



SHAAR HASHAMAYIM.COM A Story for the Days of Awe

BY YAAKOV LUBAN

About 100 years ago, the Chofetz Chaim suggested that motion pictures were invented to help human beings visualize Divine judgment. We will all give an accounting of our actions after seeing a “movie” of our past misdeeds. Today, with the help of computer technology, we can find further insight into spiritual realities.



I don't know if Harry (name changed to protect his identity) really saw it or if he just imagined the whole thing. Either way, the experience shook him to the core and changed my life as well. Neither of us have been the same after that fateful evening.

It took place on a stormy night in the midst of the Days of Awe (Aseret Yemei Teshuvah). The wind was howling and the thunder crackling. I had a strange premonition that something eerie was about to occur, and my apprehension was soon confirmed by an anxious tapping on my front door. Opening the door, I saw Harry with his hair disheveled, his shirt untucked and a look of excitement in his eyes.

“You look like you have just seen a ghost,” I said.

“More frightening than that,” he replied. “I’ve just been through the *Shaar Hashamayim* (Gate of the Heavens)!” He proceeded to tell me the whole fantastic tale.

“I had been surfing the web for some time when I heard a clap of thunder. The lights went out for a few moments.

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When the power was restored, I saw a strange new icon on my computer screen: a ladder reaching into the heavens with angels going up and down. Under the ladder, there appeared the intriguing words *Shaar Hashamayim*.

Naturally, I was cynical. ‘Sure. Hashem has a web site and uses Windows 2000.’ Still, I couldn't contain my curiosity and clicked on the icon.

Three columns appeared: the *Book of Life*, the *Book of Death* and Undecided. ‘What a cute idea for Aseret Yemei Teshuvah,’ I thought. Just for fun, I typed my name into the search field. To my disbelief, my name appeared in the Undecided column.

Annoyed at what appeared to be a practical joke, I clicked on my name. A new screen opened up with a chilling sight...*Harry: Age 47, Mitzvot (good deeds): 49,832,562, Aveirot (sins): 62,521,724, Status: Rasha (evil).*

While somewhat unsettled, I still couldn't believe that this was real. I was soon convinced otherwise. Clicking on the *mitzvot* and *aveirot* links, I saw tables with entries documenting every second of my life. Shocked, I scrolled down one of the tables:

Date	Time	Action
November 2, 1984	10:22 AM- 10:26 AM	224 words <i>lashon hara</i>
August 5, 1986	9:30 PM - 9:42 PM	584 seconds Torah Study
January 21, 1992	9:02 AM- 11:31 AM	2854 words spoken during <i>davening</i>
September 5, 1997	5:30 PM- 5:32 PM	128 seconds of anger
March 18, 1999	9:15 PM	\$150 given to <i>tzedakah</i>

Graphics by Michael Lipkin

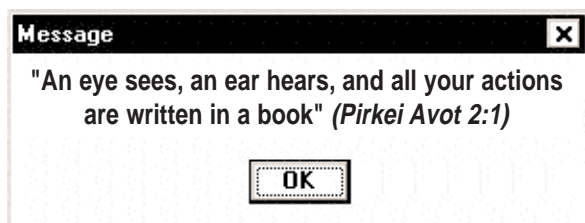
I randomly highlighted January 12, 1970:



On my Windows Media Player I saw a playback of what happened some 30 years earlier. I was *davening* in yeshivah with what appeared to be intense *kavanah*. Then I heard a playback of the voice inside my head: ‘*Shema Yisrael*, if I win the lottery what should I buy first? *Hashem Elokeinu*, a Jaguar or a Rolls? *Hashem Echad*.’

In a frenzy, I highlighted other entries. Some of the *mitzvot* were impressive, but the *aveirot* were terribly embarrassing. My whole life was recorded in precise detail. I had forgotten most of these events, but here they were in hypertext links!

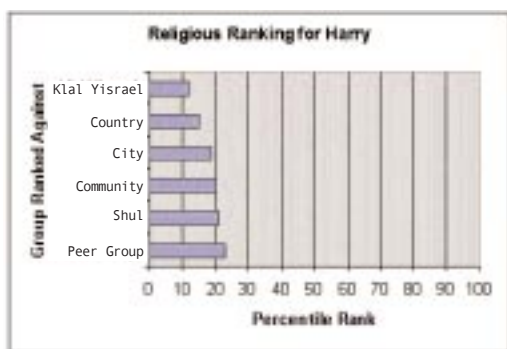
As if responding to my thoughts, a message flickered across the screen:



I had never realized that “The Book” was written in HTML!

Was this a protected site? King Solomon’s statement at the end of *Kohelet*—“The final thing, everything is heard”—took on new meaning. The *Targum* (the Aramaic translation) understands this to mean that all acts performed in private will become public knowledge in the world to come. I shivered at the thought of my friends logging on to my file and viewing my entire life.

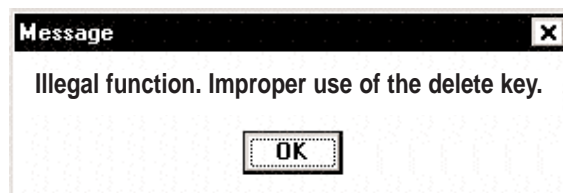
‘Stay calm and don’t worry,’ I thought. ‘I’m probably in good company. Surely my friends are in the same boat as I am.’ Then, my eye caught an option on the tool bar entitled ‘Ranking.’ I opened the screen and found that I could view my status in relation to various groups. My notions of religious superiority melted away. I was in the bottom 23rd percentile of my group of friends and even lower when compared to other groups.



A cloud hung over my head. I always assumed that God automatically inscribed me in the *Book of Life*; now I saw that I was in the Undecided column and with good reason. I thought of my family who needed me and my plans for the future. I was too young to die and was scared.

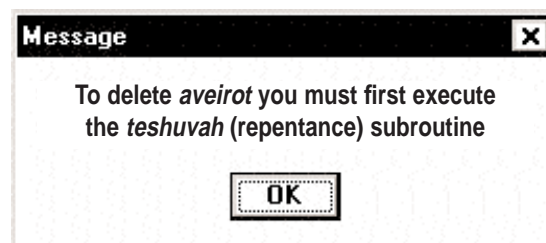
Then I had a stroke of genius. Why not use the delete key to wipe out my sordid past? My slate would be clean and I would be moved to the *Book of Life*. With a trembling hand, I highlighted a long list of *aveirot*, and pressed the delete key.

A new message popped up:

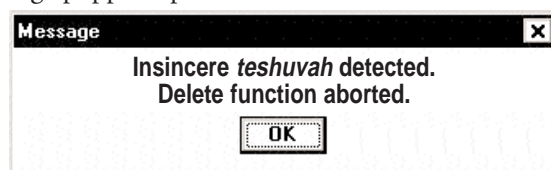


In desperation, I hit the help button. Maybe an angel would fly out and help me out of this terrible mess, I thought.

Instead of an angel, this message appeared:



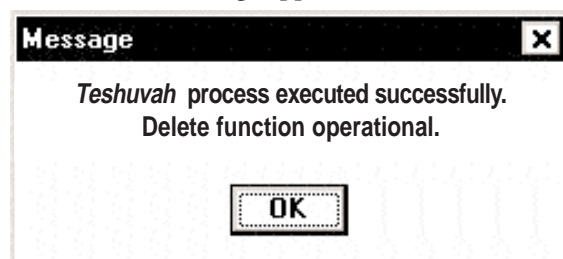
Of course. How simple. Why didn’t I figure that out myself? I made a fist, tapped my chest a few times and began reciting *Vidui*. I was doing okay when another message popped up.



There was no use pretending in the Divine Court.

I began thinking about the millions of *aveirot* I had committed. I never realized how often I sinned in the course of each day. I was classified as a *nasha* because of my inadequacies and indiscretions.

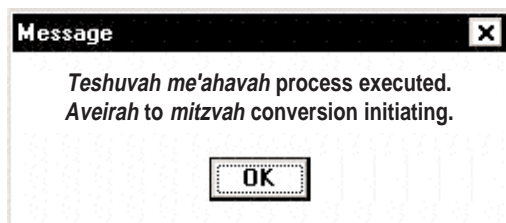
Overcome with remorse, I regretted having wasted my years and compromised my values. I promised myself that if I survived this mess, the future would be different. Suddenly, the computer screen began flashing and my media player was automatically enabled, playing joyous music. A new message appeared on the screen:



I couldn’t believe it. Was it really so easy to erase the past? I quickly highlighted all the sins I had ever committed and scrolled through millions of entries with lightning speed. Anxiously, I pressed the delete key again. All the sins between man and God disappeared in a flash.

(*Teshuvah* is not effective for sins between man and man until one asks forgiveness from the offended party; I am still struggling with this dimension.) Suddenly, I was a new man with a clean slate. The past was gone. I checked my status on the initial screen; I was now a *tzaddik* (righteous person) inscribed in the *Book of Life*.

Although I should have been ecstatic, I now felt like a person with no past. All those seconds wasted. Millions of opportunities tossed into oblivion. Hashem had been so kind to me; even when I was a *rasha*, He provided my every need, and I reciprocated with ingratitude and destructive behavior. I knew that my *aveirot* had distanced me from my Creator; I now felt a longing to move closer to Hashem. My thoughts were interrupted by another flashing message:



I then remembered the Talmudic statement (*Yoma* 86b) that if *teshuvah* is motivated by *ahavah* (love of Hashem) all *aveirot* are transformed to *mitzvot*. Past sins actually become a positive force in one's life.

Was it possible that my sorry life was now redeemed? I checked my *mitzvah* column and found that I had 89,364,252 *mitzvot* to my credit. What an amazing windfall. All my *aveirot* were converted into *mitzvot*.

I was dumbfounded. Every year in the past, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur flew by, offering golden opportunities I consistently missed. Yes, while sitting in *shul* I tried to do *teshuvah*, but was I ever really sincere? What a terrible loss! I am so lucky to have seen the light."

Just as Harry concluded his story, he leaped towards me, grabbed my lapels and shook me. He was yelling, and at first I could not grasp what he was saying.

"Tell them, Yankel, tell them," he shouted.

"Tell who, Harry?"

"Tell the people. You must tell them."

"Tell them what?"

"Tell them they are all crazy!"

"Why, Harry?"

"Because they use the delete key on their PC's, but they don't delete what really counts."

And in a flash, Harry ran out.

"Harry, where are you going?" I called after him.

"Back to *Shaar Hashamayim*." And he was gone.

I recently received an email message from Harry. Now he's Rav Chaim and is living in the Old City near the *Kotel Hamad'aravi*, the real *Shaar Hashamayim* that *Yaakov Avinu* saw in his dream.

Harry's last words still ring in my ears. "They use the delete key on their PC's, but they don't delete what really counts."

It's a powerful message. And that is why I'm sharing this story with you. 