

Bilvavi Walkthrough of Avodas Hashem

During Elul, Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur,
Succos, Hoshanah Rabbah, and Simchas Torah

[Based on “Bilvavi” talks]

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Editor's Intro

The Rav has delivered thousands of penetrating talks on how to serve Hashem, with several hundred talks on the Festivals alone, most notably, the *Yomim Noraim* (the days spanning Elul through Yom Kippur) and Succos, which completes the *Yerach Aisanim*, “The month of giants”, the month of Tishrei which contains three major holidays central to the Jewish people: Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Succos. Needless to say, each of these derashos contain powerful spiritual potency to them. Our hearts become opened in the process, we gain a burning desire for truth, we feel more than ever that we truly want to do what Hashem wants, we want to strip away at all the layers that cover over who we really are, so that our true self, our pure *neshamah*, can finally radiate. It is that experience which the reader is afforded, through the Rav's timeless messages.

Due to the large volume of the Rav's derashos, it has been attempted here to collect a “summary” (if that's even possible) of the Rav's derashos about our avodah during these days, spanning Elul, Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, Succos, Simchas Torah, and after Yom Tov ends. We have tried here to be as brief as possible in conveying the main points and the common thread that runs throughout the derashos on each of the respective festivals. (The more complete version is found in the pdf's of *Elul Talks, HolyDays Talks, and Succos Talks*). We have attempted here to create a “walkthrough” for the *avodah* spanning Elul until after Succos. Hopefully, the reader will find it as a useful, concise handbook to get through these awesome days, to come closer to Hashem and utilize these days to their fullest, so that we can get to know what Hashem really wants from us – and what we really want from ourselves.

Avodah Of Elul

Through Simchas Torah

There is so much to work on from Elul all the way through Simchas Torah and beyond. Can the Rav summarize the general avodah that we have during Elul, the days of Selichos, Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, the days between Yom Kippur and Succos, then Succos, Hoshanah Rabbah, and Shemini Atzeres & Simchas Torah?

A

The *avodah* of Elul is all about “*Ani L’Dodi V’Dodi Li*”, “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me.” It is a time when we become beloved, like a *kallah* who finds grace by her *chossan*, in our relationship with Hashem.

The days of *Selichos* (for the Ashkenazim who have this custom) is the time to feel pained for anything we have done that went against Hashem’s will, and to ask Hashem for forgiveness over the past and for the damages we have done.

The *avodah* on Rosh HaShanah is to become close to Hashem - and thereby be deemed meritorious before Hashem.

The *avodah* during *Aseres Y’mei Teshuvah* is a time to fix the past, do *teshuvah*, and make resolutions for the future.

Yom Kippur is a time of spiritual cleanliness and purity, so that there are no barriers between oneself and Hashem.

The days between Yom Kippur and Succos are a result of a pure bond with Hashem which we have hopefully attained from the purity that we reached on Yom Kippur, and extending this pure bond with Hashem into the rest of the year as well.

The *avodah* on Succos is the time to live in the material world under “Hashem’s shade”, to dwell with Hashem’s Presence in all aspects of our life.

The *avodah* on Hoshanah Rabbah is to fuse this entire process [from Elul until now] into one unit [to bring us to a state of oneness with Hashem through all of the above points].

Elul

Believing In Our Power To Renew Ourselves

The more a person is clear about the power of renewal, the more effective his *teshuvah* will be; it will have something to stand upon. In turn, the less a person is aware about this belief in the power of renewal, or if he doesn't think about enough and he is almost entirely unaware of it, even if he will do *teshuvah* on a "halachic" level, usually such *teshuvah* will not last into the rest of the year.

We should understand deeply that each and every one of us has gone through decades on this world already, where we did many mitzvos, as well as sins, G-d forbid. A person has learned a lot of Torah, but there were also many times of wasting time from Torah study. The pressures of life weigh heavily upon each individual, with a millstone around the neck. There is a tremendous burden upon every soul, and all of these burdens have gathered on top of each other, over the years of a person's life. A great deal of sins and improper actions have accumulated, in addition to the various stresses of life. When a person tries to unload this huge burden from upon his shoulders, he finds it nearly impossible. It seems to a person that it is impossible for him to leave this situation behind.

What happens, as a result of that realization? Usually a person will try even harder, trying to make things work. He will try to bear the yoke of Torah upon him, he will try to get some spiritual uplift, he will try to better his actions, and he will try to continue and move on. But the truth is that the giant "package" that has accumulated over the years upon his soul is too big for him to carry, and it is beyond his energies. It is a burden that he cannot carry.

Some people, when they come to that point, will give up completely. Others do not give up, and they continue to try harder, with the belief that that if they try harder, they will eventually get assistance from Heaven and then succeed, or through some other means. When the days of Elul arrive – the end of this year, and the beginning of the next year – every person feels a need to become spiritually elevated, to continue to strive higher, and to attempt to get there.

But the truth is, as mentioned above, that this is really too big of a burden for a person to carry. So what does Hashem ask of you? If the burden is too enormous to carry, what does Hashem want from us?

The simpler answer to this is that it's true, you really can't carry the burdens that are upon you, but if you try your hardest, you do your part, and Hashem will do the rest. That is a true perspective. However, there is a more inner perspective, which is a totally different attitude towards life.

Teshuvah offers a person renewal in the same way that a small child feels that first grade is completely new for him, and how a thirteen-year old boy views his bar mitzvah, and how entering high school feels new, and later, how entering Beis Midrash feels new. He sees it as new, and everything feels new to him, when entering these situations. The same is true of the feeling of renewal that is *teshuvah*.

Believing in renewal is the root of *teshuvah*. It shows a person that if he truly does *teshuvah*, he is not merely throwing away his sins. That is the basic part of *teshuvah* – getting rid of sin. But the depth of *teshuvah* is that all that has piled upon the person until now, can now be thrown off, and the person can begin anew. When one begins again anew, he will be able to “light like an eagle, bold as a leopard, swift as a deer, strong as a lion” to do the will of his Father in Heaven.”

If a person does not view *teshuvah* with this inner attitude, his life will feel too burdensome and heavy to bear, and it will only continue to feel more burdensome. There are some individuals who literally feel alive from their Torah learning and mitzvos that they do, which revitalizes them and elevates them, but they are still feeling very burdened from all that has gathered upon them; each person can write an entire book about his stresses and troubles that he's carrying on his shoulders.

Teshuvah accomplishes the same effect for the soul as a convert, who is considered born anew. It is with the person's belief that it is possible to become a new creation.

These words will seem far-fetched to some people, but if someone believes the idea we are saying here, a new window will be opened up to him, which will enable him to begin instantly from a new place.

The secret of *teshuvah* is a hidden matter, because it seems to many people that *teshuvah* means “repentance from sin”. But that is just the beginning of *teshuvah*. A person can do that part of *teshuvah* instantly, and he may succeed. But in order to do “complete” *teshuvah*, he will not get there just through repenting from sin alone. If he has accessed the power to believe in renewal, before the ten days of repentance have arrived – then he will be able to do the complete level of *teshuvah*.

For this reason, Elul precedes the Ten Days of *Teshuvah*. Elul is about believing in the power of renewal, and through believing in the power of renewal, a person can then come into the ten days of repentance having done complete *teshuvah*. The days of Elul are given to us for this reason. Hashem has implanted these days into Creation to give us this power.

Elul has the *mazal* of *besulah* (virgin), because a *besulah* is about something new, and it symbolizes the power to become renewed.

One should reflect deeply into this idea and firmly believe in this, to bring this belief out from its potential state and to activate it. He should clearly believe that that a person has the power to become renewed, every day, at any moment. Although it doesn't seem that way at first, with the more we strengthen this *emunah* (belief) and reveal it in our souls, we enable ourselves to throw away the packages of sin that have accumulated upon us.

As opposed to an elderly person writing on paper after erasing its ink, through renewal we can become like a child writing on a fresh new piece of paper. Elderly Torah scholars become wiser with the more they age. The simple understanding of this is because they get their life from Torah, therefore they have energy from it. That is true, but the more precise way to understand this is because they are connected to the power of renewal, and therefore whatever they have gone through until now is like a nullified vow, which becomes annulled retroactively – enabling them to always begin again anew.

The words here, on one hand, will seem very far; but on the other hand, they are closely attainable, to anyone who deepens this belief in the power of renewal, within himself.

One who merits to reveal this power, with *siyata d'shmaya*, will be able to undergo a renewal even after going through a stressful, burdensome day, or after a long, stressful period of his life. There is always this power to rise above the past burdens and become renewed, as if nothing has happened until now, no matter how much a person has been through. Once this power to believe in renewal becomes revealed within the person, it will accompany him throughout the year, and for eternity.

Teshuvah is a secret. It is a secret based upon the belief in the power of renewal. The clearer one is about this belief, the result will be that he will merit with *siyata d'shmaya* to do complete *teshuvah*, as we say, (Return us, in complete repentance, before You). ¹החזירנו בתשובה שלימה לפניך.

¹ From Holy Days Talks, "Believing In Renewal"

Selichos

Advice For Having Kavanah During Selichos

It is difficult to concentrate throughout all of the *Selichos* every day.

Usually people do not know what the words mean, and even when we do know what we are saying, it is hard to concentrate so much and put our hearts into the *Selichos*. The truth is that the prayers of *Selichos* are above our normal level; it is way above than what most people can handle. So what are we to do? Usually on the first day of *Selichos* there is a lot of inspiration, and it is easier to concentrate. But for the rest of the days of *Selichos*, how can we keep concentrating on the words we are saying?

We will need more than inspiration; we need a certain *da'as* (a mature perspective) in order to approach it. We need to remain with our aspiration to concentrate on all of it, even though we aren't actually on the level of concentrating for the entire time. We can make sure to at least utilize the beginning of the *Selichos*: by trying to concentrate on at least the very beginning of the *Selichos*. That much, we can all do. In this way, we give away the "beginning" of all our *Selichos* to Hashem.

This is not an attempt to inspire ourselves – it is rather stemming from inner clarity that all beginnings need to be devoted towards Hashem.²

² From The Weekly Shmuess_03_Beginnings

Erev Rosh Hashanah

Many people simply try to do too much within a certain amount of time, when it is not realistic.

People of this type push their energies very far, way beyond their actual capacity, and they always feel like they are not succeeding. Erev Rosh HaShanah arrives and this kind of person feels that the year has gone by with absolutely no growth. Often these people really have grown during the year, but they are not aware of it, because they have very unrealistic aspirations from themselves.³

³ Fixing Your Focus_06_Time Management

Rosh Hashanah

Corona and Rosh HaShanah

Some approach Rosh HaShanah with a sense of yirah (trepidation and fear of judgment) and others approach it with a sense of love and closeness with Hashem, as the Rav has explained, that this is a matter that depends on one's personal soul root. This past year, 5780, was very different than other years. Corona was definitely the biggest wake-up call ever for Hashem we've ever seen, and it clearly evokes a sense of yirah, because Hashem sent punishment to the entire world. Does that mean that we need to approach this year's Rosh HaShanah of 5781 with a sense of yirah (trepidation) because we are living in scary times where we don't know what will happen next? Even if a person's soul root is ahavah and he normally approaches Rosh HaShanah as a time of ahavah, have the times now changes and even such a person would need to feel more yirah about Rosh HaShanah?

A

The troubles affecting our *ruchniyus* (spiritual situation) of the last few years were actually a more difficult problem for us, than this past year's corona pandemic. As for how to approach the coming Rosh HaShanah, it is still a matter that depends on one's personal root (which is either *yirah*/trepidation or *ahavah*/love).

Contemplations For Rosh HaShanah

PART 1 – MALCHIYOS, ZICHRONOS & SHOFAROS

(1) "*Hayom Haras Olam*" (Today is the birth of the world). Rosh HaShanah is the day when the primary creation, the human being, was created.

(2) Who created all of this? It is the Blessed One, Whom there is none other besides.

(3) For what did He create it all for? What is the purpose of it all? So that we become close to Hashem, and thereby reveal Hashem in His creation. This is the intention behind the concept of “*Malchiyos*” on Rosh HaShanah [declaring Hashem’s dominion over the entire Creation.]

(4) The intention behind “*Zichronos*” on Rosh HaShanah is that one should try as much as he can to remember all of the different deeds he committed this year.

(5) The intention behind “*Shofaros*” is that one should improve his deeds, by doing complete repentance. Included in this is for one to clarify his aspirations and his purpose in life, and to take upon oneself a resolution for the coming year.

PART 2 – WHAT TO THINK THROUGHOUT ROSH HASHANAH

“Rosh HaShanah” contains the word “*rosh*”, “head”, from the word “*raishis*”, the beginning point, which hints to us that on this day, a new start is revealed. It is the revelation of a new beginning point for us. Therefore a person should connect himself to the “beginning point” of the soul, which is called *peshitus*, the “simple point” of the soul. As a hint, the Gemara says that the more *pashut* (smoother) a shofar is, the better the *shofar* is. From connecting to one’s inner point of *peshitus*, a person becomes connected to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, amidst this *peshitus*-simplicity. Therefore, the inner *avodah* on this day is to become connected, in the depths of one’s soul, to a simple sense of the Creator, which is above all reasoning and logic.

One needs to progress and regress, back and forth, between two different states [as follows]. For part of the time, one should be connected with this simplicity, by “running” towards the Creator from this place of simplicity in oneself [focusing on simply sensing the Creator]. For the other part of one’s time, one should retreat back into his thoughts, by thinking of the fact that Rosh HaShanah is the day when the world was created, and that there is a Creator, and that He created it for a purpose, which is for His creations to accept upon themselves His dominion. One should also remember his deeds and repent over them, and to once again accept Hashem’s rule over him.

PART 3 - PIYUTIM

It is customary to recite the *piyutim* (liturgies), of which a large part describes the greatness of the Creator. When one’s soul feels opened to this, one can feel a pleasure in reflecting on the Creator’s greatness, verbally expressing this greatness with words of praise to the Creator. This is an additional part of the closeness to Hashem which is revealed on this day. There is a way of connecting to Hashem on this day though simplicity, as explained earlier, by thinking of the One who created the world, and there is also a way of connecting to Hashem on this day by speaking of

His greatness, which is revealed through His creations. This is the implication of *HaYom Haras Olam*, on this day the world was created.

PART 4 – WHOM TO DAVEN FOR

Each person should act according to his current level. If one is at the level in which he feels a need to *daven* for personal requests on Rosh HaShanah, than it is proper for him to do so. This, however, should only be done in addition to what was said earlier, because *davening* for personal requests should not become the main part of Rosh HaShanah.⁴

Rosh HaShanah – A Time of Dread or A Time of Joy and Closeness With Hashem?

On *Rosh HaShanah* by *davening*, we say, “*Hayom haras olam, hayom yaamid bamishpat*”, “Today is the birth of the world, today is the day we stand in judgment.” These are two different aspects of *Rosh HaShanah* to focus on.

Chassidus focuses on “*Hayom haras olam*”, the fact that *Rosh HaShanah* is the birth of the world, and that Hashem is nearby and we must be afraid of being distanced from our closeness with Him. *Mussar* focuses on “*Hayom yaamid bamishpat*”, the judgment itself, fear of actual punishment for the reality of our sins.

It is not an issue of which way is more truthful. Each person must serve Hashem according to the way he is supposed to, to serve Hashem from his *shoresh haneshamah* – the root of his soul.

Hashem should merit all of us that each person should find the way that is suitable to his *shoresh haneshamah*, so that each of us can reach the *Yom HaDin* the way we are supposed to – each to his own.⁵

Concerning Rosh HaShanah in general, there are two different fundamental approaches, of how to feel about it.

The approach of the *baalei mussar* towards Rosh HaShanah is that it is a time of *yirah* (awe, fear, or dread). On Rosh HaShanah, there is judgment over all of mankind. We recite the prayer of *U’Nesaneh Tokef*, which describes the great, awesome fear of this judgment. The approach of

⁴ from Q&A #3864 – *What To Daven For On Rosh HaShanah*

⁵ From *Holy Days Talks* – “*Mussar Vs. Chassidus*”

Chassidus towards Rosh HaShanah, however, is to view it as a time of closeness to Hashem, a time of exaltedness, and revelation, of Hashem's Presence.

So there are two different ways to feel about Rosh HaShanah – it is a time of *yirah* (fear and trepidation), or it is a time of *ahavah* (love and closeness).

On a personal level, one should sit with himself and reflect: How do I, personally, feel about Rosh HaShanah? Which is the way that is more appropriate for me, personally – to view Rosh HaShanah with *yirah*, or with *ahavah*?

Of course, we need to approach it with both *yirah*\fear and *ahavah*\love.⁶ But what is the main feeling you need to have about it? That is the area which applies to you, personally.

A person may have grown up in a certain kind of atmosphere or surroundings, or he may have heard, that Rosh HaShanah is a time of *yirah*. But in reality, it could be that he personally needs to have the approach of *ahavah* towards Rosh HaShanah. Or, vice versa: he may have grown up with a different attitude - or he may have heard - that Rosh HaShanah is a time of *ahavah*; but it may actually be the approach of *yirah* which he mainly needs.

If he really needs the approach of *ahavah* towards Rosh HaShanah, whether it's because this is his soul root, or whether it's because this is the personal spiritual level he is on, and instead he approaches it with *yirah*, because that's how he grew up, or because that's what he heard about it - then he has 'trained' himself to mainly feel *yirah* towards Rosh HaShanah, when in reality, he really needs to approach it with mainly *ahavah*. His feelings are in a personal exile when Rosh HaShanah comes, because he is not feeling his own, personal feelings.

And the same is true for the opposite case: if someone's main feeling towards Rosh HaShanah is really *yirah*, but he was always told to approach it with *ahavah*, or he read about Rosh HaShanah that it is a time of *ahavah*, and *yirah* was never the focus – he has been training himself to mainly feel *ahavah* towards Rosh HaShanah, when in reality, it is *yirah* which is supposed to be his main feeling towards it. This is also a personal "exile" to his soul's feelings.

Therefore, Rosh HaShanah might either be a redemption to one's soul, or it might be the opposite of this, *chas v'shalom*. The *Gemara* says that Yosef got out of jail on Rosh HaShanah. For Yosef, Rosh HaShanah was a time of redemption. But a person on Rosh HaShanah might just be in a prisonlike state inside himself, if he is not feeling his true feelings about Rosh HaShanah. But he can also merit, with *siyata d'shmaya*, a resemblance of what it was like for Yosef to leave prison on Rosh HaShanah.

⁶ See *Rosh HaShanah_047_Fear and Closeness of Rosh HaShanah*

When one mainly has the feelings towards Rosh HaShanah which are appropriate for his own soul root (*shoresh haneshamah*) and which are aligned with his personal spiritual level (*madreigah*), one can reach a redemption of the soul on Rosh HaShanah [with regards to his soul's feelings].

The more that one attains self-recognition of his own soul, the better one will know which particular emotion is suited to his unique personality, and when Rosh HaShanah approaches, he will better recognize if his main approach should be *yirah* or *ahavah*.

As mentioned earlier, this is either a result of better recognizing one's *shoresh* (soul root), or recognizing one's current personal spiritual level. So this is a question about a person's entire *avodah*, not only a question of how to feel about Rosh Hashanah.⁷

⁷ From Q&A following aforementioned source

Aseres Y'mei *Teshuvah*

What To Daven For During Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah

QUESTION: We have many things we want to *daven* for during Yomim Noraim. Is there any one tefillah that we should use as the basis and focus in our tefillos, for all of Rosh HaShanah, Aseres Yemei *Teshuvah* and Yom Kippur?

ANSWER: *Daven* to Hashem that you should be able to want only the will of Hashem.⁸

Our Avodah During Aseres Y'mei Teshuvah

Our *avodah* during the *Aseres Yemei Teshuvah*, and especially during Rosh HaShanah, is essentially to arrive at a palpable sense of Hashem's existence in our heart. Besides for awakening a fear of the *Yom HaDin*, we need to feel and sense in our heart that Hashem is with us, next to us, and that He can be revealed in our heart. Just as you can feel a friend standing next to you, so must you feel that Hashem is with you. This is called "*kirvat Hashem chushit*" - palpable closeness with Hashem.

⁸ From Q&A on Learning Torah & Serving Hashem

Erev Yom Kippur

Asking Forgiveness From Others

Yom Kippur does not atone for sins unless one has sought forgiveness from others. Yom Kippur is atonement from sins against Hashem, and it is also a time to seek atonement for sins committed between man and his friend. There is a great light on Yom Kippur of love for all creations, of “And you shall love your friend like yourself”, and therefore there must be seeking of forgiveness from others before Yom Kippur.

Everyone asks each other forgiveness, because, deep down, everyone feels the light of this love. A person may not be consciously aware of this, but “his *mazal sees*” – his inner soul can feel this truth, that Yom Kippur is a time of mutual connection between the entire Jewish people....

How Can We Forgive Those Who Hurt Us?

All of us have been hurt and insulted by other people throughout our life – both physically and emotionally. Some of us have been more hurt by others, and some less, but all of us have been hurt by others. How can we find the strength to forgive? We must realize that we can't judge another person, because we do not fully understand another person. Since you can't fully understand why a certain person did what he did to hurt you, you are able to forgive him from a much deeper place in yourself.

The Chazon Ish writes that this world is like a closed riddle; this is certainly regarding human beings, who are a big mystery. We don't really know why a person really hurt us. This realization will provide you with great *menuchas hanefesh* (inner serenity).

When a person feels his ego very strongly, he demands that those who hurt him should seek his forgiveness. Deep down, he wishes punishment to come upon others who have hurt him; he wants justice to be served. But if a person reaches a true healthy feeling of *shiflus* (humility) towards himself – he realizes that he doesn't even understand himself – and thus he understands that he surely doesn't understand other people. He realizes that as much as we can know, we still do not know everything – “The purpose of knowledge is to know that we do not know.”

Therefore, we can't know why people hurt us. It is much easier to forgive others with this perspective. This makes us much more readily forgiving towards others, more compassionate towards others. When we internalize this perspective, we can merit the meaning of *הנון המרבה לסלוח* - to be forgiven by Hashem for our own sins.

Eating The Festive Meal On Erev Yom Kippur

On Erev Yom Kippur, there is a *mitzvah* to eat. There are many different intentions explained in our holy sefarim of how a person should go about eating on Erev Yom Kippur. We all fulfill the *mitzvah* to eat on Erev Yom Kippur, regardless of our intention in it. But what are we thinking as we eat? By the *seudah mafsekes*, what are we thinking? Are we just thinking that we are eating, or are we thinking that it is a *mitzvah*? There are many things we can think about to elevate this act of eating, but here is one inner intention to have.

Each of us, almost without exception, is able to fast on Yom Kippur. In order to fast on Yom Kippur, it is possible to eat little on Erev Yom Kippur, but we would be very weak when fasting on Yom Kippur. If we really want to have concentration when we *daven* on Yom Kippur, we need energy. On Erev Yom Kippur, we should have the intention that we are eating in order to have the energy to fast on Yom Kippur.

Why do we need the energy to fast? So that we will be more comfortable? People before a fast have the habit to say to each other, "Have an easy fast." What does an 'easy' fast mean? Does it mean that they shouldn't suffer? Now there are pills people can take before a fast which makes the fast easier. For what reason should we make the fast easier...? If our intentions in wishing others well before a fast are true, it is not about having an easy fast. It is so that we can have the energy on Yom Kippur to *daven* properly.

So when eating the *seudah mafsekes*, what are we thinking? What our thoughts then? Let us think for a moment, before we begin to eat, why we are eating. We cannot eat entirely for the sake of Heaven – that is a high level. Rather, let us try to think that we are eating in order to have energy on Yom Kippur and to be able to *daven* properly.

If you can have this thought before you eat the *seudah*, and during the *seudah* as well, this is reaching a degree of "*In all your ways, know Him*". Even more so, you can try to eat one food with the intention that you should have energy on Yom Kippur to *daven* better.⁹

⁹ From Holy Days Talks, "Five Steps to TE-SH-U-V-AH"

When Reciting The Tefillah Zakah

When we recite the *Tefillah Zakah* (which one should try to say, as stated in *Mishnah Berurah*), we state that we forgive anyone who has harmed us, whether in this lifetime or in a previous lifetime, except for certain injustices committed against us, which we are not allowed to forgive for, as the *Poskim* discuss. Besides for those isolated occurrences, we must strive to forgive any Jew who has wronged us, and to do so from the depths of the heart.

This should not be done with the agenda that if I forgive others, then Hashem will forgive me, even though that is true. Rather, the intention should be to forgive every Jew out of a love for all Jews, to desire that they should have it good. It is not about you. Before we go into Yom Kippur, we should awaken our ahavas *Yisrael* for all Jews, and we should ask ourselves: Do we really want that every Jew this year should have it good, to be sealed for a good year? Or are we each worried only for our own private lives, that only “I” should have it good and that only “I” should be sealed for a good year?

If we truly want that others should have it good, we should then realize that it is insensible to bear any resentment against anyone, even if another has truly insulted you and wronged you. If you really want others to have it good and not only yourself, you should try to forgive, with your whole heart, truthfully, any person in the Jewish people who has wronged you. (To actually reach a “complete heart” is a high level, but even if you are not at that level, you can still be able to forgive someone completely).

You need to reach a point where you truly want every Jew to have a good year this year; you should want even someone who has wronged to merit a good judgment. If you want to take this further, you can even *daven* for others that they should have a good year. An even higher level than this is to pray for the betterment of those who have wronged you – in spite of the fact that he did not treat you fairly.

One should inspect his heart well before doing this, to see if his heart is at peace with what he is doing. This part of *teshuvah* - “*And you shall love your friend like yourself*” - is of the fundamentals of this day of Yom Kippur. Not only should there be practical concern for others on this day, but mainly in your heart, you should feel a greater love for all Jews, on this day.

Kol Nidrei

In the beginning of *Kol Nidrei*, we say that we are permitting ourselves to pray together with [intentional, rebellious] sinners. During the rest of the year, we may not pray together with [intentional] sinners. But on Yom Kippur, there is one day of the year where even those who have gone the most astray in the Jewish people come to *daven*, and it is permitted for us on this day to pray together with these who have intentionally sinned. This is not simply a day in which more people come to shul to *daven*. Rather, Yom Kippur contains a power that unifies everyone together. It is “And you shall love your friend like yourself” which connects every Jew together, which is especially apparent on Yom Kippur.

The day of Yom Kippur is the one day of the year which causes Jews from all walks of life to come and gather together. On Yom Kippur, even those who have gone astray and who are very far, will come to *shul*, with *siyata d’shmaya* (heavenly assistance). This is not merely an action they are doing. Rather, their hearts are active on this day, seeking atonement from Hashem. Not only are they coming to speak with Hashem, but they become united again with their brethren, the collective whole of the Jewish people. They are not gathered together in *shul* by coincidence. Rather, there is a light of truth that comes down onto the world on Yom Kippur. The unifying love between all of the Jewish people is this light.¹⁰

The Tefillos On Yom Kippur

On Yom Kippur, before we are about to recite *Kol Nidrei*, and before we are about to *daven* any of the five *tefillos* of Yom Kippur, we should first stop and think that we are about to stand before Hashem and speak with Him. Before beginning each *Shemoneh Esrei* on Yom Kippur, stop for a minute, or half a minute, and think about: 1) Whom you are about to stand in front of, and 2) Whom you are about to speak with, and 3) When you are speaking with Hashem, where are you actually found? Remember that “The entire land is filled with His glory.”

When you speak with Him, it must be “as a man talks to his friend”, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* explains. Hashem is found in front of us, here, and with Him we are speaking. Hashem has no corporeal body, but His existence is constantly in front of us, and with Him we are conversing.

If one can extend this awareness into the rest of the year as well, that is praiseworthy. But let us at least do it once a day, before we are about to *daven*. For once a day, before you are about to *daven*, think for just a few seconds about Whom you are about to speak with.

¹⁰ From Holy Days Talks, “Five Steps to TE-SH-U-V-AH”

Even if you cannot be on this level during the rest of the year, at least on Yom Kippur, before each of the five *tefillos*, stand for a few moments and think that you are about to stand before Hashem and that you will be speaking with Him. You can also try to pause in middle of *Shemoneh Esrei* every so often and remind yourself that you are standing before Hashem.¹¹

¹¹ From HolyDays Talks, “Five Steps To TE-SH-U-V-AH”

Yom Kippur Day

What Should We Daven For On Yom Kippur?

The first thing a person needs to ask for on *Yom Kippur* (as well as the last thing) is that Hashem should purify his heart; in other words, that his connection to all materialistic and forbidden pleasures be erased from his heart, that Hashem should take them away from within him. After this, one is able to be purified with the “pure waters” – he can receive purity from Hashem to come upon him, in that his pleasures in life will come from true, inner pleasure.

Our Avodah On Yom Kippur

On Yom Kippur, we are at the deepest level of closeness with Hashem we can reach. It is reached only in the very innermost depths of our heart, where our true power of choice lies.

The external layer of our heart is where we seek atonement in order that we shouldn't suffer, and so that we should have *Gan Eden* and *Olam HaBa*, etc. But the depth of seeking atonement which we need to reveal is, that it should pain you, deeply, that there is a barrier between you and Hashem, which has been created from sin. That can spur you on to do true *teshuvah*, and that is where the true atonement lies.

Any of the other reasons of why we need atonement are also true (at least to some level), but on Yom Kippur, when we keep seeking atonement, through continuously the words **”סלה לנו, מחל לנו, כפר לנו”**, “Forgive us, pardon us, atone us”, the inner intention of these words that we should ideally have is, that we want to be cleansed from sin, and not just to simply be forgiven, as we ask during the rest of the year in *Shemoneh Esrei*, in the blessing of **סלה לנו**.

Every person will need to clarify to himself, internally, why he wants to be “forgiven” from Hashem. If it is because he wants to avoid being punished and because he wants to have spiritual success, then the words we are saying here are very far from him. But if a person seeks truth, and to live a truthful life, a life of closeness with Hashem, his main request for atonement on Yom Kippur is to desire more closeness with Hashem.

“*My soul thirsts for G-d*” – one can feel how distant he is from Hashem and it is painful to him, bitterer than death, and this is what he asks Hashem for, that the barriers be removed between him and Hashem. If that is his entire concern on Yom Kippur, then he attains a certain level of closeness already, and even if it is not the complete level, it is something worthy.

When one is mainly concerned with this in his requests on Yom Kippur as he continuously says the words *כפר לנו, מחל לנו, סלח לנו*, and if this is what he desires in life, he is closer to doing “complete *teshuvah*”, and he will feel the closeness with Hashem, and then he can know with certainty that his sins have been forgiven.

Chazal teach that if a person wants to know if his sins have been forgiven or not, he should try to sense afterwards (after doing *teshuvah*) if he feels closer to Hashem or not. If he feels closer to Hashem than before, it is a sign that his sins have been atoned. If this is what a person wants in his life – to desire closeness with Hashem – he can then reach the level that is after the atonement of Yom Kippur, which is the atonement of death. The atonement of “Yom Kippur” itself is an obligation upon every person to try to reach, by every person, no matter what level he is on; but in order to reach the higher level of atonement on Yom Kippur, of “death atones”, which we read about on Yom Kippur when we read the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, we need to go deeper. Yom Kippur is the gateway that leads us to sensing a palpable closeness with Hashem, to reach a point in which we are willing to give our entire life for this – to reach closeness with Hashem.

We cannot live on this level during the rest of the year, for it is a very high level to stay on. But we can at least have one time of the year where we access it, on Yom Kippur, which is called the “day of *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*”. It was the day where the *Kohen Gadol* entered before Hashem in the *Kodesh Kodashim*, and the *Nefesh HaChaim* explains that one can enter the *Kodesh Kodashim* on an inner level, in the depths of his own heart, resembling the *Kohen Gadol* who entered the *Kodesh Kodashim* on Yom Kippur.

This is at the innermost depths the heart. When one is willing to enter into this deep place, a person is faced with the ultimate choice: Are you prepared to go further into the atonement of Yom Kippur, by entering into the next step, of “death” – by being willing to give your life for this? If you can even touch upon this level, you are connecting to the depths of the *avodah* of this day.

And so, the first step of the atonement on Yom Kippur is to do true *teshuvah* and to feel a greater sense of Hashem’s Presence. This level is required by every person to reach. The step after this is a higher level, which not everyone reaches: to want this closeness with Hashem so much that you are willing to die for it, as Nadav and Avihu did.¹²

¹² The Weekly Shmuess_05_Vayeilech – Yom Kippur - Atonement

The Climax - Neilah

It is written, “Go, my nation, into your rooms, close the doors behind you, until the wrath passes.” We “close the doors” behind us by the prayer of *Ne’ilah* on Yom Kippur.

The word “*ne’ilah*” means to “close”. It is the “closing of the gates”, and on a deeper level, we close the gates to the rest of the world during *Ne’ilah*, where we can enter into the deepest place of ourselves, alone from all others. No one else can be with us there. It is closed off from the rest of the world, it is hidden, and there, each person can enter the place where he is alone with only Hashem and His Torah.

Ne’ilah is where we begin to enter our innermost point of our soul, where all is closed off from the rest of the world, where no one else can enter – no one but you. It is also called the “*sod*”, the “secret”, of the soul. It is also called “*liba l’pumei lo galya*” – the “heart cannot be revealed by the mouth” – it cannot be expressed verbally, because it takes place entirely deep in the heart, where it will never be known or explained to others.

One can penetrate into this deepest point of himself, where he is utterly alone from anyone else, and he cannot include anyone else in there, because it is the place of “*liba l’pumei lo galya*” - it cannot be expressed or revealed to anyone.

Each person on his own level can enter this place in himself and find the deepest possible recognition he can have towards Hashem; the sensing of the reality of Hashem that is in the heart. (It is that place in the soul which also reaches the deepest level of understanding of Torah.)

The heart is described by our Sages as being a place that contains room within room, where one can keep entering more inward, deeper and deeper.

The beginning of one’s *avodah* on Yom Kippur, and especially at the beginning of *Ne’ilah*, is certainly a time where the higher-pitched voices of prayer can be of inspiration. But this is not the depth of our *avodah* during *Ne’ilah*. Our *avodah* by *Ne’ilah* is: to speak to Hashem, from the depths of one’s heart, as deeply as possible. It is the time to reach the deepest place in ourselves - each on his own level; and from the deepest place in oneself that one reaches, he should speak to Hashem from there. Don’t just let out groans and screams then, which are superficial forms of inspiration, as if it is shofar on Rosh HaShanah. Instead, speak to Hashem, from the deepest place in yourself that you have come to recognize. Even if it is not the deepest possible place compared to what others may have reached, it is still considered to the deepest place in yourself, at the level that you are on currently.

That deep place in the soul is the *“lifnay v’lifnim”* (in front of Me and before Me), that each person can reach on his own individual level, and it is really the avodah of our entire lifetime to reach this point. But on Yom Kippur, each person is able to reach it as much as he can, on his current level.

One needs to speak to Hashem on Yom Kippur during all of the *tefillos*, but especially during the prayer of *Ne’ilah*. One must speak to Hashem then from the deepest part of himself that he recognizes. If one does not speak to Hashem from that place of himself, he has not touched upon the depth of our avodah of Yom Kippur.¹³

¹³ Holy Days Talks, “Returning To Your Inner Purity”

Motzei Yom Kippur

Is Yom Kippur Gone?

A person cannot live all day in the state of *Yom Kippur*; he has to leave *Yom Kippur* at some point.

When a person immerses in a *mikveh*, it is enough to be in it for just one second; as long as he's totally immersed in the water. The same is true with *Yom Kippur*. On *Yom Kippur*, a person has to come to just one moment of truth, and from that moment onward, he draws forth purity.

Hashem does not demand of any Jew that he live the whole year like how he is on *Yom Kippur*. There are five kinds of suffering we have on *Yom Kippur*, and this suffering ends on *Motzei Yom Kippur*. There is no *halachah* that we have to remain on the level of *Yom Kippur*. On *Motzei Yom Kippur*, we return to routine life; it is brought in *halachah* that one must immediately begin to build the *sukkah* after *Yom Kippur* is over. It is clear to anyone that when we build the *sukkah* on *Motzei Yom Kippur*, we are no longer on the same level as we were by *Ne'ilah*. If so, what are we supposed to take out from *Yom Kippur*?

On *Yom Kippur*, we have to feel as if we have entered the *mikveh*; a person enters the *mikveh* impure, but he emerges from it purified. If we reach a certain point of truth on *Yom Kippur*, we receive a special purity in our soul – and from it, we can continue into the next year pure, all the way until the next *Yom Kippur*.¹⁴

...Of *Motzei Yom Kippur*, it is said, “Go eat your bread happily...for G-d is already satisfied with your deeds.” When one's sins have become erased, he can then go eat his bread happily. The joy is not simply because his sins have been forgiven; that is also a reason to rejoice, but the depth of the joy is because it is sin that causes sadness and now that the sins have been removed, there is no place for sadness in the person. When sins are removed, a person naturally finds himself happy, for the soul is connected to the Creator, and this is a natural joy of the soul, where it delights in its very bond with the Almighty.

¹⁴ Holy Days Talks, “Yom Kippur – A Day of Purity”

Succos

Our Avodah On Succos

The depth of our *avodah* on *Succos* is to combine the two sides of mankind and integrate them together: the Four Species, which represents our *mitzvos*/movement, and the mitzvah of sitting in the *Succah*, which represents our recognition of Hashem/non-movement.¹⁵

.... On *Succos*, we have two mitzvos – the mitzvah of sitting in the *Succah*, the mitzvah of shaking the Four Species. The fact that we have these two mitzvos shows us that it is our *avodah* to integrate our two aspects in how we relate to Hashem – our lower aspect, which is called *adnus* (reflected by how we must perform the mitzvos) and our higher aspect, which is called *havayah* (our recognition of Hashem’s Presence).

What does this mean? Does this mean that we split up *Succos* into two activities – part of the day we sit in the *Succah*, and part of the day we take the Four Species? That is only a superficial approach. The real definition of our *avodah* on *Succos* is to integrate the Four Species with the *Succah* - in other words, to perform the mitzvos upon a recognition of His existence.¹⁶

Sitting In The Succah

The festival of Succos is called “*tzeila d’mehemenusa*” (in the shade\shadow of faith)¹⁷, a term similar to the word “Betzael”, which is from the words, “*b’tzeil Keil*” – “in the shadow of the Almighty.” Thus, Succos is a time where a person can especially feel the “*tzeila d’mehemenusa*”, how he is in the “shade” of Hashem, how Hashem is near him like his own shadow. The time and place of Succos (the *succah* itself) has the power to bring a person to be near Hashem [“*etzlo Yisborach*”, “near” Hashem – from the word *aitzel*, “near”, and from the word “*atzilus*”, the highest spiritual dimension].

¹⁵ From Succos Talks, “The Jew’s Inner Self”

¹⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷ *Zohar parshas Emor, 103a*

There are three festivals – Pesach, Shavuos, and Succos. On Pesach, the concept of *korban pesach* was how a person could become especially near Hashem, for the *korban pesach* had to be *tzli* (roasted), which is from the word *aitzel*, near, a hint to being near Hashem. On Shavuos, we received the Torah, which is near Hashem. On Succos, we have the *succah*, which is called *tzeila d'mehemenusa*, a time and place where we can be especially near Hashem.

We explained that the depth of this is for a person to feel the “*panim b'panim*” of Hashem, where the *panim* of Hashem is revealed, through the *s'chach* and four *defanos* walls of the *succah*, as well as through the airspace (*chalal*) in between the *succah*, and even in the ground of the *succah*. Thus, in all six directions of the *succah*, there is the *panim* of Hashem. That means that the revelation of the *panim* of Hashem is everywhere, in every place.

...The essence of Succos is that there is *Ain Od Milvado* within all of *chalal* space; as in the teaching of the Sages, “*Ain Od Milvado*, even in the empty space of the world”. There is “*Ain Od Milvado*” [or *giluy panim* of Hashem] even in the *chalal* space of the *succah*.

Therefore, the entire world is nothing but a giant amount of concealment (*hester*) that hides Hashem's light.¹⁸ The *succah* conceals and constricts the light of Hashem; the *succah* itself is not the light of Hashem, it is just the “*tzeila d'mehemenusa*”, “the shadow of faith”, because, from a deep understanding, it is but a “shadow” of the light of Hashem, and not the light itself.

The *succah* conceals the *ohr* light of Hashem, by keeping it contained in that space and not letting it spread past the walls of the *succah*. In that sense, it conceals Hashem's light, keeping it within the *succah* alone. In the future, the light will be allowed to spread everywhere.¹⁹

Ushpizin

On Succos, the seven “shepherds”, the *Ushpizin*²⁰, descend into the earth.²¹ Why do they come down?

In Heaven, there is Gan Eden and Gehinnom, which are separated from each other by a hairsbreadth. But on Succos, where even the wicked are atoned for by the four species, (for the *aravah* atones for those who do *aveiros*), there is a unique revelation taking place on this lowly

¹⁸ For further insight into this matter (and how to go beyond the view of “*hester panim*”), see **Tefillah #0120 – Finding The Shechinah**

¹⁹ Succos Talks, “In The Light”

²⁰ “Ushpizin” – lit. “Guests” – the seven righteous individuals who come to the *succah* (on alternating nights) are: Avraham, Yitzchok, Yaakov, Moshe, Aharon, Yosef, and Dovid.

²¹ Zohar parshas Emor, 103b

world we dwell on, which does not take place in Heaven, which the seven *Ushpizin* are willing to descend to this earth for, in order to witness.

In Heaven, there is *giluy panim* (revelation of Hashem's radiance), but only in Gan Eden, and not in Gehinnom. In Gehinnom, there is *hester panim* (concealment of Hashem's radiance), which is called "*She'ol*". But on Succos, there is a revelation that even on this lowly realm, there can be *giluy panim* even in the ground, the lowliest plane of earth. This is a higher revelation than anything found in Heaven!

In Heaven there is a differentiation between the souls of the righteous and wicked, with Gan Eden and Gehinnom. But the seven "shepherds", the *Ushpizin*, desire for the righteous and wicked to be unified, because they want the entire Klal Yisrael to be unified. They come down here to this earth on Succos, because their deep desire is to see the entire Klal Yisrael unified.

Chazal say, "One shepherd, to all of them." On Succos, when "all of *Yisrael* can sit in one *succah*", when even the wicked are atoned for by the *aravos* in the *lulav*, the seven shepherds come here to this world not only to see the *tzaddikim*, but even the wicked. They come down here to this world even though there is a *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) here, which makes it painful for them to come down here. Chazal say that the souls have difficulty coming down here to this world, where there is an evil inclination – and this is referring to Succos, where the *tzaddikim* descend to this world, to the *succah*, in order to see the unified level of *Klal Yisrael*, where the righteous and the wicked are all united through the concept of the *succah*.

Furthermore, all of the souls in the world are all together on Succos, because Succos is a time of judgment over water, and this connects all souls together, because the rain is needed by everyone.

During the rest of the year, there is "*nefilas apayim*", which is also known as *tachanun* (supplication, where we cover our faces), which is a prayer that rectifies the souls who have fallen into the depths of sin, "*She'ol*" [However, this rectification does not connect everyone together all at once, because is *nefilas apayim*, the opposite of *giluy panim*].

But of Succos, where there is the revelation that there is *giluy panim* everywhere, it is said, "Praiseworthy is the one who did not sin, and if one sinned, he shall repent and be atoned." It is explained in many *sefarim hakedoshim* that Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur is the time of *teshuvah m'yirah* (repenting out of fear) and Succos is *teshuvah m'ahavah* (repenting out of love)²², which is the higher level that returns everyone [and through the *teshuvah m'ahavah* on Succos, one can reach the point of "Praiseworthy is the one who did not sin".

²² *Imrei HaRim (Chiddushei HaRim): Succos*

Thus, on Succos, everyone is returned, and this is what is meant by the “*giluy panim*” of Hashem - which connects everyone together, all at once. For this revelation, the seven shepherds are willing to descend from Heaven onto this earth.²³

²³ ibid

Simchas Beis Hashoeivah

What's The Big Celebration All About?

Chazal teach that in the future, the entire Jewish people will sit in one *succah*. Thus, the *succah* connects everyone together. That is why the *chassidim*, *anshei maaseh* and *baalei teshuvah* were all connected together on Succos, through the song they sang at the *simchas beis haShoeivah*.²⁴

.... In the future Hashem will again be One. Hence, the future, when we will return to the state of oneness, is also a return the state of the first day of Creation. Nowadays, we do not have this oneness.

The *simchas beis hashoeivah* returned all of Creation to the state of before the sin. That is why the *chassidim*, *anshei maaseh* and *baalei teshuvah* were all able to sing together by the *simchas beis hashoeivah* – it was because it was a return to before the sin, when there was no difference yet between righteous and wicked, between those who never sinned with those who sin – for it was a world without sin.²⁵

.... The *Zohar* says that the joy of the *simchas beis hashoeivah* comes from the future, because they would draw forth the water on the *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah* with the joy that is called “*sasson*”, and *sasson* refers to the joy of the future. This is the view that it was called *simchas beis ha“Chashuvah”* – it returns the world to the level of the letter *ches*, equal to the number 8 – the number that corresponds to the future. This is another way of how the *baalei teshuvah* and *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh* all become connected together - it because in the future there will be no sin and hence no difference between those who sinned with those who never sinned.

In the future Hashem will slaughter the evil inclination, and the Gemara brings this teaching in middle of the discussion about the *simchas beis hashoeivah* which is in Tractate Succah.²⁶ Why does the Gemara say it precisely here, and not in any other tractate? It is because Hashem will slaughter the evil inclination from the spiritual light of the *Simchas Beis HaShoeivah*, a joy of the future, where there is no separation between anyone. When Hashem slaughters the evil inclination, it will be clear that there is no difference between *baalei teshuvah* with *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh*.

²⁴ Succos Talks, “The Unified Song At The Simchas Beis HaShoeivah”

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ Succah 52b

The Gemara there says further that Hashem will show how the evil inclination looks to both the righteous and the wicked, and then He will slaughter the evil inclination, and everyone will be crying. The righteous will be crying because the evil inclination looks so big, and the wicked will be crying because they will see that the evil inclination is really small and they will be amazed how they didn't overcome it. The wicked will be crying, and they will do *teshuvah*, and then Hashem will slaughter the evil inclination. Then there will be no more difference between the righteous and the wicked.

That is the depth of the *simchas beis hashoeivah*. What is the entire difference between the *baalei teshuvah*, with the *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh*? It is because *baalei teshuvah* succumbed to the *yetzer hora*, while the *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh* overpowered their *yetzer hora*. But when the *yetzer hora* becomes removed, there is no difference between *baalei teshuvah* with the *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh*. So when Hashem slaughters the evil inclination in the future, this does not simply mean that the *yetzer hora* will cease to exist, but that there will no more difference between those who sinned with those who don't sin. The *simchas beis hashoeivah* reveals that all of the Jewish people are connected together!

There is still more to say about this, but to summarize, we have learned here that the *simchas beis hashoeivah* was a joy about the unified state of the Jewish people, and this unity was achieved in two different ways: (1) By returning to the root (this is the “*shoeivah*” aspect in the *simchas beis haShoeivah*, which is from the words “*shov aleph*”, returning to the “*aleph*” – to return to the state of the first day of Creation, or before the sin of Adam). (2) By accessing the future (this is the “*chashuvah*” aspect in the *simchas beis haShoeivah*, from the words *shov ches*, returning to the “*ches*”, the “eighth” – to connect to the state of the future, when there will be no more sin).

May we merit in our own times, with *siyata d'shmaya*, to a complete joy, a unified state of the Jewish people, which will be the very Redemption.²⁷

²⁷ ibid

Hoshanah Rabbah

Davening On A Deeper Level

When we *daven* to Hashem, we *daven* with our mouths, from our lips. But there is also a deeper way to *daven*: when we *daven* from our “*shoresh haneshamah*”, the “root of all the [collective] soul” [from the point where the entire Jewish people are unified together].

The two *aravos* we take together with the *lulav* on Succos are parallel to the two lips; thus the level of Succos represents the normal level of prayer, where we *daven* from our lips. But there is a verse, “*With their lips they honor Me, but their hearts are far from Me.*” Therefore, praying with our lips alone is the incomplete level.

But on Hoshanah Rabbah, the *aravos* are all taken together, alluding to the unity of the Jewish people, “*areivim zeh l'zeh*”, for all Jewish souls are rooted in one unit. When we pray from this unified place, it is the level of “*b'asher hu sham*”, where our prayers are not coming from our lips, but from our unified essence, the root of all our souls. With such prayer, a person’s prayers may be answered by Hashem even before he calls out to Hashem, as in the verse, “*Before they call out, I answer.*”

This is the level of the higher unity, called “*areivus*”, revealed through the *aravos* of Hoshanah Rabbah. This is the depth of the connection between Hoshanah Rabbah and water, where we pray for water, from its source, alluding to the concept of *b'asher hu sham*, “there”. This is the “seal within a seal” on Hoshanah Rabbah – it refers to the concept that Hashem judges us based upon the place we are in, “*b'asher hu sham*”, for being “there”, in our original, upper, heavenly source. There, in the source, everything is pure, clean, and good – thus when one is “there”, everything will be good. Moshe was saved by water, which symbolizes the “higher waters” of Heaven that can save a person; unlike the “waters of strife” which prevented Moshe from entering the land. The waters that saved Moshe’s life alludes to the rectifying “waters” of Hoshanah Rabbah which can save a person, which is the “*sham*” (there) of “*b'asher hu sham*” – for a person to return to his upper, heavenly source, “there”. It is that place which reveals the highest level of atonement which seals the entire Jewish people for a good year.²⁸

28 From Succos Talks, “Atonement For Yisrael & Yishmael On Hoshanah Rabbah”

Shemini Atzeres & Simchas Torah

Our Joy On Shemini Atzeres & Simchas Torah

The *Midrash* says that Hashem desired to remain with the Jewish people even after [the first seven days of] *Succos* ends, saying to them, “Remain with me one more day” [which refers to the day of *Shemini Atzeres*].

What exactly is this joy? It is the joy that one can have just in being attached to Hashem, to simply feel with Him in a sense of companionship.

Simchas Torah offers a different kind of joy. It is the joy one has in being attached to the Torah, and thus we make a celebration that we have completed the Torah.²⁹

...The joy of *Simchas Torah* is thus a joy that is above the natural kind of joy. It is the unlimited joy one can have in the Torah.

The same is true for the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*. Our *avodah* during the seven days of *Succos* is to realize how all of the world and nature is futile, to erase our attachment to this world.

After a person has hopefully nullified his attachment to this world – and there are seven traits inherent in nature – he is now able to connect totally to Hashem, a state of being that is essentially above nature. That is the joy of *Shemini Atzeres*.³⁰

Leaving The Succah

We have just left Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and *Succos*. On *Succos*, when a person takes the Four Species and he sat in the *sukkah*, if he feels even a little holiness, he could feel a connection to the Four Species and to the *sukkah*. It is hard to leave behind the *sukkah* and the four species. If someone didn't feel that it was hard to disconnect from it, he is simply not sensitive to the spiritual.

²⁹ From Succos Talks, “Joy of Shemini Atzeres & Simchas Torah”

³⁰ *ibid*

But if someone did feel that it was hard to part from the *sukkah* and from the four species, he now has an *avodah* to go deeper than this. He can be aware that “Although I have parted ways from the *succah* and from the Four Species, I am not parting ways from the presence of the *Shechinah* which had settled upon the *sukkah*!”

We cannot invalidate the difficulty in leaving behind the holy objects used in our performance of *mitzvos*. There is a well-known story about the Vilna Gaon on his deathbed, when he was holding tightly onto his *tzitzis* and he cried over how much he did not want to part from it. But it is this pain of disconnection which brings a person to the true perspective. A person leaves the *sukkah* and he will miss it, and he certainly needs to feel pained at leaving it. But we also know that the *Shechinah* comes to dwell on the *sukkah*, as the *Gemara* says; and a person can always remain connected to it.

This is the depth about life. When it comes to disconnecting from the materialism of this world, one needs to disconnect from it slowly and sensibly. It is painful for a person to detach from it, but that is man’s *avodah*. He must eventually reach the point where it does not feel painful for him to be disconnected from This World, and that will be the root his spiritual success on this world.

The next stage in the *avodah* is to disconnect even from our connection to the spiritual, such as the example of leaving the *sukkah* behind. At first a person must certainly feel that it is painful to leave behind a *mitzvah*; he had been connected to it and now he is leaving it, so it should certainly feel painful. He must feel that he will miss the *sukkah* when he leaves it. But after he feels this pain, he must then realize that this pain can bring him to the more inner understanding: although he is leaving behind the *sukkah*, he is not becoming disconnected from the *Shechinah* that came to the *sukkah*.

This is only one example, but there are many more examples of this concept. When a person loses a parent, this is very hard and painful for him; he is aware of the loss. But along with the pain, he can come to understand who his real “Father” is – his eternal Father whom he will always have. He has then succeeded in using the parent-child relationship as a *moshol* (parable) to get to the *nimshal* (lesson).

This deep way to live life enables a person to detach from the materialism of This World, from the view of the body, and to instead use the “tools” and “garments” which Hashem has given us, as a way to disconnect from everything else that is other than Hashem, Torah, and *Klal Yisrael*; so that we can channel the power of absolute connection towards a complete, true connection with Hashem.³¹

³¹ Succos Talks, “Leaving The Succah”

Stay With Me More One Day

On *Simchas Torah*, a person has to have at least felt a minimal amount of closeness towards the Torah. One has to feel the *Yom Tov*, to feel the *Simchas Torah*, to feel *Shemini Atzeres* – of which Hashem said, “Remain with me one more day.”³² He has to feel that it was hard to part from Hashem after such a period of closeness, just as Hashem finds it hard to leave us at the end of *Succos*. He has to have felt that he has the opportunity to feel the reality of Hashem for at least one more day.

The Day After – Where Did All of the Ruchniyus Go?

On *Simchas Torah*, anyone who has learned a little Torah during the year will feel some joy on this day as he’s dancing by *Hakafos*. He feels elated after each *Hakafah*. But he’s feeling deep down, “Why can’t I love the Torah this much during the rest of the year as well?” He feels an inner contradiction in himself.

Others experience a different problem: they enjoy *Simchas Torah* and they rise to high levels of loving the Torah on this day, but the day after *Simchas Torah*, they find themselves back to routine, and they wonder where all their high levels went.

Obviously, this frustration is not experienced by those who don’t live an internal kind of life. Such a person doesn’t even feel the changes, and he has no problem making the transition from *Simchas Torah* to the next day. But the more a person is sensitive to his inner spiritual world, the more he can feel the difficulty, of making the transition between the festivals to the normal routine of the year.

What, indeed, is the correct way to go about it? A person must be aware that before the festival, he will not feel as elevated, and that the festival will elevate him, and after the festival ends, he will go back to the regular routine of the year. In other words, he must know beforehand that it will be like this.

This is not because a person should simply despair from trying to acquire higher levels and to avoid the pain of the disappointment. It is because one must be aware that we simply cannot be on higher levels all the time. We can be aware that the elevation we feel on the festivals is temporary, and that it is not meant for the rest of the year to be on this level.

³² See Rashi, *Vayikra* 23: 36

The point is to become aware that there's a part of ourselves that can jump to higher levels, but that doesn't mean we need to stay at those higher places we jump to. In this way, when the festivals end, instead of feeling a great fall from our level where we feel like we've fallen flat on the ground, we can fall away lightly from it, which will lessen the impact of the fall.

...One must be aware that the higher levels we can reach are only for the time being, but after that, we need to return to routine, and there is nothing wrong with this, for it is supposed to be this way.³³

³³ Succos Talks, "Before and After Simchas Torah"