

MAKING THINGS

Better

תקנו בחודש שופר - שפרו מעשיכם וחדשו מעשיכם

YAMIM NORAIM 5778

RABBI MOSHE HAUER

*Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion
Congregation
Baltimore, Maryland*



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Dedication

This collection of essays is dedicated
to the memory of my father and teacher,

ז"ל HaRav Benyamin Hauer
אאמו"ר הרב בנימין ב"ר משה ז"ל

who taught our family and countless others
how to live and breathe the words of the Torah.

I hope and pray that הקב"ה will continue
to grant strength and health to our dear mother,

תלחט"א Mrs. Miriam Hauer

to continue עמו"ש to guide and inspire all of us
along our path in life, עץ החיים, בדרך.



Dedicated by

Ben Tzion & Orlee Luchansky

Commemorating the yahrzeits
of their beloved grandmothers

Sadie Cohen

סימה בת דוד

15 Tishrei

Genia Harari Dubinski

גננדלה בת יחיאל מאיר

10 Tishrei

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Foreword

The period of the month of *Elul* and the *Yamim Noraim*, known as the High Holiday season, is a great gift, מן הטובות אשר הטיב השי"ת עם ברואינו. Each year we are afforded this opportunity to reflect and to reconnect, to spend weeks engaged with G-d and community on a fundamentally deeper level than the usual. Ideally this serves as a basis for the substantive and tangible adjustments to our lives resultant of *Teshuva*. But even without those measurable changes, we treasure this time as our annual visit back to the source, to the wellspring of our existence, and we draw upon its inspiration – consciously and unconsciously – for the balance of the year.

Over the years at Bnai Jacob Shaarei Zion, we have worked to enrich the season and make it more impactful and lasting. A number of years ago we moved to focus our discussions during this season around a single theme, a specific area of growth that would be the backbone of our *Teshuva* work for that year. More recently we developed an artistic take-home card that encapsulated that theme, and that left room on the back for personal notes and commitments, insights taken from the season that could be referenced throughout the year.

Subsequently, we attempted to take one further step towards creating a lasting impression of this precious season. This booklet is a continuation of that effort, recording the central addresses of the *Yamim Noraim* 5778 season, dedicated to the theme, "Making Things Better." These essays are not meant as scholarly presentations, but rather as words of inspiration and guidance to a community of growth-oriented individuals. While the words may have some value for a general audience, their primary intended audience is the membership of our community who heard these speeches during the *Yamim Tovim*, and who seek to keep the sparks of the season alive.

It is my hope that you will find this of some value, and that each of us and all of us will continue to grow in every way – religiously, inter-personally and individually – to enhance ourselves, our families and our community, and to sanctify Hashem's Name in our world.

With best wishes for a healthy and productive year,

Rabbi Moshe Hauer

Introduction: Making Things Better

Our Sages related the term “*Shofar*” to the word “*Shapir*”, meaning beautiful, and read it as a mandate: The blast of the shofar tells us to beautify our actions, to beautify ourselves, to make ourselves better.

This is, of course, the very essence of the *Teshuva* process. Yet setting about to make ourselves better requires vision and humility, as well as clear and meaningful goals and the practical tools to achieve them.

The essays presented here review our discussions during the *Yamim Noraim* of 5778 addressing these issues, and are meant to inspire and instruct us towards making ourselves better.

May each of us be blessed with a year of life, health, meaning, and growth, as we move towards the most beautiful and perfect version of ourselves.

Core Goodness and Boundless Potential

Rosh Hashanah Evening

תקעו בחדש שופר בכסה ליום חגינו כי חק לישראל הוא משפט לאלקי יעקב

Sound the Shofar at the moon's renewal, at the appointed time for our festive day, for it is a decree for Israel, judgment day for the G-d of Yaakov.

We will recite this verse together in a few minutes, as we prepare for the first Amidah of Rosh Hashana, for our first opportunity to be עומד במלך, to stand in G-d's presence on this day of affirmation of His Kingdom. This verse from the Psalms is laden with meaning, and teaches us a great deal about the character of Rosh Hashana.

I want to share with you a pair of insights into this passage derived from the teachings of Harav Yissachar Shlomo Teichtal, HYD. Rav Teichtal was a prominent Slovakian Rav who was ultimately murdered in the Holocaust, and was keenly aware of the painful upheavals – both internal and external – that the Jewish people were experiencing, yet with his unique perspective he saw in the Hell that had broken loose around him the seeds that would plant the Garden of Eden in *Eretz Yisrael*.

One of the central aspects of his work and writing was his perspective on Jews who were not perfect, who lived their lives differently than he and not in line with the tradition, sometimes even opposed to it. His beautiful and uplifting perspective on the imperfect Jew informs his insight into this verse and into the awesome Yom Tov we are about to begin.

Why does the verse attribute the judgment of Rosh Hashana to *Elokei Yaakov*, the G-d of Jacob? Why does the verse specifically associate Yaakov with this Day of Judgment?

Rav Teichtal shared two invaluable insights on this association, both derived from the Midrash Tehillim on Psalm 81, the source of this verse.

מדרש תהלים – מזמור פא

למנצח על הגתית לאסף הרנינו לאלהים עזנו הריעו לאלקי יעקב. זה שאמר הכתוב (במדבר כג, כא) לא הביט און ביעקב. מזה ראה בלעם להזכיר ליעקב, ולא לאברהם ולא ליצחק. ראה שיצא פסולת מאברהם, ישמעאל וכל בני קטורה. וראה שיצא מיצחק עשו ואלופיו. אבל יעקב כולו בקדושה, שנאמר (בראשית מט, כח) כל אלה שבטי ישראל שנים עשר. הדא הוא דכתיב (שיר השירים ד, ז) כולך יפה רעייתי ומום אין בך. לפיכך לא הזכיר אלא יעקב לבדו. הוי, (במדבר כג, כא) לא הביט און ביעקב. אמר אסף, הואיל וכל האבות יש בהן פסולת ויעקב אין בו פסולת, איני מזכיר אלא יעקב לבדו. הריעו לאלהי יעקב.

Avraham experienced a crushing disappointment and loss in his life. His first child, Yishmael, had to be sent away and would not remain part of his true family, part of the eternal Jewish people. This was also the fate of the sons he had later in his life with Keturah. Avraham had many children, but many of them were lost to the future of our people.

Yitzchak had a similar experience. He had only two sons, twins, but one of them – the first, his personal favorite – would not remain part of the eternal Jewish people.

Only Yaakov had the distinction of מטתו שלימה, of all of his children remaining forever part of the Jewish people. In the words of the Sages, once we came to the children of Yaakov, a new rule applied: ישראל אף, even a Jew who sins will remain forever part of our people.

And so, we speak of this day as the Day of Judgment before the G-d of Yaakov. Yes, this is a Day of Judgment, and we are judged for wrongs and sins we have committed. But we are being judged from the inside. We are being judged by the G-d of Yaakov, the G-d Who will not let go of us - whatever our failings - Who evidently sees in us the inherent goodness that makes our bond unbreakable. The G-d of ישראל אע"פ, of the truly eternal Jewish people.

That is one perspective.

The Midrash continues with another aspect of Yaakov that we affirm on this day, invoking another well know distinction between our Avos.

דבר אחר, למא הזכיר יעקב מכל האבות... אברהם יצחק ויעקב היו אוהביו של הקב"ה. אברהם קראו הר, שנאמר (בראשית כב, יד) בהר ה' יראה. יצחק קראו שדה, שנאמר (שם כז, כז) ראה ריח בני כריח שדה. יעקב קרא אותו פלטיץ, שנאמר (שם כח, יז) אין זה כי אם בית אלהים. אמר לו הקב"ה, חייך, אתה קראת אותו בית עד שלא נבנה, על שמך אני קורא אותו, שנאמר (ישעיה ב, ג) לכו ונעלה אל הר ה' ואל בית אלהי יעקב. וכן ירמיה אומר, (ירמיה ל, יח) כה אמר ה' הנני שב שבות אהלי יעקב. ועוד אסף קישט את דבריו, ולא הכיר בתרועה אלא ליעקב, שנאמר הריעו לאלקי יעקב:

All three of our forefathers visited the site of the future Temple. Avraham described it as a mountain, Yitzchak as a field, and Yaakov as the House of G-d. Yaakov alone saw beyond what the place looked like here and now; Yaakov saw in it the potential, the possibilities, the vision of what could and would be there.

We too, today on Rosh Hashana, stand before the G-d of Yaakov. We

stand here not as who we are but as who we can be, with a vision for being better, more perfect people. And we know that the G-d of Yaakov will recognize the value of that within us, and will see beyond where we are to where we aspire to be.

May we recognize our core goodness as the children of Yaakov, and may we fill ourselves on this day with a vision, with a picture of where we can be, of where we wish to be. **בן ידה רצון.**

Na'aseh Adam: Perfecting the Divine Image

First Day of Rosh Hashana

Our family was once visiting the National Gallery in Washington. As we passed through the gallery's display of the works of the Impressionists, we found an artist sitting near one of the paintings with her easel and canvas, working to reproduce one of those beautiful portraits. We stopped to study her piece, which was an excellent copy of the original. As she continued to paint, I complimented her work and said she must be pleased that she is almost done. She looked at me and smiled. "Almost done?! I am not even halfway done." I was surprised because to me it appeared that she had essentially completed the portrait. "Do you see the original, the glow of the skin, the coloring of the eyes? I have to keep going over and over my canvas, carefully and methodically adding layers and touches until my painting will become nearly that beautiful."

היום הרת עולם. Today is the anniversary of creation, of the creation of man. The anniversary of when G-d said בצלמינו כדמותינו "Let us make man in our image, in the image of G-d." A human being is a magnificent creature, uniquely created in the image of G-d. On this day, G-d inspired us with the breath of life, and with that He granted us our essence – His essence – the soul, a piece of G-d Himself, חלק אלוך ממועל.

But G-d did not create a finished product. We are not complete the day we are born. Every day, every year, we add another layer, a little glow to the cheeks and color to the eyes of that beautiful being that each of us is supposed to be, that each of us is supposed to make of ourselves.

I once hailed a cab in Jerusalem, and told the driver that I was headed to Yeshivas Chevron in Givat Mordechai. He paused, took a breath, and looked at me wistfully. "Did you know Rav Broide?" I replied affirmatively, as I indeed had the privilege to spend a bit of time with Rav Simcha Zissel Broide z"l, the former Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron. In the early 80's he had come to Baltimore for the better part of a year to receive eye treatment at the world-famous Wilmer Eye Clinic at Johns Hopkins. While here, he resided and gave classes at Ner Israel. The classes were elegant and brilliant, like the man himself.

I once had the privilege to take him to a doctor's appointment. He was so warm, so friendly and gracious. When we arrived at the office, the receptionist lit up and greeted him with such warmth and respect, like

family. That was the way he had greeted her. It was beautiful to see.

“Yes, I knew him.”

“What a man”, said the driver. “I used to drive him often. Because of him, I stopped driving my cab on Shabbos. Not because of anything he said, just because of who he was.”

That is the work of art, the beautiful portrait. That is what a man is supposed to look like. Good, gracious, kind and giving to the point where simply meeting such a person affects you.

And this is not reserved for the great Torah scholar. It is an image each of us needs to complete, layer upon layer, adding glow to the cheeks and color to the eyes.

אדם, “Let **us** make man.” To whom was G-d speaking? Who would be His partner in our creation? Some (see Rashi) say G-d was consulting the angels, when He proposed creating another being who would share the spirituality of the angels. Others (Ramban) say that G-d was addressing the earth, as the earth would be G-d’s partner in our creation, as it would provide the body while G-d would provide the soul.

However, the Zohar (see below) suggests that G-d was actually speaking to US, to you and to me, to the man He was about to create. “Let US make man.” “I will start, but I need you to finish. I will give you the raw materials, the potential, but you need to make yourself into the full Divine Being that man can be.”

בצלם אלקים. On this day, we were created in the “image of G-d”. That is the picture of what we are supposed to be, and that is the image we must complete. But what exactly does it mean to be in “the image of G-d”? On the most fundamental level, it describes what man can, and must, look like as a person of character, והלכת בדרכיו, that we emulate G-d’s ways, that we follow His guidance and really end up looking like Him, ממה הוא רחום אף אתה ממה הוא חנון אף אתה, being compassionate like G-d, being gracious like G-d.

Many have seen the blowing of the Shofar as commemorating and re-enacting that moment that occurred on this day at the beginning of time, when G-d breathed life into us, when He endowed us with our essence, with our soul. But on another level, as we will emphasize in the Mussaf, we also commemorate when G-d again gave of His breath, when He blew the Shofar at Sinai, on a day – יום הששי – that our Sages saw as the day that man’s creation was advanced, when we were given

the gift of Torah, the ultimate tool for our refinement as human beings. And it is that tool, that second infusion of breath, of life, that adds the glow to the cheeks and the color to the eyes, that guides us in making that image of man - that image of G-d - that much more beautiful and perfect. שפרו מעשיכם.

As the Talmud (TB Yoma 86a) says, our goal is *Kiddush Hashem*. Our goal is that when people encounter us, whether those people are non-Jews we encounter in our work or in the store; whether they are Jewish colleagues, friends or neighbors; or whether they are our children, parents or spouses: when they see us, when they see how refined we are in our interactions with others, when they see our kindness and our honesty, they will exclaim: *Ploni* who has studied Torah, whose life is guided by Judaism and observance, do you see how beautiful, how pleasant are his actions? How fortunate are his parents and his teachers to have created such a human being!

That is what we are supposed to look like. Good like G-d; kind like G-d; compassionate like G-d; gracious and giving like G-d; patient like G-d.

That is how we are to complete the portrait. Those are the layers of nuance that we must add to the portrait, to add glow to the cheeks and color to the eyes.

In the beginning of the Zohar (ח"א יג), it distills the core mandates of man, and presents the ninth such mandate as follows:

זוהר חלק א דף יג/ב

פקודא תשיעא, למיחן למסכני, ולמיהב לון טרפא, דכתיב נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו, נעשה אדם בשותפא כלל דכר ונוקבא, בצלמנו עתירי כדמותנו מסכני דהא מסטרא דדכורא עתירי, ומסטרא דנוקבא מסכני, כמה דאינון בשותפא חדא, וחס דא על דא, ויהיב דא לדא, וגמיל ליה טיבו, הכי אצטריך בר נש לתתא למהוי עתירא ומסכנא בחבורא חדא, ולמיהב דא לדא, ולגמלאה טובא דא לדא. וירדו בדגת הים וגו', רזא דנן חמינן בספרא דשלמה מלכא, דכל מאן דחס על מסכני ברעותא דלכא, לא משתני דיוקניה לעלם מדיוקנא דאדם הראשון, וכיון דדיוקנא דאדם אתרשים ביה, שליט על כל בריין דעלמא בההוא דיוקנא, הה"ד (בראשית ט ב) ומוראכם וחתכם יהיה על כל חית הארץ וגו', כלהו זעין ודחלין מההוא דיוקנא דאתרשים ביה, בגין דדא הוא פקודא מעליא לאסתלקא בר נש בדיוקניה דאדם על כל שאר פקודין, מנא לן מנבוכדנצר, אע"ג דחלם ההוא חלמא, כל זמנא דהוה מיחן למסכני לא שרא עליה חלמיה, כיון דאטיל עינא בישא דלא למיחן למסכני, מה כתיב (דניאל ד) עוד מלתא בפום מלכא וגו', מיד אשתני דיוקניה ואטריד מן בני נשא, ובגין כך נעשה אדם, כתיב הכא עשיה, וכתיב התם (רות ב יט) שם האיש אשר עשיתי עמו היום בועז:

The obligation to be gracious and giving to the needy, as it says – ‘Let us make man.’... for G-d made society such that we are able to benefit each other, to fill each other’s needs... So I have seen in the book of King Shlomo, that one who graciously takes care of the needs of others will forever look like Adam himself... Note – here it says ‘Let us make man’, while there – regarding Ruth having her needs taken care of by Boaz – it similarly says, ‘The name of the man who I have made with...’

נעשה אדם – שם האיש אשר עשיתי עמו. In our goodness and graciousness, we complete the picture of what man is supposed to really look like. We make ourselves.

There is one more piece to building that image of G-d.

When Noach emerged from the ark, G-d gave mankind the prohibition of murder, and said: וְאָךְ אֶת דַּמְכֶם לִנְפֹשׁוֹתֵיכֶם אֲדַרְשׁ. “I will concern myself with your lifeblood, from anyone who spills a man’s blood I will seek retribution, I will address it.” And then, G-d adds, שׁוֹפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם, “One who spills the blood of man, through man his blood will be spilled, for man has been made in the image of G-d.”

It is puzzling, however, that specifically at this stage, after the failure of man that brought about the near destruction of the world, G-d should assert man’s divine image in punishing a murderer.

Perhaps the verse is saying something else. Perhaps instead of understanding the “image of G-d” as a description of the victim and, therefore, of the gravity of the crime, instead it is a description of the onlooker, of the witness, of the judge. Yes, G-d says, I concern myself with anyone hurt, harmed or killed. I care, I always know about it, and I will not let it go. But where you know about it, שׁוֹפֵךְ דַּם הָאָדָם בָּאָדָם, as Rashi explains, where there are witnesses and judges, then it is they, it is **we** who must respond, because we are created in G-d’s image. And it is we who are expected to do G-d’s work.

Yes, part of being in G-d’s image is being a magnificent person, reflecting G-d’s goodness and beauty. But another part is doing His work - justice for the downtrodden and kindness for the poor.

וְאָהַבְתָּ אֶת ד’ אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְשָׁמַרְתָּ מִשְׁמַרְתּוֹ (דברים יא א). “You shall love Hashem your G-d and you shall safeguard that which is precious to Him.” Ramban explained: It is our task to look out for those who G-d is most con-

cerned for. He protects the stranger, is gracious to the poor and the needy, stands up for the orphan and the widow. That is our job. For we are to be like Him, doing His work, making ourselves in His image.

Many months ago, I had the privilege – together with others – to visit the Machlis home in Yerushalayim. The Machlis family is unique in their goodness and graciousness. They have over a hundred guests for every Shabbos meal; needy people, homeless people, people who are not well, and people who just need a place to be for a Shabbos meal. The force behind it was Henny Machlis, z”l, who passed away not long ago. I never had the privilege to meet her, but her legacy lives in her outstanding husband and her beautiful and exceptional children. What is so exquisite about them?

A story from the beautiful book written about her, as told by a guest:

I was at the Machlis house on Shabbos. An overflow of people was sitting outside. A really bedraggled, smelly, shaking fellow came in. Everyone got turned off. I thought Rav Machlis would put him outside. But their son Yehoshua, who must have been 23 at the time, sat him down and brought him soup. And because the man's hands were shaking, Yehoshua fed him, spoonful by spoonful. I thought. Who are you that you care so deeply about this man that no one else cares about? Ah, you're a Machlis!

This summer, the family married off a daughter. Yes, of course if you have a hundred people for a Shabbos meal, you will have a thousand for a wedding. And yes, if your guests for Shabbos include literally every kind of person with every imaginable need, then your wedding will as well. But there was more to it than numbers. Miriam Adany, a friend of ours whose life is dedicated to kindness and goodness, attended the wedding and wrote me the following note:

“מי שלא ראה את החתונה הלילה לא ראה חתונה מימיו”

One who has not experienced tonight's wedding, has never seen a truly joyous wedding.

This was not just another wedding. This was not just a wedding of an orphaned bride. This was something else entirely. The extent to which each of the bride's siblings brought joy to her before she went to the Chuppah – I have never seen anything like it anywhere in the world.

But beyond that. The guests at the wedding included every kind of person. Every male or female beggar at the Kosel; every kind

of guest; young women and old, each with their own challenge. Young women who came to the wedding in jeans, with piercings all over their faces. And every one of them was greeted with such profound respect. To each one they said, "Ah! We were waiting for you! Thank you for coming! We are so glad that you came... it really means so much to me that you are here."

When I first heard them say this, I thought that it must be so nice for the guest to hear such warm words of welcome. But as I continued to hear it and to see it, to see how they greeted each and every one of these "special guests" in this gracious and welcoming manner, I could not handle it. I felt so small compared to these children.

They danced with each and every one of these guests, all of these poor and stricken people. I was looking for the clusters of friends of the Kallah, for the circle of cousins – but they were not to be found. Everyone was family.

And what moved me the most was how at the end of the wedding, before the Sheva Brachos, Rabbi Machlis asked everyone to come together and to pray for all the single men and women, that each of them should find their happiness, should be able to find their partner in life.

That is the picture. That is the image of G-d. The image of goodness, personified. Humility, love, caring.

As we sound the Shofar, we simulate that moment when G-d infused each of us with **His** essence that would become **our** essence, the divine soul that He placed within each of us. And with that same sound of the Shofar, we recall Sinai, when He inspired us with His word. Let us hear the call of שפרו מעשיכם, the call of making ourselves better, the call of נעשה אדם, "Let US make man", of finishing the job, of making that image more perfect, of adding the glow to the cheeks and color to the eyes.

May we merit to be in that image, a good and gracious image of a person that **we** can truly be proud of, that **He** will truly be proud of, ישראל, אשר בך אתפאר, "The Jewish people in whom I take great pride."

כן יהי רצון....

יש תקווה לאחריה

Always Hoping, Always Praying

Second Day of Rosh Hashana

The overall life expectancy in the U.S. has begun to decline for the first time since the 1930's.

Yes, despite the incredible advances in medicine and public health, overall life expectancy is declining. And it is not because of Obamacare.

Angus Deaton, a Princeton economist who won the Nobel Prize for his work on the intricacies of measuring human well-being, has been following what is now a national epidemic of depression. In a recent study, he found that since 1999 there has been an alarming national increase in deaths from drugs, alcohol abuse, and self-harm, "deaths of despair."

The former Surgeon General of the United States, Dr. Vivek Murthy, spoke of the diseases that are striking more Americans than ever, diseases of self-harm; from the most dramatic and immediate, to addictions, to others. And he coined a striking phrase: **"Diseases of despair driven by deficits of hope."**

"Diseases of despair driven by deficits of hope."

It is indeed the deficit of hope that powers the disease. As one writer on the issue noted:

Long-term studies of individuals at high risk are telling. Over a ten-year span, it turns out that the one factor most strongly predictive of harm is not how sick the person is, nor how many symptoms he exhibits, nor how much physical pain he is suffering, nor whether he is rich or poor. The most dangerous factor is a person's sense of hopelessness. (Aron Kheriaty, Dying of Despair, First Things - August 2017)

Hope is something essential to the human condition, to the human ability to live. The psychiatrist Victor Frankl, in "Man's Search for Meaning", his memoir of life in the concentration camps, writes about inmates who lost hope.

A man who could not see the end of his provisional existence was not able to aim at an ultimate goal in life. He ceased living for the

future, in contrast to a man in normal life. Therefore, the whole structure of his inner life changed, signs of decay set in.

A man who let himself decline because he could not see any future goal found himself occupied with retrospective thoughts... Instead of taking the camp's difficulties as a test of their inner strength, they did not take their life seriously and despised it as something of no consequence. They preferred to close their eyes and to live in the past. Life became meaningless.

The prisoner who had lost faith in the future – in his future – was doomed.... I once had a dramatic demonstration of the close link between the loss of faith in the future and this dangerous giving up.... My senior block warden confided in me one day: "I would like to tell you something, Doctor. I have had a strange dream. A strange voice told me that I could wish for something, that I should only say what I wanted to know and all my questions would be answered. What do you think I asked? I wanted to know when the war would be over – for me. I wanted to know when we, when our camp, would be liberated and our sufferings come to an end. "And when did you have this dream?" "In February 1945", he answered. It was then the beginning of March. "What did your dream voice answer?" Furtively he whispered to me, "March 30th."

When he told me about his dream he was still full of hope and convinced that the voice of his dream would be right. But as the promised day drew nearer, the war news which reached our camp made it appear very unlikely that we would be free on the promised date. On March 29th, he suddenly became ill and ran a high temperature. On March 30th, the day his prophecy had told him that the war and suffering would be over for him, he became delirious and lost consciousness. On March 31st, he was dead. To all outward appearances, he had died of typhus. ... But his true cause of death was his loss of faith in the future...

This is the critical ingredient of hope, of seeing beyond the present and certainly beyond the past, into a hopeful future. A future where life can be made better.

A Shofar is made from a *keren*, a horn that by nature is extended. The Talmud (TB Horayos 12a) notes that this represents an unfolding and extended future, a horizon. And the Shofar produces two kinds of sounds, the short, broken sounds of the *Shevarim* and *Teruah*, sounds

that resemble cries of pain expressed in painful **moments**, and the extended, strong sound of the *Tekiah*, that – like the horn from which it is sounded – extends and continues, implying an unfolding future, an extended horizon.

That is our sound. The sound of a future, of hope. Because Jews never lose hope. Period. As we read in today's *Haftorah*, יש תקוה לאחריהך, there is hope for our future.

We are the עם יודעי תרועה, the nation that knows and recognizes the *Teruah*. We know how to cry. We know that the *Teruah* – the sob – is sandwiched between *Tekios*; the moment of agonizing pain, represented by the sobbing sound of the *Teruah*, must always be followed by the extended and welcoming horizon, as there is always פשוטה לפנייה, ולאחרייה, always something to hope for, to look forward to.

As Rav Tzadok Hakohein of Lublin (*Divrei Sofrim* no. 16) explained:

אין ליהודי להתיימש משום דבר, בין בעניני הגוף כמו שאמרו (ברכות י' סוף ע"א) אפילו חרב חדה על צוארו אל ימנע מהרחמים, בין בעניני הנפש אפילו נשתקע למקום שנשתקע וחטא בדבר שאמרו ז"ל (זוה"ק ח"א רי"ט ע"ב) שאין תשובה מועלת חס ושלום, או שתשובתו קשה, או שרואה עצמו משתקע והולך בעניני עולם הזה, אל יתיימש בעצמו לומר שלא יוכל לפרוש עוד, כי אין יאוש כלל אצל איש יהודי, והשם יתברך יכול לעזור בכל ענין;

וכל בנין אומה הישראלית היה אחר היאוש הגמור דאברהם ושרה זקנים ומי מלל לאברהם הניקה וגו' (בראשית כ"א ז'), שלא עלה על דעת אדם עוד להאמין זה ואפילו אחר הבטחת המלאך ושרה הצדקת ידעה והאמינה דהשם יתברך כל יכול ועם כל זה צחקה בקרבה, שהיה רחוק אצלה להאמין זה בידעה זיקנת אברהם דטוחן ואינו פולט כמו שאמרו (בראשית רבה מ"ח י"ז) וכן זקנתה, ואם היה רצון השם יתברך לפקדם היה פוקדם מקודם דלמעט בנס עדיף ולא עביד ניסא במקום שאין צריך, אבל באמת מאת ה' היתה זאת שיהיה בנין האומה דוקא אחר היאוש הגמור שלא האמין שום אדם ואפילו שרה שתיפקד עוד, כי זה כל האדם הישראלי להאמין שאין להתיימש כלל דלעולם השם יתברך יכול לעזור והיפלא מה' דבר, ואין לחקור בחקירות למה עשה ה' ככה:

וכן הישועה דלעתיד נאמר (ישעיה נ"ג א') מי האמין לשמועתינו וגו', וכן אמרו (סנהדרין צ"ז סוף ע"א) דאין בן דוד בא עד שיתיימשו מן הגאולה, ועל כן אמר (ישעיה נ"א ב') הביטו אל אברהם אביכם ואל שרה תחוללכם, דגם התחלת בנינכם היה כן אחר היאוש, ושוב מצאתי בתנחומא (פרשת וירא ט"ז) על פסוק (בראשית כ"א א') וה' פקד דבר זה עיין שם ואהניין:

ואברהם אבינו ע"ה ראש האומה הוא שפתח דבר זה שלא להתיימש משום דבר כשנשבה לוט וכבר נתיימשו כולם מלהציל, דעל כן אמר מלך סדום הרכוש קח לך דכבר נתיימש בידי המלכים וקנייה אחר כך אברהם אבינו בשינוי רשות, ואברהם

אבינו אזר עצמו עם שלוש מאות שמונה עשרה ילידי ביתו לרדוף אחר ארבעה מלכים, ובנדרים (ל"ב סוף ע"א) דהוא בגימטריא אליעזר, ומשמעות השם מפורש בתורה אצל משה רבינו ע"ה כי אלקי בעזרי ויצילני וגו' (שמות י"ח ד') שכבר היה חרב פרעה על צוארו והשם יתברך יכול לעזור גם אחר היאוש שאין להתייאש משום דבר, וזהו רמז מספר שלוש מאות שמונה עשרה בגימטריא יאוש עם הכולל היינו שמספר זה הוא המוציא מידי יאוש ומורה שהשם יתברך עוזר מכל דבר שהאדם חושב להתייאש:

A Jew may not despair regarding anything, be it material – even if the sword lies across his neck, or spiritual – even if he has sunken to sin in an area that seems irreparable... he must never say that he cannot break out of this, for there is no such thing as despair for a Jew, and G-d can assist in any situation. The Jewish nation was built after the total despair of Avraham and Sarah ever being able to have a child... purposely... so that this would become the essential character of the Jew, to believe that there is never room for despair.

Beyond the story of Yitzchak's birth, our history is filled with stories of hope, against all odds.

When Moshe *Rabbeinu* was a young man, Pharaoh arrested him for killing an Egyptian who had beaten a Jew. He was condemned to death by the sword, and was placed in position for the execution. The sword was placed on his neck but could not penetrate it. As our Sages (TB Brachos 10a) said, "Even if the sharp sword is placed across his throat, he must not despair, he must not refrain from praying for G-d's mercy." He survived and eventually named his son Eliezer, expressing his gratitude to the G-d of his father Who helped him and saved him from Pharaoh's sword. *We don't give up hope.*

Avraham Avinu had a servant, also named Eliezer. When Avraham rejected the idol worship of his parents and contemporaries, Nimrod threw him into a fiery furnace. But he survived. Nimrod chased Avraham from the land, but was impressed enough to send his son along with him, to serve as his servant. Avraham would name him Eliezer, expressing his gratitude to the G-d Who helped him and saved him from Nimrod's furnace. *We don't give up hope.*

Avraham and his wife wanted so badly to have a child together, and they finally did after they had been married for decades, when he was 100-years-old and she was 90. Then, more than thirty years later, G-d tells Avraham – as we read today – to offer that child to him. Avraham takes him, they travel the distance to Mount Moriah, he builds the al-

tar, he arranges the wood, he binds his precious son on to the altar, he takes the slaughtering knife in hand, and the angel stops him. *We don't give up hope.*

מי שענה לאברהם אבינו בהר המוריה, מי שענה ליצחק בשנעקד על גבי המזבח – הוא יענו. Avraham continued to hope, continued to pray, as did Yitzchak. One could imagine that as Yitzchak lay on that altar he would be frozen in the moment of terror, or at most he would think back about the better times. His past life would “flash before his eyes”. One would imagine Avraham's pain, his despair of the future, his thinking back to the good old days before the shock of G-d asking for his son back.

But no, they prayed. The sword was unsheathed, it was placed upon the neck, and they did not stop hoping. They did not stop praying. And they were not disappointed.

The story of the Jewish people is the story of defying the odds, of hoping against hope, of the revival of hope even in the valley of the dry bones, the place where the phrase “אברה תקוותינו” comes from (*Yechezkel* 37:11), where lost hope is confounded by miraculous resurrection of life and of hope, becoming the key line in the song of return composed by Jews who thought themselves secular, who did not even mention G-d's name in their anthem, but who sang “עוד לא אברה” “תקוותינו, our hopes – the hopes of 2,000 years, are indeed not lost. *We don't give up hope.*

We don't know how to give up. We are Jews. We would have to either deny or ignore our history to even think of giving up hope.

Yet, in reality, there are Jews – including some here today – who may not have a strong sense of hope. Yes, we can encourage ourselves to look back at our history as a source of hope. But what are the other essential ingredients to nurture hope?

There are two.

First, we gain hope from our faith in G-d.

In the same passage we quoted earlier, Rav Tzadok noted that the *Gematria*, the numerical value of the word יאוש, despair, is 317, while the name Eliezer, the name reminding us of Avraham and then Moshe's salvation from the sword lying across the neck - that G-d was there to help and to save from the furnace of Nimrod and the sword of Pharaoh - that name has the numerical value of 318. Faith in G-d's salvation transcends despair.

The *Maharal* of Prague (*Be'er Hagolah* 4:2) taught that word for prayer, תפילה, means hope. The Talmud (TB Brachos 7a) asserts that G-d Himself prays, ושמחתים בבית תפילתי. How can G-d pray? To whom can G-d pray? What do you get for the G-d Who has everything?

Explained *Maharal* that while it is true that we direct our prayers to G-d, a prayer is not a request – it is a hope. ראה פניך לא פללתי. The hope that fills our heart, that we yearn for, that we dream of and that we want and are waiting for, that is our prayer.

Yes, G-d prays. Because G-d hopes. He yearns for our well-being, for our success. And we pray, but to pray we have to hope. To pray we have to have dreams that fill our hearts. To pray we cannot despair. We must know – with all our hearts – that things can be better. We pray that **He** make them better. We pray that **we** make them better. We never stop hoping, and we never stop praying.

The Psalm of this month, לדוד ד' אורי, ends with a phrase: קוה אל ד' חזק ויאמץ לבך וקוה אל ד'. The Talmud (TB Brachos 32b) explained: If a person prayed and was not answered, what shall he do? Pray again, hope again.

Do you notice? The word for prayer is קוה, hope!

We never give up. We keep praying. How many times have we been privileged to see those prayers rewarded? Prayers that were not answered so many times, but we kept hoping, we kept praying, and then it came.

In my role as a Rabbi, as a friend, with people who face challenges that do not seem to be going away, challenges of health or of infertility, of the struggle to find a job or to find a mate, one of the things that I do – sort of predictable I guess – is to encourage people to pray. To keep praying. I have shared this passage in the Talmud, this phrase from Tehillim - קוה אל ד' חזק ויאמץ לבך וקוה אל ד' – so many times. And so many times that continued hope has proven rewarding, sometimes sooner and sometimes later. We should not give up hope.

Yes, we gain hope from our faith in G-d. But we also gain hope from each other.

Avraham and Yitzchak were able to maintain hope as they climbed that mountain because they **climbed it together** – וילכו שניהם יחדיו. Community, connection to others, breeds hope. Isolation breeds despair.

I will quote to you from a recent discussion of the subject.

To cite just one finding from among a growing body of medical research on this subject, Tyler VanderWeele of Harvard's T. H. Chan School of Public Health recently published a study of 89,000 participants that found that some groups remain protected from the rising tide of despair and self-harm. Between 1996 and 2010, those who attended any religious service once a week or more were five times less likely to self-harm. There are straightforward reasons why religious practice protects. Church attendance is a social activity that protects people against loneliness and isolation. (Aron Kheriaty, Dying of Despair, First Things - August 2017)

Yes, from being in shul, from being part of community, we can gain hope. We are granted hope by each other, by the company of others, being noticed by others, being smiled at by others. This is part of the magic of community.

Yet many come out to join community and still feel alone.

I will tell you the saddest story.

A few years ago, a man in his thirties took his own life by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. After his death, his psychiatrist went with the medical examiner to the man's apartment, where they found his diary. The last entry, written just hours before he died, said, "I'm going to walk to the bridge. If one person smiles at me on the way, I will not jump."

Does this story surprise you? Do we realize the power we hold in our faces, in our smile, in our eye contact? ויילכו שניהם יחדיו. The power of togetherness creates and sustains hope and life. It is no wonder that Rav Yisrael Salanter was known to teach that a person should consider his face as a רשות הרבים, public property, as his facial expression impacts everyone he encounters.

Years ago, I developed a conscious and simple habit. When I visit hospitals and nursing homes, grim and busy places, I try to make a point to smile at everyone I see in the halls. It is amazing how that affects the people I walk by. They often very readily crack their own smile, sometimes with a look on their faces as if they just discovered a world of possibility.

It is tragic that nobody smiled at that person walking to the bridge. How I wish I would have a chance to speak to that person. I would

have told him – as I would urge all of us - don't wait from someone to smile at you. Smile first. Break your isolation.

And do not wait for that one particular person to return your smile, the busy person, the 'important' person, the popular person. I can tell you, those people – when I pass them in the hospital corridors – they don't notice my smile. They are too busy to notice. Maybe they are speaking on their Bluetooth and oblivious to me smiling at them, or maybe they have had their social needs met by the many people reaching out to them, and so they find no need or space to offer a smile to another. Don't wait for them to notice, to smile back. Find the person who will notice, who will readily respond and appreciate your friendship.

Break your own isolation. Create your own world of hope.

I turn especially to our younger people. This need for company, for human contact, for a real smile - not an emoji - is life-giving. An article appeared in this month's issue of the Atlantic titled – “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” The article chronicles the same trend we described above, this rise in despair, the growing deficit of hope, and traces it quite compellingly to the isolation created by the false connectedness of technology.

We need to be with **people**, to look at them, smile at them, and experience their company. We give each other hope.

Hope is essential. In our drive to “make things better”, we need to see the horizon, the possibility of better things. **Faith** nurtures that hope. **Community and friendship** nurture that hope. Considering our history as a people, and the stories of many individuals, can nurture that hope.

Let's conclude with a remarkable story of hope built on faith and connection.

Dr. David Pelcovitz tells the story of the time he sat at a Chai Lifeline Retreat. A man was on the stage, an alumnus of the early days of Camp Simcha - when it was still co-ed - and was telling his story. He had met a girl in camp, and they fell in love with each other. They had both been sick with cancer, but were doing better, and – over the objections of their families – they decided to marry. The date was approaching, when he got a call that his bride had taken a turn for the worse and she was critically ill in the hospital. He flew from his home on the East Coast to her bedside in California, and arrived at the hospital to find her deathly ill, bloated and hardly recognizable. He was beside him-

self in anguish and pain, seeing his dear bride and his dreams of a life with her essentially over.

Eventually, he realized he had not yet davened, and he decided to daven right there in the room. He davened, and he davened hard. As he was approaching the last blessing of the Amidah, and the request that G-d bless us with the light of his face, all he could think of was the beautiful and radiant face of his *kallah*, the face that he knew and that was now unrecognizable. He summoned all his concentration and prayed to G-d – “Please let me see the light of her face one last time.” He had faith, and he had – and yearned for – connection. And lo and behold, he reported, shortly thereafter her situation changed dramatically. His prayer was answered.

As he finished telling his story, two children bounded up to the stage. They were his children. Not only did he get to see the glow of her face, but she came home, they married, and these were their children. Dr. Pelcovitz reports that the person next to him at the speech whispered to him – “I was her physician. I never saw such a dramatic turnaround in my career.”

He did not stop hoping. We should never stop hoping. We should never stop praying.

As we prepare to blow the Shofar, we should recall how Avraham and Yitzchak – with the knife at the throat – continued to hope, continued to pray. Together they held on to hope.

מי שענה לאברהם אבינו בחר המורידה, מי שענה ליצחק כשנעקד על גבי המזבח – הוא יעננו. May G-d who responded to the prayers, to the undying hopes of Avraham and of Yitzchak even as the sword lay across their throats, may He respond to us, may He grant us the ability to always hope, to always yearn for better, and to never stop praying.

Living Up to Our Principles

Shabbos Shuva

The Disparity Between Intellect and Character:

When Is תלמוד מביא לידי מעשה?

Robert Coles is a professor emeritus of Psychiatry at Harvard who taught classes on morality. In a classic essay titled “The Disparity Between Intellect and Character”, he begins as follows:

Over 150 years ago, Ralph Waldo Emerson gave a lecture at Harvard University, which he ended with the terse assertion: “Character is higher than intellect.” Even then this prominent man of letters was worried (as many other writers and thinkers of succeeding generations would be) about the limits of knowledge and the nature of a college’s mission. The intellect can grow and grow, he knew, in a person who is smug, ungenerous, even cruel. Institutions originally founded to teach their students how to become good and decent, as well as broadly and deeply literate, may abandon the first mission to concentrate on a driven, narrow book learning--a course of study in no way intent on making a connection between ideas and theories on one hand and, on the other, our lives as we actually live them.

He goes on to tell a story about a student of his, a sophomore from a Midwestern, working-class background, who had obviously worked hard to get to Harvard, and needed to continue to work hard – cleaning the rooms of her fellow students – to get through school.

Again and again, she encountered classmates who apparently had forgotten the meaning of please, or thank you--no matter how high their Scholastic Assessment Test scores--students who did not hesitate to be rude, even crude toward her. One day she was not so subtly propositioned by a young man she knew to be a very bright, successful pre-med student and already an accomplished journalist. This was not the first time he had made such an overture, but now she had reached a breaking point. She had quit her job and was preparing to quit college in what she called “fancy, phony Cambridge.”

... As she expressed her anxiety and anger to me, she soon was sobbing hard. At one point, she observed of the student who had propositioned her: “That guy gets all A’s. He tells people he’s in

Group I [the top academic category]. I've taken two moral-reasoning courses with him, and I'm sure he's gotten A's in both of them - and look at how he behaves with me, and I'm sure with others."

The essential question this young and disillusioned young woman posed to her Harvard professor can be asked over and over, not only of Harvard professors or of others in the secular world of what we call חכמות היצרניות, external, superficial wisdom. The question is something we can ask ourselves within the confines of Jewish life, of the Torah community. It is a question that we are often asked by disillusioned people, young and old. How can it be that there is sometimes such a gulf between what we as a faith, as people of faith, stand for, and how we actually live our lives? What does it take for us to live up to our principles?

Of course, we do not stand here today on *Shabbos Shuva* to speak about others, to analyze the failures of others or of this or that system. Our purpose is to look at ourselves, to see what we can do to enhance ourselves, to enhance how we live consistent with our own principles.

The take-away from this question is not that principles are irrelevant, that what we study has no significance or impact. No, we firmly believe that תלמוד מביא לידי מעשה, that study leads to action.

The Rambam explains the Mishnah (*Peiah* 1:1) that we say every morning in which all those special *Mitzvos* for which we accrue rewards in the next world but nevertheless benefit from in this world are listed. After listing a number of great actions in the interpersonal realm, including honoring our parents, acts of loving kindness, and fostering goodwill between people, the Mishna concludes and says ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם, the study of Torah equals them all. Rambam explains that this is not speaking about the relative weight of Torah study, but rather about the practical result of Torah study. תלמוד מביא לידי מעשה. Study leads to action. If we will study, it will lead us to perform these good deeds and more. When we study we learn the principles, and those principles in turn ground us and lead us to action.

Yet, it is apparent that this is not always the case. Our challenge and goal today is to determine how – in establishing our principles – they can serve as an effective guide for our actions; that they not be intellectual, abstract ideas that take no shape or form, nor exercise significant influence, in our lives.

How do we ensure that our study leads to action? How do we close the gap between intellect and character?

Rosh Hashana, The First Day of Teshuva: Principle as Our Personal Measure

A very good place to start is to explore the role of Rosh Hashana in the *Teshuva* process, as it appears that Rosh Hashana is all about establishing and affirming our principles, about knowledge intended to lead to action.

There is a classic question asked about why Rosh Hashana precedes Yom Kippur. If Yom Kippur is the day of atonement and forgiveness, would it not be more fitting to go through that process before facing judgment, rather than being judged only to then have the judgment undone by forgiveness? This question was asked by Rav Yisrael Salanter.

Consider the following approach. The *Tosfos* (TB Rosh Hashana 27a) address an apparent contradiction in our liturgy regarding whether Hashem created the world in Nissan or in Tishrei, a question which is the subject of a dispute between Rav Eliezer and Rav Yehoshua. They explain that both dates are significant in the scheme of creation, as Rosh Hashana is the day that G-d conceived of the world, while it was actually created in Nissan.

Rav Yitzchak Hutner (*Pachad Yitzchak* Rosh Hashana 4:14) notes that based on this association of Rosh Hashana with the conception of creation, we can readily understand that it is the day most suited for judgment, as our Sages (*Bereishis Rabbah* 12:15, quoted by Rashi to *Bereishis* 1:1) taught us that G-d's original concept was to create the world with *מדת הדין*, following the strict expectations of judgment. It was only when He saw that the world could not be sustained according to that standard that he added *מדת הרחמים*, the attribute of mercy. As such, Rosh Hashana is the day we go back to measuring the world by that original standard of judgment.

While G-d certainly anticipated how things would turn out, He nevertheless did not go directly to mercy because we always need to start with a standard, a baseline. We need to have something to live up to, an ideal. If we start with mercy, if we start with forgiveness, then we do not have the clarity - the lighthouse - that guides us as to how things really ought to be.

We must have principles to live up to.

If our goal this season is to figure out how we grow and make ourselves better, one of the fundamental tools in that process is setting for ourselves an image and vision towards which we strive - the principle,

the ideal, the baseline against which we measure ourselves. We need to identify that ideal, learn how we should be doing things, and then we take our own measure relative to how it ought to be.

The first account that we have of the observance of Rosh Hashana comes from the book of Nechemia (Chapter 8). How was it observed?

ספר נחמיה פרק ח

ויאספו כל העם כאיש אחד אל הרחוב אשר לפני שער המים ויאמרו לעזרא הספר להביא את ספר תורת משה אשר צוה ידוד את ישראל: ויביא עזרא הכהן את התורה לפני הקהל מאיש ועד אשה וכל מבין לשמע ביום אחד לחדש השביעי: ויקרא בו לפני הרחוב אשר לפני שער המים מן האור עד מחצית היום נגד האנשים והנשים והמבנים ואזני כל העם אל ספר התורה: ויעמד עזרא הספר על מגדל עץ אשר עשו לדבר ויעמד אצלו מתתיה ושמע ועניה ואוריה וחלקיה ומעשיה על ימינו ומשמאלו פדיה ומישאל ומלכיה וחשם וחשבדנה וזכריה משלם: ויפתח עזרא הספר לעיני כל העם כי מעל כל העם היה וכפתחו עמדו כל העם: ויברך עזרא את ידוד האלהים הגדול ויענו כל העם אמן אמן במעל ידיהם ויקדו וישתחוו לידוד אפים ארצה: וישוע ובני ושרביה ימין עקוב שבתי הודיה מעשיה קליטא עזריה יוזבד חנן פלאיה והלויים מבינים את העם לתורה והעם על עמדם: ויקראו בספר בתורת האלהים מפרש ושום שכל ויבינו במקרא: ויאמר נחמיה הוא התרשתא ועזרא הכהן הספר והלויים המבינים את העם לכל העם היום קדש הוא לידוד אלהיכם אל תתאבלו ואל תבכו כי בוכים כל העם כשמעם את דברי התורה:

And Ezra the priest brought the Torah before the congregation, both men and women, and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read in it before the square that was before the Water Gate from the [first] light until midday in the presence of the men and the women and those who understood, and the ears of all the people were [attentive] to the Torah. And Ezra opened the scroll before the eyes of the entire people, for he was above all the people, and when he opened it, all the people stood.... And they read in the scroll, in the Torah of God, distinctly, and gave sense, and they explained the reading to them. Then Nehemiah-he is Hattirshatha-and Ezra the priest, the scholar, and the Levites who caused the people to understand, said to all the people, "This day is holy to the Lord your God; neither mourn nor weep," for all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the Torah.

Did you notice? No *Machzor*, no *Shofar* is described here. Just one thing: They read from the Torah. They read the standard, the baseline, by which we are to abide. It was that – not *Unesaneh Tokef* – that

brought forth the tears of the people, who now had an ideal, a baseline against which they could be measured.

Perhaps that is the reason for a unique feature of our Davening on Rosh Hashana. The lengthy *Mussaf Amidah* has at its core three blessings regarding three themes of the day, מלכויות וזכויות ושופרות, G-d's Kingdom, Judgment and Shofar. But we do not simply pray and recite a blessing regarding these themes. We illustrate each of the themes with ten verses from *Tanach*, from Scripture. Evidently, we need to establish the basis in Torah, in principle, for the vision we lay out on Rosh Hashana.

Similarly, *Rabbenu Yonah* wrote in the beginning of his *Shaarei Teshuva* (Para. 6) that the keystone of *Teshuva* is recognition of the standard of Torah. While we cannot expect of ourselves perfect performance of each and every obligation and principle of the Torah, our starting point is the acceptance of its rules and truths as the eternal standard by which we live. *Teshuva* is to militate against a state of נעשית לו כהיתר, of becoming inured to one or another *Aveiros*, not just failing to observe them but giving up on even trying. *Rabbenu Yonah* associates this value with the blessing recorded in *Parshas Ki Savo* for the one אשר יקים את דברי התורה הזאת, who holds the Torah up as his standard.

All of these sources and ideas illustrate one important dimension of how principles can make a difference, can cease to be an abstraction: **By our employment of these principles as the active yardstick against which we measure ourselves.** We do not hold the principles as disembodied, intellectual commodities. We use them as the baseline for the most serious, soul-searching process in Jewish life, as the starting point for the Ten Days of *Teshuva*, of personal stock-taking and soul-searching. **We measure ourselves up against the Torah.**

This is reminiscent of a classic interpretation of what the Torah (*Devarim* 17:19) describes with regards to the King and his Sefer Torah. The King is told to carry it with him everywhere, וקרא בו כל ימי, דיין, and “read from it all of the days of his life.” However, the word used is בו, leading some to say that what we are really hoping for is that when he reads the Torah, what he shall find in it is all of the days of his life, meaning – that his life will completely reflect the picture the Torah draws of how life is to be lived. This is the charge of the King – not to simply carry the Torah on his arm, but to live it in his life.

ללמוד וללמד, **Passionate Principles**, ברוך אשר יקים

It is worth underscoring a further point about principles, actually about kings and principles.

Ramban (*Devarim* 27:26), in his own discussion about the phrase in *Parshas Ki Savo* for the one אשר יקים את דברי התורה הזאת, follows the same reasoning as *Rabbenu Yonah*, that the verse is not referring to one who observes the Torah but rather to one who uphold its principles. However, he notes a comment from the *Talmud Yerushalmi* that explains that the verse is directed especially at the King, as well as those who have the ability to influence others to live according to the Torah's standards. We are all supposed to see the Torah not as our personal standard of choice, but as the standard for the entire Jewish world, and to a degree for the world as a whole. Our commitment and connection to our principles is undoubtedly strengthened when we elevate those principles to objective status, and then passionately advocate for those standards to be adopted way beyond ourselves.

Today, this is not a simple matter. The direction Western society has taken has been away from accepting universal standards and values, celebrating instead the value of "freedom" to do whatever the individual values – as long as he causes no clear harm to others. For the Jewish people and other minorities, there is a pragmatic value in this approach as it has allowed us to live by our values, and not have the values of the majority imposed upon us. In a way, we have benefited from the Western attitude of "Live and Let Live". But as a result, what has developed is an atmosphere where there is no recognition of the need to hew to any kind of a standard, to respect any objective values. This has had quite harmful effects.

I get the New York Times headlines in my email box each day. I scan the headlines, and occasionally read a full story, infrequently enough that I still get by with the free ten stories a month! In July, a story caught my eye, a feature in the Magazine about the movement towards "open marriages", where members of a couple allow each other "freedom". The story was presented with dozens of illustrations, interviews with couples living this way - described coolly and naturally as a new and normal trend. This shook me to the core. What is a person raised in this environment to do?

The world around us has shifted such that we – as Orthodox Jews – need to defend standards, age-old standards, that are now often por-

trayed as intolerant or immoral, as they go against the ethos of the time. For ourselves, for the next generation, we have a compelling obligation to repeat to ourselves and instill in ourselves the belief in eternal standards, in the immutable truth of the Torah's values as the foundation of the world. We have to hold up the Torah and we have to bow towards it.

Indeed, Ramban himself goes on to explain that there is a moment in our ritual when we make a "statement" to this effect: When we hold up the Torah for *Hagbaha*, and turn it so that everyone in the shul can see the writing inside, and everyone focuses on it, bows towards it, points to it, what we are saying is: *This is our standard! These are the values around which we build our lives.*

That is what we have prayed for throughout Rosh Hashana, that what we stand for and what we believe in should be recognized and appreciated by the entire world. We want the world to know about Hashem, and we want to be the conduit for that knowledge. We want to be the salesmen for G-d and His values. And a good salesman is someone who believes in the value of his product.

When we infuse our values with passion, taking it from the abstraction of a personal choice to the strength of a national or universal standard; when we translate what we learn for ourselves into something we are compelled to share, ללמוד וללמד; when we teach and preach, we will be more likely to practice.

Our values should be passionately held, shared and discussed.

ללמוד על מנת לעשות: Learning for the Sake of Doing Better

The Mishna in *Pirkei Avos* (4:6) discusses the special case of one who studies in order to act, הלומד על מנת לעשות. *Rabbenu Yonah* is puzzled by this, as it is hard to see this as a special case. Is the standard the one who studies with no intention to act accordingly? Is the standard a hypocrite?

In addressing this problem, *Rabbenu Yonah* offers a fundamental distinction that sharply addresses the issue we have been grappling with, i.e. how we close the gap between intellect and character, between knowledge and action. As he explains, the standard is someone who would certainly intend to live by what he learns. What he lacks is that he is not studying for the sake of living better! The special case of the one who learns in order to act, הלומד על מנת לעשות, is one whose goal in his studies is to learn how to be better, how to do better.

ורצונו לטרוח כמה ימים ושנים להשיג דבר קטן ולהנהיג עצמו על פי האמת, הרי זה למד על מנת לעשות, שכל עיקר אין מחשבתו כי אם על המעשה להיות אמיתי, ולפיכך מספיקין בידו ללמוד וללמד ולעשות **שהכל בגלל המעשה.**

He is willing to toil for days and for years to gain a small insight that can improve his behavior. He is learning in order to do, as his entire intention is only to improve his actions, and therefore he is assured that he will not only be able to study and teach but that he will indeed act according to what he has learned, as refined actions were the essential goal of his studies.

This Mishna, in light of *Rabbenu Yonah's* commentary, addresses our issue head-on. The method to assure the closing of that gap between intellect and character, between knowledge and action, is the pursuit of knowledge for the sake of action, for the sake of doing better.

I don't know about you, but for me this is not a "given". I enjoy the learning. I find it "interesting", and appreciate gaining new knowledge and deeper insight. I am not always studying to make myself better. But I ought to. I ought to connect to everything that I learn, seeing how it can guide me to be a better person, how it can influence or change my behavior. As Ramban wrote in his classic letter of guidance to his son, אגרת הרמב"ן:

והוי זהיר לקרות בתורה תמיד אשר תוכל לקימה, וכאשר תקום מן הספר תחפש באשר למדת אם יש בו דבר אשר תוכל לקימו.

Be sure to study Torah always, such that you will be in a position to fulfill its laws. When you conclude studying, search within what you have learned to find something that you can fulfill.

This idea was a core principle taught by Rav Yisrael Salanter, and emphasized in his classic *Iggeres HaMussar*. Rav Yisrael saw his generation lacking in many core values. They may have been careful about Kashrus, but they were not ethical in their business dealings. His prescription, his understanding of the Torah's prescription, was simply this: Study those areas of halacha in which you wish to improve, and study them with the intention to improve. This study will have the practical effect of creating the same kind of instinctive recoil from dishonesty as we may have from that which is not Kosher.

ברא הקדוש-ברוך-הוא יצר-הרע, ברא לו תורה תבלין... אם בפרט והוא העיקר, ללמד תורת כל עבירה ועבירה לבדה. לגאווה – תורת הגאווה; למשא ומתן באמונה – חלקי התורה אשר לעניינים שבין אדם לחברו בעסקי העולם, וכדומה. וכן לכל מצווה ולכל עבירה את תורתה. הנשגב והעיקר בשימוש רפואות התורה

לתחלואי היצר, הוא ללמד בעוז ועיון עמוק היטב דיני העבירה עצמה, ההלכה עם כל סעיפיה, כי עינינו הרואות הרבה מהעבירות אשר האדם נמנע מהם בטבע ולא יעבור עליהם, אף גם בעת אשר ילחצנו לזה איזה דבר. וישנם עבירות חמורות מאלו, והאדם הזה בעצמו יעבור עליהם בנקל. ... וזאת הלא ידוע, כי השתנות הטבע תוולד רק מלימוד והרגל רב. ולכן היסוד העיקרי והעמוד הנכון להבין את עצמו לשמירה מהעבירות ועשיית המצוות, הוא רק הלימוד הרב בהלכה זו הנוגעת לעבירה זו או למצווה זו, ובפרט בעיון הדק היטב, כי זה הלימוד עושה קניין חזק בנפש להיות העבירה מרוחקת ממנו בטבע.

כדומה במחוזותינו אלו, תהילה לאל, איסורי נבילות וטרפיות ודומיהם מוטבעים בנפש הישראלי, עד אשר לא יצטרך שום איש לאכופ טבעו ותאוותו להתרחק מהם, כי המה לו לזרא... ואולם, בעונותינו הרבים, במשא ומתן הוא בהיפך: רוב בני-אדם לא ידרשו על חשש גזל ועושק מעצמם... אכן, אם ישים האדם לבו ונפשו ללמד ההלכות השייכות לממון בעיון, גמרא ופוסקים איש לפי ערכו, ובפרט אם המרכז יהיה על תכונת איסור והיתר, לידע איך להשתמר מגול, מה רב כוחה להשריש לאט-לאט קניין רב בנפש, עד אשר יהיה שווה בעיניו שאלות איסור והיתר, ושאלות השייכות לממון. ... ובפרט על מנת לעשות. זאת תיתן פריה לאט לאט, לתת עוז בנפש להישמר ...

I want to daven better. I am disappointed by my own Davening. If I want to change, I have to learn about it, but to learn for the sake of change, for the sake of action.

Keep on Repeating it - Until You Believe It

There is a novel and eye-opening idea found in the teachings of the *Ritva* that is very instructive and relevant for us, and may open the door to yet another important understanding in how we can bridge this gap between intellect and character.

We all know that Moshe was not allowed to enter Eretz Yisrael because of his actions at the *מי מריבה*, the Waters of Strife. Yet, what exactly he did wrong is the subject of intense debate amongst the commentaries. Rambam in his introduction to *Pirkei Avos* (*Shemonah Perakim* ch. 4) suggests that his sin was a failure of character, as he expressed anger towards the Jewish people, an anger that was not representative of G-d's feelings towards the Jewish people at the time.

Ramban (*Bamidbar* 20:7) raises a number of objections to this explanation of the Rambam, including the following: When G-d addressed Moshe, he takes him to task for not believing in Him, *יען לא האמנת בי*. If this is simply a failure of character, of Moshe losing his temper, why would this be called a lack of faith?

The *Ritvah* wrote a small book known as the *Sefer Zikaron*, wherein he responds to the questions posed to the Rambam within the Ramban's commentary on the Torah. He addresses this question as follows, in a manner that is completely related to our discussion.

When Moshe was speaking with G-d following the sin of the Golden Calf, he asked G-d to inform him of His ways, *הודיעני נא את דרכיך*. Rambam himself in the *Moreh Nevuchim* (1:54) explained that Moshe wanted to learn G-d's ways so that Moshe could reflect those ways in his own leadership of G-d's people. G-d of course informed him of his 13 Attributes of Mercy, the *י"ג מדות הרחמים*, including notably *ארך אפים*, that G-d is patient, slow to anger. Yet here Moshe got angry?! Evidently, Moshe did not really **believe** what G-d had told him, for had he really believed it – says *Ritvah* – he certainly would have responded differently. *כאשר לא נשתמש משה בעת הזאת במדה הזאת נמצא שלא האמין במשה. בדבר זה כי האמונה מצטרפת למעשה*. What he knew, if he really believed it, would have expressed itself in his actions.

Wow. If you really believed it, you would act upon it. Intense!

What can we do to make ourselves believe it? Perhaps the answer lies in what we ourselves do with those same 13 Attributes. But let us first turn again to the teachings of Rav Yisrael Salanter.

Rav Yisrael (in a note following his 30th letter in *Ohr Yisrael*) writes about knowledge of an external kind that can reside in the brain of a person, separate from his persona, as opposed to knowledge in the realm of character, that needs to become part of the person himself.

כאשר לימוד הישרת דרכי המידות וטהרת כחות הנפשיות נפרדים המה מלימוד כל תורה וחכמה יען בהם הידיעה ואדם היודעם שני דברים המה והידיעות המה רק צפונות בקרב האדם ובוזה קנה האדם שלימותו להנהיג דרכיו על פי ידיעותיו הנכוחות והישרות. לא כן בדבר הישרת דרכי המידות וטהרת כחות הנפשיות אשר לא ע"פ ידיעתם בלבד יחיה האדם לנהל מעשיו במישור לימודיהם אם לא קננו הידיעות בלבבו וקשורים וצמודים בהאדם יהיו לאחדים.

As such, for it to become part of the person, Rav Yisrael counsels that the study of the ideas must be done with both emotion and repetition, *בשינון ובהתפעלות*. He advised his students not to simply study the ideas found in our works of ethics, but to choose a statement of Chazal, a value statement, and to repeat it over and over in a manner that stirs his emotions and finds its way – drills its way – into his heart and character.

וכ"כ ר"י בלזר בשערי אור (ט, ג): ועל כן טוב לחזור מאמר מיראה ומוסר כמה פעמים וביחוד כאשר יגיע לאיזה מאמר חז"ל או שאר דברי מוסר אשר ירגיש

בנפשו כי יתפעל מזה ויחדור לתוך חדרי לבבו, יחזור וישנה עליו בהתפעלות כמה וכמה פעמים עד אשר יהיה חרות על לוח לבבו ולטוטפות בין עיניו ואז גם בלכתו בחוץ ובשכבו על משכבו יצלל המאמר הזה לתוך אזניו כפעמון ולא ימוש מזכרונו.

Do any of us do that? Are any of us real *Baalei Mussar*? I do not, because I am not.

But I do exactly that – as do you – with one specific sentence. I do it over and over again, repeating it with emotion, hoping that it will find its way in to my heart. I do it for approximately two weeks every year, several times a day, until on the last day I do it many, many times. And you do it too.

The sentence that we repeat over and over again is the 13 Attributes. We say it as a centerpiece of our prayer. We say it over and over again, with feeling, with a tune, until we believe it. We do not want to be in a situation where we do not really believe in G-d's goodness, לא האמנתם בי. Moshe heard the 13 Attributes from Hashem, he heard it once, and – he did not yet make it a part of himself. We repeat it, over and over, until we believe it, until it is a part of us, יעשו לפני בסדר הזה.

This is what we must do with all the values that we wish to not just preach but practice. We must make them our mantra, our repeated values, over and over. *We must not just say them in a dry and detached manner; we must say them – and I do not mean simply in a Mussar session, but in our conversations and discussions with spouse and children, friends and family - with feeling and passion, until we believe them.*

The Last Step: Being vs. Doing

In our effort to bridge the gap between intellect and character, to move us to live up to our principles, we have thus far identified four important steps: First, identify principles that do not remain abstract but that we use as the measuring stick with which we look at ourselves. Second, a passionate commitment to principle, to the extent that we do not keep it to ourselves but are moved to share it with others, to have others adopt this principle in their lives. Third, study for the sake of improving ourselves, ללמוד על מנת לעשות. And fourth, the mantra, the values that we repeatedly and passionately invoke, in that way drilling them into our way of thinking and living.

Before taking the last step, I want to share two stories. These stories are classic, almost typical, and you have heard dozens or hundreds just like them.

A young Torah scholar went shopping for a Lulav in Bnei Brak, when suddenly he noticed the great Steipler Gaon, HaRav Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, coming to look for his own Lulav at the same stand. He watched as the great Rav looked at one Lulav, then a second, and then settled on a third, which he paid for and took home.

The young man was very surprised. He had already spent hours searching for a Lulav that met his standards, to no avail. And this great Rav found a good one on the third try?! He felt he had just witnessed a miracle.

On his way home, the young scholar bumped into a friend of his, a grandson of the Steipler Gaon. Excitedly, he began to tell him the story of the “miracle” he had just witnessed with his grandfather.

The grandson responded: “Let me share with you another miracle of my grandfather, and you will tell me which is greater. Every year before Succos, my grandfather goes out to shop for the Four Species. He comes to a shop, and takes a look at the merchandise. Often, he is less than thrilled with the general quality. But he realizes that if he – the Steipler Gaon – leaves the shop empty-handed, word will travel that the Steipler was disappointed in the merchandise of so-and-so. And so, he buys one of the Lulavim, and brings it home. At home, he has a whole stack of Lulavim that he has amassed while looking for the right Lulav.”

And another story:

Once, on an Erev Yom Kippur, while Rav Yisrael Salanter – then a very young man - was on his way to shul to Daven Maariv, he encountered a known, G-d-fearing man coming towards him. His sense of fear of the Divine judgment was apparent on his face, and he had tears streaming down his cheeks. Rav Yisrael asked him a question for which he needed an answer, but the man – absorbed as he was in his own concern and fear – did not respond.

Rav Yisrael commented: “When I had parted from this person, I thought to myself: ‘Why is it my problem that you are G-d-fearing and fearful and trembling about the Day of Judgment? Why is that relevant to me? You need to pleasantly answer my question, as that is the way of goodness and kindness.’” (Ohr Yisrael p. 118)

These two typical stories underscore a core Torah value. Far more important than the specifics of this or that law or practice, is the human goodness and greatness that these practices are to mold. When

shopping for the perfect *Lulav*, the *Steipler Gaon* did not forget to be the perfect person. While going to meet G-d in judgment, Rav Yisrael Salanter did not want to ignore the *people* he met on the way there.

Samuel Oliner was born in Zynbranowa, in Poland. His family was killed in the Holocaust, but he was saved by a Polish woman who taught him – as a young child - how to pass himself off as a Christian. As a survivor, he dedicated his life to studying altruism, to understanding why some people – like that Polish woman – risked everything to save the lives of others, while others did not. He wanted to identify the factors that create what he would call “The Altruistic Personality”.

Towards this end he conducted extensive research. Interestingly, one of the conclusions clearly emerging from the data was that religious upbringing per se was not a significant determinant. Rather, *how* religion and values were taught made all the difference. When people experienced religion as dogma, as a list of do’s and don’t’s that they simply had to obey, it did not appear to drive them to altruism. But when they were made to see their religious values as something they could understand and respect, as building a truly internally held value system, then it did move them to be that greater person, the one who would do for others.

This too is part of the broader legacy of Rav Yisrael Salanter. In a sense, his battle was to elevate the Torah student and scholar from the storehouse of knowledge and good deeds, to the personality of Torah. To shift Torah from a to-do list to a vision of what we are to-be. When that is the stated goal, when the objective is both greatness and goodness, then it is unlikely to miss its mark.

In so many of the challenges we face, this perspective would give us great insight and motivation to stay on track, to achieve. What do we want to look like as a person? דמוות דיוקנו של אבא, the image of both greatness and goodness. To aspire to be truly proud of ourselves; to be amongst those who bring pride to G-d; to live lives of congruence and consistency.

Our language and conversation needs to be filled with the language of values and principles, deeply held. Values and principles that we measure ourselves up against. Values and principles that we are driven to share. We must learn, must study, על מנת לעשות, with the explicit and clear goal to make ourselves better, to make ourselves greater. To be those who both G-d and we can be proud of, ישראל אשר בך אתפאר.

Humility: The Key to a Better Future

Kol Nidrei

I want to read to you a letter, a letter that tells an amazing story. The letter was personal, but made such an impression upon its recipient that he had it published in the Baltimore Jewish Times of April 27, 1945. Sidney Cohn - uncle of our own Jeffrey Cohn - wrote the letter to Ben Katzner, a leader of the Associated Charities and Sidney's former employer. At the time that Sidney Cohn wrote this letter - in December 1944 - he was serving in Germany as a Captain in the Ninth Armored Division of the United States Army. A few months earlier - during the Yamim Noraim of 1944 - Sidney had sent Mr. Katzner a check to cover his annual contribution to the Associated for 1945. Ben Katzner had felt that a man who was risking his life for his country need not worry about also giving money and he returned the check. This was Captain Cohn's reply:

Dear Ben:

Your six-page letter written December 1 reached me today. Belated as it was, I appreciated and enjoyed it immensely.

There was one big disappointment, however, and that was the fact that you returned my check. However, since mailing you that check much water has rolled over the dam. In the middle of December our outfit was hit head on by the Rundstedt offensive (aka the Battle of the Bulge) and we had a rough time for a while. But, thank the Lord we got out of a trap and most of us came through okay.

The biggest thing, however occurred just a week ago when our outfit took the Remagen bridge (enabling Allied troops to travel into Germany).... The courage displayed by our men could not be surpassed. It seems funny to me that we were connected with an operation that actually turned the tide of the entire war. I had some very close calls on this operation, but thank the Lord everything is okay up to this point.

In view of the above trials and tribulations, I cannot for a minute consider reducing my contribution to the charities. Rather I'm increasing my donation to \$50 in thanks to the One above for taking care of me. If you remember in the prayers of the High Holidays

one quotation says “Repentance, Prayer and Charity will abolish the evil decree.”

...

Sidney Cohn, Capt.

Ninth Armored Division

This is a remarkable letter. It is outstanding in its demonstration of the pure faith – *Emunah uBitachon* – of the writer, unswervingly committed to his *Tzeddakah*, with the firm belief that its merit would grant him added protection from above. But perhaps what is more striking is its apparent humility. Here was a hero, a man who was putting his life on the line daily for the sake of his country and the free world, and instead of resting on his laurels he earnestly felt that he needed to do more.

Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato in *Mesilas Yesharim* (ch. 22) writes about the essential quality of humility. As he describes it, the humble person understands that whatever his strengths, skills and wonderful qualities – he is still a work in progress, he still can be better. The fundamental importance of that quality is that it opens the door to future growth, to learn and to change.

Yom Kippur is a perfect time to discuss humility. At *Maariv*, following the Yom Tov Amidah, we will humbly bow and beat our chests, acknowledging our failings, our imperfections, and readily saying that we are not perfect, that we can be better. We will do that twice tonight and eight times tomorrow, and – just to make sure – we already did it once at *Mincha*.

Bent, bowed, humbled. We are not perfect, we can be better.

That is not a simple posture to adopt. In fact, it may be the hardest thing in the world to acknowledge that we are not perfect, that we can improve, can do better. We do this on Yom Kippur by reading a prepared and standard script from the *Machzor* prayer book, but it is harder to do the extra step that we ought to do – to improvise, to add our own words and address our own personal, specific areas of improvement. And just because we can do it today, when speaking privately to G-d, it does not mean we can do it as readily when speaking to a real person, to our parent or our child, to our spouse or our friend, to our employee or our boss, to our client or our neighbor.

It is hard to do this, but it is refreshing and liberating. It is exciting and

revitalizing. Because if you cannot acknowledge imperfection, then you can never make things better.

As you know, the theme for this year's *Yamim Noraim* discussions in shul has been "Making Things Better". You may think that coming up with these themes is a cinch; it's not! I played with various phrases to express the same idea, one of them: "Good to Great". That is actually the title of a book that I learned a lot from, a mega bestseller written by Jim Collins of MIT, analyzing where the difference lies between the good company and the great one. It is a fascinating and instructive book, and what is most intriguing is that the idea that it comes back to, time and again in different ways, is the critical and practical value of humility. Because to make the journey from good to great, to make yourself better, you have to begin by embracing the idea that you are not perfect, that you can be better.

Hence, for example, the concept of "windows and mirrors" (p 34):

The great leaders "look out the window" to apportion credit to factors outside themselves when things go well, and they "look in the mirror" to apportion responsibility. The other leaders did just the opposite. They'd look out the window for something or someone outside themselves to blame for poor results, but would preen in front of the mirror and credit themselves when things went well.

Strangely, the window and the mirror do not reflect objective reality. Everyone outside the window points inside, directly at the great leader, saying, "He was the key; without his leadership and guidance we would not have a great company." And the leader points out the window and says, "Look at all the great people and good fortune that made this possible. I'm a lucky guy."

Or, another example (p. 74-75):

Leadership is about creating a climate where the truth is heard and the brutal facts confronted... Leading from good to great does not mean coming up with the answers and then motivating everyone to follow your messianic vision. It means having the humility to grasp the fact that you do not understand enough to have the answers and then to ask the questions that will lead to the best possible insights.

Or another example (p. 97-98):

Great companies stick with what they understand and let their

abilities – not their egos – determine what they attempt... They did not have a **goal** to be the best, a **strategy** to be the best, an **intention** to be the best, a **plan** to be the best. They had an **understanding** of what they could be the best at. The distinction is absolutely critical.

Do we hear what the research of the MIT teams discovers? That the key to becoming better, to becoming great, is to be humble, to be open to the ideas and critiques of others, to confront the realities of our weaknesses and strengths and to proceed with a sharp understanding of both.

For this reason, the hope for the future of our people and of our world – for the ultimate leadership from Good to Great - rests on King David, and the eventual *Moshiach* that will arise from amongst his descendants.

We had two models of kings within the Jewish people, Yehuda and Yosef. Both were tested in the area of their personal morality. *Yosef Hatzaddik* resisted and overcame the temptation. He did not sin. Yehuda sinned. You might think that Yosef should be crowned the eternal king of Israel, that from him should come the one who would lead us to the perfect world. But no, it is to Yehuda and to his descendant David that we turn. Because while Yehuda sinned, he – like his grandson, David – הודה ולא בוש, unflinchingly and unhesitatingly acknowledged that sin. He faced it, and he was committed to fix it. He was humble; he acknowledged his weaknesses and addressed them.

That is the power that we need to lead us. If we were perfect, we could turn to Yosef to led us on in perfection. But we are not. And therefore, the leadership we need is one that will acknowledge our imperfection, that can readily say חטאתי, “I have failed”, and just as readily fix it. That is the kind of leadership that can improve an ailing world.

And thus, wrote *Rabbenu Yonah* (*Shaarei Teshuva* 2:12), the ear is described in the Talmud as the most critical limb, חרשו ניתן לו דמי כולו, because it is through our ability to listen that we learn and improve, as the Proverb (15:31) says, און שומעת תוכחת חיים בקרב חכמים תלין, “The ear that hears the lessons of life resides amongst the wise.”

And it is in the same vein that the Talmud (TB *Sanhedrin* 24a) describes the difference between the sages of Eretz Yisrael and those of Bavel, that the Babylonian sages were more arrogant and argued aggressively, leading to impasses and unclear conclusions. Whereas the sages of Eretz Yisrael argued pleasantly, hearing each other out and sharpening each other’s ideas, thus reaching true conclusions.

The greatest Sages, the most accurate and trusted teachers of Torah, from Moshe to Hillel and beyond, were always those who were the humblest people, and were thus open to really hear the truth, hear the other side, not allowing their defenses and their need to prevail or to preserve their position to block the light of truth, of what had to be done. Indeed, איזהו חכם הלומד מכל אדם, the wisest man is not the know-it-all but the one who is open to learn from everyone. And one of the ways Torah is gained, מ"ח קנינים, is to love constructive criticism, אהב את התוכחות.

Love criticism?! Does anyone even like criticism? Even when welcomed...?!

A few years ago, someone shared with me a fascinating and inspiring article from the New Yorker magazine titled "Personal Best: Top athletes and singers have coaches. Should you?" The article is by Dr. Atul Gawande, a surgeon, and he wrote about how at a certain point in his career he was doing very well, with success rates well above the national averages and complication rates well below. But he had plateaued, stopped improving. He wondered if he could be better.

Interestingly, what pushed him along was an afternoon visit to a tennis club while he was on a business trip. He had played competitive tennis when he was younger, and would often travel with his racquet, just in case he would have some time to catch a game. On this afternoon, he showed up at a tennis club, and was looking for anyone who wanted to play. There was nobody available, but one of the club pros said that if he wanted to pay him the hourly coaching rate, he could play him. He agreed, and they began to play, when after a few minutes the pro shifted into his usual mode of guiding his partner. He made a suggestion for a foot adjustment that he felt would enhance his serve. Dr. Gawande was skeptical and uninterested in the unsolicited advice, as his serve was the best part of his game. But he tried it, and - lo and behold - the minor adjustment of foot position recommended by the coach added some 10 MPH to his serve.

Evidently, even if we are pretty good - we can be better. Evidently, if we let others watch what we do, and we invite their critique of what we do with a welcoming ear, we can do better. If we have the humility to welcome hearing how we can do better, we will do better.

So, he asked a retired surgeon, a mentor of his from his residency, to watch him operate and provide feedback. The feedback taught him things that only another surgeon could notice, and when he incorpo-

rated the suggestions, his complication rate went down and his success rate climbed.

But who welcomes criticism? I read this article, I thought – that is great. I will ask someone to critique my work, tell me what I can do better. Then I realized that I already have that. Hundreds of people do that, even without me asking.

And I cringe at criticism, even when I ask for it. Don't you? It is hard to be truly humble, to truly feel that we want more than anything else – more than feeling that we are great, that we are right – to actually be greater, to be better.

I wonder why I am so weak. *Rabbenu Yonah* in his commentary to Avos (1:6) -where we are taught קנה לך חבר, that we must acquire a friend - notes that one of the essential benefits of a good friend is that friends can rebuke and correct each other, can provide that outside pair of eyes that can guide us and keep us honest. That is what friends are for.

That is what he said. But what we experience is that criticism may in fact be the best way to lose a friend!

Nevertheless, without question, that is where the action is, that is where success lies. Humility, the ability to acknowledge our faults, that we can be better, to hear and accept constructive criticism – these are the openings, the portals to growth and greatness.

What I would like to suggest to each of us tonight, however, is not that we go home and criticize each other. I am not even suggesting that we go home and ask each other for coaching, for the guidance of how we can be better. Because it does remain the case that criticism hurts us, even when we “welcome” it. And even more so, when it comes to what we say to each other about the other, what we really need to do is more affirmative, to notice and to compliment each other on the good things that we are doing. That is the 21st century version of *Rabbenu Yonah's* advice regarding “acquiring a friend”, even if it might be called “friendship for wimps”.

But there is something else that I would suggest we all consider doing. As we said earlier, Yom Kippur is about bowing, humbling ourselves and saying we are not perfect and we are sorry and want to do better. And this may be the hardest thing in the world. Yes, we do this on Yom Kippur, reading a prepared script from the *Machzor* prayer book, but it is harder to do what we the extra step that we ought to do – to im-

provisé, to add our own words and address our own personal, specific areas of improvement. And it is even harder to do it when speaking to a real person, to our parent or child, to our spouse or friend.

So, this is the idea: Don't criticize; apologize. Open wide that exciting door to making things better, to making a more perfect world for yourself and for those around you. Listen, look at yourself, and express yourself. When you say all these *Viduyim*, these confessions, take some time to speak for yourself. Speak about what you want to fix. If you are walking home with someone, or if you are going home to someone, or if you can think of someone you will be calling or seeing right after Yom Kippur or on Monday morning, think about what you can acknowledge to them, about what you can do better.

And the best thing about it is that it is contagious. It works SO MUCH BETTER than criticism. Just try it, work on yourself, be apologetic and sincerely work to make yourself better, and those around you will - not definitely but most likely - follow your lead.

This week we showed the film *Screenagers*, about internet addiction issues. One of the scenes had a group of young teens standing around being asked questions about their own internet use. When asked if they thought they were addicted to the screen, they all raised their hands, except for one brown-haired girl right in the middle. Her friends confronted her, and she adamantly maintained that she was not lying.

A later scene in the film brings us to the same girl's home, and her parents' discussion of their habits. Each of the parents - comically and sadly - was busy asserting how the other was addicted to the phone. They were looking at the other, not at themselves, and they were criticizing, not apologizing. And while they failed at improving themselves, they did succeed at transmitting their values to their daughter. She too refused to acknowledge her failings, her weakness.

But there is an opposite model, and it is much more exciting. How about a world where children see their parents apologizing to each other? Where children will even see a parent apologize to them? Where the atmosphere is one of growth, of always trying to do better, to be better, to go from good to great? To not being taken with our self-image as a hero for what we have done but rather as someone always striving - like Capt. Cohn - to do more?

Rav Yisrael Salanter (see *Shaarei Ohr* in *Ohr Yisrael* 11), wanted every

community to have a *Bais Mussar*, a place where people would come to work on making themselves better. The presence of such a place would announce to one and all the obligation – the need – to work on ourselves. Its open doors would invite others to join, and even those who would not enter its doors would know: There is a place, and there are people, who are trying to improve. And this will inspire them to push themselves a bit harder, to make themselves a bit better.

That place can be your home, or your shul.

There is nothing as joyous or as exciting, nothing that opens the door wide to a world of possibility of making things better, as our own humility. We need not criticize; but we can apologize. And from there, things can truly get so much better.

Never Stop Speaking

Yom Kippur Yizkor

Six weeks ago, I travelled to Atlanta to give a talk commemorating the *yahrzeit* of an old friend who passed away very suddenly, in his 50's, a man named Moishe Esral. What was most striking about the experience was the clarity I received from his still-grieving family, from the first call asking me to come, through every part of the event itself: They were absolutely clear what the evening was going to be about, and it was the same thing it had been about each of the past few years when they had the sad opportunity to commemorate his *Yahrzeit*. This was going to be an evening about Integrity.

Why? Because their wonderful husband and father lived a life of integrity. It was a value that he held dear in his personal life, in his business and community. He stood for it and they knew that he stood for it, to the point that there was no question. A night in his memory would be a night where he would continue to speak, to share the message that he shared in his life: Live a life of Integrity.

Today, we are not going to discuss integrity. Instead, we are going to speak about how we can have that clarity, how we can craft the message that we will continue to communicate after 120 years, after we have left this world.

Two weeks ago, I was speaking to my mother on *Erev Shabbos*, and she shared with me a Chassidic thought on the Parsha. וילך משה וידבר. "And Moshe went and he spoke..." Even when Moshe went, even when he left this world, he continued to speak to us, his message continued to resonate. My mother was saying it about my father, that his messages, his words and what he lived for continue to speak to us even though he has gone.

On Rosh Hashanah, we spoke about how that day was the anniversary of our creation, of the day that G-d said "Let US make man". We learned then the words of the Zohar (I:13b), that "us" was an invitation to man - the man being created - to join in the act of creation. G-d is telling us, "I will create the ingredients, the raw materials, but you must finish the job. I will draw the basic portrait, but you must add the glow to the cheeks and the color to the eyes."

Today we will add a piece to that. Our Sages considered the ultimate

element within man to be the power of speech, the רוח ממללא. **G-d gave us the power of speech in our lifetime. When we follow the mandate of נעשה אדם, when we live our lives as we should and complete His creation, we grant ourselves the power of speech beyond our lifetime. We continue to speak, our life's message continues to be heard, long after we are gone.**

As you know, a little more than half a year ago my father ה"מ passed away. I was not shocked by my father's passing. My father was not in his 50's; I was in my 50's. My father was 89.5 years old, a Holocaust survivor, and had been in very poor health for several years. We were not foolish or naïve. We knew the day would come, and sure enough it did.

I miss my father very much. It is not an exaggeration to say that I shed a tear for him virtually every day. We spoke on the phone every day, and I miss that. I think of him and how he would react to this or that event or experience that he would have or that I would report to him. I miss how his eyes would light up when we came to see him, and watching him sit and sing *Zemiros* or share Torah.

But I am not devastated. In fact, every day I think about him, and I feel him and hear him. He is still speaking to us, because he made so clear what he stood for.

As observant Jews, we went through an amazing period called *Shiva*. During that week, we sat in mourning, on the ground with our shoes off, and we spent the week as *Shiva* is meant to be spent - invaluable - focusing on who our father really was, distilling the messages that he gave us in life, so that we would continue to hear them, and we could continue to share them.

Our first moments of *Shiva* gave us one of those messages. Our uncle, my father's younger brother, joined us at the *Shiva* house right after the funeral. While his own poor health precluded him from spending the full week with us, he did want to at least start the *Shiva* with us, before continuing to his home in Bnei Brak for the rest. We of course wanted to hear what he could share about our father and their early life together, and he told us things that we never knew.

He told us about how when they were in Mohilev, the area of the Ukraine (Transnistria) where my father and his family had been banished to during the Holocaust, my father - then a *yeshiva bachur*, a young religious student with glasses - was singled out to be tormented by the commandant of the labor camp. He made my father haul logs

that were bigger than he was. When they were digging footings for a bridge, the hole became filled with water and they had to form a bucket brigade to empty the water and dump it elsewhere. The officer had my father stand last in the line, and told the person before him to dump the water on my father.

All of us were shocked. Our father had never told us anything about this. Sure, he had told us about the years spent in Mohilev, but he described it as something like a ghetto. The stories he shared were about his study sessions with Rav Yosef Shtern zt"l, where they would learn an extra page of Talmud to make up for the lack of food for supper. He told us about the great rabbis who were his roommates in the cramped space they lived in, and about the excitement of the time the *Rebbe of Seret* appeared on a *Motzei Shabbos* while they were reciting *Kiddush Levana* for the month of Nissan.

Inspiring memories he shared. The misery he hid.

This brought out to us one of our father's messages, an idea reflected in the last line we inscribed on his *Matzevah*: א"ך טוב וחסד ירדפוני כל ימי חיי "א. "Surely goodness and kindness shall pursue me all of the days of my life." My father at his own 80th birthday explained that he chose this verse (*Tehillim* 23) as his mantra in life, because he was born on א"ך אלול, the 21st (=כ"א) of Elul. He was very positive, seeing all the good he had in his life.

Yes, the good. This man who lost his mother at ten years old; who was exiled with his family to a miserable labor camp at 14; who survived the Holocaust but then had to leave his father and siblings to avoid being drafted by the Romanian army at 19; who came to a new country and a new language, essentially walked himself down to the *Chuppah*, and worked hard until he found a proper career position. He felt that only goodness and kindness pursued him all of the days of his life, until he left this world on א"ך אדר.

That was one of his enduring messages. Be positive, happy, and see the good in life.

The *Netziv* (*Devarim* 25:9) offers a fascinating explanation of the unusual ritual of *Chalitzah*, the removal of the shoe of the surviving brother who refuses to perform the *Mitzvah* of *Yibum*, to marry his deceased brother's childless widow. He explains that the shoe represents the physical body of the person, as we find that Hashem instructs Moshe to remove his shoes – to step out of his physical

existence – when encountering G-d at the burning bush. The Mitzvah that this man was presented with was the opportunity to step out of himself and to do something to perpetuate the life of his deceased brother. By marrying his deceased brother's wife - not as his own but for the sake of his brother - he would be carrying forward the spirit and life of his brother, continuing his presence in the world.

We do the same thing when we mourn. We take off our shoes. Evidently, this is the time for us to step out of ourselves and to realize that it is now our task to consciously do that which we have been unconsciously doing every day of our lives: Continue to share the message of our parents.

We step out of our own selves to be them, to be their continuity.

There is a fascinating Halachic irony. As we all know, the mourner returns from the funeral to eat a hard-boiled egg. One of the basic reasons for this is the symbolism in that the oval egg has no opening or “mouth”; so too a mourner is silent, closed-mouthed. Yet, the Halacha states that when visiting a mourner, the visitor should be silent until the mourner speaks first. But isn't the mourner supposed to be closed-mouthed? Why should it fall to him to be the conversation-starter?

Perhaps what this custom tells us is the following: We spend all our life talking, using that power of speech that G-d gave us. But now that our parent is gone, we have to stop talking. No, not stop for the week or even for the day, but for long enough that when we start speaking again it will be with the realization that from here and on these are not my words. **I stepped out of my shoes, I stepped out of myself, and I stepped out of my voice. I am now speaking דבריו של מת, I am carrying forth the power of speech of my parent, who will live on through my words. שפתותיו דובבות בקבר.**

Perhaps this is part of the idea of the mourner saying *Kaddish* and leading the Davening. The essential nature of these obligations is that they are *Devarim SheBikdusha*, matters that are specifically said in community, where the mourner's job is to lead and to bring out the responses of others. The mourner does this because it is his duty to realize that his voice is a voice that was brought out by another. The community is responding to his call to bless G-d; he is responding to his parent's call to bless G-d. We are continuing each other's voices.

The Talmud (TB *Taanis* 11a) teaches that after a person is gone from this world, the walls of his house tell the story of his life, **כי אבן מקיר תזעק**. As we go about life, we come to realize that we grant everything around us the power of speech, we make everything around us reflect

our values and our message, tell our story.

Sitting *Shiva* brings that home as well: The enduring messages of our loved one are embedded in their environment.

Our father's house was filled with *Sefarim*, Torah texts. He had *Sefarim* everywhere, with bent corners and pen marks and with notes stuffed in them. To him, learning was the *Shira*, the song of Torah. He did not study Torah just because it was an obligation; it was his love. He studied it all the time. He studied it as a child in Chasidic yeshivos in Europe, as a teenager in the labor camp, as a rabbi in adulthood, and as a retiree in *Yerushalayim*. And he especially sought out and found the inspiration that would come from the words of the Torah.

This enduring message of his is reflected in the verse my mother תלחט"א had inscribed as the first line on our father's *Matzevah*: מזה אהבתי תורתך. "How I love your Torah; I discuss it all day."

Koheles (7:2) taught that is good to go to a house of mourning, as the living take what they see there to heart. The living come there and they see the walls of the house, the environment the person created, and they hear hopefully good things, the discussion of what about this person – the deceased – is going to live on. And they take this to heart. "What will be said about me? Have I crafted the message – am I living the message – that will continue to speak for me long after I am gone?"

Rav Elchonon Wasserman HYD wrote many *Sefarim*, and all of them were called קובץ, "a collection of": Collections of שיעורים, lectures; of הערות, notes; of מאמרים, essays. I read once – I do not recall where – that he did this because he felt that what he was writing was not his own but the collected insights of those who had taught and guided him.

I feel the same way. I am not a clone of my father. We are very different in many ways. But the more time goes by, especially through *Shiva* and during this past six months, the more I realize that the things that I say and teach are really the collected values and insights, the strength and passion that I was privileged to receive from him. It is not my voice, it is his.

I once asked one of my mentors, Rav Moshe Shapira z"l – who also passed away this year and who my father admired very much and learnt from – if he would give a shiur to a group I had brought for a visit in *Eretz Yisrael*. He demurred and encouraged me to focus on traveling the land, saying, אין תורה בתורת ארץ ישראל. While the conventional understanding of that statement is that no Torah compares to

that learned in Israel, he explained it as celebrating the Torah we learn from the land itself, from the connections and memories it makes for us, from how the land speaks to us.

I shared this thought with my father. It spoke to him.

My father's greatest thrill for the last 24 years of his life was living in *Yerushalayim*. As a friend from Baltimore who came to the *Shiva* correctly pointed out, whenever my father visited here he spoke about *Eretz Yisrael*, as if he was the ambassador.

Is there any place where even the stones speak to us like they do in *Eretz Yisrael*? My father heard them speaking to him.

I wonder if that is why Moshe was condemned to remain outside of *Eretz Yisrael* because he hit the rock and did not speak to it. Indeed, the very nature of the land of Israel is that the stones speak to us. This is the land of *אחוותכם* ארץ צרעת בבית ארץ, where the stones that make up the homes, or the threads of the fabric, turn colors to send us messages. As Rav Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l said about the stones of the *Kotel*, *יש לבבות ויש לבבות, יש לבות אדם ויש לבות אבנים, ויש אבנים ויש אבנים, יש לבבות ויש לבבות, אבני דומה ויש אבנים* – לבבות – לבבות, “There are hearts of stone but there are also stones with heart and vitality.” Moshe could not enter *Eretz Yisrael* if he could not hear or speak to the stones.

We are in the moments before *Yizkor* when many of you have your thoughts appropriately turned to your own fathers and mothers, and I was hesitant to crowd your important thoughts with memories of my father. But I chose to do so, and I hope it is okay. I felt that this is the best story I can tell you, the best example and illustration of what we are discussing now – of crafting a message that will continue when we are gone.

All of us need to find that eternal voice within ourselves. And all of us who will proceed to say *Yizkor* must remind ourselves of how we will continue the voice, the eternal voice, the lasting messages of those who brought us into this world. We should find that voice and those messages, and we should carry them forward, loud and clear.

And that is the task we all have today, on Yom Kippur. This is the day that we stand and pray to be granted another year of life. But we must not only seek a year; not even 120 years. We must go for the gold. We take off our shoes, we step out of our physical, temporal selves, and we say to ourselves: What can we do to make ourselves eternal? What can we do so that we will speak forever?

That is what each of us has to do. Step out of our shoes and into eternity.

Afterword: The Beauty of Rav Yochanan

Neilah

The Talmud (TB *Berachos* 5b) tells a story about how during Rabbi Eliezer's final illness Rav Yochanan came to visit him. Rav Yochanan was a strikingly beautiful person, who literally lit up the room. But in the light, Rav Yochanan saw that Rav Eliezer was crying, and he asked him why.

Rav Yochanan suggested the obvious possible reasons: unfulfilled goals, financial frustration or familial disappointment. Rav Eliezer was not crying over any of these things.

להאי שופרא דבלי בעפרא קא בנינא. "I am crying over your beauty, your *Shufra*, that will be swallowed up by the dust." Rav Yochanan joined him, and they cried together. על דא ודאי קא בכית.

It is a strange story. Rav Eliezer is dying and he is crying over the death of Rav Yochanan?!

I heard this question asked more than thirty years ago, on a street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, on a rainy *Taanis Esther*, during the funeral of Rav Moshe Feinstein z"l. The question was posed by Rav Nissan Alpert z"l, a student of Rav Moshe, who was himself deathly ill as he delivered this eulogy of his beloved teacher.

Talking through tears, he explained the passage beautifully and personally. Rav Eliezer was a student of Rav Yochanan. He had dedicated so much of his life to learning from Rav Yochanan, to learning the beautiful ways of Rav Yochanan, *Shufra d'Rav Yochanan*. He had hoped all along that he would be able to carry on Rav Yochanan's legacy, and that in that way Rav Yochanan's beauty would never be swallowed up by the dust.

But that was not the way things were turning out. Rav Eliezer was dying. And he looked at Rav Yochanan, at his beauty, at his *Shufra*, and he was so sad and so afraid that it was going to be lost forever. He was not crying over his own family, over his possessions or his failed ambitions. Yes, it is possible that before Rav Yochanan came to visit, before he basked for one last time in his glow, he shed tears over those disappointments. But now in the presence of Rav Yochanan, there was only one thing he could think about, one thing he could cry about.

He cried over the beauty of Rav Yochanan. The beauty that he had always hoped to preserve and to spread in the world, and that was now fundamentally at risk of being lost forever.

As we approach *Neilah*, the closing prayers of Yom Kippur, we may feel a bit like Rav Eliezer on his deathbed. This is the moment of the sealing of our fate for the coming year. There are many things we can cry over: unfulfilled goals, financial frustration or familial disappointment. And it is entirely fitting for us to cry over these things.

But in the middle of *Neilah*, our perspective will shift as we will have our own version of Rav Yochanan's visit. The beauty of G-d Himself will enter the room and illuminate it. That beauty will be seen and felt as we call out, over and over again, the *י"ג מידות הרחמים*, the Thirteen Attributes of G-d's mercy, describing G-d's overwhelming kindness and goodness. We will see and absorb within ourselves the incomparable beauty of G-d, and that light will change our tears.

We will feel how dark the world we live in is, how far it is from reflecting G-d's kindness, goodness and truth; that the beauty of G-d is - so to speak - liable to be swallowed up by the dust and the darkness. And we will understand that our ultimate wish, our ultimate goal in life, is that we who were created in His image may live our lives in a way that reflects His attributes, *יעשו לפני בסדר הזה*. And we will cry for a further opportunity to preserve that light for the world, *למענך אלקים חיים*.

Shofar. Shapru Maaseichem. Make yourselves, your actions, more beautiful. Our goal, our mission in life, is to preserve the ultimate beauty of our maker, the ultimate *Shufra*, that we can uphold through enhancing our own *Tzelem Elokim*, our own divine image.

We, like Rav Eliezer, are afraid. Our own future is uncertain. Each of us has good reason to cry: unfulfilled goals, financial frustration or familial disappointment. But this is the moment where we can draw ourselves to our full height, the height that these days and that this moment asks of us: *למענך אלקים חיים*. Our tradition teaches us that the most powerful tears we can shed at this moment are those we shed for G-d's sake, for the fulfillment of the wish and the prayer of all these Days of Awe, that G-d's presence be known and felt in the entire world, that the darkness be replaced by His light. Let us cry for the beauty of G-d, for His truth and His way of life, that it is our mission and our greatest dream to preserve and to build.

We must cry, hope and pray that we - the Jewish people, the students of His Torah, G-d's children - will preserve and uphold the beauty of G-d in the world, *ישראל אשר בך אתפאר*.

May G-d hear our prayers, and may each of us and all of us be sealed in the Book of Life, in a world that will soon be filled with His light.

