

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
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 Rosh Hashanah/Teshuvah  
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*Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita*

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## *Rosh Hashanah/Teshuva*

*Presented by*

**Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

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### ***1. Touching Man's Spiritual Potential***

The Torah tells us that in the Shmitta year (the Sabbatical year) the land must remain fallow and one is not permitted to engage in agricultural pursuits because it is, "**Shabbos L'ashem (A Sabbath for Hashem)**". The Sforno in his commentary explains that "**Shabbos L'ashem**" means that the Shmitta year should be a time of dedicating oneself to introspection, meditation, and the study of Torah. The Shmitta year is devoted completely to spiritual endeavors.

The Torah states that during the first day of *Chol HaMoed Succos* of the eighth year (the year after the Shmitta cycle), the entire Jewish People (men, women, and children) must gather at the Temple Mount to hear the reading of *Mishna Torah* (The Book of Devarim) by the King of Israel. This Positive Commandment is referred to as *Hakhail*. The Torah states that the purpose of this reading is, "**So that they (the Jewish people) should listen and learn to fear Hashem.**" The purpose of the mitzvah of *Hakhail* is to instill the fear of G'd into the hearts of the Jewish people.

The Torah designates the eighth year during the Festival of Succos (after the Shmitta Cycle) as the time for the mitzvah of *Hakhail*. In order for us to understand the sequence of events, which begins with the Sabbatical year and culminates with the reading of the Torah by the King on the Festival of Succos (at the beginning of the eighth year), we must understand why this progression is the most appropriate. It would seem that according to the interpretation of "**Shabbos L'ashem**" (offered by Sforno) that the Sabbatical year which is designated for

introspection, meditation and the study of Torah – should follow the mitzvah of *Hakhail* rather than precede it. If the purpose of the reading of *Mishna Torah* on the Temple Mount is to learn to fear G'd, it would seem that one should first be inspired by this reading and then dedicate the following year to spiritual pursuits. Yet, the Torah states that this is not the case. Why is this so?

We only have the capacity to internalize and experience an event only after a certain degree of spiritual preparation. To begin this process we must dedicate a year to spirituality (the study of Torah, meditation, and introspection), without any distraction whatsoever. Then we must experience Rosh Hashanah (the Day of Judgment), and the Ten Days of Penitence, culminating with Yom Kippur. It is only at this point, when we have been sufficiently oriented that we are able to ascend the Temple Mount to listen to the King of Israel read the Book of Devarim and learn to fear G'd.

The Torah is teaching us that even with an awe inspiring event, we do not have the capacity and sensitivity to receive, absorb and internalize it unless we first prepare ourselves.

The Torah tells us that Adam was made from earth (*Adam- from "adama" meaning "earth"*). Just like a field needs to be cultivated and prepared for sowing, regardless of the quality of its soil and seed, so that the seed takes root and germinates properly, so too does man, regardless of his potential, need to be cultivated in order to be receptive to spirituality. The Talmud tells us, "**I (G'd) created the Yetzer HaRa (The Evil Inclination) and I created the Torah as its antidote.**" For the Jew, the

study of the Torah is equivalent to the “plow” which cultivates and orients the person to be sensitive to its values and to appreciate its concepts. Therefore before being qualified to do the mitzvah of *Hakhail*, one experienced the following sequence of events: the Shmitta year, Rosh Hashanah and the Ten Days of Penitence culminating with Yom Kippur.

If one enters into Rosh Hashanah (the Day of Judgment) – the most awesome and solemn day of the year- without any degree of preparation how can one have a sense of G'd and the gravity of the day? Chazal tell us that the Torah was given to those “who partook of the Mann (Manna).” The Mann (which sustained the Jewish people in the desert for a forty year period) was spiritual food that presented itself in a physical form. It spiritualized and gave the Jewish people the capacity to fully absorb the Sinai experience and the Torah itself. Had the Jews eaten physical food (which is material and earthy), then they would not have had a sufficient capacity to internalize the Torah properly.

The verse in Shir Ha'Shirim (Song of Songs) states, “I am asleep but my heart is awake.” Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl explains this verse based on the Zohar that “I am asleep” is referring to the Jewish people. The Jewish people are asleep and are not sensitive to their spirituality and to G'd. He explains that the phrase “my heart is awake” is referring to G'd, who is the heart of Jewish people. G'd is continuously awake and He sees that His children (Jewish people) are in a deep sleep. How does G'd awaken them? Reb Chaim of Volozhin explains this with a parable:

There was a king whose son was stricken with an illness that would intensify if he were to fall asleep. In an effort to keep his son awake, the king removed him from the bed and placed him on the hardened ground. However, despite the discomfort of the earthen floor, the son began dosing off. The king had to resort to placing knives and spikes under his son to force him to stay awake. Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl explains that this is the reason why the Jewish people experience tragedies and suffering. It is G'd's attempt to keep them awake. When the Jewish people drift away from G'd and fall into a trance-like state which causes them to be insensitive to their spirituality, it will ultimately bring about spiritual death. Therefore G'd brings upon us pain and suffering to awaken us so that we should not drift into spiritual oblivion.

We experience many difficulties but are we in touch enough with ourselves to realize why we are experiencing them? Although G'd attempts to awaken us from our trance with much suffering, we are not sensitive to understand and appreciate the value of this experience. Rambam writes in Hilchos Teshuvah (The Laws of Repentance) that listening to the sound of the Shofar is a Torah Decree and simultaneously it transmits a subtle message: “Those who sleep, awaken from your sleep. Rouse yourself from your trance, introspect your ways, remember your Creator and do teshuvah.” A man can appreciate and relate to a spiritual experience properly only if he sensitizes and elevates himself above his physicality. Therefore in order to maximize on the Rosh Hashanah experience, one must orient himself to spirituality through the increased study of Torah and through doing mitzvos in a more perfect manner.

## **2. The Power of Torah**

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that there are two types of rain that are needed to allow the various species of vegetation to grow. For example, in order for a tree to grow, the rain needs to penetrate its roots – thus requiring a fierce and heavy rain. However, that rain is so powerful that it can devastate crops. Therefore crops require more gentle rains in order to be nourished.

The Torah tells us that G'd says, “I will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your children.” At the time of the coming of Moshiach, G'd will remove the spiritual impurity/covering/blockage, which was introduced to the heart after the sin of Adam. Ramban explains that after the sin of Adam a spiritual covering came upon the heart impeding it from being sensitive to spirituality. As result, the heart lusts after the material and everything that is contrary to spirituality. At the end of time G'd will rehabilitate the heart to its original condition. Until that time, how could the Jew overcome and penetrate that spiritual blockage?

Studying the Torah with the proper intent has the ability to break through the covering of the heart. Despite the confusion and falseness of the world, Torah study has the ability to penetrate the heart and allow the individual to understand his predicament.

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that the only way one can take control of and dominate the evil inclination is through Torah study and performing acts of kindness. If one does not engage in these two areas, then the inclination will be in control of the person.

The Midrash Tanchuma asks, “Why is the Torah compared to rain water? Just as water is able to penetrate stone, identically Torah can wear through the heart that is made of stone. Our Rabbis tells us that if one’s heart is like stone it will melt away. If one’s heart is like iron it will burst. Therefore it is worthwhile for the Jew to sacrifice his life for the sake of Torah. He should engage in it day and night.” The only way the heart can function properly is if the Torah penetrates it.

During the Days of Awe (the days from Rosh Hashanah through Yom Kippur) one should reflect on how his time over the last year was invested. It is true that many mistakes were made on a deliberate as well as on an inadvertent level. One should introspect, reflect upon, and understand one’s failings. Rabbeinu Yonah explains that the first step in the process of teshuvah (repentance) is the recognition of one’s failings. In order for one to be able to properly reflect on one’s actions and assess his failings, one needs to break his heart of stone through the study of Torah. It is only then that he will have the clarity necessary to do a proper teshuvah.

### 3. *The Importance of Sincerity*

The Gemara in Tractate Rosh Hashanah cites a verse, **“Moshe said to the Jewish people – who is as great as our G’d? Whenever we call out to Him, He responds.”** However, the Prophet Yeshaiya said to the Jewish people, “You should seek out G’d when He is found. Call to Him when He is close.” From the words of the Prophet it is indicated that one cannot beseech G’d at any time that one chooses to do so. Rather, one should do so during the time that He is closest to the Jewish people – which is the time from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur. How do we reconcile the words of the Prophet with the words of Moshe Rabbeinu, **“...Whenever we call out to Him...”**

The Gemara answers that when a *tzibur*/quorum (a minimum of ten men) beseeches G’d, He responds to them whenever they call out to Him. However, regarding the individual, G’d responds during the time that He is closest – which is during the Ten Days of Repentance. Thus, the Prophet is referring to the individual beseeching G’d, while the Moshe Rabbeinu is referring to a *tzibur*.

Rambam writes, “Although teshuvah and crying out to G’d is something positive (done at any time), during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur – it is considered more special. During these ten days, G’d receives one’s teshuvah (repentance) immediately. It

states, “You should seek out G’d when He is found...” This is referring to the teshuvah of the individual. However, whenever the *tzibur* (community) does teshuvah and cries out to G’d with a “whole heart – *leiv sholeim*” G’d responds to them.” Rambam explains that the words of the Prophet are referring to the individual while the verse in the Torah is referring to the *tzibur*. However, he adds regarding the *tzibur*, that although they can call out to G’d throughout the year, they need to do so “whole heartedly” in order for Him to receive their teshuvah and prayers. He does not mention “whole heartedness/sincerity” regarding the individual. Evidently, during the ten days of teshuvah, G’d is so close to the Jew (because of His love for him), that even if the Jew beseeches G’d (as an individual) without a sincere heart, He will respond.

The Midrash Tanchuma explains, “We find that there are three times of the year that there is a day of judgment that relate to our financial situation: on Passover the judgment is on grain, on *Shavuot* it is on fruits; however, on Rosh Hashanah the judgment is on life or death. G’d judges us for life or death with the blow of the Shofar... If the individual does teshuvah with a whole heart (*leiv shaleim*) then G’d will judge him to be meritorious. Because on these special days, the gates of heaven are open and G’d watches us from every location.” We see from the Midrash that G’d will receive the teshuvah and prayers of the individual and the *tzibur* only if they are done with a sincere heart/ *leiv shaleim*.

Thus, we must say that although Rambam only mentions the need for the *tzibur* to beseech G’d with a sincere heart, it does not necessarily exclude the individual. It is understood that if the individual cries out to G’d without a sincere heart, his teshuvah and prayers will not be accepted. Therefore during the ten days of awe, when G’d is closest to the Jewish people it is the time that the individual as well as the *tzibur* need to beseech G’d *b’leiv shaleim*.

Every aspect of our lives is determined during this ten day period. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us to reflect and introspect in order to prepare for this important time.

### 4. *The Expectation of Man*

The Torah states, **“I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you...”** Rashi explains, “Hashem said to the Jewish people, “You should look at the heaven and the earth which I have created to serve you. Did it ever happen that the sun did not rise in the east and

illuminate the world? The earth that I created to serve you – did it ever change its function? Did you ever plant and it did not grow? Did you ever plant wheat and barley grew in its place? If the creations of heaven and earth do not deviate from their function despite the fact that they are not deserving of reward when they function as they were intended to or receive punishment if they should fail, should it not be more so that the Jewish people not deviate from their responsibility because they are deserving of reward and subject to punishment?”

One of the methodologies given at Sinai as an approach to interpret the Torah is known as *kal v'chomer*. This logical principle states, for example, if one is deserving of reward for doing less, how much more so is one deserving for doing more (minimally the same degree of reward). To give the Jewish people a greater understanding of their responsibility, Moshe uses heaven and earth as the model to establish the *kal v'chomer* to give them an appreciation of the value of their actions. It seems that the function of heaven and earth is not comparable to the function of a human being. Heaven and earth are not “beings” that have the ability to choose. Therefore, they perform the function for which they were created. However, the human being who is a creature of choice must continuously contend with an inclination which makes his choice difficult. If so, there is no basis for the *kal v'chomer*. However, the Torah presents this as a valid *kal v'chomer* and we must understand why it is so.

Rambam states in Hilchos Yisodei HaTorah that *malachim* (angels) who were created to carry out the Will of G'd are not spiritual robots. An angel is a spiritual being who does not deviate from carrying out the Will of G'd because it recognizes and understands who G'd is. Thus, the angel is not the spiritual robot.

We find on the third day of creation that G'd decreed, “Let the earth give forth fruit trees producing fruit.” Meaning that not only should the fruit of the tree be edible, but even the tree itself should be edible. However, G'd's Command only brought about a tree which was itself inedible but that produced edible fruits. For some unknown reason, the angel, who is the spiritual being, who carries out the agency of G'd, did not follow the order as it was given. Thus the result was not as perfect as G'd had wanted it to be. Now that we understand that the function of the angel is based on its own understanding of G'd, we are now able to appreciate the *kal v'chomer* which is being drawn by the Torah (from heaven and earth to the behavior of the human being).

Meaning – although the angel is not deserving of reward or punishment it does not deviate from His Will because it is cognizant of the Will of G'd. The Jew who is subject to reward and punishment should definitely be cognizant of His Will because if not, he will be held culpable for its violation or deserving of reward for its fulfillment. The only reason a Jew fails is because of his lack of cognizance.

The function of the evil inclination is to distract and overwhelm the Jew so he will not appreciate the Will of G'd. He will lose perspective regarding his behavior. If one would continuously reflect on the consequences of his actions – for the positive or negative – then he would be no different than the angel. In fact the Jew would be even more inclined than the angel to do the Will of G'd because he is eligible for reward while the angel is not.

The Gemara in Tractate Sukkah states, “I (Hashem) created the evil inclination, and the Torah as its antidote.” The Torah is needed to give one the clarity to appreciate the consequences of one's actions. It is when one achieves clarity through Torah study that he is able to subdue the evil inclination.

The Torah tells us that at the end of time G'd will circumcise our hearts and the hearts of our children. Sforno explains this to mean, “G'd will remove all confusion from our hearts. He will open our eyes and thus be removed from the pitfalls of life.” One will have the clarity to want to do “good” because the state of confusion in which we exist will be lifted. In order not to have this happen, one only has to realize the invaluable benefit of doing the Will of G'd and the grave consequences that result from deviating and not following His Will.

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis tells us that a Torah Sage angers because the fire of Torah is within him. As the verse states, “Are not My Words like fire...” Rashi explains that the Torah contained within the Sage causes him to become angry. The Torah itself gives one an appreciation and depth of understanding of the wrong that is being perpetrated. However others who are not advanced in their Torah knowledge do not have the capacity to sense the wrong in what is contrary to the Torah.

It is only by gaining clarity that one can attain a semblance of the understanding of an angel. Thus, the comparison that is drawn by the Torah between the Jew and the angel is valid.

## 5. *The Success of the Evil is a Confirmation of G'd's Justice*

The Torah states in the Portion of Haazinu, **“Yeshurun became fat and kicked. You became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent – and it deserted G'd its maker, and was contemptuous of the Rock of its salvation.”** Sforno explains “Yeshurun became fat and kicked” is referring to the Jewish people who are called “Yeshurun” because they are the congregation of those who uphold the Torah and have the ability to delve into its depth. He explains, “Just as the animal who kicks the owner who feeds it, so too the Jewish people shun (kick) G'd who provides them with their sustenance and blessing. How did this happen? You, the Jewish people, who are “Yeshurun” who are able to delve and understand the Torah, you have turned to all of the material desires and through them have become thickened (lost your sensitivity) to unadulterated truth.” If the Jewish people become overly involved and immersed in the material they lose their sensitivity to truth; thus, they bolt from G'd.

Moshe refers to G'd as “the Rock whose action is perfect.” Meaning, even when one is punished and it seems that he is being treated unjustly by G'd, he must understand that G'd is Perfect and His Judgment is Perfect. Moshe continues and states, “All His ways are Just.” The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains this by citing the Midrash Tehillim, which cites the words of King David who rejoiced when he witnessed evil being rewarded. “Why did he rejoice? It is because he understood – if this is the way G'd treats those who transgress His Will, how much more will He reward those who adhere to His Will.” How do we understand this?

We can explain it with the concept of *rasha v'tov lo* – an evil person (who despite his evil) experiences good fortune and *tzaddik v'ra lo* – a righteous person (who despite his devoutness) experiences misfortune. If one sees an evil person with good fortune while the righteous person is experiencing difficulty, one may perceive this wrongly and take a position that G'd is not being Just. Thus, Moshe states, “All of His ways are Just.” How do we put this into perspective?

There is no individual who is completely evil or completely good. Although the vast majority of one's deeds may be evil, if he had done even the minutest act of kindness (or other righteous deed), he is deserving of

reward. G'd does not withhold the rightful reward from any living creature. Thus, the *rasha* who is deserving of reward will receive it in a material context. Therefore, if G'd does not deny reward to the evil for even the minutest act of righteousness, how much more so will He bestow reward on the *tzaddik* who is so deserving. It is important to note that the *rasha* receives his reward in the physical context while the *tzaddik* receives his reward in a spiritual context – which is the world to come. Thus, when one sees a *tzaddik* experiencing misfortune and a *rasha* experiencing exceptional success in his life, one should understand that the *rasha* is being rewarded for the few good deeds that he had performed. This is the reason King David rejoiced when he saw the evil being rewarded.

If a Jew lives a life, which is focused on materialism and this becomes his value system, then his ability to comprehend and appreciate G'd's Justice becomes impaired. He will not be able to understand why the *rasha*, despite his evil ways, deserves material success while the *tzaddik* suffers.

## 6. *Shofar, Entering into the Inner Sanctum of G'd*

The Mishna in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that a Shofar cannot be made from the horn of a cow. The Mishna gives two reasons for this. The first reason is that the horn of a cow is referred to as “*keren*” and not “Shofar.” Secondly, there is a principle “*Ein kateigor naaseh sanheigor*” – that a prosecutor cannot be an advocate.” The horn of the cow represents the Golden Calf (*Chet Ha'Eigel*) with which the Jews sinned at Sinai. Anything which has relevance to the Golden Calf must be avoided at a time when we are in need of an advocate. Any derivative of the cow or gold arouses the most serious level of prosecution against the Jewish people.

On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol (the High Priest) officiated with two sets of vestments. He would wear the golden vestments when he performed the service in the outer sanctuary of the Temple. However, when he performed the service that was particular to Yom Kippur, which required him to enter the Holy of Holies, he wore white vestments. He was not permitted to wear the golden vestments for the Yom Kippur service because he had to enter the Holy of Holies (the location of the Shechina – the Divine Presence) to atone for the Jewish People. If he had worn gold, he could not have functioned in the capacity of an advocate because gold arouses prosecution.

The Gemara asks, since the principle “a prosecutor cannot be an advocate” only has relevance within the context of the Holy of Holies – the location of the Divine Presence- then why is it that one cannot utilize the horn of a cow to fulfill the mitzvah of Shofar since the mitzvah is fulfilled outside of the Holy of Holies?

The Gemara answers that since the purpose of the blowing of the Shofar is to cause G'd to “remember” (*zikaron*) the merits of the Jewish people, when one blows the Shofar it is considered as if he is standing inside the Holy of Holies. The blowing of the Shofar brings about an intimacy between the Jew and G'd that is the equivalent of standing in the Holy of Holies. Thus, at this moment, the prosecutor cannot be an advocate (the cow horn cannot be used). What aspect of the Jewish people do we want G'd to “remember” on Rosh Hashanah?

The Gemara asks if the shape of the Shofar should be bent or straight. The Gemara concludes that the shape of the Shofar should be bent “*kafif* (in Hebrew). Since the blowing of the Shofar is intended to “remind” G'd of the merits of the Jewish people, it should also reflect their posture- which is being humble and bent before Him. The Shulchan Aruch writes that although during the year we recite the Amidah in an erect position, it is advisable to recite the Amidah of Rosh Hashanah in a slightly bent position. This is to indicate one's humility and submission.

The Jew has the unique quality of submitting to G'd. No other people have submitted themselves as the Jewish people have done. When G'd gave the Torah to the Jewish people, they accepted it unequivocally by declaring “Naaseh V'nishma – we will do and we will listen.” All of the nations of the world when offered the Torah had asked G'd, “What is written in it?” in order to determine if they wanted to accept it. The Jewish people had negated themselves to G'd to such a degree that He had asked, “Who revealed this secret (known only to the angels) to My children?”

The only separation between the Jew and G'd is his own conflicts of interest and agenda. However, when the Jew blows the Shofar it recalls the level of negation demonstrated by Avraham our Patriarch. He was willing to sacrifice his only son because G'd had commanded him to do so. Although G'd had promised Avraham that he would his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in heaven, he did not question the word of G'd.

This level of submission is a prerequisite to being able to enter the Holy of Holies. The Shofar causes G'd to

“remember” that the Jew possesses the characteristic of submission of Avraham. If Avraham was able to perform the Akeidah, every Jew as his spiritual heir, has the ability to do the same. Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl writes in his commentary on Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) that the reason Jews throughout history have given their lives not to submit to idolatry is because Avraham had inculcated this characteristic into his spirituality.

Rambam states in Hilchos Teshuvah, “Although the obligation of blowing of the Shofar is a Divine Decree in the Torah, simultaneously the blowing of the Shofar is also an allusion (*remez*).” The message that the Shofar conveys is – all those who are asleep or in a deep slumber should awaken. They should introspect and reflect on their past behavior and do teshuvah (repent). Part of the teshuvah process is to remember one's Creator. Those who are in a slumber have forgotten the truth because they are consumed with the vanities of time. They occupy themselves completely with pursuits of vanity and emptiness, which have no value. Gaze upon your souls and better yourselves and abandon your evil ways and improper thoughts.”

The Shofar awakens that which is dormant within the Jew because he has the inherent ability to submit to G'd.

## 2. What is the Ultimate Rehabilitative Process of Teshuvah?

The Torah states in the beginning of Sefer Bereishis, “***Bereishis bara Elokeem es ha'shamaiyim v'es ha'aretz: v'ha'aretz hoysa tohu v'vohu v'choshech al panei tahom v'ruach Elokeem merachefes al panei ha'maiyim – In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth – when the earth was empty, with darkness upon the surface of the deep, and the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters.***” The Midrash explains that each of the words in this opening verse of the Torah alludes to events that will take place in the future. Meaning, when G-d created existence, He preordained that certain events will happen.

The Midrash explains that “***v'ha'aretz hoysa tohu - earth was empty,***” refers to the Babylonian exile. “***Choshech - darkness,***” refers to the Greek exile; as the Talmud tells us, “they blackened our eyes with their decrees.” “***Al panei tahom- surface of the deep***” alludes to the Roman exile, which is seemingly as endless as the “deep” source of water. (We are still experiencing the Roman exile after more than 2,000 years.) “***V'ruach***

**Elokeem merachefes al panei ha'maiyim - the Divine Presence hovered upon the surface of the waters**" is ascribed to the spirit of Moshiach who will come only in the merit of teshuvah (repentance) which is compared to water (*maiyim*). As it is stated in Eicha, "Your heart should gush forth water when you stand before Hashem." Rambam states in *Hilchos Teshuvah (The Laws of Teshuvah)* that the confession that one makes during teshuvah must be in the presence of Hashem. What relevance does teshuvah have to water? Why is the statement "**hovered upon the surface of the waters**" an allusion to teshuvah?

Rambam states that if one attempts to do teshuvah but does not totally sever himself from his sinful past, then his teshuvah process is equivalent to immersing in a mikvah (ritual pool) for the sake of purification, while still holding on to a rodent, which is the source of his spiritual contamination. Rambam is comparing the teshuvah process to the mikvah itself. However, the verse from Eicha, which is cited by the Midrash, is indicating that the water itself is not the teshuvah but rather a consequence of the teshuvah. As it says, "your heart will gush forth water."

If one is spiritually contaminated, he must immerse himself completely in a mikvah in order to achieve spiritual purity. The Halacha (law) dictates that if there is as much as one hair of his body that is not under water, he is not purified. The desired result is only achieved when one totally dunks himself. How do we understand the purification process of the mikvah? The Maharal of Prague (in his work on Chanukah) explains that humanity exists on dry land and not under water; therefore, the latter represents non-existence. When a person immerses himself in a body of water, in essence, he enters into a state of non-being. When he emerges, he enters a state of existence and is considered a "*bria chadasha* – a new being." As such, whatever contamination he had prior to the immersion, no longer applies to him.

Dovid HaMelech says in Tehillim (Psalms), "A broken and shattered heart Elokeem (G-d) will not disgrace." Rabbeinu Yona explains in his work *Shaarei Teshuvah – The Gates of Repentance* that the teshuvah process only has meaning because of the Attribute of Mercy (Midas HaRachamim). However, within the context of Midas HaDin (The attribute of Justice) there is no place for teshuvah. Dovid revealed to us that if the person is truly broken and shattered, as a result of the

teshuvah process, even Elokeem (the Attribute of Justice) will not disgrace (reject) this person's teshuvah.

The Torah tells us that an earthenware vessel (after becoming contaminated) cannot be purified in a mikvah. In order for it to become uncontaminated, it must be broken or shattered so it loses its function as a vessel. If it is reassembled, it is considered a new creation that does not have relevance to the original vessel – and therefore it is pure. The same holds true for a person. If he is broken and remorseful because of his sins and does teshuvah, he is forgiven because when he is broken he is the equivalent of the non-existent person. Therefore, after the process of teshuvah, the individual is a new person. Thus, because the sinner no longer exists, even the Attribute of Justice cannot prosecute the penitent.

We say in the tefillah of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that we are likened to a broken shard - "earthenware vessel." We identify with the purification process of the earthenware vessel because - "A broken heart Elokeem (G-d) will not disgrace."

We can now understand why the Midrash compares the process of teshuvah with water. Just as when one immerses into the water, entering into a non-existent state and he emerges pure, so too does one need to be broken and remorseful to the point that one's heart gushes forth water (tears) to indicate that he is totally broken. Thus, the "water" referred to in the Torah "**hovered upon the surface of the waters**" is synonymous with the broken state of man when he is in a process of teshuvah.

### ***3. What is the Significance of the Seventy Root Nations of the World?***

The Torah states, "**When the Supreme One gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the children of man, He set the borders of the peoples according to the number of the Children of Yisroel. For Hashem's portion is His people; Yaakov is the measure of His inheritance.**" Meaning, when Hashem established the nations of the world, He did so in accordance with the number of members of Yaakov's family who came to Egypt. The Torah tells us that the reason there are seventy nations of the world is that there were seventy individuals of Yaakov's family who descended to Egypt. How do we understand this?

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that when Hashem created Adam (the first Man), he was created as a spiritually pure being. Because of his purity, all of his descendents would be spiritually pure. However, there existed a representation of evil in the world – the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. When Adam ate of the Tree of Knowledge, he lost his pure state because it became intermingled with Evil. Thus, all of his decedents were born with an intermingling of Good and Evil. It was not until Yaakov Avinu (our Patriarch) that spiritual purity was reestablished because he was able to purge himself completely of the impurity, which was inherited from Adam. Consequently, Yaakov produced seventy offspring who were endowed with pure souls. With this explanation, we can understand the Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia that tells us that the radiance of Yaakov had a semblance to the radiance of Adam. Meaning, that Yaakov possessed a purity that was similar to Adam's original state. On the contrary, the seventy nations of the world remained spirituality impaired because of the intermingling of Good and Evil. Because of their make-up, the nations of the world are diametrically opposed to the existence of Yaakov and his family – who were seventy in number.

We see that by Hashem's design, the Jewish people are meant to be the counterbalance to the nations of the world. The role of the Jew is to have a positive influence on the spirituality of the nations of the world and not to be influenced by them. This is why Hashem created seventy nations to correspond to the seventy descendents of Yaakov.

Sforno tells us at the beginning of Sefer Shemos (Book of Exodus) that when the Torah refers to the seventy descendents of Yaakov, it only identifies Yaakov's children by name and not his other descendents. Sforno explains that by identifying them by name, the Torah is indicating that each son had his own unique dimension of spirituality. Although all seventy members of Yaakov's family were special, they were not on the same level as his twelve sons.

The Maharal in his work *Gevuras Hashem* explains that the slavery and bondage in Egypt did not commence to any degree until the passing of Yaakov Avinu. Because of Yaakov Avinu's great dimension, the Evil influences in Egypt could not erode the spiritual standing of Yaakov and his family. However, the moment Yaakov passed away, the bondage in Egypt began to

evolve and was finally implemented when his entire generation passed away. It was at that time that the impurity of Egypt was able to spiritually entomb the Jewish people and cause them to lose contact with their holiness. If Hashem had not taken the Jewish people out of Egypt when He did, they would have been lost forever.

It is interesting to note that world events seem to revolve around the Jewish people, despite the fact that we are so few in number. How is it possible that billions of people take notice of an innocuous number of Jews (7 billion humans vs. 13 million Jews)? Evidently, the world at large is pitted against the essence of the Jew. There is a spiritual tug-of war between the Jewish people and the nations of the world. This is the battle between Esav and Yaakov.

On September 11 2003, the nation and the world commemorated and memorialized the tragedy that took place two years ago. How have we, as Jews, changed as a result of that tragic event? We need to recognize that Hashem is reminding us that the Jews, who are the spiritual counterbalance of the world, must fulfill their role in existence. If the Jew is spiritually strong and steeped in Torah study and mitzvos, then the world is strengthened. If on the other hand the Jew is not attached to Hashem and has no interest in his spiritual development, then the world is unprotected and subject to insecurity through many tragic events. As the Torah states, Hashem created the nations of the world based on the number of people in the family of Yaakov, indicating that the Jew is spiritually the equivalent of all existence.

Hashem sent us a message two years ago that although we live under the protection of the most powerful nation of the world we are not safe and secure unless we are close to Him. We could have all the security measures in the world and we will still not be safe because the only way to gain security is by adhering to the Will of Hashem. As Dovid HaMelech (King David) states in Tehillim (Psalms), "If Hashem is your security, then you have security." Unfortunately, the fact is the world has not significantly changed since the tragedy of September 11. We find that most people (even most synagogue goers) believe that the most significant change in the world since September 11 is that people are a bit more courteous to one another. Is that the reason that more than 3,000 people died tragically – so that people should be able to say "good morning" with a broader smile to one another? It is absurd to diminish the significance of this tragedy in this manner. We as Jews must understand the message that our

only safe-haven in this existence is to become closer to Hashem.

#### ***4. G-d Throughout the Ages Has Demonstrated His Love for Us***

It says in Selichos, **“Do with us as You promised us: “And despite all that (all of our failings), when they will be in the land of their enemies, I will not have despised them nor abhorred them to destroy them, to annul My covenant with them, for I am Hashem their G-d.”** Despite all of the shortcomings of the Jewish people and the many exiles and tragedies they have experienced, how did Hashem demonstrate to them that He did not “despise them nor abhor them”?

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah explains that the meaning of the verse “he did not despise them” is referring to the Babylonian exile. During this trying time He sent them Daniel, Chananya, Meshael, and Azarya. Chananya, Meshael, and Azarya were thrown into the fiery kiln because they would not bow to the image of Nebuchadnezer (the Babylonian Emperor who destroyed the First Bais HaMikdash (The Temple)). In addition, Hashem sent them Daniel who was thrown into the lion’s den. Meaning, that Hashem demonstrated that He did not “despise” the Jewish people because of their sins and he sent them the gift of special Torah leaders such as Daniel, Chananiya, Meshael, and Azarya.

It continues that He did not “abhor” the Jewish people because He also sent the Hashmanaim and Mattisyahu, (who were responsible for the miracle of Chanukah), during the Greek exile. He sent Mordechai and Esther who saved them from Haman the Wicked who had decreed that every Jewish man, woman and child should be annihilated (the miracle of Purim). Had it not been for these special individuals, the Jews would have become completely assimilated or destroyed.

The Gemara concludes that the meaning of “not to annul His Covenant” is referring to the Persian exile when Hashem presented the Jewish people with Reb Yehudah HaNasi (Judah the Prince) who was the redactor of the Oral Law. The Oral interpretation of the Torah would have been forgotten had it not been for Judah the Prince compiling it into the Mishnah. We refer to Judah as, Rabbeinu Ha’Kadosh (Our Holy Rabbi). He is the only person, other than Moshe, who we call our Rabbi-“Rabbeinu” to indicate his greatness.

Although the Jewish people had many spiritual shortcomings and experienced many exiles and tragedies, Hashem nevertheless demonstrated His love for us by providing us with special Torah leadership who gave their respective generations the necessary understanding of their heritage. If it were not for these leaders, we would have been assimilated – G-d Forbid. Thus demonstrating - **“...I will not have despised them nor abhorred them to destroy them...”**

The Gemara states a principle that if one prays for a fellow Jew to have his need fulfilled, which is identical to his own, Hashem will give priority to the need of the one who is praying on behalf of his fellow. Unfortunately, there are more Jews unaffiliated with Judaism than those who are; and those who are connected can always use an upgrade in their level of commitment. What do we do for our unaffiliated brethren and what do we do for ourselves to be able to advance our own Judaism? If a Jew truly understood who he is and what his heritage is, he would definitely become involved in Torah study and mitzvah observance. It is only because of a lack of Jewish education and understanding that Jews drift away. We must pray that our fellow Jew be given the understanding and appreciation for our heritage.

The Mishnah in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that whoever saves the life of a single Jew it is as if he had saved the entire world. Therefore, if one saves a Jew spiritually, the value is the equivalent to saving the entire world and it will impact upon his progeny until the end of time.

#### ***5. G-d’s Love for the Jewish People***

The Torah states that at the end of time the Jewish people will eventually do teshuvah and return to Hashem. As a result of this, Hashem will bring forth great blessing to the Jews and He will, **“...return to rejoice (I’sus) over you (the Klal Yisroel) for good, as He rejoiced (sos) over your forefathers, when you listen to the voice of Hashem, your G-d...”** The Torah uses the term “sos” to refer to the joy that Hashem will feel at this time. Why does the Torah use the term “sos” rather than “simcha” or many other expressions of rejoicing?

Dovid HaMelech (King David) states in Tehillim (Psalms), “I rejoice (sos) over your words (the Torah) as if I found a large amount of spoils.” Dovid HaMelech could have expressed his joy over the Torah and mitzvos with other terms, however, he specifically chose this term. The Vilna Gaon z’tl explains that the word “simcha” indicates

joy that is complete, while the term “sos” denotes a happiness that is incomplete. He explains this through the following parable:

In order for the king to reward his loyal subject for his service, he allows him to enter into his royal treasury and take whatever his heart desires but only for a period of five minutes. The subject is joyful and thankful that he will be allowed to take whatever he wants from the royal treasury. However, he is also anguished by the time constraint he is given because he understands the opportunity at hand. Similarly, Dovid HaMelech rejoiced over the Torah that he was given because he understood its infinite value. However, at the same time he was distressed by the fact that he was restricted to seventy years and would not be able to partake of this treasure beyond that point.

With this explanation we can understand why the Torah uses the term “sos” to express Hashem’s joy and not the term “simcha.” Hashem loves the Jewish people to such a degree that even though so much blessing is bestowed upon us, He is pained that He could not give us more. Since Hashem is infinite with no restrictions, He wants to provide us with boundless blessing as well but because of our own limitations, He is unable to do so.

If Hashem loves the Jews to such a degree that it gives him pain not to be able to do more for us, then we should understand that when He denies us His Goodness, it is clearly in our best interest. Now we can somewhat appreciate the idea that because of Hashem’s unending love for us that even when we experience a set back in life we can understand that it emanates from His Goodness and not from vindictiveness. If He could give us more, He would. Therefore, the Mishnah states, “Just as one blesses Hashem for good fortune, he must bless Him for misfortune.” Because of his unlimited love for the Jewish people, He does only what is good and necessary for us.

Reb Chaim of Volozhin z’tl asks, if punishment and suffering are necessary as part of the rehabilitative spiritual process (which is only in our best interest), then why should one pray to Hashem to heal him when he becomes ill? Does one ask the doctor to withhold a life-saving procedure when the only road to recovery is through that procedure? If so, then how do we understand the blessing of the Amidah –“Heal us Hashem and allow us to recover”?

Reb Chaim answers that although Hashem brings illness upon a person as part of the rehabilitation of his spirituality (which is a positive thing), Hashem is

nevertheless affected by the fact that the Jew is in a state of suffering. It is similar to a parent who needs to assist the doctor when he performs a painful procedure to his child. The parent is joyful that the child will recover through this procedure; however, the parent feels the hurt of his child. Therefore, Reb Chaim explains that if one prays for healing because he feels Hashem’s pain (as a father to a child – and even to a greater degree) then that feeling itself becomes the rehabilitative process that causes the person to be deserving of recovery. One can only relate to Hashem’s pain (when a Jew is in a state of suffering) if one understands to what degree Hashem loves the Jewish people.

## 6. The Capability of Man

The Torah states, **“I call heaven and earth today to bear witness against you: I have placed life and death before you...”** The Midrash explains that Moshe is saying to the Klal Yisroel *“Heaven and earth were created to accommodate mankind and that they have never deviated from their function. Did one ever plant a wheat kernel and have it grow barley? Heaven and earth are not subject to reward and punishment and yet they do not deviate from the purpose for which they were created. Therefore Klal Yisroel who is rewarded for doing good and punished for doing evil, definitely should not deviate (from the purpose for which they were created).”*

Chazal explain that the laws of nature operate in a specific manner because Hashem chose their functions to help mankind to maximize its purpose, which is to choose between good and evil. Just as Hashem created heaven and earth with all the ingredients necessary to help mankind fulfill its purpose, so too did He create the human being with all the capability to fulfill his purpose. What is the purpose of man? – To serve Hashem - to sublimate and subordinate the physical to the spiritual, despite one’s inclination for the material. Therefore, man was given the capability to bring about that result.

The Torah tells us that Hashem provides man with all that is necessary to fulfill his purpose; and the mechanism that is needed to succeed and advance spiritually is the Torah itself. Just as the heavy rains pierce the ground to sustain the tree (though its roots) and just as the dew continuously covers the vegetation of the earth to bring about blessing and sustain existence, so too did Hashem give us the Torah which is the equivalent of both rain and dew to sustain our spirituality.

The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the Written Law (*Torah Sh'Bichsav*) is equivalent to rain because it is tangible as the rain is visible. However, the Oral Law (*Torah Sh'Bal Peh*), which is communicated verbally, is as unnoticed as the dew when it is falling. Just as Hashem gave rain and the dew to sustain existence so too did He give us the Written and Oral Law to sustain our spiritual existence. Therefore a person cannot say that it is too difficult to do the Will of Hashem, because He provided us with whatever is necessary to bring that about.

Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) states, "*Im ein Kemach, ein Torah* (If there is no flour, there is no Torah)." Meaning that one cannot study Torah if he does not have material sustenance; Therefore, Hashem provides it. Otherwise, one can say that he cannot study Torah because of his personal circumstance. However the Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains this statement in Pirkei Avos differently – "If there is no flour, it is an **indication** that there is no Torah." If one toils and does not succeed then it is an indication that he is not pursuing Torah - because if he were, then Hashem would provide for him adequately.

We must be cognizant of events that we experience in our lives. These are indications which give us direction and understanding on whether we are on the proper path or have gone astray. We need to understand why there are difficulties and tragedies on a personal and communal level. If Klal Yisroel is not succeeding spiritually then there is no material success. However if Klal Yisroel, as a whole, is functioning as a spiritual entity, then Hashem will provide whatever material success is needed to accommodate our purpose in existence.

## 7. Does the Jew Have the Ability to Empower Hashem?

The Torah states, "**You have weakened the Rock (referring to Hashem) which gave birth to you, and forgot G-d who brought you forth.**" There are a number of commentators who explain this verse in many ways. The Sforno explains that the Torah is saying that if the Jew's focus in life is materialism, then his understanding of Hashem, (The Rock), will become weakened because he is distracted from his spirituality.

The Zohar tells us that when Hashem informed the angels that He was going to create man, their response was that man is deficient and not even worth mentioning – because he is prone to fail. Hashem nevertheless created man and

punished the angels who opposed this. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the verse "**You have weakened the Rock...**" is referring to Hashem's position that man's existence is worthwhile. However, if man fails, then he weakens Hashem's position in his defense.

Rashi on the other hand explains this verse differently. It is referring to the fact that Hashem bestows existence with His blessing; however, if man should fail in the spiritual realm, then Hashem will withhold His blessing because the Jewish people are not deserving. Therefore, the Torah is saying, "**You have weakened the Rock...**"

When the *meraglim* (*the spies*) returned from scouting out the Land of Canaan, they reported that they had seen the decedents of the giants and other untenable situations. They had said that the nations of Canaan "are stronger than Him." Rashi cites Chazal, who explain that the spies were actually saying that the tribes of Canaan were even stronger than Hashem. They believed that Hashem was able to defeat and destroy the Egyptians, but the Canaanites had thirty-one kingdoms and Hashem did not have the power to destroy them. How do we understand this? The spies themselves participated in the Sinai event and prophesized while in an awake state. After understanding the awesomeness and capability of Hashem, how is it possible for them to say that He is not able to defeat thirty-one kingdoms?

Based on Rashi's interpretation of the verse "**You have weakened the Rock...**" we are able to understand what the spies were saying. Hashem's level of interaction with this existence is based on the Jew's merit. If the Jew adheres to the Torah and does the Will of Hashem then he is deserving of His blessing; however, if the Jew fails and is undeserving, then Hashem withholds His blessing and does not allow the Jew to succeed. Meaning, that Hashem binds Himself to the principle of "reward and punishment." The spies believed that the Jews had sufficient merit to be redeemed from the enslavement of Egypt; however, they believed that they did not have sufficient merit to allow Hashem to bring about the conquest of thirty-one kingdoms of Canaan.

Their understanding was that the infrastructure of "reward and punishment" – the principle of being deserving - was put in place by Hashem to govern existence and was established in a way that even G-d Himself was not able to override the system. However, this was/is not the case. Despite one's unworthiness, if Hashem should choose to interact with existence in a positive manner, then He overrides the system.

The Menorah in the Bais HaMikdash was placed outside of the Holy of Holies, on the other side of the *paroches* (curtains) which was the separation between the Covered Sanctuary and the Holy of Holies. The Torah states, “the Menorah must be placed outside of the *paroches*.” The Midrash explains that Hashem is actually saying, “You must put the Menorah outside the Holy of Holies (which is the location of the Divine Presence) so that you should not mistakenly think that I need your light.” The Midrash continues and says that Moshe asked Hashem, “Why do you want us to kindle the lights of the Menorah since You are the light of the world?” Hashem responded by saying, “The reason I want you to kindle the light is to elevate you in the eyes of the nations of the world - that they should see that I do need your light.” It seems that the two statements of Hashem are contradictory. On one hand Hashem says the Menorah must be placed outside of “My location” (the Holy of Holies) to indicate that He does not need our light. On the other hand, His response to Moshe is that in fact He does need our light.

Under normal circumstances the world functions within the context of reward and punishment. If we succeed spiritually then Hashem bestows blessing on the world. In other words, our “light” is needed because it determines the level on which the world functions. However, if we should fail spiritually, then Hashem’s blessing is withdrawn and the world is diminished. Seemingly, from this one could believe that the Klal Yisroel empowers Hashem. However, this is not the case because if Hashem chooses to override the system, He is not limited or bound by any criteria. This is indicated by the location of where the Menorah is placed: “it must be outside of the *paroches* to indicate that I do not need your light. - I am able to bestow blessing, regardless of your unworthiness.”

The Torah tells us that there will be peace in the Land when the Klal Yisroel will follow the Statutes of Hashem. Is there no peace today because of the reality of anti-Semitism “Esav sonei l’Yaakov – Esav despises the existence of Yaakov” or is it because the Jewish people are not adhering to the Dictates of the Torah? If the Jewish people were to follow the ways of the Torah, then they would strengthen “the Rock”; however, if we as Jews falter, then He becomes “the Rock that we have weakened”.

### ***8. Why is the Jew Held to Such a High Standard - Especially on Rosh Hashanah?***

The Mishna in Tractate Rosh Hashanah tells us that a Shofar cannot be made from the horn of a cow. The Gemara explains this by giving two reasons. The first reason is that the horn of a cow is referred to as “keren” and not “Shofar.” Secondly, there is a principle “*Ein kateigor naaseh sanheigor* - that a prosecutor cannot be an advocate.” The horn of the cow represents the Golden Calf (Chet Ha’Agle) with which the Jews sinned at Sinai. Anything, which has relevance to the Golden Calf must be avoided at a time when we are in need of an advocate. The cow or gold arouses the most serious level of prosecution against the Klal Yisroel.

On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol (the High Priest) officiated with two sets of vestments. He would wear the golden ones when he performed the service that was not specific to Yom Kippur. When he performed the service that was particular to Yom Kippur, he wore white vestments. He was not permitted to wear the golden vestments for the Yom Kippur service because he had to enter the Holy of Holies (the location of the Shechina – the Divine Presence) to atone for the Klal Yisroel, and if he wore gold, then he could not function in the capacity of an advocate.

The Gemara asks, since the principle of “a prosecutor cannot be an advocate” has no relevance outside of the location of the Shechina, then why can't we utilize the horn of a cow to fulfill our obligation of Shofar since this mitzvah is also performed outside of the Holy of Holies?

The Gemara answers that when one blows the Shofar it is considered as if he is standing inside the Holy of Holies. How do we understand this? Rosh Hashanah is the Day of Judgment (Yom HaDin). The Midas HaDin (the Attribute of Justice) of G-d is so exacting on this Day that even the angels in heaven tremble from its awesomeness. Midas HaDin subjects all of existence to an exact level of scrutiny.

The Second Bais HaMikdash (the Second Temple), which stood for 420 years, had more than 300 Kohanim Gadolim (High Priests) officiating over this period. However, the First Bais HaMikdash, which stood for a period of 410 years, had only eleven. The Gemara tells us that if the Kohen Gadol was not fully spiritually qualified, he would expire immediately when he entered into the Holy of Holies. This occurred because being so close to the Shechina (the Divine Presence), if he was not in a perfect state, he would be subject to Midas HaDin. It is evident from this that when Midas HaDin is functioning in its most potent form it is an indication of our close

proximity to the Shechina. Therefore, Rosh Hashanah, which is the Yom HaDin (Day of Judgment), is an indication of how close we are to Hashem.

On one hand, the Judgment of Hashem is awesome and fearful, causing the angels in heaven to tremble. However, on the other hand, His closeness to us reveals the degree to which we are valued. Being in such proximity to the Divine Presence on Rosh Hashanah is the equivalent to standing in the Holy of Holies. Therefore, we do not fulfill the mitzvah of Shofar with a cow's horn because the principle of "a prosecutor cannot be an advocate" is in force, just as it was for the Kohen Gadol; This is unlike Yom Kippur, when he was the only one permitted to enter into the Holy of Holies.

It is stated that the Shofar should be taken from a ram because it symbolizes the ultimate submission and sacrifice for Hashem. When Avraham Avinu (Avraham our Patriarch) was told by Hashem to bring his only son (Yitzchak) - who he loved - as a sacrifice, he did not hesitate and immediately embarked on that mission. However, after the binding of Yitzchak, an angel called from heaven and told him not to slaughter his son. At that moment Avraham noticed a ram caught in the thicket and prepared it to be brought as a sacrifice in the place of his son Yitzchak. As a result, Hashem valued the sacrifice of the ram as if Avraham had sacrificed his own son. Therefore, the ram's horn symbolizes the most advanced level of dedication and sacrifice to Hashem.

When Satan, the prosecutor of the Jewish people, begins his prosecution, he is silenced by the sound of the ram's horn because it is the ultimate advocate of the Klal Yisroel.

Understanding the gravity of the Day of Judgment, we must also recognize Hashem's exceptional love for us, which is the basis for the Attribute of Justice. Despite the awesomeness of the day, the Jew must feel fortunate that we are in this situation because of His closeness to us.

### ***1. The Linkage between the Passing of Sarah our Matriarch and the Akeidah***

The Torah juxtaposes the passing of Sarah our Matriarch to the *Akeidah* (the binding of Yitzchak). Rashi cites the Midrash which explains that the juxtaposition communicates to us that the Akeidah was the direct cause of Sarah's demise. The Midrash tells us that when Avraham bound Yitzchak and was about to slaughter him, satan shared this with Sarah. Upon hearing this, she believed that Avraham carried through and slaughtered her

only beloved son and this caused her to expire. She was unaware that G-d had had only tested Avraham to see if he would slaughter his son. G-d did not intend Avraham to actually slaughter Yitzchak.

It is interesting to note that the Midrash says that satan had continuously attempted to deter and stop Avraham from going to the Akeidah. Satan understood that if Avraham were to succeed and carry through as Hashem had dictated to him, the merit of this act would stand by the Jewish people for all eternity to silence his prosecution against them. Therefore on Rosh Hashanah – the Day of Judgment- we blow the shofar (ram's horn) which is synonymous with the Akeidah to silence satan.

When Avraham was traveling with Yitzchak to the Akeidah, satan had presented himself as a raging river which made it impossible for Avraham to continue. Avraham beseeched Hashem that he wished to carry out His Will but it was not possible because his life was in jeopardy. Immediately the river ceased to exist. After Avraham had succeeded with the Akeidah and was told not to inflict any wound upon Yitzchak, G-d sent a ram in the place of Yitzchak to be slaughtered by Avraham. In this way Avraham was able to actualize his feelings and it gave him the opportunity to concretize his selfless dedication to the Will of G-d. Because Avraham had actualized the Akeidah through the ram, the merit was established for all time to silence the prosecution of satan.

Satan was defeated. Although it appeared that Avraham was secure in his accomplishment and that from this point forward Jewish people would forever be protected from the prosecution of satan, nevertheless this was not necessarily the case. Rambam states in Hilchos Teshuvah (the Laws of Repentance) that if a person was evil his entire life and does teshuvah (repentance) at the last moment, all of his evil deeds will not be mentioned and his classification would be tzaddik (devout). Conversely, if a person lived his life as a tzaddik and at the last moment he regrets all the good deeds and accomplishments that he had performed, his positive record would be removed and not even mentioned by the Heavenly Court at the time of judgment. He would thus be classified as a rasha (evil person).

Satan believed that although Avraham had succeeded with the Akeidah, there was a possibility that he would be able to nullify and negate the positive value of the Binding of Yitzchak. Satan felt that if the Akeidah would be the direct cause of the death of Sarah our Matriarch, there would be a possibility that Avraham

would be angered and regret what he had done – thus nullifying the eternal defense from prosecution against the Jewish people.

The Torah tells us that despite Avraham's understanding and linkage of events, his faith and trust in Hashem remained unshaken. He did not regret for a moment what he had done. The fact that Avraham did not regret the Akeidah – despite the pain that he had experienced by losing his life's partner (Sarah), solidified and eternalized the effect of the *Akeidah*. Satan could no longer negate its value.

Every day we say in the closing beracha (blessing) of the Morning Blessings, "...Hashem...do not bring us to the power of error, nor into the power of transgression and sin, nor into the power of challenge, nor into the power of disgrace. Let not the Evil Inclination dominate us." Based on what precedes and follows the word "disgrace" it is evident that it is addressing something within the context of spirituality and not in the physical.

Reb Elchanon Wasserman zt'l, visited the London community prior to WWII for the sole purpose of raising funds for his Yeshiva in Branovich. He was accompanied by one of the leaders of the London Jewish. Most households would only contribute a few coins and slam the door behind them. Despite this demeaning treatment, Reb Elchanon persisted in his door to door fundraising because he appreciated the great financial needs of his Yeshiva. The communal leader accompanying him asked, "How are you able to tolerate this ongoing abuse and disgrace?" Reb Elchanon responded, "My Rebbe, the Chofetz Chaim zt'l taught me that in life everyone needs to experience a certain amount of embarrassment. The question is - in what context does one experience it. Is it for the sake of Torah or for the sake of something else? I prefer to experience it for the sake of Torah." Torah is the ultimate glory. As it is stated in Pirkei Avos, "There is no glory other than Torah."

If Torah/one's spirituality is the ultimate glory, then it stands to reason that the ultimate disgrace is within the context of spirituality/ Torah. We say in the Amidah (silent Prayer) in the blessing of the Tzadikim (righteous), "...Put our lot with them (tzadikim and Chassidim) forever, and we will not feel ashamed, for we trust in You...." We are not devoutly righteous nor are we scrupulously pious (Chasidim); however we say that in the merit of our "trust" in Hashem we should not be embarrassed. We beseech Hashem to "put our lot with them" – meaning that our share in the world to come

should be among the righteous and there we should not be disgraced. Although we may not succeed sufficiently within the spiritual context to be counted among the tzaddikim, we pray that in the merit of our "trust" in G-d that we should not be disgraced. The ultimate disgrace is to be spiritually blemished for all eternity.

We must pray that although there are many events which we witness and do not understand, we should not come to the point of negating our spiritual accomplishments. We must remember how Satan attempted to create a situation that could have nullified the greatest accomplishment of Avraham our Patriarch.

#### ***4. The Purification of the Jewish People***

The Torah states regarding the first of the Ten Commandments, "**I am Hashem, your G'd, Who has taken you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery.**" Rashi cites Chazal who explain, "G'd said, 'It was worthwhile for Me to take you (the Jewish people) out of the land of Egypt so that you should be My servants.'" Regardless of what G'd needed to do, i.e. reveal miracles, it was worthwhile for the sake of taking the Jewish people as His subjects.

There is nothing that is difficult for G'd to do. The miracles in Egypt and the Splitting of the Sea are no less miraculous than the orderly function of nature. Ramban explains that nature itself is a concealed miracle. The only difference between the sun rising and setting each day and the Splitting of the Sea is that the sun rises and sets every day whereas the Splitting of the Sea was a unique occurrence. In either case, they both happen because G'd Will's it to be so.

The Torah states at the beginning of the Portion of Yisro, "**Yisro, the minister of Midian...heard everything that G'd did to Moshe and to Israel...-that Hashem had taken Israel out of Egypt.**" Rashi cites the Mechilta which explains, "the greatest miracle that G'd performed was taking of the Jewish people out of Egypt." At the time of the exodus, Egypt was physically decimated. Egypt had been destroyed by the ten plagues. Why is the taking out of the Jewish people out of Egypt considered the greatest of all the miracles that had transpired? If the walls of the prison are destroyed and the warden and all the prison guards are killed, would it be considered a great miracle when the prisoners flee the prison?

As a result of being in Egypt for 210 years, the Jewish people were so infected with spiritual impurity and acculturated with Egypt that they were completely shut down on a spiritual level. They had no capacity to internalize or process anything that was spiritual in nature. Within the context of reality, it was virtually impossible for them to ever be purged/cleansed of their impurity to become receptive to spirituality. They had fallen to the lowest level of impurity, which is the 49<sup>th</sup> level. Despite all of this, after experiencing the ten plagues and leaving Egypt, the Jewish people were able to recognize and internalize the revelation of G'd at the splitting of the Sea. This was demonstrated by the declaration of the Jew, "This is My G'd." The level of revelation of G'd at the splitting of the Sea that the maidservant experienced was at a greater level than that of Yechezkel the Prophet.

Chazal tell us that Yisro had worshiped every deity in existence. Thus, he understood the effect of being completely immersed in impurity. It was because of this appreciation that he was so impressed when he had heard that G'd had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt – meaning that He had purged them of that impurity. This was the greatest miracle of the exodus.

Now we are able to understand in a different light the Chazal that is cited by Rashi regarding the First Commandment – "G'd said, 'It was worthwhile for Me to take you (the Jewish people) out of the land of Egypt so that you should be My servants.'" The Torah is specifically addressing the purging process that G'd had performed for the Jewish people to cleanse them from their spiritual impurity so that they should have the capacity to be His servants. Ultimately this would enable the Jewish people to stand at Sinai and receive G'd's Torah.

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that there was a discussion between Reb Shimon Bar Yochai and his students regarding why the Jewish people were deserving of annihilation during the period of Purim. The students of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai were of the opinion that the Jewish people deserved annihilation because they had partaken in the feast of the *rasha* (evil one) – Achashverosh (the Emperor of Persia). Reb Shimon Bar Yochai rejected their explanation because if that were the case, then only the Jews in Shushan (the capital city of the Persian Empire) who participated in the feast should have been liable for punishment and not the entire Jewish people. The reason he offered for the Jews deserving annihilation was that they had bowed to the image of Nebuchadnezzar (Babylonian Emperor, who had destroyed the First Temple). Nebuchadnezzar had ordered all of his

subjects to bow to his image or be subject to death. The only Jews who did not bow were Chananyia, Meshael, and Azarya. Thus, since the Jewish people bowed to the image of Nebuchadnezzar, they deserved annihilation.

The students of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai asked him, "If in fact the Jewish people did bow to the idol and thus deserved to be destroyed then why were they not?" He answered them, "Because their bowing was only an external action with no substance. They only bowed because they were compelled to do so. Consequently, the decree against the Jewish people manifested itself in a similar manner – it only appeared as if they were to be annihilated but it was not meant to be."

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah tells us that if one were a true heretic he is classified as a "*min*-heretic." Even if that person were to gain a level of clarity and do teshuvah (repent) for his heretical beliefs, G'd will cause him to die. The reason for this is that heresy is something that is so deeply rooted in a person that even if he were to do teshuvah it would be only on a temporary basis. He will ultimately return to his heretical beliefs. G'd prefers that the individual should die as a righteous person. Thus, He will take him after he does teshuvah so that he should die as a tzaddik (righteous) before he reverts back to his heresy.

Reb Yonasan Eibshitz z'tl explains that when the students of Reb Shimon Bar Yochai asked him "If in fact the Jewish people deserved to be destroyed then why were they not?" They were alluding to the fact that even if the Jewish people had done teshuvah, because they had bowed to the idol they should be classified as "*minim*-heretics." Their difficulty was that G'd should have taken them in their state of teshuvah before they would revert back to their heretical ways. Yet He did not. To this, Reb Shimon Bar Yochai responded that their bowing was only an external act. They did not actually believe in what they had done. In essence they did not assume pagan beliefs. Therefore their teshuvah had fully reinstated them since they were never "*minim*."

The Jewish people in Egypt became idolaters assuming the classification of "*minim*." Although the Jews had come to a level of clarity through the Ten Plagues, they were destined to return to their idolatrous beliefs. Despite their status as "*minim*," G'd purged them of their impurity so that they would not revert back to their idolatrous ways. This was worthwhile for G'd to do in order for the Jewish people to become His servants.

The Commentators ask- why does G'd identify Himself as "Hashem who had taken Israel out of Egypt" and not "the G'd who created the world?" With our understanding, we are able to explain that it is only because the Jewish people were spiritually purged did they have relevance to G'd. Had G'd not performed the greatest miracle of all by cleansing them, there would have never been a Jewish people or a Sinai event. Thus, G'd identifies Himself as the One who took Israel out of Egypt.

### ***5. A Rebbe Must Value the Honor of His Students No Less than His Own*** (from Beshalach)

The Torah tells us that Moshe had chosen Yehoshua to lead the Jewish people in the battle against the Amalekites. The Torah states, "Moshe said to Yehoshua, **'Choose for us men and go wage war with Amalek.'**" The Midrash states, "The manner in which Moshe addressed Yehoshua indicates that although he was Moshe's student, Moshe related to him as an equal. This is to teach us proper behavior. As his teacher/mentor, Moshe could have said to Yehoshua, 'Choose for me...'" Rather, Moshe said, "Choose for us..." – speaking to him as a peer. From here we learn that the honor of the student should be valued by the rebbe/teacher to the same degree that he values his own honor."

Simply, one could say that the Torah is teaching us a methodology for a teacher to impact upon his students in the most effective manner. If the teacher values the student no less than he values himself – relating to him as a peer- his teachings will impact on a more profound level.

The Gemara in Tractate Taanis states, "Rav says, 'I learned an enormous amount from my teachers. From my colleagues more than from my teachers. From my students (I learned) more than all of them.'" Rav's statement reveals that the development and growth of a Torah sage is mainly through the interaction between the teacher and his students. They are the medium through which he advances himself. If in fact the teacher assumes new levels of Torah advancement, through the student, then the rebbe/teacher must be beholden to the student. In addition, his honor as a Torah sage is directly attributed to the student. Thus, it is logical that he should honor and value the student no less than he values his own honor.

It is written in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) that one should establish/mentor many students. Rashi in his commentary cites Chazal who explain that despite the

fact that one may have mentored many students at a younger age, he should continue to mentor students even at an advanced age because the students that he will mentor then may surpass the students of his youth. Reb Chaim of Volozhin z'tl in his commentary on Pirkei Avos explains the value of continuing to mentor students in another vein. It is based on the principle of "from my students more than all of them." The Mishna is advising the Torah sage to mentor as many students as he can (regardless of his age) for the sake of his own Torah advancement. It is only through the interaction with the students that the rebbe continuously advances.

On a simple level, one would understand the principle of "from my students more than all of them" to mean that in order for a rebbe to be most effective with his students he must prepare and present the material in a cogent manner so that the students should be impacted upon by his teachings. Simultaneously, the rebbe also develops to have a greater understanding of the subject matter because of the questions posed to him by the students. However we are able to understand this concept on a more profound level.

The Gemara in Tractate Moed Katan teaches us that when one chooses a rebbe/mentor for himself, "he should have a semblance of an angel." As it is stated in Malachi, "If he resembles an angel of G'd, you should seek Torah from his mouth." Just as an angel, who is an agent of G'd, acts solely for the sake of G'd without deviation or ulterior motive (I'shmah), so too the rebbe/teacher must be an individual who teaches the Torah with the pure intent of disseminating G'd's Word.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos states, "All who exert themselves for the community should do so for the sake of Heaven (I'shmah), for then the merit of the community's forefathers will aid them..." When a rebbe/teacher possesses the characteristic of an angel, which is acting purely for the sake of G'd, then he will minimally have the merit of the forefathers of his students assisting him. Meaning, his level of Divine Assistance (siyata d'shmaya) will be at an advanced level –thus causing the rebbe to have another level of Torah. The student of this rebbe will be a greater beneficiary of his teachings because of the special Divine Assistance that he merited. Based on this principle, we are able to understand Rav's statement "from my students (I learned) more than all of them." It is only through one's dedication to disseminate Torah to his students does a rebbe merit the most advanced level of Divine Assistance.

Therefore if the rebbe truly appreciates the basis for his own advancement on Torah, he will value the honor of his students as he values his own.