



The Tochechah and its Vaccine

By Rabbi Shlomo Stochel

To truly internalize and identify with the texts and events of this week's Parashah is to be subjected to a rollercoaster ride of emotions, vacillating between joy and sorrow, in an escalating yet downward spiral.

Fortunately, we begin with feelings of joy as we imagine ourselves bringing to the Beit HaMikdash our Bikkurim, our first produce of the season, in a public celebration for which we are commanded: "וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּכָל-הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר גָּמְוֶלְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְבִיטָהּ אִתָּהּ:" "And you shall rejoice, together with the [family of the] Levite and the stranger in your midst, in all the bounty that your God has bestowed upon you and your household (Devarim 26:12). And we continue to be joyous as we bring the Ma'asrot, over which we declare "עָשִׂיתִי כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר" "I have done all that I was commanded" (ibid. 14) which Rashi (s.v. אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי) defines as "וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בּו" "I rejoiced and caused others to rejoice with it."

This sentiment of gladness continues as we read about the large stones, engraved with the words of the Torah, to be installed on Har Eival in a ceremony of Korbanot. The concluding command here, too, is "וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ לְפָנַי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ" "and you shall rejoice with Hashem your God" (ibid. 27:7).

Then, suddenly, we discover that Har Eival is the public site for a series of curses, and Har Gerizim for a series of blessings. As we listen to the curses declaring damnation to a variety of sinners, we sense our emotional state shifting to sadness and dejection. Then follows a brief inventory of blessings, beginning with "בְּרִוּהַ אֶתְּהָ בְּעִיר וּבְרִוּהַ אֶתְּהָ בְּשָׂדֶה" "Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country" (ibid. 28:3), that temporarily restores our high spirits.

And then the final and sustained pummel to the chest and heart – the Tochechah, a litany of horrors, so hauntingly evocative of ancient, medieval and modern atrocities – the darkest days of Am Yisrael. Fifty-four Pesukim long, these constitute the most terrifying and ghastly descriptions of what will befall us when we betray our faith, religious principles and practices. An emotional roller coaster ride... toward what destination? Where is the last stop?

The answer is contained within the Tochechah itself. Why will we suffer these indignities, these brutalities? "לִמַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עֲבַדְתָּ" "Because you would not serve your Hashem in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything" (ibid. 47). It is no simple coincidence that our parasha opens with Bikkurim, whose theme is "וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּכָל-הַטּוֹב וְאֲשֶׁר גָּמְוֶלְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ" and closes with the Tochechah, the consequence of "לִמַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב". Rather, it is one matter for the Torah to inform us that we can prevent tragedy from occurring to Am Yisrael by worshipping Hashem in joy and rejoicing in the material gifts Hashem has granted us. It is still another matter as to how to define this elusive term, שמחה.

An analysis of Mitzvat Bikkurim yields some edifying results. Bikkurim presents a paradox of sorts. The Mishna describes in detail the pageantry of the Bikkurim ceremonies during the era of the second Beit HaMikdash. It was a ceremony of great fanfare, of pomp and circumstance. After entering Yerushalayim, the Bikkurim bearers were greeted royally by the notables of the city. The people formed special caravans; the horns of the oxen were gilded with gold. They were met by throngs of people who ushered them into the city with song and dance. No other produce brought to the Mikdash merited this kind of celebration – not Terumah, not Ma'aser Rishon, not Ma'aser Sheini, not Ma'aser Ani. Only for Bikkurim. And the irony is that unlike those Terumot UMa'asrot, whose obligatory gifts ranged from 2% or 3% to 10% of one's crops, Bikkurim could be any amount of one's produce: "הַבְּכוּרִים אֵין לְהֵם שְׁעוֹר מִן" "Bikkurim have no quantity from the Torah" (Rambam Hilchot Bikkurim 2:17). A few olives, a few grapes, a few figs would suffice. The Torah specifies a טַבַּח, a basket, indicating that a small portion of each fruit was sufficient.

Clearly the definition of שמחה as conveyed by Bikkurim is one of quality, not quantity. Happiness is not an acquisition, but an attitude. It is not a material state, but a mental state. This is not to denigrate those who are blessed with more. "וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּכָל-הַטּוֹב" "אֲשֶׁר גָּמְוֶלְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ" emphasizes that the wealthy as well as the poor are to enjoy all of the good that Hashem has granted them. The Torah is anti-ascetic; our tradition has always admired and even encouraged material achievement. The story is told of a Chassidic Rebbe who visited the owner of a considerable

fortune and found him eating black bread and radishes for dinner. Said the Rebbe: "My dear friend, you should eat chicken one day, duck the next, turkey the third day, and then a good steak." As soon as they had the chance, his disciples asked the Rebbe to explain his strange interest in the diet of this wealthy Jew. The Rebbe replied: "If he eats chicken, he may be expected to give a poor man a herring. But if he himself eats radishes, what do you think he will give to the poor?"

The key to שמחה is the communal character of the celebration, as we observed in the Bikkurim festivities. And in the Pasuk we referenced above: "וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּכָל־הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר גָּמְרוּ־לָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְבִיטָהּ אִתָּהּ: וְהָלַוִי וְהַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ: עִשִׂיתִי כָּכָל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתָנִי - שְׂמֵחָתִי בּוֹ - וְשִׂמְחֶתִי בּוֹ." It is the sharing of joy that marks true שמחה. As Rashi, cited above, defines שְׂמֵחָתִי בּוֹ - וְשִׂמְחֶתִי בּוֹ. I not only have rejoiced but I have brought joy to the Levi and the stranger in my midst. A pleasure shared is a pleasure doubled. Happiness may be the only quality in life that is multiplied by division.

Perhaps that is why the Tochechah in our Parashah is stated in the singular rather than in the plural as it appears in the parallel Tochechah in Parashat BeChukotai. The theme of our Tochechah is, as we have seen, is "לִפְנֵי אֱשֶׁר לֹא־עֲבָדְתָּ אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ" Without the communal sharing of שמחה, as conveyed by Mitzvat Bikkurim, and the building together of a community in which to share joy, all that is left is the individual, unprotected, uncared for, alone, and subject to the indignities and degradations of the Tochechah.

Our central Pasuk provides yet another twist on this same theme: "וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּכָל־הַטּוֹב אֲשֶׁר גָּמְרוּ־לָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְבִיטָהּ אִתָּהּ וְהָלַוִי וְהַגֵּר: אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ: וּלְבִיתְךָ" It sounds as if the Pasuk is written so as to define שמחה as rejoicing in all the good that Hashem has given you and your family, which consists of אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ - you, the Levi and the Geir who are in your midst. They are all to be part of your family; they are all to share in your שמחה. And this has been our practice throughout Jewish history. Almost every rite of passage is termed a שמחה, whether בר מצוה, פדיון הבן, or חתונה. And none of these events is viewed as complete, none of these is viewed as a joyous occasion, without the presence of the community.

But recall that the inclusion of others is not the inclusion of family friends or even family members. It is the landless Levi and the stranger in your midst. Or the orphan or widow as specified elsewhere "וְשִׂמְחֶתָּ בְּחַגְגֵךָ אִתָּהּ וּבְנֶיךָ וּבְתוּרֶיךָ וְעַבְדְּךָ וְאִמְתְּךָ וְהָלַוִי וְהַגֵּר: וְהִנְיָתוּם וְהִאֲלַמְנָה אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ: "And you shall rejoice in your festival, you and your son and your daughter and your male and female slave, and the Levi and the stranger and the orphan and the widow that are in your communities" (Devarim 16:14). It is therefore no surprise that inclusion refers to those whose lives are not stable - to those who suffer the misfortune of rootlessness and alienation. For Am Yisrael to evade the calamities of the Tochechah, it is precisely those who are less

fortunate and more vulnerable who must be invited to become part of our joyous occasions.

The 13 Midot- Just a Magic Formula?

By Sarel Rotblat (23)

This Motza'ei Shabbat, we will begin reciting Selichot and say יג מידות הרחמים. These Midot are the formula of forgiveness that Bnei Yisrael were given by Hashem after the Cheit Ha'Eigel. The Pasuk in Shemot (33:13) says Moshe approached Hashem and said "הֲדַעֲנִי ה' אֵת דַּרְכְּךָ" "Hashem show me your ways." The Gemara in Rosh HaShanah (17b) cites Rabi Yochanan that in response to this request from Moshe, Hashem wrapped himself like a Sheliach Tzibbur, showed Moshe the order of the Tefillot [13 Midot], and said: "when Bnei Yisrael sin they should do this before me and I will forgive them for their sins." What did Hashem mean by "do this before me?" Should we wrap ourselves in a Tallit and mention the 13 Midot and call it a day? What power do these words have that transforms Hashem's attitude towards us like a magic spell for us to be granted forgiveness?

Some Rishonim say that this answer was literal; if one wraps himself in a Tallit and says these words with Kavanah, he will not come away empty handed from Hashem. Rabbeinu Bachaya states that the Segulah of the 13 Midot only works if we understand the meaning of the 13 Midot, say them with Kavana, and make sure we have Aveirot that are holding us back. The Maharal adds that Hashem appeared to Moshe 'wrapped in a Tallit' to demonstrate that when we daven, we should 'wrap ourselves in a Tallit,' to not be able to look right or left, get rid of all distractions, and be completely enveloped and focused on our tefillot, as if we have a barrier around us.

Yet, the Gemara quotes "יַעֲשׂוּ לִפְנֵי כֹסֶדֶר הַזֶּה;" it doesn't say "יאמרו לפני" "They will say before me." There is an action involved here with regards to this 'סדר', these 13 Midot, which is not just the simple recitation of them as magic formula of forgiveness. We have to do something by 'imitating' and demonstrating the 13 Midot, not just saying them. We have to embody the 13 Midot and take them on as our own. Just as Hashem is merciful, we too must be merciful. Just as Hashem represents truth so too we should try to. As the Mussar Seifer Tomer Devorah starts off, "הָאָדָם רָאוּי שִׁתְּדַמֶּה לְקוּבוֹ," "A person is fit to be similar to his Creator." The goal of Selichot and the 13 Midot isn't just to daven, but to come closer to Hashem by becoming more familiar with these attributes of Hashem and then taking them on as our own by practicing these Midot.

We know that the 13 Midot are only said with a Tzibbur and take on the status of a Davar SheBeKidushah (Shibolei Haleket). What is the connection between a Minyan and these 13 attributes? Explains the brother of the Maharal, in the Sefer HaChaim, this formula is only effective and helpful if

the people reciting these words reflect these Midot in their personal behaviors. It is more likely that each of these attributes will be found within someone in a group - someone will be merciful, someone else will be kind and thus all of Hashem's attributes will be represented by the Minyan as a whole and quite literally, "יעשו לפני כסדר הזה," each of these attributes will be performed before Hashem. During this season, may we focus on these attributes, recite them with the appropriate Kavanah but also try and make them "our own" by acting and adapting each of these Midot so that we will be worthy of a Ketivah VeChatima Tovah.

Light Goat, Dark Goat – A New Perspective on the two

Goats of Yom Kippur

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

A New Approach to the Sa'ir La'Azazel

It seems so bizarre to throw a goat off a cliff, and yet, of all days, we perform this strange ritual on Yom Kippur?! While we have offered a new approach in the past, we set forth another fresh idea based on a most intriguing and curious debate recorded in Bechorot 8b.

Rabi Yehoshua vs. the Athens' Wise Men

Bechorot 8b records that the great Tanna Rabi Yehoshua had a conversation with the Roman emperor regarding the gestation period of a snake, in which Rabi Yehoshua disagreed with the conclusion reached by the "Wise Men of Athens." The following exchange occurred between the emperor and the great Tanna:

The emperor said to him: But how can you disagree with the sages of Athens? Aren't they wise? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya responded: We are wiser than they. The emperor said: If you are wiser than they, then defeat them in debate and bring them to me.

The Gemara proceeds to record many of the exchanges that ensued between Rabi Yehoshua and the Greek sages. However, we shall focus on the one we feel has relevance to Yom Kippur:

They brought him two eggs and said to him: Which is the egg of a black hen and which is the egg of a white hen? Rabbi Yehoshua brought them two cheeses and said to them: Which is the cheese from the black goat and which is from the white goat?

This interchange seems nonsensical. We shall follow in the footsteps of the Maharsha, who understands this and the other arguments between the Athenian sages and Rabi Yehoshua as a profound debate reflecting fundamental differences between Hellenistic and Jewish thought.

The Hellenistic Perspective

We suggest that the light hen represents a life lived well and morally while the dark hen signifies an immoral and evil-ridden life. Both argue the Greeks result in the same state.

The fact that an egg from a dark hen and a white hen like identical is that no matter how one lives, in the end, there is no difference. Shlomo HaMelech presents this cynical view in Kohelet (9:2):

הכל באִשֶׁר לְכָל, מִקְרָה אֶחָד לְצַדִּיק וְלְרָשָׁע לְטוֹב וְלְטָהוֹר וְלְטָמֵא, וְלְזָכָה, וְלְאִשֶׁר
"אֵינְנוּ זֹכָה: כְּטוֹב, כְּהָטָא"

"All things come alike to all; there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean and to the unclean; to him that sacrifices and to him that sacrifices not; as is the good, so is the sinner."

This pessimistic view of life permeated Greek culture.

The famous Greek Tragedies reflect this gloomy outlook.

My son Binyamin Jachter and son-in-law Yisroel Perton both add that Greek wise people use an egg as their Mashal for life since it is a natural product symbolizing the cycle of life. For the Greeks, nature is perfect and in no need of improvement or redemption.

The Torah Perspective

In dramatic contrast, the Torah embraces a far more optimistic outlook on life. All, especially the Jewish people, are headed for Kapparah, redemption. Rabi Yehoshua's two goats represent the two goats of Yom Kippur. The light goat represents the Sa'ir LaHashem, the goat whose blood we sprinkle on the Mizbei'ach HaPenimi, the inner altar. The dark goat signifies the goat that is brought to the desert and thrown off a cliff.

Both goats produce identical cheese, meaning that both goats of Yom Kippur lead to the identical product – redemption. However, a choice is involved. Hence, Rabi Yehoshua chooses cheese for his allegory. Cheese is a product of human intervention and ingenuity. Judaism utterly rejects the Greek adoration of nature and their demand that it be left untouched.

Judaism insists that the world as a whole and each individual within it need redemption. All are flawed and need much improvement, similar to raw milk, which is improved to cheese. Raw milk remains fresh for a minimal time, but the cheese lasts. Thus, turning milk into cheese redeems, so to speak, the milk.

Yom Kippur's Two Goats

The two goats of Yom Kippur represent Teshuvah Mei'Ahava (Teshuvah driven by the love of Hashem) and Teshuvah Mei'Yirah (Teshuvah triggered by fear). Teshuvah Mei'ahava can elevate us to previously unattainable heights just as the Sa'ir LaHashem reaches the part of the Beit HaMikdash not ordinarily accessible to most Korbanot.

The Sa'ir thrown off the cliff represents Teshuvah Mei'yirah, returning to Hashem but "kicking and screaming" throughout the entire trip. This Sa'ir's turbulent journey to the desert and even more turbulent end represents the repentant's tempestuous path that changes because he feels he must and not due to introspection.

Two Choices for Yom Kippur

The dramatically different paths of the two goats to redemption represent two different ways one may experience Yom Kippur. For many, their Yom Kippur experience is comparable to a colonoscopy. This procedure is not particularly pleasant, but we endure it since it is necessary to maintain our health. But, on the other hand, many, sadly, view Yom Kippur as drudgery and repeatedly are peeking ahead to see how many pages are remaining until we are at long last finished.

However, others embrace Yom Kippur and love Yom Kippur. For one, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik was effusive about his love for Yom Kippur. His family recounts how the Rav would not eat on Motza'ei Yom Kippur since he was so enthralled with Yom Kippur that he would continue singing the Yom Kippur melodies hours after the fast was over.

His grandson Rav Moshe Twersky HY"D also enthusiastically embraced Yom Kippur. A Talmid at Rav Twersky's Yeshiva tells of how he sat next to Rav Twersky one Yom Kippur, and soon before the Tefilla began, the latter introduced himself. Rav Twersky explained that it is customary for people sitting next to each other to introduce themselves before a long plane ride. Then, Rav Twersky told the Talmid that they were about to take a ride to heaven!!

For some, Yom Kippur is as pleasant as our dragging a goat to the desert and cast off a cliff. For others, Yom Kippur is an unparalleled and unequalled opportunity to reach closer to Hashem. The two goats of Yom Kippur thus symbolize the stark choice that Yom Kippur presents for the Jew.

The path of the two goats is determined by lottery, forces not under their control. However, we have a choice. Our choice is to choose our way to the resultant Kapparah of Yom Kippur. We can model ourselves after the route of the Sa'ir LaHashem or the Sa'ir LaAzazel.

A Model for Geihinom

On a darker note, the Sa'ir LaAzazel and the Sa'ir LaHashem also symbolize the two routes to Gan Eden. Ultimately, Kol Yisrael Yeish Lahem Cheilek Le'Olam HaBa, as Chazal teach (Mishnah, Sanhedrin 10:1). However, there are two paths to attain this goal. One is to merit proceeding straight to Gan Eden, and the other is to arrive there after a year-long stint in Geihinom (Mishna, Eduyot 2:10). Ultimately, the result is redemption, but the road is similar to that of the goat pushed off the cliff for some. The searing trip through the boiling hot desert and the tumble down the rocky cliff are appropriate symbols of Geihinom.

Conclusion - We are Destined for Teshuvah

The Rambam (Hilchot Teshuvah 7:5) follows Rabi Eliezer (Sanhedrin 97b) that the Jewish People are redeemed only through Teshuvah. The Rambam, though, in his following statement, proclaims that eventually, the Jewish people will do

Teshuvah.

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik concludes that just as it is an article of faith to believe in the Mashi'ach eventual arrival, so too it is an article of faith that the Jewish people will eventually return. We rigorously reject the Greek surrender to nature and the Greek capitulation to tragedy. The Greek ethos is most definitely not the Torah way! Our Hashkafah, as Rabi Yehoshua insists, is dramatically superior to Greek wisdom. Not that we are superior, but our knowledge stems from a Superior Source.

With its abstentions from worldly indulgence and exclusive focus on Avodat Hashem, Yom Kippur symbolizes Gan Eden. Therefore, training and preparing ourselves to embrace Yom Kippur ultimately prepares us to embrace Gan Eden and the pleasant and direct path to its gates.

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