

Erev Yom Kippur
14 Talmudic stories on Interpersonal Relationships
 Mois Navon

The Purpose of Creation

God’s purpose in creation was to bestow of His good to another. . . . God alone, however, is the only true good, and therefore His beneficent desire would not be satisfied unless it could bestow that very good, namely the true perfect good that exists in His intrinsic essence. . . . [As] true good exists only in God, His wisdom decreed that the nature of this true benefaction be His giving created things the opportunity to attach themselves to Him to the greatest degree possible for them.

R. Moshe Hayim Luzzatto, *The Way of God*, 1:2:1

“How is it possible to become attached to the Almighty? . . . only by becoming attached to His characteristics.”

Sotah 14a.

“Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18), declared R. Akiva, “this is a fundamental principle of the Torah”

Sifra (Kedoshim 4:12); Ber. Rabba (24:7).

“... when he says the commandment ‘love thy neighbor as thyself’ is an important principle in the Torah, we must understand that the other 612 mitzvot in the Torah . . . are no more or less than the sum of the specifics contained and conditioned in this one commandment, ‘love thy neighbor as thyself.’”

(R. Yehuda Ashlag, *Gift of the Bible*, p.30).

Repair

For transgressions between man and the omnipresent Yom HaKippurim procures atonement; for transgressions between man and his fellowman Yom HaKippurim does not procure atonement until he has pacified his fellowman.

(Mishna Yoma 85b).

Shulhan Aruch (Orech Hayim 606:1): “That one must appease his fellowman on Erev Yom HaKippurim”

Mishna Berura (*ibid.*) “though one is required to appease his fellowman all year round, if one put off doing so, he is absolutely obligated to take care of matters on Erev Yom Kippur in order that he will be purified of all his sins [on Yom Kippur].”

Between Buyer & Seller

- (1) Rav once had a complaint against a certain butcher [that sinned against him]; when the butcher didn’t come on Erev Yom HaKippurim [to appease him], [Rav] said, ‘I will go to appease him.’ R. Huna met [Rav] and asked, ‘Where are you going Sir?’ He said, ‘To appease someone.’ Thought he: Abba [i.e., Rav] is going to cause someone’s death. [Rav] went there and remained standing before [the butcher] who was sitting and chopping an [animal’s] head. He raised his eyes and saw [Rav], and said, ‘You are Abba, go away, I will have nothing to do with you.’ While he was chopping the head, a bone flew off and struck his throat and killed him.

(Yoma 87a).

Between Employer & Employee

- (2) Our Rabbis taught: He who judges his neighbor favorably is himself judged favorably. A story is told of a certain man who came down from the Upper Galilee and was engaged by an employer in the South for three years. On Erev Yom Kippur he requested of his employer, “Give me my wages that I may go and feed my wife and children.” “I have no money,” he replied. “Give me produce,” he demanded – “I have none,” he replied. “Give me land” – “I have none.” “Give me cattle” – “I have none.” “Give me pillows and bedding” – “I have none.” So he slung his things behind him and went home depressed. After the Festival his employer took his wages in his hand together with three laden asses, one bearing food, another drink, the third various sweets, and he went to his house. After they ate and drank, he gave him his wages. Said [the

employer] to him: ‘When you asked me, “Give me my wages,” I answered you that I have no money, what did you suspect of me?’ ‘I thought perhaps you came across cheap merchandise and had purchased it.’ ‘And when you requested of me, “Give me cattle,” and I answered, “I have no cattle,” of what did you suspect me?’ ‘I thought that they may be hired to others.’ ‘When you asked me, “Give me land,” and I told you, “I have no land,” of what did you suspect me?’ ‘I thought perhaps it is leased to others.’ ‘And when I told you, “I have no produce,” of what did you suspect me?’ ‘I thought, perhaps they are not tithed.’ ‘And when I told you, “I have no pillows and bedding,” of what did you suspect me?’ ‘I thought that perhaps he has sanctified all his property to Heaven.’ ‘By the [Temple] service!’ he exclaimed, ‘it was so; I vowed away all my property because of my son Hyrcanus, who would not occupy himself with the Torah, but when I went to my companions in the South they absolved me of all my vows. And as for you, just as you have judged me favorably, so may the Omnipresent judge you favorably.’

(Shabbat 127b).

Between Colleagues

- (3) Once Rav was expounding portions of the Bible before Rabbis. R. Hiya entered and Rav started over from the beginning. Bar Kappara entered and Rav started over from the beginning. R. Shimon ben Rebbi entered and Rav started over from the beginning. R. Hanina bar Hama entered, he said, ‘So often shall I start over?’ And he did not start over. R. Hanina was insulted. Rav went to him on thirteen Erev Yom HaKippurim, but he would not be appeased [for legitimate reasons explained in the Gemara].

(Yoma 87b).

- (4) R. Yosef had a grievance against Raba son of R. Yosef bar Hama. When Erev Yom Kippur arrived [Raba] said, “I will go and pacify him.” Proceeding to R. Yosef’s house he found his attendant engaged in mixing a cup of wine for him. “Give it to me” said Raba, “and I will mix it.” He gave it to him and the latter duly mixed it. As [R. Yosef (who was blind)] tasted it, he remarked, “This mixing is like that of Raba son of R. Yosef bar Hama. “I am here,” the other answered. “Do not sit down upon your legs,” R. Yosef said to him, “before you have explained to me these verses...”

(Eruvin 54a).

- (5) [The Rabbis were displeased with R. Eleazar ben R. Shimon and left him unburied in his house for 18 to 22 years. Finally an incident occurred which made the Rabbis realize that they had let the matter go too long.] Then the Rabbis went to attend to him [for burial], but the townspeople of Akabaria did not let them; because during all the years R. Eleazar ben R. Shimon slept in his upper chamber no evil beast came to their town. But one day, it was Erev Yom Kippur, when the townspeople were busy, the Rabbis sent [word] to the townspeople of [the neighboring town] Biri, and they brought up his bier and carried it to his father’s vault...

(Baba Metzia 84b).

Between Priest & Pilgrim

- (6) Abaye said: At first I used to snatch the priestly dues for I said to myself, ‘I am showing love for the mitzvah,’ but when I heard the teaching, “‘They [i.e., those bringing the offerings] shall give,’ but he shall not take himself,’ I would no more snatch it, but would say to all, ‘Give them to me.’ And when I heard the following [Braitā] which taught: “‘They turned aside after unjust gain,” R. Meir said, Shmuel’s sons used to ask for the portions themselves,’ I decided not to ask for them but would accept them if they were given to me. And when I heard the following [Braitā] which taught: ‘The modest withdrew their hands from [the priestly gift of the show-bread], but the greedy took it.’ I decided not to accept [any priestly gifts] except on Erev Yom Kippur so as to establish myself as one of the priests.

(Hullin 133a).

It was taught [in a Braitā]: R. Shimon said, “A priest who does not believe in the [Temple] service – as a divine institution (Rashi) – has no portion in the priesthood.”

(Hullin 132b).

Between Husband & Wife

- (7) R. Rehumi, who was frequenting the school of Raba at Mahuza, used to return home on Erev Yom HaKippurim. On one occasion he was so involved in his learning [that he forgot to return

home]. His wife was expecting [him at any moment, saying], 'He's coming home soon, he's coming home soon.' As he did not arrive she became so depressed that tears began to flow from her eyes. He was [at that moment] sitting on a roof. The roof collapsed under him and he was killed.

(Ketubot 62b).

[God] allows one man to die and gives his wife to another man, and at times a bad man gets a good wife. These happenings are great mysteries, but it all conforms to justice.

Zohar (Terumah 170b)

Between Parents & Children

- (8) It was related of R. Akiva that in all his days he never said, 'The time has arrived to stand [and stop studying]' except on Erev Pesah and on Erev Yom HaKippurim. On Erev Pesah, because of the children, in order that they shouldn't fall asleep. On Erev Yom HaKippurim, in order that they should give food to their children.

(Pesachim 109a).

Between Children & Parents

- (9) R. Yosef son of Raba was sent by his father to the academy under R. Yosef, and they arranged for him [to stay there] six years. Having been there three years and Erev Yom HaKippurim was approaching, he said, 'I will go and see my family.' When his father heard [of his premature arrival] he took a weapon and went out to meet him. 'You have remembered your mistress (zona)?' or 'You have remembered your dove (yona)?' They got involved in a quarrel and neither one ate the meal before the fast.

(Ketubot 63a).

Between Man & the Poor

- (10) Pelimo used to say every day, 'An arrow in Satan's Eye' – [meaning: "I can taunt the Satan, who is the Yetzer Hara, and he cannot cause me to sin" (Rashi)]. One day on Erev Yom Kippur, he [the Satan] disguised himself as a poor man and went and called out at [Pelimo's] door; so bread was taken out to him. He said, 'On such a day when everyone is inside, shall I be outside?' Thereupon he was taken in and bread was offered him. He said, 'On a day like this when everyone sits at the table, shall I sit alone?' He was led and sat down at the table. As he sat, his body was covered with suppurating sores, and he was behaving repulsively. [Pelimo said] to him, 'Sit properly.' Said he, 'Give me a glass [of liquor]'; and one was given him. He coughed and spat his phlegm into it. They scolded him, [whereupon] he swooned and feigned death. Then they heard people crying out, 'Pelimo has killed a man, Pelimo has killed a man!' Fleeing, he hid in a bathroom; [Satan] followed him, and [Pelimo] fell before him. Seeing how he was suffering, he disclosed his identity and said to him, 'Why have you [always] spoken thus [cursing me]?' 'How else am I supposed to speak?' 'You should say, "The Merciful one rebuke Satan."' (Kiddushin 81a-b).

- (11) Mar Ukba had a poor man in his neighborhood to whom he regularly sent 400 zuz on Erev Yom Kippur. On one occasion he sent the money through his son who came back and said, "He does not need [your help]." "What have you seen?" [Mar Ukba] asked. "I saw that they were pouring old wine before him." "Is he so refined?" [Mar Ukba] said, and then doubled the amount and sent it to the poor man.

(Ketubot 67b).

- (12) ... R. Yohanan ben Zakkai saw in a dream that [his nephews] were to lose seven hundred dinars in that year. He accordingly forced them to give him money for charity until only seventeen dinars were left [of the seven hundred]. On Erev Yom Kippur the government came and seized them. R. Yohanan ben Zakkai said to them, "Do not fear [that you will lose any more]; you had seventeen dinars and these they have taken." They said to him, "How did you know that this was going to happen?" He replied, "I saw it in a dream." "Then why did you not tell us?" they asked. "Because," he replied, "I wanted you to perform the mitzvah [of giving charity] lishma (disinterestedly)."

(Baba Batra 10a).

Between the Poor & Man

- (13) Rami bar Tamari, also known as Rami bar Dikuli, of Pumbedita once happened to be in Sura on Erev Yom Kippur. When the townspeople took all the udders and threw them away, he immediately went and collected them and ate them. He was then brought before [the court of] R. Hisda who said to him, "Why did you do it?" He replied, "I come from the place of Rav Yehuda who permits it to be eaten." Said R. Hisda to him, "But do you not accept the rule that [when one arrives in a town] one must adopt the restrictions of the town he has left and also the restrictions of the town he has entered?" He replied, "I ate them outside the [city's] boundary." "And with what did you roast them?" He replied, "With kernels [of grapes]." "Perhaps they were of wine used for idolatry." He replied, "They had been lying there more than twelve months." "Perhaps they were stolen goods?" He replied, "The owners must have certainly abandoned all rights to them for lichen was growing amongst them." [R. Hisda] noticed that [Rami bar Tamari] was not wearing Tefillin and said to him, "Why do you not wear Tefillin?" He replied, "I suffer from the bowels, and R. Yehuda said: One who suffers from the bowels is exempt from wearing Tefillin." [R. Hisda] further noticed that Rami was not wearing tzitzit and said to him, "Why are you not wearing tzitzit?" He replied, "My Talit is borrowed, and R. Yehuda said: A borrowed Talit is, for [the first] thirty days, exempt from tzitzit." While this was going on a man was brought in [to the court] for not honoring his father and mother. They bound him [to have him flogged], whereupon [Rami] said to them, "Leave him alone, for it has been taught: every commandment which carries a reward by its side does not fall within the jurisdiction of the court below." Said [R. Hisda] to him, "I see that you are very sharp." He replied, "If only you would come to R. Yehuda's school I would show you how sharp I am!"

(Hullin 110a-b).

"The Elders of that city then wash their hands." Our Rabbis taught: "And all the elders of that city, who are nearest to the slain man shall wash their hands over the heifer whose neck was broken in the valley," ... They then declare, "Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it." But can it enter our minds that [the members of a] Beit Din shed blood! Rather, [the meaning of the statement is, that the man found dead] did not approach us such that we dismissed him without giving him food...

(Sotah46b).

"Flay a carcass in the market for a wage, but do not beg from others."

(Baba Batra 110a).

Conclusion

- (14) Abba was a cupper and daily he would receive greetings of peace from the Heavenly Academy; Abaye received greetings on every Shabbat eve, and Raba on every Erev Yom Kippur. Abaye felt dejected because of [the special honor shown to] Abba. People said to him: This distinction is made because you cannot do what Abba does. [The Gemara elaborates that Abba was meticulous in his dealings with his patients, not exposing women, not embarrassing the poor, giving scholars service and charity, and judging others favorably]. Raba was dejected because of [the special honor shown to] Abaye and he was therefore told: Be content that the whole city is protected [in your merit].

(Taanit 21b).

"See that I have placed before you life and good, and death and evil; and I am commanding you to love...love your God" (Devarim 30:15-20).

Avraham Ibn Ezra (on Dev. 30:20) - "life is for love."

The Law, stiff with formality, is a cry for creativity; a call for nobility concealed in the form of the commandments. It is not designed to be a yoke, a curb, a straight-jacket for human action. Above all the Torah asks for love: Thou shalt love thy God: Thou shalt love thy neighbor. All observance is a training in the art of love.

AJHeschel.