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HAAZINU-YOM KIPPUR 5787

The Ultimate Contact

RABBI NAFTALI REICH (Torah.org)

The Ultimate Contact Never give up hope. No matter how bleak your plight may seem, do not allow yourself to surrender to despair. This is what we are told. This is what we tell others. This is what we believe. Hope springs eternal in the human heart.

In this week's Torah reading, however, we find an altogether different perspective. On the last day of his life, Moshe addresses an evocative poem replete with metaphors and allusions to the Jewish people. With broad strokes, he presents a sweeping view of the past and a searing vision of the future. When will Hashem bring an end to the suffering of His people? He tells them. When the power of their enemies spreads uncontrollably and no one can withstand the onslaught.

What does this mean? The Talmud provides the answer. It is a reference to the Messianic era. Moshe is prophesying that the Messiah will come when then Jewish people abandon all hope of redemption, when they despair of salvation.

The commentators are mystified. Why is despair a prerequisite for redemption? Yearning for the arrival of the Messiah is one of the central tenets of Judaism. If so, why does the Talmud contend that this yearning must be forgotten before the Messiah can come?

The commentators explain that the yearning for the ultimate redemption must indeed remain strong and vital among the Jewish people without any interruption. The Talmud, however, is addressing a different brand of hope. What is our first reaction when we face an anti-Semitic crisis? Do we turn toward Hashem and plead with Him to save us? Or do we consider other avenues? Do we mobilize our military forces, if we have any? Do we bring all our political and diplomatic influence to bear? Do flex our financial muscles? Do we call upon the press and the media to help us?

This then is the hopelessness that will hasten our redemption. First, we must recognize the utter futility of self-reliance. We must despair of solving our problems on our own. Only then will we turn to Hashem with absolute trust and faith in Him as the sole Source of salvation. Only then will we deserve to be redeemed.

A great sage was sitting in his room, immersed in a pile of holy books. Just then a distraught woman burst through the door and planted herself in front of him.

"You must help me!" she wailed as tears ran down her cheeks. "My husband is desperately ill."

"Come back tomorrow," said the sage.

"Tomorrow?" she shrieked. "I can't wait until tomorrow. He may be dead by tomorrow. I need your help now!"

"If you insist," said the sage. He closed his eyes and pursed his lips. After two minutes of silence, he opened his eyes. The woman looked at him with breathless expectation.

"I'm very sorry," he said. "I can do nothing for your husband."

The woman went deathly pale. She clutched her head and screamed, "Lord in Heaven! Help me! I am lost. Even the holy sage cannot help me. Only You can save my husband. Please! I beg of you!"

Then she collapsed into a chair, her body wracked by wrenching sobs.

"Go home in peace, my child," said the sage. "Your prayers will be answered. As long as you placed your trust in me, there was no hope. But the hopelessness in your heart led you to our Father in Heaven. He is the only One who can give you what you need."

In our own lives, as we strive for financial and professional achievement, how often do we think to ourselves that the key to success lies in contacts, marketing or other stratagems? But that is not really true. No matter how hard we work or plan or scheme, Hashem can wipe it all away with a flick of His figurative wrist. So what are we supposed to do? Of course, we need to make our best efforts, to go after the contacts and the marketing and whatever else seems to be indicated. But we must always keep in mind that Hashem controls the world, and if we're looking for contacts, He is undoubtedly the Ultimate Contact.

What Will They Remember?

KATIA BOLOTIN (Aish.com)

Here's an exercise to stimulate your imagination. Think about what your loved ones will remember about you. Could it be a story or a piece of good advice? Maybe a time when you taught them a meaningful lesson? Perhaps a time when you reprimanded them? Which of your actions will have made a lasting impression?

On the last day of his life, Moshe recited a heartfelt, poetic song to the entire nation. But this was not a song in the sense that we think of a song today. Moshe's song, Haazinu (meaning "listen" in Hebrew), was composed in a state of Divine inspiration. Its prophetic words emphasized the collective mission of the Jewish People—past, present, and future. Moshe's song corresponded to a significant transition for the Jewish People—the change of leadership and entrance into the Land of Israel. As the next generation moved onward to new, uncharted experiences, what final words from Moshe would they remember? How does wisdom endure?

These are the same questions we must ask ourselves today. How is a message of lasting relevance best transmitted? We pass on timeless values through example. Striving to live by what we believe in doesn't imply perfected belief. Questions fuel and strengthen us to delve deeper. Striving to live up to our ideals models continual spiritual growth.

Why and how have the ideals of Moshe remained relevant throughout the generations? The Jewish People have always been taught to revere and consult their elders for guidance. The Torah states: "Ask you father and he will tell you, your elders and they will relate to you."

The Hebrew word for elder is zakein, which is a contraction of the Hebrew phrase "zeh kanah—this one has acquired." As stated in the Talmud: "Rabbi Yosi Hagelili says, 'An "elder" [zakein] means one who has acquired wisdom.'"

In a Torah community, there isn't a generation gap but rather a connecting bridge. Revering one's elders is an enduring Torah value that's central to Judaism. The Talmud states: "Whoever teaches his grandson Torah, it is as if he [the grandson] has received it from Har Sinai."

Respecting the older generations makes a tangible difference in being able to transmit values. These are not communicated through coercion or fear but by lovingly cultivating the bonds of a shared history and an ongoing mission. The Talmud teaches that even an elderly person who is not a scholar should be respected and honored because they have acquired so

much life experience. Each of our personal stories of overcoming difficulties and challenges can enrich others.

But sometimes, those we care about may disappoint us. You'll search for just the right words and they'll fall on the proverbial "deaf ears." We can learn from the example of Moshe to aim higher and keep speaking to the soul. Soulful communication transcends the physical body. The soul is attuned to deeper spiritual matters. The challenge is to reach the very core of the other person. Be patient and keep trying. A person's inner essence is their soul, which is always receptive and pure.

The final words of Moshe were a seventy-line poetic song about the nation's triumphs and difficulties. Its inspiring message resonates and speaks to us now.

Judaism's emphasis on passing our heritage on from generation to generation is expressed through daily thoughts and actions that can transform the mundane into the holy. Heaven can be brought down to Earth by integrating the Torah's teachings into our lives. Eventually, we'll become what we do repeatedly. Although it's said that actions speak louder than words, heartfelt words of guidance and instruction leave an enduring impression. What will yours be? That's the message you'll pass along and for which you will be remembered.

No Threats, Just Decisions

RABBI YISROEL CINER (Torah.org)

This Shabbos, which falls a few days before Yom Kippur, we read the parsha of Ha'azinu. Moshe, before his death, summons heavens and earth to serve as witnesses to the reproof that he will give Bnei Yisroel. "Listen, heavens, and I will speak! And let the earth hear the words of my mouth. [32:1]" Heavens and earth—you witnessed Bnei Yisroel's accepting the covenant and you will be there until the end of time to testify as to their fulfillment of that covenant.

"Listen, heavens, and I will speak! And let the earth hear the words of my mouth [32:1]:"

The Torah that I've given to you, Yisroel, is the very life-source of the world. It strengthens and gives stature to those who learn it. Hashem's acts are perfectly just. The righteous will receive every iota of their deserved reward, although they might have to wait to receive it until the next world. Even the wicked will receive full payment for any meriting act they performed. Your sins only harm yourselves, not Hashem—you generation that is perverse and crooked. Is this how you pay back Hashem!? A foolish and unwise nation forgets all that was done for them while ignoring the eventual repercussions of their actions. [~32;2-6 according to Rashi]

Look back, remember what happened to those who angered Hashem. Look to the future, realize that Hashem can bring you to the time of the Moshiach {Messiah} and the World to Come. When Hashem punished the nations, He didn't obliterate them because you, Yisroel, were destined to come from them. Because of you, Yaakov, His portion. You were faithful to Hashem in the desert, accepting His Kingdom and His Torah and you continued to demonstrate that trust, following Him faithfully in the wilderness. Hashem led you securely, and no person or force was able to battle you. [~32:7-12 according to Rashi]

The commentators explain that this reproof is very different from the ones we find elsewhere in the Torah. Elsewhere we are told that if we'll keep the Torah, we'll receive specific blessings and if we won't, then we'll receive specific curses.

Here we are being told something very different. Think. Contemplate. Weigh. Decide. No ultimatums. No threats. You think it through and decide what makes the most sense. What's the best thing for you to do. How will you gain the most...

Our parsha discusses our national past. Look at the heights that we had reached! Perhaps you'll think that once we fell from that level, we can never again attain it. Our parsha also discusses our future. The time of Moshiach awaits us with all of its grandeur! That is who we are. That is what truly defines us. Decide to take the steps to return there.

That's where we've been and where we are ultimately heading. Decide if we are going to speed up that process or slow it down. For or against. No threats—just decisions.

Yom Kippur too affords us a glimpse of this sojourn—a glimpse of where the world has been and where it's heading.

After the first day of creation, the Torah writes: "And it was evening, and it was morning, day one." Not the first day, but, rather, Day One. The Medrash teaches that this refers to Yom Kippur.

The Ohr Gedalyahu explains that at that point of creation, no 'beings' had yet been created. There was absolute Oneness. The Day of One. Once the angels, with the forces of ra {evil} were created on the second day, this Oneness no longer existed. There was now the illusion of events occurring without Hashem's direct intervention. The illusion that there might be more than One...

The world will return to this state at the time of the Moshiach. There will be absolute clarity and the whole world will recognize Hashem's sovereignty. "On that day His name will be One."

Those are the two bookends of man's journey. Absolute clarity on either end with a lot of confused meandering in the middle.

But Hashem granted us a day each year when we can get a glimpse of that Oneness. A glimpse of where we're heading. The numerical value of the Satan is 364. The year is comprised of 365 days. There is one day where he can't even present the illusion that he has power. That is what the Medrash was teaching when it said that Day One refers to Yom Kippur.

That day is designated for the annulment of ra {evil}. Hashem removes the external ra and we must remove our internal ra. It is the day of forgiveness and atonement.

Yom Kippur—where the world had been and where it's heading. Ha'azinu—where we've been and where we're heading.

Decisions...

Calculated Double Speak

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY (Torah.org)

Ha'azinu is the last song of the Torah. It details some wonderful attributes that paint a glorious picture of the relationship of G-d and His people. And it also admonishes the Jews for their lack of gratitude and wisdom in understanding their role in the creation.

Hashem discusses the folly of sin with the seeming redundant expression. "Is it to Hashem that you do this? Am naval, v'lo chacham! A nation unwise and vile! (32:6). It seems that there are two distinct problems with the rebellious people. They are called vile and foolish. Is the Torah waxing poetic, or can we garner more from the seeming repetitive words of admonishment?

The Dean of a prestigious Yeshiva gave his weekly shiur to a packed audience every Thursday. His words were calculated and the thoughts flowed in perfect succession with hundreds of students listening in concert. Hardly anyone dared to interrupt the lecture with a question or contradiction; rather they would wait until the class ended, when the Dean would answer each student with patience and clarity.

One morning, a new student entered the class and followed the brilliant dean's lecture until the crescendo of his analytical discourse. Then, as the final argument was about to be made, the student rudely interrupted with a point that made no sense whatsoever. The Rabbi, shaken from the interruption, motioned to the young man to hold his fire. The student refused, shouting as if he had discovered gold, while trying to knock the entire lecture off its foundation. All who were in attendance were upset by the totally irrelevant points that ruined the train of thought for the hundreds of students.

The other students who saw their Rabbi's frustration whispered to the neophyte that his question was frivolous and irrelevant as they tried to dissuade him from continuing his futile interruptions. But the young man did not stop. Finally the Rabbi himself left the lectern, smiled to the young man, then bent over and whispered something in his ear that quelled the burst of irrelevance.

After the lecture an older student took the new student aside and explained him that it was not right to interrupt the class and scores of serious scholars when he was not well versed in the topic. Then he showed him why he had no point and how his questions were an array of confusion. The young man realized his folly and was quite ashamed. "But I am not sure what the Rabbi meant when he whispered, 'You cannot pose a question like a shikerer (drunken) foreigner'. It sure quashed my rudeness, but I am baffled by the meaning of the comment."

A few moments passed and another student approached the neophyte. "The Rabbi would like to speak to you."

The young man entered the office and apologized for his brazen interruptions. But the Rabbi waved his hand. "I did not call you to chastise you. I just wanted to explain what I meant by a drunken foreigner. "When an American drunk says something in his stupor," the rabbi began, "we understand what he is saying, but he does not understand what he is saying. And when a sober

foreigner makes a comment, he understands what he is saying, but we don't understand what he is saying.

"But when a drunken foreigner makes a comment, neither he understands what he is saying nor do we understand what he is saying!"

Rabbi Yosef Shaul Nathanson commented on the aforementioned verse. "If the nation were wise and vile, perhaps we can reason with them. And if the nation were foolish but righteous, we could educate them. But when they are both unwise and vile, then it is almost a hopeless cause!

When listening to the Torah's admonitions we must realize that Hashem is not berating us with an harangue of verbal put-downs. Rather, each invalidating adjective is carefully calculated, referring to a different aspect of our erroneous ways. As we approach the days of Yom Kippur and are about to verbalize our confessions for myriad sins, take the time to analyze the different expressions and phraseology, as they represent the complex indifference we often to display toward Hashem's carefully worded admonitions. With a little inflection and reflection, we will merit the antidote to those words of admonition.

DO WE DREAM OF KILLER SHEEP?

AVROHOM YAAKOV

In Ha'azinu, Moshe warns: "I will send against them the teeth of cattle." (30:24)

Rashi, quoting the Sifri, makes a remarkable comment: "There was actually an incident where sheep bit people and killed them."

At first, this sounds almost comical. Lions killing people? Certainly. Bears? Of course. Sharks? No surprise. But sheep?

You can imagine the headline – "Local man survives bear attack, later killed by aggressive lamb."

Or the police report - "Suspect described as white, woolly, approximately three feet tall, answers to the name Shaun."

Why would the Torah choose such an absurd image?

The commentators explain that the point is not zoology but theology. The Torah is teaching that when Hashem's judgment is at work, the normal rules by which we evaluate the world can be turned upside down. The danger is not in the creature. The danger, or protection, comes from Hashem.

That is why the Midrash doesn't speak about lions. Everyone knows lions are dangerous. The novelty is the sheep. The very symbol of harmlessness becomes the instrument of punishment. As the Maharal explains, the lesson is that power does not reside in nature itself. Power resides in the Creator who operates through nature.

HUMANITY HAS ACHIEVED extraordinary things. We have artificial intelligence, space travel, genomic medicine, supercomputers, and instant communication across the globe. We understand the world better than any previous generation.

But every so often we discover that understanding is not the same as control.

Consider a company that spends millions of dollars on cybersecurity. It has consultants, firewalls, backup systems, and a dedicated IT department. Everything is protected.

Then the entire system crashes because one employee clicks on an email promising "Free muffins in the break room."

Billions of dollars of technology... defeated by a muffin.

Or think about our own lives. We carry phones more powerful than the computers that landed astronauts on the moon. Yet many of us become completely helpless when the Wi-Fi goes down for ten minutes.

The router becomes our sheep.

We tend to worry about the lions: the big threats, the major crises, the obvious dangers. Then life reminds us that sometimes it is the sheep, the tiny, overlooked thing, that brings our plans to a halt.

That is exactly Moshe's message.

The Torah is not discouraging science, planning, or human achievement. Judaism celebrates wisdom and human creativity. Rather, it is warning against the illusion that knowledge equals mastery.

We can study nature. We can harness nature. We can predict nature.

But we cannot ultimately control nature.

The same Hashem who established the laws of the world can remind us, whenever He chooses, that He is not bound by our expectations.

The sheep of the Sifrei is therefore not merely an odd story. It is a lesson in humility.

When things are going well, we should never become so confident that we forget Who runs the world.

We do what we must - we work, plan, build, innovate, and prepare. But at the same time we remember that our security comes not from our systems, our expertise, or our predictions alone.

As the saying goes, "Man plans, and G-d laughs."

Sometimes Hashem sends a lion, and everyone notices.

And sometimes, just to make sure we understand the message, He sends a sheep.

Could the People Have Stopped Moshe's Passing?

RABBI YOSSE IVE (Chabad.org)

When the time came for Moshe to end his earthly sojourn, the Torah set out his final instructions:

"The L-rd spoke to Moshe on that very day, saying: Ascend Mount Avarim [to] Mount Nebo ... and die on the mountain..." (32:48-9)

What do the words "on that very day" imply?

Rashi compares this verse with two previous cases where the same phrase is used.

The first is when the Torah (Bereshis 7:13) says that Noah entered the ark "on that very day." In that case, the people around Noah had vowed to forcibly stop him from entering the ark, and even hack it to pieces, so as to prevent the flood from occurring. Therefore, G-d instructed Noah to enter the ark "in the glare of full daylight," as if to challenge anyone to try to intervene.

The second occasion when the phrase "on that very day" is used is when the Israelites left Egypt (Shmot 12:51). Here too, many Egyptians swore they would prevent the Israelites from leaving through the use of weapons. In response, G-d had them leave "in the middle of the day," daring anyone to try and stand in their way.

Similarly, in our case, Rashi interprets "on that very day" to mean "the middle of the day." He explains that it intends to convey that Moshe was to end his life that day, whether the people liked it or not, for when the Israelites heard of Moshe's impending death, many of them declared that they would not let it happen.

They protested: "The man who brought us out of Egypt, divided the Red Sea for us, brought the manna down for us, made flocks of quails fly over to us, brought up the well for us, and gave us the Torah – we will not let him (go to his final resting place)!"

Thus, G-d instructed Moshe to ascend the mountain "in the middle of the day," making it clear that they had no power over what would happen.

WHILE RASHI'S EXPLANATION provides a reason for the words "on that very day," it also creates several difficulties. Most significantly, how could the Israelites imagine that they could prevent Moshe's death? G-d is the ultimate Giver of Life, and there is no way a human being can prevent another from passing away! While Noah's peers or the Egyptians opposed to the Exodus could have attempted to use force to achieve their goal, there was really nothing anyone could have done to prevent Moshe from dying if G-d were to take back his soul.

It is also difficult to understand what Rashi gains by telling us about the other two situations where the phrase "on this very day" is used. When he gives his explanation about Noah entering the ark, he does not delineate the other two occasions where this phrase is used. Why now, on its third appearance, does Rashi decide to elaborate so extensively?

THE REBBE EXPLAINED that the reason for the more detailed and complex commentary from Rashi is because Rashi is actually aware of the inherent problem posed by the text. While the words "on that very day" are clearly superfluous and suggest that G-d specifically intended that Moshe's passing would happen in the middle of the day – this explanation is highly problematic. In the two other cases – opponents of Noah and of the Exodus – we can assume that those trying to intervene were wicked people who had no problem opposing the will of G-d. By contrast, the Israelites at the time of Moshe's passing could be assumed to be righteous. Why would we think that they would so overtly seek to contravene the Almighty's plan?

Given that it is counterintuitive that the Israelites would have sought to oppose a clear Divine instruction, Rashi felt compelled to begin by sharing precedent for his understanding.

But how would the Israelites have thought it possible to prevent Moshe's death? Rashi doesn't spell it out, as a closer look at the Biblical text makes it obvious. Moshe is told to ascend the mountain and he was to breathe his last breath once he reached the place of his eventual burial. Moshe could

not die until he arrived at the designated spot. So, all the Israelites would have had to do to prevent (or at least delay) Moshe's death was to block his ascent up the mountain.

Nevertheless, this still begs the question: Why would the righteous Israelites even contemplate defying G-d?

RASHI EXPLAINS THAT THE Israelites felt great loyalty to Moshe for all he had done for them. They felt it was their duty not to abandon "The man who brought us out of Egypt, divided the Red Sea for us, brought the manna down for us, made flocks of quails fly over to us, brought up the well for us, and gave us the Torah." Judaism attaches great importance to the virtue of gratitude, so the Israelites felt justified in displaying their gratitude towards Moshe.

While gratitude is indeed an important virtue, it still seems hard to accept that any Israelite would imagine that this gives them the right to act in direct conflict with the expressed will of G-d. After all, had G-d not explicitly instructed Moshe that he was to ascend the mountain?

But that is precisely the point! Moshe alone was instructed to go up the mountain. By objecting, they were not going against any instruction that they had been given by G-d. Rashi hints at this when he cites, "G-d spoke to Moshe." It was Moshe who was told it was time for him to die; as far as the Israelites were concerned that was none of their business.

We have here an important lesson about the importance of gratitude, one of Judaism's core values. When people help us or show us kindness, showing appreciation should be our top priority. We should look around at all the people who continue to make important contributions to our lives, and ask ourselves: When was the last time I told them how much I appreciate all they do for me?

Adapted from Likutei Sichot, vol. 19, Parshat Ha'azinu II.

Yom Kippur

Who am I, really?

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN (JNS.org)

This guy comes up to the chazzan, the cantor, in synagogue and says, "How come every time I come to shul, you sing the same song? Like, every single time?"

"Which song is that?" asks the cantor.

"Kol Nidrei ...

So what is Yom Kippur? What does a Day of Atonement mean? Does it mean that we can come to synagogue and fast one day a year so we can fress and graze the other 364? And then come back next year to wipe the slate clean all over again?

I can't imagine too many intelligent people would buy that.

Yet there is something special about Yom Kippur, isn't there? We all know that it's special, don't we?

Some people say Yom Kippur is special because they meet up with old friends they haven't seen since last year.

Jokes aside, I must say that for me, personally, Yom Kippur is a very inspiring time. It is a day when all kinds of Jews materialize—a day when, somehow, our inner identity shines through, even if we aren't quite convinced about it ourselves.

I know many people feel guilty about coming to shul on this day when they don't necessarily make too many appearances year-round. But there is a good reason that we attend on Yom Kippur.

The Torah reading for Yom Kippur day describes it as "an everlasting statute ... to make atonement for the sins of Israel, once a year (Achat Bashanah)."

But the mystics, who always go beyond the simple interpretation to uncover hidden layers of depth and meaning in the Torah, explain that Achat Bashanah doesn't only mean "once a year." It also means "The One of the Year!"

Just as the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies in the Temple only this one day a year, so, too, does every one of us come face to face with our own Holy of Holies on this one day. It's a day when every Jew confronts his or her oneness. On this day of oneness, we penetrate through all the externals, all the barriers, all the iron curtains as we come face to face with our own genuine, inner identity.

On this day, we all find ourselves. The real me, the real you, the real Jew is revealed on Yom Kippur.

And that's why those who are not usually in synagogue all year do come on this most sacred day, because something touches the deepest core of a

Jew. He may not be able to identify it. She may not be able to articulate it. But there is something felt deep down in our gut, in our kishkes!

Even beyond our kishkes. Because you know what lies beyond a Jew's kishkes? The neshamah—the "soul." So even if I can't quite explain the phenomenon, I know something is happening, in my shul, in my community, in my people and in my heart. And so I come. I am here. Don't ask me why. Don't demand an explanation. But I'm here.

So this one day of the year reveals the oneness, the uniqueness of a Jew with G-d. It is the moment of truth that reaches deep into the crevices inside our very core and touches our nucleus, our irreducible minimum. Somehow, the neshama is awakened on Yom Kippur, and we encounter who we really and truly are.

So who are we really?

Let me share a powerful teaching from Maimonides, the great sage known as the Rambam, who lived more than 800 years ago. Listen to what the Rambam writes in his Laws of Repentance (so appropriate for the Day of Repentance), Chapter 3, Paragraph 4:

"How G-d judges us is not by quantity, by the number of our merits or demerits; but by quality, by the magnitude of these deeds. Sometimes, a single mitzvah can outweigh many inequities. Equally, a single misdeed may sometimes counterbalance many merits. And this calculation is according to the Infinite knowledge of the All-Knowing G-d. He and He alone is the Supreme Judge."

What is Maimonides saying? That you just never know. That someone who performs fewer mitzvahs in number may actually still be greater in value. For all we know, one single good deed may be as valuable as hundreds of good deeds combined! Who knows? Only G-d.

The bottom line is that we cannot judge the value of a mitzvah; therefore, we cannot judge people. No human being can judge another. Do we know the value and true worth of a single deed they may have done? No. Only G-d knows.

And that's why I don't want you to judge other people. But by the same token, I don't want you to judge yourself too harshly either.

Who are you? You may be a doctor, lawyer, accountant or businessperson. You may be a teacher, secretary, student, butcher, baker or candlestick maker. But at the end of the day, you are a Jew. And even if you didn't step into a shul since your bar or bat mitzvah, you're still a Jew.

My father was born in Poland. In 1939, when Germany attacked, its troops bombed the cities. People ran for cover in underground shelters and bunkers. My father told the story of how it once happened that a bomb landed right outside a particular bunker.

At that moment, he said, every single Jew cried out Shema Yisrael! In that bunker were rabbis and laymen, Chassidim and Bundists—socialists who didn't believe in G-d. My father confirmed that even atheists shouted Shema Yisrael with the same fervor as the religious Jews gathered there for protection.

As they say, there are "no atheists in the foxhole."

And it all comes out on Yom Kippur. May we all discover our inner selves and, please G-d, reveal and develop our genuine, true identity in this New Year.

Time Travel

RABBI NAFTALI SILBERBERG (Chabad.org)

Imagine you could go back in time... What would you do differently, now that you have the benefit of 20/20 hindsight and the added maturity and wisdom which comes with age and experience? There are so many things you would change that you probably wouldn't even know where to begin. Would you start with your teenage years when you dreadfully mistreated your parents, completely unappreciative of all they had done for you? Would you want to redo a job interview which you botched? Do you desperately wish you could have been kinder to your spouse, or perhaps would you want to have said "I love you" more often to a person who is no longer with us?

Unfortunately, life isn't so kind. The tape of life annoyingly continues to roll, no matter how awful the recording may be, and there is no rewind button which allows you to erase and rerecord the parts which today you are so ashamed of. The moment a statement leaves your mouth, the moment you perpetrate any act, it is permanently etched in your file. Yes, you can ask forgiveness from an individual whom you wronged, and you can certainly improve your behavior from hereon forward, causing others to forgive and

forget your prior lapses in judgment. But those awkward painful moments will forever be part of your life story...

All this is true with regards to our personal matters, business issues, and our interactions with others. It does not, however, apply to our relationship with G-d.

The Talmud teaches that "repentance which is motivated by fear (of divine retribution), transforms all past willful transgressions into mere erroneous oversights. Repentance which is prompted by a genuine love for G-d causes all previous sins to become merits!" This means that through proper repentance not only do we cause G-d to forgive and forget our sins, we actually have the ability to "go back in time" – not only to neutralize our past mistakes, but to transform them into positive deeds!

The secret behind this nature-defying stunt is the Jewish soul which we all possess. The soul – which is especially revealed on Yom Kippur – is intrinsically a "part of G-d," and thus shares G-d's timeless nature. Just as G-d transcends the limitations of time, so too the Jew – who through proper repentance is fully in tune with his soul – has the ability to go beyond the limitations of the physical body and can actually "repair" an event which happened long ago.

This Yom Kippur, be a part of a very special experience. After all, if someone offered you a ride on a time machine, wouldn't you jump at the opportunity?

WHERE IS LIFE'S "UNDO" FUNCTION?

RABBI YANKI TAUBER (Chabad.org)

Life, as we all know, is a series of blunders. We never, never ever, get it right the first time.

Is it supposed to be this way? Obviously not. Why not? Well, if something is a blunder, then, by definition, it's something that should not have happened. But never mind semantics — let's talk gut feeling. I trust my intuition more than any syllogism. Well, every time I begin to see another of my life's blunders developing, every filament in my gut screams: "Noooo! This should not be happening....!"

And yet, strip life of all its false starts, of all its wrong turns, missed opportunities, naive presumptions, fumbling first attempts and learned-it-the hard-way experiences, and what's left? Nothing worth writing home about, never mind going through all that trouble to live a life for.

Okay, then, let's say we put intuition and gut feeling aside and say that blunders are supposed to happen, as part of G-d's grand plan to make life worthwhile. But if that's the case, we're back in the bland and meaningless space of a pre-programmed life that's not worth going through all that trouble for. Besides, how could my blunders be things that G-d wanted all along to happen, if many, most, (all?) of them result from actions which G-d specifically told me He doesn't want to happen?

That's the crazy thing about blunders. Without them, there's nothing. Yet if there's one thing we can about them say with absolute conviction, it's that they're not supposed happen. How can something not supposed to be and supposed to be at the same time?

G-d knows, but He's not telling.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR LIVES

RABBI YITZCHAK BREITLOWITZ (Ohr.edu)

People sometimes view Yom Kippur as a day of sombre doom and gloom, full of long unintelligible praying, physical deprivations, and fears and anxieties about the future. Yet our Sages view Yom Kippur in quite a different light.

The Mishna in Masechet Ta'anit (26b) tells us that Yom Kippur was one of the two most joyous days of the Jewish year (the other being the 15th of Av, as explained there). Yom Kippur is a day of forgiveness, reconciliation and opportunity for a new beginning, unencumbered by the crushing deadweight of past failure. Yom Kippur is a wondrous gift of love from the Creator, the gift of a second chance. As such, despite the lengthy prayers and the physical discomfort of no food or drink, and our backs, knees and feet being sore from long hours of standing, one should cherish every moment "like the sweetness of honey" (an expression I heard from my revered Mashgiach Rav Dovid Kronglass, zatzal). For an all too brief 25-hour period we are with G-d, in Whose presence there is "strength and joy" (Chronicles I 16:27).

If a blind person were given one day in which to see, what would he do? How he would rush to savor the memory of color, of pattern, to notice the green of the grass, the colors of flowers, the smiles of his children. How he would hold on to everything he could see so he could imprint it on his mind

and soul and consciousness, even as the physical image fades away. This last hour of Yom Kippur, as we say the Ne'ilah prayer, is very much the same. We spend most of our lives only half-seeing. If not blind, then we are at least color-blind, missing so much of the essence. On Yom Kippur, when we really focus, we can begin to see. On this day the Shechina (Divine Presence) is particularly close and the gates of Heaven are open to our prayers. But toward the end of the day that time is ending, and we will go back to our regular life, our life of half-seeing. The prayer of Ne'ilah is shorter than the rest of the Yom Kippur prayers. There are no long "al chets". We are pressed for time and we are pushing to get those last few requests in. We are trying and striving to hold on to the special moments when G-d is closer to us than at any other time of the year, to remember them so we can continue to keep some of the holiness within us.

And teshuva can be earned in a moment if we do it right. The gemara in Avoda Zara (17a) relates the story of Elazar ben Dordaya who was a notoriously degenerate person. He was so degenerate that he traveled the world looking for prostitutes. Finally he heard of one he hadn't been with, far away. He made the trip, but she was so disgusted that he had spent so much effort to find her that she refused to be with him. This woke him up. In an instant he realized what he had become. In despair, he turned to the mountains and hills and asked them to pray for him. They answered him that they couldn't — they had to pray for themselves. Next he turned to the heaven and earth and asked them the same. Again he got the same answer. Next he turned to the sun and moon, and again was turned down. Finally he turned to the stars, and they, too, refused him. At last he cried out that the only one who could save him was himself. All of it was on his shoulders. With this realization he cried such a pitiful cry to G-d that his soul left his body. At that instant a voice from Heaven sounded, "Rabbi Elazar ben Dordaya has earned a share in the World-to-Come." He had been given rabbinic ordination posthumously. When the rabbis of the Talmud told this story they would cry with the realization that in an instant someone could ascend so high-to and acquire his share in the World-to-Come in one minute — and yet so many of us waste so much time. And so many years.

The great Reisher Rav, zatzal (Rabbi Aaron Levine who died in the Holocaust) explains this story further. What is the meaning of Elazar ben Dordaya's dialogue with the elements? What earned him his passage into the next world? He explains that the hills and mountains are often a reference to parents. When Elazar realized what he had become, his first impulse was to look for someone to blame. He called to his parents, as if to say, "It's not my fault. You raised me poorly and that's why I became what I became." But in his heart of hearts he knew the truth. Hearing the echo of his parents' response in his own heightened consciousness, he understood that whatever his parents may have to answer for is between them and G-d, but that he and all of us remain free actors responsible for the life we choose. Next, in his restless, frenetic efforts to find a scapegoat and an excuse, he turned to the heaven and earth, which are symbols of the environment. Perhaps his environment could be blamed — his friends, his society, the predominant culture to which he was exposed. He got the same answer. Next he turned to the sun and moon, which control the crops, and are symbols of economic circumstance. A person might be led to sin because of poverty, or conversely the pressures of success might be a crushing insurmountable burden. Again he received the same answer. Finally, he turned to the stars, his DNA, as it were, his predetermined characteristics. All these things he looked to blame, and each one refused. Finally, he realized it all lay in his own power. Though parents and environment and economics and inborn traits all weigh on a person, ultimately we have free choice. We are not a product of rigid determinism. This is what Elazar ben Dordaya realized, and in realizing it, he took responsibility for himself. This is what earned him his life in the World-to-Come. He approached G-d with honesty, simplicity and directness. We certainly cannot fool G-d, but we must be careful not to fool ourselves either!

The Maggid of Kelem used to tell a story, a famous parable, in which for one half hour the inhabitants of the city's graveyard were brought back to life for the purpose of fixing what they had not done right in life. He described the frenzy of the dead, rushing from their graves to learn a page of gemara, or to give charity, or to try to make something right with their loved ones. And all the time they had their eyes on the clock. Twenty five minutes left, then only fifteen, finally five, and then the clock strikes, and with a wail the dead are again gone. The Maggid of Kelem would finish by asking his audience, "And my friends, what's so bad if we have more than a half hour? And my friends, who says we have a half hour?"

Life is precious. Opportunities are legion. Let us use the gifts that G-d in His infinite kindness has given us and may we and all of Israel merit a good and sweet year of health, holiness and growth.

A Powerful Tool in Our Toolbox

RABBI LABEL LAM (Torah.org)

Thus, we see that man is truly placed in the midst of a raging battlefield. For all matters of this world, whether for the good or for the bad, are trials (tests) for a man... – The Mesilas Yesharim

With Yom Kippur rapidly approaching we find ourselves in an awkward position. We would love to take this sacred opportunity to correct the mistakes we have made in the course of our lives. Classically, this involves a few necessary steps; 1) Sincerely regretting what was done 2) Admitting to HASHEM verbally 3) Accepting upon one's self to never do it again. 4) In matters between man and man there is still a need to make reparations and ask for forgiveness. These are the basic requirements. Admittedly, it is not very easy and each step has its unique challenges. Let's focus on number four on our list, "Accepting upon one's self to never do it again".

That may present a major problem for even the most sincere and devoted repentant. How can one guarantee that this and that will not happen again. It can only happen if through the Teshuvah process the person becomes a completely different person. That was me "then" and this is me "now". How do we travel from "then" to "now"? I may feel this way "now", but who can really promise when it becomes "then" again?! That is the question!

I think Einstein was credited with the phrase, "The definition of insanity is to do the same thing over and over again and expect a different result". Something about us has to change. What can we possibly change? One arena is in the realm of thought. In the mystical books there are a companion of terms referred to as, "MOCHIN D'KATNUS" and "MOCHIN D'GADLUS". Literally translated they mean, "THE SMALL MIND" and "THE BIG MIND". Practically speaking, we are referring to a visceral way of reacting versus a mature approach to a given situation. Sure, we have all learned throughout our lives and from our earliest days how to get our way with certain strategies that may have worked well for us in the particular and peculiar circumstances in which we developed them.

Some like to call these "triggers" nowadays. However, as life progresses, we all could benefit from gaining more tools, "coping mechanisms". Abraham Mazlow famously stated, "To a person with a hammer, every problem will tend to be a nail." The BIG MIND is a fuller toolbox with a wider variety of wise responses to more complex situations.

A man came to the Divrei Chaim, the Sanzer Rav for important advice. When he met privately with the Rebbe he shared his terrible predicament. He claimed to be an angry man that was given to fits of uncontrollable rage. Life was becoming unbearable for him and the people around him. In desperation he came to the Rebbe for some wise advice. The Rebbe listened and then began thinking and thinking. He told the man that this is a very difficult case and he would have to think about it even more. He asked the man to wait, in the meantime in an anteroom nearby.

The Rebbe then called over his loyal Gabai/attendant and asked him if he had any good ideas about how he could get the gentleman waiting in the other room to become upset. The Gabai agreed to the unusual challenge and cooked up a scheme. A few moments later the Gabai was passing by that man with a tray full of drinks and creamy cakes and he intentionally tripped and spilled it all over the man sitting there. Adding insult to injury the Gabai then began to berate the man and blame him for tripping him and causing the whole accident. The man sat there with perfect equanimity enduring the obvious abuse.

Then the Rebbe asked the man to come back in and, noticing his messy appearance, the Rebbe feigned wonder and asked him what happened. The man told over the incident. The Rebbe asked rhetorically, "And you didn't get upset?" The man confessed, "I overheard the conversation that you had with the Gabai and I knew you were testing me." The Rebbe told him, "That is the answer to your dilemma. You see that you can control yourself when you realize that you are being tested. HASHEM is testing you! He tests all of us." Living life with that realization is a powerful tool in our toolbox.

Caution: Temper Your Ecstasy

RABBI NAFTALI SILBERBERG (Chabad.org)

It was the day after Yom Kippur when Yankel the village thief made an appearance at the house of the rabbi. Yankel was "well-respected" for his prowess in burglary; indeed, although his shady occupation was common knowledge, he had never been caught red-handed throughout his lengthy

career. In his hands were two large sacks filled to the brim with stolen goods. Candelabras, jewelry, antiques — you name it, it was there. "Rabbi," Yankel tearfully blurted, "I was so inspired by the services yesterday that I decided to return all these items to their rightful owners. Would you do the honors?"

The delighted rabbi congratulated Yankel on his courageous and upright deed and proceeded to deliver the valuables to their grateful owners. When he returned home, he saw that his office had been ransacked. Gone was all the cash intended for the poor for the holiday of Sukkot.

The rabbi raced to Yankel's home. "How could you do such a thing? What happened to all the remorse and inspiration?!" he roared.

"Rabbi," Yankel responded, "Yom Kippur is Yom Kippur, but business is business..."

The Yom Kippur Torah reading discusses the service of the High Priest in the Temple on this holiest day of the year. The reading begins with the words: "The L-rd spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they drew near before the L-rd, and they died."

Other religions, all of which are predicated on the pursuit of spirituality, would reward such an act with instant sainthood

What bearing does this prefatory verse have on our personal Yom Kippur service? An examination of the "sin" which led to the premature deaths of Nadab and Abihu will answer this question.

The Tabernacle was inaugurated by a Divine revelation witnessed by the entire nation. The entire nation breathed a collective sigh of relief, as they realized that G-d had in fact wholeheartedly forgiven them for the sin of the Golden Calf. At this historic and hallowed moment, Aaron's two saintly sons were seized by holy ecstasy. Their spiritual high caused them to dash into the Holy of Holies with an incense offering, where their souls overdosed on divinity and slipped away to be absorbed into the Holy Fire which emerged to welcome their pure souls.

While other religions, all of which are predicated on the pursuit of spirituality, would reward such an act with instant sainthood, Judaism looks askance at their deed. Spiritual highs are elating and inspiring, but they are not the reason for which we were created. Rather, we were created to infuse our physical environment with G-dliness, through the seemingly mundane acts of mitzvot. Any spiritual high which does not express itself in subsequent daily life is exhilarating — but virtually pointless.

What an important lesson to bear in mind on Yom Kippur!

"Business is business" cannot simply continue after Yom Kippur. The whole point of this holy day, the day when we are likened to white-clad angels, is to bring meaning and holiness to the everyday "business as usual."

What If That Was the Last Thing You Said?

RABBI EFREM GOLDBERG (rabbiefremgoldberg.org)

We are living in a time of more words than ever before. Think about how many words we encounter and produce in a single day. Texts, WhatsApps, emails, posts, comments, voice notes, captions, reactions. And now with AI, we can generate paragraphs, articles, responses, even entire conversations almost instantly. We have never had more words available to us, and we have never been able to produce them with less effort. The danger is that when words become so easy to produce, they begin to feel cheap. We type something and hit send without fully thinking. We often react and respond before reflecting. We sometimes write things about people we would never say to their face.

Yom Kippur comes along and reminds us that words aren't cheap at all. They are enormously consequential and indeed create worlds. Usually, we are encouraged to live by the dictum of Chazal in Pirkei Avos, **אמור מעט ועשה הרבה**, say little and do much. On Yom Kippur, strangely, we reverse it. We do very little and say an enormous amount. We aren't out there taking action to demonstrate our transformation. We are in Shul davening and davening and davening, talking about our regret, confessing our mistakes, describing who we have been and who we want to become.

And remarkably, so much of what we confess is about speech itself. In Ashamnu and in Al Cheit, we confess for what we expressed with our lips, for foolish speech, impure speech, lashon hara, mockery, idle conversation and gossip. So much of what went wrong this past year came from our mouths.

And what is fascinating is that we made mistakes with speech and we fix them with speech. The Torah tells us, **כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבך**, "For this matter is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, to perform it." The Ramban asks, what is the *davar* that is so close to us? He explains that the Torah is talking about teshuvah. Transformation isn't somewhere far away. We don't need to become different people, move somewhere else, or wait for some dramatic moment of inspiration. It

is accessible right now, and it begins בפֿיך, in your mouth. The path back must begin with saying what happened, admit it, and articulate responsibility. Say what you regret and say what you are going to do about it.

That is why teshuvah requires vidui. The Gemara in Yoma asks, how does a person confess? And the answer begins, אומר, he says: חטאתי עויתי. פשעתי. It isn't enough to know we did something wrong. It isn't even enough to feel badly about it. We have to say it. Indeed, the Shulchan Aruch tells us that even though we already confessed before Yom Kippur, we confess again on Yom Kippur itself, and then again and again throughout the day. The repetition isn't because we forgot that we already said it. It is because there is something transformative about articulating who we were and who we want to become.

The Navi Hoshea says, לקחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה', take words with you and return to Hashem. Chazal say, במה יתכפר ישראל? בדברים. With what will the Jewish people achieve atonement? With words. But that sounds almost too easy. Isn't that exactly what we call lip service? You behaved one way and now you say some words and everything changes?

I think the answer is contained in the Hebrew language itself. דברים means things, while דיבור means speech. The same root describes the words we say and the things that exist. That isn't coincidental. When we speak, we create things. Dibur creates devarim. Words create realities. A few words can end a friendship or begin one. Words can destroy a reputation, damage a marriage, alienate a child or humiliate someone. But words can also restore confidence, repair a relationship, give someone courage, express gratitude, offer forgiveness or make another person feel seen. We tend to think words describe reality. Torah teaches that words create reality.

That is why Yom Kippur begins in such a strange way. The shul is packed, everyone is wearing white, the sifrei Torah are held at the front, the chazzan begins that haunting melody, and what do we say? Kol Nidrei. All vows, prohibitions, oaths and commitments that we have made should be null and void. That's our great introduction to the holiest day of the year? The answer is yes, because what is a neder? I can take something completely ordinary and permissible and, with nothing more than words, change its halachic reality. A shtender that was perfectly permissible a moment ago can become forbidden to me because I said so. Nothing physically changed. I didn't touch it or alter it. My dibur created a davar. We begin the day by reminding ourselves: never underestimate what comes out of your mouth.

Benjamin Zander, the longtime conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, tells a story he heard from a woman who survived Auschwitz. She was deported with her little brother. She was fifteen and he was eight. Their parents were gone, they had no idea where they were going, and while they were on the train she looked down and realized that her brother had lost his shoes. Like an older sister frustrated with her little brother, she began yelling at him. Why are you so careless? Why can't you keep track of your things? Now when we get wherever we are going, I am going to have to find you another pair of shoes.

They arrived at Auschwitz and were separated. She never saw him again. He didn't survive. Those were the last words she ever said to her eight year old brother. She described that when she was finally liberated and walked out of Auschwitz, she made a pledge to herself: “I will never say anything that couldn't stand as the last thing I ever say.”

Imagine living that way. Not morbidly, but mindfully. If these were the last words my spouse heard from me today, would I be comfortable with them? If this were my last conversation with a parent, is this how I would want it to end? If this message couldn't be deleted, unsent, explained away or followed by another message, would I still press send?

We live in a world obsessed with having the last word. We admire the clever comeback, the devastating response, the viral takedown, the line that leaves the other person speechless. Yom Kippur asks us to aspire to something much greater than having the last word. Live so that your words could stand as your last words.

Perhaps that is part of why we say vidui already at Mincha on Erev Yom Kippur, before Yom Kippur has even begun. The Gemara explains that we confess before the seudah hamafsekes because perhaps, G-d forbid, something could happen during the meal and we would never have another opportunity. When it comes to Yom Kippur, we want to make sure that if these were our last words, vidui would be among them. We would have said what needed to be said.

Words aren't just sounds, they are acts of creation. With words we confess and with words we forgive. With words we apologize, encourage, thank and inspire. With words we can tell our spouses we love them, our children that we are proud of them, our parents that we appreciate them, our friends that they matter to us, and Hashem that we desperately want a relationship with Him. Change is much closer than we think. בפֿיך. It is right there in our mouths.

We begin Yom Kippur with Kol Nidrei, confronting words from our past and trying to undo what should never have been said. But perhaps we should leave Yom Kippur with a commitment about the words of our future. Before I criticize, I will ask whether these words will accomplish anything. Before I forward something, I will ask whether it needs to be shared. Before I respond when I am angry, I will give myself the space to choose my words instead of unleashing them. But even more importantly, I won't wait to say the words that need to be said. I'm sorry. I forgive you. Thank you. I believe in you. I'm proud of you. I love you. How can I help? I was wrong.

We spend so much time regretting words we wish we could take back. Maybe we should spend more time worrying about the words we never got around to saying. The compliment we felt but didn't give. The gratitude we had but didn't express. The apology we kept putting off. The encouragement someone desperately needed that we assumed somebody else would provide. The “I love you” we thought was obvious and therefore didn't need to be said.

We don't know which conversation will be our last, but we do know which conversation is our next. We don't know how many more opportunities we will have to say what needs to be said, but we know we have this one. Take your words with you and return to Hashem. Take them seriously and use them carefully. Use them to create, to repair, to heal and to bring people closer.

That survivor walked out of Auschwitz having learned through unimaginable pain, “I will never say anything that couldn't stand as the last thing I ever say.” We don't need to learn that lesson through tragedy, we can learn it from Yom Kippur.

This year, let's stop worrying so much about having the last word. Let's make sure the words we say are worthy of being our last.

The Story of Your Life

RABBI SHAIS TAUB (Chabad.org)

The Book of Jonah, read in its entirety during the Yom Kippur afternoon services, is the story of your life. This is what the Zohar (2:199A) says.

I know what you're thinking. “This has got to be a metaphor, because I have never boarded a seafaring vessel bound for Tarshish to escape prophecy, gotten caught in a storm, had the crew throw me overboard and been swallowed by a fish.”

You're right. Those things haven't happened to you. And they probably won't happen to very many of us. But, still, the Zohar says that this is the real story of your life.

You are Jonah. The real you, for “Jonah”—in Kabbalistic parlance—is another name for the soul. Hence, the story of Jonah is the story of a soul's journey here on earth. Thus, on Yom Kippur, as we examine our lives and consider our purpose in this world, we remember the historical Jonah whose real-life narrative symbolizes our spiritual odyssey.

Your story begins at birth. A soul from on high is plunged into an earthly body. Before its descent, the soul lived an angel-like existence, basking in a glow of spirituality, intimately bound to its Creator. But the soul must leave its home. It is confined to a material vessel, its senses overwhelmed by the brash stimuli of this world. “Jonah,” the soul, “boards the ship,” the body. And where does this ship take its passenger? “Away from the presence of G-d.” Indeed, the very name of Jonah—closely related to a Hebrew word meaning “aggrieved”—alludes to the unique frustration of the soul confined to the body.

The soul, Jonah, the hapless passenger, has traveled far away from G-d. Yet, where can one go and be far from the One? Where is it that the Omnipresent cannot be found? Has the soul—upon entering this coarse, physical realm—really left G-d behind? Just as G-d was with Jonah at the moment of his first prophecy in the Holy Land, so too was G-d with Jonah as he languished on the high seas.

And yet, we, like Jonah, delude ourselves into thinking that our journey to this earth has somehow taken us “out of range” of our relationship with G-d. Like Jonah, we take this perceived distance as an indication that we have somehow been dismissed from our mission. But no; the soul does not escape G-d by coming down to this earth. To the contrary, it is an agent of G-d, a representative of His will charged with imbuing sanctity into the mundane and perfecting an imperfect world.

Sooner or later, the false lure of material satisfaction comes to its inevitable conclusion, and the physical life to which the soul had resigned itself grows unruly and fierce. “The Almighty rouses a furious tempest.” Not to punish, heaven forbid, but to shake the soul from its complacency, for “Jonah had gone down to the inner part of the ship . . . and slept.” The soul is numb.

“So the captain came and said to him, ‘What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call upon your G-d!’” A voice of conscience stirs from within. “What is

your occupation?” What have you done with your life? Why are you here? Why were you sent?

The moment of truth. The soul must acquiesce. G-d is here too, and I am none other than His very messenger. My life has a purpose. “I am a Hebrew, and I revere the G-d of Israel!”

News & Views

false post-9/11 Islamophobia narrative legitimizes antisemitism

Jonathan S. Tobin (JNS.org 14-9-26)

The 25th anniversary of the terrorist attacks on America on Sept. 11, 2001 has come and gone. Despite criticisms and pleas from many of the families of the victims as well as others, New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani attended the ceremony held at the 9/11 Memorial Plaza in what was Ground Zero on that awful day. After days of massive attention focused on the commemoration of the attacks, the media and the political class quickly moved on to other contemporary issues and crises.

But before this moment fades into memory, it's worth pausing and considering how understanding this historical event not only informs how the world thinks about 9/11 and its aftermath. Equally, if not more important, is the ability of mainstream liberal media, opinion leaders and politicians to shape the narrative about it, guiding discourse about today's challenges that ought to, but often aren't, linked to the threat the attacks represented.

WHO ARE THE TRUE VICTIMS OF 9/11?

Take, for example, the home page of The New York Times on Friday. Among its top stories were the following items: “Islamophobia Shaped a Generation of Muslim New Yorkers” and “Facing Islamophobia, Mamdani Keeps Focus on 9/11 Victims.”

As conservative commentator Ben Shapiro put it in an X post that described the feelings of many: “If you were an alien who landed on Earth this morning, and you were reading the top headlines on the NYT's webpage, you would immediately assume that 9/11 was an attack on Muslims.”

Those stories weren't the only ones the newspaper published that day about the anniversary, some of which discussed the actual victims of the Al-Qaeda terrorists who were responsible for the murder of the 2,977 people at the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan, the Pentagon in Washington and on a field in Shanksville, Pa. Still, Shapiro's comment aptly characterized the way so much of the country's chattering classes prefer to think about 9/11.

They may be willing to note that the crimes committed that day were the doing of Al-Qaeda, an Islamist terror organization. But once that basic fact is acknowledged—many conspiracy theorists on the far left and far right prefer, of course, to blame the Jews for this and every other global calamity—they prefer to treat the attacks as if they were not connected to Islamist beliefs about the need for jihad against the West. Nor do they note that those ideas are supported by hundreds of millions of Muslims worldwide, even if some argue that a majority of the world's 1.9 billion believers in Islam do not.

More to the point, they have continued to treat Muslims as if they were the primary victims of the 9/11 attacks because of an alleged backlash against them, which fueled the wave of Islamophobia the Times references in its articles.

The newspaper, like much of the mainstream press, treats this backlash as if it were an obvious fact that can be asserted without the need to prove it. Indeed, they have been doing that for the better part of the last two decades. But, as I first pointed out in October 2010 in Commentary magazine, the claim that American Muslims were subjected to widespread and/or systematic discrimination or violence is simply a myth. At that time, the hoax about a 9/11 backlash was used to support an effort to build a Muslim community center and mosque on the footprint of one of the buildings destroyed in the World Trade Center disaster.

The failed effort to build that center and mosque was rooted in a desire to flip the narrative about the terror attacks to focus on the sufferings of Muslims, rather than people who were murdered by Al-Qaeda or the generational war Islamists were waging against the West. While it was never built, the supporters of this project did succeed in doing something more important: They helped set the tone of media commentary about Islamophobia then and since, while downplaying the truth about Islamism.

A MYTH PROMOTED BY INTERESTED PARTIES

To point this out is not to deny some examples of prejudice or increases in reported hate crimes against Muslims after 9/11. But most were anecdotal and not rooted in objective proof. Indeed, the studies often cited as backing up these claims are the works of groups funded by left-wing donors whose purpose is to depict the United States as Islamophobic. Others, like Georgetown University's Bridge Institute, were created and funded by Qatar, the main sponsor of the Muslim Brotherhood.

More objective studies, like FBI hate-crime statistics, point to a very different conclusion. They show a huge increase in religion-based hate crimes in the past 25 years. Its victims, however, are Jews, not Muslims. Though making up less than 2% of the American population, reported hate crimes against Jews have consistently made up the overwhelming majority of such offenses in the United States.

U.S. government officials, starting with President George W. Bush, who laughably repeatedly insisted that Islam was “a religion of peace,” bent over backwards to disassociate Al-Qaeda (and then its successors and fellow Islamists, such as ISIS, Hamas and Hezbollah) from normative Muslim ideas. At the same time, American popular culture similarly generally shunned depictions of Muslim terrorists in films and TV shows or explorations of how they were inspired by their faith for fear of validating prejudice.

This dovetailed with the way progressives were imposing new doctrines about race, intersectionality and settler-colonialism on American academia during this same period. It led to a generation being indoctrinated in toxic ideas that labeled Muslims as Third World peoples who were always victims of “white” imperialism and racism, regardless of their own actions. At the same time, Jews and the State of Israel were falsely depicted as “white” oppressors who were always in the wrong, even when they were—as during the Hamas-led Palestinian-Arab terror attacks in southern Israeli communities on Oct. 7, 2023—the victims of atrocities, torture, rape, kidnapping and murder.

RADICAL DOCTRINES V. THE FACTS

While these radical obsessions exacerbated racial divisions in the United States, they led most of the chattering classes to assume that Americans were Islamophobic while granting a permission slip to an unprecedented surge of antisemitism, especially after Oct. 7.

But as the Times's account of Mamdani's plight as a victim of Islamophobia makes clear, most of what falls under the rubric of that form of prejudice is actually something very different.

If many New Yorkers and others are critical of Mamdani, it's not because they hate Muslims. It's because they understand that he is someone who has dedicated his career to supporting Islamists and seeking the destruction of the only Jewish state on the planet. The same applies to other supposed contemporary victims of Islamophobia, like Michigan Senate candidate Dr. Abdul El-Sayed.

Indeed, the organization most often cited by liberal media sources as the authority on Islamophobia—the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR)—was founded as a front group for fundraisers for Hamas and is guilty of spreading Jew-hatred. The majority of what CAIR labels as “Islamophobia” is nothing more than noting prejudice against Jews and examples of antipathy for Western civilization that emanates from the Muslim community.

And far from such views being relegated to the margins where hate groups dwell, they have been mainstreamed by the corporate press, as well as the former Biden administration, which created a “National Strategy to Counter Islamophobia and Anti-Arab Hate” by following CAIR's lead. Just as shocking was Biden's willingness to include CAIR as a consultant in its confused and ineffective effort to counter antisemitism.

If a generation of Muslims thinks of themselves as victims, it is not because they have been subjected to a campaign of hate and violence in the United States. It's because they have been taught—as is the case with so many others of their fellow Americans—that their country is irredeemably racist. They may deny that they are the ones spreading hate. But their widespread involvement in spreading prejudice and bigotry against Jews and Israel, or organizing pro-Hamas rallies on college campuses and in U.S. city streets after Oct. 7, cannot be denied. Yet since their prejudices have been validated by those who focus on Islamophobia while ignoring antisemitism, they continue to point to 9/11 as if they are the ones who were wronged that day and ever since.

The impulse to oppose all forms of prejudice is laudable. Yet one of the primary reasons why antisemitism is out of control in the United States is because those who spread it have largely been granted a pass for doing so

because of lies about America after 9/11 and leftist doctrines about race. The belief that the Jews and Israel are inherently evil and guilty of horrible crimes like “genocide” and “apartheid” was once only believed by those who dwelled in the fever swamps of American politics on the far left and far right. But now, such blood libels are routinely given credence by publications like the Times.

By treating the backlash myth as fact and treating Mamdani—a politician whose entire career has been dedicated to spreading blood libels against the Jewish state—as a victim of prejudice rather than a hate-monger, outlets like the Times didn’t just get the 9/11 anniversary story wrong. Sadly, it has become part of the mindset that has allowed American antisemitism to fester and go mainstream.

Genocide accusations in a mirror

PAUL BACHOW (JNS.org 14-9-26)

By multiple required legal standards, Israel has not committed genocide in Gaza. Hamas, on the other hand, has not only committed atrocities; it has mastered the art of reframing them.

By invoking the word “genocide,” Hamas has turned its own crime into a political weapon; a weapon aimed at Israel and the truth itself. The tragedy is not only a loss of life but the loss of clarity. It creates a world in which the perpetrator can claim the mantle of victimhood and be believed.

Understanding the legal meaning of the word “genocide” is essential, but recognizing how easily it is manipulated is even more urgent. If we fail to do so, we risk allowing the worst crimes to hide behind the most powerful words and mistaking propaganda for justice.

In 1992, in Butare prefecture in southern Rwanda, someone sat down and wrote a memorandum on how to run a propaganda campaign. It was mimeographed, unsigned and largely cribbed from a French textbook on advertising. Investigators found a copy years later, after the killing was over.

Buried in it was a technique the author called accusation en miroir—“accusation in a mirror.” The instruction was simple: accuse your enemy of exactly what you intend to do yourself. “In this way,” the author wrote, “the party which is using terror will accuse the enemy of using terror.”

The technique did not die in Rwanda. It has become a standard instrument of modern conflict. We have watched it deployed at scale twice in the last four years—in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and now in Gaza.

The term “genocide” carries enormous moral force. Because it is widely regarded as the “crime of crimes,” it is increasingly used not only to describe atrocities but also to justify them. “Accusations in a mirror” are now common among perpetrators.

Russia used the tactic in 2022 when it claimed Ukraine was committing genocide in the Donbas region. No credible evidence supported the allegation. Ukraine responded by bringing a case before the International Court of Justice, seeking a formal declaration that no genocide occurred. The case is still years from resolution, but the strategy is unmistakable: weaponize the word genocide to legitimize aggression.

To understand why this tactic is so powerful, it helps to look at the legal definition of genocide.

Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide lists five categories of genocidal acts, only one of which involves killing. The convention defines genocide as “Any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group.”

Intent is the core requirement. Without the intent to destroy a particular group, the crime of genocide is not being committed.

The instruction was simple: accuse your enemy of exactly what you intend to do yourself.

This element—intent to destroy—is absent from Israel’s conduct in Gaza. Israel’s practice of issuing more than 105 mass evacuation orders, creating “safe corridors” of evacuation (in areas where Hamas was shooting civilians to keep them as human shields), creating evacuation zones and dropping leaflets before building strikes all demonstrate an intent to avoid civilian casualties, not to eliminate or destroy a population. These practices are incompatible with genocidal intent.

In war, civilian deaths, while tragic, are not automatically illegal under international law. The governing standard is proportionality: civilian harm must not be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage. Proportionality recognizes that civilian casualties can occur lawfully during armed conflict, especially when combatants embed themselves among civilians—as Hamas purposely does.

Hamas does not fall under any of the protected categories listed in Article II.

It is not a “national, ethnical, racial or religious group.” It is a political and military organization: a political party with an armed wing. The convention deliberately excluded political groups from its definition. As a result, Hamas casualties do not constitute genocide under international law.

In 2007, the ICJ clarified that genocide requires the destruction of “at least a substantial part” of the targeted group; large enough to threaten the group’s future viability. Gaza’s population at the start of the war was approximately 2.2 million. Even using the highest estimate of 60,000 civilian deaths, the casualty rate is roughly 2.7%. This is tragic, but nowhere near the threshold required for genocide.

Similarly, the estimated 100,000 Gazans who have emigrated represent an insubstantial part of the population. Neither figure approaches the level of destruction necessary to make a specific group unable to continue as a viable community.

Determining civilian-to-combatant ratios is difficult. Israel counts combatant deaths; Hamas counts nearly all deaths—including natural deaths and individuals executed by Hamas—as civilian. Combatants often fight in street clothes, making them appear civilian at the site of death even when armed. Hamas also counts journalists as civilians even when they are on Hamas’s payroll or photographed carrying weapons.

Israel has stated that it intends to kill every Gazan who participated in the atrocities of Oct. 7. Those individuals, regardless of clothing, were combatants engaged in a mass-murder operation inside Israel. Their deaths cannot be counted as civilian casualties.

The use of human shields further complicates the numbers. Human shields are victims of a war crime committed by Hamas, but unless they directly participate in hostilities, they are still counted as civilians. Hamas understands this dynamic and exploits it. The more civilians die, the more Hamas can incorrectly claim genocide and the more sympathy it gains in the global media.

This brings us back to “accusations in a mirror.”

Hamas committed mass atrocities on Oct. 7, yet it successfully redirected global outrage by falsely accusing Israel of genocide. The accusation is emotionally potent, easy to spread and difficult for the public to evaluate against legal standards. Social media amplifies the charge until it becomes an illusion-of-truth narrative, regardless of its accuracy. Hamas started this war intending to cause civilian deaths. The global outrage should be against Hamas.

Won’t someone please think of the Muslims?

TOM SLATER (Spiked-online.com 13-9-26)

‘What terrifies me is if ISIS were to detonate a nuclear device and kill 50million Americans. Imagine the backlash against peaceful Muslims?’

That tweet – posted with a twinkle in the eye by the late great comedian Norm Macdonald in December 2016 – might just be the most incisive piece of satire our still-young century has so far produced.

It had another good airing on social media over the weekend, as the world marked the 25th anniversary of 9/11 and mainstream-media outlets couldn’t help but Do The Norm Tweet, pivoting away from the apocalyptic Islamist atrocity itself to hand-wringing about the ‘backlash’ supposedly suffered by Muslims in its wake:

‘After 9/11, Islamophobia shaped a generation of Muslim New Yorkers’, ran a headline in the New York Times. ‘We were viewed through the lens of terrorism’, a British Muslim interviewee told BBC Radio 4’s Today programme. ‘Sadly there were questions about our faith and whether we share British values.’

You’d be forgiven for thinking 9/11 was a colossal act of ‘Islamophobic hate speech’ – a spicy viral YouTube video, perhaps – rather than the mass slaughter of Americans by Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda for having the temerity to defy their radical Islamic ideology.

The liberal elites have been struggling to shake off this tic for a quarter of a century now. We saw it in Britain last year, when the 20th anniversary of the 7/7 London bombings was met with a preponderance of thinkpieces in which ‘Islamophobia’ was mentioned more than Islamism, if Islamism was mentioned at all.

To the extent liberal outlets feel comfortable talking about the attacks themselves, they can do so only by paying solemn tribute to those slain, as if they were the victims of a natural disaster or a national-security screw-up. The searing, pressing question of why they were murdered is one to be evaded at all costs.

This reflex is sadly not confined to the media. Zohran Mamdani, the Muslim American mayor of New York City, has been at it for years. In interviews he has recalled a teacher at his NYC school telling him, on the day of 9/11, this

might mean him being bullied. He has also claimed his ‘aunt’ didn’t feel comfortable wearing her hijab on the subway in the aftermath of the attacks.

Horrible stuff, of course. But I dare say those who were blown up, burnt alive, ripped to pieces by steel and glass, should prey on our minds just a touch more than those who were called names in the playground or temporarily felt the need to forgo public transport.

When leftists aren’t deflecting to the domestic ‘backlash’, they are deflecting to the so-called War on Terror. Mamdani’s tweet commemorating the 20th anniversary paid tribute to the 3,000 New Yorkers who ‘died on 9/11’ – a curious choice of verb, as if they all keeled over from heart attacks – before switching focus to the ‘hundreds of thousands who died in the wars that followed’.

We all know what he was getting at with this crude bit of accounting, with this counting of body bags: that the US’s subsequent ‘crimes’ were, if anything, worse.

Yes, the War on Terror was a bloody folly. But to suggest any moral equivalence between America and its allies waging foolhardy foreign wars – fuelled by a righteous desire to crush transnational jihadism as well as utopian dreams of ‘nation building’ – and jihadists purposefully butchering civilians en masse is morally infantile at best.

At worst, it is apologism for Islamism. It suggests that Islamists’ efforts to slaughter their way to paradise, to subject all of humanity to their Islamo-totalitarian rule, is a bit of a nothing burger when contrasted with the supposed horrors of ‘American imperialism’.

It chimes with the depressingly common refrain heard on the left after 9/11. That the United States – if anything – had it coming. That al-Qaeda’s fascistic assault on this rugged, teeming metropolis was, in the words of the Guardian’s Seumas Milne, the Americans ‘reaping a dragons’ teeth harvest they themselves sowed’ – because of the ‘unabashed national egotism and arrogance’ of decades of US foreign policy.

Why do they persist in this despicable little dance? Progressives, certainly, struggled to compute 9/11. Those who had been pickled in cultural relativism, who had come to loathe the very civilisation that produced them, were suddenly confronted with the fact that there are much worse alternatives; that Western capitalist society, for all its faults, is infinitely superior to an ideology that loathes freedom and worships death. Better to change the subject than admit there might be something to America that is actually worth defending.

It seems a toxic brew of identity politics and postcolonial theory has melted leftists’ minds. They now view everything through their prefab hierarchy of victimhood, in which some groups – particularly Muslims – are forever the victims, even when they are the perpetrators. When layered on to geopolitics, it amounts to portraying even murderous jihadists as the noble savages of global affairs – robbed of agency, lashing out in tantrum-like anger against an overweening, imperialistic West.

This certainly seems to be the case with Mamdani, who was born in Uganda to Indian parents. While his more excitable critics insist he is some crypto-Islamist, or Muslim migrant subversive, his deflections over Islamism show he is actually depressingly well integrated into what is now elite American culture – a culture that is gripped by self-loathing on the one hand, and a deep racial / religious paternalism on the other.

The ‘won’t someone please think of the Muslims?’ reflex may well be absurd. Norm Macdonald could certainly see that. But it is also suicidal. It reflects a refusal to take Islamist barbarism seriously, to admit that Western life is under attack. Hopefully, it won’t take another 25 years for our ruling class to awake from this stupor.

Protecting America's Future

LAWRENCE KADISH (GateStoneInstitute.org 16-9-26)

Imagine the following scenario:

Albert Einstein pens his famous letter to President Franklin D. Roosevelt during World War II, warning him that the Nazi Germany has the scientists and the means to produce a weapon of enormous destructive power. It would be called the atomic bomb.

But, in this scenario, Einstein then says it could unleash untold devastation on humanity, so do not build it.

The Nazis, under no such compunction, accomplish such a challenge and the world as we currently know it is just a lengthening shadow of what might have been.

That is exactly what is occurring in the debate over whether the United States' current lead in artificial intelligence should be placed in shackles. It is also why President Donald J. Trump, a student of history, recognizes that in

doing so we would be handing Communist China an enormous strategic advantage in their pursuit of global dominance.

Does there need to be appropriate oversight of AI? Of course there does, just the way there are protocols for the use of nuclear energy and multiple safeguards regarding our nuclear weapons arsenal. However, it is clear to every world leader that the role of AI cannot be overstated and that unilaterally placing restrictions on its development places our nation's future in danger.

The executives of those AI corporations, surrounded by billions in wealth, have little at risk during their current round of hand-wringing except the ire of their shareholders. Trump literally has the fate of the free world before him. He is correct in warning the nation that whoever loses the AI race loses its future. While there needs to be an appropriate debate about AI policy and possible safeguards there can be no pause in America's pursuit of AI dominance if we are to protect the future of democracy.

Einstein understood the enormous power of the atom but, equally important, the threat it posed when deployed by a regime so malignant that it will always define evil. When Roosevelt received Einstein's message, he too recognized the existential threat of being runner-up in the race for the bomb. He authorized "The Manhattan Project" — and America's ultimate triumph during World War II was assured.

Much has been written about the transformative role of drones on the battlefield in Ukraine and the Middle East. However, listen to military leaders such as members of the U.S. Joint Chiefs and they will tell you that drones are already "yesterday's news." Presently, the focus is on AI and how it will have a strategic role in determining who will win the next conflict.

Roosevelt faced a pivotal turning point in America's future based on his decision to approve enormously powerful technology. Today, Trump can tip his hat to his long-ago White House predecessor and report, "We got this."

The Right Shul

LARRY GORDON (5tjt.com 9-9-26)

I know some people who have never been in more than one shul during their entire adult lives. Now that I think about it, I prefer moving around, trying different shuls. Do you think that’s a good idea or not?

The fact of the matter is that when I was too young to cross a street, in one circuitous city block in Crown Heights, there were about nine shuls where I could daven without having to cross a street.

In some ways, picking a shul is like ordering from your favorite restaurant. There may be an extensive menu of fancy dishes, but somehow you can’t get past ordering the same dish each time you’re there.

Sure, you always have the option of popping over to the other shul in your neighborhood, but there’s no denying that both Hashem and the davening are pretty much the same no matter where you go.

As we evolve as frum men and women, we’re often redefining our relationship with Hashem. And it’s usually at this time of year—Rosh Hashanah—that we’re more inclined to take a more definitive stand on the nature of that relationship.

Earlier this week, I made a short trip from the Five Towns to the Ohel, the final resting place of the Lubavitcher Rebbe and his father-in-law, the previous Rebbe, R’ Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, zt”l. Let me just say that the experience of going there is deeply meaningful, and I just don’t visit this holy place to daven often enough.

It was a very busy and crowded Sunday afternoon. On the men’s side of that small, stone-walled structure with the open roof called the “Ohel,” things were very tight with a few people pushing and jockeying for position. On the women’s side, which is just behind the matzeivos of these two great Rebbes, things seemed much more tranquil and calm. I glanced over for a moment and saw women praying with devotion, some swaying with their eyes closed in silent meditation.

On the men’s side, the davening was a bit more animated, with lots of shuckling, men moving back and forth with their eyes closed, sometimes moving in multiple directions with their feet planted firmly in place.

I remember a few years ago when someone came up with the idea of erecting a mechitzah between the men’s side and the ladies’ side of the Ohel. Frankly, it felt strange and out of place. I don’t know about the politics surrounding the matter, but just a few days later, the mechitzah was taken down.

We were talking about this on the way home from the Ohel and I speculated that people had indeed been going there for decades to daven and recite Tehillim, and if the Rebbe had thought that a mechitzah was necessary, he would have made sure there was one. So, if the Rebbe thought that a mechitzah was unnecessary at a kever, I suppose that’s the final word on the matter.

If there is a Jewish landmark where everyone is welcome, the Rebbe's Ohel is it. Visitors sat at tables with a cup of coffee and pens and paper, writing kvitlach, committing their intimate concerns to paper, praying and hoping for a better future. But most important, hoping to connect with Hashem and waiting expectantly for an answer to their prayers.

On this visit, I did more than that. For the first time in a long time, I made multiple stops. I even impressed myself by being able to locate—albeit with some difficulty—the kevarim I was hoping to find.

My father's parents are right there near the Ohel. My mother's parents are deeper inside Montefiore Cemetery, but I developed a technique over the years to find them. For my bubby and zaide—Aharon and Chaya Malka Berger—I know that I have to drive down Carmel Avenue. It's toward the end of the cemetery, and my grandparents are buried two rows behind Rabbi Yaakov Bender's mother—Rebbetzin Basya Bender. So, my car rolls slowly along this so-called street until the Bender name carved in stone pops out and into my line of vision. Then I know I'm in the right place.

We visited and said Tehillim at the kever of my brother, Binyomin, who I wrote about last week. Then we stood in disbelief at the kever of my niece, Rachel. Then we visited the kever of my Aunt Esther Goldman, who's next to her daughter, Chanchy Bruk, who took ill and died at the young age of fifty-four. Chanchy is the mother of our columnist, Chaim Shaul Bruk, the Chabad shliach in Bozeman, Montana who you've no doubt read about and come to love and admire in these pages over the years.

So, back to where you daven over yom tov, and in particular over Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Some people I know go to daven at 7 a.m. on Yom Kippur and finish by noon before going home to sleep until about 5 p.m., when they begin Minchah. Then there's the option of the later minyan like the one at 770 I described last week.

Others can daven someplace else all year but when it comes to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, they return to their familiar old yeshiva, opting for a bit of nostalgia during the Yamim Noraim.

Long ago I lived near a friend who went to Yeshiva Chaim Berlin on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I was pretty astounded when I found out that on Rosh Hashanah, they start at 7 a.m. and finish at 5 p.m. Yom Kippur is an all-day experience, the difference being that there's no two- to three-hour break as there is in other shuls.

The first year I lived out here in the Five Towns, I davened at a local shtiebel and as the time for the fast came to a close on Yom Kippur, they just kept davening like time didn't matter. Up to that point in my life, the time the fast ended on Yom Kippur as well as Tishah B'Av was everything. How do you just blow past a zman? I'm writing these words this week after dinner, so I'm looking at the experience a bit differently, even with a touch of admiration. But when you've reached hour 26 of a 25-hour fast, things look differently.

Some people can sit in shul most of the day on Yom Kippur but after the break in the afternoon they just have to go someplace new for Minchah and Neilah. It's like you just need something new and refreshing, and a new shul environment is just what you need at that moment.

By the way, that can be valid for the rest of the year as well. That is, you need a steady rotation of three to four shuls to go to during the year. I mean, you were in this shul last week so you need to try something else next week. On the other hand, some people are the exact opposite. As I mentioned above, there are people who davenin only one type of shul. You'll almost never see them anywhere else.

One of these types is preferable to the other. I'm just not sure which one it is. The good thing is that there's an abundance of shuls out there. Hopefully everyone can find a place to daven in that they can honestly call home.

Kosher & Halacha Korner

The following article may be at variance to local Kashrus Agencies. When in doubt, contact your local reputable Agency. In Australia, direct any questions to info@kosher.org.au or visit www.kosher.org.au

She'ailos U'Teshuvos

RABBI DONIEL NEUSTADT (Torah.org)

QUESTION: Should people who continue to rely on the lenient opinion of those poskim who permit drinking “company milk(1)” (chalav stam) throughout the year(2) be encouraged to drink only chalav Yisrael during Aseres yemei teshuvah – just as they are careful to eat only pas Yisrael at this time of year?

DISCUSSION: While this issue is not explicitly addressed by the poskim,(3) we may assume that it is appropriate to be stringent about chalav Yisrael during Aseres yemei teshuvah. This is because the poskim suggest a number of reasons, all inter-related, as to why everyone should be careful to eat only

pas yisrael during Aseres yemei teshuvah, and the parallel between pas Yisrael and chalav Yisrael is obvious:

* So that we conduct ourselves with an extra measure of purity during these Days of Repentance.(4)

* To serve as a reminder of the unique status of these days.(5)

* To beseech Hashem not to judge us stringently, just as we have adopted a practice which is not strictly required of us.(6) Those who are lenient in regard to chalav stam rely on a controversial ruling of some poskim who in the past – when chalav yisrael was not readily available – reluctantly permitted the consumption of “company milk”. Clearly, then, for all of the reasons cited above, it is appropriate not to rely on this leniency during Aseres yemei teshuvah. (7)

QUESTION: On Erev Yom Kippur, may one eat, wear leather shoes or wash his face and hands after reciting the Birkas ha-Mazon of seudah ha-mafsekkes?

DISCUSSION: Although, technically, Yom Kippur does not begin until sundown, it has become customary that the restrictions of Yom Kippur are in force once Birkas ha-Mazon of seudah ha-mafsekkes is recited. Some poskim mention this custom only concerning eating and drinking,(8) while others include the restriction against washing and anointing too.(9) [A minority view includes the restriction against wearing leather shoes as well,(10) but this has not become the accepted custom.(11)] In order to avoid this issue, one should stipulate – either verbally or mentally – that he does not wish to assume any of the Yom Kippur restrictions until he either verbally “accepts” Yom Kippur, or until he recites Tefilah Zakah before Kol Nidrei, which contains the formal “acceptance” of the holy day of Yom Kippur and its restrictions.(12) But, b'diavad, one who failed to make such a stipulation may rely on the poskim who rule that the restrictions of Yom Kippur do not begin until one actually “accepts” Yom Kippur upon himself, or at sundown.

QUESTION: If one washes for bread on Motzaei Yom Kippur after reciting Havdalah, does he first recite Al ha-gefen v'al peri ha-gefen over the wine or grape juice?

DISCUSSION: Yes, he does. Concerning this halachah, Havdalah is unlike Kiddush: When one recites Kiddush right before the meal, the Birkas ha-Mazon over the meal covers the wine as well, since Kiddush is considered as part of the meal(13) even though the wine was drunk before ha-motzi was recited. But when it comes to Havdalah, the majority of the Rishonim do not consider it as part of the meal, and require, therefore, that Al ha-gefen be recited prior to washing. B'diavad, however, if one forgot to recite Al ha-gefen and only remembered about it after washing, he should not recite Al ha-gefen and rely instead on the opinions who hold that Birkas ha-Mazon covers Havdalah wine as well.(14) Other points to remember about the Motzaei Yom Kippur meal:

* After drinking the wine or grape juice for Havdalah, no She'hakol or Borei nefashos is recited over any other beverage which is either on the table or which one is planning on drinking at this sitting.(15)

* The bread or cake that will be eaten at this meal should not be on the table during Havdalah. If it is already there, it should be covered.(16)

* If additional wine is drunk during this meal, Borei peri ha-gafen should not be repeated.(17)

QUESTION: On Yom Tov, may one use a match to transfer a flame from one place to another?

DISCUSSION: The general rule is that on Yom Tov it is prohibited to create a new fire,(18) but it is permitted to transfer an existing fire from one place to the next. The application of this principle is as follows:

* It is forbidden to strike a match to create a new fire.(19)

* It is permitted to place a match on a red-hot electric coil in order to ignite the match. This is considered transferring an existing fire from place to place, for a red-hot coil is halachically equivalent to fire.(20)

* It is forbidden to place a match near or on a hot electric coil in order to ignite the match. This is considered creating a new fire,(21) since the hot coil is merely a heat source and not actually “fire”, as a red-hot coil would be.

* It is questionable whether or not it is permitted to ignite a match by placing it near a red hot coil [or by touching it to a hot light bulb]. Some poskim permit it since an existing fire [the red hot coil or the “fire” in the bulb] is merely being transferred; nothing new is being created.(22) Others, however, hold that transferring a fire is permitted only when the fire itself is being transferred, but not when one is transferring the heat which emanates from that fire.(23)

QUESTION: When reciting Havdalah over wine [or grape juice] in the succah, does one recite Leishev ba-Succah?

DISCUSSION: The general rule is that Leishev ba-Succah is recited only

before a kevius seudah, a sit down meal, consisting of at least a k'beitzah [approx. 2 fl. oz.] of either bread or cake. Sitting in the succah merely to drink wine [or grape juice], even if the drinking takes place with an entire group and for a long period of time, is not considered a kevius seudah and a blessing is not recited.(24) Some poskim rule, therefore, that Leishev ba-Succah is not recited over wine when it is drunk for Havdalah.(25) Other poskim, however, make a distinction between drinking wine just for enjoyment and drinking wine in performance of an important mitzvah such as Havdalah. In their opinion, the blessing of Leishev ba-Succah is recited when wine is drunk for Havdalah, since the mitzvah of Havdalah elevates the drinking and gives it the dignity of a kevius.(26) Although either opinion may be followed as there is no prevalent custom, those who want to avoid a potentially questionable situation make sure to eat some bread or cake immediately after Havdalah which allows them to recite Leishev ba-Succah according to all opinions.(27)

QUESTION: Is there an halachic objection to using a succah with a metal frame?

DISCUSSION: Yes. Although it is permissible to use a metal frame to support the walls of a succah,(28) placing schach directly on the metal frame is problematic because we follow the opinion of some Rishonim who maintain that any object which directly supports the schach must also be made from materials which are kosher for schach.(29) Since kosher schach cannot be made from metal, l'chatchilah one may not place schach directly on top of a metal-frame succah. B'dieved, however, in a case where only a metal-frame succah is available, it is permitted to use this type of succah.(30)

QUESTION: May one use a metal-frame succah l'chatchilah if wood strips are placed over the metal frame and the schach is placed on the wood?

DISCUSSION: Some poskim permit using a metal-frame succah if the schach does not lie directly on the metal, since the schach is no longer touching the metal and being supported by it, but rather by the wood which is directly under it.(31) But other poskim are hesitant about this leniency, since the schach is really being supported by the metal frame, and the wood serves merely as a barrier between the frame and the schach. According to these poskim, the only way to use a metal-frame succah is to use the wood strips in a way that they become the main support for the schach. For example, by placing heavier wooden strips diagonally across the top of the frame and putting the schach on top of the diagonal strips, the wooden strips become the support for the schach rather than the metal frames.(32)

FOOTNOTES:

1 Although Shulchan Aruch rules that for milk to be kosher, the milking must be supervised by a Jew, some have argued that in the United States [and other developed countries] where government authorities closely monitor the dairy industry and strictly enforce the law against mixing other milk with cow's milk, government regulation should be tantamount to supervision. According to this argument, the fear of being caught by government inspectors who are empowered to levy substantial fines serves as a sufficient deterrent and may be considered as if a Jew is "supervising" the milking. Based on this argument, several poskim allowed drinking "company milk" (chalav stam), i.e., milk produced by large companies, without supervision.

2 See The Monthly Halachah Discussion, pgs. 145-150, for a complete overview and analysis of this subject.

3 Obviously, the earlier poskim could not have dealt with this QUESTION, since chalav akum is forbidden according to all views all year round. It is only with the fairly recent introduction of chalav stam, which is permitted by some poskim during the year, that this question arises.

4 In Talmudic times, everyone was careful not to allow their food to become impure (chullin b'taharah) during aseres yemei teshuvah; Tur quoting the Yerushalmi (Shabbos 3:3).

5 Levush O.C. 603.

6 Chayei Adam 14:1; Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 130:2.

7 See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 609:1 and Igros Moshe O.C. 3:12 who write that during Aseres yemei teshuvah we should be stringent when it comes to all questionable issues.

8 Mishnah Berurah 608:12.

9 Leket Yosher, pg. 137; Mikraei Kodesh, Yomim Noraim, 65.

10 See Bach 608:1.

11 See Sha'ar ha-Tziyun 553:3 who rules (regarding Tishaha b'Av) that an automatic onset of the restriction against wearing leather shoes cannot possibly begin as long as one is still wearing leather shoes.

12 Mishnah Berurah 608:12. Interestingly, Harav S.Z. Auerbach questioned the custom of reciting Tefilah Zakah before Kol Nidrei, since Kol Nidrei should be recited before Yom Kippur begins; Halichos Shelomo 2:4-2.

13 Based on the rule that Ain kiddush ela binkom seudah.

14 Mishnah Berurah 174:15 and 299:29.

15 O.C. 174:2 and Mishnah Berurah 3.

16 O.C. 299:9 and Mishnah Berurah 31.

17 Mishnah Berurah 299:26.

18 Because of the prohibition of molid – creating a new entity. For this reason it is forbidden to turn on an electric light or appliance on Yom Tov.

19 Mishnah Berurah 502:4. Under extenuating circumstances, it is permitted to ask a non-Jew to do so; Shevet ha-Levi 8:121.

20 Chazon Ish (quoted in Imrei Yosher, Nashim 70 and in Orchos Rabeinu, vol. 2, pg. 104); Igros Moshe Y.D. 2:75.

21 Mishnah Berurah 502:4; see Az Nidberu 7:61.

22 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 13:3 and note 13) Yabia Omer 2:27.

23 Harav Y.Y. Kanievsky (quoted in Orchos Rabeinu, vol. 2, pg. 104); Harav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Hilchos ha-Moadim 8, note 10); Tzitz Eliezer 7:27- 5.

24 Mishnah Berurah 639:13.

25 Shevet ha-Levi 6:42.

26 Chazon Ish (quoted in Rivevos Efrayim 1:428) and Luach Eretz Yisrael.

27 Harav Y. Y. Kanievsky (Orchos Rabeinu, vol. 2, pg. 228); Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Shemiras Shabbos K'hilchasah 58:22), who recommends reciting the Leishev ba-Succah before Borei peri ha-gefen; see Minchas Shelomo 2:58-35 and Ma'adanei Shelomo, pg. 70.

28 Care must be taken, however, that the canvass or other material be firmly attached to the frame so that the walls are sturdy enough not to flap around in normal weather.

29 In addition to this opinion, there is another opinion which maintains that even an object which does not directly support the schach, but supports the support of the Schach, must also be made from material which could be kosher Schach. Although Chazon Ish (O.C. 143:3) rules in accordance with this view, Shulchan Aruch O.C. 629:8 and the majority of the poskim do not accept this stringency, and the accepted custom is to be lenient; see Chelkas Yaakov 3:127, Minchas Shelomo 2:55 and Moadim u'Zmanim 1:82.

30 Mishnah Berurah 629:22; 630:58. See also Chazon Ish 143:3 and Minchas Yitzchak 4:45.

31 Based on Bikurei Yaakov 629:9; see Mikroei Kodesh, Succos 1:21.

32 Harav S.Z. Auerbach (Minchas Shelomo 2:55). See Mikroei Kodesh, ibid.

YOM KIPPUR – Q & A

OU HALACHA YOMIS (OUKosher.org)

Q. May a person who is ill eat or drink on Yom Kippur?

A. If a person is a choleh sheyesh bo sakanah (suffering from a life-threatening illness), it is forbidden to fast. Rather, it is a mitzvah for such an individual to eat on Yom Kippur. Nonetheless, halacha stipulates that when possible, the breaking of the fast should be minimized by eating or drinking less than the shiur (amount) for which a healthy individual would be liable for the Divine punishment of kares. In practice, when feasible, one who is ill should eat less than the volume of a large date and drink less than a cheek full. Both of these volumes are somewhere between 1 to 1 ¼ fluid ounces.

The Shulchan Aruch states that when a time span of kedai achilas pas has elapsed, the same amounts can be eaten and drunk again. There are a wide range of opinions for the length of this time span, ranging from 2-9 minutes. It is recommended that the reader consult their local rabbi.

If these amounts do not alleviate the life-threatening situation, the person who is ill may eat and drink in a normal manner. Once the danger to one's health has passed, continued eating and drinking should be limited to the shiur described above. (Shulchan Aruch 618-7 and 8 and Beur Halacha s.v. ve'im)

Q. My children will be eating sandwiches on Yom Kippur. How should they wash netilas yadayim?

A. Although regarding washing in the morning, Shulchan Aruch writes that one should only wash until the knuckles, poskim point out that if one must eat bread on Yom Kippur, one should wash the entire hand including the palm, the same way that they would the rest of the year (Levushei Mordechai quoted by Shevet HaLevi 8:139 and many other poskim). In this regard, washing for bread is like the requirement of Kohanim to wash before reciting Birkas Kohanim. The Mishnah Berurah (613:7) writes that Kohanim on Yom Kippur must wash their entire hand before Birkas Kohanim. In all these cases, there is no violation of washing hands, since the intent is not for enjoyment.

Lehoros Nosson (2:42) explains the difference between washing for bread and washing in the morning. Although in both cases throughout the year, lechatchila (in the first instance) one should wash the entire hand and bedi'eved (after the fact), it is enough if one washed up until and including the knuckles, there is still an important difference between them. Regarding washing for bread, many Rishonim hold that that this is an absolute requirement, and although we are lenient if it was not done, Shulchan

Aruch (OC 161:4) writes that one should be careful to wash the entire hand. However, Shulchan Aruch makes no mention of washing the entire hand to remove ru'ach ra'ah. This was only introduced by later poskim, such as the Magen Avrohom (4:7). Therefore, on Yom Kippur we do not follow this added stringency, since at the same time it would be a leniency to wash beyond the knuckles.

Q. How should one wash their hands upon waking in the morning on Yom Kippur?

A. Shulchan Aruch (OC 613:1-2) writes that the prohibition of washing on Yom Kippur applies only to one who washes for enjoyment. If one's hands become dirty, one is permitted to wash off the dirt. Similarly, one may wash one's hands upon waking in the morning to remove ru'ach ra'ah. Because this encompasses an element of danger as well, washing to remove the ru'ach ra'ah is considered even more of a necessity than washing off dirt. Although the rest of the year, we are careful to wash our entire hand three times, on Yom Kippur we wash three times only up until and including the knuckles (i.e. until the palm), since strictly speaking that is enough to remove ru'ach ra'ah. The Chazon Ish (Orchos Rabbeinu II, p. 207) held that one need not be concerned if some water goes past the knuckles, since this washing is not intended for enjoyment. After Yom Kippur, one should wash the entire hand three times (Luach Davar B'ito cited by Piskei Teshuvos 624:1).

Q. It is preferable that the candle used for havdalah motzei Shabbos should have two wicks, so that it is similar to a torch which has significant light (O.C. 298:1). Does the same preference apply to the havdalah candle used motzei Yom Kippur?

A. The Eishel Avraham (624:5) as well as Rav Sraya Devlitzky (Kitzur Hilchos Hamoadim Dinei Motzei Yom Kippur Siman 10) write that an avukah, torch, is preferred on motzei Yom Kippur just as motzei Shabbos (Dirshu M.B. Hilchos Yom HaKippurim, Miluim p.61, 624:11). However, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, zt"l (Shulchan Shlomo, 298:3:1) writes that a braided candle is unnecessary for motzei Yom Kippur. He reasons that on motzei Shabbos, we use a bright-burning braided wick to celebrate the creation of fire by Adam Harishon. In contrast on motzei Yom Kippur, we are acknowledging the prohibition of using fire during the day and a single wick candle is adequate. However this year, since Shabbos and Yom Kippur coincide, it would seem that all would agree that two wicks should be used.

Candles (Melb) Fri 18 September 2026, 8 Tishrei 5787 5.55p/6.53p

Candles (Melb) Sun 20 September 2026, 10 Tishrei 5787 5.57p/6.54p