

## Divine Disgrace

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles  
Summary by Channie Koplowitz-Stein

"All chet ... *bechillul Hashem* -And for the sin ... through desecrating God's Name." It is logical to assume that the opposite of this sin is the *mitzvah* of *kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying God's Name. If we understand the word *chillul* as creating a vacuum and emptiness, we can perhaps gain a better understanding of the scope of this sin.

The source for the *mitzvah* is in Parshat Emor where the Torah says, "And you shall not desecrate My holy Name." It applies not only in public, but also in private. As Rabbi Mordechai Ezrachi notes, the purpose for which we were created was to glorify God's Name. If we claim that *kiddush Hashem* is only for others, we are desecrating our very essence and cheapening ourselves while minimizing His importance.

The Netivot Shalom based on the Rambam writes that sanctifying God's Name, is not just a public expression of dying to preserve the sanctity of His Name, but the very basis of Jewish life. Every time we restrain ourselves

and win over the *yetzer horo*, we sanctify God. The reverse is a desecration. When Avraham brought his son as an *akeidah*, he faced this battle. [*Akeida*"H is an acronym for *Al Kiddush Hashem*.] But the struggle was not totally over when Hashem stopped him and Avraham sacrificed the ram. There was another ram caught by its thorns (*bekarnov*) in the thicket. This is the struggle we face daily in the thicket of life. Every time we succeed, we create a ray of light and shine, as Moshe's face shone (*keren*) with light when he brought God's glory down to earth.

When we do a *mitzvah* without proper intent, we also make Hashem's Name hollow, cites Letitcha Elyon. That explains why Sukkot comes after Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, for Sukkot is the ultimate *mitzvah* for *hiddur*, for beautification. As Rabbi Imanuel Bernstein writes, Yom Kippur puts ourselves into perspective and balance with our true purpose, and Sukkot does the same for our possessions. Through beautifying the *mitzvot*, we are in fact beautifying ourselves before God.

Rabbi Ochion notes that we are all ambassadors for Judaism everywhere we go, especially if we look Jewish. Therefore, it is important that our behavior reflect an exalted moral standard. When we act inappropriately, we may cause others to do the same, and potentially create a great *chillul Hashem* which is the severest of all sins. It is not only the action that has to change, but the person himself, writes Moda Labinah. For men, this can be through learning *Torah* and for women through working on *middos*.

The sin of *chillul Hashem* is so severe that the angels say there can be no forgiveness, as cited in *Sichot Eliyahu*. However, as we begin to recite *Neilah*, and the gates of heaven start to close, the accusing angels are barred from entering. We ask Hashem at the time of *Neilah* that He open the gates for us, His children, writes *Halekach Vehalebuv*. We want the opportunity to atone for desecrating His Name and again sanctify His Name, to declare Him as King over the entire universe.

## Days of Judgement Unlike Any Other Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

The first blessing in *shemone esrei* is a general outline -Why are we here? What are we about? What did we start with? Where are we going? Jewish history is a journey towards redemption and every generation brings it closer. When the *Beit Hamikdash* will finally be rebuilt it will be an accumulation of all the *mitzvot* of all the generations. In this context we ask Hashem, "Remember us for life." We want to become something higher, we want to be a link in the chain of accomplishing our ultimate mission.

The second blessing is *gevurot* which speaks about Hashem revealing himself to us as a mighty king. Hashem shows his strength via nature. We mention *chesed* in this *bracha*. Hashem takes His attribute of *gevurah* and contains it and allows the attribute of mercy to overcome justice and that is the ultimate strength.

In the first blessing we are told the formula of what life is about. But we are human and make mistakes. We fall and get up again. Hashem knows who we are and in addition to justice he treats us with mercy to help us accomplish what we are meant to do. We add a prayer for life in this blessing in keeping with the motif of wanting to go further, to do better, to dedicate our life to really deserve what Hashem continually gives us.

During *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* and *Yom Kippur* we focus on the past and do *teshuva* by recognizing what we did and resolving to do better. When we do this, we take away the impact the sins had on us and open ourselves to rising higher. This explains what Chazal say that on *Rosh Hashana* three books are opened. The righteous are straightaway written to life, the wicked to death and the *beinonim* (those in between) wait till *Yom Kippur*. This refers to spiritual life. A *Tzadik* who constantly

chooses good is alive in the fullest sense, a *rasha* via his wrong choices writes himself to spiritual death. People in between, who want to do right but must struggle with their bad inclination are in principle committed. They will gain if they are given more time.

Rav Bloch explains that after experiencing Rosh Hashana we are given the ability to do *teshuva* in potential. We find ourselves thinking, where are we, what do we want to improve, how will we go about it. We are given *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* to concretize our good intentions so that it doesn't get lost. This explains why we take on extra commitments during these days. Even if we don't plan to continue, it takes something that in potential was higher than us and puts it into action which creates a foundation to help us reach greater heights during the year.

The High Holy days are a very elevated

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period. On *Rosh Hashana* we reach the proverbial peak. Our mission during the year is to slowly get back to that point step by step via our actions, thought, and speech. Hashem is closer to us now than at other times. We can achieve during these days things that are

much harder during the year. If we internalize this, then when we come to *Yom Kippur* and accept upon ourselves to do better, Hashem will wipe away our sins and gives us a clean slate to start anew.

It's what we choose in life, not the circumstances, that will determine the quality of our life. When we do what we need to do, our souls are happy. The High Holy days were given to us to arouse us, to push us to go higher, to actualize who we are, to choose life.

## Forgiveness and Atonement

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Dr. Esther Shkop

The Torah commands us, "You shall not take vengeance nor hold a grudge..." There's no commandment to forgive. The Torah's perspective is that there's no such thing as a sin without a punishment. They are inexorably linked. It may not be seen immediately, and it may be internal, but natural law dictates that every act must have a consequence. Natural law also argues that what's done can't be undone and punishment must be measure for measure. Should we choose to forgive, the assumption is that the wrongdoing will reoccur again. Unless somehow stopped, people who do wrong will continue as long as they can get away with it.

In the 13 Attributes we describe Hashem as *noseh avon*. The root word of *noseh* is *lasot* which means to lift up. A sin is like a proverbial rock on the sinner's back. Since every sin is linked to punishment, there's all that burden on the sinner's back that demands justice and retribution. When a person repents, Hashem lifts it all off his back. What happens to the punishment?

After *cheit haegel*, when Moshe pleaded for forgiveness, Hashem relented and said, "*Salachti kidvarecha* - I forgave as you said." And yet He decreed that He would wipe out the Jews who sinned slowly over 40 years. It follows that *selicha* doesn't mean to erase but a delay in carrying out an inevitable sentence. So too *noseh avon* signifies a need for punishment but also forgiveness in a different way. It can also mean to tolerate as when Moshe begged Hashem for forgiveness after the sin of the spies, "*V'ka'asher nasata ha'am*

*hazeh* -As you have tolerated these people all along." What happens to the punishment if the sin is tolerated and lifted?

Targum treats the concept of *nesiat avon* as either being willing to forgo one's desire for payback or willingness to accept punishment and the inevitable suffering that comes with it. It's not sufficient to have remorse or try to pay back. Some wrongdoings can never be made right. But if we resolve to change, then Hashem will lift the burden off our back. Only He can forgive. But there's a condition. There's no forgiveness without action. Hashem wants to see us change.

During *Aseret Yemei Teshuva* we say *Shir Hamaalot* after *Yishtabach*. It begins with, "A song of ascents, from the depths I called out to you Hashem." Some commentators say it indicates the great distance that has formed between the sinner and Hashem. Therefore, he has to call out to Him as He is so far away when in fact it's the sinner who has gone so far away. "Should you safeguard the sins who can withstand (remains alive)?" The sins can't be swept away, but Hashem who judges with justice also has mercy. "For forgiveness is with you... (and not with anyone else)." Malbim explains that a mere mortal cannot forgive or erase because then wrongdoings will become rampant. But Hashem is unchangeable. He's not harmed or enhanced by our actions. *Selicha* is one of Hashem's attributes. "*L'man tivareh* - So that you will be feared." Rashi based on the *Tanchuma* says only Hashem has the sole right to forgive. Ibn Ezra explains, if Hashem won't forgive then the sinner will lose hope leading to wantonness. *Selicha*

leads to *yirat shamayaim* which is standing in awe of Hashem. Since man is created in the image of Hashem, he remains empty and dissatisfied so long as he's separated from the source.

*Pedut* is the ransom with which one redeems someone from captivity. Hashem redeems the sinner from the person he became to what he could be. Rav Soloveitchik based on the Rambam explains that time is not linear. *Teshuva* means return. It's coming around full circle. Every moment of our lives includes the past, present, and future because in our mind we are made up of who we are based on our past experiences, where we are now, and where we intend to go. We're constantly working towards all of them together in anticipation of the future. Who we are is how we look at our past and what our aspirations are for the future. That's the basis of the Rambam's statement that repentance is regret of the past and a commitment for the future. It's a dance between us and Hashem in which we take a step forward and He comes towards us. It's a very creative process in which a person chooses to remake his personality and define himself all over again. Asking for *selicha* is asking for a chance to recreate yourself.

Judaism believes that man can take that step towards Hashem and then hand in hand transform himself not only to attain what he previously lost but to rise higher. He can elevate the strife, struggle, passion, and pursuit he used to fall, to return and climb higher than he ever dreamed possible.