



Dedicated in memory of Rachel Leah bat R' Chaim Tzvi

אמך WOMEN'S TORAH WEEKLY

Volume 5 Number 27
Yom Kippur Edition

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Yom Kippur: Sin of Swindling

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

At the apex of *teshuvah* and atonement, during the emotion laden last moments of *Neilah* we say, "*L'man nechdal m'oshek yodeinu*" –Let us refrain from stealing. The line seems almost incongruous. Is the climax of the holiest day of the year really all about theft? Is there a deeper message behind this prayer?

The Moadei Chaim explains that dishonesty awakens judgment upon a person. The punishment of the Great Flood came because of petty stealing. On Rosh Hashana we say, "*Mi yaaleh b'har Hashem... nikei kapayim,*" Who can ascend to the mountain of Hashem? Only someone of clean hands who can affirm that all his money was earned in an honest way. If children are sustained on false gains, how can they ascend in Torah? If we want them to grow spiritually, we have to be scrupulously honest.

At *Neilah*, we beseech Hashem to answer our *tefilot*. Yet the Midrash says the prayers of someone whose hands are soiled with theft cannot be heard. Like impure sediments, falsity pollutes our prayers. Lack of intent doesn't exonerate our misdeeds. Casual acts such as borrowing something without returning or damaging something without letting the owner know is theft. The first of the specific sins of the confession prayer is *gazalanu* (We have stolen). Our sages say theft is so commonplace that most people are guilty of it. Therefore we have to be extra vigilant. *Oshkek* includes taking something with force, withholding someone's property, denying a loan, making late payments on a debt, failing to pay hired help, not putting in a full day of work, using office time for personal phone calls, and taking office supplies without permission.

It's not enough to confess. One must look at

the root of the sin. Otherwise we are liable to fail again. Rav Salamon points out that the causes of *oshek* and *gezel* are the twin evils of falsehood and deception. During the ten days of repentance we refer to Hashem repeatedly as *rav chesed v'emet*. Everything about Hashem reflects truth. If we epitomize falsehood, how can we brazenly ask Hashem to bless us with a good new year. The height of *Neilah* is coming face to face with *emunah*. Do we live the concept of, *Hashem hu Elokim*, in our daily life or are we dishonest? Are there commitments or promises that we made and didn't follow through? In what way do we oppress others without realizing?

The Klei Yakor writes that the correlation between Esav, *ish sair* (the hairy man), and the *seir l'azazel* (the goat that atoned for our sins) is rooted in the fact that Esav and his descendants are partially responsible for our *aveirot*. The Tana Dvei Eliyahu notes that when Yaakov and Esav were in their mother's womb they made a pact that Esav would get this world and Yaakov would get the next world. When Yaakov met Esav after his sojourn in Charan, Esav said, "Who are these to you?" He meant to say, "Didn't we agree I'd get *olam hazeh*? What are all these wives, children, and possessions?" Yaakov responded, "I didn't acquire them for the sake of having them. They are merely a means for me to attain *olam habeh*." This is the Jewish perspective on *olam hazeh*. We are not a religion of asceticism. We are meant to elevate the physical to the spiritual. In contrast, Esav viewed money and pleasure as an end in themselves. The archangel touched Yaakov on the thigh which signifies future generations. We are the ones affected by Esav's outlook. Many of us need to work to make ends meet but how many of us make it an end in itself. Our children want our time and attention more

than all the material pleasures in this world. When the *seir l'azazel* was sent away we pledged to never again fall prey to the enticement of the *ish sa'ir*. The *ish iti*, the person facing death accompanied the goat, for who more than he understood the value of every moment of life.

As descendants of Yaakov we must strive for more. We have to think about the *seir l'azazel*, about the areas of our life that should be thrown off the cliff. The more we get entrapped in the physical world, the more it pulls us away from the spiritual world. Are we unnecessarily indulging? Are our priorities mixed up? Are we using our hands to accumulate more and more instead of giving to others and to our children?

The Torah says, "Esav started back to *Seir*." The Zohar notes that Esav leaves us at *Neilah*. People don't descend to the level of thievery at once. First money takes on significance and before long nothing will stand in the way of getting those possessions, even dishonesty. Esav entices us to indulge even if it must be in a less than straight matter. Therefore we ask Hashem, "*L'man nechdal,*" Give us the clarity of vision to understand what we were put on this earth for.

Before beginning *Neilah*, we read Maftir Yonah. Just as Hashem sent Yonah on a mission, our souls too are sent down for a purpose. The Gerrer Rebbe explains that if we don't use the talents and gifts Hashem has given us, we're guilty of robbing our souls. Therefore we ask Hashem that we not sin with theft. We ask for divine assistance to complete our task so that our souls can go back to their rightful place under the heavenly throne secure in the knowledge that we've lived life honestly and to the fullest.



Tomer Devora: Perfecting Oneself #6

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

The sefer, Tomer Devora, is based on a verse in Micha, “*Mi Kel komocha..*”-Who is like you Hashem. It describes how man should adopt Hashem’s Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, transforming himself from a mere human to a G-dly individual. This class focuses on the *middah* of *yichbosh avoneisunu*. If a Jew sins out of desire or carelessness, Hashem contains the sin in this world and does not let it detract from our *mitzvot*. While a *mitzvah* can ascend to the heavenly throne, sin remains in the finite world.

Chazal say, “*Sechar mitzvah b’hai alma lecha*”-The reward of a *mitzvah* cannot be in this world. A *mitzvah* is spiritual and therefore it is impossible to compensate for it in *olem hazeh*. However an *aveira* can be punished in this world or in *gehinom* but can never touch the World To Come. Hashem doesn’t take away from our *mitzvot* to pay up our *aveiros*. They are two different realms.

The Torah tells us, if we keep the *mitzvot*, we will get rain in the proper time and produce will come forth from the earth and all the trees will bear fruit. Similarly the Torah tells us the reward for some *mitzvot* such as long life for honoring one’s parents. How then can we say that there’s no compensation? The Ohr Hachaim explains that reward received in this world is meant to help us perform more *mitzvot*, but it is not true repayment.

The Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva writes that sins act as a barrier and distance us from Hashem. No *mitzvah* is so strong that it can outweigh one’s *aveirot*. A sinner’s *mitzvot* cannot take him to *olam habah* unless he repents. Still, although one’s *aveirot* will have to answer for themselves, they will not take away the reward a person will receive for his *mitzvot*. The Gemara in Brachot notes how when Hashem destroyed Sodom he remembered Lot and the good deed he had done. Although Lot was a sinner, Hashem recalled

his noble act when he went down to Egypt with Avraham. He kept quiet as Avraham presented Sarah as his sister.

This kindness of Hashem that he’s *kovesh avonoseinu* is a *middah* we should strive to emulate. It means quelling the urge to take revenge. If someone ruined your *shidduch* (prospective match), thank him for being Hashem’s messenger in preventing you from marrying the wrong person. If your wife is disrespectful and angers you, be grateful to her. Chazal say Rav Chiya had a wicked wife but he would bring her gifts in gratitude for protecting him from sin and raising his children. Remember the good and don’t dwell on the evil. Chazal say, “*Kol hamavir al middosov maavirin m’menu kol pishav*,” One who looks away at misdeeds done to him will merit that Hashem will look away at his sins. May it be a year of forgiveness and blessing.

Maftir Yonah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Shimon Isaacson

The book of Yonah is a trilogy of *teshuva*. It tells the story of the repentance of Ninveh, the *teshuva* of the sailors, and the return of Yonah to Hashem.

Hashem commanded Yonah to go to Ninveh and to tell the people that the city would be destroyed. Yonah feared that they would repent and this would reflect negatively on the Jewish people. He therefore boarded a ship heading to Tarshish with the intent of running away from Hashem. A great storm overtook the sea. The sailors tried to bring the boat to port but could not. They drew lots attempting to find the cause of the tempest and when it fell on Yonah they threw him overboard. The waters then quieted down. The sailors saw it was all the hand of Hashem and fear overtook them. They offered sacrifices and repented.

Hashem then appointed a large fish to swallow Yonah. He waited three days and

then he began to pray and do *teshuva*. Hashem caused the fish to spit him out and Yonah went to Ninveh. He called out that in another 40 days the city would be overturned. 40 days signifies *teshuva* and rebirth. The people listened. They donned sackcloth, fasted, and repented. Hashem accepted their *teshuva*. However the Talmud Yerushalmi notes that it was a *teshuva chizoni*-a façade which did not last.

Yonah was a man of truth. In his worldview, *midat hadin* (justice) reigned supreme. Sins had to be punished. Mercy did not jive with truth. He was upset when Hashem forgave Ninveh. Hashem then made a beautiful *kakoian* (shade tree) grow above Yonah. The next morning a worm rose up, sucked out its nourishment, and caused the tree to die. A *sharsheret*-a hot wind came and Yonah lost his protection. Hashem then told him, you’re upset about the *kakoian* in which you didn’t invest

anything. Should I then not worry about Ninveh, a city teeming with people? Din alone will not work. The world cannot survive without mercy. Even the simplest thing such as a shade tree depends on *rachamim*. As the holy day of Yom Kippur ebbs away, we read Maftir Yonah, a silent plea for Hashem to have mercy on us.

A fundamental tenet of Judaism is the concept of Divine Providence. Everything happens for a reason. The fish, the *kakoian*, the worm, and the hot wind were all agents of Hashem meant to send Yonah a message. We too must be extra cognizant of the hidden signs Hashem continually sends us especially during these ten days of repentance. Let us return with hearts full of faith in the knowledge that Hashem is right there in our lives waiting to accept our *teshuva*.