

OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT NITZAVIM-VAYELECH • 23 ELUL 5780 SEPTEMBER 12, 2020 • VOL 27 NO. 37
 ROSH HASHANA • 1 TISHREI 5781 SEPTEMBER 19, 2020

PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Let It Go!

"You are standing..." (29:9)

A few weeks ago, I mentioned that one of the great things about having been part of Ohr Somayach for more around three decades is that I have met some people who are clearly living on a different level to the rest of us mere mortals. One of these great souls distilled the essence of one's relationship with one's fellow into three principles: His first principle is, "I was created to serve others, and no one was created to serve me."

The second is, "I wouldn't do it to you. But if you do it to me - it's okay." This doesn't mean that a person should be a doormat and invite the world to trample on him, but *post facto* - if you did something to me that I could really take you to court for and get back at you - and I give up on that - I get forgiven for *all* my sins.

The source for this is the Gemara that says, "Anyone who 'passes over on his character traits,' meaning one

who resists the knee-jerk reaction that many have to resent and want revenge - and just lets it go - so, concomitantly, Hashem lets go on all our sins.

It's true that this level of saintliness is beyond the letter of the law, but it sure sounds like a good deal to me. *All of my sins?* Another source for this idea is the Tomer Devorah, which says that even though we constantly flout the Will of Hashem and use our G-d-given abilities to go against His Will, nevertheless, He constantly continues to give us the power to continue to do this and doesn't "hold a grudge."

During this week, before Hashem opens the Books of Judgment, I can think of no better exercise than to think of someone who has wronged us - and remove all resentment from our hearts. And with that we may approach the Heavenly Throne.

POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel • Tel: +972-2-581-0315 • Email: info@ohr.edu • www.ohr.edu

Love of the Land, written by RAV MENDEL WEINBACH, zt"l • General Editor: RABBI MOSHE

NEWMAN • Design: RABBI ELIEZER SHAPIRO z"l / DANIEL FREEDMAN

© 1992 - 2020 Ohr Somayach Institutions - All rights reserved • This publication contains words of Torah.

Please treat it with due respect. Editor's disclaimer: Ohrnet Magazine is not intended to be a source for halachic rulings. In any real and specific case one should consult a qualified halachic authority for a ruling.

Proudly sponsored by Coyne Property Management -
 Corporate and Property Investment Advisory Services -
 California | United Kingdom | Israel | Australia. Contact: jzulman@coyne.biz

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Nitzavim-Vayelech and Rosh Hashana

Eruvin 30-36 and 37-43

Don't Lean on Me

“If a person put his eruv (of food for eruv techumim to allow walking an additional two thousand amahs outside the city on Shabbat) above ten tefachim, his eruv is not valid, but below ten tefachim, his eruv is valid.”

By deductive reasoning, the *gemara* states that the *mishna* is speaking about a tree in the *reshut harabim* (public domain), and yet the part of it above ten *tefachim* is considered a *reshut hayachid* (private domain) by the nature of its dimensions. Another detail: The person making the *eruv techumim* has intent to “acquire his place of rest for Shabbat” on the part of the tree below ten *tefachim*. (See Rashi for a detailed explanation of how this makes the *eruv* valid below ten *tefachim* and invalid above that height.)

If the tree was in the *reshut hayachid*, however, the *gemara* says that both below and above would be valid for the *eruv*. There is a question raised on the use of a tree for an *eruv*. “One may not use a tree on Shabbat” is the objection raised in our *sugya*. The answer given is that since the relevant time period for the *eruv* to take effect is on Friday afternoon between sunset and total nightfall – a time which is not yet clearly Shabbat – our Rabbis did not decree a prohibition against using a tree during that time period.

A point raised by the Rishonim is why removing the new *eruv* from the tree is considered “using the tree”? If anything, when the *eruv* is on the tree it is using the tree, and when he removes it from the tree he is no longer using the tree! The main prohibition against using a tree on Shabbat or Yom Tov was enacted for the case of a person who is using the tree by *climbing* it, because of a concern that he might break off a branch of the tree while climbing it. One answer provided to explain the use of the tree in the case of an *eruv* is that if a person would be allowed to remove the *eruv* from the tree on Shabbat, he might also lean on the tree – an act which is a clear forbidden use of the tree. (Ritva, Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 336:1 and Mishna Berura *s.k.* 12)

Invariably, when I see this halacha of not using a tree on Shabbat and not removing anything from it, I am reminded of a story I heard involving one of the *gedolei hador* of the previous generation, Rav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, *zatzal*, lovingly known as “the Steipler.” (1899-1985) What follows is the version of the story that was told to me in 1978 when I went to him for a *beracha* and for a few questions at the same time. When I reached his house, some family members and students warmly greeted me and explained that all communication from me to him needed to be in writing since he was deaf. Besides getting a *beracha* from him, it was an extremely inspiring experience just seeing him and being in his presence. Before I left, I asked one of the people in his house if he was always deaf – I couldn't imagine his being able to become such a great Torah scholar and *tzaddik* without being able to hear any voices or sounds from the outside world.

I was told (to the best of my understanding at the time and the best of my memory now) the following: The Steipler was forced into the Russian army as a soldier in the field. Despite this situation, of course he was

extremely careful to eat only kosher food and observe all mitzvahs, down to the last detail and beyond. On one Shabbat winter day he was on guard duty outside. The day started off warm and he removed his heavy outer coat and extra warming garments for his neck and head. While he was occupied at his post, a Russian soldier came along and hung his articles of winter clothing on the branches of a tree. Then the weather turned extremely cold, and became colder each minute. He had ruled that it was not permitted to remove anything from a tree on Shabbat except in the event of a life-threatening situation. The Steipler was certainly more than willing to suffer the pain of the frost and determined that his life was not in danger. He reassessed this conclusion as time went on, and he did not touch his winter garb until after Shabbat. He survived, but unfortunately the cumulative effect of the cold that day damaged his hearing.

• *Eruvin 32b*

Eliyahu: Both a Prophet and a Torah Scholar

“Seven halachas were taught at the beginning of Shabbat in Sura in front of Rav Chisda. At the end of Shabbat, the same teacher said these same seven halachas in Pumbedita in front of Rabbah.”

Who could this mystery teacher possibly be? Sura and Pumpedita were cities in Bavel that were too far from each other to travel by foot on Shabbat! At first, our *gemara* proposes that the teacher must have been Eliyahu Hanavi – Elijah the Prophet – since no human could cover this distance by foot on Shabbat. And in the context of the *sugya*, this would prove that there is no prohibition of *techumim* above ten *tefachim* on Shabbat. However, another possibility is suggested by the *gemara*, one which would negate proof of the halacha under discussion. “Maybe it was Yosef ‘the demon’.” (From Rashi it seems this was the name of a person who did not observe Shabbat and therefore was able to travel by some means from Sura to Pumpedita on Shabbat.)

The commentaries ask how the *gemara* could have suggested that it was Eliyahu Hanavi. We learn elsewhere in Shas that we cannot rely on the word of a prophet to learn halacha, even to be reminded of a halacha l’Moshe m’Sinai.

To answer this question, we need to distinguish between something said by a prophet as a prophecy that was taught to him by Hashem, as opposed to his own halachic ruling that he arrived at based on Torah sources, wisdom and logic. Something said by a prophet as prophecy cannot be accepted as halacha since “The Torah is not in Heaven.” However, when any Torah scholar, even a prophet, teaches a halacha based on sources and Torah reasoning, it may be accepted. When our *gemara* suggested that the teacher in both cities was Eliyahu Hanavi, it meant that Eliyahu Hanavi was teaching these seven halachic rulings that he arrived at based on his Torah wisdom as a great scholar, and they were not rulings that he was relaying as prophetic teachings. (Maharitz Chiyut, Tosefot Yom Tov and others, one of whom also suggests that our *gemara* may be the source for the custom of singing “Eliyahu Hanavi, Eliyahu Hatishbi...Eliyahu Hagiladi” at the conclusion of Shabbat.)

• *Eruvin 43b*

NITZAVIM

Questions

1. What is the connection between the verse "atem nitzavim" and the curses in the previous *parsha*?
2. Who were the wood-choppers and water-carriers?
3. Why can Hashem never "swap" the Jewish People for another nation?
4. One who ignores the Torah's warnings "adds drunkenness to thirst." What does this mean?
5. What two cities were destroyed along with S'dom and Amorah?
6. "The hidden things are for Hashem, our G-d, and the revealed things are for us..." What does this mean?
7. According to Rashi, how will the day of the ingathering of the exiles be "great and difficult"?
8. Where is the Torah not to be found? Where is it to be found?
9. When and where did the Jewish People become culpable for each other's sins?
10. How do the earth and sky remind us to keep the mitzvahs?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 29:12 - The Jewish People asked, "Who can survive such curses?" Moshe responded, "You've done a lot to anger Hashem, and yet 'atem nitzavim'— you are still standing before Him."
2. 29:10 - Canaanites who joined the Jewish People under false pretenses.
3. 29:12 - Because Hashem swore to their ancestors that He would never do so.
4. 29:18 - He causes Hashem to reckon his unintentional sins alongside his intentional ones, punishing him for all.
5. 29:22 - Admah and Tsevoyim.
6. 29:28 - There is collective culpability only for "open" sins, but not for "hidden" ones.
7. 30: 3 - It will be as if Hashem needs to take each individual by the hand and lead him out of exile.
8. 30:12-15 - The Torah is not found in Heaven, nor is it across the ocean. Rather, it is "very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart."
9. 30:28 - When they crossed the Jordan and accepted the oath on Mount Eval and Mount Grizim.
10. 30:19 - The earth and heavenly bodies, although receiving neither reward nor punishment, always obey Hashem's will. How much more so should we, who stand to receive reward or punishment, obey Hashem.

Q & A

VAYELECH

Questions

1. Moshe said, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in..." How do we know this does not refer to physical inability?
2. Which of Moshe's statements to Yehoshua was later contradicted by Hashem's command?
3. Why does the Torah refer to Succot of the eighth year as though it occurred during the *shemita* year?
4. Why does the Torah command that babies be brought to the Torah reading?
5. What does it mean that Hashem "hides His face?"
6. What function does the song *Ha'azinu* serve?
7. Which verse promises that the Torah will never be totally forgotten?
8. What is the difference of opinion regarding the placing of the Torah scroll which Moshe gave the *levi'im*?
9. On the day of Moshe's death, why didn't Moshe gather the people by blowing trumpets as he normally would have?
10. Moshe said, "For I know that after my death you will act corruptly," but, in fact, this didn't occur until after Yehoshua's death. What does this teach us?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 31:2 - Because verse 34:7 says "His (Moshe's) eye never dimmed, and his (youthful) moisture never departed."
2. 31:7 - Moshe told Yehoshua to share his leadership with the Elders. Hashem later commanded Yehoshua to rule alone.
3. 31:10 - Because the laws of the seventh year still apply to the harvest.
4. 31:12 - To give reward to those who bring them.
5. 31:17 - He ignores their distress.
6. 31:21 - It warns what will befall the Jewish People if they abandon Torah.
7. 31:21 - "For (the Torah) will not be forgotten from the mouth of their offspring."
8. 31:26 - Whether it was placed outside but adjacent to the Ark, or inside next to the Tablets.
9. 31:28 - Blowing the trumpets expressed Moshe's dominion, and "there is no dominion on the day of death." (*Kohelet* 8)
10. 31:29 - That a person's student is as dear to him as himself. As long as Yehoshua was alive it was as though Moshe himself was alive.

WHAT'S IN A WORD

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Nitzavim-Vayelech & Rosh Hashana

The Strong Ones

As Moses passed the torch of leadership to his protégé and successor Joshua, he said to the younger padawan, *Chazak V'Ematz* – “Be strong and be strong” (Deut. 31:7, 31:23). After Moses’ passing, G-d Himself reiterated that messaging, using this expression four more times when speaking to Joshua (Josh. 1:6-18). Generations later, when King David gave a pep talk to his son and future successor Solomon, he too said, *Chazak V'Ematz* (I Chron. 22:13, 28:20). What is the deeper meaning of this seemingly redundant expression that uses two words for “strength” – *chozek* (*chizzuk*) and *ometz* (*imutz*)? What other words in Hebrew mean “strength” or “power,” and how do they differ from the words that opened our discussion?

Rabbi Avraham Bedersi HaPenini (a 13th century Spanish sage) and Rabbi Shlomo Aharon Wertheimer (1866-1935) both explain that *ometz* refers to an above-normal amount of “strength,” while *chozek* remains the standard term for “strength.” For example, if a person grew especially weak, but was then nursed back to health and was now “strengthened” to be as strong as a normal person, the word *chozek* is appropriate. In such a case, the term *ometz* cannot be applied because the “strength” in question is no more than that which a regular person possesses.

The Vilna Gaon (to Josh. 1:7, Prov. 24:5) explains that *chozek* refers to outer “physical strength,” while *ometz* denotes strength “in the heart.” This explanation is echoed by the Malbim in his work *Yair Ohr* on synonyms in the Hebrew language. But, elsewhere, the Malbim (to Isa. 28:2) seems to take a different approach. There he explains that *chozek* refers to a sort of temporary strength. With time, such strength tends to atrophy, slowly, but surely, losing its potency. On the other hand, *ometz* refers to a more resilient form of strength that

constantly recharges itself and never weakens or falters.

In his work *HaRechasim LeVikah* (Gen. 25:23), Rabbi Yehuda Leib Shapira-Frankfurter (1743-1826) departs from this model and speaks about three types of “strength.” In his assessment, *gevurah* refers to “physical strength,” *ometz* refers to the “strength in one’s heart” (i.e. one’s spiritual resolve), and *chozek* refers to the “strength of will” (i.e. courage). To illustrate the difference between the latter two he explains that *chozek* is necessary for entering a battle or any dangerous situation without being scared, while *ometz* is the courage to remain in battle and not run away when things heat up.

The Talmud (*Berachos* 32b) explains that when G-d told Joshua *Chazak V'Ematz* through Moshe He meant to encourage Joshua in two specific areas. With the word *chazak* He intended to motivate Joshua to strengthen himself in Torah study, while with the word *ematz* He meant to encourage Joshua in the performance of good deeds. How does this fit with what we have learned? Rabbi Wertheimer explains that the greater a Torah Scholar one becomes, the more effort he must exert into being able to perform good deeds. Such a person must harness super-human efforts to fortify his will, to make sure he continues performing good deeds and does not simply lose himself in the more theoretical world of study. In light of the above, the strength of will required to do this is most appropriately termed *ometz*.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) traces the word *ometz* to the two-letter root MEM-TZADI, which means “sucking” or “squeezing.” Other derivatives of this root include *mitz* (“juice”) and *metzitzah* (“sucking”). *Ometz* relates back to this root’s core meaning because it refers to a person

mustering all his strength and “squeezing” out every last ounce of energy. Red horses are described as *amutzim* (Zech. 6:3) because they exert so much effort that their blood rises to the surface of their skin as if it was “squeezed out,” and this causes even their hairs to be colored red.

Rabbi Dr. Asher Weiser (editor of the Mossad HaRav Kook edition of Ibn Ezra’s commentary to the Pentateuch) argues that the word *ometz* is related to the similar word *otzem* (“strength”). He establishes this connection by noting that the ALEPH of *ometz* is interchangeable with the AYIN of *otzem*, and the other two consonants switch places by way of metathesis.

How does *otzem* mean “strength”? Rabbi Yehuda Leib Edel (1760-1828) explains that *otzem/etzem* refers to growth in the sense of added quantity (see Ex. 1:8, 1:20, Deut. 7:1, Joel 2:2, Ps. 35:18). In other words, *otzem* refers to “strength through numbers.” From that import, the word expanded to refer also to “inherent strength,” i.e. added *quality*, not just *quantity*. Alternatively, he explains that *otzem* in the sense of “strength” is borrowed from the word *etzem* (“bone”) because the bone is physically the strongest component of one’s anatomy.

Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (1935-2017) notices a common theme among all words that contain the two-letter string AYIN-TZADI. The word *eitz* denotes a “tree,” which contains within itself everything that will be created from it. In fact, this relates to the self-referential word *etzem* (“self”), which contains the sum total of one’s potential. We encounter this idea again in the word *atzuv* (“sad”), which describes a person who retreats into himself and fails to expand outwards; and the same is true of the *atzel/atzlan* (“lazy” or “indolent” person) who keeps all his potential bottled up inside of him and does not bother to act on it. *Otzer* (“stop”) similarly refers to holding something back from further expanding, thus keeping its potential for growth locked up inside. The Hebrew word for “advice” (*eitzah/yoetz*) similarly uses this two-letter combination because an honest advisor can only offer his counsel to the extent that he grasps the entirety of the situation – the *etzem* of what is being considered. In line with this, Rabbi Shapiro explains that *otzem* refers to one’s potential strength that is pent-up within him but has not yet been outwardly expressed. (Rabbi

Pappenheim offers a similar exposition on the biliteral root AYIN-TZADI.)

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) writes that a tree is called *eitz* because of its “hard” or “strong” trunk. He further writes that *atzuv* is related to *eitz* in the sense of “wood” because it is a “dry” emotional state in which one is bereft of life and happiness. In a fascinating twist, Rabbi Marcus connects the words *otzem* and *eitz* to *oz* – all of which mean “strong/hard” – by noting the interchangeable nature of TZADI and ZAYIN.

Rabbi Wertheimer compares the word *oz/izuz* in the sense of “strong” to the word *az*, which also means “strong” or “bold.” He explains that the AYIN-ZAYIN combination refers to the strength of one’s spirit/resolve in that he cannot be easily dissuaded or deterred by others. A person’s *oz* is so palpable that it can be physically reflected in his face (see Ecc. 8:1), and it is therefore poetically called a “garment” in which a person dresses (see Prov. 31:24).

When Moses sent spies to scout out the Holy Land before the Jewish People’s attempt at conquest, he asked them to examine whether the Canaanites were “strong (*chazak*) or weak” (Num. 13:18). But, when the spies returned, they said that the Canaanites were “strong” (Num. 13:28) using a different word – *az*. Rabbi Wertheimer accounts for this word switch by explaining that the spies were originally charged with determining whether or not the Canaanites were *physically* strong (*chazak*). Instead of doing this, they decided to examine the Canaanites’ psychological resolve, concluding that they were so strong-willed and motivated to fight that their determination could be seen on their faces (*az/oz*).

Interestingly, Rabbi Naftali Hertz (Wessely) Weisel (1725-1805) writes that the primary meaning of *oz* always refers to Divine supernatural powers/abilities (in contrast to *gevurah*, which can also refer to powers/abilities within the normal course of nature). Rabbi Yehuda Edel cites Rabbi Weisel, and adds that this is what it means when it says, “G-d gives *oz* to His nation” (Ps. 28:11). In other words, He elevates the Jewish People above the rules of nature to the realm of the supernatural. According to this, it is only in a borrowed sense that *oz* can refer to anything that is “strong” or “powerful.”

When the Psalmist exhorts the reader to “Give *oz* to G-d” (Ps. 68:35), this does not literally mean that a mere mortal can actually strengthen G-d. Rather, it means that when the Jewish People follow G-d’s will, then He showers them with more abundance, *as if* they had given Him more energy (see *Eichah Rabbah* 1:33). Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (1873-1936) offers a powerful insight related to this idea. Obviously, we cannot *actually* power G-d, and yet He gives us the opportunity to feel like we are doing so in order to teach us a lesson. When you do a favor for somebody, you should allow him to do something else for you in return so that the beneficiary of your favor does not feel forever indebted to you for doing him that favor. In the same way, when G-d does us the ultimate favor of giving life and sustaining us, He also gives us a chance to feel like we can do something for Him in return by following the Torah and giving Him *oz*.

The word *takif* is the standard Aramaic translation for *chozek* and *oz* in the Targumim. It is also a Hebrew word that appears in the Bible (see Est. 9:29, 10:2, Ecc. 4:12, Dan. 4:27). Rabbi Pappenheim traces the word *takif* to the two-letter root KUF-PEH, which means “complete circle.” Other words derived from this root include *hakafah/haikef* (“circumference,” “encircle”) and *kafah/kafui* (“frozen,” because first the outer perimeter surrounding the liquid freezes first and only afterwards does the rest of it freeze over). Interestingly, Rabbi Pappenheim relates the word *kof* (“monkey”) to this two-letter root, but

admits that he does not know how to explain the connection.

Rabbi Pappenheim further explains that *chozek* refers to strength in one’s ability to *withstand being overpowered* by another, while *tokef* refers to strength in the sense of one’s ability to *actually overpower* others.

Rabbi Pappenheim’s etymology of the word *takif* is reminiscent of his explanation of the word *chayil* (“strength”), which he similarly traces to the two-letter root CHET-LAMMED (“circular motion”). Accordingly, *tokef/takif* refers to a level of strength/potency whereby one can totally surround and overpower another.

Rabbi Edel explains that when we describe God as *takif*, this invokes His all-encompassing (i.e. all-around) power/sovereignty. The Aramaic expression *matkif* commonly found in the Talmud refers to one sage “attacking” or “overpowering” another sage’s position with a persuasive argument.

Rabbi Shlomo of Urbino (a late 15th century Italian scholar) writes in *Ohel Moed* (his lexicon of synonyms) that there are 36 words in Biblical Hebrew for “strength” or “power”! Although Yonah Wilheimer (1830-1913) – the Viennese publisher of the 1881 edition of *Ohel Moed* – notes that this is somewhat of an exaggeration, it remains true that we have only scratched the surface of this topic...

For questions, comments, or to propose ideas for a future article, please contact the author at rcklein@ohr.edu

We wish all of Ohrnet Magazine’s readers and friends “*Ketiva v’chTIMA tova*” — May you be written and sealed in the book of life and have a good and sweet new year!

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BLESSING THIRTEEN: “FACING” REALITY

“Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who crowns Israel with splendor.”

Our Sages explain that the “splendor” mentioned in this blessing refers to the *Tefillin Shel Rosh* – Tefillin that are worn on the head. In a certain sense, donning the *Tefillin Shel Rosh* in the morning is the final moment in our preparations for beginning our day. We have clothed ourselves physically and now we “clothe” ourselves spiritually. The Tefillin sit on the “crown” of the head and, as taught by the Rabbis, they open up a conduit between us and Hashem, one that gives us the opportunity to connect to Him in a significantly enhanced manner. Tefillin are a means of connecting our intellectual selves to the spiritual dimensions. Anecdotally, in 2002 an article appeared in the Chinese Journal of Medicine mentioning Tefillin. The writer explained that the spot where the Tefillin sit on the cranium is precisely the same location where acupuncture needles are inserted in order to increase spirituality and to purify thoughts.

The head is the seat of the intellect, and Judaism teaches that it is not by chance that the head is also the highest part of the body. The Maharal of Prague explains that humans, unlike animals, are created to walk in an upright position because it is a reflection of our spiritual potential. We are the only creation that has the ability to be both physical and spiritual. Our feet represent the more physical part of us, firmly placed on the ground. The head represents the spiritual side of us, pointing upwards towards the spiritual realms.

Interestingly enough, it is the face that reflects our emotions. Physiognomy – the means of assessing the character of a person by studying their facial features – has always been around. Since the beginning of time it has been used to judge the emotional state of a person and to make broad judgments about a person’s character. It was extremely popular among the ancient Greeks, and during the Middle Ages, and in the eighteenth century it became the biggest fad of

its era. In fact, it is still studied today. It should come as no surprise that Judaism also teaches that the face is the most expressive part of the body. It reveals our thoughts and feelings – even when, sometimes, we wish that it wouldn’t! In Hebrew the word for face is “*panim*”. The word *panim* comes from the word “*pnim*” – inner. Revealingly, the word “*panim*” is plural, because the face is the meeting point between the two worlds that we inhabit simultaneously: our inner persona and our outer one. Our faces reveal our inner identity to the outside.

The Rabbis teach that the face is the portal to the soul. That is why the face of a truly spiritual person will reflect their innate sense of Divine connection. The saintly Chofetz Chaim used to ask why people polish their gold and silver and jewelry. He pointed out that they were not worth any more afterwards than they were before they were polished. So why bother? And he would answer that the polish reveals the true splendor of the article. Without polishing them it is impossible to appreciate their true beauty.

So, too, a person who spends their entire life “polishing” their soul and perfecting their character will be readily identifiable to the spiritual connoisseurs of this world. This is why truly spiritual people often have an otherworldly glow to their faces. What we are seeing is their *pnimiut* – their inner essence.

Now we have reached the point in our journey through the Morning Blessings that our connection to G-d is so real and palpable that it is inescapable. And at this momentous occurrence we recite the blessing, “Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who crowns Israel with splendor”. Because there really is nothing more glorious – more *splendorous* – than knowing that our relationship with G-d can both transcend the physical and affect the physical at the same time.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Faith in Fortune

As a prelude to the final song (*Haazinu*), Moshe foretells of the nation's defection from Torah, and its consequences. He explains the effect the song may have on these occurrences. When the nation will "eat, be satisfied and grow fat" and turn to other gods and serve them — then, after the *tzarot* (troubles) will come to pass, the song of *Haazinu* will testify against them as a witness.

Notice the factors that bring about defection — *the nation will eat, be satisfied and grow fat*. The case of defection is the luxury that comes from the abundance of everything good. The spiritual and moral regimen by which the Torah sanctifies physical corporeality is not compatible with lush, self-indulgent sensuality.

This is the rock on which Israel's faithfulness, and hence also its happiness, have been wrecked several times. This is the ultimate task that Israel must fulfill: To be faithful to G-d and to His Torah, *even* in the midst of affluence and good fortune. This is a vision that will be realized only when we are ripe for our final redemption. Then, prosperity will come to us without endangering our spiritual health.

However, until such time, the message of the song of *Haazinu* will play a significant role in maintaining the focus necessary to get our spiritual bearings. As a result of its defection, Israel will be plagued by many sufferings — *tzarot*, literally, that which *confines and constricts*. Their effect will be to constrict insatiable desire and restore a person (or nation) unto himself. The people will then be ripe to hear the message of the *shirah*: Instead of blaming G-d for its fate, the people will understand that its fate is the consequence of its waywardness.

This understanding will penetrate in a process described in the Torah: *You will bring [these thoughts] to your heart* (Devarim 30:1). It is not enough to perceive facts and events on the outside. These must be "brought back" to the inner mind to reflect upon them and draw the appropriate conclusions. The blessing and curses that will befall the Jewish People, foretold thousands of years in advance, will be taken to heart — brought back to the inner mind to deliberate and reflect on them, leading to a full return to G-d and His Torah.

- Sources: Commentary, Devarim 31:21-22, 30:1

STRATEGIC TESHUVA

Creative Ways to Help Yourself Do the “Right Thing”

by Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb

We all have some bad *midot* (character traits) and some bad habits. When we consider doing *teshuva* for them, we are apt to think as follows: "I am really out of control. Why do I do those terrible things? I should be stronger! How can I increase my self-control so that I can overcome those strains, temptations, etc.?"

That sort of thinking can be useful. But it is not the only helpful approach. Another technique is this: "When do I fail like this? What is there in the environment? What else has happened that day? Under which *specific circumstances* do I fail? And, what can I do to *change those circumstances*?" The technique of changing the circumstances in which we generally fail is what I call "Strategic Teshuva."

Midot and habits generally have "triggers." For example, certain people provoke an angry, aggressive response. Other people may not pose a problem. Or the "trigger" might be specific activities, such as driving in heavy traffic ("road rage"), caring for fighting siblings, waiting in line at the bus terminal, filling out government forms, and so on.

The same is true for other temptations. Laziness comes naturally when one is surrounded by computer games, bad literature, inviting beaches and - most important - other lazy people. (A boy from Los Angeles told me it took him six years to get his bachelor's degree because certain courses interfered with his beach schedule!) Illicit pleasures attract most strongly when they are readily available and when others in the neighborhood indulge.

Our first responsibility is for our *actions*. When the "triggers" of the bad habits and *midos* occur, it is extremely difficult to stop the habits and *midot* from acting. One solution is to try to *avoid the triggers*. Change the environment. Move your residence if you can. If you can't, spend as much time

in another environment which will provide respite from the temptation. (The most effective positive environment is doing *mitzvot* with other people: Learn in a *beit midrash*, visit the hospital *with others*, plan a *chesed* project *with others*, teach Torah in a *school*, etc.) Certain activities cause tension which triggers anger. If you cannot avoid those activities, alternate with relaxing activities.

A second solution is to *add* something to the environment which will make it easier to do the right thing. If you have trouble getting up for *davening* in shul, find a study partner for ten minutes before *davening*. Then, when the alarm rings and you reach over to push the snooze button, you will think: "But what if my study partner comes and I'm not there?! How embarrassing!" – and you will get up!

In many cases you can make a contract with yourself: If I succeed in overcoming the temptation (enough times) then I will allow myself something I very much enjoy. This is what psychologists call a "behavior contract." Thus I have a personal incentive to do the right thing. For example: "If I get through the meeting without getting angry, I will allow myself to buy that picture for the wall/go to that restaurant/etc."

The key is to control the environment by avoiding some things and creatively adding others so that it will be easier to do the right thing.

Now, some people think that this cannot be right. This means that we are only running away from our problems, not solving them! The problem is precisely this: I am not able to *overcome* those temptations. How do I solve that problem? By *avoiding* them, or by adding extra incentives?

There are two answers. First, who says that the only problem is to overcome the desire? On the contrary:

Our first responsibility is for our *actions*. Suppose someone cannot control a desire to steal from Macy's. If he shops only in Bloomingdale's, or he rewards himself for not stealing from Macy's, he has not overcome the desire - but at least he is not stealing!

Second, often we can only overcome the desire if we have a respite from the wrong actions. As long as the bad habits and *midot* are active it is very difficult to gain control.

Therefore, avoiding the triggers and adding payoffs may be the only way to gain control. Yes, the *ultimate* goal is to become immune to the temptations. But this may require two stages: First avoiding the triggers and adding payoffs; and then developing the psychological strength to resist. Trying to do without the first stage may make the second stage impossible.

Think of addictions. You cannot simply tell the addict: "Stop using that stuff!" He can't stop, and all the therapy in the world will not help *while he is still on the drug*. But if he enters a sanitarium where the drug is unavailable, then the therapy can help him become immune to the temptation to use drugs.

Strategic *teshuva* may thus be the necessary first step to complete *teshuva*. But it is more than that. If that is all that you can manage at the moment, then strategic *teshuva* is enough to gain *kappara* (atonement) Hashem does not ask more of us than we can do. If you avoid the triggers, add incentives and start to work on immunity, then in the meantime you have *kappara* for all the past mistakes even before you achieve immunity. Isn't that worth it?

PARSHA OVERVIEW

Nitzavim

On the last day of his life, Moshe gathers together all the people, young and old, lowly and exalted, men and women in a final initiation. The covenant includes not only those who are present, but even those generations not yet born. Moshe admonishes the people again to be extremely vigilant against idol worship, because in spite of having witnessed the abominations of Egypt, there will always be the temptation to experiment with foreign philosophies as a pretext for immorality.

Moshe describes the desolation of the Land of Israel which will be a result of the failure to heed Hashem's mitzvahs. Both their descendants and foreigners alike will remark on the singular desolation of the Land and its apparent inability to be sown or to produce crops. The conclusion will be apparent to all – the Jewish People have forsaken the One who protects them, in favor of idols which can do nothing. Moshe promises, however, that the people will eventually repent after both the blessings and the curses have been fulfilled. However assimilated they will have become among the nations, eventually G-d will bring them back to Eretz Yisrael.

Moshe tells the people to remember that the Torah is not a remote impossibility. Rather, its fulfillment is within the grasp of every Jew. The Torah portion dramatically concludes with Moshe's comparing the Jewish People's choice to follow the Torah to a choice between life and death. Moshe exhorts the people to choose life.

Vayelech

On this, the last day of his life, Moshe goes from tent to tent throughout the camp, bidding farewell to his beloved people, encouraging them to keep the faith. Moshe tells them that whether he is among them or not, Hashem is with them, and will vanquish their enemies. Then he summons Yehoshua, and in front of all the people, exhorts him to be strong and courageous as the leader of the Jewish People. In this manner, he strengthens Yehoshua's status as the new leader.

Moshe teaches them the mitzvah of *Hakhel*. Every seven years, on the first day of the intermediate days of Succot, the entire nation, including small children, is to gather together at the Temple to hear the King read from the Book of Devarim. The sections that he reads deal with faithfulness to G-d, the Covenant, and reward and punishment. G-d tells Moshe that his end is near, and he should therefore summon Yehoshua to stand with him in the *Mishkan*, where G-d will teach Yehoshua. G-d then tells Moshe and Yehoshua that after entering the Land, the people will be unfaithful to Him, and begin to worship other gods. G-d will then completely hide his face, so that it will seem that the Jewish People are at the mercy of fate, and that they will be hunted by all. G-d instructs Moshe and Yehoshua to write down a song – *Ha'azinu* – which will serve as a witness against the Jewish People when they sin. Moshe records the song in writing and teaches it to Bnei Yisrael. Moshe completes his transcription of the Torah, and instructs the *Levi'im* to place it to the side of the *Aron* (Holy Ark), so that no one will ever write a new Torah scroll that is different from the original – for there will always be a reference copy.

*Ohr Somayach announces a new
booklet Harmony of a Nation –
Overcoming Baseless Hatred by*

Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

https://ohr.edu/Sinat_Chinam.pdf

The students, alumni, staff and events of Ohr Somayach

by Rabbi Shlomo Simon

Rabbi Michael Rovinsky
Born: Dallas, Texas
St. Louis, Missouri
Smicha: Kol Yaakov Yeshiva and Ner Yisroel Yeshiva
Johns Hopkins University, MBA
Licensed Clinical Therapist
Masters Degree in Education

NCSY (National Council of Synagogue Youth), a *kiruv* project of the OU, has touched the lives of more than a quarter of a million Jewish high school youth over the last sixty years. It has sent many of its participants to *yeshivot* and seminaries in Israel. Over 20 years ago, encouraged by NCSY, Rabbi Nachy Brickman, a former NCSY Regional Director, established the Derech Program at Ohr Somayach. It still attracts many NCSY graduates.



In 1980, a young NCSYer from Dallas, Texas came to Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem. His name is Michael Rovinsky.

Michael's parents were and still are among the pillars of the Dallas Jewish Community. The family belonged to a Conservative synagogue. At the suggestion of a friend, they sent Michael to the local Orthodox Day School for elementary and junior high school. Because of Michael's positive experience there, he maintained a connection to some of his *rabbeim* and got involved in NCSY while in public high school.

Michael's father is a successful mechanical engineer with his own consulting company. The plan was that Michael would become an engineer and eventually take over the business. Hashem had other plans.

While his parents approved of Michael's choice of Ohr Somayach as a place to spend the gap year after high school, they thought it would be just that – one year. But after exposure to Rabbis Yaakov Bradpiece, Eli Merl, Moshe Pindrus and others, Michael decided that one year was not enough. While tutoring weaker students, he also discovered that he had a love of teaching, a love that continues until today. He prevailed on his parents to let him stay for another year. You can probably guess what happened after

that second year.

Michael returned to the States and went to Yeshivat Kol Yaakov in Monsey, NY for the next two years and then to Ner Yisroel Yeshiva in Baltimore. He got married and stayed for another six years in their Kollel.

During his second or third year in Kollel, he got a call from a local modern Jewish high school. There was a class of the weakest, least interested, and almost uneducable kids, whose *rebbe* had quit in the middle of the term. They asked if he was interested in taking it over. He was. During his *bein hasedarim* at the Kollel, he taught the toughest youth in the school. He was good at it. And it reawakened his love of teaching. Instead of manipulating and restructuring

the physical world as an engineer, he wanted to dedicate his life to helping other Jews discover their inner spirit and to channel it towards the true purpose of their creation.

In 1990, his seventh grade *rebbe* from day school in Dallas. Rabbi David Leibtag, called him and asked if he would be interested in moving back to his hometown to become the *limudei kodesh menahel* and a *rebbe* in the day school there. He was. By this time Michael had acquired some secular degrees, including an MBA from Johns Hopkins University, and he had become a *mohel* after training with Rabbi Moshe Rappaport of Baltimore. His training also included a stint in Jerusalem with the famous *mohel*, Rabbi Yosselle Weisberg, *zatzal*.

His parents were very happy that he was coming home with their grandchildren, and were very proud of his accomplishments.

Michael, who is quite outgoing, articulate and a very professional *mohel*, quickly developed a huge following in Dallas and his services as a *mohel* were in great demand. Surprisingly, his clientele included not only the wider Jewish community, but also many non-Jews, including medical professionals, who preferred him to less experienced urologists.

Before long he had become probably the busiest *mohel* in the United States. He has been invited all over the world to perform *milah*. He recently did one in Rome for a non-Jewish family and was also invited to travel to Ecuador and the United Arab Emirates. Hundreds of professional midwives and OBGYNs around the country recommend his services to their patients.

In 1993, Michael was offered the position of Executive Director of the Epstein Hebrew Academy in St. Louis and to be a fifth grade *rebbe*. Before he left; the Dallas Jewish Community extracted a promise from him to come back regularly to do *milah*. Today, Michael averages at least one day per week in Texas doing *brissim*, as well as going to other cities around the US for circumcisions and *brissim*. In fact, when I spoke to him recently, he was on the road where he was scheduled to be doing over 60 *brissim* and circumcisions over the next three days.

In addition to his incredibly busy schedule, he has become the “go to” person for those wishing to train as a *mohel*, due to the volume of babies his *talmidim* can be exposed to. He is also the Director of the Association for the Advancement of *Bris Milah*, an organization which strives to provide every Jewish child an opportunity for a *Bris Milah*.

His connection to NCSY is still strong. He has been the St. Louis City Director of NCSY for the last 20 years. He also runs the Jewish Student Union, the OU’s Jewish outreach programs in secular high schools in St. Louis, and sends many graduates to summer programs and *yeshivot* and seminaries in Israel.

How can one man juggle so many responsibilities without dropping any? As many of his admirers say, “He’s a cut above the rest.”

SPECIAL ROSH HASHANA Q & A

Question

1. Why do we blow the shofar during the month of Elul?
2. Where in the written Torah text does it tell us explicitly that the first day of Tisrei is Rosh Hashana?
3. We eat apples dipped in honey to symbolize a sweet year. Why do we choose apples above other sweet fruits?
4. What two blessings do we say before sounding the shofar?
5. Which Book of Tanach does the beginning of the Tashlich prayer come from?
6. What three barren women were "remembered" by Hashem on Rosh Hashana?
7. A person's yearly allowance is fixed on Rosh Hashana, except for three types of expenses. What are they?
8. We refer to the binding of Isaac in our prayers when we say: "Answer us as You answered Abraham our father on Mount Moriah..." What was Abraham's prayer on Mount Moriah?
9. Why, even in Israel, are there two days of Rosh Hashana, whereas other festivals in Israel are celebrated for only one day?
10. What halacha applies to the shehechyanu blessing on the second night of Rosh Hashana which does not apply on the second night of any other holiday?

Answers

1. After the sin of the golden calf, Moshe went up to Mount Sinai to receive the second set of Tablets on Rosh Chodesh Elul. On that day, the Jewish People sounded the shofar to remind themselves to stray no more after idol worship. Also, the sound of the shofar strikes awe into our hearts and inspires us to return to the ways of Torah. (*Mishna Berura and Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 581*)
2. Nowhere. The Torah calls it "a day of shofar blowing." (This is one of many examples showing how our observance depends on the continuous oral tradition dating back to Mount Sinai.) (*Bamidbar 29:1*)
3. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words: "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed..." (*Bereishis 27:27*). The Talmud identifies this "field" as an apple orchard. (*Ta'anis 29b, Biyur Hagra*)
4. "Blessed are You... who has commanded us to hear the sound of the shofar," and the shehechyanu blessing. (*Orach Chaim 581:2*)
5. The Book of Micha (7:18-20).
6. Sara, Rachel and Chana. On Rosh Hashana it was decreed that these barren women would bear children. (*Tractate Rosh Hashana 10b*)
7. Expenses for Shabbos, Yom Tov, and the cost of one's children's Torah education. (*Ba'er Hetaiv Orach Chaim 242:1*)
8. He prayed that Mount Moriah should remain a place of prayer for all future generations (*Onkelos 22:14*). Also, he prayed that his sacrifice of the ram should be considered as though he had actually sacrificed Isaac. (*Rashi 22:13*)
9. Before our current exile, we did not have a fixed calendar as we do today. Rather, the Supreme Torah Court in Jerusalem determined our calendar on a month to month basis. They did this on the first day of every month, based on witnesses testifying that they had seen the new moon. Therefore, the people outside Israel had insufficient time to find out the exact date in time for the festivals. The "two-day festival" arose to correct this situation. In Israel, however, the people lived close enough to Jerusalem to find out the exact date of all the festivals except Rosh Hashana. Since Rosh Hashana occurs on the first day of the month, even those living in Jerusalem sometimes needed to observe it for two days, if the witnesses failed to arrive.
10. On the second night of Rosh Hashana it is customary to wear a new garment or to have a new fruit on the table when saying the shehechyanu blessing. Thus, the shehechyanu blessing applies not only to the holiday, but to the new garment or new fruit as well. (This is done in order to accommodate the minority of halachic authorities who rule that no shehechyanu blessing be said on the second night of Rosh Hashana.) (*Taz 600:2*)