

HURRICANE ISAAC

By Ozer Bergman

Here's the weather report: Hurricane Isaac will visit every shul and synagogue in the world on both days of Rosh HaShanah. However, unlike destructive Hurricane Ike that struck the USA, ours will spread sacred desire across the globe. This portends major improvement for humankind over the next twelve months and beyond.

Happy Birthday, Humankind!* What present are we getting from God this year? The same as every year: Opportunity! Just as our great-granddaddy and great-granny were blessed with the opportunity to improve this world, so are we. Improvement doesn't mean only physical, like building a better mousetrap or app. It doesn't even mean helping the poor and ill out of the goodness of our hearts. It means doing what we need to do—as individuals, families, neighbors, communities, and as a people—at God's behest, and with the intention of claiming this world as part of God's kingdom.

To do the job, we need *emunah* (faith). *Eemunah* depends on *kedushah* (personal morality). To reload our *emunah*, we need to spend Rosh HaShanah with tzaddikim, *kedushah* masters.

We usually think of personal morality as a passive behavior, a not-doing that protects and maintains what is, but doesn't build or add to it. The fact is, the strength we invest in such not-doing creates within us a new and stronger yearning for whatever pertains to *kedushah* (holiness). All things in their natural state are *kedushah*-neutral. One's *kedushah* quotient determines how he reads and understands the Torah, which determines how he *lives* the Torah. How you live the Torah determines the *kedushah* of everything with which you have contact.

We human beings inspire or corrupt one another with our desires. We can do so without trying, without even meaning to. All we have to do is breathe. Breathing out, you send out desire for what you desired at the moment. Breathing in, you inhale someone else's yearning. That's why, even though you're consciously committed to being the best Jew you can be, sometimes you have an inexplicable urge to do something distinctly

un-Jewish. You've been infected by a delinquent's polluted breath. You're not off the hook. You're being challenged.

This breathing business also explains why a lost-in-exile Jew gets a sudden urge to outdo Moses. A gust of tzaddik-air blew by and he got a deep whiff. Inhaling holy air increases the power of our desire, strengthens our resolve in the face of challenges, and makes us more tzaddik-like. But holy inhalations are just seeds. They aren't full-blown yearning until a person says, "I want that." As Rebbe Nachman said often, holy yearning-expressed-in-words is very precious.

The shofar is not empty. It is filled with yearning for *kedushah*. Who put it there? Yitzchak Avinu, our patriarch Isaac. When he acquiesced, totally and unconditionally, to be slaughtered for God's glory, with genuine yearning, he instilled in each of his Jewish descendants, even the worst of us, the willingness to die and to *live* for God, His Jews and Jewishness. The essence of his breath and desire as he lay bound on the altar, ready to be slaughtered, emerges from the shofar notes of Rosh Hashanah. We have the opportunity to inhale it.

The shofar's notes summarize what we need. The *tekiah* is *tekiat kaf*—holding the tzaddik's hand, attaching yourself to the tzaddik to gain Jewish yearning. The *shevarim* (related to the word for "broken") is brokenhearted yearning. The *teruah* (related to the word for "friend") is our love and affection for God. The final, extra-long *tekiah* is what connects the entire world to holy desire, so that the entire world, all of Adam and Eve's descendants, return to right-living. Amen.

*Most everything was created in the last days of Elul, Year Zero. But since it was all created for us and we are responsible for its well-being, the official World Birthday is Rosh HaShanah.

*a gutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!*

—Based on *Likutey Halakhot, Umnin* 4:8–11

SIDEPATH

Rebbe Nachman teaches: There may be times when you don't feel you can speak to God, when you don't feel the words you are speaking. This can happen and it does happen. Do not be discouraged. Just sitting there before God and wanting to pray to Him is in itself a very great thing (*Likutey Moharan* II, 25).

You can also make a prayer of this. The very fact that you have come to pray, and cannot, can itself be something to pray about (*ibid.*). Even when you cannot speak, even when all you can get out of your mouth is one word—only one word!—it is still worth all the efforts you put into *hitbodedut*. Repeat this one word again and again. Even if this continues for a few days, constantly strengthen yourself with this word. Ultimately, God will open your mouth and send you the necessary words to be able to pray and meditate properly (*ibid.*, II, 96).

PARASHAH PEARLS

By Chaim Kramer

26:2 Take some of the first of every fruit that you harvest

Every Day Is A Chance For Renewal

Bikkurim signify the characteristic of renewal. Just as a farmer brings his first fruits to the Temple each year, so too, a person must try to renew himself each year. The mitzvah of *bikkurim* teaches us that no matter what troubles or difficulties we experience, we can always recall God's kindnesses and strive to renew our dedication to Him. In the Torah, the mitzvah of *bikkurim* is followed by the mitzvah of tithes, after which Moses states: "Today God commands you" (Deuteronomy 26:16). Specifically, "today"—for today is a new day, a chance for renewal!

Our Sages warn us to keep far away from any sin, even the smallest (*Avot* 2:1). They also teach us that no matter how a person acted in the past, he should never give up hope (cf. Rashi on Deuteronomy 26:16). Be careful of sin, and renew yourself. Begin again! Begin anew! (LH IV, p. 103a-206).

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26:5 An Aramean tried to do away with my father

We Should Seek The Good In Speech

The bridge between holiness and unholiness is the realm of the mundane, which can be used for either pure or impure purposes.

The bridge between holy speech and unholy speech is *Targum* (the Aramaic translation of the Torah), which has the potential for both good and evil.

Laban was an Aramean, and thus represents *Targum*. Through his unholy use of the Aramaic language, Laban tried to cause Jacob to fall from holiness into evil. But Jacob subdued the evil in the *Targum* by staying away from evil speech—such as slander and lies—and elevated the holiness in the *Targum* by seeking out the good in speech—e.g., Torah, prayer and *hitbodedut* (LM I, 19:4).

28:12 God will open for you His beneficent treasury—the heavens

Our Torah Insights Bring Blessing To The World

The *Zohar* teaches that when a person originates Torah ideas, God uses these words to form Heaven and earth anew. But if the Torah insights stem from the imagination, then "firmaments of futility" are created (*Zohar*, Introduction, p. 4b-5a), through which famine comes to the world.

Thus, when a person studies Torah following the guidelines set forth by the true tzaddikim who have transmitted the Torah from generation to generation, and he originates Torah teachings, he can create a heaven from which to draw forth bounty and blessing. But if he originates false Torah teachings, he creates a false heaven that withholds bounty and blessing from the world (LM I, 54:6).

28:47 Because you did not serve God your Lord with joy

With Joy, We Can Liberate Souls From The Depths

When a person cheers himself with the joy of a mitzvah—such as Torah study or the performance of good deeds—this joy is so great that it reaches down to his feet and lifts them up—i.e., he dances for joy. Similarly, one who serves God with joy can reach all the way down into the lowest levels and elevate

the souls that have been trapped there due to their sins (LM II, 81).

28:59 The illnesses will be terrible and persistent

Giving Charity Heals The Body And The Soul

At the time that the Heavenly Court dispatches suffering upon a person, they make it take an oath that it will not set out to afflict the person except on such and such a day; and that it will not leave him except on such and such a day, at such and such a time, through the agency of such and such a person and such and such a medicine, and by the hand of such and such a person, on such and such a day (*Avodah Zarah* 55a).

Ve-ne'emanim (persistent) literally means "trustworthy." Our Sages teach that these illnesses are trustworthy in the sense that when they are sent to punish a person, they take an oath to leave on a certain day. Even if the person has not yet repented of the sin that caused his suffering in the first place, the punishment stays true to its oath and will depart on that day.

However, if the sick person gives charity to a tzaddik before that day, he mitigates the decree. Then any medicine he takes will have the power to heal him (LM II, 3:1).

29:3 God did not give you a heart to know

A "Knowing Heart" Understands The Truth

One must strive to attain a "knowing heart"—a heart that knows that whatever happens in the world comes from God (LM I, 154).

KITZUR L" M WEEKLY

15 — The Hidden Light (continued)

3. The essence of knowledge is in the heart. For the gentiles also possess knowledge, but their knowledge has no heart. The essence of knowledge, however, is when it exists in the heart, as it is written, "God did not give you the heart to know" (Deuteronomy 29:3). The seat of fear is also in the heart. In other words, the essence of knowledge is to know God in one's heart and not just in one's mind. A person should bring down and bind knowledge of God to his heart until he is taken by dread, fear and awe of God's

greatness—until he is awakened to serve Him in truth, and until he finally merits the highest level of fear, which is fear and awe of God's exaltedness, and then he will know of Whom to be afraid. A person attains all this through *hitbodedut*—by judging himself—and by this, he merits the "hidden light." Fortunate is he who merits this!

4. When we call out to God with imagery that applies to flesh and blood [i.e., anthropomorphic descriptions such as "with a strong hand and an outstretched arm" (Deuteronomy 26:8) or names such as "Compassionate and Gracious" (Exodus 34:6)], and He is there for us whenever we call Him, it is only a consequence of His lovingkindness. For were it not for His lovingkindness, it would be totally inappropriate to call out or to describe God with imagery, praises, words and letters—but all this is simply a kindness from God. In light of this, it is fitting for a person to rouse himself and to pray with great enthusiasm when he recalls the greatness of the Creator as he perceives Him in his own heart. For God is far more exalted and sublime than any of the praises and imagery. It is only out of God's love, compassion and great kindness that He has given us permission to call Him by these names and to pray before Him, in order that we might merit to cleave to Him. Therefore, it is fitting that a person should at least say these words and imagery wholeheartedly, with great feeling and self-transcendence, so that we might merit, through God's lovingkindness, to call Him by these names and descriptions.



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