



*On the Festivals*  
by  
*Rabbi Yaakov Hillel*  
*Rosh Yeshivat Ahavat Shalom*

*Sukkot*  
*Repenting With Love*

*Stage by Stage*

Sukkot is the culmination of the intensive spiritual work of the *Yamim Noraim*. Now we can reach new heights. Until *Ne'ilah* on Yom Kippur our repentance was *teshuvah me'yirah*, repentance from fear. After that, we transition to *teshuvah me'ahavah*, repentance from love.

Our service of Hashem in the *Yamim Noraim* has three stages.

On Rosh Hashanah we elevate spirituality over physicality. The mitzvah of Rosh Hashanah is blowing the *shofar*; it is the *Yom Teruah*.<sup>1</sup> This mitzvah is fulfilled with an intangible, spiritual entity – the breath we blow into the *shofar*, a hollow horn, to produce sound. “One who blows, blows from within himself.”<sup>2</sup> Blowing breath (spirituality) into the *shofar* (physicality) teaches us to place spirituality above physicality.

On Yom Kippur we advance to a higher plane. After giving precedence to spirituality on Rosh Hashanah, we can go on to disconnect from physicality altogether. We refrain from eating and drinking, bathing, anointing the body, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations<sup>3</sup> – in essence, the gamut of worldly

---

<sup>1</sup> *Bamidbar* 29:1.

<sup>2</sup> See *Ramban*, *Bereshit* 2:7; *Likute Amarim-Tanya*, chapter 2; *Emek HaMelech*, *Shaar Tikune HaTeshuvah*, pp. 77, 86; *Shaar Vav*, chapter 31:211. Hashem “blew...a living soul” into Adam (*Bereshit* 2:7) on the first Rosh Hashanah.

<sup>3</sup> *Yoma* 73b.



pleasures – purifying and uplifting ourselves to the level of the angels.<sup>4</sup> On Rosh Hashanah we served Hashem with both a physical vessel, the *shofar*, and a spiritual entity, our breath. On Yom Kippur we serve Him only with our breath, through speech; we say the five *tefillot* of the day,<sup>5</sup> which correspond to the five afflictions.<sup>6</sup>

After that we are ready for Sukkot; now we can work to transform physicality into spirituality. The mitzvot of Sukkot are fulfilled through material objects: the *sukkah*, made of “the refuse of the threshing-floor and the vineyard,” and the branches and fruit of the Four Species. Through these mitzvot ordinary physical objects become sacred and spiritual.

This stage-by-stage progression leads up to Simhat Torah, when we complete the weekly cycle of reading the Torah. Torah is spiritual, and a material mind that has not been purified will be unable to grasp it.<sup>7</sup> On Rosh Hashanah we gave prominence to spirituality over physicality; on Yom Kippur, we annulled physicality; and on Sukkot, we uplifted physicality to spirituality. On Simhat Torah, we are cleansed and purified to such a high degree that we can cleave to Torah with no barriers.

### ***Physicality Transformed***

As Jews, we understand that physical objects and actions can be uplifted to spirituality. Even something as mundane as a coin has spiritual significance. The Arizal teaches that a penny in our pocket in this world is not a solely material entity – it is a Divine light that stems from the higher root of our soul. It comes down to this world in the physical form of a coin. That coin has great spiritual potential, because we can turn it into a means for service of Hashem. This is why the Sages teach that “the money of the righteous is more precious to them than their person”<sup>8</sup> – they appreciate its spiritual value and know that it can be used as a tool to do mitzvot.

The lofty level of sanctifying the material is exclusive to the Jewish people, as we learn from our Sages’ vivid description of the great day of judgment in the future. Hashem will hold a Torah scroll in His Arms and call upon all those who studied Torah to come forward and receive their reward. The idolatrous nations will step up en masse to claim a share. One by one, they will list their grand contributions to civilization – bridges, marketplaces, and commerce – all intended only to help the Jewish people study Torah. Since all they did was just for us and our Torah, they will

---

<sup>4</sup> *Yalkut Shimoni, Va’et’hanan* 834.

<sup>5</sup> *Maariv* at night, *Shaharit*, *Musaf*, *Minhah*, and *Ne’ilah*.

<sup>6</sup> *Shaar HaKavanot, Derush Yom HaKippurim, Derush Alef*, p. 110c.

<sup>7</sup> The Maharal writes that one can only acquire Torah after he has refined his *middot* (*Derech Hayyim, Avot* 3:17).

<sup>8</sup> *Hullin* 91a.



say, don't they also deserve reward?

Hashem will prove to them that their claims are false and that they sought only to further their own interests. He will offer them a chance to fulfill a mitzvah that is easy enough – dwelling in a *sukkah*. They will build *sukkot* and settle in, until the real test comes: Hashem will unleash the sun's full heat, making the outdoor booth hot and uncomfortable. As soon as the temperature rises they will exit the *sukkah*, kicking it on the way out.<sup>9</sup>

Why will Hashem test the nations specifically with the mitzvah of *sukkah*, and why with the sun's full heat? To show them that they have no connection to mitzvot and cannot claim reward. As long as they are comfortable in the *sukkah* and it shelters them from the elements, they are happy to stay. Once the sun's heat becomes unpleasant they will walk out, with a kick.

The problem isn't leaving the *sukkah*; if someone suffers from sitting in a *sukkah* and his discomfort will be alleviated by leaving it, he is exempt from the mitzvah.<sup>10</sup> The problem is that parting kick – if they are capable of that, their pretense of promoting commerce and construction for the sake of the Jews' Torah study is clearly false. In their eyes, there is nothing sacred about boards and branches put together to serve as a *sukkah*. The same was true of their own endeavors – they were strictly material and commercial, with no sacred intentions behind them.

To us, the *sukkah* is the *tzila d'mehemenuta*, the shade of the *Shechinah*, where we are in the company of the *Ushpizin Ila'in*.<sup>11</sup> We know that “the Name of Heaven rests upon the *sukkah*.”<sup>12</sup> To them, it is only a pile of wood, because they have no concept of uplifting physicality.<sup>13</sup>

This is the essence of Sukkot, when we “rejoice before Hashem, your G-d.” There can be no greater joy than living a life that elevates and sanctifies physicality, fulfilling our nation's purpose in this world and rectifying the world by bringing about its subjugation to the Kingdom of the Al-mighty.

---

<sup>9</sup> *Avodah Zarah* 2a–b, 3a.

<sup>10</sup> *Sukkah* 25b–26a.

<sup>11</sup> The exalted spiritual guests whom we invite to our *sukkah*.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 9a.

<sup>13</sup> This concept is foreign to non-Jewish faiths. This is why celibacy for priests and prohibitions against consumption of alcohol and the like are part and parcel of these religions, even if many of their “holy men” observe these restrictions only for the public eye. We, on the other hand, view marriage as a means to achieve perfection in Torah and mitzvot (see *Yevamot* 62b) and bring a new generation of G-d-fearing Jews into the world, not merely as a way to live a comfortable and enjoyable life. Eating, sleeping, and working for a living are more than physical needs or pleasures; they are part of our service of Hashem.



## *Hashem's Knowledge, Our Choice*

Our *teshuvah* until the end of Yom Kippur is *teshuvah me'yirah* – repentance from fear. After that, there is a shift to *teshuvah me'ahavah*, repentance from love with great joy.<sup>14</sup> The difference between them is the difference between the service of a servant and that of a son. We can better understand the association of each period and its own type of *teshuvah* by understanding concept of *yediah*, omniscient Divine knowledge, and *behirah*, man's Free Will or freedom of choice. *Teshuvah me'ahavah* is related to Hashem's *yediah*, and *teshuvah me'yirah* to man's *behirah*.<sup>15</sup>

How can it be that on the one hand, Hashem knows in advance what we will do, yet on the other, we are still making on-the-spot decisions about our actions? Isn't this a contradiction? If Hashem already knows what will happen, what choice do we have? And if we do have a choice, doesn't that mean that Hashem's knowledge is less than absolute? The Sages allude to this question in a mishnah in *Avot*: "Everything is predestined, and freedom [of choice] is given. And the world is judged fairly."<sup>16</sup>

The Rambam discusses this difficult topic.<sup>17</sup> If Hashem knows in advance whether someone will be righteous or wicked, what choice does he have in the matter, and where is his Free Will? It has all been settled – if Hashem already knows, it cannot happen differently. And if it *can* happen differently, wouldn't that mean that His knowledge is *not* absolute?

The Rambam writes that "the answer to this question is longer than the earth and broader than the ocean."<sup>18</sup> He refers to his words in *Hilchot Yesode HaTorah* concerning Hashem's all-encompassing foreknowledge: "The Holy One, blessed be He, does not know anything with knowledge that is external [to Him], as people do. They and their knowledge are two entities. Rather, He, blessed be His Name, and His knowledge are one. And human intelligence cannot fully comprehend this."<sup>19</sup> Man is unable to grasp how Divine foreknowledge and human Free Will can coexist, but that is only because the human mind is finite. Just as it is not within man's power to comprehend the Creator, it is also not within his power to comprehend the depths of the Creator's infinite "Mind."

---

<sup>14</sup> *Kedushat Levi, Parashat Haazinu, "Mi Kel kamocho"; Bne Yissachar, Maamare Hodesh Tishre, Maamar Yod, ot chaf.*

<sup>15</sup> See below, "The Transition."

<sup>16</sup> *Avot* 3:15.

<sup>17</sup> *Hilchot Teshuvah* 5:5.

<sup>18</sup> See the Raavad, who writes that it would have been preferable for the Rambam not to have presented the question to begin with, rather than raising doubts (*Hasagot HaRaavad, Hilchot Teshuvah* 5:5).

<sup>19</sup> *Hilchot Yesode HaTorah* 2:10.



Hashem's "Mind," unlimited by constraints of time and space, can know in advance what choices we will make without impairing our ability to make those choices independently. The Rambam cites the prophet Yeshayahu: "'My thoughts are not your thoughts, and My ways are not your ways,' said Hashem."<sup>20</sup>

Man's intellect and knowledge are not the same as Divine intellect and knowledge. We can only know what already exists and transpires within the limits of our understanding. Such knowledge is not an inherent part of us. It is what the Rambam calls "external." We know it only when it happens. Let us say that someone plans to deliver a Torah lecture. He cannot accurately predict how many people will choose to attend; until it actually happens, there is no way for him to know what the outcome will be. Once the listeners arrive, though, the lecturer can of course see how many people are there. We only know what we have already encountered and what has already happened.

Unlike ours, Hashem's knowledge is not dependent on any external factors. He does not need to see the crowd at a lecture to know that it took place and that it was attended by  $x$  number of people.

Regardless of Hashem's foreknowledge of how events will unfold and what we will do in every circumstance, our actions *are* up to us – what we do is the product of our Free Will. The fact that He knows what our choice will be does not change that it was our choice, and in no way absolves man from responsibility for his deeds. We make our own choices and it is up to us to choose well.

### ***Levels of Revelation***

A teaching of the Arizal resolves the apparent contradiction between Hashem's *yediah* and man's *behirah*.

Hashem reveals Himself to the world on different levels (*hanhagot*). The highest level is the *Shem Havayah* (the Divine Name *yod-keh-vav-keh*), known as *hanhagat haKeter*. It is pure Divine mercy and loving-kindness (*Rahamim* and *Hesed*), with no trace of Divine judgment (*Din*). At this level, which is only rarely apparent to man, Hashem runs the world entirely in keeping with His Will. He is the omniscient G-d, and He knows and orchestrates all events.

A lower level is the Name *Elokim*, symbolic of Divine Judgment. The level of *Elokim* is more within the realm of man's understanding. It is what we see in this world on a regular basis,<sup>21</sup> as opposed to the concealed *hanhagah* of *Keter*. At the

---

<sup>20</sup> *Yeshayahu 55:8; Hilchot Teshuvah 5:1–5.*

<sup>21</sup> *Elokim* has the same *gematriya* (numerical equivalent) as the word *hateva*, nature; *teva* is the



ongoing level of *Elokim* (*Din*), man has the Free Will to do as he wishes.

All the different revelations and levels of Hashem's *hanhagah* are one – He is all-encompassing. At times He deals with the world with *yediah*, in keeping with His Divine plan for Creation. At other times He deals with the world on the level of *behirah*, allowing man to do as he chooses, whether good or bad.

### ***Plan and Punishment***

Based on this teaching of the Arizal, the Ramhal explains more about these two different *hanhagot* of Hashem.<sup>22</sup> At times He relates to us on the simpler level of *hanhagat hamishpat v'hasachar v'ha'onesh*, rule through judgment, reward, and punishment. At other times, He relates to us on the level of *hanhagat haYihud*, rule directly and exclusively by Hashem to eventually reveal His Oneness. The Ramhal also calls this *hanhagat hamazal*, “the rule of destiny.”

At the lower level of *behirah* and *hanhagat hamishpat v'hasachar v'ha'onesh*, everything is openly revealed and perfectly comprehensible – whatever happens makes sense. Reuven does a mitzvah, and we see that he is rewarded. Reuven commits a sin, and we see that he is punished. As the Torah says, “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments and you fulfill them, I will give your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce, and the tree of the field will give its fruit” and much more.<sup>23</sup> The reverse is also true: “If you despise My statutes...then so will I do to you...” The verses that follow are a description of the very worst suffering imaginable.<sup>24</sup>

With *hanhagat hamishpat v'hasachar v'ha'onesh*, man's deeds determine what will happen to him; the righteous have it good and the wicked suffer, and the black-and-white justice of the situation is obvious and clear to all.

The higher level of *yediah* and *hanhagat haYihud v'hamazal* is usually concealed from us and is beyond our comprehension. On this level, all that takes place is part of Hashem's Divine plan for the Creation, directed to the world's ultimate rectification: “The Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and created the world.”<sup>25</sup> We do not know Hashem's plan and can find it difficult to understand events that, according to *hanhagat hamishpat*, are incomprehensible. As an

---

natural order called *Elokim* (see the Maharal's *Be'er HaGolah*, *HaBe'er HaShevi'i*. In *Shevuot*, *Perek Torah Ohr*, the Shelah writes that this is alluded to in the *Zohar*).

<sup>22</sup> Most of the Ramhal's writings are based on the teachings of the Arizal, although he does not mention their source. See the last section of *Arba Me'ot Shekel Kesef*, and *Daat Tevunot, ot kuf-lamed-dalet*. See also my work *Shorshe HaYam, Helek Dalet*, for a fuller explanation of this topic.

<sup>23</sup> *Vayikra* 26:3–13.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 26:14–43.

<sup>25</sup> *Zohar*, vol. II, p. 161a.



obvious example, we cannot understand why “there is a righteous person who has it bad, and there is a wicked person who has it good.”<sup>26</sup>

If we could see the whole picture as Hashem does, including how every occurrence and development leads up to the world’s ultimate rectification, we would have no questions. We would understand how every minute detail fits in and is essential. As it is, our vision is so very limited that we cannot understand circumstances that are the product of *hanhagat haYihud v’hamazal*, unrelated to the more obvious logic of *hanhagat hamishpat v’hasachar v’ha’onesh*.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Hidden Purpose***

Everything that transpires has a purpose known to G-d, even when that purpose is hidden from us. A classic example is the story of Elazar ben Durdaya, a man who was hopelessly submerged in immorality. One day he was shocked into the realization that he had to repent his life of sin. He repented on a level so intense and so overpowering that his soul departed, and a Heavenly Voice called out, “*Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaya is destined for the life of the World to Come.*” When Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi heard about Elazar ben Durdaya’s end he wept, saying, “One can acquire his share in the World to Come in a single moment.”

Years of utter spiritual and moral degradation had led Elazar ben Durdaya to this moment of supreme *teshuvah*. For his regret and anguish over what he had done with his life to be so very powerful, he first had to sink to the lowest depths – if he had not gone so low, he could not have soared so high. We can suggest that the sin that led to his great *teshuvah* was in the realm of *hanhagat haYihud*: Elazar ben Durdaya was forced into sin as part of Hashem’s plan for him to reach the heights of *teshuvah*.

However, this profound concept is very complex and calls for great caution. The Ramhal warns that a superficial understanding holds great risk. We dare not persuade ourselves that according to the principle of *hanhagat haYihud*, our sins are all just part of Hashem’s Divine plan for man and the world to attain perfection.<sup>28</sup> “What is hidden is for Hashem our G-d, and what is revealed is for us and our children forever, to fulfill all the words of this Torah.”<sup>29</sup> The earthly *bet din* operates only on what is revealed – not on any esoteric calculations of *hanahgat haYihud* and Divine plans calling for gross sin as an avenue to glorious repentance. Desecration

---

<sup>26</sup> *Berachot* 7a.

<sup>27</sup> The phenomenon of *gilgul* (reincarnation) is one possible manifestation of *hanhagat haYihud*. When *Iyov* was unable to accept his intense suffering, the suggestion that he was suffering for sins committed in an earlier life consoled him (see Ramban, introduction to *Iyov* and *Iyov* 30:33).

<sup>28</sup> See the Rashash’s introduction to *Rehovot HaNahar*, p. 7b, “*v’seder*,” concerning Adam’s sin.

<sup>29</sup> *Devarim* 29:28.





of Shabbat is punishable by stoning<sup>30</sup> and the *bet din* will punish the transgressor regardless of any possible “hidden *tikunim*” brought about by the sin. This was true even of the Shabbat desecrator in the desert, who was stoned despite his pious intentions.<sup>31</sup> *Tikunim* and Hashem’s plan are not our province. In this world we operate strictly in keeping with the straightforward rulings of the *Shulhan Aruch*, and not based on esoteric calculations.

## *Concealed*

Our Sages teach, “Everything is predestined, and freedom [of choice] is given. And the world is judged fairly.”<sup>32</sup> “Everything is predestined” is a reference to *hanhagat haYihud* – everything that happens is part of Hashem’s plan, in keeping with His Will. “And freedom [of choice] is given” refers to man’s Free Will and the straightforward workings of reward and punishment, dispensed in keeping with man’s actions. Ultimately, “the world is judged fairly,” because Hashem wants to reward us for making the right choices.

Often, we cannot see how this is so. King David said, *Diminu, Elokim, hasdecha b’kerev Hechalecha*, “We imagined, *Elokim*, Your kindness is in the midst of Your Sanctuary.”<sup>33</sup> When we see suffering, we think it is “*Elokim*,” the Name of G-d that denotes Divine Judgment and punishment. But this perception is only imaginary (*dimyon*), because our viewpoint from below is hazy and blurred. If we could see what is in Heaven, in Hashem’s Sanctuary (*b’kerev Hechalecha*), we would know that even the suffering is kindness, not harsh judgment at all. There, with Hashem’s omniscient knowledge of past, present, and future, it is apparent that all His deeds are *hesed*, intended only for our good. He is a merciful G-d Who does not inflict suffering upon His children for no reason. There are hidden calculations behind what takes place in our world.

Ultimately, even the very worst that befalls a person is from Hashem and we need to accept that it is good, even if we cannot yet see or understand that good: “Everything the Holy One, blessed be He, does is all for the best.”<sup>34</sup> From where we are, we may not understand why or see the good, but from the perspective of the Heavenly Sanctuary, there are no questions.

---

<sup>30</sup> If the transgressor was warned in advance and if his transgression was witnessed by two witnesses. (see Rambam, *Hilchot Sanhedrin* 12:1).

<sup>31</sup> *Targum Yonatan, Bamidbar* 15:32.

<sup>32</sup> *Avot* 3:15.

<sup>33</sup> *Tehillim* 48:10.

<sup>34</sup> *Berachot* 60b.





## ***The Transition***

Now we can explain the transition at *Ne'ilah* from *teshuvah me'yirah* to the *teshuvah me'ahavah* of Sukkot.

The Arizal<sup>35</sup> teaches that with each of the five prayers on Yom Kippur we advance to increasingly higher levels, culminating in *Keter*, the highest level. The level of *Keter* is associated with the *Shem Havayah* (*yod-keh-vav-keh*).<sup>36</sup> At the conclusion of *Ne'ilah* we say *Hashem Hu HaElokim* (Hashem is *Elokim*) seven times. Now, the *hanhagah* called *Elokim* (*hanhagat hamishpat*) ascends and merges with the higher *hanahagah* called *Shem Havayah* (*hanhagat haYihud*), and *teshuvah me'yirah* becomes *teshuvah me'ahavah*.

*Teshuvah me'yirah*, the *teshuvah* of the *Yamim Noraim*, means that we repent because we fear the judgment and punishment that are the outcome of *hanhagat hamishpat*. But there is also *hanhagat haYihud*, which operates on a different plane, based on Hashem's plans for the *tikun* of man and the world. Here we accept Hashem's Will not because we understand it, but from love of Hashem Who leads us and guides us. This is the *teshuvah me'ahavah* that comes after Yom Kippur.

When we understand that Divine Judgment and Divine *Hesed* are both from the One G-d, *hanhagat hamishpat* (*Elokim*) comes together with *hanhagat haYihud* (Hashem); this is the profound meaning of *Hashem Hu HaElokim*. When we understand this truth, fear becomes joy. It is the transition from *teshuvah me'yirah* to *teshuvah me'ahavah*. Our *teshuvah* is different now. We recognize that everything, even what seems bad, is all for Him and all for a purpose. Now we can serve Him with joy, like a loving son serving his father.

***This essay contains divre Torah. Please treat it with proper respect.***

To put your name on our e-mail list, please contact us at [office@ahavatshalom.org.il](mailto:office@ahavatshalom.org.il)

---

<sup>35</sup> *Shaar HaKavanot, Derushe Yom HaKippurim, Derush Dalet*, p. 102b–c.

<sup>36</sup> It is strictly forbidden to pronounce the *Shem Havayah*; we may not even say its letters in uninterrupted sequence. In ordinary speech, we say it as "Hashem," literally "the Name." In blessings and prayer, we say instead the Name *alef-dalet-nun-yod*, the Name of *Adnut*.