

Parsha Ponders

Yom Kippur | September 25, 2020 | 7 Tishrei 5781

The foreseen repentance¹

והיתה זאת לכם לחקת עולם לכפר על-בני ישראל מכל-חטאתם אחת בשנה וגו'

This shall be for you an eternal decree, to atone for the Jewish people for all of their sins, once a year...²

There is a *Midrash* which teaches³ us that on *Motzei Yom Kippur*, when the Holiest day of the year ends, a Heavenly voice declares: "Go out and eat your bread with joy! Drink your wine with a merry heart! As G-d has already accepted your actions"⁴. This teaches us that we should feel confident after Yom Kippur that our sincere efforts for repentance were accepted. However, the phrasing of this teaching is a little odd. If it said "G-d has accepted your actions", that would have been fine. What does it mean that "G-d has *already* accepted your actions"? Seemingly, this only just happened today.

One of the classic theological questions in Judaism is the paradoxical conflict between Hashem's perfect knowledge of the future, and our complete ability of free will⁵. How can we have free choice, if Hashem's knowledge of the future seemingly should "force" our actions to fit that knowledge? One answer⁶ is that although Hashem knows the future, that future isn't inevitable. Our actions are independent of His knowledge. Hashem's knowledge doesn't in fact force our actions⁷. An analogy would be if you were to be standing on a windowsill and you saw someone walking. Your knowledge of their walking doesn't force the person to be walking. That's their choice. The same is true with Hashem's knowledge of the future. Even though He sees the future, it doesn't force the future⁸.

¹ Based on Sefer Apiryon to Leviticus 16:34, by Rav Shlomo Gantzfried, the author of the Kitzur Shulchan Aruch

² Leviticus *loc. cit.*

³ Koheles Rabbah 9:7. Tosafos to Yoma 87b s.v. והאמר brings this *Midrash*. It is also brought in many *halachic* sources, such as Semag Lavin § 69, Abudraham *Ta'am HaTekiah BeMotzei Yom HaKippurim*, Hagah at the end of Mishneh Torah *Hilchos Shvisas Asor* s.v. מה שנהגו תלקוע, brought by the Beis Yosef to Tur Orach Chaim § 624 s.v. ואוכלין ושותין (the Beis Yosef seems to attribute this to Hagahos Maimoniyos). The Beis Yosef s.v. ומ"ש שתקיעה זו thinks this is also what the Tur is quoting. Rav Gantzfried himself brings it in Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 133:29

⁴ Ecclesiastes 9:7

⁵ See Avos 3:15. The following is a selection of classical sources which attempt to address this paradox: Rav Saadiah Gaon in Emunos V'Deos 4:5, Rambam in Mishneh Torah *Hilchos Teshuva* 5:5 and Ra'avad *ad. loc.*, Rabbeinu Bachaye in Chovos HaLevavos *Sha'ar Avodas HaElokim* Chapter 8, Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi in Kuzari 5:20

⁶ Rav Shlomo Gantzfried brings this explanation from Midrash Shmuel to Avos *loc. cit.*, citing Rav Moshe Almasnino (16th century) in his Pirkei Moshe *ad. loc.* (in the version I saw its listed as *mishnah* 19 s.v. כך ידיעתו יתברך). This explanation was preceded by Kuzari *loc. cit.* It argues on the Rambam's understanding of Hashem's knowledge, that it is perfect to the point that it forces man's actions to fit that knowledge. This understanding creates the paradox in the first place

⁷ Rav Shlomo Gantzfried quotes his contemporary Rav Aharon Reisman, the author of Beis Aharon, who says this explains a line in a *piyyut* we say in *Kedusha* of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (that starts ביד האוהו): הצופה. לרשע והפך בהצדקו. Even though Hashem sees that this person is wicked, that doesn't contradict their ability to choose to become righteous

⁸ I find this easier to understand if we take the concept of time travel into account. If someone were to travel back in time and witness a well-known event, such as the assassination of a famous figure, nothing would change. The time traveler's knowledge isn't forcing the events to take place. They take place because of the choices and actions of those in the past. Knowing how things will play out doesn't remove the free will of the shooter. The same would be true of Hashem's knowledge of the future. It's akin to Hashem "traveling back in time" to the present, since He is above time

Two more important facts will shed light on this *Midrash*. One, is the Torah tells us⁹ that if we follow Hashem's decrees, He will give us our rain in its proper time. This can be understood¹⁰ according to a story that *Chazal* relate¹¹ about Alexander the Great. He is quoted as saying that if the people aren't worthy, then the rain is solely for the sake of the animals. This is why the verse stresses *our* rain, because otherwise it's the animals' rain. Two, is that it's part of human psychology that a person would rather earn their food than for someone to give them a handout¹². It's embarrassing to be dependent on others. With this background we can begin to understand the *Midrash* we started with.

If a person properly spent Yom Kippur, contemplating all the sins they did over the year, thoroughly regretting them and sincerely repenting, they can be assured that Hashem forgave them. The evening after Yom Kippur, they return home to break their fast. As they sit down to their meal, perhaps they won't feel comfortable with the thought of eating. Sure, Hashem just completely forgave them, but what about when this food first grew in the ground? This loaf of bread, while it was still wheat in the fields, was before the person repented. They were still a sinner, and that means that the rain didn't fall in their merit. It fell solely for the animals! In a sense, this bread isn't really theirs. How could they eat it?

To this the *Midrash* declares that Hashem has *already* accepted their actions. Meaning, Hashem obviously knows the future. Indeed, when this bread was still wheat in the ground, the person hadn't yet repented. However, Hashem knew that they eventually would! As such, the rain that fell on the wheat was also in their merit. The wording *Midrash* is then very precise. Go and eat with joy! Don't despair at the thought of eating bread that's not yours. It *is* your bread! Don't say your food grew while you were still a sinner, and came about in the merits of the animals. For Hashem has already forgiven you.

Gemar Chasima Tovah

⁹ [Leviticus 26:3-4](#)

¹⁰ [Rav Shlomo Gantzfried](#) cites this explanation from אמ"ו, the author of [Tiv Gitin](#), [Rav Ephraim Margaliyos zt"l](#). My guess is אמ"ו stands for מורי ורבי, my lord my master my teacher

¹¹ [Bereishis Rabbah 33:1](#); [Vayikra Rabbah 27:1](#); [Midrash Tanchuma Emor § 6](#); [Tanchuma Yashan Emor § 9](#)
[Yerushalmi Bava Metzia 2:5](#)

¹² This is known as נהמא דכיסופא. See also [Yerushalmi Orlah 1:3](#): מאן דאכיל דלאו דידיה בהית לאסתכלא באפיו