נענה - *and what can we answer after him?*

The *Akeidah* therefore does not automatically become our merit merely because we descend from Avraham Avinu. For *zechus haAkeidah* to join with us, the *Akeidah* must first be remembered by us in Rav Dessler's fullest sense: *only if the Akeidah is remembered by us and is a reality within our hearts.*

We must look toward Avraham Avinu and learn to include ourselves within his *Akeidah* through our own measure of *mesirus nefesh*. We are not asked to reproduce Avraham's test literally. Each person must surrender something of himself, according to his level, על תורתו ועל עבודתו, *for His Torah and for His service*. We make the *Akeidah* present by demonstrating in our own lives that Hashem's will matters more than our private will.

Only then can we truly become part of the *Akeidah*, and only then can its merit be joined to ours when Hashem sees the chain of all the generations as one. The favorable *zikaron* of Rosh Hashanah is therefore not simply a request that Hashem look backward at the greatness of our ancestors. We must look backward ourselves until their past becomes our present.

This gives deeper meaning to the conclusion of the bracha of *Zichronos*: *And may You remember today with mercy the Akeidah of Yitzchak for his descendants.* The prayer is that the *Akeidah* stand before Hashem as our merit, but Rav Dessler teaches what it means for us to be capable of standing within that merit.

Shofaros - The Secret of the Teruah

And through what does *Zichronos* become alive? ובמה בשופר - *And through what? Through the shofar.* This is the defining power of the shofar: it awakens *Zichronos*.

Rav Saadia Gaon lists ten meanings of the mitzvah of shofar. Among them is להזכירנו עקידת יצחק שמסר נפשו לשמים וכן אנחנו נקבל על עצמנו למסור - *To remind us of the Akeidah of Yitzchak, who surrendered his life to Heaven, so that we too accept upon ourselves to give ourselves over for the sanctification of His Name, and our remembrance will rise before Him for good.*

The wording is exact. The shofar does not merely remind Hashem of the *Akeidah*. It reminds us. We are to accept upon ourselves our own *mesirus nefesh*, and then we can be remembered for good through the remembrance of the *Akeidah*. The shofar turns the ancestral memory into a present commitment.

But Rav Dessler then moves to an even higher dimension. The Zohar comments on אשרי העם יודעי תרועה - *Fortunate is the people who know the teruah* (Tehillim 89:16). The pasuk does not say those who hear the *teruah* or those who sound it, but those who *know* it. The Zohar explains that these are those who know *raza d'teruah*, the secret of the *teruah*. For Rav Dessler, this knowing is not intellectual knowledge alone. *Sod* belongs to the heart. To know the secret of *teruah* means that the heart itself rises to the spiritual level expressed by it. Such people can come to *they walk in the light of Your countenance* (Tehillim 89:16). The Zohar identifies this with the primordial light, the *or haganuz*, which Hakadosh Baruch Hu concealed for the tzaddikim. A shofar in its full spiritual meaning is therefore connected to the light of the World to Come.

What is this hidden secret that the heart must know? The Zohar points to *You shall break them with a rod of iron* (Tehillim 2:9).

Rav Dessler explains that the secret of *teruah* is *kabbalas yissurim b'ahavah*, accepting suffering with love.

This is an extraordinarily demanding level. It is not merely passive resignation to what cannot be changed. A person accepts Hashem's judgment so completely that he can receive *yissurim* with love, even with joy, because he recognizes that Hashem's *din* is true. If he has sinned and distorted his relationship with Hashem, then his concern is no longer simply to escape pain. He wants truth restored. At the highest level, he can even desire that Hashem correct and punish him according to the truth of His judgment.

This is a secret hidden from the ordinary human heart. It can be grasped only by one who reaches a very high spiritual level. Chazal describe such people as שמחים ביסורים - *rejoicing in suffering* and apply to them ואיהביו - *Those who love Him are like the sun emerging in its strength* (Shoftim 5:31; Yoma 23a).

Such joy can come only from *ahavas Hashem*. Rav Dessler calls it *yeti'ah min hahester*, emerging from concealment, comparable to the sun emerging from its covering. While a person remains within *hester*, suffering is experienced only as darkness and loss. When love of Hashem becomes sufficiently deep, he can perceive even *din* as an expression of Hashem's truth and therefore as a path back toward closeness.

When Din Itself Becomes Rachamim

The Midrash gives this idea its central Rosh Hashanah formulation. On אשרי העם יודעי תרועה - *Fortunate is the people who know the teruah*, R' Yoshiyah asks: do the nations of the world not know how to sound a horn? Rather, Klal Yisrael knows how to appease its Creator through the *teruah*, so that He rises from the Throne of Judgment to the Throne of Mercy והופך להם מדת הדין למדת רחמים - *and transforms for them the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy* (Vayikra Rabbah 29:3-4).

The precision is important. It is not merely that mercy replaces judgment. *Middas hadin itself* is transformed into *middas harachamim*. Rav Dessler finds this idea made explicit in an explanation cited in the Siddur of R' Yaakov Maltzan in the name of the Ya'aros Devash (Derush 6).

The Ya'aros Devash explains that the shofar is itself the sounding of *din*. The prosecuting forces are not permitted to enter before the heavenly court until the shofar is heard. Once its sound is heard, judgment begins and the forces of prosecution are permitted to present their claims. The shofar therefore announces, in effect, הנה יום הדין - *Behold, the Day of Judgment has arrived.*

And precisely this is what confounds the Satan. The defendant himself is demanding that judgment begin. He says, as it were, Judge my case. Why would a person summon the judgment against himself? Because he is no longer fleeing from Hashem's truth. He accepts upon himself the *din* that his sins deserve.

This same principle is expressed in *Nefilas Apayim*, where a person symbolically gives over body and soul to receive the judgment of Heaven as it should truly be received. When he accepts *din* below, Hashem's anger is quieted and, as it were, His mercy is aroused. Chazal express the principle as למטה אין דין למעלה - *Where there is judgment below, there is no judgment above.*

This is not a technical escape from judgment. It is a transformation of the person's relationship to judgment. So long as the self stands against Hashem's *din* and demands to be protected from it, judgment remains something opposed to him. When he accepts Hashem's judgment out of love, the resistance itself is removed. The *din* that seemed to distance him from Hashem becomes a means of returning to Him. In that sense, *middas hadin* itself becomes *middas harachamim*.

One Avodah: Malchuyos, Zichronos, and Shofaros

We can now see why the three brachos form one unit, and why their order matters. *Malchuyos* is the foundation. We begin by accepting

Hashem's Kingship and work toward the nullification of every independent desire before *hadar ge'ono*, the majesty of His greatness. At its highest level this is not merely obedience through fear, but *hisbatlus b'ahavah*, the unification of our will with His.

Then comes *Zichronos*. We understand that the *Akeidah* and the *mesirus nefesh* of all the generations stand before Hashem as present realities. But their merit can truly join us only when we place ourselves within the same chain by bringing some measure of their *mesirus nefesh* into our own Torah and avodah.

Finally comes *Shofaros*. The shofar awakens that *zikaron* and calls us to make it our own. At its deepest level, the *teruah* asks us to accept not only Hashem's will but His *din* itself, and to accept it out of love and out of the longing to sanctify His Name.

This is the meaning of גילוי ברעדה - *Rejoice with trembling* (Tehillim 2:11). The trembling is real, because Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment. But the joy is also real, because the deepest acceptance of Hashem's Kingship removes the distance between the servant and the King. When Klal Yisrael accepts His *din* מִתּוֹךְ אֲהַבַת הַשֵּׁם - *out of love of Hashem* - and מִתּוֹךְ הַשְׂאִיפָה לִקְדֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ - *out of the longing to sanctify His Name* - it becomes possible for judgment itself to open into mercy. Thus, the progression of Rosh Hashanah is complete. *Malchuyos* removes the independent will. *Zichronos* joins us to the self-surrender of the Avos and of all the generations. *Shofaros* carries that surrender to its highest form, where even Hashem's judgment is received as the will of the King whom we love. Then *middas hadin* is not merely set aside in favor of mercy. It is itself transformed into *middas harachamim*.

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The Night I Choose Trust Over Despair

Coronation Night: On the Essence of Rosh Hashanah

Rabbi YY Jacobson

"Coronation Night" – that is how one of the great spiritual masters would define the night of Rosh Hashanah.

In a 1974 sermon, **Rabbi Yosef Dov Soleveitchik** (1903-1993), one of the great Jewish thinkers of the last century, related that when he was a young child learning in cheder (Jewish day school), in the Russian village of Chaslavitch, in the days preceding Rosh Hashanah, he could recognize in his teacher an extraordinary sense of trepidation.

"Our teacher, who was a Chabad Chassid (disciple), said to us: 'Do you know what Rosh Hashanah is? The Rebbe, the Tzemach Tzedek would call the night of Rosh Hashanah – 'Karanatzia Nacht' ('Coronation Night').

"Do you know whom we will be coronating?" the teacher asked the children.

The young Soleveitchik prodigy responded in jest: "Nicholas." (This was several years before the 1917 Russian Revolution, when Nicholas still served as the Russian czar).

And the poor teacher of Chaslavitch responded: "Nicholas? He was coronated years ago. Why do we need to coronate him again? Besides, he?! He is not a real king..."

(This was the authentic Jewish internal pride a poor Jew had in the shtetl, something sorely lacking in so many successful and affluent Jews).

"Tonight, my dear children, we coronate G-d; we place a crown on G-d..."

"And do you know who places the crown?" The teacher continued. "Yankel the Tailor, Berel the Shoemaker, Zalman the water-carrier, Yossel the painter, Dovid the butcher..."

Rabbi Soloveitchik concluded: Over the years, I have given many sermons and written many discourses on the concept of Rosh Hashanah, but nothing ever made me feel the true depth and power of the day as the words of my childhood teacher. Every year, when I recite in the Rosh Hashanah prayers the words, 'Rule over the whole world in Your glory,'

I remember my teacher in Chaslavitch.

The Essence

How much of Judaism is compressed in this brief conversation between the teacher and students? In a few words, a poverty-stricken Jewish teacher in a small shtetl in Russia gave his seven-year-old students the core, the essence, the very marrow of Jewish existence, of Jewish thought and experience.

Now he needed not explain to them why they should marry Jewish girls, continue living as Jews, be proud of their Jewishness, as so many teachers and educators today. It was more than obvious: Who would want to miss out on the opportunity of coronating G-d...

Why Bother?

But why does G-d need us to coronate Him? If G-d created us, does He really need us to declare Him king? He is the boss regardless.

And what does it mean that G-d is our king? Imagine you assemble 15,000,000 ants and declare yourself king over them. When 50,000 of them then turn left instead of right, you kill them in a single instance. Does that make you king over them? G-d gave us our entire existence; our entire being and life force are from Him. Relative to Him, we are far smaller and far less significant than an ant in the presence of a human. Can He then be our king? Is that not an insult to Him?

Yet here lay one of the great and daring ideas of Judaism. G-d, the perfect endless one, desired to be king not through power or by the dictates of nature. He desired to be chosen as king; He wanted a relationship with someone distinct from Him who would freely choose to construct a bond with G-d. It is our opportunity to choose trust, love, and oneness.

So an infinite, omnipotent G-d suspends His infinity, suppresses His endlessness, and conceals His omnipotence, to allow space for an intelligent, independent, and self-oriented human being who is then capable of choosing G-d as his or her king.

And where do I coronate Hashem? In those very spaces where I do not feel His presence, where I feel so detached, alone, and afraid, in the intimate spaces of my brain and heart that do not trust and do not feel infinite oneness with infinite bliss. That is where G-d "can't" do the coronation. He, so to speak, "needs" me to choose trust and connection. It is in that space where I feel so separate and anxious, that I, and only I, can coronate Him.

The Night

This, the spiritual masters explained, is the meaning of Rosh Hashanah, the day when the first human was created. It is the day when small, frail, vulnerable, and lowly human beings invite G-d to serve as their King. G-d could place His own crown on His head, but then He would be a dictator, not a king; the relationship would be coerced, not chosen. So G-d waits all year for this great moment for which the entire universe was created – the moment when you and I coronate Him as our king.

Rosh Hashanah is the most moving day in the Jewish calendar. More than any other day, it embodies the meaning of human existence and the vulnerability of a G-d who linked His fate to man's.

Happy Coronation Night. May we feel the presence and love of the Divine in every space of our heart and life. And as we say in the Rosh Hashanah prayers, may the entire world experience their true oneness with the Divine, and the world will be ONE.

Dedicated anonymously with heartfelt gratitude to TheYeshiva.net for its ongoing inspiration and as a zechus for my family, for abundant blessings, health, happiness, and hatzlacha in the New Year. In honor of the New Year, please increase in your charity. Please help us continue our work at <https://donate.theyeshiva.net/>

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Rav Ahron Lopiansky

Between Malchus and Adnus

We enter Rosh Hashanah with the sense that teshuva and bettering our

actions are the broad theme of these days. Indeed, Rosh Hashanah is the first of the asseres yemei teshuva. Yet, as we keep davening, we rarely find any mention of sin, nor any type of repentance per se. As a matter of fact, it is prohibited to mention sin or sinning in the davening of Rosh Hashanah. This really leaves us bewildered as to the connection of this day to the process of teshuva.

We speak a lot about Hashem as “king”, and Rosh Hashana as the day of coronating the king. It is something that leaves us a bit puzzled. Does this mean just “to believe in Hashem”? Does this mean just obeying His orders? How does this differ from Hashem as master [Adon] of the world, and thereby having the right to tell us what to do?

To fully understand the meaning of Rosh Hashanah, we need to take a second look at the concept of Hashem as “monarch”, as opposed to a “master”. A master is someone who owns a slave, or in a more benign version an employer and employee. The subordination of the employee or servant is simply there to bring benefit to the master. By either having acquired the servant by force or the employee by money, he now can dictate to the servant/employee what it is that he is to do, and it is all there for the benefit of the master.

But that is not the concept of a monarch. The Rambam states that “the monarch’s heart is the very heart of the nation” (Hilchos Melachim 3:6). What this means is that just as an individual person is considered such by having many parts working in excruciating tandem to create one whole person, so too a nation has many parts and pieces that must come together as one. An individual person has a mind and heart that have the vision and understanding, and they then instruct the hands and feet to accomplish the common goal. All of that together is a whole person.

This is similarly true of a society. A society where each person has their own goals and visions and desires yet comes together for things of common benefit is a very nice society. But it is not a people and not a nation. It is only when there is a commonality of being and vision that they can begin to become a nation. A nation needs to have a leader who provides the vision and guidance for all the other parts to realize their common dream.

Israel is the nation of Hashem, meaning it is the nation that understands that its essence is to bring out and reflect Hashem's greatness in this world. This nation is formed by people who understand this and want to contribute their very being for this aspiration. It also needs someone to be the heart and mind, whose understanding and vision brings this into focus, and then the rest of the nation falls in line, each contributing their own share to this common vision. That is what monarchy is all about, and that is why we pray to restore the monarchy of Dovid Hamelech.

Rosh Hashanah is the beginning of man. Way before we deal with the bits and pieces of our performance, we need to put down the goal of ourselves as humans. If a person's goal is some sort of pleasure or personal achievement, then he could technically be a Torah abiding person, but he's not part of that big picture. He may be doing the mitzvos, and staying away from aveiros, but it has nothing to do with malchus Shomayim. Rosh Hashanah we start by putting down the framework of our actions and aspirations as part of malchus Shomayim. The world is meant to be a “kingdom”, meaning a place where all the pieces come together to realize this malchus Shomayim. Without crowning Hashem as our king, we really are missing the single most important part of changing ourselves. We are meant to make a statement that we recognize all of this world as being parts of a monarchy. It is a place that has one vision and focus, implemented by the contribution of each person giving what they possess for this mMalchus. This comes before Yom Kippur.

This is also the reason why the gemara (Rosh Hashana 32b) rules that the verse of “Shema Yisroel” may count towards malchiyos. Even though Hashem as king is not mentioned explicitly, but the idea of “echad”- oneness- is really an expression of what malchus is all about. Malchus is the mechanism that creates a unity of everything, the “echad”. Without

malchus we have many bits and pieces but no cohesive whole.

Rosh Hashanah coming first in the days of teshuva gives us a very different picture of what teshuva is all about. Yes, we have done wrong, and yes, there are consequences, But those are particular items. The big question, however, is what is the framework under which all my activities are subsumed. Even believing in reward and punishment still does not ensure that my purpose in keeping Torah isn't for personal gain or loss. My keeping of Torah needs to be seen as part of the big world, bringing malchus Shomayim back together.

If we understand the point of malchus on Rosh Hashanah, we will be able to structure our life appropriately and allocate our resources and deeds to one purpose: malchus.

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