



O.A.H. CHAGIM NEWSLETTER

OD AVINU HAI YOUTH MINYAN - 2020



INSIDE

*Short divrei Torah
written by the boys
of the Od Avinu Hai
youth minyan*

THIS ISSUE

Following the great feedback and success of our recent Shavuot newsletter which was filled with divrei Torah covering many different topics relating to the chag, we are proud to deliver our latest edition covering Rosh Hashanah, the 10 days of teshuva, Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

Due to the restrictions on gatherings and shul services, we didn't want people to miss out on the opportunity that Hashem gives us during this time of year when He comes 'closer' to us with His arms wide open. Be'ezrat Hashem this newsletter will bring inspiration and Torah into people's homes, providing basic yet fundamental ideas that can be shared with our families during the time we will spend together over the festive month of Tishrei.

May we all be written and sealed in the book of good life, with health, success, Torah, peace and bracha in all that we do.

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OUR KING, HELPER, SAVIOUR & SHIELD

DAYAN DAVID



We are now in the midst of the days of Selichot. We awake early in the mornings to beseech Hashem and prepare ourselves for the coming days of judgement, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

We praise Hashem in the beginning of tefillah (the Amidah) 3 times a day: 'Melech ozer umoshiah umagen', 'Our King, our Help, our Saviour and our Shield'. Our Rabbis explain these praises to refer to the period of judgement from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur.

On Rosh Hashanah, Hashem behaves as King when He judges His creations. The world was created on the 25th of Elul and Adam Harishon was created on Rosh Hashanah. On every anniversary of this great day G-d judges man and His creations for its existence in the coming year, the whole creation depends on our actions and merit for its forthcoming existence.

We approach Rosh Hashanah with fear and trepidation before The Almighty and have our merits and preparation in hand, dressed in our best but with fear in our hearts to face the King, standing upright on our own feet without any support, with our best all prepared, this is why we say '*melech*' before the King for judgement. In the 10 days of teshuvah, Hashem gives us a helping hand and we feel closer to him and it becomes easier to do teshuvah; then He is '*ozer*', we walk on our feet but He supports and helps us. On Yom Kippur we fast and keep the laws of Yom Kippur and pray all day using the 13 attributes of mercy and the vidduy confession, then He becomes the '*moshiah*', the saviour, and elevates us, carrying us up like a father carries his son to save him. And after that even if there are faults we don't manage to correct going through all the days of awe, we then sit in a sukkah for eight days and in His great mercy He acts as a shield, '*magen*' and directs away from us those tests we might not be able to overcome. '*Melech Ozer Umoshiah Umagen*'.

We have had a very difficult time facing the challenges of Covid19, but we have come to realise that Hashem Hu HaElokim - G-d is Lord over the world, with a tiny virus He has turned the world upside down. In spite of all the great advances in science and technology nothing could be done to stop it. Ain od melevado, there is no power besides His. Now we need more than ever to pray for His mercy.

Wishing you all a Kativah ve Chatimah Tova, a year of salvation for Klal Yisrael and the world. Amen.



THE SIMANIM

DAVID ISRAELI



It is the widespread custom to have the special foods that are a 'good sign' for the upcoming year on both nights of Rosh Hashanah after Kiddush. There are various customs regarding the different foods which are used, but in general the Yehi Ratzons are the same, which is the main purpose of the simanim.

One should remove all of the new fruits from the table while making Kiddush on the first night so that the shehecheyanu on the first night at Kiddush will not cover them, so they can use them for the shehechiyanu on the second night.

One should make sure that all of the simanim have been appropriately checked for bugs, and should say the Yehi Ratzon (preferably each person for themselves) before eating the fruit.

The Simanim

Date: one takes a date and has in mind all other fruit on the table and says the bracha of "borei peri ha'etz" and should eat a piece of the fruit. They should then say the Yehi Ratzon that all those who seek our harm should cease to exist, having in mind the enemy's from the lower world, and then eat from the date again.

Vegetable: one takes a vegetable that is not usually eaten during the meal (ie banana) and says the bracha "borei peri ha'adama", having in mind all other vegetables on the table.

Leek: one takes a leek and says the Yehi Ratzon before eating it, having in mind to slash the evil forces that were created from their sins.

Spinach: if one doesn't have spinach one should use beetroot instead, and have in mind during this Yehi Ratzon that the prosecutors and harsh forces that are prosecuting us in heaven should be removed.

Black-eyed beans: when one says this Yehi Ratzon they should have in mind that their merits should increase like these beans.

Gourd: one should have in mind that any evil sentence should be ripped up.

Pomegranate: one should have in mind that their merits should be plentiful like the pomegranate.

Head: when eating the head of the sheep one should remember the ram from the Akeidat Yitzchak and say "we should be like the head and not like the tail".

Apple in honey: our custom is to have apple jam, and when one eats this they should say "May it be Your will to renew for us a good and sweet new year".



TESHUVA, TEFILLAH & TZEDAKAH

JORDAN MOSES



The Gemara Yerushalmi says that teshuva, tefillah and tzedakah (repenting, praying and giving charity) will overturn a bad decree. As one approaches Rosh Hashanah, the day of judgement, these three things are the most instrumental in changing a bad decree.

Rabbi Tatz explains that in the Heavenly Court we are not appealing to the judge by "making our case". There is nothing we can say that Hashem didn't already know. The root of these three things is a deep change in personality. Teshuva is the change one makes within oneself, Tefillah between oneself and Hashem and Tzedakah between oneself and others.

Teshuva

Teshuva literally means to "go back". It is not just repentance, which means regret and remorse. It is going back to Hashem, like a child coming back to his loving parents' arms despite everything they have done and become. It is going back to the source of existence and the point of purity before birth when we had such tremendous closeness to Hashem.

Tefillah

Tefillah is the change that happens between man and Hashem. To explain this, we must understand what tefillah is. In tefillah, we turn to Hashem as the provider and source of all blessings. But how can we change Hashem's mind to give us something He hasn't - He is giving us exactly what we need and knows this better than we do ourselves! The answer is like the child that asks his father for a dangerous tool. When he is little and will use the tool for the destructive reasons his father says no, but once he matures and learns to use it wisely, he receives it. In tefilla we are not asking Hashem repeatedly for the same things, hoping that we will eventually persuade Him. We are changing ourselves, tefillah by tefillah, and becoming a person who is worthy to receive more to use for the right reasons - to serve Hashem and to do His will.

Tzedakah

Rav Dessler explains that in this world there are two types of people - givers and takers. In any given relationship, there are two perspectives - rights and obligations - and both are valid. However, if we as people choose to focus on what we can give to this relationship and not take, the world will be harmonious. This is the depth of tzedakah, and this is also the reason why the written Torah does not mention any rights, only obligations, to teach us this fundamental lesson.

Chazal say: "One that hates gifts is alive". Because Hashem is the ultimate giver, one who becomes a giver is emulating Hashem's ways and is therefore truly alive.

THE ESSENCE OF THE SHOFAR

RAPHAEL MOSES



Tekiah, Shevarim and Teruah

There are 3 types of sounds that are blown by the shofar; tekiah, shevarim and teruah. The Ben Ish Chai writes that these sounds are meant to contrast with the tekiah. The tekiah is a sound of triumph and joy, while the shevarim and teruah are sounds of pain and suffering. Because of the opposing feelings they represent, when one blows the shofar, he shouldn't connect the tekiah with the others, which is done by taking a breath in between.

But why do we have both sounds of joy and sounds of sorrow emitted from the Shofar?

The Ben Ish Chai explains that the contrast between the tekiah (a sound of joy and happiness) which is immediately followed by the shevarim and teruah (both sounds of sadness, pain and suffering) is intentional. We are supposed to remember while listening to the shofar that we cannot forget Hashem during times of contentment. Success can quickly turn into failure. Only with Hashem's help did we succeed, and only with His help will we continue to do so. However, upon hearing the sorrowful sound of the Shofar, we should not think that in times of suffering Hashem has left us. We should not become depressed. Right after these blasts, we sound a tekiah again, to signify that Hashem is there, and in His mercy will help us return to a state of rejoicing again.

Why do we blow

In preparation for the new year, we blow the shofar each morning throughout the month of Elul. Every morning, the shofar reminds us of the holiness of Rosh Hashanah, marking the start of the new year that lies ahead. The shofar is a reminder for us to do teshuvah - repentance. It serves as a wake-up call from our

human ways, and encourages us to do mitzvot. The sound of the shofar awakens our desire to become closer to Hashem, a desire for meaning and fulfillment, and reminds us of the ram that was slaughtered by Avraham in a test from Hashem to demonstrate his loyalty and commitment.



Intentions to have on Rosh Hashanah

But on Rosh Hashanah, our main intention when listening to the shofar is two things. First is to have in mind that we are fulfilling the mitzvah from the Torah to blow/listen to the shofar on this day. And second is to crown Hashem as our King and really internalise what this means, nullifying ourselves to Hashem and His will. So when we blow the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, we trust in Hashem's plan for us and know that His instructions are our path to a fulfilling and meaningful life in the new year.

Blowing on Shabbat

There is a big question why we don't blow the shofar on shabbat even though it is still Rosh Hashanah. Firstly there is no prohibition against using 'ritual objects' on Shabbat as we read from the Torah scroll on shabbat.

Secondly, it can't be because it's considered a musical instrument, because on a regular shabbat musical instruments (including shofars) are forbidden, but they are forbidden on Rosh Hashanah too! So obviously the mitzvah of blowing shofar on Rosh Hashanah is an exception, otherwise the mitzvah of shofar could never be fulfilled.



Rather, the reason is because everyone wants to fulfil his obligation to hear the shofar, but not everyone knows how to blow the shofar. Someone might bring his shofar to an expert to learn how, and thereby accidentally break shabbat by carrying the shofar outside. This shows the importance of the prohibition of carrying on a regular Shabbat, that even the great mitzvah of blowing shofar on Rosh Hashanah is cancelled if it falls out on Shabbat, just in case an individual comes to carry it outside.

MALCHUYOT, ZICHRONOT & SHOFAROT

MARK DARZY



Rav Yosef Carmel writes that much of the focus of the day of Rosh Hashanah, both in terms of time and energy, is on tefillah. At the centre of the tefillot is Musaf, and at the heart of Musaf there are three very unique blessings: Malchuyot, Zichronot, and Shofarot. What are the main themes of these three blessings and how do they relate to the activities of the day?

Malchuyot is a vehicle to reconfirm the coronation of Hashem as King of the universe, on this day that commemorates the beginning of the world's existence. We mention the concept of kingdom, the most grand and powerful position in human hierarchy, in order to try to relate somewhat to the awe-inspiring nature of Hashem.

After reaching some type of picture of Hashem's greatness, we are hit with the question: could Someone so great be interested by and involved in the lives of us lowly humans? Through the pasukim we then bring in Zichronot, we are reminded that Hashem was and will continue to be involved in the course of human history. He recalled and acted mercifully with Noach in the ark and with Bnei Yisrael in the depths of their slavery in Egypt and remembers for our benefit our belief in Him as we went out to the wilderness.

Other questions still linger on. He exists and leads us through history. But isn't He too distanced to communicate with? To deal with this question, we are introduced to an ancient yet contemporary form of communication, the predecessor (l'havdil) to the dots and dashes of Morse Code, which far surpasses even the codes of modern computers in its power. That is described in Shofarot. Hashem has used the shofar to communicate with us at Har Sinai and He has instructed us to use it to communicate with Him. It will be sounded when our Exiles return and when the Beit Hamikdash will be rebuilt. The sound of the shofar contains our emotions, in sounds that are more profound and versatile than words could ever be.

It is interesting that each of the three elements is the centre of a different part of the day's activities. Malchuyot is the centre of our prayers, changing to "HaMelech Hakadosh" and appearing prominently in many of our piyutim. Zichronot is highlighted in the Torah reading, where we read how Hashem remembered Sara and the Akeidat Yitzchak. Of course, Shofarot is carried out in the main, active Torah mitzvah and the only topic of the day that the Torah mentions explicitly, the blowing of the shofar (Bamidbar 29:1). Thus, the three pillars of our spiritual existence, our tefillah, Torah study, and our performance of mitzvot, are all utilized to give proper expression to the concepts of the day.

WHY ANOTHER DAY?

JORDAN MOSES



Like the other chagim, Rosh Hashanah is two days in communities outside of Israel. However unlike those other chagim which are celebrated for only one day in Israel, Rosh Hashanah is also celebrated for two days in Israel.

The reason for this is because the Hebrew month used to be established on a monthly basis depending on when witnesses would see the new moon and come to testify this in Bet Din (court). Once it would be confirmed that they were telling the truth, they would spread the news to advise everyone that today was rosh chodesh (a new month). The people outside of Israel did not receive the news fast enough and would therefore have to celebrate two days out of doubt. But because Rosh Hashanah is the only festival which falls on the first day of the month, this problem could occur even for people in Israel if witnesses did not come on the first day, hence since the times of the second Temple it is celebrated as two days in Israel as well. Nowadays, the Rabbis decreed that the same applies even though we have a fixed calendar, so that in the future when Mashiach comes and we return to the original system, people in the outer cities should not forget that it takes time for the news to spread and should still keep two days out of doubt.

But there is a deeper reason brought in the Zohar explaining why particularly on Rosh Hashanah we always have a second day. He says that there are two very different types of judgements on each of these days. The judgment on the first day is called dina kashia - a harsh judgment, and on the second day is dina rafia - a weaker judgment. The first has the harshness of an exact strict judgment and the second is blended with mercy.

The Zohar continues to explain that every one of us has two roles in our service of Hashem; one is directly to G-d, and one is between man and man. Each one of these roles requires separate judgement. We need to give a reckoning of how we have lived our lives as individuals, and also how we have contributed to the broader community. On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we are judged as an individual, with our personal life under scrutiny. It is needless to say that this might not go so well. But thankfully, on the second day we are judged on what we have done for others. We may have a child, a spouse, a parent, and are certainly part of a family, community and a world around us. What difference have we made to them? Are they better off and positively affected due to our presence in them?

The first day is harsh judgment since we stand completely alone as individuals. The second day is a lighter judgment since we are never alone when we are part of something and contributing to its success.

To fulfil our mission and pass the dual judgment, we must succeed at both. This pushes us to aspire to be a complete Jew, to fix ourselves and to also contribute to the world and community we live in in whatever way we can. And this represents the essence of what Hashem wants from us in return for giving us a year of life and bracha.

TASHLICH BY THE RIVER

YARON ISRAELI



Tashlich comes from the Hebrew word meaning "to cast," referring to the intent to cast away our sins. Tashlich is usually performed on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. If the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, Tashlich is done on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. It may be performed throughout the 10 Days of Teshuva, or even until Hoshanah Rabbah (the last day of Sukkot), except on Shabbat.

Special pasukim are recited next to a body of water, such as a sea, river, stream, lake or pond, preferably one that has fish.

Why next to the water?

- One reason for saying Tashlich next to water goes back to when Avraham Avinu performed the Akeidat Yitzchak, which took place on Rosh Hashanah. On his way, the Satan tried several times to stop his progress. One of his tricks was to block Avraham's path with a river. But Avraham continued straight into the river until it reached his neck, at which point he prayed to Hashem and the river dried up. We commemorate this self-sacrifice of Avraham by going to a river.

- Another reason is that going to a river bank or sea shore is also awe inspiring as we contemplate Hashem's mercy in preventing the waters from flooding the dry land. This realisation of Hashem's mightiness inspires us to repent.

- Water with fish in it is optimal since fish are not subject to the "ayin harah" and are also known to have many offspring. Fish do not have eyelids, so their eyes are always open. This is likened to Hashem's constant supervision over us, and we pray that He will always watch over us with mercy. Also, just as fish may be caught in a fisherman's net, so too, we are caught in the net of judgment. This awareness helps awaken us to repent.

The goal of Tashlich is to cast both our sins and the Satan away from us. When we shake our clothes after saying Tashlich, this is merely a tangible act to achieve



the spiritual goal of shaking sins from our soul. It is needless to say, the physical motions near the water and fish are not what give us the atonement. But if we apply the sincere desire to heal our relationship with Hashem as portrayed in the physical demonstrations of Tashlich, then it serves as a crucial part in the process of repenting and returning to Hashem in purity.

THE 10 DAYS OF TESHUVA

SHAWN MIRANDA



The 10 days of repentance are the first 10 days of the Hebrew month of Tishrei. The 10 days begin with Rosh Hashanah and end with the conclusion of Yom Kippur. The first 2 days are on Rosh Hashanah and the third day is always the fast of Gedalia which starts at dawn and ends at night. However, if the third of Tishrei falls on Shabbat, the fast is postponed to the fourth day. The tenth day is the last and the most serious, the Torah mandated fast of Yom Kippur which is a strict day of no work, fasting and prayer.

During these days it is considered the time which is most appropriate for doing teshuva (repentance) for all our sins. They are an opportunity for change and these 10 days are crucial to the outcome of our judgement which determines what can be done about future deeds. Many have the custom to try and take something on in these days which they struggle with, to show Hashem that we are worth giving life to, and to show ourselves that we are able to change.

Changes to prayers during the 10 Days of Teshuva

- Many congregations say selichot during these days, however our custom is to say it throughout the entire month of Elul. Although we do add some extra parts in these days.
- Another change is brought in the Gemara in Brachot (12b) that in these 10 days we change the ending of the third blessing in the Amidah to “the Holy King” instead of “the Holy G-d”.
- There are also other changes and additions made in the Amidah during these days, so it is advisable to pay extra attention and follow each word in the siddur.
- The prayer of Avinu Malkeinu is said after the repetition of the Amidah of Shachrit and Mincha during the 10 Days.

Kapparot

On erev Yom Kippur it is customary to do kapparot where a chicken or money is waved over a person's head and a short prayer is recited saying “This is my exchange, this is my substitute, this is my atonement. This rooster/money will go to its death/tzedakah, while I will enter and proceed to a good long life and to peace.” The chicken is then slaughtered in accordance with the laws of shechita and would be given to charity for consumption at the erev Yom Kippur meal.



THE 13 ATTRIBUTES OF MERCY

RABBI YOSSI DAVID



The Gemara in Rosh Hashana (17b) says Hashem told Moshe that “whenever the Jewish people sin, let them carry out this service before Me and I will forgive them,” referring to the 13 middot (attributes of mercy) of Hashem which we say so many times in the selichot and on Yom Kippur.

The Tomer Devorah writes that Hashem specifically said to “carry out this service” and not just to say this prayer. He explains that man was created in the image of G-d, and He is asking us to imitate His actions – just as He is merciful, so too should we be merciful, just as He is kind, so too should we be kind. By doing this and replicating His ways, we will be bettering ourselves and becoming more G-dlike so He will surely forgive us. So now we need to understand what these 13 middot are.

Hashem! (Adon-ai) – G-d is merciful before a person sins, even though He knows they are about to sin.

Hashem! (Adon-ai) – G-d is merciful after the sinner has gone off course.

1. **God (E-l)** – He uses His infinite power to be merciful.
2. **Compassionate (raham)** – G-d is filled with loving sympathy for human weakness and eases the punishment of the guilty.
3. **Gracious (v’hanun)** – He shows mercy even if we do not deserve it, without taking anything in return.
- 4 & 5. **Slow to anger (ereh apayim)** – This is two middot; First, Hashem is slow to punish the wicked, giving them a chance to repent. Second, Hashem withholds the reward of the tzadikim in this world so they can reap it in the next world.
6. **Abundant in Kindness (v’rav hesed)** – He is the ultimate giver, if the scale is evenly balanced between good and bad deeds, He tips the scales toward the good.
7. **Truth (v’emet)** – He keeps His promise that He will accept us back if we do teshuva.
- 8 & 9. **Preserver of kindness for thousands of generations (notzeir hesed la'alafim)** – Hashem remembers one’s good deeds and uses them as merits to benefit their future generations who may be less deserving.
10. **Forgiver of intentional sin (nosei avon)** – G-d forgives intentional sins resulting from evilness, as long as the sinner repents.
11. **Forgiver of rebellious sin (pesha)** – He even forgives those who commit a sin with the intentions of angering Him.
12. **Forgiver of error (v’hata’ah)** – He forgives unintentional sins, or sins committed out of carelessness and thoughtlessness.
13. **Who cleanses (v’nakeh)** – For those who truly do teshuva, Hashem is merciful and forgiving, wiping away their sins and even turning them into merits if the teshuva was done out of love.

If we have in mind when we say these 13 middot that we will try and act in this merciful manner with other people, then Hashem will act in this merciful manner to us, granting us a good judgement and writing us in the book of life.

THE SCAPEGOAT

TZVI JOSEPH



The Torah says that “two identical goats were taken on Yom Kippur. A lottery was cast; one goat was deemed ‘to G-d’ and sacrificed as a sin-offering; the other was sent to the wilderness and to ‘Azazel’, where it would be thrown off a cliff to its death” (Vayikra 16:7-11).

The Korban Se’ir HaMishtaleach - the goat which is thrown off a cliff is read about in the musaf of Yom Kippur. But it is very difficult to understand what exactly is going on over here, and what does this have in common with Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year?

Unlike most korbanot, it is killed not by shechita, but by being thrown off a cliff, far away from the mizbeach, onto pointed rocks beneath. The goat ‘bears the sins of Am Yisrael’ and we attain kaparah, atonement, through its death.

The commentators, including the Kli Yakar, associate the Se’ir with Eisav (who is described as an ‘Ish Seir’). The Kli Yakar says that Eisav’s purpose in this world has been to tempt us and pull us away from Avodat Hashem, serving Hashem, through any means possible. Apart from him and his descendants’ savage acts of cruelty against us, they drew swathes of Klal Yisrael away from G-d and the Torah, and corrupted them with their false enticements.



When Klal Yisrael throw the goat, symbolising Eisav, off the cliff, the statement they are making is that we completely reject Eisav and everything he stands for, and this, together with the teshuvah of Yom Kippur for the times when we did fall prey to him, brings us atonement.

WHY THE 5 PROHIBITIONS?

EITAN ISRAELI



Yom Kippur is known as the day of atonement, the day we are closest to Hashem. Many people think that Yom Kippur is a sad day where we have to fast and stay in shul and beg mercy from Hashem. However, Yom Kippur is actually one of the happiest days of the year. It is the day we are closest to Hashem, the day where we can pray for anything, where our prayers are closest to being fulfilled. Yet as we all know there are 5 prohibitions on Yom Kippur.

The 5 prohibitions

1. No eating or drinking
2. No wearing leather shoes
3. No bathing or washing past the knuckles
4. No anointing with perfumes or smearing oils
5. No marital relations



If Yom Kippur is such a happy day then why do we have these 5 Prohibitions which make the day seem like a sad one?

A parable can be used to answer this question.

There was once a wealthy man walking through the marketplace when he happened to pass by a beggar on the streets. The wealthy man being from a wealthy family and town, was shocked to see that a person could live in such harsh conditions on the streets. After giving the poor man some pennies, he got up to see a wise old man standing over him. He turned to the wise man and expressed how bad he felt for this poor man. The wise old man chuckled and replied, you can feel bad for him but it's impossible for you to actually feel bad for him. The wealthy man was confused by this statement, yet he chose not to ponder over it. A few days later, when the wealthy man returned back to his town, he was shocked to find that his house had been burgled and all his possessions had been taken. At least I have some money left in the bank he thought, however it turned out that his bank had been robbed as well. At least I have my fields he thought, but when he went to check them out, they had all been demolished and the crops destroyed. Feeling slightly helpless he walked back home, thinking on the bright side, at least I have my house he thought, but when he got home, to his dismay he found out his house had been burned down.

He now had nothing left, his wealth was gone, his fields destroyed and house burned down. With no other option he headed to the marketplace and joined the homeless beggars on the street. For the next few weeks, the wealthy man worked hard doing cheap labour and scavenging for whatever money and food he could

get his hands on. Being an experienced dealer with business it was not long before he regained his wealth status again.

A few months later the wealthy man met the wise old man in the marketplace, memories of their last interaction came to his mind as he walked over to greet him. After a quick greeting and introduction, he suddenly noticed a homeless person sitting in the corner. Upon seeing a homeless person, the wealthy man sprinted over to him, bent down and offered him his cloak, bought him some food and gave him some money to find shelter for the night. As the wealthy man returned, the wise old man having known about the tragedy that had befallen the wealthy man, revealed that this is what he meant when he had said to him “you couldn’t actually feel bad for the homeless”. Before when you never experienced being homeless you had no idea what it actually felt like, and so you couldn’t really experience his situation and help in the right way. But now that you have experienced it first-hand you can actually feel bad, and connect to him unlike you had ever done before.

This is very much why we have the 5 prohibitions on Yom Kippur. Throughout the year we eat and drink, we wear expensive clothes clean ourselves and use the finest creams, these are all materialistic things. All these are things that we may enjoy, however they distance us from Hashem. On Yom Kippur we change all of that. We aspire to be as close to Hashem as possible on this day. The closest things to Hashem are angels and on this day, we are on the same level as angels which this can be proven from the fact we say Baruch Shem Kevod out loud on Yom Kippur. In order to be as close to Hashem as possible, we need to become an angel and to do this we must distance ourselves from all the materialistic things that distance us from Him.



So these 5 prohibitions are not there to punish us, rather we use them as tools to get as close as possible to Hashem on the holiest day of the year.

May we all merit to be judged in the book of life and happiness. Amen.

WHAT DOES YONAH REPRESENT?

TZVI JOSEPH



In mincha of Yom Kippur we read the book of Yonah. Yonah was commanded by Hashem to give over a prophecy in the city of Ninveh, but instead flees Eretz Yisrael attempting to avoid his duty. Hashem causes Yonah to be thrown off his ship by his fellow sailors, trying to calm a storm poised to sink them, after which he was swallowed by a whale. The whale spits him out after spending three days and nights in his stomach, and he goes and delivers his prophecy to Ninveh that the people need to repent their evil ways and to change their relations from baseless hatred to love of other.

The Vilna Gaon understands the book of Yonah as a parable for the journey of the neshama, our soul. The first pasuk reads “Vayehi dvar Hashem el Yonah ben Amitit” – “and the word of Hashem came to Yonah the son of Amitit”. ‘Amitit’ says the Gaon, is a reference to ‘HaAmiti’ - the true one, ie Hashem. And so, if we take Yonah to mean the neshama, then in the first pasuk, G-d instructs the neshama of its mission right before the start of life.

The second pasuk reads ‘Kum, lech el Ninveh, Ha’ir Hagedolah” – “get up and go to Ninveh, the great city”. This is Hashem telling the neshama to descend into the world. “Vayered Yafo” – “and he went down to Yafo. “Vayimtzah oniyah” – “and he found a ship”. The neshama comes into the world and immediately enters a physical body.

But Yonah does not complete his mission. The neshama is waylaid by the temptations of the world, and fails. So Yonah is then swallowed by a whale, which represents when a person is laid to rest in their grave.



But Hashem gives Yonah a second chance and instructs him to deliver his prophecy again. This represents the neshama entering this world again, and again, as a gilgul (reincarnation), to try and fulfil its mission.

The Gaon gives advice on how to break this cycle, for the neshama to leave this world having fulfilled its purpose.

Instead of avoiding our purpose in life, if one is constantly evaluating themselves then they can find the areas of their weaknesses, where they fail time and time again, and work on these. And if they find it and correct it, the neshama can complete its mission and not have to come back again as a gilgul.

This is very much related to Yom Kippur which is a time where we engage in deep introspection of our actions in the previous year, understand where we went wrong, and make a plan of how we can fix this. We can clearly see from the story of Yonah that no one is out of reach from Hashem.

So if we use this day properly, then we can realign our actions in the coming year to be focused on what our mission in this world really is; to serve Hashem properly and to show love for each other. And in this merit we pray that Hashem will grant us a year of life, allowing us to be able to perform our mission in this world, exalting His name and doing kindness to all those around us.



60 MINUTES THAT DECIDE OUR YEAR

SAMUEL AARON



The climax of our Yom Kippur davening is at Ne'ila, when the sun is setting on the holiest day of prayer and introspection. Ne'ila means 'locking', because the gates in heaven are about to be locked and this is our last chance for being granted the atonement of Yom Kippur. We leave the doors of the Aron Hakodesh open during Ne'ila signifying that the gates of heaven are wide open to our prayers and requests.

Rav Aryeh Ginzberg tells over a powerful story which happened on motzei Yom Kippur just 9 years ago. A very large Baal Chessed (kind person) named Shloimie Gross (z"l) decided to travel from his home in Brooklyn to spend Yom Kippur davening in the famous Yeshiva of Mir in Yerushalayim. Immediately after arvit, Shlomie, who was a major supporter of the Mir, was escorted up to the front of the large beit hamedrash to receive a warm bracha from the Rosh Hayeshiva of Mir, Harav Nosson Tzvi Finkel (z"tl). The Rosh Hayeshiva gave his dear friend Shlomie a warm handshake and an even warmer bracha. Someone from the Yeshiva administration managed to get hold of a camera and took a picture of both Rav Nosson Tzvi and Shlomie still wearing their talit with their magnificent smiles. (see picture)

It was just a few short weeks later when the terrible news spread throughout the Torah world, that the Rosh Hayeshiva of the largest yeshiva in the world had left this world. Over the next week, the magazines and newspapers were filled with stories and pictures of the Rosh Hayeshiva's saintly life. One of the pictures printed, was the one with Rav Nosson Tzvi and Reb Shlomie, taken just a few weeks earlier on motzei Yom Kippur.



When this picture was printed, a close friend of Reb Shlomie, Rav Binyomin Povarsky (shlita) (son of Rav Berel Povarsky, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovez) immediately faxed this picture to Reb Shlomie at his office in Brooklyn and followed up a few moments later with a phone call saying "Shlomie, can you imagine that not more than half an hour before this picture was taken, unknown to anyone in this world, it was decided by Hashem that the Rosh Hayeshiva was going to pass away this year", and then his voice faded off.

The story picks up just a few short months later, when a great tragedy occurred that left hundreds of people shocked and bereft, on an erev shabbat, when Reb Shlomie was stricken with a massive heart attack and he suddenly passed away.

This incredible Baal Tzedaka (charity giver) was buried in Israel and in the van that drove the family from the airport to cemetery, Rav Povarsky painfully reminded the family of the picture that he had sent Reb Shlomie months earlier and the comment that he made then about the picture, and then he added; “who could have ever imagined that the Din handed down in Shamayim just a half an hour before that picture was taken was that both these unique and special people would be leaving the world in the coming year of 5772”.

If we would truly grasp the significance of what takes place in Shamayim at the time of Ne’ila, the sealing of the judgement, we would be shaking with every part of our body. Especially this year with the amount of losses that we have all suffered, we need to remember that this was all decided and finalised at Ne’ila.

The Brisker Rav (z”tl) used a famous parable to describe the different attitudes to this time. During the war, merchants would smuggle goods across the border illegally. The penalty for this crime was death. People used to hire a wagon driver for a high fare to transport them and their merchandise to their destination. As they would get closer to the border, the merchant would start trembling from fear. He knew the consequence if he was caught was death. The wagon driver was nervous, but not as afraid since he had done this several times before. The horses weren’t nervous at all. As far as they were concerned, it made no difference where they were.

We need to stand in front of Hashem at Ne’ila not like the horses who are unaware of what is going on, but like the merchant, with the clarity and



understanding that today is judgement day. We, our family and the entire nation’s future is in Hashem’s hands at that moment. And if we can connect to this moment, then hopefully we will all merit a year of health, parnassah and all the brachot that this world has to offer.

THE SUKKAH

NATI RAYMOND



The Torah says "You shall dwell in sukkot for seven days, every citizen of Israel shall dwell in sukkot in order that your generations shall know that I caused the Jewish people to dwell in sukkot when I brought them out from the land of Egypt" (Vayikra 23:42-43).

Why do we sit in a Sukkah?

When the Jewish people left Egypt and travelled into the wilderness there were about 3 million people. The wilderness was a place of great desolation inhabited by deadly snakes and serpents, and there was no protection from the burning heat of the sun. Hashem therefore miraculously protected His chosen nation by surrounding us with seven clouds of glory - four around the sides, one above them, one below them like a carpet and one to lead the way. We are commanded to sit in a sukkah to remember this wonderful and miraculous act of kindness.

Another reason is to bring humility and thank Hashem for a bountiful harvest. Hashem commanded us to sit in the sukkah precisely at the harvest season, when we would normally congratulate ourselves on a successful harvest in our nice comfortable homes. The humble sukkah reminds us that everything comes from Hashem.



A further reason is to subject ourselves to the elements and thus strengthen our faith in Hashem. By doing this we are also remembering how the poor feel being

exposed to the cold, giving us more of a reason to be thankful to Hashem. This should also trigger a person to give to the poor and celebrate the festival with them, bringing peace and brotherhood in the nation.



7 SPECIAL GUESTS

JOSH ISAAC-SAUL



The Rambam states that anyone who sits comfortably with his family in his own Sukkah and does not share with the poor is not performing a mitzvah for joy but rather for their stomach. Hence why every year on each different night of Sukkot we invite one of the 'Ushpizin' to sit with us in the Sukkah. This custom was established by kabbalists in the 16th century.

The question is asked: Why do we invite specifically these seven 'personalities' to our Sukkah rather than any other great people from our history?

According to the Kabbalah, each of the Ushpizin personifies one of the seven "sefirot" or Divine qualities with regard to the earthly world:

Avraham - Kindness

Yitzchak - Bravery, courage

Yaakov - Glory

Yosef - Essence, holiness

Moshe - Leadership, justice

Aharon - Excellency, empathy

David - Kingship

Together, the seven make up a model of man, with all the potential perfection.

As each of the Ushpizin are welcomed into our sukkah, they empower us with the particular quality that defines him. This is the deeper reason why they are called the "shepherds of Israel," because like a shepherd who provides nourishment for his flock, these seven leaders nourish us with their spiritual essence.

And while these seven great souls are our "shepherds" all year round, the seven days of Sukkot are a time when their presence in our lives is more pronounced and revealed. As we enter the "temporary dwelling" of the sukkah, freeing ourselves from the dependence we developed on the material comforts of home and hearth, we are now in a place in which our spiritual self is more revealed and accessible. In this place the Ushpizin visit us, empowering us to connect the seven dimensions of our own soul's "divine image" with its supernal source in the divine sefirot, feeding, nourishing and fortifying our spiritual self for the material year to come. They set an example, and show us how we can strive to be better.



WHEN FOUR BECOMES ONE

SHANE MIRANDA



The Arba Minim are the four species which we are commanded to bind together and wave in the sukkah, during the festival of Sukkot. We take the Aravah (willow branch), Hadass (myrtle bough), Lulav (frond of date palm) and the Etrog (citron fruit). By binding them together for a mitzvah, we show our desire to consecrate our entire being to the service of Hashem.

The Midrash says that the four species symbolise our desire to unite the four "types" of Jews in service of Hashem. It explains that each of the species are different with their taste and/or smell, which correspond to types of Jews who study Torah and do good deeds.

- The aravah has neither taste nor smell, symbolising those who lack both Torah and good deeds.
- The hadass has a good smell but no taste, symbolising those who possess good deeds but do not study Torah.
- The lulav has taste but no smell, symbolising those who study Torah but do not possess good deeds.
- The etrog has both a good taste and a good smell, symbolising those who have both Torah and good deeds.

Another explanation is that the four species represent parts of the human body. Each of the species or its leaves is similar in shape to the following organs; the Aravah represents the mouth, the Hadass represents the eyes, the Lulav represents the spine and the Etrog represents the heart.

The symbolisation of the arba minim is similar to how the four sons represent the Jewish community on Pesach. The four species together, represents the unity of the Jewish people, and the fact that it is made up of individuals with all possible mixes of Torah knowledge and good deeds. But on Sukkot we have all just come out of Yom Kippur, accepting upon ourselves the desire to come closer to Hashem, we are all reborn and equal as one. Every Jew has a mission and responsibility which only they can fulfil, just like the different organs in our body. Only



together in unity can we strive to accomplish our mutual goals and carry out the duties given to us as one nation chosen by Hashem. So now we take these four species together, and celebrate this festival as one nation with God.

CHOL HAMOED - WEEKDAY OR NOT?

ALEX HAROUNOF

Chol Hamoed refers to the “intermediate period” of the chagim of Pesach and Sukkot. They are the days sandwiched between the beginning and ending holy days of both chagim. From Sukkot to Simchat Torah there are 9 days. The first two days (Sukkot) and the last two days (Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah) are Yom Tov days; the middle five days are Chol Hamoed.

On Chol Hamoed, however, we are permitted to follow different laws to yom tov/shabbat. For example, we may use electricity or drive a car. (Unless, of course, it falls out on shabbat). However one is encouraged to try to avoid going to work, doing laundry, writing and certain other activities.

The special mitzvot of the festival are equally followed on Chol Hamoed. For example, it is still forbidden to eat chametz during Chol Hamoed of Pesach, and we still eat in a Sukkah and shake the lulav and etrog on the Chol Hamoed of Sukkot. The days of Chol Hamoed also include the mitzvah to be joyous and celebrate; and one should wear nicer clothes than their weekday clothing.

There are special prayers and Torah readings in shul during Chol Hamoed, and we have the custom that we do not wear tefilin.

What is permitted on Chol Hamoed

Chol translates to “weekday/mundane.” Moed means “holiday/sacred.” Each of these on its own is quite simply understood, but how can one day be at once both a simple weekday and a holiday?

In order to maintain the fine balance of holiday and weekday, a set of guidelines exists to help us determine what we may and may not do on those days. The general principle is to do as little “skilled” work as possible, and as much holiday celebration as you can.

Permitted activities include:

- Anything done in order to prepare or cook food.
- Anything done for medical purposes.
- Any non-strenuous work which, if not performed at the time, would cause loss.



Additional laws:

- Business should be avoided unless it will provide one with funds to purchase something for the holiday or if one will lose a major capital in the business by not attending. Selling merchandise is permitted.
- We go shopping only for items needed for the holiday, unless the item is currently on sale and will be more expensive after the holiday, or will be otherwise unavailable for purchase.
- Writing should be avoided. When absolutely necessary, it should be done in a different way than usual.

Hoshana Rabbah is known as the last day of judgment, which begins on Rosh Hashanah. The Zohar says that while the judgment for the new year is sealed on Yom Kippur, it is not “delivered” until the end of Sukkot. The Midrash tells us that Hashem told Avraham “If atonement is not granted to your children on Rosh Hashanah, I will grant it on Yom Kippur; if they do not attain atonement on Yom Kippur, it will be given on Hoshana Rabbah.”

The last day of Chol Hamoed is Hoshana Rabbah. The custom is to stay up all night learning Torah and saying selichot, as it is written in the machzor. This is because on Sukkot we are judged concerning rain for the year and all human life is dependent upon water. Since Hoshana Rabbah is the last day of Sukkot and the verdict will be according to the final judgment, we want to make the most of this day by learning all night and praying to Hashem.

According to the holy Zohar, every Heavenly decree pertaining to a person is sealed with an inner seal and an outer seal. The inner seal is sealed on Yom Kippur. The outer, upper seal is made and completed at the middle of the night on Hashanah Rabbah. This is what is called “the handing over of the papers” to the angels. The verdict of Yom Kippur, including the sentences of the guilty people, is written on these papers. Even though the papers have been delivered, though, it’s still possible to save the situation until Shemini Atzeret. Therefore, one must arouse himself and fully repent on Hoshanah Rabbah, and one’s heart should concentrate on repentance throughout the day.

After we finish praying shacharit on Hoshana Rabbah morning, we take the aravot and we strike them against the ground outside. This is symbolic to rid ourselves of any remaining sins (the leaves representing these transgressions) that might influence Hashem’s decision not to send rain at the right times in the year.



SHEMINI ATZERET - ASKING FOR RAIN

RAPHAEL AARON



Rabbi Yehuda in the gemara in masechet Taanit (daf 7a) says “The day on which rain falls is as great as the day on which the Torah was given”.

The Maharsha gives a beautiful explanation to this. He says that water is the most important element of matter which fills our universe and in the same way the Torah is the key ingredient of all spirituality. Rain in Hebrew – ‘geshem’ – is the root of the word ‘gashmiut’ which means materialism. And therefore, you have the material world and the spiritual world matching each other.

In the gemara, Rava goes one step further. He says “The day of rain fall is greater than the day on which Torah was given”. He learns this from the very same verse “yaarof k’matar likchi” – (Hashem says) “Let My Torah fall like rain.” This means that the Torah is compared to rain, indicating that rain is even greater!

Here the Torah is being compared to rain, suggesting that the day on which rain falls is greater than the day on which Torah was given. Once again the Maharsha helps us understand this, and explains that when rain falls, it affects everybody. However, when Torah is given it doesn’t affect everybody. It only positively affects the lives of those who embrace it, who take hold of the opportunities that it presents to have their lives enhanced through the study of Torah and through the practice of its mitzvot.

Over the two concluding days of Succot we actually have rainfall and Torah celebration merging together through the festivals of Shemini Atzeret and Simchat Torah. On Shemini Atzeret we pray for rain and on Simchat Torah we rejoice in the Torah.

I believe that our tradition here throws out a challenge to us. We need to strive to ensure that the giving of Torah has the same impact as the falling of rain, and really let it become our lives. In order that we can engage in Torah, embrace its values and perform its mitzvot to enable us to have truly fulfilling and life enhancing experiences.

Let us therefore ensure this year that we have a true Simchat Torah that we celebrate not only the Torah that Hashem gave us but the extent to which we all wish to receive it.



TRUE SIMCHAT TORAH

ELISHA MOSES



Following the days of Sukkot and Shemini Atzeret we celebrate Simchat Torah, rejoicing upon concluding the reading of the entire Torah. All of us dance and sing the day and night away with the Torah with an immense joy that is greater than any other time of the year.

Why celebrate with the Torah?

Because there is no greater joy than the celebration of having the spiritual blueprint with which to live by. The Torah is a roadmap of our soul and of the universe that allows us the power to make sense of our lives and the world around us. Torah empowers us with tools to navigate our way through the dark and unexpected roads of life. No gift is greater than having direction in this world, particularly in uncertain times. And that is the best reason to celebrate.

Why now?

Why do we conclude and celebrate Torah at this particular point in time and not during Shavuot when the Torah was given at Har Sinai?

Because the true celebration of Torah is possible only after we have been forgiven and received the second luchot on Yom Kippur. On Shavuot we cannot celebrate, because the Torah and its recipients were not yet tested. As we see, 40 days after Moshe received the first luchot on Shavuot, the people built the golden calf, which led to the breaking of the luchot. Only after Moses prayed for 80 days and 80 nights to Hashem to forgive us and received the second luchot on Yom Kippur is it then possible to truly celebrate.

Because now we have been broken and learned that we can rebuild after loss. Now we know that even flawed human beings can grow through the process and



embrace Torah and use it as a map for life. On Shavuot we appreciate that perfect people can use Torah to live their lives. But what about all the rest of us? After Yom Kippur all of us, including the imperfect ones among us, can embrace Torah and live by it.

The Dubner Maggid says over a story that can help to understand this point. A King and Queen were childless for many years. Desperate, they visited a Rabbi who gave them a bracha with a

cautionary clause. Soon, the Queen would have a baby girl. However, no man outside the family is allowed to see her until her wedding day. And so it was. When the Queen gave birth to a baby girl, a secluded island was prepared for the Princess to live on. There she was raised in regal style with the finest educators.

As the Princess came of age, the King had a serious technical difficulty in marrying off his daughter. Each nobleman in the King's court was thrilled to accept the princess's hand in marriage, until it was explained that the first date and the wedding would coincide! On the verge of despair, the King approached the final nobleman, who remarkably agreed to marry without as much as a peek.

As the wedding date approached the nobleman's repressed bridal fears shook him deeply. On the wedding day, the whole world came to dance, except for the anxious groom. As he peered underneath the veil, he braced for disaster - but to his surprise, the princess was incredibly beautiful. A nagging nervousness persisted: "What's the catch?" But none was coming. Every day he unveiled yet another wondrous aspect of her personality. Not only was she stunning, she was also courageous, good spirited, charming and deep.

Months later, the nobleman approached his new father in law to admit his delight in his new bride and confide his disappointment - that he had essentially missed out on the wedding. The King decided that a new party would be arranged. All the guests would be invited back but this time only one person, the Prince himself, would dance to express his absolute delight. And so it was.

Shavuot, explained the Dubner Maggid, marks the Jew's unshakable commitment to Hashem's wisdom and His Torah. Not knowing what was in the Torah, at the foot of Har Sinai, the Jewish nation confidently proclaimed Na'aseh V'nishma (We will perform the mitzvot and then we will understand them). That faith remained blind until we were exposed to the sweetness of the Torah. Simchat Torah celebrates, through dedication to Torah Study, our joy and ever expanding appreciation for the Torah's pristine beauty and depth.

The absolute passion and joy on Simchat Torah gives us strength for the entire year to serve Hashem with pure love and joy. May we use this day well and embrace this special connection we have with Hashem.



BEREISHIT - THE MERCY OF HASHEM

AVI WAKEFIELD



In Parashat Bereshit, the creation of the world is introduced in two ways: Each of the days of creation begins with, "Vayomer Elokim" and then the next part with, "Bereishit bara Elokim"; we can see that the 4 letter name of Hashem is not used but rather "Elokim". However, when the Torah repeats the story, the name of Hashem is used, as it says, "Hashem Elokim".

Rashi explains that originally the world was to be created through middat hadin - the strict attribute of Divine Justice, as the name Elokim implies. However, the world could not function on only this attribute and was eventually created according to the rules of justice and mercy combined. This partnership of middat hadin and middat harachamim (attribute of mercy) is alluded to in the description of Hakadosh Baruch Hu as, "Hashem Elokim". Elokim refers to din - harsh judgement, and Hashem to rachamim - mercy.

Creation also occurred in two stages: Chazal teach us that the entire creation of the world was dependent upon whether the Jewish people would accept the Torah. The first acceptance of the Torah at the time of the golden calf occurred under middat hadin, so that when the Jewish people sinned they should have immediately been destroyed. Middat hadin means that immediate and complete punishment should be given out to one who sins. Eventually, Hashem gave the Bnei Yisrael another chance and instructed them in the 13 middot shel rachamim (which we said so many times over Yom Kippur), thereby enabling a second kabbalat hatorah.

This change from middat hadin to middat harachamim did not only occur at the time of creation or at the time of matan torah - this takes place every year. Rosh Hashana is the yom hadin - day of judgement. The world should really be judged according to the middat hadin. Yet, Hashem knows that we cannot stand judgement under those terms so He gave us Yom Kippur as a chance to be judged according to middat harachamim.



As we begin the Torah with Sefer Bereishit, we should remember the lesson of balancing the middat hadin (justice and judgement) with the middat harachamim (mercy and compassion). One of the ways we may be able to do this is to view others in a favourable way - dan l'kaf zechut - as Hashem so mercifully does to us, which we should all strive to do.