

בס"ד

דברי תורה ד'צבי אליהו
DIVREI TORAH

יום כפור

Yom Kippur

September 28, 2009 - 10 Tishrei 5770



Dedication Page

To the Members of Congregation B'nai B'rith Jacob

Thanks for Your Warm Hospitality

Best Wishes for a
Wonderful and Healthy New Year
and a Meaningful Fast



Rafi and Dina Barnett
(High Holiday Chazan)

P.S. Looking forward to seeing you
in Eretz Yisroel on your next trip

Fast of Gedaliah

Rabbi Adam Singer

Think things through. Not to the point of obsession, not to the point of sacrificing action, but invest in a healthy consideration of where your action or inaction will lead. The early stages of progress often look like moving backwards. As Rabbi Noach Orloweck, shlita, once taught us, "to build a very very tall building begin by building a very very deep hole". Another example: if you want to be heard, begin by listening to the person you want to hear you. Often we stumble because we confuse our larger goals for the small acts we want to accomplish now. We want to be heard so we speak louder, even though it alienates the person who we hope will listen. In short, wisdom is less about knowing right from wrong, and more about knowing what is right for right now.

The Fast of Gedaliah is an occasion to reflect on how to actualize what we know is right. The fast falls on the first day after Rosh Hashonah. It is our first opportunity to to integrate some of the spiritual uplift of the Days of Awe into our more quotidian work-lives. It is the first rung in the bridge between Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur, the day when we make our most concerted effort to rise above the people we have been before. If Rosh Hashonah is the head of the year (Rosh is Hebrew for head, and ha - shonah literally means the year), the Fast of Gedaliah is the first attempt to grow a thought from ethereal concept to concrete action, and better life-habits.

I am writing this on the Fast of Gedaliah, which means that you are reading it at least

a few days after the fast. But, the message remains relevant. Whether you didn't know about the fast, or you fasted but didn't understand it, or even if you spent the whole day in contemplative work and action, we can all benefit from a little more reflection on how to better implement our ideals.

The fast commemorates the death of a righteous man named Gedaliah ben Achikam (d. @586 BCE, Israel). The book of Jeremiah describes how the Babylonians installed Gedaliah as the proctor of Israel after they destroyed the Temple and took over the region (6th cent BCE, see Jeremiah Chapter 40). Gedaliah's rise to power was miraculous and a source of tremendous inspiration for the embattled Jewish people. Though they had lost their Temple and their autonomy, their governor was just, righteous, and one of them. He was the last real hope for a strong Jewish settlement in Israel after the destruction of the Temple. He was one of those incredibly unique personalities who was perfectly righteous and beloved by Jews and non-Jews alike. He was irreplaceable, and his tragic death marked the end of close to 700 years of Jewish rule in Israel.

Gedaliah was a man of almost perfect piety and righteousness, but his righteousness was not balanced with the wisdom to examine the long term effects of his actions. The prophet Jeremiah recorded that Gedaliah's advisors caught wind of an impending assassination attempt against him. Gedaliah was loved by the Babylonians and the Jews, but the indigenous Cananite population saw him as a threat. They recognized that killing Gedaliah ben Achikam would end any

semblance of Jewish autonomy in Israel.

Yochanan ben Karaich and all of Gedaliah's field officers warned Gedaliah that king of Ammon was sending an assassin. Gedaliah refused to listen. He felt certain that the path of righteousness was in trusting others and giving them the benefit of the doubt. He refused to recognize the danger facing him and the entire Jewish people.

Gedaliah entertained the messenger from Ammon, Ishmael ben Nesanyah, and the ten men Ishmael brought with him. They ate and drank, and at the end of the meal Ishmael ben Nesanyah murdered Gedaliah ben Achikam.

Our sages blame Gedaliah for his own murder, as well as the exile of the Jewish people which followed it, and the deaths of scores of Jewish people who died in his wake. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (Italy and Israel 18th cent.) points out that Gedaliah's refusal to judge Ishmael ben Nesanya unfavorably caused this destruction. Gedaliah's misunderstanding and misapplication of Jewish righteousness brought his own death and so much more calamity. Rabbi Luzzato uses Gedaliah as the paradigm for our need to gain a deep understanding of how to apply real righteousness to our lives. Living a righteous Jewish life requires a wisdom that goes beyond knowing good from bad and right from wrong. It requires a view of the long term effects of our actions, and heartfelt analysis whether our actions will truly bring the results we hope for.

The contemporary political implications of the story of Gedaliah are truly terrifying.

Believe me when I tell you had no political theme in mind when I began writing this. I allow the reader to make his or her own political conclusions in the context of this story. I am more interested in the lesson Gedaliah teaches for our own individual lives. Have we successfully taken the broad view our own future? Are we allowing a long term vision of success to affect how we relate to our friends, spouses, children. . .? The behavior we reprimand today, might be an asset sometime in the future. The action we criticize today might cripple or at least disrupt actions we may want in the future. The character trait which so annoys us, might be better overlooked or maybe redirected for this individual or our own best interests.

Take this time between Rosh Hashonah and Yom Kippur seriously. If you were not successful in finding a clear vision for your year on Rosh Hashonah, now is the time to do it. If it still doesn't get clear, don't fret, G-d willing there will be Rosh Hashonah's to come to plan for. But use this time, and be cognizant of the importance of the long term view of the future and the lesson of the Fast of Gedaliah ben Achikam.

May we all be blessed with a healthy, sweet, and happy new year and a clear mind to see how best to actualize our innate Jewish potential. **GOOD SHABBOS AND A HAPPY HEALTHY SWEET NEW YEAR!!!**

It's easy to economize when you're broke.

The Time Is Now

Reuven Formey

After we have crowned G-d as King on the day of Rosh Hashanah, we move forward in our approach to Yom Kippur, the day for us to plead with G-d that he wash us clean of sin and allow us to begin a new year of service to Him, blemish free. What an immense opportunity that G-d has given us to purify our souls of wrongdoing. But a statement by the Rambam in regards to Yom Kippur raises a question. Rambam says, "Yom Kippur is the time of teshuvah for all...therefore all are obligated to repent and confess on Yom Kippur." Now, the days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are included in the 10-day period known as the Ten Days of Repentance. This period, as the Rambam states before his comment on Yom Kippur, is a favorable time for repentance. Therefore, why does Rambam go on to single out Yom Kippur by itself and say it's "a time for teshuvah for all?"

To add to the question, it is incumbent upon a person to repent *whenever* they sin, no matter what day of the year it is. If they are sincere and they approach G-d properly, He will forgive them even then. For example, King Hezekiah fell ill and was told that he would face death for not making the effort to have offspring. After realizing the error in his conduct, he repented and G-d added 15 years to his life. The Sages derive that this was *not* during the period of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. So we see that it is possible and required for one to do teshuvah at any time it's needed. Just because Yom Kippur is a special time for teshuvah does not mean that one is not obligated to repent at

all times. So what new idea does the Rambam present by adding "Yom Kippur is the time of teshuvah for all?" Even further, what if a person has fought and beat their inclination for evil and is not in a state of uncleanness from sin? Why would Yom Kippur be a day of teshuva for him or her as well?

The answer lies in the fact that the day of Yom Kippur *itself* obligates teshuvah. During the rest of the year, even though an individual may be obliged to do teshuvah, it's not the day itself that makes it obligatory. It is the fact that the person remains in the category of a sinner and is not allowed to remain in that state of separation from G-dliness. But, the actual *day* of Yom Kippur holds within it the *command* for Jews to make themselves proper vessels for G-d to purify them. The power of Yom Kippur is that the teshuvah is more readily and easily accepted on this day. The word "mitzvah" is related to the word "tzavta" which means "connection." Therefore since the mitzvah that permeates this entire day is teshuvah, our abilities are heightened in regards to accomplishing it because of the "connection" found within the day. And therefore only after a person follows the command to do so can the full revelation of that sublime power permeate the soul and cleanse it.

But what about the rare individual who has been totally righteous and has not fallen into sin this year? How can he or she repent? Can one be obligated to do something that does not apply to them? To this the Rambam says that what has been confessed on one Yom Kippur should again be confessed on a following Yom Kippur, thereby causing the person's repentance to

be consistent and not decrease in strength. But that would mean that repentance is an ongoing thing! *Right?* Right. We must understand that even though teshuvah is often translated as “repentance”, its literal translation is “to return.” Teshuva is doing everything in our power to return to our hearts, minds, and souls to a state where we are in perfect conjunction with the Divine will. It encompasses more than just saying I’m sorry and I won’t do it again. It has to permeate our whole being at all times. In this regard, Rambam brings the verse, *“For I know my iniquities, and my sins are constantly before me.”* (Psalms 51:5) The Alter Rebbe says in Tanya that by this verse King David means that even though he slew his inclination for evil, he never forgot about his sins of old. He kept them “before” him at a distance so that he would be reminded of where he had fallen in the past, and would use that memory to spur him to even higher teshuvah than before! The important word here is “distance.” One should not remember their previous sins and allow the thoughts to bring them to depression. Depression leads to sin. But one should keep them “before” them at a distance, far enough not to consume their spirit, but close enough to recall them and use them as a catalyst to spark new and loftier teshuvah.

During the year, since the sin itself is what obligates one to repent, then if there is no repeated sin, then once again repenting for the same previous sin is not an obligation (Although using it as King David did is what we should strive for). But on Yom Kippur, a day that obligates us in repentance, it is necessary and beneficial for all of us to return, pushing even farther from those sins and bringing us closer to G-d all at the

same time. And King Solomon said, *“There exists no righteous person in the land who [only] does good and never sinned.”* (Kohelet 7:20) Therefore, this mitzvah of Yom Kippur, and the ideal state of keeping our sin “before” us while constantly returning to G-d applies to all of us. We have the ability to ascend to unfathomable heights in our service to G-d, but we must first walk the paths of return that lead to those levels. And the higher the level the more energy and effort that must be expended on the path to it.

The prayer service of Yom Kippur reflects the loftier level of teshuva that can be accomplished on this great day. There are five prayer services on this day: Maariv, Shacharit, Musaf, Minchah, and Neilah. These prayers reflect the five levels of the soul (Nefesh, Ruach, Neshama, Chaya, and Yechidah) as they are included in the highest level, Yechidah. The word “yechida” is from the word “yachid” which is sometimes translated as “one”, but more deeply means “alone.” This is because Yechida, the highest level and essence of the soul, is completely tied into G-d’s Essence, which is said to be completely alone and incomparable to any levels of Creation. Even though the whole day of Yom Kippur is related to our essential connection, it’s the fifth service of Yom Kippur (Neilah) that’s specifically represented by the fifth soul level of Yechidah. Neilah has the meaning of “locking” or “closing.” At this final portion of a long day of fasting and crying out to our Creator, the level of Yechidah is revealed and it is as if every Jew is closed off, locked away, and alone with G-d at this essential level. When you’re alone with the King for a personal conversation, on a day where

He is elevating you to a lofty plane and wants to erase any impurity that may have put a block between Him and you, will you spend the time properly? Yes, it's good to see our friends, but will we spend these precious moments talking, looking around, counting the minutes until the service is

over, or will we take advantage of being alone with the Master of the Universe?...

(Based upon the teachings of Rebbe Menachem M. Schneerson, zt'l)