**S.A.L.T.– PARASHAT HAAZINU - YOM KIPPUR**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

One of the sins which we confess in the *vidui* text on Yom Kippur is the sin of “*timhon leivav*.” The source of this phrase is a verse in Sefer Devarim (28:28), where the Torah lists “*timhon leivav*” among the curses that God threatens to bring upon *Benei Yisrael* if they disobey His laws. Rashi interprets “*timhon leivav*” to mean “*otem ha-leiv*” – the closing of the heart. To what exactly does this refer, and what precisely are we confessing when we say we are guilty of “*timhon leivav*”?

The Alter of Kelm (cited in *Yalkut Lekach Tov*, vol. 2, p. 97) suggested an analogy to anesthesia. When an anesthetic is administered to a part of the body, the patient is incapable of experiencing any pain in that area, no matter what is done to it. The surgeon can perform the most painful procedure, but the patient will not feel anything. The Alter explained that “*timhon leivav*” refers to spiritual anesthesia, a condition where a person is not moved or inspired by anything. This is a state of absolute apathy, where the individual does not care and is incapable of caring. A person struck with “*timhon leivav*” cannot change because his heart is “closed,” unreceptive to the stimuli that would ordinarily trigger a process of change. This is, indeed, a dreadful curse, which the Torah lists together with “*shiga’on*” (“insanity”) – the inability to make beneficial cognitive decisions, and “*ivaron*” (“blindness”) – the inability to chart a safe, secure path in life. Like these conditions, “*timhon leivav*” prevents personal growth and development, and does not allow us to live our lives to the fullest.

On Yom Kippur, we confess to having willingly become stricken with “*timhon leivav*,” that we have closed our minds and hearts and lived with firm apathy. We became comfortable with who we are and the way we live, without considering the possibility that change is in order. We made ourselves immune to inspiration and impervious to new ideas. We erected mental and emotional barriers around ourselves to ensure we are not moved or stirred to change and improve. And we are committed to reversing our “*timhon leivav*” by opening our hearts, accepting criticism, honestly studying ourselves to identify our faults, and giving serious consideration to significant changes in our habits and lifestyle that might be warranted.

Sunday

Yesterday, we raised the question as to the meaning of the term “*timhon leivav*,” one of the sins which we confess in the *vidui* service on Yom Kippur. As we saw, the source of this term is the *tokhecha*, the Torah’s frightening list of calamities that God threatens to bring upon *Benei Yisrael* if they disobey His commands, which includes the curse of “*timhon leivav*” (Devarim 28:28). We need to understand the meaning of “*timhon leivav*” in the context of the *tokhecha*, and on this basis understand the sin referred to by this term in the *vidui* service.

The verb *t.m.h.* appears much earlier in the Torah, in Sefer Bereishit (43:33), in describing the bewilderment of Yosef’s brothers as they feasted in Yosef’s home in Egypt: “*Va-yitmehu ha-anashim*.” Yosef – the Egyptian vizier whom they did not recognize as their brother – seated them in age order, and they were amazed that he knew their ages. It appears that this world expresses paralyzing astonishment and shock, a state of dysfunction wrought by a completely incomprehensible situation or intractable dilemma. When the Torah warns of “*timhon leivav*,” it refers to a condition where people are unable to think coherently and rationally due to the shocking nature of their situation. Indeed, as mentioned yesterday, this curse appears together with the warnings of “*shiga’on*” (“insanity”) and “*ivaron*” (“blindness”), which also describe a state of impairment leading to dysfunction.

If so, then we are left with the question of how to explain the sin of “*timhon leivav*” mentioned in the *vidui* prayer. If this term refers to a kind of mental impairment resulting from emotional trauma, then how can we speak of a sin of “*timhon leivav*”? How can we confess to being guilty of experiencing such a state?

The answer, it seems, is that at times we unnecessarily act as though we are “bewildered” and dysfunctional. Like a person who has lost his way and decides to walk randomly ahead rather than ask for directions, we have the tendency to conduct ourselves based on habit, intuition, or popular fads, rather than bothering to determine the proper course of action. We prefer the bliss of ignorance over the challenge of acquiring knowledge; we choose the simplicity of “cruise control” to the painstaking process of inquiring and finding answers. The sin of “*timhon leivav*” is the sin of self-imposed ignorance and bewilderment, of living unthinkingly, happily uninformed and oblivious of what is truly expected of us, of calmly and instinctively treading along the path that is familiar and fashionable, without challenging ourselves to ensure we act correctly.

The period of the *Yamim Noraim*, as the Rambam famously writes in explaining the symbolic meaning of the *shofar* (Hilkhot Teshuva 3:4), is intended to “awaken” us from our “slumber,” to snap us out of state of spiritual unconsciousness and get us to start thinking about how we live and how we should be living. On Yom Kippur, after we confess the specific mistakes we have made, we acknowledge the fundamental flaw of “*timhon leivav*,” of our chosen state of blissful dysfunction, of resigning ourselves to ignorance and mindlessness. And we proclaim our desire and commitment to overcome this passive spiritual state and to take responsibility for ourselves, to actively pursue knowledge and to pay close attention to our conduct and decisions to ensure that we are living the way God wants and expects us to live.

Monday

There is a famous story told of Rav Yisrael Salanter, who one year insisted that everyone in his community eat on Yom Kippur due to the outbreak of a cholera epidemic. He felt that the increased risk of infection caused by fasting warranted that everyone, including those who were perfectly healthy, must eat to keep their immune systems strong. According to the popular account of this story, which appears in Rav Baruch Epstein’s *Mekor Barukh* (2:11), Rav Yisrael approached the front of the synagogue, and in full view of the congregation that had assembled for the Yom Kippur prayers, he recited *kiddush* over a cup of wine followed by the *berakha* of “*mezonot*” over some food.

[Rav Asher Weiss](http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%9E%D7%98%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%9E%D7%A1%D7%A2%D7%99-%D7%91%D7%92%D7%93%D7%A8-%D7%94%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%9D-%D7%91%D7%AA%D7%A9%D7%A2%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%90%D7%91-%D7%95%D7%91%D7%A2/) raised several questions regarding this account. For one thing, according to the consensus of halakhic authorities, one who needs to break his fast on Yom Kippur does not first recite *kiddush*. Since Yom Kippur was established as a fast day, the Sages did not require *kiddush* over a cup of wine on Yom Kippur as they did on other festivals, and thus even if one is required to eat on Yom Kippur for health purposes, there is no obligation to recite *kiddush*. (See *Mishna Berura* 618:29.) Secondly, even if we assume that Rav Yisrael Salanter maintained, in principle, that *kiddush* should be recited before breaking one’s fast on Yom Kippur, it is difficult to understand how this would work as a practical matter. The well-established *halakha* of “*kiddush bi-mkom se’uda*” requires that *kiddush* be recited in the framework of a meal. This means that when one recites *kiddush*, he must then eat a halakhic meal, defined as the consumption of a *ke-zayit* of bread, or at least a *ke-zayit* of “*mezonot*” food (or a *revi’it* of wine). This quantity must be eaten within several minutes (4-9 minutes, depending on varying opinions) of reciting *kiddush*. However, when an ill patient must eat on Yom Kippur, he must, if medically possible, eat in small installments. Practically speaking, then, it seems difficult to imagine Rav Yisrael Salanter eating a complete *ke-zayit* of food within the required time-frame after *kiddush* on Yom Kippur. It is hardly conceivable that a healthy person seeking to maintain his immune system to avoid infection would have to eat a sizable portion in one sitting, and could not maintain his health by spreading his eating over numerous small installments. There thus seems to be no halakhic possibility of reciting *kiddush* in such a case.

Indeed, Rav Weiss cites other sources that record the story differently. One particularly interesting version appears in Rav Betzalel Zev Shafran’s [*Shu”t Ha-Rabaz* (11)](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=1235&st=&pgnum=75), where he writes that he heard from reliable sources that Rav Yisrael Salanter advised his community to take a formal vow before Yom Kippur rendering their food forbidden for consumption. Once the food was prohibited by force of the vow, the food could not become subject to the prohibition against eating on Yom Kippur, in light of the halakhic rule of “*ein issur chal al issur*” – an object forbidden by force of one prohibition cannot then become forbidden by force of a second prohibition. This way, the food would be forbidden on Yom Kippur by force of an ordinary Torah prohibition, and not by force of the especially severe prohibition against eating on Yom Kippur. Although Rav Yisrael maintained that eating was necessary to avoid infection, nevertheless, he sought to lower the stakes, so-to-speak, by having the food forbidden by force of an ordinary Torah prohibition. (After citing this account, Rav Shafran then proceeds to question this recommendation.)

Regardless, it seems that different accounts of this episode exist, and it is difficult to ascertain how Rav Yisrael Salanter actually ruled. Rav Weiss makes this point in response to a suggestion made by a certain to allow eating on fast days during flu epidemics, based on this well-known story of Rav Yisrael Salanter. Rav Weiss said that as the details of this story are uncertain, no definitive conclusions can be reached on this basis.

Tuesday

The Mishna in Masechet Yoma (1:5) tells that on Erev Yom Kippur, the elder *kohanim* would meet with the *kohen gadol*, who would be performing the Yom Kippur service the next day, and they would administer an oath. The heretical Sadducee sect, which wielded considerable power during the Second Commonwealth, advocated a different manner of offering the incense on Yom Kippur than that mandated by the rabbinic oral tradition, and so the *kohen gadol* was made to swear that he would perform this service according to the method espoused by *Chazal*. The Mishna adds that after the oath was taken, the *kohen gadol* would cry over having been suspected of heresy, and the elders would likewise cry.

Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg, in his [*Musar Ha-mishna*](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=2500&st=&pgnum=129), cites two different reasons for why the elders wept after administering this oath. The Gemara (Yoma 19b) explains that the prohibition of “*chosheid bi-ksheirim*” – wrongly suspecting an innocent person – is an especially grave matter, and violators are liable to severe punishment. The elders thus wept out of fear that they may have transgressed this prohibition. The Talmud Yerushalmi, however, explains differently, commenting that the elders wept for the very fact that such an oath was necessary. The unfortunate reality that high priests, entrusted with the vitally important responsibility of bringing atonement through the Yom Kippur service, needed to be suspected of heresy, was sufficient cause for wails of anguish.

Rav Ginsburg elaborates further on the Yerushalmi’s remark, suggesting that it perhaps touches upon a broader phenomenon. Namely, the prospect of a *kohen gadol* deviating from accepted halakhic norms in deference to heretical ideas reflects the universal susceptibility to sin. At least symbolically, it represents the fact that nobody is ever free from the clutches of the *yetzer ha-ra*, of human frailties and vices. Even as the *kohen gadol* approaches the most sacred place on earth on the holiest day of the year, he cannot be assumed to act appropriately. The *yetzer ha-ra* lurks everywhere and confronts us at all times. No matter who we are or where we are, we need to struggle to overcome our negative tendencies and to follow the path which the Torah charts for us. This frightening realization, that there is no sanctuary to where we can flee from our own weaknesses, caused the elders to cry.

Wednesday

Yesterday, we noted the Mishna’s description in Masekhet Yoma (1:5) of the oath administered to the *kohen gadol* before Yom Kippur, whereby he swore to offer the incense on Yom Kippur in the manner required by the halakhic tradition. Due to the influence of the heretical Sadducee sect, which advocated a different procedure for the incense offering, it was necessary for the elders of the priestly tribe to force an oath upon the *kohen gadol* before Yom Kippur, to ensure that this ritual would be done properly. The Mishna states that after the *kohen gadol* took this oath, both he and the elders wept. The Gemara (Yoma 19b) explains that the *kohen gadol* wept because he was suspected of heresy, and the elders wept due to the gravity of the prohibition of “*chosheid bi-ksheirim*” – wrongly suspecting an innocent person.

The question arises, since the elders were required to administer the oath in light of the influence wielded by the Sadducees, why did they weep? Undoubtedly, their suspicion was entirely justified under the circumstances, and they were in fact required to impose this oath upon the *kohen gadol* in order to ensure the integrity of the Yom Kippur service. Why, then, did they cry? Since they did precisely what they needed to do, why did they fear the consequences of violating the prohibition of “*chosheid bi-ksheirim*”?

Rav Yitzchak Hutner ([*Reshimot Leiv – Sukkot*, pp. 81-82](http://hebrewbooks.org/pdfpager.aspx?req=34876&st=&pgnum=81)) explained that the elders’ weeping was a necessary prerequisite for their suspicion to be allowed. In the exceptional instances when an interpersonal offense is permitted, it must be accompanied by discomfort. Rav Hutner gives as an example Rabbenu Yona’s ruling in *Sha’arei Teshuva* (3:58) that one is allowed to speak *lashon ha-ra* about a *ba’al machaloket* – somebody who instigates fights. The Chafetz Chayim, in *Shemirat Ha-lashon*, qualifies this ruling, noting that somebody who regularly speaks *lashon ha-ra* may not follow this leniency. When *lashon ha-ra* is permitted, it may not be spoken joyfully, or even casually, and it may be spoken only with a degree of unease and even anguish. Therefore, somebody who frequently relishes the opportunity to share negative information about his fellow may not speak *lashon ha-ra* even in situations when it would ordinarily be allowed.

Similarly, Rav Hutner explained, although the elders were permitted – and in fact required – to suspect the *kohen gadol* and impose this oath, it needed to be done with grief, with a degree of emotional pain. Rav Hutner added that this is the reason why the Mishna bothered to tell us about their weeping, a detail which does not, at first glance, appear to relate to the required procedure to prepare for the Yom Kippur service. This weeping was an outright halakhic requirement, as suspecting the *kohen gadol* was allowed only if it was done with a degree of inner turmoil. The Mishna is teaching us that even when we have a need to act suspiciously and question the innocence of a fellow Jew, this must not be done with the satisfaction of feeling superior, but must rather be accompanied by genuine feelings of discomfort. We should relish and seize opportunities to judge our fellow Jews favorably, and lament the occasions when we are compelled to be suspicious.

Thursday

The Rama (O.C. 624) records the well-known custom to begin constructing the *sukka* immediately after the conclusion of Yom Kippur. This custom perhaps challenges us to analyze the relationship between these two holidays that might account for the practice to begin preparing for one immediately following the other.

One of the themes of Yom Kippur is expressed by the verse in Sefer Vayikra (16:16) which describes the sprinkling of the blood of *Am Yisrael*’s national sin-offering on Yom Kippur: “*ha-shokhein itam be-tokh tum’otam*” (“which dwells among them, amidst their impurity”). The altar and the Temple are cleansed so that God can continue residing within it, among His nation, despite our mistakes and wrongdoing. On Yom Kippur, we come before the Almighty as King David did after his sin with Batsheva, crying, “*Al tashlikheini milefanekha*” (Tehillim 51:13) – imploring Him to remain with us despite our sins. We acknowledge that we are unworthy of His continued presence among us, and so we beg for forgiveness and compassion, and commit ourselves to try to improve ourselves, so that God will remain with us in spite of our sins. In short, we ask God to maintain His close relationship with us despite our “impurity,” even though we do not always act as He wants us to.

After Yom Kippur, we immediately and eagerly proceed to preparing the *sukka*, which represents the flipside of our Yom Kippur plea. The experience of living in a *sukka* symbolizes our desire to live in intimate closeness with God irrespective of the physical conditions. We specifically leave our comfortable, secure and stable homes and move into a crude, temporary structure to demonstrate that we value our relationship with God far more than material comforts and luxuries. On Sukkot, “*zeman simchateinu*,” we show that ultimate joy comes from our bond with the Almighty, not from our material possessions. Immediately after Yom Kippur, when we beseech God to reside with us even though we do not always fulfill His wishes, we rush to construct the *sukka*, expressing our desire to reside with Him even though He does not always fulfill our wishes. In order for us to justify our demand that God desire a relationship with us despite the imperfect conditions we create through our occasional wrongdoing, we must show our desire to cultivate a relationship with Him despite the imperfect conditions that He creates for us. Just as He accepts us as we are, with all our deficiencies, we, too, must remain committed to Him and cherish our relationship with Him despite the deficiencies in our lives, and the many unfulfilled wishes which He has, in His infinite wisdom and for reasons we cannot know, chosen not to grant us.

Friday

In the beginning of Parashat Haazinu, Moshe describes the tenderness with which God cared for *Benei Yisrael* in the wilderness, comparing the Almighty to an eagle waking its young: “As an eagle arousing its nest – it flutters over its chicks” (32:11). Rashi, citing the *Sifrei*, explains that when an eagle comes to its nest while its chicks are sleeping, it does not fly straight into the nest, which would overwhelm and frighten them. It rather patiently hovers over the nest to wake its young slowly and gently. This analogy is used to describe God’s love and concern for people as He brought them into the wilderness and gave them the Torah.

It is hard to ignore the educational message allegorically conveyed by *Chazal* in this passage. When we seek to “arouse” our youngsters, to inspire them with religious devotion and draw them into the service of the Almighty, we need to proceed slowly, tenderly, and patiently. If we come at them too swiftly or too directly, we will overwhelm them. Youngsters need time to “awaken,” to grow, to develop, and to build a commitment. *Chazal* here urge us to follow the example of the eagle, which patiently gives its young a chance to awaken slowly, at a pace which is appropriate for them, without intimidating or overwhelming them.

In describing the eagle’s tender method of waking its young, Rashi writes that as it hovers over the nest, “*nogei’a ve-eino nogei’a*” – it touches the chicks ever so gently, barely making contact, in order not to frighten them. In education, too, we must employ the method of “*nogei’a ve-eino nogei’a*” – delicately balancing the child’s need for close attention and control with their need for personal space. Parents and educators need to be close to their charges, but not too close; we need to get involved enough to positively influence them, but not so involved that they are unable to grow and develop at a pace and in a direction that suits their particular needs, inclinations and temperaments. Just as the eagle exercises patience with its young, caring for them gently and tenderly, so must we give our charges the space, patience and sensitivity they need to “awaken” in a way that is right for them.

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