
Shofar and the Dual Nature of Man as Both Subject and Object*

The Brisker school of Talmudic thought is renowned for its precise categorization of halachic constructs. The most familiar of these categorizations is the division between cheftza and gavra- oriented laws, i.e., the determination of whether a particular halachah is subject- or object-oriented. In his teshuvah derashah of 1974, the Rav expanded the scope of such categorization to describe the fundamental principles that underlie the mitzvah of shofar. He then developed the concept even further to promote a view of the metaphysical effect of sin and repentance on man.

The Mitzvah of Shofar: Objective and Subjective Components

As a prologue to every section of the *Mishneh Torah*, Maimonides lists the mitzvos discussed therein. In his prologue to *Hilchos Shofar*, Maimonides states that there is a requirement “to hear the sound [kol] of the shofar on the first of Tishrei,” and, in the very first paragraph of the first chapter, he writes that “it is a

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positive Biblical mitzvah to hear the blast [*teruah*] of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah as the verse states: 'A day of *teruah* shall it be for you.'" There are two subtle differences in wording between the prologue and the first sentence: 1) Why does Maimonides first use *kol* and then *teruah* to refer to the sound emanating from the shofar? 2) Why does he refer to the day alternately as "the first of Tishrei" and "Rosh Hashanah"?

The answer to both questions lies in understanding the dual aspect of the mitzvah, as outlined by Maimonides: "Even though the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah is a decree of the Torah, there is an [additional] allusion in it. It is as if [the shofar's call] is saying: 'Awake, sleepers from your sleep and slumberers from your slumber! Search your deeds, repent and remember your Maker'" (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:4). Not only do these words constitute a moral message, but they bear halachic implications as well. By introducing the "allusion," Maimonides suggests a new understanding of the shofar obligation. While mitzvos such as eating matzah on Pesach do not contain any subjective component and demand no reaction to the significance of the physical act,ⁱ Maimonides emphasizes here that aside from the auditory experience of hearing the shofar, there is also a *kiyum shebalev* aspect of the mitzvah whose fulfillment requires a subjective emotional response.ⁱⁱ In delineating the dual aspect of this mitzvah, Maimonides' words are precise: "Even though the blowing of the shofar is a decree of the Torah..." i.e., even though there is an aspect of the mitzvah that is external and objective, "...there is an allusion in it," an inner, emotional fulfillment without which one has not truly addressed the obligation inherent in the mitzvah.

The objective and subjective components of the mitzvah of shofar are indicated by the Biblical phrases *yom teruah* and *zichron teruah*, respectively. *Yom teruah* refers to the objective component of the mitzvah and legislates that anyone who hears the necessary shofar blasts fulfills the obligation. However, the *zichron teruah* aspect involves a qualitative dimension, a cognitive response. One who has greater understanding of the significance of the shofar and is deeply affected by the majesty and awe engendered by its sound,

achieves a greater fulfillment of the mitzvah.¹

The differences in wording between Maimonides' introduction and his first paragraph can now be understood. Maimonides, by his use of the phrase "to hear the sound [*kol*] of the shofar on the first of Tishrei," refers only to the objective aspect of the *mitzvas shofar*. Even the name of the holiday, Rosh Hashanah, is omitted and instead referred to only as a date on the calendar, to emphasize the mechanical performance of the mitzvah. However, when Maimonides states: "It is a positive Biblical mitzvah to hear the blast [*teruah*] of the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, as the verse states: 'a day of *teruah* shall it be for you,'" he is alluding to the inner fulfillment. As a result, Maimonides uses the word *teruah* to denote the sound of the shofar, evoking the *teruah* of the trumpet which is mandated at a time of communal danger: "And when you go to war in your land against the adversary that oppresses you, then you should blow [*vehare'osem*, a *teruah* blast] with the trumpets" (Numbers 10:9).

The word *teruah* is used when the trumpet is blown in a moment of crisis. Man is conscious of this day not merely as a specific date

¹ At this point, the Rav cited another proof to the objective and subjective components of the mitzvah of shofar. Rava in *Rosh Hashanah* 28a-b states that a *toke'a lashir*, one who blows shofar because he enjoys the sound (as opposed to having in mind fulfillment of the mitzvah) fulfills his obligation of hearing the shofar. The Gemara states that had Rava not taught us this law, we may have thought that one who blows the shofar without intent to fulfill the mitzvah does not fulfill his obligation because the verse states "*zichron teruah*" and this individual is *mis'asek*, involved in something else. The Gemara is difficult to understand, since a true *mis'asek*, one who blows the shofar by accident while intending to do something else, would in fact not fulfill his obligation of shofar, even according to Rava. However, in light of the dual nature of the mitzvah, this passage can be understood. Although a true *mis'asek* does not fulfill the mitzvah, unlike the *toke'a lashir*, that difference is only with respect to the objective component of the mitzvah of shofar. However, regarding the subjective element of the mitzvah, neither the *toke'a lashir* nor the true *mis'asek* concentrate on the meaning of the mitzvah. A *toke'a lashir* is therefore indeed equivalent to a *mis'asek* with regard to the subjective component of the *mitzvas shofar*, because the inner fulfillment (the *zichron teruah* aspect) is lacking in both cases.

on the calendar when a mechanical act is performed, but as the day of judgment in which man engages in prayer to plead for his life. Maimonides therefore uses the specific name for the holiday which evokes this consciousness: Rosh Hashanah.

One indication that the mitzvah of shofar indeed contains such a subjective component is the close halachic relationship between blowing the shofar and prayer. Although there are two sets of shofar blasts heard on Rosh Hashanah – the *tekios demeyushav* (the shofar blasts heard on Rosh Hashanah – the *tekios demeyushav* (the shofar blasts blown prior to the *Musaf* service) and the *tekios deme'umad* (those blown during the recitation of *Musaf*) – Rashi states that the Biblical obligation is not fulfilled until one has heard the latter.ⁱⁱⁱ

The integral relationship between prayer and shofar suggests that shofar too parallels the highly subjective and emotional experience of prayer (*avodah shebalev*²). The sound of the shofar must be accompanied by a type of prayer, which emerges from the sound of the shofar. There are a number of close parallels between the mitzvah of shofar and the mitzvah of prayer. For example, at the conclusion of the Rosh Hashanah *Amidah*, we recite, “For You listen to the sound of the shofar and are attentive to *teruah*.” Our reference to God as one who listens to the shofar blast parallels the language we use for God in relation to prayer: “שִׁמַע תִּפְלֶה עֲדִיהָ כָּל בְּשָׂר׃, Hearer of prayer, unto You all flesh will come” (Psalms 65:3). Similarly, the Talmud relates that, “[the] shofar, since it is made to be a memorial (*zichron*), it is as if it is in the Holy of Holies [of the Temple]” (*Rosh Hashanah* 26a). Prayer, too, is directed toward the Holy of Holies.³ King Solomon, in his dedication of the Temple, identified the direction of prayer as well by way of the Temple (I Kings 8:29-30).

Maimonides writes: “And the shofar that is blown, whether on Rosh Hashanah or on Jubilee, must be a bent horn of a sheep, and all shofars are invalid except for the horn of a sheep” (*Hilchos Shofar* 1:1). The Gemara (*Rosh Hashanah* 26b), explaining the requirement for the shofar to be bent, states: “The more a person bends his will, the better.” Rashi elaborates: “The more a person

² *Taanis* 2a; Maimonides, *Hilchos Tefillah* 1:1.

³ *Berachos* 28b; Maimonides, *Hilchos Tefillah* 1:3, 5:3.

bends – in prayer, pressing his face toward the ground – it is better, based on [the verse] ‘and My eyes and My heart shall be there’ [I Kings 9:3]. Therefore, on Rosh Hashanah, when [the shofar] is used for prayer, and to recount the binding of Isaac, it is required to be bent.”

If a *toke'a lashir* indeed fulfills the objective *yom teruah* component of his shofar obligation, why should this fulfillment not be applied to one who blows a straight shofar? The answer is that if the shofar itself is not an object through which one can fulfill the complete shofar obligation of *zichron teruah* as well as *yom teruah*, then that shofar cannot allow fulfillment of even the *yom teruah* aspect of the mitzvah.⁴

The halachic specification of the shofar's shape suggests that prayer is a critical motif underlying the performance of this mitzvah, reinforcing the integral relationship between prayer and shofar.^{iv}

The Dual Nature of Prayer

The relationship between prayer and shofar is reflected as well in the proper approach to the act of prayer itself. The *kiyum shebalev* of prayer consists of man's feeling of absolute dependence on the Creator. Prayer is not restricted to Jews but rather expresses a universal need. Thus, when King Solomon dedicated the first Temple, he specifically included the non-Jew in the prayer community: “And also the non-Jew that will come from a distant land...will come and pray in this house” (I Kings 8:41-42). If a person feels no such dependence on his Creator, his very humanity is critically lacking. Prayer is a natural and universal impulse: “As a hart pants for brooks of water, so my soul yearns for you, Lord” (Psalms 42:2).

⁴ A similar concept applies for the mitzvah of *lulav*: one fulfills the mitzvah of *lulav* by simply taking hold of the four species – the shaking sequence (*na'anuim*) normally associated with the mitzvah is not actually required. However, if the *lulav* for some reason is incapable of being shaken, the *lulav* itself is considered deficient and one cannot fulfill the mitzvah through taking such a *lulav*.

Prayer is normally associated with speech, the one attribute which differentiates man from other life forms. Through prayer, man represents himself, utilizing the very attribute which attests to his greatness. Man stands before the Creator and engages in conversation in accord with the verse, “תפלה לעני כי יעטף ולפני ה' ישפך שיחו”, A prayer of the afflicted when he faints and pours out his plaint [*sicho* - literally ‘his conversation’] before the Lord” (Psalms 102:1). Man, with his capability of achieving prophecy, engages Hashem in dialogue through verbal prayer.

Yet not only man engages in prayer. “Hearer of prayer, unto You *all* flesh will come” (Psalms 65:3). All living creatures engage in this activity, instinctively pouring out their needs to God. The mystics consider the chirping of the bird and the cry of the jackal as spontaneous calls uniting them in prayer to their Maker.

When man prays, he must identify himself not only as the very crown of creation who can express himself verbally, but also as a simple life form with mundane but very real physical needs. For the Jew, the wordless cry expresses itself in the sound of the shofar, hence the halachic link between shofar and prayer.

In which of these two aspects of prayer must man engage first: well formulated verbal prayer, or instinctive, nonverbal prayer? The Rosh Hashanah service, in which the *Malchuyos*, *Zichronos*, and *Shofaros* sections are recited respectively, each subsequently followed by the shofar blasts, clearly indicates that the verbal precedes the nonverbal.

This sequence reflects a frustration with the inadequacy of verbal prayer. As one example, the Rav said that on Yom Kippur, at the conclusion of the *Ne'ilah* service, he often felt that despite having spent the entire day in prayer, he had not articulated even a tiny fraction of what he wanted to express. This perspective is found within the *Ne'ilah* prayer itself: “צרכי עמך ישראל מרבים ונדעתם קצרה”, The needs of Your nation are great, yet they are lacking in intellect [i.e., the ability to express these needs].”

To illustrate this point, one can imagine that if a father is absent from home for an extended period of time, his son fantasizes that upon his father's return he will relate all of what has transpired in detail during his father's long absence. However, in the excitement

and tension of reunion, the son forgets the myriad of detail that he had eagerly anticipated relating; he articulates only disorganized and fragmented ideas.

A Jew has similar feelings at the conclusion of *Ne'ilah*, the final prayer on Yom Kippur: he has spoken, yet said nothing. In order to adequately express his deep longing when words have cruelly failed him, he feels the compulsion to release an instinctive, inarticulate cry. In the seconds before the Holy One Blessed be He once again retreats into obscuring clouds, man must urgently express what he could not verbalize in an entire day of prayer. He thus sounds the shofar as a response to the ultimate futility of verbal prayer to express his needs.

The constrained nature of prayer in describing man's needs is doubly true when attempting to glorify God. The series of praises which initiate the morning service (*Pesukei Dezimrah*) starts with *Baruch She'amar*, in which we initially express confidence and optimism that our praise and song will be adequate:

Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the Universe...who is lauded by the mouth of His people, praised and glorified by the tongue of His devout ones and His servants... We shall exalt You, praise You, glorify You, speak Your name and proclaim Your reign....

However, as the *Pesukei Dezimrah* progress, the more the abject inadequacy of our words to even begin to express God's praise becomes apparent.^v This theme finds expression in the concluding blessing of *Pesukei Dezimrah*, *Yishtabach*. Man understands that despite all the previous praise, he has accomplished and said nothing. Hence, as the Kabbalists explain, *Yishtabach* means that God's true praise can only emanate from God Himself: the word *Yishtabach* is a passive verb meaning “may Your Name be praised forever.” Its conclusion states, “For You is fitting...song and praise, lauding and hymns...” It would be audacious to suggest that we have just engaged in God's praise. We emphasize that Hashem is “God of thanksgivings, Master of wonders, who chooses musical songs of praise...” He is above the praise of mankind. The only

reason we are permitted to even brazenly make the attempt is because God Himself, "chooses musical songs of praise...." In His infinite mercy, God allows us to praise Him despite the feebleness of our attempt.

Man's Split Personality

When discussing the *kiyum shebalev* of shofar, Maimonides lingers on the reproof that is inherent in its sound ("awake, sleepers from your slumber...those who forget the truth for the vanities of the time").

The communal blowing of the trumpet at a time of collective danger (Numbers 10:9) is executed by the leaders of Israel, who thus reprove, while the masses hear the sound and accept the reprimand. However, when an individual blows the shofar on Rosh Hashanah on his own behalf in order to fulfill the mitzvah, to whom is the message of the shofar directed? In other words, who is giving the rebuke and who is the receiver?

The answer can be inferred from a passage in Tractate *Rosh Hashanah*:

The Rabbis stated: The following are obligated in the blowing of the shofar: priests, Levites, and Israelites, strangers, freed slaves, hermaphrodites, those castrated and half-slaves. One who is half-slave cannot blow on behalf of those of his own kind or those not of his kind. Rav Huna states that he can blow for himself. Rav Nachman responded to Rav Huna: What is the difference between blowing for himself and blowing for others? Just as the part of himself that is a slave cannot allow others to fulfill their obligation [when the half-slave blows the shofar on another's behalf], similarly the part of himself that is a slave cannot allow the free half of himself to fulfill his obligation. Rav Nachman [therefore] said that he cannot blow even for himself (*Rosh Hashanah* 29a).

One who is not obligated to execute a mitzvah himself cannot

be the cause of fulfillment for another who is obligated. A slave therefore cannot blow shofar on behalf of a free man because the slave is exempt from the mitzvah. Similarly, a half-slave cannot blow shofar on behalf of a free man, because the part of him that is a slave cannot blow on behalf of someone who is free. Furthermore, a half-slave cannot blow shofar on behalf of another half-slave, because the part of him that is a slave cannot blow on behalf of the part of another that is free. Rabbi Nachman goes even further to state that the half-slave cannot even blow shofar on his own behalf, since the act of blowing is partially being accomplished by the part of the individual that is a slave, i.e., a part of him that is unable to exempt his own free part.

Rabbi Nachman's opinion would seem to fly in the face of common sense. For example, what does a half-slave do when it comes to other mitzvos that only free men are obligated to perform? Prayer, *tzitzis*, *tefillin* and *lulav* are all mitzvos that the half-slave is required to perform, and we are not concerned about the slave half of the individual exempting the free half. Why, then, should shofar be different from these other mitzvos?

The answer is that the actual mitzvah of shofar is not in the blowing but in the hearing. The blessing recited before the first shofar blasts states: "who has...commanded us to *hear* the sound of the shofar." He who blows the shofar creates a sound through which others, as well as the blower himself, can fulfill the mitzvah. Inherent in the mitzvah of shofar is the participation of two types of individuals: a *toke'a* (blower) and a *shome'a* (listener). For the other mitzvos enumerated, such as donning *tallis* and *tefillin*, there is no such division; one fulfills the obligation through the act of the mitzvah itself, and therefore there is no impediment for the half-slave. But regarding shofar, a half-slave cannot fulfill the mitzvah on his own, because his slave half acting as a *toke'a* cannot exempt his free half as a *shome'a*.

In light of this halachic construct, we can now offer an approach to who provides the rebuke and who receives it. It would appear that the mitzvah of shofar conceptually splits the person who blows it into both a *toke'a* and *shome'a*, an active and passive participant. When an individual is both a *toke'a* and *shome'a*, the individual is

speaking to himself. The mitzvah of shofar thus expresses itself as a dialogue between two personalities within. As one talks, the other listens.

In a strict sense, however, it is incorrect to state that the mitzvah of shofar splits a personality in this way. Mitzvos in fact do the opposite; they unite the whole personality. Fulfillment of mitzvos unites a divided and scattered personality into a coherent whole. The *Shemoneh Esrei* prayer which includes the hope of “gathering the dispersed of Israel” addresses an imperative on an individual as well as a communal level.^{vi}

The bifurcation of personality occurs not through mitzvos, but rather through sin. Sin splits the personality into *tamei* (impure) and *tahor* (pure) components. Judaism desires the unity of the individual, in keeping with the imperative to maintain the image of God. *Imitatio Dei* is the foundation of human existence. Since Hashem is One, our own goal must be to emulate this attribute as closely as possible. The Torah never accepted the dictum that the body is intrinsically impure; on the contrary, man must strive towards sanctification of the body. Judaism desires that man be internally consistent, without conflict or contradictions.

In a sense, we are fortunate that sin performs this function of splitting the human personality, for otherwise, the entire personality would become enveloped in impurity. If the whole personality would be corrupt, it would be impossible to engage in *teshuvah*. Repentance cannot be *creatio ex nihilo*; it can be mobilized only from an initially uncorrupted core. Even in the most egregious of transgressors, something pure remains. Judaism does not believe in the modern theory that there are irredeemable criminals doomed to spend their lives in sin. Even Jeroboam, the greatest sinner of all, as well as Elisha ben Avuyah, were told *chazor bach* – return (*Sanhedrin* 102a). A fundamentally impure personality cannot effect such a return. The split in personality is what makes *teshuvah* possible.⁵

⁵ The equation between sin and separation is a theme in Kabbalah as well. Sin results in the separation of the attribute of *malchus* from *yesod*, between the Divinity manifest in nature and the Divine spark revealed to people through the soul (*Zohar*, Volume 3, *Pinchas* 131b).

The shofar therefore addresses itself to the split personality of the sinner. The pure part of this personality provides reproof, while the impure part listens. In effect, the shofar tells the person that the sinner can only speak in the name of a portion of the personality, not the whole person.

The message of the shofar, that the impure side of the personality does not represent the entire individual, is part of what a letter attributed to Maimonides refers to as the exodus from sin. Maimonides draws an analogy between *teshuvah* – the exodus from sin – and the exodus from Egypt.⁶ In this conception, the person is a slave to the sinful aspect of his personality, while *teshuvah* is the redemption. Just as on Pesach we must engage in telling the story of the exodus from Egypt, on Rosh Hashanah we must also engage in telling the story of the exodus from sin. The medium through which this story is told is the shofar. The message to the sinner is that there is an inner, pure part to his personality which is “in exile,” and that the sinner is acting as a false witness if he represents himself as the entire individual.

Man as Subject – *Nosei*

The concept of man as both *toke'a* and *shome'a* regarding the mitzvah of shofar can be generalized and is applicable to many things. In everyday language, we often refer to people or items as subjects or as objects. For example, if one writes a letter, the writer is the subject. He is engaged in a creative activity, while the letter is a passive object, the item being acted upon. This simple concept is applicable to virtually anything in the world.

The categories of subject and object are used extensively as well in the world of Halachah. As only one of many examples, the difference between making a vow (*neder*) and swearing (*shevuah*)

⁶ See *Iggeres Hamussar* in *Iggeros Uteshuvos* (Jerusalem: Ha'achim Levin-Epstein, n.d.), pp. 7-8; translated by Leon D. Stitskin in “From the Pages of Tradition: The Methodology of Maimonides – The Last Will and Testament of Maimonides,” *Tradition* 10:2 (Winter 1968), pp. 124-125. [On the attribution of this letter to Maimonides, see Y. Shilat, *Iggeres Harambam*, pp. 697-699.]

rests on this dichotomy. *Shevuah* involves what is known as an *issur gavra*, a prohibition which applies to the subject. One can swear not to sit in a sukkah, for example, the emphasis being on the individual to whom the prohibition is directed (“I swear not to sit in a sukkah”). *Neder*, on the other hand, is a formulation which rests on the object being prohibited, an *issur cheftza* (“That sukkah is prohibited to me”).

On a metaphysical level, one can conceptualize Hashem as a *nosei* a subject in the most absolute sense. His omnipotence is expressed in a number of ways: the creator of worlds, the *Ein Sof*. Hashem continually renews His creation (*mechadesh betuvo bechol yom tamid ma’aseh bereshit*) such that our very world depends on His constant involvement as Creator.

Man, created in His image, crowned with honor, was given the imperative to walk in His ways – *vehalachta bidrachav*. Explaining this imperative, Maimonides (in the introduction to *Hilchos De’os*) uses the expression *lehidamos lo* – to imitate Him. Imitation of Hashem is not limited to performing acts of compassion, but extends to imitation of the essential attribute of becoming a *nosei*. In keeping with this imperative, man must therefore strive to become subject and not object (*nisa*), one who influences one’s surroundings (*mashpia*) rather than one who is influenced (*mushpa*), one who creates and is not created, one who acts and is not acted upon, one who controls his environment rather than being controlled by it.

A person as subject is blessed with free will. This gift was not given to inanimate objects because their essential nature is that they are passive. Free will allows man to fulfill his role as a subject.

In light of this distinction, we can define sin in these simple terms. Sin occurs when man becomes an object, when he changes from *gavra* to *cheftza*, when he is transformed from a creator to a victim.

The simplest verbs which denote the dichotomy between a subject and an object are those of ascent and descent, respectively. Ascent involves an act of overcoming the force of gravity, while descent involves succumbing to this force. Gravity is a force that is not characteristic of personality, it is characteristic of objects,

things. If a person loses his dynamic, subjective existence and cannot counteract various forces which tend to pull him downward, he is acting as a simple object.

Not coincidentally, ascent and descent are Biblical metaphors for mitzvah and sin, respectively. When Israel sinned during the Golden Calf incident, Hashem’s instructions were for Moses to descend Mount Sinai, while upon his reacceptance of the Tablets, the command was for Moses to ascend. The breaking of the Tablets as an expression of Israel’s sin reflects the metaphor of descent, commemorated on the 17th day of Tammuz when Moses was commanded, “Go descend” (Exodus 32:7). In contrast, the reestablishment of the Tablets commemorated on Yom Kippur, involving an act of self-creation as Moses himself hewed the Tablets (Exodus 34:1), reflects the metaphor of ascent (“Ascend Mount Sinai in the morning” [Exodus 34:2]). Ascent is also closely associated with Jerusalem and the Temple: “You shall arise and ascend to the place which the Lord your God has chosen” (Deuteronomy 17:8).

In the Yom Kippur Temple service (the *Avodah*), the object most closely identified with sin is the *sa’ir hamishtalei’ach*, the scapegoat. The mishnah in *Yoma* describes the ultimate fate of the scapegoat in the ritual: “It went backward, and it rolled and descended until it was halfway down the mountain, where it became dismembered into many parts” (*Yoma* 67a).

Can there be a more accurate description of what sin itself does to a person? Even before his total descent he is broken apart, an abject victim of gravity.

Sin transforms a person into someone who is acted upon or influenced. In response to the very first sin, when Hashem confronted Adam after eating from the Tree of Knowledge, Adam’s response was, “The woman who You gave to be with me, she gave it to me...” (Genesis 3:12). When Hashem confronted Eve in turn, the response was similar, “The snake tricked me and I ate” (Genesis 3:13). Both emphasized their helplessness in overcoming an external influence that “forced” their fall. Suddenly, man as the crown of creation, sent forth to conquer the earth (“fill the earth and conquer it” [Genesis 1:28]) succumbed to the very environment he was created to control.

The insistent demand of shofar, according to Maimonides, is to awaken from our slumber. Sleep is a passive state, in which man is pure object. When he is awake, man can protect himself and control his environment, but when sleeping he is powerless.

We find the equation of sin with sleep in the incident of Samson and Delilah. Samson had a unique personality, fundamentally different from the other leaders of his time. The other judges – Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah – were great leaders of people. They led armies to war and were fine strategists. They could be categorized as leaders or commanders. However, only Samson was called *gibor*, mighty. He acted against his enemies as a solitary figure; he needed no one to abet him in his battles.

The account in the Book of Judges emphasizes the terror that Samson struck in the hearts of the Philistines. His physical strength alone is inadequate to explain this reaction on the part of his enemies. One individual, no matter how strong, could never defeat thousands of people on the basis of physical might alone. The power of Samson over his enemies emanated from a deeper, psychological source. His unique abilities stemmed from a dynamic spiritual personality, a personality which paralyzed others in confrontation. His enemies did not understand the power that he held over them, and they asked Delilah to ascertain the secret.

Yet, when Samson fell asleep on the lap of Delilah, he was suddenly transformed – he lost his role as subject and became object. The stunning tragedy of this transformation was Samson's total lack of awareness that this change had even taken place. After his fateful sleep, he awoke and said: "I will go out as usual, but he did not know that God was removed from him" (Judges 16:20).

The lack of awareness that one has lost his dynamic personality is the ultimate tragedy of all sinners.⁷ Sometimes Delilah is a

⁷ The Rav took the story of Samson's unawareness of his loss of strength as an analogy to the State of Israel's reaction during the Yom Kippur War of 1973. In the initial days of the war, hubris resulted in the belief that the war would be won in a few short days, like the Six-Day War of 1967. Only after the war became extended and the battlefield losses mounted was there even an awareness of vulnerability. The Rav stated that the "Delilah" in the case of the State of Israel was widespread belief in the

vulgar type of beauty, sometimes she is a community, sometimes a political system, or the search for *hedone*. Every generation has its own temptation which reduces individuals to the level of object.

What, therefore, is *teshuvah* in contrast to sin? Ascent versus descent. Through sin one is an object, while *teshuvah* allows one to again become a subject. Through sin man is acted upon, while through *teshuvah* man can act once again. Through sin he becomes a thing, while through *teshuvah* he becomes a person. Through sin gravity overwhelms, while through *teshuvah* gravity is overcome. When Israel sinned, gravity overcame Moses, who could not support the first set of Tablets. When Israel then returned in *teshuvah*, gravity was overcome and the second Tablets were indeed held high.^{vii}

The shofar must serve as the alarm which warns man that because of sin he is pulled ever downward, staring into an abyss. He must heed the cry of the shofar and engage in *teshuvah* in order to regain his dynamic personality.

Man as Object – *Nisa*

Although Hashem as Creator is absolute *nosei*, there are occasions when God, paradoxically, acts as one who can be influenced, as *nisa*. This attribute is specifically evident when we refer to Hashem as One who listens to prayer.

Hashem as both *nosei* and *nisa* is indicated by the proximity of two verses in the psalm comprising most of the *Ashrei* prayer. "Your kingdom is a kingdom that spans all eternities, and Your reign is in every generation" (Psalms 145:13). God's will leads the entire cosmos. Nothing takes place on earth without His dictate. Through His will He controls events millions of light years away. Yet, at the same time, "He does the will of those who fear Him, and He will hear their cry and save them" (Psalms 145:19). His will envelops infinity, yet when it comes to those who follow Him, he "steps aside," as it were, and becomes the *nisa*. Every Jew can pray, can open his heart from the depths of his being, can make requests of Hashem, which He can then choose to fulfill. In this way,

Land of Israel without the God of Israel.

insignificant man influences the Omnipotent.

Before man does *teshuvah*, God is distant from him. During the Ten Days of Repentance, God brings man close to Him. As such, the one who does *teshuvah* becomes the *nosei* and God, as it were, becomes the *nisa*. "He does the will of those who fear Him."

The very concept of prayer is a mystery to the Rabbis. How is it possible that lowly man can influence the Master of the Universe through prayer? Yet prayer is the most powerful weapon in the hands of man, because through prayer, man as *nosei* can influence God as *nisa*.

On Rosh Hashanah, God moves from the throne of justice to the throne of mercy. This movement takes place because man influences while God becomes influenced. This mysterious notion is the enigmatic result of prayer.

The Rav recounted how, as a child, his teacher in *cheder* would refer to the first night of Rosh Hashanah as "coronation night," the time at which we crown Hashem as we proclaim our acceptance of the yoke of heaven. The Rav then asked his teacher why, if Hashem is truly King of the world, does He need man to place the crown on His head?

At the time, the Rav said, he did not understand his teacher's answer, but he did remember the phrase he quoted from the Song of Songs (7:6): "The king is held captive in the tresses [of His beloved]."

In the physical universe, Hashem is the *nosei*, but in His relationship with Jewish destiny, Hashem wants the Jew to play the active role. Regarding Jewish history, Hashem is passive, *nisa*, "held captive" as it were.

In light of this concept, the Rav homiletically reinterpreted the phrase from the Shacharit service, *HaMelech hayoshev al kisei ram venisa*. Instead of "The King who sits upon a throne, high (*ram*) and lofty (*nisa*)," the Rav translated it as, "The King who sits upon a throne is in control of the entire cosmos (*ram*) even while He makes Himself an object, listening to our entreaties (*venisa*)."^{viii}

In response to the imperative of *vehalachta bidrachav*, we must also assume this dual role. Not only must we play the part of *nosei*, but of *nisa* as well. At specific times, man must be a *mashpia*, and

at other times a *mushpa*. The shofar, as explained earlier, symbolizes this dual role, as the person blowing the shofar is at the same time a *toke'a* and a *shome'a*.

The Duality of Man

The very creation of man suggests his dual role. "And the Lord created the man in His own image, in the image of the Lord He created him, male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). What is the meaning of the juxtaposition between the image of God and the creation of man as two sexes? The answer is that male and female in this context are to be taken not in a physiological sense but rather in a spiritual-metaphysical sense. The male aspect refers to man with the dynamic, active personality of a *nosei*, while the female aspect refers to man with the passive personality of a *nisa*.^{ix} The possession of both qualities, in turn, reflects the image of God who is *ram venisa*.

As far as man is concerned, the means to achieve the attribute of *ram* is clear. It is imperative to be physically and spiritually powerful like Samson – but to wake up at the sound of the shofar before Delilah wakes us...

But in what way does Hashem want man to be a *nisa*? First, through subjugating himself to the Higher Will. The paradigm of man as both *nosei* and *nisa* was Abraham. On the one hand, he was perhaps the greatest *nosei* in Jewish history. As a young child, he alone uncovered the secret of the unity of Hashem. Maimonides emphasizes that no one taught him (*Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 1:3). In addition to his spiritual strength, his physical prowess was demonstrated in his battle with the four kings (Genesis 14). Yet, upon Hashem's command, this same person took his son to be sacrificed. He did not question the glaring contradiction between God's command and His previous commitment to make Abraham into a great nation through Isaac. By performing the *Akedah*, Abraham was acting against everything he believed. Yet, he bent his own will to God's, thus acting as a *nisa*. During the *Akedah*, Abraham told his servants, "I and the lad will go until there and bow..." (Genesis 22:5). The act of bowing symbolizes total

subordination to Hashem.⁸

Besides subordination, another manifestation of man as *nisa* is the attribute of sensitivity. When a potential convert approached Hillel and asked him to summarize the entire Torah on one foot, he replied, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your friend" (*Shabbos* 31a).

Insensitivity and cruelty are diametrically opposed to Judaism. A Jew must be merciful and charitable; to see someone else in pain should be unbearable. When Eliezer searched for a wife for Isaac, his criterion was kindness (Rashi on Genesis 24:14, s.v. *attah hochachta*). Rebecca's response suggested that she had the requisite quality of sensitivity, even towards Eliezer's animals. Only one who displayed these qualities could be a proper wife for Isaac.

Another way in which man must act as a *nisa*, which complements sensitivity, is the yearning for holiness. As a small illustration, the Rav used the following anecdote from his past:

I remember not far from where my father lived there was a Modzitzer shtiebel. On Shabbos evening [before Shalosh Seudos] once in a while I would visit. They were poor Jews, Jews who could not buy bread or make a living. The chasidim would continually sing Bnei Heichala, Hashem Ro'i Lo Echsar, then again Bnei Heichala, and again Hashem Ro'i. They sung beautifully, and the Modzitzers could indeed sing. I had the impression that they weren't singing because they wanted to sing; they were singing because they could not leave Shabbos....

I remember an encounter I had in this shtiebel as a small child. One of the men who had been singing most enthusiastically approached me and asked if I recognized him. I told him that I did not, and he introduced himself as

⁸ The Rav stated that the widespread support of the State of Israel by the general Jewish community is a manifestation of man's attribute of *nisa*. Their ongoing support of Israel, a small country whose continued existence defies all odds, is an irrational act that flies in the face of their own natural pragmatism.

Yankel the Porter. During the week I knew Yankel the Porter as someone very ordinary, wearing shabby clothes, walking around with a rope. Yet on Shabbos, I did not recognize him. He wore a kapota (albeit one consisting of more holes than material) and a shtreimel. I could not imagine that this individual of such regal bearing could be the same person.

Well after nightfall I naively asked him, "When do we daven Ma'ariv?" He replied: "Do you miss weekdays so much that you cannot wait to daven Ma'ariv?"

Yankel the Porter could not take leave of the Shabbos Queen because his soul was not that of a porter but of a prince.

The mitzvah of extending Shabbos into the weekday reflects the yearning of the Jew for holiness, allowing the holy to impact us.

There is a mishnah that amplifies this theme. The mishnah lists a number of individuals who do not merit a share in the World to Come, including Bilam, Do'eg, Achitophel, and Gechazi (*Sanhedrin* 10:2). The evil nature of the first three is well known: Bilam threatened to destroy the nascent Jewish nation. Do'eg slaughtered an entire community of priests at Saul's behest, and Achitophel plotted against the kingdom of David.

But the inclusion of Gechazi in this list seems somewhat out of place. The sin of Gechazi, the servant of the prophet Elisha, was that he coveted a gift that was offered to Elisha but refused by his master. What was the severity of this sin that he deserved to be listed among this immensely wicked company?

Gechazi's sin lay in the fact that although he served the prophet for so long and was in the very presence of holiness, his fundamental personality remained unaffected. His insensitivity to the presence of sanctity in the person of Elisha, a sanctity to which he had such close proximity and access, placed him on the same list as much more evil people who did not have the benefit of such association. Gechazi's failure to be influenced by Elisha stands in stark contrast to Elisha's own metamorphosis as protégé to the prophet Elijah, as well as to Joshua's relationship with Moses.

In the *Malchuyos* portion of the *Amidah* recited on Rosh Hashanah, we ask God to establish His Kingdom on earth, “[so] all children of the flesh (*b’nei basar*) will call upon Your Name, to turn all the wicked of the earth (*rish’ei aretz*) to You.” *B’nei basar*, referring to those who cannot resist sin, will shed the destructive *nisa* aspect of their personalities as they no longer succumb to temptation. The *rish’ei aretz*, evildoers who actively rebel against God, will abandon their insubordinate *nosei* attitude as they subjugate themselves to their Maker. Thus, an important theme of *Malchuyos* is that we must strive to become *nos’im* in areas that we previously were *nisa’im*, and vice versa.

NOTES

ⁱ It should be mentioned, however, that the Rav indicated in a number of public lectures that the eating of matzah at the Seder is, in fact, one aspect of the fulfillment of the mitzvah of *sippur yetzias mitzrayim*. The Rav used this idea to explain Rabban Gamliel’s statement in the Haggadah.

ⁱⁱ As an example of another application of this concept see “The Power of Confession,” *On Repentance*, pp. 75-76, where the Rav discusses the mitzvah of *vidui* and other mitzvos in the context of *kiyum shebalev*.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Rashi, *Rosh Hashanah* 34b s.v. *tekios* and *Tosafos* 33b s.v. *shiur* (end), citing Rashi. See also Rashi’s comments on Lev. 23:24, where the term *zichron teruah* is used. According to Rashi, the term refers to the recitation of the verses of *Zichronos* and *Shofaros* in *Musaf*. This interpretation suggests that the shofar-blowing (*teruah*) and the recitation of these verses must be closely associated in order for one to fulfill the mitzvah of shofar.

^{iv} In the 1970 *Yarchei Kallah*, the Rav noted that according to the Yerushalmi (cited by Rosh, *Rosh Hashanah* 4:10), the blessing for shofar is לשמוע בקול שופר – which he interpreted to mean “to listen into the sound of the shofar” (i.e., so as to prompt the necessary emotional response).

^v In a lecture presented in Boston on April 18, 1970, the Rav cited *Nishmas*, the penultimate prayer of *Pesukei Dezimrah*, as explicitly expressing this idea:

...were our mouth filled with song as the sea with water and our tongue ringing with praise as the roaring waves, were our lips full of adoration as the wide expanse of heaven, and our eyes sparkling like the sun or the moon, were our hands spread out in prayer as the eagles of the sky, and our feet as swift as the deer—we still would be unable to thank You and bless Your Name, Lord our God and God of our fathers, for even one of the thousand thousands of thousands and myriad myriads of favors that You performed for our ancestors and for us.

Why, then, do we even attempt to praise God? Because, in a sense we cannot help ourselves. As *Nishmas* continues:

Therefore the limbs which You gave us, the spirit and soul which You breathed into our nostrils, and the tongue which You put in our mouth shall all thank, bless, glorify, extol, revere, hallow, and do homage to Your Name, our King.

See also *Blessings and Thanksgiving: Reflections on the Siddur and Synagogue*, Chapter 2.

^{vi} In a lecture to the Rabbinical Council of America in the mid-1950s, the Rav explained that the Biblical phrase “אם יתקה גזתך בקצה השמים משם ... יקבצוך, If your dispersed will be at the ends of heaven, from there, Hashem, your God, will gather you in...” (Deut. 40:4) is written in the singular because the verse refers to individual rather than communal redemption. Note that the Rav regularly applied Messianic/eschatological prophecy to the individual in contemporary times:

The curse of "and the Lord scattered thee among the nations" refers not only to a nation, but can also apply to the individual sinner. His capabilities, his spiritual powers, his emotions and his thoughts are without internal cohesion; he has no single axis around which his personality revolves. For such a person repentance leads to "the ingathering of the exiles," meaning the reunification and concentration of the personality which has been shattered to smithereens as a consequence of sin. So says the second Rabbi of Lubavitch: "It is written: 'If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee.' How the matter of ingathering applies to the individual self must be understood, for normally gathering and concentration pertain to the realm of the many. But Scripture spoke metaphorically in the phrase 'be driven out unto the utmost parts' and the intention was the dispersion of the sparks of the light of the spirit (which is one) in many strange and very remote places, for 'God's light is man's soul.'" The human soul, born in God's image, is fathomless and it contains in itself vast areas in which its sparks and particles

can be dispersed so that “ingathering and concentration are necessary also with every individual and this is the main point of the well-known phrase ‘the ingathering of the exiles’ ...”

There is great significance to this analogy which compares individual exile and the ingathering of the exiles of all of Israel in the political-geographical sense (to some extent, we see it happening now in our day, not exactly as prophesied, but there has occurred a beginning of the ingathering of Jews from all the remotest corners) to the idea of self-exile and the ingathering of the exiles in the metaphysical-spiritual sense as it applies to the sinner. Through repentance, the sinner also gathers together the dispersed sparks of his spiritual self in order to reintegrate his personality. (Pinchas Peli, *On Repentance*, Orot Publishing House, 1980, pp. 327-328).

David Shatz (“A Framework for Reading *Ish ha-Halakhah*” in *Turim: Studies in Jewish History and Literature, Presented to Dr. Bernard Lander*, KTAV Publishing, Hoboken, 2007) similarly notes that “while [the Rav] does refer to the notion of redemption in history, he often presents redemption as an event that takes place within the human psyche.”

^{vii} Although in most midrashic accounts Moses threw the Tablets down in response to Israel’s sin, in the account of the *Yalkut Shimoni* (*Ki Tisa* 393) Moses actually dropped the Tablets because they became too heavy for him to bear. According to the Rav, Moses’ sudden inability to carry the Tablets reflects Israel’s own fall towards sin. In contrast, the second time that Moses climbed Mount Sinai, he was able to ascend the mountain while carrying this new set of Tablets, reflecting Israel’s *teshuvah* and their resultant rise (1964 *Yahrtzeit Shiur*). For a summary of this lecture, see *Yemei Zikaron*, pp. 9-28, and *Derashot Harav*, pp. 45-75.

This passage in the *Yalkut Shimoni* is also discussed in the Rav’s 1979 *teshuvah derashah* in a different context (see the chapter on “The Avodah and the Conclusion of Yom Kippur”).

^{viii} Although this interpretation is clearly homiletic, it is striking to note that the Rav’s interpretation of *nisa* as describing God who accepts our supplication is quite consistent with how the phrase *ram venisa* is used elsewhere. For example, in the prayer recited immediately after each set of shofar blasts in the *Musaf* of Rosh Hashanah we recite:

ארשת שפתינו יערב לפניך א-ל רם ונשא, מבין ומאזין מביט ומקשיב לקול תקיעתנו
וקבל ברחמים וברצון סדר [מלכיותינו\זכרונותינו\שופרותינו]

May the utterance of our lips be pleasant before You, O God Who is *ram venisa*, who discerns and gives ear, looks closely and hearkens, to the sound of our shofar blasts, and may You accept with mercy and favor the order of our [*Malchuyos/Zichronos/Shofaros*] verses.

Using the appellation *ram venisa*, we ask God to listen to our prayer.

^{ix} See *Yemei Zikaron*, pp. 32-37, as well as *Blessings and Thanksgiving*, pp. 115-124, where the Rav discusses this metaphysical distinction between man and woman in more detail.