

ANINUT

Essay by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I believe it is no accident that the word used to express the initial period of grief after the loss of a loved one is **ANINUT**. And although the root of the word is often used to mean **AVEILUT**, grief and mourning, I cannot ignore the fact that it is also related to the word **ANI**. Technically speaking, certainly from a Halachic perspective, this is the period of time during which one is to be involved with preparations for the funeral, with thoughts of the deceased. But, in reality, despite that, it is a period of intense aloneness; a preoccupation with the self and a justified wallowing in self-pity. Inability to cope with the reality that has just become, one can only focus on **ANI** (me) – how will I survive this loss? What will I do? Can my life ever be the same? My loss, my pain. And, as if to emphasize this (or could it possibly be intentional?) one is told not to relate to the Almighty in any positive way. Exemption from all positive mitzvot, regardless of any desire to perform them, shuts one out of the world of Gd. The only way you may relate to Him is out of **YIR'A** (fear) – a weak basis for any positive relationship. We are bidden to obey all the prohibitions. We are permitted to express our anger at Gd – if that be the case – by not being expected to perform positive mitzvot; we may not express that feeling through disobeying or

misbehavior. That is where the line is drawn.

But the other side of the coin, that relationship with Gd which is based upon love and rooted in a sense of trust and need, seems to be denied. When everything falls apart and no one can really make you feel better so you turn to Gd, you are told 'no'. You may cry to Him, ask for help, talk to Him, but you may not exhibit the behavior that has always represented your wanting to please Him and praise Him. And although this may be for our benefit in some way, it leaves the person more alone than alone. You are only **ANI**.

MA YIT-ONEIN ADAM CHAI, GEVER AL CHATA-AV - Why should a living man complain? A man for his sins (Eicha 3:39).

REUVEN, B'CHORI ATA, KOCHI V'REISHIT ONI, YETER S'EIT V'YETER AZ - Reuven, you are my firstborn, my strength and the first of my might; [you should have been] superior in rank and superior in power (B'reishit 49:3).

If the word **ANI** is, indeed, related to the root **ALEF-VAV-NUN**, - it has a double meaning of **AVEILUT** in the pasuk from Eicha, and **KO'ACH, G'VURA**, strength, from the pasuk in B'reishit.

Regarding the quote from Eicha, perhaps, one who is to be an **ADAM CHAI**, a person who is truly alive, **MA YIT-ONEIN** – how can he be one who is focused on the **ANI**, only on himself? That cannot be true life. But rather he

should be **GEVER AL CHATA-AV**, be strong, overcome his sins and then truly achieve life.

If a person is only involved in self, thereby becoming the center of his universe, he cuts himself off from achieving what he should during his lifetime because he does not relate to the world which is outside of him, sufficiently; he does not consider his fellow-man as worthy as he himself is. In this sense, it is to be mourned that he has thrown away his life. But on the other hand, a person must have a feeling of self-worth, must know his own strengths and value so that he can interact positively and effectively with those outside of himself. His greatest strength stems from within and then he can give of himself to others and, in turn, be strengthened by them:

**IM EIN ANI (ON, OZ) LI, MI LI? UCHSHE-
ANI L'ATZMI, MA ANI (ON, AVEIL)...**

Borei N'fashot

Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I found that especially after my son, who has Down's Syndrome, was born, old things took on new meanings. Things I had never thought twice about. Most specifically and most often, this expressed itself in the words of the davening. I began to realize how brilliant and how divinely inspired the men of the Anshei Knesset HaGedola were when they coined the formulae for b'rachot and davening. For although the surface meaning of the words was one thing and very clearly that one thing, so much more could be read into them even at a p'shat level.

The first thing I noticed was the new meaning I found in the b'racha of BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT. It no longer only referred to food or sustenance. It also became very literal:

BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT V'CHESRONAN
- Gd created all beings, even those with 'chesronot'- lackings- large or small. He created my special son.

AL KOL MAH SHEBRATA - He created these particular beings in addition to everything else He created. Why?

L'HACHAYOT BAHEM NEFESH KOL CHAI
- so as to instill through them real "life" and meaning into other people's lives. How their presence enriches and enhances us all. How wealthy we become when we allow ourselves to be open to these nefashot with chesronan and to be touched by them.

Along the same lines, I noticed that its partner b'racha had similar meaning: **SHEHAKOL NIHYAH BIDVARO**. Yes, even people like my son were created for a purpose with the same "words" as all other beings, all as the will of the Ribono Shel Olam. (Could this even be considered a type of Tzidduk hadin?)

It was interesting how the request in the Shmoneh Esrei of ATA CHONEIN LA'ADAM DA'AT also took on a special meaning. It was no longer simply a statement of gratitude for our intellect and a request to use it properly. Now it was a plea that my son, too, could be granted DE'A, BINA, V'HASKEL to the extent that Gd would permit.

Mashiv HaRu'ach / Morid HaTal

Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

The second b'racha of the Shmoneh Esrei is referred to as G'VUROT (powers). The primary gevura of Gd that is mentioned is T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM, the revival of the dead. Depending upon the season, we insert one of two different phrases between the opening sentence and the rest of the b'racha. We refer to the particular gevura of Gd in terms of bringing either rain - MASHIV HARUACH U'MORID HAGESHEM - or dew: MORID HATAL. According to Bartenura in the Mishna of B'rachot (5:2) rain is considered a gevura based upon p'sukim in Iyov (5: 9-10). The main theme of the b'racha, however, is the revival of the dead, so how do these phrases about rain and dew fit in?

We have been taught that receiving rain is similar to T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM because it makes possible the growth or rebirth, of a 'dead' seed in the ground into a plant. Given that the main idea, then, is T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM, perhaps another way of understanding these words is appropriate:

MASHIV HARU'ACH - When it comes time for Hashem to "return the spirit"

(soul), the time of T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM, He will also

MORID HAGESHEM - return it along with the physical body (GASHMIYUT) from which it came (as Ramban says, that the physical will be elevated to the level of the neshama so that there will no longer be any conflict between the two.)

What further supports this kind of understanding is the phrase used during the other part of the year: MORID HATAL. (26:19) The dead shall live... awake and sing you who dwell in the dust, for Your dew is the dew of light. Chazal, on the Yerushalmi (B'rachot 5:2), explain this as: this is the dew through which, in the future, the dead will be revived.

How perfect! MORID HATAL - at the time of T'CHIYAT HAMEITIM, Gd will bring down the TAL that will do just that - revive the dead.

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### While We Are Alive

If you want to MASHIV HARU'ACH, to return the spiritual to your life and enrich it, then you must MORID HAGESHEM - you must lessen and minimize the role and importance of GASHMIYUT, the physical and material in your life.

# NEVONIM

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

In this week's Parsha, Rashi points out something interesting which we might, otherwise, not notice. When Moshe recounts his difficulty in handling all of B'nei Yisrael (1:9), he relates the solution of appointing others to help him: HAVU LACHEM ANASHIM CHACHAMIM UNVONIM VIYDU'IM L'SHIVTEICHEM... [provide for yourselves men who are wise, understanding, and well known to your tribes... (1:13).] But when he tells what he did, he says VA'EKACH ET... ANASHIM CHACHAMIM VIYDU'IM... (1:15) [so I took... men who were wise and well known...], the description of NEVONIM - 'understanding' is absent. As Rashi says: AVAL NEVONIM LO MATZATI [I didn't find men who were 'understanding'.]

In order to suggest an answer to this, I would first like to take a seemingly different idea to connect to this:

According to Chazal (referenced by Rav Moshe Shapiro in MiMa'amakim on D'varim p.20), the book of D'varim, also called Mishneh Torah, is actually a bridge between TORAH SHEBICHTAV [the written law] and TORAH SHEB'AL PEH [the oral law]. The Zohar tells us there is a hint to the Oral law in this parsha: VAYHI B'ARBA'IM SHANA... HO'IL MOSHE BEI-EIR ET HATORAH HAZOT... (1:3;5) [In the 40th year...

Moshe began (desired - Ramban) to elaborate on this Torah]. According to Megaleh Amukot (Ofen 246), the Zohar is telling us that the concept of 'Mishneh Torah' is the "secret of TORAH SHEB'AL PEH" that the Jews received after 40 years - MEM SHANA (written in Hebrew, this spells out Mishna). [He adds a kabbalistic statement: "In my opinion, this is the 'secret' (SOD) of VAYHI YITZCHAK BEN ARBA'IM SHANA B'KACHTO ET RIVKA" [Yitzchak was 40 years old when he took Rivka (as a wife).] The initials of B'KACHTO ET RIVKA, are BET ALEF REISH which spell BEI-EIR 'explained' (as Moshe does at the beginning of D'varim). Since Yitzchak is the secret (SOD) of TORAH 'SHEBICHTAV and Rivka is the secret (SOD) of TORAH SHEB'AL PEH. And Yitzchak had to wait 40 years before taking Rivka since the Jews waited 40 years to get TORAH SHEBE'AL PEH.

How does this relate to our opening question? I would suggest the following:

The miraculous existence of the people in the midbar, under the direct involvement of Gd to sustain them, is now coming to an end as they prepare to enter Israel to live a 'normal' life where these "open" miracles will be hidden. The leader of the people during their supernatural travels, Moshe, is being replaced by Yehoshua, the one who will lead them into and in Israel, conquering the land in a way that might have involved occasional miracles, but the supernatural was not the rule of the day.

Returning to NEVONIM, Rashi defines this as M'VINIM DAVAR MITOCH DAVAR (1:3) [they can derive one thing from another]. A NAVON is one who can take the information given, that which is placed before him and understand the meaning beneath the surface to be able to use it to apply elsewhere. He can take the knowledge before him, expand upon it and gain more understanding than that which would superficially be apparent. If I may be so bold as to suggest this, I would posit that TORAH SHEB'AL PEH, its development and usage would be something that is HAMEVIN DAVAR MITOCH DAVAR - it is something developed through BINA. If this is true, then it could explain the lack of NEVONIM at that point in time. The people had been taught TORAH SHEBICHTAV all by Moshe, not having been exposed to developing deeper ideas yet in the way it would be in the future. The generation of the midbar

had no reason to have developed NEVONIM. Now, as they prepare to enter Israel, what do we find? USHMARTEM VA'ASITEM KI HI CHOCH-MATCHEM UVINATCHEM L'EINEI HO'AMIM... V'AMRU RAK AM CHACHAM V'NAVON HAGOI HAGADOL HAZEH" (Va'etchanan 4:6). [You shall guard them and perform them for that is your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the people... and they will say certainly, this great nation is a wise and understanding people.] B'nei Yisrael are being charged USHEMARTEM - which Rashi defines as ZU MISHNA - this is study.

When they finally enter Eretz Yisrael they will be developing that aspect. As Chazal tell us, TORAH SHEBE'AL PEH was initiated only when they began to settle the Land. And it is only then that the other nations refer to them as NAVON.

# KAVANA

## Afterthoughts

by Yocheved Bienenfeld

Davening with kavana (concentration) has always been a struggle for me. I believe I'm not alone in this. But I'm very conscious of my failings here. Sometimes, this awareness helps achieve greater concentration and sometimes, it does just the opposite by discouraging me. Occasionally, if only rarely, this very despair, the feeling of shame it engenders in me, brings about the kavana unexpectedly. When I said the words ZOCHER CHASDEI AVOT (He remembers the kindnesses of our fathers), I thought of what it must be like for HaKadosh Baruch Hu to listen to the vast amount of prayers like my own, prayers recited dutifully but by rote, religiously, but without feeling. How He must "hurt", how much pain it must cause Him to see what is available today compared to once upon a time. ZOCHER CHASDEI AVOT - when He remembers our forefathers, their greatness, their kindness, their unparalleled devotion and attachment to Him, how He must bemoan the change. And yet, despite this, He still will MEIVI GO'EL LIVNEI V'NEIHEM - He will bless us, ultimately, with the GO'EL, the Redeemer we so pray for, despite our shortcomings.

When I feel lacking kavana, as above, the following comes to mind as well: ELOKAI, N'TZOR L'SHONI MEIRA USFASAI MIDABEIR MIRMA (My Gd,

guard my tongue from evil and my lips from speaking deceitfully). This pointedly reminds me at the end of my Shmoneh Esrei - which may not have been said with the best kavana - that I also don't want to deceive when I daven and say words I don't mean or even pay attention to, resorting to simple lip service. Is this not also deception?

But when all is said and done, I think of this: YIHYU L'RATZON IMREI FI V'HEGYON LIBI LIFANECHA..." (May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be favorable to you...). We beseech the Almighty to accept our prayers, hoping that our IMREI FI - the words of our mouths and HEGYON LIBI - the thoughts in our hearts - be desirable to Him. Why do we separate the context of our davening into two categories, one of words and the other of thoughts from our hearts? Why not use a single phrase to describe our prayer? Perhaps, this can be understood in two different ways:

First, there are different kinds of prayer. One of them is prayer that is uttered with the mouth, expressed verbally. Another kind is the prayer that is wordless, that which is in our hearts, that which cannot find expression in speech. So maybe these two descriptions of IMREI FI and HEGYON LIBI, are meant to thereby include all prayers, silent as well as audible, those defying expression as well as those clearly articulated.

Then, there could be a deeper level to this explanation that is, perhaps, not quite so noble. As a matter of fact, in all honesty, it is an understanding that would be a condemnation of our ability to pray as opposed to a concession to different types of prayer. It might even be a more realistic assessment of most of our prayers, unfortunately. And that explanation would be to understand the words IMREI FI as just that: something that came from my mouth, without kavana, without connection to soul or thought. My mouth rambled on out of habit while my thoughts were else-

where. But lest we be led to think that we are empty and our prayers are meaningless, we must recognize that although some of our prayer might leave much to be desired, we still do have HEGYON LIBI, the thoughts in our heart. There, indeed, is part of us that in the depth of our hearts says the words of these prayers, as well as its own words, with feeling and sincerity and truly means all that was expressed, if only by our tongues.

And so, we request and hope that both kinds of prayer be accepted.

# POTE'ACH ET YADECHA

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

The Shulchan Aruch tells us that we must say the above pasuk with special kavana and if we forget to, we need to repeat from Pote'ach et Yadecha until the end of Ashrei (O.C. 51:7; Mishna B'rura 15-16). We learn from Chazal (see Rashi, Radak, Metzudos Dovid, et al.) that this pasuk tells us that HaKadosh Baruch Hu provides food, parnasa, and other desires according to what people want. Accordingly, the traditional translation of this verse is, "You open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." Technically speaking, however, in order to mean this, it should say ... R'TZON KOL CHAI not L'CHOL CHAI RATZON. The technical translation then should be "You open Your hands and fill every living being with desire."

My problem with the explanation of Chazal is twofold:

1) we know that Gd doesn't give us everything we want. (The world simply could not survive were we all spoiled brats.)

2) the pasuk before this one states very clearly that He provides everyone with food: EINEI CHOL EILECHA Y'SABEIRU V'ATA NOTEIN LAHEM ET OCHLAM B'ITO (The eyes of all look to You with hope and You give them their food in its time). In addition, it says two verses

later that R'TZON Y'REIAV YA'ASEH (He does that which those who fear Him desire). Again, seemingly the same thought, so why repeat it?

I am not about to dispute Chazal, they know a lot more than I do. There must be something here that I don't understand. But because these questions stand, it would imply that we are to learn an additional message.

To be true to the p'shat, I offer the following: To be MASBIA RATZON, would seem to mean that Gd satiates, gives to all a complete portion of RATZON - of will. Meaning that He makes sure all of us are blessed with the necessary desire to continue living our lives regardless of the portion that has been meted out to us - rich or poor. So, if what one receives from Gd is sparse and one is an oni, what enables him to continue and go one and not give up? RATZON. What makes it possible for anyone who has been handed difficulties to continue and not give up? RATZON. And that will, that RATZON, is what Hashem gives us so that we can successfully deal with the lot we have been given. We have always been told that Gd never gives a person a NISAYON or burden that he can't handle. It must be because He has blessed us with the necessary amount of RATZON to continue.

If this is true, then it is easier for me to understand the halacha that requires us to repeat from POTE'ACH ET YADECHA

until the end of Ashrei, if we haven't properly concentrated on those words. Why not simply repeat that one verse? Because if the above meaning is true, then the verses are all one unit: What helps the person activate this RATZON to continue? What assurance does he receive? The knowledge that although TZADIK HASHEM B'CHOL D'RACHAV (Hashem is righteous in all His ways), although Hashem is a Gd of DIN and justice, He is CHASID B'CHOL MA'ASAV (magnanimous in all His deeds) - He operates LIFNIM MISHURAT HADIN, not in strict judgement, and so we are dealing with a compassionate Being and there's every reason for hope. Especially since KAROV HASHEM L'CHOL KOR'AV, L'CHOL ASHER YIKRA'UHU VE'EMET (Hashem is close to all who call to Him, to all who call him in truth) - when we are having difficulty with our portion, despite being blessed with the necessary RATZON, Gd is close to us when we call out to Him sincerely for His help. And R'TZON Y'REI'AV YA'ASEH ... - He won't ignore our pleas, but will respond and redeem. SHOMER HASHEM ET KOL OHAVOV V'ET KOL HOR'SHA'IM YASHMID. And for those who are on the high level of coping without complaining and operating purely out of a love of Gd, He responds by protecting them so there is no need for them to call out, while He deals with their enemies. Therefore, T'HILAT HASHEM Y'DABER PI VIVARECH KOL BASAR SHEM KODSHO L'OLAM VA'ED (My mouth will speak the praises of

Hashem...), it more than behooves us to proclaim the praises of He Who granted us the will, the desire, the strength to continue against all odds and to be able to trust in His help always.

I can't ignore, however, the understanding of Chazal so, perhaps, the meaning that is eluding me is something like this:

If we look at the word RATZON in a different way, understand it on more than a superficial level, a truer meaning can emerge. We have RATZON of which we are aware and RATZON of which we are not aware. The RATZON of which we are aware would, more often than not, fall into the category of material needs and desires. We know what we want. And, very often, what we want is not necessarily what we need or even that which is good for us. The RATZON of which we are less aware is the one that is related to our spiritual needs, the desires of the NESHAMA. We are usually not tuned in to those desires. Our lives are spent in a struggle between the desires of the NESHAMA, indeed, its needs, and material desires. Sometimes, they are in harmony with each other, but, more often than not, this is not the case. Despite this, we know that what is truly best for us is that for which the unsullied NESHAMA longs.

An example of this true desire of each person is in the Rambam (Hilchot Gerushin 2:20) where he discusses forcing a man to give his wife a get. On the one hand, a get that is given through

coercion, is not valid. On the other hand, we are told that the Beit Din can administer lashes, they are KOFIN OTO, they force him until he agrees to give the get. So how is this not coercion? Because, says the Rambam, the man is actually doing what he wants to do - as a Jew, he wants what his NESHAMA wants, to do the right thing.

If this is so, if we place that definition of RATZON into the verse in Ashrei, it becomes more believable. Because Gd, indeed, does satisfy the desire, this inner RATZON of everyone. For the desires of the NESHAMA are pure and are exactly what is good for the person and the same desires that He would want for us as well.

# LO TIT-GO-D'DU

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I've been reviewing parsha every week for quite a few years and once in a while, I am lucky enough to notice things I've never noticed before which give additional meaning to what I'm learning. Very often, it comes in the form of a certain usage of a word where it can be understood in more than one way.

For example, in Va'etchanan (5:19) which we read a few weeks ago, Moshe recounts the scene at Mt. Sinai and describes how the 'voice' of Hashem was a KOL GADOL V'LO YASAF - [a great voice which didn't cease] (according to the Targum as cited by Rashi). A few verses later, he tells how the people were afraid of hearing this voice: "Why should we die for this great fire will consume us if we continue to hear the voice of Hashem Elokeinu." Whenever the Torah uses similar wording in two (or more) places that are close to each other, it's always a good idea to look for a reason for it, even if the reason is simply a play on words. So here we have the word YASAF/YOSFIM meaning 'to stop' in one verse and meaning 'to continue' in the other. There is a similar occurrence of this debated definition of YASAF in Parshat Vayeishev (B'reishit 38:26) in the story about Yehuda and Tamar. After Yehuda publicly admits that it was he who impregnated Tamar, the verse tells V'LO

YASAF OD L'DA'ATAH [and he didn't continue/didn't cease being intimate with her]. This translation reflects Rashi's informing us that the word can be understood in two different ways. If so, then using that information in Va'etchanan maybe we can understand the verse about the people not wanting to continue to hear the voice of Hashem as an implied warning to us: "If we stop listening to the voice of Hashem VAMATNU - we will die." True.

Similarly, I found an additional message in this week's parsha of R'ei, based upon different legitimate understandings of certain words. It is also, I believe, an appropriate message as we approach Elul. BANIM ATEM LASHEM ELOKEICHEM LO TITGOD'DU V'LO TASIMU KORCHA BEIN EINEICHEM LAMEIT (14:1) [You are children to Hashem your Gd, you may not cut yourselves and you may not make a bald spot between your eyes over the dead]. The content of this verse tells us of the limitations in the way we are allowed to mourn over the dead. In essence, we are not to indulge in the practices of the other nations. Why? Because you are a holy nation to Hashem your Gd. And Hashem chose you to be a treasured nation for Him out of all the nations on the face of the earth (14:2).

TANYA: LO TITGOD'DU - LO TA'ASU AGUDOT, AGUDOT... Don't create separate groupings for yourselves, e.g., a beit din in the city where part of the members holds according to the opinion

of Beit Shammai and another part holds according to the opinion of Beit Hillel.

It's interesting that Chazal in the gemara (Y'vamot 14a) choose to define LO TITGOD'DU in a way that differs significantly from the p'shat, the simple meaning, a way that doesn't seem to fit into the context of the verse. They see it as meaning that we shouldn't behave in a way that breaks us into separate groups. There is even a halacha derived from here that a city should not have two batei din with each one holding according to a different authority (Rambam Hilchot Avoda Zara 12). The reason I find this interesting is because of what follows in the pasuk: V'LO TA'ASU KORCHA BEIN EINEICHEM. The simple meaning of this half of the pasuk is consistent with the first half - don't behave in self-mutilating ways because of mourning a death. But the wording also seems consistent with the first half on a deeper level. Look at the root of KORCHA. Is it not KORACH - the master of machloket and divisiveness? (V'LO YIHYEH K'KORACH UK'ADASO (Korach 17:5) - don't be like Korach and his group).

LO TA'ASEH KORCHA - don't let there be splits among you; distance yourselves from divisiveness. BEIN EINEICHEM - don't let your eyes see things in a way that separates you from others. Because this can only result in LAMEIT - whether actual death (as in the SIN'AT CHINAM present during the siege of Jerusalem before the

destruction of the Second Temple) or in the punishment of TZORA'AT for the unavoidable LASHON HARA that will result from MACHLOKET, and one with TZORA'AT is considered as dead.

This would mesh well with the Ha'amek Davar on the pasuk, for he questions the use of apparently two reasonings for this warning.

1) BANIM ATEM LASHEM - you are HaShem's children, and

2) KI AM KADOSH ATa - because you are a holy nation. Since we are separate from the other nations, unique, and holy to HaShem, we should demonstrate this by not using their practices, such as those in the pasuk.

In understanding the meaning behind BANIM ATEM LASHEM, however, he uses Chazal's second understanding of LO TITGOD'DU while combining it with the simple meaning of the second phrase: Since you are children to HaShem, therefore it isn't proper that you should appear separate in customs belonging to the Torah, for the nature of children is to go in the same path.

My conclusion has to be that there are, indeed, two messages here and the entire pasuk can be read and understood each way:

1) Since you are children to HaShem your Gd, you may not cut yourselves and you may not make a bald spot between your eyes over the dead and thus

**behave like the other nations who practice such acts of self-mutilation.**

**2) Since you are children of HaShem, don't break up into differing groups and don't behave like Korach to cause divisiveness and machloket which will only lead to death.**

# T'SHUVA, CIRCLES, AND THE UNIVERSE

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

I usually try to prepare myself, during the month of Elul at least, for the approaching New Year. T'shuva is not a new concept for me and I probably read some of the same things year after year for inspiration. Among the reasons that t'shuva at this time is difficult for me is that I try to do t'shuva most of the time during the year. I believe that any good, religious Jew does the same. We take account of our behavior on a regular basis and don't really need the blast of the shofar during Elul to wake us up to the fact that we are always accountable for our deeds. I think that what makes this time of year a time of more focus - aside from the fact that Chazal emphasize that this is an EIT RATZON for t'shuva - is that the judgment factor comes into play. When we do a CHESHBON HANEFESH - a self-evaluation - during the year, it's more with an eye to improving and to undoing improper behavior (yes, this is still considered t'shuva) with little, if any, thought given to DIN, to judgment. Now, however, the very real and almost palpable atmosphere of judgment makes us very aware of the fact that we have to account for our actions before Gd.

All that said, I need to read something

during Elul that might help inspire me. So, I was reading (re-reading) material about t'shuva by Rav Kook zt"l - whom I greatly admire. He explains that t'shuva is a universal phenomenon, not something limited to the Jew or even to mankind in general. The gemara (Pesachim 54a) lists t'shuva as one of the things that was 'created' before the creation of the world. This idea that "t'shuva predated the world" is not a chronological statement, but a causal one. In other words, "t'shuva makes the world go round" - it enables the world to exist. If, indeed, t'shuva existed before the world, by definition, there was yet no sin nor sinners to necessitate it. It is the "foundation of the universe, the energy that pushes the world onward to elevate it to its true nature and destiny... waves of t'shuva cascade all over existence... the universe calls out for perfection... The voice of the universe cries out to mankind: Can't you hear? Can't you feel the pain? Aren't you ashamed?" (Moadim L'Simcha, pp. 14-15 by Rav Shlomo Aviner). Our thoughts of t'shuva are actually caused by these "waves" filtering in from the world outside. In essence, t'shuva is a return to the point of birth. The world needs to be perfect, as intended; we need to return to the pure nature with which we were created.

Thinking about the way this whole process of t'shuva was described, and recognizing that its root, SHUV, shares a cognate meaning with SOV (turn

around) and SOVEIV (surround) led to my seeing this process as a circular one: when we say someone returns to from whence he came, it implies a movement in a circle, as opposed to linear - at least, that's how I envision it. Given that, I started thinking about some "universals".

The universe is round in nature. The cosmos, planets, everything is circular. There seems to be a natural flow in Nature. Thinking about this circular formation led me to focus on the fact that not only did Gd create the world "circular" but also the systems that exist in the world are also cyclical: physical Mankind begins and returns to dust; spiritual Mankind (the neshama) begins and returns to its source; many creatures (animals, fish, birds) return to the places of their birth to recreate - and in some cases, to die; Nature recycles itself: seeds to plants to seeds; animal carcasses replenish the earth; water is recycled - there is the same amount of water in the world now as there was at the time of Creation. The movement of the Sun, Moon, and planets is circular; planets rotate and revolve. Everything goes around.

What about the cyclical nature of time? We Jews believe that certain periods of time have certain characteristics. Historic events that have occurred stamp their imprint on a given time for all the future, which means that when that period of time returns (implying a cycle) it is colored with the effect of

that event. From a mystical point of view (I don't have the sources), time is defined by the different energies and emanations that infuse it. And when these times re-occur those energies are at their fullest and can be tapped into and captured. (This would seem to fly in the face of our belief that we shouldn't hold by "good luck" or "bad luck" times. But we do hold this to a certain extent: the 9 days, the 9th of Av, 40 days from Rosh Chodesh Elul to Yom Kippur... They don't, however, determine history and events and we have the power to overcome those "negative" times or ignore the "positive" ones.)

So, what is it about circles (and cycles) that describe the act of t'shuva that makes it such an important force in the universe? One possibility could be in the message of HaRav Ben Tzion Firer about the merits of the circle (Eileh Heim Mo'adai: SOD HAMA'AGAL p.191). "The circle is eternity. There is no beginning and no end. It represents equality - in a circle, every point is equidistant from the middle. Nothing closer or farther, no concept of greater or lesser importance. The secret of the circle was placed in the creation of the world ..." The ways of the Torah are referred to as a circle by Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch in his definition of MAG'LOSECHA (T'hilim 17:5) and MAG'LEI TZEDEK (23:3). These words mean "your circles". "MAG'LOSECHA are the circles or bounds drawn by Gd's Law which circumscribe all our acts" (Hirsch

T'hilim, Feldheim, p.125). T'shuva pre-dated the world; Torah pre-dated the world. The universe is based upon these circles.

Coming full circle: we return to our original selves, full circle; we return to the boundaries, the circle of the Torah which surrounds us; we return to the essence of the universe.

And I always thought t'shuva was simply a personal thing.

P.S. Just wondering: is it at all possible that this SOD HA'IGUL (secret of the circle) has anything to do with what B'nei Yisrael saw at Mt. Sinai that influenced them to form davka an eigel?

# T'KA B'SHOFAR GADOL

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

...L'CHEIRUTEINU ... V'KAB'TZEINU  
YACHAD MEI'ARBA KANFOT HA'ARETZ

Sound the great shofar for our freedom  
... and gather us together (YACHAD)  
from the four corners of the Earth.

(from the weekday Amida)

Could the word YACHAD be considered  
an extra or unnecessary word? Would  
V'KAB'TZEINU meaning "gather us"  
automatically imply that this would  
mean "together"?

If this is a possibility, then I suggest that  
the word YACHAD is referring to Gd  
together with us. May we gather  
together Klal Yisrael from galut along  
with (YACHAD) the Sh'china in exile - to  
return to Israel. We daven for kibutz  
galuyot (the ingathering of exiles) and  
make the mistake of thinking that its  
purpose is simply to bring all Jews back  
to Israel. But the reason we want all  
Jews out of galut involves more than  
that. For when we all return, it means  
that the Sh'china will return as well; for  
we know that Gd promised us He would  
be with us in galut. And so, if we are  
lacking all Jews here, we are lacking -  
more significantly - the presence of the  
Sh'china.

With this backdrop, I prefer to under-  
stand a quote in our morning daily

davening from Tz'fania 3:20, differently  
than it is usually translated:

... BA'EIT HAHI AVI ETCHEM U'VA-EIT  
KAB'TZI ETCHEM ... B'SHUVI ET  
SH'VUTEICHEM L'EINEICHEM... [at that  
time I will bring you and at that time I  
will gather you ...when I bring back your  
captivities before your eyes]. "When I  
bring back your captivities". The word  
SHUVI, however, in its correct  
grammatical form doesn't mean "when I  
bring (you) back; it means "when I  
(Myself) return". If so, the p'shat  
(simple) meaning of this would use the  
word EIT in its meaning of 'with' and  
thus be: "When I return with your  
captivities". Gd's Sh'china will, indeed,  
return when we have all returned.

Along the same lines, the b'racha that  
closes this request could be interpreted  
accordingly, as well: M'KABEITZ  
NIDCHEI AMO YISRAEL - the simple  
meaning is - "He Who gathers together  
the NIDACHIM - the dispersed of His  
nation Israel." Alternatively, it is  
possible to understand this as meaning -  
"He who gathers together those who  
were NIDACHIM, dispersed because of  
His nation Israel." The Sh'china was  
NIDACHAT because the nation of Israel  
was in galut - for Gd promised that He  
would remain with us in exile and not  
forsake us. Therefore, this ending would  
refer to the gathering in of the Sh'china  
as well.

It's time to bring Him back.

# L'OLAM Y'HEI ADAM...

## **Afterthoughts** **by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

L'OLAM Y'HEI ADAM Y'REI SHAMAYIM...  
UMODEH AL HA'EMET, V'DOVEIR EMET  
BILVAVO

One should always fear Heaven... and admit the truth and speak the truth in his heart. (from the morning davening).

The importance of truth is fairly obvious. Without it, the world would be even more absurd than it already is, even more confusing. The confidence that things were truly as they seemed would be gone and, as such, we could not possibly function effectively; we would flounder even more. Simply put, the world couldn't survive. As if to underscore the seemingly obvious need for truth, we are told here to speak the truth even in our hearts - to be honest with ourselves. And what might appear to be a simple statement, is advice that isn't as easy to follow as it might seem.

Most of us find it quite difficult to do, I believe. We've all been there. It's called rationalizing. We make all kinds of excuses to justify certain behaviors or conclusions - not just in order to look good in the eyes of others - but to be able to live with ourselves. It is interesting how effective we can be in lying to ourselves. But we couldn't really do this if we were able to DOVEIR EMET BILVAVO. I understand why we might find it difficult to admit the truth to

others, we may feel embarrassed about our opinions or our behavior. But why is it so difficult to admit the truth to ourselves?

I'm not really sure, but I do have some thoughts. One reason could be that by being truly honest in our deepest selves, we rob ourselves of any illusion we may have had about who we really are. We also destroy our rationalizations for behavior that is beneath us, yet to which we still cling. To a certain extent, we are baring our souls to ourselves and, sometimes, it might not be such a pretty picture. Obviously, being honest with ourselves would afford us the opportunity to evaluate, to change, to do t'shiva where necessary. After all, what kind of a vidui (confession) can a person do if he is clueless as to his faults?

On the other hand, we might very well discover positive elements, admirable traits we hadn't focused on and, perhaps, even a greatness of being.

Having said that, I think there is a more profound importance to being able to recognize and admit the truth to ourselves: after 120 years, we are told, some of the YISURIM we will have to endure in order to purify our souls in the OLAM HA'EMET (world of truth) is just that: facing the EMET. Scrolling through scenes in our lives in which we may not have behaved the best possible way; times we did wrong and knew - deep down - that we were wrong. To the extent that we hide these truths from

ourselves during our lifetimes, to that extent will the experience be more painful. The humiliation felt while "watching" these scenes while in the presence of the most merciful Father is, indeed a GEHINOM. Emotional pain, as we all know, is greater than physical pain; and that's exactly what we will have to expect at that time.

With that insight, I would like to try to get a better understanding of what we are told about Yitzchak (Toldot 27:33): When he becomes aware of the fact that he has just been fooled by Yaakov and with Eisav standing now before him, it says "and Yitzchak trembled with an extremely great trembling". Many suggestions for his trembling have been offered but I would like to focus on the Rashi which says 'he saw GEHINOM open before him'. The Gur Aryeh says that Yitzchak experienced a "taste" of GEHINOM. Again, there are a few explanations of why the concept of GEHINOM suddenly appears here (e.g., see Targum Yonatan). But the bottom line is that he saw GEHINOM associated with Eisav. And that means - according to those who hold that Yitzchak truly had been deceived all these years by Eisav and really believed him to be good - that Yitzchak realized that he had been living in a world of deceit and falsehood; that he had been wrong all along. "Yitzchak sensed deceit; but he wondered who was the guilty one: was it Yaakov, who had acted, outwardly, at least, with deceit? Or was it Yitzchak himself, who had allowed himself to be

misled?" (Strive For Truth, part 1; Eliyahu Dessler; pp.268-269). And only now did the EMET - the unvarnished truth - appear before him. This was shades of GEHINOM, hints of that emotional torment one experiences after 120 years when confronted with the truth.

And if this is the reaction to recognizing the truth in a situation where, through no fault of his own, Yitzchak was "living a lie", so to speak, then certainly we can expect the reaction to "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" that will confront us after 120 to be no less.

I submit, then, that the authors of our prayers were giving us more than just good advice when they said L'OLAM Y'HEI ADAM Y'REI SHAMAYIM... UMODEH AL HA'EMET, V'DOVEIR EMET BILVAVO. One should always (forever - l'olam) fear Heaven... and admit the truth and speak truth in his heart. In order for us to have as smooth a transition as possible L'OLAM - to that eternal world, it behooves us to 'fear Heaven', etc. and to have the ability to recognize the truth and admit it - even to ourselves.

P.S. Interesting footnote: consider T'hilim 15 which is commonly read at funerals: Mizmor l'Dovid... A psalm of David. Gd, who shall live in Your Tabernacle, who shall dwell on Your holy mountain? He who walks in moral integrity and speaks the truth in his heart...

# **GADOL, GIBOR, NORA**

**Afterthoughts**  
**by Yocheved Bienenfeld**

## **THOUGHTS ON GD AS GADOL, GIBOR, NORA**

If I were to be asked what Gd's primary description or characteristic would be, I would say GADOL - which Chazal identify as His attribute of CHESED V'RACHAMIM, kindness and mercy. For despite what we do and what we see in the world, a reality that would clearly not be what He wants and for which we would deserve punishment, if He operated exclusively out of His MIDAT HADIN (attribute of justice), our very existence would be in jeopardy. And, from a personal standpoint, I have been most fortunate to feel myself the beneficiary of Gd's CHESED V'RACHAMIM, of His goodness and love, B"H, as opposed to the opposite. Gd is known as the GOMEL CHASADIM par excellence. Chazal tell us that He created the world as an act of CHESED because of His 'desire' to give.

If, however, we leave this as the final conclusion as to the nature of Gd, we are left with the problem of His G'VURA, of this MIDAT HADIN. If He is both equally and entirely CHESED and G'VURA and we cannot conclude that He is primarily one or the other, how, then, are we to balance this picture? Perhaps, we need to return to the previous thought that if Gd were to

judge us according to our deeds, through MIDAT HADIN alone, the survival of humankind would be in doubt. If then, that is so, how is it that it doesn't happen? Because of that self-same G'VURA: EIZEHU GIBOR? HAKOVEISH ET YITZRO. Who is considered a GIBOR? One who conquers his YETZER. Gd activates His G'VURA to conquer and overcome His MIDAT HADIN and allows the MIDAT HARACHAMIM to reign. This means that at the same time that Gd's MIDAT HARACHAMIM functions, His G'VURA does as well. Otherwise, the CHESED couldn't be operative.

Similarly, when we see or feel that Gd is behaving towards us through G'VURA, through His MIDAT HADIN, here, too, it is not operating by itself. For, in truth, when this happens, is it not because He wants what is, ultimately, the best for us? Punishment is never given for its own sake. We are, after all, dealing with Master of the universe, not with a human motivated by petty concerns. If Gd deems us deserving of punishment or of difficulties, then when He punishes, or deals us a rough hand, it is only because that is what is best for us - even if it doesn't feel that way - so our souls would not forfeit their rightful place in OLAM HABA. And so, the punishment, too, is an act of CHESED.

This understanding now gives us the true combination of CHESED and G'VURA, of RACHAMIM and DIN, in equal measure. And, in essence then, it

would seem that the two are inseparable and blend together as one - which would explain the paradox of Gd's being entirely CHESED and entirely DIN at the same time. This combination is what Chazal refer to as NORA. Describing Gd through these character traits is an invention of the human mind to help us understand how He functions. As odd as it may be and as foreign as it may be to our limited understanding, in reality, Gd is, indeed, ECHAD - there is no compartmentalization. And that is EMET.

# GRATITUDE

## Afterthoughts by Yocheved Bienenfeld

While reading Rav Schwab's book on prayer, I was stricken with the fact that there seemed to be a certain pattern presented in P'sukei d'Zimra. According to the Ashkenazic siddur, we precede BARUCH SHE'AMAR with MIZMOR SHIR CHANUKAT HABAYIT L'DAVID in which we recognize how Gd keeps us alive and functioning even in difficult times and so we conclude HASHEM ELOKAI L'OLAM ODEKA (HaShem, my Gd, I will always thank You.) The theme of gratitude is introduced. We now proceed in BARUCH SHE'AMAR, to recognize Gd for Who and What He is, which is - in truth - unknowable, so we can only "bless" His name, that which we know of through His behavior. Being recipients of all this, we are directed to HODU LASHEM, don't take it for granted, thank Him. Indeed, we then respond with MIZMOR L'TODA, a psalm of thanks. Having expressed our gratitude to Gd, His honor and glory have been enhanced and, therefore, Y'HI CH'VOD HASHEM L'OLAM (may Gd's honor endure forever). Gratitude to Him increases His honor. (As a matter of fact, the very psalm with which we started, lays down this very rule: L'MA'AN Y'ZAMERCHA... - in order for honor to 'sing' to You, I will first offer up my thanks.)

I was unsuccessful in trying to follow this concept of gratitude through the rest of P'sukei d'Zimra, so I stopped trying. But what I found pre-occupying my thoughts was this very concept of gratitude which involves much more than what we find in the daily davening. We are taught that gratitude is a fundamental tenet of Judaism. The mitzva of honoring parents, for example, is totally based upon it; we acknowledge - repeatedly - our debt to Gd for having redeemed us from Egypt; we say blessings over everything from which we derive benefit; we are not allowed to hate the Egyptians because we "owe" them for having hosted us in their land (before slavery), etc. As such, the lack of gratitude is seen as a heinous offense. We are not allowed to permit Moavite males to come into K'HAL HASHEM. Why? Just because they didn't provide us with food when we were travelling in the desert? Is that really so terrible? Obviously, the reason must be of significantly greater import. We are all familiar with the explanation of how this was a blatant display of ingratitude on their part, given that as descendants of Lot - who benefited from and owed so much to Avraham - they really "owed" this to the Jewish people, his descendants. Rav Eliyahu Dessler says "the true service of Gd is built on a foundation of gratitude" (Strive For Truth - vol 1; p. 153). Ingratitude in Judaism is not tolerated. Rav Saadia Gaon and Rabbeinu Bechaye

say that "the sense of gratitude is the basic religious emotion in Judaism, for the whole Torah is based upon it" (The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways, Rav Soloveitchik, p.70).

Why should this be so? What is it about gratitude that bestows upon it such importance? Perhaps, a hint to a possible answer can be found in the Hebrew term for it: HODA'A - TODA. The root of the word is identical to that of VIDUI - confession. A statement of thank you is an admission - a confession, if you will - that you owe something to someone else. It could mean you had been lacking in an area and they filled the need; or it could mean that even though there was no need, you benefited in some way from someone else. It could also be an admission that you cannot properly repay the other person.

The importance of recognizing this might be reflected in the very fact that people often find it difficult to express gratitude. What is so frightening or difficult about this "admission"? I think what could be unsettling is the following: firstly, it would mean you were unable to function adequately on your own - you needed help. And maybe that makes you aware that you are not self-sufficient. There is nothing wrong with that for, indeed, we are not self-sufficient, nor were we meant to be. But for some people, this could be a blow to a fragile ego: we don't like to feel dependent. Secondly, accepting

help, or gifts, very often leaves you feeling beholden to someone else. You feel you "owe" them, whether or not this is true. And if you can't "pay them back", you feel less of a person. Again, it is an affront to the ego. Thirdly, it simply means that now you are "connected" to someone else and you may not want to be.

All of the above share one common thread and that is an involvement with another person. A recognition that "no man is an island". It is humbling to be a recipient of deeds or gifts even though it can also be uplifting. But regardless, it means you need to interact with another person and in a kind and grateful way. Maybe that is why gratitude is considered so important. You are placed (sometimes, forced) into a situation that insists that you interact positively with another being so that you are forced to admit, perhaps, that you need others in order to be whole. We see the opposite in ingratitude. Ingratitude could very well reflect a dangerous tendency. Not that you are afraid to admit that you needed or benefited from someone but that you are so self-involved that you might not even be aware that someone else did something special for you. You are only thinking of yourself, you actually expect others to do for you. The ultimate in conceit. And a world or people who cannot think of others is the opposite of what Gd wants. We know what happened to the Generation of the Flood.

And maybe this is what Gd wants us to realize: we do need each other. We are not gods; we cannot survive on our own - we were not meant to. BOREI N'FASHOT RABOT V'CHESRONAN AL KOL MA SHEBARATA L'HACHAYOT BAHAM NEFESH KOL CHAI - we were created with our deficiencies so that we could interact with others and benefit each other. Going the obvious step further then, we arrive at our need for the Highest Being, the Adon Olam. Being dependent upon Gd should be a liberating experience. It's call BITACHON. This awareness requires a constant state of gratitude to Gd. Yes, even to the extent that we are expected to bless over the bad as well as over the good. It makes it impossible to forget about Gd or even be unaware of His presence.

Aside from this obvious need and reason for our gratitude to Gd, I think the true importance rests on the previously mentioned fact that showing gratitude is an admission that we are not all-powerful and that we have needs. If I can recognize that and accept that, it will be simply impossible to make myself into a god or create anything that would resemble a god. If I am at peace with the fact that I am not in control - nor am I meant to be - then I won't be tempted by false idols or ideals but will recognize the true source of all I need.

We have, then, in gratitude, a heightening of our behavior - person to person - and the basis of our behavior toward Gd.

In view of all this, I would like to propose that we understand the psalm of the day for Shabbat in a significantly different way. Our davening on Shabbat says: ... TOV L'HODOT LASHEM..." (...and the seventh day praises and says: a psalm for the Shabbat day: it is good to give thanks to Gd...). Shabbat is our MEI'EIN OLAM HABA - a taste of the world to come. And what is the essence of this world to come; what is its ultimate praise, its song? TOV L'HODOT LASHEM - it is good to be grateful to the One Above. We achieve the future world through this attribute and it is the essence of that world.