



***Authentic Kabbalah - Sephardic Studies
Benei Noah Studies - Anti-Missionary/Anti-Cult Materials***

Shabat Shuva Insights Haftarah, Kabbalah, Halakha

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The Haftarah of Shharit Yom Kippur

***"Is such the fast that I have chosen?
A day for a man to afflict his soul?
Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush and lie down on sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast acceptable to HaShem?"
(Is. 58:5)***

***"These external acts [of the Yom Kippur fast] are only for the purpose of arousing the heart. These acts serve as only shells (klipot) for what should be in them, which is the sincere intent (kavanot). The [intent] is the soul and spirit of these acts. Without the [intent] these acts [of Yom Kippur observance] are mere corpses of the dead."
(Malbim, Hazon Yishayahu Commentary, Beir Halnyan 58:5,
Mikra'ot Gedolot Yishyahu 229a, page 457).***

Yom Kippur is the day when our prayers are the longest and should be the most intense. This is our annual chance to get our lives straight before G-d. Unfortunately, not everyone takes this opportunity seriously. Some people are just too shallow to fathom the serious importance of this day.

Instead of making Kippur a day of significant teshuva (repentance), some congregational leaders choose instead to make a show of the prayer services. Aspects of this disgusting behavior, unfortunately, have infected many of our communities. I will provide two examples.

From year to year, I see operatic Hazanim (public readers) specially hired just to recite the High Holiday services. They sing the prayers with such impressive melodious voices. Many of them could easily be professional opera singers.

As for me, whenever I see a minyan that has such a Hazan, I go and pray in another. I do not go to Synagogue on Yom Kippur to be entertained by an operatic Hazan. I do not believe G-d hears my prayers better, nor is He more inclined to answer them because the ceremony is beautiful enough to be considered a professional performance. Indeed, such external shows are loathsome in my eyes. Yet, congregation after congregation will pay thousands of dollars (sometimes tens of thousands) to have these opera star Hazans come perform for them. I wonder if G-d is as impressed with them as they are with themselves?

Another type of Hazan that I loathe is the melodramatic actor. As known there are a number of confessional prayers recited on Yom Kippur in each of the five services. During each of them, we recite a confession of a list of sins.

When certain Hazans begin to read these confessionals all of a sudden, as if on cue, their eyes swell up with tears and their voices choke over pronouncing the words. Their mediocre reading of prayers is all of a sudden transformed into a dramatic performance! It should only be that such intense dramatic public readings of the prayers be truly sincere. If only everyone was so sincerely sorry for their sins, as the actors make it appear, maybe Mashiah would have come by now.

Yet, there is a price to pay for such drama. It takes these Hazan actors five times as long to finish the prayers as it would if they only prayed normally. By the times they are finished, many in the congregation are ready for a nap as opposed to desiring to finish praying. Instead of arousing the congregations to teshuva, these Hazan actors drive people's hearts away.

The fact that these actors cry and wail does not bother me so much as how they pray in between the confessionals. In these others parts of the service their eyes dry up as fast as they got wet. Their voices instantly become strong instead of weeping and broken. They then race through the service as if there were a prize for the first one to finish.

Worse than this, they turn on their tears in a moment during the confessional then turn them off and run through the rest of the prayers immediately thereafter. In and out of crying they go, right on cue, just like an act. What a performance! I wonder if HaShem and the Watcher angels applaud these Hazan actors as the Hazans and those who hire them would have us do?

Here we are on the most important day of the year and most of us in Synagogue are subject to a dramatic show instead of a real and sincere call to change our behavior, our personalities, and our selves. Instead of a sincere call for us to regret what we have done, and to change our course in life, we put on a show of remorse, reflected by the hypocrisy of our Hazans. It is this type of hypocrisy that HaShem spoke about to the

prophet Isaiah thousands of years ago in the verse quoted above. How little have things changed!

Thank G-d not all Synagogues are like the ones I have described above. Many indeed have the regular Rabbi or even laymen of the congregation take turns, each reading a portion of the services. This way no one man puts on a performance anymore than anyone else. Everyone contributes together. I cannot think of a better way to solicit Divine forgiveness for our sins that our working together in sincere cooperation.

Kabbalah

***"And He said, pave the way, clear the path,
remove the stumbling-block from the path of my people."
(Is. 57:14)***

It is interesting to note that the Haftarah for Yom Kippur morning conceals within it a number of subtle messages. This one pasuk (verse) will suffice us to reveal just a little bit. Hidden within the gematrias of the original Hebrew words are numerical messages that hint to the deeper concepts involved.

"V'Amar (247) Solu (96) Solu (96) Panu (136) Derekh (224)" (And He said, pave the way, clear the path...).

The word V'Amar is numerically equal to 247. If we add the value of 1 (for the word itself) we have the numerical value of the words Rahem (mercy) and Avraham (both = 248).

The word Solu (pave) is numerically equal to 96. This number is also the value of the holy Name El Adonai, the Name that rules over the physical universe (Olam HaAsiyah).

The words Panu (clear) and Derekh (the way) together numerically equal 360. This is the value of the term Shas (Shin, Samekh), which is another name used for the Babylonian Talmud.

These four words alone conceal within them the secret meaning of what is necessary to pave the way and clear the path. The following is a Kabbalistic explanation.

This physical world of ours is referred to by the Kabbalists as Asiyah, the world of Doing. Our standard laws of physics apply here primarily, even over spiritual law. Asiyah is the realm of the most severe limitations. The way to expand Asiyatic limitations and thus rectify this realm is to perform holy physical acts as ordained by G-d in His Torah. This is why the Torah gave us commandments specifically to perform and not just concepts to think about or believe in. Without the doing, our physical realm remains a primitive and harsh place. Yet, once we work hard to transform our world, we can turn it into a paradise.

Due to the severe restrictions placed upon us by the laws of physics, there is not much room for mistakes. For example, we are familiar with the law of gravity. We all know what would happen if we stepped outside a window. We would fall. The law of gravity is pretty strict about this. We cannot think of too many examples wherein which the law of gravity can be broken. What we can discover, however, is the nature of gravity and how it works. With this knowledge, we can develop a technology that instead of breaking the law uses natural forces to circumvent it. In this way, we can transform our physical world to make it an ever more so comfortable place in which we can devote our time to higher causes, such as the pursuit of G-d.

A psychology of harshness and limitations can never release us from our self-imposed prisons. We need an aspect of high spirituality to do this. This aspect is Divine mercy. Mercy is an attitude that must manifest as action. It is patient, understanding, and forgiving. When we approach our world with these attitudes we accomplish a whole lot more than without them.

While we must respect the boundaries imposed upon us by the laws of Divinely ordained nature; we still must interact with our world with the concept of mercy. Lacking the integration of the concept of Divine mercy into our everyday lives, we will destroy ourselves.

The Torah was given us to teach us matters about conduct. By following proper conduct, we transform our minds and thus our lives. In order to accomplish this in a practical manner, our holy Sages developed the Talmud (Shas). In this sacred set of literature are to be found teachings and wise instruction for all occasions.

The Talmud explains the Torah to us, not verse by verse like a commentary, but rather by example. More than any other book, including the Zohar, the Talmud is the greatest of Kabbalistic texts. The legal arguments of our Sages along with their stories and history all conceal within them the most profound secrets of how our universe operates. Only one who studies and then applies the lessons of the Talmud truly assists G-d in repairing His world.

When this pasuk from the Haftarah is understood according to this Kabbalistic insight we learn that in order to pave the way, meaning to correct the imperfections of our physical world, we must act with the characteristic of mercy, one towards another. How this is accomplished is taught us in the Talmud (Shas).

This behavior is called "preparing the way." For when we act with proper behavior one towards another, we hasten the coming of a greater, new world. Moreover, who is responsible to do these things? The answer is the tribes of Ya'akov (the Jewish people and those Righteous Gentiles who assist them to perform their duty). The name Ya'akov has the numerically value of 188 (with the Vav). Add to this the number of letters and we have 193. The words Salu Salu in the pasuk in question together equal 192, with one as the kollel, they equal 193.

The name Ya'akov as described in double the value of 96, the Name ruling over Asiyah, El Adonai. This is no coincidence. The role of Ya'akov (the Jewish people) is to rectify the world of Asiyah in two distinct manners. One is the outer rectification of action. The second is the inner rectification of intent. In other words, in order for one to do the right thing, one must first thing in the right way.

In order to help us think clearly and to know right from wrong, we have the Shas. Everything so neatly fits together. All we need to do is open our eyes and see. When we do, we will be ever thankful to our Creator and give praise to his holy Name. Barukh Hu U'Barukh Shmo.

Halakha & Musar

Yom Kippur as we know is the Day of Atonement. On this day G-d forgives our sins and most importantly removes from us the punishments due us for committing them. However, a point made very clear by our Sages is that Yom Kippur only atones for those sins that a person has committed against G-d alone. If one commits a sin against another person, one IS NOT forgiven unless certain things first are done.

RaMBaM outlines in his Hilkhot Teshuva that merely asking forgiveness from a person you have wronged in not enough to obtain atonement from G-d. In order for one to be truly forgiven for one's sin against another one must first confess to the wronged person in detail what was the nature of your sin against him/her. This is called vidui. It is not enough that you confess to G-d how you wronged another, you must confess to the person him/herself.

After one has made a full verbal confession to the face of the person one has wronged, one must be truly remorseful for one's actions. This is called Harata. One cannot say or believe deep down that at the time the sinful actions one committed were right. One must truly feel deep within one's heart that what was done was very, very wrong.

Even, with Vidui and Harata, there is still one final step to forgiveness. This step is the most important. This is called tikkun. One must make amends and fix or compensate the wronged person in accordance to how much damage was caused by your wrong actions. This might have to be a financial compensation if the wronged party suffered financial loss because of what was wrongly done to him/her.

Let me state this very clearly – unless one does Vidui, Harata, and Tikun, there is no atonement for sins between people. Therefore, unless, one does teshuva the right way, Yom Kippur will pass over that person with no positive benefit.

There is a common practice today that before Yom Kippur one simply asks others for forgive him/her for whatever sins they might have committed against them during the last year. While this tradition is nice and politically correct, it does nothing to help the individual who has truly done things to harm other people.

I personally know and have seen all too many type of people, religious and not, who act like completely wicked people during the year. They intentionally harm others, and justify their behavior by saying they are doing what is best. The religious sinners are the worst in that they seek to justify their behavior by saying they are doing G-d's work. There are actually disgusting individuals out there (Rabbis included) who perform the most perverse acts of immorality and attempting to justify their behavior by saying that they are acting in accordance to Halakha.

Do not go through the rote observance of Yom Kippur, proud of your meticulous observance, all the while not repenting of the serious sins you have done and continue to do. Do not hide under your kippah or black hat and proclaim in your heart how righteous you are. G-d knows the heart and judges us by our insides not by our external performances. If you want to continue calling yourself religious then you had better start observing the religion G-d's way.

When you act arrogantly towards another and cause him/her harm by your actions or by your words, you had better make amends. For if you do not, what you did to another G-d Himself will do to you (ref. Sefer Ba'al Shem Tov). That is a heavy judgment for one to have over his/her head. Nonetheless, it is only there if we ourselves place it there.

RaMBaM clearly outlines for us what it means to repent. Unless we have done these things, before we recite the long confessional prayers on Yom Kippur, our prayers are hypocritical before G-d. He will not bless us nor will He forgive us all the while that we lie to Him and to ourselves. This is not true because I say so, but because G-d has said so centuries ago to His prophets in the TaNaKh. Read the TaNaKh and see for yourselves. G-d is forgiving, but so must we be forgiving.

It behooves us all to look at ourselves and acknowledge our shortcomings, what we have done wrong to others, and work hard to make right what we have made wrong!

Shana Tovah and Gamar Hatimah Tovah!