

Erev Yom Kippur¹

The purpose of the day as seen through Talmudic anecdotes

By: Mois Navon

Erev Yom Kippur is an integral part of Yom Kippur itself. This notion is most readily seen in the Talmudic inference (*Berachot* 8b)² on the verse, “And you shall afflict your souls on the ninth of the month in the evening” (*Vayikra* 23:32). The term “afflict” is interpreted to mean “fasting” and is commanded for Yom Kippur, which is on the tenth of the month. Since it is deemed untenable that the Torah could be enjoining two consecutive days of fasting, the Talmud infers that the import of the affliction to take place on Erev Yom Kippur is “eating” in order to fast.³

There are a number of discussions in the Talmud that further bolster the contention that Erev Yom Kippur is a day to prepare for Yom Kippur itself. The Talmud tells of preparations for the general public that took place on Erev Yom Kippur, such as readying a soaked towel wrung dry to keep cool (*Yoma* 78a), and organizing food in time (*Avoda Zara* 5b⁴, *Hullin* 95b⁵). And as one might expect, the Talmud addresses itself to the Erev Yom Kippur preparations for the service in the Temple, such as: refining the Temple incense (*Kritut* 6b), warming the Temple Mikve (*Yoma* 34b), and instructing the Cohen Gadol (*Yoma* 18a).

1. This article is dedicated to my brother, Dr. Joseph Navon, who serves for me as a paragon of exemplary interpersonal relationships akin to “Abba the Physician” described by the Gemara quoted in the conclusion of this essay.
2. Similarly *Pesachim* 68b.
3. Tur (*Hil. Yom Kippur*, 604). Alternatively the Torah Temimah (*ibid.*, n.97) explains that the eating is to make the fast more difficult. R. E. Kitov (Book of our Heritage, p.83) explains that the meal is an expression of our joy at the opportunity of atonement. All of these explanations support the general idea that the activity comes as preparation to Yom Kippur. (R. E. Kitov also brings an alternate explanation: that the meal should have been on the festival itself but since it is a fast day the meal is shifted. Though here the meal is not a preparation per se, it does directly link Erev Yom Kippur with Yom Kippur itself).
4. Similarly *Hullin* 83a.
5. This Gemara mentions a permission to use meat found dropped by ravens on Erev Yom Kippur, since in all probability it was kosher due to this great increase in meat being prepared for the pre-fast meal.

Clearly Erev Yom Kippur is integral to Yom Kippur itself in that it provides the necessary time for readying oneself for the most solemn day of the year. But considering that this holiday is really one of elevating the spirit and achieving atonement for one's past misdeeds, certainly there must be more to the preparations than merely doing what is required to physically endure the fast, or doing what is necessary to insure the smooth performance in the Temple.⁶

Looking to the Talmud for the answer, we find that it contains no less than fourteen scattered narratives⁷ describing seemingly unconnected events, all of which took place on Erev Yom Kippur. A Mishna provides the key that connects these varied stories in the Talmud and also provides a solution as to the spiritual preparation that Erev Yom Kippur affords:

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

(Yoma 85b)

This Mishna is brought by the Shulhan Aruch (*Orah Hayim* 606:1) as normative halacha within the laws entitled, "That one must appease his fellow man on Erev Yom HaKippurim". The Mishna Berura⁸ (on the Shulhan Aruch *ad.loc.*) explains that "though one is required to appease his fellow man 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]."

As such, the true preparation of Erev Yom Kippur is that of repairing the transgressions that transpired between man and his fellow man.⁹ Only then

6. *Yoma* 87b does state that one should confess one's sins on Erev Yom Kippur, but this is only as an expedient lest one miss performing the confession on Yom Kippur itself.

7. Including the previously mentioned "technical" statements, there are 21 unique references to Erev Yom Kippur.

8. Based on the *Mateh Efraim* (*Shaar Hatzium* 13).

9. Indeed the Shulhan Aruch (*Orah Hayim* 606) explains that all are obligated to seek forgiveness from everyone, even the dead!

can the individual be ready to achieve the complete atonement provided by Yom Kippur itself. Given the great importance of this spiritual preparation, it is most instructive to analyze each of the Talmud's fourteen stories that serve to define and determine the extent of this activity.

Between Buyer & Seller

Rav once had a complaint against a certain butcher [that sinned against him]¹⁰; 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)

From this story we can glean the following points: (1) Erev Yom Kippur is the day upon which it is expected that one go to appease his fellow. This, as mentioned, is because Yom Kippur does not atone for transgressions between man and his fellow until one has appeased his fellow man. In the realm of interpersonal relations, the atonement provided by Yom Kippur is effective only after one appeased his fellow. (2) So imperative is appeasing one's fellow man that – under certain circumstances – stubborn refusal to do so may make one liable to death.¹¹

In this narrative the critical importance of rectifying interpersonal relationships in the marketplace is brought graphically to the fore.

10. Rashi (*ibid.*, s.v. *behadi tabha*).

11. Note that it was really incumbent upon the butcher to seek out Rav. Indeed, the Maharsha (*ibid.*, s.v. *Rav hava lei*) explains that Rav put aside his own honor in order to appease the butcher and furthermore the butcher demeaned him by calling him by his name "Abba".

Between Employer & Employee

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. [The employer then asks the employee what he thought when he couldn't remunerate him in any form. The employee explains that in each case he justified how the employer might indeed not have been able to pay. The employer affirms that in fact he was right, and then blesses him for his favorable judgment].

(*Shabbat* 127b)

According to a version of this story brought by the Rif and the Rosh,¹² the incident took place on the eve of the festival of Succoth. It is nonetheless reasonable to assume the authenticity of the normative version, which places the incident as occurring on Erev Yom Kippur, since it fits the Erev Yom Kippur genre of reconciliation between man and man. Of course, the complete reconciliation actually takes place after the Festival by all accounts, and not on Erev Yom Kippur. Nevertheless, the employee who wished to return home on Erev Yom Kippur to be with his family did use the day appropriately – returning home to take care of his family. But more to the point, he judged his employer favorably, evidently on Erev Yom Kippur itself.¹³ And so it can be said that on this day designated for addressing interpersonal relationships,

12. As brought in Mesoret Hashas.

13. It is clear from the verbal exchange between the employer and employee when they review the incident in retrospect – "And what did you think when ...?" – that the employee had judged him favorably immediately upon each instance that the employer had denied him payment.

the employee went to great lengths¹⁴ to maintain a positive attitude toward his fellow man, in this case his employer, despite his seemingly legitimate cause for resentment.

Between Colleagues

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 eves of Yom HaKippurim, but he would not be appeased.

(Yoma 87b)

Here is an explicit example of the importance of appeasing one's fellow on Erev Yom Kippur. In explanation of R. Hanina's refusal to accept Rav's overtures, the Talmud goes on to detail certain extenuating circumstances revolving around the leadership of the academies.¹⁵ Be that as it may, what is pertinent for our study is the emphasis once again on Erev Yom Kippur as the time to appease one's fellow. In this case the example demonstrates appeasement between colleagues.

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

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14. Rif (Ein Yaakov, *Shabbat* 127b, s.v. *tanu rabbanan*) notes that it would seem that there was in fact no room to judge the employer favorably since he consecrated his property (through a vow of "*hekdesh*") when it was to be used to pay his obligations to his employee. However, explains the Rif, the employer had intended to pay his employee using the proceeds from his cattle and land – but at the time when the employee asked to be paid, these were hired out and he could not sell them. In order to pay his employee in a timely fashion he then had his "*hekdesh*" vow absolved, thus enabling him to sell his movable property and pay sooner than waiting for his land and cattle leases to expire.
 15. The Gemara asks how R. Hanina could act so unforgivingly. It is explained that he saw in a dream that Rav was being hung from a palm tree – a sign that he was to become head of an Academy. Rashi (*ibid.*, s.v. *halma*) explains that R. Hanina bar Hama was currently the head of the Academy which meant that for Rav to become the head, he would have to die. Instead, R. Hanina decided that the dream could be fulfilled if Rav went to head an Academy in Bavel. As such, he did not accept Rav's overtures of appeasement thus forcing Rav to go to Bavel, where he indeed became the head of the Academy in Sura.

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..." [thus indicating that R. Yosef was indeed appeased].

(*Eruvin* 54a)¹⁶

Erev Yom Kippur is yet again shown as the opportune time for colleagues to appease one another, even if it is not done verbally but through actions. Here Raba's mere coming to the aggrieved and mixing him his drink was enough for R. Yosef to understand his good intentions. R. Yosef then responded affirmatively to Raba's overture by asking him his opinion in a matter close to his heart, thus taking the relationship past the need to explicitly verbalize his acceptance (which might also have been embarrassing).

[The Rabbis were displeased with R. Eleazar ben R. Shimon and left him unburied in his house for 18 to 22 years.¹⁷ Finally an incident occurred that made the Rabbis realize that they had let the matter go too long.¹⁸] 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)

This story demonstrates Erev Yom Kippur as being the time propitious for righting wrongs between colleagues as well as fulfilling the precept of caring

16. Similarly *Nedarim* 55a.

17. R. Eleazar ben R. Shimon was appointed by the state to catch thieves (Rashi, *ibid.*, s.v. *rasha zu*) and the Rabbis were upset with him because he arrested their relatives (Rashi, *ibid.*, s.v. *d'rethi alai*).

18. The Gemara gives two explanations: His wife's neighbor cursed her to the effect, "they should leave you unburied like your husband." Alternatively, R. Shimon himself appeared to the Rabbis in a dream telling them to bury his son.

for the dead. One might be inclined to claim that Erev Yom Kippur was simply used by the Rabbis since the townspeople were too preoccupied to disturb them. But then really any festival eve could have been used for this purpose.

The duties of Erev Yom Kippur consist of going to the *mikveh* and eating the final meal, and some might include haircutting. The same preparations, outside of eating the final meal, would be needed for Erev Succoth or Erev Pesah. But with Succoth, one can imagine that people are still finishing their Succoth, putting together their Lulav, perhaps even purchasing them. With Pesah, people are occupied with final cleaning, burning *hametz*, and preparing their Seder plate. The only kind of preparation that might make Erev Yom Kippur a time when people are more preoccupied would be if they were seeking forgiveness from their fellow man – which would then only strengthen our thesis here. That is, the Rabbis chose Erev Yom Kippur, not only to right a wrong against their colleague, but because indeed doing so is the “*mitzvah d’yoma*” and everyone was also so doing.

The designation of Erev Yom Kippur in this story once again underscores the power of the day as one to be used toward mending misdeeds between man and his fellow man.

Between Priest & Pilgrim

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] that 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] that 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 demonstrate that I am still one of the priests.”

(Hullin 133a)

At each stage, Abaye's decision to change his actions was based on altruistic motivations. However, in the last stage, it is not readily understandable what was selfless in Abaye's making himself known as a valid priest. The previous page of the same Gemara (*Hullin* 132b) provides an answer. The Gemara explains that a priest who does not believe in the Temple service as a divine institution¹⁹ is not entitled to the priestly gifts. Consequently, Abaye, by not accepting any priestly gifts, though doing so out of great modesty, could have been perceived to be demonstrating himself to be an unbeliever. Such an act could be construed as a serious attack on the institution of the priesthood and the Temple, since the priest's position of honor, respect and leadership derives from the Temple itself.

Indeed, inasmuch as the priest performs indispensable religious rites for the greater good of the nation, his public denial of such rites would delegitimize them in the eyes of those for whose good they are done. In order to obviate such misgivings, Abaye accepted gifts on this one special day – a day marked for redressing relationships between man and man, in this case between priest and community.²⁰

Between Husband & Wife

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)

This account highlights the obligation of husband to wife, Erev Yom HaKippurim serving as a time when relationships between "man and man"

19. Rashi (*Hullin* 132b, s.v. *she-aino modeh*).

20. [Alternatively, Abaye made himself available to the public on Erev Yom Kippur as an act of kindness toward them, by providing more accessibility for the public to offer their sacrifices – editor].

are to be set aright. Though the couple had an arrangement whereby the husband learned year-round, nevertheless that arrangement also included one day of reunion.²¹ By violating so sacrosanct an obligation between husband and wife, apparently no amount of Torah learning was enough to mollify the judgment brought down by the tears of a lonely wife.²²

Ironically, the Gemara elsewhere (*Baba Metzia* 59a) teaches that, “One must always observe the honor due to his wife, because blessings rest on a man’s home only on account of his wife... And thus did Raba say to the townspeople of Mahuza [where R. Rehumi in the above Gemara was studying], ‘Honor your wives, that you may be enriched.’”

Between Parents & Children

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.²³ On Erev Yom HaKippurim, in order that they should give food to their children.

(*Pesahim* 109a)

Here again, like in the previous example, we find an “arrangement”, whereby a family member (e.g., the father) returns home from study at very infrequent intervals (certainly by today’s standards). It must be understood that economics

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21. A husband has an obligation to fulfill his conjugal duties, however it is within the wife’s rights to free him from them (*Mishna Brura, Orach Hayim* 240:1:6). The Gemara (*Ketubot* 62) discusses the frequency of such obligations, the story of R. Rehumi being brought as an example of what happens to scholars who adopt the minority opinion that one can absent himself for extended periods of time to study.
 22. One could speculate as to the efficacy of the punishment which removed entirely the prospect of the longing wife from ever seeing her husband. Nevertheless, it would not be unreasonable to propose that, since he had shown himself incapable of fulfilling the relationship incumbent upon him, his demise served to free his forlorn wife to find the soul-mate who would fulfill the relationship. Indeed the Zohar (*Terumah* 170b) explains, “[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.”
 23. The Rashbam (*ibid.*, s.v. *hutiz*) explains that either the father needed to give his children a nap or if the father comes home too late the children will already be asleep. Tosafot (*ibid.*, s.v. *hutiz*) agree with the latter explanation.

and transportation were on a different scale, not to speak of the social milieu (i.e., the Gemara in numerous places, *esp. Ketubot* 62b, enumerates many of the sages and the great number of years at a time that they studied). Taking these factors into account, R. Akiva's practice of releasing his students only two days a year can be more readily understood. From this short anecdote it is learned that, though the father's role of study is of utmost importance, there are times when the children's needs rise over and above his own daily occupations.

Erev Pesah is a time when the father comes home to ensure that his children participate in the religious rite of the Seder – specifically the “telling of the story”²⁴ by which the father fulfills a religious precept *of his own*.²⁵ In contrast, the father's arrival home on Erev Yom Kippur is solely to show his personal care for his children (“and his household”, adds R. Hananel [*ad.loc.*, s.v. *Tanya*]). For though there is an obligation to eat on Erev Yom Kippur,²⁶ there is no specific religious obligation for the father to feed his children (and “household”) in particular on this day more than any other day.²⁷ Hence his arrival home can only be to deepen his personal relationship with them.²⁸ Thus, once again, Erev Yom Kippur is shown as a day to address interpersonal relations, in this case between a father and his children.

24. Rashi (*ibid.*, s.v. *hutz*), Rashbam (*ibid.*, s.v. *hutz*) – both emphasize the need for the children to be awake at the time of the Haggadah.

25. “And you shall tell your son...” (Shmot 13:8). Based on this verse the Mechilta (*ibid.*) and the Gemara (*Pesahim* 116a) explain that the primary obligation is to one's son, in whose absence one could secondarily fulfill with other people, or even to oneself (based on an earlier verse: Shmot 13:3). Rambam (*Hil. Hametz* 7:1); Rambam (*Sefer HaMitzvot* 157); Sefer HaHinuch (21). “It is a biblical obligation to tell the story” (Hayei Adam, *Hil. Pesah* 130:11).

26. Most Rishonim hold that the obligation to eat on Erev Yom Kippur is biblical, Kesef Mishna (*Hil. Nedarim* 3:9) maintains it to be Rabbinic.

27. The Gemara (*Ketubot* 65b) discusses the obligation of the father to provide food for his children till age 6, and in *Ketubot* 49b the need to feed them till puberty (see Rashi, *ibid.*, s.v. *k'sh'hen*) is discussed. See Rambam (*Hil. Ishut* 12:14,17) and Magid Mishna (*ibid.*).

28. One might argue that there is a mitzvah of “hinuch” (i.e., training the pre-maturity aged children in the commandments that they will in the future be obligated to perform), or perhaps there is a mitzvah in teaching his household in general the ways of mitzvot. However, such a claim must be dismissed given that these obligations would then require the father to come home on many, many other occasions. Just to teach them to eat before a fast day would not warrant breaking study and traveling home, when such was not taken lightly as seen from other examples in the Gemara.

Between Children & Parents

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?!" or "You have remembered your dove?!"²⁹ They got involved in a quarrel and neither one ate the meal before the fast.

(Ketubot 63a)

From here we see that the draw of familial relations pulls strong on this day of interpersonal reconciliation. Nevertheless, unless there is some specific need to attend to, there is no justification for stopping one's learning.³⁰ In the previous cases, individuals were required to stop their learning to attend to interpersonal matters where they were the indispensable party. However, here, where the man is fulfilling his personal and national mission, he is seen as giving into an impermissible weakness. Again, to be able to relate to this story one must take into account the various factors of the times (e.g., technology, economics, transportation, social milieu). At that time, when the Torah was transmitted orally or at best from hand written documents, each person was an invaluable treasure trove. The individual scholar was not only one who learned and developed himself and his Torah, but also one who functioned as a repository of knowledge and a vehicle for its transmission.³¹

This narrative provides a counterbalance to the other stories reviewed thus far. From the previous stories one might have the impression that Erev Yom Kippur is a day of family get-togethers (e.g., as seen by the "Father to Children", "Husband to Wife" stories). However, here it is made clear that the "get-

29. The intent, whether "dove" or "mistress", is the same (Maharsha, *ibid.*, s.v. *mata*) – the confusion in versions is apparently over whether the word started with a *zayin* (*zonathecha*) or a *yud* (*yonatecha*).

30. "The sword bound in the book are a gift from heaven...since he left the book, he was shown the sword" (Iyun Yaakov, *ibid.*, s.v. *shakal*).

31. Though this is in part true even today, there is a vast difference given the advent of the printing press, computers, and various means of storing, retrieving and transmitting information.

togethers” are for very specific reasons: to strengthen dependent relations and fulfill attendant obligations. Such cannot be said in the case of the independent man.

Between Man & the Poor

Pelimo used to say every day, “An arrow in Satan’s Eye.”³² 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)

Two primary lessons are clear from this story: (1) One must not deem oneself so righteous as to be above the powers of the Satan. (2) One must treat the poor with dignity. This story’s lessons stem from its being part of two story genres. On the one hand it comes in a long list of stories reproving even the most righteous of men to be wary of the powers of Satan. On the other hand, it is stated specifically in this case, and this case only, that the incident took place on Erev Yom Kippur. Such a specific denotation is not coincidental and thus puts the story squarely in the purview of our analysis. The story clearly shows

32. The meaning of the expression is: “I can taunt the Satan, who is the *Yetzer Hara*, and he cannot cause me to sin” (Rashi, *Kiddushin* 30a, s.v. *hava amina*).

the great extent to which one should strive to deal with the poor. Pelimo was a paragon of virtue, as indicated by his initial statement, and consequently his dealing with the poor was exemplary. It was only when he was pushed beyond all reason that he cracked. Nevertheless, the story provides a high-mark in man's relation to the poor.

Additionally, given that Erev Yom Kippur is the time of redressing interpersonal relations, it is possible to view this story as a redressing of relations between man and the Satan³³ – what might be called intra-personal relations. That is to say, on the day when one is to reconcile affairs with his fellow man, one should also rectify character traits within oneself. In the case of Pelimo, the characteristic of self-righteousness obviously needed to come into check.

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?" said [Mar Ukba], and then doubled the amount and sent it to the poor man.

(Ketubot 67b)

Like the previous story, this one has multiple messages, it too being part of two story genres. In this case, the story comes as one in a long list of narratives depicting the extent of man's obligation to the poor, and more specifically, the extent of the definition of "needy".³⁴ In addition, it is also part of the Erev Yom Kippur series, once again demonstrating that Erev Yom Kippur is the day most propitious for taking care of human relations.

...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

33. I would like to acknowledge Binyamin Katz of Efrat for pointing out this novel approach.

34. The Shulhan Aruch (*Yoreh Deah* 250:1) quotes – as halacha – a story from the same page of the Gemara that, "... even if he was accustomed to ride on a horse with a servant running before him when he was wealthy and became impoverished, one should buy him a horse and servant..."

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* (for its own sake)."

(Baba Batra 10a)

In this story, the specific day - Erev Yom Kippur – seems to be incidental, and perhaps it is. However, it is possible to interpret as intentional the Gemara's going out of its way to indicate specifically this day (as opposed to any other day during the year, which would have still fulfilled the needs of the story that the incident occur within the particular year). This story, again, is one that revolves around interpersonal relationships: between man and his extended family, as well as between man and the poor.

Furthermore it is on Erev Yom Kippur that R. Yohanan ben Zakkai reveals to his nephews that he wished them to fulfill the precept of giving charity in its most sterling manner – anonymously and without ulterior motives. True that the actual charity was not given on Erev Yom Kippur, nor was it designed to be; nevertheless, the story climaxes and is resolved on this day, once again imbuing the reader with a sense of intent to connect Erev Yom Kippur with *tzedaka lishma*.

Between the Poor & the Community

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 [town'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 that 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)

Given the story's Erev Yom Kippur context, it is more than reasonable to contend that its theme addresses interpersonal relationships – in consonance with all the other Talmudic stories in this genre. That being said, this detail-laden story is not readily understood without a thorough analysis. Who was R. Hisda? Who was Rami bar Tamari? What was the social milieu of Sura? What is the context of the story with respect to the Gemara to which it is juxtaposed?

Surveying the hundreds of times throughout the Gemara that R. Hisda³⁵ appears, one obtains a portrait of a deep thinker, a great teacher, a humble leader, and an affable individual concerned with human dignity. He was known to greet everyone first – idol worshippers included (*Gittin* 62a). He was also a self-made man, a man of initiative – starting out in poverty (*Baba*

35. The synopsis of R. Hisda is based on the entry in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 8:531 and *Encyclopedia L'Hochmei HaTalmud V'Ha'Geonim*, Vol. 1, Yavne Publishers, Israel, 1998, pp 149-152.

Kama 91b, *Shabbat* 140b), he obtained his own wealth as a brewer (*Pesahim* 113a, *Moed Katan* 28a). He then used his own money to rebuild the Sura yeshiva. Furthermore he was a believer in “Torah U’Madda”, as his studies included secular subjects like health and hygiene (*Shabbat* 82a, *Berachot* 39a). The Gemara (*Taanit* 23b) refers to him and R. Huna as “the pious men of Bavel.” This title is indeed supported by our story; for while all the town’s people are busy with their own Erev Yom Kippur preparations, R. Hisda sits in court, seeking to maintain justice, and consequently peace, in the community.

In contrast to R. Hisda who is one of the most frequently quoted Rabbis in the Talmud, Rami bar Tamari appears only one other time in the entire Gemara, perhaps twice, if a version discrepancy that identifies Rami bar Tamari to be Rami bar Dikuli is accepted.³⁶ In the first instance (*Menahot* 29b), Rami asks if a Torah scroll remains kosher if it has a letter “vav” cut; (in response he is told to have a child read the word). In the other instance (*Yevamot* 80a), he quotes an opinion as part of a legal dispute. Clearly Rami bar Tamari, though a scholar, is not in the same league as R. Hisda.

Now, of utmost importance to the proper understanding of the story is its social context: Sura. Sura was a flourishing Torah-based theocracy. It was a place where eating milk in meat was as much a crime punishable by the “state” as stealing fruit in the marketplace. Furthermore, it was a society that valued its Torah-based social order, a place where punishments for “religious” crimes still retained educational value – for there is a general principle that punishments that cease to impress societal behavior modification are not carried out.

It was within this social milieu that Rami bar Tamari was brought before R. Hisda for judgment of the crime of violating a decree enacted by R. Hisda’s teacher Rav (the founder of the academy in Sura). Indeed, this story comes as an illustration of a preceding Talmudic discussion wherein Rav instituted his prohibition against eating udders. As such, we cannot be surprised that Rami is brought to court for violating a ruling of the town’s founding moral arbiter.

36. *Menahot* 29b has Rami bar Tamari as the father-in-law of Rami bar Dikuli; however the Shita Mekubetzet (2) emends the text to read Rami bar Tamari is Rami Bar Dikuli.

Furthermore, R. Hisda's line of questioning should come as no shock, as he was merely interrogating the subject from all aspects of his actions. That he goes beyond the actual deed and questions him about his attire – i.e., his lack of Talit and Tefillin – can be explained by the fact that, inasmuch as Rami was clearly well versed in halacha and not some simpleton (*am haaretz*), R. Hisda was surprised to find that he did not wear the traditional accoutrements of a pious Jew.³⁷ That these questions were more out of curiosity than cross-examination can be supported from their non-standard introduction using the word “*hazyei*”, “noticed” – that is, R. Hisda “noticed” that he wasn't wearing them.³⁸

The epilogue to the story, where Rami interjects into the court's flogging of a man found to be in violation of honoring his parents, serves to further emphasize the self-confident piety of Rami. His interjection is nevertheless not novel to R. Hisda, who reacts without surprise. Indeed, the halacha in such a case maintains that the court is not *obligated* to administer the punishment, but is nevertheless permitted to do so if it deems prudent.³⁹

Going back to our original premise—that the story comes to elucidate some aspect of redressing interpersonal relationships—the question still remains as to specifically what lesson is to be gleaned. Though the story concludes with the court punishing someone for violating the commandment of honoring parents, and furthermore, with Rami saving the fellow from flogging, these points are really secondary to the main body of the story, serving to emphasize what preceded rather than being the principal point.

Ultimately the story begs the question: Given that Rami was well versed in Jewish law and custom, being a student of R. Yehudah, why did he not avail himself of the hospitality of the people of Sura? There can be little doubt that

37. Indeed, in that day all pious Jews wore Tefillin all day; and even in a religious community today, a Jew wearing a four-cornered garment without tzitzit would most certainly be the subject of questioning gazes.

38. Though it could be that R. Hisda was trying to probe further to find out what was really at the bottom of this incongruous character.

39. Tshuvot HaRashba (745), Rambam (*Hil. Memarim* 5:15); See Hagahot V'Hidusim (*Hullin* 110b) – esp. Maharitz Hiyut.

in such a town, where everyone was preparing for the Erev Yom Kippur meal, the community would have been more than willing and able to accommodate him. It would be unreasonable to expect the community—busy with the day’s preparations—to ask every unfamiliar face if they are in need of a meal. That the accepted practice was for wayfarers to approach the local population is seen in the Mishna that teaches how a town’s elders deal with an unsolved murder. The elders perform the “*Eglah Arufah*” ritual, whereby they declare in effect, “**he did not approach** us such that we dismissed him without giving him food” (*Sotah* 9:6).⁴⁰ Clearly the onus is upon the wayfarer to seek communal hospitality.

R. Chaim Shmuelevitz (*Sihot Musar* 5731, 17) explains that the story comes to express the ethic that one must go to great lengths in order to take care of oneself and not be dependent on the community; as it says, “Flay a carcass in the market for a wage, but do not beg from others” (*Baba Batra* 110a). Thus, though Rami was obviously poor, wearing borrowed clothing⁴¹ and having a weak constitution⁴² (evidently his meager resources did not afford him the most nutritious of diets), he nevertheless did not go to the community for assistance when he still felt that it was in his power to subsist independently. And this, though it meant collecting scraps of discarded meat, cooking them on a fire from moldy twigs and eating them outside the city limits – even still, this was better than becoming a burden on society.

This interpretation of the story not only makes pertinent all the many details of the narrative, but also fits with the theme found in all the other Erev Yom Kippur stories. And its novel message also comes to complete the genre by explaining yet another type of interpersonal relationship. Indeed, while the Talmud furnished many examples of how the community is to provide for the poor, Rami bar Tamari has communicated the paradigm of *how the poor is to behave toward the community*.

40. See also *Sotah* 46b.

41. “My Talit is borrowed.”

42. “I suffer from the bowels.”

Conclusion

We have seen that just about every conceivable relationship has been addressed:

- Between Buyer & Seller
- Between Employer & Employee
- Between Colleagues
- Between Priest & Pilgrim
- Between Husband & Wife
- Between Parents & Children
- Between Children & Parents
- Between Man & Self
- Between Man & the Poor
- Between the Poor & the Community

There is one last Erev Yom Kippur story brought in the Gemara. This story, though not describing a specific interaction between man and his fellow man, does impart a more far reaching statement about interpersonal relationships:

Abba was a physician⁴³ 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)

In this passage, people are not shown redressing specific interpersonal relationships; however, they are shown being rewarded, as it were, by heavenly greetings for the positive fulfillment of maintaining positive relationships. Raba is greeted on every Erev Yom Kippur for his merit of “protecting the city” – presumably his general good deeds and learning thus procured

43. Literally: “cupper”.

protective merit for the city's populace.⁴⁴ As such, Erev Yom Kippur, the day designated for emphasizing positive interpersonal relations, is an appropriate time for blessing one who helps his fellow man's well-being (in this case providing supernatural protection). Nevertheless, the heavenly blessings are most forthcoming for one such as Abba, who on a daily basis actively gives of himself – in time, resources, and emotions – to the betterment of his fellow man. Abba's actions go beyond mending damaged relationships, and beyond maintaining interpersonal relationships (e.g., by protecting the city); rather, his actions serve to *create* positive relationships.

Indeed, though mending interpersonal relationships is of vital importance, it is ultimately the **making** of positive relationships that is the goal of the Torah. "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18), declared R. Akiva, is a fundamental principle of the Torah.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the Torah states, "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 Ezra⁴⁶ explained that these verses teach us "life is for love." Indeed it has been said that all Jewish observance is nothing more and nothing less than training in the art of love.⁴⁷ Erev Yom Kippur, then, is a day that serves, in conjunction with Yom Kippur itself, to rectify man's whole being and elevate him to fulfill the Torah and indeed his very role in Creation.

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44. See Maharsha (*ibid.*, s.v. *hava*).

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

46. On Dev. 30:20.

47. Abraham J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, [New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1955], p.307.