

The  
**CHASSIDUS**  
**PERSPECTIVE**  
*with Reb Yoel Kahn*

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# THE INCREDIBLE POWER OF YOM KIPPUR

The Gemara cites two opinions regarding the atonement of Yom Kippur. According to one opinion, the day of Yom Kippur itself atones, while according to another view, atonement is only achieved through repentance. The Rambam rules that "the day itself atones for those who repent." In other words, it is the day of Yom Kippur that atones; however, in order for the atonement of Yom Kippur to take effect, it is also necessary to do *teshuvah*.

## TIMELY ATONEMENT

This requires explanation. How can the mere day of Yom Kippur erase a person's sins?

Were the atonement of Yom Kippur to consist simply of the waiving of punishment for one's sins, we could understand. However, the *kaparah* of Yom Kippur is much more than that. *Kaparah* also translates as *wiping away*, meaning that Hashem wipes away the grime and *kelipah* produced by *aveiros*. How can this *kelipah* be removed just like that, without any effort on our part?

The fact that actual *teshuvah* erases the *kelipah* can be somewhat understood. *Sefarim* explain that the *kelipah* created by an *aveirah* consists of a "body" and "soul": the body is created from the act of the sin, while the soul is derived from the resulting pleasure. When a person does *teshuvah*, the feelings of remorse—the opposite of pleasure—undo the soul of the *kelipah*, while the *vidui*, the verbal expression of regret and resolve, destroys the *kelipah's* body. But how can Yom Kippur itself have the same effect?

This is especially difficult if we say that there is no requirement of *teshuvah*. However, even according to the Rambam, *teshuvah* is merely a side condition, and it is the day itself that atones. How does that work?

(We might have understood the atonement of Yom Kippur as being achieved through repentance. Although *teshuvah* is effective throughout the year, we know that during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, it is more potent and acceptable than the rest of the year. Similarly, we would have explained that the *teshuvah* of Yom Kippur is of even greater quality. However, this is not the case; it is the day of Yom Kippur itself that atones, and *teshuvah* is just a side requirement.)

## IS THE EIGHTH FIRST OR LAST?

Another point about Yom Kippur is that it is associated with the number eight.

Yom Kippur was preceded by seven days during which the Kohen Gadol prepared for the *avodah*, making Yom Kippur the eighth day. The Gemara compares this to the seven days of *miluim*, which was followed by the revelation of Hashem's glory on the eighth day.

Explaining the uniqueness of the number eight, the Kli Yakar writes that creation is characterized by systems of seven (for example, the seven days of creation), while eight refers to Hashem. Chassidus takes this a step further and explains that the level of *Elokus* associated with the world is also included in the number seven. Eight signifies a level of *Elokus* that is beyond creation (higher than *hishtalshelus*).

The number eight is associated with *milah*, which is performed on the eighth day, following a full circuit of seven days. This also connects with Yom Kippur, as the Midrash states: "In which merit would Aharon enter the Kodosh Hakodoshim? In the merit of *milah*."

Additionally, we find the number eight regarding the *avodah* of Yom Kippur: The Kohen Gadol sprayed blood eight times on the *aron* and *paroches*. However, instead of seven preceding the eighth (as in all the other examples), here an opposite order was used: The Kohen Gadol sprayed blood first once upward, and then seven times downward.

What is the significance behind this difference?

## GET READY, GET SET, FORGET

Even when discussing a level of *Elokus* that is beyond *hishtalshelus*, it is possible for it to have somewhat of a relation to *hishtalshelus*. Therefore, although it is higher than the seven (*hishtalshelus*), it is preceded by and attained through them.

But there is yet a higher level which has no relation to *hishtalshelus* at all. Such a level cannot be reached by prefacing the seven, as it stands alone and has nothing at all to do with them.

This idea can be illustrated by the account in Gemara that R. Zeira fasted to forget Talmud Bavli so he would be able to study Talmud Yerushalmi. Why did he need to forget Talmud Bavli? Doesn't prior knowledge enable one to attain further wisdom?

The answer is that it depends on the type of wisdom one wishes to attain. If it has a relation to what he knows until now, that knowledge will indeed prepare him to attain the higher knowledge. But if one desires to reach a level that has no relation to what was achieved before, his present knowledge will get in the

way, and it must therefore be forgotten.

Similarly, when one plants a seed in the ground, the seed must first rot, and only then will a fruit-bearing tree emerge. Since the tree has no relation to the seed, the seed must disintegrate to make way for the tree.

However, if a seed will not be planted, the tree will not grow either. Although the tree is very different from the seed, there is somewhat of a relation between them. Therefore, the seed must be placed in the ground and decay, and only then will the tree grow. Similarly, R. Zeira needed to first study Talmud Bavli and forget it, and only then was he able to master Talmud Yerushalmi.

This all portrays the first level, which is beyond *hishtalshelus* yet shares something in common with it ever so subtly. This results in the above-mentioned paradox: It must be preceded by the first step, but that step must then be removed.

Yom Kippur includes these two levels. There is the dimension of Yom Kippur that is beyond a person's regular *avodah*, but at the same, it has some type of relation to it. Then there is a higher dimension that is entirely beyond human capacity whatsoever.

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## THE WAYWARD PRINCE

Why indeed does a Jew do *teshuvah*? After all, he has sinned, thus removing from himself the yoke of Heaven. What is it that bothers him?

The reason is because deep down every Jew desires to fulfill Hashem's *mitzvos* and stay away from *aveiros*. The only reason he might sin is because the *yetzer hara* gets in the way (as the Rambam explains). When this inner feeling comes to the fore, his misconduct troubles him and he does *teshuvah*.

However, there is a dimension that is much more profound.

We know that a Jew remains a Jew even if he has sinned. However, this can be understood in two ways (both of which are correct).

Imagine a king who has perfect character traits and every other positive quality. His son, the prince, receives the best education, growing up immersed in intellectual pursuits and noble *middos*. Unfortunately, the prince veers off the correct path and becomes a murderer and thief.

It is obvious that this behavior does not define the prince's true character. However, this itself can be explained in two ways. One way of looking at it is that the prince's negative conduct is only external; deep down he still possesses the same virtuous *middos* and wants to do the right thing.

While this is true, there is a much deeper dimension at play. *The prince is the king's son*. He has an essential connection with his father; he loves his father and his father loves him. The fact that he still retains good *middos* is merely a derivative of this connection.

Similarly, when we say that a Jew remains a Jew despite his sins, this does not only mean that his behavior is external and deep down he wants to do what's right. Rather, it means something much deeper: *He will always be Hashem's child*.

Hashem states that "No matter what, you are My children;" we have an essential connection with Hashem as His children.

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Yom Kippur is about us as Hashem's children. In this dimension, there are no *aveiros*.

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## BEYOND FIRE

There are three dimensions in a Jew's relationship with Hashem.

One dimension is a Jew's revealed connection to Hashem, through the regular conduct of following the path of Torah and *mitzvos*. This can be compared to ordinary fire, which can become extinguished. Similarly, this connection can become compromised if a Jew does not act as he should.

When this occurs, he must tap into the second dimension, in which his relationship with Hashem is still whole. This can be compared to a hidden "fire" latent within a flint stone. This type of fire cannot become extinguished; even if the stone was submerged in water for decades, a spark will emerge when it is struck.

However, even this deeper dimension consists of "fire," namely, a Jew's inner, unlimited desire to fulfill Torah and *mitzvos* which can never be weakened. There exists yet a third dimension—"Hashem and Yisroel are one." We are Hashem's children and are one entity with Him. This cannot even be described as a connection without limitations; no words can properly express it.

## DEPTH OF THE DAY

We can now understand the two dimensions of Yom Kippur.

The concept of Yom Kippur as the eighth day refers to a level that is beyond

*hishtalshelus* but still has some relation to it. Although the preceding level must be removed to make way for the higher level, it is still a necessary prerequisite. This reflects the idea of *teshuvah*. From this point of view, Hashem and Bnei Yisroel are two separate entities (as it were); however, our connection is so strong that it remains intact even when we don't act properly. The *aveiros* and resulting filth exist, and *teshuvah* erases them.

But Yom Kippur is much more than that. It is about us as Hashem's children. The concept of *aveiros*, of positive qualities versus negative qualities, is not part of the discussion to begin with. It's about something altogether different—"Hashem and Yisroel are one."

This is what it means that Yom Kippur itself atones. It doesn't mean that there is a sin and it is subsequently erased; rather, in this dimension, *there are no aveiros*.

## INTO THE SEVEN

This level is represented by the initial spray of blood in the Kodosh Hakodoshim. It is not preceded by seven, because it has no relation to *hishtalshelus* at all.

If so, why is this spray followed by seven more? Once we have this dimension, what more is necessary?

Despite the greatness of this essential connection, it must be drawn into the details of a person's conduct and character.

There were individuals who were prepared to give up their lives for Hashem—a feeling originating from the *etzem haneshamah*—yet, once the need for *mesiras nefesh* dwindled down, it was not as perceptible. This is because the *etzem* hadn't affected their revealed *kochos*.

This is why the first spray is followed by an additional seven, to imbue the *etzem* into the seven *middos*. Similarly, although Yom Kippur

itself atones, we must also do *teshuvah*.

The essence of Yom Kippur especially comes to the fore during *ne'ilah*, the fifth *tefillah*, corresponding to the fifth level of the *neshamah*, *yechidah*. *Ne'ilah* means *lock*, as all gates are closed, leaving Hashem and Yisroel alone together, to the exclusion of anything else. At the same time, Yom Kippur as a whole is referred to as "a day that requires five *tefillos*," as the power of *ne'ilah* permeates the details of the other four *tefillos* as well.

For further learning see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, pp. 1149ff. *Sefer Hamaamarim Melukat: Tishrei-Cheshvan*, pp. 74ff.

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