**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT HAAZINU -**

**ROSH HASHANA 5778**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

The Mabit, in his discussion of the status of a sinner’s repentance if he subsequently repeats the offense (*Beit Elokim* - *Sha’ar Ha-teshuva*, chapter 6), cites the Gemara’s ruling in Masekhet Yoma (86b) regarding confession on Yom Kippur for sins of prior years. According to the majority ruling among the *Tanna’im*, one should confess on Yom Kippur only for sins committed during the previous year. Assuming one had confessed his misdeeds of previous years during previous observances of Yom Kippur, he should not confess them again. The exception, however, is a sinner who confessed his sin last Yom Kippur but has since repeated the misdeed. In such a case, the individual must, indeed, confess even for the prior instances of the sin in question.

Seemingly, the Mabit observes, this ruling proves that repeating a sin after repentance retroactively renders the repentance meaningless. If the repetition of a sin requires one to repent anew for the past instances of that sin, we should, apparently, conclude that the initial repentance retroactively loses its value, as the individual repeated the offense and thus showed that his resolve to change was insincere or otherwise deficient.

The Mabit dismisses this argument, advancing a different explanation of the Gemara’s ruling. The Mabit writes that the Gemara requires repenting for the previous sin not because the repentance was retroactively deemed valueless, but rather to strengthen the individual’s resolve in the present. The Gemara instructs the sinner in this case to verbally recall his having earlier transgressed this violation and repented, so that he will make a greater effort than he had made before to avoid the sin in the future. Although his repentance was valid, as he genuinely regretted the sin and resolved to avoid it in the future, he clearly needs to work harder to improve, and *Halakha* thus requires him to reflect upon his entire history with this misdeed so he will recognize the need to invest greater effort this time.

A different approach is taken by Rav David Levanon, in his *Be-yerach Ha-eitanim* (pp. 47-48). He writes that if a penitent sinner repeats his offense after repenting, then he must repent for the initial sin because its recurrence may perhaps reflect a fundamental deficiency in his repentance. The recurrence does not prove that his repentance was not wholehearted and was thus valueless, but this possibility certainly exists. As such, he must repent again for the initial sinful act in case his repentance is retroactively deemed invalid.

Another explanation might be suggested by distinguishing between different levels of repentance. Rav Soloveitchik (*Al Ha-teshuva*, pp. 15-33) famously distinguished between “atonement” and “purity,” the former referring to a pardon, and the letter referring to the elimination of all effects of sin. The lower level of repentance achieves atonement, such that the penitent sinner escapes punishment for his wrongdoing, whereas the higher level achieves a state of purity, whereby the individual is cleansed of all adverse effects of his misdeed. Accordingly, we might suggest that if a person repented for his sin and then committed the act subsequently, although his repentance remains valid, and he had earned atonement, he clearly has failed to purify himself. The sin’s recurrence indicates that the individual has yet to rid himself of the sin’s effects, despite his having achieved atonement, and that he has not undergone the full transformation that the highest level of *teshuva* entails. Therefore, he must repent anew even for the initial violation, for which he had already earned atonement, in an effort to cleanse and purify himself from the sin’s adverse effects on his being.

Sunday

In our last several editions of S.A.L.T., we’ve examined the question as to whether one’s repentance for a sin retroactively loses its value if he then repeats the sin. One of the starkest examples of this phenomenon – the recurrence of sin after repentance – is Sefer Shoftim, where we find a disturbing pattern of sin, repentance, and the recurrence of sin. Sefer Shoftim tells of numerous occasions when God punished *Benei Yisrael* for their pagan worship by subjecting them to enemy rule or persecution, in response to which *Benei Yisrael* repented and cried to God for help. God accepted their prayers, and helped them defeat the enemy, but then, once peace and tranquility was restored, the people returned to their idol-worship. This process repeated itself several times over the course of this period, as told in great detail in Sefer Shoftim.

Rashi, in his commentary to the beginning of the sixth chapter of Sefer Shoftim, notes a subtle nuance in the formulation of this pattern. Generally, throughout Sefer Shoftim, *Benei Yisrael*’s return to pagan worship after defeating their enemy is described with the verb “*va-yosifu*,” which indicates that they resumed worshipping idols after a hiatus. However, in the beginning of chapter 6, after the account of *Benei Yisrael*’s miraculous victory over the Canaanites under the leadership of Devora and Barak, the verse says simply that *Benei Yisrael* worshipped idols, not that they “resumed” worshipping idols. Apparently, as Rashi observes, there is a difference between *Benei Yisrael*’s resumption of idolatry after the battle against the Canaanites and their resumption of idolatry after their other victories during this historical period. It seems that on the other occasions, *Benei Yisrael* picked up where they had left off before they turned to God for help, whereas in the time of Devora and Barak the people’s sins somehow began a new chapter of wrongdoing. To explain this distinction, Rashi writes that previously, “one sin accumulated over the other,” but after the victory over the Canaanites, *Benei Yisrael*’s record was cleared, and thus this sin began an entirely new accounting of sin. Rashi explains that the magnificent song of praise sung by *Benei Yisrael* after the triumph over the Canaanites (“*Shirat Devora*”) had the effect of erasing their record, such that their subsequent idol-worship began a new record of sin, whereas previously their resumption of idolatry added onto their previous account of wrongdoing.

The clear implication of Rashi’s comments is that throughout most of the story of Sefer Shoftim, *Benei Yisrael*’s repentance did not permanently erase their sins. When they resumed their worship of idols, their new wrongdoing was added onto their previous account of wrongdoing – presumably, because the recurrence of sin retroactively invalidated their repentance. The lone exception is the time of Devora and Barak, when *Benei Yisrael* reached a level of repentance that could not be retroactively invalidated by the resumption of sin.

Rashi’s comments must be examined in light of the theory advanced by the Mabit (*Beit Elokim* - *Sha’ar Ha-teshuva*, chapter 6), which we have examined over the last several days, claiming that the recurrence of sin does not retroactively invalidate repentance. Seemingly, Rashi disputes this position, and maintains that generally, a sin repeated after repentance indeed renders the repentance meaningless, such that the offender becomes once again culpable even for the earlier misdeeds. However, if this is the case, then we need to understand why an exception was made in the time of Devora and Barak. Apparently, Rashi maintains that lower-level repentance can be reversed through a recurrence of sin, whereas higher-level repentance cannot, but this distinction requires some clarification.

Tomorrow we will *iy”H* examine Rashi’s comments further.

Monday

Yesterday, we continued our discussion of the question of whether repeating a sin after repentance retroactively voids the repentance, by examining Rashi’s comments in Sefer Shoftim (6:1) in which he appears to distinguish in this regard between different kinds of repentance. Rashi writes that in most instances in Sefer Shoftim when *Benei Yisrael* repented in response to crisis, and then reverted to their sinful ways when the crisis ended, “one sin accumulated over the other.” This seems to mean that the previous sins, for which the people had repented, resurfaced, so-to-speak, as their resumption of their sinful ways negated the atonement yielded by their repentance. The exception, Rashi writes, was after *Benei Yisrael*’s triumph over the Canaanite king Yavin during the time of Devora and Barak. When they later resumed their idol-worship, Rashi writes, this began a new accounting of wrongdoing, as the song of praise sung after their victory had the effect of permanently erasing their sins. Rashi here clearly indicates a distinction between different kinds of repentance – one which becomes undone by a subsequent recurrence of the sin, and another which does not. How might we understand this distinction?

A possible answer, as suggested by Rav Yitzchak Sorotzkin (*Rinat Yitzchak – Shoftim*, p. 284-5), emerges from the Ran’s discussion in one of his published sermons (*Derashot Ha-Ran*, 9) regarding repentance in times of crisis. The Ran writes that as the Torah assures us in several contexts, God lovingly accepts our repentance even if it was triggered solely by a dire crisis, and He will respond by intervening to save us. However, the Torah emphasizes (see Devarim 4:29 and 30:2) that we earn this favorable response when we return “with all your heart and with all your soul.” The Ran explains this to mean that we undergo a genuine process of repentance such that even after the crisis is solved, we remain loyal and devout. If, however, we turn to God in repentance only so that He will intervene to save us from the pending crisis, without committing to permanently change our conduct, then our repentance will not be fully accepted. The Ran writes that even this low level of repentance will be effective in reducing the extent of suffering, but will not earn us complete protection from the threat.

This is likely Rashi’s intent in his discussion of the pattern described in Sefer Shoftim. In most instances, *Benei Yisrael*’s repentance was not fully sincere, as they turned to God only in the hope that He would rescue them from their oppressor, without intending to permanently remain devoted to His service. Their prayers were nevertheless accepted, but only to a limited extent. And once the people returned to pagan worship, they were now liable to punishment even for their previous misdeeds. In Devora’s time, however, the people repented sincerely, as expressed in the beautiful song sung to celebrate their triumph and publicly glorify the Name of God. This sincere repentance was not undone by their subsequent return to idolatry.

Accordingly, Rashi’s comments do not dispute the view of the Mabit (*Beit Elokim* - *Sha’ar Ha-teshuva*, chapter 6) that sincere repentance is valid and effective even if the sinner later repeats the sin. Rashi speaks of repentance which was not entirely sincere, which was triggered by a dire crisis and was focused solely on alleviating that crisis, without a genuine commitment to long-term change. This is far different from the case addressed by the Mabit, where the sinner truly repented but later succumbed to temptation.

Tuesday

The common custom is to sound one hundred *shofar* blasts on Rosh Hashanah, far more than is strictly required by *Halakha*. *Tosefot* (Rosh Hashanah 33b), citing the *Arukh*, explains this practice based on a tradition that the mother of Sisera, a Canaanite general who was killed after an unsuccessful battle against *Benei Yisrael*, wept one hundred times while waiting in vain for her son to return from war. In the song of praise sung by *Benei Yisrael* after defeating Sisera, they described how his mother sat distraught by the window, weeping, seeing that her son has not returned from the battlefield (Shoftim 5:28). According to the tradition cited by *Tosefot*, Sisera’s mother cried one hundred times, and we commemorate her crying by sounding one hundred *shofar* blasts on Rosh Hashanah.

The basis for the connection between Sisera’s mother and *shofar* blowing on Rosh Hashanah (as noted by the *Perisha*, O.C. 592) is the Gemara’s discussion (there in Masekhet Rosh Hashanah) regarding the nature of the *teru’a* sound. *Targum Onkelos* (Vayikra 23:24, Bamidbar 29:1) translates the word “*teru’a*” as “*yabava*,” and the Gemara establishes the meaning of this Aramaic word based on the aforementioned description of Sisera’s mother crying: “*va-teyabeiv*.” The word “*teru’a*,” the Gemara concludes, denotes crying, and thus the *teru’a* sound is one which resembles a wail of grief and fear. The *Arukh* explained that since Sisera’s mother’s wails are the basis for the requirement to produce a crying sound with the *shofar*, we commemorate her wails by sounding one hundred blasts, in commemoration of Sisera’s mother’s one hundred cries.

A different explanation appears in the *Sefer Ha-manhig* (*Hilkhot Rosh Hashanah*, 21). He cites a Midrashic source (*Midrash Tanchuma*, Emor 11)that women in labor generally wail one hundred times before the baby is delivered, and he thus suggests that the one hundred wails of the *shofar* commemorate the wailing of a woman during childbirth.

This theory is also advanced by the *Meshekh Chokhma* (Vayikra 23:24), who proceeds to suggest an explanation for the connection between Rosh Hashanah and childbirth. As the world and its inhabitants stand in judgment before God on this day, the *Meshekh Chokhma* writes, we are like a fetus during the tense period of labor, the process which will determine whether or not it will emerge safely into the world. On Rosh Hashanah, God is judging us to decide whether we will be “born” into a new year, or, Heaven forbid, we will not. And thus the *shofar* sounds, which express our feelings of fear and terror, are associated with the anxious period of labor, when the infant’s fate is being determined.

This association might also be understood as referring to the opportunity we are given on Rosh Hashanah to experience a “rebirth” in the form of repentance. This explanation is advanced by [Rav Pinchas Friedman](http://nebula.wsimg.com/51478c74b77be6a9304def82ad8c3f7f?AccessKeyId=A4ED24A1025F8CFF3BBB&disposition=0&alloworigin=1-), who cites in this context the comment of the Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni*, Tehillim 102) that speaks of those generations “which are like ‘dead’ in their actions, but they come and pray before You on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and You create them like a new creature.” As we stand trial on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, it is very likely that we are “like dead,” that we are undeserving of another year, but God mercifully grants us the opportunity to recreate ourselves, to be born anew, to turn ourselves into new people, so we may earn another year of life. Rosh Hashanah is associated with childbirth because this is the great privilege we are granted on this day – to be born anew, to enter the new year as an infant enters the world, with a perfectly clean slate and with endless potential, unhindered by our mistakes and failures of the past.

Significantly, this connection between Rosh Hashanah and childbirth is expressed through the sound of wailing and crying. This signifies, perhaps, that as in the case of childbirth, our recreation through repentance also entails a difficult, grueling process. Just as a pregnant woman does not expect to experience the elation of a new child without first enduring the painful process of labor, similarly, we cannot expect to experience the elation of rebirth, of self-recreation, without a difficult process. Change happens neither quickly nor easily. It requires a complex, taxing emotional process, a process of honest self-assessment, recognition of failure, shame and guilt, and a courageous commitment to change. The “wailing” sound of the *shofar*, according to the *Sefer Ha-manhig*, expresses the painful process of rebirth, of introspection and growth, the process that we must undergo in order to recreate ourselves so we can begin the new year as better people.

This analysis helps explain the complex, and often confusing, nature of the Rosh Hashanah experience. Rosh Hashanah features a number of seemingly conflicting themes, including elements of fear and angst, as well as elements of joy and festivity. Rosh Hashanah is a day of joyous celebration because we are given the opportunity to begin anew, to recreate ourselves, to start again. We celebrate the arrival of the new year just as we celebrate the arrival of a new baby, as we become like a newborn infant, entering the world with a clean slate and endless potential in front of us. However, this rebirth is achieved through a tense, difficult process of honest introspection and sincere repentance, through the tears of regret and of longing for improvement. It is through the grueling process represented by the wails of the *shofar* that we experience the special festivity of Rosh Hashanah, the unparalleled joy of rebirth and renewal.

Wednesday

The *musaf* prayer on Rosh Hashanah contains three special sections, each of which focuses on a different theme. *Malkhuyot* deals with God’s Kingship, and cites a series of Biblical verses that make reference to God’s status as King over the world. In *zikhronot*, we speak of how God keeps a precise accounting of all actions of all people, for which we are all judged. In the final section, *shofarot*, we recall the event of *Matan Torah*, the Revelation at Sinai, when the *shofar* was sounded, and we pray for the time of the future redemption, which will be heralded by the *shofar* sound.

The Gemara in Masekhet Rosh Hashanah (16a) famously explains the significance of these three blessings: “Recite before Me *malkhuyot*…in order for you to crown Me as King over you; *zikhronot* – so that your remembrance shall come before Me favorably; and with what – a *shofar*.” From this passage it appears that the purpose of reciting *zikhronot*, reflecting upon the fact that God remembers, and holds us accountable for, all our deeds, is so that He will remember us favorably on this day of judgment.

The question arises as to why this recitation should have such an effect. In *zikhronot*, we contemplate the reality of “remembrance” – that all our actions are remembered and we will be judged accordingly. This reality, of course, is true regardless of whether and how much we think about and discuss it. Why would the recitation of *zikhronot* make us worthier of a favorable judgment? If we are being judged on Rosh Hashanah for our actions during the previous year, why would the outcome be affected by our dwelling on this fact? (This question was posed already by the *Sefat Emet*.)

The answer might emerge from the famous comments of Rav Yosef Albo, in his *Sefer Ha-ikarim* (1:4), where he discusses his classification of the basic tenets of Jewish faith. Whereas the Rambam listed thirteen articles of faith, Rav Yosef Albo argued that the articles of faith could be reduced to three core beliefs: the existence of a Creator, accountability (reward and punishment), and Revelation (*Matan Torah*). These three articles of faith, Rav Albo explains, are embodied in the three special sections of the Rosh Hashanah *musaf* prayer service. *Malkhuyot* speaks of God as King by virtue of His having created and exerting complete control over the earth; *zikhronot* speaks of our accountability for our conduct; and *shofarot* speaks of God’s revelation to *Benei Yisrael* at Sinai. Accordingly, Rosh Hashanah is the time for contemplating the basic tenets of faith. As we celebrate the anniversary of the world’s creation, we remind ourselves that God created us to serve Him, and will reward us for our obedience and punish us for our disobedience. We thus recite the sections of the *musaf* prayer, proclaiming that God is Creator and King, who has given us laws and who rewards and punishes in accordance with our compliance with, or violation of, those laws.

Once we view *malkhuyot*, *zikhronot* and *shofarot* as declarations of the basic tenets of faith, we can perhaps understand the Gemara’s comment. God judges us mercifully if we celebrate His Kingship by sincerely reaffirming our loyalty to Him, if we spend our time on Rosh Hashanah, the day when His Kingship is renewed, contemplating His status as King and our status as His loyal subjects. As we begin the new year with this focus, reminding ourselves that we are here to faithfully serve our King, we earn His forgiveness and a favorable judgment, and will, hopefully, be given yet another year in which to continue striving and working to serve Him to the best of our capability.

Thursday

The Gemara in Masekhet Rosh Hashanah (16b) famously observes that we sound two sets of *shofar* blasts on Rosh Hashanah – both before and during the *musaf* prayer – even though one would suffice to fulfill the Torah obligation of *shofar* blowing. The reason for the extra blasts, the Gemara explains, is “in order to confuse *Satan*.” *Tosefot*, citing the *Arukh*, explain this to mean that *Satan* becomes frightened upon hearing the extra *shofar* sounds, worried that perhaps the extra sounds herald the onset of the Messianic Era. The final redemption will result in the permanent demise of *Satan*, and so it becomes frightened when it hears the additional *shofar* sounds which, in its mind, announce the arrival of *Mashiach*.

It has been suggested that underlying the Gemara’s comment, as understood by the *Arukh*, is a connection between the Rosh Hashanah observance and the onset of the Messianic Era. The Rosh Hashanah experience is intended, at least in part, to bring us closer to the experience of a redeemed, perfected world, a world without “*Satan*” in all its various manifestations.

The image of *Satan* represents evil in its different forms – including both human vices, as well as tragic events. What these share in common is the effect of causing us confusion and distorting our perception. Our natural vices and negative tendencies confuse our sense of right and wrong, making misconduct seem appealing and noble conduct appear undesirable. Tragedy and misfortune make the world seem harsh, hostile and chaotic, and world events seem haphazard and random. We must struggle to believe that our world is governed by an omnipotent, benevolent and just King, because all around us we see calamity and suffering. “*Satan*,” then, is the group of forces in the world that make religious belief and practice a difficult challenge. In the future, at the time of the final redemption, *Satan* will experience its final defeat, and will finally and permanently be eliminated. In a redeemed world, we will live with clarity. We long for the day when our natural instincts will no longer be at fierce odds with our rational sense of right and wrong, and when all events will be clearly recognizable as the handiwork of a kind, compassionate God. The eternal elimination of *Satan* in the Messianic Era refers to the eternal elimination of the confusion and misperception that makes religious life so challenging in an unredeemed world.

Rosh Hashanah is intended to bring us a step closer, if only a small step, to this clarity. Our reaffirmation of God’s Kingship on Rosh Hashanah is a firm rejection of “*Satan*,” of the distortions so often planted in our minds by our natural vices and by the seemingly random events we see and experience. With both joy and trepidation, we celebrate the renewal of the Almighty’s Kingdom and reassert our unwavering loyalty to His rule. This restatement of loyalty moves us just slightly closer to the time of our final redemption, when confusion will once and for all be eliminated, and we will see with perfect clarity that God is the true King over the universe.

Friday

The Gemara in Masekhet Eiruvin (53b) cites the comment of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya that there were three times when he was “defeated” in the sense of being unable to defend himself against criticism. On these three occasions, somebody pointed out something wrong in his conduct, and he had no response. On one occasion, Rabbi Yehoshua told, the person who criticized him was a young girl; on another it was a young boy; and on another it was a woman who had hosted him for several days. We may reasonably assume that this woman was an innkeeper, or somebody from a distant community who hosted Rabbi Yehoshua when he traveled.

On one level, this account teaches us of the need to humbly accept criticism from anybody and from anywhere. Rabbi Yehoshua draws our attention to the fact that although he consistently held his own while debating complex, intricate halakhic topics in the study hall with the leading scholars of his time, young children and a simple innkeeper succeeded in putting him in his place. Every person we meet, young or old, has something for us to learn from, and we must be openminded and humble enough to accept guidance and even uncomfortable criticism from anybody who offers it.

However, there might also be another lesson to learn from Rabbi Yehoshua’s stories. It is perhaps no coincidence that all three of these people who succeeded in “defeating” him were people who were unaware of his stature of greatness. Two were young children, and the third was, presumably, a woman from a distant community. Rabbi Yehoshua’s peers, as well as those who lived in his surroundings and within his sphere of influence, and who thus acknowledged his stature as a towering Torah sage, would not likely have pointed out his mistakes. If they saw something he did that appeared wrong, they would have either given him the benefit of the doubt and figured that they misunderstood, or, out of respect for the rabbi, simply remained silent. The three people who criticized him did so precisely because they did not recognize his greatness and therefore did not treat him with such reverence that they shied away from offering criticism.

Rabbi Yehoshua thus teaches that respect often gets in the way of recognizing our faults and failings. As we embark upon the process of introspection and self-assessment, in search for the areas of our conduct that require improvement, we must view ourselves without the bias of reverence. We need to study our conduct and our beings the way those young, free-spirited children evaluated Rabbi Yehoshua – with simple honesty, without preconceived notions or perceptions of stature. Certainly, we need to view ourselves with a certain basic level of self-respect, or else we would not even care to embark on the process of self-improvement. At the same time, however, we cannot approach this process from a perspective of self-reverence, holding ourselves in high esteem such that we intuitively give ourselves the benefit of the doubt. We need to study ourselves with sheer objectivity, honestly trying to determine where we act properly and where we act wrongly. It is only with this kind of youthful brazenness towards ourselves that we can hope to identify our shortcomings and work to correct them.

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