**S.A.L.T – Yom Kippur 5780**

**Parashat Haazinu**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Gemara in Masekhet Yoma (87a) tells the unusual story of Rav, who was once delivering a lecture (introducing Rabbi Yehuda Ha-nasi’s lecture), and three other distinguished rabbis – one after the other – walked in late. On each of those three occasions, Rav returned to the beginning of his talk out of respect for the latecomer. When this occurred a fourth time, with the late arrival of Rabbi Chanina, Rav did not go back to the beginning, figuring that he had already inconvenienced himself enough. Rabbi Chanina was offended by what he regarded as a lack of respect. Startlingly, the Gemara tells that Rav approached Rabbi Chanina to request forgiveness each Erev Yom Kippur for thirteen years, but Rabbi Chanina refused to forgive each time.

The *Sefat Emet*, commenting on this episode, observes that Rav did nothing wrong by not starting his lecture from the beginning a fourth time when Rabbi Chanina arrived. The fact that he had done so on previous occasions did not obligate him in any way to repeat himself a fourth time. Rabbi Chanina’s grievance was unjustified, but Rav nevertheless expended great effort in seeking his forgiveness. To explain Rav’s conduct, the *Sefat Emet* establishes that the requirement to request forgiveness before Yom Kippur applies even if the other’s grievance is unwarranted. We are to try to reconciliate with those who harbor resentment towards us even if we are absolutely certain that we had not actually wronged them in any way.

The Tolna Rebbe suggested explaining the *Sefat Emet*’s conclusion based on the *Sefat Emet*’s remarks elsewhere – in his commentary to the Torah (Yom Kippur, 5651). There the *Sefat Emet* writes that the reason for seeking reconciliation before Yom Kippur is because one of the goals of Yom Kippur is to bring *Am Yisrael* together. Citing the verse in Yeshayahu (59:2), “*Avonoteikhem hayu mavdilin beineikhem le-vein Elokeikhem*” (“Your iniquities have separated between you and your G-d”), the *Sefat Emet* explains that interpersonal sins separate between people (“*beineikhem*”), and our sins before God separate us from Him (“*u-vein Elokeikhem*”). The goal of Yom Kippur, the *Sefat Emet* asserts, is to eliminate both rifts – the rift between us and the Almighty, as well as the rift between us and our fellow Jews. The Tolna Rebbe added that this is indicated already by the *Tur*, who, in discussing the requirement to seek reconciliation before Yom Kippur (O.C. 606), cites the Midrash (*Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer*, 15) as noting how we resemble the angels on Yom Kippur: “Just as the ministering angels are clean of all sin, so is Israel [on Yom Kippur] clean from all sin; just as there is peace among the ministering angels, so is it among Israel on Yom Kippur.” The reason for seeking reconciliation, then, is not simply because we cannot earn atonement for interpersonal offenses without securing the victim’s forgiveness, but, more fundamentally, to create a sense of unity and harmony among the nation, so we resemble the heavenly angels.

This easily explains why, as the *Sefat Emet* commented in reference to the story of Rav and Rabbi Chanina, we are to seek reconciliation even from those who feel unjustified resentment towards us. The goal of reconciliation before Yom Kippur is not simply to earn atonement for our wrongs, but to break the barriers that separate between us and our fellow Jew – including those barriers which we are not guilty of erecting. The relevant factor is not guilt, but the very situation of tension and hard feelings between us and our fellow. And therefore, we are to not only ask forgiveness from those whom we have wronged, but also humbly and nobly seek reconciliation from those who feel we’ve wronged them, even if we are certain we haven’t, as part of our collective effort to bring *Am Yisrael* together in love, peace and harmony on this special day.

(See also Rav Soloveitchik’s analysis in *Harerei Kedem*, 39.)

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted the *Sefat Emet*’s remark in his commentary to the Talmud (Yoma 87a) that the requirement to seek forgiveness before Yom Kippur from those whom we have wronged applies even to those who feel unwarranted grievance. Based on the Gemara’s account of Rav repeatedly seeking forgiveness each year before Yom Kippur from another rabbi who was unjustifiably angry at him, the *Sefat Emet* concludes that we are to try to reconciliate with anyone who feels resentful towards us, even if we are certain of our innocence. As we saw, the Tolna Rebbe explained the *Sefat Emet*’s theory based on a passage in the *Sefat Emet*’s Torah commentary (Yom Kippur, 5651) stating that reconciliation is required as part of our effort to create peace and unity on Yom Kippur. We are to ask forgiveness not simply in our quest for atonement for our wrongdoing, but additionally, for the purpose of bringing *Am Yisrael* together by breaking down the barriers that separate between us and our fellow Jew. Therefore, the requirement to seek reconciliation applies irrespective of guilt.

The Tolna Rebbe suggested applying this theory to explain the Mishna’s description of the procedure followed when the *kohen gadol* would meet the elder *kohanim* in preparation for Yom Kippur. Due to the influence of the heretical Sadducee sect during the Second Temple, which occasionally succeeded in having its members appointed to the high priesthood, the elders were compelled to elicit an oath from the *kohen gadol* promising to follow the halakhic tradition when performing the Yom Kippur service. Nobody was permitted to accompany the *kohen gadol* as he entered the Sanctuary for the special Yom Kippur incense offering, and so there was no possibility of ensuring that he followed the halakhically required procedure, as opposed to the procedure advocated by the Sadducee movement. Therefore, the elders would have the *kohen gadol* take a solemn oath before Yom Kippur that he would perform the service properly. The Mishna (Yoma 18b) relates that after administering the oath, the elders would weep. The Gemara (19b) explains that they wept because they suspected the *kohen gadol* of heresy, and wrongfully suspecting an innocent person constitutes a grievous sin.

The question naturally arises as to why the elders wept, considering that they had no choice but to administer this oath. As the Rambam explains in his *Hilkhot Avodat Yom Ha-kippurim* (1:7), the proliferation of Sadducee beliefs during the Second Commonwealth necessitated this oath, given the concern that the *kohen gadol* would secretly perform the service in accordance with the Sadducee interpretation of the law. Why, then, did the elders need to feel guilt over the possibility of wrongfully suspecting an innocent *kohen gadol*, if this was necessary due to the circumstances?

In light of the *Sefat Emet*’s theory, the Tolna Rebbe explained, the answer becomes quite clear. Before Yom Kippur, we are to endeavor to break down the barriers between us and our fellow Jews, including those barriers which we are not guilty of erecting. The fact that the elders were perfectly justified in suspecting the *kohen gadol* and imposing an oath does not change the reality that this created tension between them and him. The weeping was necessary as a means of easing these tensions, as it showed the *kohen gadol* that the elders felt uneasy about having to suspect him, that they much preferred to presume his innocence. This was done in an attempt to break the emotional barrier that the suspicion and oath created, fulfilling the requirement to do our utmost to eliminate any and all feelings of tension and resentment among Jews in preparation for Yom Kippur.

The Tolna Rebbe added that this might also explain why the Rambam included in his codification of the laws of Yom Kippur the description of the elders weeping after administering the oath. The Rambam wrote his *Mishneh Torah* as a halakhic work, not a historical work, and it thus might at first seem puzzling that he found it appropriate to mention the elders’ weeping after the *kohen gadol*’s oath. The explanation might be that this weeping was not simply a natural response, but a halakhically mandated response, in fulfillment of the obligation to seek reconciliation before Yom Kippur. The elders wept in order to ease the tensions wrought by their necessary suspicion of the *kohen gadol*, and their weeping was thus incorporated into the Rambam’s presentation of the laws of Yom Kippur, as it demonstrates the need to seek reconciliation before Yom Kippur even from those whom we are not guilty of having wronged in any way.

Monday

During the *mincha* service on Yom Kippur, we read the book of Yona, which tells the famous story of the prophet Yona’s assignment to journey to Nineveh, the bustling capital of the Assyrian Empire, and warn the townspeople of the city’s imminent destruction. The people of Nineveh heeded the prophet’s warning and immediately proceeded to repent from their criminal behavior and pray. God reversed the decree against Nineveh, and the city was spared. The obvious connection to Yom Kippur is the theme of repentance, specifically, its ability to avert punishment.

Rav Moshe Natan Lemberg of Makova, in his *Ateret Moshe*, points also to an oft-overlooked detail of the story of Yona as bearing relevance to Yom Kippur. Yona initially tried to avoid his mission by boarding a ship and sailing to a distant land, but God brought a violent storm which threatened the vessel. The sailors drew lots to determine on whose account the unusual storm struck, and the drawing named Yona as the culprit. Yona confessed to the seamen that he was fleeing from a mission assigned to him by God, and the storm struck the ship because of his attempt to escape. The sailors threw Yona overboard, whereupon the tempest immediately ended. Yona was miraculously saved, and he proceeded to go to Nineveh and deliver his message. Significantly, as the *Ateret Moshe* notes, the sailors hesitated before throwing Yona off the ship. Even after determining that he was the cause of the crisis – both via the lottery and through his own confession – they made another attempt to reach dry land (1:13). Only after this attempt failed did they decide that they had no choice but to cast Yona off the ship. And just before doing so, they offered a prayer to God, begging not to be punished for killing their passenger. The *Ateret Moshe* finds it very significant that even after conclusively determining that Yona was responsible for endangering everyone on the vessel, the seamen did not immediately cast him from the ship. They waited as long as they could before taking the necessary action, and even then, they committed the act reluctantly and with a heavy heart.

The *Ateret Moshe* suggests two points of connection between this aspect of the story and Yom Kippur. First, he writes, we turn to God on Yom Kippur and ask that He show us the same compassion shown by the sailors to Yona. We know we are guilty of wrongdoing, but we beseech God for compassion despite our guilt. Just as the sailors were reluctant to take action against Yona even after his responsibility was confirmed, we hope and pray that God similarly deal with us mercifully even though we have sinned and are deserving of punishment.

Secondly, the *Ateret Moshe* writes, the story of the sailors shows us how far we must go in looking favorably upon other people. If the sailors refused to immediately condemn Yona even after conclusively determining that his wrongdoing directly put them in danger, we should likewise look kindly upon even those who have wronged us. Rather than rush to berate and condemn those who act toward us improperly, we must try to reserve judgment, to restrain our anger, and to have compassion. On Yom Kippur, when we are to work on improving our character and eliminating feelings of hostility and resentment towards our fellow Jews, we are shown the inspiring example of the sailors, who teach us to look upon others favorably and restraining anger, rather than rushing to condemn.

Tuesday

The special service performed in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* on Yom Kippur included the unusual “lottery” which determined the fates of two goats which were brought as atonement sacrifices on behalf of the nation. As the Torah commands in Sefer Vayikra (16:8), the *kohen* would draw lots to determine which of the two goats would be offered as a sacrifice in the Temple, and which would be brought out into “*azazel*” –the desert east of Jerusalem – and cast off a cliff, symbolizing the banishment of the nation’s sins. Both these sacrifices were unique: the *sa’ir la-azazel* (goat take to the desert) marked the only instance of an animal sacrifice offered outside the *Mikdash*, and the *sa’ir le-Hashem* (goat offered in the *Mikdash*) was unique in that its blood was sprinkled in the *kodesh ha-kodashim* – the inner sanctum of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.

The Mishna in Masekhet Yoma (62a) establishes that the two goats were to be identical in both appearance and monetary value. These two goats were, initially, precisely the same, but their fates were the diametric opposites of one another – one was brought to a remote, desert location and sacrificed there, whereas the other was sacrificed and offered in the most sacred location in this world, in the innermost chamber of the *Beit Ha-mikdash*.

How might we explain the significance of these two goats, and why were they to be identical?

We are all comprised of two very different dimensions – one that is “*le-Hashem*,” sacred and sincerely devoted to God, and another that is “*la-azazel*,” vain and sinful. Like the two Yom Kippur goats, these two elements both seem identical, equal parts of our beings. On the surface, we appear to be self-contradictory, righteous in some ways and sinful in others; we are neither purely good or purely evil, but rather a messy composite of both. One of the goals of Yom Kippur is to firmly establish that at our core, we are “*le-Hashem*,” sincerely committed to the “*kodesh ha-kodashim*,” to the pure, devoted service of the Almighty. This is achieved through the “*sa’ir la-azazel*” – by banishing from within our beings all our vanity, our egotism, our selfishness, our dishonesty, our laxity, our disobedience, and all our other vices – and sending them as far away as possible. We withdraw from all forms of physical enjoyment and from all mundane activity, and eliminate all feelings of anger, jealousy and resentment, and we repeatedly confess our wrongdoing, resolutely proclaiming that we want all our negative habits and tendencies in “*azazel*,” entirely eliminated from our beings, so we can devote ourselves purely and sincerely “*le-Hashem*,” and reach the “*kodesh ha-kodashim*,” the heights of sanctity that we truly desire. The statement we make on Yom Kippur is that although the two dimensions of our beings appear identical, they are, in fact, precise opposites of one another. One dimension defines our essence, while the other interferes with the actualization of our essence. The “*sa’ir le-Hashem*” represents who we truly are, and who we are able to be once we banish the “*sa’ir le-Hashem*,” the pressures, desires and weaknesses that get in the way.

Rav David of Tolna (cited in *Kenesset David*) once sought to encourage his *chassidim* who before Yom Kippur felt distraught over the unlikelihood of achieving true, permanent repentance, and he suggested a comparison to a well-known *halakha* involving property rights. Normally, a person who can prove having resided in a property for three years, and claims that he legally acquired that property from the original owner, is awarded the property. However, the presumed owner can disrupt this process by occasionally expressing “*mecha’a*” – “protest,” announcing that the squatter’s presence on the property in unlawful, done without his approval, and thus does not indicate a transfer of ownership. By voicing this “protest,” the owner prevents the squatter from being able to prove his rights to the land on the basis of his three-year presence.

The purpose of Yom Kippur, Rav David of Tolna explained, is to “protest” the presence of the *yetzer ha-ra* (evil inclination) within our beings. We express our wish to banish all our vices to “*azazel*,” to the remotest, most distant regions, that we do not in any way approve of its residence in our minds and hearts. The expectation is not that we will live all year long with the same spiritual focus and intensity which we experience on Yom Kippur, but rather that we define the core essence of our identity by our spiritual aspirations, and not by our faults and negative habits. We reject our vices as an unwanted “squatter” which violates the “*kodesh ha-kodashim*,” our sacred essence, pronouncing that while our positive and negative habits might appear to have equal standing, the former reflects our true essence, while the latter is something we fiercely reject, and which we struggle each day to eliminate and overcome.

Wednesday

It is customary to sound the *shofar* at the conclusion of the *ne’ila* prayer, marking the end of Yom Kippur. Rav Eliyahu Lerman of Viscott, in *Eizor Eliyahu*, offered a creative explanation of this practice, noting that the verb *t.k.a.*, which is commonly used in reference to sounding the *shofar*, can also mean “affix,” or permanently thrust. He cites as an example the verse in Sefer Yeshayahu (22:23) in which the prophet says about Elyakim (an officer serving under King Chizkiyahu), “*U-tkativ yateid be-makom ne’eman*” – “I shall knock him as a peg in a permanent place,” referring to his permanent installment in his post as manager of the king’s palace (replacing Shevna, who was deposed). The “*teki’a*” sounded at the conclusion of Yom Kippur, Rav Eliyahu of Viscott suggested, calls upon us to strive to make permanent the inspiration we received on Yom Kippur. It is intended to urge us not to leave the uplifting Yom Kippur experience behind, but instead try to ensure that it makes a lasting and permanent impact upon our lives.

If so, then the *shofar* sound on Rosh Hashanah and the *shofar* sound at the close of Yom Kippur serve opposite – and complementary – purposes. The sounding of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah, as the Rambam famously writes (*Hilkhot Teshuva* 3:4), is intended to “awaken” us, to shake us from our routine, to rattle us, to call us to introspect and make the necessary changes in our conduct. At the end of Yom Kippur, we sound the *shofar* for the very opposite reason – as a plea for stability and permanence, a call to firmly implant all that we’ve gained during this period within our minds and hearts, so it remains with us throughout the coming year and beyond. The *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is a call to change, while the *shofar* at the end of Yom Kippur is a call for consistency; the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is a call for questioning our current position, while the *shofar* at the end of Yom Kippur is a call for solidifying our current position and making it permanent.

Personal growth requires both kinds of “*shofar* sounds” – the sound of self-doubt, and the sound of firm conviction. On the one hand, we will never grow if we do not regularly question ourselves, scrutinize our beliefs, our assumptions and our habits, or look for ways to make positive change. But at the same time, we cannot grow if we are incapable of long-term commitment, if every change is purely experimental or contingent upon our fleeting whims and moods. We must sound both the *shofar* of uncertainty and self-doubt, as well as the *shofar* of conviction, living with both the humility of questioning ourselves as well as the strength and determination to follow through on our resolutions and making permanent positive change.

Thursday

Moshe introduces the poem of Ha’azinu by proclaiming that his message shall “pour forth” like rain pouring down on fields: “*Ya’arof ka-matar likchi…ki-rvivim alei eisev*” (32:2). Many writers extended this analogy to apply to Torah generally, comparing Torah instruction to rain falling onto the ground. The *Sefat Emet*, for example, explains that the ground has vast potential, the capability to produce enormous amounts of tasty and nourishing products, but it requires rain for that potential to be actualized. Similarly, the *Sefat Emet* writes, every individual has the potential for spiritual greatness, but that potential can be realized only through the “rain” of proper Torah instruction and guidance.

Rav Menachem Bentzion Sacks, in his *Menachem Tziyon*, added further insight into the analogy drawn between rainfall and Torah instruction. He noted that rainfall is beneficial only if the seeds are properly embedded in the ground. Rain that falls on loose seeds ruins them. Not only is the rain unable to produce vegetation if it falls on these seeds, but it destroys them, denying them the possibility of producing in the future.

Rav Sacks applied this aspect of the analogy to religious education. Brilliant and inspiring discourses can have the desired effect only upon those whose foundations are suited for “watering.” A certain basic level of knowledge, awareness and receptiveness is needed for the “rain” of Torah teaching to produce results, to inspire commitment and devotion. Rav Sacks cites in this context King Shlomo’s advice in Sefer Mishlei (10:19), “*Be-rov devarim lo yechdal pasha, ve-chosekh sefatav maskil*” – “With abundant words wrongdoing is not stopped, and he who restrains his lips is wise.” Words are capable of bringing about positive change only if the “ground” has been prepared for them, if the individual is at the point where he can be receptive and open to teaching and instruction. Otherwise, the “rain” of wise teaching will be unproductive, at best, and counterproductive, at worst. In our desire to motivate and inspire the people around us to embrace the Torah, we are best advised to “restrain our lips” until we have ascertained that the foundations are in place that allow the precious “rain” of Torah wisdom to touch and awaken the hearts of our fellow Jews and unlock the vast potential within them.

Friday

As we noted yesterday, Moshe begins the poem of Ha’azinu by comparing his words to rain falling on a field: “*Ya’arof ka-matar likchi…ki-rvivim alei eisev*” (32:2).

The *Sifrei* presents several different explanations for this analogy, various different ways in which the words of Torah resemble rain. One explanation is that just as rain fertilizes the ground and produces many different species, similarly, Torah “produces” many different kinds of devout Jews. In the *Sifrei*’s words, “There are among them rabbis, there are among them upstanding people, there are among them scholars, there are among them righteous people, and there are among them pious people.” The Torah guides and uplifts all who study it, though not necessarily in the precisely same way. Its purpose is not for its students to all become one and the same, but rather for each individual to find his or her unique path to a meaningful, accomplished life following the Torah’s teachings and observing its laws.

Earlier, the *Sifrei* draws a puzzling association between this verse and the *egla arufa* – the special ceremony that was to be performed when a murder victim was discovered, and the killer’s identity was not known. The *Sifrei* notes the word “*ya’arof*” used by Moshe in describing how his words would “pour forth” like rain, a word which resembles the command, “*ve-arefu*” – that the city nearest the murder victim’s body must kill a calf as a means of achieving atonement (Devarim 21:4). On the basis of this association, the *Sifrei* comments, “Just as the calf atones for murder, so do words of Torah atone for murder.”

Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg, in his *Yalkut Yehuda*, comments that the *Sifrei* cannot possibly be understood to mean that a murderer earns atonement for his crime through the study of Torah. After all, the *Sifrei*’s teaching is based on an association between Torah study and *egla arufa*, and it is clear that the sacrificing of the calf does not atone for the killer; the Mishna (Sota 47a) states explicitly that if the killer is identified and caught after the *egla arufa* ceremony was conducted, then the killer must be prosecuted and punished. Undoubtedly, then, the *Sifrei*’s intent is that the community’s collective guilt for a murder that took place can be atoned through Torah study. The *egla arufa*, as the Mishna (Sota 45b) famously teaches, is brought by the town nearest the crime to atone for failing to the take the necessary precautions to prevent such crimes from taking place. The *Sifrei* thus teaches that in addition to the *egla arufa*, a society must react to criminal conduct through public Torah study – the model of which being Moshe’s public instruction of the poem of Ha’azinu – to infuse within the public proper ethical values and norms that will raise their conduct to a higher standard and prevent criminal and unethical activity.

We might add that the Rambam (*Guide for the Perplexed*, 3:40) explained the purpose of the *egla arufa* ceremony as intended to generate discussion about the crime in the hope that the killer’s identity will become known. The public event will, naturally, generate curiosity, and as the word spreads and the conservations take place, it is possible that information will surface that will lead to solving the mystery. (See Professor Nechama Leibowitz’s discussion of the Rambam’s comments in *Studies in Devarim*, pp. 201-208.) We might perhaps apply this explanation to the *Sifrei*’s association between *egla arufa* and Torah learning. The *Sifrei* here points to the importance of making Torah values and teachings part of the public conversation, much as the *egla arufa* ceremony was aimed at triggering conversation about the tragic crime that took place. The dissemination of Torah knowledge must be part of our response when we witness moral decline, doing what we can to introduce the Torah’s high demands and expectations into the public conversation so that they guide and elevate all of us, thus helping to eliminate improper conduct from our midst.

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