

Rabbi Isaac said:

"Four things tear up the decreed judgment of man; charity, prayer, changing one's name (identity) and changing one's actions."

In memory of my dear friend Levi Olenick, whose genuine and passionate concern for others is missed. He still serves as a model, unparalleled in his sincere love of Torah and kindness. Moshe Ben-Chaim

ESTD 1997

JewishTimes

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

Volume II, No. 48...Sept. 19, 2003

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IN THIS ISSUE:

PARASHAS NITZAVIM/VAYELECH	1,5,6
JEWISH NEW YEAR	1,3
DAY OF JUDGMENT	1,2
DEATH OF INNOCENT/EUTHANASIA	3
ETERNAL LIFE	4,5
IMPROVING WEALTH	6
THE SHOFAR	7,8,9

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Nitzavim / Vayelech

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Hashem your G-d will bring back your remnant. And He will have mercy on you. And He will again gather you from the nations among whom He dispersed you." (Devarim 30:3)

Moshe tells Bnai Yisrael that their repentance will be rewarded. The Almighty will respond to the prayers and cries of His nation. He will redeem Bnai Yisrael from

(continued on page 5)



THE JEWISH NEW YEAR

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

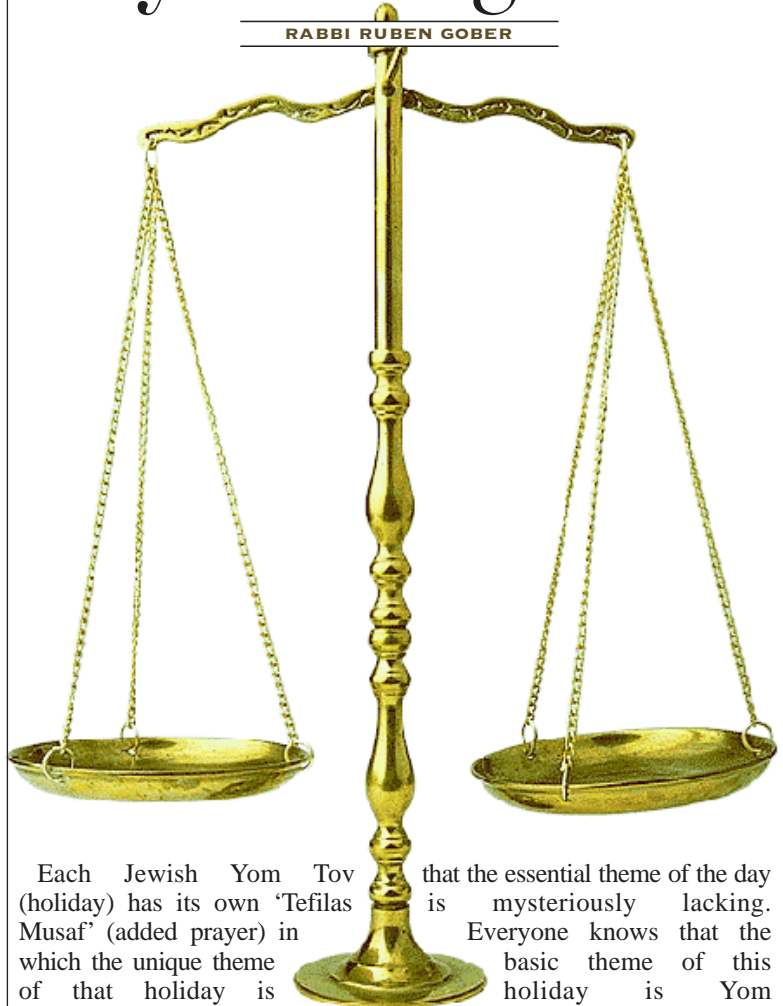
The Jewish New Year is unlike man-made celebrations of the secular New Year, accompanied by self indulgence, drunkenness, and the inescapable self realization that the partiers celebrate nothing other than the celebration. Through the laws pertaining to the Jewish New Year, God continues to direct us to absolute truths in our never ending search for reality.

Our new year, Rosh Hashanna, Judaism focuses on a singular concept that God is the King, the Ruler of the universe. We make no personal requests. Rather, we praise God, His absolute omniscience and omnipotence through precisely formulated prayers. Our prayers

(continued on page 3)

Day of Judgment?

RABBI RUBEN GOBER



Each Jewish Yom Tov (holiday) has its own 'Tefilas Musaf' (added prayer) in which the unique theme of that holiday is expressed. For example, on Pesach the tefila mentions that it is the time of our redemption and on Shavuot it mentions that it is the time that we received the Torah. However, when we look at the Musaf of Rosh Hashana we notice that the essential theme of the day is mysteriously lacking. Everyone knows that the basic theme of this holiday is Yom HaDin—the Day of Judgment. The Talmud in Rosh Hashana 16a says that on this day everyone in the world passes before G-d to be judged. Yet, when we search the Musaf, we find that there is no mention of this theme at all.

(continued on next page)

Day of Judgment?

RABBI RUBEN GOBER

(continued from previous page)

The only reference that we find to the Day of Judgment is in the middle bracha (blessing), that of Zichronos (remembrance) where we speak of G-d remembering all creatures on this day and deciding their fate. However, we are still left to wonder why Chazal (our sages) only inserted this in the greater theme of Zichronos, when we focus on ideas about G-d, rather than constructing a blessing that focuses on our being judged.

Even more curious is how Chazal didn't even construct a bracha that has at its essence a request of G-d to pass a favorable 'verdict'. When we think of being judged, we naturally think of going before a judge to plead our case or at least asking for mercy in the outcome. Our tefilos contain no such request. With these observations we are left with some strong questions: Why would Chazal leave out the essential theme of Judgment from the tefila? Why would they not construct a blessing in which we can express our request for a favorable verdict?

One may respond simply that there are specific requests that we make with regards to the judgment. There are four extra insertions that we add in to our tefilos on Rosh Hashana and on the following days until Yom Kippur; these additions contain requests, such as "write us in the book of life" and the like. But upon closer examination, we see that this just raises more questions. Firstly, why are our requests for life and a good year limited to additions and not an actual bracha? Shouldn't there be a specific bracha formulated for this purpose? Furthermore, the Tur, in Orach Chaim Siman 582, says that these additions were allowed by our sages but only with difficulty. This seems extremely problematic—if the additions are appropriate then why were they only allowed with difficulty? If they're not appropriate, then they

shouldn't be allowed at all!

Apparently, when they constructed the tefila, Chazal did not want to emphasize the idea that we are being judged. What did they want us to focus on? Let us examine the basic themes they established for the Musaf prayer of Rosh Hashana. There are three brachos unique to this day (what follows is an extremely brief summary of the blessings for reference; a deeper understanding of each one demands analysis beyond the scope of this article). The first one is 'Malchios', kingship, in which we speak about G-d as King of the universe and how in the future all of mankind will recognize this idea. 'Zichronos', remembrance, is the second bracha; the basic concept here is that G-d is an Omniscient Being who on this day decides the fate of all beings for the upcoming year (again, notice the lack of the term 'din', judgment, in the bracha). The third bracha is 'Shofaros' which expresses ideas behind the commandment to blow a ram's horn on this day; here the basic idea is the distance between man and G-d, as it says at the end "and none is similar to You." All these berachos express ideas about G-d, without any focus on man or man's needs. Even from our cursory examination we see that on the Day of Judgment, Chazal felt that it is inappropriate for us to focus on ourselves, despite the fact that we are being judged. Just the opposite—man must focus on that which is beyond himself and the physical world. Chazal constructed the Tefila in such a way that one must draw his attention to philosophical ideas about God. Of course the question we need to ask is why.

Clearly, Chazal are teaching us that Judaism has a different view of 'Judgment Day'. The Torah's concept of Yom HaDin isn't how most people look at judgment, like

a court case for every individual where we sit in front of the judge and argue our case. It's true that we are judged, but in Torah the din, the verdict, isn't based on a simplistic notion of whether we are 'good people' or 'bad people', innocent or guilty. Of course it is true, as many statements of Chazal point out, that there is a verdict passed based on whether we are righteous or evil individuals. However, this really depends on one concept—the state of the soul. Man's level isn't a simple question of his good deeds or bad deeds; it has to do with his perfection and how he has attached himself to the truth. God, of course, is the Ultimate Truth and Existence—He is the Prime Mover of the Universe, upon which all other existences are dependent. For our souls to attain any level of existence we must exercise our 'bechira chofshis', our free choice, to use our G-d given wisdom in pursuit of truth and G-d; only in this way can we attain true metaphysical existence for our soul.

It is based on this concept that we are judged; come Yom HaDin, man really has no right to come before G-d and 'plead his case'. Such a notion is against Torah—G-d knows what level man is on and all that he has encountered in this world. This isn't a court case where man tries to convince the judge of his innocence—such an idea is absurd with reference to G-d. Our notion of Din is totally different—its based on a philosophical, metaphysical foundation of Judaism, that of the state of man's soul. In Torah, the notion of 'Judgment' means that man must reflect on where he stands with regards to reality for ultimately that is how he is judged; for us, it is a chance to reflect on the true ideas behind the physical universe and give our souls real existence. It is only in this way that we may warrant a favorable verdict.

With this understanding of Judgment, we can see why our tefilos don't mention Yom HaDin and don't have specific requests that pertain to the judgment. Chazal didn't want man to be caught up in his own personal judgment; there's no point in it since it won't accomplish anything. The judgment is based on G-d's knowledge of man and the level of his soul. For man to win a favorable verdict, there is only one thing he needs to do—to reflect on the ideas about real existence, and there is no Real Existence other than G-d.

We may now explain why the Tur writes that the additions in Tefila that contain requests were only allowed with difficulty. Clearly, Chazal didn't want man to focus on his own physical needs on this day and it is for this reason that there is no specific bracha that talks about this. The essential goal is for man to focus on what is true and real, and attach himself to those ideas. However, Judaism doesn't deny human nature, and it is only natural that if man is being judged then he be concerned about himself. Man by his very nature is egoistic and must think about himself and his physical needs. Recognizing this, Chazal made a concession to human nature and allowed for him to ask for a good verdict. However, this was only a concession and Chazal ensured that this idea be clear by only allowing these requests to be expressed as additions in preexisting brachos. When we look closely at the specific berachos in which the additions are inserted, the first two and last two of the tefila, we notice that these are berachos that focus on G-d and Divine Providence and not man's own needs. It is clear that on this day, the Day of Judgment, our sages wanted to guide us in gaining "real life", focusing on ideas about G-d and giving existence to our souls. ■

THE JEWISH NEW YEAR

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

accompanied by the Shofar blasts, emphasizes this one theme:

"And so too Hashem our God, instill your awe upon all your works, and Your dread upon all that You have created. Let all works revere You, and all creatures prostrate themselves before You. Let them all become a single society to do Your will wholeheartedly. For as we know Hashem our God, that the dominion is Yours, might is in Your hand, strength is in Your right hand, and Your name inspires awe over all that You have created."

Regarding this idea of God's complete rulership, Talmud Rosh Hashanna 16a records a Mishna stating, "on Rosh Hashanna, all those who enter the world pass before God (in judgment) like sheep". The Mishna quotes a source, Psalms 33:16 - "Who forms at once their (man's) hearts, Who understands all their doings." Metsudas Dovid understands this as, since God created all people the same, He therefore understands all people equally, and this understanding is limited only to God - as God is Judge. One Who judges accurately possesses the entire truth about His created beings.

Ibn Ezra offers a different explanation, understanding the verse in Psalms slightly different, "The One Creator (of) their hearts, Who understands all their doings." Ibn Ezra teaches us a subtle idea: "There is One Creator - and there cannot be many - therefore He alone understands all their doings." Ibn Ezra states, precisely due to God's oneness, does God judge people. I

ask, "Why does the reality that God is one, demand that God judge man?" How is God's judgment of man a natural outgrowth of His being one?

Ibn Ezra teaches this; God judges mankind, thereby teaching us that there is a Judge, One God. The very act of God judging us, is an essential lesson. It teaches the most fundamental idea, i.e., Unity of God. As only God judges, no other being or entity can judge.

God judging man targets many goals. I feel Ibn Ezra derived from this institution of judgment, that man must recognize God as the Ultimate Ruler. This is the main idea: Being judged is not primarily so man takes account of his actions, as an ends in itself. Rather, being judged is so "man recognize the existence of The Judge". There is a Being with ultimate knowledge and power - the Creator of all reality.

"Then You Hashem will reign alone over all Your works, on Mount Zion, resting place of Your glory, and in Jerusalem Your holy city, as it is written in Your holy writings, "Hashem shall reign forever, your God, oh Zion, from generation to generation, praised be God".

This quote repeats, "G-d will reign". By definition, God does not share His Oneness. He possesses the distinction of Oneness exclusive of all 'others'. We stand in judgment, thereby attesting to His eternal, independent reign. The idea of God is inherently bound up with the concept that God knows all of man's actions. We cannot agree to any concept of God, bereft of His absolute knowledge of our actions. This necessitates our act of repentance before Him. According to Ibn Ezra, standing in judgment is truly a testament to God's unique role as Ruler. The Creator knows His works, as the verse says, "The One Creator (of) their hearts, Who understands all their doings." By definition, "He alone understands all their doings." We therefore attest to His reign by standing in judgment.

This command to attest to God's exclusive reign as King by adhering to the laws of Rosh Hashanna, implants in man the most basic idea: God is One. ■

Death of the Innocent & Euthanasia

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Two questions: Why do babies get killed by bombers, and, why can't a person suffering in a hospital take his life?

Mesora: G-d wishes man have free will. This is his plan. Man must be the sole cause of his fate - he alone is to be responsible for his reward or punishment. G-d does not interfere with man's free will, although He may perform miracles when He sees fit.

The Talmud says that although G-d does not desire man to rape, He does not interfere with the natural process of insemination and birth. This makes sense: if in response to each of our sinful acts, we would see G-d miraculously halting our attempts, or suddenly punishing us, our free will would be lost, and the entire plan of reward and punishment would be forfeited. G-d will also not allow the righteous to suffer any harm, "not one of his bones will be broken." Thus, G-d may allow one to die at the hands of another due to sin. But if he is sinless, or deserves life due to G-d's calculations, he will be saved, as was Daniel from the lion's den, and Chananya, Mishael and Azarya from the furnace.

Why do babies get killed? Let me first say that I don't feel G-d suffers pain to those undeserving. However, the Rabbis do say that a child can be killed for the sins of the father. But even more, we must agree that life is a gift from G-d, and He alone decides who should live and who shall die. We cannot possess G-d's knowledge. Although at times we see what appears as unjust circumstances, we must know that G-d, Who gave us His perfect Torah, with laws of perfect justice, will not act unjustly. Whether we can see the justice is another question. And our questions cannot detract from the perfect life outlined in the Torah; we don't suddenly abandon all of mathematics, which is reasonable, when one formula is incomprehensible. So too, we do not

abandon the perfect Torah, when we cannot fathom one of its ideas. The flaw is in us, not in the Torah, or in G-d.

Realize also that death is not the end of true life. If one is commanded by a foreign ruler to commit idolatry or suffer death, he must suffer death. How can this be, if life is the be all and end all? The answer is that physical life is for the purpose of our perfection, in line with G-d's ways. Part of these ways is not to profane G-d. Therefore, we must, at all costs, never commit idolatry. This corrupts G-d's unique role in the eyes of others, the most tragic of all crimes, and it removes our merit. True life is the eternal life, and our death here is of no consequence when placed in proper perspective. Of course, we must not be negligent, so we must protect our lives so we may achieve our perfection. But there are times when life loses its purpose according to the Torah. G-d knows when a life is to be spared, and when it is not to be spared. It is painful when a child is lost, but this tragedy must not overshadow G-d's system.

I must also say that if we wish the end of the violence committed by the Palestinians and Arabs, we have it in our hands to follow G-d's system and wipe out all of the terrorists. We cannot be concerned with world opinion or U.S. funding. Until we live in accord with G-d's Torah, by definition, we must suffer the consequences He has warned about in His Torah. As long as Sharon's government does not follow G-d, G-d will not follow him, and tragedy will continue. The corruption of the Israeli government is due to an underlying denial of G-d's ability to protect Israel. Military might alone, cannot succeed. Torah adherence must play a central role, guiding all of our actions. King David was victorious over his enemies, and so can Sharon be, but only if his actions mirror those of King David's.

Regarding your second question, one cannot take his life. By doing so, he denies G-d's unique role as the One who grants and take life. As a Rabbi stated, our own lives are not ours to destroy, even though we are in much pain. Additionally, one denies G-d's ability to heal by such an act. ■

INHERITING ETERNAL LIFE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I am a new Noachide and recently received an inquiry from a Christian acquaintance asking me about something that Rabbi Maimonides wrote. I am unfamiliar with this work of the Rabbi and I do not know how to answer this person's questions. The quote by the Rabbi and the inquiry that follows are below:

"Whoever accepts the seven commandments and observes them with care is considered a pious Gentile, and has a share in the eternal life; but this is on condition that he receive them and fulfill them because G-d commanded them in the Torah, and made us to know (them) through Moses our teacher, because the sons of Noah were commanded in them earlier." (Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhos Melakim 8.11)

Does this mean that if a gentile doesn't know or believe that the Noachide precepts were revealed in the Torah, but he keeps them anyway, he doesn't have a share in eternal life because of his lack of belief? Just wondering how belief vs action comes together in this quote. I'm thinking of the many moral pagans who never knew anything of the Jewish Scripture.

Mesora: Your quote from Maimonides is accurate, but incomplete. He continues to conclude that law as follows:

"...But, if they were done (the Noachide commands) from one's own decisions, this is not a Gare Toshav (proselyte) and he is not of the righteous of the worldly nations, and not of their wise people."

Maimonides concludes his law, teaching that eternal life depends on the fulfillment of the Noachide laws, but only if fulfilled as "G-d's commands." Interesting though, Maimonides formulates his latter statement addressing one who acts from his own knowledge – not G-d's command – but surprisingly, he omits the gentile's loss of eternal life. Does he mean to say that although the gentile is not acting in accord with Torah law, he nonetheless merits eternal life? This omission is very significant. In the beginning of his law, as you quoted, Maimonides states clearly that one who merits eternal life is one who follows the Noachide principles as "commands of G-d". It would follow, if one does NOT follow these Noachide commands based on Torah obligation, he should forfeit his eternal life. But Maimonides omits such a statement.

The verse from which this principle is derived is Psalms, 9:18: "Return ye wicked to the grave, all peoples (who) forget G-d."

This verse teaches that there is one cause for those who will return to the grave. (Rashi teaches

in Sanhedrin, 105a that "returning to the grave" means a loss of eternal life.) This one cause is the "forgetting of G-d". One who forgets G-d (not cognizant of Him) causes his or her forfeiture of eternal life.

Perhaps Maimonides correctly distinguishes between what it is that renders one a proselyte, and what forfeits one's eternal life. One is considered a proselyte if he adheres to the commands of G-d. The following of these same seven Noachide laws - not as a fulfillment of G-d's word - does not make one a proselyte. Only if one follows these seven laws 'to fulfill G-d's commands', does he become a proselyte. A Torah status of "proselyte" devolves only upon the person who meets the Torah's criteria. Such a person also inherits eternal life by a fulfillment of G-d's word. But if one follows the seven Noachide laws, from his own reasoning, he is not a proselyte.

However, Maimonides teaches that the latter does not forfeit eternal life. Since one may come to the realization of G-d on his own, he does in fact receive eternal life. He is not a proselyte, as this Torah status only devolves upon one who fulfills the Torah's criteria. A Torah status of "proselyte" is achieved only via Torah adherence. But eternal life is not determined by fulfillment of commands - an interesting point. One may inherit the World to Come, although he has not fulfilled the seven Noachide laws as an act of subjugation to G-d's word. The World to Come is granted to one who realizes G-d, even if arrived at by his own reasoning, and when this reasoning guides him to follow the same principles contained in the seven Noachide laws outlined by the Torah.

For example, one may live without a Torah, ponder the world, and recognize his Creator. He may then continue his probing of the world, and arrive at the same seven principles enveloped in the Noachide laws. He then follows these principles - his mind alone reasons that these principles are truths. This person never heard of the Torah, yet, he arrived at the same truths contained in the Noachide laws. Maimonides teaches that such a person inherits eternal life. We have an example of a person similar to this, Abraham.

It appears that Maimonides derived his principle from the verse in Psalms, "Return ye wicked to the grave, all peoples (who) forget G-d." Only those who forget G-d lose eternal life. But if one recognizes G-d, even on his own, he merits eternal life.

Eternal life, then, is only possible if one recognizes G-d. Why is this? Why isn't the

adherence to the Noachide laws alone sufficient? The answer is based on an understanding of "eternal life".

Eternal life is synonymous with realizing G-d. It is a state in which man's soul continues after physical life. All that exists of man after life is his soul. His body decays in the grave, but his non-physical feature – his soul – is not affected by physical death. The soul continues to exist. But how? It is by G-d's will that the soul which studied Torah during its Earthly stay, should reach even higher knowledge after death, for eternity. This is the blissful state that all our Sages anticipated. They enjoyed their studies during life, but with the impediments necessary to procure health and wealth. These were distractions. After life, such needs are inapplicable. The Sages realized this state would be one of uninterrupted thought, and higher knowledge of G-d. They looked forward to this state. Conversely, many Jews and gentiles believe the next world to be something different. Maimonides classifies many groups possessing faulty notions of the next world, based on their Earthly and material desires. However, the Sages possessed correct knowledge of the afterlife. They knew that it is not of Earthly phenomena. They anticipated a pure state of acknowledging truths, with no interruption, and no cessation. Only one, who appreciates and looks forward to new ideas here, will enjoy an afterlife bereft of physical hurdles.

If one's studies do not eventuate in the appreciation of G-d, then the afterlife is impossible. All knowledge must culminate in an appreciation of the Creator; otherwise, it is not true, knowledge. Why is this so? This is because "knowledge", by definition, means knowledge of "something." We can study mathematics, physics, philosophy, and even Torah. But if knowledge in any area is not viewed as a reflection of G-d's wisdom, then it is not knowledge. In such a flawed state, we lack the central component of our knowledge – that what we learned stems from G-d. Our studies are a complete failure. Our purpose in life, in every activity, is to come closer to knowledge of G-d. Therefore, there can be no continued existence after death, if such a state is not a continued knowledge of G-d.

We must realize how essential it is to possess accurate knowledge, and knowledge of G-d. Maimonides formulates his law perfectly. One may become a "proselyte" only through strict fulfillment of the Torah's criteria. But even if one does not become a proselyte, he may still inherit the World to Come, if he has acquired accurate knowledge of G-d. This must be so, as the Torah was not given to mankind until the year 2448. What eternal life was available to Adam, Eve, Noah, and the rest of the world, if Torah must be followed as a prerequisite? The answer is that even without Torah adherence, eternal life was, and is available to all those who acquire

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INHERITING ETERNAL LIFE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from previous page)

knowledge of G-d.

One last point on Maimonides' formulation: He says that one is a proselyte, provided he fulfills the Noachide laws as G-d's laws, instructed through Moses, "that Noachides prior to Sinai were commanded in them." What is Maimonides saying by, "that Noachides prior to Sinai were commanded in them"?

It appears that a Noachide must comprehend that his laws originated prior to Sinai. Why?

In Maimonides' previous law, he states that Moses caused only the Jews to inherit the Torah. This teaches a new lesson: Noachide laws, by definition, must be understood to be a system separate from the Torah given at Sinai. Although included in the text of the Torah, the Noachide laws predate Sinai. This Noachide system exists today, as it existed before the Torah. The Torah encapsulates two systems, Noachide laws, and Judaic laws. Torah is for all mankind. However, just as parts of the Torah apply only to priests, so too, parts of the Torah apply to Noachides alone.

Maimonides teaches that Noachides must comprehend that their system is not part of Judaic Torah, but it is a system that G-d commanded much earlier. This knowledge is essential to their fulfillment of their commands. If a Noachide feels he is following something that originated at Sinai, what does he lack? He lacks the realization of the nature of Noachide law. Noachide laws address not what Judaic Torah address. Judaic Torah is the ultimate system for the highest perfection in man, which also includes the seven Noachide principles. But the Noachide system differs: it is the basic, fundamental laws entitling man to human existence. As Maimonides states, "And anyone who does not accept the Noachide laws, is killed." The Noachide system is one that procures a right to a continued life. This idea is central to one's adherence to the Noachide laws. One must realize he fulfills these laws as his right to existence. A Jew too, must be concerned with the curses that befall him, or the nation, when Torah is abandoned. But the Noachide laws, when abandoned, are met with death, and are thus, a more grave violation.

G-d's will is that there be one nation, the Jews, who study and teach Torah to the world. These Jews must be highly refined in their knowledge and in their morality. This is not the role of other nations. But any person created, may decide to benefit by joining the Jewish nation, and such a proselyte will be considered equal to the Jew, as it is written, "as you (are) so is the proselyte". ■

Parashas Nitzavim / Vayelech

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from page 1)

exile. He will return the nation to the land of Israel.

The passage implies that redemption will be immediate. The Almighty is eager to respond to the prayers of the nation. If Bnai Yisrael repents, the process of redemption will immediately be set in motion.

Our Sages explain that this immediate response is not limited to Bnai Yisrael. Any tzibur – congregation – can expect Hashem to react immediately to its sincere cries. Maimonides discusses this concept in his Mishne Torah. He explains that it is always appropriate for a person to repent and pray to Hashem. However, during the ten days from Rosh HaShanna through Yom Kippur repentance and prayer are more effective. One's entreaties are more readily accepted during this period. Maimonides then qualifies these comments. He explains that this distinction only applies to the prayers of the individual. The congregation receives different treatment. The Almighty is always prepared to react to the sincere repentance and prayers of the tzibur.[1] In short, the individual cannot be assured of an immediate response to his or her prayers. The congregation is assured that its entreaties will always be immediately considered by the Almighty.

The Talmud discusses an exception to this principle. The Talmud explains that seafarers do not enjoy the preferential treatment provided to a congregation. A group of seafarers encounters rough seas. They fear they will perish under the pounding of the waves. The mariners turn in fervent prayer to Hashem. They cannot assume they will be treated like a congregation. The Talmud explains that these are not really a congregation. They are regarded as individuals. Therefore, their prayers, regardless of their sincerity, are treated like the entreaties of individuals.

Why are the mariners not regarded as a group? Why do their prayers not receive the same preferential treatments afforded to other groups joined together in devotion to the Almighty?

The Rav of Sochotchuv offers an answer. He explains that there are two types of groups. Sometimes a group is joined together due to accidental occurrences. The members of the group are not interested in each other's welfare. Each individual is concerned exclusively with his or her own interests. This is a group of unrelated individuals thrown together through a set of circumstances. This does not constitute a tzibur.

This is because there is no fundamental relationship between the members.

There is a second type of group. This group is joined by some fundamental common bond. The members care for each other. This group is not drawn together through accidental circumstances. These people choose to join as a unit. This group is a tzibur.

The seafarers are an example of a group that is not a tzibur. They have been thrown together by necessity. They may pray simultaneously and even in a single location. But each prays alone. The petitioner presents the Almighty with his or her own needs. The other individuals in the group are irrelevant. The prayers of these individuals will not receive special treatment.

In a true tzibur there is unity of purpose. Each member includes the others in his or her prayers. The petitioners stand together. They are not merely together through physical proximity. They are joined together through mutual relationships. Their prayers merge and create the petition of a tzibur. This group can expect special treatment.[2]

"And now write for yourselves this song and teach it to Bnai Yisrael. Make them memorize it so that the song will be a witness for Bnai Yisrael." (Devarim 31:19)

Moshe tells Bnai Yisrael to write the song he will teach them. They are to learn and memorize the song. This song is testimony to fundamental concepts of the Torah.

What is the "song" to which Moshe refers? According to the simple interpretation of the passage, Moshe refers to the song of HaAzinu found in the coming parasha. However, our Sages offer another interpretation of the pasuk. According to this interpretation, the "song" is the entire Torah. In other words, Moshe commanded Bnai Yisrael to place the Torah in written form. This interpretation is the basis for one of the 613 mitzvot. Every male is required to write a Sefer Torah – a Torah scroll.[3]

The Torah scroll is created by recording the contents of the Torah upon specially prepared parchment. The letters of the Torah must be carefully and exactly drawn. Each must be completely surrounded by parchment. This is the principle of hekef gevil – surrounding with parchment. Because of this rule, no two letters can be attached. The point of attachment will render both letters unfit. This is because the

(continued on next page)

Parashas Nitzavim / Vayelech

RABBI BERNARD FOX

(continued from previous page)

surrounding area of parchment is broken at the point of attachment. The letters are not completely surrounded by parchment.

The rule of hekef gevil has another ramification. Many letters in the Hebrew alphabet are closed or nearly closed figures. Below are some examples:



Mem

Samech

Final Mem

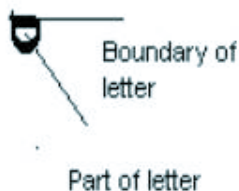
These letters give rise to an interesting problem. Assume that the parchment on which one of these letters is written is perforated in the area adjacent to the inside of the letter. Because of this perforation, the inside of the letter is not adjacent to parchment. In other words the inside dimensions of the letter is not surrounded by parchment. Is this letter acceptable?



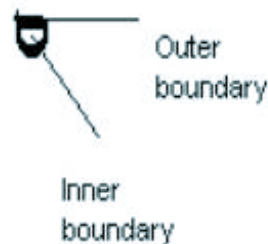
This issue is the subject of a dispute among the authorities. Most authorities maintain that the letter is acceptable. According to these authorities the requirement of hekef gevil only applies to the outside of the letter. In our case the outside boundary of the letter is entirely surrounded by parchment. Therefore, the letter is acceptable. The Talmud Yerushalmi disagrees. According to the Yerushalmi, the letter is not acceptable. The perforation adjacent to the inside boundary of the letter is a break in the parchment. The letter is not considered to be surrounded by parchment. In other words, the requirement of hekef gevil applies to the inside of the letter as well as to the outside.[4]

This dispute provides a fundamental insight into halacha's definition of these letters. According to most authorities the perforation adjacent to the inside of the letter is irrelevant. It does not disqualify the letter. This implies that the hollow portion of the letter is actually part of the entity of the letter. The letter is composed of two portions the outer colored portion and the hollow inside. The entity of the letter does not have an inside boundary. The hollow portion is merely a component of the letter. The only boundaries of the letter are the outside dimensions. Therefore, a

perforation on the adjacent to inside of the letter is of no consequence. The boundaries of the letter are created by the outside of the colored portion. The letter is completely surrounded by parchment. The requirement of hekef gevil is met. (See diagram below)



According to the Yerushalmi, the hollow inside the letter is not part of the entity. The letter is bounded on the inside and the outside. It follows that the letter must be bounded by parchment on the inside as well as the outside. The requirement of hekef gevil applies to the inside boundaries of the letter. Therefore, a perforation of the parchment adjacent to the inside boundary of the letter renders the letter invalid. (See diagram below) □



[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:6.

[2] Rav Yitzchak Mirsky, Higyona Halacha (Jerusalem 1997), volume 3, pp. 18-19.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat 18.

[4] Rav Yosef Karo, Bait Yosef Commentary on Tur, Orach Chayim 32:16.

Improving Wealth

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: How do I merit Hashem's intervention in my life (e.g., help with livelihood)? How does such intervention manifest itself?

Mesora: Malachi 3:10 describes the promise of G-d's wealth secured by our giving ma-asare, tzedaka, (the Shulchan Aruch says the best form is 20%). G-d promises to "open up the storehouses of heaven and empty out a blessing for you until there is more than enough." The Torah says in this one area, ma-asare, one is allowed to test G-d, as the verse says before this, "and test Me please in this." G-d asks we test Him by giving tzedaka, and He promises a response of a blessing that is "more than enough." Why is THIS the area that causes success? Because it is here alone that man demonstrates his conviction that all is in G-d's hand - he 'risks' his own sustenance. Such conviction is endorsed by G-d, by his subsequent fortune. Only when one makes such a sacrifice, is he truly convinced that G-d can, and will respond. In this area of perfection, G-d responds in kind. This 'response' validates one's act as having been proper in G-d's eyes. This person also values giving to others - he uses his wealth properly. He is then one to whom G-d entrusts with additional wealth.

A Rabbi once mentioned that this "more than enough" is predicated on the recipient having a number in his mind that is "enough". G-d will not give a blessing to one who is never satisfied when his needs are met.

Wealth is a means - not an ends. One must be living properly so that there is the relationship between you and G-d, that G-d will respond to your test. Study for the mere interest in Torah ideas of morality, justice, and truth, fulfill G-d's commands, be honest in business, and adhere to the tenets of Torah. When one lives in accordance with reality, i.e., G-d's Torah, G-d then secures your life's finances so you may continue in His path.

Examine your ways to see where you require improvement. Be honest, and investigate G-d's will through His Torah. It is for our good, and it's ways are pleasant, "Vidarche-ha, darchey Noam."

Talmud Betzah teaches, our yearly, monetary allotment is determined between Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur. Use this time before Rosh Hashanna to improve yourself, and do so out of a true, honest quest for recognition of why Torah and the commands are beneficial, and perfect. Only then will you be living as G-d wishes, as one who clearly understands G-d's wish for man's good, performing His commands out of conviction to the truth. Maimonides taught that insofar as one is perfected, (intellectually and in action) in this proportion does G-d relate to him.

How your wealth will be manifested is G-d's knowledge - not that of man. □



The Shofar

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What is the significance of the shofar - the ram's horn? Its primary focus are its blasts, blown during our prayers on Rosh Hashanna. We also have the custom to blow it each morning during the month of Elul. This month precedes the month of Tishrei - the first day of which is Rosh Hashanna. During this month of Elul, the shofar is to act as a "wake-up call". "Uru yishanim mi-shinasschem", "Awaken you slumberers from your sleep." At this crucial time, when we are soon to be judged for life, prosperity, and health, the shofar alerts us to our impending judgment. We are to arouse ourselves, waking up from our routine activities and backsliding during this past year. We are to examine ourselves, detecting our flaws, and responding with a renewed strengthening of Torah values and actions. But why use a shofar? What is its significance?

Purpose of the Blasts

We learn that the blasts of the shofar are meant to resemble the weeping and sobbing of Sisra's mother. This is why we have long and short blasts, as weeping takes on different types of cries. Sisra's mother awaited his return from battle. (Judges, Chap. 5) Sisra delayed in returning. Sisra's mother assumed he was dividing great booty, so this must have taken time. But later, her assumption of good, turned towards reality, and she realized he must have perished at war. Her sobbing was a response to recognizing reality. The shofar blasts are to make us associate to Sisra's mother's sobbings - her return to reality. We too must return to reality, that is, returning to a life of Torah. This is enforced by Rosh Hashanna, a day when we direct our attention to G-d's exclusive role as King, Who knows all our thoughts and actions, and Who rules the entire world. During our last prayer on Yom Kippur, "Neila", we say, "so that we may disengage from the oppression of our hands." Our daily activities of work, family and other pursuits distract us from what our true focus must be - the study and application of G-d's Torah system.

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 26b teaches that a shofar used for Rosh Hashanna must be bent, not straight. This is to resemble man's "bent" state of mind - he is bent over in humility. This parallels a contrast: G-d is King, but we are His creations. Our undistorted recognition of G-d's role as our Creator and King, results in our sense of humility.

The Shofar at Mount Sinai

We find the shofar associated with many events. The shofar waxed increasingly louder at Sinai when G-d gave us His Torah, "And it was that the sound of the shofar went and grew increasingly loud..." (Exod. 19:19) Why was shofar integral to Sinai? Sinai was also much earlier than Sisra.

How is shofar related to Sinai, Rosh Hashanna, the Jubilee year, and the binding of Isaac?



So does Sinai's shofar convey a different idea than sobbing? It would seem sobbing is unrelated to Sinai. What is Sinai's shofar to teach us? Rashi states that it is the custom of man that when he blows for a long period, the sound gets increasingly weaker and more faint. But here, at Sinai, the sound grew louder. Rashi clearly indicates the lesson of shofar is to teach that this event was not orchestrated by man. Shofar is to reflect the Creator's presence. Why was this lesson required at Sinai? Perhaps the very act of accepting the Torah is synonymous with our recognition that this Torah is G-d's ideas. Only such an appreciation will drive our studies towards answers which resonate with absolute truth. G-s knowledge is the only absolute truth. Truth is the purpose of Torah study. Torah was therefore given with the sound of the shofar, embodying this idea. Rashi also mentioned that the sound of the shofar on Sinai "breaks the ears". This means it carries great impact. Why was this quality of "sound" necessary? The miracles alone proved G-d's existence!

There is one difference between a sound and a visual: sound is perceived unavoidably. You cannot "hide" your ears. Turning away from a visual removes its cognizance, but this is inapplicable to sound, certainly a loud sound. It would appear that besides the grand spectacle of Sinai ablaze, when receiving the Torah, the Jews required uninterrupted attention. The shofar blast kept them attentive to the divine nature of this event.

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The Shofar

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from previous page)

Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 16a: "Rabbi Abahu said, 'G-d says blow before Me with a ram's horn, so that I may recall for you the binding of Isaac, son of Abraham, and I will consider it upon you as if you bound yourselves before Me.'" Since the ram is what Abraham offered in place of Isaac, our blasts of the ram's horn are to recall this event before G-d. It is clear from this Talmudic statement that Rosh Hashanna demands a complete devotion to G-d - we must render ourselves as if bound on the altar, like Isaac. We accomplish this via our shofar blasts. This act attests to our commitment to Abraham's sacrifice. We gain life in G-d's eyes by confirming Abraham's perfection. We follow his ways. This merit grants us life. The lesson of Abraham is not to end when Rosh Hashanna ends. This holiday is to redirect our focus from the mundane, to a lasting cognizance of G-d's presence and role as Creator. He is to occupy our thoughts throughout the year. "Bichol diracheha, da-ayhu, vihu yiyashare orchosecha", "In all your ways, know Him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs, 3:6)

But let us ask: why is the binding of Isaac central to the theme of Rosh Hashanna? There were many instances where great people sacrificed themselves in the name of G-d? Let us take a closer look at that event.

When Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac, and was subsequently commanded not to do so, he found a ram caught in the bushes: (Gen. 22:13) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son." Why did Abraham feel he was to offer the ram "in place" of Isaac? This was not requested of him. Sforno suggests that Abraham understood the presence of the ram as an indication that it was to be sacrificed - a replacement for Isaac. It appears from Sforno, that G-d wished Abraham to "replace" his initial sacrifice of Isaac. It also appears from Sforno that Abraham wished to fulfill the perfect act of sacrifice, although subsequently he had been instructed not to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham wished to express the perfection of adherence to G-d's command. Therefore, G-d prepared this ram. Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 teaches that this ram was one of the ten miracles created at sunset on the sixth day of creation. This clearly teaches that G-d intended this ram to be offered. Why was it so essential that Abraham offer this ram?

A close friend suggested the following, insightful answer: Abraham was not "relieved" when subsequently, he was commanded not to slaughter his precious Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram displays a subtle, yet important lesson about Abraham. Abraham did not remove his attention from G-d, once 'he had his son back'. Only someone on a lesser level of perfection would suddenly be overcome with joy that his son will remain alive with him, and then indulge that emotion with no attention to anything else. But Abraham's perfection didn't allow such a diversion from the entire purpose of the binding of Isaac. Although commanded not to kill Isaac, Abraham's attention was still completely bound up with G-d. This is where Abraham's



energies were before the sacrifice, and even afterwards, when his only son was spared. Offering the ram teaches us that Abraham never removed his thoughts from G-d, even at such a moment when others would certainly indulge in such joy. Abraham did not rejoice in Isaac's life, more than he rejoiced in obeying G-d. The ram teaches us this. Abraham remained steadfast with G-d. Abraham's perfection was twofold; 1) he was not reluctant to obey G-d, at any cost, and 2) nothing surpassed his attachment to G-d.

Maimonides on the Binding of Isaac

Maimonides discusses the significance of Abraham's binding of Isaac. I will record his first principle: "The account of Abraham our father binding his son, includes two great ideas or principles of our faith. First, it shows us the extent and limit of the fear of G-d. Abraham is commanded to perform a certain act, which is not equaled by any surrender of property or by any sacrifice of life, for it surpasses everything that can be done, and belongs to the class of actions which are believed to be contrary to human feelings. He had been without child, and had been longing for a child; he had great riches, and was expecting that a nation should spring from his seed. After all hope of a son had already been given up, a son was born unto him. How great must have been his delight in the child! how intensely must he have loved him! And yet because he feared G-d, and loved to do what G-d commanded, he thought little of that beloved child, and set aside all his hopes concerning him, and consented to kill him after a journey of three days. If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it three days after he had received the commandment, proves the presence of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what

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The Shofar

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of G-d. There is no necessity to look for the presence of any other idea or of anything that might have affected his emotions. For Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that God might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man's duty to love and to fear G-d, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment. We have repeatedly explained this. The angel, therefore, says to him, "For now I know," etc. (ibid. ver. 12), that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a G-d-fearing man, all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of G-d. This idea is confirmed in Scripture: it is distinctly stated that one sole thing, fear of G-d, is the object of the whole Law with its affirmative and negative precepts, its promises and its historical examples, for it is said, "If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy G-d," etc. (Deut. xxviii. 58). This is one of the two purposes of the 'akedah (sacrifice or binding of Isaac)"

Maimonides teaches that the binding of Isaac, represented by the ram's horn, displays man's height of perfection, where he sacrifices what he loves most, his only son, for the command of G-d. Shofar, the ram's horn, thereby conveys the idea of the most devoted relationship to G-d.

We see why Rosh Hashanna focuses on the shofar as a central command. It is on Rosh Hashanna that we focus not on G-d's miracles, salvation, or laws. Rather, we focus on G-d alone. This means, a true recognition of His place in our minds, as King. He is our Creator, Who gave us existence, the greatest gift. Abraham's sacrifice is the ultimate expression of man apprehending the idea of G-d, and loving G-d. Not the idea of G-d Who saves, heals, or performs miracles, but more primary, as Creator.

Shofar and the Jubilee

Another area requires shofar, the Jubilee year. This is the 50th year in the Hebrew calendar. After the shofar is blown, all slaves are set free, and all lands returns to their original inheritors apportioned by Joshua upon his initial conquest of Israel. What is the role of shofar here? Additionally, the shofar on Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee shofar. We are to use the same shofar on Rosh Hashanna as we use on the Jubilee. It would seem counter intuitive. Doesn't the day of Rosh Hashanna have more significance than a day which occurs only once every 50 years? Why is the shofar of Rosh Hashanna derived from some area, which on the surface, seems less significant? Maimonides states that once the shofar is blown, there is a pause: until ten days later, Yom Kippur, although free, slaves remain in the domain of their masters. Why do they not go free immediately upon the shofar blast?

The Jubilee year teaches us yet another facet in recognizing G-d as Creator: man's "ownership" (slaves and land) is a mere fabrication. In truth, G-d owns everything. He created everything. Our ownership during our stay here, is not absolute. We learn from the release of slaves and land, that



ownership follows G-d's guidelines. It is a means by which we again come to the realization of G-d's role as our Master.

Perhaps Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee for good reason. The Jubilee attests to a more primary concept: G-d as Creator. Rosh Hashanna teaches us that G-d judges man, but this is based on the primary concept that G-d is Creator. Our recognition of G-d's judgment must be preceded by our knowledge of His role as Creator. Therefore, Rosh Hashanna's shofar is derived from the Jubilee's shofar.

Why don't slaves go free immediately upon the shofar blast? If slaves would be freed, their freedom during the entire ten day period would eclipse their repentance. The law is perfect: masters cannot work these slaves anymore for fear of their preoccupation with ownership, and slaves cannot leave their masters homes, for fear that they would be self-absorbed in their new found freedom. Both, master and slave, must focus on G-d's role as King during these ten Days of Repentance.

Summary

I all our cases, we learn that shofar has one common theme: the recognition of G-d as our Creator. This recognition was essential for the Jews' acceptance of Torah, for our acceptance of G-d as the true Judge, and for us to view G-d as the absolute "Owner". Abraham expressed the zenith of love of G-d, so this event of the binding of Isaac is remembered, and reenacted via our shofar blasts. As a Rabbi once said, G-d created everything, so there must be great knowledge in all we see - I refer to our command of Shofar. □

Question to Ponder

What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? The Torah does not record superfluous information.

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