

As we approach Yom HaDin –Yom Kippur, the Day of Judgment

It may be helpful to consider this marvelous passage from

Tractate Shabbat 31a

Rabbi Abba ben Joseph bar Hama, known as Rava, a fourth-century Babylonian said: When a man comes before (the day of divine) judgment, he is asked:

אמר רבא בשעה שמכניסין אדם לדין אומרים לו

נשאת ונתת באמונה - Did you deal honestly in business?

קבעת עתים לתורה - Did you set times for studying Torah?

עסקת בפו"ר - Did you produce a legacy?

צפית לישועה - Did you anxiously hope for the redemption?

פלפלת בחכמה - Did you seek wisdom?

הבנת דבר מתוך דבר - and did you discern one thing from another?

Finally, the last question:

השם יראת Were you a *yirat hashem*?

Did you live in Awe of the Creator?

The Maharal of Prague, Rabbi Loewe, explains that these six questions are an initial entrance exam to discover whether we were dominated by the material or the spiritual aspect of our personalities.

Were we in fact physical creatures having an occasional spiritual experience or were we spiritual beings in physical forms?

Judah Loew ben Bezalel, (c. 1520 – 17 September 1609)^l widely known as the **Maharal of Prague**, or simply **The MaHaRaL**, the Hebrew acronym of "*Moreinu ha-Rav Loew*," ("Our Teacher, Rabbi Loew") was an important Talmudic scholar, Jewish mystic, and philosopher who, for most of his life, served as a leading rabbi in the cities of Mikulov in Moravia and Prague in Bohemia. In Jewish folklore he came to be known as the fashioner of the *golem*, a huge man made out of clay, made through mystical and magical formulae, and created to defend the Jews of Prague from their anti-Semitic neighbors. Some say the golem story inspired Mary Shelly, the creator of the Frankenstein tale.

נשאת ונתת באמונה - Did you deal honestly in business?

Why is this first question? Why is honesty in business the primary question? What does honesty in business mean for us as individuals and as a society?

Being honest in business should be the primary example of the values of a free and open society.

As we are faced by a greater and greater economic and social gap in American society, the place of business, especially big business, has moved to the center of the news and it informs the basic structural challenges we must address in the near future.

Rabbi Yitzhak Breitowitz, a professor at the University of Maryland:

"How we conduct ourselves in business is not only a test of our love for God and our moral character; it is "the acid test of whether religion is simply relegated to an isolated sphere of human activity," "It is business ethics, one could posit, above all, that shows God coexists in the world, rather than God and godliness being separate and apart."

For the Maharal of Prague, whose comments on these question very very cogent, question asks: Was the person a giver or a taker. Was the so –called "animal part of us" which is selfish and feels separate from others the motivation in our lives? Or was the transcendent and caring part under control? Were we panicked and greedy in our relationships or were we capable of being calm and generous.

American Jews are confronted by two very different perspectives about money in the American and Jewish traditions.

The Protestant ethic at the core of much of America's attitude toward money values not only work, but the resources it produces, including money. All too often in modern America, money in this approach is taken to an extreme, such that money becomes the measure of a person. We speak of a person's "net worth," referring to how much money or other financial resources he or she has, as if that really defines the worth of a person.

Another source of American perspectives on money is the Enlightenment. John Locke championed that we are endowed with the right of "life, liberty and property." In Locke's theory, we give up some of our rights in order to gain the benefits of civil society. Among these are our rights to all the monetary resources we have produced, for every government taxes away some portion of those resources. The burden of proof, however, rests with the government to show that it needs that money and that it is using it wisely and fairly. That I get to keep a significant part of what I earn is at the root of capitalism, for that motivates me to work to earn at least as much as I need and maybe much, much more.

In sharp contrast, classical Jewish sources assert that by creating the world, God owns it all. lies only to my standing vis-a-vis other people, not vis-a-vis God.

God's ownership of the world, though, means that I must abide by God's rules in doing business. Based on quite a number of specific rules governing business in the Torah itself, the rabbis of the Talmud and later times amplified them in spelling out what the rabbis understood to be God's demands of us.

All who are in business know that one stays in business by making a profit. The Torah sees that as a value and it sees paying and not avoiding taxes and tithes, but rather offering them graciously and thankful for the opportunity to support the greater good. Is it honest to set up headquarters of businesses outside the US in order to avoid paying taxes?

The many safeguards against oligarchy in the Torah and Talmud include: The laws of shmitta –the sabbatical year) offers debt relief —the seventh years shmitta cycle begins today –

The 50th year of the 7 years cycles, the Jubilee year, shnat yovel, return of property to their original tribal homestead.

The mitzvah in Leviticus sefer vayikra Chapter 18 "Do not put a stumbling block before the blind" This has been interpreted as the obligation of the seller to inform the buyer of any defects in the item sold. There is no caveat emptor –let the buyer beware- in the Jewish tradition. Shades of Bernie Madoff; Shades of the mortgage swindlers that led to the recession that began in 2008.

The Torah is also concerned with how we treat employees. Are we dealing honestly in business by not raising wages, by denying benefits to our employees, and by rewarding top executives with outrageous salaries? The last development, in particular, has brought about, over the last three decades of the so-called 1%, the superrich that seem to have more power and control over our institutions and in many ways are turning our country into an oligarchy. While many of us are comfortable and enjoy middle and upper middle class living conditions this oligarchy has managed to accrue such great power that is far greater than we can even imagine.

Bribery is often discussed in the Torah, particularly, in the judiciary. But isn't our corporate and governmental structures overwhelmed by lobbyists and superpacs who in their own way achieve their ends through their forms bribery.

It is virtually impossible to overturn these structures without a considerable revolution of ideas and commitments. A great start in this needed revolution is precisely in our own everyday lives and how honest we are in business.

On the upcoming ballot questions to be voted upon on November 4th there are two ways you may consider to help us move in this direction and to help our Commonwealth be more honest in business.

Our Tikkun Olam group has been devoting itself strenuously to the effort to pass the ballot question #4 on Nov.4 .This would require companies that employ 11 or more workers to allow their employees to **earn** sick time – up to 40 hours of sick time a year to take care of their own health or a family member's health. Workers will earn one hour for every 30 hours worked, and can use their sick time only after working 90 days.

My colleagues in the clergy of all the denominations have been active in garnering yes votes on ballot question 3 prohibiting gaming casinos in the Commonwealth.

קבעת עתים לתורה - Did you set times for studying Torah?

The Talmud is shrewd. It doesn't ask, Did you learn Torah? Did you study Torah? It asks, did you establish a time for study? Do you have control over your time, over your life? And if you don't, who does? Where does your time go?

Here the Maharal comments on the thrust of this question. Was the person materially-oriented or guided by principle? Fixing times for Torah implies mastery over the clock and the calendar. Being haphazard in learning is to drift and risk living reactively to the matter and mood of the moment.

The Talmudic sage with perhaps the funniest name: *Ben (son of) Bag Bag said: Turn the Torah over and over for everything is in it. Look into it, grow old and worn over it, and never move away from it, for you will find no better portion than it."*

Our tradition rests on a radical premise; it is perhaps the most revolutionary idea, although it is over 2000 years in practice, that all of us must strive to become literate Jews. There are no surrogates and substitutes in this effort, either by priests, monks, rabbis, or scholars. The basic value of individuals being the conduit of a living tradition through learning is imbedded in Shma -- veshinantem levaneckha vedibarti bam- and you shall teach it to your children and say to them....

The Shm'a is a declaration that the way to know the unity of the Divine- is based on transmitting Torah to the next generation. It is the basic Jewish obligation of engaging in Torah study- in its narrowest sense the study of Torah- the five books of Moses –the Pentateuch and its Rabbinic commentators and in its

broadest sense – this study is to be carried out in any language one reads and understands- need not be a Hebrew scholar. It demands a literacy in Jewish ideas, traditions and customs that are acquired as much from practice, as from books or the web. We are blessed in our community with the Mea'h adult learning program that provides the scaffolding to learn the language of Jewish discourse in order to enter the millennial Jewish conversation; This conversation did not begin in the shtetl of Eastern Europe. Rabbi Ed Feinstein has commented that the "Torah is not a book, a scroll held the ark. Torah is a process: Torah is an eternal conversation among hundreds of generations of Jewish men and women, sharing their perceptions of life's meaning and purpose, of God's presence in their lives, of the lessons and message of life, of what they learned from life. When we study Torah, we join the process, we join the conversation.

The lack of adult Jewish literacy is the strongest factor that has prevented us from passing on our tradition to the next generation. We, both adults and children in our community, are so sophisticated in what we do in secular lives. We have so much intellectual curiosity and yet many of us remain bereft of basic knowledge and understanding of our own roots and traditions. Many adults remain adolescent in their knowledge of Jewish concepts and they are missing out on our remarkably rich and ongoing tradition of interpretation. This is perhaps one of our greatest contributions to the world at large.

Make this your new year's resolution: Jewish literacy. Take a look at the Adult learning flyer as you leave –or on our website- and take advantage of answering this question –did you make time to study Torah?

The rabbis of the Talmud wrote: "These are the things for which a person enjoys the dividends in this world while the principal remains for the person to enjoy in the world to come. They are: honoring parents, loving deeds of kindness, and making peace between one person and another, but the study of the Torah is equal to them all" (Talmud Shabbat 127a).

עסקת בפור"ר

- Did you produce heirs?

Were you involved with being fruitful and multiplying?

Have we passed on our experience to those who follow after us? Have we inspired others to take on the responsibilities of good living? Have we raised a generation of students that will take on our teachings and move them forward, with all their emendations, to the following generations?

The Maharal here too comments: Was the person an isolated individualist or fundamentally communal? Did we live just for ourselves, indulged our needs and wants or did we understand our mission here to be for the sake of making a difference for others?

We are the products of many mentors and teachers, parents, colleagues and friends. Do we play that role for others? Do we provide not only information but inspiration to make our life experiences avenues of teaching others?

To be fruit and multiply in our reach into the world is to reach towards immortality of our ideas and convictions.

צפית לישועה - Did you anxiously hope for the redemption?

I don't know about you but every morning as the radio alarm goes off in time to hear the top of hour news on WBUR I hope that the first item will –we are pleased to announce that the Messiah has come and we'll be paying happy music from now on. No news is good news. I anxiously hope for the redemption.

Have we remained hopeful that the best days of our lives are ahead of us? Have we fallen into despair, perhaps the most difficult of mental states?

Do we still strive for a world as it ought to be and not as it is?

Are we committed to the calls for social justice or are we numb?

Do we support each other to resist despair.

In these difficult times can we look back and realized that we have endured despite enormous challenges of 1939, only 75 years ago , in less than five years that followed 50 million people were murders, slaughtered in many horrific ways. We emerged to rebuild ourselves. Forces of evil always exist –to give into despair is to grant them victory.

The Maharal brings this question into the interpersonal realm.

Was the person unrealized or actualized potential? When some of our native goodness is unused over time one feels trapped and grows cynical about himself, and subsequently the rest of the world, perceiving it to be forever stuck and unfixable. The moment, however, we make even the slightest real step of improvement then there is the opposite tendency to project a sense of hope and possibility upon the universe.

The psychologist, Victor Frankel, himself a survivor of Auschwitz, studied those who survived and those who did not. "The last, and greatest human freedom," he writes, "is the freedom to choose your attitude."

פלפלת בחכמה - Did you seek wisdom?

הבנת דבר מתוך דבר - and did you discern one thing from another?

Hokhma-wisdom compliments Torah –at TBZ we pride ourselves in our openness to critical scholarship of Jewish texts. We are always encouraging that we add our own wisdom to our tradition. We are always grateful to our capacity to have discernment –to arrive at logical conclusions to our explorations.

We admire our capacity to exhibit different types of discernment of our reality and see them all as words of the living God.

The Maharal comments: Was the person striving to perfect their perception of reality or not? The human intellect is the most uniquely profound piece of matter in the universe. It is the prize of all prizes to possess. When it is dedicated to and saturated with The Divine Mind called Wisdom then the person is lifted beyond the daily dust of existence and is tinged with a deeply tuned-in quality akin to perfection.

The study of arts and sciences do not contradict our devotion to Torah. The capacity to think logically to learn to infer one thing from another is a hallmark of wisdom.

What is your wisdom? What has life taught you? How will you exhibit it in your life? How will you share it with others. Wisdom is also derived for our life experiences and interactions with others. What have you learned from your education, from marriage/divorce, from working, from building a home, raising children, from the joys and the suffering and the struggles of life?

As the Talmud *mekol malamdai hiskalti* –I have received wisdom from all whom I encounter.

The first of the petitionary blessings in the daily Amidah reads: *atah khnen l'adam da'at umelamed le-enosh binah. Khaneynu mey-itkha dey'ah binah vehaskel. Baruch Atah Adonai, khonen ha-da'at.*

You graciously endow human beings with intelligence, and you teach mortals understanding.

Holy One of Blessing, the gracious Source of knowledge.

Were you a yirat hashem?

Maharal

Was the person living with a daily awareness that he is a piece of creation absolutely dependent upon A Creator? Does he realize that he has no existence or stance in reality without that Creator? Perhaps, the person, G-d forbid, lived with a fanciful illusion that he created himself, designed his talents, and molded his circumstances and he therefore has no need to express a molecule gratitude for a lifetime of blessings. (#6 is the key to the first 5)

I discovered a 7th question that ties in with this question: This one question is found in Jerusalem Talmud (there are two) the most consulted and studied is the Babylonian Talmud)

Yerushalmi Kiddushin 4:12 (66b) teaches us that it is wrong to neglect even the simplest of life's blessings: "Rabbi Hezkiah, Rabbi Kohen in the name of Rav: **In the future a person will give accounting for everything that his eyes saw and he did not eat.** Rabbi Eliezer took this teaching seriously. He saved his coins so that he might eat of everything once a year." Opportunity to say the shekhiyanu blessing.

This is the source of the Rosh Hashanah custom to have an edible on the table that we have not had for a year- for many it was the costly pomegranate in order to be able to recite the shekhehiyanu blessing.

Simply put: Have you enjoyed the world and all that is beautiful and tasty in it?

Are there shekhehiyanu moments in our lives? Do we see ourselves as beneficiaries of the robustness of the world around us? Do we enjoy the fruits of our labors? Do we see many of our everyday experiences as miraculous and truly a blessing.

Do we see the world through eyes of wonder?

This is what can be called yirat hashem –being in awe of God.

Answer these questions as you will. But answer them.

יִרְאַת ה' Did you have a sense of Awe of Heaven?

Reb Zusia's question:

The seventh question comes from the famous Hasidic tale of Reb Zusya. Reb Zusya was on his death bed crying. All his disciples were gathered around and they asked him why he was crying. He replied, When I get to heaven I'm not concerned that they will ask me why I wasn't more like Moses because I'm no Moses; but when they ask me, "Zusya why were you not more like Zusya?" What shall I say? This is the ultimate question. Are we doing everything in our power to be a fully actualized human being, are we growing and developing into the person we are meant to be, are we fulfilling our potential?

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ואפילו הכי אי יראת ה' היא אוצרו –
אין, אי לא – לא; משל לאדם שאמר
לשלוחו: העלה לי כור חטים לעלייה!
הלך והעלה לו, אמר לו: עירבת לי בהן

אמר לו: לאו! אמר לו: ? חומטון קב
מוטב אם לא העליתה

Did you have Fear of Heaven? After all this (if he can affirm all these questions), if he possessed the fear of the Lord, it was well; if not, it was not so. This is like a man who ordered his agent to store a measure of wheat in the attic. The agent did so. Then the man asked him whether he had mixed some dry dust with the wheat (for protection against weevils), and he answered nay. "It would have been better," said the merchant, "if thou had not stored it."

and how we help the poor-the remarkable mitzvah of *pe-ah shikha and leket* –the leaving of the corners of your field unharvested (the first example of a “fringe” benefit)–of not going back for a sheave that has been forgotten and the leaving of sheaves that have fallen to the ground during the loading of the sheaves onto a cart – was mitzvah of providing the poor with a way of maintaining their respect buy harvesting themselves and being able to glean .

This seems like a small mitzvah –but imagine if we would with the help of corporate America find a way for people to maintain their self-respect by having jobs and providing the needs of those who have no jobs.

Need for transparency; insiders vs. outsiders.

Other examples are honesty in weights and measures.