

## **Dvar Torah - Yom Kippur**

**Rabbi Lawrence Teitelman**  
**Young Israel of Jackson Heights, NY**

It was an annual occurrence at Yeshiva, but one that took only a split second and would go largely unnoticed. As Mincha on the afternoon of Yom Kippur would commence, and with the students still trickling in from the brief break after Mussaf, those who knew to watch for it would notice that the Kohen, as he approached the Bima for the first Aliya, would mutter something to be heard only by the Baal Korei, who would, in turn, utter a response equally inaudible to all but the Kohen. It was only then that the Kohen would proceed with Barkhu and the Baal Korei with Krias ha-Torah.

The question on the table - or perhaps, to be more precise, the Bima - was the tune to be used for the Torah Reading at Mincha. Would it be the solemn tune that was associated with the High Holidays and used for the Torah Reading on the mornings of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, or would it be the ordinary one utilized throughout the year? By ascertaining the tune in advance, the Kohen receiving the Aliya would be sure to say the Birkhos ha-Torah in the same tune that would be used for the Torah Reading that would immediately follow. In a period when we are especially cautioned to adhere to the traditional tunes - however those may be defined for a particular community - it was imperative that the Kohen and Baal Korei both be on the same proverbial page of their music books.

What was at stake in this exchange was in fact a lot more than simply a bit of cantillatory consistency. It seemed that every year, in the Rosh Yeshiva's shiurim that preceded the Yamim Noraim, we would be reminded of a classical inquiry into the nature of the Krias Hatorah at Mincha of Yom Kippur: Was it modeled after the Torah Reading of the Taaniyos Tzibbur, the public fasts on which we also read the Torah at Mincha, or rather was this an independent obligation, one specific to Yom Kippur along with its myriad other unique features? Three things, we were taught, depended on the outcome of this analysis: (1) Was someone who was not fasting permitted to receive an Aliya at Mincha? If the Torah Reading was a function of it being a Fast Day, then seemingly not, whereas if it was due instead to it being Yom Kippur with its other qualities, perhaps there was some room for leniency. (2) In the blessing of the Haftara that would follow that Torah Reading, do we end with "Magen David" as on regular public fasts, or should we add one more blessing reflecting the kedushat ha-yom - the sanctity of the day - "Melekh Mochel ve-Soleach... Mekadesh Yisrael ve-Yom ha-Kippurim" as we did on Yom Kippur morning. And (3) our own issue, do we use the eerie tune of the Torah Reading on the High Holidays, or the ordinary one like on other public fasts. It would seem then that by choosing the ordinary tune over the eerie one, that the Kohen, Bal Korei, and the Minyan at large had resolved this important debate in favor of the position that the Torah Reading at Mincha on Yom Kippur was in fact due to its being a Fast Day, with all that this decision entailed.

Upon further inspection, however, one realizes that the previously proposed analysis of the Torah Reading at Mincha on Yom Kippur does not fully capture the totality of the experience. Even if with regard to the three particular aforementioned items - withholding an Aliya from the non-faster, excluding the otherwise last berakha after the Haftara, and using the ordinary year-round tune - we may observe a common undercurrent of the public fast, the fact remains that we are reading from the Torah about the "Arayos" - the laws of forbidden intimate relationships - and not "Vaychal" typically read at Mincha of fast days. There are several possible reasons for this selection (see Tosafos, Megillah 31a, for some possible explanations), but they all reflect somehow on the ideas and events of Yom Kippur per se. One suggestion that is somewhat attractive (especially inasmuch as on Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol would rather read part of the Torah by heart than waste time rolling the Torah to the next place and thereby delay the proceedings) is that this reading comes from the same Parshas Acharei Mos that we read in the morning, thus establishing a connection between the two readings and perhaps signifying that the afternoon reading, like the one in the morning, was a function of Yom Kippur.

Along these lines, the Haftara that follows this reading is not the usual portion from Isaiah - "Dirshu Hashem be-Himatzo" - that is the standard for Mincha of a Taanis Tzibbur, but rather Sefer Yonah, a choice that is specifically identified with Yom Kippur. Indeed, it seems that the essence of this book is really all about the dialectic at hand. The story of the people of Ninveh and their repentance is replete with many complex issues, some of which may account for the flight and eventual plight of Yonah who may have fundamentally taken issue with them.

In the final analysis, if even the Torah Reading at Mincha - a short and seemingly isolated part of a long and interconnected service - represents the confluence of two very different themes - the public fast and Yom Kippur as an independent holiday, how much more rich is the entire Yom Kippur experience when one considers all of its other components including some of its most famous hallmarks - Kol Nidrei, the Avodah, and Neilah, that roughly correspond to the beginning, middle, and end of this multifarious day. Indeed, the more formal plural appellation that is used in the blessings of the day, "Yom Ha-Kippurim" (as opposed to Yom Kippur) perhaps connotes - among other things - the numerous facets of the day that must receive our attention.

May we all be sealed in the Book of Life, the Sefer Ha-Chayim, on this Yom Ha-Kippurim.

*Dedicated to the memory of my father Dr. Bernard Teitelman, Avi Mori Binyamin ben Shmuel z"l, who passed away one year ago during Mincha of Yom Kippur.*