

## A Weekly Byte... from Isralight

(Yom Kippur)

*Small Tastings of Torah, Judaism and Spirituality*

From Rav Binny

Yom HaKippurim: The day of atonement; that is how we usually translate it; but is that what it really means? I heard a remarkable story this summer, in the midst of all the fighting in Aza, though in all honesty I have not troubled to corroborate the story.

*Apparently a group of Ultra-Orthodox residents from Bnei Brak came to a field near the Gaza strip to harvest wheat for Pesach. Every summer they search for wheat ripe enough to harvest in August when the sun dries the wheat most intensely as part of the process in producing 'shmura matzah'; matzo made from wheat specially guarded against moisture to prevent it from rising and becoming unleavened. The wheat is then stored till its use in baking Matzos in the spring.*

*Since this year is the Shmittah or sabbatical year, they needed a much larger quantity of wheat, to harvest enough for two years' worth of matzos. At Kibbutz Sufa, right next to the border with Gaza, they found a large field sown in mid-January (apparently a rare occurrence) so they found 2000 acres of green wheat which was exactly what they needed.*

*With Operation Protective Edge's air campaign under way, they could see the pillars of smoke over Aza, and the Israeli air force hitting back against the Hamas missile launchers, but were nonetheless able to harvest the wheat and load it onto trucks for the cleaning and storage process in the plant located further north.*

*Two days later, in what is now a well-documented event, thirteen terrorists emerged from a tunnel which led from the Gaza strip and opened into the wheat fields of Kibbutz Sufa. The terrorists had been counting on emerging un-noticed amidst the tall wheat stalks all of which had just been cut down by the Bnei Brak Matzoh bakers. As such, they were immediately spotted by the Israeli Army and were all prevented from launching what would have been a horrendous terrorist attack by thirteen terrorists armed to the teeth spreading out all at once to the nearby homes.*

*Indeed, one could say a lot of Jewish lives were protected by the mitzvot of Shemittah (the Sabbatical year) and shmura matzoh this summer.*

Kaparah is most often assumed to mean atonement, implying that this special day helps us to atone, or gain forgiveness, for our past mistakes and transgressions. But let's take a closer look at the root Kofer (made up of three Hebrew letters: **Kuf**, **Peh** and **Resh**)

The first appearance of this root in the Torah is found in the story of Noach who is told by G-d to cover the Ark (inside and out) with **Kofer** or pitch (Genesis 6:14) which would serve as a **protective** layer against the flood waters soon to come.

Later, Yaakov attempts to appease his brother Esau who is approaching with a large army by sending presents, saying : "*Ulai **achapra** panav be'mincha*" (Genesis 32:20) : "Perhaps I will appease him with gifts". Here too, Yaakov is hoping these gifts will **protect** him from Esau's wrath.

And later, in the book of Exodus ( 16:14 ) the manna is described as falling on the ground as a thin **protective** layer “ ... *ke'kfor al ha'aretz* ...”

Based on these and various other sources, Rav Menachem Leibtag suggests that *kaparah* is actually a form of protective covering. As such, Yom Hakippurim would be the day when we are achieving protection . (As an example the *kaporet* in the Tabernacle is the lid which protects the contents of the Aron or ark...)

On this day, more than on any other we attempt to come close to G-d and reconsider why we are here and what we are meant to do with the lives and blessings we have been given. The culmination of this entire day is the shofar blast at the end of the *Neilah* prayer when we cry out “*Hashem hu ha'Elokim* “*the Lord is G-d*”, the same words uttered by the Jewish people who have just witnessed the fire coming from the heavens in the time of Elijah the prophet, and the same goal laid out by King Solomon in his speech dedicating the newly built First Temple, the *Beit haMikdash*. ( “*Le'maan data kol amei ha'Artez ki Hashem Hu Ha Elokim*” )

Hashem represents the name of G-d which is beyond our comprehension; the G-d of boundless mercy we cannot fathom. The root letters *yud heh vav* and *heh* forming the same letters as *hayah hoveh* *Ve'yehiyeh*: representing the idea that G-d was, is , and always be; an idea simply beyond our capacity to fully comprehend. Like the mercy we receive which knows no bounds. We cannot possibly have earned, in this lifetime, all the good Hashem has bestowed upon us.

*Elokim*, on the other hand is said to represent justice or *din*. The idea that we get what we deserve, that good merits reward, and evil warrants punishment. A life equation much more easily comprehended. We think that sometimes G-d is just and sometimes merciful. But in truth, G-d is not ‘sometimes’ anything. By definition, whatever G-d is, G-d always is; so G-d must always be merciful and always be just. Because G-d’s justice is merciful, and G-d’s mercy is just; it’s all one; the whole world and all that happens is all part of Hashem’s one-ness and part of one plan.

This is part of what Hashem is sharing with us at the beginning of the Ten Commandments:  
“*Anochi Hashem Elokecha*’ “*I am the Lord your G-d...*” (Exodus 20)

And this is perhaps the essence of what Yom Kippur is all about: what most protects me in my life: is the absolute knowledge that Hashem runs the world. Our greatest choice is how we choose to see the world; if we could really know that Hashem is always there, we would never be alone, and we would never ever have a bad day; because it would all be good. Easy to say; but very hard to do. So one day a year we try to tap into that beautiful truth, and fall in love with our Creator, all over again. Yom Kippur is about reconnecting to Hashem who is always protecting us; it is the day we celebrate the anniversary of being forgiven for the great mistake of the Golden Calf and remembering that Hashem always has and always will love us. On this day we reaffirm our faith in G-d, and we have the chance to consider how, in the coming year we will once again live up to G-d’s faith in us.

Wishing all of you and the entire Jewish people a meaningful day full of joy and forgiveness, and renewed faith and love.

Best wishes for a sweet happy and healthy year and a *G'mar Chatimah Tovah*.

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