

When Opportunity Knocks

An incident involving the Sage Rav serves as an explanation of a *gemara* elsewhere: Rav had been insulted by a butcher in his community. He waited for the butcher to ask forgiveness on *erev* Yom Kippur, as is customary among Jews. When this fellow failed to show up, Rav took the initiative of going to his shop, certain that once the butcher saw him he would seize the opportunity to make amends. When Rav entered the shop, the butcher was in the midst of chopping an animal head into pieces. He looked up from his work, noticed Rav and cried out "Are you Abba (Rav's name)? I want nothing to do with you!"

As he continued chopping, a bone flew off the table, struck him in the throat and killed him. This was Heavenly punishment for showing such disrespect for a great Torah scholar.

The *gemara* (*Rosh Hashana 16b*) tells us that three books are opened on Rosh Hashana. One is the record of the very wicked, another of the very righteous and a third of the in-between. The righteous are immediately inscribed and sealed for life. The very wicked are immediately inscribed and sealed for death. The fate of those in-between is left pending until Yom Kippur. If they merit, they are recorded for life; if not they are recorded for death.

The definition of an "in-between," says the *gemara* (*Kiddushin 40a*), is one who has as an equal amount of merits for his good deeds as debits for his transgressions. One more mitzvah can tip the scales and win salvation for him, and sometimes for an entire world which is equally balanced. It should follow that one whose record is balanced on Rosh Hashana need only tip the scales on the credit-side before Yom Kippur in order to be consigned to life. Why then does Rambam (*Laws of Teshuva 3:3*) state that only if he does *teshuva* — repents of his sins — does he gain a favorable verdict?

"Seek Hashem when He can be found," urges the Prophet Yeshaya, "call Him when He is near." (*Yeshaya 55*) And when, ask our Sages, is Hashem particularly near to us? "During the ten days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur," answers Rabbi Abba ben Avuha. (*Rosh Hashana 18a*) When Hashem makes Himself so available for us to ask forgiveness and mend our ways, our failure to do so is a repetition of the disrespect shown by the butcher to Rav. This is so grave a transgression that a single mitzvah — and perhaps many more — cannot balance the scales of judgment against it. Shunning the opportunity to ask Divine forgiveness can only lead — like in the incident of Rav — to the gravest of consequences.

Yoma 87a

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Upwards and Sideways

A *succah* must have at least three walls. Certain laws were given at Sinai to Moshe, even though they were not recorded in the Torah, which allow us to stretch the definition of a wall. One of these is the concept of "*gud asik*" which enables us to see as reality an imaginary, upward extension of an existing wall.

Two examples of this are mentioned: 1) The *succah* has the required number of walls of the required minimum height. However, they do not reach up to the *schach* (roofing) which is supported by tall poles. We therefore apply "*gud asik*" and view the walls as extending upward and reaching the *schach*. 2) Four poles are placed on the corners of a roof and upon them the *schach* is placed. There are no visible walls supporting the *schach*, but (according to one opinion) by applying "*gud asik*" we extend the walls of the house upward so that they form the necessary walls.

Both of these cases are cited in *Shulchan Aruch*. Regarding the first case, the halachic authorities point out that "*gud asik*" applies even if there is a sideways gap between the (imaginary) upward extension and the *schach*, provided this gap is less than three *tefachim* (handbreaths). This is made possible by applying another one of those aforementioned oral laws, called "*lavud*," which allows us to view any gap of less than three *tefachim* as non-existent. (*Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 630:9*)

Regarding the second case, however, "*gud asik*" applies only if the poles in question are at the very edge of the roof. If they are not at the very edge, even if they are less than three *tefachim* away, we cannot "come to the rescue" with "*lavud*," and such a *succah* is invalid. (See *Mishna Berura 630:31*)

What is the difference?

Perhaps the answer lies in the dispute between the Sages Abaya and Rava regarding a platform erected in the center of a *succah* whose *schach* is above the maximum height — 20 cubits — for a kosher *succah*. This platform has the length and width dimensions required for a *succah*, and its height from the floor eliminates the problem of the *schach* being too high above it. The only problem is that this platform standing in the middle of the *succah* and removed from the *succah* walls has no walls of its own. Abaya states that we may apply *gud asik* and extend the platform walls upward to form *succah* walls, to which Rava counters that a *succah* must have recognizable walls. His thesis is that only if there are recognizable walls can they be extended, but the sides of a platform which are totally unrecognizable as walls cannot. This principle can help us distinguish between "case one" above in which the walls are recognizable and only need extending, and "case two" in which there is no recognizable relationship between the house walls and the area on the roof even slightly removed from them.

Succah 4b

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