

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Yom Kippur





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Torah Wellsprings

Yom Kippur

"The Holy Day"

Many people call Yom Kippur, יום הקדוש, "the holy day,"; they are hesitant to call it by its real name - Yom Kippur.

The Gemara also seems to refrain from saying Yom Kippur, and the tractate that discusses the halachos of Yom Kippur is called יומא "The Day."¹

The reluctance to say "Yom Kippur" is also noted in the *Chumash*. In Vayikra (16:29), twenty-eight pesukim discuss a set of *korbanos*, and the Torah doesn't say when they are brought! Finally, after twenty-eight pesukim, the Torah tells us (16:29) בחדש השביעי בעשר לחודש, that these

korbanos are brought on the 10th day of Tishrei, which is Yom Kippur.

It is as if the Torah, the Gemara, and people in conversation, do not want to express the name Yom Kippur.

The Bnei Yissaschar (*Tishrei* 8) explains that this is because Yom Kippur comes from a very concealed place, a place beyond time and place.

As the Bnei Yissaschar writes:

"Yom Kippur comes from a concealed place; therefore, it is proper to conceal it... Hiding its name demonstrates that it

1. Masechtos *Shabbos*, *Succah*, *Rosh Hashanah*, and *Pesachim*, are named after the holiday they discuss, but the Gemara on Yom Kippur is called יומא, "day."

comes from a hidden world, beyond time."

It states (*Vayikra* 16:2) ואל יבא בכל עת אל הקודש, "The Kohen Gadol cannot enter the Kodesh Kadoshim at all times." The Kli Yakar explains that he can't go on a date that is עת, time. He may only go there on Yom Kippur, the day that is beyond time.

All aspects of Yom Kippur are above and

beyond the boundaries of time.

Once a year, on Yom Kippur, korbanos were brought in the Kodesh Kadoshim. The Kodesh Kadashim was a place beyond the boundaries of this world.²

Also, on Yom Kippur, the Jewish nation becomes spiritual beings, like the *malachim*, who are beyond the boundaries of this world.³

2. The Gemara (*Megillah* 10:) states that the Kodesh Kadoshim was 20 x 20 amos and that there were ten amos from each side of the aron to the wall. So, how was there room for the aron? The Gemara answers, "the place of the *aron* didn't take up space."

This is because the Kodesh Kadoshim is beyond the boundaries of this world.

3. Yom Kippur, we don't eat or drink. We become like the *malachim*.

The Tur (606, quoting *Pirkei d'Reb Eliezer*) writes: "The Satan sees that there are no sins among the Jewish nation on Yom Kippur and he says, 'Master of the world, You have a nation on earth that resembles the *malachim* in heaven. The *malachim* are barefoot and so is the Jewish nation barefoot on Yom Kippur. The *malachim* don't have knees and similarly the Jewish nation stand erect the entire Yom Kippur. The *malachim* are clean from all sins, and so is the Jewish nation on Yom Kippur. As the *malachim* have peace, so does the Jewish nation on Yom Kippur [because they ask

So, on Yom Kippur, the day, the location, and the Jewish nation are heavenly beings.

Furthermore, on Yom Kippur, Yidden do teshuvah, and teshuvah is beyond the boundaries of this world. As the Gemara (*Pesachim* 54.) states: שבעה דברים נבראו קודם שנברא העולם ואלו הן תורה ותשובה וגן עדן וגיהנם וכסא הכבוד ובית המקדש ושמו של משיח, "Seven things were created before the creation of the world: Torah, *teshuvah*, Gan Eden, Gehinom, the Kisei HaKavod, the Beis HaMikdash, and the name of Mashiach."

When one does *teshuvah*, he enters a realm that is beyond time. All these aspects come together on this holy day to help the Jewish nation attain atonement.

The Gemara (*Shabbos* 129) teaches, "A person should sell the walls of his home to buy shoes." The *mekubalim* explain that the earth was cursed (due to Adam HaRishon's sin, see *Bereishis* 3:17), and therefore, one should wear shoes to separate himself from the impurity of the earth. The exceptions are Yom Kippur and in the Beis HaMikdash.

forgiveness from one another on erev Yom Kippur].¹ Hakadosh Baruch Hu hears the Satan's testimony and forgives their sins."

The Midrash (*Devarim Rabba* 2:36) writes, "When Moshe was in heaven, he heard the *malachim* say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד, and Moshe brought down these words and gave them to Bnei Yisrael. So why do we say it silently? Why don't we say it out loud? It can be compared to someone who stole jewelry from the king's palace and gave the jewelry to his wife. He tells her, 'Don't wear the jewelry in public, only at home.'

But on Yom Kippur, when the Jewish nation becomes pure like the *malachim*, they say out-loud, in public, ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד."

The Mishnas Chassidim explains that it is beneficial for us to go without shoes on Yom Kippur and in the Beis HaMikdash because this enables us to acquire the holiness that is present there. Yom Kippur is so holy, and even the earth has holiness on that day.

The gabbai of the Sar Shalom of Belz zt'l saw his rebbe inhaling deeply on Yom Kippur. "Are you ok?" the gabbai asked. "Perhaps you need to eat?"

The Sar Shalom replied, "I'm fine. I just wanted to inhale the holy air of Yom Kippur."⁴

4. If Rebbe Shalom of Belz was ill and needed to eat, he wouldn't hesitate. We know this from the following letter that his son, Rebbe Yehoshua, wrote to Rebbe Mendel of Vitznitz, (5655):

"To my beloved *mechutan*, the holy tzaddik, the pride of the Jewish nation, Rebbe Mendel *shlita*: I'm writing this letter because I was shocked to hear that your chassidim are worried that you might fast on the holy day, Yom Kippur. But who can believe that a holy man like you would do such a thing? Hashem, Who told us to fast on Yom Kippur also told us to guard our lives. I remember when my father, Rebbe Shalom of Belz, was ill, and we were worried that he might want to fast on Yom Kippur. But he was righteous. Immediately after Kol Nidrei, he asked that we bring him food. Before eating he said "*hareinu muchan*... I am prepared to do the mitzvah of my Creator to preserve my life" and he ate his food joyfully. It was the type of joy we only saw when he ate matzah at the Seder or when he shook the *lulav*... Certainly, you will also be cautious with this mitzvah and follow the doctors' instructions. Especially since you are a great person, and many people watch what you do. If you will be stringent and not eat, others will learn from you, and this could be dangerous for them.

"Believe me; I didn't want to write this letter to advise you how to act. I'm writing this letter against my will because I care for you so much. Hashem should bless your bread and water and remove

About Yom Kippur it states (*Yael* 2:11), כי גדול יום ה' ונורא מאוד ומי יכילנו "For Hashem's day is great and extremely awesome..." It is a very holy day. We can acquire holiness and closeness to Hashem from this day that will be experienced and appreciated throughout the year.⁵

your illness and send you a complete *refuah*, quickly.

"These are the words of your *mechutan*, who truly loves you, who hopes and trusts to hear good news about your good health."

5. Reb Mordechai Chaim of Slonim *zt'l* would tell the following *mashal* each year at his *seudah hamafsek*:

Someone owned a beautiful bird, and people would come to his home to look at it.

A thief realized that if he gets this bird, he can charge money for people to come see it.

He stole the bird, but he didn't know how to care for it. Very soon the bird was scrawny and ill. It wasn't worth keeping it as a show bird anymore, so he brought it to the town's *shochet*. At least he will get a meal out of it.

But who did he find by the *shochet*? The true owner of the bird was there!

"Give it back to me," the owner said. "That's my bird."

The thief replied, "Your bird was fat and beautiful, and this bird is thin and scrawny. How can you claim that it's your bird?"

The *shochet* didn't want to get involved, so he said, "I won't *shecht* the bird before the rav rules who is the owner."

Three people arrived at the rav's door: the *shochet*, the true owner, and the thief. The rav untied the rope that bound the bird's feet, and the bird ran to its true owner.

The Mitzvah to Eat on Erev Yom Kippur

Shulchan Aruch (604) states, מצוה לאכל בערב יום הכפורים, ולהרבות בסעודה, "It is a mitzvah to eat on *erev Yom Kippur* and to partake in big meals."

The source of this mitzvah is from the pasuk (*Vayikra* 23:32), וענייתם את נפשותיכם, בתשעה לחודש, "You shall fast on the ninth day of the month." Chazal ask: Yom Kippur is on the tenth day. Why does the *pasuk* say we should fast on the ninth day? Chazal answer: "If you eat on the ninth day, you will be rewarded as though you fasted that day."

What is the reason for this mitzvah? We will share some insights:

Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 4:9) teaches, "By all other *yomim tovim*, we make *seudos* to celebrate the mitzvos we perform on *yom tov*. This is important because when one is happy with the mitzvos, the reward is very great... But we are fasting on Yom Kippur. We can't eat meals. Therefore, the Torah commands us to eat on *erev Yom Kippur* to be happy with the mitzvos."

So, the meal on *erev Yom Kippur* is to celebrate the mitzvos of Yom Kippur (the fasting, the tefillos, the teshuvah, the laws of *yom tov*, and the five afflictions). Our joy increases the reward for keeping these mitzvos.

Furthermore, the Rabbeinu Yonah (*ibid.* 4:8) writes, "[We eat meals *erev Yom Kippur*], as this shows

Reb Mordechai Chaim explained, "Throughout the year, the *yetzer hara* makes it is hard for us to serve Hashem. Yom Kippur, Hashem takes the *yetzer hara* away. Now, let's see where you run. If you run to Hashem, that means you are connected to Him."

that we are happy that the time of his atonement has arrived..." According to this explanation, the meals of erev Yom Kippur are to celebrate that our *aveiros* will be forgiven.

The *Tur* (quoting a Midrash) tells the following story):

Once, there was only one fish available in the marketplace - a large fish - and a Jewish tailor and the mayor's servant were bidding to buy it. The mayor asked his servant to buy him fish, but whatever price the servant suggested, the Yid outbid him.

In the end, it was sold to the Jewish tailor for five gold coins.

The mayor summoned the tailor.

"What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a tailor."

"Why did you buy a fish that's worth one gold coin for five gold coins? And why did you bid against my servant who wanted to buy the fish for me?"

The tailor replied, "Hashem commanded us to eat and drink today because Hakadosh Baruch Hu will forgive all of our sins. I would pay even ten gold coins. How could I not buy it?"

The mayor agreed that he was right, and he let him go.

The Midrash concludes that when the tailor opened the fish, he found a diamond inside, and "He had *parnassah* from it for the rest of his life."⁶

The Rabbeinu Yonah writes a third reason why we have a mitzvah to eat on *erev Yom Kippur*: "So

6. Tzaddikim taught that we learn from this episode that the meal of *erev Yom Kippur* is *mesugal* for *parnassah* and wealth.

that we will have strength and energy on Yom Kippur to pray and to seek ways to do *teshuvah*."

We now state a fourth reason for the meals on erev Yom Kippur, taught by Rebbe Yehoshua of Belz *zt'l*:

On a fast day we say, יהי רצון מלפניך שיהא מיעוט חלבי ודמי שנתמעט היום כחלב מונח על גבי המזבח לפניך, "...May it be Your will that my fats and my blood that became less today due to my fast be considered like the fats and blood that go on the *mizbeiach*."

On Yom Kippur we will fast, and our blood and fats will be lessened. They will be considered as if they are sacrificed on the *mizbeiach*. The *erev Yom Kippur* meals increase a person's fats and blood. Those are the blood and fats – which came from a mitzvah – that we want to sacrifice to Hashem on

Yom Kippur. We don't want to sacrifice regular blood and fats. Therefore, we have a mitzvah to eat on *erev Yom Kippur*.

The *Sfas Emes Hakadmon* (quoted in *Ein Yaakov, Yoma, 81: Anaf Yosef*) teaches that the purpose of the meals on *erev Yom Kippur* is to put people in a good mood, so they will be willing to forgive their fellow man. He writes, "I think the atonement takes place more on the ninth day than on the tenth. Because on the ninth day, the Jewish nation makes peace with one another. As Chazal say, if you sinned to your fellow man, you aren't forgiven before receiving his forgiveness. When one fasts, he is angry, and that divides people. But when one eats and drinks, he has a happy heart, and all Yidden unite."⁷

7. The Beis Avraham said that when one eats on *erev Yom Kippur*, he should imagine that a lion is in front of him.

Ask Forgiveness

Shulchan Aruch (606:1) says that when someone asks you for forgiveness, you shouldn't be cruel but rather forgive him.

The *Mishnah Berurah* explains that when you forgive others, Hashem will forgive you, as Chazal say, כל המעביר על מדותיו מעבירו לו, על כל פשעיו. "But if you don't forgive, Hashem won't forgive, either."

The Shaar HaTzion (606:8) explains, "Heaven acts *midah kneged midah*. You should forgive your fellow man even if he rebelled against you. And then Hashem will forgive you, even for the *aveiros* you transgressed on purpose. As Chazal say, 'Who does Hashem forgive? Those who forgive others.'"

A higher level is to forgive your fellow man,

even before he asks you for *mechilah*.

We do this every night in *kriyas Shma she'al HaMitah* when we say, רבונו של עולם הרנינו מוחל, and we forgive everyone who sinned against us.

The *Zohar* writes that Reb Abba saw a person, tired from his travels, lie down on a mound of earth. A venomous snake approached the traveler, and a moment before the snake struck, a heavy object fell on the snake and killed it.

When the man awoke, he saw the dead snake and understood that he was saved by a miracle.

Just as the man got to his feet, the mound of earth he had laid upon earlier crumbled and fell down a cliff. He was saved a second time because if the mound crumbled a moment earlier,

In other words, this joyous meal should be eaten with a lot of *yiras Shamayim*.

he would have fallen down the cliff together with it.

Reb Abba asked the traveler, "What are your merits that Hashem performed these miracles for you?"

The man replied, "At night, before I go to sleep, I forgive everyone who wronged me, and I seek to do kindness with them."

Reb Abba cried out and said, "Your deeds are greater than Yosef HaTzaddik's. Yosef forgave his brothers, as is proper for family members to forgive one another. But you forgive even people who aren't your family. That is a greater level. You deserve that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should do many miracles for you."¹¹⁸

8. Chanukah, many chasidim go to their rebbe when he lights Chanukah *lecht*. In a large chasidus in Yerushalayim, the Rebbe requested, "This year, I want that the *bachurim* should be near me when I light the Chanukah *lecht*."

As there were many *bachurim*, the *gabai* arranged a rotation schedule. Each *bachur* was able to be near the Rebbe for at least one night of Chanukah.

The first night of Chanukah went over well. But on the second night, one *bachur* said to his friends, "The *gabai* stands near the Rebbe every night, why can't we? Why do we have to take turns?"

He convinced his friends to push their way forward to the front of the room, to be near the Rebbe when he *tzinds lecht*.

The *gabai* rebuked them, "You are taking away the rights from the other *bachurim*."

The *bachurim* ignored him, and the *bachur* who instigated the idea said, "When you go away from your place, we'll leave our place."

There were only a few minutes left until the Rebbe would come in to light the Chanukah *lecht* and the *bachurim* were still there.

"Go back to your place," the *gabai* demanded, as he was quickly losing his temper, but it didn't help. The *gabai* slapped the *bachur*, the ringleader, just as the Rebbe entered the *beis medresh*. The *bachur* ran out of the *beis medresh*, ashamed.

The next morning, the *gabai* asked forgiveness from the *bachur*. "I was correct for trying to make order, but I was wrong for hitting you. I apologize."

The *bachur* replied, "You embarrassed me in public; I will never forgive you."

A few days later, the Rebbe summoned the *bachur*. It was Thursday night, the fifth night of Chanukah. A *Chok l'Yisrael Chumash* was on the Rebbe's table, opened to that day's portion of the *Zohar*. The Rebbe asked the *bachur* to read the *Zohar*. It told the story (stated above) that Reb Abba saw that someone's life was saved twice, miraculously: A poisonous snake was killed before it could smite, and a mound of earth crumbled and fell down a cliff moments after he left it - and it was because this man forgave his fellow man.

The Rebbe said, "Do you understand what I am telling you? The way of the Torah is to forgive. There is no other way. And if you forgive, miracles will happen to you."

The *bachur* agreed. He went to a bakery, bought cake and *lechayim*, and carried it to the *gabai's* home. "Please forgive me for disrespecting you," the *bachur* said when the *gabai* answered the door.

"I regret hitting you," the *gabai* replied.

They drank a *lechayim* together and they made up. They forgave each other, and the episode was placed behind them.

That night, the *bachur* returned to the yeshiva's dormitory.

He couldn't fall asleep, so he collected the *shamashim* from all the Chanukah menorahs that were lit in the room, and he put them on a chair near his bed. Lying in bed, he studied Gemara by the light of the *shamashim*. As can be expected, he fell asleep. The Gemara fell on the candles and his bed caught fire. He awoke and

We see from this story that for forgiving others, one merits life.

Forgiving is also *mesugal* for good children.

The *mekubal* Reb Yaakov *zt'l* merited to be the father of Rebbe Aharon HaGadol of Karlin *zt'l* because he forgave others. There are two versions to the story.

saw fire all around him. He jumped out of bed and quickly woke up the other *bachurim* in his room. They called the fire department.

The *bachur* realized that a miracle happened to him. If he hadn't woken up in time, his life would be in danger.

It was three o'clock in the morning. The *bachur* knew that the Rebbe would be in beis medresh studying Torah, as he was there every night, at this hour. The *bachur* ran to the beis medresh and told the Rebbe the miracle that happened to him and to his friends. "It is exactly as the Rebbe told me. I forgave and miracles occurred."

The Rebbe replied, "Sometimes Heaven puts the right words into my mouth, to help bring about a salvation."

During the Six Day War, many people took refuge in the bomb shelter basement of the Mirer Yeshivah in Yerushalayim. When the war was over, some *bachurim* went up to the roof of the yeshiva and they found three bombs there that miraculously didn't detonate.

Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt'l* said to the yeshiva students, "You probably think you were saved in the merit of your never-ending Torah and *tefillos* in the bomb shelter, but I know the real reason we were granted this miracle. A mother and her five children were with us in the bomb shelter. Her husband abandoned her years ago, and since then she struggles to support her family all by herself. As bombs fell in Yerushalayim, I heard her say, 'Hashem, You know that I have all the reasons in the world to be angry with my husband. Nevertheless, I forgive him. And just as I forgive him, you should forgive us and save us.' I think that her *vitur* and forgiveness is what saved us."

According to one version, moments before Yom Kippur, Reb Yaakov was handing out *machzorim*. Several people put out their hands to receive a *machzor*, and Reb Yaakov gave them *machzorim* without thinking about who should get the *machzor* first and who should get it second.

One wealthy person waited a few moments with his hand outstretched until he got his *machzor*. The rich man felt slighted and insulted because he felt he deserved to receive first. So he smacked Reb Yaakov across the face.

According to the other version, Reb Yaakov was the chazan on Yom Kippur for Maariv, and he said a long *Shemonah Esrei*. When

he took three steps back, a wealthy person smacked him for davening so long.

Either way, the story ends the same way according to both versions:

Reb Yaakov didn't harbor any hard feelings in his heart. He immediately forgave the wealthy man.

People encouraged Reb Yaakov to forgive the wealthy man. "He was probably having a bad day," they said. "He certainly regrets what he did. Forgive him."

Reb Yaakov responded that he doesn't know what they want from him. "I forgave him right away."

In that merit, a year later his wife gave birth to the holy child, Reb Aharon HaGadol of Karlin zy'a.⁹

9. Forgiving is also *mesugal* for *shidduchim*, as the following story demonstrates:

For a long time, a divorcee ate his Shabbos and *yom tov* meals with a family in Bnei Brak, but one day they got into a dispute. The

guest insulted his host and the host answered back. The guest left in the middle of the meal, and for months, he didn't return.

Erev Yom Kippur, the *baalabuste* of this household said to her husband, "Maybe you should call our old guest to ask him *mechilah*?"

"I should ask him for forgiveness?" he asked. "He started it. He insulted me. He should ask me forgiveness."

"Perhaps you're right, but I still think you should ask *mechilah*. And maybe in the merit of asking *mechilah* our older daughter will find her *shidduch*..."

Their older daughter was nearing thirty, and the parents worried about her. The husband promised to ask forgiveness.

By this time, the divorcee had moved to Borough Park. It took some time until he got his phone number. He called him moments before *Kol Nidrei*. They had a cordial conversation.

"Do you remember that time when you were in my home? I said some unkind words ... I ask *mechilah*."

"Don't worry about it. You did nothing wrong. It was my fault. I ask you forgiveness."

Then, the divorcee said, "I will be in Bnei Brak Chol HaMoed Succos. I'll come to visit you."

After this conversation, the couple in Bnei Brak felt relieved. They felt that now their daughter will have her *yeshuah*.

And indeed, it was so. *Motzei Yom Kippur*, as they were eating the meal, a *shadchan* called up and suggested a *shidduch* for their daughter. This was the first offer in months. On Chol HaMoed Succos they were celebrating their daughter's *vort*.

The divorcee promised he would visit on Chol HaMoed, and he came in as they were celebrating the *vort*. He came in with a big smile on his face, and he said, "I'm coming from my own *vort*! I was just engaged tonight..." They tearfully danced together.

It seems that as soon as they forgave each other, the channel for both their salvations opened up.

Grab Merit

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 3:4) writes, "Everyone must consider himself to be 50% virtuous (יָסֵא) and 50% guilty (חַיִּיב), and he should also think that the world too is 50% virtuous and 50% guilty. If he does an *aveirah*, he will tip his scale and the scale of the entire world to the side of guilt, thus bringing destruction to the world. If he does a mitzvah, he tips himself and the entire world to the side of merit, which brings salvation to the world. This is the reason that all Bnei Yisrael are accustomed to increase the giving of *tzedakah*, and doing good deeds from Rosh Hashanah until Yom Kippur, more than the rest of the year."

The Rambam says that throughout the year, and primarily during Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, one should think that he is fifty percent virtuous and fifty percent guilty. If he does just one good deed, he will

tip the scale for himself and the entire world. Therefore, during these days, it is recommended to "grab" mitzvos.

In particular, the Rambam mentions giving tzedakah during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*.

Giving tzedakah, especially during Aseres Yemei Teshuvah, is a *segulah* for a good judgment on Yom Kippur. Rabbeinu Efraim writes that this is hinted at in the words (*Devarim* 16:20), צדק צדק תרדוף, למען תחיה וירשת, which can be translated as follows: צדק צדק תרדוף, run after the mitzvah of צדקה. Why? למען תחיה, so you will be written in the book of life. וירשת implies that you should give tzedakah ויִתְּשֵׁר, during six days of Aseres Yemei Teshuvah. Four of the days one cannot give tzedakah: on Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Shabbos Shuvah. This leaves us with six days in Aseres Yemei Teshuvah to

accomplish the mitzvah of tzedakah.

But it isn't only tzedakah. There are many mitzvos we can do that will turn the judgment in our favor.

One year, *erev Yom Kippur*, the Chasam Sofer *zt'l* thought of a *shidduch* between an orphan boy and an orphan girl and told his daughter to be the *shadchan*. She replied, "I will take care of it immediately after Yom Kippur."

The Chasam Sofer told her that he wants her to take care of it immediately because he wants this merit in time for Yom Kippur.

Later that day, she returned to her great father and said, "The orphan boy is concerned about the *shidduch*, because the girl doesn't have money."

The Chasam Sofer replied, "tell him that he will have *parnassah* his entire life. Perhaps he won't

be wealthy, but he will have *parnassah*."

The Chasam Sofer's daughter passed on the message and the *shidduch* was finalized that very day.

That night, the Chasam Sofer arrived to *beis medresh* for Kol Nidrei later than usual. The *gabai* pointed to the clock. The Chasam Sofer told him, "It isn't late. Heaven begins the judgment when I say *Kol Nidrei*."

The end of this story gives us a glimpse of the greatness of the Chasam Sofer. Heaven began the judgment when the Chasam Sofer said *Kol Nidrei*.

It is also told that the Chasam Sofer's son-in-law saw a pillar of fire in the Chasam Sofer's home on *erev Yom Kippur*, and he fainted from fright.

The Chasam Sofer told him that the pillar of fire was Eliyahu HaNavi.

Yet, despite the Chasam Sofer's greatness, he still wanted one more mitzvah before the day of judgment.

We should do the same. We should ask ourselves, "What good deed can I do to merit a good year?"

Or think, "What good *kabbalah* can I take on for the new year that will help my judgment?"

The Chofetz Chaim *zt'l* told the following *mashal*:

A poor woman was selling apples in a fair. Thieves came and turned over the baskets of apples. The thieves and many people in the market were grabbing the apples as though they were for free. The apple merchant sat there crying. Someone told her, "Why do you cry? Everyone is grabbing apples, and you should do the same. You can also grab apples."

The *nimshal* is: When you see that the *yetzer hara* is succeeding, taking from

you many opportunities to do mitzvos, it isn't a reason to despair. He is grabbing from you, but you can also grab and do as many good deeds as you can. This can be the mitzvah that will tip your scale and the scale of the world to the side of virtue.

Kol Nidrei

The Or HaChaim Hakadosh writes in a letter, "A wealthy person bought me the honor to take out the *sefer Torah* for *Kol Nidrei*. When I opened the *aron kodesh*, a bright light filled the *beis knesses*. It was like the gates of Gan Eden opened up..."

Kol Nidrei is a special time, an uplifting time. Klal Yisrael recites this *tefillah* with awe and passion. They know that this is one of the highest moments of the day.

But many wonder: What is special about the *Kol Nidrei* that it touches people's hearts so deeply?

Kol Nidrei is essentially *hataras nedarim*, annulling vows. We also make *hataras nedarim* on *erev* Rosh Hashanah, but then it isn't said with the awe we have at *Kol Nidrei*. What is its significance?

Here are a few explanations:

1) The *Zohar* teaches that we have the power to annul Hashem's oaths when we say *Kol Nidrei*. Because it is possible that due to our sins Hashem placed a strict decree on the Jewish nation and sealed it with a vow. Even if we do *teshuvah* and succeed in arousing Hashem's compassion, what do we do with the oath? Hashem's oath is annulled with the *Kol Nidrei*. We aren't only annulling *our* vows; we are also nullifying Hashem's vows so that He can give us a good year. This is one of the reasons that people are inspired when they say it.

2) Rebbe Pinchas of Koritz *zt'l* (Imrei Pinchas, Yom Kippur תקק"ז) says, "Before *Kol Nidrei*... the *malachim* and the *neshamos* come down from their place in heaven. No place in the world can host the *malachim* and the *neshamos*, other than within the tears that we shed before Hashem."

3) Yom Kippur, *malachim* come down from heaven to daven together with us, but the *malachim* don't want to be among sinners. Therefore, we begin Yom Kippur with thoughts of *teshuvah*, enabling us to daven together with the *malachim*.

4) The Baal Shem Tov *zy'a* explained that Klal Yisrael knows that as they say *Kol Nidrei*, the Satan is trying to cause them to sin and testify against them. The explanation is as follows:

The Gemara (*Yoma* 20.) says, "השטן is *gematriya* 364, because the Satan has

permission to persecute and to incite people to do *aveiros* 364 days a year. On Yom Kippur, which is the 365th day, he must be silent." The Satan knows that he can't persecute on Yom Kippur, and therefore when we say *Kol Nidrei*, it is the Satan's last chance to slander the Jewish nation and cause them to sin before the judgment. Klal Yisrael sense that they are in danger, and therefore they do *teshuvah* when they say *Kol Nidrei*.

The Tune

Shulchan Aruch (619:1) states, ואל ישנה אדם ממונהג העיר, ואפילו בניגונים או בפיוטים שאומרים שם, "Don't change the custom of the city, even the *nigunim* or the *piyutim* they say." The *Mishnah Berurah* explains, כי על ידי זה מתבלבל דעת הקהל, this confuses the community.

Furthermore, the holy *sefarim* teach that the traditional tunes of Rosh

Hashanah and Yom Kippur remove the harsh judgment.

One of the translations of the word זמירות is to prune, and it is known that אלקים is Hashem's name representing harsh justice. So (*Tehillim* 47), זמרו לאלקים means prune away the harsh judgment with song.

We can explain this with a *mashal*.

A king's young son became insane and was sent to an asylum. The king upgraded the services of the asylum so his son will receive the best care. He built a swimming pool and an exercise room for the asylum, and he hired the best psychologists to work there.

The son became better and was completely healed. But the asylum directors didn't tell the king the good news because they wanted to benefit from the king's ongoing financial support.

The healed prince tried to escape the asylum and

go home, but the doors were always locked. He wrote letters to his parents, but those letters were confiscated and never sent.

Once, the king's son scribbled on a page, and he gave it to one of the directors of the asylum and asked him to send it to his father. The director was happy to do so because this letter proved that the prince still needed help. Which normal child of his age sends a scribbled paper to his father?

The asylum directors didn't realize that the prince concealed a hidden message within the scribbled letter. When the king received the letter, he studied the letter from all angles, and picked up that his son was pleading with him to take him home because he was well.

This can explain the tunes and melodies we sing on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We say many tefillos to our King,

our Father in heaven, but the angels sometimes intercept our tefillos and don't let them to go up to heaven. Therefore, we sing melodies. The *malachim* don't understand their importance, and they allow the songs to go up to heaven. Concealed within these tunes are our yearnings, regrets, and requests for the upcoming year. Hashem understands hidden messages and grants us a good year.

The Evaluation Test

Reb Yitzchak Hutner told the following tale:

Someone put his home up for sale and said that he would sell it to the highest bidder. The price kept going higher and higher, but he didn't sell it to anyone. Finally, a frustrated bidder asked him, "Are you planning on selling your home or not?"

He replied, "I don't want to sell my home. I simply wanted to know how much

my home is worth. This is how I tested it."

Reb Yitzchak Hutner zt'l said that a person can also figure out how precious he is to Hashem or how important a specific service is to Hashem based on the extent of the difficulties and the opposition. If the yetzer hara gives you a tough time and doesn't let you serve Hashem, this tells you that you are very precious to Hashem. And if there is a particular mitzvah that the *yetzer hara*

is placing all its strength to stop you from performing, you can determine from that that this mitzvah is very special to Hashem.¹⁰

The Mishnah (*Avos* 5:5) lists the ten miracles that took place in the Beis HaMikdash, and one of them is that the kohen gadol never became tamei with *tumas ker* on the night of Yom Kippur.

This doesn't seem miraculous, especially since the kohen gadol didn't sleep on Yom Kippur

10. We can also use this test to measure the value of a generation. If your generation is bombarded with difficult tests - harder than ever before in history - know that you are living in a very special time. The yetzer hara is afraid of what you can accomplish, so he throws all his poisonous arrows at you.

One of the difficult tests of our times is *shmiras einayim*, guarding the eyes. The fact that the yetzer hara places so much effort in this realm proves that it is very important for us to guard our eyes.

The gematriya of עין is 130. We have two eyes, and twice עין is gematriya 260. The kohen gadol said Hashem's name (pronouncing it as it is written) ten times on Yom Kippur. The gematriya of Hashem's name is twenty-six. $10 \times 26 = 260$. This implies that when one is careful with his eyes, he is likened to a kohen gadol on Yom Kippur.

night (see Mishnayos Yoma 1:7).

The answer is that on Yom Kippur the *yetzer hara* is very afraid because if the Jewish nation attains atonement, Moshiach will come, and the *yetzer hara* will be slaughtered. Therefore, the *yetzer hara* works very hard to prevent that.

As the Tosfos Yom Tov writes, "The *yetzer hara* and the *yetzer tov* fight like two sworn enemies. When one of them is about to be conquered, he becomes stronger. As we see, people become very strong moments before their demise, and they speak lucid words as though they are healthy. Therefore, it was very likely for the *kohen gadol* to become *tamei*."

But the *yetzer hara* didn't succeed. The *kohen gadol* remained pure, and that is a miracle that Hashem performed for us.

Teshuvah

The Midrash (*Koheles Rabba* 7:32) tells the following *mashal*:

Thieves in jail dug under the floor of their cell. Every night, when the guard wasn't watching, they dug a tunnel, which led out of the jail to freedom. When the tunnel was complete, they all escaped except for one man who remained in prison. In the morning, the prison warden hit him with a stick. "Foolish man!" he said. "You were able to escape; why didn't you?"

This *mashal* describes our obligation to do *teshuvah*. We can escape our sins and free ourselves from Hashem's wrath, so why don't we?

The Rabbeinu Yonah (*Shaarei Teshuvah* 1:2) quotes this Midrash, and he writes, "Know, when a sinner pushes off doing *teshuvah*, his punishment increases each day. He knows

Hashem is angry with him, and he has a place where he can escape- and that place is *teshuvah* - but he remains rebellious. "

One of the discussions found in *teshuvah sefarim* is how to atone for severe aveiros. People who committed great sins asked the gedolim for the path to become pure before Hashem. But when we study their responses, we become frightened because they require many fasts, afflictions, and humiliations to attain atonement. The path for atonement that they express is far beyond what anyone can do today.

However, contemporary *teshuvah sefarim* discuss these topics, and they offer far easier paths for attaining atonement.

The Shevet HaLevi (vol.4 *siman* 55) writes:

"You asked me about a *baal teshuvah* who did *teshuvah*, and now he's married with children...

and he learns in a *kollel* in Yerushalayim. He is cautious with all the mitzvos, and he toils in Torah. You asked that I should arrange a plan for *teshuvah* for him because until he was eighteen, he didn't keep any mitzvos. His parents aren't religious at all, and he didn't know anything. During those days, he ate non-kosher, he ate on Yom Kippur, and he ate chametz on Pesach.

"You quoted the Noda b'Yehudah who says that Torah scholars don't have to afflict themselves so much for their atonement, nevertheless, the Noda b'Yehudah concedes, some fasts and *sigufim* (afflictions) will undoubtedly be needed so he can have a complete *teshuvah*, תשובה המושקל. Similarly, the Reishis Chachmah says, הוא בלא הוא לא סגי, that just learning Torah or just afflictions, alone, isn't enough. It has to be a mixture of the two to attain atonement.

"The truth is that this is a difficult topic to discuss. Who is the person these days who can set a path for *teshuvah*? Who can say that they rectified their own sins? Woe to us from the day of judgment! We are living in a weak generation, spiritually and physically. When we read the *sefarim* of the early scholars on these topics, the hair on our heads stands up. Therefore, we are better off being silent, and HaKadosh Baruch Hu, who accepts people who do *teshuvah*, will mercifully show them what they should do for their *teshuvah*.

"Nevertheless, I found a diamond in the introduction to Yismach Moshe. He writes, 'Rosh Chodesh Av, תקמ"ד, I had a dream...'"

In this dream, heaven revealed to the Yismach Moshe that *change* itself is the greatest affliction. One doesn't need to fast, nor does he need any other form of *siguf* (affliction). Change in itself is a *siguf*

because it is so difficult to change.

The Shevet HaLevi explains that the *teshuvah sefarim* that discuss how many days one must fast to atone for his sins refer to a person who sinned once or twice. He had a weak moment, he fell, and now he seeks to rectify that. But if one is accustomed to sinning, he doesn't need anything other than to improve his ways. The effort involved in effecting a lasting change is *yesurim*.

The Shevet HaLevi writes, "The person you asked about was a תינוק שנושבה, born to irreligious parents, and he didn't know anything about Torah, and that's why he committed many *aveiros*... Later, he did *teshuvah*; he raised himself above the quagmire of sin. He merited to go from level to level until today he sits and toils in the tents of Torah. He built up a holy Jewish family, and he is cautious with the mitzvos. This itself

is a perfect *teshuvah*, תשובה based on the lesson המשקל from the Yismach Moshe.

"We generally don't learn halachos from dreams, but this time, it is logical, and it seems correct. I have a lot to discuss on

this subject from many sources in Chazal, however, I decided to end the letter here because I became very afraid as we discuss rectifying sins.¹¹ May Hashem see our broken heart and enable us to do *teshuvah sheleimah*.¹²

11. We quote this sentence in the Shevet HaLevi's words:

והי מקום אתי להאריך בעניינים אלו מדברי ש"ס ורז"ל בכמה מקומות אך בכונה הריני מקצר כי אימה ופלצות אחזוני בדברי על תקונים על פוגמי עונות

12. There are people who are addicted to the internet, *r'l*. According to the Shevet HaLevi's lesson, probably, when they overcome this addiction, they won't need any other affliction to attain purity from sin. The difficulty involved in breaking an addiction is affliction, enough.

Rebbe Michel of Zlotchev *zy'a* (quoted in *Igra d'Pirka* 24) teaches that when one serves Hashem beyond his natural abilities Hashem will perform miracles for him beyond nature.

I received a letter from a couple who was childless for many years. Following Reb Michel Zlotchever's lesson, they wanted to perform a mitzvah beyond their nature, so Hashem will perform a miracle for them and grant them children. They were both addicted to the iPhone and internet, *r'l*, and they decided to throw away these devices. It was *mesirus nefesh* for them, and they prayed that this sacrifice should grant them a miracle beyond nature.

Ten months later they bore their first child.

The Chasam Sofer forbade his students to study חכמות היצויים, foreign subjects, which could lead to heresy.

One student writes that he was from the best *bachurim* in the

yeshiva, and he always obeyed the Chasam Sofer. However, once, he awoke in the middle of the night, and he was tempted to read one of those forbidden books. All the other *bachurim* were sleeping, so no one would know. He reached for the book, but suddenly he saw an image of a person with a sword drawn. Frightened, the *bachur* threw down the book, and the image disappeared.

"It must have been my imagination," the *bachur* decided, and he picked up the book again. Once again, he saw the man brandishing a sword. He put the book down and went to sleep.

The next morning, after the Chasam Sofer finished his daily *shiur*, the Chasam Sofer said, "It's time to remind the *bachurim* of the prohibition against reading ספרי היצוים. We haven't spoken about it for a while, so this is a reminder that there is a הרם on them and it is strictly forbidden. הרם has the same letters as רמה (sword) because if one isn't careful and transgresses the הרם, he can be punished, *chalilah*, with a sword..." Hundreds of *bachurim* heard the Chasam Sofer's words, and only one understood exactly what the Chasam Sofer was referring to.

In the Chasam Sofer's day ספרים היצוים was the problem, spurred by the Enlightenment movement. Today, it's the internet, and we must be careful. We should do everything to avoid falling into that mire. But if we fell there and managed to pull ourselves out, miracles beyond nature will happen to us. And the struggle and afflictions we go through to change our routines will totally erase all our sins.

In Tzanz, many *bachurim* attended the Divrei Chaim's *shiurim*, only it wasn't an organized yeshiva. A wealthy person said to the Divrei Chaim, "Since the *bachurim* are learning here anyway, why not open a yeshiva for them, and I will cover all expenses?"

"I'm afraid of the responsibility," the Divrei Chaim replied.

"But the Chasam Sofer opened a yeshiva," the man said.

"We can't compare ourselves to the Chasam Sofer," the Divrei Chaim said. "When the Chasam Sofer merely looked at a *bachur*'s face, that *bachur* wasn't able to sin afterwards."

It is known that the Chasam Sofer's holy influence protected all the *bachurim* in his yeshiva from *aveiros*. The story we wrote above is an example.

There was a *baal agalah* who served his town loyally for many years. He was getting old, and couldn't keep up with the demand, so the townspeople decided it was time to hire a new wagon driver to take his place.

A strong, young lad was chosen for the position.

The first wagon driver was insulted. He worked for years as the town's wagon driver, and now a young man was taking his place. He said, "I will test the new wagon driver and see whether he is fitting for the job. If he passes the test, I will graciously hand over the reins to him. But if he can't answer my questions, he isn't fitting for the position and I will retain my post."

The veteran wagon driver asked the young man, "What will you do if your wagon gets stuck in the mud?"

"I will get off the wagon and push the wagon out of the mud."

"What will you do if that doesn't help?"

"I will tell everyone to get off the wagon, and together we will push the wagon out of the mud."

"And if that doesn't work, what will you do?"

"I will unload the packages, to make it easier for the horses, and we will try again."

"And if that doesn't work, what will you do?"

The lad thought for a moment and admitted that he doesn't know.

"Then you aren't worthy of the position."

The lad humbly accepted the rebuke, but he still wanted to know the answer. "Please tell me. What does one do if his wagon is stuck in the mud, and can't get it out?"

Looking the young wagon driver in the eyes, the old wagon

Kabbalos

Part of the teshuvah process is to make a realistic *kaballah* (plan and resolution) to improve your ways.

It states, שובה ישראל עד ה' אלקיך, "Do *teshuvah* up to Hashem, your G-d."

Rebbe Shmelke of Nickelsberg *zt'l* explains, שובה ישראל, do *teshuvah*, עד,

up to a certain point. Don't take on too much because then you will fail. Growth in *avodas Hashem* is achieved with tiny steps.

The main thing is to keep your *kaballah* all the time, without exception.

The Beis Avraham *zt'l* told the following *mashal*:

replied, "An experienced wagon driver never drives his wagon into the mud in the first place."

Similarly, in regard to *teshuvah*, there are ways to rectify the past, but making amends is difficult. It is far better not to sin in the first place.

The same applies to relationships. Erev Yom Kippur, we ask *mechilah*, and sometimes, we must ask *mechilah* from family members. A breach in the peace of a family is easy to create, and so hard to rectify.

But if we did err, there is always a way to reconcile.

The Tzemech Tzedek of Lubavitz *zy'a* asked: Why do people seek to buy fast running horses? If the horse is going in the right direction, then running fast is a quality. But sometimes, it runs in the wrong direction. A fast horse running in the wrong direction will cause one to lose his way quicker.

The answer is: A fast horse can also bring one back more swiftly, to his desired destination. Even if one strayed far one can return quickly.

An alcoholic decided never to drink alcohol again.

He made this *kabbalah* at night, and true to his word, he didn't have his usual late-night drink. In the morning, he craved a beer and began walking towards the tavern but stopped midway. "I can't do this," he told himself. "I'm a new person. I'm not an alcoholic anymore," and he returned home.

In the afternoon, he walked all the way to the tavern. But then he quickly rebuked himself and returned home.

By nighttime, he complimented himself. He said, "Today, I controlled myself from drinking all day. I had four or five difficult tests, but I was strong like iron and kept

my resolve. For this, I deserve a reward," and he went to the bar to celebrate.

Often our *teshuvah* looks the same. We resolve to improve in some matter, we are successful sometimes, and then we pat ourselves on our shoulder and promptly revert to our old ways. We need to make a firm decision, once and for all, and then we will succeed with *teshuvah*.¹³

Regret

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa *zt'l* taught that on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we are judged primarily to see whether we regret our *aveiros*.

We aren't 100 % guilty of our evil deeds. We have many excuses, and Hashem might accept them. Just

13. The Rabbeinu Chananel says that עַד הָאֵלֶקֶד means that if your sins reached Hashem's throne and brought blemishes all the way up to there, you can still repent and your *teshuvah* will be accepted.

think about the powerful *yetzer hara*, negative human tendencies, bad routines, influences around us, and more, and we understand that sinning is almost inevitable. However, Hashem asks, "I understand that you failed sometimes. I understand that you erred. After all, you are human. But why don't you regret what you did? Why are you placid, feeling that all is well? You should at least regret your sins."

The Midrash (*Naso* 13:3) writes: "It states (*Mishlei* 29:23), גאות אדם תשפילנו, 'Adam's downfall was his haughtiness.' Hakadosh Baruch Hu told him to do *teshuvah* for eating from the *eitz hadaas*, and...Adam replied, 'I don't want to do *teshuvah*.'" It seems from this Midrash that Adam's primary sin was that he didn't want to repent.

Adam had excuses for his *aveirah*. As he said, "The woman... gave me from the tree..." The problem wasn't the sin per-se as much as that he didn't regret it.

Think about before Whom you sinned, and you will regret your *aveiros*. As we say, אל חטא שחטאנו ... לפניך, "For the sin that we committed before You..." Rebbe Asher of Stolin *zt'l* explained that our primary regret is, שחטאנו לפניך, that we sinned before *You*.

People regret their *aveiros* for several reasons (fear of punishment, embarrassment, feelings of failure and incompetence, etc.) but the ideal regret is to feel bad, שחטאנו לפניך, that we sinned before Hashem. "How could I have sinned before Hashem, whose greatness and whose kindness is boundless?" ¹⁴

14. The Beis Yisrael *zt'l* was very strict that no one should speak in his *beis midrash*.

Shame

Erev Yom Kippur, Rebbe Henoah of Alexander *zt'l* made a *cheshbon hanefesh*, and he felt very broken by his sins. He was so embarrassed and broken that he didn't want to show his face.

Chassidim were going to Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa *zt'l* on *erev Yom Kippur* to receive his *brachos* for a good year. His student Rebbe Henoah didn't want to miss out on this opportunity, but he was too ashamed to show his face! That's how bad he felt.

He decided to go see Rebbe Bunim together with a group of *chassidim*. He would stand off to a side and receive the Rebbe's *brachah* without drawing attention to himself.

After receiving the Rebbe's *brachah*, Rebbe Henoah was in a hurry to return home so that he could conceal his shame, but Rebbe Bunim called him back.

At that moment, Rebbe Henoah's humiliation and shame left him. He thought, "The Rebbe wants me. So, I'm not all that bad." He came close to the Rebbe,

Once, two *bachurim* spoke during *davening*, and the Beis Yisrael told them that they can't return to his *beis midrash* for two weeks. One of them told the Beis Yisrael that he regrets that he spoke. The Beis Yisrael said, "Since you regret, you can come back to the *beis midrash* right now."

The other said, "It wasn't my fault. The other *bachur* spoke to me. He caused me to talk." The Beis Yisrael told him that now he can't return to the *beis midrash* for six weeks! Why?

Because the main thing is to regret what you did wrong. When you regret, there can be growth and improvement. But when you don't regret, you will never become better.

and Rebbe Bunim told him that it isn't important anymore.

Rebbe Henoah understood: When he was humble and broken from his sins, he was on a very special level and Rebbe Bunim wanted something from him. Perhaps he wanted his *tefillos*, his *brachos*; he had a lot of potential at that time. But when he felt arrogance, he lost that level.

Trying

Change is hard to come by, and we don't always succeed, but we must try. The main thing is that we try to improve.

The Torah tells us that when Yaakov Avinu saw shepherds with their flocks gathered around a well, he asked them why they weren't giving water to their herds. The shepherds explained that there is a heavy stone on the well, and they aren't strong enough to spin it off

themselves. "When all the shepherds gather, we can take the stone off the well."

The Imrei Emes of Gerzt'l asked: Yaakov saw the heavy stone on the well. He should have realized that they can't remove it on their own. So why did he ask?

The answer is: Yaakov Avinu was telling them, "I understand that the stone is heavy, but why aren't you trying to remove it? Perhaps you will succeed."

We will use *tefillah* as an example because *tefillah* is one of the hardest mitzvos to do correctly, and we are obligated to try. Therefore, on these are days for introspection, one should ask himself, "When I daven, do I think about what I'm saying, or do I just mumble the words? Do I speak during the *tefillah*? Do I come on time? What can I do to improve my *tefillah*? What small step can I take so I can daven better?"

It is very hard to daven properly, and it is likely that even after this introspection, you will fail. But you can try. Before each tefillah tell yourself, "I am going to make this tefillah the best I can. I will try to daven well." The outcome might not be so good, but you tried.

This is the attitude we need to have towards all areas of *avodas Hashem*. Don't worry if you fail but worry if you aren't trying. And if you keep trying, you will succeed in the end.

The Turn-Over

Teshuvah is amazingly powerful; it can turn *aveiros* into mitzvos. As the Gemara (*Yoma* 86.) states, גדולה תשובה שזדונות נעשות לו כזכויות, "Teshuvah is great because the *aveiros* he intentionally committed become his merits."

The Bardichover Rav *zt'l* said to a great sinner, "I am jealous of you because

when you do *teshuvah*, you will have so many mitzvos."

The man replied, "Just wait another year, and you will have more reason to be jealous."

The Tiferes Shlomo (Radomsk) *zt'l* came to visit the renowned *baal teshuvah*, Reb Chaim Dovid Doctor *zt'l* when he was on his deathbed. Reb Chaim Dovid Doctor moaned, and the Tiferes Shlomo assumed that he was lamenting the sins of his youth. The Tiferes Shlomo told him, הימים הראשונים יפלו, "The first days will fall away." He was telling him, "Don't worry about the past, because you did *teshuvah*, and you won't be punished. It will be like those early days aren't part of your life."

Reb Chaim Dovid Doctor replied, "Chas veshalom! I'm not *mevater* on a single day!" Reb Chaim Dovid Doctor didn't want to lose one day of his life, not even those days when

he was irreligious. Because since he did *teshuvah*, those early days were also counted among his merits.

Rebbe Yitzchak Meir of Zinikov *zt'l* met someone who was very worried about his *aveiros*. Reb Yitzchak Meir told him the following idea that he heard from his father, the Apter Rav *zt'l*:

The *Navi* (*Yirmiyahu* 50:20) discusses the era of Mashiach and states, ובעת ההיא נאום ה', יבוקש את עוון ישראל ואיננו ואת חטאת יהודה ולא תמצאנה כי "At that time...they will search for the sins of Bnei Yisrael, and there aren't any. They will search for the sins of

Yehudah, and they will not find because I will forgive." It seems from this *pasuk* that people will be searching for sins. Why?

The Apter Rav *zt'l* explained that every *aveirah* is a zero. When one repents through love, the *teshuvah* is a number, and when you place that number before the zeros, it becomes a large number. As Chazal say, when one does *teshuvah* out of love, the sins become virtues. This is the reason why in the future, people will be looking for sins. Therefore, don't feel broken over your past because everything will become your virtues." ¹⁵

15. A *bachur* was once staring at Reb Yitzchak Meir of Zinikov *zt'l*, and Reb Yitzchak Meir asked him, "Why are you looking at me?"

The man replied, "It's written in *sefarim* that it is a great *inyan* (concept) to look at *tzaddikim*. It purifies the soul."

The Rebbe replied, "It is also written (*Yeshayah* 60:21), ועמד כולם צדיקים, all *Yidden* are *tzaddikim*. I think it will be better for you to look at yourself." He was hinting to him that he should take a good look at his deeds and see where he has to improve. That will accomplish even more...

A girl from a good home committed severe *aveiros*, and her conscience didn't give her respite. She had suicidal thoughts. The Chazon Ish *zt'l* sent her this message: "Chazal say, הרהורי עבירה קשין מעבירה, 'Thinking about *aveiros* is worse than *aveirah*.' This means thinking about the sins of your past is worse than actually doing them. You must stop thinking about your *aveiros*..." She followed this counsel, recovered from her depression, and built a *bayis ne'aman b'Yisrael*.

And when you do proper *teshuvah*, the past turns over and becomes like *mitzvos*.

Newly Born

Chazal say that when one does *teshuvah*, he becomes like a newborn child (תינוק שנולד). He isn't the same person as before.

Reb Baruch Ber *zt'l* (*Birchas Shmuel*) excelled in the *mitzvah* of honoring

his parents, and when his father was ill, he stayed with his father every night. One night, Reb Baruch Ber couldn't be with his father, and he appointed someone to take care of his father. His father was *niftar* that night. Reb Baruch Ber felt that had he been more devoted, and if he was with his father that night, he might have prevented his father's death.

The *shivah* passed, but Reb Baruch Ber didn't return to his *yeshivah* to give his *shiurim*. His spirits were low, and he was afflicted with guilt.

He went to Radin to seek encouragement from the Chofetz Chaim *zt'l*. The Chofetz Chaim told him, "When one does *teshuvah*, he becomes a brand-new person. He isn't the same person who committed the sin. And that is the reason *teshuvah* atones. He isn't the person who committed the *aveirah*..."

Reb Baruch Ber came out of the Chofetz Chaim's house dancing. He shouted, "I'm a new Baruch Ber! I'm a new person!"

On the night of Yom Kippur, we say the *brachah shehechyanu*. Rebbe Yissachar Dov of Belz *zt'l* noted that due to the awe and fear of judgment, it doesn't seem to be the right time to say *shehechyanu*.

He answered that we aren't saying *shehechyanu* on the *yom tov*; we are saying *shehechyanu* on *ourselves*. Because when we do *teshuvah*, we become new people.

Happy with the Atonement

The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* teaches:

We think that we do *teshuvah*, but to a large extent, Hashem does everything. Hashem places the desire to do *teshuvah* into our hearts.

As we know, *teshuvah* brings salvation, even the coming of Mashiach. The Chasam Sofer asks: Why should we deserve salvation? Why do we deserve Mashiach? We didn't do anything. Hashem did the *teshuvah*!

The answer is: We are happy that Hashem is guiding us on the path of *teshuvah*. We are overjoyed that we are becoming better and more loyal to Him, closer to Him, and that is our merit.

One could be upset that he is doing *teshuvah*, because *teshuvah* means obedience to halachah and to be restricted to the rules of the Torah. Before his *teshuvah*, he did whatever he wanted, and now, life is limited.

Nevertheless, we want *teshuvah*, and we are happy we are improving our ways. And for that, we deserve to be rewarded.

It states (*Tehillim* 14:7), מִי יֵתֵן מִצִּיּוֹן יִשׁוּעוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשׁוּב ה' שְׁבוֹת עִמּוֹ יִגַּל יַעֲקֹב יִשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל.

The Chasam Sofer explains that Dovid HaMelech is asking, מִי יֵתֵן מִצִּיּוֹן יִשׁוּעוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל, why do we deserve *yeshuos*? Although we do *teshuvah*, behold, בְּשׁוּב ה' שְׁבוֹת עִמּוֹ, it is Hashem who is guiding us on the path of *teshuvah*. We aren't doing anything!

The answer is יִגַּל יַעֲקֹב יִשְׂמַח יִשְׂרָאֵל; we are happy that Hashem is leading us in the path of *teshuvah*. For that, we deserve *yeshuos* and the upcoming redemption.

Chazal tell us (end of *Taanis*) that Yom Kippur is one of the happiest days of the year because we become cleansed from all our sins on this day.

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 7:6) writes,

"Yesterday Hashem hated him. He was disgusting, distant, an abomination. Today he is beloved, precious, close, a friend." ¹⁶ We rejoice with the closeness that we attain on Yom Kippur.

Rebbe Moshe Kobrinert¹ explains the following words that we say in *tachanun*:

הַפּוֹתָהּ יָד בְּתִשׁוּבָה לְקַבֵּל פּוֹשְׁעִים וְחַטָּאִים, Hashem stretches out His hand to accept the sinners who do *teshuvah*. נִבְהַלָּה וְנִפְשִׁינוּ, we are shocked and surprised at ourselves, מְרֹב עֲצֻבוֹנוּ, that we are sad. Why are we sad? We should be the happiest people in the world because Hashem wants our *teshuvah*.

Hashem is also happy with our atonement.

It states (*Tehillim* 139:16), הַיּוֹמִים יָצְרוּ וְלוֹ אֶחָד בָּהֶם, "Hashem created days, and one is

16. We quote the Rambam's holy words: הַתִּשְׁבּוּבָה מִקְרִבֶת אֶת הַרְחֻקִים. אִמֵּשׁ: הָיָה זֶה שֶׁנֶּאֱוָי לִפְנֵי הַמָּקוֹם, מְשׁוֹקֵץ וּמְרוֹחֵק וְתוֹעֵבָה, וְהַיּוֹם הוּא אֱהוּב וְנִתְמַד קְרוֹב וְיָדִיד.

Hashem's day." *Tana d'Bei Eliyahu* (ch.1) writes that this is referring to Yom Kippur. It is Hashem's day because He is so happy with our atonement.

The *Tana d'Bei Eliyahu* writes, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave this day to the Jewish nation with love and joy. A *mashal* of servants who were cleaning the king's palace. When the king went outside, he saw all the garbage thrown out, and he was extremely happy. This is how it is on Yom Kippur. When Hashem forgives the sins of the Jewish nation, He is extremely joyous. Hashem says, 'Rejoice because I am forgiving the sins of the Jewish people.'"

The Midrash (*Tana d'Bei Eliyahu Zuta*, end of ch.4) states, "Moshe went up on Har Sinai for forty days... On the fortieth day [Yom Kippur], the Jewish nation proclaimed a fast day. The fast began at night. In the morning, they went towards Har Sinai. They

were crying as they came towards Moshe, and Moshe was crying as he came towards them. Their cries went up before Hashem, and Hashem's compassion was roused on Bnei Yisrael, and He accepted their *teshuvah*. Hakadosh Baruch Hu said, 'Bnei Yisrael! I swear by My name and by My throne that your tears will become immense joy. This day will be a day for atonement for you, for your children, and your grandchildren, for all generations.'"

Viduy

The Rambam (*Hilchos Teshuvah* 1:1) writes, "If a person committed an aveirah...he must say *viduy* before Hashem. As it states וְהִתְוַדוּ אֶת חַטָּאתָם אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ, 'They should confess their sins...! This is a *mitzvas asei*.'"

The Maharal (*Nesivos Olam*) states that when one sins against his fellow man and regrets what he did, he will often kneel before his

fellow man to appease him and ask for forgiveness. When he does so, the man bends to hear what he says, and their faces are very close. This hints at the very close connection between Hashem and the Yid, when he recites viduy and asking forgiveness for his sins.

Every mitzvah should be performed with joy, and therefore *viduy* should be said joyously. This explains why אשמו and אל הטא are recited with a tune.

Once, after the *viduy* of Yom Kippur, the chazan of Zaslav said, "Ribono Shel Olam, if the Jewish nation hadn't sinned, where would you hear such a sweet *Ashamnu*?"

Rebbe Zusha of Hanipoli *zt'l* would say, "If the Jewish nation hadn't sinned, where would Hakadosh Baruch Hu get a ונסלה such as the Jewish nation says on Yom Kippur night, with a tune and with an outpouring of the soul?"

The Yismach Yisrael *zt'l* said that when he was young, he heard from *magidim* that when one says *viduy* he should think: There will be another time when I will say *viduy*. That will be after my demise when I stand before the heavenly *beis din*. I will be dressed in a tallis and *kitel*, I will say *viduy* like I'm saying it now, but then it won't help me. Now I can fix everything with my *viduy*."

Rebbe Yaakov Yechezkiyahu of Pupa *zt'l* taught that when one is about to say *viduy* he should imagine that he is crossing a forest alone, and he was assaulted by a band of thieves. They are sharpening their knives, and he knows that his end is near. He asks the thieves to allow him his last wish, and they permit it. His last wish is to say *viduy*.

Imagine this scene and then say the *viduy* on Yom Kippur.

Immediate Atonement

In every *Shemonah Esrei*, we request that Hashem forgive us, as we say, סלה לנו, and immediately afterward we say, ברוך אתה ה', חנון המרבה לסלוח, we thank Hashem for forgiving us. The Baal HaTanya (*Igeres HaTeshuvah* 11) asks, how do we know Hashem forgave us? Maybe He didn't, and the *brachah* is a ברכה לבטלה?

He answers that when we ask for forgiveness, we are confident that Hashem forgave us, and there is no fear that perhaps the *brachah* is in vain.

We quote:

"One must have *emunah* and *bitachon*, without any doubts at all that Hashem will forgive us immediately when we ask for forgiveness. Every day in *Shemonah Esrei*, we ask Hashem to forgive us, as we say, סלה לנו. After that, we immediately say, ברוך אתה ה' חנון המרבה לסלוח. But behold, when in doubt, one

mustn't make a *brachah* lest his *brachah* be in vain. How can we bless Hashem for forgiving us? Perhaps Hashem didn't accept our *teshuvah*, and He didn't forgive us? The answer is: We have no doubt. After one says, סלה לנו מחל לנו, he is forgiven. And if we wouldn't sin again, we would immediately be redeemed, as the next *brachah* states, ברוך אתה ה' גואל ישראל."

The Noam Elimelech *zy'a* writes, "The Torah teaches us to say *viduy* with confidence in Hashem's compassion and to believe that Hashem will forgive our sins. One shouldn't say *viduy* with sadness and *yeush*, as this brings on *dinim*. Rather say *viduy* with *bitachon*. Trust that He will forgive you. As it states (*Mishlei* 28:13), ומודה ועוזב ירוחם, 'When one admits his sins and abandons them, Hashem will have compassion on him.'"

Bilaam also said *viduy*. When he saw the *malach*

standing before him, he said חטאתי, "I sinned" and the Midrash writes, "Bilaam was a clever *rasha* who knew that his only protection from punishment is *teshuvah*. When he said חטאתי he was protected."

The Beis Yisrael *zt'l* said it's a mitzvah to publicize this Midrash, particularly to *bachurim* (who often feel that Hashem won't forgive them). Even Bilaam attained forgiveness when he said *viduy*.

The *viduy* is written in alphabetical order: אשמנו בגדנו גזלנו and so on. The Reishis Chachmah explains that our *aveiros* tainted all the letters of the alef beis, which are the letters of Creation, and we correct them with the *viduy*.

However, notes the Reishis Chachmah, the first word of the *viduy* isn't אשמנו, it is חטאתנו, as we say אבל אנחנו חטאתנו אשמנו... ואבותינו חטאתנו אשמנו... Why don't we begin with אשמנו with the 'א.

The Reishis Chachmah explains that it is important to begin *viduy* with חטאתי, because this word removes the *mekatreg* (the Satan who proclaims our sins). If we were to begin telling our *aveiros*, the Satan could go up to heaven and say, "Listen to what he's saying. He himself admits that he sinned." But after we said חטאתנו, the Satan is silenced. He cannot speak out against us. Now we can say *viduy* in the order of the *alef beis*.

In the era of the Beis HaMikdash there was a mitzvah called *viduy maasros*, to go up to the *beis hamikdash* twice in seven years and proclaim that you observed all the halachos of *maasar*, *terumah*, and the likes. Surprisingly, this mitzvah is called *viduy maasros*, since he is proclaiming that he *kept the halachos*. He isn't confessing that he sinned.

For example, by *viduy maasros* one says, לא עברתי, ממצותיך ולא שכחתי "I didn't

transgress your mitzvos and I didn't forget" (*Devarim* 26:13). Why are these words called *viduy* (confessions)?

Rebbe Shalom Chaim of Koidenov *zt'l* answered that both Hashem, and the person, are speaking in these *pesukim*: The person says, עברתי ממצותיך, "I transgressed your mitzvos," and Hashem replies, לא עברתי "you didn't transgress." The person says, שכחתי, "I forgot to keep the mitzvos," and Hashem responds, לא שכחתי, "you didn't forget."

And this is because *viduy* wipes away sins entirely.

This explains why it's called *viduy maasros*, a confession. Man confesses his errors, and Hashem responds that there's no sin at all. Similarly, when we say חטאתי, Hashem replies, "You didn't sin." The sin is completely gone.

Reb Chaim Volozhiner *zt'l* was traveling to his son's *chasunah*, and he

stopped in the middle of the way to daven *shacharis* in a *beis medresh*. It was a day that the *sefer Torah* was read (a Monday or a Thursday, etc.), but that *beis medresh* didn't have a *sefer Torah*. Reb Chaim asked the *rav* about that, and he replied, "The closest *sefer Torah* is far from here. We aren't obligated to go there to hear the reading of the *sefer Torah*."

Reb Chaim Volozhiner disagreed, but he remained silent. He didn't want to debate the *rav* in front of the congregation.

When Reb Chaim returned home after the *chasunah*, he heard that his personal *sefer Torah* was stolen. He understood that he was being punished for not demanding that the *Torah* be read that morning.

While he was saying *viduy* for this transgression, the police arrived with the stolen *sefer Torah*. They found the thief.

Because there is a rule, אין יסורים בלי עון, all pain and trouble come from sins. But when one says *viduy*, the sins are removed. And therefore, the problem was removed, and the *sefer Torah* was returned.

Viduy for Bitul Torah

Why isn't there an אל חטא for *bitul Torah*? *Bitul Torah* is from the severest *aveiros*, and it seems that there should be an אל חטא specifically for this sin.

The Sfas Emes *zt'l* answers that *bitul Torah* is stated in אל חטא. We say, אל חטא שחטאנו לפניך בבלי דעת. Some explain that these words are asking repentance for the *aveiros* we committed accidentally. The Sfas Emes says that this *al chet* refers to *bitul Torah*. We are repenting that we committed *aveiros* because we didn't know the *halachos* and the ways of the Torah. Because the Torah teaches us how to act, and without this knowledge, one is

liable to commit many *aveiros*.

Furthermore, we say, אל חטא שחטאנו לפניך בפריקת עול, referring to the sin of casting off the yoke of Heaven. The Sfas Emes writes that when one doesn't study Torah, this can be called casting off the yoke of Heaven.

So, two *al chets* refer to *bitul Torah*.

Hashem's Visit

Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa *zt'l* told the following parable:

Someone's home was very dirty, and although he tried to clean it many times, he was never successful. So he thought of a plan. He invited the king to visit his home, and the king accepted the offer. The king can't come to a home that isn't clean, so the king's servants arrived before the visit and cleaned his home. The man gained doubly:

He hosted the king, plus his house was cleaned.

This is what happens on Yom Kippur. As we say in the *zemiros* of Motzei Shabbos, על חטאי, for my sins, עבור תעבור, come visit me. Thus, we earn doubly: Hashem comes to us, and our sins are removed.

This seems to be the intention of the Mishnah (end of *Yoma*), אמר ר' עקיבא אשריכם ומי מטהר ישראל לפני מי אתם מטהרים ומי מטהר אתכם אביכם שבשמים, "Yisrael, you are fortunate! Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who is purifying you? It's your Father in heaven!"¹⁷ On Yom Kippur we stand before Hashem, and that is the root of our atonement.

Neilah

The climax of Yom Kippur is *Neilah*.

The Mishnah Berurah writes, "One should be very *zariz* with *Neilah* because the climax of the Aseres Yemei Teshuvah is Yom Kippur and the climax of Yom Kippur is *Neilah*, for everything is dependent on the closure (הכל הולך אחר: ההחיתום)."

Neilah is when Hashem signs the decrees for the coming year, and therefore, we should daven with immense *kavanah*.

At this time, there is a lot of divine compassion, and even the severe sin of *chilul Hashem* can be atoned for by *Ne'ilah*. Although, the Gemara (*Yoma* 86) says that *chilul Hashem* isn't atoned until the day one dies, nevertheless, the Meshech Chachmah explains that at *Neilah* one can receive atonement for *chilul Hashem* too.

17. One year, before *Ne'ilah*, students heard Reb Yechezkel Levenstein repeating this Mishnah to himself many times.

The explanation is as follows:

The *Yerushalmi* explains that there isn't forgiveness for *chilul Hashem*, because someone belittled and disgraced Hashem's honor, and who will dare speak up in the person's credit? To do so is equivalent to saying that it isn't so terrible to disgrace the King of the world. Therefore, all *malachim* are silent, and there is no forgiveness for *chilul Hashem*.

However, at *Neilah*, the *malachim* aren't part of the judgment. Hashem judges us alone, and when we plead before Him, He will forgive us.

The Ramchal writes that at *Neilah* one can attain the level of Adam HaRishon before his sin. It is a time when we can become completely pure before Hashem.

We will begin on a clean slate, and we will have a good year.

בתיבה וחתומה טובה.