

Alyth YOM KIPPUR IN THE TORAH:

Leviticus 16

²⁹And this shall be to you a law for all time: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall practice self-denial; and you shall do no manner of work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you. ³⁰For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; you shall be clean before the LORD. ³¹It shall be a sabbath of complete rest for you, and you shall practice self-denial; it is a law for all time. ³²The priest who

²⁹וְהָיְתָה לָכֶם לְחֻקַּת עוֹלָם בַּחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי בַּעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ תַּעֲנּוּ אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם וְכָל-מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ הָאֲזִיחַ וְהָגֵר הַגֵּר בְּתוֹכְכֶם: ³⁰כִּי-בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהָר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטָּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תִּטְהָר: ³¹שַׁבַּת שְׁבִתוֹן הִיא לָכֶם וְעֲנִיתֶם אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם חֻקַּת עוֹלָם:

Leviticus 23

²⁶The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ²⁷Mark, the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. It shall be a sacred occasion for you: you shall practice self-denial, and you shall bring an offering by fire to the LORD; ²⁸you shall do no work throughout that day. For it is a Day of Atonement, on which expiation is made on your behalf before the LORD your God. ²⁹Indeed, any person who does not practice self-denial throughout that day shall be cut off from his kin; ³⁰and whoever does any work throughout that day, I will cause that person to perish from among his people. ³¹Do no work whatever; it is a law for all time, throughout the ages in all your settlements. ³²It shall be a sabbath of complete rest for you, and you shall practice self-denial; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall observe this your sabbath.

²⁶וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ²⁷אֵךְ בַּעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים הוּא מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יְהִיגָה לָכֶם וְעֲנִיתֶם אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם אֵשָׁה לַיהוָה: ²⁸וְכָל-מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי יוֹם כִּפּוּרִים הוּא לְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם: ²⁹כִּי כָל-הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תַעֲנֶה בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְנִכְרְתָה מֵעַמִּיהָ: ³⁰וְכָל-הַנֶּפֶשׁ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּלִמְלָאכָה בַּעֲצֵם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְהִאֲבַדְתִּי אֶת-הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִוא מִקֶּרֶב עַמִּיהָ: ³¹כָּל-מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ חֻקַּת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם בְּכָל מְשַׁבְּתֵיכֶם: ³²שַׁבַּת שְׁבִתוֹן הִוא לָכֶם וְעֲנִיתֶם אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם בַּחֹדֶשׁ בְּעֶרֶב מֵעֶרֶב עַד-עֶרֶב תִּשְׁבֹּתוּ שַׁבְּתֵיכֶם: פ

Numbers 29

⁷On the tenth day of the same seventh month you shall observe a sacred occasion when you shall practice self-denial. You shall do no work.

⁷וּבַעֲשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי הַזֶּה מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ יְהִיגָה לָכֶם וְעֲנִיתֶם אֶת-נַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם כָּל-מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ: ⁸וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם עֹלָה

AND IN THE MISHNAH (Yoma 8:1):

On the Day of Atonement it is prohibited to eat and to drink, to wash, to anoint, to wear shoes, and to have sexual intercourse.

A king and a bride may wash their faces; and a new mother may wear shoes. Such is the decree of R. Eleazar. But the sages forbid it.

Whoever eats food to the size of a large date - that is, the date with the kernel - or drinks a mouthful, is guilty.

All food is combined together to the size of the date, and all liquids to the mouthful; but food and beverages are not combined together.

Fasting

On the day of atonement it is forbidden to eat, to drink, to wash, to anoint oneself, to put on sandals, or to have marital relations.

MISHNAH YOMA 8: 1

COMMENT

From very early times, prayers of petition have been accompanied with fasting. Instinctively people have felt that to pray alone is not enough. Fasting made the prayers say more. The messages that fasting naturally suggests to us are many. On a basic level, it allows us to feel that we are not asking for something for free. We are also willing to give of ourselves, and there is nothing more fundamental that we can give than what we see as our basic right to eat and drink. On a deeper level, it is a reminder of how dependent we are on God's gifts, that even for our most basic needs we are always no more than one step away from the grave, and that even if deprived of them for a short time our lives become untenable.

On another level, fasting focuses our attention on ourselves. It reminds us of our vulnerability. By appearing small before God, by being vulnerable, we hope to arouse his compassion. We wish to remind him that we are but flesh and blood, and remain forever in his hands. Thus we hope that he will take our smallness into account, and disregard our transgressions much as a

parent is constantly making allowances for her child.

However, as effective a tool as fasting is in enhancing prayer, there are also inherent risks as there are risks in any religious activity. The real danger is seeing fasting as an end in itself, as something worth pursuing for its own sake. Fasting is a tool, an aid, just as prayer itself is only a means to achieve the 'real' religious aims. There is a danger that people will not move beyond this tool, will dedicate their lives to excessive fasting, to constant prayer, without taking its lessons and applying them to everyday life. There is the danger that, once we feel we have payed the price, God's forgiveness is seen as automatic, as deserved and acquired. The haftarah on Yom Kippur reminds us: it is not fasting that God requires, it is caring for the needy, feeding the hungry and clothing the poor. It is by emulating those qualities in God for which we beseech when we fast that ultimately we make ourselves worthy of God's blessings and forgiveness. If fasting does not lead to this, then it becomes no more than an empty exercise.

CHAIM WEINER

Is not this rather the fast that I have chosen? To loose the chains of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring the poor, who are cast out, to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you hide not yourself from your own flesh?

ISAIAH 58: 6-7

TAKEN FROM "YAMIM NORAIM: A HIGH HOLY DAY
COMPARISON"

Repentance

SOURCES

Return, O Israel, unto the Lord your God; for you have stumbled in your iniquity. Take with you words, and return to the Lord. Say unto him: 'Forgive all iniquity and accept that which is good.

HOSEA 14: 2-3

Of what does repentance consist? That the sinner abandon their sin, remove it from their thought and resolve in their heart not to do it again, as it is said: 'Let the wicked forsake their way.' One should regret the fact that one transgressed, as it is said: 'For after I had returned I was sorry.' One should make God who knows all hidden things one's witness that one will never again return to this sin, as it is said: 'We will no more say "our gods" of the works of our hands.' One must confess verbally, stating those matters which one has resolved in one's heart. MAIMONIDES: LAWS OF REPENTANCE 2: 2

Rabbi Zusya of Hanipol said: There are five verses in the Bible which constitute the essence of Judaism. They begin in Hebrew with one of these letters: 'Tav, Shin, Vav, Beth, Heh', which comprise the Hebrew word for Repentance: 'Teshuvah'.

Tav: You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God.

DEUTERONOMY 10: 10

Shin: I keep the Lord before me always.

PSALM 16: 8

Vav: You shall love your neighbour as you love yourself.

LEVITICUS 19: 18

Beth: In all your ways acknowledge Him.

PROVERBS 3: 6

Heh: To walk humbly with your God.

MICAH 6: 8

Therefore, resolve to act accordingly so that your repentance may be sincere.

HASSIDIC

With everlasting kindness will I have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer . . . For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall My covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you.

ISAIAH 54: 8-10

Alyth U'NETANEH TOKEF

Let us acknowledge the powerful holiness of this day
For it is awesome and terrible
And on it your sovereignty shall be exalted
Your throne established in loving mercy.
You reign upon it in truth.

In truth: You are the judge,
The prosecutor, the all-knowing the witness,
The author and the sealer,
The scribe and the recounter.
You remember everything that has been forgotten
You open the book of remembrance
And from it proclaim
And the seal of every person is there.

The great shofar is sounded,
A still small voice is heard.
The angels are dismayed,
They are dazed by fear and trembling
As they proclaim: Behold the Day of Judgment!
For all the hosts of heaven are brought for judgment.
They shall not be guiltless in Your eyes

And all creatures shall parade before You like sheep.
As a shepherd herds his flock,
Causing the sheep to pass beneath the staff,
So too do You cause to pass, count and record,
Reviewing the souls of all living
Decreeing the length of their days,
Inscribing their judgment,

On Rosh Hashanah it is written down,
And on Yom Kippur it is sealed.

וְנִתְּנָה תִּקְוַת קִדְּשֵׁת הַיּוֹם, כִּי הוּא
נוֹרָא וְאִיּוֹם:
וְבוֹ תִּנְשָׂא מַלְכוּתְךָ, וְיִכּוֹן בְּחֶסֶד
כְּסָאֲךָ,
וְתִשָּׁב עָלָיו בְּאֱמֶת.

אֱמֶת כִּי אַתָּה הוּא דִּין וּמוֹכִיחַ,
יּוֹדֵעַ וְעֹד,
וְכוֹתֵב וְחוֹתֵם,
וְסוֹפֵר וּמוֹנֶה,
וְתִזְכּוֹר כָּל הַנִּשְׁכָּחוֹת:
וְתִפְתַּח אֶת סֵפֶר הַזְּכוֹנוֹת,
וּמֵאֲלֵיו יִקְרָא,
וְחוֹתֵם יָד כָּל אָדָם בּוֹ.

וּבְשׁוֹפָר גָּדוֹל יִתְקַע, וְקוֹל דְּמָמָה
דְּקָה יִשְׁמַע: וּמִלְאָכִים יִחַפְּזוּן,
וְחִיל וְרַעְדָּה יֵאֲחִזּוּן,
וְיֵאמְרוּ הִנֵּה יוֹם הַדִּין,
לִפְקוֹד עַל צֶבֶא מְרוֹם בְּדִין,
כִּי לֹא יִזְכּוּ בְּעֵינֶיךָ בְּדִין.

וְכָל בָּאֵי עוֹלָם יַעֲבִירוּ לְפָנֶיךָ כְּבָנֵי
מְרוֹן.
כְּבָקָרִית רוּעָה עֹדְרוֹ, מַעֲבִיר צֹאנוֹ
תַּחַת שִׁבְטוֹ,
כֹּן תַּעֲבִיר וְתִסְפּוֹר וְתִמְנֶה,
וְתִפְקֹד נֶפֶשׁ כָּל חַי,
וְתַחְתּוֹךְ קֶצֶבָה לְכָל בְּרִיָּה,
וְתַכְתּוֹב אֶת גְּזֵר דֵּינָם.

בְּרֹאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה יִכָּתְבוּן,
וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כְּפוּר יִחְתָּמוּן

How many shall pass away and how many shall be born,
Who shall live and who shall die,
Who shall reach the natural end and who shall not,
Who shall perish by water and who by fire,
Who by sword and who by wild beast,
Who by famine and who by thirst,
Who by earthquake and who by plague,
Who by strangulation and who by stoning
Who shall have rest and who shall wander,
Who shall be at peace and who shall be pursued,
Who shall be at rest and who shall be tormented,
Who shall be exalted and who shall be brought low,
Who shall be rich and who shall be impoverished

But repentance, prayer and righteousness avert the severe decree.

For Your praise is in accordance with Your name.
You are difficult to anger and easy to appease.
For You do not desire the death of the condemned,
But that they shall turn from their path and live.
Until the day of their death You wait for them,
Should they turn You will receive them at once.
In truth You are their Creator
And You understand their nature
For they are but flesh and blood.

Their origin is dust
Their end is dust.
They gather food with their lives,
They are like shattered pottery,
Like withered grass, like a faded flower,
Like a passing shadow, like a vanishing cloud,
Like a breeze that blows away, like dust that scatters,
Like a dream that flies away.

כַּמָּה יַעֲבִירוּ, וְכַמָּה יִבְרָאוּן:
מִי יֵחִיָּהּ, וּמִי יָמוּת:
מִי בִקְצוֹ, וּמִי לֹא בִקְצוֹ:
מִי בָאֵשׁ, וּמִי בַמַּיִם:
מִי בַחֶרֶב, וּמִי בַחֲתִיָּה:
מִי בָרָעַב, וּמִי בַצָּמָא:
מִי בָרָעַשׁ, וּמִי בַמַּגֵּפָה:
מִי בַחֲנִיקָה, וּמִי בַסְּקִילָה:
מִי יָנוּחַ, וּמִי יִנּוּעַ:
מִי יִשְׁקֹט, וּמִי יִטְרֹף:
מִי יִשָּׁלוּ, וּמִי יִתִּיסָר:
מִי יַעֲנִי, וּמִי יַעֲשֶׂר:
מִי יִשְׁפֹּל, וּמִי יִרוּם.

וּתְשׁוּבָה וּתְפִלָּה וְצַדִּיקָה
מַעֲבִירוּ אֶת רֹעַ הַגְּזֵרָה.

כִּי כְשִׁמְךָ כֵּן תִּהְלֶתְךָ,
קָשָׁה לִכְעוֹס וְנוֹחַ לְרַצּוֹת:
כִּי לֹא תַחְפוֹץ בְּמוֹת הַמֵּת, כִּי אִם
בְּשׁוּבוֹ מִדַּרְכּוֹ וְחַיָּה.
וְעַד יוֹם מוֹתוֹ תַּחֲכֶּה לוֹ,
אִם יָשׁוּב מִיַּד תִּקְבְּלוּ.
אָמֵת כִּי אֶתָּה הוּא יוֹצֵרָם, וְאַתָּה
יוֹדֵעַ יִצְרָם,
כִּי הֵם בָּשָׂר וְדָם.

אָדָם יִסּוּדוֹ מֵעָפָר וְסוּפוֹ לְעָפָר:
בְּנִפְשׁוֹ יָבִיא לַחֲמוֹ:
מְשׁוּל כְּחֶרֶס הַנִּשְׁבֵּר,
כְּחֹצִיר יֵבֶשׁ, וְכֹצִיץ נוֹבֵל,
כְּצֶל עוֹבֵר, וְכַעֲנַן כָּלָה,
וְכָרוּחַ נוֹשֶׁבֶת, וְכַאֲבָק פּוֹרֵחַ,
וְכַחֲלוֹם יַעוּף.

But You are King,
God who lives for all eternity!
There is no limit to Your years,
No end to the length of Your days,
No measure to the hosts of Your glory,
No limit to the eternity of Your Name.
Your Name is fitting to You
And You are fitting to it,
And our name has been called by Your Name.

וְאַתָּה הוּא מֶלֶךְ אֵל חַי וְקַיִם.
אִין קֶצֶבָה לְשָׁנוֹתֶךָ, וְאִין קֶץ
לְאַרְךְ יָמֶיךָ:
וְאִין לְשַׁעַר מְרֻכָּבוֹת כְּבוֹדֶךָ,
וְאִין לְפָרֵשׁ עֲלוֹם שְׁמֶךָ:
שְׁמֶךָ נֶאֱדָה לְךָ וְאַתָּה נֶאֱדָה לְשְׁמֶךָ,
וּשְׁמֵנוּ קָרָאתָ בְּשְׁמֶךָ.

Act for the sake of Your Name
And sanctify Your Name
Through those who declare the sanctity of Your
Name.

עֲשֵׂה לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ, וְקִדַּשׁ אֶת שְׁמֶךָ
עַל מְקַדִּישֵׁי שְׁמֶךָ,

For the glory of Your name, honoured and sanctified,
Like the utterances of holy seraphim, who sanctify
Your name with 'holy'
Inhabitants above with inhabitants below:

בְּעֲבוּר כְּבוֹד שְׁמֶךָ הַנִּעְרָץ
וְהַנְּקֻדָּשׁ,
כְּסוּד שִׁיחַ שְׂרָפֵי קֹדֶשׁ,
הַמְּקַדִּישִׁים שְׁמֶךָ בְּקֹדֶשׁ,
דְּרֵי מַעְלָה עִם דְּרֵי מַטָּה
כֹּכָבוֹב עַל יַד נְבִיאָךְ: וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל
זֶה וְאָמַר:

As is written by the hand of the prophet:
And they called one to the other and said...

THE PROBLEM OF UN'TANEH TOKEF

Some years ago, during the morning service of Rosh Hashanah, I was conscious of a pretty eleven-year-old girl sitting near the front of the sanctuary. Her mother, who had not yet reached her fortieth birthday, was in the hospital dying of cancer. There was at this point no realistic hope for a remission (She actually died just a week later; the funeral service was held on the morning preceding Yom Kippur). I had spent a considerable amount of time with this woman; she had been very much in my thoughts during the previous few months. But now I was thinking about the daughter. How would she respond when the inevitable occurred?

I had always been moved by the power of the U-netaneh toqef liturgy; but this year, with the child sitting in front of me, I found it difficult to say the words, "U-teshuvah u-tefilah u-tsedakah ma'avirin et ro'a ha-gezeirah." Max Arzt wrote in his commentary on the liturgy for the Days of Awe, "The prayer reaches its climax when it assures us that it is within man's power to annul an evil decree." Did this mean that it was within the power of that child, or her mother, to arrest the cancer through penitence, prayer, and charity? Would the mother's untimely death after an agonizing struggle prove that she and the members of her family had not engaged sufficiently in penitence, prayer, and charity, and that they were therefore at least partly responsible for the consequences? I was quite certain that I did not want the girl to leave the synagogue with such a message. But was that what the liturgy truly meant?

Rabbi Marc Saperstein

While there is a certain grandeur about the meditation and while its popularity has been attested to throughout the ages it cannot be denied that if taken too literally the hymn can be offensive to modern tastes. Particularly the suggestion of repentance, prayer and charity as means of averting the divine threat of a horrible death 'by fire, by water, by the sword, by wild beasts, by earthquake, by plague, by strangling and by stoning' is hardly likely to prove the best incentive to the living of the good life. The problem of pain, the mystery of why the good God allows evil to exist, is one that has exercised the minds of the greatest religious thinkers. Various solutions have been offered but when all is said we have to confess defeat. We have to recognise that we are in the presence of the unfathomable, that the finite mind of man cannot hope to penetrate the secrets of the Infinite. But our faith insists on the belief in the goodness of God.

Rabbi Louis Jacobs

'Repentance, prayer and tsedakah avert the evil decree.'

That is what the text says, but is it true? All of us know examples of people who have repented, who have prayed, and who have done acts of tsedakah, and yet have suffered. How then can we say these words?

It was Rabbi Nehemiah Nobel, the rabbi of Franz Rosenzweig, who explained the meaning of this line. He said: Notice that it does not say that these things ma'avirin et hegezerah hara-ah, which means 'avert the evil decree'.

What it says is that they avert the roa of the gezerah, that they avert the evil of the decree. The decree comes to all people, to the good and to the bad alike. But those who live right, those who pray and repent and do tsedakah, are able to endure it better. They see themselves, not as the hub of the

universe, but as spokes on God's wheel. They understand that God does not exist in order to serve us but that we exist in order to serve God. And so when the decree comes, as come it must to every person — they are able to accept it in faith.

Rabbi Jack Riemer