


Nitzavim Vayelech

English version

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THE PROCRASTINATION PLUNGE

A 60-year-old man is cleaning out his drawer. He notices a note from the shoemaker, dated 20 years back. He never got around to picking the shoes up, and he had completely forgotten about them. He decides to add some spice to life, to check if the shoemaker is still there and if his shoes are, also, still there. As he passes by the shoemaker's shop, he notices that it is still open, and the same guy is there, just he is 20 years older.

"Sir, I came to pick up my shoes that I left here, 20 years ago." "Do you have a receipt that you left the shoes by me?" "Yes." He pulls out the slip and shows it to the shoemaker. The shoemaker takes the slip and goes to the back room, to look for the shoes. Shuffling can be heard, as things are moved around, and about 10 minutes later, the shoemaker calls out. "Mark? Are you Mark?" He says, yes. The shoemaker calls out, "Come back tomorrow. Tomorrow your shoes will be ready."

After working with students for many years as an effective learning specialist, I realized that academic students don't necessarily want to know how to speed read, improve memory or focus. They are interested in one thing: getting homework done. There are four things that hold students back from getting homework done after they have succeeded in absorbing the information given over in class, and it is

important to identify what, specifically, is holding them back. I write the causes in order of their frequency. 1. Procrastination. 2. Time management. 3. Motivation. 4. Distraction.

We are all like high school students who need to get our homework done, i.e., some sort of Teshuva, before Rosh Hashana. Procrastination is commonly confused with laziness, or thought of as being a result of laziness. In fact, they are not at all connected. Laziness is defined as being "disinclined to activity or exertion." Procrastinators don't put things off because they don't want to work. Instead, procrastinators tend to postpone tasks they don't want to do, in favor of tasks that they perceive as either more important or more fun. The shoemaker is not, necessarily, lazy. He just procrastinates, gets busy with the other shoes, with taking customers, with doing the books, paying his bills. The student who does not do homework is not as much a lazy student as he is one who needs help overcoming procrastination - which is a more important lesson for life than school itself. One study found that 70% to 95% of undergraduate students procrastinate, when it comes to doing their homework. Researchers have found that procrastination can negatively impact your grades by as much as five points...which might



not sound serious, until you realize that can mean the difference between a B- and a C+.

When a person starts doing something that is more pleasurable, he doesn't necessarily forget what he had to do. What happens in procrastination, is, that we start other actions that we just want, and suddenly we get plunged into doing those not so important actions, as if we need to finish them. As the Ramban teaches us the psychology of the procrastination plunge. למען ספות הרנה את הצמאה When we translate these words literally, the meaning is hard to understand. In order to add the satiated with the thirsty. (Devarim 29;18) The commentators explain these words in different ways. The Ramban (different than Rashi) explains that the physical component of one's soul, the "nefesh", is usually sated with what it needs. But when a person tastes a little bit of his desires, he develops a thirst, a hunger, for that addiction or passion. After tasting the desire, whetting the appetite, the Nefesh develops a passion. Before, Nefesh wasn't so hungry. Now, it is starving. A person thinks, I'll just have one small bite, I will just say one thing about that guy, I'll just look once, I'll take just one puff, I'll just hold on to the grudge a drop more, I'll just sleep in on Sunday,... and I will fill my desire with just a tiny drop, a small amount. After just a taster, I won't need it anymore, or even want it anymore. Wrong!! The Yetzer Hara works in the way of משיעו רעב, you give it a finger, and it takes your whole hand. When you whet your appetite, you develop a passion. Your want turns into a need.

Our teenagers want just one quick video game, a drop of entertainment, one song, a small schmooze or just one more chapter of the book. But when you choose to do a not-so-important activity before a more important activity, for just a few minutes, you develop a

passion you cannot overcome, and you get dragged into it. I call it the procrastination plunge, and free choice is somewhat taken away.

The passuk is telling us, that G-d does not hold us as accountable for not withstanding our temptations as much as He holds us accountable for not withstanding that first taste, the seemingly innocent "sampling". We are held accountable for allowing ourselves to get involved in unnecessary situations – situations which were, actually, avoidable. איכא (Bava B. 57b) דרכא אחרינא רשע By allowing ourselves a "taste", we are guilty of opening the opportunity to sin. G-d holds us accountable for getting involved in things we did not need to, when we did have the strength to fight the sin, and only along with the accountability for the taster, are we accountable for the sins we have no strength to combat, and they are added to the prosecution.

When we do Teshuva, it is not enough to just regret and stop sinning. ומוקה וענב ירהם And one who admits and leaves behind will be granted mercy. (Mishlei 28;13) We need to leave the scene of the temptation. We need to leave the cookies in the super-market, we need to leave the grudge of the past behind, we need to leave our access to inappropriate things. The biggest sin is allowing yourself access to the sin, or not creating for yourself the circumstances that will make it easier for you to implement your higher-valued activities and goals. אַשְׁרֵי-הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁרוֹ לֹא הִלֵּךְ בַּעֲצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְדַרְךָ חַטָּאִים לֹא עָמַד אֲשֶׁר לֹא הָלַךְ בַּעֲצַת רְשָׁעִים וּבְמִוֶּשֶׁב לְצִים לֹא יָשָׁב Fortunate is the man who never walked in the counsel of the wicked, never stood in the path of the wicked, and who has never sat where the scornful sit. (Tehillim 1;1) If he did not go, how did he stand? If he did not stand there, how did he sit there? And if he did not sit there, how did he scoff? This is to teach you, that if he went, he will end up

standing. If he stood, he will end up sitting. If he sat, he will end up scoffing. (Avodah Zarah 18b)

I used to be a self-help addict. I would read endless books on self-help, a book a weekend, believing that knowledge is power. Until I realized that knowledge, itself, is not power. Implementation is power. I call myself a self-Selfie steps to overcome procrastination.

help addict because I was procrastinating on implementation by spending time amassing knowledge. Everyone knows that the secret to losing weight is burning more calories than your intake, and the secret to financial stability is to spend less than you earn. The pivotal point of power is the mastery of implementation, and the skill of overcoming procrastination.

1. One of the biggest reasons people procrastinate is because they catastrophize, or make a huge deal out of something. It may be related to how tough, how boring, or how painful it will be to complete the task; whatever the case, the underlying theme is that doing the task will be “unbearable.” This is why I recommend the 5-minute rule: A cognitive behavioral therapy technique for procrastination, in which you set a goal of doing whatever it is you would otherwise avoid, but do it only for five minutes. If after five minutes it's so horrible that you have to stop, you are free to do so.

2. Procrastination comes in many forms. For example, there is a fine line between perfectionism and procrastination. When you say “I want it to be good. I want it to be perfect,” what you're really doing is not doing your work. People with perfectionist tendencies tend to wait until things are perfect in order to proceed—so, if it's not perfect, you cannot be finished. Or, if it is not the perfect time, you believe you can't start. This all-or-nothing mentality can hold you back from starting or completing tasks.

3. Plan your day, week, month, year in advance. This is not a big task. It should take only about 10-15 minutes of quiet time, each day. Do the most difficult and most important things first, and work your way down to the easier stuff.

4. As you start to tackle items on your list, pay attention to when thoughts of procrastination start to creep into your mind. If you find yourself thinking “I don't feel like doing this now” or “I'll have time to work on this later,” you need to recognize that you are about to procrastinate.

5. Accountability partner (not your spouse). This can quash procrastination, because when you hold yourself accountable to your accountability partner, you won't allow yourself to succumb to lame excuses.

6. Deadlines. Make sure that your goals have deadlines, otherwise, you can drag on with the same task for twenty years, like that shoemaker.



A BAAL TESHUVA FROM CHELM

The Masters of Mussar teach us that Teshuva does not mean to be better. It means to be different. The fellow who discovers that he got on the wrong train cannot just get up and sit in the opposite seat, facing the direction in which he wants to be going. He's got to get off the train. Find where he went wrong. And start on a new track. When people discover that they have gotten themselves into a habit that does them no good, the solution is never on the same plateau as the problem. Only uprooting and starting again can make the difference.

This we find in the words of Rabbeinu Yonah in his Iggeret Hateshuva. There is only one way to do Teshuva: It is by seeing yourself as a new person and starting afresh. Getting into the "now" and making sure that you do your best that any past mistake will not be repeated. It is not to live in the past and in regret. Regret is an acutely painful feeling, and one that has its very specific time and place. Regret can be effective only AFTER a person has changed. Despite the fact that Teshuva is a combination of *קבלה על העתיד* and *הרתה*, Regret for the past and Accepting a new path for the future, Teshuva does not start with regret. (This may be the reason why G-d made Rosh Hashana before Yom Kippur: to teach us that before we work on atonement, scrubbing the sins of the past by means of regret, we must initiate a new beginning.) And most people get so busy with regret that they just never do teshuva, no matter how much they try.

This is true about most things for which we would like to do teshuva. We usually attempt teshuva on things that we feel bad about. And then, we get so busy feeling bad about them that we get sidetracked and end up not rectifying them. Regret, says R' Yonah, should be reserved for after change. When someone

recognizes faulty behavior in himself, he should first figure out what new habits need to be adopted. He should put the new behavior into practice, and only then, after he has already effected a change, can he go through the hell of regret. Why in this order? R' Hutner writes that the Mitzvah of Teshuva is a Mitzvah Temidit, a constant mitzvah that can and should be done at any time, in any place. We learn this from the words of King David *והטאתי נגדי תמיד*. Even so, this refers to the part of Teshuva that involves making changes for the future, not to regret. Regret, in its deepest essence, has its root in anger, in not accepting one's past self or behaviors, and is a close cousin to rebuke. The word rebuke is usually understood by us as reprimanding others. R' Hutner points out that regret is actually rebuking oneself. And, says R' Hutner, just as rebuke is a mitzvah, so is regret. The problem is that just as rebuke is something that most people are not capable of doing properly, (especially nowadays) so, too, is having regret for sin. Although regret is necessary, it must be approached and felt in the proper way, with caution. It is very hard to rebuke others properly, and no less difficult to rebuke oneself. It's also hard to recognize one's personal strengths, while regretting actions that resulted from the opposite: from personal weakness. Therefore, says R' Hutner, regret cannot be a Mitzvah Temidit. This is ironic, because most people who want to do Teshuva for something in the past just cannot seem to get the regret out of their head, making it somewhat Temidi. That is the only part that should not be Temidi.

The town of Chelm decided to build a new synagogue. So, some strong, able-bodied men were sent to a mountaintop to chop down trees for long beams to build the holy building. The



men put the logs on their shoulders, four at a time, and trudged down the mountain to the town below. When they arrived, the town chief yelled, "Foolish men! You should have rolled the logs down the mountain!" The chief went up to the top of the mountain and kicked the last log. The log rolled down the hill very smoothly. The men agreed this was an excellent idea. So they trudged back up the mountain with the heavy logs still on their shoulders, and rolled them back down again.

Let the mistakes of the past be the lessons for the future, but don't waste the future feeling bad about mistakes of the past. We might even lose our creativity to change our behavior due to our feelings of inadequacy, due to our feelings of regret over slips and foolish mistakes that have been made. We need that creativity to find a new way, to plan a different path for the future. It is hard to plan a new direction, to figure out where you want to go, when you are looking out of your rear view mirror.

On a similar note, I have found the following to be very true while coaching people. When a person tries to break a negative habit, many times he finds himself in a losing battle. His conscious and rational decisions lose to habit and the subconscious. "Stop smoking! Stop eating unhealthy or fattening foods! Stop thinking negative or improper thoughts!" None of these commands seems to work. Neither does "Stop being afraid! Stop spacing out! Stop feeling down! Stop laughing ! Stop crying! " When one tells himself what not to do, or, better yet, makes a negative command to the subconscious, it disobeys. Why? The subconscious accepts only suggestions of what to do: not commands of what to "stop" doing

or "don't do". It simply deletes the "don't", and carries on with the rest....

In Elul, there are two ways to do teshuva. Stop sinning!. Stop gossiping!. Stop! Or start doing something else. The subconscious knows how to get a person to continue doing something, even though he has made a rational decision to stop that behavior. So, instead of telling your body to stop a certain habit or obsession, thought process or emotion, tell yourself something to do, think or believe. The fellow who is on a diet, who is hungry, should not say to himself stop desiring the caramel dream chocolate cream and peanut butter whatever, rather reach for a carrot instead. The cigarette smoker should not tell himself smoking kills, you will die younger, or anything else that implies desisting and has not helped him stop smoking until now. Instead, he should chew on a pencil, or something else. The person who has a fear does not stop being afraid when he tells himself to stop being afraid. (Eventually one starts to worry that he cannot control his worries.) But if he asks himself rational questions, "What are the chances of this happening ? What are the advantages of having such a fear?" then there is a better chance that he will deal more effectively with the fear. Why ? because the subconscious does not listen to commands so easily. But it will learn from a new way of behavior, answering an effective question, new body language (posture/physiology) or action. It will listen to a positive suggestion, where there is no resistance or habit.

If we stay in regret, if we stay at the stop sign, we will never change. If we want change, we must come up with new behaviors, new thoughts, new tactics and new beliefs .



BLASTING THROUGH TO OUR TRUE SELF

I'd like to present three puzzling teachings of our Sages concerning the shofar we blow on Rosh HaShanah, and explain how they can all be understood through one fundamental concept.

First of all, why do we use a ram's horn, and not the horn of some other animal? The Sages tells us that this "brings up before G-d the memory of Isaac bound on the altar, prepared to be offered up as a sacrifice." G-d then promises to view us as if we prepared ourselves as a sacrifice before Him" (Rosh HaShanah 16b). Now, we might wonder, does G-d really need symbolic reminders of Isaac's self-sacrifice? The moments of history lay before Him like the words on a paper before the eyes of the reader. G-d does not need a symbolic horn to recall Isaac bound on the altar, and the ram which ultimately substituted for him.

Another puzzle: Our Sages explain that we sound the shofar blasts twice on Rosh HaShanah – once while congregants are seated and then again while they are standing in prayer – in order to "confuse the Satan." It will cause him to fear that the Final Redemption has arrived, and that his career is over. We want to confuse the Satan so that he does not testify against us during these crucial moments of judgment. Now, again, we might wonder about this: How can a ram's horn confuse an angel – especially the angel who specialized in confusing us all year round! Hasn't he learnt already from thousands of previous Rosh Hashanahs that this is not the shofar of the Final Redemption, but rather just the shofar of the Jews in the synagogue on the Day of Judgment?

One more question. In the Mussaf prayers on Rosh Hashanah, we speak of G-d this way: כִּי שׁוֹמֵעַ קוֹל שׁוֹפָר אַתָּה וּמֵאֲזִינֵי תְרוּעָה וְאֵינְךָ דּוֹמֵה לְךָ because you are One who listens to the sounds of the shofar, and you hear the Teruah sound, and there is none like You... This seems to imply that G-d has a special ability to hear something in the sounding of the Shofar that no one else can. What can this possibly be?

The key to all three of these puzzles is the unique capacity of the shofar to wake us up spiritually and put us in touch with our core desire to act in accordance with the will of the King of Kings, and to serve Him with our entire being like our Patriarch Yitzchak. This desire is deeper than any personal desire, will, or want. Although we may not have been fully cognizant of it (in ourselves or others) during the year, it is still deep within us. It is an unspoken emotion, one that can only be awakened and expressed through the sound of the shofar – a sound that emanates from the soul itself. Not everyone can hear this, and no one can hear it like G-d. At the crucial moments when G-d judges us in accordance with who we are then and there, we want more than anything to reconnect to this core emotion and will.

We may have been oblivious to the secret of the shofar during the entire year. We may have acted in a manner that was not in accord with this core will. But it is there. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov would say that a Jew is like an onion. The more you peel, the more tears come out. We Jews may have many levels that cover our true identity. But the shofar peels them away. On Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, when we wish we would have been able to be better, more real, more spiritual – and we feel a tear roll down onto the Machzor – that is an



expression of our true self. And that is exactly how we want G-d to see us when He comes to judge us.

The Satan works overtime all year long to ensure that this does not happen. His mission is to confuse us so that we get out of touch with our true self. When he sees that the core of the Jew is pure and impenetrable to him – an inner will that bursts forth on Rosh HaShanah – he becomes frightened, thinking that he is finished. He knows that if we uncover this level of our true identity, then we will ultimately see the Final Redemption accompanied by the powerful blasts of the great ram's horn.

In the large coatroom of the well-attended synagogue where I occasionally pray, I recently noticed the following sign: "Beware of pickpockets!" A few days later, another sign went up: "Dear thief! The bag you took

contains knives and stones that have great value to me, but absolutely no value to you. Please return the bag to its place!" I figured that the owner must be a shochet. For some reason, I could not get this sign out of my head.

I finally realized that this is the kind of message we should all be conveying to our Evil Inclination during these days leading up to Rosh HaShanah. He stole from us our precious inner identity – what we really are deep inside. Indeed, the Evil Inclination's worst crime is to make each one of us feel like "just another person." Lowering our sense of self-worth and, consequently, our expectations of ourselves, caused us to feel that we are just fine the way we are. These days especially, we should force the Yetzer Hara to give us back our true identity – which is more valuable than anything else in the world!

THE MEANING OF TESHUVA

The Talmud gives us an example of when a sinner can be considered a genuine *Baal Teshuvah* (penitent): *If he refrains from sinning a second time when he encounters the same woman at the same place and time where he had previously sinned (Yoma 86b).*

This is a rather puzzling test. Must a *Baal Teshuvah* actually return to the same place and the same temptation in order to prove his sincerity? Even more puzzling is the Talmud's mention of going back to the *time* of the sin. How can the penitent possibly accomplish this?

We find a precedent for this approach in G-d's response to Yishmael's prayer when he and his mother Hagar seemed to have run out of water in the desert. When Yishmael felt himself close to dying of thirst, he turned to G-d and cried out for mercy. G-d was about to create a spring of water when the angels tried to

intervene: *How can You bring water to the boy whose future descendents will kill Your children through thirst?* G-d responded: *What is Yishmael at present – a tzaddik or rasha? Tzaddik! He is to be judged as he is now – באשר הוא שם* "The *Kli Yakar* helps us understand what the Sages mean by drawing our attention to two key *pssukim* in our *parashah*: "For this *mitzvah* is not in the heavens...nor across the sea that you may say: 'Who will cross the sea and get it for us so that we can fulfill it?' Rather, it is very close to you; it is in your mouth and heart to do it" (*Dvarim 30:12-13*). In other words, one must not be afraid to do *teshuvah* because he might not withstand the tests that lie ahead. Neither does he need to go to the far ends of the world – to the scene of sin – in order to prove that he will not sin again. Rather, the place of the sin is in the heart. Intense regret can return one to the place and time of sin in

order to uproot it. Pain and positive regret can change the heart. They can transform past failure into lessons for the present and future. Change in perception on the part of the *Baal Teshuvah* ultimately result in change of behavior and character. And that is how we are judged on Rosh HaShanah. G-d sees our present state, and how it will result in positive change in the future. What happened in the past does not determine the ultimate verdict. What is decisive is our character and our “re-programmed” heart as we stand before the Supreme Judge on Rosh HaShanah.

Why is this? Because a person’s essence is what is in his mind and heart at the present moment.

This concept can help us understand a curious request we make of G-d numerous times during this High Holiday season: בספר צדיקים – *Inscribe us in the Book of the Righteous and Pious*. The question is obvious. If we are righteous, we need not ask. If we are not, why would imploring G-d get us into the Book where we do not belong? How are we to understand such a request?

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto explains how *teshuvah* works. *When the thought of pleasure and willingness is removed from the sin, then the sin itself is erased and nullified (Messilat Yesharim Ch. 4)*. Sin is generated by an evil thought. When we oppose inner negative motives mentally and emotionally, G-d is willing to see us as different people. Although we may have sinned throughout the year, sincere thoughts of *teshuvah* can enable us to stand before G-d on Rosh Hashanah and say: *“I now perceive all that pleasure I derived from the sin as pain. I do not want to continue such actions. I am not the sinful “I” of yesterday. And I am not the “I” of tomorrow, where I might fail another test. Right now, I am a better person – the “I” I really want to be”*

There is a midrash that can help us in becoming that person we really want to be (*Midrash Aseret Hadibrot* on לא תגזול). King Solomon was once approached by three merchants who suspected each other of pocketing the profits from their successful business trip. King Solomon replied that he would be willing to judge the case the following day. When the three merchants re-assembled, he told them about a query sent to him by the Roman Emperor involving a boy and girl who had promised to marry when they came of age. They stipulated that in case either one would decide to marry someone else, they would first ask permission of the other party. Time passed, and the young woman found a suitable man whom she liked very much. True to her word, she took her fiancé to the door of the man she once promised to marry in order to get his permission. The man kindly accepted the woman’s decision and refused the handsome present of gold and precious stones that the groom had brought along to appease him. With real sincerity, he wished the young couple a happy life together. On the way home, unfortunately, the pair was captured by a ruthless band of thieves. The booty was split between them, and the young bride was taken to the leader of the gang. She implored him to hear her story. The head of the thieves somehow found it in his heart to be merciful, and returned the bride to the groom – together with all the gold and precious stones.

King Solomon turned to the three merchants, and asked them to help decide the question sent by the Emperor: Which of the three acted most nobly – the woman who kept the promise of her youth, the man who both gave permission for her to marry someone else and refused the lavish present, or the head of the thieves who could have had both the money and the bride had his mercy not gotten the better of him?

Each one voiced a different opinion, but King Solomon commanded that the one who praised the thief be tied up and whipped. If he praised the thief who had no legal rights to the bride or valuables, then he must be a thief himself! And, of course, the man confessed.

As King Solomon wrote in the Book of Proverbs: "...a man is according to what he

THE EQUILIBRIUM HOLIDAY

Rosh Hashana is the holiday of mixed emotions. It is a day of precise judgment, but yet a day of joy. A day to tap into our humility, while we celebrate it as a holiday. I always had a hard time figuring out what state of mind to be in, on Rosh Hashana. To cry, or not to cry? This was always for me a bottleneck of emotions. The Halacha is that I am allowed to cry only if I am brought to tears from the depth of feeling of my prayers. This is the only day of the year that even our tears have an instruction manual. What is all this emotional tightrope? Even in the blowing of Shofar, there is somewhat a mixture of G-d's Attributes.

עלה אלוקים בתרועה יקוק בקול (Tehillim 47 6). שופר. The Alshich points out that Elokim is the Attribute of Judgement, while YHVH is the Attribute of G-d's Mercy, which is activated when a person taps into Shofar, or שפרו מעשיכם, better your ways. What is the point of this "equilibrium"?

The Sefer Hachinuch explains for us the concept of Rosh Hashana. "It is from G-d's kindness toward his creations to judge and inspect their actions once a year, *in order* that they not sin too much, and that there be a place for kapparah... This day is the day that holds up the world, and that is why we make it a holiday. And because it is a day of judgment, it is appropriate to approach it with fear and trepidation more than any Holiday."

Rashi quotes the Midrash in the beginning of this week's parasha. "Why is it that the Parasha of Nitzavim (literally, standing up) is

praises" (*Mishlei* 27:21). If we praise good deeds, then that is who we are. If we ask to be inscribed in the Book of the Righteous, it means that we really want to be righteous. And if we are sincere, that is how we are perceived by G-d as well. כן יהי רצון

next to the curses and threats of Parashat Ki Tavo for those who do not keep the Torah? Because after the Jews heard the 98 curses, and after they heard the 49 of Sefer Vayikra, their faces changed colors, and they said, Who can stand up to these?! Moshe calmed them and said, אתם נצבים היום You are standing today; you angered Hashem so much, and yet He still did not put an end to you, and you are all still standing..."

This is hard to understand. Wasn't the purpose of the curses and threats to warn Klal Yisrael to be careful to keep the Torah, every Mitzvah? What was Moshe doing calming them down, diminishing their fear, telling them they don't have anything to be afraid of? Why was he mixing up their emotions?

But the answer is that all that G-d wants is sincerity. He knows who we are, our backgrounds, our weaknesses and our tests. He does not ask of you more than you are able to do. But just one thing: Be serious about it. Once the Jews turned colors, Moshe knew that they were taking it seriously. And this is the purpose of the equilibrium. G-d has a place for Mercy, and that place is reserved for those who take Him and His Torah seriously. Not for the ones who say שלום יהיה לי כי בשרירות לבי -אלך Peace will be to me, as I follow the dictates of my heart...

Every year, G-d creates the world anew. Rashi, on the first passuk, בראשית ברא אלוקים says that in the beginning, G-d wanted to create the

world with His Name Elokim, the Attribute of Judgment. Rashi's commentary is based on a Midrash Breshit on the words (in Bereishit), אֵלֶּה תּוֹלְדוֹת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ בְּהִבְרָאָם בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת יְקוּנָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם: – *These are the creations of the Heavens and the Earth, when He created them. On the day that YHVH Elokim created the earth and the Heavens.* The Midrash says, “YHVH Elokim” – it is similar to a King that had empty cups. The King said, if I put hot water into them, they will explode. Cold water, they will implode. What did the king do? He mixed hot and cold water, and he put it into the cups and they remained undamaged. So, HKBH said, if I create the world with My Attribute of Mercy, there will be a lot of sinners. If I create it with the Attribute of Judgment, how can the world stand? Therefore, I am creating the world with a mixture of both Mercy and Judgment, and I hope it will last!

G-d's judgment is meant to prevent sin. The point of Rosh Hashana is that we take this day and think that even if we have sinned, we are happy *to be aware* that we have sinned, and we know what we have to work on.

Recently, a thought came to mind. The letters YHVH are a shortened version of יהוה ויהיה He was, He is, He will be. What does this have to do with Mercy? The Attribute of Mercy is, in Hebrew, רחמים, Rachamim. The Abarbanel (Ki Tisa 34) says that the word רחמים comes from the word רחם Rechem. Womb. What does this mean?

G-d's Mercy does not mean that G-d just lets things pass. וויתור. He does so only with the logic of a womb. The womb symbolizes a place where there is no place. To make room for someone where there is no room for that person to exist. So to, with mercy, G-d created

room for the sinner to repent. How, exactly, does He do that?

The womb symbolizes that for the sake of the future, it is worth dealing with the present. Don't look at the present for what it is; look at it with the future in mind. Look at the good that is going to be born. G-d has patience with a person as he is, in the present, because He knows that this person has the **potential for growth and improvement.**

There are three ways G-d finds a place for a person who is, seemingly, undeserving. His past – he may have some merit in his past or from his parents. זכות אבות. His present- באשר הוא שם. Even if he will be bad in the future, for now, he is good. His future – Moshe did not kill the Egyptian until he saw, with his Ruach Hakodesh, that nothing good was going to come out of this Egyptian. Being that G-d is היה הווה ויהיה – He is not bound by time. He is in the past, present, and future, all at the same time. G-d can see things for our merit that we may not see. That is why we cannot explain G-d's decision of רשע וטוב לו – צדיק ורע לו – why good things happen to bad people, or bad things happen to good people. This is an outcome of His מדת הרחמים, the Attribute of Mercy.

So, we say before blowing the Shofar, Alah Elokim bitruah, Hashem b'kol shofar. Elokim – His Attribute of Justice ascends with the t'ruah blast; but His Attribute of Mercy, YKVK, ascends with the sound of Shofar, of improvement. The message of the Shofar is Shipru Maasechem, improve your deeds, and by doing so, G-d will reveal Himself as YHVH and find a place for you, even if you are not deserving, but in the merit of the new you of the New Year.

A REFUND ON TIME

The days in which we presently find ourselves are days in which we all look for merits. However, R. Y. T. Salant, in *B'er Yosef*, helps us understand something about this from the famous story of R' Preida. (Eiruvin 54b) The Talmud begins with the passuk in our Parasha: **ועתה כתבו לכם את השירה הזאת ולמדה את בני ישראל שימא בפיהם** R' Akiva learns from here that it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure that the student comprehend the lesson and be able to repeat what the teacher said in his own words.

R' Preida had a student that would comprehend Torah concepts only after he was explained four hundred times. Once, in the middle of the four hundred times, R' Preida was invited to come to a Simcha that was to take place that evening. After the person delivering the invitation left, R' Preida finished the expected four hundred times. Still, the student did not comprehend. R' Preida asked what was different this time. The answer he got was, "The moment that the messenger invited you, I lost my focus. And then, after he left, I kept thinking that R' Preida would get up any minute to go to the Simcha." R' Preida responded, "Pay attention, and I will teach it to you again." He taught him another four hundred times. And then a Heavenly Voice came out and said to R' Preida, "Would you rather have another four hundred years of life, or that you and your generation merit the World to Come?" R' Preida answered that he chose option B. G-d responded, "Give him both!"

Why did G-d give R' Preida both options, just because he chose option B? To pick the next world over a long life in this world is a no-brainer. Why then would R' Preida be rewarded so generously for his answer?

The answer is that R' Preida was on the level of wanting additional time in This World in order to serve Hashem more and more. He realized that every minute in This World was so much greater than all the pleasures of the Next World, where there are no more mitzvot.

Still, R' Preida chose that he *and his generation* merit the Next World, passing up opportunity for his own growth (via long life) for the sake of his whole generation. And because he preferred bringing merit for the people over his own merit and personal spiritual growth, he was given a double reward. G-d did not let R' Preida lose out personally because of his sacrifice for other people.

When we do not have a lot of time, and we wish we had more of it, there is nothing better to do than to bring merit to the *tzibbur*. When we are hearing someone out, and he is taking a long time, don't rush him. G-d will give you a refund on that time. When we are in the *Asseret Yemei Teshuva* and we do not know how to squeeze the maximum out of the time we have, the best advice is to look around and see where we can cause more merit for Klal Yisrael.

LE ELUI NISHMAT IONA BEN ZEEV (ZL) PNINA BAT TZVI (ZL); NEJAMA BAT SCHLOMO HA COHEN (ZL); RAJEL BAT YAACOV (ZL); ZEEV BEN YAACOV (ZL) TZVI BEN DOV BEER (ZL)

