

Divine Kindness

A scarlet cord was tied between the horns of the scapegoat. Turning white miraculously after its death, G-d indicated that our sins were forgiven. G-d also provided divine guidance over the sender of the scapegoat throughout all generations; they never required food during their arduous, desert journeys of 12 miles to the cliff.

ESTD
1997

JewishTimes

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Volume II, No. 50...Oct. 3, 2003

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

HAAZINU/YOM KIPPUR	1,5,6
AWESOME POWER OF TESHUVA	1,4
THE SCAPEGOAT	1,2,3
PURPOSE OF YOM KIPPUR	4
REPENTANCE	7
HIGH PRIEST'S GARB	8,9
MULTIPLE VIEWS	9,10
ANOTHER GIFT: THE 10 DAYS	10
ASCETICISM VS INNUI	11

SUGGESTED READING:

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS
MUST KNOW AS TRUE. WE URGE YOU TO READ THEM:
www.mesora.org/13principles.html

God's Existence: Belief or Proof?

www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html

God's Land Without God?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:
www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html

HaAzinu / Yom Kippur

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"One who does not observe the restriction concerning bread baked by a non-Jew should observe the restriction during the Asseret Yemai Teshuva." (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayim 603:1)

The ten days beginning with Rosh HaShanna and ending with Yom Kippur are the Asseret Yemai Teshuva – the Ten Days of Repentance. This a period devoted

(continued on page 5)

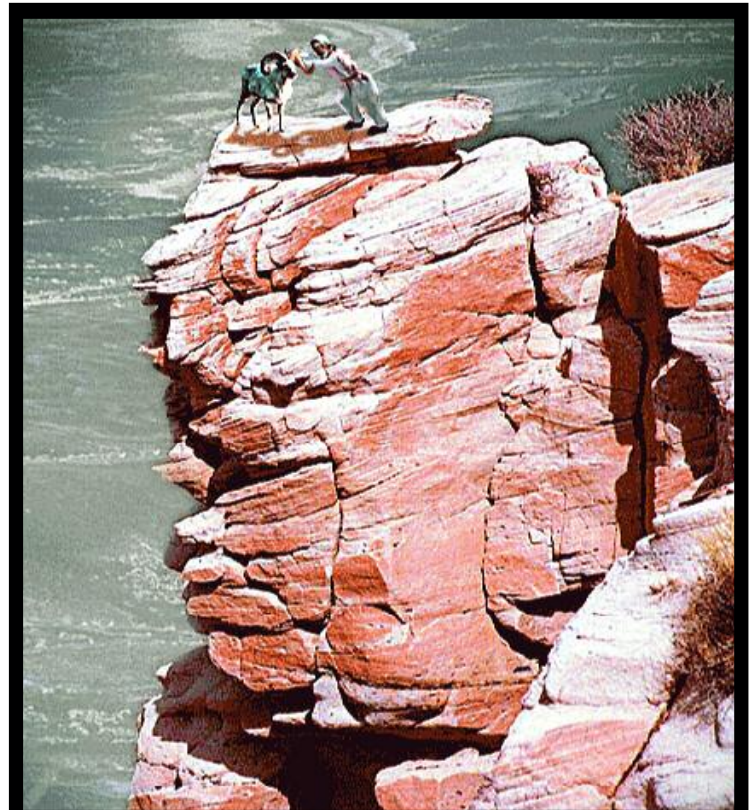
the AWESOME power of TESHUVA

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Many people have the notion that Jews only "care about their own." An honest study of our history shows that this is not the case. We are concerned about the welfare of all people. On Yom Kippur we read the Book of Jonah which tells of G-d's compassion for the wicked people of Ninveh. This story illustrates the awesome power of Teshuva. The most surprising element in the narrative is that the sinful people actually listened to Jonah's rebuke and repented. This is one of the most inspiring stories in Tanach. How often in history do we encounter the moral transformation of a corrupt people? Human stubbornness and the propensity for rationalization block the path of return. It is hard to believe but histories greatest villains were righteous in their own minds. They were fighting for a cause. Distorted idealism can be the worst evil. It gives rise to fanaticism and allows people to commit the worst atrocities with a clear conscience.

We face the problem today. Anti-Semitism has taken the form of primitive religious zealotry which promises paradise to those who die while destroying innocent Jews. Israel finds itself in an Aise Tzaar (time of suffering) and we must identify with the pain of our brethren. There are many things we can and must do. In addition there needs to be a fundamental change of

(continued on page 4)



An appointed person would lead the scapegoat 12 miles into the desert, and culminate his journey by pushing the goat off the peak of the rocky cliffs to a certain death. Why?

THE SCAPEGOAT

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by student

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 saeer líazazel as being solely ritualistic and ceremonial. Although the gentiles have ritualistic practices, they are

(continued on next page)

THE SCAPEGOAT

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

(continued from previous page)

symbolic and their performance engender some emotional satisfaction unlike the scapegoat. Judaism prides itself on the fact that one's 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'saeerim 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 teaching.

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 kapparat 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 hafmishtaleyach, the goat that was sent away to meet its final destiny in the desert. The atonement 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 kapparat 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 an 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 severable 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

(continued on next page)

THE SCAPEGOAT

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

(continued from previous page)

understood. We bribe Samael and give him the saer 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 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 saer l'azazel was taken to the desert by the ish iti, a specially prepared man. This demonstrates that the ultimate destruction of the saer 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 saer 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'achey 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 saer 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 saer 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 saer 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 saer 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 saer 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 saer 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 saer 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 saer 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." ■

the
AWESOME
power of **TESHUVA**

RABBI REUVEN MANN

(continued from page 1)

attitude. Let us admit that we have been shaken to our very core. We had a sense of total confidence in the military and technological prowess of the Jewish state. We never believed that Israel could become so vulnerable. Statistics tell the story. Tourism has virtually come to a standstill. Many summer camps for Diaspora children had to be closed down.

The situation in Israel has great significance and demands a response. We must admit that we were wrong to believe that the security of Israel could be achieved by physical means, alone. The Torah teaches that the Jewish people are a special creation of G-d whose welfare depends on adherence to His commandments. The "blessings and curses" are clearly set forth in the Torah, reiterated by the prophets and confirmed by thousands of years of Jewish history. In recent years some "visionaries" allowed themselves to believe that a new era of enlightenment had come to the Middle East. The current violence against Israel has shattered all illusions. The "matzav" (situation) demands that we give up illusions and return to HaKadosh Baruch Hu (Holy One Blessed be He). At this time of year we must respond to the spiritual alarm that is sounded by the crisis. Let us draw inspiration from the people of Ninveh who did not harden their hearts to the words of the prophet. Let us instead seize the moment and return to Hashem with renewed determination to study Torah, obey His mitzvot and be united with Eretz Yisrael and Klal Yisrael. Then we can be confident that as in the case of Bilaam, Hashem will take the curse and turn it into a blessing because "Hashem your G-d loves you." □

THE PURPOSE OF
Yom Kippur

RIVKA OLENICK

"For on this day does He give you protection, to cleanse you; from all your sins shall ye be clean before the Lord." Leviticus 16:30. What is meant by: "For on this day does He give you protection, to cleanse you"? It seems that when a person is cleansing oneself of past sins before God on Yom Kippur, one is automatically given protection. We are specifically commanded on this day to atone for our sins before God, as it says. So, does the day automatically grant a person atonement for ones' sins because it is Yom Kippur? "From all your sins shall ye be clean before the Lord."

There are two separate ideas in this one sentence and each is dependent on the other. God designated Yom Kippur as the day for the Jew to atone with the purpose of cleansing and purifying ourselves. If you atone appropriately you will be cleansed before God. What is kippara, atonement and what is its' purpose for us as Jews? Only the Jewish people are commanded to atone for their sins on this day; and only Jews are cleansed and protected on this day. The day of Yom Kippur distinguishes the Jewish person from a non-Jew through God's command only if we utilize this day for its' real purpose. Even in atonement the Torah gives us instruction and guides us in "how to" atone. It is a complicated process yet, we capable of it.

On Yom Kippur like the Sabbath; we refrain from all work and we sanctify God's name by not doing any work. On Yom Kippur we atone and purify ourselves from the sins we committed that took us away from God. He allows us not

only to return to Him, but as we reclaim our own devotion to the future He renews our life. The Sabbath too reinforces our devotion to the future, as we guard the Sabbath and we keep it holy. Even the Jewish people who partook of the sin of the Golden Calf were forgiven by God, they were given protection, they admitted to their corrupt ways and were granted atonement. The purpose of kippara is to give a person the opportunity to reclaim the status of purity. Through the absence of gratifying our senses and having physical enjoyment we face our "moral philosophical self." This is how we show our "internal moral self" as Jews on Yom Kippur.

We cannot survive as a people without this process of atonement. We would just continue to sin until we are completely destroyed. So, we are given Yom Kippur to atone wholeheartedly with our request and of hope for renewal from God. We are also aware that every sin we commit has "chipped away" at our moral self, the part of us that God demands to be righteous and holy. That is how He chose us to be and declared us to be maintained; it is our purpose and the purpose of our being given the Torah. All of the sins we engage in take us away from who we were originally created to be and who ideally we are to be. Sin removes a person's free will, so a person merely survives and in just surviving like an animal, we are no longer "Adom" and we forfeit our relationship to The Creator. God gives us this positive opportunity by depriving ourselves of all the physical enjoyment that we partake

of on the Sabbath and He gives us Yom Kippur. The opportunity to regain our purity, to begin again, a rebirth, it is another great gift. God gives all of us everything needed to exist the best possible way. So we realize that our present existence because of our repeated transgressions is a spiritually poor existence.

We are really not worthy of continued existence since we are so far away from our true purpose, to be an Eved Hashem, the reason we were created. On Yom Kippur God allows each of us to be completely in touch with our moral self, and we desire to have new and pure moral feelings. With honesty and sincerity we beg God to renew our lives and to give us the strength to live the correct life! This is our realization – that our true existence is dependant only upon the service of God. God frees us and gives each of us a new future through kippara. He renews our life that is His gift to us. Truthfully, Yom Kippur should be the happiest day of the year for every Jew. What greater gift is there than the renewal of one's life! Just as it is a mitzvah to eat on Erev Yom Kippur, it is also a mitzvah to fast on Yom Kippur.

Approach Yom Kippur with hope, not dread and feel joy in the opportunity to be this close to the Creator, our Judge and our Father. "Happiness is thine, O Israel, before Whom dost thou obtain thy purity! Who maketh thee pure? Thy Father in heaven! For it says: "I pour pure water over you and ye become pure!" The fount of Israel's purity is God, even as a Mikvah purifies the unclean, so doth God make Israel pure." (Yoma 85b) □

HaAzinu / Yom Kippur

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from page 1)

to introspection and repentance. Shulchan Aruch comments that during this period it is appropriate to observe the restriction against bread baked by a non-Jew. In order to understand this comment, some background is required.

Our Sages established a prohibition against eating food cooked by a non-Jew. This law is often misunderstood. The law is not a precaution against eating non-Kosher food. Supervising the preparation of the food does not alleviate the prohibition. In other words, food cooked by a non-Jew is prohibited even if the entire process is supervised by a trustworthy Jew.

What is the reason for this restriction? Maimonides provides the reason for this enactment in his Mishne Torah. He explains that the prohibition is designed to prevent intermarriage! The Sages were very sensitive to the forces encouraging assimilation and eventual intermarriage. They concluded that these forces can only be overcome by creating barriers against intimate social relations. Familiarity is fostered through sharing a meal. Conversely, the inability to share a meal is a barrier to social intercourse. As a result of these considerations, the Sages prohibited the consumption of foods cooked by a non-Jew.[1]

It should be noted that this prohibition is not merely directed against the food prepared by an idolater. The restriction extends to the food cooked by any non-Jew. This is consistent with Maimonides' basic reasoning. The decree does not involve any judgement regarding the morality or integrity of the non-Jew. Instead, it is designed to discourage assimilation and preserve Torah values. Accordingly, it extends to food prepared by any non-Jew.

It must be noted that this prohibition does not extend to all cooked foods. The restriction only includes foods that "are worthy to be served on the table of a king." In more modern terms, only foods that would be served at a banquet are prohibited. For example, pop-corn prepared by a non-Jew is permitted. A steak is prohibited.

There is a dispute among the Sages regarding bread baked by a non-Jew. According to some authorities, this bread is prohibited. Other authorities argue. They maintain that the prohibition only extends to bread that is produced in the home of a non-Jew. Commercially produced bread, baked by a non-Jew is permitted. The reasoning underlying this position is obvious. The entire enactment is designed to discourage intermarriage. The restriction is a barrier against intimate social gatherings. Consumption of commercially baked bread does not result in sharing a meal with the baker! Therefore, there is no reason to apply the restriction to this product.[2]

We are now prepared to understand the above law. Shulchan Aruch begins by acknowledging that there is a basis in halacha for permitting bread baked commercially by a non-Jew. However, he explains that this leniency should not be practiced during the Asseret Yemai Teshuva. During this period, the more strict interpretation of the law should be observed. Even commercially baked bread should not be consumed.

The basic message of Shulchan Aruch is that during the Asseret Yemai Teshuva we should be more scrupulous in our observance of halacha. We should adopt practices that we do not observe during the remainder of the year.

It is very important to note the specific practice that Shulchan Aruch cites as an example. Shulchan Aruch provides the example of refraining from eating bread commercially baked by a non-Jew. What are the implications of this example? Clearly, Shulchan Aruch is not suggesting that we adopt stringencies that lack a firm basis in halacha. Instead, Shulchan Aruch cites an instance in which there are two equally reasonable positions. During most of the year, it is acceptable for a person to adopt the more lenient position and eat bread commercially baked by a non-Jew. During the Asseret Yemai Teshuva we should conduct ourselves according to the more stringent position. However, it is important to recognize that this more stringent position is consistent with normative halacha. In short, a person who adopts arbitrary stringencies that do not have a basis in halacha is not following the directions of Shulchan Aruch.

We have now explained the basic message of Shulchan Aruch. Let us now analyze Shulchan Aruch's law at a deeper level. On a superficial level, the law presents a problem. Shulchan Aruch is suggesting that we adopt practices during the Asseret Yemai Teshuva that we do not observe during the rest of the year. It seems that we are attempting to

deceive Hashem. We are portraying ourselves in a manner that is not reflective of our behavior during the rest of the year!

This question is based upon a misunderstanding of Shulchan Aruch's law. The question assumes that our scrupulous observance of halacha during the Asseret Yemai Teshuva is an attempt to demonstrate our righteousness. If this is the intent of Shulchan Aruch, our self-portrayal is indeed dishonest and inappropriate.

Rav Yitzchak Mirsky offers an alternative explanation of Shulchan Aruch's law. He begins with an analogy. Imagine you are invited to the



(continued on next page)

HaAzinu / Yom Kippur

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from previous page)

White House for a meeting with the President. For this meeting, you would probably dress very carefully. Perhaps, during the week you rarely wear a suit. But for this important meeting you wear your finest outfit. You meet with the President attired in your carefully selected clothing. The President realizes that the clothing you are wearing is not your usual garb. He knows that you have adapted your dress for the occasion. There is no deception involved in your decision. You are demonstrating your respect for the office of the presidency.

Rav Mirsky explains during the Asseret Yemai Teshuva the Almighty's presence should be acutely felt. We should feel the awe of Hashem's closeness. This is analogous to meeting with the President. This sense of awe should inspire us to conduct ourselves in an exemplary manner. This is not a deception. Instead, it is an expression of respect for Hashem.[3]

“For the commandment that I have commanded you today is not too difficult for you. Neither is it too distant from you.” (Devarim 30:11)

“And you will return to Hashem your G-d and you will listen to His voice according to all that I have commanded you today – you and your children with all your heart and all your soul.” (Devarim 30:2)

One of the 613 commandments is the mitzvah of repentance – teshuva. Teshuva requires an evaluation of one's behaviors and attitudes. This evaluation is followed by a decision to change. Teshuva is a very personal experience and an individual effort. The Yamim Noraim – the High Holidays – center upon the theme of Teshuva. Therefore, it is interesting that so much of the activity of the Yamim Noraim takes place in a community or congregation. We spend long hours in synagogue. Many of the prayers we recite can only be recited in this public forum. Even our confessions, supplications and prayers for forgiveness take place in this communal setting. These are days that require personal introspection. Why is so much of our time spent in a public setting?

The two passages quoted above provide an important insight into the mitzvah of Teshuva. This insight will provide one response to our question.

In the first passage, Moshe admonishes the people regarding observance of a commandment.

Moshe assures the people that they can perform this commandment. It is not too difficult or too complicated. They have the ability. To which commandment does Moshe refer?

The commentaries offer various responses to this question. Nachmanides suggests an answer based upon the surrounding context of the pasuk. He explains that Moshe is referring to the mitzvah of teshuva. He is assuring us that we have the ability to renew ourselves. We can change. Nachmanides contends that this passage is the source in the Torah for the mitzvah to teshuva.[4]

The second pasuk quoted above is from the same chapter of the Torah. In this passage also, Moshe discusses teshuva. In the passages preceding this pasuk Moshe predicts that the people will sin. They will be expelled from the land of Israel and forced into exile. In our pasuk, he assures Bnai Yisrael that they will ultimately repent. Once the nation repents, Hashem will redeem His nation from exile. Nachmanides contends that this second passage is also the source of the mitzvah of teshuva.[5]

This raises a question. Every mitzvah is derived from a single passage in the Torah. Other passages may amplify and add detail. However, the basic command is derived from a single pasuk. In Nachmanides' comments he seems to ignore this principle. He identifies two separate passages as the source for the mitzvah of teshuva.

Rav Ahron Soloveitchik suggests an answer to this question. This answer involves two simple steps. First, Rav Soloveitchik suggests that the citing of two sources suggests that there are two different commandments dealing with teshuva. In other words, each passage is the source for a one of the two mitzvot of teshuva.

Second, Rav Soloveitchik defines these two separate mitzvot. He explains that the first passage is directed to the individual. This mitzvah of teshuva instructs the individual to repent. The second passage addresses the nation. It communicates another mitzvah of teshuva. This second mitzvah is placed upon the community. We are required to repent as a congregation.

In short, according to Nachmanides, there are two mitzvot of teshuva. One is a commandment upon the individual to repent. The second command admonishes the community to perform teshuva.[6]

This raises a new question. How are these two mitzvot different? Why are both needed? Why are the community and the individual commanded to perform teshuva by two separate mitzvot?

Perhaps, the answer lies in again considering the context of these passages. This second passage appears in the context of a prophecy. The people will sin. They will be exiled. They will repent – as a community – and they will be redeemed. The mitzvah of communal repentance is presented in the context of national redemption. Teshuva is described as the method for restoring Bnai Yisrael. This context reflects on the nature of the mitzvah. The context explains the basis for the communal imperative to repent. We must repent in order to restore Bnai Yisrael. We cannot be redeemed from exile without returning to Hashem.

The Torah is telling us that we have a mission and destiny as Bnai Yisrael. We are responsible for the fulfillment of this mission and destiny. We must be redeemed. We are responsible for our own redemption through the performance of teshuva.

Individual repentance is required for a very different set of reasons. This second form of repentance is a response to our individual sins and imperfections. The purpose of individual repentance is not national redemption. Its objective is person and individual renewal and development. We must seek to perfect ourselves. We can only achieve this objective through ongoing, individual teshuva.

We can now answer our original question. Rosh HaShannah and Yom Kippur are devoted to teshuva. However, there are two mitzvot of teshuva. We are required to repent as individuals. We are also commanded to repent as a community. Therefore, the emphasis on community is appropriate. We should be concerned with our personal repentance. We must also be involved in the community's repentance. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Maachalot Assurot 17:9.

[2] Rav Yosef Karo, Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dayah 112:1-2 and notes of Rav Moshe Isserles.

[3] Rav Yitzchak Mirsky, Higyoni Halacha (Jerusalem 1997), volume 3, p. 23.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 30:11.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 30:2.

[6] Rav Ahron Soloveitchik, Sefer Perach Mateh Ahron, (1997), volume 1, p 175.

Maimonides in his Code gives us the specific formula for repentance: "I beseech Thee O' Lord, I have sinned, I have deviated, I have been negligent before you and I have done such and such, and behold I have repented and am ashamed of my deeds, and I will never again repeat this deed." "This is the essence of the verbal formula for repentance," says Maimonides, "but whoever wishes to add to it may do so and this is even considered praiseworthy."

It is important to note that while repentance is accepted by God even if it is not verbalized, that is, even if it is done in thought alone, it is not considered complete until one has verbally expressed these thoughts. The essence of repentance is in the heart and mind as it is stated in Deuteronomy, "And you shall know this day and return to your heart... (Deuteronomy 4:39)." Why then does the Torah call for verbalization? The answer lies in a principle of Halakah that verbalization is the most complete expression of human thought. The ideas of the mind, as profound as they may be, reach their full fruition

only when they are translated into tangible statements. For this reason one may think in Torah without reciting a blessing before doing so, while verbalizing Torah or even writing Torah ideas demand a blessing. The Torah considers verbal expression to be the final stage of the thinking process, the crystallization of one's thoughts. Repentance is not complete until one can stand before the Creator and enunciate one's thoughts clearly concerning his or her misdeeds.

Why is it necessary for one to invoke the Creator in one's expression of repentance? Is not the essence of repentance the recognition of one's error and the conviction never to return to the misdeed, that is, never to perform it again? Why then is it necessary to begin the repentance formula with the expression "I beseech Thee O' Lord"?

Here we get an opportunity to see the great insight of Torah. The objective of the entire Torah is to give man the correct idea of God. This idea is the one idea that must never be distorted. Hence Torah rails constantly against idolatry or attaching any form to the Creator. Once the idea of God is

distorted in any way whatever man is doomed.

Man is a creature that is guided by thoughts. This is true even in his most mundane actions. But aside from the activities that are vital for man's existence there exists a realm of behavior that involves man's higher nature, that part of him which is truly human. Here man's activities are determined by his value system or what he considers to be good or not good. The Torah teaches us the remarkable concept that this is all dependent on one's idea of God. If one sees God as a big daddy in the sky that metes out punishment for infractions and gives rewards for certain actions then one's entire life will be spent trying to gain reward and avoid punishment. If one thinks God has a physical form one will ascribe to him human traits and act towards him as he would towards a human being. He will also think that the physical reality is the underlying reality of all existence. If one knows that God is not physical, nor can He be compared to any of His creation as the prophet states, "And to whom can you compare me sayeth the Holy One (Isaiah 40:25)," that this God is the source of all



existence, as is stated in the first verse of Genesis, and that all that we perceive as physical stems from the underlying reality of God's infinite knowledge, then one will spend one's life in reaching God as He reveals Himself through His infinite knowledge and wisdom. All the actions of such a person will have just one objective, that is, to know God as the prophet states, "In all your ways you shall know Him... (Proverbs 3:6)." Such an individual will indulge in physical and psychological pleasures only insofar as is necessary in order to be able to pursue his relationship with the Creator via the divine element God has implanted in man's soul.

Whenever man sins he lacks, of necessity, knowledge either of the Creator or himself. Because of his error he sways from his course and engages in activities that take him away from God. He must therefore first and foremost approach God, reestablish his relationship with Him and turn to Him with the words "I beseech Thee O' Lord." With this one most powerful phrase one comes to realize that sin is not just a misdemeanor and repentance a childish

resolution, but that sin involves a necessary turning away from the Creator, a deviation from one's program in life and repentance is a return to that way of life that involves an endless reaching out towards the Creator.

Maimonides in his ingenious formulation of the laws of repentance taught us an important truth. He stated that in order to repent one must have knowledge of certain principles of Torah. In his heading for the laws of repentance he states, "The explanation of this commandment and the principles that are drawn along with it and because of it are in these chapters." These principles include free will, the afterlife, how God judges man, what is apostasy, knowledge of God, the value of repentance, which things prevent repentance, and the correct way to serve God. Why is it necessary to know all these things in order to repent? The answer is plain; Since repentance is not a mere act of contrition but a qualitatively new relationship with the Creator one must have a sound knowledge of these principles which are the very basis of man's relationship with God. One must review these

principles and seek in them new depths of understanding in order to establish one's relationship with God on a higher plane. The Torah and the prophets have made it clear that without knowledge one cannot serve God. David charged his son Solomon upon his taking leave from this earthly existence with the words "know the God of your fathers and serve Him (Chronicles I 28:9)." As the Rabbis say, "first one must know Him and then one may serve Him." All perfection involves a knowledge of the Creator and the more perfected one is the greater is that knowledge. As man strives for higher levels throughout his life his knowledge of God is forever changing, forever deepening.

The measure of a human being is in direct proportion to his knowledge of God. As such there are various degrees of human existence until one reaches the level of our great teacher Moses whose knowledge of God was the very highest attainable by the human species.

Repentance as seen by the Torah is not a mere act but the quintessence of man's relationship with God. □

THE High Priest's Garb

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



The High Priest alone had rights of entrance into the Holy of Holies, and only on Yom Kippur. This is the most sanctified of all locations on Earth. It represents man's closest approach to G-d, and mimics Moses' approach to G-d on Mount Sinai; both cases included cloud.

In his "Guide for the Perplexed", (book III, chap. IX) Maimonides discusses another "screen" separating him from G-d. It is a brief chapter, and I quote it in its entirety below:

"The corporeal element in man is a large screen and partition that prevents him from perfectly perceiving abstract ideals: this would be the case even if the corporeal element were as pure and superior as the substance of the spheres; how much more must this be the case with our dark and opaque body. However great the exertion of our mind may be to comprehend the Divine Being or any of the ideals, we find a screen and partition between Him and ourselves. Thus the prophets frequently hint at the existence of a partition between G-d and us. They say He is concealed from us in vapours, in darkness, in mist, or in a thick cloud: or use similar figures to express that on account of our bodies we are unable to comprehend His essence. This is the meaning of the words, "Clouds and darkness are round about Him" (Ps. xcvi. 2). The prophets tell us that the difficulty consists in the grossness of our substance: they do not imply, as might be gathered from the literal meaning of their words, that G-d is corporeal, and is invisible because He is surrounded by thick clouds, vapours, darkness, or mist. This figure is also expressed in the passage, "He made darkness His secret place" (Ps. xviii. 12). The object of G-d revealing Himself in thick clouds, darkness, vapours, and mist was to teach this lesson; for every prophetic vision contains some lesson by means of allegory; that mighty vision, therefore, though the greatest of all visions, and above all comparison, viz., His revelation in a thick cloud, did not take place without any purpose, it was intended to indicate that we cannot comprehend Him on account of the dark body that surrounds us. It does not surround G-d, because He is incorporeal. A tradition is current among our people that the day of the revelation on Mount Sinai was misty, cloudy, and a little rainy. Comp." Lord, when thou wentest forth from Seir, when

thou marchest out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped water" (Judges v. 4). The same idea is expressed by the words "darkness, clouds, and thick darkness" (Deut. iv. 11). The phrase does not denote that darkness surrounds G-d, for with Him there is no darkness, but the great, strong, and permanent light, which, emanating from Him, illuminates all darkness, as is expressed by the prophetic simile, "And the earth shined with His glory" (Ezek. xliii. 2)."

As a Rabbi once explained, cloud alludes of the ever-present veil which exists between man and G-d. Even at Revelation at Sinai, and even in connection with the most perfected man who ever lived and who ever will live - Moses - there was "darkness, cloud and thick cloud." ("And any form was not seen, only a voice", refers to what was witnessed at Sinai.) It was essential that the Jews realize their inherent ignorance (cloud) in relation to knowledge of G-d's essence. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest is also commanded to smoke the Holy of Holies with incense, again creating a veil. Man has no faculty by which to grasp another person's thoughts. We are limited. Certainly, we cannot know G-d or His thoughts. We can only perceive that which is in some way connected to our senses, which G-d is not. The clouds teach the idea of the impregnable veil between man and G-d. G-d told Moses, "You cannot know me while alive." (Exod. 33:20)

As the priest was to be exemplary of man at his optimum, he displayed certain, prized qualities. I would like to suggest an idea behind a few of the garments worn by the high priest which embellish his role. My belief is that the "tzitz", the gold plate worn on the priest's head reading "Holy to G-d", was to demonstrate that one of such perfection, has his intelligence focused on, and subjected to G-d. His mind - represented by his forehead - is tied to G-d. In contrast, but complimentary, the priests' heart goes out to his brethren, seen in the Breastplate bearing colorful and precious stones representative of all twelve tribes, and worn on his heart.

Another garment was the Ephod, a robe, with two onyx stones set in settings of gold on each shoulder. From rings attached to these settings, there hung the Choshen, the breastplate we just mentioned. But what catches the attention is that

again on the black onyx stones are the twelve names of each tribe. Why two sets of the tribes' names? Why is one colorful stone-set of the 12 tribes' names, suspended from the black stones with the tribes' names? And is there an idea behind the "suspension" of one set from the other?

I once heard an interesting explanation from a Rabbi; black, more than color, represents death. We might refer to that which is burned, or a plant which is dead, as proof of the connection between the lack of color, and death. Perhaps the colorful tribes represent the tribes in existence, i.e., "us", the "living" Children of Israel. The black onyx stones represent the actual individual sons of Jacob, i.e., Reuben himself, Shimone, Levi, themselves, etc. What this would mean, is that the living Jews are "suspended" on our forefathers. That is, our merit today is suspended (based) on the merit of Jacob's perfected sons, who have died, represented by black onyx stones. This teaches that our distinction and merit before G-d is based not on ourselves, but on the fact that we are descendants from those great individuals. The High Priest wears this display so as to call upon G-d's mercy. He beseeches G-d to remember those twelve dead tribes for the sake of being benevolent to those living twelve tribes - us today. The High Priest calls upon G-d to remember us, Who desired the creation of the Jewish nation through these twelve, righteous men. So, we are represented by the twelve color stones, that are suspended by the black, onyx stones. That is, our merit to existence is drawn from the Tribes' righteous lives, and G-d's oath to their descendants.

Addressing ornate garments, we must be careful not to fall prey to idolizing objects. Even the Choshen which housed the Urim v'Tumim, a prophetic system, never possessed powers itself, as nothing has power but G-d alone. Not people, not objects. It is impossible to be otherwise. All things are created, and are subject to laws of creation, therefore, they can not alter creation.

I recently read an article by a Rabbi who attempted to deter Jews from ascribing powers to the Ayin Hara, the "Evil Eye." At first, I was excited by the prospect that our teachers see Judaism clearly. But as I read the article, I saw that this Rabbi too felt there is a power of an Evil Eye. He was only attempting to persuade Jews to ask G-d to defend them from it. But this Rabbi indeed felt a defense from its power was needed, displaying his belief in the nonsensical notion of powers other than G-d. This is a form of idolatry.

Rashi states that when the brothers of Joseph came down to Egypt, they were commanded by their father Jacob to enter Egypt through separate entrances so the Ayin Hara should not have power over them. How do we understand this Rashi? Allow me to briefly expound.

(continued on next page)

THE High Priest's Garb

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



(continued from previous page)



Ayin Hara can be explained very simply: It refers to a psychological state. If one says, "My! What a beautiful baby". Others will say, "Don't give it an Ayin Hara". Does this mean that admiration of an infant can cause some change in that child? Not at all. Words have no powers, other than producing a change in the listener. What might happen is that another mother will be jealous that this statement wasn't made about her child. She may develop unconscious jealousy and aggression towards the favored baby, or towards the mother. The unconscious of a person is very cunning, usually going undetected, and seeks satisfaction. This jealous mother might unconsciously, and "accidentally" pour some of her hot drink on the mother, or the child. But the act of spilling doesn't assume a new power in the universe. It is explained by three existing, natural phenomena - jealousy, revenge and the unconscious. The fact that spilling occurs on the heels of the statement of admiration is not due to a power, but to jealousy acting out through the unconscious. This mother can't tolerate another child receiving more admiration than her's, and unconsciously, she pours her drink on the other mother, satisfying her aggression.

We need not create false, mystical explanations of Ayin Hara. A person with the chochma (wisdom) of human nature will understand this very easily.

The same applies to the brothers as they entered

Egypt. Jacob knew that his sons were of great stature, as we see that just two destroyed an entire city. Jacob figured that 10 men of great stature, coupled with a foreign appearance walking through the gates of Egypt would raise some eyebrows. Imagine 10 tall foreigners walking through Tel Aviv Airport. Security would definitely be suspicious. There was no reason for the brothers to bring undue suspicion upon themselves. Jacob wisely commanded each of them to enter through a separate gate. This would minimize any attention. Jacob's suggestion was wise - not based on a fear of 'mystical powers'. Rather, it was based on his understanding of human psychology and the desire for his sons' safety. Jacob wished that no "suspecting eyes" cause harm to his sons through trumped up charges.

Our forefather Jacob desired to be buried outside of Egypt, lest the Egyptians make his grave into an idolatrous object. (Rashi) Jacob knew the nature of man, that it seeks to deify leaders. This is yet another permutation of man seeking powers for his security.

Tying a thread around Rachel's tomb does not instill power in that red bendel. There is no such thing as power out side of G-d, other than our own muscular strength and forces of nature. Rachel had no powers, and even pleaded with her husband Jacob for children. Had she any powers, she would make her own miracle. It is therefore contradictory that fools project powers on Rachel, who openly testified to being powerless.

It is to my dismay that I now see Jewish bookstores run by rabbis, selling red bendels. The Tosefta in Talmud Sabbath, chapter seven, clearly states that this practice of wearing red strings was a heathen custom, and is prohibited.

Help the Jewish people. When you see stores selling these chamsas, red bendels, and devices to "protect" your cars, inform them of the grave prohibition they violate. Tell them to read the Tosefta and think about their actions, how they are bereft of reason - G-d's gift to us. As a Rabbi once taught, wisdom is so prized a possession in G-d's eyes, G-d allowed His name to be associated with it, "Tzelem Elokim", "form of G-d".

When you see idolatrous practices, it is your duty to genuinely denounce them with expressed interest that you are concerned for another Jew - so others are not mislead. Speak out. By remaining silent, you encourage further corruption. ■

Defending Multiple Views: The Problems

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Your site is quite odd.

You seem to negate any idea of any arguments throughout Jewish History and presume yourself as the sole source on what is considered "correct" and "truth", whether it be in areas of Philosophy or Halacha. To presume either is quite laughable even for the greatest talmid chacham, which I'm sorry to say from reading through your website, you do not seem to be.

You quote the Rambam a great deal despite many views (especially in areas of philosophy) that clearly argue with his views. To presume any of these views as the "correct one" or "truth" is a) quote presumptuous b) a dangerous foolish move. There are many philosophical and spiritual views in Judaism, yet you claim your opinions are correct.

In my experience the beauty of Orthodox Judaism, from both a halachic and philosophical perspective is the wealth of views we have in people trying to better find how Hashem fits their lives. To make a statement that your view is correct or "better" than someone else's is wrong and can lead that person astray.

You should really consider placing on your site a greater variety of views and quote sources from many different philosophical backgrounds. You should also get an education... many of your claims are clearly stated from a lack of one.

Mesora: Answer a few questions to yourself:

1) Why did all the Rabbis and Sages argue on each other, stating their views with absolute conviction, equally convinced their opponent was wrong? They should have accepted other views equally, but they didn't.

2) You write, "the beauty of Orthodox Judaism, from both a halachic and philosophical perspective is the wealth of views..." According to you, my view should be equally acceptable as yours, which places you in an unanswerable contradiction.

(continued on next page)

Defending Multiple Views: The Problems

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from previous page)

3) You claim that by many people arguing on Rambam, this validates their positions as equally tenable. I fail to see the logic in your argument. Perhaps today, I will argue on Einstein. I doubt my position will ever be viewed as entering the arena with that "heavyweight". The validity of a position does not emerge from either, numbers of supporters, nor from the simple act of opening one's mouth in opposition. Credence for one's argument emerges though a single criterion: rationality. 4) Your most obvious problem is your statement, "people trying to better find how Hashem fits their lives". You thereby suggest that what is absolute, is one's predefined life. From that 'starting point', according to you, only then do we seek how G-d "fits" into our predefined philosophy. You miss the entire point of Torah, that G-d's knowledge is absolute, and the purpose in life is for man to "fit" himself into G-d's philosophy. Not the opposite as you state.

G-d's Torah contains no problems. All is true and harmonious. The Torah has only one position on each concept, i.e., "absolute truth" reflecting G-d's knowledge. The Rabbis taught, (paraphrased) "originally, there were no arguments in Torah. It was only due to man's ignorance that arguments arose." It is for this reason that we find the Rabbis so vehement in their positions, not accepting what their minds saw as incorrect. They did not accept a "wealth of views" as you do. They understood the concept that truth is 'singular' by definition. There cannot be two true views on a single point.

If you condone Maimonides' teaching of his own view, to the exclusion of others, than you must be consistent with all teachers. Maimonides taught what he saw as truth, although others taught differently than he taught. Do you feel Maimonides should teach other opinions, with which he disagreed? This makes no sense. □

ANOTHER GIFT:

The 10 Days of Repentance

RIVKA OLENICK

"Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near our King, to Your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who desires repentance."

From the Shemoneh Esrei The purpose of the 10 days from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur is repentance, tshuvah. Engaging oneself in repentance requires introspection as we look into our actions and we have regret for our transgressions. At the sound of the first shofar blast, teruah it cries out to each of us for "self-examination", to reconcile our differences with each other, and to make amends and repent. The use of the emotion of guilt can act as a positive motivator; facing shame and regret pushes a person towards tshuvah.

How many of us are aware of the profound need for and the importance of the 7 days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, especially designated for repentance? Once again, God is giving us another gift of love. Love for His created beings through repentance, and the opportunity to relate to Him, when He is closer to us. During these 10 days God is more accessible to us individually and according to the Rambam when we call Him our call is answered immediately. The Rambam also says: "For in every situation a person has the choice of changing from good to bad and from bad to good. The choice is in one's hands." The choice is yours, it is up to you, and it is for your own benefit. Even on one's deathbed, even an evil person can repent, and God hears that person's tshuvah. "Seek God when He is to be found." from Isaiah 55:6, which refers specifically to these 10 days. The Rambam states further that: "Calling out to God is desirable at all times, whether a person's judgment is sealed or not." God gives us the 10 days from Rosh Hashana until Yom Kippur to pour out our heart, to draw closer to Him through our tshuvah. We are reminded of this idea every single day, when in our tefila we ask God to: Bring us back, bring us near, and influence us to return. This is all daily preparation for repentance, and as the Rambam says: "we should be constantly calling out to God." The question is: do we take it seriously, as an obligation that does have beneficial results, or do we just mutter the words?

The Meiri (Rosh Hashana 16b) stresses the

importance of using the unique nature of these 10 days and uses harsh language to describe those who fail to use this time and opportunity to repent. This is a time of keen awareness, for us to be more cognizant of our actions and behavior. With more awareness of the Creator during this time, and of God hearing our plea through our tshuvah. During these 7 intermittent days when we are eager to be closer to God, He gives us additional time when we are feeling positive about the Yom Tov but at the same time, we now draw closer to Him and return to Him. Chazal say that tshuvah performed during this week is on a higher level than the significant tshuvah we perform throughout the entire year. On Yom Kippur we culminate our tshuvah the entire day in fasting and repentance.

The 10 days of repentance is an amazing process to partake of because it is a qualitatively unique period of time for all Jews. A time when only Jews can come closer to God and God makes it possible for us to do so. Let these 10 days of repentance and devotion act as leverage for you personally and use it with hope and optimism to transform yourself, like "perfect repentance" before God. It is too awesome a time to ignore. These 10 days give us more awareness of a "truer reality" as Jews. And it is given to us as a valuable and precious gift, an investment we each can make in our soul. How could a person pass this up? We usually think of tshuvah as repentance from our sins, but tshuvah also means to return, to return to God. This is the relationship we have with God, as His created beings and He set it up for us this way. There is a relationship to God and this relationship allows us to return to Him, "Who desires repentance."

It is up to each of us to take this seriously, since this is the most important relationship we have. And at the same time we realize how far away from God we really are. We have the heavy, burdened status of gulus, Klal Yisroel is disbursed mostly outside the land of Israel without the Temple. We must be more aware of the necessity of regaining our status as "the light" unto the nations and as one nation chosen to be God's "holy nation." In calling out to God we feel the pain knowing our distance from Him, and this is what awakens our heart. This is what should make us literally cry out to God, this is teruah, the cry of the first shofar blast. □

When one searches through the words of Torah and Chazal, one can easily see that Judaism doesn't view the physical pleasures of the world as inherently evil. Certainly, they must be enjoyed within the framework that the Torah sets up, but there is no reason for one to feel that to be close to G-d one must be totally removed from the physical. The Rambam, in the Fourth Chapter of his introduction to his

commentary on Pirkei Avos, explains that the Torah does not value abstention the abstention from physical pleasures as an ends to itself, like taking on extra prohibitions. In fact, he says that the Torah is critical of the Nazir for taking added prohibitions upon himself, which is the reason why he must bring a sin-offering. Furthermore, we see that there are mitzvos that demand that a person engage in some physical pleasure, such as eating on Shabbos and Yom Tov. Of course, the reasoning of these types of mitzvos goes beyond the physical pleasure itself, but it is clear that the Torah makes use of these pleasures, demonstrating that bodily pleasures aren't viewed as inherently evil. This contrasts with the philosophy of Asceticism, a view that maintains that any physical pleasure is inherently evil and damaging to a person. Ascetics go to extreme lengths to avoid any and all worldly pleasures, for they feel that to be on a spiritual level, one must be removed from the physical world. Clearly the Torah labels such an opinion as false and untenable. G-d put man in this world as a physical being to utilize all of its opportunities for the service of G-d.

However, when we come to Yom Kippur we find a mitzvah which has a striking resemblance to asceticism, that of 'Innu' (innui), affliction. The Torah says that on Yom Kippur one must afflict himself and separate from worldly pleasures. How do we understand this commandment in the framework of the Torah's view on worldly pleasures?

The Torah uses a similar term of Innu' by the event of the 'mon', the food which G-d gave to the Jews in the desert. Moshe Rabbeinu says, in Devarim 8:2, that G-d gave them the 'mon' "in order to afflict" them. There are two questions that must be asked on this statement. Firstly, what does it mean that the Jews were afflicted by their receiving the 'mon'? Where was the harm in their receiving food? Secondly, what was the purpose of their affliction in the desert? What did it accomplish?

The Talmud, in Yoma 74b, addresses what the affliction was in receiving the 'mon'. According to one opinion, the affliction stemmed from the fact that they didn't have 'bread in the basket'. Rashi explains that each day, they only received enough 'mon' for that day so that they were concerned about what they would have to eat the next day. But we are still left with some questions. What is so bad about not having food stored up for the future, when G-d Himself said that He would provide it for them? Even more, we need to understand why this affliction was so important that G-d wanted the Jews to experience it; what is the big deal about not having food for tomorrow if don't need it now anyway?

If we look around at society, we can easily see that the Talmud has sharp insight into human psychology. We do not have to look far to see how people are so concerned with having food for the future; some people go so far as to have pantries and freezers filled with food for weeks to come, even if there is no need for it in the foreseeable future and despite the fact that it costs them money now. People do not just get food when they need it; they want it way in advance, knowing that it is there for them. Having 'bread in the basket' certainly does provide people with a sense of security, and this is what the Talmud is talking about. Still, we need to ask why-- why is man so concerned with his food for weeks to come? What is this security that man looks for?

Food is a type of object that is distinct from all other types in that it is essential for a person's survival; without food, one will starve to death. This dependency on food means that a person must depend on something external to himself for his own existence. Because of this, man cannot be absolutely independent—he needs that which is external to himself and which he cannot provide by himself. This fact, however, isn't so simple for man to accept; man, by his very nature, thinks highly of himself and wants to feel as if he can do everything on his own. People don't like to feel that they are dependent on some external source or object for anything, and certainly not for their very survival and existence. Man's ego wants to convince him that he can control everything that affects him on his own. Because man resists accepting the reality of dependency, he must find ways to delude himself of this fact,

ASCETICISM vs 'INNUI'

RABBI RUBEN GOBER

and allow him to feel that he's not dependent in actuality. This is why we find people who constantly store food in their house, even before the need or the possibility of need for it arises. By storing food in one's house, a person can act as if he is independent and feel secure about his survival; he doesn't have to go anywhere or to anyone for his sustenance and he can feel that he has the ability to continue to survive on his own.

With food within his own reach, he need not look anywhere else for his continued survival and, through this, he may feel independent.

With this principle in human psychology, we can now understand the affliction that the Jews experienced with the 'mon'. In the desert, the Jews never had this security since G-d only provided food for that day. Even though they didn't actually need more food at the time, there was still that part of them that wanted to feel independent and secure, which means having 'bread in the basket' so that they need not worry about tomorrow. This feeling of constant dependency was an 'affliction'; since its against the natural human desires, it had to cause some psychological pain.

Now we can explain why G-d did this to the Jews in the desert. The purpose of this affliction wasn't for them to just be in pain and insecurity; as we said before, there is no value in pain per se. G-d did this to them to teach them an idea that they must live by. There is only one source of security for man and that is G-d. If man wants to attain any sense of security so that he need not worry about his needs, then he must recognize his 'real dependence', namely that ultimately everything in the world comes from G-d and if one looks for sustenance he must look to G-d. When the Jews left Egypt they were on a low level; the Egyptian culture was based on idolatry and false notions about G-d and man's relationship to G-d. In the desert, G-d had to teach the Jews the correct view, which includes how man must view himself as a dependent being, looking to G-d for all his needs, despite the fact that man's emotional nature is to deny this and look for independence. This, then, was the lesson of the affliction of the 'mon' in the desert.

With this, we have a better understanding of what the Torah view of Innu' is. Innu' is not an idea of asceticism where man must pain himself and be removed from the physical world to reach higher levels; rather, innui is an affliction on the instinctual, psychological part of man, where he undergoes some psychological pain to move closer to G-d and truth. By the 'mon' the affliction was in their having to give up the instinctual desire for independence so that they could properly view their dependency on G-d.

Now we can explain the concept behind Innu' on Yom Kippur. The main theme of Yom Kippur is Teshuvah, the process of repentance in which a person recognizes the evil of sin and abandons his sinful ways. In order to recognize the evil of sin, though, a person must see what is the good, for evil is defined as that which is not good. The Torah teaches us that the good is that which brings us closer to G-d, namely the study of His Torah, gaining knowledge of Him and following his commandments. Sin is where a person leaves this path because he values something else, namely that which brings him instinctual satisfaction. If man would work purely based on truth, he would see the good in G-d's Ways and Wisdom and not be interested in sin; it is the 'yetzer hora', the evil inclination in man, that is his instinctual part, which overpowers him and influences him to sin. Teshuva, then, necessitates that one pull back from instinctual satisfaction and gain control over his desires in order to move closer to G-d. However, in order to do this, one must be able to undergo a certain amount of psychological pain so that he can withdraw his attraction to the instinct and channel this energy towards his service to G-d.

This then is the concept of Innu' on Yom Kippur. The affliction that man undergoes by abstaining from these physical pleasures is essentially tied to the theme of Teshuva. True repentance, that is leaving the instinctual desires for the higher good of pursuing G-d, demands that one be 'afflicted' not for the pain itself but rather so that he may pull away from his involvement and attraction to the physical pleasure and channel that energy towards the real good. Part of abandoning sin is the removal of energy from that desire for satisfaction. By its very nature, this process demands a certain amount of pain since that part of him will then be left unsatisfied. However, after this stage of Innu', man can use that energy and sublimate it towards the true good, that of pursuing G-d through the Torah, and then live the most pleasurable life possible for man. □