

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah tells us of how the evil Amalek attacked the Bnai Yisroel as they left Mitzraim. In order to defend Yisroel, Moshe sent Yehoshua to lead Yisroel in battle against Amalek. While Yehoshua led the physical battle on the battlefield below, Moshe stood above on top of a hill and led the spiritual battle.

As the Torah tells us: "And it came to pass that when Moshe raised his hands, Yisroel prevailed, while when he lowered his hands, Amalek prevailed". (Shemos 17:11) The Mishna asks an interesting question: Was it the hands of Moshe that won or lost the battle? No, answers the Mishna. Rather, the Torah is teaching us a foundation of Jewish faith: As long as Yisroel looked heavenward and make their hearts subject to their Father in Heaven, they would prevail; but when they did not, they would fall. (Rosh Hashana 3:8) So, as we approach Yom Kippur with heavy hearts, we turn our eyes skyward to Hashem, so that we may prevail.

On Yom Kippur which begins Tuesday night, we will ask Hashem to forgive us for all of our wrongdoings and we will also resolve to do good in the coming year. In fact, this Shabbos is called Shabbos Shuvah; it is so named for the beginning words of the Haftarah that we read this week in the book of Hoshea. As the prophet tells us in our Haftarah this week: "Return O Yisroel to Hashem your G-d because you have stumbled in your transgressions." (Hoshea 14:2) Let us now take advantage of these waning moments to do teshuvah – to return to Hashem.

Teshuvah and prayer are always proper. However, in the time between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, in which we now find ourselves, Teshuvah and prayer are especially proper. During these 10 days, Hashem is standing ready for us to return to Him, as the prophet tells us: "Seek Hashem when He is found..." (Yishayahu 55:6) (Artsroll Selichos, p. 19 citing Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 2:6) When is Hashem found? The Talmud explains that Hashem is found in the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. (Rosh Hashana 18a) Thus, Hashem, as it were, gives us general amnesty in these days to return to His loving embrace. The first step in returning to Hashem is confessing what we did wrong. Then we must apologize to Hashem for our wrongdoings and resolve not to return to our old ways.

The following inspirational story shows how important it is for all of us to make a spiritual accounting before Yom Kippur.

The Holy Reb Elimelech and the Holy Reb Zisha were two brothers and Chassidic Rebbes who lived around 200 years ago. Reb Elimelech and Reb Zisha had a third brother who was a simple village innkeeper. Some of the Chassidim wanted to see how this third brother carried-on his business. Was this third brother as holy as the two Rebbes?

One day, the Chassidim of Reb Elimelech journeyed to the village where the third brother operated his tavern. Sure enough, they found the third brother standing behind the counter of his tavern, selling vodka to the surly yokels of the province. There was certainly no hint of any spiritual flights into the lofty Worlds above. Could this really be the brother of such holy men as Reb Elimelech and Reb Zisha?

The Chassidim did notice however that the tavern-keeper would time to time take out a little notebook and write a few words in it.

The bar was closed at nightfall, and the inquisitive Chassidim asked to sleep at the inn. Then, late at night, when the household was fast asleep, the Chassidim listened-in from the room next to the tavern-keeper, and they heard the simple man turning pages and reading to himself. Every so often, the man would strike his chest and weep bitterly.

Overcome by curiosity, the visiting Chassidim walked right into the room and asked the man why he was striking himself. Their host answered them simply that this was a regular custom. Every day, whenever it seemed to him that he had violated the Torah in some way, or if an unholy thought had crossed his mind, the man would note down his violation in his little notebook.

Then, when night came, he could never go to sleep until he had repented with a full heart. And he even had a sign by which he knew that his repentance was accepted in Heaven. For when he saw that his tears had blotted out the ink in his notebook, then he knew that in Heaven his sins had been erased. (Sipurei Chassidim al HaMoadim, p.70, R.S.Y. Zevi, R.U.Kaploun trans.) Sometime before Yom Kippur, everyone should make an accounting of all of his spiritual mistakes for the entire year. The more detailed the list of violations is, the more likely we will be able to correct our deeds.

If we committed violations in our relationships with our fellow Jews, then asking for forgiveness from Hashem is not enough; before Yom Kippur, we must seek out those people that we offended and beg their forgiveness. It is crucial for us to use these last days before Yom Kippur to make a spiritual accounting and to resolve to change in the coming year. Then we will truly feel the holiness of the holiest day of the year. A Gmar Chasima Tovah. **Good Shabbos Everyone**