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Rosh Hashana and the Meaning of Life

Rabbi Yonah Burr

There is a well known Gemara that describes how the judgement of Rosh Hashana is passed;

אמר רב כרוספדאי אמר רב יוחנן שלשה ספרים נפתחין בראש השנה אחד של רשעים גמורין ואחד של צדיקים גמורין ואחד של בינוניים. צדיקים גמורין נכתבין ונחת מין לאלתר לחיים. רשעים גמורין נכתבין ונחתמין לאלתר למיתה. בינוניים תלויין ועומדין מר"ה ועד יוה"כ זכו נכתבין לחיים לא זכו נכתבין למיתה.

"Says Rav Kruspidai in the name of Rav Yochanan; three books are open on Rosh Hashana; one designated for the utterly wicked, one designated for the extremely righteous, and one for those in the balance. The extremely righteous are signed and sealed for life immediately. The utterly wicked are signed and sealed immediately for death. While the judgment of the ones in the middle is pending during the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are inscribed for life. And if they do not merit, they are inscribed for death".

Tosfos makes a simple calculation. If an average person is one who is in the balance, his din pending until Yom Kippur, his merits and debits being equal, then the 'extremely righteous' are those who have a simple majority of merits over debits. And conversely, the 'utterly wicked' have a simple majority of debits over credits. One does not need to be sinless to be deemed extremely righteous, nor does one need to be meritless to be deemed utterly wicked; a simple majority tips the scale in either direction.

If so, asks Tosfos, why then do we find people that clearly have more merit than sin die during the year? Or why do we see seemingly utter sinners prosper? People who clearly have a simple majority of merit suffer and die, and even people who are clearly wicked seem to enjoy the good life. How can we oversimplify things by saying the righteous are immediately judged for life and the wicked are judged for death?

Tosfos gives an amazing answer: the meaning of life or death in this gemara does not refer to this world, but rather to the world to come, חיי עולם הבא. Every year, we are judged on whether we are worthy of the

world to come. If we are righteous, we are sealed for life- in the world to come. If we are deemed wicked, we are deemed for death, severance from the world to come. So even if a tzaddik dies or suffers that year, he was still inscribed for life, because life does not necessarily mean the good life in this world, but rather that he deserves to merit the world to come.

But this raises a new question! Why does Hashem judge us every year regarding the world to come? Wouldn't it be sufficient to judge us right at the end of our lives, where we belong in the next world? Moreover, what is the point of declaring that so and so deserves the world to come now, if this perspective of him can still change if he decides to sin?

My Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock, זצ"ל gave a beautiful explanation. עולם הבא is not a 'place' somewhere in the sky that we go to receive our reward. Rather, עולם הבא is a state of being; are we connected to Hashem, getting our sense of fulfillment through serving Him and learning His Torah, then we are already in עולם הבא now! We are already basking in His glory now! True, it is not fully manifest and apparent, because we are still physically in this world, but the concept of being attached to Him is something that starts here and now.

The judgement of Rosh Hashana, then, is to determine if we are already in עולם הבא now; not in the distant future, but where we are holding in our present state of being.

The Rosh Yeshiva explains, that this judgement is very relevant now, as well. Everyone needs a livelihood, and everyone needs their other needs met. And it goes without saying that we need Divine assistance in our spiritual pursuits as well. But there is a huge difference if we are receiving our needs as one who is already in Olam Haba, than if we are merely living a physical existence without being truly connected to Hashem. Hashem will decide how and when to supply us with all our needs from a completely different perspective if we are living an olam haba life now. Things might not be rosy and good all the time, but we are connected to Hashem and are decreed as one truly alive.

There is a well-known parable said in the name of Rav Yisroel Salanter; imagine if someone goes on a trip to a faraway land. There are travel expenses, hotel expenses, restaurant expenses, and so on. Who pays

for all of that? It depends- if he is traveling on a business trip, for the purpose of promoting the business, the expenses are fully paid for by the company. But if he is traveling for pleasure, for himself, then he must foot the bill.

The same idea applies to our stay in this world; if we view ourselves as agents of Hashem, here for a purpose, and trying to be connected to Hashem, we are viewed as agents of the business; all our expenses are paid. However, if we are here for ourselves, we might be supported and supplied with our needs, but the expenses are on us.

It depends entirely if we are truly connected to Hashem or not.

May we all merit to be truly inscribed in the true book of life!

Wishing everyone a כתיבה וחתימה טובה

The Tools That We Need!

Rabbi Yonah Burr

תניא א"ר יהודה משום ר"ע מפני מה אמרה תורה הביאו עומר בפסח? מפני שהפסח זמן תבואה הוא. אמר הקב"ה הביאו לפני עומר בפסח כדי שתתברך לכם תבואה שב־שדות. ומפני מה אמרה תורה הביאו שתי הלחם בעצרת מפני שעצרת זמן פירות האילן הוא אמר הקב"ה הביאו לפני שתי הלחם בעצרת כדי שיתברכו לכם פירות האילן. ומפני מה אמרה תורה נסכו מים בחג אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא נסכו לפני מים בחג כדי שיתברכו לכם גשמי שנה. ואמרו לפני בראש השנה מלכיות זכרונות ושופרות מלכיות כדי שתמַלִּיכוּנוּ עליכם זכרונות כדי שיעלה זכרוניכם לפני לטובה ובמה בשופר! (מסכת ר"ה טז)

The Gemara in Meseches Rosh Hashana relates a beautiful idea; "Says Rav Yehuda in the name of Rav Akiva, why does the Torah command us to bring the barley offering Pesach time? Because Pesach is the time that the crops are being judged, says Hashem, bring the barley offering before Me, so that I shall bless the produce in the fields for you. And why does the Torah say to bring the two loaves on Shavuot? Because on Shavuot the fruit of the trees are judged; bring before Me the two loaves, so that I will bless you the fruit of the trees. And why does the Torah say to pour a water libation before Me on Sukkot? So that the yearly supply of rain shall be blessed; and say before Me the verses of Kingship, Remembrances, and Shofros, so that you proclaim Me King, and so that you are remembered before me for good, and sound the Shofar!

The message is clear: true, Hashem Judges us, and our lives hang in the balance. But Hashem gives us the tools we need to not only have the merit to pass the judgment but to flourish and thrive.

Through the pesukim of Malchiyos, we can rededicate ourselves to Hashem and proclaim Him as our King. Through the beautiful verses of Zichronos, we recall the love and special relationship that we have with Hashem. And finally, Hashem gives us the shofar, which has the power to arouse us and inspire us. Using these special tools, immersing ourselves in the davening, and enjoying our special closeness with Hashem is itself a merit to be inscribed for another successful year.

Wishing everyone a *טובה וחתימה טובה* and a year blessed with everything good!

Rejoicing While Trembling

Rabbi Doniel Schon

For most of the Moadim, special days on the Jewish calendar, there is a mood reflecting the essence of the day. On Sukkos we are happy, celebrating Hashem's sustaining the Jewish nation throughout its 40- year journey through the desert. On Tisha B'Av we are sad, mourning the destruction of the two temples, and that we no longer have that special place to meet with Hashem. Rosh Hashana, though, seems to convey different messages and the essential nature of the day does not seem clear at first.

On the one hand, Rosh Hashana has an element of simcha, joy: the Shulcha Aruch (597:1) states that on Rosh Hashana one should eat, drink, rejoice, and it is prohibited to fast. Seemingly, Rosh Hashana has the same joyous nature as the rest of the Yomim Tovim. Yet, the Rambam in Peirush Mishnayos (Rosh Hashana 4) writes that "Hallel is not recited on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur because they are days of avodah, humility, fear, awe of Hashem, to escape and run to him, to do teshuva, offer supplications, requests, and forgiveness. So - is Rosh Hashana meant to be a joyous day like the shalosh regalim, or is it meant to be a more serious day similar to Yom Kippur?

The answer lies in discovering the true essence of the day of Rosh Hashana. Rosh Hashana is the day in which we acknowledge Hashem's creation and maintenance of the entire world, from the smallest blade of grass, to the distant planets many light years away. We both acknowledge Hashem as both king of the entire universe, as well as king over ourselves, and we recognize that on this day, the anniversary of creation, we will be brought in judgement before Him. This acknowledgement elicits feelings of both joy and awe, and while seemingly contradictory, can in fact coexist in a person at the same time.

Rabbi Avroham J. Twersky once asked that there seems to be a contradiction between two verses in Tehillim. In Chapter 2, the possuk states "serve G-d with awe", while in chapter 100 the possuk

states “serve G-d with joy”. Is it possible to serve G-d with these two conflicting emotions at the same time?

Rabbi Twersky responded with a parable. Imagine that one was a concert violinist and was asked to play in front of the president at a royal banquet with many dignitaries present. On the one hand he would feel immense joy for making it to the top of his field, having been asked to perform at such a special event. Yet at the same time he would feel a sense of awe at performing at such a setting, and would feel anxious that he would not play well enough.

This parable truly expresses the emotions that we should feel on Rosh Hashana. We should have tremendous joy at the opportunity to come before Hashem on Rosh Hashana. Being in Hashem’s presence is a blessing in itself, and Hashem will certainly bless us and grant us a good year. Still, there is a sense of awe at the severity of the day, a day in which we will be brought before Hashem to be judged for our actions and thoughts. In a sense, it is actually the sense of awe that we feel that will be a merit for us and cause us to be judged favorably, which will in turn allow us to feel joy.

Rav Meilch Biederman relates the story of the a chasidic rebbe, the Beis Aharon who told two of his chasidim to study the portion of the work Reishis Chochmah which describes in great detail the terrifying punishment that a person will receive in gehinnom for his sins. He told them both to return in three months.

The first student returned to his master looking as pale as a ghost. He asked the Rebbe if he would actually receive such great punishments for each small sin. The Rebbe calmed him by saying “We have a compassionate Father – when we do teshuva, Hashem will certainly forgive us and spare us from the punishment.”

The second student came to the Rebbe and calmly repeated the information he read about gehinnom and did not seem fazed by the punishment that awaited one who sinned. To this the Rebbe replied – “you should know, the punishments outlined are only the beginning, in fact it can get much worse”

Another student who witnessed the exchange with both students begged the Rebbe for an explanation. “Is gehinnom extremely frightening as you described to the second student, or can we be calm and secure as you assured the first student”?

The Rebbe replied – “If a person is afraid of gehinnom, then he has nothing to fear. But if he isn’t afraid, then he has a lot to fear.”

So too with Rosh Hashana, if we are not afraid, and do not take the day seriously, then there is what to be fearful about. However, if we treat the day with the proper awe and respect, then Hashem will certainly grant us a good year.

May we merit to make the most of Rosh Hashana and be inscribed in the book of life, and be granted a new year filled with all of life’s blessings.

Understanding Malchiyos, Zichronos, and Shofros

Rabbi Yosef Bauman

The primary part of our Rosh Hashana davening is the Pesukim of Malchiyos, Zichronos and Shofaros, recited in Shemoneh Esrei of Musaf. This recitation is based on the Gemara in Maseches Rosh Hashana 16a, which quotes Hashem as telling us, "Say before Me on Rosh Hashana, Malchiyos Zichronos and Shofaros; Malchiyos- in order to accept Me as King over you; Zichronos- in order that the remembering of you shall come before Me for your good- and through what? Through the Shofar." This is the general idea of what we are doing by saying these pesukim- declaring Hashem King and accepting His sovereignty over us, and bringing up our "good records" accompanied by the shofar to merit a good judgement on the Day of Judgement. But what exactly are we doing by reciting thirty Pesukim surrounding these themes? What are we supposed to be concentrating on while saying each Posuk?

I used to find this part of davening- the central part of Rosh Hashana davening!- a dry recital of Pesukim, without understanding the significance of each posuk. I'm sure many others find it this way as well. But then I was introduced to *Derech Hamelech*, a sefer written by my Rosh Yeshiva, Rav Yaakov Schnaidman, shlit"a. This sefer is dedicated to explaining what we are intended to do by saying these pesukim and deciphering the point being brought out by each individual posuk. I would like to share a brief overview of the ideas mentioned in this sefer and hopefully provide a better understanding of these tefillos.

Malchiyos

Rosh Hashana is the day on which the world was created. As such, it is also the day that the world is recreated- meaning, when Hashem decrees what will transpire in the world throughout the next year. Hashem created the world with the intention of being King over it- meaning, so that He could demonstrate His infinite kindness to His creatures and allow them, as His subjects, to recognize His goodness and serve Him

in return. Therefore, on this day of renewal of the Creation, we stand before Hashem and recognize Him as our King, and at the same time pray that the purpose of the creation should be realized. This is the general theme of the ten Pesukim of Malchiyos. More specifically, this idea begins to take shape in the three Pesukim brought from the Torah—the first being Hashem Yimloch Leolam Vaed, 'Hashem will reign forever', which expresses the point that Hashem created the world for the purpose of ruling it and being recognized as its King, and the world will last forever in order to serve the purpose of Hashem's everlasting reign. The next two pesukim bring out the point that Hashem's Kingship is mainly recognized currently through Bnei Yisroel, who are dedicated to His service and are His main 'representatives' in the world. His Kingship is recognized through them even when they fall from their lofty level and do aveiros, but still never separate themselves completely from Him. All the more so when they maintain their status and are described by the name Yeshurun, meaning straight and unwavering from the proper path. We daven that Hashem should indeed be recognized as King in the highest way possible, and that we should, through our actions, help bring this about.

The next three Pesukim, brought from Writings, go beyond the above: Hashem's purpose in creating the world was to be recognized as King not only through Bnei Yisroel, but through the gentiles as well. Ki Lashem Hamelucha u'moshel bagoyim, He should be both a King to Bnei Yisroel (who have a special relationship with Him as His worthy subjects) and a Ruler over the nations, who should at least recognize that He is the Source of everything and be subservient to Him. Until the time comes when this goal is realized, Hashem "dons" His Grandeur and Might, His attributes with which He keeps the world going, "that it not topple" Af tikon tevel bal timot. On the other hand, through our service of Him, especially in the Beis Hamikdash (but even in its absence, in a more limited way), Yavoh Melech Hakavod, Hashem's glory is revealed even now. When saying these pesukim, one should accept upon himself to do his part to reveal Hashem's glory by serving Him to the best of his ability.

The three Pesukim from the Neviim focus more on this ultimate goal: that through the final redemption of Bnei Yisroel, Hashem

will be revealed as Melech Yisroel v'goal, the King of Yisroel and its Redeemer, and will be recognized by all as the only Power. The 'saviors' will judge the kingdom of Eisav (which represents evil in this world) and obliterate it, thereby v'hoisah Lashem Hamelucha, Kingship will be truly recognized as belonging to Hashem. Then it will become clear that Hashem Echad u'shmo echad, that everything that happens in the world, even what seems bad, is all part of Hashem's will and is for the good. We conclude with the final posuk from the Torah, that of Shema Yisroel, which doesn't mention specifically the term Melech, but refers to this idea that Hashem is now our God, and in the future will be recognized by all as Hashem Echad. We daven that this should all come to fruition soon.

Zichronos

When we talk about zichronos with regards to Hashem, we don't refer to Him 'remembering' something as opposed to forgetting it. Everything is revealed to Hashem, and the concept of 'memory' and 'forgetting' doesn't exist by Him- as we say in the introduction to this part of davening- ein shich'cha lifnei chisei k'vodecha, there is no forgetting before Hashem's Throne of Glory. Rather, the concept of zichronos refers to Hashem's focusing on a particular being or occurrence, dealing with it in a certain way, or providing for it in a particular measure. This is parallel to a person's recall of something or someone, which leads to their acting in a certain way towards the subject of their memory. In other words, this refers to Hashem's hashgacha, His supervision over the world. On Rosh Hashana, in particular, being the Day of Judgement, "the remembering of all creation comes before You, the deeds of each man and his destiny," meaning that Hashem focuses on all deeds of all of creation in order to pass judgement and determine how He will act towards it in the coming year.

The three pesukim from the Torah focus firstly on the concept of reward and punishment, demonstrated by the destruction of the world through the Mabul, and Noach's salvation from it; and on Hashem's more focused hashgacha (zicaron) over tzadikim like Noach and Bnei Yisroel, known as hashgacha pratis, 'specific supervision.' This special focus is in the merit of our forefathers and a result of the covenant Hashem made with them, to watch over Bnei Yisroel and help them

achieve their specific purpose in the world. We again daven that Hashem should indeed deem us worthy of His special attention.

The three pesukim from Kesuvim continue to detail Hashem's hashgacha: firstly, Hashem gave us Yomim Tovim, special days as a 'memorial' to His miracles that He performed, which actually contain higher levels of holiness, 'remnants' of those miracles. These special 'bursts' of kedusha give us the opportunity to break out of our ordinary, mundane life and achieve loftier levels. Secondly, Hashem remembers His covenant to provide specifically for those who fear Him, to enable them to serve Him without disturbance. Thirdly, Hashem remembers His covenant with the Avos to sustain Bnei Yisroel even in exile, in order that His glory will be revealed through them. The pesukim from Navi continue with this theme, describing how Hashem remembers Bnei Yisroel's merits, of their trusting in Hashem and following Him out of Mitzrayim into the desert, their accepting of the Torah and entering into a covenant with Hashem, and their everlasting dedication to Torah. Hashem's constant 'remembering' of these merits will eventually bring about the Redemption, to bring us close to Him again. This is again echoed in the final posuk of Torah, that Hashem will remember the covenant He made with Bnei Yisroel and redeem them, thereby revealing His glory to all the nations, may it happen soon.

Shofaros

The shofar that we sound on Rosh Hashana corresponds to an esoteric concept referred to by the same term. This shofar on high is an emanation (shefa) of extreme holiness from the highest realms that Hashem brings into this world, representing the power of the Torah and enabling us to delve into it, and also presenting the possibility of spiritual rejuvenation and repentance. This is the basic understanding of the above-quoted statement, "Say zichronos before Me so that your remembering shall come before Me, and with what? With the shofar." Meaning, that we say Zichronos to strengthen the Divine Providence over us, and this comes about through the power of the shofar, which causes His influence to come down to us and enable us to rise to lofty levels. Our physical blowing of the shofar serves to help arouse this influence and bring it down to us.

The three pesukim from Torah all describe the giving of the Torah at Har Sinai. The sound of the shofar heard at that time represented the power of the Torah entering our world. This emanation of holiness (1) brought Bnei Yisroel up to the level necessary to be capable of understanding the Torah, (2) continued to grow stronger, representing the constant Divine influence and assistance necessary to help us day by day to grow in Torah throughout the ages, and (3) reached each and every member of Bnei Yisroel individually. We daven that as individuals we should indeed be able to attain our personal levels of Torah study, and bring about perfection in the world.

The three pesukim of Kesuvim continue to describe various attributes of Hashem and His influence represented by the shofar.

The pesukim of Navi teach how the emanation of holiness brought by the shofar on High, will eventually bring about a great influence of kedushah into this world, which will bring about the Final Redemption. "All inhabitants of the world will see Hashem's glory, and like the blowing of the shofar will hear." This is the blowing of the Great Shofar referred to in the second posuk, representing an ever-growing influence of holiness, through which even far-flung Jews will be inspired to return to Hashem. And it is with this influence of the shofar that Hashem will 'battle' the nations, in other words, they will be totally overwhelmed by the extreme holiness, and their control over Bnei Yisroel will be no more. The final Torah verse is a reference to our service of Hashem through karbanos, combined with the power of the Torah, which together bring about the revelation of Hashem's shechina. Again, we daven that we should merit these lofty levels soon.

I hope this overview will open up more understanding of these crucial tefillos. May all of our prayers be accepted favorably.

Shabbos Shuva

Rabbi Yonah Burr

Says Rav Kruspedai in the name of Rav Yochanan, “three books are open on Rosh Hashana- one for the utterly wicked, one for the extremely righteous, and one for the ‘benoni’, the average. The extremely righteous are immediately written and sealed for life; the utterly wicked are immediately written and sealed for death; the benoni, the average, are pending until Yom Kippur; if they merit, they are written for life, if they do not merit, they are written for death”. (mesechtes Rosh Hashana 16)

How familiar we are with this gemara! Everything hangs in the balance, and even one act can make all the difference.

The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva perek 3 changes the wording of Rav Yochanan’s statement somewhat- “the average are pending until Yom Kippur- if they do Teshuva, repent, they are written for life, and if they do not repent, they will be sealed for death”.

Why does the Rambam specify that only Teshuva would help the benoni? If he is average, 50-50, seemingly, any mitzva should ‘tip the scale’ and win him over to the side of the righteous?

Rav Chaim Friendlander zt”l, gives us an enlightening approach; we customarily think of the benoni as someone whose sins exactly equal his merits. We are just waiting for that one additional act to tip the scale. However, there is a different gemara that gives us another perspective regarding the benoni. Rav Yossi HaGlili says: “the righteous are governed by their yetzer hatov. The wicked are governed and driven by their yetzer hara; the benoni is governed by both his yetzer hatov and his yetzer hara.(Berachos 61b)

The benoni is conflicted; he is under the constant influence of both his yetzer hara and yetzer hatov. Everything he does has a dual motivation. There is some good and some not-so-good in every act. Perhaps he davens a long davening- some of it is to have real intent, while some of it is to appear righteous. Perhaps he gives tzedakah- well, some of

it is to really be helpful, while part of it is to boost his own feeling of importance. Everything he does is hybrid, some good intent, tainted with some personal agenda. Perhaps this is why the Ramban states that only teshuva can make a real difference. The core issue here is that he is a combination of motivations. Just to do more acts is just more of the same. It will not affect the fundamental change necessary to change his status or change who he really is.

Teshuva, on the other hand, is the first step to true change. To take stock and start in a new direction. This will create internal change and truly classify him as a tzaddik. Teshuva is the power to change!

Let us internalize the inspiring words of Rabbenu Yonah of Shaarey Teshuva- “thoughts of teshuva can instantly change a person. At that moment, he has left the darkness and now enjoys great light!
May we all merit a Gmar Chasima Tova!

Double Edge

Rabbi Nosson Nota Burr

Among the customs unique to Yamim Noraim, many people have the minhag to recite Tehillim 130 during the Aseres Yimei Teshuv after Yishtabach, before Borchu. This Psalm talks about calling out to Hashem from the מעמקים, from the depths, to listen to our cries.

I heard the following question posed a few years ago by Rabbi Meyer Dovid Greenberger, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Ner Yisroel in Toronto. Passuk Daled of this kapital is very enigmatic. The Passuk says: **כִּי עִמָּךְ** הַסְלִיחָה לִמְעַן תִּירָא. Artscroll translates this as “For with You is forgiveness that You may be feared.” What are we trying to say here? Why is the fact that Hashem forgives us a reason to fear? **לִכְאוּרָה** if Hashem will have forgiveness, that is less reason to be afraid. I found three explanations for this passuk that spoke to me. These answers not only resolve the question, but also contain within them three profound messages that give us the key to the entire avoda of these holy days.

1. Rashi explains that the selicha is only in the hands, so to speak, of Hashem Himself. No malach or intermediary can wield any power over the awesome gift that is selicha. Each and every one will have to stand directly in front of Hashem Himself, and that is why there is what to fear.
2. Based on the writings of the Baalei Mussar, the passuk can be explained that since we have such an opportunity to draw close, it can turn into a kitrug and accusation against us if we don't take advantage of the opportunity.
3. The Ibn Ezra on the passuk, cited in Ramban's Hakdama to Devarim, has a different take on it. He explains it more encouragingly. In a world without repentance, we would have given up trying to be good long ago. It would be too overwhelming and over before it started, if one misstep spelled the end. Reshaim would not be afraid of Hashem, because once they messed up and fell off the path, there would be no choice but to continue on their current road. However, **כִּי עִמָּךְ** הַסְלִיחָה, כי עמך הסליחה,

because it is possible to come back even after one errs, למען תורא, we have reason to be afraid and fear Hashem.

The first two pshatim highlight our responsibility to improve and do teshuva during the Yamim Noraim. The third pshat encourages us, in a positive way, to do Teshuva, because we have the capability to fear Hashem, and it is not too overwhelming and impossible. These are two ideas for us to balance side-by-side during these days. On the one hand, like Rashi and the Baalei Mussar, it is a huge responsibility that we need to ensure we do not squander. There is no Malach that can help, no one we can rely on to “pull strings”. We are standing directly in front of the Melech Malchei Hamlachim and must answer to the King Himself. On the other hand, this very mechanism can bring us great comfort and confidence. The only way we can possibly draw close to Hashem is because He embedded Teshuva into the fabric of the world He created. Without this exact system, we would be lost and too far removed to crown Hashem as King over us.

Now we can understand the significance of the passuk and how it is a key to some of the yesodos in our avoda of this time. May we all be zoche to use this time to its fullest and return fully to Hashem’s embrace. Kesiva V’chasima Tovah.

Changing For the Good

Rabbi Dovid Yehuda Katz

Naturally, every decision a person makes should be based on that person's environment, personality, upbringing, etc. And if a person decides to do something good, he should not be rewarded because it is not due to his credit that he or she chose to do the good action, rather the circumstances that he or she was in is what caused them to make that choice. The same would apply if that person chose to do something bad; he or she would not be held responsible, because it would not be their fault that they chose to do it. They made the decision due to the circumstances that they were in. However, Hashem gave us an amazing gift called bicherah, free choice, which means that despite the situation that a person may find themselves, a person can still choose on their own, whether they want to do the right thing or not. Therefore, if someone chooses to do a good action, it is due to his or her credit that they chose to do it. The same also applies vice versa, that if a person chooses to do a bad action, he or she is held responsible because it is their fault that they chose to do the bad action.

In Meseches Makos (Daf yud, Amud bays) Chazal tell us that this goes a step further. And that is, that not only does a person have the ability to choose between good and bad, but *בדרך שאדם רוצה לילך מוליכין בה* the way that a person wants to go, they (Hashem) bring him. This concept is true whether a person chooses to go in the ways of the righteous or he chooses to go in the ways of the wicked.

Rabbi Avigdor Miller (Tape # 152) explains this concept on two levels. Number one, on a natural level, and number two, on a supernatural level. On a natural level, people notice what they are interested in. For example, a healthy person has side vision. However, most of the time we are not paying attention to the things in our peripheral vision, unless we are on guard. A police officer on a late-night patrol would be quick to respond to movement that he sees in his side vision. The same would be true for a criminal doing something illegal late at night. The reason they are noticing things in their side vision is that they are very interested in seeing what is happening around them. There was a teacher giving a detective course to students. Suddenly in the middle

of the course, the door burst open, and a man ran into the room and attacked the teacher. There was a short scuffle and fight, and then the attacker pulled himself away from the teacher and ran out of the room. From start to finish, the whole episode only took a few seconds. The teacher brushed himself off and explained that the incident was staged. He then asked the students to describe what they saw. What color was the attacker's jacket? Or was he even wearing a jacket? What type of pants was he wearing? What color were his eyes? How tall was he in accordance with the marks on the wall? Etc... The number of students in the class matched the number of different descriptions there were. The teacher explained to them that a trained eye knows what he is supposed to look for and notices it right away. Rav Miller explains that when someone is interested in something, he notices it right away, even though others who are not interested in that particular thing go without noticing it at all. With this in mind, we can understand that naturally, if we want to do good, we will automatically notice ways to do those good things.

Rav Miller explains that from Chazal we see that not only will a person naturally go in the way he wants, but Hashem will even help him and send him ways and means, above nature, to go in the ways that he wants.

One of the proofs that the gemara in Makos brings, to prove that Hashem helps a person go in the ways that he wants, even if it is things that a person should not be doing, is from Bilam. When the officers of midyan and Moav came to hire Bilam to come and curse kilal Yisroel, Hashem told Bilam not to go with them. So Bilam told the officers that I can not go with you to curse Klal Yisroel Because Hashem does not let. The officers left Bilam disappointed. When the king of Moav saw that Bilam did not wish to go with the officers, he then sent officers who were more respectable than the previous ones, hoping that Bilam would not also turn them down. When the second group of officers arrived at Bilam, Bilam told the officers to stay overnight, and Hashem would tell him if he could go with them. Surprisingly, this time Hashem told Bilam he can go with the officers. The gemara understands that the reason why Hashem told Bilam the second time that he can go with the officers is because Hashem saw that Bilam desired to go with them; therefore, Hashem told him he could go with them, even though

Hashem did not want Bilam to go with them, and it was the wrong thing for him to go.

Rav Miller explained that when Hashem sends help to someone to do good, the person himself has to use his free choice to take the opportunity, to utilize the help that he is being sent. For example, if A is not on good terms with B, and A decides that he would like to repair his relationship with B, Hashem may send an opportunity to A, to help out B, in order to allow A to rebuild a positive relationship with B. However, when the opportunity comes for A to do the chesed for B, A will have to use his free will to choose to do the chesed, despite the fact that it may be hard for A to do the chesed for B because of the negative feelings he has towards B, because of the bad things that B may have done to A. Also, when the opportunity comes to A to perform the chesed, the opportunity will not come and announce itself to A that I am your opportunity to fix your relationship with B; rather, it is A's job to notice the opportunity when it comes.

Another illustration would be, if someone wants to give tzedakah but can not afford it, it is possible that Hashem will send him more money in order that he will be able to give tzedakah. When this person actually receives the extra money, to be able to afford to give tzedakah, he may forget that he wanted to give tzedakah and he may be tempted to keep it all for himself. In this case too, even though Hashem sent him the opportunity to be able to give tzedakah like he wished, and he will have to remember that he wished to give tzedakah, and he will need to use his free will to choose to take the opportunity that he was sent from Hashem and go against his temptation to keep it all for himself.

The month of Elul, Rosh Hashonah, Yom Kippur, and Succos, are all a times for Teshuvah and coming closer to Hashem. But these yomim tovim themselves will not do the teshuva for us; rather, we have to use our own free choice to choose to do teshuva and come closer to Hashem. Our first thought of changing our ways for the better may seem very difficult and above what we can achieve. Keeping in mind these principles, if we want to do something, then we will naturally realize all the opportunities that will help us and make it easier for us to change for the good and even more important that Hashem will help

and give us opportunities to change above natural means. Then we will realize that changing our ways is not that hard after all.

May we all be zoche to make the decision to change our ways for the good and notice all of our existing opportunities to change for the good, and receive help from Hashem to go in those good ways.

L'Dovid Hashem Ori

Rabbi Yossi Rabinowitz

The Mishnah Brura (581:2) brings the minhag of reciting 'Ledovid' (Tehillim, 27) twice daily, beginning Rosh Chodosh Elul until Shemini Atzeres. This minhag is not quoted in Rishonim and early Achronim, and in fact, the opinion of the Gr"a (Maaseh Rav) is that we do not add in our nusach hatefilah to what was already instituted, and therefore, he did not have this minhag. Nevertheless, the minhag of reciting 'Ledovid' was accepted by most of Klal Yisroel. The earliest source to this minhag (that I am aware of) is the sefer Shem Tov Hakaton (printed 1706), who strongly encourages the recitation of this mizmor during this time period.

What is the connection between this mizmor and these days of teshuva? Mateh Efrayim, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (amongst others), explain this minhag based on the Medrash (Tehillim and Parshas Achrei Mos). The Medrash expounds on the pesukim: "לדוד ה' אורי" [Hashem is my light]-refers to Rosh Hashana. "ישעי" [and my salvation]-refers to Yom kippur. 'כי יצפני בסכה' [He will hide me in his shelter] -refers to Sukkos. The Achronim explain, that the reason we begin reciting 'Ledovid' already from Rosh Chodesh Elul is based on the Baal Haturim who notes, that the second to last pasuk- "לולא האמנתי לראות בטוב ה' בארץ" begins with the same letters as Elul. Chida (Chomos Einach on Tehillim) adds, that the last pasuk-

"קוה אל ה'" [Hope to Hashem] refers to these days. "קוה אל ה' חזק ואמץ לך וקוה אל ה'" [Hope to Hashem] -during Elul.

"חזק ואמץ לך" [strengthen yourself and he will give you courage] -during Aseres Yemei Teshuva "וקוה אל ה'" [and hope to Hashem] -on Yom Kippur.

Why was this mizmor chosen above other pesukim in Tanach, which speak more directly about teshuva or the Yomim Norayim (see for example Tehillim mizmor 51)? The earlier sources that mention this minhag explain that this mizmor is not merely an allusion to these days, rather its recitation helps us be zocheh to a favorable judgement. Shem Tov Koton (mentioned above) writes, that whoever recites this mizmor from Rosh Chodesh Elul until Simchas Torah (that was his minhag), even if there is a bad decree, he can annul it. He continues: this mizmor has the power to nullify the Satan and all mekatrogim, and remove all harsh decrees against the person, who will then be zocheh in din. (He explains this idea based on Kabbalah).

On a simple level, we can understand this concept based on the Medrash mentioned above. The Medrash tells us that during these days Klal Yisroel is in great danger. In Shomayim, the Sarei Haumos and Satan tell Hashem that Klal Yisroel has aveiros like the other nations. They claim that we are not worthy of a favorable din. For this claim Klal Yisroel responds, "בזאת אני בוטח" [in this I trust] (see Medrash there).

Rashi and Radak explain that these words-בזאת אני בוטח are referring to what was stated earlier- "ה' אורי וישעי, מעתה חיי". We respond that although we may have adversaries who point out our flaws and misdeeds, we put our trust in our loving Father who is merciful and will favor us in din. Panim Yafos (Achrei Mos), quotes this minhag of reciting Ledovid, and explains the minhag based on this Medrash. He adds that the name of Hashem (shem Havaya) appears 13 times in this mizmor, corresponding to the 13 midos of rachamim. We know that we may not have acted the way we were supposed to; nevertheless, we trust in Hashem's endless mercy and compassion He has for His beloved children.

Now we understand that reciting 'Ledovid' is not merely an allusion to these days, but it also helps us understand our avodah during this time period. We must recognize that we are in grave danger from all those who stand up against us, and try to prevent us from being zocheh in din.

After this recognition, we strengthen our bitachon in Hashem that He will give us a favorable judgement. Now we understand what the Chida (quoted earlier) means when he writes that the last pasuk קוה אל ה refers to these days. The way we enter this time period is with the understanding that although there is a great Sakana we place our trust in Hashem.

Rav Shach zt"l visited the Brisker Rav shortly prior to his passing [on erev Yom Kippur]. Rav Shach noticed that the Brisker Rav seemed quite concerned. Rav Shach tried comforting him by noting the Chazal (see Tur 581), that Klal Yisroel is joyous on Rosh Hashana, confident that Hashem will perform a nes for us. The Brisker Rav responded quoting the piyut Keser Malchus, who describes that during these days of awe, we proclaim: "אברח ממך אליך" - "I will run away from You [Hashem] back to You". We recognize the great danger we are in [both for this world and the next], we want to run away! We run back to our loving Aveinu Shebashamayim. The Brisker Rav continued and noted that this idea is written explicitly in Rambam in his perush hamishnayos at the end of meseches Rosh Hashana. The Rambam describes these days and writes that these days are days of fear and "ומברח ומנוס אליו" - we run away and escape back to Hashem. The Brisker Rav explained that we first need to recognize the grave situation and then we put our trust in Hashem.

This idea is expressed throughout 'Ledovid'. We speak about how the enemies stand up against us "צרי ואובי לי" but we fortify ourselves with our reliance on Hashem.

May Hashem help us internalize this message and merit the special benefits that come along with this mizmor. Shana Tova Umesuka to one and all.

(Based on a shiur I heard from Rav Shalom Hertzberg).

Thinking of Doing Teshuva? Or Thinking is Teshuva!

Rabbi Yehuda Y Silver

It's happened countless times: my wife asks me to pick up something from the store or make a stop on my way home. I get in the car, fully intending to run the errand, but then I get a phone call and suddenly I am home. Oops! I got involved in the call, totally forgot, and didn't realize where I was headed.

That happens in life all the time. We get involved in the details and activities of life and forget that we are heading to Olam Habah.

The Mesilas Yesharim (Chapter 2) notes that this is the primary way the Yetzer Hara attempts to make a person stumble. He is like Paroah, trying to work a person without respite, so he has no time to think about whether he is on the correct path.

This is especially true in today's society, where the technology that we live with gives us no time to think. A few short years ago, when a person finished davening before the chazzan, he would pick up the nearest sefer or pamphlet and skim through it. We had nothing to do! Nowadays, our phones and watches are constantly tugging at our attention.

The Mesilas Yesharim assures us: if we give ourselves a moment to think, we won't just regret our actions, we will naturally move toward Teshuva. The process starts with mindful reflection.

The root of the word Teshuva is שׁוּב, return, and it is closely related to the word יִשָּׁב, to settle. The first step to repenting and starting anew is to settle down. When we are not running around, we have the capacity to think clearly. (See Rav Dessler vol 2 for a similar concept.)

Personally, I find that even when I am not busy, I have decided not to look at my phone and stroll calmly home, but my mind is automatically filled with thoughts of what I plan on doing, what for supper, etc. The

Yetzer Hara got me again! Not being busy means not even thinking about the humdrum of life. It means clearing my mind and thinking about where I am heading in life.

It's not so hard, all it takes is a conscious decision that for five minutes, when I walk home from shul on Shabbos, I will be involved in my own world and think! Try it, it's refreshing and enjoyable!

Kesiva V'Chasima Tova!

Hashem Is My Light and My Salvation

Moshe Vegh

We live in a time of miracles. So many, in fact, that we risk forgetting them. As we approach Rosh Hashana, we must remember that everything which will unfold in the coming year is being written now. Recent events remind us of Hashem's guiding hand. The miraculous death of Ebrahim Raisi, "the Butcher of Iran," in a helicopter crash shocked the world. Exploding pagers and walkie-talkies that neutralized Hezbollah before they could cause harm. The fall of Assad. Hundreds upon hundreds of missiles aimed at Eretz Yisrael failed to reach their targets. Key leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah were struck down. We endured a miraculous twelve-day war with Iran.

And though we mourn every soldier we have lost — each one a world unto himself — we recognize that the toll, as painful as it is, has been far smaller than any military analyst could have predicted. These are not coincidences. They are wake-up calls. Hashem is calling out to us. The question is: will we answer the call?

Do We Pray by Rote—or Do We Mean It?

When we open our siddurim, do we simply recite the words, or do we truly daven with our hearts?

Chazal teach us that true yiras Shamayim comes not just from saying the words, but from living with the awareness that Hashem is before us at every moment. As Dovid HaMelech declared: "שׁוֹתִי ה' לְנֶגְדִי תָמִיד" "I place Hashem before me always." This is the essence of tefillah. To stand as if before the King. To know that every word we utter rises to Heaven. To realize that prayer is not a monologue, but a living conversation with our Creator.

As we approach Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, we must ask ourselves: are we reading from the siddur, or are we speaking to Hashem? Are we fulfilling an obligation, or are we opening our hearts?

When we truly place Hashem before us—Shivisi Hashem l'negdi tamid—our prayers are transformed. They become alive, personal, and

filled with meaning. (לדוד ה' אורי וישעי – Tehillim 27) Each year during the month of Elul and through the High Holidays, we recite Psalm 27: “אֵיךָ אֶפְרָא” – “Of David: Hashem is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”

This verse sets the tone for the entire psalm: a message of courage, trust, and faith in the face of challenge.

Light and Salvation

The Midrash teaches: “אורי – My light” refers to Rosh Hashana, when Hashem’s light of judgment shines upon the world, while “וישעי – My salvation” refers to Yom Kippur, the day of forgiveness and atonement. David HaMelech reminds us that even in moments of judgment, when we stand before Hashem with awe, there is also light, clarity, and ultimately salvation.

One Request Above All

David declares: “אַחַת שְׁאַלְתִּי... שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית־ה' כָּל־יְמֵי חַיִּי” – “One thing I ask... to dwell in the House of Hashem all the days of my life.” Despite all his needs – wars, enemies, and struggles – David reduced everything to a single yearning: closeness to Hashem. This is also the essence of Rosh Hashana. We do not focus on personal requests, but rather on proclaiming Hashem as King, desiring only to live in His presence. Faith in the Face of Struggle

David does not deny the reality of challenge: “Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear...” He transforms fear into faith by anchoring himself in higher purpose. Rosh Hashana, too, is a day of awe, but not of despair; it is a day when fear is elevated into faith, and trembling is transformed into song.

Living With Gratitude

The psalm concludes: “לֹאֵלֹא הִאֲמַנְתִּי לְרֹאשׁוֹת בְּטוֹב־ה' בְּאַרְץ חַיִּים” – “Had I not believed I would see the goodness of Hashem in the land of the living...” and finally: “מְנוּחָה אֶלֶי־ה', חֲזַק וַיֵּאֲמַץ לִבִּי” – “Hope in Hashem, be strong, and let your heart take courage.” This is the essence of Rosh Hashana: not only to crown Hashem as King, but to strengthen our

own hearts with hope and faith that His goodness will be revealed in our lives.

A Message for Our Time

Just as David HaMelech longed to dwell in the House of Hashem, so too we prepare during these Yamim Noraim to bring His presence more fully into our homes, our communities, and our world. On Rosh Hashana, our prayers rise not only for ourselves, but for the building of communities, homes, and sacred spaces that reflect His light. Rosh Hashana is not only about personal prayers — it is about answering Hashem's call, building sacred spaces in our lives, and reflecting His light into a darkened world.

May this year be one of growth, faith, miracles, and revealed goodness for all of us.

The Root of the Problem

Rabbi Avrohom Aharon Weiman

“I will certainly remove My Shechina from them!” Hashem responds to Klal Yisroel’s teshuva. In Parshas Vayelech (וי, לא), the Torah predicts how Klal Yisroel will eventually serve avoda zara and Hashem will punish them. Then, they will do teshuva and Hashem will continue to remove His Shechina. Why does Hashem continue to distance Himself after they did teshuva?

Let’s analyze Klal Yisroel’s teshuva. The pasuk says, “[Klal Yisroel] will say on that day, ‘Is it not because Hashem was not in my midst, that all of these tragedies befell me?’” It is apparent from the mefarshim that Klal Yisroel were confessing that they served avoda zara, which caused Hashem not to be in their midst. If Klal Yisroel confessed for serving avoda zara, why did Hashem continue to distance Himself and not accept their teshuva?

The Chassam Sofer (in Sefer Toras Moshe) quotes Chazal who explain the prohibition to look and gaze at an avoda zara. Chazal explain the way of the yetzer hara is to get one to look, then contemplate, then desire, and slowly bring the person to serve the avoda zara. Therefore, explains the Chassam Sofer, the main punishment for serving avoda zara is for the looking and contemplating which lead the person to the actual עבירה. The Chassam Sofer explains that this is the reason Hashem continued to distance Himself. Klal Yisroel were only confessing to serving the avoda zara and not confessing to the looking and contemplating that brought them to serve the avoda zara.

We see from here that a big part of teshuva is to contemplate the small steps that brought oneself to do the עבירה, and to do teshuva on them, as well as on the actual עבירה. This can be compared to weeding a yard. If one only cuts the weed, the weed will grow back. The only way to solve the problem is to attack the root of the weed. Either pull it out or kill it with weed killer.

Targum Yehonason, by the lav of Lo Tirzach (You shouldn’t murder) elaborately translates the words “You shouldn’t murder” - “My nation

Yisroel should not be murderers, nor friends or partners with murderers, and murderers should not be seen among Kinesses Yisroel, in order that your children should not come after you and learn to be among murderers.” By Targum Yehonason including in his translation things that may bring one’s descendants to murder, we see that there is much more to an עבירה than just the act itself. One must set up precautions to prevent oneself and one’s descendants from coming close to the עבירה.

Here is a mashal that brings out this yisod. There was once a very honorable tzadik. He was very respectful to everyone. However, one Shabbos he came home from shul, shaken up by someone who had screamed at the Rov calling him a fool and an ignoramus, and vented to his family (obviously not mentioning the name of the man or any details that would make it lashon hara). Afterwards, he realized that he shouldn’t have said anything. This was the only time he ever spoke against someone in front of his family. Even so, it made a small impact on his children. One of his sons followed in his way and was an honorable tzadik. However, once a year, he would vent to his family about issues that happened at shul. A few generations later, he had a descendent whose Shabbos table was full of belittling and mockery. As his years went on, his sly remarks began coming out at shul. When he saw something he didn’t like, he would give it to the person over the head. He became a person who got into arguments with everyone. A few generations later, one descendant, who was full of hatred for others, got so upset with someone that he plotted against him and murdered him.

This is obviously an extreme mashal; however, the yisod is true. One small act can slowly bring terrible results. Targum Yehonason is teaching us that no matter how great we are, we still need to distance ourselves from even the smallest mistake or bad middah that could bring about a murder. This is the power of bad middos and bad shorashim.

Shorashim of עבירות are very important to have in mind during the Yamim Noraim. We are working on teshuva, searching for areas to work on, and planning what to change and how to change. We need to make sure that we include a plan to stop the עבירה, have charata

(remorse), say veduy on the עבירה, and uproot the bad middos or other roots that cause the עבירה.

Here is another mashal. There was once a man with major anger issues. He once got very upset and broke a \$50,000 crystal vase. “How could I let myself explode and get so out of control?” he regretted from the depths of his heart. This was it; he was going to change himself once and for all. After much thought and contemplation, he declared, “I accept upon myself to never break another crystal vase ever again!”

Obviously, this man is making a big mistake. The root of his problem is his anger. He needs to work on controlling his anger. Even if he succeeds in not breaking another crystal vase, he may still get angry again and break something expensive that is not crystal. (Or worse, an important relationship.)

As we experience these days of kedusha and inspect our actions, we will be”H find many עבירות we can work on. In our planning, we need to contemplate the עבירה and its shoresh, “Why am I doing this עבירה, what small steps brought me to it?”

During one’s search, one may find many things to work on. We must be very careful not to get discouraged. The yetzer hara loves to get us to do nothing. One way is to tell us, “There is so much. It’s too hard. I’m so overwhelmed.” The only way to beat him and succeed is to persevere and do something small and significant. Another way to help overcome him is to rejoice in every step one takes in the right direction. One should rejoice over one’s inner desire to do what’s right and with every thought and action one does to change oneself. If we get stuck, we should turn to our Rabbeyim and Rabanim to help direct us on the proper path. They can help us plan which עבירות and shorashim to work on and help us with our kabala. One should also daven to Hashem for help to find what to work on, and to succeed in changing oneself.

May we all merit to take advantage of this special time and special Heavenly Assistance, to work on ourselves, do teshuva shlayma, and

uproot the bad shorashim and prevent ourselves from doing עבירות in the future.

(Based on my understanding of Reb Yechiel Wolf's vaad)

Lessons of the Succah

Rabbi Yonah Burr

"So that your generations will know that I caused the Children of Israel to dwell in succahs when I took them from the land of Egypt". (Leviticus 23:43)

The Talmud cites the well-known dispute regarding these succahs; according to Rabbi Eliezer, they refer to the miraculous clouds of glory that G-d enveloped the Jewish People with during their entire forty-year stay in the wilderness. According to Rabbi Akiva, however, they were simple huts that the people built for themselves.

Now, according to Rabbi Eliezer, it is quite understandable why Hashem gave us a mitzvah to commemorate these succahs; it was a miracle of incredible proportion, spending forty years under the Divine protection of the clouds. Additionally, the medrash relates that these clouds softened the harsh desert terrain, flattened any obstacle in their way, and even 'dry cleaned' their clothing!

But according to Rabbi Akiva, they were simple huts; it is not readily apparent what makes these simple structures something worth commemorating. The Rashbam explains that according to Rabbi Akiva, it is precisely our humble beginnings that we are recalling. We often take for granted the blessings we have or attribute them to our own efforts. The mitzvah of succah is there to remind us that we started with nothing, and then Hashem brought us into the land; everything we have is from Him, and we should be grateful for what He gives us. It emerges then that succah contains a double message; what we have is a gift, and we should appreciate it, while at the same time we realize that Hashem is there behind the scenes, affording us His Divine protection!

Sukkah: A Divine Embrace

Rabbi Doniel Schon

When the Torah describes the mitzva of sitting in a Sukkah, it mentions that we sit in the Sukkah in order to remember that HaShem caused us to dwell in sukkahs throughout our miraculous journey through the desert upon redeeming us from Mitzrayim. The Gemara in Masseches Succah debates whether the sukkahs we sit in commemorate the clouds of glory that enveloped the Jewish nation throughout the journey or the actual huts that the Jews lived in. But regardless, the Succah reminds us of the miraculous journey that HaShem led us through the desert. The Bach points out that since the Torah went out of its way to describe a reason for the mitzva of sitting in a Sukkah, it is imperative to actually contemplate the Jews' miraculous journey through the desert while one sits in the Sukkah to perform the mitzva in its most optimal way.

Many commentators ask - if the mitzva of dwelling in sukkahs is to remind us how HaShem took care of us through the desert, then why do we celebrate it in the fall? Pesach also commemorates how HaShem took us out of Mitzrayim, and we celebrate it in the spring when HaShem took us out. Why, then, is Succos, which also commemorates HaShem taking us out of mitzrayim celebrated in the fall?

The answer commonly given is that if we were to celebrate Succos in the spring, our sitting in the Succah would not be recognizable as being performed for a mitzva purpose. Many people leave their homes in the spring to go outside to enjoy the warmer weather, so if we observed Succos in the spring, it would not be recognizable as being done for a mitzva. However, in the fall, when people are generally leaving their summer homes and returning to their more permanent homes, when a Jew leaves his permanent home and enters a more temporary dwelling, it is apparent that he is doing so for a mitzva purpose.

The Vilna Gaon offers a more profound explanation to answer the question. He says that when the Gemara mentions that we sit in a Sukkah to commemorate the clouds of glory, it is not referring to the general idea that there were clouds of glory surrounding the Jews through their

journey, but specifically to the clouds of glory that returned to protect the Jewish nation after Moshe had obtained complete forgiveness for the sin of the golden calf.

The Vilna Gaon explains the timeline as follows. The possuk tells us that after the sin of the golden calf, the clouds of glory left the Jewish nation. On Yom Kippur, the 10th of Tishrei, Moshe had successfully lobbied Hashem to completely forgive the Jewish nation for the sin of the golden calf. On the 11th of Tishrei, Moshe instructed the nation to donate materials to construct the mishkan. On the 12th and 13 of Tishrei, the Jews brought an abundance of donations. On the 14th, the donated materials were distributed to the craftsmen. Then the next day, the 15th of Tishrei (the first day of Succos), the Jewish people began to build the mishkan, and the clouds of glory returned to their position protecting the Jews.

According to this interpretation, it is quite clear why we celebrate Succos exactly where it is in the calendar. We are not merely commemorating the event that HaShem protected the Jewish nation with the clouds of glory; rather, we are celebrating the fact that even though the sin of the golden calf caused the Jews to lose the protection of the clouds of glory, through our sincere teshuva, HaShem restored the clouds of glory, signifying that the Jews had regained their special connection to HaShem. Therefore, we celebrate Succos on the 15th of Tishrei, as that was the day that clouds were restored after the sin of the golden calf.

Rav Dovid Cohen, adds that this explanation of the holiday of Succos fits beautifully with the way the Vilna Gaon explains the give-and-take between Moshe and HaShem after the sin of the golden calf. At the beginning of Shmos chapter 32, HaShem informs Moshe that the Jews have sinned and that He plans on destroying them. Moshe immediately pleads on behalf of the Jews, and shortly after the Torah writes (32:14) *vayinachem Hashem al ha'raah aher diber la'asos*-HaShem reconsidered the punishment He planned on inflicting upon the Jews. However, even after this assurance, Moshe continues to plead with HaShem. Why did he continue? Hasn't HaShem already assured Moshe that He will not destroy the Jews?

The Rashbam explains that when Moshe asked HaShem hodeinei na es dirachecha – show me your ways (Shmos 33:13), Moshe was asking that HaShem personally lead the Jews into Eretz Yisroel. This was in response to HaShem mentioning Vishalachti lifanecha malach – and I will send before you an angel (Shmos 33:2). Even though HaShem had already forgiven the Jews for the sin of the golden calf and would not destroy them, there would still be a punishment that remained – that they would be led by an angel, not by HaShem Himself. This is why Moshe continued to plead on behalf of the Jews, and Moshe did not back down until HaShem responded (Shmos 34:10) hinei anochi koreis bris negged kol amcha e'eseh niflaos – behold I will seal a covenant, before the entire nation I will make wonders. It was only at this point that HaShem had fully forgiven the Jews and exalted them to the lofty status that they were on before the sin of the golden calf. The Vilna Gaon comments that the niflaos- wonders (Shmos 34:10) referred to the return of the clouds of glory, because their return was the sign that HaShem had fully forgiven the Jewish nation and that they would be able to enjoy their previous special relationship with HaShem as had they never sinned at all.

So, this Succos, when we sit in the Sukkah and contemplate the huts and clouds of glory which HaShem protected us during our journey through the desert, let's also think about the fact that the Sukkah reminds us that HaShem is willing to take us back even after we've sinned. Hopefully, we have put the proper work into Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and can rejoice that we have fully restored our personal relationship with HaShem.

Intimate Knowledge: Niglah and Nistar in the Sukkah

Rabbi Ari Federgrun

לִמְעַן יֵדְעוּ דִּרְתֵיכֶם כִּי בַּסָּפוֹת הוֹצֵאתִי אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּהוֹצִיאִי אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ
מִצְרַיִם אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

“In order that future generations may know that I made the Israelite people dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt—I, Hashem your God” (Vayikra 23:43).

There are three mitzvos in the Torah where the pasuk itself provides a reason for the mitzvah. By Tzitzis the Torah says “למען תזכרו”—so that you will remember. By Tefillin it says “למען תהיה”—so that it will be. And by Sukkos it says “למען ידעו”—so that you will know.

On a halachic level, the Bach explains that for these three mitzvos, it is not enough merely to perform the act; one must also have the proper kavanah. The Mishnah Berurah and Pri Megadim note that while this is the ideal way of fulfilling the mitzvah, it is not strictly required.

What stands out, though, is that only by Sukkos does the Torah use the language of ידיעה—knowledge. This is not just external awareness but an inner, intimate understanding. As we see in the pasuk “ידע אדם את” —when Adam “knew” Chavah, it reflected a profound depth of connection. So too, by Sukkos, the mitzvah calls for a knowledge rooted in deep relationship and awareness.

This charge of ידיעה—an intimate knowledge—highlights the unique role of Sukkos, both as the culmination of the Tishrei Yamim Tovim and as the finale of the Shalosh Regalim. Rabbeinu Bechaye, one of the great Torah commentators of the 14th century, in his Sefer הקמה, offers a range of explanations for the mitzvah of Sukkah. Some are in the realm of נגלה—drawn directly from the narrative and text of the Torah—while others belong to the realm of נסתר—hidden layers of meaning. Interestingly, Rabbeinu Bechaye himself defines these realms differently: נגלה relates to how mitzvos shape a person in this world, influencing one’s emunah and middos; נסתר relates to the נפש,

strengthening and beautifying it. What follows is a brief synopsis of his commentary.

On one level, the Sukkah recalls the miracles of the desert: the daily portions of man, the miraculous protection, and the ability to survive in an uninhabitable wilderness. The generation that experienced these miracles firsthand felt Hashem's presence constantly. But later generations might question: Was the desert really so harsh? Perhaps it was more livable than described? Maybe they were near fertile ground or close to a settled city? Or perhaps everyone in that region also benefited from the man?

Why is it the Sukkah, in particular, that reaffirms this belief? Because the journey of Am Yisrael followed a clear trajectory. They were redeemed from Egypt with the goal of entering Eretz Yisrael, a place of *דירת קבע*—permanent dwelling—centered around the *Beis HaMikdash*, the *בית עולמים*, the eternal home. But to reach that permanence, they first passed through a stage of *דירת ערא*—a temporary dwelling—in the desert. Rabbeinu Bechaye teaches that our future redemption, may it come speedily in our days, will mirror this pattern: first a stage of *דירת ערא*, relying directly on Hashem's protection, followed by the permanence of Eretz Yisrael. So too, we leave our stable homes and step into the fragile walls of the Sukkah, reliving the *דירת ערא* of the generation of the Midbar.

On a deeper level, the Sukkah embodies the *ענני הכבוד*, the Clouds of Glory. According to the Mechilta, Bnei Yisrael were surrounded by seven clouds, just as the *כסא הכבוד* is encircled by seven clouds (Pirkei D'Rebbi Elazar). Appropriately, Sukkos falls in the seventh month and lasts for seven days—the very month in which the world was created, with Sukkos beginning in its midpoint.

The Sukkah also reflects both *עולם הבא* and *עולם הזה*. Its halachic dimensions themselves hint at this: the requirement of three walls parallels this world, with its directions of east, west, and south, while the north side remains open. A wall may be formed by a *צורת הפתח*—two pillars with a crossbeam—resembling the letter *ה*, with which this world was created. The Sukkah's minimum height is 10 *טפחים*, drawn from the Aron, which was 10 *טפחים* high, with the Keruvim *בכר* סוככים

נפיהם, their wings forming a canopy above—like the סכך. In contrast, the next world was created with the letter י, whose numerical value is 10.

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains that the Sukkah is a symbol of our avodah in this world. The ה, representing the five senses, signifies the effort and toil of עולם הזה. When used for mitzvos, this effort leads to the י—a deeper grasp of the ten Sefiros, the clarity of עולם הבא. Then we merit to sit beneath the סכך, crowned in shade, basking in the radiance of the Shechinah. As we declare in Tehillim: ה' שִׁמְרֶךָ ה' צִלְךָ עַל-יְדֵי יְמִינֶךָ—Hashem is your protector; Hashem is your shade at your right hand. Perhaps we can suggest that נסתר complements נגלה. On the one hand, the Sukkah reflects a process of temporality leading to permanence: from דירת עראי in the desert to דירת קבע in the Beis HaMikdash, sustained all along by Hashem's intervention. On the other hand, the Sukkah represents both this world and the next: the work of the five senses, the toil of mitzvos, and the striving of עולם הזה—which leads to the clarity and permanence of עולם הבא, dwelling under the shade of Hashem. In the Midbar, Hashem Himself carried us to our destination. In the final redemption, explains Rabbeinu Bechaye, the same will occur. But in the present, we must toil. We must exert effort to reach the sanctity of the כסא הכבוד, encircled by clouds, until we enter the קדש הקדשים, where the Aron rested in its sacred space of 10 טפחים.

May we be zocheh to experience this closeness with Hashem, to attain ידיעה—an intimate knowledge of both נגלה and נסתר. And may the efforts of our Yamim Noraim elevate our tefillos on Sukkos, so that they are fully accepted: הרחמן הוא יקים לנו את סוכת דוד הנופלת.

The Value of a Zero

Rabbi Dovid Wachs

The Torah tells us to leave our homes for seven days during Succos and live in a temporary dwelling called a Succah. Although the walls can be solid, the roof must be made of items that grow from the ground and cannot be so thick that rain cannot come in.

In our prayers, Succos, is referred to as the "Zman Simchasaynu" - the time of our joy. How can it be a time of joy, though, if we eat our meals and dwell in a flimsy structure that exposes us to the chill and the wind? Doesn't this state of discomfort detract from the state of joy that we are supposed to be in?

Rav Yaacov Niman z"l says that the temporary nature of the succah reminds us of the temporary nature of the world in which we live in. Judaism teaches that our souls come from a higher, spiritual world and are put into our bodies for a finite period in this physical world. The Torah is the blueprint, the instruction manual, that directs the soul how to live and how to

perfect and refine its essence. When a person dies, his or her soul returns to its permanent home (Olam Haba). Rabbi Niman says that genuine happiness can only be attained when one has this perspective. By dwelling in a flimsy, temporary succah, which reminds us of our temporary sojourn here, we gain the means for actually achieving more simcha. Having this perspective helps us realize and order our priorities in life. Among other things, it helps us overcome pettiness and helps us to face challenges with optimism and strength. It can help us put less emphasis on material gain and focus more on spiritual matters.

However, this perspective should not imply that we devalue this earthly existence. On the Shabbos of Succos, we read the book of Koheles (Ecclesiastes). Shlomo Hamelech - King Solomon - the author, writes in the second verse, "Futility of futilities, says Koheles (Solomon), futility of futilities. All is futile!" The author of "Mashal Umelitza" explains this enigmatic passage in the following way. A young child is learning numbers. He understands the numbers 1-9 but is puzzled at the value of the number "0." He asks the teacher what its value is, to

which the teacher replies that it has no value. The child then asks what its purpose is if it has no value. The teacher replies that by itself it has no value, but if it is joined to another number it can raise that number by tens, hundreds, thousands, ad infinitum.

Shlomo Hamelech, is saying that yes, the physical nature of our world is futile. Materialism is temporary and finite, and can lead to jealousy, greed, anger, selfishness and war. But it is only futile and empty when it is by itself. When used the proper way and with the proper intentions, however, our material world can be a vehicle for bringing much good in the world. We can

help many people and increase love and good will around us. Enjoying our material blessings can also help us to appreciate and feel gratitude to the Almighty, thereby bringing more holiness into the world.

This is what Shlomo HaMelech means when he says that the world is "futility of futilities." It is only that way when "all is futile," the concluding words of the verse. If we absorb ourselves in material acquisitions and pursuits and ignore a higher purpose and service, then it is indeed futile, but when we use the world to help us acquire greater wisdom and ethical and spiritual greatness, and as a way to extend ourselves to others, then the world becomes very valuable and not futile at all.



For additional information, to request a chavrusa and study the topic of your choice, or to set up a new shiur please contact Rabbi Schon at dschon@northeastkollel.org

Sunday

9:30 am Gemara Kidushin Shiur (R' Bauman)
9:30 am Yorucha (R' Schon)

Monday

9:45 am Shabbos Chabura (R' Schon)
8:00 pm Semichas Chaver at B'nai Israel
(R' Schon)

Tuesday

9:45 am Shabbos Chabura (R' Schon)
8:45 pm Night Seder Chabura

Wednesday

10:00 am Shabbos Chabura (R' Schon)
8:30 pm Exploring Topics from DafYomi
(Zoom - Rabbi Burr)
8:45 pm Night Seder Chabura

Thursday

9:45 am Shabbos Chabura (R' Schon)
9:15 pm Parsha Chabura (R' Burr)