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TOURO TORAH

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אלול תשע"ז—תשרי תשע"ח

September 2017

Inside This Issue

Live a Little

What's in a Name?

Got to Get that Goat

Live a Little

By Reena Evans

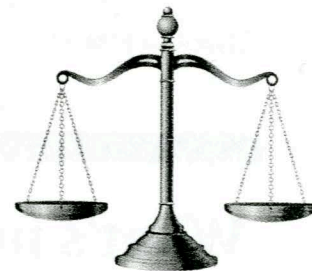
Time is running out. Your lease on life will expire on the first of *Tishrei*, 5778, however many days and hours that is from now. Unless you do something about it.

We know that there are three books open before *Hashem* on *Rosh Hashana*: The book of life, the book of death, and the book of the *beinonim* – those who are neither complete *tzaddikim* nor complete *reshaim*. The *Toldos Yaakov Yosef* writes that these books are open so that we can choose where to sign our names. Each person gets to choose whether to write himself into the book of life or the book of death. As we say in the davening of the *yamim noraim*, in the *tefillah* of *unesaneh tokef*, – “הוֹתֵם יָד כָּל אָדָם בּוֹ” – “the signature of every person is in it.” What kind of crazy person would choose to write himself into the book of death?! It’s your choice, and you can sign up for life! “ובַּחֲרַת בַּחַיִּים לַמַּעַן תַּחֲיָה” Choose life so that you can *really* live. (R’ Moshe Tzvi Weinberg)

Rav Zev Leff cites a *remez* in *Shemos* which reveals a connection between the concept of *ir miklat* and the month of Elul. One who murders through negligence, rather than through circumstances completely beyond his control, must flee to an *ir miklat*, a city of refuge. The *passuk* describes this situation: “וְאִשֶּׁר לֹא צָדָה וְהִטְאִלְקִים אֶתְּהָ לִּידֵּוּ וְשָׂמְתִי לָהּ מְקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יָנוּס” “But for one who has not laid in ambush and G-d had caused it to come to his hand, I shall provide you a place to which he shall flee” (*Shemos* 21:13). The first letters of “אֶתְּהָ לִּידֵּוּ וְשָׂמְתִי לָהּ” spell אלול.

The accidental murderer who must flee to an *ir miklat* lacked proper regard for life and therefore failed to take all of the necessary precautions to prevent the accident that he caused. Every second of this temporary life has eternal value. Through a person’s actions, words, and thoughts in the physical world, one can perfect himself by emulating G-d and becoming close to Him. By doing so, a person fulfills his purpose of earning an eternal relationship with G-d through his actions in this world. “Every second of temporal life is invested with infinite and intrinsic value, for it is the seed of eternity” (R’ Zev Leff). If someone understands the importance of every second of life, he will certainly be careful with another’s life and not come to accidental murder. In the *arei miklat*, the accidental murderer is reeducated to appreciate life so such an accident does not happen again.

Each year, we fail to properly appreciate the value of the precious, eternal moments of our own lives, and we squander them with empty, ephemeral pleasures or devalue them with sin. “We are, so to speak, guilty of unintentional murder of ourselves” (R’ Zev Leff). The month of Elul, as alluded to in the *passuk* about the *ir miklat*, is a “time of refuge” where, just like the unintentional murderer, we must reeducate ourselves and learn to truly live, to utilize every moment for its true eternal purpose.



“ Each person gets to choose whether to write himself into the book of life or the book of death. ”

- Reena Evans

The first step is to want life, to truly fulfill the words of *David HaMelech* that we have been saying since *Rosh Chodesh Elul*: "אֶחַת שְׁאֵלְתִי מֵאֵת ה' אֹתָהּ אֲבַקֵּשׁ שְׁכֵנִי בְּבֵית ה' קַל יָמֵי חַיִּי" - "One thing I asked from *Hashem*, that shall I seek: Would that I dwell in the House of *Hashem* all the days of my life" (*Tehillim* 27:4). This dwelling in the House of *Hashem*, keeping *Hashem* in our lives at all times, is the only real life. David's sole request must become ours as well. We have the chance to sign up for life if we really want it, to grab this opportunity!

" We are, so to speak, guilty of unintentional murder of ourselves. "

-R' Zev Leff

Once we decide we really want to choose life, to live with *Hashem* and make each moment eternal, we then must begin to work on ourselves so that such a life will be possible. We must turn our attention to the *aveiros* we have committed, the *mitzvos* we have not done properly, the negative character traits we possess, the Torah we have neglected to learn. In short, we must look at all the moments of death we have inflicted upon ourselves in the past year, and turn to *Hashem* and ask him to take us back, for He has abundant mercy and wants us more than we can imagine,

no matter how far we have fallen.

R' Moshe Tzvi Weinberg tells the story of a young man who approached his Rebbe prior to *Yom Kippur* to ask for his forgiveness, as is customary. "Rebbe, are you *mocheil* me?" The Rebbe answered with a twinkle in his eye, "סלחתי כדברך;" I forgive according to your words. If you are sincere in asking, then I forgive you; if your request is part of the pre-holiday routine you have been doing by rote for years, I'm not so interested. In the penitential *selichos*, we are asking - as the name implies - "*selichah*," forgiveness, from *Hashem*. We hope for the response *Hashem* gave *Moshe* when he *davened* for the Jewish people after the sin of the spies, "סלחתי כדברך," that all was forgiven. But as this rebbe so wittily told his student, we have to really be asking. We have to choose it and to want it, to work on ourselves so that we reach a level higher than the one at which we currently stand. Our souls should burn with the yearning for true life, closeness to G-d, and the forgiveness we seek.

So live a little. Live for real.

Based on R' Moshe Tzvi Weinberg's *Stollel Selichos* 5776 shiur (heard on yutorah.org) and R' Zev Leff's *Festivals of Life*.

What's in a Name?

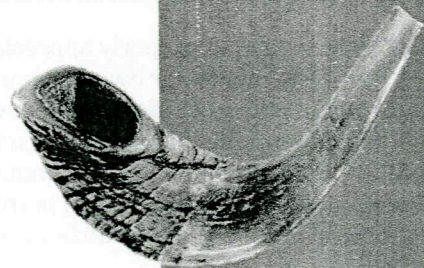
Elisheva Hay

The festival of *Rosh Hashanah* is mentioned twice in the *Chumash*, first in *Sefer Vayikra* and later in *Sefer Bamidbar*. Interestingly, the *chag* is not referred to in either case by the name *Rosh Hashanah*; instead it is referred to with the word "*teru'ah*," the sounding of the *shofar*. In *Sefer Vayikra*, the *chag* is described as "שבתון שבתון" (23:24) and in *Sefer Bamidbar* as "כל מלאכת עבודה לא תעשו יום" (29:1). It seems that *teru'ah* must be central to the purpose of the *chag*, but what makes it so? Who is the call of the *shofar* meant for, and what is its message? More importantly, what can the *teru'ah* teach us about the *avodah* of *Rosh Hashana*?

The word "*teru'ah*" is also found in *Parshat Behar*, next to the commandment of the laws of *shmittah* and *yovel*:

והעברת שופר תרועה בחדש השביעי בעשור לחדש... וקראתם דרוך לארץ לכל ירשביה... ושבתם איש אל אחוזתו ואיש אל משפחתו תשבו

You shall sound the shofar in the seventh month on the tenth day... and you shall proclaim freedom throughout the land for all its inhabitants... you shall return each man to his ancestral heritage and you shall return each man to his family. (*Vayikra* 25:9-10)



What is the connection between this *teru'ah*, which announces *yovel* (the Jubilee year), and the *teru'ah* of *Rosh Hashanah*?

Rav Hirsch comments that we learn from the above *passuk* that the *teru'ah* of the *yovel* is "a signal for the return of all men and possessions, out of strange and estranging attachments, back to the freedom and purpose originally destined for them by G-d." (Rav Hirsch on *Vayikra* 22:24). In the *yovel*, or Jubilee year, the land is returned to the original owners, slaves are freed from their indentures. Rav Hirsch explains that "... that which the תרועה של יובל means for the social, material relation of men and possessions, the תרועה של ראש השנה means for the spiritual relation of men to G-d" (ibid.) So, too, the *teru'ah* of *Rosh Hashanah* calls us to return our very selves to the purpose which for which *Hashem* originally designated us.

In conclusion, the *teru'ah* that we sound on *Rosh Hashanah* is a call to each and every Jew, a call for us to listen and do *teshuvah*. The call does not address us merely as wicked sinners who must repent to avoid punishment, but rather as individuals who, over the course of the year, have become a little estranged, a little bit removed from our original purpose. Perhaps we spent too much time looking in the mirror, or even pressing the snooze button one too many times, causing us to be late so that we rushed through an act of *chesed* and missed the chance to do it with a smile. *Teru'ah*, then, invites us to do *teshuvah*, in the literal sense of returning, and thus rededicate ourselves in the service of G-d.

“ Who is the call of the shofar meant for, and what is its message? ”

-Elisheva Hay

Got to Get that Goat

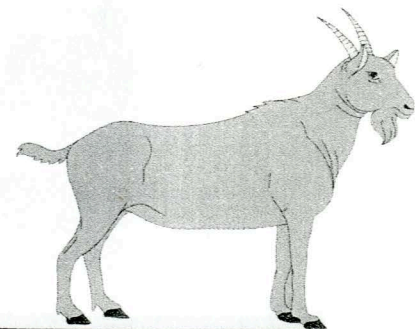
Chaya Tessler

In *Tehillim* 27, a chapter with many connections to the months of *Elul* and *Tishrei*, *David Hamelech* writes, "אם תקום עלי מלחמה, בזאת אני בוטח" - "If a war will come upon me, in this I trust." The same word is used in *Parshas Vayikra*, in the *pesukim* regarding the offering brought by the *kohen gadol* on *Yom Kippur*. "בזאת יבא אהרן אל הקדש" - "With this [the goat] shall *Aharon* enter the *Kodesh*". It is written in various commentaries that *David Hamelech* intentionally chose the word "בזאת" to equate this *passuk* in *Tehillim* with the one in *Vayikra*. One way to interpret *David's* words here is as follows: "If the *Satan* is against me in war, I trust in the *avodah* of *Yom Kippur* [to save me]."

“ This is an enigmatic and confusing sacrifice in which our *aveiros* are somehow transferred to a goat, which is then thrown off a cliff...What is the meaning of this *avodah*? ”

- Chaya Tessler

Additionally, one may notice that the *gematria* of "השטן" is 364 – one day less than a full year. *Chazal* tell us that the *Satan* has power all year, except for on one day – *Yom Kippur*. On *Yom Kippur*, each one of us is supposed to reach the level at which we too can say that we trust in the *avodah* of the day to help us win out in our fight against the *yetzer hara*. We are supposed to trust that on this day, we can gain forgiveness, atonement, and purity.



During the times of the *mishkan* and *Beis Hamikdash*, the *avodah* of the day was the sacrifice most commonly referred to as the *se'ir le'azazel*. This is an enigmatic and confusing sacrifice in which our *aveiros* are somehow transferred to a goat, which is then thrown off a cliff in order to get rid of these sins. What is the meaning of this *avodah*, and how can we connect it to the work we do on ourselves on *Yom Kippur* nowadays, to our personal fight against the *Satan*?

The Vilna Gaon gives a *mashal*: There was once a prince who was not as well behaved as his father would have preferred. The king's ministers, especially the envious prime minister, desperately hated the prince and were constantly on the lookout for opportunities to point out his faults. They badmouthed the prince so many times that, eventually, the king banished his son. The prime minister did not take this as a victory, for he knew that in order to finish the job, he had to keep the prince out of the kingdom for good. He did all that he could to cut off contact between the king and his son. The king understood what was happening and came up with a plan of his own. One day, he made a big hunting party, a huge event to which the entire kingdom was invited. It was such an exciting occasion that the prime minister forgot to worry about what would happen if the prince showed up. As the king had expected, the prince made his way back to the palace without interference. Once the prince met his father face to face, he inevitably yearned to reconnect and be reaccepted.

The hunting party represents the *se'ir le'azazel*, the goat which gets loaded with all our sins and toppled down a mountain. The prime minister is the *Satan*, who gets distracted by the goat, gloating and taking pleasure in all the *aveiros* he got us to do throughout the year. He is so caught up in his reveling that he doesn't realize that while he is busy counting his successes, we are taking advantage of his absence and doing something much more monumental than all our *aveiros* put together. We are reconnecting with our Father.

On *Yom Kippur*, all the *kochos hatumah* are limited. The barriers that block a person from *Hashem* all year do not have the same effect on that hallowed day as they do during the rest of the year. During the year, the sins we commit pollute our *neshamos* and make it difficult for us to feel the way we should, leading to more sins. On *Yom Kippur*, our souls are immersed in a spiritual *mikvah*. Every year, when we read about the *se'ir le'azazel*, the same process takes place; our souls are purified. It is not simply about forgiveness, but atonement and purity as well. On *Yom Kippur*, we should remember this and truly believe that *Hashem* is giving us the opportunity to regain our *kedushah* and connect to Him. With this in mind, may we have the strength to *daven* with a sense of purpose, the ability to truly experience the *avodah* of *Yom Kippur* and the opportunity to connect once more with our Father in Heaven.

“ Every year, when we read about the *se'ir le'azazel*, the same process takes place; our souls are purified. ”
- Chaya Tessler



~Touro Torah~

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