

The very existence of idolatrous "cultures" teaches that man follows others, even when customs violate reason. In contrast, Judaism is built on rational principles. This year, may we all abandon a culturally-followed Judaism, seeking the wisdom of God's laws, and teach these truths to our youth: insuring their unwavering commitment to Jewish life.

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### Holidays

# Yom Kippur

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Repentance and Yom Kippur only atone for sins committed towards Hashem ... However, sins committed towards another person ... are not forgiven until one pays his friend all that he is obligated to pay him and appeases him." (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:9)

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# THE SCAPE GOAT



RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

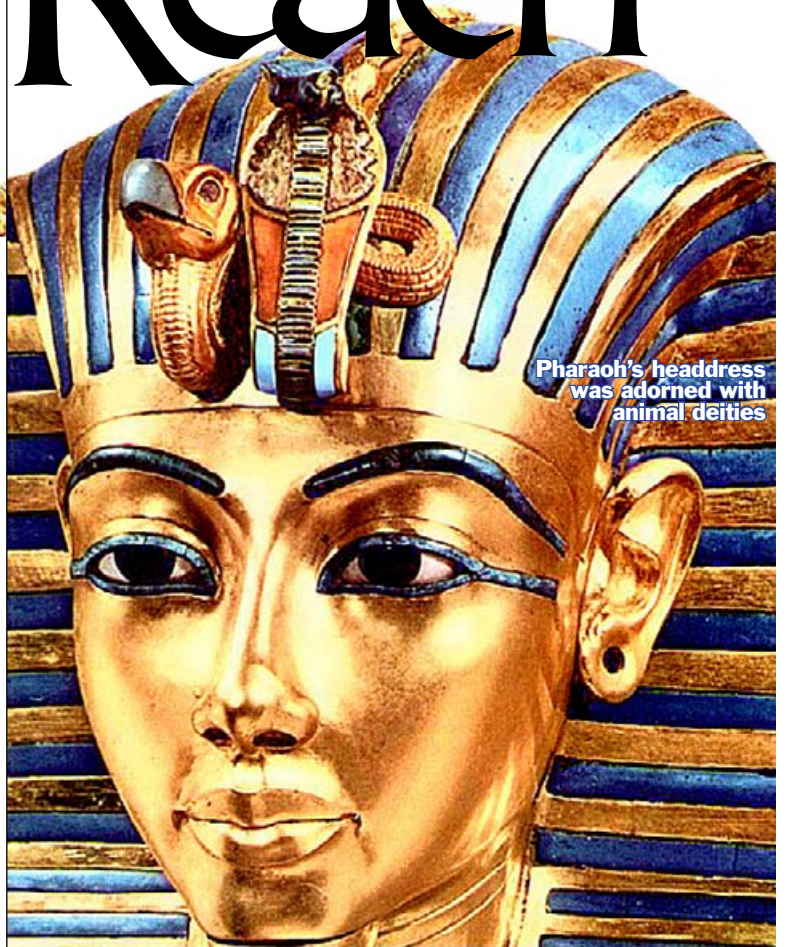
Written by students

The scapegoat is a very unique sacrifice. All other sacrifices require shechita and zerika which is the fulfillment of the sacrifice and reflects the presence of atonement. However, the scapegoat is brought to a desolate place and is brutally killed by being thrown over a precipice. Chazal teach us that the nations of the world criticize the B'nai Yisroel for its practice of the saer l'azazel as being solely ritualistic and ceremonial. Although the gentiles have ritualistic practices, they are symbolic and their performance engender some emotional satisfaction unlike the scapegoat. Judaism prides itself on the fact that ones

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# THE SCAPEGOAT Egypt's Reach

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Pharaoh's headdress was adorned with animal deities



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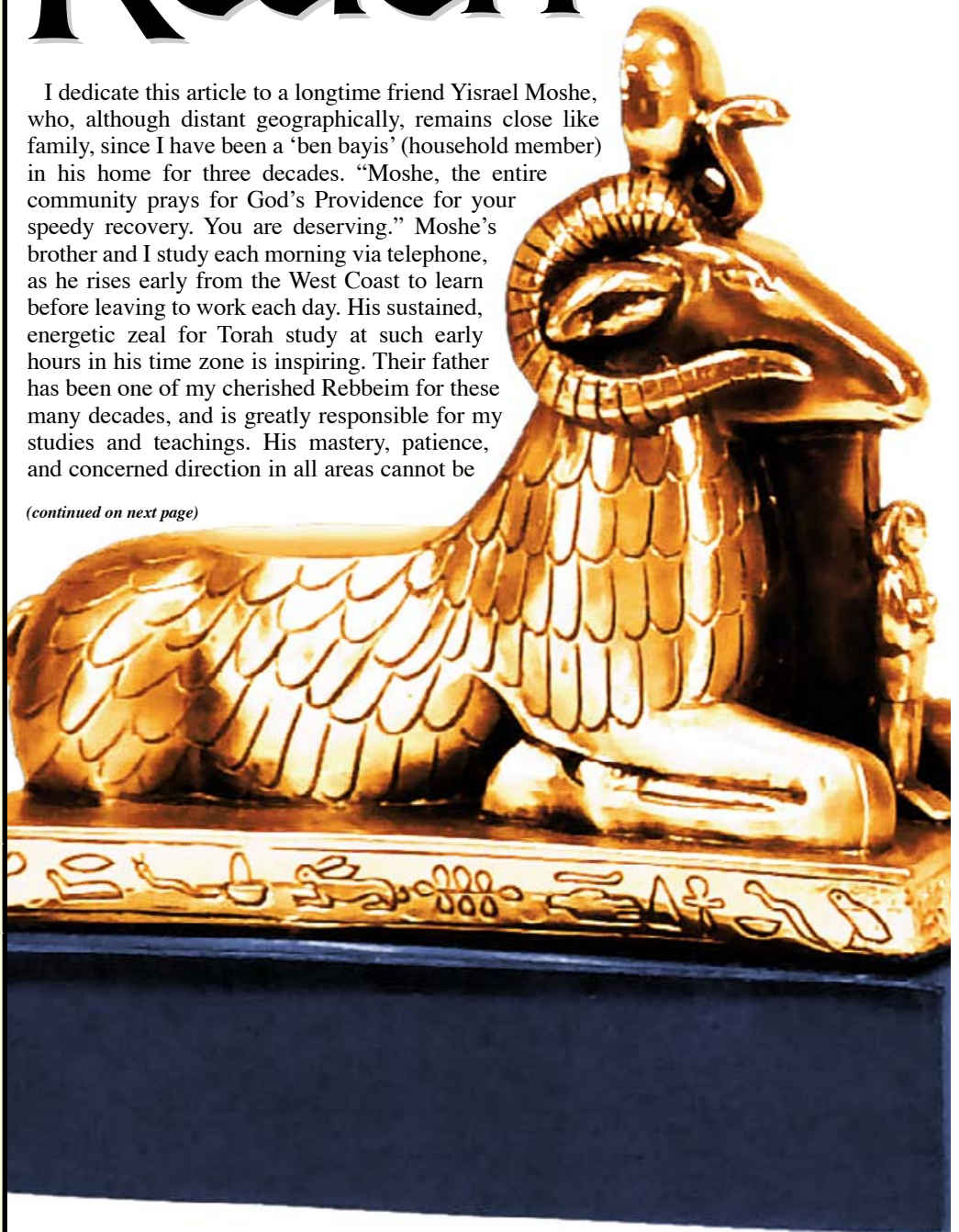
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# THE SCAPEGOAT Egypt's Reach

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM  
BASED ON A DISCUSSION  
WITH AARON ZIMMER**

I dedicate this article to a longtime friend Yisrael Moshe, who, although distant geographically, remains close like family, since I have been a 'ben bayis' (household member) in his home for three decades. "Moshe, the entire community prays for God's Providence for your speedy recovery. You are deserving." Moshe's brother and I study each morning via telephone, as he rises early from the West Coast to learn before leaving to work each day. His sustained, energetic zeal for Torah study at such early hours in his time zone is inspiring. Their father has been one of my cherished Rebbeim for these many decades, and is greatly responsible for my studies and teachings. His mastery, patience, and concerned direction in all areas cannot be

*(continued on next page)*



repaid. And all of us owe a great debt of gratitude to the Rebbetzin for her unwavering support of Torah, and Hachnasas Orchim (welcoming of guests). Her backbone and dedication through times glad and sad has made an indelible mark on me, and her entire family. I don't know from where you get your strength and courage, but retain it, because Jacob is almost a Bar Mitzvah, and will only gain from your example. Your warmth is unmatched, as is your caring and genuine personality. Together, this family dedicates themselves to God, honesty, and to everyone who enters their lives. I, and the entire community wish you all health, wealth and happiness for this, and many decades. Refuah Shlaymah, v'Ksiva v'Chasima Tova l'Kulchem.

Continuing with words of chizuk (strength) I wish to share some thoughts on Yom Kippur. My friend Aaron called two nights ago, sharing with me some interesting insights into the Azazel the Yom Kippur Scapegoat. As we learn, two goats were presented before God, and a lot was cast which pronounced the fate of each: one was sacrificed, and the other was led by an appointed individual to its certain death: it was led through the desert and ultimately hurled off Mount Azazel, the jagged cliff which dismembered the descending goat before it hit ground.

Aaron explained the Rabbis words, "God gave Azazel is portion". What does this mean? As Aaron explained, during bondage, the Jews absorbed the Egyptian worship of animals. One idolatrous attachment was addressed by the slaughter of the famous Paschal Lamb, which we kill in refutation of Egypt's proclaimed deity. To benefit from God's Egyptian Exodus, the Jews must have killed that lamb. Otherwise, they could not accept God, and Torah, as their view of God would include some harbored reverence of that lamb. Such reverence cannot coexist with the true concept of God, who is 'alone' in His role as Creator. Rashi states four fifths of thee Jews in Egypt perished. They could not extricate themselves from idolatry. However, many others who successfully abandoned lamb worship, nonetheless, held steadfast to another deified animal: the goat. The destruction of the goat dedicated to Azazel is tied to Egyptian goat worship. "And you shall no longer sacrifice to the goats." (Lev. 17:7) As Aaron mentioned, goats are always chewing: a base human instinct is the appetitive drive. In specific, goats over other animals become obsessed with a single partner in copulation. Man too gravitates to the appetitive and sexual drives, so perhaps, the goat attracts man on an unconscious level, as it too enjoys and displays

unrestrained lust. Perhaps, it is man's very instincts that chose the goat over all other animals, as an expression and satisfaction of his own makeup. Egypt selected the goat, not by accident, but because it "appealed" to those lustful and unrestrained oppressors, the Egyptians. Jews too are made of the same cloth, and absorbed this instinctual magnetism. They too accepted the practice of sacrificing to the goats.

How does God address this problem of the Jews' attachment to the goat? "God gave Azazel is portion". Aaron explained this to mean that although Egypt and those Jews felt there was some "force" out there, the powerful goat-god, God's "giving its portion" means that God controls all, and no other forces exist outside of Him. God "giving" a portion to the goat (Azazel), means that God is solely responsible for this imagined "force" embodied in the goat's traits. In other words, "Do not think as did Egypt, that the goat and imagined desert demons (one and the same) are some independent force that reign outside of God's control. No, all is under God's hand, and He also created what you only perceive as a "force", but is in fact, man's instincts. However, these are all man's projections. No forces exist outside of God, and He demonstrates this by commanding a tragic end to the goat, to that presumed desert god. We should react, "How can we kill a real god?" From the planned and unimpeded death of the goat, we learn that it cannot protect itself. It is not a god! Egypt assumed otherwise. All of those imagined desert demons and forces could not protect this goat, what other cultures assumed to be a god. Hence, the idea that the goat is a supernatural being is dismissed. Simultaneously, God is viewed as superior, since nothing opposed His command to kill this "god".

But why allow such a practice to begin with? After all, the Rabbis admit that this scapegoat sent to Azazel is one of three Torah commands, regarding which; the idolatrous nations of the world, and our own instincts accuse the Torah. They say about Azazel, we are sacrificing outside the Holy Temple, "just as they do" to their gods! How can this be that the Torah allows such a practice? Cannot such a practice mislead us, and encourage idolatrous sacrifice in the desert, just as before?

Let us understand: these goat-gods, demons or shadim, are all imagined. The Talmud teaches that they are "seen" in only four locations: in pits or caves, mountaintops, at night...and in the desert. Why this limited travel? Can't they move freely? The answer would be yes, if they were real beings. But the Talmud is pointing to something: these four instances where demons are seen, share a

common bond: they are places where man is isolated. And when man is alone, his powerful social need is awakened, and yearns for at least one other person to be with, to talk to...to "see". So, he does, he sees things. His imagination, coupled with his strong social need, creates daydreams of people, or animals that embody some human quality. This affords the solitary individual some sense of company, or it caters to his fears. And as we said, goats embody man's two base instincts. So when man is alone, as he used to be in the old days as he traveled across plains and deserts by foot, his loneliness would create visions. The Talmud teaches us that we should not "greet" these demons, for by doing so; we elevate what is imaginary, to the status of "reality". Thereby, the Torah aptly guards man against falling prey to all dangers, and psychological dangers are at the forefront of the battle. Goat gods and demons are not real, and we must not treat them as real.

The command not to sacrifice in the desert is the response to this behavior. It puts a lid on any expression of desert god sacrifices. But would not Azazel actually encourage desert sacrifice? The answer is no. This is because God, and not man, initiates Azazel[1]. And if man does not initiate this practice, it is not an expression of his imagination: it is not idolatry. It is also a controlled activity, once a year. The opening of the parsha Acharay Mos highlights this. This Parsha almost immediately describes the Azazel scapegoat. But before doing so, God tells Moses to speak to his brother Aaron, that he may not enter the Temple at his discretion. And the reason God says this must be observed is because "I appear in cloud". What type of explanation is this? How does God's appearance in cloud reasonably demand that Aaron not enter the Temple to sacrifice at any time? And why mention this prohibition here? The reasoning is sound: Aaron's two sons were just killed by God, precisely because they sacrificed, without being commanded. Such an act is prohibited, as it reveals man's feeling that he knows better than God how to sacrifice. This religious emotion can kill us. What is God's response? "Do not sacrifice at all times...for I appear in cloud." "Cloud" means to say, "I am hidden. You cannot know Me, nor have you any right to decide when or how to sacrifice to Me." God is teaching us that Aaron's sons were killed for acting on their feeling that they knew better than God when to sacrifice. God condemned them for brining a "strange fire" which was not commanded.

Although well intended, our intentions must follow truth, and cannot dictate truth. The religions of the world express the latter senti-

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ment; "Our feelings justify and validate our actions as God's will." But this too, God reprimands, "For in the thoughts of my heart I will go." (Deut. 29:18) This is cited in the Torah as man's justification for deviating from God's words, but God does not accept such a justification and other religions borne of man's feelings, for man cannot know better than God. God says this man will not be forgiven. Our actions must follow He who knows better. Thus, Judaism is a religion of accepting objective reality, where other religions manufacture a subjective "reality", assuming man's feelings dictate reality. Thus, they forever strive to force the external world to comply with their fantasies, only to be confronted at every turn with frustration: for the real world does not function according to their infantile fantasies carried throughout adulthood.

Now, if the Rabbis stated that the Azazel scapegoat appears to the nations as idolatry, why did God see fit to allow it? I suggest that God desired the Jews to witness this part of our makeup, as expressed in "God gave a portion" to the Azazel. God is placing this idolatrous act on a pedestal, on this one day of Yom Kippur. In other words, God is saying, "See this Azazel? This is what your instincts are prone to do; you sacrificed a goat to demons in the desert. Recognize your instinctual nature, that it can lead you to falsehoods (defenseless goat-gods), and its tragic end." Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, requires man's acceptance of his instinctual nature. Apprehending this reality

of our instinctual nature must precede our address of these instinctual drives.

The Rabbis also quote "Samael" (translated as "the blinding agent[2]") or Satan. Samael normally conveys our sins to God. But on Yom Kippur, all it has are praises for this Jewish nation, who appear as angels; not eating, not sitting, not wearing shoes, who are at peace with one another, and are free of sin. God hears the prosecutor's (Samael's) praise of the Jews, and then He atones them for the sins of the Temple and the nation. What does this metaphor mean? The Rabbis mean to teach the second half of Yom Kippur's lesson: why God atones us. We are atoned due to our demonstration that we can in fact control the instincts, as we display with our abstention from pleasure in these areas. The very fact that we can overcome our drives demonstrates our level, as individuals who can see the truth, and master our appetites. This level renders us worthy of life. We can be atoned. Our yearly overindulgence is the cause of our attachment to these desires. As we abstain from them this day of Yom Kippur, we recognize our desires as we ache for them. This must awaken us to just how involved we are in pursuing these pleasures. Knowledge of the sin is the first step towards dealing with it. Through abstention in these areas, we can study ourselves, and gauge our activities, thereby moving from a life of temporal pleasures, to a life of eternal wisdom.

Yom Kippur straddles both issues: through the Azazel scapegoat we recognize the

instinctual and idolatrous emotions which exist in us all, and as a Rabbi once taught, how that life leads to a tragic end. And through fasting and abstention from other pleasures, we demonstrate our ability to control those desires, and merit atonement. Since this day is all about atonement, we focus on the cause for our need for atonement: the instinctual nature of man. The book of Jonah is therefore read, as it reminds us of the inhabitants of Ninveh, who heeded God's warning, and whose lives were spared as they repented from their sins. Man can overcome his emotions.

May we all benefit from this day, and be sealed for life. Chasima Tovah. □

[1] Simultaneously, we cannot bring animals anywhere except in God's Temple. In the end, this Azazel scapegoat is to heighten our awareness of our idolatrous natures, while adhering to God's command. This scapegoat mission to the desert, is following God's prescribed laws, and is no longer an expression of man's idolatrous practices, as God initiated this one-time yearly demonstration.

[2] Samael "blinds" man from the truth, and leads us astray after instinctual gratification.



(Yom Kippur continued from page 1)

## Holidays

The ten days between Rosh HaShanna and Yom Kippur are devoted to repentance – Teshuva. Maimonides explains that the violation of any commandment engenders an obligation to repent from wrongdoing. Repentance is essential in securing atonement.

However, repentance alone is not adequate in every case to secure atonement. Maimonides explains in the halacha above that there is a fundamental difference between a sin committed against Hashem and a sin committed against another individual. If we sin against Hashem, we violate the perimeters of the relationship between ourselves and our Creator. Atonement is secured through repairing this relationship. Through repentance, we restore our relationship with Hashem and secure atonement.

When we sin against another individual, we have violated the perimeters of two relationships. The mitzvot of the Torah establish clear expectations regarding our relationships with other individuals. When we violate a commandment that regulates our relationships with others, we have violated one of Hashem's commandments. Because we have violated a commandment of Hashem, we must repair our relationship with Him. Therefore, we must perform Teshuva.

However, we have also acted outside of the proper perimeters of our relationship with another individual. The Torah requires us to also repair this relationship. We must return the relationship to within the perimeters established by the Torah. In order to accomplish this, we are required to make restitution and any other payments required by the Torah to the damaged party. We are also required to secure the forgiveness of the person we have harmed.

**“And just as I forgive every person, so too cause all others to look kindly upon me and completely forgive me.”** (Teffilat Zakah)

It is customary in many Ashkenazic communities for the members of the community to individually recite Teffilat Zakah prior to Kol Nedrai. Teffilat Zakah is a fascinating and moving prayer. The prayer ends with an acknowledgement that we can only atone for sins committed against another individual, through securing this person's forgiveness. The teffilah continues with a declaration. The individual reciting the prayer grants forgiveness to all others that have sinned against him. Then, he beseeches Hashem to intervene on his behalf with those against whom he has sinned. He asks Hashem to inspire these people to forgive him for the sins he has committed against them.

This element of Teffilat Zakah deserves careful consideration. It is based on an interesting premise. In Teffilat Zakah we forgive individuals who have not necessarily approached us and asked for forgiveness. Similarly, we ask Hashem to cause those we have sinned against to forgive us. Presumably, some of these people whose forgiveness we are seeking, we

have not personally approached. The teffilah implies that forgiveness is effective in securing atonement, even in instances in which the sinner has not made any personal appeal to the affronted party. In other words, atonement requires Teshuva and the forgiveness of the aggrieved person. However, it is not necessary for the wrongdoer to personally appeal to the injured party.

This does not seem to accord with Maimonides' position. According to Maimonides, we are required to ask the offended party for forgiveness. It is not adequate that the person spontaneously forgives us in a moment of charity. We cannot secure atonement without directly asking the person we have harmed for forgiveness.

**“Even if he only verbally insulted his friend, he is obligated to appease him and confront him until he forgives him. If his friend does not wish to forgive him, he brings to him a delegation of three people that are his friends. He confronts him and asks for forgiveness. If he is not appeased, he brings him a second and third delegation. If he is still not appeased, he abandons him and this person that has not offered forgiveness is the sinner.”** (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:9)

Maimonides acknowledges that sometimes a person will not willingly and eagerly forgive a wrongdoing. What is the extent of the obligation to appease the injured person? Maimonides explains that we cannot discharge our obligation through asking once. We must persist. We must recruit a delegation of supporters and in the presence of this delegation we must press our case with the injured person. One delegation is not enough; we must return with new delegations even a second and third time.

What is the purpose of these delegations? It seems that the delegation exerts pressure upon the injured party. We hope that the peer pressure exerted by the delegation will influence the person that has been harmed and evoke his forgiveness.

As we noted above, Maimonides apparently maintains that in order to secure atonement, we must make every reasonable effort to appease the person we have harmed. Yet, Maimonides tells us that it is not enough to repeatedly appeal to this person for forgiveness. We are required to assemble delegations – time and again – and appeal to our friend for his forgiveness. It is difficult to understand this requirement. It is reasonable for the Torah to require the wrongdoer to make repeated appeals to the injured person. In some instances, it is understandable that the injured party may not be immediately convinced of the sincerity of the repentant wrongdoer. But why is the wrongdoer required to assemble delegations?

One possible explanation is that in order to secure atonement, the sinner is required to secure the forgiveness of the person he has harmed. If he needs to enlist the assistance of others, he must take this measure.

But this is clearly not Maimonides' position. If the injured party refuses to forgive the repentant petitioner, he nonetheless receives atonement. So, if the forgiveness of the injured person is not absolutely required, why assemble these delegations? Would it not make more sense to simply require the repentant sinner to make a specified number of appeals?

In short, there are two interesting elements in Maimonides' position. First, Maimonides seems to disagree with the position expressed in Teffilat Zakah. According to Maimonides, we cannot secure atonement for a sin against another individual simply through repentance and the person's forgiveness. We are required to personally appeal to the individual against whom we have sinned. A spontaneous act of forgiveness – not preceded by an appeal – does not secure atonement. Second, the forgiveness of the person we have sinned against is not absolutely required in order to secure atonement. If the person refuses to provide his pardon, atonement can still take place. Nonetheless, the repentant person is required to take extreme measures to secure this pardon. Why are these extreme measures – the forming of up to three delegations of supporters – required?

In order to resolve these difficulties, we must return to an issue discussed earlier. When a person sins against another individual, there are two dimensions to the sin. It is a violation of the Torah. In this respect, the sin breaches the relationship between the sinner and his Creator. The sin also represents a deviation from the proper relationship between the sinner and the injured person. It is obvious that in order to restore one's relationship with Hashem, repentance is necessary. But how is one required to respond to the damage that has been caused in one's relationship with others?

Maimonides maintains that securing the person's forgiveness is not adequate, neither is this forgiveness absolutely necessary. One cannot secure atonement through unsolicited forgiveness. One is not denied atonement because of the obstinacy of the person that bears a grudge. But in order to secure atonement, there is one absolute requirement in addition to repentance. The sinner must assume responsibility for his wrongdoing. He must demonstrate his acceptance of responsibility through proactively seeking to restore the proper relationship with the injured person. Spontaneous forgiveness is inadequate. Spontaneous forgiveness does not include an acceptance of responsibility by the wrongdoer. He has done nothing to restore the relationship. He is merely the beneficiary of a charitable act by the injured party. In contrast, when the sinner appeals repeatedly to the injured party for his forgiveness and when he goes so far as to assemble delegations to support his plea, he has demonstrated that he not only regrets his behavior but he also accepts responsibility for correcting the relationship. Once he has assumed responsibility, even if he fails to secure forgiveness, he has executed his duty. Now he can secure atonement. □

# Teshuva

RABBI RUBEN GOBER

## ...more than a command

After discussing the commandment for repentance in the beginning of his Laws of Repentance, the Rambam says in chapter 7, law 1: "Since control over himself is given to each individual as we explained [in the previous chapters the Rambam discussed how every individual has free will] a person should try to do repentance and confess with his mouth his sins, and shake from his hands his sins, so that he should die as a Ba'al Teshuva (one who repented) and merit the world to come." There are a few questions that can be asked on this statement of the Rambam, but it seems that there is one basic problem: What is the Rambam trying to teach us here? We already know that there is a commandment to repent so what does he mean that since a person has free will, he should repent - what does this add?

Furthermore, the last part of the law is quite puzzling: "...so he should merit the world to come" Does the Rambam mean that we should perform this obligation as a means to achieve the reward of the world to come? From a simple reading of the text, it would seem so. However, a problem arises when we read in Chapter 10 Law 1: "One should not say 'I will perform commandments of the Torah and be involved in its wisdom so that I will receive the blessings written in it or so that I will merit live in the world to come'...it is not appropriate to serve God in this way..." and again in the same chapter, Law 4: "...maybe one will say 'I will learn Torah so that...I will receive a share in the world to come' - we are taught saying 'to love God' - anything you do should be from love." It is clear that the Rambam discourages any motivation for performing commandments other than the love of God. If so, how could the Rambam encourage a person to fulfill the commandment to repent with the motivation of receiving reward in the world to come?

To understand what the Rambam is trying to teach us, let us examine his original statement more closely. The Rambam says that since a person has free will, he should repent. What is the connection between the concept of free will and the concept of repentance? And why does the Rambam mention this only now in chapter 7 and not in the beginning chapter when he introduces the commandment to repent?

Many times we find that when people think about their own actions and behaviors, whether they be sins or just everyday habits, people believe that these actions stem from a part of them which is perma-

nently engrained inside themselves, almost as if there is some force within them that causes them to do these actions, and, therefore, they must do it. They feel that they don't have any control over these actions; it's simply a part of who they are and that it is something they cannot change. They don't sincerely desire to change since a part of them feels that there is nothing they can do about it. The notion of free will, however, directly opposes this type of perspective in that it means that there is something within man that can allow him to act in whichever way he deems good and correct. The concept of free will shows us that man is the final, ultimate arbiter of how he lives his life so that if, for example, man desires to change, he has that ability.

With this idea, we can understand the connection between free will and repentance, but we are still left with our previous questions about the end of the statement: "so that he dies as one who repented and can merit the world to come." What does the Rambam mean? Why is he suddenly shifting to death and the world to come? And why isn't the fact that we have a commandment to repent a sufficient motive?

Once man understands the concept of free will and its import, namely that he has the ability to choose the life that he wants to live, it naturally follows that man is obligated to think through what he wants to do with his life. Of course, this demands an analysis of what the value and function of his life is. Every decision we make reflects what we think is valuable and want to pursue in life. When we think about the fact that we can choose what we want, we need to consider what man is, what the nature of our existence is, in order to choose what is best for us.

It is in this context that the phenomena of death and the world to come are relevant to one's personal concerns and values. Most people look at their existence and only take into account one ingredient of their makeup, that which they can sense and feel- the physical element. But when one thinks about the fact that death is inevitable, it places the physical world in a certain perspective. The inevitability of death shows man that the physical world does not partake of 'real existence' in that eventually it must end; it won't last forever. So what is a 'real existence' that will last? When we look at man, we notice another component of his makeup, the soul. This is the aspect of man which he uses to think, to conceptualize, to appreciate the wisdom of God, and to delineate between good

and evil. The Torah calls this aspect of man the 'Tzelem Elokim', image/reflection of God, which the commentators explain to be the intellectual capacity to reflect on the non-physical (see Sforno on Genesis 1:27). That being the case, there is a way man can have a 'real' lasting existence- by partaking of the non-physical and developing the non-physical tool that God granted him, the soul. How does it last forever? That is 'Olam Haba', the world to come where the soul of man continues to exist after the physical part of man, his body, is gone.

This perspective is clearly expressed in Tractate Avot, Chapter 4 Mishna 16: "Rabbi Yaakov said 'This world is like a vestibule to the World to Come- prepare yourself in the vestibule so that you may enter the reception room.'" Here too, one should not think that the Mishna is teaching one to serve God in order to obtain reward (that is contrary to what the mishna previously taught in Chapter 1, Mishna 3); rather the mishna is teaching a perspective, how one should look at his existence in this world. When one sees that the physical world around him is limited and that only the non-physical part of him will continue to exist, he is forced to look at his existence here as a temporal means of preparing oneself for the next life. With that perspective, a person will look at physical enjoyments and relate to them differently, in effect changing his view of reality and bringing about internal as well as behavioral changes in the person.

With these concepts in mind, we can now explain what the Rambam is trying to teach us. When one realizes that he is not under the uncontrollable sway of any internal 'forces' but rather has the ability to choose a life of value and meaning, one is forced to evaluate what is valuable and worth pursuing. In this study, man must reflect on the nature of this worldly existence- it is limited and temporal. That being the case, man must realize that the only real and valuable existence is one in which he lives in line with his soul so that his soul is developed and perfected so that it is able to exist beyond this physical world after death. This is what Rambam means: do repentance so that when one dies, one will have merited a place in the world to come. The Rambam doesn't mean that one should repent for a greater reward. That would be giving us a false motivation, as he says later in Chapter 10. Rather, he is teaching us to view repentance with the correct perspective of reality: that one should realize what is real and what is temporary and adjust his mentality and behavior accordingly, just as the Mishna in Avot taught. In this perspective, the World to Come is not a reward one should sacrifice for - it is the only value one has, even in this world, just as the value of the vestibule is in its ability to prepare for the reception. Thus, in this statement, the Rambam teaches us the idea that repentance is more than just a command by God - it is the natural response man has when he is honest with himself who he is, and what is a truly meaningful existence. ■



(The Scapegoat continued from page 1)

## Holidays

commitment to the Torah is based upon his intellectual conviction and that its commandments are ethical and moral principles. We must therefore explain the significance of the scapegoat and the intellectual insight the Torah is imparting to us.

The Eben Ezra gives us a clue as to the secret of the saeer l'azazel. He states that a basic secret of the scapegoat is after the word azazel and when you are 33 years old you will know this secret. If one counts 33 verses from the word ha'midbarah, the word after azazel, which appears in Leviticus, chapter 16 verse 10, one may get a clue. The verse that is being referred to is 17.7. The verse states: "They should no longer sacrifice their sacrifices unto the satyrs that lead them astray. Rashi explains the word l'saerim to mean l'shaydim, unto the demons. The Eben Ezra is teaching us that if one desires an insight into the scapegoat he [sic] must recognize that adhering to this practice will lead one to the practice stated in chapter 7 verse 17. The Israelites will no longer turn astray and sacrifice to the shaydim as the nations of the world. We will explain this insight after we examine several salient laws with respect to the saeer l'azazel. It is interesting to note that the Rambam holds that the saeer renders atonement without repentance for all commandments that are not punishable by kares, excision. Rabbi's, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi's position in the Talmud, although we do not paskin like him, is that even the day of Yom Kippur effectuates atonement. We must appreciate how does atonement work if the sinner is not repentant. Halachically Teshuvah implies that one must return to G-d. His relationship with the creator must be rekindled as a result of his recognizing the cause of his sin and being able to elevate himself to a higher intellectual level. The individual is a changed person, one who is no longer drawn by the temptations of the instinctual nor the frailties of the emotional components of his nature which causes him to commit the sin. We therefore must understand how does the mere practice of the scapegoat grant atonement to a sinner?

The last Mishna in the tractate of Yumah quotes a statement of Rabbi Akivah which states "Happy are you Israel before whom you are purified, and who purifies you, your father in heaven." This is a puzzling statement. Anybody who does Teshuva and returns to G-d as a result of his own actions is purified before G-d. This applies even to a Gentile. Why does Rabbi Akivah specify a Jew; and furthermore it seems from his statement that Teshuva is extraneous to this purification process. We must try to comprehend Rabbi Akivah's teach-

ing.

Nachmanidies comments on the Eben Ezra and explaining the service of the scapegoat discusses a Medrash. The Medrash says that the children of Jacob give Samael, their prosecuting angel, a bribe on Yom Kippur. This bribe is the sacrificial goat. It is given so that he should not annul their sacrifices. The goat l'azazel has all the sins of the Children of Israel on its head as set out in the verses in the Torah. The Medrash continues, as a result Samael will see that there is no sin on Yom Kippur and will explain before G-d, Creator of the world, there is one nation in this world which are akin to the ministering angels. Just like the ministering angels are bare footed, so too on this day the Jews are bare footed. Samael makes similar observations when addressing G-d with respect to eating, drinking, standing all day, making peace amongst themselves and being free of sin. In all these activities the Jewish people on Yom Kippur are comparable to the ministering angels. The Holy One upon hearing these testimonies from the prosecutor Samael, makes atonement for the alter, the sanctuary, the priests of Israel and for all the people of the assembly of Israel. This is the Agadah that the Rambam quotes to help us understand the saeer l'azazel.

This Agadah raises several questions. Who is Samael and how is he bribed? Originally the purpose of the bribe is so that the sacrifices should not be annulled, however the seeming result of the bribe is that it is responsible for the entire kapara of Yom Kippur. The Rambam in the Guide To The Perplexed states that Samael is the appellation applied by our sages to Satan. The derivation of the word Samael is Sam - Kel, the blinding of G-d. Samael represents that part of human nature which blinds the individual from perceiving the ultimate reality, G-d. The yetzer harah and Satan are used interchangeably by Chazal and represent man's evil inclination which is rooted in his physical nature. Chazal use the term Satan, which implies something external to man, to signify that this part of man is not his essence. Rather the tzelem elokim is man's essence. Chazal use the term yetzer harah to teach us that although it is not man's essence we are nevertheless responsible for this part of man. The key to understanding the saeer l'azazel is appreciating its inexorable connection to kapparot Yom Hakippurim. There were two goats which were subject to the lottery. One was designated for G-d and was brought upon the alter as a sacrifice. The second goat was designated l'azazel and was the saeer ha'mishtaleyach, the goat that was sent away to meet its final destiny in the desert. The atone-

ment of the day of Yom Kippur was really a result of the goat that was designated l'azazel and not the one that was brought as a sacrifice. The kapparot Yom HaKippurim is unique because it atones for many sins, kalot vechamurot, lenient and stringent sins. Whereas a korban chatas is brought for a particular maase aveira, act of violation, and atones for that particular sin. On Yom Kippur lifneh Hashem tetaharu, we are purified before G-d. The essential character of the day is a mechaper. This is a different type of forgiveness than a specific korban chatas, a sin offering. Yom Kippur is related to the state of the gavra, the individual. The day is mechaper the individual. A person who appreciates the sanctity of the day, demonstrates that he, as an individual, is worthy of forgiveness. Consequently, this new status results in the removal of the particular sins.

An understanding of the service of the scapegoat gives us insight into the essential nature of the sanctity of Yom Kippur and its function as a metaheer. The saeer l'azazel functioned as a atonement for all the sins of the Jews. Leviticus Chapter 16, Verses 21 and 22 tells us that Aaron placed his hands on the saeer l'azazel and confessed all the sins of the Children of Israel and all their transgressions and placed them on the head of the Azazel goat. How does this goat serve to forgive all the sins of the Jewish people? The Torah is teaching us that the sins of man are really separate and extraneous to his essential nature. Aaron was capable of removing all of man's sins and placing them on the head of the goat. The saeer l'azazel as stated, represents the Satan, man's evil inclination, the part of man driven by his fantasy. This service signifies that the part of man which is based upon his emotions and fueled by his fantasy is really not reflective of man's true essence, his tzelem elokim, his sechel. This part of man, his instinctual nature, is severible from his true nature. However, if man follows his fantasies and his evil inclination he is doomed as the saeer l'azazel, to face a brutal and lonely death.

The Midrash quoted by Ramban, Nachmanidies, can now be understood. We bribe Samael and give him the saeer l'azazel. We as Torah Jews recognize that the pursuit of the fantasy blinds us from perceiving chachmas haboreh, the wisdom of our creator. We acknowledge by the service of the scapegoat, that there is a spiritually higher nature to man, his true essence which we value. As Torah Jews, we thereby attempt to lead our lives based upon the tzelem elokim. By bribing Samael, we acknowledge that there is a part of man's nature, which is overpowering. However, we

(continued on next page)

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can not deny our instinctual nature, but must acknowledge that it stems from the lower part of man's being, and as such must be dealt with. If we deny our instinctual nature Samael, it can have tragic consequences. On the contrary, we recognize the instinctual part of man's nature but acknowledge our life long struggle as Torah Jews to separate that part of our nature from the tzelem elokim. Only by bribing Samael and recognizing the potent powers of the fantasy, can we hope to ever be successful in combating these forces and removing them from overwhelming our actions as Torah Jews. We demonstrate that ultimately if one is led astray by the powers of the fantasy he will surely perish and be doomed to spiritual genocide.

The saeer l'azazel was taken to the desert by the ish iti, a specially prepared man. This demonstrates that the ultimate destruction of the saeer is not fortuitous. Rather, it is a necessary result that the pursuits of the fantasy will lead to ones downfall. That is why the ish iti was mezuman l'kach, was prepared for this job, to ensure and guarantee that the saeer would meet its eventual destruction. This recognition by Klall Yisroel that we appreciate the overwhelming force of man's instinctual nature and constantly strive to overcome it and elevate our lives to a higher spiritual plane, makes us akin to the mal'achei hashares, ministering angels. This causes Samael to remark that on Yom Kippur the Children of Israel are like the Ministering Angels. The Ministering Angels are not under the influence of the instinctual, they are not swayed by emotions. Similarly on Yom Kippur the Jewish people demonstrate through the prohibitions of the day (eating, drinking, cohabitation, and wearing leather shoes etc.) that we abstain from these physical pleasures to demonstrate that there is a higher part to man's existence.

This explains how the saeer l'azazel atones for all sins. Since man recognizes this concept and appreciates that his physical existence leads him on the path of Samael, he must strive through chachma to live life based upon his tzelem elokim, and thus become a different type of gavra. Yom Kippur is a day of reality whereby he recognizes the dangers in his daily existence of Samael but elevates himself on this day to be metaher before Hashem. This explains that although a person did not do teshuva on a particular maeseh aveira, but since he recognizes the consequences of Samael and that man's true essence is chachma, he has elevated himself to higher spiritual level and he is a gavra worthy of forgiveness.

We can now understand the reason why there

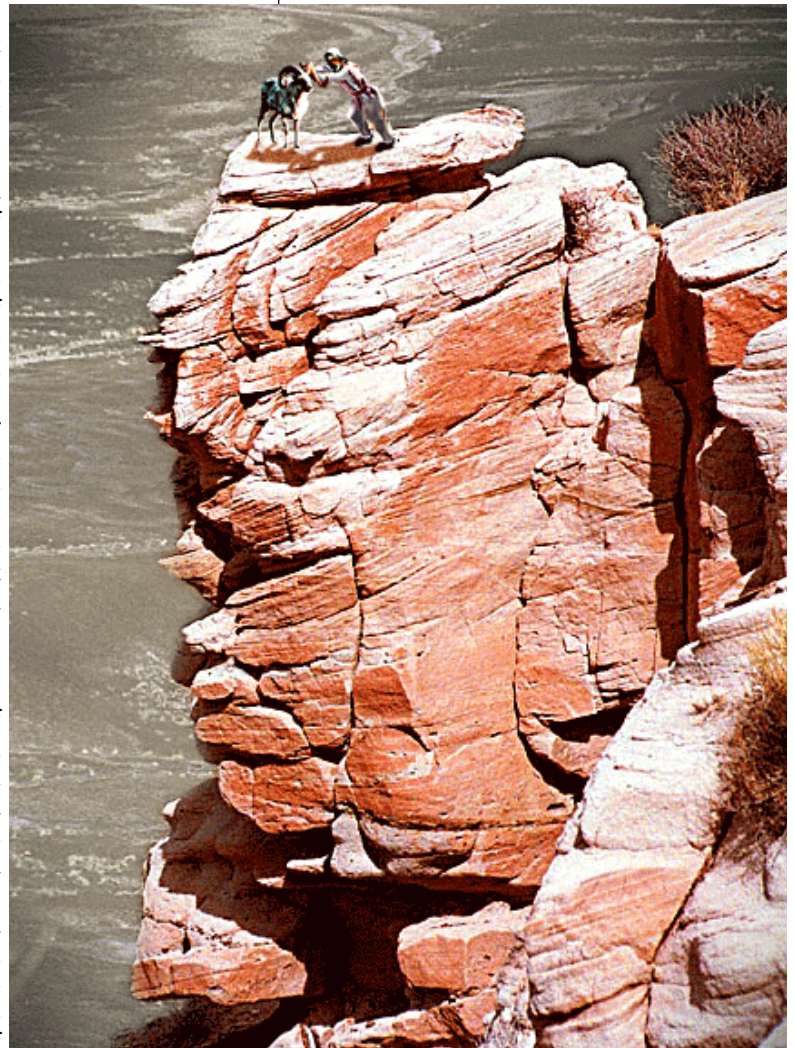
are two goats, one for Hashem and one for azazel. This represents man's dual nature, his intellect which is l'Hashem and his instinctual which is l'azazel. In order to have the sacrifice to Hashem, you must have the saeer l'azazel. One can not be successful in his struggle as a talmid chachom unless he recognizes the lower part of human nature. Intellectual perfection can not be achieved if one simply represses his instinctual nature. By repressing one's instinctual nature it still remains a influential part of his personality.

The many meticulous details with respect to the performance of the saeer l'azazel also evidences this concept. A person is driven to the life of the physical by many powerful forces. Each of these drives are shattered by the method of performance mandated by the Torah by bringing the saeer l'azazel. A person is drawn to the life of the material because of the enticements of the physical pleasures that one imagines is comforting when living an instinctual existence. This is why the saeer l'azazel is brutally thrown over the cliff to a

torturous death. This represents that visions of physical pleasures are illusory and transitory and ultimately will result in a painful shattering of such false emotions. A person is also drawn to the life of the physical because he feels that material success garners respect and popular acceptance by the masses. Therefore the saeer l'azazel is sent out with one man, alone without any fanfare, to a desolate and lonely place in the desert. This demonstrates that leading a life of materialism will ultimately and invariably result in a lonely and desolate existence. Lastly, a person is fooled by the entrapments of a physical existence in order to insulate himself from the limited nature of

such an existence and to cater to his fantasy of immortality. Thus the saeer l'azazel always meets the same destiny, a harsh and cruel termination, to help emasculate any such fantasies that a person may harbor.

We can now appreciate Rabbi Akivah's statement quoted in the last Mishna in Tractate Yumah. "Happy are the Children of Israel because they are purified before G-d." Although it might be possible in isolated cases for individuals to come to the true recognition of G-d, however for a nation of people, on such a large scale, is impossible. How fortunate are we Torah Jews who have a system of Torah and Mitzvos, (that contains the abstract and beautiful practice of the saeer l'azazel), a system based upon chachma that allows us to recognize man's true nature and remove ourselves from living a purely physical existence, the life of fantasy that ultimately leads to man's downfall. Therefore Rabbi Akivah exalts "how happy are we the nation of Israel that we are fortunate to such a blessing." □





# SWORDS VS WORDS



**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

Contrast the two major religions with Judaism, and you are struck with this gruesome reality. On the one hand, Jihads and Crusades unveil their coercion of religion – the sword’s ultimatum; while Judaism is presented with words...reasonable arguments for a good life, and no ultimatums. In fact, Abraham and the other prophets displayed the exact opposite: they sacrificed their ‘own’ lives to help others live and acknowledge the Creator and His will for mankind. Never did any Jewish prophet or leader resort to anything but reason to present the Jewish theology. Even while imprisoned, Abraham debated with his fellow man, directing their minds towards the path of reason...the only path available for determining reality and truth.

Any truth, be it religion, math, science, et al...is of no value if one who verbalizes the fundamentals of that truth; remains blind to its validating rationale. Quotations from famed thinkers attract accolades and applause. But life’s meaning is not measured by how many claps one may induce, from others who are equally blind. Life is for the purpose of “knowing”. Life is for realizing what is true, what is real. And with no conviction, one possesses no commitment or value, regardless of his words.

A religion that coerces others to follow it, is a religion whose principles cannot defend itself. It is a religion of cowards and insecure adherents who find a momentary ease from their self-doubt, when one more feeble-minded soul agrees, instead of suffering death. Some validation that is! But this method of religious bribe, of forced ultimatums, reveals just how bereft of validation these religions truly are. Validation of a religion cannot come by the sword’s threat. Validation of anything must be derived from reasonable argumentation. Yes, Muslims and Christians greatly outnumber Jews. But with what type of numbers: numbers who

cannot defend their faith with any semblance of reason? Shall these numbers impress us? Both religions cannibalize Judaism, and with such transparency, one is amazed that their adherents can fool themselves. It is from this suppressed truth that anti-Semitism springs forth: “Kill the Jew, for his arguments will prove us wrong.”

Many frightened Jews and liberals will seek to squelch such open critique. But this was not the way of Abraham, Ramban, Maimonides, and any other Jewish mind that knew the truth. They did not seek the applause from the masses, or cover from their scorn. These great minds lived for God and His truth. Their reality was not the billions of hands clapping, fame, fortune or legacy. Their reality was truth. They understood life is temporal, so they placed no stock in prolonging a life that denied truth. The Torah’s law to die in place of committing idolatry, adultery or murder teaches this.

“Swords vs Words”: What does that tell you about the major religions of the world? It teaches that their sense of reality is based on how many others agree. How foolish and contradictory this is. For in their quest to validate their religion, they brag of how many others accept blind faith, as proof. Listen to that: masses with blind faith are their proof. This means that those masses that have no proof but accept their religion, are their validation. Thus, they claim validity based on absent-minded individuals. Sadly, this disease has penetrated Jewish leaders. Just last week a major Jewish newspaper quoted an orthodox rabbi who said, “religion is not subject to proof or demonstration, but it is based on faith.” In other words, God’s orchestration of Revelation at Sinai, His miraculous plagues in Egypt, and His other feats...are of no value. Man should simply “believe” a religion, and ignore facts. God performed futility, according to this rabbi. I wonder why this rabbi prays at

all during these High Holidays, where every other word attests to God’s acts as Creator, and our insignificance. It is the very existence of the universe that reveals the Creator: a purely scientific claim, repeated throughout these Ten Days of Repentance.

Judaism is based on scientific truths, not faith. God gave us a universe as a laboratory for uncovering His wisdom. God demands reason, and gave us the faculty of intelligence, to be used, not traded for easy faith. God “works with reason”, and thus, His revealed religion operates in accordance with intelligent rules. Since He desires we know Him, which means we must know the Being who is reasonable, the path to Him can only be “reason”.

I will close with one thought for those of you who feel faith is superior to reason: Can a person have faith in a XXXX? That’s right, no typo...I’ll repeat myself to remove your doubt: Can you have faith in a XXXX?

By now you are scratching your head, because you have no idea what a “XXXX” is. This means, that you cannot have faith in a thing, which you do not apprehend. Just as you cannot apprehend what I mean by XXXX, you cannot have faith in XXXX. So, faith clearly requires some apprehension of that thing, in which we are faithful.

This is my proof that knowledge surpasses faith: since we now have proof that faith cannot exist without apprehension, or rather, some knowledge, we realize that knowledge must exist, before we have faith. Knowledge is essential within faith itself. Thus, faith is impossible, without knowledge. This teaches us that the human mind demands apprehension to make any move. And the greater the apprehension, the more we know about reality.

Now what is better: faith in something, or 100% knowledge? Of course, it is the latter. For with 100% knowledge, we are convinced and can gauge our actions based on what we know is true. Just as a builder can construct a house only once he knows math, so too, man can only formulate true ideas about God, once he starts with 100% knowledge about His laws and actions. But if we have no proof for our assumptions, then all we do is based on ideas that may be completely wrong.

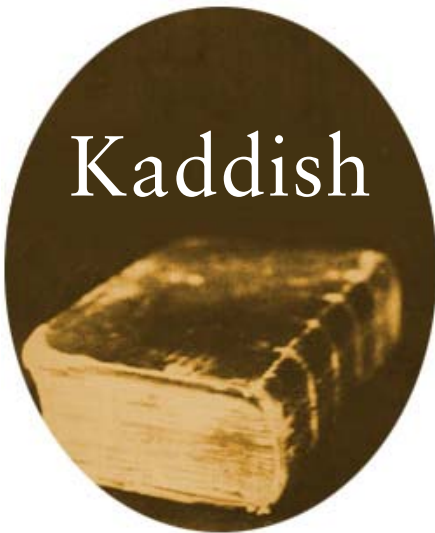
God records Moses’ words which recall Revelation at Sinai, “Lest you forget what your eyes saw” (Deut. 4:9), “You have been shown to know that God is God” (Deut. 4:35), and “And you shall know it today” (Deut. 4:39). Moses teaches that God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai, a “demonstration”, precisely so mankind might witness God’s existence, and so future generations receive this proof of the Creator. Faith is insufficient, and proof is what Moses used as his argument to the Jews to live by Torah.

We live but once. Care for your life by living in accord with proven truths, not faithful guesses. ■

# Can we Elevate the Dead?

MOSHE ABARBANEL

## Kaddish



Can the living elevate the status of the deceased? In shul we often hear people wishing mourners that their deceased relative's souls should have an "aliyah", a rise. Can we really affect the dead?

In the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Daya, (Laws of Mourning; 377:4) Rav Moshe Iserlis (Rama) states "And to lead the Evening Service after Shabbos, this is the time the souls return to Hell. And when we pray and say Kaddish in public we rescue our parents from Hell." This statement has many problems. Why is it that only on Saturday nights can we save the soul? Where did the souls go on Shabbos? If we do not pray and recite Kaddish, then their souls return to Hell? This is specifically for parents and their surviving children, so people without children never get a chance to be redeemed?

If the Earthly actions of the 'deceased' sent them to Hell, how can 'our' actions save them? And conversely, if one's parents went to Heaven, then, if their children do not say Kaddash or pray, will the soul of the deceased now descend to hell? If this is so, then evil people like Trotsky (whose children have become religious) are going to heaven. And righteous people like Moses (whose grandchildren became idol worshippers) are in hell. What kind of Justice would this be? Man should be rewarded for "his" actions in this world, and for no one else's. Our actions are the only ones we can control, and it would make sense, that is what we will be judged upon.

Things in the physical world can be measured, i.e., in time. Things in the non-physical world are not measurable in time. Therefore, the idea of deceased souls relating somehow to the Sabbath cannot be the literal meaning: this statement of the Rama must exclusively address the living. I wish to suggest the following interpretation: On Shabbos our energies are restricted and need an outlet upon the conclusion of Shabbos. It is possible after the loss of a parent that we may be resentful towards God, and with that pent up energy, we could find ourselves in a rebellious activity. By praying and saying Kaddish, especially after Shabbos, we reaffirm our recognition of God's greatness. This reflects well upon our actions and the values imbued in us by our parents. [Editor's Note: Moshe Abarbanel means to say that in truth, we cannot affect anyone who has passed. His or her state is based on his or her merit, not ours. However, if we properly channel our energies when

they seek deviation from Torah, as they might, upon the conclusion of the Sabbath, then we reflect well on our teachers, our parents, "as if" we spare them some retribution. This is a logical explanation of the difficult Rama.]

Examine Koheles 9:5, "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing at all: there is no more reward for them, their memory is forgotten." What does this mean? After death we can no longer affect our share of the world to come. Only by living a correct life here can we affect our place in heaven. Rashi explains: "But the dead know nothing and they have no more rewards for their actions after their death. Rather he who prepares on the eve of Shabbos will eat on the Shabbos." On Shabbos work is forbidden. Therefore if one does all the preparatory work before the Shabbos begins, he will eat on Shabbos. If not, then it is too late and he will go hungry on. So too with regards to heaven. One must prepare himself in this world before entering the world to come. Nothing else will help once he arrives there.

Ethics of Our Fathers 4:21 states, "Rabbi Yaakov says: This world is like a vestibule before the World to Come: Prepare yourself in the vestibule so that you may enter the banquet hall." Rabbi Yaakov is clearly instructing man to be involved in a proper life here [learning Torah, keeping the commands between man and his Creator and the commands between man and his fellow man]. Only by living the proper life can man attain his place in heaven. Sforno confirms this idea in his commentary on this Mishna, with this statement: "This world is like a lobby 'this means that man's presence here does not serve a purpose unto itself, but is for the purpose of preparing himself to enter the palace and find favor there [in the eyes of the King]. In deed, that is the ultimate goal. He who does not grasp this truth will have spent his time there in vain, and so it is in this transitory life. He who does not attain eternal life here [on earth] has lived in vain." One must direct his energy in the pursuit of good in this world in order to partake in the good in the world to come.

As Yom Kippur approaches we must each examine our actions and save ourselves through "Repentance, Prayer and Charity." Let us concentrate on our behavior in this world for the coming year. May all of Israel be inscribed in the book of life. ■





# DIVINE JUDGMENT

RABBI DANIEL MYERS

**Q.** When reading the Tochacha in Parshat Ki Tavoh, one is reminded of the many tragedies that have occurred to the Jews over the centuries up until present times. When witnessing horrible Yissurin all around us, should our reaction simply be "Tziduk Hadin," acceptance of the Divine Judgement, or is there another approach?

**A.** This topic is a most complicated and painful one. I am not prepared to elaborate on it, I can only wish Nechama to all of our bereaved brothers; however, I think it would be beneficial for those who are prepared to learn about this issue to quote from the words of the Ramban found in Shaar Haggmul, The Gate of Reward. (Part 5, 6) After discussing various approaches to understanding Divine reward and punishment, the Ramban writes the following:

"Notwithstanding whether one understands God's justice or not, he should believe that there is after all justice, good discernment and knowledge (Tehillim 119:66) in God's judgement-although in a hidden way-and that everything is in righteousness, justice, loving-kindness and compassion. (Hoshea 2:21) You may ask us the following question: 'Since there is a hidden element in Divine judgement and we must believe in His righteousness as the True Judge, praised and exalted be He, why then do you trouble us by commanding us to learn the previously explained arguments regarding God's justice? Why can we not thrust everything upon the belief, which we must ultimately rely on, that God is the One with Whom there is neither unrighteousness nor forgetfulness since all of His words of decree are effectuated with justice?'

This is an argument of fools who despise wisdom. With the enlightenment that we have attained, we can benefit ourselves by becoming wise and

knowing God, blessed be He, through His manner and deeds. Moreover, we will believe and trust in His faith-in both the known and hidden matters -more than other people because we will be learning to understand the concealed matters from the explicit ones. We will recognize the fairness of the Divine judgement and the justice of the Divine decision. Thus, it is the duty of every person who worships God out of love and fear to search his mind in order to justify the Divine decision and to substantiate the judgement as far as his ability allows. This justification should be done according to the method of the Sages, which we have explained on the basis of their words. In addition, I offer this warning to the one who desires to be classed with the righteous: he should not endeavor to inquire into this problem based on material of the texts and most speakers on this theme. The great Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon of blessed memory has already voided much of the problem with his arguments in the twelfth chapter of the book "The Guide of the Perplexed." (3:12) He states: 'When people think that the evils in the world are more numerous than the good things, and when they compare the happiness of man and his pleasures in the times of his prosperity with the anxieties, deep grief, mishaps and sicknesses, it seems to them that man exists for his own evil. However, most of the evils which occur to individual persons come as a result of their lack of understanding. We complain and seek relief from our own faults, and we worry about and suffer from the evils which we have willingly brought upon ourselves, as Shlomo said The foolishness of man perverts his way, and his heart freteth against the Eternal. (Mishlai 19:3) Most evils to which mankind is exposed are those which people cause to happen to each other, such as quarrels and wars, or those

which people bring upon themselves, such as overindulgence in food and other passions. The person who goes into battle irrationally and shoots arrows should complain only against himself if he is harmed. Similarly, he who eats bad food and becomes a leper (heart attack in today's terms, or a smoker who suffers from lung cancer) should be vexed only about his own foolishness. So too, you will find people who endanger themselves in the desserts and seas in order to become richer than their neighbors and to trample under foot the pieces of silver and gold. (Mishlai 68:31) When troubles overtakes them, though, they go around wishing to be delivered, complaining about the fortunes of the time and wondering at their evil lot. The Holy One, blessed be He, does not, however, renew wonders and miracles in the world in order to help the insane in their unworthy efforts. You will further notice that one who has gathered sufficient money for his needs will regard himself less fortunate and worse in position than one who has gathered diamonds in his treasures; the former even complains about his fortune! The one who has attained these additional diamonds has not attained anything intrinsic to himself and his own strength, but he has instead acquired some vainglorious or mockeries or things which may bring about his downfall. He who lacks them, though, has not missed anything.'

It is true that the Rabbi Moshe Ben Maimon of blessed memory instructed many and strengthened the falling knees with his explanation that the good things necessary in the world -such as the water and food needed to sustain life -are extremely abundant and are found in all places. It is appropriate that every thoughtful person should take all of this to heart in order to understand the order of the Creator, blessed be He, in His world and the good care He takes of His creatures. However, the question of a particular righteous man who suffers still remains. We have no propensity for seeing the world in its totality."

In summary, the Ramban writes the following:

**A.** There are various approaches to the topic of Divine reward and punishment. (Ramban elaborates on these approaches in sections one through five.)

**B.** Often, one can not understand God's decree; he must simply accept that there is justice in God's judgement-although in a hidden way. However, like all true knowledge of Hashem's ways, whatever insights one can have into this complicated topic is beneficial and spiritually uplifting.

**C.** Much of the hardship that people go through are actually self-inflicted.

**D.** In general, the basic needs that are essential for mankind are extremely abundant and readily available. Therefore, it is appropriate for each individual to see and appreciate the order and beauty in God's creation, and the good care that He takes of his creatures. Let us hope and pray that we merit Hashem's salvation speedily in our days. □

# MAIMONIDES

## NATIONAL TRAGEDIES



**Debby:** I notice that some websites are using Maimonides' Mishneh Torah (i.e., they cite Laws of Fasting 1:2-3) to support an argument for Katrina (the hurricane) as Divine intervention. There, Maimonides states that one must view tragedies as God's message. And if he ignores this "message", God will increase His fury.

However, based on your article (<http://www.mesora.org/Katrina-Response.htm>) I know that Rambam believed the opposite; he believed that natural phenomena are matters of chance and not Divine Providence (Guide, Book III, chap. XVII); and he believed that only human beings could be influenced by Divine Providence - more specifically, only human beings whose physical and intellectual perfection are outstanding, such as the prophets (Guide, Book III, chap. XVIII).

Therefore, Rambam provides two examples. A given ship sinks due to chance; and a given roof collapses due to chance. Whether or not people chose to board the ship or stand under the roof could be influenced by Divine Providence if those people were of a high enough physical and intellectual perfection. But the sinking of the ship and the collapsing of the roof were only by chance.

So, I conclude that the former websites - which use Rambam to support the "Katrina is (or could be) Divine intervention argument" - are cherry-picking Rambam's words, taking them out of context.

May I ask your thoughts on this please? What does Rambam actually say in Laws of Fasting? Many thanks.

*Debby Kobrin*

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** I discussed this issue with a wise Rabbi not long after the tsunami hit last December. Maimonides' Laws of fasting, which you quote, refer to the Jewish nation 'alone', for whom all public tragedies are in fact God's Divine message. This is what Rambam means, and this is not so regarding other nations. The Torah's words quoted by Maimonides prove this, as God says to the Jews, "If you walk with Me with happenstance, I will abide with anger for your claim of happenstance." God addresses the "Jew" in the Torah, not the other nations. He says that if we interpret tragedies as natural, then He will, blaze His fury in response for our false interpretation. Outside of the Noachide laws, God's Torah is an exclusive address of the Jews. Therefore, only the Jew is to take their national tragedy as a Divine message. This does not

mean that God loves the Jew more than all other peoples, for why would God have created all peoples?

Why is the Jewish nation alone to respond to apparent natural phenomena, as Divine? Does God desire the Jews alone to have the best life? Not at all. God is equally concerned about all creatures: this is why He created us all. But the Jew must view national tragedy as Divine, because they are recorded in the Torah. And when they occur, we are to respond with repentance, as our validation and agreement that God's word is being fulfilled. This should be the response of all nations; they should view our tragedies as God's message, using the Jew as His method of instruction...for everyone.

God manifests global veracity of His word for all mankind to witness. The Jew's fate of success when Torah observant, and tragedy when corrupt is God's message to the "entire world". All members of mankind are to realize God's Torah as the only religion revealed by God, and this is achieved by monitoring the fate of the Jews. It is not to be understood that God cares but for the Jew alone. God cares for all members of mankind. We are living proof for all generations of God's Torah, through all the blessings and curses that we experience. Throughout time, God responded to mankind for his sins and merits. Now, after the Torah was given, God uses the Jewish nation as a testament to the truth and reality of His Torah.

There are no grounds to suggest that a natural disaster is God's direct attack on the victims. They are laws of nature. God created His world with natural laws, for the precise reason that He wishes us to study His wisdom. Only when God says otherwise, are we to assume otherwise.

Now, what happens if the Jew ignores these warnings? God says He will show us His wrath for interpreting the first tragedies as natural, and He will deliver further tragedies. Why is this God's response? Can't we simply repeat our false interpretation for His second punishments as well? It appears that God will not let up from His fury, until we repent. And when we do, the suspension of His fury will prove that His Torah is true: repentance removes punishment.

My best wishes for you Debby, and for your family for this New Year. May you and yours be written and sealed for good in all areas. The Jewish nation needs more people like you, who not only seek the truth, but also share it with others in such a gentle and concerned manner.

*Moshe Ben-Chaim*



# SUCCOS



**Reader:** Can you please explain the relationship of the Lulav and Etrog to Succah. On most holidays, there is usually a relationship between the mitzvah and the holiday like maztah on Pesach, or the succah and Succos. What is the purpose of the Lulav and Etrog? I am finding it very hard to find any information. Of the many I have spoken to, little information is known. The main response I get is "we do it because we are commanded to by G-d". Well this of course is a given, but find it hard to accept as an answer.

**Mesora:** In his book entitled HorebI, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explained a close relationship between the Succah, and the Etrog and Lulav. I will mention his ideas, followed by my thoughts - stimulated by Rabbi Hirsch.

The Succah, a minimalistic structure, is to focus man on a minimizing his material lifestyle. This teaches man that pursuit of the physical world is not the goal of our temporary, Earthly existence. The lulav too embodies the correct attitude towards the source of all physical good. We demonstrate our thanks to G-d for His bountiful harvest. We realize G-d alone has complete dominion over the world.

The Talmud states, (Succah 37b) "Why do we wave the Lulav? R. Yochanan said, we wave out and back (horizontally) to the One who owns all four directions on Earth, and we wave the Lulav up and down to the One Who owns heaven and Earth". Rabbi Yochanan - in my opinion - separated the two acts of waving "in/out" from "up/down" to teach us that there are two areas of G-d's dominion which we need to realize: G-d owning all four directions refers to something other than heaven and Earth. We see this clearly, i.e. that He is the Creator of all. This is why we wave up/down. But if up and down waving covers heaven and Earth, i.e., all creation, what is left to recognize about G-d's greatness? I believe it is to emphasize His dominion over man's actions - that G-d has complete knowledge of our travels on Earth (our actions) as alluded to by the "four directions", which is limited to Earthly activity. This subtle difference points us to the realization that there are two distinct areas in which we must attest to G-d's

greatness: 1) G-d is omnipotent, He can do all, as He created heaven and Earth, 2) G-d is omniscient, He knows all, as He is aware of all our travels and actions.

Interestingly, these are the two main themes of the High Holiday prayers, "Malchyos" (omnipotence), and "Zichronos" (omniscience). Rabbi Yochanan's view is that our waving of the four species on Succos must demonstrate G-d's dominion in all areas; in His creation, and in His government of man.

Why must the Succah be temporal and frail by design? Succah breaks man away from his insecurities regarding his wealth. Man continuously and falsely attempts to compensate for physical insecurity by striving for riches. Man must strive to focus on G-d as his Sole Benefactor, instead of relying on the work of his hands. The drive towards the physical as an ends, removes G-d from man's life. Lulav contrasts Succah by emphasizing the use of the physical for the right reasons. We thank G-d - the Source of our bounty - replacing our faulted view of the physical, with this proper thanks to G-d for providing vegetation. All physical objects that we are fortunate to receive should be used in recognition of the 'Supplier' of these fruits, and not to reaffirm our own physical strength.

It also makes sense that Succah - not Lulav - is used to demonstrate man's required break from the physical. Man's home is the one object which embodies Earthy permanence,...not so man's food. Therefore, I believe a frail home - a Succah - is used as opposed to fruits - which are consumed objects, and do not afford man the satisfaction of permanence. Since man does not attach himself to fruits as he does his home, the home is from where man must make his break.

Perhaps this is why we also read Koheles (Ecclesiastes) on Succos. In this philosophical masterpiece, King Solomon presents the correct philosophy for man, in relation to work, wealth, happiness, sadness, and primarily, in accomplishments. King Solomon states numerous times, "what extra is there for man in all is toil that he toils under the sun?" He even commences his work with his

summary, "All is futility of futility...". The Rabbis questioned King Solomon's statement, "How can King Solomon say all is futile, when G-d said in Genesis that the world is very good?" The answer is that Solomon was referring only to the physical as an ends in itself as futile. When G-d said it was good, He meant that as long as it serves only as a 'means' to man's pursuit of wisdom. There is no contradiction between King Solomon and G-d.

In summary, Succah breaks down man's weighty attachment to the physical. Lulav redirects that attachment towards G-d, the source of all our sustenance.

Fulfill the obligations of this Succos holiday. Adhere to the commands of eating, drinking, and certainly sleeping in the succah, even light naps. Make the scach (Succah covering) from detached plant life such as reeds, wood, or bamboo, so you may gaze through the gaps at the stars as you lie on your bed - recognizing your Creator, the Creator of the universe. Wave the lulav and esrog in all four horizontal directions demonstrating G-d's exclusive dominion over all man's affairs. Wave the lulav upwards and downwards, demonstrating G-d's exclusive creation of that which is up and down - heaven and Earth.

By living in these frail huts, may we strip ourselves of our own false security, and may our waving of the lulav and esrog redirect our security towards the One who provides a bountiful life - realizing that our ultimate protection and security comes from G-d.

[1] Soncino Press, 6th English Edition 1997, pp 132

## SUCCOS

RABBI BERNARD FOX

**"You should dwell in Succot for seven days. Every member of the nation of Israel must dwell in Succot. This is so that your future generations will know that I caused Bnai Yisrael to dwell in Succot when I brought them forth from the land of Egypt. I am Hashem your G-d."** (VaYikra 23:42-43)

Our passages describe a fundamental mitzvah of the festival of Succot. We are required to live in thatched huts - Succot - for seven days. The Torah explains the reason for this commandment. The mitzvah reminds us of the Succot of the wilderness. During the sojourn in the wilderness, the nation dwelled in these insignificant structures. These huts provided minimal protection from the harsh elements of the wilderness. Nonetheless, the nation survived the sojourn and even thrived. This experience provides testimony to the providence of the Almighty over His people. During the festival of Succot, we reenact the

(continued on next page)

experience of the wilderness. Through this process we are reminded of the Almighty's providence.

In Tractate Succah, the Talmud suggests that an important law can be derived from these passages. The first mishne of the Tractate records various laws regarding the structure of the succah. One of these requirements is that the structure may not be higher than twenty cubits – the equivalent of thirty to forty feet. The mishne does not state the reason for this restriction. However, the Gemarra poses the question. What is the reason for the limit on the succah's height? The Talmud offers various explanations. One is derived from our passages.

The Sage Rabba suggests that our passages provide a reason for restricting the height of the succah. According to Rabba's interpretation, the passage requires the height of the succah to be consistent with the purpose or character of the structure. The essential component of the succah is its roof or covering. This covering must be composed of sechach – branches or vegetation. The character of the roof must be evident to its occupant. A person's immediate range of vision extends to a height of only twenty cubits. If the succah is within twenty cubits, the occupant is aware of the sechach. If the height exceeds twenty cubits, the sechach is above the person's range of vision. The occupant will not be cognizant of the sechach.[1]

Rabba's position raises a number of questions. First, how does Rabba derive his principle from our passages? Our passages state that we are required to dwell in the succah during the festival. The passages also explain the reason for this mitzvah. It is intended to remind us of the huts in the wilderness. The passage does not seem to state any structural restriction.

The second difficulty with Rabba's position requires a brief introduction. The Torah contains 613 commandments. Each commandment has a reason or purpose. In some instances, the purpose of a commandment is not revealed. In other cases, the reason is revealed. What intentions or thoughts must a person have in performing a commandment? Certainly, a full understanding of a commandment enhances its performance. But what is the minimum cognizance required in performing a mitzvah?

There is a dispute among the Sages regarding this issue. Some maintain that a person must be aware that the activity is a commandment. Others take a different position. They assert that the person must consciously perform the activity required by the mitzvah. However, the person is not required to recognize that the performance is a commandment.

An example will illustrate the dispute. Assume a person picks up the Four Species. The person is not thinking about the activity and is barely aware

of the action. Both authorities agree that the commandment has not been performed. Now, assume a person picks up the species. The action is done with intention and forethought. However, the person is not aware of the mitzvah of the Four Species. Has the commandment been performed? The more lenient view is that the mitzvah has been fulfilled. The more stringent view is that the commandment has not been performed. The person was not aware of performing a commandment.

It must be noted that neither position maintains that the person must be aware of the purpose of the mitzvah! This higher level of understanding and thought is not required for the minimal performance of a mitzvah.

We can now understand the second question on Rabba's position. Rabba maintains that the occupant of the succah must be aware of the sechach. Why is this necessary? The most obvious explanation is that the sechach reminds us of the purpose of the commandment. The occupant's awareness of the sechach assures recognition of the purpose of the mitzvah. In other words, performance of the mitzvah of succah requires cognizance of its purpose!

This requirement is an anomaly in halacha. At most, we are required to be aware that we are performing a commandment. Generally, a mitzvah is achieved without awareness of its purpose. In other words, Rabba posits that it is insufficient for the succah to merely reflect the purpose of the mitzvah. The height must assure that the occupant is actually aware of the purpose in performing the commandment. This level of awareness is not generally required.

The commentaries offer a number of responses to our first question. One of the simple explanations is provided by Rabbaynu Nissim. He begins by acknowledging that the passages have a clear simple interpretation. The passages state a commandment and its purpose. He then explains that these objectives could be accomplished in a more concise manner. The passages could have merely stated that we are required to live in the succah during the festival because Hashem caused us to live in huts during the sojourn in the wilderness. Instead, the passages contain a seemingly superfluous phrase. This phrase is, "This is so that your future generations will know". This entire phrase could have been replaced by the single word "because". Every word and phrase in the Torah has a message. Rabba is providing an interpretation of the seeming verbose wording of the passages. The additional phrase has a message. The message is that the succah must be constructed in a manner that makes known to its occupants the purpose of the commandment. This is accomplished by restricting the height of the succah. Through this regulation, the sechach is

within the visual range of the occupants. The sechach reminds these occupants of the purpose of the mitzvah.[2]

BaCh extends Rabbaynu Nissim's reasoning in order to answer our second question. He begins by noting an oddity in the Tur's discussion of the mitzvah of succah. The Tur is a code of halacha. Generally, the Tur does not expound upon the theological purpose of commandments. However, in a few instances the Tur deviates from this policy. One of these instances is the mitzvah of succah. The Tur's discussion begins with an elaboration on the purpose of the mitzvah. The Tur then explain various laws and requirements of the mitzvah in light of its purpose.[3] BaCh asks the obvious question. Why does the Tur deviate from its usual method of presentation and digress into this theological discussion?

BaCh responds that the answer lies in our passages. Rabbaynu Nissim observes that the passages are apparently verbose. He explains that the seemingly extra phrase is establishing a structural requirement. BaCh asks a simple question. How do the passages communicate this message? He responds that the passages tell us that it is not sufficient for the succah to reflect its purpose. The succah must effectively communicate its message to the occupants. This communication is accomplished through fostering an awareness of the sechach. In other words, the passages establish a unique requirement for this mitzvah. The reason for the mitzvah must be communicated. Cognizance of purpose is fundamental to performance of the commandment.

BaCh explains that now we can understand the Tur's digression into the purpose of the mitzvah of succah. In the case of most mitzvot this discussion is irrelevant. Performance of the commandment does not require appreciation of its purpose. The Tur's mission is to define the elements required for proper performance of the mitzvah. A discussion of the mitzvah's purpose is not relevant to this objective.

The mitzvah of succah is different. Our passages establish a unique requirement for the fulfillment of the mitzvah of succah. In this instance, cognizance of purpose is fundamental to the proper performance of the mitzvah. Therefore, it is appropriate for the Tur to discuss this purpose.[4]

We can now answer our second question on Rabba. Our interpretation of Rabba is correct. He does acknowledge the role of a special cognizance in the performance of the mitzvah of succah. The structure must foster an awareness of purpose. Generally, this level of awareness is not needed. However, our passages establish a special requirement for the mitzvah of succah. In the performance of this mitzvah, cognizance of purpose is fundamental to the performance. ■