



A YOM KIPPUR READER

5774/2013



Celebrating
50 YEARS *of dedication to our students and the community.*

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Fifty years ago Rabbi Gedaliah Anemer, zt"l, founded our yeshiva with a small handful of students. It was a time of pioneering, a time of enormous dedication. People took second mortgages on their homes to enable the yeshiva's existence. We look back with much gratitude to Hashem for all of the chesed He has bestowed upon us, and we dedicate ourselves anew with the spirit and determination of our founders to the cause of Jewish education Rabbi Anemer held so dear.

As we look back on fifty years of service to the community, we hope that you will enjoy these articles from our archives.

In Loving Memory
לעילוי נשמת

שמואל זאנוול בן אשר לעמל

Mr. Samuel Moer

דבורה בת הרב חיים

Mrs. Dorothy Moer

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Mrs. Gussie Lubitz

by
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The Scapegoat

By Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky
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A Unique Feature of a Unique Service

Among the most unique features of the atonement of Yom Kippur is the *sa'ir la'Azazel*, the so-called scapegoat. It is unique in two ways:

1. No other sacrifice is so sweeping in its capacity as an atonement. Every other sacrifice relates to a specific sin. Even the public sin offerings brought on the festivals are meant to atone specifically for defiling the Temple. The *sa'ir la'Azazel*, however, relates to all sins – even to intentional ones. What is the nature of this sacrifice that gives it this sweeping scope of atonement?
2. Moreover, the manner of the sacrifice is peculiar. It is not slaughtered in the manner of conventional sacrifices; rather, it is flung off a cliff. The place of the sacrifice is not the Temple altar but a valley outside the Temple area; in fact, it seems to be as desolate an area as possible, as far removed as can be from the center of *kedushah*. Also, the person charged with sacrificing the *sa'ir la'Azazel* is not the *kohen gadol*, who performs the rest of the Yom Kippur service, but rather an assistant. The Torah specifically refers to him as *ish itti* – a man of the moment – a seemingly derogatory term denoting temporariness.

The Ramban emphasizes very strongly that although the scapegoat is a sacrifice designed to “give the Satan his due,” it is nonetheless performed in response to God’s command. As if the emphasize this point, the Torah’s command never to bring sacrifices outside the Temple immediately follows the portion dealing with the Yom Kippur sacrifices. It’s as if to emphasize that sacrifices are only to be brought for God in response to His command, with the Yom Kippur service only a variant way of expressing this. This interpretation of the Ramban is based on *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* (chap. 46), which explains the *sa'ir la'Azazel* as a way of “appeasing” the Satan so he won’t challenge our Yom Kippur offerings.

How are we to deal with a concept that sounds so alien to Judaism? How do we distinguish between the offerings of witchcraft and an *avodah* mandated by God, designed to “appease” Satan?

Of Sins Internal and External

Let us begin our study of the role of the scapegoat in atoning for evil by examining the first appearance of *ra* (evil) in Creation. *Sefarim* refer to the two stages of *ra*: before eating of the fruit of

the *eitz hada'as* (tree of knowledge) and afterwards. It is generally accepted that before Adam and Chava ate of the *eitz hada'as*, the *yeitzer hara* (evil inclination) was external, and with the eating of the forbidden fruit it was internalized (see *Moreh Nevuchim* 1:2; *Nefesh HaChayim* 1:6). The significance of the act of eating in this transition is obvious, for in contrast to committing a proscribed act, consuming forbidden food actually incorporates the prohibited substance into a person's system (see Ramban regarding eating *treif* food).

It may be difficult to envision a person devoid of any internal urge for evil; yet perhaps the two different stages can be understood by considering the contrast between a person failing to avoid clothing with *sha'atnez* (forbidden mixture of linen and wood), for instance, and a violation of prohibitions against illicit relationships or unkosher food. If a person wears clothing containing *sha'atnez*, it is usually because he is too lazy to submit his clothing for checking; it is too expensive to buy a *sha'atnez*-free garment, or the suit is too nice to discard. All these factors are external. The individual experiences no internal craving for *sha'atnez*, nor does he attain any special fulfillment from transgressing this prohibition.

On the other hand, when a person has a craving for an illicit relationship or a forbidden food, his very self wants it, as though he cannot live without it. His battle vacillates between feeling shame at himself for wanting to yield to his base, animal instincts to feeling rage at people, or at the Torah, for trying to restrain him against his will. The Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 17a) relates the story of Reb Elazar ben Durdia who died upon doing *tshuvah* for a lifetime of licentiousness. Rav Yitzchak Hutner, *zt"l*, explained that Reb Elazar's very life force was so tied up with *aveiros* that he was left without any sense of self when the *aveirah* was extricated from him. Thus, once he conquered the craving, he died.

One can compare the difference between combating these two types of *yeitzer hara* to the difference between battling an invasive disease and fighting cancer. An invasive disease is more easily overcome, for one can differentiate between the body and the disease. The antibodies identify the foreign agent as such and battle it. A cancerous growth, however, is composed of the same material as the body (modern research focuses heavily on learning the differences and finding treatments that will discriminate between the diseased tissue and the healthy tissue), and the antibodies cannot identify this particular part of the body as alien. By the same token, the standard *tshuvah* process may work well for us when we struggle to eradicate sins of the first category, as long as we recognize that we have committed a sin and that we are of clear resolve to rid ourselves of it. Then we can hope to succeed in making some inroads into removing the sin from our personalities. But what about those sins we are so involved in that we do not want to rid ourselves of them? What about those habits, practices, and objects of desire that are integrated into our very selves? Can we ever succeed in ridding ourselves of them?

Internalized Evil: Its Development and Its Counterforce

The internalization of the *yeitzer hara* within man – whereby good and evil became so integrated that they could not be distinguished from one another – took on many forms throughout the chain of history:

- Adam HaRishon ate from the *eitz hada'as*, internalizing the *yeitzer hara* within man for all time.
- When twins were born to Yitzchak and Rivka, a new type of mixing of *tov* and *ra* emerged. The two boys were twins, and it was unclear as to who represented *tov* and who *ra*. Yitzchak favored Eisav for the *Berachos*. The *pasuk* in Malachi states, “For Eisav and Yaakov are brothers, and yet I have loved Yaakov and despised Eisav” (1:2-3). Although there seems to be no apparent reason for it, Yaakov was the preferred one. Chazal also liken Eisav to an animal whose appearance is “kosher” but whose internal signs are unclean (*Midrash Shocher Tov* 120:6).
- When the children of Israel left Egypt, they were accompanied by the *eirev rav* – the mixed multitudes of Egyptians who had overtly embraced Judaism and became part of Israel but carried with them vestiges of idolatry that ultimately resulted in the sin of the *eigel* (golden calf).

This was the beginning of the chain of events that culminated in the *kapparah* of Yom Kippur, with the *sa'ir la'Azazel* as the primary component. It was insufficient to offer an atonement for the *eigel* through an offering to God. As long as there is a *yeitzer hara* within a person and its influence pervades all of man's deeds, all the offerings and atonements he offers are tainted. One must first extricate the *ra* from within the person. Only then is he capable of offering a genuine atonement.

This is where Azazel enters the scene. The *kohen* takes two goats as similar in appearance as possible; *sefarim* write that they represent the twins Eisav and Yaakov. The *kohen gadol*, representing all of Jewry, then stands before God and performs a lottery, for it is beyond our power to rid ourselves of this *ra* on our own. We must enlist Divine assistance to identify the one that embodies evil. Once we have determined which he is, we send it out of *klal Yisrael*. The goat that represents the potential for good can then be elevated through *shechitah*, *zerikah*, and *haktarah* – the sacrificial order in the Temple – and become holy. The part that is evil cannot be elevated; it must be expunged. We send it off to the forces of evil and rid ourselves of it.

This last point requires some elaboration. Our task in this world is not to destroy *ra*. There is a place for *ra* in creation and only God will eventually exterminate it. Ours is to separate the *ra* from the *tov* and make certain that our personalities, our actions, and our society in general are free from *ra*. This *avodah*, this specific approach, stems from Adam's initial challenge, which was not to destroy the *eitz hada'as* but to make certain he did not consume any of it and contaminate himself with it. On Yom Kippur, we reverse the process started by Adam HaRishon. We discriminate between the

genuinely good and the pseudo-good of *ra*. *Ra* is returned to its “place in creation” – the *Midbar* (wilderness). Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachya explain that *ra* – which encompasses the forces of desolation and death, of waste and destruction – reigns supreme in the *Midbar*.

No, we are not offering sacrifices to the Satan; rather, by giving back his unwelcome gift of pseudo-*tov*, we thereby cleanse ourselves.

Disenfranchising Evil

Many of the comments concerning *sa'ir la'Azazel* fall into place with the explanation above:

The *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* (chap. 46) explains that the *sa'ir la'Azazel* counteracts the *kitrug*, the discrediting assault of the Satan on our other *korbanos*. It is similar to tossing a bone to a dog to keep him quiet, as another interpretation of Chazal explains (*Raya Mehemna*). Or, in contemporary parlance, think in terms of someone who owns one share in a corporation and continuously litigates in court against every move he deems contrary to his (i.e. the stockholder's) interests. But as soon as he is bought out and his capital is returned to him, he is no longer a party to the company's fortunes. As an outsider, he is powerless. Similarly, so long as the Satan is part of our enterprise, he has legitimate claims to our fortunes; when he is gone, he is no longer part of our world.

The Gemara (*Yoma* 67b) explains that the *sa'ir la'Azazel* is an atonement for the angels Aza and Azel who sinned with earthly women, which brought into being the wicked and powerful *nefilim*. Although this occurrence is shrouded in mystery and we have no clear conception of what really transpired, we can at least comprehend that a dilution of spirituality took place through this marriage of the heavenly and the mundane, resulting in an introduction of new elements of *ra* into the world. The children they produced, then, embodied a blend of *tov* and *ra*. This is the worst type of *aveirah*, which only Yom Kippur can atone for.

Chazal say that the red threads tied to the horns of the goat and hung in the Beis HaMikdash – threads that turned white to proclaim that *b'nei Yisrael* were forgiven – represent the *zohamah* (pollutant) that the snake introduced into Chava (*Maggid Meisharim*).

The *Yalkut Reuveini* cites a midrash that a person destined to die during that year was chosen (through *ruach hakodesh*) to send off the *sa'ir la'Azazel*. This is the meaning of the designation of *itti*; he was a “temporary person,” so to speak. The reason for this is because the person involved with each *avodah* (aspect of the divine service) is representative of that *avodah*. The *kohen gadol* represents longevity, as does the general scope of the *avodah* in the Beis HaMikdash. The person who was to send off the *sa'ir la'Azazel*, however, was a man marked for death – most fitting for his specific task.

Back to Origins

On Yom Kippur, we loosen a bit the tentacles of *ra* that have dug so deeply into our flesh. We are free of *ta'avas achilah* and *ta'avas nashim*, which are proscribed on that day. Chazal say we resemble angels on Yom Kippur (clad in white, standing, etc.). We are no longer akin to the *nefilim* – the children of fallen *malachim* – but, rather, to untainted angels. We are gathered on the day that the sin of the *eigel* was expunged from the *klal Yisrael*. We now have the opportunity to cleanse ourselves of facets of our personality that in truth we never wanted to be rid of. Aharon HaKohen would place his hands on the *sa'ir* and confess the sins of *klal Yisrael*. He would then “place the sins on the head of the *sa'ir*,” meaning that *klal Yisrael* would recognize that those sins were not theirs. They were the snakes’ *zohamah*, the machinations of Eisav, the influence of the *eirev rav*. The *kohen gadol* then dispatched this embodiment of evil to the desert, its place of origin, back to its rightful owners. And *klal Yisrael* emerged as clean and pure as Adam was before he sinned.

Life Support

By Rabbi Akiva Leiman

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Yom Kippur is here and we have been hearing about *T'shuva* for a while now. The Ba'alei Mussar dried up many an inkwell describing the unbelievable *chesed* that is *t'shuva*. You've stolen, you've sinned; can you possibly take it back? The damage is done irrevocably. Yet, of course, we – as High Holy Day Jews – know you can. *T'shuva* can do the seemingly impossible; it can return us to the primordial *aveirah*-less state; the state of the human as he was meant to be. We must, the *Ba'alei Mussar* tell us, give thanks for this wonderful innovation that HaShem has introduced, this Return to Paradise Lost.

However, the G'mara (in Kiddushin) obfuscates this seemingly clear fact. There the G'mara states that one who might have been a *Tzaddik* for the greater part of his life can still devolve into a degenerate by simply regretting his accomplishments. All those orphans comforted, those *Yeshivos* built, that Torah learned, those matzos ingested, the imbibed *Kiddush* and imbued *Shofar* – all gone in a sigh. A *Tzaddik* no longer – he's gone; a life's work gone in a sigh.

This G'mara, while provocative, is likewise instructive. If regrets can cause *mitzvos* to dissipate, then why should the same not be true for *aveiros*? If regrets do erase deeds, then both good and evil must evaporate in their wake. So if I may, I'd like to ask those *Ba'alei Mussar*: Why do you consider *T'shuva* such a big *chesed*? If it can erase my *mitzvos* – as the G'mara in Kiddushin explicates – then HaShem “must” allow it to do the same for my *aveiros*. Fair is fair!

We've erred, however, and I think I know where.

We assume that good and bad are on equal footing, and what applies to one necessarily must apply to the other. This is incorrect. The Torah compares good to life and evil to death (*U'vacharta Ba'Chaim*), and there are basic differences between the two. Life needs to be maintained, death does not. Life unsustainable naturally turns into death; death remains static no matter what level of care it has received. For death to actually desist, miraculous Divine intervention to the tune of *T'chias HaMaysim* would be necessary. Life is fragile; death is eternal. Extending the metaphor: *ma'asim tovim* need sustenance. *Ma'asim tovim*, again, are to be compared to life. The life-blood of goodness is the executor's sense of a job well done and his immense satisfaction in what he has accomplished. Any lack in that regard starves off the oxygen, and puts the 'good' on life support or worse... hence: the scary G'mara in Kiddushin where a *Tzaddik* can revert to ignominious nothingness with just a sigh; unsupported life fades away. Conversely, *aveiros* are death. They need no support, they ask for

no handouts. They are static, cold and everlasting. Regret can pose no threat to an *aveirah*.

And yet regret does. It can eradicate the *aveirah*. How? Why?

T'shuva is a sign of HaShem's absolute beneficence. To erase an *aveirah* is a virtual impossibility and yet HaShem has created for us the prospect of just such an erasure. True, only sincere regret with all its accoutrements would function as a perfect *t'shuva*, but the very fact that it works at all to eliminate the *aveirah* (or to wake the dead?) is a windfall of such monumental consequence that it defies description. In gratitude to HaShem should we not, at the very least, avail ourselves of this opportunity on this most auspicious day?

I have a new question for the Ba'alei Mussar: How is it that you stressed *t'shuva* as only a *chesed* when, much more remarkably, it is patently impossible to fathom?

Ben Adam: bring thyself back from the dead.

Please.

It's In Our Hands

By Rabbi Yitzchak Scher

Kollell Zichron Amram

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The Sages teach us that the Ten Days of Repentance is a time when Hashem is especially “close” and accessible to us. During this time, when we turn to Him with sincerity and commitment, He more readily accepts our teshuva and gives us extra help in accomplishing our goals. However, on Yom Kippur itself, Hashem seems to give an even extra portion of divine assistance. The Gemara (Yoma 20a) explains that on Yom Kippur, the Satan (the angel appointed by Hashem to point out negative actions, challenge us, and prosecute us) is not allowed to act in his prosecutorial role. Seemingly, this is one extra portion of Divine help unique to Yom Kippur. However, heavenly prosecution is something that may be too lofty for us to relate to. Practically, how does this affect us and encourage our teshuva? This can be answered by a different Gemara (Bava Basra 16a), which says that the Satan and the *Yetzer Hara* (our innate inclination towards choosing evil) are both the same force. According to this, if the Satan has no permission to prosecute, then the *Yetzer Hara* has no permission to entice us to sin (see Pachad Yitzchak, Purim, 8, and Sfas Emes, Yom Kippur, 5649).

Many of us are very excited to hear this idea- a day without the *Yetzer Hara*? Amazing! However, the idea is not as simple as it sounds. The Mishna records that in the times of the Beis Hamikdash, the Kohen Gadol would not sleep at all during the night of Yom Kippur. Even after the destruction of the Temple, some cities chose to remember the Kohen Gadol's service by also not sleeping the night of Yom Kippur. In one city, this practice led to a negative outcome:

“Abba Shaul said that they would do this even outside of the Temple as a remembrance, but they would sin. Abaye said... explain this passage to refer to the city of Neharda. [Abaye proves this through the following conversation.] Eliyahu said to Rav Yehuda the brother of Rav Sala Chasida: “You ask why Moshiach hasn't come - but this Yom Kippur [many acts of immorality] were committed in Neharda” [He asked Eliyahu] “What does Hashem say?” [Eliyahu responded] “Sin crouches as the doorway (Bereishis 4)” [Rav Yehuda further asked] “What does the Satan say?” [Eliyahu responded] “The Satan has no permission to prosecute on Yom Kippur.” (Yoma 20a)

If acts of immorality were committed on Yom Kippur itself, then the *Yetzer Hara* seems to still be working hard, even on Yom Kippur, to draw people towards sin. Additionally, we know from our own lives that sin is certainly possible on Yom Kippur! Most Jews have experienced that unfortunate reality. If so, how can we understand the concept that the *Yetzer Hara* doesn't function on Yom Kippur?

The answer to this question lies in the above Gemara. Eliyahu relates Hashem's response to the sins that happened on Yom Kippur in Neharda. Hashem quoted a verse from the Torah "Sin crouches in the doorway." This is the same message that Hashem gave Kayin prior to his murder of his brother, Hevel. The full verse says: "If you improve yourself, you will be forgiven. But if you do not improve yourself, sin crouches in the doorway. Its desire is towards you, but you can rule over it. (Bereishis 4:7)" In this *pasuk*, Hashem tells Kayin both the main challenge of life and the power of a human being to triumph over this challenge he will inevitably face. Hashem puts us in a world where sin lurks around every corner.

The Yetzer Hara has a desire to seduce us and entice us towards actions that are detrimental to our bodies and souls. However, the power is within us to control our urges and overcome the Yetzer Hara's powerful pull. A human being has the ability to rise to the heights of angels and have no struggles with desire, or fall to the depths, living like animals who live only to fill their bodily needs. If so, how does one determine the direction in which he will travel? The difference between these two poles is found in the first half of the *pasuk*. "If you improve yourself..."

The choice is in the hands of the person. If a person exercises his ability of free choice and chooses improvement, then Hashem will forgive him and assist him to overcome his Yetzer Hara. (See Kid-dushin 30b and Rashi, *ibid.*) However, if a person does not choose to work towards improvement, then sin crouches at the doorway, waiting to pounce on its victim. (and even at this point, the *pasuk* implies that the Yetzer Hara can still be conquered!) Hashem told Kayin a fundamental concept of life. Hashem understood Kayin's mood, Kayin's desires, and Kayin's animosity towards his brother. Hashem also knew that the Yetzer Hara had "gotten the best" of Kayin. So Hashem, accordingly, tells Kayin the way to release himself from the grips of the Yetzer Hara. Do not feel helpless. Recognize that you can change. The Yetzer Hara will release you as soon as you sincerely choose improvement! It's all in your hands Kayin. As we know, Kayin didn't take this advice, which resulted in his brother's murder.

This is the same comment that Hashem made concerning the sins committed on Yom Kippur in Neharda. Hashem is teaching us an important lesson. On Yom Kippur, He is ready to release us from the grips of the Yetzer Hara. Yom Kippur is a time when a Jew can really reach the level of an angel. He can live in a reality, be it a short one, where his soul's true desires come out. The person wants only to cling to Hashem, cling to Torah, and accomplish spiritually. Physical desires, material goals, and this-worldly aspirations won't cloud his vision or block his path. For one day a year, the neshama can have its chance to shine, as the Jew really feels what his true being is: a soul yearning to cling to Hashem, with a physical body to serve merely as a tool for his spiritual goals. He can disregard (to some extent) his physical façade and live as a neshama. Even though this feeling may dissipate shortly after Neilah, the experience is enough to help us realign ourselves and our goals for

the coming year. Once we experience the heights that a human being can reach, we know what to work towards during our lifetime and are less inclined to sink back into the depths from which we may have come.

However, this elevated feeling can only be achieved if we earnestly desire it. If we choose to work towards genuine self improvement on Yom Kippur, Hashem will respond in kind, allow us to get a glimpse of the reality of ourselves, and release us temporarily from the Yetzer Hara's constant ambush. However, if we do not make the right choices, even on Yom Kippur itself "sin crouches at the doorway" ready to pounce.

In fact, this is one way to explain the purpose for the prohibition of so many physical activities on Yom Kippur. The Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 313) explains that involvement in physical activities and pleasures strengthen a person's desires for more of these pleasures. The more that one is involved excessively in these activities, the more distant that person may become from spirituality and a real connection with the service of Hashem. (See also Ramban, Devarim 29:18) Therefore, part of our duty on Yom Kippur is to withdraw from physical activity and physical pleasures. As we immerse ourselves in a day of complete spirituality and non-physical pleasure, our goals and aspirations should also shift towards the ideas of spiritual growth and self improvement. As our thirst for spiritual growth strengthens and we authentically commit to live by these ideals for the coming year, Hashem, will help us reach these heights on Yom Kippur.

The Sfas Emes sums up this concept with a beautiful metaphor, based on the Midrash. Just as when the rust is removed from gold, the beauty of the metal can shine through, so too on Yom Kippur we are able to remove our physical façade and let the beauty of our souls shine through. In the prayer of Neilah we say to Hashem "You stretch out Your hand to sinners." On Yom Kippur, Hashem is standing next to each Jew, stretching out His "arm", ready to uplift us (pun intended) and help us improve. However, we must do our part and grab on to that hand. If we make that decision, then the benefits of Yom Kippur will be enjoyed for that day, for the coming year, and for eternity. May Hashem endow us all with the ability to transcend the physical world this Yom Kippur and grant us all a *g'mar chasima tova*.

Hashem is Our King

By Reuven Gaisin

Yeshiva Gedolah

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At Mincha on Yom Kippur we read the entire book of Yonah¹ for the haftarah². Why do we read the book of Yonah on Yom Kippur? Furthermore, why specifically at Mincha?

Lessons of Teshuva

One classic answer is given by the *Levush* (Rabbi Mordechai Yoffe, 1530-1612). The *Levush* states that we read the book of Yonah on Yom Kippur because it teaches the tremendous power of teshuva (repentance)³. Although the *Levush* does not flesh out where we see that message, we may be able to understand as follows: Yonah received a prophecy from Hashem with a mission to inform the people of Ninveh that because of their wicked behavior the whole city would be overturned in forty days⁴. According to Rashi, the word “overturned” in this prophecy had two possible meanings. If the people did teshuva, they would be “overturned” from bad to good. However, if they did not, their city would be “overturned” – destroyed⁵. After receiving this message, all the inhabitants of the city of Ninveh did teshuva. When Hashem saw this, He let them live. Their teshuva saved them.

If one might ask whether this power of teshuva applies to an individual as well as to a community, one need only look to the chazzan’s repetition of the Musaf *amidah* when we say: “ותשובה ותפילה וצדקה מעבירים את רוע הגזרה” – But repentance, prayer and charity remove the evil of the decree!⁶. A commentary on the machzor called *Mateh Levi* (Rebi Aharon son of R’ Michel from Mikelstok, mid-1800s, Europe) clarifies that this is referring to the decree for an individual⁷.

Dr. Mendel Hirsch (1833-1900), the oldest son of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, explains a reason along the same lines as the reason given by the *Levush*, but with an added element. The book of Yonah was chosen to be read, teaches Dr. Hirsch, “at this serious moment of the departing day

1 In addition to the whole book of Yonah, we read Michah 7:18-20.

2 Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim, siman תרכב, se’if ב based on Maseches Megila 31a.

3 *Levush HaChur* תרכב, se’if ב.

4 Yonah 3:1-4.

5 Rashi there.

6 Assuming the implication of this tefilla is that any one of these removes the evil of the decree; one does not **need** all three. See also Midrash Rabba Breishis 44:15 and Rosh Hashana 16b.

7 Found in Machzor Mikrei Kodesh: Yom Kippur, Ashkenaz, page 372.

[since it will] bring to our minds the power and nature of repentance”⁸. We learn about the nature of teshuva from the example set by the people of Ninveh, as taught in a Mishna in *Taanis*⁹: “. . . It is not stated regarding the people of Ninveh: And God saw their sackcloth and their fasting, but [rather]: And God saw their deeds, that they repented their evil ways - , וַיִּרְא הָאֱלֹהִים אֶת-מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם, כִּי-שָׁבוּ מִדְרָכָם הָרָע.” Real teshuva is not simply fasting and wearing sackcloth; rather it is, as Dr. Hirsch says, “mending one’s ways.” The commentators explain that fasting and wearing sackcloth are a means used to humble a person and assist him/her in doing teshuva.¹⁰ We do learn a fundamental lesson from the people of Ninveh that teshuva constitutes mending one’s ways. Nevertheless, Dr. Hirsch points out that there is a crucial distinction between the goal of teshuva for Jews and for non-Jews: “The forgiveness which is granted to them [non-Jews] by their return to the general duties of humanity, for us [Jews] is attached to our returning to the whole of the laws and teaching of the Torah.”¹¹

Another reason for reading of the book of Yonah on Yom Kippur is brought by the *Kol Bo* (15th century halachic compendium), which states that the reading of this book is meant to awaken us to do teshuva, so that we may follow the example of the inhabitants of Ninveh and be saved as they were¹². The *Ba’al Yesod V’Shoresh HaAvodah* (Rav Alexander Ziskind, 1700-1794) teaches in a similar vein that we read Yonah on Yom Kippur in order to take *mussar* (a moral lesson) from the teshuva of the inhabitants of Ninveh, to do teshuva ourselves¹³. In addition, the book of Yonah includes other people who do teshuva, which can also inspire us to do teshuva: according to the Malbim (Rav Meir Leibush Malbim, 1809-1879), Yonah himself does teshuva.¹⁴ The *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* (8th century aggadic compilation) says that the men in the boat from which Yonah was thrown were transformed by the experience of watching Hashem’s actions and immediately threw out their idols, then ultimately converted to Judaism, in their own form of teshuva.¹⁵

In addition to making the point that the book of Yonah speaks about teshuva, the *Abudraham* (Rav David Abudraham, 14th century) also says that we read Yonah on Yom Kippur in order to teach that a person is not able to run away from Hashem if he or she has done *aveiros* (sins). As the pasuk in Tehillim (139:7-8) says: “Where can I go from Your spirit? And where can I flee from Your presence?

8 Dr. Mendel Hirsch, *Sefer Hapthoroth*, London, 1966, pg. 657.

9 *Taanis* Perek 2, Mishna 1. The pasuk quoted in Mishna is Yonah 3:10.

10 Maharsha on *Taanis* 16a and Mishna Berura se’if katan א on siman תקמז.

11 *Ibid.* pg. 658.

12 *Kol Bo*, *Cheylek* 4, column שח (Feldheim, תשננ).

13 *Sha’ar* 11, perek 11.

14 Malbim on Yonah 2:8.

15 *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*, end of the 10th perek.

If I ascend to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in the lowest depths, behold, You are there”¹⁶. Yonah tries to escape from Hashem’s command by taking to the sea, an action that fails because Hashem controls all¹⁷.

Lessons of Rachamim

Another approach as to why we read Yonah on Yom Kippur takes the reason out of the world of teshuva and into the world of *rachamim* (mercy). After the sailors found out that the mighty wind was occurring on account of Yonah, they asked Yonah what could be done to stop the mighty wind. Yonah told them: “Pick me up and heave me into the sea” (1:12). The sailors did not immediately do that, rather the “men rowed hard to return to the shore” (1:13). When that did not work, because the storm was becoming more intense, the sailors heaved Yonah into the sea. However, before they actually heaved him into the sea, they prayed to Hashem saying: “O, please, Hashem . . . do not reckon it to us as innocent blood. . .” (1:14).

Yalkut Me’am Loez on the book of Yonah (anthology of aggada, commentaries, and halacha on Tanach. Rav Shmuel Yerushalmi, published around 1989) brings down in the name of the sefer *Ohr HaMikra* (Rav Uri Langer, published in 1952 in NY) that we read the book of Yonah on Yom Kippur because in the book of Yonah we see how much *rachamim* the sailors felt for Yonah, that even though they were aware that the mighty wind was definitely coming on account of Yonah, they were reluctant to throw him into the sea, an action they thought would cause Yonah to die. We also see the *rachamim* that the sailors had on Yonah from the prayer which they said before throwing him into the sea. The *Me’am Loez* continues and says, “We then beseech *rachamim* from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the source of *rachamim*, to have pity on us and release our judgment to be for life”¹⁸. Although the *Me’am Loez* does not explicitly state why the reading of Yonah is specifically at Mincha, he does hint to it. He says, “We then beseech *rachamim* from Hakadosh Baruch Hu.” Right after the reading of the haftarah, we daven (pray) the *amidah* of Mincha, which does include requests for *rachamim*. However, when the *Me’am Loez* tells us that we beseech *rachamim* after we read Yonah, he may be referring to our beseeching for *rachamim* soon afterwards during Ne’ilah, a prayer focused on asking for *rachamim* from Hashem.

The sefer *Seder Hayom* (Rabbi Moshe Ben Yehuda Makir, Tzfat, 16th century) explains that the prayer of Ne’ilah was instituted specifically in order to ask for *rachamim*: “Ne’ilah is a prayer added on this holy day [Yom Kippur] to awaken *rachamim* at the time that the gates of the upper sanctuary

16 Abudraham, Seder Tefilos Shel Yom Hakippurim, pg. רפז.

17 For the Chofetz Chaim’s explanation see Mishna Berura, siman תרכב, se’if katan ז and Sha’ar Hatzion se’if katan י.

18 Yalkut Me’am Loez, Trei Asar, pg. רצב (H. Vagshal).

are being locked; that before the gates are locked, our prayers should enter and be accepted with favor and affection to fill our requests” that all our sins be forgiven and erased¹⁹.

From the book of Yonah we also learn about Hashem’s *rachamim* towards human beings. At the very end of the book of Yonah, Hashem says to Yonah: “You took pity on the *kikayon*. . . . And I – Shall I not take pity upon Nineveh the great city . . . ?” (4:10-11). In presenting Yonah with this question, Hashem is teaching that He treats those He has created with *rachamim*.

Reading the book of Yonah is befitting at the time of Mincha, a time when we are moving towards the end of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is a day when we focus on teshuva and Hashem grants each of us atonement and purity. By doing teshuva, each of us becomes eligible to receive more complete atonement and purity. Ne’ilah is a prayer when we particularly beseech Hashem for *rachamim*. The book of Yonah, with its combined messages of the power, method, and necessity of teshuva, as well as its lessons of *rachamim* – both that of God and man –, is the perfect book to read to prepare us for those last crucial moments of Yom Kippur²⁰.

19 Seder Hayom, pg. קפו.

20 For other reasons see Chochmas Shlomo on Shulchan Orach, Orach Chaim, siman תרכב, se’if ב; Rav Yitzchak Mirsky, Hegyonei Halacha, chelek 2, pgs 69-72; Be’er Moshe, Vayikra 8, pg. ריז.

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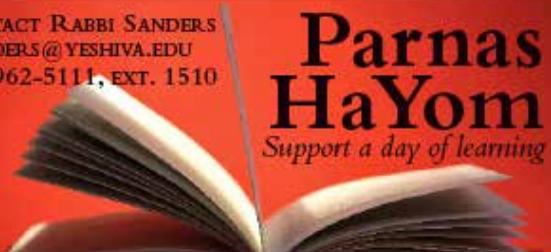
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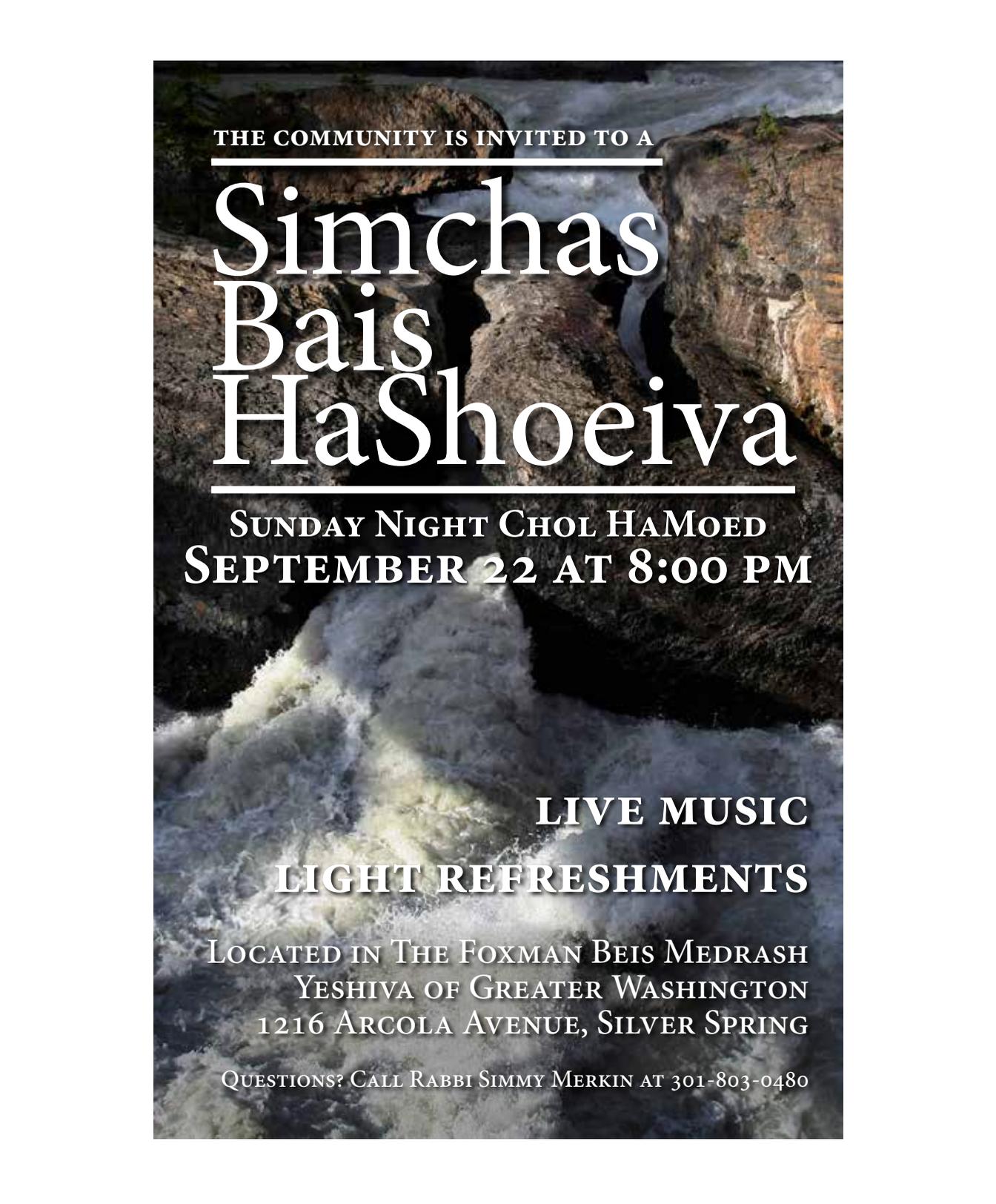
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